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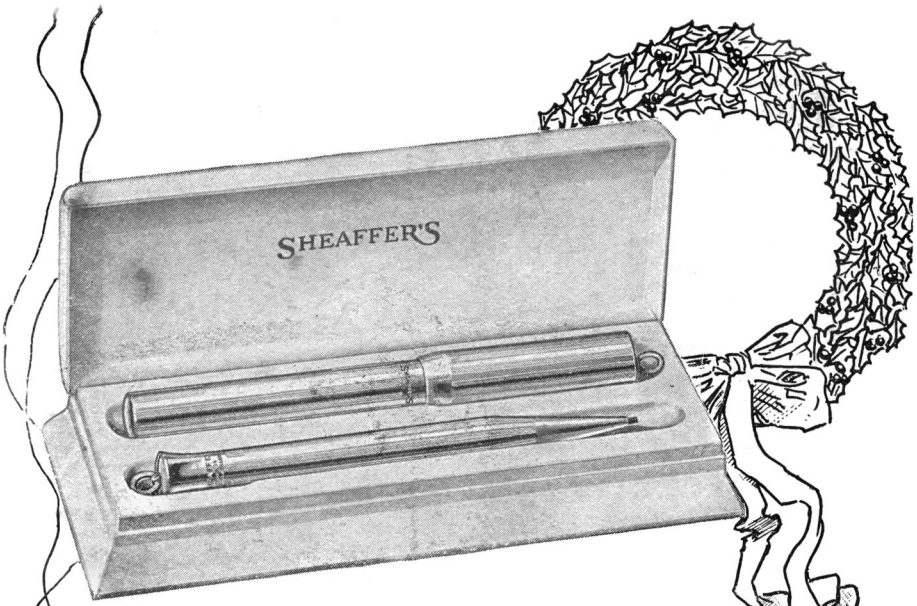

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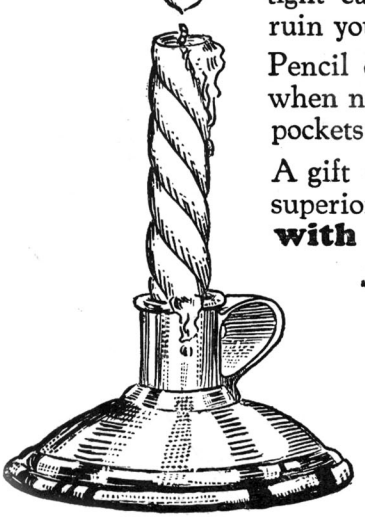

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PENS **"LIFETIME"** PENCILS

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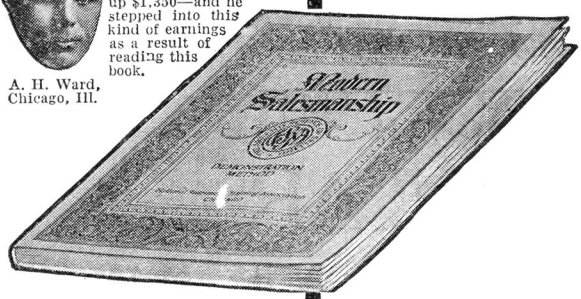
$12,000 A Year!

A. H. Ward, Chicago, held a small pay job. Now he averages $12,000 a year as a salesman. Last month he cleaned up $1,350—and he stepped into this kind of earnings as a result of reading this book.

A. H. Ward, Chicago, Ill.

What This Amazing Book Did for These 8 Men



It would be just as easy to tell the same story about 20,000 men—even more—but what this book brought these eight men is typical. If you do not get a big salary increase after reading this message you have no one but yourself to blame. This amazing book is

NOW FREE

$1,000 in 30 Days

"After ten years in the railway mail service I decided to make a change. My earnings during the past thirty days were more than $1,000."—W. Hartle, Chicago, Ill.

First Month $1000

"The very first month I earned $1,000. I was formerly a farmhand."—Charles Berry, Winterset, Iowa.

$524 in Two Weeks

"I had never earned more than $60 a month. Last week I cleared $306 and this week $218."—Geo. W. Kearns, Oklahoma City.

City Salesman

"I want to tell you that the N. S. T. A. helped me to a good selling position with the Shaw-Walker Company."—Wm. W. Johnstone, Jr., S. Minneapolis, Minn.

$554.37 In One Week

"Last week my earnings amounted to $554.37; this week will go over $400."—F. Wynn, Portland, Ore.

$10,000 a Year

C. H. Malfroot, of Boston, Mass., stepped into a $10,000 position as a SALES MANAGER — so thorough is this training.

$100 a Week in Only 3 Months

H. D. Miller, of Chicago, made $100 a month as stenographer in July. In September, three months later, he was making $100 a week as a salesman.

IT seems such a simple thing—but the eight men on this page who did this simple thing were shown the way to quickly jump from deadly, monotonous routine work and miserable earnings to incomes running anywhere from $5,000 to $10,000 a year. They sent for the book, "Modern Salesmanship," that you can now get—free.

Possibly it is just as hard for you at this moment to see quick success ahead as it was for A. H. Ward of Chicago. When he was a soldier in France, wondering how he would make a living if he got back home safely, $10,000 a year seemed a million miles away. But read what happened after he had read the book we want you to send for. Almost overnight, as far as time is concerned, he was making real money. In one year he made $12,000.

There is nothing unusual about Mr. Ward, or about his success. Thousands after reading this book have duplicated what he did—Mr. Ward simply was willing to investigate.

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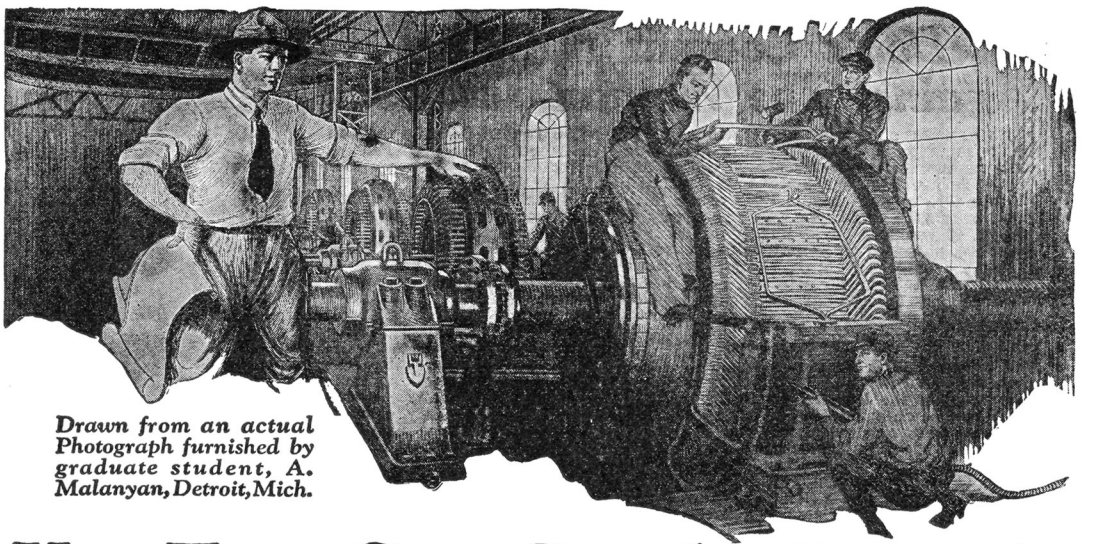

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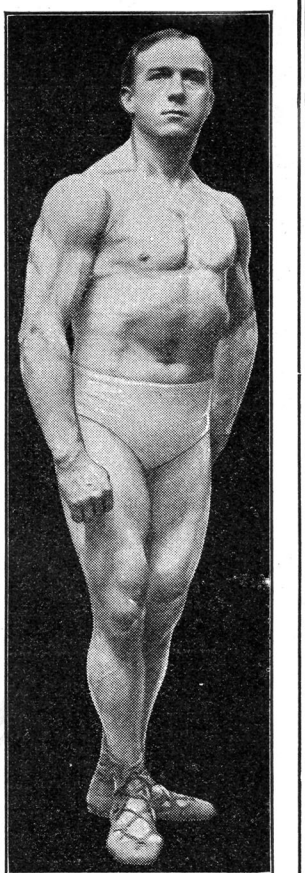

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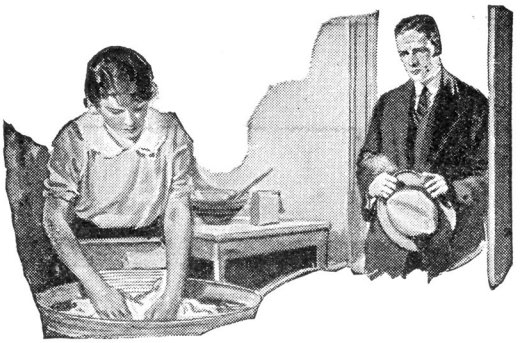

Was *this* part of your marriage contract?

DID you tell her that she would have to do the washing? That she would have to wear last year's clothes? That she would have to skimp and save to buy even the necessities of life?

For her sake—for the sake of the children who are growing up—*for your own sake*—don't let the precious hours of spare time go to waste.

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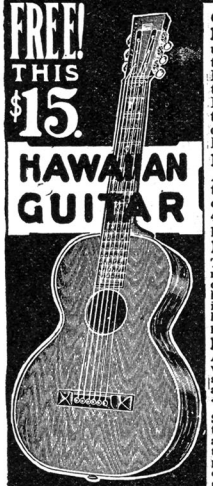

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Send for FREE BOOK

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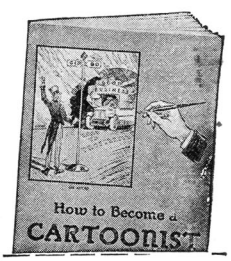

Washington School of Cartooning, Room 5412B, 1113-15th St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF CARTOONING
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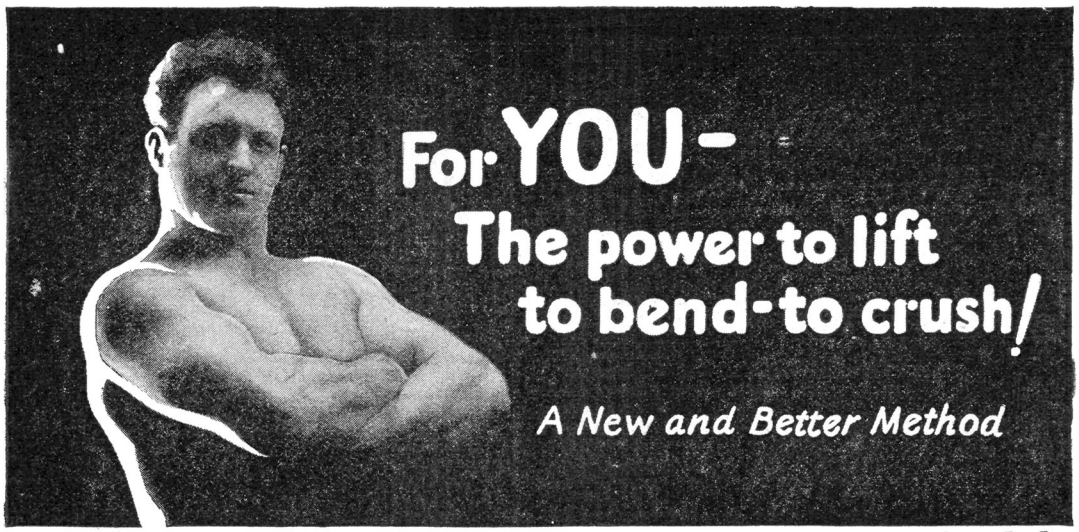
Name.....
(Print Name Plainly)

Address.....

City.....State.....
(If under 16, please give age.....)



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STRENGTH, health, vitality and power are the Greatest Things in the World. The consciousness of strength brings with it the greatest satisfaction that man can have. You glory in it, you are thrilled by it—it is undoubtedly the call to greater life.

I have always been interested in the systematic, scientific development of strength because it gives me the joy of living. I have learned not only the wonder of being strong but the secrets—the knack—the system of *acquiring* tremendous strength. I want to talk to you sincerely. I have proven that my method is fundamentally right. My way succeeds because it discards old ideas and employs those unique principles that I have been fortunate enough to discover. This system has given me such marvelous strength that people refer to me as the "Superman of the Ages." I know what my method can do for you because I have proven what it can do for others. I would be unable to perform daily my feats of strength if it were not for these new discoveries in strength and muscle building.

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There is nothing else like my method and there is nothing else that will as quickly, or surely give you the big, bulging muscles and crushing strength that every red-blooded man wants. See what I have been able to accomplish myself, by the use of this system. I support more weight than any other man. I drive heavy nails through many layers of oak and iron with my bare hands. My muscles are trained. I am able to bend heavy steel bars into carefully worked designs. I perform feats of strength that astonish thousands with the sheer power of muscle that my system has given me; and this same method can give the same power to you. My success in giving strength to others is due first, to the knowledge of how to acquire strength and second, to the knowledge of how to give this method to you.

The unusual thing about the Breitbart Method is that it not only develops huge bulging muscles, but super-strength as well. Many methods that aim to develop large muscles actually fail to build strength. The Breitbart way is so simple that you will be astonished and yet it brings the sure promise of power, muscle and health even to puny weaklings. Read what Breitbart, himself, says.
—*Andrew Passannant*
(Prize-winning athlete)

I Want to Give You Strength

It makes no difference how weak and frail you may be or what your occupation; I can and will give you a better body—rugged strength—muscles you will rightfully be proud of. I will give you so much vitality, health and power that they will be your greatest pride and the envy of your friends. There is no one I cannot help. My secrets are yours—the secrets which enabled me to build up my own powerful strength. The methods of every physical culturist in the country are known to me and I have found them all very much alike. Mine is a new and far better method, unlike any you have ever seen or heard of. You would be amazed to see the slightly built fellows that I have fashioned into fine, strong healthy specimens of manhood. Real he-men that reflect and radiate the very power and muscle they possess. You can have it—I want you to. It is my life work. Let me give you that rugged power that knows no defeat.

Send For My New Book Now

I have prepared this book just for you. It is full of photos, illustrations and all kinds of interesting information about strength. Everyone who has read it agrees that it is the finest book of its kind ever published. I have been offered real money for copies of this book but I am willing to give it to you—all that I ask is that you send me a dime to cover the cost of postage and mailing. It will thrill you just to glance at the illustrations, its amazing newspaper reports and articles or the chapter called "Adventures in Strength." It will give you a new sensation—a new outlook on life. It is being published for the first time and I don't want you to miss your copy. The last issue was exhausted very quickly. Don't wait until it is too late. Write for it immediately. It is handsome and you will be proud to show it to your friends.

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FREE! Breitbart's *Muscle Meter*. If you send for my book at once, I will send you free one of my famous muscle meters to test your muscular capacity. This device measures strength a new way. It is so simple you will wonder no one thought of it sooner—and yet it tells you whether you are as muscular as you should be. Write at once—free—while they last. Clip the coupon now—don't delay—*the first step to power is decision.* ACT! Send the coupon—before you turn the page!

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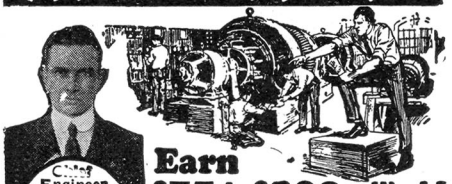

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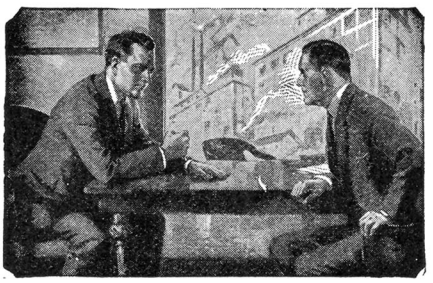

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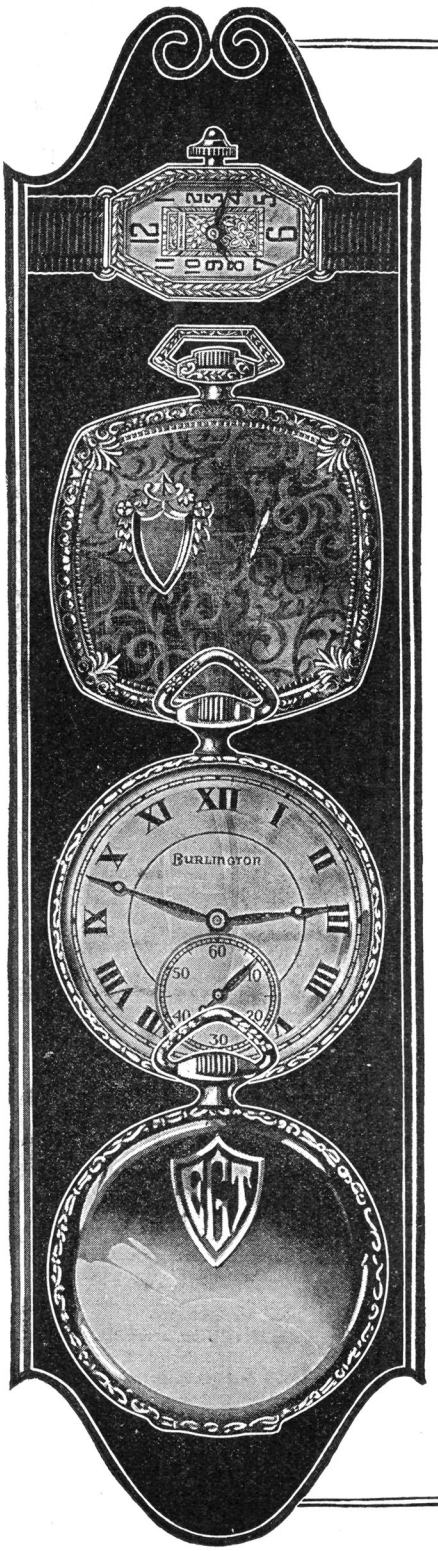
Address .....



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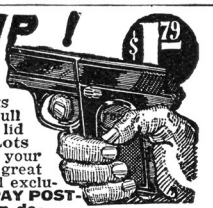

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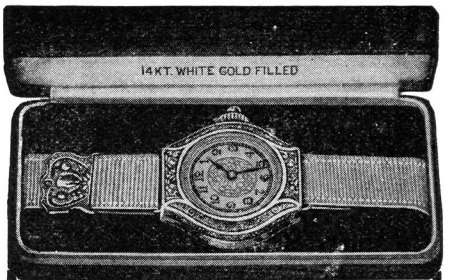

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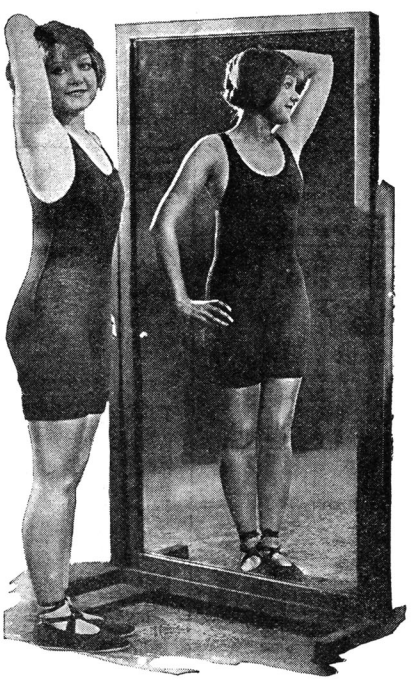
The Transformation of Jane

By

JOYCE JEFFERSON

Frankly, I wondered about Jane Dawson. Her letters had been so cheerful—almost too good to be true coming from a girl, who at school was acknowledged as the homeliest in our class. At that time Jane was a girl's girl, for what she lacked in physical attractiveness she more than made up for with a fun loving disposition. But, strangely enough her joyous spirits only came to light among the girls. The few times she had been invited to mixed parties, she remained a wall flower the whole evening long.



But now, three years out of school her letters to me were filled with accounts of this chap calling, and that one wanting to, and of parties and dances, and good times without end. Naturally, the thrill of seeing her again was tinged just a little bit with curiosity about what could have brought about this great change.

Imagine my surprise, when I met Jane at the station, to find her the picture of radiant girlhood, cheeks aglow with the bloom of health, her figure just ideally symmetrical and, wonder of wonders, wearing hats that really became her.

"Jane," I gasped, "Jane, you are a wonder. When I last saw you you were, we-l-l, I know it's unkind to say it—but you were—sort of an ugly duckling. Now I find you more beautiful than any girl in our crowd. How did you do it? You must tell me for I want to get rid of my double chin." She laughed. And understanding my enthusiasm didn't mind the personal remarks.

"It does seem almost unbelievable, doesn't it?" she said. "But really it is ever so simple once you know how. But I really owe everything to the Brewster School of Beauty Culture."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, "I have heard so much of this school lately but always thought it would be so difficult to learn. How did you find the time?"

"The time was only thirty minutes a day," answered Jane with a sly twinkle in her now handsome eyes, "and you don't have to go to New York for it at all." The Course is so arranged that it makes no difference where the pupils live, in New York, the smallest town or even on a farm—the school can do for them what it has done for me. A wonderful booklet tells all about it.

Then she went on to explain to me her glorious secret.

Tears almost came when she told me how she had longed for years for the attractiveness that would insure her the same good times as her more fortunate sisters. Then the new and charming smile came when she remembered the transformation. Truly I had discovered a reborn soul.

While Jane and I were talking the thought occurred to me that every woman in this country should know about this wonderful system of gaining beauty. For surely there are thousands, yes! probably hundreds of thousands of unattractive women who would find health, beauty, and happiness from acquiring these priceless secrets.

The moment I got back to town I called on the Brewster School of Beauty Culture and arranged with them to send their booklet, "An Adventure in Beauty," to every woman and girl who would like to examine its fascinating pages.

The School welcomed this plan with enthusiasm and promised to send the booklet free of all charges during the next 30 days. You must act quickly, therefore.

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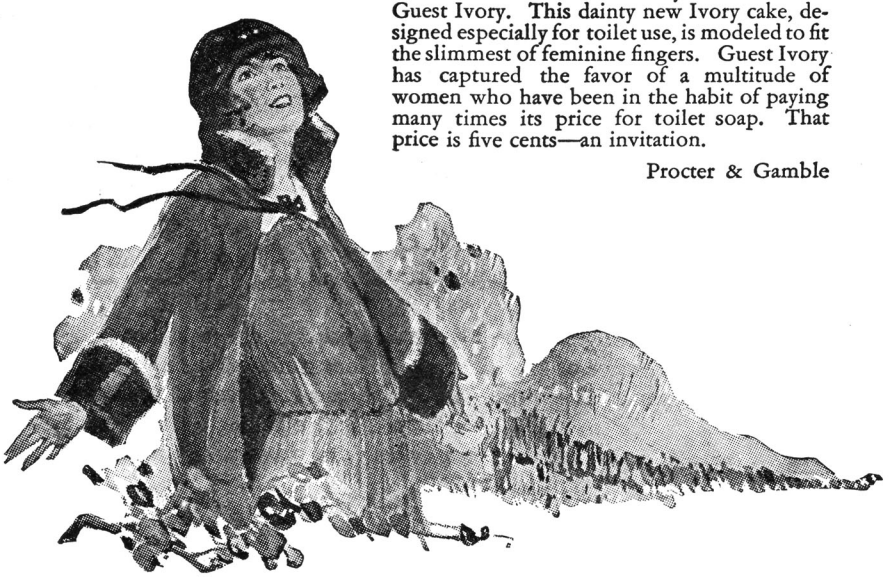

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXIV. DECEMBER 7, 1924. No. 4

The O Donoju

By William West Winter

Author of "Galahad of Lost Eden," "Millions in Motors," Etc.

If it were not that Mr. Winter's story-telling gift is so comprehensive we should say that he is at his best when he is creating a character. But the trouble with trying to distinguish Winter for a particular talent is that he is at his best in so many departments of writing. Take this story of Arizona and Mexico, for instance. In the O Donoju he has certainly created a notable character—a very personification of romantic austerity. And yet the author of this grim and fascinating being is not so obsessed with the power of his central creation that he slights the rest of his dramatic material. You will find in these pages not only characterization of a high and striking order but suspense, mystery, the atmosphere that goes with strange people in a strange country, action so swift that your eye trips over the lines as it tries to follow, and—wonder of wonders in a tale so tense and earnest—flashes of grateful humor, here and there, to ease the aching tension. A writer who can put all these things in a story cannot be said to excel in any single particular. For if you distinguish one talent, you necessarily neglect the others. And, as the reading of this great adventure tale will prove, none of Winter's talents is negligible.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

EL NIDO.

EL NIDO sat high on a cliff, arrogant and saucy as Castle Gaillard itself, in spite of the signs of crumbling ruin that encompassed it about. Three hundred feet of sheer drop separated it from the grassy valley through which flowed a creek, one of the headwaters that went to form, lower down, the Rio Yaqui. Three hundred feet more of sheer and sometimes overhanging rock loomed above it before the top of the flat mountain could be reached. Winding, clinging, twisting and twining interminably back and forth, a road, not ten feet wide at any point, snaked its mile and a half of length along precarious ledges and

precipices to end at last on the broad ledge whereon El Nido was built. Northward and eastward it looked, out over the bare Sonora hills standing white and gay in the bright and almost perpetual sunshine of the region. Mountain and valley, clad in yellow grass, streaked here and there with the greenery of fertile valleys, blotted now and then by patches of somber timber, swept endlessly within view toward the horizons. And El Nido looked out over them, claiming dominion with the effrontery of Man.

El Nido was square and squat and white in spite of crumbling stucco here and there. On the bare expanse of court before the arched door of the entrance, there looked a row of arched windows, deep set in embrasures. On the frontal corners stood square, stubby turrets, roofed with tiles. Between them, along the edge of the flat roof, ran a balustrade that suggested a parapet. Behind, between wings that sat fairly back against the cliff, lay a ragged garden with a dilapidated fountain in the center. Citrus trees, dusty and neglected, grew in it, together with flowering cactus and palms that were yellow and dry. Back of the fountain was a rudely arched cave entrance in the cliff, black and cool to look at. It served the purpose of granary, storehouse and stables where there was no room to build those offices. There was something medieval and warlike about the place, though, except for its location, it was nothing but an old Spanish house, now falling into neglect and ruin.

It was entered through the great arch of the doorway leading into a stone-flagged entrance hall with gloomy, dank walls, out of which sprang a great, heavy stairway of stone. It was comfortless enough in spite of old and faded hangings of Moorish and Indian work on the walls and rugs on the stone floor.

Over the arch of the doorway was set a stone, square and unconnected as though it were an escutcheon. There was no keystone visible. But on this slab, smoothed off level with the stucco, was carved a shamrock and some Spanish words which seemed to fit admirably the spirit of the place:

EL NIDO
DEL O DONOJU.

That was all: "The Nest of the O Donoju!" But there was reckless audacity and arrogance in the claim that fitted well with the Celtic implications of the name. The O Donoju who had built the place a hundred years ago had thereby placed his stamp on all of Sonora that was visible from his eagle's perch.

But now there had been no O Donoju at El Nido for many years and it had suffered in the care of such retainers of the family, such irresponsible peons as had casually inhabited it or looked after it. The very name of O Donoju had almost been forgotten on the border. In most quarters it was taken for granted that the last O Donoju, fugitive avenger, or murderer, was dead. Even Bob Murray, whose henchman Hogarth, gunman and customs rider, had ridden the border for many years for the main purpose, it had been said, of watching El Nido and all who might return to it, had long ago concluded that Don Luis, the killer of Sam Murray, was dead. And why not? There had once been broad lands and valuable mineral rights which the O Donoju had owned, but most of them were now in the hands of the Murray. Only El Nido and the valley and range surrounding it, on which roamed a few thousand head of cattle, remained of the ancient estate. During the latter stages of the Yaqui War even such prosperity as had remained until then had been stamped into the ground.

Yet El Nido was once more awake and alive. Horses stood in the dark of the cave stable and men lolled on the flat court terrace before the house, while two or three swarthy and beshawled women pottered about in the kitchen and living rooms. In the valley below, the few peons who still worked the scanty fields of the estancia looked up wonderingly at the hawk's nest hanging above them, and shook puzzled heads. All the O Donojus were dead—and yet, here had come back, out of the void, not one but *two* O Donojus!! *Bastante!* These were mysterious and doubtful things in the will of God! Who were they to question it? *En boca serrado no entran moscas!* Into a closed mouth no flies enter! Therefore they wondered—and kept silent.

Strange things were happening in Mexico, in any event. Small wonder that strange things happened here also. The ancient and immutable Don Porfirio was in flight from Vera Cruz for Paris. A dazed and half-stupefied population, not knowing yet what it was all about, had marched to the polls and set Don Francisco Madero, richest of Mexicans and yet friend of the poor,

in the hoary old dictator's place. The terrible General Huerta, drunken and dissolute and bloodthirsty, had yielded the allegiance of the army. Men said that the millennium had come, that the *ricos* were to surrender their lands to the poor, that there would be no more labor, no more hunger, no more petty tyrannies such as the decree that every poor *mozo* must wear trousers when he took himself to town.

En boca serrado no entran moscas! A wise saying, that! For, while Don Francisco might have brought the millennium, as was promised, still, here were *two* O Donojus come again to rule the O Donoju domain: and with them had come men with rifles and full bandoliers of cartridges, many laden burros, and machine guns that they set up on the squat towers of El Nido.

Furthermore, preceding this advent, epochal things had transpired up there to the north where the border between Mexico and the United States ran, not more than a half dozen miles distant. Whispers scarce believed ran through the valley, and men and women gathered to shake their heads over the rumors and to doubt their authenticity. Yet this much was certain: there had been a fight in connection with the running of guns for the Maderistas, and in that fight the dreaded gringo, Señor Bob Murray, and the even more dreaded customs rider, Hogarth, had been killed, while the suddenly resurrected Don Luis O Donoju, supposedly dead these twelve years, had been desperately wounded.

Yet the matter was past comprehension. Gun running was no new thing to the peons of the valley, nor was it astonishing that the O Donoju, granted that he was alive and not dead, should have been engaged in it for the Maderistas. But that he should have been in partnership with Murray, as was said, that Murray should have discovered his identity just as the transfer of arms was taking place and that these two confederates should forthwith engage in mortal combat, was a confusing and unbelievable tale. For all men knew that between the Murrays of Arizona and the O Donojus of Sonora lay the gulf of mortal hatred and feud. Therefore, while the killing might be accepted as natural, the alliance that preceded it could not be.

Furthermore, while Don Luis O Donoju, alive instead of dead, could be identified and accepted as the last of that formerly great family, what was to be said of the *second* O Donoju, who looked no more like an O Donoju than a lily looks like a sunflower? No one had ever heard of this O Donoju, who, on the day following that which had seen Don Luis brought home to his ancient nest, sorely wounded and doomed to die, had stalked in, ragged, dirty and unkempt as any tramp and followed by a Mexican retainer fully as disreputable as himself. The O Donojus, Celtic though they may have been originally, were Mexican now to the core, while this one who called himself O Donoju was, under his rags and grime, fair and tall and strong, and, unless his appearance and his poor Spanish lied most disconcertingly, a Yankee of the North.

No wonder that, in the face of these puzzles, the stolid peons gazed at each other noncommittally and kept mouths closed against the entrance of flies!

Inside the stronghold, where Don Luis, a tough man, was taking his time departing in spite of a bullet through his lungs and another in his shoulder, there had been discussion and confession, contributing somewhat toward a clearing of the atmosphere for those most closely concerned. A second O Donoju had come to the Nest, demanding recognition to the consternation of Don Luis' men, who never had heard of another O Donoju. Though weak and failing hourly, none but Don Luis could deal with this matter and it was taken to him. Lean and hawk faced, still fairly young, he bore his sufferings with grim and satisfied stoicism, nor did he hesitate to waste his last strength in disposing of the mystery.

"Señor Don Luis," one of his men informed him as he lay waiting patiently the arrival of lawyer and priest from the railroad, "this one comes and says that he is O Donoju, though he is a gringo beyond all doubt. He insists that he will explain nothing except to another O Donoju, and will wait until the O Donoju is recovered sufficiently to talk to him. Yet it is probable that he lies, for one of the men, who has ridden much on the border and been vaquero for many years, declares that he recognizes him as one who for several years has pastured sheep along the border in Arizona—a poor man, much persecuted, as others are, by the Señor Murray. It is also declared that the Mexicano who comes with him is known as one Gregorio Dominguez,

who has been his herder for years. However that may be, the man declares that O Donoju he is and will remain. So what can we do?"

The O Donoju was conscious and his strength held up surprisingly. He reflected a moment. Then: "I will see the man," he said. "Bring him in."

The man entered a little later, coming with a mixture of defiance and of soft deference and silence as befitted a sick room. He was not so unprepossessing as on his arrival, having washed and made shift to mend his rough garments. But he obviously was a Yankee, tall and strong, with a face that was good looking though now set in hard and grim lines. He seemed, as obviously, one whose lines had lain in rough places, though to the keen and discriminating look that the wan O Donoju bent upon him there were signs of better situation in the past to be observed.

His retainer, whom they had called Gregorio, stood behind him, with decently bent head. He was merely a Mexican of the peon class, past middle age, but boasting a sort of hardihood.

Don Luis spoke English without accent, while the Spanish of his visitor was that of the border American, imperfect and fluently incorrect. It was in English that Don Luis addressed him as the stranger stood, somewhat ill at ease and yet determined.

"You say you're an O Donoju?" demanded Don Luis. "If this is a joke it is a poor one under the circumstances!"

"An outrageous one if it were deliberate," agreed the stranger, quickly. "But, though my intrusion is inexcusable, no doubt, it is of necessity, in a way. As for the claim to be an O Donoju—in your presence I drop it. I'm not an O Donoju, though I had firmly intended being one!"

"You will have to speak in something less like a parable," said Don Luis. "Frankly, I don't understand you."

"You could not, of course. To do so you would have to hear my explanation, and in your present state it would be unpardonable to weary you with it. But, if, when you are strong enough, I might tell you——"

"I'm stronger than I will be in an hour; stronger than ever I will be again. If there's anything to tell, let me hear it now."

"That would be murder," muttered the man. But Don Luis stared at him with grim and luminous eyes.

"Is it a vital matter?" he asked, weakly. The stranger bowed his head.

"To me—yes. To you—no."

"Nothing is vital to me now. I'm dying, man. In a day, two or three days at most. It's not amusing to lie here awaiting it. Tell your story. It may distract me and it will not tire me unduly to listen. But as to talking—or advising——"

He stopped with the fever flush bright on his sallow cheeks and the pseudo O Donoju nodded his understanding. For a moment he hesitated as though to protest further, but the wounded man made a feeble, impatient gesture and he yielded to its command. While Don Luis lay with eyes closed in the big, ancient bed with its age-yellowed sheets, and an anxious peasant woman hovered silently back and forth, he began his story in a low voice.

"I saw your fight over there on the border. I am not sure but that in killing Murray and Hogarth you merely anticipated me, or at least an attempt on my part. I'd been following them with some such thought in mind."

He stopped, but Don Luis lay motionless until the pause grew noticeable and then merely opened his glazed eyes and looked at him. But the look was a command to go on.

"I guess I'm in the same boat as you, where the Murrays are concerned. Gregorio, here, has told me the story as he knows it, and it was the fact that you were at feud with Bob Murray that got the notion into my head. I'm at feud with him myself—or was, and still am with all of his damned breed that are left! Gregorio, tell how it started!"

The Mexican broke in in his soft accents, speaking Spanish.

"The Señor Juan was an unlucky man," he said deferentially. "Señor Murray had cheated and robbed him as he has many others. Nothing that the Señor Juan undertook was successful, until, from one who had sprung from a family of *ricos,* proud and wealthy, he was reduced to the possession of one poor flock of old ewes."

"I came out here years ago, sick and half dying," said the stranger, breaking in with suppressed feeling. "I'd have died in the sanatorium, in time, and I had no wish to die sitting around and waiting for it. I took a chance and set out to buy a flock of sheep, to plunge into the mountains and fight it

out in the open. Right there, taking advantage of a half-dead man, Murray cheated me on the sheep—or his manager did at his instruction. He sold me a bunch of worthless, broken-mouthed ewes. Yet I beat him after all. I didn't die. I fought it out and got well and strong again. Even my flock finally picked up and increased. I was getting along all right when I filed on some water not far from his range. That attracted his notice again and he acted as he usually did. He ran me off, protested my patent in the land office and worked his pull to get it canceled. Then he cheated me on shipments and commissions, beat me on supplies, starved me out until I sold my wool and lambs at a suicidal loss and finally was reduced to this last flock of about the same caliber as the one he had started me with. You know his methods, I presume; how he holds this country by virtue of his control of the jobbing business, taking toll of the ranchers who must ship through him and buy through him, and be clipped and cheated at both ends; how he holds the scattered storekeepers through credits for goods and how his bank has squeezed his mortgagors until now he owns most of the cattle and sheep in the region and can ruin any small rancher he sets his hand against. Could, I should say, for he's done for, thanks to you. But his brood will hunt as he did, no doubt."

Again the O Donoju breathed an interruption.

"His brood is a young girl, I think," he commented.

"His daughter, yes! But she's a Murray with a Murray's disposition. The feud's still to run a little while."

"In war against women?"

"In war against a breed of wolves. As long as a Murray, male or female, tramples and grinds weak folk, I war with him or her! But I'm disturbing you!"

"Go on!" said the O Donoju, and closed his eyes again.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW O DONOJU.

THE American had expressed his last sentence with a scarcely suppressed fury that, directed as it seemed to be against a girl, was surprising. He did not, in spite of the wrongs that evidently had infuriated him, appear the sort of man that would hold a grudge against a woman. But evidently he did.

The man Gregorio continued the story for a moment.

"The señor was about to discharge me because he was no longer able to pay my wages. It was that matter we discussed, Señor Don Luis, and it was my opinion that the señor bore an unlucky name, by reason of which Señor Murray was able to get the best of him. In such a case my poor wisdom suggested that another name might aid him. There was also the point that the Señor Juan, having sprung from the rich, had not the protection of the good God, who is well known to love the poor only. And it seemed to me that Señor Juan, now that he was poor himself, could rightfully claim the help of God. The Señor Juan was a good master and for these reasons it seemed to me that his luck would change. Therefore I refused to be discharged."

"The luck had changed just so far," said the man bitterly. "I had been somewhat interested in Gregorio's naïve theory regarding the unluckiness of my name and in the story of the O Donojus, which he was telling me to illustrate his point, or to adorn it, when Hogarth, Murray's creature and accomplice, accompanied by Murray himself, held us up in our camp and arrested us as being involved in gun running. Of course, I was a convenient scapegoat for themselves, perhaps even for you. I was poor, down and out, friendless. They simply stuck us up at the point of a gun and threw us into jail at Tucson.

"There wasn't the shadow of evidence against us, of course. But the United States commissioner was absent and the marshal owed Murray something. They just kept us there in the squalor and dirt of the common jail, with Mexican criminals, tramps, scum of all sorts, for ten days. Then we had a hearing and were immediately discharged. But my sheep had wandered or starved in the meantime and all I had left was a pistol and Gregorio's rifle and a few dollars in money.

"We wandered about the town, dirty and ragged, looking like tramps, and you can imagine that I wanted to *get* Murray and his hired gunman, Hogarth. Then, as we ate in a dirty Mexican restaurant, Gregorio saw a man whom he thought he recognized. I'm afraid he spied on him, listening at a

window when we left the place, but what he heard was not very enlightening except that it had to do with some sort of rendezvous at this place, El Nido. And Gregorio had told me the story of the O Donojus and El Nido. It had interested me greatly, especially as it spoke of a feud with Murray left unsettled by the death of the last O Donoju. It seemed to me that chance was pointing out a way for me to drop my identity and to pick up a new one with as bitter a feud as my own tacked onto it. Maybe I was a little unbalanced, sir, but the coincidence was too much for me. From then on I determined to be the O Donoju and to carry on the O Donoju vendetta."

The pallid face on the bed had turned toward him and the eyes had opened as the meeting at the restaurant was mentioned. They closed again, and the face remained without expression.

"Of course," went on the stranger whom Gregorio called Señor Juan, "the man at the restaurant was you, though I had no idea of your identity."

The wounded man spoke almost in a whisper, a grim smile on his pinched lips.

"Salvador was the name I used," he said. "There was a bit of amusement in dealing with Murray under the name. He did not know me. He, like most people, thought me dead. He'd followed me with detectives ever since I killed his brother Sam, always swearing he'd get me if he found me. So I died conveniently. I had nothing against him. The feud was not of my making or following. But to do business, as a revolutionary under an assumed name, with the man who had sworn to kill me—was funny!"

He made a sound that was startling, inasmuch as it was a chuckle proceeding from his shattered chest. Indomitable, the Mexican was able to laugh in the very face of death.

"So I gather, now," said the stranger, wonderingly, his own heat fading in the face of this stark stoicism. "I didn't know it then, though Gregorio, who had seen you in other days, had an inkling of the truth. I only knew there was to be a rendezvous at El Nido, having to do with gun running in which Murray was concerned. That much was gathered.

"The rest is easily told. I had some vague notion of appearing on the scene when Murray and Hogarth turned over the contraband, of holding them up as they had held me up, and then either putting them behind bars for good or else, if they resisted, killing them or being killed. For this purpose we sneaked about the warehouse of Murray and Sons until we found the freight car loaded with the guns disguised as hardware and mining machinery. We hid aboard it and when it was dropped at a siding we got off. Then we struck out toward the point where the stuff was to be delivered. That was near Bigelow's ranch, where we spent the night, and there I took up the character of O Donoju, giving that as my name and even"—he smiled harshly—"even inviting them, in true seignorial manner, to drop in at El Nido and allow me an opportunity some day to repay them for their hospitality. I judge that Bigelow took it with a grain of salt, judging me by my appearance, but his wife seemed to be a bit impressed. They, too, I gathered, were victims of Murray and were about ready to throw up the sponge in the face of his persecution. Murray couldn't even stand having a modest rancher running his few cows so near his Forkhandle Ranch."

Again as he paused to see if he were wearying the stoical Don Luis the eyes opened and bade him go on. He hurried it now, seeing the anxiety with which the woman hovered about. Indeed the interview seemed cruel and he was regretting his impulse to relieve his overcharged feelings to one who must be sympathetic.

"I'll make it short. We trailed the pack train that came down to the siding that night, and removed the guns. We were hiding near by when you and your men met Murray, and we even heard the careless word of one of your men that betrayed your identity to him. We saw his attack and how you did not even draw until he was shooting. In fact, we saw it all."

He stopped and again the whisper came without emotion.

"You saw it? Then who shot Hogarth as he was about to shoot me down?"

Gregorio modestly exhaled. "I, Señor O Donoju!" he said with a trace of pride. And again came that grim, uncanny chuckle on the lips of the dying man.

"And then," went on the stranger hurriedly, "since the affair was settled so, it seemed to me that the best I could do was to come here, tell my story, and ask to be

enrolled among your followers. I did not know you were so badly hurt, of course."

"But you still want my name?" asked the O Donoju.

"No," said the stranger hesitantly. "No; not as long as you can carry it yourself. I used it—to get admission—in some hope that it would serve me. It already seemed my own, an instrument of my revenge. That was why——"

"But you are avenged. Murray is dead, they say."

"Dead, but his daughter is alive." The stranger's voice again became a snarl. "She's as bad as Murray. She's of the same haughty, unscrupulous breed. Before the warehouse that day she drove up in her shiny car, knocking us out of her way—two tramps that her father had put in the gutter! And when I faced her she stepped out with her long, disdainful face with its sleepy eyes and looked at me as if I were the mud beneath her wheels. And: 'Have some one drive this dirty beast away from here, José!' says she to her smirking Mexican chauffeur! She called me a beast; a dirty beast, to be exact, and her own father had made me dirty and a beast!"

He was fairly trembling with the rage the memory called up and his haggard face and the marks of the jail still on him enhanced the fury to a point where it assumed the aspect of an obsession. But the wounded don lay immovable. The woman made fluttering gestures of protest behind them.

"I'll think matters over," said Don Luis. Brought to himself, the stranger retreated slowly to the door, going on tiptoe. Don Luis coughed painfully.

The strange Señor Juan descended to the terrace where the men of the O Donoju received him in silence but without hostility. Word came to them after a while that the strangers were to be fed and lodged. So Gregorio and his master remained waiting with what patience they could summon the final cast of the dice in this matter. There was not much hope, for they realized that the O Donoju was dying, and that, in a day or two, El Nido would again be without a master, until some heir of its proprietor appeared.

The lawyer, a priest and a doctor of sorts appeared toward evening and hastened to the wounded man. Again the waiting was resumed, but at the close of the day, escorted by one or two wondering villagers from the valley below, there came up the road two more Americans, a man and a woman mounted on tired and hard-ridden horses. The man was a lank, rather grizzled fellow of the dry, desert type; the woman younger, with some traces of faded good looks remaining to her under her rough ranchwoman's dress and the fatigues of her life and her recent ride. The man dismounted wearily before the surprised Señor John and spoke dispiritedly.

"We done took you at your word, O Donoju," he said dully. "I reckon you didn't expect us so soon, but here we are."

The woman had tears in her eyes. "Yes, here we are, señor," she echoed.

"Bigelow—and Mrs. Bigelow!" exclaimed John. He flushed at the unfortunate position he was in, recalling his grandiloquent invitation, given as being in keeping with the character he had assumed, without thought that it would ever be taken up. "What in the name of all the devils brings you here, and in this condition?"

The woman looked at the house as though desirous of entering and finding rest. But the pseudo O Donoju could not invite her. The house was not his. Bigelow leaned wearily against his horse.

"Hell brings us here!" he said bitterly, and his eyes roamed to the machine guns so recently installed. "Murray's been killed, but his hands are out after them that done it. He scribbled somethin' on a paper to the effect that O Donoju shot him, but that don't hinder them cow-punchers of his. They found a trail of mine where I follered a pack train toward the border and trailed it back to my place this mornin'. Leastwise they was on their way, aimin' to lynch me, since I haven't been on any too good terms with Murray and was handy to them. But a customs rider was out too, trailin' Murray's and Hogarth's movements and he got ahead o' them, aimin' to run me in on suspicion of being connected up with the gun runnin'. He let out to my wife that they was on the way and she give him the slip and rode out on the range to warn me. I didn't have no chance. It was either goin' in for gun runnin' with them framin' me up for that, or bein' lynched by them riders. So we remembered that you had invited us and that you was the man that did cut him down, and we lit out over the border for this place. And say! You got guns here

and likely will have Murray's she-whelp on your heels after this. Well, I'm a gunner! Served a term in the navy once. If you'll take me on I'll make them coffee mills talk for you!"

The woman sat down wearily on the stone steps of El Nido, heedless of the stolid, wondering scrutiny of the armed men who occupied the terrace. She half smiled through her tears and looked beseechingly at John. What could he do? Explanations were beyond him. He shrugged his shoulders in a gesture that went with the character he had assumed so heedlessly.

"There are women inside," he said desperately. "They will take care of you."

No one interfered as he gave her a hand and escorted her into the huge, cold and bare hall of the old fortress. A Mexican woman made no demur as he asked her to minister to Mrs. Bigelow's needs. As for her husband, Harvey Bigelow, he could only answer him vaguely, putting him off.

Time dragged on in the great, silent old half ruin, and at last a Mexican came in and bowed to him, requesting him to attend Don Luis again. He found the Mexican fortified with apparently regained strength, due to stimulants administered by the doctor. He was propped up with pillows and his eyes were now wide and restless, glittering with fever.

"He insists on speaking to you, señor," said the doctor, reproachfully. "I can do nothing with him, though it is death. I beg you to be considerate."

"I'm going to die anyhow," said the O Donoju, shortly. "I've been thinking matters over, señor, and it seems to me that they may be arranged. First, what is your name?"

"John van Wyck," said the stranger, judging it best to humor him.

"A gentleman? A man of education?"

"My family's good and I'm a graduate of Yale."

"So. That is good! I went to Harvard myself. I've been thinking of your whim to take my name. Why not? There is no one else to bear it and, as you've said, we have a kinship in a common enmity if in no other respect. But the name carries obligations, señor!"

"I'll assume any obligations that prescribe the uprooting of the Murrays," said the other man in a growl, a sudden rush of hope carrying him away.

The lawyer scribbled busily in a beautiful copperplate, fussing now and then with important-looking official seals. The doctor fidgeted and the priest prayed silently to himself.

"What do you propose?" asked Don Luis weakly.

"I'll make war on them like any bandit. I'll take toll of her for every one she has oppressed. I'll guard and cherish your heritage here and build up what the Murrays stole from you. I'll make El Nido what it was when the O Donojus were great!"

"So!" said Don Luis, with his uncanny chuckle, which brought on a fit of coughing. When it was over: "So! A bandit O Donoju! Well, why not? The first was little more than that—and he was of your complexion also. Madero will not last, I'm afraid, and it will need a strong man here if the name is not to die. The old wolf, Huerta——"

He broke off and switched abruptly to another subject.

"But there is something you should know and little time left me to tell it. You shall have your wish and be the O Donoju. Señor Arriga, the *notario,* has drawn up my will. You say you have heard the story of the O Donojus and the Murrays, but you've heard it from the mouth of ignorance. Here are the facts:

"My brother Nicolas, twenty years ago, came home from abroad, where he had had some slight acquaintance with a young woman known as La Victoria—a dancer, but an estimable and beautiful creature nevertheless. She had preceded him by almost a year, coming to the States to dance under a contract. Here she encountered Sam Murray, son of old 'Socorro' George Murray, who had made a fortune in the old cattle wars and the commission-and-jobbing business he afterward developed. You know the history of Murray and Sons; how they came to rule and oppress the region of southern Arizona and extended their depredations into Mexico. I need not dwell on it except to say that of all the Murrays, Sam was the worst. He was also the elder of the two brothers and inherited the larger part of his father's fortune.

"Another dose of the brandy, doctor! That's better! Sam married the señorita Luisa Victoria because she was much sought after, I suppose, and it flattered his pride to get what others could not. She was a

Catalan, a lovely and good woman, and Sam won her with his wealth and his overbearing ways. And almost immediately he showed himself in his true character as a suspicious and overbearing brute. He made her unhappy from the start.

"By chance she encountered my brother Nicolas in Kansas City, just after he came home. He called on her and was ordered out of the house by Sam, who then turned on her, accusing her of things which had never occurred to her, and ended by practically throwing her out of the house and onto the street. That he was drunk does not excuse him, more especially as she was to become a mother within a short time.

"She knew practically no one. The land and its people were strange to her. My brother seemed almost a compatriot and a friend, and she appealed to him for help at his hotel. There the drunken Sam came on her trail, wild with whisky, murderous. He killed Nicolas; shot him down like a dog! And a court acquitted him!

"And I shot Sam! I was bound to do it, as an O Donoju. It is our code. I'd have let the matter drop after that, but Bob Murray wouldn't have it. He hounded me with detectives and his threats until I conveniently died to get rid of him. But he probably never was thoroughly convinced that I was actually dead; and the finish, after all, came between us. And that brings us to Murray's daughter!"

"The quarrel with her isn't finished. I'll make it mine!" said Van Wyck, shortly.

"Well, as to that I'll say nothing. It is your affair—though it isn't nice work, this warring on women. I didn't mean Bob Murray's daughter. You see, Van Wyck, *Sam* Murray left a daughter, though he never acknowledged her and ignored her existence if he knew of it. The mother fled to Mexico, died there later and left the infant in care of a convent. The proofs of her birth are adequate and I've collected them assiduously. She's Sam Murray's rightful heiress and I've sometimes planned to strike at Bob through her. There is no question that more than half of the Murray fortune belongs to her by right. I don't know where the girl is, but she can be traced if she is alive. That is up to you—only, sometimes it is best to let sleeping dogs lie. Who knows what sort of girl she is—a foundling cast out on the world since the orders were banished from Mexico? But there lies your problem as an O Donoju. Will you take it up—as my heir?"

"Count her as a weapon in my hand," said Van Wyck grimly.

Don Luis fell silent. He evidently was weakening. He signed to the lawyer and while Van Wyck, dazed and only half comprehending this unlooked-for outcome, stood by, the final formalities under the law of Mexico were carried out. And then Don Luis sank back and waved his hand feebly.

Down on the terrace, while the priest performed the last offices for the last of the O Donojus, Van Wyck stood with Gregorio and looked out over the cliff across the valley to the bare, rolling hills that ran away toward the United States border.

"I have a name now that ought to satisfy you, Gregorio," he said slowly.

"A name and a nest, señor! Did I not say that God looked after the poor, while the devil led the rich into misfortune? You have a name with which to meet the future, but the señor may remember that, in a small way, I, Gregorio, have made that future more secure. I took that black dog, the gunman, Hogarth, off your trail when he was about to shoot Don Luis. And Don Luis lived long enough to make you his heir."

"I know," said the new O Donoju, shortly. "It might have turned out otherwise. Still, I'm sorry you killed him. I'd rather have done it myself."

"And now, señor," said Gregorio respectfully, "what next?"

"Sam Murray's daughter," said the O Donoju, harshly. "I'll find her if she exists. And if she doesn't—I'll create her!"

Gregorio caught his meaning and chuckled.

CHAPTER III.

THE SENORITA ARRIVES.

THE O Donoju paced restlessly the beaten expanse of his courtyard before the arched entrance of the fortalice. At either side rose the twin square towers, between them the rows of arched embrasures, frowning darkly. The place, at close hand, had changed little, though there was an atmosphere of cleanliness and of life it had lacked for many years. Sandaled, dark-faced men in nondescript clothes, but nearly every one armed with holstered pistol, and with a bandolier of cartridges slung across his chest,

either lolled in shady spots, stood sentinel at points of vantage or plodded in and out on tasks of the moment. From a deep, arched window in each tower, cut so as to give a sweep of vision, the half-etched muzzles of machine guns peered. A concrete pit, half sunken in the terrace on which the house reared its bulk, concealed the draped length of a field gun. Far below, the valley and the stream nestled peacefully, the fields now cultivated and busy, showing mathematical parallelograms and triangles of varicolored vegetation.

The O Donoju's young and rather pleasant face was sober and serious. A line drawn between the eyebrows marked discontent and other lines beneath the eyes and at the corners of the mouth accentuated the expression. He was no longer ragged and unkempt as once he had been. He was clad plainly and rather roughly, but his clothes and boots were whole and substantial, his face clean shaven, his hair cropped and smooth.

Harve Bigelow, taciturn and still tall and lanky, but no longer wearing the air of one deviled and perturbed, strode among the men, seeing to it that boxes and kegs piled at the spot where the winding road joined the terrace were properly bestowed in the storage caves behind El Nido. He stopped a moment by the "pill box" where the sinister length of the gun lurked under its lashed tarpaulin, lifted a corner of the cover and gazed approvingly at what was underneath. The O Donoju turned to face him as he straightened up and dropped the canvas back to place.

"Any word of Gregorio?" he asked morosely.

"Nope," said Bigelow shortly. "I allow he'll wander in by sundown. Say, Don Juan, this piece of hardware is sure one jo darter!"

"Ought to have a couple more of them," said Don Juan indifferently. "Don't suppose we'll ever have to use it, though. Sandoval in sight yet?"

"He's on the way. Smoke from El Toro signaled him comin'. Reckon that's his dust down the valley now."

The O Donoju looked down and along the valley and nodded as he observed the dust curling and puffing under hard-driven wheels and pounding hoofs. In a moment a light buckboard drawn by mustangs at a gallop swung up out of the fields and began to plunge up the first grades of the distant road which wound and twisted along the cliffs toward El Nido. A spot of color in the seat caused him to grunt his satisfaction.

"This thing," said Bigelow with all the pride of recently acquired knowledge, "can rake them hills opposite clean to the line. There ain't a nook or cranny I ain't got spotted and figured for angle and elevation. I'd sure admire to have some of them Villistas and Carranzistas and such come snoopin' around here with an idea of shellin' us out from the other side. I'd plumb surprise 'em."

The O Donoju listened darkly.

"I'm not worried about *them*," he said scornfully. "But if they pile in a few companies of soldiers from over the border you'll have to sit up and take notice, Harve!"

"We ain't done nothin' to Uncle Sam to make him mix in," said Bigelow comfortably.

"No," said the O Donoju, "but when we do——" He left the sentence unfinished and its significance caused Bigelow to look startled.

"Say," he said uneasily, "you ain't aiming to get rash, are you?"

"I'm aiming to start something—I don't much care what," growled The O Donoju. "I'm getting sick of it all. We drove out the last ambitious bandit patriot and his gang nearly six months ago and there wasn't enough fight in them at that to give us reasonable exercise. I heard that Colonel Leo Buckner had joined De la Vega in Baja, California and was planning to go Walker one better and invade Sonora from there. That promised a little excitement for a while, but unfortunately Buckner seems to have got no farther than Walker did, and probably got his throat cut beside. The life's too tame and easy. The zest has gone out of it. It's as though when Murray died there died with him every real incentive to action."

"The señorita doesn't think so, I reckon," said Bigelow. "Likewise these *mozos* down here are plenty satisfied. Shucks, man, they've made the first full crop they've known for twenty years, what with the Yaquis and then with the revolutionists. As for Murray, him being dead let's us out a whole lot, but as long as young Hogarth is r'arin' around I allow we can count on needin' a gun or two for a while."

"Hogarth doesn't promise much," said the O Donoju scornfully. "I looked for more fireworks from the Murray girl, but she seems as tame as the rest. That's what gravels me. I didn't expect her to lie down and take it all like a whipped puppy. If I had, I'd have taken a way other than this legal twaddle and slush. There's no satisfaction in having the law hand over the stuff to you. Why, when that judge at Hermosilla made over El Tesoro Mine to me I was right down disappointed and still more so when we rode in to take it over. Shucks! I looked for a fight at any rate, with maybe the Murray girl down there to make it interesting. But never a ruction, Harve. The manager hands over the books and the stuff as blandly as you please, with no more than a formal protest. If it had been me, I'd have shot it out with any one on God's footstool before I'd let it go. Relied on Washington, they did, and of course Washington wasn't going to do a thing! I could have told them that much and wouldn't have charged them a lawyer's fees for the word, either. No, I reckon Murray took the last bit of Murray backbone with him when he died."

"He left a little with the señorita, though," grinned Bigelow. "She's sure keen on the scent of it."

The O Donoju glanced briefly and obliquely at him with a queer expression.

"Yes," he said dryly. "She's keen enough. And a fool! What's she racking in here for when the game's in her own hands? I wish she'd stay where she belongs."

"I've got a notion she allows she belongs here more than any other place," said Bigelow as dryly. They could hear the shouts and objurgations of Sandoval as he lashed his panting mustangs mercilessly up the interminable windings of the road. Bigelow sauntered away to watch the bestowal of the last packages of munitions and the O Donoju stopped to cast one discontented glance over the opposite hills before turning to the arched entrance of the Nest. His eyes caught the distant view of a tiny mounted figure crawling down a slope and something wistfully expectant shone in them as he stopped for a moment to watch it. The figure broke into a gallop as it reached level ground and vanished behind an intervening fold. The O Donoju slowly ascended the broad steps to the cavernous arch of his doorway and faced about to the courtyard. Behind him rustled a woman's dress.

"She coming, Don Juan?" asked a voice. "Lord's sakes, I suppose we'll have to stand around now. But I hope you tell the señorita that this ain't no hotel run à la carte. I'm givin' her the best we got, but it ain't no Waldorf and she needn't expect it."

"Whatever you've got is plenty good enough, Mrs. Bigelow," said the O Donoju, "and the señorita will have to be satisfied. She," he added with a slight sneer, "can't expect the luxuries a Murray is entitled to, at El Nido."

"Well, don't go to riling her up, for my sake," said Mrs. Bigelow plaintively as she turned back to the gloomy interior and her household tasks. "Whenever you rub her the wrong way she takes it out on me and the women."

She went off, grumbling a bit, and the frowning O Donoju raised his head as a wagon whirled over the last rise of the road and came to a plunging and spectacular stop in the courtyard. Sandoval, the driver, waved a theatrical whip as he half stood up with his weight on the reins of his rearing steeds. He had no sooner cramped the wheels than his passenger whisked from the seat and dropped to the ground to run toward the O Donoju.

Don Juan swept his broad hat from his head with a bow that suited his station and yet held something subtly and mockingly ironical in it.

"Welcome to El Nido, señorita!" he said, and there was in his tone, something of the same subtle mockery. The girl seemed to catch it, for she paused a moment on the lower step, looking reproachfully at him.

"This ceremony for me?" she asked. "It has an empty sound, Don Juan!"

"But it is from a full heart now that you are here," said Juan. He eyed the girl and a faint hint of approval crept into his eyes. She flushed warmly under the ivory of her cheeks and her own full, dark eyes softened under his glance, while her lips trembled a little in the beginning of an expectant smile. But Juan did not relax the formality of his manner, standing aside with an extended hand to take the tips of her fingers and guide her past him into the dark hall.

"The Señorita Mercedes Victoria y Murray!" he announced sonorously, though there seemed no one to take the announce-

ment except a white-bloused peon servant who stood with humbly bent head as the girl swept into the bleak hall. She glanced around with a little shudder.

"Ugh!" she said. "The place is like a tomb! I wonder you do not move to civilization!"

"And leave the seat of the O Donoju!" said Juan as though shocked. "Sacrilege! This, señorita, is my Nest; warm and cozy to one who has felt real bleakness in adversity. Even you—now that the gray walls of a convent and the reek of a barroom no longer assault your sensibilities—might remember that. I am the O Donoju; and this is the O Donoju Nest."

The señorita shrugged her shapely shoulders, frowning at distasteful memories thus called to her mind. She replied to Don Juan resentfully.

"Your tongue has a way of being bitter, my friend," she said sullenly. "It is not necessary to remind me of things I would as soon forget. I do not forget, at any rate, what I owe you."

"I hope not," said the O Donoju, and stepped forward to take her coat which she let slide from her shoulders into his hands, half turning to him as though to face him and lifting her own hand as if to let it engage with his. The O Donoju's brown fist paused and she completed the maneuver, letting the cloak slide into one of his hands while she pivoted slowly, to come face to face with him, holding the captured hand.

"I shall never forget that, Don Juan!" she assured him fervently. Her face, ivory-tinted, soft and rounded, with full, ripe lips, great dark eyes, was alluring and inviting to any man, and the voice, soft and rich, held a note of pleading. The O Donoju swept the cloak over his arm, bent slightly and handed her toward a couch covered with Indian blankets.

"A well-regulated memory," said he politely, "is an asset of value, señorita. There are things to remember—and things to forget!"

The señorita seemed slightly vexed. She shrugged her shapely shoulders and took the seat he indicated, taking off her hat and throwing it carelessly down. She had thick black hair piled and coiled about her head. Her costume, under her coat, was plain and serviceable but quite evidently expensive and becoming to her.

"Señora Bigelow will attend you in a moment," said Don Juan. Señorita Mercedes tapped a sullen foot on the stone floor and glanced askance at him.

"You are as cold and inanimate as your floors, my friend," she said angrily. And then, with characteristic petulance and violence: "Curse Señora Bigelow!"

"Why curse the señora?" asked Juan, idly. "If any are to be cursed, curse the O Donoju. I can stand it better."

"I'd like to," said the señorita, candidly. "You are a devil! A heartless devil without soul or compassion. I do not believe you know what a smile means."

Don Juan proved her a falsifier by smiling. It did not please her. Indeed, it enflamed her all of a sudden. She half rose, leaning toward him.

"So!" she said in a strangled voice. "You can smile! But it is not a smile. You laugh at me, do you? But it is not wise to laugh at me, I tell you! No, it is not wise!"

"You're quite mistaken, I assure you," said Juan composedly, in English. She stared at him fiercely, but the fire gradually died out in her eyes and she sank back on the couch. Mrs. Bigelow chose that moment to enter and bow a greeting. Mrs. Bigelow, in the dim light of the hall, was a different and much improved woman from what she had been when the ragged O Donoju had extended to her and her husband his invitation. She had softened and filled out, her face was smooth and contented and her features were softly pretty. But in her candid Saxon eyes shone a measure of disapproval for the señorita which she could not entirely disguise.

"The señorita's room is ready," she said primly. The señorita arose with a sinuous grace, shoulders and hips swinging slightly. She walked toward the stairs and Mrs. Bigelow stood aside for her. But suddenly the girl stopped full and looked intently into the elder woman's face. Gray eyes met the black ones fairly and fearlessly and suddenly the señorita turned away, laughing contemptuously, half at herself. Mrs. Bigelow flushed and the O Donoju looked on with narrowed, contemplative eyes.

"The compliment—if it was a compliment—was not altogether undeserved, señorita," he said quietly. "You agree, I trust!"

The señorita swung about on the stairs, laying a clenched hand on the stone baluster.

"I go to keel you som' day!" she hissed.

The O Donoju simply laughed again, this time frankly. The señorita choked on a fervid oath uttered under her breath and turned to run up the stairs. Mrs. Bigelow started after her with resentment written on her countenance.

"Some of these days," she said angrily, "I'll get tired of her airs! What did she mean by lookin' at me that way, I'd like to know?"

"It wouldn't do you any good to know, Mrs. Bigelow," said Juan gently. "Don't try to know."

Mrs. Bigelow went on her way, but before getting out of hearing she fired a parting shot.

"I'm not so dumb as all that, Mr. Don Juan. Don't you suppose I know a jealous cat when I see one! Huh! What's gnawing *her* vitals is easy to guess!"

Don Juan made no acknowledgment but stood silent until she had gone. Then he walked to the entrance and again strode into the courtyard. He looked once more at the hills and as Bigelow poked his head from one of the tower windows he asked impatiently:

"Any sign of Gregorio?"

"Might have been him riding down from the line an hour back. Reckon he'll be in soon if it was."

Don Juan turned and went discontentedly into the house. In the bleak stone-walled hall he glanced about him and up the stairs.

"Making war on women!" he commented bitterly. "A fine, exciting vocation it is! If only she'd strike back!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE O DONOJU MAKES READY.

THE O Donoju seated the Señorita Mercedes at the table in the huge dining room, bare and gloomy as were all the chambers of El Nido, using the same marked but perfunctory formality that had distinguished her first reception. Yet he had made no attempt to match her care in costuming herself. He still was wearing his rough clothes. He seemed to keep himself in constant readiness to take the field at a moment's notice. On the other hand, Señorita Mercedes had come, despite the remoteness of the place, prepared for action in her own way. From her necessarily curtailed luggage she had produced a black, semidress gown with half sleeves that showed the roundness of her arms and a low-cut neck that revealed the charm of her throat. In the chill barracklike surroundings of the old fortalice she made an incongruous appearance. She seemed underdressed against the chill of the place and at the same time overclothed.

Nor did she match the meal. It was a plain meal, of simple, mostly native dishes, served crudely on a bare table which, though it was of ancient Honduras mahogany, remained rude and unfinished as it had been constructed by untutored Indian craftsmen of long ago. The Bigelows shared it with them, rather awkward and silent in the presence of the brilliant young woman, uncomfortable and vaguely hostile as they sensed her underlying contempt for them. She paid them no attention but devoted all her arts and vivacity to arousing the somber and absent-minded Don Juan.

Don Juan refused to be aroused. Something was on his mind and his attention to the girl was as perfunctory as his courtesies. He seemed expectant of something to occur, interested in things remote from them. And the señorita finally abandoned her attempts in baffled vexation.

"So!" said she at last, her rage flaring up. "Your welcome, after all, was but words! It appears that my arrival was not desired."

"Your arrival!" repeated Don Juan absently. He seemed to be listening for footsteps in the outer hall and tore himself back to her with an effort. "Your arrival, señorita! Yes; but we had not expected you. Even now I don't know why you have come."

"You mean that you did not want me to come," she rapped out bitterly.

"It is hardly a suitable or comfortable place for you," said Don Juan composedly. "We have few luxuries at El Nido. It lacks modern conveniences."

"A curse for your luxuries and conveniences!" she flamed, and added with unconscious naïveté: "Though, to be sure, you live here like bats in a garret. The place makes me shudder. You do not know why I came? You should know, my friend; none better!"

"But I don't," said Don Juan shortly, heedless of the note of languor in her voice, though Mrs. Bigelow caught it and let her

lip curl slightly. "Why the devil did you come?"

"And why the devil should I not!" retorted Mercedes, angrily. "If I have no claims on you——"

"Not a damned claim," said the O Donoju, calmly.

"Yet you have claims upon me, as even you cannot deny."

"I gladly waive them," said the O Donoju, wearily.

"But I will not permit them to be waived. I—I have some sense of gratitude. I know that I owe you much. And even so, when the matter goes to culminate, my friend, it is plainly my duty to take my stand at your side."

The O Donoju looked at her blankly. Yet, flushed as she was, inflamed with earnestness, whether of rage or devotion, she was a sight that softened even him. For another instant there flickered in his eyes that light of approval, that faint stirring of something that might have been interest or even more than interest. And the señorita thirstily caught the poor drop of sentiment. Yet with all her willfulness and lack of self-restraint she had her own share of subtlety. Instinct and knowledge alike aided her. Often had she beaten herself like an imprisoned bird against the bars of the man's reserve and indifference, bruising and infuriating herself to no avail. She might do it again if roused, but she felt now that her cue was to go softly, to seize upon every slight manifestation of sensibility, to feed and nurse it carefully to a flame —if that were possible. And it should be possible. He was a bitter, hard man who sometimes frightened her by his rocklike hardness, but that some softer fiber lay under that exterior just such hints as this gave evidence from time to time. And she knew him for a lonely man; one living apart from all companionship. Such men bury their desires, encase them in surface shells, suppress them, but they have a way of smoldering underneath, acquiring force from their very suppression, to finally burst forth in consuming flame if the proper draft is applied to them at a propitious moment.

The O Donoju had shown this much interest—he leaned a bit forward to her as he answered her declaration. And so slightly that it was almost imperceptible, her movement in response brought her a bit closer to him.

"The matter culminates?" he questioned. "In what respect?"

Her eyes were on his, and they did not lose that faint flicker of interest, though its character changed. It was almost absently that she replied.

"Everything culminates," she declared. "The fight is won and it only remains to make sure the fruits of victory. The spoils are under our hands to seize and make away with. So I have come to you. Where else should I go?"

"How do I know where you should go? You talk of spoils and of the fruits of victory. What do you mean?"

"Surely your stupidity is a pretense! We have won, I tell you! The Señorita Claudia Murray is beaten with all her lawyers. The judge of the gringo court has given a verdict for us. Almost two thirds of all the Murray possessions are directed to be surrendered to me as the heiress of Samuel Murray, with a strict accounting from the day of his death of all profits and investments of his estate. It is a great possession. Naturally it is necessary that we move quickly now to realize upon it and to go."

"Go!" said Don Juan with his irritating repetition, challenging her every utterance.

"Of course we must go! How long may we maintain the farce we play before the *alguacils* seize us? You may be safe up here in your Nest of an Eagle, but what of me? I have no desire to languish in a prison, my friend."

Don Juan grinned slightly. "Still, I don't understand what you are afraid of," he remarked calmly.

"But certainly you pretend! You know full well——"

"I know nothing at all," said Don Juan, "but that you are the Señorita Victoria y Murray. Being so, why should you not remain so?"

"But——" she began helplessly.

"There are no buts. The place of the Señorita Murray is with her own people, not with an O Donoju. In fact, now that you are established as a Murray, association, even, with the O Donoju, is extremely compromising."

The señorita looked at him, almost bewildered. He met her astonishment with a comfortable smile, but she was somewhat encouraged by the fact that the same faint warmth lurked in his eyes. It almost

seemed that he betrayed a trifle of wistfulness and regret to her. She groped vainly for an answer to the riddle. Bigelow, looking at his wife, dropped a slight wink for her benefit, and Mrs. Bigelow regarded both of the others rather darkly.

Harvey rose slowly from his seat, nodding to his wife. "Come on, Daisy!" he said casually. "Reckon Don Juan will excuse us." And as Mrs. Bigelow followed him he whispered to her over his shoulder: "Showdown," he said, "for that hell cat! Hope she ain't packin' a knife."

Don Juan did not appear to note their going, but the señorita watched them through the gaping door with impatience before she wheeled on Don Juan. He was lighting a cigarette and he waved his hand to a package which he had placed before her. She caught hold of herself and took up one to light it, and to reflect in the interval of time given her.

"I do not understand you, my friend," she said at last. "You are a strange man, yet this is the strangest trail you have yet taken. Unless you inform me what is behind it all——"

"There is nothing behind it," said Don Juan with a note of impatience. "You are a Murray: I am the O Donoju! It is enough, surely."

"It is not enough for me," she retorted. "Again, I do not understand."

"You have come into your heritage," he explained patiently. "You are safe in it. Nothing can befall you. Therefore the thing is finished. It is done. You have what is yours and it should be enough."

Mercedes eyed him under lowered lids, contemplatively. Her volatile humor apparently had vanished.

"So!" she said softly. "I have what is mine. But the O Donoju—what has he?"

"Satisfaction—after a fashion," said Don Juan with a wry note. "It is enough."

"What satisfaction?" she persisted, and he answered her again almost absently, falling to brooding.

"Satisfaction against the Murrays. Though it is damned thin and unpalatable, at that. But such as it is, I have it."

The señorita considered this thoughtfully. "A moment since you spoke of me as a Murray," she reflected. "Your satisfaction—embraces me as a Murray?"

Don Juan suddenly laughed more humanly. "Why, yes," he said, cryptically, "as a Murray you are a satisfaction indeed. I am satisfied with you—as a Murray, my dear!"

"As a Murray! But I am not a Murray."

"You are now. Haven't the courts proclaimed it? And that's why you must henceforth be careful how you associate with the O Donoju. Murrays do not associate with us."

"Why not?"

"You know very well. Have you not fought through this war of lawyers for six months and more? The O Donojus and the Murrays are at feud. It is war between them. And you are a Murray."

She came abruptly to the point.

"All of which is nonsense," she retorted. "I know well that there is feud between you and the Murrays. Have I not been a part of that feud? But now you have beaten the Murrays and you say you are content. Yet all that you have won is the satisfaction of beating them. I—I am not satisfied! I do not understand. You are not a fool! Why then, do you not proceed to realize upon all this and go away with the spoils? There is a great deal of money to be had, and it should not be hard. Already I have laid a foundation. I have spoken to the lawyers about a distaste for trade and for the region. I have talked of Paris, of Spain and Italy—of South America when they protested that Europe was unsafe now that there is war. I even urged them to a negotiation with Señorita Claudia, with a view to her buying my interests. But in that I was late. She had approached them with an offer to sell.

"I would not buy, of course, though I was urged. And to sell would not be difficult. There are plenty who would buy if the price were low—as it would be for the cash, I assure you. Why not then, realize on it all, take the money and go? I do not understand what folly holds you back."

"You may sell and go at any time you please," said Juan absently. Again he was listening against some expected arrival and the girl was annoyed.

"I! I!" she said. "I can sell? But what of you, señor? I am talking of you!"

"The matter is of no consequence to me," said he shortly. "It concerns you alone."

Mercedes frowned and regarded him. He had risen and was pacing the dank bare room impatiently now. She rose also and walked so as to come face to face with him.

He stopped gloomily and she took him by the arms with her hands, standing close to him, searching his somber face with her eyes.

"I do not count with you?" she asked plaintively. He averted his eyes.

"Why," he said sullenly, "you are a Murray now. How can you count with an O Donoju?"

"Why lie to me? I am not a Murray."

"You are!"

"I am not! If to be a Murray is to be no more with the O Donoju I will not be a Murray! I am sick of being a Murray, *caro!* I hate the whole wretched farce. I am alone with these gringos, strange to their cold and harsh natures, unutterably lonely and without friends among them. In all the world there is no one so alone and friendless as I, and you have made me so. Yet I have not complained, for was there not always my O Donoju on whom I could lean? What will I do—who will I lean upon if you refuse me your friendship now?"

Her voice, always rich, had fallen low and pleading, her eyes were overflowing with tears and the vivid face was turned to his, eager and avid for comfort. The O Donoju's hard jaw relaxed a bit, his mouth softened and the little light of emotion and hunger again crept into his eyes. His troubled gaze met hers and he wavered. His arms even flexed and began to reach out to her. She again moved imperceptibly.

"Caro!" she breathed, "you are cruel! You would condemn me to death among the harsh Yankees! See, I am lonely and hungry, even as you are lonely and hungry! I cannot go back to them. I do not wish to leave you!"

The O Donoju was breathing hard, his face flushed. The light in his eye was almost a blaze now. The scent of her was in his nostrils and every fiber of his being was answering to her call. She had known when to strike! She had caught him at the height of his disillusion, in the full surrender of himself to his disgust and disappointment, when the ashes of triumph were bitter in his mouth, when his isolation was bearing upon him harder than it ever had, when there was no prospect of action and combat to carry him out of himself. At that moment she came to him, warm, human, enticing, offering him love and beauty and sympathy.

She slid insinuatingly into his arms and he was stooping to the lips that were half opened to him. They met his and clung to them, the fire of her embrace sweeping him up and out of himself.

There was a clack of boot heels on the stones of the hall outside and the rolling ring of big roweled spurs whirring against the rock as some one strode into the house from the courtyard. For a moment Mercedes' arms tightened convulsively on Juan's neck and then they loosed half fearfully as his hands went to them, disengaging them. His head was up and the light she had kindled in his eyes was gone, to be replaced with another of fierce expectancy and hope. He dropped her clinging hands and strode to the door.

"Hola! Gregorio!" he shouted. "This way! What news?"

And swaggering and clanging in his boots and spurs Gregorio stamped through the great door, swept the girl with his glance and bowed to her with a flourish before turning to his chief.

"News indeed, my captain!" he exulted. "The señorita returns to the estancia foaming with wrath and vowing blood and vengeance! Nay, more! She rides to seek it at El Nido! She and the Señor Hogarth ride with half a dozen men to pull El Nido down over your head!"

"With half a dozen men!" shouted Don Juan. "Are you loco? A half a dozen men!"

"She had no more of her own who would follow. But she will not be alone. There is a renegade by the name of Buckner who has dropped from some corner of hell where the devil has hidden him heretofore. He has camped not far along the border with two hundred fiends of his own kidney, mostly Yaqui bravos from Baja California. The señorita goes to join him, and she has vowed that she will lead him to the sack of El Nido and all the wealth it contains. She has bargained with Buckner with the bait of the store from El Tesoro and the offer to him of El Nido for a stronghold, and the bandit has enlisted under her banner with his Yaquis."

For an instant Don Juan stood blankly considering this news, slowly realizing what it meant. Mercedes stood forgotten, but listening avidly. Then Don Juan laughed out loud.

"Buckner!" he shouted. "She has joined *Buckner?* Why—the man is known from

Cape Horn to Vancouver as the biggest scoundrel unhung! Buckner! She has joined him!"

He threw back his head and laughed again. But Gregorio frowned.

"A devil out of hell indeed," he growled. "But one to be feared, my captain! He is a terrible man. Who else than a terrible man could have marched from Baja California to Sonora? And he has Yaquis with him!"

"So much the better," said the O Donoju lightly. "It promises well."

And he slapped Gregorio on the back and started out with him to digest this news and further details. Mercedes, apparently forgotten, ran swiftly up to him and grasped his arm.

"Carol" she said. "What do you go to do?"

"Do!" said Don Juan, amusedly looking down at her. "Do! Why, I go to my war with the Murrays. And that reminds me. You, my dear, belong among them. You are a Murray now. So—back to your flesh pots, *querida!"*

"What do you mean?" she stammered.

"I mean you're going back," he answered crisply. And he strode out of the room without further glance at her.

CHAPTER V.

CLAUDIA DECIDES.

CLAUDIA MURRAY sat on one side a large table in Judge Merriam's office and twisted in her hands a pair of suède gauntlet gloves. She twisted them idly, unconscious of the act, but the tension deep within her was betrayed by the fact that they were wound and compressed to mere creased wisps of thin leather in her sinewy, shapely hands. Yet her rather long face was calm enough, the soft mouth serene, the long eyes more sleepy in appearance than otherwise.

"So," said she, "this is the end of your efforts on my behalf, Judge Merriam?"

"Not the end, I hope," said the judge, soothingly. "The district court has decided against you, but there remains an appeal to the circuit court, and after that to the supreme court. As for the Mexican end of the case, there, I am afraid, conditions do not justify further efforts at this time. The grants to your father were rescinded under Madero, who was recognized by our government. If his successor had remained on friendly terms with the United States it would have been different, of course. A little money, judiciously expended, would have worked wonders, in all probability. But Huerta was not recognized and almost immediately quarreled with the state department. Under the circumstances, any hope of accomplishing anything in your favor with him vanishes almost completely. But, of course, what has happened so many times below the line may very well happen again. If and when it does, an administration which can be approached in your behalf might easily obtain power. But so long as that drunken ruffian holds power there is little chance of doing anything."

"In the meantime," said Claudia, dryly, "this O Donoju holds El Tesoro Mine under Madero's decree, in spite of the fact that Huerta has rescinded it. He also sits serenely in the midst of five thousand hectares of grazing land that belonged to my father. In addition to all that, this girl who has appeared out of nowhere is placed in possession of all my mineral rights in Chihuahua, Sonora and Durango, and the oil claims in Tamaulipas—though there too, I presume, Huerta will seize the cream. And now the United States district court has decided that she is the rightful heir of Uncle Sam Murray and as such entitled to the bulk of his estate in this country. This, I believe, leaves me little but an interest in Murray and Sons of less than one half, a half interest in the Southwest Lumber Company and the possession of the M. and S. Land and Livestock Company."

"The supreme court——" began Merriam feebly.

"You were totally unable to refute the evidence presented to the district court, Judge Merriam, and I doubt if you will be able to do any better on appeal. I don't grudge her the spoils—if she is entitled to them. But as long as I feel that there is something wrong—something hidden and secret and smelling of fraud—I'll not lie down and let it go without a fight. And as long as the O Donoju is behind this girl, I'll think something is wrong. He crops up continually. He peers out from behind every maneuver made to destroy me. He murdered my father and he pursues me with a vindictiveness that knows no limits. Who is he? Where does he come from? How

does it happen that he bears such a vindictive grudge against me? Can you tell me that?"

Judge Merriam was somewhat embarrassed. As the confidential adviser and attorney of old Bob Murray he knew many things he did not care to explain at length. Still, succeeding to the position of adviser to Murray's daughter, he deemed her entitled to at least a part of his confidence. It was a question as to how much.

He reflected for a moment and then went to a row of metal boxes labeled with names of clients and cases. One of these he took down and brought to the desk, to open it with a key. From it he took documents, some of a legal nature, others which appeared to be newspaper clippings, somewhat yellow with age.

"How much of this story do you know?" he mused. Claudia looked at him inquiringly.

"How much? I know what has developed during all this litigation. Every one knows it now," she commented a little bitterly. "They have reveled in details of that old scandal to the point of nausea."

"I know. It is a scandal so old as to have been forgotten and it therefore has all the freshness of novelty. You know that your uncle, Sam Murray fell out with his wife, a Spanish woman—very beautiful, by the way, though entirely unsuited to him—that she was involved more or less with a Mexican gentleman named Don Nicolas O Donoju who, in spite of his Irish name, was a thorough Latin. Well, it's enough that Sam Murray killed O Donoju and drove his wife out, repudiating her and the child she bore a short time later, though he never took any steps to give legal force to his action. Either fear or pride seems to have kept his wife from ever raising claims for herself or the child, and, dying in Mexico a few years later, all trace of her and of the child was lost. In fact, it seemed not to be to the interest of any one to revive the matter. Sam dying intestate, your father, as his supposed nearest relative, took over his share of the Murray estate.

"The way Sam died you have also heard. Don Luis O Donoju, a younger brother of Nicolas, educated in the United States, reverted to type and shot him in a Chicago hotel lobby. He escaped and never was arrested. But your father, who had the traits of the family fairly well developed, took up the feud and pursued O Donoju persistently until he received apparently well-founded report that the latter had died. Even so, he seems never to have given up the idea that he might yet encounter him—as he finally did, to his misfortune.

"Nevertheless, for some twelve years there has been no O Donoju at the family estancia, and El Nido, as the place is called, has been vacant and going to ruin while the once considerable properties have been alienated in one way or another. To some of them, by purchase and—er—certain other means——"

Claudia caught the slight hesitation. Her lip curled.

"Say it!" she said curtly. "I've had my father's little failings exposed until I'm quite hardened to it. He bribed and bought forfeited titles—stole the properties, in other words. He was killed in the act of gun running. Very well! He was lawless, it seems, but if he could bear the onus, I can too. I'm his daughter and I don't care what he had done!"

"Well, anyway, complications now set in. The O Donoju was neither dead nor was he the last O Donoju, or so it appears. Don Luis O Donoju reappears, only to die finally and completely, but leaving his name and power to *another* O Donoju—if it isn't the same O Donoju in a different disguise. Being a prominent Maderista, he has little difficulty in establishing his rights to some of the property in your father's possession, and our state department, having recognized Madero, declines to interfere. To tell the truth, your father's activities along the border and in Mexico have been of such a nature as to make the entire affair one of delicacy."

Claudia's expression was that of one who has discounted the worst one can hear. She brushed the lawyer's rather dry explanations aside impatiently and interrupted him with fierce energy.

"Nevertheless, he was my father and this O Donoju murdered him in cold blood. Well, the O Donoju shall pay for that, after his own fashion. I'm sick and tired of lawsuits in which the cards are rigged against one from the start! I'll pay the O Donoju in a way he'll understand, treacherous dog that he is! I'll pay him as father would have paid him. He'll discover that there is still a Murray left alive!"

"The law——" began Merriam deprecat-

ingly. Claudia brushed the law aside fiercely.

"I've had enough of the law! The law enables this cunning dog to defy all right and decency! It works against the innocent and for the liar and the thief and the cheat! Law! Mexican or American, what has it done for me? My father murdered! And the law says that he was killed in Mexico where the United States has no jurisdiction. In Mexico the law blandly assures me he was shot down in the act of violating the neutrality of a friendly power and breaking the laws of that power. But all I know was that he was killed without an opportunity to protect himself; shot like a dog by a treacherous half-breed who was his accomplice in any crime he was committing and murdered him no doubt as much for the proceeds of the deal as in consideration of this musty old feud. What had *this* O Donoju, of whom no one ever heard, to do with the feud, anyhow? The law refuses to aid me. It turns over the estate my father labored to build up for me to a stranger who bobs up from Mexico with a lot of documents which are probably forgeries. Behind her leers this O Donoju, providing her with funds stolen from my father's mine, hiring her attorneys, pressing her claims with all the cunning and persistency of the cowardly fox he is. I want no more law, Judge Merriam. I'll make my own law, the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, from now on. I'll *get* O Donoju!"

She was speaking in low tones and without exuberant emotion, but there was a vibrant note in her rich voice that carried a threat. She was an exotic type, with little of the Scot about her externally, with a long, oval, rather pale face in which were set heavily lidded, long, and light eyes which ordinarily gave her a sleepy appearance but which, when she raised her lids, could flash with fire and passion rendered the more striking by the delicately curved red mouth. Cold and disdainful and indifferent she seemed at one moment, only to blaze consumingly in the next. She was blazing now, though little trace of excitement appeared in movement or voice. Only her strangely light eyes, contrasting with her dark hair, showed her passion.

"No more law for me," she said. "I'm for action outside the law! If I have an outlaw to fight I'll fight him with an outlaw's weapons. If I don't burn El Nido down over his head you can put me down as no fit daughter of Bob Murray!"

The lawyer shook his gray head doubtfully.

"How?" he asked flatly. Claudia's eyes dropped again and she became the girl who had so aroused and infuriated that unknown and unremembered tramp before her father's warehouse, sleepy, somewhat supercilious.

