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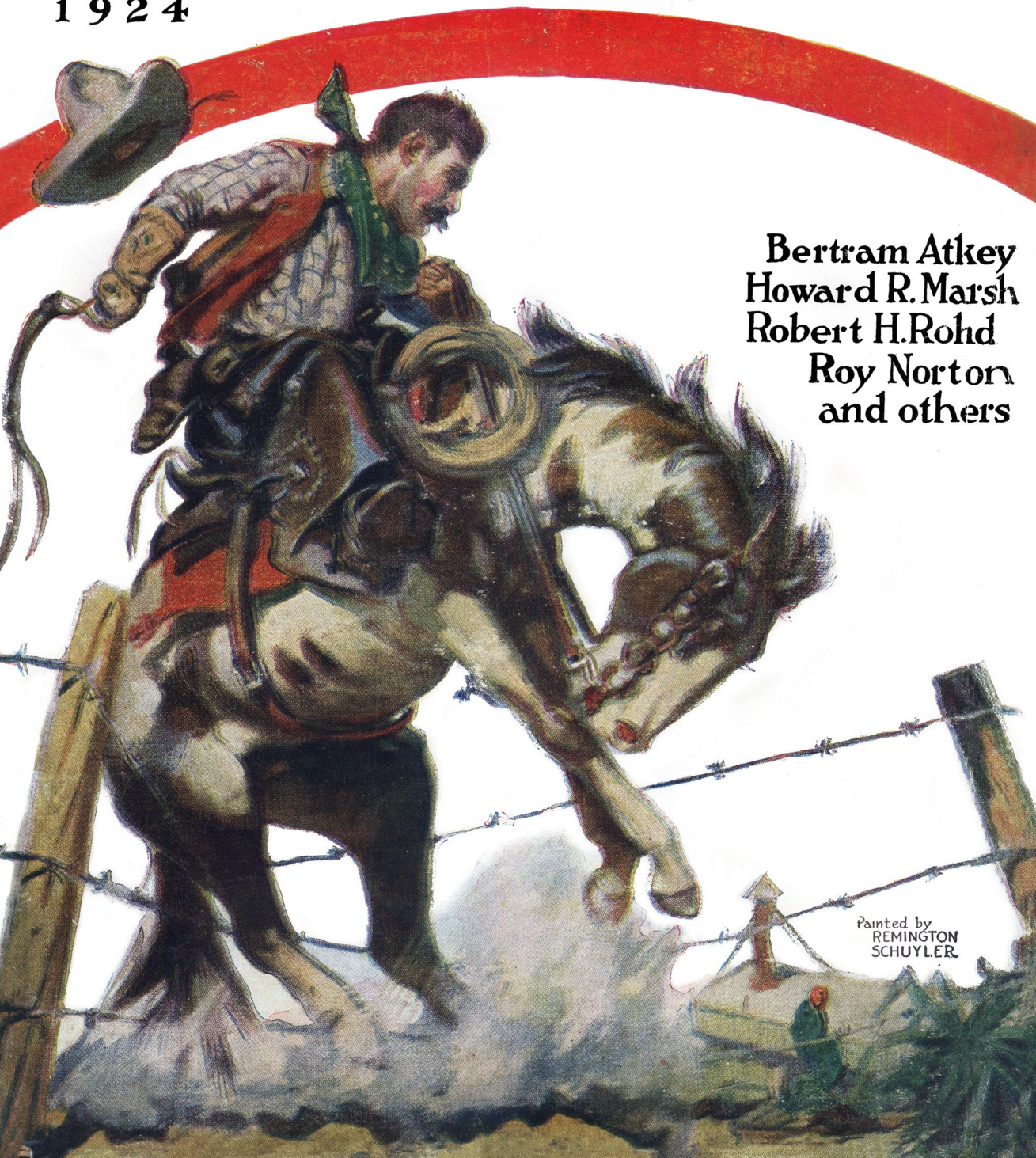
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The Popular Magazine

APR. 20,
1924

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Bertram Atkey
Howard R. Marsh
Robert H. Rohd
Roy Norton
and others

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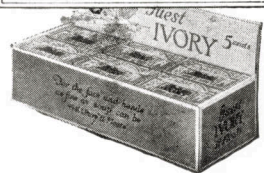


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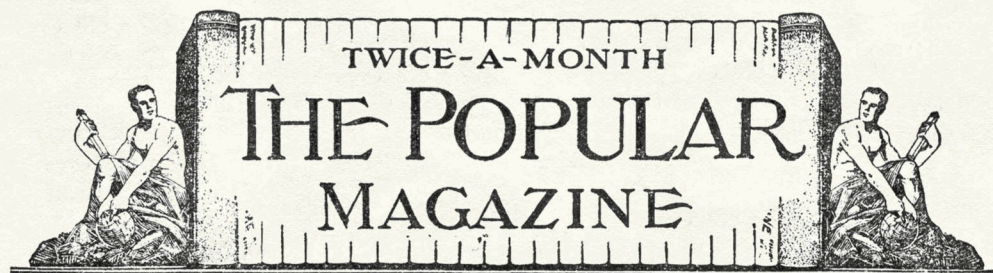
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The complete book-length novel in the next issue of the POPULAR will be "SEWARD'S FOLLY," a story of the Alaska-purchase days, by Edison Marshall. In the same issue will appear the first installment of a great tale of the Southwest, "THE RIDERS FROM TEXAS," by Dane Coolidge. This notable issue will be on the news stands May 7th. Reserve your copy in advance.

Vol. LXXII

APRIL 20, 1924

No. 1



THE CRUSADER'S CASKET. A Complete Novel A modern feud and an ancient curse make romance live.	Roy Norton	3
LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF GOLD. A Short Story An episode in the life of a desert settlement.	Howard R. Marsh	60
PIGEON PIE. A Short Story The doves of strife descend.	Talbert Josselyn	70
THE STRENGTH OF THE MEEK. A Short Story Ottie Scandrel purveys health—and amusement.	C. S. Montanye	80
DRAGOUR, THE DRUGMASTER. A Series II.—The Barford Heirlooms.	Bertram Atkey	91
CAUGHT IN THE NET. Editorials	The Editor	101
FOR HIS TRIBE. A Short Story The primitive stirs the blood of a man.	Charles Tenney Jackson	106
TONY SITS IN. A Short Story A story of poker as it should not be played.	Percival Wilde	116
GOLD AND THE GIRL. A Four-part Story—Part III. A romance of the sea and treasure-trove.	H. de Vere Stacpoole	131
THE FIGHT AT BOGGY BAYOU. A Short Story When a man defied the Mississippi.	Harris Dickson	153
TALKS WITH MEN. Adventures in Experience VIII.—On a Variety of Matters.	Martin Davison	163
THE AVAILS OF THE FRACTION. A Short Story Alaska and the desserts of treachery.	Theodore Seixas Solomons	167
THE GREEN RIBBON CLUB. A Short Story The Great Macumber investigates a marital mystery.	Robert H. Rohde	175
A CHAT WITH YOU.		191

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXII.

APRIL 20, 1924.

No. 1



The Crusader's Casket

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Great Wong Loo," "Spanish Joe," Etc.

The story of an ancient curse, dating back to the days of romance when the doges ruled the "Queen of the Seas," that turns at last to a benediction. Mr. Norton is an old friend of POPULAR readers. His tales of "David and Goliath" have brought him a well-earned eminence among lovers of robust fiction. In this novel, dealing with the adventures of two young Americans in Venice, he has left his familiar field of the American West, but the charm of his art has not suffered by the change of setting. He remains a master of the human drama.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel.)

CHAPTER I.

STUBBY, squat and insignificant, the steam schooner *Adventure* lay at anchor well up at the head of the Giudecco, and, resting quietly there in the moonlight, her character could have been no more certain to the seafaring mind if she boisterously had disturbed the night by bawling aloud, "I am a tramp of the seas." So still were the waters that not the slightest sway or quiver moved her riding lights and the shadow she cast was as clearly defined as if there were two of her, each dark, one

upright and afloat, the other slanting away like a silhouette of black paper, foreshortened until her single funnel appeared even more stubby than it was in reality, her masts slightly tilted, her deck housing and single bridge flattened down to meet the shadowy deck.

After a time a tiny shadow at the end of the bridge stirred vaguely, and then for a moment the picture was disturbed by the sharp glare of a match as the master and owner of the *Adventure*, Captain James Ware, lighted his pipe before again coming

to lazy and contemplative rest with his elbows on the top of the weather sheets of the landward bridge wing.

The owner and master of any other laden tramp in Venetian waters that night would have chafed and perhaps thought, or audibly expressed, a vast annoyance with the harbor authorities, with the port facilities, or the general dilatoriness of the "Queen of the Adriatic" for not having found him a berth over there to port where the long line of docks, to one of which he must eventually moor to unload, was packed solidly with other craft. Other master owners might have made mental calculations as to the expense of every day's delay, inasmuch as it costs nearly as much to keep an idle ship afloat as it does to operate one that is extremely fortunate and busy. But not so the philosophic Mr. Ware, sometimes facetiously known as "Happy Jim" in other ports where he had dawdled; ports that girdled the globe to the north and south of the line; ports where there were great cities of men; ports that were scarcely ports at all but mere lagoons, palm fringed, seldom visited, and laved by lazy Southern seas.

Likewise, here and there over the globe, were men who did not refer to Mr. Ware as "Happy Jim," but from far or near watched his cruises with grave concern, speculating as to whether some of the sources of his income might not be questionable; for master owners had been known to run liquor to prohibition countries, guns to revolutionary juntas, or, in milder theft, rare laces, perfumes, jewels and forbidden valuables where the high protective duties justified such risk for gain. Once an inquisitive and suspicious American revenue officer, satisfactorily disguised, had taken pains to become familiar, or at least momentarily intimate, with a member of the crew of the *Adventure* who after varied libations had confided somewhat of Mr. Ware's doings.

"Fair mystery, that's what he is, mate. Him and his ship, both of 'em. But I'm sayin' this—he's a sailorman, every inch of him. Most of these men in steam can't make sail, but the owner can. Proved it by bringing her to port in the Red Sea, when her engines went bad, with canvas all over her—even to jury rigs on the funnel. Got a picked crew aboard her, too. Mighty particular about who brings a ditty bag aboard. Investigates 'em first. Won't have any man that can't keep his mouth shut,

drunk or sober. Makes funny cruises. I've known him to go a thousand miles in ballast just to have a look at some out-of-the-way, God-forsaken blotch of an island, where maybe he'd disappear for a week at a time hunting with a bunch of flea-ridden natives. One time down Sarawak way he went off with a bunch of greasy head hunters and was gone for nearly a month, and with us layin' at anchor all the time, too. What he went for nobody ever knowed. Crazy, I reckon."

"But how does he make that sort of thing pay?" demanded the revenue man, and then said with a confidential and knowing wink: "Reckon that he must now and then run a cargo that's—um-m-mh—landed in the dark of the moon. Eh!"

For a long time the man off the *Adventure* stared at his inquisitor and then said: "Now you seem to be askin' questions. That's one of the fust rules of the ship *Adventure's* crew—never to answer questions. The owner does all the answerin' that's ever done. And I've got to shake a leg. Our Old Man's strong on discipline—almost like a man-of-war's man—and shore leave with us means that we got to go back when it's over. I've got just twenty-eight minutes in which to get aboard. So long!"

There were still other peculiarities in the equipment of the *Adventure* that caused some comment. For instance, she carried a first-class motor launch that would have done credit to a man-of-war, a luxury that is not customarily afforded by a tramp freighter of small size, and she was a trifle too well engaged for a craft of her calling. Futhermore, her owner indulged in the luxury of two cabins, one immediately aft the chart house which he occupied when navigating dangerous waters or in heavy weather, and the other a suite below decks and astern, large, commodious, far too well fitted for anything but a private yacht.

Captain Jimmy, having finished his pipe, strolled the length of his bridge as if considering some better form of entertainment, and then with a sudden resolution thought to himself, "Well, here I am in Venice for the first time, and so far it's all up to the advertisements, moonlight, still water, distant towers and—— Hang it all! I'm going ashore and get a nearer look at it." Then, aloud, he called for the dinghy to be brought alongside from the stern where it floated idly, and when his command had been

obeyed descended into it and told the oarsman to pull him around the building that was indicated on the charts as the custom-house and then into the head of the Grand Canal.

"If there's anything worth looking at, that ought to be the beginning of it," he ruminated as he stared upward at the gilded God of Fortune that held shining sail aloft and waited for a breeze to swing it from apparent rigidity to weather-vane activity.

When the boat swung round the point the Grand Canal opened up its winding vista and evoked from Captain Jimmy a burst of admiration. Gondolas moved here and there with the gondoliers swaying their bodies in that rhythmic stroke that is neither rowing nor sculling, and the lights of the Regina Palace Hotel and its brilliant palm-bordered terrace shone before him in splendor like a beacon of amusement. In front of it a big boat with swaying Japanese lanterns suspended from two stubby masts held a band of peregrinating troubadours who sang one of the old boat songs, that, though hackneyed, took on new fervor from surroundings.

"We'll stop at that landing over there where the lights are," the captain said, gesturing with his hand, and the sailor made his way slowly across and into the stream until nearly abreast the hotel, when he suggested that perhaps they had better make the gondola landing alongside where a score of the Venetian craft awaited trade.

"You can come back here for me at—No!—can't tell how long I'll be. You can go back to the ship and I'll take one of these gondolas when I come off," said the captain and had turned away before the man's "Aye, aye, sir," had reached his ears.

He hesitated for a moment, and under the landing light looked down at his clothing as if uncertain whether it were befitting a visit to the hotel terrace, mentally decided that inasmuch as it was not a uniform and was in fair condition it might do, peered around the corner to discover if any of the loungers were in negligee garb, saw that they were, and sauntered slowly toward the narrow terrace entrance that was railed off from the water with a marble balustrade. He made his way unobtrusively to a table somewhat in the rear, seated himself and ordered one of the long, iced drinks and found time to eye those around him. For the most part they appeared to be of the more fortunate

class of travelers rather than of the "tourist" type, persons with sufficient means to move leisurely from place to place, with neither need nor desire for ostentation by which to attract attention to themselves, and neither too boisterous nor too silent. A well-bred, well-to-do crowd, the captain decided, and one of which it was pleasant to be a part. Behind him he heard the musical chattering of an Italian party and, having well mastered that tongue himself, was somewhat amused by their comments upon the song just concluded. An English clergyman was gravely discussing something, and at a near-by table, alone, sat an attractive young woman of the unmistakable American type, who now and then glanced at her tiny wrist watch and frowned as if impatient because some expected one was late.

Captain Jimmy's attention was distracted by the voice of one of the hotel concierges insisting upon the serenaders' boat pulling ahead to make room at the clean, white-marble landing for an arrival. The man was punctuating his remarks with certain Italian expressions that betokened much impatience. These evoked able, prompt, and vociferous retorts from the boatman, much to Captain Jimmy's amusement, and then he peered around one of the potted palms and could well understand why this arrival, at least, should command attention. Out in the canal an exquisite motor boat, perfectly fitted and electric lighted, was impatiently making its way inward. A girl, white clad, and as immaculate as her boat, stood swaying to the slight motion as if accustomed to progress by sea and almost before the boat had been caught by the waiting boat hooks leaped gracefully to the steps and tripped upward. The captain gasped with inward delight and felt that he was not alone in admiration. He mentally pictured a very modern sea nymph, alive and glowing with health coming to a beach; a nymph with hair that was of a striking auburn; blue-gray eyes with long lashes; a finely modeled face, and lips that, smiling, displayed even teeth, and with a figure that suggested the perfection attained only by the very modern young American girl who is given to athletic sports. She swept the terrace with a glance of perfect composure and seemed heedless of the looks of admiration which her presence had caused, quite as if she were entirely inured to being stared at; then moved forward to enter the hotel by

the great doors leading from open terrace to lounge.

Suddenly Captain Jimmy heard the scraping of a chair over the marble tiles and saw that the girl who had been waiting for some one had sprung to her feet and was rushing forward.

"Tommie! Oh, Tommie! Wait! Is it really you?" she called and at the sound of her voice the sea nymph halted, looked around and hurriedly advanced to meet her. Jimmy could not help overhearing their words, for they came immediately to the table by his own and seated themselves.

"I can't see why on earth I didn't find out you were in Venice," declared the waiting girl. "Just to think of it! You stopping at the Hotel Danieli all the time, and—I read all the hotel lists from day to day and so did Dick, but we didn't see your name. Isn't it a pity! And we are leaving to-morrow morning!"

The arrival glanced around, then bent forward and whispered something to her friend, who listened and then said, in a shocked voice: "Tommie! You don't mean that is the reason why I didn't see your name on the——"

"S-s-sh!" warned the girl called Tommie and again they discussed something in whispers until, glancing up, the first girl said, "Oh, there goes Dick now, and he's looking for me. Come on. Let's stop him."

Captain Jimmy felt a distinct sense of loss when they arose and hastened away. He sat hoping they would return, and considering "Tommie." The three things uppermost in his mind were that she was the most charming girl he had ever seen, that the conversation indicated that she and her friend had been schoolmates at some girls' college, and that she was from the South, as evidenced by her speech.

Presently the girl and her friend appeared, arm in arm, and, followed by the man, crossed the terrace and boarded Tommie's launch, which at once swung out from the landing, made a flashing sweep as if to display its power and grace and then, quickly gathering racing speed, tore away over the canal with two bow waves like jeweled fans, and disappeared.

Distinctly disappointed, Captain Jimmy lost all interest in the beautiful terrace, called the waiter, paid his bill and asked if it was necessary to take a gondola to reach St. Mark's Square, that being, he had read,

the center of Venetian attractions. Having learned that the journey could be made on foot he retraced his steps to the gondola landing and traversed a lane so narrow that by stretching out his arms he could touch the walls on either side, and then reached a brilliantly lighted street where the shops were still open, and laughing, strolling crowds sometimes made his progress difficult. He paused on a canal bridge, admired what is declared to be the ugliest Byzantine church in Venezia, entered a still more crowded and narrower street and finally halted in a great archway and looked out entranced upon the square which is one of the most beautiful and famous and romantic in existence.

The moonlight magnified its six hundred feet of length and three hundred of width into long distances and glittered upon the superb façades and mosaics of the cathedral; made the Campanile majestic and austere like a gray needle piercing the sky; pricked out the great rows of columns and pillars bordering the entire square, and distracted attention from the blazing shops and cafés with their swarm of human idlers. For the moment Captain Jimmy was overwhelmed with the burden of traditions surrounding this moonlit space, and then, pulling himself together, strolled toward one of the most brilliantly lighted cafés, curiously read the historic name of "Florian," and choosing a table which had just been vacated on the outer edge of the pavement, seated himself. Two men who occupied a small table almost at his elbow in the crowded space abruptly stopped speaking, and his eyes happening at the moment to be downcast to adjust his legs to the intricacies of the ornate table base, saw that one of the men's feet had quickly reached across and pressed the foot of his companion as if adjuring him to caution.

Captain Jimmy looked up at them and found their eyes fixed on his. Then, having nothing to conceal and but little interest in what they might think of him, he looked away and casually lighted his pipe.

"Will the signor favor me with a match from his box?" he heard one of the men say in Italian, but thinking that the request had not been addressed to him, made no response. He was made aware of its direction only when he heard one of the men say, "Pshaw! You are needlessly alarmed, Pietro. He doesn't understand our tongue

and is merely one of the million or so tourists. You were saying that——”

He heard the two men settle themselves back into a less strained position but, smiling to himself, did not again look round and assumed an air of abstraction.

“Well, you not being a Venetian, probably never heard of the Dandolo box, or, as it's commonly known, the Crusader's Casket. It is supposed to be a holy relic from Constantinople brought back by its conqueror, the Doge Enrico Dandolo, in the thirteenth century. The Doge Marino Faliero, who was beheaded in 1355 was, according to tradition, the first man to desecrate it by opening it, and the superstitious attributed his greed for power and his downfall to whatever it contained. The method of opening it is secret, but he is supposed to have discovered this and—he lost his head. It was sufficiently revered, however, so that from then on until the time of Napoleon it was never disturbed, and was carefully guarded. Napoleon, you may know, was in his way a great collector. When he looted Venice in 1797 he heard the story of the casket, was attracted by its history, and carried it away with him to France. There is a story that he was annoyed because of his inability to find the method of opening it and that he was known to have passed hours inspecting it, but would not permit any forceful means for breaking it, although it had no enormous intrinsic value. That is, to an emperor. It is merely a small, roughly beaten but intricately worked casket of gold studded with crudely cut gems. Tradition says that at last he found the way to open it and—that was the end of his power. He died an exile. When in 1815 France returned to the Venetian republic the four bronze horses and other treasures carried away by Napoleon, she sent also the historic casket and it remained in the treasury until 1849 when, after her heroic resistance, Venice, conquered by famine, fell to the Austrian besiegers.

“Now, it so happened that in the ranks of those who so long fought in her defense was a certain American named Yancey Powell, originally from one of their barbaric States, territories, or whatever they are called, known as Kentucky. A red-headed man who was a fighter, this American. They still tell stories of his steadfast valor and reckless determination. When all was over this Colonel Powell—for he had

become a colonel of Venetian artillery—escaped. No one knows how. There are a hundred stories about it. Some said that he swam miles and boarded an American merchantman laying off the island of Murano. Others say that, being an accomplished adventurer, he so ably disguised himself and so well spoke the hated Austrian tongue that he actually succeeded in passing through their lines and eventually made his way back to America. But this is certain—that when he went the Crusader's Casket went with him. No one knows why he chose it when there were jewels rare and priceless at his command—things easier to carry. He could have filled his pockets with jewels, for he had access to the treasury. He could have burdened himself with priceless relics of great value; but this is known, that all he took was the Crusader's Casket, the box brought from Constantinople by the Doge Dandolo in that historic year of 1204. It is enough to make one believe in this theory of reincarnations, is that well-authenticated story; enough to make one question whether he was not—well—two men in one!

“My grandfather fought in that great and stubborn defense and, starved and wounded, was lying there on the flags of the old treasury house when this stubborn, red-headed man, knowing that all was lost, entered to make his farewell. It was this grandfather of mine who told me the story. He told me that the American, a scarecrow in rags, tall, bony, scarred, entered and stood dejectedly in the center of the treasure vaults which he had helped to defend until that ultimate moment of defeat. Everybody knew him. There could be no mistake of identity. He stood for a moment as if thinking in great despair of all that was lost to the accursed Austrian, then slowly, very slowly, he took his sword from its scabbard held it in his hands for a moment as if considering whether he should brook its inevitable relinquishment, lifted it to his lips, kissed it as if in farewell and—swiftly broke it across his knee. He tossed the hilt one way and the broken blade the other. My grandfather was nearly struck by the thrown point, and rolled to one side and into the deeper shadows. He saved that point of blade and was clinging to it when the Austrians came and jerked it from his hands. My grandfather was a man who understood many things, although why he should have cherished that piece of broken sword has always baffled me,

"But—coming back to this red-headed colonel of America—my grandfather saw him walk across to the great store of wealth that was kept in cases, pause in front of them, seem to deliberate and then—he proved that he must have been addled by the long fight! For he selected but one thing, that valueless box of thin gold and crudely cut stones, the Crusader's Casket! There were diamonds there like pigeon's eggs. Rubies worth a king's forfeit. Emeralds one of which would have made a man wealthy for life. Pearls of value to buy power, and pleasure and wine. But he chose none of these. He threw such aside, seeming to seek but one bauble and then, when he found the Crusader's Casket, clutched it in his hands—quite reverently—as if he did not wish it to fall into the grasp of those who were to come—and tucked it into his ragged shirt and without another glance at all that he had left behind ran out and through the door that swung open, unguarded for the first time in centuries, and was never again seen by that grandfather of mine."

Captain Jimmy heard a sigh and suddenly found that he too had been mightily interested in this story. He was tempted to turn, apologize for eavesdropping, and ask a question; but was spared the effort by the companion of the fervid narrator who said: "Well? Well? What then? Where is it now, Pietro?"

"That, my friend, is the point! After all its travels, after all its vicissitudes, that strange casket has returned. It is here again! Here in Venezia. But it comes not with a Powell. Colonel Yancey Powell must be long dead. It comes back in the hands of one strange American; one who has much money; for does he not buy a palace that once belonged to a prince of the house of Mascarelli, for which he paid much gold? And I who have seen drawings of the Crusader's Casket made by my grandfather, whose painter hand of youth was inimitable, and whose hand of age had not lost its dexterity, have seen it. So, I ask you, what does it mean? Why should this priceless casket—priceless, yet of no more value than a song—why should it have been returned here to the city whither it came in that far-off day of 1204, seven centuries ago?"

Again there was a long silence and Captain Jimmy waited impatiently for an answer. When it came it was distinctly disappointing.

"Pietro Sordillo, you are what the English call a crank! You are a Venetian. Once you were a consulting expert of the college of historical antiquities. Now you are but a registered guide; a man who escorts from the offices of hotels the tourists. You take them through the cathedral, pointing out its beauties; you take them through the Palace of the Doges, calling attention to its frescoes; you conduct them across the Bridge of Sighs and display the dark chambers where men passed their final hours and then—then!—you take them to the glassworks and bazaars, knowing that if they buy you receive a commission for bringing them there! You write poems that will never be printed. You give money to your friends in misfortune. You strive to keep sober and—yield to temptation, after which you fall. Wait a moment—just a moment! The apricot must bloom before it bears fruit! And now, because in your official and menial capacity as guide you have taken an auburn-haired American girl through a palace when its owner was absent—doubtless because you bribed the caretaker—and therein find a thin, gold box, you rave as to whys and wherefores. What concern is it of yours? Did she not pay you?"

"Pay? She paid well! She paid even that bribe which I gave to the caretaker. And I liked her, for in her I saw a soul of flame. And—I have started a poem to her which goes thus:

"Lady of that Western land,
Fair of face and fair of hand,
With hair that's like a crown of gold
And eyes that many secrets hold,
Your slave I am,
Respectfully I kneel.

"No yoke of servitude is mine
Save that to serve is joy divine;
No suppliant I for love's caress
Although—"

"It sounds pretty bad to me," the other man interrupted. "What are you going to do with it? Mail it to her?"

"No, some day I shall give it to her; place it in her hands."

"Nonsense! You may never see her again."

"But I shall. My fortune is made. She has engaged me by the week, indefinitely, and she may be here all summer, she says. She stops at the Danieli. Each morning at nine thirty I am to await her orders."

"What is her name?" inquired the other

man, and Captain Jimmy listened attentively but was disappointed.

"*Per Bacco!* I do not know yet; but that I shall learn, for I am to be not only guide but courier for her, and she says she may ask me to do many strange things but that she will pay liberally. I am to be at her command night and day."

"Sounds interesting," said the other man, plainly stifling a yawn. "But I can't see what all this has to do with the golden box."

"Why, it's this way! I did not know it was there and it was she who told me that at no matter what cost the bribe I must get her into the palace of this American, Harnway, and that while there we must try to discover if the box was in his possession. I did not then know that it was the Crusader's relic—not until I saw it, and then——"

"What did this young woman do when it was shown to you?"

"It was in a locked cabinet along with other curios of more or less value and she—she stared at it as calmly as if this were the last thing on earth she had been seeking and then suggested that perhaps we had best be going. She thanked the major-domo very politely, telling him that now she could rest content having seen the inside of a real Venetian palace home, and added to the already liberal bribe I had given him. Then we went to our gondola and were rowed away to see a fast motor boat that she wished to rent and use during her stay here. That also looks as if her visit would be prolonged, does it not? I am very glad of employment, for the season is dull and men with wealth and liberality seem to come not."

After a moment more they got up and sauntered away; but Captain Jimmy sat for a long time staring abstractedly out over the square, and then arose and turned down past the Palace of the Doges, that miracle palace that is declared to be the finest kingly house on earth but which he did not appear to see. He walked down to the great gondola landing at the foot and chose a grizzled old gondolier whose craft he boarded, and straightway fell into fluent conversation, leading the veteran to boast of his knowledge of Venice and its inhabitants.

"I suppose you know the Mascarelli Palace?" inquired Captain Jimmy.

"Si, signor. Well. Most well. I also know its new owner, the rich American."

"What's his name?" Jimmy asked, with a casual air that concealed his acute interest.

"Harnway. His first name is—a strange name—let me think."

"Is it by any chance Lemuel?" was the apparently innocent inquiry.

"Si, si, signor. That is it. Lemuel Harnway."

Captain Jimmy successfully concealed a start of surprise and made no reply. But to himself he said: "Well I'll be hanged! So it's Lemuel, eh? Over here for keeps, too. The old scoundrel!"

CHAPTER II.

CONSIDERABLY to the mystification of the *Adventure's* cook, a "colored gemmleman from Maryland" who prided himself on the excellence of his service for the owner, that somewhat freakish man announced on the following morning that he would not breakfast aboard ship. Furthermore, he had his launch put into the water and was taken ashore.

The boat made a landing almost in front of the staid old Hotel Danieli on the Riva degli Schiavoni, and Captain Jimmy, remembering having read that it was originally a fourteenth-century palace that in its successive times had been the residence of doges, ambassadors and world's notables, and as a hotel had been known for more than a century, felt like taking off his hat and making it a respectful bow. He paused irresolutely for a moment, grinned, consulted his watch, saw that it was but eight thirty on that bright, sunlit morning, and somewhat to the astonishment of his motor sailor ordered him to find a berth near by and await further orders. Then after a surreptitious glance at his clothing, at the polish of his boots, and a fumble at his tie to reassure himself that it was eminently correct, he strode leisurely across the broad way, swinging his malacca stick and entered the Danieli. He trudged past the obsequious and uniformed door man as if he were an habitu  of the place instead of making his first visit, glanced sidewise into the breakfast room, seemed again reassured, and delivered hat and stick to another attendant, announcing that he wished breakfast.

The head waiter greeted him at the entrance and was rendered duly respectful and attentive by a gold coin that somehow found its way into his palm.

"That seat over there, please," said Captain Jimmy in an almost confidential pitch of voice and was thereupon ushered to a seat beside one of the stained-glass windows in the front and, strangely enough, facing another small table at which was seated a young lady with auburn hair, now turned to burnished gold by the light of stained glass. To Captain Jimmy it appeared as if this were an aureole, saintly, glorious.

She was absorbed in a guide book and bestowed upon him nothing more than a cool, casual, indifferent glance before resuming her reading. He had ample opportunity to study her face. There was something about her distinctly thoroughbred, he mentally decided, and in addition to that a suggestion of purposeful independence and bravery. The chin was not that of a weakling and the mouth, although delicate, indicated anything but laxity of will. After that one sweeping, appraising glance she paid no more heed to him than if he had never existed, or never taken a seat at a neighboring table that faced hers. She was too oblivious to his presence for pretense and seemed wholly engrossed in some occupation of her own that was at least methodical; for, when her breakfast was concluded, she thrust the dishes aside with an almost masculine gesture, and spread a map, and with a guide book as reference began tracing certain routes with a tiny gold pencil that she produced from her pocketbook. Now and then she appeared to be in doubt, frowning, meditating and erasing some of the markings to supplant them with others. Captain Jimmy, quietly observant, wondered if all her tours were made in such purposeful manner. When she began to fold the map he hastily summoned the waiter, paid his bill, and without glancing at her sauntered out into the hallway, timing his movements so that he need not depart before she appeared. He saw, lounging in the hallway, the guide Sordillo whom he had overheard talking on the previous night and, even as the rustle of girlish garments behind gave warning of approach, stepped across and accosted him.

"I see by your badge," he said, "that you are a guide. Perhaps you can tell me where I could find another guide known as Pietro Sordillo."

At sight of him the guide frowned slightly, but if he recognized his interlocutor as the man he had seen on the previous evening

in St. Mark's Square his handsome young face did not betray him. In English almost as flawless as Captain Jimmy's own he replied, with a slight bow, "At your service, sir. I am Pietro Sordillo."

Captain Jimmy found the directness of the questioning eyes disconcerting, but succeeded in finding a somewhat stammering answer.

"I am a stranger in Venice, but a friend of mine whom you once served recommended you and—and I wish to engage you."

"I am gratified, sir. And the name of your friend was——"

"Farnham. Charles Farnham. An American; but I doubt if you will recall him. A Venetian guide must meet many people," said Captain Jimmy, with the feeling that he was blundering and had made a mistake in so brazenly prevaricating to this slim young Venetian. "However, that doesn't matter. Are you engaged?"

For quite an appreciable time the dark eyes scrutinized him and Captain Jimmy could not read them.

"I do not remember the name Farnham," Pietro said at last. "And, signor, I never forget names. But—I am sorry. I am regretful that I cannot be of service. I am bespoken. If I could——"

"I seem to be the cause of all this," a musical voice broke in at Captain Jimmy's side, and he saw the girl beside him, and immediately lifted his hat and bowed. "And I can understand why you particularly wished to engage Pietro Sordillo, for there are but one or two guides in Venice with his knowledge," she went on, entirely self-possessed and speaking as one American might to another in a foreign land.

"That is what I have been told," Captain Jimmy said, seizing at any straw for conversation. "I wished particularly to get him to conduct me through the Palace of the Doges."

The girl's calm eyes studied him for a moment as if to assure herself that she was speaking to a gentleman and then she volunteered, "I was going there myself this forenoon. If you wish, you may come with us. It will not in the least discommode either the guide or me."

"You are kind," Captain Jimmy hastened to reply. "I accept, gladly, if you are certain I shall not prove an intruder."

"Not at all," she declared, and turned to Pietro with a gesture.

Captain Jimmy, happening to glance at the guide at the same moment, was surprised to discern a tightening of the latter's lips and a flash of disapproval in his eyes; but he cared nothing for these manifestations of distrust now that opportunity had so kindly thrown the girl in his way. They went out together and the shipmaster saw from the corner of his eye that his motor sailor had arisen and stood as if expecting the party to board the launch.

The girl and the guide had paused and were looking in a shop window and Captain Jimmy swiftly made a gesture signaling his man to return to the *Adventure*. The sailor stood a moment irresolutely as if expecting to receive some orders regarding the return of the launch to the shore, but, when Captain Jimmy somewhat impatiently repeated his signal, touched his cap and started his engine. Another plan had entered the captain's mind, which was that if he wished to become better acquainted with the American girl it might be necessary for him to become a guest of the hotel, something that he could scarcely explain if it were known that his ship was lying in the harbor, and he anything but a casual tourist. No, he decided, the tourist rôle was the one to adopt. And, as if his deception were to be aided, almost the first question the girl asked brought him in deeper.

"You are stopping at the Hotel Danieli? I think I saw you breakfasting there."

"Yes," he replied. "That is, I did breakfast there, although my luggage hasn't yet arrived. Yes, I am stopping there."

"And I suppose you are touring, like so many of our countrymen do at this season of the year, coming for but a day or two, going, no one knows where?" she asked, but with such an evident lack of interest that he felt certain she was merely making polite conversation. It piqued him somewhat.

"No," he answered, "I am not one of the rapid tourists. I like to take my time. Suppose I'm rather lazy in my sight-seeing. My stay is indefinite. It may be for but a few days or it may run into weeks. That depends on circumstances."

As he strode beside her he was almost unaware that he was admiring her with side-long glances until, happening to look at Pietro, he saw that the latter was fixing him with what he again took to be a look of distinct disapproval.

"Wonder what that boy has got on his

mind and why he dislikes me?" the captain thought to himself, but speedily forgot this subject in conversation with his more charming companion.

"And I suppose that you too are here as a tourist?" he questioned.

To his considerable surprise her face suddenly lost its look of calm interest, hardened perceptibly, and without looking at him, but frowning slightly at the pavement as if recalled to something, she replied, "No, I am not a tourist in the ordinary sense. I came here on—on a sort of mission." And then with a quiet vehemence, and as if speaking impulsively to herself she added, "And I'll stay here too, until it's performed!" There was something like a threat against fate in her declaration that surprised him; but her manner warned him that to intrude with a question would be to tread upon dangerous ground, and at that moment the guide, as if purposely to create a diversion, called their attention to two historic columns of the palace through which those condemned to public execution had been led to death.

But once inside the palace Captain Jimmy found that whatever other matters she had on her mind, the girl was capable of becoming absorbed in the historic and artistic side of her surroundings and, furthermore, displayed an astounding knowledge of what she observed. Once she even disputed a certain point with the guide, compelling his admiration by her argument and making the captain feel woefully ignorant and somewhat "out of it."

"You seem to be pretty well informed regarding the palace," he suggested, smiling at her as she victoriously drove home her point.

"Me? I have known the history of much of this palace since I was a child," she declared. "And I had reason to."

He was tempted to ask her what that reason might be, but, as if wishing to avoid further questions she stepped across the great council hall in which they were standing and began to inspect at close range some of the adornments. Once again, when they were being led through the Bridge of Sighs with its terrible memories, she stopped and looked through the narrow window into the dark placid waters of the rio beneath, and commented, "There is a tradition that those who might never return were permitted to halt here and take their last look on daylight and the outer world. Poor, unfor-

tunate men! What despair they must have felt in that moment."

The captain caught Pietro's eyes fixed on her in the dim light with a great look of understanding, as if he recognized a kindred spirit in the world of romance, and once again was bewildered by the many sides to the girl's character. And this bewilderment was continued when he parted from her at the hotel door, for in that morning's tour he had been amused by her wit, had joined in her laughter, and yet felt that he had made but small headway toward an acquaintanceship.

"I am indebted to your kindness for a very pleasant and instructive morning," he said, "and—I do not even know your name! Mine is Ware."

She relented enough to say, after a momentary hesitation as if considering the etiquette of self-introduction, "And mine is Cardell. But please don't thank me for the forenoon. It was nothing. Surely Americans should be friendly to one another when in strange lands."

That was all. She was gone before he could think of any sentence suggesting a return of her courtesies, or the possibility of other excursions. He felt distinctly rebuffed; quite as if he had failed to make himself sufficiently entertaining to tempt her to a continuance of the acquaintanceship, and secretly his pride was hurt. The guide still was standing near him and the captain thrust his hand into his pocket and proffered an extravagant payment in the shape of a gold coin; but Pietro abruptly put both hands behind him as if to avoid contamination and said: "Signor, the lady pays. She has been your host. I am not a servant who accepts tips from his employer's guests."

"But—good Lord! You work for a living, don't you, Sordillo?"

"Sometimes I work for love," stoutly asserted Pietro with a bow, and the captain had difficulty in suppressing a smile at the guide's exaggerated politeness and air of haughtiness.

"Then perhaps you will join me in a drink of something?" Jimmy suggested, but was again rebuffed with an almost equal melodrama of speech.

"I never drink when in attendance upon a lady of such unquestioned refinement and breeding as has the Signorina Cardell. I shall probably be with her this afternoon and it might prove offensive." But at the

look on Captain Jimmy's face he did relent sufficiently to add, "Some other time, signor, when I am off duty, perhaps I shall be glad of the hospitality. But until then——"

With an airy wave of his hand and a lift of his hat he turned and disappeared into the vestibule.

"Well, I'll be tarred and feathered if he isn't a funny bird!" the captain chuckled, and then made his way across to the landing and called for a gondola to take him out to the *Adventure*, which still lay at anchor plainly visible from where he stood, and appearing in the distance like a smudgy tramp asleep in the entrance to the Giudecco.

As the gondolier deftly swung his ornate prow channelward the captain thought of his next move in keeping with his tourist rôle. It might not be wise, he considered, to have his luggage delivered at the hotel by one of his own men, although subterfuge seemed absurd. He wondered why he had not openly said that he was the master of a ship in the harbor and had merely dropped into the hotel for breakfast; but, after all, that might have caused some questioning in the mind of Miss Tommie Cardell as to how and why he should be ashore for an early breakfast. He turned in his seat and addressed the gondolier in English.

"Could you take a steamer trunk and a hand bag back to the Danieli for me and tell them that I shall come ashore and register after lunch?"

The man smiled, displaying wonderful teeth, and shaking his head, paused in his stroke, lifted a gesticulatory hand and said, "Signor, no spika Inglesa."

Captain Jimmy repeated his words in fluent and unhesitating Italian, much to the gondolier's delight.

"The signor speaks Italian so well that it seems a shame for him to use English! Yes, I can take the trunk and bag and deliver your message. You may trust me that the work will be well done. And I shall tell them that the signor will arrive—when?"

"Some time this afternoon," Ware replied. "You will have to lay alongside my ship until I get the things packed, but I will pay you for your time."

"Excellent, signor. Most excellent."

He fell into his long, swaying stroke again and his passenger turned and stared at the never uninteresting panorama of the marvelous waterway; but behind him the gondolier

smiled quietly as if somewhat amused by something, and shook his head until the gold rings in his ears swayed with merriment.

The gondola came alongside the *Adventure*, whose chief officer had lowered away a side ladder that, like many other appointments of the ship, appeared too well made, too clean and bright, for the use of a mere tramp. The chief himself stood at the head and hailed, "Glad you came back, Captain Ware. We can make our dock right after lunch and the shipping agent has been off to see you, sir."

Jimmy told the gondolier to wait alongside the ladder, disappeared below and did his hasty packing. The gondolier lounged gracefully on the running board of his slender craft and—singularly enough—held a conversation in very good English with one of the sailors who had some questions to ask about shore resorts. Furthermore, the gondolier himself seemed to have an inquisitive strain, for he asked several adroit questions as to the master, the owners, and previous voyages. But he used nothing but Italian when the owner appeared behind one of his sailors, who deposited the steamer trunk and bag in the gondola, and even the thanks for the liberal fee given him was expressed in the tongue. The captain, with an expression of amusement in his eyes, watched the gondola sliding away and then turned briskly to his chief officer.

"Mr. Barton," he said, "I'm afraid you will have to take the ship into the dock and deliver her cargo. About that agent——"

"I think I see him shoving off there now," Barton said, staring at a spot shoreward.

"Oh. Coming off again, is he? That's good. Send him down to my cabin."

"Yes, sir." Then after a moment's pause and further staring, "Yes, sir, that's him all right."

The agent came aboard briskly and with an air of businesslike concern. He was taken below, gaped for a moment at his surroundings, and then remarked, cautiously, "Captain, I've some rather good news for you. Our firm can contract a cargo out at once—that is, of course, if we can come to terms."

"What is it?" the owner asked, with anything but an air of joy.

"Cement from Spalato, down on the Jugoslavia coast, to Alexandria, Egypt. Easy stuff to handle, good berth down there—run right alongside the cement company's

dock, steam-crane work, so no delays, use their own men to stow, and full tonnage. All you can carry, if the price is right."

But to the agent's surprise the owner of the *Adventure* hesitated, pondered and then asked, "Any rush about it?"

"Yes," the agent admitted, "there is. It's necessary to get it off immediately."

"Afraid I can't take it on," said the skipper, shaking his head. "In fact, I am not open to anything, not even charter for—well—maybe for some days, or possibly weeks."

And when the agent went over the side he muttered, "That man is crazy!" A judgment in which Ware himself might have concurred smilingly.

CHAPTER III.

IN the week following his arrival at the Danieli, Captain Jimmy found himself in what was for him a most peculiar predicament. Very peculiar for him, inasmuch as he found himself more than half in love with a young lady who seemed willing to accept his companionship at odd hours but who never bestowed any confidences regarding herself or her past and asked none of him. He was baffled by her attitude and actions. There would be forenoons when she rambled with him unconcernedly through the delightful old quarters of the delightful old city, and seemed carefree, happy, unconcerned in anything save the pleasure or interest of the moment. She invited him on excursions to Murano, that ancient island home of the glassworkers, whose furnaces still glowed, and rambled with him on other islands of the Lagune, islands scattered prodigally and green on placid blue waters where romance seemed at home. Sometimes she herself handled the wheel of her launch and displayed a skill that appealed to his seamanship. Once she drove daringly under the counter of his own ship now unloaded and lying in ballast only in the Giudecco, and he pretended interest in the lacing of his shoes, bending his head downward and leaning his broad shoulders forward lest some of his lounging men recognize him. He noted with approval that Barton had taken the opportunity to repaint the *Adventure* and that she had lost her seaworn look. Evidently Barton was hoping to surprise her owner with his diligence when the latter returned from his shore wandering.

"Look! Look, Mr. Ware," the girl called

excitedly as her launch slipped away. "That ship is called the *Adventure* and she carries our flag. Isn't she beautiful? I should think you would take more interest in a ship from home," she added when he merely gave a quick glance upward and again looked away.

"I am too much interested in the way you handle your boat," he replied.

"Why? Don't I do it well?" she asked ingenuously. "I raced boats at Miami and Palm Beach and had got rather fond of myself as a sailor. Don't make me doubt myself, please. Besides, I don't suppose you are any better sailor than I am, are you?"

She laughed in his face, and he would have laughed in return had not his eyes at that moment encountered Pietro's in whose glance there was an odd expression of expectancy.

"Of course I'm not," he asserted. "How can you expect a mere tourist to know anything about the sea?"

"What are you interested in, anyway?" she demanded. "You don't seem to care so very much about palaces, or historical things, or traditions, or——"

"Well, get on with it," he said laughingly when she paused in her arraignment. "You seem to think I'm a frightfully useless dawdler."

"You haven't said anything to convince me otherwise," she remarked severely. "For some reason that I can't explain you impress me as one of those who drift aimlessly. A man without a purpose. I don't like aimless people. They annoy me."

"I suppose then, Miss Cardell, that you have an aim," he suggested, lazily, and was astonished by the sudden change that came over her face, sobering it, slightly hardening it.

"Yes," she declared, "I have. I am the last one of my family, I sometimes think, who has an aim or courage. I've got a brother who laughs at me and is too lazy to do anything worth while. I suppose he's at Palm Beach right now, fishing, sailing, dancing and doing all sorts of things that aren't worth a rap. I should have been the man of the family."

"It's usually the women who have the refinement of brains, and the more steadfast courage," he remarked.

"That's very nice of you to say that," she said, mollified and smiling at him. "You

tempt me—almost—to take you into my confidence."

"I wish you would," he declared, sitting suddenly erect and looking at her with unmistakable admiration in his handsome eyes. And he could have mentally anathematized Pietro, who at that moment interjected himself with a suggestion that it was time they return to the hotel unless they wished to be late for luncheon. They returned and again he felt as if an opportunity had been lost.

He was chafing at his helplessness throughout the afternoon, and stopped on a bench down in the public gardens to consider what the week had brought forth. It had resulted in nothing save that he had been accepted as a casual acquaintance when no other was convenient. Such status annoyed him. Other women he had known had been only too eager to accept and seek his friendship. Sometimes he had been driven to reserve by such attentions. And now when he had found a girl whom he ardently wished to impress he felt a failure. It but increased his determination to get on some other and more intimate footing with Tommie Cardell, to break through that reserve with which she surrounded herself whenever he tried to approach her.

Again, there was something mysterious in her movements. Twice in the week he had seen her in the hotel drawing-room, seated obscurely in the corner behind the palms, holding confidential conversation with the perfervid young guide Pietro Sordillo. He was still thinking of these little happenings that night when, after she had declined to accompany him to the opera, pleading a previous engagement, he loitered in front of the hotel for an hour or two, lonely, and saw the crowd diminish along the Riva degli Schiavoni until the great sea-front way appeared almost deserted. A vagrant impulse impelled him to walk up to the nearest gondola station and step into the first one at the landing.

"The signor wishes to go—where? He can trust me, old Tomaso, to take him," politely boasted the gray-haired but sturdy old veteran at the oar. For a moment Captain Jimmy hesitated and then with a wave of his hand said, "Oh, anywhere! I don't care. You might cut down through the first canal and get to the Rialto." And then suddenly he seemed to recall something and said, "No, I'll tell you what to do,

Tomaso. Take me into the Rio della Guerra and from there into the Rio dei Baretteri. There's an old palace there I wish to see—the palace of Mascarelli."

"Oh, the one now owned by the wealthy American, the Signor Harnway?"

"Yes, that's the one," said Captain Jimmy, settling back into his seat as the gondolier dipped his long oar into the water, swung the high and ornate prow of his black craft sidewise and urged it forward.

For a long time, leisurely, almost silently, the gondola slipped through the narrow waterway bordered by buildings high and as black and still as the water which the prow of the gondola seemed to slip over rather than to part. At that hour of the night no other boats intruded upon them. Once they passed three or four other craft whose owners, tired, lay asleep as if the canals were their homes to which they had come for rest when the day's work was done. Gloomy doorways opened here and there above landing steps whose bases were laved and slapped by the languidly disturbed waters. Here and there a wall was passed whose creepers and vines, flowering dully in the gloom, swayed in the water as if aroused from sleep. Suddenly the gondolier paused and muttered as if in astonishment, "There is another gondola ahead of us that acts peculiarly! As if it didn't wish to be seen and— Strange things happen in these rios at night, signor. Perhaps we intrude."

"How do you know they act peculiarly?" demanded Captain Jimmy, interested.

"They have kept just far enough ahead to keep from sight, signor. I can tell by the wash. Each time when there is a turn where we could have taken another direction they have waited to see whether we would leave them. They do not wish to be seen."

"All right. Let's have some fun with them. See if you can catch up and come alongside. There's twenty lire extra in it if you can," Captain Jimmy remarked impulsively. "I've never seen a gondola race and it ought to be worth while. Go to it!"

The gondolier grinned in the darkness, said something about an extra twenty lire being worth striving for, and shot his slender boat ahead with swift strokes of the long oar. It turned a corner in time to see a similar boat making off into an intersection. A few yards more and Captain Jimmy's boat, with a rapid swerve, also had turned

into a still narrower rio and now in a patch of light from high windows they saw the pursued gondola making undoubted haste to escape.

"Forty lire if you overtake them," called Captain Jimmy, with dormant sporting proclivities aroused. "Yes, I'll make it fifty. Shake a blade. Let's see what you can do!"

The veteran at the oar was now swaying his body backward and forward with his foot and stiffened leg keeping time as his stroke increased, and the gondola seemed pulsing with effort. It slowed down to make the next turn around which the escaping boat had disappeared some minutes before and then Captain Jimmy heard an exclamation, felt Tomaso making frantic efforts to alter the course of his craft, and heard his shout, "Signor! Look out for yourself!"

He had but a glimpse of the high, sharp, metal prow of another gondola, manned with two oars, shooting forward to ram his own craft! There was a resounding smash, the gondola in which he stood was overturned and he found himself swimming in the water near his own gondolier, who was swearing steadily with a vigor that proved that he was angry, rather than frightened, and in no danger of drowning. And this surprise was not dulled before he received another; for he heard a woman's voice commanding sharply, "Keep straight on! Straight on and back as fast as you can. A police boat may be called! Quickly!"

"True, signorina! True!" he heard another well-known and recognized voice reply and the two-oared gondola slithered past, its black shape appearing snakelike, its two oars working at racing speed and then in a moment they were gone. He knew that he had been run down by Tommie Cardell and that the man in the head of the attacking gondola had been none other than Pietro Sordillo, the guide, her retainer.

His own gondolier came swimming toward him like a water rat to see if his passenger required assistance, saw that he was well able to care for himself and swam toward the overturned gondola which floated but a few yards away. Captain Jimmy had just gained his side and was resting with an arm on the craft when they heard a shout above them on the narrow ledge of a street near by and knew that the authoritative tones could have come only from an officer:

"What's wrong down there?"

The gondolier was about to shout his ex-

postulations when Jimmy laid a hand on his arm and clutched it savagely, then shouted, "Nothing serious, officer. Just an accident. That's all. We took a turning too abruptly—all my fault. Here, I'll hand you an oar so you can give us a tow down to the first landing."

"This is too much! What will any policeman say of me with such an excuse as that?" growled Tomaso, but was silenced by his passenger.

"We can tell him I was learning to row. Shut up! I'll pay well if you keep quiet."

Thus admonished the gondolier fell to a sulky silence but, by the time the officer above had caught the end of the oar and dragged the overturned gondola and its two living burdens along a convenient landing, had recovered his tongue and was as volubly lying as even Jimmy could have wished. A gold coin slipped into the official hand turned the policeman into a messenger to find another gondola and bring it to the scene, and Captain Jimmy and his gondolier sat on the edge of the landing and dumped the water from their shoes.

"Tomaso, did you recognize who it was ran into us?" Jimmy asked thoughtfully.

"I did and—I didn't, signor. The man's face was in blackness, but—that was a familiar voice and once I hear it again—my ear is good. He shall pay for it!" The veteran left no doubt of what he would do to that enemy once identification was certain.

"But mightn't it have been an accident?"

"Accident! I smile, signor! Here in the darkness I smile! No man who ever stood on the running board of a gondola and handled an oar like that man ever rammed another boat in Venice by accident. That man was born to the water, the same as myself."

"But suppose I don't want you to get him? Suppose I'd rather get him in my own way?"

Jimmy saw the old gondolier stop, bend forward and look at him as if to make certain that this was not a jest, and then turn, whistle softly through his teeth, and give an odd chuckle.

"Ah. The signor heard as I did, that there was a woman in that gondola! Now I begin to understand. The signor wishes, for reasons of his own, to hush this matter up."

"Exactly," the captain replied. "No one

must know. Not even the gondolier whom the policeman is now bringing around the bend down there. Listen, Tomaso, I was learning to row a gondola. I got flustered and banged her against a corner. That is all. And now listen still closer. I pay you to keep this between ourselves and I'm going to hire you and your boat from now on until I get this matter straightened out. You are to be at my service night and day. Understand?"

The gondolier, who in his forty or fifty years of life on the canals had known of, and perhaps participated in, many strange affairs, chuckled wisely and said, "I am the signor's man. And he may leave it to me to keep any one from knowing anything. But I can't tell until I can get my boat out of water how badly she was rammed. Those metal prows driven by two oars can cut like a knife, sometimes. I think I had better have this man tow me into a little quiet basin over on the other side of the Grand Canal behind the Chiesa della Salute where, when dawn comes, I can hide her if need be until I can repair her."

"Good. If necessary get a man to help you who can be trusted to keep his mouth shut. Come to the Hotel Danieli to-morrow at noon and ask for Mr. Ware. I shall leave you now and find another gondola. If I cut through this passage where will it take me?"

"Out onto the canal near the Rialto Bridge, signor, and there is a gondola station close by."

The oncoming gondola drew up alongside, the captain bade the officer and the gondoliers good night, and trudged away through a narrow alleyway, leaving a trail of water behind him. An hour later he surprised the watch on the *Adventure* by coming aboard and going below to his cabin, from which, later, and well clad, he returned to the shore. Swinging a light stick and appearing as if he had but returned from a most placid evening he entered the hotel and the lounge to find the young lady Tommie engrossed in conversation with that earnest young gentleman Pietro. They looked up as he said, "Good evening," and he wondered if it were a trick of his imagination, or a fact, that they appeared to exchange glances of relief or surprise even as they responded to his salute. And was he mistaken in wondering if there was a dry irony in Pietro's question:

"Ah, the signor has taken advantage of the balmy night and been to hear the band concert in the public gardens?"

"I'm fond of music," said Captain Jimmy evasively. "I had rather hoped for the pleasure of company this evening; but I saw neither of you around when I left the hotel. Were you at the concert?"

The cool directness of his question appeared to cause the guide some slight confusion.

"No, signor," he said, lowering his eyes to the rug at which he stared contemplatively. "The signorina is—er—planning her further explorations in my beloved Venezia."

Jimmy saw a slight smile curve the corners of Tommie's most charming mouth and was not surprised when she turned from the writing table after folding up a map of the city and smiled openly at him.

"Yes, Mr. Ware," she said, "I am still unsatisfied. There is much to be seen in Venice. Don't you think so?"

"I do," he agreed, feeling all the time that perhaps he was fencing with a very charming antagonist. "The canals, by night, are wonderful. There is a mystery about them, a sort of glamour. Quite as if romance were not yet dead in the greatest home of romance that the world has ever known."

"Ah! The signor too feels that?" cried Pietro, suddenly enthusing. "He sees it to-day? Then think what it must have been in those past centuries when silks and satins rustled in the gondolas and the gondoliers of the rich and powerful wore velvet and gold! Back in those ages of poetry, and song, and love!"

"And perhaps abduction, and the stiletto, and the vendetta also, eh?"

"Possibly," said Pietro with a shrug of his shoulders and uplift of his hands. "Men of the medieval ages were hot blooded and quick to act."

"And I fancy that the Venetians are still hot blooded and quick," retorted the captain, steadily eyeing the guide to discern if the latter might not in any way betray himself.

"I suppose we are—if we are crossed," calmly replied Pietro.

"And perhaps as dangerous to-day as they were years ago—in the Dark Ages?"

"And perhaps as dangerous, signor."

Miss Cardell looked up at the two men as if suspecting some hidden import in their

2B—POP.

speech and, almost as if thrusting herself between two combatants, intervened.

"To-morrow afternoon, Mr. Ware, I plan to go to the Lido in my launch. Would you like to come along?"

"Nothing could delight me more," he said sincerely. "With one reservation—which is that in the evening you are to go as my guest to the gardens to hear the very famous military band that is playing there this week."

He saw that for a moment she hesitated and that Pietro was staring at her as if to suggest that she decline, and he felt a savage desire to tell that young man that it was not the part of a guide to make suggestions to his employer. She glanced up almost casually at Pietro, intercepted his look and then her lips closed firmly as she replied, "I shall be your guest in the evening, with pleasure, Mr. Ware."

Pietro arose almost sulkily, recovered his poise, and said: "Then it is planned that we leave the hotel at three o'clock, Signorina Cardell."

"That is the arrangement. Good night," she said as he bowed, and after making his salutation to Captain Jimmy retired with a swing of his lithe young shoulders that seemed to express something akin to "washing his hands" of something.

The girl watched him go with an amused look in her eyes and seemed almost unaware of Jimmy's presence. He expected her to make some comment, but she did not. He was tempted, under the lure of her eyes, to bluntly ask her the meaning of the night's episode, but fortunately remembered that although friendship grows with an astonishing rapidity between congenial fellow countrymen when they find themselves alone together in a foreign land, there is a limit to inquisitiveness. Moreover, he was aware that within a week he had formed a most astonishing and perplexing desire for this girl's esteem. He contented himself with a reference to the departed guide.

"That young chap seems to be a most competent sort of person, quite above the average run of guides, doesn't he?"

"Ah, you have noticed that too? Well, he amuses me. He does, actually!" she declared. "He reminds me of some old poet who, all fire and fervor, had stepped out of a frame. But perhaps you don't know that he is a poet? Well, he is. He gave me to-day a bundle of manuscript and—

well, it was all I could do to keep from laughing at his earnestness; which would have been dangerous for, Mr. Ware, it is always dangerous to laugh at those who are in earnest, no matter what silly form their earnestness may take. So, I read them and praised them—with some slight mental reservations. I'm afraid he has read his Tasso so reverently that he has unconsciously imitated the Tasso style. But Pietro is a wonderful boy. Yes, just a boy. He is so respectful—almost reverential. And he does so enthuse over his Venice and her traditions."

"I have observed that," Jimmy admitted, with a sense of justice and truth. "Also that he appears to be your most willing slave."

"We—Pietro and I—have a quest together." She laughed, and then as if it were after all no jesting matter became suddenly grave and frowned absently through the open windows. "He wished me to achieve something that my heart is set on doing," she said and then, much to Jimmy's amazement, slapped her open palm on the writing table with a feminine air of determination and declared, "And I'll achieve it, too! You can bet on that, as we say down home when we're really in earnest."

Then suddenly she laughed and said: "But all this means nothing to you, and to tell the truth I felt that I had to promise to accompany you to-morrow night just to show him that I was, after all, somewhat independent of this quest of ours that seems to have become a mutual one."

"I'm glad of that, for I benefit thereby," he asserted.

"You are complimentary," she said, smiling, as she arose and gave him her hand and wished him good night.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Captain Jimmy arose in the morning at his customary early hour, following the habit of the sea, and strolled out into the scarcely awakened Riva in front of the hotel, he walked as usual to the edge of the stone escarpment and stared reflectively out toward the Giudecco. He observed that the *Adventure* still lay there, floating light and with her bow turned toward him as if eying him with reproach for such base desertion. He grinned at the thought and mentally saluted her with,

"That's all right, old girl. I understand, and I'm not certain that you haven't some right to be jealous. Affections do have a way of getting divided, sooner or later!"

The gilded God of Fortune on the Dogna di Mare, resting on its globe of gilded copper and upheld by its two bronze kneeling athletes, still held a steady motionless sail and stared seaward, the morning sun reflecting from its surface and making it shine like polished gold. The huge old Church of the Salute, majestic and imposing, was reflected in the waters at the mouth of the Grand Canal and the early gondola ferries were plying busily across carrying men, women and children to the larger island for their day's tasks. Captain Jimmy lazily stared at and admired the picture presented to him, and was turning back to the hotel for his breakfast when he discovered another lounging man, whose gaze was fixed calmly on the same hotel entrance. It suddenly occurred to Jimmy that he had seen that man several times within the last few days and he recalled that each time there had been something familiar about him. And now, in one of these peculiar flashes of memory that so strangely identifies, aided perhaps by a shift of the light on a profile, he mentally exclaimed, "Oh! Now I've got him! That was the guide to whom Pietro was talking on the first night I ever saw that young scalawag. That's the man he called Giuseppe. Suppose he's hanging around either in hope of an engagement, or waiting for some appointment. Looks a bit of a rascal, too."

And then, consulting his watch, and finding time advancing, he speedily dismissed the lounging Giuseppe from his mind and went for breakfast with a well-developed sailor's appetite. But that was not the last he was to see of Giuseppe that day; for when after a cruise rendered marvelous by the company of Miss Tommie Cardell he landed at the Lido and strolled around with her while listening to the instructive comments of Pietro, he saw Giuseppe for the second time, engrossed in conversation with an old dame who had curios for sale. He saw him again, an hour later, when, having escaped Pietro for a while, he strolled through the long, shaded gardens leading to the terrace of a great hotel and returning that way discovered Pietro and Giuseppe in vehement conversation. Their arms waved and shook, their slender hands gesticulated

beneath each other's noses, and they appeared almost on the point of quarreling when the captain and his companion approached.

"Bah! Giuseppe, take this from me—you ask too many questions. It must stop!" Jimmy heard Pietro declare as with a final snap of his thumb and finger he turned and joined them.

"You seem frightfully disturbed about something," Miss Cardell remarked with a smile and her excited guide doffed his hat, thrust his fingers through his hair and asserted, "Disturbed, signorina? Yes, I am. That pig of a guide, Giuseppe, becomes too—what you Americans call—the fresh—that's it! Too fresh with me. Pfaugh! What is he, the swine? Just a guide! Nothing but a guide! He does not understand me, for I am not only a guide, but a poet! The signorina will bear out my assertion, I am certain."

And then with one of the sudden changes of temper that made him so boyishly attractive his face suddenly broke into smiles and he laughed heartily.

"We quarreled over the first stanza of Dante's immortal work, and I should have known it was useless to be disturbed by such an ignorant clod as my friend Giuseppe, who is always wrong. He laughs at my poem which I shall publish at my own expense on the next Feast of Il Redentore, which of course you understand."

Ware looked blank and Pietro scornful at such ignorance.

"The Feast of the Redeemer," he said severely, as if speaking to a child "commemorates the deliverance from the great plague of 1537 and is celebrated the third Sunday of every July by our greatest municipal procession on the canals, because in that terrible time tens of thousands of our citizens, to escape the plague, took refuge in boats on the canals and lived there till the plague, through the efficacy of prayer, was checked. The poem which I am composing endeavors to be worthy of such a tragic event and solemn commemoration. It is nearly completed, and needs to be, for there are but ten days more until it must be issued."

Captain Jimmy had difficulty in retaining his smiles at the grandiloquence and self-assurance of Pietro, this child of Venice, who took his city, and its fêtes, and his own work with such prodigious seriousness.

He was spared comment by Miss Cardell, who straightway won a still warmer place in Pietro's heart by declaring, with the utmost kindness, "And I am certain, Pietro, that your poem will be worthy."

"The signorina appreciates my genius," Pietro declared gravely. "And now if I can be of no further service, perhaps the signorina will excuse me for the day—that is, unless she wishes me to accompany her and the signor to the concert this evening."

He looked at Jimmy almost as severely as if he thought the girl might need a cicerone or a knight-errant, and appeared so boyishly eager to protect her that again Ware was tempted to laughter.

"No, I shall not need you, Pietro," his employer said in that same kindly and tolerant tone, much as if she were speaking to a child. "Mr. Ware will take good care of me. You may go now, if you wish."

He murmured his thanks with an elaborate bow, and would have started away had she not halted him with a suggestion.

"There is no need for you to take one of the ferries," she said. "Use my launch and have it return here after it has landed you on the other side."

"The signorina is ever thoughtful," Pietro declared with a dazzling smile of gratitude and again started away; but again, as if recalling something, the girl turned swiftly to Ware, said, "Please excuse me a moment. There is something I must say to him," and called to her retainer in her clear voice arresting his departure. Ware seated himself on one of the benches and watched her as she hurried across the intervening space and addressed Pietro, who listened to whatever she had to say with an almost exaggerated gravity and deference.

"She's making a frightful mistake with that boy, I'm afraid," Ware meditated, as he observed the guide's air of adoration. "He is infatuated with her. If it weren't for his constant attitude of respect I'd be tempted to advise her to send him on his way; to get rid of him; to tell him to shove off! But he gives her the same look that I notice he gives to the Madonna whenever he goes into one of these musty old churches and begins to rave about the glories of Venice. He's Venetian, all right! I'll hand that to him. And somehow, although he distrusts me, I like him."

The girl well groomed, beautiful, so typically American thoroughbred, and as

tall as Pietro, was walking back and forth along a garden path as if considering something and uncertain about it. Now and then she stopped and faced the Venetian with a question, which he answered volubly, his dark face energetic, alight, eloquent. Apparently he was attempting to impress something upon her and once he pointed with a graceful sweeping gesture that embraced the opposite shores that lay shrouded and peaceful in the late afternoon light. It was as if he were calling attention to the beauties of the "Queen of the Adriatic" that lay languidly on her hundred and a half islands out there in the blue seas. Pietro paused and looked at her as if in appeal. Her words came vaguely to the involuntary listener:

"I believe you are right, Pietro. And, anyway, I shall decide and give you an answer to-morrow morning when you come to the hotel. I can't feel as you do about——" She paused and glanced in Ware's direction, flushed when she saw that his eyes were fixed upon her and then lowered her voice to conclude her sentence. Pietro shrugged his shoulders, glanced at Ware, and then with another typically Latin bow turned and made his way down to the launch. Ware felt a vague resentment that was immediately dissipated when she advanced toward him hurriedly, smiling and apologetic for keeping him in waiting so long.

"Now," she said gayly, "all my serious business for to-day is done and I'm going to forget about it and have a good time with you."

He could not doubt that she expressed her feelings. He was flattered and joyful, because of her impulsive surrender to the moment. He did not pause to note that it was the first time that they had ever been together alone with no intention of having anything but a "good time."

When the launch returned it was in that quiet hour when twilight comes so fast over the great lagoon and its islands, and they boarded it and went over the placid reach between the Lido and the Punta della Motta, where they landed, dismissed the launch and strolled up the wide street to the broad and inviting entrance of the gardens. They paid their respects to Benventuni's statue of Garibaldi and stopped to stare at Tamburlini's bust of that unlucky and lost explorer Francesco Querini, after which they

made their way to the quaint little open-air restaurant and chose a table beneath trees that were old when Napoleon Bonaparte made plans for enlarging this beauty spot of the Adriatic. They wondered if he might not have sat there himself, beneath those same trees, when the idea of that great extension germinated in his mind, and were as happy as children in their speculations. But it was not until night had fallen and the huge military band, playing with Italian fervor, had exercised its spell that they fell silent and somewhat absorbed. They strolled away, by mutual but unexpressed impulse, and sought the old sea wall at the extreme end of the island. From there they stared at the few moving lights that could be seen in that somewhat isolated view. The true city of Venice with its dense population lay far away on its myriad islands and it was as if they were alone and the sole occupants of an island of their own.

"Do you know," she said, quite as if to herself, or speaking to one of whose sympathetic understanding she was confident, "this all seems familiar and old to me. It's—it's as if I had known it all my life." She turned and looked at him in the starlight and said abruptly, "I suppose you wonder what I am doing here in Venice, all alone, don't you?"

"I couldn't be that impertinent," he asserted gallantly. "That you are here is sufficient for me."

For a time she regarded him and then said, with nearly a sigh, as if perplexed, "I suppose I ought to resent that as being too personal, but what's the use? I feel that—that you like being with me—and—and I like being with you. For some reason I don't understand you give me a tremendous feeling of support and confidence, quite as if, should it become necessary, I should find in you a very stalwart friend. You've got that air about you, you know, although you are most always rather a sobersides, aren't you?"

"I'm afraid I am," he admitted with such an air of gloom that she laughed openly at him, much to his confusion. And this too was for him a strange experience, amounting to revelation, for it had been many years since any woman or girl had been able to provoke that form of perturbation. "Is it possible," he asked, hesitant, "that I can help you in any way in whatever it is that keeps you here, as you say—alone?"

She did not answer immediately but leaned over the wall and threw pebbles that some one had left on its top into the quiet waters of the lagoon below.

"If I could——" he began, and then stopped as she turned toward him with a tiny gesture. Her face seemed dim and pathetic in the light of the stars as he bent toward her.

"No," she said slowly, "I don't think you could help. And, furthermore, I don't think I should want you to do so. It might get you into trouble. I'm rather a—rather a reckless person, I'm afraid. If I weren't a little reckless I doubt if I should tell you what I'm going to; which is that I'm over here to commit a burglary, and, if the police don't stop me, I'm going to do it, too!"

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Commit a burglary? You don't mean that literally, do you?"

"I do! Word of honor! That's what I'm here for, and I've come across the Atlantic to do it," she asserted.

The nervous laugh with which she broke the spell of his astonishment perplexed him. He could not but be certain that she was in earnest about the projected burglary, yet could not surmise why on earth she should have such a plan, or why, even then, she should in a confidential moment confide in him. That wasn't the sort of thing that burglars, as he had always heard of them, did. It certainly wasn't professional or according to the traditions of the craft.

"Well," he said at last, "if you're out to commit a burglary you can count me in on it. I'm inexperienced, but of this I'm sure—that if you desire something fervently enough to steal it I'm game to help grab it, whatever it is!"

"You think I'm joking," she retorted. "Well, I'm not! There's something over there in Venice that I want. I ought to have it. It belongs to me. The only way I can get it is to steal it and—Pietro is all right, but he's such an impetuous, uncertain, wildfire sort of helper that I'm afraid he will get everything mixed up, and so I'd like to have your advice. You're the only one I've met over here whom I can feel I can trust. You seem so sane, so calm, and so capable, and—— Oh, to tell you the truth my heart is set on this thing!"

"On this burglary?" he asked, smiling a little in the darkness now that her barriers of reserve had been thrown down.

"Yes—for I suppose we must call it that," she replied.

"Isn't— isn't there any other and more legitimate way of getting whatever it is that you covet?" he asked, still inclined to accept her words as a whim or jest.

"No, there isn't!" she said bitterly. "If there were, I wouldn't steal it. But I've just got to get it. That's all there is to that!"

She seemed to have forgotten him in the minutes that passed as she still leaned over the wall and looked downward upon the wash of the Adriatic that whispered against the base of the old gray walls. He watched her, half amused and wholly imbued with a desire to take her into his arms.

"I've never yet gone into a burglary," he said at last, whimsically, "without at least knowing what it was that must be stolen. And so, as I've announced my willingness to become a criminal if you are bent on the game, and there's no other way of getting possession, I suggest that you tell me all about it. If you and I have got to steal something, let's steal it right! I've got to know, haven't I, what it is we're to steal and where it is situated?"

He spoke with the still predominant feeling that this must be some sort of jest, but to his dumfounding she evidently took his words seriously. She made no laughing retort to prolong it, but, still leaning on her elbows over the sea wall said, "An American here whose name is Lemuel Harnway has got a little casket that belongs to my family, and I'm going to get it!"

He was thankful that she was looking abstractedly into the Adriatic when she spoke, for otherwise his start of bewilderment might have been observed. It required a moment for him to adjust himself to such a serious position and adopt a pose. He bent toward her and in the gloom studied the whiteness of her profile, the shadowy shape of her young shoulders and then looked around to collect himself before answering.

"Well," he asked, feeling that to her at least there was something vital in all this, "if this man Harnway has got something that belongs to you, or your family, why don't you ask him for it?"

"Ask him? Ask a Harnway for anything?" she exclaimed, suddenly turning as if she had been a spring released from position. "I'd rather die than ask a Harnway

anything on earth! Why should I or any of mine ask? He knows it belongs to us, and if he had any decency wouldn't have to be asked. I'd as soon think of asking the devil for holy water." She stopped for a moment, then turned back across the sea wall and added, "And that's not all of it, either. I—I did ask him one time, and he refused. Brutally refused! Worst of all, he ridiculed me, because after I had left his house and was walking past his library window I heard him laughing as if he would burst."

"But—but what did he say when you asked him for—whatever it is—this casket you want?"

Her indignation was extreme, absurdly so he thought, when she replied:

"He told me that if I was a year younger he would put me over his knee and spank me! That shows what a brute he is! I tried to get my brother Bill to go and shoot him; but—pshaw!—Bill is nearly as bad. He laughed, too, until I scratched his face!"

"And since then you, and your brother——"

"Since then I've never told him any of my plans. If I'm the only one left to maintain the family honor I'll do it! I swear I will!"

He was inclined to laugh at her agitation, but was too patient and wise to thus imperil her further confidences, and so, after looking around and peering through the starlit gloom suggested, "Come. There's a seat over there, I think. Suppose we go and sit where you can be comfortable while you tell me as much as you wish of this quest of yours. For I suppose you call it a quest, don't you?"

"Yes, it's nothing less than that," she asserted; but willingly walked with him until they reached and sat on a fine old bench whose arms comfortably and shieldingly portrayed the Winged Lions of St. Mark's.

"I've been considering this taking you into my confidence for several days now," she admitted. "So I may as well tell you all about it. First—I'm afraid you'll think I'm an awful little liar—my name isn't Cardell at all. That is merely one I took to keep that old villain, Lemuel Harnway, from knowing that I was registered at a hotel in Venice. My real name is Powell. And my first name isn't Tommie, either. That's just a nickname. My real name is

Tania, which is an old family name in my tribe. What is it? Did you hear some one?"

Even in the darkness she had observed the sudden start and restless movement that, in his surprise, he had been unable to check.

"I must have been mistaken," he said, recovering himself and peering around as if to assure himself that he had been needlessly alarmed.

"Of course you will understand, when I explain, why I had to take a false name. Then there was another reason for it. My brother Bill is one of those good-natured things, 'Laughing Billy' they used to call him at William and Mary when he was on the football team, because no matter how rough the game got he always laughed. He's like a—like a—big, good-natured St. Bernard dog, except that when he gets really in earnest and puts his foot down about something he's right emphatic. He kept his foot on me after that time I told old man Harnway what I thought of him, and until I came of age and could do what I pleased with my own money. I gritted my teeth and waited, after I saw that there was no use in depending on Bill to uphold the family traditions. Then I told him I was going to carry on myself without any help of his and—we had a bit of a scene, Bill and I did!—he told me that if he ever heard of my doing anything foolish in this matter he would telegraph Harnway, himself, and telegraph the police and—oh well!—do all sorts of mighty foolish things. So when I made up my mind to act I told Bill I was going to spend the summer with some friends up in the Maine woods, and came over here under another name so he couldn't do anything to stop me. I suppose he thinks I'm up around Moosehead Lake fishing, right now! But I'm not. You can see that! I'm over here to square accounts with this man Harnway, who laughed at me and who has got what belongs to my family—not his, or him!"

She was so vehement that she was slapping her white hand on the winged lion's head to emphasize her words; but the lion, being of marble, did not show signs of resentment and seemed a benevolent lion, indeed, that enjoyed a caress.

Ware was smiling in the darkness and watching her, absorbed and quite as benevolent as the lion. Furthermore, he felt that he would no more have resented it had she

slapped him on the head in the same familiar way. She sat brooding over her wrongs until, still secretly smiling, he urged her to further explanation.

"If I'm to be a partner of yours in this restoration of rights, or stolen property, or vindication of family honor," he said, "I think you should tell me what it's all about. That's the way things are done in a real partnership of any sort, aren't they?"

"Of course," she replied. "Only I get so angry when I think it all over that I forget that I've taken you into partnership. But it's a pretty long story and I don't intend to bother you with a lot of it."

She paused a moment as if to collect her thoughts and settled back into the corner of the bench with an arm resting on the back-turned and friendly wing of the marble lion, and the moon that had climbed up across the far hills to lend its light to the glow of the stars shone on her face so that, bending slightly forward and watching her, he could see the profoundly serious expression in her face and eyes. He saw that, no matter how absurd her quest might appear to her brother and to Harnway, to her, at least, it was as vital as was ever the quest of the Grail to an early and fanatical crusader.

"My great-grandfather was a Colonel Yancey Powell, and he fought for Venice in 1849. He was one of the last guards of the treasury and when the Austrians had defeated the Venetians and were entering the city he took from the treasury a historical box called the Crusader's Casket, a very old relic which I won't bother telling you about; but it had a sentimental value with it that appealed to him so much that he didn't want it to fall into Austrian hands. He wouldn't surrender, but succeeded in escaping to America. And he brought the box with him. It's of gold and very, very old, and no one can open it. They say there's a curse rests on whoever does open it, but that's neither here nor there with what happened afterward. Naturally, Yancey Powell felt that he was its custodian and thought a lot of it. He was that sort of a man, was my great-grandfather."

Ware, listening, gave no indication that the story thus far was old.

He traced idle patterns in the gravel with his stick, bent forward and listening.

"Well, when the war in America came on he fought for the Confederacy, and there's a

dispute about how the Crusader's box came into the hands of the Harnways. Yancey Powell was a careless man about money matters. He borrowed some money from a Harnway who was a banker in our town, and that Harnway, being a miserly sort of person as some bankers naturally are, claimed that the chattel mortgage my great-grandfather gave as security covered everything in Yancey Powell's house, and so he kept the Crusader's box when he foreclosed. When the war was over my great-grandfather called for it, and they quarreled and my great-grandfather challenged and killed that Harnway. Which of course served the old miser right. You can see that. Then that Harnway's brother shot my great-grandfather and—— They must have been terrible years! One or the other side was always finding an excuse to shoot the other!"

"A regular Kentucky feud, I reckon," Captain Jimmy remarked drily. "Nonsensical way of settling things!"

"Nonsensical nothing!" she declared heatedly. "When two families fall out because one is entirely mean and despicable and wrong, and the law won't do anything, what else is there for the wronged one to do, if they've any honor at all, but fight it out? People who are in the right can't lay down and let themselves be walked over, can they? Well, I should say not—if they've got any spirit! Thank Heaven, my people had spirit."

"Well, who got the best of it?" Ware asked, still looking at the gravel and the point of his stick.

"That's the unfair part of it. The Harnways did," she admitted reluctantly. "Not because they were right, but because there were more of them and maybe they were better shots. Anyhow, they kept, and still keep that box that belonged to my great-grandfather."

"And so——"

"That's why I'm over here. Lemuel Harnway is a ridiculous old man! He never did have an awful lot of family pride, I take it, because he was educated up North, and then he traveled a lot and—— Of course the Harnways are rich. Mighty rich! And he's been like his tribe, money grabbing, and so made a lot more until he's worth millions and millions. He stopped living the year round at Rocky Crossing where we all come from and moved over here and bought a palace for himself. Then after a time he

moved a lot of his things over her and I suspected that he had brought back our box—the box that belongs to my family, and I told Bill about it; but Bill is no good. I've been told that he actually talks to old Lemuel Harnway when they meet, and a friend of mine swears he saw Bill and Harnway drinking mint juleps together when that old thief was a senator down in Washington. But you can bet I'd never do it! I've got too much pride for that. Bill and Harnway think the family feud is foolish and done with; but I don't!"

"You don't mean to say that you believe in those old-fashioned feuds sufficiently to wish to kill Mr. Harnway, do you?" he asked, amazed and amused by her vehemence.

"No-o-o," she admitted with a touch of reluctance, or repulsion, and perhaps relenting a trifle, "I can't say that I'd like to have him killed. That does seem rather foolish. But I'm not going to let him keep that casket that really belongs to us if I can help it. And I'll never, never forgive him for what he said to me, and for laughing at me! The idea of his threatening to spank me——"

She stopped, bit her lip and concluded with a gesture of anger.

"I can quite understand your feelings in the matter," Ware declared, and she turned toward him with quick gratitude.

"I knew you could and would," she said impulsively. "You see, my intuition about you was right, after all. But I don't know whether I ought to ask you to do anything, even in the way of advice, to help me recover that box."

"We've sort of—sort of made a compact of friendship, haven't we?" he asked. "Well, friends stick to each other, support each other, and if necessary fight for each other, don't they? That being so, I'm going to help you get that box. Old Lemuel has got to dig up. That is determined."

"If you help me get that casket," she exclaimed bending toward him until she was so temptingly near that he could fancy the warm fragrance of her hair and breath were gently wafted by the lazy night breeze across his face, "if you get me that casket"—she repeated—"I'll be your friend for life!"

"Then we have a long friendship ahead of us," he stoutly asserted. "It seems an absurdly easy way to win it."

"Not so easy as you might think," she

said dubiously, and then sighed deeply and leaned back into her corner, evidently sobered by recollection. "There are a lot of obstacles in the way. First of all, I'm afraid some one suspects me, because I'm quite certain that a few nights ago when Pietro and I were reconnoitering Harnway's palace a boat followed us." She hesitated laughed and then added gleefully, "We ran it down and upset it."

Again he smiled to himself in the darkness, but offered no confession.

"The second great obstacle is that there is a law in Italy, particularly and stringently applied here in Venice, that no art treasures can be taken out of the country without government consent. In fact, they practically confiscate articles of great historical or artistic value, by reserving the right to purchase. Venice would pay a fortune for that Crusader's Casket, for its history and appearance are thoroughly well known. Why, do you know, there are about a half dozen famous old paintings that have it in the composition, and one by a very distinguished painter, called, 'The Lady and the Casket,' which I believe is a portrait of the wife of one of the old-time doges."

"So, if we stole it from old Lemuel, we'd then have to turn round and steal it from Venice, then from Italy, eh? Sounds promising," he remarked.

"It does seem like—like quite a lot of stealing, doesn't it?" she replied, with a sigh of perplexity. "And another feature is that although I can depend on Pietro for the first theft, I'm not so certain that he would care to have the casket leave Venice. He's so frightfully patriotic, so wrapped up in his beloved Venezia that he might at the last moment—well—balk."

He laughed, amused at her prodigious gravity, and then said, cheerfully, "One thing at a time. Step by step. Perhaps we'll get so accomplished in the art of burglary after our first experience of looting old Lemuel's house that we can find a way to rob Venice with ease."

"You aren't laughing at me, are you?" she demanded coldly.

"No-o-o; but—by the way, didn't the casket belong to Venice in the first place, and didn't your great-grandfather, Colonel Yancey Powell—didn't he—er—do a little bit in the burglary line himself when he took it?"

"Mr. Ware, I'm afraid I must resent

that," she exclaimed with some heat in her quiet voice. "My great-grandfather was not a thief. He was a great soldier of liberty. He took the Crusader's Casket to keep it from falling into the profane hands of those unspeakable Austrians! Can't you see that? It wasn't theft. It was protection."

