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The Popular Magazine

JAN. 7, 1925

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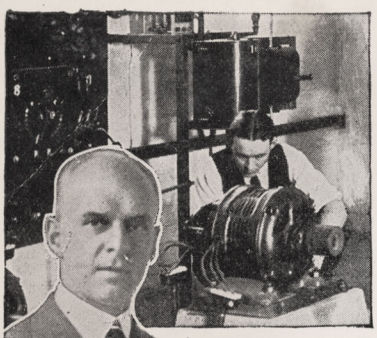
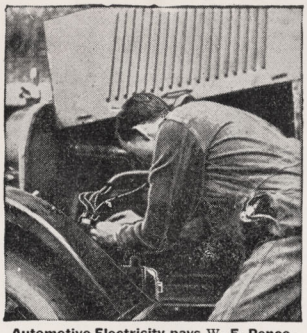


Herbert Dickerson, Warrenton, Va., makes $7,500 a year



Automotive Electricity pays W. E. Pence. Albany, Ore., over $9,000 a year

J. R. Morgan, Columbus, Ohio, makes $30 to $50 a day in business for himself

Electrical Experts Are in Big Demand

I Will Train You at Home To Fill a Big Pay Job

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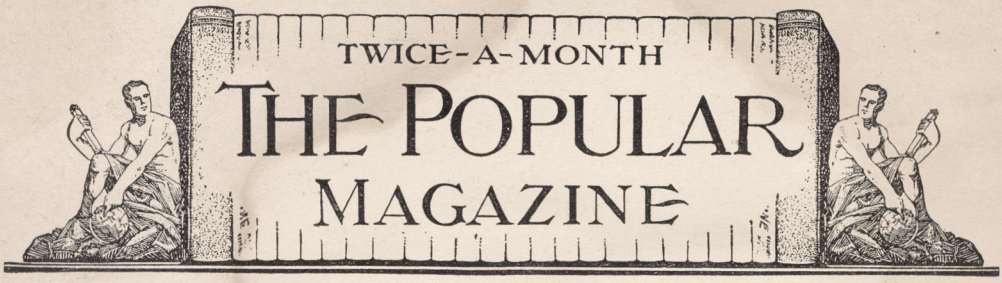

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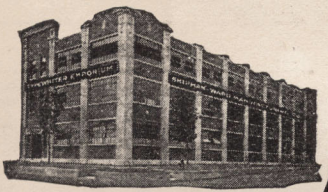

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Present Position .....

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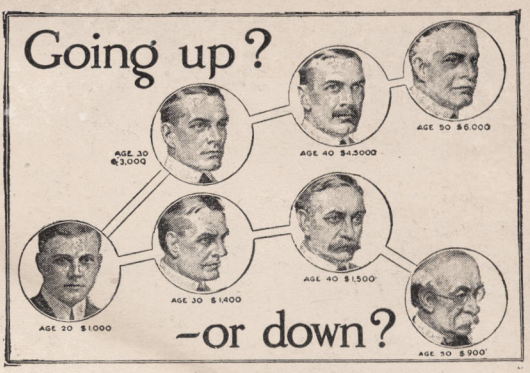

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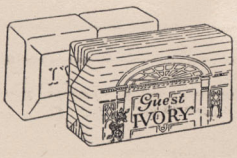

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXIV. JANUARY 7, 1925. No. 6

Temescal

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "The Ridin' Kid from Powder River," "Sunny Mateel," Etc.

Here are the opening chapters of the great Knibbs story we have been promising you. Sometimes it is dangerous to ornament a promise with high praise; but we are not timid about indorsing "Temescal." Nothing we say about this masterpiece of modern romance will raise expectations that the story will not overtop. If you like the West, it is here. If you like swift adventure, it is here. If you have an affection for rugged beauty, manly sincerity, courage in danger, fortitude in suffering, the friendship that lives on loyalty, the loyalty that dies for friendship, the quick trigger that guards the high heart, the drum of hoofbeats in the dust cloud, the pulse of star beams on the midnight desert—they are all here. Only our enthusiasm makes us say so much to whet your appetite—for the story is able to speak for itself.

The gay and gallant Temescal will be no stranger to those readers whose memories reach back to that delightful Christmas story, "The Gifts of Temescal," which was a feature of the holiday POPULAR of a year ago. In the march of incident early in the novel there is an echo of that stirring day when Temescal rode into Santuario with a girl baby on his saddlebow and rode out again with an army hot on his heels, for, like many another fine novel, "Temescal" is the offspring of a short story. What was all of the short story is but a minor incident of the longer one; yet an incident necessary to a complete understanding of the admirable character that Mr. Knibbs draws with such understanding care and such complete success.—THE EDITOR.

(A Five-Part Story—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

TEMESCAL.

NO one in Cabazon seemed to know who Temescal was, where he came from, or whither he was bound. Yet there was nothing so very mysterious about him. His manner was gracious. He commanded respect by conversing elegantly with the intellectual and simply with those unable to appreciate a spacious brow and the finer subtleties. He enjoyed surprising himself by doing the unexpected, leaping, as it were, from hazard to security, and, as frequently back again. He delighted in matching wits with worthy metal, in being sincerely gallant to humble folk, and as sincerely insolent to those who deemed themselves his superiors. Temescal would have indignantly repudiated the sug-

gestion that he ever flattered any one, patron or pauper. Nevertheless, flattery occupied considerable space among the commodities of his stock in trade, and he was a discreetly liberal merchant. He took great pleasure in performing a kindly act, not, as he confessed, because of its intrinsic value, but rather because its reflection illumined qualities within himself of which he had not dreamed. Yet if any one had suggested that he went about the world doing good he would have shrugged his shoulders, spread his hands, and allowed an eloquent silence to convey the impression that any small good which came of his presence or his activities was as the light of the beneficent sun, a radiation most natural and scarce worthy of remark.

The only mystery attached to Temescal was his career. He journeyed through a land preëmpted by fierce war and fiendish banditry, and he journeyed alone. He paid liberally for such entertainment as he found, answered all questions, and asked none. He did not even question his own career, leaving that to slow, incurious Time and the ultimate accounting.

Had Temescal been inclined to make war for its own sake, he might have become a great leader—south of the border. As it was, he had but one man to lead—himself. Consequently, when one of the many colonels of the many Mexican armies devastating the land overtook Temescal in the little town of Cabazon, Temescal was obliged to either disclose his actual identity and business, or assume that of a common soldier. The colonel was recruiting those willing to declare themselves Liberals and shooting those whom he suspected as loyal to the government. Temescal flatly refused to become a soldier. When questioned as to his business and his political inclinations, Temescal replied that his business was to keep out of trouble, and that his sympathies were with the poor of the land.

With the charming simplicity of his kind, the colonel ordered two of his soldiers to take Temescal out beyond the edge of the town and shoot him. To the amazement of the soldiers, the innkeeper of Cabazon, and the colonel, Temescal laughed at what he termed the colonel's ridiculous suggestion. He had been disarmed, but suffered no other restraint. He drew a silk handkerchief from his pocket and flicked the dust from the toe of his boot. "Had I been unwise," he declared impressively, "I would have entered your service, and you, my colonel, would have been a dead man within the next twenty-four hours. I would have killed you myself. Then I should have become colonel. Your men would follow me, there not being among your company my equal in presence or strategy—save, of course, yourself."

Temescal paused, snapped the dust from his handkerchief, and calmly replaced it. The sharp snap caused the colonel to start. Of a truth, the prisoner was no ordinary adventurer. The colonel frowned. Temescal cleared his throat. "In refusing to enter your service, I have done you a favor. I have saved your life. It is evident that you are generous, and of a noble family. To be under obligation to a mere civilian like myself would doubtless distress you. It is possible to satisfy such obligation by allowing me my liberty. But to maintain your prestige it must not seem that you have changed your mind. Therefore you will do me the honor of escorting me beyond the curious eyes of your excellent soldiers, and shooting me yourself. Have I your permission to make a confession? Many thanks!" He stepped from between the guards and toward the colonel, who sat at wine in the very chair which Temescal had so recently been obliged to vacate. "I will then be a dead man," he whispered, "discreetly dead. Thus you will have maintained your prestige——"

"I will take care of that——" began the colonel.

"Also, you will have secured my horse, a very fine animal," continued Temescal, "and my pistol, an excellent weapon, and the gold which I have secreted in an arroyo beyond the town. Of this your men know nothing. Otherwise they might thoughtlessly relieve you of it, after having thoughtfully assassinated you. If my suggestions do not seem comprehensive, if I have overlooked any small detail of military ethics, kindly correct me."

As the colonel had but recently arrived in Cabazon, and the hour was midafternoon, he was sober, consequently able to think. "I will attend to this man," he declared finally, gesturing dismissal of the guard. Temescal drew a coin from his pocket and tossed it on the table. "From one who is about to die. Drink, and enjoy yourselves, my children." A young lieutenant caught

up the coin, stared at Temescal, shook his head.

So Temescal passed from Cabazon, head bowed and hands clasped behind his back, as one who contemplates the dire inevitable. The colonel followed, upon his horse.

Far out on the desert they halted at the edge of an arroyo. Temescal faced his captor. "I shall require the use of my hands to find the gold, my colonel."

"Proceed," said the colonel.

Straightway Temescal drew a money belt from beneath his shirt. The colonel frowned, and his short upper lip curled back from his white teeth in an unpleasant smile. "Not so fast!" he said as Temescal was about to hand the belt to him. "Lay it on the rock there."

"As you wish," said Temescal politely.

"Now sit down and pull off your boots."

Temescal had not considered the possibility of being left barefooted in the desert. Almost, he lost his presence of mind. But instead of going into a blind rage and leaping upon the colonel, he gestured acquiescence affably, sat down, drew off his boots, and laid them upon the rock with the solemnity of one officiating at an altar. "I trust the boots will not be found too large for such aristocratic feet as they are about to adorn," he declared. "You will also find my horse a well-mannered animal. I give him to you, honored beyond words that he is to bear so astute and noble a commander."

It is possible that Temescal overdid the matter in regard to the horse, which, according to the fortunes of war, was already confiscate. It is also possible that the colonel was not as stupid as he appeared. In any event, the colonel told Temescal, brusquely, to move on—and indicated the direction with the muzzle of his pistol. Temescal's face expressed astonishment—not because he had been told to betake himself otherwhere and immediately, but because of the colonel's discourteous manner. However, there was no other choice, so Temescal curled his toes against the sting of the hot sand, and with head erect and shoulders squared, marched toward the north. The colonel watched him until he had disappeared beyond a distant ridge. He shrugged his shoulders. "Something tells me I ought to have shot him," soliloquized the colonel as he dismounted and gathered up the spoils. He shivered the least bit, as one touched with the chill of sudden apprehension.

Meanwhile Temescal sat down beyond the ridge to cool his burning feet. Regretfully he drew off his jacket and cut off the sleeves. "Were *he* but inside it," he muttered wrathfully, "I would use a broader and a deeper stroke." From the sleeves he fashioned crude footgear. To turn a man out into the desert barefooted was the next thing to a death sentence—and possibly the colonel had so considered it. But what bit into Temescal's very vitals was the fact that the colonel had tricked him, had discounted his sincerity to the very decimal, and had ignored his courtesy. "But still, I am alive," reflected Temescal, "and that in itself is something."

He would have preferred not to progress farther just then, but, accustomed to progress under adverse conditions, he rose and trudged across the blistering sand, wading, as it were, ankle-deep in shallows of palpitating heat.

On his way to Cabazon he had passed through a narrow cañon where there was water. There he had paused at the spring to water his horse, and, as was his inevitable custom, he had raised his hat in greeting to the isolated spring. In fact, Temescal always raised his hat to a desert spring, an isolated shade tree, or a wild flower discovered in some lonely spot where flowers were not often to be found.

Without food, adequate footgear, gun, ammunition, horse, or money, yet Temescal was not disheartened. His reason told him that he had but one slender chance in a thousand of getting safely out of the immediate vicinity on foot. Yet something deeper than reason assured him that he would survive to become Temescal again. At the moment he admitted that he did not know who he was or whither he was bound. As to where he was—— "But why mention hell?" he reflected. "Only a fool emphasizes the obvious."

CHAPTER II.

THE ROCK.

ARRIVING at the cañon spring, Temescal drank long and deep. His anger cooled, but did not evaporate. Rather, it solidified. He found shade along the cañon's southern wall. He sat down, not, however, that he might plan a way out of

his present difficulty. To the contrary, he allowed his imagination to drift toward a conclusion as to what might happen to the colonel, should fortune bring them within rifle shot again. "And I trust it will happen before my new boots are badly worn. I paid thirty dollars for them, in Tucson." This observation in itself is of no special significance, save that it points toward the supposition that Temescal did not steal the boots, and also toward the conclusion that he had but recently crossed the border. Add to this the circumstance that Temescal was journeying south when overtaken in Cabazon, and it would appear that his mission in Mexico was of a purely personal nature, probably inspired by a desire to see rather than to be seen.

He gazed at his mutilated jacket, at his bandaged feet. He thought of going back to Cabazon, under cover of darkness, and surprising the colonel, who would undoubtedly be drunk by nine o'clock. Had Temescal been properly armed and equipped he might have done so; but his forces, so to speak, were too badly scattered for a successful flank attack. No, he would wait until a real inspiration stirred him to action. Meanwhile he bathed his swollen feet and contemplated the desert vista beyond the mouth of the cañon—a wide space of shimmering heat and gray-green cacti and brush.

While in Cabazon, Temescal had partaken liberally of wine. Because of the recent rude and unexpected interruption, the vintage had not had opportunity to perform its proper office. Now, however, the wine served to soothe Temescal's most natural irritation by inducing sleep. Yet he would not sleep near the spring. He was too wary a campaigner to be caught napping. He climbed to the rim of the cañon, and after gazing silently toward the distant town of Cabazon, he scooped out the sand at the base of a huge, knifelike slab of rock that partially overhung the cañon, and curled himself within the scant shade. Without moving he could view the open desert and also look down directly upon the spring in the cañon bottom. He made a cigarette and smoked it thoughtfully. It was his habit to smoke one cigarette before he slept, one upon rising, and as many as he cared to make during the day. The conditions surrounding, confronting, and in fact, enveloping Temescal might be termed adverse, or reverse, according to where one stood and surveyed them, yet they did not disturb his magnificent poise. Naturally he was annoyed, especially when he thought of his new boots and the man who now wore them. As for the morrow? But what was to-morrow, save to-day with a few possible variations? "Plenty of time for that," he observed philosophically. "Meanwhile I will sleep." And Temescal slept.

It happened that the colonel in Cabazon had but barely tasted of the wine of the country when he received a message by courier which entailed a swift and secret journey to the headquarters of the general commanding the fragments of the dilapidated and disreputable army of which the colonel was actively in charge. The general was encamped on a ranch some thirty miles north of Cabazon. The colonel's presence was an immediate necessity. He was not pleased with the summons, but he knew better than to ignore it, so he had Temescal's horse saddled—a much finer horse than his own—and taking Temescal's money belt and six-shooter, he set out toward the rancho. The colonel also took with him, as companion and bodyguard, a young and swarthily handsome soldier, known to his fellows as Lieutenant Juan Sepulveda—to the ladies as "The Charming One." A colonel may or may not be a favorite with the ladies, depending largely upon his manner and appearance. Juan Sepulveda was not a colonel, but he had the manner and appearance of a dusky young Adonis, while his colonel was not so favored. Moreover, there was a girl in Cabazon—in fact, there were several girls—yet, the one and most interesting young woman of the village was admired by the colonel, and she admired Lieutenant Juan. And that was one of the reasons for the colonel's choice of a bodyguard. There was another reason, but it would be an unforgivable digression to retrace and disclose the love affairs of the colonel, or of Juan.

Juan, utterly unsuspecting and affable, accompanied his colonel across the afternoon desert, treating the imposed duty somewhat as a lark. The colonel purposely avoided the course Temescal and he had taken but a few hours before, because he knew there was *no* dead gringo out there where, according to the colonel's own statement to his men, there was. Consequently,

as their way lay through the cañon, they entered it at its southern end, about a mile below Temescal's temporary sleeping quarters.

Temescal was awakened by voices. Cautiously he uncurled himself and peered down into the cañon. About twenty feet below him stood two horses. A few yards beyond the horses were two men. One of the men was digging in the sand at the base of the cañon wall. The other, who was garbed like a colonel in the Mexican army, was evidently directing operations. Temescal leaned forward and gazed down intently. What, in the name of reason, were they doing? Suddenly Temescal's heart skipped a beat. The officer was *the* colonel, the very colonel who had appropriated his new boots. In fact, he was wearing them. Temescal edged cautiously out of his burrow. He did not know what he was going to do, but he knew that he would do something. Here was a divine opportunity to rehabilitate himself.

His own horse stood below, saddled and equipped for a journey—canteen, carbine, serape, and possibly a bottle of wine in the saddle pocket. Modestly Temescal admitted to himself that he was equal to any two men in the Mexican army. And he enjoyed the strategic position of seeing without being seen. He thought of securing a sizable stone, or a small rock—he was not particular—and hurling it down upon the unsuspecting colonel. Temescal decided to follow the rock himself, allowing—so to speak—the other soldier to break his fall.

The colonel unbuttoned his shirt and drew out a money belt. Temescal's heart skipped another beat. It was his own money belt. "We will leave it concealed here until we return," the colonel was saying to the man who dug in the sand. It occurred to Temescal that burying money in this isolated spot was an extraordinarily peculiar proceeding. He was not aware that the colonel had been summoned to the presence of the general, nor was he aware that the general was in the habit of borrowing sums of money from his officers. But the colonel knew it. Hence these extraordinarily peculiar proceedings.

Temescal frowned. "And to bury my own money, almost under my nose," he breathed. "It is a sign and a token. Something will come of this!"

Prophetic utterance! For the colonel handed the money belt to the kneeling soldier, who took it and laid it in the hole he had dug and covered it with sand. His back was toward the colonel. The colonel drew his revolver. Then Temescal understood. "Buried treasure, and no one left to tell the tale." Temescal thought swiftly. If the colonel killed the soldier, there would then be but one to reckon with. Yet Temescal's generous and humane soul could not countenance the cold murder of a man, even though his own money and safety were assured in the result. It has been said that the thought is parent to the act, or something like that. In this instance the thought and the act were as twins, born upon the instant. Temescal's blood boiled. On his hands and knees, he heaved his stout body up to leap upon the assassin below. He had forgotten the limitations of his hiding place. His back arched suddenly against the huge slab of rock under which he had burrowed. Instantly, rock, pebbles, sand, Temescal and noble intentions toppled and fell slithering into the cañon. Owing to a gyration of the slab of rock, Temescal landed on top of the heap. His teeth clipped together. He saw stars, and numerous constellations. And beneath the great rock lay the proud but retired colonel of a regiment in the Mexican army.

Temescal felt of the back of his neck. He drew out his silk handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his forehead. He shrugged his shoulders—politely—and spread out his hands. "This," he said, his thumb touching the rock on which he sat, "will save us the trouble of digging another and a larger hole." He gestured toward the spot where the money belt was concealed. Neither the fall, the terrific jolt, nor the surprise shook, for a moment, Temescal's natural poise and dignity. It is to be noticed that he said "us" when mentioning the fact that further excavating would be unnecessary. Thus he implied a companionship which, in turn, implied a mutual interest. Wisely taking advantage of Juan Sepulveda's surprise, Temescal explained in excellent Spanish just what the colonel had had in his hand and was about to do with it when the slab of rock toppled and fell. Lieutenant Juan almost believed him. "And while I dislike undue exertion," added Temescal, "I am willing to prove my statement by assisting you in digging beneath this rock. You will find my gun in your colonel's hand. In

fact, he didn't have time to drop it. Possibly such proof is unnecessary, because you will observe that I have possession of your carbine, and you are unarmed. However, I *must* have my boots. Therefore, we will dig."

As the still-astonished Juan dug and heaved and tugged at the slab of rock, Temescal assisted by advising as to leverages and wedges. Occasionally Temescal paused in directing the operations to rub his back. He had suffered a slight strain, but he explained that that need not interrupt his friend's efforts. Juan, who was familiar with Mexican colonels and their playful ways when gold or women were concerned, began to believe that he had narrowly escaped being shot in the back. When, at last, the slab of rock was removed from an all-but-perfect silhouette of the colonel, it was as Temescal had said—an ivory-handled pistol was gripped in the colonel's hand. "And he was not picking his teeth with it when I hurled this rock," declared Temescal, shrugging his shoulders and spreading one hand—the other was still poising the carbine. Juan Sepulveda gazed at Temescal, at the carbine, and at the colonel. Like Temescal, Juan was somewhat of a philosopher. "We have two good horses," he said.

And he left the suggestion in the air, so to speak.

"You have spoken wisely," declared Temescal. "Kindly remove the boots from this gentleman. I would draw them upon more honorable legs."

"It would not be well for us to return to Cabazon," observed the young soldier as he removed the boots. It was only too evident that the colonel would have no further use for them.

"Again you have spoken wisely. Your name?"

"Juan Sepulveda, señor. And yours?"

"Importunio—Temescal. Perhaps I have another. You have inferred, correctly, that we are to make a journey together. We shall require food. You will return to Cabazon, after dark, and seek out some young woman who will secure food for us. That should not be difficult, because I saw you talking to a rather attractive girl when your colonel-that-was arrested me. However, I shall give you money, in case your good looks do not awaken immediate sympathy. You will return to a spot that I shall designate. Then we shall see what we shall see."

"Which will *not* be the sun upon Cabazon to-morrow morning," declared Juan Sepulveda, emphatically.

"You are a man after my own heart!" cried Temescal. "I have wished for such a companion—sturdy, loyal, young and good looking. Together we shall do great things! I have much wisdom in the ways of men, although I admit women puzzle me. Also, I have gold, and mature judgment. What can resist us?"

"Nothing, unless it be the army," suggested Juan.

"The army? Ah, yes! I recall something that looked like an army, yonder in Cabazon. I had forgotten it. However, because of your recent association with it, we will avoid it, for the time being. Still, I regret that there were not a few more colonels under the rock when I launched it."

"The rock! Yes! You are a strong man—a very strong man!" declared Juan admiringly.

"When in anger—yes!" admitted Temescal. "Come! After refreshing ourselves at the spring—in case you have no tequila with you—we will climb out of this cañon and you shall see where I tore the rock from its roots. I imagine that the hole is there yet."

"You speak of tequila, señor. My colonel always carried a little silver flask, but I fear it is empty. He drank from it, turning it to the sky, just before we entered the cañon."

"To deaden his conscience, that he might kill you. That account is closed. However, we will salvage the flask."

"With the day," said Juan, gesturing toward the setting sun, "I will take my horse and proceed to Cabazon——"

"Softly, young soldier! You will proceed on foot, leaving your horse, your hat and your arms with me. Then, if you should happen to be recognized by one of your former companions, you have been waylaid, robbed and disarmed, and your colonel murdered. Here is money. Be cautious. Should some young woman secure food for you, pay in kisses if possible, in gold if necessary—but not in confidences. Preserve an air of mystery. Convey the impression that you are in great distress. You may be, if you are recognized and captured."

"As you wish, señor. But where shall I meet you?"

Allowing Juan to precede him, Temescal climbed to the cañon's rim. "Yonder, in the open I will wait. Go with God, and return with—provisions."

Temescal, however, did not wait in the appointed place, but chose a low hill, several hundred yards from the spot, where he kept vigilant watch, curbing, as the moon rose, a natural impatience to be gone. He had still to assure himself that the young soldier could be trusted. "That I have saved his life means nothing," soliloquized Temescal. "Gratitude frequently rebounds in a most unexpected manner. I rescued a small dog from the jaws of a big dog, once—and the small dog promptly bit me. However, the small dog was half starved and, consequently, somewhat cynical. I feel empty, myself."

Presently a lone, dim figure appeared, marching with its shadow across the moonlit desert. Arrived at the spot Temescal had designated, the figure stopped, turned about as though perplexed, and finally called softly. Temescal sheathed his six-shooter, and came down from his hill, leading the horses. He had recognized Juan's voice, and had surmised that the peculiar hump on his back was a sack of food.

"I might have known that you would be cautious," said Juan; then, reproachfully: "But, señor, you might have trusted me!"

"Didn't I trust you with five good, old, solid American silver plunks with which to buy the grub?" Temescal spoke in our own vernacular, and testily.

Juan did not understand the language, but he caught the import. "Yes! Yes! And if it is that I have seemed to delay, that is because of Chiquita. She was quick to get food for us, señor; but when it came to paying"—Juan scratched his head reflectively—"I could not be less generous than she. If kisses could be measured, I think this sack would not contain those which we exchanged. Here is the money, unspent, señor."

"You have earned it. Put it in your pocket. Doubtless you have eaten. I will eat as I ride."

"I have eaten nothing," observed Juan rather pensively. "Entering Cabazon, fear dulled my appetite. Departing, I had no opportunity."

"But you delivered the goods," said Temescal, forgetting in his enthusiasm that Juan did not understand English.

From the foregoing one might surmise that Temescal was not all that he seemed to be—or possibly, that he was more; that his elegant diction was an affectation and the Spanish language acquired. Has it not been said that occasional sojourners in a foreign land become more native than the natives themselves? Yet it is both unfair and unwise to judge hastily, or become prejudiced by a name.

Juan, however, saw only in his companion a great man suffering a chance misfortune. Warmed by a modest nip of tequila, Juan mounted his horse. "We will seek new fortunes together!" he exclaimed, and promptly felt in the sack for something more substantial than optimism.

"We ride with the moon!" declared Temescal, waving a piece of dried goat's meat which Juan passed to him.

Two shadows fled across the dim, ghostly reaches of the desert, bearing south, as is frequently the custom of adventurous shadows. The few, faint lights of Cabazon disappeared. Juan gestured toward a far range of hills etched in black upon the rising moon. "Beyond those hills," he confided to Temescal, "is a town that I know. There they make good wine, and there is much feasting and dancing. No gringo has yet discovered the place."

"Yet one may," declared Temescal, darkly. His new boots, made to measure in Tucson, and ordinarily a perfect fit, pinched his swollen feet. Otherwise, nothing disturbed his equanimity.

CHAPTER III.

THE WAIF OF WAR.

ACCUSTOMED to night marches and the companionship of hardy men, Juan Sepulveda was nevertheless astonished by Temescal's unwearying animation, as they rode down the long, starlit hours that lay between them and the hills of dawn. Temescal sang a robust song in a robust tenor. He recounted many incidents in his adventurous career. He spoke of Heidelberg, Vienna, Paris, the Riviera, as one might mention Schenectady, Troy, Albany and the Palisades. He told amusing tales of prominent characters both in America and in Mexico. He seemed broadly familiar with all that was going on in the world. He

discussed the qualities and characteristics of horses, men and dogs with an impartiality so humorous and intuition so keen that his young companion did not know whether to laugh or listen in amazement. Then, for a change, Temescal talked about the stars, naming some of them, and illustrating, by anecdotes both ancient and modern, their supposed influence upon men. Yet never once did Temescal mention himself as a principal, but always as an observer.

And, in turn, Juan told of exploits along the border, and far south in the land, of raids and reprisals, of battles, fiestas, pretty girls, legends of ancient loot, of Aztec mines, and undiscovered cities. To all this Temescal listened with polite interest, meanwhile gaining a fair insight into his companion's character; for he who talks of others confesses himself.

When the conversation finally drifted round to their present condition and prospects, Juan was for outlining a definite campaign of fortune. Temescal elbowed the suggestion aside. "It is not a wise proceeding to knock too loudly upon the door of To-morrow. It is true that some bold ones have done so, and with success. I have, myself. However, I do not favor haste and importunity. As for knowing what one is going to do, from day to day, that is like eating the dulce before the frijoles. It dulls one's appetite."

"But, señor——"

"Quite correct. You are young. I will illustrate my contention. Doubtless you have had many sweethearts. Among these there was doubtless one with whom you arranged to meet in the evening, beneath some shadowy tree where even the moonlight would have been an interloper. And there you met her, knowing as you journeyed toward the spot, that she would be there. Your young heart beat fast. You were enraptured. You thought you had realized the superlative bliss. But wait! Again you strolled along an evening street, alone, and thinking how cruel some other saucy young señorita had been in declining to meet you. It was dark, of course—or it should have been dark. Suddenly you were aware of a presence, a young presence, a feminine young presence, to be brief: and almost instantly she recognized you. You had not dreamed of meeting her. Your heart beat seventy times faster than it had upon the previous occasion. You felt as though you had fallen into a river, and had found a pearl upon its bank when you climbed out. Further illustration is unnecessary. You understand."

"Indeed, señor! You mean that adventure is like a charming mistress, wayward, perhaps, but ravishing; that her charm for one lies in not being aware of what she will do the next moment, but——"

"Or whom," murmured Temescal.

Juan's flight of fancy, like a falcon that had struck, returned to his wrist. "So I shall be content to follow you."

"You speak wisely. And I am not averse to having a friend at my back. However, there will be occasions when you will lead—in a physical sense. As now, for example. The gray horses of the dawn are tugging at their traces. Soon their blazing chariot will roll up the edge of the world, and then—it will be hot. You spoke of a ranchito, a little way off the road to Santuario. We will stop at this ranchito, where I shall allow you to shave me, after we have fed our horses and refreshed ourselves. My shirt also needs washing. Breakfast, a shave, a clean shirt, and a little sleep, and I shall be ready to discover this town of feasting and dancing of which you have spoken. However, when in Santuario, be discreet in introducing me, especially to men. As for the ladies, it will not be necessary."

"You mean the señoritas will naturally find you interesting, and that therefore they will——"

"That is not impossible. But no. In this instance you will have the ladies to yourself. I shall keep in the background. As you have no doubt observed, I am solid, and difficult to move. I am, perhaps, what one might call 'selective' in my tastes, and only those who appreciate it, interest me. There was, however, a girl in San Antone—a most interesting town in the old days, when a man's introduction was his personality, not his raiment, and——"

"But, señor, what about the girl?"

"Nothing. Friendly discourse serves to cheat weariness. Yonder seems to be the hacienda."

So they turned from the wagon road, heartened by the prospect of rest and refreshment, both for themselves and their weary horses. Temescal visioned shade and cool water, simple ranch folk, native hospitality, and many children, who would scat-

ter like young quail at the unexpected arrival of a strange guest.

The ranchito, however, which Temescal had called, in his expansive way, a hacienda, proved a bitter disappointment; not because it was a meager ranch house and a small property, but because it was tenantless, the adobe ransacked, the homely furnishing burned, mutilated, destroyed; the entire habitation devastated. Temescal viewed the desolation with hot anger in his eyes. "We will proceed with caution," he said, as Juan was about to explore an inner room, evidently hoping against hope. Juan paused. Turning his head he gazed at Temescal with eyes somber, questioning. "I knew these folks," he said finally. "They were kindly folk and industrious. Often I stopped here on my way to Santuario."

"Where there is much feasting and dancing," murmured Temescal.

Juan shrugged his shoulders. "We can do nothing here. Let us go."

"Strange that this desolation should affect you," said Temescal. "Surely you are not unfamiliar with this sort of thing. Your illustrious army——"

He was interrupted by a faint, wailing sound, which seemed to come from behind the door of the unexplored room. The companions glanced at each other. Temescal drew his six-shooter, strode to the door and thrust it open. Juan started nervously as he again heard that queer, choking wail. Temescal gestured toward a corner of the room, beyond the beam of morning sunlight which lay like a patch of gold on the dark, earthen floor, and holstering his gun he stepped into the room, knelt and tenderly lifted a tiny, naked infant from the shadowy corner. He pressed the baby awkwardly against his broad chest. He strode to the larger room, paused, then gestured with his elbow. "Water! Make a fire and warm the water—but not too hot."

Juan made a fire and heated the water in a broken olla. Meanwhile Temescal paced back and forth, endeavoring to soothe the baby. He sang softly. He teetered the infant up and down and talked to it. Still it wailed lustily. Finally Temescal offered it a silver piece, pressing the coin into the tiny, clenched fist. The child wailed more lustily than ever.

The sweat stood out on Temescal's forehead. His face grew red. He felt ridiculous, inefficient, helpless. He desired ardently to smoke; yet he could not bring himself to lay the child upon the bare floor, and there was nothing in the way of blanket or clothing upon which to lay it. Finally Juan advised that the water was warm.

Temescal was not unskillful in handling a horse or a six-shooter, but when it came to bathing a squirming infant—— He spread his silk handkerchief on the floor, laid the child on it, and glanced round. As there seemed to be nothing less flexible than a saddle blanket with which to wash it, he unbuttoned his shirt, drew it over his head, and solemnly hacked a piece from the tail of the shirt and dipped it in the warm water. The infant bawled, squalled, choked, grew purple, silent; squawked, mewed plaintively, and gathering breath, began all over again.

Juan was amazed that a man like Temescal should take so much pains with the child of mere peasant folk. Yet he was interested in spite of his youth. So when it came to clothing the child, Juan offered to donate his shirt. But Temescal frowned down the suggestion. "I began with this," he said, gesturing toward the infant, "and it is for me to complete the task." Carefully he swathed the baby in his own shirt and carried it to the doorway. "See! It has all but ceased to weep. Untie the horses! We shall proceed to Santuario. I will carry the child and shield it from the sun. When we are within sight of this town of feasting and dancing," Temescal emphasized the latter words, "you will ride ahead and make arrangements with some good woman for the immediate care of the child. Choose a married woman, one that is portly, who smiles, and has children about her. I dislike to seem arbitrary, but evidently you have had no experience with these things," and Temescal indicated the baby awkwardly cuddled in his arms.

"It is plain that *you* have," said Juan admiringly. The infant had ceased to wail.

"Not I!" thundered Temescal. "Nor do I wish to have. Fate has thrust this burden upon me! And Fate has made us companions. What would you have done had you discovered this orphan and I had not been with you? You would have been helpless. A beneficent though blundering design sent me to save this child, which should hereafter bear my name, were it a manchild. Yet I am not to have even that consolation."

"Then, señor, why not call the child 'Temescalita?' "

Temescal's face beamed. "Not a bad suggestion, from a soldier. You may amount to something yet. Meanwhile, we delay. Hold the child until I am ready to take it." And Temescal transferred his tiny burden to Juan. Immediately the tiny burden began—as Juan said—to mew and squawk amazingly. Temescal mounted his horse. "You see, it misses me already!" he asserted complacently. "Careful! You are not handling a sack of beans."

As they rode away from the ruins of that which had so recently been a quiet and industrious home, Temescal discoursed upon banditry carried on under the guise of honest warfare.

Yet their conversation finally drifted to happier themes. The abstract gave place to the concrete, which for them, was Temescalita, who, for a wonder, slept peacefully in the hollow of Temescal's arm, her tiny body shaded from the sun by Temescal's serape. And of her they talked, hazarding a guess as to her age, speculating upon the fate of her parents, and discoursing about her future. "I shall provide for her!" declared Temescal enthusiastically. "She shall be clothed and fed and educated. Under the circumstances, I could hardly do less for her."

"But, señor, she is not your child. She is really nothing to you. How are we to continue our journey if the niña is to receive all these things?"

"No, she is not my child," said Temescal coldly. "And she is nothing to me. Yet she could not have been more my own had I been her father. And she is everything to me. Had the little one been flesh of my flesh it had been my duty to provide for her. Now it is more than my duty—it is my absolute and unsought delight. Though the shrill noise she made gripped my very vitals, though I all but wrestled with her to subdue her to the bathing, and though I know that she does not possess the garments most essential to her age and my tranquillity, still is she the most wonderful atom that I have ever touched with these hands."

Within sight of Santuario, which had hitherto remained hidden by the low hills, Temescal sent Juan ahead to make arrangements for the immediate care of the child.

And so Temescal entered the town of Santuario, an impressive figure, mounted upon a fine horse. Within his arms slumbered the tiny Temescalita, wrapped in a silken shirt. It is true that Temescal was shirtless, and that his arms were bare, save for the serape across his shoulders. He had sacrificed the sleeves of his jacket for footgear in the desert near Cabazon. Yet he seemed utterly unaware of his lack of adequate clothing, and oblivious to the curious glances of the townsfolk as he rode slowly down the street. He looked neither to the right nor the left, but gazed, somewhat sternly, toward the west.

Juan hailed him at the end of the street. "This way, señor! I have made all arrangements. Yonder is the house."

"I suppose you have not overlooked the fact that I have no shirt," said Temescal.

"I had not thought of it. I will get one for you."

"To the contrary, you will take the niña and stand here until I return. And when I return I myself will deposit the little one with its foster mother. But I do not care to appear before her as a Yaqui of Sonora. Where did you say they sold good wine?"

"There, señor—across the street."

No community, small or large, is without its news scavenger, usually some doddering mediocrity who collects news with all the careless gusto of a garbage man and dispenses it with equal abandon. Such an individual, observing Juan Sepulveda standing at the corner and holding a mysterious bundle in his arms, accosted him.

"Have I not met you before?" inquired the gossip, who exhibited half as many teeth and twice as much unshaven beard as the average citizen of Santuario.

"If so, it was not at the barber's," retorted Juan, who felt exceedingly self-conscious and awkward, holding a bundle which might at any moment proclaim itself. "Scratch your fleas elsewhere. I am occupied."

"So?" The gossip's sly, watery eyes hardened. "And your friend, in the cantina yonder, is also occupied, no doubt. Do not forget, young man, that there is a jail in this town of Santuario, where offensive strangers may explain themselves."

"A calabasino swings in the wind. It is cracked and makes a queer sound. Good wine would leak from it; therefore I do not pour. Adios, Señor Flea-trap. I shall itch until you are gone."

The gossip departed, muttering. From

the doorway of the cobbler's shop he watched Temescal come from the cantina, cross the street and enter the store of one Estancio, where clothing, of a kind, was to be had. "Look!" whispered the gossip to the cobbler as Temescal came from the store. "Is that not the bandit, Temescal?"

The cobbler scratched his head. "If it is not, it is his brother. Let us inquire of Estancio."

"Or at the cantina," suggested the gossip.

"Estancio charges nothing for information," declared the cobbler, shrewdly surmising that the gossip's thirst was not entirely for information. "We will talk with Estancio."

Meanwhile Temescal purchased a shirt, not of silk, not exactly to his liking, but the best that could be had in so small a town. Tying his horse to a tree in front of a modest adobe, he took Temescalita in his arms and followed Juan to the house, where Temescalita was presently deposited with a plump and smiling mother, who could scarcely number her offspring on the fingers of both hands, including her thumbs. The zealous Juan had followed Temescal's instructions to the very letter.

"I fear this is an imposition," said Temescal.

The mother of many shook her head. "No! No! Where there are so many, what is one more or less? Juan has already told me the sad news of those poor folk of the ranchito. The little one shall be cherished as my own. As I am proud of all these, so am I proud of this one," and the señora gestured toward her small army of progressively sized youngsters. Meanwhile she allowed her fine dark eyes the privilege of admiring Temescal's commanding figure. She sighed. "My husband was also fond of children."

"He is away, perchance?"

"Indeed, señor. He is with the saints."

"A pity!" exclaimed Temescal courteously, and, it must be admitted, a trifle ambiguously. However there was cause. The señora was a widow, and Temescal's naturally gallant manner had, more than once, been misinterpreted. He gave the woman a piece of gold, and departed, politely, of course, but noticeably in haste. Juan had to step briskly to keep pace with him.

"Did I not choose well?" queried Juan, wondering at his companion's agitation.

"Too well! She is a widow."

"But not unwilling to take either the child, or money for its care."

"Or another husband," said Temescal, solemnly. "She has fine eyes and a motherly way. I know the type. I—she will make an admirable foster mother for Temescalita."

After seeing to it that their horses were fed and corralled conveniently near the cantina, Temescal and Juan made themselves comfortable in the purple shadows of the vine-covered portico of the posada. Temescal rubbed his chin reflectively. Whatever his reflections may have been, they were diverted abruptly. "I have not been shaved!" he declared. "And the good widow saw me thus! Yet perhaps it is as well."

"Or better," suggested Juan facetiously. The wine of Santuario was nothing if not "heady."

"How so?"

"You do not seem to like widows, señor."

"Collectively, I admire them. Individually, I wish them well, from a distance. This is good wine. Drink slowly."

Juan, who had consumed better than twice as much wine as Temescal, laughed. "As for the wine—you make it go farther, I make it go faster."

Temescal shrugged his shoulders. His gaze, shadowed by his broad sombrero, seemed to be occupied with the little group talking and gesticulating in the store across the way, where one, Estancio, sold many indifferent commodities, including shirts, and dispensed gossip gratuitously. Juan refilled his cup and drank, not leisurely, as Temescal had suggested, but with youthful gusto. He called the posadero's daughter, asking her to fetch more wine.

A pretty girl passed the cantina, nodded to Juan and glanced curiously at the unmoved Temescal. Juan raised his cup, saluting the pretty girl, and inadvertently slopping wine on Temescal's boots. Still Temescal stared across the way, seemingly oblivious to Juan, to the homely daughter of the posadero waiting to be paid for the wine, and to pretty girls passing and nodding saucily.

"There is wine at your elbow," suggested Juan. "I drink to Juanita Escobar who just bowed to me. She is the prettiest girl in Santuario."

"Indeed!" Temescal's head came up. He turned toward the innkeeper's daughter. "A

thousand and one pardons, señorita! I cannot recall having ordered more wine. However, I am forgetful, at times. My companion has suggested a toast to the prettiest girl in Santuario." Temescal rose and bowed graciously. "So, we drink to you, señorita."

Juan got to his feet from which he was immediately swept, as it were, by his companion's tour-de-force, into drinking a health to the obviously homely daughter of the innkeeper.

Ignoring Juan entirely, the innkeeper's daughter curtsied to Temescal. "Thank you, señor. You are kind. And you are not drunk."

Juan sat down and stared sulkily at the middle of the street. "But no!" he observed, imitating Temescal's expansive manner, "I shall keep in the background. You shall have the ladies to yourself. I am solid, and difficult to move. I am what you might call 'selective——' "

Temescal laughed heartily. "You propose a wise amendment. It is your capacity for wine, and not my own that restrains me from drinking to all the girls in this delightful village. One of us, at least, should be watchful, even here."

"I am not drunk," declared Juan sullenly.

Temescal rose and laid his hand on Juan's shoulder. "Do you still hold me your friend?"

"Oh, as for that——" grumbled Juan.

"Count the buttons on my new jacket!"

"A trick," said Juan. "I can count. There are none." Yet in spite of himself he glanced up. Meeting Temescal's magnetic gaze, his own was welded to it, and in the heat of such concentration his mind cleared. Still Juan held to the tail of his stubborn mood that now, perversely, kicked to free itself. "But there is nothing to fear in this place," he declared, gesturing his indifference.

"Amigo," said Temescal affectionately, "you may get drunk, and I will not desert you. You may play the fool, and I will stand by you. You may quarrel with an enemy and I will uphold your argument. You may even slop wine on my boots, and I will not censure you. But one thing you may not do and be my friend; and that is, sulk! If I should chance to reprove you for this or that, and you find neither wisdom nor humor in the reproof, curse me outright. Declare yourself angry, abused, misunderstood, insulted, slandered; sweat out some kind of lusty argument with me. Steal my horse, my money, my reputation—if you can—but do not clench your fist and then hide it in your pocket!"

The sheer vigor of Temescal's harangue, aside from its import, struck the last vestige of moroseness from Juan's mind.

Temescal returned to his chair beneath the purple shadows of Las Uvas. Juan drummed his fingers on the table top. Presently he rose and strode across the street to get cigarillos of a kind not to be had in the posadero. Perhaps ten minutes passed before he returned with the cigarettes. His manner seemed peculiarly diffident as he proffered a cigarette to Temescal. And Temescal noticed that Juan's hand trembled as he lighted a match. Juan leaned close. "Estancio, who keeps the shop across the way," he whispered, "asked me who you were. I told him you were Temescal, and my friend. He asked me if you were not Temescal, the thief of Cabazon. I serve you and you only, señor. If again questioned what shall I say?"

"Your hand is unsteady," observed Temescal. "See, the match has gone out. Another!"

Temescal lighted his cigarette and puffed thoughtfully. He blew a ring of smoke, a second ring, and a third. "Tell him he hit the ball on the nose," he said finally. Then, as Juan seemed puzzled: "Your friend across the street is keen, but unwise. Inform him that I am Temescal; that it is my pleasure to patronize Santuario this little while, and purchase supplies for my men. Tell him to breathe no word of this to any one. Thus I shall gain much advertising. But it is unnecessary to say anything about the colonel beneath the rock. That matter is settled."

"Yes, señor. But are *you* Temescal the bandit?"

"None other. And you, it would seem, are my men."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOTHER OF MANY.

"BUT, señor——" Juan had heard strange tales of Temescal the bandido, known throughout the northern states of Mexico as a violent man, cruel, brutal, cold-blooded and so ignorant that he was unable to sign

his own name. "But, señor——" reiterated Juan, staring at his nonchalant and smiling companion.

"Nothing is impossible, my young friend. Your garrulous storekeeper suggests that I am Temescal of Cabazon. Can you disprove it?"

"It is true I first saw you in Cabazon."

"Quite so. Have you ever seen Temescal the bandit, or talked with him?"

"Not unless you are the man."

"Accept me as such until you can prove otherwise. Yet, if you are not pleased with my identity, if you feel that our friendship is founded upon a misapprehension—in short, if you imagined me a gentleman and discovered me to be a rascal, let us shake hands in recognition of a pleasant fellowship concluded, and go our separate ways. I am selfish, as are all men, yet I like to appear generous. You are without money, and without occupation. Half of the gold I carry is sufficient for my needs. The other half is yours should you choose to accept it and journey by yourself."

"But you saved my life, señor!"

"Which is nothing. I refer, of course, to the circumstance. Friendship is not a matter of bookkeeping."

"And you offer me half of your gold——"

"Which is nothing."

Perplexed, Juan frowned and wriggled his nose like a dog trying to follow an elusive scent—which is not a pun in Spanish. He had forgotten the chief issue—whether or not Temescal was the notorious bandit, in endeavoring to appreciate Temescal's peculiar line of reasoning. Saving a man's life was nothing. Gold was nothing. Juan sat with his cigarette unlighted, his wine untasted. Temescal casually studied the young soldier's face.

"It would seem that everything is nothing," declared Juan, after a few moments of troubled reflection.

"Wiser men have arrived at a similar conclusion."

"I am no philosopher," declared Juan, using, however, the word *"pensador,"* which delighted Temescal as a naked equivalent; for indeed he who thinks must needs be a philosopher. "I am no philosopher, yet I know a straight road when I see it, and an honest man when I hear his voice."

"Yet a straight road grows monotonous, and obvious honesty becomes tiresome."

"To the fire with your philosophy!" cried Juan. "I will not accept one centavo of your wealth. Fate chose for me when the rock fell in the cañon of Cabazon. Are you greater than Fate, that you can cast me off with a bribe?"

"No," chuckled Temescal, "but now you have sweated yourself sober, and that is as it should be."

Meanwhile, Estancio informed each person entering his shop—in the strictest confidence—that the mysterious caballero who drank wine in the shade of Las Uvas was none other than Temescal the bandit, a great leader and generous to the poor. "He came into my shop, here," declared Estancio, "and purchased a shirt of the best quality. He paid me liberally, not asking the price. When I tendered him his change he waved it aside, telling me to present it to the shirt maker, who, unquestionably, was a very poor craftsman. Only a leader of bandits could afford to be so indifferent as to the cost of a shirt, and so generous to the poor."

The little group of townsfolk nodded thoughtfully. Estancio's argument may or may not have seemed convincing, yet it was accepted in silence, as most of them owed him money. Finding himself in undisputed authority as a dispenser of interesting news, Estancio enlarged upon his theme. Bankrupt of facts he drew upon his imagination. This Temescal conferred the favor of his presence in Santuario as a visitor and a friend. His men, encamped a few miles from the village, would not appear during their chief's visit, as he did not wish to startle or offend the citizens by a show of force. The young man who accompanied the great captain was one Juan Sepulveda, who had once been a soldier but was now Temescal's lieutenant.

"But the bundle which he bore in his arms?" queried the village gossip.

Estancio frowned at the interruption. "A secret, my friend, which I am not at liberty to divulge."

And so the news circulated swiftly, as strictly confidential news often does, until Temescal's presence in Santuario was the chief topic of conversation.

The village gossip, finding himself somewhat out of the running, betook himself to the home of the alcalde, the one person in town not in debt to the storekeeper. The gossip whispered in the alcalde's ear. The sleepy old alcalde mumbled and nodded, nor

seemed inclined to do anything else until the gossip suggested that Estancio was exceeding his authority by influencing the citizens to receive this Temescal as a guest and a friend. "Are we to be represented by a mere shopkeeper," inquired the gossip, "when the welfare of our community is at stake?"

This clarion challenge, albeit whispered, awoke the alcalde to action. Calling to his wife to fetch him his hat and his cane, he tottered out and down the dusty street toward the store of his social enemy, Estancio.

"Was it not in the wine shop of Emanuelito, in Sonora, that I sat at wine with him, when he was captain of rurales? We were younger then. And the girls of Sonora——" Estancio paused and stared at the alcalde, who frowned round upon the indolent group listening to the shopkeeper. To frown is the prerogative of a justice of the peace. To ask questions is another prerogative. "You sat at wine with whom?" quavered the alcalde.

Estancio hesitated; yet the questioning eyes of his audience demanded an answer. Estancio was in too deep to retreat gracefully, and as there seemed to be no island of evasion immediately in sight, he struck out boldly for the opposite shore. "With none other than this Temescal yonder, who recently entered my shop and——"

"You are acquainted with him, then?"

"As I said, we sat at wine. Doubtless he has——"

"That being the case," quavered the old alcalde, "you will introduce me."

"But why? Are you not the alcalde? Moreover, this Temescal is a most peculiar man, who dislikes attention and social functions. Even now he sits beneath the vine, talking with his lieutenant and enjoying himself in his own way. Possibly he will call upon you this evening——"

"Possibly we will call upon him immediately."

"But my shop!" argued Estancio. "Many are here and I am a busy man."

"Snuff!" said the alcalde. "We can adjust that. Miguel! Alessandro! José! Felipe! Fernando! and you Pedro!" the alcalde indicated the assemblage with a wave of his cane, "you will accompany me."

The suggestion met with enthusiasm, save in the case of Estancio, who, however, took up his hat, and assuming his professional manner, strode out, followed by the tottering alcalde and a half dozen citizens.

Temescal, who sat at ease, his legs crossed, and his gaze concerned, apparently, with the toe of his boot, ceased toying with his silken handkerchief. He allowed his disengaged hand to rest not too far from the ivory handle of his six-shooter. The shopkeeper advanced, hat in hand, and bowed. Gesturing with the professional suavity of a clerk introducing a wealthy patron to an expensive purchase, Estancio made Temescal and the alcalde known to each other. Temescal rose briskly, bowed gracefully, and repeated the alcalde's name. Shrugging his shoulders—politely—and spreading his hands, Temescal asked the alcalde if he would not be so kind as to introduce his friend. The alcalde smiled shrewdly. "This," he said, gesturing indifferently, "is Estancio Nulidad, who once sat at wine with you in Sonora, but whom, doubtless, you have forgotten."

"Completely!" declared Temescal, turning his back on the storekeeper. "Señor Alcalde, may I have the pleasure of ordering refreshment for you?"

The alcalde thrust his cane beneath his arm and rubbed his hands. He accepted a seat, cleared his ancient throat, and continued to rub his hands until the posadero's daughter fetched wine. Over the good wine they talked, while the little group of citizens stared, chiefly at the lordly and gracious Temescal—obviously a greater man than the alcalde himself, and one reputed to be generous to the poor. Among them were those who hoped the great Temescal might notice how poor they were and live up to his reputation. Meanwhile Juan stood within the doorway of the posada, apparently uninterested in the proceedings, yet actually alert that none might approach Temescal too closely from behind. Temescal, turning his head, beckoned to Juan. "You will see that our good friends here do not suffer from thirst. It is a hot day." And he flung a ringing piece of gold on the table.

"That is his way," declared Juan to the group of citizens. "Always thinking of others; even as he rescued and found a home for the girl-child of which you have heard. We will withdraw that the alcalde and my friend may converse undisturbed."

"You call the Captain Temescal your friend?" queried a villager.

"None other!" replied Juan, borrowing both Temescal's phrase and his manner. "Though I serve him, I am also his companion and friend. But do not mistake that he will tolerate familiarity. Your shopkeeper pretended an acquaintance with him. And you will observe that your shopkeeper has returned to his shop. There was also a colonel——" Juan bethought himself and changed the subject.

Temescal was familiar with alcaldes and their works from Tehuantepec to Juarez. However, he did not allow the slightest glimmer of ennui to appear on his courteously animated face as he chatted and drank wine, discreetly, and listened to the musty and didactic alcalde drone along ancient highways of local history like a Spanish oxcart on a mesa road. The alcalde flattered himself that he was entertaining the notorious captain, while Temescal flattered himself that he was preparing the way for a peaceful sojourn in Santuario.

Finally Temescal's patience and his capacity for wine placed the alcalde in a more or less horizontal condition, which was presently rectified through the assistance of two more or less perpendicular citizens who volunteered to escort the justice of the peace to his home.

Linked arm in arm, the dizzy and yet optimistic cavalcade marked time, advanced, hesitated, took a right oblique, then a left oblique, and finding themselves again in the middle of the road, halted to take observations. Meanwhile the alcalde wept on the shoulder of one of his supporters, while the other, taking advantage of this moist interim, tenderly lifted the alcalde's watch from his pocket and deposited it in his own. Then, with curious abruptness, the three leaned forward and charged at an immediate rise in the road, followed by six more or less desultory legs.

Temescal sighed. "And I had but begun to feel the wine kick against my palate," he murmured.

Slowly the hot sun drifted toward the low, western hills. Open doors swung lazily in the faint breeze. Temescal tilted his sombrero over his eyes and stared moodily at his boots. They needed polishing. Finally he called Juan from the cantina and suggested supper. Juan was about to summon the posadero's daughter, when Temescal interrupted with a gesture. "A too-great familiarity with those babblers is not good for us, or for them. We will dine elsewhere."

And elsewhere they dined, partaking liberally of frijoles, chili con carne, enchiladas, huevos con chile, dulce, and dusky-hued coffee, finally admitting that they felt momentarily satisfied.