"I've ridden the range with my men at the Forkhandle," she said, "ever since it happened. We've had to ride and to fight. There have been raids from over the border, men killed, my own and Mexicans. There have been cattle stolen, more the past week or two than ever before. The O Donoju is behind that."

"Can you prove it?"

"Do I need to prove it? Not to myself, and I am the one who counts. Who but O Donoju would do it? We have looked to the governor and the army to put a stop to it. Law and order! Have they protected us? On the contrary, they stick companies and regiments in camps well back of the line, and drill. When my cattle are raided and my men shot, long before they can arrive the thieves are safe in El Nido laughing at us. But if we offer to follow into Mexico, then the troops are active enough to prevent us from violating neutrality! I'm done with troops and with neutrality of that sort. I'll appeal where neutrality doesn't count."

"To whom?" asked Merriam dryly.

"Why, to fighters. Or a fighter, I should say. Remember Colonel Buckner?"

"I do," said Merriam curtly. "The less you have to do with him the better for you."

"I'm not so sure. What if he is a soldier of fortune? He's a gentleman, a man who has some consideration for a woman and a lot less for neutrality and international poppycock. He owes me something, too. Father helped him in his venture to Lower California."

"Your father had his fingers into many pies which were not savory," said Merriam caustically. "Buckner is a suave and subtle devil, but he's none the less a scoundrel. Reputation paints him in unrelieved black, as a man who would stop at nothing."

"The sort of man to cope with the O Donoju," said Claudia, flippantly. "I know

him. I met him before he went south and reputation lies about him. I don't care, anyhow. You and Steve are failures. What has *he* done, for example, although he has an incentive equal to mine? *His* father was killed when mine was."

"Nothing," said Merriam. "There seems nothing that can be done. But you can ask him yourself."

He rang a bell and in a moment his young associate entered, Stephen Hogarth, son of the old gun fighter and customs rider who had been Bob Murray's confederate and satellite. But the son differed from the father fully as definitely as Claudia differed from hers. There was nothing of the desperado or the gunman about Steve. A protégé of Bob Murray's, he had been reared for the law, to succeed finally as one of the Murray counsel, bound to their interests by ties of close relationship and obligations at the hands of the head of that house. Although he could ride, shoot after a fashion, and was strong and athletic, strife for him had always been pictured in terms of pleadings and of subtleties, of cross-examinations and of exhortations to juries. His father's lawless blood had been diluted by training until now the power of government and the law, the orderly processes of courts, were as natural outlets to him as the smoke of his gun had been to old Hogarth. The feud was to him an academic affair to be argued pro and con, to be arbitrated by juries and justices. Yet above all and beyond all, he had the Hogarth loyalty and he hid under a rather staid exterior an almost fanatic devotion to Claudia.

"Claudia wants to know what you accomplished in Mexico, Steve," said Merriam. Hogarth shook his head.

"Nothing!" he said. "Only for you I wouldn't have ventured that effort. Mexico is no place for a gringo in these days. I did my best, but all my search revealed no evidence to contravert the Señorita Murray's claims."

Claudia nodded gloomily. "What did I say? And yet there is too much coincidence here. It doesn't ring true. This girl bobbing up after twenty years, with the evidences on her that she's spent at least a part of those years behind a bar or in some dance hall! There's a taint of fraud about her, a scent of forgery and perjured evidence!"

Merriam shrugged. "The thing is to prove it, and that we can't do. They've swept the convents out of Mexico, deported the nuns, scattered possible evidence to the four winds of heaven. Her case is air-tight as it stands. Her mother's name was Victoria, as La Victoria she danced in Mexico after your uncle broke with her. The thing looks fishy, but there isn't a flaw that we can exploit.

"And, for that matter, who is this O Donoju? That looks as fishy as the other. O Donoju killed Bob Murray, by Bob's own dying declaration. But what O Donoju? Don Luis was dying in El Nido about that time, from all we can learn, and this O Donoju had never been heard of. I've been fairly conversant with the Murray-O Donoju feud and its ramifications for many years, but until recently I never heard of a Don Juan O Donoju. Yet one bobs up to fight this girl's battles and to carry on the feud in a more subtle and vindictive manner than those directly concerned. It has been Juan O Donoju's lawyers, Juan O Donoju's money, Juan O Donoju's hatred which have emphasized the entire contest, although he himself has never showed his face. He sits in El Nido like a spider in his den, weaving the net for our feet. He's a myth; too elaborate in his mystery to be true. Yet he wins."

"He hasn't won yet!" said Claudia, tensely. "Where's Buckner and his band now, Steve?"

"Buckner? What do you want of Buckner?"

"I want to know where he is!"

"He's where you'd better let him stay Buckner is no fit associate for you, Claudia. And he's entirely too close to the Forkhandle for comfort, in my opinion. He has bobbed up after being driven from the railroad not a dozen miles from the line. From Los Dos Cabezas de Vaca, down by the border, it's not two hours' ride to his camp from what I hear."

"I'm glad of that," said Claudia composedly. "It means I can reach him and form an alliance with him if necessary."

Merriam raised his eyebrows in resignation. He knew the futility of arguing with Claudia. There was fiery disregard for consequences in her that had formed no small part of her father's equipment. Opposition she would not brook and the lawyer realized it. He could only hope that the folly

of what she contemplated would come home to her before she got herself into trouble.

Hogarth however was not so complacent. He started a remonstrance.

"I tell you the man's a scoundrel; as dangerous as a wolf! They tell tales of him all over the West!"

"I've met him and I don't believe them," said Claudia, flatly. "He's a soldier of fortune, and, on the whole, a rather romantic and chivalrous sort. I met him before he joined the revolutionists. He was at the ranch."

"But he's come here, crossing the Gulf in some way unknown, with two hundred ruffians, most of whom are Yaqui Indians deported to Lower California by Diaz. Unmitigated scoundrels, savages, brutalized and infuriated against every white person! The man is little better than a bandit himself. He fights on whichever side offers the greatest chance for plunder. He is neither Carranzista nor Huertista, but first, last and all the time for Buckner."

"Who can blame him?" said Claudia serenely. "He's merely like the rest of them. Anyhow, *I* trust him and I'm going to get his help. To a man like that, even if he's what you say, the prospect of getting such a stronghold as El Nido will be more than attractive. He needs such a place in his business. Steve, come along! I'm for the Forkhandle and I'm going after the O Donoju in my own way."

Hogarth looked helplessly at Merriam, who shrugged his shoulders. But it was Claudia who commanded and Steve could do nothing but obey. He followed her to her car dutifully.

CHAPTER VI.

COLONEL BUCKNER.

THERE had been argument and remonstrance at the Forkhandle Ranch on Cow Creek, but though Hogarth waxed eloquent and dwelt with force on his devotion to Claudia and even on his affection for her, which last fact was well known to her and was taken for granted quite as casually as was the first, the effect on her was negligible. She was, for the time being, in the grip of an obsession. And when Hogarth thought of appealing to the foreman, old Sam Crewe, sallow, hard-faced, craggy as the rocks of the Parajitos and as laconic as Leonidas, he was restrained by the knowledge that Sam, who at one time had taken an interest in the son of old Hogarth, now looked upon him with something approaching profound indifference.

And Sam himself seemed to be with his young mistress. Hogarth had the instinct which looks on women as things to be protected, in his case an instinct of his own weakness, seeking for something still weaker. But Claudia was not weak at all. Instead, she dominated and commanded, and her own riders, rude and harsh men of the desert ranges, acquiesced as a matter of course to her leadership. And Hogarth knew, after several discussions, that her men were as recklessly willing to join her in a lawless raid, with or without the aid of a bandit revolutionist like Buckner, as she was to lead it. They too held the feudal grudge against the O Donoju and wished to wipe him out. And Sam was as calmly ready to fall in with the idea as he was to accompany Claudia on a ride over the range.

And Hogarth, doubtful and half scandalized, in the end looked at Claudia's slim figure, felt her sleepy eyes upon him, and yielded. After all, she was worth it, with her stirring, tantalizing beauty, worth even a plunge into melodrama and lawlessness. This rendezvous with Colonel Buckner, cast at, by ironic chance, Los Dos Cabezas de Vaca, the very spot which had witnessed the killing of Murray and Hogarth, violated his every instinct, yet in the end he agreed to it and sullenly prepared to be one of those present. After all, Claudia Murray was a well-known and influential young woman and it hardly seemed possible that even such a man as Leo Buckner, unmitigated scoundrel as he might be, would venture any action against her within the limits of the United States. With himself and Sam Crewe and half a dozen of the Forkhandle riders to protect her, the meeting which she had so recklessly arranged would be safe enough.

So, at the time, thought Sam Crewe. Neither reflected that to such a man as Buckner was, the very facts they relied on to deter him would only add an incentive to treachery. But they did not know, in spite of his reputation, what manner of man was Buckner. They had only hearsay to go upon, and that was offset by the single encounter they had had with him at a time when he had set himself to make a good impression. That he looked upon all women

as his destined prey, that he stopped at no villainy whatever and that he regarded honor and honesty as humorous abstractions without actual existence in fact, they had no idea.

Thus, when Claudia came riding with her half dozen men, among them Sam Crewe and Hogarth, the former silent and calm, the latter disturbed and rebellious, she found awaiting her a suave and smiling freebooter. She and her companions halted at a snarled *"Quién viva!"* and awaited results. There was a short pause and then Buckner rode from the shadows of a clump of brush where he had remained hidden, to dismount politely before her and doff his hat with an exaggerated sweep and bow.

She looked at the freebooter as he bowed before her and was somewhat impressed. He lived up fairly well to her ideas of such men. He was tall, rather good looking, his dress was semimilitary and a bit dashing. He wore a large felt hat with a wide brim and a rather high and flat crown. He had a tunic of khaki cloth crisscrossed with bandoliers of cartridges and hung with a wide belt and holstered revolver. Khaki trousers tucked into high boots fitted the rest of it. Even his military mustache was in keeping. His manners were rather elaborate, but pleasant.

"The señorita," he assured her in Spanish, "does me a devastating honor. My heart is at her feet!"

Claudia hardly liked the use of Spanish, but she answered in kind.

"Thank you, Señor Colonel. Your courtesy in granting my request overwhelms me with gratitude. It gives hope that I may impose further on your magnanimity."

"The Señorita Murray has but to command."

But the flowery exchange bade fair to get nowhere. With a trace of impatience Claudia broke into English.

"That is all very well," she said. "But can't we abandon compliments and speak more directly? I've come here for a purpose and I'd prefer to discuss it with you."

"I can hardly be expected to guess it, Miss Murray," said Buckner pleasantly. "But if it is something I can do for you, by all means count on me to the fullest extent."

This was better and Claudia felt her irritation vanish. The man had the cunning of the devil and a profound instinct for deceit. He dropped readily into the manner that would best reassure her, a subtle mixture of respect, of camaraderie, backed by well-chosen words and the counterfeit of good breeding. He seemed a loyal gentleman.

"I came here to propose to you an action that may result to our common advantage," said Claudia rapidly. "I intimated as much in the note I sent to you. You're a soldier of fortune, a revolutionary. And—by the way, what faction are you allied with, colonel?"

The abrupt question, which had suddenly occurred to her, took the colonel aback. He had no ready answer.

"Why, Miss Murray, it's a bit difficult to say. You know everything is so confused in Mexico that one hardly knows to-day who are his friends of to-morrow, while the friends of yesterday are only too often the enemies of to-day. Much as I regret it, it seems that our revolution has degraded into a mere scramble for spoils and——"

And then intuition or perhaps a flare of his obsessing cynicism, drove him to a daring acknowledgment.

"And since that's the case I must confess that I'm rather out for my own hand myself. It's a case of each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

He laughed as he said it, and the laugh hid the essential villainy of the confession. It covered treason, greed, ferocity with a veneer of light bravado. It made crime attractive and butchery romantic.

"Well, so am I," said Claudia, recklessly. "I don't care what side you are on. I'm glad you're not tied down to any side. You're a free agent carving your own career. That's the kind of man I'm looking for."

"You've found him then," said Buckner confidently.

"If you were a Carranzista, you'd probably have to account to the governor for your actions to some extent. But if you're neither tied up with him nor with Huerta, you don't have to answer to any one. It's a free-for-all fight down there, and why shouldn't you fight for your own hand? Isn't that right?"

"I couldn't possibly have defined my sentiments better, señorita," said Buckner candidly.

"Well, I've come to offer you an object to fight for."

CHAPTER VII.

PRISONERS.

BUCKNER had foreseen it. He was not at all surprised. Motive only still escaped him. He had dismissed the thought that reverence for his romantic image had drawn the girl to him. She was of higher class than that. His colossal vanity still considered infatuation as a possibility and even a probability, but swift intuition told him that if she was trying to win him it was with more subtle weapons than the mere offer of herself. And even more shrewd perception bade him hold his judgment in abeyance altogether.

Again he took a cautious, subtle tack.

"Miss Murray," said he seriously, "your late father and I were associates in an enterprise. I respected him. I am a mere soldier of fortune, dependent on my sword for a livelihood. But believe me, I would want no better object for which to fight than the daughter of Bob Murray!"

He knew he had scored as soon as the words, calculated in the true vein of romance as it is written, were out of his mouth. He saw her flush, saw her long, half-hidden eyes flash open and soften, saw real feeling answer the counterfeit feeling he essayed. Distrust, always in the background, doubts that had ridden her, vanished like a summer cloud. The man was a true knight-errant, one to be utterly trusted.

"Then," she exclaimed impulsively, "I'll put myself in your hands, colonel! And you shan't fight for anything so unsubstantial as your regard for me and my father. There is going to be reward and recompense for you and your men. Who knows! There may even be such things as power and conquest, which should be attractions to a soldier. Have you ever heard of the O Donoju and his Nest?"

Buckner's eyebrows rose. The question was superfluous. The O Donoju and his Nest had lashed his envious soul for many a day.

"Surely," said he with a touch of amused irony.

"And El Tesoro Mine?"

"What is that?"

"A mine! A gold mine with free-milling ore. It used to belong to my father and lies down the Yaqui valley about twenty-five miles."

"Oh, yes! I've heard of it—and of others. It is closed and deserted to all practical purposes, the stamp mill dismantled and the shafts closed. A rich property—when conditions are settled."

"Rich—yes! It was rich when we lost it. The O Donoju sued for it and recovered it under Madero. No shipments of bullion had been made from it for many months and there was a large accumulation which the government had impounded. They turned it all over to the O Donoju. He has it yet."

"Where?" The question came like a shot.

"Where? In El Nido, of course. He sits there like a hawk in its nest, guarding his loot and the plunder he has accumulated from the whole countryside during this upheaval. He has played his own game, taking for himself alone, siding with no faction —unless he favored Madero, which I doubt. He's a bandit without allegiance, gorged with plunder and laughing at rivals from his impregnable stronghold. He's a cowardly, brutal villain; a thief and a murderer. He rules all this section with a hand of iron, like some old robber baron of the Middle Ages."

"Just a moment," said Buckner, gently and thoughtfully. "I gather that you are interested in O Donoju. He has robbed you?"

"Robbed me! He has robbed me and robbed others! He's murdered my father and Steve Hogarth's father. He's been running off my cattle right under the eyes of the frontier guards. He's persecuted and plundered me. He sits there in his insolence and pride like the half-breed he is, swaggering in his immunity from punishment. And the law refuses me help; the government refuses me help; the army even refuses help. I want him killed, driven from his fort, plundered as he has plundered me!"

He nodded thoughtfully and sympathetically to the girl. For the present his admiration for her was thrust into the background. It could wait. She was a fiery, hot-blooded damsel well worth winning, but that would come later. He had seized swiftly on the weakest part of her position. She had come to him bearing what she thought gifts, begging an alliance. But what had she to offer him in exchange? Not a thing!

Not for an instant did he know scruple

or hesitation. His plan, or the first, obvious step toward a plan, was decided upon instantly. It was too simple; too ridiculously easy!

He nodded sympathetically. He spoke frankly and practically, allowing her not the slightest cause for doubt of his sincere interest.

"Now, that's a project that hits us where we live, Miss Murray. We're right with you if it is at all practicable. For your sake and for the sake of my friendship with your father, beside what is in it for us, it appeals to me. But it will take planning. And in the meantime I'm violating neutrality by hanging about on this side the line. Suppose you and your men come over to my camp! We can make you comfortable and there are white men among us—enough to make you feel quite safe. We'd like to have you. Frankly, you and your men would be valuable recruits."

"Certainly!" said Claudia at once. She turned to give orders to Hogarth and Sam Crewe. The first looked unhappy, the second sardonic.

"Not on your picture!" said Sam stolidly. "You and me ain't goin' to amble in on this bunch of hostiles, Miss Claudia. We'll just camp this side the line."

Claudia looked at him in disdain. "Well, then, stay here and be safe," she said tartly. "I'm going with Colonel Buckner!"

The colonel shrugged his shoulders. Sam looked at Claudia and she stared back at him. It was a conflict of wills—and the girl's, aided by a habit of almost fanatic devotion, conquered. He turned to his men helplessly.

"Come along boys," he said morosely. The men followed without sign of protest, though it must have occurred to more than one that they were ramming their heads into the lion's mouth. And in a moment evidence of the fact was forthcoming. From the shadows around them men gathered, afoot and mounted, dozens of men, scores of men, almost it seemed that there were hundreds of them. In the throng of flitting, half-seen shapes, secretive and stealthy, fairly smelling of savagery, the little group was lost. And it came home with sudden conviction even to Sam that, even if he had won his point it would merely have precipitated matters. They had ridden like fools into an overwhelming ambush. But there was nothing now to be done. They could only go forward with such grace as they could muster.

They seemed to ride monotonously for endless hours. Sam spoke of it with one of his rare breaks of silence.

"Trailin' around and gittin' nowhere," he said. "This hombre is aimin' to throw us off the track to his wikiup. Shucks!"

The last bespoke gentle contempt for such puerilities.

But at last, when the moon had sunk, they turned downward to a sloping valley, as arid and dusty and dry as most of the hills and gullies and valleys they had been wandering through and about. In a short time they came to willows and brush, and then to a feeble stream which rapidly grew larger until it was a sizable little creek running over rocks and through cottonwoods and grass and willows. The valley spread out and they came upon a fire-dotted expanse of ground from which came a murmur of sounds mingled of the lowing of cattle, the stamping and snorting of horses, the yelping of dogs, the mutter of human voices. They passed rude shacks of boughs, clattered through the semblance of a street or lane, from which rose a musty, unpleasant smell of dirt and offal and general uncleanness. It was lined with the rude huts and with tiny fires over which squatted men and a few bundled and shapeless women. It led to a square hut of adobe, near to the remnants of a corral and there came to stop. Colonel Buckner dismounted and gave a courteous hand to Claudia.

"My house, señorita, is your own!" said he in Spanish as she dropped down beside him. "Your presence will make our rude headquarters as a palace. Enter, if you please!"

She half hesitated, looked back. Sam Crewe and another of his men dropped lightly beside her.

"Go on in, ma'am!" said Sam. "We're right here behind you!"

She gave him a glance of contempt and turned in. Sam crowded in on the heels of the colonel and his other men drew up before the door.

Colonel Buckner seemed annoyed at the persistency of Claudia's followers, but he gave his irritation no other expression than a shrug. He glanced around the bare earth-floored room, which opened off another in which could be seen a tumbled camp bed, and smiled with satisfaction.

"I think you will be quite safe here," he remarked complacently. There was a note of irony in this but Claudia appeared to take it at its face value. She returned his smile and spoke with easy composure.

"I am sure we will be," she said graciously and began to draw off her gloves and lay them on the battered deal table which, with two homemade chairs and some saddles and a valise constituted the only furniture of the room. She even looked into the other room, eying folding canvas cot and officer's equipment that hinted at occupancy by the colonel or one of his lieutenants.

"That being the case," said the colonel, "I'll leave you to rest. In the morning we can discuss our affairs more at length."

He bowed, received Claudia's negligent nod and stepped out. Claudia stood motionless until the door had closed behind him. Sam stepped to the door and closed it and then faced her.

"Well!" said Claudia, sharply.

"Well, you've gone and played hell!" said Sam meditatively.

"Yes—I'll admit he fooled me completely. But it's too late now. We've got to go ahead with it."

Hogarth, surprised at her attitude, so at variance with her former air of confidence and with the attitude she had maintained until the door had closed upon the colonel, broke in:

"Why, I thought you were set on trusting him! What on earth changed your mind so suddenly?"

"Why, I don't know. Intuition, maybe. It seemed all right out there on the line with troops almost within call, with the moon shining on us and the colonel so polite and agreeable. I guess I wasn't uneasy at all until he sent back so many of his men. He had more than enough and could spare them. But even then I reserved judgment. In fact I hardly doubted him. Then, when we were so long in getting here, and when we did and I looked at this camp—saw it, smelled it—I woke up to the situation. But it was too late. We were in for it then."

"It did sort of bring home the fact that this ain't no regular disciplined army, none whatever," said Sam. "Well, I reckon you better whirl in and knock off what sleep you can, ma'am."

Claudia stood silently with hands folded behind her. Then she nodded and picked up her gloves. She seemed sober but not at all alarmed. Hogarth, however, was deeply agitated.

"But, good Lord, what are we to do?" he remonstrated excitedly.

Claudia merely shrugged her shapely shoulders. It was Sam who answered.

"Nothin'," said he succinctly, and then added a qualifying word. "Except lay low and see how the cat jumps."

"But we're in this scoundrel's power!"

"Hell! Don't we know it?" rejoined Sam. He got up, ignoring Hogarth's evident desire to discuss the matter, looked into the sleeping room, examined the blankets on the cot.

"Look clean enough," he commented grudgingly. "Reckon they're the colonel's. I'll fix you up all right, ma'am."

He went to the door, again opened it a bit and at his low-spoken word two of the men got up and sauntered around the hut to sink again into somnolence beneath the other window which opened into the bedroom. And then Claudia retired to sleep, to Hogarth's amazement throwing off her anxiety with perfect ease. It was evident that she and Sam knew perfectly well that they were captives, being held, probably, for ransom. Yet Claudia was able to sleep.

She not only slept but awoke refreshed, though Crewe and Hogarth had rested hardly at all. The cattleman suffered little, however, though the lawyer was more than seedy. For a considerable time they were left undisturbed, and during that interval they discussed their plight from every angle. Claudia even ventured a hope that the colonel might prove trustworthy, arguing that the bait she had offered him must still be effective. But Sam ruthlessly crushed that hope, pointing out that she could not aid him effectively in gaining El Nido and its treasure and that the colonel knew it as well as they did. To Hogarth the exposition indicated the utter hopelessness of their plight, but neither Sam nor Claudia yielded to despair. Instead, they retained an astonishing serenity, and seemed more concerned over the delay attending breakfast than over anything else.

And still Claudia ventured to put forward another argument, almost the last she had. It was not a strong one and it was crushed as ruthlessly as the others.

"But what's his motive?" she demanded and Sam answered succinctly.

"He wants you, ma'am!"

"But what in the world would he want of me?"

"Ransom—maybe," was the calm answer.

"Ransom! But I couldn't pay much of a ransom—and the United States would have something to say to him."

"Uncle Sam ain't sayin' it very loud. You forget you come in here of your own notion. You disremember that this Buckner ain't answerable to no government you could lay your hands on. Uncle Sam might go to blowin' another town or two off the map with the navy or even send the troops over after Carranza, but while he might worry Carranza or Huerta a whole lot, I don't reckon it would do you any good. Buckner ain't likely to worry over what happens to them."

"But if he has to retreat over the line he'll have to answer."

"And he won't have to if he gets El Nido. You gave him the hint how to kill two birds with one stone yourself. Suppose he teams up with O Donoju instead of fightin' him? Where are you then?"

"Out of luck, I suppose," said Claudia, with a short laugh. "I've been a fool—but I still think he may be all right."

They were beginning to feel hunger and it seemed that they were to go unfed, but now they heard the sound of approaching men outside and in a moment the door swung open to admit the colonel. He did not come alone. A squalid Indian in a tattered sombrero carried a basket and another brought firewood. Two or three armed men pushed ahead of them a woman who was shoved unceremoniously into the room, as the colonel, at the door, smiled and bowed suavely to them. The armed men did not come in, but lounged before the hut and stared owlishly at Claudia's cow-punchers who stood between it and them.

Claudia looked at the woman with eyes wide for the moment and then they narrowed again. Hogarth observed her and sprang to his feet with a cry.

"Another white woman!"

The girl, for such she was, shrank toward him and stretched out a hand to him.

"Señor!" she whimpered, in Spanish. "Señor! You are Americano! You will protect me?"

Hogarth's mouth fell open as he recognized her. "The Señorita Murray!" he said. "How came you here?"

Claudia's cool and scornful voice broke in on her agitated answer.

"Yes," she said, "that requires some explanation. Where did *you* come from?"

The señorita glared about her like a trapped animal, recognizing them as enemies, in no doubt as to their hostility. Her beauty had suffered somewhat through rough handling. She was of a sleek type and dishevelment was not becoming to her. Even so, however, she presented in her distress an appeal to Hogarth's chivalry.

She broke into English, strongly accented.

"Ees Mees Murray? Bot ees it you are frien's wiz zees mans? You have act wiz heem?"

"But we are all friends together—I hope!" said the colonel, engagingly. The woman shrank farther from him. He turned with a sharp order to the men.

"Prepare the food!" They ceased gaping and bent down to the fireplace busying themselves in preparing a belated breakfast. The colonel kicked the extra stool into place and settled himself on it while the señorita crept closer to Hogarth and appeared to seek his help. Hogarth felt a deep sympathy for her in her distress.

"Events," said the colonel, "appear to be going our way—or coming, I should say. All goes well. And now let us talk about our plans. First——"

He paused and glanced at Claudia. Her long, half-veiled eyes met his inscrutably. But there was nothing inscrutable about Buckner's glance. It was bold, rapacious, possessive and triumphant, and any illusions she might still have harbored must have died at that moment. Stark and uncurbed evil looked at her and leered. Even the man's superficial good looks vanished to leave the signs of unbridled villainy apparent in every line of his features.

"First," he resumed, "there is Miss Murray. There seem to be two Miss Murrays here, by the way. That needs explanation."

Claudia answered contemptuously. "This is my—cousin, I suppose. She is the heiress to the bulk of the Murray estate."

"Not so! I am not!" said the Señorita Mercedes shrilly. Her protest went unheeded. The colonel pulled his mustache as he looked at both.

"So! I had thought you were Bob Murray's daughter and heiress?"

"So I am. But she is Sam Murray's daughter and has possession of most of the estate. You are not well informed as to recent events."

"I have been busy otherwise," said the colonel. "But it doesn't seem to matter. I apparently have both heiresses. Two ransoms instead of one, eh?"

"You talk in a different vein to last night," said Claudia.

"But last night is not to-day. You have come here, my dear, of your own will, but I am afraid that you will not leave except at my will. And my consent to losing you can only be had for a consideration. Your charms, I may say, have made a great impression on me, and I hold them at a high figure. It is only natural." He bowed mockingly to her.

"And El Nido?" asked Claudia. He laughed.

"I have considered El Nido for some time. It is a hard nut to crack and I have even thought of seeking an alliance with this O Donoju. I have changed my mind since you have told me he has treasure there. In any event, it should have occurred to you that I do not need your help in taking El Nido. No, though your presence might inspire me, your aid is not exactly necessary."

"Not even if I know a way to take it?"

"Madam, we are not living a romance. Secret entrances and subtle plots have small relation to realities. You will forgive me but I doubt seriously any knowledge on your part equal to my own. You see, I have scouted El Nido more than once. I know all there is to know about it without actually exploring it. Do you know more? I doubt it."

He smiled indulgently and as the Indians set a rather unsavory mess of tortillas and stew on the table drew up his stool.

"We will eat then and discuss arrangements." He waved them forward and Sam and Claudia at once took position, though Hogarth and the señorita held back. "You, Miss Murray, are held in twenty thousand dollars' ransom. The matter may as well be expedited. One of your men will return for it. He will require some days to gather the money, I take it. We will meet him at the line on the day appointed, receive the money and turn over—the goods, shall we say? All will be arranged, of course, to guard against any excess of zeal which might lead him to return with a troop of cavalry. You need not worry about that part of it."

Claudia looked at Sam and he nodded almost imperceptibly. She drew her breath in a little, resigned sigh.

"Very well," she said, "he shall go at once."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WAY OUT.

THE affair progressed rapidly, in a businesslike way. To the señorita and to Hogarth it seemed to go with a disquieting matter-of-factness. Neither Claudia nor Sam Crewe appeared to feel any emotion beyond a sort of philosophical resignation. It was as though they recognized that the colonel held all the cards and that all they could do was to accept the situation stoically. They acquiesced apathetically and without argument to his swift and comprehensive proposals. Though Hogarth could see no other course open, such supine yielding alarmed and angered him. As for the señorita, she was inclined to voluble protest and pleadings which went ignored.

On the matter of the messenger Hogarth got another shock. When that question was brought up Claudia answered without hesitation, naming himself. He started up with a veto but she heard his impassioned protest with a sad smile.

"Why, Steve, we are beaten. It makes no difference. You are the logical selection as one of those who have handled my affairs. Don't you see?"

"But I can't go and leave you here!" he stormed.

"You can't help me by staying, and you can by going. It's the only way to secure my release. You'll be serving me better this way."

There was that in her tone and expression which conveyed a suggestion of hidden meaning, something regretful, indulgent, half sad, as though she anticipated a final parting. Hogarth could not dispute her logic, yet, with his eyes on the triumphant figure of the colonel, he felt that to go was to bid farewell forever to any hopes he might have cherished. He could not explain this except through a profound distrust of the colonel's good faith. There was that in the man that would, he felt, stop at no evil. In the full light of day that instinctive revulsion and suspicion of the man

brought about by knowledge of the character of his following and actual contact with his camp of ruffians swelled into complete conviction. Ransom! It was no question of that alone. Here was a helpless young woman, delicate and lovely, left in the power of a man who had no more moral restrictions than a hyena. His treachery would go to any lengths of bad faith. He marveled that the others did not appear to see what was so clear to him.

"I won't go!" he said flatly. Claudia made a gesture of helplessness.

"You merely make it harder for me, Steve," she said gently. But that was all. She turned to Sam.

"Which of the men, then?"

"Might send Riker," said Sam, as though turning over in his mind the various capabilities of the men left. Hogarth wondered at the choice, for Riker was little more than a boy, the youngest and least reliable of the men. The colonel grew impatient as they reflected.

"Decide!" he said. "It makes no difference, after all. One is as good as another."

Claudia agreed wearily and asked for pen, ink and paper which was produced from the colonel's war bags in the next room. She wrote carefully and fully for a few minutes, addressing the document to Merriam, and handed it to the colonel. It seemed to be satisfactory to him after he had read it carefully. It set out their situation fully and yet tersely, emphasized the necessity of paying the ransom and authorized the lawyer to take all steps necessary to raise the money. The messenger was to return with it to the appointed place on a day named, where he would be met and the Americans released on payment of the money. The details were not elaborate and a simple warning that an attempt to use force in their rescue would be unavailing sufficed. The rest of the arrangements were up to the colonel and none of them had a doubt that he would look after his end of the matter with an efficiency born of experience. Hogarth watched it all with a despairing consciousness that Claudia was signing what was worse than a death warrant for herself. His own fate was involved, yet he did not think of that except to begin speculation as to how and on what occasion he should be prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible in her defense.

"And what about—her?" said Claudia curtly, pointing with her pen at the Señorita Mercedes. That young woman had been staring hopelessly and tragically before her for most of the time.

"Why," said the colonel, indulgently, as though, having won his point with astonishing ease he could afford to humor his prisoners, "since she, according to your report, is the real heiress to the Murray fortune, her ransom will be larger. However, before deciding, this matter should be investigated and the truth determined. For example, how comes it that she, your cousin as you declare, is a Mexican? And how, if she is a Murray, does she come to be visiting this O Donoju? You must know that we picked her up on the road to the railroad coming from El Nido with one of the O Donoju's men. Now, it seems strange that a Murray should be friendly with the O Donoju."

The señorita awoke from her desperate lethargy to sudden activity.

"Ha! The O Donoju!" she broke out in rapid Spanish. "Yes, I had forgotten him. You, señor, had best take care, for the O Donoju will tear you limb from limb if a hair of my head should suffer! I warn you!"

The colonel did not seem to be unduly impressed. "The O Donoju, then, holds you rather highly?" he speculated thoughtfully, and smiled. "That is strange," he remarked to Claudia, who shrugged contemptuously.

"Why not?" she sneered. "The O Donoju found her and backed her in her fight for the Murray estate. There is nothing surprising in her presence with him. I have no doubt that her affections have been freely bestowed on him."

The señorita came to her feet with eyes blazing and cheeks flaming.

She poured out a stream of Spanish imprecation and exhibited a fury that bid fair to pass into personal violence. Through it all Claudia sat with cold eyes looking sleepily from under long, narrowed lids, ineffably suggestive of supercilious contempt. But the señorita was all fiery beauty in her rage, and Hogarth felt a swift reaction to her emotion, mixed of pity, of sympathy for her plight, of something like admiration for the unbridled energy of her display. Something stirred in him as the pretty fury stormed. Here was one who acted as one should act, fighting with tooth and nail when threatened instead of surrendering

apathetically. If Claudia had only her fire and abandon instead of being incurably cold and self-centered even in her pursuit of vengeance!

The colonel however, merely listened to the outburst with discriminating enjoyment. He was appraising it with every ounce of shrewdness he commanded.

"So!" he remarked when the señorita at last paused for breath, her rage dying into a sobbing protest that had its element of pathos and led Hogarth to move closer to the girl and lay a hand on her arm in an attempt to comfort her. "So! A very interesting situation. But it merely adds to the possibility. If the O Donoju values the lady he may be a bidder for her. If not—well, we can leave her until later when we have settled your affair, Miss Murray. Call in your man and give him instructions."

This was done, the young fellow stalking in stolidly, though his face showed the effect of the strain of the night's vigil and in his eyes there was a haunting look that seemed one of desperation. He was silent and emotionless on the surface, however, when Claudia gave him his brief instructions. He took the note and then looked at Sam with what seemed doubt and agony. Sam stared back at him and one could not have read truly the expression of either of them. But the young man suddenly nodded shortly and turned to the door. The colonel rose to go with him.

The two went out and they could hear the brief exchange of greetings that Riker had with his companions. They seemed curiously charged with suppressed feeling, as though on the one hand these bade him a final farewell and on the other he expressed regret and shame at having to part with them. Beneath it all there was something tense and expectant that even reached the colonel. For a moment he paused and eyed the men squatting there with keen, searching gaze. But they merely returned his stare with level, indifferent eyes and he finally strode away ahead of Riker. A moment later the cow-puncher rode out of their ken, mounted on his own horse and accompanied by two men who seemed to be Mexicans rather than Yaquis.

Sam Crewe strolled to the door and watched until Riker had gone. He talked idly and cursorily to the other men as though discussing the weather, but it was not meteorology that interested them.

"What's the word, Sam?"

"Nothin'—only keep your eyes peeled. We'll have to go through 'em, I reckon."

"Shore enough! When'll it be?"

"Have to watch fer a chance. That hombre's due to make a slip."

"Well, shoot when you're ready!"

"I will, boys. And you all do your damnedest."

"You know it!"

He came back and Claudia looked at him questioningly. He sat down and rolled his inevitable cigarette.

"Ready?" she asked calmly. Hogarth felt a stirring of anticipation and wonder.

"As far as we can be. But what about the señorita there?"

Claudia eyed the girl disparagingly, her lip curling. The señorita, having found Hogarth's comforting hand, was clinging to it and still sobbing quietly. Hogarth returned Claudia's glance with defiance.

"Whatever is doing, you can't desert her," he declared. And Claudia smiled wearily.

"You ought to have gone," she said regretfully. "You only made it worse."

"I couldn't go and you know it!" he declared fiercely.

"It's no time for heroics, Steve. You can't help by staying—and it would have been bad enough without you. As for that girl—I don't know! I doubt if she would appreciate anything we did for her."

The señorita brokenly expressed her conviction that God and all the saints had abandoned her, and then began to pray rapidly. Sam looked at her ruminatingly and Claudia yawned. But underneath her assumption of ease, even Hogarth began to sense a tense expectation, a sort of highly keyed nervous tension. Her pallor had insensibly increased under her tan and there were little lines of what almost seemed pain about her mouth.

Sam Crewe, who was unquestionably the leader of the group, by tacit consent, strolled to the door and again leaned against the jamb of it, gazing out indifferently into the sun. Groups of Indians were strolling or lounging about, guarding every exit, apparently careless but all armed and all really alert for a movement on their part. His men still remained as they had been but tension underlay their outward calm. The air was electric with it and even the señorita awoke to the fact that something

was impending. She looked up as Sam began to speak in a low, monotonous voice.

"Here she busts!" he said. "His nibs is comin' this way—on foot—and he's got a squad of *mozos* clatterin' back of him, mounted! Thought he'd make a slip! If he gives us a chance we takes it! Ready?"

"Ready!" said Claudia, with a little catch of her breath. Her long eyes were open now, and blazing with a fevered light. The señorita began a plaintive query.

"Shut up!" said Sam. "Steve, got your six-shooter handy?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, git ready to use it. We're goin' out of here—such as can make it!"

"But the señorita?" Steve was flustered and agitated, taken aback and nervous with the sudden revulsion to the need of action. He could not yet realize the sudden shift in the situation. There seemed to be no plan, no opportunity for concerted action. Yet evidently they were to fight and without warning. It seemed a hopeless prospect, a mere flurry of resistance, doomed without doubt. And why should they have sent the ransom demand if they were going to fight now?

Sam looked at Claudia and she at the señorita who was glaring about her like a trapped animal, utterly at a loss.

"Drag her along then!" said Claudia with an impatient laugh. "One more or less makes no——"

"She ain't no use," said Sam, but he said it with an effect of resignation, indicating that it made little difference in any event.

The colonel was almost at the hut, striding through the odorous dust of the pathway, men gathering behind the group he led and concentrating toward that center of affairs. His men rode behind him, with rifles on thighs and he indicated to them the little knot of cow-punchers at the door. They, in turn, glanced at Sam as though for instructions.

"Wait," said he. The horsemen came on, nine or ten in all, and wheeled before the door while men on foot drew in at either side of them. The colonel waved a hand and stepped to one side.

"Sorry to separate you, gentlemen," said the colonel, mockingly. "Afraid though that I must ask you men to go with these fellows. They'll see you safely disposed."

Hogarth crowded to the door and behind him came Claudia. He could hear her sibilant breath at his shoulder. The señorita began again her invocations. Claudia plucked Hogarth back and motioned to the girl, and he ran to her side to lift her by one arm and drag her to the door. He acted without thought, in a sort of panic, under the necessity of joining those without in whatever they were about to do. But they seemed utterly disinclined to do anything. They were advancing slowly and dejectedly toward the horsemen, Sam last, while Claudia stood framed in the doorway, looking on. The colonel saw Hogarth behind her and made an impatient gesture.

"Here!" he said, "you too. Come out of that!"

"Get 'em, boys!" The cry came sharply and shrilly from Sam. With its utterance the cow-punchers acted as one man, each of them springing for a horse. Their pistols flashed out and began to bark. There was a turmoil of shrieks and yells, of barking, crashing guns, a flight here and there of surprised and panic-struck men, the crash of falling bodies. Hogarth was aware of Claudia darting out ahead of him, her own revolver spitting fire, as she mingled in that devil's whirl. He too drove out through the door, dragging the señorita behind him, drawing his gun and fighting through the smoke for a glimpse of something at which to shoot. He saw something that looked like the colonel darting to one side, fired at it and was vaguely astonished because the report of the gun seemed to come from a distance. Smoke whirled back on him and choked him. A horse plunged against him and he was vaguely aware that a dark figure swung something high above him as it cursed with guttural intensity. He pointed the gun blindly upward and pulled the trigger. A rifle came crashing and rattling down at his side and the horse plunged again.

He caught it by the bridle, finding it taut and dragging to one side, where its late rider held to the reins though he lay on the ground with a bullet through him. Acting almost automatically, Hogarth dragged the beast down and pulled the señorita forward, yelling to her to mount. He managed in some way to get her in the saddle in spite of the rearing beast. But as he let go of the bridle she screamed and in the next instant the horse had leaped through the struggling mob and was gone.

Two other horses revolved about him,

crashing together and stamping almost on top of him. He heard a hoarse command:

"Hop on it, Steve! Shake a leg!"

Somehow he was scrambling into the saddle of the horse, beside another mounted man who held it with iron hand for him. He grasped the reins and shook the blur from his eyes to look around him. And then his companion whirled with a yell, shoving his own horse around. The next moment he was being borne at a run through smoke and over fallen bodies, with dust and confusion ahead of him and the crash of firearms all about him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE O DONOJU AGAIN.

IN a storm of noise and dust and roaring weapons they rode, on leaping, frenzied horses, snorting with panic. Ahead, almost hidden in dust, snapping skirts betrayed where Claudia and the señorita led the rush. With them, crowding on either side and to the rear came two cow-punchers, banging away to either side. Claudia was also looking back and firing now and then. Farther back Hogarth and Sam Crewe spurred on. They had taken blindly a quartering course through the cluster of rude huts, crashing through them or swerving around them. Women were screaming and diving from under the hoofs of the horses, men were rushing about and dodging behind every obstruction. Behind and on every side there were flashes and banging rifles. Bullets sang all about them, but most of the firing was wild and hurried. Back of them was more confusion and noise, but over it came the rattle and clatter of pounding hoofs where the pursuit was getting under way.

Sam Crewe uttered a disgusted curse and jerked in his saddle. But he did not neglect to turn and fire again and again until his weapon was empty. Then he reloaded as he rode, coolly. Claudia up ahead was doing the same and one of the men with her had dragged from a boot at the saddle the carbine left there by the late owner of the horse. He tried the action and then swung about to let fly at some one or other. Hogarth also looked for targets, but had to fire more or less at random. Things were flashing past too fast for him to pick a mark with any certainty.

They hurtled through the last of the huts and breasted a slope, dashing into high brush which promised them some shelter. But they were now climbing and exposed to fire from below, and the pursuit was back of them and able to concentrate. A cow-puncher up ahead went down with a crash and Sam Crewe momentarily drew up as he came to him. The man was painfully endeavoring to roll over on his face and to get his elbows under his body. He clung to the rifle that had gone with him.

"So long, Sam," he gasped. "Pull your freight! I'll git me a few."

"So long, Bill," said Sam, and went on. The man stretched out, his face drawn and agonized, blood straining his waistcoat between the shoulders. He got his rifle under him and it began to speak in sinister accents which were answered by yells testifying to its sting.

They closed on those ahead, but not too rapidly. The others, too, were scattering out, the remaining cow-puncher dropping back to meet them. Sam and Hogarth slowed down somewhat and began to fire as rapidly as they could in the effort to gain time for the two girls ahead. They seemed to progress with pitiful slowness up the slope. To the sides, far away, men were riding like mad, roweling their horses cruelly up the hill to head them off. Sam took a long shot at one and hit him.

By a bare few seconds they won out, gaining the top and beginning the rush down the opposite side before they could be intercepted. They turned at the bottom of the slope, blindly plunging down the cañon it bounded, over rocks and through sheltering brush, thrashing on their quivering horses without mercy. It all seemed hopeless. Escape was a remote possibility. There were but the three men left beside the women and even as they began to feel that the pursuit was being distanced the last of Sam's men came down from a shot fired from the ridge above them. He lay there senseless, pinned under his horse. Sam Crewe again looked down.

"Gawd!" said he, dryly, with what seemed a little catch in his voice. "Gawd!"

He rode on again. He had another duty than to stay and die with the man, much as he would have liked to do it. And he swayed in his saddle now and then, while his face was no longer calm and impassive. It was gray, and sweat rolled from his brow, while his eyes were wild and set. On his

shirt there spread a black stain under his left arm.

Then, as the slopes behind and above them seemed to be filling with distant, galloping figures, and bullets dropped all about them, as the last hope for anything but a costly ending seemed to fade, the end came, suddenly and without warning. The rattle of rifle fire suddenly swelled from ahead and upward, yells echoed with a new note of terror and surprise. The galloping horsemen on the slopes pulled their mounts to their haunches and then wheeled and began to drive backward at full speed. Some of them dropped and rolled grotesquely down the hills.

Firing continued and Claudia dragged her horse to a stop, in the notion that they had been cut off. But behind Sam urged her on with hoarse shouts. He was looking upward where the brush spurted puffs of dim vapor, and the Yaquis were thronging backward in rout.

"Go on!" he yelled! "They ain't after us!"

The señorita had kept blindly on, too frightened to reason at all. She had merely clung to her horse and followed where the others led. Claudia spurred on after her and around a bend in the valley through which they rode. She had no faintest idea where they were nor had any of the others. The señorita alone might have had an inkling, but she was too terrified to take note. So, when they dashed out into a broader expanse of valley land, they rushed without warning upon a dozen men who were riding rapidly upon them and, as the newcomers fanned out before them, their horses rushed in and jolted wearily to a stop without the aid of a suggestive rein.

A tall man in a wide sombrero, with bandoliers of cartridges crossed on his breast, turned his horse across the path of Claudia's mount and reached for the reins. She gazed for a moment into a sun-browned face with light eyes, a face that grinned at her with a showing of white teeth. She heard an Anglo-Saxon voice speaking.

"Here!" it said, "what's your hurry? We've dusted off those hostiles and you're all right."

"Thank God!" said Claudia fervently, and her voice shook in a threat of hysterical laughter. "Thank God for that! And who —and who—who are you?"

The man shoved his sombrero back on his head, his grin persisting. "The O Donoju, at your service," he said simply.

Claudia began to laugh, her mirth growing more and more shrill. Everything was growing black about her, hazy and whirling. She saw the O Donoju's cheerful face grow concerned and then heard through the confusion a shrill outburst.

"Ah, mi caro! Mi carrassimo! Ah, Don Juan!" She knew vaguely that the señorita was declaiming her gratitude and devotion, but she had lost interest in the worry of the whirling darkening universe about her. The O Donoju went backward into some dim region, the voices of Sam Crewe and Hogarth sounded and faded into distance. She sank forward in her saddle and began to drop softly into space.

When Claudia came out of the abyss she had dropped into she was aware of cool, rather damp air, of a sort of twilight gloom, and, as her wandering wits came back to her, of looming, towering walls of what seemed stone. Light came through windows set deep in embrasures fully four feet thick. She was in a bed of huge size, furnished with old linen that was yellow with age. Other bedding consisted of rough blankets. About her was a noticeable scarcity of furniture, there being nothing much but two or three rough chairs and an ancient and battered cabinet or chest of drawers set against one wall. The room was large and gloomy, its floor of stone or cement with but one Indian rug upon it.

A woman who, to her astonishment, evidently was an American, rather pretty in a faded sort of way, came to the bed and looked down at her.

"I'm Mrs. Bigelow," she explained simply. "How you feeling now?"

"All right," said Claudia dubiously. "Can I have a drink?"

Mrs. Bigelow brought her water in a large, porous Indian jar, which kept it deliciously cool. She drank eagerly, and then moved cautiously, with an idea that she had been hurt. But aside from a general feeling of soreness she seemed undamaged.

"Where am I? Where are the rest of them?" she demanded.

"This is El Nido," said Mrs. Bigelow. "Don Juan brought you in. The others—came too." She seemed to hesitate a little in saying this.

"Where are they? And who—but it's the O Donoju, isn't it?"

"That's what he calls himself," said Mrs. Bigelow. "You'd better rest a bit, miss. You've sure had a time of it."

Claudia half rose, looking around for her clothes. She was wearing night things belonging, she suspected, to Mrs. Bigelow. "I'm all right," she said. "I want to get up. Where's Sam Crewe?"

"He's—he's below; Mr. Hogarth too. I wouldn't hurry if I was you."

"Steve and Sam? But where are the others?"

"There weren't any others," said the woman, sadly and gently. "No one but you and the señorita."

Claudia stared at her and then the force of it came home to her slowly. She shuddered and her eyes filled with tears.

"My fault!" she said with dry voice. "My fault! I led them into it, and they died—for me! God forgive me! God forgive me!"

She bent her head to her knees and her body shook with her grief. Mrs. Bigelow sat down on the bed and for some time stroked her hair gently without saying anything. Slowly Claudia's tears spent themselves, and then the woman spoke.

"From what I hear, ma'am," she said, "they went out the way a good man would go. Don't you fret yourself over what can't be helped."

"They died for me," said Claudia, simply.

"Then you'd ought to be proud you had such men," said Mrs. Bigelow.

"But it was my criminal folly that led them into it," she choked. "I'll suffer—from this—all my life!"

"They was good boys, that's a fact!" said Mrs. Bigelow, and her matter-of-fact statement seemed to convey more comfort than could have been expected. Claudia raised her face and stared straight ahead. Her long eyes were wide open now, bright with a light of fever.

"Yes, they were good boys!" she agreed. She seemed to dismiss them from her mind and looked about her. "My clothes!" she said. "I want to get up!"

Mrs. Bigelow seemed about to continue her remonstrance, but thought better of it. She went to a heavy door and opened it to call some one. In a short time a Mexican woman came and handed in Claudia's garments, cleaned and put into some sort of shape again. Mrs. Bigelow assisted her to rise and helped her get into them.

When she was dressed again Claudia turned to the other woman.

"Where is the O Donoju?" she demanded. "I wish to see him."

"Well, I reckon he's around. But—Miss Murray, you know——"

"Oh, I know!" said Claudia impatiently. "He's the O Donoju. That's the reason. I want to get away from here. I've got to get back to my ranch and get men and come over here and wipe out that pack of wolves that—killed—my—men!" Her voice broke again and her eyes shone wildly, no longer sleepy and hidden, but flaming like jewels. Her face was flushed with what seemed fever.

"You can see the O Donoju, I reckon," said Mrs. Bigelow grudgingly. "There's nothing to prevent if you want to—except him! But—well, I guess he'd better tell you himself."

She left the girl standing there and went to the door. The Mexican woman again was summoned and sent for her master. Claudia sat down on the edge of the bed and Mrs. Bigelow took a chair, sitting rather primly in it. The girl held her hands clasped between her knees, looking stonily down at the bare floor. Then, after a delay of some minutes, the door opened and the O Donoju stepped in, his gray eyes level upon her, his face no longer smiling but like a hard mask.

"You sent for me, Miss Murray?" he said. Claudia did not look up.

"Yes," she said, "I sent for you. I seem to owe you a debt—for rescuing me. I can't help that, can I? If I had known—but I want to relieve myself of further obligation to—the O Donoju. I wish to go as soon as I can."

The O Donoju thrust a hand in a trousers pocket and leaned against the wall.

"I can guess your—anxiety," he said thoughtfully. "I'd like to oblige you if I could. But I don't see how it is to be done."

"What do you mean?" She looked up now, her eyes closing to narrow lines. "Am I still a prisoner then?"

"Not of my making," said the O Donoju calmly. "At the same time, there's no way of getting out. You see, your friend Buckner has taken the hint you gave him. He has two hundred estimable gentlemen planted all around the place sniping every one that shows a nose outside. I doubt if a jack

rabbit could get through his lines without damage. Certainly you couldn't."

"You mean he's attacking this place?"

"He's making a pretty good stab at it. Your late exploit seems to have annoyed him considerably and I gather that he's in something of a temper. He wants you and the señorita, his ransom money, a considerable sum from me—which I haven't got—and he also wants El Nido. He isn't at all modest in his wants, is he?"

Claudia continued to look at him and he continued to return her gaze.

"But," said Claudia, finally, "I *must* get out. I can't stay here."

The O Donoju lifted his shoulders a bit. "You'll have to argue that with the colonel," he said."

There was no answer to that and she made none. She reflected for a few minutes. Then:

"Where is Sam Crewe?" she asked. The O Donoju's expression changed and he glanced at Mrs. Bigelow. She shook her head slightly. The O Donoju's voice became grave and deep feeling showed in it.

"He was a very brave and fine man," he said gently. "A man you may be proud of having inspired. When we got to you, he was very badly hurt, Miss Murray, and—he died after we brought him in."

Claudia uttered a moan, but her face was stony. "And Steve?" she questioned with dry lips.

"He's hurt slightly. Nothing to worry over at all, I'm glad to say. The Señorita Mercedes is giving him excellent care."

"I think—I'd like to go to him, if you please!" She spoke listlessly. He nodded and stood aside from the door. She got up and walked past him slowly, her eyes cast down to the ground. Taking no notice of him, she waited until Mrs. Bigelow drew up with her and then followed where she indicated, down a gloomy, damp hall, stone-walled like the rest of the place, to a room at some distance, in one of the other wings. She was about to enter as Mrs. Bigelow opened the door when, with a crashing roar that almost shook the solid cliff, something exploded below and outside. In spite of herself she started and cowered back. The O Donoju evidently had followed this far, for he spoke near by.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "That is only this lady's husband playing with a toy he has down there. It's his answer to a pair of three-inch field guns that Colonel Buckner has turned on us."

CHAPTER X.

THE O DONOJU SERVES.

CLAUDIA entered the room and closed the door after her. She wanted to shut out the O Donoju, who, however, had turned about and was already walking away down the corridor. She found this room also dimly lit through windows set in deep embrasures, but it was lighter than the hall had been and she could see fairly well. In another bed, ancient and huge, Hogarth was sitting up, while the Señorita Mercedes Murray cowered beside him. She had been frightened badly and stared at Claudia with bright eyes that seemed to accuse her of being something threatening. The girl's lip curled contemptuously as she walked toward the bed. Hogarth, who had been encouraging Mercedes with a hand laid on hers, dropped it and faced her. He seemed to be uninjured except for a wound in the right arm, which was marked by a bandage. It was quite evidently not serious and he showed few traces of having gone through a crisis other than the slightly haggard look in his face. He greeted Claudia with a welcoming smile but visible embarrassment.

"I guess I don't have to make you two acquainted," he remarked. Claudia threw her chin up a bit, and Mercedes, recovering from her fright, tossed her head in a more emphatic expression of hostility.

"You are all right?" demanded Claudia. "I wanted to talk to you—to question you about——"

"Oh, yes. Quite all right except for a slight flesh wound. But aren't you too upset——"

She interrupted him impatiently. Claudia had entered the room full to overflowing with contrition and in an agony of self-abnegation. She had felt that she must make up to this sole survivor of those who had gone to death at her bidding for all the disaster her folly had brought upon the others. Stricken with horror at the outcome, sorrowing over the dead, blaming herself bitterly, it had seemed that she could make no expiation other than to repay the one of them who was left for all the devotion that had been shown her. Hogarth, who had served her blindly and to the best of his ability, even against his better judg-

ment, represented for the moment the sum of all the unquestioning devotion of her heroes. The others she could never now repay, but he, whom she knew loved her, had a claim to everything she could give. She did not love him in return, and could not, as she knew, but she could pretend love and give him care and devotion that would serve in lieu of it.

In that determination she had sought him out—to find him holding the hand of a woman who, by all standards, was her enemy and his. Her abnegation had died suddenly, yielding to irritation and disgust for his folly. He knew—he must know—what the woman was and what relation she maintained with the O Donoju! Yet back there in the bandit camp he had yielded to his sentimental impulse to protect one who leaned on him, and he was now yielding to the same invincible softness of fiber. For Hogarth was soft, as she recognized; the sort of soft male who deceived himself, yearning for some one even softer who might furnish him food for believing himself a strong and virile protector. Claudia knew that she had always puzzled and piqued him because she gave him no chance to exercise his strength for her benefit except as she herself ordered and directed. She now, in a flash of insight, saw his love for what it was; a fiction and a delusion, based on a conception of her which was far from the reality. He had imagined her and loved her as a weak woman. She was a strong one, on the contrary, and Hogarth could never love a strong woman.

It was strange that, even as this fact came home to her, she thought of the O Donoju in sharp contrast to Hogarth. It was a wandering, casual thought, but none the less a distinct one, picturing Don Juan as one who was as different from Hogarth as well could be. She had dominated Hogarth, as she had dominated even Sam Crewe and her cow-punchers, as she had dominated the lawyer Merriam and almost every man she had ever encountered except her father. And of all the men she had ever known, she had loved old Bob Murray, in spite of his unlovableness, best of all. She could never dominate him even when he was most indulgent to her. She felt that she could not dominate the O Donoju. But in his case she hated and, if she could not dominate, she could at least wage war against him.

In the instant of these reflections she was aware of the sullenly hostile stare of the Señorita Mercedes, her own cousin. She returned it superciliously and swept toward Hogarth.

"Upset! No," she said. "I want to hear what happened—about Sam and the others, if you can tell me. The señorita, I am sure"—with a sneer—"will excuse you!"

The señorita uttered something under her breath which sounded scurrilous, even in Spanish. Claudia was sure that it was something ill bred if not worse than that. Hogarth was embarrassed, though he did not understand her, feeling the tension between the two.

"Why, of course—and she doesn't have to go, I suppose! There isn't much to tell. Sam was hit hard breaking through. He didn't say anything and I didn't know. The —others—were shot down one by one. Only three in fact got through at first. I didn't see much of it in the excitement. You know as much as I do until we met this O Donoju and his men. Then you fainted and he caught you."

"Yes! And where were you? Looking after *her?*" Her nod at Mercedes was an insult. The señorita again muttered. This time her accent left no doubt, though Claudia's Spanish was fortunately not inclusive enough to catch the full meaning of the term.

Hogarth flushed uncomfortably. He did not care to go farther into that rather humiliating situation when, as Claudia slid from her horse, with Mercedes fairly throwing herself upon Don Juan, the latter had pushed her off and toward his own awaiting arms while he caught the fainting girl. Hogarth had received Mercedes with mixed emotions then. And he recalled rather vividly her outburst of reproach and invective directed at O Donoju and at Claudia, to which O Donoju had paid no attention whatever.

He broke into his narrative, suppressing these facts. He told how Sam Crewe had collapsed and how the O Donoju's lieutenant, Gregorio, had acted upon court orders given to him, endeavoring to stanch the blood, to close the wound so as to bring the man to safety. They had had little time, for more and more of Buckner's force had been coming up and the odds had quickly shifted in their favor. The O Donoju had retreated down the valley and up

a winding road along the cliff, some twenty-five men coming with him. Sam had been borne along, half dead. He had had every care after they had reached the impregnable Nest, but it had been all in vain.

"The O Donoju talked to him before he died. Sam told him how Buckner had caught you, but not the reason that took you to his camp. Let him think you'd gone there to negotiate for the return of cattle he'd stolen. You may be sure that I didn't let on either."

Claudia stared ahead of her with dry, shining eyes, again wide open.

"Of course," she said. "Good old Sam! And I killed him!"

"You may be sure he didn't blame you at all, Claudia," Hogarth seized upon her evident sorrow, the protective instinct, the desire to soothe and console rising in him. "Not Sam—nor any of them, I'm sure. All of us were glad to do our utmost for you!"

That struck a chill into her. He was so evidently uncomprehending! He talked like a book. Fool! Didn't he realize that these men followed and obeyed her, rode into peril with her because *she* led and dominated and commanded their obedience? Didn't he know that she dominated because she was self-sufficient and bold and resourceful as any man? Didn't he know that they loved her for that? And she had repaid their love and trust by egregious folly ending in their deaths! He did not know and could not know. To him no woman was a woman unless she were also soft and flabby and sentimental and petulant and uncontrolled! He was the type of man that worshiped the tabby cats, purring and soft at one moment, spitting and clawing the next —like this señorita who was, Heaven save the mark, her cousin! And of all those real men, he alone had lived!

Sam Crewe had not told; had not blamed her! Whoever thought he would tell or would blame her? Not she, at any rate, who knew him!

Thought of repaying in the person of Hogarth all this devotion of which she had been recipient vanished and was forgotten in indignation and contempt. She rose and turned her back on him, not even noticing the señorita, and walked slowly to the door. She went out and turned down the corridor to go back to her room, depressed and yet slowly crystallizing a determination to fulfill her obligations in some way. To avenge seemed the only reparation she could make; to avenge them bitterly on Buckner and his thieves, and then to avenge them on the person of the O Donoju, who had been the first motive force in this disaster. She writhed under the necessity of being beholden to the O Donoju. The thought of him made little shivers run up her spine to her neck.

She passed the dimly lighted widening of the corridor that heralded the opening to the stairway and heard voices coming from below. There was an impatient note in one which she recognized as that of the O Donoju. She shrugged in distaste for even the sound of his voice and went on until she had come back to her own room. She entered and sat down on the edge of the bed, looking downward at the toe of her boot, considering ways and means of getting away. But there seemed no way and she gave it up, her direct mind forcing the conviction that again she must merely wait on opportunity and seize it swiftly when it turned up.

She went moodily to the window and stood looking out at the small bit of scene its depth permitted. It was not much; a bit of a court or patio, with walks of flagstone, a dilapidated fountain and straggling, yellow palms and orange trees. At its back rose the cliff above a cavern which seemed to serve as a storeroom and stables. Everything about the place seemed crude, ancient, medieval. Comfort, warmth, human relations, all seemed lacking. The men lounging below were merely Mexican peons, half clothed, brown of skin, lackadaisical in manner, though they all went belted with pistols and knives. Poor devils, they seemed, serving, as they had served for generations, haughty overlords who considered them next to the beasts of the field. Ignorant, spiritless survivals of a once proud race, useless to her and to themselves. They offered her no hope. Serfs of the O Donoju, a kick from him or a crust was all they could conceive of reward for slavish and instinctive devotion.

The door opened behind her and she turned to confront Mrs. Bigelow. The woman, though she and her husband were followers of her enemy, impressed her as being friendly enough, though Claudia was not fool enough to think she could win active help from her. Still, she was kindly and Claudia felt a liking for her and a de-

sire to meet her friendship halfway. In spite of her boasted strength of character, a true Murray endowment, she was a lone woman among enemies and she felt the need for a woman's company and understanding, which Mrs. Bigelow offered.

But Mrs. Bigelow seemed a trifle embarrassed.

"Don Juan says to inform you that dinner's ready, Miss Murray," she said apologetically. Claudia's eyes narrowed to long lines.

"Is it?" she said. "If you please, I'll have mine here."

Mrs. Bigelow flushed a little. Claudia was used to giving orders and had spoken a bit haughtily, though her attitude was directed more at the O Donoju than at his messenger.

"Well," said Mrs. Bigelow, rather shortly, "that's what I guessed you'd want and I told him so. But there ain't any arguin' with the O Donoju. You might as well know it now as later."

"I don't propose to argue with him," said Claudia, curtly.

"All right then. You'd better come along."

"I told you I'd eat here!"

"And the O Donoju says to me that he hasn't got enough women here to look after the work as it is, and he can't spare men to do it. He allows that if you can't eat at the same time and place as the rest of us you don't eat at all. I says I'm willing to fix your food and bring it here but he says that he ain't and that I've got enough to do without waitin' on you. Which he ain't any too polite and he means about what he says, so what can a body do?"

"Very well," said Claudia though she was beginning to be acutely conscious of her hunger. It was dinner time and the light told that it was an evening meal that was meant. She had eaten nothing that she knew of since early that morning, though while she was in a faint they might have given her some broth. "I'll go without!" and she turned her back on Mrs. Bigelow.

The woman went out without another word and Claudia felt her sense of being alone increased. It was as though a friend had deserted her. She almost regretted her tone, which must have offended the woman. But it was too late. She returned to the window rather forlornly, contemplating the prospect of a supperless bed and a growing hunger. And then what? She considered the coming days, finding the prospect of a deliberate hunger strike to present no elements of dignity nor of prospective benefit. Why would the O Donoju care whether she starved to death or not? It would be all one to him and merely rid him of an enemy within his gates.

Time passed, how much she did not know or heed. No sound beyond that of men moving and talking below came to her. There was no indication that the place was besieged and she even began to doubt the truth of the O Donoju's assertion to that effect. But she was weak and nervous in spite of her self-control and her insistent hunger worked upon her, inducing a feeling of self-pity, a more or less apathetic misery that grew upon her. She returned to the huge bed, sitting on its edge and slumping forward with her eyes again on her boot toe, thinking dully of her predicament. Her mind was not as clear as usual and her will unequal to the task of buoying her up as it had in Buckner's camp. There she had at least had devoted and brave men to lean upon and command. Here she was alone and helpless except for Hogarth—and Hogarth had proved a broken reed, an inflated balloon; a man who lay abed with a scratch allowing a Spanish tabby cat to pur over him!

Just as she felt the smart of tears creeping under her eyelids she heard the door open again and winked them angrily back, rearing her head to outface any who entered. It was the O Donoju who stalked in, his face scowling, and his hands outstretched to uphold a laden tray of food. She felt a surge of indignation at his countenance and a pang of joy at sight of the eatables. Which dominated her she could not guess, and did not try. He kicked a chair into place beside the bed and placed the tray upon it.

"There!" he said with a touch of bitterness. "Go on and eat! And when you're through, shout down the stairs and I'll come and get them."

Without another word he turned and strode out of the room, closing the door behind him with something approaching a slam. Claudia stared after him somewhat bewildered, but the aroma of the food drove out her wonder and she began to eat with a ravenous appetite. As the food disappeared her spirits insensibly rose.

CHAPTER XI.

CLAUDIA'S FAILURE.

WITH the vanishing of the food and her hunger came thought and a consideration of the O Donoju's action. It took the form at first of a slowly rising flush which rapidly gave way to increased anger. She drove contrition away, telling herself that she had no reason to be ashamed because he had so boorishly yielded to her natural determination to eat alone. He had merely tried to put her in the wrong when she knew very well that she was in the right. He had shown her neither courtesy nor consideration and she owed him none in return. Who was this O Donoju, half-breed, murderer and thief, that she should feel ashamed before him? Why—why, he was the man who had killed her father, shot him down without warning, plundered and robbed his daughter, herself!

She lashed herself into a cold fervor of rage and hatred. He! The assassin, sitting here in his carrion bird's nest, with his sweetheart and tool whom he had set on and coached to pluck from her the less precious things her father had left! He! Stalking through his gloomy halls like a ghoul that shunned the light of day! Who was he to vent his crude discourtesy upon her, flinging her her food as he might have flung it to a dog? He himself was the dog; a vicious, cowardly dog who might hold her in his power for the time, but whom she would surely find means yet to punish to the utmost! She had the impulse then to await his return for the dishes and to pistol him as soon as he entered the door. She felt that she could shoot him down without a qualm, as he, no doubt, had shot her father and Hogarth's father. That impulse carried her rapidly to the chair where her clothes had lain and where her jacket still hung. Beneath it she found cartridge belt and revolver hanging, the former half full of unspent shells as it had been when her fight with Buckner's men had ended.

Somehow the fact that the gun was there and had been allowed to remain there untouched damped her ardor like a dash of cold water. It spoke vaguely of supreme contempt and confidence or else——

Or else it indicated a touch of chivalry which the O Donoju could not possibly boast. Failing that, it might be interpreted to mean that he did not regard her as an enemy, which also was unthinkable. He must know that she was his enemy and always would be. She considered this matter and finally shrugged her conclusion that it was merely a silly Latin exhibition of what they called hospitality and the consideration due a guest. It was a gesture, theatrical and meaningless, which must be flourished even though it spelled danger. Very probably he would enter only when he knew that she was not prepared to threaten his safety.

She buckled on the belt and holster nevertheless, with a grim tightening of the lips. Then she looked at the tray and tossed her head. Call for him, indeed! That was likely! Yet if she did not he would, no doubt, find in her neglect to do so an excuse to come stalking in like a gloomy tragedian, to take it away. His waiting on her himself was only another gesture. It was ridiculous to think that a Mexican grandee, as he regarded himself, would have seriously considered his servants.

Claudia picked up the tray and took it out herself, her head held high in case any one was outside. If there had been a servant there she would have shoved the thing at her and ordered her to dispose of it. There was no servant. Unless she was to leave the tray on the floor for some one to take away she must take it herself or call some one. She was a bit curious to see what the other arrangements of this place were and that was enough to decide her course. She picked her way through the now dark hall and to the vast stairway of stone leading down to a dimly lighted ground floor.

The stairway bent around in a curve and led her down into a great, high-ceiled hall, scarcely illuminated by oil lamps stuck in niches, with one on a big unpolished table which formed about the only furniture of the place. The hall had the appearance of a dungeon and was dank and cool. It had great arched spaces at either side opening on rooms and toward the front she could see the huge carved doors, one of which was open. In it, his back against the closed leaf, his sombrero tipped forward over his eyes and a rifle across his knees, sat a peon apparently asleep.

She walked out into the hall, looking to right and left. On one side a room, vast, high-ceiled and gloomy as every room in this place, loomed in fitful dusk broken only by

the light of one oil lamp. It was empty and scantily furnished as the rest.

On the other side was what seemed a dining room, or what was used as a dining room. At least it was lit by several lamps, all of the most ordinary sort, with glass founts and smoky chimneys and without shades. They were placed on a large table as plainly made as a kitchen table but with a top of a single enormous plank of some dark, hard wood, much scratched and battered. A number of diners had eaten there, judging by the rush-bottomed chairs and the remains of the food and dishes. There did not seem to be any one there for the moment, but as she took a step that way a door in the rear opened and Mrs. Bigelow and a Mexican woman entered and gathered up dishes from the table. Claudia immediately stepped in, carrying her tray.

"I have finished my dinner and have brought the things down," she said as Mrs. Bigelow looked up and came toward her to take the tray. The woman nodded and looked obliquely over Claudia's shoulder.

"All right, Miss Murray," she said, "but you could have called and some one would have come after them."

Her look, however, had attracted Claudia's attention, and she swung about. Over in a corner which she had been unable to see from the hall there was a small desk, and before it sat the O Donoju, still booted, his wide hat on the floor at his side. He was looking up from some lists he had been studying. He shoved the papers aside and rose.

"I'm sorry you won't find the best of service here," he said quite composedly. "We've got a rather large number of men to look after and only these two women to do it. But we'll try to make you as comfortable as possible under the circumstances."

She hardly heard what he said, giving it no heed. It was her first full sight of the O Donoju, barring that original meeting when her strength and senses had gone together. Of that she had the vaguest recollection. In the upper rooms he had been in gloom, his face further shaded by the hat he had worn. She had barely looked at him then, giving him as little notice as possible.

Here he stood bareheaded in the light of the oil lamps, which if not the most vivid at least showed him clearly. And he was not Mexican at all—or at least he showed no single Mexican characteristic. She had seen high-caste Mexicans who were as white as herself, but they had always borne some sign of an alien race, either in bearing, in coloring, in manner. This man was fair, blond, far more of a Nordic than herself. He was big and strong and upstanding, with direct gray eyes, firm jaw, straight nose and thin lips. He was tanned a healthy red, not the chocolate brown or olive of the brunet races. And he spoke English with the ease of one to whom it is a native tongue.

A feeling of bewilderment surged over her. This was the O Donoju! But the O Donoju was a Mexican! There must be some error, some substitution, some trick being practiced upon her! Her mind ran the gamut of possibilities and seized with a great upleap of joy on the most plausible. Had some one—some American—in this distracted country driven out or killed the real O Donoju, seizing his place and fame as a bandit, even taking his name? If so, this was not the O Donoju, not the man she must hate and war upon. It was only a man of her own people with whom she might be friends and even allies. She even felt her lips trembling in a smile, a doubtful, hesitant smile, forcing itself breathlessly to the surface.

"Why!" she said, with a catch in her voice. "Why, I thought—I thought I'd fallen into the O Donoju's hands, Mr.——"

The man's lips straightened in a smile, half veiled.

"I'm afraid you have, Miss Murray," he said regretfully. "I'm the O Donoju!"

"But—but you're American!" she protested, her heart sinking.

"No more! I'm the O Donoju of El Nido, and a Mexican citizen. My—family—has been Mexican for more than a hundred years."

Claudia struggled to regain her poise. This was the man she hated and was at feud with. This was the man who had killed her father, and so bitterly persecuted herself. She had to despise him, to fight him, to kill him if she could. She knew that, and a few minutes ago she had been only too willing to do her best at all three. But for a moment she had felt a great wave of relief, had felt the burden of her feud slip from her like a mantle, leaving a feeling of lightness behind. To resume it cost her a

definite effort and when she had dragged over again the veil of hatred, there was a sense of futility left with her, a feeling of weariness and depression.

"I don't understand it," she complained. "You're the O Donoju, whom we have been fighting?"

"I'm afraid so," said the O Donoju politely. "However, under the circumstances, we may at least declare an armistice. I don't offer you hospitality, Miss Murray. It might imply an obligation. We're simply in the same boat and will have to lay aside our enmity for the present in the face of a common danger. Afterward you will be at perfect liberty to forget the whole matter and proceed as before."

And then Claudia shut her eyes and made a desperate effort of the will. She shut her eyes and forced herself to see what she had had no difficulty often enough in visualizing. She saw her father lying wounded to death in the midst of grinning, dark-skinned Mexicans, writhing in his agony while a man looked on him, his smoking pistol in his hand, coldly watching him die. She saw again her father crawling, expending his last strength to write on a scrap of paper, bloodstained: "O Donoju shot me!" She compressed her lips in the effort, her face dead white, lashing herself to what she knew was her duty, to a deed she knew she owed the man whose daughter she was. By sheer will power she forced the blood pumping in her veins, forced the red rage to answer her call upon it, forced her taut nerves to the act. And then, her eyes, inflamed and glittering, her lip showing a drop of blood where her teeth had seized it, she snatched her weapon from its holster and fired it desperately at the man.

It snapped harmlessly, with a slight click. She had not reloaded it since emptying it at Buckner's bandits.

Something snapped within her and she opened her eyes wider, and then, dropping the useless gun, she put her hands over her face and stepped slowly backward, groping for something, she knew not what. Her breath began to strain through her stiffened lips, to well out in great sobs. Her knees struck something and bent and she sat suddenly in a chair. There was a table there at her side and her head sank on it in her arms.

The O Donoju said nothing. But he must have moved, though she did not hear him. She felt his presence close to her and then she was aware of something sliding gently to her finger tips on the table. But she had no interest in it. About the only interest she had in anything was to creep away and lock herself in her room and go to bed.

After a time she did just this. She raised her head, keeping her reddened eyes bent studiously downward to the table, intending to rise and creep away if she should be allowed to do so. But there at her hand was her pistol, put there, she knew, by the O Donoju. She stared at it with a little shudder and then quickly looked around. The O Donoju tactfully had vanished.

Claudia laughed bitterly and scornfully—at herself. She tossed the empty and useless pistol down again and turned away. She walked through the hall, where the sentinel still slumbered at his post, and crept up the stairs. She held to the broad stone balustrade and dragged herself a little. She felt that there was nothing in the world that could ever arouse her again from the apathy that had settled over her.

However, she was mistaken. She had reached the curve of the stairway and was rounding it when there came a crashing thunder of sound and a rocking of the foundations under her feet. She felt a concussion of the air that almost threw her down, and heard a rattling discharge of something like hail about her. The man sleeping at the door leaped upright like a jack-in-the-box, yelling curses and appeals to the saints, about equally mixed.

The Mexican woman she had seen several times and Mrs. Bigelow rushed out into the hall and stood there looking about. A Mexican in a bullion-hung sombrero, high boots and clanging spurs, armed with a revolver, dashed through and to the rear opening on the patio or garden. He looked out and shouted to other men outside. The O Donoju strode from some spot and gave curt orders.

"Nothing to alarm you!" he said to the women. "They've got a gun up by taking advantage of the darkness. That shell didn't hit anything but the cliff over the house!"

Claudia did not feel reassured, though the other women, with many glances behind them, went back whence they came. But she could not again face the O Donoju, and resumed her progress to her room. He

turned away and left the place by the rear, apparently to investigate more closely what had happened.

CHAPTER XII.

"EVEN IF YOU ARE—A MURDERER!"

THE O Donoju joined his lieutenant, Gregorio, in the patio, and examined the damage that had been done. It was not extensive, as he had intimated. A shell had struck the cliff above one of the lateral wings of his forbidding retreat and had scattered fragments of rock and shell over a considerable area. No one appeared to have been hurt at all, but there was on the ground evidence that some part of the roof had suffered. Pieces of broken tile lay there on the ground, visible in the lantern light by which they made their investigation, but it was too dark to measure the extent of the damage. The O Donoju seemed distrait and absent-minded as he took in the scene, his attention only half upon the event. The flamboyant Gregorio, his mustaches twisted into a martial set, eyed him askance.

"This is bad, señor," he commented. "It is the work of the devil."

"Yes," said the O Donoju, absently. "The devil, no doubt—or one of his chief lieutenants." He shook himself together and shrugged slightly. "But what is this of the devil, amigo? To the favored of God, the devil is a trifle!"

He turned back to the house and Gregorio followed, shaking his head.

"Aye, to the favored of God, señor," he commented doubtfully. "There was a time when the señor was poor and God favored him. But when I reflect that the señor is no longer poor——"

"Poor enough," said O Donoju, shortly.

"It may be," went on Gregorio without noting the remark, "that God, having prospered us to a degree, has lost interest and surrendered his guardianship to the devil. And every one knows what payment the devil renders his own."

The O Donoju listened idly, giving him scant attention. "Your deity is fickle, Gregorio," he commented.

"Not so, señor. For God loves the poor and the devil aids the rich. When we were poor we had aid from God and despite the devil we prospered. You became the O Donoju, your enemies were overthrown, you achieved your ambition. But there came a time when the favor of God grew to the point of making you rich. Now God despises the rich and gives them no aid. Having, through obtaining wealth from El Tesoro and elsewhere, become one of the devil's favorites, how can you count longer on the grace of God? I am an ignorant man, but to me the matter seems plain enough."

"That God's favor has gone over to Colonel Buckner?" asked the O Donoju.

"Who am I to say what instruments God may use? It may even be so, though I would rather believe that God has merely withdrawn his countenance and left you and the colonel to the devil. It appears certain to me, at any rate, that luck has deserted us."

The O Donoju strode into the house and to his desk in the room where Claudia had encountered him. He took up the sheaf of papers and glanced at them.

"So! Then you believe that our luck has changed?"

"It is evident. For many months all went well. We lived and prospered in a modest way, señor, with lands and cattle and enough to eat and drink. We had faithful men with arms to defend ourselves. The señor governed as the O Donojus had always governed, protecting all from both Don Francisco's men and those of Huerta. God had avenged you on your enemy. He had raised up the señorita to confound the Mees Murray and to take from her all her wealth. But then the señor gained possession of El Tesoro Mine, with much wealth, and there the devil enters. Had he gained it by his own strength and that of God there might be some doubt, but he was given it by Don Francisco's courts and every one knows that courts are the very instruments of the devil. Furthermore, with the señorita came great wealth, and it is obvious that God has no interest in the wealthy, as I have often said."

"Oh, stop your croaking and metaphysics!" said the O Donoju impatiently. "You harp on one idea to extinction. Change the record and play another tune, for the love of Heaven!"

"But señor, it is the devil plays the tune, not I! Has he not been making music loudly? Who but the devil sends the señorita here again to tempt the señor and make love to him——"

"What?" cried the O Donoju angrily. "What the devil put that into your head?

You'll think the devil is active if you go on talking that way!"

"Nevertheless," said the unabashed Gregorio, "it is as I have said. I don't need the devil's assistance to see what goes on between you and the señorita—and the señorita is a child of the devil if ever there was one, beside being a Murray. All the Murrays are close kin to the fiend. One devil brings another, so we have the señorita returning when you sent her away and with her comes another in the shape of this Mees Murray and the Señor Hogarth, who is of the same breed as his father was before him. Furthermore, behind them comes this arch devil of them all with two hundred subdevils in the shape of Yaqui Indians and guns which he surely got from the devil."

The O Donoju swung about on him. "Get out of here!" he roared. "You and your devils! Get out and if I catch you spreading notions of that sort about I'll hang your hide on a door. Afraid of a pair of rusty old guns because they make a loud noise and chip a few splinters off the rocks! Take your cowardly carcass out of my sight!"

Gregorio turned his hat in his hand and sidled toward the door, wearing an injured expression.

"The señor wrongs me," he said complainingly. "It is not fear of guns I feel. I fear women and devils, not guns. And the devil is in these women, as you will find."

The O Donoju glared until he vanished, which he did at once. But the last words had struck home a little. There was some truth in them. These women had certainly brought a devilish and disturbing influence into the place. It might be because they were both Murrays. That, however, did not entirely explain matters to his satisfaction. It did not explain, for example, why the señorita had tempted him during a moment's weakness. That weakness, he recognized, was effervescent and would not return. He did not know why he knew this, but it was certain that he did know it. He could recall the señorita's beauty and fervor with entire calm now. They did not move him in the least. The problem she now presented was not complicated by that factor. She was simply a nuisance and in the way. She did not fit in well with sieges and desperate adventure.

But the other Murray woman's presence was disturbing to a greater degree. True, she also was in the way, but much more insistently than the señorita. She fitted in entirely too well. She was the very epitome of adventure and turmoil and she brought a full share of them into his hitherto rather monotonous existence. Also, she reacted upon him in ways that were disturbing. She should have aroused no sentiment but that of dislike, as of an enemy known and avowed. Certainly she made no call on him for chivalry and consideration other than was commanded by her situation. He must, of course, being a man, give her shelter and protection for the time being, but that was all. He had only to get rid of her as soon as he could and forget her. Only, he had his doubts that he could forget her so easily.

He made a pretense of studying his lists, important and disquieting enough in themselves to keep his attention. But insensibly he found himself trying to analyze his sensations and finding it difficult. He went back to the time when this supercilious and haughty damsel had roused in him an almost bloodthirsty rage. It had persisted enough to cause him to find the Señorita Mercedes—or to pay lawyers and agents to find her—to finance her through her litigation for the Murray estate and to take a sort of satisfaction in her final victory. Or, no, he had not taken much satisfaction in that! Come to think of it, the victory had left him singularly cold. It had even been received with a feeling of depression and a sense of disappointment. He had felt vague shame, as at having done something unmanly. Yet he had only seen to it that a wronged girl had gotten her just deserts. He concluded that the shame had arisen because his motive had not been disinterested. He had not actually cared a bit whether the señorita was wronged or whether she had any rights in the premises. He had wished to bring low the insolent representative of the house of Murray.

He had done that to an extent and it did not thrill him at all. He found that his former emotion against Claudia had evaporated into thin air, had almost been forgotten, indeed. Looking back on the episode that had aroused it, he had difficulty in visualizing it, and when he did he was inclined to wonder that it had ever had its importance in his sight. It seemed rather trivial now.

Then the señorita had made love to him,

which might have been expected. The señorita made love to any male as naturally as she breathed or ate. But it was not to be expected that he should have found himself moved by her attempts, yielding to her blandishments like any silly boy. It was also somewhat mysterious that he had so suddenly gotten over that foolishness. The recollection of it still was vivid. He had felt so much alone, so friendless, so aloof from all companionship, and he had been so discouraged with the failure of his plots to satisfy him that he had been easy prey. That was certain. But he still felt all those things even in added degree and yet he could not now even consider reaction to the señorita's passion. That was what puzzled him. Why had the señorita so suddenly ceased to move him?

That thought brought up further disquieting reflections. Why, on the other hand, had the advent of this other Murray, whom he had hated, first occasioned him a rather full feeling of satisfaction in that he had been able to serve her? He certainly had felt satisfaction when he had snatched her from Buckner's grasp and it was not satisfaction at foiling Buckner, either. Logically, he should have been glad to see her in Buckner's clutches. Instead, he was glad to snatch her out of them.

Then there was the dinner episode. It amounted to little, but it was suggestive of more. She had acted with just the sort of supercilious lordliness he might have expected in refusing to eat with his aids. Yet he didn't blame her, although it was true that Mrs. Bigelow and the Mexican woman had all they could do. He made allowances for her. When she refused to join them—and he had absented himself from the meal so that she should not be embarrassed by his presence—he had tried to be angry, to let her go hungry, only to yield and carry her food to her himself. Why?

Lastly, she had deliberately and without provocation tried to shoot him. He ought to have been indignant at that. But instead her failure acted upon him most peculiarly. He had been sorry for her. Her gesture had been so magnificently dramatic, her courage and the will she had shown had been so steel true, that her rather ridiculous failure had come as a shock. It had overwhelmed her, sent her sobbing and unnerved to hide her head. And it had made the O Donoju almost ache with sympathy for her. That was why he had shoved the empty pistol into her hand and had sneaked out of the room.

The O Donoju gave it up and sighed and went back to his lists. He did not see them very clearly, though he saw the white, strained face of Claudia Murray interposed in front of them. The O Donoju began to think that he was losing his mind. The daughter of Bob Murray ought to be pitying *him:* not he her!

At this moment he became cognizant of the fact that some one had entered the room, and he looked up. It was the daughter of Bob Murray, and her face was white and still, with long, low-lidded, sleepy eyes as usual.

"Why—what's the matter?" the O Donoju found himself making the inquiry with half-startled anxiety.

"I didn't know you were here," said Claudia, tiredly. "I went upstairs—but the room was almost a wreck. There's plaster all over it—in the bed and everywhere. So I came down—to find Mrs. Bigelow."

The O Donoju rose solicitously. "Why, that's all right! I'm very sorry. Must have been the shell, but there is no danger, I think. Shall I call——"

"Yes. But wait a moment! I didn't expect to see you here. But since you are—I want to say that—my outbreak was silly, and I'm sorry for it. Even if you are—a murderer!"

"Even if I'm a *what?*"

The O Donoju almost shouted the question, and Claudia's eyes opened momentarily, disclosing the fact that they were, in spite of some redness, cool and clear and gray where one would have expected them to be dark and slumberous, in keeping with her countenance. Her nerves had been subjected to a strain and she was startled out of her usual composure.

"Why, you killed my father, you know!" she explained, hastily, with some sort of dim notion that she had to excuse her epithet.

The O Donoju came close to her, staring at her with a most peculiar intensity. "I killed your father, did I?" he said.

"Yes, you did," declared Claudia defensively.

The O Donoju continued to stare at her and she was aware that he was angry. A moment ago she had expected anything but anger from him. Scorn, perhaps; contemp-

tuous triumph maybe, but not anger. The fact that he was mad clear through pleased her. It made her almost joyful.

"Humph!" growled the O Donoju, half turning away and then quickly glanced back at her as though to make sure that she meant what she said. "So that's it? I killed your father!"

Claudia had a sudden shocking conviction that she was not only glad he had been made angry but that her joy went deeper, being founded on her lightning inspiration that the reason he was angry was because he had *not* killed her father. Which was absurd, of course. Nevertheless, she undoubtedly was caught up in a confused whirl of emotions in which there was no rhyme nor reason. He had killed her father, and she was glad that he was angry at being accused of killing her father, because that anger showed her he had *not* killed her father! It was all preposterous enough. She wondered if, in a moment, she would be glad that he *had* killed her father.

"Well," said the O Donoju, with emphasis, "if you think I'm going to get down on my knees and grovel for forgiveness for killing your parent, you're mistaken. I make no excuse for anything I may have done."

Claudia's confusion extended to a desire to laugh. Excuse the killing of her father! *Excuse* it! Somewhat bewildered, she sat down and the O Donoju stalked out of the room. He seemed to be always stalking either in or out of her presence. Melodramatics! She was lost in them, overwhelmed by them. The whole affair was taking on an atmosphere of unreality, like a stage play with actors ranting through preconstructed situations. The tenseness rang false.

And then came another crash, another concussion of the air, another rattling shower of fragments and another chorus of yelps and blessings and curses from impulsive Mexican lungs. She jumped in her chair with an impulse to shrink and cower. While she was overcoming it came the roar and shock of another explosion, seemingly almost at her side and then shouts in Spanish.

"Bravo, señor!"

An irritated American voice echoed them.

"I'll give them hombres hell!" it announced.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. BIGELOW TALKS.