"Let's call it confiscation in a worthy cause under war conditions," he said, turning toward her with a disarming smile, and after studying his face for a moment as if to reassure herself that he was not ridiculing her sophistry she said:

"That's a much nicer way to put it. Besides, I hadn't thought so much about that part of it as I have about getting it away from that impossible—that horrid old swine—that old villain who is the head of the Harnways!"

"He does sound like rather an old ruffian," Jim remarked, and could see that he was regaining her approval. "But it strikes me that before I can give any advice or assistance I should look the ground over, discover the location of his palace, how the waterways run, and all that. I understand that a good general always studies his field of battle before making a plan."

"Good!" she exclaimed, clapping her slender white hands together. "Good! That is just what I have been doing! I have made a map of all the rios and main canals of that locality. If you wish I can give them to you to study."

"No," he said, still regarding her with whimsical but wholly admiring eyes, "I think it best that I myself go and explore all that region. It wouldn't do for me to be—er—biased by your judgments, I think. Of course, your plans may prove the ones we will adopt—quite possibly so—but we ought to form independent judgments, hadn't we?"

"That sounds reasonable," she agreed after a moment's rumination.

She started to speak again when the distant ringing of a mellow, musical bell became audible.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, rising to her feet. "I had no idea it was so late. That is the warning bell to clear the gardens for the night. We must hurry lest we be locked in."

He did not dare tell her that such a contretemps would be welcomed by him, and that he could find no more enjoyable way

of passing the soft Venetian night than seated with her on the cool old bench with its winged lions, or dawdling through the great groves amid fragrant, somnolent flowers, or leaning over aged sea walls to watch the waves, and be together to welcome the pallor of the vivid and whispering Adriatic dawn. He did not tell her that the bell's voice, singing and ringing like the voice of a great contralto, sounded to him like the strident and disturbing clangor of a mere policeman's gong, distracting, unwelcome, and officiously interfering. But the spell was broken. He arose and accompanied her down through the long promenade shaded on one side by great and friendly old trees, on the other by the dim wall that faced the quiet, surging sea, and thence across the ancient bridge and out through the great bronze gates. They strolled quietly down to the Riva, and at his shout of "*Poppo!*" a gondola, black, slender, with no tomblike *felza* to cut off the now brilliant light of the moon, slid placidly alongside and took them aboard.

The oar seemed to caress the water. The high prow with its likeness of a Phœnician blade and quaint studs swung outward and, accompanied by other late-returning craft, on some of which the musically inclined sang in soft Venetian voices the old, old songs of the gondoliers, they swam toward the sleeping city. For no reason that he could define both he and the girl from Rocky Crossing, Kentucky, were silent; but once he felt that she moved a little closer to him in the lazy, comfortable, and well-cushioned seat, and his heart beat with a warm sense of protection, and a great wish to take her into his arms as lovers do in that quaint old city of the seas.

It was not until they parted in the dim vestibule of the hotel that she suddenly put out her hand and said softly, as if in fear that her confession might be overheard by prying ears, "Do you know, I've been thinking it all over, and I'm glad—mighty glad—that I trusted and took you into my confidence, because now I feel that I—that is, that we—are going to succeed. I've been right dubious these last few days and felt that I needed one of my own kind of folks to help me out. And I'm glad I found you, Mr. Ware!"

Before he could make a reply she was gone—off up the dim hallway. It swallowed her in its gloom but some of the

fragrance of her seemed left behind and for a moment he stood staring into the inner twilight that had enveloped her and straining his ears to hear the last faint sounds of her steps as she retired. He was not certain but that he should have been amused, although delighted by her wholly foolish and wholly absurd continuance of a feud that was in itself wholly foolish and wholly absurd; but all his practical, sober sense and judgment were swept aside by a tenderness that was new; that had come to him after he had believed such tenderness indurated and dead.

"By Heaven!" he muttered. "This is a silly thing. But if she wants old Lemuel's golden box, she shall have it, if I have to steal it myself!"

CHAPTER V.

THE two gayly painted guard posts with their quaint, rounded tops that stood in the great canal in front of Lemuel Harnway's fine old palace were reflected in the still waters of the late afternoon and the shadows seemed as still as the posts themselves; as still as the image of the ornate façade of the palace itself. High and sheer the venerable and historic old building stood as if its front wall sturdily bade defiance to the canal as it had done for centuries. It seemed to suggest that the Grand Canal, and not itself, was the interloper, and that it stood there by right of first domain. Then the shadows wavered, distorted, little ripples began to advance until the entire reflection was aquiver, and a gondola, with the ease of a gliding swan, slipped forward, turned its prow deftly into the waterway between the guideposts and the wide marble steps of the front entrance and came to a halt.

Captain Ware winked in a friendly way at his old retainer, Tomaso, told him to wait in the shade, and staring at the marble tracery of the old entryway with approving eyes, advanced upward.

"The old fellow did himself well," he thought, and then looked up at the open door as a liveried footman appeared therein and bowed.

"Is the Signor Harnway at home?" Jimmy asked.

"He is, signor—but have you an appointment?" the man asked, eying the visitor speculatively as if to gauge his importance.

"No, but I think this will prove sufficient," the captain said as he produced and handed the man a card.

His manner seemed to express assurance and confidence, hence the footman became obsequious, bowed more deeply and with a gesture ushered the visitor into a waiting salon near the grand entrance, and disappeared. It was but a minute later when the curtains were swept aside and Lemuel Harnway, gaunt, tall, white headed, white eye-browed, and white mustached entered with extended hands and said, "Lord bless my soul! If it isn't Milly's son Jim, I'm a dog-goned old liar!"

"Yes, Uncle Lem, it is I all right," the captain admitted as he stepped forward to shake the friendly extended hands. "I didn't know whether you would remember me or not, and I didn't know but that you might be too busy to see me."

"I'm never too busy to see my sister's only son, am I? You young scalawag. How dare you make any talk of that kind? Well, have you given up that fool idea of skipping a tramp steamer yet, or haven't you?"

"No, Uncle Lem, I haven't. The *Adventure* is lying out there now—in the Giudecco."

"*Adventure*, eh? What a damned silly name for a ship. Reckon you named her that because you're romantic. Humph! Romance! Tommyrot! Thank the Lord Almighty, you must have got that from your father's side of the house. The Harnways had too much sense to be romantic. Now, your mother——"

"It was she who chose that name for my ship, Uncle Lem. I bought her the year before she died."

The harsh old face suddenly became grave and thoughtful and he looked momentarily aged and tired.

"Perhaps Milly did have some romance in her, after all," he admitted. "Otherwise she'd hardly have run away with Tom Ware and lived all the rest of her life up there among the Yankees on that barren, cold, rocky place called Cape Cod. Um-m-h! Anyhow you must have got this nonsensical love of the sea from him. I'll say that much to his discredit. I always had to respect Tom, but we never could get along together!"

"I remember, Uncle Lem, that you and he were never alone for fifteen minutes at a time without a hot discussion about some-

thing or other. I even remember that you tried to dissuade him from going into the steamship business, although he did seem to make money out of it when you swore he would go broke."

Lemuel Harnway sniffed, seemed at loss for speech and then chuckled as if amused. "I believe I did," he admitted. "But even as great a man as I am can sometimes make mistakes, Jimmy. Sometimes, but not often. Now of course you must get your traps off that fool ship of yours and come here and stop with me—the longer the better. Why don't you sell the blasted thing and come and stay with me for keeps? I'm getting old, Jimmy, and you're the last living being that has Harnway blood in his veins."

Captain Jimmy was unexpectedly aware that his affection for his uncle was greater than he had conceived. That reference to their kinship brought back, poignantly, the family conditions which time and feud had brought about. He remembered, now, that as a boy he had been fond of this grim uncle, then a harsh and dominant fighting man with hot blood flowing from a courageous heart, and that had not this same uncle become a restless old wanderer after the death of his childless wife, whom Jimmy had never seen; they might have formed a greater affection. He remembered his mother's shocked voice when the news came that his uncle Lemuel at the age of fifty had married a girl of but nineteen. Then again he remembered when, less than a year later, news had come of her sudden death, his mother's long silence, her sigh, and quiet words, "Poor old Lem. Poor, poor old Lem! Always stiff with family pride, marrying too late in the hope of having an heir to carry on the name, and now—this! What will become of him now?"

Then there were the long years when they heard from him but intermittently from strange places—sometimes from the heart of wild continents, sometimes from the heart of civilizations, always on the move, never content, and then the almost final severance of family news when that connecting link of communication, his mother, slipped peacefully away to rest.

Captain Jimmy lifted his eyes from the finely tiled floor, aware that he had not given an answer to this proffer of hospitality so freely tendered. His uncle, too, seemed to have fallen into an old man's reverie. He

was seated in a high and severely carved chair in the shadows of the salon as if withdrawn from the afternoon light. He sat erect, white and severe, with his white old hands, still vaguely expressing capability and grasp of affairs, clutched in front of him. Jimmy had not seen him for nearly ten years, and in the interim had learned to better appraise men. He surreptitiously studied him. There was no mistake but that he adequately fitted that ancient, high and carven chair. A doge of old Venice, austere, powerful, and stern, might have some time occupied it, but his possession could have been no more harmonious. Here, thought Jimmy, was an old lion, battered in body but still brave in mind, waiting and perhaps chafing in the certainty of his inevitable end. But the lion would fight for his own possessions and ambitions and ideals until the very last. That was Uncle Lemuel Harnway!

"I feel I'd like to do what you ask, and come, Uncle Lem, but there are certain reasons why I can't—why it's impossible. I'm still the master of a tramp ship, you know."

His voice, after the pause, sounded loud in that echoing space where waiting room opened into loggia, and loggia fronted grand staircase, and words reverberated upward through marbled spaces to the great and distant mosaic dome.

"Can't do it, eh?" the old man replied, lifting his leonine head as if he too had been disturbedly aroused from long reviews. "Maybe you don't care to be hampered by hospitality? Um-m-h! To be fair, I've known that feeling too. But I'd like to have you come. I get bored with having to pretend to be interested in a lot of people who don't mean a cussed thing to me. Not a single thing! The trouble with me is that I've always been too damned polite!"

Jimmy put his hand above his lips to conceal the smile that came involuntarily and could not be suppressed. Polite? Why this old fire eater had been distinguished for his lack of form. He had once told the wife of a president that she was his official hostess by a mere accident of politics. That was politeness of the Henry Clay order, and this uncle of his had tried to fashion his senatorial career on the precepts of that bygone statesman.

"Yes, I've always been too polite," his uncle reiterated, "even when I didn't have

much joy from it. It's cost me a lot, one time and another, politeness has; but it's becoming in a Harnway. How long do you intend being here—is it impertinent in me to ask?"

"I can't tell," Jimmy said, looking through the window and thinking of his pledge of the previous night. "I've got some—er—business that I wish to see through. My time is not entirely my own."

The elder man grunted deeply as if amused and at the same time skeptical.

"Unless you've squandered all that money your father left, I shouldn't think business with you could ever be urgent. You've certainly got—or at least had—money enough. But if you've been making a fool of yourself, you know—well—you know I've got more money than I can ever use—unless I find the Fountain of Youth, which doesn't seem likely."

He looked at the younger man with an unmistakable mixture of envy and of affection in his clear old eyes. Jimmy smiled and shook his handsome head that was shaped not entirely unlike that of his kinsman, and was unaware that the family resemblance extended much farther—so far that his uncle was recalling as he sat there, staring, that thirty-five or perhaps forty years before he must have looked enough like this nephew to have passed for his twin brother. And again he unconsciously sighed as he waited for a reply.

"No, Uncle Lem, it's not what you think at all. I haven't squandered my patrimony. In fact, I believe it's gone in the opposite direction. I haven't tried to make more money, but it seems to have piled up a little without much effort on my part."

His kinsman sighed again, this time as if disappointed that he could not step into a financial breach.

"Then if it isn't money, I suppose it's that fool ship that keeps you from——"

"No, it's not exactly that, either. It's— it's—— He stopped and stared thoughtfully at the pattern of the rare old stained-glass window through which the evening sun was painting a marvelous-colored mosaic on the floor of the reception salon. The old man sat up suddenly and his eyes twinkled with understanding.

"By gad! It's a woman, then. It's about time you were getting married if our race isn't to die out entirely. That was my mistake. I liked too many of 'em when I was

young, and I put off marrying too long. And—— Lord A'mighty! I've got it, Jimmy! Never thought of it before. If you'd only marry some nice girl and change your name to Harnway, or—— No? You don't like that idea? Well how about compounding it to—say—Ware-Harnway, or even Harnway-Ware?"

"Be too much like patterning after the English custom," Jimmy said, grinning with the remembered knowledge that once upon a time, long before, his uncle had at least pretended a violent Anglophobiaism. He could have no greater proof of time's changes in this once-violent old man than when the latter slowly shook his head, displayed no signs of annoyance and said, "They've got a lot of customs that are admirable when there is no alternative. This is one of them. They take pride in their forbears. Why not? We breed horses down in Kentucky. When we find a great sire, we continue his name, don't we? Now take our family, for instance, there was a Colonel Merivale Harnway who fought in the War of the Revolution, and afterward——"

Jimmy hastily interrupted lest he be compelled to listen to a family genealogical history with which he was already familiar.

"Oh, it's a good name, all right. So is Ware. But—coming back to the invitation, I really can't accept your hospitality, Uncle Lem, because I've promised to help do something that would keep me from such acceptance."

"Well, why didn't you say so, then? I never yet asked any man to break a promise, even if he pledged himself to come out at sunrise and try to shoot me. A promise is a promise. So we'll let it go at that. I hope it's got something to do with your love affair—— Oh, it's not a merely casual thing, eh? It's serious, I can see, by the expression on your face. Lord bless me, boy! You don't need to scowl at me as if you were about to challenge me! I meant no disrespect. Listen! I'd help you marry any fine young woman on earth unless, of course, she was one of that danged Powell tribe!"

He had paused, frowned, and seemed interested in studying the tips of his outstretched shoes as he concluded with that solitary reservation.

"But—but suppose, Uncle Lem, that it happened to be one of the Powells?"

"Nonsense! There are a lot of fine young

women in the world whose names aren't Powell. However, I'm making a poor host of myself. Come with me. I'd like to show you my house—*ours*, you understand—*ours*—if you'll make it so."

He stood to his feet, admirably erect and dignified, unmistakably a gentleman of a fine old day, and, when his nephew did likewise, linked his arm affectionately through the younger man's and impelled him toward the entrance, thrusting aside the tapestries with a graceful gesture of his firm old hand.

"I bought this palace," he said, with evident pride of possession, "because it has a history. Because it once belonged to gentlemen, and there was a retired Polish pawnbroker from Chicago who was after it. It didn't seem right that a man who had made his money by usuring the unlucky should ever live here; that walls which had sheltered those with noble instincts; that had heard the tragedies of the worthy; that had known the love secrets of a hundred generations of youth; that had known timid brides, and mothers of first-born should fall into such degradation."

"I thought you were neither romantic nor sentimental, Uncle Lem," Jimmy remarked, with a grin.

"I'm not! I hate such nonsense! I bought this place because—well, because I wanted to settle down, and this place is so well arranged. That is—I got it arranged to suit myself by having some new plumbing, and—um-m-mh!—a few alterations such as having a partition knocked out here and there and— By the way! Look at those frescoes up there. Those on the right were done by Pietro Liberi, and those on the left by Andrea Vicentino. Garibaldi lived in this palace and is said to have stood for hours admiring that fresco and—I don't blame him! It's worthy of any man's admiration. Now this is the big salon. Noble room, isn't it? The Doge Luigi Contarini who ruled from 1676 to 1684 owned this palace and lived here. Before he became a doge, of course. He used to hold a sort of court in this room. Think of what it must have looked like—two or three hundred guests at a reception and—all that! I'm afraid I've rather outraged its original purpose by these cabinets. I've made it a sort of museum with 'em. Can't help collecting things. Sometimes I come here and pass hours admiring them, myself."

As if lost in thought and that realm of

romance and sentiment which he so strenuously decried, and denied, he halted and his eyes swept over the magnificent old hall whose splendors had been but faintly dimmed and harmonized by the invisible touch of time. Sunset had fallen outside and he, standing there elegant of figure, and refined of face, seemed a part of the sunset of a life elegant and refined, in surroundings worthy of such a man. The light was tender as it passed through the stained-glass windows of the enormously high and vaulted dome, lingered on the heavy Venetian cornices and dull golds of their embellishment, and gently caressed the paintings wrought by long-dead masters.

Jimmy's awed inspection was disturbed by his next words.

"Come over here," he said. "Here's something that will interest you because you are a Harnway. This cabinet here—first at the side." He smiled and then chuckled audibly as he conducted Jimmy across the tiled floor while the resonance of the empty spaces and vaulted reception hall magnified and echoed the sounds of their progress. He halted in front of a cabinet, fumbled in his pocket for a bunch of keys, found them, adjusted glasses to the bridge of his high, thin nose and bending forward found the lock. He opened the door, reached within, and selected a small box of dull gold whose colors seemed lost in the lights and shadows that fell upon its quaint craftsmanship.

"That," he said, as he handed it to Jimmy, "is the Crusader's Casket. I brought it back here. You know what it means? What it has cost? The lives of God knows how many men. It wiped out our and the Powell family when it reached America, because it was the origin of a feud. There are but few of either Powells or Harnways left because of that thing you hold in your hands."

Jimmy turned it around, examining its curious scrolls and figures, which to him appeared of Persian design. "It seems a most absurd cause for a feud," he said thoughtfully. His uncle, smiling grimly, watched him.

"Tell me, Uncle Lem, was our ancestor entitled to its possession?"

The spare figure straightened stiffly and swiftly.

"Of course. Otherwise it would never have left the possession of the Powells. The

Harnways never fought for the box itself, but to hold what they were justly entitled to, something that was their own. If it had been a wooden cat it would have been fought for as zealously, as intrepidly. Of course it was a pity that the feud ever arose, because I'll admit that the Powells were a fine family, one of the best in Kentucky, and worthy foemen. Most worthy."

"Then, Uncle Lem, you have no very great dislike for them, now, have you?"

"Lord bless your soul, my boy, no dislike whatever. In fact I have met and feel rather friendly toward the last male Powell left alive, young William. But of course we never refer to the Crusader's Casket."

"And you have met—that is—by the way, are there any other Powells whom you have met?"

The old man laughed softly, took the box from his nephew's hands and as he restored it to the cabinet and locked it, while his face was averted, said, "Yes, there's one other, a sister of William's. And she's a little devil! Got all the Powell courage, and daring, and damn'd obstinate determination to carry on the feud until she gets that box. But, by God! no Powell can ever have it!"

For a moment Jimmy was at loss for words, and then, remembering the legends, turned the conversation.

"I believe there was a mystery about its contents, wasn't there, or something like that—some unsolved secret as to how it could be opened?"

His uncle quietly reopened the cabinet, brought the box forth again, and spoke as if the feud were forgotten in the interest of the relic.

"Here, let me show you something exceptionally ingenious. I forgot to mention it. Yes, it can be opened. I learned how to do it myself, but whatever relic it originally contained was missing. Somebody in the past had nabbed it. It is opened this way."

He held the box up, readjusted his glasses, and pressed a corner of an arabesque that slid a tiny fraction of an inch to one side. He turned the box over and moved a similar arabesque on an end, then one at the back, and at the other end, after which he pressed the central portion of another figure, and the lid flew open, exposing the empty interior with its ebony lining.

"Isn't that ingenious?" he asked gloatingly. "It took me five years to learn that

trick, and then it was by accident. Lay you five dollars you can't do it now."

"Done," said Jimmy, and promptly lost the five. His uncle was elated as a boy over a puzzle. "Have another five on it? Well, it would be a shame to take your money. Here, hold it in your hands and let me show you. Here's one of the secrets—you must press hard on the sides when moving the end slides, otherwise, as it's already cost you five to learn, they don't move. I regard this as one of the cleverest mechanical things I've ever seen."

"Clever enough to cost me five dollars," Jimmy agreed with a grin as he opened and reshut the box several times, before handing it to its owner.

"I observe that you like and appreciate that box, Jimmy," said the older man. "As I've remarked, I begin to feel old and the cares of possession, and defending Harnway property, become onerous. Also I feel generous toward my only surviving kith and kin and so—Jimmy. I'll give you that box, here and now, with just one single proviso: And that is that you'll pledge yourself never—never—to let it fall into the hands of a Powell."

He extended his old hands with the box resting in their palms, as if presenting some priceless offering. His fine clear eyes stared at Jimmy while the latter stood regarding the little golden casket as if fascinated by its dull glow. It seemed to gleam mockingly up at him as if daring him to grasp it. He was in a mental quandary. He was tempted to accept it and then opportunely let Tommie know that it was in his possession and—couldn't she steal it from him easier than from this inflexible old gentleman of the feudal school who had it guarded in the heart of a great palace? Why carry on the absurd feud? Why not end it now in the easiest way? His hand moved slowly forward and then abruptly stopped, wavered, and fell.

"No, sir," he said in a somewhat strained but quiet voice, "there are—certain reasons why I can't accept the casket with such a pledge."

Still fascinated by the box, as if hypnotized by all it meant, he didn't look up at his kinsman's face. He did not observe the strange expression that came over it. It was one of relief, of smiling self-satisfaction, much like the expression that a miser might have displayed when dealing with a fool who

had too magnanimously declined the half-hearted proffer of a golden gift. And this strange old miser of family honor and guardian of the object of a feud, said, very simply, "Don't want to take it on, eh? Well, back it goes. I'll keep it and while I'm its custodian I'd like to see any Powell take it away from me."

He put it back in the cabinet and carefully, indeed, painstakingly, locked the door and, to make certain that it was locked, shook it to test its security.

"Uncle Lem," Jimmy blurted in something akin to desperation, "you haven't asked me why I won't give such a pledge and accept the care of the box."

"No, sir, I haven't. And I don't intend to," his uncle replied in a tone that his nephew could not interpret. It might have been that of annoyance, or of resignation, or even contempt. He craved the respect of this elderly though yet vigorous old man, his sole remaining kinsman, who had so generously welcomed him and so frankly sought his affection, and he found it difficult to find words adequate to his personal predicament. He could appreciate the storm of wrath that would be evoked by his frank admission that he was in love with a daughter of the hated Powell clan, and that to her he had given a pledge of assistance for the recovery of that damnable and malevolent trinket of gold for whose intrinsic value any Powell or any Harnway could have taken no heed. Any of either clan could have bought a finer object without sacrificing a single mint julep in a day's visit to Washington.

"But—but, sir, suppose that I didn't wish to give such a promise, yet that I still coveted the box so much that I'd be tempted to steal it, and that—"

"You are making supposititious cases! If you coveted the box you'd take it with the attendant conditions. And if you had some impossible, fool reason for not making a promise—which of course couldn't be, inasmuch as I'm talking about the Powells—well, I suppose you'd prove yourself a Harnway and try to take it by hook or crook. That's the way our tribe have usually gone after things they really wanted. We're like most families, I reckon, no better nor no worse. The difference between us and many others is that when we went after a thing we usually got it. Even if we had to—er—steal it! If you want this casket and don't care to give your pledge, why, you can some

time take a chance on stealing it from me. And I'd like to see how any one could get away with that job!"

He stopped and burst into a roar of laughter that echoed and reëchoed throughout the great reception room that was dimming in the sunset glow now that the hour had lengthened.

"Uncle Lem," said Jimmy, "it might come to that yet. I warn you, sir."

"Go to it, Jimmy. If you get away with it you're welcome and I'll prove a good loser—to one of my own blood," his uncle asserted as he led the way out of the stately old room, leaving it and its treasures to silence.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN JIMMY, coming out of his hotel on the morning after his avuncular visit, scowled as he saw the trim figure of his first officer approaching with that unmistakable swing of the sailor ashore. Captain Jimmy hastily glanced behind him to see if either Miss Tommie, or Pietro, was in sight, then advanced to meet the man, who was undoubtedly coming to him.

"Hello, Barton," the captain greeted him. "I suppose you want to see me about something." He scarcely veiled his annoyance, somewhat to his chief officer's surprise.

"Yes, sir, I did come ashore to see you. Knew you were still in the hotel because that gondolier of yours that's always hanging about—"

"How did you know I had a regular gondolier of my own?" the captain demanded, surprised by the chief's knowledge of his movements.

"Why, sir, the old chap's that proud of being your man that he brags about it, and every man along the water front knows it now. I hope, sir, that you're not forgetting that we have a launch of our own aboard the *Adventure* and—"

"No, Barton. I'm not forgetting. But—what is it you want?"

"That shipping agent has been aboard again and made a new offer. Splendid chance, I call it. About twenty per cent above regular rate. You remember his being aboard, and offering a cargo of cement from Spalato over to Alexandria? Well, it's that again. It seems that some big contractor in Heliopolis, Egypt, who is putting up an enormous hotel, or something like that, is going to be stuck unless he can get material,

and our agent can't get hold of another boat to make——"

"Oh, to blazes with the big contractor! His funeral, not mine!"

"Very well, sir," Barton said, turning away with a look of disappointment. "I thought it only right to tell you, and——"

He stopped and hesitated, then shut his firm lips again as if it were useless to appeal to such an owner.

"Good heavens! You look disappointed about my refusal," Jimmy remarked.

"Oh—I am, sir! You see, it's this way. This contractor works a few hundred men—poor devils, you know. We've seen them, sir, you and I have, the kind of men who have to work for a living in Egypt—and at this time of the year, too. Nearly all of 'em have big families dependent on 'em, and it'll be hard on those few hundred men to be laid off. Perhaps it's because I've got a family of my own that depends on my wages—that makes me think so much about those poor devils."

Captain Jimmy had an immense respect for Barton. "Barton," he had once said, "is the best chief officer and the most humane man I've ever known." And now the humane side of the man appealed to him. Barton, glancing up at him, read the new look of thoughtfulness and consideration in his owner's face, and dared to make a further suggestive remark.

"The agent tells me there has been a breakdown in the cement mill at Spalato, and we'd not have to clear from Venice for four days yet because the cargo couldn't be ready for us before then. If it were possible, sir, that this four days' delay here in the Giudecco might make any difference in your decision, I could tell the agent."

Captain Jimmy could not suppress the smile that he turned upon this man for whom he had such a distinct liking.

"Barton, you're a wonder!" he exclaimed impulsively. "You're the greatest man to take on the troubles and perplexities of other people that I've ever met. Me—I'm selfish and thoughtless, I'm afraid. And——"

"No, Captain Ware. You're neither, only—only you have never been put up against it yourself and you don't know as well as I do what being laid off indefinitely, when every penny counts, means to a man who has to work for a living. I can't help but think about those others."

Captain Jimmy looked into the unflinching eyes for a moment and then laid a hand on his chief officer's shoulder and laughed.

"You win, Barton," he said. "You can tell the agent that we'll take that cargo. Also that I've authorized you to make the terms."

"And when shall I send the boat to bring you aboard, sir?" the chief asked, striving to suppress his satisfaction.

"Maybe I'll not come aboard at all. If I don't I'll give notice as owner, to the port authorities, that you are master of the ship. You've got a master's certificate, so that is easy. You will wait here until the last minute, then if I don't come aboard proceed to Spalato and take on that cement, carry it to Alexandria, deliver and collect. I'll cable you orders to Alexandria in case I don't go along."

"Thank you, Captain Ware," Barton said. "Not that I care to be master if you are aboard, because I'm satisfied to be your first mate; but because—well, you understand. I'll hold the ship until the last minute in the hope that you'll take over the bridge. And I'll be ready to clear, sir, if you come aboard."

"Nobody could kick at that! You're what I might call 'The Complete Sailor,'" Jimmy remarked with an entirely lost pun upon "The Compleat Angler." "But, in any event, on the fourth night the *Adventure* sails; the cement reaches Alexandria; the contractor, who is doubtless robbing his clients and bloated with fat, gets it, and the work continues; the hundred or so of poor laboring men don't get laid off; their wives and families don't miss a meal of mutton stew—and there you are! We become benefactors—at so much per ton for cargo."

"I can't take it as a joke, sir," Barton said, gravely wagging his head. "But I thank you for your confidence in me. I'll do my best."

"Barton," said Jimmy suddenly impressed with this unbreakable modesty and fidelity, "I shouldn't ever make a joke of anything with you. You're so confoundedly serious. But you go ahead and make the contract. We'll see it through, one way or the other. I'm too busy to look after it myself because I'm head over ears in something here that seems to take all my time."

He grinned to himself at the thought of what really was absorbing his time, and wondered if he was a hopeless idiot at the

age of thirty years. No, he decided, the pursuit of Tommie Powell couldn't be classed as idiocy. It was far more important to him than anything else. The movements of a steamship or the acquisition of a dull gold box that had been the cause of a Kentucky feud were all mere incidentals. He would miss the sight of his ship lying off there in the mouth of the Giudecco when he emerged by mornings from the Hotel Danieli, but the pang would be small in comparison with missing the sight of his family enemy on any morning of any week.

"We'll let it go at that, Barton," he said, resuming his habitual attitude. "You've got your orders and understand?"

"Yes, sir. I've got 'em. We're to take the contract and I'm to lay off until the last minute; then, if you don't come aboard, I'm to go to Spalato and——"

"That's it. Maybe I'll come and maybe I shan't. That depends. Anyhow, carry on as if I weren't coming. So long."

He turned and walked back to the hotel entrance, observing as he did so that the guide Giuseppe had put in an appearance and with a palpably evident pretense of absorption was staring at a weather-beaten amusement notice tacked to a hotel billboard. Just at that moment, with an air of prodigious importance, Pietro walked out of the hotel and waved his hand with something of condescension to his friend Giuseppe, caught sight of Jimmy, and suddenly frowned. Jimmy was secretly amused at the boyish fervor of the young poet-guide and would have passed him had not Pietro, as if come to a sudden resolve, checked his progress.

"Signor," he said in his fluent but staccato English, "you are accompanying my lady this afternoon when she makes purchases for the decoration of her launch for the water parade of the Fête of the Rendetori, are you not?"

"Yes, I have been honored by an invitation. Why?" Jimmy asked, staring down at the handsome youngster who seemed perpetually and terribly in earnest.

For a moment Pietro appeared at a loss and then asked, "Would you perhaps care to go with me to-night to see one of the quaintest of Venetian ceremonies, but one in which, I fear, the signorina would not be interested?"

Jimmy asked, almost disinterestedly, "What is this—er—ceremony?"

3B—POP.

"It is what is known as the midnight meeting of the Fratelli Nero," Pietro explained. "You have heard of the Misericordi?—well, this is a similar organization and confined to our most noble city. You will be interested, signor, I promise."

"All right," said Jimmy, "I'll come."

"Just a moment more, signor." Pietro stopped him as he was about to move away. Coming closer to confidential range the guide added, "And I suggest that you tell no one of our proposed excursion, because it might get me into trouble among some of the Venetians and a word dropped anywhere in Venice is no longer unspoken, for it becomes a butterfly with swiftly beating wings."

Jimmy laughed and said, "Oh, that'll be all right. I'll tell no one."

"Not even the signorina?" Pietro insisted with absurd apprehensions.

"No, not any one," Jimmy asserted, smiling as he turned away. "Beginning to show his true colors. Just like all of the guide fraternity. Wants to make me think I'm getting some treat so rare and so seldom privileged that I'll be there with the big liberal fee when the time comes for settlement."

In the pleasure of the afternoon he forgot his proposed trip and assisted in working out a wonderful scheme for the decoration of the launch. He even contributed with some rather reckless purchasing on his own behalf, and bought a complete set of storage batteries for special illumination, declaring that the launch would prove unworthy of its owner unless illuminated with more lights than could be provided from its permanent batteries.

"But you see, Mr. Ware, how do you know I wish to have so many lights?" his companion objected. "Perhaps—maybe I'd rather have no lights at all, on that night."

Puzzled, he turned and looked at her and saw that she was frowning, perplexed and serious.

"Why?" he insisted, wondering at the change that had so abruptly come over her.

To his further mystification she answered, "I'd rather not tell you."

His disappointment was so obvious that she immediately displayed a wish to placate him. She turned, glanced about to see that Pietro was not too close and no others observing, and laid a hand on his sleeve.

"I'll tell you why," she said. "The night

of the fête is to be very important for me. I haven't yet decided that I want you involved, although—you're a dear. I believe—I believe—I think too much of you to get you into what may prove to be an awful mess. But the fact is that on the Saturday of the Fête of the Rendetori, when all of Venice will be on the Grand Canal, I'm going to get my casket."

"Heavens! You don't mean it!" he exclaimed, and then, troubled, shook his head and remonstrated. "See here. I think you should not be too hasty about attempting anything rash. Can't I dissuade you from trying to go after that foolish malicious little box?"

She shook her head obstinately and the contour of her mouth that was customarily a tender and mobile arch, became set and firm. He read the danger signs and hastened to make his peace.

"Well, then, if you're intent on going after that fool thing I insist on being a fellow criminal. I don't care to—good Lord!—I don't care to have you take the risk of being shot at. You don't know what you are attempting," he declared distractedly, recalling the unrelenting old guardian of the casket, the man whom she did not in the least surmise to be a kinsman of his own, his only one. Again she shook her head with that same air of determination.

Captain Jimmy, much distressed, looked away from her and upward as if seeking help or inspiration. They were standing at the head of the Merceria, that great Venetian shopping street and thoroughfare from St. Mark's to the Rialto, just within the shadow of the arch of the Clock Tower. He saw above him against the clear blue sky the whirling pigeons and then, closer at hand, the sculptured relief in perpetual memory of that harsh old woman who slew the chief conspirator of the plot against the Doge Gradenigo by hurling from the window above a marble mortar board, bringing horse and rider to the ground, and thus wrecking a great uprising. It seemed to him that this terrible old woman of the thirteenth century could have been no more desperately courageous and determinedly intent than this very modern girl here at his side. Argument was futile.

"Well," he declared, "if there's anything doing in the burglary line on Saturday night it is I who must make the attempt. Not you! If I can't dissuade you, I insist that

I'll do it myself. I can't let you take such a risk."

His eyes came back from the marble woman above to the living one at his side and he surprised that in her look which made him start; as if she had fathomed his great regard and glowed with appreciation and understanding. Standing there in the crowded thoroughfare, oblivious to the hurrying, jostling movement that surrounded them, forgetting all others, they were as isolated as if they had stood alone in a deserted street, and, confused at thus being caught unawares, she flushed and turned away with self-impatience.

"I'm not going to tell you any more about my plans—not now, at least," she said. "Come on. I want to visit an artificial flower shop, and there's Pietro coming back to see what has detained us."

"But what I said goes!" he muttered hurriedly. "Don't keep me out of your confidence."

"I'll not, my friend," she said, abruptly turning, looking up at him, and resting a hand for an instant on his coat sleeve.

"But you'll have to make it soon, won't you?" he insisted with equal haste as the obtrusive guide came toward them. "This is Thursday, remember, and Saturday comes quickly."

"I thought I had lost you, signorina," the musical but unwelcome young voice broke in upon them, and Jimmy could have turned and said things to Pietro that would have caused that patriot's hair to blanch. He looked his thought at the guide, perhaps, and encountered a scowl that was as harsh as his own. "Can't quite get him," he thought to himself as they started onward in momentarily enforced single file through the narrow street. "To-night I'm going to try to learn why it is that he dislikes me. Hello! Who is that? Looks like that lean boob—what's this—his name is—Giuseppe! That's it, Giuseppe!"

The man who had so unexpectedly distracted his attention dodged into a doorway. Jimmy turned, shouldered his way through the crowd, and on the pretext of looking at a window filled with walking sticks stared inward. There could be no mistake. It was Giuseppe again. Giuseppe who always appeared wherever he went.

"I'll be hanged if it doesn't look as if—as if he might be following me," Jimmy ruminated as he turned away to overtake

Tommie Powell, alias Cardell. "Something darned funny about this. Got to keep an eye out for that swab."

But not again throughout the afternoon could he find opportunity for renewing confidences with Miss Powell. It had now become a fixed appointment that he and Tommie should dine together; so he hoped, when they sat opposite each other at the table in the cozy side of the hotel, to resume that broken conversation. To his chagrin, after he had seated himself at the table she avoided it by sending word that she could not be with him that evening and he dined alone in anything but contented solitude. He did not see her leave the hotel. Furthermore, he did not see Giuseppe. The only man he saw whom he knew was the patient old gondolier whom he had retained, sitting, half asleep, in his repaired and revarnished craft, stolidly awaiting orders. At sight of him Captain Jimmy grinned and thought, "If I don't fire that old crab he'll keep on waiting forever. I don't know which one is the worst, he, Pietro, or that Giuseppe person."

Then he loitered over the newspapers, was bored by their inanities, strolled out along the Schiavi, yawned, wished he had not made the appointment with Pietro, and finally dozed in a corner of the lounge until awakened by the guide, who came in, gently aroused him and said, "It's time we were going, signor, to see that very interesting, that remarkable, ceremony. I hope you are not annoyed because I was compelled to disturb you."

"Oh, no. That is, not much." Jimmy yawned as he arose and sought his hat.

"This way, sir. I've got a gondola waiting up here in the mouth of the first rio," said Pietro when they reached the street, which at that hour had but few pedestrians. It was on the tip of Jimmy's tongue to suggest that they might as well take Tomaso, the veteran gondolier who sat expectantly waiting but who made no sign of recognition.

In silence they boarded the gondola. Pietro made a gesture as if their destination had already been fixed and the man adjusted the sash round his lean hips and bent his broad shoulders to the oar. Jimmy, still drowsy, was in no mood for conversation, and Pietro seemed for once to be content with silence, save that now and then he hummed a plaintive little Venetian love song

as he stared thoughtfully upward into the velvet of the starlit skies that seemed far and obscure in a night of darkness. The gondola came to a stop, and Pietro briskly stepped out, offering his hand to Captain Jimmy to assist him up the landing steps opening into a narrow passageway, and then after a moment's pause said to the gondolier, "It is best for you to continue on through this rio and out into the Grand Canal by the Straw Bridge, where we will meet you in half or three quarters of an hour."

And then: "This way, Signor Ware. It is so dark that you may have to guide yourself with a hand on either side, but the distance is not far."

Jimmy plunged ahead into a passage between walls so high and dark that he might have believed his way led through a cellar but for the narrow belt of stars high overhead and the regularity of the cobblestones over which now and then he stumbled.

"This would have been a grand little place for a murder in the good old days," he thought, and just then as if to remind him that perhaps the good old days hadn't entirely vanished something like the wings of a huge bat enveloped his head and shoulders, he heard a hoarse, muffled shout from Pietro, as if the poet-guide also had been attacked, and was jerked to the pavement and fallen upon by two men, one of whom deftly threw a loop around his legs and despite his hearty kicks succeeded in tightening it. Jimmy fought with all his strength to release his head, striking blindly with an arm that he got free and once bringing a grunt and a curse from the man with the cape.

"He hits hard and is strong. Help me here at his head," he heard the man growl and then, as he tried to twist over to free his other arm a menacing voice: "Signor, if you don't surrender I'll knock your cursed skull in!"

The other man now had found that free arm in the darkness, pinioned it, and panting and perspiring, Jimmy's assailants got him down, forced his arms to his sides and bound them with anything but gentleness. Recognizing the futility of further effort, Jimmy suddenly lay still and listened. But a few yards away in the darkness he heard muffled oaths in a chorus, indicating that the agile Pietro had wriggled and twisted so alertly that he was still putting up a valiant fight; but one of Jimmy's captors suddenly

slithered away into the darkness, there was an added explosive voice to the *mêlée*, then all was still save for one voice that kept insisting on haste.

"Bunglers! If you don't hurry the watch will be here! Pick them up and run! Run!" the voice insisted, and Jimmy suddenly was hoisted in arms that were as hard and strong as those of a stevedore, thrown across a broad shoulder, and felt himself carried along as if he were of no weight at all. There was a halt, the sound of a door being thrust open, a cool draft and he felt that he was being carried down moist steps between damp walls, and tales that he had heard of old murders, of subterranean entrances to waterways where victims were drowned and secreted for days flashed through his mind. Behind him he could hear, first, the closing and barring of a great door, then other heavy steps indicating that Pietro, as helpless as himself, was a companion in his enforced journey.

Much to Jimmy's satisfaction, after a considerable distance had been traversed in that damp atmosphere the man carrying him began to ascend, and Jimmy recovered his presence of mind and began to count the steps. They climbed twenty, then took a short, level walk in a drier atmosphere, climbed twenty more, turned, climbed another twenty, made that same regular turn and did still twenty more, indicating to Jimmy that they must be ascending some sort of a tower, or at least scaling to the top of some high structure. Then there came a halt and a whispered consultation which lasted for a minute or so, until that same directing voice commanded, "Never mind. Do as I say. Put the American in that room by himself." There was an instant's pause, some more hurried whispering, and the voice spoke again, impatiently, "No, the American by himself. Put the other in a room at the far end and if necessary to keep him quiet when he comes to, cut his throat. Give him the stiletto instantly if he lets out a single shout. Wait a moment! Perhaps it's better to do that anyway. We can keep his cadaver in the water basement for a week, or until we can slip it out to sea and with a few weights dump it over."

Jimmy gave a violent twist, caught his bearer unawares and came down upon the stone floor with a jolt that knocked him half unconscious. Before he could do more he

was seized by his bound and kicking heels and dragged forward with as little regard for his struggles or discomforts and frequent bumps as if he had been something inanimate. A door banged shut and he felt himself alone. Recovering somewhat, he rolled quickly in its direction, with his head found what he took to be the bottom of the door, and tried to listen through the folds of the cape that by now almost smothered him. He could not be certain whether it was the violent rush of blood through his own veins and arteries, or vague whisperings that he heard, and he groaned with helplessness. It seemed horrible to think that perhaps out there, even now, that handsome, fiery, temperamental, jealous youngster, Pietro, was being as callously slaughtered as if he were but a trussed sheep. In something of a fury of unreasoning impotence he rove to and fro, straining every muscle of arms and feet to break his bonds, biting savagely at the smothering folds of the cape and beating his feet helplessly on the stone floor.

The opening of the door brought a pause to his efforts and he heard that same heavy and unmistakable voice of command.

"Shut that door and stand by it, outside, one of you. And you others get that cape off his head lest he smother to death. Don't wait to untie it! Slash it away with a knife."

Jimmy felt the cold, creeping, menacing touch of steel between his cheek and the cloth. It slid upward, suggesting that it could slit him even more easily than it cut the heavy cape, there was a swift, final slash, a tug, a jerk, the rending of fabric, and his eyes were blinded by light even while his lungs struggled to make up for lost air. He blinked the sweat from his eyes, rested quietly, though panting, and looked upward.

A broad-shouldered, burly ruffian in gondolier's garb was bending over him and holding a lamp as if to make certain that he still was alive. Gold earrings under the man's black hat swung restlessly, twinkling sharp reflections of light. His sharp eyes stared from beneath bushy eyebrows, eyebrows black as a raven's wings. If a buccaneer of old had bent above a victim the picture would have been unchanged.

"Um-mh!" the man grunted. "He's alive enough. No doubt of that." For a long time his unblinking eyes studied Jimmy's face as impersonally as if he were merely

looking at a curio, an object of worth, or a stone dog in a garden.

"He doesn't look either dangerous, or worth much," he finally commented, somewhat to Jimmy's dislike. He grunted again, straightened up, carried the lamp to a rickety table and placed it thereon, fumbled in the pocket of his blue shirt for tobacco and papers and with these in his hands preparatory to making a cigarette returned to his victim.

"You understand Italian?" he said, and when Jimmy, striving to preserve at least a slight advantage shook his head in the negative, blurted, "Bah! You do. Or, if you don't, you're not going to learn much! But I say you do. You must. Now, listen. It will be worth your—ummmh!—your life, maybe. Will you be quiet if I let them liberate your feet and get you into a chair? Not that it makes much difference, because if you had the lungs of a man ape from Africa you couldn't make yourself heard outside this room."

Jimmy saw the futility of further assumption of ignorance and answered, "All right! I'll be quiet! You seem to have the best of it—so far."

The man grinned and gestured, and some one behind Jimmy cut the bonds that confined his legs and he stretched his cramped tendons, and sat up. Another gesture and he was lifted to his feet by two men who swung him around until he could see a chair. He walked to it and seated himself. A swift appraisal of his surroundings showed him that he was in a circular chamber, justifying his earlier surmise that he had been carried upward from the basement to a tower. There were narrow windows on all sides, but they were at least fifteen feet above the possibility of reach, and barred. The construction of the dome proved that he was in a room with a rounded, peaked roof, a place built for, or at least admirably adapted for, a prison chamber; one that doubtless had held many prisoners before ever he had been brought there. One that might have witnessed anything from mere sequestration to tortures manifold.

"Well," Jimmy asked in English, "what's it all about? What do you want with me? What's the answer?"

The man's ready grin proved that he understood.

"I spika da Ingleese too. Learn da Ingleese when run a da shine shop in New

York; but—spika da Italiano better. So—we spika da Italiano, signor."

His cheerful grin had given Jimmy a momentary hope of good will that might be cultivated, but it was instantly dashed by the man's next words which were in Italian, harsh, uncompromising, and—without the grin.

"Signor Ware, captain of the ship *Adventure*, I am paid to capture you. I am paid to hold you up to the time when your ship is to sail for Spalato. If you do not resist you shall suffer no harm. You will be well fed and can sleep well here! I am paid to be careful and considerate of you. But I am paid to see that you do just as I say. Otherwise—if you prove troublesome—it is left to me! I don't wish to adopt—let us be kind in word—extreme measures. But this, understand, you are to be kept here until your ship sails with you aboard or—your stay may be long. Which is it to be? I ask you? Peacefully, unharmed, and quietly, or must I make you forever still?"

Jimmy, amazed and perplexed by this astounding decree, could not immediately reply. As if impatient of delay the man shifted, again eyed him, and added, "Personally you are of no importance to me. I dislike destroying anything which is of no importance to me, because I always know that it may be of use to some other than myself. For that reason I should regret having to destroy you. But, captain, you are going to stay here one way or the other, until the boat sails, and it is for you to say whether you sail with it or never sail again. I have contracted and never yet have I taken a contract that I didn't carry through. Now, which is it to be?"

For a long time Ware stared into the unblinking, expressionless eyes before he asked, "And Sordillo? What of that young man Pietro Sordillo? I'll not leave him out of the bargain. What have you done with him? Is he to be included in this agreement?"

His captor suddenly displayed signs of amusement. He twisted in his chair, then beat his hands upon his knees and abruptly burst into hoarse laughter. He knuckled his eyes as if they had been involuntarily dimmed by the moisture of mirth at a cause so insignificant.

"What has he to do with it—this guide, this little man you call Sordillo?"

"He's got a lot to do with it," stoutly

asserted Jimmy. "I'll make no compromise and no agreement until I'm assured that he is treated as well as myself, and cared for and kept unharmed. Also that if I'm liberated in four days he is liberated, unharmed, with me."

"And if I don't agree to this——"

"You can go to blazes! I'll agree to nothing! For some reason I but half guess you don't want to hurt me if you can help it. But I tell you this, Sordillo and I leave or finish together. So you can take it or leave it!"

Again the man with the earrings rocked to and fro with personal amusement before he sobered enough to ask, "This Sordillo. Pietro Sordillo. The guide and bad poet—very bad poet! Is he, may I ask, a friend of yours?"

"He is!" Jimmy declared with extra vehemence. "I overheard your instructions regarding him, and if you're going to knife that boy as if he were nothing better than a troublesome dog in your way—well, sharpen the knife plenty because you'll have to use it on me too! Pietro and I came together and—one way or the other—we go together. I'll be quiet, peaceable, unresisting, and stand for the game, whatever it is, if Pietro is turned loose when I am."

For a long time the burly man regarded him, first with an air of amusement as if surprised that any one should object to the taking of a mere guide's life, and then with an air of perplexity, as if this were a new manifestation of humanity to which he was unaccustomed. He finally shifted his eyes and stared at the door as if not quite certain what answer to make.

"Do you think," he asked curiously, "that Sordillo would make the same insistence for you if the positions were reversed? That he would demand your safety before making certain of his own?"

"That doesn't matter. He might or he might not. I don't know. But I do know what I'm demanding, and I'm positive that I'm the one you expect to get money out of, or paid for, so—that's my answer."

The man got to his feet, consulted his watch, glanced about the room and said, "All right! That's an agreement. You are to remain tranquil, and—no harm shall come to Sordillo." He turned and stared again at his prisoner, then grinned and wagged his head. "I'm certain," he said, "that I can take your word. You Yankees are a

funny tribe. If I hadn't lived with a lot of you, I'd—no, I wouldn't take your promise! But as it is——" He turned toward the man who stood quietly by and ordered: "Cut loose his hands. Then see to it that everything is comfortable—that his bed is all right—that he has water, or, if he prefers it, wine, and after that lock the door and keep it guarded outside. I'll see you out there!"

He jerked a head and thumb in the direction of the hallway, glanced around the room as if to reassure himself of its strength then walked to the door, opened it and carelessly strode away through the empty and resonant corridor.

The broad-shouldered man liberated Jimmy with another stroke of that knife that had never been sheathed, grinned in a purely impersonal way, sheathed the knife and followed. But he bolted the door from the outer side after he had closed it and Jimmy proved this by immediately walking across the chamber and testing it.

CHAPTER VII.

JIMMY could not in the least conjecture what had been the cause of this personal outrage, what the project of profit by his capture, or what had become of Pietro. The sole concrete fact was that he was a prisoner in a tower somewhere in Venice, and that, somewhere in that same building, was Pietro, whose life he had possibly saved. Jimmy, when not excited, was inclined to be a philosopher; hence, convinced that he could do nothing to effect his escape, he calmly threw himself down on the not uncomfortable bed in the circular room and in less than a minute was asleep.

"Rattlety-bang! Thumpety-thump!" A terrific noise in the hallway, accompanied by loud grunts, some perfervid oaths, and more banging against the door aroused Jimmy and brought him to his feet listening.

"Sounds like a dog fight in the fo'c's'le," he muttered, "only this time it's not dogs. Go to it, whoever you are!"

Then as suddenly as they had begun the sounds ceased, there was silence, and then some one was fumbling at the huge bolts of the heavy door. It swung open a crack and a voice growled, "Are you in there, Signor Ware?"

"Yes, I am here," Jimmy replied as he edged to the side of the door with a chair

that he had hastily seized and held upraised and ready to strike. "Who are you?"

"Tomaso, signor. Your gondolier, Tomaso. May I come in now without being smashed with that chair I think you are holding?"

Astonished at the old gondolier's night vision Jimmy laughed, dropped the chair and swung the door open. He could hear Tomaso panting heavily in the darkness and then, "Have you a light, signor?"

"Yes," Jimmy said. "Just a moment. But I've no match." He felt two or three thrust into his fingers, struck one, crossed the room, found the lamp and with it in his hand turned and stared at Tomaso.

"Good Lord! You're hurt!" Jimmy exclaimed. "What's all that blood on your face?"

"I don't think it amounts to much, signor. Knife thrust in the dark. Fought it off with my arm. Grazed my head."

"You look as if you'd been half scalped, instead of grazed," Jimmy remarked solicitously. "Come over here and let me have a look at it."

"The signor capitano had perhaps better have a look at the other fellow first. He may need attention more than I," Tomaso remarked, stepping back and looking downward. Jimmy advanced, bent over with the light, and discovered the man with earrings, his chief abductor, lying doubled up in a grotesque attitude, with clothing as badly rent and torn as Tomaso's, while some disheveled blankets on the floor proved that he must have been either asleep or lying down on guard when Tomaso attacked him.

"How did you do it to him?" Jimmy asked.

"Why, when he tried to knife me I got him by the ears and banged his head against the wall. I don't think he's dead. His skull ought to be too thick for that. I think I know who he is. He's mostly a loafer and not much good, so it won't matter much if he is dead."

Jimmy dragged the man with the earrings inside, came to the conclusion that he was merely knocked out, so tied his hands with the handkerchief from around his neck and then examined his henchman's wound. He assisted Tomaso to cleanse it in the wash basin in the room, and bound it up with a towel, turbanwise.

"Ah, that's better. A million thanks, signor. You are a good man and kind

master. I feel all right now. So, if you'll wait here, I'll bring in the other one from far down the hall. I left him there when I came to this one," and he indicated the bound brigand with a careless kick in the ribs.

"I'll bring the light. You seem to have had rather a merry party of it, Tomaso. Good old sport! I'll come along with the light."

"No, you remain here and watch this one, signor. I don't need the light. I can manage alone."

He disappeared, Jimmy heard his bare feet slapping down the hallway, then after a time heard them returning. He came through the door carrying a man so bound with ropes and so wrapped with a gagging cloth that he appeared helpless to do more than give an occasional soundless wriggle. Tomaso carried his burden over to the bed, dumped it casually thereon and then said, "If the signor will hold the light so I can see to cut away this gag, our friend may feel better."

Jimmy promptly obeyed. Tomaso slipped a knife from its sheath and said to his victim, "Best lay still or I might make a mistake and slice off an ear or two." He gave a quick slash, and the lamp almost fell from Jimmy's hand as he recognized Pietro.

"Good heavens! What's this? You've made a mistake, Tomaso."

"Not I, signor," the old gondolier declared.

"Where did you get him?" Jimmy demanded. "Out of another room in this crib?"

"Not at all. I nailed him when he was on his way to his hotel—down near the landing of the rio."

"But—but Pietro is my friend!" Jimmy insisted. "Cut those ropes and let me help him limber up."

"You'll most likely help him to limber up with your fists, or your boots, after I tell you how I happened to get him," Tomaso asserted. "Suppose, my master, you don't liberate him until I've explained."

He was so certainly in earnest that Jimmy hesitated and looked at Pietro. That young gentleman shut his mouth tightly, as if refusing to speak, and turned his head away.

"Pietro, haven't you anything to say?" Jimmy asked, bending over the poetical guide.

"You know I haven't," Pietro snapped.

"Let this old water rat squeak. I'd like, myself, to hear his story."

Jimmy, mystified by this turn of conversation, turned to Tomaso and nodded. The old gondolier sat down on the foot of the bed and grinned mirthlessly at the prostrate Pietro.

"Why, to-day, signor—or yesterday now—I saw this scalawag talking to that big lump over there on the floor, and I knew there must be something wrong afoot, from the confidential way in which they talked and because the lump is no good. It bothered somewhat, and so when to-night I saw this Pietro take you off in a gondola that's not a public one, but a private one owned by this lump's pal, I made up my mind there was something wrong, and I followed you. I got into that passageway too late to help, but I saw that something like a lively play was going on, Pietro here pretending to be struggling and fighting, and you down. Him fighting? All he was doing was to boss the job and fool you so that if you got away there could be no evidence against him! Then when they carried you into this building they left the lower door open. So I slipped inside, took off my shoes and watched and listened. Pietro paid off all but one man, this lout with earrings, and they shoved off. If they hadn't been in such a hurry to reach the nearest grog shop they'd have seen me; because I had barely time to slip into one of the empty rooms a few feet ahead of them.

"Then Pietro waits in the hall with his ear to a crack of the door until the decorated brigand here and his pal come out and lock the door. They all go downstairs, where Pietro pays off the stevedore who carried you in, and he too shoves off. Then Pietro gives his instructions to old Earrings to make sure that you don't get away for at least four days, but—I'll say this for him!—he made it plain that you weren't to be hurt in any way that could be helped unless you cut up ugly, and that you were to be well fed and watered. He gives Earrings a key and tells him that he needn't come down to lock the outer door because he's got another key for himself. When I heard that I ran down and out. I waited quite a while and then comes Master Pietro down the street and I took him in before he knew what happened; fixed him up with the spare mooring line of my gondola; got the key out of his pocket; brought him back;

dumped him in the hallway and slipped up on Earrings. I waited quite a while and thought Earrings ought to be asleep. But when I struck a match to find him, he jumped up and we had a very nice little party. A very nice party, signor, and, if I do not boast, I'll say that for a man of my years there's quite a lot of good stuff left in me yet. However, that's all I know about it—and there they are. Nice pair of 'em!"

For a long time Jimmy looked at Pietro, who eyed him back with a scowl as black as the night outside. Jimmy could not in the least conjecture the whys and wherefores of this conspiracy and suddenly felt sorry that Pietro, who had so often amused him, should prove so black a traitor to friendship.

"Pietro, my lad," he said in English, "I can't understand this at all. I thought you were my friend. You are the last one in the world I would have classed as a Judas Iscariot!"

"You're a nice one to call any one a Judas. I should say so!" Pietro cried, breaking his long, stubborn silence with such indignant and vehement anger that his face whitened. He tried to sit up, struggling like a trussed fowl, and then limply chucked himself back on the pillow with an air of helpless exasperation.

"Go ahead and talk," Jimmy said.

"How can I talk—freely, and express myself when—lying here like this, with my hands tied?" Pietro demanded.

Jimmy suddenly burst into a roar of laughter at the absurdity of Pietro's speech, but the latter appeared to discern nothing funny in his remark and scowled all the more.

"All right. We'll loosen your hands so you can express yourself," said Jimmy, and then in Italian told Tomaso to go over and close the door and stand guard by it.

"My lad," said Jimmy as he proceeded to unbind the rope lashings, "you're laboring under some sort of delusion. If you think I ever played the part of a Judas in anything, I'd like to have you tell me what it is. We'll have to get that straightened out first. So, with a little patience, I don't doubt but what we'll come to a better understanding. There you are! Free! Now you'd probably feel more comfortable if you got up and sat in a chair. It's no fun being tied up like a boneless ham. I've been through it myself this evening—by your orders. So you've

had at least some of your own medicine back, thanks to good old Tomaso."

Pietro got up, stretched himself, massaged his wrists and ankles to restore circulation, readjusted his necktie with a touch of vanity, smoothed his mop of hair and took a seat at the little marble-topped center table opposite Ware.

"You think I'm not, as the Americans say, wise to you, eh?" he growled. "You can't talk Italian, eh? You said so on the first night I ever saw you there in St. Mark's Square, and you took pains never to speak it in front of me after that. Then you pretended to be a tourist and came to the Danieli to stop! You, the master of the ship *Adventure* lying out there in the Giudecco! And you wormed your way into the confidence of my lady like a cheap detective. Bah! You got her to tell you things. Bah! And you and that old water rat followed us one night when we were going about our project and studying the situation, and you didn't take warning when we ran you down—my lady and I! Yes, we did it, and I wish you had both been drowned! I tell you this to your face."

"So it was you? I thought so at the time, but wasn't certain," Jimmy commented, with a grin. "I suppose she knew it was me who got tipped into the canal and had to swim?"

"My lady did not—God bless her sweet soul. I kept your perfidy from her," Pietro exclaimed with a fervency that reached melodrama. "I knew that she might show pity to you and disbelieve your baseness, but I, her guardian, thought I could take care of you!"

"And you darned near did it, Pietro. You darned near did it!" Jimmy conceded, still smiling at this wild Latin fervor, this unconscious acting, this overdeveloped sense of drama that in any other than Pietro would have seemed absurdly ridiculous. The only element that saved Pietro, Jimmy decided, was his profound and fiery earnestness and his chivalric determination to be of service, come what might, to his much-admired employer.

It was these ameliorating conditions that caused him to ask, curiously and almost inconsequentially, "Pietro, how old are you?"

"I'll be twenty-one next month," the boy blurted and then, impatiently: "But what's that got to do with it?"

"I just wished to know; but go on with

your arraignment," Jimmy said with a faint and tolerant smile.

"All right, I will. I'll make you admit that you're a Judas. You think I don't know, but I do. I've had lots of ways of finding out all you did. If you think a Venetian guide hasn't ways of finding everything out about everybody—bah!—you don't know Venezia. What are you going to say when I tell you that you are nothing but a tool of that old villain; that wretched old American who has more money than he ever deserved; that old man Harnway? Ah-ha! You are surprised at my knowledge! You went to his house to report your perfidy. You did! Don't deny it. He likes you so well that he put his arm around your shoulder and called you by your first name. You can't deny that either because the door man saw it. Ah-ha! I see you are at last ashamed of yourself. And he took you up into the salon and showed you that little casket that he stole and that I have taken a solemn oath before the shrine of Our Lady to recover for its rightful owner, who is the sweetest, finest lady that ever came from the town of Kentucky, in a State called Rocky Crossing, United States of America. Now I ask you—are you a Judas or are you not, Signor Ware?"

He jumped to his feet, sputtering, glaring, and with the backs of his hands resting on the top of the table, bent forward as he must have thought an accusing angel might bend to confront and utterly demolish a quivering and stripped malefactor. It seemed to increase his anger when Jimmy gave a low whistle, rammed his hands in his pockets, tilted his chair back, elevated his feet to the table and quietly grinned.

"Well, Pietro," he drawled at last, "from your point of view it does look pretty bad, doesn't it? I'll be hanged if, from your viewpoint, you haven't made out rather an admirable case against me! I'll admit it! In a way you've got the makings of a first-class lawyer in you, I should say."

Pietro could not altogether resist this praise. But as if to harden himself for the performance of a stern duty he chased away that slight trace of self-satisfaction and assumed a highly judicial air.

"Since you have admitted your baseness, your treachery, your vile masquerading, and that you have led the most wonderful lady that the State of Rocky Crossing, U. S. A., ever produced, into perhaps giving you her

confidence, I should now like to know what you are going to do about it?"

Jimmy brought his feet down with a bang as a solution of the situation, somewhat whimsical, was formulated in his mind.

"Suppose I make a bargain with you. There are certain reasons why I don't wish to have Miss Cardell"—he tripped, almost using her true name of Powell—"your employer, know that I am merely the master of a tramp freighter, or that I am acquainted with Mr. Harnway. Suppose I agree to help lift that box myself in return for your keeping those matters silent? Are you a very good burglar, Pietro? I dare say you're not! I don't believe you ever robbed even a—church, or a collection box, or a blind man, did you? Well, if you never have, my experience might prove valuable. I come from a long line of people who have been accused, openly, of grabbing things that didn't belong to them. It's in the blood, I tell you. Could we make that bargain?"

As he spoke he saw Pietro's eyes widen with astonishment at such a brazen confession of heredity.

"The signor is not jesting, is he?" Pietro asked with a perplexed stare.

"Not at all. I'll make that bargain and I'll carry it out, too! Was never more in earnest in my life. I've a particular reason, come to think of it, why I should like to steal that box myself and hand it to Miss—er—Cardell."

"If, as you say, you are expert in such matters, which neither my lady nor I are, your offer is attractive," Pietro said, staring first at the lamp, then at the stolid Tomaso, then back at Jimmy. "But I wonder if I dare trust you? Your record so far as I know is—bad. Very bad, signor. The one thing in your favor is that to-night you tried, as you believed, to save my life. I heard you and my heart softened a little at that."

"Of course, if you don't agree to my terms," Ware said thoughtfully, "there is nothing for me to do but hand you and that hired brigand of yours there on the floor over to the police. I'd be sorry to do that, because I understand that brigandage in Italy is now punishable with life imprisonment or death, and as our case is so clear, and Tomaso such a good witness, and this man of yours would undoubtedly confess—well, I'd hate to think of your being hanged,

shot, beheaded, or whatever it is they do to them down here, Pietro."

He shook his head sorrowfully, but from the corner of his eye saw Pietro's long, slender fingers suddenly clutch the edge of the table as if, for the first time, the gravity of his predicament was impressed upon him.

"You—you wouldn't do that, would you, signor?" he gasped in a dry voice as if from a suddenly restricted throat.

"I'm afraid I would. I don't see any other way out of it, Pietro," Jimmy asserted with an assumption of profound gravity. "I think we'd better strike that bargain, hadn't we?"

Pietro wriggled and twisted in his chair, then put both elbows on the table and thrust his fingers through his mop of hair as if distracted. At last he groaned, "I've got to! I can do nothing else!"

"Good! Then we'll shake on it, eh?" said Jimmy with great alacrity.

Pietro accepted the proffered hand in a cold grasp of formality and with evident reluctance.

"Now," said Jimmy cheerfully, "you might dump what's left of that pitcher of water on the head of your hired man there and see if that'll bring him out of dream-land. That's all you need do. I'll reserve to myself the pleasure of kicking him down two flights of stairs."

But when the ruffian with the gold earrings was restored to a dripping consciousness and his hands liberated he was in such a pitiable state of funk, and clung to his head with such a genuine air of holding it together after the battering it had received, that Jimmy relented.

"Humph! Guess he's had enough to last some time," he said, standing above the man and glowering down at him. Then peremptorily he growled, in Italian, "Get up and get out of this! And move fast, because if you don't I'll tell Tomaso to take another go at you, you lop-eared, murderous thug! And if you're not out of Venice in twelve hours the police will get you. I'll see to that, too. Get out!"

With all his former truculence and bragadocio gone, fearful not only of this American who threatened him but of the savagely grinning old gondolier who had already administered punishment that he was not likely to forget in many moons, the man crawled to the doorway on his hands and knees, then got to his feet and with a sud-

den access of fear-stimulated strength ran through the hallway and pattered down the stairs as if there was danger of reconsideration behind.

"Now, Pietro, my friend," Jimmy said quietly, "we'll light ourselves out with this lamp. You can lock this old crib that you doubtless rented for this festive night—the night when the Fratelli Nero celebrate, you remember—and we'll get Tomaso to lend us his gondola. You can row it, since you are so handy with an oar. Tomaso and I both know that. We've seen you work. And you, Tomaso, will then go to one of the night dispensaries and get a few stitches taken in your scalp. Tell them it was an accident. We've all agreed to keep our mouths shut about to-night. Come on!"

CHAPTER VIII.

JIMMY wrote the letter on a Hotel Danieli letterhead and then, after due thought, walked out, purchased plain paper and plain envelope at a shop and rewrote it. It ran:

HON. LEMUEL HARNWAY,
Venice.

MY DEAR UNCLE: Certain circumstances have put me in a position concerning which I cannot at the moment confide; and I consider it not only sportsmanlike, but necessary, for me to warn you that I am involved in a conspiracy—and pledged to perform therein—directed against a certain possession of yours. I could not take this part without warning you that I must, for the time being at least, be regarded and treated as your enemy. For me not to warn you would be dishonorable. For me to tell you exactly what the conspiracy is would be equally dishonorable, because it would be a betrayal. If the day comes when I can win your forgiveness by confession, you will, I am certain, appreciate my predicament. Puzzling as this letter may seem, I feel that it is but fair, after having visited your house, to tell you frankly that you must be on your guard against me, or any with whom I am associated. I am, sir,

Most affectionately yours,

JAMES WARE.

He tried to find other expressions less cryptic, weighed words and sentences, and then feeling that he had done his best, mailed it.

"I doubt if the old boy will ever forgive me if he learns the truth of this affair," he ruminated after the letter was mailed, and half wished that he could recover it. "But Tommie wants that box and I've just got to help her get it. Her heart is set on it, and—confound the thing, anyhow! I wish old Yancey Powell had broken his arm before he ever got hold of it!"

He did not, however, make the most obvious and reasonable wish, that he had never met Miss Tommie Powell, his hereditary enemy by Kentucky feudal code. In fact, so recalcitrant to code was he that at that very hour of the morning he was eagerly waiting for her to appear for breakfast, and filled with a new idea for decorating her launch that he hoped might please her and prove his genius and fertility of invention. Between times he speculated curiously on what she had planned for Saturday night.

When she appeared, fresh, smiling, clad in summery white befitting the season and climate, and advanced to meet him, his heart thumped with the knowledge that she was glad to find him there and at least accepted him as a good comrade.

"Hello," she said. "Wonder if I kept you waiting for breakfast? I'm lazy this morning. Had quite a party last night. Kept me up until all hours."

"I was kept up rather late myself last night," he admitted, making a dry private joke. "But all this is of no importance. I'm upset because you haven't yet confided your plans about how we are to get that silly casket."

Her face lost its smile as the great pursuit recurred to her and she looked warily around as if apprehensive that his words had been overheard. He too looked but saw no one save Giuseppe loitering at a distance, and, out at the edge of the Schiavi wharf, Tomaso, with a bandage around his head, gravely watching him with a doglike fidelity.

She led the way inward to the breakfast room and to her accustomed table, and he followed. Perhaps as a subterfuge to avoid answering him she became engrossed in the bill of fare.

"That's got the same things on it that it had yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, and the day before that—and so on," he said, smiling at her. "Being blessed with a Kentucky appetite, you're going to take ham and eggs, the same as you did yesterday and the day before that, and the day——"

"How do you know I am?" she retorted, throwing the card aside.

When she smiled he stubbornly, as was his way, reverted to his original point, the casket.

"See here," she said, lifting her eyes to his—and for the moment they were troubled

—“I’ve thought the whole thing over. You’re mighty kind to listen to all my harassments, and all that—and if I didn’t—well, like you, I’d jump at your offer to help because I’m going to try to do something that I’ve never done before and—”

“Burglary,” he said, smiling, “is more than a profession. It’s an art.”

She stopped and looked as if taken unawares, and he continued:

“Yes, thieving, for that’s what it is, is the result of a highly needful youth, a growth and development in sordid surroundings, thievish environment, and the example of others. Now I’ve got an idea that you’ve not had many of these advantages in the profession. You’re tackling a job that would appal an expert. You’ve got it in your very charming head that you are going to find a way to enter, burglarize or loot the palace of one Lemuel Harnway, ex-senator of the United States, who may in his time have done a bit of robbing himself, and therefore may know how to guard against it. I have volunteered in the enterprise and in a spasm of momentary weakness you consented to accept my assistance. Do you keep your word, or don’t you?”

“I do, but I didn’t say how best you could assist me, did I? Suppose I decided you could be of the most help by remaining here in the hotel? Or, if you are religiously inclined, suppose I suggested you go to some church and pray for my success?”

“Prayer as a help to burglary is something I never thought of,” he said with a grin. “Think of the poor but honest burglar’s wife keeping prayerful vigil while her adored husband is out perilously earning their nightly bread and *pâté de foie gras*.”

An ominous silence followed his badinage and when, after a time, she lifted her eyes they were cold and angry.

“You talk as though I were a thief—all the time you speak of my enterprise that way. And I think I explained to you that I’m not, and that I’m trying to recover only that which rightfully belongs to me. If you can’t accept my attitude, I certainly decline to accept your help or encouragement.”

“My dear girl,” he said, assuming a gravity that he did not at all feel, “I appreciate all your high motives. If I didn’t, do you think I should suggest—nay, insist!—that if you plan to force Harnway’s palace for the purpose of capturing that relic it must be myself and none other who does it?”

She looked at him incredulously and then her mood softened.

“But you couldn’t find it, because you don’t even know where it is, and I do!” she remarked triumphantly.

He dared not offer an argument against this, but said, “I’m certain I could find where it’s kept, if you were to tell me how it may be reached.”

“No,” she said, “I do appreciate your bravery and your generosity, but I couldn’t direct you to it.”

Again he fell to the old arguments, warning her of the dangers, calling attention to the fact that any servant of the house would be justified in shooting her if she were surprised in her act; that she was contemplating a double felony, that of burglary and of attempting to carry from Italy an undeclared object of art.

“Well,” he said in desperation when he found her as immovable as ever in her determination, “I shall go with you.”

“I might consent to your going in the boat,” she yielded, displaying at least a certain amount of weakness and desire for support. “I can’t entirely feel trust in Pietro. He’s too impulsive. He isn’t cool enough to be depended upon in a pinch. Although I think he is willing to defy the law when his dander is up, as we used to say down home.”

Jimmy smiled to himself and thought, “Defy the law? I should say he would. Don’t I know! The young devil!”

He then comforted himself in the hope that within the thirty-six hours that must intervene before her desperate attempt could be made, she might weaken in her resolve, and wisely decided that his dissuasion must be masked lest open argument but strengthen her stubbornness.

Together they crossed over the Grand Canal to a little basin behind the Chiesa della Salute, where they found Pietro superintending the decoration of her launch. Jimmy met the guide’s stare with a grin and complimented him on the work. He saw at once that the lights of the launch and the decorations had been so arranged that they did not interfere with each other. Furthermore, by a cunning manipulation, the decorations had been so arranged on nets that they could be stripped and discarded at an instant’s notice.

“I don’t quite get the idea, of course,” Jimmy said, with a note of interrogation in

his voice, and looking an invitation at the girl to explain if she felt so inclined.

"Why, the idea is this," she said. "We can travel with lights ablaze, and decorated like most craft will be for the water promenade up and down the Grand Canal to-morrow night. Then, just at the time when every person in all Venice who can will be out somewhere on the canal, we move away into the smaller rios which at that time are certain to be empty. We put out our lights, carry through my project, and, if not interfered with, return to the canal, join in the merry throng with all lights and decorations beautifying ourselves, and no one the wiser. If, on the other hand, we have to disguise ourselves for some reason——"

"In other words if you are interrupted, observed, shot at, or anything like that."

"Yes, if anything unpleasant happens and we have to make a run for it we can strip our decorations in a moment and are thus effectually disguised because everybody will be seeking a launch that looks like a white-flower swan, which is what this will look like when it is finished."

Jimmy had to admit the ingenuity of the plan, and was still hopeful that something would intervene to prevent her attempt. He was considering this when he discovered that he was without anything to smoke, and while Tommie was giving further directions walked across the tiny bridge at the end of the basin and into a cigar shop. His coming evidently was a surprise to a man who was dawdling therein, but who turned quickly as Jimmy entered. It was Giuseppe, and Jimmy resisted an impulse to seize him by the shoulder, whirl him around, and ask him if these meetings were merely coincidence, or whether he had been employed to watch his movements. The absurdity of such procedure kept him from so doing, but nevertheless he could not clear his mind of the suspicion that Giuseppe was much too frequently visible. And then he thought to himself: "Pshaw! That's what a guilty conscience does."

But he made up his mind to test his suspicions in another way, and so returned to the launch, pleaded that he had forgotten an engagement, made an appointment for later in the day and slowly walked back past the cigar shop to give Giuseppe ample opportunity to follow him through the intricate lanes, narrow streets and unexpected

market places and squares on that side of the canal. He doubled back, dodged unexpectedly, and after a half hour of playing the hare to a supposititious fox came to the conclusion that he had been mistaken. He decided to return for Tommie; but when he reached the bridge across the end of the basin and looked for her, both she and Pietro had disappeared. Also Giuseppe had gone.

Jimmy was annoyed because he had needlessly separated himself from Tommie for some hours, called himself many opprobrious kinds of an ass, and took a gondola across to the Hotel Regina where he sat under an awning and vainly tried to conceive some way of keeping the girl from carrying out her foolhardy plan. He thought of hiring the faithful Tomaso to slip around and wreck the engine of the launch at the last moment, and then decided that inasmuch as Tommie's motor engineer was almost certain to be on the watch that would prove impossible. Furthermore, that young motorist was a kinsman of Pietro's, so doubtless any attempt to bribe him would prove useless. He thought of writing an anonymous letter to his uncle, but concluded that not only would this be a betrayal of Tommie, but not playing the game. And, furthermore, he secretly admitted that inasmuch as she desired possession of that confounded casket, he really wished she might get it, or better yet, that he might be the means of getting it for her, thereby winning her undying gratitude.

And it was this last thought which finally caused him to cast all doubts and scruples aside and make his final choice.

"By the shades of Colonel Yancey Powell!" he mentally exclaimed. "She wants that box and I'm going to get it for her or at least keep her from being punished for her part of the game if she's caught."

CHAPTER IX.

THERE is no place on the globe like Venice en fête. There is no place where the citizens of a city give themselves over so whole-heartedly to a festival as in that ancient republic, that once imperial ruler of the seas, the "Queen of the Adriatic." And there is no more generally attended fête than that commemorating the deliverance from the great plague, which has been celebrated every year at the same time, with but a short lapse, since 1537—nearly four

hundred years. That "Feast of the Ascension and Nuptials of the Sea" instituted in 991, wherein the state barge manned by forty-two oars, guarded by one hundred and sixty-eight of the most valiant noblemen and knights, conveyed the reigning doge out to that point beyond the Lido where in the name of Venice he cast a flashing ring into the waves and uttered the formula: "*Desponsamus te, in signum perpetuæ veræ dominii*"—"We marry thee, O sea, in sign of absolute dominion"—has long since been lost. The "Feast of the Dogressa" when the wife of the doge was crowned and, clad in robes gorgeously embroidered with priceless jewels, led a stately procession, reached its height of glory about the time when Columbus discovered America, and then gradually became forgotten. Likewise the "Feast of the Marys," when twelve little girls gayly dressed were rowed in a state barge through the principal canals, has been obsolete since the fourteenth century. But the "Feast of the Redeemer" dies not, and each year takes on greater dignity and—greater celebration.

Captain Jimmy listened to Pietro's explanation of this on their eventful night, the guide having for the moment become poet quite as inconsequentially as if the decorated launch in which they rode had no other purpose than to mingle with the thousands of other craft that passed ceaselessly to and fro on the great waterways. Scores of them had music aboard, and nearly every one had its singer. Now and then a gorgeous and highly illuminated barge passed with something akin to a small opera company and a full-sized orchestra to furnish harmonious accompaniment. The stately old palaces along the banks were illumined and some had great garlands of flowers trailing from roof to water. Everything was lazy movement, softened light, and romance. Throughout the balmy summer night it would continue, but it could be depended upon to be at its best between the hours of eleven and one in the morning, after which time the more sedate retired to their homes.

And the party on the swan boat waited with increasing tension for the first propitious hour. They stared at each other expectantly when the great bells of the Campanile, that slender, lighted shaft that loomed up above the gray old city as if seeking the stars, mellowly struck eleven o'clock.

"You are still determined to go, are you?" Jimmy asked the girl, who had listened with slightly parted lips and face aglow with excitement.

"Of course I am! You don't think I'd come clear across the Atlantic to weaken at the last moment, do you?" she asked.

"No, I don't think you would," he replied soberly. "Well, I suppose its time for action and—you said you had your plans well worked out."

She laughed a trifle nervously, he thought, and leaned forward and spoke to Pietro who was riding forward beside the man at the wheel, and Pietro in turn spoke to his kinsman, who gave the wheel a turn and, still at the same leisurely pace, swung the boat around and headed for one of the rios. He slowed down as they entered it until they crept beneath a stone bridge of the Schiavi at a most sedate pace and moved quietly, almost noiselessly, into the dark depths. After the lights of the Grand Canal and the fête the way seemed dark, gloomy, and dangerously narrow. As they progressed in a constantly increasing tension Jimmy was pleased to observe that they passed neither gondola nor other craft. Tommie too noticed it and exultantly called his attention to their good fortune.

"See," she said quietly, "Pietro was right. This entire part of the city is practically deserted to-night. We shall go to a turn not far from the palace of that dreadful old man, where we shall find a gondola moored. Pietro, you and I will transfer to that, and Pietro will row us to the place. Then, if we can get it, as I am almost certain we can, I shall go and you and Pietro will wait for me, or until you hear an alarm."

"It sounds good," was all Jimmy said, but he had already made up his mind that her plan must suffer alteration.

The launch made another turn and stopped in the shadows of buildings that by their darkness and gloominess suggested that in hours of daylight they were used for factories or warehouses, and here, in the dusk of a long-disused entrance, they came to a halt beside a gondola. Slim and sinister it looked in that gloom, its black sides as dark as the shadows in which it rested. A switch clicked and the lights of the launch were extinguished. Quickly and somewhat excitedly Pietro stepped across to the gondola and felt for its mooring rope, while Jimmy followed, gave his hand to the girl,

and helped her to a seat. The poet-guide loosened the boat, stood erect with the long oar in his hand and asked quietly, "All ready, signorina?"

"Yes, Pietro," she said and then turned to her motor driver with, "You remember everything, don't you? That you are to be ready to start at an instant's notice, and that you are to remain here without fail, no matter what happens, until one of us comes?"

"Sì, sì, signorina. You may depend upon me."

"Go ahead, Pietro," she commanded as calmly as if they were bent on nothing more than an innocent excursion, and Pietro threw his vigorous young weight against the long oar, poised on the footboard, took a step backward and thrust the slender gondola past the launch and into the unruffled waters of the dark and narrow canal. He reached a sharp turn and with an apparently effortless motion swung the high prow outward, then sidewise, cleared a wall by a foot, and Jimmy saw that they had entered a long waterway on each side of which tier on tier of window boxes filled with fragrant plants, and walls cumbered with flowering creepers that seemed gently asleep, could be dimly discerned beneath the more open light of the high stars.

He peered at his companion whose dark dress made but a vague outline against the bordering darkness. Her face in profile showed pale and cleanly cut. Her chin was thrust forward and her head held high and purposefully. He could not avoid the admiring thought that "blood will tell!" and wondered if that long-dead Yancey Powell who had fought so desperately in this same ancient old city, and had so valorously escaped when the fight was done, might not have looked as she looked, some time, on perhaps this same rio. Colonel Yancey was dead, but the same buildings looked down on the same quiet stretch of waters then as now, and for centuries before had done the same. A masterful spirit with high and chivalrous aims had been then reviewed by these grim old watchers that stood like sentinels guarding their waterway, but they could have observed nothing more brave and daring of that fighting stock than on this quiet night. A Powell had come and gone. A Powell had come again, to dare again, to go again—if the luck of the day was with her! Suddenly Ware saw in this queer

quest something as big and fine, if of less importance, as was ever the quest of the Grail. It meant as much to the girl at his side as ever the quest of the Grail to those crusaders of old. They had ventured into strange, distant and hard lands; but so had she. They had dared much, but their daring was no greater than hers. His heart warmed toward her until he yearned to take from her weaker shoulders this perilous task, and if it came, endure for her the burden of defeat. The proposed robbery of his own kinsman no longer appeared like a foolish burglary, but as something great beyond words. They were going out to rob a castle, he and she, and the dragon, his kinsman, was the enemy.

His meditations were ended by a backwash of the long, skillfully wielded oar that brought the slender gondola to a slow halt. They crept, under way, beneath a grated window but a few feet above, a window through which centuries past the armed sentries of powerful noblemen might have stood constant watch against enemy attack. It was unlighted, dark, moss covered.

"This is the window, signorina," Pietro whispered as he reached upward, clutched the bars, and brought the gondola to a dead stop.

Gentle waves rippled past, washed against the gray walls, and quieted. The flowering creepers, water laved, swayed gently, and again came to rest. They had the stillness of the night, the serenity of the stars, the placidity of waters around them and from none of the dark old buildings about them came a light, or a sound.

"Good, go ahead with it," the girl murmured, standing up, and Pietro clutched his fingers into the moss and handed backward a huge stone.

"Here! Let me take that," Jimmy whispered, as he thrust himself in front of her and accepted it in his hands and quietly lowered it over the edge of the gondola so that it sank noiselessly into the water.

"Pietro has made many trips here in the night," the girl whispered as the work of demolition went on. "All that he has been afraid of is that some one might discover it in the daytime. But all he has to do is to take down a lot of these stones—and out comes the iron grating! We've got an inside plan. Once I get through, I know just which way to go and turn to reach the main floor. If you will keep on taking those

stones from Pietro, and dropping them overboard, 'I'll get ready for my part.'

Almost mechanically he obeyed and in the darkness he heard the soft rustle of garments as if she were discarding feminine garb that would impede her bodily freedom. He had no time to look around, and besides would not have done so lest he prove ineptly curious. Stone after stone was handed downward to him and then there was a pause, a soft, grating sound, and into his hands came bodily the ancient iron grille, and with its contact he heard Pietro's whisper, "That is all. The way is clear."