The evening stars were glowing softly in a velvet-black sky when Temescal and Juan came out into the night and strolled leisurely toward the posada. "Presently we will visit the home of Temescalita," observed Temescal.

Meanwhile the alcalde slept. He was awakened abruptly by his wife, who seemed perturbed. She thrust a folded slip of paper beneath the alcalde's nose. "Read this!" And then, not waiting for her husband to find his spectacles, she informed him of the contents of the note, at the same time berating him for associating with men who dwelt without the law. "And this Temescal," she cried, waving the note to emphasize her utterance, "is nothing more than a swaggering, wine-drinking pauper! He demands that you immediately find food and lodging for his followers—twenty of them—fodder for his horses, and entertainment for himself and his lieutenant. He will arrive at nine o'clock."

The alcalde blinked and stared at his wife. "But he has arrived! No later than this afternoon I talked with him. There is some mistake. Something is askew. Let me see the note."

The alcalde read, sighed, and shook his head. "I cannot understand it! He seemed a most agreeable person. Make some coffee. I will answer this note in person. There is some mistake."

The alcalde took his stick and a lantern and departed to summon together such citizens as could be relied upon to help provide sustenance for the bandit captain and his men. Being met with considerable protest, the alcalde resorted to logic. "We give—or he takes," was his argument. The citizens saw the point.

Temescal, however, was not to be found. Yet he was not in hiding. To the contrary, he was conversing with the foster mother of Temescalita, chaperoned, so to speak, by Juan, to whom he had said upon entering the house: "Do not leave me for an instant!"

Temescalita, having been properly clothed and nourished, was asleep. And

Temescal filled, in a physical sense, the chair of the departed sire of the little brood of curious-eyed childrer who stared in wonderment at Temescal'. noble proportions and magnificent watch chain. Following the usual and meaningless compliments, Temescal opened with a direct attack. "There will be no nonsense about this!" he declared sternly. "It is simply and solely a business matter. For the care of my adopted daughter I shall give you ten dollars a month the first year, twenty dollars a month the second year and thirty dollars a month the third year, unless I choose to make some other disposition of the child." He counted out twelve shining gold pieces and laid them upon the table. "For the first year," he said. "Take good care of the little one. She bears an honorable name." And Temescal abruptly cleared his throat.

"Of a truth, you are generous!" exclaimed the mother of many, who had not seen so much gold in all her life. "But should there be no second or third year—yours being a dangerous calling?"

"I was not aware of it," and Temescal gestured airily. "Still, I appreciate your solicitude—for Temescalita. Within the month you will hear from me or from my solicitors in regard to the niña. I shall immediately dispatch a letter to them. Teach the niña my name. I will again look at her while she sleeps." And Temescal strode to the dim corner of the room and gazed down upon the tiny Temescalita. He shook his head. "Strange!" he mused. "The child seems to have become noticeably larger in this short while. Nor was I aware that she was of so dark a hue. However, I could recognize the infant among a dozen of her age and size." To assure himself he leaned close. His hand, outthrust to steady himself, pressed something which wiggled and squawked suddenly. He leaped back as though he had touched a live ember. The mother of many, chatting with Juan, rose and came swiftly. And swiftly she gathered a squirming bundle to her ample breast.

"I had not noticed the other one," apologized Temescal, retreating toward the middle of the room. "Pardon my clumsiness, due to a sincere regard for the slumbers of Temescalita."

The infant, being led to discover that which soothed its irritation and, in the economy of nature, occupied its vociferous energies to the full, became as placid as a mildly gurgling brook. Replete with sympathy and sustenance, it almost immediately fell asleep. The mother of many smiled benignly. "I cherish the little one as though it were my own," she murmured feelingly.

"But isn't it?" queried Temescal, staring at the baby asleep in her arms.

"This, señor, is your Temescalita. The other, yonder, is my youngest, Maria de la Concepcion Conchita."

"I should have at least known that voice," muttered Temescal.

"Will you not kiss the little one before you go?" said the mother of many. "See! Is she not pretty?"

"Not for the world would I disturb her!" declared Temescal, drawing back. "We will be going. To-morrow, perhaps." Temescal took up his sombrero and moved toward the doorway. As he stepped out he bade the señora adieu in his most stately manner. The youngsters, hitherto unnaturally quiet, clustered round their mother, within whose ample arms slumbered the altogether fortunate Temescalita. The light of the candle shining from behind the mother of many cast a halo about her head.

Temescal turned abruptly and strode to the street. Once clear of the doorway light, however, his pace slackened. Relieved that the interview was concluded, he allowed himself the luxury of reflection. "A most worthy woman, and not unattractive; generous by nature, and by nature generously proportioned. One who neither slights nor idealizes the duties of a mother; exacting obedience by example—for I doubt that a child finds it easy to obey a garrulous parent. Repeated admonitions have been known to awaken perversity in a saint. Indeed, she appeared somewhat like a heroic Madonna, as she stood——"

"Was it not much money for the care of one small infant?" queried Juan, who imagined that his silent companion might possibly be reconsidering his generosity. Temescal stopped, as one might, who, leading a halterwise and familiar old hobby, suddenly discovers that the hobby has left him to answer the hee-haw of some vagrant mule.

"Money? Infant? Much money? One small—— Of a truth, I was upon a broader path. No, it was not too much—nor

enough. Do you think when I cast money upon the table I do not first measure conditions? Were there not six small ones to feed? I——"

"Seven, señor."

"Did I overlook another? Seven, then. Is it not, that some small good has come out of a great wrong? Could those who devastated the home of Temescalita have dreamed that in providing for her I have provided for six others? Yet it is so. Yonder good woman is industrious. Her home proclaims it. She will use discretion in spending the money to clothe and feed her children. Thus will she be relieved of worry. Worry disorganizes the digestion. Worry is also communicated directly from mother to infant. I would have Temescalita become a healthy and consequently happy child. Thus you may observe my selfishness in providing so liberally. I do not refer to the amount, you understand, but to its uses."

"Yet the señora seemed to have a good digestion before you gave her the money," suggested Juan.

"Quite so. And so did I."

"Then why would not the little Temescalita have grown fat on perhaps five pesos a month, señor?"

"I refer to quality, not quantity, my friend. I fear I have overshot the mark. A too-heavy charge makes a pistol jump. Let us descend to arithmetic. Ten dollars in American gold—thank the illustrious stars—is twenty dollars in the money of Mexico. Divide twenty dollars by seven children—or eight, was it?—and you have but two or three dollars each month with which to clothe and feed a child. And you thought I had been too liberal? You think carelessly!"

"I see that you are right," admitted Juan, who, however, saw nothing more abstract than the light in the cantina up the street. "She is a good woman, but unfortunate in choosing husbands. Of these, one was drowned in the acequia, one suffered a fatal accident, and the third——"

"Magnificent!" cried Temescal. "It doesn't matter what happened to him. He is with the saints. Three of them! *Por Dios!* I shall instruct my attorneys to send the woman twice as much as I promised for the second year! The great President of the United States should know of her. He would be delighted."

CHAPTER V.

"BUT, SENOR——"

THESE deep-bosomed women, with ox eyes and a motherly manner——" Temescal stopped abruptly and touched his companion's arm. "We have been visiting with the mother of many but a short half hour, yet observe the change in this village." He gestured toward the plaza from whence came the sound of a guitar twanged harshly, singing and coarse laughter. A group of armed men, most evidently not citizens of Santuario, clustered about the doorway of the cantina. "They are armed, yet they are not soldiers," said Juan.

"We will investigate by disappearing from this street," declared Temescal. "Turn slowly, my friend. We are observed already."

"Nor are they vaqueros from Los Ojos," Juan continued as he faced about with Temescal and walked leisurely toward a hillside tree.

"What they are not, does not interest me. What they are, may."

"But, señor——"

"That little word will get you into much trouble, some day. This sudden change bears a peculiar significance. You will leave me, and after ascertaining that our horses are where we left them, return and tell me that my apprehension is unfounded. Then if you wish to argue——"

"I am not afraid to be seen on the street," said Juan, who felt that Temescal was the least bit too positive and peremptory. Juan shrugged his shoulders and departed whistling. This Temescal was a clever man, and bold, but overcautious at times. And no matter who the strangers were, Santuario was always a friendly town. There was a bonfire in the plaza. There would be feasting and dancing!

Crossing the street Juan met Juanita Escobar, pretty, saucy, and arrayed in fiesta raiment. Juan bowed. Juanita smiled and used her eyes. They had met aforetime and neither had forgotten the occasion.

"I thought you were a soldado," said Juanita, "but I see you have become a groom. You were feeding the horses back of the posada to-day, were you not?"

"My own, and my friend's."

"Your friend's?" Juanita laughed. "Would you call Captain Temescal your friend if he were here?"

"But yes! He is not my master. We are companions."

Juanita had heard the gossip of the hour. She had seen Juan and Temescal together. She liked to anger the handsome Juan, whom she would presently flatter, then captivate—a simple and effective system and more frequently employed than many men realize. "Where is your companion then? The alcalde is looking for him—and for you. There will be dancing in the plaza, to-night. If you are not Captain Temescal's groom, you will be there, and you will introduce me to him."

"But, yes, if you will tell me what all this means."

Juanita shook her head. She made a saucy mouth at Juan.

"I will give you a kiss, if you will tell me," suggested Juan. But to Juanita the proposal seemed altogether too one-sided. "For a kiss," she whispered and leaned close, "I will give you nothing," and shrugging from Juan's grasp she turned and swept away.

Juan frowned. An impromptu fiesta was in progress. Its music and glamour called to him. Could it be possible that his companion *was* Temescal the bandit, the scourge of Coahuila and Durango, nicknamed The Thief of Cabazon? And if these who drank and sang and made the streets their own were his men, why then did the bandit captain hide within the shadows?

A ragged and armed stranger brushed past. Juan followed him into the cantina. The place was dim with smoke, noisy with loud talking. "Ladrones," thought Juan as he covertly glanced at the company. One asked Juan to drink with him, and following the brief ceremony, told him to pay for the wine. Juan paid, receiving change for a peso.

"You have money?" queried another. "That is good, for I have nothing but this and my thirst." And the man drew from his tattered shirt that which Juan at first thought was a soiled linen handkerchief, but which proved to be an infant's white dress of fine texture and delicately fashioned. He stared at the garment. "Where did you find it?" he asked.

"Am I a fool?" said the other. "What will you give for it?"

"No, I am a fool," declared Juan, and he proffered a peso which the ragged one quickly accepted. Juan tucked the tiny garment in his pocket. "You serve Temescal?" queried Juan as they drank together.

"None other!"

Juan started as though another and more resonant voice had spoken. He turned to go when some one in the street cried, "Viva Temescal!" and the salute was reiterated hoarsely by those about him. Juan was crowded to the doorway, out into the street. Mounted on a big horse was a broad man, a thick man, who sat solidly in the saddle, paying no attention whatever to the shouting of the people. "Beno suerte, Temescal!" cried a man at Juan's elbow. And, "A lo lajos, Temescal!" cried another, and those round about laughed at the jest. Yet not until the thick man had dismounted in front of the posada and had given the reins to one of his followers did Juan realize that this captain was not the Temescal he knew.

"Where is this alcalde?" queried the thick man, seating himself in the chair which the other Temescal had so recently occupied.

The old alcalde tottered up. "Here, señor. I was just about to ask your lieutenant there——"

"My lieutenant? Know then, wizened one, that my lieutenant is in camp."

"Then who are you?" And the alcalde turned to Juan.

"Yes, who are you?" growled the thick man.

"Juan Sepulveda."

"That answers nothing! Pablo! Miguel!"

The two called upon seized Juan's arms and led him up to the table.

"So then, you are my lieutenant?"

"It is a mistake," said Juan. "I am no man's lieutenant. I am but visiting here in Santuario."

"But this young man is your lieutenant," insisted the alcalde, deceived by the resemblance of the one Temescal to the other. "Was he not with you this afternoon, when we had wine together—and my watch disappeared?"

"You drool like a broken egg!" The captain waved the alcalde aside.

But the alcalde persisted: "This young man entered our town to-day with one who called himself Temescal. If you are not the man, then I am blind. However, you then said nothing about quartering your men upon us, but hinted that you wished to be left to yourself to enjoy the peace and quiet

of the village. Then, much to my surprise, you send me a note, demanding provisions for your men and fodder for your horses. Following which——"

The bandit captain raised his hand. "Girl-face, whom do you serve?"

"Temescal!" declared Juan.

"You lie!"

"Not so!" declared a voice from within the posada. Attention, hitherto centered on the bandit captain and Juan, lifted to behold a broad-shouldered, impressive figure standing nonchalantly in the doorway. As Juan stared, recognizing the voice, the figure seemed to grow less distinct of outline, for the very good reason that the posadero's daughter, unable to resist either Temescal's persuasive manner or the gold piece, proffered with a hint that she could purchase a pretty dress with it, had been slowly turning down the one lamp in the outer room, unobserved, and unhindered because her father had wisely ordered her from the cantina next door. The captain, whose back was toward the doorway, was obliged to take a great deal for granted. Nearly all his men were either in the cantina, drinking, or in the plaza, dancing. Two of them, it is true, were present, but engaged in holding the prisoner. "My friend whom you detain," continued the voice pleasantly, "does not lie. Nor do I say that you are a murderer, a blackguard, a drunkard, a thief and an impostor. You call yourself Temescal. Dogs also bark. Had you brains with which to reason, I should be happy to discuss the present situation with you. But you are of the *gente sin cabron*—therefore it would be labor lost to shoot you through the head. First, you will order the he-goats who detain my companion to release him. But let them make one movement toward hostility and you are a dead thief. My companion will now step from between Don Rag-shirt and Don Fleatrap and stand behind them that he may breathe more freely. So! You may be curious as to the authority which commands you. Know, then, stealer of eggs, that I am Temescal of Cabazon, protector of——"

"Quedado! Guardarse!" cried Juan, as the bandit captain leaped from his chair and whirling, fired at the voice in the darkened doorway. Yet where the voice had been, Temescal was not. Rather, he was halfway down the room. "Through, and follow!" he cried. Juan lunged for the doorway. One of the bandit's guards caught his arm. "Have it, then!" cried Juan, who had jerked his pistol from beneath his armpit. The man went down in a writhing heap. Juan jumped over him and backed into the posada. His pistol barked like a startled watchdog. "Go, while there is time!" he called to Temescal, who was firing at the flashes in the doorway.

Juan felt a hot pain sear his shoulder. His pistol was empty. Turning, he stumbled to the rear of the room. He heard shouting and the sound of hurrying feet; then Temescal's voice behind him. "Idiot! Through the patio, to the horses!"

Accustomed to hazard, the companions were in the saddle and spurring for the open before it was known in which direction they had gone.

South they pounded through the night, across the great plateau known as the Plain of the Padres. Juan rode in the lead, being more or less familiar with the country. When the pace finally slackened to a trot, Juan employed himself in speculating as to how their horses had happened to be saddled and ready in the very nick of chance; and further, how it had come about that Temescal had so opportunely taken possession of the front room of the posada. Temescal must have saddled the horses, aware that danger threatened. Juan felt contrite, ashamed of himself for having doubted the judgment of his friend. Had not Temescal told him to see that the horses were where they had been left—and to return and tell him that he had been mistaken in apprehending danger?

Juan thrust his hand beneath his shirt. His shoulder was numb. The strength of the wine he had taken was evaporating. Presently Temescal took the lead, pushing his horse steadily, but never beyond a trot. Juan followed, his head dropping, then coming up sharply as a thrust of pain awakened him. The night seemed endless; and the dawn a grim harbinger of disaster as it glimmered across a barren land and wild. Burial place of many historic adventurers of both cross and sword, the Plain of the Padres offered neither food nor shelter from the advancing sun. Feeling that he could not much longer endure the fatigue and pain, Juan spurred to Temescal's side. "I am wounded," he said.

"Ride!" said Temescal, and sped on.

A half hour, and again Juan spurred up to Temescal's pace.

"Señor, I bleed," he said, gesturing toward his shoulder.

"Ride!" said Temescal, not turning his head.

Again Juan dropped behind, the reins loose on the horse's neck, his hands clinging to the saddle horn. He glanced down at his arm. The dark stain, but recently a spot, had spread nearly to his wrist. Yet it was not the realization of his injury, but the actual pain that made him sick and faint. Finally, in a last desperate effort to check his companion long enough to at least bandage his wound Juan spurred up close. "I can go no farther," he said, swaying forward as both horses slowed down to a walk.

Instantly Temescal reined up and dismounted. "Idiot!" he thundered, "why did you not say so?"

Juan's only answer was to slip from the saddle into Temescal's stout arms. "Those ladrones almost winged a pigeon—but not quite," muttered Temescal as he bathed the wound with their precious canteen water. Searching for something with which to bandage it, he came upon a handful of fine, soft material folded and tucked in Juan's pocket. A handkerchief, a keepsake from some girl—Temescal unfolded the tiny garment which Juan, through sentiment, had bought from the ragged one in Santuario. "But no!" reflected Temescal, shaking his head, "it would seem that another has the true keepsake and this is but a reminder of it. This baby's dress is a fine garment and it is a shame to tear it: but necessity is no respecter of fine linen. I had a most excellent shirt, myself, but recently."

A nip of peach brandy from Temescal's silver flask, and Juan's eyelids fluttered open. "Is it you, señor?" he murmured faintly. "I had thought I was with the saints."

"Better luck next time, amigo. Moreover, it is hard digging hereabout, so I decided to take you with me."

"But, señor——"

"No, we are not followed. Naught but the sunlight rides the mesa between us and our escape. Worry promotes fever. Cool your wound with the assurance that we are safe for the present. Another nip of brandy —so!"

"You have no wound, señor?"

"Not a scratch. A hole or two in my new jacket—mere misplaced buttonholes. Do you feel stronger?"

"I feel like a fool. I doubted your judgment——"

"The bullet is a hard teacher. You have lost a little blood, which is nothing compared with gaining a little wisdom. And remember—courage is valueless without judgment. A bull has courage, yet a little man on foot can outgeneral and destroy him. But we are not here to talk. Up now! Lean on me! A foot in the stirrup, and you are your own man again."

Juan Sepulveda, still a bit shaky, yet inspired by Temescal's hardy example, again followed, slowly, viewing the broad straight back of his companion with feelings of respect and affection. To serve such a man was a privilege, were he rascal or saint, or a composite of both, mixed judiciously. Henceforth there would be no arguing, Juan decided: no dalliance with pretty girls when his companion sent him upon an errand, and no dalliance with wine when war was all about them. Juan's to-morrow was bristling with good intentions.

CHAPTER VI.

PEDRO IMPORTUNIO.

A THIN skein of smoke first called their attention to the hacienda—or such they imagined it until near enough to determine the huddle of low buildings and unfenced acres roundabout, as neither ranch nor inn. Temescal, who had been observing the place with much curiosity, disvested himself of his money belt. "I will leave it here, beneath this flat rock," he said, "close to the road. Mark the spot. Should I have the misfortune to depart hurriedly from this world, the gold will then be yours."

"But, señor, in such a case I should not survive you."

"You might—in spite of yourself. Many a doting wife has said as much—and widowed, lived to marry a better man."

"Would the gold not be safer farther from the road?"

"Not as safe. I have dismounted to tighten the cincha—thus. My horse is restless and tramples out my tracks—thus. I have not set foot off the road to tell of other purpose in dismounting."

"But, señor, we cross the Plain of the

Padres. None but simple folk would live out here in this lonely land."

"I will not argue the question. Use your eyes. What do you see?" Temescal mounted and urged his horse forward.

"I see spots dancing before my eyes like gnats in a sunbeam," replied the literal Juan.

"Poetic—but irrelevant. Look farther."

"I see a house and outbuildings, yet there are no fields inclosed, and little cultivated land."

"No sheep, cattle, goats, or a sign of husbandry?" queried Temescal.

"Of a truth, it is but a poor land."

"Of a truth, it is rich in mischief," declared Temescal positively.

"You speak as though you knew the place, señor."

"I have seen it but this once—yet I know it," and Temescal included the immediate vista in a broad gesture. "The man who lives in a place like this, and does not till the soil, or keep sheep or goats or cattle, lives by his wits. He is far from all law except his own. To be contented with such a home implies villainy, or stupidity, which is equally dangerous. Use your eyes."

"Had I your brains!" said Juan.

"Nonsense. And what a mess you would make of them! Be glad that your own are in their original shell. Thinking by proxy is one of the great sins of humanity. We draw near to the house. Remember, a wounded man is always under suspicion. Carry yourself as naturally as your wound will permit. You are Juan Sepulveda, as usual. I am, for the time being, Pedro Importunio. They will understand 'Pedro.'"

A swarthy native, hollow cheeked, and with a sunken, red slit where an eye should have been, stared across his nose at the strangers like a suspicious dog peering round the corner of a house. Temescal, anxious to have their horses fed and to inspect and attend to Juan's wound more thoroughly, ignored his immediate antipathy for that man, asking him if they might have breakfast and fodder for their horses.

"We have nothing to sell," said the hollow-cheeked man.

"Nor have I," declared Temescal, "because what I have to offer so far from a town, is priceless." He unscrewed the top of his silver flask and filled it with brandy. "Here, taste of it! Consider yourself *my* guest. I appreciate your hesitancy in the matter of breakfast and horse feed. You are an honest man, and we are unknown to you. Be assured that we are not rascals, but travelers in distress. Our horses are weary, and my Cousin Juan, here, has suffered an accident, for which his horse was to blame, but not the sharp rock upon which he fell. I would have water that I might cleanse the dirt from the wound, and food that we may continue on our way to Sandoval, if——"

"Sandoval is not upon this road," said the hollow-cheeked one, drinking the liquor hastily, but retaining the tiny cup.

"Then, indeed, we are lost!" exclaimed Temescal, turning to Juan. And Temescal closed one eye. "But one is never lost in good company," declared Temescal, again facing the sinister stare of the hollow-cheeked man, who seemed unmoved by either Temescal's appeal, or his brandy. Yet Temescal noticed that the tiny veins on the other's bulbous nose had changed in hue from purple to red. The brandy was at work. "A thousand-and-one pardons, señor," cried Temescal. "I had not noticed that your cup was empty. Again! As for breakfast, we require but little. Meanwhile our horses can be fed. Would five pesos induce you to reconsider the matter?" And Temescal, much to Juan's surprise, slapped the fellow heartily upon the shoulder. "Of course we shall dine, and pay for it. All the shops in the land will close when Pedro Importunio does not pay."

"Five pesos?" The hollow-cheeked one curled his fingers.

"Seguro Miguel!" Which, although Temescal seldom resorted to slang, is pretty fair Spanish for "Sure Mike."

"Enrique!" shrilled a woman's voice from the adobe, "must I tell you again that there are horses to be caught and saddled before Captain Temescal returns from Santuario?" And a short and exceedingly fat woman appeared suddenly in the doorway.

"I have strangers with me," called the hollow-cheeked one. "They ask for breakfast."

"Must I spend my life cooking for all the thieves who steal horses and ride this way?"

"Without horses we would have been late for breakfast," said Temescal, who had followed the man Enrique to the doorway. "It is a pleasure to meet you, señorita. And even though we appear to you as thieves,

believe that we would steal even less of your time if circumstances permitted." Temescal bowed, and jingled some silver in his pocket. The woman's shrewish expression changed at once to one of oily suavity. "Indeed, it will be an honor to prepare food for——"

"Pedro Importunio. Kindly do not ask me the name of my horse. I have not yet learned it. This is my cousin, Juan Sepulveda, a vaquero of Los Ojos."

"Your handsome cousin is wounded?" queried the woman shrewdly.

"Injured, rather. A fall from a horse. Thus it is that he does penance for my sins as well as his own. But you will absolve us, with a bite of breakfast, perhaps?"

The woman's crafty eyes flashed toward the single orb of her man. He passed his hand over his face as one who brushes away a cobweb, and at the same time squeezed his nose between his finger and his thumb. Temescal knew the sign—shutting off the breath—yet its significance did not seem to disturb his easy poise.

They entered the low, wide, and many-roomed house. The earthen floor was beaten smooth and hard by much use. The walls were brown with smoke. Despite the heat the doors leading from the main room, apparently to numberless other rooms, were closed. The place smelled of stale grease, and commingled odors of cooked food. A serviceable and ample stove, of American make, stood in a corner of the room, and upon it were pots and kettles of a size such as one might expect to find in a small hotel, rather than in an isolated ranch house occupied by but two persons. The woman bustled about the stove. The man, Enrique, seemed to hesitate as to whether he had best go and attend to the duty of catching the horses, or stay.

"Must I remind you again that we have no milk?" queried the woman. Enrique of the hollow cheeks departed grumblingly. Following his departure, Juan and Temescal were shown to a room back of the kitchen where they could wash and prepare themselves for the meal.

"I have used my eyes," whispered Juan, as Temescal washed his face and rubbed his curly black hair vigorously. Temescal gestured toward a big heap of bottles in the back yard.

Juan nodded gravely. The bottles had once contained American whisky, not a surprising fact in itself, but significant in that only officers of the several Mexican armies and as many bands of guerrillas were able to procure and afford such beverage. "We are as fledglings in a rat's nest." whispered Temescal. "The rest I had promised ourselves may be longer than I had anticipated. There are men," Temescal adjusted his silken scarf, "in those rooms. Otherwise we should not have been left alone with the fat one. When you speak, be cautious. If you shoot, waste no cartridges."

"Si, señor, my shoulder is still painful, yet I think it is not broken," said Juan. There was ample reason for changing the subject. The morning sunlight through the front doorway cast the shadow of a listening woman on the floor of the other room.

"If I could have afforded it, I should have had a physician in Dolores examine the injury," said Temescal. "The poor have no business to get injured. Yet though we are poor we may still pay with both money and gratitude for that which the young woman is preparing for us. He seemed an old man to have so young a daughter. No doubt——"

"But, señor——" Juan caught himself, and cleared his throat.

"You speak wisely," declared Temescal, "especially when you leave so much to the imagination."

Always realizing the absolute value of personality, Temescal took pains to enhance his naturally fine appearance by casting himself into a superlatively pleasant mood, without the aid of other stimulant than necessity. In three strides he had entered the adjoining room, each stride sprightly, yet dignified. His eyes shone with congeniality. His face radiated good-fellowship. Even his hands, as he gestured and shrugged his shoulders—politely—expressed deference and a high regard for the portly woman who was preparing his breakfast. "I fear this is an imposition," he said. "Yet your father was undoubtedly sincere when he invited us in."

Enrique's wife—known to the ladrones who periodically frequented the rendezvous as "The Wildcat," stared at Temescal unsmilingly. As she distrusted all men, including her husband, it was difficult for her to accept Temescal's compliment as to her age. "I am no more the daughter of Enrique than this Juan Sepulveda is your

cousin—and you know it!" she said, squaring her elbows and facing Temescal.

"A thousand-and-one pardons, señorita!" Temescal bowed gallantly. "You are perhaps his niece, then?"

"You are bold, and an old hand with women," declared Enrique's wife. "But flattery does not fill an empty larder."

"Or an empty heart, perhaps?" queried Temescal in his best manner.

The fat woman displayed a slight hesitancy, as though considering the matter. Temescal encouraged acquiescence in his suggestion by maintaining a dignified silence, as though the question were of the deepest import. For a second, or perhaps two seconds, the portly wife of the malignant Enrique seemed undecided. But she had been a vixen so long, and accustomed to the speech and ways of rough men that not even Temescal's blandishments could soften her harshness.

"Your breakfast is ready," she said, gesturing toward the end of the long table, which could have accommodated twenty hungry men.

"Lacking only your smile to make it a banquet," declared Temescal, who seemed strangely immune to her rebuffs. And with the manner of a don of Andalusia, he seated himself and partook of the coarse fare with all the grace of an exquisite carving a pheasant. Juan, whose shoulder was exceedingly painful, ate sparingly. He was still using his eyes. There was milk upon the table, although the woman had said there was no milk. Juan wondered why Temescal had wasted so much courtesy upon so ill-mannered a woman. And any one not totally blind could see that the woman was as old as Enrique himself. Still, Temescal had referred to her as his daughter. Truly, Temescal was playing a childish part. Then, like a twinge of conscience, a sudden pain shot through Juan's shoulder, reminding him that Temescal had foreseen the recent occasion for it. So, recalling his vow of loyalty and obedience, Juan accepted the situation without further self-questioning, determined that if they were as fledglings in a rat's nest. the rats would find them prepared for an attack. It worried Juan that their horses and carbines were not within reach, so, complaining that he felt dizzy, he rose and stepped out of the house. Following Temescal's general example Juan did not hasten to see if their horses and arms were easily available, but sat on a bench under the portal, his head in his hands—the veriest image of dejection.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Temescal, noticing Juan's attitude.

The woman questioned his exclamation with shrewd eyes.

"The coffee!" said Temescal. "May I trouble you for another cup?"

Enrique's wife poured another cup of coffee, which Temescal drank slowly, as though desirous of experiencing its full flavor.

Meanwhile Juan had risen and was walking slowly out toward the road. He had no need to feign distress. His shoulder pained him exceedingly. He strode back and forth like a man suffering from toothache. His stride became aimless—down the road a few paces, then back, then a few paces toward the house. Meanwhile he used his eyes. The horses were in a small corral, still saddled. Juan could hear Temescal's voice, and an occasional word. He paused and listened. Temescal was telling the woman the story of "The Alcalde with Three Wives!" Juan knew the story —one that interested men, and was of triple interest to all women. Temescal's deep, mellow voice rolled on. Juan continued his pacing up and down, yet with a definite aim. Finally he was round the corner of the adobe, in the shade. Passing an open window he glanced within. Five or six ragged and villainous-looking men were asleep on the floor. Their arms—American rifles—were in a corner. Juan's experience in the army told him much. The men obviously were bandits, possibly followers of the other Temescal. Moreover, they slept the sleep of those overcome with much strong drink.

He passed the window swiftly. It would be well to get the horses and depart. Cautiously he entered the corral, secured the horses and was making his way back when a head was thrust from the window he had so recently passed. Bleared eyes stared at him from a heavy, drink-swollen face. Juan nodded a greeting and kept on. He heard a voice, and then another. He hastened round the corner and up to the doorway. Temescal was proffering money to the fat woman, who was arguing shrewishly. "But why should we wait for your husband, when the sun is already above us?" queried Temescal.

"Señor!" cried Juan. "Make haste! There are men in that room!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Temescal. "The señorita assured me that we were alone. Twice she has refused the money I have offered for our entertainment. I would have her understand that we are not beggars."

Temescal had heard the sound of a voice and some one moving in one of the rooms, and for that reason he was on his feet and ready for a surprise. Yet he did not know, until Juan arrived at the doorway with the horses, where Juan had gone. "Your money!" said Temescal brusquely, as he tossed the coins on the table. Enrique's wife had earned the name of The Wildcat, beyond all doubt. With a surprisingly swift gesture, for one so fat, she dipped her hand into the pot of ground chili on the table and flung the pepper in Temescal's face. For an instant Juan did not realize what had happened. Then, as he heard Temescal cry out, he knew. Dropping the reins of the horses, Juan leaped through the doorway and caught hold of his companion. "This way!" he cried, pulling Temescal round and urging him toward his horse. "Here is the stirrup. Mount and ride! I will follow."

Thrust against the horse, Temescal, though blinded and suffering great agony from the pepper, caught stirrup and horn and swung up. "I am of no use. I am blind!" he cried. Juan struck the horse, which leaped away.

The fat woman shrieked, calling upon some one to kill the strangers. And like a mad Amazon she rushed at Juan to grapple with him and hold him. "An eye for an eye!" cried Juan as he struck out. Enrique's wife suddenly sat down in the doorway. Juan jumped back and swung to the saddle. As he spurred his horse he turned. A rifle was thrust through a window. Juan's pistol barked. A figure slumped down beside the fat woman. Juan leaped to his horse and sped down the road like a flash of light. A half mile beyond the house he overtook Temescal, who was riding at a short lope. "Turn!" he cried. "You ride toward Santuario!"

Temescal, rubbing his streaming eyes with his handkerchief, reined up. "Even though blind, I still have intuition. Somewhere near here is my money belt. Ten paces east of the road, beneath a triangular piece of rock. Secure it."

Juan hastened to obey, yet it took him some time to find the hiding place of the money. Finally he rode back to Temescal.

"I see one coming from the hill, driving horses before him," said Juan. "Yet there is one among the thieves of the plains who will not ride again. Also I was forced to punch the fat woman in the eye. Otherwise she would have detained me."

"You did wisely," said Temescal. "Lead, and I will follow the sound of your horse's hoofs."

"You suffer!" cried Juan.

"You must be my eyes—for a time. I shall recover. Almost, I dodged the assault. Ride wide of the house and then swing in toward the west. I would give my money belt and all that it contains for a gallon of cold water."

And despite their injuries and suffering they rode hard, bearing in an arc toward the south and then toward the west. They were not followed then, for the very good reason that the bandit Temescal's men had instructions to await him at the house on the plains. Finally the far, blue range of the Cordovas rose like a tiny welt on the great plain, and toward the hills rode Juan, faint and weary, and following him, Temescal, suffering great pain from his seared and swollen eyes. Soon their horses slowed to a walk, leg weary and oppressed by the intense heat.

Toward evening they struck into an arroyo which narrowed as it reached the hills. The horses pricked their ears and struck into a trot.

"There is water near by," said Temescal.

"Si, señor."

"Your voice sounds strange."

"You are a fool." declared Juan in the singsong voice of the demented. "Had I your strength I would have strangled the fat sow with my naked hands, and thirst should then be unknown to us. My colonel is dead. Then how should he spend money?"

"Find water!" Temescal commanded brusquely.

Juan found it—rode his thirsty horse into it, and without so much as a sigh, slipped from the saddle, and sank into oblivion. Temescal, who had regained a glint of his eyesight, dragged Juan from the pool, and half seeing, half feeling, poured a trickle of brandy down his throat. Temescal did not drink until he had bathed his eyes in the

pool. Then he took a generous draft of the peach brandy, and set about washing and rebandaging Juan's wound.

This accomplished, Temescal unsaddled the horses and hobbled them. As they hopped ludicrously up the barranca toward the hills, he shrugged his shoulders. The horses might stray, and neither he nor Juan were in the best condition for tracking them in the morning. Yet presently the sound of the hobbled hoofs ceased. Temescal nodded. "They have found grass—else they would have kept on. And here is water. They will not stray far."

Toward midnight, when the stars were many, and the air was cooler, and faint, occasional breezes from the hills drifted down the barranca, Juan wakened and sat up. He still felt weak and dizzy, but his mind had cleared. He could see nothing in the darkness. "Compadre!" he called softly.

"I am here," came Temescal's voice.

"You do not sleep?"

"No. My eyes are not inclined to sleep, this night, so I keep them company."

"You suffer much?"

"Not greatly—now that I have hold of the pain and will not let it gain the upper hand. Moreover, I have my handkerchief bound about my eyes. I have dipped it in the pool."

"I know of no pool," declared Juan.

"We are in the foothills of the Cordovas. You rode well, until the fever of your wound unseated both you and your reason."

"And you, unable to see, took care of me, that I am here and safe?"

"It is nothing. I did what I could."

"But, señor! What may I do to ease your suffering? It is not that you should be burdened with the care of one like me. What may I do?"

It is possible that the great Temescal chuckled, or perhaps it was the sound of wringing out his handkerchief and dipping it in the pool that Juan heard. Then: "Sleep, my son. The good sleep will restore you, strengthen your sinews, heal your wound, clear the cobwebs from your brain. Is there not to-morrow? To-morrow you will climb the golden stairway of the dawn, and standing upon the rim of the world survey the fields of romance and adventure. You are young. Sleep while you may. Then it will be still, that I may think."

"Of what will you think, señor?"

"I cannot say. Thought is born of itself. At present I am thinking of Temescalita."

"Temescalita!"

"None other. Her little hands lie cool upon my eyes."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE ARROYO.

POSSIBLY because youth seems perversely inclined to ignore good advice, Juan did not go to sleep, as Temescal had suggested, but lay staring up at the countless and incomprehensible stars, thinking of his recent experiences and pondering upon the probable consequences of deserting from the army. His imagination—so to speak—was in the saddle and spurring blindly in a wide and erratic endeavor to escape no greater enemy than himself. Had his pulse—still carried a trifle high by the momentum of his fever—been normal, he might have reasoned that he was far safer in the companionship of Temescal than serving under so unscrupulous a leader as his colonel had proved to be. Yet Juan again allowed himself to doubt Temescal's judgment, and the value of his personality as affecting those inclined toward argument. It was quite evident that Temescal was vain of his personal appearance, vain of his eloquence, his marksmanship, his courage and his new boots. True, he was a fine figure of a man, talked entertainingly, shot accurately, feared nothing and wore excellent leather—yet in spite of all this he managed to stir up trouble wherever he went. His very presence excited interest, invited controversy, caused women's eyes to turn admiringly—a dangerous man to be associated with. Why, even in Santuario, where Juan was known, it had been Temescal this and Temescal that, and Juan Sepulveda scarce noticed, or if noticed it was simply as the handle on the lamp, something useful but having nothing whatever to do with its radiance.

Thus Juan cogitated, inspired by that human perversity which forever seeks to pick a flaw in perfection. A gentle snore disturbed his cogitations. The mist of stars that floated above him became less vague and fanciful. A twinge of pain pricked his shoulder. It was as though the finger of conscience had touched him. "A trifling wound, in the muscles of your shoulder," an inner voice seemed to say. "Had it not

been for the foresight and courage of your companion—who snores—the wound might have been here!" Juan shivered as he fancied a finger placed directly between his eyes. A deeper snore shook the balmy air of the starlit and peaceful night. "He sleeps!" soliloquized Juan. "While I lie here sleepless! And he snores like he talks, with great assurance. I am thirsty. He spoke of a pool." Juan sat up and felt about. His saddle blanket was beneath him, and his saddle placed for a pillow. Across his legs was a serape—Temescal's serape. Juan threw back the serape and stood up. His tongue was dry and rough, his forehead hot. Temescal had taken off Juan's boots that he might rest more comfortably. Juan, not aware of this in his somewhat dazed condition, took a step toward what he thought might be the pool —a black shadow in the hazy shadows of the rocks. He stepped, as one often does when arising at night in an outdoor camp, on a sharp stone. "Ow!" exclaimed Juan. A sharp click, like the turning of a key in a crisp lock, startled him. "It is I, señor! Do not shoot!" he cried briskly. Temescal's snoring had ceased abruptly.

"I thought so," said Temescal. "But I am glad you spoke. I was about to express a doubt."

"But, señor, you slept!"

"Not a wink!"

"But, señor, some one snored."

"Then it must have been your conscience which slept and snored while you listened. However, that is nothing unusual. What disturbed you?"

"I have a great thirst."

"So? Then get back to your blanket, and remember that we are companions in distress—not master and servant. You should have called me. I will get water for you."

Juan was glad to creep back to his blanket. He still felt weak and dizzy. Temescal fetched water from the pool, traversing the rocky ground several times, as his small drinking cup held but little, and Juan was a thirsty man. Refreshed by the cool water, Juan felt better. As his physical irritation subsided he grew penitent. Temescal retired to his place against the rock, where he sat smoking a cigarette to allay his hunger.

"I have not slept since you spoke of Temescalita," declared Juan, presently.

"That is bad, because the mind magnifies distress at night. Moreover, your tone implies that you would confide something to me. Frankly, my temper is somewhat short, owing to the condition of my eyes. However, I shall try to be just. If you won't sleep, go ahead and talk."

"It is nothing, señor. And yet——"

"Spoken like a woman! Out with it, and tell me to my face that you are weary of this pilgrimage; and I, Temescal, have disappointed your romantic young ideals; that our feasting has been of the catch-as-catch-can order and our dancing has been to the tune of six-shooters and thundering hoofs. No loafing about war-tortured towns and strutting in uniform before the fear-stricken and fawning eyes of girls who would knife you if you didn't wear a uniform. No opportunity, in this, our peaceful and serene adventuring, for standing bravely shoulder to shoulder in a firing squad and shooting down poor, stupid peons lined against an adobe wall! No officer to slap your face and call you that which it would shame me to utter, because you had looked cross-eyed at some girl he fancied! No chance to dash out the brains of an abandoned infant with the butt of your rifle; to loot, maim, devastate, pillage, brutalize, murder; or terrorize and put to shame the womanhood of your own country! Oh, I can understand how, sojourning with a man of peace and a gentleman—your stupidity is my excuse for mentioning it—and finding yourself in a position to recline at ease and think, you have been filled with self-pity for your humble estate as the companion of the friendless Temescal."

"But, señor!"

"Quite so! Do not interrupt me. I can confess and absolve you much quicker and more effectively than by listening to that which I already know. I would instruct rather than reprimand. To be brief, jealousy is at the bottom of this nest of disorder which seems to have enmeshed your better self. Jealousy! If it is possible for you to be nakedly honest with yourself, and with me, answer me! Was it not in the town of Santuario that you first secretly rebelled against my judgment and authority? Wait! And was it not because you imagined that the glances of many of the women were concerned with Temescal rather than with Juan Sepulveda? You have hitherto fed upon the admiration of women as you have taken your daily bread

—as a matter of course. Missing a meal or two—so to speak—you wondered who had filched it. Jealousy inspired you to charge me with the offense. Do you think I would stoop to filch a cooky from the shallow platter of your egotism? Girls? Shucks! Women? Shavings! And from these shucks and shavings you have kindled a fire to scorch your own soul. I may seem intolerant. I am not. I am simply honest. What have you to say?"

"I am dazed," declared Juan, contritely. "Yet now that you have finished speaking, I see that you are correct. I have been disloyal in thought. Forgive me!"

"For being yourself? Not I. Forgiveness between friends is of the heart, not of the lips. Moreover, I did but humor a passing fancy; I knew nothing of your callow cogitations. I but guessed at them. And in becoming vehement I somewhat eased the torment of my eyes, which feel like two ripe Bermuda onions. A pungent simile. But now that you have confessed——"

A gentle snore interrupted Temescal's harangue. Temescal smiled. "Of a truth, I thought I could talk him to sleep if I kept at it long enough. The hatches of his mind battened themselves down in sheer self-defense. Poor young soldier! Who am I that I should chide his youth? Yet good will come of it. In declaring himself disloyal to me, if only in thought, he will become more loyal. Yesterday he exhibited exceeding loyalty. 'One of those thieves of the plains will not ride again,' he said, their argument having been adjusted automatically, so to speak. And, 'I was forced to punch the fat one in the eye,' he said again, 'else she would have detained me.' Happily expressed, and with no thought of the risk he ran when he helped me, blinded and helpless, to my horse. Of a truth, Juan Sepulveda shall prosper, and sleep soft, and become a good citizen—of some country—even though he is but incidental to my present quest. The dawn is twitching at the curtain of night. Hunger is also twitching at the lid of my empty stomach. I could do much to a pot of frijoles—without chili."

Temescal, squinting ludicrously, gazed toward the western sky. A bold, bright star still hung resplendent against the farthest wall of space. Temescal rose stiffly, and reaching out his arms as though importuning some goddess of old, addressed the heavens in a resonant, mellow voice, forgetting that Juan slept within a few feet of him, or that there was a Juan Sepulveda in the world. "To you, bright star of Mexico, I will say that which I may not say to her. Somewhere within this desolated land she sleeps in comfort and soft luxury. Each mile I journey is a song to her, a cadence of unrest and high desire. She, like the immortal Beatrice, bade me on this errand forth, and thus far I can't see that Señor Dante had anything on me. Yet I shall arrive, and lay my homage at her pretty feet." Temescal paused and scratched his head. "That is," he added thoughtfully, "if she hasn't changed her mind and decided to spend the summer at Palm Beach." Temescal frowned, possibly at his own interruption. "And when, once more in my beloved City of Mexico, we again sit beneath the silken awning of the Café Simpatica, and I recount the hazards and the stress, the——"

Juan sat up suddenly. Temescal's voice, intensified by his feelings, had risen a full, though melodious octave.

"Are you in pain?" queried Juan solicitously.

Temescal frowned. "I was but stretching myself awake." He yawned. Midway in the act of flexing his arms he stopped. A faint, silvery tinkling tickled the suave, still air of the arroyo.

"Sheep!" exclaimed Juan, rising.

"Breakfast!" declared Temescal.

CHAPTER VIII.

TEMESCAL SHAVES.

THE pool, a luxury after traversing so arid a land, was patronized extensively by both Juan and Temescal. After bathing his eyes, Temescal kindled a tiny fire and heating water in his drinking cup, shaved himself laboriously. Juan was puzzled that Temescal gazed continually into his broad, upturned sombrero as he shaved. Peering into the small round mirror fastened in the crown of his hat, Temescal smiled at the reflection of Juan's curious face.

"You are feeling better," declared Temescal, holding his head a bit sidewise and scraping away with his razor, "else you would not be so interested in my labors."

"But, señor, your back is toward me. How can you know that I watch you?"

"This little informer told me," said Temescal, tapping the mirror with the handle of his razor. "As you have surmised,

I have been able to keep myself presentable when far from the conveniences of a town, by having this little mirror always handy." Temescal took up his hat and surveyed his partially shaven face critically. "Yet, by 'presentable' I do not mean simply clean shaven." His hand trembled as he replaced his hat on the ground. He smiled, and his hand grew steady as he resumed his task. "You would not consider a man presentable with a bullet hole in his head, would you?"

"I have seen many such, and they were not good to look upon," said Juan, puzzled by the peculiar question.

"Quite so. Once, in Agua Caliente, I had the misfortune to differ with some gentlemen to whom I had taught the grand old American game of poker. I will admit that the lesson was expensive, to them. One of these gentlemen became displeased, as he said, with my personal appearance. It happened that we were standing out in front of a cantina, the displeased gentleman in front of me. There were others behind me. I replied courteously to the one who had accosted me, raising my hat as I invariably do when addressing an inferior, or a woman."

"Yes! Yes! I see!" cried Juan.

"Indeed? And what do you see?"

"Why, those behind you were preparing to seize you and recover their money. You shot the man who had insulted you, made a rush for your horse——"

"Softly, amigo! You mean *you* would have shot the man in front of you. Think, while I shave my chin." Temescal again picked up his sombrero and apparently studied his face. Then he laid his hat down and shaved his chin with a few broad strokes, glancing up at Juan who had moved round in front of him, the better to hear his discourse. Juan shook his head.

"Then I am allowed to proceed?" queried Temescal, wiping his razor gently on the palm of his hand and rubbing the lather into the side of his boot. "It was thus," he said, as he dropped the razor into his sombrero. "In this little glass I saw one behind me about to shoot me. I turned thus——" Temescal leaped to his feet, and whirling like a cat that is thrown in the air, fired twice at a clump of brush on the edge of the arroyo. Then, before the startled Juan could catch his breath, Temescal jumped round again and kicked him in the stomach. Juan doubled up like a hinge and shot backward into the pool. It would seem that Temescal had suddenly gone crazy. Hardly had he kicked Juan in the stomach when he charged at the clump of brush on the arroyo's edge like a dog after a rat.

Gasping, bedraggled and half stunned, Juan dragged himself from the pool. He saw Temescal standing knee-deep in the brush, gazing at the ground.

"Señor!" called Juan. Temescal did not seem to hear him, but stood gazing down pensively, his six-shooter hanging loose in his hand.

Juan experienced a quick chill that was not due to his immersion. He stepped gingerly among the rock, coming to where Temescal stood.

On his face, in the brush, lay that which had, less than a minute past, been a living being—a potential murderer, as the cocked carbine bore eloquent testimony—yet a living being, as fond of life, perhaps, as was Temescal himself. Recovered from his surprise, Juan seized one of the lifeless arms and turned the body over. "Such are the followers of one called Temescal," he said, pointing toward the hideously grinning face.

"What could you expect of this," observed Temescal, gesturing toward the fallen man, "save ambushment, treachery, brute hatred and the lust to kill?"

"Dog!" exclaimed Juan.

"Not so! Rather, a poor waif of circumstance, the ragged emblem of poverty and disease; ignorant, faithless, kicked from one mischance to another, feeding from the common trough of his kind, and finally forced to bear arms and serve a cause about which he knew and cared nothing save that it fed him—filled his belly with coarse food and clothed his back with a garment which a dog would sniff at and disdain to sleep on. Go back three hundred small years—the snap of a finger in eternity—and find from whence he came, and then dare censure *him* for what he was."

"You mourn for a man so vile and treacherous, señor?"

"Not so. I do but ponder him and his kind. I think I have done a good deed in freeing him from the wheel. It was his time to go. I am but incidental to his going."

"There were no others?"

"A bright question, my son, now that this one is where he is. No. He came alone, and he went alone."

"I thought you had gone mad," declared

Juan, gazing at the still pensive Temescal. "You were smiling, until you whirled about and fired so swiftly."

"To defend myself—yes."

"And now I know why you kicked me into the pool. Otherwise I might have made an excellent target for this one, or others, had they been with him."

"Quite so! It was the quicker way. You are inclined to argue."

"But, señor——"

"The handle by which you swing your arguments. But what?"

"Why did you charge at the very place where this man was concealed, knowing he was there. He might have killed you."

"That is true—because my first shot missed him. Yet, where else could I run?"

"And the story of the men in Agua Caliente—the men who would have shot you in the back?"

Temescal frowned, as though endeavoring to recall the details of the incident. "Oh, as for that story," he said finally, "I did but humor a passing fancy—until I raised my hat and saw in the mirror the bright ring of a carbine muzzle in the brush here. Then the story became a reality, with a slightly different setting. So you may observe that nothing is impossible. No riddle that the human mind may conceive, but what some mind may solve. Hence the riddle of immortality may yet be solved, without recourse to ancient superstition and ignorance. But I ask your pardon for talking sense. We will bury this poor peon and——"

"But, señor, it moves!" declared Juan, starting back and seizing a rock with which to quiet all movement of the supposedly dead bandit. Temescal seized Juan's arm. "Let it move," he said quietly. "Did I not tell you that nothing is impossible?"

The man on the ground shuddered. His eyes came open. He groaned. Temescal knelt and examined the wounded one's head. "Damn the luck!" murmured Temescal in excellent American, "I only creased the buzzard!"

The companions again had recourse to the pool. Temescal bathed the scalp wound of the thoroughly frightened and evidently penitent young ruffian, set him on his feet, and leading him to the arroyo's edge pointed toward the morning desert. Temescal said nothing. He simply gestured—with his six-shooter. The other zigzagged across the open, and disappeared among the rocks. Temescal turned to meet Juan's reproachful gaze.

"I have earned your reproach," declared Temescal. "I missed twice. However, he will never require a comb with which to part his hair. He enjoys a permanent division."

"I am glad he is alive," said Juan, slowly, after considering the matter. "Now you will speak words that I can understand."

"Breakfast, for instance?"

To be continued in the next issue, on the news stands January 20th.

SOMETHING RARE IN COWS

LOUIS HILL, of Great Northern Railway fame, excellent judge of painting that he is, has hanging over his office desk a cow picture which is distinctly nothing to brag about. It represents as scraggy, bony and generally wretched-looking type of cow as ever fought for sustenance in a desert. It is, however, not her looks but her history over which Mr. Hill enthuses.

"She was," he explains, "the only common cow ever killed by a locomotive of our road. A great many cows have been accidently killed on our tracks. Many of them we thought common cows. Not so when investigation was made. It always turned out that, despite the multitude of common cows in the Northwest, every cow killed by our locomotives was a full-blooded, thoroughbred, prize-winning, precious animal. The cow in that picture happened to belong to an honest Swede who, when our claim agent asked him what her value was, immediately replied: 'Vel, Ay tanks she ban vort' about forty-eight dollars.'"

Noblesse Obleege

By Charles Somerville

Author of "The Vanished Star," "A Gentleman's Agreement," Etc.

A vivid and human story of the professional prize ring and the sinister influences that move in the shadows behind it.

LITTLE Jimmy Crowe—tiny Jimmy Crowe—when he first opened the letter and read it, felt that it couldn't be real. He figured himself going batty, imagining things. But after a while he steadied himself into the conviction that the letter was genuine! A huge, fine piece of good luck had befallen just when he had become convinced that the word held no such brand of thing for him any more!

His heart was pounding in his small body as if he had received bad news instead of good. But then his heart had all gone fluky these days, anyway. He went to the open window of his room which was small even for so small a man and breathed deeply of the soft June air. But still he felt a little dizzy.

That wasn't unusual. He had been feeling continuously somewhat dizzy for months. Dazed might best, perhaps, describe it. And, in Jimmy Crowe's shoes, who wouldn't have? For to drop from an income of about seventy-five thousand dollars a year and a fortune of nearly half a million to the occupancy of a four-dollar-per-week, strictly-in-advance hall bedroom in a reeky East Side, New York, tenement, is a steep fall. It is by way of going the limit. The drop had, indeed, been so complete that Jimmy wasn't always certain of being able to produce the four dollars strictly in advance.

All he had left of everything he had once possessed was his fame. This was still lively. He was only forty years old and the memories of men still young were vivid of Jimmy in those years between his twentieth and thirtieth when he held the flyweight championship of the world—a tiny bit of speedy muscularity with a big man's punch. Sporting writers frequently harked back to him and his prowess though with an odd effect on Jimmy of their writing of him after he was dead. It carried the same impression to other readers less intimately concerned. Many of these had come to think that Jimmy really was Way Off Somewhere cooling his rosined toes in the neighborhood of the Gates of Glory.

He had been a newsboy, a wiry midget of a kid, when "Brownie" Ryall, manager of boxers, nipped him out of an amateur show, supported him, trained him, chastened him and finally guided him to the crown in his class. Brownie had also assumed full control of Jimmy's business affairs all the while the big cash was curling in, feathering his own nest, to be sure, but being very fair, as boxing managers go, investing Jim-

my's money for him as well, so that when Brownie Ryall died suddenly of pneumonia, he left Jimmy's concerns shipshape with "the greatest flyweight of all time," as the newspapers frequently designated Jimmy, possessed of about four hundred thousand dollars.

But he had also left Jimmy in dense ignorance of how to handle it. And he couldn't leave Jimmy his sharp and accurate judgment of men. It was simply that at this time little Jimmy Crowe felt friendly toward all the world and was eager to feel that all the world felt the same toward him. And he had taken on men for friends who were human rats. With a loan here and an investment wheedled out of him there, always with voluble promises of fat returns, they had eaten and eaten at his fortune till, one day, since none of these fat returns had ever come in, Jimmy was alarmed into finding out just where he stood financially. When the figuring was over the showing was that his wealth had dwindled to one hundred thousand dollars. He was induced to try to build his fortune up again—in Wall Street. And then the big rats got him. Following which he had hired the four-dollar-a-week room on the proceeds of a pawned gold watch.