THE O Donoju came back calmly enough. Claudia anxiously searched his face for an answer to her surmises.

"There's a little battle on," he said. "Nothing to worry about."

Still, he did not seem entirely unworried, though he was certainly not unduly alarmed. Claudia felt that the situation was a bit more serious than he made out to her. She knew that men from the wings and the patio were gathering outside in the court before El Nido. She heard another crash, not quite so near, answered almost at once by Bigelow's gun. Bigelow could be heard through the front door and though his voice was slurred by distance she was perfectly aware that he was swearing in true military fashion.

The O Donoju went to the rear, not to get out of danger but to see to the hastening from the storerooms of shells for the gun. She heard him barking orders to his men and presently a string of them began to run back and forth from the cave at the rear, bearing the brass cases in their arms. She got up and followed them to the door, looking out on the terrace where Bigelow and several men were hustling about the gun. It was half buried in a pit cut in the rock and had a sort of parapet in front of it. Even as she looked on they swung open the breech, shoved in a shell, stood back while Bigelow made a hasty adjustment, and then the piece crashed out its defiance. Breathlessly she watched, attempting to follow the course of the shot. In a few seconds she saw it burst, quite a distance from where she thought it was directed.

With her eyes on that spot and her ears strained for the faint detonation of the explosion, she barely noted a flicker of light to one side of the spot in the void she was watching. But in a moment she heard a screaming and a terrible, shattering crash. She was struck and hurled to the ground while the world lit up in a brilliant blaze. Some one rushed out over her, shouting to others out there who were crying out in answer. But those shouts were mingled with groans, and a single whimpering cry.

She was wondering dully where she had been hit and how badly when she was snatched up from the ground and hurried inside the house. She opened her eyes to

see the O Donoju holding her for an instant before he dumped her into a chair. Some one was screaming in the hall and she heard him shout out.

"For God's sake make that woman shut up! You there! Gag her, will you!"

Instead, the screams rose more shrilly and Claudia, sure now that she was not hurt, looked out to see the señorita rush forward and cling to the O Donoju. She was in a somewhat disheveled condition, her black hair disordered and falling about her shoulders. She threw her arms—and very shapely arms they were—about the O Donoju, and moaned!

"*Ah, mi caro!* Save me!"

The O Donoju presented no picture of chivalry succoring the distressed maiden at that moment. He was angry and volubly angry. He said something that sounded like a curse, ripped the señorita's arms from his neck and spun her around and into the arms of Hogarth, who was standing in the door looking on rather uncertainly. The señorita managed somehow to subside into them with gracefulness, and to cling there.

"All of you! Get back to the rear!" roared the O Donoju. He waved them violently toward the patio. Outside continued agitated noises and breathless swearing. Another shell banged somewhere against the building. It roused Claudia from her half-stupefied condition. The Mexican woman and Señorita Mercedes were plainly out of control and Mrs. Bigelow was unequal, alone, to the task of handling them.

Claudia leaped up and ran forward. "I'll help," she said, and the O Donoju grunted a commendation. He had turned and was off before she had heard it, diving through the gaping door to the terrace in front. Claudia seized upon the señorita and began to urge her to the rear, but Mercedes clung to Hogarth stubbornly.

"That's all right!" said Hogarth rather awkwardly. "I'll look after her well enough, Claudia!"

Claudia let him do it and ran to help Mrs. Bigelow drag the Mexican woman away and to the rear. The woman had a notion that some one had been killed, and that it was her husband, and she was determined to rush out and see for herself. They assured her that her husband was entirely safe, though they knew nothing about it, and finally got her through the hall and out into the patio almost by main strength. Hogarth half carried the shrinking, fainting señorita after them.

Claudia sat down on the crumbling edge of a stone fountain. She was trembling a little and still wondered why she could feel no pain from the blow that had knocked her down. She began to investigate but was obliged finally to admit that it must have been merely concussion, as there was not a thing the matter with her. She was even a bit exhilarated and excited as the shells continued to crash out there somewhere. But she heard no more roars of the gun being fired on the terrace.

The señorita stilled her pathetic sighs gradually and found strength to raise herself languidly from Hogarth's still protecting breast. She hung to him, but she no longer lay there relaxed.

"Ah, señor!" she breathed tremulously, "what you must think of me! But you are so strong—so brave!"

Claudia had a fleeting impulse to laugh. She did not blame Hogarth, but she could not quite follow the Señorita Mercedes' praise. And Hogarth, in the dim light, looked rather ridiculous trying to assume an air in keeping with the flattery. He should, of course, have been heading for the front to join in the defense, but there were obstacles in the way. Mercedes clung too closely, for one thing, and uttered protests against any effort to move. Mrs. Bigelow sniffed audibly.

"If she ain't a flabby piece of dough I never saw one," she remarked contemptuously. "Call *her* a Murray!"

There was so much doubt in her emphasis that Claudia felt a stir of interest. For a time no more firing occurred and things were quieting down. All the available men had vanished to the front and the women were alone with Hogarth, who sat with the señorita at some distance. The Mexican woman was too busy praying to count for anything.

"Mrs. Bigelow," she asked hurriedly and in a low voice, "*is* she a Murray? I don't think you're an enemy to me and I want an answer! *Is* she a Murray?"

Mrs. Bigelow looked at her in surprise. "Why, land love you!" she exclaimed. "Of course I ain't your enemy. You ain't to blame for your pa's goings on and I've always said as much. You never set them cow-punchers on to lynch Harve, so why'd I be your enemy?"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Claudia. "What cow-punchers and who did they lynch?"

"They didn't lynch nobody," said Mrs. Bigelow, with another prolonged look. "They tried to. Didn't you know they tried to fasten his killin' on my husband and come to lynch him? He rode it out over the border about two jumps ahead of them and come here to the O Donoju. Left the ranch and everything, though Lord knows your pa hadn't left him enough of a ranch to amount to anything."

"I never knew anything about it," said Claudia, "except that a shiftless rancher in the Parajitos had been trailed from near where my father had been killed. He evidently had been running guns into Mexico, and as my father was killed when he helped intercept them there was talk that this man had been implicated. But he had gone when they went after him."

"You don't know no more than a baby," said Mrs. Bigelow, with a short laugh that harbored bitterness, "especially about your pa."

Claudia flushed. She did know about her father. At least she had heard enough, from Merriam and from testimony given in court during the long-drawn litigation, to conclude that he had not been exactly a saint. But his feuds and oppressions had been glossed over. She understood that he had been a hard man, one who had fought others and had made enemies. Perhaps he had not always been an admirable character. But she had owed him the duty of believing the best of him and she had had little difficulty in doing it.

"I know enough about him to refuse to hear him traduced!" she exclaimed indignantly. Mrs. Bigelow shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, that ought to settle it," she said sarcastically.

It did not. Claudia felt that her father needed further defense.

"I'm not so ignorant, either," she declared. "I've heard about the feud with the O Donojus. I know that my father's brother, Sam, was killed by Luis O Donoju and why he was killed. Maybe there was some excuse for that. But my father never did anything to the O Donoju and yet he killed him! Besides, what business was it of the O Donoju to mix in a Murray family matter and bring out this alleged daughter of Sam Murray to claim her inheritance? It was wanton, vindictive hatred and I can't make anything else out of it."

Mrs. Bigelow rose from her seat and made as though to move away. But she fired a parting shot.

"You know a lot and you know it all wrong," she said. "For instance, that 'shiftless rancher' was my husband, Harvey Bigelow, and he was as hard-workin' and steady a man as ever saw Arizona. He had a nice ranch and a tidy bunch of cows, enough to annoy your pa, who didn't like to see nobody but himself get along in life. He mavericked Harve's calves, he run him off his water, he drove him from all the good range. He cheated him on beef sales and he didn't allow him any chance at all to make a living. Yet Harve never raised a hand against him.

"Harve never ran any guns and never had anything to do with running any. But your pa, and the customs rider, Hogarth, that he had working for him, were running them right along. One of the things you don't know is that it was your pa and Hogarth who ran those guns when he was killed. And one of the things your pa didn't know was that the agent he was running them to was the O Donoju. He found it out just after the guns had been delivered over the line and then he tried to kill the O Donoju. He found out what your uncle had found out before him—that the O Donoju took some killing. The O Donoju got him—and your pa, with Hogarth, got the O Donoju. That's the straight of it and it will maybe set you right about a bit of history, ma'am!"

She was marching away, but Claudia jumped up and grasped her arm. "Wait a moment!" she said. "You've said some things I don't understand. They aren't true. My father running guns! And with the O Donoju! That's ridiculous!"

"It's a fact just the same," declared Mrs. Bigelow. Once started her reticence had yielded to the feminine impulse to talk. "And it isn't ridiculous. Every one on the border knows your pa was running guns."

Claudia felt a slow conviction growing within her. It was true. She never had acknowledged that she held suspicions before, but she had. The course of events had raised them. There had been remarks which when coupled with the rather obvious efforts made to cover up some of her father's activities had made suspicion certain.

For example, the utter failure of the government to act in her father's defense had been enlightening. Then, during the litigation, accusations had been made which, though ruled out by the court as irrelevant, had left their sting and had gone uncontradicted. But running guns with the O Donoju! That was a bit too thick.

"And I didn't say he knew he was actin' with the O Donoju," went on Mrs. Bigelow. "He didn't. The O Donoju was Madero's agent and he wasn't using his own name. He called himself Salvador, I think."

Claudia almost screamed. "Why! That's not true! I knew Salvador. At least I saw him once. And he looked about as much like the O Donoju as I look like an Eskimo!"

"Oh, did he? Much you know about it. He *was* the O Donoju, I tell you. Salvador was Don Luis O Donoju, the man who killed your Uncle Sam. Your pa didn't know it and Don Luis didn't let on. He wasn't looking for trouble and he hadn't any feud with your pa, though your pa had one with him. And your pa found it out there on the border and being bullheaded like he was he went for his gun. And Don Luis gave him the first shot and took him into camp and Hogarth shot Don Luis and then some one killed Hogarth. There, Miss Know-so-much, is something for you to chew on if you've a mind to."

Claudia was in a whirl of confusion out of which only one statement forced itself clearly.

"Hogarth shot the O Donoju! And killed him?"

It was a cry of incredulity.

"You're dead right he did! Leastwise, he got him so bad he died here in El Nido just a few days later. I was here and I ought to know."

"But," cried Claudia desperately, "who is the O Donoju now? Why, do you mean that this has all been a horrible masquerade? Who *is* the O Donoju?"

Mrs. Bigelow regained a tardy reticence.

"There you've got me," she said shortly. "Better ask *him*. All I know is that he fell heir to the O Donoju and took up the fight against you Murrays."

"I'm the only Murray left," said Claudia feebly. "He took up the fight against me, then?"

Mrs. Bigelow did not answer that. After a moment's thought Claudia spoke again.

"What had I done to him?" she asked. "Why should he persecute me?"

"I don't know that either," said Mrs. Bigelow. "Harve and me never had any grudge against you and we didn't never see why the O Donoju should have. But that's his lookout. Ask him!"

Quiet had descended upon the place. Hogarth was whispering with the señorita and the Mexican woman had ceased to pray. Mrs. Bigelow observed lights and movement inside the house and moved away to lend a hand if it should be needed. Claudia sat alone as the Mexican woman crept after her.

Ask the O Donoju! Aye, she had much to ask him!

CHAPTER XIV.

HOGARTH IS ROUSED.

FIRST however it occurred to Claudia that there was another who might answer a question. That was the señorita. The O Donoju had persecuted her and the señorita had been his tool. She would know something and she could be made to talk by one means or another. Claudia had not observed the señorita for nothing and she had no doubt of her ability to handle her. She rose and walked hastily over to the spot where Hogarth and Mercedes cooed to each other.

"I apologize for interrupting you, Steve," she said ironically. "But I wish to ask the señorita something. One moment, if you please!"

She spoke with the old voice of command and the señorita looked up a bit uneasily, though defiant.

"You ask me som't'ing, Mees Murray?" she demurred, seeking English instinctively, though Claudia understood and spoke border Spanish better than Mercedes spoke English.

"Yes, I do, and I want an answer!" Claudia declared. "I want to know how you and the O Donoju come to be mixed up together!"

Hogarth sensed something embarrassing and broke in.

"Look here, Claudia, you'd better leave that alone, hadn't you?" he said.

"No, I hadn't. I want to know and I'm going to know. This woman has set herself up as being my cousin and she's had the backing of the O Donoju in her claim. She's succeeded up to now in making her case.

But I know that she and the O Donoju have been engaged in a plot together and I'm convinced that she's no more a Murray than you are. Where did the O Donoju find you? In some slum dive behind a bar, as is likely?"

"Claudia!" shouted Hogarth indignantly.

But Claudia was proceeding deliberately, aware that Mercedes had a temper and striving to arouse it beyond the point of caution. She did. The señorita sprang to her feet with blazing eyes and the two faced each other in the dusk, with Hogarth striving to quiet them.

"Ha!" screamed the señorita. "You! To say this to me! And who are you, daughter of a thief who was a son of a thief? Niece of a rascal and coward who drove his wife to death! So, so! I am a fraud and a cheat, am I? But the judge of your courts does not say so! So spit like the cat you are and observe that I laugh at you! It is too late, Mees Murray! Scratch and meow as you please and I will only laugh! Yes, girl of the dance halls, if you please, accomplice of the O Donoju in cheating you and wresting away your wealth—I laugh at you! For you cannot change what your courts have done!"

She talked of laughter but there was none in her attitude or voice. She was spitting and tearing like the cat she had called Claudia, with all sense of caution gone, and Claudia, frozen to immobility, listened and shuddered underneath.

"We have cheated you!" she cried. "The O Donoju has cheated you! *He* produced the proofs and found me where you say, Mees Murray, and with those proofs your wise judge was fooled. Ha! You shall know more. For when the bandits caught me I was on my way again to Tucson, to sell and convert what we had gained into money, to bring it to the O Donoju and with him to go away! And why not? It is mine, given to me by the great Americano judge."

Hogarth it was who cried out now in protest. The revelation came to him as a shock that far surpassed any that Claudia felt. The latter had half expected it. But she had not expected to be left frozen and numb by it as she was. She turned away from the blazing señorita, who was more lovely than ever in her unrestrained rage, and made her way slowly to the house.

Hogarth hesitated, utterly upset, angry himself though where to place his anger he did not yet know. Chiefly at the O Donoju, to be sure. Manlike, he blamed the other man. The woman had been tempted, led astray, of course, worked upon in her poverty by an unscrupulous man.

He was working himself into a blind rage to match the señorita's when the girl, suddenly recalled to what she had said, gasped and seized him by the arm.

"Señor, it was not true!" she declared fervently. "It was not true. I lied to hurt her, that is all! It was not true!"

Hogarth put her away with a growl.

"I'll settle with the scoundrel!" he declared, attempting to stride in search of the O Donoju. Mercedes flung herself upon him and clung to him.

"I lied, I tell you!" she screamed. "I lied, Señor Stephen. I do *not* love the O Donoju!"

"You're lying now to save him!" said Steve bitterly. He clutched at his belt where the revolver lay in its holster, drew the gun and swung the cylinder out to make sure that it was loaded. Though less used to firearms than she, he did not make the mistake Claudia had made. He meant business and something of his father's cold hardihood came to his aid at this crisis. Mercedes cried out and snatched at his hand to grasp the gun. Claudia, hearing the scuffle of their wrestling, turned around and looked dully on. More melodrama! More heroics! She was utterly wearied and disgusted with it all. It was all at bottom so despicably ugly!

Hogarth, manlike, struggled and found the struggle undignified. Dignity never troubled the señorita. She was a child of nature and knew not the meaning of the word. But to wrestle with a woman humiliated Hogarth, while at the same time, her arms clinging to him, the sense of close contact insensibly drew him from his obsession with another man. Her protests began to gather weight and to make themselves heard. He made out that she was swearing by a dozen saints that it was not O Donoju that she loved; that it was himself. He should not endanger himself by rushing on the O Donoju's gun. He was a terrible man; a heartless beast; a cold fish whom no woman could care for. She had never known a real man until she encountered Hogarth. She would die if anything happened to him—and who would protect her

in all the peril through which she walked? Hogarth did not reflect on the inconsistency of this. Inconsistency was another thing that meant nothing to Mercedes. He was only growing aware of the fact that her lithe, soft body was clinging to him, that her arms were binding him, that her eyes were swimming in tears and that her tragic face was extremely appealing. The O Donoju receded into the background and Hogarth found himself somehow assuming the rôle of comforter and protector and consoler of this Niobe.

Claudia saw enough to convince her that Hogarth was lost to her also. Fool! Even such a confession could not open his besotted eyes! She wondered dizzily at men and their stupidity. There were only two sorts and it was a question which was the worse. They were either of the stamp of Buckner and of the O Donoju—evil to the core—or they were like Hogarth, putty, soft in fiber and brain. Despicable or contemptible! There was no medium.

She was unutterably tired, yet she had no desire to rest. Every inch of her body was crawlingly sensitive, every nerve jumping despite her outward lassitude. She crept into the house and to the dining room where lamps still burned. She felt that she must have light, that she could not remain in the dark. The room was littered with rubble of stucco and plaster brought down by one of the shells that had raked the place. She sat on a chair amidst it and it seemed to match the wreck of all her ordered illusions. Through the hall and the door she could hear the distant, subdued murmur of the voices of men lying out there to guard against attack. But all that world outside was unreality. She had no further concern with it. It was made up of men, and men were brute beasts or idiots.

The capable Mrs. Bigelow bustled in and looked at her.

"For the land's sake why don't you go to bed, child?" she asked with some contrition. Claudia did not look at her.

"I don't feel like it," she said. It seemed inadequate, but she had the instinct of concealment.

"What's got into you? You look like a ghost. There isn't going to be any more fighting to-night, most likely."

"Fighting! I wish there were!" said Claudia bitterly. Mrs. Bigelow shook her head and then departed, since she could not do anything and was wise enough to know that her ministrations were not wanted. Claudia sat and stared at her boot toe, as had become almost a habit. She mulled dully over the entire prospect, going over and over it again and again. It was all very obvious, yet for some reason she continually sought for some loophole, some flaw in the structure which would weaken the conviction she had. The O Donoju had not killed her father. But she would rather he had than that he should have done what he actually had done.

Wearier and wearier she grew, with no thought of sleep. Yet sleep came to her at last, creeping on her unawares. And as she dozed off with her head on the littered table, that weak link in the chain for which she had so persistently groped became clearer and clearer until, as she fell fast asleep, it hovered there before her eyes and remained with her in her dreams. Yet it was no more than the face of the O Donoju as he stood gravely before her mind's eye, with his strong, honest features gravely considerate of her and his steady eyes searching her own half-veiled orbs. She fell asleep with that vision before her eyes and it comforted her and soothed her nerves.

When she awoke she found herself on a couch, old and musty and worn as was everything about the place. It was not in her own room, but in the huge drawing-room across from the dining room. She lay there, comfortably disposed, and there was a blanket wrapped about her. She had no recollection of having been moved, but she knew quite naturally and completely that the O Donoju had come upon her and had gathered her up and carried her here. She lay thinking back over the events of the night before and pretty soon she shook her head and smiled with a little curling of the lip. She knew! Just what she knew and how she knew it did not make any difference. She was no more logical than others of her set. Instinct served her where reason failed. And instinct told her that there was too much melodrama for it to ring true. There were too many plots and counter-plots, too much villainy and of a quality too complicated. She could believe in the villainy of Colonel Buckner because there was nothing very complicated about that. It was just plain, obvious villainy, direct and simple. But the villainy of the señorita's description was fraudulent. The

O Donoju's face was a complete refutation of it.

And over and above it all the fact that had seemed so unimportant last night loomed up with enormous significance this morning. The O Donoju—or *this* O Donoju at least—had not killed her father! She reflected comfortably on that fact and found to her surprise that she was almost inclined to make allowances for the O Donoju who *had* killed him. You see, *that* O Donoju also had been killed, dying in a fair fight, she supposed. She was willing to call it quits and to harbor no malice. After all, she had known her father for a violent man, a very hard man to love as she had conscientiously tried to love him.

There did remain, however, an element of mystery. The O Donoju was not a villain, yet he *had* persecuted her vindictively and he *might* have perpetrated a fraud in the doing of it. Why? It could only be because he hated her, and if he hated her he must have had cause to do so. What cause? To the best of her knowledge she had never seen him in her life until she faced him in the flight from Buckner. Yet she must have done something to him because he was not the man to nurse hatred unless he had cause.

Claudia, whether acting through reason or instinct, was a direct person. Instinct and reason alike told her the same thing. If there was a misunderstanding here, or a mystery, it must be cleared up, and the only way to clear it up was to go straight to the O Donoju with it and get him to clear it up for her. This she determined to do and she smiled as she came to this conclusion.

Mrs. Bigelow entered hard upon the smile and looked her approval. Although disheveled and none too neat in appearance, Claudia looked better than she had at any time before this. Her skin, always so white even when it should have been tanned, always transparently clear, was now lovelier with the faintest tinge of rose. Her long, sleepy eyes gave the exotic long oval of her face an aspect of tantalizing mystery, of something withheld, and the faint smile hinted that the something that lay behind the mask was as pleasant and lovely as what was on the surface. Singularly enough, when she was pale and serious she seemed to hide passion and fire and smoldering flames. When the rose crept in and the smile came the hidden things seemed cool and sweet and restful.

"Land alive!" said Mrs. Bigelow admiringly, "you sure look like a half-open moss rose this mornin'." And Mrs. Bigelow had no idea of being poetical, either. "You've cheered up some?"

"Quite a bit, thank you," said Claudia demurely. "How's the Señorita Mercedes?" And she laughed a little. The señorita amused her at this moment.

"Blah!" said Mrs. Bigelow, inelegantly. "That cat! Lord love a duck! But with all the trials that come natural to a body why she has to pester around here and horn in where she ain't wanted does beat time! Talk about your bad pennies! Why, the O Donoju almost threw her out bodily the other day when she came rampaging around, hanging about him and wanting him to pick up stakes and beat it somewheres. Not"—she added with a sly look sidewise at Claudia—"that she ain't got her ways of appealing to men and the O Donoju's a man and gifted with foolishness like other men. I reckon maybe, what with moldering and mooning up in this hole, she may have stirred him some, but he got bravely over it when Gregorio came rampaging in with news that there was action on foot. *Then,* I tell you, there was something doing!"

She stopped with unction and asked abruptly: "You'll be wantin' something to eat, I reckon. What'll it be? Beans with chili or beans without? Outside of that and flapjacks and beef there isn't much to offer."

"Anything at all," said Claudia. "I'll help you get it. But what happened when action commenced?"

"Oh, nothing much. Gregorio had been scouting your place. The O Donoju has notions that a way, you know, though I always says it's plumb idiotic for a man like him to be pestering around a girl like you. Well, that Mexican comes flapping in with his bullion hat and his spurs a yard long announcing that you'd gathered your host and was tearing this way to join up with that scoundrelly bandit Buckner and aiming to tear El Nido loose from the cliff. The O Donoju gives one whoop of joy and slings the señorita away from where she was doing her cling-stone act, hustles her out and into a buckboard and throws her duds after her, telling her to pull her freight for the railroad. And off she goes, spitting

Spanish cuss words and blue fire and promising him she'd come back and cut his heart and liver right out of his carcass. I sure thought we'd got rid of her and maybe I wasn't relieved! Why, to show you how far her folly carries her, when she comes here fawning around the O Donoju and he turns a cold shoulder on her she ups and accuses me—*me,* mind you—of entangling his fickle affections. And my Harve right here ready to make war medicine if I ever looked at a man! Ain't it the limit?"

Claudia was joyously convinced that it was.

"And she got caught and came back!" she prompted.

"Sure. Suppose we could git rid of her that easy? Not in a year! Gets taken in by Buckner and then you-all pull her out with you when you come. The O Donoju has set out to scout those Yaquis and he runs into you. When she gets here she sets to working on him again, sighing and mooning and letting on to be in a regular state of mind needin' masculine comfort. The O Donoju's some peevish and tells her to get to the bad place out of here and go to work where she may be useful. But he don't let her help you none and so she sets down to nurse this Hogarth hombre, who ain't damaged much but appears to like some one to hold his hand and stroke his manly brow for him. And if she ain't been a darned nuisance ever since, I don't know what nuisance is in the dictionary!"

Claudia's smile grew even more subtle. The unexpected loquacity of Mrs. Bigelow did not deceive her. She was perfectly well aware that there was a motive behind it, but she suspected the motive to be a good one. Mrs. Bigelow impressed her as being shrewd in a pleasant sort of way. She also believed Mrs. Bigelow to be friendly toward her. And, of course, like any woman, she could scent a romance as far as the wind could blow it.

"It's rather strange, isn't it," said Claudia reflectively, "that Señor O Donoju, who always strikes me as being very courteous and considerate, and who must be fond of the señorita to go to so much trouble for her, should act as you say he did? I wonder why?"

"Listen!" said Mrs. Bigelow, severely. "You don't know anything about the O Donoju! When you do you will know a lot more than you do now. But just to give you a start I'll say that the O Donoju is *class!* He may not be Spanish class nor Mexican hidalgo class, but he's good United States class, and you can bet your last chip on it. Being class he knows class! And knowing it he don't waste time with any such dance-hall trash as the señorita nor endeavor none to impress her with subtleties. No, he takes means with the señorita that she can understand and when she gets too promiscuous he just throws her out on her head. And I reckon that if this Hogarth hadn't arrived to beguile her, that kind of treatment would have resulted either in her gettin' so nutty over him that she commits suicide or else would have persuaded her to slip a dirk into his lung, the betting being about equal either way. Of course," she added a bit anxiously, "you understand I'm sort of speakin' in parables. I don't mean the O Donoju actually uses violence or unnecessary objurgations on this critter. He merely speaks and acts with considerable lack of subtleties. Outside of an occasional 'damn!' I reckon he don't even cuss her actually. But he speaks plain and unmistakable."

"I'm sure I understand," said Claudia, demurely. "And I'm glad to hear it—that he didn't beat her or throw her out on her neck, I mean. She's really a lovely creature and that would be too bad. And now, where is that breakfast? I'm disgracefully hungry."

CHAPTER XV.

BATTLE.

THE saturnine Harvey Bigelow, the O Donoju and three or four Mexicans were toiling perseveringly at the wreck of the field piece on the terrace. It had been struck by a shell and its recoil and breech mechanism disarranged in a shocking manner. That was apparent even to Claudia's ignorance as she came out into the brilliant sunshine and observed their profane labors.

"No use, Harve!" said the O Donoju despondently. "You couldn't fix that thing with a machine shop, let alone with that Stillson you have. Damn the luck! That fellow must have an artillery expert with him."

"Is it serious?" asked Claudia pleasantly, from behind them. The O Donoju whirled about.

"What are you doing out here?" he cried.

"Don't you know those brutes may be opening up at any moment?"

"Don't you?" asked Claudia, coolly. The O Donoju suffered a flicker of approval to show in his eyes.

"I'm in a slightly different position from you," he said. "Better run along to the rear, Miss Murray. This is the firing line."

Claudia's color grew slightly more assertive and her eyes sleepier.

"Yes—and I'm not much of a shot, I suppose you mean? But I can do better than —last night, señor! Really I can. I don't want to stay with the noncombatants, please."

The O Donoju considered her with a half smile and finally nodded. "You've got good nerve," he said. "I don't doubt you're able to take care of yourself. But there isn't any call for you here—as yet."

"It's a bore back there," said Claudia, complaining. "Can't I sit out here—say on the steps, back from the edge, and watch you?"

"Nothing to watch," said the O Donoju, with what seemed a sigh. "Harve and his pet are about out of action."

Claudia looked around, noting the signs of toil through the night. The edge of the terrace and a line commanding the court where the road debouched into it from the cliff side, were barricaded by rows of sacks filled with rubbish and rocks and sand. She looked up at the façade of the Nest and observed that it had suffered during the night's bombardment. One of the corner towers had been shattered while the roof was crushed in in two places. Windows were empty of sash and showed gaps in the surrounding masonry. But the sturdy old fortress remained for the most part intact.

The O Donoju noticed her curiosity.

"I'm not going to conceal things from you," he said abruptly. "I think you're courageous enough to bear the knowledge. We've run into a bit more trouble than I ever anticipated when I settled in the Nest. That sort of casual mess you see doesn't begin to tell the story. The fact is, we're in a hole and I don't see how we are to dig out of it."

"Why," said Claudia, "it seemed to me that we were as safe as before. They can't get at us, can they?"

"I don't know whether they can or not. As a matter of fact they don't have to. Buckner has at least two field guns with which he can reach us, and he can systematically knock this place down about our ears. And I suppose that's what he will do."

"But," said Claudia, "it wouldn't serve his purpose to knock it down. He wants it intact." Then she paled as she thought of how she herself had pointed out to Buckner El Nido's availability for his purposes. The O Donoju perceived her confusion and evidently read it aright but, to her relief, merely smiled with no hint of reproach.

"Of course he does—or did. But before you were up this morning we had a bit of parley with Buckner. He proposed terms through a wigwag expert he sent out down there. Harvey, here, while qualifying as chief gunner, learned flag signaling and was able to talk to him. First he proposed that I meet him under a flag of truce. But I'm not trusting Buckner's flags any too much and declined. So then he made his proposals through his signaler. Briefly, they were that I surrender El Nido and—er—some of its inmates, retire with the honors of war and call it square."

"What inmates?" Claudia asked sharply.

"Well—one inmate, I should say. You, to be candid! I gather that Buckner is rather angry at your cutting through his whole army the way you did, and he desires to punish you. The rest of us he doesn't regard as so important, even the señorita failing to arouse his cupidity unduly. That will not flatter her when she hears it."

He spoke lightly but Claudia was not deceived. "I see," she said, thoughtfully. But the taciturn Bigelow half turned and growled a word.

"Maybe you do," he said, "but I doubt it. I ain't blaming O Donoju for turnin' the offer down, although you *are* a Murray, but it wasn't sense to signal Buckner what he done! He's mad enough anyhow without addin' that to his temper."

"Shut up, Harve," said the O Donoju.

"What did he call him?" asked Claudia, unexpectedly. Harvey gasped.

"I never said he called him anything," he protested.

"But he did," said Claudia. "I know. What was it?"

"It was only a bit of bluff," said the O Donoju, with annoyance. "Nothing to consider at all."

"It wasn't no bluff," said Harvey with

a grin. "But I ain't goin' to tell you. I don't know how you guessed it, but the language I had to flag that feller was nothin' I'd repeat to anything short of an army mule. There are some spicy terms in Spanish and I reckon Don Juan must have exhausted the dictionary for them."

"Well," demanded Claudia, "what was the upshot of it?"

Harvey was about to answer in spite of the O Donoju's evident disapproval, but at that moment the answer came from another source. Far away, on the brush-hidden slopes of the hills facing the cliffs on which El Nido nestled, a bluish haze, shot through with fire, puffed up. There followed a faint moan which rapidly rose to a scream and ended abruptly with a stunning detonation. Fire shot above the rim of the terrace and clouds of smoke mingled with rock fragments rose for an instant into sight.

"There he goes!" said Harvey with disgust. "If Betsy was fit for work I'd have that barker located and put her out of action in no time. But the dirty dog went and sneaked his guns up at night where I couldn't rake him and the devil's luck gave him the first crack at me. Now he can sit over there and pepper us without ary a comeback!"

"And the way he expressed himself," added the O Donoju, grimly, "indicates that he means to do it. He wanted El Nido but he's past wanting that or anything else more than he wants my hide. That's his first effort to make good on his threats, and here comes the second!"

With that he lifted Claudia suddenly and deposited her inside the archway, well back from the doors. She saw, even in the fluster of this unexpected activity, the others ducking for cover. The same scream pierced the air, and was followed by another explosion, but one less sharp. It did not die away abruptly as the other had but seemed to persist with a sound of rumbling and rushing and a clatter of débris. The O Donoju ran out and looked upward.

"Damn!" said he fervently. Claudia crept out and joined him, to see the right wing of the Nest shattered and crushed by a shell that had landed squarely on its roof. Dust and smoke were settling downward like a pall.

"Get *back!*" said the O Donoju angrily, and shoved her toward the door. He did not stop with putting her inside, but marched her through the hall and across the patio, now littered with fallen rubble, to the dark cave entrance behind it. Here were the other women, clustered silently except for the señorita, who was making a good deal of noise. She had hardly been unceremoniously ushered into the place when another shell sent a shower of tiles and masonry into the air. The O Donoju turned and darted back to his post of duty.

Hogarth came from the back of the cave where he had been rummaging. He had a bandolier about his shoulders and carried a rifle. The señorita cried out to him, reproaching him for leaving her, but he reassured her with the declaration that he would come back if danger threatened her, and then went on his way gallantly enough. The sight of him caused Claudia discontent. She wanted to see what was going on out there and perhaps to take part in it instead of crouching in this musty hole like a fox in its burrow. The blood and the temper of the Murrays' was stirring in her and the sight of Hogarth shamed her.

She rose and ran back into the cave, easily finding stacked rifles and boxes of cartridges, with equipment. She worked feverishly, poking shells into a bandolier before she noted that the gun she had was a bolt-action rifle, requiring clips, with which she was unfamiliar. But she found a case of the brass slips and stuffed her jacket pocket full of them. She would puzzle out later how to manipulate them and the weapon she held.

She was running out past Mrs. Bigelow and the latter spoke to her. She was not greatly agitated, seeming rather resigned.

"They don't need you—yet," she said. But Claudia didn't care. They might not need her, but she needed action. She ran across the patio, through the littered hall and out of the doors, hardly noting that the arch gaped now wide and raggedly and that the only leaf remaining sagged drunkenly on one hinge, its sturdy wood splintered and shattered. As she came on the terrace, now obscured with dust and smoke, another shell somewhere near banged and the air smote and rocked her.

She dropped to her knees, half choked with the rising, swirling dust, aware of flying fragments that seemed to miss her only by a miracle. She was excited and uplifted, exultant and determined. She crept forward toward the line of sandbags, to worm

her way forward until she could look over them and peer out toward the valley. Something off to one side of her, toward the roadway, began to chatter like a riveting machine.

"Who's firing that machine gun?" roared the man at her side. She recognized the O Donoju and he had half risen to go to the point whence the sound came. Before he had time to do so the man on the other side of Claudia hunched himself up.

"Señor, I will see to that fool!" he said and rose to a crouching position and ran along back of the men strung out there. The O Donoju half turned.

"All right, Gregorio," he said. "Knock him on the head!"

His eyes met those of Claudia, now peering out under frowning, determined brows, and he gave a gasp of astonishment.

"What the devil——" he began.

"Now, don't scold!" said Claudia firmly. "You're not going to do *all* the fighting on my behalf. I'm able to do my share of it and I propose to do it. That is, if you'll show me how to work these stupid things."

She dragged the clips out of her pocket, disclosing them in her tiny, open hand. The O Donoju half opened his mouth, shut it again, and then impatiently grabbed the things from her.

"Trust a woman to be a nuisance!" he growled. "Here! Since you will have it! Slide this over the grooves in the rims of the shells and stack one over the other until you have five of them. Then throw your bolt back—this way—see! Shove the clip down and push it as far as it will go. Then ram a loose shell into the breech—this way, and close the bolt and turn it down! And *don't forget* to turn it down! Then you're all cocked and ready."

Claudia followed him with grave attention, readily catching the instruction.

Bang!

Another shell smashed into the doomed Nest, sending up a geyser of rubbish. The machine gun which had so aroused the O Donoju by premature practice, burst out with a stuttering chatter of protest. Mingled with its rattle came the less evenly punctuated sound of rifle fire from the same direction.

"But do I have to stop and fix one of these things each time?" complained Claudia, too interested to notice. The O Donoju was half on his feet, peering anxiously through the smoke and dust and he did not answer her question.

"Lie close there!" he ordered, and sprang into the murk. Claudia sat with her back to the dike of sandbags and looked discontentedly at her loose cartridges and the empty clips. Then she got up and walked after the O Donoju. Men shouted at her, but she paid no heed to them. She was bent on solving that weapon, whatever happened.

Shells continued to fall and smash things monotonously. Once she was thrown down by one which burst somewhere near by. She was conscious that smoke and dust streaked her countenance and that her covert-cloth riding clothes were smeared and disarranged. But she pressed on until she came on outstretched legs of men who lay behind the breastworks and fired frantically over them at something she could not see. She peered about her and then something that sounded like a very shrill winged insect brushed through her hair. Next instant a hand grasped her and dragged her down.

"Damnation!" roared an angry voice. "*Will* you get some sense!"

But she did not resent his emphasis. She had found the O Donoju again.

"I want to know about this!" she shouted loudly to make herself heard above that pneumatic riveter that was banging away at her ear. And it suddenly stopped, disconcertingly, while curses in Spanish and English filled the gap in sound that its cessation left.

The O Donoju again whirled away from her. Claudia was tingling with a rage to get into this mêlée but she *must* know about those clips. And then an inspiration smote her. Of course? How silly of her! She should fill a number of them and have them ready.

So she sat down again while bullets whined over her, and set to work with a steady hand and an earnest, anxious brow, stuffing shells into the brass clips and tucking them into her bandolier. When she had it filled she sighed with relief and then rolled over to poke her rifle across the parapet, raising her head to see what was going on. Dark, sweating men lay on either side of her and one of them, she saw as she glanced aside, had a red blob of blood on his cheek and reaching down to the stained and open collar of his shirt. From a black spot at

the top of this fresh blood welled and ran down. He did not seem to know that he had been shot through the face but continued firing stolidly, with the whites of his eyes gleaming as his only sign of excitement.

But the sight made Claudia angry. She looked out, seeing as a ribbon of white under the slowly rising cloud of smoke, a patch of the road. There seemed to be nothing on it, but somewhere back in the murk came little flashes of fire, and all around was that insistent singing of projectiles. The machine gun got going again and in a moment more a crouching figure came behind her and paused as it passed behind the men.

"Are you all right? Not hit?" asked the O Donoju.

"No," said Claudia, "but I wish I could see something to shoot at!"

"Might as well bang away at the flashes," said he. "Better still, cut it out and get out of here!"

"I won't!" said Claudia, firmly.

His hand came down in a gentle slap on her shoulder. It was a comradely slap, a fraternal gesture, but it made her heart leap joyously.

"You're a whole handful of grit, young woman!" he said, and if the slap on her back was comradely there was a softness and earnestness in the verbal praise that was surely more than that. Otherwise, why should there be that perceptible catch in his voice?

But he was speaking again and not to her. "You are hurt! To the cave with you!" she heard him say in staccato Spanish.

The man at her side protested, seemingly surprised to have his attention called to his wound. But he obeyed orders and slid out of the line, staggering off on weak legs as soon as he was clear. The O Donoju crept to his place beside Claudia.

"Doesn't look very good," he said casually as he looked over the parapet. "But we can hold them until they get our range."

C-R-R-ASH!

A wave of compressed air swept over Claudia's back and the O Donoju echoed others who cursed near by. A rattling, stinging shower of missiles peppered their legs and backs. Unrestrained masculine blasphemy echoed in Claudia's ears and she went quite unshocked. Almost she regretted her own ignorance of effective profanity, so appropriate to the occasion did it seem.

"There it comes, damn it!" said the O Donoju. He was on his feet shouting orders to men about him. Several in quick obedience slid backward and darted away toward the wrecked Nest. The others remained and continued their steady firing. The machine gun went dead again.

C-R-R-A-ASH!

This time the report and concussion were stunning and were followed by screams and a choked cry of agony. Blinded and half stunned, Claudia strove to get her breath, fighting against something that was crushing her. She heard a yell from somewhere outside, heard the O Donoju shouting encouragement and the answer of gallant rifle fire. She opened her eyes to behold a great gap in the parapet, dead and sodden things within her sight. Then the O Donoju crouched beside her and over her, still crying encouragement to his men but devoting his body to her own protection.

Another order, and this time she saw the grinning, wolfish face of Gregorio as he stooped and dragged her from her place. He gripped her in an iron arm and bore her away, back toward the Nest whose gaping walls rose stark above the riot and murk. She fought and screamed to get back to O Donoju, whom they were leaving behind.

But Gregorio carried her ruthlessly through the shattered arch and back to the cave in the rear.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER THE MOUNTAIN.

DIN and confusion seemed to reign all about Claudia. Outside, beyond the barrier of stark and shattered walls, of piles of rubble from which clouds of dust arose, sounded a mingled racket of shouts, yells and banging rifle fire. Over and above it, at deadly, regular intervals came the crashing thunder of bursting shells.

Inside the dimly lighted cavern, through which lazy wisps of smoke drifted, smelling of burned powder, was more noise; noise of shouted orders and directions of one man to another, noise of chattering women's voices, noise of the Señorita Mercedes' prayers. Mostly it was noise of bustle and frantic toil, however, which both men and women engaged in. The man whose face had been shot through, wearing a stained

bandage around his jaws, stumbled pantingly here and there. Gregorio rushed about, shoving Claudia to one side as though she had been a sack. Other men, four or five in number, some wounded, bustled about. Mrs. Bigelow and the Mexican woman were as busy. Claudia stared for a moment, with the one idea that she was going to dodge through this bevy of hurrying ants and make her way back to the fight. But then she saw what it was all about and abruptly changed her mind.

They were all striving with might and main to fortify the entrance to the cavern with sandbags and boxes and bales of hay. And Claudia, with glad energy, joined in the effort immediately. She ran forth and joined a swarthy Mexican with only one good arm, who was laboriously dragging from the rear a sack of grain. He grunted and gasped with the effort and his dark visage was gray with suffering and fatigue. Yet he flashed her a grin of thanks as she seized a corner of the heavy sack with both hands, tugging sturdily at it. In a moment they had dragged it to the fast-rising barrier and then she stooped to put her lithe strength under it and tip it up across the wall.

"Good, señorita!" grunted her companion, and without another word turned to stagger back after another load.

Claudia became so busy that she could not give attention to what was going on outside. In any event she had little leisure to do so. While she bent her energies to strengthening the fortifications the racket outside swelled louder, took on a different note, and in a moment more men began leaping through the gaps in the walls of El Nido, clambering through shattered windows, leaping over piles of rubble, dashing through the wrecked and blocked patio toward the cavern. They came swarming over the breast-high wall to throw themselves down behind it and thrust their rifles over the top, peering and panting like spent foxes.

Five came at first, then there was a pause and another couple dashed in. Another pause, and then, as the tensely poised men suddenly let loose a blast of fire, three others swung out through a gap in the masonry, running swiftly. One of them, tall and erect, hung back a moment and paused to empty a revolver into the murk back of him. Claudia caught an instant vision of writhing, dark faces showing amidst the débris of shattered El Nido, and then they were gone again, blown away by the sleet of bullets poured from the cave. Then the O Donoju turned and trotted calmly toward them, wiping his sweating and stained face with a sleeve. A dozen friendly hands reached out to drag him over the barricade. He encountered Claudia's anxious stare and showed his teeth in a smile.

"Hello!" he said cheerfully. "Pretty hot out there!"

She had pushed forward to him and now seized his arm, which he lifted with an inquiring glance at it and then at her. There was a jagged slit in the sleeve, but he laughed.

"Not a scratch!" he declared. "One got close enough to use a knife but I tapped him on the head with the butt of a gun. Hogarth got in all right?"

"Here!" said Hogarth pantingly from behind. The señorita already had him in her grasp and was moaning over him in a flutter of panic to find some wound.

Claudia suddenly turned and ran back to her rifle left leaning against the wall, returning with it to the barrier. But already the O Donoju had brought order out of the excitement.

"None of that!" said he as she pushed forward. "There are five men there now and that's enough. The rest of you get back and to the sides. Get coffee and hot food ready. Most of us are famished and we've not too much time to eat."

Mrs. Bigelow, with tense lips and bright eyes in a pale face, already was at work, having made sure that Harvey had come in approximately safe and sound though chipped in spots by bullets. He clung to a rifle which had a shattered stock. A lull in the noise had fallen, broken only by a desultory patter of shots which in comparison to the racket that had gone before seemed feeble and peaceful. Bullets sang over the barricade and chipped fragments from the ceiling of the cavern, but the walls swung back from the entrance and the men and women had gathered in obedience to the O Donoju in the sheltered portions away from the line of fire. Here, where a fire was going in a sort of huge brazier, Claudia hastened to assist Mrs. Bigelow and the Mexican woman to get food ready.

The Mexicans squatted silently along the wall, their rifles leaning back of them. Hot

coffee was served out to them and they uttered shy thanks in liquid Spanish. The O Donoju stood there calmly, apparently giving small thought to the situation. Claudia herself handed him a cup of coffee after the others had been served.

"What was it all about?" she asked. "I don't understand it—though," she added with a quick catch of the breath, "it was a glorious fight!"

The O Donoju smiled. "Quite a brush," he agreed. "And I'll hand it to Buckner for having a head. You see, El Nido was located and built when artillery wasn't as perfect as it is now. It was probably impregnable then. It still is against rifles alone. But Buckner stole a march on us by bringing up and placing his guns in the night. Luck was with him too, for a chance ranging shot, pure guesswork in the dark, put Harve's own gun out of action. If we'd had daylight and the gun to help us we'd have been able, probably, to drive him out of his emplacements. Without the gun we were helpless. He raked us for a while to draw off our attention, turned loose a storming party with a machine gun on the road, cleared it of my men for most of the way up and then rushed our barricade. We could have held it all right, but as soon as we were busy he turned his big guns on that end and blew holes in our defenses. Then we had to beat it and here we are."

But Claudia's quick wits were at work.

"Yes, but for how long?" she asked. "Can't he get his guns up now that the way is clear and blow us out of here?"

"Certainly!" said the O Donoju coolly. "Idea scare you?"

Claudia gave him a slow look from under heavy-lidded, long eyes. "Not in the least!" she said, and laughed. The O Donoju laughed also and here and there the silent Mexicans flashed white teeth in tribute to courage.

But there was no time for mutual admiration. The men were fed, relays of the defenders being relieved by those who ate first. And as others were refreshed the O Donoju had them busy. Pickaxes and crowbars were forthcoming from the endless stores in the cavern, which was roomy and vast. Men set to work digging holes in the rock at the sides and high up on the arch of the roof. Even in the floors they dug and the reason of this activity was not for long a mystery. Even the señorita, distracted between Hogarth and her own complaints to the saints, finally comprehended the grim business as Gregorio and Bigelow brought out sticks of dynamite and began to charge the holes as they were dug. She rushed out of the obscurity and threw herself like a fury on O Donoju.

"Ah," she cried excitedly, "so it is this way you would end it? Coward! Fiend without heart! You would destroy us all rather than surrender!"

"For the love of God!" said the O Donoju, disgustedly. "Are you in again? Go and surrender if you wish to! A lot I care!"

"So I will!" shrieked the señorita. "So I will! Señor 'Ogart,' my friend! This man is mad! Let us go and make terms for our lives!"

Hogarth had come forward, uncertainly trying to calm the excited young woman.

"Why, Mercedes!" he remonstrated. "What terms can we make? I don't know how——"

In moments of extreme stress when talking with Yankees, Mercedes relied on English for adequate expression. She used it now.

"You don' know!" she cried. "Ees always zat you know not'ing! Bot me! I know! I s'all char-r-rm zat picaro! I s'all melt 'ees 'ear-rt! You s'all see!"

And before they could make a move to stop her she had dashed to the front and had sprung up on the barrier, crying out shrilly to the outer air.

"Señor! Señor Colonel!"

She must have taken the Yaqui ruffians by surprise, for not a shot was fired at her. A complete and sudden silence fell over El Nido, in whose ruined halls and rooms there had previously been much activity of hidden men. A single guttural voice was raised in a shout and then a silence fell again for a moment. Only a moment and then as hands reached to pull the señorita from her perilous perch the tall and lean figure of Colonel Buckner showed in the gap opposite them.

"Señorita!" he called. "You wished to speak to me?"

The hands that had clutched her dropped as all awaited the outcome.

"Yes, señor! I wish to speak to you. It is that we would make terms with you!"

Claudia laughed scornfully behind the señorita, but the other did not hear nor

heed. She was bending forward over the barrier, gazing intently and imploringly at the colonel, who was smiling silkily.

"Terms!" said he. "By all means! My terms are very simple and easy of acceptance. Persuade Señor O Donoju to surrender to me the bullion from El Tesoro which I am informed is hidden here—probably in that cave, since we have been unable to find it in the house—and we will regard it as ransom in full for all but one of you—yes, even for your sweet and charming self. Señor O Donoju and his company may then go safe and sound wherever they choose."

The O Donoju started. The señorita had turned toward him, puzzled and uncertain.

"The bullion from El Tesoro!" he muttered. "Now, how did he get that notion?"

"I'm afraid I'm responsible," said Claudia humbly. "It was my fault. I told him it must be here in order to induce him to —to help me against you and El Nido."

"You surely played hell then," he said gloomily. "Lord, what fools we all are! But—I don't know! That fellow is playing with very inflammable material. There might be a chance——"

"Don Juan!" The señorita was imploring. "Say that you will give it! Promise him anything that will get us away!"

The O Donoju laughed cynically. "Get us away!" he sneered. "Get you and some of us away, you mean. All but one, he said. What one does he mean?"

He raised his voice in a shout. "What if we agree? Of whom do you make an exception?"

Buckner answered suavely, but with an ugly relish.

"You may all go free," he said, "except the charming Miss Claudia Murray."

The señorita interrupted the curse that was springing from the O Donoju's lips. She stooped quickly and seized him by the shoulder.

"Yes, yes! Give her up! Why not? Is she not your enemy?"

With lips set like steel Claudia moved forward toward the barrier.

"Yes!" she said stiffly. "She's right! I'm your enemy—and I owe expiation. Let me go out there!"

The O Donoju seized her roughly and fairly threw her back, at the same time sweeping the señorita's clutching hand aside. His face was flaming with regal anger.

"Get back! I'm master here, I'll have you know! You fool! What are you trying to do?"

"I'm going out and surrender," said Claudia, with a gasp. "I brought him here, led him on to attack you! I have cost enough lives! The señorita's right. I'm an enemy —and I'll pay the price for you!"

The O Donoju stared in exasperation. "And how?" he said.

"My life for yours!"

"Damnation nonsense! I'd blow your brains out before I'd let you go a step! Think I'm ass enough to trust him, anyhow? And how about the bullion he raves about?"

"Give him that too!"

The O Donoju uttered a shout of laughter that was utterly without mirth and swung to the parapet, rearing his height in full view.

"Listen!" he bellowed in Spanish. "You, Indios and Mexicanos! You have spent lives like madmen for a madman's dream! You have been lied to and deceived by that white scoundrel! There is no bullion here and never has been. All the money of the O Donoju is where it has always been, in the banks of Nogales, where you cannot reach it. Search well and see if you find it. Search El Nido and search this cavern if and when you, or what is left of you, can win entrance to it! You will find no bullion! You'll find nothing but death!

"As for you!" He shook his fist at the colonel. "You unspeakable fiend! I'll live long enough to see you crucified!"

"Fire!" shouted the colonel, but the O Donoju had dropped lightly down before the order could be obeyed and it was the colonel who had to duck swiftly to avoid the storm of bullets that were let loose from the barrier. He disappeared just in time and they heard him raving and swearing at his men.

"Snails! Tortoises! Sons of sloth! Hurry with that gun and we will see how long he holds this miserable burrow against us!"

The O Donoju dropped back, laughing cynically. He strode past Claudia and began again to order his men to feverish haste in their toil. The majority of them had finished with the holes and their charging and while Gregorio and Harvey Bigelow busied themselves in attaching wires from

a battery to the caps of the dynamite others had gone farther back and were engaged in dragging horses from the recesses where they were stalled. Saddles were being thrown on some and others were being packed from the multitudinous stores. But Claudia did not see this. She had shrunk back a little as the O Donoju passed her, scowling at her. And now the señorita posed in front of her.

"Coward!" she hissed. "Gringo coward! You let him stop you! But I—I tell you—I would have fought my way out to surrender if it would have saved the man *I* love!"

"What are you talking about?" said Claudia wonderingly. Yet, at the word, a little thrill had shaken her. The man she loved!

"Aye! But I am a woman of flesh and blood, not a cold-hearted snake of the North! That fool of an O Donoju! He is ice that seeks to embrace snow! But *you!* You are without either fire or courage!"

Claudia tried to laugh. The idea that this emotional bundle of passions and fears should call her coward should have amused her. But she could not be mirthful. Something like a blaze of light had lit up her brain with that talk of sacrifice for the man who was loved. For it was in a wild notion of saving the O Donoju that she had tried to give herself up. She had not been thinking of expiation. She had not been thinking of the lives given for her and that would still be given—except *his* life! It had been the O Donoju for whom she would have blindly gone to torture and death. The knowledge was complete and overwhelming, frightening her.

Suddenly she turned on the señorita. "When you have made good your boast, cousin!" she said coldly, "you may have a right to talk. You are free with love yourself. Let us hope that you find strength to spend yourself freely for your love when the time comes!"

To her surprise the señorita began to weep softly and silently and, without a word, turned away and crept into the shadows. Some time later Claudia, looking out toward the barricade, observed Hogarth lying on guard and beside him, loading clips of cartridges, crouched Mercedes.

Time passed slowly, and then they began to hear the noise of triumphant shouts and the urging of men who were struggling with something heavy. It could be nothing but the gun being dragged into position back of the ruins of El Nido and close up to the cave mouth. Expressions heard in the hilarious uproar left them no doubt. It was merely a question of moments before their frail barrier must be swept away in a storm of explosive.

But the O Donoju came out and gave sharp orders. The men at the barriers crouched alertly. The others gathered and pushed the women back toward the depths of the cave. Gregorio came up to Claudia, handing her a rifle and dropping over her shoulder a full bandolier of cartridges. She looked hesitantly to the O Donoju, to receive a curt nod as an order, and she meekly obeyed it, stumbling back toward the midnight blackness of the cave. But here she found men gathered with numerous horses, saddled or packed. They had electric flash lamps which sent streaks of light here and there, to expose a passage of unknown width and depth leading back into the rock.

Gregorio stood beside her, chuckling.

"When one hunts a fox," he said, "it is well to remember that he has more than one hole to his burrow!"

The men leading horses started forward, their lights playing on the chasm. The others came after and they all plunged into the depths of the mountain.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE O DONOJU EXPLAINS.

TWO or three hundred yards they went, through a constantly narrowing passage that offered fairly good footing and was well enough lighted by electric lanterns carried by several of the men. Some remained behind, with them the O Donoju. These, evidently, were holding the mouth of the cavern while the others gained a lead over any pursuit.

The sound of firing grew muffled within a short time, as they took turnings in the passageway, now quite evidently a natural tunnel in the rock, improved by the hand of man. Finally they all halted except those who led the horses, who went on for some distance. But they did not group together. Claudia was among the first to stop as Gregorio, who was bringing up the rear, himself fell out and waited. She had been anxiously scrutinizing the black void through which they had come and was the first to note that the Mexican paused as though he had reached a destination, squat-

ting down beside the wall of the passage. As she stopped those on ahead slowed down and halted where they were, all curious and anxious or doubtful of going forward into the unknown without specific direction.

In a moment they heard two almost simultaneous muffled explosions entirely different in character to the easily distinguished rifle fire. The encompassing mountain seemed to tremble and a slow ripple of air was wafted down through the tunnel. A little later came the clatter of feet, and points of light bobbed up and down where men hurried toward them. Claudia strained her sight to see who they were and then gasped in disappointment as she observed that O Donoju was not among them, although Hogarth was. He was hurrying past Gregorio when the Mexican asked a question.

"How goes it, señor?"

Hogarth was peering ahead as though to assure himself that the señorita was safe. He answered hurriedly.

"They got their damned gun in place finally. Something was going on out there. Some sort of row or other. Heard the colonel cursing everybody and everything in Spanish and some one took a shot at some one else. But they got the gun up, which was all that was necessary to cook our goose. Just before they had her charged and leveled we beat it. They gave us a dose of shrapnel but we were all back safe. Before they rushed the entrance we had made it past where Bigelow and the O Donoju had the battery. Left them——"

He was interrupted by an even louder roar which brought the stagnant air rushing through the tunnel and fragments of rock raining down from the roof. The roar died away in a rumbling that droned sullenly lower and finally ceased. Every one stared into the void, frozen immobile for a moment or two. Gregorio got up from the damp floor and grinned.

"They will come no farther, comrades," he chuckled, slinging his rifle carelessly to his back. Others of the men did the same as though confident that the fighting was over, at least for the time. Then they took up the march.

But Claudia let them file past her while she strained useless eyes back into the dark. Beyond her a short distance Mrs. Bigelow also waited, stolidly patient. In time they were rewarded, though the wait of a minute or two seemed an age. Steps echoed hollowly and the beams of a lamp flickered again in the passage. They came nearer and behind them the figures of Bigelow and the O Donoju loomed up, coming upon the two women suddenly in the darkness.

"What on earth are you waiting here for?" asked the O Donoju, stopping with a glance beyond for Mrs. Bigelow. Harvey pushed by them and joined his wife, throwing an arm around her and urging her gently on. The O Donoju waited for Claudia.

"We thought something might have happened," said Claudia, a bit breathlessly. "So we waited."

The O Donoju laughed a little. "Nothing happened—to us," he reassured her. "We waited until they got up courage to rush the cave. When they'd sneaked up rather reluctantly and carefully after their shrapnel had swept the place, and were darkening the mouth of it and beckoning on those behind, Harve and I let the dynamite go. I don't know whether any of them got hurt—and don't much care. But there is a block in this tunnel that will require some digging to penetrate, and they can't follow us until that is done."

Yet he did not seem entirely easy in mind. To Claudia, with ears rendered acute by a feeling that had taken her by storm, there was still a note of gloom and anxiety behind his apparent lightness. Yet to her also it seemed that the worst was over and their escape assured. The tunnel must lead somewhere to the open and it should be but a matter of avoiding search until they could gain a place of safety. In fact, this rather sudden and tame ending to the storm of the night and morning seemed something of an anticlimax. It put the defense of El Nido in the category of a useless gesture and it brought within view the time of parting and farewells. In a few days at most she would be back on the Forkhandle, picking up the threads of her life where she had dropped them. That life, once considered a busy and more or less absorbing one, loomed flat and tasteless now, empty of all attraction. To potter at managing a cattle ranch, to discuss details of the business of Murray & Sons—such of it as was left to her—to wander about the country, to the Pacific coast and to New York, seeking such amusement as there was, would be an empty and profitless existence. It would lack something vital. There would be money, enough for

all reasonable needs. There would be ample leisure. There would be many friends. In short, there would be all that she had ever had. Yet there would not be what she wanted.

She turned and began the walk after those who had preceded them. In the dark of the cavern, lit only for a few feet by the O Donoju's torch, they were absolutely alone. They could not even hear the steps of Harvey and Mrs. Bigelow ahead of them. She felt depressed and sad and she lingered with dragging feet as though tired, though she was merely unconsciously striving to make the most of these last hours, to drag them out and prolong them.

The O Donoju lounged beside her, his torch sending a beam ahead that wavered up and down, picking out with startling suddenness irregularities of wall and floor as they came up to them and passed them. They seemed to be ascending, and the floor, which had been wet in places, grew dryer and smoother as they progressed. Claudia found herself pondering her little mysteries wistfully.

What had she—or her father—ever done to the O Donoju that he should hate them and pursue her so ruthlessly? Above all, what terrible injury had she done him, unwittingly, that he should have stooped to a vengeance unworthy of any one but a vindictive sneak? She had only to look at the O Donoju to make up her mind that no action of her father's could account for his persecution of herself. Only personal hatred could do that. Yet she had never seen the man in her life before her rescue at his hands.

The O Donoju also was lost in what seemed wistful and gloomy reflections. He glanced now and then at her as though trying to say something which he did not know how to begin. And when at last he spoke it was with an oddly apologetic air.

"I wonder, Miss Murray," he began, "if it ever has struck you how great an influence comparatively trivial events may have over any of us?"

Claudia felt some vexation at the introduction of trivialities into a problem which to her was not at all trivial.

"I'm sure," she replied a little sadly, "that trivial things have faded rather completely from my mind lately. There are too many that are not at all trivial."

"Of course—and that's a bit of what I am driving at. I suppose there have been times when certain matters appeared important to you, that, with the lapse of time and a shift in viewpoint, later took on an aspect of rather absurd insignificance. Perhaps you've felt that events which once seemed to be of paramount importance affecting all your actions, and even governing your future, took on, with the passing of time, a rather tragic futility."

"I suppose so," said Claudia indifferently.

"Well, I feel that I'd like to try to explain to you some things which may seem inexplicable to you. They are undoubtedly past forgiveness. Indeed, I don't ask that you forgive them. But I do feel that you ought to know that, while once upon a time certain events concerning you loomed up in my mind with such distorted aspects that they warped my judgment and twisted my vision, leading me to do things that I otherwise would not have done, the passage of time has reduced those things to something of their proper perspective. In other words, they show now as what they are; trivialities which I let move me—to my shame."

"You mean—the O Donoju and Murray feud?" asked Claudia, in a daze. "The—the killing of your kinsman and of my father?"

"Those!" said the O Donoju, moodily. "What had they to do with it? They were no business of mine."

"No business of yours!" Her exclamation of amazement seemed to startle him into an appreciation of what he had said.

"Why, yes. Of course you don't understand. The O Donoju feud is none of mine—except as I found it ready-made for me! It sounds absurd, no doubt, but I never had the least interest in the quarrels of the O Donojus and the Murrays. I never heard of them until a short time ago."

"But," said Claudia helplessly, "what—why—are we—how do you happen to be carrying on that feud?"

"I'm not," said the O Donoju. "I have been carrying on a feud, but it happens to be my own and has no particular connection with the O Donojus—except as one of its phases connects. You see, I'm not the O Donoju—or rather, I am, and yet I am not."

"Please!" said Claudia, breathlessly, "please talk sense!"

"I'll try to explain. I'm the O Donoju

legally and by right, but I have no connection with the O Donojus who were at feud with your father—except an entirely fortuitous one. I had reason to hate your father and so had the O Donoju—of that day, I mean. But for entirely different reasons. We came together, purely by accident——"

"And combined forces against him?"

"No! Not that. You've never known precisely how your father met his death, have you?"

"He was murdered by the O Donoju, whom he interrupted in the act of smuggling rifles over the border."

"Then why did not the United States government bring every pressure to bear on the Madero government to secure the punishment of his murderer?"

"I never knew why," said Claudia, sadly.

"But I know, for I saw the affair, Miss Murray. Your father was killed in—er—in a fair fight, but one which he himself started. And he himself was running guns *—in connivance with the O Donoju!"*

"But that's preposterous!"

"Tragically so! Yet true. He didn't know the O Donoju, though Don Luis knew him. O Donoju was a sardonic sort, fatalistic in a way. He found the situation amusing, no doubt, up to the last. And when the discovery came, through the careless word of one of his peons overheard by your father, he acted the fatalist and the gentleman to the last. He took your father's invective without retort and—when the crisis came—he delayed his own draw!"

"You mean," she gasped, "my father shot *him?"*

"He did, Miss Murray. The O Donoju was the fastest and most accurate shot I ever hope to see—even superior to Hogarth, who was with your father. Yet your father shot him before he was himself shot."

"But Hogarth! He was also killed!"

"Not by the O Donoju. In fact, he shot Don Luis an instant after the latter killed your father, only to be killed himself by a bullet from one of the peon's rifles. Forgive me for rehearsing all this tragedy for you, but I can't let you believe that there was any—murder—or that I afterward condoned such a crime by casting my lot with the criminal."

Claudia was staring dully at the beam which now rested on the floor before them. They had come to a pause and it seemed appropriate. Everything seemed to have come to a pause. Her own life especially.

"I don't understand!" she murmured uncertainly. "How do you know all this?"

"I was there," said the O Donoju. "I was there, hidden where I could see, having posted myself with the intention of catching your father red-handed in smuggling guns and of taking him to the jail into which he had had me thrown on a false charge to the same effect."

Claudia groped her way to the wall and leaned against it. She stared at the shadowy bulk of the O Donoju—who was not the O Donoju—and she did not see him at all.

Suddenly she laughed a little, her breath catching oddly. "I don't see," she said, "I don't see what all this has to do—with trivialities. I really don't!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"RIDE IT OUT!"

THE affair had taken on an aspect of weird unreality. It seemed to be some witch's concoction contrived here in the black depths of the earth, with death and destruction behind and God knew what ahead of them. The bones of murdered men and of men killed in fight were the ingredients of that brew. It was ghastly and unbelievable, a nightmare out of which she would awake to find that there was no O Donoju, no El Nido and no emotion that racked and tore the bosom like a rake of steel.

The O Donoju feud had never seemed a reality before to her. She had known only vaguely of it. She had heard details during the litigation over the estate but she had found them unsavory and had put them out of her mind as concerning chiefly her uncle who was dead and would have to answer for his sins elsewhere. Her father's part in it had had no actual existence to her, though she had heard his threats against the O Donoju time without number. They had been simply threats, without translation into deeds.

"I wish you'd get it over with," she complained bitterly. The O Donoju that was and was not moved in the gloom and began.

"I've got to, now, of course," he said, as though to himself. "Though it wasn't what I had meant."

And then, in an even, unemotional voice

he told his story. How he had come to Arizona in the bygone years to build up his health, to make his fight for life. How first, at Murray's direction, the latter's sheep foreman had cheated him. How he had persevered in spite of it, winning strength and a moderate prosperity unmolested until he had begun to encroach upon what Murray considered his own preserves. How, from that time, he had been remorselessly ground under the Murray machine, robbed and ruined and reduced to his last miserable flock of sheep. And here she interrupted him.

"Trivialities!" she said bitterly. "More of them!"

"But," he said in answer, "they were, after all, just that. I realize now, as I did not then, that your father hardly knew who I was. I was merely an item in his path, something to be brushed aside or stepped on. There was nothing personal in it, I presume. I simply happened to be in his way."

"No doubt!" said Claudia, with what sounded like a sneer.

But he went on again, briefing his experience. He told how Murray, when Hogarth needed a scapegoat, had assisted in his seizure and incarceration, how he lay in the filthy jail, ragged and unkempt, with raging hatred growing in him, for more than a week before he was even granted a hearing and then how he was dismissed without even an apology for the outrage visited upon him, nor with any redress for the loss of his last flock of sheep. And he told also how Gregorio had put into his mind the idea of losing his identity and so waging war against Murray. He informed her how Gregorio had told him, with many embellishments, the story of the O Donojus and how he had supposed the last of them to be dead and in that idea had determined to take the name and establish himself at the deserted Nest.

Swiftly followed the narrative of his discovery of the carload of arms and munitions and his trailing it to the point where delivery was to be made and payment collected. The rest was the story of the tragedy that had followed on the discovery of O Donoju's identity.

By this time the sense of unreality, even much of the horror, had left her and she was listening intensely and with a growing hope. That bitter irony of a moment before had been not for him but for the idol she had erected in the shape of her father, which he was overthrowing. And in all this narrative, replete with the wrongs of a man as it was, he had consistently softened her father's part in it. She seemed to feel more anger against the dead than he did. She was ready to forgive him, to go to her knees before him in expiation—if only it should prove that he had *not* originated that fraud and carried it through against her.

"We helped his men to carry the O Donoju to El Nido," Don Juan was saying. "He was dying—but he was tough and lived longer than could have been expected. There was time to bring a priest and a lawyer. And there was time in which he and I got to know each other and he, especially, came to know my grievances and my late intention to steal his name and residence. I've said he was a sardonic devil and he proved it now. The idea struck him with more force than it had me, in whom it had begun to fade and to look ridiculous. There was no O Donoju to follow him and not much for an O Donoju to inherit. We had much in common, including our grudge against the same—family. In short, the O Donoju insisted on carrying the project through, only he improved on it by formally adopting me and making me his heir to both name and the O Donoju estate. As to the latter, it did not seem to amount to much, but later a suit he had had pending for the return to him of El Tesoro Mine, which your father had acquired, was terminated favorably and I came into peaceable possession of the mine and the bullion that had been impounded.

"And also, I came into the feud, with what I thought the duty of carrying on the silly battle against a dead man and those whom he had left alive. I was swollen with hatred and egotism, blind with passion and spleen. The O Donoju, as he died, gave me a warning out of his real chivalry, which I did not heed. Instead, I pursued a course he had never made up his mind to take, which he had drawn back from taking. I let my petty hatred rule me and I brought on you all the harm I could. You know the story. There is no excuse I can offer, no palliation I can claim for a low, underhanded, unspeakably petty persecution of a girl I had seen but once and who, if she had injured me, had done it unconsciously

and in a way that never should have assumed importance in any mind that was not half crazed by brooding over the things I have told you."

The O Donoju stopped and Claudia listened in the conviction that there must be more. But there was no more.

"I injured you!" she finally demanded. "I? But how did I ever injure you? I never saw you before——"

"You never knew me, you mean," said the O Donoju, sadly. "It was the triviality I referred to. It is hard to believe that it could have so burned into me, so inflamed me, so destroyed all sense of proportion that I should remember it with such a deadly clearness. I didn't mention it because it shamed me to think of it. For what was it? Merely that you, quite naturally, when annoyed by a filthy tramp, should refer to him with disgust and order him out of your way. I would have done the same in your place, I suppose. But I never saw that. I couldn't see it, under the circumstances. For the tramp was myself!"

Claudia listened blankly. It did not seem entirely trivial to her. She had been borne out of herself by his narrative; she was in a mood to feel with him all and more than the suffering he had undergone, the outrage that had been visited upon him. In the light of her gratitude to him she exaggerated his wrongs as he himself had done. While she could not for the life of her recall the episode he was narrating, she was ready to burn with indignation at herself and to excuse his rabid reactions to it. The trouble was that, while they excused much, they did not excuse enough. They might justify hatred and contempt but not forgery and fraud and robbery.

He only sketched that wretched episode mildly, making her part in it appear what he had called it, a trivial and natural expression of repugnance to a disagreeable figure. Still, Claudia saw it much as he had seen it at the time, envisioning his own despair and wretchedness and contrasting it truly with her opulent and arrogant security and the unconscious insolence that went with it, all gained, at least partially, at his expense. No, she did not blame him for his rage nor even for the vindictive feeling he had harbored. She sympathized with them, feeling a sort of vicarious shame for the person who could have done this to him. For she could not remember the episode at all nor regard her own part in it as anything pertaining to herself.

"Brutal!" she commented at last. "How *could* I have done such a thing?" Nevertheless she spoke with the inner feeling that some other person, certainly not herself, must have done it. Only, the O Donoju could not know that.

"So," said he, "you know the rest of it and what miserable revenge I took upon you. I don't think there is any more to be said. Ample restitution would be the only possible expiation of such an act and that, unfortunately, in the very nature of things, I am unable to make."

Claudia did not care whether he made restitution or not, except as it might show his repentance. But his remark struck her consciousness like a blow. There could be only one reason why he could not make restitution and that was the fear of consequences to himself and his confederates. Again her idol was exhibiting his feet of clay, with what seemed a singularly stupid inability to recognize their earthy ugliness. The conviction of his innate unworthiness blanketed her depressingly. Almost dully she picked up her rifle and turned down the tunnel.

"We had best be going on," she said lifelessly. "The others have gotten far ahead."

The O Donoju recognized the finality in her tone and drew a long breath. From that time on he said no more but walked stolidly beside her, lighting her feet over the constantly ascending pathway.

They traversed perhaps half a mile of rockbound passage before a light ahead of them advertised the opening to the outer world. It was blocked and choked by the silhouettes of the others, but when they had made their way to it Claudia found it to be a smaller cavern opening upon what seemed a hillside. It was more or less blocked by brush growing in front of it, so that she could not see what sort of terrain they had emerged upon. She was, with the others, too tired and hungry to care at the moment. It was hard to realize that all these events had been crowded into the space of a bare three or four days, and especially hard to believe that all this battle of men and of hearts and of souls had occurred between the evening of one day and the afternoon of the next. Yet the light outside the cavern insisted that it was so. Last night the first disastrous shell had fallen upon El

Nido. At high noon of this day the thunder of exploding dynamite had drawn a veil of rock between them and that wild storm of healthy and open strife. But no veil was there to be thrown over this morbid war of minds and morals, where love strove in vain for trust in the face of the leering specter of black dishonor.

The O Donoju evidently had arranged this halt, for already some of the horses were unpacked, brush had been gathered and lighted and food was cooking. The company settled down to refreshment and rest, the Mexicans gathering in low-talking groups to one side, the women, except Claudia, pairing instinctively as impelled; Mrs. Bigelow and the Mexican woman with their husbands, Señorita Mercedes with Hogarth, to whom she clung like a bur. But Claudia brooded alone, sick at heart and inexpressibly despondent. They had come out of darkness into light, but the very light was a mockery and a torture to her.

The O Donoju ate and stood waiting, immobile and unmoved to all outward appearance. He seemed a very rock for strength, and yet she had incontestable proof that, at heart, he was naught but a cowardly and pusillanimous wretch. Señorita Mercedes, her putative "cousin," lavished her uncontrolled and naïve affections shamelessly upon the fatuous Hogarth. Claudia observed that with a sneer. She had a thought to tell Hogarth what he already must know; that she was a mere stool pigeon, fraud and unscrupulous impostor. But what good would it do? Hogarth himself had been the first to recognize this fact, her own impulsive and unrestrained words had confirmed it and yet he found excuse for her and sat fatuously under her blandishments. Hogarth was beneath contempt.

She might have sought Mrs. Bigelow for comfort, but to do so would have been to encounter Harvey, her husband, and she recognized that in that dour heart there was a quality of cold hostility to her and all that she stood for which she could not overcome. Not that she blamed the man. She recognized his justification and she did not resent his attitude.

The hours passed by, interminably crawling. The yellow light beyond the entrance to the cave began to turn to gray and to fade into twilight. Then suddenly it grew dark, and chill crept in. Men slipped out behind the brush and stood there talking in very low tones, while they searched the landscape for possible lights or signs of humanity. Apparently they found none.

It must have been about ten o'clock when the O Donoju gave a sharp order and activity began again. The party gathered silently, some dozen or so men—all that were left of nearly twice that number who had garrisoned El Nido, and some of them wounded—three women, and the O Donoju. There seemed to be no particular need for caution even though it must have been obvious to their foes that the O Donoju had a way of escape. The tunnel might have led them anywhere within a radius of miles, its direction and terminus must be utterly unknown, so that it seemed more than unlikely that any ambush could have been prepared for them. Yet the Donoju was cautious. Scouts went out ahead. They were followed after a considerable interval, during which no alarm had reached them, by mounted men leading or driving the pack horses. Lastly, Bigelow, Hogarth, the three women and the O Donoju mounted and rode out.

The starlight beyond the brush gave some light which enabled them to gather a faint idea of the ground ahead of them. It appeared that they had come out high upon a sloping hillside which ran downward to form a gully and sank into the blackness of a cañon far below them. Mostly the ground was clear, but where the rough undulations of the slope ahead merged with steep ridges lining the deep draw, the black density of timber blotted out the sky. A trail which they followed meandered ahead of them.

A sufficient interval had been allowed between the sections so that they could not hear the softened trample of the pack train. Faintly and distantly there came back to them now and then the snort of a horse. Their own animals groaned or grunted and these were the only sounds that broke the silence. Even the O Donoju, searching with keen eyes and ears like some wary beast, seemed reassured and relaxed a bit, beginning a signal to quicken the pace.

The mournful howl of a wolf ululated from the hillside off to their left and somewhat behind them. The O Donoju choked a startled exclamation and reined in so sharply that the following horse rammed the crupper of the beast he rode. For a breathless instant they all sat frozen, listening with straining ears.

Then floated to them the sharp and distant crack of rifle shots, the faint and weakened cries of men fighting for their lives.

With a muffled oath the O Donoju swung his horse with ruthless bit and wheeled him about, herding the others before him. But it was a forlorn and quickly abandoned hope, that intention to retreat to the shelter of the cave. A yell, clearly human and exultant, replete with savage ferocity and triumph, rang out behind them on the slope they had just traversed. They caught the sound of horses tramping and sliding in the soft sand of the hillside, closing in upon them, though as yet they could see nothing.

"This way!" said the O Donoju tensely, jerking his horse about again. "Ride it out!"

He seized Claudia's bridle, Hogarth that of Mercedes, Bigelow his wife's. Almost before the words were out of his mouth spurs had struck home and the snorting, frightened horses were rushing wildly along the slope of the hill and toward that looming blackness of timber ahead of them. It seemed utter madness, thus to seek the very shelter that hid the ambush. For it was from the timber far ahead that the sound of fighting came to them, though even now it was dying away and being replaced by yells of exultant savages. Behind them the flash and report of discharged rifles urged them on. Ahead the fiercest and most ruthless red men of Mexico awaited them.

CHAPTER XIX.

CLAUDIA'S CONFESSION.

THE route the O Donoju took and how he found it remain mysteries. But somehow he rode *ventre à terre* through the darkness, never stopping nor slowing down to check his progress. Along a constantly steepening slope, which grew ever rockier, he dashed, swinging Claudia's horse from side to side to avoid obstacles, leaning half out of his saddle to guide her. From flank and rear sparked hostile rifles and there were plenty more ahead. Now and then a bullet sang its sinister note about their heads, but none found a mark. Indians or Mexicans shooting in the dark are not reliable marksmen, and their headlong progress offered no easy target. Strung out in pairs they rushed on until, with a suddenness that almost caused her to leave the saddle, the Donoju set up his own horse and threw Claudia's to a stop. He was out of the saddle before their course was checked and another leap carried him to her side. He wasted no time on waiting her pleasure but grasped her waist and knee with a mighty grip and hoisted her bodily into his arms. Then he ran for some yards and almost dashed her and himself to the ground. Just behind him—the señorita moaning and ejaculating panicky invocations, Mrs. Bigelow panting—came the others. In another second or two they were all crouching close to the ground, the women huddled together, the men on their elbows working the bolts of their rifles.

Claudia shook off her confusion and raised her head to look around. She still had her rifle slung over her shoulder and its presence had made itself felt in a bruising way as it banged against her in her ride. She slid it off over her head and tried to make out her position. They seemed to be in some natural depression of the ground among rocks of various size which made a crude breastwork for them. But the gaps and intervals promised little effective shelter when daylight should offer a chance for accurate aim.

"What was it?" she asked as she crept to a place near the O Donoju, shooting back the bolt of her rifle. As before, she was rather uplifted by the imminent peril and the prospect of action that should render all thought useless and superfluous. "How did they know?"

The O Donoju hunched his shoulders philosophically. "Quién sabe?" said he. "I was afraid of it. There were peons in the valley below El Nido and, despite my warning, not all of them may have escaped. There may have been one or two would voluntarily join the outlaws. If not, torture would serve Buckner well and expeditiously. Some one of them has weakened or betrayed us, it is certain."

"It looks bad for us, then?" commented Claudia in a detached way. She again was looking curiously at Mercedes who, curled in a ball, was alternately pleading to Heaven for succor and denouncing every one with whom she had ever been connected for their perfidy in getting her into this hole. The O Donoju also looked and uttered a short and half-resigned laugh.

"You at least have nerve enough to meet the situation," he said. "I guess you know. It is about curtains for us!"

"No chance of surrender and ransom?" she asked idly.

"I'd sooner trust a pack of wolves. They'd never spare us. I'd rather go out fighting than be crucified over an ant hill. How about you?"

"The same," said Claudia. They spoke casually, neither unduly cast down. There was hard fiber in both; the fiber of the Murrays in the girl and some native hardihood of his own in the O Donoju.

The latter laughed again.

"I made a shot in the dark yesterday," he commented, "in the hope it might strike a target. I reckon it went wild, though we heard sounds of quarreling and a shot among the Yaquis in El Nido. They're uncertain beasts to work with, edged tools that may cut both ways. When I taunted them with the fact that my wealth was safe in bank I had a hope that they might resent having been urged on to be slaughtered for something that did not exist. But that scheme went wrong, for here they are, as ravenous as ever."

"And here we are!" echoed Claudia resignedly.

"Yep!" he said shortly. Then he tensed and slid his rifle forward. "Look out, Harve! Hogarth, be ready! Here they come!"

Claudia also made ready, and none too soon. There had been silence except for hoots of owls and calls of wild animals, signals evidently. Now the air was split and shattered by wild yells of fury, and dim, shadowy figures, appallingly near by, sprang into view and came rushing in like grotesque goblins. At the same time the darkness was dashed with red streaks and the human uproar punctuated with the crackling of rapid fire. Bullets stormed and sang over them and Hogarth gave a little, involuntary cry. At this the invocations of Mercedes abruptly stopped and she rose and darted forward to throw herself down beside the man. Claudia lined her sights on one dim outline and pulled trigger. In another moment she was blazing away as fast as she could work her rifle bolt, while at her side the O Donoju's rifle banged and leaped. The pungent powder smell enveloped them and the rifle grew hot in her hands. The hammer clicked on an empty shell and she snatched for a fresh clip and began all over again.

There was a frenzied moment of wild action, a vision of a figure with gleaming teeth and glistening knife leaping over a barrier, a scream of ferocity followed by a choking yell. Then the O Donoju swore softly and with relief and Harvey Bigelow growled an encouraging word to his wife. The shadowy figures had disappeared, and only occasional rifle flashes flickered here and there about them.

"That cost those devils a few more," said the O Donoju with grim satisfaction. "Who got that wild cat who came over?"

They looked around and toward Hogarth, who was half sitting up, holding to his shoulder. Señorita Mercedes was fussing over it with a superfluity of emotion, tearing her linen in the most approved style to make a bandage. Right at her feet lay a dark and sprawling body, its arms outflung and one knee drawn up. Something stuck out of the neck just where it joined the shoulder. The O Donoju leaned forward and whistled.

"His own knife, right in the hollow!" he exclaimed. "Who did that?"

"Aha!" said Mercedes, her eyes flashing in the dark. "The beast! He was about to slay my 'Ogart'! But instead he is slain!"

Hogarth grinned weakly but with admiration in answer to O Donoju's questioning stare.

"You bet she did it!" he said. "He came down on me like a ton of brick and I was out of it. Hit in the shoulder! Mercedes caught his wrist as he struck, wrenched the knife out of his hand and dirked him as neatly as anything you ever saw! Some girl, I'll say!"

Mercedes fell into her quaint English for her admirer's sake.

"I veel keel som' more," she proclaimed, "eef zey try zat again!"

Claudia caught herself smiling wonderingly at the girl. A quick warm feeling of kinship toward her welled up. Her former scorn and contempt had fled abruptly. She caught herself admitting that this had been done as a true Murray might have done it.

The O Donoju grunted. "Thought there was good stuff in you if any one could ever dig it out," he said. Then he resumed his place while Mrs. Bigelow quietly crept over to help Mercedes in her ministrations to Hogarth. "It all helps," he said to Claudia. "Make it cost them as much as possible even if the end's the same. We'll take plenty of them with us."

"We'll try to," agreed Claudia cheerfully.

She really felt a somber kind of relief. The inevitable finish of this at least promised an end to her otherwise insoluble problem. She had been cut off from one life violently, had found another impossible, and now even death had lost much of its proverbial sting. She was a bit feverish and nervous, conscious of an extreme fatigue, and keyed up to a point where the final outcome was awaited almost with impatience. When would these wolves make another rush?

The O Donoju answered that unspoken question.

"I think they've had enough for the night," he declared. "Indians don't much relish fighting in the dark. And they know they have only to wait for morning. As soon as they can see clearly this place won't be any too salubrious a shelter."

A moment later he spoke again.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Quite!"

"Then you'd better snatch what sleep you can. You must be tired."

This raised a laugh. Sleep! She was miles away from it. Yet she was deadly tired. Only, when one is about to die, one doesn't sleep, unless one is the traditional condemned murderer who reposes in the shadow of the gallows. Besides, there was, as she felt, something yet to be said between the O Donoju and herself. There was some explanation yet due and perhaps a confession from one or the other to be made. Come daylight there would be no time for such things, but during this lull such clearance as could be had must be arranged. She, for one thing, could not go without telling him what she felt she must tell. It would hurt him to know what he might have had and what he had lost, but then, he deserved the hurt. There would have been no thought of confessing to him, whether he asked her or not, that she had come to love him, had she not been so completely certain that he himself was devoured by love for her. This certainty of hers needed no confession on his part. He, however, being dense like all men, would not guess the truth and therefore it would be necessary to tell him.

Nevertheless, impossible as it had seemed, she did doze. Even the desultory firing died away and stillness took its place. The low voices of her companions could not arouse her. She might have conversed but there was nothing to talk about. That was the tragedy of it. There could not be anything in common between her and the O Donoju even though this perverse infatuation of hers defied all reason and knowledge. But she felt no impulse to force the issue and begin. There would be, she knew, plenty of time in the coming hours before dawn. It wouldn't take five minutes. It might even be done while the last fight was on and without interrupting the working of her rifle.

So, now and then she fell into a fitful sleep. It served to pass the hours. She was aware that she awoke from time to time, aroused by distant noises, as of loud voices. Once, too, there was a burst of shooting, far away. It might have been that some of the O Donoju's men had intrenched themselves and were resisting as they were. Then, suddenly, she came wide awake. Ringing in her ears, though faint with distance, was a scream of such agony as she had never imagined. Tense and throbbing with the misery of that sound she listened breathlessly and knew that the others were also holding their breath.

Again it came! Again!

And once more, but weaker and with a sobbing note that bespoke the passing of a soul tortured beyond its strength.

Silence enveloped them and remained unbroken. It was the O Donoju who spoke first, in a dry, harsh voice.

"One of my men—they were torturing him!"

Mercedes gasped a Latin phrase which even the unlettered Bigelow could translate: "Into Thy hands, O Lord——"

She bowed her head and crossed herself. Even the O Donoju bent his head devoutly.

Silence again. And so it remained until the first faint streaks of dawn lightened the sky above them. Silence without sleep!

The O Donoju stretched and yawned, and then began to adjust his position, seeking a firmer and more comfortable rest for his rifle. Claudia eased her stiffened limbs, conscious that she was thirsty and would die with more resignation if she had water. But there was no water. She looked up as the gray lightened and sighed. Her problem was over. Her time had come to speak.

She did not even find it hard to begin. "Señor O Donoju!" she said.

"Yes?"

"You told me a great deal back there in the tunnel. But you didn't tell me every-

thing. Still, there wasn't any need. I know that you love me!"

The O Donoju turned his head and in the growing light she saw his lean face grow gaunt and hungry and a pain that she felt like a knife creep into his haggard eyes. For a moment he remained mute, as though stricken dumb. Then:

"God! But that's true!" he said. His voice, though almost a whisper, recalled to her that agonized cry of the night.

She met his mute misery unflinchingly, though her own heavy-lidded eyes were now open and searching his, conveying unmistakably all the pity and regret that she felt. She put out her hand and closed it gently over his.

"But you aren't as clear sighted as I am. So I'll tell you what you may not know. I can do it, since we have only a few minutes more. The pity of it is that if you had not been what you are—had not done what no honorable man should do, it might have brought us a great peace to know. You see, I love you even more than you can love me, Don Juan!"

For one short moment his face lit up as though glorified and then the light slowly faded before her intent and sad regard. Slowly the qualification of her confession crept into his understanding. His face hardened and grew old and he sank his head.

"You're right!" he said. "It might have been glorious—to know. But now—it's hell!"

Neither of them said any more, but they remained as they were, looking straight ahead at nothing, his hand around the stock of his rifle covered by hers. The day lightened steadily and yet no movement occurred. Quite evidently the Yaquis felt that they could safely postpone the event and prolong the misery.

Then the O Donoju stirred fretfully and raised his head to look about. He saw nothing, but he now was himself again, with no trace of his recent emotion except that he seemed to have aged.

"I wish to Heaven they'd begin!" he growled.

He swung his head around toward Hogarth and Mercedes, annoyed at the low-toned conversation they were carrying on. Their voices, or rather the señorita's voice, echoed insistently, harping on complaint.