It was time for him to interfere in this mad project. He turned and bent toward her and said, "Now tell me how I'm to go when I get inside."

"You're not going inside," she whispered back as she thrust herself forward past him and lifted her hands to the window sill. "You're to wait for me to return, and, if you hear any alarming noise, you and Pietro are to get away as quickly as ever you can."

He had no time to remonstrate, to discuss, or to argue, for suddenly her lithe young body, clad in boyish knickerbockers, leaped upward, gained the stone ledge and was disappearing. There was no time to be lost. He did not wait. He threw his sailor-trained hands upward, clutched the ledge and sprang after her. There was nothing else to do, unless she were to face unforeseen perils and menaces alone and unsupported. He heard Pietro's expostulations, muttered savagely behind him, twisted his body, and jumped forward into enveloping darkness. His shoes, although he landed on the stone flagging on his toes, made a harsh noise. He felt his arm clutched with hands that even through the cloth of his pongee suit thrilled him and her voice, so close to his ear that it was fragrant with her breath, remonstrating, "No—no—no! You mustn't come in here with me! You'll spoil everything!"

"I'm going with you," he whispered. "Where you go, I go." And then in the excitement of the moment he added: "Always! Never from now on shall you go alone."

In that solid, profoundly quiet darkness he sensed that she drew back, hesitated, and then he felt a hand groping for his as if, after all, in this disturbed moment she was afraid of what might come and was grateful for his support. He caught it, held it, felt

its yielding appeal, and could not restrain himself even in that peculiarly trying moment, so there in the darkness lifted it to his lips. He was disappointed when, as if shocked, it was hastily withdrawn, and her whisper came to him, "We must turn to the left. Then we climb some stairs and there is a door which we must open, and then we go to the right, find another door, and are in the loggia."

"I'm afraid you will have to hold my hand and lead me," he whispered back.

But she did not do as he wished. Instead he felt her fingers fumble and catch his coat sleeve, urge him toward her, and then hastily pull him forward. Suddenly she stopped and again there was that fragrance of her near breath as she admonished him, "You must take off your shoes. They make a frightful noise."

He bent over and removed his shoes and wondered why he hadn't himself thought of that precautionary measure.

"Got 'em off," he whispered as he straightened, and again the hand found his coat sleeve and led him forward. There was a muffled bump and she stopped.

"This must be the door into the loggia," he heard her whisper as sounds indicated that she was softly feeling, adventuring, trying to locate the latch and then, "Ah! Here it is."

He was about to caution her to open it slowly lest the loggia be lighted and guarded, but was too late to overtake her eagerness. The door swung open and high above in the peak of that inlaid dome that he had admired there shone a light bathing the great twin stairways in a dim but faintly visible mystery. They led upward from either side, step above step, worn, ancient, austere, as if watching, as through many ages they might have watched countless times, the advance of intrigue. Her hand restrained him as she paused to listen. Her suspense could have been no greater than his, as they held their very breathing and strained their ears for inimical or menacing sound.

None came. The great entryway was as silent as a dead conqueror's tomb. He felt as if they were little children lost in the legendary woods when again he felt the impulse of her urgency that pulled him ahead on their weird and lawless adventure. He knew the direction now as well as she, but permitted himself to be drawn upward until they reached the central landing, then to

the left ascent. She halted before the great bronze doors that barred the salon whose breadths, and widths, and heights he had admired. The light appeared stronger now. He could see her plainly as she moved forward with one white hand held outward, eagerly, yet cautiously.

It touched and seemed to caress the first great door. The door swung open, and again, to his surprise, there was a light in the dome of the great salon, as if to guard it from violation. It was high up in the center roof whose gilded figures seemed watching them. But it was brighter than the outer one through the gantlet of whose rays they had so hurriedly passed. High overhead though it was, it made everything distinct; the great solemn salon; the marvelous frescoes; the Corinthian pillars at the sides; the dull pattern of the tiled and sweeping floors; the cabinets containing the valued and prized collections of his sole kinsman and—off to the side—that one which held the Crusader's Casket of gold. For but an instant she hesitated, and then with soft and hurrying feet urged him into haste that was almost a run as if a fairy had led him into a dance toward some long-sought goal. He hurried with her across the broad, tiled space, their noiseless feet in unison. He anticipated, with a sympathetic shock, her disappointment when she must learn that the cabinet was locked. He hadn't thought of that till now. He resolved that if necessary he would seize the thing and carry it away, or, if it proved too heavy, kick and break the glass with his stockinged feet. But to his surprise the door yielded.

"Uncle Lem must have forgotten, for once, to lock it!" he thought with a great thankfulness as she pulled it open, released him, bent forward, and then reached for the golden box that lay plainly exposed. She clutched it to her breast and turned toward him with sparkling, triumphant eyes. She reminded him, somehow, of a picture of Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, that he once had seen; only this maid was there by his side, palpitating, looking even more boyish than the picture of the original Joan who, as he recalled, was clad in shining armor rather than in youthful knee breeches. She turned to escape and he paused long enough to close the door of the cabinet, and then ran after her.

It was not until they reached the foot of

the stairs that he thought he heard a sound in some remote part of the house, the sound of heavy footsteps. He seized her arm and together they stood, breathlessly listening. There was a momentary silence, and then again the undoubted trudging of boot-clad feet across stone floors. The girl stood as if petrified with doubt and anxiety, and he became from that moment the leader in their strange enterprise.

"Come quickly!" he whispered, and urged her toward the door that was still ajar, the door through which they must pass. They hastened through and then, as if all the good fortune that had thus far accompanied them had been lost, from somewhere through the wide spaces of halls and the narrow passageways below a sudden draft raced along, the door slipped from his fingers and closed with a resounding bang. But even through its thickness they heard those clumping steps, as if suddenly suspicious and alert, racing down the broad stairs.

"Run! Run!" he muttered sharply as he seized her arm and with the other hand extended and guiding him by the feeling of the walls, urged her with him. They raced downward. Once he tripped and nothing but that same sailorlike training of hand and foot saved them from a fall. The heavy steps behind were in hot pursuit. He saw the dim square of light made by the open window, lifted her bodily and almost threw her through it. In almost the same moment he had scaled it and dropped into the waiting gondola just as two hands seized his wrist and strove to hold him prisoner. The man inside the palace was shouting a wild alarm and crying for help. Jimmy braced his knee against the wall, gave a mighty thrust, and felt the hands slipping. They lost their hold and he dropped into the gondola. Pietro, calling upon his patron saints, thrust the gondola off just as a man's head appeared in the opening of the window shouting for the police.

Then as the gondola was urged into way they heard him call as if to some one who had joined him, "Robbers! We have been robbed! Run you to the telephone and notify the guard. And you, Paolo, come with me to the water gate!"

The water gate could not have been far off. It must certainly have been accessible, for even as Pietro swung the gondola to make the turn of the bend they saw behind them a flashing light, dimly made out an-

other gondola manned by two oars in pursuit, and then Pietro swung into the oar at such vigorous speed and with such trained skill that it seemed as though the great sweep must break with the strain.

"Lean into it, Pietro! I wish I could help you," Jimmy cried.

"I wish you could, signor, because that other boat comes fast!" Pietro replied brokenly, and now rowing desperately.

A moment later the strong light of an electric torch came sweeping around the corner, cutting a beam into the darkness and reaching out until it found them. Jimmy stood up in the boat, seized a folding chair to use as a weapon and crawled back over the slim after deck of the gondola, prepared to fight. The other boat was gaining by leaps and bounds. There seemed no possibility of reaching the launch before it overtook them. Nearer and nearer it edged, and the man in the bow was shouting alternately for them to stop, and for the police. The long prow of the pursuer crept up until it was overlapping the stern and it seemed to Jimmy that nothing could possibly save them now, when from out of the darkness of a cross rio swept another slim black shape that hurled itself savagely into the pursuer, its great steel prow tearing and rending the flimsy woodwork, then rearing high upward as both became wrecks. The torch in the hands of the man in the boat disappeared in the water. There were cries of anger, oaths, shouts, and their own gondola was almost overturned as one of the others collided against it and swung it crosswise. A form was seen emerging from the water and its hands clutched the gondola near where Jimmy stood with the chair upraised and his muscles flexing to strike.

"Don't hit me, Signor Ware! Don't strike. Help me aboard! It is I, Tomaso," a hoarse old voice besought him, and Jimmy dropped the chair and caught the rugged old wrists and hoisted his man aboard. He had no time to ask explanations, but he understood. Pietro had recovered the gondola's balance and with muttered exclamations and prayers was again urging it forward.

A second gondola with a second electric torch swung around the distant turn and was bearing down upon them as rapidly as it could be propelled. Jimmy saw Tomaso crawling over the boat and springing to assist Pietro. Together they pulled at the single oar which is awkward work and a

waste of strength, but with two such watermen as these it at least hastened their progress.

"Here we are! Here is the launch, signorina," Pietro shouted, and the gondola swept up alongside their craft. Together, pell-mell, they tumbled in, the girl still clutching her treasure to her breast, and although excited she was anything but panic-stricken. The feeling of the launch beneath her feet seemed to reassure her.

"We still have a chance," she exulted. "And if they overtake us, at least no one shall have the casket. I'll throw it overboard, first, rather than let it go back to the Harnways."

"Good!" Jimmy explained fervently. "Good! Why not chuck it now?"

"Not until the last hope is gone," she replied determinedly, and then her voice was lost in the sudden spiteful roar of the engine as the launch, with wide throttle, sprang away from the screening water gate where it had been waiting.

The long beam of light behind was now so close that it pricked out the floral swan, the white hull of the launch, the bent back of the engineer who was stooping over his wheel as if by the pressure of his hands to force the speed, and the set face of the American girl who was huddled down in one of the wicker seats still holding the golden box that had caused so much trouble and now threatened to bring upon them the harsh hands of the law. The launch raced round a corner. Whistles blew behind them, indicating that the second gondola had been a police boat. The launch raced down a smooth stretch at such speed that it outdistanced the pursuers by a whole turning.

"Now! Get that stuff off. Chuck it overboard," Jimmy shouted, and Pietro and the panting old Tomaso assisted him to throw off the decorations that must mark and identify them wherever they went. Ripping and tearing, the nets and framework gave and their wake was littered with flowers that tossed upon the waves. Here and there behind them they could see occasional lights springing to life in windows bordering the rio, heads thrust through, but always the blowing of the guard's alarm whistles became fainter.

"By heavens! We've given them the slip, I do believe," Jimmy cried as, the work of dismantlement accomplished, he stood in the rocking cockpit and stared behind.

"Just around that curve we pass under the bridge and out into the Grand Canal, signor," Pietro said, standing erect beside him and, animosity forgotten, putting one hand on his shoulder and pointing with the other.

"But we don't dare stop to let the signorina off," Jimmy remarked. "That police boat is too close on us."

"And there is no landing place until we pass the bridge," Pietro added. "If we could get her off the boat, we could take our chances. All they could do would be to arrest us and we could hold our lips."

"By Jove! Pietro! You're a trump to think of that," Jimmy exclaimed in spontaneous recognition of the other's loyalty. He accompanied his remark by extending his hand, and Pietro took it, and then and there they knew that they were to become friends. But their remarks had been overheard by the girl, who exclaimed, "What? Put me off and you take all the responsibility and bear all the blame? Well, I guess not! We either escape together or go to jail together. I've got something to say about that!"

She started to her feet to continue her remonstrance when there came an unexpected interruption. Swinging around the turn with a searchlight ablaze came another launch traveling at high speed as if to intercept them.

"A police launch!" Pietro exclaimed. "They've been warned by telephone to meet us."

"Quick work! They're better than I thought they could be!" Jimmy remarked with compulsory admiration. "We're in for it unless we can make it into the Grand Canal, and then—we can at least give them a race!"

By the same impulse they all dropped down into the boat, Pietro kneeling on the floor of the pit, old Tomaso, wet and dripping and with his gray hair hanging in strands across his forehead, hunched like a giant-shouldered gnome, the girl still sitting erect, and Jimmy half crouched as if to be ready for a fight when the finish came. The motor-boat driver alone appeared bent on his task and recklessly taking chances. He still hung over the wheel with his chin thrust forward and a scowl on his face, blinking at the oncoming light that almost blinded him.

"Hold fast!" he cried sharply, and gave

the wheel a violent twist that brought the launch swirling about, its prow lined toward the light. He accelerated his engines until they roared with energy and speed. There were shouts and cries from the oncoming boat; it held on for an instant and then, weakening when it was apparent that nothing but a swerve could keep it from being cut down, swept to one side and edged against the walls. Its clutches were grinding with the abrupt effort to hold itself. It wriggled and twisted as if in distress.

Jimmy felt the launch beneath their feet lean over, poised for an instant at an acute angle while its bow wave came back in a broken, drenching spray and then it slithered past the menaced, struggling police launch, barely scraping its side, while its affrighted occupants shouted in a babel of explosives to "Surrender!" to "Stop the boat," to "Sheer off if you don't want to ram us," and other phrases less to the point. Jimmy saw with admiration that the man at their own wheel never looked back; that he was working hands and feet to shoot past; that the launch was now taking on a reckless racing speed, and that the pale arch of the bridge seemed soaring toward them from above. They smashed through a belt of total darkness; running still faster, with bow waves climbing ever higher, tore from the black shadow out into the sparkle and glitter of a million festal lights, caught the smell of the fresh sea and nearly swamped in an abrupt swerve to avoid a barge load of astonished singers. They rocked and tossed through the wake of an excursion steamer, heeled over sharply to avoid a lighted gondola filled with children, made a wide curve to gain an opening between a procession of gay celebrants and then sedately slowed down. The engines suddenly stopped their clamor as they were shut off. The man at the wheel stood up, brushed the damp hair from his eyes and looked back at Captain Jimmy as if for orders.

"Can't we cross over and land somewhere in the darkness of the Giudecco?" Jimmy asked as he stared about him.

"We can't, sir," gruffly shouted old Tomaso, as he stood up and pointed backward. "That police boat has rounded and is coming out as if escaping from Hades. And that's not all, signor. Over there from the other side comes another launch. There's nothing for it but a race for the

open down the Adriatic. Tell him to get going at full speed, signor. It's our only chance!"

Jimmy stared. Tommie, still clinging to the box, did likewise.

"Oh, he's right, Jim," she said. And even then he was aware of an exultant throb as she used his familiar name. It proved her dependence and that now, at last, she was hoping that he might rescue her from this predicament.

"All right, Tommie," he said, "leave it to me. We'll give 'em a run if this launch of yours has lively heels—and I think she has. Here, you"—to the engineer—"give her all she's got and head down the Giudecco. All the rest of you sit down. We don't want to look conspicuous or make ourselves a target. They may begin to shoot pretty soon, if we prove too fast for 'em."

He stood erect in the cockpit, alone, and rapidly thinking. Then he bent downward to the engineer and, with a hand on his shoulder ordered, "Get every foot out of her that you can, even if you rip the engine apart. Bear down to starboard. See that black shape—right down through there—steamer with dim riding lights? Well, get alongside her first of all and stand by to stop quickly. If she's the one I think she is, and we can gain time enough so they can't see what we do, the signorina, old Tomaso, and I will board her. After that you and Pietro keep on and race those fellows to a standstill. I'll tell Pietro what to do after that. Shake her up!"

The man nodded and "shook her up," as probably she had never before been shaken. Down the dark opening they raced. Their course was no longer obstructed now that they passed through the main procession of craft. Back behind them they could see the distant searchlights of but two boats and then, off to the left, there shone another. Like hounds that had caught a scent the guard boats were answering the alarm and closing in. For a moment Jimmy watched them with sea-trained eyes, and then chuckled as he decided that they were not gaining, but were possibly losing.

"Go to it!" he cried aloud in his excitement. "Catch us if you can! You're welcome. This is some boat to catch!"

He felt that the girl had arisen from her seat and was standing close behind him. He felt, also, that he had taken the command from her hands and was robbing her

of conquest. He turned and faced her in the dim light of illuminations and of stars and said, "Tommie, you've got to let me run this show now, and ask no questions. I'm trying to get out of it as best I can—for your sake. Does it go? Whatever I do?"

"Of course it does," she bravely asserted. "Whatever you do I'll know is for the best. I got up to tell you that. And—Jim, if you want me to I'll throw the only incriminating evidence—I think that's what it would be called—the casket—overboard."

"Not by a darned sight!" he exclaimed, turning toward her with a grin. "We got ourselves into this mess trying to get it. We've got it—and we won't let go till we have to. We're not beaten yet. I've got a plan. Sit down now, and don't bother me for a minute or two."

She subsided into the chair and he stood alert and watchful as the launch raced ahead.

"Pietro," he called quietly, "come over here. I want to tell you what to do."

The boy climbed quickly to his side and, with the wind of their rapid flight whipping his shock of hair listened as Jim said, "You know that is my ship. She's all ready to sail, or should be. What I plan to do is to take Miss Cardell and Tomaso aboard as quickly as possible from the dark side where, at this turn of the tide, the side ladder should be. Then you and your cousin are to go ahead. Hit it up hard. Give the police boats a long hard chase. Don't let them suspect until it's too late that they've been fooled. My ship will get under way at once. I'll answer for that. The police can do nothing with you if they catch you but hold you up and I'll make it worth your while to keep your mouth shut and be held up. You'll hear from me within a few days. I'll be responsible for the safety of the signorina if you'll do this. You can trust me with her, can't you?" he continued whimsically.

"I can now, signor, although there was a day when I didn't," Pietro said. "And—you'll bring her back, won't you? Some time? It's not the money I care for, although maybe I'll need it if they catch us."

Jimmy laid a hand on his shoulder and said "Yes, some day I'll bring her back. And, Pietro, we're friends. I'll be behind you all the way, if the worst comes and you are caught. Is that good enough? All

right! That goes! And we've gained enough to fool them. That's my ship. Run down on it and do as I say."

Pietro shouted to the man at the engine. The launch swung round, and the black hull of the *Adventure* screened everything of the fête from sight. To Jimmy's gratification he saw that her side ladder was still down. Looking upward he saw the heavy roll of smoke from her funnel against and besmirching the stars. Moreover her anchor was up. It all seemed too good to be true. He wondered how all this could be. Then a voice from the head of the ladder became audible and he recognized it as Barton's, when it said, "All right, sir. We can be under way in five minutes. As soon as you are aboard."

"This," said Jimmy, "must certainly be Fate!"

He boosted the astonished Tommie upward, Tomaso, obedient to his orders came behind, and with a "Good night, signorina. Good night, signor," Pietro called to his kinsman and the launch shot ahead, tearing up the quiet waters and leading the befooled police boats on a long and fruitless chase.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN JIMMY escorted the bewildered Miss Tommie down to his cabin, told her to use it and retired to give her an opportunity to rearrange her somewhat disordered attire. He returned to the deck and climbed to the bridge, where he found Barton and saw that the ship was making full speed through the still night. Already the illuminations of Venice and the fête were dropping behind. Barton made way for him as if for his superior officer and Jimmy smiled.

"I suppose you understand you are master of the ship now, and duly registered as such," he said. "Have you any objections to taking two passengers to Spalato?"

Barton grinned appreciatively and shook his head.

"So many strange things are happening that I'm getting used to anything," he remarked. "But, to tell the truth, sir, when I got that letter of yours I didn't quite know what to make of it!"

"What's that? Letter from me? I have written you no letter."

Barton pulled from the inner pocket of his coat an envelope and handed it to

Jimmy, who took it inside the chart house and spread it under the chart lamp, frowning in bewilderment. It was typewritten, even to the signature, and a most extraordinary epistle which read:

CAPTAIN BARTON,
S. S. *Adventure*.

You will please weigh anchor at eleven o'clock this evening, see that steam is up and have everything ready for immediate sailing when I come aboard with a lady passenger, Miss Tania Powell. You may expect us between eleven and twelve o'clock, midnight, although it is possible that we may be detained somewhat later. Miss Powell's luggage will come aboard shortly before our arrival.

JAMES WARE.

Jimmy took off his hat, laid it on the table and read the letter again. Barton, standing behind him said, apologetically, "When I got it, sir, I didn't quite know what to make of it. It didn't sound like you, and to order the anchor brought aboard, leaving the ship to hold her place with the engines when the tide was on the turn sounded so—well—I beg pardon, sir—so unseamanlike—and then there was that typewritten signature, too. Honestly, if you hadn't given me orders to clear to-night I don't think I'd have paid any attention to this until I hunted you up and made certain that it was you who wrote it."

"I didn't write it," Jimmy said, still staring at the letter. Then suddenly he turned and asked: "About the lady's luggage—did it come aboard?"

"Yes, sir. A suit case and a trunk. I had them taken to your cabin. There was a note and, I think, some keys in an envelope addressed to Miss Powell, sir, that I laid on top of the trunk so she could be certain to find it."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" was all Jimmy could say, as he still stood there stupefied by surprise and striving to conjecture how all this could have come about.

"Who brought the lady's luggage?" he asked.

"The regular gondolier from the hotel—or at least the man wore one of the hotel sweaters and caps."

"All right! I don't understand it, and I didn't write the letter, but—well, it has helped, Barton. It has helped! No one was ever more glad to get under way quickly than I was when I came aboard. You can bet on that. But you are master of the ship and—I'm going below to see if our passenger is comfortable. Is everything in

my work cabin behind the chart house ready for my use?"

"I saw to that, sir, as soon as I got the letter saying that your suite below was to be given to the young lady."

"That, too, is good," Jimmy said as he slowly and thoughtfully turned, descended the bridge stairs and walked aft. He did not immediately go below, but stood at the stern, leaning over the rail, watching the last of the Venetian lights grow dim and endeavoring to work out this inexplicable puzzle. Finally abandoning it, he descended to his sumptuous quarters aft and rapped gently upon the panel of the door. It opened almost immediately, but he was aware that it had been locked.

"Come in," a cold voice bade him and when he entered he saw the girl, now clad in a tailor-made skirt that evidently had been slipped on over the knickers, in fact, the same costume in which she had been garbed in the early hours of that evening when their adventure began. In her hand she held some receipted hotel bills, some currency and a bunch of keys. He saw a different girl than he had known, one who was extremely calm and decidedly cool, but who was palpably angry. It was as if the fighting blood of her clan were afire and she very dangerous. His eyes swept past her and he saw on top of the piano in his miniature salon the golden box, glittering dully, occupying a place all to itself, as if it malignantly leered upon them and waited for the outcome. His eyes came back to meet hers as she still stood there, quietly, and somewhat sternly waiting.

"Well," she said, "I am waiting for your explanation!"

"Explanation? Explanation of what, Miss Powell?" he asked.

"Of this," she said, gesturing toward the suit case and trunk. "And of these receipted bills from my hotel. And of who, and what you are, and what you expect, or hope to accomplish by——"

"Good Lord! Tommie! You don't think I had anything to do with all that, do you?" he cried. "I'm as much in the dark about it all as you are. I swear I am!"

There was such unmistakable sincerity in his attitude and such shocked appeal in his voice that she relented ever so slightly and her look of anger gave way to one of astonishment that was yet on guard and doubting.

"If you didn't pay my hotel bill, and write a letter to the hotel management telling them that I was unexpectedly called away, couldn't return, and asking the hotel to have a maid pack my stuff and send it aboard with the keys, who did?" she demanded. "Why, the hotel even returned me two thousand eight hundred and fifty-six lire which they said was in excess of my bill!"

"I don't know anything about it," Jimmy declared, alarmed and distressed by this peculiar predicament.

"But you brought me here—to this ship," she insisted. "And you seem to be known here. Can you explain that?"

"Yes," he said gravely, "I can. I haven't lied to you, but I may have deceived you a little bit. No—not about that baggage, and the hotel, and all that; for of that I am as ignorant as are you."

"Pfaugh! If you'd deceive me about one thing I can't see why you wouldn't about another!" she exclaimed, snapping her fingers and turning half from him with a gesture of contempt.

"But you'll hear me confess about the—er—in what way I have deceived you, will you not?" he pleaded. "That's only fair play, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," she admitted, but in a way which predicated her doubts of anything he might have to offer.

"May I sit down to do it?" he asked, his sense of the absurd and ridiculous coming to his assistance, and also a desire to gain a moment's time to think.

"I don't see why you shouldn't," she said, with the same contained coldness. "I presume from the photographs I've seen, and your name on the music, and on the fly leaves of books, that you are master here. The place appears to be yours."

"Thank you," he said, secretly elated by the knowledge that her curiosity had at least led her to an inspection of his premises, and walked across and sat down in the depths of his favorite easy-chair as if by its comforting associations to find assistance in his hour of trouble. "And you—won't you sit down until we can get this matter straightened out?"

She seated herself on the top of her trunk, as if scorning to use anything but her own property for such a purpose. One of her trim feet was clear of the floor and she could reach it only with the toe of the other

thin, shapely shoe. With it she tapped the rug beneath, impatiently, as she faced him.

"I am listening," she reminded him.

"Well," he said dubiously, and still distressed, "I may as well tell the whole thing, mayn't I? I don't see any other way out of it. 'Pon honor I don't! But first of all I'll tell you I never expected to bring you here to this ship, and I had nothing whatever to do with your baggage being brought here, or your hotel bill being paid, and I have never had any desire to take advantage of you—in any way. Good heavens! I'd give this ship, right now, to have everything as it was a day or two ago."

"Then you own it, do you?" she asked with an unescapable sarcasm in her voice.

"Yes, I own the *Adventure*. She's mine. My hobby. My ship. I live on her most of the time. And I've lived on her for more than three years, and I love her, too, Miss Powell. You can understand how a man can love a ship, can't you? No—I don't suppose you can."

He stopped, bent forward after one comprehensive glance about his possessions and home, and without lifting his eyes went on, as if carefully reviewing all that had taken place between them, "I saw you over there on the first night the *Adventure* came to this port—over there at the hotel—and—I wished that we were friends. I was very lonesome. Then I went down to the Square there in Venice and heard that boy Pietro talking to a friend, that fellow Giuseppe, and he was talking about the Crusader's Casket, and about you. And I had reason to be interested about that casket, Miss Powell, because my mother was the last woman of the Harnways, and Lemuel Harnway is my uncle and sole kinsman."

A gasp and a movement caused him to lift his eyes. She had risen to her feet, and stood there with clenched hands, stern and indignant of face, head thrown back, and everything about her pose eloquent of anger and indignation.

"Wait! Wait!" he pleaded. "Don't be angry until you hear what I have to say. It was I, after all, who helped you steal that trinket over there, that damn'd bauble that has cost so much of enmity, and blood, and death! Senselessly! The thing that wiped out Powells and Harnways, the good of them and the bad of them alike—remorselessly, absurdly! Oh, Miss Powell, if I were a feudist as those others have been; or if I

hadn't prized your friendship, appreciated and yielded to the foolish desire of your heart, that thing on which you had so set your mind, do you think I would be here to-night?" He gestured toward the Crusader's box with an emphasis of hatred. "No, if I had my way, it would have been at the bottom of the sea before ever it fell into the hands of either Powell or Harnway! It would never have been! I helped you get it because you wanted it, and I wanted you to possess anything you desired."

For a time, with averted and downcast eyes, she weighed his words, and as an evidence of relenting walked slowly across the room and sat down in one of the easy wicker chairs. He saw his advantage and, leaning toward her, went on with his explanation, argument, and appeal.

"It may be that I did a foolish thing; but I was driven to it by my longing for your esteem. I was a coward on that night down in the gardens, there under the trees with the sea washing the old walls, when you confided to me your quest. I was afraid to tell you that I was a Harnway on my mother's side, one of that race that you fought against and hated. I was afraid that if I told you who and what I was, I couldn't ever see you again; that you would regard me as an inherited enemy, and—and—I didn't wish to be that. I craved to be at least one of your friends. I wished to at least have fair standing for something I wanted very much, your esteem and—perhaps something greater! Yes, I'm going to say it now, when everything has to be cleared up. I didn't have the courage to tell you who and what I was because I was afraid that if I did I couldn't ever be with you, ever see you, ever talk to you again. Tommie, I kept those things from you because of that! I helped to put into your hands that little golden trinket because of that. Because neither it nor the old feud mattered when all I wanted was you!"

He found himself on his feet without thought of anything save his yearning for her; found himself standing in front of her, bent forward with outstretched hands, appealing, pleading for understanding, for forgiveness, and she had leaned toward him, as if considering all that he had said. He waited in an agony of apprehension and then when she made no response whispered: "Tommie! Tommie! You mustn't blame

me too much for what I've done, because I love you. I can't help anything that's been done any more than I can help being a Harnway or you can help being a Powell. Isn't it time that all the old horrible, tragic episodes of a feud were brushed aside, and the feud itself forgotten? I've no excuses to offer—nothing at all—save that I love you. That I want you! That if I can't have you and your love, I still cry for your friendship. And—see! We are here! We have escaped from the police and we are going to a foreign country far beyond Italy's reach, and—”

He flung himself across the intervening space, seized from the piano the ancient golden casket and thrust it into her hands. Her fingers were interlocked, white and hard pressed, but at the touch of the metal they relaxed, yielded, opened and for a moment clutched that cause of feud. She lifted it as if never before she had seen it, stared at it as if fascinated, then slowly looked upward at him as he bent above her, waiting, petitioning. And then the Crusader's Casket fell unheeded to the floor as both her hands went up to him. He caught them and lifted her and she was held close to his breast. Her hands, released, moved swiftly upward until they were around his shoulders where they held closely as if after all their restless, reckless eagerness they had at last found and clung to the greatest possession of all. She felt something against her foot in that moment and impatiently kicked it aside. It was the little casket of gold.

CHAPTER XI.

SPALATO, of that new but ancient country, Jugo-Slavia, is, and since the time when the Romans ruled the world has been, a great old city. Its ancient stone quays have known many ships, from slave-driven galleys to spreading sail, and from sail to steam. Many boats have rubbed their bows against its broad landing steps, and many feet have balanced themselves from boat to shore, but none more eagerly than those which stepped thereon in the early-forenoon hours of the day following the flight of the steam tramp *Adventure* from Venetian waters. Loungers in front of the long row of ancient buildings facing the aged water front, and loungers who sat beneath the trees, indolently stared at the landing party. First came a gray-haired old man in the

unmistakable garb of a Venetian gondolier who growled and held the prow of the boat hard to the water-washed stones. Then came one who helped ashore a quietly smiling, but somewhat embarrassed girl, and then a rugged man, broad shouldered, who said to the two oarsmen, "You can go back aboard, or stay here, whichever suits you best. But be here in a couple of hours from now, to take us off. And if we're not back in a couple of hours, stand by till we come, understand?"

Barton had given his orders. His men, who may have surmised that in the future they were to obey him as master of the tramp *Adventure* said, "Aye, aye, sir," and watched the shore party depart.

Any one who walks along the water front of Spalato, bounded on one side by the waters of the Adriatic and on the other by the gray old buildings, knows that there is a certain narrow street leading back toward the hills and that if one follows it there is an ancient church, bent as if its years had told upon its physical uprightness, in whose weather-beaten belfry hang mellow bells.

It was there that the feud of Rocky Crossing, Kentucky, came to an end when a Harnway and a Powell came together as one. They signed that agreement on a somewhat soiled register of marriage wherein many others with strange names had witnessed the greatest of life's compacts.

But it was not until they were again aboard the *Adventure* whose prow was turned back from the bay and toward the rocky point behind which lay the spreading cement mills, that the feudists stood in the captain's suite alone. There had been some mutual embarrassments, and secret considerations, and much happiness when they entered there together and closed the door. To Captain Jimmy the main cabin looked squalid now, as if despite all its restrained elegance of fitting and thought it was unworthy of its new occupant. To the new occupant it seemed perfect. She reveled in the thought that it was a home afloat of which she was part owner, coming to timid but certain possession. She stood for a moment in silence, surveying it, for it did not yet seem that all this was hers, and that but a night before she had stood there feeling insecure, uncertain, indignant, and afraid of plot. She saw it all with a new understanding, the round of bent windows looking astern over sea and land, the window

seats beneath with comfortable cushioned couches, the pots of flowers, the piano, the bookcases, the curios picked up from many lands, the deep rugs from Eastern ports, and the white-enameled doors leading to the tiny dining room, the sleeping cabins, and the bathroom with its quaint tiles and porcelain and silver fittings that would not have disgraced a luxurious yacht. This was Jimmy's home. And she had been brought into it because he had forgotten the feud and because he loved her. She turned toward him, feeling that he was still standing behind her with his back against the door and enjoying her content. But then she saw that his eyes were fixed thoughtfully in another direction. She turned again and discovered the Crusader's box that still stood, aloof, upon the top of the closed piano, its dull golden sides agleam with the light through the opened ports astern. She walked across the room and lifted it in her hands, and faced him.

"Jimmy!" she said, and held it toward him as if to surrender it for all time.

He tried to avoid the significance of her surrender.

"By the way," he said, without meeting her eyes, "I know how to open that thing! Uncle Lem showed me the secret. There's nothing inside the box after all, but—it's yours, now, so you ought to know how it's worked. Here—let me show you."

He took it from her hands and with an enforced gayety to hide feelings too deep and profound for expression pressed one of the golden scrolls.

"You slide this thing to one side, then you slide this one on the end, and then you do the same with this—and there you are. You can open it now. Try it and see."

She took the box from his hands and tested the lid. It opened bravely.

"Why, you said it was empty! It isn't. There's a letter in it," she exclaimed holding it toward him, and he leaned forward and stared.

"There wasn't anything in it the last time I opened it," he mumbled. "See what it is. It's yours, now, you know."

She took from the box the folded paper, put the casket back on the piano and there was a moment's wait while she unfolded their find. This is what she read, while Jimmy followed, over her shoulder:

To MISS "TOMMIE" POWELL: I hope by the time you read this letter—which you will if all

my plans have worked—you have become my niece in truth; for you are a brave and spirited little girl, entirely worthy of that brave Colonel Powell, your ancestor, and fully competent to care for the Crusader's Casket which, after consideration, I decided should be given to you to have, hold, cherish, et cetera. I've tried to give you with it an object far dearer to me, my only kinsman, my nephew, Jim Ware.

If you have read this far you are doubtless mystified by what I have written, so I shall now explain.

First, you had not been in Venice more than two days when I saw you, recognized you, and surmised that you had come with determination to try to possess yourself of that casket, which, you may remember, you rather heatedly vowed in my presence to "get some day if you lived long enough." At that time you were such a fiery little girl that I somewhat enjoyed exasperating you just to hear what you might say, and I was tempted on that very afternoon to send you the casket with my compliments for your fearlessness.

Hence, when I saw you in Venice, I was again amused and curious to know how you would make your attempt. It was easy to employ a man to watch over your movements. I was actually standing behind the hangings in what is known as the "throne room end" of my salon when you and your ardent young fellow conspirator, the amusing Pietro Sordillo, came to look for it.

Somewhat to my surprise, on the very next day, it was reported to me by my retained observer that a young man named Ware had arrived in the port, and apparently under false pretense of being nothing but a tourist rather than the owner and master of the ship *Adventure*, was constantly tagging around at your very pretty and nimble heels. And in days following my observer was driven to the conclusion that my nephew's attentions were very sincere. This was almost proven so by the conversation between you and my nephew one night in the public gardens, which my faithful observer heard from the shrubbery immediately behind where you sat. When your young man Pietro began to loosen the walls of my palace by night, it was difficult for me to restrain myself; but when my nephew Jimmy visited me, declined my hospitality, and then very honorably favored me with a warning and an open declaration of war, I was having the most amusing time I have ever known in Venice. And when enough was learned to expose the full details of the plot against my property, or yours—we'll not quarrel more over that insignificant point, my dear—my amusement reached an apex. I, too, laid plans for your reception. I had but one fear, which was that a certain old bulldog of a gondolier who had attached himself to my nephew and whose name is, if I remember, Tomaso Something-or-another, would upset everything. My man Giuseppe began to find it extremely difficult to watch all of you because he could scarcely be in three or four places at once, and his chief instructions were to keep an eye on you.

However, on the night of the robbery, I hope to be behind the curtains. To save you the necessity of damaging my beautiful cabinet,

which I prize, I shall leave it unlocked. I appreciate the difficulties you may have in getting an object of art so well known out of Italy, and have decided to assist you not only to escape with it, but at the same time give my nephew an opportunity of showing what stuff he is made of. If my plans succeed you will be driven to take refuge on the *Adventure*—not by the police, for the simple reason that no police boats will be present. The launches which pursue you, also the gondolas, will be employed by me with instructions to herd you and your party to the *Adventure* and to prevent you from landing anywhere else.

I have forged a note to my nephew's skipper so that there should be no delay in your departure once you and he are aboard. It is but logical that he, closely pursued, and seeing that sole avenue of escape open, will take it. The hour of the robbery I can merely conjecture.

The few young women I have intimately known are never happy without clothes, personal possessions, gewgaws and such, and I want you to be happy. So I have sent to your hotel, had your bill paid, and your belongings packed and delivered aboard the ship. I earnestly hope that nothing proves missing, and that you will not suffer too much inconvenience. Likewise I apologize for my intrusion, which has for its sole intent your personal comfort.

I have but three doubts about the success of my plans at the time this is written; the first that something may prevent you and my nephew from securing the Crusader's Casket; the second that you may lose it in your flight and fail to ever read this letter, thus robbing me of much of my enjoyment, and the third, the most serious of all, that you will not sufficiently appreciate my nephew to marry him. As far as he is concerned, if he doesn't appreciate you sufficiently to do his utmost toward that happy consummation he is blind, stupid, and I shall forever disown him. A man of his age who doesn't properly appreciate you is too much of an ass to be called a Harnway.

On the other hand, if, as I hope he will, and trust he has, besought you in marriage, I urge you, my dear Miss Powell, if such urgency is at all necessary, that you give the boy a chance. He is a very fine young man from all I know of him and all I have heard of him. I surmise that he is anything but a pauper; but not even the financial side of the affair need stand in the way, for I do now make a bargain and an agreement for your consideration which is this:

That if you, Miss Tania Powell, and my nephew, James Ware, do marry and will, after such honeymoon as you may choose, return to Venice and make your home with me, I shall constitute you and him, jointly, heirs to all I possess upon my demise which, in the natural course of events, cannot be long delayed.

I could wish a legal change of name, but upon that I do not insist, owing to your perhaps natural prejudice against the name of Harnway which has for so long and so unfortunately been disliked by any Powell. But it is a very old man's natural desire that his name should somehow be continued. It might possibly be compounded to Harnway-Powell, or—I'll make the last concession for proof that all my prejudices are done and that the detested and de-

plorable feud is at an end—he might even legally change the name to Powell-Harnway because I appreciate the Powells as admirable, and honorable, and fearless enemies and a very fine old family. I leave all this to your kindly consideration, in the earnest hope that you will find a way to make one concession to a very old man, who regrets a past feud, and who could find a last and greatest happiness in having you and all your glorious youth by his side in his last years. Youth, Miss Powell, is a very, very beautiful thing and reaches a noble perfection when joined with love. This conjunction I deem the best of human attainments. If you can find your way to love my nephew I shall feel that life has nothing more to offer, and I, too, shall love you, and eagerly long for your coming and your companionship. In any event the malice is dead and the feud of the Crusader's Casket is at an end. And—God bless you, little girl! To me, whatever may come, you will always be wonderful! Sincerely yours,
LEMUEL HARNWAY.

Jimmy saw that her brave young eyes were flooded with tears and held out his hands in that great longing to shield and comfort which is ever companioned with love. She came to them and, clinging to him, cried generously, "Oh, Jim! Jim, I never thought he was like that! We must go back to him. He wants us. He needs us. And you can change the name to anything you like—anything that will please him. I don't care now."

For a full minute she rested there, his kindly hands comforting her until the generous little tempest was subdued, and then, as if ashamed of her weakness she released herself and found her wisp of handkerchief. She turned from him, stopped as if fascinated by something and then moved across the wide cabin space to where the Crusader's box rested, open, upon the piano. It gleamed mockingly in its dull colors of gold as if cynically challenging them to find anything worth while in their brief lives when it had seen so many scores of generations quickly come and briefly pass.

"Jimmy," she said, gesturing toward it, "you can have that thing. It's bad luck. I don't want any of it."

"Neither do I," he declared soberly, as if he too was superstitious.

"Then"—she paused thoughtfully—"we're going back to Venice, aren't we? Couldn't we give it back to Mr. Harnway?"

"But he doesn't want it."

She took the casket in her hands, leaned her elbows on the top of the piano and for a minute stared out of the open porthole nearest to her side while Jimmy stood ad-

miring the picture she made and studying the changing expressions of her face. He saw it suddenly brighten as if she had solved a problem, and now she looked at him, seeking consent.

"Then suppose, when we return to Venice, we give it to Pietro. Would that do?"

"I suppose it would," he agreed, and then added with a smile, "But he, being a poet, an antiquary, and a patriot, will probably give it back to his only permanent love—Venice."

And time proved his judgment; for Pietro did!

"Seward's Folly," a book-length novel of Alaska by Edison Marshall, complete in the next issue.



NOT SO DUSTY

AS dry as the dictionary!" Something ought to be done to correct the regrettable effect of that hoary but far from venerable epithet. It is the purest slander. We know of no more engaging and withal improving companion for the passing of a vagrant idle hour than that same maligned and unoffending volume.

We have not yet completed our list of ten books to take with us into the well-known hypothetical seclusion of a desert retreat. But we are sure of three of them. The first two are, of course, the universal choice—the Bible and Shakespeare. The third, we proclaim without an instant's hesitation, is the dictionary. We have seen many lists of "ten books" and in one or another of them we have found books we should like to have by us if we were condemned to solitude, but nowhere have we found mention of Noah Webster's best seller. And we find it hard to understand why this should be. We have seldom encountered any book so universal in its appeal, so sympathetic to every mood, so delightfully varied and unexpected as the dictionary. We have heard it said that Rudyard Kipling used to spend his vacations with no other book than the dictionary. We do not know if this is strictly true, but we can very well credit it.

Consider what the dictionary has to offer. It gives you words, to start with, words whose existence you may never have suspected, or have known and forgotten; words that evoke new ideas and set your imagination careering down strange and delectable byways that lead to venturesome conjecturings in dim and distant realms, ahead in the hidden future, behind in the storied past, afar in fabulous countries of the present. It gives you new meanings for old words, old words for new meanings. It takes you back to the roots of the language and shows you how this English we speak is a composite of the tongues of Homer and Vergil and the troubadours of Normandy and the bards of the Saxon and the Celt. It gives you facts too, facts about people and places, facts about strange animals, birds, and reptiles of whom you, perhaps, never heard, facts about scientific things like electrons and atoms and metals with strange names and properties, yttrium, for instance. If this is dry stuff then champagne is bottled dust.

Reading in the dictionary is like poking about in a strange neighborhood or an unfamiliar country. Interesting things appear so unexpectedly. You wander idly down a page, mouthing over and rejecting words whose story is an old one to you, when suddenly your eye lights on one that is startlingly new and attractive. You turn it over, contemplate it, digest it, resolve to make it your own, and then it suggests some other line of inquiry and you turn the pages until your curiosity in the new direction is satisfied and a fresh curiosity takes its place, and so on, with never an end to the excursion until you are minded to end it. That is another excellent point about reading in the dictionary. There is no definite objective toward which you must hurry. You may take your own sweet time, stopping here, detouring there, doubling on your tracks if you wish, just as though you were wandering reflectively through some quaint old town peering into little lighted shop windows, staring at the fretted façades of ancient chapels and cathedrals, venturing down dimly lit side streets where ancient houses watch you as you idle by, with nowhere in particular to go until the curfew, or an agreeable drowsiness, calls you back to your bed in the little inn.

Give your dictionary a trial. It will amply repay the expenditure of an hour of any man's spare time. You will find it isn't very dusty, after all.

Itching Foot such a cool-sounding ailment as chilblains.

But to Davis the ailment was very real and very uncomfortable. During the hot noon hours, when even the children gained strength for further onslaughts of the heat by long siestas, Itching Foot had to sit stolidly with his feet in water. At such times he cursed the settlement of Liberty, cursed the sun, the desert and all denizens of it. But let any one else suggest that Liberty was not a fit place for a man to inhabit and the two hundred pounds of Itching Foot Davis would hunch into a fighting attitude. For Itching Foot had two great loves in his life: One, Liberty and the desert; the other, his Chinese cook, Wong Tong, whom he had kidnaped and set to work in the Liberty House, and who now occupied the cabooselike back end of it with a large family to whom he was "illustrious ancestor."

Now Itching Foot Davis shouted to his cook. "Wong Tong!" His voice was husky and moist, as if the perspiration which trickled down his face had found its way into his throat. "Wong Tong, you lazy heathen! Bring some cold water! This is boiling already!"

From the kitchen door the thin, gray face of Wong Tong peered into the room. "Yes, sir, Mr. Davis." Then the thin face disappeared.

Itching Foot twisted in the broad, cane-bottomed chair. He wanted to get up and stamp his feet and yell; to forget the everlasting itching in a spasm of vocal rage. Instead, he clicked his stained teeth together and turned his head to look out over the desert as though hoping for relief from that quarter.

His half-closed eyes stared down the gray-white Bishop-Mojave Road. In his imagination he could follow that road along the foot of the High Sierras, winding across the desert, on to the town of Mojave. And northward, too, he knew the road thoroughly; up the Owens Valley, past Little Lake and Owens Lake, then the alkali dry lakes, on through Lone Pine and Big Pine to Bishop. He moistened his lips as he thought of the trail across from Bishop, up into the cool mountains where snow lingered even now. Oh, for a handful of that snow to—

"Hey! Wong Tong, you blasted, locomotive-ataxiaed, paralyzed son of a snail!

Bring that cold water before I dance on your yellow face!"

"Yes, sir—yes, sir!" Wong Tong hurried into the bare, beamed room and grinned good-naturedly at his boss. "Here it is, cold water. I went down to stream and got some fresh."

"You did, did you? I thought you were drilling a well for some. Say, Wong, look out that south window. See how the blamed road dances up and down. Hot! Say, it's the devil's own heat that makes things behave like that. A minute ago that mountain spur down there came rushing right at me and then turned and ran away again."

"Yes, sir," said Wong Tong seriously. "I saw it, many times. Mountain is afraid of Mr. Davis and runs away."

Itching Foot Davis grinned and Wong Tong grinned slyly back at him. His master's good humor prompted him to talk again.

"A man coming," he said depreciatively.

Itching Foot jerked upright in his chair.

"A man?" he shouted, craning his muscular neck to look out both north and south windows. Any person arriving in Liberty was the cause of great excitement. He might bring news; he might even stop at the Liberty House. Men had actually done that. In February two motion-picture location men had endured Itching Foot's hospitality while Sam Slade worked over their disabled car. And again in May a party of tourists had been caught in a sand storm and forced to the Liberty House for shelter. So no wonder Itching Foot was excited. "Where is he?" he demanded. "He's not on the road."

"Down from mountains, Mr. Davis. He come beside stream, down from mountains. Walking so!" The Chinese man imitated a staggering, weak-kneed stride. "He fall once, two, three. But he get up and he come on."

"Why, he's all in!" said Itching Foot. "If he's walking like that he's almost done! Why in the devil didn't you—"

"Oh, he get here all right," intoned Wong Tong, with that impersonal optimism of his race. "By and by he be here."

"The devil you say! Get my shoes, pronto! You hard-hearted little heathen, you'd let a man die in front of you and—"

Still fuming over Wong Tong's lack of sympathy, Itching Foot Davis pulled huge shoes over his bare feet and hurried out into

the heat. Beside the Liberty House he shaded his eyes with his hands and studied the course of the little Cottonwood Creek which gave Liberty its only valid excuse for existing.

"Wong Tong! Where was he when you saw him? He's not in sight now."

The Chinese poked his head out of the front window. "See big black bird?" he asked, pointing to the blue-china desert sky where a buzzard swung in low circles. "Man under black bird."

Itching Foot shot one look of accusation and anger at his Chinese cook, then hurried as rapidly as his bulk would permit up the course of the yard-wide stream.

Five minutes later his shouts roused the inhabitants of Liberty. "Hi yi!" His stentorian voice shattered the desert silence, startled every person in the settlement. "Help! Quick!"

By the time the twelve gates in front of the little houses had debouched the men of Liberty, Itching Foot Davis appeared, stumbling, running, gasping. In his arms he held the limp, warped body of an old man.

Straight to the Liberty House he ran with his human burden, into his bedroom. There he deposited the man, paused a moment to curse Wong Tong for his unwarranted optimism, then issued orders to the Libertians as rapidly as they appeared. "Sam, you go get Mrs. Slade. We'll need her for nursing. Ramon, go over to the Satterwaites and get that flask of whisky Sid has. Herb, you organize the other men, collect a bunch of sheets and keep them soaked in cold water. Hang some in front of the windows and bring me some to put around this poor old codger."

For a moment Itching Foot Davis was left alone with his patient. He smoothed the long white hair back from the old man's forehead, then began gently to undress him. As he worked he talked to relieve his emotions. "Poor old devil! I guess you're done, old-timer! You've prospected your last claim, given the vein your hammer for the last time—poor devil! Just a sack of bones, you are. Your heart ain't doing nothing, not a thing for you. Just ticking a little like an old watch. Well, mebbe we can make you feel better; mebbe we can help you go out in comfort." His voice was sympathetic; oddly soft it sounded from a man of Itching Foot's rough characteristics. His hands, too, were gentle in their

touch and his little blue eyes shone unusually bright.

He began to talk again, angrily, as though the man on the bed could hear him. "The devil! I'm getting soft over this! It's because I love prospectors on general principles. Love 'em because they're part of the desert, I guess. And when an old codger like you, with your long, tobacco-stained whiskers and scrawny old carcass comes to me to die, well—well, it kind of hurts clear through and—Wong Tong, you yellow gopher snake, hurry up with some water!"

II.

At midnight Itching Foot Davis relieved Mrs. Sam Slade at the bedside of the dying prospector. There was not much to do. The old man had been made as comfortable as possible. Now it was merely a matter of waiting until the end.

"He has stirred once or twice in the last hour," Mrs. Slade reported to Itching Foot. "I think he may regain consciousness before the last. If you need me again, Mr. Davis, I'll be glad to come back. Don't hesitate to call me."

Itching Foot waved his hand and blinked his thanks at Mrs. Slade, then pulled a chair up beside the bed and waited. The minutes passed slowly. The prospector's breathing was almost inaudible; its deathly faintness made the desert sounds seem more desolate. From the near foothills came the demoniacal cry of coyotes; in the lone cottonwood tree a pair of mourning doves cooed plaintively; from the distance sounded the prolonged moo-oo-oo of a cow at the Terapin Rancho.

Sympathetically Itching Foot studied the sunken face of the old prospector. "You've had your day, old-timer," he thought. "You're past your threescore and ten, and I reckon you're ready to go. I wish you'd wake up before you go. Mebbe you would like to tell us of your family and friends; mebbe you'd like to know that you're being taken care of at the last."

Time dragged on. Itching Foot thought of many things: Of his youth in Garden Valley, Nevada; of the Indian-fighting days; of the fact that he, too, was growing old and perhaps some day—

The figure on the bed stirred; a deep sigh sounded. Itching Foot leaned close, placed his huge hand on the prospector's wrist. He was surprised to see that the old man's eyes

were open. Startlingly clear the eyes were, and they gazed at Itching Foot as though understanding how things stood.

"Just lie quiet, old-timer," Itching Foot said soothingly. "You're with some mighty good friends."

The prospector nodded weakly. Then he spoke, scarcely audibly at first but with increasing intensity.

"I guess I'm checking in, stranger. It's all right. Right. Had my day, you know; getting tired of going on, anyway. Glad to go out on the desert and not in some big city. Understand?"

Itching Foot nodded energetically; he didn't trust his voice.

"More than forty years on the go," the prospector resumed. "Merced, first; Imperial, Kern River, Colorado Desert—anywhere there was gold. Gold. Just finding it, you know; couldn't use much of it. Haven't any family." He stopped and closed his eyes as though awaiting the end. But a moment later he gathered strength and spoke again.

"Thanks for a decent death, stranger. No buzzards' or coyotes' clawing. Afraid of that. Thanks. Gold. Listen close, stranger. I found gold up above here. Most I ever saw. A great vein of white quartz, heavy and black with gold. Found it—millions, I should say. Can't tell how deep the vein is. But big. Most I ever saw. It's yours, stranger, for taking me in."

"That's all right," Itching Foot said. "Don't worry about it now. Just keep quiet and rest."

The old man smiled feebly. "I'll have a long rest," he said. "I must tell you of the lode. You know where the Hip Bone Cañon separates like the horns of a bighorn? Above the south horn it is; high above it so's you can jump off into the cañon, almost. I found it up there. Then—sick—mineral poisoning, maybe; more likely bacteria. Millions of gold—go up about six—" The man caught a great, gasping breath. "Thanks, stranger—yours."

He smiled, and the smile became fixed as his breathing ceased.

III.

Just as Turkey has its sultan, as the Terrapin Rancho has its major-domo, so the settlement of Liberty has its czar. Itching Foot Davis, of course. He it was who arranged the funeral for the unknown pros-

pector, and he did it in his usual thoroughgoing way.

From the Terrapin Rancho came "Perky" Perkins to sing a tenor solo; Sid Satterwaite, who once was a vestryman in a little church in Wessex, read the burial service. Then Itching Foot Davis spoke a few laudatory words over the stone-lined grave in the sand beside the mesquite thicket.

"He was a good man. And how do I know he was a good man? Because for forty years he lived in God's outdoors, and any man that does that just naturally gets to be good. I don't know anything about him except that he was a prospector, but I do know he was a good man and—and a credit to his community, which community is all the land between here and the Kansas border. Sid, will you give him a prayer?"

"Now, friends, I'd like to have you all stop in at the New Liberty House where I will give you some important news."

Itching Foot Davis wiped his pink, bald head with a bandanna kerchief, settled a two-gallon sombrero on his fringe of gray hair and led the way to the "social room" of the hotel. Once or twice he glanced reverently over his shoulder at the lonely grave on the desert. "That's the first death that ever happened in Liberty," he said solemnly to Sam Slade. "Some of us have been here almost fifteen years, too."

But in the hotel, with the curious inhabitants of Liberty ranged around him, Itching Foot quickly transformed himself from an undertaker and philosopher to a business man. Quickly, concisely, he told his townsmen of the gold vein which the prospector had discovered.

"I am a fair man," he said, swelling with dignified pride and shifting uncomfortably on his itching feet. "I feel it is my duty not to keep those millions of dollars for myself, as I have a perfect right to do, but to let each and every family in this fine town of Liberty have a few of the millions." His little blue eyes beamed benevolently. "Besides," he added, "I'm too old and I occupy too important a position as hotel-keeper in this town to go up and locate the gold claim. I could do it, of course. Back in Garden Valley, Nevada, I once climbed the highest—but no matter. This is the way I have figured it out. We people of Liberty will send two of our stanchest and truest citizens up to locate that gold mine. Then we'll share the millions. I figured it

out this morning while Perky Perkins was rehearsing his solo."

From the hip pocket of his bulging khaki trousers Itching Foot pulled a paper. "Me and Sam Slade are needed right here in Liberty to take care of the tourist trade," he said seriously. And the inhabitants of Liberty, although they knew that not fifty tourists visited Liberty in the course of two years, nodded their heads approvingly.

"That leaves ten men to pick from. Sid, you've got to stay to choose a name for that baby that's coming. We need Ramon Chico to run down to Mojave once in a while for supplies; Whitey, you and Hide Yerxa and Hank Schweiger aren't strong enough. Of the other five men, three have large families and a crop of alfalfa coming on. So I move we cast a unanimous bullet for Herb Sackrider and Tony Begony as the locaters of the great Liberty Gold Mine!"

The people of Liberty, too surprised and excited to speak, grunted an admiring assent. Itching Foot beamed more benignly than ever.

"Herb and Tony, you're chosen for this work which will some day make your names famous. Now we've got to outfit you. This is the way I've figured that." He referred to his paper again. "Sid Satterwaite will donate the use of one burro; Tony Begony has the other. Hank Schweiger will give twenty dollars in cash as a stake against emergency. 'Whitey' Hubbard will furnish the canteens, four two-gallon ones, at least; Hide Yerxa will give all the necessary food for a two months' trip, if that is necessary; Ramon Chico will bring a couple of good lariats; Sam Slade will get together the necessary tools, and the rest of us, myself not included, will give the clothes, blankets and everything else needed. I am furnishing the brain work, you understand, and that's the hardest of all. Now then, let's go! We want our emissaries to start to the gold lode at daylight in the morning. Let's get busy! Let's go!"

Itching Foot danced from one foot to the other, as though he, at least, were r'aring to go; it was the chilblains, of course, but his frantic actions drove the others to galvanic endeavor, truly heroic effort, considering the temperature.

So it was that the next dawn in Liberty saw Herb Sackrider and Tony Begony, mounted on two heavy-bellied, spindle-legged burros, and surrounded by canteens,

cooking dishes, blankets and food, depart toward the mountains. No two crusaders in any age were ever more heartily cheered or laden with good wishes than the two excited Libertians as their ludicrous steeds bore them toward the great golden lode.

IV.

"I have just figured out the proper division of the millions," announced Itching Foot Davis one evening a month later. The inhabitants of Liberty had gathered, as they did nightly, in the social room of the New Liberty House to hear Itching Foot retell for the twentieth time the story of how he had heard of the great gold mine and to discuss with each other what they would do with their promised millions. Itching Foot was in a rather surly humor that night. His feet had been especially aggravating; the first days of December had brought no relief from the heat, and on top of all there had been no word from the two emissaries who were seeking the gold mine, although the weeks had stretched into a month.

Of course Itching Foot had not lost faith in the venture; he only wished that Tony Begony and Herb Sackrider would hurry a little more. But some of the other Libertians began to wonder if the dream of riches would materialize.

"Maybe we won't have any millions to divide," suggested Mrs. Sam Slade. She naturally was a pessimist because her fat husband was so unflinchingly optimistic. "I think that prospector was crazy. I've given up hope of ever being rich."

Itching Foot turned on Mrs. Slade; his blue eyes glistened. He was exasperated by the heat and the foot ailment, and he took out the piled-up total of his wrath on harmless Mrs. Sam Slade.

"You have, have you?" he demanded with heavy sarcasm. "Given up hope, eh? Why, you poor, feeble-hearted little croaker! In that case you'd better go on home. I don't want you around me—you might contaminate me with your insinuations. You poor little—little croaker."

Mrs. Sam Slade sprang to her feet red with indignation. "I'll—I'll——" she sputtered. Her husband laid a heavy hand on her arm.

"Come on, Mamie," he said quietly, but he shot Itching Foot Davis with an optical dart. "Come on. We're not wanted here. Good night, gentlemen—and Mr. Davis."



Liberty and the Pursuit of Gold

By Howard R. Marsh

Author of "Susceptibility Plus," "The Bite of the Desert," Etc.

The gold that Liberty found was in the heart of a man.

THE little desert settlement of Liberty pulsed with excitement. The very air, for long weeks quivering and heat laden, seemed surcharged with emotional electricity.

True, it did not require great events to agitate Liberty. Shut off from the world as it was by the great wall of the High Sierras and further isolated by the miles of desert which extended to the north, south and east, comparatively minor events loomed large to the Libertians. The arrival of a prospector, a chance visit by a touring party, a new baby, sickness in any one of the twelve families of the town—these and even lesser occurrences gave Liberty its thrills. But on this November day began a series of happenings which rapidly carried the little community to its emotional peak.

There was nothing unusual in the way the day started. It was like fifty preceding days. The sun rose hot and red over the Panamint range far to the east; gradually the mountain mist was dispelled and the sun became a glaring ball of white, blinding and withering. To dodge the cruel heat the inhabitants of Liberty withdrew, temporarily, from the world. The twelve frame

houses of the settlement were as lifeless as tombs. Window shades were drawn tightly on the east and south sides of the unpainted dwellings, giving them a queer, sightless appearance. On the west and north exposures water-soaked sheets hung limply from the window frames.

No person stirred on the single street; the "four corners" were deserted. Back in the depths of his garage and oil station Sam Slade slept in a chair. His mouth was open as if only in that way could he gasp enough air; perspiration rolled down his fat cheeks, neck and body, soaking the undershirt and trousers which constituted his entire costume.

Across the road, in the front room of the New Liberty House, "Itching Foot" Davis was similarly clad. The hotel proprietor was not asleep, however; he was seeking relief from chilblains by soaking his feet in cold water. Davis was probably the only man in the entire region of the Mojave Desert who suffered from chronic chilblains, and in the hot summer months when their itching drove him almost mad he could get little sympathy from the other eleven men of Liberty, who actually seemed to envy

With that parting shot he led his sputtering wife from the room.

For a moment Itching Foot was stunned by the sudden defection in his followers. Never had it happened before. Then anger asserted itself again. "Any one else want to backslide?" he demanded belligerently. "I'll take over all claims, pay back any of the stakes you put up."

There was a heavy silence for a moment. Then thrifty Hank Schweiger spoke. His words were uncertain and heavy, as though they were dragged from him.

"If Herb and Tony were a-going to find that gold mine they'd have done it long afore this," he said. "I'd—I'd like my twenty dollars back."

"You would, would you?" demanded Itching Foot. His bellowing voice broke shrilly.

"It'd buy quite a few ewes," Hank Schweiger explained apologetically.

"You'll get your twenty dollars!" shouted Itching Foot. He strode to the shiny tin safe bravely lettered, "The Liberty House," and brought out a roll of bills. "There!" He threw the entire roll at Schweiger. "There's twenty-two dollars. Keep the interest!"

After Schweiger's sudden departure with his wife and six little tow-headed kids there was a long silence. Itching Foot was getting his breath, adjusting his mind to the sudden lack of confidence which threatened to topple him from his place in the community.

"Next?" he asked. His anger was now the calm, cold kind.

"I *could* use my burro," mild little Sid Satterwaite announced.

"All right, I'll buy you one," Itching Foot declared. "And now get out of this hotel and never come back here again! Get! Any one else want to sell out?"

Inasmuch as Hide Yerxa feared that the groceries he had furnished had long since been eaten, and as the other donators to the prospecting trip had given nothing of much value, there were no more deserters from the ranks that night. Instead, the other inhabitants of Liberty deemed it best to side with Itching Foot Davis. For two hours there was a general reviling of the Sam Slades, of Hank Schweiger and Sid Satterwaite.

"They ought to be driven out of town." Whitey Hubbard declared. "I'm done with them! No spirit, they haven't; no

pride, and no gambling instincts. I'm through with that breed!"

"Check!" agreed the faithful followers of the golden lodestone.

"Let's give 'em a coat of tar!" suggested the excitable and bloodthirsty Ramon Chico, who scarcely knew what the trouble was about.

"No," declared Itching Foot Davis heavily. "We'll not make that kind of trouble." He was suddenly heavy-hearted and forlorn; the thought that he had lost several of his best friends was hammering at his consciousness. "No, we'll just ignore 'em. Ignore 'em from now on. G'night, gang! I want to get to bed. My feet are something terrible to-night. G'night."

An hour later Itching Foot Davis was still tossing wakefully in his creaking bed. "And to think that Sid Satterwaite just named his new baby 'Davis Satterwaite' after me," he mourned, as though that fact made memory of the angry evening unendurable.

V.

For the first time in its fifteen years of existence the settlement of Liberty was divided against itself. The Slades, the Schweigers and the Satterwaites were ignored, ostracized. In turn, these families held indignation meetings, strove to swing the sentiment of Liberty against Itching Foot Davis and his dream of wealth. It was a sad situation, with neighbor sneering at neighbor, old cronies calling each other fools.

Itching Foot Davis suffered. He was tender-hearted, sympathetic, for all his bluff exterior, and the thought that he was a villain to three families which had once idolized him was painful. He was morose, restless. Never had his chilblains seemed so bad. He slept very little and sat for long hours straining his eyes toward the mountains, hoping to see Herb Sackrider and Tony Begony returning.

Doubt assailed him. Perhaps the gold mine did not exist; perhaps Herb and Tony had been injured, were dead. Perhaps he, Itching Foot Davis, had sent them on a mission from which they would not return. At such thoughts he shuddered, thinking of the wives and families of the two men.

Another week passed. There came a morning when Itching Foot could no longer endure the gloomy thoughts which assailed

him. He dressed rapidly, greased his feet with mutton tallow and incased them in heavy cowhide boots. Across his shoulders he slung a canteen and a pack of food. Itching Foot was going up in the mountains after Tony and Herb.

Down the road to the south he went, plugging along gloomily. Daylight brought him to the Terrapin Rancho. There he borrowed a broad-backed piebald mare. An hour later he was urging the horse up the first declivities of the High Sierras, angling toward the right branch of Hip Bone Cañon.

It was torturous going. The huge body of Itching Foot, long unaccustomed to riding, to the sudden jolts of the mare as she slid stiff-legged down declivities or pounded heavily over rocks, developed strange aches. Perspiration streamed down his florid face, gleamed on his set jaw. Often he would drop heavily from the mare's back and fairly pull the animal up a small precipice. All day he pushed forward steadily, with a grim determination that ignored dangers and pain.

Yet it was slow going. Often he must detour for a mile in order to advance a hundred yards. Nightfall found him still well to the north of the Hip Bone Cañon. Morosely he made camp beside a trickling mountain stream, stake-tied the horse and tried to sleep. At dawn he was up again and on his way. He had progressed but a few hundred yards when the odor of smoke came to him. For a moment his heart was joyful in the thought he had found the camp of Herb Sackrider and Tony Begony. But in response to his hail a bronzed forest ranger came up from the stream bed.

"Seen anything of a couple of prospectors?" Itching Foot asked hopefully.

"Not lately," the ranger replied. "About two weeks ago I saw a camp fire from the top and I've been intending to go over and investigate. I've been up on top for almost two months, but the snow came last week and drove me out. What's your business?"

"I'm looking for those two prospectors," Itching Foot said. "I've got to find 'em."

"One of them wasn't a graybeard, was he?"

"No." Then a sudden thought struck Itching Foot. "A graybeard came down six weeks ago, though. Died in my hotel."

"Now did he?" exclaimed the ranger. He was hungry for conversation. "I got to know the old fellow pretty well. He's been

up in these hills for almost a year, and I ran across him several times. He was cracked, you know. Three times he insisted that I go to see the gold mine he discovered, and every time he led me to a sheer granite butte. 'Fine, richest gold mine in the world,' the old fellow insisted. Poor old desert rat! Yet he was happy enough."

"You mean," asked Itching Foot heavily, "that there wasn't any gold mine?"

"Just a granite bluff, but the old fellow saw millions of pure gold in it. What's the matter, friend? Sick?"

For just a moment Itching Foot Davis wobbled on his aching feet. Then, "I'll have to be going," he said. "I'm in a hurry to find my friends."

The ranger was reluctant to see Itching Foot hurry away. "Humph! The big fellow's got something on his mind," he decided. "S'long!" he called.

"S'long!" came the answer. Itching Foot's voice sounded heavily hopeless.

Another agonizing day for Itching Foot; a day of aching muscles, sudden breathlessness, painful pounding of the heart, and through it all the leaden anguish of frustrated hope. For hours the sun was pitiless; then gradually it dropped behind the mountain peaks, burnishing the snow-covered tops and casting long shadows on the desert below. Beneath him and far to the north Itching Foot could see the little cluster of dwellings and the single cottonwood tree of Liberty. Thought of the settlement and the hope and anger in it, all due to him, made Itching Foot groan aloud. To his ears came an answering groan, an echo, perhaps. But he shouted aloud, and again there came an answer. In a moment he had clawed his way up a steep rock, plunged through a thicket and almost stumbled over Tony Begony and Herb Sackrider.

The momentary surge of relief at finding the two men was instantly overwhelmed by concern. Herb Sackrider, ordinarily a lanky mass of sinew and energy, was curled 'limply on the bank of a wisplike mountain stream where it eddied out of a clump of laurel. Beside him, with his swarthy face sunken and turning yellow, was Tony Begony. The men stirred weakly at Itching Foot's approach.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Sick," groaned Herb Sackrider. "The water, I guess. Must have been dead things in it."

Itching Foot was leaning over the men now, feeling their pulse, offering them water from his canteen. "How long you been this way?" he demanded.

"Always," moaned Tony Begony weakly. "Days and days. We've been getting weaker and weaker. Can't walk, either of us now. And food won't stay down. We knew three days ago that we were going to die."

"Going to die!" echoed Itching Foot. "Why, you baby-hearted chicken thieves! Why didn't you make a break out of this place?"

"At first we thought we'd be well in a day or two," explained Herb Sackrider. He was feeling stronger already because of Itching Foot's presence. "We didn't want to give up looking for the gold mine, and thought we'd stick it out. Then we got weaker and weaker, and one night the burros got away. We were near the top then, and did start out. This is as far as we got. Oh, God!" He was suddenly covered with the cold perspiration of weakness and pain. "I'm dying, Itching Foot."

"Not by a barrelful!" Itching Foot declared. Forgotten now were his own pains, physical and mental. "We'll get you out of here and down into Liberty to-morrow."

"We'll never make it," Herb Sackrider declared. "We've lost our burros and we can't walk. We'll die here." There was a forlorn grunt of agreement from Tony Begony.

"Forget the dying business," urged Itching Foot. "Wait till I get some hot tea into you and you'll cheer up. I promise you that you'll be back in Liberty by to-morrow night. Hang on until then."

That was a long night for Itching Foot. Mixing the deft tenderness of a woman with the brusqueness of a commander instilling courage in his troops, he strengthened the two men for the day ahead.

At dawn the journey down the mountain began. Herb Sackrider and Tony Begony were lifted astride the piebald mare and tied on by Itching Foot. They swayed limply from side to side, threatened to topple as the horse started the descent. But Itching Foot supported them with his strong shoulder, caught them as they dropped weakly forward on the mare's neck or threatened to keel backward.

Down they went, slipping, sliding, riding an avalanche of rock and rubble; now pull-

ing up with breath-taking impact against a granite butte, now horse and man alike straining to mount a jagged wall. No question of seeking the easier, safer trails down the mountains; no time to stop for food or water. For death was hovering over those two men on the horse and only medicine and faithful nursing could drive the specter away.

If, as the Indians say, the god Mesquitz watches from the high peak west of Liberty, then Mesquitz saw a strange sight that day. In the morning perhaps the god smiled sardonically at the rugged, piebald mare and its burden of two limp, miserable men; perhaps he could even chuckle at the sight of Itching Foot, straining and swearing at men and mare, at the queer way he hobbled on his bleeding feet, at his mottled purple face and his clothes which had been torn to rags. But before nightfall even Mesquitz must have admired the eternal courage of man, must have marveled at man's endurance and stanchness.

Hour after hour Itching Foot Davis struggled ahead. Sometimes he seemed to be carrying the two men on his own back, they leaned so lifelessly; again he had to tug the exhausted mare ahead by sheer strength. His hat had been knocked from his head by one of the toppling men and he had not dared to stop to pick it up; his boots were cut through until they were flapping strips of leather and his feet left marks of blood on occasional white rocks. He was suffering, was Itching Foot Davis, suffering far more than the numbed men whom he was rescuing. His lungs ached and he gulped the thin air without satisfaction; his heart pounded with trip-hammer strokes under the strain. But even when he was dizziest, when his body seemed a single fire of pain, Itching Foot refused to consider stopping or temporarily abandoning the two men. On and on he must go. Now he gained a yard, another yard, then a slipping, bruising fall down a declivity and he was ten yards nearer his goal. Yard by yard, rod by rod—

Two days it had taken Itching Foot to reach Tony Begony and Herb Sackrider in the mountains; in one day he brought them home again. For dusk found him at the base of the mountains and much nearer Liberty than he had hoped. He spoke cheering words to the men on the piebald mare, although they long since had sunk into stupor;

affectionately he addressed the horse, praised its stanchness, although the animal was weaving from side to side like Itching Foot himself.

"They'll think—we're—drunk," he told the horse, and he tried to laugh. But his throat was taut and dry. "You're a—good—old—mare," he said. "We're—almost—home."

Probably that last hour, when Liberty seemed so near and yet never nearer, was the hardest for Itching Foot to endure. It almost seemed that he'd never arrive. For himself, perhaps it made little difference, but there were some little Sackriders and little Begonys who would want their fathers. He must plod ahead through the alkali dust, one weary foot ahead of the other; step by step, nearer, nearer.

In the last dim light of dusk he saw the people of Liberty. They had seen him coming from the mountains and they were running to meet him. A choking lump rose in his throat. There was good old Sam Slade, and wistful little Sid Satterwaite, and honest, stolid Hank Schweiger. Mrs. Sam Slade, too, and—

They were around him now, solicitous, eager to help. Mrs. Slade had a hot-water bottle in her hand, the only hot-water bottle in Liberty; Sid Satterwaite had brought along his precious flask of whisky. They crowded around him, tried to find a beginning to the help they would offer.

"I'm all right," said Itching Foot Davis. He didn't know his own voice; it sounded far away and thin. "I'm—all—right. Take care of—Herb and Tony. There isn't any gold mine. The prospector was crazy. I'm all—right. Once in Garden Valley, Nevada, I—I—I climbed the—highest—"

Itching Foot Davis rocked back and forth on his bleeding feet, smoothly, easily, like a toy rocking horse. Then his body described a wider arc. He went down. His old bald head was in the dust and the fringe of gray hair seemed a part of the smearing alkali. He tried to rise to his knees; his aching arms stretched toward Tony Begony and Herb Sackrider and the piebald mare. Then his powerful body seemed to shrink; it huddled limply in the dust. Oblivion had brought him respite from pain and fatigue.

The morning sun was shining in Itching Foot's room when he awoke. For a moment he was content to remain in luxurious repose. Then thought of the previous days

smote him and he strove to rise. Instantly a cool, soft hand was placed restrainingly on his head.

Beside him was Mrs. Sam Slade, tender, solicitous, mothering. Itching Foot stared at her for a moment, wondering at her white garb and at the tears in her eyes. Then one huge, brown, lacerated hand stole from under the sheet and took Mrs. Slade's fingers. "It's so good," he murmured, and marveled why the tears were running down her cheeks.

Suddenly another thought stirred him. He had a question to ask and scarcely dared to ask it. It was so much better just to rest, not to worry. But he must know.

"How are Herb and Tony?"

Mrs. Sam Slade smiled down at him. "They're pulling through all right," she assured him. "Ramon Chico broke all records riding to Mojave last night and got a doctor. He says they'll come along all right now. They just got down in time," she added.

Itching Foot smiled happily. Remarkable how quickly pain gave way before happiness.

"Are you strong enough?" Mrs. Sam Slade was speaking again. "The boys are all outside and they'd like to have a peek at you."

"Sure! Send 'em in!" There was the old-time husky heartiness in Itching Foot's voice.

Through the door they filed, the men of Liberty. Embarrassed, awkward, ill at ease they were. In front tiptoed faded little Sid Satterwaite and the stolid Hank Schweiger. The honest blue eyes of both were wide with hero worship.

Itching Foot Davis stretched a hand to each of them. "How does it go, old-timers?" he asked.

Sid Satterwaite gulped noisily. "About that burro, Itching Foot," he said in his mild tenor, "I don't want it; I can't use it. But Itching Foot, if you would be godfather to my new little boy baby just as I planned, and—"

"Sure!" boomed Itching Foot. "I've been godfather to a heap of babies in my day. Back in Garden Valley, Nevada, I—"

Hank Schweiger interrupted him. Hank had something important to get off his mind. "Say, Itching Foot, I put that twenty-two dollars back in your safe last night. It's all right, aina?" He, too, swallowed noisily. "Aina?" he repeated anxiously.

For the fraction of a minute Itching Foot was silent. Then he squeezed Hank Schweiger's fat hand. "Sure thing! You know I was going to buy a stone for that poor devil of a prospector out there on the desert. His grave looks so damn' lonesome. Sure, it's all right, Hank."

And then Itching Foot Davis knew why

the tears were running down the cheeks of Mrs. Sam Slade. For there were tears in his own eyes, tears of happiness and weakness. "Hurray for Liberty!" he said. Then, to conceal his embarrassment, he plunged into one of his famous anecdotes.

"Back in Garden Valley, Nevada——" he began.

More stories by Mr. Marsh in future issues.



OVERHEARD ON THE JOB

THE scene was one of the innumerable real-estate developments now going on in Suburbia. A plasterer was slowly spreading concrete. Watching him impatiently, stood the builder-owner of the dwelling under construction.

"Why don't you speed up?" cried the boss. "Gee, the more you fellers git the less you do."

"Old stuff!" replied the worker nonchalantly. "What's bitin' you, anyhow? You should worry. Any one 'u'd think you was paying us outer your own pocket."

"Outer whose am I?" challenged the boss.

"The guy who falls for this dump, uv course," said the plasterer. "You ask him twenty thousand for this place and it ain't worth half that."

"That so?" parried the boss. "Well, let me tell you, there's nothin' in these small apartment houses. The real money is in the bungaloos, that's where it is."

"Oh, them eggshells!" exclaimed the worker. "I kin slap them together in my sleep. Some of them's a crime."

"Yeah? But just suppose you slap on that concrete, while you're at it," retorted the boss. "Remember, I'm giving you sixteen dollars a day."

"Huh, you're givin' me nothin', I told yuh," reiterated the plasterer. "In Chicago men like me is gettin' twenty-eight a day and no kickin'."

"Gee, fellers like you are putting it all over us, that's sure," grumbled the boss.

"And you're takin' it out on the tenant," laughed the plasterer.

"Well, my bootlegger is buyin' this shack," said the boss, with an air of justification.

"Yeah?" said the plasterer, suddenly interested. "I wanna get some good stuff. Order some for me, will yuh? How much is it?"

"Eight a quart, but it's the real thing."

"Ah, I bet it's like this concrete or them laths—snide," said the plasterer. "But tell him to bring around a case to my house, will yuh, boss? It will be a big favor."



HOW TO MAKE MONEY

AMONG the guests at a stag dinner in Washington a few weeks ago were two nationally known politicians, both of them millionaires. During the evening another guest asked each of them at different times this question: "How do you explain your great financial success?"

"I succeeded," one of them said, "by saving money, by always saving money. I've never gone into a deal without trying to rewrite each clause of the contract to see if I could save an extra dollar thereby. Then, when I got the extra dollar, I kept it."

"I attribute my success," said the other, "to the fact that, when I was young, I learned how to throw away good money gracefully at times, and to make a grand gesture of it. But I don't take any special credit for it. I think every man has had to learn the same lesson before he got rich."



Pigeon Pie

By Talbert Josselyn

Author of "The Desert Audits an Account," "The Winning Number," Etc.

What is one man's pie may be another man's pigeon.

ON a rocky knoll overlooking the alleged chief street of the mining town of Lucky stood two buildings; one a two-story frame affair with the words "Chibble's Boarding House" lettered across it; the other a squat, patchwork creation rich in all of a single coat of thin white paint. Side by side they stood, neighboring; neighboring, but not friendly. Once they had been, but not now.

A small, wiry man, Mr. Prentiss Chibble; like some other men of his size, proud in inverse ratio to his cubic content. A huge bulk of a man, Mr. Tom Bass; like some others of his girth, more than inclined to be pompous. Pride and pomposity—these have been responsible for more than one war.

According to Mr. Chibble, amicable relations had been broken off on the day that Mr. Bass made slighting remarks about the butter. Now every one knew that the Chibble place was quite the best boarding house in town; still quoting its owner, the only one setting a table fit for a civilized man's stomach, not a hog's. No neck beef, vegetables as fresh as the across-desert trip saw fit to permit, as few weevils in the mush as could be expected, and real, if rancid, butter. When a man of Mr. Bass' breeding

made supercilious remarks and scraped at the roof of his mouth with a spoon, mentioning lard, it was time to call a halt, and Mr. Chibble had called it. According to Mr. Bass, however, such was by no means the true reason for his precipitate rising from the Chibble table. As owner of the original Lucky town site, Mr. Bass' authority on real estate was not to be questioned, and when, in the midst of the meal, he had learned quite accidentally that Mr. Chibble had bought certain lots adjoining his own at a price much cheaper than he had been asking there was but one thing for a man of integrity to do, and he had done it.

Be that as it may, whether it was lots or lard, the Chibbles no longer spoke to the Basses. Daily the pride of one puffed a little higher in the sight of the pomposity of the other; closer each drew to him his satellites, and more and more took a hand in exerting authority and in checkmating the other. Faster the converging lines moved toward the point where but a little thing would be responsible for a fine crash.

And now the scene shifts some fifteen miles to the west, where the mesa, flattening out and deepening in soil, had been

taken over by a number of dry-farm ranchers. Little old Mrs. Pettigrew is leaving in Neighbor Cupp's wagon for the railroad and town. Said Mrs. Pettigrew, giving final instructions to Joey Cupp as she tied the sunbonnet strings about her lean throat:

"Be sure and feed the horses, and water 'em, and shoot that jack rabbit that I ain't been able to if it comes anywheres near the garden, and most of all don't forget to tend them pigeons."

"Yes'm," said Joey Cupp. The pigeons had been mentioned three times in the last five minutes.

"I aim to get back from the city just as soon as I can," continued Mrs. Pettigrew. "All-night rides in the cars and traipsing around asphalt streets may be fun for younger people, but not for me. Why that boy Elmer of mine couldn't sell that measly lot we got without my having to pack up and go to town I don't see; he could have been back here by now putting in that barbed-wire fence. Well."

The elder brother of Joey Cupp pulled on the reins and the team drew slowly away along the new wagon-track road that stretched across the mesa. Mrs. Pettigrew, taking a final look back, admonished once more, "Don't forget the pigeons!"

"I ain't going to!" announced Joey with rising asperity. Whereupon he immediately did, remembering them around midafternoon. Whistling shrilly, he thrust his face against the wire netting of the room-sized cage wherein Mrs. Pettigrew's especial favorites cooed and bobbed their heads. "Want to eat, pigeons?" he demanded. Filling one tin with wheat at the shed and another with water at the windmill, he unhooked the door latch and advanced into the covered board-and-wire home, his whistle now at its apogee. Cooing was supplanted by a peering and a wild, bewildered flapping of wings.

"Round you go!" commanded the feeder, and waved his arms.

Round the pigeons went. The door, hanging an inch open, sagged wider, then swung yawningly. Round they went—and out.

The overalls and boots of Joey Cupp moved frantically, but by the time that they were in the open the compact and feathered blue cloud was a hundred yards away and gaining speed as it winged over the tops of the tree yuccas in the general direction

of the horizon, the hills, and the town of Lucky.

"Gee!" breathed Joey Cupp. "Look at 'em go!"

They went.

Prentiss Chibble, watching table scraps disappear down the craws of his somewhat rangy chickens at the rear of the boarding house in the drowsiness of the afternoon sun, was startled into wakefulness by the apparition of a feathered host that plumped down into the runway from out the heavens with much slatting of wings, and immediately divided itself into some twenty component parts, each keenly alive to the presence of abundant food.

"Hi!" cried Mr. Chibble, throwing aloft thumbs that had been contentedly thrust into the waistband of roomy khaki overalls. "Get out of that!"

Down dropped his hands to shake the wire netting, but he had no more than caught at the meshes before his grip relaxed. Slowly emerging from the door beyond the tree-yucca property line was Neighbor Tom Bass. With a snort Mr. Chibble let go the fence. He had no intention that *that* hulk should get any amusement out of his discomfiture. Rather should the invading host be turned into a thing of account, and discomfiture descend upon Mr. Bass instead. An idea illumined Mr. Chibble's brain.