Now if Jimmy Crowe with his high, clean fame had ever come out flatly and let the sporting world know that he was stony broke benefits for him would have been held. Or he could easily have obtained money for the starting of a gymnasium wherein the use of his name would have been more valuable than the cash advance on the other side. But Jimmy Crowe, you see, had been a champion. And it is not easy for one who has ever been such to step forward hat in hand.

A few old intimates, friends whom he could now estimate as genuine, knew his real need of money and about once a week one of these would have him taken on as a sort of consultant behind some second-rate, or youthful, aspiring fighter, and this would be worth about fifteen dollars to Jimmy. Most of the sporting crowd, noting his presence at these sporting bouts, thought he had a financial interest in the fortunes of the boxer or was lending gratis the prestige of his person in a mediocre battler's corner.

Over his poverty, however, Jimmy Crowe possessed the infinite solace of being able to sleep comfortably with himself. He had lost neither his fortune nor his championship by turning drunkard or licentiate; he had been an upright man of the ring and unquestionably a great champion and a generous friend. He could even dismiss thought of his wife, who had left him about the same time his money did, herself bedizened with jewels his money had purchased. Jimmy had several photographs of himself in ring costume in his heyday and a finely bound volume of the records of champions, and these he found highly consoling at times, for they could kill loneliness.

His health worried him, though. Like most men who have been tremendously strenuous physically in their youth, Jimmy was prematurely aged. He was withered, puckered and shrunk. He was now even less than a flyweight. Small exertions made him whistle when he breathed. If his health had been all right he felt that he could have faced the future with an equable if unhappy mind. But he had been finding it hard to fight off the dread of a collapse which must involve the hospital and an advertisement to the wide world of his penniless state.

But now this letter! It was heart lifting, amazing, splendid, great!

In type of purple rimmed with gold there was printed at the top of the sheet:

JACK CARNEY
Heavyweight Champion of the World.

And then Jimmy read:

DEAR MR. CROWE: At the personal request of the champion I am writing to ask you if it will be possible for you to give us your services in the capacity of an advisory handler at the training camp to be opened July 10th at Long Branch, New Jersey, to prepare the champion for his match with Bruno, at Battle Acres, September 15th.

I am authorized to offer you seventy-five dollars a week and all found from July 8th to the date of the match.

If you can arrange other business affairs so that you can accept our offer the champion and myself will be greatly pleased.

Sincerely, JAMES MAGEE, Manager.

And at the bottom of the letter in the champion's own hand a pen had scrawled:

Come on down to the camp with us, Jimmy Crowe. I would sure like to have you there.
JACK CARNEY.

The sweet surprise was the greater in that Jimmy Crowe knew Carney only slightly, Magee not at all. Jimmy had shaken hands with the champion some four

or five times at chance introductions in fight stadiums. Fifty words would comprise all the talk that had ever passed between them. And what particular use Jack Carney had in mind to make of him, Jimmy couldn't think. Of course there were many things he could tell Carney out of his own long experience that might be valuable, helpful. At any rate, he was sure that opportunities would arise by which he could make himself worth the money to be paid him in the training quarters.

He dug out his small change to see if he had sufficient with which to telegraph Magee his acceptance and found he had. He'd best telegraph because the letter had already been two days at the office of Bill McGuigan, a sporting editor who through a mutual friend had delivered it to Jimmy. The little man was happy that it had come that way. It showed that neither Carney nor his manager was aware of Jimmy's mean home address. He had some clothing of fine quality left from his wealthy days, which a little tailoring could make look nearly new. In his trunk under the bed was also a sufficiency of gymnasium apparel. He could, therefore, join the champ's camp in the guise of affluence—with his head up. Fine!

Yet—Jimmy fiddled his fingers in his tight, grizzled curls—how in the world had the champion come to think of him at all?

It was well there was no little bird on the job to whisper the truth to him. Jimmy probably would have flushed and turned Jack Carney's offer down—very much obliged and all that, but, thank you, no! And if he had done that—but he didn't, and that's where the story comes in.

Still there is no objection to letting the reader himself know immediately what had induced the heavyweight champion of the world to send for tiny Jimmy Crowe.

In his large, expensive hotel suite Jack Carney had turned to his trim, sharp-faced little manager and said:

"Magee, I want to get little Jimmy Crowe for the camp."

"What for?"

"I want him, I'm telling you."

"Well, I ain't got him in my pocket, 'Champ,' and I ain't got the first notion of where to send for him."

"I happen to know—I've been told," said the "Big Fellow," "that a letter sent in care of McGuigan, sporting editor of the *Globe,* will get to him all right. Write and ask Jimmy to join up at seventy-five a week and all found from the time the camp starts."

"Seventy-five! For the love of Pete! And we got all the people hooked up now we need, more than we need—falling over each other they'll be! What's the idea?"

"The idea is—I want him. I want to see him around me. You don't know it and the little guy himself don't know it, but he's done as much for me—my getting to be champ—as all my training and the tough battles I had to put up before I got on top."

"Yeh?" asked Magee in surprise and mockery. "I had nothing to do with it, I suppose?"

"Oh, sure, Jim. You had confidence in me, staked me and was smart as a whip about the matches you made till I was ready to take on the best of them. But little Jimmy Crowe helped a whole lot too—a whole damn lot."

"How? You don't hardly know him, as far as I know."

"He don't know how well I know him—Jimmy doesn't," said the youthful giant, with a wide smile on his face. He looked down for a second or two as if he were studying the knuckles of the right hand which had earned him nearly two million dollars. "I was twelve years old—twelve—straddling a rafter up in the roof of the fight hall watching Jimmy Crowe scrap. He was the first champ I ever saw on the job. I'd crashed in—through a skylight. But they didn't have time to send anybody up to the roof to yank me out. Crowe was fighting 'Kid' Styx—a lightweight, and a good one, you bet. Jimmy was giving away more than twenty pounds. Remember that fight?"

"Sure. I saw it."

"Wasn't it a whale?"

"That's no lie."

"Well, I spent my last two-bits next day buying a photograph of Jimmy Crowe and I've had it around me ever since."

"Well," laughed Magee, "ain't the photo enough without paying out seventy-five for Jimmy himself?"

"You write to Jimmy Crowe care of McGuigan to-night—do you hear?"

"But what's all this he did for you—and what do you expect he's going to be able to do at the camp?"

"That fight I saw him put up," grinned the champ at Magee. "What a wow! What Jimmy Crowe did for me that night was to show me what a champion was like—had to be like to be a real one. He showed me that when I was a little bit of a kid and it came back to me when I started fighting and it's stuck to me. Yep—he showed what kind of a man a champion had to be!

"Kid Styx was no bum, you can bet, Magee. He'd oughta had that fight that night. Jim's manager must have felt greedy about that time, because it was a fool of a match for little Jimmy—he was giving away twenty pounds to a good fast man and you know what twenty pounds means among little men. Why, Styx had little Jimmy Crowe busted ten, eleven, twelve times in that fight. But every one of those times—— From there in the rafters I'd be watching little Jimmy Crowe. And his legs would be gone and his arms would be gone and his breath would be gone and his punch would be gone. But he'd hold himself together somehow or other and feint and lead like he was still there and was going to start something himself, bobbing his little head around in the English roll so Styx couldn't get a fair slam at his jaw and somehow—well, because he was a real champion, don't you see—he stayed. I could name you a hundred, two hundred fighters that ten different times in that fight, if they had been in Jimmy's shoes, would have quit and damn small disgrace to 'em at that. But Jimmy Crowe stuck. And he won. He outhearted Styx, that's what he did, and won. And, Magee, there ain't been a time in my own fights, in the toughest of them for me, when I was hurt, weakening groggy, half-turned yeller, that the picture of Jimmy Crowe hasn't bounced up in my mind like I saw him that night—like a little dancing doll—and I'd remember how he'd stuck—how real champs stick and I'd stick—and win."

It was notorious that sharp-faced Jimmy Magee had as much sentiment in him as a screw driver. He threw up his hands.

"Am I going blooey or what?" he demanded. "Are you telling me, Champ, that you need somebody around the camp to keep your heart up for this fight with Bruno—a big stiff that you can lick in one round with one hand?"

"You're a fine guy to be telling me I'm afraid of anybody," said huge young Carney, with a big, smiling show of his strong, faultless white teeth. "How come you got all those diamonds stuck all over you? But, listen now—I want Jimmy Crowe in the camp from the get-away and I don't want to have to make any more speeches about it either. And don't try to bargain him down from seventy-five—if he'll accept that."

"Sure he will," said Magee. "I hear he lost a lot of money."

"Yes, but I guess he's pretty well fixed yet. But, anyway, he never was cheap when he was a champ, so don't make me cheap to him."

The wiley young Carney knew that Jimmy Crowe was flat broke. Jack's trainer, old wise Jack de Britt, once Jimmy Crowe's handler, had whispered it in confidence to the champion, tentatively suggesting what big-hearted young Carney eagerly seized the opportunity to do—help little Jimmy Crowe in a manner that would have on it no taint of charity.

But it would never do to let Magee know this aspect of the matter. A down-and-out would always be nothing but a down-and-out to Magee, and he'd think nothing of asking a former flyweight champion of the world to tote water buckets or rosin the training-camp ring.

The shrewd Magee was now noting that the heavy, black eyebrows of the champ had drawn together in sign of absolute decision and was in haste to risk no disagreement with a meal ticket which was studded with jewels.

"Oh, all right, kid. Don't grouch. I'll get you Jimmy Crowe—ten Jimmy Crowes if you like."

"There never was only one Jimmy Crowe, old fox face," said the champ. "You go write that letter."

Tiny Jim's activities at Carney's camp may be quickly passed over. Sufficient to say that he was well worth what he was paid, being an expert in the mixing of the brine lotions in which Carney's hands were soaked and pickled till hardened to the toughness of leather; expert in the matter of a fighter's training diet, in the use of the time watch at the camp bouts and in many other things pertinent to the game.

Toward the last his job, self-appointed, had been that of sitting up nights beside the champ while he slept. Jack went to bed with all the windows wide, of course,

while the winds from the sea swept over him. In the coolness, sometimes sharp chilliness, of the September nights, during the hours just before dawn it was very important to protect the champ from working his shoulders and torso free of the stout coverings, for a muscular cold can be most crippling to the speed and endurance of a fighter's arms. And Jimmy Crowe, night after night, sat blinkless and saw that this catastrophy did not occur.

He liked Carney strongly. The champ had proved good natured under training discipline and was given to spells of merriment sheerly boyish and decidedly attractive. Carney had never been moved to tell Jimmy Crowe of the inspiration he had drawn from watching Jimmy win from Kid Styx in the long ago, but he had shown toward the former ring wonder a sort of son's deference that had been as soothing to the sensitive and somewhat trampled pride within the little man as oil upon a burn.

Time had worked up to the day before battle. Camp was struck in the morning. Only Magee, the chief trainer, De Britt, and a Japanese valet remained with the champ on his return to his New York hotel suite. The other handlers all went to their homes to report the next night at Battle Acres.

As for Jimmy Crowe, he went straight back to his four-dollar-per-week East Side tenement room. The several hundred dollars which had come into his possession in wages gave him such a feeling of comfort and assurance that he meant to keep that "roll" intact as long as he could.

The stay at the seashore had done his health great good also, and Jimmy was feeling serene both in body and mind as he closed the door of his little room behind him. But this wasn't to last long. Not more than a minute, in fact. For within that small space of time there came a knock on his door and upon the knock temptation coolly entered—temptation confident in the high price it was able to offer for the soul and honor of Jimmy Crowe, temptation in heartsickening form for it was temptation strong indeed.

II.

Jimmy Crowe, seeing who it was that had followed the knock on his door into his room, stood up out of his rocking-chair bristling.

"This ain't right, Dixon, it ain't right!" he said. "You hadn't ought to have come here. Suppose anybody saw you coming in who knew you and knew me? It would look rotten."

"Aw—who'd ever know me in this—this sort of a place?" retorted Dixon.

"How did you find out where I was, anyway?"

"I usually find out what I want to."

Tiny Jimmy Crowe looked the other man straight in the eyes—"Dapper Dick" Dixon whose largest reputation was that he was the trickiest eel in the sporting world.

Just now he was manager for Bruno, the challenger for Jack Carney's title. Dixon was amazingly clever at taking hold of some second or even third-rate fighter and running him along a series of knock-outs of first-class has-beens until he gained such public notice as would make the battler an attraction for a championship match. Then he'd leave his man flattened out and look for another unknown to boost and boom.

He had been dubbed "Dapper Dick" since youth because he standardized dress among his kind. His taste ran to very finely pointed patent-leather shoes with tan uppers, and silk-collared shirts fastened with heavy gold bar pins. And bright green neckties. When young he had appeared slim and slick and had been neatly handsome of countenance. He had fattened and coarsened now markedly about the chin and under his steel-gray eyes, and was many pounds heavier. But he dressed as dapperly as ever.

"You usually find out what you want, do you?" finally said Jimmy Crowe after a long look at him. "Well, if you dug me up thinking you're going to get any dope out of the champion's camp—say, you'd better get out of my room, Dixon. Go ahead—get out of my room."

"Easy, Jim, easy. Don't get excited. I hear your heart ain't any too good anyway. What do I care about knowing anything out of the champ's camp—his condition or anything? Don't you suppose I know as well as you know that Carney can lick this big bum of mine in a half a dozen wallops? I'm up here to show you the way to some easy money—a good big bunch of it—if you'll only listen to me."

"Crooked?"

"Aw, crooked me necktie! It's a stunt that isn't going to do anybody any harm.

But it can do you a whole lot of good. Oh, sure—and me too. I'm not up here throwing any smoke that I'm trying to hand you charity, Jimmy Crowe. Although at the same time I know you're down and out. This room would tell the story plain enough if I hadn't been wise when I came up here."

"It's because you heard I was broke that you've come up here?"

"I know you maybe have held together the seventy-five per that Carney's been paying you."

"How'd you find that out?"

"The gorilla up in the zoo told me," grinned Dixon. "But, listen, you've had money—real money. You know how far a few hundred berries will travel in this town, Jimmy. Well, I didn't come here to talk to you in hundreds, Jimmy. I came here to talk to you in grands—what do you know about that?"

The former champion frowned.

"What can I do for you that would be worth thousands?"

"Just go up to a man for me and drop something in his hand."

"Thousands for doing that?"

"Yep."

"How many thousands?"

"Ten—at least. Ten grands," replied Dixon flatly.

Ten thousand dollars!

Sick, spent Jimmy Crowe breathed hard. Willy-nilly, his mind leaped to the contemplation of the sum. Knowing out of bitter experience what he now knew of the handling of money he saw readily how this capital could mean his future comfort and independence, the start of a gymnasium in his name, a training school for boxers, the managing of fighters, a business game that he would understand! He gulped, striving hard to dismiss the vision. He looked at Dixon.

"The champ is mixed up in this, of course?"

"Sure—he figures. But it's small harm that's coming to him. The fact is that in the end he'll make money out of it—another bout, another half million."

"Why don't you go to the champ himself, then? Afraid of a wallop on the jaw?"

"I shouldn't wonder if I was," replied Dapper Dick in all frankness. "He's got such a lot of kale these days. And besides he's got religion or something about being a white champ and nothing else. But you, Jimmy—you ain't got a lot of kale. And a bunch of good it ever did you to be a white champ! Look at you now."

Jimmy's mind revolted at the large element of truth there seemed to be in what Dixon said.

"What's this I got to do for it?" he demanded. "Who is the man I got to see and what's it all about?"

"Do you declare in on it?"

"Not till I hear what it is. You might be asking me to hand a man a bomb."

"No," laughed Dixon, "nothing near as bad as that."

He took the time to lift a cigarette out of a gold case, strike a match and then blow a deep inhalation of smoke from both mouth and nostrils.

"Oh, well," he said easily, "I've got to take the chance. If you balk—bingo, the scheme goes blooey, I suppose. But you'd never have anything on me. There's only the two of us here. I'd swear myself black in the face this talk never happened. It would be just your word against mine. So sit down in the rocker, Jimmy, and I'll perch on the bed here and come through."

Dixon's face had become flushed in the heat of the room, but Jimmy Crowe's face was pasty white.

"Now, Jimmy," said Dixon, "you know that Jap the champ took on as valet out West on the movie lots?"

"Sure—he's with him now."

"Well, he's my man—on my pay roll. I planted him on Jack."

"What?"

"Sure," laughed Dixon, "by recommendations about twenty times removed—see?—I slipped him over on the champ."

Jimmy Crowe pondered the significance of this successful effort in cunning and thought he vaguely understood.

"Then what?"

"The rest is a pipe if you'll play with me," said the dapperly dressed man with the fire of eagerness striking into his calculating gray eyes. "You know the dope that's being printed about the fight—the champ in one round or—the most—three for him to put the K. O. over on Bruno. With the bout scheduled at twelve rounds. Well, Jimmy, I want to be able to lay about two hundred thousand between, say, seven o'clock to-night and the time of the battle that Bruno stays the limit. I've got to have about that much time because I can't go

out and pay all the money personally. They'd begin to sniff out something. But I got two hundred grand to slap on that bet that Bruno stays the limit. And you know well enough the odds I can get."

"Ten to one—easily," figured Jimmy Crowe.

"You said it. And better than that, too. And you can get the same odds for yourself, Jimmy, on the money I'll hand you for your end. And that'll be one thousand dollars cash. You can place it yourself or I'll have it placed for you. And that's ten thousand in your pocket."

"Yes, but you ain't told me yet——"

Dixon snapped his cigarette end out of the open window.

"Here's where I come to it."

He dug in his waistcoat pocket and brought out a small bottle. There was no label on it and Jimmy saw that its contents were colorless as water.

"What's in it? And what have I got to do with it, Dixon?"

"What's in this bottle," stated Dixon promptly, "is chloral."

Jimmy Crowe leaped from his chair glaring.

"Why, that's poison stuff! It could kill a man. It's knock-out drops!"

"That's right too. But what do you suppose I'd want to be murdering Jack Carney for? Or to put him to sleep before the fight? I got this from a doctor that knows his business. And I'm swearing to God to you, Jimmy, that it's just a weak solution. All it's intended to do is to take the pep out of a man. If Carney gets it about half an hour before the fight he'll come into the ring dragging his feet. His eye will be off and the kick will be taken out of his wallop. It will just look as if he went over the edge in training, see? But it will let my big bum stay the limit with him."

"I guess you're figuring it will let your big bum become champion of the world tomorrow night."

"Nix—that would start something. Carney's trainer, De Britt, would be sure to get wise to something. They'd have a doctor in to look Jack over and the doc would be able to mark out the symptoms and the bets would be declared off and they'd cook up a mess of tar and feathers for me—the sporting writers would. Nix, Jimmy, I'll be winning a cool two million if Bruno stays the limit and that's good enough. Besides, it will mean another match for him with Carney and another fat purse. Then I'll let Bruno go in and take his dose and bet my money all the other way with a lot of boobs who'll think he's good because he once stayed the limit with the champ. Well, there's the proposition."

"All very fine," said Jimmy Crowe sourly. "But how do you expect me to get this stuff into Carney a half an hour before the fight? With all that bunch around him?"

"It ain't Carney I'm asking you to hand this stuff to."

"Who?"

"You're going up to take dinner with the champ at his hotel to-night, ain't you?"

This reminder caused a sickening twinge to traverse Jimmy Crowe's throat. "Be sure to show up, Jimmy, old pal," had been Carney's last words to him.

"How did you know that, Dixon?"

"I told you at the get-away about the champ's Jap valet being my plant, didn't I? Well, to-night when you go to Carney's rooms to dinner the Jap'll be on the job to take your hat when you come in. And you hands him this little bottle in your hat. Nothing could be easier than that."

"No, it couldn't," said Jimmy. "And then what does he do with it?"

"Why, I guess you know—or maybe you don't—that the champ always takes a half a glass of hot water in his dressing room about when he starts to get his street clothes off—always does that just before a fight. The Jap's under instructions to bring along a little spirit stove to heat the water for him. In goes this chloral—just the same color as the water. The Jap's living too close to Carney, Magee and De Britt up there for me to take a chance sending any outsider anywhere near the champ. But you—well, it's a pipe, ain't it, Jimmy?"

"But won't he taste this stuff in the water when the Jap's giving it to him?"

"No taste to it at all. The only thing it will do—and you can bet I've got the info' on it—is make the water taste a little flat. But hot water tastes flat, too. So that's that."

Silence came then for a brief space.

"No risk to you, Jimmy, you can see that. The Jap's all ready to blow to his own country on the stake I'll give him when the fight's over. None of my gang knows who the go-between is going to be. Only you

and me are here together now, Jimmy. And that's all that'll ever know about it. If the Jap reports to me to-night that you've delivered him the stuff I'll be up here to-morrow afternoon at five and hand you one thousand cash and you'll have lots of time to get out and have some wise friend lay it for you at ten to one or better. You can be dead sure after you've given this bottle I got here to the Jap that I'll be up here to-morrow with the grand, because if I didn't play fair with you, look what you could do to me? Spill the beans to Carney and where would I be? It's all clear —ain't it, Jimmy? Here—here's the bottle."

But Jimmy Crowe turned his back on Dixon and the bottle. He went to the one window of his wretched little room and stared out while the reek of the mean, crowded street came up to his nostrils. There had been at first a wild, angry look in his eyes. But then his stare became vacant. And he heard Dixon's voice behind him—very close to his shoulder.

"Ten thousand, Jimmy," Dixon was saying, "as good as in your pocket now. And not a chance of a nasty comeback. Don't be a boob, Jim. You were square yourself right along and see what you got out of it! You must be wise by this time that the only thing to do in this world is to look out for yourself. There's Carney now—sure, with his two million and more he can afford to be upstage about being a white champ and the 'honor of the game' and all that schoolbook stuff. But suppose Carney came down to a little room like this—a little, bum tenement-house room. And was sick. And broke. And got a chance like this to make ten thousand and not do anybody any real dirt at that. Don't you suppose he'd do it? Don't you suppose if he was in your shoes he'd jump at the chance? You can bet your sweet life he'd grab it with both hands and three rousing cheers! I've come to you on the level, Jimmy. I've put my cards right out on the table. You know just what the game is and how far it is intended to go. Ten thousand dollars in your kick, Jimmy. And you know well enough what that can mean to you—your own gym, your own string of fighters, your independence." Dapper Dick was a swift psychologist without being familiar with the word. "That's what the ten grand can do for you, Jimmy Crowe. Oh, I'm wise to your feelings and like you for it. If I was trying to do any real harm to Carney—well, poor as you are and sick as you are and all that, I don't think I'd have come near you, Jimmy. But this don't really scratch Jack Carney. And it will heel you. Come on—what do you say?"

Jimmy Crowe went on staring down into the redolent street. The cords in his neck grew taut. His face became as rigid and white as a plaster mask and glistened with sweat. His little hands were clenched tight.

Then his small, tense figure relaxed. A very weary look came into his eyes and their lids lowered. As he turned toward Dapper Dick Dixon his clenched hands fell open. And one of them—his once famous right—he extended toward his tempter.

"All right, Dixon," he said huskily. "My mind's made up. Hand over the bottle."

Dixon eyed him sharply. Not the time now to slap him on the back, congratulate him on showing good sense or predict that this display of it would see him on Easy Street again. Dixon simply and quickly handed Jimmy Crowe the bottle.

But at the door he paused to say:

"If the Jap telephones to me to-night, 'Yes,' I'll be here at five sharp to-morrow, Jimmy, with *two* thousand!"

And immediately left the room.

At half past seven o'clock that evening Dixon sat in his apartment with a telephone at his elbow. He had been nervously expectant of a call for some minutes. Just then it came. He hastily grabbed off the receiver, put it to his ear and recognized the voice. It was the Jap.

"Did he give you that bottle?" Dixon demanded.

The answer came:

"Yes."

III.

The public had been told via the newspapers that the big fistic event could have only one result. McGuigan of the *Globe* epitomized expert opinion in this wise: "It will be a duel between a wild cat and a mule and, conceding that this particular mule may have a nasty kick, I do not see one chance in a thousand of his landing it on this particular wild cat."

For all that, not less than one hundred thousand persons, a flock of women in the horde, jammed their way into the huge stadium known as Battle Acres just across

the Hudson from huge New York, to see for themselves what would happen.

The opportunity of beholding Jack Carney seriously in action came rarely, scarcely ever more than once a year. And was he not acclaimed in speed, skill, strength, all qualities, the greatest heavyweight champion that had ever graced the fight game? If Bruno could not make it an even contest, put up a real fight, in any event the vast crowd reckoned they would be witnesses of the champion making his kill, and its emotion was whetted thereby to a wild expectancy.

The fight was at night and the ring stood as a huge splash of light in the center of a black, mammoth bowl. Lively bouts going ahead of the big moment drew merely cold attention. These over, battalions of reporters' typewriters and telegraph keys from the ringside sent up a cacaphony like the steady discharge of batteries of miniature machine guns. The writers laughingly shouted predictions to one another. Bruno out in one round! Bruno out in three! The prophecies were about equally divided in this wise. The most favorable toward the contender only allowed him a life of six rounds.

McGuigan of the *Globe,* a one-round man, grinned at the hunch which had come to him to write the story of the affair as one might report a condemned murderer's last day on earth. "The doomed man arose cheerfully yesterday morning and partook of a hearty breakfast of chops, eggs, toast and coffee," he would begin it, and——

Loud cheering started. It was for Bruno, friendly but with a tinge of mockery in it too. He wedged slowly through the ropes in a red-and-yellow bath robe which he soon shed into the arms of one of the four handlers cluttering around him in his corner. The crowd then looked with some respect at his huge, brown-skinned body. On his head was a thick tuft of black hair resembling a cockatoo's crest. His eyebrows were black, thick and lowering. Huge he was, but plainly from his movements at the outset, unwieldy, clumsy, slow.

Less than a minute the center of the stage was his. Then the big cheering went up—tremendous, whooping. Carney had appeared, a spotless, snowy sweater descending to his rugged, bare legs. When this came off there was an audible wave of admiration. It was a splendid body he exposed to view, nude save for white-satin trunks, tightly laced white shoes and rolled white socks. His flesh looked as cleanly white as the sweater that had come off him. Compactly, beautifully well knit were body and limbs, and of such exactness proportionately that he did not look his six feet of stature, appearing much smaller than the brown-skinned, hulking Bruno—although their difference in height was only an inch.

All in the ring then lined up for the camera men. Next the announcer bawled the introductions of the fighters to the public. The referee called Carney and Bruno to the center of the ring and rapidly ran over the rules to govern the fight, after which he waved each back to his corner. The vast crowd sat up at rigid attention, awaiting the sound of the gong that would bring the men instantly together to fight.

At the same time McGuigan turned to his telegraph operator, whose eye in these affairs was as experienced as his own.

"Say, Vic," he said a little testily, "let up on that key a minute and take a look at the champ. Does he look right to you? He pulled himself through the ropes as though he were lifting a thousand pounds. Got a foolish look on his face, too."

"He looks wall-eyed to me," agreed Vic, studying Carney as he stood with arms outstretched on the ropes. "Looks as if he'd had a hard night. What's the dope, Bill? Figures Bruno so cheap that he hasn't been behaving himself?"

"No. I dropped down to his camp a dozen times or more and always found him attending strictly to business. He looks all right in the body—shapes up fine."

"Over the edge in training, perhaps?"

"We'll soon see," replied McGuigan, for the gong calling the fighters into action had just clanged.

Not thirty seconds old was the tremendously advertised battle when the sporting writers were exchanging puzzled glances. Not one minute old was the fight when the one hundred thousand spectators surrounding the ring were demanding in bitterness of temper both to one another and again blankly into the night the one question: "What's the matter with Carney?"

It was true that he appeared to be carrying the attack to the other man. But he was pottering about the ring as ponderously and clumsily as Bruno himself! His efforts were hopelessly slow. His blows were

sweeping past Bruno's face and body absurdly wide of their mark. The dash, the speed, the whizz-bang character of assault that had carried Carney to the top, to international fame, to wealth—where was all that? This the wild cat? The bell sounded for the end of the round and the crowd that a little while before had rocked the skies with cheers for Carney now nearly literally blew him back into his corner with the huge blast of boohing they exploded.

McGuigan and Vic were looking at each other wide-eyed.

"He looks in shape all right," snapped the sporting writer. "But he's all gone. His eye is batty—his judgment of distance is crazy. Did you see those three wide-open chances at Bruno's jaw he missed? Two right hooks, a right uppercut and a left hook? Off by a mile!"

"He landed that straight right to the heart, though."

"And nothing behind it—not the kick of a rabbit! And he kept losing form every once in a while—fighting from his heels instead of his toes. His eye is off and his punch is off. And gosh almighty knows what's happened to his speed!"

"Aw—what do you expect?" said the man at the telegraph key. "What does he expect? It's what comes of not sticking to his game. Six months out on the movie lots with that jazzy bunch has put him on the blink. That's the answer, Mac."

"Vic, you may have said more than you think. Working under the strong noon suns and in the terrific glare of the studio lights—it may have affected his eyesight. That would be a smacker of a story!"

The second-round gong sounded.

"Let's see," said McGuigan. "He may snap out of it."

But Carney didn't. He lumbered and slumped and patted about the ring in the same lax, slow fashion in this round as he had in the first. True, he landed four times on Bruno's head with his usually deadly right, but to-night it did not produce so much as a visible jar. And, as far as that was concerned, to the crowd beyond the ring it appeared as if he had taken more than he gave. Bruno had turned loose several big wide swings that looked from a distance as if they plopped straight into the champion's face. From the ringside, however, it could be seen that these blows had only fallen on the champion's practiced shoulders. A blast of booing bigger than the first accompanied the famous battler to his corner and Bruno got a tremendous cheer when he turned his head back while going to his own and openly guffawed at the great Carney!

"His defense was all right," said the telegraph operator nervously.

"Long training—automatic," growled McGuigan. "If that big stiff Bruno had just one flash of speed behind his punch he could make himself the champion of the world to-night! He's got the chance of his life. I wonder why Dixon doesn't tell him to pile in? Carney can't hurt him—that's been plain from the first round. And this big boob has a pretty stiff punch in his right. He could do it—he could lick Carney to-night! Say, where's Dixon anyway? I haven't seen him in the bunch over there with Bruno."

McGuigan called down to the writers sitting nearest Bruno's corner:

"Dixon there?"

"No—we've been trying to spot him ourselves," came the reply from Curley of the *Planet*. "Hey, 'Red,' where's your boss?"

This question was shouted at Red Phelan, the top-handler just then in the act of sponging off Bruno's outstretched tongue.

"Oh, somewhere I guess," called back Phelan. "He don't attend to any of this work anyhow." Then he turned his attention quickly to Bruno, who having drawn his tongue back into his mouth lifted a glove and drew Red's ear down to his lips.

"Hey, Red," whispered big Bruno swiftly, "that stuff's ruined Carney entirely. It ain't only took all the speed out of him but he's got nothing left in his punch. He couldn't lick a child to-night. Dixon or no Dixon, I'm going out this round to put the K. O. over on him!"

Red Phelan's little eyes blinked rapidly. In turn he put his lips to Bruno's ear.

"You said it—shoot!" he said. "Smash right into him from the gong! You can take all he can hand out to-night and laugh at it. Keep that right of yours whaling for his jaw. You're bound to land it. And when you do you'll be champion of the world! You should worry about the holler afterward. Let 'em holler! You'll be champion! To hell with staying the limit! To hell with Dixon! You put over the K. O. on Carney and you can tell all the Dixons in the world to go fly their kites.

I'll manage you and make the split right on the purses—not like they are now, all for him and the rest for you."

The gong crashed.

"Right into him!" said Phelan in a whisper that was yet a scream.

Out of his corner rushed Bruno, straight at Carney, his ponderous arms whirling. He let go one mighty right-hand swing and then another. It is true they missed Carney's jaw but only by a narrow margin. Carney was seen to be on the defensive, seeking to stave Bruno off with left-hand jabs, landing them but not bringing the big brown man to a pause in his onrush. Again came the big right over and Carney fell against the ropes getting out of the way of it.

The crowd now was on its feet, too excited to make a sound except for a few women who screamed.

"He's beaten Carney into his own corner!" somebody suddenly cried.

"The mule is kicking the wild cat all over the ring!"

But as Carney leaned back on the ropes in his corner, his manager, Jimmy Magee, called up softly: "All right now, Jack!"

The next second the sporting writers had leaped from their seats upon their tables, for pandemonium came. The wild cat had suddenly gone blindingly wild! In the split of a hair Carney was all over big Bruno, smothering, battering him with a lashing fury of blows. Not swinging blows, but blows delivered from his toes with his whole, big, compact body behind them, blows delivered in the crook of his arm by a fist that traveled scarcely ever more than six inches. Usually four, sometimes only two. Blows with a force like the impact of a steel bar! Twenty and more such blows dug against Bruno's eyes, nose, mouth, rammed at his heart and buried themselves in the pit of his stomach till the brown giant became a floundering mass of flesh with a crimson mask!

Nobody saw the finishing touch—only the effect of it. For the champion, working now with all the dazzling speed that was his glory, stepped up to Bruno till his chin touched the wavering man's shoulder and the right-hand blow traveled a scant three inches, to the chin. It stabbed Bruno on the point of the jaw and dropped him face forward in utter collapse to the floor of the ring. Nor was it for a full three minutes afterward, as he sat in the corner to which he had been carried, that the first conscious glances appeared in Bruno's puffed, swollen, and all-but-unrecognizable countenance.

In a din of cheering so stupendous it seemed a tangible force that was bearing him aloft, although in reality he was riding on the shoulders of his handlers, Carney was carried back to his dressing room with ten squads of policemen fighting off the adulating thousands battling to get near him, struggling madly for a mere glance of his eye, a touch of his hand, even of his foot!

IV.

In his dressing room the champion, still in ring costume, waved away his handlers after the preliminary toweling of his head and shoulders. And he waved back the privileged ones who were trying to slap him on the back or shake his hand.

"I want everybody to clear out—right away—for a few minutes," he called decisively. "You too." He nodded at the handlers.

"If you're wanting to talk to me, Jack," said his manager, Magee, "I've got to go out to the box office and look over things. Dixon's been planted there all night. Never was near his man's corner at all."

"I don't want to talk to you now, Jimmy. The man I want to talk to is right here, though. I mean you, Jimmy Crowe! All the rest of you beat it, please."

The last man snapped the door behind him and it was a signal that the champion and Jimmy Crowe were alone. Jimmy, his face pallid, was wiping his forehead with a handkerchief already soaking wet.

Carney knit his black eyebrows and glared at him.

"Have you got the nerve to face me, Jimmy Crowe?" he demanded.

"I have," said Jimmy Crowe and glared back.

"Have you committed a murder, Jimmy Crowe?"

"Lord, I hope not!"

"Then what have you done with Dapper Dick Dixon? Magee thinks he's in the box office. But Jack de Britt has had scouts out all over the place and he never showed up here at all to-night. And you and De Britt and me know that the last seen of Dapper Dick Dixon alive was—by what you've said yourself—at five o'clock this

evening in your room. What have you done with him?"

"Well, Champ," said little Jimmy, still wiping the perspiration that the excitement of the night had caused him, "when he came up into my room this evening and started counting out his dirty money I couldn't help beginning to figure whether, bum heart or no bum heart, I didn't have one good slam left in me."

"Yeh?"

"Yeh, Champ. And I let him have it."

"Was the kick still there, Jimmy?"

"Yes, thanks."

"How long was he out?"

"I expect he's up in my room yet—still out."

"What did you use with that punch—an iron bar?"

"No. When I put him away I laid him out on my bed and poured all there was in that bottle of dope down his throat. Then I tied him hand and foot. And then I had the satisfaction of gagging him with that roll of dirty money. I figured if he got here himself—he's shrewd, Champ—he might get wise to what was up. I didn't figure you was such a hell of a good actor. If he'd got wise he'd have hopped around coppering his bets and come out of it with a whole skin. So I thought he might as well go by-by for the rest of the night."

Boyishly young Jack Carney seized grizzled Jimmy Crowe, lifted the little man high in the air, hugged him and set him down again as lightly as a feather.

"You ole reg'lar guy!" he laughed delightedly.

"Where's the Jap, Jack?"

"I expect my pal, 'Kid' Butts, is attending to him somewhere under the stands right now. You should have seen his yeller hand shake when he slipped me that half glass of hot water.

"Water was all there was in the bottle I handed him last night, Jack," grinned Jimmy Crowe. "Did you ever see that stuff—chloral? You can't tell the difference. We could slip Dixon ten years in prison for passing that stuff around. That's the law."

"Well, just now," said the champ, "I like best to figure him chewing on that roll of dirty money. It's about all he's got left in the world now. Magee tells me that between the first and second rounds he put down two hundred thousand on me to win in the third—odds our way. It wasn't fooling the public any. The regular bets had all been laid. This was Dixon money looking for us. Well, they found us."

"Fine, Champ!"

"Yeh—but it looks as if you were the only one of us out on this deal, Jimmy. You stood to win twenty thousand. And now what you got?"

"I got myself, Jack, all nice and clean like you feel just out of a bath. That's enough for me."

"Is that so?" said the youthful Carney. He paced over to his coat hanging on a form as the last official act of the Japanese valet, and brought out a slim, oblong book and a fountain pen. He steadied the book on the back of a chair and began to write.

"You stood to win twenty thou—if you had been that kind of a guy, didn't you, Jimmy?"

"Lay off that check stuff, Carney," said the former flyweight king with sudden sharpness. "I'm not around you looking for a tip."

"Where do you get that—a tip?"

"What I did," said little Jimmy Crowe, "was—well, I was a champion once myself. It was like—well, one champ to another. See?"

"I'll say I see," nodded Carney. "And where do you get it that I'm so dumb I'd be handing you anything anybody could think of as a tip—me tip the best man in his class that ever stepped. Or tip the man that showed me when I was a kid what a real champ ought to be—I'll tell you about that some time, Jimmy. Me handing a tip to a champion whose picture I got in an album right after the pictures of my father and mother—yeh, that's how good you've been standing with me, Jimmy Crowe, since I was twelve years old. Tip? Lay off that tip talk yourself, Jimmy Crowe."

The champion finished his writing.

"You've sure got a piece of what we won to-night coming to you. If you want to call this piece of paper here that calls for thirty thousand dollars a tip——"

"Aw, nix," said little Jimmy Crowe, his lips very white. "Nix. It would look as if I did—what I did—for that."

"You take that check for thirty grand just as you played square with me—from one champ to another."

"Nix."

"Like you said, Jimmy—from one champ to another. There's a French word for it that's the turkey. I heard it out on the movie lots——"

"They sure taught you something out there," smiled tiny Jimmy Crowe. "That was the swellest piece of acting you pulled off to-night I ever saw in my life."

"Don't get in the way of what I'm trying to say to you," growled Carney with an annoyed twist of his black, curly head. "Out there in the movies I'm watching a scene. It's one of them plays about history. Two kings is mixed up in it. One king is on the run. His people have chucked him out. He's hiding in an inn—you know, a country hotel. The king of that country happens along on a skylark over a jane. He's kinda in disguise. But he comes into this here inn and sees the other king that everything has gone against and he's dead broke. So the director says to the king what's in his own country:

"Register surprise. You know this bird. You know he's a king. You played polo or something like that together when you were kid princes. But you're in disguise with that false wig and he don't know you. But you know he's had misfortunes and he's broke. You make him a low bow—a kind of a bow that tips him wise that you know he's a king. And—now fish out the bag of gold. Bow—hand it to him."

" 'Now,' says this director to the other king, 'scowl! Shove it back to him. You may be dead broke but you ain't taking money that way from a stranger. You ain't forgot yet that you're a king. Or was anyway!

" 'Now, you other king. You step back a little. You smile. Now you lean over. Raise your wig. Whisper to him. He gets you—he knows you! Now shove him back the money again.

" 'Now—ex-king—up, bow, smile. Take the money. Bow again. You'd starve before you'd take money from the mob. But from another king—as king to king—sure you would! That's it. Take it!'

"Then this here director turns to me and he says, 'The French have a fine word for that—kings and the like sharing with each other.' "

" 'What is it?' I asks him.

"And he says, *'Noblesse obleege!'* Get it?"

Jimmy nodded that he did.

"Well then, Jimmy," the black, curly crest of the heavyweight fighting king of the world lowered and so did his truly royal pair of shoulders and his royal torso, as he held out to the tiny man his check for thirty thousand dollars, *"Noblesse obleege!"*

Jimmy took it.

He turned and made blindly for the door. But there he turned and faced Carney. He bent his own little royal grizzled head and the royal shoulders that had once carried the speediest pair of arms on earth, and he too bowed to his royal midriff. Then he looked up and said:

"If it's anything to you, I don't mind telling you that you've made me feel so good that right now I think I could lick you, you big stiff!"

He would have brushed out of the door on that but Carney with a yell of laughter made a spring and seized him.

"No, you don't! You stick till I get dressed. And after we've all got back to New York you and me are going to sneak out and hop a taxi and go up to your room, because, honest, Jimmy, I'm dead stuck on being around when you untie Dixon."

THE SEAT OF INSPIRATION

A YOUNG navy officer on duty in Washington was working over a mass of blue prints in an office in the navy department one morning. Wishing to change his seat to the opposite side of the table that held his papers, and other chairs being out of his reach, he turned a wire waste-paper basket wrong end up and sat on it. When he stood up, he drew back his foot to kick the basket over right side up, but hesitated. At that moment an inspiration had come to him. The result of that lightninglike idea is on every American battleship now. It is the wire or trellislike mast, which looks very much like an up-ended wire basket.

The Fifty-third Card

By Percival Wilde

Author of "The Adventure of the Fallen Angels," "The Pillar of Fire," Etc.

Bill Parmelee, reformed gambler, searches his memory and finds one game from which the experts of fortune have not extracted the element of chance. It is one of the few games played on a felt-topped table that does not figure in the repertoire of the professional—and its name is tiddledywinks.

(A Novelette.)

TONY CLAGHORN was in an argumentative mood. Three deep lines, gracefully curving, corrugated his lofty brow; his lips were firmly set; his chin jutted out formidably; his mustache, waxed to fine points, quivered. His left hand poised a smoldering cigar, and his right hand aimed a long, well-manicured forefinger at the audience of one to which he was delivering his lecture.

Even Tony's clothes were argumentative. Knickers and coat of a screaming gray-and-green plaid, guaranteed to be the very latest thing in Scotland, golf stockings of an impressionistic pattern doubtless inspired by a close study of some rare and venomous reptile, shoes unlike any others that walked the earth, and a weirdly iridescent tie in whose folds gleamed a scarab, were the outstanding features of a costume as remarkable as it was appropriate to its wearer's disposition.

"I repeat," said Tony, "there are games in which cheating is impossible."

His friend, William Parmelee, ex-gambler, farmer, and unwilling corrector of destinies, shifted his gaze from the fertile fields through which the train was rolling to meet the determined eyes that interrogated his.

"I heard you the first time," he remarked.

"Nevertheless," said Tony, "I repeat it again: there are games in which cheating is impossible."

Parmelee fumbled with the lapel of his coat and gravely extracted a pin. Without a word he handed it to Claghorn.

"What's this for?" inquired that worthy.

"Have you a pencil, Tony? Preferably a large one, with a thick, heavy lead?"

Claghorn gazed at him suspiciously. "Yes," he admitted, after a pause.

"Well," murmured Bill, "suppose you take the pencil—the large pencil, with the thick, heavy lead—and jot down the names

of the games in which cheating is impossible on the head of the pin."

Tony scowled. "Be serious."

"I'm perfectly serious."

"Of course, cheating is possible in most card games——"

"All of them."

"Most of them," Tony corrected firmly. "When an honest man and a rogue sit down together, the rogue will naturally try to get something for nothing."

"So will the honest man," commented Bill.

"What do you mean?"

" 'Something for nothing'—isn't that the greatest motive in life? What man is there who doesn't thrill at the thought of it? Gain something by the sweat of your brow—wealth, fame, position—and while you'll probably hold on to it longer than if you hadn't worked for it, will it give you the same excitement that you would have had if it had been something you acquired for nothing?"

"An honest man doesn't reason that way."

"I'm not talking about reason," said Bill. "I'm talking about feeling. You feel before you reason. You're a child before you're a man. And it's the child in you that thrills, that doesn't get tired and bored and disgusted, that makes every day of life worth living.

"Pay cash for a theater ticket, and you'll kick at the price. Get a pass for the same seat because you've presented the manager with a box of cigars costing ten times as much as the ticket, and you're pleased. Buy something for what it's worth—that's dull; it's business. Win it in a lottery, by buying up most of the chances, and you pat yourself on the back—even if it costs you more in the end. Get something for something—that's humdrum, tedious, an ordinary matter of buying and selling. Get something for nothing—that's adventure, that's romance, that's the cave man in your blood who was your ancestor a million years ago, and who painted himself purple and green and did a dance of triumph because a fish took his hook when there was nothing but a feather tied to it!"

Tony grinned. "I see your point," he admitted.

"Honesty!" ruminated Bill. "Honesty is sometimes hard to define. Tony, did you ever have an aunt—an aged, maiden aunt bound for heaven, if anybody ever was—who played solitaire?"

"No," said Tony. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I had an aunt like that. She sang in the choir; she spent her days doing charity. But she spent her evenings at a little card table. She would have thought it a deadly sin to gamble; she wouldn't touch euchre, which she considered the invention of the devil. But playing solitaire, with no opponent, with no stakes of any kind, she didn't hesitate to peek once or twice—or even oftener—or to give the cards a little shuffle, when it was strictly against the rules; or to take liberties of the kind that Hoyle prohibits. She was a moral woman, my aunt, and I have no doubt that if I live a blameless life I'll find her waiting for me at the pearly gates when I get there; but I have often wondered how she could do what she did and square it with her conscience. I decided that any human being as saintly as she was couldn't be called a cheat."

"Why not?" inquired Tony.

"It wasn't cheating," smiled Bill. "My aunt was just making up new rules as she went along. Hoyle cramped her style; she corrected him, just as she had corrected my school exercises."

Tony knocked the ashes from his cigar, adjusted his elegant self more comfortably on the leather cushions of the smoking compartment, and nodded energetically.

"Now we're getting back to the subject," he declared. "Sometimes you can't make up rules as you go along; the other fellow won't let you. Sometimes you have to play the game as it is meant to be played, because the man who invented it thought of cheats and made it impossible for them to have a chance. Sometimes you play fair because you have to play fair; because cheating is quite out of the question."

Bill gazed at his friend through half-closed eyes. "Are you referring to golf?" he asked innocently.

Tony laughed. "No," he said.

"I didn't think you were," Bill conceded. "You see, I've watched the play on the links down at the country club, and I made the discovery that the average man forgets how to count the moment he has a club in his hands. In plain, ordinary arithmetic four plus four equals eight. In golf—when there's nobody looking—four plus four equals four."

"Let's leave golf out of it," suggested Tony. "I've played it myself."

Bill reflected. "The one honest game. Do you mean tiddledywinks?"

"No. That's one game I never touched."

"Nor I," confessed Bill. He looked meditatively out of the window. "Perhaps you mean the game of matrimony," he hazarded.

"Heaven forbid!" said Tony. "There's more sharping at that than at any other game in the world! I've done well enough at it myself, but I know lots of fellows who thought they were drawing prizes only to find them blank."

Bill nodded. "Tony," he said, "I give up. Tell me the name of your cheat-proof game, so that I can pass the good news on to posterity. Tell me about the one game in which cheating is impossible. What do you call it?"

Tony lowered his voice, and prodded his friend in the neighborhood of the solar plexus with a lean forefinger. "I call it faro," he murmured.

II.

To put it plainly, Tony was taking a mean, low advantage. To speak of faro as the one honest game, when he was fully aware that the mission upon which his friend was now engaged had to do with that particular subject, was tantamount to informing him that he had embarked on a wild-goose chase. All morning Tony had kept his opinions buried in his bosom; he had resolved to unburden himself of them now, better late than never.

Yet Tony had been present upon that occasion but a few hours past when the telephone in the little farmhouse had rung, when the operator had announced that New York was calling, and when a faint, barely audible voice at the other end of the wire had identified itself as that of the extraordinarily well-known Gilbert Cochrane.

If a young man inherits two or three millions, he ceases to be obscure—if he has ever been obscure. If he inherits ten millions, he becomes a figure of importance. If, however, he comes into an estate variously estimated between forty and seventy millions, he becomes a personage whose doings are front-page material for all the newspapers. Gilbert Cochrane belonged in this last category.

A shrewd father, who had thought no more of purchasing control of a railroad than another man would have thought of purchasing a packet of cigarettes, had vastly multiplied the by-no-means-inconsiderable fortune which had constituted his own inheritance. He had passed it on to Gilbert in flourishing condition, soundly invested, and so thoughtfully tied up that even Gilbert's wild extravagance could never impair the principal. Only the income, well into the millions itself, was under Gilbert's control; but that, the young man decided early in life, was sufficient for his simple needs. Useless and senseless, he resolved, to attempt to add other millions to the many which his forbears had provided; sufficient to the day was the income thereof. The young man devoted himself whole-heartedly to the task of spending it.

For a year or so the cost of additional residences actually kept his bank account stationary. There were already the family mansions in New York and in Newport; in rapid succession Gilbert acquired a camp in the Adirondacks, a villa at Southampton, and a shooting preserve in Georgia, each purchase being duly described and copiously illustrated in the newspapers. But Gilbert was too restless to be content in any of his numerous homes: for most of the year he flitted aimlessly from port to port on his seagoing yacht.

When twelve months had elapsed, and the young man was as affluent as ever, he electrified the newspapers by presenting the Adirondack camp, the Southampton villa, and the Georgia preserve to charitable institutions, by placing the yacht in dry dock, and by announcing that his interests would now be centered upon horse racing.

He embarked upon his new venture on a grand scale, building palatial stables, buying horses by the dozen, and entering mounts at every track. Moreover, he backed his faith in his entries with large sums of money, and as the same perverse genius that had shielded him in the beginning continued to protect him, Gilbert won amounts so formidable that bookmakers were compelled for self-protection to decline his bets. This, however, did not embarrass Gilbert, who had begun to feel bored at his monotonous success. He disposed of the horses in which he had lost interest, and turned to fresh fields and pastures new.

Stock speculation did not attract him, for the very excellent reason that his far-seeing father had made it quite impossible

under the terms of his will. Even the income would cease were Gilbert to carry his experimentation into Wall Street. Wherefore the young heir, craving excitement, and having already tired of all ordinary extravagances, commenced the study—at close range—of games of chance.

Bridge had not held his attention long. Something of his father's shrewd mind was in the son, who demonstrated an ability to win almost as he pleased. Poker could not fill the gap; consistently good luck, coupled with inherited skill, deprived the game of its thrills. Roulette had no charms for him; there was a mathematical streak in Gilbert's make-up, and he knew too well how to calculate that the odds were overwhelmingly against him. It was faro, one of the simplest, and surely one of the speediest of gambling games, that proved most congenial to his temperament; and it was at faro that for the first time his notorious luck failed to follow him.

Taken all in all, there are few methods of separating oneself from surplus wealth that are as clean-cut and agreeable as faro. The precautions taken to protect the players are numerous; the percentage in favor of the bank is far smaller than that in roulette; and action is swift—exceedingly swift. A deck of cards is shuffled, cut, and placed face upward in a metal container which allows only a single card—the uppermost card—to be drawn out at one time. The first card, being exposed, is dead; the two cards following, however, win alternately for the bank and for the players, who, disregarding suits, are at liberty to bet even money that any card—or any one of a number of cards—will either win or lose. The two cards constitute a turn, there being obviously twenty-five turns in a complete deck. The advantage to the bank lies in the fact that when the cards in a turn are of the same denomination—constituting a split—half of all sums hazarded upon them, either to win or to lose, is forfeited. A check upon the dealer is maintained by the case keeper, who records what cards have appeared upon a simple apparatus; a second check is maintained by the players, who keep a record of their own; a third check is provided by the mechanical dealing box; and there is still a fourth check in the fact that the bank is frequently bought and operated by one of the players.

It was at this simple, easily comprehensible game, hedged about with a series of devices expressly designed to protect the players, that Gilbert Cochrane parted with the respectable sum of a quarter of a million dollars in a little less than two weeks.

III.

Over the long-distance telephone, despite the rapidly mounting charges, the young multimillionaire had been quite as leisurely as one might have expected him to be.

"I have heard of you, Mr. Parmelee," he explained in a gentle, unhurried voice; "in fact, there are few men in New York who haven't heard of you. You have built up quite an enviable reputation."

Bill, somewhat overcome by the honor of talking to one of the richest men in the world, swallowed. "Very kind of you to say so, Mr. Cochrane," he said into the telephone.

"Not kind at all," contradicted the invisible speaker; "it's nothing more than the truth. In your own field you have no competition—you're unique. And you deserve your reputation, I'm sure of that. Now, Mr. Parmelee, if it were made worth your while, would you run down to New York for a few days?"

"What for?"

"If you will, Mr. Parmelee, I'd like you to give me your expert opinion on a game in which I have been playing."

"What kind of game?"

"Faro."

Bill whistled.

"You are familiar with faro, aren't you?" inquired the unseen speaker.

"I've played," Bill admitted. He might have added much more. He might have mentioned that in some sections of the country which he had visited on his travels faro had quite eclipsed other games, and that he himself had spent several months manipulating the dealing box in a gambling house. But those months were part of a past which he was trying to forget. "I've played quite a little," he said.

"I thought as much."

"But I'm all through. I never want to see a faro layout again."

"I'm not asking you to play," said the voice over the wire. "I'm asking you to look on—nothing more. And then I want you to tell me whether or not the game is honest."

Not even the fact that he was talking to

the possessor of the Cochrane millions could infuse Bill with enthusiasm. "If you don't think the game is honest, don't play in it," he advised. "I'm not keen about doing any more investigating. I'm a farmer. I'm not a detective. And I'm busy with the haying."

The voice over the wire was unruffled. "If your haying is worth more than ten thousand dollars," it suggested, "finish it, by all means. But if it's worth less than that, jump on the next train for New York."