"For, it is beyond doubt an outrage, my 'Ogart'!" she declaimed. "That these bravos and that coward of a colonel should have the power to injure us so! If I had not met you and learned to love you, my bravo, it would not be so bad. I am not afraid to die, but it is the dying when we were just about to be happy that I object to. God, who intended us to be happy, must have forgotten us! And I had planned so well for us. It would have been a simple matter to have disposed of the great business of Murray, to have taken the money before they could know what I was about, and then you and I could have fled where they could not find us and have been rich and happy all our lives."

Hogarth answered her impatiently but with resignation born of a knowledge of the futility of attempting to explain the unmoral character of the señorita's projects.

"But, my heart, I've so often told you that we could not do that. We could not take money and plunder Miss Murray as you suggest. It wouldn't be right."

To which the señorita replied:

"Ah, that Mees Murray! So cold and insolent and what you call 'stuck-up!' Why agitate oneself about her? Let her eat out her cold heart for love of the O Donoju, who is so stupid he does not even guess it! We—we will show them how to be happy!"

The O Donoju turned in disgusted amusement from the endearment that followed.

"What an instance of obsession!" he remarked, resignedly. "The señorita is simple and primitive and can understand nothing that is not the same. Also, she is essentially and hopelessly lawless. She believes, and not all the proofs in this world could convince her otherwise, that she is a fraud, that she has no right to the name of Murray nor to the Murray estate. She cannot conceive that her late translation to wealth and respectability is anything but a cunning and complicated plot of master criminals, aimed, by means of forgery and fraudulent proofs, at gaining possession of a fortune. Before you arrived, Miss Murray, she had come in upon me in a perfect fever to convert her spoils into cash and to flee with me beyond pursuit, where we could enjoy our ill-gotten gains. She was excessively angry, but not at all convinced of my honesty and her own when I refused, told her to go back where she belonged, marry and raise up heirs to the Murray fortune. Now she is singing the same song to Hogarth!"

But that song was not heard by Claudia. With eyes rounded to great, swimming stars, she was devouring the O Donoju's grim face and her mind was fighting in a mist of confusion to interpret what he had said. The world about her was reeling and only his set and now alarmed features were steady in her sight.

"What? What is that?" she gasped. "Say that again?"

"Why, say what?"

"You said—you said that she and you—were honest! That she *was* a Murray, did you not? That is what you meant?"

"Why, of course she is a Murray! She's your cousin, the daughter of your Uncle Sam. Don Luis O Donoju, and myself after him, dug up enough proof to establish that fact beyond the shadow of a doubt! But why——"

Claudia was clutching his arm with fingers that bit. "And you didn't—you didn't forge affidavits and produce fraudulent proof—to defraud me and—revenge yourself?" She was shaking him as though to dislodge his disclaimer from his astounded wits. And gradually she shook comprehension into them.

"You mean," he stammered at last, "that you thought I had foisted a fraud upon the courts and upon you?"

"Of course—of course! And you didn't?"

"Certainly I didn't," he said shortly. "I'm bad enough, to pursue you with hatred for months, to even decide to push the señorita's claim through because it would hurt you, although Don Luis had hesitated to do so because he didn't think it quite ethical. He'd *never* have done it after your father's death had made it inevitable that the loss would fall on you. God forgive me, I wasn't so scrupulous, but at my worst I'd never have been the sort of blackguard you seem to think me! No, the señorita is perfectly genuine!"

The waiting Yaquis were forgotten. So was death, so was the coming battle. Claudia stood upright and threw her arms wide while her face was glorified.

"I *knew* it!" she cried joyously. "I knew it! I knew you couldn't!"

Then, as the O Donoju half rose to pull her to safety, she threw her arms about his neck while he was still on his knees and as he rose, she buried her head on his shoulder, laughing and sobbing in the same breath.

The O Donoju may have been stupid and he certainly did not entirely understand all this. But he did the right thing. He too forgot the Yaquis and the presence of imminent death, standing there with Claudia in his arms and the others staring dumfounded at them. He gathered her closer and said a lot of soft and rather meaningless things designed to comfort her and enormously effective in doing it.

And not a shot was fired at them, nor did a Yaqui stir.

CHAPTER XX.

THE O DONOJU RIDES WEST.

IT suddenly dawned on the O Donoju that the situation was precarious—or should have been. With an instinctive uprush of feeling verging on panic he forced Claudia down and sank beside her. Life, which undoubtedly was forfeit in any case and had had small value just a moment ago, suddenly had assumed a desirable quality to both of them. With that realization there came to both of them a terrible pang of regret and rebellion against the fate that condemned them. But this feeling hardly had time to take control of them. Almost as they fished eagerly and hopelessly for some glint of light in the darkness of their future they heard the drawling voice of Harvey Bigelow and looked around to see him kneeling on one knee and peering over the shelter of the rock behind which he had lain. He was searching the landscape in every direction.

"Them Yaqui bravos may have their domestic virtues," he was growling, "but I ain't never heard that sympathy with gringo love-makin' was among 'em. I'll gamble all I got that they ain't wastin' none of this here chivalry on you all."

The O Donoju realized that this was true, and he too, with a sudden stupefied joy, stood up and looked about. Everywhere was a deserted void of sandy and rocky soil sloping down more and more abruptly toward the pitch of the cañon or upward behind them to the timber-shadowed ridge. They were gathered in a sort of scooped hollow under a steeper rise of outcropping rock, which gave them some protection from the higher slopes while scattered boulders before them offered a breastwork against frontal attack. In front brush furnished some scanty cover for attackers but there were none visible to the most careful scrutiny.

The slopes behind were also silent and broodingly peaceful.

Yet they might have hidden ambushed men, but if so why did the men not take advantage of this reckless exposure? Not a shot was fired, not a movement broke the stillness.

Wonderingly they stepped forth, still cautious, but everything remained as before. Walking carefully to the nearest brush they did indeed find empty cartridge shells and signs of recent occupancy, but there was no one there. The entire party gathered together and began a thorough exploration which resulted in the conclusion that, whatever had caused the phenomenon, their ruthless foes had vanished during the night as silently and secretly as ghosts.

On the O Donoju and on Claudia fell an oppressive restraint. This uncontemplated salvation at the final moment was not what they had looked for. They had come together during the exaltation of approaching dissolution, when every petty consideration of expediency or convention had faded to nothing. But now they were thrown back into the world they had bidden farewell, and they found that its problems and observances were as something strange to them. They found it difficult to adjust themselves. The feeling was manifested in a studied avoidance, a reluctance even to look at each other. It was as though they had been trapped into reprehensible betrayals under false pretenses.

But other and more pressing problems forced these into the background. They must drink and they must eat, especially the former. All of them were suffering from thirst and there was no water anywhere near them. That was not a serious matter provided the lower slopes of the steep valley were as safe as these upper ones appeared to be. There was water down below, and to it Bigelow and the O Donoju led the way.

They hurried downward without any particular precaution and their confidence was justified, for no one appeared to molest them. After climbing downward along the slopes for more than half a mile they dropped at last to the bottom of the cañon, which widened out into a valley as it progressed. Here was a small stream of clear and cold water, hidden behind willows and cottonwoods, with lush grass growing near by. All of them were soon drinking eagerly.

They were near a thick clump of willows and from this came an unexpected sound of movement, accompanied by a groan. The men started to their feet with rifles ready, but there was no hostile movement. Only a choking voice muttered a plea for help. The O Donoju and Bigelow stepped forward and cautiously parted the branches. Then they stooped and lifted a body, to carry it out into the open and lay it on the grass. Mrs. Bigelow and Claudia hurried to their assistance.

It was the body of a man, evidently badly wounded, though not yet dead. He was of lighter color than the copper-hued Yaquis, though sun browned to a degree, with black hair and mustache and a bristle of beard a couple of days old. His clothes were torn and stained with blood and dirt but they were more elaborate than the simple cotton jumpers and denim trousers affected by most of the Indians. Nor was his hair banged and bobbed behind, but cropped like any gringo's. In short, he was white, or nearly so.

"I think that is one of Colonel Buckner's lieutenants," said Claudia doubtfully. "I saw him, I think, when we were at his camp."

Mercedes volubly confirmed this guess, recognizing the man as one of those who had captured herself, one evidently in considerable authority under the colonel. And in this they were confirmed when, after working over him for some time, he came out of his coma and looked at them dazedly, but with dawning hope. He tried to struggle to a sitting position, and failing that attempted to kiss the hands of the women who ministered to him.

"Ah! Thank God! Señoritas! A thousand thanks——"

"Quiet," said the O Donoju, leaning over Claudia. "Who are you and what brought you to this?"

The man swallowed water eagerly, gulping over it. As the pinched look of death he had worn faded with returning life, his features became more attractive and at the same time, more repellent. He was a good-looking fellow but there was the stamp of indulgence and weakness on his face. Even now, in his extremity, his brown eyes wandered from one pretty face to another and settled on that of Mercedes with what almost might have passed for a smirk. Well, and on his feet one could easily have pic-

tured him as a devil-may-care swaggerer, of loose and dissolute life.

"Good!" said he in answer to the O Donoju. "You are entitled to know, señor! You behold here the late Colonel Buckner's former chief of artillery, Ramon Sanchez y Aguilar by name! You, I take it, are the gentleman with whom we have been bickering these past hours?"

There was something almost impudent in his manner and the O Donoju frowned.

"You take it right," he said. "Though why you should comfort yourself on it I don't see. We've something of a score to pay with you."

"But no," said the man, easily, though he spoke weakly. "The score is paid, Señor O Donoju! It is settled with interest. These cursed Yaqui bravos have seen well to that."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, señor, I was present when you promised Colonel Buckner that you would live to see him crucified. I cannot believe that you have a gift of prophecy, yet I acknowledge that you hit the nail on the head with that boast. For, thanks to the gentle lambs he trusted to follow him devotedly, your prediction has come true. You will find the colonel—or a fraction of him—farther down the cañon in a small side gully, unless I am mistaken in my location of last night's events."

"Of what events? What has happened here?"

The incorrigible rascal, half dead as he was, managed to cast a languishing glance at Mercedes which made Hogarth scowl. The señorita was a match for him and bridled quite in character.

"The ladies' pardon if I speak of painful matters. However, I tell but the truth. The Señor O Donoju will perhaps recall that he taunted our brave Indians with the fact that they had been led against El Nido on a wild-goose chase; that, in short, he had no gold in the place nor anywhere short of the banks at Nogales? So! That had its effect, as I can testify. There was grumbling against the colonel who had forced them to storm this place with the promise of untold gold and arms and it now appeared that there was no gold to be had. Also, our Yaqui lambs were homesick. Here were they, near to the land of their fathers from which they had been exiled by the late Don Porfirio. The hills of Sonora, the scented pine woods of their youth beckoned to them. They longed for the wild life of old; and the colonel, after leading them within sight of the Promised Land, had kept them fighting in a quarrel for which they cared nothing. Instead of gold, all they had had was hard knocks.

"There was some slight trouble, señor, but for the time it was suppressed. There was a Yaqui or two shot by the colonel, to be sure, but what is one Indian more or less? Nothing at all! Unfortunately, this was not a case of one more or less but of nearly two hundred. Still, our colonel persuaded them that you lied; that, in fact, the gold was there, in the cavern, and that its capture was only a matter of time. Once it was gained they would be free, if they chose, to seek their childhood haunts and live forever amid the joys of slaying my countrymen.

"There had been one or two of your peons seized when we entered the valley and of these one had been—er—persuaded, by methods known to our lambs, to talk. He it was who told us of this other entrance to your stronghold, señor, and as was but natural, it was, of course, blocked at once. When you retreated, incidentally blowing up a number of our Indians, we were ready for you. The rest I think you know. We carried out the ambush rather neatly, I think, letting your advance guard and pack train get well into the valley before closing in on it. The result was that we captured the entire pack train without trouble, driving such men as survived——"

"So some survived?" demanded the O Donoju.

"A number, señor! It was the pack train we wanted and even the prospect of blood was not enough to call our lambs from that. Your men fled to the hills over there, and are still there, I suppose.

"Alas! As you know, we found no gold in the packs and it was forcefully borne in on our men that you had spoken the truth. However, we managed to keep them to the work of capturing you and until the colonel arrived with the rest of his men there was no serious trouble.

"It was the newcomers who were most grievously put out by our ill success. They held a council after their savage manner and the colonel attempted to argue with them. This was a mistake. For argument led to mutual recriminations and strife, dur-

ing which I was shot and barely escaped with my life, thanks to the fact that the bravos were intent on taking the doughty colonel alive. They succeeded, but in the confusion your unworthy servant managed to gain shelter where he passed unnoticed, although several others of my countrymen were slain and scalped before my eyes.

"As I say, they took the colonel, though he fought as became his reputation. I have already informed you where you may find him."

"What became of the Indians?" demanded the O Donoju.

"Señor, why ask? The pine-clad hills of Sonora were calling to them, the United States border, lined with the terrible gringo cavalry, was entirely too near for comfort. Our Yaqui lambs did not hesitate. They waited only long enough to attend to the colonel and then decamped in a body. I, for one, was glad to see them go. It is not pleasant to live and work among wolves such as those!"

The scamp asked politely for water and it was given to him. The need for food began to press and they did not delay here. There were such of the men as were still alive to be found, also. The O Donoju and Bigelow left the women with Aguilar and Hogarth and set out down the cañon. In time they came to the gully spoken of by the Mexican and entered it to find complete corroboration of his story. Here were the grewsome signs of slaughter and, near by, were the bones of Buckner, crucified indeed, but after the Yaqui fashion, with his hands and feet held out by forked sticks driven into the ground and his body stretched across an ant hill. The two white men shivered and turned sick at that dreadful sight.

Here also were their packs, scattered around, plundered but with some provisions carelessly left behind. Of these they took what was available, and returned.

Later search of the lower reaches of the valley resulted in the discovery of Gregorio and four other men, who rejoined them. Also they found enough of their horses, which had been turned loose or had escaped, to mount them all. And so, after making camp that night in the valley, they were able on the following morning to take up the march to civilization and safety.

They swung out of the mountains on the slope toward Nogales and, with horse and provisions, turned the Mexican Aguilar loose to look after himself. He went with effusive expressions of gratitude and a final preening of himself before the disdainful Mercedes. Had he remained much longer in their company there would have been battle between him and Hogarth. They turned toward the border, which was reached at nightfall. But there was as yet nearly thirty miles to go before the Fork-handle welcomed its mistress.

It was at the summit of a ridge that the O Donoju finally drew rein and pointed out, in the dusk, the twinkling firelight of a camp not half a mile away. On one side of him Claudia sat her horse, her feet dangling, for none of them had saddles. Near by the others grouped, their eyes strained thankfully to those points of light.

"There's the line," said the O Donoju, rather gruffly. "Those fires are the camp fires of the United States troops. You and Hogarth and the Señorita Mercedes will be safe with them in another fifteen minutes."

Claudia did not answer this for a moment. When she did speak her voice was low and even. There was moonlight enough, if he had looked, to see that her eyes were veiled inscrutably by long, drooping lids.

"That," she said, "is all very well! But it does not settle anything, Don Juan!"

"No," he agreed gloomily. "It does not. But it is a line—and you will be able to draw it through the life of these past few days. Over there—these things of Mexico, of the O Donoju and of El Nido, may be a record which is wiped off the slate."

"I think not," said Claudia. "For the O Donoju remains."

"The O Donoju returns where he belongs, to rebuild El Nido and put his people back on their little farms in the valley. That means work and poverty with them, but they look to me and they have been faithful to me. So—you have only to forget, Miss Murray."

"I don't think that is all," said Claudia, thoughtfully. "You owe me some reparation, I think."

"How can I pay it? I can't even surrender El Tesoro, for it is held by Orozco's men. What I can do, I will, of course."

"Without reservation?"

The O Donoju nodded dully. He faltered, seemed about to speak but choked on the words. Then he held out his hand and Claudia took it in hers.

But she did not drop it and ride on to the line. Instead she asked, casually: "Which way is El Nido?"

The O Donoju listlessly indicated the direction and she laughed a little. Then, still holding his hand tightly in hers, she reined her horse against his, forcing it toward the west.

"Steve!" she called to Hogarth, "ride on with Cousin Mercedes and take her and the Bigelows to the Forkhandle. We will see you later."

"But where are you going?" asked Hogarth, doubtfully. She waved her hand gayly to the west.

"Why, back to El Nido," she answered lightly. "The O Donoju is endowing me with all his worldly goods and I am going to take possession."

There was a moment's silence during which there came a chuckle from Gregorio in the background. Unheard he muttered:

"Aha, señor! Thou art poor again and God has blessed you!"

But the O Donoju did not hear. His horse, deftly kicked by Claudia, was moving rapidly beside hers into the gloom. Behind, Gregorio doffed his sombrero with a flourish.

"Adios, friends!" he said, importantly, and galloped after his master.

Claudia pulled down to a walk as he came close behind them.

"Don Juan——" she began, and the O Donoju interrupted her abruptly. He seemed unable to pull himself together for the moment.

"My name is John van Wyck!" he said, jerkily.

"But I like the O Donoju better! We are going back to El Nido with no further thought of such nonsense as you are imagining. And—I suppose there are priests in Mexico, still?"

The O Donoju drew his horse to a stop and looked at her long and searchingly. And her long eyes answered his look steadily, though the rose crept into her face under the moonlight. Her hand closed on his with sudden, imploring force.

"I'm going to pay you, all my life!" said the O Donoju.

Gregorio cleared his throat loudly behind them.

"Señor," said he, "there is Padre Felipe, at Carrizal!"

"Go get him, then!" said the O Donoju angrily, and Gregorio went off at a tearing run.

Claudia leaned forward a little and her face was lifted.

"All your life, Juan!" she said.

In the next issue, "Old Boreas Cuts the Cards," a complete book-length Christmas story of the West, by Francis Lynde.

THE BIGGEST BUSINESS

THE United States postal service is the biggest single business in the world. Here are a few facts about it:

It delivers an average of 112 letters a year to every man, woman and child in the United States.

It has 51,393 post offices—one for every 58 square miles of territory in the United States.

It has 351,000 employees, who are paid over 441 million dollars a year for their services.

Every hour 1,400,000 letters are dropped into the letter boxes of the nation.

A surprising thing about our postal service is that there are more rural post carriers than there are city postmen. In the country 44,552 rural routes supply mail to six and one half million families. In the cities 43,677 postmen serve millions of homes and business houses.

There are five thousand railroad postal cars in service, and almost as many mail automobiles.

The postal service operates the biggest savings bank in the world. Last year its deposits were over 134 million dollars.

Each day rural letter carriers travel over a million miles.

Fifteen and one half billion stamps and one and one quarter billion postal cards are sold each year.

Some business!

Bill and the Bunk

By Hugh Kennedy

Author of "The Darkened Kitchen," "Mongswa: Later of Twigs," Etc.

The means employed by the mounty seemed low, but the end proved justification enough for any man.

ARBUTUS BAY has a scimitar blade of beach that every summer attracts a colorful throng of campers from the city a few miles distant. That city—Vancoria, the Canadian seaport near the international boundary line where it threads the islands of the Gulf of Georgia—calls its children home from their diversions with the rains of autumn, so that September sees the sands of the bay deserted, its cottages boarded, its tent floors roofless, its tea shops and its merry-go-round forsaken alike by patron and attendant.

Outside the bay, like a broken chord to its shallow arc, lies a low, narrow, barren island which has incongruously borrowed the name Arbutus also. Distant two miles or more from the beach, and scoured by tide rips often dangerous for small craft, this island presents a harsh contrast to the smooth sands and even contour of the bay. It owns not a single feature that favors habitation or invites even the most casual visit. Its shores, while never precipitous, are strewn with barnacled boulders and heaped with wave-worn driftwood. Windswept and drenched with the scud of storms, its surface gives foothold to neither tree nor shrub. Even grass fares badly on its dreary levels and only along the most protected slope of its single elevation—a mere hummock—does any patch of vivid green ever relieve its forbidding bleakness. The rest—boulders and glacier-scoured rocks, sand wastes made drearier by sparse and wiry sedges—carries out in detail the general dismal scheme. No hut or other shelter—nothing made by human hands except a mariner's sign—disputes with the elements their domain over the whole worthless islet.

Yet in the latter days of last September a belated camper at the beach might have detected, with the aid of a binocular, a solitary sign of human activity, if not of human habitation, on the island. Its farther shore line has a sharp indentation which nearly divides it in two. This inlet, narrow at the mouth, spreads out into an expanse capable of affording anchorage to half

a dozen such craft as could float in its shallow waters. On this inlet, as the camper's glass would have disclosed, rode a dark hulk, mastless and indistinct, the relic of something that might once have been a fishing boat.

The same belated camper might have seen, had he chosen a certain breezy evening of the dying September, a canoe bobbing in the restless waters of the channel beyond the island. The canoe, he could have made out, was a dugout, ancient, weather-beaten; and the two figures squatted in it had all the appearance of native Indians.

And native Indians, even on a closer inspection, he might well have decided them to be. They had the bronze complexion, the broad-brimmed felt hats, the misfit clothing that often go with that part. Their movements were slow, their expressions stolid. Fishing they seemed to be, one paddling with a short, choppy stroke, the other handling a line that trailed astern.

Their luck appeared to be of the worst. Not a single silver-scaled trophy lay in the dugout. And small wonder; for when the angler drew in his line in a pretense of examining his gear for sea grass, a sinker of lead came up at the regulation distance from the end of the line, but at the end itself neither spoon nor hook appeared. This discovery—if discovery it was—occasioned the fisherman neither surprise nor chagrin. He let the weight slide back into the water and paid out the line to its full length again. His mate paddled on with uninterrupted strokes. Neither spoke. Both were as earnest as though their sole hope of escaping starvation depended on the chance of some edible sea dweller attaching itself to that hookless, baitless piece of string.

Until the sun went down they kept up their solemn farce. The tide was running toward the full and the breeze ruffled the surface into choppy waves, calling for some skill on the part of the paddler in managing his craft. He kept its bow headed into the current, yet gradually, as though unmanageably side slipping in the rips, it drew nearer and nearer to the barren island. Like flotsam it tossed. More than once disaster seemed to threaten it, until finally, after a survey of sea and sky, the fisherman drew in his line and the paddler, as though agreeing with him that temporary haven should be sought, headed their craft with commendable skill into the inlet.

Every stroke now brought them nearer to the floating hulk, but they maintained toward it a complete indifference. The paddler drove the canoe toward a patch of shingle which offered an available landing place. To reach it they must pass the hulk, yet their stolid faces betrayed no interest. They hardly bestowed a glance in its direction.

Derelict though it appeared to be, it had not yet been cast up on the sands. It still floated, and some one had thought highly enough of it to moor it to an anchor at the time submerged. A closed-in cabin covered the whole of its forward half, a cabin entered amidships by two narrow swinging doors and lighted by a few six-inch portholes. From the uncovered portion of the craft the engine had long since been torn. The gunwale had rotted in places. The paint on the hull had blistered and peeled, revealing strakes that were worm-eaten and unseaworthy; a vessel whose sailing days were done. Yet the rope that moored it was both stout and new.

The swinging doors of the cabin thrust suddenly outward. A becapped head appeared and a husky voice hailed the canoe. "Hey, you guys! Where you think you're going?"

It seemed to take the canoemen completely by surprise. A swift stroke of the paddle brought them to a standstill. Their mouths went stupidly agape. Neither seemed to comprehend the question so fiercely flung at them.

"Keep off," ordered the head outthrust from the cabin. "Hear me?" And suddenly the man was squinting along the barrel of a shotgun which served to conceal his features no less than to emphasize his command.

If the canoemen had failed to grasp their aggressor's words, they missed none of the import of the pointed weapon. Their blank expressions vanished. The man in the stern seized a spare paddle, and both, with well-timed grunts, belabored the water. A surprisingly few strokes brought them back to the mouth of the inlet. There, beyond shotgun range, they turned for an amazed survey of their enemy. He still stood with head and shoulders thrust out of the cabin doors, the gun barrel held slantingly before his face. He threw his arm outward in a driving gesture.

"Gwan!" he shouted. "Gwan away from here."

Like two thoroughly intimidated natives the men in the canoe obeyed. They pushed out into the disturbed waters and guided their craft along the shore until the single elevation on the island hid from their view both the inlet and the mysterious vessel which it sheltered. There they landed and beached their canoe beyond the reach of the tide. Lifting a tarpaulin, one of them disclosed various parcels which bore little resemblance to the equipment of two natives on a brief fishing expedition. They began to make preparations for a stay.

"So the badger's in his hole," remarked one as he lighted a cigarette.

"Sure is," agreed the other, lifting his hat to scratch a very red, a wholly Caucasian crown. "Must be expecting company soon."

"He'll get it," promised the other grimly, "and some of the party won't have bids to the doings either."

"Recognize him, did you?"

"Could swear to him. We'll have the goods on that old eel at last."

II.

"Bunk!" laughed redcoat derisively.

"Aw, Bill!" whispered the girl in protest.

"Sh!" complained an irritable woman in front. "Sh, *sh!*"

It was the early show of the evening, but the Alcazar, Vancoria's Premier Picture Palace, held a crowd that was a tribute to the popularity of the week's offering. The story, its vaunted succession of "kicks" and "punches" already delivered, was nearing the final thrill of the inevitable "clinch."

"Bunk!" sniffed the obstinate redcoat again. "Pure bunk."

"Aw, Bill!" The girl laid a hand on his arm. Her reiterated protest was almost tearful.

The grim and noble "mounty" of the screen had gone out to get his man. Singly he had faced the perils of the Northland. The French-Canadian priest, the Hudson's Bay factor, the half-breed trapper who never neglected to say, "Gar!" the super-dog husky—all had played their parts. The log-trading post, the snow-clad wastes, the rushing rapids, the frail canoe, had lent their aid in giving to scenes indubitably "shot" in the Sierra Nevadas a subarctic flavor sufficiently convincing. Now at last the grim and noble hero infolded the never really essential heroine in a manly, if wooden, embrace.

Redcoat took up his headgear from his knee—it was too precious to be intrusted to the hat-holding contrivance beneath the seat—and rose. "Ain't it the bunk, though, kid?" he asked with a shamefaced grin that confessed to a pleasant hour in spite of his scorn.

"Aw, Bill!" The girl's throaty contralto had the catch of feelings stirred. "It was *good.*" And hat in hand she followed her stalwart escort to the full-length mirror in the vestibule.

The hat adjusted, the powder on her nose inspected and bettered by a fresh dab, the girl was ready for the street and for argument. "Shame on you, Bill Hunter!" was her opening gun, but the glance with which she devoured her escort's magnificence gave the lie direct to her word. From his stiff-brimmed, carefully dented, gray-felt hat, the scarlet brilliance of his body-gloving tunic, the gold stripes and exaggerated flare of his black cavalry breeches, to the shining tan of his contour-revealing top-boots, her swift glance had flown in admiration ardent and unashamed. Yet she repeated her shot. "Shame on you, calling that lovely fillum bunk. Bunk—and you a mounty yourself!"

"Guess I started something there, kiddo," he easily laughed it off. "Let's finish the argument in here. Their sodas are pretty good." And he turned into the inviting door of a confectionery shop.

A narrow table in a palm-secluded corner dividing them, they gave their orders, the young constable openly exchanging an admiring glance with the waitress.

"Ain't you the awful flirt, Bill. You just quit it," his companion giggled, hiding under her forced gayety a wince of pain.

"'Tain't me, girl." He handsomely laughed the subject away. "It's the uniform."

"M'h'm!" she sighed. "Ain't it the grandest outfit! It must be just gorgeous to be a real mounty."

He planted his elbows on the table top with no answering show of enthusiasm "Forget it, girl. It's a bum job. The glad rags is all there is to it—that and three none-too-square meals a day."

"Aw, Bill, don't say that. Think of the work—the good you can do and all."

"Help!" he mocked. "Think I'm a mis-

sionary? Where do you get that good stuff —out of the movies?"

The girl denied that as the source of her admiration, but refused to yield one jot of it. "Why, the whole world knows," she overwhelmed him, "that a better bunch of men was never got together in uniform."

He rose to bow. "On behalf of the bunch, I thank you," he mocked.

The waitress, returning with their sodas, created a momentary diversion. The girl took a taste through her straw. "Um, yummy!" she pronounced her delight.

The redcoat took her education in hand. "Now look here, kiddo, somebody's been giving you a bum steer. The force never was what the movies and magazines paint it, and it ain't right now what it used to be."

She lingered over a delectable morsel. "Tell that story to your grandpaw," she scoffed.

He pointed his spoon at her and his voice rose slightly. "Get this, kiddo girl: The old days of a corporal going out with a single private and bringing in a whole tribe of rampaging redskins is done. And a redcoat don't go out any more in a blizzard and bring in a bad man poisoned with moonshine. And girls like that overweight dame in the picture simply don't cut any figure in the game at all, and never did. And get this again: Since we moved out here to the coast we cut out even what little glory stuff used to be in the game. Dope peddlers, bootleggers, moonshiners—that's the sort of cattle we go after here. Not much romance in that, huh?"

Her eyes glowed under his indignant earnestness. "Ain't it just what I said?" she turned his guns on him. "The good you can do and all—ain't that doing it?"

"Oh, mommer! Say, girl, you're a mile up in the air. Come down to earth. Know what kind of work that is? It's *dirty* work. It means hiring jailbirds and hopheads and lushes for stool pigeons and come-ons and spies. It means detailing men in civvies to play pal to peddlers till they get the goods on them. Fine and lofty work, I don't think!"

"Aw, Bill, there ain't anything in what they say, that men on the force peddle dope themselves?"

He clenched his spoon. "I'll sock the guy on the button that says it to me."

"Didn't I tell you?" she triumphed. "The force is clean, and doing good to-day as it's always done."

"I ain't denying that, little blondilocks. It ain't the good we do, it's the way we do it, that I'm sore about."

She looked at him fondly as with downcast eyes he stirred his soda. "You're just all right," she pronounced, "the lot of you."

"Yeh," he scoffed bitterly, "a noble set of hellions we are. Look at the way we got to work. Say, honey girl, d'you know what I've seen us stoop to? Listen. I've known a guy on the force keep company with a girl, playing up his uniform and the supposed glamour and romance of his job for all they were worth. What for, says you? Why, just so he could pick up any bits of info about her family that might come handy in his business. Ain't that playing it low-down? I'll say it is."

It failed to shake her. "That's her own lookout, Bill. Anyway, a nice girl wouldn't have a family of that sort."

"A nice girl can't always choose her own family, kiddo." He pushed back his emptied glass. "I'd like to ask you to have another tall one, but, honest, kiddo, I've got to get back. We're putting on some kind of a show to-night—if we get the signal—and little William has got to be in on the play. Sorry, but it's time to be hiking."

He strode to the cashier's wicket, had a brief but lively exchange of badinage with the girl on duty there, then rejoined his companion at the street door.

"Car, honey, or hoof it?" he gave her her choice when they had reached the first corner.

"Aw, Bill, let's walk. It's such a duck of a night for a stroll."

"You said it, goldilocks, but we got to make it brisker than a stroll. Tell you what let's do: we'll stroll up to my time limit. Then I'll put you on a car. I got to keep that date I told you about."

She clasped his arm. "Aw, Bill, it ain't anything dangerous, is it?"

He threw back his head for a laugh. "Dangerous? It'll be as full of perils as the weekly meeting of the Dorcas Society. Can't give you the details, but it'll probably mean taking some poor unarmed boob by surprise and surrounding him five to one. If that's dangerous—— But let's cut the shop talk, kiddo. How's your old man these days?"

She turned her head away. "Aw, Bill, I'm bothered about dad."

"What's wrong? The old man sick?"

"No, Bill, it isn't that. You know, dad has always been a good deal of a trial at home—at first to mother, and now to me."

He attempted to laugh it off. "Don't you worry, little kiddo. Your dad's all right. Any guy that's got a daughter as skookum as he has ain't going to give you no call for worry. That right?"

Her smile blossomed again under his flattery. "Aw, Bill, if you ain't the dreadfulest kidder!"

"Well, what you grousing at the old boy for? Been playing the races, has he?"

"Aw, Bill, it's just nothing at all. Why should I worry you with my troubles?"

"Worry? Look here, goldie girl, I'm a bear and a half for worry if it's going to ease your feelings any. Come through, now. Tell Bill. What's dad's latest?"

"Nothing much out of the usual, Bill. He never *would* work, you know. We've got our own house, thank Heaven! but dad, he——"

"But he sponges on you. Ain't that right, kiddo?"

"I do help to support him, Bill, and on an elevator girl's wages that's no picnic sometimes. But when he has money he's always free with it. And lately, he's ***had*** money."

"Well, ain't that all to the good? What you knocking the old boy for?"

They were crossing a street railway and she waited until the noise of a passing car had diminished. "He's away too much, Bill—two or three days at a stretch—and he either puts me off or flies into a rage when I ask him where he's been."

He laughed reassuringly. "And that's all you got on the old man! You worry easy, kiddo."

She pressed closer to him, seeking comfort in his careless strength. "I do worry, Bill, and mother worries too. If only he wouldn't be so close-mouthed, I wouldn't mind."

He laughed again his light, reassuring laugh. "Your dad's all right, honey girl. A jane like you would keep any father straight."

"Aw, Bill, you mean that?"

"Mean it? Say, kiddo, if it wasn't for the people on the block I'd take a chance and show you how much I mean it."

It was her turn to laugh. "And you have to be so particular," she simpered, "when you're out in uniform. Don't you, Bill?"

"Particular? A perfect lady at a prize fight's got nothing on me. That's the worst of my darn job. Well, kiddo, I got to put you on your car at this corner. If I don't beat it back lively I'll be getting my hair combed in the morning."

III.

"Ouch! Have a heart, nurse. What you doing to that wing of mine—peeling the hide off?"

Deftly the white-clad nurse worked on. "Sorry if I hurt, you poor boy, but the dressing must be changed this morning. Ah! It's coming on nicely."

Her patient managed to turn a grimace of pain into a grin of satisfaction. "Good business, nurse. Lucky I stopped that charge of birdshot with my left wing instead of one of my lungs."

"You had a miraculous escape, young man. You ought to be thankful."

"Right you are, nurse. I knew I'd been crocked for fair when I woke up in a regular hospital instead of the sick bay at the barracks. I've got no kick, unless it is that the doc won't take these bandages off my eyes long enough for a look at my nurse. She's a dandy, *I* know." Deprived of the play of his eyes, he yet flashed his teeth in an engagingly impudent smile.

The nurse was neither young nor pretty. "It might retard your recovery," she warned him, not at all displeased.

In spite of his pain he managed a chuckle. "I'd take a chance, nurse."

She went on with her work. "There!" she pronounced comfortingly when she had finished her ministrations.

He seized her wrist in his free hand and held it. "Straight goods, nurse, when do I lamp daylight again?"

She patted his hand. "Not for a good while, my boy, I am afraid."

His grip tightened until she winced. "But I *will* see?"

"Now look, son," she laughed reprovingly. "I told you that yesterday. You must have faith. You'll be all right. The retina of one eye is affected by the blow they gave you on the temple. Perfect quiet —and complete darkness—will make everything right again."

"They sure crocked me up some, didn't they, nurse angel?"

"You're doing fine," she comforted. "You're to sit up this afternoon." And she sped away to other tasks.

Bill Hunter sank back on his pillow. Stripped of his panoply of scarlet and gold, his wide shoulders clad only in drab flannel, the bold and merry play of his eyes concealed under cotton and gauze, his lean jaw as yet unshaven for the day, he still radiated that attraction which only the comeliness of clean, lusty and unspoiled youth can command.

That afternoon he not only sat up, as his nurse had promised, but he had his first visitor. A girl whose golden bobbed curls surmounted the black attire of bereavement she stepped quickly toward him with arms outstretched. "Aw, Bill!" Her voice had a breathless catch. Tears welled to her eyes.

He flashed his quick, broad grin on her. "Hello, kiddo! Dandy girl, Flossie, to come and see me this way."

It halted her forward rush, stopped her tears on the instant. "You wretch!" she bridled. "Guess again, Bill Hunter."

He chuckled delightedly. "Not Flossie? Then it's Min. How are you, Min, old pal?"

"Bill Hunter, you're a brute. You don't deserve that I come to see you. I'm going, right this instant. You said, too, that it was nothing dangerous, that show of yours; and it *was*."

"Whee-oo!" he whistled his pretense of surprise. "If it ain't little goldilocks! Give me your flipper, flapper. My eyes feel better already for the sight of you."

She clasped his extended hand between both her own. "Aw, Bill, you knew it was me all along. Say you did."

"How could I help it, kiddo? Flossie's got a squeaky soprano and Min never speaks but she giggles. You've got a throb to your voice like the string of a cello. I could pick it out of a chorus. And how are you, little pink and white, how are you?"

"Aw, Bill, how are *you?* Your poor eyes!"

"All right in a month or two, doc says. One bum medico, that, when it comes to treating sore eyes."

"Aw, Bill, ain't he good?"

"Shucks! If he was worth the gas he burns he'd tear off this bandage and give a guy one peep at a swell sight like you. That'd cure them in no time."

She had caught his mood. "Uh-huh," she flung back at him, "and your sore arm —if he took that out of its sling you'd know how to cure it too."

"Surest thing, kiddo. But I still got one good free arm that ain't working."

She drew back. "Better save that for Flossie," she advised.

"Score one, kid!" he shouted delightedly. "Some comeback, that."

"Aw, Bill," she cried, all anxiety again, "stop fooling. Tell me about yourself. How did it happen, you getting hurt this way?"

"Oh, nothing much, goldie girl. Only that little show I told you might come off the other night. Well, it came off. That's all."

She drew up a stiff chair and sat close to the arm of his reclining seat. "And you fibbed to me," she reproached him. "You said it wasn't dangerous."

"Didn't suppose it would be. Trouble was, it didn't come off just according to plan."

"What went wrong, Bill?"

"Hijackers, kiddo. They butted in just ahead of us and queered our stuff. I guess the papers had the whole story."

"I don't know, Bill. I haven't dared—I mean I haven't read them. It was out Arbutus Island way, wasn't it?"

"Yep. We had the info that a gang of bootleggers was making that a night rendezvous. They had the hulk of an old fishing boat anchored there in an inlet and they used it as a warehouse for the bottled goods. They would run out there at night with the stuff in a launch and store it in the hulk until the rum runners they did business with came for it in a speed launch from over the line; always at night, of course."

"But, Bill, what was wrong about that? They weren't breaking our laws, were they?"

"Why, girl, the stuff was all contraband. Not a bottle of it carried the government label. It was up to us to seize it. Well, we had two of our lads planted on the island made up as Siwashes. When they tipped us off with a pocket-flash signal that the bootleggers' launch was heading for the inlet it was our play to dash up in our own launch and gather in the lot, wet goods and all."

"Aw, Bill, and you went and said that *that* wasn't dangerous!"

"I gave you the wrong steer there, all right, kiddo. I wish to Heaven it was the only wrong steer that I'd ever given you."

"What ever do you mean, Bill?"

His face was averted. "Nothing, goldie girl, nothing I can tell you now. Well, our scouts must have seen a launch, or heard it, heading in toward the inlet, for they gave us the signal. We were drifting on a slack tide between the island and the bay, so that we could make our dash in a few minutes. We made it, all right. But the gentry our scouts had taken for the local bootleggers—they were our meat, you understand, and not the foreign rum runners—turned out to be a rival outfit from across the line. They held up the local gang with guns, intending to swipe their booze and get away with it before the genuine gang came up."

"Aw, Bill!"

"This was the merry little party we ran into and the shooting had already commenced. We made the inlet at full speed, guided by our two scouts, one at each side of the entrance, with their flash lights. Once in, our searchlight showed us what was what. We horned right into the scrap. It was pitch dark, for the most part, hard to tell friend from foe. We split up and boarded both the launch and the hulk. Our lads were shooting pretty free, trying to scare the guys into surrender. A right lively little party it was. I had just got a foot on the old hulk myself when some geezer let me have it point-blank with a shotgun. It was that close the cordite burned through to the hide."

"Aw, Bill!"

"Yes, girl, that's the way I got mine, but the guy that got me must have got his too. Right in the shoulder, by such light as there was, I meant to get him, and I guess I did. It was a case of shoot or be shot. Anyway, I heard him drop and I was just going on to clean up my job when some thug cracked me over the coco with the butt of a gun. Talk about stars! I saw them all, and a flock of comets besides. Next thing I knew I was lying in the cot there all trussed up the way you see me now."

"Aw, Bill, it was awful! But you cleaned up your job. The mounties got all the hijackers, as you call them. I know that much."

"And that man on the hulk that I plugged, girl—how about him?"

"The man on the hulk, Bill"—her voice broke—"is dead."

"Dead! Croaked him, did I? Good Lord!"

"Aw, Bill, you wasn't the only one shooting."

"No, I wasn't. But I was the one that tried to wing him."

She wrung her hands. "Aw, Bill, don't be so sure. You don't know. It was pitch dark. You can't be sure."

He found her hand, pressed it to the arm of his chair, stroked it. "What's the matter, honey? Don't take on so. It's bad, but it was all in the day's work."

"Yes, Bill, I know. Excuse me." She disengaged her hand, rose, crossed the room. Staring there with unseeing eyes at an engraving of the kind shepherd bringing back the hundredth lamb, she plied her handkerchief, regained her self-control. Seated again, she took Bill's hand and placed it on the sleeve of her dress. "Can you feel that material, Bill?"

"Feel it? Sure. Kind of harsh, ain't it? What dress you wearing, kiddo?"

"Mourning, Bill."

"Mourning? Gwan!"

"Since the day before yesterday, Bill. They wouldn't let me see you sooner."

"Say, kiddo, this is bad. Who's dead of your folks?"

She choked back a sob. "Dad, Bill."

"No!" For a moment he refused belief. "Poor old scout—dead! Must have been mighty sudden, honey. What was it ailed him?"

"He was in—an accident."

"Killed? You poor little kid! The last worry he was to give you was the worst."

"Yes, Bill. He was—he was shot."

"Good God! How? Where?"

She dropped her head on his hand. "At Arbutus Island, Bill."

He went suddenly rigid. Her tears falling on his hand, he stared, it might have been, straight through his futile bandages at life—life with its tangle and its mystery. "My God!" he breathed.

For a time neither spoke. Then he sighed. "An orphan, kiddo—I've made an orphan of you."

"Aw, Bill, don't take it to heart. Others

were shooting. You don't know it was you."

"Have it your own way, kiddo. We'll say it wasn't me." But his tone belied his concession.

"Others were shooting," she persisted miserably.

"Sure—up in the air."

He sat erect in sudden resolution. "Listen here, kiddo. I've done you harm enough. I want you to cut me out, shake me, cold-shoulder me. Understand?"

"Don't, Bill," she pleaded. "It wasn't you. I *won't* believe it was you."

"There's worse than that," he said hoarsely. "I'm a hound, a skunk, a white-livered spy. I want you to cut me out."

"Aw, Bill, *please!*. Don't talk like that."

"I'm going to tell you something, girl. Then it'll be curtains for me. Listen."

"No, Bill, no. I don't want to hear it."

"I've got to get it off, kiddo. I can never see you again if I don't."

"Aw, Bill, if it's another girl, don't tell me."

"It's worse than that—worse than the worst you could guess. Any nice girl like you should be off me."

"Aw, Bill!"

"Remember the man on the force I told you about—the one that started keeping company with a girl to get the goods on her folks?"

"Yes, Bill." It was the merest whisper.

"I was that guy, and you was the girl. And I didn't even get the info I was told to get. *Now* will you shake me?"

"Aw, Bill, don't, don't. What do we care why you started playing around with me? You started. What else matters?"

His fingers sought one of her curls. "You mean that, goldie girl?"

"Do I mean it? Aw, Bill."

He fingered the soft curl. "An orphan, kiddo. I've orphaned my best girl. The regulations don't say a word on what to do in a case like that."

"The regulations? H'm!" Her sniff was half laugh, half sob.

"It's got us all tangled up together, this thing."

"Yes, Bill."

"Together, kiddo. And for life. Ain't that right?"

"Aw, Bill," she choked. "Bill!" and pressed within the circle of his groping arm.

More stories by Mr. Kennedy in future issues.

TO DO ITS WORK

MR. WEEKS, the secretary of war, was the first spokesman for the administration to rebuke publicly the new tendency of Congress to break up into "blocs." It was sovietism, he declared in a speech, because it would result in each class or element of the population trying to sacrifice all the others to its own interests. Moreover, he argued, it would mean the end of party government, which in its turn would mean the end of true Americanism.

A few days later he was discussing the speech with a Western senator.

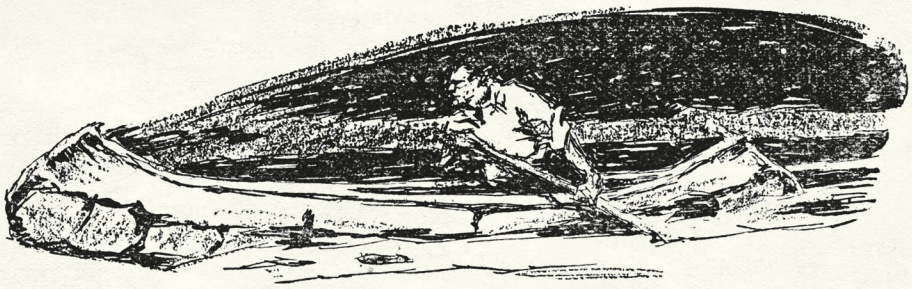
"I see, Mr. Secretary," said the senator. "What you mean is that Congress needs less 'bloc' and more tackle."

A TRIBUTE TO GOETHALS

EVERYBODY who is anybody in Washington knows that one big reason why the Panama Canal was built so rapidly was that Roosevelt, when he was president, literally made General George Goethals czar of the Canal Zone and that President Taft continued the czarship. Stuart Godwin, who once published a daily newspaper in Panama, tells a story illustrating in what reverence the government employees there held the czar.

One of the compositors in the government printing plant in the Zone had an irresistible passion for capital letters. As a result of it, he had several pitched battles with the proof readers. Finally, the foreman of the shop settled matters peacefully.

"Hereafter," he instructed the compositor, "I want you to understand that in the Panama Canal Zone you can't use capitals for anything but God and General Goethals."



Along the River Trail

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Bill Morningstar," "Captain Sir Ian," Etc.

No man had ever run the Grand Discharge and lived, but it was two out of three that night.

FROST had touched the hardwood ridges of the country round the trading post of Beaupre. Maple and beech and birch were aflame with scarlet and gold. The morning air was crisp with a tang which awakened the lazy dogs prowling about the settlement. With noses toward the north they sniffed and whined restlessly. Even the stolid Indians from the distant Bay country moved with a semblance of briskness as they loaded their canoes with supplies which replaced the fur packs they had fetched in months ago. Presently the flotilla would swing out into the River Rouge and disappear into the far reaches of forest and muskeg that spread beyond the divide toward the somber Northern silences, so soon to be carpeted with white.

From the gorge above the post came the muffled thunder of the Grand Discharge, round which the Indians would portage—a long traverse of eight miles before they could again launch and run the less dangerous rips below the rock-walled torrent. No man, Indian, breed or white, had ever run the Grand Discharge and come out alive.

Jean du Bois, known from Nipigon to the Bay as "Big Jean," turned to the factor who was joking with the Indians as they made ready for their long voyage. "Sometaime I t'ink I run those Gran' Discharrge in mah leet canoe. I t'ink mebby I mak' heem all right."

"Huh!" grunted MacDonald, "an' did ye mention your ambeetion to drown yoursel' to Marie?"

Big Jean laughed heartily. "*Non!* But I say somet'ing else, jus' same."

"An' it would be aboot time," said the factor dryly. "Ye ha' been courtin' the lass for how long, now?"

"Long taime," replied Jean, shaking his head. "But I don' mak' to marry ma belle Marie when I'm poor mans. Dees taime I mak' seex hundred dollar, and she say, *'Oui,* I marry you Jean, when the spring she come and the bird she sing again, and you come back.' "

"Ai! A mon that fetches in two silver fox in one season has the luck! An' 'tis luck amazin' ye had, what wi' ceevilization eatin' into the woods and the law creepin' north until the post is but a wee bit shop wi' no authority, and trade a matter of long accounts and short profits. 'Tis not like it used to be."

"I t'ink I say adieu to Marie," declared Jean, swinging on his heel. MacDonald nodded, pulled at his pipe. Big Jean was a few paces away when the factor called him back. "A word wi' ye, Jean. An' ye can take it as advice, or simply as the obsairvations of a friend. Jo La Forge has loafed at the post all this summer, the while ye have been buildin' your cabin above the gorge. I ha' nothing to say aboot his intentions toward a certain young leddy ye are interested in. That matter is for you. But this I know: Jo La Forge wears

a knife for your back, sin' ye tossed him through the West Camp window, wi' the frame thrown in for good measure. How I know is not here nor there. The priest will be comin' upriver this day. Ye ha' money, and the wee bit hoose near buildit. Ye ha' been a long time courtin' the lass. Ye would be off for another season wi' Marie to wait the comin' of spring and the sight of your great carcass heavin' down the trail wi' your pack. What of the lass an' ye do not come back? She has waited long. Yet, after all, it is none of my business whatever."

"I t'ink what you say is ver' good, by Gar!" said Jean. "But I don' t'ink Marie she marry me so queeck! I mak' to trap dees taime, den when the spring she come and the birds——"

"Springtime and birds, ye say? If I had not seen ye at work wi' your fists I would call ye a great saft loon wi' no courage whatever. But I mind well the time you pitched two of the Rouge River gang through the window of the West Camp, wi' the sash accompanyin', and broke the arm of 'Black Andre' with a wee twist of your hand. And was it not Jo La Forge crawled to the river, spittin' out teeth from the camp to the stream? I ha' seen ye at work, else I would hold ye a mon of no courage whatever. Get aboot your business. I ha' done."

Laughing, Big Jean turned away and strode toward the row of cabins edging the forest back of the post. As for Jo La Forge, Jean was in no humor to take the factor's warning seriously. Jean swung along, humming a tune. Marie had promised to marry him. The new cabin was all but completed. Another season of trapping and he would have enough to furnish the simple home as he had dreamed of furnishing it—not with the crude makeshifts of the average habitant, but with a bed and chairs and a table and stove such as the factor had. Then he would clear the land, purchase a horse and a cow, plant grain and vegetables. And the factor had hinted that he might be able to give him employment at the post a part of each season. Jean strode up the path leading to old Antoine La Rue's cabin, where Marie and her mother were hanging out the freshly washed garments of the family.

At a word from her mother, Marie La Rue left her work and came to meet Big Jean. Had he been more egotistical, he might have realized an assuring significance in the mother's attitude, but Big Jean was blind to everything save the dusky beauty of the French-Canadian girl who smiled and welcomed him, and seizing his hand led him into the cabin where her father, old Antoine, sat smoking his pipe. Antoine La Rue, himself a big man, yet as a youth compared to Jean Du Bois, had been confined to his home for several months, recovering from an accident suffered when he and four rivermen had been caught in the breaking of a log jam on the south branch of the river that spring. Old Antoine, gaunt, grizzled and unshaven, took his pipe from his mouth. "I would talk with you alone," he said. "I am glad you came back."

Marie gazed at Big Jean a moment, nodded, and left the room.

"What is it, my friend?" said Jean.

Old Antoine touched his arm and shoulder. "The pain is gone, but I can do no work. If I could hunt or fish—but I am no good."

"You need the money?" queried Jean.

Old Antoine shook his head. "Never have I borrowed. Always I have worked hard. Soon the winter will come. To you I have said nothing. But if it is that you could get some meat for us, before you go——"

"By Gar, I get the meat!" exclaimed Big Jean. "But you must not worry, my friend. I have left money with Marie, all I make for those silver fox. It is for you, until I come back in the springtaime."

Again old Antoine shook his head. "The meat I will take. The money I will not touch. That is for Marie and for you. You are a good man. I am happy that my daughter is to be your wife."

"Oui! That is the best! And the fresh meat—you shall have it."

Big Jean strode out of the cabin, his moccasined feet noiseless as he stepped behind Madam La Rue, and bending forward kissed her cheek.

"You are like a great moose!" scolded madam, startled yet not displeased. "You make no sound when you wish to go softly: and when you do not, it is as though the forest were being torn down."

Jean glanced at Marie, who bit her lip. Jean made one step toward her. Marie turned and ran, laughing as she entered the cabin. "My poor father!" she said as she

stooped and kissed him. Old Antoine's sallow face was touched with a wan smile.

Stopping at the post to get his rifle, Big Jean told MacDonald that he was going up the river trail to get a moose for Antoine La Rue.

"Then ye would be giving up the trapping this season?" queried the factor.

"*Non.* I get the meat for Antoine—then I go."

" 'Tis true Antoine has had no work for some time. His wounds mend slow. 'Tis thoughtful of ye, Jean. But have a care where ye take moose this time of the year. The law creeps north. 'Tis five hundred if ye kill a bull out of season and a thousand dollars if ye kill a cow moose. But ye know your work. Thirty-thirty, is it that ye want?"

Big Jean nodded. "The law, M'sieu' MacDonal'? What is the law when a man must eat? I get the moose for Antoine. He is sick and don' mak' the hunt. I come back ver' queek."

"No doot Father Joseph will be glad to see ye," said the factor.

Noon found Big Jean far up the river trail, beyond the rapids. Turning from the river he struck east, following a blaze that finally led him to a sunny opening in the forest, a small clearing in which stood the new cabin, its peeled logs already bleaching from pale yellow to a soft whitish gray. Jean padded softly up the path, paused at the low porch and nodded to himself. He enjoyed the smell of the pine chips warmed by the sun. He stood his rifle against the door and turning surveyed the clearing. "She is the good place," he said softly. "The leet cabane and theese yard. She is not the big place, but I mak' her myself, by Gar! Ma belle Marie she say it is good. She cry leet taime when she look at theese place, and say I am a good man. All taime she laugh when she cry. 'Here we live long taime and be glad,' she say. When the springtaime come——" Big Jean's eyes were fixed on the edge of the clearing. Cautiously he reached back and as cautiously drew his rifle up. The snarl of the thirty-thirty ripped through the silent woodlands. A big brown shape lunged from the edge of the forest, plunged to its knees and sank slowly down. Hardly had the bull moose ceased to struggle when Jean's rifle snarled again. The brush along the edge of the clearing whipped back and forth. A rending of brush, the whipping of small branches as an invisible something thrashed about, and then came silence, the shrill note of a white-throated warbler, the gentle swish of the pine tops in the light breeze. Big Jean strode across the clearing, pulling his knife from its sheath as he went.

That he had killed the first moose, a huge bull, was no great surprise. He had expected to find a moose somewhere in the vicinity of his cabin, but that a second should appear so quickly seemed more than fortunate, even though the second animal happened to be a cow moose—a matter of indifference to Jean when fresh meat was needed. Had not the factor said he was lucky? And his luck was holding good. Here was plenty of meat for old Antoine and his family, meat that they would salt down for the winter. And the hides—old Antoine could use them to advantage.

Jean went to work with his knife. Although he worked fast it was mid-afternoon before he had skinned out and cut up the meat. He was bending over to pick up one of the heavy hind quarters when a twig snapped behind him. Although not anticipating danger, he had been beset by sudden hazards so often in forest and camp that he acted instinctively. Instead of turning, or trying to straighten up, he dropped flat on his face and rolled swiftly to one side. Something hurtled over him—a long, sprawling figure that struck the ground and was on its feet in a flash. Big Jean glimpsed a gray flannel shirt, red sash and beaded moccasins. He sprang up and crouched with knees bent and hands curved to grip as Jo La Forge slashed at him with a straight, broad-bladed skinning knife. "Hah!" grunted Big Jean as he realized the other's treacherous intent. Parrying the blow with upthrust arm, he jumped backward and jerking his own knife from its sheath flung it at his feet. "You mak' to keel me?" he cried. "Sacrè! But I mak' the fight weet mah han's. I t'ink I keel you, by Gar!"

La Forge, with a toothless grin, and his sallow face drawn with hate and fear, circled his enemy, watching for a chance to run in and strike. Big Jean, crouching, swung his arms gently, maintaining the balance of a cat about to leap. La Forge, realizing that if he once came within the grip of Jean's arms, the fight would end then and there, feinted with his left hand; and as Jean parried, thrust his right arm out

straight. The knife slit the sleeve of Big Jean's shirt. Jean laughed. Jo La Forge, desperate with fear, jumped back and then in again, slashing at Jean's neck. Twice the blade drew blood. Suddenly Jean raised his knee and straightened his leg. The terrific thrust caught La Forge in the stomach. Big Jean leaped at him, closed with him and tore the knife from his hand. La Forge fought with the fury of desperation, but he could not hold out long beneath the great weight and strength of the giant who had clinched with him. Slowly La Forge's arm was bent back. He shrieked with pain. "I t'ink I keel you!" said Jean. But some providence intervened to save him from murdering his enemy. Perhaps it was the thought of Marie La Rue—the realization that if he killed La Forge he would become a hunted man, an outlaw, and then the new cabin would remain empty, and his name become disgraced. No, he could not kill Jo La Forge, even though the factor had warned him that La Forge had threatened his life.

Big Jean lunged up, bringing the other man with him. Then he flung La Forge from him with the quick fury of one hurling a dangerous animal to the ground. La Forge lay where he had fallen, his face ghastly white, his arms and legs twitching. "Mebby I keel heem anyhow," muttered Jean as he stood over the other. He turned and strode over to the cabin spring for water. He washed the wounds on his neck and arms, and filling a bucket came back to the edge of the forest. La Forge had disappeared. Big Jean shook his head. "Nex' taime I feex him good," he muttered, and, stooping, carried a quarter of the meat down to the river.

Dusk was heavy in the forest when Jean drew his canoe from the stream above the rapids. He unloaded the meat and carried it up to the river trail. He was returning to pull his canoe farther up on the bank and turn it over, when the prow of a Peterboro pushed through the gloom, and a voice hailed him. Big Jean paused with his hand on the gunwale of his canoe. "I'm Jean Du Bois," he said in reply to the hail. The other canoe grounded softly in the shingle. A man stepped out and steadied the canoe as another walked from the stern and stepped ashore. Big Jean noticed that the first man was armed. A holstered revolver hung at his hip. The other he recognized as an Indian from the post who that spring had entered government service as guide for the wardens patrolling that section of the country. "Bo' jou'!" cried Jean heartily to the Indian. The Indian returned the greeting, yet with no friendly inflection. The white man turned briskly to Jean. "What's that you are packing up to the trail?" he asked.

"Dat ees the good meat for ma fren' Antoine La Rue. He ees seek an'——"

"What kind of meat? Let's have a look at it."

"Certainement! It is the moose, m'sieu'."

"Sorry, but the season doesn't open until day after to-morrow. You'll have to come along with me, Du Bois."

"For why you say dat I come weet you, m'sieu'?"

"Killing game out of season. You killed a moose, didn't you?"

"*Oui.* I keel heem for Antoine." Unnoticed by the others Jean gently shoved his canoe a little farther into the stream. He feared neither of the men, individually. But the law!

"Let's look at that meat." said the warden.

"*Oui,* I show heem to you," acquiesced Jean.

"And don't forget you are under arrest," cautioned the warden.

"*Oui,* I don' forget," said Jean.

As he spoke he stooped, and with a great heave shoved the canoe out into the river and sprang across the rear thwart. Before the warden realized what had happened Jean was paddling toward the middle of the river. He held the canoe against the tug of the current and listened. But no command to halt came to him through the darkness, no word, no sound save the dull roar of the rapids below. "By Gar, I fool heem!" muttered Jean as he headed upstream with a mighty heave of his shoulders.

"He's got to buck the current," said the warden to his canoeman. "Shove off and we'll hit it alongshore and try to head him."

The Indian and the warden swung to it, and the Peterboro fairly jumped through the still water alongshore. A few hundred yards and the Indian had the canoe heading diagonally across the river. Big Jean saw them coming through the dusk just in time to avoid a collision. He backed water and swung the light birch-bark round, helped by the current. The other canoe

changed its course and followed. "Halt, or I'll shoot!" called the warden.

"Den you shoot dat white water," called Big Jean.

"Will he run the Grand Discharge?" queried the warden of his companion. The Indian grunted something in reply. Both canoes were traveling at a good clip and the heavy current carried them farther and faster in the darkness than either realized, until the Indian called out a warning and paddled viciously to swing the craft out of the current. Possibly the second canoe would have made it to shore had it not struck a half-submerged boulder. It swung round, dropping stern first into the rips. "Straighten her," cried the warden, but the grip of the rapids had them.

Big Jean, amidships in the birch-bark, braced his knees and held bow on to the leap and lunge of the torrent. He could see nothing except the occasional gleam of a lashing crest and he could do nothing save straighten the canoe with an occasional sweep of his paddle. He felt as though he were flying through the air in a tremendous storm that lifted and flung him down, spun him about and swept him on with a rush and a roar that all but numbed him. No man had ever run the Grand Discharge and come out alive. He felt the canoe stagger. It seemed to hesitate. Then it rose and shot up and up until Jean had lost all sense of direction and balance. The bow hung on the crest of a great, hissing white wave, dove down into a viewless abyss—and Jean wiped the water from his eyes as the birch-bark shot out on the smooth current below the gorge. To the left gleamed the few faint lights of Beaupre. "By Gar, I mak' heem!" breathed Big Jean. Then suddenly he recollected why he had dared to run the rapids. The others—what had happened to them? La Brut, the half-breed, was a good riverman. But the best riverman was helpless in the Grand Discharge. Big Jean let his canoe drift with the current for a few seconds, then slowly he swung it round and faced upstream. "I t'ink mebby dey don' try to mak' the beeg jump," he murmured. "La Brut he know eet ees no good. I t'ink I have the luck."

Something long, and darker than the current, drifted toward him. He feathered his paddle and let the object slip alongside. It was the Peterboro canoe, bottom side up, one end out of the water, the other submerged with the weight of the warden, who was just able to cling to the craft, but too weak to call for help or even to speak. Big Jean allowed the Peterboro to slip down until he could seize the warden's collar. The warden felt himself lifted from the water, and then the river seemed to close over him and he sank into unconsciousness.

When he regained consciousness he realized that he was muffled in warm blankets and that some one—MacDonald the factor—was bending over him with a tumbler of whisky in his hand. "Ye ha' had a lang swim," said MacDonald dryly. "An' ye ha' had all the water a mon can tak' wi'out droonin'. Will ye no ha' a wee bit whusky for a change?"

The warden took a mouthful of whisky, coughed and shivered. "Where's La Brut?" he questioned feebly.

"Ask the river," said MacDonald. "Big Jean fetched ye ashore, a-totin' ye like ye wur a corpse. He canna' find La Brut. But one out of two makin' it through the Grand Discharge is a verra good average."

Presently the warden recovered enough strength to sit up and inquire after Jean Du Bois.

"Where would he be but talkin' wi' his lass, Marie La Rue?" said the factor.

"I'd like to see him," declared the other.

"Aye! No doot ye would. An' I'll be tellin' ye, Farley, law or no law, if ye arrest yon lad for the takin' of a wee bit meat for his friend Antoine ye'll be layin' hand to a better mon than yoursel' any day o' the year, includin' the Sawbath. He'll go wi' ye, now that he has talked wi' his lass. But an' he go, 'tis not me that would be carin' to stand in your boots when he comes oot."

"Will you tell him I'd like to see him?" said Farley.

"I'll do that. Have a nip of whusky the while."

The warden drank and a tinge of color crept into his cheeks. Presently the factor returned with Big Jean stalking behind him. For a few seconds the officer gazed at the splendid figure of the French Canadian, at his massive shoulders and chest, his easy poise. The warden was somewhat surprised when Big Jean smiled and held out his hand. "The river she don' get you dees taime," he said.

They shook hands. There was a peculiar light in Farley's eye. "When you pulled

me out of the river and dumped me in your canoe, did you say anything to me?" he questioned without preamble.

"*Oui.* I t'ink mebby you don' hear what I say. But I say, 'M'sieu' Poleece, you goin' make to arres' me eef I tak' you to Beaupre?' "

"I thought I dreamed it," said Farley. "Did I answer you?"

"*Oui.* You say you take me jus' same for keel those moose."

"And you fetched me ashore, at that?" said Farley.

"Certainement! I t'ink you don' walk to theese place."

"Why didn't you heave me overboard and let it go at that? I was all in. And nobody would ever know about it. You had your chance."

"*Oui,* I t'ink that. Den I say to myself, 'Jean, it is bettaire to say to Marie what happen and eef she say for to go weet you to the jail, I go.' You say, m'sieu', nobody know what happen eef I let you stay in de rivaire. *Non! Le bon Dieu.* He know, and Marie, she know. Jean Du Bois he don' mak' to drown one man what don' mak' the fight. You wan' to mak' fight, some taime, I throw you in dose rivaire, queeck."

Farley, being altogether human in spite of his official obligations, grinned. "You better pack that meat down to old Antoine before some carcajou or wolf gets to it. But understand, don't let me see a pound of it. And if ever I take after you again, above the gorge, just tell me whether you intend heading upstream or down, before you start. It may make a difference."

"Then you my fr'en'?" queried Big Jean, surprised at the officer's attitude.

"You bet your life! I didn't see any moose meat up there on the trail. You were trying to kid me, weren't you?"

"*Oui.* She is dark when you talk weet me."

"Well, you certainly are cool, considering what you've been through since I met you upriver. I think La Brut went under when the canoe upset at the first bend. I don't know how I happened to come out of it alive."

"Ye can think aboot it the night," said the factor.

Big Jean strode out into the night and across to the cabin he had so recently left. Marie, who had waited impatiently for his return, met him at the entrance to the door-yard. "Jean?" she said.

"*Oui,* it ees Jean. Dose poleece ees ma fr'en'. We shak' the han'. He ees forget dat I keel dose moose. Now I t'ink I mak' leet traverse an' get dat meat."

"Jean, Father Joseph came to-day."

"Dat ees good! I t'ink I see heem, den I go for to mak' de trap."

Marie La Rue struggled between impatience and amusement at what she considered Jean's denseness. "You will not go!" she declared, and then wished that she had kept silent.

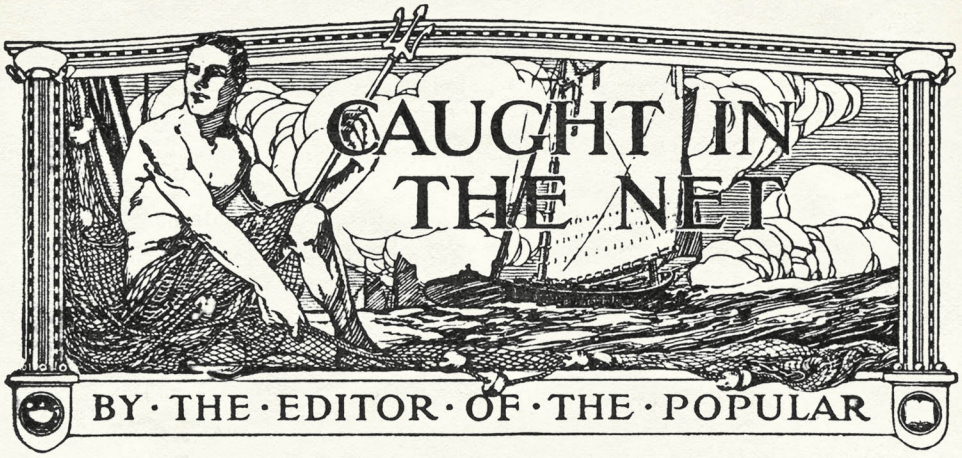
Jean stared. Never had Marie spoken sharply to him until that moment.

"Den I don' go," he said slowly. He stooped and caught her in his arms. "*Ma belle!*" he whispered. "*Ma chère petite Marie!*"

Cold silver touched the tops of the pines far up the river trail. Marie, too excited and happy to sleep, lay staring at the moonlight in the window of her room. Along the river trail moved a huge shadow stooped beneath a heavy burden. With the patience and ease of great strength Jean Du Bois was carrying nearly his own weight in a moose hide supported by a tump line. Three times he made the journey from Beaupre to the cache and back. Dawn glazed the windows of the cabins as he came in with his last load. A thin wand of smoke rose from the chimney of the La Rue cabin. Big Jean sniffed. He stretched his arms and yawned. The door swung open and Marie waved to him. "Tired, Jean?"

The question stifled his yawn. "Tire'? Me? *Non!*" And he shook his head vigorously. "But, by Gar, Ah'm hongry!"

The first installment of a great Western serial by Mr. Knibbs will appear in an early issue.



FRANCE'S DEBT

NOT the least of America's various contributions to the Allied victory in the late unlamented war were her loans to the embattled governments. At the time, neither we, the creditors, nor the Allies, our debtors, were much concerned about the time or method of repayment. Victory was such a desperate necessity then that nothing else mattered.

Times have changed. Already Great Britain has come forward with a policy of repayment, and little by little our credits in that country are being discounted according to a workable and definite scheme, mutually acceptable and satisfactory. For the time being, at least, our loan to Great Britain is settled business. But our French loan remains to be dealt with. With accumulated interest at the present rate of five per cent it amounts to-day to something over three and a half billion dollars. International financiers are pretty well agreed that if this rate continues France will shortly be unable to meet the interest payments, let alone pay off the principal, and we shall be left, eventually, holding the bag.

Critics of France say that she has been remiss in urging a plan of settlement on a practicable basis. Only now, five years after the war, are her statesmen taking the matter of her indebtedness to this country under serious advisement. Yet France is due the most sympathetic consideration. It must be remembered that her viewpoint can scarcely be ours. We see her as involved in a perfectly clean-cut business obligation to pay. She sees herself as the world's creditor in a great deal more than money—in blood, in lives, in the very sources of her economic prosperity. For it was France, after all, who held the common foe at bay while the rest of us girded on our arms, more or less at our ease. She feels that a sentimental obligation in her favor exists and that it must balance to some extent the fiscal undertakings that stand against her.

Here is a knotty problem. For if she asks complete cancellation of her debt she stands discredited financially and commercially. Her exchange rate falls to the vanishing point as did Germany's at one time. It is physically impossible, on the other hand, to undertake payment until the Dawes plan brings her fiscal relief in the shape of funds from the other side of the Rhine. And even then she must face the problem with the utmost prudence, lest in granting too much she cripple herself with taxes, paralyze her industry, and so from the frying pan fall into the fire.

This much is apparent from study of the press reports treating the subject. France has reached the conclusion that debt cancellation cannot be contemplated, even if America were ready to grant it, and that for her own practical good, as well as her idealistic honor, she must make terms of some sort, however tenuous. She has perceived that America is no Shylock, but that Americans are interested in knowing whether she has the integrity and the courage to make a trial, at least. She understands that we tend to favor all under dogs, but that the under dog we will root for the loudest is the one that is disposed to fight the odds and climb on top again.

LAWYERS IN GOVERNMENT

THE claim has been made—and not without some foundation in fact—that the legal profession, being overcrowded, invades Congress with its otherwise idle cohorts. Hence, many lawyers who can pick up but scant livings in the ordinary course, turn their attention and talents to the field of politics and become successful candidates for the national legislature. Of course, to have men of the law at the heart of government is an excellent thing, but it is not equally satisfactory that they should dominate the scene to the extent they do now.

Ideally, Congress should be a representative body, not only geographically and politically, but occupationally. Under the first two heads there is no complaint. The Constitution takes care of the geographical apportionment and the voters themselves look out for the political temper; but there is hardly any attention given to the trade, profession, or business training of candidates. At least, the only attention that is given usually comes after election, when some dissatisfied faction or group complains that the congressional representative of their district has no idea of their cause or ideals, and consequently is out of tune.

More than half the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives are lawyers, so that every line of legislation must be subjected to the lawyer's point of view, which is all right in itself, but does not always permit of wider aspects of the common good.

What is the remedy? Comparatively few bankers, farmers, teachers, manufacturers and other men of business are interested enough—or perhaps disinterested enough, if their incomes are large—to enter the congressional race; so the lawyer naturally, by virtue of his knowledge and general facility of public address, gravitates to Washington, D. C.

Reflecting on it, we are not inclined to think that it is principally a matter of money that in the main determines candidature. It is probably more a matter of thinking and talking on one's feet and facing an audience. Lawyers are used to this, but the average man is not, and he ordinarily would rather face a firing squad than an expectant audience.

Therefore, perhaps, if we want to have greater occupational representation in Congress—and this grows more desirable as the government grows more complex—we must assiduously cultivate the art of public debate and public speaking in every possible way, and help Mr. Average to express himself to gatherings of his fellows.

Incidentally, our country is not alone in this matter of a majority of lawyers in government. The Senate and Chamber of Deputies in France are of like proportions. England and Canada are better off. On the other hand, Australia needs lawyers in her Parliament—at the last reckoning she had but one.

SIDE LIGHTS ON NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE CAVALRY

IN the four National Guard and six Reserve Cavalry divisions the nation has the source of stimulation for good horse breeding, popularization of horseback riding, formation of a cadre from which the States can recruit trained men for its mounted police forces which are every month vital factors in preserving the domestic peace, besides of course the availability of an essential component of a well-balanced military force.

These ten divisions are being trained under the supervision of regular army officers, in conformity with our National Defense Act, as a homogeneous element of the army of the United States, in every respect as are the regular divisions, in the light of the lessons of the World War. Applications for the cavalry are far ahead of the permitted quota. This testifies to the present popularity of the mounted arm. In the recent C. M. T. C. camps many young men could not be accommodated for the training, but the results obtained with those who were fortunate enough to be enrolled will pay increasingly large dividends as these boys get back to their communities and infuse the cavalry spirit into their associates

Due to the fact that a cavalryman must be able to do all that an infantryman is called upon to do, and in addition must also take care of a horse and a large amount of equipment, the mounted service must have a superior type of man. The late war amply demonstrated that cavalrymen easily could be transformed into artillerymen, machine gunners, remount depot squadrons and supply units. The elasticity of mind and the resourcefulness demanded of the branch is a potentiality and asset eagerly availed of, as even a cursory examination of the list of high commanders in the World War proves. It is necessarv to mention only Pershing, Haig, Allenby, Harbord, Dickman and Read.

The presence of a cavalry unit has very often lately stimulated the inception of polo in the vicinity of its station, and it can be safely stated that no other single influence has contributed more to the unprecedentedly rapid strides this game, with all its valuable civic influences, has made among the nation's major sports.

A SPARTAN OF THE GRIDIRON

AMERICAN football usually is spoken of as a game, and a game, according to the dictionary definition, is "a contest for recreation or amusement, to be won by chance, skill or endurance." It is doubtful indeed if any football player or football coach would accept this definition as an accurate one when applied to the high-tension brand of football played by the teams that represent our colleges—the sort of football that draws its hundreds of thousands of spectators every Saturday afternoon during the season. For better or worse—and there is something to be said on each side of that question—we have wandered far from the old idea that a game should be played for the pleasure of the players, and whatever benefits, moral and physical, football players derive from the sport, surely they draw small dividends of recreation or amusement from the big games and the hard grind of preparation that leads up to them.

Percy D. Haughton, the coach whose sudden death shocked football followers last October, was a true exponent of the spirit of modern football. To him the sport was deadly earnest combat—something between a war of conquest and a holy crusade. In his book on the game he summed up his attitude toward it in these words: "Football is a miniature war game played under somewhat more civilized rules of combat, in which the team becomes the military force of the school or university which it represents."

Building winning football systems was Mr. Haughton's work in life. He gave Harvard teams that in their day were invincible; when death ended his career he seemed on the point of leading Columbia out of the football wilderness. But Haughton did more than build winning football systems. He built men to make the systems. His methods were Spartan. Discipline, he said, was the cornerstone of football success, and of his players he demanded implicit obedience. Deadly, scientific precision was his ideal, and he tried always to drive the element of chance out of his team's play. Trick plays received little of his attention. The teams he coached won or lost on clean, sound, hard-fought football. He was a stern taskmaster but a fair one, and the young men who took degrees in the hard school that he ran admired and liked him. Above all—and in spite of his businesslike coaching methods—he was a sportsman beyond reproach.

Percy Haughton was more than a great football coach. In his comparatively narrow field he was a great leader and a great teacher. No man could go to school to him without learning lessons of certain value in later life.

POPULAR TOPICS

AT last we have received proof positive that this dizzy old world really is changing. An Irishman recently won first prize in the British Empire peace-plan competition established by an American, Edward A. Filene, of Boston.

Just how an Irishman happened to get interested in peace we don't know, but

Bolton Waller, of County Wicklow, carried off the prize of one thousand pounds offered for the best plan for keeping the nations from coming to blows.

THERE probably are as many Indians in the United States to-day as there were when Columbus landed in America in 1492, according to a statement of the interior department. The latest Indian census places the number of original Americans at 346,962. During the fiscal year that ended June 30th last the Indian population showed an increase of 2,619, and in the last eleven years there has been a gain of over sixteen thousand.

The State of Oklahoma has the largest Indian population, with 120,000 red men making their home there. New York has the largest Indian population of the Eastern States—slightly over six thousand.

IT will be many a long and wet year before John Bull will accept American ideas about prohibition, but his old friend Barleycorn is meeting with some stiff competition right on his own stamping ground. Many public houses in small English villages are installing soda fountains. The soda habit is getting a firm grip on the tight little isle with the often tight little population. Just now there are more soda fountains being sold in England than there are in the United States. During the first four months of this year 38,000 American fountains were set up in England.

HAVE you a little buffalo in your home? If you haven't, and you want one of the animals that the nickel made famous, send a request to the interior department and they will ship one to you free except for the freight charges. About 250 of the animals, surplus from the Yellowstone Park herd, are being given away by generous old Uncle Sam.

But before you decide upon a buffalo as a pet, think a while. A gentleman in La Grange, Indiana, got one and then wished he hadn't. This bull thinks that he is the Light Brigade and every time he sees any one he charges. He hasn't caught a victim yet, but he has wrecked three fences.

THE 1924 wheat harvest of the world totals slightly over three billion bushels. The United States, as usual, is the leading wheat-producing nation. Our harvest was 836 million bushels, 27 per cent of the world's total. This is an increase of about 50 million bushels over 1923. After domestic demands are taken care of there will be a surplus of 255 million bushels for export.

India, the second largest wheat producer, had a harvest of 364 million bushels, slightly less than last year. Argentina's harvest was 247 million bushels, an increase of 50 million bushels over 1923. Canada's harvest was only 292 million bushels. as against 474 million in 1923.

FOR a good many years now people have been handing us that old saw: "Hard work never killed any one." We didn't argue about it—arguing being the hardest kind of hard work—but being of a slightly nontrustful disposition we took precautions against hard work killing us. Fortunately—speaking for ourself, of course—these precautions did the trick and we have managed to stick around long enough to see a modern scientist shatter another old myth. Doctor Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins University has gathered statistics that show that after middle age hard physical work *does* kill people. Up to forty, men engaged in really hard work have a lower death rate than men holding jobs that require little or no physical effort. But after forty it is different. For the ages 45-54, the death rate among men doing hard work is 12.6 per cent higher than among men with easy jobs. For the ages 55-64 it is 24.8 per cent higher.

OVER in merry England they have a town called Bath, and Bath has a race course. A month or so ago a horse named Razor won a race. A jockey named Barber rode the winner. It was a tight finish.

Naturally, Razor won by a hair's breadth.

But it was a close shave.

Baseball at Berbera

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Twenty-five-dollar Slave," "An Ostrich Egg for Hackensack," Etc.

The great American game visits the Dark Continent and is spiced with a dash of native African jazz.

WHOEVER picked this place to send a ship to certainly felt sore about something. The worst yet, and for New Year's Day at that," grumbled Seaman William Sprague of the scout cruiser *Toledo*. From the after deck he gazed at the desolate waste of sand and scrub and wind-blown hillocks that rolled from the water's edge to the horizon of British Somaliland. A stout wall of masonry surrounded the little settlement of Berbera from which a handful of officials, civil and military, maintained law and order among the wandering tribes of this turbulent African protectorate.

The wall and the whitewashed fort were eloquent of the perils, forays, and campaigns of twenty years during which the "Mad Mullah" of Somaliland had led his fanatical forces against the English expeditionary columns. Peace had been restored, at length, after many a gallant soldier in khaki had found a grave in the desert or won his medal in some heroic encounter against odds. It had been one of those thankless, costly tasks of the British Empire whose motives are sometimes inspired by a sense of duty. Withdrawal would have left a tumult, bloody and incessant, of tribe against tribe.

To the bluejackets of the *Toledo,* Berbera was a lamentable mistake as a liberty port. Young "Kid" Sprague reflected his shipmates' impressions. He was still sputtering about it when a messenger brought word that Lieutenant Gillette wished to see him. The seaman hurried forward to the officers' quarters and dived downstairs to a hallway whose steel walls were lined with six-inch shells in racks. Close to an ammunition hoist was a stateroom in which the energetic, good-humored junior lieutenant was hard at work with his coat off. He moved in the midst of bulky cameras, tripods, and film cases. As a motion-picture expert, the navy department had detailed him to make a record of the cruiser's unusual voyage along the African coast. Soggy with perspiration, he exclaimed:

"Hello, Kid. The executive says I can borrow you to help lug my outfit. There is enough of it to break a good, husky camel's back."

"Yes, sir, and do I get in the picture?" was the eager query. "When this film is distributed to the movie houses at home,

I'd like to strut my stuff. I know a girl in Hackensack——"

"Yes, and at every port on this cruise, William," interrupted the lieutenant. "You are a fast worker. I've watched you. Sorry, but I have picked Martin Donnelly as the Yankee gob in British Somaliland. A big, husky guy with a fighting jaw."

"All right, sir, but you better watch your step. That bird is a buddy of mine, and I wouldn't crab his game for anything. But he gets pursued by a jinx whenever he goes ashore. On the level, trouble is his middle name. He stays sober and he means well but——"

"Pipe down and grab the tripod and camera," commanded Lieutenant Gillette. "Donnelly can't spoil this show. It is going to be good. I met the district commissioner of Berbera when he came aboard to call on the captain. A corker! He is all set to round up a big caravan for me. The tribes that come to the coast are right under his thumb. He has a troop of camel cavalry to make 'em behave. This will be the real thing."

Martin Donnelly was waiting for them at the gangway. In a fresh suit of whites, his harsh visage grimly serious as usual, he looked the part of a brawny man-of-war's man who packed a punch. He was a competent machinist's mate, but acting for the screen was a new experience and he eyed the picture outfit with bashful uneasiness. After the launch had shoved off to take them to the beach, the lieutenant explained:

"What I want most is a mob scene with a kick to it, Donnelly. You have strayed out into the desert, beyond the English compound, understand? You are attacked by hostile Somalis. Single-handed, you fight your way out."

"Do I?" was the comment which registered no enthusiasm. "If it's publicity stuff you're after, to coax bright lads to join the navy and see the world, I shouldn't call it a hit. They'd sooner stay home and risk the bandits of Broadway."

The argument was unheeded. The lieutenant had the soul of an artist. Somaliland offered fresh material for the camera. So shoal was the water at the small pier of Berbera that the ship's boat dared not risk landing there, but stopped a few rods out. Four black Somalis came splashing through the gentle surf. They carried a clumsy wooden chair slung on stout poles. Nervously the lieutenant seated himself upon this tipsy throne and went swaying and pitching to the beach. His face expressed the fear of an undignified ducking if the coolies should stumble.

Clutching the camera, Kid Sprague also made the trip without mishap. He called it riding pretty. He felt like a rajah on parade. Martin Donnelly, awaiting his turn, displayed a certain nervousness. Rawboned and muscular, he was a heavier man than appeared. These coolies were spindling creatures, with legs like sticks. Donnelly made the mistake of growling a caution in a bass voice that sounded like a threat of sudden death. It threw the burdened Somalis out of their stride, as one might say. One of them stumbled in the surf. The weight of the shoulder pole bore him down. The chair pitched forward. The indignant machinist's mate was spilled into two feet of water. To the spectators he seemed to be trying to stand on his head for the benefit of the camera.

"Hold it," cried Lieutenant Gillette, from force of habit.

"Hold that native for me," thundered Donnelly, spitting sand and salt water.

"I told you so, sir," remarked Kid Sprague. "It was the jinx that spilled him end over end. We are due for a sweet time in the desert."

"Nonsense! Hush your fuss," the lieutenant exclaimed. "Come along, Donnelly. This hot sun will dry you off in a jiffy."

District Commissioner Jevons waited for them at the pier in a battered flivver that looked as if it spent a hard life cruising over the desert. He was a plump, jovial person with a brick-red complexion, a man who made the best of things. It was a great event to welcome an American man-of-war to Berbera. He was hospitably anxious to be of service. Donnelly's mishap disturbed him. He apologized for the Somali chair bearers.

"Otherwise things are going very nicely," he informed them, with a beaming smile. "I have mustered about two hundred nomads in all, with their camels, goats, and what not, from several tribes. They will pitch camp for you, pack up again, anything you like, Lieutenant Gillette."

"And all you had to do was send word for them to come in, Mr. Jevons?"

"That's about it. At this time of year a lot of them are moving toward the coast

to trade. All they own in the world is carried on their camels, and precious little of that. Here is a bit of a yarn that may interest you. A couple of tribes had a row the other day. A man was killed. The quarrel spread and another beggar was popped off before our camel constabulary could be sent out to quiet it. I sent for the chiefs and held court yesterday. Fined 'em a hundred camels. The chiefs will be holding a conference to-day and wrangling for hours about dividing the fine—how many camels each tribe is to contribute. A good picture for you, what?"

"Splendid!" cried the lieutenant. "Nothing faked about this stuff."

The district commissioner seemed pleased. Dispensing justice and discouraging the wild Somalis from cutting each other's throats was all in the day's work for him. It seemed commonplace. Young William Sprague was thrilled with excitement. He was drinking in every word. This was the high spot of the voyage. Martin Donnelly was glumly silent. The misadventure in the surf had ruffled his temper and oppressed him with a vague sense of foreboding. The day had begun wrong. He had to obey orders, but he disliked the life of a movie hero.

A fuzzy-headed native driver steered the flivver through deep sand until the radiator boiled furiously and clouds of steam marked the slow progress. Mr. Jevons remarked that this was the cool season at Berbera, with the temperature seldom more than a hundred in the shade. In summer the weather was rather annoying.

The glare of the sun was pitiless. After a while they could see afar off the gathering of the tribes. White hillocks were covered with hundreds of natives who had assembled to see the fun. Lithe, active men were these warlike Somalis, with clean-cut features that betokened the Arab strain of blood mixed with the black. They were dressed in their best raiment, white cotton robes, gay sashes and ornaments. The women and children were with them, laughing and shouting.

In a level space the caravan was milling about in clouds of dust and a bedlam of noise. These desert nomads were not so spick and span. Their clothes were dingy with travel and the smoke of fires. They were on the march. Apart from them stood a group of stately men in spotless garments. They had the bearing of authority. Two or three were bearded and elderly. These were the chiefs who had come to settle among themselves that heavy fine of a hundred camels. An absurd amount of fuss for the Englishmen to make over a couple of dead Somalis! These dignified men strode forward to greet the district commissioner and to beg the privilege of shaking hands with the officer from the American warship with the guns that could shoot many miles.

"What a gorgeous chance to stage a mock battle, Mr. Jevons!" impetuously suggested the lieutenant. "Divide 'em up—all those Somalis on the sand hills and the people of the caravan—and let these sheiks, or chiefs, lead a charge. What do you say?"

"I'd rather not risk it," reluctantly replied the district commissioner. "Awfully sorry, but the Somali is an excitable brute. We found that out long ago. It takes very little to touch him off, and he jolly well loves a shindy. Your imitation battle might turn into something too realistic. When they do get out of hand it's not so easy to calm 'em down again."