"That's right, pigeons," he loudly commended, "eat away hearty. That'll fatten you up for when I'm ready to make you into pies. Nothing like having a lot of pigeons along with good tender chicken." And he rubbed his hands as though the disappearance of provender down totally alien throats was a thing exceedingly to be desired.

Mr. Bass halted between back step and his own new chicken yard. Over his large, florid face, with its great band of white mustache, played a number of conflicting emotions. Mr. Chibble redoubled his urgings to eat, and dilated on the toothsome of pigeon stewed, baked and broiled when served at the unexcelled Chibble table. The florid onlooker shifted his feet much as an unsettled-in-mind elephant might do, turned slowly, with whatever he had intended to do undone, and creaked into the paint-washed house.

A chuckle escaped the boarding-house owner. At the same moment a second idea

illuminated him. Why not stewed pigeon indeed? When the gods showered food into one's back yard, who was to question? Now if he could just draw some netting over the top of the fence; or maybe— The speculation vanished as his guests, with filled crops, rose from the yard as compactly and as suddenly as they had come. Away they whistled to the south, in the direction of the Big Two Mine, with its prideful and rumbling ten-stamp mill.

Mr. Chibble rubbed finger tips together. Well, they'd stayed long enough for him to give red-face Bass something to puzzle about, provided the old skulk hadn't been peering out of a window. Rather pleased with himself, Mr. Chibble went toward the kitchen to take up again the duty of supervising the cook.

An hour and more passed. The rear door of the Bass house opened and the portly Mr. Bass in his tight-girthed trousers reappeared, now carrying a pan of cracked corn. Feeding time for the Bass poultry. "Chick, chick, chick, chick!" came the stentorian command. Feeding time, also, for the Pettigrew pigeons. High overhead the touring flock saw and heard—and descended.

Simultaneously Prentiss Chibble thrust open a screen door and advanced upon his chicken run with a largess of wilted lettuce. The advance stopped. The bulking Mr. Bass checked a remark half uttered; his hand, deep-dipped in the pan, remained there; for the space of a moment he studied the triangle formed by chickens, pigeons and the halted Mr. Chibble. Then his hand came filled from the pan and scattered corn among the busy, bobbing blue heads. "Here, pigeons!" said Mr. Bass. "Nothing like pigeons for breakfast, or dinner, or supper."

The turned-up overalls flapped about Mr. Chibble's hurrying legs; his lean chin thrust itself juttingly over the top wire of the property-line fence.

"Get those pigeons of mine out of your yard! You hear me?"

Mr. Bass looked coolly down. "Your pigeons? Ho, ho, ho!" His hand dipped into the pan and more corn went flying. "Ho, ho, ho!"

A taut-faced Mr. Chibble gripped a tree-yucca post. "Get those pigeons back into my yard or I'll have the law on you."

"Yes?" said Mr. Bass. "How?"

"How? Because they're mine!"

Mr. Bass smiled slowly. "Prove it." He continued to scatter corn, and Mr. Chibble noted with knife-jab suddenness that each successive handful fell nearer and finally into that part of the yard having a wire top and acting as a coop. He bounced like a teakettle with the lid tied down.

"Shoo!" he bawled.

The Bass chickens, already wrought to high tension by the action of their visitors, cackled and burst into concerted running, and the Chibble fowls echoed their panic. Unconcernedly the twenty Pettigrews pecked toward the coop.

Mr. Chibble smote the post. Birds that had first descended into his yard, and eaten his good food, and that were by more than all rights his! He found control of his voice. "You'll hear from this!"

With the dignity that became one a foot taller and a hundred pounds heavier, Mr. Bass inclined his head. "You would buy those lots from somebody else, hey?" Cautiously he lowered his hand and slid the wire coop door close upon the last of the marchers. "Pigeon pie," said he; and added jinglingly: "Out of the sky."

Mr. Chibble choked. In cold fury he looked at Mr. Bass, and Mr. Bass returned the stare.

Mr. Chibble wheeled; down upon Lucky and Warwick Brown's store he made descent. At the recent election, through the medium of a humorous vote, the lean store-keeper, with a predilection for baldness, exactness and petty worrying, had been made justice of the peace. At about the same time, and without any humor entering into it, Mr. Brown had given a ninety-day note to Prentiss Chibble.

"Afternoon, Wick," said Chibble. "I was just passing by and I happened to think about that note, and says I, I'll drop in and remind him that it's due in a couple of days, and at the same time—"

"Why, yes, so it is," said Wick, looking up with a pucker between his eyes. "Day after to-morrow. Hum. Well, now, to tell the truth—"

"Now that's all right," interrupted Mr. Chibble heartily. "I was thinking that you might want to get it extended, what with all the improvements that you've been making and one thing and another, so I said— Of course, there's just a chance that I may not be able to, but I'll know for sure in a couple days. Probably I will, so that's all

right. Say, that neighbor of mine up on the hill is liable to get himself into trouble." Mr. Chibble's voice hardened. "This afternoon I got some pigeons as a surprise—for my wife—and when my back was turned the first thing that I knew they'd been decoyed into the next yard."

"Into Bass'?"

"Decoyed with corn into Bass'. Now I'm a peace-loving man and I don't want any trouble, so that's why I come to you as the justice of the peace to go up there and tell that big hulk where he gets off at when it comes to breaking the law."

Mr. Chibble's hard little gray eyes bored into Wick Brown's uncertain blue ones as the nice shiny trap sprang tight. It sprang much tighter than the owner of the little gray eyes was aware. Only that morning Wick Brown had climbed the knoll to inquire of Mr. Bass as to when a two months' overdue grocery bill might be paid; and Mr. Bass, with the ruffled dignity of those who can afford to pay and won't, had vaguely mentioned next week, at the same time bringing to the fore certain favors both real and imaginary that he had bestowed upon Mr. Brown. A second climbing of the knoll would in no way advance the status of the bill, yet nonclimbing would scarcely be beneficial to the renewal of the note. Mr. Brown shifted his mental feet as much as the trap permitted. He fell back upon the exactness of the law.

"Well, now, Prent, I'd be glad to go, but as justice of the peace the going somewhere isn't in my jurisdiction. That's for the constable. You go get Jerry Noonan and have him tell Tom Bass to give you back your pigeons; then if he won't, you and Jerry come down here and we'll have a warrant sworn out, and Jerry will serve it, and he'll bring Tom down here and we'll hold court, and you having proofs of ownership of pigeons will get 'em, and Tom will get a reminder from the court for having flouted the law. That's legal. Let's see. You got the pigeons in to-day; well, whoever brought 'em up from the railroad will be able to identify them. Was it Ed or Steve?"

Mr. Chibble opened and closed his mouth several times after the manner of the cat who has gotten feathers instead of the canary. He stared malevolently at the justice.

"Well, if that's law I don't think much of it! That's all. Talk about your red

tape and a man running his legs off—I thought that when we elected officers they were supposed to do their duty, especially by their friends; but it seems they ain't. Well, a number of things may seem different by next week." He nodded darkly.

"You go see Jerry Noonan like I'm telling you," placated the hapless Mr. Brown. "He's a friend of yours. You explain to him how it is and tell him how Ed—or was it Steve?—brought 'em from the railroad station——"

"You go to grass!" cried Mr. Chibble, and stalked from the store. Over his shoulder he threw back the words, "That note ain't going to be renewed!"

He stumped along the street. In front of the Round Dollar Pool Hall a teamster, last of that clan to stay by hay-burning means of propulsion instead of gas, was repairing his wagon with bailing wire. Mr. Chibble stopped. It was Ed Munn, who did the hauling for the Chibble boarding house; also, the same Ed that Wick Brown had spoken of.

"Heh," said Mr. Chibble, and poured into the partisan Ed's willing ears as truthful an account of the afternoon as there was need for.

"Pigeons, eh?" said Ed. "They'd go mighty good in a stew, now, wouldn't they?" Mr. Munn at times ate at the Chibble house.

"You come along with me to Jerry Noonan and tell him how you hauled 'em up from the railroad for me," said Mr. Chibble, "and you'll get some of the stew."

Wagon repairing was abandoned. Mr. Noonan, however, was not to be found in his usual haunt at the rear of the Lucky Smoke Shop. The card players opined that he was out hunting stills, in unofficial capacity, that is, or perhaps he was after those burros that had been stolen; at any rate, he wasn't there, and the questing two emerged into the gathering dusk.

Mr. Munn again smacked his lips and looked about. "Blamed if I wouldn't like some of those pigeons, and like as not Bass will have 'em all in the pot by morning. Say, if they landed first in your yard like you say, why of course they're yours, and constable or no constable you've got a right to take 'em. I would if they was mine, and it's getting dark now."

Mr. Chibble nodded resolutely. "What with a justice of the peace that's scared to do his duty, and I'm going to fix him plenty

for it, and a constable that's off somewheres enjoying himself, I can see that if a man wants to get what's his he's got to take the law into his own hands. Come on up to the house."

A half hour after the light of the early retiring Basses had winked out, the law was taken; a good deal more of it would have been had not the Bass chickens, awakened by hoarse breathing and the pulling and tugging at coop wire, voiced their alarmed sentiments, to be followed by the sound of retreating footsteps.

"Well, we got half," announced Mr. Chibble when in his own kitchen. "I guess that's enough."

It was. It brought Mr. Bass hammering on the Chibble front door a half hour before breakfast. The fury of his countenance was so pleasant to look upon that Mr. Chibble, from an upstairs window, fell into witticism.

"The cook ain't quite ready to serve you yet, mister. How do you want your eggs?"

"You're a thief!" bawled Mr. Bass. "I'll have the law on you if it's the last thing I do!"

"Drinking again," said Mr. Chibble. "Too bad."

It was now an apoplectic Mr. Bass' turn to descend from the knoll upon Wick Brown's store, nor was his inward condition improved by the wait of nearly an hour, though outwardly he was geniality itself as key-reaching Mr. Brown approached the door.

"Morning, Wick," said Mr. Bass. "I happened to be passing and thought of what you said yesterday about that little bill. Now if it would be of any help to you I could advance you the money in two or three days perhaps. We'll see. Say, that little whiffet up on the knoll next me has got himself into trouble, plenty. I had some pigeons come to me yesterday and this morning I found that half of 'em had been stole. Now, I ain't naming any names, but I can smell stewed pigeon as well as the next man, and if the law don't step in and give me damages there's going to be trouble."

Wick Brown, caught for the second time in twenty-four hours between an instanding note and an outstanding bill, fell back upon his sole support, the exactness of the law. He was full in the midst of it, with Mr. Bass growing redder and redder, when there came the sound made by a number of pairs of

shoes marching in unison along the plank sidewalk. Mr. Chibble, Mr. Ed Munn and a gentleman named Dan McGann, with whom Mr. Chibble had had dealings in connection with the sale of mines to the outside world, and who professed to have at one time dabbled in law, were advancing blithely after the manner of men who had breakfasted well and who were now out to fill their lungs with fresh air, toothpicks in mouths. At the same moment, from the other direction, the loose-nailed planks slapped under the feet of two men swinging along with the manner of those who go to keep a breakfast appointment that holds within it something out of the ordinary. Steve Delaney, owner of a motor truck, and Clark Binder, prospector and claim owner, profound authority on everything and nothing; both friends of Mr. Tom Bass.

Trio and pair simultaneously stopped alongside Wick Brown and Mr. Bass. The trio smiled retrospectively, the pair prospectively. Mr. Bass blew up.

"Say, boys, these three skunks stole half the pigeons last night!"

"What's that?" said the boys. "What's *that*?"

"Who you calling a skunk?" demanded Mr. Chibble.

"Look out how you speak about people's actions you ain't sure of!" threatened satellite Mr. McGann.

"Why didn't you shoot 'em?" asked Mr. Delaney.

"Why didn't you fill 'em full of buckshot?" specified Mr. Binder.

Further comment, mixed and counter-mixed, snappily arose.

"I'd like to see you buckshot me," said teamster to truck driver.

"Some people's actions you can always be pretty sure of," opined know-all Mr. Binder to one-time-near-lawyer McGann.

"You heard what I said," puffed Mr. Bass.

From out of the Lucky Smoke Shop approached a strolling figure. Constable Jerry Noonan ran a hand across a mouth from which came the commingled odors of tobacco and alcohol, and smiled benignly. Groups indulging in mock drama were ever a source of pleasure.

"Ah, go on with you," adjured Constable Jerry, assuming stern features, "or I'll run you all in."

Never was a man so swiftly taken at his

word. In a twinkling the demands for the incarceration, of somebody else, were compounded like the old-time arithmetic problem of the horseshoe nails. When the fire and brimstone of accusation had blown away a stunned Wick Brown found on his grocery-store order docket, and set for trial at two that afternoon in the vacant Pastime Bowling Alleys, the charges of pigeon stealing, Bass versus Chibble, countercharges of the same, Chibble versus Bass, and a multitude of bewildering minor indictments running from ordinary threat and desire to kill, S. Delaney versus E. Munn, and vice versa, to the more rarefied forms of malfeasance and misfeasance as preferred by Messrs. Binder and McGann.

Swiftly the factions took up battle headquarters, the Basses choosing Steve Delaney's trucking office while those of Chibble faith gathered in Ed Munn's corral. The show-down as to who was to run things in town had come. It was no time to mince matters; pigeons were but a means to an end, and proof as to possession of these pigeons, no matter how arrived at, became the paramount word.

From the Munn corral came hints of Chibble procedure. "Character witnesses," said near-lawyer Dan McGann. "Foundation for honesty. Then various eyewitnesses, building up toward a convincing, dramatic climax."

"Say," said Mr. Munn, "how's this for a climax . . . Shh—there's somebody going by . . . And then we'll put . . . Dang it, there's somebody else!" His voice sank to a whisper. "How's that, eh?"

"Wonderful!" glowed Mr. McGann. "They won't have a leg to stand on."

"And every time Wick Brown looks at me," said a grinning Mr. Chibble, "I'll see to it that he good and plenty remembers a note that's due to-morrow."

The three beamed at one another.

"I guess that coopers the Bass barrel," said Mr. McGann.

Which indeed it might have, had it not been for the fine old aphorism of certain similar minds running in certain similar channels. But of this, more anon.

Meanwhile, Constable Noonan, reënforced by further tobacco and alcohol, fell to the task of preparing the Pastime Alleys for a throng that threatened to tax its utmost capacity as news of the coming legal battle spread along the street and into the

hills, gaining in color as it went. At Joe Driscoll's board-and-canvas hotel it became known that little Prent Chibble had knocked big Tom Bass flat with a chair, while "Rip" Connor, at the farthest outlying claim, left off windlassing to drink in the details of how Bass had thrown Chibble clean across both of Wick Brown's counters. Work for the day was given over, picks and shovels put aside, ore buckets left at the bottoms of shafts. By noon the town had taken on a holiday appearance; half an hour before time for court the walls of the Pastime Alleys were on the bulge.

Two o'clock approached.

A door at the rear of the hall opened and the Chibble litigants filed solemnly in, Mr. Chibble ramrod of carriage, Mr. McGann bearing several large tomes that might have been law books, or dictionaries, with Ed Munn gripping a boxlike affair covered with a thick blanket, which he immediately placed beneath the table where they were to sit. Acclamation from the Chibble supporters, remarks from the others. Again the door opened. Appeared the Basses, their leader in a clean white collar whose impeccability had in no way been jeopardized by an entangling tie. Followed Mr. Binder, lionlike head thrown back and squat torso incased in a legal-looking alpaca jacket. Astern Steve Delaney paused at the doorway to give final instructions of seemingly great import to some one stationed outside, then sat down at the plank-and-sawhorse bench and went into conference with Mr. Bass and Mr. Binder. Acclamations from those who had made remarks, and remarks from previous acclaimers.

Two o'clock. With it, his honor himself. Not to be outdone in way of greeting, the humorous electorate responsible for Wick Brown's present position made cheerful welcome, with a sprinkling of severe law-and-orderites frowning such greeting down. A very much preoccupied person, Wick Brown glanced at close-packed partisans and humorists in front, at a none too clear-brained Jerry Noonan behind, at Scylla on the left, at Charybdis on the right, and settled himself at his improvised raised desk. He ran a hand through thinning hair, buttoned his coat tight, and rapped sharply with a block of wood.

"The court will come to order. Now, Prent, if you'll just tell——"

Dan McGann was on his feet, bowing

graciously. Opportunity had walked in and made itself at home.

"If your honor please, I represent Mr. Chibble, and as such am legally empowered to ask all questions necessary to bring out the facts in the case. If at the conclusion the court feels that anything has been omitted he may then proceed to examination, but"—and Mr. McGann smiled deferentially—"I do not think this will be necessary." Again he smiled; and having put the courtroom and his honor in their proper places by his collective fragmentary remembrance of the law, he turned affably upon the bolt-upright Mr. Chibble.

"Now, Mr. Chibble, how long have you lived in Lucky?"

"Most all of a year," said Mr. Chibble.

"Ah. In other words, practically as long as there has been a town of Lucky. You are, then, an old citizen, well and favorably known. Does there chance to be any one in the courtroom?"—Mr. McGann looked slowly about—"who, as an even older resident, remembers the day that Mr. Chibble arrived?"

Hank Bevan, third sawhorse-and-plank row, aisle, shifted his tobacco from one side to the other. For the whole of an hour he had been priming himself for just this question.

"Why, yes, sir, I remember that there day. I hadn't been in town more'n two or three weeks myself, and I was one of the first to come. I seen Mr. Chibble riding in Ed Munn's wagon with a load of freight, and I says to myself right away, 'Now there's a mighty likely looking man. Yes, sir, the sort of man that another man would like to tie to.' That's what I said."

Mr. McGann beamed as one seeing unsolicited truth come into its own. "Thank you, Mr. Bevan. Your volunteering of such important information is indeed appreciated."

Mr. Bevan again shifted his chew. It was the first time that he had ever spoken in a courtroom.

"I remember right after I seen him," he continued, warming to his task, "that the wagon broke down and Mr. Chibble got kind of pitched out, and all the while he was a-dusting himself off he handed out the cussingest pretty line of talk I ever heard."

Laughter, some of it derisive, rose from the room.

"Yes, yes," hastened Mr. McGann, trying to hide a frown, "doubtless anybody would have under the circumstances. I think that's about all, Mr. Bevan." He made motioning signs that the witness sit down. "Now, Mr. Chibble, what is your occupation?"

"Owner of a boarding house. Owner of mines and business property."

"A man of affairs, let us say then, to sum it up."

"You bet. And when it comes to setting a good table——"

Unable longer to restrain his feelings, red faced and getting redder, Mr. Bass gave vent to a strident horse laugh. "Haw, haw, haw!"

A white-faced Mr. Chibble sprang up; his lips moved swiftly with early compliments of the season. The carpenter's hammer sounded; Mr. McGann tugged at his client's coat tails. Mr. Chibble simmered down, but the opening play was over; the ball had been fumbled, and while Mr. McGann was calming Mr. Chibble, alpaca-coated Mr. Binder skirted the end with it tucked under one arm.

"Just to get in a word edgewise," said Mr. Binder to Wick Brown. "Yes. We might like to ask some questions. You, also, Mr. Bass, have lived some time in this town?"

"I should hope so," loudly stated Mr. Bass. "I owned the first town site."

"And all the old-timers and newcomers were acquainted with you?"

"I'll say they were." And to prove it, Mr. Bass called upon five in the front row. Glowing were the testimonials; ready for sainthood was Mr. Bass.

"That's fine," radiated Mr. Binder. The machine had at last gotten started. He became jocular.

"And as to yourself, Mr. Bass, do you happen to recall the arrival of the gentleman sitting opposite, when he was in the wagon that broke down? Or were you too busy?"

"Too busy. I was trying to get some ants and flies out of my office, so I didn't have no time to notice anything so small as that going by."

Guffaws rose. So did Messrs. Chibble and McGann, as though flames enveloped their chairs. The play was getting too far down the field.

"Your honor!" barked Mr. McGann. "Is

this a court or the playroom of a half-witted elephant? If it is the latter, I can say a few things myself, and can call upon others to do likewise!" And McGann did, in the surge of his attack using up several prize witnesses he had intended saving for climactic work. Mr. Binder retaliated. Acerbities grew. Personalities spread among opposing witnesses; invitations to step outside became numerous. Without touching intermediate gear, the trial shot into high.

"I tell you I seen pigeons in Bass' yard a week ago," announced witness Al Coffey.

"I tell you you didn't," retaliated witness Pete Rimmer.

"You're a liar!" said the Bass supporter.

"You're another!" returned the Chibble exponent of truth.

Whereat, with the length of a bench separating them, the two made heroic endeavor to get closer.

Thump—thump—*thump*, went the hammer.

"Hey, hey, hey, hey!" cried Constable Noonan, thrusting not too rapidly down the aisle.

"Pull 'em off," urged one group.

"Let 'em fight," said another.

Semiorder was restored and the testimony went on, some of it straying far afield, where old scores came in for fine reviving.

"I remember the incident of the Bass pigeons flying about town, your honor, because I was just coming out of my shaft on the claim that Rory McNally tried to swindle me out of."

"Yeah?" cried Mr. McNally. "And how did you come by that claim anyway? Ha? The authorities would like to know!"

"It's this way, your honor. Says I, Prent Chibble has got in some pigeons, having promised to, some different from the promising of Mike Foster, who never paid for his share of the bacon we got in clean from Chicago, and then at that it was all milked and spoiled."

"I seen Bass' pigeons that afternoon over by some land Tim Kipp tried to measure for me with a surveyor's tape that was ten feet short. Ten feet in a hundred, and the only good part of the claim was beyond where he got through measuring."

"Why, your honor, that witness ain't got brains enough to last him through the night. I remember one time out at Soda Spring when——"

Unavailingly did a harried Wick Brown

battle with the rising sea of prevarication and reminiscence. Word had gone out from the opposing headquarters that they couldn't lose; that they could go the limit in testimony because they had Wick Brown under their thumb. So they went. Many who had come only to look on now entered the lists. Five testified as to having seen Mr. Chibble write a letter ordering the pigeons; seven retaliated as to the check Mr. Bass had sent off. The smiles of counselors McGann and Binder, expanding under the words of their own witnesses, began to go slightly awry as it became more and more evident that stalemate was the order of the day. Vigorously did they reapply themselves to further effort, piling the pyramidal weight heavier and heavier upon Wick Brown.

At length there came a lull, and then it was that Mr. McGann, being less out of breath than his opponent, swiftly applied himself to slamming on the capstone—his capstone. He nodded to the hard-staring Mr. Chibble, to the guardian Mr. Munn.

"Your honor," he cried, "it has become painfully evident that mere words of truth are this day of no avail. It would seem that physical evidence alone would be able to triumph over the Machiavellian cunning of those about us. Very well, they shall have it." Again he nodded to Ed Munn, and Mr. Munn removed his foot from the blanket-covered box whereon it had been firmly placed.

The bulking Mr. Bass left off applying his continuous and unpaid-bill-suggesting look at the weight-carrying Wick Brown and glanced sharply at Mr. Binder. Mr. Binder shook his head with the complacency of one who had no fear of physical evidence, and at the same time motioned Truck Driver Steve Delaney toward the rear door. Mr. Delaney disappeared through this as Mr. Munn rose and swung the box to the top of the table.

"Your honor," said Mr. McGann, "we call the honorably known teamster Ed Munn as witness, and this"—he indicated the covered box—"as incontestable corroborative evidence."

Mr. Bass half rose from his chair. So did Mr. Binder. He stared at the box with growing concern, and this time there was no complacency in his nod as he turned to Mr. Bass. "Get that stumbling fool in here," he snapped. "Quick! Your honor,"

and he swung upon the raised desk, "I would like to offer——"

"I have already offered," cut in Mr. McGann, "I have already——"

The apparition of Steve Delaney backing into the room with something bulky in his arms stopped Mr. McGann short up, and then, after the briefest moment, started him again at fullest speed.

"Get that blanket off!" he shouted at the waiting Mr. Munn.

"Hurry up with that, Steve!" bawled Mr. Binder.

Mr. Munn tugged at the blanket, but it caught on a corner; Mr. Delaney's burden jammed in the doorway. Wild pulling and heaving followed. Simultaneously there appeared in the courtroom two packing crates, one made of wood and wire, the other of wooden slats alone, both covered with railroad billing labels, both containing straw and a scattering of blue feathers; both equally declaimed over.

"The shipping box our pigeons came in!" chorused the Chibbles. "The original crate!" stormed the Basses.

Pandemonium followed.

"Look at the labels. *Railroad shipping labels!*"

"Consigned to T. Bass himself."

"Original!"

"Genuine!"

"Brought up by me in my wagon."

"Brought up by me in my truck."

"Look at the feathers!"

The roar died down. Hot eyed, the Basses stared at his honor. Likewise, so did the Chibbles. Silence settled over the courtroom. Ominously the two factions awaited a decision—in their favor. Grins appeared among the humorists; Wick Brown was the loser, no matter who won.

That Mr. Brown knew this was painfully apparent. He continued to shift his head from one group and its crate to the other. The judgment of Solomon, by comparison, was nothing. Solomon had neither note to meet nor unpaid money due.

"Well?" said the factions.

Wick Brown spread his lean hands on the desk. The silence deepened. And as it deepened there appeared in the doorway at the rear of the hall a little old woman in a sunbonnet, followed by a gawky youth of twelve. Slowly the little old woman entered, questioningly. She came up beside Wick Brown's desk.

"I'm Mrs. Pettigrew. I'm sorry to interrupt the court in what's probably a murder trial, but I couldn't get no information anywheres in town, everybody bein' to the trial, and so I came here. I'm looking for my pigeons. They got away from Joey Cupp yesterday afternoon, and when I got back from the junction, where I didn't have to go to the city after all, he and I started out looking for 'em, he havin' said that they'd come this way. Do any of you happen to know anything about 'em? There was twenty, all kind of dark blue."

The silence now pervading the room made the stillness that had gone before seem like the roaring of bulls.

The speaker took a step forward, looking about. "Why," she exclaimed, "there's their feathers in that box! And that other box, too!"

Silence no longer held. A cackling howl rose from those who had been content merely to be spectators, and who had not testified. The hammer of his honor rapped, just once, and a hush swooped down. The room leaned forward.

Up rose Wick Brown; a Wick Brown now ten feet high. Slowly he took in the Basses, took in the courtroom, took in the Chibbles. With a single motion he gestured the Bass trio and the Chibble trio to step in front of the desk. And fearfully they stepped.

Wick Brown ever so slightly inclined his head. He spoke. His words were few, but proved amply sufficient.

"This has been a pleasant day. So pleasant that some of us should feel like shaking hands. Mr. Bass, Mr. Chibble."

Mr. Bass continued red, Mr. Chibble white.

"Of course," said Wick Brown, "if you want to share the pleasures of the day with the outside world, as news——"

The large right hand of Mr. Bass and the small right one of Mr. Chibble started back, hitched forward, and met.

"And now, gentlemen, pigeons come high in this part of the State. Twenty-five dollars from each of you. And for every one of those who have so delightfully as attorneys and witnesses made this day pleasant, five dollars apiece. Jerry, pass around your hat."

The hat began its peregrination.

Up to one side of the desk edged Tom Bass and caught his honor's eye. "That

bill I overlooked will be ready for payment when you get back to the store," he confided.

From the other side Prent Chibble hitched forward. "No need worrying about that note. Let it run as long as you like."

The Noonan headgear returned heavy and shapeless with silver. Into Joey Cupp's cap went the metal stream.

Wick Brown bowed to an uncomprehending Mrs. Pettigrew. "As I've said before, pigeon pie is costly in this part of the world, ma'am. It's yours."

Mrs. Pettigrew, trying to say everything, said little or nothing. Joey Cupp supplied the deficiency.

"Gee," he announced, hefting the cap, "you could buy ostriches with this."

More stories by Mr. Josselyn in early issues.

THE DEAD ONES

DURING the autumn before Fred Landis, a brother of baseball's high commissioner, went out of politics and into literature, he and Albert J. Beveridge, then a United States senator, did some fine, high-and-moving, oratorical campaigning together.

Beveridge had the greater flow of eloquence of the two, but Landis was not far behind in that gift. In fact, he was so good at it that sometimes his own oratory picked him up and did what it would with him. He had a particularly impressive blast that he got off against the railroads, it being the proper thing in those days to berate them at all opportunities. A feature of this flight was his denunciation of what the railroads could do under the right of eminent domain. They could, he declared, run their tracks through farms, yards, graveyards, anywhere they chose.

Landis was spouting this one night in Michigan City. He put on all his steam, waved his hand on high, let out his voice another octave and exclaimed: "And, fellow citizens, they can, if they want to, run these tracks of theirs straight through cemeteries, that sacred ground, those last resting places of the sainted dead, where you, my countrymen, and your ancestors have been buried for the last fifty years!"

TRUE BUT UNEXPECTED

UNCLE CY BLANKENBAKER, the veteran voter, was commenting on political problems.

"Now that there is a law against buying votes," he said, "campaign expenses are bigger than ever."

ANOTHER PASSING OF THE HORSE

IN Potomac Park, with its miles of roads following the river, Washington has a superb driveway, one of the loveliest in the world. Late in the afternoon, winter and summer, the park is belted by a continuous chain of automobiles going at a high rate of speed and filled with diplomats, officials and society folk. Standing in one of the footpaths you get a kind of mesmeric effect from the ceaseless zip-zip of the motor cars flashing past.

Only one "horse carriage" appears in the parade, now that cars are "the thing." Every afternoon at five o'clock it enters the park, its handsome pair of bays going at a slashing trot under the tight reins held by the colored coachman who, with the colored footman, sits statuelike on the box. In the carriage are two old, old ladies with extraordinarily white faces under the black lace of their bonnets. They wear lavender; one has a great Persian cat in her lap; both have a way of looking over or seeing through people that your flapper will never learn. They never bow to anybody. Nobody seems to know who they are, except that they are the "last Washington people to keep a carriage and pair."

A few years ago they had company in Mr. Burleson, Mr. Wilson's postmaster general, and General Miles. But Miles is dead and Burleson no longer lives in Washington. Soon not a driving horse will be seen in Potomac Park.



The Strength of the Meek

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "Glorified Golf," "So This Is Paris," Etc.

Ottie Scandrel enters the business of health for wealth and runs into an epidemic of trouble.

ONCE upon a time, as they say when they're broadcasting the cute little bedtime stories via the radio, a big tramp called "Uncle Ottie" Scandrel, with more money than brains and more leisure time than a convict, bought a big, beautiful health farm called Five Acres, located in a place known as Wellington, New York. Now, Uncle Ottie, my dear girls and boys, thought he would pull a Muldoon, make the wealthy healthy and rent out rooms to any of the cast-iron leather pushers getting conditioned up for a mill. And so Uncle Ottie, who had more brass than a twelve-thousand-dollar motor boat, shot his roll to make Five Acres just the grandest place that ever was.

With an ex-welterweight known to the trade as "Tin Ear" O'Brien playing assistant manager, assistant trainer, assistant social secretary and with everything shaped up as nice as the "Follies," he flung open the front door to the public and sat down to wait for the flies to walk in and onto his parlor flypaper.

Put on your rubber ear muffs and listen to what happened.

From what I gathered, the former owners of Five Acres, after a tough scuffle with Kid Mortgage, had thrown in a towel and stepped aside to wait for the count. Scandrel misguided optimist and all-around numskull, had heard a whisper about the place somewhere and had called around to do the counting out himself—from a bank roll that would have caused consternation in any livery stable where there was an epidemic of choking. The deed was done and hidden away in a safe-deposit vault along with his diamond cuff buttons, his first false teeth and other valuables.

After that Ottie blew up to the Bronx to break the news. Twenty minutes after stopping in the gym he had made arrangements with Looie Pitz, a fight manager and antique enemy, to condition "Dangerous Dave" McFinn, one of Pitz's light-heavyweights, at Five Acres.

The agreement arrived at and Pitz smiling a way out, Scandrel threw some tobacco wrapped in paper in a mouth that was big though small, thrust out his chest, dragged down his cuffs and smirked at me.

"That's business, Joe. Right away the

customers. If I don't click off a fortune in my first twelve months in this back yard I'm willing to admit I've got a personality like a handful of stewed prunes. Let me shove you up there for a couple of weeks and I'll show you the way to handle an up-to-date health factory. You'll be surprised!"

"I've read of Wellington in histories," I said, "but never in geographies. Just about where is it hidden?"

Ottie admired the latest trick in light-blue shirts and collars in an opposite mirror and curled a lip.

"Don't you know nothing? I've got the best location in the world—if you don't count Cuba. Wellington is convenient to White Plains, Albany, Staten Island and Lake Erie. It might be farther away from Crimes Square and nearer than it is. But you can bet your sour life it's planted just right for *me*. It's on the main road and I'll have the dollar boys dropping in to get improved if I have to go out and trap them with nets. Wait and see."

Blithely pivoting the conversation around, he went on to tell me all about how quickly he expected to be entertaining the upper Fifth Avenue clique and a few other millionaires listed in both the telephone and the "Blue" books.

According to Scandrel the big grift came in the weekly rent handed over by those clients who were suffering from too much Wall Street, a deep friendship with bootleggers and an overabundance of Broadway. From the gab I gathered Ottie expected to rent his Indian clubs out at a dollar fifty a swing and the other instruments to increase the muscles and decrease the bank balance at rates that were equally as usurious. To diminish a long story, his patter was of such interest that when he turned the nose of his latest horseless carriage north the next day I was in the front seat beside him.

With only a mere half dozen warnings from traffic officials who failed to take to my boy friend's driving, we hit White Plains in the main boulevard, went this way, that way and forty minutes later were in that part of Westchester that was more country than the country itself.

There were hills and rills, high spots and low spots, farmhouses and charm houses on every hand and along every foot.

"This here Wellington trap is eight min-
6B—POP.

utes ahead," Ottie informed me at length. "Listen. It's apt to tear the shirt off your back with laughter but don't smile when we steam through. The jobbies who hang out there are terrible sensitive. Honest, the bunch of them are so narrow-minded that you could button their ears at the back of their necks. I gave the post office a snicker the first day I come up to look the property over, the sheriff heard about it and it cost me three dollars and a pint of Brooklyn rye to keep out of the box. That's the kind of a slab it is."

And it was.

Wellington, once we gassed in, proved to be rural to the extreme. It's principal thoroughfare had been left unpaved for the benefit of the six or eight chickens that escaped disaster by inches. There were two stores on one side of the way and one and a half on the other, to say nothing of a photodrama shop that advertised "The Four Horsemen of the Covered Wagon."

Groups of village loungers stood here and there and gaped as we went past. During the ordeal Ottie's face was as severe as a boarding-house gas bill.

"Get on to them yicks, Joe," he mumbled. "Look at that big clown who's resting his feet by the laundry and slant his clothes. For a fact, a fashion plate like him belongs in a dinner set. I'll bet he thinks musical comedy is something you spread on crackers!"

Accompanied by as many stares as the average immigrant gives Ellis Island, we shot up a hill, turned to the right and running under a big new sign that read "Five Acres," pulled up to the porch of a rambling, white colonial homestead that had enough pillars for a couple of dozen twin beds.

"This is it!" Ottie exclaimed with no small degree of pride. "And if it ain't the kitten's cookies then George Washington never buckled on a sword. Wait until I turn this car out to pasture and then I'll show you around the premises."

He had hardly finished speaking before Looie Pitz rode up on a bicycle, followed closely by Dangerous Dave McFinn, a big set-up in a white sweater who would have given any toad a run for first honors in a contest for frightful faces. Pitz steered the front wheel of the bicycle into Ottie's leg, fell off, picked himself up and arranged his cravat.

"Five miles up the dales and down the

hills. How are you feeling, kid? You seemed to be lagging on the last mile."

"What do you mean—lagging?" McFinn growled. "How could I go faster when I was running up on the back wheel of your bike? Hey, ride that and don't ride me. I guess I didn't have to come up here to learn how to move my feet. I'm a New York boy and——"

"Put a circuit breaker on that noise!" Pitz interrupted. "If conceit was consumption you'd be coughing your head off. I'm your manager—not no six-day bicycle rider. To-morrow you'll do your roadwork on the Tarrytown boulevard."

"Like fun!" McFinn snapped. "I seen a Sunbonnet Sue doing some garden exercises down the road a piece and she looked pretty nifty. I like this route fine. If you don't, I'll ride the wheel and you do the running!"

With that he tottered away, leaving Ottie to snicker.

"Quite the comedian, eh, Looie? Where are you going to spring that baby—at the Palace?"

Pitz looked at his watch and then asked me the time.

"The Palace me eye—he's got too many queens on his mind as it is. He thinks he has Al Jolson tied for the laughs but a couple of good slappings will change his tunes. Really, I think I'll be able to cash in on this party. He punches like a slot machine, packs a kick like a guy looking for a raise in wages, never whines about punishment and has a greyhound looking slow when it comes to speed. I've got him on the docket for a prelim at College Point on the nineteenth of the month with a run-around who signs himself 'Nitric Acid' O'Neal. I look for him to go far."

"He undoubtedly will," Scandrel barked. "About six feet—down to kiss the canvas. I may be wrong but he don't look to me as if he could alarm a clock. And I know for a fact that most of those big gimicks haven't hardly any appetite for the ring refreshments."

"How do you mean—ring refreshments?"

"Punch!" Ottie grinned. "Come on, bring your shoes inside, Joe, and I'll show you around."

"You won't see much, O'Grady," Pitz cut in. "The only health you'll get up here will come from not being able to overeat!"

Ottie's gym in the rear of the place was quite a landmark with its brand-new second-

hand fixtures that ran from rings and swings to rowing, chest and weighing machines. I was presented to Master Tin Ear O'Brien, who held the portfolio of all-around assistant and to six or eight hard eggs who handled the rub-down end of it on a weekly salary that consisted of board and whatever pockets they could pick. O'Brien was a tall Scandinavian with one of those pans that made the visitor wonder how any one could be so ugly and still exist. He had formerly been in the belt business but had retired when some customer of his own weight had accidentally dropped a couple of gloves on the end of his chin.

After we watched Dangerous Dave McFinn cool out we gave the orchard a glance, counted the apples and took a look at the barns and outbuildings before returning to the main pavilion again.

We reached it as Tin Ear O'Brien shuffled out and spoke to Scandrel.

"Listen, boss. I disremembered to tell you, but between nine o'clock this morning they was a party looking for you on the telephone. I—now—the name sort of skips my mind, but he says for me to tell you that he's riding up here at five this afternoon. So you had better stick around."

"It's a good thing ankles don't unhook," Ottie snarled. "If they did you'd never be able to take a walk. How many times have I told you to write down the names of all the people who buzz me on the chicory? Honest, you'd make a false tooth ache. Get alone with yourself somewhere and think up the name before I slap the taste out of your mouth!"

Brain strain on O'Brien's part was unnecessary for at five o'clock promptly fifteen thousand dollars' worth of motor car rushed up to the front porch, a chauffeur and a footman in livery had a fist fight to see who would open the door first and out of the big truck alighted a stout gentleman who resembled money from the top of his high silk hat to the tips of his low, patent-leather scows.

He carried weight for age, a complexion that would have stopped a train and a walking stick with a platinum knob.

"I presume," he puffed, once he had dropped anchor in the front parlor, "I am expected."

Ottie dusted off a chair, passed a box of Corona—Long Island—cigars and snapped a speck of dust from his sleeve.

"Er—now—my secretary is a little deaf. We're having his ears repaired next week. He didn't get your name off the wire this morning."

"I'm Channing Lamont," the other explained, taking the hint. "I want to speak with you on a confidential matter," he added with a look in my direction.

"Talk freely," Oattie invited. "This here is Joe O'Grady, a pal of mine. Joe wouldn't think no more of opening his mouth to pass a sardine in the middle of the Atlantic with my bare hands. From looking at you," he rushed on, "I won't make no positive guarantee, but if I won't boil off ten or fifteen pounds of that excess baggage you're carrying around——"

"One minute!" Lamont interrupted in a voice that matched his complexion. "You're evidently laboring under a false impression. I didn't come up here to reduce my *avoir-du-pois*, young man!"

"Ha-ha!" Scandrel guffawed. "Pardon my social error, er—what *did* you come up for?"

Lamont helped himself from his cigar case but neglected to pass it around.

"I'll explain as briefly as possible. First of all, have you ever heard of Tarkington van Riker?"

I had the bulge on Oattie there.

Any one whose literary education had not been neglected when it came to the daily newspapers had heard of Tarkington van Riker. The young man mentioned had been a sensation in Wall Street where, as a bucket-shop plunger, he had made and lost fortunes with the nonchalant ease of a colored hall boy matching pennies with the janitor. From what I remembered reading, Van Riker had been a clerk in a Stock Exchange house and had started his career by a three-dollar stock purchase that hadn't stopped growing until his winnings ran to the four-figure mark and the bottom had fallen out of the market.

Being busted meant as much to Tarkington van Riker as a run in a silk stocking to the wife of a hosiery manufacturer. After his first financial flop he sold a couple of dress suits and with the proceeds went back to take another tumble out of the ticker. From then on it was a case of him having it or not having it. A scenic railway was straight compared with Van Riker's ups and downs.

Channing Lamont acquainted Scandrel with these facts.

"Yeah? So this Van Riker's in Wall Street, is he? What do you want me to do—buy some of his stocks?"

Lamont glared.

"This Van Riker buccaneer is in love with my daughter Alice. Do you get that?—he's in love with my daughter Alice!"

"Well, what does that make *me*?" Oattie snickered.

"And my daughter Alice," Lamont roared, "is in love with him!"

Scandrel looked at me and winked.

"I hear them tell how these things do happen now and then. What else?"

Lamont jammed his cigar back in his face.

"From information my daughter Alice dropped the other night at dinner I have learned that Van Riker is coming up here next week. After his last fiasco in the Street, his physician has advised a complete rest and change."

"He'll get the change all right if he comes across with it!"

"My daughter Alice," Lamont went on, "is also coming up here next week, ostensibly to visit her aunt who has a bungalow over at Rosewood. Do you grasp the plot?"

"Certainly. What do you think I am—thick? Er—I get it all. You want me to see that your daughter Alice and the Van Riker party don't lose no time in getting together for a fling at this pastime known as matrimony. Am I right or wrong?"

Channing Lamont climbed out of his chair. He threw the cigar away, bit the end from a fresh one and broke that in half.

"That's the very thing I don't want you to do! My daughter might be a silly, irresponsible girl but I don't intend to stand back and let her marry a common gambler like this Van Riker. I want you to do everything in your power to head them off. I want you to keep tabs on Van Riker and make certain that while he's here he isn't with her. I don't want him to see her. Nip this romance in the bud, keep them apart and I'll be willing to double the amount Van Riker pays you for the period of his rest cure!"

Oattie rubbed his hands like a secondhand clothes dealer at the sight of a bargain in a fur-lined coat.

"Fair enough! I'll step on love's young scheme like a grape! Just leave this to me, Mr.—now—Lamont. Knocking the man

out of romance is my salad suit—the clothes I wear for the mayonnaise. I'll fix this bim so he'll look at matrimony the same as double pneumonia; I will for a positive fact!"

With his color close to normal again, Lamont collected cane and tipper.

"Then I'll rely on you. Before I go, tell me this. Is there anything else you would like to know?"

"Yes—your weight!" Scandrel yelped. "Listen. For two hundred and fifty cash I'll take the sill off that bay window you're carrying around. I'll iron out a couple of those unnecessary chins and I'll have you romping around like a two year old crying to go."

Before Channing Lamont was allowed to get away he had promised to come up in the late summer for a couple of weeks!

"It's a gift," I said when we were alone. "Anybody else would have been pinched for slander—making remarks like that."

Ottie chuckled.

"Give me credit, Joe. If I could make a date with the King of Italy, it's dollar bills to doughnuts, I could talk him out of his crown!"

A day or two later Tarkington van Riker wrote for reservations for himself and valet. Ottie dashed off an answer that Tin Ear O'Brien beat out on the typewriter, hurled it into an envelope and, stepping on the gas, rushed down to Wellington's ludicrous post office where business was falling off on account of the price of stamps. The missive registered, we took a new road and started back to Five Acres. Halfway between the village and the farm we were given a dash of comic opera.

Turning from one road into another the motor shied at the sight of a girl in a sunbonnet who, with a hoe in one graceful hand, was busy in a garden that appeared to grow everything with the possible exception of bananas. One look was enough for Scandrel who immediately threw on all of the four-wheel brakes that were working and nudged me.

"One of the cabbage queens, Joe. Ain't that sunbonnet becoming? I'll park here until she turns around if it takes from now until Sunday-night supper. I want to see what kind of a face she's wearing with that handsome blond hair of hers."

"You're a nut for the years!" I snapped. "This girl is probably the same one McFinn was speaking about the other day. Drive

on and don't annoy her. Vegetables are high priced enough as it is."

"Get out and walk if you don't want to sit here and wait! What wren ever got annoyed by any one *looking* at her? I like her sunbonnet and I like her sunburn. I like——"

The girl turned and Ottie stopped speaking as quickly as if some one had stolen his watch.

There was a reason, for if either of us expected to see a great big blond mamma who was a panic in the line of looks, neither of us was doomed to disappointment.

The Maude Muller on the other side of the garden fence was comely, blue-eyed, crimson-lipped and the owner of a complexion that she might have picked from one of the peach trees in the rear of the place. And to make the bargain fair all around she had a smile that made the celebrated sunshine look like an inch of blown-out candle.

She was beauty plus!

"We—I beg your pardon," Ottie mumbled. "Er—have you got a match to spare?"

Mistress Looker rested dimpled arms on the fence and smiled over it.

"No, I'm sorry but I haven't. I left my cigarettes, holder and match box up at the house. Tell me—how does my garden look from your side of the road?"

Ottie buttoned his jacket, grinning like a foundling at the sight of a nursery full of toys.

"Baby, I'll tell the neighbors you certainly grow a delightful lettuce. We all eat vegetables, so we ought to get acquainted. The names over here are Scandrel and O'Grady. Stay just where you are for a minute and give us the low-down on the beans and parsley."

She did.

Still featuring the delightful smile she informed us that her name was Amabel Biggs, that she was interesting nineteen, ran down to Manhattan every so often, hadn't missed the Ziegfeld "Follies" since she had quit the little red school on the hill for good, and only lived at Wellington because New York was so full of hicks.

Scandrel took all of this with the greatest of interest and immediately gave her a helping of his own autobiography. Any one listening in on the conversation would have gone away with the idea that he was as well known as Forty-second Street, as popular

as light wines and beer, as free with his money as Monte Carlo and a bigger sport than either baseball or horse racing.

"Now that we're all friends," he wound up, "be through with the dishes at eight o'clock punctual. I'm coming to take you buggy riding if you can stand this bus."

Miss Biggs registered enthusiasm.

"Won't that be fun! I'd love to go. And that reminds me. Who's that big boy in the white sweater I see passing along here every day?"

Ottie looked at me.

"Grab that one while it's hot, Joe. Who's the big boy in the white sweater? Listen, Delicious," he said to the girl, "that party is only a goofy box fighter who'll be on crutches any time after the nineteenth. He's so rough that he uses a rake as a side comb and he's got a personality as thrilling as a hangnail. Not only that but he's so mean that his knees are the only thing that give. Dismiss the idea instantly."

"I was just wondering," the girl giggled. "For the last few days he's been chasing a man on a bicycle and he hasn't caught him yet."

Equal that!

A week later Tarkington van Riker, with valet, motor and more luggage than a musical show, reached the Scandrel layout and caused some eye widening.

The Captain Kidd of Wall Street turned out to be everything we hadn't expected him to be. Van Riker was short, plump and smug—a quiet, taciturn individual with a round, moon face, a habit of coughing and a pair of feet that could have been used for transporting freight if they had been floated.

"I am Tarkington van Riker," he said the minute he alighted, waving a hand at a young man who began throwing valises out of the car. "And this is Jepson, my faithful valet."

"One of the Westchester valleys, hey?" Ottie snickered. "Break out all the luggage, Jep, and get it up to Suite 13. Make it fast!"

"Yes, sir. Directly, sir," the valet answered, picking up four bags and turning so we had a look at him.

Sweet lavender!

Jepson, in his way, was as good looking as the fair Miss Biggs of the cabbage patch. He was young, he was well built, he looked like the best part of Park Avenue and he

had a face that any movie director would have been glad to put on the screen.

In fact he was so handsome that Scandrel stared with open mouth until he and the luggage had vanished together.

"What male chorus did *he* use to work in, Van?"

The terror of the Stock Exchange coughed and turned his eyes from the doorway.

"Oh, Jepson, you mean? Yes, he was formerly a haberdashery salesman on Fifth Avenue. I rather liked his looks and so I took him on. He's very meek and he's proved very satisfactory. If you'll pardon me I'll go upstairs and see if he's getting things to rights."

A half hour after that I wandered into the gym and found the loungers talking Van Riker and valet over.

"Lovely roses!" Dangerous Dave McFinn was sneering. "The ticker tramp looks half-way human but his man servant girl is twice as sweet as candy. When I seen him I couldn't figure out if I ought to slap him on the wrist or the jaw. He's one of them sweet young things that always makes it a case of hate at first sight. I only wish he would touch *my* necktie. I'd knock him so hard that he'd wake up with a French accent!"

"Yes, you would," Tin Ear O'Brien cut in quickly. "Lay a finger on any of the boss' boarders and we'll ship you out to College Point in pine. Leave me hear you open that thing you call a mouth and I'll break you in half!"

"Like heck you will!" McFinn shrieked. "You couldn't punch the icing off a layer cake! Come on—make good!"

Without waiting for a second invitation O'Brien shot over a couple of fast ones which the other blocked. What bore all the earmarks of exciting fisticuffs was ended by the appearance of Looie Pitz who, taking a couple of stray punches in the ear, got in between them.

"You witless half-wit, you!" Pitz screamed at his protégé. "Is this where you leave your fight with O'Neal—after me spending my money and losing fourteen pounds riding the bicycle? I ought to have left you stoking the boiler in that apartment house——"

"Speak to *him!*" McFinn mumbled, giving O'Brien a look as sharp as cutlery. "Sure, he should give me a black eye! What do *you* care? You ain't got a date with a

gal that you just met yesterday for the first time——”

“*What girl?*”

The light-heavyweight reached in a pocket, took out a carrot, gazed at it fondly and sighed.

“A sweet little skirt by the name of Biggs. But don’t be asking no more personal questions. I’m going down the road a piece now to see her. Try to stop me and you’ll find my contract upstairs under the mattress!”

Pitz was diplomatic if nothing else. Putting everything he had into a smile he patted the big boy on the shoulder.

“That’s all right, kid. If there’s anything I like to see it’s a boy and a gal going down the fork of the road to spoon. But keep your hat on in the sun.”

“What do you think I am—refined like that Jepson joke—taking my lid off the minute a dame comes along?” was McFinn’s retort. “So long—I’ll be back for dinner.”

“You tell ’em, you will!” Tin Ear O’Brien murmured in a voice that sounded like bottles breaking.

Starting the next day, Tarkington van Riker became Scandrel’s willing victim. Oattie put him over the jumps in the Steeplechase for Health and though the wizard of Wall Street grumbled frequently, he fell off the pad at six o’clock for the mile sprint that was his eye opener, did his gym work and all the rest of it as faithfully as could be expected with Scandrel never letting him out of his sight.

If the patient, perspiring Van Riker led a strenuous existence, the meek, mild and handsome Jepson enjoyed the popular life of Riley. The good-looking valet never arose before ten o’clock, took breakfast, wandered away and didn’t show up again until dinner time. Like his master, Jepson said little and if the pointed remarks of Dangerous Dave McFinn and the gym rubbers were overheard by the beautiful youth they were disregarded entirely.

When it came to quiet, the faithful Jepson had a henpecked husband looking like a victrola playing jazz with the doors wide open.

“So good, so far,” Oattie said at breakfast a week later. “I had Channing Lamont on the long distance last night and I gave him the dirt. When I told him that Van hasn’t been three feet away from me and the farm, Lamont was as tickled as if I had used a

feather. Believe me, I’ll get an attractive dime for this trouble.”

Before I could answer Tin Ear O’Brien shuffled in.

“Hey, listen, boss. Didn’t you not tell me that if any frail come around here asking for Mr. van Riker I should give you a tip off?”

“I said those very words. What about it?”

“She’s outside now!” the ex-welterweight hollered.

Scandrel pushed aside a couple of eggs that were so fresh they were impertinent and pulled on his coat.

“Come on, Joe. You beat it back to the gym,” he instructed O’Brien. “You might scare the chicken, Radio.”

“What’s the idea of calling me Radio?”

“Because you’re such a loud speaker!” Oattie yelled. “Take the air!”

When we reached the front porch it was to find a snappy little roadster drawn up at the front doorstep. In it was seated a girl with dark-brown hair, soulful eyes, but an expression that seemed to suggest the fact that while she was long on looks she was short on brains. She wore some wise scenery that had probably been snatched out of the latest fashion periodicals, a hat with a feather in it, and was listening intently to something Dangerous Dave McFinn, who stood with one foot on the running board, was saying.

One look was enough to ignite Oattie.

“You’ve got a nerve!” he bawled at Pitz’s marvel. “Who told you to dock here and get friendly? And ain’t you got manners enough to remove your hat when you’re talking to a lady? Take it off! Put it on! Beat it before I break your back!”

McFinn mumbled something and slouched away. Oattie buttoned his coat and toyed with an introduction. The girl, a dangerous worker with the eyes, gave him a lovely smile.

“I’m Alice Lamont. I wonder if I can see Tarkie van Riker for a minute or two. I’ve got something I want to ask him.”

Oattie sighed and shook his head.

“Not a chance in the world, Cutey. It’s against the rules. I couldn’t let you in if you were Cleopatra willing to give me a piece of the Nile for the favor. That’s that!”

Miss Lamont pouted demurely.

“I didn’t think such a nice-looking man

could be so mean. Please let me speak with Tarkie. If you don't, I'll—I'll cry!"

Scandrel looked at me.

"Listen, Bright Eyes, don't be like that. Er—give me the message and I'll see that Van Riker gets it as fast as special delivery."

The young lady drew a breath.

"This is the way it is. The ladies of the Wellington Knitting Guild are giving a fair and bazaar next Monday night at the Town Hall. I came over to ask Tarkie if he wouldn't loan us Jepson, his valet, to help with the decorations. That Mr. McFinn I was talking with has volunteered to come over and help and——"

"Don't say another word!" Ottie barked. "Jep is yours if I have to take him out in the back yard and beat him like an Oriental rug. I'll get him right away."

He disappeared, leaving the girl to look me over. She had just finished when Scandrel returned, followed meekly by the quiet Jepson.

"Here he is, Cunning. Use him all you want but be sure and give him his lunch. And Looie Pitz says he'll let McFinn crash in around two bells to lend a hand. Er—if I ain't got a date to-night I might run in and take a look around. I used to be in the decorating business myself."

"Really! Houses?" Miss Lamont lisped.

"No—faces! Get in, Stupid!" Scandrel hissed at Jepson. "So long, honey. Don't be sore because I wouldn't let you go inside. Remember—people who live in paper houses shouldn't throw scissors!"

The snappy little roadster purred away.

"I thought you were friendly with the blond Miss Biggs?" I said. "You're as fickle as a bigamist."

Ottie curled a lip.

"Yeah? That's what you think. Can't I be polite without cracking a proposal? Picture me moving furniture around for a fair when I can take a walk with Amabel and not lift a finger. Beauty is beauty but hard work is labor. Anyhow, that doll seemed sort of dumb to me and look at blondie. She swings a fascinating hoe and already she tells me I'm a stylish dresser. I'll bet regular money she hasn't told McFinn and Jepson *that* yet."

I stuck out an ear.

"Who?"

"Yes, McFinn has been buzzing around and she's been out with Jep a few times but

that worries me like a burning barrel in a vacant lot does a fireman. How can either of them figure when they've got competition like *me*? And that reminds me, Joe. You stick around and watch Van this afternoon while I go up and see Amabel. She's promised me a couple of cabbages and some celery. That's the kind of a rib to be friendly with, eh?"

Dangerous Dave McFinn, as more time elapsed, eased off on the heavy work. Outside of his morning gambol along the highways, and little light gym duties, he spent most of his time up at the cabbage patch. McFinn looked fit and ready for the College Point glove bouncing and Pitz, who had worked over him like a sweatshop operator on a pair of serge trousers, was as pleased with his results as a girl using a lip stick for the first time. The light-heavy continued to sneer at both the perfect Jepson and Tin Ear O'Brien, but hostilities were quickly suppressed by Scandrel or Pitz himself. Even the taciturn Van Riker took a hand when Ottie's assistant and the big bruiser almost came to blows on one occasion over a pair of Indian clubs.

In such fashion Monday approached with the fair and bazaar at the Town Hall and Wednesday with the battle on the boards in that dear East River resort.

At seven o'clock Monday morning, Ottie rushed off in the car with Van Riker galloping along at the rear axle. They had hardly disappeared before Pitz, game but melancholy, threw a leg over his favorite bicycle for the last stretch of road work his meal ticket was scheduled to rip off before leaving Tuesday morning.

"This bicycle riding has knocked me for a twist," Looie moaned. "Between the wheel and the kid chasing around with the blondes and brunettes I'm on the verge of a breakdown. All set, Dave? Come on—pursue me!"

McFinn opened his sweater.

"Hey, Looie," Tin Ear O'Brien yelled when both were ready to breeze. "Why don't you turn the wheel in and buy a motor cycle?"

"Who asked you to speak, Foolish?" McFinn growled. "Don't be putting ideas like that in my manager's head. I've a good mind to chuck a stone at you for butting in. All right, boss. Move the pedals!"

"I'll get that gil yet!" O'Brien fumed when we were alone. "Ottie says I'll lose

the portfolio of assistant manager if I start anything, but I'll get him if I have to poison his oatmeal and use an iron bar!"

That was a vow.

There was no sign of Ottie until early in the afternoon when he locked Tarkie van Riker in his room and came down on the porch to give me a nudge and one of the handbills advertising the fair at the Town Hall the same night.

"Read this, Joe. Quite the event, what? Er—I've been trying to get Amabel on the telephone and invite her to blow down there with me to-night but so far the wire hasn't answered and she's not around the garden. I'd like to lay bets that she and Jep have gone over to Tarrytown in a hired hack. Honest, for a valet that boy spends money like an intoxicated spendthrift. I don't know what wages Van pays him, but they're a mistake, no matter how much."

At four o'clock Ottie phoned the Biggs household again. There was no answer. At five he did the same thing over again with the same results. The big beautiful blonde was not home at six and the wire didn't respond at half past six, seven o'clock or twenty minutes after seven. When there was still nothing stirring at eight Scandrel, with three nails left on his right hand, was willing to acknowledge defeat.

"Mebbe the hack broke down somewhere, Joe. But that's neither here nor there. I'll give this Jepson a fast line when I see him. It's better to have loved and lost than to have gotten a broken nose. Come on, let's me and you run down to the Town Hall ourselves and look these knitting freaks over. Er—if you'll wait a minute I'll slip upstairs and slip on my cocktail suit. I might not be the best-known person there but I'll be the best dressed, I really will!"

When we reached the scene of carnival it was to find the entire population of Wellington present. The Town Hall was lighted up like a frost-bitten beak. There were at least twenty flivvers parked at the curb. We purchased a pair of admission tickets from a cross-eyed young man in a hard-boiled shirt and a cutaway coat.

"One dollar ninety each," he informed us when my boy friend laid down a quarter.

"So you know we're from New York?" Ottie hissed. "What do you mean—one dollar and ninety cents?"

"The ninety cents is the war tax, mister."

This statement made Scandrel sneer.

"War tax, is it? You silly mock turtle, haven't you heard the war is over? Step out here a minute and let me tell you a secret."

The ticket seller came out of his booth, licking his lips.

"Yes, mister. What kind of a secret?"

"This!" Ottie bellowed, planting a right uppercut directly on the unfortunate pasteboard passer's chin. "The next time you want to have some more fun make an appointment with me by mail."

We went up a flight of stairs and into the hall. There, the first thing we saw was the youth and beauty of Wellington tripping around from booth to booth, dressed like a burlesque show. We hardly had an eyeful before a stout lady in pink satin rushed up to the startled Ottie and pinned a lily on his lapel.

"Isn't that just adorable?" she gushed. "Two dollars please."

She snatched a bank note from him, rushed away and was replaced by one of the village belles who carried a notebook and a pencil.

"Handsome stranger," this girl lisped, "I just know you're going to take a chance on a diamond ring to help the benefit. You are, aren't you?"

Ottie gave me a helpless look.

"I'll need a benefit myself after this. Two fish for a pansy that don't smell so good as it is. A diamond ring, you say? *That's* different. I'll take all the chances you've got left. Who can tell? I might get engaged any time—to a blonde."

"A short wife and a merry one!" the pride of Main Street cooed, taking another chunk out of Scandrel's bank roll.

From then until the time we reached the rear of the layout Ottie impersonated a sailor with a shore leave and a pocketful of rupees. He took chances on a half dozen pairs of knitted wristlets, a cream separator, an incubator, a red-flannel shirt and a pair of rubber boots. He put a dent in four different layer cakes at seventy-five cents a cut and tanked up on lemonade at a dime a sip. Further disaster was only prevented when we encountered Looie Pitz outside of a fortune teller's tent, sobbing in his handkerchief.

"Sav you!" Ottie barked. "What's the matter—did somebody crook your bicycle?"

"You boys here?" Pitz moaned. "I just got an awful pushing around from a dame to a dunce cap. Her name is Lady Mys-

teria and she told my fortune three ways. She give me terrible news. She says I'm in for a big disappointment, that everything I counted on is going to flop and that I should beware of a dark woman. I suppose that means the colored girl who called for the laundry yesterday. What'll I do?"

"Did she read your palm?" I inquired.

Pitz put his handkerchief away.

"I never thought of that. I'll go back and get her to look at it. Maybe I've got some good news on my hands after all!"

He vanished into the tent like a sheik while Oattie and I did a turn into the refreshment section. Here was a soda-water fountain with the customers hanging on three deep, looking for the cracked ice and automatically feeling for the brass rail with their brogans. The first thing we saw after the fizz counter was Miss Lamont making merry over a nut sundae with Master McFinn, who wore a suit that looked as if it had been cut from a livery-stable blanket.

We had hardly lamped the two before we saw Tin Ear O'Brien and the rub-down crew singing their college songs and lifting steins of root beer at a table in a corner. After that the next thing on the ledger was Oattie's heel on my instep.

"Here they come now, Joe! Watch me dish this Jepson baby like Eytalian spaghetti. He's got more crust than pie—keeping my sweetie out as late as this!"

I looked in the same direction he was staring and perceived the charming Miss Amabel Biggs hanging on the arm of the quiet Jepson, whose smile was that of a puss after a supper of catnip. With hardly a glance in any direction they took the next table to the one held down by a person we recognized immediately as being no less than Tarkington van Riker himself. Miss Biggs slid into a chair but as luck would have it Jepson failed to make the hook above him for his hat and the dicer, slipping out of his hand, hit the wall, bounced off and landed accurately on the head of Dangerous Dave McFinn.

Like lightning McFinn sprang out of his chair, tore the brim from the hat and threw it in the astonished face of the valet.

"You big mockie!" he roared. "You did that on purpose! You can't insult me when I'm with a lady! I never did like you and now I hate you! Put up your dukes. I'm going to give you the cuffing of a lifetime!"

Before any one, Scandrel least of all,

could interfere, Tin Ear O'Brien, tearing himself away from his merry comrades, reached Jepson's side in one spring and two bounds.

"Sit down, you big stiff!" the ex-welterweight snarled. "When you talk of battling with this boy you're talking about a fight with *me!* I've got a little hate myself on board! Get back there to your table or I'll knock you cold!"

Wham!

Snapping over a beautiful right hook that would have surely meant curtains if it had landed, McFinn threw himself at O'Brien and quicker than instantly an interesting exhibition of the manly art was in progress.

Screams of alarm mingled with confused cries and a few feminine shrieks, as the two went at it hammer and tongs.

"As the shoemaker said when the boat was sinking—every man to the pumps!" Scandrel bellowed. "Pardon me a minute, Joe. I think I'm needed elsewhere!"

Hurling a dozen or more spectators roughly aside he reached the scene of conflict, tore off his coat and sprang into the heart of it. There were too many people in the way for me to get a robin's-eye view of exactly what transpired. When I got to the front of the crowd it was to find McFinn, Scandrel and Tin Ear O'Brien in a tangle on the floor—one or two of them completely out!

The light-heavyweight, in a sudden silence so profound that the fall of an acorn would have deafened a squirrel, staggered to his feet and reeled over to Jepson, who had been an interested bystander.

"You goofy cake eater!" McFinn mumbled. "I'm going to get you after all!"

The quiet valet removed both hands from his pockets and smiled.

"After," he corrected amiably, "I get you first!"

Allowing a left-handed sock to glide harmlessly past his handsome head, the young man stepped forward and swung himself—with both hands. The duet of punches might have been helped along by luck and accident combined but both landed and both registered. Without bothering to say good-by to any one present Dangerous Dave McFinn did a somersault over a chair and crumpled up under a table!

"My word!" I heard Tarkington van Riker gasp.

The next climax in the festival of fight

and fright was the appearance of the stout Mr. Channing Lamont who took the center of the stage at the same minute that Scandrel used his feet to stand on again. Lamont swept the place with his glance and looked at Ottie, his face two shades redder than scarlet.

"So this is the manner in which you told me I could rely on you!" Lamont thundered. "You scoundrel, my sister in Rosewood wrote me to say my daughter Alice has been seeing Van Riker every day! Is this the way——"

"The summer weather has affected your intelligence!" Ottie croaked. "He ain't been out of my sight for two minutes in two weeks. Look at him over there. Does he look as though he's been carrying on the love affairs?"

Lamont wheeled around and glared in the direction Ottie indicated. Then his mouth opened slightly and his eyes widened.

"You imbecile, that isn't Van Riker—that's Jepson, his valet!"

At this the young man who had knocked McFinn for a goal took off the brass knuckles he had been wearing, dropped them carelessly back in his pocket, and laughed.

"Perhaps I had better explain," he said to Lamont and Scandrel jointly. "When I told Alice I intended to come up here she told me about the characters in a magazine story she had been reading. It sounded good. So I decided that I'd be Jepson, the valet, and that Jepson would be Tarkington van Riker temporarily. Get the point? The idea worked splendidly but it had one flaw in it. That is, Alice and I discovered we did not care for each other as much as we had imagined and so you haven't any cause for further worry, Mr. Lamont. Eh—as

a matter of fact a Miss Biggs and myself ran over to Tarrytown this afternoon and were married there."

He turned to the blushing Amabel as Alice Lamont giggled.

"And oh, dad," she cooed, using her soulful eyes, "I know you are going to be frightfully angry with me but I suppose I might as well tell you now and have it over with. I'm engaged, too. It was simply a case of love at first sight with us both. You always objected to handsome men but now you won't have any cause for complaint. He's so sweet but so homely and——"

"Stop right there!" Channing Lamont roared. "Who is this man? *Where* is he?"

The brown-haired Alice nodded at the motionless figure of Dangerous Dave McFinn.

"Over there—under that table, dad!" she giggled again. "No, I'm not a bit worried either. He's the strongest thing. And he told me a knock-out is part of his business!"

Smile that one away!

Fifteen minutes more or less later, as Scandrel and myself passed the tent of the fortune teller in the main room, Looie Pitz, wearing an expression like that of a bride-to-be on her wedding morn, came out, rubbing his hands.

"You boys back again?" he chuckled. "Say, listen. I just now got my palm read and the news couldn't be better. Lady Mystery tells me that I'm going to get the surprise of my life right away. And that ain't all. Guess what else she said?"

"What else did she say?" Ottie mumbled.

Pitz pulled down his cuffs.

"That somebody is going to steal my bicycle! Ain't it true—it never rains but it gets wet!"

What's your wave length?

Another Montanye story in an early issue.



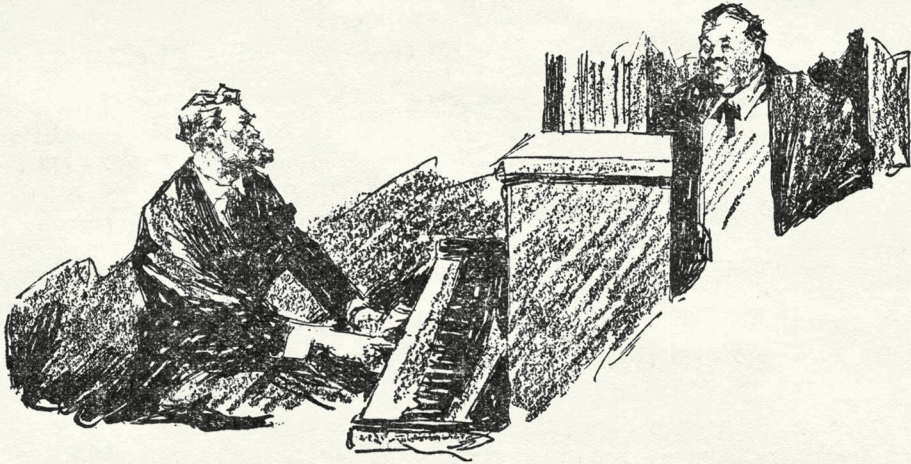
WORTH CONSIDERING

WHEN Weber and Fields had their famous reconciliation after their long and equally famous break-up of partnership, they decided to employ for their show all the members of their old company that they could find. When they were all lined up, one of the chorus girls struck Joe Weber as being much older than any of their former singers could possibly be.

"Say," he asked William Raymond Sill, the man who had got the assemblage together, "does that one belong here? Was she in our old company?"

"No, she wasn't," Sill said. "A newspaper man asked me to give her a trial."

"What newspaper man?" asked Weber. "Horace Greeley?"



Dragour, the Drugmaster

By Bertram Atkey

Author of "The Entry of Dragour," "The Man With the Yellow Eyes," Etc.

II.—THE BARFORD HEIRLOOMS.

The invincible partners—Dass, the mountainous craven, and Chayne, the diminutive lion—investigate further the hideous doings of Dragour, that implacable master of villainy.

LITTLE Mr. Salaman Chayne gently put the goldfinch which, perched on his right forefinger, had been pecking busily at a small spray of groundsel proffered by his left hand, upon the edge of a near-by nesting box, and with the air of one who has made a sudden decision turned and left the "bird room" into which he and his partner, Kotman Dass, had transformed the top floor of their joint residence, No. 10 Green Square.

It was the morning after the wasplike Salaman quite unexpectedly had found himself a witness of the suicide of Sir James Argrath. The tragic death of the ruined financier had provided dramatic corroboration of the truth of the statements, evolved from certain obscure but effective processes of thought, by that remarkable man and, as he himself had put it, "notable coward," Mr. Kotman Dass.

This mountainous person, whose physical shortcomings, due to an astounding excess of avoirdupois, were, in a sense, more than counterbalanced by an amazing brain which,

though working obscurely, never seemed to work wrongly or to fail to solve any puzzle upon which it fixed itself, had been requested by his fierce though diminutive partner to consider one or two small points which Salaman had observed in the relations between his cousin Sir James Argrath and his beautiful wife, Creuse Argrath.

This Kotman Dass had done—arriving along his customary tortuous, darkly intricate and wholly unorthodox channels of thought, at the conclusion that Lady Argrath was a drug addict securing her supplies of what probably was some strange, possibly new, drug from a person who controlled and operated a huge organization for its illegal supply and distribution. In return the woman, her affection for her husband killed, her moral fiber sapped, had disclosed certain secrets of her husband, a financier, to the drugmaster.

All of which Salaman Chayne, a man of no marked intellect but extraordinary courage, at first had received with angry derision, contempt and menace—even going so

far as to threaten physical retribution for the slander of Lady Argrath upon the courageless and shrinking Mr. Dass—as a tiny hawk may menace a large and flustered barnyard hen.

But within twenty-four hours events had more than justified Kotman Dass. Sir James Argrath had shot himself, in the presence of his beautiful, soulless wife, of Salaman Chayne—and of one Mr. Gregory Kiss, a private detective, who, working silently on a drug case, had also come upon the trail of the secret drugmaster. And, more than that, Salaman had learned the name and seen the face of the secret pest of whose existence the elephantine Dass had spoken. He was called Dragour—by his slaves and victims—and he had snatched Lady Argrath into obscurity from under the very eyes of Salaman and the silent Mr. Kiss.

Both had disappeared.

Kotman Dass had been wholly right.

From the well-hidden flat in the London theater district, in which the tragedy had occurred, Salaman Chayne, once a devoted admirer of Lady Argrath, fiercely swearing to devote himself to the capture and destruction of that very real enemy of mankind, Dragour, had gone straight back to Green Square to fetch his partner Dass. But that one had gone to bed and, behind a locked door, refused to be awakened.

Now Salaman, fresh from feeding his birds, found him, while awaiting breakfast, lost in contemplation of a perfectly appalling chess problem in which white was inevitably to checkmate black with a knight and a rook in eighteen, or some equally complicated number of moves.

"You were right about that drug dealer Dragour, Dass," he said abruptly, without preliminaries. "Argrath was ruined—he's shot himself—and his wife has disappeared with Dragour. I want you to come to the flat where it happened and take a look round. That weird brain of yours may notice something that will help me find Dragour. The brute held me up—me—with a pistol, Dass."

The colossal, dark-skinned man sitting enormously in a big chair by the window, continued to pore over the chessboard.

"Oah, yess, yess," he said vaguely. It was palpable that he had not heard a word.

The fiery Mr. Chayne stiffened, and his narrow, sharp-pointed, corn-colored hair and beard seemed to bristle.

"Damn you, Dass, do you mean to insult me?" he demanded, his voice booming. "Put away those toys and wake up before I kick them into the Square!"

Kotman Dass started violently—a weakness to which, like many seriously absent-minded men, he was prone.

"Oah, ten thousand apologies, my dear fellow, Mister Chayne," he said, intensely agitated, and, in his agitation, markedly using the queer, clipped pronunciation which, like his dark skin, more than hinted at a long line of native Indian ancestry. Mr. Dass called himself an Anglo-Indian but, pressed, would concede that he was Eurasian, and, threatened, would paint his ancestors at least as black as they probably were.

Salaman repeated his news—and instantly Kotman Dass was in a flurry of panic-stricken protest.

"Oah, noa—certainlee I can by no means screw myself to point of visiting room of tragedy. I am verree sorree, dear Mister Chayne, but personal investigation of scene of suicide is out of question for me. I should be so verree afraid that I should be off no service. My brain would refuse stubbornlee to function—owing to intense agitation of nerve centers—which are at all times intenselee responsive and highlee sensitive to immediate outside influence. Thatt is reason why at all times I am so verree disgusting coward—thee sensitive nerve centers, oah, yess. I beg off you—excuse me, if you please, my dear mister."

Salaman stared, his hot yellowish-gray eyes glittering.

"Pah!" he said explosively. "You sicken me, Dass. You nauseate me. Suppose everybody shirked everything on account of 'sensitive nerve centers.' Why, damn you, I shall be there to hold your hand!"

"Noa, noa—if you please, excuse disgusting white-livered cowardice by me. I will verree gladlee consider thee matter here in my chair and evolve theories off possible value. Thee spirit is verree willing onlee flesh is deplorablee weak."

The huge flabby body was quaking.

"Veree sensitive nerves—most highlee strung, yess," mumbled Mr. Dass, looking as if he were on the verge of tears.

Salaman Chayne, grinning with sheer rage and mystification—for he was wholly incapable of understanding his vast partner's shortcomings—restrained himself with an

effort. He made an attempt to meet Kotman Dass halfway.

"Now look here, you spineless mass," he said truculently, "will you come as far as the door of the flat and look in—through the chink if you like—*bah!*—and give me what information you can glean from that? I'll give you my word that I will not use force to make you enter the room."

"Oah, if you please, noa—I am greatlee preferring not—"

The fiery Salaman ground his teeth.

"Now look here, Dass," he shouted. "Understand me, once and for all. This man, this monster, Dragour, is an enemy to mankind and he is going to be scotched—like an adder. And I am going to scotch him—and you are going to help me. I intend to go ahead regardless of anything—I shall brush aside any opposition. I want to warn you—to warn you just as seriously as I can that if you decline to come along to this flat—as far as the open door only, I promise that—and give me the benefit of your freak brainwork, I will go straight up to the bird room and wring the neck of your talking starling like a dog's."

It was the most dreadful threat Salaman Chayne could think of and one which he was wholly incapable of carrying out, as Kotman Dass would have realized at once had he been less perturbed. For, like his quaking partner, Mr. Chayne was a bird man, and was as passionately fond of the host of little feathered folk inhabiting the bird room upstairs as Dass. It was, indeed, the hobby for birds which had brought them together in the first place, though it was the successful application of their combined talents to the task of making a sufficient income which kept them together.

Kotman Dass succumbed instantly to his dreadful threat to murder the starling he had so patiently and wonderfully taught to talk. He agreed to go to the flat, as their man Hollerton brought in breakfast.

"Very good, Dass," said Salaman. "You're doing a sound thing—sound and citizenlike."

Kotman Dass shook his mighty head sorrowfully.

"It will react seriouslee upon my general health and I shall suffer agonies. I shall be bilious again," he stated gloomily. "I am always soa after occasions when my nerve centers have been too greatly vibrated by outside influences. I shall eat hearty

breakfast for purpose of supporting my physical strength."

"Yes, do," said Salaman satirically. "But try to keep your meal within reasonable, human bounds—a thing you rarely do—or you certainly will be bilious. In fact, I wonder you aren't always bilious."

Kotman Dass paused in the middle of taking a truly prodigious supply of kidneys and bacon.

"If it were not for my superb digestion," he said with a nervous chuckle, "my life would be profound burden, yess, indeed."

Breakfast seemed to have restored his equanimity a good deal—but the restoration was wholly temporary and by the time he had been towed to the door of the flat in which Sir James Argrath had shot himself the big man was in a lamentable state of nerves.

There was no difficulty about entering the flat. Salaman had kept a key found on the mantelpiece overnight. The body had been removed, and as there was ample evidence that it was a plain case of suicide no detectives were there. No doubt the silent Mr. Gregory Kiss had seen to all that when he telephoned for and remained to receive the police overnight.

The place was well, comfortably and normally furnished and the nervousness of Mr. Dass seemed to subside a little as he stood at the door of the sitting room while Salaman Chayne settled down to search the flat.

But twenty minutes' patient searching revealed nothing, and Salaman grew irritable. The glances he threw continually across to the ponderous figure blocking the doorway momentarily grew more savage and contemptuous.

Kotman Dass, however, appeared unconscious of these. His dark eyes had grown dreamy and abstracted, seeming to follow the movements of Salaman almost unconsciously. Not till the little man, having exhausted the possibilities of the ornaments and most of the furniture, scowlingly began to pull up the carpet, presumably with a view to examining the floor, did Kotman Dass speak.

"If you please, my dear mister, what is it you wish to find?" he asked mildly.

"Find, you fool? Find?" snarled Salaman. "Birds' nests! Lost golf balls! Why, what do you think I'm looking for? This was Dragour's flat—probably a ren-

devious for him and dozens of his clients or victims. I'm looking for papers—drugs—anything of that kind."

Kotman Dass nodded.

"Please excuse me then if I point out to you that you have exhausted most of the possibilities for hiding places of this room—except for floor, which Dragour would not use because of slow and cumbersome business of lifting carpets and soa forth."

"Oh, he wouldn't use the floor to hide things under, wouldn't he? Well, what else would he use?" jeered Salaman.

"It seems to my mind thatt he would desire hiding places thatt are veree easilee accessible and can be used quicklee and neatlee," said Kotman Dass mildly.

"Well, come in and show me some, damn you."

"Oah, noa, please excuse," ejaculated Dass, his eyes wide on an ominous stain on the carpet.

"But to save time and to accelerate departure from this spot please play me little melody upon piano—just a little scale would suffice perhaps."

Salaman stared at him, hesitated on the brink of an angry outburst, then thought better of it and went over to a handsome upright piano and, raising the lid, ran a finger tip up the line of ivory keys.

"There's your miserable melody," he said dryly.

Kotman Dass smiled nervously.

"Oah, yess, veree miserable," he agreed. "Thee piano is seriously out of tune—no tuner has been allowed to work att thatt piano for considerable period of time. Yet it is good, valuable piano."

His eyes brightened.

"I venture to advance proposal, Mister Chayne, thatt you take out one of thee keys for me to examine."

Salaman did so, without comment.

For a moment Kotman Dass turned the beautifully fashioned bit of ivory about in his podgy fingers, then pressed his thumb, with a pushing movement, against the bottom of the apparently solid oblong at the end of the key. The base slid back, revealing a neat oblong cavity about an inch and a half long and an inch wide.

Inside the cavity lay a small bottle full of tiny white tablets.

"*Hah!*" went Salaman, his eye running greedily over the line of keys.

"And now, iff you please, I will go home,"

said Kotman Dass simply. "I am not feeling well in my liver and there is stain on thee carpet thatt makes my nerves jump, and moreover I have just solved chess problem in my mind."

"Oh, all right, clear off," snapped Salaman ungraciously, shut the door, and turned to ransack the piano keys.

II.

Perhaps half an hour later Mr. Salaman Chayne, his usually scrupulously flat and neat pockets bulging a little, stepped jauntily into the big, sunny apartment, half library, half smoking room which he and Kotman Dass used mostly.

"Those piano keys were full of things," he said. "Drugs, mainly, but other things as well. Among 'em, these. It required six keys to hold them."

He poured on to the table before the abstracted eyes of his partner a handful of pinkly flashing rubies—huge things, much too huge to be devoid of flaws. But the flaws which would have prejudiced a dealer in jewels solely as jewels against them, mattered little for, as Salaman Chayne proceeded to point out, the value of the gems lay more in the exquisite and microscopic carving into which their surfaces had been wrought.

"D'ye know what you're looking at, Dass?"

That remarkable coward nodded.

"Oah, yess, dear mister. These are thee famous Barford Heirlooms, rubies which were said to have been stolen from thee Lord Barford few weeks ago. Thatt was occasion upon which thee jockey Ferank Sover was arrested and charged with theft of these gems."

Salaman Chayne nodded.

"Yes, Dass. If I had half your memory, Dass, and you had a quarter of my courage we should be an astonishing pair. Let me see—what happened? Sover, the jockey, was discharged, wasn't he?"

Kotman Dass nodded, keeping his finger tip carefully marking his place on a pageful of nightmareish algebraical symbols, hooks, Xs, Zs, zigzags, jazz twists, small circles, decimal dots, lines, curves and minute figures which he appeared to have been reading with keen delight.

"Oah, yess, jockey was discharged by magisterates for reasons of lack of evidence and excellent, first-class testimony to the

man's high character furnished by Countess of Barford," said Kotman. "Thee lady stated that she had found him person of high character. But police stated that he was waster, no good, a jollie bad hat. Veree humorous difference of opinion, you see!"

"He was Lady Barford's jockey, retained by her to ride the race horses she had in training, wasn't he?"

"Oah, yess. There was a report in scandalmongering paper that lady in question was in love with thee man Sover."

"True, d'you think, Dass?"