"What?" gasped Bill.

"I'm willing to pay you ten thousand if you do no more than look around and tell me I'm playing in a fair-and-square game. I've lost a lot of money at it, you see, and I won't mind that at all if I know that it has been taken from me honestly. It's worth ten thousand to me simply to be sure of my ground."

"I see."

"Perhaps the game is what it should be. If so, I'll be very glad to learn that. But if there's something wrong, and you can point it out to me, and prove it to me, I shan't object in the least if your fee is considerably higher—say twenty or twenty-five thousand." The unseen speaker paused, while Parmelee hastily collected his thoughts. "I must know your answer at once, Mr. Parmelee. What is it?"

Bill grinned. "I'm not a millionaire, Mr. Cochrane," he confessed, "and twenty-five thousand is twenty-five thousand. When and where do I report?"

There had followed most explicit directions. Despite the fact that either of two later trains would have brought Parmelee to New York in ample time for the night's adventure, he was to pack his valise immediately, and to start at once. Upon his arrival in the metropolis he was in no event to communicate with Cochrane, but was to amuse himself as he pleased during the afternoon and evening.

At half past ten to the minute he was to wait in the street in front of an address in the lower Thirties; there Cochrane's secretary would meet him in an automobile. The voice over the wire described the car in detail; upon recognizing it, Parmelee was to enter it, and receive further instructions.

Perhaps unnecessarily Cochrane explained that his elaborate precautions were due to the fact that it would be well for him not to be seen in Parmelee's company; one breath of suspicion, and the trip would be in vain. It would be easy—so easy—for the hunted men—if once they thought they were being hunted—to eliminate all trickery from the game. That possibility must be averted.

Bill nodded his approval as he appreciated the shrewdness of Cochrane's plans. "They call that chap lucky," he remarked to Tony as he hung up the instrument, "but I don't—far from it. I say that he has luck because he deserves luck; because he looks so far ahead, and takes account of so many things, that he just naturally has to come out on top. Luck may be capricious, luck may strike where you least expect it; but my experience has taught me that it generally comes to the fellow who has planned to meet it halfway."

Tony's eyes gleamed. "How about your own luck?"

Bill shook his head. "Is it luck or isn't it? I thought I'd found my place in life as a farmer, and here's destiny knocking at my door and telling me——"

"That you can make more in a day by your knowledge of cards than you can in a year by your knowledge of crops."

"Exactly," said Bill. There was no exultation in his voice. Quite the contrary, an outsider would have come to the conclusion that bad news had suddenly reached him. "More in a day by my knowledge of cards than in a year by my knowledge of crops," he repeated. "That's wrong, Tony. That's dead wrong. The world shouldn't be built that way."

"Twenty-five thousand if you win—ten thousand if you lose, remember," tantalized Tony.

"Get thee behind me, Satan!"

Hastily Tony drew the conversation to another angle of the subject. It was dangerous, he sensed, to allow his friend to moralize. With centuries of New England forbears he might suddenly take it into his head to abandon the venture—and Tony yearned for the thrills to be extracted from it. Far better, decided Tony, to direct his restless mentality toward a neat little problem which had begun to occupy his own mind even while he listened to the telephonic conversation.

"Why, do you suppose," inquired Tony, "was Cochrane so keen on your leaving at once? He doesn't want you until half past

ten to-night. Why wouldn't a later train have answered for his purposes quite as well?"

"If you want me to give a guess," said Bill—and the events which followed showed how surprisingly wrong his guess was—"it's because an early train is the one train which I would not be expected to take. Just put yourself in the place of the people whom Cochrane is fighting. They're gambling for big stakes. They've separated him from a lot of money already; they know there's more where it came from. If they are nearly as farsighted as he is, they'll have some man who knows me on duty at the station watching incoming trains. With the amount that they're putting into their pockets, they can well afford the expense of such a precaution. But Cochrane is reckoning on it, you see; the man will be watching the late trains—while I slip in on an early one."

Tony was a slow thinker, but sometimes he was an accurate one. "Possibly," he admitted, "but not probable. If you wanted to go to the city unnoticed, you'd get off at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street—instead of staying on the train until it reaches Grand Central Station."

Bill smiled, and guessed wrongly a second time. "That's what they might expect me to do if I thought I was being watched. But why under the sun should I think such a thing? No, Tony, you may depend upon it that Cochrane has foreseen all that a very, very clever man can foresee. I'm going to follow his instructions to the letter."

But Tony was still unwilling to relinquish the subject. Like a dog with a marrowy bone, he found great pleasure in turning it over and over, in attacking it here and there, in exploring its innermost recesses. "You know, Bill," he commented, "if I were a gambling-house proprietor, and I wanted to know what you were doing, I wouldn't have my man waiting in New York at all."

"What would you do?"

"I'd do something much simpler," said Tony. "I'd give him orders to camp out right here in West Woods, Connecticut. And I'd tell him to keep a very close eye on the little railroad station."

"Rot!" said Bill.

It was thus that William Parmelee, ex-gambler, farmer, and unwilling corrector of destinies, guessed wrongly three times in as many minutes.

IV.

Out of the mouths of babes and little children, wisdom—sometimes. Tony was more nearly right than he suspected.

The morning train from New York had brought a curious passenger. Sleek, roly-poly, bland, innocent, good-natured, and attired, withal, in the vestments of a clergyman, he had disembarked at the West Woods station in a humor so cheerful that not even the misadventure which he promptly related to the agent could damp it.

Traveling from one parish to another, he had, by some incomprehensible error, boarded a northbound and not a southbound train. The conductor would doubtless have set him right immediately had not he, the clergyman, promptly dropped off to sleep. With well-meant consideration the official had refrained from waking him, and the mistake had not been discovered until, having slept his fill, he had tendered his ticket but a few minutes ago. There had been mutual consternation—and the clergyman had hastily descended from the train, to wait two hours, or thereabouts, for a southbound train which would carry him back over the way that he had come.

"I got on at Pawling," explained the clergyman. One might have expected him to be vexed. On the contrary, he bubbled over with laughter. "I was going to White Plains. It's a trip I've made a hundred—no, a thousand—times! But my wits must have been woolgathering, I'm afraid. I was sleepy. I must have been thinking too hard about next Sunday's sermon. Perhaps that's what made me sleepy! Ha! Ha! My sermons have been known to have that effect on my congregation!" The rotund little man overflowed with merriment. "At any rate, I did a most incomprehensible thing. The northbound train comes in two minutes before the southbound one."

"I know that," assented the station agent.

"I know it quite as well as you do," chuckled the clergyman. "At least, I ought to know it. But in spite of knowing it, I managed to board the wrong train! And then, having started wrong, I dozed off—must have been that sermon again!—and the conductor had too much respect for the cloth to wake me!"

"Too bad," sympathized the station

agent, "too bad." He might have been less sympathetic had he been able to compare notes with the conductor, now a dozen miles away. That worthy would have informed him that the clergyman, very wide awake and knowing exactly what he was doing, had boarded the train at New York City and not at Pawling. He would have added that the clerical gentleman had slept not at all, that his ticket, duly taken up, had read for West Woods, and that if he had alighted at that hamlet it had obviously been for the reason that it was his destination, and that he wished to go there.

Lacking an opportunity to compare notes with the conductor, a search of the clergyman's person might have been quite as surprising. Besides a small Bible, which he had read ostentatiously from time to time, it would have revealed a blackjack and a fully loaded revolver—surely an astonishing assortment. And the most casual examination of the clergyman's person, snugly hidden under his broadcloth, would have disclosed most remarkably developed muscles—muscles strangely inconsistent with his peaceful avocation.

Yet upon a cursory inspection the man who claimed that his own sermons made him sleepy, looked the part. His round, unwrinkled face, which blinked up at the station agent like that of a suddenly awakened owl; his chubby hands, large but not strikingly so; his well-brushed clothes, across whose front glittered a thin gold watch chain—all were in harmony with each other.

The station agent looked him over, smiled, and made a mental note that such persons should not be allowed to travel unaccompanied by guardians. He refrained from expressing this opinion, however, and confined himself to stating that the down train was due in one hour and fifty-eight minutes.

"I know it already," said the smiling parson; "the conductor was kind enough to tell me so. And you"—once more he bubbled over with merriment—"you will be making it your business to see that I'm on it when it pulls out!"

The agent nodded. "I'll remind you, never fear. In the meantime, make yourself comfortable." He waved a hand at the long benches around the deserted waiting room. "I'll get you something to read if you like."

The man of the cloth was quick in his protest. "No reading, if you please," he begged. "I have overtaxed my eyes already, the doctor tells me. Perhaps that is why I felt so tired this morning. No; no reading, thank you. I'll manage to pass the time away without."

In recounting the episode several days afterward, Drummond, the station agent, admitted that he had been greatly relieved at this reply. His stock of reading matter consisted chiefly of the back numbers of periodicals devoted impartially to boxing, horse racing, and bathing girls; and had the reverend gentleman accepted his well-meant but thoughtless offer, Drummond would have found himself in an embarrassing situation.

He discovered quickly, however, upon what the clergyman depended for his entertainment. If his eyes were tired, his tongue and ears were most certainly not. Planting himself at the grilled ticket window, he drew the willing agent into a conversation which began with the antediluvian history of West Woods, and progressed by easy stages to a discussion of the leading men of the place.

Now in a hamlet whose inhabitants number fewer than six hundred, leading men are not likely to be plentiful, but despite that handicap Drummond did his subject full justice. He loved to talk—and the clergyman, it appeared, loved to listen; surely a happy combination! Wherefore the station agent, commencing with old man McGregor, who had become a notable by the simple process of living one hundred and two years, limned an admirably detailed biography of the individuals whose fame had shed luster on the little village.

Besides McGregor there was Pappagianopoulos, the shoemaker, worthy descendant of the Greeks who fought at Marathon. A bountiful providence had enshrined him among the immortals by bestowing six fingers on each of his hands, and—so it was rumored—a similar number of toes on each of his feet. Pappagianopoulos might be found in his shop under the Motion Picture Palace any hour that the clergyman cared to inspect him.

There were others, too—men who had achieved renown in the hamlet because of circumstances that would have attracted no attention whatsoever in the great, busy world without, but which set them apart

in a class by themselves in West Woods, Connecticut. The station agent, warming to his appreciative audience, dealt with them one by one in a series of brief but comprehensive thumb-nail sketches.

But there was one name which he did not mention at all, and the clergyman, after waiting in vain for him to bring it into the conversation, finally did so himself.

"Interesting, most interesting, and most entertaining," he commented. "The true study of mankind is man. Where else can one learn so much as from the thoughtful consideration of those individuals who have distinguished themselves from the great mass of humanity by some splendid, noteworthy accomplishment?"

If there was sarcasm beneath the remark, the station agent failed to detect it; and the bogus preacher, licking his lips over his rounded periods, congratulated himself on the unction with which he was carrying off his part. To certain intimates, in the Tenderloin of New York, he was familiarly known as "Holy" Hutchins. Those intimates were aware that a protracted stay in a large, heavily barred building whose inmates paid no rent and who remained no longer than they were actually compelled to had given him both the opportunity of "getting religion" and of acquiring the sanctimonious manner which became him so perfectly. They would have applauded, he felt sure, had they been able to observe him impressing the station agent now.

But enough time had been wasted on preliminaries. Holy Hutchins half closed his eyes. "I have heard it said," he remarked blandly, "that one of your well-known men is named Parmelee—William Parmelee, I believe."

The station agent grinned. "Yes," he admitted.

"Why didn't you mention him?"

"To a minister?"

"Why not?"

"Well," said Drummond reluctantly, "he's a card expert, Bill is, and I had the idea that a clergyman wouldn't care to hear about him."

Holy Hutchins smiled his sweetest smile. "He is a man, isn't he? And I am interested in all kinds of men. Besides, if I have been informed correctly, he has given up the evil practices of his youth."

"Yes, that's true enough."

"He has adopted the remarkable profession of hunting down other—shall we say?—card experts."

"Card cheats, you mean."

"Card cheats, if you will." Holy Hutchins rubbed his hands benignantly. "Now it appears to me that Mr. Parmelee is doing something to make the world better—in his own way, of course, in his own way. It is a noble effort. I preach the Eighth Commandment. Mr. Parmelee does what he can to make the world practice it. We are colaborers, coworkers in the same field. Why should you not speak of him to me?"

Drummond laughed. "If that's the way you look at it, it makes all the difference in the world! If I had known you felt like that, Bill Parmelee would have been the first man I'd have told you about. We're mighty proud of him, here in West Woods. We think he's just about the greatest man that's ever lived in this little village! Why, there isn't a lad in miles around who can't talk about him by the hour!"

The clerical gentleman nodded. "Suppose you tell me about him."

"What shall I tell you?"

"Everything."

Drummond smiled the smile of the man who is about to embark upon a most agreeable undertaking. As he had stated, there was not a child in the hamlet who could not relate tales about Parmelee; and in his admiration for the hero Drummond yielded to nobody.

He had heard stories—inaccurate—exaggerated—with gaps which Parmelee himself never could be persuaded to fill in. He accepted the inaccuracies and the exaggerations, and he bridged the gaps with highly colored episodes of his own invention. He traced Parmelee's beginnings, described his wanderings about the country, confided that he had a theory of his own to explain his return to his home town, and all but swamped the listening clergyman with the detailed history of a long series of more or less impossible exploits. Parmelee could see through a card cheat quite as easily as he could see through the back of a card—and that latter feat, the voluble station agent explained, was merely child's play for him.

When Holy Hutchins finally called a halt it lacked but five minutes of train time, and Drummond had been holding forth without interruption for nearly an hour.

The station agent locked the ticket office and escorted the passenger out of the station. "This time," he promised, "you'll take the southbound train. I'll see to that." Then an automobile came down the hill, rolled up to the platform, and stopped. "Speak of the devil!" whispered Drummond. "That's Parmelee himself!"

Holy Hutchins riveted his gaze upon the two men who emerged from the car. Upon the first, a blue-eyed, blond-haired young man, dressed in the simplest possible manner, he wasted no attention. Upon the second, a slightly older man whose mustache was waxed to fine points, whose knickers and coat were of an unearthly plaid, and whose shapely legs were encased in rattlesnake stockings, Hutchins focused his eyes as if he were endeavoring to make a permanent record in some mental camera.

"So that's Parmelee!" he murmured.

Then, with an inconspicuous motion he passed his hands over his hip pockets, and made sure that his weapons were readily accessible.

V.

They had entered the train with hardly a glance at the rotund little clergyman who boarded it with them; indeed, as the clergyman had selected a car one removed from that which they had chosen, they had not come within fifty feet of him. At Tony's suggestion, they had migrated to the smoking compartment, and once alone in it, Tony, almost bursting with the opinions buried in his bosom, had immediately launched into the debate whose beginnings we have already chronicled.

"I repeat," said Tony, crossing his shapely legs defiantly, "I repeat that faro is a cheat-proof game."

Bill smiled patiently. "Sometimes, Tony," he said, "sometimes you have too little faith in human nature—and sometimes you have too much."

"Faro is——" began Tony.

"Faro is a game like other games," Bill interrupted. "Where wits are matched against wits, somebody is going to try for an unfair advantage. The stakes are big. The rewards are worth while. And the man with a faro layout has a big head start even before he opens his doors."

"How so?"

Bill grinned. "Because the statement that faro is the fairest of all games has been made so often that it has almost become an adage. It's one of the most cherished beliefs of the public. What are the average man's convictions? That all heroes smoke pipes; that all villains smoke cigarettes; that all pretty girls are young; and that faro is fair! If he loses at roulette, he'll suspect the wheel—and there may be nothing the matter with it. Roulette has a bad name. But if he loses at faro, he feels that he's had a run for his money. Something about faro inspires confidence.

"It never occurs to him that the very devices which seem to protect him can be made to work against him. Unless he's a Cochrane he doesn't reason that nothing invented by human ingenuity can't be improved by human ingenuity."

He rose and smiled at his traveling companion. "Let that sink in, Tony," he adjured. "Remember that while the fellow who invents a newfangled sewing machine —or a phonograph—or an electric light—becomes famous, the chap who invents a new way to trim suckers at poker—or roulette—or faro—isn't looking for fame, and doesn't get the advertising he really deserves."

With this Parthian shot he made his way back to his seat in the car, to stare fixedly out of the window for an unconscionable length of time. There Tony joined him when his cigar had been entirely reduced to ashes, and offered the proverbial penny for his thoughts.

Bill shook his head. "They may not be worth it," he prefaced. "Yet——"

"Yet?" Tony prompted.

"Have you ever met Cochrane?"

"No; but I've heard a lot about him."

"So have I," admitted Bill. He turned his chair to face his friend squarely. "Tony, I may be dead wrong, but there's one little point that has been coming up in my mind again and again."

"What's that?"

"The telephone call—the long-distance call."

"What about it?"

"He must have talked for a quarter of an hour."

"He did."

"Well, the toll covers the first three minutes only. After that there's an extra charge for each minute."

Tony laughed. "Why should you care? You don't have to pay it."

"I care nevertheless."

"Cochrane can afford such little luxuries."

"That's just what's making me think so hard," confessed Bill. "Cochrane is an enormously rich man. He is an extravagant man. He is famous not only for the size of his bank account, but for his liberality in drawing on it."

"Well?" challenged Tony, considerably puzzled.

"There's this," Bill pointed out. "It has been my observation that millionaires—the few millionaires I've been privileged to know—may waste tens and hundreds of thousands on their pleasures, but they're extraordinarily economical when it comes to little expenses. Perhaps that's why they're millionaires. They don't object to paying a fortune for a particularly fine automobile—but they're mighty careful not to put two stamps on a letter when there is a chance that it will get by with one stamp. They'll lose any amount on the races without a pang—but they'll figure for half an hour to compress an eleven-word telegram into ten words, and save the few cents that the extra word would cost. They don't balk at spending more than the average man's yearly income on one night's amusement—but when they put in long-distance calls they speak with their watches in their hands to make sure that they don't use up one second more than three minutes! Now, that's just what Cochrane didn't do!"

"He couldn't have said all he wanted in three minutes."

"Yes, he could!" contradicted Bill. "He could have said it in one minute. Why didn't he? Why did he talk—and talk—and talk—when it cost money, and when he knew that I knew it cost money?"

"Maybe he wanted to impress you."

"Not Cochrane! It's the near-rich man who tries to make an impression. The millionaire doesn't care about it; there's no novelty in it for him; and something deep, deep down in him always tells him to save money on the small expenses. Why didn't he run true to form?"

It was Tony's turn to guess wrongly. "Because Cochrane is in a class by himself, that's why," he asserted.

"I have been trying to believe that," Bill admitted, "but somehow it doesn't ring true."

He turned to the window again, in so uncommunicative a mood that Tony, after several attempts, gave up hope of engaging him in conversation, and retreated to the platform to smoke a solitary cigar.

The brakeman had left the doors open. Tony braced himself against a handrail, looked out, and breathed deep. To the rear swayed the three or four cars composing the body of the train; ahead, the engine, visible as it plunged into a curve, belched clouds of smoke. The air was filled with the clank and grind and clatter of chains and couplings and revolving wheels—but Tony found the din curiously soothing.

Along the sides flitted a constantly changing panorama: green fields dotted with rivulets, marshes crowded with bulrushes, meadows in which grazed cows and sheep. The city man gazed—forgot where he was—thrilled with the joy of living.

Then, suddenly, some sixth sense began to speak to him; some deep-buried instinct handed down to him by warlike ancestors began to warn him; some eternally watchful self, looking out from the back of his head, began to scream: "Danger! Danger!"

Tony wheeled about like a flash, to come face to face with a convulsed, distorted countenance which glared into his. It topped a squat, rotund body garbed in the broadcloth of a clergyman.

For an instant there hissed through Tony's mind the frightful suspicion that had he not turned when he did, the man would have pitched him from the swaying train. His imagination reeled at the thought of what might have happened to him. Then, even while he told himself that his fear was insane and groundless, the clergyman inhaled spasmodically—once—twice—and unburdened himself of a thunderous sneeze.

The reaction was nearly as paralyzing as the icy horror that had preceded it. Tony gasped, and clutched at the handrail for support. Yet he mastered himself as the clergyman's countenance relaxed into smiling, placid lines; found his way to the door, though his legs trembled; murmured an habitual "God bless you!" and—bolted for safety.

VI.

Some periods of time are so featureless that they do not linger long in the memory. Some are so eventful that they are never forgotten. Like familiar nightmares, they

conjure themselves up in imagination for years and decades. When Tony reluctantly bade his friend farewell at the station, he little anticipated what happenings the next few hours had in store for him —nor did he foresee how utterly any man other than a native New Yorker would have been terrified by them.

He had urged Bill to spend the afternoon with him. Rather surprisingly Parmelee had pleaded private business, and had begged off. Not to be denied lightly Tony had suggested taking in a show, and when that had not produced the desired response, had mentioned that a two-handed game of poker in his comfortable apartment would logically be followed by a somewhat intimate investigation of a wine cellar which Tony admitted was excellently stocked.

Smiling, Bill had failed to rise to the bait.

"I'll meet you at supper," he promised, but refused to commit himself to anything for the hours between.

Chagrined and wondering, Tony watched him disappear into the subway. He would have given a great deal to be in possession of full details of the mysterious errand upon which Parmelee was bent; it was tantalizing to know so much, and yet to know so little—and Tony was an incurably inquisitive person. It was evident as the nose on a man's face that his friend had picked up a promising clew, and was determined to run it down; yet Tony, for all his familiarity with his methods, found himself quite in the dark.

Emphatically nettled because he had not been taken into the secret—and there was clearly a secret—Tony strode into Forty-second Street, and turned northward on Madison Avenue. A taxi would have taken him home more rapidly, but Tony wanted to think. The results of his thinking, he would probably have admitted had he been asked, would probably be of no particular importance. But that could not deter him from giving himself up quite whole-heartedly to it.

Engrossed in his speculations he crossed Forty-third and Forty-fourth Streets. Forty-fifth Street witnessed no progress, but midway to Forty-sixth Street a new and undeveloped angle suddenly occurred to him. Revolving it industriously in his mind, he reached the corner, stepped off —and then, for the second time in a single day, instinct came to his rescue.

Certain animals, authorities say, divine the presence of the hunter when neither sight nor scent nor sound reveal him. Born New Yorkers, other authorities will testify, anticipate the dangers with which their city besets them as naturally and as unconsciously as they set one foot before the other.

Tony stepped off the curb, plunged in thought. But hardly had he moved a yard before he leaped—leaped wildly and desperately—and as he did so, a careering motor car, sluing around the corner, whizzed through the space which he had just vacated.

A sight-seer from Chicago, observing the incident, felt his hair rising on his head. "Gee, that was a narrow squeak!" he murmured. "It looked as if that driver was trying to run him down on purpose!"

Thus the man from Chicago; but Tony, typical New Yorker, had already caught his stride again, and proceeded unconcernedly on his way.

At Forty-seventh Street he halted in subconscious obedience to the traffic signal, while an endless stream of vehicles crossed the avenue. Parmelee, he told himself, had evidently considered the details connected with the long-distance telephone call of great importance; what inferences, if any, had he been able to draw from them?

At this juncture a heavily laden truck thundered by, and some person behind Tony chose that moment to bump him with great violence. Had Tony been a Westerner—or a Southerner—or a foreigner—he would doubtless have been precipitated under the ponderous wheels, and the name of Claghorn would have adorned the following morning's obituary column. Had one Bill Parmelee, of West Woods, Connecticut, been in Claghorn's boots, a unique and promising career would have come to an end in an instant. But Tony was Tony—and a native New Yorker.

With a powerful movement, none the less powerful because it was automatic, he drove his right elbow into the ribs of the jostler, extended his hand in a simultaneous motion, grasped the unknown firmly by the coat, and rectified his balance.

If the police officer in charge of traffic observed the occurrence, he took no notice of it. He blew his whistle; one traffic

stream stopped, and another began to flow. With it flowed Tony, who had not paused either to exact or to offer apologies, who had not, in fact, looked behind him at all.

Had he done so, he might have observed a short, rotund clergyman, still doubled up from the impact of Tony's elbow, and gasping painfully for breath. But the New Yorker, busy with his thoughts, and not in the least disconcerted by what had taken place, paused not at all. In the streets of New York certain hazards were to be encountered. Sometimes they were more pronounced than at others; sometimes less. In either event, they were worthy of scant attention.

Tony continued his walk. At Forty-ninth Street the car that had deliberately attempted to run him down once before, made another attempt. Certain it is that Tony did not recognize it as the same automobile. He had hardly glanced at it the first time; busily engaged in bowing to a flapper acquaintance across the avenue, he hardly glanced at it the second.

Instead he merely sprang five feet or so in a detached, absent-minded manner—sprang, incidentally, the exact distance required to avoid the onrushing danger, and not an inch more—alighted gracefully, and finished the bow which he had begun. He had not dropped his cigar; he had not ruffled his hair; he had not even lost the current of his thoughts. "Sorry Bill isn't here," he ruminated; "there are several questions I would like to ask him."

He reached the corner of the street in which his apartment was located, paused, and gazed affectionately at the teeming avenue. "Little old New York!" he mused with the true devotion that the metropolis nurtures in the hearts of its sons. "No other town like it! No, not a one!"

His glance wandered into the distance, and fell like a benediction on the crowded streets and the overflowing sidewalks—while a hundred feet away a portly little clergyman, seeing Tony look back, dodged under a convenient awning and began to take the liveliest interest in a window display of sporting goods. Holy Hutchins had been much in evidence for some hours; his retiring instincts told him that it might now be well for him to merge unostentatiously with the background.

He ventured out as soon as he dared. The casual manner in which Tony had eluded his snares had vastly increased his respect for him. "Clever!" he murmured. "Clever as they make 'em! He's got eyes in the back of his head, that man Parmelee!"

As rapidly as possible he proceeded to the corner. Tony was nowhere in sight. One of the innumerable rabbit warrens in the city which he loved so much had swallowed him up in its elevators, and was whisking him up some hundreds of feet to his home on the fourteenth floor.

Holy Hutchins gazed east and west—likewise north and south—also up and down. His quarry had eluded him.

A motor car pulled up at the curb near him.

"He got away," remarked Holy Hutchins.

"You don't have to tell me that," remarked the driver sarcastically.

"Not my fault."

"Well, wasn't mine, neither."

The bogus clergyman opened the door of the car and stepped into it. "What does it matter whether he got away or not?" he commented philosophically. "A few hours more or less—who cares about that? We'll get him in the long run."

The driver let in his clutch with a jerk, and spun around the corner, narrowly missing three pedestrians and one Pomeranian dog. "We'll get him to-night," he said shortly.

It was at this precise moment that Tony, having deposited his hat on the rack, having kissed his pretty wife, and having lighted the first of a brand-new box of his favorite cigars, made the sagacious comment: "There's just one thing wrong with this little old town."

"And what's that?" inquired Mrs. Claghorn.

Tony gazed out of the window. "New York's too slow," he declared.

VII.

It is interesting to conjecture what dangers Tony unknowingly avoided by remaining at home, contentedly smoking one cigar after another, that afternoon. The bogus clergyman, despite his conviction that a few hours more or less mattered little, was apparently a tenacious individual, for he drove only as far as the nearest public telephone. A few minutes' earnest conversation was followed by the prompt ar-

rival of reënforcements in the shape of two young men with cauliflower ears, excellently developed under jaws, and badly developed foreheads.

With their assistance, the street into which Tony had vanished was patrolled with a vigilance which would have done credit to professional detectives. It may be inferred, moreover, that life would have been made exceedingly full and interesting for any person answering the description which Holy Hutchins had given his aids. Parmelee, he had explained, wore a mustache waxed to fine points, and encased his lower extremities in rattlesnake-patterned golf stockings. Fortunately for the five million other inhabitants of the city, however, Tony was a stickler for buying wearables of exclusive designs, and while golf stockings of gray or tan passed once or twice during the afternoon, the vigil was unrewarded.

At seven Parmelee arrived for the evening meal. He had little to say during dinner, and that little was confined almost entirely to side-stepping his friend's questions. But immediately afterward he took Tony aside.

"Old fellow," he prefaced, "you know I'd like to take you along to-night."

"Of course you're going to take me along," said Tony. The thought that he might ever be omitted had never entered his head.

"It can't be done, Tony."

"And why not?"

"You know my instructions. I'm to go to an address in the Thirties. I'm to be there at ten thirty sharp. I'm to get into a car which will meet me there."

"There'll be room for two in the car," Tony pointed out.

"Doubtless—but Cochrane's orders are quite definite, and he didn't include you in them. Tony, I'm not going to take you."

"You can't do that!" Tony pleaded earnestly. "Cochrane probably knows all about me. He probably knows that we've always hunted together."

Parmelee shook his head decisively. "Whether he knows it or not, Tony, you're going to stay home."

Tony rose, deeply offended. For over a year he had been Parmelee's companion on every adventure. "All right," he said, "if you haven't any use for me any more——"

Bill laid his hand on his arm. "It isn't that, old fellow," he soothed. "There's never a time that I haven't use for you; and when there's fun I like to have you along to enjoy it. But to-night, I'm afraid, things are going to be different."

"How different?" challenged Tony. His eyes sought those of his friend shrewdly. "Bill, what's your real reason?" he demanded.

"I've told you."

"No, you haven't."

Bill shrugged his shoulders. "Well, if you must know, the real reason is that I'm running into danger."

Tony bounded across the room. "And that's why you don't want me to come along?"

"That's why."

Tony smiled happily. He laid claim to no more bravery than the average man; yet he could imagine no more joyful adventure than to face an unknown menace in company with his friend. "Bill," he declared, "if there's danger, I'm certainly going with you. Do you expect me to back out just because there's a chance of trouble?"

"There's more than a chance," Parmelee explained reluctantly; "there's a strong probability. I made a few inquiries this afternoon. I have friends in New York—fellows I used to know in the days when I made a living out of the cards. Some of them have settled down and turned honest. Some of them—haven't. Some of them are respectable business men. Some of them are crooks. Some of them are in the police department keeping some of the rest of them in order. Well, I went the rounds to-day, and I asked a few questions, and I found out where Cochrane is playing faro. Tony, he's playing at Seeley's."

"What's the point? I've heard of Seeley's. How is it different from any other gambling house?"

"The house isn't different—steel doors, and all that sort of thing, just as you'd expect. It's Seeley that's different." He half closed his eyes. "Tony, I've never met the man—never in my life. But it seems to me as if I've heard of him ever since I was a kid. He's dangerous. He was dangerous when I heard his name for the first time—and he's even more dangerous to-day."

"Dangerous in what way?" queried Tony.

"He doesn't care any more about a hu-

man life than he does about a white chip, that's all. He operated out West some time ago. He packed up and left in a great big hurry. They said that he had been mixed up in a shooting. He stopped a while in Chicago. He left there in a hurry, too. I don't know why, but I've heard rumors. He's been doing business in New York for two years now, and something tells me that if I break up his game to-night he may not take it kindly."

"What can he do?" scoffed Tony. "This isn't the West. This isn't Chicago. This is New York, the safest city in the world."

Bill laughed. "I've heard it called many things, but I've never heard it called that."

"In a Western mining camp he might shoot you," admitted Tony, "but here——"

"Here," interrupted Bill, "he might do exactly the same thing, with just one big difference: in a Western mining camp, if they ever caught him, he'd be lynched; here, they may never catch him, and if they do, he'll have a dozen eyewitnesses who'll be willing to swear through thick and thin that I took his revolver out of his pocket and shot myself with it."

"Nonsense," said Tony.

"It may be nonsense, but I take it so seriously that I'm not going to let you get mixed up in it. Tony, much as I hate to do it, to-night I play a lone hand."

Tony knew his friend too well to argue with him. Far simpler, he noted mentally, to pretend to give in—and then to do exactly as he pleased. He merely inquired, "I suppose you are armed?"

"No," said Bill.

"I'll give you a revolver."

"I don't want it."

"Why not?"

Parmelee shook his head. "I'll be better off without it. My only chance is to manage things so that I won't need weapons at all—because if I do need them, I'll be so outnumbered that they'll be of no use. No, Tony; I'll do my fighting with my wits. I'll run less danger that way."

Tony thought an instant. "If Cochrane is as shrewd as you think he is, he will have taken steps to protect you against Seeley."

"I hope so," said Bill sincerely. He smiled. "It may sound unheroic, but I'm not a bit keen on taking unnecessary risks. Heroes do that only in books—and this is real life."

Tony nodded. Then a beatific expression spread over his countenance. "There's still another thing in your favor," he pointed out. "Perhaps you won't do anything to offend Seeley. Perhaps you won't find anything wrong. Faro," declared Tony Claghorn for the seventeenth time in less than that many hours, "is the one fair gambling game. Faro is a game in which it is impossible to cheat."

Bill grinned. "Oh, is it?" he murmured ironically.

VIII.

Curiosity, the adage has it, once killed a cat. Curiosity came very, very near to killing Tony Claghorn. Let us qualify at once, however, by giving Tony credit for more than a modicum of devotion to his friend. Bill was running into danger; Tony did not propose to allow him to face it single-handed.

At ten o'clock Parmelee climbed into a taxi, told the driver to set him down at a corner in the lower Thirties, and departed.

Precisely thirty seconds later Claghorn climbed into a taxi, told the driver to trail the car which had just left at a discreet distance, and followed his friend.

Ten seconds after that an automobile which had been cruising through the neighborhood most of the afternoon and evening turned abruptly as Holy Hutchins recognized the man he was hunting, and joined unostentatiously in the procession.

Into Madison Avenue and down Madison Avenue turned Parmelee's taxi. A hundred yards in the rear Claghorn followed. And a hundred yards farther to the rear rolled Holy Hutchins and his driver.

The pseudo-clergyman had removed his coat, and had replaced it with a dark sweater. Somehow it had altered his appearance completely. The ministerial collar was still visible—but the sweater had accentuated certain unlovely features of its wearer's physiognomy. Hutchins was ready for business—and he looked the part. Gone was the oily blandness which he had assumed earlier in the day; come in its stead was an expression of unchangeable determination that boded ill for some one.

Parmelee's taxi came to a halt. He alighted, paid off his driver, and dismissed him. Quietly he walked into the side street in which he was to meet his employer's secretary.

Nearly a city block distant, Claghorn's taxi stopped. Tony disembarked.

"What do you want me to do now?" inquired his chauffeur.

"Stick around," said Tony. "Be where I can reach you when I want you."

Parmelee proceeded along the street. Once a fashionable neighborhood, it had long ago fallen from grace. On either side dingy, cheerless rooming houses lined it. Most of the first floors and basements had been given up to small tradesmen: tailors, milliners, shoemakers, and the like. Here and there table-d'hôte dining rooms, which had been thronged earlier in the evening, flaunted their signs.

He paused for an instant in front of the address which had been given him over the telephone. It was a dingy rooming house, neither more nor less dingy than its neighbors. He glanced at his watch under one of the few street lamps that the dimly lighted block afforded; it was well before ten thirty. He put up his watch, and strolled toward the other corner.

Opposite him, and distant half the length of the street, Tony Claghorn moved stealthily from shadow to shadow. He had donned a dark hat and overcoat; even a few yards away he was quite indistinguishable against the background.

Parmelee reached the corner and turned. Claghorn retreated into an areaway and watched. Without pausing, Parmelee proceeded leisurely to the end of the street. He glanced at his watch again; it lacked but seven or eight minutes of the appointed time. He wheeled, and retraced his steps.

Once more he passed the address which had been given him, continued down the length of the street—and as he did so a long, gray touring car with the curtains closed swung around the corner which he had just left, rolled silently over the asphalt, and came to a halt at the rendezvous.

Tony, watching from across the street, felt his heart beating like a trip hammer —why, he hardly knew. The arrival of the automobile, tallying with the description that had been given of it, meant only that Cochrane's man was waiting for Parmelee. Yet something made Tony extraordinarily uneasy.

Blotted in the shadows, he flattered himself that he had not been observed; yet keen eyes, behind the curtains of the waiting car, had already picked him out. While his dark coat served admirably as protective coloration, it is greatly to be feared that his blond mustache, waxed and glistening in the dim light, made his discovery inevitable.

Holy Hutchins, sitting next to the driver, jerked his thumb in Tony's direction and whispered to the cauliflower-eared men in the back seat, "That's the fellow!"

They gazed with interest at Tony's glistening mustache. "How long do we wait for him?" they inquired.

"Wait for him nothing!" declared Holy Hutchins. "He's had a chance to come over. He isn't going to; he's got cold feet." He extracted his blackjack from his hip pocket. "Come on, boys," he murmured, and opened the door of the car. "No noise —but make sure you get him."

Tony, watching intently, saw Bill, having reached the corner again, turn and approach the gray touring car with quickened steps. But to Tony's utter amazement the three men who descended from the car paid no attention whatsoever to Parmelee. Instead they spread out fanwise and crossed the street, converging upon himself.

They approached, and Tony, utterly bewildered, racked his brains in vain for a solution of the problem. By no stretch of the imagination could their advance be called other than menacing. Their faces, dimly revealed in the gloom, were not prepossessing; their costumes were of a kind associated with a world with which Tony had not mingled; and their silent, simultaneous approach was distinctly threatening.

They neared. Tony, with his back against the wall of a house, saw that their hands were not empty—that they clutched short and ugly instruments known to the clubman by repute. As if by magic a pearl-mounted revolver leaped into his own hand.

They halted within a pace of him. "What do you want?" he challenged.

Holy Hutchins did not trouble to reply. He turned to his allies. "Let him have it, boys," he commanded.

It was then that things began to happen very quickly. Like one, the three men plunged upon their victim. Tony raised his revolver—and a vicious blow from a blackjack raised it still higher before he fired, the report echoing through the silent street like that of a cannon. He would

have fired again had the weapon not dropped from a hand which had suddenly gone numb.

As best he could he fought against overwhelming odds: one good arm, and nothing but a fist at the end of it, against three desperate men armed with short leather clubs, heavily loaded with lead. He saw a slight figure rushing from across the street to his aid.

"Keep out of it!" he cried to him. He knew Parmelee had no weapons, and Tony, at bottom, was a very gallant gentleman.

If the advice was heard, it was unheeded. Like a wild cat the lithe figure of the ex-gambler bounded into the scrimmage, and the fight became general.

Had it been lighter, the outcome would not have been doubtful. Human flesh cannot withstand the crushing impact of black-jacks wielded by muscular arms. It would all have been over in a moment.

But darkness is always on the side of the lesser number—and Tony, resolved to sell his life dearly, had backed himself into a corner—and reënforcements had arrived—and the single revolver shot was presently followed by the swift patter of many feet running toward the spot from which it had rung out.

Holy Hutchins gritted his teeth as from the corner of his eye he observed the approaching multitude. "Beat it!" he commanded, and the three men ran for the waiting automobile. With muffler cut-out open, screaming its defiance of pursuit, it went roaring down the street.

The mob, headed by two police officers, engulfed the two men who remained. One of them, bleeding from half a dozen small cuts, was shakily on his feet; the other, quite unconscious, was stretched at full length on the pavement. And the mob, growing every second, filled the street and overflowed at the corners.

One of the police officers turned to the man who stood erect. "Are you hurt?" he inquired.

"No; not much."

The officer bent over the motionless shape at his feet. "They got this fellow, I'm afraid. He's a case for the ambulance." He opened his notebook methodically. "What's your name?" he inquired.

"Anthony P. Claghorn."

"New Yorker?"

"Yes."

"And this man?" He indicated the recumbent mass on the pavement.

The man who stood erect mopped his bleeding lip with a handkerchief. "His name is William Parmelee," he said.

"New Yorker?"

"No; he comes from a little out-of-the-way village in Connecticut."

"Let's get him to the hospital quick."

Somewhere within earshot in the crowd, and quite as safe there as if he were a thousand miles away, stood a portly little man whose heavy sweater nearly concealed the ministerial collar about his neck. He grinned.

IX.

If Seeley had indulged in only a little advertising, the brownstone-front house in which games of chance were conducted every night for the benefit of men, young and old, who longed to get action for their money, would have been one of the notable landmarks of New York. But Seeley did not advertise. His clientele was as large as he desired it to be; and while it was his boast that his guests might indulge in any game they wished for any stake under the sun, he found it well, for many reasons, to shrink from the fierce light of publicity, and to conduct his business as quietly and unostentatiously as possible.

The ancient mansion in which Seeley operated differed in no external particular from those on either side of it in its highly respectable neighborhood. Its immaculate shades were drawn all day long, and at night no blaze of light came from its windows to distress the conservative landowners who resided in the vicinity. Quite the contrary, the select souls who had penetrated to the interior could have vouchsafed the information that behind the shades the windows were again guarded by massive steel shutters through whose crannies only tiny wisps of illumination might reach the outside world.

The steel-grilled outer door was like any other door; it was only when one had passed beyond it into the vestibule that a second, and very, very different, door became visible. It was famous throughout the underworld, notorious with the gilded set which marched through it, and it was the pride of Seeley's heart. It had been manufactured to serve as the entrance to some exceedingly up-to-date safe-deposit vault. Three or four tons in weight, made from

shell-proof armor, and fitted with a bewildering array of locks, bolts, and combinations, it swung easily on massive hinges to admit those whom Seeley decreed might enter. The others might work on its case-hardened exterior with acetylene torches, with hammers and sledges, with dynamite, with every destructive agency known to man, without doing more than marring the shining paint which covered its impregnable surface.

Within, two floors were given up to a series of luxuriously furnished, but moderate-sized rooms. Other proprietors of gambling houses might make much of some one great central space in which eight or ten different games might simultaneously be conducted. Not so Seeley. Long experience had taught him that it was human nature for a crowd to gather about some sensational winner or loser, and that such a crowd would find so much entertainment in merely looking on that its members would not dream of playing themselves. A secondhand thrill was nearly as good as one at firsthand; and it was even better if the stakes involved were larger than the spectator himself would dare to hazard. A secondhand thrill, moreover, was economical.

It was in order to combat this money-saving instinct that Seeley thoughtfully divided his crowd, gave up a separate room to each game, and made sure that no spectacular player would draw too great an audience from other tables. A newcomer might wander from room to room freely; might, at his leisure, make up his mind in what manner he would most willingly be divested of his surplus cash. But once having decided, his attention would not thereafter be distracted by events which, however interesting in themselves, had no direct bearing upon his fortunes.

This being the rule at Seeley's, no notice at all was taken of the young man who entered the gambling house barely half an hour after the occurrences which we have already related, and who circulated freely through the place. He had knocked at the grille the correct number of times. Having passed it, he had whispered the correct password to the guard on duty at the shell-proof inner door. Seeley had inspected him, had noticed that his lip showed a fresh cut and that his face was slightly battered. These, however, explained the young man, while exhaling an alcoholic fragrance in Seeley's direction, were the result of a recent tumble—a tale which the gambling-house proprietor did not doubt after a single sniff.

The young man's clothes were of good cut; the references which he volunteered were irreproachable; and while he had apparently imbibed enough to make sure that he would be a liberal player, he had not yet reached the stage at which he might be expected to be disorderly. He had a pocketful of money, he stated, without having been asked, and he had a system which he proposed to try out on Seeley.

Seeley smiled. Here, clearly, was an ideal patron. "What's your system for?" he inquired genially. "Roulette—faro—twenty-one—poker?" naming a few of the games in progress at the moment.

The young man swallowed a hiccup. "It's good for all of them!" he declared. "It's as good for one as it is for tother. It's the greatest system there ever was."

Seeley bowed his satisfaction. "Walk right in," he invited. "Look around; find out what you want to play first. When you're ready the cashier will sell you chips."

"Much obliged," said the young man. He buttonholed the gambling-house proprietor for an instant. "You won't mind," he inquired, "if I win a lot of money? It's a good system, you know."

Seeley laughed. "Win as much as you like," he challenged. "The blue sky's the limit."

Thus encouraged, the young man proceeded within, and began to meander through the well-filled rooms. Had any one observed him closely, it would have been noted that, despite his intoxicating breath—a detail produced in the twinkling of an eye by the simple expedient of gargling a tablespoonful of raw alcohol—his glance was surprisingly alert. From table to table he passed unostentatiously, watched the play for a few minutes, and wandered on.

Seeley, who was everywhere, encountered him a number of times. He chuckled. His guest, like a fly, was buzzing around industriously before deciding on which sheet of fly paper to alight. That final freedom of choice Seeley begrudged no man; it mattered not at all to the gambler what manner of parting from his money his prospective victim selected.

He noticed that his new patron hovered about the faro table after having studied

the others. He was, apparently, deeply interested in the game.

"Going to try it?" inquired Seeley.

"I'm thinking about it," the young man admitted.

"Well, take plenty of time to make up your mind," said the proprietor genially. "Study it—and then try your system on it. It's the fairest game in the world."

"So I have heard."

Upon Seeley's next visit his guest was so profoundly engrossed with the play that he was keeping tabs on one of the score sheets provided by the house.

"Made up your mind yet?" inquired Seeley.

"Yes." He exhibited the score sheet. "I would have won—won heavily."

"The system?"

"Of course the system." His voice was apologetic. "If you don't mind, I'm going to watch one more deal, and then I'm going in."

"Suit yourself," boomed Seeley. "In this house you can do what you like."

The young man must have taken the permission literally, for he wandered out into one of the hallways shortly thereafter. Seeley, returning, noticed his absence, and was about to inquire about it when, suddenly, every one of the hundreds of electric lights in the place went out. Almost at once there echoed through the many rooms the sound of a terrific pounding on the armored door.

"A raid!" The words leaped from fifty mouths.

Matches were struck. In their dim light, Seeley appealed to his frightened patrons. There was no occasion for worry, he explained. The armored door had withstood many assaults; it would withstand one more. Seeley's men would dispose of all gambling paraphernalia—incriminating evidence—in hiding places prepared long in advance. Then, and not until then, the police would be admitted.

He finished his speech—a speech which he had delivered on many similar occasions. He turned with an engaging smile—and then the smile vanished as he observed that at least twenty of his listeners were in uniform, and that their familiar blue coats were decorated with equally familiar police badges.

The lieutenant in command answered his unspoken question. "Want to know how we got in, don't you? Well, we sawed through the steel-barred scuttle in your roof an hour ago. The hammering out in front is nothing but camouflage. We waited until we got our signal, and then we walked right in."

"Signal?" growled Seeley with an oath. "Who gave you a signal?"

The police lieutenant waved his hand at a young man with a strongly alcoholic breath who picked his way through the dark with the aid of police flash lights.

"I told the lieutenant I'd be ready when the lights went out," explained this latter individual, "and then I made sure the lights would go out by unscrewing a bulb, pushing a copper cent into the socket, turning on the current, and blowing out your fuses."

"You did, did you?" rumbled Seeley. "And who in thunder are you?"

"Haven't you met each other?" inquired the police lieutenant with surprise. "Mr. Seeley—Mr. Parmelee," he introduced.

X.

Seeley gazed at his unwelcome guest with eyes that almost popped out of his head. "Parmelee! Parmelee!" he sputtered. "I thought you were——" He broke off suddenly.

"Why not say it, Mr. Seeley? You thought I was in the hospital, didn't you? Well, that's precisely what I wanted you to think. That's why I said that the man whom your hired thugs had nearly killed was Parmelee and not Claghorn. I knew there would be somebody in the crowd who'd rush to the telephone and tell you the glad news. And that would give me a chance to catch you at your crookedness red-handed."

Suddenly the lights blazed on. The fuses had been replaced. Parmelee made his way to the seat lately occupied by the faro dealer.

"Lieutenant," he suggested, "see if you can get everybody into this room. I'm going to deliver a little lecture."

The limited space became painfully crowded, but more than a hundred men had been jammed into it when Parmelee rose gravely, bowed, and announced as his text: "Faro—the fairest of all gambling games."

He looked from right to left, and smiled with an admirable platform manner. "First of all," he began, "let us consider how the bank cheats the players.

"Splits—like cards on a turn—are the dealer's life-savers. On each split the bank wins half of what has been staked on the cards, with no possibility of losing. If the dealer, when shuffling the cards, can manage to put up half a dozen splits, the game becomes unbeatable.

"Do you think it's difficult to put up splits?" He smiled. "I place the cards in two piles, just as they come from the dealing box. I have made up my mind what cards are to split on the next deal. I place them just a little to one side—do you see?—and then when I even up the piles the cards that are going to split find their way to the bottom of each pile. I stripped them out. You didn't see me do it, did you? But they are at the bottom nevertheless.

"Now I want to make the halves of the splits come together. I have a pile in each hand, and I tell you that each pile ends up with king, five, jack, two, and eight in the same order. I do what is called 'the faro-dealer's shuffle'—it's difficult, but you can learn it if you practice it long enough—and the cards come together alternately throughout the deck—like this. I cut a few times; that convinces you I'm fair. But notice what I'm really doing; I'm distributing the splits so that they won't come out in succession. Now I'm ready to take your money."

Bill faced the deck, and spread it out on the table. "Do you see, gentlemen? There are going to be seven splits on this deal. I put up five and two more just happened. What chance have you got against a game like that?"

A ripple of applause spread through the crowd. Bill bowed.

"Bear in mind," he warned, "bear in mind that in faro, the so-called fairest of all gambling games, the cards are taken from the box face up. They are placed in two piles face up. They are shuffled by the dealer. They are cut by the dealer. He has chance after chance to arrange them in an order that will be profitable for him and expensive for you. He has a big salary to earn. How do you think he earns it?"

He took up the deck and ran it rapidly through the dealing box.

"Of course," he resumed, "too many splits would be suspicious. I don't have to trust to them. I notice what the biggest plunger is doing—whether he is backing the high cards or the low cards—and in exactly the same way I put the deck so that his favorites lose. Really, it's no trouble at all." Expertly he demonstrated.

A bespectacled young man in evening clothes interrupted with a question. "Suppose, after I've backed the high cards for the first half of the deal, I change my system and back the low cards for the second half?"

"Then I used a 'two-card' dealing box—a box which lets me take out two cards at a time instead of one; I add a fifty-third card to the deck, and I change the run of the cards to beat you. It's a little more complicated," he explained. "I need a mechanical shuffling board—like this one." He trod on an unseen button under the carpet, and a dainty little lever flashed into sight with a card gripped in its teeth. He pointed to it with a flourish. "Gentlemen, the fifty-third card! In play, of course, you'd never see it. I'd keep it hidden with the deck. But once I have added the fifty-third card, I can change the run by drawing it out or letting it go by—or I can make the fifty-third card win or lose as I please."

The bespectacled young man was not entirely satisfied. "How do you know when the fifty-third card is coming? You have to know, don't you?"

"You bet I have to know," Parmelee declared. "With the players keeping tabs, they'd spot a fifth king like a shot!"

"Well, how do you find out?"

"You bring me naturally to the second part of my lecture. It is entitled 'How the players cheat the bank.' The fifth king and his duplicate—I never forget that duplicate for a second!—are what we call 'tell cards.' They are cut the least bit wider than the other cards in the deck—and when either one of them is coming—watch—do you see this bolt at the side of the box move? You'd hardly call it a motion, because it's so slight. But if you're watching for it, you'll catch it. That's how I know.

"Suppose, however, that some greenhorn has bought the bank. Do I bother with fifty-third cards? Hardly! They'd spoil the game. I simply hand the banker a deck of very special cards—a deck in which all the low cards are narrow, and all the high cards wide. The difference amounts to nothing. The greenhorn will never notice it.

"Then I take my seat at the table—I

and my friends—and the bolt at the side of the box tells us what's coming next. We bet. We bet heavily. We lose once in a while, just to make the banker feel happy. But the bets we lose are little ones, while the bets we win are big ones!"

The bespectacled young man shook his head. "I can understand how such a box could be used to cheat me when I'm the banker, but if the bolt always moves, why don't I see it when I'm watching the box, and Seeley is the banker?"

Parmelee laughed. "You don't see it because you're not watching closely enough—and because you don't know what to watch. There's not a chance in a million of your catching on. Why, you've been playing this game right here—you've been losing your money to this box—and you saw nothing wrong with it until I pointed it out to you!

"But that isn't all! This box possesses almost human intelligence. Why should I take even a slight chance of detection when I have to take none at all? I move the box about on the table like this—a triple combination, you notice—and in the words of the manufacturers, 'it locks up to a square box.' You can examine it now, and you won't find anything suspicious. But another series of movements—so—unlocks it, and if I'm using a fifty-third card, I won't make any embarrassing errors."

Again the applause broke out—the applause of men who are being offered rare and valuable entertainment.

"This particular method of cheating," concluded Bill, "is a combination of what we call the 'two-card box' and the 'needle-tell.' There are other methods—many others. I hope you'll take my word for it."

But the bespectacled young man had more questions to ask. "The box locks up with a triple combination?"

"Yes."

"That is to prevent strangers from finding out that it isn't a fair box?"

"Of course."

"Then how do you happen to know the combination?"

Bill actually blushed. "I used to be a professional faro dealer myself," he said. "The boxes we had weren't good for much, and this particular box—well, I hope you won't think I'm blowing, but I invented it!"

He bowed, gravely announced, "Here endeth the lesson," and was about to make his way toward the door, when his eye fell upon a curiously shrinking individual who had been found in the basement by the police, and who was making strenuous efforts to be intensely invisible. Over his dark sweater he now wore a coat, but the neck of the sweater did not entirely conceal a strangely incongruous element of his costume, a ministerial collar.

Through Bill's mind flashed memories: the ministerial collar which had boarded the train at West Woods; the ministerial collar which had alighted from the gray automobile; the ministerial collar which had figured prominently in the battle in which Tony had so recently succumbed.

"Grab that man!" commanded Bill. "Grab him! Grab him!"

XI.

The bespectacled young man insisted on driving Bill to the hospital in his own car, a luxuriously upholstered limousine. "We really ought to know each other, Mr. Parmelee," he declared. "My name is Cochrane."

The ex-gambler grasped the proffered hand with a grin. "I suspected as much," he said, "but, by George, haven't we had a deuce of a time getting together?"

In the few minutes following immediately upon the arrest of Holy Hutchins, much light had been thrown upon certain obscure subjects. The bogus clergyman, spurred on by promises of leniency, and thoroughly intimidated by Parmelee's obvious desire to throttle the life out of him, had owned up to his share in the day's thrilling episodes, and now Cochrane, supplying the few missing links, was in a position to clear up the entire situation.

Sitting next to Tony's cot in a private room at the hospital, the men compared notes in hushed voices. Tony was still unconscious. He had sustained a concussion of the brain, the surgeon in charge told them. They could only wait for him to come to—and in the meantime not all the noises in a boiler factory would make the slightest impression upon him.