This was disappointing, but the lieutenant bore up well. If he should be accidentally popped off in a shindy it would do him no good to have Mr. Jevons fine the culprits a hundred camels. Their only escort consisted of two dusky, turbaned troopers who stood beside their riding camels, ready for orders. Indicating Martin Donnelly, the lieutenant remarked:

"I brought this man along to get some action. A rough-house with a bunch of your natives. Is that too explosive?"

"I am afraid so," replied Mr. Jevons. "Really, they don't know how to play at fighting. However, I think you will enjoy making pictures of the caravan. It has never been done, to my knowledge."

Martin Donnelly ceased scowling. He was perfectly content to stand and look on. Like magic, the *rur,* or nomad village, sprang into being. Bundles of curved sticks were unlashed and set up to form conical frames over which grass mats were bound. A few minutes and a score of these huts were ready to occupy. Women were milking goats in baskets woven so tight that they leaked not a drop. Naked children ran to and fro on errands. It seemed like turmoil and yet every one knew what to do.

Lieutenant Gillette was turning the crank of his camera, grinding out many feet of

film. He told Kid Sprague and Donnelly to wander through the village, pretending to chat with the chiefs, playing with the naked black babies, buying strings of beads from the wrinkled, sun-dried grandmothers. Anxious to furnish more excitement than this, the district commissioner presently suggested:

"Would you like to have me put on a spear-throwing contest? The Somalis are very clever at it. I confiscate their spears, as a rule, but special exemption was granted for to-day."

This sounded like a stirring scene for the camera. It caused lively discussion among the grass huts as well as among the spectators crowded on the sand hills. Many volunteers were anxious to display their prowess. With the aid of the chiefs, Mr. Jevons sorted out a dozen tribal champions, agile young men filled with vanity. They came running to the cleared space, flourishing the long-shafted Somali spears with broad steel heads. The winners would be rewarded with silver coins, so Mr. Jevons announced.

William Sprague helped to shift the camera to a new position. Then he went to the farther end of the arena to watch the spears finish their flight. The display of skill was astonishing. At short range the limber Somalis hurled the spears at a grass mat hung on a pole and seldom missed the target. When they threw for distance the spears flew high and descended in a long arc to quiver in the sand.

The crowd seethed with clamorous excitement. The spirit of rivalry boiled to the surface. It was tribe against tribe. Even the haughty chiefs were betting camels and donkeys on this spear thrower or that. Placid person though he was, the district commissioner appeared a bit apprehensive. With his emotional children of the desert, one never could tell. Lieutenant Gillette was happily absorbed in making pictures.

A refreshing breeze had swept in from seaward. It tempered the blistering heat and kicked up the fine sand in little whirling clouds. A strapping Somali bounded forward to cast a spear. He had been tied for distance with another black athlete. He shouted defiance and also personal remarks which appeared to be regarded as insulting. His soaring spear was deflected in its flight by a gust of wind. It drifted from its course enough to pitch down in a group which had edged too close for safety.

A venerable Somali chief threw up a hand to shield his head. The spear wavered deceptively. It plunged down to slice through the folds of the sluggish old gentleman's turban, nicking an ear and cutting a gash in his shoulder.

To a people accustomed to wounds by bullet, knife, and sword the injury was trifling. The patriarch and his friends, however, jumped to the conclusion that the thing had been done with intent to kill. Between this group and the kin of the man who had thrown the spear was an ancient tribal blood feud. They made a hasty rush for him. Their intentions were quite obvious. The heavy Somali stabbing knives flashed from beneath the white robes.

Seaman William Sprague found himself entirely too much in the picture. Caught in a swirl of angry, yelling nomads, he tried to fight his way clear. In order to avoid being knocked off his feet, he struck out to right and left. His fists were hard and his reach was long. He resented being stepped on to make a Somali holiday.

His vigorous defense added fuel to the flames. Some of these high-tempered tribesmen, when under the green banner of the Mad Mullah, had vowed death to all Christian dogs. Although seldom dismayed, District Commissioner Jevons might have been heard to ejaculate:

"My word! Here we go. This *is* a bit thick."

He was whacking fuzzy heads with his light cane while he shouted to his two troopers of the camel constabulary to drag Seaman Sprague out of it. Lieutenant Gillette gallantly stuck to his post to turn the crank for more feet of film. It was too good to lose. As a last resort he would pick up the tripod and swing it as a bludgeon. He was resolved to sell his life dearly.

Martin Donnelly already was in the midst of it. Nobody had to give him any orders, with his young buddy in a jam. He moved well ahead of the pair of dusky troopers. With a sigh, he perceived that he was elected. This was destined, after all, to be another one of his busy days ashore. Getting dumped into the surf had been a warning, like a weather forecast, that the jinx was still active.

He was a formidable figure in action.

Methodically he grasped two frenzied Somalis, one in each hand, and banged their heads together. His shoulder lunged against another and bowled him heels over head. His heavy shoes trampled upon bare toes whose owners sat down abruptly and held their feet in their hands. He knocked a knife from one fist and poked a knee in the stomach of a warrior whose intentions were homicidal. Behind him surged the two troopers, clubbing heads with the butts of their rifles. The embattled Donnelly was the apex of a flying wedge. He it was who fished poor Kid Sprague out of the rumpus by the seat of the breeches and stood him upon his feet. This done, they emerged together, somewhat the worse for wear but by no means to be listed as casualties. In naval lingo, the machinist's mate had successfully conducted a cutting-out party.

It was time for all hands to move rapidly in the direction of Berbera. Spears were whizzing past their ears as they scrambled into the flivver. The district commissioner felt quite unhappy. His volatile tribes had broken up the show.

"I am frightfully sorry they kicked up," said he. "The blighters are feeling their oats. I will send out twenty camel soldiers and teach 'em a lesson."

"Twenty soldiers? Give the blighters twenty dollars with my compliments," cried the delighted lieutenant. "I got just what I wanted. Nobody is going to say *that* stuff was faked at Hollywood. Are you sure you can put the lid on them, Mr. Jevons?"

"Rather. We have more or less of that sort of thing to contend with during the caravan season. By Jove, it *was* grist for your mill, wasn't it! And so bally impromptu."

"You said something, sir," came from Martin Donnelly, who was rubbing his bruises. "Impromptu is good. The performance was rough in spots for lack of rehearsals, but it was there with the pep. Thank God this is only temporary duty for me! I'd hate to be the regular picture guy on this cruise. The first appearance has wore me all out."

"I was there," chimed in Kid Sprague. "Right smack in the picture."

"You are welcome to it, boy," Donnelly replied. "I like adventures, but not when they run as close to a post-mortem as that. The excitable Somali! That's the truth, and then some."

Mr. Jevons left them at the pier, after expressing his thanks for the pleasure of their company. In the afternoon, he reminded them, the English colony of Berbera would be prepared to entertain the officers and crew ashore, as many as could be spared from duty.

Martin Donnelly refused to be carried out to the launch in the coolie chair. He rolled up his wide trousers and waded through the surf. He was willing to try anything once. In the boat he remarked, as one profoundly impressed:

"Entertain the officers and crew. That's what he said. I suppose we'll send two hundred men ashore. And there's nineteen people in this Berbera colony, includin' six ladies. Kid, you'll have to hand it to 'em. A sporty little bunch. I never was strong for the Britishers before."

"We're going to give them a baseball game, Martin. They never saw one. I hope we can make it snappy. They are certainly shy of amusements."

"If you catch for the starboard-watch team, Kid, it will amuse 'em a lot," was the unkind comment.

With superior pride, Seaman Sprague explained a skinned nose and barked knuckles to his messmates at dinner. From his modest narrative it was to be inferred that he had saved Donnelly, the lieutenant, and the camera from extermination. He might be a young gob on his first cruise, but he guessed he could take care of himself. The other lads of his division envied him.

The captain, most of the officers, and half the crew went ashore when the afternoon sun had begun to lose its fiery heat. The nineteen English residents, bless their hearts, had exerted themselves to make this a red-letter day in Berbera. At one side of a sandy expanse, called a playing field by courtesy, they had employed native labor to erect every large tent, canopy, and awning that could be found. This canvas made a long pavilion in which benches and tables were set.

The sailors of the *Toledo* were to be entertained with cold drinks, sandwiches, cake, cigarettes and candy. The little weekly mail boat from Aden had been given a special order for this purpose. There was also an officers' tent with wicker chairs and a tea table at which the six English ladies presided. His excellency, Colonel Somersworth, the governor of Somaliland, was

waiting to greet his naval guests. Soldier, administrator, and gentleman, he had been wounded four times in the campaigns against the Mad Mullah.

For the bluejackets the baseball game was a serious affair. They were indifferent to heat and sand. The rivalry was keen between the nines of the port and starboard watches. Games had been played from port to port. At the end of the cruise a *Toledo* nine would be picked from this material to match itself against the other ships of the fleet.

For Berbera such a contest was sensational. Strange rumors had spread among the Somalis, who had no idea whether they were to witness a pastime or a battle. They swarmed to the scene, at least a thousand of them, and picturesquely framed two sides of the field. Never had a more extraordinary crowd of fans gathered to witness the great American game. It was to be noted that District Commissioner Jevons eyed them vigilantly as he strolled with the cane hooked over his arm. A squad of camel troopers stood ready for police duty. Apparently the excitement of the morning had simmered down, but it was advisable to take precautions.

The players trotted out for practice. Martin Donnelly, the old reliable, played first base for the port watch. He was neither fast nor graceful, but no better man had been developed for the position. Kid Sprague, limber and full of dash, was behind the bat for the starboard-watch team. His pitcher was "Rusty" Hackmeyer, a water tender of huge dimensions. Much of him was fat. His white trousers and blouse always seemed too tight for him. He fairly bulged out of them. He had a double chin and an arm like a ham. Service in the tropics had failed to melt him down. His station when on watch was a steel platform high above the roaring oil burners of the fireroom. He was entirely undisturbed by temperatures hot enough to fry an egg.

Rusty Hackmeyer was a good-natured bully who enjoyed cuffing young seamen over the head or perpetrating practical jokes as rough as his fancy could invent. In short, he was a whale of a man with the manners of a bear. As a baseball player he was useful in spite of his tonnage. He pitched a fast ball with his beef behind it and wielded a vicious bat. Because hot weather could not weaken him, he was the best selection for this Berbera game.

Martin Donnelly strolled over to watch him warm up. Although comrades of the black gang, they were foemen on the diamond. Affably Donnelly remarked:

"Hullo, Rusty, you three-ton truck! There ought to be a law against you. Here's the governor and the total white population all set to watch an exhibition of the strange American sport of baseball. They'll laugh their heads off when they see you roll around the bases."

"Wait till I strike you out a couple of times, you big stiff," grinned Rusty. "How about it, Kid? Have we got his number?"

"Easy meat. The jinx is working strong to-day, and he knows it."

Donnelly looked uncomfortable. He wished he had borrowed a rabbit's foot from one of the negro cooks in the ship's galley.

The officer in charge of the crew's athletics was brave enough to act as umpire. The job was no pink tea. There was no love lost between the rival watches. It was scrappy from start to finish. In the first inning the English onlookers became aware that baseball was quite different from the sedate, decorous leisure of a cricket match. They had read that the Americans had originally evolved it from the old English game of rounders. Evidently they had added many Yankee improvements.

The incessant chatter of the coaches was especially queer. The fielders kept up a racket even louder. They called their opponents the most insulting names. It sounded like a riot. Such were the impressions, only more so, of the horde of Somalis jammed close to the outfield. The catchers in masks and armor, the hickory bats, signified that sooner or later the hostile tribes of sailors would have to fight it out in the manner of a duel. Very fond of their own tribal songs and dances, the sons of the desert mistook the cries of the players for war chants or prayers, like supplicating Allah for victory. Over and over again they heard the magic words repeated:

"Atta boy! Eat 'em alive!"

The emotional Somalis were quick to imitate a refrain like this. It suggested the cadences of their own primitive music. They clapped their hands in unison and swayed with shuffling feet as they swelled a monotonous chorus of:

"At-tah *boy*-ee! *Eat* 'eem *alive*-ah!"

The noble bulk of Rusty Hackmeyer signally impressed the spare, sinewy race of blacks who carried not an ounce of extra flesh. They expected him to perform mighty deeds. The first time up, he failed to connect with one of his terrific wallops because the canny pitcher of the port watch carefully walked him. Then he was easily thrown out on a lumbering attempt to steal second. The rooters of the port watch jeered and hooted the weighty water tender. Bets were offered that he would get stalled in the sand and have to be pulled out with block and fall. When he came to bat again, the poet of the radio room was ready with a jingle which the port watch roared all together:

"Poor old Rusty,
Fat and dusty,
Two knots is his gait.
Port watch, sic 'em,
You can lick 'em,
Rusty goes as freight."

This irritated the ponderous Hackmeyer. Like most rough-handed humorists, he failed to appreciate the joke when it was on him. The lanky pitcher fed him a slow drop that floated to the plate and looked as big as a coconut. Rusty swung his club with the intention of soaking the ball clear across the Gulf of Aden. The result was a pop fly that fell into the shortstop's hands. More sarcastic cheers. A thousand Somalis were presently chanting with fine effect:

"Pooah ol' Rustee,
Fat—ah—dustee,
Eat—eem *alive*—ah."

The rotund water tender was in a fretful temper. He didn't mind being ridden by a bunch of gobs, he grumbled, but he objected to being razzed by a mob of heathen natives. It was disrespectful to the ruling race. In the pitcher's box, however, he steamed along for six innings without disaster. His team had tucked away a one-run lead, 5-4, and he was still sending them over with speed and precision.

The seventh inning was even more auspicious for the seagoing team of the starboard watch. Luck broke their way. Ground hits bounded at crazy angles. The outfield muffed two easy chances. Three more runs were scored. Rusty Hackmeyer felt soothed to the extent of 8-4.

He strode grandly in to pitch the last half of the seventh. The game had reached its crisis. In the shadow of defeat, the undaunted partisans of the port watch made so much noise that the nineteen English people of Berbera were positively appalled. They were reminded of the ferocious red Indians, the truly native Americans whom they had encountered in books. Waving their little white hats, these impassioned mariners emitted yells of rage and entreaty.

This tense spirit of warfare communicated itself to the wondering ranks of Somali tribesmen. They had begun to feel bored and mystified but now they were to be rewarded, or so they inferred. The infuriated young men from the warship would presently begin slaying each other with the round wooden clubs. Such wrath as they displayed could not be restrained even by the camel soldiers of his excellency, the governor.

By no means stupid, these wanderers of the desert had grasped the first principles of baseball. When a player slammed out a hit, they greeted it with mirthful applause. It was diverting to watch the agile sailors scamper this way and that. Now, however, they were hushed and eager, expecting sensational events. They pressed forward, white robes and black faces.

Rusty Hackmeyer pitched to the first batter up. He was the coxswain of the captain's gig, a tow-headed lad from Texas. Square on the nose he smote the ball and drove it over second base for a clean two-bagger. A bull-necked carpenter's mate spat on his hands and slammed a clean single to right field. As though by a spontaneous impulse, the Somali host erupted in a fervent, rhythmic chorus of:

"Pooah ol' Rustee,
Fat—ah—dustee."

It rose and fell in a minor key, pierced by the shrill voices of the women. Hands were clapped to mark the beat of it. Tirelessly it was repeated over and over, in a kind of musical intoxication. Rusty Hackmeyer turned and glared. Once or twice he shook his head as though a bee had stung him. In fact, as he later admitted, the damned thing bored into his ears like a gimlet.

He tried to ignore it and set himself to pitch with the most cautious deliberation, watching the two men on bases. All he could hear was "Pooah ol' Rustee," like a barbaric funeral hymn being sung over his

grave. He was sweating even more than usual. His round face was crimson. Kid Sprague, fearing heat apoplexy, beckoned him and said:

"Seven innings is all. The umpire just told me. Can you make the grade? We chop the last two innings so as to have plenty of time to clean up on this Berbera banquet."

"Sure I can make it," was the sulky reply. "What's the idea? Losin' your nerve? Listen to those crazy natives. Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"Forget 'em, old man. Use the bean. Home was never like this, but don't you care."

Immediately after this, Rusty was guilty of two wild pitches. One of them soared into a tent. To his comrades' dismay he presented the batter with a base on balls. With none out and the bases filled, Martin Donnelly was the next man up. He took his stand with a certain grim satisfaction. The omens were propitious. The jinx was vanished. Poor old Rusty, fat and dusty, was at his mercy. The vociferous Somalis had the big pitcher's goat. For the first time during the cruise he was flying distress signals. Turning to William Sprague, who crouched behind the plate, Donnelly remarked irritatingly from a corner of his mouth:

"Watch it ride, Kid. Here goes your old ball game."

"Blah! You'll fall over your feet if you do hit it," snorted the catcher. The tribesmen had ceased their monotonous chant. A wave of fresh excitement swept over them. From one group to another the word swiftly sped. This tall, scowling man who gripped the war club was a chief of prodigious strength and valor. He it was who had raged barehanded through the caravan, banging heads together, terrible as a rogue elephant. It was surmised that he bore a charmed life.

Now it was gossiped among them that this hero and his tribe had thus far suffered defeat in the baseball affray. He was about to lead the final attack and so overcome misfortune.

Such was his confident intention. Rusty Hackmeyer also had a feeling that something was about to happen to the ball game. With a sad grunt he fed Donnelly a ball that had everything left in him, including a prayer. The brawny machinist's mate stepped in to meet it. Right in the groove and precisely as high as he liked 'em!

The crack of the bat told Kid Sprague that the ball had departed on a long, swift journey. High over the center fielder's head it sped like a shell from a one-pounder. It was by far the longest, hardest hit of the game.

Rusty Hackmeyer sat down in the sand and fanned himself with his hat. He needed the brief rest. Runners were streaking madly around the bases. Martin Donnelly galloped earnestly to make the circuit. Absorbed in his effort, he failed to perceive the seething commotion among the Somalis back of center field. There was a kind of whirlpool in one spot where the shouts were bloodthirsty.

In the midst of it was the venerable desert pilgrim who had been nicked by the spear in the morning. His ear was bandaged. With a yelp he reeled back, clapping both hands to his nose. He had stopped Martin Donnelly's home run. It was more than coincidence. Some sinister magic was at work. First it had deflected the spear and now its baleful influence had sought to knock the patriarch's head from his shoulders. Beyond a shadow of doubt the sorcerer was the black-haired American sailor, square-jawed, with muscles of iron, whom his friends were loudly acclaiming as "Hot-stuff-Donnellee-ol'-timeh."

Two fielders were pluckily racing to retrieve the ball. One retreated with speed even greater. A Somali knife had whickered past his neck. The other lad was made of sterner stuff. He was bound to have that ball if he had to be carried off feet first. Here was a bluejacket fit to lead a forlorn hope or command a boarding party.

The old gentleman with the damaged nose filled the air with his cries for vengeance. His own followers were buzzing about him like hornets. Meanwhile Martin Donnelly was plodding on his way, turning up as many knots as his legs permitted. He failed to see a long-limbed Somali bound out of the ruck, shedding his robes as he ran. The district commissioner, really agitated for once, recognized this infuriated sprinter as the eldest son of the patriarchal sheik who had collided with the baseball. Dutifully, and as custom decreed, he had volunteered to settle the score of his father's wrongs.

Events were whizzing so rapidly that the

authority of the British Empire found it difficult to interfere. A knife gleamed in the fist of the murderous Somali. His intended victim was Martin Donnelly, who had just then rounded second base. He was unaware of his peril until the frantic shouts of his shipmates warned him that something was wrong. He glanced over his shoulder. What he saw was startling. The naked Somali with the deadly blade was skimming the sand directly in his wake.

Did this imperiled machinist's mate flee in panic to find refuge among the camel troopers? Not a bit of it. He was in duty bound to pull this baseball game out of the fire by tying the score. You might have called it the homing instinct. He was, by nature, a very stubborn man. Desperately, tenaciously he pounded along the path to third base.

The Somali, after getting off to a delayed start, was gaining with every stride. It was like a destroyer in chase of an armored cruiser, with a torpedo ready to launch. It was an error to say that Martin Donnelly was clumsy and slow on his feet. At this moment he could have qualified for the sprints at any track meet. He was a sheer miracle of speed.

The dusky troopers dashed forward with rifles ready, but they dared not fire for fear of potting the bystanders. The port and starboard watches, surging in the direction of third base, thought better of it. A mêlée might bring a thousand Somalis swarming down upon them. Besides this, there was a curious fascination in watching Donnelly run it out. He proposed to score if his wind lasted, and he would thank nobody for meddling. It was supremely a sporting proposition.

Imploringly the bluejackets yelled, rivalry forgotten:

"Oh, you Donnelly! Step on the gas. You can do it."

"Atta boy! The other guy stubbed his toe and lost a yard."

"Run like hell, old-timer! You can make it in three more yumps."

The courageous outfielder had finally pounced upon the ball as it rolled from under the feet of the tumultuous tribesmen. Dodging like a rabbit, he escaped their clutches and ran clear. With all his might he hurled the ball. Rusty Hackmeyer, no longer seated amid the ruins of a baseball game, scooped the ball from the ground and revolved in his tracks to relay it to Kid Sprague.

Donnelly had left third base and was well on his way to the home plate. The lathy Somali with blood in his eye was no more than half a dozen feet behind him. The umpire foresaw the closest decision he had ever been compelled to make—the ball, the hunted Donnelly, and the pursuer with the knife all due to arrive together. Rusty Hackmeyer juggled the ball. Even at that it would have reached Kid Sprague's hands in plenty of time to cut the runner off at the plate had it not been for the marvelous pace that Donnelly was setting in this last spurt. With a tremendous roar, he dived head-foremost and was enveloped in flying sand.

The baffled Somali ran plump into the arms of two troopers who tapped him on the head and took away his knife. Limply he was led off to jail. And now the fickle children of the desert, a thousand strong, veered from gusty anger to uproarious mirth. They rocked with laughter. The episode was of a kind that appealed to their simple sense of humor.

From the confusion at the home plate, emerged Kid Sprague, holding the ball aloft and raving at the umpire:

"He's out. I tagged him when he slid. He never touched the plate."

"A home run, and I'll say I earned it," protested Donnelly, shaky in the legs.

"You had a pacemaker," retorted the Kid. "You wouldn't have been here yet, if the native hadn't run you plumb off your feet."

The umpire was a naval officer of tact and discretion. Both teams were crowding around him. With Donnelly safe and sound, they were once more thinking in terms of baseball. Commanding them to fall back, the officer announced: "I couldn't see the play for dust. In fact, I was too busy getting out of the Mad Mullah's way. It was mighty close, boys. You will all agree to that. There is merit in Kid Sprague's argument that Donnelly was doing better than his standard cruising speed. You might say the port watch was playing ten men instead of nine. Supposing we allow the run and say that Donnelly honestly earned it. And I'll call the game finished. That leaves it a tie, 8-8. There is nothing in the rules to cover the case. How about it?"

The bluejackets, to a man, agreed that the umpire displayed the wisdom of Solomon. Also it was a hot day and cold drinks awaited them in the pavilion. So they cheered the umpire and Martin Donnelly and the nineteen friendly English people of little Berbera. The district commissioner felt rather exhausted.

"This baseball of yours *is* a rousing game, isn't it?" he said to the captain of U. S. S. *Toledo*. "I hope my Somalis won't insist on playing it among themselves. It would keep me busy holding court and fining 'em so many dozen camels."

Martin Donnelly sat on a bench in the shade, a bottle of ginger ale in one hand, a sandwich in the other. He felt refreshed and somewhat comforted, but the clouds had not entirely cleared. To Kid Sprague he confided:

"I was jinxed all day. I couldn't get away from it. And I wanted to have a happy New Year."

"You had it, but you are too dumb to figure it out," chided William. "Didn't we stage a perfectly elegant picture for the lieutenant this morning? And didn't you play in all kinds of luck when you beat the Somali gink to the home plate? Huh, he made you burn the wind and scored your run for you. It tied the game, didn't it?"

"Maybe there is two ways of looking at it," thoughtfully admitted Donnelly.

"Of course I'm right," declared the sagacious Kid. "You passed your jinx off onto that poor old sheik that got it going and coming. Cheer up, Martin, old top. You are leaving the jinx behind you in British Somaliland."

"On the level, Kid, do you believe that? Then I guess I have enjoyed myself after all."

Mr. Paine will have another Navy story in the next issue.

ARE THE OLYMPIC GAMES WORTH WHILE?

VARIOUS unpleasant incidents that marked and marred the holding of the eighth Olympic Games in France last summer have caused many people, especially some of the leaders of sport in England, to wonder if the Olympic Games are worth while—whether, instead of filling their purpose of cementing international friendships, they do not give rise to international hatreds that will live for many years.

Men and women of many nations and many traditions meet in the struggle for Olympic supremacy, in many cases in sports of the personal-contact sort that even among people of the same nation often lead to quarrels. So it is not strange that the Olympics at every revival have brought forth bursts of national feeling in which the voice of good sportsmanship has been unheard.

In this year's games the kingly sport of fencing caused the most lurid incidents. Quarrels between French, Italian and Hungarian swordsmen led to at least one challenge to fight it out with sharp swords—the challenger being barred from further Olympic competition by the committee in charge of the games. The Latin temperament also had its innings when a French boxer bit an American boxer while they were engaged in the ring. But most of the disturbance was caused by the unsportsmanlike attitude of spectators, many of whom knew little or nothing of the games they were watching, but were very certain that they wanted their countrymen to win. The booing of the American rugby-football players in their final match against the French team was confined to people in the grand stands—the players themselves giving evidence of the best of feeling. This was true also in the track-and-field events, in which the United States, Finland and Great Britain fought hard but good-temperedly for every point.

It is more than doubtful that the Olympic Games will be abandoned without a further trial, and equally doubtful if the United States or Great Britain will refuse to compete in the next games. But it is likely that the program of the games will be considerably curtailed, and possible that sports in which the personal-contact feature is strong will go into the discard. It is also likely that in the next four years the love of sport will grow in many nations, and that greater familiarity with games will cause the spectators at the next Olympic Games to regard the contests as sporting events rather than a miniature edition of the World War.

Snake Fear

By Howard R. Marsh

Author of "The Bugs Battery," "Not a Dude Ranch," Etc.

What was it that saved the life of Dike McNeil? Was it the bumblebee in the cactus or—Something Else?

BALDY, the mousy burro of "Side-winder" Dutton, refused to go down to the bed of the dry wash. Refused absolutely, thoroughly, stubbornly. Baldy was a patient animal ordinarily, and reliable. Many miles across the Mojave Desert he had carried Side-winder Dutton or his pack; sometimes both. On enterprises honorable and enterprises nefarious the burro had been Side-winder's able aid. But now he balked.

There, above the twenty-foot cut in the desert floor, he braced his spindly legs and refused to go down the declivity. The drop-off or something in the bleached bed of the dry wash below didn't appeal to Baldy; that was evident in the way the big ears laid back on the ungainly head, in every line of the pot-bellied body.

"Come on, you!" shouted Dutton, pulling at the halter. Blasting oaths Side-winder used, terrific oaths, oaths which Baldy ordinarily understood and appreciated. But this scorching September morning Baldy was unreasonable. And Dutton was in no mood for delay. The torridity was intense, life-sucking. Heat waves danced, layer upon layer above the alkali sand of the desert; each separate rock and creosote bush and clump of sage seemed to quiver and jump in the pulsating atmosphere. Even the distant mountains appeared to shake and move; now they rushed forward, huge and threatening, now they retreated far behind a waving gossamer veil.

The heat worried Side-winder Dutton. It withered his little body, already sucked dry by many years of desert sun. He was a scrawny man, without a superfluous ounce of fat. His face was small and tight skinned. The features were sharp, ratlike, repulsive, particularly the beady little eyes which shifted rapidly from side to side, generally following the contour of the ground. He was looking, always looking for something. And that was the second reason the heat worried him—it brought out rattlesnakes to bask in the sun.

No man on the Mojave Desert feared and hated snakes as did Side-winder Dutton; the fear was an obsession. From Big Pine to Mojave the desert dwellers knew of Dutton's great abhorrence of snakes. That trait, and perhaps certain snakelike characteristics, had earned for him the nickname of "Side-winder," a cognomen which aptly described his slinking, venomous disposition.

Just why Side-winder was so mortally afraid of snakes no man could tell, least of all Dutton himself. He had been afraid as a boy, horribly, sickeningly afraid, and

the fear had increased with manhood. Now he never stepped through the alkali sand without watching ahead and both sides of his trail; he never crawled under his blanket at night without first beating the ground around his camp.

He had never been bitten himself; he had seen but a single man who had. That was "Spike" Estes of Cactus Springs, several years ago. Side-winder Dutton had seen a rattler sink his fangs into Spike's thumb. Immediately Side-winder had keeled over, faint and nauseated. When he recovered he found Estes had made himself a tourniquet from his bandanna and then systematically and thoroughly slit open his thumb to suck out the venom. Plenty of whisky applied internally, and tobacco juice to the thumb, seemed to make Estes well again, after some hours of pain and a swollen arm. But it was days before Side-winder Dutton fully recovered from the shock. If a snake ever bit him he'd die of fear, that seemed certain. But he took care that no snake should ever have the chance. His rodent eyes watched carefully; his ears were always pricked for the warning, vibrating rattle. Most of all he feared the side-winder rattlesnake, because it moved around at night. But Side-winder himself rarely traversed the desert after dark; only when he must leave behind some recent cache robbery or similar crime, or when driven by thirst or hunger, did he stir after the sun dropped behind the Sierra range to the westward.

When the burro halted on the edge of the dry wash and refused to proceed, Side-winder's first thought, of course, was of snakes. More than once the dull eyes of Baldy had seen a coiled rattler before the keen ones of Side-winder. So now the desert rat searched the declivity below, gingerly poking around in the rocks and rubble. Finding nothing, he returned to tug at Baldy's halter. But the burro braced his thin legs and stuck.

The next move was to beat Baldy. Side-winder did that thoroughly with a tough mesquite root. Dust flew from the mouse-colored sides of the burro; his eyes narrowed and he snorted once or twice, at the same time delivering short and premature kicks at the atmosphere.

Now Side-winder Dutton was in a terrific rage. His oaths were as torrid as the atmosphere, his little face was convulsed with fury. Suddenly he untied his pack and seized a huge, cast-iron frying pan. It whirled through the air, propelled by all Side-winder's nervous strength, and caught the little burro squarely across the eyes. Baldy dropped to his knees, then plunged headlong down the miniature precipice. The master apparently had won the contest of stubbornness. But when he reached the bottom of the wash he found he had lost. Little Baldy was dead, his neck broken by the fall.

Side-winder Dutton swore sullenly and kicked the burro's lifeless body. Then he removed and cached his pack and found a shaded spot in the lee of the bank to think out his problem. There he was, thirty or forty miles from any settlement, without means of carrying his pack. Less than a week before he had left Independence, and already he had lost his burro. That meant retracing the tedious, life-sucking route or—— Well, he'd wait until night and see.

At dusk Side-winder Dutton made his way cautiously to an uptilted granite butte west of the wash. From the top of the rock he studied the desert. Then he grunted his satisfaction. To the north he had seen the glimmer of a camp fire.

Half an hour later he walked into the circle of light from "Old Faithful" Larkins' fire. "'Lo," he said, studying the aged prospector. He almost thought he knew the man, he had seen so many like him—thin, furrowed face, covered with gray hair except where it shaded into brown around the mouth, spare, muscular figure and half-shut, clear eyes.

"'Lo, stranger," responded Larkins. If he were surprised at the sudden appearance of a slinking man from the shadowy creosote and encelia he made no sign. "Had your chuck yet?"

"Thanks, yes," answered Dutton. "Camp's a couple of miles south. Saw your light and came over to say 'lo. Prospecting?"

"Yes."

"Any luck?"

"Only out three weeks."

The two men were silent for several minutes as men are often silent on the desert, where speech counts little. Then Side-winder Dutton asked the question he had been preparing.

"Got a partner?"

"No. I go better alone."

"Yeah," agreed Dutton. "Me, too."

Again silence for several moments except for the shifting of Old Faithful's burro in the darkness beyond the fire where he was stake-tied, and the quarreling, snarling bark of coyotes in the foothills to the west.

"Well, good night," said Side-winder Dutton, stirring.

"S'long."

Dutton rose and moved ten paces away. Suddenly he whirled and dropped behind a screening creosote bush. His six-shooter jerked from his hip. Old Faithful Larkins half rose. Then he toppled backward as Dutton's gun flashed three times.

Now Side-winder Dutton had the burro he desired.

II.

Deputy Sheriff Dike McNeil was proceeding from the Duckfoot Ranch to the Cross-A-Cross on the unusually peaceful mission of collecting the poll tax on cattle. He traveled at night, preferring the slight chance that Hotfoot, his calico pony, should break a leg by stumbling in the uncertain gloom, to the withering heat of the day. His way lay straight toward the mountains, and he kept a sharp lookout for Smokebush Wash lest he and Hotfoot tumble over the edge unawares.

He judged he was nearing the wash when the unmistakable odor of burning mesquite and sage reached his nostrils.

"Some old rat out prospecting, eh, Hotfoot?" he hazarded. "I like prospectors on general principles; guess we'll go over and say hello, eh?" He nudged the pony toward the north; already he could see the faint glow of a dying fire in the darkness.

"Hello, stranger," he called a moment later. He could see the man's feet close to the fire but there was no response.

"Poor devil's asleep," he thought. "Guess I won't disturb him after all." He leaned to the right and Hotfoot wheeled. Only when he was fifty yards away did a certain impression of his mind seem important. It was the man's feet; odd how widely spread they were, and how they turned so rigidly outward. Perhaps the fellow was sick. For the second time he wheeled back. Sliding from Hotfoot's back he strode to the man by the fire. A match flared in the blackness for a moment.

"Dead!" exclaimed McNeil. The brief flare had shown an old prospector warped inhumanly on the ground; it had revealed outturned pockets and brown-stained sand and more than one bullet hole.

Deputy Dike McNeil wasted no time. True, he could not trail the murderer until morning. But the body of the old prospector must be protected some way from the coyotes and buzzards if for no other reason than to be identified and to serve as evidence against the murderer. McNeil dug manfully with a short-handled shovel he found in camp; he put all the strength of his broad young shoulders into the task. Long before dawn he had a shallow stone-lined grave ready and another pile of stones to heap on top. No use for coyotes to try to claw when McNeil got through.

He waited until daylight for the burial. Perhaps he could identify the man; anyway he wished to photograph him mentally and to make certain that he had been murdered, not committed suicide. He was soon satisfied on that score; the wounds were widely separated and any one of them would have been enough to kill. Hastily he heaped the man's belongings on his grave.

"Now, Hotfoot," he said to his pony, "we'll get the guy that plugged this poor old devil. Sure we will." There was cold anger in Dike's Scotch accent; it burred his words. And there was determination in his voice. Dike MeNeil was on a man hunt, and failure in a man hunt was unknown to the young deputy sheriff.

There was little trouble following the trail of old Larkins' burro from where it had been stake-tied the night before. The alkali sand was clearly marked. If a "norther" had come down, the trail would have been instantly obliterated; as it was McNeil could follow it at a lope. As he rode toward the wormlike meanderings of Smokebush Wash he talked to his pony.

"One mistake that murderer made, Hotfoot," he said. "He left the fire burning. That is apt to be a fatal error for him. Yes, sir. Otherwise that poor old prospector could have laid out there in the sand and sage for months and nobody the wiser. Yes, sir. Till his bones were bleached and no one could guess who he was or how he died. Just one mistake, Hotfoot, but murderers generally always make one. Whoa, there, Hotfoot! A little slower. Maybe our murderer is right here in the wash." He reined up where the burro's tracks went over the drop-off and studied the bed of the wash.

Then he urged his pony to a stiff-legged, sliding descent.

On the stone floor of the cut the burro's tracks were not evident. Obviously, though, he had turned west. Nothing for Dike McNeil to do but follow along, watching carefully both sides to see where the burro climbed out. Three hundred yards down the winding dry river bed he saw the dead burro of Side-winder Dutton. The sight excited him greatly.

"That's it, Hotfoot!" he exulted. "Absolutely on the right track! This ain't the burro we've been following! No, sir! This one tumbled over the edge; you can see his marks. Yes, sir, and broke his neck or leg and had to be shot. And the owner of this here burro went out after another. Maybe he was the partner of that poor devil back there. Maybe not. But anyway he took his burro and had to shoot to get it. Yes, sir! Clear as daylight. So we just keep going till we find where the second burro climbed out and then—hello, there's where he stopped to pick up his pack. Surer than shooting. All right, Hotfoot, a little faster please!" The pony's hoofs clicked on the stones of the dry wash.

Side-winder Dutton had made an early start that morning. His conscience was not bothering him, for he had none. Neither had he any appreciable fear that the murder would be discovered for weeks, maybe months. Still it was one of his axioms to put many desert and sand-blasted miles as quickly as possible between himself and his occasional crimes. At dawn he was on his way, heading for the great Sierra range to the west. A short distance down the wash he found an easy ascent and urged the burro up to the desert floor. Once there, man and beast plodded stolidly through the checkered, gray-green sea of creosote and sage. Side-winder kept abreast the burro's shoulder. In that way there were two pairs of eyes watching simultaneously for snakes; two pairs of ears to heed the warning rattle. Back and forth Side-winder's beady eyes darted, searching, always searching for the fearsome reptiles. Only occasionally did he glance back over his trail.

Yet he saw Dike McNeil soon enough. Perhaps that strange extra sense which men seem to develop on the desert warned him. He turned and shaded his eyes, stared for a moment at the racing figure which raised a dust cloud behind him. Then he swore venomously. Yes, that rapidly advancing rider meant business; no doubt whom he was after.

Side-winder Dutton tore a canteen from the pack, thwacked the burro's bony hips and plunged into the waist-high creosote bush. The brush was scanty and spaced at regular intervals, as all desert growth is. But it offered fair concealment, and the burro, running ahead, might draw the trailer away. But Side-winder took no chances. He crawled rapidly through the creosote, at times rising to run a few feet, his body bent double and hunched forward. Now his eyes darted more rapidly than ever, his ears were keener for the warning rattle of a snake than for sounds of possible pursuit.

The ruse of turning the burro loose had been seen by Deputy Dike McNeil. That act alone proved the guilt of the man he was following. So Dike McNeil set his square jaw, hunched forward and touched his pony's sides with the ornamental but rarely used Spanish spurs.

A hundred yards short of the spot where Side-winder Dutton had left his burro, Dike McNeil slid from his pony. He had no idea of riding rashly into an ambuscade. "Stay there, Hotfoot, till I whistle," he ordered. The pony perked its ears knowingly. Dike McNeil reached for his canteen and went into the brush, cutting obliquely toward the west.

There began that morning under the glare of the desert sun a game of hare and hound, a game in which the stake was death. Dike McNeil, young, desertwise and courageous was the trailer; Side-winder Dutton, venomous, full of treachery and ready to kill, was the fugitive. The advantage was all with Dutton. He could flee rapidly, or he could hide behind some boulder or creosote bush and then, when the trailer appeared, coldly and methodically shoot him down. Dutton knew that, and he leered his satisfaction. Dike McNeil knew it, and his blue eyes glinted dangerously.

At first Side-winder Dutton chose to flee. He might escape that way without risking his ornery body. The chances were that he could outdistance his pursuer, who must follow his trail laboriously. If worst came to worst he could pick a likely spot to make a target of the man following him.

Two things handicapped him in his flight: The constant and careful watch he must keep for rattlesnakes, and the fact that he

had started his flight that morning without breakfast. Already he was feeling a little faint; the withering desert sun seemed to suck his vitality. He paused often to swig deeply from the canteen. Once on a piece of rolling ground he stopped to study the desert expanse behind him. Perhaps he was fleeing from no one; perhaps the pursuer was already off the trail. But far back he saw the black hulk of a large man dodging forward from bush to bush, always keeping screened from any one directly ahead.

Down went Side-winder Dutton again; once over the rise he ran for a hundred yards, then dropped into the sand and crawled again.

The sun's rays grew hotter as the day advanced. Side-winder Dutton seemed to shrivel visibly. His canteen was almost empty now. When he crawled rapidly there was a singing in his ears and the bushes and rocks danced before his eyes. His nerves were taut under the strain; each foot of advance must be studied for possible rattlesnakes. Once he thought he heard the heart-shaking rattle and saw the brown-yellow diamond-backed body of which he dreamed. He became deathly pale, and even when he found it was only the long, dried spine of a bayonet cactus he had disturbed, his heart thumped violently and he proceeded more slowly.

Behind him Dike McNeil, too, was taking punishment. His eyes were bleared and half closed from the desert glare; his huge body had demanded and exhausted all the water in the canteen; his throat felt like a splintered board in spite of the efforts of a swollen tongue to moisten it. "If I'm this way," he thought, "the fellow ahead must be worse. I'm stronger than most. Must watch now; he'll be turning soon."

Ahead, Side-winder Dutton already had decided to turn on his pursuer. His quick eyes sought a possible place of concealment, something better than the thin creosote bush. He found it at last—a thick clump of bayonet cactus, waist high, with a single blossom stalk rising from the center. He could lie behind that, gun ready, and when the trailer came by, shoot him at close range. Cunningly, Side-winder crawled fifty feet beyond the cactus clump, then circled back to it. There he waited, supine, six-shooter in hand, his elbow resting in the sand to steady it. Two, three minutes he waited. Then he saw Dike McNeil dodging forward, rapidly but cautiously, his automatic pistol ready. Still he waited. McNeil was twenty paces away, ten paces, but why take any chance?

Now Side-winder squinted carefully down the long barrel of his six-shooter; his finger tightened on the trigger. Dike McNeil was watching ahead, watching the trail. Such a pitifully easy target! Scarcely ten feet away.

Side-winder Dutton pulled on the trigger with gradually increasing pressure so as not to disturb his aim. Suddenly he screamed and leaped backward, his face convulsed with fear. The gun blazed harmlessly in the air. Right at his nose had sounded the terrible, nerve-breaking rattle he dreaded.

Dike McNeil whirled; his automatic pumped lead at the scrawny, murderous man ambuscaded behind the cactus; he leaped behind a boulder and fired again, the bullets clipping away spines of the cactus before they reached the body of Side-winder Dutton. Then slowly he went forward, ready for attack. But the first bullet had ended the nefarious career of Side-winder Dutton.

"Sorry, my hearty," said the young deputy sheriff, leaning over the sharp, rodent, fear-stricken face which stared blindly at the sky, "but you had the first shot. And damned if I know how you missed me at that distance!"

He was sincerely sorry, was young Dike McNeil, but there were no two ways about it. That scrawny, ill-favored man warped on the ground had killed one man in twenty-four hours and fully intended to kill another. "Sorry," repeated McNeil, and his regret vaguely included all the death and suffering in the world. Soft, he was suddenly tender-hearted in his reaction to the strain of the man hunt.

There, in the thickest of the cactus, a bumble bee had imprisoned itself between two spines, drunk, perhaps, with the sweetness of the cactus bloom. Frantically the bee fluttered its wings against the brittle growth, producing a queer, vibratory rattle. Involuntarily Dike McNeil started, then gently he parted the spines and freed the honey-laden bee; it crawled a few steps and took wing across the desert.

"How," McNeil asked himself again, staring at the body of Side-winder Dutton, "could he have missed me at that distance?"

Selwood of Sleepy Cat

By Frank H. Spearman

Author of "Whispering Smith," "Nan of Music Mountain," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

"John Selwood, gambler"—that was how he styled himself. But in the camps and budding cities out beyond the end of steel, where personalities counted more than pedigrees, the hard-shelled frontiersmen spoke of him familiarly—though not without a touch of awe—as "Gentleman John." In that small but yeasty agglomeration which was Sleepy Cat in the days of the Overland Trail, Selwood, gambler though he was, leaped quickly to a commanding pinnacle. Gambling was regarded, in Sleepy Cat, as a business like any other—to be respected in accordance with the merits of its adepts. As a gambler Selwood was duly respected—for nobody questioned his honesty. As a man, he was even more respected—for nobody, after the shooting fray at "Bunty" Bartoe's saloon in which Selwood single-handed defended his wounded partner, Dave Tracy, from the attack of five gunmen, questioned his courage or his ability to back any hand he cared to play. Doctor Carpy, the composite hotel-keeper-physician of the turbulent community, who witnessed the affair and treated Tracy's wound, reported that three of the Calabasas gang were killed in that fight and a fourth wounded. Even the lusty citizenry of Sleepy Cat were wary of a man who could shoot like that. And the story of the fight, when it had gone the rounds, won Selwood a host of admirers, good men to have on his side, dangerous men to antagonize—men like Jim McAlpin, the Russell & Wentworth barn boss, and Bob Scott, the Indian, and Bill Pardaloe, the mule boss, and Abe Cole, the blacksmith. It also won for Selwood a job which he didn't need, but enjoyed. When Ben Wentworth heard of the business from Doctor Carpy he hired the gambler to superintend the Russell & Wentworth mule-freight line between Medicine Bend and Sleepy Cat. But if the fight which introduced Selwood to Sleepy Cat brought him allies and emoluments it made him enemies—Atkins and Barbalet and all their ilk of the River Quarter dives—and particularly Starbuck, putative and de facto mayor of Sleepy Cat. For Starbuck realized that with a man like Selwood established in town his own preëminence was threatened. Nor was Starbuck pleased by Selwood's assiduous attendance at the daily auctions presided over by "Big" Haynes in Fyler's store. It seemed to Starbuck that Selwood's interest in the auctions was something less than genuine and that the real attraction which drew the dangerous and debonair young gambler to Fyler's place was not Fyler's merchandise but Fyler's daughter. And Starbuck viewed with hostile eye any man who looked twice on Christie Fyler, for he had plans of his own touching her future.

(A Four-Part Story—Part II.)

CHAPTER XI.

BOOTS WITHOUT SADDLES.

CHRISTIE looked like a frightened fawn at the giant mule boss. Pleased at having made an impression, although it was in the nature of frightening her to death, Pardaloe followed his advantage. "You needn't 'a' been scared, little girl, not for one minute, no matter *what* happened. Do you think I'd see *any* man scare you? Not f'r a second! I'd break any man in two like a match that ever give you a word or a look! I ain't anything on fine clo'es—but I know what's a-comin' to a woman!"

Christie could only stare and gulp down her fears; but she tried to smile, and both turned to listen to Big Haynes.

There really remained only the formality

of knocking down the Queen of Shebas to Selwood. Would he take them? He would.

At his bid?

At his bid. The gambler threw away the third match he was skeletonizing, snapped shut his knife, put it in his pocket and stepped to the cashier's desk, where Fyler, his eyes dancing in nervous expectancy, and his facial muscles twitching into appealing smiles, was counting and recounting the twelve fateful pairs of stockings and wrapping them up.

The crowd, with craning necks, closed in to witness the last act in the turbulent drama—they wanted to see the actual money paid. Haynes thought it more dignified to keep his post, but he was high enough above the onlookers to see everything. Selwood, from a roll of bills that he drew from a trousers pocket, counted off eight one-thousand-dollar bills—to these he added bills of five hundred and one hundred dollars to make up his bid—and silently watched Fyler with trembling fingers count them over.

When the trader had done this and thanked his extraordinary customer, Selwood, taking the package of stockings under his arm, turned to go. Christie had managed to disappear, and, somehow, Selwood was glad of it. When he stepped with his purchase out of the front door Haynes was trying to regain the attention of his audience. It was useless. Pardaloe and Abe Cole, sputtering talk and close behind Selwood, led the way, and on their heels half the crowd pressed to be first to tell the story upstreet and down.

Next morning a Russell & Wentworth Conestoga wagon stood in front of Selwood's place. The wagon was filled with boots. The mules had been sent back to the barn and Bill Pardaloe, in charge at the wagon, had painted a rude muslin sign and fastened it to the side of the Conestoga.

The sign read, simply:

FREE BOOTS TO-MORROW.

All that day Pardaloe was the busiest man in town explaining the odd announcement. He managed to make it clear to everybody, except to a stupid Gunlock Indian, loafing for the day in Sleepy Cat, that the sign meant exactly what it said and that precisely at noon on the following day every man applying to Pardaloe would be given a pair of boots absolutely free; the only stipulation being that they must be tried on on the spot and worn away. When asked why not to-day for a free pair, Pardaloe explained that Selwood was giving away the boots and meant that his friends at Thief River should have an equal chance with his friends at Sleepy Cat.

Early next morning men began to drift down Fort Street. They brought up, for the most part, near Selwood's gambling hall. By ten o'clock a crowd out of all proportion to the importance of the event filled the street about Selwood's place. On the Thief River horizon there was a show of dust at daylight. By sunup, as they expressed it in Sleepy Cat, it looked as if a sand storm were brewing on the Spanish Sinks. When Sleepy Cat men turned out of doors after breakfast the town was alive with strangers and an hour later the mob surrounding Pardaloe clamored for the boots. It was decided to avert a riot by advancing the opening of the distribution to eleven o'clock, and at that hour, Pardaloe, bursting with the responsibility of his job as almoner, and moderately fortified with mountain high wines, mounted an upended beer keg and announced for the last time the conditions, namely, that each man must wear his boots away. Pardaloe stood backed by Bob Scott and McAlpin, and held in his hand a hickory singletree with which to moderate objection, adjust dispute, and prevent crowding.

For two hours the pressure on the open end of the wagon was severe. The united efforts of the three worthies in charge were needed to curb the ambition of three hundred applicants for one hundred and fifty pairs of boots. Within the space rigidly roped off and in charge of McAlpin, for the trying on, a dozen men at a time sat in the sun and dust, each struggling with his pair of opera boots. Feet reflecting all conditions of frontier hardship and foot cover-

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The careful reader of this second installment of "Selwood of Sleepy Cat" may notice that the "Bunty Barteau" of the first installment has become the "Bunty Bartoe" of the second, and that "Big Hayes" has become "Big Haynes." These changes were requested in a telegram from the author. Unfortunately, the magazine containing the first installment of Mr. Spearman's story had been printed when the telegram reached us, so we are making the requested changes at the earliest opportunity.—THE EDITOR.

ings—not to say stockings, ranging from nothing whatever to muskrat skins, buckskin shirting and army blankets—were common run. Scott, passing out the boots, was loudly and continually petitioned for large sizes and larger sizes, but with his characteristic shrewdness he emptied only one barrel at a time, making each comer take his chance. In this way alone, he insisted to Pardaloe, staggering, so to speak, under the outbursts of profane protest with which he was assailed—could fair play be accorded to all comers. A heap of discarded boots, shoes, moccasins and fragments of buffalo robes began to pile up under the wagon. Men strutting away in brand-new opera boots aroused the sleepiest of the natives to what was going on at Selwood's.

But not a few men, unable to find their fit and determined not to be left out, stalked off in boots too tight, and with feet gradually swelling a protest in the sunshine at their violent cribbing, sought solace along the bars of the River Quarter. Some of these victims, inflamed with a growing sense of their discomfort, rejoined the crowd and assailed Pardaloe with abuse. Nothing could be more to Pardaloe's taste, for he only ached for opportunities to meet objectors with the singletree—and did it. Others, discomfited—and dissatisfied with the result of complaints to Pardaloe—wrangled with one another in the crowd itself and at times a vigorous fist fight ended a profitless dispute.

When the Thief River contingent reached the square the confusion deepened. Fifty men had come thirty miles for boots and as the supply dwindled the uproar grew. McAlpin sent pressing messages to Selwood for help. The bearers only succeeded in getting Selwood out of bed. He professed he had no relief to offer and sent word to give away what boots they had and close up shop.

This was easier said than done, and McAlpin, relieved by Pardaloe, went at length to Selwood in person to plead for some kind of help. He managed to get the gambler down to the scene—now almost one of despair, for the small sizes and narrow widths remaining were a mere source of hopeless rows and bitter recriminations.

Selwood's appearance was greeted with loud cheers. Everybody yelled—some were in no condition to do anything more. Selwood dispatched Pardaloe down to John Cole's big general store to buy a fresh supply of boots. More than a hundred extra pairs were picked up and dumped as quietly as possible in with the original stock—they were cowhide boots, much more useful and of bigger sizes than Fyler's French-calf opera goods.

With this relief it looked as if the crisis had been met, but in the midst of the second distribution an alarm was raised. Again the Spanish Sinks were enveloped in a storm of dust. Seasoned scouts soon cried, "Indians!" and a scare was on. But as minute men rushed to the river to burn the upper and lower bridges, it was further declared that the oncoming horde were friendlies, that is, Gunlocks, and had their squaws with them. This allayed fear of hostilities and the excitement both ebbed and rose again when the first bucks to reach Fort Street announced they were about to take the warpath against the Crows; but had halted at Sleepy Cat for new boots!

Selwood stood nonplused. He was in no position to offend the Gunlocks; they had, in fact, come to his rescue on at least one occasion, when the hostiles had attempted to hold up a wagon train crossing the Spanish Sinks; and were in the habit of appearing in Sleepy Cat at reasonable intervals to visit "P'Chink-nazee," or Big Nose, as they called Selwood; and receive such further reward of virtue as might suggest itself to their esteemed friend.

Ben Wentworth had forcibly declared that the mild-mannered red men of the desert had already collected more reward than the value of the train they had saved, but Selwood did not feel in that way, and after the company refused to authorize further allowances in their behalf Selwood jollied them along as pensioners of his own.

Such boots as were still to be found in Sleepy Cat, Selwood bought—some pairs of the opera boots were secured from dissatisfied, or rather, already satisfied wearers, and such were distributed to the waiting bucks; and the more provident of these, without waiting for new boots, investigated the discard and supplied themselves with better footwear than the white man had carried away.

But with every resource to supply their needs exhausted, the Gunlocks still hung in silence around the wagon. They exhausted Pardaloe by refusing to understand his harangues and the louder he talked the less they seemed to comprehend. The shadows

of the Superstition Peaks were creeping over Sleepy Cat but the now gloomy bucks did not disperse, and it looked as if they meant to demand supper and to camp on Selwood for the night. It was Selwood himself who in the end solved the problem of getting rid of them. He sent out trusty henchmen who brought up all the plug tobacco in town, and Selwood in person explained to the ancients of the invaders that being resolved no red friend of his should go home without a testimonial of his affection, and since no more boots were to be begged, bought or stolen in Sleepy Cat, he had resolved that every brave should be presented with a sixteen-ounce bar of rough-and-ready Battle-Ax plug tobacco. This offer conveyed in good Gunlock to the assembled braves was received with guttural acclaim.

The butts were split open. Bucks that had already been supplied with boots were, of course, excluded from this further gratuity. But as increasing numbers of warriors in single file approached the wagon, Pardaloe and McAlpin were instructed to cease their disputes with those barefooted worthies whom they accused of having already taken boots, and to give a sixteen-ounce plug of chewing tobacco to every man in line. Dusk saw the swarthy caravan, their war spirit apparently satisfied, again disappearing into the brooding dust of the Spanish Sinks.

CHAPTER XII.

PARDALOE IS MILDLY DISAPPOINTED.

SUNDAY in Sleepy Cat was not the best day of the week; it was usually the worst: but Sunday morning was fairly quiet and on the Sunday following Selwood's sensational performances, Christie, troubled, was abroad early. The sun was scarce an hour high when she hastened upstreet from the tent camp toward Doctor Carpy's hotel. Slender in figure, light of foot, alert, almost swift in action, Christie looked neither to the right nor the left and the few men stirring at that hour caught none of her glances.

The front door of the hotel was open. She entered the narrow hall with the caution of the inexperienced and looked through another open door into the office, which was empty. The morning sun, prodigal of values, shone gloriously through the dusty east windows and a dog, old and overfed, lay peacefully dozing before the battered office stove. He paid no attention to Christie when she walked in and halted in perplexity at the desk—which consisted only of a shabby piece of old counter and a half-empty cigar case containing with a few cigars an abundance of old bills rendered the proprietor for merchandise had and delivered.

But on the counter stood the dinner bell and Christie, after some looking about and some hesitation, seized and rang it.

Startled at the noise it made, Christie set it down in trepidation and waited for results. For a moment there were none: then men, some in coats and some coatless, some bearded and some unshaven, but all very much face-washed and with hair very wet and plastered, began appearing from nowhere, or rather from everywhere—at the doors and through the windows, Christie saw them, moving, some slowly, some eagerly, but all with great accord, toward the entrance to the dining room across the hall. The doors were closed, but one adventurer, more bold than his fellows, pushed open the closed door, walked in, and the rest trooped heavily in after him.

Christie, watching this eruption of men, stood with eyes for the most part cast down. Yet there was one man she sought and her glances swept at least the backs of all the men as they passed in. Then she heard a woman's voice and one not pitched in an amiable key.

"Ready? No! It's not ready and won't be ready for half an hour yet. Who rang that bell?" were the words that floated across the hall to Christie; and on an ascending scale of emphasis and volume. Some one was clearly much annoyed and the apologetic murmur of various bass voices did not assuage the woman's impatience.

Christie felt like dropping through the floor. Very positive steps were coming rapidly her way. The next moment she was faced by a stern-looking woman.

"Did you ring that bell?"

Christie felt it would be useless to deny. "I didn't know it was the dinner bell," she explained. "I just wanted to speak to somebody——"

"What about?"

There was rude resentment in both questions; the second coming so sharply after the first, started Christie's own quick-triggered temper. "I want Doctor Carpy."

"What for?"

"For my father."

"Well, he's not here. There was a fight this morning down in the River Quarter. A man got shot. He's down there. What's the matter with your father?"

Each question was chopped off with a mental ax and the question flung with about as much consideration as a bullet.

"My father," retorted Christie resentfully, imitating and beginning to feel the harshness of her questioner, "needs a doctor. He was robbed last night and beaten!" She spoke her words with due feeling; but if she expected to make any impression with the news or to arouse sympathy for her anxiety she was disappointed—stories of Christie's sort meant little to Margaret Hyde—she had become too inured to the violence of a frontier town.

Christie studied her strange face with unconscious interest. The once fine features had grown hard with the years that should have softened them; the years that ought to have crowned her womanhood had withered it. The eyes that once had hoped and danced and smiled on young life shone now coldly on all alike. Margaret was not coarse, not common, but it seemed as if with hope dead, all human interest, all human sympathy, too, had died.

"Well, if you want him, you'd better wait here till he comes back," she snapped. As she spoke the two women heard a heavy step on the porch and the next moment the doctor walked in.

He threw down his bag and threw off his hat with the air of a tired man. Then sitting down as his housekeeper left the room, he heard Christie's story. Whether Christie herself appealed directly to the doctor's blunted sympathies or whether his professional sense of duty impelled him, who shall say? At all events Christie told him her father had been called out of the tent late the night before, set on by two men, robbed of all his money, brutally beaten about the head—and that she had not dared leave the tent to hunt up the doctor till after daylight.

Without discussion Carpy told her to wait one minute till he could get a cup of coffee and he would go with her. "A teamster got hurt last night. I stayed up with him till twelve o'clock. Then about two o'clock a man got shot down street—he didn't take long: but the fellow he cut up took two hours and most of my—thread." The doctor, with instinctive restraint modified the last word, and excusing himself, bade Christie wait.

But the cook had overslept, the coffee was not ready. Carpy muttered somewhat and sputtered, rummaged about for some bandages and was ready to go with Christie.

Selwood kept a room at "Carpy's Hotel," as it was locally known, and usually slept there, but his hours were irregular and he did not often appear in the dining room before noon. This Sunday morning Selwood was up early because he had a two-day drive to Medicine Bend ahead of him with only a night stopover at Point of Rocks. Moreover, his first morning trip whenever in Sleepy Cat was to the tent of his wounded partner. On this particular morning, before he went to the barn for his team, Selwood, leaving the hotel, walked down to the River Quarter on his way to Tracy's tent. Near the bridge he saw Christie coming up from the tents with Doctor Carpy. He would have passed them, and preferred to do so, without comment, for he was in no mood, being jealous and resentful, to make any appeal for Christie's favor; accordingly he tried to pass on.

Carpy, however, held him. "John," he began, without preface or apology, and catching the lapel of Selwood's coat to make sure of his victim, "I said to you only the other day, 'If there's any human scum in the whole blamed United States that ain't landed in Sleepy Cat, it must be b'cause they ain't never heard of it yet.'"

Beyond touching his hat, and that almost without looking at her, Selwood did not acknowledge Christie's presence. He held his eyes strictly on Carpy and received the doctor's outburst without visible emotion. In fact, he made no comment of any sort—only stood waiting for, and as if entitled to, some further explanation, before troubling himself to speak. "Why don't you say something, you big galoot?" demanded the doctor, fussed, to tell the truth, by the presence of the slip of a young woman at his side—so young, indeed, that she should be called a girl rather than a woman.

"What do you want me to say?" asked Selwood, without a smile. "You always ask me that when you get mad—and you're mad most of the time. What's bothering you?"

"John, it's nothing that ever bothers *me,*

that bothers me; it's what bothers other folks that makes my bother. Now here's this nice little girl——" He looked toward her and knit his brows in perplexity. "Dash it," he continued apologetically, "I never can remember your name——"

The doctor had taken off his hat and was scratching his ear when he appealed to his companion for help.

"Christie Fyler," interposed Christie. Just the sound of her voice pulled Selwood's eyes to her eyes. And he saw she had been crying.

"You know this big hulk, don't you, Christie?" asked the doctor with genial informality. "If you don't," he continued, "meet 'Gentleman John.' "

Selwood was impatient. "Don't be a fool, doctor," he protested, neither greatly pleased at the mention of his Sleepy Cat nickname nor at the situation before him.

"Well, it *is* Gentleman John! You can't get rid of it," persisted the doctor. "You just tipped up your hat to her, didn't you? Nobody else within a hundred and fifty miles of Sleepy Cat would do that, would they?"

Selwood, perceiving the course of the doctor's loquacity, ignored the rest of it. He turned his eyes on Christie, whose face showed her distress.

"Is your father sick?" he asked without much feeling.

"He was robbed and beaten last night," she said, looking at him and speaking quickly. "Two men came to the tent, called him out, knocked him senseless and took all his money——"

"A pocketful, too!" interjected the doctor.

"And yesterday morning Mr. Atkins took possession of the store and put father out of it entirely."

Selwood could no longer pretend indifference. "Why?" he asked, mildly.

Christie wrung one hand nervously in the other. "Oh, I don't know—I can't understand it. Neither can father. He says father owes him money. He doesn't—not a penny. But he's taken all our goods, and *everything!* and put us out in the street!"

Selwood listened without batting an eye. Christie's restrained grief was plainly acute.

Carpy thought it should have called forth some expression of sympathy from the gambler. "Why don't you say something?" remonstrated the doctor. "That man"—in disgust he addressed Christie—"got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning."

Selwood asked a question of the doctor. "How bad is Fyler hurt?"

"Well, aside from his head being cut wide open and bein' pounded up generally with a wagon spoke, he ain't really hurt at all," replied Carpy, ironically.

"Doctor," murmured Christie, naturally indignant and anxious to get away from an unsympathetic atmosphere, "ought we not to be hurrying to get the medicine back to father?"

Selwood turned to Christie. "I wonder whether I could see—your father—a minute." He didn't want to say, "your father," being just that resentful; Selwood *wanted* to say, not, "your father," but "Fyler"—so little was he in love with him; and being just mean enough to feel the trader had "something coming to him."

"Why not?" interposed Carpy. "He's down there in that tent right back of Dave's."

"I'd better wait till you come back," suggested Selwood, appealing to Christie.

"Come along to the office, then; I'll give her the medicine and you two can go back together."

Until the two left the office, medicine in hand, Carpy kept the talk going. But when Selwood found himself on the way to the tent in company with Christie only the situation grew embarrassing. It was all very well to be glum when the doctor filled in the gaps but now it was different. Moreover, Selwood's hardness of heart was fast giving way before the innocence of Christie, who, properly, chilled as she perceived Selwood's attempts to warm. Altogether, by the time the tent fly was reached Selwood's fine poise had about failed him. He was feeling uncomfortable.

The tent was a good one—of ample size, with a side for Christie neatly curtained off. But the curtain happened to be drawn back, and Selwood's eyes, though decently restrained, missed few of the feminine touches that revealed a woman's presence and a woman's hand in little decorations and conveniences where ingenuity counted for much and conditions contributed little. "Doctor Carpy has been promising us rooms at the hotel ever so long," faltered Christie, holding back the fly when Selwood, stooping a little, passed inside. "But we never can get two empty near each other

at the same time!" And Selwood's knowledge of how Margaret hated women about the hotel made this easy to understand.

Carpy's presence was not needed to enable him to pass on Fyler's condition. Selwood had come in contact with many injured men and saw at once from Fyler's eyes that he was more scared than hurt. He had been beaten, but he had evidently escaped pretty well at the hands of men that meant to kill him. He looked up from his cot at Selwood, all eyes—his eyes were big as saucers and in the circumstances Selwood could hardly suppress an instinctive desire to laugh at the sight of the mass of bandages in which Carpy had swathed his face and head.

"I'm sorry I haven't a chair to offer," said Christie, embarrassed. "They seem to break as fast as father brings them down. Please sit down on my cot."

Selwood, however, would not sit down while she stood, so Christie was forced to sit down on the cot first. She chose the head. Selwood disposed himself at a respectful distance toward the middle. But as he settled himself, down went the cot with both of them.

Christie repressed a little scream. Selwood scrambled to his feet, helped her up, adjusted the underpinning and insisted it would hold Christie; but neither tried it again.

Sitting on the edge of a box, Selwood listened without comment to the story—told partly by Fyler and partly through excited interruption by Christie. Violence was all so new to Christie, her view of it as something too horrible for men to resort to, was so naïve in the surroundings to which she was now condemned, that Selwood regarded her as the most innocent person he had ever met, and felt sorry for what might be ahead of her on the frontier.

Despite his dislike for her father, moderating now at his unlucky experience and ludicrous appearance, Selwood offered what perfunctory consolation he could, but not being skilled in that sort of thing did only reasonably well at it. He asked Fyler, at length, whether anything had been done to find the men that had robbed him. Nothing had been done. He asked whether Fyler thought he would recognize his assailants. Christie intervened. "How could he? It was pitch dark—but Mr. Starbuck warned father just the other day to be careful." Selwood pricked up his ears. "He said the town is bothered every night with men that come in in the evening," continued Christie excitedly. "They rob people and leave again before morning."

Selwood nodded regretfully. "That makes it hard on the local talent, doesn't it? Well, you got off with your life," he said to Fyler. "That's better than some men do. I'll see whether I can find out anything. And I'll drop in again to see how you are coming on. I hope you'll be feeling better, soon."

Christie followed him outside the tent, and pausing a few steps away, appealed to him with troubled eyes. "Do you think my father will get well?"

Selwood, struck by her anxiety, answered with less than his ordinary hesitation. "I do."

"If he died, I don't know what would become of me."

"I'm not a doctor, Christie." Her name came in a kind of gulp, the first time he had ever spoken it to her. "But I've seen a good many men pounded on the head," he said, flushing a little with self-consciousness at the admission. "If your father were hurt really bad he'd be unconscious—and he would breathe like—well, like a man snoring pretty hard."

"He says he doesn't want to get well, now he's lost everything."

"If all the men in Sleepy Cat that have lost everything were to die there wouldn't be Indians enough on the reservation to bury them. He'll get over that. Sleepy Cat money comes easy and goes easy. Besides, I wouldn't say your father's lost everything. He'll get his store back, somehow."

"And he has begun gambling, too, in this horrible place," murmured Christie, fingering the fringe of her shawl and holding her eyes down on it as she yielded to the impulse to unburden her overanxious heart, "and that's like death to me. I hate gamblers!"

Selwood turned red as a turkey gobbler. Where was his poise now? But Christie's eyes fortunately were bent on the fringe in her nervous fingers.

"Where's your father gambling?" asked Selwood, swallowing but resolved to bluff it out.

"Oh, down in that horrible River Quarter."

"Well, if he's taking his money down there he's not gambling—he's just getting

robbed. If he's bound to gamble he'd better pick a place where he has a chance."

As he spoke with a touch of defiance, Bill Pardaloe, rolling on his lean legs like a ship in a long swell, hove in sight, coming toward them with a napkin-covered tray. "Look at that man!" exclaimed Christie. "How he reels! What can he be balancing in his hands? It must be somebody's breakfast. I'm glad it's not mine—oh! I thought it was gone!" she cried as Bill stumbled, reeled and by a Herculean effort regained his balance. "He'll surely drop it!"

"He won't drop it," Selwood assured her in tones of velvet calm, though inwardly he was thinking violence.

Why, unless out of meanness, Meg had given Pardaloe the tray, after he had been downtown all night, Selwood could not surmise. Whatever the situation, Bill was heading, with more or less certainty, for Selwood and Christie.

"I'll make a guess," suggested Selwood. "Doctor Carpy is maybe sending your breakfast down, and something for your father. What's the matter with you, Bill?" he demanded tartly as Pardaloe approached. "Hold the tray quiet—can't you see you're spilling everything? Is this the stuff Carpy sent down for Mr. Fyler?"

"No," growled Pardaloe, not pleased by the reception, "this is not the stuff Carpy sent down, this is the stuff *you* sent down! Where d' y' want it?"

"I sent nothing down," said Selwood, vexed and denying untruthfully. "No matter," he added, cutting Pardaloe's insistence brusquely off. "Whoever sent it, it's to eat. Where will you have it?" He asked the question of Christie.

With a protest at somebody's kindness—and she thought she knew whose—Christie very thankfully took the tray and Selwood held back the fly for her to pass inside with it. On the threshold, she turned her eyes to his. "Father mustn't eat anything today, doctor said. And there's a great deal more coffee here than I can drink. Won't you come in and help?"

While Pardaloe listened and stared, Selwood coughed decently and thought he *might* go in, for a minute—and followed Christie inside. But before doing so he told Pardaloe to go to the barn and get the team ready. Pardaloe, left alone, stood a moment, his mental perplexity revealed in the almost permanent scowl that furrowed his brow: then he lifted up the fly and stooping, pushed slowly into the tent. In the excess of his politeness Bill removed his battered hat as he entered, and to adjust his sight to the interior knit his brows still closer over his beady eyes. Selwood and Christie were too much engaged with the tray—which had been set on the box at the head of the cot—to notice Pardaloe's entrance. "Where's the man 't w'z hurt?"

Pardaloe, without minding his tone, asked the blunt question rather to announce his presence than to seek information, for Fyler lay immediately before him. The injured man started. Christie, turning, saw the tall intruder and apologizing lamely, welcomed him perfunctorily.

Selwood was not pleased, but knowing Bill's peculiarities made the best of it. Pardaloe listening, bareheaded and silent—his shiny eyes close on her—to what little Christie had to say, and vouchsafing no acknowledgment, felt his way gingerly forward, sat down uninvited on Christie's cot, which she expected every moment to give way under him, and looked hard at Fyler. Pardaloe's neck was long and when he shot his head forward it sloped at an angle of about forty-five degrees. This gave his gaze an intensity somewhat felt by the person he looked at. Fyler regarded him as if expecting another assault. Pardaloe, however, had only peaceful intentions. Leaning forward, he studied Fyler's eyes, which were all he could see of his face among the bandages, and just turned his head toward Selwood. "Who is he?" asked Pardaloe, in that hushed voice in which even the irreverent speak of the dying.

"Who is he?" echoed Selwood tartly. "Why, he's this young lady's father—Mr. Fyler."

Pardaloe bent his head a little farther down. His eyes bored through the bandages till he penetrated the disguise and recognized Fyler. He twisted his neck around to Selwood again and screwed his face into an expression in which surprise and disgust struggled for precedence. The corners of his mouth fell till they were lost in the depths of his beard: two heavy lines springing from the sides of his nostrils drew down after them. In this wise he regarded Selwood, who with good reason feared some sort of a "break" but could not avert it. Pardaloe, turning, looked just once more at Fyler, put his hat on his head and rising

drew himself up to his full height. "Hell!" he exclaimed, fixing his eyes, with tomblike gaze, on Selwood. "I thought 'twas some friend o' yours!"

CHAPTER XIII.

SELWOOD ISSUES INVITATIONS.

SELWOOD made the best of an awkward moment. "Pay no attention to Bill," he said as the tent fly closed behind Pardaloe's disgust and the mule boss strode wrathfully away. "Nobody does. He probably didn't understand me and didn't recognize your father. I'm driving to Point of Rocks and Medicine Bend to-day," continued Selwood. "I'll be gone two or three days, it may be. You say Starbuck promised to clear those fellows out of the store for you?" He spoke so evenly and naturally that no one could have suspected him.

"He's coming back this morning," replied Christie, with great confidence, "to talk with father about it. So I'm sure that will be all right."

"Your father is going to get well," predicted Selwood, without comment. "You needn't worry about that, anyway."

But he was not gone two or three days. That night at dusk, with the moon rising, Christie heard a man's voice outside her tent. "Is Doctor Carpy there?" She was alone with her father and made no answer. The question was repeated. Christie peeped through the fly. Selwood stood at the tent door. She opened the fly farther and answered him.

"I thought he might—or might not—be here," he said in the same slow, even tone, "but I wanted to ask a question, anyway. Yes, I expected to be gone until Wednesday. I found a teamster hurt, at Point of Rocks, so I drove him back this afternoon and I'm looking for Carpy." He did not add much that he might have added, namely, that no real emergency had made this return necessary and that he was inquiring for Carpy where he was quite certain he should not find him. "Have you any idea," he added, "where I could get hold of the doctor?"

Christie stepped silently just outside the tent door. "Father is asleep," she said guardedly. "The doctor hasn't been here this evening."

"Sorry I troubled you. Father any better?"

"Oh, I think so. He slept a lot to-day."

"He'll be pretty sore to-morrow morning. But that won't mean anything. Did Starbuck get those fellows out of the store for you?"

Little escaped Selwood. She turned her face quickly to one side. "No," she said, looking down, "he did not."

"But he's going to?"

"No."

"What's the matter?"

"I—he——"

"Well?"

"I'm afraid I can't explain."

Selwood was coldly silent. Christie's eyes were still on the ground. But he saw she was keeping something back and presently began to rage with suspicion. "Are you so close to him," he demanded at length, "that you can't talk to another man about a couple of thieves?"

Christie, stung, looked suddenly and sharply up. He saw her eyes were swollen as if with weeping. "If you knew my situation, you wouldn't say that. I only wish" —she spoke from the heart—"I might never see him again!"

"Well," exclaimed Selwood, cooling with relief, "if that's the situation I won't ask any more questions. So he wouldn't do anything?"

"No," blurted out Christie, now angry at the recollection, "not unless——"

"Unless what?"

She clasped her hands. "Unless I'd do something I refused to do."

An expletive, like a pistol shot, escaped the listener. The two faced each other in silence. Christie, unable to support the interval, was looking down again. "I promised to ask no more questions," said Selwood, after a pause, "but I've got to ask just one. Is he fit to live—or isn't he?"

Frightened, she looked up. "I'm making it worse and worse. I didn't mean to; please don't be so terribly angry. I see I must say what I hoped I might escape. He said he would help father—if I would marry him!"

Selwood did not laugh. Her distress was too evident. "And you refused?" was all he said. "What did your father say?"

That cut deep. Christie could only hold the gambler to his word. "You said you wouldn't ask any more questions," she replied simply; but she had a turn of simplicity that was silencing.

Selwood drew a breath. "I'm glad I happened back to-night, anyway. Maybe something can be done. Can your father hear us here?"

"He's asleep."

"But he has ears. There's nothing he might not hear, only I don't like listeners. I don't believe you're afraid of me. Step over this way a minute."

She hesitated to let go the tent fly. "I'm not going to ask you to marry me—I wouldn't ask any woman to marry me, Christie. But that needn't prevent my helping you get back what belongs to you. If you're really afraid," he continued, for she was not looking at him, plainly reluctant to follow, "I'll talk here, no matter who hears—and even though it might mix things up."

"I'm not afraid," protested Christie, but he knew she was afraid. "If you'll just tell me whatever it is, quickly."

Selwood spoke when they stood together away from possible eavesdroppers. "Your father isn't hurt bad," he said, quietly, that he might not startle her. "But he can't very well do this, so you must. The minute day breaks to-morrow morning, be dressed, leave this tent and walk straight to the store. You needn't be afraid. You won't see anybody, but you will be watched, and safe, from the minute you leave the tent till you're back in it. When you get to the store, if you see an Indian sitting on the front steps, walk right up to him and ask for the key to the store. He'll give it to you. Ask him to watch the store till you come back after breakfast. He will. Then get Carpy, early, at the hotel and have your father carried up to the store on his cot. He'd better stay there day and night —and you, too—till he's up."

As Christie listened a wave of contrition swept over her. She felt rebuked. To have slighted such a man as these words revealed to her, in favor of the man she now realized Starbuck must be, was quite enough to humble her.

"What shall I do if there's no Indian there?" she asked, promptly connoting that she meant to do exactly as he directed.

"Then straight back to the tent for"—he laughed slightly—"if it means anything, it'll mean I'm dead. But you'll be protected in any case. Just don't be afraid to do as I tell you. Will you?"

She looked at him without answering. Where he stood the big moon lighted his face, for he had surrendered the shadow to her own. "What," she asked, "are you going to do?"

He smiled, a leisurely kind of smile, a reassuring but noncommittal sort of smile—for smiling was not Selwood's regular occupation. "It's pretty hard," he said, "in this town, for a man to say just exactly what he's going to do till after he does it. It depends sometimes on what the other fellow does—and, generally speaking, on who does it first."

She regarded him gravely. "I hope you won't go in any danger on my father's account."

He suppressed a laugh. "Not as much as I'm in now."

It was a foolish thing to say. He tried to hedge, but alarmed, she cut him off. "What do you mean?"

"In Sleepy Cat," he replied, getting back to his senses, "a man doesn't have to *go in* any danger; he's in it the minute he hits town. The only way to keep out of it would be to pick a dark night, when it's raining hard, and quit the blamed place."

"You've been far too kind to us to get into any trouble for our sakes," she repeated, almost mechanically. "I only wish we were away from here."

"I'm willing to get into trouble if you'll stay. I'd rather hunt for a little than to see you leave."

Christie tossed off a sense of embarrassment. "My leaving couldn't possibly mean anything to—any one in Sleepy Cat."

"If I could tell you what it would mean to me you might change your mind on that point." She regarded him in the moonlight rather bravely till he said that much. After he spoke, she was silent—almost receptive; but he added desperately: "There's just one miserable blamed reason why I can't."

Christie changed the subject, instantly. "Wherever we go, we couldn't find a kinder friend—father said this morning. It's when trouble comes that real friends count. And your influence would be good on father." Selwood started a little. "I'm so afraid now of his running around with these awful gamblers, down in River Street." Selwood looked away. "I'm afraid he'll lose what little money we have left."

"Tell him," said Selwood, grimly, "if he must gamble to do his gambling farther uptown."

"What difference would that make?"

"Well"--shuffling a little—"he'd anyway have some show for his money."

Christie spoke very seriously. "Gambling is gambling. Of all men in the world I think gamblers are meanest. Don't you?"

Selwood coughed. He had taken off his hat and was twisting it a bit confusedly in his fingers. He studied the hat a moment and presently looked at Christie. His face, open to the moonlight, showed his eyes clearly. "To tell the truth," he said simply, "I never thought much about it. But," he added, pausing, "I guess maybe you're right. I'll be going. You'll remember to do just as I've told you? And please say nothing whatever to your father about the matter till it's over."

They walked together to the tent, then he turned his steps, reflectively, upstreet toward the gambling hall. At the entrance he paused. The lights were on; men were moving in and out of the place; the tables were filled and the peculiar silence, at times, of a gambling room was broken by the familiar clash of chips or the infrequent, mechanical call of a dealer.

Selwood did not go in. Instead he retraced his steps in the direction of Fyler's store building; this he sauntered circumspectly about, inspecting each side with deliberate care and walking away from it thoughtfully. It looked like a hard nut to crack. He walked thence back to the hotel, went upstairs, followed the narrow, low corridor to his room, unlocked the door and went in. He lighted a lamp, adjusted the wick and the shade and sat down on the side of his shabby bed. On the wall opposite him hung a framed woodcut of a missionary padre. In the silence, Selwood looked long and thoughtfully at the old print. A cloud had long hung over the story of his own life, a cloud that Selwood had always felt might possibly be lifted by this old man—if he were yet alive. The uncertainty of this was one reason that helped to paralyze Selwood's resolve to find him.

To-night the gambler acted with his natural determination. He rose, took the picture from the wall, turned down the wick of the lamp, blew it out, and with the woodcut under his arm returned to the hall.

Carrying the picture to his room, he wrote and printed on a sheet of paper, a sign; and returning to the hall, hung the picture on the wall beside his desk—about the most conspicuous place in the room. Underneath the picture, he tacked the written sign:

FOR RELIABLE INFORMATION AS TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF THIS OLD PADRE I WILL PAY ONE HUNDRED OUNCES OF GOLD DUST.

JOHN SELWOOD.

Bill Pardaloe watched him put the portrait up. He read the sign and turned to Selwood, who had sat down at his desk and lighted a cigar. Pardaloe read the sign haltingly at least twice before he turned to ask questions.

When he spoke, Selwood answered his inquiries laconically. "I want to talk to that padre," he said. "To anybody that can bring him to me—or me to him—I pay one hundred ounces of gold dust."

Pardaloe's sharp nose pushed well forward. "Where is he?"

"If he's alive," answered Selwood, "he's wandering somewhere around the mountain country among the Indians."

Pardaloe studied again the features of the long-haired old man in the print. "Won't any other padre do?" he snorted, picturing to his imagination the good times latent in one hundred ounces of gold dust.

"No other padre," said Selwood unfeelingly, "will do."

"What do you want with him?" demanded Pardaloe.

The answer was prompt and incisive. "That's my business. Get hold of Bob Scott, Bill, and bring him here."

For ten years John Selwood had wanted to meet—yet lived in a certain dread of meeting—this padre. He had finally resolved to face him, and, if it must come, to know the worst.

Other frontiersmen, drawn by Pardaloe's talk, crowded up to look at the picture. The usual discussions ensued, in which optimists declared they had seen the padre, and were sure of the reward; while others tried to belittle such pretensions and were contemptuously skeptical of the statements.

Selwood rid himself of the first rush of questioners and retired to his room, with Pardaloe, who had reappeared bringing Scott. "There's been a mean deal put over this trader, Fyler," Selwood began, addressing both men. He told them the facts in the case, about which they had already heard the town talk. "And after robbing

him of his stock of goods," continued Selwood, "they called him out of his tent, knocked him on the head and took all his money, to make things easy for themselves."

"Will he die?" asked Pardaloe.

"No."

Pardaloe's interest diminished. "Poor work," he mumbled.

Nor did Selwood extract from him any sympathy for the trader's plight. He was in fact cold and crusty on the whole situation. "The blamed fool went down to Bartoe's place," he grumbled, "and paraded around there with a roll of money—that's what the boys they didn't get while he was the after at the tent. What else could expect?" he demanded.

Selwood cut him off—for one of Bill Pardaloe's peculiarities was to pursue a subject to the limit. "I know, Bill," he admitted, "but that doesn't change matters any. Fyler's girl is an innocent sufferer for his foolishness. Her father may be a blackguard, but she didn't pick him out. Now this is what I called you both in for. I'm going to clean those fellows out of Fyler's store to-night. I'll need some help. Do you two want to join me? There'll be a fight. Take it or leave it, just as you like—no harm done either way."

Bob Scott never responded, to Selwood, at least, with anything more than an affirmative grin; he wasted no words on any subject. Pardaloe, however, had to have his talk, and from the number of objections he habitually raised to any proposal he might have been thought desperately opposed to everything suggested by anybody, anywhere, at any time.

"Look here, John," he growled, "I know who's in that store."

"So do I," assented Selwood, unsympathetically.

"It's Atkins and Bartoe and Big Haynes."

"What then?"

"Yes, that's all right—'what then?' But those fellows are loaded. They'll shoot. How you going to do it? Here's the moon pretty near full. Why don't you wait a few nights till you can work under some cover?"

"One reason, Bill, is, that if we wait a few nights those fellows will steal the whole stock and move it out of the store before Fyler gets on his feet."

"Goin' to coax them out with candy?"

"I'm going to smash in one of the doors. There are two, a front door and a back door. All I'll ask you to do," explained Selwood, addressing Pardaloe, "is to watch one door, where you'll be in the dark, while I take the other door, myself."

"What's Bob going to do?" demanded Pardaloe, with acrimonious suspicion.

"Bob's going to hold up a lantern for Atkins to shoot at."

Pardaloe did not join in Scott's laugh at his own expense, but he was silenced. And as Selwood, warming to his subject, revealed the high points of his plan of attack, the pupils of Pardaloe's eyes could be seen to dilate with interest. Selwood, speaking low and quietly, continued to lay out his plan. It promised the warmest kind of a time. Pardaloe's backward, skeptical expression changed into an anticipative glow. He offered neither further comment nor criticism, but rose on his bony shanks. "Let's go, John."

Scott ventured a grinning inquiry—he was after all the more prudent of the two adventurers that Selwood had called to his aid. "What kind of firearms have them fellows got in there?"

"Atkins is a little dangerous," said Selwood, for he felt he must be reasonably honest. "It's no use denying, Atkins is handy with a Colt's. Bartoe carries a bottle. He may not wake up until it's half over. He and Big Haynes use shotguns. They're as likely to hit each other as to hit us. What do you say?"

Pardaloe was impatient. "Let's go!"

"I'll meet you at the barn at twelve. See Abe Cole, Bill, and get a sledge hammer. I'll get a couple of axes from the barn. By the way," he added, "here's something I want you two to do before you go."

The three men passed unnoticed through the hall, and Selwood stopped them outside. He pointed to the big sign over the wide doorway:

JOHN SELWOOD, GAMBLER

"Get a ladder," he said to the two men, "and take that sign down."

"What for?" blurted out Pardaloe, all his suspicions rising together. "What are you doing that for?" he demanded.

Selwood, with his cigar, was reasonable and calm. "It never should have gone up there. Dave coaxed me into putting it up, after he got wounded that night down at

Bartoe's—said it was too good advertising to lose. Well," he continued with an acid touch, "I'm advertised! Everybody along the Mountain Divide knows I'm a gambler. Why advertise i any longer?"

"Yes," growled Pardabe, "they know you're a gambler. But if you haul down your sign how's everybody going to know where to find you?" he asked triumphantly.

"Better for some of 'em if they didn't know," retorted Selwood, indifferently. "Stop your talk, dash it. Bring out the ladder and pull down the sign."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EARLY-MORNING PARTY.

FILLING in for one of his men, Selwood sat dealing at the large faro table near his desk. It was two hours since he had left Christie. In that interval, she had another visitor at the tent. Her father had wakened when Christie was called to the tent door by a voice. Looking cautiously out, she saw Starbuck standing in the moonlight.

"I didn't want you to think that I went away with any hard feelings," he said, explaining himself calmly to Christie and throwing into his words that touch of sympathy and interest he was always able to summon. Christie listened with reluctance. But as her caller was at no loss for words, he was soon heard by her father, who, raising his voice, called him, over Christie's protest, into the tent.

From this unpleasant situation she could not escape; but in some way remembering another voice and another's words, she felt immensely strengthened in her resistance to its possibilities. These were not long in unfolding. And when an unpleasant subject was opened again under cover of sympathetic interest in her father's affairs, she was very positive in what she had to say.

Her father unfortunately intervened in the most trying way. "Here's the man," he said, "that can give us the help we need, Christie, if you'll treat him in the way you'd ought to."

Christie burst into tears. The obligation of secrecy was on her—she thought she knew why, now; but she would not resist the satisfaction of a covert threat. "If Mr. Starbuck won't help us," she exclaimed, "we may find *some*body in Sleepy Cat that will."

Her eyes flashed the words at him like a challenge. She was sorry the instant she had spoken, but it was too late to recall her words.