"There was no real data upon which to base conclusion. Probablee it was untrue, though the man Ferank Sover was undoubtedlee handsome blackguard."

"H'm, yes—so he was. Promising horseman once, too," mused Mr. Chayne. "But he went to the bad altogether. Drinks like the intake end of a fire hose, I've heard."

Salaman reflected.

"But if Frank Sover did not steal the rubies somebody did, or how has Dragour got hold of them?"

Kotman Dass smiled.

"It was not proved that Sover did not steal thee jewels—it was only proved that there was no evidence to show that he did steal articles in question. Veree different matter, you see, do you not, dear Mister Chayne?"

"Humph! So you think he did steal 'em?"

Kotman Dass yawned a little and glanced at his book. Clearly he was getting bored with this elementary stuff.

"Oah, I am of opinion that Countess of Barford gave jewels to Sover to take to Dragour in return for drug or for other reason—blackmail perhaps—I do not know."

He turned a ruby over between his huge fingers.

"Thee carving is rare old Chinese work but thee stones are veree abominably full of flaws, though carving is exquisite. They are not veree valuable except to collector of antiques and soa forth. Dragour evidently has weakness for collecting rare specimen objects."

"How d'you know that, man?"

Kotman Dass indicated the miscellany of small objects mixed up with the bottles on the table by the rubies.

"Many off those things—cameos, seals, tiny ivories, scarabs and soa forth are of interest to collectors onlee. Some are good."

Salaman Chayne stared at his partner with unwilling admiration in his hot eyes.

"Oh, are they? You've got a rare gift of quick observation, Dass. I hadn't noticed that these were specially rare things, but if you say so it's true, no doubt. You haven't got the pluck of a dead fowl, but I'll not deny that your brains are fair—very fair. I'll ask you to stretch 'em another trifle, in fact. How will this help me get on the track of Dragour?"

Without an instant's pause the mountainous Mr. Dass replied:

"Oah, see the Lady Barford, get Sover's address from her if possible, tell Sover you have proof of his passing rubies to Dragour, exhibit rubies to him, and make ugly threats till he betrays Dragour—if he can. Veree simple matter. Please excuse further just at present, dear Mister Chayne—my mind is occupied with little mathematical problem in this small work."

And so saying Kotman relapsed ponderously into his book.

For a moment his partner surveyed him as he hunched, shapeless and huge over the "small work," then muttering something to the effect that "if he had the pluck of a severed earthworm he would be a man in a million—but as it was he wasn't," Salaman gathered together his spoil from the flat and left him to his little problem.

III.

Fortune favors even the precipitate at times and it favored Mr. Salaman Chayne to-day.

At the steps of the Barford town house he met a lean little man, who would have been handsome had his face not been so deplorably engraved with the hall marks of unrestrained excess. This one was coming away scowling and angry, evidently having received the worst of a verbal conflict with a flushed butler who, from the door, was watching him go down the steps.

It was the ex-jockey Sover.

Salaman, who had often seen him riding in his palmy days, recognized him at once, and promptly stopped him.

"Just a moment, Sover, my man. I want a word with you," he said peremptorily.

"Oh, you do—and who the devil might you be?" responded the man aggressively.

Salaman, instant, even anxious, as usual, to discover offense, thrust his fierce face close to that of Mr. Sover.

"I am Salaman Chayne—remember that. And I allow no man to be insolent with me. Remember that, also, Sover. I am engaged at present in aiding the law to run down an employer of yours—a man called Dragour."

The flush on the jockey's thin face died down suddenly, and his eyes grew hard and watchful.

"Dragour!" repeated Mr. Chayne softly, his eyes fast on his man. "Between whom and the Countess of Barford you acted as go-between—jackal—in the matter of the Barford carved rubies."

"Forget it, Solomon," said Sover jauntily. "It's old stuff, all that. I've been arrested on that charge once—and proved innocent—and the case was dismissed."

He laughed—but his eyes were searching the hawky face of Mr. Chayne, and his laugh was uneasy.

"Yes, I know, my man. There was no evidence. But I have all the evidence I need—and the rubies—which I am now on my way to return to Lord Barford. I advise you to come with me—and to be very careful to behave yourself—or I'll have you in a cell within ten minutes."

He rapped out his threat with the clean-cut and forceful explicitness of a deadly quick firer.

"I deny everything," said Sover uneasily. "And even if that was true, everything I've ever done was done by the direct orders of Lady Barford."

"You'll have a chance of explaining that to Lord Barford in a moment. I haven't an atom of doubt that you've just been repulsed at the door in an attempt to blackmail Lady Barford."

The jockey started, his eyes narrowing.

"You're going to see Lord Barford?"

"I am—now. And you are coming with me."

"Oh, am I?"

"If I have to kick you up those steps to get you there," said Salaman grimly.

The jockey stared at him. Small though he, too, was, yet he topped Salaman by some inches and he was not unversed in violence. But, nevertheless he found something in the air of little Mr. Chayne which strangely daunted him. The little man looked all steel wire and whipcord, and there was an odd yearning look in his hot, yellowish-gray eyes that was unmistakable. Sover, conscious that he was far from being in condition to withstand the "pressure" which the

grim little hawk clearly intended to exert on him, if necessary, capitulated swiftly.

He shrugged.

"You think you're doing a clever thing by running to Lord Barford with your cock-and-bull story—but you'll only manage to ruin Lady Barford and do yourself no good," he said with an air of warning. "Why can't you let sleeping dogs lie? They're 'some' dogs, I'll tell you! Wake 'em and you'll be sick and sorry before you're a week older"—his voice fell to a flat whisper—"if you live that long."

Salaman laughed acidly.

"A man like you advising a man like *me* what to do about sleeping dogs!" he said. "Why, it's like a situation in a bad farce. Come along."

Reluctantly Sover accompanied Salaman to the door.

The butler, eying Sover, was inclined to make difficulties—the Earl of Barford was on the point of leaving England with the countess, he explained loftily, and could see nobody.

"You are playing with fire, my man," said Salaman acidly. "And for every second you keep me waiting you place your situation in more serious jeopardy. Now, that's enough—go to Lord Barford at once and inform him that Mr. Salaman Chayne is desirous of restoring to him the Barford carved rubies which were lost recently."

The butler gaped, wide-eyed, then showed them into the hall, left them to a footman from whom he had evidently taken over the matter of dealing with Sover, and hurried up the broad flight of stairs.

He was back almost at once, his manner extremely deferential—to Salaman.

He showed them into a charming little room, wholly feminine in its mode of decoration, on the first floor.

"Will you wait here, if you please. Her ladyship will see you at once."

A door at the other side of the room opened as he spoke and a woman entered—a slim, tall, fair woman, extraordinarily graceful, with deep, dark-blue eyes and a mass of pale-gold, gleaming hair. But her perfect lips were not red with the redness of natural health and the dark shadows about her eyes were not normal. She was very pale. Her glance darted from Salaman Chayne to Sover the jockey.

She looked at Salaman's card.

"I understand that you have something

to say to me about—the—Barford rubies, Mr. Chayne?" she said, a curious reserve in her manner and voice.

Salaman smiled and bowed.

"Permit me to remind you of the old adage that deeds speak louder than words, Lady Barford," he said rather floridly—he was always prone to be florid with ladies—and poured the handful of rubies on a table close by, with a gesture.

"The rubies! You really have recovered them! I did not believe——" she gasped. "But—where did you get them? From whom? In what way did you—secure them? I don't understand."

There was no sign of relief or pleasure in her manner. Rather, she seemed afraid, startled, uneasy and tremendously surprised. She must have sensed that Salaman was noting this, for she looked at him steadily.

"This is so very unexpected," she said with a pale smile. "I congratulate you," she added. Sover, she ignored wholly.

Then the door opened quickly and a tall, bronzed, youthful-looking man came impulsively in.

"Enid, we shall——" he said as he came, but broke off sharply as he saw Salaman and the jockey. It was Lord Barford.

"Oh, I'm sorry—am I intruding? I——" His blue eyes caught sight of the rubies on the table and he stopped short, his mouth open.

"Why—the rubies!"

There was very real relief in his pleasant voice, for the stones were heirlooms and, though he owned them, yet serious legal difficulties were liable to arise should they ever pass permanently out of his possession.

"This will save an enormous amount of bother," he went on gayly.

His wife nodded, almost reluctantly, it seemed.

"We have to thank this gentleman, Mr. Salaman Chayne, for restoring them," she said.

Lord Barford turned at once to Salaman, smiling and offering his hand.

"Then let me make haste to do so. You have extricated me from a tiresome difficulty, Mr. Chayne, and I am tremendously grateful."

Salaman waved a jaunty hand.

"It happened to crop up, Lord Barford—on my way," he said. "It was quite simple."

Lord Barford smiled—he was quite young and looked like a man who would be far

more at home on a polo pony or a hunter than anywhere else.

Then he looked at Sover and his face hardened.

"Had you anything to do with the recovery of the stones, Sover?"

"Oh, no—on the contrary," said Salaman.

"Ah! 'On the contrary,' you say, Mr. Chayne? Then you *were* guilty after all, were you, Sover?"

The jockey's jaw thrust forward.

"What d'yah mean, 'guilty?' I was discharged, wasn't I?" he said impudently. "I'll say this while I'm at it. This man dragged me in here with threats—I believe he's armed or I'd have changed his tactics for him. I know nothing about the rubies."

His eyes were fixed on Lady Barford.

"At least, nothing I'll say—unless I'm forced. But I want to warn you, Lord Barford, that I shall be easily forced. I haven't been treated so well by you and Lady Barford that it would give me any heartache or lose me any money if I told the truth about them—and I'm pretty sure that if you guessed the truth you'd be nearer going on your knees to keep me quiet than ringing for your servants to throw me out—as you seem to be intending to do!"

His eyes were on Lady Barford throughout, in a stare of undisguised menace. Both Barford and Salaman saw that—and they saw, too, the deadly pallor which had crept to her face, the strange fear which dilated her eyes.

Salaman spoke, his beard bristling, his eyes and voice aggressive.

"Permit me to advise you both," he said. "Lady Barford, there are things which sooner or later will have to be told to your husband. Wouldn't you sooner tell him yourself than allow this creature to tell him? He's no longer fit to ride for his living and he intends to try blackmail instead. And you, Lord Barford, wouldn't you prefer to have a—difficult story—an account of a trouble which will call for your sympathy and forgiveness—from your wife's lips rather than from this man's?"

His tone became urgent, his deep voice began to boom, and curiously he seemed to dominate in that room.

"Be advised, both of you—why, you're only a pair of children anyway—but you love each other, I see that. Lady Barford, be courageous, take your husband into the

next room and tell him everything. *I will take care of this scoundrel until you both decide what shall be done with him.*"

Husband and wife looked at each other. Both were white now.

"Enid—is there really anything to tell?" asked Barford.

She stared at him, her eyes haunted.

"Oh, Geoff—Geoff—there is so much to tell you that I—I am afraid," she said.

Her eyes were ringed with black circles and she began to tremble.

"You—you will be astonished—disgusted—no, no, I—there is nothing to tell—nothing—"

She broke off hopelessly, swaying.

Her husband, puzzled, went to her, slipping his arm about her.

"Why, darling, what is it all about?" he said tenderly. "If there's anything—some absurd slander—"

Salaman turned on Sover.

"Get outside and wait for me there," he snarled softly, and Sover made haste to obey.

The little man locked the door behind him and turned to the Barfords. The woman, close in her husband's arms, was weeping terribly.

Over the fair, gleaming head, Barford looked with mute mystified appeal at Salaman—who spoke earnestly.

"I am old enough to be the father of either of you two," he said. "There's something to tell you that Lady Barford shrinks from. So *I* will do it. After all, it's not so deadly. She has been sinned against more than she has sinned. A victim—one of many. What she fears to tell you is this—that she has become a victim to the drug habit—"

"Drugs! *You*, Enid!" Barford was appalled.

"Wait a minute, will you!" rapped Salaman.

"She is only one of many victims to the scoundrel who specializes in entrapping women into the habit—as fowlers entrap linnets. I am seeking him now. Listen carefully. He has a special drug which victims cannot easily obtain except through him—or his agents, for he rarely appears himself. After a period he deprives them of supplies and they become desperate, as drug takers do under deprivation. Then this scoundrel—this pest—the Drugmaster—Dragour, he is called—makes his bargain, always

through agents. In the case of Lady Barford, Sover, her jockey, was the agent. He offered to renew her supply of the drug in return for the heirloom rubies. Lady Barford gave Sover the rubies to hand to Dragour. And, remember this—cling to this, Lord Barford—the price was light, a bagatelle compared with the price this reptile has forced from some poor souls. It happened that he has a weakness for collecting old, rare things—such things as these carved jewels—and, for his first demand, these satisfied him. It might have been worse—I tell you, it might have been a thousand times worse! You've heard of the Argrath suicide. That was Dragour's work. He ensnared Lady Argrath, and through her ruined her husband. Never mind that now. That's all your wife has to confess—and what you ought to thank God for is this that it's not come too late. You've got back the heirlooms—though they don't matter much—and you're going to get back your wife! I can see how much that matters. She takes this drug, yes—but, compared with many she's hardly more than a novice at the habit. Be glad of that, Barford, for it affects your whole life. Take her away and protect her. More than that—make sure of her. Get the best medical advice you can and act on it—for whatever it is, it's a deadly drug that Dragour uses and it grips body and soul—body and soul. You'll have to fight for her—she'll have to fight for herself—but you'll win, if you like."

He stopped.

Lord Barford, his face white and troubled, spoke to the weeping woman.

"Is that true, Enid? All true?" he asked pitifully.

She seemed to nod, sobbing.

His voice dropped to little more than a whisper.

"Oh, my dear, why didn't you come to me and tell me—old Geoff? Haven't we always been pals? It—it just breaks my heart to think that you were afraid to tell me—me—about the miserable rubies. Never mind, never mind all that now. Mr. Chayne's right. We'll do just as he advises. Fight it out together—go round the world, fighting it all the way. Drugs! You won't be a slave to any damned drugs if we're always together, my dear. I'll fight it for you—keep you happy and laughing—laughing, girl—like it used to be. You'll see—oh, you'll see. Look up, now, darling—

don't cry any more. It's going to be all right!"

She raised her head, and her face, wet with tears, was close to his.

"Oh, Geoff, I am so sorry—so sorry and ashamed and humble. If you will help me—I have been mad, I think. It was so insidious. It began when I was so interested in the two year olds at Newmarket. You remember how I used to go out early to watch them? I used to have headaches and one day Sover offered me a headache cure—and somehow, without thinking, I got to rely upon it. Oh, if only you will help me to make things as they used to be, Geoff!"

"Yes—I know, I understand. It's all right now, dear," he murmured, soothing her, comforting her. "It might have happened to anybody."

Salaman, smiling benign approval, went quietly out to deal with Sover.

But that one was no longer there.

To Salaman's furious inquiry the butler, hovering uneasily about the hall, replied that Sover had left ten minutes before, picking up a taxicab immediately outside the door.

"I had received no instructions to detain the man, sir," said the butler.

Salaman conceded that it was his own fault, and stood for a moment pondering whether he should return to the Barfords or not. He decided that he would not. It was so much more dramatic that way—just to drop into their lives, do them an immense service, and disappear. Yes, it would be very dramatic—and like many physically small men, Salaman Chayne had a great weakness for dramatic effects.

And, in any case, he could always see the Barfords later. Just at present it was Dragour who demanded all his attention. So he reasoned.

But, as he walked jauntily homeward he was forced to confess that the affair had brought him no nearer to grips with the drugmaster. True, he had snatched a victim and certain spoil from the powerful and elusive scoundrel but he had not advanced more than a very little upon the trail which he was following and intended still to follow with such grim tenacity.

"But I shall come up with him in the long run—if it takes me half my lifetime," muttered Salaman, reaching for his cigar case. "For Sover should be easily enough located again. And sooner or later, if watched, he

will let fall a clew, a thread that will lead to Dragour."

But there Salaman miscalculated—and realized as much when he saw that evening's paper.

It was Kotman Dass who handed it to him, pointing out some flaring headlines:

JOCKEY MURDERED.

FRANK SOVER SHOT IN WEST-END FLAT.

SCENE OF SIR JAMES ARGRATH'S MYSTERIOUS SUICIDE.

Salaman read through the account. There was little information beyond the bare facts.

Early that afternoon one, Mr. Gregory Kiss, a private detective investigating the suicide of Sir James Argrath, had visited the flat in which the suicide had taken place. He found the hall door open and, as no answer to his repeated rings was forthcoming, he had entered, discovering the body of the jockey Sover stretched on the floor of the chief room. He was quite dead—the doctor whom Mr. Kiss had called at once stating emphatically that he had been shot through the heart from behind. A curious feature of the crime was that the dead man's fingers were closed tightly on an ivory piano key which he evidently had taken from the piano in the room. The rest of the report was conjecture and a brief account of Sover's life career as a jockey.

"Well, what do you make of that, Dass? Who killed the man?" asked Mr. Chayne.

Kotman Dass blinked dully at his partner over a bookful of hieroglyphic symbols.

"Itt is peretty obvious that thee man Sover was shot by Dragour or one of his creatures," he mumbled absently, as their man brought in a note for Salaman.

"Why?" demanded the little man.

"Highlee probablee because Dragour suspected him of treacheree—or anticipated that he would turn traitor; maybe also that he had discovered in some way secret of piano keys—foo late; maybe he knew too much—thatt can be dangerous fault in people who work for men such as Dragour."

"But that's only guesswork, Dass," objected Salaman, opening his note and beginning to read.

The elephantine Mr. Dass shook his head.

"Oah, noa—there are six good reasons why——"

"One's enough—and here it is!" said Salaman sharply, and read his note aloud—thus:

"MR. SALAMAN CHAYNE.

"Sover became the subject of newspaper headlines because he made a nuisance of himself and because he knew too much. Take care that you do not make the same mistake. You are beginning to invite the closer attention of
"DRAGOUR."

Kotman Dass looked startled.

"Veree dangerous villain, thatt man," he ejaculated. Then, as his singular brain worked on, despite his shock, he added:

Another story of this series will appear in the next issue.

"There are curious revelations in thatt letter."

"What revelations?" demanded Salaman.

"It shows that Sover is not at all first person killed by Dragour or his men and also that Dragour does not know yet that you are person who ransacked his piano-key hiding places. But you must be careful, dear Mister Chayne—you are in grave danger."

"So is Dragour," jarred Salaman.

Kotman Dass studied the angry eyes of the little man.

"Oah, yess, obviuslee thatt is so!" he murmured hastily and returned to his book.



THE "SUCKER" LIST

THE United States government has discovered that there are so many "suckers" in this country determined to be robbed that it is warning everybody to refrain from being listed as a "sucker." Lists of suckers are sold for large sums of money in Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. They are purchased by men and firms who intend to do a little discreet pillaging by mail. The names listed are those of men and women who, by buying stock in fake corporations or by answering the "feelers" mailed out by crooked engineers of "ways to get rich quick," have proved that they can be separated from their savings.

A short while ago government attorneys were investigating five hundred cases based on complaints against individuals and firms using the mails to defraud. According to the charges of the victimized "suckers," these five hundred cases represented a loss of more than \$140,000,000 by the credulous public.

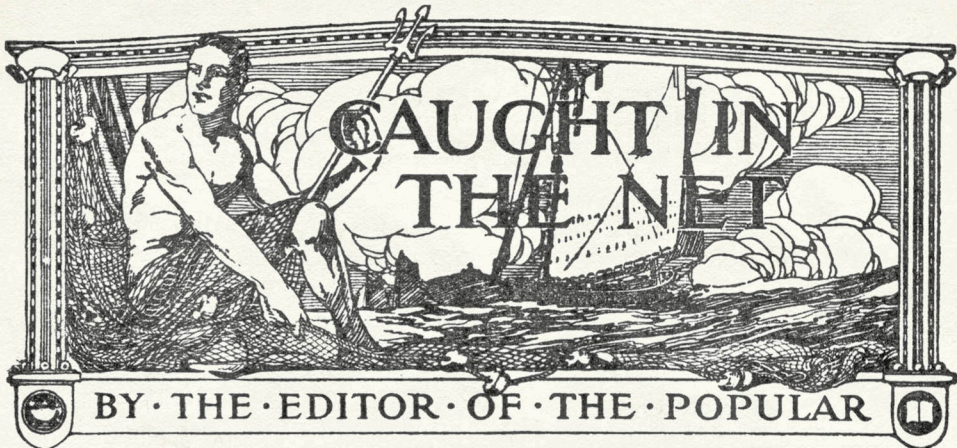
When government pursuit of a crooked firm gets too hot it sells its list of "suckers" to some other set of burglars-by-mail. If you don't want your name peddled around as an easy mark, don't mail an answer to the next letter you get promising to make you rich in six months. That is, don't do it before getting your banker's opinion of the "prospectus."



SPEAKING OF MARRIAGE

MARRIAGE seems to be becoming less popular in the United States than it was a few years ago. A smaller proportion of our people are taking the plunge and a larger proportion of those who have taken it are wishing that they hadn't. At least that is the story told by the marriage-and-divorce survey made by the census bureau. In 1922 there were 1,033 marriages to every 100,000 of population; in 1916 there were 1,055—a decrease of 2.09 per cent. In 1922 there were 136 divorces per 100,000 of population; in 1916 there were 112—an increase of 21.4 per cent. In 1922 there was one divorce to every 7.6 marriages; in 1916 one divorce to every 9.3 marriages. In 1922 Maryland had the highest marriage rate and North Dakota the lowest; Nevada the highest divorce rate and—with the exception of South Carolina—the District of Columbia the lowest.

South Carolina is the only State whose laws will not permit divorce on any grounds. Apparently the South Carolinians regard marriage as a real sporting proposition—a fight to a finish with a decision by the referee barred.



PUTTING IT OVER

HAVE you ever wondered why it is so easy for some men to command respectful attention while other men, who look just as good on the outside, cannot contrive to get a receptive audience from their best friends? Has it ever happened to you to make a proposal that was turned down before you had completed sketching in its outlines, only to see another man come along, make essentially the same proposal in the same quarter, and achieve instant indorsement of his idea? Have you been amazed at the ease with which this man "put it over," and righteously indignant at the favoritism of Fortune in his case?

It is true that there are men who have only to speak to "put it over;" and there are other men who talk themselves into apoplectic fits and never find a sympathetic listener. There seems to be a mystery about this. But there really isn't. A great deal of hokum has been circulated about supersalesmen who hypnotize their prospects by the magic of their tongues and the witchery of their presence. The secret of the man who puts things over does not lie in the buoyancy of his manner or the style of his oratory as a rule. It lies in the past, in his life record. It is called "prestige." The man who puts it over without an effort is not a sorcerer, or a favorite of Lady Luck. He is simply a fellow who, in the beginning, got a chance to do some little thing and did it surprisingly well. Then he did some other trifling job—and did that just a bit better than it had been done before. And little by little, day by day, month by month, and year by year, he went from each job to the next higher one, accomplishing successive tasks not merely acceptably but unusually well. So that, as the years passed, he built up a reputation for dependability plus. At the outset his ideas had no greater market value than any man's ideas. But there came a time when men began to say of him, "He makes good." And from that time on all ears were open to his proposals. He had a reputation that challenged consideration. He could put anything over, not because he was an orator, but because he had put over nearly everything he ever attempted and men had confidence in his ability to repeat.

"Putting it over" is not a knack, or a gift. It is simply the effect of a reputation for success. It is a faculty that grows out of hard work and hard thought, translated into terms of achievement.

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

WHAT'S the big idea?"

Whenever a man or a number of men meet with disaster in an attempt to accomplish some startling physical feat or to demonstrate some revolutionary process of thought, there is certain to sound from the shadows of the peanut gallery that familiar query, couched in a thin, querulous tone. History contains no evidence of the assertion, but from our knowledge of the nature of

humankind we dare declare with certainty that it sounded when the first antediluvian man demonstrated that it was easier to kill your enemy by hurling a stone than by tearing him limb from limb with teeth and hands. It echoed through the Roman Empire when the early Christians were being fed to the imperial managery for the sake of a conviction. It shrilled in Spain and Italy when Columbus maintained the possibility of reaching the East by sailing to the west. Benjamin Franklin, experimenting with the lightning, was an object of derision in certain quarters.

In our day we have the man who deplores every achievement of science. The automobile is held up to scorn; the airplane; radio communication. There seems to be a more or less invariable proportion of humanity which prefers the static state to the evolutionary. Just now certain of our neighbors are viewing the round-the-world flight of the army aviators with cynic eye. "What's the big idea?" they ask.

What then, is the big idea? Why do anything that has not been done before? What a man doesn't know doesn't hurt him. Our ancestors, who knew nothing of mechanical transportation, electric communication, and scientific hygiene and pathology, probably were as happy as we are. They did not miss these things. Why worry ourselves, then, with progress? All this complexity is disturbing. Why not let well enough alone and keep our airplanes safe in their hangars?

Because we are men. We are insatiably curious, insatiably ambitious. We are born with a mysterious, unreasoning urge to understand everything and conquer everything. We cannot help ourselves. A few of us—fortunately only a few—are static and satisfied. The rest of us want to go ahead, even at peril of peace and our very lives. Evolution is the "big idea." Never mind where the road leads. Let's follow it and see. Let's see what the aerial circuit of the earth will lead us to!

Have you ever thought that animals do not wonder where the road leads? They stay where food and safety are—and remain animals!

SUPERSTITIONS

HAVE you got a fetish, a charm to invoke success? Do you have a bad day if you happen to forget a "lucky piece" when you change from one vest to another? Are you like one man we knew who couldn't work in the same room with a red-headed stenographer? Or another whose peace of mind was ruined if he happened to step on a crack in the pavement when he walked to business?

Probably you have no weaknesses as pronounced as those we have indicated. Probably you pride yourself on your freedom from superstition. But if you think hard you will find, the chances are, that there is some psychic flaw in your common-sense policy of dealing with the day. It may be that the hammering of a typewriter annoys you and slows you up. Or you may not be able to do your best work when somebody is talking in the next office. Or you may not feel quite yourself unless you have time to smoke your own particular brand of cigar after lunch.

"But such things as that have nothing to do with superstition," you will protest.

They have, though. If you will analyze the matter, you will see that the man who cannot be comfortable at work without his lucky piece and the man who is distracted by near-by conversation are very much akin in their weaknesses. For it all comes down to a matter of concentration. The man who has lost his fetish and makes mistakes in his work, and the man who has missed his cigar and gets his dates mixed are really in the same boat. Neither the fetish nor the cigar have anything to do with their confusion directly. Their real trouble is that they are worrying, the one about his fetish, the other about his cigar, or the talk in the next room, and neither can give his whole mind to what he is about.

Practically all of us are superstitious in this sense. We have one, or several, minor weaknesses that get us into difficulties. It is really almost as absurd to be put out by the clatter of a typewriter as to be distracted by the loss of a lucky piece. Little annoyances play too great a part in the lives of most of us. They should be of no more importance than foolish superstitions. The man who does good work

consistently is the man who has learned not to let the irrelevancies of circumstances and imagination get between him and his job.

THE REAL VETERAN

SOME people insist that the war veteran must of necessity emerge from the clutches of Mars a transformed being. Books have even been written to prove this hypothesis. In fact, all of the books about the returned warrior have taken that stand. Perhaps some sane and sensible person has written a book about John Smith who went to war and returned and remained just the same old John Smith. But the book has not been published.

The literary conception of the returned warrior is of a man who faces life disillusioned, dissatisfied, wrapped in a cloak of his own rarefied atmosphere from the folds of which he peeps out at the humdrum world of every day and either shudders or sneers. This man goes from job to job and finds each one a little less worthy of his attention than the last. And finally he starves to death on a park bench in mental agonies that eclipse the pangs of hunger!

Of course, there are such men—or there might be. Nobody can tell what the gruesome experiences of war may or may not do to the nervous organism of a sensitive man. The people who write about such characters are within their artistic rights. They will claim that they are not writing of a type but of an individual. But the effect of their work is none the less insidious. Their readers cannot know what was in their minds, and the net result is that the dismal fiction hero of the war stalks from the pages of the book and becomes the popular conception of the real thing.

It is time that somebody wrote a story about an ex-war type, rather than an individual, to set us right. The story should tell of the average veteran's experience, It should show him struggling to get a toe hold in the ordinary world again. There is enough of bitterness and disillusionment in that process alone for any author. It should show him, after many slips and falls and desperate scrambles, finally getting the toe hold. It should show him turning the cold shoulder to irresponsibility, self-glorification, self-pity, the urge of the wanderlust. It should show him settling down and becoming one of us—reverting to the character of the old John Smith we knew before he went away. For that is the real story of the veteran; he has put the war behind him. He has acknowledged disappointment, but he has stopped crying about it and written it off his books. He has taken the best the war taught him and put it to work. The rest he has forgotten—or is trying to forget. There are millions of this kind of veteran to one of the fiction kind. Why not dignify him with a book, too?

NARCOTIC EVIL NOW A SERIOUS PROBLEM

ONE of the big problems before the United States at the present time is the curbing of the narcotic drug evil. It is asserted by experts that the habit of using narcotics is a greater menace than it ever was before. At a conference in New York City, last year, attended by 250 men and women of the Narcotic Drug Control League, ex-Health Commissioner Copeland said that while the United States should not import more drugs than were necessary for medical use, twenty times the quantity required for that purpose are imported and the surplus goes to supply drug addicts and make new victims of the narcotic evil. He was in favor of a movement to limit the drug output at its source and believed that this would be the most effective remedy.

Bishop William T. Manning, who presided, said that the drug evil had become tragic and terrible. Men and women, for the sake of the profit involved, he said, will undertake the work of inoculating the drug habit into the lives of schoolboys and girls.

From Rochester, New York, came the news that peddlers had been selling narcotics to school children and had canvassed the ranks of the pupils for the pur-

pose when school was over for the day. A drug addict in Rochester who was sentenced to serve three months in the Monroe County penitentiary for vagrancy said he began using "the stuff" as a schoolboy when foreigners accosted him and offered narcotics at a nominal sum.

Recently in Washington, D. C., F. R. Eldridge, chief of the Far Eastern division of the department of commerce, who had made a careful survey of narcotic conditions abroad, urged agitation for an international agreement to suppress the importing of narcotic drugs. He described the drug traffic as being huge in extent. The proposed agreement, he said, should give the right of search, seizure and confiscation of drugs found illegally on board of vessels, in the same manner as, under the international law, contraband of war can be seized and confiscated when found.

The orders of Moose and Elks have sent a petition to President Harding asking him to call an international conference to devise ways and means of suppressing the traffic in drugs and medical scientists are planning other measures to lessen the importation of drugs.



POPULAR TOPICS

PRINCE MOHAMMED ALI IBRAHIM of Egypt has challenged Jack Dempsey to meet him in a ten-round fight. He says that he will bet a hundred thousand dollars that Dempsey can't knock him out. The royal bruiser's trainer, one "Blink" McCloskey, late of the U. S. A., says that the prince has developed a right-hand wallop that he calls the "pyramid punch," which upon landing knocks the unfortunate recipient for a row of sphinxes.

If this scrappy descendant of old King Tut can flatten the champion with this punch we will begin to believe in the divine rights of royalty.

Until then we will put our faith in the short lefts of Dempsey.

CALIFORNIA proudly claims a higher ratio of automobiles to population than any other State. Over a million cars were registered in 1923. There are automobiles on ninety-nine out of every hundred Californian farms.

Californians can afford to own cars. The total wealth of the State is over fifteen billion dollars, and the per capita wealth over four thousand dollars. The State's wealth increased by 78 per cent during the ten years between 1912 and 1922.

In addition to having the highest ratio of automobiles to population, California leads the rest of the Union in the ratio of motion-picture actors and actresses to population, and in the ratio of bathing girls to population.

In the ratio of bathing suit to bathing girl California isn't so far up on the list.

COLLEGE students must enjoy many a quiet snicker while listening to the doubts and fears that some of their more serious-minded elders express about them and what is going to become of them.

A canvass made at Columbia University is supposed to show that a majority of the members of the senior class are perfectly willing to marry for money; and that whisky is the favorite drink of the students.

Still worse, the students of Wabash College, in Indiana, refuse to wear garters, and apply the doctrine of self-determination to their hosiery. Evidences of non-support are common on the campus.

All the Wabash students are of the male variety. They are determined that no metal shall touch them.

Worst of all, Albert Parker Fitch, once a professor at Amherst, says that American college students are dull, profane, bibulous and childish. To make everybody happy, he adds: "And at that they are better than their parents."

How long will it be before some one discovers that college students are among the most artistic and efficient "kidders" of the universe?

If—as seems extremely unlikely—all the hogs killed in the United States last year were placed end to end, they would extend in a double line around the world at the equator, and in a single unbroken line from the north pole to the southern end of South America. Also, if—as seems equally unlikely—they were placed twenty-one abreast, they would extend from New York to San Francisco.

In other words, eighty-one and one half million hogs made the great sacrifice last year, and we ate more than ten billion pounds of pork. In addition, we ate almost nine billion pounds of beef, three quarters of a billion pounds of veal, over a half billion pounds of mutton and lamb, and three million pounds of goat meat.

In still other words, the average American got away with 62.5 pounds of beef; 7.9 pounds of veal; 5.2 pounds of mutton and lamb; and 91.4 pounds of pork. He also consumed 16.4 pounds of lard. In all, he ate 167 pounds of meat, 17 pounds more than in 1922.

It is a painful admission to make, but we are afraid that hosiery—both male hosiery and the more interesting variety—is going to be noisy this summer. A fashionable New York shop advertises as its spring shades Tambour, Drum-skin, Rum-tetum, Tom-tom, Kettle, Trompette, Blare, Clarion, Tally-ho and Fan-fare.

AND right on top of that comes news from jolly old London that artists there are making efforts to brighten up formal evening parties by introducing men's evening clothes of purple, jade, green, orange and royal blue.

These gentlemen must have been to see a minstrel show.

ANOTHER shocking item of news from across the Atlantic is that the "Almanach de Gotha," after chronicling the past performances and present form of royalty for more than a century and a half, has discontinued publication.

Most Europeans no longer are interested in a "Who's Who of Royalty." What they want is a "Who's Through of Royalty."

It always is interesting to know what the men who sit in the seats of the mighty do while the seats are left vacant for a while and they are amusing themselves. Some of the members of the new British labor government have given a list of their recreations. Here it is: Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, walking and golf; Arthur Greenwood, theatergoing; Norman Angell, small-yacht racing; George Barker, photography and microscopy; Frank Hodges, walking, tennis, golf and billiards; Colonel Wedgwood, cycling; Robert Smillie, bowling and billiards; Doctor Haden Guest, walking and swimming; Ben Tillett, boxing.

We don't know how many people who are considering buying an automobile think much about how much it will cost to keep it running after it is bought, but it seems to us to be a good idea to do a little figuring before you yield to the arguments of the salesman.

The Chevrolet Motor Company has collected data showing that it costs five dollars a week to run a light car five thousand miles a year. This allows for depreciation and the replacement of the car after seven years of service.

The most costly item is garage rent—27 per cent of the total. Next comes depreciation, 20 per cent. Gasoline costs 19 per cent of the total, oil 1½ per cent, tires 8 per cent, repairs 19 per cent, and insurance—fire and theft—5½ per cent.

Five dollars a week isn't an excessively high price for the fun and health you get from owning a car. But five dollars a week is a drain on a small income. We certainly don't want to discourage any one from buying a car—but it is well to make sure beforehand that your bus isn't going to be a blunderbus.

CAN it be possible that Victor Hugo had the United States navy department in mind when he wrote "TOILERS OF THE SEA?"

At any rate, some members of the G. O. P. certainly believed in the old axiom "To the victors belong the spoils."



For His Tribe

By Charles Tenney Jackson

Author of "Two O'Clock at Keokuk," "The Little Lone Star of Old Heidelberg," Etc.

The voice of the primitive—the law of the primitive—blood calls to blood and man to man.

THE old numb panic shot to Brent's brain when he came around the schooner's after housing face to face with the jungle cat. He couldn't help it—an alley kitten would have stopped him just as helplessly for a moment. It was something bred into him with his father's blood, a sickening obsession that made him stare helplessly at the caged jaguar there under the awning abaft the mainmast of Martinez's coastal trading schooner in the flat dead torrid calm of the Honduras reefs.

The secret-service man tried to laugh it off—and then knew how weak was his pretense. They were all watching him; the truculent skipper, Martinez; Santos, the Spaniard, who had brought the beast out from the jungle for old Heitmann, the animal collector; even the idle steersman glanced forward as Brent dropped his luggage from his nerveless hands.

The big cat had arisen as if at a challenge from the stocky powerful figure of a man before its narrow cage. The only other passenger was the Indian woman crouched under a ragged mat awning by her tawdry household stuff that the native boatmen had just tumbled over the rail. Her coarse black hair hung over her brown cheeks and her beady eyes glittered with the

incurious patience of a savage as she watched the man and the brute before her. Heitmann's captive had lain dulled with the heat in sullen apathy until the American came aboard. But now stealthily it arose; then, alertly as if at a call, stood watchfully with lowered head, its tawny, spotted body rigid, and with wide unblinking eyes fixed on the American.

That was what had instantly drawn their attention. The untamable jaguar which had worn its fury out against the native packers who had brought it down the Almirante jungle trails in this same iron-bound crate had been lethargic, bellyful and heat stricken, on the *Juliette's* deck until Brent was put overside from the Honduran customs launch. Then this swift flash of the yellow, powerful body to a crouch, and its ceaseless fixation upon the stranger, watching avidly, with flattened ears listening, the man's dumb recoil before it.

Brent was fighting for his control. He had felt this shattering agony before when a feline confronted him unexpectedly—he knew it would take him a minute or so to speak, to be himself, rugged, taciturn, a man of iron nerve who had faced death a dozen times in his work as an operative of the department of justice.

"What's the matter, Señor Jervis?" said Santos sharply.

Jervis—that was the name Brent had gone by in the Latin-American ports where he had been known as the agent of a sugar-machinery concern of New Orleans while looking into the activities of certain export houses suspected of being the outside end of the dope-running ring to the Gulf cities of America.

"Señor Jervis!" The Spaniard was staring at him in an odd wonder as if his own mind was groping back to a forgotten scene. "At Tegucigalpa—the Planters' Club—one time, Heitmann was telling—get back there, you damned brute! Lie down!"

Santos sprang furiously at the cage, thrusting at the cat with the heavy stock of his leaded whip. For the brute had lunged in senseless ferocity, with a scream whose cutting monotone was as the stroke of clean steel in the sun; its white teeth tore past an iron bar into the wooden slats which had been affixed there just for the purpose of protecting the trail packers from its mad outbursts. The light crate rocked with the twisting convulsions of its body doubled at the end against the barriers.

Santos beat the jaguar's muzzle as the writhing head sank and plunged and locked tighter teeth into the splinters.

"*El Tigre!* Get back! Down with you! What's the matter?"

For the moment they had forgotten Brent. He was not looking at this crescendo of the jaguar's fury. He was still half turned from the cage toward the Indian woman who was now watching him. Without a turn of her immobile face—merely a shift of her slitte^d eyes up to the burly-bodied man who was staring over her head.

It appeared that Brent had forgotten the cat. There was, among the grimy kettles and mat baskets and bundles of her meager household stuff—she was very likely a woman of some coastal tribe taking passage on Martinez's dirty schooner from some swamp river inlet down to her folk on a coffee plantation for the season's picking—a cheap mirror such as the traders peddle to the simple, wild peoples of all the world. A beglit affair with perhaps twenty inches of comically distorting glass. One of those pathetic vanities of humble folk everywhere which will make the most-loved face a grotesque at six feet distance.

Brent was staring at himself in this look-

ing-glass. Santos was cursing the jungle cat and beating the slats. Martinez, the unshaven, lanky-jawed master of the *Juliette*, stood scratching his pajama-clad leg and grinning at the Spaniard's futile efforts to quiet the captive. The half dozen men of the shambling native crew, forward in the scant shade of the limp canvas, regarded the altercation with dull interest. Over the rail the Caribbean was one flat carpet of heat; a deadly cloth of gold under the afternoon sun and the windless air, with Utalla Island a blur to the south.

Brent was looking at himself in the woman's mirror. He knew he had not yet shaken himself free from his unnerving agony. That blind panic of his blood, which made him start at a feline and slink aside shaking with the fascinated dread of a man who retreats from the strike of a cobra, still gripped him.

But it was the astonishing thing in the looking-glass now. He had never seen himself, of course, in these brain-searing moments. It was funny—he couldn't quite make out the figure. It appeared to be himself there, outlined against the blaze of the intolerable sky, and yet?—well, there was his stocky, powerful body, but the shoulders seemed huge, drooping, with long bulging muscled arms. He was in a sort of a crouch, his legs crooked in a shambling gait—but it was his face which held him. Low and squat and broad, the eyes so lined about and deep that he could not well make them out. And his lips, they seemed pulled back, snarling; his teeth white, and his lower jaw squared low so that there seemed to be no neck, merely a huge, sinister bulge of muscle, veined and swollen; the whole bulk of him a distorted menace, a dull-brained brute, maddened, at bay before pitiless enemies.

Strange. Yet he had felt that way before the jungle cat. And before—long before, many times when he was shaken by this childish fear. Always he imagined his shoulders drooped, his teeth clenched, snarling in a mad fury to disguise his panic; and his step became a slink to get him aside out of the implacable mystery which the yellow eyes of a feline suggested to him.

He couldn't tell others about his weakness. Men laughed. It was just one of those things you evade—like a soul-damning experience of childhood which a man must live down and through but cannot forget.

Brent had not come face to face with it for years until now on the *Juliette*, except that time in Tegucigalpa, at the Planters' Club, having a brandy and soda with old Heitmann. Heitmann had been telling of the superb specimen of *Felis onca* which some natives had trapped for him up the Almirante. Heitmann was jubilant. The American tiger which once roamed all over the Isthmian states and Mexico was getting scarce. But Heitmann went to the hospital in Bluefields with a touch of dengue, and could not see to the shipping of his pet down the coast for sending to New York on a United Fruit Liner.

He had been talking to a group of fellows one drowsy afternoon at the club table, and a harmless yellow kitten ran under Brent's chair. "Jervis, the sugar-machinery agent," had nearly upset the table in his numbing nervous recoil from it—stood like a fool, shaking and silent, unable to answer their surprised questions. They all looked at him—that same curious, suspicious incredulity which now, on this dirty coasting tramp, the *Juliette* outfit were giving him.

The wail of a heat-weary child came somewhere from the heap of miserable household baggage by which the Indian woman sat under the mat awning. Her move to caress it displaced the grimy looking-glass. Brent lost that wavering grotesque of himself which had been outlined against the field of sky and water; he felt rather stupid now, dulled and shamed, and in a great weariness as if every cell of his vital force had been called pitilessly to a supreme crisis; and then he had evaded, escaping an issue too great for him, that he dared not meet.

He had not seen the baby before. The woman held it now, muttering to it, but looking stolidly up at Brent. A brief, silent wonder, a fleeting recognition of something not to be understood.

Not to be understood. Brent couldn't either, any more than he could Heitmann's crowd at the club, or that uneasy, furtive suspicion with which the schooner men now regarded him.

He turned back along the rail. The pitch was frying out of the deck seams. The five-o'clock slant of the sun in that offshore calm was appalling. The vessel was in a northerly tidal drift; her gear creaked with a maddening rhythm on a flat greasy swell; she seemed like a maimed insect tortured in

an intolerable ray of white light from a searing lamp.

Brent thought the cabin might be less unendurable. But to reach the aft companion-way he would have to go nearer to the jaguar's cage. The beast was just abaft the mast close to the galley. Well, he could do it. Always, after a moment or two, he had conquered his outward tremors. But never that inner sickness that he grimly covered from the eyes of his fellow men.

Anyhow, the affair was over. The jungle cat had relaxed to the slat floor of its clumsy crate. Santos sat on the end of it springing his whipstock and talking rather victoriously to Captain Martinez, who scratched his head unimaginatively.

"Heitmann's cat—what the hell got into him that way—"

"Look out, mister!" yelled the skipper bewilderedly.

For the jungle cat had arisen as if startled by the menace of a trailing enemy. Santos sprang away from the crate and stood howling his rage. He turned, shaking his whip at the American.

"It's you—that's what it is! You come near and he—"

El Tigre stood silently watching Brent. The stocky body on its short legs, and with the thick tail waving slowly, had none of a leopard's grace nor a lion's majesty. The flat head and the yellow eyes had a ceaseless, cruel stealth, an untamable quality of hatred to men; and as if this man before it, who feared and hated, was something waited for, a victim trailed through long dreams of its brute soul.

"I don't like 'em," grunted Brent surlily. "Funny, maybe, but I can't stand 'em. Wouldn't have come out to this tramp if I'd known this damned cat was on board. Too late, now. I—can't you put me into Truxillo soon as this blistering calm lifts? I'll get down the coast some other way; pretty close quarters on this—" He stopped inaudible at the last.

Martinez looked nervously relieved—perhaps it could be done—if they ever had a feather of wind to-night. The skipper mumbled something about weather and went aft, lifting his bare feet ticklishly from the blistering planks.

Santos lit a cigarette and regarded Brent. The tiger cat stood rigid, fixing the stranger with yellow, unblinking eyes. The Indian woman was quieting her brown, naked baby.

It was as if they all had relaxed, bowed to stupor by this immensity of power, the light and silence stinging out of space upon the earth.

"He is—what you say—got your goat? Oh, I tell the world!" The Spaniard grinned with an attempt at familiar ease now—he would show this taciturn Yankee that he had been to New York and New Orleans. "Heitmann sent me word I was to see his big cat got to Bluefields for the banana boat. Heitmann got the fever—oh, yes, he left it to me, Señor Jervis. A devil cat—killed his man twice up the country. Tasted blood—a man-killer—but me—I hammer on the cage and he gets down quiet—sometimes."

He struck the slats lightly. The tiger cat was as a stone figure, the lambent eyes watching Brent.

"All right," muttered the American. "Let him be." But he couldn't take his own eyes from the brute's blank stare. His hands were gripped behind his back in a mighty control that dared let him stand here facing the thing he feared—a cowering that was ineradicable, that his father, his grandmother, had felt—a tradition of his breed reaching back endlessly.

That native woman—he wondered if she knew his fear? She was on her knees now, caring for her naked young. He had hardly given her a glance before save out of dull, unthinking eyes after his retreat. Now he saw she was not the Indian hag he had supposed, old, withered, a mere stolid lump. She had put back her black hair to see better. A youngish Indian woman of the coast, come out of some swamp inlet to find labor down in the coffee fields; but with her cheap trade-calico gown drawn close about her form Brent saw the strength of her brown shoulders, the sullen fortitude of her eyes, a patient mother animal caring for its young. Her look upon these two men of alien race might have been that of a well-satisfied dog upon two idling strangers.

"I snap my fingers—I point at him. Look, I get his eye!" Santos leveled a yellow finger at the light iron frame past the teeth-riven wooden slat. He was laughing, his finger not six inches from the nose of the tiger cat. Brent stepped nearer—he would see this through. It was a good time to see it through. He had never done it yet, stood staring back, eye to eye, with one of the tribe.

He even bent slightly, looking past Santos' finger to the head of the spotted cat. The spume of its mouth was on the iron bar. Something was dripping—no, it was falling, a tiny flicker of white from a bent joint where the screwed cross section must have been torn loose by the madness of the jaguar's attack.

Brent saw that. And Santos' long finger was lowering. He knew that the Spaniard was looking now at him. He turned and the two men stared into each other's eyes. The department-of-justice operative felt something snap in his brain, a clear dominating sureness, as if a machine had clicked, a modern mechanism that had nothing to do with inherited obsessions of the human soul. Brent's savage, tree-dwelling ancestors, a hundred generations ago, might have fought howling against the saber-toothed tiger, and ever since there had been a nerve cell in the brains of his race ready to explode shatteringly when a cat enemy crossed their path; but here was what the ages had given him—he was Brent with a report to make to his chief in Washington when he got home.

He forgot the tiger cat. He even put a finger down to the broken hollow pipe of the cage, touched the white trickle of powder, smelled of it and then dusted his hands casually.

"Dope," he said interestedly. "Who you runnin' for, Santos? The big crowd or just on your own? Maybe with Ellerman, eh?"

Santos would not answer him. The two men straightened up and looked squarely at each other again. "Funny plant," Brent went on. "Loaded a hollow bar of the cat's cage with cocaine. In glass tubes, eh, and paper; that's good. The cat would go through the customs to some animal collector in New York—sure, nobody could touch it, the cat on guard right by it. Heitmann don't know anything about it. Your crowd just horned in on the old man, eh?"

Brent didn't usually talk so much. It must have been the reaction from shaken nerves. He knew it was. Always, after the experience, he had sought out his human kind as if he was seeking shelter at a fire from the primordial dark. He laughed confidently; it was good to loosen his tongue now, even with this dope runner.

"Come through, Santos. I know now that you know me. And I can't touch you, I reckon." He raised a hand toward the

Juliette's sloven tops: "Honduras flag—outside our waters. Nothin' doin' unless they grab in on this job at Bluefields. All right—all I'm down here for anyhow is just to get in on the know."

"You're Jim Brent," said the other man at last. "I had a hunch when I saw how scared you were of the cat. I remember Heitmann telling of the man at the club. Afterward somebody said it was Brent. People down there knew what you were in Honduras for. They had you spotted—they followed you around."

Brent laughed curtly. "I know. I couldn't do a thing. They were onto me and my usefulness was ended. That's why I poked up the coast waiting for a fruit boat to start home."

Santos threw away his cigarette and moved aft. "As far as you like, Señor Brent of the United States secret service. You can do nothing. This schooner will call in at Truxillo—perhaps. If she don't, what then, Señor Brent? What you do then?"

There was no mistaking the covert threat. The Spaniard did not even feel the need of disguising it. There was insolence in the way he sauntered to the wheel, looked idly at the box and then up at the limp, sickly hang of the schooner's canvas. A mongrel coaster with half a cargo of stinking hides under her hatches loafing down the coast landings from Uvilla.

Brent sat on the rail in the stifling shade of the cloth and let his eye wander aft, then forward. Santos was talking with the skipper. Martinez seemed apathetic to whatever was said.

The crew was sprawled forward anywhere in the shade. Not a thing to do in this flat, hot sea, a glassy deadness over the water. Not even a gull flew anywhere. In all the sun-drenched sky nothing but a blur of low cloud south, landward.

"Ought to have kept my mouth shut," Brent thought. "I never should have noticed that stuff. I was shot to pieces by that damned cat. Reckon Martinez is in on this, too. His crew—nothin' but dumbbells. Knife a man for a peso. Can't do anything but watch 'em. Funny lay—never came to Uvilla lookin' for anything. Just waitin' for the fruit boat. And there must be forty thousand dollars' worth of stuff in the cat's cage. Plenty of room—couple of false pipe fittin's in the bars would

carry a world of dope. And Santos thinks he'll do me in. That's it—easy. They don't very often get an operative off alone where they can bump him and nobody know. He thinks I can uncover something big—must be workin' with Ellerman; and that mob'll pull anything to cover up."

He mused quite complacently about it. This was stuff in his day's work. He could study it as easily as if he sat in a departmental swivel chair going over his reports.

He scrutinized Santos with professional interest. A thin yellow man, suave, unreadable save for one thing—a cool deviltry that had no scruple of any sort. An intelligent, reasoning being too, this Spanish smuggler, who would be both merciless and careful.

Captain Martinez was a mere sheep sort of fellow who could be led to anything if it was safe and there was money in it. The mate and the crew, even if unaware of the dope running aboard the schooner, would not help Brent in the affair. The American was nothing to them; a few dollars would satisfy them whatever happened.

Brent strolled aft presently. When he came opposite the jaguar's cage the brute arose. There it stood shadowy behind the bars, watching him. A house cat will preserve that same studied silence following the movements of a butterfly which it cannot reach. Brent was truly not afraid now. The veil had been torn from the slow growth of a hundred centuries of reason in his mind but he had covered the feeble thing again; his soul appeared to be a tiny brave fire which he must shield against a dank, smothering jungle dark pressing all about with the savage faces of his fathers peering close.

There was that Indian woman's looking-glass, the phantom in it—funny about that, how he appeared in that, fear and rage gripping him. Did he look like that to them? Did she see him so?

Then he ran over the case he had just turned up by the merest chance. The cocaine was routed for the United States with Heitmann's cat, and Brent should have let it go through into American jurisdiction. Then he might have followed on and got something on the inside people. Really there was nothing to do now but take care of himself against the *Juliette* outfit.

When he encountered Skipper Martinez's shifty furtive glance, as he turned down to the stuffy cabin, Brent cast away his last

doubt. The two were of no mind to land the narcotic-squad agent in any Honduran port where he, at the least, could destroy the profit on one big cocaine job. As Brent's eyes went below the hatch level he looked squarely at Santos and Martinez by the wheel. They returned the look intently. The same full implacability which was in the eyes of the jungle cat. Neither fear, conscience nor reason—the mere look of the destroyer.

"Do me in," grunted Brent in the hot silence of the grimy cabin. "Figure it any way, they want to do me. Martinez can hold this tub on and off the coast a week if he wants—until Santos pulls something."

He tried the door of the room they had assigned him. The lock was perfectly useless. Santos had the one just across, and the captain the after cabin.

When the three met at dinner under the after awning there was no sign of any disclosure. The unshaven skipper slouched sleepy-faced in his chair when the yellow boy had taken away the things. Santos maintained his air of a man of the cheap world. Of the cat's outbreak, of Señor Jarvis' ostensible business at Truxillo, nothing. The weather, the grub and the coaster's trade, that was all the intermittent talk. The tropic dar! dropped down bulging with stars. A faint light showed by the fore-castle head. The helmsman sat back on the rail wearily while the schooner drifted.

"Before daylight," grumbled Martinez, "a breeze. We get off this shore then. All feel better, eh?"

"It will blow up," said Santos. "See that cloud southeast wink now and then? Too hot. Are you a good sailor, Señor Jarvis?"

"I can get away with it. Better than this dead air. Man couldn't sleep much below if this held all night."

"No." This thought seemed to hold Santos. "Well, there is the deck, but *el tigre* will have an uneasiness."

They would all have housing if they wished save the jaguar and the Indian woman, this lone, stolid deck passenger for whom nothing was provided. She ate her own rice and plantains crouched as she had been all afternoon by her pots and mat baskets. On a pause in the indifferent talk Brent heard the child's wail. He saw it in the dim light from the galley door, a naked brown little animal crawling slowly by her knee, trying to arise.

Brent took a short turn forward before he went below. The cage of the jungle cat was just forward of the galley. Between it and the shelter of the Indian woman he stopped.

The jaguar had arisen. He heard its footpads; he could smell it, and then its eyes gleamed dully. Watching him again silently. It had come to a sullen indifference to the rest of the human tribe save himself. He had an idea that it was counting his footsteps, measuring the distance he took to the rail and back when he stopped and turned.

"What damned nonsense!" he grumbled, and went below. He had not even noticed the woman in the dark. A lump of coppery flesh, not overclean, a dull, squat savage—even the natives had paid no attention to her.

"Wonder what the kids are doin' now? They'll be down at the beach on the East Shore. I'll be with them for two weeks before school opens. Chief knows I'm due for time off when I get back and report. Nothin' to report—they had me marked down too soon."

Perhaps it had been his fault that the people he was sent to investigate had covered up so well. He was no genius of a sleuth; a plodding, careful and trustworthy city dick before he joined the Federal narcotic squad. A family man, too—a good citizen with a paid-up home in Baltimore; and glad to get down to the beach with his kids after he made his report on this outside end of the Gulf dope running. He'd swim with them, and pitch horseshoe, cut the grass; help his wife with the dishes in the summer-cottage kitchen. His job would be clean off his mind down there with his folks.

No imagination about Brent. He shut the door, piled his luggage against it, looked over his two guns, and wished there was more air than just the one port offered. A two-handed, quick-shooting fighting man when he had to be but never excited about it. The chair and his luggage jammed against the door was about all he could do while he had to sleep. They could hardly get a knife to him without his awakening. And despite the heat he slept. Dangerous to-morrows were part of his job.

It must have been hours later when a pitch of the vessel brought him to. A surge of phosphorescent water splattered in the

port. He got out clumsily to close it in a refreshing burst of new air. The schooner was lifting, with the seas banging up under her counter and her gear beginning to creak and hammer up above him. Once he heard a faint shout, and then the wind howling louder. Martinez's weather had struck. The little port was buried in a foamy sea.

"Shakin' up some." Brent sat on the edge of his berth. Not much use for a landsman to try sleeping now. For some moments he listened to the spatter of rain across the decks, the clatter of blocks and gear in the squall. Then he thought of getting to the cabin and having a smoke while this bucking sea was on. He was fumbling at his baggage against the door when there came a terrific shattering blow. Everything loose in the room slid and piled over his prostrate form, and when he got up another tremendous impact came somewhere forward.

Brent got to the cabin half stunned. Total darkness there, and when he crept to the companionway a cataract of water met and threw him down the stairs. He crept up again conscious that faint shouts came above the wind and the tear and tumble of wreckage in the dark.

Then he stumbled into Martinez. The skipper was howling at some of his men who had got a boat overside but were shrieking at a glistening bulk that arose alongside.

"Struck a derelict," yelled Martinez. "Stove in for'ard—gone! Look out—your boat there!"

Brent followed him waist-deep in water, holding along the housing while the crew fought in a panicky mob to keep the boat from swamping, to work it from under the menace of the capsized hull. Again it dealt the stricken *Juliette* a glancing blow as it sheered past. Quite apparently the schooner was doomed. At least one mast was overside, having smashed the rails in a tangle of stays and cloth. The crew was dragging at the small boat under the quarter now, imploring each other, cursing and advising, quite out of all discipline. Martinez seemed no better off. He hung to the rail against the seas, howling at them.

A new affair to Brent—shipwreck. He gripped to the after housing trying to see, wondering if they were ready to cast off, who would give the word for them all, and how.

Then some one came crowding past him. It was Santos. When he saw the group he, too, shouted. Then he twisted an arm past Brent to pass him and still hold to the line along the house.

Martinez began his insane orders—the boat was all but swamped under the counter, two men in it and the others blundering about the falls. Then Santos turned, gripping a hand into Brent's sleeve.

"It's you? You don't go. No, you——"

Brent smashed into him. He got the point of the Spaniard's knife lightly in the flesh of his ribs. Then the two went down fighting, rolling under the streaming seas until they fetched up in the scuppers, strangling, drowning, clutching at each other's throats.

Brent was atop the smuggler when he heard Martinez's final cry. Apparently the others had made the boat. Brent could not see, for the broken mast came through the shattered rail and drove him from the man he had fought. He got to the line along the house again and clung in rain and dark and foaming crests of water following over the schooner's stern.

There he gripped and choked; and presently some one clutched his knees. Santos again. The fellow got slowly up, gasping.

"They've gone. Left us. She's sinking."

"I guess so," grunted Brent. "Your dirty work, Santos, that we're left on her. Pretty rotten, knifing me there!"

"What would I take you to port for?" The smuggler seemed rather astonished. "Sure, I'd get you if I could."

They were pressed almost face to face by the seas. The rain beat them pitilessly, but it seemed that the wind was lessening. Planks, native baskets, ropes—all the stuff of a sloven coaster along the Carib islands—were streaming past them as the vessel rose and sank heavily, bucking around broadside to the dying squall.

"You knew too much," continued Santos coolly. "Well, here we are. She must be stove in forward like a box, ridin' on that turtleback hulk. They gone—all gone. The cat, too. I saw the mast come back on its cage. You feel better for that, eh?"

A cool devil, indeed, this Santos. Within five minutes, as a distorted moon broke through the scud, Brent saw him trying to find a dry cigarette paper in his pack. Brent was in his pajamas, which had been almost torn from him. Santos regarded the hairy

chest of the American as if wondering at his own audacity in grappling with Brent's rugged power. Then he shrugged.

"The sea is running down. A lot to happen in twenty minutes. The schooner is down by the head—still she may just log lower and float. Nothing but a rotten box. Look at her masts—both gone. She couldn't stand a tap, señor."

"Did they get that woman off?"

Santos laughed: "Would they try? Wait for a dirty beast?" He swung along the deck forward. "Gone, sure. Certainly."

But along the waist, crawling past a tangle of cordage and blocks, and stopping now to stare up at them, was the Indian woman. She held her child against her bare breasts, put back her dank hair and watched them stolidly. The moon showed the shine of water on her brown back; but there she crouched like a beast, indeed, that had been battered, deluged, overborne, but lived.

Neither fear nor resentment on her impassive face, as if expecting nothing from these white men of the mastering race. She had just clung to life and her child as would any good animal.

"I don't know their coast-swamp talk," muttered Santos. "Anyhow, no good, no use bothering with her. Now, you and I, Brent—civilized men, even if we'd kill each other somewhere else—we got to get out of this fix. This schooner'll sink sooner or later. We'll make a raft. If the sea stays down we can get to the reefs."

The woman's head shifted alertly. The two men followed that glance. Brent heard Santos' voice sink to a whisper.

For the jaguar had come about the stump of the mast. It took a step forward, stopped, its wet body glistening in the moonlight, and watched the three of them. Slowly its green-yellow eyes seemed fixing upon Brent. When Santos moved noiselessly to the rail it still watched the American implacably, as if none else were there.

Brent could not stir. As in a dream he heard Santos mutter.

"Mast smashed its cage—knocked overboard and swam back. A devil—a killer—he's watching you, Señor Brent!"

The moon swung so that the cat's eyes were greener. It came on a yard. Brent felt like a lump of helpless flesh in its path.

It was not fear—the sinking schooner might bring that, but this was something else. As if he had skulked, crept and hid-

den for endless ages before a killing enemy and the long trail was ended. He heard a movement. Santos had stolen aft. Then he knew the woman was following. He did not see them go, but presently he lifted his own foot and set it back. It did not seem his own muscles coördinating with his will, but some other mechanism that was in motion to slink aside from death. He felt that his mind was outside of his body; and as if he could see two shapes—the tawny jungle cat with its head lowered and ears flat coming on slowly, and the white, almost naked body of an animal that stood upright and retreating stealthily before it.

He passed the corner of the wrecked house. Santos had swung over the rail behind the wheel into protecting shadows, mute as a stone. The Indian woman and her child had got to the after deck when Brent made the turn. The jaguar came out on the clear moonlit deck not eight feet distant. Then they all stopped. The swept deck offered neither weapon nor refuge. The mother seemed to study the uselessness of retreat. She stood watching the man who was between her and *el tigre*.

Brent felt that slowly. That he barred the leap to the mother and the naked child if the big cat sprang for the weaker. He tried to stir feebly against the green stare of the brute's eyes. He wanted to know if he could move a hand against this creeping paralysis—if he could even turn his head to find the other man. If the cat leaped he would go down like a throttled antelope.

Finally he heard his own mechanical voice. "Santos, you got a gun. I see it behind the rail. You shoot."

The Spaniard crouched lower. "I'm waiting. If he comes at me—but he's not hunting me! It's you. Stripped for a fight—now, go to it!" He laughed feverishly. "You and the woman——"

Brent would have leaped on him, but the cat was now in the space between them. It had circled as if to go about him toward the woman and her child. And she did not move. When the jaguar put a noiseless footpad on the planks her eyes shifted to the man.

He had some dulled sense that the jungle killer had satisfied its curiosity about him; a pitiless hope that it would slink past him. Its long body sagged down, stiffening as if for a spring. Only when he moved his foot did it turn its head, the eyes glinting,

the tail twitching as if doubting what this white stocky figure might do. Very likely it took a hundred thousand years before any hunted thing of the jungle turned aside from safety to save the weaker of the pack from the trailing killer.

But Brent could feel the cut of his finger nails in his palms. The muscles of his neck seemed rising under his hair.

"Go back," he whispered, and took a step. "Back, I tell you!"

The big cat crouched lower; its teeth began to bare. The man took another step. The woman, her brown shoulders shining in the moonlight, the naked child at her breasts, watched him.

"Go back," repeated Brent thickly. Something began to lash out of his brute consciousness. He was gripped with a longing to spring and bite and choke—not that he desired to save life, but the tribe which must live by its young.

The cat was snarling as he came on. Then the man was answering. His teeth were grinding, his upper lip raised with dull sounds coming from his throat. A sort of a roar, like a strong-limbed ape challenging. He struck his breast and came on. It came back to him as it had in the woman's looking-glass. That huge-necked phantom crouched over on short, crooked legs, with long hairy arms swinging—coming on crouched with jaw outthrust and eyes glaring. He had seen that to-day in his great fear—in the woman's mirror.

He wondered what she had seen—what she saw now. A savage woman with her young watching the man who was stronger!

Brent knew he was coming on and roaring inarticulately. His head was swinging right and left—there was no reason in him, just the urge to kill. He feared the cat would slink and escape.

"Name of evil!" Santos muttered from the rail.

Brent had crouched lower. He felt the cat's breath. They were eye to eye—and the jaguar's began to contract slowly. Its tense loins relaxed, its shoulder sank away as if it was turning, as if it needed a moment to defer the attack of this white animal stealing on, unfearing and dangerous.

The man took another step. The brute slunk slightly toward the rail where there was a shadow that might offer cover.

And then they all heard a sound. Santos had arisen. He staggered out with the

pistol glinting in the moonlight. He was aiming.

"Name of God! You get back!" he was howling. "Get back! You're not a man—a brute—an ape—"

Brent saw with a side glance that the pistol was aimed at—him! And he sprang toward the other man full in the bite of the acrid powder smoke. The bullet tore a bloody line past his cheek. Then he came with a ferocious, undreamed-of power upon Santos. The Spaniard was like a fawn in his grasp. But something was quicker. Brent saw a shadow against the moon and a twisting weight struck over his shoulders. The cat had leaped.

They went to the deck together, the jaguar screaming and striking out. Brent felt the skin and flesh of his back tear under blows, but the brute's teeth had found flesh beyond him. He drew off and then plunged in fighting, seeking the cat's throat. Then he lifted and choked and dragged with a power quite beyond him.

Once he twisted the big cat's head about and the animal seemed to have a fleeting surprise in its eyes as if inquiring: "Let me alone. I got my kill. You get your own meat."

As if a hundred thousand years had fallen from the soul of the man and they ought to be brothers in the hunt! But after all you fight for your tribe.

Brent buckled his bare knees into the spotted back of the cat, knotted his hands into its throat until he shook it free from the smuggler, who dropped again to the deck as if he had been a carcass over which two primal killers had been fighting. Then the big cat came whirling madly about with dripping teeth and Brent plunged against it with a howl of his own. A raging lust was on him that he must not relax while life opposed. He seemed to be seeking a spot in this heaving, twisting fur where he might sink his own teeth while life opposed.

He thought he was winning, too—that was his last triumphant feeling, that he had hurled the killer to the deck and was flung out over it crushing and choking while he knew that his own body was being torn and beaten by claw and teeth. A great inexorable joy to it, the revenge for ages of fears and cringings of his own tribe. He just clung to the cat's throat, under its body now as they rolled and locked.

Then there came another rush and the impact of savage blows beating down. The muscles of the brute relaxed slowly. Brent had one last glimpse up past the jaguar's crushed skull before blackness overcame him. The brown-backed woman seemed to tower there; a fierce and terrible woman who still held her naked child to her breast while she beat the big cat's head with an iron bar she had found by the capstan—stone or club, it might have been, wielded by the mate of a hairy-chested tree dweller against a saber-toothed tiger. For the tribe, for the young, that the tribe might grow to power against its trailing killers.

That was all Brent knew until he came to his senses slowly in broad sunshine. Human hands were trying to unlock the grip of his own in wet, torn fur. Other humans got him to his feet at last.

It appeared that the wreck of the *Juliette* had beached itself gently on a sand bar with the in tide and that a Honduras customs boat had sent a landing party to it. The young lieutenant looked Brent over wonderingly.

A stocky human, his skin white from some thousands of years of linen, wool and cotton, but now caked with blood from crown to ankles. Yet he smiled at them when they asked about the killed member of his own tribe there on the deck. He had no interest in that whatever.

Another story by Mr. Jackson will appear in an early issue.

PROPHECY FULFILLED

THE burdens of the presidency of the United States killed Warren G. Harding and made a wreck of Woodrow Wilson's physique. Both tragedies were foretold by Wilson himself. Soon after Mr. Harding's death, Mr. Wilson was visited in his S Street home in Washington by an old friend who told him: "You may not remember it, but as far back as nineteen hundred and eight you prophesied the late president's end. It was in a lecture you delivered on constitutional government, at Columbia University. Here's what you said."

The visitor took from his pocket a copy he had made of the pertinent paragraphs. It read:

In the view of the makers of the Constitution, the president was to be the legal executive; perhaps the leader of the nation; certainly not the leader of the party, at any rate, while in office. But by the operation of forces inherent in the very nature of government, he has become all three, and by inevitable consequence the most heavily burdened officer in the world.

No other man's day is so full as his, so full of the responsibilities which tax mind and conscience alike and demand an inexhaustible vitality. The mere task of making appointments to office, which the Constitution imposes upon the president, has come near to breaking some of our presidents down, because it is a never-ending task in a civil service not yet put upon a professional footing, confused with short terms of office, always forming and dissolving.

And in proportion as the president ventures to use his opportunity to lead opinion and act as spokesman of the people in affairs, the people stand ready to overwhelm him by running to him with every question, great and small. Men of ordinary physique and discretion cannot be presidents and live, if the strain be not somewhat relieved.

"A strange affair," commented the officer rolling over the dead jaguar. "There was a woman with a child. We tried to stop her but she crossed the sand into the jungle. These swamp people can hide anywhere. Hardly more than a savage. And I perceive that you might be a gentleman, señor—an American gentleman."

Brent laughed outright and wiped the blood of his enemy and his own from his eyes. He saw now that that grotesque cheap mirror of the Indian woman had been swept, in the storm, into a shattered panel of the deck house, and there it hung.

He saw himself in it. He felt of his neck—it seemed huge, bulged with muscles, his arms long and blurred as if with hair. And that trick of baring his teeth as he skulked with outthrust jaw. The good fighting crouch of a good brute, oncoming and dangerous.

He wondered if the woman saw in him what he thought he saw in her looking-glass! A good brute for the tribe and the young!

"Its skin," Brent grunted to the lieutenant. "She should have had it—it was her kill. They used to wrap the children in 'em—oh, not so many thousand years ago! But I want it. It'll make a nice rug for my kids' playroom. Or my library. Lieutenant, it's grand what you said about me being a gentleman!"



Tony Sits In

By Percival Wilde

Author of "A Case of Conscience," "Red and Black," Etc.

Bill Parmelee, expert of the pasteboards, demonstrates the possibilities of a valuable device known to the esoteric as the "shading box."

THE wind whistled down the chimney, and the birch logs blazing in the old-fashioned fireplace sent up ruddy bursts of flame.

Bill Parmelee, one-time gambler, would-be farmer, and now, despite his will, corrector of destinies and terror of his former associates, gazed happily into the fire and murmured, "Tony, old man, this is the life!"

Chance, which had once flung Bill into the ranks of the sharpers, which had allowed him, for six long years, to lead a precarious life by ingeniously circumventing rules made for the guidance of others, had had its revenge by picking him up and dropping him upon another square of the human chessboard. Wherefore Bill, reformed, and possessing an encyclopedic knowledge of the devices by whose aid games of chance may be made less risky for the person employing them, had become a most formidable antagonist of the shifty gentlemen who persisted in supplementing their natural skill by unostentatious sleight of hand.

There had been the case of Sutcliffe, who, by the use of a little instrument known as a poker ring, had separated Tony Claghorn from his income quite as rapidly as it rolled in; and there had been the case of one Schwartz, who had relied chiefly upon the

machine known as the Kepplinger holdout; and there had been the case of Floyd, whose roulette wheel had possessed almost human intelligence; and besides these there had been many others. But Bill, equipped with an unparalleled knowledge of cheating devices, and himself an expert in the art of legerdemain, had come, like an avenging angel, to the aid of honesty in distress, and had exposed the sharpers with what had seemed ridiculous ease. His innocent expression, his twinkling blue eyes, his youthful features, his countrified air had deluded his victims into a sense of false security; his career, as the champion of fair play, had been a march from one success to another.

Yet Bill found little satisfaction in the rôle that had been forced upon him. Six years spent in the pursuit of fortune at cards, at roulette, at faro, at every gambling game to be found anywhere, had satisfied—more than satisfied—his every aspiration in that direction. Brought home by an accident, set upon a new track by another accident, he had turned to farming wholeheartedly—and had enjoyed it. In the beginning, doubtless, it was the novelty that had attracted him. But when the novelty had worn off he found himself engaged in an occupation which gave his intelligence

almost unlimited scope. To make a blade of grass grow where none had grown before, to breed better cows and hogs, to contribute his share to the well-being of mankind: these were ambitions which were so intensely worth while that he was content to give himself up to them.

Even the winter evenings, when the windows were frosted over and the mercury shriveled up in the ball of the thermometer were filled with satisfaction for Bill. With his aged father smoking his pipe and looking dreamily into the fire, and Tony Claghorn, his best friend, whom months of persuasion had finally induced to try a winter week-end in the country, at his side, Bill found himself filled with contentment.

"This is the life!" he repeated.

Tony, sitting so close to the fire that his clothing was in danger of bursting into flame, cast a glance through the window at the thickly falling snow. "And they called Peary a hero!" he murmured.

"What did you say?" Bill inquired.

"Miles and miles through snow and ice," raved Tony, "but he didn't have to go to the north pole for it. He could have gone to West Woods, Connecticut. By George! I never knew how much snow there was in the world."

John Parmelee smiled. "You should have been here thirty-six years ago, in the winter of 'eighty-eight. We had real snow that year. This," and he waved his hand at the flakes falling densely over the whitened meadows, "this is what we call an open winter."

Tony refused to be comforted. "Never—never in all my life did I expect to find so much cold weather—all in one place. It wouldn't be so bad if it were sprinkled here and there; if it would stop snowing for an hour or so, once in a while. But that's just the trouble with your Connecticut weather: once it's begun, it doesn't know when to leave off. It was cold when I got here; and it's been getting colder ever since; and the end doesn't seem to be in sight."

"If you wait until May——" suggested Bill.

"I'll be frozen before then!" said Tony.

The crystalline tinkling of sleigh bells announced the belated arrival of the postman. Bill rose energetically. "Maybe the mail will cheer you up, Tony."

"More of the same kind?" inquired the New Yorker without turning his head.

"It looks like it."

With obvious disapproval Bill pawed over the half dozen letters, tore them open, and glanced impatiently at their contents.

"Well?" murmured Tony.

Bill made a wry face. "Tony, old man, you've been advertising me too much. Here's a letter from Philadelphia: they want me to have a look at a roulette wheel. Here's another from New York: somebody who forgets to sign his name wants to know if I can tell him where to buy a holdout. He doesn't want to use it to cheat, he says. He just wants to use it to make some experiments. Tony, do you get a mental picture of the experiments?"

Tony laughed. "What are the rest like?"

"A woman who uses violet-scented paper wonders if I could be induced to take part in a bridge game which she considers suspicious. She doesn't like to mention names, but she tells me in confidence that a prominent society woman is altogether too lucky with cards. She wouldn't accuse her of anything dishonest for the world—but what are my charges for investigating the case?"

"Go on," chuckled Tony.

Bill smoothed out a crumpled sheet.

"A young man—age eighteen, so he says—wants my expert opinion. Is it—or is it not—possible to cheat at checkers?"

Tony roared.

"Thanking me, and assuring me that he will be glad to reciprocate any time," concluded Bill, "he remains my very truly yours." Bill crumpled up the letter and flung it into the fire. "Now I ask you, how can you answer a question like that?"

"You've still got one left," said Tony, indicating an unopened letter.

"I'm not even going to read it," declared his harassed friend. "It goes into the fire."

"No! No!" exclaimed Tony.

"Why not?"

Tony snatched the letter, which Bill already had rolled up into a ball, and smoothed it tenderly on his knee. "Don't you see," he inquired, casting an eloquent glance at the falling snow, "that this letter comes from Florida?"

II.

It was short and to the point.

DEAR SIR: Do you know Pete Carney? Do you know his game? Will you come here and show it up? The other half of the inclosed will be waiting for you. Very truly,

ALLAN GRAHAM.

The address was that of a famous east-coast hostelry; the inclosure, the half of a thousand-dollar note.

Tony whistled.

"Just look what I've saved from the fire! Why, this is real money."

"Not without the other half."

"No; but think how easy it would be to get it."

Bill raised his eyebrows. "What makes you think that?"

"You've done it a dozen times, haven't you? You can do it again."

"Maybe—and maybe not."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing," Bill pointed out, "men named 'Pete'—not 'Peter'—are generally experts at games of chance."

"Are you joking?"

"It is barely possible that this man Carney—Pete Carney—might be so good that I wouldn't be able to carry out my contract."

Tony, with memories of episode after episode in which Bill had shown his ability to match his brains against those of sharpers, gazed at him incredulously.

"You don't really mean that?"

Bill nodded seriously. "You think I'm good because you've never seen me up against the real thing?"

"How about Schwartz? And Sutcliffe?"

"Pikers! Pikers!" Bill declared; "a child could have tripped them up just as easily as I did."

"How about Floyd, and his electric roulette wheel?"

"That was a little more difficult," Bill admitted, "but I happen to know that this man Carney—Pete Carney—is in a class by himself."

"Because he's named 'Pete?'" scoffed Tony.

"No. Because I've played poker with him. You see, in the six years that I spent traveling around the country I met a good many professional gamblers; and Carney was one of them. I used to have a pretty good opinion of myself in those days. I changed it after I'd had a little session with Carney.

"We had just one rule: you could do whatever you pleased so long as the other fellow didn't find it out. You could use a holdout; ring in a cold deck; deal seconds; stop at nothing short of murder—if the other man didn't see it. But Carney did see it! When you played poker with Carney you

played a square game. He'd catch you every time if you didn't."

"And Carney?"

"When he played with me," declared Bill, "he played according to Hoyle, too. At least, I thought so. But that didn't prevent him from cleaning me out."

"No!" ejaculated Tony.

"Pete Carney is one of the very finest poker players I've ever met. When he bets a full house, you're sure he's bluffing; and when you make up your mind that his hand is unbeatable, and lay down your own, the chances are he has nothing better than a pair."

"There's nothing to stop you from calling!"

"Nothing except what it costs. And Pete used to have one awkward habit: whenever you did call, he'd have the cards. Then you'd think twice the next time, and you'd decide there was no sense in throwing good money after bad, and you'd drop. And Pete would rake in the pot, and shuffle his hand into the discard, and look at you with his head cocked on one side, for all the world like an intelligent cocker spaniel, and you couldn't get mad, even if you wanted to."

Bill smiled reminiscently. "That's one reason I'm not keen on running up against Pete Carney. He's good—really good."

"Are there other reasons?"

"Just a few. He doesn't have to cheat; he can win without cheating. And he can live without winning, because an aunt of his left him a fortune a few years ago, and he's been rolling in money ever since."

"He may have spent his money."

"Not Pete."

"He may be hard up. He may be doing just what this man Graham suspects he is."

"It's out of his line. Pete feels at home in a flannel shirt, riding breeches, and puttees. If he's stopping at a swell hotel in Florida, he's there on a vacation, and that means playing cards for fun—not for business. Pete wouldn't combine the two."

"But he must have done something to make Graham write that letter."

Bill gazed at his friend thoughtfully. "Do you know Graham?"

"Never met him face to face, but I've heard a lot about him."

"For instance?"

"He's in with all the best people."

"What else?"

"He plays a good game of polo."

"Any more?"

"Nothing, except that he's probably a very nice fellow."

"Probably." Bill nodded, and began to inclose the bisected thousand-dollar bill in an envelope.

"What the devil are you doing?" demanded Tony.

"I'm sending his money back to him."

"You're not going?"

"A thousand dollars for two weeks' time? No."

"But think of the sport, man! Why, it's better than hunting big game! And just think of somebody actually giving you money to go to Florida in winter!" Tony glanced at the windows and shuddered. "By George! I'd like to go there myself."

"Why don't you?"

"Do you mean it?"

Bill glanced at him keenly. "Why not?"

"You mean, introduce myself as Bill Parmelee?"

"Only to Graham. Remember, Carney knows me."

"And then?"

"Catch Carney cheating—that's all," Bill tantalized.

"You know I can't do it!"

"I don't know anything of the kind. You've learned a lot—and you'd bring a fresh mind to the problem. You know what they say about beginner's luck."

Tony hesitated—and was lost. "Suppose," he ventured, "suppose I watch and I don't find anything wrong?"

"You'll have a chance to try a bold bluff. Take Carney aside. Tell him you advise him to stay out of the game. I'll give even money that he follows your advice."

"He might," ruminated Tony; "he might at that! He might even confess!"

"He might," assented Bill.

The more Tony revolved the matter in his mind the more feasible it seemed. And buried somewhere deep in his soul was a craving to take the center of the stage himself; to emulate Bill's dramatic achievements.

He rose slowly, gathered his coat tightly about him, and nodded. "Bill," he said, "I'm going to sleep on it. I'll let you know what I decide to do in the morning."

Long after Tony had begun to snore the Parmelees, father and son, sat at their fireside and smiled at one another. John

Parmelee had not contributed a word to the discussion, yet he had missed no detail of it.

"Well, Bill?" the father inquired at length.

"Well, dad?"

"You're very deep."

"Not too deep for you, dad."

"Not yet, anyhow." John Parmelee puffed his pipe thoughtfully. "You know, Bill, every time you show up a cheat you make up for one of the dark spots in your own career."

"I like to think that, dad."

"Otherwise I'd rather have you stick to farming."

"Same here."

For some minutes there was silence. Then John Parmelee spoke again.

"Your friend Claghorn will probably be starting in the morning."

"Probably."

John Parmelee smiled mysteriously. "And you, I take it, will be following on an afternoon train?"

Bill nodded.

III.

Tony was in high spirits as he boarded the train. In fact, he was so buoyant that it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from breaking out into a series of triumphant Indian war whoops.

His friend, whom in his idolatrous fashion he regarded as the world's greatest authority on his peculiar subject, had admitted him to a footing of full equality; had, indeed, sent him upon a mission which he frankly admitted would call for superlative skill. The inference was clear; the pupil had learned all that the master could teach him, and Tony, who had plunged into the joyous game of exposing sharpers with his characteristic abandon, felt that he had passed the critical period of his schooling with the highest honors.

"I'll wire you and let you know how I'm getting along," he assured Bill on parting.

"That will be kind of you."

"I may trip him up right off, you know."

"You may."

"But if I don't," announced Tony, as if the idea had struck him that instant, "I'm going to spring a bold bluff. I'm going to advise him to get out of the game. I'm going to act just as if I had the goods on him."

"Very ingenious," murmured Bill, "very

ingenious. But Tony, if you don't mind my offering a suggestion——"

"Well?" said Tony kindly.

"I'd stick to the bluff if I were you. Even if you think you see something wrong while the game is going on, I wouldn't say a word about it in public. I'd tell Carney—Carney only. I'd take him aside and whisper in his ear. I wouldn't try to make any sensational announcement over the card table."

Tony nodded indulgently. "You mean that you would rather not have me humiliate him. Is that the idea?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I'll do that," said Tony.