"It's all my fault, I'm afraid," said Cochrane. "I had lost a lot of money at Seeley's. I became suspicious. Whenever I was banker, there was a group of young men—always the same group—which won with great regularity. I didn't know one of them—nor did my friends. Seeley had in-

troduced them, and that was nothing in their favor.

"But that wasn't all. I didn't act as banker very often. I wanted action. As the banker, I could only accept bets. As a player, I could make them—and Seeley very obligingly raised his limit for my benefit."

"Benefit?" queried Bill, with a smile.

"Let's call it that," said Cochrane. "I wanted action. I got action. I got it in precisely the way that you described tonight. I'd back the high cards. I'd lose halfway through the deal. I'd switch to the low cards. I'd win a turn or two, and then I'd lost straight through to the finish."

"The fifty-third card."

"Exactly. I know it now. Sometimes I'd play with no particular system. I'd bet almost at random."

"Then there would be splits."

Cochrane nodded. "There would be a steady succession of splits. Not too many, of course—but enough to make it very painful for me. Whatever I did, whether I played with a system or without a system, whether I backed the high cards or whether I backed the low ones, I lost—not too steadily, but steadily enough anyhow."

"A good dealer would see to that," murmured Bill.

"I had heard of you, Mr. Parmelee. I had heard how successful you had been in similar cases. I made up my mind—just when I don't know—that I was going to ask you to drop in at Seeley's, and tell me whether the game was honest. I made the colossal mistake of confiding in one of my friends, because he promptly told another one, and the news must have gotten back to Seeley."

Bill nodded grimly. "That explains many things," he said. "Seeley didn't want me investigating his game. He decided to spike your guns. He telephoned me himself; he said that he was Gilbert Cochrane He invited me to New York, and he hired thugs to make short work of me. Either they would kill me—Seeley wasn't particular—or they would beat me up so badly that I would go home and stay home."

"Exactly," said Cochrane.

"He sent one of his men to the little town where I lived to trail me onto the train. Tony Claghorn warned me that that might happen," he confessed with a grateful glance toward the unconscious figure on the cot, "but I didn't take it seriously. And then Hutchins—so he told us himself—mistook Tony for me, and the poor fellow had a mighty hard time of it."

A mighty hard time! A mighty hard time indeed! Never did Parmelee learn how near, how very near, death had stalked behind Tony on that momentous afternoon. Tony himself never told him, for Tony, native New Yorker, never knew. He was aware that the three men who had attacked him in the areaway had meant mischief; but he was blissfully ignorant of the fact that not once, but repeatedly, had they attempted to finish him. It was due to this that Hutchins and his accomplices were subsequently sentenced to terms much lighter than they had deserved.

"When Seeley telephoned me, and said that he was Gilbert Cochrane, I swallowed the bait—hook, line, and sinker. He offered me a very large fee——"

"How large, Mr. Parmelee?" interrupted Cochrane.

"Twenty-five thousand."

Cochrane, the multimillionaire, opened his bespectacled eyes wide. "That *is* a large fee," he admitted. "Go on, Mr. Parmelee."

"There was only one thing that made me suspicious——"

"And that?"

"The length of time the man who called himself Cochrane talked over the phone. Millionaires never waste money on long-distance tolls."

Cochrane grinned with delight. "You're dead right!" he exclaimed. "I would never have telephoned you. I would have written you a letter. In fact," and he opened his coat, "I've got the letter I was going to send in my breast pocket this minute."

"Why hadn't you mailed it?"

Cochrane grinned again. "I was true to my blood, Mr. Parmelee. I didn't mail it because I thought I'd find out what was wrong with the game by myself—and in that way I'd save the amount of your fee."

Parmelee nodded gravely. "I guessed wrong a number of times. I guessed right just once. That saved me; that—and Tony Claghorn.

"When I reached New York, I looked up some of my old friends. I found out where you had been playing. Incidentally I found out the password to the place, so that I could go there alone if I wanted to."

"And the raid?"

"I arranged that for my own protection. What would my life have been worth if I had dared to say what I did in Seeley's house without police to guard me? The raid was fixed up easily enough," Bill admitted with a grin. "'Chick' Powers and I were both gamblers and good pals years ago. Now Chick is a police lieutenant. He took charge of the raid himself. You'll admit that he conducted it in great style."

Cochrane had listened soberly. Now, with reluctant fingers, he extracted his check book from his pocket. "Mr. Parmelee," he said, "if I had engaged you, I would have limited your fee to a suitable amount—five thousand dollars at the outside. I didn't engage you, but you have rendered me a very great service nevertheless. What do you expect me to pay?"

Bill waved a deprecatory hand. "Put up your check book," he commanded. "I don't want any pay at all. If Tony gets well I'll be entirely satisfied."

But Cochrane was already writing his signature. "Five thousand dollars is a fair amount," he said, "five thousand dollars—neither more nor less. But I haven't forgotten that Seeley, speaking in my name, offered you twenty-five. Seeley, I'm afraid, isn't going to make good on his promise, and I, Mr. Parmelee, I look upon an obligation incurred in my name as a debt of honor. I shall pay both fees. Mr. Parmelee, this check is good for thirty thousand dollars."

Bill gasped; but it was Cochrane's turn to wave his hand. "Don't hesitate to take it," he urged with a smile. "But for you, Seeley would have gotten it."

The figure on the cot had begun to stir. Now it opened its lips. "I repeat," Tony mumbled, "I repeat that faro is a cheat-proof game."

Cochrane turned to Parmelee with consternation written large upon his features. "Your friend is going insane!" he declared.

But Bill smiled happily. "No," he corrected, and subsequent events proved that he was right, "he's beginning to get well."

Look for more of Mr. Wilde's work in early issues.

GOSSIP OF THE GREAT

SPEAKING of Washington:

Representative George Holden Tinkham of Boston, who was the first American to fire a shot at the Austrians after the declaration of war by the United States against Austria, wears the biggest and longest beard in Congress.

In the Japanese embassy on N Street there is a typewriter so large that it takes two able-bodied men to lift it. It prints 2,450 Chinese characters.

There are many senators and representatives who are enthusiastic boosters of the movement in several sections of the country to do away with the big advertising billboards which deface the scenery along highways and railroads. One senator is in favor of subjecting them to a Federal tax.

Joseph W. Tolbert, long-time Republican national committeeman from South Carolina, drops into Washington frequently, but he never wears a cravat when he does so. In fact, he never wears one.

Borah of Idaho, is the most popular speaker in Congress. Whenever it is known a few hours in advance that he will take the floor, he packs the galleries.

Cordell Hull, chairman of the Democratic national committee, wrote the country's present income and inheritance-tax laws when he was a member of the House in the first Wilson administration.

Three senators in a recent cloakroom discussion of the average citizen's neglect of the duty of voting found, by a brief calculation, that they held their seats by virtue of the votes of less than thirty per cent of the qualified voting population of their three States.

George A. Morgan of the Philadelphia mint, has discovered that Secretary of the Treasury Mellon is a stickler for accuracy in the matter of reproducing his features. Mr. Morgan had to give Mr. Mellon four sittings when making the bronze medal of the secretary in compliance with the rule that such a likeness is struck off of every head of the treasury department.

When "Tempery-ment" Came to Baldknob

By Holman Day

Author of "The Ear of the Wrong Pig," "The Ultimate Goat," Etc.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. But Cook Breed of the Wagg camps, being an expert in the culinary line, didn't need to taste the pudding in preparation for "Stingy Jasper" to know that it wouldn't be fit to eat.

TIMMETT BREED went out in the first flush of the rosy dawn and picked a pint of dew-gemmed blueberries, particularly big ones which had been ripened on the sun-flooded ledges of Baldknob.

He merely scowled at the beauties of morning; he yanked at the berry bushes with vicious tugs. He constantly muttered profane speech; he was relieving his soul of certain opinions regarding a person whom he called "the damn little goo-goo-eyed, cross-bred daughter of a dooflicker and a dilbo bird," and added, for the information of a horrified chickadee near at hand on a branch of a bush, that if the aforesaid person should drop headfirst twenty feet and land in the middle of lemon meringue pie her head was so soft the frosting wouldn't be dented. Being a cook, he used culinary metaphor.

Mr. Breed, though he was an ardent devotee of the movies whenever he could get to town, was talking about a motion-picture actress!

But Mr. Breed's new sentiments had developed from actual contact with a movie near queen; the halo cast by the magic of the silver sheet had been rudely torn away; he was bitterly sorry because he had met any of the guild in person; he felt that he never wanted to see another moving picture as long as he lived.

As a lumber-camp cook, turning his first quarter century of faithful service, he supposed he had exhausted all the trials and tribulations of the job—and what he hadn't experienced on his own hook he had heard about from other cooks and thus had become the repository of all the woes which can visit a woods pot-wrassler. But that was before the Forest Films Production Company came to Jasper Wagg's camps at Baldknob to make two-reel motion pictures —featuring Miss Lucille Langdon; and sour vinegar for Breed's mental blanc-mange was she proving to be!

Breed had no sort of liking for the rest of the troupe of actors, saddled on him as extra eaters.

But the hatred which he had developed in the case of Miss Lucille Langdon, leading lady, was so virulent that Mr. Breed, when she was in his thoughts, was almost as afraid of himself as the listening chickadee seemed to be.

However, entirely by his own volition, he was out on the ledges yanking off blueberries before he had started his breakfast making for the timber crew. And the berries were designed for the elaboration of Miss Lucille Langdon's special breakfast! He would rather have been gathering poison ivy to brew in her coffeepot and might have done so if he had believed he could get away with it.

A woods cook is more or less of an autocrat in his domain. He has his acute pride in performance. He is a constant seeker for appreciation and is avid of praise. A slur at his victuals hurts him as much as caustic criticism rasps a painter of pictures. The cook lives in a very small world, and gets to be notional. He will conquer a crew's distaste or die trying.

But the zealous Breed had been having no luck whatever in the case of Miss Lucille Langdon who had never been in the woods before and knew nothing about woods customs and culinary limitations; she never ought to have come into the woods on this trip, so the cook pondered savagely.

Mr. Breed, in his wounded pride, was making an especial effort this morning to break down the barrier of her prejudice and take away from her all excuse for any more of her scornful slurs regarding what Breed gave her to eat. He was going to bake for her some of his celebrated blueberry biscuits. From Oquossoc clear to Carratunk Falls woodsmen still brag about Breed's blueberry biscuits.

Returning to camp with his selected berries, he came upon Boss Dan Creamer in the "dingle," the roofed space between the main camp and the cookhouse. Creamer looked up from his inspection of axes and saws; he was out early to make sure that the crew of "Stingy Jasper" would have sharp cutting edges to get the most out of an arduous day's work for an exacting employer.

The boss blinked a quizzical glance at the berries in the colander. "Catering special to sweet Lew-silly, hey? Why didn't you pick her a bokay? Oh, I forgot! Bokays are being attended to by another branch of the fam'ly!"

Framed in the cookhouse door, invulnerable in that sanctuary from attack by even a boss, Cook Breed cursed Creamer with lurid profanity. An uninformed listener would have found truly amazing that style of speech, considering that it had been provoked merely by suave mention of a lady and a bouquet.

But the truth was, Mr. Creamer had poked into the especial hot core of the fire which had produced a general smolder in all of Mr. Breed's system. That sly mention of "another branch of the family" was a wicked jab. The cook's sister was the patient, thrifty, much-enduring wife of Jasper Wagg, who was called "Stingy Jasper" behind his back in all the North Woods—and deserved the sobriquet. But he had been thawed into liberality all of a sudden by the goo-goo eyes of a picture actress!

In the past Wagg had chased out of his camps every hanger-on or visitor, no matter what the excuse or the business of the wayfarer might be.

Cook Breed, an earnest seeker for gossip and all kinds of new angles of life in the world outside, liked to have folks drop in and feed fodder to his keen-edged curiosity while he fed their mouths with special titbits of his cookery. But Stingy Jasper set them all to the right-about—jewelry sellers, rafflers, photographers who toured to make group pictures of the crews—and he had been particularly savage in the case of an itinerant evangelist who had overstayed because the hospitable cook found him not only very newsy but a tough arguefier on points of doctrinal theology—Mr. Breed's pet topic.

The boss picked up a crosscut saw and squinted along its edge. "You ought to have kept that elder around with you a few more weeks, 'Old Beans.' He might have been able to break you of this cussing habit."

Mr. Breed was not rebuked or shamed. The present mess needed the savor of anathema. Jasper Wagg beforetimes had run everybody else out of camp but he was making the stay of the motion-picture devils a perfectly glorious sojourn, so far as his clumsy efforts could avail.

To be sure, Stingy Jasper had profanely shooed away the avant-courier, the location scout. However, when the company came

that way later with a half-hearted intention of pitching tents, Mr. Wagg changed over his whole attitude in regard to intruders after he had seen and talked with Miss Lucille Langdon. She assumed the rôle of a shrinking damsel who was afraid of the wilderness. She vamped Mr. Wagg. It was a new experience in his drab life. 'Twas only another familiar case of the frozen avalanche falling furiously after a thaw. Wagg's hard nature melted and slopped all over the place. Miss Langdon must not encounter the hardships of tent life! Wagg gave her for sole use the office camp; he lodged the other actors in a curtained-off end of the main house. He consorted there with them on fulsomely amiable terms.

There was no other woman in the company, except the leading lady; the two-reel, North Woods dramas required he-men with the girl for a foil. Wagg gave her his undivided attention. It proved to be a tough spectacle for a brother-in-law. The latter had never discerned any likable qualities in Jasper Wagg, anyway. But to see him turn about all of a sudden and make a fawning, mushy, infernal old fool of himself! Mr. Breed was not able to put his flaming sentiments into coherent speech—he merely cursed, as he did now when Boss Creamer poked into the embers of ire.

II.

The cook poured the blueberries into a special batch of dough, after the crew had been fed and had gone away to the choppings. He wished the berries were bullets and that he was loading a blunderbuss. But over all his vengeful emotions was riding his pride as a cook who was determined to win praise. He muttered as he stirred in the berries. "Every time she whoofs that devilish cigaroot smoke out of her nose she says something about her being a *arteest!* Dammit, I'm a artist in my own line—and she's got to wake up and see it!"

In making the omelet he beat the whites of the eggs separate from the yolks for the sake of attractive fluffiness. He did the best he could to clear the grounds from the coffee; he banged two raw eggs into the pot and wished that Stingy Jasper could view that extravagance; Breed knew that Wagg would writhe but would not venture to reprove.

Wagg was sauntering in slow patrol outside the cookhouse when Breed emerged carrying a tray which he had contrived from small saplings and birch bark. The time was nine o'clock—the middle of the day in the estimation of a woodsman. But Breed had been strictly enjoined as to the hour of the movie queen's readiness for her first meal; and he was obliged to carry her food to her! That was a fine tipping over of the gods of precedent in the case of a woods cook! He gritted his teeth every time he lifted his tray in the cookhouse, to start on his journey as a menial.

Wagg beamed on Breed and the latter found the mellow urbanity more irritating than the scowls Wagg had regularly bestowed on a wife's relative in past inglorious times.

The woods lord stepped in front of the cook. When Breed halted, Wagg lifted the corner of the makeshift napkin made out a section of roller towel which the cook had laundered.

"Good! Fine!" praised Wagg after inspection. "Some of your famous blueberry biscuits, eh? The little lady will be tickled. We must keep the dear little lady pleased!"

"Well, I'm trying to please her, ain't I? I'm doing the best I can, considering that about all you've ever give me for cooking tools is a pair o' hames, two screw drivers and a bull auger!"

"Look here, Breed! If this breakfast wasn't going to the dear little lady I'd pour the coffee down your back and flail you over the head with that tray! Don't you dare to twit me about what I give you to cook with!"

But when the cook stumped on sullenly, Wagg dropped into his unctuous, old-cat purring. "Give the little lady my morning greetings, Breed, and tell her when she's ready I'll take her down to the falls on the big wagon. And, by the way, Mr. Wales said he might need you in the picture today—just being yourself, a woods cook." Wagg cackled sneeringly. "It won't need any brains, like real actors have!"

"Making me lug vittles like a damn hired girl is as far down as you'll get me to go in this life," retorted Breed over his shoulder. "Don't run no resks—trying to skrench me into acting!"

"Are you slurring actors?"

"You heard what I said and you can figger it to suit yourself! There's no call for you to act nippy for actors' sakes, unless

you're thinking of joining this troupe closer'n you have up to date."

The brother-in-law got the full force of the innuendo and prudently kept his mouth shut.

The rebellious servitor balanced his tray on one hand and pulled the string of the latch and opened the office-camp door; Miss Langdon was sitting at ease in a big chair made of peeled spruce saplings. She put a cigarette to her lips, drew languidly and exhaled the smoke in twin streams through her nostrils. "'Timid,' you should never intrude upon a lady," she rebuked, pulling her peignoir more closely about her, "without knocking and waiting for her command to enter."

"Keep your latchstring pulled in, ma'm! When it's poked out it's the woods sign of 'Come in!'" he growled.

"Woods signs may do for woods people! You must always remember that I'm from the city and I insist on city manners, Timid!"

He set the tray on the splint table in front of her chair, and leaned forward, glaring at her, propping himself on his knuckles. "There's also a style o' manners up here in the woods, ma'm! And it ain't reckoned genteel to call men by their first names on too short acquaintance. And furthermore," he blazed, allowing his long-suppressed resentment considerable vent, "you've been calling me 'Timid' for four days, now, and I'm asking you to slam the oven door shet on that! My name is Timmett!" He spelled it out for her. "But I allow only close friends to use it on me. My name is Mister Breed!"

"You surely don't expect me to put a handle on the name of a servant, do you?" she asked insolently.

"I ain't no servant to nobody, ma'm! I'm the cook of a lumber camp—and when you know more about the woods you'll realize better what a cook's standing is!"

"How do you dare to be saucy to me?"

"Same question fits both cases!" He yanked the towel off the food.

"I shall report your pertness to Mr. Wagg, Timid!" She exhaled more smoke from her nostrils and ground her cigarette on the tray's white bark, spoiling its spotlessness.

She leaned forward and surveyed the heaped biscuits, frowning. "What are those loathsome objects?"

"Them's my well-known blueb'ry biscuits, ma'm! They're talked of from——"

"I don't wonder! They're perfectly hideous to look at!" She was picking out the berries and dropping them on the floor. "Merely looking at them has quite spoiled my appetite." She lounged back in her chair and lighted a fresh cigarette. "I may be able to sip a little coffee later; but I'm quite afraid of your omelet, after looking at those biscuits. I don't understand how even the coarse woodsmen can endure to eat what you cook, Timid."

Mr. Breed was no longer in control of anything in his mental make-up. "Yuh ain't got brains enough under that corn-tossel mop o' hair to understand anything—Lew-silly!"

She flung the cigarette at him and leaped to her feet. "You impudent wretch! How dare you be familiar with me? How dare you pronounce my name that way?"

"Once more, same question fits both cases, ma'm!"

She began to shriek in the ecstasy of her ire. She bombarded him with biscuits as he backed away.

The door of the lady's boudoir was thrown open by a violent hand outside. Wagg stormed in. "What has happened, dear little lady?"

"This smutty-nosed wretch has insulted me!"

Mr. Breed started to declaim an ireful comparison of insults but Wagg grabbed him by the collar and plentiful slack of trousers, ran him to the open door and kicked him off the porch of the camp.

A few minutes later Wagg stamped into the cookhouse. He found Breed on his hands and knees in the lean-to, his private sanctuary for bunk and belongings. Breed was packing those belongings into a "Kennebecker"—a capacious, two-section canvas luggage carrier of the extension type. "You don't mean to tell me you're going to quit, do you?"

"There ain't no need of me prophesying about something that's already happened. I quit when you kicked me."

This was catastrophe, nothing less, in the case of an employer who had a crew of fifty men tussling with the rear of the drive in the jaws of Hellity-hoorah Falls, at the foot of Baldknob—to say nothing of a company of dependent motion-picture actors—*and* Miss Lucille Langdon!

The laboring oar was shifted into Wagg's hands almighty sudden! "Look a' here, Tim, the both of us have been dretful hasty. I'm sorry for what I done in the heat of the moment—but the dear little lady was so terribly cut up and—so helpless, you know!"

Mr. Breed rose from his knees. He did not reply. His face was creased with the hard lines of vengeful but resolute hold-in. He took his alarm clock from the shelf and tucked it spitefully into a corner of the Kennebecker.

The sight of the clock reminded the employer of Breed's early-rising faithfulness in service. "I'll make it up to you any way you say, Tim! I'll even h'ist you another dollar a week for tending out on the little lady. I don't want you should go off and leave me in the lurch. I'll lose men on account of you—they like your grub. Gar-slang it, I shan't let you go out!"

"*She's* been calling me a servant! What be I—*your* slave?"

"No, Tim! You're the best cook on the river! And where are you going, if you do make a fool of yourself and leave here?" he asked anxiously.

"Reckon I'll visit with sister and swap talk a leetle spell and then——"

"I'll give you five dollars a week over 'n' above wages as long as these motion-picture folks are here," hastily promised Wagg, though he was writhing under fear of this hinted exposure to his wife and was agonized by the thought of the extra pay. "But you've got to promise to be genteel to the little lady," he hedged. "She's in an awful state of mind right now. She says she can't work to-day, on account of your actions. Tim, you've gotter understand the nature of an arteest like her. And make allowances! She has explained it all out to me. It's temperament! All them real arteests have it. I reckon we all of us have it, if we understand well enough what's the matter with us."

"I know I've got it," declared Mr. Breed. "And I suppose you'll be saying it was your tempery-ment that made you kick me."

"That was what it was—and it's got to be excused in anybody," cried Wagg, gratefully grabbing at the suggestion. "We all have temperament in our different lines of work. Oh, I have learned a whole lot from the little lady! She's wonderful. I ain't saying a thing against your sister, Timmy! But she don't have the broad view on things, as they are in these days!"

"It'll sound better, coming from you, and considering how matters are moving up here just now, if you keep reminding yourself by saying 'my wife' instead of 'your sister,'" suggested Mr. Breed balefully.

"You ain't making threats, be you? You ain't misunderstanding my friendship with the dear, little, wise lady?"

"She's as wise as they make 'em—and I ain't misunderstanding!"

There was offensive significance in the brother-in-law's tone but in the stress of the circumstances Wagg controlled himself. "I'll do my best to make things more to your satisfaction, Timmy! And that's a good deal for me to say to any man—and it's about as meeching as I'll ever grow to be! Don't get too brash with me!" There was a return of the Wagg hard nature. "Now let's be sensible and all friendly. And it's five dollars extry, remember!"

Mr. Breed meditated sourly; then he set his alarm clock back on the shelf. "I won't leave you in the lurch! It would hurt my reppytation as a reeliable woods cook, and I can't afford to resk anything of that sort. Is she done with the tray?"

"Yes, Timmy! I et some omelet and coaxed her to eat the rest and drink some coffee."

"And did you give her any advice about trying her tempery-ment on a man who's got plenty of his own?"

"She allows that she'll never speak another word to you. That makes it all safe."

"It'll help some! She can't keep on being too familiar with my first name, at any rate, if she keeps her pert clapper glued down."

"And here I be, trying my best to get her to call me Jasper," mourned Wagg. "Tim, you're too notional! She's a dear little lady." He walked away.

Mr. Breed addressed the only auditor left in the cook camp—his cat. "As stingy mean as Jas' Wagg is in his right senses, if something desp'rit and ha'sh ain't done to get him back to 'em, hell will be to pay in his case! When he offers me five dollars extry a week to cater to that little shrimp of a languishing Liddy, hating me as bad as he always has, he'll drop coin for her like a beech sheds nuts after a frost; all she's got to do is hit him a pat—and the tree'll be shook! Gor-ram it, I ain't staying here

to wrassle grub to help him out of a hole —I'm staying here on my sister's account."

He went to the lair of the tigress to get the tray. Miss Lucille Langdon fixed her stony gaze on the ceiling and dragged at her cigarette.

Mr. Breed picked up, one by one, the scattered blueberry biscuits.

He kept his mouth closed. He found this attitude entirely satisfactory in the case of one member of the picture gang; he resolved to adopt it in his relations with all the rest of the actors.

III.

But when Director-leading-man Oscar Wales returned that day from location where they were shooting water stuff at Hellity-hoorah Falls, Miss Langdon had another attack of temperament and hysterically bleated to Director Wales her story of how she had been insulted by a servant. "I couldn't come on location to-day! I simply couldn't work! I don't know when I'll be able to compose myself for my rôle. And the terrible food he brought! I'm afraid of everything he cooks, now! He said I had no brains and he called me Lew-silly! Just think of it, Oscar! A lady of my prominence in the profession! Insulted by a kitchen scullion! What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll make the knave crawl to you and beg your pardon," declared Wales. "I'd prefer to kill him—but we must eat, you know!"

He strode away to the main camp.

Miss Langdon lighted a cigarette and touched up the traces left by tears.

In the camp Wales refitted himself with the accouterments which he had laid aside, after working that day on location in "The Knighthood of the Pines." To be sure, no actual hero ever appeared in the Maine woods with a two-gun holster, a cartridge belt and a sombrero, but that was Mr. Wales' conception of what his rôle required.

He stamped into the cookhouse where Breed was stirring up a batch of gingerbread. Wales covered his man with both guns. The full dramatic opportunities of the situation inspired the leading man—and several preluding drinks of potent high wine, known in the woods as "morson," or white rum, helped along the intrepid inspiration.

"You have insulted a lady of my company, you low-lived varlet! I ought to kill you in your tracks! I'm going to permit you to buy your life by an apology to her! March!"

The actor delivered his speech with savage frenzy. He looked dangerous. Mr. Breed, having inside information, believed that Wales actually was dangerous! The actor had come into the cook camp a little while before to ask for hot water for the purpose of reducing to potable mildness the fiery high wine.

Having been trained by long experience with woodsmen never to take chances when rum was talking, Mr. Breed marched across to the lady's sanctuary and apologized. He craved pardon on his knees, Mr. Wales insisting on that abject attitude; the actor even dictated the speech. Mr. Breed, choking back what he really wanted to say, was finding much difficulty in scratching together words of his own for the apology. Then, dismissed scornfully by the pair, the cook trudged back to his work and dashed more ginger into the batch of flour. He went about his other duties. Mr. Breed was engaged in deep rumination. His thoughts dwelt upon alcohol as a source of courage.

"Yes sir! Even an actor! Even an actor! He can git that way!" he kept muttering.

He was giving Actor Wales no credit for real courage, as a man. Breed had been observing too much fake stuff in the making of pictures up in the woods. Even the log that Wales had lifted to register his brawn was a mere frame on which bark had been nailed.

This latest demonstration was evidently more of that temperament which had come to camp—accepted even by Jasper Wagg as an excuse for extravagant performances. Breed was ready to join the temperamental coterie. "But it looks to me like temperyment does best when it has been torched up!" was his conviction.

Having performed similar experiments in chemistry when mood or exigency made demands, he did something in a stone crock with prunes, warm water and yeast and hid the crock under his bunk. Feeling the need of voicing some of his opinions he made a confidant of his cat, having a high regard for that inseparable companion.

The confidences had mostly to do with what might be expected to happen after

temperament had been sufficiently torched. Furthermore, so Brother-in-law Breed opined, Jasper Wagg was in a bad way. Mr. Breed, out of his habit of mixing batches in the cookery line, proceeded to mingle with the spirit of malevolent revenge a due regard for his sister's peace of mind and her interests in Wagg's property. It was truly incredible, the way Stingy Jasper was letting himself go, but seeing was believing—and Breed had been keeping a sharp eye out!

IV.

After beholding an old fool tumble still farther into folly—falling for the first time—Breed was not particularly surprised by what he heard one evening; but he was shocked into the conviction that it was high time for him to do something definite as a self-appointed guardian of Jasper Wagg and the latter's bank account.

Wagg and Actor-director Wales were in conference on a bench outside the cook-house in which Chef Breed sat in darkness, smoking his after-supper pipe.

Wales delivered a fulsome panegyric on Miss Lucille Langdon's ability as an artiste. "But she has never had the right kind of a chance, as yet, Mr. Wagg! She'll never be able to show what she can do, so long's we stick to these two-reelers. If she can be backed for a feature picture, under my direction, she'll shine as a star. Shine? Yes, blaze!"

"I believe what you say," agreed Wagg with soulful emphasis. "She's a wonderful little lady."

"The best that can be done with two-reel pictures is to peddle 'em as program fillers for the small houses. But with a feature picture we can spell her name with electric bulbs on Broadway, Mr. Wagg! I'd be proud to see it among the white lights."

"So would I!" declared Wagg. "She's a dear little lady!"

The everlasting repetition of that commendatory phrase caused Breed to grit his teeth, stand up and shake his fists above his head. It put still another impulse in him. He tiptoed to his lean-to and sampled the brew in the crock. For the proper period of time it had been working while he worked and, being a diligent concoction, had been also working while he slept. Mr. Breed rolled a sip on his tongue, drank a dipperful and presently was conscious of a spreading glow in his midriff. "It has got the real tingity-ting!" he declared, and drank another dipperful.

When he returned to where he could catch the further drift of the conference, he heard Director Wales explaining what would accrue in the way of profits to the backer of Miss Lucille Langdon, star. "You're a business man, Mr. Wagg, and you can't afford to let sentiment play any part in what you undertake. We'll put aside all sentiment!"

"We'll have to do it! I'm being spied on!" quavered the timber baron. "But, on the other hand, she's a dear——"

Mr. Breed clapped his hands over his ears; if he should hear that complete bleat once more he believed he would go leaping onto Wagg's back like an enraged bobcat.

"A lot of these frothy sex features are grossing a million, Mr. Wagg—and now they're being cut out. Outdoor fillums—clean and snappy outdoor stories will be the big drawing stuff from now on. I don't know how much you're making out of the lumber business, but if you decide to back Miss Lucille Langdon as a star, under my direction, your profits will make your saw-log drag look like a cracked shingle laid 'side of a new fifty-dollar bill! Outdoor fillums! The exhibitors are ready to eat 'em up!"

Even though the interior of his camp was dim, Mr. Breed could see some outdoor "fillums"—indoors. They were looped in festoons on a long pole above his stove, for drying purposes.

Director Wales had fixed up a makeshift developing laboratory in one of the store camps and had brought along a hand projector in order to view the "rushes" of his daily work, so that he might decide upon retakes before leaving the isolated region. The presence of that hateful clutter in his kitchen had added to the cook's grouch. The laboratory man was everlastingly fussing around, caustically enjoining Breed to be careful with his fire.

Wales continued to extol the outdoor "fillums." Wagg agreed with him. In horror Breed heard Wagg seriously consider the idea of investing one hundred thousand dollars, following up promises made to Miss Langdon some time previous.

"The trouble with most independents is this: they go in on a shoe string, Mr. Wagg,

The big boys go in with the dough and they clean up millions. You're shrewd, and you've probably got the cash! I know you have a lot of confidence in Miss Langdon, because you've told me so. She has a wise little head for business, even if she is an artiste. She'll need an advance, of course! She knows where she can buy a ripping story. The author is a friend of hers. And she has friends all down along the line among the topnotch picture people. If the thing can be swung, where the cash is concerned, we can stay right here, send out for more people, buy the story and go to it. Otherwise, we'll have to be digging out in a couple more days!"

Wagg found this declaration of intended departure a doleful piece of news. He whined his regrets. "It'll be a terrible lonesome place up here," he mourned, "unless I can see the face of that——"

Breed saved himself from violence by sealing his ears with his palms. Then he went into the lean-to and consumed two more dipperfuls of what he was now calling "prune poke-um-up," his triumphant sensations suggesting the name.

When he heard a noise and looked out into the kitchen and saw his cat running around in circles on the floor and leaping wildly at the walls he was not especially astonished. To be sure, the cat was subject to periodical fits. But in this instance, in his muddled state of mind, Mr. Breed was convinced that the cat had heard Wagg call Miss Lucille Langdon "a dear, sweet, little lady" once too often. It had long been Breed's contention that a cat understands human language better than the animal is given credit for. For that reason he frequently unloaded his soul to the cat as a safe repository for his sentiments.

Grimalkin scratched its precipitate way across the floor, jumped at the log wall and skittered to the ceiling; then it flung itself into space and swept through the fly strips dangling from spools. It collected a considerable number of the strips and was wrapped in a cocoon of them when it rolled over and over on the floor.

Wales was still maundering on about outdoor "fillums."

Breed promptly lost interest in the cat, fighting the sticky strips as it scrambled about the kitchen. He peered from the open window, standing back cautiously in the shadows. By the light of a pocket flash lamp held by Wales, the infatuated and gullible Wagg was writing out a check. It was payable to the order of Miss Lucille Langdon, so a remark revealed. In order to learn the amount Breed was obliged to listen once more to the "dear little lady" encomium. The check was for twenty-five thousand dollars in order to start the "Lucille Langdon Productions" in a fashion to fit that artiste's abilities.

Then Mr. Breed had his agonized mind taken off the subject of the family money. The frantic cat jumped on his back, leapfrogged to the window sill, made a springboard of Director Wales' head and went yowling away into the night, trailing the ends of the cocoon of fly strips.

"Ye gods!" yelled the director. "That damnation cat is snarled up in the negative of 'Knighthood.' There goes ten thousand if we don't catch her! Talk about outdoor fillums! They're outdoors now, all right!"

He ran into the camp and secured his guns. His shouts brought forth the other actors.

"There she is—up that tree!" howled somebody. "Look at her eyes!"

The blazing disks betrayed the animal. Before Breed could get out of the cookhouse, Wales began to shoot with both guns. He did not appear to be an especially good marksman. He was still raining bullets into the tree when Breed arrived; the cook was armed with his biggest carving knife in order to have a weapon of his own in his determination to give full vent to the temperament which he felt surging in him. Moreover, he vociferously claimed for the cat the right to indulge in the general run of temperament which was infesting Baldknob.

In running matters over in his mind, in later times, Mr. Breed was never exactly sure of details of the happenings after the cat, beloved pal and trusted confidante, came sprawling and squalling from the tree and squirmed in dying struggles at his feet. In the black storm gust of his ire those aforesaid details were blotted out. While the happenings were in progress, however, there was a flash of acute realization that he had scalped Director Wales. At any rate, Breed was conscious that he was standing with his knife in one hand and a mat of hair in the other and beheld a bare scalp shining in the murk of the evening.

Abstractedly, he rammed the hair into his trousers pocket and forgot it in the rush of events immediately following.

His prowess in dealing with Wales sent the actors scurrying when Breed dove at them with his slishing knife cutting the air.

He ran back into the cookhouse and hastily consulted the inspiring and invigorating crock; he did not bother with dipperful installments of heroism; he lifted the crock in both hands and drank from the brim.

When Jasper Wagg came storming in, bawling dreadful profanity and threats of this, that and the other, Mr. Breed adopted a neat method of shutting off anathema and rendering Wagg incapable of attack. Having no use for more prune poke-um-up, Breed upended the crock over Wagg's head, sluiced upon the tyrant the fluid and the sodden dregs, and effectually crowned the lord of timberlands with the crock. It proved to be a tight fit as a hoodwink.

V.

There was racing and chasing on Jasper Wagg's lea, of course, after the night and the wilderness had swallowed up Timmett Breed. His presence was acutely demanded. His absence promised to effect a complete disorganization.

First of all, the most essential man in a lumber camp was gone—merged in the void. Timber jacks as well as actors must eat!

Jasper Wagg had lost not only a cook, vitally needed in that time of tussle with Hellity-hoorah Falls, but he had also lost a chance for instant retaliation. The thought of that loss kindled hot fires in him. But the real white heat of utter ferocity came from his certainty of what kind of a story Breed would carry to Mrs. Jasper Wagg!

In the stress of his despair Wagg offered a cash prize of one hundred dollars for the capture of the fugitive. His men might have been more assiduous in pursuit if they had really believed in Stingy Jasper's sincerity. He was acting crazy and seemed wholly irresponsible as he ran from side to side of the clearing; his timber jacks were skeptical enough to figure that he would come out of his lunacy later and repudiate his wild offer.

There was still another acute case of disorganization.

Actor Wales persisted in getting in front of the raging Wagg. Mr. Wales patted dolefully his bald head and attempted to convey to Wagg what the loss of that special and high-priced toupee meant to a leading man who still had the finishing shots to make in a motion picture. The actor failed to elicit any marked sympathy or particular interest from a victim who had more bitter reasons of his own for desiring the return of one Timmett Breed. Scandal, divorce and alimony were mixed into the mess.

Noting the cooling interest of Jasper Wagg in the woes of an actor, Wales slipped the twenty-five-thousand-dollar check to Miss Langdon, in order to play safe should the cooled interest sour into financial repentance.

"I can't work without that top piece," he told her. "It'll give me an excuse to beat it to a city hair artist, the first thing in the morning. You go along with me and cash the check, and we'll skip. T' 'ell with the rest of the two-reeler!"

"You're rattled! Pull yourself together! What chance would we have, starting his suspicions if we try to beat him to the bank? And the bank folks may hold us up till they can get an O. K. from Wagg. I've got that old halibut hooked! I'm going to stay right here and land him. Cool off your intellect—but you'd better wear a cap to bed, Oscar! Else you'll catch cold. Don't argue with me about that check. If I run away he'll be sure to catch me and grab it. If I stay here under his nose—well, let him try to get it!"

She tucked the check into the bosom of her dress. She resolved to make an instant test of just how firmly Jasper Wagg was hooked. She crossed over to him, where he stood raving, and patted his arm. She raised her eyes and drooped her lids and ogled him with a leer into which she tried to put all manner of seductiveness. "Poo-ah boy!" she murmured. "Has the naughty man been wicked to you, too? Just as he was to me?"

This confraternity in distress won him.

He sniffled when he took her hand between his palms. "I'm afraid he's going to get me into a terrible mess," Wagg whined. "Will you stick by me, no matter what happens?"

"To the limit!" she assured him, thinking solely of cash and wondering what a timber baron's limit might be!

"You're a dear little, sweet little, won-

derful little lady!" he assured her rapturously.

She gently withdrew her hand from his fervent clasp. She gave him a languishing upward glance. "Nighty-night! Be goo-ad!" she cooed.

"I'll be anything you ask me to be, for your sake!" He stood and looked after her till she had closed the door of the office camp. "For my own sake," he muttered as he stumbled across toward the main house, "I'd be a murderer right now if I could get my hands on Tim Breed."

His foot struck against the dead cat. He picked up the animal by the tail and flung the carcass over the precipice of Baldknob with a mighty swing. As if he had vicariously vented some of his spite by doing to Breed's cat what he would have liked to do to Breed, he did not swear at men when they drifted back from the bush and reported their inability to find the fugitive.

VI.

Either out of profound and restoring sleep, or from a stupor induced by something else than weariness, Mr. Breed came back to his blurred senses when the red dawn was streaking the skies. His head ached something awful!

He hoisted himself off his back and peered over the edge of the bateau in which he found himself. The bateau was sweeping along with the current which received its impetus far up the river from the tumbling waters of Hellity-hoorah Falls. He recognized the landmarks and perceived that he was not far above Temos Landing, the settlement where the stage line from "outside" ended.

Mr. Breed dove his hand into his pockets to ascertain whether he had had the forethought to bring along any money. Apparently, to his concern, he had overlooked that precaution. In his trousers pocket he found only a wad of human hair. His memory of how he came to be navigating was misty, but he distinctly remembered that in some queer fashion he had scalped an actor.

Prudently, to be rid of incriminating evidence, Mr. Breed threw the hair overboard.

Later, when he hove in sight of Temos Landing, he rowed the bateau to the shore.

Several rivermen, whom he knew, were on the beach overhauling warps. He gingerly returned a reply to their kindly hail, wondering what they had heard about his late exploits. Apparently, they had heard nothing. They were entirely matter of fact and continued with their work.

A sleek young man, of city style, came hurrying to the shore from the tavern near by. "You have come from upriver, mister, so I see! Is that motion-picture company still at Wagg's camps?"

Except for the presence of the men who knew he was Wagg's cook, Breed would have denied all knowledge of Wagg's camps and of any picture company. He was obliged to admit sullenly that the actors were still at the camps.

"I'll hand you a good piece of change to take me there!" promised the stranger.

"I ain't no guide and I don't want the job!" Mr. Breed pulled up the bow of the bateau.

When he returned from the work he found another slick-looking young man confronting him. "I'll slip you a bigger piece of change if you'll take me—and leave that fellow off the passenger list."

"Look here, Erskine!" snarled the other. "I couldn't stop you from following me on the train and the stage, but here's where you get off and stay off—see? I found this man first—and he's mine."

In his general dissatisfaction with life and all who were living that life, Breed glared at the claimant. "Found me? What do you think I am—a mislaid doormat or a strayed steer? And there don't nobody own me. I've proved that much upriver and I stand ready to prove it down here."

Undismayed, the two strangers beset him, one on each side, and barked their bids for his services.

"Damrat ye, shet up! I've got a headache! Feeling the way I do, I wouldn't row and pole this bo't up the river if the 'Postle Paul should come along here in a hurry, follering up his letter to the Galooshians!"

To his astonishment his besiegers suddenly shifted their attention exclusively to each other, after an interchange of blistering recriminations which were not concerned with the hiring of a boatman.

They promptly began to batter at each other with their fists, the odds lying with neither. It was a battle between two combatants who were pretty nearly matched, so Mr. Breed and the other onlookers agreed. Since the conflict was between utter strangers, the North Country watchers

found the fight entertaining and were sorry when the young men stopped punching each other, swapped stares and then began to discuss the main point of the quarrel. Breed, an inquisitive seeker for all kinds of information, drew near them and was wholly disregarded in their earnestness.

"This scrapping with fists isn't getting us anywhere, Erskine!"

"I'll agee with you on that point, even if I do find you all wet on everything else, Denton! But I'm right when I say that the divorce Lucille got from you will stand law."

"No, sir! She put one over on me and it won't stand law. She committed bigamy when she married you. And she doesn't care a continental for you, Erskine. You may as well know it. She is all ready to come back to me." He patted his breast pocket. "She is playing the game with me now! She has written a letter to me, tipping me off about a big make in prospect up here. She has hooked a timber millionaire —and I'm to be in on the split. My cards are down! It's too good a hand for you to beat, I'll say!"

In his film magazine Mr. Breed had read much about the battledore-and-shuttlecock game of matrimony in certain movie circles, but this rapid work in batting a wife back and forth was making him dizzy.

"I'll take your word for it, Denton," retorted the man called Erskine, the putative second husband, accepting the news quite complacently. "I wouldn't believe anything better of the muffle-brained jane, such as she has proved herself to be. But I'm glad I chased you on a chance! If you're so almighty sure she committed bigamy when she married me, you'll make a good witness when I stir up criminal action."

Denton scowled and scratched his butterfly mustache. "A threat to spill the beans, eh? Well, what's the answer?"

"You're too bright to ask the question," returned the still more complacent second husband. "Take me in on the split—that's the answer! I can forget I was ever married, just as easy as I can forget her. You can have her again—without any strings!"

Brother-in-law Breed was forgetting something on his own part. He forgot his headache and his reluctance to go back to what he had left in the nature of a general mess at Wagg's camps; he was entirely ready to reconsider the previous refusal to serve as boatman. He was putting Jasper Wagg's wife's property interests ahead of all consideration for Jasper Wagg personally. Plain enough was it that a watchdog of about Timmett Breed's size was needed back at Baldknob to do some vigorous and wake-'em-up barking!

The two young conspirators turned again to Breed; he was placidly whittling a chip and was profoundly inattentive when they called to him. He seemed to be coming out of a dream and blinked stupidly when they repeated their bids.

"Both of us want to go," said Erskine "We'll both pay and that'll double the ante. Each of us said ten! Now we'll say twenty. Come on! Earn some easy jack!"

"I ain't feeling very well," stated Mr. Breed, craftily hesitant. "But if you'll row the bo't, you two, I'll go along and steer so as to help you take advantage of the eddies. I reckon this is the only bo't you can hire hereabouts."

"We have found out that much," acknowledged Denton sourly. "Well, if there's no other way of getting upriver, it'll have to be a case of a couple of sailors pulling for the shore, I suppose!"

"Yes sir! But first pulling for their wallets!" said Breed uncompromisingly. "After you've pulled that way you won't be so ready to quit pulling on them oars!" He stuck out his hand and they paid.

By this arrangement Mr. Breed returned to the foot of Hellity-hoorah Falls in a considerable amount of style. He leaned comfortably back in the stern of the bateau, with one leg cocked over the other, and lazily manipulated the steer oar. If he did not give his sweating and swearing rovers all the help he could with the back drift of the eddies, that was Mr. Breed's own business.

Before making the last turn in the river, to bring the foot of the Falls in sight, he asked suddenly, as if the question had just occurred to him. "By the way, what in sunup are you two critters up here for, anyway? Joining that troupe of actors?"

"Well, we have a little business with 'em," admitted Denton.

"They've been snapping their views down at the foot of the Falls for the past few days, and mebbe they're there now," their guide stated.

He steered the bateau to the shelving shore in an eddy, stepped out and recon-

noitered from a patch of bushes on the high bank. "Yes, there they are!" he called down to Denton and Erskine. "There's swift water betwixt here and the Falls and I reckon you're too tuckered to tackle it. Better walk the rest of the way along the path. I suppose you want me to stay right here and tend the bo't and wait for you, hey?"

"You bet!" the two chorused. "We expect to be able to go back down river again right soon."

Said Denton to Erskine as they started away, "She must have tapped the till before this. She had the combination all right when she wrote her letter."

The first husband put his hand on the arm of the second husband and halted him. "I'll come through all the way to you, Erskine! Then you and I can hitch up closer and play with each other on the square. I'm not chasing up here to take that girl back. Here's the letter!" He pulled it from his pocket. He talked out openly, wholly disregarding the presence of the apparently stupid woodsman who had picked up a chip and was whittling. "First, she double-crossed me, and this letter proves that she has turned around and intends to nick you. If we go at her now in double hitch she simply has got to come across with what she has pulled in up to date—and she can stay on here and fill up her little tin pail once more." He gathered a handful of blueberries and dumped them into his mouth. While he munched, he cocked his eyebrow, seeking ratification.

The other stuck out a prompt hand and pledged himself. Then the pair of blackmailers marched on.

Breed crawled to the edge of the bushes, as far as he dared, and gave his full attention to affairs at the foot of the Falls.

Miss Langdon was there, on location.

Director Wales, now devoting himself wholly to directing, was oppressed by the heat of the summer sun and mopped his shiny head every once in a while. "More of that actor fake! I might have knowed it!" growled Breed. "I didn't scalp him—it was only false hair!" He was considerably comforted.

Miss Langdon beheld the two husbands advancing, gave a little cry and hurried to meet them, apprehensively desiring to have that reunion apart from the others among whom Jasper Wagg loomed.

Neither of the husbands showed any uxorious delight when she had joined them. They did not even shake hands with her.

"We don't intend to crab your act, Luce," said Denton, taking the lead as first husband. "Your two-legged bank is over there, I take it! Act cool and dignified! You can go back and tell him we came up looking for a picture job—and you didn't find us topnotch enough for any parts in the 'Lucille Langdon Productions.' That'll show your old hornbeam how mighty particular you are in making feature pictures! Now, listen!"

Mr. Breed was too far away to hear any words, but he noted that Denton was doing some earnest talking during the next few minutes.

Miss Langdon faced Breed, her back to the others. Jasper Wagg was pacing with much uneasiness. These smart strangers were entirely too good looking!

Miss Langdon gave a fine impersonation of scorn and resentment and, at the first of it, registered absolute refusal to consider any proposition; it was not acting; she felt the genuine emotions of a part for once in her life!

The two husbands, working as one team, had her cold, so Erskine averred. She had her choice between alternatives; either prosecution for bigamy as well as exposure to her new backer, or a free rein to go ahead and dig up more gold for herself. When the young men began to raise their voices she stopped haggling. Erskine loaned her a fountain pen; Denton gave her the thick packet of her letter as a support for the check which she indorsed. Mr. Breed was able to observe that transfer of the check.

Then his passengers bowed low, swept off their hats in deep respect—so it appeared—and started back toward the hidden bateau.

Their faithful boatman had the craft ended around, its stern on the shore, when his men appeared; they were gleefully passing the check back and forth. Denton put it away in his pocket, claiming that privilege as first husband and discoverer of the lode.

"Well," assented Erskine, "it's only a matter of birds of a feather sticking together till we can cash in."

"Thank God, water runs downhill!" said Denton, looking out on the rippling flood.

"All easy from now on, eh, old scout? Current and cash, both going our way!"

"Step in, gents, and take your places for'ards!" directed Breed, steadying the stern of the bateau.

When both of them were insecurely poised, straddling over the transverse seats, he threw all his strength against the rail of the craft and dumped Denton and Erskine overboard.

Breed leaped in after them; when they struggled to their feet, their shoulders above water in the shoals, he grabbed them, gasping and blinded as they were, and violently rapped their heads together.

Before they knew what it was all about, he dumped them back into the boat, frisked Denton for the check and pushed away the bateau, leaving them only the steer oar. The swift water bore them away, lying half stunned in the bilge.

Mr. Breed started promptly for the foot of the falls—seeking the presence of Jasper Wagg. There was no more hesitancy or apprehension in Breed. He had a perfectly good ticket of admission—the check which he carried gingerly by one corner.

All of a sudden he had a happy thought in regard to that check. Halfway to the foot of the Falls he met the company photographer, setting up his camera to make some "stills."

"By thunder, Cook Breed, I'm glad to see you back! Some rotten breakfast we had this morning, I'll tell the cockeyed world!"

"If I look good to you, better snap a view of me as a keepsake," suggested the cook amiably.

"I sure will—and give you plenty of prints!"

"One'll be enough, mister!"

When the photographer was ready, Mr. Breed stepped toward the camera and held the check well forward for a full close-up. "Keep that picture mighty sly, mister!" he urged. He winked. "Just between you and I!"

"Sure thing, cook! You bet I'll try to stand in with you, all right!"

Mr. Breed, approaching the Falls, sheered off and called Jasper Wagg to him by gestures and manner significant and compelling.

"And there's your dam'-fool check," stated Mr. Breed, finishing a succinct recital. "You can see how she has made it over to only two of her husbands. If all of 'em had caught on and had come up here, she prob'ly would have had to paste on a strip to hold all the names."

Stingy Jasper collapsed and sat on the ground, holding the check by the ends between hands which shook like loose clapboards in a gale. He was not able to frame coherent speech; he simply clucked.

When Breed did get the drift of a few remarks a bit later, he put up his palm decisively; he was master of the situation. "Nothing doing! Tell her yourself! I'm shet of actors—the whole bunch and caboodle of 'em. I'll cook 'em jest one more meal—because that's in the line of something personal!" He remembered his deal with the photographer. "And you tell that bald-headed swamp heron, that thinks he's an eagle, but ain't—you tell him for me, in pertickler, that if he comes into my cook camp and even as much as whispers about that hair—I'll kill him—and that'll only be about half pay for that cat o' mine!"

After that ultimatum, Mr. Breed strode away to the Wagg camps. He remained carefully closeted with his pots and pans. He observed no details of the severance of relations with the motion-picture coterie.

VII.

In the evening Jasper Wagg sneaked into the cookhouse. "They're gone, Tim!" he stated huskily. "Hide and hair, bag and baggage! But speaking of hair! Wales got drunk. We had to tie him onto the wagon to keep him from coming in here."

"It saved you the expense of hauling out a dead body—as a timber owner has to do by the law!" growled Breed. "I reckon you're beginning to come back to yourself—when you're thinking about costs."

Wagg was too humbled to resent the words or the tone. He pulled out the check and inspected it gratefully. "It was a grand and noble job you done, Timmy!"

Breed snatched the check from the trembling fingers.

"You ain't going to use it against me, with your—I mean my wife, be you?" bleated Wagg.

Mr. Breed scornfully answered that question by action, not words. He was standing beside the stove in which there was a fire for the beans, staple of the next morning's breakfast. He lifted a cover, twisted the check into a taper and lighted his pipe.

While he puffed he reflected comfortably on the print which was tucked down deep in his Kennebecker, accompanied by the negative. He was hoping he would never have need to use that whip on Jasper Wagg—but one never knew, in this uncertain life, after a man has already made an infernal fool of himself over one woman!

"I want to do something real nice for you, Timmy! You're showing yourself high-minded and a hero," faltered the brother-in-law. "I'll do anything you say. Only ask!"

"Well, if you're going to be as liberal as that, I'm asking for a six-burner kairosene stove for this cookhouse. You've been letting me sweat and stew here till I'm nigh parboiled. I'm asking for a whole new set of pots and kittles. I've got a lot of pride in my cooking—and I want to do it right! That's all I'm asking for."

"I never knowed a man could be so forgiving and generous," gasped Wagg.

But despite that praise, grudge did have to indulge in a bit of a flare back.

"And one more thing in pertickler, Jasp'," said the cook, with such an air of importance that Wagg winced, expecting, at last, the grab for wages or hush money. "I ain't naming persons—not now—but there has been considerable kicking—and not by the crew—about grounds in the coffee." He bored his employer with accustomary stare. Wagg had relayed complaints from Miss Lucille Langdon. "If you've come to have certain notions about coffee grounds, getting them notions here and there, as ye might say, I want to keep ye suited right along! I'm asking for one o' them coffee per-cue-lators." It was a rather daring venture upon thin ice. It was really a taunt. But for reasons connected with the future, Mr. Breed was testing out the new docility of a brother-in-law. Mr. Wagg stood for it! Then Mr. Breed went farther. "And seeing how you've sort o' become addicted to grabbing in an omelicks in the middle of the day, I'm asking last and final for one o' them new-fangled, double-j'inted omelick pans, sech as is advertised in this cattylogue." He handed the bulky volume to Wagg and pointed to a picture.

Stingy Jasper started for the office camp with the catalogue under his arm. "I'll run it over, and I may see something else you'll need, Timmy. When a cook caters to me, I'll try to cater to him!"

Mr. Breed contentedly reflected on the manner with which Wagg had endured even the taunt about the omelet—and that was a real sidewinder of a wallop at Mr. Wagg's past habit of hanging around camp in order to share food with Miss Lucille Langdon in a tête-à-tête. "He may have a temperyment, like he claims to have," soliloquized Breed. "But I've got it coopered—and the bung shoved in! From now on I've got the everlasting twist on Jasp' Wagg. If you're going to be a brother-in-law, be one good and plenty!"