"Anybody that goes near the store without me," Starbuck said calmly, "will get riddled with buckshot. So," he added, looking first at Christie and then at her father, "don't make any mistake like that."

He marched with dignity out of the tent. Fyler kept up a weak fire of reproach. Christie was used to such things on more subjects than one, and only continued to weep a little, silently. When her father quieted down she sat in the dim light of the lantern and looked on the beds, gazing thoughtfully at the dull, yellow flame. What thoughts were in her mind, her father, least of all, could have surmised. She gave him some refreshment presently, and he fell into an uneasy sleep. That moment seemed to rouse her from her apathy and signalize her resolve.

She rose cautiously but hurriedly, caught up a shawl that lay across her cot, opened her little trunk and quickly drew out a scarf.

Pausing, and looking at her father only long enough to be sure he slept, she carefully lowered the wick of the lantern, blew out the light, and stepped with as little noise as possible to the tent door. Wrapping herself in her shawl, and winding her scarf about her head and neck, she pushed open the fly and stood, alone, out in the moonlight.

She had set herself a difficult task. Women, it is true, might sometimes be seen in the streets of Sleepy Cat late at night. With the constant presence of emigrant trains, emergencies might and did arise that took women uptown, but these were rare. Once started, Christie did not hesitate. She walked swiftly along the street, hardly knowing which way to look in her quest, but determined to follow it. At one time she hurried directly past the gambling hall up the hill; but she shrank from exposure to the glaring lights. Had she looked within she might have seen Selwood where he sat. The only place where she hoped she might make a successful inquiry was at the big barn; and toward this, after repassing the gambling house, she directed her steps.

She was now being trailed, though she did not realize it. Believing herself unobserved and unseen, she pursued her course, and it was only when Bob Scott stepped out

of a shadow in front of her that she was frightened.

"Were you looking for somebody, lady?" he asked.

Christie jumped, but Scott's inoffensive manner reassured her. She had seen him in company with Selwood at the store, and some instinct told her he meant no harm.

"I *am* looking for some one."

"Who is it?"

"He's the superintendent of the freighting line."

"I guess I know who you mean. He was down to see your father to-night."

"Oh," she cried in confusion, "I don't mean Mr. Starbuck."

Scott was confident. "I don't either. You mean John Selwood. If you do want to see him, I think I can find him. But I'll have to be gone a few minutes. Now here's the barn." He pointed to the big structure close at hand. "If you'll walk down with me, and wait a few minutes in the office, I'll have him here."

"Who's in there?" asked Christie, looking at the barn with proper suspicion.

"There are two men on duty there all the time, but I'll give you a better guard than that."

Still in fear, and trembling, Christie accompanied her guide to the barn office. Two formidable-looking dogs rushed to the door as Scott opened it. Admonishing them, he turned with a quiet grin. A lighted lantern on the desk revealed the interior to Christie. "If you can sit here for five minutes," said Scott, "these dogs will guard you better than anybody in Sleepy Cat could do it. Just pet them a little." Christie made friends cautiously with the two dogs. "We call one Chloe," explained Scott, "and this is Sweetheart. They're Mr. Selwood's favorite wagon dogs—half bull and half mastiff—and if anybody tries to come into this office while I'm gone, they'll eat 'em up. Are you willing to wait with them?"

Christie smiled rather mournfully. "I suppose I can't help it," she said uneasily. "Will you be long?"

"Three minutes—maybe five."

"Please hurry!"

Scott lost no time in getting to Selwood, whom he found at his desk. The Indian whispered to him. Selwood hastily seized his hat, followed Scott out the back door, and the two, singly, and walking in different directions, joined Christie.

Chloe and Sweetheart, barking furiously, sprang up to be fondled when Selwood opened the door. Scott took the dogs outside, and Selwood turned to Christie. "I've been looking everywhere for you," she said, "and if I hadn't seen Mr. Scott, I never should have found you."

"You can get me any time by leaving word at the barn," said Selwood.

"Are you in business here, Mr. Selwood?"

"Why—yes."

"What is it, may I ask?"

He answered haltingly—glad it was dark. "Well, I'm mixed up in different kinds of business here—that's what got me into trouble with your father." He spoke with a laugh—or tried to. "I run this Russell and Wentworth freighting outfit," he continued. "I suppose if I called myself anything, it might be a mining man. What has happened?"

She was so confused and overcome now that she could hardly summon the words she wanted. "Nothing *has* happened. I feared what might happen—to-night. You didn't tell me," she ventured, "just what you were going to do about the store." Then she added, disconnectedly, "Mr. Starbuck came over again."

Selwood looked keenly at her. "What did he want?"

"First he said," she began brokenly, "he wanted to turn the store back to father."

"Was that all?"

"No."

"What else?"

"If——"

"If—what?"

"The same condition he named before."

"If you'd marry him, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did you say?"

"I said—what I said before."

"Tell him," suggested Selwood, "if he must marry somebody, to apply to me."

Christie could summon no lightness. "Then he made a threat," she went on. "He said that anybody that went near the store without him would get killed."

"And you wanted to let me know?"

She fingered the fringe of her scarf but looked steadily at him. "To be careful," she said.

He took her back to the tent, and parted with her, hard as it seemed to do, at the fly. "Why did you want to warn me?" he asked as an afterthought.

"To repay your kindness." They spoke in low tones.

"Nothing more?"

"What more could there be?"

"Well," he said lightly, "if I get hurt, you'll know it was while I was trying to follow your advice."

"Please don't get hurt," she exclaimed, and slipped so hurriedly into the tent that he was left alone to catch his breath.

The old store building in which Fyler had housed his earthly possessions stood, detached, on a corner of Fort Street. Originally a log structure, it had been enlarged and added to, but it was, all of it, well put together and capable of standing a pretty stiff siege if defended by resolute men—and none knew better than Selwood that it would be well defended by men of the character of those now inside. If he had minimized to Pardaloe the hazards of a fight for the store it was only to meet his objections. For while Pardaloe would rather fight than eat, he needed to be petted till plunged into the mood for action—after that it was only necessary to hold him back until the time was ripe.

Shortly after three o'clock that morning the moon, still bright, was drawing close to the western peaks that guarded the town. It was the hour in which the dissipations of a frontier night are ordinarily over and hardy men are deepest in sleep. At that time, two men with the barest of shifts for disguise, and followed by two dogs, whining and leaping at their heels, left the stage barn. One man carried three common axes, of the heavy type used in the tie camps down river; the other carried a sledge of a size and weight that would have rendered it useless in the hands of an ordinary man. But neither Pardaloe nor Scott nor their companion in the adventure were ordinary men; the first was a giant in physique, the second dangerous in encounter, and the third fertile in resources.

As the two men neared Fort Street, Selwood, stepping out of the shadow of a building, joined them. He wore, like the others, a bandanna tied with little ceremony across his nose; a flat wagoner's hat shaded his eyes. "You brought the right dogs?" asked Selwood, looking at them.

"I did," muttered Pardaloe as Chloe and her mate tangled themselves up between his legs, " 'n' if ary one of 'em gets killed, somebody's goin' to get dumped right down on the rock pile along with 'em."

Fort Street was quiet as a graveyard—not a soul was stirring and the party reached the store unobserved. They halted in the shadow thrown on the north side of the low building. Pardaloe dropped his sledge with unnecessary noise and Scott, true to instinct, laid his axes noiselessly on the ground. Selwood tiptoed to the corner and inspected the front doors. They looked substantial. The whole front was exposed to the blaze of the moonlight and it looked like suicide to attempt a forcible entry. Every aperture, he well knew, was barred or nailed and would give way only before a determined assault. Pardaloe, who could not keep quiet long at a time, stamped to the front to join Selwood. "What y' going to do?" he demanded in a hoarse whisper. With these words he sneezed. It was a suppressed sneeze, but it shook the solid earth.

"I'm going to wake everybody up inside, first, and tell 'em to shoot," murmured Selwood. "Put your handkerchief up over your nose, you lubber."

Pardaloe with the bandanna loose on his neck, was obstinate. "Can't do it, John. It's full o' dust—can't breathe. Let's get at 'em."

Selwood led the retainer back to Scott and, approaching the high, shuttered window on the north side of the building, felt carefully all around it. The two dogs, cowed, crouched at Scott's feet. Selwood studied the building a moment. Then he turned to his companions.

"They'll look for us first at the back door—that's the natural way to open this oyster. I'll smash this shutter. Bill, you go around to the south side and slam away at the other window. Bust it if you can, but, whatever you do, make plenty of noise. When I get through this shutter with an ax, Bob drops the dogs in here, one after the other—they won't get both of 'em. When you hear me yell, Bill, it will mean the dogs are in. Then run to the back door with your ax, Bob, and chop at it. I'll take the sledge and an ax around to the front door, Bill. When you hear the dogs inside, join me at the front door and give it the sledge for all that's in you. Now get to your place, Bill—when I hear your ax, I start here. Keep out of range, best you can; there's at least one hard shooter in there."

A moment later the thud of Pardaloe's ax against the hollow shutter on the opposite side of the building would have waked the dead, had there been any in Sleepy Cat proper. Timed at the expected signal, came the crash of Selwood's ax into the north shutter. Clad loosely in shirts, belted trousers and boots, the two men sent a shower of rapid blows into the stout barriers opposing them. Selwood, working in semi-darkness, chopped and smashed at the jamb of the stubborn shutter without an instant's let-up. A loud shout from within, followed by a shot, greeted the attack; Chloe and Sweetheart, savage with excitement, yelped and whined. Selwood's ax sank to the head into the splintered jamb. A second shot rang out. A shotgun discharged from close inside the north shutter warned the besiegers what to expect and a buckshot glancing from the blade of the ax, caught Selwood above the ear. Scott, crouching with the dogs, jumped as a second bullet stung his wrist and a third brought an angry yelp from the dog Chloe. Atkins, if it were he, was firing a shotgun from the counter, standing on it so to range his fire down.

There was no sign or thought of a retreat. Working his ax loose, Selwood redoubled his blows—one or at most two more charges of buckshot he believed were all that were to be feared for a moment, and the sooner they came the better it would suit him. He sank the ax head again and again into the thick lock rail of the shutter, intent on reaching the hook fastening. Again a charge of buckshot hurtled through the damaged casement and sprinkled the axman, the Indian and the dogs, but there was no cessation in the ferocious shower of blows. The splintering crash that followed each one told how fast the shutter was giving way, and the sound of a fourth report from a shotgun also told Selwood that Pardaloe was under fire. Throwing all his energy into one last swing Selwood drove the ax completely through the jamb to pry out the staple. The ax helve, weakened by the blow, broke. With an oath, Selwood called for the sledge and the next minute what remained of the shutter hung loose.

Within, Selwood and Scott heard the shouting of the defenders.

"The doors, boys!" roared Selwood. Pardaloe, yelling like an Indian, was plying his ax. Selwood tore the shutter from its hinges, stooped, caught Chloe in his arms, unsnapped her leash and threw her like a shot into the store. From Scott's arms, Sweetheart flew in after her.

In an instant pandemonium raged inside. Wild shooting, the snapping of the infuriated dogs, mingled with the cursing of the bewildered defenders, the crash of Scott's ax at the back door and Selwood's ax with Pardaloe's sledge at the front. Wood and iron could not withstand such assault. Bullets from two revolvers were thrown desperately from within, but the positions of the two parties were now reversed; the trouble was all on the inside. Darkness, the danger of shooting one another in shooting at the dogs—and with it all the three men in the store were having all they could do to keep from being torn to pieces. The hickory crossbar that held the front doors splintered before the first blows of Pardaloe's sledge and the stout barriers gave way. Throwing himself against the weaker one, Selwood smashed and shouldered through it and fell into the store. He was greeted by a charge of buckshot that, because he had slipped and fallen, went over his head. To dodge to shelter behind the front end of the counter was the work of an instant. Pardaloe, unopposed, dashed in from the front end, and Selwood, springing from his momentary shelter, grappled the form of a man in the darkness. The two clenched on the floor.

"Call off your dogs!" came in a stentorian voice from somewhere; it sounded like Big Haynes. Selwood, rolling his man in a fierce scuffle toward the front, dragged him to the doorway, threw him into the street, and ran back to help.

Scott, from outside, had set a lighted lantern up in the battered window opening and hastening to the door with a second lantern ran in to secure the dogs just as Selwood reached Pardaloe. He sat astride a prostrate defender, with his bony fingers fastened on the man's windpipe. Selwood understood too well what that meant. Catching a lantern from Scott's hand he held it on the man's distorted features above Pardaloe's hand just in time. Grasping Pardaloe, Selwood broke his grip and held his arm. "Let loose, Bill! Let loose, I tell you! You're killing him."

"Dash it, John," protested Pardaloe, struggling to get away from the gambler's hands, "that's what I'm trying to do. Le' me alone—he tried to plug me! Who is

he?" demanded Pardaloe, with a wealth of surly epithets. "Atkins!" he exclaimed, as Selwood held the lantern closer to the man's swollen face.

"Get your knee out of his chest, Bill," remonstrated Selwood. "Can't you see he's slipping? He can't breathe."

"Time to finish a bear's when you got him," mumbled Pardaloe, stubborn and unconverted.

With many reproaches aimed at Selwood for unwarranted interference, Pardaloe, shaking himself loose, baffled, and eying his prey, stood by till Selwood, bending over the gasping man saw he was coming to, and started to drag him forward to throw him out.

Pardaloe bared his arms. "Stand away!" he exclaimed in a hoarse growl. "Stand away, John! You throw'd yourn out. I throw mine out."

He picked up and carried Atkins forward bodily. Selwood turned to help Scott with the dogs. These had Big Haynes, greatly embarrassed, behind two big boxes in a corner—and held back by Scott, they were tearing to shreds with fiendish delight the blanket Haynes had slept in. Haynes called loudly for quarter, and as Selwood went forward again, Scott, while he held the dogs, advised Haynes to hustle out the back door.

When Selwood reached the front door he saw Pardaloe toiling back up the steps, carrying Atkins, kicking wildly, into the store. "What are you doing, Bill?" demanded Selwood, amazed.

"Didn't throw the blame critter fur enough, first time," Pardaloe panted. "Stand back, John! Dod blast you," he muttered to his struggling victim, "stop your bitin'! Out y' go!"

CHAPTER XV.

THREATS AND CONFIDENCES.

IT was the work of only a few minutes for Selwood to regain his room back of the gambling hall. He slipped out of his rig and began to wash up. His face was disfigured by blood that had trickled under his hatband from the wound above his ear where the buckshot had torn his scalp. The furrow was not deep—little more than a scratch—and he checked the flow with the rough-and-ready styptics of teamsters and frontiersmen.

Within fifteen minutes he was back at the post he had left an hour earlier, with the few sitters around him who had gathered at the last table where faro was being dealt.

Hardly ten minutes later three men appeared at the open doors of Selwood's place. Starbuck, accompanied by Atkins and Bartoe, walked into the hall and stood for a moment looking about. Selwood, his eyes shaded for the table, saw them without difficulty and while not losing sight of the play kept them in his field of vision. He knew what they were there for—to see whether he was missing from his ordinary post. Selwood impassively pressed the case spring and kept an untroubled eye on the layout. His visitors lingered only a moment, but it was past the closing hour and while the last of the players straggled out, Starbuck came in again.

With his hair brushed back, his features unruffled and his dress in order, Selwood stood at his desk preparing to lock it. Starbuck strode across the empty room, with his usual energy and Selwood, turning the key in the lock, looked up at him.

"What have you barn bullies been up to to-night, Selwood?" he demanded, without preliminary.

Selwood asked what he meant. Starbuck told of the attack on the store. "Atkins and Bartoe hold a bill of sale for that stock," he declared indignantly. "Things have come to a pretty pass in Sleepy Cat when legitimate owners are to be chewed up by dogs and thrown out into the street. This thing has got to stop, or you'll have to move your headquarters out of this town." Selwood parried with civil answers the questions roughly asked, and met untroubled the threats roughly made; and asked only an occasional question himself.

"Have you heard any talk of Vigilantes organizing in Sleepy Cat?" he asked. "I don't know much about it." Selwood as he spoke dropped the bunch of keys dangling in his fingers, into his pocket. "But the little talk I heard here a few minutes ago about some kind of a fight at Fyler's store was that the Vigilantes had got after the men that had robbed Fyler and tried to kill him. There's no use your talking to me about my men; they do as they please—you know that. Talk to them," he suggested, while Starbuck, very angry, continued to blow off. "If Atkins and Bartoe can show title to the goods why don't they

get their friends together and go back and claim them?"

"Bartoe says there were half a dozen or more men in it—and they're in the store yet, he says." Selwood thought Pardaloe and one Indian in possession must be making a good deal of noise, but he said nothing. "There's going to be a clean-up in this town before long," added Starbuck significantly. "Folks that are making trouble ought to get ready for it."

"Meaning just whom, Starbuck?" asked Selwood, pacifically.

"Meaning whoever's behind all this rowing that's going on here lately."

"Well, Starbuck," returned Selwood, with some slight appearance of fatigue, "you know, or ought to know, that I'm the man that threw Atkins and Bartoe into the street to-night; they ought to know it; if they don't, tell them so. Of course, I wouldn't have done it if I'd known there were friends of yours in the store. If it hadn't been for me they would have been hanging to trees by this time—that's the fact. And tell them the next thing like that Fyler job they try to pull off they *will* be hanging to trees—that's the plain, straight, everyday English of it."

Starbuck had never been faced quite so bluntly. Selwood never had shown his hand quite so carelessly—parted with his caution quite so completely. But a woman stood between them and she meant the more to Selwood because, though he cherished slight hope of holding her himself, the thought of her going to Starbuck was bitter enough to make him ready for any manner of fray.

Starbuck stood eying the gambler intently. Then he spoke with composure. "Selwood, you're cutting quite a figure here in affairs that you've got no business in. You've tried some steps that don't fit the music you dance to in this establishment. You're playing too many games to win all of them—do you know that?" Selwood was too absorbed in watching Starbuck's eyes to make the slightest response in words. If there was anywhere in his demeanor an answer it lay in the inscrutable expression of his own eyes; he seemed poised for any issue. "Whether you do or not," Starbuck went on evenly, "you'll find your 'du-al' rôle will wind you up if you play it long enough. It won't work in Sleepy Cat."

Starbuck paid his enemy one compliment. Without any attempt to back out of the room he turned and walked straight to the door. There he paused and looked around.

"Good night, Mr. Selwood," he called out calmly.

"It's pretty late for that, Mr. Starbuck," retorted Selwood. "Good morning."

Daylight was really breaking. "Hold on a minute," he added, walking forward to where Starbuck stood at the door. "You're giving me some advice. I'll give you a little. There's Vigilante talk brewing in Sleepy Cat, Mr. Starbuck. And Vigilante talk in Sleepy Cat means—some time—Vigilantes." The word carried a sting—as Selwood well knew.

"When the Vigilantes get me," cried Starbuck, "they'll get you, Mr. Selwood."

"In that case the branch of one tree will do for both of us. But why wait for the Vigilantes? We can fix up our differences any time."

"Some time—not any time, Mr. Selwood."

"Some time, for you, Mr. Starbuck," smiled Selwood, as Starbuck stalked heavily down the steps, "any time for me."

It was late that Monday before Selwood appeared again. At noon in his room at the hotel he was pulling himself together for a shave. After lunch he walked down the street in the sunshine, with a careful eye for enemies, but passed Fyler's to see what the place looked like after the change of owners.

Scott had patched up the scars. The front doors showed fewer traces of the rude assault than Selwood had expected. But there was a deathly quiet about the place. Selwood missed the noise of the auction crowd and the shouting. The town knew that there had been a fight at the store during the night but for various reasons the principals concerned had kept their own counsel. When Selwood approached Fyler's, two men stood on the corner talking—Big Haynes and Harry Barbalet. Selwood understood perfectly well that Harry, the chief gossip of the River Quarter, was uptown to bore into Haynes for all the information he could get as to who the pseudo-Vigilantes had been—that his sore and aching friends might be posted accordingly. Big Haynes, however, had been uncommunicative and when Selwood hove in sight, left Barbalet unceremoniously and drew Selwood aside.

"I want to explain things a little, John," said the big fellow. "This sneak"—he nodded toward Barbalet who, left alone, was walking up the steps into the store—"is up here trying to pump me about who was in the party. He didn't get anything. I know Pardaloe was—but I didn't tell *him* that. I could make a guess at another friend of mine——"

"A friend of *yours!*" exclaimed Selwood.

"Easy, John—just easy for one minute, will you? I want to call a white man like you a friend as long as I live—and that ain't goin' to be a great while, if I don't get out of this town, I see that. But who I guessed, or didn't guess, is my business—not the business of these bums! What I want to say to you is this: I wa'n't in no way mixed up in this scheme to rob Fyler. I had some goods of my own in there and stayed with them fellows so as not to get robbed myself. I've got no money, John—you know that. It's come easy, go easy. Last night I fired no gun and hit no man. I was asleep under the counter and if I hadn't got my head and shoulders into a dry-goods box them blamed dogs would have eat me up. As it was, they chewed up my legs something shameful! Carpy's been cauterizing me all day. That's all, John. Right is right, ain't it, John? 'N' you know the facts. I helped the girl 'n' the Indian and McAlpin get Fyler up here early this morning—they'll tell you that, too; they understand the situation. And I want to tell you, 'tween you 'n' me—that man Fyler ain't hurt much, neither."

Selwood had no reason to doubt Haynes' story. "I hold nothing against you, Haynes, as far as I'm concerned. And I don't know rightly what you're talking about. Somebody at the hotel said there'd been a fight. If any of my men were mixed in it and have injured anybody, they'll have to make it right."

Barbalet came down the steps with a satisfied smile on his face—a wise smile meant to ingratiate him with the two men talking on the corner. Nothing lacking in assurance, he addressed Selwood. "That's a nice girl in there." He nodded back toward the store. Selwood only looked at him in silence. It was really an ominous silence; but Barbalet had confidence and sometimes faced such silences down. Big Haynes on his part had one characteristic that had saved his skin where better men got into trouble; he had learned to stare at a man and keep his mouth shut at the same time. In this manner he listened to Barbalet, but he was in nowise surprised to see Selwood turn his back abruptly on the impudent loafer and walk away.

Haynes thought it well to interpose a philanthropic warning. He nodded toward the store. "Go slow on what you say about anybody in there to Selwood, Harry."

"How so?"

"They're friends of his."

Barbalet smiled anew. "She thinks Selwood is a mining man."

"Well, he is, isn't he? Made his money down at Thief River, didn't he? And got his rich mine down there yet, hasn't he?" Haynes blurted the words out staccato fashion.

"She and her old man were talking about him just now," continued Barbalet with fatal persistency. "I asked whether she meant Selwood, the gambler. She said no, she meant the mining man—the man that runs the Russell and Wentworth wagons. She don't know he runs the place up the hill," grinned Barbalet.

Big Haynes took the information all in, but took it stonily. "I don't know it either, when I'm around that store, Harry," he said significantly. "And speaking of bartenders—and barbers: Did you ever hear of the one that died of old age by not knowing too much?"

"Maybe Selwood thinks I'm afraid of him," suggested Barbalet, head down and eyes up, facing Haynes.

"Why not cut your own throat, Harry; you've got the tools. Why wait to get your head knocked off—that's what I'm askin' you?"

"I guess from the way Mr. Gentleman John walked off just now, he wouldn't like to have her know he's a gambler," retorted Barbalet.

"I've got a better guess than that: when he wants her to know it he'll tell her himself."

"Wonder how he'd like it if I was to tell her?"

"He wouldn't like it."

"Wonder how much it would be worth to him for me not to tell her?"

Big Haynes was prompt in his reply, and disinterested. "Not a cent to him—not if I guess him right. But before you cross his trail, Harry, send for the buzzards; they're

quick workers and they'll make a clean job of you."

Selwood walked down street quite unconscious of the corner talk behind him. But he felt cheated out of his visit, and feeling that he had a perfectly good excuse made occasion to walk around by Fyler's an hour later. This time he found Christie alone and behind the counter in the front of the store.

Her face lighted when she saw him coming up the steps. She lifted both hands quickly to her hair, to smooth it, as he walked toward her. She had evidently been at work among the goods and was still busy. Her face, already flushed, seemed to deepen in color under his gaze and the slight disorder of her dress matched the pretty disarray of her hair. She stood a picture of youth in the freshness of health and endeavor. "Things were in such *awful* shape, this morning," she said, with her fingers running like mice among the hairpins and with her eyes fixed in dire apology on Selwood's eyes. "I know I'm a sight!" she exclaimed. "But you'll never know what this poor store looked like."

"If it looked anything like you," he ventured, "I shouldn't have touched it."

Could Christie have blushed more deeply she probably would; but unable to do so, she did something worse, as far as Selwood's composure was concerned. She laughed. And it was the happiest, carefree laugh in the world—no fret, no worry, neither regret nor apprehension—just the young, happy laugh of a young, happy moment. Selwood felt himself rudely shaken with every vibration of her throat, but he clung to the life line. "You got your father over all right?" he asked, swallowing mildly.

"Oh, yes. Mr. Haynes helped—he felt awfully ashamed, he said, of the way things had gone. And Mr. Pardaloe and Mr. Scott were——"

"How's your father?"

"Oh," Christie heaved a big sigh of relief, "ever so much better. Oh, I keep saying 'Oh' all the time. Please stop me. I think I'm excited. I know I shall never be able to say all I want to to thank you—how am I *ever* going to do it?"

She looked at him with eyes so wide open and so appealingly perplexed that Selwood momentarily wilted. His eyes fell. The man that could look at any sort of a hand at poker calmly, or into the muzzle of a gun without visible hysteria, faltered before Christie's eyes. He kept his wits just enough to answer her appeal. "You've done it," he managed to say, and continued: "I hope you'll have no more trouble. Bob Scott will be sneaking around here for a while at night; Bob doesn't sleep much."

"He just saved my life, helping this morning. And——" She hesitated and twisted her fingers a little as she stood behind the counter. Then she summoned courage and went on—in truth she had much the greater courage of the two. "And—he—when I spoke of you he told me you were not here at all last night! And I just knew *that* wasn't so. And *you* told me you were not here at all last night! And I just knew *that* wasn't so. You told me you'd prefer I shouldn't mention your name; but I just couldn't help it once—I—I—felt so happy over our getting our store back. And Mr. Scott just didn't seem to know anything about anything. And he said that Mr. Pardaloe had gone out of town early this morning——"

"He took a wagon train out," explained Selwood. He did not add that knowing there was but one way to keep the mule boss quiet, he had sent him out.

"Where *were* you last night?" demanded Christie, growing in pretty boldness—pretty because it was nothing but gratitude and fast-kindling confidence—with just the merest dash of receptive feminine curiosity. "Oh, you needn't tell me, if you don't want to," she added hastily. "I know I ought not to ask."

Her head hung down—about far enough down to reproach herself for hardihood; and her eyes looked up just far enough to reach his; and just innocently enough to shatter his good resolutions of every sort.

"You've full permission to ask me any kind of a question in the world," he said. "Just remember that. I *was* here a little while last night. But Pardaloe and Scott did the hard work."

"Somebody certainly did it. How can men be so mean as those men were to really steal everything we had?" Christie sighed at the thought. But it was not the sigh that shook Selwood; it was the appealing confidence of her question to the one man she felt sure she could trust; and it was so satisfying to him to be even for a few moments in that position.

He stumbled at some effort to answer or

explain her difficulty, but Christie rode right on. "I suppose," she said impulsively, "I might as well ask: How can men be as good as you and your friends were to risk their lives to get back what was taken away from us—when they couldn't have the *slightest* personal interest in helping father and me?"

Selwood demurred. "I wouldn't say just exactly that. I know Scott feels very friendly to your father and you—and Pardaloe, too."

"Oh, Mr. Pardaloe doesn't like father *at all!* I think if he had followed his inclination he'd have dropped poor father in the middle of the street on the way up here!"

Selwood retreated and advanced together. "He may not like your father. But he does you. I'll tell you how it is, Miss Fyler." Selwood gulped a little on the solution. "Men like Pardaloe and Scott and myself don't see a nice young lady like you often."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Christie, flushing anew at her success as a nice young lady.

Selwood once started, warmed to the subject. "It isn't nonsense. You're the first one I ever saw in my life——"

"I wish you please wouldn't make fun of me!" protested Christie meekly; but in matter of fact, not unhappy in her embarrassment.

"All my life, since I ran away from home I've——"

She opened her eyes. "Did you run away from home?"

"I never had a home, rightly speaking, but I ran away from an uncle I lived with. And ever since I've lived on the frontier and seen nothing but these poor, half-starved emigrant women. When I see anybody like you—I—why shouldn't I help, if I can?"

"But the other men, Mr. Pardaloe and Mr. Scott, are not a bit like you." She did not trust herself to look up when she said it; and her tone was so soft!

"They're maybe a little rough, but they're a whole lot better men than the man I am."

She glanced at him saucily. "Don't fish for compliments—I'm just in a silly complimentary mood. You make yourself as little as you can, but you don't deceive me. I just know you planned things and risked your life to do this for—us."

"Christie, I'd do anything for you—honest to God, I mean it, every word. Just give me a chance to do things for you. If my own affairs were as straightened out as most men's are"—he stammered—"I never would ask anything more than the chance ——" He leaned toward her in his intensity. Christie, frightened at what she had aroused, stood with her eyes down on her hands, clasped nervously before her on the counter.

"To do everything for you!" he exclaimed.

Her heart beat a tattoo. She breathed fast in spite of herself. This was a new tone in a man's voice for Christie, and she was afraid.

"And kill any man that stepped between us. Do you hear, Christie?"

It was not hard to hear words such as these words, but difficult to know what to say. However, the simplest answer was the best. "Yes," she answered faintly.

"Look at me, Christie," he said almost sternly. Christie summoned up her courage. She raised her eyes. Selwood's face was red to the temples. His eyes glowed. Her heart almost stopped at their expression. "Some time," he said in deadly earnest, "I'm going to tell you everything. Then—you'll be the judge, Christie."

He walked down street with his head thrown well back, and kept on to the tent quarter for his daily visit to Tracy.

Selwood found him much disturbed. He had just received a visit from an unusual caller—Harry Barbalet, one of his old-time enemies. Harry had told him a long story about Selwood's uncalled-for meanness in cleaning Atkins and Bartoe out of Fyler's store, threatened reprisals, and left the sick man worried. Selwood made light of the complaint, but Tracy took it seriously. "What did you do it for?" he asked with invalid peevishness.

"Do it for?" echoed Selwood surprised. "Should you stand around and let a couple of thieves take a whole store away from an old man like Fyler?"

"He ain't so very old. It wasn't our funeral, anyway."

Selwood flared. "So you don't like it?"

"I don't like to get that bunch stirred up. What's the use?"

Selwood tried in vain to bring Tracy around to his way of thinking. Tracy was much upset that Selwood should dip into a quarrel not his own. "I dunno, John," he said at last, "I don't guess you're fitted just exactly for keeping out of other folks' rows. You ain't exactly that kind, John. You're

too much of a gentleman—the fellows that nicknamed you hit it about right. Oh, I know you don't like it. I didn't like to be called 'Smooth Dave' Tracy, but they had me right. You're too much of a gentleman —so you're fightin' all the time with these river rats."

" 'All the time?' " echoed Selwood indignantly.

"Well, a good deal of the time, Carpy tells me. You're a cool bird, John, and you play a good game of poker, but you don't make a gambler—not by a jugful."

"Why, Dave," protested Selwood, willing to humor the sick man, "you've always said I could swear worse than you could."

"You didn't learn that gambling. You learned it knocking down mule skinners."

"Another 'gentleman's job,' " said Selwood, releasing his accumulated bitterness. "No matter, Dave," he added in the same vein, "I never made a success of anything I undertook."

"Well, everybody knows that ain't so. But why stir up Atkins and Bartoe and Starbuck for this man Fyler? What's he to you?"

Selwood squirmed but held his peace.

"I know, he's got a girl——"

"Don't drag her into it," said Selwood savagely.

"Suppose they are robbing people," Tracy went on, shifting ground instantly, "or shooting people. They ain't robbed you."

"They've robbed my company," interrupted Selwood sharply. "That's robbing me. They shot you, didn't they? That's shooting me! What the devil are you talking about?" he blurted out in a rage. "I don't——"

Tracy feebly put him off. "That's the trouble. You get mad. If you was just a gambler and wasn't a gentleman you wouldn't get mad."

Selwood, in a heat, flung out of the tent.

CHAPTER XVI.

BAD NEWS FOR CHRISTIE.

NO further attempt was made on the store, and while her father was getting well Christie acted as manager. Haynes having partly acquitted himself of evil intent, started his auction sales again and business went on. But one day Haynes called on Selwood to say his own stock of goods would not last over a week longer and begged Selwood to reinstate him at the hall. And on promise of good behavior, Selwood told him when his goods were sold he would give him a chance again.

Christie, meantime, walked on air. To herself, she scarcely concealed her interest in Selwood. Indeed, she found herself sensitive after a few days because Selwood did not call oftener. He had kept track through Carpy of Fyler's improvement, but Christie rarely saw him even passing. Yet some remembrance of their last talk was pleasant in her heart—some thought of a confidence in her worth expressed by the only man in her new and strange surroundings that she felt sure she might trust.

Starbuck was not so backward in expressing sympathy. He came in one day especially to tell her that he had learned all the circumstances of the row between her father and his partners and thought if her father would figure out his damages, when he was well enough to do so, he, Starbuck, would see that Atkins paid. "And, Christie," he added, in earnest of his intentions, "tell your father not to be modest about fixing the amount. Atkins is a bad egg—that's the truth of it. I get along with him. I have to keep the peace here and I get along with everybody. But your father ought never to have had anything to do with a man like that."

He made no reference whatever to the unpleasant alternative he had offered before, and seemed to wish it lost sight of; for he showed now only an interest in seeing what appeared clearly a wrong properly righted.

Fyler accepted the olive branch. He would accept, so Big Haynes said, a red-hot poker from the devil himself if it were offered him. Christie received Starbuck's overtures coldly. A man may be fooled more than once; but a woman, provided her affections are not involved—in which case she merely fools herself—is not easily deceived the second time by a man she has once distrusted. Starbuck's new approaches to her favor were deftly made, but the doors of the heart that beat in Christie's brown eyes were no longer open to them. She liked Starbuck's bluff, taking way but she no longer warmed to Starbuck himself. The result was a certain critical attitude on her part. She was just enough afraid of the man to treat him civilly; but she threw into her talk with him little carp-

ing bits that kept Starbuck irritated though they did not cool his ardor. Indeed they rather inflamed it with a resentful resolve to bring the girl, in somewise, to time.

"There's a hussy that's got 'em all beat," declared Doctor Carpy to Selwood. "Shy as an antelope and as trim on her feet. We never had no women like that down in my country. What? New Mexico? They're flat—not up and coming like this pert youngster. But she's got a mind of her own, boy—don't you ever forget that! Fyler? Oh, he's all right. I go in there just to rattle a few words with Christie. She asked me this morning what had become of you."

Less than that much of a firebrand would have sent Selwood's good resolutions to keep away from Christie Fyler up in smoke. What he ought to do and what he wanted to do were as far apart as the north pole and the south—and in the clash of opinions the south pole won.

Leaving Carpy, Selwood walked up to the hall on the hill. The only sign of life about the place was "Bull" Page who was filling and shining up the lamps. Selwood spoke kindly to him—Bull was a devotee. Walking to the back of the hall Selwood went behind his desk. He lifted the glass clock dome, doubled the shoe up and put it into one of his capacious pockets. Giving Bull a cigar, as he passed out, with the caution not to light it till he had put away the big can of kerosene, the gambler retraced his steps to the hotel and his room. He had planned, mentally, to ask Christie to-day whether this was her shoe. If she claimed it, he meant to make her prove her claim by trying it on for him.

It was useless to pretend he could visit her without careful preparations. The least vain man would have tried to look his best for a call on the only young and pretty girl in Sleepy Cat—Bill Pardaloe "claimed" she was the only pretty girl on the Mountain Divide.

And Selwood was vain. He probably did not think so, but his careful dress among careless men condemned him. This afternoon that he went to call on Christie he was in that dangerous state of preparedness that had given him his unwelcome nickname. He was not a mere fop, nor a dandy of any sort; the serious expression of his face was quite enough to dispel any unpleasant impression of that kind. No dandy looks at times—indeed, much of the time—as if his friends were all dead; but when Selwood walked into Fyler's store his sober air might have misled a careless observer into thinking so.

Fyler sat in a chair near the door, sunning himself. At the whip rack Big Haynes was helping a man pick out a wagon whip. In the darker rear end of the store, Selwood, pausing at the door to shake hands with Fyler and ask after his health, caught a glimpse of Christie talking to some man whose back was so turned that Selwood could not see who it was. The quiet gambler, with his left hand resting easily on the toe of the shoe in his pocket, chatted for a moment with the father of the girl who claimed so much of his thoughts—talked with him about the news from the East, the increase in travel, the growing disorders in the town, and at length getting away from him, walked back into the store.

Big Haynes stopped him to help sell the whip. "Here," he said to his reluctant customer, "here's a man knows all about whips. I call that a good whip," he added, cracking his choice vigorously. "There's a lash that'll wear forever. What do you say, John?"

Haynes with a flow of commending words handed the whip to Selwood, who cracking the whip—which was a poor one—managed to give a qualified approval. "It will wear forever," he said calmly to the buyer, "if you don't use it too often."

"Why, of course," assented Big Haynes with a wealth of apparent honesty, "a man can't use that lash for a log cabin—nor pull a wagon out of a creek with it. But rightly used that lash'll put cheerfulness into the heart of a mule when he's a thousand miles from home—that's all *I* claim. John," he continued, "I hear Wentworth will be here to-morrow."

"Yes."

"Bringing old General Roper with him?"

"So I'm told."

Selwood heard Christie's voice just then in the back of the store. And it was raised in indignant protest. "I don't believe any such thing," she was saying, hotly.

Selwood heard a man's laugh. He recognized it as Starbuck's. He heard also Starbuck's subdued but satisfied retort: "Ask him, some time."

"I will," exclaimed Christie vehemently. "I'll ask him the very next time I see him."

The talk between the two evidently had gone on in ignorance of Selwood's presence. To know that Starbuck was in the store—and talking with Christie—was quite enough to stir Selwood into an ugly mood—and some intuition suggested that they might be talking about him. Resisting an impulse to walk back where he could be seen, Selwood, his left arm resting on a bale of blankets piled on a dry-goods box between the two counters, and holding in the fingers of his left hand an unlighted cigar, stood perfectly still, eyes and ears open, watching Haynes' tactics in selling the whip.

He had not long to wait. He soon heard Christie's footsteps, light and quick—she always came down on her heels with much decision. He had listened to her footsteps so many times he could have picked them out among all the footsteps in Sleepy Cat. And they were coming toward him.

She stopped, as she saw Selwood. He looked around. She was standing within arm's length. Her flushed face, her challenging expression and questioning eyes betokened her excitement. She looked fixedly at him. Returning her gaze, he lifted his hat with his left hand and laid it carelessly on the blankets. Then he waited for her to speak, and as she did not, at once, he broke the pause himself. "Good morning," he said, "if it's not too late."

Starbuck, who had followed Christie forward, halted a few feet away. The passageway was narrow and he could not have passed forward if he would. Selwood gave no intimation he was aware of his presence.

Christie, struggling apparently with some sort of suppressed feeling, hesitated. She forgot to return Selwood's greeting. Then looking at him as if she would look clear through him, the question pressing for answer burst from her lips. "Are you a gambler?" she asked bluntly. The words were loud and clear. Even Haynes heard them. He stopped his sale to look across the counter and saw Christie confronting Selwood with appealing eyes.

There was a moment of straining silence—with Selwood returning Christie's gaze. That question had been expected, but it was none the less dreaded when it came.

He spoke deliberately—and only to ask another question; but his voice lacked its accustomed pitch and resonance. "Who told you I was a gambler?" he asked.

Christie whirled. "This man"—Christie pointed to Starbuck—"told me so, just now. Is it true?" The words came like bullets.

Selwood looked at Starbuck coldly and long; then he turned his gaze back to Christie. The truth had to come. "I am a gambler," he said.

The blow struck home. He saw her horrified amazement as the realization of what his words meant sank in; it made it the harder to face her with what now seemed even to him a shameful fact.

"You told me," she responded with a tremor and with anger fast rising in her eyes, "you were a mining man."

It was no time for evasion; in the parlance of his kind, she was calling. Nor would he if he could, have tried to deceive her further. There was only one person in the world that Selwood felt ought to have the truth, all the truth and nothing but the truth at his hands—and she should have it.

"I am a sinning man," he said. "I didn't tell you I was a gambler because I didn't want to be classed with the cutthroats and jailbirds that infest this town and call themselves gamblers." He spoke slowly and evenly and pointed with his left hand as his arm rested on the blankets, to Starbuck. "The kind of thieves that call themselves gamblers and divide their stealings with this man." Starbuck started, furious. "The kind," continued Selwood without raising his voice, "that this man blackmails for a living."

"Stand away, Christie!" Starbuck shouted the words. With a violent oath he sprang forward. Haynes jumped, and grabbing him threw his arms around him. Selwood, motionless beside the blankets, waited with his eye fixed on his enemy while Haynes remonstrated with the enraged man and reminded him of Christie's presence. Christie in a panic found herself caught between the two men. She tried to signal Selwood to let her pass, for words stuck in her throat. But he would not budge and he compelled her to stand and to listen. "I'm just a common gambler," he went on remorselessly, "but nobody can say I'm not a square gambler. I back my game against the game of other men—no man can say worse than that of me. Turn him loose, Haynes," added Selwood, contemptuously, "you're not doing me any favor by standing there."

Christie, thoroughly frightened, called

desperately to her father, who had heard the commotion and came hobbling back. Fyler intervened and remonstrating in turn with the two angry men, asked Selwood to step to one side that Starbuck might pass out.

"I'll settle with you and your establishment both together. You've bothered this town long enough. Watch out!" exclaimed Starbuck viciously as he passed Selwood.

Selwood, much to Haynes' surprise, did not even attempt a retort. He was compelled, with his life at stake, to watch Starbuck's eyes. But apart from that instinctive caution it seemed either as if he did not hear Starbuck's threats or gave them no heed. There was much more weighing on his mind than Starbuck's words. Haynes and Fyler walked with Starbuck to the door in wordy talk. It was a chance for three talking men to express themselves and for one man who disliked talk to maintain a moody silence. Christie hurrying to the back of the store, left Selwood to his pillar of blankets. He gazed, rather discouraged, after her retreating form; lifted and inspected his unlighted cigar as if looking for company. Then, summoning resolution, he took his hat in his hand and followed Christie to the rear of the store. She was busying herself with the shelves. He stood a moment beside the counter; she gave him no attention.

After a minute of being ignored, he broke the silence. "You haven't heard the whole story——"

"I've heard enough." She did not look around; but her voice told the story of her suffering.

"I didn't mean to tell it now. But some day I'd like to tell you everything."

She whirled toward him with her old impetuosity but without her light heart. Her eyes flashed. "And I thought," she said resentfully, "I thought, that among all the vile men of this vile town, there was at least one that was clean-handed!" Selwood made no effort to break the silence. "Well!" she exclaimed, turning back to her shelves, "it's no matter!"

"I suppose this means you're through with me!"

"I am."

"You haven't heard the whole story yet," he repeated quietly. "But if you're through with me I suppose it wouldn't interest you —anyway."

CHAPTER XVII.

FATE TAKES A HAND.

McALPIN had been working furiously all the day before, and had every hostler and barn boy working his fingers' ends off, to make the big barn ready for the expected visit of the head of the firm, Ben Wentworth. Lefever had sent word from Medicine Bend that Wentworth was bringing with him General Roper, chief engineer in charge of the railroad construction; and reminded McAlpin that Wentworth would be looking for a clean barn and that both distinguished visitors would be looking for a pony race and a game of poker.

Selwood had been down at Thief River looking after his mining operations; he had some time before sold a half interest in his mine to Wentworth.

On his return he dispatched a driver with his own team and a light wagon to relay the distinguished visitors through from Point of Rocks, and Wentworth with his guest reached the foothills overlooking Sleepy Cat by noon.

One of the busy places in Sleepy Cat, particularly at stage time, was the open square in front of the company barn, blacksmith shops and paint and wagon shops. The Medicine Bend stage had pulled in and pulled out again for the west and the Thief River wagon with mail and express was making ready to start south, when the light rig with Wentworth and General Roper drew up before the barn.

As the company representative Selwood received the two men. Wentworth, almost as tall as Pardaloe, with large features, sweeping mustachios, aggressive eyes, wearing a broad plainsman's hat, a dusty velveteen suit and huge solitaire diamond in the bosom of his gray woolen shirt, was a familiar figure to Selwood.

General Roper was an object of much greater interest to Selwood. He was shorter, and stouter with the advance of years, than his companion—wore a black slouch military hat and a soldier's mustache, gray and close-cropped. His features were small, his eyelashes burned out with sun and alkali, and years in the saddle had emphasized his slender bowlegs. Selwood, when he could decently do so unobserved, looked at this man very closely and inspected him very coldly—he felt that he had particular reason to.

After the horses, wagons, equipment and shops had been gone over, Selwood took his guests to the hotel for dinner, stopping on the way at Tracy's tent that Wentworth might go in with Selwood and speak to him.

After dinner the construction engineers took Roper away, and Selwood drove Wentworth to Thief River for the mine inspection. They got back late to the hotel, where Carpy and Roper joined them. After a good bit of talk and more or less action in the barroom, the four went to the dining room for a late supper. The meal was prolonged after the manner of those men of the mountain West that meet after long intervals of separation. When they do meet there is so much ground to be covered in reminiscence; there are so many stories to be told—and there is no country in the world to supply such stories—why should not the hours be mellowed and golden?

Roper, old army officer and steeped in the traditions of autocracy and action, was first to manifest impatience as the early night wore on and no game was in sight. He walked with Carpy to the hotel office, sent a telegram and was ready for new ventures.

"When does this poker player of yours show up?" he asked of Carpy. "What did you call him—'Gentleman John?'"

Carpy touched the old gentleman's breast with his finger. "He was with us at supper to-night—John Selwood."

"That young fellow? Wentworth's superintendent?"

"That's 'Gentleman John,' but don't call him that," explained Carpy with his broad smile, "unless you want a row."

Roper shrugged his shoulders. "We're going to miss Dave Tracy to-night."

"You may; you may," assented Carpy enigmatically. "But the young fellow will do the best he can."

The four men sat down in Carpy's room. Carpy supplied the chips and opened a big box of cigars while Selwood placed a new deck of cards on the table, the seal of the packet unbroken. He acted as banker.

A game of poker is a monotonous affair to all except the players themselves. Its constant hazard of hopes—blasted with every hand that fails and freshened with every hand that wins—supply to the gambler that sting of uncertainty and the hope and fear of loss or gain that prick anew his hardened sensibilities. But these afford to the onlooker only an academic excitement. As the hours pass, fewer irrevelant words are wasted—even the night frowns more silent. The religious, spending on his knees the midnight hours in contemplation or meditation, is not more absorbed in his devotions than the seasoned poker player in his deal, his opening and his draw.

Midnight found the four men, fresh at the work, the gains and losses seesawing from one pile of chips to another. At two o'clock in the morning, Carpy, a moderate winner, dropped out on the plea of necessity. Wentworth and Selwood were behind; Roper was winning and in excellent humor. He found that Wentworth, whose game he knew, was easier than Selwood to win from, and directed his batteries chiefly against him. Selwood, willing to see Wentworth eliminated from the game, encouraged this; and with the day breaking in the east and the air of the room vitiated by the kerosene lamps, heavy and enervating, Wentworth, a considerable loser, quit.

"I hope you're not done, young man," exclaimed Roper, whose palate was whetted for further victories.

"I don't usually sit in a game longer than this," responded Selwood, whose composure seemed proof against adverse fortune. "But if you want to make it noon, I'm agreeable."

Wentworth threw himself on the bed, beside Carpy whose snoring was of a peaceful nature. Selwood pushed aside the calico curtains, threw open the windows for air, put out one of the hot lamps, dashed some cold water over his face and sat down to finish with the man best known among the poker players of the Mountain Divide.

The young gambler meant to trim him; and all that had gone before was only preliminary to what was now in hand. From the moment Selwood had sat into the play the night before, he had done little more than to study Roper's game. It was a so-called "gentleman's game," equally without bad manners and without mercy—bold on winning streaks, guarded on losing streaks; a game difficult to beat because it was a game well in hand. Selwood set out to beat it. Roper liked the two-handed game—Selwood meant that he should—meant that his confidence should be well established. The general continued to win until within half an hour of breakfast, when a bad streak

cost him heavily. Overconfidence—enemy of cautious men—led him for just a little while, too far afield; that mysterious agency of chance, poker luck, momentarily deserted him. In a fit of pique the general tried to discipline it—to drag it rudely back to his aid—with the mortifying result that in half a dozen hands he lost every dollar he had made in the early-morning hours. Selwood was showing his teeth.

Nor was the strategy he made use of altogether in the monotonous turn of the cards and the nerve-wearing bet against the unseen. He reasoned that before General Roper would lose his winnings he must first lose his temper; this, the six disastrous hands had cost him. But now the general, like a prudent soldier, retreated. He drew into his shell, silent and crabbed and Selwood saw that something was necessary to encourage him. He ordered breakfast and while it was being prepared the general won some consolation pots.

The meal was brought to the door by the housekeeper, Margaret Hyde, pale, silent, emotionless. Selwood thanked her, tried to slip a bill into her hand, but could not, and took the tray from her hands. The better part of the pot of strong coffee was conceded by Selwood, who took only a cupful, to Roper. The general lighted a fresh cigar from the big box, tilted back in his flimsy chair and looked his opponent carefully over. What he thought, what conclusions he reached, were his own. Selwood, calm under the inspection, only toyed, thoughtfully—while General Roper smoked—with the cards on the table before him. When Roper was ready to resume he, himself, drew a sealed pack of new cards from his pocket. "Let's have a fresh deck, young man," he said indifferently—or with an air of indifference—as he produced them. "It seems as if I can't remember your name."

"It ought not to be hard for you to remember," was all that Selwood retorted. But the remark was unnoticed, as Selwood meant it to be. When Roper brought out his own cards, Selwood without comment took the cards they had been playing with all night, tore the pack through the middle, threw it into a corner, and opened Roper's pack. The play went on.

Within an hour, by nursing the play along as a practiced hand at a billiard cue nurses three balls within the balk line around the table, Selwood had his game where he thought he could manage it. It was not merely poker; it was the mental attitude of the exasperated man facing him. When Roper played for safety, Selwood was patient; when the general dashed at him headlong, Selwood stopped the charge and mercilessly took his pound of flesh. By ten o'clock that morning Roper realized he had found a man his superior in nerve and his equal in strategy, and his anger was the anger of that master of fence who realizes that his skill has been matched and his rapier outpointed.

But the general lacked the caution to profit by his discernment. As a frontier gamester he had a reputation to sustain—and to be beaten by a mere sitter-in at a friendly game, to be held up, in reminiscence, to the ridicule of his acquaintances in recalling a circumstance such as this, was too much. And egged on by that arch foe of us all, vanity, General Roper pressed his enemy.

Selwood recognized the symptoms as the beginning of the end. Roper's recklessness was stimulated designedly by minor successes and his hopes were repeatedly dashed by staggering losses. He was gently decoyed into boldness and brutally punished for his temerity. His discomfiture was studied and his feelings trod underfoot. In no other possible way could his pride have been so humiliated, and his pretentious autocracy abased. He rose from the table at noon—although Selwood offered to play longer if he wished—exhausted physically, his eyes on fire, his voice shrunken to a rasping treble, a beaten man. It was not the money lost—though he had been completely cleaned out—but he had been mastered at his own game and he knew it.

"Get my I O Us together, and see what I owe you," he said brusquely as he pushed his chair back. "Look here," he added insolently—Selwood in leisurely fashion was casting up his accounts—"where did you learn to play poker?"

Selwood did not take the trouble to look up. "Among the thieves and cutthroats at Thief River," he answered with no lack of curtness and a complete indifference to the result of his words. "Why?" he asked in turn and with no less insolence. "Don't you like my game?"

"What's your business?" demanded Roper. The general had cast aside the mask of suavity worn for so many hours;

Selwood met his rudeness with rudeness. "Playing poker," he retorted, indifferent to results.

"What!" exclaimed Roper, kindling. "Do you mean to say you're a professional gambler?"

"That sounds like it, doesn't it?"

"You insult me, sir!" exclaimed Roper with an oath.

"You insulted me when you refused to play with my cards. You called for your own, didn't you? And I cleaned you out with your own."

Roper flew into a passion. "Do you play with marked cards?" he thundered.

Selwood was impassive. "Nobody would need marked cards to play with you, general," he returned. "I play with marked cards when I play with thieves—they furnish them."

"Wentworth! Carpy!" roared Roper. "Come in here!" The two men, smoking, and with their feet on the table were in the doctor's office. They appeared at the door together. "What do you mean," Roper demanded with a string of expletives, "by running in a professional gambler on me for a gentleman's game of poker?"

Carpy looked blank—but the look was mostly assumed. "Has he cleaned you, general?" he asked with medical innocence.

"Wentworth," blurted out Roper, "you told me he was your superintendent here."

"Dash it, he is," returned Wentworth, testily. "Last time you were up here you cleaned out Dave Tracy. You weren't so blamed particular then whom you played poker with."

Roper stamped about in a tantrum. "I've been played on—taken in by a common card sharp. I've been robbed."

Selwood, who had been sitting as an unconcerned listener, slapped the cards with which they had been playing sharply down on the table. He rose instantly and confronted Roper.

"I wouldn't call a man of your years a liar, general. But you can't crawl away after a game with me with any such word as 'robbed!'"

"Why you blamed old martinet!" shouted Carpy angrily.

"Hold on, doc! Hold your horses!" interposed Wentworth hastily. "The general is my guest—we're gentlemen here."

Carpy could not be suppressed. "Every man on the Mountain Divide," he thundered at Roper, "would call you a liar if you called John Selwood a crook."

Selwood put up his hand. He was white with anger. "I'll do the talking, doctor," he said. The men watching him made no further attempt to interfere. Roper, sullen, stood silent. "This man"—Selwood pointed to Roper—"calls me a card sharp. He has good reason to—a better reason than he knows!" He was looking as he spoke at Wentworth and Carpy and directed his words to them. "I want to tell you, gentlemen, who that man is." His finger pointed remorselessly at Roper. "And I want to tell you who I am. That man sent my father to his death at the hands of Indians! That man tried to send my mother and me to the same death. That man put a stain on my mother's name. He sent me out into the world without a name. If that man's word is good"—he shot the words out like bullets—"my father and my mother were never married!"

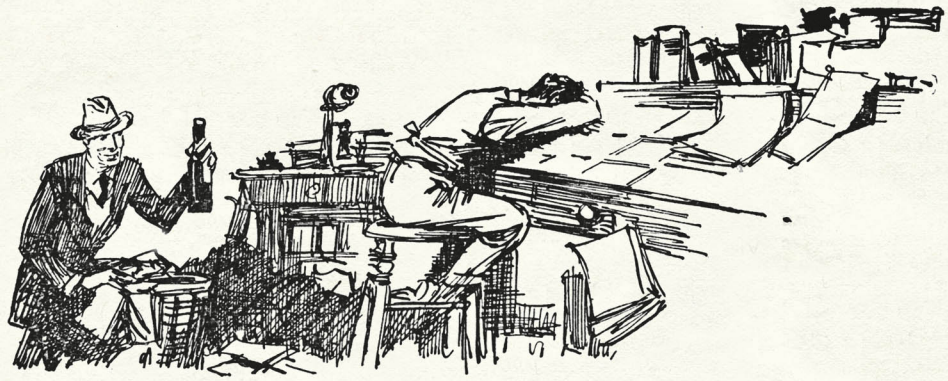
"Damnation!" shouted Carpy, enraged. "Why don't you kill him?"

Selwood went steadily on. "I'll tell you that, too. I came out on the Divide ten years ago. I was fifteen years old. I went to this man up at the fort and told him who I was. He cursed me. The only man on the whole trail that showed me honest kindness was the old man that lies down there in the tent—Dave Tracy. Dave Tracy was a gambler; he could teach me no trade but his own. He never tried to make a gambler of me—I made one of myself—I liked it, I drifted into it, I expect to die in it. I don't excuse it. I don't whine about it. I know the cards—they know me. They're false friends, like all friends—with you when you win, against you when you lose. But I don't forget what that man has done to me and mine. You ask me, Carpy, why I don't kill him. It's because his son, Lieutenant Henry Roper, was my father!"

An instant of silence, terrible to sustain, followed the astonishing words. Roper, apoplectic with emotion, started, gasped and clutched at his shirt collar.

Before any one could reach him he fell heavily to the floor.

To be continued in the next issue, December 20th.



"As Meek as Monk"

By Caroline Lockhart

Author of "The Dude Wrangler," "The Spirit that Talked from a Box," Etc.

The only difference between Monk and the proverbial worm—at least, so his townsmen imagined—was that the worm would turn.

JOHN W. MONK, editor, owner, business manager, printer, office boy of the *Prouty Grit,* published weekly in Prouty, Wyoming, held the type stick at full length to get the effect of the headline he was setting. A slight frown marred his placid brow when he suddenly realized that, owing to the fact that he had not enough capital S's in the font to complete the sentence, he would have to change the wording.

"BISHOP SMART VISITS KINGS AND QUEENS" was a splendid headline but it was obvious that the last word simply had to be plural so there was nothing to do but try another. He sighed as he substituted, "BISHOP SMART THE GUEST OF ROYALTY," which was not bad but not so good as the former, and wished, as he had wished a thousand times, that he could afford enough type to set any "head" he wanted to.

His supply was not only limited but so old that it was worn round on the corners, which was not surprising in view of the fact that he had used it for twenty years, or ever since he had moved his print shop into Prouty in a wagon. He had printed his first newspaper, not much larger than a pocket handkerchief, on a job press in a tent. Later he had acquired a hand press which he had set up in an empty saloon building, and still occupied, though the light was poor and the location not to his liking.

The afternoon sun shining on his brown hair as he stood at his type rack brightened it until it looked like a halo. His resemblance to Anton Lang was remarkable. With his brown beard, mild brown eyes, and benign expression he might readily have passed for the famous Christus of Oberammergau, or his brother.

"As meek as Monk" had come to be a saying in Prouty for his fear of giving offense, of hurting some one's feelings in his paper, was mistaken for humility.

Now, however, as he glanced at the clock his tongue clicked against his teeth in exasperation. Dodd, the haberdasher, had promised him faithfully to have the copy for his advertisement in by two o'clock, and here it was two thirty. There was a gleam in his eye as he limped to the door to see if Dodd was coming, which indicated that he might have more spirit than he was accredited with having.

There was no sign of him, so, since he could not afford to go to press without it, nothing remained for Monk to do but put on his hat and make his third trip after it.

Dodd, the haberdasher, was one of his crosses, and a heavy one. Each week he

delayed the paper because he would not get his copy ready. For a long time Monk had been charitable and excused his tardiness on the grounds that he was exceedingly busy or a natural procrastinator; now he was fairly certain that it was pure, unadulterated cussedness on the part of his largest and most consistent advertiser. And he had to swallow it, for Dodd's weekly advertisement made the difference between running behind and breaking even.

Monk took his faded brown hat from its nail and started. As he closed the door and looked down Arapahoe Avenue, which was almost empty of cars, teams, and pedestrians, he wondered disconsolately if nobody ever again was going to get married, have a baby, or be arrested. There was not a thing even remotely resembling news to put in the paper, but he had plenty of plate matter, and he had wielded his trusty shears judiciously, so that if he was successful this trip in getting Dodd's "ad" he could be on the press at four thirty and by six o'clock have the *Grit* on the cigar counter.

The thought raised his spirits a little and he limped along quite briskly, visualizing Dodd at his desk on the thronelike platform in the back of the store where he was eternally figuring and writing letters. He was framing his opening sentence—he wished to be firm without being too insistent—when he raised his eyes and saw Dodd standing on the edge of the sidewalk opposite.

Dodd seemed keenly interested in the actions of the two O'Mahoney kids, whose father had just completed a jail sentence for bootlegging, and Monk wondered what the youngsters were up to.

One of them had his eye applied to a crack between the planks of the crossing while the other was fishing for something which lay beneath it.

"Lost something, sonny?" he asked, as he limped closer.

The elder raised his moist, freckled face and said excitedly: "They's a dollar down there and we almost got it!"

Monk showed proper surprise at the astounding information and stopped to watch the ingenious modus operandi by which they were attempting to recover the money.

They had a little bolt attached to a string and on the bolt was a large chew of gum. When the gum was dropped on the money it stuck readily, but the difficulty in salvaging it lay in the fact that when it came up they could not grasp the edge of it. The two had worked for half an hour, they told him, and meant to keep on trying until they got it.

"It'll make a good little story, their patience and ingenuity," Monk thought to himself, smiling. He smiled at Dodd, too, but Dodd was watching the boys' efforts too intently to see it.

Finally the gum stuck on the edge of the money and it came up slowly.

"Easy, now! Easy!" Monk admonished, his voice vibrating with excitement.

"There! Now we've got it!" he cried triumphantly, as the younger O'Mahoney reached in the crack and gripped the edge tightly between his fingers.

There it lay in the small, grimy palm, calling up visions of pop, candy, ice-cream soda, a fortune in the eyes of the bootlegger's boys, all but speechless with ecstasy.

"That's mine!" The curt voice of Dodd was like the shock of ice water to the three who heard it. In a kind of frozen silence they stared at the long white hand reaching for the dollar.

" 'Tain't!" The small fingers closed over it tightly. The child thrust his hand behind him while his blazing eyes defied the haberdasher.

"I lost it last winter—in February—and I've been too busy to take up the plank and get it. Hand it over." Dodd grasped the boy by the shoulder.

"Findin's keepin', ain't it, Mr. Monk?" the boy demanded passionately.

Monk's face was a study. He glanced at Dodd to be sure he was in earnest.

"Guess you'll have to give it to him, if it's his," he replied with an effort.

The little O'Mahoney's freckled face contorted in a grimace, and he cried in rage and disappointment as Dodd uncurled his fingers and took the money from him. The elder poured forth a stream of epithets of which "cheap skate" was the mildest, as Dodd, with a look of satisfaction on his face, dropped the dollar in his pocket where it jingled against others.

"If anybody'd told me this, I wouldn't have believed it," Monk muttered as he looked after the narrow, blue-serge back of his best advertiser. And what a story it would make if he dared print it! Then

he went down in his pocket and produced a half dollar, his last until the paper was out and he could make collections, and pressed it into the hand of the little O'Mahoney just as Dodd turned his head at the door of his haberdashery and saw the action.

Perhaps he felt it a rebuke, perhaps his conscience pricked him, at any rate when Monk followed him down the avenue of socks and neckties to the platform, Dodd sat down hard in his office chair and snapped at him:

"You must be pretty flush down there on the *Grit* to be able to give away money—I know I can't afford to."

Monk looked guilty.

"They were so disappointed. I—I was a boy once myself," he stammered apologetically.

Monk at the moment was thinking—the comparison had occurred to him frequently—how much Dodd, lank, bloodless, with a complexion that had a blue, undernourished tinge to it, looked like an angleworm. His baldness, and his face, which was pointed, strengthened the resemblance, and now Monk speculated whimsically as to whether if he should take him by his head and yank it suddenly he would not snap back and slide down a hole in angleworm fashion. He asked humbly:

"Is your copy ready, Mr. Dodd? I should like so much to get out on time if possible."

"No, I've been too busy. I'll bring it up myself, later."

"But, Mr. Dodd," Monk pleaded, "I'm waiting for it—I'm all ready to go to press."

"Then why don't you?" Dodd asked sardonically.

Monk did not answer. He knew that Dodd realized how much his advertisement meant to him, as he knew that the haberdasher was doing this on purpose. It gave Dodd a feeling of importance to make the *Grit's* editor await his pleasure, and it amused him to see Monk endeavor to conceal his annoyance and disappointment. To-day, however, he wanted to discipline him, to punish him well for giving him that uncomfortable feeling of smallness which was still with him.

As Monk turned away, a shabby figure in the brown clothes which to Dodd's certain knowledge he had worn four seasons, he sniffed mentally, "The power of the press!" and called after him:

"By the way, Monk, you don't want to forget to mention the fact that Jim O'Mahoney is out again and warn him as to what will happen if he is caught a second time selling moonshine."

"I mentioned it when he was arrested," Monk answered, "and I don't see any use in hurting the feelings of his wife and family."

"The fear of publicity prevents more crime than the fear of the law." Dodd spoke as if he had said something original, and added: "Give it to him!" His eyes narrowed. "It doesn't seem to me that you come out strong enough on these liquor violations, Monk. It can't be you're in sympathy with the bootleggers?"

"The law has to be enforced," Monk replied perfunctorily. The street at the end of the vista of socks and neckties looked like a haven of refuge, and he made for it as rapidly as his rheumatism permitted.

Monk winced as the barber called to him jocularly from his doorway:

"Paper be out this month, old feller?"

"You'd probably see it sooner if you subscribed instead of borrowing," Monk retorted with an unwonted show of spirit.

"Say, why don't you put some pep in your sheet?" The barber added darkly, in an undertone: "They's enough goin' on in this town to get out a real paper if you wasn't afraid to print it. I wisht I could run the *Grit* for a couple of issues."

"Run it in the ground!" Monk replied sharply.

He felt despondent, heavy-hearted, discouraged. Nobody liked his paper. He was a cipher in the community. Everybody thought the *Grit* lacked "pep" because he could not bring himself to hurt folks' feelings. If he did, then the folks he offended would be around to lick him. Better be dead than a small-town editor. His shoulders sagged and his thoughts were gloomier than his office as he opened the door and prepared to wait with what patience he could until it pleased Dodd to bring his advertisement. "Class Clothes, Nobby Neckwear"—Monk knew all the vulgar phrases, and could have written it himself in twenty minutes if Dodd would have allowed him to do so.

The shop never had looked dingier, more eloquent of uncompensated drudgery to

Monk than it did to-day as he pulled out the stool with its rung reënforced with baling wire, and perched himself upon it where he could watch the old-fashioned clock on the wall and the door of the front office.

While the clock ticked off the seconds toward four thirty, at which time he would have to abandon all hope of getting the paper on the cigar counter before people went home to supper, he built air castles and ruminated. He dreamed of the realization of his secret ambition, namely, to some day go to press without Dave Dodd's advertisement! This had come to be Monk's idea of affluence and independence.

Once it had been to have a typesetting machine operated by electricity. There seemed, however, not the remotest chance that either would ever happen. The territory was limited as to subscribers, while Prouty's business men argued that since every one knew their stock nearly as well as they did there was no need to advertise. There were no leaks to stop, as Monk had reduced living and office expenses to a minimum. He "batched" in a small room in the rear of the shop, ate sparingly, and had figured costs until he knew the exact amount of profit on a visiting card.

As Monk's mind darted hither and thither like a cornered rat seeking its liberty, wild thoughts came to him. He had had them before in moments of despondency when Dodd had been later than usual with his copy. Some day he would go to press without the haberdasher and then commit suicide!

The fact that Dodd's chagrin would be only temporary, and when the shop was sold to pay his funeral expenses he would have another victim, were arguments against this method of escape from Dodd's tyranny.

Upon one thing he was determined, however, and that was when he felt himself dying he would call Dodd to his bedside and just before he slipped through the Pearly Gates he would tell him what he thought of him. Heaven, to Monk, was a place where there was not only no rheumatism but no one was ever late with his advertising.

His heart gave a leap when the door opened, but a glance dispelled his hope that it was the belated copy. Instead of Dodd, it was Jim O'Mahoney, advancing with a stealth which suggested a secret and private mission. He walked cautiously, not to say gingerly, and the reason was apparent when he unbuttoned his coat and disclosed a bottle containing a transparent fluid thrust in the waistband of his trousers.

"I brought you a little present," he said in a whisper. "The kids was tellin' me about the four bits you gave 'em. They was shore tickled."

"Just as much obliged, Jim, but I never use it. Are you—er—still bootlegging?"

"I'll say so; got to make back that fine I paid to the county. Try it; it's got age on it; been cached six months in a charcoal barrel."

"It's been twenty years since I took a drop of anything."

"This might do you some good besides helpin' you some," O'Mahoney urged humorously. "It's got boxin' gloves in it—reg'lar war medicine."

"It wouldn't hurt my eyes or start me to raving?"

"If it would, half of Prouty would be blind and the other half crazy."

Monk hesitated.

"My spirits are twenty below zero. The truth is, I'm so blue seems like I can't stand it any longer," he confessed to his visitor. "The paper 'n' ever'thing."

"The paper's all right if you'd just put some kick in it."

The criticism seemed the last straw. Monk reached for the bottle.

O'Mahoney watched him critically as he put it to his lips and advised as he heard it gurgle:

"Take a good one while you're at it."

"It's tolerable stout," gasped Monk as he strangled.

"You'll get an answer from that by special delivery," O'Mahoney assured him as he set the bottle on the composing stone and departed, leaving Monk with the feeling that a fire had started somewhere in his vitals.

Monk looked after him, envying him the heighth and broad shoulders which gave him the right to swagger, and then glanced about for some likely place to conceal the bottle. The wastebasket appealed to him as both safe and handy, so he placed it in the bottom and returned to the stool to enjoy the pleasant glow which was creeping over him.

While the agreeable sensation lasted he forgot Dodd and his advertisement, but it

was of comparatively short duration, and as soon as it had vanished he felt nervous, irritable, and his grievance against the haberdasher grew until it filled the universe.

In his mind's eye he could see Dodd sitting at his desk like an elongated angleworm in blue serge calmly writing and figuring, perhaps even smiling to himself in the knowledge that Monk was waiting impatiently for his copy. The thought made Monk's blood run faster.

"I feel hos-tile," he muttered. "If I was the man I was once, I'd go to the gumbo with that Missourian!" He tried to double up his fist on the hand with the two stiff fingers.

Then he speculated as to how much it would cost to hire somebody to whip him. He felt that nothing short of bodily injury to the haberdasher would satisfy him. Sitting on his high stool with his heels hooked into the rung reënforced with baling wire, he reviewed the pleasing picture of some husky warrior rolling Dodd in the dust in front of his clothing emporium.

By now the hands of the old-fashioned clock on the wall had reached four thirty, and Monk all but gritted his teeth as he limped to the door to see if by chance Dodd was coming.

The proprietor of the cigar counter was passing and bawled at him:

"Will the 'Bingville *Bugle*' be out 'fore day after to-morrow?"

Monk wished that he could think of something smart and cutting to say about the fellow's cigars and tobacco; but nothing occurred to him so he slammed the door until the glass rattled.

A mighty resolve was rising within him—a reckless determination which had its source in the transparent fluid that had boxing gloves in it—and he struck the composing stone smartly with the flat of his hand as he shouted to the spiders in the corner and the flies on the window:

"By the Eternal! I'm going to press without him!"

His waxen skin had a tinge of color; his mild brown eyes blazed with purpose and anger; even the dank forelock which hung to his eyebrow seemed charged with energy as he added: "I'm not only going to press without his 'ad,' but I'm going to write a piece about him! 'As meek as Monk!' I'll show 'em!"

"Beware the wrath of a patient man," says an adage, and Monk was prepared to prove the truth of it. He was ready to go the limit and take the consequences.

He filled the space he had reserved for Dodd with plate matter—"Aunt Emmy's Talks on Canning Vegetables"—and took the picture of "The Greatest Mother in the World"—the Red Cross cut he kept on hand to fill space in emergencies—from the front page to make room for the article about his enemy.

"If kick's what they want, they'll get it," he snorted. O'Mahoney's criticism still rankled, to say nothing of the brutal candor of others who had told him to his face that all the *Grit* needed was burying. "I'll lambaste 'em one after the other, and when I haven't a solitary advertiser left I'll end it all with a razor!"

This was his mood when he sat down at his old marred desk where he had written reams of fulsome praise about everybody in Prouty, and the anæmic Dodd family especially.

He dipped his pen in wormwood, gall, and vitriol, words came which he had not known were in his vocabulary as he flayed Dodd, the haberdasher. He not only related the incident of the afternoon, describing the scene and the little O'Mahoney's disappointment in graphic language, but he went back into ancient history and told how Dodd had sold a saddle horse with a ringbone to his pastor for fifty dollars.

He called attention to the fact that Dodd made capital of his public spirit, and, at the same time, without soul or sentiment, defaced the scenery with his advertisements.

"Buy It of Dave Dodd: Class Clothes and Nobby Neckwear" greeted picknickers in sylvan dells and stared at tourists from every rock and precipice until the slogan had become a nightmare, Monk declared, and urged that the State highway department do something about it.

He was just gathering up the sheets of paper when he heard a step which, without looking, he knew to be Dodd's.

"Here's your copy," Dodd said brusquely.

It was the moment Monk had dreamed of and prayed for. He drew himself up several inches and his beard stood out like a bayonet aimed at Dodd's heart as he said with polite gusto:

"Go to hell, Mr. Dodd! I'm going to press without you."

It was altogether the most perfect mo-

ment Monk ever had experienced as he watched Dodd's pale eyes widen, his thin lips part in amazement, wondering if he had heard correctly. He would not have been more astonished if one of the Belgian hares in his back yard had attacked him.

"You mean you don't want my advertisement?"

"You're too late," Monk replied curtly as he limped back to his cases.

It was five thirty; Prouty could not have the *Grit* for supper but they'd have it for breakfast if he had to work half the night.

The walls had a circular motion, and the floor occasionally came up to meet him in a fashion which recalled an experience on shipboard, but he did not weaken in his determination to get the paper out as soon as possible.

He was delighted with the headline he wrote for the Dodd story. With the one about the bishop visiting royalty it would balance the page beautifully. The space between where "The Greatest Mother in the World" had been he filled with locals —Mrs. Hans Nelson was among our Saturday shoppers—Charlie Runyon was over from Goose Creek on Monday—etc. When the page was made up to his satisfaction he took a proof of it to see if there were more than the usual number of typographical errors, or, at least, any so bad they had to be corrected.

There were a good many he discovered, particularly in the Dodd story, and by the time the proofs were revised it was eight o'clock and he was drowsy, so actually overcome by a desire for sleep that he felt as if he had been drugged and could not keep his eyes open another second. He reasoned that if he could just "lose" himself for a moment he would wake up refreshed and finish his work quickly. The temptation was too strong to resist so he pulled the stool close to the composing stone, shoved the form aside, laid his head on his folded arms, and died temporarily.

It was thus Dodd found him when, upon passing the *Grit* office on his way to a meeting in the church basement, he saw a light burning in the rear of the shop and curiosity overcame his anger. He had vowed never to set foot in the place until Monk had apologized, groveled, cringed, as he was sure he would after a couple of issues without him, but, in the meantime it would be on his mind, he would be speculating and conjecturing as to what had happened to explain Monk's sudden independence. There was a possibility that he had had a windfall from some quarter, or that he was going to sell the paper. Monk was secretive and not given to telling his business.

Anyway, Dodd decided to have it out with him when he saw the light burning, and so walked to the back of the shop with a heavier step than was necessary, with that intention.

Peering around the corner of a type rack he discovered Monk in his uncomfortable position, sleeping like a hay hand. The editor did not stir as Dodd walked closer and listened to his heavy breathing. Then the haberdasher suddenly threw up his head like a bird dog in a quail country. His nostrils dilated. He sniffed audibly. Did he or did he not detect the smell of moonshine? He had been at the courthouse once when the sheriff destroyed liquor, so the odor was not unfamiliar. He leaned over the inert figure and his ejaculation contained both surprise and satisfaction.

His nose had not deceived him. Monk, the old reprobate, had been drinking.

Moonshine, then, was the source of his courage and independence. Well, if he could just locate his bottle he could have him where he could not wiggle.

Dodd stepped lightly as he searched the premises, peering into likely hiding places, opening drawers and boxes, moving furniture, sounding the walls for secret panels. He had concluded that Monk had buried the bottle outside somewhere when his eye fell on the wastebasket. He dived to the bottom and was rewarded. There it was; he shook and smelled of it, a pint of moonshine with a man-size drink taken out of it! Two hundred dollars and thirty days in the calaboose for the editor if he notified the sheriff and furnished the evidence! Dodd all but smacked his lips as he thought of it.

He laid a rough hand on Monk's unresisting shoulder and shook him unmercifully.

"Leave me be," Monk muttered.

"Wake up!"

"I gotta sleep," stirring a little.

"Sleep! You're in a drunken stupor."

Dodd's voice finally reached Monk's consciousness. He sat up and blinked at him stupidly. Then he demanded:

"What you doing here?"

Dodd held up the bottle triumphantly.

"I found your cache."

Instead of the consternation he expected, Monk asked easily:

"Well, what you goin' to do with it? Drink it?"

"Turn you in, maybe. We'll talk it over."

"You talk and I'll work. I gotta get out this paper."

It was plain that Monk was now cold sober but still mutinous. Dodd asked incredulously: "Are you goin' to press without my ad?"

"Surest thing you know," replied Monk flippantly, and commenced to whistle: "When the Midnight Choo-Choo Leaves for Alabam."

"Monk," impressively, "don't you realize that I've got you—that I got the evidence and can have you arrested?"

"Not without a warrant," Monk returned airily. "While you're getting it, I'll print my paper." He added significantly: "It'll be good this week—it's got a kick to it."

Startled, the haberdasher asked suspiciously:

"You writin' a piece about me?"

"I'm givin' you free publicity—it won't cost you a nickel." Monk locked the front page and started over to the press with it.

"Lemme see it."

"Pass over that evidence."

Dodd walked to the press and tried to decipher the headlines, but he could not read type backwards so the big letters told him nothing. "When the Midnight Choo-Choo Leaves for Alabam" Monk whistled as he stepped about briskly.

"What you sayin' about me?" Dodd demanded, clearly nervous.

"Everything you can think of," said Monk grimly. He picked the crumpled proof of the front page out of the waste-basket and put on his spectacles. Then he held it at arm's length and read oratorically:

"DAVE DODD TAKES DOUGH FROM KIDS

Meanest Man in Wyoming Robs Children of Fruit of Their Labors"

Dodd's lips parted.

Monk continued:

"A shameless vandal, desecrating sylvan dells and defacing cliffs and precipices with his odious advertisements."

"You goin' to print that?" Dodd shouted.

Monk went on down the column, reading at random:

"Sold a horse with a ringbone to his pastor for fifty dollars and refused to return the money when the preacher killed it to put it out of its misery."

Dodd sank down on the stool Monk had vacated. His long, thin legs became like sticks of wet macaroni and refused to support him. He had thought that transaction a secret between him and his Maker. A man with a memory like Monk's was a detriment, a menace to the community!

Monk looked at him over his spectacles as if waiting for his approval.

"I forbid you to publish that article!" Dodd shook his finger at him.

"'The fear of publicity prevents more crime than fear of the law,'" Monk quoted. "Listen to this—it's the best part of it:

"He buys the bulk of his groceries from mail-order houses and then gets up in the Boosters' Club and urges the public to patronize home merchants, and the *Grit* can prove it."

The perspiration stood out in drops on Dodd's high forehead.

"That is scandalous! Every word is libelous! I can send you to jail for it."

"I need a rest anyhow," said Monk calmly. "It's twenty years since I had a vacation. Say, won't they eat up this issue?"

They would. And well Dodd knew it. He could not live that article down in a year of Sundays. He had sneered at the power of the press often, but now it looked like a monster—merciless, terrible. The *Grit* had become a juggernaut ready to crush him, and Monk had grown to gargantuan proportions, an implacable giant wielding a powerful weapon. He realized that he could stand in the street and shout his head off, but what would it amount to as compared to the *Grit's* circulation among three hundred and seventy-eight subscribers?

Dodd swallowed a lump that would have choked his jersey.

"Mr. Monk, I want your friendship."

"I want my bottle," Monk replied coldly.

"I admit that I am hot-headed and impulsive——"

"Like an angleworm," observed Monk ambiguously.

"But if you are willing to let bygones be bygones and start all over———"

"I want my bottle," repeated Monk stolidly.

"I'll return the evidence and promise to be more prompt in future with my copy."

Monk hesitated; that article was a masterpiece; besides, it balanced the page so beautifully. If he threw it out he should be compensated for the sacrifice.

"Dodd," finally, "I've been letting you have your space too cheaply. There's a great deal of composition in your ads and I'll have to raise the rate on you. Twenty cents an inch will be my price in future."

Dodd interlaced his long, predatory fingers and wrung them as he figured that the raise would increase the weekly cost of his advertising about two dollars. He was going to protest, to say something about coercion—blackmail—when his eye fell on the proof of the front page with which Monk was toying nonchalantly. "DAVE DODD TAKES DOUGH FROM KIDS" the headline screamed at him. That settled it.

"All right; I suppose you're entitled to it," he said reluctantly. "Take out the story."

"Gimme the evidence," stubbornly.

The gleam in his eye told Dodd that never again would "As meek as Monk" have any significance. The editor had stretched his wings, like a young eagle—tasted blood, like a royal Bengal tiger, and henceforth would be a factor instead of a cipher in Prouty. All this passed through Dodd's mind swiftly as he handed over the bottle, which Monk took to the sink in the corner and emptied, rinsing carefully to remove the odor.

"I hope we're as good friends as ever, Mr. Monk," he said uncertainly.

"Better," replied Monk calmly as he picked the type from the Dodd article, slipped "The Greatest Mother in the World" back in the center, and built up the front page around it.

There was nothing in his manner to indicate that he had just won a great moral victory besides increasing his monthly income by at least eight dollars.

More Lockhart stories in future issues.

SUPERB MODESTY

IN the "Congressional Directory" the biographical sketches of the senators and representatives are, of course, autobiographies. Many of the statesmen, yielding to the temptation thus presented to picture themselves to the world as heroes and geniuses, lay on the puffery with heavy touches. But, while some of his colleagues use up half a page of fine print bragging about themselves, there is one who confines his sketch of himself to fifteen words, thus: "Martin B. Madden, Republican, of Chicago, was elected to the fifty-ninth and each succeeding Congress." And yet, Mr. Madden has a career he may well be proud of. When he was ten years old, he was making his own living as a water boy in a stone quarry. To-day he is wealthy, one of Chicago's ablest bankers and business men and a national leader of his political party. He is one of those rare and real gentlemen: a self-educated, self-promoted and self-made man who never brags about his maker.

THE MOST POPULAR BOOK

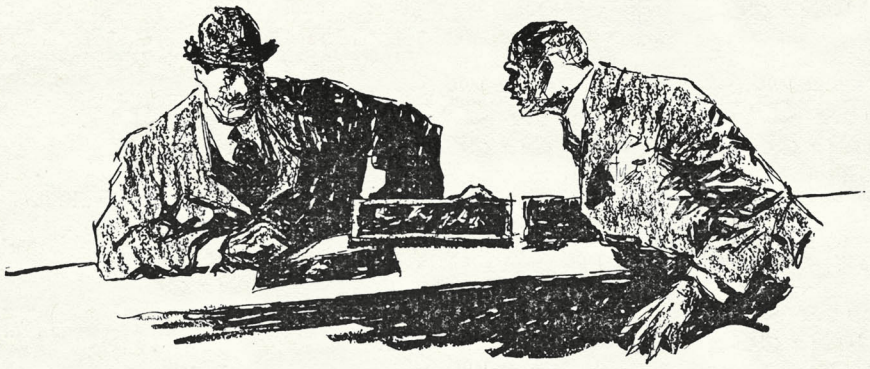
BEST sellers come and go, but the Bible remains the world's most popular book.

Last year the American Bible Society distributed seven million Bibles in various parts of the world. Almost three million were sent out from the society's New York headquarters for use in the United States.

The Bible is printed in nearly all languages—even in some languages that most of us never have heard of. The latest addition is an edition in the Quecha-Spanish dialect for the use of the Andean Indians of South America.

Despite the earthquake disaster, 343,500 Bibles were distributed in Japan, an increase of 100,000 volumes over 1922. All the plates from which they were printed were destroyed in the earthquake.

Bibles in forty-two different languages were required for distribution in Massachusetts.



The Shoe Clew

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "Compassion," "The Avails of the Fraction," Etc.

A business episode, human and intensely interesting, which goes to prove how easily the evidence may be misread.

I WANT to buy a diamond ring," requested a large, portly man, politely, of a clerk near the entrance of the jewelry store of Hays, Henshall Company, South Spring Street, Los Angeles. It was toward the end of a cloudless Saturday morning in January.

Dockery, the clerk, conducted the customer farther down the long, brilliant line of show cases.

"Something about—about what sort, sir?" he asked.

The elderly man removed his large shell-rimmed glasses and wiped them deliberately with an immense silk handkerchief. He looked at the clerk a little shyly as he answered: "Something special. I'm afraid it may be hard. It is my own ring I want to replace." He almost blushed with confusion as he added: "I lost it. So careless! *So* careless!"

He looked first at the trays in the show case beneath him, then at the back of the store where were glass-partitioned offices. He seemed uncertain.

"I tell you, young man," he said, half apologetically. "You ask, please, one of the proprietors to come. You do this for me? I must match it if I can. It was *so* careless of me. A very nice ring, and I want his advice. He has much more experience, you know."

Dockery flushed. It was a common delusion. "Oh, very well—certainly. I'll call Mr. Henshall, if he's at leisure."

Herbert Henshall came forward slowly, blandly. "You want to match a stone, Mr. Dockery tells me. I am Mr. Henshall." He held out his hand and looked interrogatively at the smiling, sheepish gentleman.

"Zumwald is my name, yes," the latter replied, shaking hands affably. "You see, it is this way. I wear always a ring which it is a gift of my wife, a plain gold ring with the diamond, a little old-fashioned, maybe. And this morning I lose it. I am several places. I wash my hands, perhaps several times. I cannot remember just where I could have lost it. It was *so* careless. Oh, she would be heartbroken! So, I think to myself, I advertise and perhaps it will be returned to me. But if not, I do not wish her to know how careless I have been, so I wish to have a new one. I have to look at a good many and do the best I can. She will not look closely, not so? Why should she? She glances merely at the back of my hand as we eat at the hotel. So, you show me, Mr. Henshall, a number of stones in plain gold."

Henshall, slightly amused, was smiling sympathetically. "About how large was the stone, Mr. Zumwald? About how costly a ring was it?"

"Costly? Oh, not much; but a gift, you see, after ten years marriage. Perhaps a thousand, fifteen hundred dollars. If I see one like it I know it right away."

Henshall brought up several trays from the cases. Later, he brought several more from an immense vaultlike safe in the rear of the establishment. Zumwald, rubbing his glasses frequently in his zeal to observe correctly, at length was satisfied with a very white stone in a setting that he declared to be exactly similar to that of the lost ring. But he regretted its newness.

"It is so bright, Mr. Henshall. Can you not make it, in some way, a little dull? No?"

"Oh, I think so. I'll take it back into our work rooms."

"And it is how much?" asked Zumwald.

"Seventeen hundred and fifty dollars," replied the jeweler, fitting the ring into a little case.

The portly customer took out of his breast pocket a large, old-fashioned pocketbook and glanced into the bill compartment.

"Oh, how should I have so much cash? Maybe only a few hundred. I go at once to the Second National Bank, and I am back directly."

Henshall, about to start toward the rear of the store, glanced at the large wall clock there. "Five after twelve! I'm afraid it's——"

"Ach!" The elderly gentleman made sounds of regret with his tongue and teeth. "It takes so long to match this ring!" He frowned with annoyance.

"You don't live here, I take it, Mr. Zumwald?" said Henshall questioningly.

"No, only sometimes in the winter. We stay at The Leander."

"They know you very well there, I suppose?"