"And remember," cautioned his friend, "Carney knows Bill Parmelee—Graham doesn't. There's no harm in calling yourself Parmelee when you introduce yourself to Graham, but see that he introduces you to Carney and his friends by some other name—Tony Claghorn, for instance."

Tony grinned. "That's a good one—masquerading under my own name! By George, that's a good one!" he repeated as the full force of the idea penetrated. "Tony Claghorn—disguised as Tony Claghorn. I'll do it!" he declared. Then a sudden thought assailed him. "But if I address telegrams to Bill Parmelee, and Graham learns of it, it will be a dead give-away!"

"Of course you won't do anything so foolish," murmured Bill.

"Of course not."

"You won't address telegrams to Bill Parmelee. You will address them to John Parmelee, Bill's father. John Parmelee will naturally want to know how his son is getting along."

"Naturally. Naturally."

"And when an answer comes, signed by John Parmelee, you will know who the real sender is."

Tony nodded wisely. "Nothing could be simpler," he declared.

It was a particularly cold morning, and the ice caked upon the boards of the station platform crackled as the men marched back and forth upon it, but Tony, jubilating silently, was oblivious to such minor details as weather. He climbed into the train with great energy and waved his friend an exuberant farewell as his momentous trip commenced.

"I'm going to bring home the bacon!" he cried.

"Good boy!" Bill shouted.

Then the train slid around a curve and the sublimely ugly little station vanished.

Tony installed himself in a chair with great dignity, and frowned. Somehow a frown seemed to be in keeping with the rôle he had assumed. He glanced at an obese old gentleman seated across the aisle—and frowned. He observed two little girls giggling in a seat near by—and frowned. He gazed out of the window, noticed a herd of cows—and frowned. Yet somewhere, deep, deep down, Tony Claghorn was almost ridiculously happy. He was off on high adventure; off on a hunt for the biggest of all big game. The sensation was delicious.

He strolled into the club car, feeling as if every eye were upon him, lighted a cigarette, and threw it away. At Pawling he bought a morning paper, glanced at the headlines, and flung that away.

He returned to his chair, and noted that his valise, conspicuously lettered with his initials, would have to be exchanged for one not so lettered. But it occurred to him also that if he, Anthony P. Claghorn, were to masquerade as Anthony P. Claghorn, the initials would be quite appropriate. Then it struck him that the lettering was obviously old, and that it might be difficult to explain to Graham why it had not been newly painted.

The problem was one which would have been of no particular importance to any one other than Tony, but that earnest gentleman, resting his chin on the palm of his hand, gazed penetratingly out of the window and wrestled mentally with its intricate details.

He had made little headway by the time the train reached Brewster, and was nervously retracing his thoughts upon the subject for perhaps the twentieth time when White Plains appeared and disappeared. Once arrived, however, at the terminal, he marched resolutely to the telegraph office and dispatched a brief, soldierly message to one John Parmelee:

"Shall not change the initials on my suitcase period."

The reply, which reached him upon the Florida Limited that evening, consisted of a single word: "Good." And Tony exulted.

But in the interim Tony had passed several happy hours in New York. He had burst in upon his pretty wife in their comfortable apartment, and in brief, soldierly

terms had explained that he was leaving for Florida.

Millie had crowed with joy. "I'll be ready in half an hour!" she declared.

In brief, soldierly terms Tony had broken the sad news to her. He was leaving on business—important business—and Millie would have to remain.

"Important business?" she had challenged. "Why, Tony dear, since when have you had any business at all?"

With impressive dignity Tony handed her Allan Graham's letter, brief and soldierly as one might desire.

She read it through and gasped.

"Why, Tony," she declared, "you're not going to try and handle this yourself!"

"That's just what I'm going to do."

"You have no chance."

"Bill doesn't think that. Bill told me to go—to introduce myself to Graham as Bill Parmelee."

"Oh!"

"If Bill says so, it's all right. Bill has confidence in me."

Now this story deals with several very deep persons. Two of them are named Parmelee; and one of them is named Mrs. Anthony P. Claghorn.

Millie corrugated her brows for a few seconds, smiled, and remarked, "Yes, dear."

Tony bustled about with great satisfaction. The brief, soldierly method had had its reward. "I'll be starting at once," he declared.

"We'll be starting."

"I will return in two weeks—or thereabouts."

"We will return."

Asserting his position as master of his own household, Tony explained lucidly just why it was impossible for him to invite Millie to accompany him. It was out of the question. Ridiculous. Preposterous. He forbade it.

Nevertheless when Tony boarded the Florida Limited he was preceded by a remarkably pretty young woman who remarked in the brief, soldierly manner that he so much admired, "Tony, dear, I'm going to have the time of my life!"

Tony thought it well to wire to John Parmelee:

"Am taking Millie along period."

The reply reached him at Richmond. It contained a single word:

"Good."

IV.

While winter seized the Connecticut hills in its grasp, while stormy winds howled, and thickly falling snowflakes covered the rolling fields, a group of men, thousands of miles away, sat in a luxuriously appointed room in the Hotel Palmetto, on the east coast of Florida, and hazarded large sums of money upon the verdict of the cards.

They wore the lightest of summer flannels and pongees, and they fanned themselves with Panama hats, for so far south cold never ventured. And being well-fed, prosperous individuals on vacations, they lived expensively, amused themselves expensively, and—gambled expensively.

Shearson, who presided over the destinies of a motor-car factory whose works covered miles, and whose employees were numbered far into the thousands, won and lost huge sums with utter indifference. The game entertained him. That was all that mattered. It never occurred to him to calculate whether, in the long run, he was a loser or a winner.

Manners, whose ancestors had bequeathed him acres of choice New York realty, admitted that his favorite game was bridge—at a tenth of a cent a point. But being agreeable, he consented to take part in daily sessions at poker, and systematically donated his profits—which were often considerable—to charity.

Haight and Marsden, who were financiers, played with nervous intensity, and frankly admitted that they enjoyed the betting because it was heavy. Unlike Manners, small stakes would never have given them a thrill. They reveled in the excitement of a game whose limit was always high, and they paid their losses with the good grace of men who have had their money's worth.

Graham and Carney completed the group. Graham, still in the early thirties, handsome, an excellent conversationalist, and an adept at a dozen different kinds of sport, played with careless expertness and generally managed to come out even. A natural-born player, Shearson had called him. Never carried away by the excitement of the moment, never deluding himself into the belief that five good cards in his hand precluded an even better hand somewhere else about the table, but never hesitating to back his judgment, he fared well on the whole.

Carney seemed to fit into the group least of all. Sixty, tall, heavy, bronzed, carelessly

dressed and strangely taciturn, he sucked incessantly at an unlighted cigar and glanced seldom at his cards. Instead his deep-set eyes wandered incessantly from face to face, reading their expressions, interpreting them, while his own expression rarely changed. His hands were huge, showing the evidence of manual labor earlier in his life. Yet when it became his turn to deal they became strangely expert. Engulfing the entire pack in one of them, he would flip off the cards with amazing speed with the other. Like a rapidly moving shuttle his right hand would travel over the left. A blur—a mere blur—and the cards, in neat little piles, would be distributed about the table.

The first time Shearson, who was talkative, had watched in utter amazement. "You've played cards quite a little," he had hazarded.

"Yes; quite a little," Carney had admitted.

There were many things he might have added. Indeed, as he paused, Shearson waited expectantly for him to continue. But Carney merely nodded, as if at some recollection which he did not propose to share, and went on impassively with the game.

During the few days that the play had progressed, five of the six men had come to know each other fairly well. Each, in turn, had contributed autobiographical reminiscences to the common fund. Shearson could neither lose nor win without being reminded of a story. Manners was interested in a variety of subjects, and managed to bring them into the conversation frequently. Haight and Marsden, being connected with Wall Street, had an unending supply of anecdotes on tap. And Graham, who despite his youth had seen much of the world, was a brilliant talker, enlivening every conversation in which he took part with an agreeable flow of observation and comment.

Only Carney held aloof. Occasionally—but rarely—a fleeting grin broke over his features; sometimes he would even contribute a monosyllable to the talk; but never a word about himself or about his past left his lips. He had engaged an expensive room, and he spent money freely, paying his bills not by check but from a huge roll of bank notes which he excavated from a capacious pocket. But even though Shearson, in an endeavor to learn something about him had deliberately touched on every subject in which Carney might have been ex-

pected to be interested, never a scrap of information resulted.

He played the game, uttering only the few words made necessary by the game itself, and he never exulted in his good fortune, though Graham, an acute observer, had noted from the very beginning that he had been a consistent winner.

"Either he's slick or he's simple," Shearson confided to Graham one evening. "There's no middle ground. Either he's got so much to say that he doesn't want to start, or he's got nothing to say at all. I can't make him out."

Graham had very definite conclusions of his own, but felt it best not to mention them. Instead, he kept his beliefs strictly to himself until an important young man whom he had never met before took up his residence in the hotel, and somewhat melodramatically introduced himself to Graham by presenting the half of a thousand-dollar bill.

Tony had expended much thought upon this detail. Its effect was as electric as he had hoped.

"So you're the man I've been expecting?" Graham exclaimed.

Tony bowed with dignity. "Yes," he murmured.

"Fine!" declared Graham. "Come up to my room and we'll have a chat."

Once in privacy, with the door bolted, Graham turned cordially to the traveler. "Light a cigar, Mr. Parmelee," he invited, "make yourself comfortable."

Tony, exulting in his rôle, lit one of his host's Havanas, crossed his long legs, folded his arms, and adopted a profoundly serious expression. "Proceed, Mr. Graham," he commanded.

"In the first place, you will notice I didn't call you 'Mr. Parmelee' in the lobby. You may not know it, but you have become an exceedingly well-known man."

"Quite so," murmured Tony.

"I would even suggest—if you approve—that you pass under some other name while you are here."

"I have registered as Anthony P. Claghorn—and wife," Tony mentioned.

"Clever—very clever."

"Even the initials on my suit case correspond."

"And the initials on your handkerchief," pointed out his observant host.

Tony bore the shock well. He glanced at the monogrammed corner of linen which

protruded from his outside breast pocket, and nodded. "I believe in being thorough," he proclaimed. For the fraction of a second he thought of mentioning that his hose, his underwear, and his pajamas were embroidered with the same initials, but he thought better of it. "I do everything thoroughly," he repeated.

"So I see. I take it that you're acquainted with Claghorn?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because it might be awkward if Claghorn showed up here. You see, Anthony P. Claghorn is a real person."

"Of course he's a real person!" declared Tony. "That's why I borrowed his name. And he won't show up here either. I saw him in New York before I left, and I arranged that with him."

"Excellent! Excellent! Now, to begin with, I keep my promises." From a wallet Graham extracted half of a thousand-dollar bill, fitted it to the half which Tony had brought as his introduction, and handed both halves to him. "I wrote that this would be yours when you arrived. Here you are. This is your retainer."

"Thank you," said Tony gravely. It was with a thrill which he hoped his exterior concealed that he pocketed the note.

"It is only a sample of what you will get if you are successful."

"I am always successful," Tony murmured modestly.

"So I have heard. That is why I sent for you. Now, as to this man Carney——"

"Pete Carney."

"You know him?"

"I know of him."

"What do you know?"

Magisterially Tony waved his hand. "Proceed!"

Graham nodded. "Very well, Mr. Parmelee. Handle this your own way. All I can tell you is that I think Carney cheats."

"You wrote that."

"Yes."

"What makes you think that?"

Graham, as previously mentioned, was an excellent conversationalist, and after one hour's uninterrupted speech he was still holding forth volubly.

Tony finally called a halt. "From what you have said, I gather that you think Carney cheats."

Graham gasped, but found the strength to reply, "Yes."

Gravely Tony helped himself to another of his host's excellent cigars.

"We shall see what we shall see," he declared.

V.

Now a game entered into for the sake of a little diversion, and a game entered into in the hope of catching one of the participants in the act of cheating, are two different things. Tony hoped that his calm exterior concealed the agitation of his feelings.

The six men, welcoming a seventh, had allowed him to buy a stack of chips, and had observed his play with visible interest. Tony, watching Carney with eagle eyes, hypnotized by the expertness which his victim-to-be displayed in his dealing, hardly did himself justice.

At his best he played a game which might have been described as passable; did not too often bet heavily on filling a straight open in the middle, and realized, more or less dimly, that a lone ace did not possess enough magnetism to attract three others to it on the draw. But in the company in which he found himself, Tony, it must be admitted regretfully, did not even shine faintly. It was disconcerting, for one thing, to find the players betting with consistent liberality; to discover that Shearson and Carney, between them, made it exceedingly expensive to draw cards. Tony, like most indifferent players, was addicted to calling. Shearson and Carney, having had more experience, backed their faith in their cards by raising, and allowed their opponents to call. Now it is an old adage that a good caller is a sure loser, and in less than an hour Tony found it necessary to invest in a second stack of chips.

Graham glanced at him keenly, but Tony shook his head ever so slightly. Had he spoken he would doubtless have remarked: "Don't worry. Everything is going according to plan." That may or may not have explained how the second stack went the way of the first in record-breaking time.

Tony had begun the session with an intense desire to catch Carney in an act of dishonesty. Halfway through this desire faded insensibly into the background and was replaced by an earnest wish not to allow himself to be utterly wiped out. He began to play more conservatively, and had the utterly miserable sensation that his opponents were reading his thoughts with the

greatest ease. Shearson, who had raised with magnificent liberality earlier in the evening, gazed at Tony searchingly, and dropped more than once when Tony, holding big hands, was depending upon him to make the pot worth while. Carney, too, who had carried the art of bluff to incredible heights, seemed to sense the value of the cards which occasionally came to Tony, and contributed next to nothing. And Manners, Haight, and Marsden, taking their cue from Shearson and Carney, the sensational players, put on a soft pedal, and allowed Tony's streaks of luck to pass without serious damage to their pocketbooks.

In desperation, Tony began to bluff, and found himself once more in deep water. He resorted to the ruses which had worked so well at the Himalaya Club, in far-off New York; but his opponents, following the lead of Shearson and Carney, were never embarrassed by them. According to the best writers on the subject of poker, the other players should have laid down their hands, and permitted Tony to rake in a pot. Evidently they had not heard of the best writers, for they simply raised, and punctured Tony's bluffs in short order.

At eleven thirty the game broke up, Tony, to his chagrin having lost not only the thousand he had received from Graham, but some hundreds of his own funds as well.

His employer buttonholed him in a corridor. "Well?" he demanded.

Tony waved a hand. "I have made progress," he announced vaguely.

"I should say so!" assented Graham. "You've lost at the rate of sixty miles an hour! If you keep on progressing that way you'll——"

Tony interrupted with dignity. "I am handling this affair in my own way," he declared. "If I had won, Carney might have become suspicious. As it is—as it is——" "As it is?"

"I have laid the groundwork for my future actions."

Graham gazed at him with an unfriendly eye. "You know," he commented, "that time you raised on a bobtail flush——"

Again Tony interrupted. "I had my reasons, Mr. Graham. Excellent reasons."

"Carney didn't even call you that time," persisted Graham; "he raised you back, and kept on raising. And at the finish, *you* called—not Carney. That may be advanced poker, but if it is, it is so advanced that I

don't understand it. If you weren't an expert, Mr. Parmelee, I'd call it sheer lunacy. What did you expect to find in Carney's hand? Another bobtail flush? If that was it, you must have been disappointed when he laid down a full house, queens up."

Tony laid a forefinger at the side of his nose in an inscrutable gesture. "Ah, ha!" he exclaimed, and again, "Ah, ha!"

Then, with great dignity, he moved away.

Wandering through the dark corridors of the hotel, he gave himself up to painful thought. He had discovered absolutely nothing, with the exception of the fact that Carney, as Bill had warned him, was an extraordinarily fine player. He had entered the game with a light heart, buoyed up by too-great confidence in his own ability. He had left it separated from most of his available cash, and the progress which he had reported to Graham was wholly imaginary.

In his dilemma he woke up his sleeping wife and threw himself upon her mercy.

She listened attentively.

"If I understand you, Tony dear," she commented, "you haven't made much headway."

"None at all," Tony confessed with a groan.

"And you've lost a good deal of money."

"Too much."

"And you want to know what I would do next?"

"Yes."

Millie smiled. As previously remarked, Mrs. Anthony P. Claghorn was an exceedingly deep person. "Tony, dear," she advised, "I would do just what you think you ought to do. That's what Bill wants, isn't it?"

"Er—yes."

"Well, go ahead."

Tony gazed at the ceiling thoughtfully. "When I left Bill, I told him that even if I didn't catch Carney in the act I'd go ahead just as if I had the goods on him: I'd take him aside, and advise him to get out of the game."

"And what did Bill say?"

"He thought that was a good idea of mine. He approved of it."

"Then I approve of it also," murmured pretty Mrs. Claghorn, turned over, and soon was fast asleep.

For half an hour Tony wrestled silently with his thoughts. Then he made his way to the telegraph office and dispatched a wire:

"Am ready to proceed with second part of plan period."

The reply was handed to him at breakfast. It was one word: "Good."

VI.

Enthusiasm, perhaps, was Mr. Anthony P. Claghorn's most marked characteristic. It was not congenial to his volcanic nature to indulge in patience; to wait for a propitious moment; to underrate his own abilities. Tony had an incurable habit of going off at half cock, and while eating his breakfast he repented of it.

With his customary headstrong energy he had thoughtlessly committed himself to a course of action from which there was no retreat, had determined to beard the lion Carney in his den, and had made his decision irrevocable by telegraphing it to his friend. He had sent off the wire in moderately high spirits. Ten minutes later it had suddenly struck him that Carney, with a Western upbringing and with a lifetime spent in the company of men notoriously quick on the trigger, might not receive Tony's gentle hint to retire from the game in a truly Christian spirit. That, Tony foresaw, might be awkward.

During the night—for he had slept but little—he had mentally pictured the possibilities. He visioned himself walking up to Carney, speaking a single sentence—and he saw Carney, with a lightninglike movement, drawing a revolver and shooting him dead on the spot. That nightmare had wakened him all of three or four times in as many hours.

He had heard tales about the quaint habits said to be characteristic of old-time mining camps. It occurred to him that Carney, instead of shooting him, might insert an expert thumb into Tony's orbit and gouge out an eye. Tony shuddered, patted his optic thoughtfully, and admitted that it felt more at home in its socket.

Visions of bowie knives, of amputated ears and noses, even of captives burned at the stake, haunted his sleep. And his breakfast, which he always enjoyed, suddenly became unpalatable when Carney marched massively into the dining room, seated himself at a near-by table, and nodded. There was grimness in that nod, Tony decided, and his heart quaked.

Furtively he glanced at his pretty wife, busy with her grapefruit, and reflected un-

comfortably that she would look well in mourning—yet he was conscious of no desire to hasten the coming of that event.

With calculating eyes he appraised Carney's bulk—the powerful muscles—the heavy-boned frame. The enormous hands, each large enough to engulf a pack of cards, might, before the day was over, be fastened about Tony's throat. He recalled Carney's amazing dexterity in dealing, and wondered if, in true Western fashion, he fired from the hip with equal expertness.

Tony cleared his throat.

"Millie!"

"Yes, dear."

"You're fond of me, aren't you?"

"Yes, dear."

"Very?"

"Yes, dear."

"That's good," remarked Tony, and reflected that it was nice to know that he would be missed.

He finished his breakfast without another word, and on leaving the dining room came face to face with Graham. This latter drew him into a corner. "Mr. Parmelee," he whispered, "if you don't mind, I'd like to know something about your plans for today."

Tony was not in the best of humors. "I do mind," he retorted.

Graham was imperturbable. "In that event, Mr. Parmelee," he whispered, "I might as well tell you that I've been doing some thinking. Deliver the goods—deliver them any way you please—and you'll find me liberal—more than liberal. But if you take a hand in the game again, and if you lose again, please bear in mind that I am not staking you. I'd like that clearly understood, Mr. Parmelee."

Tony glared at him. "I am fully able to pay my own losses, Mr. Graham."

"I am glad to hear that," said Graham, and walked away.

Disconsolately Tony proceeded to the veranda and slumped into a chair. Much as he would have liked to appeal to Bill for help his pride prevented him from doing so. Then he turned his head and discovered that Carney, well fed and at peace with the world after an excellent breakfast, had installed himself in a chair not six inches distant from his own.

It was Tony's opportunity to remark manfully, "Mr. Carney, queer things were happening in that game last night. I don't want

to accuse you of anything, but I do want to advise you to stay out of it."

He said nothing of the kind. Instead, he smiled in a friendly manner, though his heart was beating rapidly, and mumbled "G'morning."

"Good morning," Carney replied.

"Nice weather," Tony opined, and Carney agreed with that opinion. "Been here long?" Tony inquired, and Carney grunted.

"Umph."

Then, for ten minutes at least, neither spoke, while Carney sucked at an unlighted cigar and the young man at his side wondered whether he weighed over or under two hundred and thirty pounds.

Presently Carney, the silent, began to speak. "Nice, quiet game last night," he remarked in his deep, bass voice.

"Yes. Wasn't it?"

"Different from the games I used to sit in when I was your age, bub."

"How so?" inquired Tony.

"Quieter—much quieter," said Carney with a reminiscent smile. "In those days, when you sat down, you never knew if you'd get up again. You kept your shooting irons handy, bub."

Tony swallowed two or three times, and nodded. Here, again, he observed methodically, was an opportunity to warn Carney, in a firm, decisive manner that it would be well for him to retire from the game. But Tony let the opportunity pass.

During the day Carney seemed to dog his footsteps. Wherever Tony wandered, Carney was never far distant. He met him on a walk—and again on the veranda upon his return from it—and found him within easy speaking distance in the dining room at lunch. When he adjourned to a quiet corner for an after-dinner smoke the big Westerner was not far away.

"Upon my word," Tony whispered to his wife, "I believe he's following me around!"

"Have you spoken to him yet?" she whispered back.

"No."

"Why not?"

Now Tony was no coward. Being a reasonable man, he had estimated the prospective risks, and considering them great, had avoided them. But with his wife forcing his hand that course was no longer possible.

"I'm going to speak to him this minute!" he declared.

He rose, straightened his coat, and threw out his shoulders. If he were to die, a heroic death, with his wife on the spot to appreciate his heroism, would be most satisfactory.

He marched across the veranda, pulled up a chair next to Carney's, and plumped himself into it.

"Mr. Carney," he said, "I want to talk to you."

"Yes, bub?" The tone was incredibly mild.

Tony felt encouraged. "I was watching the game last night," he declared resolutely. "I took a hand just to watch."

"Yes, bub?"

Tony sensed that he was at the edge of the precipice. He leaped over with a rush. "If you know what's good for you, you'll get out of that game."

The die was cast. Tony waited with an oddly impersonal curiosity. Would Carney draw a knife or a revolver? Or would his thumb seek Tony's eyeball?

None of these things happened. Instead, the bronzed Westerner inclined his head ever so slightly, and murmured, "Yes, bub."

Tony gasped. "You heard what I said?" he demanded incredulously.

"Yes, bub."

"And you'll quit the game?"

"I sure will."

Like wine Carney's unexpected meekness went to Tony's head. "I said nothing last night," he declared, "because I didn't want to humiliate you before the others. But now we're alone and I can say what I think. If you know what's good for you, don't let me catch you in that game again!"

"I won't," Carney promised.

With dignity Tony rose. "That's all," he informed his victim, and stalked off. Victory was his, and he felt just a trifle delirious.

As he turned the corner of the veranda Graham came to him with outstretched hands. "Mr. Parmelee," declared that young man, "I apologize—I apologize most humbly. I overheard every word you said to Carney, and every word he said to you. You have done what I asked you to do, and I'm eternally obliged."

Tony waved a deprecating hand. "Don't mention it," he murmured.

Graham seized him by the arm. "I told you that you'd find me liberal, and I'm going to prove it. Come inside, Mr. Parmelee, and watch me cash a check."

VII.

It would be pleasant to end this story at this point. It would be pleasant to relate that Tony marched into the telegraph office, reported the success of his mission, received the answer, "Good," and returned home covered with glory.

But in the interests of veracity, it is necessary to detail the events which took place after Tony, in brief, soldierly fashion, had indited that final telegram: "We have met the enemy and they are ours exclamation point."

Half an hour earlier the world had been overcast with gloom for Tony; a leaden gray pall had hung thick upon everything. But in the twinkling of an eye the mists had lifted and rosy tints had come in their stead. Success had come—overwhelming success—and Tony basked in its effulgence.

In company with his pretty wife he proceeded to the beach and enjoyed a swim. He felt entitled to relaxation after his labors. He splashed around merrily until a porpoise-like blowing warned him of the approach of some large animal. Then he turned, and to his boundless amazement discovered Carney, in a trim bathing suit, disporting himself near him.

Now according to all the rules of etiquette, Carney, being an exposed sharper, should have avoided the presence of his conqueror and should have fled from his sight like a thing accursed. But Carney, evidently, possessed no sense of shame, for he swam nearer, turned gayly on his back, and called out a greeting.

Tony replied—he could do no less—and when Carney offered to race him back did not see his way clear to refuse. Nor could he decline when Carney, having won the race hands down for all his sixty years, invited him to help sample the contents of a pinch bottle which the Westerner had thriftily buried near an abandoned hut.

During twenty-four hours Tony's opinion of Carney had fluctuated widely; and it fluctuated still more after a few swallows of an amber-colored liquid had gurgled down Tony's throat. Somehow Tony's vision began to clear. He feared he had overlooked Carney's good qualities, such as they were; and that fear became a certainty before the bottle was emptied.

"Good stuff," Tony remarked, smacking his lips critically.

"None better," Carney assented.

"But there's not much left in the bottle," Tony pointed out in alarm.

"Sall right, bub," said the Westerner, "there's more where this came from." He glanced around to make sure that he was not overheard. "How'd you like to meet me in my room to-night?"

"What for?"

"Well, if we're not going to play cards," grinned Carney, "time will be hanging heavy on our hands, and I've got a little valise—not too little—with several more bottles in it." He placed a hairy paw on Tony's knee as that worthy deliberated. "Bub, I've got a cocktail shaker, and we'll send down for some ice and a couple of limes, and I'll mix you something that you've never tasted in your life!"

When the next book on etiquette is written, the authority responsible for it will doubtless state the correct procedure for a young man confronted with a situation of this kind. Tony, somewhat mellowed by the excellent whisky he had drunk, reflected that Carney's invitation indicated a spirit of forgiveness as remarkable as it was praiseworthy.

He, Tony, had humiliated Carney as much as one man may humiliate another, had accused him of cheating, and had ordered him out of the game. Yet Carney, far from harboring the slightest ill will, had accepted his chastisement meekly, and was making unmistakable overtures of friendship to his former enemy.

Under the circumstances Tony could not very well show himself less magnanimous than his victim.

"I'm with you, daddy," he remarked with simple elegance, dressed, hastened through his supper, made a satisfactory excuse to his wife, and presently rejoined the convivial Westerner.

It became speedily apparent that Carney had not exaggerated in describing the little—not too little—valise. Tony had never seen another like it. The sides, fitted with nickel-plated racks, held a bewildering array of gayly colored bottles. Every ingredient of every known beverage was present in proper proportions.

Carney set the valise upright on a convenient table, removed his coat, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

"Bub," he confessed, "long, long before you were born, I used to tend bar. The drinks are on me. What will you have?"

Tony sighed blissfully. "A Martini," he murmured.

"Martini it is."

The hands which dealt so wonderfully were even more expert with a cocktail shaker. In an incredibly short space of time two glasses, filled to the brim with an ice-cold concoction, made their appearance. Tony quaffed his slowly and appreciatively.

"Daddy," he remarked, "you don't mind if I call you daddy?"

"Not at all."

"Very well, then. Daddy, you're a great man."

Carney bowed. "What will it be now?"

"Have you the makings of a Clover Club?"

"That—and anything else," Carney assured him.

The Clover Club was followed by a Manhattan—and a Bronx, which Tony encored enthusiastically—and an absinth frappé—and then Carney introduced his guest to the alcoholic mystery known as a stinger.

Now there are stingers and stingers, and their formulas vary widely, but Carney, so he modestly confessed, knew the formula of the one prehistoric, primeval, protoplasmic stinger from which all other stingers are descended. He demonstrated.

"Do you like it?" he inquired.

"'Sgood," commented Tony blissfully, "'sawfully good. 'Swonderful!"

Carney must have had a stomach of cast iron, for he matched his guest, glass for glass, and remained wholly unaffected. But Tony, being a younger man, and having had less experience, became mellower and mellow.

At ten he swore undying friendship with Carney. Carney had not asked him to do so, but Tony felt it was in order.

"There's so much bad in the worst of us, and so much good in the best of us," he misquoted happily, "that means you, daddy."

Carney bowed—both of him—Tony noticed. It struck Tony suddenly that here was an excellent opportunity to reform the old man, and he turned his forceful energies to it. He paused occasionally for refreshment, for his throat became dry at frequent intervals, but he noted with pleasure how respectfully Carney listened to what, by Tony's own confession immediately afterward, had been one of the most eloquent and moving sermons ever delivered.

Its effectiveness was demonstrable, for

Carney professed his reform at two-minute intervals beginning at ten thirty. Tony was affected—almost to tears. And at eleven o'clock he prevailed upon Carney, who was himself beginning to show the influence of his potations, to accompany him downstairs to the card room, there to make public profession of his repentance.

"Come with me, brother—I mean daddy," urged Tony.

Navigating unsteadily, clinging to each other on the general principle that in union there is strength, the two made their way through the endless corridors, and pushed open the door beyond which the nightly session was in progress.

Around the circular table were seated Shearson, Manners, Haight, Marsden, and Graham. And Tony blinked in utter astonishment as in a sixth chair he discerned his good friend, Bill Parmelee.

"Bill," he gasped, "is that you?"

"You bet it is!" declared the apparition.

"Well, if it is," commented Tony, accepting the incredible fact with good grace, "I'm mighty glad to see you. Bill, I want to introduce my friend Mr. Carney. He may be a card cheat, but he's the right sort."

Bill laughed shortly, and rose from the table. "And I," he declared, "I want to introduce Mr. Allan Graham. He's a card cheat—the only one in this room—and he's the wrong sort."

Graham's face, pale with fear, distorted with fury, was a confession for anybody to read.

Tony pinched himself. "Graham? Not Carney?" he queried.

"Exactly."

Tony glanced around the room. In his befuddled condition he had not noticed the deathlike silence of the men who sat at the table. Shearson's features, usually so genial, had become set and stern. Manners, generally so dapper and smiling, was quiet—ominously quiet. And Haight and Marsden, with compressed lips, wore the expression of jurors about to convict a criminal upon a capital charge.

Though Tony did not sense it, he had burst into the room but an instant after Parmelee had unveiled the sharper.

He gazed incredulously from face to face. The unexpected revelation had nearly sobered him.

"Graham? Not Carney?" he repeated stupidly.

"Graham—not Carney," echoed Bill.

Impulsively Tony flung his arm about the big Westerner's shoulders. "If that's so," he declared, "I'm satisfied with life!"

VIII.

It was not until noon the next day that Bill made any attempt to answer the many questions that had been hurled at him. It was not until then that Tony was in a condition either to ask questions or to understand the replies, and Bill felt that his friend was entitled to a little enlightenment.

"I had my first suspicions," Bill explained, "the moment I saw Graham's letter, and read that he wanted me to come here and show up Pete Carney as a card cheat. That was suspicious—very suspicious—because I know Pete as I know myself, and I was willing to stake my life that he wasn't cheating."

Carney, who was listening, smiled broadly. "You were taking a big chance, weren't you, Bill?"

"Not even a little one!" Bill declared. "I knew you had turned over a new leaf, Pete, and I had faith in you. Aside from that," Bill added with a chuckle, "I knew that it wouldn't take you more than one or two sittings to clean up everything in sight; that is, if you really wanted to, and didn't care how you did it. It was a big game—a game which justifies a man in tearing a thousand-dollar bill in two, and mailing me one of the halves must be a big game—and if you were winning so slowly that Graham had the time to write me, and the further time to await my arrival from Connecticut, it was a fair inference that you were playing honest poker."

Shearson, another listener, nodded. "That sounds reasonable," he admitted.

"I began to ask myself questions," pursued Parmelee, turning to Tony, "the moment you placed that letter in my hands. Why did Graham want Carney convicted of cheating? To recover losses? No. If he had lost heavily he wouldn't have been able to spare a thousand-dollar bill. Did he have a grudge against Carney? Not likely. Nobody, in all the years I knew him, ever had a grudge against Pete.

"Then what other reason could there be? The solution came to me like a flash as I looked into the fire with the letter in my hand. This man Graham, for private objects of his own, wanted Carney removed

from the game! It was the only possible, the only logical explanation.

"Perhaps Graham actually thought that Carney cheated; perhaps he thought me so clever that I would prove he cheated whether he cheated or not; perhaps he had found out something about Carney's past. Pete used to be a pretty well-known figure; there's no telling what Graham had heard.

"In any event, it was clear the moment I studied Graham's letter that he wanted to get rid of Carney, and wanted to get him out of the game because he cramped his style. He had learned enough about Carney to be sure that Pete would catch him like a shot if he, Graham, ever tried anything underhand.

"That was what I read between the lines of Graham's letter."

Tony whistled. "The letter was three or four lines long, and may have consisted of twenty-four words!"

Bill smiled. "It wasn't what he wrote—it was what he didn't write—that really mattered. I did some fast thinking during the next few minutes, Tony.

"What was I to do? My first impulse was to forget it; to return the torn money to Graham and burn the letter. Carney was amply able to look out for himself—that I knew.

"My second impulse was to mail the letter to Pete, and to tell him to punch Graham's head. That would have served him right.

"But then it struck me that if I refused to help Graham, he might think up some other devilish scheme, and I didn't like the idea of old Pete fighting an enemy who was as contemptible as that.

"I made up my mind to give Graham a fair chance—to remove Carney from the game and see what Graham would do then. In a big game cheating would be worth while. I decided to give Graham plenty of rope. Perhaps he'd hang himself with it. Perhaps he'd show that I had misjudged him. I was curious to know the answer.

"So I sent you ahead, Tony, to masquerade as Bill Parmelee—and I followed you just twelve hours later."

Tony gazed at his friend in amazement. "If you followed me, who answered my telegrams?"

"My father."

"How did he know what to answer?"

Bill grinned. "Before I left, I told him

that no matter what you wired, he was to answer 'Good.' It may have been mean, Tony, old fellow, but I didn't dare let you into the secret. You're not a good actor. You might have given it away.

"I knew you wouldn't catch Carney cheating," pursued Bill. "There were two excellent reasons. In the first place, he wasn't cheating; and in the second place, if he had been, you would never have detected him at it. I'm fairly good with the cards myself, but Pete is a real artist. He can do anything with them, except make them talk. So when you suggested—it was your suggestion, Tony, and I give you credit for it," Bill fabricated generously, "that you spring a bold bluff on him, tell him to get out of the game as if you had actually caught him, I agreed with you right off—though I did write Pete a letter, telling him what was afoot, simply to make sure that he wouldn't wipe you off of the face of the earth as soon as he understood what you were driving at. Pete's an old friend, and I knew he'd follow instructions to the letter."

Carney grinned reminiscently. "It took him all morning to get up enough nerve to speak to me."

"But he did!"

"He did," Carney admitted, "he stood right up to me. Bub, did you know that men have been shot for doing less than that?"

Tony was silent, but his wife spoke for him. "He knew it, and I knew it too," she asserted, "because the night before he could talk of nothing else in his sleep!"

Carney gasped. "And knowing that, ma'am, you let him walk up to me?"

Pretty Mrs. Claghorn smiled. "Mr. Parmelee approved—and I knew that if Mr. Parmelee approved, it would be all right."

It was Tony's turn to gasp. "Bill," he declared, "if she had the faith in me that she has in you—"

"Go on, Mr. Parmelee," urged Shearson.

Bill nodded. "I lay low and waited—waited for the psychological moment. When Carney took Claghorn upstairs to sample his good liquor, I took Carney's place in the game. That was easy," he explained. "I struck up an acquaintance with Mr. Shearson and he invited me right in.

"I couldn't wait. I didn't dare wait. If Graham was planning anything, he would begin right away. As a matter of fact, the fireworks started within ten minutes."

"What did he do?" inquired Carney.

"He used a shading box, Pete," said Bill, producing an implement the size of a large button from his pocket. For the benefit of the others, he demonstrated. "A shading box holds a bit of colored paste—in here—and it comes out through this slot in the top. That's all there is to it, except that the man who uses one rubs his thumb over the slot now and then, and marks the backs of the cards with it. The boxes come in pairs, one red and one blue, so that he can match the color printed on the backs of any deck. The least little spot will tell him all he wants to know, and it's mighty hard for anybody else to detect unless, like me, you're looking for it. I waited until he won his first fat pot, and then I spoke right out in meeting."

Shearson laughed. "And then he tried to prove that you were the cheat!"

"It would have been awkward," Bill admitted, "if we hadn't found the shading boxes tightly sewed to the under side of Graham's vest."

Carney broke a long silence. "He knew better than to try that when I was in the game."

"That's why he wanted you out of it."

Carney smiled grimly. "He got his wish. Much good it did him!"

But pretty Mrs. Claghorn corrugated her brow. "Answer me one question, Mr. Parmelee."

"A dozen if you like, ma'am."

"What has Tony had to do with all this? What has Tony accomplished?"

"A great deal," Bill assured her.

"I wonder! You wanted Mr. Carney out of the game. A letter to him brought that about. You wanted to sit in the game yourself. You did, didn't you? Where does Tony figure?"

"He threw Graham off of the trail."

"That could have been done in a dozen other ways."

Bill grinned. "You're too clever for me, ma'am. Much too clever! You see, Tony was spending a week-end with me when Graham's letter arrived; and Tony couldn't talk about anything but the snow—and the ice—and the cold. And something told me—something told me—"

"That he might enjoy a Florida vacation?"

"Ma'am," said Bill with a bow, "I never could lie to a lady."



Gold and the Girl

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "Ocean Tramps," "The Garden of God," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

How that ill-assorted quartet came to be drawn together aboard the mystery-ketch *Baltrum* is quite a story. Sheila Dennis and the Irish fisherman Larry were there when Dicky Sebright found the boat. They were there under sufferance of the British government, whose port representative at Hildersditch had loaned the ketch to Sheila's sea-captain father pending its sale by auction. And they had stayed on, having nowhere else to go, after Captain Dennis' death. The ketch herself had come from nowhere, with two foreigners aboard. And when these two had conveniently murdered each other for reasons unknown she lay unclaimed. So much for Sheila, Larry, and the *Baltrum*. Dicky Sebright found her. Dicky had lost his job and picked up a slender heritage simultaneously. And being sick of jobs he wanted to do a bit of small-boat sailing while he pulled himself together and readjusted his scheme of life. He liked the *Baltrum* and her crew, and would have bought the one and adopted the other. But he couldn't buy her until she came up for auction—so, pending that event, he took a berth aboard her. Then the gold was discovered. It lay in painted pigs, down in her hold, masquerading as iron ballast. Many times over a fortune, it was. So much for Dicky and the gold. Now for Mr. Wilfred William Corder, fourth of the venturesome crew. "James," as Mr. Corder was called, happened to be a friend of Dicky's. And he happened to be the sole surviving heir to a great many millions. It was he who bought the *Baltrum*—knowing Dicky wanted her, and desiring to play the fairy godfather. He thought he was buying a ketch, but he found he had acquired a gold mine. And so he joined the three. For the gold was like a magnet. He didn't need it, but he wanted it—his share of it. So much for the whole quartet. Now for the problem. Whose was the gold? The government's? Possibly. Yet the four had found it. They felt that whatever the law said, they owned it by moral right. What to do? You cannot peddle pigs of raw gold without long explanations. And explanations lead to investigations. And gold is slippery stuff. They hit on a plan. Bury it secretly. Get a permit to search for treasure. Then find it—legally. And so, convoyed by Corder's yacht, the *Dulcinea*, they set out to bury the *Baltrum's* ballast on Crab Cay, three thousand miles away. And at Teneriffe they met Bompard. And Bompard roused suspicions. In fact, everybody roused suspicions—particularly Morgan, mate of the *Dulcinea*—and Bompard.

(A Four-Part Story—Part III.)

CHAPTER XXIII.

LONGLEY AND HEARN.

The great Peak stood whilst the sunset's flow-
ers

Grew on its lava of cliff and scaur,
stood, a tower above all towers,

Died like a dream with the evening star.

KEEP her as she goes," said Larry,
handing the wheel to Longley.

Sheila looked away back where
the great peak was dying in the dusk
above a luminous purple sea with the islands
of Heiro and Gommera vaguely sketched in
the twilight beyond. They were beyond

pursuit, there was nothing to follow them unless the *Tiede*, a tinpot ferryboat, the American training brig and the two fruit schooners. They were beyond pursuit and they had the gold.

Down below in the cabin a little later, James, who had quite recovered himself, gave her details of the tragedy.

"Only for you," said James, "things might have panned out a lot different. You put me wise about that chap and I was on my guard. I wasn't on my guard just at first," said James, "but directly the thing occurred I knew and was able to drag Dicky away and do a bunk.

"We started all right, went part of the way by tram and then hoofed the rest, climbing all the time till we got to this *fonda* place he'd spoken of. He'd sent round the day before and they had a cold chicken ready for us and rolls and butter and salad and olives all done up in a basket and two bottles of white wine and glasses and corkscrew and all; then we hiked on, carrying the provisions with us, climbing zigzag to an orange grove that grows on a shelf a couple of miles from the *fonda*.

"Bompard said he'd spread the table while we explored round. We climbed the goat tracks to the mouth of a cave we saw, and which wasn't worth the trouble.

"When we got back there was Bompard with the feast spread. He'd opened the bottles of wine and while he was messing about hunting for something he'd dropped, I took up one of the bottles to examine the label and put it down again, but I didn't put it down in exactly the same place I'd taken it from and that must have confused him."

"How?" asked Sheila.

"Wait till I've finished and you'll see. When luncheon was over and we were lighting up, old man Bompard began to look about him uneasily. He looked at me and Dicky and then he says: 'How do you feel?'

"I feel all right,' says I. He says nothing for a moment, lights his cigar and then drops it, clapping his hands to his—front.

"He was doubled up with pain and then he began crying out that he was poisoned—that the wine was poisoned and shouting for a doctor and a priest.

"I tumbled to the business at once. He'd poisoned one of the bottles to do us in, and owing to my shifting them he'd taken the dose instead of us. He kept shouting to us

to run to the *fonda* and tell them to fetch a doctor and a priest, and we ran.

"I explained the position to Dicky as we were tumbling down cliffs and chasing along goat paths. I had enough Spanish to tell the people of the *fonda* what he'd said. I told them we'd send more help from Santa Cruz, and then we kept on running, took the wrong path and got lost, but got down at last and made for the harbor.

"We didn't know where to find priests and doctors, so I ran into that chemist man in the Callé What's-his-name, and told him a gentleman was ill and gave him the directions. That's all. Only for you putting me wise we'd have stuck to that chap and maybe have been knifed by his confederates, for I liked him and never would have believed, off my own bat, that he was up to mischief."

"Good heavens," said Sheila, "you left him!"

"Of course we left him."

"But are you sure——"

"What?"

"I don't know——" Her mind was upset. The joyous figure of Bompard arose before her. She had liked him at first sight; suspicion had cast its odious shadow upon him, but the first liking had clung, obscured by the shadow, but now peeping vaguely forth again.

The question she was asking herself was frankly this: "Could that fool of a James have——"

"Are you sure it was poison? Might it only have been illness?"

"Sure," replied James. "Why he said it himself—confessed it."

"Might it only have been his fancy?"

"Goodness, no," said Dicky. "The chap was poisoned right enough—if you'd only seen him."

Sheila brooded. Well, there was no use worrying. But to run off and leave a man like that! And, still, if Bompard was what she had fancied, what better could they have done? They had told the *fonda* people, and the chemist——

"Anyhow," said she, "you did everything for the best and there's no use bothering now. Let's have supper."

All around here between the Canary Islands, and between them and Madeira, the sea is of an extraordinary depth and a blueness almost Caribbean in its wonder and brilliancy, maybe because the bottom

here has no mud or sediment. It is all coral; coral even at the depth of over a mile.

When Sheila came on deck next morning she found the sun up, the Canaries vanished and the Selvages a dun line marked with foam on the port bow.

The Selvages, or Selvagees, have a chapter of their own in the long, exasperating history of treasure hunting, the history which to my knowledge has never been marked by one find worth mentioning. Here was actually hidden a vast amount of gold and here armed with full directions as to the position of the treasure the British government sent one of their ships under Sir Hercules Robinson. He found nothing. It was like the Trinidad business, the map given by the dying sailor in all good faith to his benefactor, the chart of South West Bay, the position of the hills, the minute details as to the location of the treasure—everything—but no treasure. It was like the Voss business, it was like the innumerable businesses of which I have a list as long as my arm, which have been started to hunt for pirate gold among the islands and keys of the West India Islands—they have never found anything but mosquitoes, never will.

Sheila, her eyes fixed on the lonely rocks, sand banks and foam goats of the Selvages felt a rising of her heart. She knew these barren islands and their story, and old Captain Dennis, who was in the main a sensible man, had drilled into her mind the absolute hopelessness of the treasure gamble. So it was that now, gazing across the water at these sinister and desolate rocks where many a man has labored like a fool, her heart rose at the thought that come what might she and her companions had at least touched *their* treasure. There was to be no hopeless digging. They had only to bury it at a well-marked spot and to unearth it again.

As she turned from the view of the islands she saw Longley and Hearn. They were in different watches, but they were both on deck at the same time, Hearn having just come up from the fo'c's'le.

Both these men were out of the picture in this expedition. They were too respectable. Dicky and James and the others harmonized with—or at least did not shout against—their surroundings, but the two yacht sailors didn't fit. They felt it, perhaps that's why they showed it. They were not used to such narrow quarters and such dingy surround-

ings; the fo'c's'le of the *Baltrum* "smelt fusty" and the cooking was not up to their expectations. They wanted fresh meat. They did not grumble, but they showed themselves dissatisfied and they showed their dissatisfaction without rudeness or giving offense. It was a sort of atmosphere they carried with them, and Sheila, who had not much knowledge of the ways of their class, thought at first she had done something to offend them. Then she discovered she hadn't—it was only the *Baltrum*.

She had made up her mind at first to get rid of them at Great Bahama, send them back on board the *Dulcinea* and so be free of them when the time came to sail to Crab Cay and do the burying.

This morning she came to alter her mind on this subject.

She had been calculating up the man power necessary for taking the ketch to Crab Cay, keeping her off it and carrying the gold ashore, and it seemed to her that they were too short handed for safety. They wanted at least another man and Longley was the man of all men for the job.

Longley had a face unintellectual as the face of a sheep and not unlike. His people originally had belonged to the South Downs before coming to Southampton in the time of King George I., and engaging in the business of yacht sailing. Longley was a safe man, Sheila felt, safe to know nothing of their business unless it was carefully explained to him, and to say nothing even if he knew.

He was just what they wanted, a big, able-bodied, stupid man, trustable to keep a secret as a steam engine. Hearn was quite different. Sheila determined to keep Longley and get rid of Hearn.

So it was that this treasure expedition with bullion at stake, greater in amount than was ever carried by any boat smaller than the *Majestic* or *Homeric*, was under sole control of a girl who put in spare moments knitting a jumper.

Longley and Hearn were ignorant of the whole business, so was Larry; James and Dicky were useless except as subordinates. They knew nothing of navigation at sea and the equally important work of navigation ashore found them wanting.

She could not trust them—at least she could not trust James; he was honor personified no doubt, but he was erratic. Dicky, when alone, was sensible, but when ashore

with James he seemed to follow the leading of the other.

She dreaded what might happen at Havana if James took too many cocktails and talked too much.

Another thing was bothering her. James had exhibited to her, without knowing it, the fact that Cupid had been at work with him. The events of the voyage, the excitements, new duties and new surroundings had prevented Mr. Corder from developing on these lines, but he might begin to develop at any moment. He was a gun ready to be fired. She felt that, knew it by the sixth sense that tells a woman all about these things and the knowledge was like a grit in the eye.

Love was absolutely outside this business so fraught with terrible possibilities. Even had she cared for James the thought of philandering would have revolted her, but she did not care for him—at least in that way.

At noon that day, with the Selvages far astern, she took the sun, the first observation on a journey of three thousand miles across the Atlantic. The *Dulcinea*, which had spoken to them and received orders as to where they had to meet, was far ahead, a white wing on a sea breezed and desolate but blue as the Mediterranean.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LANDFALL.

THE north Atlantic, like the Bay, has a bad name got mostly from winter experiences on the Liverpool-New York passage. It has a cold name, too. But the north Atlantic below 40° is as beautiful as the Pacific, as blue, and more trustable.

They had no bad weather but a favoring wind that fell to a dead calm six days out, as if resting, and then resumed work blowing across the infinite distances of the swell from a sky hung on its sea line with white summer clouds. The nights were tremendous with stars, and one dawn coming on deck they saw away on the starboard beam a fairy cloud, pearly and pink tinged, diaphanous, yet hinting of solidity—Bermuda.

The *Dulcinea* had vanished from sight days before, had outsailed them. There was nothing in all that sea but the fairy island and a freighter so far off that its hull was almost down beneath the horizon.

They had changed their meeting place

with the *Dulcinea* at the last moment. Great Bahama had been chosen at haphazard, but it was too far north of Rum Cay, at least farther than necessary, it was also not a good rendezvous from the point of secrecy.

Sheila, looking over the charts on the night they left Teneriffe, had suggested this and the others had agreed. The expedition, rushed from the moment of its inception, was like a bag packed in a hurry, and this important point turned up only at the last moment and James, for once in his life, was able to give advice that helped. He knew the whole Bahama bank and he had a long memory for places and soundings.

"You're right," said James, "and Great Abaco is as bad. You get all sorts of schooners and boats from Nassau pottering round. We can't do better than meet off Turtle Island. There's good anchorage but no one's there and no one goes there, for there's nothing doing. There it is east of Eleuthera and north of Cat Island; there's no reefs to make bother and no chance of missing the *Dulcinea*, for the place isn't bigger than a dinner table. Shortt knows it—he was with me when I was there last. It's a good fishing center."

"May there be yachts there?" asked Sheila.

"In the winter there might," said James, "but not now."

The change of rendezvous was given to the *Dulcinea* when they spoke her that night, but on the lovely morning when all calculation ought to have shown them Turtle Island dead ahead, the sea showed nothing.

The *Baltrum* was making ten knots; there were land gulls white in the flower-blue sky, but of land there was no trace.

Sheila felt a chill at the heart as the morning wore on and the *Baltrum* sighing and sinking to the swell bravely made her way in face of the endless and unbroken azure. The ship had done her duty and the hands—only she had failed. Her navigation was at fault. But not much. Toward noon Larry who was on the lookout shouted: "Land!"

"Where away?" cried Sheila rising from the cabin hatch and running forward.

"There isn't any land," said Larry, "but sure it's there right enough." He pointed, not ahead, but away on the starboard bow and there, thready against the sky, showed the masts of an anchored vessel.

"It's her," said Larry.

It was.

Turtle Island, too low in the water to be seen at that distance, showed as the hull of the *Dulcinea* became fully visible; Turtle Island without a tree, just a low-lying mass of rocks, foam bearded and clanged about by gulls, with the *Dulcinea* lying at anchor in fifteen fathoms a quarter of a mile from the shore.

They dropped anchor a couple of cable lengths away from the yacht and the *Baltrum*, tireless, for sails never tire, swung to her moorings, without loss of stick or rag for all her journey and just as though she were still swinging to the tide and the tune of the bell buoy in Hildersditch Pool.

CHAPTER XXV.

THEY TELL LARRY.

HOW?" asked James.

It was noon of the next day, the *Baltrum*, with the wind on her port quarter, was south of Turtle Island; and Crab Cay, if the charts and the reckoning did not lie, was due to be sighted somewhere about three o'clock. Sheila was down below with the two others giving them her opinion that the worst and most difficult part of the whole business was coming now.

"This way," said Sheila. "It's just as if we had committed a murder and were trying to dispose of the corpse—I mean the difficulty is just the same. First of all Larry will see what we are doing, and secondly, there's Longley. I took him with us because we were undermanned, and secondly because he seems so stupid. I felt sure it was safe to bring him along, but it only occurred to me last night, as I was lying awake and thinking, that stupidity doesn't stop people from talking. He may suspect nothing, but he is sure to think it's queer when he sees us bringing ballast on shore at this island and burying it."

"Naturally," said James.

"Then if Mr. Morgan is 'wrong,' as I suspect him to be, he may question Longley."

"We must keep them apart when we get to Havana, that's all."

"Well, we must try and do that," said Sheila. "Then there's Larry. I've always been afraid to tell Larry about the gold lest he'd lose his head and talk. It was a mistake. I ought to have told him and I think we ought to tell him now."

"Why now?" asked Dicky.

"Because he will be able to help to keep Longley ignorant of what we are doing. They are sure to get talking together about it."

"Will he cut up rough at not having been told before?" asked James.

"Larry! Oh, no, he's too devoted to me for that. Let's call him down right now and get it over."

A minute later the old sailor entered the cabin, shut the door at the command of Sheila and stood twiddling his cap and waiting for orders.

"Larry," said Sheila, "I've got something to tell you of the greatest importance. I couldn't tell you before because it was a secret, and the secret was not all mine."

"Yes, miss," said Larry.

"It will be the most surprising thing you ever heard; and when you've heard it, you will know how important it was to keep it a secret. You know those metal blocks among the ballast?"

"Yes, miss."

"Well, they aren't metal—they are gold."

"Yes, miss."

"Pure gold. They must have belonged to those two men who killed one another. No one has claimed them, so they are ours."

"Yes, miss. I knew that long ago."

"Knew it long ago! How on earth did you know it?"

"Sure I heard you talkin' about it, and me listenin' at the skylight," said Larry.

"Oh, good gracious!" cried Sheila. "Listening!"

"I wasn't listenin' to hear," said Larry, "but not havin' corks in me ears it come to me as I was settin' be the skylight mendin' a sail one day beyant there at Hildersditch. You and Mr. Sebright was talkin' and the ould hooker's a fiddle for carryin' sound. 'So they've got a saycret they're keepin' from Larry,' said I, and wid that I listened all the more."

"You haven't said anything?" asked James.

"Me say anythin'!—it's me that's been bottlin' it, for if I hadn't tumbled to it the hands would have heard, and you chatterin' away about it down below. Many's the time I've called Hearn or Longley for'ard so they mightn't hear anythin' comin' up from the skylight. Me talk—faith, it's you that ought to be askin' that."

"Never mind, Larry," said Sheila. "Mr.

Corder didn't mean that you'd talk really—only by accident. Well, you know now, anyhow, and what we have to do is to keep Longley from suspecting anything. I don't know how much you heard when you were listening; but it's just this, Larry—there's only one way to turn this gold into money and——”

“I've tumbled to it, miss,” said Larry. “Sure ould Mike Connelly did the same at Stranrae whin I was a boy. Mike, he robbed a chap of five goulden soverins and dug a hole an' buried thim and then dug them up again, pritindin' they was treasure-trove; but sure wan of thim was an Australian soverin and that give the show away on him.”

“Well, we haven't robbed any one, but that's just about what we want to do—it's our only way. Crab Cay is the place we've fixed on and we're close to it now. We have thought out everything. We have the shovels for digging and the sacks to fill with sand to take the place of the ballast we are landing, not that it will equal its weight, but at all events it will be something toward it. The only bother is Longley and keeping the thing hid from him—at least keeping him from suspecting the truth.”

“Faith, that's so,” said Larry. “Well, Miss Shaila, if you'll give me the time to turn it over in me head I'll maybe be afther thinkin' of somethin'. Longley hasn't the since of a rabbit beyond steerin' and splicin'—all the same, a rabbit would be askin' questions seein' what we're afther and it's for me to put the blinkers on him.”

He left the cabin, took the wheel from Longley and sent him forward on the lookout. Then the others came up.

Invisible and all to west of them lay the Bahamas and the vast flats from which they rise. These banks—and the great Bahama bank has a length of three hundred miles and width of eighty—are the tops of vast mountain ranges rising sheer from incredible depths. Could the waters of the ocean be stripped away you would see the entrance leading to the Straits of Florida like a narrow road winding past sheer cliffs rising miles high to a table-land dotted with hillocks—the Bahama Islands.

Crab Cay is the most eastwardly lying of all these hillocks, the last thing to show of land before Profundity takes charge, making the bed for the Atlantic Ocean to toss in.

Here at Crab Cay, Rum Cay, Caycos, Cat

Island and Mariguana, the old blockade runners of the American Civil War used to hide and keep their depots. It was at Crab Cay that Chiselman fought Hayes, Hayes “boarding” the islet where Chiselman and his crowd were making merry, just as though he were boarding a ship. Long years before that Horne was supposed to have hidden a vast quantity of plunder in the sands of Crab Cay, and in the waters to westward of it, protected from the northeast trades and southwest winter gales; some years ago the bones of a ship might have been seen, an old-time ship with the bow all smashed and gone but the poop still standing. This afternoon, however, when Larry on the lookout cried: “There she is,” and the others crowded forward to look, Crab Cay far across the luminous blue of the sea showed nothing of these old-time furious happenings. Nothing but the thready tufted forms of two palm trees, wind bent by the northeast trades, lonely and lost looking.

“Keep her as she goes,” cried Sheila to the helmsman. “It's all thirty-fathom water this side and to the west, and good holding ground.”

Then as they drew nearer she took the wheel herself, giving the order for the anchor to be got ready. It fell in twenty-five fathom water and as the *Baltrum* swung bow on to the flood Crab Cay in its full extent and desolation lay before them.

Oval in shape, exactly like one of those cuttlefish bones you can pick up on any beach, it lay in the light of the late afternoon sun, the gulls lamenting over it as though it had been a corpse. Of all places in the world—excluding cities—Crab Cay is perhaps the most sinister. Death Valley backed by the Funeral Mountains is horrible, but it is overdone, it shouts. Crab Cay whispers. Whispers and simpers in the sun, the wind stirring the sands and the gulls lamenting on the wind; nowhere higher than six feet above tide mark, it gives you a low horizon bounding a dark-blue desolate sea, and always when the lightest wind is blowing you hear mixed with the sound of the waves on the beach, a voice within a voice, the silky uncertain whisper of the sands.

In the sou'west storms Crab Cay shouts till its voice is heard at Cat Island. It is preferable then.

The two palm trees standing some forty feet apart and bent by the eternal trade

winds leaned to the west and in all the white heat-shaken expanse to south and north not another tree showed, not a bush or blade of vegetation.

Certainly James was right; of all places in the world a better could not be imagined for the hiding of treasure. There was nothing here to attract ships or men, only the good anchorage.

The boat having been got out, Larry rowed them ashore, leaving Longley to keep ship. Then having hauled the boat above high-tide mark they walked to the palm trees, stood, and looked around them expectantly.

None of them spoke for a moment. There was something about the place that blanketed conversation, something that filled the mind with a sense of negation. It was Larry who broke silence.

"I've been thinkin', Miss Shaila," said Larry, "and turnin' it over in me head that the best way to be doin' is tell Longley that you aren't aisy about the metal ballast. Tell him it's puttin' the compass wrong, or some thrash like that—he won't 'now the differ. Then you can say to him you want to shove it ashore and take sand on instead—at laste, I wouldn't be sayin' it to him but to me in his hearin'. Well, then, we can get the stuff ashore and dump it, then bring the bags off for the sand and fill them and bring them on board. That ought to be all done be to-morrow night. Then at night when Longley's aslape, and he slapes like a dead policeman, row off and bury the stuff, you and me and the gintleman here and Mr. Sebright."

"I was thinking something like that myself," said Sheila.

"That's a top-hole idea," said James. "The only danger is he might wake up and find out what we are doing."

"Well, unless you murther him, there's no other way out of it," said Larry, picking up an empty crab shell, examining it, and throwing it away again.

"It's the only way," said Sheila, "and we've got to run risks—not that there's much risk about Longley, even if he did know. He's too stupid. Well, are you agreed?"

"I am," said Dicky. "Yes—we're all agreed. And now we're here, let's fix on the spot where we'll hide the stuff. Those trees seem to have been put up by Providence for a land mark; suppose we bury it midway

between them. It's all soft sand, except those hillocks the trees grow from."

James, who had brought the boat hook with them, as a protection against crabs should they eventuate, prodded it in the sand till Larry told him to give over.

"That chap's watchin' us from the ship," said Larry. "I tould him to get on with the brass work and there he is hanging his sheep's head over the side. We'd better be gettin' back. You've fixed all you want to and if you want to be doin' any more talkin' you can do it aboard."

"I don't see any crabs," said Sheila as they turned to the boat.

"You'll see them soon enough," said James, "unless they've deserted the place."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RISING OF THE CRABS.

LONGLEY stood by as they came on board and helped to stream the boat on a line.

"Larry," said Sheila, as the old man was going forward with the other after the conclusion of this business, "I've made up my mind to have the metal ballast out of her."

"Come here," said Larry to Longley, who was just about to plunge down into the fo'c's'le. "I'll be wantin' you in a minit—and what for do you want to get the ballast out of her, Miss Shaila?"

"I don't want to get all the ballast out," replied Sheila in a sharp voice. "How stupid you are! I said the metal ballast. It's disturbing the compass; there's a variation that has put us miles out. I was going to have got rid of it at Teneriffe, that's why I got the sacks—then I forgot about it."

"Well, I don't see how that bit of ould iron can be disturbin' the compass," said Larry, "but sure if you're set on havin' it out—well there you are. And when do you want it shifted?"

"You'd better begin and get it on deck now," replied the other, "so's to be ready for work in the morning."

"I'll start on it wid Longley when we've had our supper, miss," said Larry.

Supper was served in the cabin a few minutes later. It was a silent meal. The gold, as long as it was quiescent among the ballast, and part of the ship, so to speak, had not troubled them. It had always been at the back of their minds and not the pull

of a rope or a turn of the wheel but had been part of the business of which it was prime mover, but it had not troubled them directly.

Now it was different. It was going to leave them. It was going to take itself ashore and hide itself in the sand and they were going to sail away without it. Not till now did they know that it had become part of them.

This great treasure had become part of their spirit, almost of their flesh and blood. They would have fought for it as men fight for their homes and their ideals, intrigued for it, lied for it—as indeed they were intriguing and lying with the wretched Longley, and they would have done all these things not for the sake of gain, but of possession; not because they were sordid or little, but because the gold was great in spiritual as well as material power, a potential treasure of the mind as well as the pocket.

They had bully beef for supper because it was too much bother to cook things, but they did not notice what they ate—it was all the same. The crying of the birds from the cay came through the open skylight and they could hear the last waves of the flood beating on the sands, a low, whispering, sighing sound that loudened occasionally only to die away again.

Worries bring up worries and to James, as he ate, the worry of having to leave the gold brought up other worries to help. The British government, that apparition whose judges can't be bribed, whose laws are so inelastic, whose arm is so long! Bompard—a vague dread of "consequences" arising from the death of Bompard had lately begun to disturb him! The crooks headed by MacAdam! Worry about all these things crept up from the subconscious mind of James to help the worry about leaving the gold.

Then as they were lighting their cigarettes after supper, sounds and voices came from outside—the voice of Larry admonishing Longley, the sound of some heavy object being carted on deck and dumped on the planking.

It was the gold coming up; moving like a cripple, hauled by common sailormen, dumped on the deck like old junk; the thing that could recreate or blast lives, feed multitudes, make the desert a flower garden, dumped like old iron to the tune of Larry's voice.

"Aisy, you fool, if you drop it on me toes I'll splinter you!"

They came out to help, and half an hour later the business was done and there it lay in the starlight on the narrow deck, block on block, a dusky heap with rope handles sticking out here and there.

When Dicky turned in a little later he could not sleep. The night was warm, but not stifling, for the Bahama temperature even in summer is rarely excessive; all the same, tossing under a single blanket, he could not sleep. The air felt oppressive and when he dozed off at last he was brought awake again with a start. It was as though the treasure on deck had suddenly spoken to him.

The gold was up there lying out on the deck unguarded; the fact that no one could possibly steal it was nothing, the feeling that it was there lying loose for any one to steal was everything.

He reasoned with himself, yet the uneasiness persisted, and the desire to go up and see if it was all right grew till, throwing the blanket off, he stood on the cabin floor in his pajamas.

James was snoring.

Dicky reached the cabin door and went up the companionway on deck.

The gold was all right. Larry, as an afterthought, had flung a tarpaulin on the heap. No one but Larry would have done a thing like that, and Dicky, having lifted the corner of the covering to glance beneath, smiled as he turned to the starboard rail and leaned on it face to the tepid breeze.

What a night! The blaze of a million stars lit the sea ruffled by a breeze from the Straits of Florida; the sky was a festival; streets of light, the blaze of palaces, a city of splendor swept through by the river of the milky way.

Dicky was no poet, but the beauty and the splendor of the sky held his mind for a moment, making him forget even the gold. He watched the stars for a moment, then the sea and the streaks to southward that showed the run of the current deflected by the southern spur of the sand spit.

Then the cay drew his attention. The surface of the cay by the water's edge seemed moving and changing in tint, the white of the sand passing as though a wave of dusk were invading it. Then he knew. It was crabs.

Crabs rising like a tide.

He fetched the night glass from its sling and looked.

Through the glass it was like watching a moving carpet, a carpet broken here and tufted there. Here and there, lifted against the sand background, great pincers showed, only to vanish again as the host from the sea flowed up and on, breaking as they went into skirmishing parties that spread with a trickling movement north and south as though running in channels.

The sight of this horrible, sudden, silent eruption of life, like the swarming of vermin, made the glass tremble in his hand. Then, closing it, he put it back in its sling and went below.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"HARD LABOR."

THEY were up at dawn, a dawn where the sky turned from flaming red to flaming yellow, that passed, becoming pure light as the brow of the sun broke from the sea; the sea that stretched without a break to the African coast and the Sahara Desert.

Sheila, coming on deck, forgot everything for a moment as she stood facing that heavenly morning, sea scented, filled with the warmth of summer and the breath of the tepid wind. Then she found that all her worries had vanished; the worry about leaving the gold, the worry as to how they would ever dispose of it. The warmth and splendor, the feeling of newness in the air and the breath of the wind from Florida destroyed doubt and filled her soul with the gayety of adventure.

It was the same with Dicky and in a way with James. Even Larry seemed to move with younger limbs as he helped to get the boat over—they had brought it on board overnight—and to bring up the sacks for the sand ballast.

Then, while Longley was making coffee and preparing breakfast they set to. They had determined to bring all the stuff ashore and leave it above high water mark; then, digging midway between the palm trees, to fill the sacks with sand and cart them on board; lastly, after nightfall and when Longley was asleep, to land, carry the gold up to the sand hole and to cover it over.

Larry stood in the boat below to receive the blocks while the others lowered them one by one in a rope sling. Four made a sufficient cargo, and when they were in,

Larry and James rowed them off, beached the boat, lugged them out and returned for more. There were twenty-one of them—five boat journeys—and knocking off for breakfast it took them till ten in the morning before the boat was ashore and the whole heap lay on the beach, the sun lighting it and the fine sand whispering about it in the wind.

Sheila, who had come over with the last load, sat down beside them, and Dicky, tired but happy, lit a cigarette.

James was on board. Lifting and hauling these heavy weights had reduced James to a condition calling for a whisky and a sparklet soda and rest under the awning which they had rigged.

"Well," said Sheila, "that much is done. We have only now to get the sacks filled, and make the hole, and get it into it, and cover it up—oh, yes, and get the sacks on board and stow them and then the whole business will be half done—or will it? No, it won't, for we have to come and dig it up again when we've been to Havana and got our permit. Oh, dear, the whole of this thing gets sometimes like a nightmare."

"Anyhow, it's lucky for us," said Dicky, "that this bit of sand is the only bit of the Bahamas that isn't British."

"Yes, and it was clever of James to pitch on it," said the girl. "He is clever if he wasn't so stupid at times. Have you noticed anything about him lately?"

"No."

"Well, it seems to me sometimes that the whole of this business is getting on his nerves; anyhow that his mind is troubled about something. I think he'd like to be out of it if the truth was told—only he's too good a sort to let us down."

"He'd never do that."

"No, I don't think he would," Sheila laughed. "If I tell you something awfully secret you'll forget it at once?"

"Yes," said Dicky.

Sheila looked at him. Their life and intimacy had bound them together as though they were brother and sister. She would say to Dicky things she would never have said to another man.

"Well, there was a time when I thought James was going to turn sentimental—you know what I mean. At Teneriffe there were moments when it seemed to me he was going to ask me to accept his heart and his yacht. Imagine the horror of guitar busi-

ness mixed up in an affair like this, and James playing the guitar! Then Bompard mercifully interposed. James has got such a fright over Bompard that he's forgotten everything else. I think he's afraid somehow that people may accuse him of having killed Bompard, or something like that."

"What nonsense," said Dicky, shrugging his shoulders.

"Of course it's nonsense—he spoke to me about it; he asked me might anything be said about our going off in such a hurry and I told him I didn't think so. We were ready for sea and going, the port authorities knew we were going, and a few hours more or less did not matter. Besides, I knew them all—they've known me and father for years. Of course," finished Sheila, "I think it was stupid rushing off like that, but when he came on board saying Bompard was dead and we must put out at once, what was I to do?"

"Well, it's done," said Dicky, "and there's no use in bothering now."

He himself had been stampeded by James' imagination. He wished now they had stuck and seen the thing through, but it was done and there was no use in bothering any more.

"Even," said Sheila thoughtfully as she watched the gulls fighting above the sands, "even if Bompard was one of the MacAdam people, they wouldn't have dared to do anything to us. That sort of people must work in secrecy."

"No," said Dicky, "but if he had many of them with him at Teneriffe they might have tried to rush the boat and take her out that night. There was no man-of-war or anything at Teneriffe to have chased them."

"Maybe, and maybe it's just as well James was frightened. Who knows?"

She turned, her eye had caught sight of something moving by the sea edge, close to the boat. It was a crab.

Dicky saw it too, but he said nothing. What he had seen last night might have been only an occasional phenomenon. He had told James of it, but there was no use worrying the girl beforehand. Crabs or no crabs the three of them would have to land that night with Larry and not only land but spend several hours on the spit. In his heart he cursed Longley, the cause of all this bother; only for Longley they could have worked any time and how they willed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNDER THE SAND.

THEY rested till two o'clock, then, taking Longley with them, they landed with the bags and the digging began.

"This sand by the water is no good," said the wily Larry. "It's got the say in it and iv'ry change of weather the bags will sweat. Dig your sand up be them trees, sor, it's a bit further to carry the bags, but sure what's the matter about that?"

"Right," said James, leading them up to the spot they had chosen and taking off his coat. "Give me a spade."

Larry handed him a spade. They had only two spades. They did not want more, for it was not only a question of making a pit in the sand, but of filling the bags direct with every shovelful that was taken out. Sheila held a bag mouth open for James as he dug; Dicky did the same for Longley. Larry stood by with a pipe in his mouth, directing operations and fastening the mouths of the sacks one by one, as they were filled.

One might fancy the gold, in its great heap on the beach just above tide mark, making cynical reflections to itself on the matter.

It had never made them work harder than this. Since it had come together into one corporate body of treasure it had done many and cruel things, filling every one in cognizance of it with anxiety, desire, suspicion and the worry that wealth alone can create, but it had never worked beings harder than this—couldn't.

After the first ten minutes, James, who had never done a stroke of real work before in his life, began to wish himself further. The business was not only back breaking, but niggling. Every spadeful had to go right into the mouth of the sack that Sheila held open and there was so little in a spadeful. They were heart-shaped Spanish spades, rather larger than the English sort, but not large enough. They ought to have brought shovels.

James found himself mentally repeating this fact during the first ten minutes or so; after that he was content to work without thinking. Filling sacks with sand for ballast is the meanest form of labor, or one of the meanest, far beneath the labor of filling them with coal. Coal is a necessity. You are helping the work of the world; sand

ballast is only dead weight, a substitute for old metal, shingle, lumps of rock.

The gold, having condemned them to this coolie work, kept them at it. They had to get done by dark. If they did not get the whole job done that night, it would mean waiting all the next day idling and sweltering in the sun.

They couldn't talk, either, and tell each other this, nor could they complain too much else Longley would surely say to himself, "Why are they in such a hurry?" They began to hate Longley; before they had finished that evening, with their backs to a flaming sunset, they were hating the world.

Sheila, who had been taking turns with the spade, helped Larry to tie the mouth of the last sack, then, leaving the spades by the trees, they got the bags on board and stowed them, making three journeys in all.

Then they had supper.

If that had been the whole job they would have been tired out and ready for bed. As it was the prospect before them drove tiredness away. Nature has provided for nearly all contingencies and every man has in him a reserve of strength of which he knows nothing till the moment comes and the call. All the same, though they were not tired, they were strained in temper. Sitting there at the cabin table a very little would have started a quarrel.

It was not so much the work they had been doing as the work in prospect that produced this condition of nerves. The gold seemed to hold out before them an endless prospect of labor and difficulties. When they buried it they would have to get back and join the *Dulcinea*, sail for Havana, tell lies freely as to "information they had received from an old sailor as to treasure buried on Crab Cay"—Knight's "Cruise of the *Alerte*" had suggested this dodge—get permission to dig, return, dig up the stuff, bring it back to Havana. It seemed endless, all the things they had to do and the fact had never expressed itself so clearly as it did to-night. Especially in the case of James.

Money was a necessity to Dicky and Sheila—it wasn't to James. He had let himself in for all this hard labor and tribulation and bother urged by the craving for adventure, that lies in every healthy soul, and the fascination of the gold; it would have been much better for him to have stayed out. He had no need for more riches and as for ad-

venture he was surfeited. So he told himself to-night. But he said nothing.

After supper when Larry had cleared the things away they sat about in the cabin, Sheila knitting, the two others smoking, Crab Cay singing to them through the open skylight. They had no newspapers or books, only "Treasure Island" and the other treasure-hunting books which James had bought at Denny's in the Strand, and the very names of which were noxious to them; they had nothing to talk about, the gold barred every avenue of conversation; the gold, squatting like a demon on the beach a few hundred yards away—waiting to be buried.

And they could not bury it till Longley was asleep.

It was ten o'clock when Larry appeared at the door of the cabin.

"Snorin'!" said Larry in a half whisper.

Sheila put her knitting down and James put away his pipe. They followed Larry on deck, and into a night where a new moon was setting, a night of stars and warm wind and vague voices from the wave-beaten cay.

Yes. Longley was snoring. They could hear the sound as they dropped over into the boat which the push of the tide carried toward the beach almost without stroke of oar.

Then having landed and hauled the boat up they set to work.

The rope handles helped, but it was a hard business, as any one who has carried weight over beach sand will know.

When the blocks were all up by the sand hole between the trees, Larry took one of the spades and Dicky the other. The hole had to be deepened and broadened, and, working in double shifts, Sheila helping, this business took them nearly an hour. They had finished it and the first pig of gold had been flung in when Sheila, turning, gave a little cry and clutched Dicky by the arm.

The beach edge and all round by the boat was moving.

"Crabs," said Dicky.

He had been half expecting them.

Larry, wiping his forehead with his arm, turned to look. He seemed quite unconcerned. He knew quite well that so long as a man wears boots and is able to stand on his feet crabs can't hurt him, even in thousands. They raised no disgust in his soul, and his only fear was that they would swarm up and fill the hole.

"They'll be thravelin'," said Larry, "same as they do over the banks be Acklin Island. Come on and get the stuff in and don't be mindin' thim."

In went another pig and they were raising the third when Sheila with a little catch in her voice said: "They are coming!"

They were. Upflowing like a tide just as they had done the night before, moving like a carpet being drawn across the sands, without haste yet unceasingly, clicking and rustling, advancing toward the working party but not at them. That, to Sheila, was the heart-catching part of the business. There was something blind and elemental in this moving host; there was no convergence toward the human beings; the far line was moving forward straight ahead like the rest and all seemed under the dominion, not of hunger or enmity or any passion known to man or beast—but of clockwork.

"I'll be attandin' to thim in a minit," said Larry, and in went the third pig, then the fourth and fifth. "Wan more," said Larry, and in went the sixth.

Then, spade in hand, and calling Dicky to help, he began to attend to the unholy host that was now scarce three yards away.

"They're changin' their feedin' ground from the left to the right of the bank," said Larry as he began smashing into them with the flat of the spade. "Hit 'em with the flat, sor, same's I'm doin'. That'll l'arn you, you bastes, to keep clear of your bethers, that'll tache you manners—bad cess to you!"

He kept on till a mound of dead crabs three yards long formed a barrier to the pit, then the burial of the gold resumed while the last of the host—after having devoured the remains of their dead comrades—passed over the eastern beach and into the sea.

James felt sick. His lively imagination had been stirred. He saw himself alone on this place with no spade to defend himself with, alone, and naked for choice, and surrounded by that passionless, terrible host. Sheila felt almost as bad; it seemed to her as though something evil in the gold had drawn that monstrous horde from the sea. Then, when the last of the pigs was in and the last shovelful of sand on top of the pile, she turned toward the boat with a feeling of relief.

The moon had long set and the stars ruled the night as they rowed toward the *Baltrum*, dog-tired now, yet feeling a relief

at having got rid at last and for a moment of the weight they had been carrying so long.

CHAPTER XXIX.

JAMES GOES AWAY.

NEXT morning, and before the sun was up, they hoisted the sail, took up the anchor and started north to rejoin the *Dulcinea*.

Though refreshed by sleep and though half their work was now accomplished, they showed no exuberance of spirit.

Up to this the gold had always been in front of them, not in the form of gold but in the form of Fortune and everything that gold can buy. Now in their minds, as in reality, it lay behind them, a dead weight of metal, a burden they would have to return and pick up again.

Everything unpleasant that they had experienced since leaving Hildersditch was associated with it and the crabs had finished the business, at least in the minds of Sheila and James.

Things had come to a head with James this morning. Sincerely and earnestly he wished that he had never come along on this job. He who had everything that the world could offer had left everything—for what? For cramped quarters, barely passable food, hard work and uneasy mind; Forsythe's words about the illegality of the business; the Bompard incident; the feeling that a gang of international crooks were somewhere in the dark background of things, and dread of the British government, all conspired to make the uneasy mind. He had bought the wrong stock; he wanted to sell out and he didn't know how.

How could he leave the expedition? How could he leave the others?

He could not tell. He only knew that wild horses would not drag him back to that infernal cay to take up that appalling burden again.

Had he really loved Sheila things would have been different, but, alas, James' capacity for love was not equal to his capacity for enjoyment. Discomfort and anxiety had extracted the arrow of Cupid—or maybe mortification had produced anæsthesia. Anyhow he no longer felt it.

About seven bells—half past eleven—the wind shivered in the mainsail, died, and the *Baltrum* lay becalmed, adrift on a dark-violet sea.

James, below in the cabin smoking cigarettes and meditating on matters, had just stuffed "Treasure Island" through a port-hole when the others came below.

"Dead calm," said Dicky.

"And now I suppose we'll be drifting for days," said James. "Good heavens! In this old tub."

"Well, one can't help the wind," said Dicky.

"I know," said James, "but it's not the wind so much as the boat; as a matter of fact she's too small for long-distance cruising. What I propose is that we all shift on board the *Dulcinea* when we pick her up."

"And leave the *Baltrum*!" said Sheila.

"Yes. She can follow on after us to Havana."

"Larry will never leave her," said the girl. "He doesn't like big yachts."

"Well, he can stick in her and I'll lend him two more of my crew to help work her."

"He's no real good at navigating, and besides," said Sheila, "I can't leave him."

"Why on earth not?"

"Because I don't want to be separated from him. We've always been together in thick and thin."

"But he's only a servant."

"Oh, dear no," said Sheila. "He's much more than that. Larry's just like part of myself, more—I'd sooner lose my right arm than Larry."

"Besides," said Dicky, "it doesn't seem to be playing the game to desert the old hooker. She's carried us through till now, and done it well."

"I don't ask you to desert her," said James. "I'm simply suggesting that we go on board my boat and that she follow us on to Havana. As a matter of fact I want to stretch my legs and feel I have head-room enough to stand up in, for a while—besides, there's the cooking. I'm not grumbling, goodness knows, but it does seem insane when we can have every comfort to stick on for no reason in cramped quarters like these."

"I can't leave Larry," said Sheila, taking up her knitting, "and even if he consented to come on board your boat I would not like to leave the *Baltrum*—it would be unlucky for one thing, and, besides, there's the feeling I have for her. She has been our home for so long. No. I don't want to leave her."

"I say," said Dicky, suddenly turning to

James, "you aren't getting cold feet, are you?"

It was an unfortunate question, for it touched the truth.

"I've got nothing but a wish to do the right thing," said James, "and I think I've done it all along. If you feel I haven't, then there's an end to it."

"I didn't mean anything," said Dicky, "I didn't mean you hadn't done the right thing, I only asked——"

"I know. Well, to tell the truth now that the work is mostly done, if you care to carry on without me, I shan't grumble. I came in for the fun of the thing, not for any profit, and I'm ready to stand out without asking for a cent—helping you, of course, all I can at Havana."

"No," said Sheila, "you have got to have your share. Only for you, we would never have done anything. Why, the *Baltrum* is really yours. It was your money that really started the business, to say nothing of the help the *Dulcinea* has been. It's really *your* expedition—we are only partners."

James said nothing for a moment. His one ambition to get out of the affair, to be free of responsibility and find himself back in his own cozy corner of life was not furthered by this generous view of the matter.

He recognized that she was speaking the truth. He had bought the *Baltrum*, bought the stores, helped with his yacht and his men, helped with his own hands. If there was any bother he would be the person held chiefly responsible—and heavens! what bother there might be! Old Forsythe's words came back to him with their hint that the whole business was possibly within the circle of the criminal law, a business romantic, appealing to the adventurous spirit, yet possibly leading to the dock.

"Look here," said Dicky, a new idea striking him. "If you're fed up with the old hooker, why don't you go yourself in the *Dulcinea*, and leave us to work her? We can do it easily with Longley and join you at Havana."

"Yes," said Sheila, "why not?"

James lit another cigarette.

"I don't like the idea of leaving you people," said he. "You'd be short-handed—unless I could leave you a couple more men."

"Longley is enough," said Sheila, "and the distance is not far; yes, do go, if you feel

cramped here. We're used to small boats and you are not."

James took a lungful of smoke. "I'll think about it," said he.

He had grown visibly brighter.

By supper time that evening, when the wind had taken change again, he had fallen in with their views. He would go on to Havana in the *Dulcinea* and they could follow at their leisure. Next morning as they lay under the loom of Turtle Island and within two cable lengths of the yacht, Larry rowed him off.

"You'll find me at the Hotel Mercedes," said he as he stood up in the boat for a last handshake. "Sure I can't leave you anything more in the way of stores?"

"No, we've lots," said Sheila.

"Or another man?"

"No, Longley is quite enough."

"Good-by."

"Luck."

They watched him go on board, the sails rising and shivering in the wind, the anchor coming aboard. Then, as the *Dulcinea* got way on her, Sheila ran up the flag and dipped it.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHAT HAPPENED TO JAMES.

THE first thing James did when he got on board was to get into a hot sea-water bath and lie in it.

The *Dulcinea* having rounded the land was on a due-west course, the auxiliary whacked up and the sails drawing to a light and variable wind.