While tidying up the kitchen, before taking to his bunk for a good sleep, he came across the stone crock where it had rolled into a corner.

He washed it carefully and put it down through the trap in the floor, with the air of one who did not expect to have any further use for it right away.

More stories by Holman Day in early issues.

THE DOG'S DAY

EVERY dog is entitled to his day—even if it is a day in court. Fido, a one-hundred-and-sixty-pound canine belonging to a Richmond Hill, New York, man, recently had his, and ended it in a cheerful frame of mind.

A two-legged citizen of Richmond Hill was walking along the street. Fido and the man who buys his dog biscuits were enjoying a romp on the sidewalk. The dog, busy enjoying himself, didn't keep a bright lookout, and in consequence there was a rear-end collision between dog and man, the dog being the collider and the man the victim.

The man received a tumble that resulted in injuries that laid him up for a month. He sued the dog's owner for five thousand dollars. The case was tried before a jury, who agreed with the lawyer for the defense that a well-behaved dog has as good a right on the public streets as any other pedestrian, whether he walks, or runs. The victim of the smash-up didn't get his five thousand dollars.

Jack and the Jills

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "Once Every Year," "The Man About Towns," Etc.

Ottie Scandrel learns that the pen is mightier than the fist—but, as somebody has remarked: "Knowledge comes high."

JUST at the present minute the identity of the author of that immortal remark, to wit, "There's good in the worst of us," skips my memory, but the fact remains this boy should be paged and the remark amended. It's highly possible that when he used his fountain pen to scribble off the quotation there were neither crime waves, taxicab chauffeurs, garage mechanics or elevator operators doing business. Undoubtedly there is plenty good that is undiscovered in any number of stone crushers doing stretches in the best jails of the nation and there's probably streaks of virtue in the most vicious of them, but it's nickels to nothing there was no more good in the young gentleman I'm going to tell you about than there is in a glass of wood alcohol.

The high-sounding title of this individual was—and probably still is—Jack Twist. Thirty or forty minutes of your leisure time will be sufficient to give you the inside dope on this youth, a thrilling dash of biography that has its own moral.

Shall we begin?

One evening—it might have been a year or it might have been a week ago—Eddie Dolt, one of the new bucket boys at the gym in the Bronx, stuck his knob in the door three minutes before we were ready to check out and give the night watchman a chance to retire.

"A stuffed shirt outside waiting to kid-glove you, Mr. O'Grady," Dolt announced. "The name is Scandal—or something that sounds like it. He's one himself, anyway. What'll I tell him?"

I gave instructions and Ottie, in full but sober evening attire, promptly crashed the gate, as out of temper as a woman with twins.

"What's the idea of putting on the canine, Joe?" he began with a snarl. "'Mister O'Grady is busy. Whom are you, whom?' The silly slicker. I guess the next time I show up he'll show me in without shooting his face off about it first."

"Say, Eddie, close the door, please," I called through to the adjoining room.

Scandrel promptly turned and did it himself.

"Don't be calling Eddie because Eddie ain't able to answer. Er—you'll find him under the desk with the rest of the trash. That old right jab still clicks, Joe. You'd be surprised. I see you're leaving. Fine, as the city magistrate said to the speeder. Get your hat and come with me."

"Is that an invitation or a threat?"

Scandrel polished up his chin on the

back of one of his lemon-colored chamois gloves and smirked.

"Both. I'll explain as we go along."

He did so with the following result.

It seemed that Allison McKeith, New York's favorite philanthropist and an elderly millionaire so wealthy that he could afford to change his collar twice a day, had written Scandrel and made an appointment at the office of what was known as the McKeith Charities. As Ottie explained he had looked in, not certain what it was all about, until one of McKeith's secretaries had dished the dirt.

"It seems," Ottie went along, one eye on the clock of the taxi that dragged us downtown, "Jack Twist applied there last week for financial aid. If you can remember farther back than six or a half dozen years ago you can remember Jackie, can't you, Joe?"

I could without difficulty.

The Twist referred to was a light-heavyweight who had created quite a reputation for himself in the ring. A fighting fool, an ace with the gloves and a bear cat for action, "Kid" Twist had the enviable record of having lost eighteen out of twenty fights. The other two were won on fouls—which had surprised Twist greatly. All over the country fight fans had been in the habit of plastering down the piasters in wagers among themselves as to how long Twist would last. When they discovered he seldom went farther than the first round they fell into the habit of betting on the number of punches it would take to lay him. Strange as it seemed this misguided specimen of the fistic art always drew a gallery for his flop contests though it was frequently rumored the crowd came to see him thoroughly manhandled.

Really, there's a touch of Roman in us all!

After having been defeated by the greatest light-heavies in the world Twist had run into a jam and a breach-of-promise suit out in that dear Sioux City. He had fought one or two fights after that, some time had elapsed, and then he had purchased a one-way ticket to the all-year-around resort known as Oblivion and had passed out of the picture.

"Kid Twist?" I murmured. "I thought that bim had shuffled off the mortal coil years ago. So he's down and out, is he?"

My boy friend snickered.

"That was always his graft—the down-and-out stuff. On the level. I was as amazed as you are when McKeith's secretary ladled it. Guess what Twist has been moaning up there?"

"What?"

Scandrel licked his lips.

"He docked at the office, out of a job, and asked for enough to keep body and soles together. The secretary told me they made him fill out a blank and then third-degreed him. According to what Jack got rid of all the fights he was ever in were frames and there was a conspiracy against him to keep him out of the ring. In one fight, so he said, they hopped his water bucket. In another fight they used the needle on him when he was in his corner. In another fight they had the canvas waxed instead of rosined—and so forth. Honest, the secretary up there had to request me to laugh in a more refined way. Well, that was his story and that was the lie that went in to old man McKeith. You can imagine how *he* took it."

Allison McKeith, as nearly everybody was aware, like most philanthropists was as gullible as a country kid buying an acre of Central Park from a well-dressed gentleman wearing diamonds. One who had fought a tough battle with Life before he had gone to Texas and made more millions than one in the oil fields. McKeith's pet diversion was correcting wrongs, making everything fair and even and extending a helping hand to all those unfortunates who had gotten a bad break.

Any tale such as the one Ottie mentioned was certain to flood the elderly millionaire with indignation.

"Where do *you* come in?" I inquired.

This was Ottie's turn to pull down his cuffs and lift up his socks.

"I don't come in—I'm there already, Joe. Naturally, when McKeith wants something investigated he goes to the biggest man in that branch of trade. I don't mean the tallest neither. To dwarf a long story I'm hired on a salary to look into this Kid Twist matter and shoot back a report. They want *my* opinion and if it's a good one the secretary up there tells me that McKeith will try to help Jack to get back all his lost glory. Picture that!"

I couldn't.

"What do you mean—lost glory? If I remember correctly Twist never had any

glory to lose. From what I used to hear about him he was a skirt-crazy Lothario, a soft set-up for any one who wanted to début a white hope, a false alarm from every angle and was so crooked that when he rode horseback he got both his feet in the same stirrup."

"Absolutely," Ottie replied. "But you can bet your fur-lined waistcoat the sob stuff he pulled on McKeith's secretary wasn't anything like that. What I care as long they're paying me to investigate? I forgot to tell you but we're bound for the Club de Rook, one of them trip-around halls down on the main pipe line. McKeith got Twist a job as waiter there temporarily. I'm supposed to date him up, look him over and hear what he's got to say."

Twenty minutes after that we wheeled into the Lane of Lights and steered a course for a certain temple of vaudeville that was located somewhere between Thirty-ninth and Fifty-ninth Streets. Shoehorned in on the second floor of the theater building was the Club de Rook, up one flight of stairs —if you walked fast. We pulled in before the building, took the fenders off a couple of vehicles parked there and alighted.

"Seven fifty," the pilot of the two-colored carriage announced, turning down the flag.

"You lie like a rug!" Scandrel bellowed. "If I had my arm around that meter I couldn't have been keeping it more company. There was two and a quarter rung up on the clock and you can take your choice between that and a punch in the horn. Speak quick!"

"Ha-ha!" the chauffeur laughed. "Ain't this a joke? We'll make it two bucks even. I respect anybody who's got good eyesight!"

Scandrel hurled two one-dollar bills in his face and in the next round of minutes we were going up the stairs that led to the Club de Rook.

One of the most recent of cabarets designed for the dance mad, the place was really a classy slab. All classes were matched up as its customers. Somebody snatched our hats, somebody else pushed us through a door and we came out in the main part of the dance hall. Here a four-piece jazz orchestra made twice as much noise as the Philharmonic, chestless shipping clerks and bookkeepers danced their favorite stenographers dizzy and around the side lines a galaxy of wall flowers whose motto was "Pretty soft!" either toyed with foaming beakers of lemonade or spooned a brutal sundae with the greatest of enthusiasm.

Scandrel promptly stabbed a client with a glittering orb and got rid of a laugh.

"So this is the Club de Rook, is it? Look at them maniacs dancing each other ragged! No wonder shoe manufacturers make millions. And look at the pans on them. The flower of the underworld and no mistake. Wait'll I trip some of the hired help and get a line on our lob. Just a minute, Gus," he requested, trapping a passing waiter. "A little information if it ain't too much of a task for you. We're looking for a tray lifter here who calls himself Twist. Is he on this shift?"

" 'At dude?" the waiter sneered. "Yeah —he's got the last six tables in the corner, but don't try to horn in on him, because 'at jobbie only waits on the dolls. You might be his own brother but that don't make no difference to me. I'm telling you now 'at boy is acting himself right into a broken bugle. I hate him, Frank hates him, Mike hates him, Jerry hates him and Harry dislikes him. If you don't believe me—ask *them*. They work here too."

The information delivered proved to be more or less correct, for the last half dozen tables in line were occupied almost entirely by members of the gossipy sex. Three giggling girls sat at one, four at another, five were at a third and the others were equally as well populated. We took up a stand at the end of the aisle as the waiter who served the group staggered over from the soda fountain, his tray heaped high with nut sundaes. One look was enough to recognize the erstwhile Kid Twist, as polished as ever but worn a trifle thin by the years.

A tall individual with two ordinary shoulders on him, hair that could only be called curly, a face that would have gotten by in a crowd and an East River mouth—full of bridges—the former knocked-out champion featured his old careless swagger.

"The Kid himself!" Ottie hissed. "A word with you, fellar!" he added, tapping the other on the shoulder with two fingers.

Twist immediately dropped his empty tray, shut his eyes and threw up his hands.

"I surrender, officer!" he whined. "Don't use force—I'll go with you quietly. Which charge is it?"

"Pretend sense!" Ottie hollered to this fit subject for alienists. "And keep your eyes

open—you're among friends. We're here to chew a little fat with you and maybe show you how to knock off a piece of money. What time do you quit?"

Twist mopped his forehead with the end of a convenient tablecloth and smirked.

"You two give me quite a start," he mumbled. "I drop off at eleven bells even and I'll meet you downstairs in the lobby of the theayter. Now, pardon me. I see Mabel sticking up a finger and that means another strawberry soda, it surely does. So long."

With that he picked up his tray and cantered down to the second of his tables where he promptly was engaged in deep conversation with a little blond girl.

"A fish like him ought to be in a pool room!" Scandrel whinnied. "He's still fussing around the wrens, I see. I'll have to jack him up if he don't cut out the mush. That kind of stuff singes me, positively. Listen, let's take a chair and look on for a while. I like to laugh as well as the next one."

With some difficulty we found an unoccupied table and sat down. We had been there a minute or two only before a stout bird with an open-face set of evening clothes got the drummer to request silence and stepped out onto the center of the dance floor to throw a speech.

"To-night," this one started, "we should give you a treat. On account of good business from you we got it a swell entertainer. Don't forget it costs us money so come often and you'll see something different every night, positively. Monday she'll sing, Tuesday she'll dance, Wednesday she'll sing, Thursday she'll dance, Friday she'll——"

"Curra out, Dizzy!" Ottie bellowed. "You've got a phonograph looking like a henned husband. Say it all and make it snappy!"

Following hard on the heels of this interruption four waiters cantered up, chaperoned by the official bouncer of the joint, an egg who looked hard enough to munch iron.

"Throw the big roughneck out!" he ordered.

Ottie's right hand immediately dropped to his pocket but instead of producing a gun he snapped out four or five of his calling cards and ended the riot by passing them around. One look at the hand-engraved nonsense on the pasteboard and the waiters exchanged glances.

" 'Former welterweight contender of the world!' " the bouncer mumbled. "This is a car of a different chassis. Er—why didn't you say so in the first place? Anybody's likely to make mistakes. And you used to be a slapper, eh? Fin me, pal."

He shook hands and whistled the waiters off while the stout gil who had the floor finished his announcement.

"And so I take pleasure in presenting to you Señorita Rosita Hernandez direct from Madrid!"

The drummer stepped on it and a dark-haired doll wrapped up in a shawl that would have made an ordinary country crazy quilt shriek for assistance sauntered out clicking a pair of castanets. She carried a red rose parked between her schoolgirl teeth, had eyes as big as saucers, a cute little nose with a tilt to it and a freckle on each side as well as a languorous smile.

Like an orange her face was appealing.

"From Madrid?" I heard Scandrel mutter. "She must have arrived by way of Newark, New Jersey, but, after all, that's none of my business. I don't care where she came from as long as she's here. She looks like a good-times mamma and I'm the silver sheik who is going to make her, that's absolutely certain. If I don't I'll go out and catch a comet!"

"Start anything," I cautioned, "and it will take more than a handful of calling cards to keep you out of the box!"

Watching with high interest all that was transpiring on the floor Ottie carelessly moved a pair of shoulders nature had made to fit pianos. The Irish señorita glided gracefully into a dance it is safe to say no citizen of sunny Spain had ever observed. Scandrel borrowed a toothpick and nodded.

"Yeah! Well, tend to your own embroidery and I'll look out for the grief when it comes my way. You tab me when it comes to speed."

"Exactly," I retorted. "How many times have turtles whizzed by you?"

This was over his head like a cloud and after passing in an order for a plate of ptomaine germs and a cup of coffee that would anchor the table for us, he gave his undivided attention to Miss Rosita. She finished the dance, exited and came back with a little Spanish ukulele to sing a Castilian ditty about a grandee who thought he

was the candy until beneath a balcony a mosquito left its souvenir on his knee. This thrilling ballad wowed the customers, the girl took six bows in a storm of applause, encored and then backed away to make an exit.

As she passed our table Ottie pushed aside a salad that was as green as the lining of a bookmaker's pocket and, leaning out, caught her hand.

"Wait a minute, Rosie. The name is Scandrel—if that means anything to you. On my left, Joseph O'Grady—one of the biggest Spaniards in the Bronx. I've got a little important business at eleven o'clock but after that I'm free to supper you at your favorite lunch room. Say something."

The dark-haired young lady freed her fingers and obliged.

"You must be full of hop, guy! So you're going to take me out to supper? How do you get that way? To me you're as necessary as a third ear and you and all the other old rips make me tired. If I had a little spare time I'd tell you just what I thought of you."

"Hear that?" Ottie snickered, waving a hand at me. "Right away the little lady tries to tell me how much she likes me. Be yourself, honey. There's a nifty club up on Fifty-eighth Street where they certainly throw a nasty menu. I think I'll be all through at half past. I'll call for you anywhere this side of Jersey in the sweetest taxi on four wheels if you're game."

The señorita showed me how much I knew of her sex by promptly smiling.

"Oh, all right, if you insist. Make it twelve o'clock at the family entrance around the corner here. I've got a five-minute date with a party who works here as it's the first of the month, but I'll fix that up soon. He's only a dumb nobody anyway."

"A regular John?" Ottie inquired jealously.

The young lady shook her head.

"No, a Jack. The rest of the handle is Twist and he slides the sundaes here on a salary and commission. Don't forget—twelve o'clock. I know the dandiest place to get broiled lobsters."

Two days after that and the egotistical Scandrel was as busy as a bumblebee in a new field of clover. By an arrangement with the well and favorably known McKeith Charities he had been appointed manager and trainer for Kid Twist who, backed by the McKeith interests and safeguarded against doped drinking water, hypodermic needles and footpads of all descriptions, was expected to stake a sensational comeback as, free from dastardly plots and conspiracies, he was to show the fight-loving public of what stuff he was made.

Really, no former champion who had been the idol and ideal of the entire country could have had better plans laid for him!

The silly side of it all only intruded when it was figured that Twist, at the very top of his form, had quit like a dog in every bout and that his previous reputation was a laugh, while the records proved conclusively that in his entire career he had been on his shoulder blades more than on his feet.

It was all fun!

The McKeith money judiciously expended in the pursuit of fair play and a square deal began, however, to show almost instantaneous results. The sport scribes started unloading columns of historical and hysterical jazz that concerned the valiant attempt young Master Twist was making to prove to the world the fallacy of the they-seldom-come-back statement.

It was remarkable.

As most of Kid Twist's early opponents had either bootlegged themselves to death or had been lost at sea or had married and settled down there was small chance of any of them making a squawk and the public, always highly interested in anything that savored of a scandal, presently was reading the evidence of the nation-wide intrigue that had prevented the Kid from climbing up to a positive championship.

Get a smile out of that!

Prominently mentioned in every item as the trainer of the luckless John Twist, and spoken of as one who was not only intent upon making sure the pugilist was going to have fair play in the future and be protected while going after it, Scandrel strutted up and down Broadway like a leading man made by misleading articles. He was all over the place and if he wasn't dashing Miss Rosita around in taxicabs he was telephoning the Hotel de Vie and requesting conversation with a Miss Mary Brown.

"With all this here publicity," he explained, once the gym had been rented as a shed for Twist to work out in, "I can sit back and write my own ticket. Just now

I've got three prospects I can sign to meet the Kid. Number one is 'Cock-eye' Wilson, the New Orleans Tornado. Number the second answers to the name of 'Wilkes-Barre Mike' Ice and the other operates as 'Minneapolis Frankie' Regan. I ain't decided yet which one my boy will knock off first."

I stared hard but a search warrant could not have found a smile on the Scandrel pan.

"What's the plant? You know as well as I do, this newspaper hashish to the contrary, that on Twist's former record he hasn't got the chance of a celluloid collar in Hades against *anybody*. What do you expect to get out of a tussle with the exception of a few weeks' salary and a hearty laugh for handling the world's worst pugilist?"

The big buffoon took a chair, counted his ankles and looked serious.

"Don't fool yourself about Jack being terrible, old-timer. Sure, he used to take a tough pushing around, but times have changed—as any ladies' tailor will tell you. I've given the Kid a couple of stiff works with the cushions on and he surprised me, he did for a fact. He's a free swinger with a beautiful left hook, he's fast and he needs education in quantities. But even all these things ain't what I'm banking on to get him across. It's something else."

"A pistol?"

Ottie curled a lip.

"You and them comicals of yours! No, it ain't an automatic. What Twist has got *now* that he didn't have *then* is confidence in himself. Six years ago he knew that he was expected to *lose* the minute they tapped the gong. He didn't have no more courage then than an office boy waiting to have his wages pushed up. Now the foot is in the other shoe. Twist knows that he's *expected to win,* he's got more courage than two quarts of nose paint and when you've got a boy who's r'arin' to go, take it from me, you've got *something!*"

There was a grain or two of truth in this statement. I admitted as much while Ottie dropped a look at his watch and put the violin cases he called feet on the floor.

"Where now?"

"Er—at four o'clock we're giving a little tea party outside. That is, Allison McKeith as well as the newspaper gang we've got working for us are coming around to give John the d. o. in action. I've invited Miss Mulqueen—Rosita, in other words—to stop in also. Now I'll call up the Hotel de Vie for a word or two with Mary and then I'll run around and see what the Kid's doing. He certainly passes his leisurely time funny."

"What does he do?"

Scandrel got up and buttoned his jacket.

"Practices handwriting. Equal that if you're able. He covers page after page with samples of it and fountain pens only last Jackie a week at the most. Some bug, hey? Still, look at all the guys who run themselves ragged chasing butterflies and looking for caterpillars and the like."

A few minutes after four I went into the main section of the gym in time to observe the great Allison McKeith caning a way into the studio, his granddaughter helping him along. Irene McKeith—as I learned later—was a young lady of some eighteen delectable years. You should have seen her. Not only did she have beauty enough for a half dozen motion-picture stars and more style than the Rue de la Paix but she had a cute little walk, a cute little talk, was as blond as a bird store that sold canaries only and had blue eyes, red lips and a regular baby stare.

What she was Allison McKeith wasn't.

Her elderly relative, intent upon bribing himself into a golden harp, appeared to be only a block or two ahead of the undertaker. The celebrated philanthropist could have finished out what years were left to him with any producer of standard burlesque, really. To begin with he was as bald as an egg, had as many wrinkles as a twelve-dollar suit after a thunderstorm, was weak about the knees and had two teeth that anybody would have been proud to own.

Scandrel, impressed by his renowned visitor, did the honors and a few minutes after their arrival McKeith and grandchild held down a couple of camp chairs to the left of the gym ring about which were congregated the usual group of pencil pushers from all the leading metropolitan rags.

"How," the antique millionaire quavered, "is our young man progressing? Justice must be done. Is he in good health?"

Ottie, gazing at little Miss Irene, grinned.

"The Kid has got silk looking like sandpaper when it comes to a finish, Mr. McKeith. I want you to glom that devilish

left of his when he's in close. He works faster than a burglar in a bank, he times his shots like a clock and a dancing master couldn't learn him no new steps. Everything is grand."

"You don't think he has sand?" McKeith wheezed, a hand behind one ear.

"Grandfather," the sweet Irene explained, "is very, very deaf."

"You mean deef? In other words, hard of hearing. The Kid is swell!" Scandrel roared in a voice that made four of the reporters present start toward the nearest exit.

McKeith smiled and nodded.

"Too bad, it's too bad that he isn't well. Please go and bring him to us. I want my granddaughter to meet this martyr of the boxing game, this Dreyfus of the padded fist. Go find him and bring him here."

Before Ottie could obey, Twist, in a green bath robe and accompanied by a few disconsolate sparring partners, put in an appearance and was beckoned over. Introduced to the man whose millions were backing him to the limit the light-heavy promptly turned away, slid into a chair beside Miss McKeith, lighted a cigarette and began to grow familiar.

"No fooling, Gertie—or whatever your name is—them glims of yours are guaranteed to paralyze. And what a cute little beak you've got. You remind me of a skirt I used to know out in St. Looie. She waited on the counter at 'Dutch Ike's' and she certainly knew how to draw the mocha——"

"Grandfather is saying something to you," Miss McKeith interrupted.

"On the eve of your return to the ring," the philanthropist croaked, "I'm interested in learning what your emotions may be, John. Do you vision the fame that you have been deprived of so long, the glory you were cheated of? Tell me what your feelings are."

"As I was saying," Twist went on, taking as much notice of McKeith as a herring of a heavy sea, "this snapper back in St. Looie didn't have none of your class. Invite me around to supper some night and I'll tell you what I think of you. And listen, do you ever movie? Just down the road here is a flicker palace that's a positive panic. You get a news reel, a comedy and a feature fillum for thirty cents——"

"For half that I'll crash you to the floor!" Ottie barked, breaking in on the tête-à-tête. "Honest, you ain't got the manners of a hog! Didn't you hear what Mr. McKeith said or did your ears get affected from sitting near him? Talk back to him or the first fight you'll have will be here and now, Numskull!"

"It's always something," Twist moaned, tearing himself away from the flapper with an effort. "A good-looking, popular man don't get no peace at all. What do you want me to say to grandpop? Shall I tell him about the time I met the three lookers in Albany? What's the use of talking to a jobbie who can't hear you? With all that money of his you'd think he could afford to buy a horn!"

Finished saying something to McKeith, Twist shed his spinach negligee, shook hands with the press men and made ready to take on his first sparring partner. While he was preparing for this, Señorita Rosita Mulqueen blew in and became one of the gallery. Ottie kept her from getting lonesome but I caught his glance straying in the direction of Irene McKeith more than once before Twist was ready.

His first sparring partner, a former white hope who drank as if he had camels in his family, furnished some diversion by continually boring in and slugging. I watched Twist closely and was pleasantly surprised by his showing for the persecuted glove pusher easily outboxed him and displayed not a little technique and science in making his punches register. At long range he tossed in right and left hooks that had the other groggy and wound up the first part of the exhibition by sending his adversary reeling from the ring.

Then he carelessly waved a glove in the direction of Miss McKeith—a salutation misconstrued by her grandfather, who promptly waved back!

"I guess maybe you've changed your tune to another song, Joe," Scandrel said a couple of hours later. "The lad can sock, can't he? And that reminds me. Me and Jackie have an invite up to McKeith's château up on Park Avenue for Wednesday night, dinner at eight. In the meantime I find myself in a little jam. Er—Rosita's downstairs waiting for me. I forgot I had a date with Mary for to-night and I don't know what to say to the imitation Spaniard without hurting her feelings."

"Mary? Is that the girl you called up at the De Vie?"

Ottie nodded, frowning.

"Yeah. 'Budd' Quince introduced me to her last month. Her name is plain Mary Brown, she hails from points west and she's here in town on business. I ain't discovered what kind of business it is but she says she's just looking around. I want you to meet her some time. I admit she ain't got them big eyes of Rosita's or that astonishing nose of Irene McKeith, but Mary laughs at all my jokes and what man could ask for more?"

"How come she wasn't up here this afternoon?"

Scandrel stood and prowled to the window.

"I should bring her here and let that Twist half-wit bother her with his gab? Not a chance. When he sees her with me will be a time when he ain't able to talk to her. Er—I guess I'd better be going. I'll fix it up with 'Simp' McLoughlin so he'll telephone me just as I sit down to dinner with Rosita and tell me to come right home, there's sickness in the family. Good-by until I see you again."

A week after that articles were signed for a fifteen-round bout to a decision that was scheduled to be staged at a Brooklyn ball park with Kid Twist and Wilkes-Barre Mike Ice as the players featured.

As expected, the articles of combat were quickly pounced upon by the sport writers who promptly rehashed all their former blah and served it over again. Either the prestige of Allison McKeith, this publicity, or Ottie's loud mouth had been responsible for a sizable purse with an interesting split to the winner and a generous allowance for its short end.

"This here Mike Ice?" Twist began, one afternoon near the end of his training period. "They tell me he's got a right as well advertised as Car-pen-ta-y's, but that's only a giggle to me. If it's like the Frog's there's hardly any use of me going into the ring with him. I hit him once, I hit him twice, I hit him three times——"

"I'll paste you *once* and that will be all that's necessary!" Ottie yelped. "I suppose you'll want to fight in a dinner jacket and an opera castor. Get wise to yourself. Ice battles like a marine, socks like a steam drill and never gives up until it's time to go home."

Twist winked at me.

"Are you kidding? You can't make me tremble. I'll flatten him if only to show little Irene how easy it's done."

"Little Irene?" Scandrel sneered. "Where do you get off to call McKeith's granddaughter by her first name?"

Without the trace of a smile the other arranged his cravat and brushed off his cuffs.

"Why not? She's calling me Jack and if she Jacks me why can't I Irene her? She tells me I write a beautiful hand, so don't razz me. And look. Grandpop wouldn't have dreamed of having us supper with him if I hadn't sold myself to Cutey. She told me the old gent dinners on a cup of hot water and wouldn't we have looked swell settin' around with a teaspoon instead of tying into that nine-dollar sirloin Mr. Butler passed around? And how about them asparagus, those potatoes, that beets——"

Wham!

The fast right Ottie unleashed missed Twist by an inch and the light-heavy, in his haste to avoid it, tripped over the desk and dropped into the trash basket. He came up brushing six notes from New York, a letter from Trenton and a Canadian post card away while Scandrel turned his back on him and picking up the telephone asked Central what wrong numbers she had to deal out before she could put him through with the Hotel de Vie!

"The big tramp!" Twist mumbled under his breath. "If he gets rosy with me I'll get Irene to talk to the old gent and find me a new manager. Well, I'm going now. To-day's the first of the month and I've got to see Rosita for a few minutes. After that I'm going to walk little Irene in Central Park."

He blew.

With the date of the mêlée at the Brooklyn ball park a matter of a week distant and the gym drawing as well as the Democratic Convention, Ottie Scandrel dashed madly about from one thing to another without accomplishing anything save a matinée now and then with the señorita of the Club de Rook and several tours of inspection with Mary Brown, who gave the landmarks of Manhattan a tumble.

This young lady from the land of ranches and vicinities where chaps were worn on the legs instead of the arms turned out to be a pleasing person with a personality that was plus and a free-and-easy, bright-and-breezy patter delivery, pleasantly different

from the gossip of the big-town ribs. I lunched with them at a celebrated hotel but outside of that Ottie couldn't have kept her farther away from the gymnasium if there had been a smallpox epidemic raging there.

Finally, more time elapsed and the morning of the evening of the clout carnival rolled around. It found Kid Twist on razor-keen edge, his confidence high and his spirits higher. He weighed in at one hundred and seventy-three pounds even, spent the afternoon in his boudoir where, with a pen and a bottle of ink, he amused himself by scribbling off the signatures of all those who had once signed the Declaration of Independence.

At four o'clock he took a nap, at five o'clock he awoke, at six he post-carded Irene McKeith and at seven he allowed himself to be ushered into the nine thousand dollars' worth of limousine the aged millionaire had sent up to conduct him to the arena of maul across the East River.

"You had better fight the fight of your life," Ottie advised while en route. "I know how you are with the jills and there'll be three queens planted right down in the first row to watch you smack. Rosita, Miss McKeith and Mary Brown. Think how they'll feel if you get thrown through the ropes or if Mike makes you osculate with the canvas. You'd better watch out."

Twist yawned.

"Don't be worrying about me. On the card I just mailed little Irene I wrote, 'This set-up in the first spasm.' So Rosita's going to be there too? So much the nicer. Here's where I get a chance to show her that while I don't want her affection I must insist upon her respect. In the first frame, fellars. That's when the big doings will happen."

There was truth in the statement at that.

The foremost members of Brooklyn's best society as well as the mob Gotham contributed to the evening's entertainment cluttered up the ball park when we arrived to find the first bout carded in progress. In the general excitement and the milling throng I lost Ottie and the Bronx bunch, used my coupon and was presented with a chair a couple of doors away from the microphone of a radio that was being tuned up for the work at hand.

A pair of lightweights were fox-trotting in the ring while the crowd slumbered and I took advantage of the interlude to stare around with some interest.

Down the aisle Allison McKeith, supporting an ear trumpet, sat beside granddaughter Irene, who made a million dollars look like a row of round zeros in an evening gown that was smart to say the least. She was watching the set-to above her with extreme curiosity her blue eyes wide and her red lips parted.

Four seats farther on, Mary Brown, the Girl from the Golden West, was demurely chaired and at the very end of the aisle the dashing Señorita Mulqueen was in evidence, only idly engrossed with the dancing contest going on above the top of her dark head.

This bout terminated finally, the semi-finals arrived and the crowd sat up. Another space and the greats and near greats were being introduced from the ring while the big fuss of the evening impended.

Wilkes-Barre Mike Ice was the first to show and when the patients saw him they saw enough. Formerly a toiler in the Pennsylvania coal mines, Twist's opponent was a brawny individual who was a striking testimony to the truth of the Darwin theory. He had a countenance that was frightful to look upon, badly chipped ears, a jaw like the prow of a battleship and a pair of glittering eyes. Typical of the period when prize fighters battled with bare fists in combats that lasted for hours instead of minutes, he looked as dangerous as a case of dynamite and a box of parlor matches.

So Ice.

The noisy greeting the Pennsylvanian received still sounded when Kid Twist, on Ottie's arm, appeared wearing his usual Irish bath robe. Displaying not the slightest interest in the physical make-up of his opponent, Twist sought his corner. After that the conventional ceremonies were religiously observed, the ring cleared and I noticed Twist trying to find little Irene through the smoke fog a gentle south breeze wafted across the park. Considering him intently I couldn't help but notice that, just before he left his corner, a spasm of something not unlike pain, fright and stupefied surprise crossed his face, leaving him curiously pale in the glare of the white lights.

There was scant time to observe more for the gong sounded and in its echoes the clarion voice of Scandrel hurled the last titbit of advice up to Twist from under the lower ropes.

"Right in, Kid! Watch his right and

poke with your left! Don't wait for him to come to you! Get him *quick!*"

I won't bore you with a punch-by-punch description of the Kid Twist-Wilkes-Barre fiasco for the very good and sufficient reason that there were exactly three—count 'em—wallops delivered. The formidable Pennsylvania miner used a right to the body and a left to the head. This combination of socks dropped Twist's guard and tied him up in a knot. Then, amid a scene of the greatest turmoil and confusion, the gentleman with the frigid title took exactly two steps forward and shot the deadly right again.

It smashed up against the peak of the hapless John Twist's jaw like an eighteen-inch shell going through a plate-glass window, it turned him around like a merry-go-round and it dropped him on his face—with the grace of a sack of potatoes being carelessly dropped from the back of a two-ton truck!

That's all there was to *that!*

Seven days or one week later Scandrel brought a new derby hat down into the Forty-second Street chophouse where I was busy with a steak, put it under the table where he could keep a foot on it and looked at me sadly.

"Er—you ain't seen nothing of the Kid, Joe?"

I informed him that I had not and offered consolation.

"Why the gloom? You must have cleaned up a nice salary for the weeks of training and your own share of the loser's cut couldn't have been so worse. Anyway, you might have expected it. A leopard can't change its spots and——"

Ottie took a glass of water.

"Leopards haven't got nothing to do with this, Joe. It was all *my* fault! If I had left Mary Brown home the Kid would have lammed Wilkes-Barre Mike for a circle. How did I know that she——"

"Mary Brown?" I interrupted. "What did she have to do with it? Surely, you're not going to tell me that she's a deserted wife."

Scandrel licked his lips.

"No, that's the trouble. It comes out now that Jackie's married to Rosita Mulqueen but is separated and paying her carrying charges on the first day of every month. When he was out in the West he met Mary Brown—her right name is Gladys White—promised to marry her and then, after he had gotten a look at her old man's signature, forged a flock of checks and took it on the run. Mary—I mean Gladys—has been looking for him ever since. That's why she come on this visit to New York."

"Even at that," I persisted, "I can't understand why you should be so deeply concerned. What else did Twist do?—run off with old Allison McKeith's granddaughter?" Ottie shook his head and went to the water again.

"He did worse than beating the cops out of town—much worse. The day I knocked him into the trash basket up at your office he must have found a letter with *my* signature on it that I had tore up. Anyhow, just a couple of hours ago I went over to the bank to deposit the three thousand dollars I make off him and find a check there I never drew—for ten thousand exactly!"

Now you tell a joke.

Another Montanye story in the next issue.

WHAT SHE PAID FOR

EVERYBODY who is anybody in Virginia knows Mrs. John Gillum, and although she has had her winter home in Washington for only the past three years, she is almost as famous there. Eighty years of age, she has long since located the fountain of youth; she has an infinite charm, and her wit is as the wit of ten thousand.

One day recently she was patronizing a butcher in Center Market, that depot of provender where the wives of cabinet officials and of government clerks rub elbows in their pursuit of bargains in food. With a quick motion she picked up a knife from the counter and handed it to the butcher.

"Really," she said, with an amiable smile, "I don't care for it, but if you will cut it off and wrap it up with the rest, I'll take it."

The butcher was mystified. "Cut what off?" he inquired.

"Your hand," replied Mrs. Gillum. "You weighed it together with the steak; and I like to get what I pay for."

A HOROLOGICAL BUDGET

THE baby year will be just seven days old when these paragraphs are offered for your consideration. Have you a pencil about you—or a tractable fountain pen? Good! Now feel in the inside pocket of your coat and extract the dog-eared envelope that holds the letter you have been going to answer for the past twelve months. Excellent! From this point proceed as follows: Estimate the number of minutes you have frittered away on each of the first seven days in 1925. Add them up, or, if you prefer, strike a daily average and multiply by seven. Consider the answer earnestly. What does it come to? If it is under ten hours—and you have been honest in your estimate—we salute you with amazement and awe. A man who wastes no more than ten hours a week deserves a niche in the hall of fame —and has an excellent chance of occupying one. But our guess is that the result of your calculations will be nearer twenty than ten hours.

No man realizes until he checks up how much time he squanders in the course of three hundred and sixty-five days. No man will believe until he has tried it how fast the interest piles up on time saved away. There is probably no higher example of the implacable timesaver than Thomas Edison. The millions of minutes this great American has horded up in useful effort have multiplied at compound interest until their value to himself and the entire world is utterly incalculable. There was a time when one of Thomas Edison's minutes was worth no more than the next man's. To-day a Thomas Edison minute is priceless.

Not every man can make his minutes worth as much as Edison's, for only a handful of men in any age can open accounts in the savings bank of genius. But anybody's minute is worth something and can be made worth more. It is certainly worth saving. Money deposited in the bank works for you. So does time deposited in useful effort.

Nowadays the prudent man consults his banker for advice on how to spend his money. And on the banker's advice he makes a budget—so much for necessities, so much for investments, so much for luxuries and amusements. Perhaps you have already done this for your money. But what about your time? Have you consulted your watch and your calendar and budgeted that? In one respect at least you are on a footing with the richest man in the world. No Crœsus will have a larger income than you, this year, in time. Second by second and minute by minute the watch in your pocket will pay you off in the currency which postulates everything great and good, the impalpable, invisible fundamental and foundation of every human edifice, from the success of the individual to the advance of civilization—time! How much of the treasure that makes you one with the princes of the earth are you going to have saved up when it comes time to make your budget for another year?

SUPPRESSION TO THE RESCUE

SOMEBODY—the president, congress, the supreme court—ought to do something about cross-word puzzles. Or perhaps the neurological section of the medical profession would be the proper agency of relief. But, never mind who, somebody ought to do something to check this epidemic of interlocking philology, for if the craze isn't outlawed and sternly repressed it is going to die of its own accord. And if it goes the way of ouija, mah jong, and put-and-take tops, several million people we know about—even though we've never been properly introduced to them—will be faced once more with the problem of how to fritter away the time their bosses pay them for.

The cross-word puzzle cries out for preservation. Nothing in the memory of living man—not even radio—has equaled it as a destroyer of shining hours. And it is not likely that anything approaching it in efficiency as a corrupter of enterprise and a blaster of careers will be devised within this century or the next. It is so diabolically convenient. All its practice requires is a daily newspaper, a pencil stub, and a disinclination for work—three things within the reach of 4.99 out of every five adults over and under the age of thirty. It doesn't even take two to play the game. Usually the entire office staff is enough.

The cross-word puzzle is the very perfection of aids to procrastination, and—— Excuse us for just an hour or two; the man who washes our office windows is in serious difficulty.

All he wanted was a word of eight letters, meaning a substance mentioned in the Bible, variously taken to be a gum or resin, a precious stone, or a pearl. We supplied it almost at once—elapsed time, forty-eight minutes only—inasmuch as it was an easy one. The word was bdellium.

We were about to say, were we not, that the cross word is deserving of preservation? To date it is only a fad. And now that the office boys have adopted it in concert with the bell hops and elevator men it is doomed to pass away unless steps are taken to establish it as a national institution.

We hope that some professional reformer casts a bilious eye on this appeal and is inspired to suppress the cross-word puzzle. It is a vice worthy of immortality. And all the situation demands is a vigorous crusade, followed by a Constitutional amendment. Once cross-word puzzling is written on the statute books as a penal offense its future will be assured to eternity.

ENGLAND'S GORDIAN KNOT

SO far as Great Britain is concerned, the problem of *swaraj,* or home rule for India, is still a long way from solution, and the question seems so bound up in world politics that the problem is infinitely complicated for all concerned. If Great Britain grants *swaraj* to India, will it result in internecine chaos, or if she does not grant it, will it result in something quite as bad?

Most of us identify the Indian struggle for autonomy with the name of Mahatma Ghandi, but it really began before the prophet of nonresistance and noncoöperation was born. War for their national independence dates back to 1857, the year of the Sepoy Mutiny. Then it was that the British government took political control out of the hands of the East India Company. For about thirty years thereafter Indian nationalism lay more or less dormant, with only the intellectuals quietly fomenting patriotism. From 1884 to 1905, the Indian National Congress carried on an active though peaceful constitutional agitation, which brought no appreciable results. Then young extremists arose, advocating and sometimes bringing about violence. The victory of Japan over Russia and the Boer defiance strengthened the hope and hands of these radicals.

In time their strength compelled Lord Morley, then secretary of state for India, to grant certain reforms, which only whetted the demand for others until he complained that they asked for the moon.

As might have been foreseen, the Great War gave India a sense of her enormous

importance to Great Britain, for she saw plainly the dependence on her for men and material. But even prior to that proud realization, the Indian National Congress which met at Lucknow in 1916 had presented unanimous demand for *swaraj*.

Denied, this home rule movement of course grew throughout the period of the war, and reached its climax when the masses, inspired by Ghandi, joined the classes in the cry for self-government. Extraordinary as it is to record, millions of ignorant peasants at that time, stirred by patriotic fervor, obeyed the mandate of their mahatma for nonviolence; it was an unparalleled feat of mob order.

Noncoöperation regarded impartially is an organized distrust of foreign government and a peaceable measure to get rid of it. It is "India for the Indians" even to the extent of going back to the spinning wheel of primitive days, and having nothing to do with modern progress in Western guise.

But who are the Indians? And this is the nub of the whole difficulty. The natives of this vast country are decidedly heterogeneous in character, and they contain within themselves many warring creeds as well as polyglot tongues, the Parsis, the Burmans, the Brahmans, the Kholi, the Rajputanas, the Afridi, the natives of Baluchistan and the Himalayas—to name a few—are so widely different that it is a proper and significant question to ask: What will they do with their freedom?

TENNIS TURMOIL

TENNIS, an amateur sport in which until recently talk of the almighty dollar has been pleasantly rare, is in a turmoil over the threatened enforcement of a rule which may rob the game of more than one of its brightest stars and which already has caused the resignation from the Olympic and Davis Cup teams of William T. Tilden 2nd, our national champion and the game's most brilliant figure.

The rule which has caused all the trouble forbids prominent tennis players from writing tennis articles for "substantial sums." As Tilden is the most prominent player-writer affected, many people seem to think that the rule was made as a personal attack on him. We do not think that this is so. The men who desire the enforcement of the rule have the welfare of tennis at heart. They want it kept a purely amateur sport, and they think that a player who derives a good income from writing about tennis is likely to acquire a business viewpoint in thinking about it and playing it. They contend that, although the great player's articles about the game may be both interesting and instructive, he is paid good prices for them not because of their actual value, but because of the publicity value of his name over them.

Of course there is another side to the question. Tilden considers writing his profession. He says that if he must choose between tennis and his business he will have to give up tennis. Certainly his book on the game, and many of his articles and stories have a real value aside from the value of his name.

It seems now that a settlement of this vexing question is in sight. The Tennis Association has appointed four men members of a committee to consider it, and these four men have chosen three others, prominent in sport but not active in tennis, to help decide where amateurism ends and professionalism starts. The three nontennis members selected are Senator Pepper, Grantland Rice, sport writer, and Devereux Milburn, polo player. The tennis-playing members are evenly divided for and against the player-writer rule. This committee should be able to formulate an amateur rule that is workable under the conditions of to-day, and that would apply to amateur sports other than tennis.

POPULAR TOPICS

HAPPY NEW YEAR—as the jolly old Roman emperors used to remark to their subjects on the morning of January first as they exacted a New Year's gift of a pound of gold.

That pleasant custom later was imitated by the English rulers, and Henry III. was a whiz at making his subjects start the year right—for him—by coming across. Later on these New Year gifts to the king became voluntary, but people who believed in a close and permanent union of their heads and their shoulders didn't forget them. While Oliver Cromwell was ruling the English roost the custom became obsolete, and it was not revived after the Restoration.

Now kings and emperors do not expect their subjects to give them New Year gifts. They are quite satisfied if they are moderately sure that they will be allowed to keep their jobs for another twelve months.

It's a brilliant idea never to crowd your luck.

As the years roll past the problem of New Year's resolutions becomes easier and easier to solve. We don't have to think up new ones any more. We just take another shot at the ones we made—and broke—last year.

Anyhow, most of the things that people used to make resolutions about now are prohibited by law.

Which reminds us that one of our 1924 resolutions was not to make any more wise cracks about prohibition.

Prohibition is a whole lot funnier than any of the jokes that have been made about it.

IT must be a source of deep sorrow to some of our go-getter merchants and manufacturers that they cannot introduce into the United States the European custom of giving New Year's gifts. Of course, the average man or woman hasn't enough money left to worry about after he or she has done his or her duty by her or his friends or relatives, but sometimes there are a few odd cents left that must seem like wasted opportunities to the shop-early-and-often boys.

Personally, we are busted. We can't even get our dog a pair—or should it be a quartet?—of spats, which the Paris mode says that fashionable canines should wear this winter. A-la-mode hounds may wear either two-button, or three-button spats.

ALTHOUGH the female of the species may be more deadly than the male, the male is more brainy than the female—according to Doctor Henry P. Donaldson of the American Neurological Association. The doctor adds that as a rule tall people have more brains than short people, and that people with large heads, because their brain cells are larger, are capable of more thorough work and of clearer thinking than are people with small heads.

By large heads, Doctor Donaldson doesn't mean swelled heads.

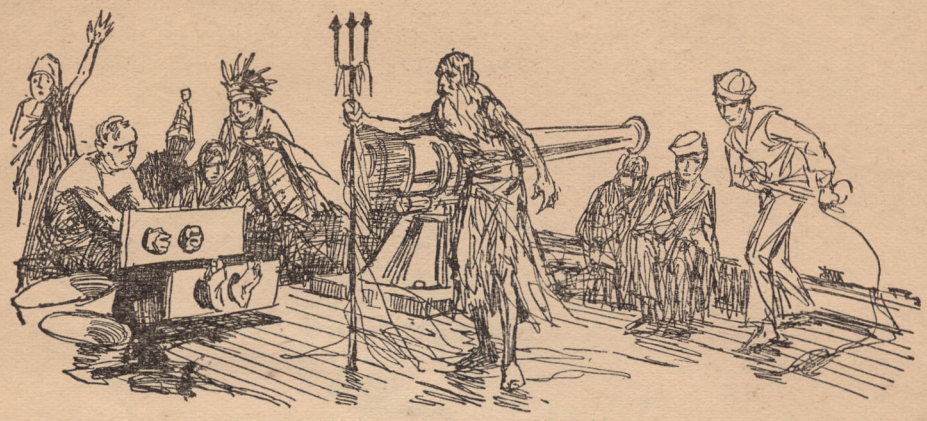
NEW YORKERS are used to having their ups and down. Each day nine million passengers ride in the city's twelve thousand elevators. It is estimated that the elevator shafts in the city aggregate more mileage than do all the subway and elevated lines.

MISS FAY LEWISOHN, who sells 'em, says that the New York débutante must spend $35,000 a year on her clothes and personal upkeep to be well dressed. A few of the items listed are: 250 pairs of stockings, $2,250; thirty evening gowns, $9,000; one dozen negligees, $3,600; incidentals, including beauty treatment, $5,000; and—oh, my *dear*—two dozen sets of lingerie, $3,600.

A CHEERFUL thought for the New Year is that living costs—which means the cost of necessities—in the United States are only 55 per cent above the justly famed, prewar level. In Italy they are 412 per cent above the prewar mark; in Belgium, 393 per cent; in France 266 per cent; in England 70 per cent; and in Canada, 43 per cent.

It is a queer thing that it isn't so much the high price of necessities that makes people peeved, as it is the high price of luxuries.

The reason being, of course, that luxuries are so much more necessary to happiness than are necessities.



King Neptune Takes Command

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "Whispers from the Sea," "Baseball at Berbera," Etc.

Surplus eggs and the Jolly Roger fly aboard U.S.S. *Toledo*.

"RUSTY" HACKMEYER, the fat water tender of U. S. S. *Toledo,* was that species of pest in human form known as a practical joker. When more than four hundred men have to live together in the crowded decks of a scout cruiser, social relations are easily disturbed. It is like a dormitory in a boarding school. The ponderous Hackmeyer's sense of humor was an annoyance, to be mentioned in the same breath with fleas or prickly heat.

He was careful to leave the seasoned bluejackets alone. His victims were the boyish lads for whom this voyage to the Indian Ocean was the first experience afloat. They were easy marks for his simple sense of humor. To sprinkle tacks in a hammock or smear glue in a pair of shoes or tell a nervous youngster that the captain wanted to see him, made Hackmeyer's broad shoulders shake with laughter.

One of these playful tricks had exasperated Seaman William Sprague who was not apt to suffer wrongs in silence. To his buddy, the amiable "Chub" Chadwick, he expressed himself as follows:

"We have simply got to hang something on this prize joker that will make him behave. If we start a scrap, maybe we can't finish it. It means trouble with the division officer and getting on the report."

"Seems as if a four-hour watch in the fireroom ought to take the pep out of him," said Chadwick. "I don't suppose he means to be a nuisance."

"Well, if he pulls anything more on me, I'll put a crimp in him if I get thrown in the brig for it, Chub. It won't be a fight. I'll hit him behind the ear with something hard. The bigger they are the harder they fall."

"Watch your step, Kid," was the sensible advice. "Outguess him. Use the old bean. Rusty is solid pig iron above the ears."

During the next few days, however, peace reigned unbroken by the water tender's merry stratagems. It almost seemed as though he had grown tired of making his shipmates miserable. He sweated and laughed and slept while the *Toledo* steamed southward along the torrid African coast. The impulsive "Kid" Sprague recovered his own good humor. If the enemy had actually reformed, he was willing to forgive and forget. He went so far as to talk baseball with Rusty and listen to his roaring yarns of adventures on many seas.

The routine of the cruise ran smoothly until misfortune smote William Sprague from a clear sky. He was putting his locker in order for the weekly ordeal of captain's inspection. It was one of a row of small

steel compartments such as the modern navy gives the sailor instead of the old-fashioned canvas bag and ditty-box. These lockers, hundreds of them, were built along the berth deck like office filing cabinets.

The Kid was a promising seaman but inclined to be careless. Earlier in the day he had forgotten to close the door of his locker and drop the key in his pocket. He thought nothing of it. Property was perfectly safe. Even the hard eggs, whom the officers were anxious to transfer to other ships, would never be low enough to steal from a comrade.

This was taken for granted, but while folding his clean uniforms the Kid missed something from his locker. In a flurry he ransacked it. His most treasured possession had vanished. It was an elaborately embroidered silk shawl bought in Cairo as a present for his mother. It had cost him a month's pay. It was the most beautiful shawl he had ever laid eyes on. He had fairly gloated over it. His friends had agreed with him. He had displayed it for them to admire. It was a humdinger of a shawl, said they. The Kid had certainly blown himself.

To find it gone was a stunning blow. Absently arranging his clothes in the locker, poor William wandered aft to sit and brood under an awning. He could never find another shawl like that and it had been a gorgeous souvenir of his visit to Egypt. Even worse than this was the feeling that his shipmates of the *Toledo* could not be trusted. The navy has its own peculiar code of loyalties and obligations. This has to be so. The code of honor had been violated.

William groped for hint or clew that might direct him to the identity of the dirty thief who had found the locker open and snatched the opportunity to ransack it. Somebody who had seen and coveted the wonderful shawl. No doubt of that.

There was one lad in his own division whom he detested on general principles. He was by no means an attractive character. A streak of the mucker in him, scrawny, secretive, and tight-fisted, this Joe Piper had been recruited from the slums of a great city. He was anxious to get ahead in the world. This much could be said for him. The navy had enticed him with the promise of an education. He was getting something for nothing. Otherwise he had no use for the service. A guy was treated like a slave, said he, and all the stuff about your duty to your country was bunk. They played you for a sucker.

It occurred to the unhappy William that Joe Piper's locker was near his own. More than once he had seen the shawl displayed and had praised it with greedy gusto. He had an uncle who worked in an Oriental importing house in New York. Therefore he posed as an expert. A shawl like that was worth a hundred dollars in a Broadway window. Kid Sprague was a boob to give it to his mother instead of selling it when he got home. He could have bought her an embroidered pillow cover in Cairo for two dollars, said the thrifty Joe Piper, who bragged of his savings account in the paymaster's office.

Kid Sprague had the impetuous logic of youth, or the lack of it. It was perfectly clear that the unpleasant Joe Piper had found the locker open and pinched the shawl. He was the guilty party. Having established this in his own mind, William hastened to discuss it with Chub Chadwick. The latter agreed at once. The very mention of Joe Piper's name was enough to set his teeth on edge.

"Sure he swiped it, Kid. He is one of those shifty ginks that just naturally snoops around. Cunning like a fox. Who else could it be? Had we better wait till we catch him ashore and make him confess? Beat him up?"

"And have him yell murder and run to report us to the patrol? That won't do, Chub. I think I ought to tell the division officer about it. Then if he asks me do I suspect anybody, I'll tell him he ought to have Joe Piper's locker searched. It's my duty to protect the ship against a crook like that."

Chadwick gravely indorsed the plan. By way of moral support he went with William to find the junior lieutenant, who felt a keen interest in the welfare of the forty-odd men directly under him. He listened with attention but objected:

"Piper is a rotten poor seaman, I grant you that, and he seems to have made himself pretty unpopular. But what have you got against him, in the way of evidence?"

"A hunch," answered Kid Sprague.

"It's a cinch," chimed in Chub Chadwick. "He's the limit."

"Um'm, if you are so positive about it,

supposing I send for him and see how he behaves under fire."

Presently Joe Piper came slouching behind the messenger. As usual, he looked sullen and furtive. A sharp reproof made him snap to attention.

"Sprague has missed a silk shawl from his locker," said the officer. "He thinks you took it. Here, look at me. Can't you hold your head up?"

"You call me a burglar?" whined the accused. "So help me cripes, the only time I ever seen his shawl was when he showed it to a bunch of gobs. What's eatin' these two guys anyhow? If I want curios, I buy 'em. I got the jack."

"And you are willing to have your locker examined?"

"Soitinly. What's the big idea? Everybody uses me rough on this damn ship. I ain't got a show."

"Stow that. Talk like a man or keep still," sternly admonished the officer."

"You didn't have to hide my shawl in your locker, Piper," blurted Kid Sprague. "You could find other places."