Zumwald shrugged. "Oh, yes, yes. For about a month, this time. We stay still for perhaps two or three weeks, my wife and daughter and I."

"Will you excuse me a moment, while I have the ring dulled a little?"

Henshall walked rapidly away, leaving young Dockery to entertain the customer with occasional polite observations.

In his office, Henshall got the day clerk of The Leander, a quiet, expensive hotel, second to none in this class in the great tourist city of southern California. Evidently the clerk gave him all necessary assurances, for in a few moments he returned to Zumwald with the ring, showed him the effects of the skill of one of his workman, and, replacing the ring in its case, said: "Your check will be entirely satisfactory, Mr. Zumwald."

"Yes? Thanks, thanks," was the reply. The portly gentleman seemed abstracted—thinking of something else. "Now this will do very well, I believe, if my wife does not look close. But I want to get back her ring if I can; and you should help me make the advertisement, Mr. Henshall, if you are not too busy. I take up much of your time already. You know how to describe diamonds and the settings. Come, you write it for me?"

"Why, with pleasure, of course," returned the jeweler amiably. "Glad to assist you to recover it in any way." He found a memorandum pad and framed an advertisement, conferring with the anxious old German. When the latter had pocketed the "ad," Henshall said, generously: "If you should recover the ring I presume you'll have no use for this. Bring it back, if you wish."

Zumwald smiled drolly. "No! This teaches me a lesson. I keep it—in a secret place. So, if I lose her ring again—I hope not—I use the new ring. You see!" He chuckled so irresistibly that the jeweler laughed and shook hands with him cordially, seeing him to the door of the well-filled store.

Besides the thousands who come to Los Angeles to stay, there is an even greater number of thousands who come each year for a few months, a few weeks or a few days. And the tourist season lasts exactly twelve months each year. They are mostly well-to-do people, many of them exceedingly well to do. There was absolutely nothing in the circumstance of the exchange of the ring for the check tending to keep the transaction in the busy mind of Mr. Herbert Henshall during the next few hours. He might have recalled with a smile the dilemma of the simple, kindly gentleman. Probably not.

But at four o'clock Dockery came to him in the office where he was unpacking some small and very costly merchandise and said that there was a man outside whom he, Dockery, thought Mr. Henshall ought to see—and see at once.

"He has a ring," said the young clerk

with suppressed excitement. Excitement is always suppressed in a well-conducted jewelry store. "He happened to bring it to me—which was perhaps fortunate—but he might have shown it to any of the others. He wanted to know about what it was worth. Of course I would have told him that we do not make it a practice to appraise articles of jewelry, but I *thought* I recognized that diamond ring as the one you sold to that oldish German gentleman this noon!"

"Where is it?" asked Henshall with immediate interest.

"He has it. I was going to bring it in to you, explaining to him that one of us back in the office was a better appraiser than I, but he preferred to keep it."

"Strange!" murmured the jeweler. He followed Dockery out into the store.

The clerk halted opposite a slim, muscular, medium-dressed man of perhaps twenty-five or thirty. He was weighing something small in his hand, nonchalantly, while he idly surveyed the contents of the show case beneath him.

"What was it you wished?" asked Henshall in his usual manner.

The man looked up quickly. "Why, simply—if you don't mind—I'd like to know the value of this stone. Or, at least, can I easily get five hundred dollars for it?"

He handed over to Henshall the identical diamond ring which the jeweler had sold to Mr. Carl O. Zumwald—as his name had been signed on the check.

Henshall, recognizing it instantly, betrayed that fact to Dockery in a look which said, "Stay here and listen!"

"Undoubtedly," answered Henshall. "Why do you ask, may I inquire?"

"Why, simply because a friend, or an acquaintance, rather, at the hotel where I'm stopping, asked me to give him five hundred dollars for it. Just as a precaution, I thought I'd slip out and make sure I wouldn't lose anything."

"I see. And may I inquire how you happened to come here—to this particular store—instead of going to any other store, or, say a pawnbroker's shop?"

"Oh, I imagine pawnbrokers aren't very reliable, are they, in such matters?"

"Perhaps not," returned the jeweler smoothly. "But—if it's a fair question—how did you happen to come to this particular store?"

The man laughed lightly. "As he handed me the ring, taking it out of a little box, I happened to notice on the lower side of the box part of a name—'Hayshen'—something like that. I didn't make any remark, but when I passed through the lobby I got a phone book and looked up the jewelers in town beginning with those letters. It was easy. May have been bought here a long time ago, I thought. The ring don't look new."

He was a very open sort of fellow, rather bronzed. He had no hesitation in giving his name and calling—"Butler, cattleman—in and out of town," he said and added: "Well, that's all I wanted to know. Thank you very much."

Mr. Butler held out his hand for the ring. But Henshall, whose face had undergone a peculiar change, shook his head.

"Would you mind stepping back into the office with me, Mr. Butler?" he asked. "I have something very important to say to you."

"Sure, sure. Only make it snappy, please."

Henshall motioned with his head to Dockery to follow. In the office he turned to Butler, his store manner quite gone. His face was flushed.

"This ring," he began, "was bought here at twelve o'clock to-day for seventeen hundred and fifty dollars. I accepted a check for it. You are evidently innocent enough in the matter, Mr. Butler, but the man who tried to sell it to you is very plainly a thief. If it hadn't been for the lucky chance of your noticing our name on the case you would have been the receiver of stolen property and this firm would have been out the value of the ring. I thank you!"

"Gee Hosiphat Hotbox!" murmured the previously imperturbable Mr. Butler. "Gosh, but I wouldn't have believed it! Benevolent-looking old gent. Perfectly respectable looking. Kind of chummed with him off and on for some time; and some other fellows have, too. Good I didn't go to a pawnshop, I'll say! What had I better do about it?"

"You?" said Henshall. "Wait! See what we'll do about it! Mr. Dockery, call up police headquarters, please. Just ask central for it—they know the number. Gracious, we're lucky!"

Butler looked very uncomfortable. "Now Mr.—Henshall, is it?"—he began. "I hate

to get mixed up in anything like this. Name in the papers and all that."

"Not at all," Henshall assured him. "It will be done as quietly as possible. We do not advertise in that way. If you lose any time over it—of course we'll want you as a witness—we'll be glad to compensate you."

Butler set his jaw. "Oh, that's all right. I suppose I'm in for it. Well, it's good for him, the old scamp. Gosh, who'd of thought it!"

Henshall, at another phone, was calling up his lawyer's office. It was Saturday afternoon, but he knew James P. Harrison to be a hard-working fellow, and by chance he got him. He asked Mr. Harrison if he could step right down to Hays, Henshall Company.

"My attorney will be here in a few minutes," the jeweler told Butler. "He'll want to get your statement, I presume."

Butler snickered. "Old Zumwald will be wondering why I'm not back and handing him five hundred. Why do you suppose he didn't get the money from a pawnbroker?"

Henshall smiled cynically at the ignorance of the cattleman. "Pawnbrokers, when relatively honest, are mighty careful about buying stolen property. And when dishonest—fences, they're called—they give very, very little on account of the risk they run."

"I *see!*" said Butler, enlightenment on his genial face. "Old scalawag naturally preferred to pass it on a private party. That's why he's been chummin' with us fellows at the hotel, huh?"

A uniformed officer, accompanied by a plain-clothes man, came into the office a little out of breath. Henshall explained the matter to them. His partner, Hays, who had been out of the establishment since early morning, coming suddenly back on the heels of the officers, got the benefit of the explanation. He was a considerably older man than Henshall, inordinately proud of the reputation of the concern.

"Avoid all publicity, as much as possible, please," he told the police detective.

"Sure, sure," agreed the latter. "It's all up to him—if he wants to make a holler. I guess he won't. Here, gentlemen, we'll have to have a complaint. I brought a blank one. You're the one to sign it, Mr. Henshall."

The younger partner signed and swore to the complaint when the operative had filled it in; and at the latter's request handed over the ring as evidence, duly taking a receipt for it. Butler, looking rather foolish, but sticking to his guns, was more than willing to accompany the officers to The Leander and explain to Mr. Zumwald what had occurred—if indeed that "gentleman" desired an explanation from him. In the ear of the detective Henshall whispered the caution to bring Butler back to the jewelry store, so that his attorney could take the man's statement.

While Henshall retold the story in more detail to Hays, the lawyer, Harrison, arrived and listened closely to the narrative.

"Have you phoned the bank asking if the check happens, by any chance, to be good?" he asked.

He was junior partner in an old firm of lawyers, having raised himself to a position of prospective eminence at the bar by dint of great industry joined to unusual care and cautiousness. He was an ardent disciple of the modern principle of legal practice that an ounce of prevention of litigation is worth at least a pound of the sort of cure that may be expected from lawsuits.

Hays and Henshall looked at him with amazement. Harrison hastened to explain. "Has no funds, presumably? Admitted. But men do strange things. This man Zumwald, as you describe him, Mr. Henshall, is a curious old character. Got up that way, again you'll say. And again admitted. But if, by chance, he should have been on the square and his check good, why of course he has committed no larceny or attempted larceny. No harm to ring up."

He looked at his watch. It was nearly five o'clock. "Probably all the bank officials have gone." He went to the desk phone.

"Nothing but the janitor," he announced presently. "Oh, well, absurd, as you say, I expect. I suppose I'd better wait until they bring this man Butler back."

Fifteen minutes later Conway, the department detective, returned with the cattleman. Their expressions denoted that something was wrong.

"Didn't get him?" asked Henshall, angrily.

"Sure, got him," replied Conway. He paused, sat down, removed his hat and wiped his forehead. "Took it mighty hard, I'll say."

Butler nodded moodily and muttered, "Wish to hell it hadn't happened!"

"What?" asked Harrison.

"The whole thing—for his wife and daughter's sake!"

"Well, it was like this," said Conway, twirling his hat. "We found him playing cards in a little parlor off the lobby, where Butler, here, had left him. I told him he was wanted—and what he was wanted for. Took him aside, of course, but the others twigged right enough. Nice sort of men, such as you'd see any time at The Leander. Men of wealth, mostly. He didn't seem to grasp it at first. When he did I thought I'd have to hold him up. Stout, you know. The kind of man whose heart may be weak. Probably putting it on, of course; but doing it mighty well. Acted as if he couldn't get it. Said he wanted a few hundred dollars to go on playing. Hadn't hardly missed Butler, who had been looking on most of the time. Well, I managed to get it through him what he was wanted for. And then he looks around, and peeps out through the door into the corridor leading into the lobby as if he's afraid some one is peekin' in, and whispers to me to take him out carefully so no one will see. I get it out of him that he's afraid his wife or his daughter may be hanging around down on the lower floor.

" 'Oh, hell,' I says. 'You got to get some things. Don't you want your bag? They got to know, haven't they?' Actually the old fellow seems to have done this thing on the quiet. Lots of crooks, you know, are straight with their families. Crooks for years and the womenfolks not wise at all. I suppose he figured on pullin' out to-night, though the clerk said they hadn't given up their rooms. They have a suite on the sixth floor—by the week.

"Well, to make a long story short I showed him where he'd better go upstairs with me and tell 'em—tell 'em anything he pleased—call it a mistake, of course, but that he'd have to spend a night or two in jail. He acted awful dazed, but he came along quietly till we got into the rooms, and there he broke down. Of course I'd kept Jones, the officer in uniform, down at the end of the hallway. But the women got wise in a minute when I walked in with him. Butler was with me——"

"Wish to Gawd I hadn't of been!" interjected the latter, bitterly. "Always hate to see a couple of nice women get a jolt like that."

"His wife, she falls on his neck," continued the detective disgustedly. "Calls him 'papa.' 'Papa!' she says, 'Oh, papa, those cards, those cards! I always tell you you like to play too much!' Course she didn't know what it was all about; but it seems that the old feller is pretty fond of his game of cards—like a good many retired business men—if he wasn't a regular crook! It gets *me*. I don't know *what* to think of the old Dutchman." Conway twirled his hat very rapidly.

Henshall remained hard. If he was at all affected by the operative's description he certainly did not show it. "He took a big chance in working at his game with his family in the same hotel. His one mistake was in letting Butler see that name on the ring case!"

"How about the girl?" asked Harrison, frowning.

"Oh, the girl?" Conway looked up with a trace of enthusiasm. "A little peach. Blonde—real . blonde. She tried mighty hard not to cry. She didn't, for a few minutes, until the old man broke down and wept. Then she bawled a little too, but she flung her chin up and looked daggers at me, and flew around, first at the old man and then at the old lady, tellin' them all sorts of ridiculous things. Say, she shook her fist at me! Kid wouldn't have hurt a cat—sweet little thing about eighteen I'd say. But she sure was mad. Well, I managed to get 'em to see reason and pack up some things for old Zumwald. Of course they wanted to come along with him! But I told them they'd better stay where they was till to-morrow morning, anyhow; and then I'd see that they was allowed to visit him."

"Did you get his story? What was his excuse?" asked Harrison.

"Why, yes, in a way. While we were waiting for a taxi. For the hotel's sake, you know, we never use a patrol. He talked slow, with big gasps, like a boy caught stealin' fruit. Said he'd lost a few hundred—what he had in his pocket—and wanted to go on playing, and thought of the ring he had bought and asked Butler to let him have five hundred dollars on it."

Henshall turned sharply to Butler. "Didn't you say he wanted to *sell* it to you for five hundred dollars?"

The cattleman scratched his head. "Did I? No, I think I said he asked me to give him five hundred dollars for it, or on it—just the same, ain't it, if you have to keep the ring? And, gentlemen, you mostly do when gamblin' gents borrow money on collateral. I hadn't much idea what the ring was worth, and I figured I might have to keep it, all right. So I thought I'd come down here and——"

Henshall turned from him disgustedly. "What'll we do with the check, Harrison?" he asked.

The lawyer turned to the plain-clothes man. "We'll need it as evidence, of course; but I think we'll have to present it, as a matter of form, on Monday morning. I wish we could have done it to-day, or, at least, have gotten a statement from the bank as to no funds. We will undertake to turn the check in at police headquarters at half past ten on Monday, officer."

"Good enough," shrugged Conway. He spoke to Butler. "You'll have to stay in town till the preliminary examination. Or return for it. That all right?"

"I'll be staying where I am—at The Leander," agreed the cattleman.

When Conway left, Harrison reduced Butler's story to writing, had him sign it, and let him go. He told the jewelers he would have to return to his office, but that to-morrow morning he thought he'd better interview Zumwald.

"What do you expect to get from him?" asked Hays.

Harrison bit his lip. "I want to hear all he's got to say. And I'd like to talk with his wife and daughter."

Henshall flushed. "We don't intend to be hard on him, do we, Hays? There's nothing in it for us. We certainly don't want any publicity. The worst thing in the world in our business—that kind of advertising."

"I should say *not!*" said the senior partner emphatically. He was very nervous.

"I hope we haven't made any mistake?" ventured Harrison, taking up his hat and coat.

"How could we?" replied Henshall.

The lawyer shrugged and left, after learning that neither of the jewelers expected to leave town over Sunday.

The young lawyer was as good as his word. At eleven o'clock next morning he saw Zumwald. He joined, if he did not disturb, a family conference—a tearful one it was on the part of the mother and daughter. But the old German had pulled himself together. There was blood in his eye. He was folding and unfolding a newspaper brought to him at his request by a jailer.

"See, what they bring him, just because he wants it?" said Mrs. Zumwald mournfully. "Etta and I, we see it, too, at the hotel; but we put it away, on the bottom of my trunk so papa does not see it when he comes back. But here—here they give it to him!"

Harrison had already seen it at his breakfast table. It contained a short notice of the arrest and of the circumstances. He had reflected that it was hard to avoid leakages with enterprising reporters forever prying open cracks in the stout container of suppressed news. And he had wondered how Hays and Henshall had relished it.

"Here, I don't care," said Zumwald doggedly. "But in Hogansport—my God!"

"You think they telegraph it home?" asked Mrs. Zumwald of the lawyer, tremulously.

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Harrison dryly.

"And it was for me," wailed the woman. "To think it should be for me he did this thing that the bad luck comes. He lose the ring I gave him so long ago, and he buys another quick so I should not scold him and cry, maybe. And then when the cards goes to his head, like it always does—though he never loses much—never more than a thousand dollars, he always tells me—he gives this ring to the friend. And *such* a friend!"

"How he knows to go to that store—it beats me!" put in old Zumwald bewilderedly.

Harrison told him. It was perhaps undiplomatic; but Harrison wanted to know things, to get into the confidence of these people. He was deeply puzzled, and more than deeply concerned for his clients, the leading jewelry firm of Los Angeles.

He maneuvered for a private talk with Zumwald, but the old gentleman assured him he had had no secrets from his family—only that he had "lost the ring—that was all!"

Harrison, in fairness, told them he represented the jewelers who had had him arrested. But this seemed to make no unfavorable impression upon the three, though the eyes of the young girl snapped. Har-

rison found himself feeling as sorry for her as for the mother, if not for Zumwald himself who, if he were a crook, was certainly a naïve one.

Zumwald—or rather Zumwald and his wife, for they talked alternately in answer to the discreet inquiries of the lawyer—stated that he was in the real-estate business, though he had practically retired. But he still handled a great many estates and properties. He had a large office, he said, in his home town of Hogansport, Wisconsin. They traveled a great deal, especially in the winter, seeking always a milder climate for "mamma."

Harrison suddenly thought of the advertisement which Henshall had told him he had framed for the purchaser of the ring, the advertisement describing the lost diamond which the new one was to replace.

"How about that ad, Mr. Zumwald? Did you put it in the paper?"

"Yes, certainly," the man replied, raising his eyebrows in perplexity. "On my way back to the hotel, of course. Not much chance, you say? Yet—odders sometimes get back pocketbooks, rings. There is still honest people. Not so?"

Harrison took the paper again and turned to the lost-and-found column. The advertisement was there!

He murmured that he hoped the whole thing was a mistake. If so, it would be straightened out. He even went so far as to offer to shake hands with them. Only the girl refused. He was a very thoughtful attorney at law when he reached the street, jumped into his car and drove to the residence of Herbert Henshall.

When the latter learned that the ad had been placed in the leading morning daily of Los Angeles he turned pale.

"What the dickens does it mean, Harrison?" They were in a summerhouse, away from the jeweler's family.

"I'll tell you what it means, Mr. Henshall," replied the lawyer slowly. "It means that we'd better get Hogansport as quickly as we can and find out the truth of this thing. According to these people's story—— It's not exactly a story, though. I should say, from what one gathers from their talk and from their replies to questions, that the Zumwalds stand pretty darned high in that old German community in Wisconsin. How that infernal notice of the arrest got into the papers I don't know. Well, that's the business of the papers, of course, and the police department always leaks—when you don't want it to. There's the very devil to pay if it's a false arrest and imprisonment."

"The check will show, won't it?" asked Henshall, with bravado. He did not, however, look at his best.

"It will show whether you have any case against the man, but it won't show how much case he'll have against you," replied Harrison rather brutally. But he knew Henshall—an economical soul—and he proposed to spend some money for Hays and Henshall. "You'd better let me get the wires working."

Henshall had taken the blow like a man, though he was far from convinced.

"Go ahead," he said, quietly. "I'll tell Hays. It'll worry him to death."

"You might tell him that I don't blame you any," added Harrison as he left.

Fearing to receive no reply from the Hogansport authorities to a private inquiry, Harrison got the Los Angeles police office to sponsor a telegram to Wisconsin asking information as to "the whereabouts of Carl Oscar Zumwald, if such a man resides in your city, and who and what he is." He purposely omitted to give any information.

Late in the afternoon headquarters passed to Mr. Harrison the following reply, signed "O'Brien, C. P.:"

Zumwald wealthy realtor holding positions of trust and confidence in this part of Wisconsin. Very high character. Together with wife and daughter is traveling for the winter. Associated Press dispatch morning paper here concerning his arrest on petty charge evidently a mistake.

"Damn!" muttered Harrison. "Just what I feared."

Rather out of abundance of caution than because he felt it at all necessary, before carrying his news to Hays and Henshall, he wrote another telegram to be sent O'Brien, asking for a description of the Zumwald family.

He saw the handwriting on the wall; and while driving to his clients—who had phoned him they would meet him at Hays' house—he planned a placatory campaign to be used on the Zumwald family in the morning. There was not only a chance, but an urgent need, for diplomacy, if he had not misread the mood of "Papa" Zumwald!

After a rather unpleasant interview with

his clients—Hays was especially hard to handle—he went home by way of police headquarters, receiving there a reply to his second telegram from Wisconsin. It was satisfactory—and unsatisfactory. A friend of Zumwald had furnished the following description and would try to send photographs: Mr. Zumwald, medium height, stout, bald, large glasses, brown eyes. Mrs. Zumwald, gray hair, blue eyes, slender. Miss Etta Zumwald, small, blond, pretty, eyes blue or gray. These details, as nearly as Harrison had observed, fitted the three individuals with whom he had talked in the morning.

At nine forty-five Harrison appeared at Hays, Henshall Company, and, accompanied by Herbert Henshall, proceeded to the Second National Bank and presented to the teller the Zumwald check for seventeen hundred and fifty dollars. Henshall being known in the bank, the check was promptly paid. The last hope was gone!

"Only one thing for it, Henshall," said Harrison soberly. "Get him out of jail and make the best settlement with him we can!"

They returned to the store and the three conferred. All three then adjourned to the law office of Goodman, Harrison & Goodman, where the elder Goodman was taken into the conference. The latter, after listening to the story, expressed the opinion that, assuming Zumwald's position in Wisconsin, socially and financially, to be as indicated by the chief of police's telegram, Mr. Zumwald could undoubtedly obtain a judgment in a damage suit for false arrest and imprisonment of at least twenty-five thousand dollars. This, of course, especially in view of the unfortunate Associated Press dispatch published in the Hogansport papers.

"Gentlemen," said Hays impressively. "You speak of the injury to the reputation of this man—this gambler! What about the reputation of the house of Hays, Henshall Company?"

"But, my dear Mr. Hays," said Goodman, spreading his hands deprecatingly, "you can't expect Zumwald to pay you damages for that?"

"What I mean," returned Hays, flushing, "is that it is worth a good many thousand dollars to us to avoid a damage suit in which we would be made to seem to be men who cause wealthy customers to be arrested on flimsy circumstantial evidence."

"Flimsy nothing!" exclaimed Henshall with considerable heat.

"We'd better get up there and handle the man with gloves, as quickly as possible," suggested Harrison.

"By all means, gentlemen," agreed Goodman instantly. "If you need me, let me know." And abruptly he left them.

They found Zumwald entertaining a person whom Harrison recognized as a fellow attorney with whom he had a slight acquaintance—Charles R. Garthorne, a good lawyer with an excellent reputation for both skill and tenacity.

He received the apologies of the trio with cold courtesy. Zumwald himself had little to say—the result, beyond question, of advice freely administered to him by Mr. Garthorne prior to the entry upon the scene of the penitent three. In answer to Mr. Harrison's polite suggestion that they all leave the jail and repair to the offices of Goodman, Harrison & Goodman, Mr. Garthorne observed that his own office was nearer, and that as Mr. Zumwald had several times, in connection with little matters of business, visited that office he would doubtless feel more at home there than in the offices of the attorneys of his late persecutors.

In fine, it was to Garthorne's office that they all proceeded after Henshall had withdrawn his complaint and the desk sergeant had discharged the prisoner with a supercilious grin.

There were explanations freely offered by Mr. Harrison, on behalf of his clients. There was a counterstatement as freely made by Mr. Garthorne, which ended in a touching peroration in which he included Mrs. Zumwald and Miss Zumwald, together with their feelings and emotions. Nor did he fail to touch lightly but deftly upon the feelings and emotions of Mr. and Mrs. Zumwald's relatives, friends, clients, associates, et cetera, in Hogansport and elsewhere in the thriving State of Wisconsin.

Asked what he, Garthorne, proposed to advise Mr. Zumwald to do, in the matter of reparation for the injustice apparently—and wholly unwittingly—done him, Mr. Garthorne replied that they would of course sue for at least a hundred thousand dollars damages. Whereupon Zumwald, meekly sullen theretofore, astonished all present—his lawyer was, or seemed to be, particularly astonished—by admitting that he,

Zumwald, in Mr. Henshall's place, would probably have done much the same thing.

"But," he added sadly, "that don't help me any in Hogansport! I get corrections, yes, in the papers. Yes, but who sees them?" He spread his hands and raised his eyebrows. "Some people will never trust me again. They say, 'Yes, here he is honorable—a gentleman. But when he is away from home? Now we know what he does with our money!' Ten thousand, twenty thousand, maybe fifty thousand dollars—it is not what I will lose, one way or other. I am sick. I want to go. You may take ten thousand dollars, Mr. Garthorne. They are business men. I am a business man, too!"

The trio withdrew to a small room obligingly placed at their disposal by Mr. Garthorne, who had gasped aloud at the childish magnanimity of his client. In the small room the three looked at each other staringly.

"What do you say?" asked Mr. Henshall of the others in obvious relief.

"What do I say?" repeated Harrison. "Whew! Take it of course, as quick as the Lord will let you—before Garthorne tells him what a fool he is."

"Why, certainly!" agreed Hays, exhaling a deep breath.

They returned to the inner office, accepted the offer, and while Garthorne dictated a release to a stenographer, Hays drew his check in favor of Carl O. Zumwald, and Henshall carefully countersigned it.

Harrison, congratulating his clients, left them on the street and started to return to his office. As he passed police headquarters, he met Conway. Naturally he stopped and talked to the plain-clothes man who, it shortly appeared, was not aware that Zumwald had been discharged.

"I guess I sympathized with the old fellow a little prematurely," observed Conway. "I saw Jones, the policeman who took the man to the lockup, a little later. He tells me that while he was waiting in the hall he talked to the chambermaid. She said she was glad to get rid of them."

"To get rid of them? Why? Didn't they tip her handsomely enough?"

"No trouble there, I guess—not that Jones remarked. But she told Jones she was sick and tired of cleaning up the mess mornings—or afternoons, rather—when they got up. Cigarette ends, empty bottles—nasty gang, I judge. And, by the way—what was his name—the witness? Butler. That's it. She told Jones that Butler was with them all the time, in and out!"

"I *see!*" said Harrison, making a leap away.

"'Smatter? Forget something?" asked Conway, who evidently was off duty and liked a friendly chat.

"That's it."

Harrison took a taxi to his office, though it was only four blocks away. There he feverishly grabbed a list of attorneys in every city and town in the United States, and found this name attached to Hogansport, Wisconsin—"Alfred L. Judd."

He seized a telegraph blank and wrote:

Obtain and wire at once some unmistakable identification mark of either Oscar Zumwald, Mrs. Zumwald or Etta Zumwald. Liberal fee for rapid action.

He took this to the telegraph office, paid a large private tip for celerity from the Los Angeles end, went to The Leander Hotel and there established communication with three parties—his law partner, the elder Goodman, to whom he spoke a few words over the phone, with the chief of detectives at headquarters, and with the chambermaid on duty on the Zumwald-suite end of the sixth floor. He kept out of sight of people coming in and going out of the hotel—the Zumwalds, for instance!

A plain-clothes man, stationed in the lobby of the bank on which Hays and Henshall had drawn their check for ten thousand dollars, soon phoned to headquarters that Mr. Zumwald had cashed the check, taking, not exchange for any part of it, but ten thousand dollars in crisp bills. He thereupon followed that gentleman to his hotel. The chief of detectives got this information to Harrison, who murmured to himself, "Score *one!*"

The chambermaid reported to Harrison—who had tipped her handsomely—that the Zumwald ladies were packing trunks.

In another hour, the Zumwalds being now at luncheon, a reply telegram from Alfred L. Judd was relayed to Harrison from his office. It read:

On such short notice best thing I can give you—more to follow—is shoe number of Mrs. Zumwald. Found her shoe dealer who says she has unusually small foot. Two and a half or three.

Harrison found the chambermaid. "Let's go in," he proposed.

They found the bedroom of the elder Zumwalds in that undelightful state of confusion that precedes a hasty winging. There were no small shoes—or large ones—in the closet.

"The trunk's not locked," observed Harrison. "Go to it, Lizzie. I'll take full responsibility. Find me a pair of the old lady's shoes."

Lizzie—who disliked the Zumwalds intensely—did as she was bid. She did it with gusto. She became an excavating machine.

"I don't have to find 'em," she remarked as she scattered lingerie here and there. "The old girl's got the feet of a hippo. Didn't you see 'em?"

The shoes, when found, almost justified her hyperbole. Lizzie pronounced them sevens or eights.

It was then, and only then, that Harrison got Hays and Henshall on the wire. He made them a quick though comprehensive report.

"Now, then, I've got two detectives in the lobby, and I want to pinch them—the gang. Will you stand for more damages in case I've made a mistake?"

For once Henshall forgot he was an economical man. For once Hays forgot his pride and conservatism. "Go to it—as far as you like!" they replied. They further stated that they would join him directly.

Butler strolled in while Harrison and Lizzie were making a perfunctory effort to restore the clothes to the trunk. Butler was much startled.

Harrison noticed one of his plain-clothes men—Conway, by name—strolling up behind Butler, so he observed to the "cattleman" that the jig was up.

This remark caused Butler to look behind him. Probably on sundry other occasions when assured that the jig was up he had noticed that some one was usually behind him.

"I don't much care if it is," he asserted scowlingly. "A measly thousand for what I did for them crooks!"

He might have said more—he did, later—had not the Zumwalds, followed by the second plain-clothes man, come strolling along from the elevator. It did not seem necessary that they should be told that the jig was up. But, judging from their faces they were in dire need of being informed in what manner the jig had become up. Harrison felt it to be a simple act of humanity to satisfy their curiosity, so he handed "Etta" the telegram from Mr. Alfred L. Judd. She laughed rauciously.

"Those feet of yours, m-m-mother!" she cried histrionically. "Didn't I tell you to have 'em amputated before they got you into trouble!"

Whereat "mother" struck the girl fairly upon the mouth.

Butler was the only one inclined to talk. What little Hicky—as he was subsequently identified—alias Zumwald, had to say was minus the slight German accent and all of the benevolence with which his speech had previously been garnished.

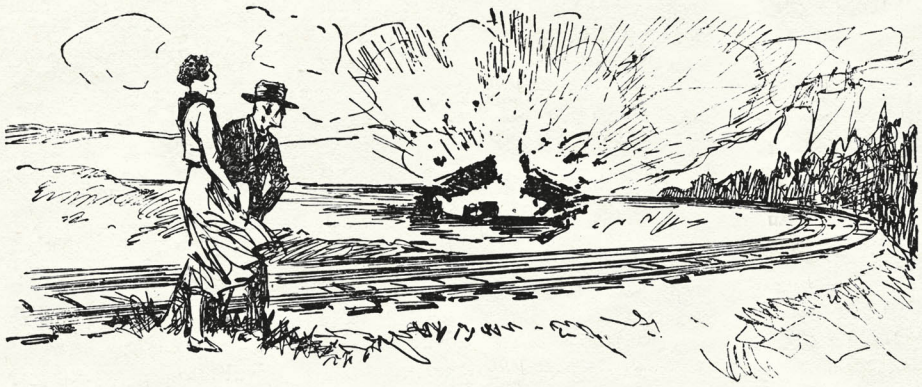
Butler admitted that he was a Los Angeles pick-up, though he had "worked" with Hicky and his lady friends before. He had never seen the little city of Hogansport, but he knew the game. Hicky always picked out wealthy men of standing who, either alone or with one or two women relatives, started out to travel. There was only one other condition. Their outstanding physical characteristics must correspond with those of himself and his female attaché's. Before details could be secured he generally figured on cleaning up and flitting.

The "cattleman" asked only fifty dollars for this information, explaining that when he gave up the other nine hundred and fifty he would otherwise be broke. When Henshall, assisted by one of the plain-clothes men, had successfully relieved the simulated Zumwald of nine thousand dollars in crisp bills, in a burst of generosity he told Butler he would accept the nine hundred and fifty.

Being a meticulous business man he was about to pay over to Hicky the seventeen hundred and fifty dollars he had received from the Second National Bank, but the long arm of Conway thwarted him.

"I'll take that," said the plain-clothes man. "That's part of the evidence!"

More Solomons stories coming.



The Agent at Showdown

By Calvin Johnston

Author of "Traveler's Choice," "Mascot Extraordinary," Etc.

President Scrymie, of the old P. D. railroad, was not a man to confuse sentiment and business. But the coming of the typewriter, and the advent of Alonzo—with a banjo—taught him better.

BY dead of winter the arguments in the switch shanty had waned and ceased. What did it matter whether a whale was a fish or the Mogul engine named after a Chinaman to men who, when they left the cheerful lodge to run and signal and climb among slippery cars and drifted switches, might never return? They touched elbows around the stove at midnight lunch hour and listened to the snowy tempest ravening to get at them, with the instinct that makes a brotherhood of the common danger.

When Denny, the old switchman, lifted his voice, even the foreman, a doubter and skeptic, nodded tolerantly.

"Something of a true prophet I have been, though never in my own affairs, which would have compelled me to act accordingly," said Denny, and though the foreman was puzzled by this and cleared his throat to argue it, a stormy rattle at the shanty window reminded him that, after all, much must be tolerated in a brotherhood.

"Which only goes to prove," continued Denny, "that truth is not always best to tell. F'instance, to-night is not a night to tell a tale of Truth, who is indeed annoying us every minute by whooping around the corners with dreadful warning of what she has waiting outside. A tale of Fiction, who is always polite, is in order. Now I know the facts connected with the skeleton of the President Scrymie family of the old P. D. and the mystery of the broken ties, and the typewriter adventure. But they would harrow the flesh of you, when the wolves of the dark are clawing at the window. So I will address it to you in the manner of fiction, and d'ye not be keening with sympathy for Scrymie, or hate his nephew, or be startled should the stove blow out in the brave first scene of Meg Muldoon and the unmasked typewriter. For I am here, and can at any instant scatter them into nothing. You have only to forget the chapter of truth we are living and enjoy the story of imagination."

Long since, when a crool king came to a throne, he would put his house in order by destroying his relations, but in the beginning we find Scrymie first active president of the P. D. in the happy position of having no kith or kin.

A large, bony, red-necked man, with a beetling expression, he sat in the handsome office in Barlow on the day of his election, cracking his knuckles with glee. "President of the P. D.," he said, and

though at the time that railroad was little more than a siding compared to the system of to-day, 'twas rich in territory and already expanding. "President," said Scrymie, "and by my own talent, and free to follow my own policy. Best of all, with not a dom relative, who have been the curse of all great officials and railroads." More than all else, this rejoiced him, who was already a tyrant, so that when Miss Meg Muldoon, one of the few female telegraph operators of those days, came in with a message he gloomed at her for approaching the solitary state of him in such an hour.

The message was congratulations from the chairman of the board, who added: "Knowing our new president as a man of advanced ideas and methods, I wish to present you with a machine just invented to take the place of longhand correspondence —the typewriter. Forwarded by express to-day. Signed on the typewriter by myself—as chairman. *.X.Qpzrph."

Scrymie had lately become aware that in ascending to his new level he was—like a fixed star who is ambitious to become a comet—venturing into excited skies.

"But Qpzrph!" muttered Scrymie. He expected, along of his talent, to hold his own with the best of them, but here he had been at once propounded a mysterious problem which would knock the creator of alphybets to his knees. He had risen to pace the floor reflectively but encountered, face to face, Miss Meg Muldoon at whom he blazed, with a wave of authority. "That is all; there is nothing else. No more remains for you to do here."

Now in all affairs of beauty or sense or disposition, graceful, modest Meg would immediately take the lead. But on the P. D. she was resented by everybody, who asked what the world was coming to when a woman declared herself in as a railroader. But because her father had saved a train at the expense of his life, and she had picked up telegraphy, the railroad stood for her.

"If you please," answered Meg to Scrymie, terrorized by his frown but with a queer instinct standing her ground.

Now, who shall say whether 'twas by accident or instinct—but the first young lady to hear of the first typewriter autymatically adjusted her back hair and munched at the small piece of gum. And when Scrymie roared like the dictator he was, "That is all," she looked with pensiveness into the great beyond of the present as if inattentive to the dictation of the greatest dictators, and drummed with her fingers.

No despot in the world could be insensible to the drumming of a subject's fingers after he had spoken, and Scrymie watched the firm slender ones of Meg Muldoon as if they were rolling out the drumbeat of revolution; or signal of intrigue with relatives which takes the place of revolution in the palaces of despots, y'know. " 'Tis certain the chairman struck the wrong keys in signing his name," she said, with condescension. The president started angrily.

"And you, miss, would not have made the mistake of your better?" he barked.

"You're saying something, Mr. President, I would not," answered the young woman. The crisp answer, born of times to come, astonished them both, though Scrymie frowned at her impudence and the young lady retreated, hardly knowing what she had said.

Once more alone, Scrymie again exalted himself as the despot of the P. D. and captain of his fate, but not so confidently, for the queer behavior of Miss Muldoon had left a lingering note of warning. "Was it insubordination?" he wondered, and that being something forbidden by regulations he peered through the crack of the door into the telegraph office to take note of her bearing. But Meg was seated quietly at her key, the usual modest half smile on her face, and Scrymie was compelled to the opinion that she had spoken on an impulse altogether strange to her character.

" 'Twas the typewriter inspired it," he concluded, and cracked his knuckles with contempt of it. It was true; far as the P. D. rails were flung and trains ran, Scrymie was supreme. He was under no obligation to director or employee, played no favorites; best of all he had no relations in the world to provide with jobs.

Such being the prideful satisfaction of Scrymie at being president, y' would have been astonished by the way he frowned at the wall map whenever his eye fell on it for the next few days. Indeed, such was his ambition, that the road began to look very small to him, and he urged that lines, long proposed, be put under construction; with such success that presently the chairman wired consent to a small program. "Have you received the typewriter?" added the chairman in one of his messages.

Said Scrymie: "Fiend take the typewriter," which in fact stood covered and unused in a corner; and thinking no more of it, began assembling a construction outfit.

Now, among the contractors who were coming and going at Barlow, headquarters about that time, appeared one with a proposition of his own. A dark, mysterious but confidential man, who leading the president to the wall map traced the longest of the proposed lines done in red, with his finger.

"But that one is largely bluff to keep the Great Southwest from invading our territory," explained Scrymie. "It need not be built for years to come."

"You do not realize," said this Contractor Gilroy, "the aggressive policy of the new G. S. management. They may be breaking into that territory any day; my information is mysterious and confidential. Besides, that line, the proposed Sundown Extension, will build itself."

"Listen," answered Scrymie with cunning, "I believe I hear the purring of the wild cat in the tie pile of his proposition."

"In fact," pursued the wildcatter, "I have myself, with backing, secured the right of way along all this line, together with town sites and land bonuses and have my graders at work in several widely separated sections. Either you or the G. S. are going to buy."

At first Scrymie was inclined to tear his hair at this discovery, but upon calculation saw that he could use it to further his ambitious plans, and wrote so convincingly to the chairman that the board consented to buy the rights of the contractor. In several of the counties which voted bonds, the grading was continued, and here and there rails hauled overland were laid down in sections of several miles. Then, the appropriation and bonus money used up, the construction was suspended, and the bond buyers and land donaters left holding the sack till the straw railroad should be completed. 'Twas an old game in those days.

During all that season Scrymie was happy as Nero. He ruled and drove his employees without mercy, and the expansion of P. D. dominion fed the vanity of him. He had forgotten the typewriter entirely when one day the chairman, who now had one of the machines in use himself, wrote asking why he continued to correspond in longhand.

Cornered at last, the president ordered his secretary to write his letters on it, but when the first batch was laid on his desk to be signed, Scrymie thought he had taken leave of his senses. "What have you done with the alphybet?" he demanded; "or does the machine express itself in algebra and astronomy? Take them away! Is it for turning out maps of chaos that I pay you a large salary as a man of letters!"

The secretary, whose fingers had grown to the pen, put on his coat. "You do not want a secretary, but a printer's devil," he said, and resigning with dignity left Scrymie destroying the letters and damning the typewriter. 'Twas a silvery laugh interrupted him, and a sort of stupefaction came over Scrymie as Miss Meg Muldoon, quietly moved the machine and its table over by his desk and seated herself with a toss of the auburn hair. "Do you wish to shoot the works at the machine," she asked, "or shall I take 'em in shorthand and transcribe?"

'Twas condescending, yet the president saw that no disrespect was intended, and he was suddenly filled with a great curiosity of the new unit of efficiency which the girl and machine seemed to form. She had slipped a letterhead under the roller with a little flirt of the carriage and her fingers fluttered over the keys; her whole tone and behavior were the same as on the day the thing had first been mentioned.

"I have been practicing on it and taking shorthand at night," she explained, and the president started when with strange composure she touched her nose with a powder rag. He hesitated a moment, feeling that a strange new personality had broken into the business world which was destined for its uplift or destruction. Then he took the plunge. "Faster," she requested, and in thirty minutes he was dictating, with eyes half closed and a peacefulness he had never known, to the swift fingers destined to handle the correspondence of the world.

Over the letters his savage old face grinned at her with a sort of awe, and he wrenched his tongue into words of politeness as he appointed her secretary to the president. She brought in her cloak and hat and hung them in a corner. "I will hang a little mirror there, too," she said.

"With pleasure," said Scrymie, his face paining him with the words.

"Hours nine to five. Is that right, Mr Scrymie?"

He nodded feebly, though his late secretary had worked twelve hours a day.

When she had written several wires she departed, and Scrymie swore softly, touching the machine. "I am afraid of her. The whole world will be afraid of her," he said. "But what can we do?"

And the fear of her was justified within three days, when he returned from a short trip. "A letter from your nephew was in the mail yesterday," she said. "He is anxious to visit you, and inclosed his photygraph. Not a bad looker at all. I answered him to come, of course."

"I have no nephew. The photygraph is a forgery!" cried out Scrymie, pulling his hair. She smiled and gave him the letter, which revealed that his deceased stepbrother whom Scrymie had supposed without children had left a son in the person of Alonzo Scrymie.

"Alonzo!" he hissed, but dare not hiss twice for he observed Miss Meg looking toward her hat and cloak. "Alonzo—come and welcome," he said with a grin of hypocrisy, and reflecting: "As I feared in the beginning, the women and their infernal machines have moved in not to be a part of the boss' headquarters but to set up headquarters of their own. We are blown up!"

'Twould not be correct to say that Scrymie found himself in a state of suspense pending his nephew's arrival; he simply expected the worst. Yet he was shocked when it arrived in the shape of a slender young man in jaunty clothes, carrying a banjo case and leading a bulldog.

"In a moment, uncle," he said, and, tying the dog to the doorknob, hung his banjo on the clothes rack, and approached with a white-toothed smile and glad blue eyes, pausing on the way to shake both hands of Meg Muldoon.

"A great honor you are, uncle, to the family," he said, "and I am sure my father would agree, saints rest him, though in his lifetime he often expressed doubts of your honesty and ability. I have hastened to offer my assistance," said Alonzo, "having won my college degrees as bachelor of arts and law. Perhaps I had better begin at the bottom; say as fireman. Don't you find it chilly in here, Miss Muldoon?" he said. As one who seizes on the first job at hand, he dumped a scuttle into the soft-coal stove and closed the door, which immediately blew open again with an explosion of gas.

"A man must be a fireman by nature," said Scrymie, wiping the soot from his face, "and you might not have the same luck with a locomotive that you do with a stove.

"Pistols, daggers and poison," he was thinking to himself, "if I could only land on him;" but the fact that Meg Muldoon was gazing at the bachelor of arts and law with interest proved that such a course would be fatal. Her interest alarmed Scrymie, who resumed: "I have been needing a man to fill a position of trust and importance, and would like to pick yourself. Can I rely on you?" he asked with caution.

"I make it a point of family honor," answered Alonzo.

"There may be a slight risk attached."

"I have not come west unprepared," said Alonzo, and displayed proudly a revolver shooting cartridges the size of capsules.

"The proposition is this," said Scrymie, reassured. "On the map here you will notice this red line which represents the Sundown Extension, running from our station of Climax forty miles to the northwest. We own the right of way, but 'tis only graded and railed in patches. Now, we have been obliged to suspend construction until more money is appropriated by the board; which will be in the spring, four or five months from now. In the meantime, I will make you station agent at this point, Showdown Station. It is twelve miles from Climax on the main line, with only three or four miles of rails laid between. Your duties will be to maintain a depot in the construction shanty there; and to patrol the right of way. For whist! The Great Southwestern may attempt a trespass from the northwest."

Y' understand, there was so much fiction in what Scrymie did and said that it would not be consistent to bring him into a true story. None knew better that the P. D. held the charter covering the Sundown Extension, which secured them against any trespass provided trains were running within another year.

But he reasoned: "I will stow away this dude relative off the line in that God-forsaken spot. If he goes crazy I will shut him up in the asylum; if he threatens somebody with the .22, the natives will put him in jail, being sore at us anyway for suspending construction; if he deserts, I can dis-

charge him with reason. And if he is fool enough to hang onto the job, he will be out of my way till the end of time."

"Good. When do I start?" asked Alonzo. "Of course, 'twill be an outpost, but absence will not break the ties between us."

"I would break all the ties on the railroad between us rather than have you get back," thought Scrymie, but aloud he answered pleasantly: "You will catch the rattler for Climax, one hundred miles west, in an hour. There is a shanty store at Showdown and some sort of trail between the two places. A farmer or freighter will give you a lift." He had Miss Muldoon make out a pass for Alonzo and write the paymaster to put him on the roll at sixty a month. Then after solemnly warning the young man to remain close to his station, he was ready to lead him out and load him in the first caboose.

"An hour! That is a lot of time," said Alonzo, "for me."

Miss Muldoon studied him closely. "No crowding," she said. "What is the machine you have in the case?"

"It is for serenading," he explained. "Would you like to hear it?"

Scrymie, bedeviled a moment by the strange new turn of the conversation, raised his fist against the banjo, but as no one noticed him, he lowered it and hastened outside to wander on the platform. "A president will soon have no place to lay his head," he reflected. He looked up at the building, depot and general office in one, a shabby enough headquarters. "It is because the old road has never had a boss of genius, that it runs trains of hearses and has a shanty for headquarters." It was incredible, y' understand, that only a few days before he had been supreme, and unhampered by a relative in the world; and now he was turned out on a platform while a nephew named Alonzo serenaded his secretary in the office. But as always when he rebelled, the memory of secretaries of longhand would range along of the Muldoon, and he would hear the chanting of the typewriter as that of angels' harps.

'Twas a blessed relief to Scrymie when Gilroy, who had made the deal for the Sundown Extension came up, even though he brought a promise of trouble. "I'm after moving my construction outfit off the Sundown, to do a contract for the G. S. Railway," he said. "When you are ready to resume building maybe I'll make you a bid and maybe I won't. But having taken the P. D.'s money, I'll caution you against letting that charter lapse for a day."

"We will have the money in three months," said Scrymie. "The Sundown will be under operation in eight months. The G. S. is the least of my troubles."

'Twas then that Alonzo, having finished the serenade and dated the typist up for lunch, came down escorting her to the lunch room of Mrs. Fogarty.

"A moment, Mr. Al," said Meg. "I see over yonder Mr. Gilroy who sold us the Sundown Line where you will keep watch and ward." Now, during the past year of his going and coming at headquarters Meg had become well acquainted with hard-faced, hard-fisted old Gilroy, and, without boldness, took her new friend over and introduced him. "We are sending him to Showdown as agent," she said.

"Merciful saints," thought Scrymie, "already it is not myself issuing orders but 'we.' This is hard."

Gilroy shook hands with the young Mr. Scrymie. "But why an agent on an unfinished line?" he smiled.

"There are agents which cannot be appointed too soon," answered Miss Meg, cool, pleasant and narrow-eyed; a mood which had already filled Scrymie with astonishment.

"Sorry I am to be moving my outfit off the line," said Gilroy, without asking any more questions, "or I would visit socially at Showdown with your Mr. Alonzo this winter. 'Tis a desolate spot," he said with melancholy, "and dangerous, the residents along the line being sore as crabs at the delay. Dynamite we will hope may not be used," he added, with the mystery and confidence peculiar to him.

"I will make that unanimous," said Alonzo. "Imagine if you can, uncle, the effects of dynamite on my banjo."

Scrymie nodded, having been pricking his ears. "What is this line of talk from Gilroy?" he thought, and then: "Sure, 'tis only Gilroy falling into jest with these silly creatures."

"Too bad, Mr. Gilroy, you are shifting your outfit," said Meg. "I am sure you would be a good friend to our agent. Still, you might drop in. And I wanted him to know you if you did."

"Pleased I am," said Alonzo, "to know

you—though 'tis only as a stranger, and you cannot visit me at Showdown." And with gestures of politeness they both passed on to the lunch counter.

The two old-timers, crafty and dangerous men in their business world, looked after them and then at each other as foxes might. Small doubt they felt after running the gantlet of these two that people even more crafty and dangerous than themselves were creeping into business.

II.

Alonzo was loaded in his caboose by his cool, narrow-eyed partner of the new business. Then three months went by.

Modern history, d'ye mind, is a gossipy, lying old man and not the brief daycent female who first introduced Alexander and Brian Boru as principals to the ringsiders. Divil a modern history would let three months pass by as me and fiction do, after consultation, but would impart as many crooked details as a spotter on No. 6's conductor does to the superintendent.

Let this wild winter night blow details away—three months passed! Meantime the storm of life had been blowing. But, peculiar it is, that while the storms of nature pile up the thunders which even a child can see, life can assemble the clouds of hurricane invisible to any man.

In those months the northwest border of the P. D. territory had been encumbered with cloud, which Scrymie, spotting only the train service and traffic, had not observed till too late.

"And yet," said Meg Muldoon, powdering one day before the hand mirror fixed to the wall, "Gilroy was honest enough to warn you three months ago."

"How d' you mean, Miss Muldoon—but who are you, in all politeness, to advise the president? Gilroy warned me to be prepared against a G. S. trespass, to be sure. But that cannot occur under a year."

"It cannot—but it has," she answered. "They are coming down from their connecting crossing with the Sundown—Gilroy's outfit in the lead; laying rails."

"But the charter we hold, ma'am; is that nothing?" Scrymie's turkey neck swelled and his red eyebrows bristled.

"All the world knows," said Meg, "that our board, after our money was spent, turned down the appropriation to finish the Sundown. Does that mean nothing to you? Alonzo told me it would be turned down. With no money to complete construction, the G. S. actually in control, the people in that territory fighting you in their own courts——"

"And where did Alonzo's information come from?" interrupted Scrymie.

"From the son of your chairman, who knew him in college."

"The chairman—my chairman, a traitor," said Scrymie, "to let us spend our money for grading and partial trackage, and lie down to the G. S."

"Whist, Mr. President," said Meg, "the G. S. president, Gower, backed by our own chairman, is on his way down the Sundown to take over the whole P. D. as a part of his system. Alonzo told me all."

" 'Twas traitorous in you both not to tell me!"

"You wouldn't have believed it."

In a daze, Scrymie was checking up the circumstances. "And I was made president only as a figurehead while the chairman pulled this scheme," he said bitterly. "I suppose some of the other directors are in on it."

"Alonzo thought not. Only the chairman, who knew you would urge expansion and made it appear to the board that he was a convert to your policy. He backed Gilroy and made big money on that deal. And it must have been part of his bargain with the G. S. that the P. D. stockholders would be held up for a million to be spent on the right of way and grading and bridges of that extension. Only to have it seized by the G. S. Then comes the move for absorbing this road into the G. S. on their own terms."

Slumped down in his chair, Scrymie said presently with resignation: "Well, I can only play what cards I hold for a job in the new organization when it comes."

"You mean that you will throw down the directors and stockholders who trust you with their interests instead of carrying the fight to the chairman on the information you now have?"

"Is it me fight a chairman of the board?" demanded Scrymie with awe of the great man.

"If you were thinking of your railroad instead of your job, that's just what you would do," said Miss Muldoon.

"Sure, I have been humoring you and letting you talk on," he answered, "but the

argyment that I should be thinking of the railroad before my own job is too silly to listen to."

Seated quietly at her machine, the young woman regarded him coolly with narrowed eyes, and again he felt that something had come into the business unbeknownst to him. "I wonder," he reflected, "what she is thinking when she looks like that," and asked her.

"Loyalty!" answered Meg Muldoon.

For an instant he was puzzled. "Y' mean loyalty to a railroad!"

"To your employers, whoever they are. Loyalty that comes before your own good." It was a new thought in those days, yet she explained in a matter-of-course way, adding: "Such as Alonzo has."

Scrymie sighed. Still he was curious. "And has he told you he was loyal?"

"He does not have to tell me. I do not know what he is about except that he is on guard and will hold Showdown Station against all comers; and not for the sake of his miserable job." She put on cloak and hat, the working day being ended. "If you should start for New York to-morrow to notify the directors and bankers what is going on, and organize them to throw out the chairman, I can hold down the office."

She had been gone several moments before Scrymie caught the meaning of her last words, then for all the bad state of his affairs he had to laugh, though disagreeably. And presently, finding himself silent and staring hard at the wall, he tried to remember where he had left off in the laugh and start it up again. I make no study of the mysteries of life, lest I happen on one which would scare me out of my wits, but Scrymie, sneering at the ignorance and frivolous talk of women in serious matters, cut out the laughter suddenly and stared harder than ever at the wall. And I have since suspected that a picture glimmering under a cavern bonfire or in the smoke of an altar, painted itself on the wall—a picture of chieftains and tribes consulting the weird women of old. Because Scrymie said aloud: "Sure, they are not so new in business after all." Again he went over her words curiously and a glitter like the reflection of the old cavern fire made a red spark in his eyeballs. But, stirring as the words were, the idea was too far-fetched. "I am not a chieftain to organize and win a fight like that," he said. "No—I must lie low; keep mum, and they will give me a job in the new organization."

'Twas final. He put on his overcoat and walked out into the clear February dusk where the headlight of No. 7 was dancing into the yards. And there he stood rigid while the business of a passenger train at a station was finished; and at the first thrust of the driving rod at the wheels, the call of "All aboard!" he swung into a sleeper. Three hours later he was standing on the main line at Climax Station under a moon shaped like a question mark; and gazing up the roadbed of the Sundown. Frozen, railless, abandoned, it lay like an endless grave where lay buried the million of the P. D. stockholders—who trusted Scrymie.

But he was not thinking of that. Only one thought, a queer one—it might have been a wish—was fixed in his mind as he gazed under the questioning moon toward Showdown, twelve miles away.

Like a man in a trance he left the spot for the town livery stable, and, horseback took the road which paralleled the right of way. When he came in sight of the big shack which had served Gilroy as office and living quarters he dismounted and, tying his horse at the roadside, made up to it softly. 'Twas now nearing midnight, but the little window at one end showed a glimmer of light; and out on the still night of the plains floated the faintest jingle of a banjo.

It broke the spell. Scrymie realized what a dunce he was to be at such trouble on the word of a gabbling girl. "As if a dude could be changed into a man," he said. Still he had come thus far and was cold and would go in. He pushed open the door.

"I've caught you; reach 'em up," he was greeted. Alonzo, giving a last strum at the banjo on his knees, held him covered. Then, without so much as turning a hair, he rose, laughing. "Is it you, uncle? Y' see, I have a prowler and thought maybe I could trap him." He shook hands and thanked Scrymie for his call, then poured out a cup of the coffee heating on the stove.

And Scrymie had not said a word. Now, sipping the coffee, he stared at the lean, hardy young man in the stained, rough clothes, with only the white-toothed grin to prove he was not a changeling. Then his glance fell on the revolver, a tremendous weapon which lay on the homemade deal table.

"You like it, do you?" grinned Alonzo.

"Well, when the G. S. broke into the west end—working in this frozen stuff in their hurry—I was warned off. The man was armed and tough and I thought: 'If they are coming like this my .22 will not compete;' but at close quarters it might answer, so I stuck it into my caller's stomach and took this Colt's away from him, trading in my .22. I am hoping the next trespasser will have a rifle."

Scrymie nodded, but passed his hand over his forehead and shook himself together, frowning. He had been an easy mark for twaddle once to-night and was not to be imposed on a second time by any such statements as Alonzo's.

"What are the rumors from up the line, the last two days?" he demanded.

"Rumor in this country is a great liar," answered Alonzo, "so I went up to see for myself. The work is starting slowly because of the cold weather, but they're coming—my word, they're coming. I did not order them off, not wishing to assume authority beyond my own natural division."

"Your division!" repeated Scrymie.

"From Climax to this station is twelve miles, and from here to the Tarantula River —the only bridge—is nine. I thought I could hold twenty-one miles and put up a sign at the bridge warning all trespassers."

Like all officials Scrymie could not bear that anything should be done without authority.

"And you did not wait the appointment from headquarters before creating a division of your own!" he snarled.

To the astonishment of him, Alonzo's eyes sparkled with humor. "I do not need a house to fall on me," he said. "With this storm coming, I knew you did not leave me alone in its path without good reason. The chairman would see that you did not draw men from the P. D. to fight off the G. S. gangs. Your fight, of course, is being made in New York. I know the risk you take in showing yourself on this line till you have the situation in hand there. And I appreciate this after-dark call; 'tis thoughtful of you, and encouraging."

"May the fiend tie their tongues," thought Scrymie; "will they never have done talking about New York?"

" 'Tis better I have no reënforcement in men or money," said Alonzo. "Then you can disclaim all responsibility for my acts. 'Twill all be settled one way or another in ten days, and you can tie up my discharge, if it is demanded, with red tape for that length of time. So I can be acting officially."

In all this surprising conduct of the young man, nothing surprised Scrymie so much as to learn that he had invested his own wages in supplies and means of defense. In the far end of the big shack formerly partitioned off as a kitchen Scrymie was shown, under the lantern, groceries and cartridges bought at the neighboring crossroads store. "To-day they refused to sell me any more," said Alonzo.

"And where is the dog?" asked Scrymie.

"He was the first casualty; buried to-day with honors. Whist!" Alonzo pushed Scrymie toward the corner, and went out into the main room with his lantern. Voices were heard outside, a knock. Alonzo, at the door, said: "Come in, Mr. Gilroy. The man with you may wait outside."

This was followed by a growl like a bear's, which Gilroy's calm voice broke in on. "Alonzo, I've come down with the G. S. foreman to talk business. You're taking a big risk in what you're doing, and all for nothing."

"Don't crowd, you," said Alonzo sharply to the foreman, and then at a quick staggering footstep and roar of curses: "Excuse me, Mr. Gilroy; this man was prowling here this afternoon and I warned him away."

"Hold!" commanded Gilroy, who had lived in brawls on the grade and was never ruffled. "This man is considerable of a prize fighter."

"I never took any prizes in that line," answered Alonzo, "but am an ambitious man." Then all three were outside, and Scrymie, reckless of discovery, was beyond the partition in a moment, with his face to the window.

There was no doubt that Gilroy was willing to see the foreman whip Alonzo and chase him out of the country; at the same time he was not one to make the young man fight odds, and stood aside with his cigar. Thus the two older men watched the mad fight of their juniors now going on in the moonlight.

For the first time in years, hard, greedy old Scrymie had a real fright. "The roughneck will eat the boy up," he thought. But the impression just made by the boy was deep. "Reckless he may seem," thought

Scrymie, "and yet is one to have an ace buried." 'Twas soon plain that he did.

Who could describe a fight in the moon dusk? It was fast and vengeful and Alonzo stood for two knockdowns; but when the other went down he stayed for two or three minutes. "If you come trespassing again I'll shoot," said Alonzo; and invited Gilroy inside to do his talking. Scrymie, behind the partition, listened as he never had listened to any hope or promise, as Gilroy offered to pay Alonzo to leave.

"This is not an ordinary raid by the G. S.," he said, "in defiance of law and property right. There are influences at work that the P. D. cannot combat. Your uncle cannot help you. So take this money and come into the G. S. employ while I put a gang at work to finish this section."

"Refused," said Alonzo, "as I refused it yesterday."

"You will be discharged by your company in a day or two."

"That's as may be," said Alonzo. "But till I am, I warn all trespassers off my division, which I have enlarged to the bridge. You forget, Mr. Gilroy," he said, "that there is such a thing——"

"Glory, glory be!" whispered Scrymie. The cold heart of the old tyrant struck his breast bone and by that miracle sent such a burst of blood through his dried-up veins that he presently came out on the departed Gilroy's heels with the glorious swing of youth.

"I heard you!" he told the battered young man. "There is such a thing as loyalty! Dom the presidency or any job, and the salary—I am off to New York this night to save the P. D. to its stockholders or go down in the wreck."

And there was quick planning, along of the joyful laughter and confidence of youth, a handshake, a "God preserve you, nephew," then a clatter of hoofs on the frozen road as Scrymie rode for No. 6.

"One ace the boy has buried," Scrymie was thinking, "and after that, another; I wonder what it can be!" For the nature of this second buried ace Alonzo had not revealed.

"'Tis best you do not know of it in case I have to dig it up," he said, "and play it, which saints forbid. But the Sundown must be held; by that token we will beat the conspirators."

There is, as y' know, only one thing sacred to everybody in America, that same being the mails. And Alonzo, who had for months known the old man holding the route contract between Climax and small inland towns, had that day bought his contract for the P. D. "You will still be employed by us for the rest of the route," he had explained, "but the mail for Showdown post office and Rivertown you will deliver to me at the end of the rails, three miles east.

"The idea being," as he told Scrymie, "that I will meet him with the old hand car which was brought here by the foreman of construction, and run the mail up by rail. Then after delivering the Showdown mail to the postmaster and storekeeper over yonder, I will push on over the other eight miles of rail which brings me in a half mile of Rivertown. 'Tis a bluff and would in no sense be called service for anything but the mails. But people will think twice before ditching the vehicle operating under contract with the post-office department. And 'tis while they are thinking twice we must do all our thinking and acting."

During the next few days the G. S. spies and the natives were amazed at the new service contracted for by the United States post-office department—by cart to end of track, by rail to near Rivertown, and by the shoulders of Alonzo the rest of the way. Violent threats were made by G. S. men who showed up in enough strength to drive off a dozen such fighters, but Alonzo, wearing the mail carrier's old cap, warned them in the presence of the loafers at Showdown post office. "Better you tried to obstruct General Grant and his army than the United States mails. 'Tis no secret that General Grant would pursue an enemy in reason, but the secret service itself will pursue you to the end of the world! You are letting the big men who employ you get you into a lifetime of trouble."

The blaggards blustered, but he had put them up against the one agency of justice they feared, and after two or three days of hesitation they put up the situation in their turn to headquarters.

"Of course when it gets to Gower himself, the bluff will be called," reasoned Alonzo, "and orders given to wipe me out."

But Gower, with a hundred schemes on hand, had been called to Chicago, and Alonzo held on to his twenty miles of right of way. Still, the reckoning was inevitable,

y' understand, and at last came the day when he knew it was about to be demanded of him. A snowy, wild afternoon that was, and he was packing the mail pouches into Rivertown, the settlement on the bank of the Tarantula, when the warning was carried to him on the gale.

He left his pouches at the office and went up to the bridge, then across it. Deep in the gray breast of the storm rumbled a still fiercer note—the charge of energy set off in a body of men when the Big Boss himself sets the spark to it.

Mingled, and muffled by the thickening snow, steel and dynamite and shouting made up the one note warning Alonzo of the reckoning. "They are grading the last gap," he thought, "with the track gangs on the heels of the graders. To-morrow they will be on my division. What a roar, to come down these three miles! There must be hundreds of men. And building in this blizzard like madmen."

There was only one answer—Gower had got to camp.

Slowly Alonzo drove his car back to the station, and that night there was no tinkle of banjo. The agent had no callers; his enemies did not need to threaten further. In two days more Gower would run his train past Showdown; in a week he would be in Climax, the heart of the P. D. territory. "Once in possession, with the counties and the State courts to back him, we can never get him out," thought Alonzo. "Even if uncle wins in New York, the loss of the Sundown will be a terrible blow to his prestige."

Next morning, when he met the mailman at the end of track, he also found the president's secretary who had driven out from Climax over the drifted road. The snow had stopped falling in the night.

The jaunty young man she had last seen in his college fashions was gaunt and shaggy as a wolf, and Meg herself was wan. Still they seemed to think that all was as it should be with themselves personally, and after a handshake the talk was of business.

"I haven't heard from Mr. Scrymie in three days," said Meg "but I know he needs to keep informed of matters out here. What shall I wire him?"

Alonzo gave her the situation.

"So Gower has come," she repeated with meditation. "I am afraid the line is lost."

Alonzo said nothing. They looked at each other calmly, the mouth of each set in a straight line. Then with a word and nod they parted, Alonzo with his hand car, Meg to her buggy in the road. Neither glanced back. Business is business—it is also war and no place for idle pleasantries. She drove back, making up her wire to the president, which never was sent.

For, driving up to the station at noon, she saw Scrymie leave the late westbound in company with another man, whom he presently introduced as Mr. Farley, a New York banker.

Knowing her as he did, Scrymie was amazed by the drive Meg had taken to get him information of the Sundown, but Farley shrugged his shoulders. "I have some of these new business people in my collection," he said. "They beat me."

Then Meg told her news and everything else was forgotten in the grief of it. "We've lost," said Scrymie, staggered completely, "and with money in hand to begin work to-morrow—gangs and material on the way." In fact, with all their forces marshaled, Gower had beaten them to it.

Farley cursed in his black beard, but it was himself who asked, and that with the same queer consideration that Scrymie had lately learned: "What of the young man who has been holding this end against the construction outfits? Send out, Scrymie, and bring him in. The blaggards will be down on him to-morrow and beat him up or kill him."

"I will send," replied Scrymie.

"That would not be fair," said Meg.

"And you mean, miss?"

"That you can take him off the job," answered Meg. "It is your job; but it is Alonzo's cause; Alonzo's fight. It would not be fair to take him off till it is finished."

"He still has an ace buried," said Scrymie hoarsely.

"We will not send but go," said Mr. Farley.

"I can show you the road," said Meg.

"I have been to Showdown," Scrymie assured politely, thinking: "Whoever heard of taking a woman into a grader's war."

But Farley told him sternly: "Did I not tell you that I have some of them in my collection? You will drive with us, Miss Muldoon," and they started for the livery stable.

"Anyway," said Meg, "we will not find him at Showdown but at Rivertown."

A long hard drive it was, even with the heavy team and vehicle. The earth was gray, with sunset pouring over the sky and setting every broken cloud aflame, when they pulled into Rivertown and took in the prospect.

The bridge three or four hundred yards away hung across the sunset. "Look," said Meg, and as if the last scene of the Sundown fight had been laid and waiting the word, a man clambered up from the bend at the bridgehead and shouted, waving his arms.

Across the river the G. S. locomotive was creeping up; on the bridge were scattered groups of men who started running back from the shouting man, then were halted by a bellowed order. A shot was fired at him which he answered, and again the crowd stampeded. Then the lone guardian plunged down the embankment and the near end of the bridge rose, tearing itself apart with a terrific smashing roar. Alonzo had played his last ace.

Meg was first at the spot where they had seen Alonzo dive down the embankment, and found crawling from a great drift a scarecrow of a man, who rose unsteadily. "Hullo," he grinned, and then in a business tone: "Uncle Scrymie, I have to report thousands of P. D. money shot into the air."

Scrymie, stingy official of the stingiest of companies had cried out in the soul of him when he saw the end of the bridge rise and fall back into the river. But, gazing at the scarecrow who had wrought the destruction, again his heart struck a drumbeat. "Have peace," he interrupted. "You have torn off a limb to save the body," and turned a black look of defiance on his New York companion.

"After being lonely all my years for want of relatives," he said, "a proud man I am to introduce such a nephew to Mr. Farley, now chairman of the board. Mr. Farley, shake hands with Mr. Alonzo Scrymie, agent at Showdown."

"Say, superintendent of the Sundown Division," said Farley, "the man who stopped Gower. For he is stopped, and with our trains on this end of the line he must abandon the other, leaving to us all the work he has done to pay for our bridge. Glory be —look at him!"

They had climbed the embankment and stood looking across the gap made by Alonzo's dynamite to the lone figure standing at the edge of the broken bridge. In the clear sunset light Gower recognized them also.

"You win," rang his deep voice across the river. He turned, raising his hand to his own men, and gave an order. In two minutes began the final retreat of the G. S. from the Sundown.

The great officials wrapped up in the tremendous scene which meant much to two railroads heard some one say: "Ever tour on a private hand car, Miss Cutie?" And they turned, startled.

"Whose little tourist guide are you?" said Meg over her shoulder.

"I can say it best on the banjo."

"Oh, well," and she joined him with a shrug.

"You can pick your secretary up at the end of track," called Alonzo.

"Hold," roared Scrymie, who had been thinking fast. "Take a letter——" And he dictated one addressed to the old chairman, thanking him for his typewriter; and Meg blushed with pleasure and wiped away a tear. Then the two officials descended to their team and the young people sat on the rear edge of the car against a sky line of gold, kicking their way homeward.

"Where," lamented Mr. Farley presently, "is the old romance of holding hands on the sofa in a dim parlor; or secret sighs? Nowadays sentiment is only a business."

"And business is loyalty," said Scrymie dryly. "Dom sentiment!"

Mr. Johnston will have a railroad Christmas story in the next issue.

THE VALUE OF FORESIGHT

PREPAREDNESS is all right if it is engaged in with the proper degree of foresight. Carelessly undertaken, it is worthless. For instance, there was the case of Chief Justice Taft—he was a Yale professor when this happened—buying two seats in advance for a football game at New Haven so as to be sure of being comfortable. So far, so good. But, when he went to occupy them, he found that they were on opposite sides of the aisle.

Conscience

By Frederick Niven

Author of "The Faith Cure," "A Little Hitch on the Way," Etc.

What happened to the old prospector that day in the cavern of the Jennie Deans was strangely symbolical of what was going on simultaneously in the depths of his own soul.

THEY were working in partnership, poor men both; and because of this lack of pelf had made their contract. They did not wish to lose too much time. Many lucky strikes had been made in the district and it was galling for a man who was by nature and calling a prospector, a man of the mountains, to have to be working in town or on the wagon roads for wages while others were away out searching the sands for color, or looking for precious ore.

While Ezra James was in town making a grubstake, Peter Sinnet was in the wilderness. When you saw Peter working in town, or on the roads, you knew Ezra—with his dog Rags, the rough Airedale, that faithful companion, perhaps more faithful than Peter if he only knew—was away beyond the last sidewalk and stump-dotted lot with its tethered cow, searching for fortune. Each possessed his miner's license, and the pact was that if one made a lucky strike he could stake for both.

And here now was Peter alone in the big wilderness and highly excited internally, however ordinary and grim of exterior he might seem to an observing squirrel, there being none else here to observe. The reason for his excitement was a formation of benches he had come upon in the deep woods. It brought back to his mind a rumor, a legend, an airy tale, current back there in Fraser City. The story went that years ago a geologist from the Smithsonian Institution, not looking for gold but for worms—worms of millions of years ago—had, in the Fraser City hotel, casually mentioned an interesting thing: to wit, that once the creek there—Bear Creek—had taken another course. Having said so much, the savant said no more, laughed his dry laugh and went his way, amused that in the old dried watercourse would be more wealth of dust and nuggets than even old man Fraser found on the bars near by. Ezra and Peter had often talked of that casual geologist. Ezra had once come upon a great boulder, large as a billiard table, and lying on it—just lying there—several gold nuggets. Both knew enough of geology to understand how they had come there; and here was Peter now in thick woods, considering how definitely the trees round him went up in terraces.

Yes, by gosh! he felt that a river ought to flow there under the last bench, where there was none. He grabbed a branch of a red willow on the edge of one of the benches, to go cannily over the bank to the next.

and his weight brought away the main stem. He slipped and nearly fell, but with a swerve recovered footing, and glanced back at the uprooted willow in a merely passing and half-conscious curiosity to see whether the bush had thus given way because it was rotten or because it grew in scanty soil. Next moment he was down beside it on hands and knees, not, that time, because he had slipped, but because of what he had seen.

He hauled out a loosened section of root, shook it gently, and as he did so small yellow flakes dropped from it. He gathered them in his hand and there, on all fours, not using his small pick but just his fingers, he tore at the sundry roots, lifted them one by one, shook them, and always from the clinging earth there dropped the yellow nuggets. He took out his handkerchief and spreading it on the ground placed the gold flakes and nuggets there, then carefully began to smite with his pick to discover at what depth was the bed rock. Three feet! And there were the big fellows that had sifted down in the æons.

Nothing did he know thereafter of the flight of time, nothing of anything but his discovery. There was no going back to camp that night; for, wiping the sweat at last from his eyes, he found it was not sweat only but twilight that interfered with his vision. He felt no hunger. The loose matches in his shirt pocket were soaked with the sweat of his exertions, but he had others, a dozen or so, in an empty cartridge case, the bullet put back into it as a stopper. Clearing a circle with his pick he lit a fire and, curled there like a dog, went to sleep. In the morning he woke, the chill of four o'clock rousing him when dawn was just a pensive smear among the treetops to east and a pallor in the blue of the sky overhead. He thought at first that he had been dreaming, then realized where he was. It was no dream: it was a big strike.

"By gosh!" he thought: and then he spoke a line that he had read somewhere: "'Rich beyond the dreams of avarice.'"

He seemed to like the sound of it.

"Rich beyond the dreams of avarice," he muttered again to the dawn sifting in its eternal way through the old woods.

Then he felt the pangs of hunger, realized he had had no supper the night before and only a noon-time lunch he had packed with him from his camp. Back at the camp he cooked a meal, ate it, doused out the fire, and set off for town. He was, as they say, tickled to death thinking it all over. To think that after all these years of prospecting through that land he had struck it there, just a day and a half from Fraser City; for the camp from which he set out, his provisions failing, he had made—after a big sweep round in the woods during the past fortnight—a mere easy day's hike from home.

"Rich, by gosh, beyond the dreams of avarice!" he muttered huskily as he trudged on.

About noon he came to the old Jennie Deans Mine, whence ran a wagon road to town. This Jennie Deans Mine was originally an ore prospect found by a Scot, but despite the original showing it had never been a great success. Company after company had leased it on the strength of its assay, but constantly the lead pinched out. It was just as he came in sight of this mine of so many high hopes and disappointments that a queer change came over Peter Sinnet. In fact it may be said that there the devil entered into him. Certainly so would the medieval chroniclers have described what happened. It was there, as he came to that desolate scene of the old workings, that something whispered in him:

"Why should Ezra ever know?"

At that he stood still, a hand in a pocket touching the kerchief full of nuggets that he carried with him. Then said he: "Oh shucks!" which was his version of the old chroniclers' "Get thee behind me, Satan!" and he trudged on to get to the old road that led from the deserted Jennie Deans to Fraser City.

But that other voice was insistent. Ezra James had announced that he felt about "through" with looking for fortune here, had indeed definitely said that if nothing was found on this trip of Peter's into the hills he would go to the coast, and from there work his passage to a new excitement in Australia.

Peter stood still and recalled that. Australia, too! His partner was as sick of it as that. Not Klondike even; not Skeena River, but clear away! And Ezra meant it; Peter was sure of that. Nothing would be easier than to go back to him and say: "Well, partner, the grub is out and we ain't struck it." Ezra, he knew, would take it philosophically, buy a ticket on the

stern-wheeler, and depart; and then it would all be his.

Rich beyond the dreams of avarice indeed! It appeared that Avarice inhabited Peter there and turned him half demented. Ezra would never know. Australia was far off. He must stop here and think it out. He sat down on the dump to do so. He did not push the devil away. He sat down to talk it out with him. Having sat down, he temporized. He could not come to a decision, but he was possessed with the notion to put off his return to Fraser City. He was not happy; really he was the most miserable man in Cariboo. He could have made himself happy in a moment simply by getting up off the rock he sat on and hiking past these deserted houses to the old road and on to town and his partner with the good news. But he did not do so.

He looked up at the Jennie Deans tunnel and then, simply to escape temporarily from this black argument going on inside him and come back to it later, he marched up to the opening and peered within. He was somewhat in the frame of mind of a man who says, over some worrying matter: "Here, let's forget it. Let's sleep on it and return to it to-morrow." Somewhat like that was his condition, only that he knew what he ought to do. This was only a stratagem to try to give Conscience the slip, this going and looking into the old Jennie Deans. All right! Conscience let him go and waited for him.

He glanced round to see if there was still a carbide lamp left in the shed beside the tunnel. He found one, battered but still serviceable, but he could not find any carbide tin that was not empty on the spidery shelf there. Ah, a butt end of candle. That would do if the tunnel was not drafty. He stepped into it. A little runnel of water, draining it, ran to one side; to the other were still the duck boards between the truck rails.

The tunnel was not drafty and, at any rate, he could go in a long way without lighting the candle. Then, abruptly, ahead of him, there was just a great blackness. There he lit the candle, and then exclaimed aloud. The place fascinated him. He had successfully shelved, for the time being, the debate on his duty to Ezra—or not exactly that, for he knew his duty, but the debate on whether he would, or would not, do his duty. Conscience may be considered as letting him go and sitting outside on the dump, in the sunshine, waiting for his return to renew the discussion. It was an amazing spectacle in there, so amazing that it did serve the purpose of partially distracting his mind from the fight going on in him of good versus evil, of a square deal versus dirty business.

Holding the candle in one hand, the other cupped round it for a reflector, he advanced. He was out of the tunnel, and into a stupendous great excavation, the roof upheld by innumerable poles. It was like a forest underground, with all those supports. Evidently they had driven in tunnels in every conceivable direction. The place was just honeycombed, in the finding and losing of that ore. Peter's candle did not show him all. He wished he had a carbide lamp, or a gasoline lamp. It must be a sight in there, all lit up. He looked over his shoulder and saw the low arch of the daylight through the tunnel behind him, and then moved on into the vast man-made cave, gazing up at the roof, staring astonished at the supports. There must have been hundreds of them. Yes, it was like a forest with all the props, a forest underground, or a cathedral.

He stepped on, and then, suddenly, apparently he was opposite one of the side workings, for a draft of wind puffed his candle out. He put his hand in a pocket for matches and could not find the cartridge. Still, he had some loose ones in his shirt. He flicked one of these on a leg, and nothing happened. He repeated the attempt with another; it did not ignite. He took a third and felt it with his fingers carefully to discover for certain which was the head. It had no head to speak of, and what remains of head it had came off with only a sulphurous odor. At once he looked over his shoulder for the light from the entrance tunnel and could not see it. Perhaps he would in a moment or two, after his eyes became accustomed to the darkness. But no; he could not see the tunnel light.

That discovery caused him to hold his breath a moment. He must keep cool and must not lose his bearings. He felt then in every pocket for his cartridge case in which he kept matches dry, but after trying every pocket twice he decided that he had lost it somewhere. The only thing to do was to fumble back to the tunnel. He must still, he considered, be in the big vaultlike be-

ginning of the mine, for he had been passing the props, one after the other. One of these many supporting posts, he thought, must be between him and the entrance, obscuring the glow of the daylight. So he stepped cautiously to one side. No, no light showed.

He drew a deep breath, and then considered that there were so many props in that place that it was truly, as he had at first commented to himself, like an underground forest. One might move left and right and still not see the tunnel light, now a near post, and again a farther one, eclipsing it. He therefore turned right about on his heel and stepped out carefully, hands outthrust and waving in slow semicircles before him. If only his hands could touch something. Then he did encounter a post, emitted a little "Oh!" of relief, felt round it, expecting to see at least some thin radiance from the outside day on the side of another prop, if no more than that. But he saw nothing. He was in pitch darkness. Then he felt clear round that prop again to make sure that he was still in the big preliminary working and had not, when fumbling forward in the dark, passed into one of the many side workings. He went right round the post, feeling it with one hand and sending the other out at arm's length in slow sweeps, and decided, his waving arm encountering nothing, that he was in the big cavern.

He then stepped out cannily in the direction he felt must lead to the opening, his arms moving in slow circles as if he were swimming in air. And then to his astonishment his right-hand fingers grazed a rock. At that he paused and listened. The thought came to him that his best plan would be to find the runnel of water that drained the place. Finding that he could stoop and feel which way it ran and then, following it, come to the entrance. Nothing simpler. He gave ear, but he could not hear any water running, only intermittent drippings and droppings here, there, yonder, in the pitch dark. He recalled a game he used to play at home with his brothers. One would be blindfolded, and then the others would lift him and carry him, sometimes all through the house, sometimes just round and about in the one room, then set him down and ask: "Where are you?" That was a creepy game sometimes. Usually the guess as to location was all wrong.

That thought of home brought thoughts of early training. His mother had inculcated in him what she called "being white," and it rushed upon him that he was not being white to Ezra!

"O God," he was about to say, "if You get me out of this I'll go right back to Fraser City and tell the good news to Ezra."

But he did not speak the words. It struck him that the Deity might not be moved by his offer of a deal. The Deity might even, if He heard, say: "Serve you right. You've got what is coming to you!" Peter, lost in that utter blackness, felt very cynical toward himself.

He was, in fact, suddenly panic-stricken. He fumbled on along the wall, and then came to space, fumbled back carefully and discovered that the rock wall turned abruptly to the right. That was surely the way out, to right; but, if it was, there should be light. The tunnel into the big cavern had no bend. How would it be, he wondered, if he left that wall and felt out for another post? He did so, very carefully, intending to count his paces lest he had to turn back again to the same place.

"One—two—three," he counted, hands before him; and then his fingers touched another wall, not another prop.

At that the sweat broke on him. He was, evidently, in a tunnel, not in the big working. So he turned on his heel and counted: "One—two—three!" backward, hands out, but touched nothing. He counted on: "Four—five—six," and touching nothing even then he stood still, trembling from head to foot. Surely it was nightmare! Surely he would waken soon! If he yelled he might waken himself. He raised his head and yelled and yelled again.

The sound fell back on him without echo, dead. Again he yelled to make sure it was no nightmare, and again that dull, echoless impact of his voice on the rock walls was terrible in his ears. He realized, by the accent of his voice, that he was in a panic, and so took hold of himself, stood stock-still, feeling, his nerves unstrung, as though he swayed in the darkness on the edge of a precipice.

"Keep calm! Keep calm!" he ordered himself.

And then Conscience, who had been sitting outside in the sunlight, waiting for him, got up, so to speak, and came there after

him, into the dark. "Beyond the dreams of avarice," indeed. Oh, if only he had not for a moment considered that horrible thought of going back on Ezra. He ought to have spurned it, marched on past the Jennie Deans to the old road and hurried, yes, hurried down to the city to tell his partner the good news.

"What a swine I have been," he moaned.

He knew he had only come into that deserted mine to have a rest from his balancing of right and wrong, his toying with good and evil. At least he could say that for himself; that he could say. He had not decided, definitely, to go back on Ezra; he had only been weighing the matter. So he mused, distraught, but took little consolation from the thought.

"You dirty swine, Peter Sinnet!" he said to himself. "You've got it in the neck now. You're lost!

"I've got to get out of here, I've got to get out," he said aloud after a pause. "I've lost my bearings. The only thing is to keep moving now, keep moving. Standing still will get me nowhere."

Again then, his arms going out in sweeps before him, but slightly elevated lest there was some low projection of rock roof above him, he footed it slowly, fumbling, through the dark; and then, after what seemed to be ages of groping in a void, he touched a timber, grabbed it, began to feel round it and out from it. Beyond it was a rock wall. Yes, he had somehow strayed into a tunnel of the side workings, but which way led to cul-de-sac and which to egress he had no notion.

"I did you dirt, Ezra, I did you dirt," he said.

A moment later came a new horror, something scampering to him. He gave a choking cry, feeling as one blind and helpless; but the beast that leaped at his side was wriggling with pleasure. A wet tongue licked his hand. Tremendously keyed up, his olfactory nerves alert as his ears, Peter knew the whiff of dog. From horror he passed to thanksgiving.

"Good dog," he said, wondering whence it came.

He stooped, groped, and the wriggle of fur was at once between his fumbling hands. He felt for the collar and grabbed it, and then the dog strained to go.

Bending down, clutching the collar, one hand held up in air lest there were any protruberances of rock against which he might hit, he let the dog drag ahead, stumbling after it, sometimes falling to his knees, but always with that tenacious clutch on the collar. He could hear the beast pant, felt its body taut and straining. At least it did not turn and snap, was entirely friendly. Again, in its eagerness, it strained too speedily and brought him down on a knee, with a crack. His free hand felt for support, and he hit it on a sharp rock; but still his right hand clutched the collar. Limping, stumbling, falling over the inequalities underfoot as the dog pulled ahead, grazing his free hand on a prop and feeling the hot sear of a splinter pierce it, Peter came at last to the blessed light of day, a faint glimmer, and to the gurgling sound of the runnel of water that drained out of the tunnel. That sift of radiance on the innumerable posts that stood there like an underground forest was a welcome sight. And there was the arch of daylight. He peered down at the dog, fumbling on, then he let it go, stood erect.

"Why, Rags! Good dog, good dog!" he said, seeing that it was his partner's dog and wondering how it had come there and found him.

But Rags left him then and went careering off along the tunnel, helter-skelter, splashing in the shallow draining creek. Puckering his eyes against the increase of light, Peter followed and then passed out into the free day. And there stood Ezra, a shotgun in one hand, a brace of grouse in the other, looking down puzzled at his dog. At sight of Peter he stared, unbelieving.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "So it was you he was after! First time he's disobeyed me in years. I was scared he was after a cougar or something, denning in that old mine. What in thunder you doing down in there, Pete?"

"Oh—I just—just passing—thought I'd have a look in at this mine. Say, Ezra, what are you doing here?"

"Me? I thought I'd pike up in the hills this far from town anyhow and see if I could get a grouse or two. I'm through working. Took a job on the hydraulickers while you were out, but it gets my goat working for other people. Had to take a day off. You got through the grub and were heading back, eh? Where's your blanket roll?"

"Didn't pack it this time!" shouted Peter, deliriously glad that he was now to tell the news. "Left it at camp—traveling light. Grub's through all right, Ezra, but you ain't through."

"What? How?"

"Look at this here, buddy," and Peter produced the kerchief full of gold slivers and nuggets.

Ezra gazed at what was disclosed to him in the other man's trembling hands. Then he looked up in Peter's face to find that tears trickled down it, that his old, stern partner was sobbing like a child.

Other stories by Mr. Solomons will appear in future issues.

THE REAL EXPERT

A FRIEND of ours is an efficiency engineer—one of those wizards, you know, who walks into an office or a factory run by people who presumably know their business, and shows them how to get results quicker, cheaper, better and with less trouble than ever before. Our friend is not the fictional type of "expert" who is supposed to draw large consulting fees for telling concerns beautiful fairy stories about impossibly theoretical methods of efficient management. He is a real, practical expert who gets practical results.

It was our recent fortune to pay him an unannounced Sunday-evening call. We had learned that his wife was away week-ending and it was our innocent intention to help him while away a twain of lonely hours. We found him exhausted and in a desperate frame of mind. His usually immaculate home mirrored his mood. We gathered that the servant had been week-ending, too. Upon his expert shoulders had fallen, for the space of some twelve hours, the care of himself, a youthful son, a more youthful daughter, the Airedale, and the Angora tabby.

The expert managed a sickly smile in greeting and sank feebly into a morris chair. From above stairs came a duet of wails and sobs.

"Children sick?" we inquired with concern.

"No! Just plumb mean." A pause, then: "I'm all in. Make yourself at home. Excuse me, a minute." He dragged himself out and up the stairs.

We looked about us and reflected that we were viewing the handiwork of a noted efficiency engineer. The room was strewn with toys and bits of children's clothing. Sections of the Sunday papers littered the floor. The fragments of a broken vase were scattered in a corner. An odor as of burned roast and scorched milk pervaded the house. We could see the remnants of a sketchy evening meal through the doorway that opened on the dining room. The table had not been cleared. Curiosity impelled us to tiptoe to the kitchen. The scene was one of frank domestic anarchy. Pots and pans, crockery and silver were jumbled atop the stove, heaped in the sink, and even piled in a corner on the floor. Beside the porcelain ice box, whose doors swung wide, the Airedale crouched. He had purloined a juicy steak and was savoring it blissfully. On the table the Angora sat with her head in the cream jug. It was a disheartening prospect.