He felt like a man escaped from prison. In years to come memory would no doubt recall the adventure robbed of its unpleasant details, showing only the blue of tropic seas, the sunlight on white sands, nights of stars and dawns miraculous in their beauty. Just now he saw nothing but the cabin of the ketch he had left behind, the discomfort, the bad cooking, the cramped deck and the ropes he had been condemned to handle.

Then he had a Martini, served by a steward in speckless white drill, finished dressing and was himself again.

Later in the day, after luncheon, the ordinary siesta which every one takes at sea in the warm latitudes was a failure. Lying on the sofa of the saloon with the novel that refused to put him to sleep beside him on the floor, the figures of Dicky and Sheila ap-

peared before James, mute, unreproachful, and yet——

Had he acted right in leaving them, in cutting himself loose from them, in determining not to return with them to that detestable crab-infested cay to take up again the burden of the gold?

Absolutely. He had done more than well by them, he had started them on the way to wealth, they could have the whole treasure for themselves. What more did they want?

And still, somehow or another, James did not feel quite easy in his mind. The something that had made him ask the question was still there.

After dinner he played cribbage with Captain Shortt, Morgan looking after the ship. The possibility of Morgan being a scoundrel or at least the possibility of his having been got at over the gold business did not trouble Mr. Corder much. He had never fully shared Dicky's and Sheila's suspicions about Morgan, still, to-night over the cigars and whisky and cards he put some questions to his skipper.

"You satisfied with Morgan?" asked James.

"Oh, Morgan—I reckon he's all right," said the other, contemplating the cards. "What makes you ask?"

"I only wanted to know if you thought him a trustable chap."

"There aren't any flies on Morgan," said the captain; "a bit slack sometimes, but trustable as Jimmy. Well! no, I couldn't work with a first officer I wouldn't lay my money on as being up and aboveboard. I'd sooner sail with a bishop. Had enough of that when I was Vanderbuilder's skipper. He'd a first that was all O. K. on the outside, and him smuggling cigars. Have it was they laid their hands on him and we were held a week bailing him out and paying fines, to say nothing of the disgrace. And I got most of the kicking and Vanderbuilder didn't wear dancing pumps when he was on that business."

"You remember Morgan held you up at Tilbury when we were leaving? What about that?"

"Oh, that. I remember, and how you carpeted him here in this saloon. Well, you wouldn't if you'd known. He ought to have told you, but he's one of the sort that won't talk up for themselves. I only found it out by chance from him—his mother was

sick, that's what held him. He had to get a nurse for her and was near broke at leaving her."

"The deuce!" said James. He felt sorry as a man feels who has done another an injustice, by accident; then he forgot Morgan and his mother and everything else about him, retiring at ten o'clock to a comfortable bed to sleep the sleep of the just, untroubled by fear of being roused to take his trick at the wheel.

It was not till they were entering the great harbor of Havana that unrest came back to James attended by seven devils worse than itself.

They berthed far out, not a great distance from the old anchorage of the *Maine* and the sight of the port authorities' boat raised a little flutter in his breast. Might it not possibly be that the dead Bompard or his friends— No. The port authorities came on board smiling and bowing, had drinks and cigars in the cabin and departed in their fussy launch. No, there was nothing to fear on the score of Bompard, the cables had had plenty of time to work in and the port authorities of Santa Cruz had known the destination of the *Dulcinea*.

But that fact did not alter the determination that had arisen in the mind of James, surrounding a plan.

He had got from the port officers a valuable piece of information. The *Tennessee* of the New York, Key West, Havana line was due to leave for New York at five o'clock that afternoon; being summer time there would be plenty of accommodation on board of her.

He turned from the rail, went below and turned to his writing table, rang for a whisky and soda, lit a cigar and took a sheet of paper headed "Y. *Dulcinea*. R. T. Y. C."

Then he began to write. He wrote two long letters, tore them up one after the other, and started again:

Yes, I have got cold feet, but I have a warm heart. Honestly I wasn't made for adventuring, and London is calling me. So, look here. I'm leaving the *Dulcinea* with orders to Shortt to be at your disposal. I'm telling Shortt to be on the lookout for you, and I'm inclosing a check in this on Gundermann's Bank, where I have a deposit—they deal with our firm. The check is made out in your name, Dicky. So cut and carry on and keep the whole of the boodle. When you are rich you can pay me back the amount in the check, so don't worry about using it. My address for a few weeks will be the Hotel Plaza, New York, after that, London.

10B—POP.

I hate dropping out of the business in a way, but the thing was beginning to get on my spine.

When you've hived the stuff, let me know and we'll have a dinner at the Savoy. That reminds me, the unfortunate Strutt is still kicking his heels in London. Heaven help us!

Your unfortunate uncle, JAMES.

Then he wrote a check for five thousand dollars, put it in the letter, addressed the envelope "R. Sebright, Esq.," and sealed it.

"And that's that," said James, lighting a new cigar.

A weight was gone from his mind. He had done the right thing.

He rang the bell, brought the captain down and explained matters.

"I'm going to New York by the *Tennessee*," said James. "Then to London. By the way, have a boat sent off to her and engage a stateroom. Mr. Sebright and the *Baltrum* will be up here to-morrow or next day. I want you to give him this letter. You are to put the yacht at his disposal and hang on here as long as he wants, then bring her on up to New York. You can cable me how things go. You have money enough for the ship; if you are short, you can draw on Gundermann's up to five thousand dollars. I'm going ashore to see them and give directions."

He came up with the captain, who called a quartermaster to get the pinnace ready, and as they stood under the awning looking toward the distant town and the shipping, fluttering to the warm breeze the flags of all nations, the deep moist bellow of a siren made them turn to where, coming up from the half-mile channel entrance, a steamer showed ghost gray in the hot and misty blue. She was the *Seville* of the Cadiz, Teneriffe, Havana line; a four-thousand-tonner painted lavender-white like the Union Castle boats, and with two bright yellow funnels.

She came along, her wash giving the *Dulcinea* a slight roll as she drew away toward the far-distant quays across the sparkling blue of the vast harbor.

Had the *Seville* been made of glass, James, watching, might have seen in her smoke room four card players, four cigar merchants of Havana, utterly undisturbed by their entrance into port and the near proximity of their wives and families; three dried-up Spaniards and a big, black-bearded, jovial Frenchman—Bompard, or his living twin image!

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE INDIGNATION OF CAPTAIN SHORTT.

TWO days later the little *Baltrum*, coming along up the Bahama passage, raised Cabo Batabano, the old Bowline Head of the pirates, while in the heat haze the shores of Cuba showed like land dissolving into sea, like sea rising into the form of land. In the summer on this coast the most astonishing effects of mirage are seen, sometimes above the land, sometimes above the sea line. It is said that Rodriguez saw Dundonald's ships in the sky, pursuing him and so escaped, making round the eastern coast to the Isla de Pinos; while, sometimes, Tampico, as if tired of its position on the mainland, rises like the flying island of Swift and floats above the Cuban shore, a phantom town in the flower-blue sky. But this morning there was nothing but coast.

James had left them a book of sailing directions, though the way in was easy enough, for the channel leading into Havana harbor has neither bar nor obstruction, is three hundred and fifty yards wide and runs from eight to ten fathoms deep on its natural bed.

At nine o'clock, or a little after, Sheila through the haze ahead saw the fortifications of the harbor mouth, beyond which lay the blue hills that seemed to float in air.

The breeze held steady and warm, a continuous breathing from the east of north, and the *Baltrum* could have steered herself as they came through the passage, the vast harbor unfolding before them and the city disclosing itself as though at the opening of a magician's hand.

Yes, there lay Havana, one of the legend cities that so few Europeans have ever seen or ever will see.

Havana of the pirate days and the plate ships, of Hawke and Morgan, Dundonald and Albemarle. Havana with its spires and streets, its *alamadas*, its wharfs, where the deep-sea ships can come right alongside, and over all the flicker of bunting and over all the lights of Cuba, luminous, consuming and, at midday, tremendous.

"There's the *Dulcinea*," cried Dicky suddenly.

"So she is," said Sheila, who was at the wheel. "Captain Shortt told me before we left Turtle Island he'd anchor not far from the opening and we could take our

position two cable lengths south of his moorings and we'd be safe. Stand by, Larry."

"Keep her as she's goin'," said Larry, who was in the bow. "Mr. Sebright, will you give me a hand wid the cable. Stidy—stidy, Miss Shaila. Port a stroke—as you are now."

He stood in the bow as the *Baltrum*, the wind spilling from her sails, came crawling toward the *Dulcinea*, passed her and dropped the anchor in fifteen-fathom water, two cable lengths to southward of her moorings, and two cable lengths north of the Alacante gas buoy.

Sheila, leaving the wheel, came to the port rail and looked at the *Dulcinea*. A fellow in a bos'n's chair was doing some paint work over the stern, washing was fluttering on a line and by the rail an old quartermaster was leaning and chewing something, possibly tobacco.

Sheila could see his jaws working; there was no one else on deck and as she took in the whole ship and situation, she said to herself: "James is not on board."

The unerring instinct of the sailor told her that the *Dulcinea* was without her boss. "The owner has gone away and left me," was written in the attitude of the man at the rail, the deserted decks and the general slackness; she was a yacht out of commission for the moment, and looked it through every inch of her.

"Maybe Mr. Corder is ashore," thought Sheila as she stood by her companion while the *Baltrum* swung to her moorings.

"Don't see James," said Dicky.

"Nor I," said the girl. "Maybe he's ashore. Ah, there's Captain Shortt."

Word had evidently gone below that the *Baltrum* was in, for the *Dulcinea*'s skipper came straight to the port rail, waved his hand and then signaled them to come on board.

Larry rowed them over and Shortt, having received them as they came up the side, invited them down below.

"Mr. Corder is not here," said he when they were in the cabin. "He's left for N'York."

"Left for New York!" said Sheila in astonishment.

"Left for N'York," said Shortt, going to a desk and taking a letter from it. "He asked me to give you this and told me to put the yacht at your disposal."

Dicky opened the envelope and took out

the letter which he read with Sheila peeping over his shoulder.

Shortt watched them. Shortt was a man with a temper; an old yacht captain, he had banked enough money to live on, and that fact gave him a sense of independence often expressed in freedom of speech, even to James.

He had never looked with much favor on the *Baltrum* crowd; it was a standing mystery to him why James had cast in his lot with them. He was frankly ashamed of the *Baltrum* as a cruising partner, and her crew did not appeal to him, neither Sheila in her old guernsey, nor Dicky nor Larry, especially Larry.

A book could be written on the subliminal disturbances set up between Larry, who looked down on yachtsmen from fisherman heights, and the skipper of the *Dulcinea*, who looked down on Larry from the height of the *Dulcinea's* deck.

Dicky read the letter through without comment.

"When did he go?" asked Dicky, looking up as he finished.

"Two days ago," said Shortt. "Left the day we came in; took the *Tennessee* for N'York."

"What's the *Tennessee*?" asked Sheila, half stunned by the news in the letter, and not quite comprehending.

"Well, she was a ship when I last saw her," said the skipper, ruffled by the faces of the two people before him, and their manner.

If the *Baltrum* had been even a decent fishing yacht her small tonnage would not have mattered so much, but to think that this pair off that mud barge had established a hold on James and were evidently now disapproving of his actions was too much for Shortt.

"Well, when you next see her, or when you next see your master," blazed out Dicky, "you can tell him my opinion of him." He tore the letter in two and handed the check back to Shortt, who took it. "You can tell him with my compliments he's a quitter."

"Now then," said Shortt, folding the check carefully in three and looking at Dicky with his dark, steadfast beady eyes honest eyes with a spark in them just then, "if you want to call him down, do it yourself. I'm not going to take any of your messages." He began to warm. "No, if

you want to call him down do it yourself, there's a cable form and his address is the Hotel Plaza, N'York. Do it yourself. I don't know who you are, I only know he took up with you and chose to cruise in your company. Seems to me he's tired of it. If he'd taken or asked for my advice, he never would—no. I call it dubious, the whole business and," finished the skipper, "if he asked for or'd listen to my advice, he'd have no more truck with you. That's straight."

"Perhaps you will remember that there is a lady listening to you," said Dicky, blazing with wrath, yet not knowing how to meet these veiled allusions.

"I wasn't saying nothing a lady couldn't listen to," said the skipper stolidly, putting the check carefully away in a drawer of the desk. "I'm only saying what I'd say to Mr. Corder and that is, keep clear of doubtful company. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with you, and I'm not saying you're right. That's the bother—I don't know. You may be highly respectable parties for all I know, but there's one question would clear it, if you have the face to answer it, and that question is—what's the grip you have on Mr. Corder? Come now, face to face and man to man, give us the facts. I get a telegram from him at Tilbury to put to sea at once and I find him at Hildersditch Pool on board of you. Out we go to sea as if some one was after us, strike Teneriffe, lay up a few days and then out we go to sea again, destination Havana, changed to Turtle Island. Drop the hook at Turtle Island and off you go, you and him, he comes back and on board, tells me to whack up for Havana. Gets here and off he goes to N'York on board the mail boat, leaving you command of the yacht—looked like as if he wanted to get shut of you. Well, what do you say? Man to man, what have you got to say on the whole of this business."

"Nothing," said Dicky. "I can't tell you anything at all about it, except that it's a secret."

"Oh, a secret, is it?" said the captain.

"Yes."

"Well, I ain't Mr. Corder's parents and guardians, but if I was I'd be asking you these questions through Pinkertons. Pinkertons—you know Pinkertons?"

"I know this," said Dicky, "if there wasn't a lady present, I'd— Oh, come on, Sheila."

He followed her on deck, Shortt coming after in the fashion of a householder escorting dubious callers to the door.

Larry was waiting with the boat and they got in.

"You haven't sent that message to Mr. Corder," said Shortt, leaning over.

"No," replied Dicky, "you can send it yourself if you want to."

"I will," said the other, "and if you've done with Ben Longley, I'd be glad to have him back this afternoon."

"You can have him back at once."

"That's all the better," said Shortt, and the boat drew away.

"Larry," said Dicky as they came on board the *Baltrum*, "tell Longley to get his bag and go back to the yacht." Then when he was below again with Sheila, he sat down at the table and lighting a cigarette fell into a reverie—or seemed to. Clotted anger is a better definition of his state of mind.

Yes, Shortt was right. The whole business, the command they had got over James, the way he had gone off leaving everything to them, the use of his yacht, that big check—was fishy, and yet he could not explain. The bother was that James' past evidently contained purple patches known to Shortt. That yeggmen and rogues had had dealings with James, not to the advantage of the latter, was presumable.

The *Baltrum* was a dirty old boat; he himself and Sheila and Larry did not look much in a social way, and yet they had captured the butterfly James, the haunter of clubhouses and great hotels, reduced him to their environment and held him to it for over a month. Then he had run away from them, leaving them money. That's all Shortt knew, and a little knowledge of this sort is a dangerous thing.

Dicky could not tell of the treasure. Leaving other things aside, Shortt wouldn't have believed the story, at least in his present mood.

"Don't worry," said Sheila, who knew exactly how the other was feeling. "Let him think what he likes, but I must say I'm more than disappointed in James. It was such a *weak* thing to do."

"It was worse than that. It was dishonorable to go off and leave us stuck like this."

"No, it was only weak," said Sheila. "He didn't think we'd be stuck. He thought with that money he left us and the use of

his yacht and crew it would be all plain sailing for us. You see, it never entered his head that Captain Shortt might think the whole thing queer and insult us as he's done—and now," finished Sheila, "we'll be without Longley; just you and Larry and me, and we can't talk Spanish, at least only a little—so we've got our work cut out before us."

"Never mind," said Dicky. "We'll pull things through. I have nearly the whole of that four hundred pounds I drew from the bank so we aren't rushed for money." He lit another cigarette, and leaning his arms on the table went on:

"There's getting on for a ton of gold on that blessed sand bank and here we are in Havana harbor, the only people with knowledge of it—"

"Heavens!" cried Sheila.

"What?"

"Morgan—I'd forgotten him."

"Well, Morgan can't hurt us even if he's crooked, and I very much doubt if there's anything wrong with him. I don't think there was time for any one to have got at him before the yacht left Tilbury, even though he was late in coming on board. I think it was James' imagination a good deal. I know Larry saw him poking about below and he looked at the ballast—well, he's a sailor and he'd be interested in this old hearse. No. I've got a feeling that we've all been imagining things into the situation—the wicked flee when no man pursueth, you know. You see what it has done for James, making him bolt like that. Don't let us get rattled in the same way, or we'll spoil everything."

Sheila said nothing for a moment. Her woman's mind, a measuring tape for character, had never been under any delusion about James. Then after a moment she said:

"I don't like Morgan. I may be wrong, and there it is, but I think you are right about our imagining too much. I liked Monsieur Bompard at first sight, then I began to suspect and imagine things about him and worried James. I think I was wrong. People you like at first sight generally are to be trusted. It was the wretched gold that made me suspicious of every one. Well, what we have to do now is to forget everything but the work before us, and the first thing to do is to get a concession or permit to dig for treasure at Crab Cay.

How are we to get it, and where are we to apply for it?"

"I'm blest if I know," said Dicky. "James talked of it as if he knew all about it, and now we're cut off from him and cut off from the yacht."

Sheila, sitting at the opposite side of the table, rested her brow on her hands. Yes, James had talked glibly of concessions and permits as though he knew all about them; possibly he did, probably he didn't. There was one thing certain, he knew Havana, and his position as a millionaire and owner of a fine yacht would have helped them a lot. But there was not the least use in grumbling; they were up against it with only their own wits to help them. Then at last she spoke:

"I don't know. If we go straight to the authorities here and ask for a concession to dig, we'll surely have to give them something, either a share in the business or money down—people don't give things for nothing. Then, even if we get the concession, are we sure they will keep their word? You know what foreigners are and we have no position or standing and the poor old *Baltrum* isn't a certificate of respectability. You are right. James has let us down—he didn't mean to, I'm sure; he didn't think—oh, we've made a mistake!"

"How?"

"We shouldn't have quarreled with Captain Shortt. I know you couldn't help it, he was so insulting, but he wouldn't have been if he'd known all; we should have told him."

"Well, it's done," said Dicky.

"Yes, and we can't make it up with him now."

"I'd sooner cut my hand off——"

"I know—all the same if we could, I'd do it. But we can't. He had orders to put the yacht at our disposal and that evidently irritated him, then we definitely refused the yacht, refused James' check, refused to have anything to do with him, told him James was a quitter—and there we are. Captain Shortt dislikes us. He is an obstinate, pig-headed man and he's in a strong position—that's all."

"It's a most awful mix-up," said Dicky. "Seems as if fate or something was working against us—and still we've got on all right up to now. We've done a lot."

"Yes, we have," said the girl, her spirit suddenly lighting up, "and we'll do more. I

know it—we'll come out all right yet. I feel it, and we'll just go ahead and trust in Providence. There's a huge fortune to be saved with all our future tied to it—where on earth would we be, you and I and Larry, if we failed?"

"We won't."

"No, we won't. The thing we have to do now is to go ashore; we can stay at that hotel James told us of—the Mercedes—and look about us and see how the ground lies. I—I——" She stopped. Something had risen in her mind. If she had been a man she would have said, "Oh, damn James!" Maybe she said it to herself in the moment when she recognized that this rotten James had let them down again.

With James everything would have been all right; staying at a hotel they would have been a "party." How could she stay alone with Dicky at a hotel, and without Larry?

Sheila was old-fashioned—but sensible.

"I'll just have to go as your sister," said she.

"Of course," said Dicky. Before he could say anything more, Larry's voice came, answering voices from overside. It was the port authorities.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CIGAR TOWN.

SHEILA who was used to dealing with port officials did the business with them, and the *Baltrum* having received pratique, they departed after expressing their surprise that such a small boat should have come all the way from Teneriffe; but it was an English boat and the mad English had a reputation for doing things of this sort for fun.

"Damn' onion peddlers," said Larry, as he watched the launch go off rocking on the blue. "Them and their coffeepot. What's your orders, now, Miss Shaila?"

Sheila gave orders for the boat to be ready to take them ashore and an hour later, having packed some things, they got in and started.

Larry rowed them. Longley had gone back to the *Dulcinea*, so Larry would be alone on board. Sheila, before starting, had given him the whole position in a few words and arranged that Dicky should return on board next morning to see that everything was going on all right.

Landing them at the boat slip by the

Santa Anna wharf he carried their luggage up to a taxi cab in the Calle San Pedro and received their last instructions.

"Larry," said Sheila, who had suddenly remembered James' capacity for possibilities, "you'd better row alongside the *Dulcinea* and give them an address here in case Mr. Corder should send any cable or message—there's never any knowing what he might do. Tell them the Hotel Mercedes."

"I'll tell them, miss," said Larry, and the taxi started.

Havana dies every day about half past eleven and revives about five—at least upper-class Havana; the negroes, the Chinese, and the lower-class natives don't seem to mind the heat. It was beginning to revive now, and Sheila, as they drove, was filled with wonder at the size of the place.

Even in the 'eighties Havana was a fine city. Now, modernized, Americanized and festooned at night with electric blazes against the stars, Havana is a city to be seen.

You can smell it also.

Out of the Calle San Pedro by way of the great tobacco factory fronting the sea and passing the cathedral, the cab drove into the courtyard of a palatial hotel. A man in white with a blue band on his cap and the word "Mercedes" on it was opening the door and inviting them to descend; behind him the white-marble steps led to the hotel entrance, which showed vaguely sketched against the cool interior the fronds of palms in pots and tree ferns in tubs.

It was like one of the hotels you see sometimes on the stage in those spectacular productions so dear to the heart of Mr. Cochran and the London public. It didn't seem quite real, the ladies of the chorus seemed just to have vacated those steps down which at any moment Mr. Berry might come to the delight of a full house.

Sheila got out, Dicky paid the driver in English money and a second hall porter, a pure-black negro, took their luggage.

Now this luggage, a suit case of Dicky's, and a big attaché case, very much battered, belonging to Sheila, was quite in keeping with the *Baltrum* and their expedition, up to this; but it was not in keeping with the Mercedes and it came to Sheila as she followed the luggage up the steps that their "wardrobes," to use a good old term, were not in keeping either. She was wearing a white drill coat and skirt, bought at Tene-

riffe, and a Panama that had cost twelve pesetas; Dicky was to match as far as material and color went, but "ready made" was written on his garments as on Sheila's.

No, they did not match their surroundings; but the hotel did not mind; a languid woman with marcelled hair, in a plate-glass office with an electric fan above her and a great block of ice near by diffusing its coolness as a flower its scent, received them without the lift of an eyebrow, presented them with the hotel register to sign, allocated their rooms and handed them over to a chocolate-colored boy who led them to the lift.

"I say," said Dicky, as they sat half an hour later in the lounge having tea, "what's your room like?"

"Gorgeous."

"Mine's got a marble bathroom off it and what the bill will be, Heaven only knows. Well, there's no use bothering, let's enjoy ourselves while we can."

He helped himself to cakes, and Sheila, as she sipped her tea, looked about her. This sudden change from Crab Cay and the cabin of the *Baltrum* to supercivilization was the strangest experience of her life; it was the off season in Havana, but the Mercedes is never empty. People from Matanzas and Santiago, cigar and sugar plutocrats, American business men and South Americans from Brazil and the River Plate came here in summer as in winter, bringing their wives and children with them. There were three or four family groups in the lounge; women elegantly dressed and covered with jewels, men manicured and barbered; the sons of Mary served by the sons of Martha in the form of negro attendants bearing aloft trays of colored drinks, coffee, cigars, and cigarettes; while from the dance room beyond the inevitable band made itself heard, a gadfly voice floating above the palms and flowers, the cigarette smoke and the atmosphere of ease and wealth.

It was strange.

Sheila felt lost. Crab Cay and Turtle Island seemed homely and warm to the heart compared with this. These men and women belonged to another creation and these surroundings to another world of which she knew next to nothing. It was as though the gold were showing a new phase of itself, something quite new, something that repelled her. For the faces of these men and women, their forms and attitudes, their

voices and laughter, their setting and surroundings—the whole show repelled her, she who had been always used to the fresh air and the sea and the simple things of life and the work which is the soul's salvation.

She felt lost in a world of which she knew nothing, a world that filled her with a vague dislike.

"Let's enjoy ourselves while we can," had said Dicky.

She finished her tea without showing what was in her mind, then she suddenly turned to her companion:

"Dicky," said she, "I don't like this place. I wish we hadn't come. I don't like the look of these people."

"Why, what's wrong with them?" asked Dicky, surprised by the sudden change in her manner and the conviction in her voice.

"I don't know—nothing. Only they make me feel like a lost dog without a single friend in the world. They are different from us—let's go away. Couldn't we get some quiet hotel, or rooms or something, or go back to the boat?"

"Well, we landed to poke about and see how the land lies and try and get help. I don't see the good of going back to the boat."

"We won't get any help in this place."

"Well, maybe not, but we can go out and prospect. I've just had an idea that we might try the British consul—just sound him about the prospect of getting a concession. Anyhow, there's no use going to a second-class hotel; it costs as much in the long run and as for rooms—goodness, how are we to look for them?"

"All right," said Sheila. "Now we are here, we had better stay, perhaps. Shall we go to the consul now?"

"Yes, if you're ready."

Sheila was just about to rise when a voice made her turn her head. The joyous, boisterous voice of a big, burly, black-bearded man. He was passing them toward the dance room; he was accompanied by two pretty young girls in white-muslin frocks, evidently his daughters, for he had an arm flung about each of them. The gentleman passed without seeing them. He was the dead Bompard.

"Dicky!" said Sheila.

"Good heavens above!" said Dicky.

"Bompard!"

"Unless it's a mistake!"

"Oh, no," said Sheila, with a little laugh.

"It's not a mistake. It's impossible there could be two like him—absolutely."

"But how's he here?"

"Mail boat, I suppose. You remember he said he had business here and I remember him saying something about his wife and children—those are the children I expect—or some of them. You'd better find him and speak to him. I felt somehow or another that James was making a fool of himself."

Dicky looked uneasy.

"To tell the truth," said he, "after leaving him like that—the way we did, you know—running off—"

"Yes, it makes it difficult; all the same it's better to grasp the nettle; he's staying here and it has to be done sooner or later."

Dicky jumped to his feet.

"Wait for me," he said. He crossed the hall and disappeared at the opening leading to the dance room.

Then Sheila waited.

An attendant came and took away the tea things and placed an ash tray and matches on the table; five minutes passed and then in the archway appeared two figures, Bompard's and Dicky's; the hand of Bompard was on the shoulder of his companion and they were talking and laughing and evidently the best of friends.

"Ah, Miss Dennis," cried Bompard, advancing with hand outspread. "What a pleasure!" He meant it, and as Sheila took his hand the full measure of her stupidity in ever suspecting this man came to her as a shock.

"And the good Mr. Cordare, where is he?" asked Bompard.

Sheila explained that the good Mr. Cordare had been called to New York on business, and Bompard, breaking off the conversation and rushing back to the dance room, returned with Madame Bompard, stout, comfortable-looking Arlésienne, and the two daughters. They didn't speak English, but Bompard made up for the deficiency, and after ten minutes' talk Sheila and Dicky bade the Bompard family au revoir and left the lounge.

Outside, in the Callé Juanita, Sheila turned to the other.

"But, Dicky! Didn't he say anything to you about the poisoning and you leaving him?"

"Oh, lots," said Dicky, "and he apologized for not having come to see us off. You

see, he wasn't poisoned; he thinks it was island fever or the salad that gave him the most frightful cramp in his bread basket. You know these southern French shout like anything if anything's the matter with them. Well, before a doctor could get to him the *fonda* people had cured him with brandy and they gave him so much that he slept there all night, and so missed seeing us go. He never suspects that we suspected him of being a crook out to do us in. It was all that damn' fool James—excuse me."

"Don't mention it. I quite agree with you. Well, I'm glad. He has made me feel quite different."

"How?"

"I can't tell you how—he's just so jolly and so friendly and so pleasant to meet that he has made the whole place seem different."

It was a fact, there was a warmth and radiance about Bompard, a human kindness better than wine to her flagging soul; he was just the same as at Teneriffe, but at Teneriffe she was not feeling lonely, dispirited and lost in a strange land.

Dicky had got the British consul's address from Bompard and they called at the consulate but found the office closed for the day.

"We'll call in the morning," said Dicky. Then they dined at a café in the Plaza Bombita, went to a cinema and returned to the hotel at ten o'clock.

Dicky, sitting by his open window and smoking a pipe before going to bed, watched the great sultry southern moon as she stood casting a rosy light on the white house walls opposite.

Something new had come to him with the adventures of the day, something new and strange and heart stirring—Sheila.

Up to this she had been a jolly companion, a sister, almost a brother, but now, away from the *Baltrum*, thrown together and with her entirely depending on him, Sheila was another person.

His heart went out to her. He saw her as she was; steadfast and brave, fearless, patient as she had always been, but with an added charm, a mysterious something that turned her at a stroke from a woman to the only woman in the world.

Then he put out his pipe and went to bed and tried to put her out of his mind. He had no right to think of her, no right to think of anything till the great business in hand was through, and yet she returned in pictures that dissolved at last and faded in the darkness of sleep.

To be concluded in the next number, May 7th.



ROBINSON CRUSOE

NO man is so well known as he thinks he is," once said Enrico Caruso. "While motoring in New York State, the automobile broke down and I sought refuge in a farmhouse while the car was being repaired. I became friendly with the farmer, who asked my name, and I told him it was Caruso. The farmer leaped to his feet and seized me by the hand. 'Little did I think I would see a man like you in this here humble kitchen, sir!' he exclaimed. 'Caruso! The great traveler, Robinson Caruso!'"



THE PRACTICAL POET

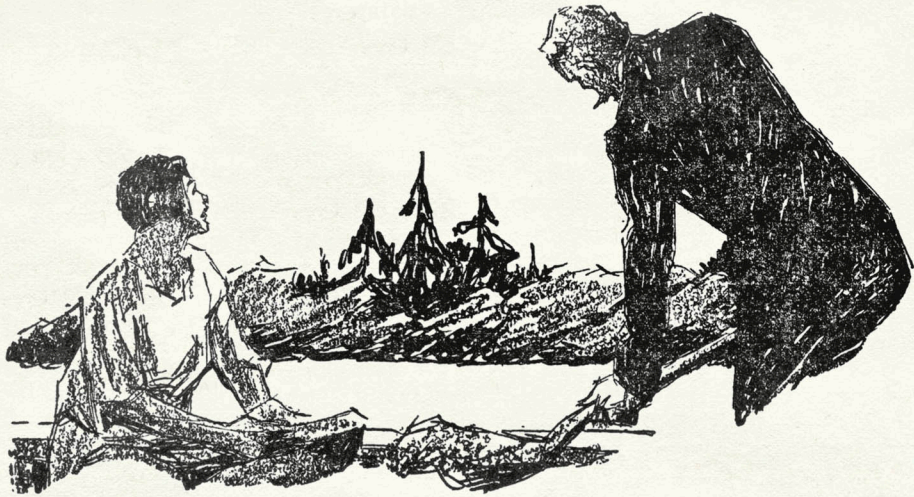
GREATER than all other honors, to the Frenchman's way of thinking, is membership in the French Academy. Soldiers, statesmen, and captains of industry may come—and they may go—but the academician lives forever. He and his colleagues of this august brotherhood are, in fact, known as "the immortals." It is hardy Frenchman, indeed, who would take the name of the academy in vain or make of it a jest.

Yet such Frenchmen have been known. One of them was the late lamented poet, Theodore de Banville. Renowned for the style and beauty of his verses, he was equally noted for the mordant irony of his sudden wit.

Upon one occasion his admiring friends were pressing him to advance his candidacy for election to the academy. He scoffed at the idea.

"But look here," said one of his interlocutors; "supposing we put you up for it. Supposing you had nothing to do with it and one day they brought you your election on a silver platter. What would you do?"

"Do?" said De Banville, with the utmost gravity. "Why, I'd take the platter!"



The Fight at Boggy Bayou

By Harris Dickson

Author of "The Hideaway," "Amiable War Horses," Etc.

What happened when the Father of Rivers ran amuck—
and "Long Grim's" boy let duty prompt his heart.

WHEN Father Mesaseba behaves himself and lies contentedly in bed, he rarely sees a levee. These long and tortuous dikes keep their most respectful distance on either side, yet guard his every twisting and escort his overflows to the Gulf of Mexico. Ages ago—Mesaseba is long, but his memory is longer—ages ago he roamed unfettered from Cairo to the Gulf, until men began erecting their puny ridges. Again and again had he torn them down, but next year found the levees rebuilt, stronger and higher. Not until the spring of 1922 did Mesaseba summon all his power to sweep away these irritating barriers. Up every branch of his many-forked streams went the mobilizing call. "Rise! Rise!" he commanded Sinnemahoning Creek in Pennsylvania. "We'll be ready," answered Rocky Mountain rivulets, and ice-locked waters of Alberta. Barely in time to resist their simultaneous assault young Furlong B. Grimshaw, Jr., had just completed his embankment across the marshy lands at Boggy Bayou.

At Boggy Bayou there are two lines of defense. The old levee angles outward in

front of the new, like the apex of a huge sprawling A, the point of which was so persistently attacked by river currents that engineers decided to abandon it for a stronger bulwark along the cross line of the A. Grimshaw's construction camp crouched behind this cross line—a precise little row of canvas houses with gabled roofs, toy habitations such as children cut from cardboard and set up in a street of make-believe.

The long Southern dusk had scarcely begun to deepen, yet Grimshaw's quarters already showed their light. Beside it, with brown bare arm lying across his desk, the engineer sat in an attitude of utter relaxation. He had finished his big job. The last few tons of dirt had been thrown in. The last gap was closed and leveled up. He was done.

Two years before, when this immaculate city lad had first shown up to work on the levees, it was whispered that he claimed to be a son of *the* Furlong B. Grimshaw, called "Long Grim" on Wall Street. "Yes," the upstanding youngster had replied. "That's my father." Then he said nothing more about it. Neither did anybody else. Fight-

ing off the Mississippi River does not encourage idle gossip. For a while the other men wondered why this heir to millions should go splashing around in mud a little deeper than they, who had their bread to earn. But Grimshaw did splash around, most effectively, and had built a thumping good levee.

Against every difficulty and obstacle there stood his embankment. He could look through the window and see it, cleaving the forest like the swath of some gigantic reaper. Grimshaw's work was done. All his energy had gone into the task. With listless hand he now stirred the neglected personal correspondence which lay before him. A metropolitan newspaper fell open, and he jerked himself upright as a girl's familiar face smiled at him from the photogravure section.

"Jessica!" he exclaimed. "What's her picture doing in the papers? Oh, yes. Bridesmaid at Alicia's wedding."

A queer sense of aloofness took possession of the expatriated New Yorker as he scanned the pictured bridesmaids who surrounded a portrait of the groom, His Grace the Duke of Druidsholm. All of that seemed so far, so very very far away. Vaguely he remembered. Every recent letter from Jess had sizzled with half-read details of this international function at which Mr. Furlong B. Grimshaw, Jr., was scheduled to exhibit himself as a groomsman. Groomsman at a duke's wedding! He could remember the time when that might seem the proper end and aim of human ambition. But now his thoughts were in the dirt, of the earth earthy. He dreamed of nothing but levees, and beating the Mississippi River. So he sat smiling and shaking his head when the foreman's excited voice called out:

"Cap'n Grimshaw! Oh, cap! Oh, cap!"

"What is it, Mr. Barlow?" Furlong sprang up to answer an oldish-looking man who thrust in his bristled beard at the doorway.

"Front levee's caving! At the p'int!"

Together they went bounding up the steep embankment and ran toward the front. Furlong outstripping the even longer-legged Barlow. At the very apex of the A, where ravenous currents dug and tore, they found that one great section of dirt had already sloughed off, while a larger slice hung like a

precarious avalanche, ready to slide into the river.

"This levee's gone, cap!" Old Barlow spoke abruptly. "Better cut her before the overflow gets any higher."

Of course their outer skirmish line could be held for a few days longer, but when it eventually gave way the floods might have risen ten or fifteen feet, and the resulting crevasse become a resistless torrent. As Barlow suggested, it were wiser to let the water in more slowly. Furlong's every muscle tightened at the inevitable test, for Mesaseba would now rage against the fresh dirt of his untried levee.

"Very good, Mr. Barlow," he decided. "We'll cut this outer line right here. I'll go and call out the men. Mr. Barlow, we are going to have a hard fight."

"I know it, sir."

The official steamer of the Mississippi River Commission plowed southward through the turbid waters, bearing a committee of senators and congressmen to inspect the levee system. On its forward deck Miss Jessica Faison glanced up languidly from her magazine, quite unimpressed by the terrible grandeur of Father Mesaseba at flood height, or by the fact that a presidential possibility was bending over her chair.

"Frankly, senator," she admitted, "I'm bored stiff."

Yet Jessica looked so provokingly pretty, and her father, old Joshua K. Faison, was so influential in party councils, that Senator Rutherford showed no annoyance.

"Suppose we play bridge," he suggested.

"I'm fed up on bridge." The girl shrugged her ennuied shoulders. "I don't want to do anything except to catch Furlong before he has time to get mulish, and rush him back to New York."

"Only a few more hours, Jessica; a few more hours. It's all arranged." The senator's butter-smooth voice tried to pacify her. "We reach Boggy Bayou at noon. I have already had Colonel Clancy telephone Furlong to meet our boat. We will take him on board, and the three of us will catch a fast train out of New Orleans on Saturday night."

"Saturday night? No, siree! Furlong must reach New York in full time for the wedding." From between the pages of her magazine, Miss Faison produced an A. &

V. time-table, and pointed to the positively underscored express. "I'm not going to New Orleans. We catch *this* train. Out of Vicksburg. To-morrow night."

As a party leader, accustomed to give orders, Senator Rutherford was not keen on taking such dictation. But that was the only way to get along with Miss Jessica Faison, who had the sweetest possible disposition provided she was allowed to do precisely as she pleased. Which Jessica invariably did, whether she were allowed or no. So the senator agreed. It seemed manifestly for the good of his party that he should make fair weather with old Joshua K. Faison, and kill two birds with one stone by placing Long Grim under personal obligations—two patriotic paymasters who were relied upon to finance the Rutherford presidential boom. Being a friend of both families he knew all about young Furlong's engagement to Jessica, and how everybody hated to see the lad buried in the mud of a Mississippi levee, when he should be playing his proper rôle in New York as son to the famous financier. Consequently Rutherford saw his opportunity when the River Commission invited these congressmen to inspect their levees during the high water. The commission needed appropriations for flood control; the possibility needed financial backing for his boom; their hands played well together, and Jessica had jumped at the idea of bringing Furlong home.

To make sure that their prodigal would return like a most obedient lamb, Rutherford had brought a letter of recall bearing Long Grim's potent autograph, together with an order from the war department accepting the resignation of Assistant Engineer Grimshaw, to take effect at once. The Rutherford credentials were horse high, bull strong and pig tight.

If her kidnaping could have been accomplished in a whirl, like motoring up to Tarrytown and restoring Furlong to his normal habitat, Jessica would have dashingly carried off the coup. But she had not reckoned upon these interminable stretches of the Mississippi. Why did the devil build this river so long, when all the other bridesmaids were having such a thrilling time with their dresses? Being penned up with these politicians fatigued her. They couldn't talk about the Duke of Druidsholm, but gabbled of levees and revetments and appropria-

tions; or huddled at a table with their heads over a map, while Colonel Clancy, president of the commission, demonstrated just how these tiresome overflows might be prevented. Why make so much fuss about a little water? When these people got wet, why couldn't they run up to New York and really see something? It might civilize them. Anyway, Jessica got bored at the levee talk that went on endlessly, endlessly.

"Senator," she dismissed him with a weary smile, "you don't have to amuse me. I'll sit here and read, or watch the river."

In spite of herself there was something about this river that held her, a power, a majesty, a mystery that kept Jessica wondering what new vistas might unfold when their boat rounded the next bend. Unconsciously she caught what desert dwellers call "the horizon fever," the craving desire to see what lies beyond the next ridge.

So for two hours she sat quiet. Then it jarred upon her when the congressional committee poured themselves through the doorway and Colonel Clancy announced:

"All ashore at Boggy Bayou! Now, Miss Faison, I'll show you a bully bit of levee construction."

"How exciting." Jess never blinked a lash to betray more than a polite attention.

"We tie up here for two hours," the colonel added.

"Two hours?" Jessica whispered to Rutherford. "Will that give us time to get Furlong?"

"Plenty. Any fool should be glad to escape from this hole in two minutes."

Boggy Bayou! This was the paradise from which no allurements could drag her fiancé! Boggy Bayou! With a glance Miss Faison dismissed its dreary shores. Under a slow bell their pilot was steering straight into a forest that grew on what appeared to be solid ground. The boat did not stop, and every passenger gasped as it went crashing among the treetops, to go plunging through a thicket of overflowed willows. Beyond the willow thicket they emerged into an open basin and tied up against a broken levee. This was the same old levee that Grimshaw had cut, its point, the apex of the A, having now caved into the river, while swirling waters beat against the new line.

At last! Here she was! The self-contained Miss Faison tingled with anticipation and ran down to the lower deck. She would be first to spring ashore and give Furlong

the surprise of his life. But Furlong wasn't there. Nobody was there, nothing except one lone snag standing above the flood, and one lone girl standing on the deck of a shanty boat. The snag wasn't Furlong, and the girl wasn't Furlong. They were of equal indifference to Jessica.

A dingy little sun-blistered shanty boat lay moored against the levee, nearly opposite their big white steamer, and from its deck the native girl stared upward, stared at this sudden apparition of a goddess in white.

Disappointed, Jessica, with every eye on watch for her fiancé, never glanced again at the fisher girl, for Colonel Clancy was saying:

"Sorry, gentlemen. I cannot understand why Mr. Grimshaw isn't here. Come, Miss Faison." He took Jessica by the arm and led her down the stage plank.

In single file the statesmen followed their host along a narrow path on top of the nearly submerged levee, until Colonel Clancy passed a clump of trees that obscured his view to the left. Abruptly he stopped and pointed, with the startled exclamation:

"Look! Look! Something's happened. Pardon me." And, brushing past Miss Faison, the officer began to run.

For several moments his guests stood where he left them, gazing at a tugboat towing a barge. Nothing unusual in that. A more distant barge hugged the main line of levee. And there they saw no cause for alarm, but Colonel Clancy was running in that direction. Something must be wrong. Then everybody ran after Clancy, one behind the other, like geese.

Far ahead of the congressional committee; Jessica sped along the levee which barely showed its crest above water, like a strip of carpet lying flat upon the floor. The ridge was less than five feet wide, and she laughed to herself at the dizzy sensation of dancing along a tight rope. Presently this semisubmerged ridge joined a higher embankment—the new line of levee which Furlong had just completed. Jessica scrambled up, whirled to her left, and raced south, with Clancy holding his lead of a hundred yards.

Breathlessly she ran. The yellow river bubbled on her left. On her right she passed a deserted camp, a pretty little camp, but empty. No human creature remained. Beyond the camp she saw a barge lying be-

side the levee, with men filing on and filing off again, like a string of ants, each carrying a bag upon his shoulder. They seemed to be in a frenzy. Why were these people so hysterical? The levee wasn't breaking. It stood eight feet above the flood, and felt solid as a rock beneath her feet. What could be wrong? And where was Furlong? Jessica sprinted forward and overtook Clancy, just as the colonel caught a laborer by his arm and asked: "What's the trouble?"

"Hell of a sand boil," the man answered, broke loose from Colonel Clancy and went running down the steep slope with his sack.

"What did he say, colonel? What did he say?" In turn Jessica caught the colonel's arm; in turn he jerked loose, as the laborer had done, and also ran down the declivity.

Jessica stood on the levee's crest, with her back to the river, watching Colonel Clancy. Far below her, at the base of the slope, dozens of frantic men were splashing about in water from what seemed to be a geyser which spouted up a stream about four feet high. That was all. Pshaw! Such trivialities failed to sidetrack the single-minded Jessica. With perfect composure she turned to Senator Rutherford, who had come up, sweating and breathing hard.

"Senator," she urged him, "you must get hold of Furlong at once. He may need a little time to pack."

"Yes." Rutherford mopped off the sweat. "But where can I find him?"

"Ask one of these men."

There were plenty of men to ask, men rushing in every direction, white men and black men, crowding on to the barge which lay moored against the levee, and hurrying off again, each with his sack of dirt upon his shoulder. None of them had time to answer questions. They were busy. Neither a lady in white nor a presidential possibility could distract their attention from that spout of water below. This water was bubbling up on the land side, at the base of the levee; and there every man rushed to drop his sack.

Nobody answered their questions about Mr. Grimshaw, so Jessica and Senator Rutherford scanned each face in the file of passing sack bearers; they peered over the gunwale of the barge at every white man who was shoveling sand into the bags. Furlong was not there. Together they turned to see if he might be among those amphibious crea-

tures at the base of the levee. Neither Rutherford nor Jessica disturbed themselves by curiosity as to why a lot of crazy people should be floundering about in the edges of a shallow lake—a lake that was a tangle of brushwood and rotting logs and matted vines. Unconcerned with them, Jessica's eye passed over a dripping figure that waded out from the water, and came striding toward her, up the levee's slope. His was not the kind of figure that any lady should look at. He drew near, about to pass. She was only conscious of hearing the water that sloshed in his boots, and he might have got by unnoticed if she had not recognized a familiar something in his gait. She looked straight at him, and gasped:

"Furlong!"

The smeary-faced creature halted and stared incredulously, then said:

"Jess? What are *you* doing here?"

"I might ask what *you* are doing?"

From Furlong's appearance he might have been wallowing in mire; he glanced at his own muddy hand, and did not offer it. Black paste clotted upon his flannel shirt; his face was streaked with mud, and water exuded from him like a sponge. Jessica made no effort to veil her disgust as she suggested:

"Won't you speak to Senator Rutherford?"

"How are you, senator?" The young man spoke mechanically, being wholly preoccupied, not thinking about Rutherford nor looking at him. His eyes turned back to the menace of the geyser. He muttered a few words and commenced to run, when Jessica gripped his elbow.

"Wait, Furlong. Don't be in such a rush. We came down with the commission, especially to get you, and——"

"Can't talk about it now. I've got to telephone for help."

"But you must get ready to leave," she persisted. "You are going home with us. In two hours."

Furlong made no answer; he only tried to break loose and Jessica gave him a shake. "You are going back to New York. To the wedding."

"Oh, yes. Alicia's wedding. That's all right. I have declined. They won't be expecting me."

"Declined?" Jessica dropped his arm, amazed by this astounding dementia in the bristle-bearded Furlong, with the sunken

cheeks, and the haggard weariness of a man who has not slept.

"Read this, Furlong," the senator interposed. "Here's a letter from your father."

Furlong stuffed the letter into his pocket without a glance.

"Read it." The senator held him fast.

"Not now. Let me go."

"But you must hurry to catch our boat."

"No. I've got to stay here." Furlong kept pulling back while the senator clung to him and explained:

"But, my dear boy, you need not stay here. The war department has relieved you from duty."

Furlong whirled and confronted Rutherford with intense gray eyes as he repeated: "The war department has relieved me? From this work?"

"Yes. To take effect at once."

The boy's head drooped, then came up with a defiant snap.

"By whose orders?" he demanded. "Upon what charges?"

"No charges were filed against you. At my request you have been honorably relieved—that is, when your resignation is sent in."

"Oh! That's the way of it?" The color surged back into Furlong's face. "You mean *if* I resign?"

"Yes," the influential personage assured him. "I've settled everything with the department."

"Then unsettle it! Can't you see that my levee's about to break?"

"But your father! The duke's wedding!"

"Damn the duke's wedding!"

By one powerful wrench the exasperated engineer jerked loose and went running toward his camp, while Jessica stood watching Rutherford trot behind him, until both men disappeared among those queer little canvas houses.

After she had traveled two thousand miles to see him, her fiancé couldn't spare two minutes. Oh, well! Fini! She'd come to the end of *that*. Quite calmly Miss Faison glanced about her. Appearances must be preserved. At the base of the levee she saw that their congressional party had assembled around Colonel Clancy, so she sauntered down the slope, and nobody listened with more rapt attention while Clancy explained the nature of a sand boil.

"You will observe, gentlemen," he said, pointing upward, "that this levee is excep-

tionally high, with a base of more than three hundred feet, and is constructed across the bed of an ancient lake. Its foundations may rest upon masses of rotted driftwood, or upon a sand bar—we do not know. Tremendous pressure from the river outside has forced this stream to flow underneath our embankment, and to bubble up inside like a spring."

"Isn't that dangerous?" queried Senator Conway.

"Dangerous?" Clancy lowered his tone to avoid discouraging the workers. "It is tearing out the interior of Grimshaw's levee, and unless he stops it, quick, the whole embankment must collapse."

In spite of her pretended obsession by the sand boil, Jessica did not fail to see Furlong when he came rushing back, with Senator Rutherford just behind him. Rutherford had been three times defeated before he landed in the United States Senate—the kind of man who never lets go. But Furlong was intent upon his job, and brushed off presidential possibilities as a cow shakes off a swarm of gnats. The senator galled his flank until he waded into waist-deep water, and left Rutherford stranded at the edge.

"Brace up, boys!" Furlong shouted cheerily. "Help's coming. Pass me those sacks."

The congressional committee drew nearer to watch every movement of the young engineer, who began laying his sandbags under water, in a ring around the boil. After marking out a circle he summoned his foreman.

"Here, Mr. Barlow, take Ellis and build your second ring—outside of this. Lay 'em close."

While Miss Faison realized the absurdity of Furlong B. Grimshaw, Jr., dabbling in this messy mud, yet she felt a thrill to see how blindly men obeyed him. Human authority could not be more despotic.

Suddenly everybody stopped. No man spoke. Workers halted in their tracks, listening to a sputter and choking of the geyser. For one harrowing instant its flow had really ceased; then it belched up a stump, and gushed out again with double force. The watchers stood paralyzed until Furlong's sharp command aroused them:

"Quick! Four of you! Get in! Throw out this stump. Good! Now more bags. More bags! Jenkins, you and Bradley help lay them."

Five men were now placing the sandbags

and results began to show, like a coral atoll built up by insects that toil beneath the waves. As tier upon tier was added, a hollow tower arose from the bottom, encircling the geyser whose pent-up waters skimmed over its top.

"Colonel, what's that for?" a congressman inquired.

"He's confining the flow." Clancy nodded approval. "By forcing a column of water to rise inside his levee, Grimshaw counterbalances the weight of the river outside. That checks the underground current, and retards internal caving."

The puzzled lawmakers were struggling to comprehend this application of a familiar hydraulic principle when Grimshaw gave his abrupt order: "Three men! Quick! Jump on these sacks. Tramp 'em."

He gave the command so curtly that the nearest three, a negro, a white boy, and Colonel Clancy himself, very promptly obeyed. They were the nearest three. Nobody smiled, not even Jessica, as the heavy-weight officer went splashing round and round the ring like a well-trained circus horse.

"Tramp 'em tight!" Furlong emphasized the order, then laughed as he recognized his superior. "Oh! That's you, Colonel Clancy? Sorry I couldn't meet your steamer, but I'm busy."

"So'm I," the colonel grinned.

By dint of concerted effort their circular dam of sandbags had now grown shoulder high, and become almost impervious. Flow from the boil was perceptibly checked, and a clearer stream brought far less mud. Which meant that the internal erosion was less.

"Bully!" Furlong expressed his satisfaction. "Now, boys, I can leave you for a while. We've mighty near stopped the caving."

When the drenched engineer waded out, Senator Rutherford maneuvered into position on his right flank, just as one of the sack bearers fell and dropped a bag. The man must have hurt himself against a stump, for he rolled over and did not rise.

"Pick up that bag!" Furlong gave the nearest man a shove. This bystander happened to be Senator Rutherford, who expected no violence to his person, when Furlong's powerful impetus sent him toppling into waist-deep water. Senators are not immune, and the engineer never glanced at

his face as he repeated: "Pick that up! Put it there!"

Before the presidential possibility realized it, he found himself in the picturesque attitude of placing a bag on the ring that circled the sand boil, while his friends burst into applause.

"One moment, senator. Hold your pose." The Associated Press reporter chuckled as he snapped his camera. "There! 'Our Next President Saving a Levee.' That ought to catch the Southern delegates."

Their hilarity rasped on Jessica until she turned away and joined two senators who went climbing upward to observe the method of filling sacks.

Thick as men could be jammed together on the barge, whites and negroes worked side by side, shoveling sand into bags that other men immediately snatched away. Every shoveler had his helper, except one tall, thin, white-haired old gentleman who kept trying to hold open his sack with one hand, while he fumbled at a shovel with the other, making such a mess that the irritated Jessica squirmed as she eyed his awkwardness. Like her competent father she detested inefficient people.

Sack bearers filed on and filed off in a never-ending procession. They jostled her and didn't apologize. Dry dust blew into her face; black mud spattered the whiteness of her shoes, and sweaty smells offended the universe. The sun roasted Jessica outside, and she boiled within, furious at Furlong. That pattering old chap kept spilling sand on the floor until she couldn't keep her hands off.

"Allow me." Jessica spoke peremptorily and caught the sack. "I'll hold this bag myself."

"Oh. Thank you. I am very grateful."

The courtly voice surprised her; it was so gentle, so deliciously modulated by soft inflections of the Southern speech. His slender fingers were rubbed raw with blisters; gray hair dabbled about his forehead; yet he stuck to his job like a gamecock—and Jessica admired grit. She felt rebuked, and no child of Joshua K. Faison ever made halfway amends. Old Josh himself always went the whole hog, or none. So after holding his second bag to be filled, Jessica rose from her knees and said positively: "Now, it's my turn."

"Oh, no, my dear—you cannot do this."
"I can."

"But," he protested, "you are a lady, and you——"

"And a long-distance swimmer, and a tennis champion. Just watch me qualify in this sack-filling tournament."

Jessica always got what she wanted, and rarely wanted what she got. This time it was a long-handled shovel, with brawny blacks to set the pace.

"Queer," the old gentleman looked up and mused aloud. "I have never seen you before. And surely I could not have forgotten."

At his sincere tribute the girl laughed genuinely, resting on her shovel to confide: "We came on the commission steamer. I live in New York. I'm Jessica."

"Jessica. Jessica." He pronounced the syllables most exquisitely. "'In such a night did pretty Jessica——' Yes, yes, dear, the name suits you well. And you live in New York? People are so kind. Every stranger helps us during the high water."

"Where do you live?" She kept him talking, just to hear the stately music of his tones.

"At Brookfield House." His withered finger pointed. "You can see the gable—behind those trees. I'm Mr. Brookfield. It's a comfortable old place, and if this levee breaks we will be washed away."

"This levee isn't going to break. We won't let it."

In her wrath at Furlong, Jessica felt that she must do something; and she'd found her job, got interested in the old man, and stuffed bag after bag like Christmas stockings. When people were fighting to hold their levees such incongruous things happened that nobody noticed the stranger girl in white, handling her shovel like a man. Her gloves, thrown aside, were trampled in the sand. With a midday sun glittering down upon the river, it was hot work. Whew! She passed a grimy hand across her face, and Mr. Brookfield smiled at the smudge.

"Never mind a little dirt," he said. "My daughters are coming presently to bring coffee for these men. You shall go home with us to wash your face and have dinner. That is, if we get a chance. Everybody works at night to save a levee."

"Then it's all night for us," she answered sturdily. "We're no quitters."

The city girl shoveled manfully, and was having a very chummy time with her an-

tique planter when somebody cried out from beside their barge.

"Levee's breaking! Levee's breaking!" a cry that stayed every hand, and stilled the throbbing of every heart.

"Levee's breaking!"

At that appalling shout their organized forces became a mob; the clocklike machine fell apart, while terrified men dropped everything and rushed to view the calamity. Whites and blacks came bounding up the slope. Some ran for the woods. Others stopped them. Mr. Brookfield looked over the gunwale, and his face went even paler as he saw what had occurred. To Jessica it seemed a very tiny crack, an almost imperceptible fissure that had opened on the levee's crest. But to an experienced eye it showed that the interior of their levee had caved. Its water-soaked foundations were melting—possibly from the sand boil—and the crown must fall. Then those mountainous waters would go roaring through the crevasse and overwhelm the lands.

Among the panicky mass that surged round the fissure, Jessica caught sight of Furlong. Her eyes met his. For the first time, and subconsciously, she began to understand. He had looked just like that on the night when he came home from France, and with shining eyes had told her what his comrades had accomplished. This huge embankment was Furlong's work, his accomplishment; it must not be destroyed. The fullness of it all, the thrill of it came to Jessica, the sense of being alive, being a part of something real, and a glorious pride in Furlong's manhood when he raised his hand and shouted: "Listen, men!"

Every voice hushed; all eyes looked to him for guidance and for courage.

"Listen, men! We are going to hold this levee. Back to your places."

Jessica's grip tightened on Mr. Brookfield's arm as she witnessed a marvel. By the power of one soul unafraid, out of panic came assurance, out of chaos came order. Magically the scattered parts of their machine fell together; the same file of sack bearers went trudging down the hill, and shovels grated methodically on the barge's floor.

"Colonel Clancy!" Furlong wheeled upon his superior, and Jessica heard him speak in a rush. "Kerrigan's quarter boat lies three miles below us, on the other side. I need it here, with every foot of lumber, every

sack and every man. Your steamer must go get it. If Kerrigan's tug is available he can do the towing, and you need not return. Hurry, colonel."

Between these two men who realized the extremity of peril, there were no petty punctilios of rank, and very few words, before Clancy understood what was wanted, and waved for his guests to follow.

"All my crowd to the boat," his big voice rose. "Everybody aboard. Where is Miss Faison?"

"Here!" Jessica answered roll call, then laid her lips close to Mr. Brookfield's ear and promised, "Never mind what he says. I'm coming back. Don't let anybody else have my job."

From the barge to the levee the gang-planks were jammed with men. Impatient Jessica couldn't wait her turn, but planted a foot on the barge's gunwale and leaped for shore. It was a broader jump than she thought. Tottering, she gained the levee's brink where Furlong threw an arm around her, only for a moment, one of those luminous moments that make all things clear.

"I'm sorry, Jess," he whispered. "When you first came, I——"

"Don't worry about me. I understand you—now." Her eyes were all ashine with the joy of comprehension as she left Furlong to his task, and ran.

In the swiftness of her flight, Jessica distanced a field of puffing senators, and left the long-legged congressmen far behind her. Two dense black columns were already pouring upward from the steamer's smokestacks. She sprang aboard, raced through the cabin, frung a few things into her trunk, and had slammed down the lid when she heard Colonel Clancy give the order, "Get under way."

A bell jangled. Deck hands were pulling in their stage plank; and before anybody could stop her, before anybody knew what she meant to do, a white figure flashed along the lower deck and Jessica leaped ashore.

"Oh, colonel! Colonel Clancy!" she yelled back. "Please throw down my trunk—little black trunk. In my stateroom."

"Get aboard, Miss Faison!" the colonel ordered. "We are leaving."

"Go on," she answered. "Throw down my trunk."

Wheels began to revolve, and the steamer was trembling when Senator Rutherford first sighted Jessica standing on the levee. He leaned over the guards and beckoned wildly.

"Come back, Jessica. Come back. You'll get left."

"I'm already left. Make the porter hurry with my trunk."

"Then I'll have to get off too."

"Suit yourself," she laughed.

"What shall I do?" The senator appealed to Colonel Clancy.

"Do something," the officer replied. "Get off. Or stay aboard. Do it now."

Rutherford couldn't leave the daughter of so important a constituent as Joshua K. Faison. He turned and went running through the cabin. Along the carpeted floor to stateroom No. 5, a presidential possibility left his trail of muddy tracks, grabbed a suit case, toilet articles, pajamas, trousers, and dry shoes. Rushing back with both arms full, he spilled socks and toothbrushes and razor strops; he stumbled down the stairway, and leaped onto the levee beside Jessica's trunk. There the steamer left him.

It never pays a presidential possibility to get riled. He is supposed to hold his temper under any and all circumstances. That's what makes him possible. One of his dry shoes dropped into the water. He fished it out with dignity and decorum. Then the girl laughed.

"Jessica," he choked as he demanded, "what do you mean by such an infernal caper?"

From behind a grimy window of the shanty boat Elvira Huckens eyed the curious behavior of these city folks. It tickled Elvira to see how grittily that gal toted her own skillet, stood square up to the huffy man and told him in his teeth, "I'm going to stay here and see this thing through."

Senator Rutherford had twice stampeded a national convention, yet for all his fiery eloquence poured upon her, he failed to budge Miss Faison.

"It's done now," she said calmly. "Help me with this trunk."

Help her with a trunk? Help her where? There was no taxi, no baggage wagon. With both arms full, Rutherford glared at the heavy trunk, glanced at the long hot levee, and mopped his face.

"Never mind!" Jessica snapped. "Don't trouble yourself. I'll get what I want, right here."

Like a terrier scratching for rats the girl burrowed into her trunk, throwing out lingerie and fripperies behind her, until she

11B—POP.

dug up a pair of riding breeches, strong boots, and a shirt.

"There! That's all I need." She had abandoned her rifled trunk and started toward the main levee, when Elvira's voice warned her from within the shanty boat:

"Better not leave sech a scatteration o' yo' things," and Jessica recognized the same girl that she had noticed when their steamer first tied up.

"Thank you. They'll be safe," she answered.

"Dunno." Elvira appeared on deck, shaking her head. "Water riz nigh two foot yis-tiddy. By night it's liable to run plumb over the top o' this here levee."

"Couldn't you let me throw my clothes on your boat?"

"Reckin so."

In a jumble the city girl raked up her belongings, like armfuls of hay, and tossed them aboard the fisher craft, while Elvira's gingham figure moved down the gangplank to the levee.

"Mebbe you wants me to take keer o' yo' trunk?" she questioned.

"Oh! If you would! Thanks. And please let me go into your boat and change my clothes—please!"

"You're more'n welcome."

The shanty boat's dingy interior reeked of fish and tar as Jessica bent low to enter. There she tossed her hat on a bunk, stepped out of her draggled skirt, then sat down and stripped off shoes and stockings.

"Would you care to have these clothes? And the hat?" she inquired sweetly. "I'm sorry they are so muddy."

"I mought buy yo' hat," Elvira considered the purchase. "But this here skirt's too all-fired skimpy. An' white stockings makes me feel too naked."

After Jessica had made her change into a tan-colored shirt, riding breeches of Bedford cord, boots and belt, she stood erect before Elvira, the amazed and shocked Elvira.

"You ain't aimin' to wear them *pants*?" The fisher girl doubted her own bulging eyes.

"Certainly. Skirts get in my way."

"They shows yo' legs scan'alous plain."

"Oh! Do they? But those sacks mus' be filled, and I can't work in a dress."

Before Miss Faison bounded away she snatched up a silver mirror from her trunk, and gave it to Elvira with such a smile of thanks that the fisher girl accepted both. Then Jessica, in breeches, went racing along

the levee while Elvira commented to herself, "Gee! Them city gals sho do ack peculiar."

The night of a thousand hours had passed, a night of toil, of anxiety and of dread. Dawn broadened upon a waste of ravaging waters; the brilliant Southern stars grew dim, and a file of ghostly men took shape again, men who all night long had climbed up and down the levee's slope, bearing sandbags from the barge.

All night long this procession had marched in front of Jessica, snatching up her sacks faster than she could fill them. On, on they moved, one phantom giving place to another—another. Over the levee's rim, out of the swamp they came; back into the swamp they vanished, to come and come again. Those vast black spaces beyond the embankment seemed peopled by ever-tramping specters of the damned, devouring sacks, sacks, sacks, more sacks, more sacks, more sacks. All night long the girl in brown breeches had knelt on the barge's floor, her sleeves rolled up and white arms bare. Sleepily she held each sack's mouth gaping open for the shovel, and struggled to keep her head from nodding. Mr. Brookfield had succumbed to utter weariness and slept on a pile of empty bags, while grouchy Rutherford still glared at her grumpily from his seat upon a nail keg.

Suddenly the girl's head lifted with a jerk, as out of the monotonous tramping she recognized a step, Furlong's step, that through the slaving hours she had come to listen for. Many times had Furlong looked in upon her, as the tireless engineer looked in upon everybody else, with a cheery nod and a hand that ever so lightly touched her shoulder.

"Well?" She glanced up.

"We've saved our levee." He sank on a sandbag, and she saw the exhaustion that he concealed from others.

"I'm so thankful!" Jessica answered fervently.

"So am I—for the sake of these indomitable people. But, Jess, you are worn out."

"No such thing," with the same little toss of the same little stubborn head.

"I just wanted to sit down here and talk with you a minute—we may not have another minute for a month. Listen, Jessica, you and the senator are leaving here at once and——"

"No, we are not."

"Yes, you are. Mr. Brookfield's car will put you in Vicksburg by ten o'clock, to rejoin the boat."

"But I don't want to rejoin the boat." She shook her head. "I want to stay here, with you, until this water goes down."

"No, Jess; that's not fair to you, or to dad. My work here is done when this levee is absolutely safe. Then I'll come back to New York. You and the senator are starting *now*, in five minutes. All right, senator." He roused the sleeper. "We are ready."

Through the mists of early morning two shadowy brown figures walked side by side along the crest of the levee at Boggy Bayou. They seemed to be men. Both wore breeches. Both were muddy, and happy. They were leaving the barge and the sack bearers behind. Ahead of them, somewhere in the gloom, an automobile kept honking. At their heels limped a presidential possibility with his gripsack.

"Here's our car, senator." Furlong helped Rutherford into the auto, keeping Jessica beside him to the very last.

"Now don't forget, Jess," he impressed it upon her. "Tell Colonel Clancy what's happened here. Tell him that when the levee began to cave we built our bulkheads across the top, inside and out, filling in between with gravel. It's standing firm. And the flow from the sand boil is reduced to almost nothing."

Then ex-Major Grimshaw of the A. E. F. stepped back a pace and smiled as he touched his hat brim in mock salute:

"Attention, Courier Faison! You shall bear the news of victory. Report to Colonel Clancy that we have plenty of material, with twelve hundred well-organized men. And by the grace of God we'll hold this line."

The trim brown figure stood before him very stiffly until he whispered: "Good-by, Jess. I'm sorry you traveled such a distance for this unsatisfactory visit."

"Unsatisfactory? Oh, Furlong, can't you see how happy I am? And how proud of you? I never loved you in New York, not as I love you—now."

Contrary to all regulations ex-Major Grimshaw half smothered his courier, and with most unmilitary salutes sent the moist-eyed Jessica speeding on her way.

"Oh, Jess," he shouted after her, "I won't forget to send your trunk."



Talks With Men

By Martin Davison

VIII.—ON A VARIETY OF MATTERS.

IF you publish this letter," writes C. V. M., "please do not publish my name. It may seem odd that I am willing to tell things to an absolute stranger that I would not to my closest friend, but I have confidence in you and sometimes talking to a stranger is less embarrassing. I want to ask your advice. I am thinking of getting married. I am engaged, and yet I seem no nearer to getting married than before I was engaged.

"I am thirty-five years old, in good health and with no bad habits. I am a credit man in a big banking organization. I make five thousand dollars a year at present and I have a good future—at least ten thousand a year, some time. The girl I am trying to win as a wife works hard for thirty dollars a week. She is ten years younger than I. I am very much in love with her. What I am afraid of is that she does not care for me in any degree commensurate with my feeling for her.

"It took me six months to persuade her to put on a five-hundred-dollar engagement ring and even now she wears it under protest. She thinks I would be more sensible to sell the ring and put the money in the bank. From what I have read about girls—and it has been a good deal, for I am a great reader—one would suppose they would be pleased when a man is devoted to them and anxious to do everything to make life as happy as possible. Not so this girl. If I take her to the theater, she wants to pay for her own seat. If we go to dinner together there is always a wrangle about the payment of the check. She wants to pay her share. As for sending her presents—generally I have to send her a thing three times before she takes it and she will not always take it then. I have a lot of sentiment in my nature—but she is as cool and matter-of-fact with me as if I were a business partner. This is not all. I have seen her with other men, fellows who have done nothing for her, who have not known her as long as I have, who have not the same claims on her—and she seems more animated and brighter when she is talking with them. In spite of all this I have hammered along till she has consented to an engagement. She suggests, about every time we meet, that we break the engagement off.

"I know that a woman's 'no' means 'yes,' and that women like to be persuaded but never—either in books or on the stage—have I heard of a woman who needed so much persuasion as this particular girl. I am determined to win her for my wife if it is possible and I want your advice. I once brought up the subject with a per-

sonal friend. His only suggestion was that the girl was using me as a good thing. This is not the case, as she insists on paying her own way at every turn. Can you tell me anything of help in such a situation, or is your advice only for those who want to get on financially? I don't need that sort of advice as I am well able to take care of myself in a business way, and lucky besides. This is a matter, however, in which my intelligence seems to be absolutely at fault. I can't understand it. I am willing to make any sacrifices for this girl. I will do anything for her. Yet she seems not only not to appreciate it but to have more of an interest in other men whose interest in her is nothing more than casual. Perhaps if you have nothing to offer, some of your readers who have had more experience than I may give me a word of sympathy and advice."

PERHAPS they may. I hope they will. But in the meantime I have something to say. Now C. V. M., please consider me as a surgeon. Your case calls for an operation. It is going to hurt—but the hurt won't last long, and you'll feel ever so much better afterward. You are strong enough to stand it. If you were not possessed with a rather hard-boiled constitution you would not be a credit man with ten thousand dollars a year in prospect. You don't need an anæsthetic. So buck up like a man and take what is coming to you.

I don't know how many thousand divorces are secured every year in the United States but I do know that a big percentage of them are granted to women who have been "hammered," as you put it, into a marriage that they were not keen about by fellows just as well meaning and unselfish as yourself.

DON'T talk about "winning a wife." The successful marriages are not those in which the woman is won by an ardent wooer. They are the kind in which both parties are willing and of the same mind. You say you are lucky. I agree with you. Suppose your fancy had hit upon a girl who was perfectly willing to spend your money. Suppose she married you for your ten thousand dollars and not for yourself. Also consider this—that if she seems to be more interested in other men who have done nothing for her, it is quite likely because she likes them better. It is quite evident that she likes thirty dollars a week by herself better than a hundred dollars a week or more with you. Also, she knows you better than you know yourself. Women are much cleverer at sizing up men than men are at estimating women. Many a girl at twenty is wiser in that regard than the average man of forty. Don't let any one tell you that a woman's "no" means "yes." It generally means "no" printed in italics. If you really like the girl as much as your devotion would imply, why not present her with an inestimable gift—to wit the freedom to choose her own husband, or no husband at all, just as it may please herself. The next time she hands you back the ring, take it and put it in a safety-deposit box. You may meet another girl who likes it better. Handle yourself in your love affair with the same self-control as you conduct your business. And above all, if you find yourself interested in another girl at any time, don't think of her as a woman, or a prospective wife—but just as a human being like yourself. Those who get on best with women neither set them on pedestals nor adopt the opposite attitude of mental superiority. They just regard them as human beings.

NOW here is another letter, this time from a woman. It is wholly admirable in tone. It is the story of a splendidly successful life, a stirring, heartening, human document.

"This story," writes Mrs. Z., "commences where the usual story ends, where 'they,' I mean 'we,' were married. We took big chances on the financial end of it after a long engagement but neither of us has ever regretted it. Don, my husband, was working for a dyeing corporation at a salary too small to support two. I had a fairly good position for that period, as I was making \$18 a week. Don's firm went to the wall and he opened a small business for himself, losing the \$2,000 he put in it as well as a large amount of my earnings. He paid all his debts though. He went

to clerking for two years, at no time making over \$20 a week. These figures sound pretty sordid in comparison with the \$5,000 salary mentioned by C. R. R. in a recent issue and even more so when I tell you that my own little wage was reduced to \$15 a week. This was due to no fault of my own. I was bookkeeping for a small real-estate firm and neither had the time nor the eyesight to try for a harder job, for all this time I was keeping house in a small apartment for the two of us. I regard this as important, for to maintain good health one must have well-balanced, appetizing meals and these are not the easiest things to find in the average boarding house, begging the pardon of any Mrs. Boarding House who happens to read these lines. Hers are probably an exception.

"The next episode of this little drama is where the war intervenes. Don did not get into it as he was past the age, and he is not an especially strong man. But it enabled him to get a better position. He commenced work for a large and flourishing corporation at the salary of \$100 a month and a small commission. I suppose the munificence of these startling figures makes you smile, but it really did look big to these two human babes who had been wandering in the woods of adversity so long. Don's earnings last year were \$1,780. I still hold down my little job and keep house.

"Now I know the editor of 'Talks With Men' is wondering why I take the time to go into such a very ordinary experience, of two such ordinary people, but I am coming to the point—what we have done with our money and whether we are getting the most out of life.

"Immediately Don started to earn, we started to save. We have always been fortunate in getting low rentals, though we have steam heat and other modern conveniences. We have saved \$10,000, partly through investment and reinvestment on the advice of one of the most conservative and largest banks in the city. The investment is mostly in public-utility stocks and bonds, so that it nets us an income of a little over \$50 per month.

"Acting through the advice of this bank we have lost no money, though we have had two episodes in the great money game which have caused us some worry. The first was the first \$1,500 we ever owned which went for bonds in the Interborough Rapid Transit Company. You know how that matter was adjusted by a new issue of ten-year bonds, three years of which have already elapsed. We are not worrying seriously, as we get seven per cent interest. The second worry was a thousand-dollar bond of the Mast & Crowell Steamship Co. They failed a year ago but the bank did most of the worrying. They were protected by the Bondholders' Protective Association. We as well as others concerned were paid in full and the fund was again invested, this time in the Illinois Power & Light Co. The rest of our money is in stock of the Commonwealth Edison Co., and its subsidiaries, paying from six to eight per cent.

"I can imagine how very dull this business of saving and working must seem to the reader, for I believe the tendency of this wonderful age of ours is to think that you cannot have a good time unless you are spending money. We have had some good times and are still having them. Every summer we have a two weeks' vacation trip and every Christmas we visit our parents, one year to see 'his' people and the next year to see 'hers.'

"I have now reached the problem, and if this letter is read by the men, they will now be yawning and thinking that a man would have stated just the problem and omitted that long dull preface. But a woman has to have a few privileges, even if she breaks into the wrong place in print. Our problem is just the same as that of C. R. R., who bought a house on a shoe string. What sort of living conditions are we entitled to in view of the facts just stated?

"We are paying a monthly rental of \$38 for a two-room, kitchenette, Murphybed apartment, with modern plumbing and heating. This sounds cheap but of course there is a joker, and that is that we are living in an indifferent neighborhood with not a single congenial neighbor. Please don't think us snobbish, but the people surrounding us are different by reason of past environment and education and they

would not enjoy us a particle more than we would them. They are the classes that never read, nor care for the cultural life. They are just as useful in the scheme of existence as we are, for they have families while we have none. We like our little apartment in itself. But considering the surroundings, we are wondering if we are doing ourselves an injustice in staying where we are. What should we do to make the most of ourselves? We have plenty of recreation and plenty of good reading matter. We do not care for a motor car. What would you do in our place? Would you buy a home? Our securities could easily be turned into money. A home would take most of what we now have and the upkeep would cost more than we pay in rent.

"Life is surely a great privilege and we want to make the most of it, but we do not know whether we are justified in taking any decisive step. We are both somewhat older than C. R. R. If we could feel that we are doing the best we can under present conditions I think we could feel a sense of satisfaction in adjusting ourselves to our present environment. I cannot close this without a little tribute to my husband. His habits are and always have been of the very best. He is enthusiastic about the corporation he works for and his loyalty is unbounded."

I WANT to present my compliments to Mrs. Z. Here is what I have to say to her. Mrs. Z, you have written me one of the most interesting and inspiring letters I have ever received. You and Mr. Z. are both brilliantly successful people. You have succeeded in bending circumstances to your own ends and although you may not realize it, you are infinitely happier and more in tune with the great harmonies of life than most people with ten times your income. I advised C. R. R. that it was well for him to own a house. His case was different from yours. He would never have saved a dollar if he had not bound himself down to the payment of a house. Besides, he had children.

You belong to that gifted but rare class of people who can save money naturally, and who can conduct their lives through affection and common sense rather than through greed and impulse. The ten thousand dollars you have saved is the most precious and valuable sort of money in the world. This kind of money is a blessing. Easy money is a curse. Your sort is the best ever. In saving and investing wisely the ten thousand, you have worked for more than yourself alone. You have been serviceable to the commonwealth. Saved-up money is so much frozen energy. It is as if you had the power of a man working for ten years secreted in a storage battery. You have put it to work in the service of the public. It is hauling people to and from their work, it is helping to light their houses. Besides this it is adding to itself year by year. The first thousand was a little ray of light, now the light is getting brighter fast and you can see that somewhere at the end of the tunnel there is a delightful place for your husband and yourself when you grow older. I printed your letter in full as it is a better and more eloquent sermon on economy than anything I could say. The charming and admirable qualities in you are optimism, steadiness of purpose, self-control. The amount of money is nothing in comparison with what it represents in spiritual values. In a nation of many careless livers and foolish spenders you shine out with a peculiar radiance. I am proud to have you as a reader.

AS to buying a house—if I were you I would put it off for a long time. Were there children it would be different. But ask yourself, whether or not you are happy as you are. One of the advantages of life in a big city is that you do not have to associate with your neighbors. Also you can buy a house at any time and it is not so easy to sell one. Still further, it is likely that some years from now houses will not be so expensive as they are at present.

Watch the ten thousand grow. Your investments seem perfectly sound. I will write you personally about them. You do well to follow the advice of a good bank. I am wishing to you and to Mr. Z. a still greater measure of that good fortune and happiness that you are earning and deserve.



The Avails of the Fraction

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "The Berg Battlers," "Clinging," Etc.

**Lederer's brains had availed against many men of cunning in their time.
But this time the honest stupidity of a yokel set them at naught.**

DOCTOR FERDINAND LEDERER had a beastly headache. He pressed a clean, wet handkerchief to his forehead as he lay in his tent on Gold Hill in the Klondike. He had just returned from an unsuccessful stampede. His pack lay flung in a corner. Dick Kibble, who was his "pardner," but whom he always thought of as his man Friday, was outside, getting him something to eat and drink.

He was an ungallant figure, sprawled on the low bunk, his blue eyes dull with pain and despair. But, seen on the dank trail an hour before, the impression of him would have been different. Erect, his lithe, athletic figure bristling with energy, chin up, eyes frowning fiercely, he had run and won a long, hard race with fatigue, making it from Eureka Creek in ten hours where sturdy mushers would have taken fifteen or fallen by the wayside. Now he paid the penalty. But he never learned!

There had been no reason thus to overtax himself. A stampede to a rumored new gold strike is an intensive affair in the going, not in the returning. Whether you have

staked a claim or have not you may take your time about getting back to your starting point. Doctor Lederer had staked a claim on a side gulch off Eureka more to be doing something than because he was at all impressed with the forlorn-looking place. He did not intend to pay fifteen dollars to the Canadian government to record the claim. Every river, creek and gulch for miles and miles around Dawson was being staked, the near-by ones long ago. Nothing came of it. Doctor Lederer, a newcomer and tenderfoot—with forty thousand others—knew this already. Still, there was always a chance—a bare chance. And he *must* strike it! He was under a strange imperative, always. He *had* to do what he wished; *have* what he wished. And his impatience in accomplishment extended to the unimportant. Hence he could not return to his fraction on Gold Hill at a sensible pace, but must needs suffer self-flagellation. Now he was paying—as he always paid!

Dick brought him strong coffee, baking-powder bread baked as only Dick knew how to bake it, ham and stewed dried apricots. The doctor frowned and gestured Dick to

set it down on the low, upturned, empty canned-butter box. He frowned, pressed the handkerchief tighter to his temples, and planned, while Kibble, meek, sympathetic, sat at the other end of the tent, silent, waiting.

For the thousandth time he planned since he left Australia six months before. Sometimes he planned aloud—to Dick Kibble, who thought him a wonder at the game—but usually to himself, for Dick could not follow any but the more obvious moves. The subtler were debarred from Dick—or he from them—by reason of the simpler mind and simpler education of the young New Zealander whom Lederer had met on the steamer crossing the Pacific and hooked up with as a very fitting partner for one who needed a man Friday. There had been no difficulty in accomplishing the partnership, for Dick, alone, like himself, venturing, like himself, half across the world in search of the gold of the Klondike, was but too glad to become associated with a man so much his superior, so magnetic, so charming, so wonderfully educated and well-informed. A glance at Lederer's person, at the supple, graceful, muscular figure of the man, had removed the only doubt the young frontiersman had felt—the physical fitness of his new acquaintance for the struggle in a raw gold camp in the arctic wastes of America. The two had pooled their slender outfits when they landed in Seattle and transhipped for the Yukon. For four months, now, they had been together in the Klondike. Fall was upon them.

Lederer's planning took a hurried, hectic tinge from this imminence of fall. There was ice already on still pools. Very soon the last boats would be leaving and the long, deadly Northern winter would spread its white pall. He could not face that. He was a man who loved warmth, cheer. A native of Austria, reared in Italy, a cosmopolitan of thirty-five years, he always had shunned the cold, the stern, the forbidding. He had not gone to Alaska to live in it but to take from it. When Kibble, facing a long fight for wealth or a competence, had spoken of "next winter," Doctor Lederer had smiled to himself at the absurdity of it—for him! Kibble might do as he pleased. But he, Lederer, would be on the wing. He did not let Kibble know that. It would have been impolitic.

There had been before his mind, in his

planning, three things: A new strike in which he, as an early stamper, would be in on the ground floor; the fraction they were living on; and a coup. The coup might be anything. But coups—of the sort that this gentleman adventurer stooped to on occasion—were dangerous in the extreme. The stampedes were all more or less fakes, or, what was worse, started by honest fools. Eureka Creek was a case in point. That left the fraction as the one best chance.

A fraction, or fractional claim, as he had soon learned when, early in the spring they had reached Dawson ahead of many others and forged up the famous Bonanza Creek to the new strikes on the benches, was an area of ground staked between claims which, when the surveyors came to measure them, were found larger than the lawful size, thus leaving small plots between. Though every miner knew that these fractions were reserved by the government, they were eagerly seized upon and staked in the hope of a revision of the law, or, as frequently happened, of a favorable ruling by the gold commission based upon some real or fancied exception in favor of certain fractions. The Klondike was the wonder ground of the world; the gold in dust and great rugged nuggets, was almost spouting from it; and graft and "pull" and one underground influence and another wrought strange miracles on the fringes of official circles. Lederer, a month before, had made his attempts, received certain encouragements—and there the matter had rested.

It was a dangerous thing to permit the recording of a fraction. The circumstances must be exceptional. Lederer understood perfectly just what that word "exceptional" meant. It must be exceptionally rich—to justify the risk. The claims adjacent to this fraction staked by Lederer and Kibble were being opened up. They were as rich as any on rich Gold Hill. But was the fraction rich?

It took work to determine that, and Lederer had several objections to doing it. In the first place he never worked—with his hands. Not as a workman. Not as a laborer. In the second place, work might show that the pay streak missed the fraction, and then there would be no use moving heaven and earth to record the fraction, for who would want to buy it? In the third place, if gold *were* in it in plenty, there was still no assurance that the men on the fringes

of officialdom would or could obtain the recording of it. Lederer compromised with these none-too-roseate considerations by letting Kibble do the work. One of them was enough to stampede about the country and look for chances of a coup.