"I didn't take it, I tell you. Won't you listen? If I was big enough I'd hand you a poke in the jaw."

There was honest indignation in Piper's thin voice. For once his glance was bold and straight. The lieutenant was not an easy man to fool. He was in daily contact with human nature, from reveille to taps. Piper was a mistake as an enlisted man, no doubt of that, but in this instance he was telling the truth. Such was the impression he made.

"All right. Dismissed," the division officer told him. "But the Lord help you if you have tried to squirm from under this charge."

The pair of accusers registered chagrin. Red in the face they lingered awkwardly, expecting a reprimand. The lieutenant surprised them by saying quite mildly:

"And that's that! I don't believe he stole the shawl. I suppose you owe him an apology, boys, but I won't insist. He has too many bad-conduct marks against him. This matter will be investigated and I hope we turn up the right man. A thief will get no mercy in this ship."

A minute or two earlier than this the bulky figure of Rusty Hackmeyer had come rolling from the fireroom hatch, a towel over his shoulder. He was on his way to the shower baths. Overhearing the argument he had halted in the background. He wore a startled air. His fleshy face reflected foolish bewilderment. It suggested the emotions of a man who had taken hold of a hot poker by the wrong end.

The division officer evidently was in a bad temper and it was healthy not to interrupt. Besides, Rusty happened to be in poor repute with his superiors. In fact, the chief engineer had threatened him with a deck court if so much as a whisper was lodged against him. At the last liberty port he had quenched a gigantic thirst with beer by the gallon, or so it was inferred when he returned aboard.

Pricking up his ears at mention of the stolen shawl, he grumbled to himself:

"Aw, couldn't Kid Sprague take a joke? The poor hophead! Of course I meant to put it back. Next time he wouldn't be so careless and leave his locker open. And he was too dumb to get a laugh out of it. Had to run to his division officer and squeal. Now the beans *are* spilled."

The dictates of prudence led Rusty to believe that the officer also was too dumb to see the joke, after an innocent man had been dragged to the front. The wise course was to keep under cover and seize the first chance to slip the shawl into the Kid's locker.

This was much easier said than done. Rusty's living quarters were in another part of the ship, among his friends of the black gang. It was difficult to find excuses for hanging about the section of the berth deck where Sprague's division was billeted. Moreover, once bitten and twice shy, William was no longer careless about leaving his locker open.

Rusty Hackmeyer worried and lost weight. Every day made it worse. He was in terror lest a routine inspection should find the shawl tucked away in his own locker. Meanwhile the affair was spreading trouble. Kid Sprague was a headstrong lad of heated prejudices. In his opinion, the officer's verdict had failed to clear Joe Piper. It merely meant that they didn't have the goods on him. He was too smart to be caught. This the Kid made public in no uncertain language.

In any company, the under dog is bound to find friends and sympathy if he is kicked hard enough. Joe Piper might be a mongrel but he deserved a square deal. So

voted some of his shipmates who had never had a decent word to say for him. In a man-of-war, gossip is a favorite outdoor sport. This incident or that is passed about and grows in the telling. Men thrown together in this manner talk much more than they read.

The impression gained headway that Kid Sprague had pulled a bone. It gave a ship a bad name to have a flighty young gob yell thief and rush to his division officer because he had missed something. Likely as not he had left his silly shawl on deck somewhere and the wind had blown it away.

All of which brought no comfort to the uneasy Rusty Hackmeyer. If he owned up, the whole crew might turn against him as a trouble maker who deserved to be hazed within an inch of his life. He had stirred up bad feeling, impaired the morale, and, as he sadly surmised, made a big, fat criminal of himself. More than one censorious petty officer would say that he had meant to keep the shawl but was afraid of detection and frightened by the fuss made over the thing.

Trying to pass it off as one of his humorous stunts would be no joke at all. His courage oozed. He was shaking in his shoes. He consisted of two hundred and thirty pounds of sorrow and regret, with the chief engineer a haunting bogy man who waited for a pretext to hand this broad-beamed water tender over to a deck court and put the fear of God into him.

As a topic for gossip and argument, the lost shawl was shoved into the background when the *Toledo* approached the equator. In the merchant marine of the old sailing-ship days crossing the line was a great event, demanding quaint and elaborate ceremonies. The origin of this briny ritual is lost in the obscurity of many centuries of seafaring. In all probability it is a pagan survival from the age of mythology, when mariners, venturing fearfully out of sight of land, offered sacrifices to appease the wrath of the gods of the winds and the sea.

The practical age of steam has banished most of this picturesque pageantry. Liners on regular routes cross the equator too often to find novelty or excitement in it. A program of horseplay is staged to amuse the passengers, but the spirit has departed. In the navy, however, the traditional rites to King Neptune have never been allowed to lapse. Familiarity has not bred contempt. A cruiser like the *Toledo,* for instance, might possibly cross the line only once during all her years of active service.

The day is observed with a vast amount of pomp and colorful detail. Once seen, it is never forgotten. Preparations are begun weeks beforehand. On board the *Toledo* the Neptune Committee had held many meetings on the forecastle deck. Its members were mostly veteran chief petty officers who could qualify as certified shellbacks. The ship's tailor and his staff had been sewing late at night to make costumes The chief carpenter and his mates toiled in secret to equip King Neptune's court. An air of mystery pervaded the ship.

The landlubbers, who had to face the initiation, were filled with dark forebodings. Of the whole crew as many as two hundred of them were to be put to the torture. They envied the shellbacks, those lucky voyagers who had crossed the line in other ships of the navy and could display their certificates to prove it. Even the captain was not exempt by reason of his august rank and station. He carried his sheet of parchment paper, duly signed and sealed, whenever he went to sea. It was kept in his safe. In fact, these documents were guarded by their possessors like so much gold. No matter how glibly a man might boast of other voyages beyond the equator, he was doomed unless he could produce the written evidence to this effect.

The standard navy-department certificate was handsomely engraved, with a picture of the ship Its language was eloquent and resounding, to wit:

DOMAIN OF NEPTUNUS REX

To all Sailors wherever ye may be, and to all Mermaids, Sea Serpents, Whales, Sharks, Porpoises, Dolphins, Skates, Eels, Suckers, Lobsters, Crabs, Pollywogs, and other Living Things of the Sea:

GREETINGS: Know ye: That on this —— day of ——, in Latitude oooo, there appeared within the limits of the Royal Domain the U. S. S. TOLEDO bound southward for the Equator and African ports.

BE IT REMEMBERED

That the said Vessel and Officers and Crew thereof have been inspected and passed on by Ourselves and Our Royal Staff and BE IT KNOWN by all ye Sailors, Marines, Landlubbers and others who may be honored by His presence, that —— ——.

Having been found worthy to be numbered as one of OUR TRUSTY SHELLBACKS, has been gathered to our fold and duly initiated into the

SOLEMN MYSTERIES OF THE ANCIENT ORDER OF THE DEEP.

Be it Further Understood: That by virtue of the power invested in me, I do duly command all my subjects to show honor and respect to him whenever he may enter our Realm.

DISOBEY THIS ORDER UNDER PENALTY OF OUR ROYAL DISPLEASURE.

Given under Our Hand and Seal,
NEPTUNUS REX
Ruler of the Raging Main

DAVY JONES
His Majesty's Scribe.

The immediate prospect of the Neptune party caused Rusty Hackmeyer to forget his private troubles. It was a temporary rift in the cloud. There were moments when he regained his boisterous hilarity. Here was amusement after his own heart. Of course it was old stuff for him, he announced. He had crossed the line three times already, in a battleship, a destroyer, and a fuel tanker. The indorsements on the back of his certificate proved it. He was proud of them.

All shellbacks were ordered to present their documents for inspection in the second dog watch two nights before the *Toledo* was due to cross the equator. The captain's yoeman, who served as secretary of the Neptune Committee, would check the list. Seaman William Sprague felt no interest in this formality. He was an unfortunate landlubber, an ordained victim. To his comrade in affliction Chub Chadwick, he pensively observed:

"These darned shellbacks are going to wallop the tar out of us. But why worry? It's all in a gob's lifetime. Join the navy and see the world."

"Be brave, Kid. Look at me and weep. I'm roly-poly enough to get paddled half to death. They use leather straps pickled in brine."

"Blah! Who's been stringin' you?" scoffed William. "The officers will see that things don't get as rough as all that. But a bird with a grudge will have a beautiful chance to get even."

"I'll say so, Kid. You want to watch out for Rusty Hackmeyer. This is the cat's whiskers for him—just his kind of a game. And he has been acting as if he had it in for you. What got into him? Did you notice how he stuck around our quarters and glowered and gloomed?"

"He has been darned peculiar, Chub, but what has he got against you or me? Not a thing. I thought we were getting along pretty well with him after he piped down on his pranks."

"Wow, how much would you give to run *him* through a Neptune party?"

"Oh, boy! I'd mortgage the next pay day," wistfully sighed the Kid.

They changed the subject. Hackmeyer had loomed in sight. He was looking for a seat in a breezy corner of the deck. Two of his friends joined him. He fished out his Neptune certificate to show them. Just then the alarm gongs clanged the call to fire quarters. The bugler took it up. Nobody knew whether the urgent summons was merely a drill or an actual fire. The crew jumped to respond. In orderly haste many things were done at once—stretching hose, standing by valves, closing hatches and air ports, fetching tools, buckets, sand, and smoke helmets.

Kid Sprague and Chub Chadwick scampered to their stations. It turned out to be an emergency drill. They wandered back to express their disapproval of such foolish interruptions. The Kid saw a folded sheet of parchment paper flutter past him and lodge against a boat chock. He snatched it before the wind could flirt it over the side. Rusty Hackmeyer's precious Neptune certificate! The corpulent water tender, whose white clothes were always too tight for him, must have thrust the paper in his pocket at the sound of fire quarters. It had popped out while he was running.

The two young gobs stood and looked at each other in blissful silence. It was much too magnificent for words. Soon the shellbacks would be filing forward to have their certificates inspected and checked on the final list.

And now Rusty came galloping from his fire station to search for his lost document. He was in sore distress. He breathed hard and mopped his face. The pair of youngsters dodged behind a gun shield to avoid him. They felt not the slightest impulse to help him find it.

Vain was the quest of the dismal water tender. Reluctantly he trundled himself to the forecastle deck to tell the committee about it. He was a man who conjectured that calamity might be treading on his heels. Sprague and Chadwick trailed him at a discreet distance. They were able to hover close to an open port where the pro-

ceedings could be overheard. It appeared that Hackmeyer was in no hurry to grapple with the crisis. For once he was diffident. At length his voice was heard to break out in hoarsely earnest protest:

"I had my certificate. Get that? It got lost when I beat it to fire quarters. Have a heart. Didn't I cross the line three times in——"

"Clamp down, Rusty," interrupted the flinty-hearted captain's yoeman. "Where's your paper to prove it? You can't hang anything on this outfit. Don't block traffic. You're keeping a hundred men waiting. On your way. I'll have to mark you down as a landlubber."

"For the love of Mike, listen, won't you?" implored the agitated Hackmeyer. "Lay off me. Quit your joshin'. You all know me."

"I'll say we do, Rusty, old sport," snapped the yoeman. "Can you produce any shipmates to sign sworn affidavits that they crossed the line with you in another vessel?"

"Nope. There don't happen to be none in this cruiser. What difference does that make?"

"A whole lot to you, big one." The yoeman stole a glance at the crowd of bystanders. They were as solemn as so many owls. "About fifty per cent of this crew just yearns to get a crack at you, Rusty. You're due for a ride. Looks like a burial at sea to me."

"Ride *me?*" exclaimed the luckless Hackmeyer, who couldn't believe his ears. "This bunch put me over the jumps as a landlubber?"

"Precisely so," curtly spoke the yeoman, ignoring further pleas. One of his aids shoved poor Rusty aside. He had heard his sentence. There was no appeal. Wrapped in melancholy, he retreated to think it over. He had none to console with him. The verdict was impressively popular. Rusty had been caught in the kind of trap he would have hugely enjoyed setting for somebody else. There was such a thing as righteous retribution.

As merciless as Indians, Kid Sprague and his buddy hugged their secret. Soon after dark of the next evening, a thunderous hail was heard from the bows of the cruiser. The watch officer reported to the captain that the Royal Scribe, Davy Jones, wished to come on board to make certain preliminary arrangements in behalf of His Majesty, King Neptune. The engines were promptly stopped.

The famous personage came up out of the deep sea. At least, his hoary beard and weedy robe dripped salt water. In one hand he held a spear, in the other a rusty metal box. In a mighty voice he demanded to see the captain of U. S. S. *Toledo*. The interview took place on the navigating bridge. The commander of this crack cruiser was the pink of courtesy and the soul of gravity. The slightest touch of levity would have spoiled it. His demeanor as dignified as though he greeted a visiting admiral, the captain placed the ship and her company at the disposal of Neptunus Rex.

The landlubbers were mustered in long lines on deck. Davy Jones passed along and, from his rusty metal box, handed each trembling wretch his written summons for the morrow. It told them:

"It has been brought to the attention of the Supreme Ruler of the Deep, through his trusty porpoises, that you, a landlubber, on board a ship never before seen in these waters, have dared to transgress on his Equinoctial Realm.

Such contumacious and preposterous conduct has so angered His Majesty that he will meet in full session with his Secretary and Royal Court, on board the offending ship, the U. S. S. *Toledo* in Latitude 00-00-00, Longitude 45 E. on the 5th day of January, 1924, to pass fitting sentence.

It is HEREBY ORDERED that you then appear in person before His Most August Presence to answer for your inconceivable conduct, and thence to suffer the travail of awful torments in order that you may be tested as to worthiness for the high estate of an Honorable Shellback."

The climax of this ceremony was when Rusty Hackmeyer, fairly dragged into line, had a copy of the summons thrust into his fist. Unfeeling laughter swept the decks, followed by three cheers for Davy Jones. Growling like a grizzly, Rusty Hackmeyer crumpled the summons into a wad and went aft to nurse his grievance in solitude.

In the day's orders, signed by the executive officer, the initiation was scheduled to begin at ten o'clock the next morning. It was startling to behold a huge black flag emblazoned with the skull and crossbones soar to the fore truck of an American man-of-war. It signified that the ship had been captured by King Neptune and his crew. The captain was merely a spectator. He had formally resigned his command.

For that brace of boyish seamen, Kid

Sprague and Chub Chadwick, the joy of squaring accounts with Rusty Hackmeyer had become somewhat dimmed overnight. Was it playing the game on the level? The voice of conscience inconveniently obtruded itself. In short, they found they had a problem on their hands. They were new to the service nor could they aspire to the caste of "officers and gentlemen," but certain influences and standards handed down from one generation of ships and sailors to another had begun subtly to mold their characters. They were sound stuff to begin with. Wholesome instincts and the training of old-fashioned homes aided them in charting the right course.

They had called Joe Piper a dirty thief when merely suspecting him of having stolen the silk shawl. In finding and hiding Rusty Hackmeyer's Neptune certificate were they not also guilty of theft and of disloyalty to a shipmate? Were they justified in withholding the document until after the initiation and then returning it to him? This had been their intention.

"That wouldn't be actually swiping it from him," argued the Kid. "All we do is forget to give it back, with all this excitement and everything."

"That sounds reasonable. You can't pick flaws in the theory of it, understand," said Chadwick, "but somehow it don't quite get over. It kept me awake last night. It's awful funny how something inside you makes a fellow feel as if he had swallowed a cockle burr. Not indigestion, though we did have commissary stew for supper. You get me, Kid."

"I get you, Chub," soberly agreed the other. "You win. When in doubt, play 'em safe. Rusty gets his certificate back right away, before the party begins. But we certainly did make the old lummox sweat blood for a couple of days. It's a wonder his hair hasn't turned white."

Afraid of repenting of virtue so heroic they rushed off to find the woebegone Hackmeyer. He was awaiting the ordeal, stripped to a pair of ragged overalls. His expansive visage wore the look of a man who had made his will and kissed the world good-by. When the familiar sheet of parchment paper was poked under his nose, he stared incredulously. The tableau suggested the well-known reprieve from the gallows.

"My God, Kid, it ain't really so, is it?" he faltered huskily. "Where did you find it?"

"Where you lost it, you big stiff," was the ungracious answer. "I hate to let you have it, but—well, here it is. Come on, Chub—he is going to burst into tears or something."

"Hey, hold on," shouted Rusty, coming out of his trance. "Maybe you don't know it, but you're heapin' coals of fire on a water tender's head."

"Gee, I wish I could," retorted William Sprague for whom a clear conscience was no reward. "It's a sin to let you off this way. Coals of fire? In an oil-burning cruiser? How do you get that way?"

"Forced into it. Caught in a jam. Can't help myself," seriously answered Rusty Hackmeyer. "My hands are up. You boys are treatin' me mighty white. Wait here till I go get your shawl, Kid."

"My shawl?" the dumfounded William echoed. "How come?"

"A joke." Rusty was greatly embarrassed. "A bum joke. It blew up on me and I lost my nerve."

"Huh, I wish I hadn't been so mushy about your old Neptune certificate. You deserved to be murdered, and I hope you get it. Did you listen to him, Chub? He swiped my shawl as a joke!"

"Lay off him, Kid. We tried to be good, and look at the comeback! The man we do the kind deed to turns out to be the gazabo that took the shawl and stirred up seven kinds of trouble. Never mind. We win both ways, come to figure it out. You get the shawl back and this fat tramp is so full of gratitude and emotions that he will let us off easy in the Neptune party."

Instead of a crew of trim, disciplined bluejackets, the *Toledo* swarmed with ruffianly pirates in baggy knee breeches, their heads bound with gay kerchiefs, cutlasses stuck through their sashes; with naked African cannibals in breechcloths whose bodies glistened with black lead; with tarry, pigtailed seamen of the days of wooden walls and crashing broadsides, ferocious Zulu chiefs in short skirts made of oakum, Neptune's courtiers brawny and tattooed; with other wild visitors to make a landlubber feel like hiding in the double bottom.

Abaft the funnels was the huge canvas tank filled with sea water to a depth of several feet. Built against one end of it loomed the raised platform and the hinged

chair, ready to tilt backward, of the Royal Barber. Beyond the tank a great iron pot was suspended from a tripod of spars. From its depths steam rolled in clouds. Around it capered the African cannibals, brandishing spears and battle-axes, and yelling for juicy victims to boil to a turn.

Although the cruiser's deck looked like a blend of a riot and a nightmare, the navy had organized itself, as usual, to proceed in swift, methodical fashion. As master of ceremonies, His Majesty, King Neptune, had a large and efficient corps of assistants. He himself was a figure to command respectful obedience, this venerable tyrant with his crown and his trident who had received the homage of all honest mariners from time immemorial.

The despised landlubbers, herding together because misery loved company, were yanked to the platform one by one. A list of their crimes and misdemeanors was proclaimed by Davy Jones. First to be initiated was none other than the executive officer, the second in command, whose word was law on any other day than this. King Neptune played no favorites in his watery realm. The barber joyfully daubed the executive's face with a villainous compound of tar and grease. The gigantic razor scraped it off and took some skin along. The Royal Surgeon stood by with his two-foot squirt gun. The victim's jaws were pried open. Swish, he got a bitter dose artfully mixed by a pharmacist's mate, consisting of quinine, aloes, kerosene, and salt water.

The chair tipped. The sorrowful executive officer fell backward, heels over head. Down he flipped into the tank, and his bald spot gleamed grandly in the sun. Half a dozen warrant and chief petty officers grabbed and shoved him to the bottom. When he came up, he was doused again. Gasping, gurgling, he was tossed out to fall into the clutches of the waiting cannibals who rammed him into the steaming pot. The captain of the *Toledo* looked on and chuckled in the most heartless manner. He thanked his stars that his Neptune certificate had been duly recorded by the yeoman.

Other officers, seniors and juniors, were remorselessly hustled through this barbaric program, and then came the gobs in batches. Among them were Kid Sprague and Chub Chadwick. When they emerged, their mothers would have wept over them. Their souls were at peace, however, and there was a certain thrill in realizing that they were enrolled in the stalwart fraternity of trusty shellbacks. Now they could look on and see Rusty Hackmeyer raging to and fro like a whale among the minnows. He was in his element, now wallowing in the tank to shove some poor devil's head under until he gurgled for mercy, again wielding a barrel stave with all the strength of his big right arm.

His was the zest of the jocular bully enjoying a rampageous holiday. His own narrow escape from this maritime purgatory gave it a richer flavor.

As wise as he was powerful, nothing was hidden from King Neptune. He even knew the secrets that the fishes told each other when they waved their fins like semaphores. It had been revealed to him how Seaman William Sprague and his buddy Chub Chadwick had played the manly part in restoring to Rusty Hackmeyer his lost certificate. It was such a deed as warmed the cockles of the briny monarch's heart. All true and proper sailormen should aspire to such a sense of honor as this. Furthermore, it became known to his majesty that in concealing the silk shawl and lacking courage to confess it, thereby causing grave misunderstandings and unhappiness, the wretched Hackmeyer had played a scurvy part.

Father Neptune made his own laws and executed them, for there was none to dispute his sway. In the midst of the ceremonies he beckoned Davy Jones aside for a private conference. The Royal Scribe nodded cordial agreement and looked immensely pleased. Into the crowd he sent two of his lustiest aids, a boatswain's mate and a quartermaster. They pounced upon the offending Hackmeyer and dragged him as far as the platform by main strength. There other willing shellbacks hoisted him to the presence of the Ruler of the Raging Main.

Some new stunt for him to pull off, thought Rusty. This his broad smile conveyed. They knew how to pick a live one. Presently, however, the curious silence made him a trifle uneasy. He gazed about him. The grotesque mob was crowding around the platform. Some inkling had winged its way along the deck. Sternly King Neptune confronted his two-hundred-and-thirty-

pound subject. Sonorously the royal voice rang out:

"Hackmeyer, harken to his majesty's mandate. Wipe that silly grin off your mug. You have been guilty of gross carelessness and disrespect to our sovereign authority. You lost your certificate. It was an act of the most scandalous negligence. It sets a rotten example to the young goofs who have invaded my realm for the first time. Any sailor thick enough to lose his certificate is liable to mislay a bass drum or a six-inch gun. Such a bust as this deserves a special sentence. The third degree of this ancient order will therefore be administered to you as a warning to mend your conduct. Go to it, boys, and carry out the decree. Make him remember his majesty's visit aboard the U. S. S. *Toledo.*"

The shellbacks yelped with delight. It was an ominous uproar for Rusty Hackmeyer, whose jaw dropped and hung on a dead center.

"Shove into it quick, Kid," implored Chub Chadwick. "We belong down in front. All hands will be fightin' for a crack at him."

"I'll say we will," exclaimed the Kid, as he grabbed a wooden paddle. They did not have to struggle for position. The others made way for them. It was recognized that these two lads had a certain claim to preference. They waited impatiently while Rusty was stripped to the waist and decorated with specially elaborate patterns of tar. The Royal Surgeon loaded the squirt gun with a double dose. Rusty wailed when he received this dreadful shot in the face.

When he pitched into the tank, Kid Sprague clutched him by the neck. Chadwick climbed upon his back. He went down and came up to spout. Then he vanished, again and again. He was a seagoing submarine. He broke all records for diving in a tank. When fished out, he was popeyed and water-logged. Even his curses were drowned.

Alas, he was too big to be jammed into the cannibal pot and prodded with spears. King Neptune bellowed a command. His courtiers dragged forward a heavy wooden frame. It was a set of stocks such as the Puritan magistrates had been fond of using.

Tremendous cheers from the pirates, cannibals, and Zulus! They rushed Rusty Hackmeyer to the stocks. His head was thrust through a round hole sawed out of two planks. His hands were locked fast in two smaller holes. He was helplessly anchored. His overalls were wet and very tight. The target was broad. The smack of barrel staves and paddles sounded like a machine gun. The blast of Rusty's language cracked glasses and made the china dance in the wardroom pantry, so a Filipino mess boy reported later.

The commissary steward came sauntering up with a basket of eggs. It was an inspiration. He refused to say how long they had been kept in the cold-storage room. Quite casually he set the basket down close to Kid Sprague who, at times, was a bright young gob. Nobody had to tell him what ought to be done with those ripened eggs. He knew precisely. Rusty Hackmeyer had brought sad moments into his life. Many other youthful seamen felt the same way. They clamored for those eggs of doubtful value.

It was point-blank range. No need to set sights for elevation or deflection. Daily gunnery drills were now to show results. Kid Sprague fired the first egg. The explosion indicated that he had the eye of a good gun pointer. Chadwick sung out:

"Reload! I'll spot the splash for you, Kid. Oh, what a shot! Plumb in the center. Fuse timed exactly right."

"Thanks for them kind words, Chub. Help yourself. I don't mean to be selfish. By golly, we ought to fly the silk shawl for a battle flag."

King Neptune stalked down from his throne on the platform and requested the pleasure of firing a few charges. After one sighting shot he scored a bull's-eye.

"Steam into line by divisions, boys, and let him have a few salvos," was the royal command.

Never had target practice been hailed with so much enthusiasm. The gunnery officer looked on and said nothing about limiting the ammunition allowance on the score of expense. He was lost in admiration. He had never dreamed that his green gun crews could shoot as accurately as this. Fast in the stocks, Rusty Hackmeyer looked more like an omelette every minute. His soul was full of anguish and his hair was full of eggshells. He had ceased to utter reverberating lamentations. He had often heard it said that the wise guy keeps his mouth shut. The adage fitted his case.

Released, at length, when the eggs were

expended, he was seen to vanish below. The revelry had ceased to interest him in the slightest degree. It was late in the afternoon before King Neptune and his retinue bade the ship farewell. The sinister Jolly Roger fluttered down from the masthead. As if by magic the decks were cleaned and the taut, immaculate routine of the navy resumed. The captain made an informal round of inspection. He felt pleased with what he observed. The crew seemed better shaken together. The spirit was more cheerful and willing. The boyish recruits carried themselves with a touch of swagger. Sentiment and tradition, mused the captain of the scout cruiser. They are essential and imperishable. Even a modern man-of-war, complex machine that it is, cannot be tuned to the highest efficiency without them.

After sunset, Rusty Hackmeyer appeared on deck for a stroll. He was in fresh white clothes. Removed were all traces of the frightful outrage to which he had been subjected. Likewise he bore no grudges. His countenance was genial, his manner bland. Amiably he accosted William Sprague and smote him over the head with a friendly paw.

"Say, Kid, I'll have to hand it to you. Whew! I wish those eggs had been just a mite fresher. We must have took 'em aboard way back at Port Said or some place."

"No hard feeling, Rusty?"

"What for? The joke was on me. And it was too good to stay sore about. You played square with me, Kid, and then you got a chance to rub it in. We quit even."

"Glad you feel that way about it," said William, to whom this was the end of a perfect day.

"It eases me a lot to get that silk shawl off my chest," confessed Rusty. He laughed and went on to say, "Yes, Kid, the joke was on me, and those sundowners surely did smear it on. It was good. I'm through. Finished. Cured. The quiet life from now on, understand? What was done to me to-day will last this cruise out. The prize boob in a ship like this is one of these practical jokers. Here is one fat water tender that knows when he has got enough. And you can put that on the loud speaker, Kid."

Mr. Paine will have another Navy story in the next issue.

ALL EXPENSES PAID

IN all the wide reaches of this free and laughing republic there has been found only one man who had all the expenses of his political career paid in full before he began it. He is F. Trubee Davison, son of the late Henry P. Davison of J. P. Morgan & Co. In his will the elder Davison set aside a handful of millions of dollars as a trust fund to enable his son to go into politics, if he so desired, knowing that, thus provided for, he would have to make promises to nobody in order to assemble a "war chest" for his speaking tours and other campaign expenses. Young Davison immediately got busy on his endowed career, and has already served several terms in the New York legislature.

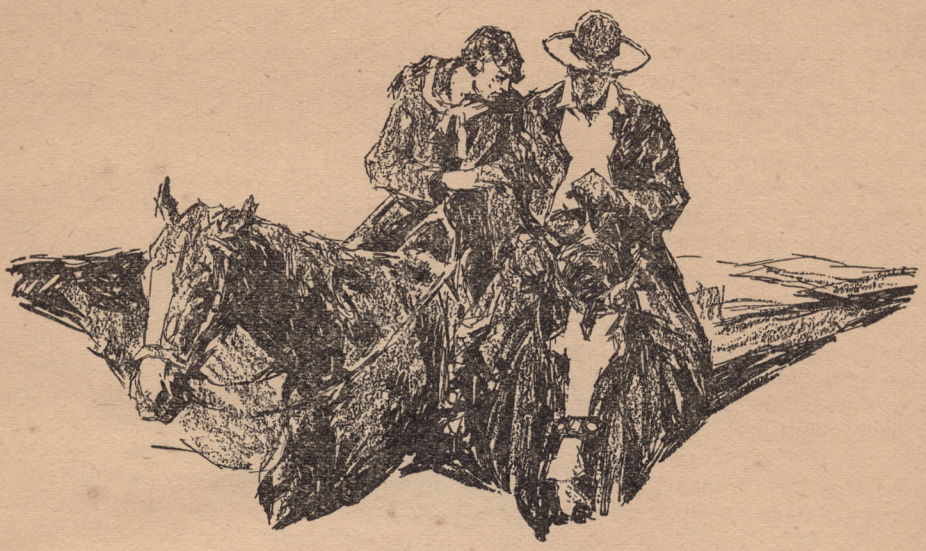
This is reminiscent of the following statement which the late Franklin K. Lane, member of Woodrow Wilson's cabinet, frequently made with all the emphasis of which he was capable: "The young man who wants to go into politics should first go into business and lay up for himself a competence. Unless he does that, he will find himself hampered at every turn in his desire to win battles for the people and the right. A poor man in politics carries many and heavy burdens."

A GUARANTEED REMEDY

MR. HOOVER, the secretary of commerce, who hates affectation of every kind, was in a group at the Metropolitan Club one evening when the talk turned on snobs and snobbery.

"There ought to be a cure for affectation," one of the crowd remarked.

"The only sure cure for it that I know of," declared Mr. Hoover, "is seasickness."



The Man with the Brown Eyes

By Laurie York Erskine

A story of Western adventure that we warrant will produce insomnia no matter what time of night you settle down to read it. It is a hard-riding, fast-shooting, blood-stirring tale of villainy and retribution. We have not often met a ruffian as dangerous and despicable as Harvey Kirk, or a servant of the law as worthy of cordial admiration as Sheriff Jim Curran.—THE EDITOR.

(A Novelette.)

CHAPTER I.

CURRAN RIDES ALONE.

THE posse halted in the foothills of the Santa Cruz range and took council. Jim Curran, slim, dark, with an aspect of youth which took full eight years away from the thirty which was his age, was all for following hot and fast upon the trail of the men they hunted; and inasmuch as Jim Curran was sheriff, his word carried weight. But the weight of his word could not alter the fact that the men of his posse were at the end of their tether. As eager as he, as durable, and of as resolute a mold, they hung back from a continuance of the chase.

"We've got to press them, boys!" Jim Curran insisted. "Press 'em till their horses drop, and they're hotfootin' it over the range. We got to press 'em or we'll lose 'em!"

"If we take after them to-night, Jim, it's us will be afoot," pointed out "Bud" Kendall.

"Look at Pinto, here. He's done, and Tad's roan likewise," protested another. "If we push into them hills to-night the hawses will be done by mornin'. We got to rest the hawses, Jim."

And Jim Curran knew that the man spoke the truth.

They had pressed hard upon the trail of the notorious Kirk brothers for two days and nights now, and the outlaws, with a six-teen-hour start had eluded them. Because they had stuck up the bank at Pima and slain two men, Jim Curran wanted the two Kirk brothers badly; because they had continued in their death-dealing, lawless career

while the homes and hearths of the border cried for the defense of every able-bodied man against the depredations of border bandits, Jim Curran and his posse were determined to get James and Harvey Kirk and rid the country of them forever. Yet here they were hot upon a trail which proved conclusively that the outlaws had taken to the mountains, and their own horses were unequal to the task of pressing the hunt farther without rest. Only the slight young sheriff on his beautiful dun mare was in a position to continue. Curran's light weight and the mare's thorough breeding combined to leave the sheriff's mount, after that grueling chase, in better condition than the others.

"All right, boys," said Curran. "Make camp and follow along my trail in the morning."

"Shucks, Jim. Yo' ain't goin' to ride on alone."

"That's whatever."

"No good. They'll peel the hide right orfen you."

"Don't you worry. It's just that I'll keep pressin' 'em on. My mare will stand it. You boys will rest up yore hawses, an' follow me first orf in the mornin'."

He made them see the wisdom of this course after some argument, and they assented. There wasn't a man among them who did not itch to pass lead with the Kirk brothers. The country must be rid of those two vermin, and they saw the advantage which Jim Curran's tireless pursuit would give them.

"All right, Jim. Only just don't get too adjacent to them serpents. We're all packin' a gun for them Kirks."

"I'll save 'em for you. So long."

"So long, Jim. Be careful."

That's how they took leave of him. Coolly, even humorously, and yet every man knew the grim menace that lay behind Sheriff Jim Curran's mission. They well knew that if he but overtook the outlaws unexpectedly, if he but ran into their camp fire at the turn of the trail, they would never see Jim Curran again. And they saw his tireless little mare trot forward bound into the hills, aiming for the distant mountains which were veiled in the purple tints of afterglow. They saw him go, and they wished him well. Then they set to massaging the limbs of their animals. There would be hard riding in the morning.

CHAPTER II.

"GOOD-BY, JIM!"

AS they took the trail on the following morning the nine men on the nine tired horses felt doubly the need for haste. It was an uphill trail leading into a range of rugged hills which gained the description of mountains rather from the massive, brilliantly colored rocks which formed them than from their height. The men pressed forward toward those gorgeous but uninviting barriers with a new urgency inspired by the thought held in the breast of every man that the relentless hunt for the outlaws was secondary to the imperative need of catching up with Curran before he overtook the quarry. They did not speak of these thoughts, however, for such considerations were bound up with sentiment and with a dark foreboding that a brave and splendid man—one of the best in the country—was in the shadow of death. They spoke rather of the objects of their hunt.

There were men among them who had never seen the Kirk brothers, and these had to be enlightened.

"You can't miss 'em," it was pointed out to them. "Harvey, he's a overgrown sort of cuss with snake blood, and eyes like a coyote. Suits him, too. He wears a black beard that makes him feel like he's a man, an' he's reported as ridin' a black bronc with a white forehead mark." Those were the principal features to be derived from the varied and profane descriptions furnished of the older Kirk. "The other, his name's James. You can't hardly call him Jim, because him and men like Jim Curran don't belong in the same world together. He's a little, sawed-orf cuss with brown eyes. They say he's got great ways with women, which ain't exactly complimentary to women. He rides a strawberry roan. Shoot anybody that looks like either of them descriptions on sight. We can check up after."

Bud Kendall, who was one of those seeking information, and more or less new to the country, wanted to know more.

"How come they got away so long, if all you people round the range despise them such a heap?" he asked.

At this his informer turned bitter.

"Son, you're talkin'! How come, is right. If we push onto their heels close enough you'll prob'ly find they'll get into the

Huachucas, an' from there they'll turn into Cochise an' make for the border. There's a heap of skunks over in Cochise County that have been givin' them coyotes shelter. 'Sandy Sam' Barlow, he's sheriff over Cochise, he's lookin' them up. But every time we get after them, that's the trail they take, an' they make the border through Tecos Four Corners, which is part Mex an' part United States. We'll get 'em in these mountains or we'll lose 'em. That's whatever!"

They had by now reached a height from which they could see the mountains clearly before them. Apparently the range offered few eminences as lofty as the peak over which their trail now twisted, and they at once saw the wisdom of Jim Curran in desiring to press the hunt forward. For the fugitives, following this mountain trail, could not turn away from it. On either side the rugged, colorful rock threw up its wall or dropped away in cascades of shattered slide. If they could overtake their men before they left the mountains they would not fail to capture them. Seeing this they pressed their tired but gallant little horses onward.

From this peak they could see the trail descend into a rough and broken pathway which fell to rocky and brush-filled depths. Beyond, it rose again to a high table-land obscured by chaparral. A rocky ledge skirted the edge of that table-land, and fell away on one side in a precipice—a sheer drop of two or three hundred feet. On the other side of the ledge grew the chaparral, which seemed to cover a gentle hillside that dropped into a valley which widened at its base into foothills. A break in the mountain range.

"Fifty blue chips they make a break for the open through them woods," wagered Bud Kendall.

"If they got sense they did," mourned another.

"We got to look for signs," wisely remarked "Doc" Ridley. "An' look for Jim Curran's signs, too."

"What's that?" cried Bud. "It's them!"

From the chaparral of the distant table-land two horsemen had darted forth. One a great hulking figure upon a jet-black horse. The other a slighter form upon a dun mount which even from that distance was easily recognizable as Jim Curran's beautiful mare. Bud Kendall drew up his rifle.

"Guess I can reach 'em," he said.

Ridley grabbed his arm.

"Don't!" he yelled. "That's Jim Curran, on the dun!"

Bud dropped his rifle, and the nine riders stood there, gazing upon distant drama which in the clear air seemed so close. It appeared as though the black horseman was fleeing, and the smaller rider striving to overtake him. For a moment they rode madly up the ledge, until they seemed upon the very rim of it, dizzily fringing the fearful drop at their horses' feet. The dun mare was outside, nearest the precipice. Then another rider appeared behind them. A slight man, on a red-colored roan. He seemed intent on overtaking the others, and spurred forward in their wake. Just as Ridley was about to give the word to ride hell for leather; to strive with everything their horses had to interrupt the certain tragedy being staged before their eyes, they saw a puff of smoke leap from the roan rider's gun. The black horseman and the man on the dun were pulled up at that, and they saw the rider of the dun mare wheel, bringing his mount upstanding on her hind legs. Upstanding on the edge of the precipice. Tense with horror the posse saw the little man transfixed in that awful position, saw him fire at the rider of the roan. And the answering fire came back while the dun mare was still prancing, striving for balance with her forefeet in the air. Wisely, viciously, the man on the roan had shot at the rearing horse.

"Oh, God!" gasped Bud Kendall; and horror-stricken, they saw the dun mare go down. With her rider, she crumpled to the earth, seemed to hang for a moment in a heap at the edge of the drop, and then go down, down, in sickening, overturning fall, to the merciless rocks below.

"Good-by, Jim!" muttered Doc Ridley.

They saw the black rider vanish then, into the chaparral, with the man on the roan hard behind him. Then, as one man, the posse thundered forward. They had more than a duty to do now. More than a countryside to rid of a deadly scourge. They had Jim Curran, a beloved friend, to avenge and to vindicate. But their spirit, their grim and terrible resolution came to nothing. Arriving at the scene of the tragedy they sought in vain for the track of the fugitives. Beat the chaparral in vain for hot and weary hours. And in the end

they found that their horses were spent and the trail hopelessly lost. Doc Ridley ground his jaws together in an excess of wrath and determination.

"We'll get 'em, boys!" he cried. "We'll get 'em! By God, if we comb all Cochise County, and have to ride into Mexico, we'll get 'em!"

"An' we don't stop ridin' 'til then," assented Bud Kendall, quietly.

CHAPTER III.

THE TROOPS MARCH BY.

SANDY SAM BARLOW stood at the gatepost before his ranch house and watched the troops march by. They passed, dusty and the color of dust, in squads, companies and battalions on their way to the border. The monotonous scuffle of feet and jingle of accounterment took on a singular and alien sound in the dry spring air, and they moved like an army of ants, brown and dingy in their long line. Then came cavalry, moving in a cloud of dust; and wagons, and more cavalry; and wagons. The troops seemed to Sandy Sam Barlow like a strange and alien monster, moving in a long form across the yellow green of his native cattle pastures.

"Queer," muttered Sam, who was not in the least impressed by that soldierly array. "Darned funny how men will go and join the army, an' things like that."

He stood at his gatepost and watched the last horseman vanish into the dust left by the passing soldiery, and stood longer, to dwell upon the peculiar circumstances that should bring such strange pilgrims to the range. It had taken a raid of death-dealing banditry from across the border, and a trail of blackened ruins, and pitiful bodies among which the forms of children were not missing, to bring this visitation. While Sam was inclined to resent the invasion of the khaki-clad hosts, on the whole he sensed a certain security with their coming. With Pancho Villa running wild along the border it was comforting to a widower with a cherished daughter to know that the line was guarded. He only hoped that the guard itself might not constitute a menace to his daughter's growing years. Thus his thoughts moved from the military to the dangers of the Mexican border, and back to the military again. He left his gatepost and turned to the house.

"'Bub!'" he called. "Oh, Bub!" But no voice answered him. And the object of his summons was nowhere to be seen.

Barbara Barlow, whom her father thus addressed, had been watching the passing troops from her own point of vantage. That was a seat on the roof of a dormer window of the barn, where she sat with her feet hanging over. She sat there like a boy, and watched the long line move by with all a boy's interest in a military pageant. Barbara Barlow was seventeen years old. She had the slim figure of a boy; a boy's straight, blue-eyed glance; a boy's sturdy blue overalls, and the brown healthy complexion of a sunburned boy. Only her black tresses betrayed her girlhood as she sat there on the roof of the barn. Certainly her actions did not.

As the troops scuffled and rumbled and jingled by she had poked her brown hand into one overall pocket and drawn from it a new and shiny corncob pipe. From another pocket she drew a little cotton bag of tobacco, and a fistful of matches. The matches she held between her red lips, and with a thoughtful frown set about the important task of loading the pipe. This she achieved by taking a pinch of tobacco from the bag and thrusting it into the bowl, where she packed it down with a forefinger. Then another pinch, packed down upon the previous one, and after that, another and another, till the pipe was full. She then thrust the tobacco bag into her pocket, and taking the matches from her lips, placed the pipestem in their place. She firmly clenched the pipestem with strong white teeth, and then began the infinitely tricky task of lighting it. The first match went out immediately she struck it, so she daintily wet the heated end of it with the tip of her tongue, and cast it into space. The second match she endeavored to nurse with the palms of her hands as she had seen her father do, but she scorched herself, and ejaculated a naughty word. The third match did the trick. Not perfectly, to be sure, but it gave the tight-packed tobacco an uneven glow which permitted her to draw a whiff of smoke through her closely puckered lips. It choked her. But she tried again. It choked her again. By this time the column had passed.

"Bub! Oh, Bub!" It was her father's voice.

"Shucks!" she murmured regretfully.

"Might have known some one would bobble the round-up."

"Barbara!" It was a bad sign when Sam called her like that.

"All right, dad," she chirped into the empty air; and she took a mighty farewell puff at the pipe.

She got a full-sized whiff of it that time, and it ended her experiment forever. Gasping, and with a fearful consciousness of her interior, she flung the pipe from her. For a moment then, she felt that she was going to faint and topple off the barn roof; and she didn't care whether she did or not. But it was only one whiff, and her head soon cleared enough to let her arise and climb to the top of the barn roof. Here she stood like a statue of Diana, and waved her arms.

"Here, dad!" she cried. "I'm up here!" And the lissome swing of her young body as she teetered along the ridgepole, silhouetted against the clear blue sky, proved that she was a woman indeed.

"Where?" yelled Sam, looking skyward, but in the wrong direction.

"Here, on the barn roof! Haven't gone to heaven yet!" she cried, laughing.

"My good glory!" exclaimed her astounded parent. "Come down orf of that!" So she entered the barn through the dormer window and slid to the earth down a convenient post.

She approached him across the expanse of yellow grass which was Sandy Sam's front yard.

"Good thing we don't live in Canada," he remarked. "Or you'd shin up the north pole. I'll have to send you away yet, to get finished, like Pete Hardy sent his two girls."

She laughed at him.

"Then who'd do the dishes and get your meals when Artesia has the lumbago?" she asked.

"That's what I was bawlin' for," he said. "If Artesia stays over to the Four Corners for another week, I reckon we'll have to get a new cook to keep house."

She frowned up at him.

"Don't you like the way I do it?" she asked.

"Sure. But you need help. Besides which I do hunger for some of them biscuits."

"I'll try 'em again. I think I put in too much lard."

"Or buckshot."

She passed him with her head indignantly in the air.

"All right," she said. "We'll have pie for dinner, and you'll have to eat it, every last bite." She strode through the house to the kitchen.

Sandy Sam stood on his porch and chuckled. After the spring round-up he had dismissed his hands to dissipate their pay in a semiannual celebration, and in the unexpected absence of Artesia, the dusky housekeeper, he was enjoying these days alone with his cherished little daughter more than his sentimental soul would admit. The sheriff of a border county has many affairs to worry him, not the least of which is an ever-recurring doubt lest his home and loved ones be suddenly deprived of his protection. Sam Barlow was the best sheriff Cochise County had had for some years, and the energy which gave him that efficiency had brought him close to death before the guns of the lawless more times than he cared to dwell upon. With the newly arrived troops to maintain peace in his county he felt that he could enjoy these few days of quietude with his girl child in serenity and domestic peace. It was a happy reprieve for him from the tense and dangerous duties of his office.

Barbara came forth from the house and passed him as he lounged on his porch.

"Where you goin'?" he asked her.

"I'm going to take Petie for a little run," she answered. "Come along."

He grinned his regret.

"Not this morning," he said. "There's work to do around the place."

She approached his chair, and kissed him.

"Hard-workin'est daddy on the range," she said.

He took her firm young arm in his hand.

"You be careful, while you're ridin'," he warned her. "There's them soldiers around, and there's folks follow soldiers that ain't good people."

"I will," she said.

"And don't go making new friends, without you know who they are."

"Why, daddy!" she exclaimed. "How you talk. You know I don't go making up to strangers!"

"Not even if they got nice brown eyes?" He laughed, taunting her.

"No, not even then," she said; and with a great simulation of offended dignity she whisked away from him and made for the

barns. He waved to her as she rode away on her piebald pony, and galloped up the yellow trail toward the gully.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN WITH THE BROWN EYES.

SANDY SAM'S taunting remark anent the nice brown eyes had not been idle whimsy. Sandy Sam was practical to a fault, and behind the teasing smile with which he saw Barbara depart he had in mind a very definite purpose in recalling with that remark an incident which at the time it had occurred, caused him vast uneasiness. It is not easy for a rough-riding, hard-working man of the open range to bring up such a delicate and amazingly beautiful thing as a wholesome girl.

So when Barbara had come to him on a certain evening of the previous autumn and told him of how she had met the young man with the nice brown eyes, and had enlarged upon what a fine and engaging young man it had been, he had become instantly alert, as a shepherd dog becomes alert at the approach of a strange animal to the flock.

It seemed that on that autumn afternoon Barbara had ridden over to Bainsville, the local metropolis; and for her mount she had taken Back Fire. Back Fire had gained his name from a trick which had placed one of Sam Barlow's hands in hospital for seven weeks, and made Sam lame for a month. Back Fire kicked like a mule. Moreover, Back Fire was blind in the left eye, which caused him to shy at any sound from the left, and veer from every sudden sight to the right. These attributes, combined to give Back Fire a propensity to bolt without warning, and kick his rider when he was down. Barbara had been warned not to ride Back Fire, and that is why she chose him for her mount when she set out for Bainsville.

As it happened all had gone well until she reached that point on the trail where it cuts closely about a tall butte. Without Barbara knowing it the young man with nice brown eyes was riding toward her on the other side of that butte, and she wellnigh rode into him, as she made the turning. But Back Fire did not know it, either, and when his one good eye caught sudden sight of the unexpected rider bearing down upon him, he immediately conceived it to be some carnivorous monster whose principle diet was horseflesh, veered, rearing, to the left, and bolted like a shot for the distant horizon. It meant nothing to Back Fire that a dense growth of chaparral obscured that horizon. He ignored the chaparral, and with his youthful rider sawing at the reins, he made straight for it, at a breakneck gallop.

The young man with nice brown eyes was considerably startled. He had turned about that butte at an easy lope. Suddenly he had seen the approaching rider, and easily veered to the right to let her pass. To his amazement he saw the girl's horse veer and bolt, and then, with a quick adjustment of his faculties, he took after her.

She disappeared into the chaparral a full fifty rods ahead of him, and nothing daunted he plunged in after her. There was a dim trail through the chaparral which he presumed the bolting horse would follow, but he felt a certain doubt, and knew that if Back Fire had gone as mad as a bolting horse will often do, the chances were that he would find the crazed animal wrapped about a tree with his neck broken, and the girl, limp, underneath him. Hoping for the best he scurried on. He lost the trail, and found another. Prancing, swerving, lashing his way through the dense growth, holding in a pony maddened by the pain of whipping branches, and tearing thorns lashed himself about the face and body by the tenuous scourges of the woods, he pressed his way through, hardly abating the speed of his animal. Finally he came forth upon the open country beyond the chaparral, but no fleeing rider was in sight.

With a sinking heart he decided that the girl must indeed be fallen in the forest growth, and he must retrace his way to the spot where she had entered the chaparral. This he did. Arriving once more, and painfully, at the place where Back Fire had plunged into the woods, he began to examine the ground for signs of the horse's flight. Then a cry reached him. The full-throated cry of a girl who was accustomed to horses and bent on making the animal she rode break its maddened pace.

"Come down, you ole dynamite!"

And whirling his pony about the young man with nice brown eyes saw the girl dashing for the chaparral once more from precisely the same direction as she had first approached it. He saw at once that unable

to stop her horse's bolt, she had kept him to a circle. She had ridden him through the chaparral obliquely, swung about it, and was now coming around on the second lap. He immediately made toward her, swung his pony as she swept down upon him, and since that wise little animal knew exactly what was required of him, came about in step beside her. He then seized her bridle, brought it to his knee, and giving Back Fire the weight of his own pony to pull along, soon brought that ardent idiot among horses to a halt.

"That's a good horse you got," he remarked. "I've never seen a trip round the world done in better time."

"He's a fool," she answered. And looking into the face of her rescuer she saw that he possessed the nicest brown eyes she had ever seen.

"Thank you," she said, and she smiled so brilliantly upon him that for a moment he was speechless.

"There isn't any reason for you to thank me," he finally said. "It was me made him run away like that. I'm real sorry."

"I'm not," she laughed. "I'm glad."

"You wouldn't have been if you'd hit a few of them trees."

But she was thinking that this man was different from the men of the range who had been her companions since childhood. He had a brightness about him, a certain vitality which singled him out among the lazy, amiable cattlemen of the country. This was the sort of man, she guessed, who could do things.

"Where are you from?" she asked him, with frank curiosity.

"Over Santa Cruz way. I just came over into Cochise County on—on business."

"My name's Barbara," she said. "Barbara Barlow. My dad's sheriff."

"I'm shore glad to know you, miss."

"You must ride home with me, and meet dad. He'll want to thank you."

"Not now." He seemed hesitant. "I got business that's sort of on the quiet. I know your dad, though, an' some time I'll come over."

"You haven't told me your name," she pointed out.

He hesitated again.

"Jim," he said. "That's all. Tell your dad I'll come over some time."

"I knew you'd want to know him." She did not conceal her pleasure.

"I know him already. It isn't that." His brown eyes regarded her with a half smile. "It's you I want to see. I want to see you again." His teeth flashed as he grinned frankly into her eyes.

"I'll look forward to it," she said.

Then they parted, and when she returned that evening she told her father about it. Sandy Sam Barlow was displeased; or rather he felt a cloud of doubt which assailed him every time the world touched this little daughter of his. In this case his doubt, his uneasiness, was much increased by the disquieting fact that the young man with nice brown eyes had withheld his name, and refused to divulge his business. Also, why had he not come home with her? It was not the way of an honest man on the range to act as this young man had acted. He pressed Barbara for a complete description of the man.

"He's—well, slight," she told him. "A slender young fellow with black hair. And he's got the nicest brown eyes I've ever seen. He isn't like most men around this country. He seemed to be so alive, and full of —of force. He shows his teeth when he smiles, and speaks in a soft voice, but it's like electricity to listen to him. His name's Jim."

As she spoke a cold suspicion which had seized her father's heart, congealed into a frightful and unbelievable knowledge. Barbara, his little woman, his girl-child whom he loved far better than life or any of its rewards, had met and achieved a liking for James Kirk, the younger of the outlaw brothers; the one who had a way with women.

"Barbara!" he cried, as her description justified his suspicion. "Barbara!" She was sitting on the arm of her chair, and he placed one arm about her, pressing her to him. "You mustn't!"

"What, dad?" She gazed at him with wide eyes. "What's the matter?"

He controlled himself. Somehow it occurred to his simple mind that she must not know the nature of that filth which her clean young soul had so nearly touched.

"Nothing Barbara. But listen to your daddy. Listen, Barbara, and remember that I'm saying this for a very serious and important reason. You must never see that man again. If he comes here, and I am away—I don't think he'll come if I'm here—send him away. Call the hands if you have

to, but send him away. Do you understand?"

She gazed upon him with troubled eyes, but she sensed with a woman's intuition that she could not reason with her father in this mood.

CHAPTER V.

A SECOND MEETING.

THAT had been in the autumn and now it was the springtime. Yet Barbara had not forgotten. Indeed the very fact of her father's reminder served to bring to her mind as she rode away on Petie, her own piebald pony, that meeting of so many months before. She remembered the young man vividly, his vigorous manner, and the vital spark in the flash of his live brown eyes. She wanted to look into those eyes again. It had occurred to her that she was thus running counter in her thoughts to her father's wishes, but somehow she felt that her friendship with this young man was something different and separate from her relations with her father. It did not occur to her to rebuke herself for this. She even felt that once she could see her friend again, the two men could no doubt be brought together and everything would then be made right.

She had ridden far from her father's ranch house, and was approaching across a rolling and colorful grassland the gully of her childhood's fancy. This was a cleft in a great hill which stood alone with barricades of rock about its brow. The gully opened widely on the rolling grass country, and had a cold stream threading it which fed copses and expanses of vivid green grass which were unknown on the sun-beaten ground outside.

As she approached it now, with that thrill of anticipation which always came to her as she drew near it, she observed with regret that another rider was single-footing toward it. A man on a pony of a color which is usually described along the border as "strawberry roan" was skirting the bottom of the hill, and obviously headed for the refreshing waters of the gully.