Then the doorbell rang. It was Friend Wife returning. She greeted her husband, greeted us, sniffed the air, and disappeared hastily.

The first thing we noticed was the cessation of the wailing from above. Then we were aware of a brief commotion in the room where we sat with our expert friend. Next we noted that the room was miraculously set to rights. Newspapers, toys, clothing, bits of broken vase, all had disappeared. We had scarcely registered this startling fact when we observed that the dining table gleamed with fresh linen and that the breakfast china was set forth. A moment later the expert's wife came in and set a tray between us bearing a steaming pot of fragrant coffee and an array of sandwiches. We looked at her. She was wearing a trim house frock. Her nose was powdered. Not a hair of her head strayed from its place.

"There," she said, as we drew her a chair. "Everything's to rights again."

"How do you do it?" we gasped.

"It's nothing," she said, pouring our coffee. "Any good housekeeper will tell you."

Which impels us to the reflection that the real efficiency experts in this broad land of ours don't come from the engineering schools.

Talks With Men

By Martin Davison

MOST of the letters that come to me are refreshing in the atmosphere they bring of moderation, toleration and common sense. The cranks and fanatics cannot be readers of this magazine, or if they are, they skip the modest fortnightly contribution of Martin Davison. They come almost always from Americans of the old American stock and while no one is more cosmopolitan than I in admiration for the fine qualities of other peoples, I confess that I have a weakness for the descendants of those who sailed the clipper ships of New England, who crossed the mountains to Kentucky, who drove the old covered wagons across the prairies of the Middle West.

Although one who spent all his time in the big cities of the East might not suspect it, there are plenty of real Americans left and going strong—and they are the leaven that gives the real flavor to the U. S. A.

SOME of those who write to me want to meet me personally—but I have neither time nor opportunity for that. What I am coming to is this—that in a majority of instances I can tell more about a man from reading a fairly long and frank letter than I could in a personal interview.

Every one, I think, has in him some tinge of bashfulness and reserve. Most people find it easier to tell some things in a letter to a stranger than they would by word of mouth to an intimate friend. One great advantage of the confessional in the Catholic Church and the use of much the same mechanism by the modern school of psychoanalysts is the cool impersonality of the one to whom the confession is made.

In fact an effort to size up a man's personality from the letter he writes me is vastly more entertaining than any cross-word puzzle. I am fairly good at cross-word puzzles but I think I am even better with the letters.

You can tell whether a man is orderly and logical in mind by the unconscious arrangement of his thoughts on paper. You can tell a lot about his manners and attitude toward others by the way he addresses a stranger. Still more, the terseness and brevity or the garrulity and expansiveness of the document gives a pretty fair clinical picture of the nature from which it emanates. If a man were applying for a job or writing to some one he expected favors from it would be different. The writer would be trying to put his best foot forward, and nine times out of ten would be striking a pose and the thing would lose its spontaneity. But a natural, frank letter to a stranger sometimes tells a lot more than the writer intends.

THERE are things in a letter beside the words. If a man sends a half legible scrawl on wrapping paper he is either very stupid or naturally discourteous. If he writes on delicately tinted paper with an embossed coat of arms he is either one born to the purple or the victim of affectation. Perhaps he has what is called the artistic temperament which sometimes expresses itself in a sort of childish make-believe and pretense and sometimes in really good work in the fine arts.

I believe also that a man's handwriting tells something about him. This is why the letters written with a pen are more interesting to me than the typewritten ones. I have spent a good many hours at odd times studying what is called the science of graphology and while its conclusions may be pushed too far, I am sure that there is something in it. No matter how a man tries to disguise his handwriting there are certain things that give him away. Some other day I will talk about this at greater length.

BUT here is a specimen letter from a young man in an Eastern city. The writer will recognize it when he sees it here, although I am changing the signature. The general appearance of the letter and the handwriting indicate that it comes from a man in good health who might be expected to excel at some athletic sport. He has a good logical brain. He is not intuitive or given to following hunches, he is orderly and methodical by nature, rather unselfish and inclined to be impulsive. Now for the letter. Skipping a few complimentary remarks about these talks, here it is:

YOU will wonder why I write you. I should be censured, perhaps, for taking up your time when there are so many with real, serious problems. However I have a queer feeling that you have something for me that would help me. Here is my picture; nationality, American—way back on both sides; age, twenty-two; education, grammar and high school and three years in the summer school at Boston University. I am now taking a course in Life Insurance Training. After its conclusion I am going to Maine to sell insurance.

"Now you'll say 'Where's the problem?' There is none, I'll admit, except that something in the back of my dome tells me that for my specific sort of a case you can give me help to succeed. My ambition is money enough to marry, raise at least three children to be good citizens and enjoy the task. Maybe I'm foolish in writing to you but I feel like it. M. M."

I HAVE one piece of advice for M. M. That is, when he completes his course in insurance to get right to work. As he is a New Englander, Maine is as good a place for him as any and one of the most healthful places to live in the world.

The mistake too many Americans make is placing too much reliance on college courses. On the whole this is the best-educated country in the world—but outside the learned professions it is a notable fact that most of the very successful men got busy earning their own living at a comparatively early age. Lots of the old college graduates are poor men and lots of the rich men never saw college and unless M. M. has plenty of independent means twenty-two is none too early to get to work. The real education comes after college. College is good if one can afford it. It supplies the tools for thought and a lot of fine contacts, but there is no education in the world like earning one's own living. Outside of technical callings a man who has the habit of reading can get all the culture he needs out of books, and besides that there is that more vital cultivation that comes from meeting other men on an even footing in the game of getting on in life. Selling insurance is an education in itself.

By the way, M. M. added a postscript asking me to dinner. Perhaps he intends to begin his selling career with me. If so I am sorry, as I am fully insured.

ANYWAY, the chances are at least five to one that M. M., if he gets to work now, will realize his ambition and that some twenty-five years from now there will be three more M. M.'s setting out in the world with a little better chance than their father started with.

Hearts, Preferred

By Jo Swerling

Another case of the merchant stung with his own goods.

IS it really true that barbers are always baldheaded? That shoemakers are shabbily shod? That physicians are constantly ailing and that restaurant proprietors invariably dine at the opposition beaneries?

There is no reliable census available to prove or disprove these alleged facts, but one thing is certain. *Schatchens*—marriage brokers—invariably are bachelors.

Which brings us directly to Max Krakow—good looking, dreamy eyed, glib tongued, earnest voiced and unattached; natural-born advance agent of Eros; one-hundred-per-cent marriage broker who had brought go-getter psychology to the *schatchen* business on the East Side.

When Tannen's Furniture Store on Canal Street put a large sign in the window, reading, "You furnish the bride, we'll furnish the house," Max, for a consideration, prevailed upon Tannen to permit him to tack at the bottom of the sign a small card which read: "And if you can't furnish the bride, see Max Krakow."

An accident had projected Max into his unusual calling. When he was a young student there had come to him his friend, Sam Levine, with a dire problem.

"I'm in love, Max," Sam informed him. "I'm crazy to get married with Leah Posner. But I don't know how to ask her. You're good on speaking. Maybe you'll help me out?"

Max was indeed "good on speaking." His every word was vibrant with the pleading quality of the gifted advocate. At the time he was undecided whether to become a lawyer, an actor or a salesman.

He undertook the delicate commission intrusted him by Sam. Within a month Miss Leah Posner was Mrs. Sam Levine, and Max was launched on a career which was destined to be pleasant as well as prosperous.

To him love became a commodity, a vendible merchandise whose mart was the wide world. Success was instant, and he dedicated himself to the job of acting as the hyphen which joined supply and demand. From his board of trade, which was the ghetto, he studied his market. To a sighing swain he would paint a word picture of some plain jane in which she would appear to be a combination of Aphrodite, Psyche, Venus, Juliet and Melisande, with a little of Ann Pennington thrown in for good measure. To the spinster or widow in search of a mate he would portray some dull chap as a potpourri of all the manly virtues and virile charms, not forgetting to touch lightly yet firmly on the matter of his business acumen, his account at the bank and his descent from blooded stock.

If the prospective groom should happen to be a pawnbroker, Max could not have it in his heart to refer to him other than as a banker. Were the parents of the

bride to be past sixty years old, he would casually bring out that she came from an "old family" and feel himself to be utterly veracious. Inasmuch as his was a trade concerned at least theoretically with love, and as he made relentless war on bachelordom and spinsterhood, Max figured that all was fair in love and war, and proceeded accordingly.

Max entered Greenbaum's restaurant with the springy step of one who knows that the world is a large, succulent oyster, to be opened and enjoyed by those who had the requisite combination of wit, imagination and persistence. Morris Blotwin, the corset manufacturer, waved a pudgy hand at him from the first table.

"How's business, Max?" called the jovial Morris. For three years he had made unsuccessful attempts to lure Max away from the *schatchen* business and into the corset trade.

"Never better."

Morris beamed at the natty figure and spoke his usual question.

"*Nu,* when are you gonna come to work for us?"

"Call me up," grinned Max, "when you hear Gabriel blowing his saxophone."

"I don't know nothing about this Gabriel," retorted Blotwin. "And I can't see what any saxophone player is got to do with a straight business proposition. But you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Here you are, one of the best salesmen in New York, with a wonderful education, and you waste your time making believe you are Cupid. I can't understand it. Is there so much money in your line?"

"I make a fairly good living at it."

"I bet you could make anyway twice as much in corsets."

"It isn't the money altogether," admitted Max. "I like it. I get a kick out of it."

"There's thrills in corsets, too—when you get to sellin' them," said Mr. Blotwin, as Max laughingly edged away to his own table. "Especially wholesale. When you get tired of being a retailer, call me up."

But Max was now fixing all his attention on the menu. A short time later, concentrating on the delightful task of eating an extra large order of Holland herring *mit pell kartoffeln,* he failed to observe that Greenbaum was watching him with moody abstraction. Only those who have enjoyed Holland herring *mit pell kartoffeln*—the herring nicely peeled, lots of sliced onions, bay leaves and *gantze pfeffer*—can appreciate the soothing, soul-satisfying oblivion it produces.

Presently Greenbaum walked over to Max's table, and Max, looking up, beheld a physiognomy heavy-clouded with gloom. Max nodded, not taking the time to make audible greeting, which would have interfered with the much more important matter of disposing of the exquisite Holland herring. Greenbaum sat down and watched Max eat. The more he watched, the gloomier he became. The young *schatchen* was deriving an almost indecent pleasure from his lunch, and at the moment pleasure was something the very thought of which gave Greenbaum dull pain.

"Krakow!" Greenbaum blurted suddenly. "How'd you like to make a thousand dollars?"

Max gulped violently. The waiter came up, and Max, by a superhuman effort controlling his voice so that it trembled only a little, gave another order for the palate-tickling herring and its toothsome garnishings. For a long time he had viewed Greenbaum in the light of a possible client, and now he sensed that the gloomy restaurant man had at last succumbed to the cosmic urge.

"Did you hear what I said?" demanded Greenbaum. "How'd you like to make a thousand dollars—cash?"

"You are getting middle-aged, Julius," observed Max mildly. "Otherwise you wouldn't ask me such a question."

"I *am* gettin' middle-aged," agreed Julius somberly. "That's why I am askin' you such a question. I have decided it's about time I should be gettin' me a frau."

"Well, well. You're about ten years late, but better late than never." Max took on his earnest, professional tone. "It's never too late to mend."

"That's exactly the same identical thing I've come to a conclusion about. And when I make up my mind," said Julius grandly, "I'm no piker. I'm willin' to pay a thousand dollars, on account. I ain't kiddin' myself that I'm what you would call a sheik."

"No," said Max. "You're not."

He turned a calculating and, it must be confessed, somewhat skeptical gaze upon the suddenly lovelorn Julius.

Julius was the sole proprietor of the Nonpareil Dining Room, Restaurant and Chop House on Grand Street. Perhaps as a prattling infant he had been chucked under the chin and cuddled affectionately by adoring parents. But that must have stopped at an early age. Nature had handed Julius a dirty deal. Years of the restaurant business had given him a greasy complexion. He was as fat and doughy and dumpy as the matzoth balls which lent lure to the Greenbaum chicken coop. He had two chins, with the serious menace of a third. Using the language of Julius' own craft, he was a trifle overdone. He had a pair of eyes with which he could see, and enough said about the eyes. His nose was an excellent organ for the purpose for which noses are created, but structurally it was a distinct failure. His hair need not be described at length; there was not enough of it to matter.

He was slightly pockmarked, had four gold teeth, never wore a belt or suspenders, and—but this is very important—his checks never came back. Financially Julius stood without reproach. He owned the restaurant outright, a home in Brooklyn which because of his bachelorhood he rented, and a large car. He was a member of eleven lodges and his life was insured. He had plenty of Liberty Bonds and an ample bank account. And he was single—the singlest man on the East Side; terribly, utterly and apparently irrevocably single.

Gazing on Greenbaum's good-natured but highly unprepossessing countenance, Max realized that the thousand dollars mentioned would hardly be in the nature of a gratuity. He had distinct and severe qualms.

"You know my rule about payment in advance," he said.

"No, I don't. I ain't never had no occasion to do business with you before." Max was about to hastily suggest that in view of their ancient friendship he would be more than pleased to accept a fifty-per-cent advance, and he was overjoyed when Julius continued: "But I'm willin' to pay you the thousand in advance. To me, when I once make up my mind, money is nothin'. It's worth a thousand to me, and I know you never fail."

"That's the way I like to hear 'em talk," jubilantly remarked Max. "You can consider yourself married—as soon as you give me the check."

From his pocket he took out several photographs.

"I know at least a dozen fine girls who would make excellent wives for you, Julius," he began.

"I want only one, y' understand."

"Sure! But I mean, you can have your choice. Now here, for instance." He handed his client a photograph. "Isn't she spiritual? That's Minnie Shapiro, and the photograph doesn't flatter her, either. You know—the furrier's daughter? The only one of his six daughters which hasn't been grabbed off. Of course you realize the man who marries her won't have to worry about where the next dollar's coming from. An excellent dowry, Julius. She has a sweet disposition and cooks like an angel. I'll never forget the time I had dinner at the Shapiro home. Minnie made some *königsberger klops* that would knock your eyes out. And furthermore——"

"Furdermore," interrupted Julius, handing back the photograph with a gesture of disdain, "Minnie Shapiro is the last woman in New York which I want her to be Mrs. Julius Greenbaum. As far as *königsberger klops* is concerned, I ain't exactly what you would call an amateur myself, either. And furdermore——"

"All right, Julius. We aim to please." Max handed over a second photograph. "How about Miss Lily Ginsberg?"

"Yeah, I know her," said Julius sourly. "The counselor's daughter."

"If the election goes right this fall, old man Ginsberg is liable to find himself a magistrate. Now there's a girl for you. A lovable disposition, and plays the piano like Paderewski. I'm quite certain——"

"Feh!" exploded Greenbaum. "Do I have to pay a thousand dollars—and in advance yet—to marry that woman? I could marry her without you, to-morrow morning, by callin' her up on the phone tonight."

"As far as that's concerned," retorted Max loftily, "for a thousand dollars—in advance—I'll get you any girl in the neighborhood that's single. And I know just the girl for you. Take a look at this photograph. Her name is Fanny Mandelbaum, and she——"

"No!" barked Julius, throwing the picture down.

Max's brow furrowed, and for a moment he was in deep thought.

"I have it," he said finally. "Just the girl. She's a widow and she's worth a hundred thousand dollars."

For the first time Mr. Greenbaum showed slight interest.

"Have you got a picture of her?" he asked.

"That kind I don't show pictures of," said Max shrewdly.

"It doesn't matter," said Julius. "You don't need to give me no more names, on account I have the lady all picked out."

"Who is she?"

"Etta Levy."

Max's face fell, and from his lips issued a low, long but highly significant whistle. Mentally he congratulated himself upon asking for a fee in advance.

Julius had mentioned the name of a young woman whose spinsterhood was the mystery of the East Side. Many times Max himself had wondered why this most desirable party had seen fit to remain single, for she had all the qualifications of a perfect bride.

Only Etta, had he known her well enough to tell him, could have explained the mystery.

Etta once gave a grab-bag party for the children of the Delancey Street settlement. There were thirty-three children at the party, and through an error Etta had gotten thirty-four packages. After the grabbing was all over, there remained in the bag one package. There it stayed, for nobody to grab, and love, and display with pride. And strangely, this left-over was the prize package of the lot.

Etta was in like case.

She was known and loved by all the East Side. But it was not the sort of love that a young woman who has not yet reached the age of thirty finds completely satisfactory. Children loved Etta like a mother, elderly people loved her like a daughter, youths and maidens of her own age loved her like a sister. But she was still Miss Levy.

Perhaps it was her own fault. She was too shy, too old fashioned. She never attempted to improve on nature with cosmetics' artful aid. She would no sooner think of smoking a cigarette than of strangling any of the settlement-house kids she loved. She didn't know the latest dances and made no effort to learn them. Many a girl of the section, much less attractive, much less desirable, had found romance. But Etta was single—the singlest girl on the East Side; fearfully, stupendously and as far as could be forecast, permanently single.

"Etta Levy," repeated Julius. "I'm stuck on her. But I wouldn't have the nerve to ask her to marry me—not for a million dollars. That's why I'm willing to do business with you, Max." He turned oxlike eyes on the *schatchen.* "Do you think it's possible?"

"In my business," answered Max, "anything and everything is possible. It's not going to be an easy job, I know that——"

He paused significantly. Julius got up and went to the desk in the little office at the front of the restaurant. He returned in a moment with a check, which he threw on the table.

There ensued a long and earnest conversation. When it was concluded the light of hope shone in the eyes of Julius Greenbaum.

"Inside of six months," uttered Max, in prophetic tones, "Miss Etta Levy will be a bride." He folded up the check he had received and carefully put it into his wallet. "And I seem to get vision of a chap named Julius Greenbaum being invited to the wedding."

There was quite a line of customers at the desk, waiting to pay their checks. Max departed, and Julius went to the cash register. For a while there was a pleasant ringing, and the clink of coins in the cash till. Julius, dreamily presiding at the register, had an exalted look on his face.

Max lived at Mrs. Bessie Rabinowitz s select boarding house on Second Avenue. Mrs. Rabinowitz herself greeted him when he arrived home.

"There was a telephone call for you tonight, Mr. Krakow," the landlady informed him. "The lady called up twice. She says please you should call her the minute you get in."

She handed him a slip with a telephone number written on it, and waited hopefully. Max promptly departed for a drug-store phone booth. He had long ago discovered that in the Rabinowitz ménage there was no privacy in the matter of phone calls, and privacy was of the very essence of his delicate business.

When he got the number he was surprised to find that the party who had

phoned him was Mrs. Bertha Levy, Etta's mother.

"Could you come right over?" Mrs. Levy asked. "It's a business matter and I can't speak over the telephone."

Max wondered whether Julius had been foolish enough to call up Mrs. Levy and inform her of his intentions concerning Etta.

"If he butts in," he thought as he hurried to the Levy home, "he's liable to ruin everything before I get a chance to start."

The Levys lived in a neat little apartment on Second Avenue, a few blocks from the Rabinowitz establishment. It was on the second floor of a two-story house, the lower floor of which was occupied by Doctor Joseph Cantor, who employed Etta as secretary and general office manager. Etta was not at home when Max arrived.

"She's gone over to the settlement house," Mrs. Levy explained. "Every night she is over there, and you'd think she got paid for it the way she wastes all her time on those kids."

"I think it's wonderful," said Max, "the way she interests herself in that work."

"Maybe it is," admitted Mrs. Levy. "But it takes up all her evenings."

There was a pause, and then Max inquired:

"And what can I do for you, Mrs. Levy?"

She seemed to find it difficult to state the business for which she had summoned him.

"I want you to know," she began, "that this is strictly confidential. If Etta ever finds out what I done, she'll be terribly angry."

Max kept a sympathetic silence.

"Mr. Krakow," blurted Mrs. Levy, "it's time my Etta got married. On account she is working in Doctor Cantor's office, and studying in books all the time, and spending all her spare time in the settlement, she ain't got no time left to keep company with nobody, and she's almost thirty years old, and I sent for you to find her a good husband."

She paused, out of breath. Max could hardly believe what he had heard. He had not dreamed that such a fortuitous circumstance would develop so soon after his interview with Greenbaum. Here the ink was hardly dry on the Greenbaum check, and the mountain was ready and eager to come to Mohammed. Or rather the mountain's mother. It was silly to think of Etta as a mountain—she was quite diminutive in stature—but anyway it was a good parallel. Mrs. Levy broke in on his thoughts with words that rang mellifluously on his ears.

"You don't have to worry about a fee," she said. "Five years ago I began a special little account just for this purpose. I made up my mind that at the end of that time—that was on Etta's twenty-fifth birthday—I would spend the money with some good *schatchen,* if she wasn't married yet. She ain't. The five years ain't up yet, but to-night I got a feeling I should send for you, and what my heart says to do, I do. So that's why I telephoned you, and I have saved a thousand dollars, and here it is."

She took the money out of a purse and gave it to him. Bewildered, he thrust it into his pocket without counting it. Things were coming too fast for him. In all his career he had never gotten two thousand-dollar fees in one night. And they had come to him without any solicitation on his part. And the party of the first part was in love with the party of the second part. All that remained was for him to cause the party of the second part to fall in love with the party of the first part. And for that, Mrs. Levy had come to the right party.

"Mrs. Levy," said Max solemnly, "you can trust the message of your heart."

"You understand," she declared, "this is got to be handled different from your other cases."

"What do you mean, different?"

"You've got to get Etta a husband without her knowing about it. She is got all kinds funny notions about such things. She don't believe in marriage brokers. She thinks matters like getting married is got to be handled by herself. But I'm afraid if she waits too long——"

Max lifted a reassuring, an understanding hand, and beamed at Mrs. Levy. She was a nice little, innocent little old woman, with watery blue eyes and white hair neatly coiffed in an old-fashioned puff on the top of her head.

"I know just how it is," said Max. "The modern girls all take the same attitude. I know just how to handle a case like this. You can be assured that the affair will be handled confidentially and discreetly."

"Another thing," Mrs. Levy said. "Etta is a wonderful girl—even if I am her mother I got to say it—and you got to find for her a feller which is worthy of her."

"Naturally. She deserves the finest. I promise you that in six months your Etta will be married—and to a man worthy of her. I have been in the business now for over ten years, and never once have I failed." He decided on a grandiose gesture. "If I don't find a man worthy of Etta in six months, I'll do something which I have never done before. I'll return the thousand dollars fee to you."

"I hope you won't have to do it," breathed Mrs. Levy fervently.

"Now I have plans to discuss with you," said Max. "I always like to go over my campaign in advance, with the interested party, and in this case you are the interested party."

"If you wait, I'll make some tea," offered Mrs. Levy.

Max waited. While Mrs. Levy arranged the table in the neat little dining room, and brewed tea in the spotless little kitchen, Max took a piece of paper out of his pocket, and a pencil, and made queer, cabalistic figures on it.

Only a few minutes from the crowded East Side, across the bridge over in Brooklyn, is a quiet hotel with a roof transformed into the semblance of a ship. Through the white masts, on a summer's night, the stars twinkle, and from a table near the deck rail one may look into the lovely, mysterious East River, and out into the calm bay which leads to the swelling Atlantic. Night, which is sometimes the grisliest of realists, can also be the kindest of camoufleurs. Looking through the deck rail of this ship on the roof at the nocturne below, harsh details are blotted out in a soft chiaroscuro.

The food isn't to be sneezed at.

The moon cleaves the river in a shimmering path of silver. On either side of this pathway the red and green and blue and yellow lights of the anchored ships gleam, and, in the distance, stands Liberty with her torch.

The jazz band on the poop deck is no slouch.

Up here on the roof there is a sense of remoteness, of aloneness. The vista which stretches out is a picture specially made for those who sit at the little tables, which are covered with spotless linen and loaded with massive silver and goblets which sound like bells when they are struck. The waiters are well disciplined machines. They appear only when they are wanted. They bring what you want.

The check will be heavy, but who cares?

Facing each other at one of the charmed tables sat Max Krakow and Etta Levy. His friends on the East Side would hardly have recognized Max, attired as he was in correct dinner clothes, and looking anything in the world but what he was—an eager *schatchen* stalking his prey. And anybody catching a glimpse of Etta could not help but wonder what a *schatchen* could possibly be needed for.

"I'm beginning to believe in magic," murmured Etta. "I just can't believe we're only fifteen minutes away from Delancey Street. The more we come here, the more I love the view. It seems we're in another world. It's so peaceful here—so quiet."

Her voice was peaceful and quiet. She was dark, and demure, with a quaint solemnity that was childlike.

"You are enjoying it, eh?" Max leaned over the table.

"It's wonderful."

"Could you enjoy it like this—all by yourself?"

She failed to answer.

"Could you?" he persisted.

She had a disconcerting way of doing and saying the most unexpected things. A score of times in the four months in which Max had been devoting his entire time and talents in behalf of Mr. Greenbaum, he had ventured tentatively to broach the subject of an alliance between the plump restaurant man and the pretty Miss Levy. Failing to do that, he had attempted to speak generally of the desirability of marriage, and each time she had adroitly switched the conversation to other matters. Now he determinedly began a brooding discourse upon the disadvantages of celibacy.

"The poets and playwrights and novelists, the painters and musicians, ever since these arts were born," he began, "have made love the motif of their masterpieces. Why? Because it's the one subject of universal appeal. Listen to what the band is playing."

He sang softly the words of the tune:

"I wanna place my weary head on somebody's shoulder,
I don't wanna grow older, all by myself."

He stole another glance at her calm, absorbed face. He gloated. She was falling

under his spell. He was disconcerted and dismayed when she said:

"It's a shame to talk business on such a lovely night."

"Talk business?" He floundered and stammered. "I—er—I don't—— What do you——"

"You're a marriage broker, aren't you?"

Many times Max had boasted of his calling. Now he could only nod miserably. He had flattered himself that he was conducting the affair with a great deal of subtlety and finesse.

As a matter of fact she had known all along why the interesting Mr. Krakow had been seeking her company. She had easily wrung a confession from her mother, and after gently scolding the old lady for her overzealousness, she had determined to anticipate Mr. Krakow's wily propositionings with a flat declaration that she wasn't interested, and didn't intend to be interested.

Max had changed an acquaintanceship into a friendship. She found the friendship pleasant. She sensed that sooner or later this friendship would undergo a change, and that it would become a business matter. She realized that it was inevitable, and decided to take the initiative.

She continued, in her level, honest voice:

"Mr. Krakow, you remind me of a dodo that has hung around long after his time has come to join his extinct brethren. You're obsolete, and you don't know it. You can't be much over thirty-five——"

"Thirty-six," said Max humbly. He saw his carefully made plans knocked awry, his campaign kicked from under him, his cosmos disordered.

"A young man," continued Etta sadly, "and you're wasting your talents—oh, I'll admit you have talents—on a business which in this day and generation is not only futile, but comical. You are ambassador for the matrimonial misfits. Those who are destined for marriage can find their mates without any interference from a marriage broker. Those who can't are misfits, and shouldn't marry.

"I have known your plans all along. I'm sorry to interfere with them. But I may as well tell you right now you are doomed to failure."

Never in his life had any woman talked in this wise to Max Frakow. And Max, recovering his aplomb, did not propose to let such a challenge pass unanswered.

"I might as well tell you right now," he said huskily, "that in all my life I have never failed. And I don't propose to begin now. I recall, in the 'Third Reader' which was part of my early school equipment, a motto which I adopted. It was on page seventy-four of the reader, and it read: 'In the bright lexicon of youth there is no such word as fail.'"

"You bring me back to my school days," smiled Etta. "I refer you to Bradford's 'History of France,' which I read when I was in 8B. On page one hundred and sixty-six you will find a chapter headed 'Waterloo.'"

Then the waiter came with the check.

Julius Greenbaum stared intently at the calendar on his desk. A smug, joyous expression plastered itself over his expansive face. The calendar told him that in two days the six-month period which Max Krakow had allowed himself to work a miracle, would be over.

Several times within the past few months he had seen Max, and each time had sought news concerning developments. He found the *schatchen* wary about giving definite information. Max met all inquiries with the simple statement: "You know I never fail." The confident, assured manner in which he said this filled Greenbaum with a lulling sense of security. He was sure that it was all over but the orange blossoms.

Glancing up, he saw Morris Blotwin, president and general manager of the Elasto Corset Company, having a party all by himself over a generous order of *gefüllte* fish. Greenbaum walked over to Blotwin's table and inquired whether or not the fish was up to its usual high standard.

"Lovely!" exclaimed Blotwin.

"By the way," ventured Greenbaum, "you're a feller which has traveled a lot. What would you say was a good place for a man to go with his wife on a honeymoon?"

"Well, it all depends," replied Blotwin. "Let me think."

He lifted his head and closed his eyes. The postman came in and threw several letters on Greenbaum's desk. The restaurant proprietor went over to look at them. He opened the first letter, and a little slip of paper fell out. Slowly he deciphered the letter. It read:

DEAR JULIUS: You will recall that I promised you Miss Etta Levy would be a bride

within six months, and that you'd get an invitation to the wedding.

I am glad to inform you that I have made good. Miss Levy is to be married day after to-morrow, and you are hereby invited to the wedding, as per my promise.

Miss Levy, it turns out, has peculiar notions concerning matrimony. The only person available she would consent to make the happiest man in the world was your humble servant. In other words, she is to marry me.

I am sending you my check for a thousand dollars, despite the fact that the thousand I got from you was eaten up by the expenses of the past few months.

I have decided to quit the *schatchen* business. If you are still desirous of becoming a benedict, I heartily recommend my erstwhile competitor, Oscar Diamond. I am sure he can find you a bride. His telephone number is Canal 3697.

The wedding will be at the home of the bride's parent. Do come if you can. Yours truly, MAX KRAKOW.

Greenbaum stared at the letter. He heard his name called. It was Blotwin. He shuffled over to his table.

"I got it!" announced the corset manufacturer. "Niagara Falls! That's the best place to go for a honeymoon. Niagara Falls. That's where Max Krakow is going on his honeymoon, he told me yesterday. I gave him a month off."

"A month off?" questioned Greenbaum.

"Didn't you know he's coming to work for me? Sure. We made a deal yesterday. And I want to tell you, Julius, that boy ought to develop into a crackajack salesman. He made me pay him twice as much as I intended. Smart boy, Max Krakow."

"Yeah," mumbled Greenbaum, dazedly. "Smart boy. He never fails."

At the home of Mrs. Bertha Levy just about then, Max's second client was about getting over the bewilderment occasioned by the announcement of Max that Mrs. Levy was to annex a son-in-law who, on his return from a honeymoon at Niagara Falls, would embark in the corset business—wholesale. Etta had confirmed the announcement with a blushing nod of her undeniably attractive head.

"And now, mamma," concluded Max, handing the old lady a roll of bills, "here's the thousand dollars which you gave me for a fee. That makes two thousand it costs me so far to get married, but it's worth it."

"But you lived up to your agreement," protested the highly delighted Mrs. Levy. "You got Etta a husband."

"You will recall, mamma," said Max, "that I agreed to find Etta a man who is worthy of her. That's impossible. But I shall try to become worthy of her. I am no longer a dodo."

Julius Greenbaum called up on the telephone.

"Hello, Central!" he said. "Give me Canal 3697." He waited a moment, then spoke eagerly. "Is this you, Diamond? This is Greenbaum, Greenbaum's restaurant. Say, how'd you like to make yourself a thousand dollars? Eh? Don't get excited. Yeah, I'll be in all afternoon. What? Yeah, bring all your photographs with you. Good-by."

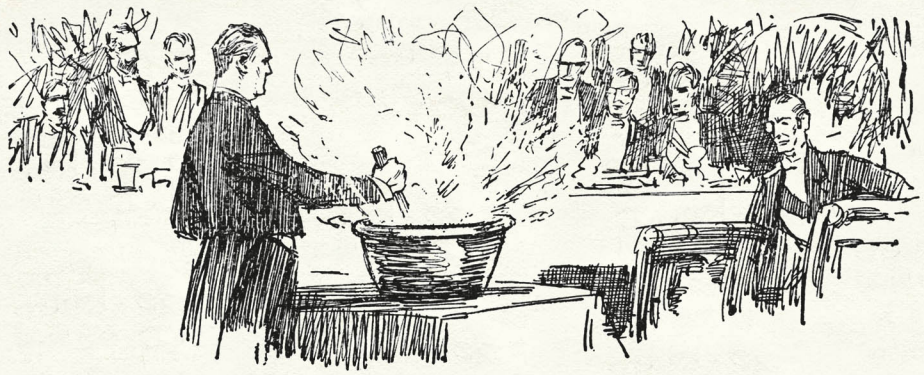
He hung up. A dreamy look crept into his eyes. A large smile spread over his ample, good-natured face.

QUALIFIED TO LECTURE

A GENTLEMAN who is now a Western congressman managed a Chautauqua circuit with headquarters in Nebraska in the summer of 1904 and engaged, as his oratorical star, the late "Marse Henry" Watterson of Louisville, Kentucky. Arriving at Kansas City, where he was to change cars, Marse Henry was persuaded by a group of congenial acquaintances to stay over all night and play poker with them.

It was a disastrous step. At daylight the next morning the silver-tongued colonel, who was to electrify Chautauqua audiences on the subject "Money and Morals," had lost his last sestertius to his fascinating friends. He was not, however, entirely destitute. He still had ideas. Sending for a telegraph blank, he wired the Chautauqua manager, collect, as follows:

"Met some friends last night in poker game, and regret to report this morning that I have no money and less morals. If you still need enlightenment, however, on those subjects, please wire railroad fare."



The Ambassador's Watch

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "M. Picard's Parrot," "Manlius, His Mark," Etc.

The Great Macumber averts an international cataclysm.

FOR the privilege represented in this eventual resurrection of notes made during a certain brief and fortuitous adventure of the Great Macumber's in the field of international diplomacy I must here make acknowledgment to a very superior and very new critic of the theater who shall be—as indeed in a manner of speaking he is—quite nameless.

This fastidious youth, a week or two since, discovered vaudeville; and when he served up the resulting roast Macumber in particular had been done to a rich golden brown. The pain which the hothouse sophisticate had experienced on learning the American public still cherished a fondness for such puerile entertainment as magic seemed to have been translated into bitter resentment against the officiating magician. The subheading chosen for an ironic dissection of our act was, "The Final Futility."

Having come upon the article while browsing over the periodical rack at the club, I carried it to the Rawley. But I brought no news for Macumber. A copy of the paper in my hand lay open on the table beside him. Upon it was a letter which I recognized with the same thrill with which I had first read it months before—a letter which I should have been supremely pleased to place, without comment, on the desk of the callow critic.

Macumber's magic futile? Here was an answer to that indictment from a great journalist and greater American, an eminent critic not merely of the theater but of world politics, who had written words which now flamed gratefully in my memory:

"How, except in this private appreciation, can I reward you? I do not know; you will not say. It will be one of the lasting regrets of my life that I may not proclaim publicly what a debt America and the cause of peace owe to you."

The Great One regarded me with a moody smile.

"I've been indulging myself, lad," said he, "by comparing two contrasting viewpoints of our more or less humble art."

Often in the weeks preceding I had urged Macumber to permit me to record in narrative form the incidents culminating in that dramatic evening in Washington, and as often I had been curtly hushed.

This moment somehow seemed infinitely more propitious. I was encouraged to make the suggestion again.

Macumber eyed me dourly and stroked his chin.

"Will my wishes never command your respect, lad?" he demanded after a little. "Must everything you know be told?" Then his glance left me and wandered meditatively from the written page to the printed one. He chuckled. "Well, it's no minor

police matter, remember. Be careful wi' the names!"

Since the attitude of the Great Macumber is what it is in regard to naming the high-placed personages concerned in the episode of the ambassador's watch, I am disposed to extend the courtesy of an alias also to that distinguished collector whose library was the starting point of the adventure.

Before the lapse of many paragraphs you who read may have another name for him, but I shall call the gentleman Aloysius Stebbins.

A collector of virtually all things collectible is Mr. Stebbins, an indefatigable hoarder of paintings, of porcelains, of tapestries, of arms and armor, of ancient coins and ancient tomes and of unaccountable other objects and items reckoned rare or beautiful or both, not for a moment excluding the much-sought formal engravings sponsored by the United States treasury department.

It has been said that by touching one of the buttons embedded in his desk, Aloysius Stebbins can summon to his side any man in New York City whom it pleases him to have there. That is perhaps an exaggeration, but it cannot be proved so by me. I know only that within five minutes after a smooth secretarial voice had inquired for Macumber, the Great One and I were speeding in a taxi toward the desk of redoubtable buttons.

For all his wealth and position and reputation for eccentricity, Mr. Stebbins received us in a manner distinctly orthodox. A humidor filled with long and slender cigars sat at his elbow, and he put it hospitably forward.

"My private importation. Rather good."

"I'd be the last man to doubt the quality," smiled the Great One. "My weakness in tobacco is for strength. You've no objection to a pipe?"

Mr. Stebbins hadn't—just then.

"I wished," said he, "to discuss an engagement with you."

"You could have chosen no better time. We are absolutely at liberty. It may be for an evening or for a season, as you will."

The connoisseur of many arts inclined his head to one side, so that his ruddy and patrician nose came to rest on a finger supporting it from nostril to bridge.

"I was not thinking of you as a magician," he corrected. "Haven't time for that sort of thing, you'll understand. Heard you were a really clever detective, though. What?"

Macumber frowned.

"I have never called myself a detective, so I may disclaim responsibility for what you have heard."

Aloysius Stebbins carefully deposited a long ash in the golden tray beside the humidor.

"Dammit! Believe Barnaby did say something about you being fussy in re——"

"Barnaby?" interjected the Great One. "I begin to comprehend, since the matter of Mrs. Barnaby's brooch comes to mind. You've lost something, Mr. Stebbins?"

"Why—ah—well, yes. It could be put that way."

"Something of value, I fancy?"

"Of the greatest value to me, and worth nothing to any one else in the world. Sleep's what I've lost. Over that damned Auger watch, and the fellow who thinks he has a claim on me because I bought it. I want you to find out what he's up to."

The financier's tone was crisp, assured. Macumber displayed a faint irritation.

"I thought," said he, "that the Bellingham National Detective Agency received a handsome annual retainer to protect your peace of mind. It's an extraordinarily efficient organization, Mr. Stebbins."

"So Bob Bellingham points out when he comes with a new contract. I've heard him say it a dozen times. But his agents lack imagination. That's something I'm told you have, Macumber. And a faculty for getting the truth out of people."

"I have heard some surprising truths at odd times. Naturally my magic affords me a certain mastery over the minds of the superstitious."

Mr. Stebbins nodded.

"That's your way, is it? I see where the association is between the magician and the—ah—investigator. Is that a word which may be used without offense? But putting all that aside, I think you'll be interested in the Auger watch. You're aware that one of my hobbies is the collection of watches?"

"You don't surprise me. In fact, Mr. Stebbins, I believe I should have little difficulty in restraining a start if you were to tell me you had your cellars filled with

Navajo blankets. Having for years been an assiduous collector of newspaper clippings, I am in sympathy with your passion for possession."

Aloysius Stebbins selected and trimmed a fresh cigar.

"It is about two weeks since that I bought the Auger watch. At the Lightman sale, you know. I wasn't present myself, but a few odds and ends of interest were picked up for me by a commissioner."

"And the interest in this watch?"

"Merely that though old it is a remarkably accurate timekeeper. Case and works were made entirely by hand in a day when the craftsman was honored. Old Hans Auger—never heard of him, I suppose?—gave five years of his life to the task."

From a drawer of the desk Aloysius Stebbins produced a small case of dull-black wood, and from the case took a hexagon of gold surprisingly like those odd-shaped gift watches which have been shown so often in colors in the magazine-advertising sections of recent years.

"Undoubtedly the world's first 'thin model,'" Stebbins remarked. "Hans Auger had modern ideas, you see, though he died more than a century ago. A supreme craftsman, Macumber. Even the ornamental engraving was the work of his own hand. He had a decade, no more, between his graduation from his long and patient apprenticeship and the day when age robbed his hand of its steadiness. This watch and another like it comprised the entire product of the years. Does such a man live to-day?

"What Auger may have got for the watch whose case held so much of his life I can't say. Probably I paid more than he received, and the cost to me was only a trifle more than a thousand dollars.

"I can't say I was unduly enraptured by having become the owner of the Auger watch. In my collection I have a dozen others of infinitely greater value and interest, and I should have forgotten the purchase had it not been for several calls on the telephone.

"The first call came three days ago, when I was at the office downtown. My secretary didn't let it come through. Later he told me there had been a man on the phone who insisted on talking to me about the Auger watch. The fellow had talked mysteriously, and Turnbull had set him down for one more crank.

"That evening the man called again. I was here in my library, and picked up the receiver myself.

"'This Mr. Stebbins?' asked a whining sort of voice. 'Well, I'm the party that did the work on your watch.'

"Not only was I annoyed at being disturbed in this fashion in my home, but I could not recall having sent a watch for repairs for many months. The man interrupted my remonstrance.

"'It's that eight-sided watch, I mean,' he said. 'You know about it, all right. I want to see you and talk things over. Mum's the word until then.'

"I cut the fellow off abruptly at that. Turnbull had been right; he was a crank.

"But a persistent crank. He was on the wire again in an hour or so, and still again in the morning. By that time I had decided on a course of action.

"'Very well,' I said. 'I'm not going downtown to-day. You may come to the house at two this afternoon. I will see you then.'

"Promptly at two the man showed up. In the meantime I had communicated with the Bellingham agency, and several operatives had been sent over. One of them borrowed my butler's livery, and while assisting the visitor out of his overcoat made certain that he carried no concealed weapon. The man was then permitted to come to me in the library. That screen yonder had been moved a little closer to my desk, and another of Bellingham's detectives crouched behind it.

"The caller introduced himself as he had over the telephone. 'I'm the party that did the work on your watch.' He appeared to think he'd said enough in that.

"I subjected the man to a careful scrutiny before I spoke. He was tall and very pale and inconspicuously, rather neatly dressed. His eyes were cool, and their expression seemed more impudent than fanatic. In particular I noticed his hands. They might have been the hands of a watchmaker. The fingers were long, slender, tapering, nervous.

"'I've had no work done on any watch,' I told him. 'There must be a mistake.'

"'Oh, no, there isn't,' said he, and glanced meaningly toward the screen. 'I came to talk about keeping a secret. Didn't think you'd want to have anybody listening in.'

" 'I'm sure,' I said, drawing him along, 'that you and I haven't any secret in common.' I pointedly ignored the fact that he still looked speculatively toward the hiding place of the detective. 'What do you think it is?'

" 'In the circumstances,' he replied amiably, 'I wouldn't dream of mentioning it. But what I want to say, Mr. Stebbins, is that I'm a poor man. Probably I don't need to tell you that there aren't a half dozen others in the country who could have done the job on the watch any better; and you can take it from me that not a soul this side of Amsterdam could have put it through in such a rush.

" 'You wanted skill, and you got it. You wanted speed, and you got it. But you weren't man enough to let me know who I was working for, were you? No!

" 'I'm frank to say that if I'd known the money that paid me was coming from Aloysius Stebbins I'd have wanted more of it. That would have been no more than fair. You've got plenty. But you're cheap. That's the trouble with all you millionaires.

" 'But it happens I've found out who's why. Just by accident it was, if you want to know how. You shouldn't have let them print the picture of that watch in the Sunday paper. Know it? How could I miss it? Is there another just like it?

" 'So now, Mr. Stebbins, I'm telling you to your face that you didn't pay me enough for my work. And I'm going to leave it to your good judgment to square up.' "

The owner of the embarrassing watch broke off with a little choking cough.

"Do have a cigar, Macumber," he urged. "I'm sure you've had the best out of that pipe load. Well, I think I've given you the substance of my conversation with the mysterious caller. No, I didn't get the slightest inkling of what repairs had been made on the watch—for that the fellow had made some repairs on some watch I couldn't doubt. He left after I'd assured him once more that there was a mistake somewhere. Said something about giving me time to think it over, and bowed himself out as coolly as he'd bowed himself in. Never appeared to concede there was a possibility he didn't have the upper hand of me."

Macumber picked up the hexagon watch and opened its case at front and back.

"It's a fact, is it, that a picture of the watch has been published?"

"Yes; in one of the rotogravure sections of last Sunday. The *Sphere's*, I believe. It was on Monday the series of telephone calls began."

"Perhaps the fellow told the truth in that respect."

"But what repairs involving a *secret* could be made on a watch, Macumber? The word kept recurring in the man's talk, and I swear he seemed sane enough."

"Did he mention repairs, though? Weren't his allusions to 'the work' and 'the job?' Might there not be a subtle distinction there? Is it possible our friend really built a secret compartment within the case of a watch resembling this?"

"What the devil would I want to hide in a watch?"

The Great One shrugged, and proceeded smoothly:

"You? Not a thing which I can imagine. But it's another watch we should have in mind, remember. Possibly a watch intended for the use of a diamond smuggler. At any rate you may bank upon it that there's a criminal connection existing in the matter, though it be only in the brain of your blackmailing mechanic."

Aloysius Stebbins nodded soberly.

"You've put your finger on it, Macumber. There is something criminal in the atmosphere of the whole business. The man who came here was a criminal—and not merely one in the sense that he attempted an extortion.

"I had him followed, of course. The place in which he found cover was a notorious rendezvous of criminals on the edge of the white-light district. There he managed to elude Bellingham's man. Saw he was being trailed, and gave us the slip. But the shadow had discovered a name for him before that. 'Skeets' Frost. That mean anything to you?"

The Great One sat erect.

"I don't know the man, but I've heard the name. Both in the line of watches and the line of blackmail Mr. Frost would seem to have been out of his element. He's a counterfeiter, Mr. Stebbins. One of the most gifted scoundrels who ever lived, I've been told. His last exploit, so far as my recollection serves, was in a lucrative new field thrown open during the late war. Liberty Bonds. Frost turned out a personal series of which Uncle Sam himself might have been proud. I thought he was still

in Atlanta paying the penalty of his patrioteering."

"I can set you straight on that," said Stebbins. "The man was released three weeks ago. Bellingham found out for me—and that's all he has found out."

"Wouldn't it be simple for Bellingham to find Frost and have a frank talk with him?"

"The frank talk would be simple. But finding him is something else. He's keeping out of sight, and he means mischief. I'm not through with him. He made that plain in a note which I received to-day. Read this, please."

Macumber unfolded the sheet of cheap paper which Stebbins had handed to him, and leaning forward I read the penciled message with him:

DEAR SIR: You tried to gang me, but I'm not worrying about that. Am where all the money you got won't find me unless it comes the right way.

Will not talk terms now. Must think it over, too. You will hear from me again.

If you do not want me to tell what I know about the watch, you will listen good and be right. I have it on you, and you know it. Laugh that off.

This strange and ambiguous communication, written in a fine, clean script, bore no signature.

The Great One replaced the note on the desk and took up the watch again.

"There are thousands of watches in the world, Mr. Stebbins," said he, "which to the casual eye would appear duplicates of this one of yours. But I have a feeling that Frost's is an exact eye. Did you not say that Hans Auger made two watches like this?"

"So I've been informed."

"They were precisely similar?"

"To the last line of engraving, I've been told."

"Do you know what's become of the other watch?"

"I can't tell you. I don't believe it ever was brought to this country. Surely you don't think——"

"I think nothing, Mr. Stebbins. I am merely permitting reason to follow the line of least resistance. From whom did you get the history of the Auger watches?"

"From Louis Farbacher. He represented me at the Lightman sale."

Macumber emptied his pipe into his palm, and deposited a pile of plebeian black ash in the tray that held the gray ashes of Aloysius Stebbins' perfectos.

"It's curiosity rather than alarm that's troubling you, Mr. Stebbins," he announced flatly after a moment of silence. "You want to know what Frost has on his mind, and you don't want to wait for him to tell you. That's it, eh? Bellingham you have looking for the man—and a better job for him than for me. I wish him the joy of it. For my own part I——"

For the last several minutes it had seemed to me that the Great One was losing favor in the eyes of Aloysius Stebbins.

"Well," demanded the millionaire, and his tone was testy, "what do *you* purpose doing?"

"I," replied Macumber serenely, "will look for the watch."

II.

The Great One sent me on to the Rawley alone, and I had been there a couple of hours when he turned up at last. He was in a high good humor.

"Mr. Skeets Frost is to be congratulated on the keenness of his eyes, lad," said he. "And I, personally, will accept compliments on the shrewdness of a certain conjecture. The second Auger watch, the twin to Aloysius Stebbins', is not only in these United States but within a very short journey of New York. Within a few hours I could put my hand—well, it may be that's saying too much. Perhaps I couldn't, for all the lightness of my fingers. 'Twill be well guarded, I don't doubt. By the way, has there been a telephone call for me?"

"Some one rang up a few minutes ago, but left no name."

"A message?"

"I was to tell you that Field had been located. He is in New York, and will drop in on you this evening."

Macumber's eyes lighted.

"That's fine news!" he exclaimed. "You remember Field, lad. Of course you do. That dull-looking chap who used to be with the military intelligence during the war—and had more brains, as I'm sure I must have told you, than any dozen of the crowd he was working with, chiefs included."

Years had passed since our last meeting, but immediately I placed the man to whom the Great One referred.

"Captain Ned Field, wasn't it? Still with the bureau, isn't he?"

"No; he's with the United States secret service now. Used to be a C. P. A., but after his taste of excitement—— Hello, there's the phone again! Yes? Macumber talking. By glory, Field, you're quick on the trigger. Come up, captain, come up!"

A minute or two afterward a pair of vacuous china-blue eyes were peering in at us from the corridor.

"Oh, you're not alone, Macumber? I'm afraid I intrude. No, it's that magic friend of yours, isn't it? Dare say he won't mind if I step in for a bit of a chat."

And into our living room straggled the lank, unmilitary figure of Captain Edwin Field, U. S. A., retired. With meticulous care for the preservation of the sharp creases of his bell-bottomed trousers our visitor seated himself and then, after a prefatory stroking of his drooping blond mustache, beamed brightly upon the Great One.

"Lovely weather, isn't it?" he asked. "Or haven't you been running about in it?"

"I have been," replied Macumber seriously. "What brought you to town, captain?"

"Oh, quite a bagful of errands. With this and that and the other I've been as busy as——" The amazing ex-soldier yawned. "You finish the simile, won't you, Macumber? I'm perfectly horrible at that sort of thing, you know."

My smile wasn't answered by the Great One.

"If you were to tell me what some of the errands were, Ned," said he, "I might be able to help out."

"Ripping of you. Perfectly splendid," murmured the captain, and once more he fell to fondling his mustache while the blue eyes sought the ceiling. "Odd flight that led 'em to call this little enterprise of ours a secret service when one naturally has so many friends. Solemn, what?"

"Precious!" grinned Macumber. "But I'm terrifically in earnest, man."

"I fancied you might be. Never phone Washington myself until after eight. Dare say you know when the reduced evening rates go on as well as I. What's on your mind?"

"Can't say. At any rate I won't—until I've heard what I want to hear from you."

The secret-service man sighed.

"You always would have your way, Macumber. It wouldn't be that mess in the labor department you have a line on, would it? Or, at a venture, the Senator Sully case?"

The Great One shook his head.

"I'm quite sure not. Wouldn't even have you bother to tell me what you're talking about. It will be something with an international aspect I'd have you tell me about."

"That's lots better fun!" exclaimed the captain. "Between you and me, I've been absolutely disgusted with home politics since the secretary of—oh, well, you'll be reading about that in the newspapers soon enough. Was it about the shipment of machine guns to Corrustro you were thinking, perhaps? That's been nipped, Macumber, My word on it.

"Affairs abroad? Getting worse and worse. Things are set for another flare up not a thousand miles from where the last one started. And at this minute—really, Macumber, I'll have to ask you not to repeat a word—it's the United States secret service that's standing in the breach. If we fail, we'll see the world in flame again. Inevitably America will be drawn in. No nation—including the Scandinavian, Macumber—will be able to maintain neutrality. That's the outlook.

"What happens depends on what becomes of the Michaels formula. Never heard of it? Damnedest gas ever thought up. Nothing used in the World War approached it. Just mild perfumes in comparison. Can't explain exactly what it does; I'm stupid about such things. But from what I've been told around the war department, it's a jolly good thing John Michaels is an American. Frightful formula to get into the wrong hands, you know. Am I interesting you, Macumber?"

The Great One nodded absently.

"You're describing a situation that ought to interest any one who's not a jingo. Go ahead. What about this Michaels formula, Ned?"

"It's been stolen."

"By whom?"

"Don't know. Little enough good it would do us if we did. Plain safe-blowing job. Congress wouldn't listen to Michaels. Told war-department experts to be on their way. Didn't even provide protection for Michaels. He had the formula in a safe I'd guarantee to open myself with a button hook. Page after page of chemists' lingo

that only an expert could make head or tail of.

"Some one came and got it. Then a loud voice wanted to know what the hell the secret service meant by letting the gas formula get away. That, of course, was Congress.

"We're not letting the formula get any farther away than we can help. We can't round it up and put it back in the old safe, but we are pretty sure we can keep it from getting out of the country. It means keeping on our toes, watching a thousand people, searching ten thousand trunks and bags. It means picking pockets, smashing locks, playing the low-down generally.

"We've got to do it, Macumber. Got to, or civilization goes to hell and stays there. We've been holding the line for a month now. Best proof we've succeeded is that there hasn't been an explosion overseas. Whoever has the formula knows that the diplomatic pouch hasn't been made that will hold it. They're scheming a way, biding their time.

"And time's a vital element, I can tell you. A month from now, as Washington sees it, the Michaels secret may be everybody's secret and nobody the worse. The bickering nations are being driven together by economic pressure. The meeting to be held on the fourth of next month is sure to result in an ironclad agreement establishing a new world entente, guaranteeing a century of peace—if nothing occurs between now and then to upset the program.

"So, four weeks more and we can rest secure."

Captain Edwin Field brought himself up short. Curtains of innocence dropped once more over his eyes, and he languidly tapped a monogrammed cigarette against a pink and gleaming thumb nail.

"That," said he, "is the international status and the world outlook as seen by one professionally interested in the theft of the Michaels formula. Of course, I may exaggerate."

"I've not known you to show a weakness for exaggeration, Ned," said Macumber softly, and then he made what was to me a most disappointing proposal.

"Stopping at the St. Swithin, are you, captain? 'Tis lovely weather, as recently you remarked, and I'm for strolling over with you. We can finish our chat on the way."

III.

What other matters may have been taken up in the further conversation of Macumber and Captain Edwin Field the Great One did not offer to tell me on his belated return to the Rawley. Neither would he, in the next couple of days, respond to attempts to open a discussion on the subject of watches.

On the second night subsequent to that of Field's visit my speculations came to an abrupt end. A gala engagement had come suddenly into prospect. Our invitation to appear came in a telegram which Macumber triumphantly exhibited to me. I reproduce it from the treasured original:

ALEXANDER MACUMBER, Hotel Rawley, New York City.

Can you entertain private dinner party Corps Club Washington next Tuesday nine p. m. in honor Baron Deuth? The president, secretary of state and number diplomatic corps will be present, but occasion informal. Please wire me immediately at New Willard. LATIMER.

"The president!" I gasped, when I had read the wire.

"The President of the United States, no less," corroborated the Great One gravely. "I'll not say I haven't been angling for the engagement."

"And who the deuce, may I ask, is this Latimer?"

"Our second assistant secretary of state. I met him not long ago through a mutual friend."

"And Baron Deuth?"

"The ambassador of a sovereign and friendly nation. He is being transferred from Washington, as you might have observed if you read more of the news than the scare heads contain. The party at the Corps Club is Washington's informal farewell to him. It's to be followed by a big public dinner—but with that we have no concern."

"I'm to be with you?"

"I see no reason why you shouldn't be, lad. In fact, I'd be inclined to make a point of it. I'll wire Latimer that I must bring my assistant."

So it came about that when the Great Macumber arrived in Washington on the Tuesday evening following, I was at his side lugging the case which held the simple apparatus needed for the illusions making up our program. Our train had been late, and the tall and distinguished gentleman

who greeted us as we entered the Corps Club was in a noticeable flurry.

"By gad!" he ejaculated. "I was beginning to fear there'd been a slip."

"And so," said Macumber, "was I. There was a devil of a delay just this side of Philadelphia. I was sorry then I hadn't played safe and taken an earlier train."

"Will you need a great deal of time for your preparations?" asked the other anxiously.

Macumber smiled.

"Allow me ten minutes, Mr. Latimer," he said. "That will be plenty."

And precisely ten minutes afterward, while the Great One stood at a mirror in an adjoining room straightening his hastily knotted dress tie, I carried his black-draped conjurer's table into the private dining hall where our audience waited.

The tables had been cleared, the chairs drawn back and grouped at the end of the long room opposite to that at which I made my entrance. The same little ironic ripple of applause which I had heard so often in the past greeted me, and immediately I was at my ease. It swept away an incipient attack of stage fright. This audience, though it included the chief executive of the greatest of nations and the titled diplomatic representatives of a dozen others, was like a thousand before which I had appeared.

Nor was Macumber, who entered in my wake, in the smallest degree flustered. As calmly as if the company were an ordinary one he proceeded, under cover of the nonsensical patter with which it is his habit to introduce his magic, to take its measure.

I stood with folded arms and listened. That was to be my chief part, to listen and to watch. Macumber's magic, he had indicated, would be solo magic. My only real duty would be to bring to him, at his command, a mortar and pestle which was to figure in some illusion with which I was not familiar. Aside from that, I was as much the spectator as any other present.

Tricks with cards and with coins followed rapidly one after the other, each a more astonishing feat of legerdemain than its predecessor, until more than a half hour had elapsed. It was not the sort of program to enthuse the average audience, which favors the more spectacular, purely mechanical illusions. But Macumber had made no mistake in assuring me, as often he had, that audiences of superior intelligence enjoy most that fundamental art of the magician, sleight of hand.

My eyes dwelt chiefly on the president. He was enjoying himself hugely. In pictures which I had seen he had seemed austere. Now his was the hilarity of a boy at a circus. I heard him remark to the bearded man at his side, in whom I had recognized the eminent Mr. Justice Tapley, that magic had been his hobby as a youngster.

Only in one way did the Great One display any trace of nervousness. He seemed to fear his exhibition was stretching to too great length. Before he produced the illusion of the "Enchanted Fishbowl," he asked the time.

"And now, gentlemen," he announced, when water and fish had vanished from the bowl, "I come to my last demonstration, for the evening is well advanced.

"In order that I shall not be accused of practicing a deception, I am going to ask one of you to be kind enough to lend me his watch."

Macumber had won over his crowd. No sooner had the request been made than a half dozen watches were offered. One of them, I saw, was the president's.

The Great One's face showed disappointment.

"No," he demurred, "I don't see exactly the watch I want. They're all too much alike. I'd prefer one that's distinctive in some way—one that you all will readily recognize. Come, please. There's such a watch here, I know. I saw it a few minutes ago when I asked what time it was."

There was a moment of silence, during which our score of spectators looked at one another doubtfully.

"The watch I want is here," Macumber repeated. "It was yours, I think, Baron Deuth. Yes; I'm quite sure of it. A hexagon shape, isn't it?"

The guest of the evening, a stout man with a trim Vandyke, shook his head.

"If you please," he said, "find another. This watch is very dear to me. It is the parting gift of former countrymen of mine who have become Americans."

"But it will be safe," persisted the Great One. "I guarantee that. No other watch will serve so well, your excellency."

A flush appeared under the baron's plump cheeks.

"I would rather——" he began. His eyes

traveled around a circle of smiles. They came at last to rest on those of the president, who leaned forward and whispered something. Then Baron Deuth smiled too, uncomfortably. "If I must," he said. "But I charge you to exercise the greatest caution, sir. The watch, as I have said, is—a-a-a-h! See! Already it is ruined!"

Once again the Great Macumber had suffered from nerves. The hexagon watch of Baron Deuth had slipped from his fingers at the instant it was reluctantly surrendered to him, and had crashed to the floor.

Macumber, murmuring a panicky apology, picked it up and held it to his ear.

"It has stopped, your excellency!" he lamented. "Can you ever forgive me for my clumsiness?"

The face of Baron Deuth bore anything but a forgiving look as he stretched out a hand.

"I will take the watch, please—or what remains of it," he said sternly. "This is outrageous!"

Looking about, distressed, I read small sympathy for the unhappy Macumber. The smiles had disappeared.

But the Great One seemed not to notice the change in the atmosphere. He held on to the baron's watch.

"The least I can do is to try to repair it, your excellency," he said. "If you'll give me just a minute. Lad, the mortar yonder, if you please!"

The thing was as high as my knees, and heavy as lead. It taxed my strength to lift it to the Great One's table, and as I followed orders I felt inimical eyes upon me.

"No! It is enough! Give me back the watch!" cried Baron Deuth, but as he spoke Macumber was pounding away with the pestle and from the bottom of the mortar came a metallic grinding and rending that set my teeth on edge.

"The man's mad!" I heard some one whisper.

I was inclined to agree. Macumber had drawn a handful of smashed cogs and broken wheels from the mortar.

"Look, Baron Deuth!" he called. "The repairs are well under way."

A groan answered him.

"Stop! Give me what is left! Stop, I say!"

Again the pestle was pounding. My heart was pounding with it. Never had I known the Great One to run amuck with magic in any such manner as this.

In the depths of the mortar there was a small explosion. A pungent smoke filled the room. As a draft swirled the blue folds from him I beheld Macumber in an attitude of astonishment, peering with hands upraised into the mortar.

Our company, now beginning to realize that the honored guest was being made the victim of some sort of hoax, surrounded the mystic table.

"Most extraordinary!" exclaimed Mr. Justice Tapley. "Nothing seems to be left of Deuth's watch but——"

"A nugget of gold," said the Great One "That's what we now have in my mortar. It is as it should be. The first big step in repairing the damage I have done has been successfully accomplished. Do you see, Baron Deuth? Step aside, gentlemen, if you please. After all, it is his excellency who is chiefly concerned in this experiment."

The bearded baron glanced into the mortar and then glared at Macumber.

"Enough!" he roared. "This has gone too far. I have no more patience for your mummeries. If this is not my watch, I call upon you to produce it. Gentlemen, I appeal——"

The Great One had gripped his pestle once more, and there had been another explosion.

As before, Macumber leaned over the mortar. Now he smiled.

"The nugget has vanished," he said, "and our interesting experiment is finished. I thank you all for the close attention which you have given to me. It has been an inspiration."

"My watch!" cried Baron Deuth.

The Great One's smile widened.

"Look in your pocket, excellency!" he said softly.

The baron's glare became a stare. His fingers moved slowly toward his watch pocket. They found a fob which I knew had not hung there a minute since, the same fob which had been attached to the hexagon watch when it was delivered to Macumber.

Baron Deuth tugged at the fob. A look of bewilderment overspread his face.

"Your watch, excellency?" inquired the Great One solicitously.

The baron breathed deeply, and the

breath escaped in a little gasp of gratification and relief.

"Yes," he said. "It is unbelievable. My watch!"

And he, too, smiled.

Four eminent citizens of America remained behind in the hall where Baron Deuth had been both honored and amazed after the other guests of the evening had departed. If I do not give them names the reader, I know, will understand my reason. A stern censor is the Great Macumber.

"Well, Macumber," one of the four spoke up brusquely, "did you get any corroboration of your suspicions while you had Deuth's watch?"

"I had no chance," confessed the Great One.

"Then all this has been——"

Macumber lifted a protesting hand.

"Please! Of course I still have the watch. The one which the baron carried away is the property of Mr. Aloysius Stebbins of New York—although I fancy it will be many a day before his excellency knows the difference."

"The baron's watch——"

"Is here! Examine it, if you will."

"I see nothing unusual about it."

"The unusual thing is scarcely to be seen."

Macumber lowered his voice, and asked a question. The man who had been spokesman for the group of lingering diners appeared startled.

"You wouldn't suppose I'd be carrying such a thing about with me?"

"Hardly," smiled Macumber. "But one might be easily obtained."

"Doctor March!" suggested one of the other diners. "He lives only a few squares away. Ring him up."

The suggestion was a happy one. Within a quarter hour Macumber was inspecting the watch of Baron Deuth in literally microscopic detail.

His eyes were dancing as he straightened and faced the rest of us.

"Gentlemen," said he, "the engraver's is truly the most remarkable of the arts. The Lord's Prayer, as we all should know, has been engraved on the head of a pin. Now behold the Michaels formula engraved obscurely amidst the chasings of an ambassador's watch!"

We were en route to New York before I asked the question.

"What," I asked, "about the watch you smashed?"

My traveling companion yawned.

"It amounted to nothing."

"But whose was it?"

"My own. A product of our famed American horologers, the Messrs. Ingersoll!" said the Great Macumber.

The Great Macumber has a Christmas adventure in the next issue.

HEARTY AGREEMENT

DOCTOR THOMPSON FRAZER of Asheville, North Carolina, famous as the best amateur pianist in the South, is also noted for the forthright and clean-cut emphasis of his speech. There is in it a note of positive freshness and cordiality that invariably impresses his hearer.

There is also in Asheville a man who megaphones to a more or less indifferent world the information that he is self-made, successful and proud of it. He shanghaied Frazer one afternoon and drove him out to a suburb where a typical "self-made" person's residence reared its proud and tessellated front to the heavens.

After a prolonged dissertation on the merits, beauties and cost of the outside of the mansion, the owner led the reluctant physician inside, discoursing meanwhile on some of the outstanding achievements of the self-made career. Propelling Frazer through the ornately overfurnished library and drawing-rooms, he finally lost all shreds of his pretense of control and inquired urgently:

"Honestly, doctor, don't you think I deserve a lot of credit for all this?"

"Yes," replied Frazer in that hearty, clear-cut enunciation of his; "and you seem to have got it."

A Chat With You

THE next issue of the magazine comes out on the twentieth and is the Christmas number. It embodies, as well as we are able to contrive it, our conception of what is known as the Christmas spirit.

Christmas means different things to different people. To Charles Dickens who knew the privations of stark poverty as a child it meant a lot of eating and drinking mingled with kindly feeling. To some ascetic who contracted dyspepsia from overfeeding in his youth it might come as a season of fasting and prayer. To most women that we know it means an aggravating period of frenzied shopping, winding up with an orgy of tying up innumerable gifts in cheerful wrappings. To the floorwalker in a department store it must seem something like a nightmare. To the manufacturer of Christmas cards it doubtless presents itself as one of the noblest of human institutions. We saw a sign in a window not long ago in which some zealot was strongly urging the formation of a society to do away with the belief among children in Santa Claus. That was his reaction to the Christmas spirit. There is a versatility about Christmas. It can be all things to all men.

* * * *

THE celebration of the holiday about the twenty-fifth of December is much older than Christianity. There are two schools of thought in regard to its origin and many learned and acrimonious things have been written on both sides. One school believes it to be of Teutonic origin. The ancient Nordics lived in a cold climate and did not get nearly as much sunshine as they wanted. So when the winter solstice was passed and the days began to get longer and the sun brighter, they celebrated the occasion by burning yule logs, drinking buckets of ale, eating more than was good for them and singing themselves hoarse.

The other school of thought claims that the Christmas holiday was handed down to us from the ancient Romans. The really ancient Romans of the republic, not the decadent ones of the empire, were a dour, hard-boiled lot. They wore leather shirts with brass trimmings. Inured to war and hardship, to a meager diet and arduous exertions they held themselves in a rigid discipline. They had one great holiday. This holiday was to commemorate the golden age of Saturn, the long-ago, far-off time when nobody had to work and every one was happy. The holiday in honor of Saturn came just about our Christmas time. Then for a few days the ancient Roman relaxed. Everything was wide open, everything was free. The pleb could joke on equal terms with the patrician, the slave whose master had lashed him cruelly but a few days before was now for a blessed time on equal terms with the master. Those hard and rigid faces under the brass hats of the legionaires relaxed into unaccustomed smiles. The constant wrangle in the senate was stilled. It was a poor man indeed who did not get a drink of Massilian wine and something better than usual to eat. Great Rome, Rome of the masons and builders,

the toilers in brass and stone, Rome of the indefatigable road makers, Rome of the victorious legions stopped fighting and working, and prayed. They gave each other gifts and acted, after their kind, much as we do at Christmas. They called this celebration the Saturnalia. The word has acquired a less pleasant significance with the passing years but originally it meant an innocent, a charming, even a religious festivity.

* * * *

THE fact that the Founder of that faith which most of us, in some form or other, profess, should have entered the world at just this season, is one of those inexplicable coincidences which seem to point to a design, an art, a symbolism, a hidden and mysterious meaning in the long drama of human affairs.

* * * *

ALWAYS, it seems, wherever people of our race have lived this time of year has meant a mitigation of the hardness and asperity of life and a return to the ways of peace and kindliness. *Hamlet* says:

Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy tales, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

Hamlet does not put this out as his own opinion. "They say" is the phrase that he employs. And they had been saying it for hundreds of years before Shakespeare first saw the morning break at Stratford.

* * * *

NO matter where it came from, it is ours now. It is part of our culture and our nature. The influence of the Founder of Christianity has enriched it with a deeper and tenderer meaning, a finer radiance. We need it. For our own part we need Santa Claus and the reindeer and the little gift-bearing trees that blossom out in flowers of fire in the midst of winter. There is no reason about it. It is entirely an affair of the heart, and sometimes the heart is wiser than the head.

* * * *

CHRISTMAS is best spent with old friends and we are fortunate this year to be able to spend it so. We have with us, for the day, Francis Lynde, who brings as his contribution a complete book-length Christmas novel. He goes to the head of the table. Then there is A. M. Chisholm, just as old and just as good a friend, who brings with him the Christmas flavor of the Canadian Northwest. There is Thomas McMorrow, who shows the charm of Christmas in New York. There is Calvin Johnston with a railroad man's tale of Christmas, there is Ralph Paine with the tang of the sea breeze in his navy story. There are Montanye, Spearman and a lot of others. But why should we go further? Did we ever fall down on a Christmas number yet? You know the answer.

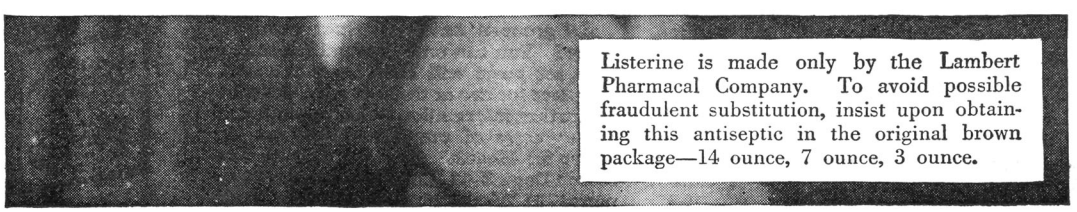
Don't look wistfully at winter pleasures

DOES sore throat throw you out of step with winter sports? Don't let it. There's no need of looking longingly at out-door pleasures this time of year because sore throat locks the door.

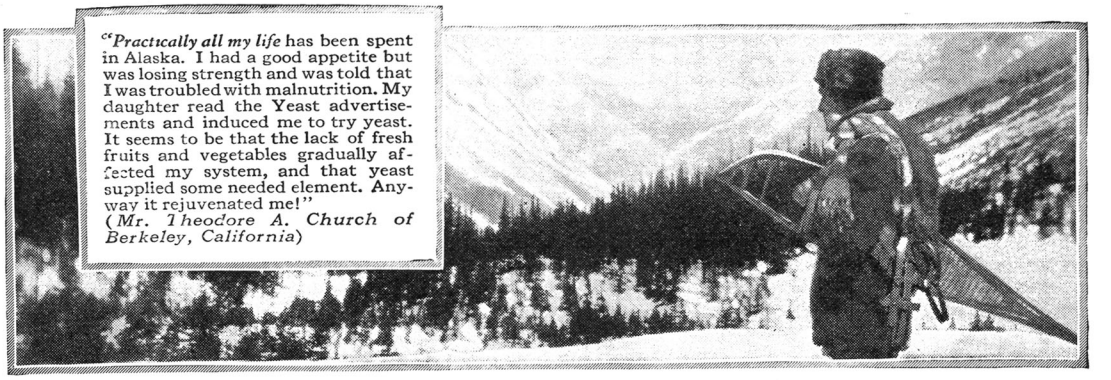
Guard against this trouble by taking the simple precaution of using Listerine systematically as a preventive for throat irritations and the more serious ills that so often follow.

When you feel that first "dry hitch" on swallowing, gargle with Listerine, the safe antiseptic. Don't let sore throat stand in your way just when you want to feel your best for business or pleasure.

Have Listerine handy always in your bathroom. It's the ideal, safe antiseptic. Its dozens of different uses are fully described on the circular that comes around every bottle.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*



Listerine is made only by the Lambert Pharmacal Company. To avoid possible fraudulent substitution, insist upon obtaining this antiseptic in the original brown package—14 ounce, 7 ounce, 3 ounce.



"Practically all my life has been spent in Alaska. I had a good appetite but was losing strength and was told that I was troubled with malnutrition. My daughter read the Yeast advertisements and induced me to try yeast. It seems to be that the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables gradually affected my system, and that yeast supplied some needed element. Anyway it rejuvenated me!"
(Mr. Theodore A. Church of Berkeley, California)

Incredibly simple! yet -
thousands are finding their health again in just this way

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast.

There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation — or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach and general health are affected — this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results. Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work — invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. Health is yours once more.

"I am a regular walking, talking advertisement for Fleischmann's Yeast. All my life I have been practically an invalid, due to constipation. When Fleischmann's Yeast was recommended to me, I ate three cakes a day. And after six weeks' treatment was cured.

"The cure has been permanent. I don't think there is a greater example than myself of what Fleischmann's Yeast can do for one, suffering as I was for *37 years with chronic constipation* and all the ills that follow."
(Mrs. W. C. Matthews of New Orleans, La.)

"Being a physician, I realized that I had Chronic Gastritis. After eating, I always experienced a feeling of distress and depression, which led to pain. When Yeast was suggested, it seemed to hold no prospect of final restoration to health, but good logic prompted me to take it. I began by eating one cake of Fleischmann's Yeast after each meal. I triumphed: for, in two months my sufferings ended, and since then I have felt no pain or discomfort."
(Capt. Joseph Finberg, Medical Corps, Chicago)

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation. Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain. Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tinfoil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form.

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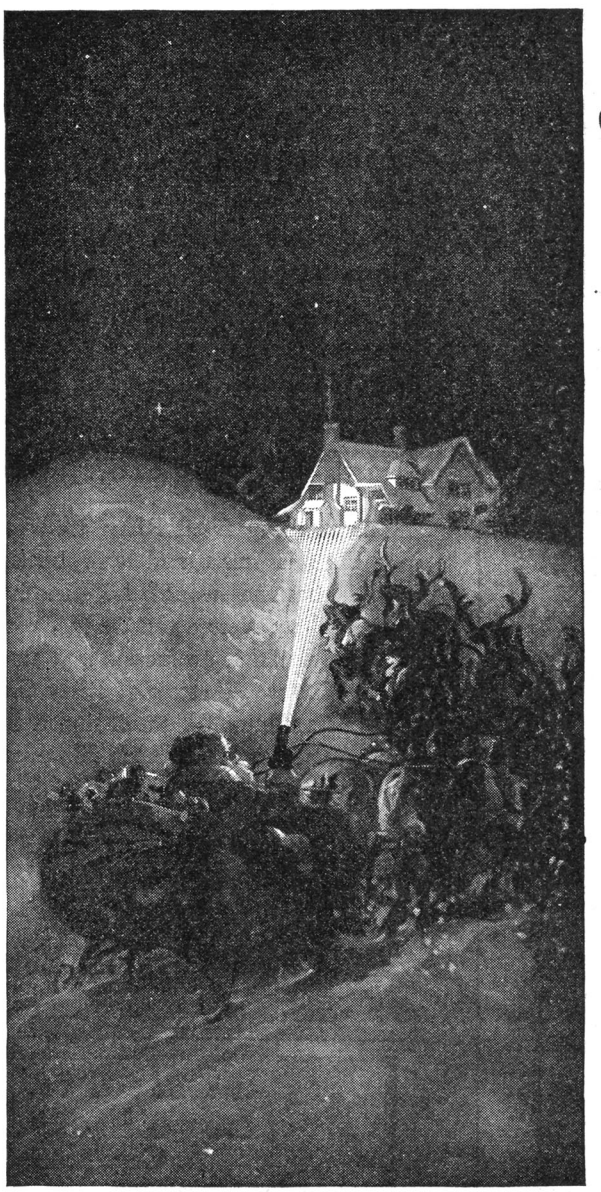

No. 2671
Eveready 2-cell Focusing Spotlight with the 200-foot range.

* *

Eveready Unit Cells fit and improve all makes of flashlights. They insure brighter light and longer battery life.

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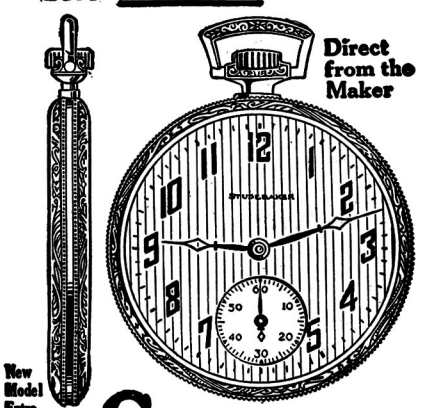

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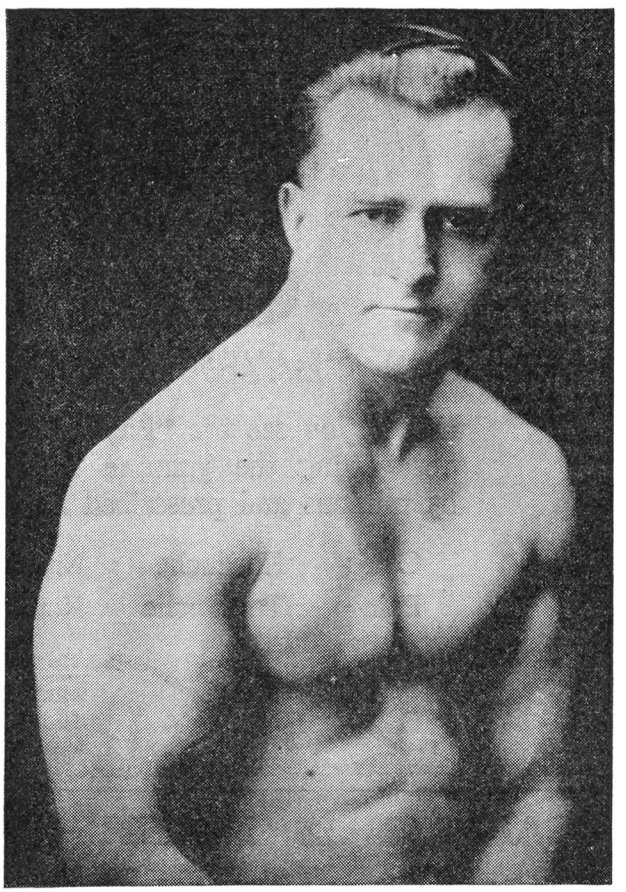

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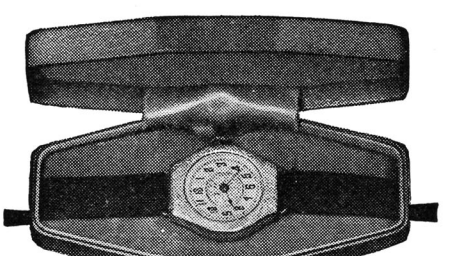

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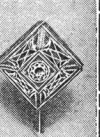

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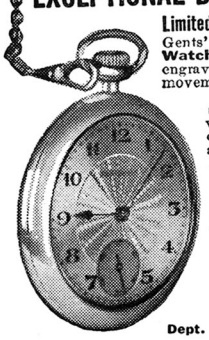

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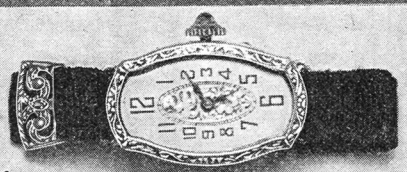

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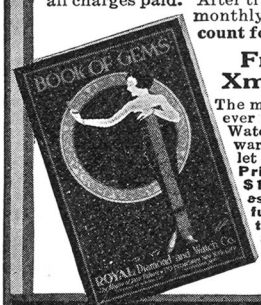

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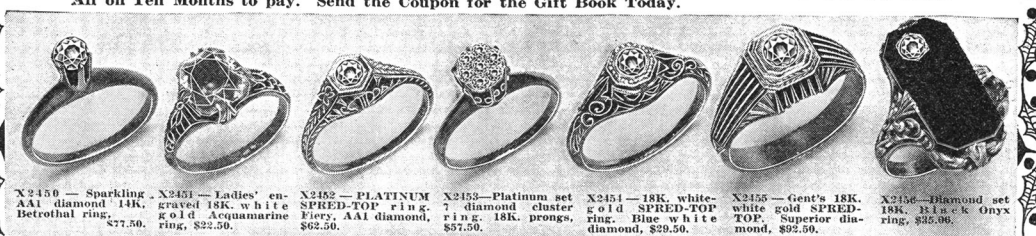

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X2452 — PLATINUM SPRED-TOP ring. Fiery, AA1 diamond, $62.50.

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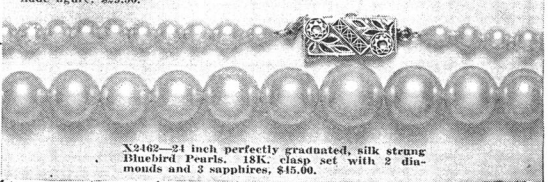
X2459—18K. white gold SPRED-TOP ring. Fine quality diamond, $57.50.

X2460 — 14K. diamond set, gents' tooth ring. $67.50.

X2461—14K. white gold, Rectaggular shape hand 15 jewel wrist watch. Sapphire crown, silk ribbon, $23.75.



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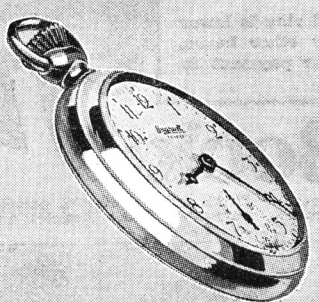

The New Yankee
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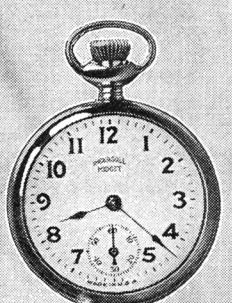
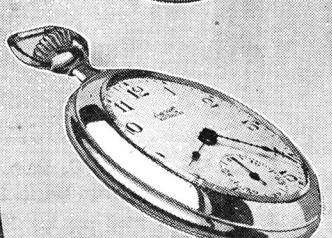
Dependable, as always, but with many new features of grace and beauty. (With Radiolite dial $2.75)



Midget
$3.50

For women, girls and small boys. Case is solid nickel. (With radium luminous dial $4.25)



Waterbury
$5.50

A *jeweled* watch. 12-size; nickel case. Stamina plus style. (With Radiolite "silver" dial $6.50)

After the third lightless night, the business men took matters into their own hands. "If the city won't pay for the lights, we will," they told the city council.

Where was Lima when the lights went out?

MAZDA, the Mark of a Research Service. It is the mark which assures the user of the lamp that the manufacturer had advantage of the most recent findings of the Research Laboratories of the General Electric Company. Invention moves from the ideal to the real. So the researches of men trained to investigate and experiment make impressive contributions to human progress.

As part of an economy program, Lima, Ohio, tried turning out the street lights. The trial lasted three nights.

One newspaper summarized the result as "the probability of a crime wave, increase in the number of traffic accidents, and the loss to Lima business houses of a gigantic sum during the holiday season."

GENERAL ELECTRIC

5 famous points

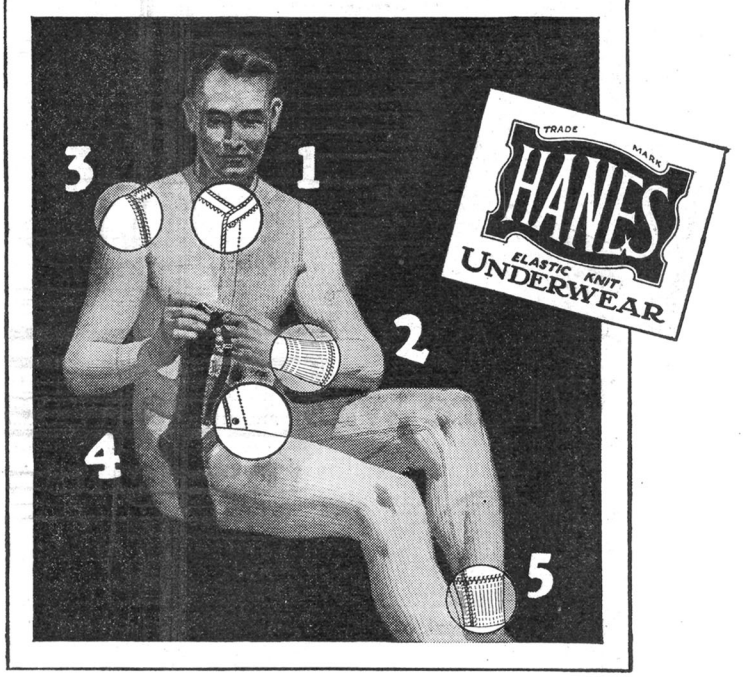
1 HANES *Collarettes are cut to size. A 40 suit has a 40 collarette. Won't roll or pucker. Protect the chest from cold draughts, and let the top-shirt lie smooth.*

2 HANES *Cuffs won't pull off. They snug the wrist. Reinforced on the end to prevent raveling and gaping. Sleeves are exact length—not uneven.*

3 HANES *Elastic Shoulders give with every movement, because they're made with a service-doubling lap seam. Comfortable. Strong.*

4 HANES *Closed Crotch really* STAYS *closed. Double gusset in thigh another comfort feature. Crotch can't bind, for* HANES *is fitted by* TRUNK *measurement, as well as chest.*

5 HANES *Elastic Ankles never bunch over the shoetops. No ugly pucker showing under the socks. One leg is exactly the same length as the other. They're mates!*



You can *pay* more, but you can't *get* more!

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It has comfort. It has wear. It has the warmth you want to keep you snug and well in winter's worst. Three weights take care of any climate. We especially recommend the Heavy Weight for all practical purposes, and at a popular price.

You get your *true size* in HANES, which guarantees real comfort. HANES Union Suits are fitted by *trunk* measurement as well as chest measurement. You can walk and work and stoop and stretch with never a bind or bunch. That's *something!*

You will know genuine HANES by the famous red label. It is guaranteed absolutely—every thread, stitch and button, or your money back. Go to the nearest HANES dealer and see this big-value underwear. Compare it' detail by detail with the 5 Famous Points. Union suits, also shirts-and-drawers.

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All outdoors invites your

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But the next morning! Unless you have learned how to avoid it your personal appearance shows the effect of a late supper and lost hours of sleep.

Internal Cleanliness is the secret of preserving your good looks and sense of physical well-being. Internal cleanliness means nothing more than continuous freedom from constipation. For constipation, says a leading medical authority, not only dulls the eye and pales the skin, but is a forerunner of the gravest diseases that afflict mankind!

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