Kibble didn't know what a coup was. He was a kind of Martha, a useful camp keeper and worker; reliable, steady, giving in always to the better judgment of Lederer the educated, the clever, the brilliant, the fine fellow. So Kibble had plugged away for months on the fraction, working alone—for Lederer saw to it that he was seldom in camp long enough to lend a hand—slaving in a narrow tunnel and a deep, slimy shaft in air that had killed three men in Gold Hill since the benches were opened up. Colors, another name for mere hopes, were all he had garnered thus far.

While Lederer sat holding his head and planning more desperately than ever before—the chill in the air frightening him—Dick Kibble sat on his empty box, waiting for a question. It did not annoy him in the least that the question was so slow in coming. That only prolonged the joy with which he anticipated it—and his answer.

"Well, Dick, my boy, anything new?" asked the man with the headache, finally. He had thrust out a hand for the steaming coffee cup.

Dick slyly parried the question. "How was the stampede?" he asked. "Get anything?"

"Staked a claim. Just to be doing something. I cannot find that there has been any gold produced. Colors, Dicky. You know colors, deah boy. That is Eureka Creek, which means, the Californians tell me, 'I have found it!' How absurd to call it that. Colors! Colors everywhere. How dare they start stampedes on colors!" Doctor Lederer glared balefully at the slice of bread he had seized. "I am very, very weary, Dicky—quite worn out!"

"Well, take it easy, doc," replied Kibble genially. "What's that question you asked me?"

"Question?" Lederer thought. "Oh, yes. Oh, nothing, but—anything new? That was all."

"Five dollars, seven fifty, three seventy-five, and near four dollars in four pans, doc. That's all that's new!"

"Where? Not here? Us?" Lederer sprang to a sitting posture.

"You're blooming right it's ours, doc. Leastways on the fraction that *ought* to be ours!"

Whereupon Doctor Lederer, painfully rising, gave his plannings the single direction of the fraction. It was a pitifully small fraction, but with such pans surely there was somebody, *somebody* who could bring influence enough now—

Having verified Kibble's news, and admiringly patted that young fellow on the back accompanied with many flattering words, he prepared to depart, though his headache was no better. He took medicines. He believed in strong medicines—quick action. He possessed an affinity with them—with their exaltings or depressings. In an hour he was on his way to Dawson City, seething caldron of the Klondike. He borrowed the last two ten-dollar bills that Kibble possessed, pressed flat in a combination diary and pocketbook which the New Zealander kept in the bottom of his waterproofed dunnage bag. The fortunes of the partnership were at a very low ebb.

In four days he was back on Gold Hill trailing a quiet, businesslike person who knew how to pan gravel after taking it from a part of a tunnel face which could not by any chance have been salted. There was no doubt of it: the fraction, though small, was equally rich with the adjoining claim. It belonged to the Canadian central government. But the Canadian central government was in Ottawa, which was a long, long way off.

Dick Kibble, always tired, latterly, with his hard drilling and poor food—for the fellow saved the best of everything for his pardner the doc—was an interested observer of these testings. He had been introduced to the quiet, businesslike person as the partner, the man who had done most of the work on the fraction. He was interrogated. He exhibited the avails of the previous pans—bed-rock pans, of course, but a fine showing. The businesslike person said to Lederer, "All right. It seems to be as you say. Let's go back to town."

Doctor Lederer called Dick to one side. "I think there's a big chance of getting our child christened, baptized and recorded," he said in his facetious way, which usually puzzled Kibble, who laughed good-naturedly anyhow. But this allusion to their child and the recorder's office was very plain to the junior partner.

"What's this bloke out here for, doc?" He looked anxious.

"Wheels within wheels, my boy," said the doctor in a low whisper. His manner with his young partner was always a combination of the mysterious and the confidential. It was a very potent mixture. "They've got to make something out of it themselves, you know, to afford to take the risk. Any time an inspector from Ottawa may come and check up on them. So, if we are to record, we must make a cut."

"Oh, sure, doc—the bloomin' thieves!" It was Dick's invincible notion that the fraction law was an Ottawa steal. That was the only reason he was willing from the first to make whatever concessions might be necessary to the powers that *were* for the sake of a recording. Since he had found the pay streak he had almost literally danced on air. For he had a sweetheart near his homestead claim in the New Zealand bush settlement, but no wherewithal for the shanty and the plow. Now he dreamed dreams.

"I may be some little time in consummating the deal, Dick." Doctor Lederer used large words when he wished to impress his partner in certain ways. He now looked about him in the tent. "I'll want my golf suit. Dining with the toffs, me boy, in our negotiations, perhaps."

"You aren't going to sell out, doc, are you?" asked Dick anxiously.

"Only the slice we'll have to part with, Dicky. Unless"—Doctor Lederer desired to be candid—"unless the price offered is big. In that case—we'll talk it over first, of course." He looked slyly at his leather bag, a thing he never took on the journeys afoot; it was too awkward. Queer, uncertain things were stirring in his mind. "I'd better take my best clothes in it. Look better, my boy. Not so?"

"Sure, make a flash, doc," grinned Kibble.

"And—I spent the twenty dollars, Dicky. It just lasted. Better give me the pannings. You can pan some more right away, but say nothing till the fraction is ours."

"Trust me, doc," Dick chuckled. He was thinking absent-mindedly of how many pannings it would take to buy a span of oxen in the New Zealand bush settlement. But it would be sluicing, or rocking at worst, not panning, they'd be doing. He got the vials containing the panned gold and handed

them to Lederer, who took them with his courtly nod and smile. Dick left the tent, and the man from many parts of the world gathered up his few good clothes, and this and that of personal possessions. He did not know exactly what might or might not happen. And it had been his rule, in such circumstances, to keep his possessions close at hand. He shortly left with the businesslike person.

Dick Kibble ate a hurried meal of bread and beans and pulled a hand sled over the dry tundra moss a mile uphill to the fast-disappearing spruce forest to drag it down again filled with wood with which to build a fire in his tunnel and another in the shaft. The fellow was a tireless worker, a good man Friday. He knew that the partnership was one of brawn and brains. It was a very necessary combination in a mining camp. He was glad that "the doc" had the brains.

"The doc" had quite recovered from the Eureka trip. His few days in Dawson had quite set him up. The walk up Bonanza Creek to Gold Hill and the walk back again were nothing to him—a mere stimulation on the physical side to keep step with the enormous spiritual lift of his prospects. The businesslike individual walking by his side, or back of him or in front—as the trail twisted and angled erratically among dumps, across footbridges, around morasses—was hardly an impediment to his winging thought. He talked to him only enough to avoid the appearance of surliness or disdain, for if he were offended the man could, conceivably, lie about the fraction in his report.

He fell to thinking about the trail and comparing it with his life—as sinuous a course, with as many sudden angles, strange dippings into dangerous places, refreshing turns of luck into the high and safe—before the next inevitable slough of despond and quagmire. It was his life to perfection, mirrored through the tortuous mazes of Bonanza, its normal course of gentle curves fantastically hypertrophied by men gold-passion twisted. In Lederer's mood of present exaltation the simile tickled him.

In Dawson he saw, very soon—after the expert had seen them first—his true principals in the deal, or, at least, two men who stood to *him* as true principals. The transaction, normally following the course of first a recording of the fraction, thus vesting its title in the names of Lederer and Kibble and then a transfer of that title to the pur-

chasers for a valuable consideration, was consummated both steps at once, just as boys, suspicious of each other, trade a broken jackknife and an apple—each with a hand on each, each letting go at the same moment.

The papers were prepared in the office of Pateller & Gridley, barristers. Lederer would have objected to them, had it not been unwise. For it was in that office that he and Dick had had prepared their location notices and also a general power of attorney from Dick, the brawn man, to Doctor Lederer, the brain man, so the latter could use his brain for the furtherance of their business at any time, whether or not the brawn man was personally present. That power of attorney was safely pinned in the inner pocket of Lederer's jaunty coat. His objection he could hardly have explained himself. It was based rather on the general principle that in matters *sub rosa*—and all Lederer's transactions, no matter how straight, were tintured, by preference, with an undersurface flavor—no one affair should ever be linked with another affair.

Both Pateller and Gridley were out. They usually were. But their chief clerk, Bonbright, who was in, usually attended to simple matters of conveyancing anyhow, so there was no difference—except to Lederer who noted, with an inner frown, that this man was the same man who had made out the power of attorney from Dick to himself.

The papers were quickly signed and attested, and the consideration passed. Lederer, an hour before, had expressed a preference for currency over exchange "on the outside." Currency was less safe than exchange, in case of theft. But Lederer, alert, worldly-wise, never feared theft. He accordingly was paid, for the transfer signed by himself for himself and by himself as attorney in fact for his copartner Richard Kibble, fifteen thousand dollars in fresh, crisp notes of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, Dawson City branch.

While Bonbright was preparing his acknowledgment upon the conveyance, Lederer did a simple, natural thing, a very slight thing, yet it was the mistake of his life. He gazed through the window—which faced the Dawson river front—and held his gaze for a moment or two upon the river steamer *Moosomin*, which was to be the last boat up the river. Bonbright was so used to making out acknowledgments that he did not

have to concentrate upon them; and he observed Doctor Lederer looking at the *Moosomin*.

"Yes," said Doctor Lederer, in answer to a polite inquiry as to what he was going to do now, "we're going to develop some other property we have."

He was heard but not heeded—except possibly by Bonbright, who was indorsing the conveyance prior to handing it to Pateller & Gridley's two clients. The clients had asked him the question just in the way of one who says, "It's a nice day, isn't it?" They were not in the least interested in what Doctor Lederer did with himself or his money—which was a pittance to these men, or to the real principals they represented.

And thus ended, for Doctor Ferdinand Lederer, in perfect success, a long series of getting-acquainted, feelers, hintings, passings from one man to another, covering the several months since he and Dick had staked the fraction. The chain had ended for the time in the blank wall of "It all depends on whether the fraction has got the stuff!" Dick had toiled and moiled and found the stuff. And now the real and successful end had come. On the narrow, crowded sidewalk of the main street of Dawson, Doctor Lederer found himself alone, feeling very fit, and with more money in his pocket than he had possessed for several years. He wove through the sidewalk crowd, hardly aware that he was not alone. His intensities had begun delightfully to work upon him.

He was a man of infinite refinements of desire. He loved art, beauty, drink, food, raiment, horses, books, poetry, the society of intellectuals and even of ascetics—between times! His was a nature of complete sophistication, of perfect and utter artificiality. He could enjoy intensely just as he could suffer intensely—when deprived of enjoyment. An appetite unappeased gave him no rest, no peace. It was torture.

Appetite, for six months, had wound up in him like a fine steel spring. Now he felt the relentless pressure of it moistening his lips. About him were rough palaces of pleasure—food, drink, gambling. *Uncouth!* With a shudder he thought of Monte Carlo; even of Sydney. No, he could not relax—uncoil the fine steel spring of the subtle, beautiful passions that were his greatest natural gift—in this monstrous wooden city of the crude and cruel Northland of his immolation. For this that he had in his pocket,

this genius of the lamp, he had suffered exquisitely, for months on end. Now he must enjoy exquisitely. He looked again at the water front—he had known since he first gazed at the river steamer from the law office that he was going to gaze upon it again and again in the next hour.

He crossed the wide, dray-laden street and interviewed a man at the wharf where was tied the *Moosomin*. He knew the sign said October 10th—two days hence. But was that to really be two days, or three or four? The man said it would be "pretty clost," meaning close to the advertised sailing. Lederer sauntered over to a clean packing case, sat upon it in the still-genial autumn sunlight and thought—fighting.

He could run up to the fraction—which would not be disturbed for several days, he knew, by the purchasers. He could fix things with Dick the peasant, the yoeman, the clod. And then he could catch the boat—easily! With seven thousand five hundred dollars in his pocket, less his fare to Seattle. Seven thousand five hundred dollars did not seem very much to him—now. His fluent mind ran on to cities of the world—expensive cities to men of refined expensive tastes. He spent money—in his mind—for this and that. How expensive the things he loved most were. Soon he would be driven to practice his profession again—as an obscure physician. A thing he hated. But fifteen thousand dollars? Ah, that was twice as much. He wet his lips and proceeded, afresh, to spend money more craftily, conservatively, with only little spurts of lavishness. It sounded better—this fifteen thousand dollars.

Dick! Dick and money. It was hard to think of them together—fittingly. Consider, if you please, the differing natures of men. Their widely differing needs. Dick was happy working—with his hands. He, Lederer, was unhappy when forced to work—actually work. The struggle thus ended.

He bought—two days later—several bottles of wine and some good cigars. This was his only concession to the gilded palaces of Dawson City. He had written a letter to Dick, telling him their affairs were delayed somewhat but promised success. He sent it by a special carrier—an acquaintance of the Hill. Still, he worried a little when the *Moosomin* did not get off one day after her schedule. Nor two. But the third, early, she cast off and steamed up the river, buck-

ing a skim of ice in the Dawson eddy. She would undoubtedly get up and out. Lederer opened his first bottle of wine.

It was some hours after Dawson had disappeared around the first upriver bend that he became acquainted with a congenial soul, a gambler of distinction, known to him by reputation. Lederer was not of this class. But he unbent, needing mightily a some one to whom to subtly vaunt. The gambler—this one, at least—understood the true meaning of making a half-round-the-world journey for a purpose of high chance. He would equally understand that a chance won is not to be renounced, either in whole or in part. He told his friend—as they drank the wine—obscured, rather by symbol and parable, of Dick, the drudge, the drone—of the day after day of his arid, stupid, obvious comments upon things and people. The gambler—a brilliant fellow—could comprehend the hate, or something quite akin to it, that six months of constant propinquity had bred in Lederer's heart for the plain, flat partner of the yoeman breed.

At Indian River the *Moosomin* stopped to take on wood—it was so much cheaper than at Dawson—and tied up for the night, there being no moon and the ice a bit troublesome to the pilot in the dark.

Lederer, in his narrow stateroom, was treating the gambler—and his woman friend—to some canned delicacies. For he had vowed to eat the grub of the country no longer. There was also a second bottle before them, a high light on its slender median line from the small brass bracket lamp. There was no marring of their converse except the thump of cordwood on the deck below—when the door opened. Dick Kibble, muddy and a little white, peered in!

"Why, Dick!" said Lederer, smiling affably, though his heart rumbled. He could not imagine it! Here was some extraordinary coincidence. Could Dick have gone hunting? His swift mind, stimulated by wine to tremendous self-confidence, instantly created an alibi. "Excuse me, dear friends," he said to his companions of the little supper. "Want to see me, Dick?" He went out upon the narrow deck.

"Thought you were in Dawson, doc?"

Lederer had the impression that Dick, the never lying, had lied. Still—why not have thought him in Dawson? Yet—

"Well, well," he said genially. "To think of your being over here on the river. No, I

had to run up here—to Stewart, the next stop. My man was called away—delayed up there. Going up to consummate the deal. Strike while the iron's hot, my boy. Nothing like it. And you?"

"I got called away, too," said Dick slowly. "I was tryin' to find Dowd. Up on the next claim, 'e was. Remember Dowd?" The smoothness of it deceived Lederer, who did not stop to think that Dick was miles from Gold Hill, and when one walks miles over the wet moss one has much time to think—of simple things to say, at least.

"Don't remember him," replied Lederer indifferently. "But I was so seldom in camp."

"Right, doc." They were at the gang-plank. "Boat's laid up for the night, they tell me. Come over to my camp and I'll tell you about Dowd. Glad I met you. Luck, I'll call it."

"Luck? My word, Dicky!" Lederer had decided to follow him. If there was to be a scene—but of course that was impossible—still it was better enacted off somewhere. The boat was dangerous. A mounted police sergeant was aboard. There was the gambler, who had developed a slightly sneering attitude with the last bottle, and the presence of his woman friend. "Let's go," he said. "I've things to tell you too. Almost sure of a sale, my boy. Matters couldn't look more encouraging. What?"

He received no reply as Dick led him along a path into the mossy woods. He did not like that. Dick always replied, though his reply was seldom worth listening to.

Dick, though, could not reply. He had exhausted, at one Herculean effort—the obscure reference to the apocryphal Dowd—his capacity for simulation. He would simulate no more, not unless it were absolutely necessary. To be alone with his partner was what he too wanted. He had no doubt of his power. No honest man like Dick Kibble, feeling as Dick Kibble felt, has doubt of his power.

There was a small, hidden camp a thousand yards down the river in the timber. There was a blanket, a frying pan and a small—a pitifully small—pack of grub, the last of the Lederer-Kibble outfit, which had been rather a brave one, in a modest way, when it had left Seattle.

The way was narrow in the brush where it debouched upon the small clearing. Dick

let Lederer precede him. He always had done this and Lederer took no alarm. As Lederer stepped upon the sod of the camp Kibble sprang upon him and bore him down. Naturally the two men were less than equal, in Lederer's favor. Fourteen hours a day, however, is a hardening process when devoted to pick, shovel and ax. But Kibble took no chances. He had him down and a skinning knife held to his throat.

"Excuse me, doc," he said, sobbing miserably. "Mebbe I'm wrong. I got to know. And you're too smart for me to take chances on."

"*Dick!*" gasped Lederer, utter pathos in his voice. It was the cry of a man who finds the wife of his bosom unfaithful to him.

"I got wind you was goin' out," said Dick doggedly, moving the knife not one hair's breadth away.

"Absurd!" snorted Lederer disgustedly. "How could you think——"

"I'll tell you. The bloke in that barrister's place that made the paper that give you the right to sell me out—he wrote me. I know it by 'eart. 'I remember you,' he says, 'from your Austrilian talk. Took me for a blooming Austrilian, and remembers arskin' me about a pal of his, if I ever seen him. 'Your pardner,' he says, 'is selling your claim and takin' fifteen thousand for it while he's lookin' at the last steamer. Congratulations. And by the w'y,' he adds, 'the boat stops, I understand, at way points, the first bein' Indian River.'"

"Doc, I gets that letter by reg'lar mail carrier the day *after* your letter come saying there was delay. You lied sure, or *he* lied. I'll find out. I got to. Move and I'll cut your throat!"

With his other hand he searched the pockets of the fear-stricken man—dumb, his wit strangely deserting him. He drew out a pocketbook, wrenching it free of the safety pins that secured it. Fumbling through it with his one free hand he drew forth a steamship ticket. He could not read it in the dark.

"For Stewart station, Dick. You foolish boy," Lederer found tongue to pur—hoping still.

Kibble sprang up, holding the ticket against the glare of the coals of the camp fire. "Pretty big—for Stewart!" He remembered the tickets, coming into the country.

Holding the strip of pasteboard between

him and the prone man so he might watch him against any attempt to rise, squinting, he read at the end, "Seattle!"

"You lie, doc, damn you!" He threw himself down upon the man again; again held the knife to his throat; again fumbled in his pockets, till a thought, a remembrance of the days when the two still had money, came to him, and instantly he tore open the man's clothes at his waist and found the money belt bulging with bank notes. The belt he tore from him and cast aside. Color—too much of it—came to his face.

Months passed before him, months of incredible toil for himself and the man of brain, who, he had believed, was using that brain for the two of them just as he, the man of brawn, was using his brawn—for the two of them. A flood of racking hardships suffused his mind, these infinitely more painful, soul-flaying, in the bitter retrospect. The fury of a patient man broke forth. He cast the knife aside.

"Get up!" he whispered hoarsely. "And fight!"

Lederer was a skillful boxer. But he had boxed only with gentlemen, or those so called. He would almost rather have been knifed than feel the writhe of perspiring flesh, the hot, panting breath of this enraged creature. Yet he could not choose but rise and fight, thinking of tricks.

He was besting the yoeman when his en-

More stories by Mr. Solomons will appear in early issues.

durance failed. The fourteen hours a day at toil he had disdained was the other's advantage, Lederer's undoing. He found himself being mauled to unconsciousness.

In a brief lapse into consciousness—before he went to sleep again for many hours—he remembered signing something with a pencil that Kibble had forced into his hands. He had no idea what it was even after he came to himself, deathly sick, sore all over to the verge of paralysis. But there was a note that informed him:

I loved you like a brother, you low-lived scoundrel. And I worked for you like I done for myself. You think I liked it. That I ain't fit for nothing else. Now you try it. You'd leave me to starve in a strange country, or freeze to death, while you splurged with the money you robbed me out of.

I got your ticket and a paper saying you made up your mind to stay and let me have your ticket and go. I got your money, only not being a dirty thief I don't intend to keep it. I'll find that wife you deserted. You think I didn't twig to what you meant. I didn't, then. But now I know you deserted her. Because you deserted me. I'll give her your half, if I kin find her. If not it will be in a bank in Auckland for you. *When you have starved and froze for a winter in the Klondike.* Or else gone to work with your hands, which you despise. You can come out dead or else a man, or a little of a man, whichever you wish.

My share is fifteen hundred pounds, which will build me a shanty and buy me oxen and mostly pay for my land. And I will be married, God bless her. And may He have mercy on your soul. RICHARD KIBBLE.



STILL ON THE FARM

FOR a good many years we have heard people wondering what would be the result of the shift of American population from the farms to the cities. We began to think that nearly all the American farmers had renounced the plow and the front porch for the city office and the movies. Figures made public by the census bureau have convinced us that there isn't so much to worry about, after all. The farmer still is very much on the job.

There are almost six and one half million farms in operation in the United States. Their products each year are valued at around twenty billion dollars. Almost half the people of the United States earn their livings, directly or indirectly, through the tilling of the soil. Of course all these people are not farmers; in addition to the men who operate the farms there are millions of storekeepers, mechanics and other tradesmen who live in small towns in farming districts whose incomes are derived indirectly from agriculture. Farming remains the greatest business of the nation.

Texas has the most farms—436,000. Georgia is second with 310,000; Kentucky third with 270,000.



The Green Ribbon Club

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "Convertible Fives," "The Yellow Devil," Etc.

The Great Macumber, magician of the footlights and Nemesis of the underworld, circumvents bigamy, exposes fraud, and forestalls murder—with the aid of a crystal ball.

EXCEPT for the recurrent flaring and waning of the glow in his pipe bowl, Macumber might have been asleep.

The stiff raw wind that had been buffeting the *Israel Putnam* from the moment she quit the shelter of Boston harbor and began to stagger through the offshore chop toward New York had long since left us with the deck to ourselves; but for all its effect on the Great One the incipient December gale could have been a summer breeze. He was lying sprawled out comfortably in his chair, with his back to the blast for his pipe's sake and his eyes, half closed, squinting moodily out into the blackness astern. Not for an hour past had he spoken.

My retreat into the depths of my overcoat had been pressed to the ultimate inch, and yet the chill cut into me. In ruggedness I could not hope to match Macumber. Surrendering to a shiver, I told him so.

"At this time of year," said I, "I find the sea air a little rich for thin blood. I've had enough, thank you. If you've no objection I'll leave you alone."

The Great One peered up at me under his hat brim.

"Not exactly alone, lad. There'll still be

company on deck for me. Look aft, there. Yon's a man I'm thinking might prove an entertaining companion!"

He took the pipe from his mouth and pointed with its bit toward the stern. Against the muggy white froth that marked the steamer's wake I made out, vaguely, a motionless figure leaning over the rail.

"A lookout," said I. "I'd not want his job."

Macumber chuckled.

"You outdo yourself, youngster. Since when are watches posted to report on hazards left behind at sea? Do you tell me you've not noticed our hardy fellow passenger before?"

I looked again, more closely, at the man at the stern rail. He was inches short of middle height, swathed in a greatcoat that descended to his heels. That, and with it the dejection of his pose, identified him as the last of the deck promenaders to be vanquished by the cold and the rising sea. For an hour after the others had fled to the steamer's warm interior, the owner of the all-enveloping coat had continued to stumble periodically past us, clutching at rail and stanchions to preserve his footing. The face

framed in his upturned collar had been a solemn and, I thought, an unhappy one.

"I'd given him credit," said I, "for sense enough to get under cover. Yes; I've noticed the man. What do you see about him to suggest he'd be cheerful company?"

"Nothing whatsoever," replied the Great One. "You misapprehend, lad. I abominate the cheerful stranger. What I said was that I'd been thinking I'd find entertainment in the man. There's a distinction, you'll grant? Of course! This man was enjoying the night air no more than yourself. He was walking the deck because he was wild with worry. Just now he'll be—see, lad, there's the sign of what's in his mind! It's high time, I think, that I was making the gentleman's acquaintance."

The Great One rose quickly, braced himself against the steamer's roll and scrambled aft along the sloping deck. I renounced my project of turning into my warm berth and followed him. His thought had been transferred telepathically to me. A moment before the man at the rail had taken what appeared to be a sheaf of letters from his pocket and had methodically torn them to shreds. Now, as he watched the scraps driving off to leeward, I could imagine him steeling himself to plunge overside after them.

Relief, though, rather than resentment seemed to show on the little man's face when his ears caught the rapping of our heels on the deck boards and he turned to look us over. He moistened his lips before replying to Macumber's commonplace, and his words came with a jerkiness betraying unstrung nerves.

"Yes, sir. It will be a rough trip. I won't get a wink of sleep. It would have been easier traveling on the train."

The Great One stared down at the black water. Its grim potentialities seemed suddenly to leap up at him.

"I'd prefer not to go overboard on such a night as this," he remarked. "A man would freeze to death before he'd drown, even if he'd made up his mind to sink and be done with it. Not a death I'd fancy."

The other shuddered.

"No; nor I. If a man wanted to die—if he could see only misery ahead in life for him, that is—there would be other ways. *That* would be horrible!"

"In any form," said Macumber, still looking down into the heaving gloom, "self-destruction is a horrible thing to consider. The

more so since as a rule it's so utterly unnecessary. Ninety-nine out of every hundred who commit suicide could make a satisfactory compromise with life were they to bring intelligence to bear on their problems."

"I wonder," murmured the little man. He wiped the damp from his thick-lensed spectacles, and when he had replaced them searched Macumber's sober and seraphic face. "You seem to have given thought to the subject. You are a—minister?"

There was a note almost of hopefulness in the question that the Great One ignored. He smiled.

"I'm a magician. Yet I have stood as confessor often enough to be qualified, as one might say, for the cloth. I've no theories to expound; I speak from knowledge, my friend. Suicide solves nothing. In killing himself a man takes only a change of venue. His case is removed to another jurisdiction. That is all."

A queer opening, this, for a conversation between traveling companions casually met. Yet after the many demonstrations I had had I might have trusted to that uncanny faculty of Macumber's of falling unobtrusively into the precise train of another's thoughts. The little man looked up at him with an interest which lacked the astonishment that so abrupt a leap into profundities might ordinarily have been expected to inspire.

"A magician?" he repeated. "You're on the stage, you mean?"

"On and off. I've just closed an engagement in Boston, and now I'll be resting for the better part of a month, barring a private exhibition or two. My name is Macumber—professionally the Great Macumber. Perhaps you've—but no! You were in Boston too short a time to have seen any of my performances there!"

The small figure at Macumber's side straightened inside the big flapping overcoat.

"Macumber! Oh, I know the name. You've had many write-ups in the newspapers. You—you're good at other things besides magic, if what I've read is true. Wasn't it you who recovered that Mrs. Glendening's jewelry a while ago? Aren't you—" He broke off, seized with a hind thought which brought bewilderment. "What made you say I didn't belong in Boston—hadn't been there long?"

"Your manner of speech," said the Great One with a grin, "betrays you as no Bos-

tonian. Two words from you would tell that to any one who'd ever heard Bostonese spoken. As for my second deduction, accident put me close behind you in the line storming the purser's office for staterooms. I observed that you passed over the return half of a New York round-trip ticket for the purser's inspection—and also that you were traveling without luggage. I'm frank to say I took particular notice of you because you seemed to have a deal on your mind; all in all, don't you think I saw enough to justify the belief that yours had been a flying trip to Boston?"

The little man at the rail had been staring at Macumber as he spoke.

"It was a flying trip," he said. "I went to Boston to meet my wife—to have an understanding with her on certain matters I've been thinking over for some days. I'm willing enough to tell you about it if you care to listen. You take an interest in all sorts of peculiar things, I've read; and this is peculiar enough, the Lord knows—as strange a business, I think, as a man ever got himself into and wished himself out of."

The Great One took his eyes for a moment from the steamer's wake to meet those behind the heavy glasses.

"You may have every confidence," he murmured, "in the good will and discretion both of my friend and myself. You've had your—understanding?"

"No; I didn't see her. She wasn't at the hotel where I'd expected to find her, and she hadn't been there. They'd never even heard of Mrs. Horatio Pinkham. Two letters and a telegram that I had sent were there awaiting her. I reclaimed them. A while ago I ripped them up and tossed them overboard."

"I noticed that, too," said Macumber placidly. "I'd made up my mind that you were in trouble and that presently I must find opportunity to learn if I could not be of assistance. I could at least offer you, I thought—well, let's say a perspective. Dilemmas grow out of all proportion when one lives too close to them. Suppose we thrash it out together? Wouldn't it have been through a misunderstanding that you failed to find your lady, don't you think? I'd wager that was it, Pinkham. Really, you do not look the sort of man whose wife would be taking French leave of him. You don't for a moment imagine she has done that, do you?"

Mr. Horatio Pinkham chewed at the tattered end of a cigar which he had permitted

to go cold before more than a half inch of it had been smoked, then cast the wind-mauled wreck overside.

"I hope to Heaven," was his devout and surprising rejoinder, "that she has!"

The Great One looked at him keenly.

"We'd best be getting under cover," said he. "From head to foot, man, you're one continuous shiver. Up forward I've an over-size stateroom that boasts real chairs; and in my bag there's a bottle that should interest a man with a chill—a bottle whose like only a magician could be expected to command nowadays. Come, you'll be my guest?"

And hooking his arm under the hesitant Pinkham's, Macumber bore his prize irresistibly away toward the *Israel Putnam's* bows,

II.

Mr. Horatio Pinkham, divested of the enormous overcoat and of the shapeless felt hat which had hidden the high and shining forehead rising above his spectacle rims, presented no figure of romance. What bulk his outline had promised on deck had gone from him with the greatcoat. His shoulders were narrow, his face long and thin, his hair sparse and colorless; and the suit he wore, too, seemed to have been cut for a man of ampler proportions. Although he must have been several years scant of forty, lines of bafflement were graven into his face which suggested he had found life itself too large for him.

I had known many an æsthetic eye to sparkle at sight of the Scotch of the Great Macumber's private stock, but in Horatio Pinkham the MacVickar label awakened no enthusiasm.

"I do not indulge," he said primly. And then, under the mild astonishment of Macumber's expression, he hastened to make gratuitous explanation. "As a boy I had an unforgettable example of the evil of intemperance before me. It was in our own family—my father's only brother. His tragedy changed the course of my own life in more ways than one, Mr. Macumber. It was very—"

"For myself," the Great One quickly interrupted, "I do not hold with intemperance; but whether there's harm in an occasional nip in the course of social exchange is debatable. Ah, Mr. Pinkham, you'll not have been married long, I think! Permit me to anticipate your question. A few stitches

would make that cravat of yours quite as good as new—and my experience of wives is that they'll have time for neckties if not for buttons."

Pinkham's hand went to a suddenly conspicuous strand of thread flaunting beside an empty buttonhole.

"Mrs. Pinkham," said he, "could hardly be held responsible. We were married only a week ago, and she was obliged to leave New York the same day."

Macumber's chin went up.

"What's this? And did I not hear you say a moment since, with an unmistakable inflection of sincerity, that you hoped she'd left you for good and all? You tire quickly, it seems."

"It's not a case of tiring. I've had time to think things over and I feel I've made a mistake. I told you it was all a strange business, didn't I?"

"Marriage," observed the Great One dryly, "is often a stranger business than either of the contracting parties bargain for. I gather your acquaintance with the future Mrs. Pinkham had not been of long standing when you led her to the altar?"

"It was not a church wedding," corrected Horatio Pinkham. "We were married in the Municipal Building in New York City within a month after our first meeting. The whole proceeding from license to certificate of marriage didn't take up ten minutes. It was as if we'd been run through the assembling room of some big modern factory. I'm not a sentimentalist, Mr. Macumber—at least I've never thought of myself as one—but I want to say the memory of the whole cold business is maddening. And the Green Ribbon Club itself! They call it the most wonderful aid to romance the world has ever known; but if you want my opinion, *death* to romance is what it is!"

The Great One shot toward me a glance freighted with self-congratulation.

"The Green Ribbon Club?" he echoed. "I'm sure I've not heard before of the organization."

"Nor had I," said Pinkham sadly, "until four short weeks ago. And when you came to me on deck I was wishing with all my heart that curiosity hadn't prompted me to look into the thing. I was in a bitter mood, I'll admit—really, I was wondering if life would be worth while considering the mess that membership in the club had got me into. I've come to the realization, Mr. Ma-

cumber, that I—well, since you'll be bound to guess as much when I've told my story I may as well come out baldly with it—I don't love my wife, and I never can love her!"

"Then why the devil," demanded the Great One, "did you marry?"

"I was drawn into it. One step led to another. For the first time in my life I was traveling off the beaten track. I was thirsting for adventure, for the unusual, and I let myself be gulled. Those damned Green Ribbon people were at the bottom of everything. Do I look like a man who in the ordinary course would be aiming at a love affair with a woman who was an absolute stranger to him?"

"You do not," confessed Macumber. "What is this club, Pinkham—a matrimonial agency in masquerade?"

"Something like it. But that is not exactly the idea. It is a movement, rather than a club. The central organization is small and its expenses are borne, I understand, by a millionaire who thinks it the ideal philanthropy and yet will not permit the use of his name. No fees or dues in any form are collected from members. One merely is required to abide by certain set rules. This, for instance."

Horatio Pinkham brought forth a strip of narrow green ribbon which had been folded carefully away in an upper pocket of his vest and looped it through a lapel buttonhole.

"Members," he explained, "are supposed to wear the ribbon in public. That's the way they recognize one another, understand. The women usually sew the ribbon to their waists or coats. Maybe you've seen some of them?"

Macumber shook his head.

"I don't think I have."

"But sooner or later you're bound to. In Manhattan Borough alone more than five thousand men and women wear the green ribbon."

"You don't say! And why, may I ask, do they wear it? Is it possible——"

"Theoretically, at any rate, every one of the five thousand is seeking a mate. The object of the club is to bring into contact men and women who have come to New York alone from smaller places and who, even after years, may still be strangers in a strange land. There are doubtless many times five thousand people on Manhattan Island, Mr. Macumber, who are Crusoes in

the crowds. They make acquaintances here and there, but they have no friends. To you that may sound incredible; *I* know it is the truth, for I have been one of them."

The Great One nodded.

"I believe you, Pinkham," said he. "Whenever I ride in the subway or on the elevated it seems to me I could put my fingers on a dozen such. How long have you been a New Yorker?"

"For twelve years; and in all the city there are still not a dozen people whom I could call by their first names without giving them a shock. I was ripe for recruiting into the Green Ribbon Club. It was four weeks ago, as I think I've told you, that I called at the club's officers and gave the answers required by their questionnaire. In return I was put through a rather cursory physical examination by the club's physician, and then provided with the ribbon of membership."

"I've seldom heard of anything more astonishing, Mr. Pinkham," Macumber warmly assured our guest. "I'll want to hear more about the Green Ribbon Club at your leisure; but let me hear now, please, of your meeting with Mrs. Pinkham-to-be."

The little man winced.

"It was an informal meeting, as you may imagine," said he. "Mrs. Pinkham—her name was Theodora Langley, then—chanced to have a chair across the table from mine in a small restaurant where I've been in the habit of dining for the last several years. When I find a good eating place, Mr. Macumber, I stick to it; for a man who must hold a tight rein on his expenditures, satisfactory restaurants are rare."

"Miss Langley was also a regular customer?"

"No; I'd never seen her there before. She had moved from another neighborhood that same day—the third day after I had acquired my ribbon."

Macumber reflected on this, then:

"I see. And your acquaintance with the lady was the ribbon's first result, was it?"

"Curiosity, if nothing more, had kept me on the lookout for other green ribbons; but Miss Langley's was the first I saw after joining the club. Five thousand people make quite an army, Mr. Macumber, yet the number is nothing among millions."

"You are quite right. Conceivably, months might have gone by before you had opportunity to test the advantages of your

membership. In finding another green ribbon in three days you did extremely well."

"Or ill!" sighed Horatio Pinkham. "At least, looking back, it seems to me it would have been infinitely better had I met any other member of the club rather than Theodora Langley."

"You'd appear by your remark to discount the attractions of Mrs. Pinkham."

"On the other hand, she is a woman of more than ordinary good looks—and perhaps three or four years younger than myself. It was no lack of physical charm I had in mind when I said I did not, and could not, give to her the love that is a wife's right. She is, simply, not my type of woman. She is a rather alarmingly modern woman, a woman more inclined to lead than to be led—and, I may safely say after my experience with her, a scheming woman."

The Great One, darting another significant glance in my direction, caught at the word.

"Scheming!"

"No word could better express my meaning, Mr. Macumber. I do not flatter myself for a moment that the woman who found it convenient to become Mrs. Horatio Pinkham is the victim of any unrequited affection. I believe it suited some purpose of hers that she acquire a husband. It was she who shaped matters from the beginning. The first word when we found ourselves facing each other in the restaurant with our ribbons on display was spoken by her. It was she who suggested another meeting. And it was she—though it's not a nice thing to say—who was the first to mention marriage. I can see it all now. It was a thoroughly cold-blooded proceeding on her part from start to finish; and for all I know I'll be in trouble yet on account of Mrs. Theodora Langley Pinkham, though I never set eyes on her again!"

"Tush, man!" exclaimed Macumber, at once solicitous and eager. "How could that be?"

"She was anxious to have me misrepresent myself. She urged and pleaded and insisted until I yielded, for *then* I could see no more than a huge joke in the thing she wanted. But since my failure to find her in Boston—"

A deeper sigh escaped Horatio Pinkham and he shook his head forlornly. The Great One leaned forward.

"In what way were you asked to misrepresent yourself?"

"She wanted to impress her people with my importance, it seemed. It struck me at the time as an interesting foible in an otherwise intensely practical woman. Practically at her dictation, I wrote what was supposed to be a letter to her. It was a ridiculous affair; reading it, you'd think I held Wall Street in the hollow of my hand. I'd been called into conference at Washington with the secretary of the treasury; again, I'd just turned down a vice presidency of the chamber of commerce because my time was already too fully occupied. There was a great deal more nonsense of the same sort. My wife let her imagination run wild. Nothing would do but that I mention a half dozen of the most prominent men in the country as my personal friends, and tell of golfing with one and lurching familiarly with the other."

The Great One's eyebrows had lifted sharply. Horatio Pinkham forestalled the interjection on his lips.

"That wasn't all," he pursued. "Mrs. Pinkham made me promise that I'd repeat the whole balderdash in conversation in the event I should meet her brother. But I'm damned if I will, Mr. Macumber. I've gone beyond a decent limit with her foolishness now. Why, the man would laugh in my face. *You* wouldn't take me for a Napoleon of finance, now, would you?"

Macumber laughed.

"I've been trying desperately for the last dozen years to find something or some one equal to surprising me. It has been with that end in view that I have turned occasionally from magic to criminology. Well, Pinkham, *are* you that?"

Horatio Pinkham's echo of the Great One's laugh was humorless.

"When I came to New York from Iowa it was my plan to get into the service of a big corporation, attend strictly to my own business, live modestly and let hard and faithful work carry me to success. I found employment as a clerk with the Knickerbocker Gas Company, and followed through the rest of my program to the best of my ability. I am still with the Knickerbocker—still a clerk. Of the men with whom my wife insisted that I claim acquaintance I have seen just one in the flesh. He is the president of our company. Twice each year I carry a file into his office and place it on

a table in the corner; he never looks up from his own desk, never speaks."

Macumber, who already had filled the stateroom with the choking fumes of the abominable black Louisiana tobacco which he properly holds to stand in a class by itself, thoughtfully packed a fresh load into his pipe.

"Did Mrs. Pinkham," he inquired presently, "give you any specific reason for wanting such a letter? Was it to be, do you think, part of a practical joke she contemplated?"

"She was planning no joke, but a deception," said Pinkham earnestly. "It was her mother she wanted chiefly to impress. Old Mrs. Langley is very well off, I believe, and my wife—a hard word to get used to, that—had an idea that by passing me off as a man with important connections she would be likely to be remembered more substantially in her mother's will. She was quite frank about it. I demurred, I assure you, but she—she dominated me. The old lady, she explained, had been confined to her bed for many months by what was expected to be her last illness. As a matter of fact, my wife received a telegram, telling her that her mother was dying, within a couple of hours after our marriage. We had rented a furnished apartment together the day before, but she never saw the inside of it as Mrs. Pinkham. Instead of going to our new home she started at once for Boston. Mrs. Langley, the wire said, had been taken from her home in one of the Boston suburbs to a hospital in the city, and there was to be an operation as a last resort."

A crooked furrow appeared in the Great One's forehead.

"You *have* got yourself into something, Pinkham," he said softly. "I won't pretend to guess what it is, but when you described the matter as a mess you picked a fair word. On the face of it the reason advanced by your lady for wanting the letter is no less absurd than the letter itself. If it weren't for the grim reality of the marriage ceremony I'd be inclined to think that a monumental and inexplicable joke had already come to pass, with yourself as the victim. I've many a question to ask you before I'll have this business of yours straight in my mind, but just now I'd wish to hear more about the Green Ribbon Club. How did you come to know of it? Do they advertise?"

"There's no advertising, as I understand it, beyond semiannual reports that the papers publish as news."

"I'm in the habit of looking through all the New York dailies with some care," said Macumber, "but I don't recollect any mention of your Green Ribbon Club, Pinkham."

"Neither do I. But Mr. Putney told me the press had been generous in giving space to the movement."

"Putney? I don't think you've spoken his name before."

"Mr. Putney is my neighbor in the fourth floor front. We live, that is to say, in the same rooming house."

"And it was through him you discovered the club?"

"Yes; he had been a member for a year or more, and he talked of little else. Every few weeks Green Ribbon groups have outings or gatherings of some other sort. Putney takes in all of them. Privately, he informed me that he wasn't a marrying man; it was just for the social life it gave him that he valued his membership in the club. Before he'd been in the house a week—he's quite the reverse of myself, Mr. Macumber; a man quick to pick up an acquaintance—I was thinking of the Green Ribbon movement as the solution of my own problem. After twelve years of the bitterest kind of loneliness, a man——"

"You don't need to tell me, Pinkham. You spoke a while since of the Green Ribbon Club's offices. Where are they?"

"In the Universal Life Building, just north of City Hall Park in Broadway. Mr. Putney met me after work one evening and took me there. As an old member he stood sponsor for me with the club. It saved investigation and perhaps a long wait. They aim, naturally, to make a check on a man's character before admitting him to membership."

"Has the club an extensive headquarters?"

"I saw the inside of only one of its rooms. Doctor Derwent came from his private office and received me there."

"Who is this Derwent?"

"The chief of the club's medical staff. A very pleasant man of middle age. Within a couple of minutes after Mr. Putney had introduced us I felt perfectly at ease with him."

"You were put through a physical examination, you say?"

"It amounted to nothing. A good half hour had been taken up by the questionnaire, and it was growing late. Doctor Derwent, who was plainly anxious to get away, merely thumped my chest a few times and listened through his stethoscope for a moment. He shook his head a little over my heart action, but he passed me. Later, he said, he might either call on me himself at home or send a member of his staff."

The creases in the Great One's brow lost some of their depth.

"So-o?" he said slowly. "Did Derwent mention what the expense would be?"

"He said there would not be a penny of cost to me. Free medical service, he explained, is one of the advantages offered by the club. That is why the staff of physicians is maintained."

Macumber smiled faintly.

"I've ventured one premature guess concerning your extraordinary club, Pinkham," said he; "and, as might be expected, I've missed. My rule of refusing to grope for motives until all the facts are before me is a good one. I'll not violate it again. Suppose you tell me about your Green Ribbon Club questionnaire? What was there to it that required a half hour of your time?"

"The question form, with space allowed for the answers, covered three foolscap pages. The club takes a particular interest in the prospective member's family history, for one thing. I was required to give the dates on which my father and mother and my sister died—dates, all of them, which stand very clearly in my memory, Mr. Macumber—and to certify that I had never been married. My own life history in more or less detail was also called for. Yes; I spent a good thirty minutes on the questionnaire."

"I'd be interested," the Great One remarked, "in looking over the form. That was your only visit to the office of the Green Ribbon Club?"

"My first and last. But a couple of weeks later I had a call from Doctor Derwent. He told me I was in a very fair state of general health, but perhaps a little run down because I'd not taken as much exercise as an indoor worker should."

"This was subsequent, of course, to your meeting with Miss Langley?"

"Oh, yes. The doctor had heard from her and knew we had become acquainted. Apparently he was aware that the thought

of matrimony was already a subject of discussion between us."

"Indeed? The match had his approval?"

"Decidedly. Doctor Derwent seemed to hold Miss Langley in high regard. He spoke of her as a talented woman with the finest of characters. The doctor took a very friendly interest in me, and about ten days later he called me up at the office to inquire about my health. Miss Langley, it chanced, had spoken for the first time the previous day of her intention to mislead her mother in respect to my circumstances. I mentioned the matter in a general way to Derwent, and told of my reluctance to be a party to the deception."

"You did, eh? And the doctor approved your position?"

"He appreciated my viewpoint, and congratulated me on it; but he advised me to do as Miss Langley wished. 'The situation, from my knowledge of it, is a peculiar one,' he said. 'A comfortable little fortune which should in due course be inherited by Miss Langley is at stake. That is all I feel at liberty to say.'"

"Doctor Derwent," said Macumber, "evidently keeps himself well posted in regard to the affairs of members of his precious club. By the by, Pinkham, was he alone in the office when you called there?"

"Yes; it was late when Putney and I arrived. The big room contained several desks, but those who used them had gone."

"So when Miss Langley raised the subject of the letter again you were influenced to some extent by what Derwent had said?"

"I—yes; I'd say that I was."

"When was the letter written?"

"Two days before our marriage."

"It was done on a typewriter?"

"No; we went into the writing room of a hotel and I wrote it with my fountain pen, using the hotel stationery."

"This was Miss Langley's suggestion?"

"Yes."

"It would be, I thought," the Great One murmured. "And two days later you married her, all in proper order. Let me hear of the events of your wedding day, Pinkham. I'm curious about that telegram from Boston, upon my word. Did you see it?"

"I didn't; and neither did Mrs. Pinkham, for that matter."

"Eh? How's that?"

"It was read to her over the telephone. She had called up her rooming place from

the photographer's studio downtown to learn if the expressman had come for her trunks. The wire had been delivered there a little before."

"Pleasant news at the beginning of a honeymoon. How did you happen to be in a photographic studio, Pinkham?"

"That was another suggestion of my bride's. No sooner had we been married than she insisted we must have our pictures taken together. Coming from the Municipal Building she had seen the photographer's sign in Broadway near Chambers Street."

"I know the place," nodded the Great One. "It's the only portrait studio downtown, I'm sure. Now, Pinkham, what happened after your wife got her bad news?"

"She took the next train for Boston. We had barely time for a hasty luncheon."

"You saw her aboard the train?"

"Yes. It was in motion and she was waving from the parlor-car window when I last saw her. She had told me that when she reached Boston she would go directly to the Hotel Forster, in order to be close to the hospital to which her mother had been taken. But as things have turned out, I—well, Mr. Macumber, I don't know what to think. I'm ready to doubt that Mrs. Pinkham ever went to Boston, ready to doubt everything except that I've acquired a wife who'll never be a joy to me—and whom I'll as like as not never see again."

The Great One blew a long thin stream of smoke from a corner of his mouth.

"On that last surmise, Pinkham," he said, "I'm inclined to disagree with you. I'm quite sure you'll see more of the Green Ribbon lady; and I believe you'll yet make the acquaintance of that brother of whom she told you."

"But you can depend on it that if I do meet him," asserted Horatio Pinkham, a glint of stubbornness lighting his weak blue eyes, "I'll not lie to him!"

For a moment Macumber regarded the little man thoughtfully. His face was grave; and so, when he spoke, was his voice.

"Permit me to suggest," said he, "that it might be as much as your life is worth not to!"

III.

When he went groping through the rocking corridors in search of his own stateroom, Mr. Horatio Pinkham had committed himself definitely and gratefully to the guidance

and guardianship of the Great Macumber. He was to mention his Boston trip to no one. The routine of his life was to be pursued quite as if he had not left New York, with the exception that all further developments of his weird matrimonial adventure were to be reported at once to Macumber or myself at the Rawley. The game must be a waiting one.

Leaving us, Pinkham was easier in his mind, I fancied, than he had been for many a day. Perhaps as much by reason of what he had read of the Great One's off-stage talents as because of the confidence inspired by contact with the man himself, he appeared to feel that he had found an all-powerful ally.

But Macumber, when the door had closed and we were alone, looked at me with an air of bafflement.

"Don't ask it, lad!" he begged. "You couldn't be deeper in the dark than myself. I *did* think some ray of light must come in my questioning of the little man, but—well, you heard it all. What, tell me, could an adventuress stand to gain through him?"

I had no answer. At the bottom of all his boring for information the Great One had found Horatio Pinkham a dry hole. There had been fully an hour of cross-examination in Macumber's deftest and most searching style, and it had yielded nothing which by any stretch of imagination could be held to explain an intrigue centering upon the Green Ribbon bridegroom. In no way might Pinkham be considered a "catch." All he had in the world was his salary, except for a few hundred dollars painfully put aside against time of stress; and only by pinching could two hope to support themselves on what he earned. Of expectations either by virtue of his own efforts to advance himself or through inheritance, the little man had none. In business life he was much less than a mediocrity, and would likely never be more; and no near kin survived.

Pinkham's father, once a prosperous merchant in Iowa, had died a failure, he told us. The instability and eventually the dishonesty of a convivial uncle who had been in partnership with the elder Pinkham had contributed directly to the smash. When it became finally imperative for him to vanish, the gay uncle had left the family business so sapped of capital that there had been no salvaging it. His brother, Horatio

Pinkham's father, had spent the last few years of his life on a bookkeeper's stool.

"And that," Pinkham had said, "is why I refused to join you in your—er—refreshment, Mr. Macumber. It was drink, and no drinking of his own, that led directly to my father's ruin and death. And drink killed Uncle Will, as well, within a year after he had fled. He died and was buried in Mexico, where he had hidden himself. We got the news in an ill-written letter from a hospital attendant whom he had asked to notify us when they told him he had only a few hours to live."

So, altogether, cheated of the business that might have been his and submerged in a minor clerical berth, Horatio Pinkham assayed in my eyes as the poorest of pickings.

"I give it up," I told Macumber. "The vicissitudes which have fallen to Pinkham's lot since he got himself tangled up with this Green Ribbon marriage mill are certainly curious, but I'll be hanged if I can see him as the victim of any deep-laid conspiracy."

"Oh, can't you?" grunted the Great One.

"I mean to say," I hastened to amplify, "that he could scarcely have been deliberately singled out as the victim. I dare say this Theodora Langley had her reasons for wanting a bona-fide marriage certificate, if not a husband, and that membership in the Green Ribbon Club appealed to her as the most expedient way of picking up one. Was she not acquainted with Doctor Derwent? The supposed telegram from Boston is easy to explain; the woman never had the intention of making her home with Pinkham. It was a subterfuge, of course."

"You don't think she went to Boston?"

"I do not."

"But *I* do, lad. Pinkham saw her off on the train, remember."

"Many trains out of Grand Central stop at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. She could have got off there."

"So she could. But also she could have got rid of the little man outside the terminal had she wished. No, lad, we can well concede the lady was Boston bound, whatever her errand."

A moment's thought convinced me of the soundness of the Great One's simple logic.

"Very well," said I, "we'll say she did go to Boston. It really makes small difference whether she went or not. At all events he didn't find her in the hotel where she said

she'd be. She hadn't even been near the place. I stand by my main contention: nothing about Horatio Pinkham interested her particularly except his green ribbon and his bachelorhood. As to that freak letter she caused him to write——"

Here I had to pause.

Macumber had been smiling; now he chuckled.

"Aye, lad, the letter! That of course is the thing. Would you tell me that you haven't thought of at least one use to which it might be put? Oh, my boy, my boy!" And poking a long finger at the bulkhead switch he plunged the stateroom into darkness and himself into his berth, making gasping sounds deep down in his throat in which I could recognize only a low form of derision.

The Great One had been asleep for a couple of hours by the time the riddle he had left me to wrestle out the night with had been trampled effectually down by the legion of leaping sheep I summoned at last to rescue me from it, and when he woke me the *Israel Putnam* lay at her dock in New York.

Opening my reluctant eyes I surprised on Macumber's face the radiance it wears when he has in contemplation an assault upon the inscrutable.

"Stir yourself, lad. There'll be a gorgeous day ahead of us."

I glanced up through the port at an overcast sky.

"I see no promise of it."

The Great One shrugged.

"Oh, the weather! Tush, it's not that I have in mind. We'll be about to look into Mr. Horatio Pinkham's mystery from the other end no sooner than we've got breakfast into us."

"The *other* end?"

"Precisely," said Macumber. "Can you not see at least three other ends—loose ends at any one of which we might with luck pick up a lead into the heart of the little man's singular romance? Well, no matter. I can."

And after only the briefest of stops at the Rawley, for whose homelike atmosphere we had found small compensation in the luxuries afforded by the hotel which boasted itself as Boston's finest, he walked to a taxi at the curb and gave instructions to the driver in the tone of a man who not only knows exactly where he is going but is well

informed concerning the shortest and quickest way of getting there.

Our first stop was made at a somewhat shabby dwelling in West Seventieth Street, near the river. The address had meant nothing to me, nor was I made aware the house was Horatio Pinkham's former rooming place until Macumber had inquired of the scrubby maid who answered our ring if Mr. Putney was at home.

"No, sir," said the girl. "He don't live here no more."

"I'm very anxious to get in touch with him. Did he leave his new address?"

The maid went to the rear of the hall and held conference with some one below whose voice rang back so shrilly that we no longer had need for the information she brought on her return to the door. Mr. Putney had left no address; he had gone out of the city, and a woman with a big house on her hands had a plenty to do without keeping cases on the flights hither and yon of transient roomers.

"I'm surely obliged to you," said the Great One politely; and before he retreated down the stoop he had neatly and solemnly and painlessly extracted a silver dollar from his right ear and slipped it into the hand of the open-mouthed slavey.

"I've never known you so direct in your methods, maestro," I remarked when the taxicab was again moving. "Did you really want to see Putney?"

"I didn't expect him to be lingering there."

"Suppose he had been?"

"In that event," smiled Macumber, "it would have been not a Mr. Putney but a Mr. Pitney in search of whom I was canvassing the neighborhood, I think. Wouldn't it be quite natural for a slow-witted servant to confuse names so similar? As it is, we can cross the gentleman off our list of prospects for the time being."

Now our ride was longer. We rolled down Broadway, through Times Square and then sped along a less congested thoroughfare to the west. When we came back to Broadway again and halted we were outside the towering home of the Universal Life Insurance Company.

The Great One entered the building alone. He was gone only a few minutes; and when he climbed back into the cab he reported:

"No Green Ribbon Club appears on the directory board, and neither of the elevator starters ever heard of the organization.

However, there are a score of offices in the building in which any one with the money may rent desk room for a few dollars a month—and no questions asked. That's how our friends Derwent and Putney acquired their spacious headquarters, beyond doubt. They could count on having the place to themselves by the time Pinkham appeared."

"And Putney?"

"Of course," said Macumber impatiently, "the two were in it together. I'd suspected that long before Pinkham had done with his story, and when he was finished I was certain of it. Aren't you almost ready to agree, lad, that the Green Ribbon Club was brought into existence for our little man's especial benefit?"

"It begins to look that way," I was forced to confess. "Where now? What's the next 'loose end' to go after?"

"There'll be little wear on your patience this time, lad; we're within a moderate stair climb of the place now," replied the Great One, and as he spoke the taxi swerved sharply in to the curb and stopped with a jolt.

Macumber had given me a nod of invitation, and I followed him with alacrity into a squat and ancient structure directly across the sidewalk. This building had no elevator, but offered access to the floors above only by steep and narrow stairs. As I climbed up the first flight behind the Great One a metal sign nailed to the front of one of the steps came on a level with my eyes:

CITY HALL STUDIO

Next Floor.

A bell rang as Macumber pushed in the studio door, and from the rear bustled a man in a dark-room apron bespattered with chemical stains.

"Pictures of Mr. and Mrs. Pinkham?" he said, scratching his head. "Let's see. Why, Mr. Pinkham's cousin came in and got 'em a couple of days ago. The negative? Sure, I've got it."

"I'm Mr. Pinkham's brother," announced the Great One without a blush. "He wanted me to drop in and order an extra half dozen. How soon may I have them? Oh, my dear man, I don't see why it should take you three days to make a half dozen prints. Won't you make a rush job of it? I'll make it worth your while. Better that than the

bother of an extra trip. A couple of hours? That's better!"

When we were on the sidewalk again, Macumber turned a complacent smile upon me.

"There! Enter the bogus cousin! Who do you suppose *that* was, lad?"

"I've resigned from the case," said I weakly. "It's entirely in your hands."

The Great One continued to beam.

"Your resignation's accepted—for the moment. And I think that in the interest of thrift I shall also release our chauffeur from his obligation. Go along whither you will and amuse yourself, lad. I'll be at the hotel by dinner time, and you shall look then upon the likeness of the unloved Mrs. Horatio Pinkham. In the meantime, while waiting for the one photograph I want and the five I could do very well without, I project a visit to the *Morning Standard* office over beyond City Hall Park. There I may or may not find our friend Billy Race; but at any rate I'll be sure to get hold of a medical directory which will tell me if his chosen profession recognizes Doctor Derwent as a fellow physician. That, my lad, is our last loose end!"

IV.

Somewhere between city hall and the Rawley, Macumber had managed to get rid of his excess burden of Pinkham-Langley wedding pictures. The one photograph remaining in his possession showed our small friend of the Boston boat in a suit of clothing of another pattern than that which he had worn aboard the *Israel Putnam*, but of like generosity in cut. The loose coat collar had risen as he stood posed before the camera, and in the print he had something of the look of a nearsighted turtle.

The woman at Pinkham's side offered a study in contrast. She was modishly and becomingly gowned—a young woman and one, as her regretful husband had told us, of more than ordinary good looks. But, and surprisingly, since she was a pronounced brunette, there was nothing of warmth in her beauty. Even in the photograph the chill in the depths of her dark eyes seemed to have registered, and in her face the appealing softness of complete femininity was lacking.

"What do you think of her?" the Great One wanted to know.

"B-r-r-r!" said I. "The lady's as cold as the deck of the Boston steamer. I can

read only strength of character in her countenance—and I'll cross Fifth Avenue at Forty-second Street any afternoon to get out of the line of march of a really strong woman."

"But," smiled Macumber, "she has her little weakness."

"Great Cæsar, miracle man! You recognized her?"

"I didn't, but Inspector Clancy did when I stopped in on a chance at police headquarters. There's a likeness of her, not quite so artistically done as regards light and shadow, included in the inspector's private hall of fame—otherwise the bureau of identification. The police know the lady as 'Crystal Ball Claudia.' She has what amounts to a passion for having her fortune told. The mania for peering into the future has so strong a grip on her, Clancy told me, that she was responsible for a cool hundred-thousand-dollar haul slipping through the fingers of a band of swindlers with whom she was operating a couple of years ago. At the moment when she was most vitally needed she was in farthest Brooklyn, listening to a newly discovered infallible recite the triumphs which another day held in store for her. Since then, so the whisper has reached Clancy, confidence men have been loath to employ her. At last report she had settled down to the life domestic with a wireless wire tapper of the name of Villiers. They're very properly and respectably married."

"Married! You'll tell Pinkham, of course?"

"I have told him. And his description of Putney tallies hair for hair with the picture of Villiers I saw at headquarters. The little man almost wept for joy. It seems that after all he'd concealed something from us in our talk on the boat. Out in his home town there's a girl—well, she'll be well along into womanhood now, as you may reckon—with whom Horatio had arrived closer to an understanding than ever he has with any other of her sex, not excluding the self-styled Theodora Langley. To marry her has been his dream. Once a month, regular as the calendar turns, they correspond. The lady in Iowa has waited patiently for her buried knight to make his mark. What made Pinkham look so longingly at the water under the *Israel Putnam's* heels, more than anything else, was the fact he was due to send another letter west. And how was he to explain to her he'd been craftily mes-

merized, and stampeded into a marriage with another woman?"

"Where and when did you see Pinkham?" I asked.

"I made the Knickerbocker Gas Company's office just before closing time, and caught him as he was leaving for his empty honeymoon flat, and took a run home with him by subway. It's really a cheerful place. Worse luck he's not in the position financially to bring on his loyal home-town sweetheart and keep her there in an approximation of comfort. The Claudia person, you see, had conquered his final objection by representing herself as the possessor of a private income equal to his salary and by insisting that as a distinctly modern woman she be permitted to contribute a full half of the living expenses."

"But what," said I, "is your explanation of the roping in of Pinkham? It's clear now that the trap was deliberately set for him, and still I can't imagine what attraction a man like him could hold for the fabricators of so elaborate a scheme."

"And neither can I, lad," was the Great One's consoling confession. "On that point I'm still unable to touch bottom. The one thing to do is to let matters take their course, barring a certain break of luck that I'm not optimist enough to count on. You may be sure that having gone thus far with Horatio, Claudia et al are not done for good with him. Sooner or later they're bound to pop back into his orbit. Then we shall see more, I warrant you, than we do now."

"Couldn't the woman be arrested for bigamy?"

"Indeed she could; and she could be successfully prosecuted. But where would that get us? We'd simply succeed in closing a most interesting incident before the arrival of the preconceived dénouement. Never would we know then the reason for the hoodwinking of Horatio. I've thrashed it all out with Pinkham pro and con, and he's more than willing to stand by. On general principles I've advised him to take no medicine which may be left for him by Doctor Derwent, and to keep no appointments of any sort without first getting word to me. With those precautions taken, and in consideration of what you and I know, I consider the little man amply safeguarded."

"Could you locate the Villiers woman if you did change your mind, maestro?"

"Clancy is trying to do that for me. I

gave him what facts I had at the time of my talk with him, and he agrees that nothing could be gained by taking action now. Against Villiers and Derwent, you must realize, we have absolutely nothing on which a criminal charge might be hung."

"Did you find Derwent's name in the medical directory?"

"Yes; he's there—Doctor Creighton Derwent. But he's neither in the city directory nor the telephone book. The address given in the medical directory is far out of date. I called the phone number it listed from the *Standard* office, and was told that Doctor Derwent hadn't had his office there for more than a year. He'd left the country, the man who answered the telephone thought—had settled into a practice somewhere in South America."

"Probably it's another Derwent," said I. The Great One yawned.

"Maybe so. At any rate we've arrived at the end of *that* particular trail. We'll concern ourselves no more with the doctor until he moves of his own volition within our ken. For my part, I've concluded to discharge the whole matter from my mind pending word from Pinkham of the reassembling of the enemy."

And dismiss it Macumber apparently did, although neither that night nor the next day did Pinkham communicate with us. But on the second morning came a telephone call which took the Great One up on his toes as he listened to the voice in the receiver. When he had hung up, he began hastily to fling shirts, socks and toilet articles into a traveling bag.

"Where away?" I demanded, after a vain wait for him to volunteer the information. "Am I not to go with you?"

"Not this trip, lad. I'll likely do no more than make a bit reconnaissance. You'll likely be seeing me back with a long face to-morrow."

But on the morrow no Macumber appeared at the Rawley. Instead, I received a telegram toward midafternoon. It had been sent from Worcester, in Massachusetts, and ran:

Take first train for Worcester to-morrow. Inquire for me at editorial room *Worcester Times-Record*. Luck breaks our way. MACUMBER.

Even though the earliest morning train was the day's slowest I observed the Great One's instructions literally, as usual, with

the result that I suffered through the dreariest rail journey of my life on the way to Worcester. When I walked into the newspaper office there I was consequently in anything but a happy mood, and the fact that Macumber was not on hand to greet me after my martyrdom did not serve to lessen my depression. He had found a friend in Worcester, I was told, and was visiting him at a local hotel. The friend, of all things, was an East Indian.

"Who the devil is this Yogi Ranosh?" I asked plaintively. "I've never heard of him."

The young reporter who had been sent out to me in the anteroom disappeared, grinning, and returned with a damp copy of the paper.

"This ought to tell you all you want to know about the old fellow," said he, pointing out a long article on the front page. "If you'll excuse me, I'll go back in. I've got a yarn on the fire."

I had read only the first few paragraphs in the column indicated by the reporter before I flung the newspaper into a corner. Yogi Ranosh was just one more traveling faker—a transcendental mountebank. Even with a burglar's kit the man couldn't have got a line into a New York daily. But in Worcester he was a novelty, and so priceless publicity had come his way. What the *Times-Record* had printed concerning his marvels was no less than so much out-and-out advertising which should have been paid for at space rates.

When I had found my way to the hotel I inquired first for Macumber. He hadn't registered, and I was put to it to ask to be announced to the charlatan yogi. A bell boy escorted me to a door above, rapped on it smartly and deserted me.

A guttural voice invited me to enter, and as I walked in I looked about for the Great One. He wasn't in the room. Its only occupant, a tawny man draped in Oriental robes and topped by an immense turban, sat in a chair by a far window. I could feel his eyes on me, but he spoke not a word.

"Pardon the intrusion," said I. "I understood I'd find a friend here—Professor Macumber."

The yogi, backed by the glare of light flooding in through the window, continued to stare at me until I was conscious of being distinctly uncomfortable. Then he said, crisply:

"Well, for the good Lord's sake, lad, whom else do you think you've found?"

V.

"The stool pigeon," Macumber was saying a few minutes later, "is one of the least appreciated boons of our civilization. He—or in this present case, she—is not an admirable character, and yet what would the police do without the aid of the underworld talebearer? It was through one stool pigeon that Inspector Clancy learned that Claudia Villiers was visiting here in Worcester; and it is through another, sent up especially for the purpose from New York, that I expect the lady to come to good Yogi Ranosh. The *Times-Record* article was the clincher. What did you think of it, lad?"

"The *n*th power of press-agentry, maestro. How did you get it over?"

"A friend of Billy Race's on the *Standard* in New York used to be city editor up here. He vouched for me by wire when I saw a chance to turn the Worcester press to account. And the thing has worked like a charm. Only an hour ago I had word from the woman sent up by Clancy—ostensibly she's a very dear friend of Claudia's—that Mrs. Villiers, or Pinkham, née Langley, will undoubtedly be calling on me here this very afternoon. Then, my boy, we'll see what can be done with the aid of yon crystal globe, which I was fortunate enough to pick up in a curio shop down the street. And now, what would you say to a bite of luncheon? We'll have it served here in the room, if you don't mind, and afterward we'll stain your face to a proper shade and rig you out in a robe that's the counterpart of my own. Aye, they've all metropolitan conveniences in Worcester, even to an adequately equipped costumer!"

Nor did the Great One have me done over into the character of apprentice yogi a minute too soon, for we had lingered long over our food and he was still putting the finishing touches on my new complexion when a call from the office switchboard told us of the arrival of her whom the New York detective bureau knew as Crystal Ball Claudia.

When she came into the room presently, it was as one expected. She was veiled, but not so heavily that I could not trace the features of the woman of the photograph; and she had no more than entered when her firmness of mind became apparent.

"Now look," said she, in a tone anything

but timid, "you people ought to deliver a lot of goods for twenty dollars. That's twice as much as I've ever paid for a fortune, and I've had some told as good as the next. If you want to know it, I think your price is outrageous."

The Yogi Ranosh salaamed low, and for a person of good Scottish rearing produced something quite passable in the way of Oriental English.

"If you do not hear the truth, lady, I would not have your money. For good or for bad, the globe tells no lies. Only what is written is there. Sometimes what is written may be wiped off. I cannot say. Without the crystal I think I can say—not your name, but the first letters of it. They are C and V."

"You'll have to do better than that," announced the decisive sitter; and ostentatiously she pushed the corner of a monogrammed handkerchief farther back into her sleeve.

"I will, I will," promised the genius of the globe, peering into the crystal depths while I placed the woman in a chair before his table and then silently retired to a distant corner.

For the next few minutes the Great One spoke in a voice pitched so low that I could catch only a few scattered words. Several times what he said brought audible gasps from his client, and once she cried out:

"You beat them all! That's true—every word of it!"

A little later she raised her voice again, now in protest.

"You can't know what's past any better than I do. That isn't what I want to hear. Tell me what's *going* to happen. Where will I be this time next year? What will I be doing? Will I be on Easy Street? Tell me that!"

Macumber's tone gathered volume, so that his words began to come plainly to me.

"A year from to-day? Ah, there is much between—much, much between!"

"Never mind that. We can come back to it. Just skip the full year."

She was leaning forward eagerly and trembling. The Great One had not overstated the case. Having her fortune told was a passion with Crystal Ball Claudia. In settings such as this she lived her whole emotional life. She vibrated to the thrill of the metaphysical. In this one weakness of hers the bird of prey was all woman.

The figure of the yogi beyond her bent lower over the crystal.

"I must tell you what I see? What if you would not like to hear?"

"Let me worry about that. What is it?"

"You are sure?"

"Yes, yes. Go ahead."

"Then it is here. You are in a room with many other people, but you sit alone. I know! It is a court of law. You—it is you they have on trial!"

A little scream escaped the woman.

"You do not like to hear? Shall I stop?"

"No; keep on! What sort of trial is it? Can you tell what it's about?"

Closer over his globe bowed the silk-swaddled form of the Yogi Ranosh.

"The trial nears an end, lady. A barrister rises to address those in the jury box. It is the crown counsel, I think—but you would say the district attorney, is it not so? He points a finger at you, lady. Ah, I can read the word upon his lips as plainly as if my ears heard it. It is—*murder!*"

This time it was no small scream that came from Crystal Ball Claudia Villiers.

"Oh, my soul!" she cried. "Never, never!"

"It is here."

"Look away from it. Forget it. I don't want to hear any more." She steeled herself with a physical effort that was obvious. "No. I'll listen. Must I be there? Isn't there a way out of it? Does everything you see have to happen?"

A silken shoulder shrugged.

"It has not yet come to pass, lady. What shows in the globe is not the inevitable. The pictures it holds are but shadows thrown into the future by the things we do to-day. The theory of predestination is a fallacy. One's course can be changed."

"The trial! Is the picture still there?"

The eyes of the Yogi Ranosh retreated from the woman's to the crystal.

"Yes, lady. The men come back into the box of the jury. One of them speaks. *Guilty!* But there are other words. *Yes. Guilty of murder in the first degree!*"

The woman had gained a rigid control of herself.

"I can't believe it," she said, her voice tight with strain. "Can you see anything else—anything in advance of the trial, and connected with it?"

The reply was slow in coming.

"Yes; now I see. It is a small man,

who wears great round spectacles. He is dying—dying of poison! That is the crime of the trial. A man with a little black pointed beard is——"

"Derwent!" screamed the woman. "Damn him. So that's his game. But I won't have any part of it. Do you hear me, crystal gazer? I'm out. I want you to be a witness to it." She wheeled and shook a finger at me, her face convulsed with terror. "And you over there in the corner—you hear me, too! I'm through with the dirty deal. They told me they were just going to job Pinkham—that's his name, Horatio Pinkham!—told me they were just going to job him into a bug house until they could get hold of the money that was coming to him. That's all they ever let me know about it. I swear it!"

And then, between bursts of hysterical weeping, occasionally led by an adroit question disarmingly delivered by Macumber, the woman who represented Horatio Pinkham's brief "past" and had all but robbed him of his roseate future, told a fragmentary story which when pieced together explained the puzzle of the Green Ribbon Club.

It was a story which opened in Mexico City. There a man who for many years had been one of the country's spectacular gamblers had come as a patient to Doctor Creighton Derwent, lately come to pastures new after relinquishing a dwindling practice in New York. South of the Rio Grande the gambler had been known by another name; but, dying, he had whispered a few words to Derwent. Like many another, Horatio Pinkham's Uncle Will had survived an early report of his death. When his time did come, it had occurred to him to offer amends for a certain single transgression of his youth. With Derwent he had left a crudely drawn but valid will bequeathing a fortune of close to a half million dollars gold to his only brother, and to the brother's heirs and assigns.

Derwent, scenting a liberal honorarium for himself as the bearer of glad tidings, had journeyed to Iowa. Then, tracing the one surviving heir to New York and locating him there by a no more elaborate method than an appeal to the city directory, the harbinger of fortune had bethought him that he might not after all have to content himself with a tiny share of Will Pinkham's money. While he was casting about for a

plan which would best serve his own interests he had encountered the accomplished swindler Villiers, with whom he had been involved in a shady deal in the past; and when the two heads were brought together the Green Ribbon Club had been born. The devious device of poor Pinkham's misleading letters was part of their plan to prove their victim's insanity. With Pinkham adjudged mentally incompetent his ostensible wife would have come into full enjoyment of his heritage; also Villiers and Derwent.

Betrayed once again by her flair for fortunes, the temporary Mrs. Pinkham revealed one more womanly attribute as she came to the end of her panicky narration. She fainted. And it was a curiously palatable liquor for an abstemious Oriental to have at hand, she may have reflected later, which restored her. But of the superb quality of the yogi's Scotch she made no mention at the moment. Her self-assurance sat again upon her, like a mantle of mail, but she was not for lingering longer in the vicinity of the accursed crystal.

"You people going to be in town here a few days? I'm glad to hear it," said she. "I want you to remember what I said. Maybe I'll have to call on you to repeat. And remember this: I'm going to catch the first train out of Worcester for New York. Before I go I'm going to send two telegrams, which any one can see who wants to, now or any other time, and when I get where I'm going I'm bound to say exactly

what you both heard me say here. I'm out. And what's more, if any little man with big round glasses is going to be poisoned anywhere except in that crystal of yours, I'll be the first one to tell the police about it. Good-by!"

And then the door slammed, and she was gone.

Macumber was passing a caressing hand over the upper surface of the crystal globe when I turned to him.

"Well, lad," he remarked placidly, "the luck held through. In wildest anticipation I never looked ahead to the like of that. Where's our mystery now?"

I caught him sighing.

"What next?" I asked. "There's a clear conspiracy case against Derwent and Villiers now, isn't there?"

"I don't know, and I don't much care," replied the Great One, tossing off the heavy turban and mopping his damp forehead. "I'll drop a long wire to Inspector Clancy, and he can use his judgment. It's of the little man I'm thinking. The news should not be kept from him a second longer than needful. You've the telephone number in your notebook, haven't you? Good! Then put in a long-distance call for him immediately. I'll talk."

An afterthought came to him as I was signaling the hotel operator.

"Oh, lad, it's no pauper you're calling," sang out the Great Macumber. "Don't forget to reverse the toll!"

The next Macumber story will appear in the May 20th issue.



A NEW KIND OF HISTORY

THE department of commerce asks us to bring to the notice of readers of THE POPULAR a new monograph published by the department, "Increase of Population in the United States, 1910-1920," the first of a series that will convey to the public in nontechnical fashion some of the interesting material obtained by the bureau of the census. This monograph is really a history of the United States for ten years, told in terms of statistics. Perhaps it is the first history of its kind ever written. It tells the interesting story of the changes that occurred in the American people as regards their number, and in the composition of the population by sex, color and nativity during the years from 1910 to 1920—one of the most eventful periods of our history. The book of two hundred and fifty-five pages is well printed on good paper and contains a large number of catograms illustrating the changes that have come about. The department of commerce wants the volume to have a wide circulation among thoughtful citizens, and as the necessity for economizing in printing expenditures makes impossible a general free circulation it will be sold for the nominal price of one dollar. You may obtain a copy by sending that amount to the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C.

A Chat With You

A MONTH ago Mr. S. G. Broadwell attempted a classification of various stories in THE POPULAR, indicating which he thought were most likely to be general favorites. We printed his list, knowing at the same time that there would be a lot of people who would not agree with him in his selection. For one thing, we noticed in Broadwell's list there were no Western stories.

Now Mr. R. L. Goldsmith writes us. His letter is a proof of the fact that different people like different things.

"Speaking of Mr. Broadwell's list," he says, "there are, to my way of thinking, some good ones in the lot mentioned but the best of all were left out. Here are some of my 'picks.' I have forgotten the names and authors of most but I can indicate the stories. How about the greatest of all, 'Garrison's Finish?' How about the Jack London prize-fight story, 'The Abysmal Brute?' There were two that were real gems about an expedition into South America, or something like that. I think they were written by Roy Norton. There was a Northern story, 'North of Fifty-three' which had either only two characters in it or all were men characters. I forget which, but *some* story. The greatest of all Western stuff was 'Chip of the Flying U' and those that came after. Lynde's railroad stories were good, especially one of building a railroad in the West, in which a doctor figured as a sort of detective. Your wolf story of the Northwest which was just completed was about as fine a description of animal life as I have

ever read. Then years ago your Norroy stories by Bronson-Howard—not his later ones but the earlier when the character was young on his pen. Paine's Annapolis story of a few months ago, and another great one of army life and the barriers in it, with a very short name, writer and name forgotten. Also Van Loan's many baseball and horse-racing stories."

* * * *

AT this point we are going to interrupt Mr. Goldsmith and help him out on the names of stories and authors. He has a remarkable memory save as regards titles. For instance the two novels about an expedition into South America were "The Glyphs" and "The Secret City," by Roy Norton. The Northern story was as he says, "North of Fifty-three." There were more than two characters in it, however, and perhaps the most important character of all was a woman. Do you remember her? There would not have been any story at all without Hazel. Paine's Annapolis story was "Anchors Aweigh" and the other story of army life, the name and title of which Mr. Goldsmith has forgotten, was also by Ralph D. Paine. It was called, "The Wall Between." The story of wild-animal life which Mr. Goldsmith characterizes as the best he has ever read was "Lord of the Barren Lands," by Edison Marshall. On the whole, we think that he picks a pretty good list. But we are sure that there are others who will disagree with him. But let him go on. Pardon our interruption he will speak still further for himself.

I COULD go on for hours picking them out as they come to my mind. The stories and effects stick long after the names and the authors are forgotten. There was a good one a year or so ago about a rock pile. Any one that tries to pick out ten or a hundred or any number of the best stories in THE POPULAR is going to have a fight on his hands. If they were to include ninety-eight per cent, some one would object because the other two per cent were to him the best. I wish that I had a complete file of THE POPULAR from the beginning. I have read the first number and never missed one until about 1914, and then I missed only a few. I wish I had all the back numbers to save for my two boys until they are old enough to read them and enjoy them. They could not read anything better to my mind. You have printed some that I did not like but they are way offset by those that I had to sit up to the wee small hours of the morning to finish. So keep it up the way you have been doing and I am satisfied."

* * * *

IT is interesting to note that the authors mentioned by this reader as his special favorites are still going strong with the exception of London, Van Loan and Bronson-Howard, who have all three completed their earthly work of authorship. Roy Norton

has a complete novel in the present issue. Edison Marshall has a complete novel, one of his best, "Seward's Folly," a tale of Alaska, in the next issue of the magazine. Ralph D. Paine is now at work on another novel. Bertrand Sinclair, who wrote "North of Fifty-three" and "The Rest of the Story," is going to give us three or four complete novels as well as a series of short stories during the coming months. B. M. Bower, author of "Chip of the Flying U," is back with us. Her new story, "Desert Brew" will start in the July 7th number.

* * * *

THE next issue of the magazine is well worth an order in advance. Besides the complete book-length novel by Edison Marshall there is the start of the best serial ever written by Dane Coolidge, "The Riders From Texas." Since Coolidge wrote "Pecos Dalhart," and "Hidden Water," he has ranked as one of the greatest writers of the outdoor West. The short stories in the number are by Harwood Steele, who gives us a stirring tale of the Northwest Mounted, J. Frank Davis, Talbert Josselyn, Bertram Atkey, Kenneth Gilbert, J. H. Greene and Larry Barretto. Altogether it is a magazine that is handy to have around the house, on the train, on the boat, or anywhere else where there is light enough to read.



Medicine vs. Milk

MORE than \$219,000,000 a year for patent medicines in the United States!

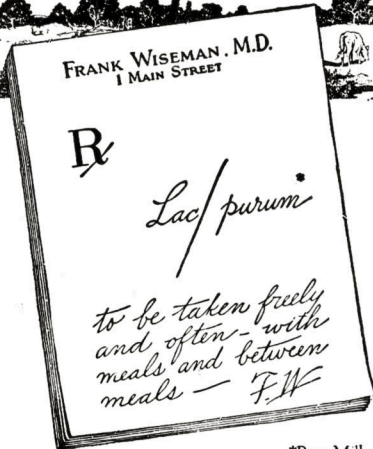
This is the astounding figure quoted by the latest Government Census of Manufactures. And this figure, startling as it is, represents only the *wholesale* cost of these medicines—not the retail price paid by the public in its frantic search for health.

There are times, now and then, when we all feel a little below par. If, instead of rushing off for a bottle of Dr. Bunkum's Tonique to brace us up, we would go to Nature herself for the greatest of all food-tonics—milk—we would be a different lot of men and women.

Milk is Nature's Patent

—the only food she ever made solely for food. It cannot be reproduced artificially. Only Nature herself can so perfectly blend all the elements of a well-balanced diet as she has in milk.

Milk sounds like patent medicine when all its virtues are catalogued. It is the oldest prescription in the world—Nature's prescription for the building of strong, healthy bodies, Nature's revitalizer, Nature's maker of rich, red blood, Nature's nerve quieter, Nature's antidote for that "tired feeling". If milk were announced for what it really is, "The greatest body-



*Pure Milk

Here is a prescription that is worth \$219,000,000 many times over. It has built more strong bodies than all the medicines invented or compounded by man from the beginning of time.

builder and health restorative in the world", people would flock to buy it.

Drink More Milk and Save Money

Milk is an ideal food for all ages—not just a pleasant drink or food merely for children. It looks simple, but it is the most complex food in the world—liquid meat, sugar and mineral salts and life-giving vitamins added.

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for it can take the place of so many more expensive foods. A quart of milk contains the same "energy" value as 8 eggs, or 2 pounds of potatoes, or $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pound of lean beef or $\frac{1}{8}$ of a pound of cheese.

Save on other things if you must, but not on milk. If anybody in your family objects to drinking raw milk there are many ways in which it can be served—in soups, custards, ice cream, desserts, cocoa—lots of good things. Use it—if you are run down, to build you up. Use it—if you are well, to keep you healthy and strong.



The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company hopes to increase the use of milk, the most nearly perfect food. It desires to arouse public consciousness to the dangers of milk that is not produced and marketed under proper conditions—and by doing bring about more rigid inspection and safeguarding the cleanliness of the milk supply of the nation.

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properly inspected, agitate the question in your local newspapers. Make sure that you get *safe* milk.

If your own local authorities have not yet taken up the matter, it is advisable that you Pasteurize your own milk at home. You will find full and simple directions in a booklet "All About Milk" which the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company will be glad to send you by mail, free of charge.

HALEY FISKE, President.

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