As she approached the strange rider, their trails merging, she noticed that there was a peculiarity about the way he sat his saddle. He seemed to be asleep, swaying and rocking with the movement of his pony. And his hands were loosely gathered on his saddle horn, the reins free on the animal's neck. Approaching nearer, she observed that his face was uncannily pale, and there was a dark stain upon his shirt beneath his arm. With quick sympathy she perceived that he was wounded, and apparently very faint. So she gathered her reins and galloped toward him. And then her heart broke into thunderous beating, and her face turned red with the blood that rushed into it, and white, as the blood rushed out. She too, felt faint, and had to pull herself together as she rode up to him. For the man on the strawberry roan was the young man with the brown eyes. Her Jim.

Barbara rode up to him, placing her horse beside his horse, and in that position she guided him into the gully. He did not seem to notice her coming, although his brown eyes opened and looked into hers when she touched his arm. He seemed in a state of coma, and followed her into the gully like a led child.

Barbara was possessed by a tumult of emotions as she accompanied this man into her fairyland. With her wish come true, and he at her side once more, the warning, the admonition of her father came to her, and she felt that what she was doing was unfair and unloyal to him. At the same time the awful fear that the wound which caused her friend to faint in his saddle might be a serious one—even a fatal one—consumed her with the knowledge that if he died she could not face life without him. Barbara had no experience to draw upon in that moment of confusion, and the margin that separated her from womanhood was such a slender one that she hung in the balance between a childish panic and a woman's hysteria. Then the common sense of her father, the wholesome frankness which contributed so much to that boyishness which characterized her, came to her in a flood.

"I'm a fool. Just like a fool woman from the East," she told herself. "He's wounded, and there's only one thing to do. Get him to the water and fix up the wound. The rest of it can wait until after that's tended to."

The strawberry roan at that moment gave evidence of a desire to part company with her. She turned him to her path with a deft touch of the rein. The young man turned to her, gazed into her eyes as though he sought to solve a riddle.

"Where we going?" he muttered. Then,

recognizing her: "Lord, I've got the fan tods. Where's that water?"

"It's all right," she assured him. "We'll get to the water right soon."

She led him to a green bank. A bank so vividly green after the parched yellow of the grasses on the range as to seem like a bank miles removed from the world he frequented. And there were flowers there.

"If you'll just lean over," she directed him, "I'll help you off."

But he was proud.

"I can manage," he boasted.

He blundered with his right leg as though it were a weary weight, but finally managed to get it over his cantle, and with a great effort dropped to the ground. He stood there for a moment, holding to his saddle horn, then he took a step away from his horse's side, while she hovered near him. He tottered to the edge of the bank, and she touched his shoulder with her finger tips, ready to assist him. Feeling her touch, he stood still for a moment and gazed into her eyes.

"You're real good," he muttered as though in a dream. Then his eyes fell to the water, and he started to kneel, seeking its cool stimulus. But his knees caved in beneath him. He muttered a stifled cry, and before she could do more than clutch at his shirt he fell unconscious at her feet.

It was amazing with what a cool and practical touch Barbara attended to him then. She opened the shirt and examined his wounded side without flinching. It was a mere flesh wound in his side under his left arm. It had bled profusely, but his fainting was no doubt largely from exhaustion. She tore a sleeve from his shirt and bathed the wound with the cold spring water. The touch of the water awakened him, but he lay still, watching her without speaking. With the other shirt sleeve she roughly bandaged him, and he waited obediently until she had finished.

"Let me have a drink," he pleaded. And he would have moved to the water's edge himself. But she stopped him, and scooped his hat brimming full of water. He drank it thirstily.

"Now you can rest a while," she said. "And then I'll take you home."

He shook his head.

"No," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I can't go home with you. I'm out on private business." He smiled a tight, grim smile.

"You're afraid of dad?" she asked with widening, fearful eyes.

His grim smile tightened.

"Didn't I say I was comin' home with you? I said I'd call. I'll do it now."

She stared at him, fascinated. She knew the men of the border well. Gun fighting was not a peculiar thing in her world. She knew that for some strange reason men were capable of bitter hatreds, and when men who hated met, the rattle of guns and grim death were to follow. This must not occur between these two men. She shook her head vigorously.

"No!" she cried. "I forgot! You can't come home with me. He'd kill you."

He frowned blackly.

"What are you talkin' of?" he asked.

"My father—daddy. He was mad clean through when I told him about how I met you. He said I must never see you again. I must be careful who I meet."

"Your dad said that?"

"Oh, Jim, don't look that way. I didn't go to hurt you. It's dad. He loves me, see? But I ought not to have done this, I suppose, only you are wounded. I couldn't help helping you when you're wounded, could I?"

"No," he said. "You couldn't."

He sat up.

"It's all right," he said. "I guess I'm not so bad. It wasn't that scratch that did it. I guess I needed a rest, that's all."

She gazed upon him with a troubled frown.

"Does it hurt?" she asked. "You mustn't be too active for a spell."

"Shucks," he answered. "It's just nothing, that's whatever. I'll be all right after I've slept and limbered up some."

Slowly he started to rise, and she came forward to help him. He attained his feet and walked to his horse.

"You're not going to ride?" she protested.

"No. I'll just make camp."

She helped unsaddle the strawberry roan, and otherwise assisted him to make camp.

"I'm sorry about dad," she told him, suddenly. "It isn't right that you should be against him. Come over some time. That's what made him mad, I think. You meeting me and then not coming in to see him. It looked queer."

"Yes, it did. Well, I'll come. Some day,

Barbara, when this business is over, I'll come."

"And you'll rest, now, and don't do too much," she adjured him.

"Just sleep," he answered. "Good-by."

He shook her strong brown hand, and she smiled into his eyes like a boy.

"Good-by, Jim," she said. "I might probably come back, perhaps. You need grub."

He smiled again with his pale, tired face, and shook his head.

"We'll meet again," he assured her. And she rode away, leaving him silent, drawn and grim beside the running water.

"God!" he said, "I must be way off the trail now. Must have slept in the saddle. This girl's country is close by Bainsville. I'll have to get over there." But he said it to himself, and grimly, conscious of the increasing difficulties of travel.

CHAPTER VI.

SAM BARLOW GOES HUNTING.

BARBARA had decided not to say anything to her father of the meeting at the gully, although she did not put this matter out of mind without a troubled sense of the singular guile that had come over her heart. It appalled her to find herself conspiring against her father's wishes. It didn't seem possible that it could be she herself, Barbara Barlow, who thus decided to protect the injured man she had left at the streamside. For she saw clearly that she was doing precisely that. She had no doubt now, that her Jim was wanted by the sheriff—that he was a fugitive from justice—and yet she was deliberately planning to keep his presence hidden. It was a thing she could not understand. A power that ruled her in spite of herself. She satisfied conscience with the argument that whatever the crime he had committed, it could be nothing that was really bad or mean.

When she arrived at the ranch house she immediately detected the presence of a visitor by the presence of the visitor's horse at the fence rail. She herself dismounted, and turning to the house, found the caller on the porch. It was Ben Talmage, from over Bainsville way.

"Hello, Ben!" she cried.

Ben was exactly the same age as Barbara, but being a male, was as a child before her. Also, before her he was vastly confused. Barbara was the grand passion of Ben Talmage's short life.

"Hello," he said, and regarded her, blushing.

"Well?" she questioned him with some asperity. She was in no mood to receive the proffered puppy love of Ben Talmage, argued she. "Well?"

But Ben was speechless. Barbara always had that effect on him. His heart and ardent soul were full of things which in the privacy of his home he frequently prepared to tell her. Things to be whispered into her ear preferably in moonlight. Sentimental things—love. But before her easy and nonchalant acceptance of life he always was speechless. She took life so lightly, he reflected. And then, with magnanimity: well, she was very young.

"Well, what?" he asked.

She flashed an indignant glance at him.

"Well, what do you want?" she explained with acid mockery. "You didn't ride all the way over from Bainsville to ask the time, did you?"

He frowned, suspecting that she was mocking him. You mustn't let them go too far, was one of his mottoes.

"How do you know I came over from Bainsville?" he asked.

"My good heavens, Benjamin!" She pronounced it as though Benjamin were a patriarch to swear by. "You don't mean to say that you came all the way from San Francisco, or Kansas City or somewhere this morning!"

"No, I came from Bainsville."

"And why, may I be so bold as to ask, did you come from Bainsville?"

He saw his opportunity now to have the best of her, and he assumed a tone of lofty superiority to achieve it.

"You wouldn't understand," he said mysteriously.

"Has it got anything to do with your wearing that toy cannon round your waist?" she asked.

He blushed. He had been very conscious of the great .45-caliber revolver which he bore upon his hip. He thought it added manhood to his stature. But the manner in which Barbara referred to it made him feel foolish.

"It has," he said with dignity. "I've come to see your father on business, if you want to know. You'll be lucky if there aren't a lot of men killed about it, too."

"Oh, Benny, tell me! Who you goin' to kill?"

He smiled with pleasure at her excitement.

"It isn't settled," he said. "There's a chase on, and it's pretty dangerous for everybody concerned."

"And you're concerned. Oh, isn't that bully! Can I come, too?"

"No, it isn't for women. It's a man's business, Barbara, and it's pretty dog-goned dangerous. I only wish I knew how we were all goin' to come out of it."

"Who you chasing?" Her face clouded as she remembered the man in the gully.

At this point Ben decided to abandon the note of calm gravity for a brusque and businesslike activity.

"Shucks!" he cried. "I can't stop here passin' words with womenfolks. Got to find yore dad." He made to pass her and run down the steps, but at that instant Sandy Sam Barlow emerged from the house door.

"Well, that's me, Benny," he announced cheerfully. "I'm her dad, all right. What is it?"

"The Kirk brothers, Mr. Barlow. They stuck up the Pima bank and killed two men. Then they killed Sheriff Curran. Doc Ridley's over from Santa Cruz and they want you up at Bainsville right away. We're out to get them if we have to ride to hell!" The boy brought this out with grim earnestness. Forgetful of Barbara's presence, he clapped his hand to his pistol butt and spoke with an exuberance which gave her for the first time in her knowledge of him a hint of his real worth.

Sandy Sam leaped into action. His eyes blazed up at the boy's first words. With the news of Curran's death they narrowed. With the boy's last exclamation he leaped for the house.

"I'll get my guns!" he cried. "Bub, you and Ben get a saddle on Lightnin'. I'll ride with you right off!"

He disappeared and the girl and boy hurried to the barns. They ran Lightnin', the great bay gelding, out into the yard, and the girl adjusted the bridle while Ben slung the saddle across the quivering flanks. Sam Barlow came to them running, strapping his belt as he ran.

"Gimme!" he snapped, and took the girths from the boy's hand to finish the job himself.

"All right, Ben! Come on!"

Ben turned to his pony. Sam Barlow turned to his daughter.

"I've got to leave you alone for a spell, little lady. Take care of the house, and be chary of strangers. Them Kirts is a bad lot. If you see two come down the trail together, shut the door, and grab the rifle; but chances are they'll keep away from here." He paused, looking into her eyes. Then, with sudden decision, he blurted out what was in his mind. "You can't mistake them," he said. "Jim, the younger one is—well he's the twin brother of that man with the brown eyes you met last fall. Good-by."

He took her in his arms to kiss her. To his amazement she began to tremble and burst into tears.

"No, daddy," she cried. "Don't go! Don't go away from me now!"

"Why, Bub!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

She controlled herself, held back her tears, and smiled.

"Just foolishness," she said. "Ben said it was dangerous."

He laughed. "There! That's all right. The gunman ain't made that can get yore daddy!"

"Sure." She smiled. "Good-by." She kissed him, and watched him gallop away with the youthful messenger. As her father disappeared in the dust of the road she knew that she was no longer a girl. No longer Sam Barlow's tomboy child. She was a woman, now; and she had a problem before her which demanded all the womanhood she possessed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN IN THE GULLY.

AFTER her father's departure Barbara's first thought was for the man in the gully. And it was a perverse, wrong thought, it seemed to her. They were hunting for him! Beating the country for him; and men would be killed! Well she knew who were the men they expected to kill. He would be the first to drop. She must warn him! A wrong thought. A perverse thought. To warn him would be a betrayal of her father.

She covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, dear God!" she whispered. "Why should I have met this man? Why do I think of him so? I love him!" She clapped

one hand to her lips at that, appalled at the admission she had made.

Standing there on the porch in her overalls and cotton shirt she seemed so like a small boy as to be pitiful beyond words. A child in the toils. And yet she was a woman brought face to face with life. The cruelty of the reality she had so soon, so abruptly, been called upon to face, had torn her from childhood as the flower is torn from the earth by the eager hands of children.

With a great effort, then, she made use of the new womanhood that had been conjured in her, and controlling her thoughts, she fled from them, taking refuge in housework. She set herself with deliberate resolution to preparing a midday meal. She had only herself to serve, but was amazed at her ability to eat. She found that the tumult of her emotions had not vanquished her appetite, and having set forth food upon the table she consumed it almost unconsciously. During the meal her mind seemed blank, dazed with a complexity of thoughts which rushed together, merged, and became incomprehensible. Suddenly she remembered that she had promised to bring him food.

"I must!" she cried. "He has had nothing. I can't let him die in the gully!"

It occurred to her that she might bring him in to her father's house. She could not be censured for that. But easily as the thought of warning him—betraying her father—had slipped into her mind, the thought of betraying him, and assisting her father was intolerable to her. Yet she must go to him. The more she busied herself about the house the more resolutely she tried to rid herself of every thought of him, so much the more was it borne in upon her mind that she must go to him. She could not help herself. Something more powerful than her will impelled her to it.

"I am in love with him," she admitted to herself miserably. And it was true.

As a criminal yields to temptation, then, Barbara yielded to love. Feeling her helplessness, yet conscious of the enormity of the thing she was about to do, she left her kitchen, and retiring to her room she deliberately cast off the overalls and shirt, to don the garments of womanhood. She would never be a tomboy girl again.

Clad now in a khaki riding habit with parted skirts, and a wide-collared blouse, she made her way to the barns and saddled the piebald pony.

"Oh, Petie!" she murmured, pressing her hot cheek against the little animal's silken throat. "This is an awful thing! This is a terrible thing we're going to do!" But she did not draw back. She led the pony out into the yard, and would have mounted, but down the trail toward the house, a man was riding. It was the man from the gully astride his strawberry roan, and again she saw him rocking wearily in his saddle, in the extreme of physical weakness and exhaustion. She ran to meet him.

"You ought not to have come!" she cried up to him; and his brown eyes smiled down on her from the saddle. He dismounted, wearily, but physically the master of himself. She addressed him severely.

"I thought you were going to stay there in the gully. And I was going to bring you some food."

"Is your dad here?" But he seemed very slightly interested in her answer. He stood there and closed his eyes, as if he were about to fall asleep upon his feet.

"No. He's away." She had an impulse to warn him; to tell him that her father was hunting for him; but she suppressed it. He must surely know his danger, and she could not move against her father any further. She bethought herself of her visitor's condition.

"Oh, you are bad!" she scolded. "Didn't I tell you to lie still until I came? Do you want to start your wound again, and go bleeding all over your nice shirt and all? Come into the house."

"Yes," he said, brightening. "Into the house, and let me sleep. Oh, I am tired."

He strode forward, ignoring her offer to assist him, and walked very steadily to the house. He stumbled a little on the steps leading to the porch, but he guided his heavy feet through the doorway, and sank into the wooden armchair near the window.

"Oh, I am tired. A lot tired," he repeated.

Again she felt impelled to warn him of the danger he incurred by visiting her home, but she restrained herself again. Yet she wanted sorely to be of help to this man. She wanted to mother him; to treat him like a little child.

"You had best rest," she said.

He gazed at her.

"But you don't know," he remarked. With a sudden recollection, he sprang to his feet. "I must see this through!" he cried.

"But you can't, you ole dynamite!" she stepped over to him and pressed him back into the chair again. "Don't you know that you are hurt? That you must rest?"

"Barbara," he said; and he fixed her with his eyes in such a manner that she felt he might have been talking in his sleep, "Barbara, I've come to see you. I laid out there under the tree on the green grass, an' I tried to sleep, Barbara; but it wasn't any manner of use. I'm tired. Done. So tired that it hurt me to lay there on the bare ground. An' my limbs ached, an' I couldn't sleep. I couldn't sleep because I was thinkin' of you, Barbara, an' I know that there are skunks ridin' the country now that could do you harm. An' I said, 'I'll go to Barbara.' I know your ole man don't like me worth flippin' nickels about, but I said, 'I'll go to Barbara, an' be near her so that she can't come to harm.' An' then, I says, 'I'll sleep.' An' here I am." He dropped his chin on his breast and closed his eyes.

"Not here!" she cried. "Not here! Oh, you ought not to have come!"

He spoke again, in the dead voice of utter weariness.

"I'm spent," he said. "When a man's horse is spent, he gives it rest. Then it will be useful to him again. If he don't rest it, it dies. An' man's the same. It's no use my going on. I'm spent. A night's sleep will fix me. If I go on now, I'm out of the runnin'." He arose suddenly, and his eyes shone brightly. "I must see this through!" he cried. Then, more quietly: "But first I must rest. Your dad's away. Over at Bainsville, ain't he?"

She nodded.

"Good! If he's at Bainsville, takin' the trail from there, I can rest."

Suddenly he turned upon her, a thought having possessed his mind.

"Harvey Kirk!" he cried. "He's takin' the Bainsville trail!"

"Yes!" she answered, all excitement. "Harvey Kirk! Oh, Jim, they're out to hang them——"

"Oh, God! Let me sleep!" He cried it out almost with a sob, pressing his hands over his eyes. "Let me sleep! Let me rest! I must soon be ready to see the finish of this!"

"What finish? You will not stay and fight?"

His brown eyes glowed, smoldering like coals.

"If Harvey crosses my trail, it's him or me!" he said, and sank into the chair again. "Show me a bed," he murmured. He did not hear her horrified but stifled cry.

"Your brother!" she had exclaimed. But he did not hear it. He was in the chair, his eyes covered, completely collapsed.

It occurred to her that he must not sleep there. She must conceal him. She thought quickly, seeking a way.

"Come!" she cried, and roughly shook him. He groaned with sheer weariness. "You can't sleep here. You mustn't. I'll show you a place in the bunk house. The hands are away, and you can sleep there, as long as you want."

"The bunk house?"

"Yes, the men are all away."

She tugged at his arm, and he arose. With stumbling feet he followed her to the bunk house, and she piled some blankets on a bunk for him. He fell into them like a tired child, and Barbara left him, to go and conceal his pony behind the bunk house, where he could mount it unperceived from the vantage of the house. When she returned he was fast asleep, his head on his arm, and his pale, drawn face, seemed in the dim light of the bunk house like the face of a sleeping boy. She leaned over him and gazed for a long while upon his face. She was seeking for some clew. Some suggestion of the evil things that had been said of him. In the fine lines of his drawn face she could find nothing to bear those accusations out.

"He can't be bad!" she protested to herself. The serene, sleeping countenance with its finely modeled jaw, its clean-cut mouth, and broad, high forehead, could not be the face of a bad man. She felt sure of it. With seventeen years of experience, she could swear there was no wrong in this man. She gazed upon his face and assured herself of that.

"It's a mistake," she said; and she sat in a broken chair and watched him. When she finally arose, finding her position cramped, the sun had gone, and the afterglow was fading into night. She drew herself up, feeling stiff and sore. She wondered how this day was going to end. If her father should return, or any of the hands, she wondered how successful she would be in warning the weary man, and getting him away from the danger which hung over him at this house. She must stay awake all

night and watch. And yet she was tired. It had been a hard day for her. She decided to go and brew a pot of coffee; strong black coffee which would ward off sleep. She turned to the bunk-house door, and then leaped back to stand petrified beside the sleeping man, and unconsciously stretch out her arms as though to guard him. For, outside, up the wagon road, she had heard a shot.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DARK RIDER.

BARBARA stood only for a moment undecided; then she divined that she must be far from the bunk house, if strangers were to come. Nothing must draw her father or any of his men to the bunk house. In that situation her youth and her boyish agility stood her in good stead. Knowing the danger of emerging from the door, she turned from it, and leaping to the high and narrow window she slid through it like a small boy. Dropping to the earth outside, she slid around the bunk house until she came to the side nearest the porch of her home. The thing to do, she decided, would be to make for the kitchen, seize the rifle there, and sally discreetly forth to investigate that shooting. Barbara was not the girl to be driven to shelter by a gunshot.

Arriving at the corner of the bunk house nearest the porch, she stood for a moment regarding the field of operations. No sign came from the road and there was no movement in the yard. Like a deer, then, she sprang from her place, and like a streak made for the porch. She bounded up the steps in two leaps, and plunged into the house to bring up all standing, in the doorway, for there in the middle of the room stood a huge figure. A figure clad in the uniform of a captain of infantry, U. S. A. A figure which stood with a hand on a pistol butt, and regarded her with as much astonishment as she regarded the hulking, overbearing form of it.

"Where did *you* come from?" she asked.

"From the road." He looked at her and laughed. The lower part of his face was concealed in a dark beard, and his teeth glistened through it when he laughed. Barbara didn't like that laugh; she sensed behind it the suspicion of a leer. She spoke sharply.

"What do you want?"

He stuck his thumbs in his belt, and moved his shoulders under the trim blouse he wore. He tilted his head to one side, and grinned.

"Now don't go to get all fussed up," he said.

"Well, you didn't come in here to pick berries, did you?"

"That sounds good!" he cried roughly. "Berries! And I haven't eaten since morning."

"You want some grub?"

He seemed to suddenly recall his mission.

"Grub? Good God, no! I can't stop for food. Not now. A horse! That's what I need. You got to gimme a horse!"

"Where's your own horse?"

"Done. Mixed up her feet in the road, and broke her back. Damn near broke mine as well. I just shot my horse up the road a way."

Barbara felt a refreshing sense of relief. That explained the shot she had heard.

"But I can't give you a horse. Dad's away. You'll have to wait——"

As she saw his face change with that remark she felt an unreasonable dread. She had said too much. She should never have confessed her father's absence. Yet this was an officer of the United States army; surely she could look for nothing less than protection from that uniform.

"He'll be back soon," she added quickly; and she saw him grin at her transparent ruse.

When she had refused him the horse the smile had left his face, and an expression of peculiar distrust and cruelty had taken its place. He had suddenly become possessed of a definite and, to the girl, an awe-inspiring menace.

"He will!" she repeated desperately. "It's the truth! He might be back any minute."

Again the hard glint of malice entered his eyes. The menace took possession of his face.

"You lie!" he said, in a voice of extraordinary coldness. "Your father won't be back to-night. You're alone here, I can see that in your face." He grinned. "No woman can fool me." The grin disappeared; back came the menace again. "Listen. I've got to have a horse. I'm carrying government dispatches, and they may mean life or death. It's for the government, see! I want you to give me a horse, pronto, and I want you to show me the shortest cut

there is to Tecos Four Corners. I've ridden like hell to get there—to get these papers there to-night, and nothing must hold me up. So trot out that horse—and pronto!"

He towered above the slight form of the girl, with a prodigious atmosphere of hulking strength, and his black-bearded face had the potential malice of the villain of melodrama. She felt very small and childish in his presence.

"You're crazy!" she cried. "I can't let you have a horse!"

He laughed and, stepping forward, seized her by one arm. She felt the tremendous strength in his grasp, and her heart leaped into her throat with fear.

"Think again!" he said in his cold, hard voice. "It's for the government. Army dispatches." And his grasp tightened on her arm, so that she gasped with pain. With wide-eyed dread her blue eyes looked up into his dark face. She was helpless, and she knew it.

"All right," she said. "If it's for the government."

But he continued to hold her arm. He was looking upon her face, appraising the girlish freshness of her complexion, the soft loveliness of her lips. She pushed away from him.

"Come," she said. "Come on!" she cried, and tugged to release her arm. But his grasp was very tight and firm.

"Don't!" she cried. "You're losing time! Come on—I'll get you a horse!" She was pleading with him, now.

"Give me a kiss first," he demanded.

"Oh, no!" She struggled. "Don't!" she gasped. But he kissed her.

"Oh!" He released her arm, and she rubbed her face with her hand. Angry, and scarlet, she glared at him. "You skunk!"

He laughed at her.

"Now show me that horse!" he said.

She appraised her position. If she could dart about that hulking form and reach the kitchen, she could snatch that rifle from its place—then he would pay dearly for that kiss.

"I'll get the key of the barn," she said. And she moved toward the kitchen. But he barred her way.

"You're like 'em all," he laughed. "Liars, all of 'em, women are. The barn door's wide open; I saw it, comin' in."

She scowled at him with baffled hatred.

"All right," she said. "Come on." And she led the way to the barn.

She had no intention of giving a decent horse to this shameful officer; this man, who profaned the uniform he wore; and leaving him outside she led forth a scrubby broncho, a hack, which was used for work that demanded neither intelligence nor stamina. But he turned upon her in an excess of rage when he saw it.

"You——" He cursed her vividly, and she threw up one arm, like a small boy warding off a blow, but he did not strike her. "I want a horse!" he cried. "Not a spavined she-goat! Get me the best you got."

She turned to the barn, and he followed her. Her heart sank as she saw his eye light upon Petie, ready saddled. He strode to the pony's bridle.

"Not him!" she cried. "He's only a pony. Here, this is the best horse we've got!" And she brought forth Thunder, brother of Lightnin', one of the finest horses that ever rode the range. "He's the best in the country," she explained.

She saw the man's eye light up as he looked upon the magnificent lines of the great bay gelding.

"That'll do," he said.

Barbara took up a saddle, and he seized it from her hands. She ran the horse out of the barn, and watched him saddle it. It seemed to her that he was strangely deft, for a soldier, in the manipulation of corded girths and knotted latigos. She herself adjusted the bridle, and was pleased that he made no examination of the bit. If he had he would immediately have seen that the bit she had adjusted was a misfit; a bit that would cause such a mettlesome horse as Thunder to fight its rider like a devil.

"Now," demanded the bearded officer, "show me that trail. There's a short cut from here to the Four Corners, and I want to know it."

She divined that she could best serve herself by giving him the information he wanted. The sooner she was rid of this man the better. She looked upon his great hulking figure in the moonlight, for it was dark evening, now. She saw his heavy countenance, obscured and distorted by the beard, and she felt a shudder of repulsion. She could hardly get the information he desired out quickly enough.

"You follow this road," she told him,

"until you come to a shack. It's a deserted shack, and a very little one. The trail across country begins there. You just turn by the shack on the right-hand side of the road, and follow the trail. It's about fifteen miles to the border."

He stepped close to her, and looked down into her face. His hard eyes glinted into hers.

"That's straight?" he queried. "You ain't trickin' me?"

"Of course it's straight!" she cried. "Why should I trick you? I don't belong to the army!"

He laughed.

"Wild cat," he said. Then again he seized her by the arm, and her heart sank.

"Don't try that again!" she said between her closed teeth. "I'll kill you!"

But he laughed again. "I like you," he said. "You'd better ride with me, and show me that trail. That little pony of yours is all saddled. Get up an' ride."

"No! Oh, no!" Her mind reeled in a sweep of awful foreboding. "I mustn't! I must stay here."

He glared down at her, seeming to hesitate. Then she struck out at him with her free hand, and gave him a tremendous blow upon his face, just above his beard. He let go her arm, and free, she darted for the house. To her surprise he did not follow her. He merely turned to the great horse, and shouted after her.

"You'll pay me for that!" he cried.

She waited in the doorway to see him ride away. She saw him put one foot in the stirrup, and felt a vast surge of relief. Then, to her horror, she saw him bring that foot to the ground again, and turn toward her, running for the house.

CHAPTER IX.

BARBARA'S COMPROMISE.

IN wild panic, she fled, making for the kitchen. She stumbled against a chair in her way, and fell sprawling on the floor. She picked herself up with the quickness of a cat, and dashed for the kitchen door. As she plunged through it she heard his footstep entering the room. She found herself blind in the darkness of the kitchen, but she knew on which wall the rifle hung above the kitchen table, and made for it in a bound. She was reminded of the forgotten dinner dishes by the loud clatter they made as she plunged against the table and upset them. She trod upon them, and stumbled, nearly falling. She reached across the table then, and groped on the wall for the rifle, but she groped too low. As she placed one knee on the table, and reached higher, he was upon her. She felt his great arm upon her shoulders, and cried out with fear and rage as he dragged her back.

"You want somethin' on the wall?" he laughed. And with his own hand he took down the rifle. "Here it is. Why, if it ain't a gun! That ain't ladylike." He opened the rifle and took out the cartridge. "You'd better have it this way." He handed her the unloaded rifle, and with a surge of the panic rage which possessed her she swung at his head with it. He seized it and took it from her hands.

"You wild cat!" he laughed.

She darted into the other room, and he followed her, still laughing. Before she had reached the door he had seized her.

"You little fool!" he cried, and turned her about so that she was facing him, with his great body loathsomely close to hers. She fought him, kicking and pounding and scratching.

"Stop that!" he growled. And he captured both her arms.

"Now listen to me." The hard glint of his eyes was sounded in the metallic menace of his voice. "I'm in a hurry. Got to make the border, and, by God, I've got to make it quick. But I like you—you're a neat, pretty, little girl. Yore goin' to ride to the border with me, or I'm goin' to make you regret it."

She tugged away from him, but his grip was like iron.

"Never!" she cried. "I won't ride with you, if it's the last thing I do!"

In the confusion of her thoughts she had a sudden inspiration. If she screamed, if she shrieked aloud, the man in the bunk house might hear. He would save her from this menace. She shrieked.

"Help! Oh, help me!"

He laughed at her.

"Louder!" he cried, and clapped his hand across her mouth.

But she did not cry out again. It had occurred to her that the man in the bunk house must be kept away from any officer of the law—and this man wore the uniform of authority. Also the man in the bunk house was weak, and this man was strong.

She regretted that shriek. She hoped he had not heard it.

With one arm about her, and one hand upon her face, the beast pressed her to him.

"Now another kiss," he smiled, and so saying kissed her again. She struggled.

"That wasn't a nice one," he sneered. "Now let this be a nice one."

Again he pressed his lips to hers, and she wrested herself from him. He followed her, as she reeled across the room, rubbing her mouth like a child.

"You'll kiss me right!" he roared. But she turned upon him.

"You're in a hurry!" she cried. "You said it! You're in a hurry, and you're losing time here! Leave me alone, now, and —I'll—I'll ride with you to the border. Only leave me alone, now! Leave me alone!"

"You mean that?"

Broken, incapable of any thought but that she must have time; that she must have a cessation of this awful conflict, she nodded.

"I'll go," she sobbed. And he led the way out of the house with his hand upon her wrist.

Seeking madly in her mind for some way out, some loophole to escape from this awful dilemma, she led her pony out of the barn, and found him ready mounted on the great gelding.

"Come on!" he roared. And she swung Petie about on his hind legs to dash madly through the gate, turn on his hind legs once more and dart down the road. The man behind her gathered up his reins to follow, and Thunder, feeling the hot pain of the unaccustomed bit, bolted through the gate and brought up beside the girl in a series of buck jumps which left his rider gasping.

"Another bolt like that!" hissed the man, "and I'll shoot that pony of yours dead."

But she gave him no answer as they cantered through the moonlight.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAIL OF THE BEAST.

SHERIFF SANDY SAM BARLOW had ridden into Bainsville in the heat of the afternoon. There he found gathered the largest posse Cochise County had ever seen. From all the range the men of the border had answered Ridley's summons to the hunt. The Kirk brothers had for themselves decided their fate. They were to be hunted out of the country. A very cursory examination of the men who had gathered to achieve this end would have satisfied the most careless observer that if the Kirk brothers were caught they would be summarily hanged. The posse that was assembled at Bainsville had seen the black trail of the Kirk brothers grow longer and wider as they pursued their violent and ill-considered way. Some of them, moreover, had seen Jim Curran die. They hoped only for one dispensation; that was that the fugitives might not cross the border before they laid hands on them. Many had ridden forth alone, disdaining Doc Ridley's plea that they await in Bainsville the arrival of authority. The rest of them waited for Sam Barlow's coming with unconcealed impatience.

They were assembled about the municipal offices of Bainsville, when Barlow with his immature guide rode in. Some were draped in various attitudes of relaxation upon the porch, and under the cottonwoods outside. Others, with Ridley in their midst, waited gravely, grimly, in the mayor's office.

Ridley and his companions arose when Sam strode in. In the doorway were crowded the men who had followed him from without.

"What's your plan?" queried Barlow, briskly.

The story of the chase through the mountains was retailed to him again. The complexity of rumors and excited elaborations which he had heard from a score of sources were now corroborated and made clear to Barlow by Doc Ridley, the grave, conservative leader of the Santa Cruz faction.

"His mare crumpled and went down over the drop. He was a good man. The best." Ridley finished his narrative gravely, seriously. Yet his desire to see this outrage avenged was thinly veiled. "We've got to get them, now," he pointed out. "Or we can never claim to be men again."

The countenance of Sandy Sam Barlow had become drawn and tense before this narrative was finished.

"We'll get 'em," he said. "D'you know which way they rode?"

"Roughly," answered Ridley. "They must have come out onto the Cochise range somewhere below Fort Huachuca. I take it they're ridin' for the border by Nacos.

We've got that trail covered; and the country is covered all along the border to a point south of here. If they try to get through, we've got 'em. But the way I figure is, they got some skunk shelterin' them in Cochise County, and will stay under cover till we let up our guard. It must be that, 'cause twenty of our men cut down to the border as soon as we hit your side of the range. They couldn't have got by with their horses spent like they was."

"Have you covered the road to Tecos Four Corners?" A trace of anxiety was in the voice of Sandy Sam.

"No. They'd have to pass through our line to make that trail. I'm bettin' on them bein' in hidin' somewhere on this range. An' that's why I called for you. I'm told you've been checkin' up on the ranches. Thought you'd know if there might be any sympathizers in the county."

"That's a good play. There's at least three cattlemen in this district who I'd lay all my chips has been playin' in with those Kirk brothers. We'll make Russ Gideon's ranch first. You say the border trail's covered?"

"A jack rabbit couldn't get through."

"Then get yore men together. We'll get 'em at Gideon's place, or we'll hold Russ an' find out a lot more about 'em than we know now. Come on."

He strode out, and a score of men took to their horses as he mounted. It promised ill for Russ Gideon if he could give no information of the men those horsemen sought. But they didn't get much out of him.

Russ Gideon and his men threw their hands into the air under the menace of thirty guns, and Barlow dismounted in a leap to question them.

"The Kirk brothers, Russ! Where are they?"

Russ Gideon, his face the color of clay, and his weak jaw trembling with the consciousness of imminent death, set forth a furious denial.

"How sh'd I know?" he cried.

But the fear of death lay upon his men, as well.

"Ask him," one cried. "Ask him what Harvey Kirk said when he left here in the mornin'!"

"It's all up, Russ!" Barlow warned him. "Tell us the truth or we'll string you up. Where are they."

"I tell you, I dunno!" wailed the cattleman. "They come an' they go. How sh'd I know where they are?"

"All right, boys," said Barlow; and Ridley, riding forward, dropped a noose over Gideon's neck.

"Cover them punchers!" yelled Sam.

While Gideon's ranch hands cowered before the muzzles of a half dozen guns, they took Gideon to a spot beneath a tall live-oak tree, and slung the rope over a branch of it. The end of the rope which was not coiled about Gideon's neck they attached to Ridley's saddle horn.

"Now then, Russ, where's the Kirk brothers?" demanded Barlow.

Gideon, green about the mouth, the color of death, swore dreadfully.

"I tell you I don't know nothing of them! They come an' ask for grub. They'd burn down the ranch if they didn't get it. What can a man do?"

"Tighten it up, doc," snapped Barlow. And Ridley rode his horse at a walk away from the live-oak tree. Slowly, horribly, the neck of the ghastly man lengthened. He arose to his tiptoes.

Gutturally, a choke in his throat, his words pleaded with them.

"Let down!" he choked. Ridley backed his horse, and Gideon's heels came to the ground.

"It's truth I'm tellin' you, boys!" wailed the tortured man. Tears streamed from his eyes. His ashen face was fraught with the frantic fear of death. "I swear to God I'm tellin' the truth. Harvey Kirk came in this mornin', beggin' for a fresh horse. I could only give him Sal, who was most as tired as his. But he took her. He said, 'I'm makin' for the border, an' if they catch up with me, I'll know who squealed.' That's what he said, an' you boys know Harvey Kirk. So I promised I wouldn't squeal."

"Is that all?" pressed Barlow. He held one arm aloft, ready to give Ridley the signal for his grim ride. "How come Kirk feels free to visit here?"

"That's all!" spluttered the miserable man. "Swear to God! He come here a spell since, before the fall round-up, it was; an' I grubstaked him, not knowin' who he was. Him an' his brother, Jim. Then they asked could they do anythin' for me. An' I said no. But they brought me in a flock of cattle with my brand marked on 'em, an' like a damn fool I took 'em. I've been

workin' for the Kirk brothers ever since. That's the honest truth."

"Which way did they ride?" Barlow was relentless.

"Southwest. Looked like he wanted to make his tracks through Bainsville. But I reckon that was only a bluff."

"Where then did he plan to make his tracks?"

"I dunno." But there was that in Gideon's eyes that belied his words.

"Tell me. Damn quick, now!"

"I dunno."

Barlow's arm dropped, and Ridley's pony started to walk away.

"No!" shrieked the wretched man. But before he fairly got the plea out of his mouth, Ridley's mount rose to a trot, and Gideon was swept off his feet to hang swinging with his toes brushing the ground.

"Back, doc!" cried Barlow. And down came Gideon, to collapse, hanging on the rope once more. Barlow stepped forward and lifted him to his feet, and he stood there, gasping.

"You lie!" cried Barlow. "I can see you lie! Now tell us which way Kirk is ridin'!"

Ghastly, Gideon stared at his tormentor.

"All right!" he said. "Only for God's sake get him and string him up, or I'm a dead man. Harvey Kirk allowed that you boys would meet at Bainsville, and that you'd cover the border to Nacos, so he allowed as he'd ride over the border through Tecos Four Corners."

Barlow betrayed his sudden fear by only the flash of an eye.

"The Four Corners!" he cried. "Bud, you an' Benny Talmage take this coyote into Bainsville. Come on, boys—we got to push hard, or he'll give us the slip!"

They saw Russ Gideon well under way, and his hands stripped of their weapons and their mounts; then they set out, riding like a troop of cavalry, at a heavy canter. Grimly they determined that if their error let the Kirk brothers make the border, Gideon would not live to gloat upon their mistake.

The afterglow had faded into dusk when they struck the trail below Bainsville, and turned eastward for the border. Here Sandy Sam Barlow decided that the party must split. Their numbers seriously interfered with speed, and the dust which the column raised was so great as to parch the throats of horse and man alike, and make the ride well-nigh intolerable. In this decision he was backed by the men from Santa Cruz. But while the Santa Cruz men were keen as wolves upon the scent which promised them revenge, Sam Barlow had an even more imperative incentive to spur him on. He knew that the trail to the border would take the fleeing outlaws past his home, and alone in that remote ranch house was his daughter, a thing more dear to him than life or duty, or the signal service which the capture of those outlaws would mean to the countryside.

They must catch the Kirk brothers before they reached the border, urged the men from Santa Cruz; but Barlow was more urgent far than that. They must capture the men they hunted before they reached the Barlow ranch, he decided. And he heatedly persuaded the ardent posse to divide its forces. They came to this decision at a spring beside the trail, where the horses had to be refreshed, and the men assuaged their thirst and bathed their hot faces in the water. The decision had not been easily reached. Sam only prevailed upon them with the suggestion that they could be of most use if they split and the greater part of them spread out to the westward to cut the fugitives off from an attempt to cross the boundary by abandoning the customary trail.

The party who were to follow this plan departed first from the spring, and left Sam with a party made up for the most part of the men from Santa Cruz. These were most eager in the pursuit, and therefore most to be depended upon to press the chase to the utmost capacity of their horses. It was to refresh the mounts that they lingered at the spring, for once in the saddle they would spur onward at a heartbreaking pace. While they lingered, a few of the younger men, contemptuous of the relaxation which the older range men indulged in with a wisdom gained of vast experience, left the resting group and wandered to the source of the water which had refreshed them. In the dusk each bush and rock took to itself a fantastic likeness of humanity, and now and then the investigating men started back before some inanimate object, only to advance, laughing at their mistake. So they did not at first regard the still, obscured form of the man who lay at the side of the water hole where the spring sprang forth from the earth, and it was not until a man

stepped full upon the recumbent body that they knew it to be the body of a man.

The discoverer swore.

"It's a stiff!" he cried, and his companions crowded round him.

A cry brought Barlow, Ridley and the others to the scene, and without a word Sandy Sam examined the body at his feet. The man was quite dead, shot through the head and body by a .45. Moreover, and more mysteriously, he was stripped of his outer clothing. Near his side lay an automatic Colt's pistol, of army pattern.

"If I ain't mistaken," said Sam, "this hombre's a soldier, and he's an officer into the bargain. Only officers carry them tenderfoot guns, I believe."

"Here's clothes!" exclaimed another, and he passed a collection of garments he had picked up near by to Doc Ridley.

Ridley was about to pass them on to Sam, when something about them caught his eye. "That shirt!" he exclaimed. "Sam, that brown-green shirt belongs to Harvey Kirk!"

Barlow snatched it from him.

"Shucks!" he said. "All shirts are alike!"

But Ridley spoke solemnly.

"I'm goin' to carry the picture of Harvey Kirk in my mind to the day I die, an' he'll always be wearin' that brown-green shirt he wore the day he tried to shake Jim Curran. Sam, if we're goin' to get Harvey Kirk, we got to look for a man dressed up like a United States officer; an' if I don't mistake, he'll be ridin' a United States officer's horse. He shot this pore feller for his animal. And in that uniform the soldiers won't stop him at the border."

In another three minutes they were in the saddle and a good half mile away from the spring where they had found the clew to Harvey Kirk's new part in life; the part of captain in the United States army.

CHAPTER XI.

BARBARA IS TRAPPED.

SPEEDING through the moonlight over the yellow ground which seemed luminous and almost transparent before her, Barbara felt, in that ghostly, terrible ride, as though she were living over again some nightmare of her childhood. Yet the essence of the horror which bore down upon her heart lay in the fact that this experience was real. It could not be shaken off with waking. It could not be conjured away with light. She knew too well that the dark rider at her side was a man of flesh and blood, and she knew too well that every fleeting step of her pony was bearing her farther from all hope of escape and nearer to the border where, it seemed upon reflection, he would all but have her in his power. She remembered the wretched settlement at the Four Corners, with its collection of Mexican huts, and trashy dance halls, where even the cowboys disdained to seek entertainment, and where only that little assembly of questionable border characters held their unending vigil over misspent, unalterable lives. Then she recalled the marching men of the morning. It seemed years since they had passed in their dusty march by her father's house, yet it had been only hours ago. And they had been fine-looking men for the most part, as far removed from this fiend who followed her as men were removed from beasts. Surely some of those men might be found at the Four Corners settlement that night. She could appeal to them for aid.

Her pony kept on in even, easy strides, but the big man gasped beside her. She remembered how he had gasped when Thunder had buck-jumped out of the yard, and it occurred to her that he had been riding hard all day. He would feel the strain of hard riding, she guessed. So she urged her pony to an almost imperceptible increase of speed. Thunder, she knew, would do his great best to maintain the pace her pony with its lighter burden set, and she guessed that the man's hand would tighten on the rein. It did, with the inevitable result. Tortured by the ill-fitting bit, Thunder buck-jumped again.

"Blazes!" Profanity gushed from the man as water from an opened main. He nearly lost his seat, and she caught a glimpse of his face, drawn with the pain of sore muscles suddenly twisted with his effort.

"Bring that little devil down!" he roared. "We ain't riding a race!"

Almost mechanically he loosened his rein, and Thunder, having his head, surged forward. The man grunted with this new exertion.

"Come up!" he yelled. "Stay with me, or I'll kill that pony!"

He brandished a gun, and with a feeling

of baffled hope she urged Petie to hold up. Thunder kept his head for some time before the man brought him up prancing. With a cruel hand he held the great horse now to an uneven lope which gave him no comfort, and he cursed vividly, rebuking Barbara for the mount she had given him.

"You'll pay for it!" he promised her. With a tortured frown she kept pace beside him. She seemed small, out of proportion beside his great figure; like an unhappy child being borne to certain punishment.

"I can't help it," she said. "I guess in the army you aren't used to riding range horses. Thunder, he's got lots of spirit."

He sulked at that. Unknown to her, he felt the implied derision, and childishly wished that he could show her how well he could really ride. If he had but known, she needed no further proof. She had seen Thunder throw many a good rider with less effort than the great gelding had used in trying to displace this man.

"He's a devil," she said to herself. She was discouraged by the thing of which he would have boasted. He seemed to her proof against every weapon she could use. After that they rode in silence, while she derived what satisfaction she could by forcing the pace which pride would not let him confess was irksome to him.

It was late when they rode into the Four Corners. Under normal conditions they would have found no lack of life and tumult at that hour, for Tecos Four Corners, being on the border, managed to live brightly after dark. But it was the first intimation of the presence of the troops that a cold atmosphere of drastic respectability possessed this settlement on the night that Barbara and her dark companion rode in from the range. There were lights in the few halls of amusement, and dark figures flitted in and out of them, and gathered in knots about the shadows of the buildings, but the pall of imminent authority hung upon the place and the usual riotous abandon was stilled. In the center of the settlement there was a guard of soldiers, for in the center of the settlement lay the border line. Barbara's companion rode down to this guard, and dismounted to hold parley with them. Barbara did not hear what he said, but she divined that they spoke of her, for he made many nods and gestures toward her as he whispered. They laughed together while he spoke, and seemed to fall readily into the spirit of what he had to say. He returned to her very briskly.

"We got to go in here," he said in a low voice. "It's headquarters, and they want to know who you are." His harsh whisper turned to pleading. "Just tell the colonel that you're a friend of mine and came to show the way."

"I'll tell them the truth," she said with spirit.

"All right. Only they won't believe you."

"Won't they?" she said. "You just wait and see."

As she strode with him into the dark building on one side of the street she planned with great relish the story she would tell of this night's happening. His friend, indeed! If her tale could get a man run out of the army, he would lose his place that very night.

They entered the door, and to her surprise she found herself in a barroom. The only sign of military activity she could see was a number of soldiers standing at the bar. She paused, and turned, questioning, to her companion.

"It's through here," he muttered. "The colonel is inside."

He whisked her across the room, through a door, across a passage, and through another door. With a flash of intuition she drew back as the door swung open. Without reason, but with a sinking heart and panic in her mind, she would have dashed away from him, but he grasped her arm and fairly flung her through the door. The room into which she was thus plunged was another barroom. But it was a gay, bright place, with the brightness and gayety of tinseled vice. It was alight with three smoking lamps, and thronged with men; Mexicans, Indians and white men drank and gambled and quarreled together.

"What's this place?" cried Barbara. And she would have dashed for the door. But he held her.

"Don't be foolish," he growled. "You can't get away. I've got you in Mexico now!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAN WITH THE BROWN EYES AGAIN.

THE establishment to which he had brought her was the notorious Tony's Place, famous in the underworlds of two nations for its strategic position on the border line. Tony's place boasted of one room

in the United States, and another, more riotous room, in Mexico. Its charm, for its habitués, lay in the fact that a man could indulge in what freedom he liked in his native land, and by merely stepping into another room thumb his nose at any officer of the law who had not gone to the laborious formality of arranging for his extradition. Barbara's companion had gained admittance to the place under the questionable subterfuge of posing as an officer with a lady; an officer who sought relaxation off duty. Regret on the part of the guardsmen who had permitted themselves to thus be hoodwinked would forever afterward be futile. To report the man's passage would be to convict themselves; and anyway, Harvey Kirk was now across the border! Barbara didn't know that her companion was Harvey Kirk, but it mattered nothing. She did know that she was out of all hope of rescue and completely in the power of a lower type of manhood than she had known existed.

Barbara had grown up in a day. The events of the morning seemed so remote to her now, as to take their place in another era. It almost seemed that the girl who had romped about her father's ranch in overalls that morning was a different being from this little woman who sat shrinking in the Mexican dance hall. That little girl had belonged to a different world. Barbara was a woman now, but she was enough the child to know the bitterness of childhood left behind. She did not like this business of being a woman. She longed for the morning to return again.

To the habitués of Tony's place who gathered in picturesque groups at Tony's unclean tables, and noisily derived what gayety they could from a world whose dregs of pleasure they had long since drained, Barbara did not appear as old as she felt. Many glances were fixed upon her fresh young face, and slim, small figure as she sat, silent at the table with the unspeakable Kirk. From the women came glances full of mockery, and occasionally, pity. From the men, undisguised admiration, and envy for the hulking officer who escorted her.

"You better cool off, kid," that officer was saying. "You're goin' to be my little pal for good, now, and the sooner you get used to that the happier you're goin' to be."

But she was deaf to his words, and incapable of thought. Her mind was numb. Except for a vague, hopeless yearning for the morning back again, she could only sit there in silence, and gaze upon the black-bearded man as if he had been a wooden post. A soiled waiter hovered at her companion's elbow, and leered across the table at her.

"Drinks," demanded the man. "Bring a glass of lemonade for the lady, an' a bottle of rye."

"Take me home again!" she cried suddenly. She spoke as a child might speak who did not believe he could do an evil thing.

"That's all right," he assured her. "Wait till you've had something to drink." But she had become conscious of the many glances centered upon her. She had caught revealing glimpses of the hideous faces from which those glances came.

"No, take me away now!" she urged. "Take me out of this terrible place. These people are awful!"

He looked at her, and his sly, cold eyes glittered.

"All right," he said. "Come over here."

He arose, and taking her by a wrist, led her like a captive to a corner partitioned off from the rest of the room with flimsy boards. A ragged, dirty curtain hung across the open side of this alcove, and within it was the conventional table, stained with the rings of tumblers, and the burns of cigarettes.

"Sit down there," he said, and placed her in a chair. She gazed up at him, distrusting him, but conscious of her helplessness. How easily he tricked her! She was putty in his great, apelike paws.

He stood in the doorway and called to the unclean waiter.

"Bring 'em in here!" he shouted; and the waiter brought the drinks in.

As soon as the waiter was gone Kirk threw himself into a chair beside her own, and drew it close to hers.

"Here," he said, "drink this. It will make you feel better." He pushed the glass of lemonade toward her. She gazed at him a moment in distrust. He swore.

"It's all right," he assured her. She was thirsty. The realization that she was thirsty came upon her abruptly. She felt parched, almost fainting. She picked up the glass and sipped it, warily. It seemed all right. She drank deeply of it, and set it down nearly empty. While she drank he

poured himself out some of the whisky and tossed it off.

"That's right," he said as she set down the glass. Then he tipped up the whisky bottle and poured a liberal amount into her glass.

"Now drink that," he demanded.

She frowned.

"No," she said shortly.

"Aw, come on. It'll make you feel fine. You need it after that ride." He lifted the glass to her lips, but she turned her head away from it. Remembering the odor borne on the breath of men whom her father had reprimanded on the ranch, the smell of the stuff sickened her.

"No!" she said.

"Come on! Don't be a fool!" he cried.

"I won't drink it!" she answered, rising from her chair. "You haven't got any right!"

He grasped her in one strong arm and tilted back her head.

"You will!" he roared. "By God, you will drink it!" He pressed the rim of the glass against her lips so that it hurt her. With a wild inrush of fear and dread she pressed away from him, upsetting the liquid. She felt that if that drink should pass her lips she was lost indeed. She had no illusion regarding the potency of liquor.

"Stop!" she murmured. "Oh, leave me alone, can't you?"

But he bent over her, forcing back her head, cursing as she baffled his attempts to make her drink. She shrieked in anger and dismay.

"Help me!" she cried. "Isn't there anybody who'll help me!"

He clapped his hand over her mouth, but the curtain was pulled aside and Tony himself appeared in the entrance.

"Cut da noise!" snapped Tony.

"She's crazy!" snarled Kirk.

"You'll have to take her out of here."

"You gotta room?"

"Sure. Bring her with me."

He came and grasped her by one arm; she was pitifully small between them; and, Kirk at the other side with a strong hand on her mouth, they dragged her from the alcove and made for a door which led from the dance hall. Desperately she struggled and fought them. She would die before they took her through that door. With a tremendous heave she tore away from Kirk's grasp and struck blindly at Tony's dark face. She hit him, and hurt him, so that he loosened his grasp. She felt Kirk's clutching hand at her shoulders, and tore away from him. Blindly she turned like a wild thing, seeking the door through which she had entered this bedlam. She plunged away from her captors, but her direction was wrong, and she found the partitioned alcove before her. There was a great disturbance in the dance hall; she could see a blurred vision of moving figures, hear a confused noise of scraping chairs. When she turned from the partition it seemed as though an army had arisen between her and the exit. The waiter and another sprang at her, seizing her with unclean hands. She fought with them, as she had fought the other two, and the other two bore down upon the fight. Somehow, without her consciously seeking it, she found her hand touching the butt of a pistol. It was a gun in the hip pocket of one of the men who sought to hold her. She grasped it, found it free in her hand, and fired. A great report, magnified by the closeness of the room!

A man went down, screaming and cursing; the others sprang away from her. She threw herself back against the partition, with the blurred vision of the crowd before her, ringed about her. A man darted forward from one side. She turned her gun on him and fired twice. He dropped and thrashed about on the floor; but as she fired on that man, Kirk closed in, grasped her pistol arm and strove to wrest the gun away from her. She screamed fiercely, fear forgotten in the excitement of conflict. She fought him. She hardly felt the blows he rained upon her shoulders and her arms; but vaguely, with a profound despair, she knew that he must win this unequal struggle.

There was a disturbance at the door. The metallic shouts of one man who snapped his words out with deadly resolution. The crowd that was so close about Barbara melted away and left her fighting with Kirk, ignorant of the new disturbance. A man had strode into the room. A man with a gun in either hand, and a deadly glitter in the brown eyes which glanced along the barrels.

"It's a stick-up!" he snapped. "And the first man that moves drops dead!"

The room stood frozen. Only Kirk continued his ferocious attack upon the girl.

The slight young man, whose countenance was ashen, but whose eyes were very bright, strode through the crowd until he saw them. With a cry he darted forward, the crowd forgot; threw himself upon Kirk and tore him backward from his assault. Kirk, taken by surprise, tumbled backward to the floor. Barbara sank down the partition for a moment, only to rally her strength and draw herself erect once more, her gun in hand.

"Jim!" she cried. "Thank God!" But as she recognized him, she saw Tony's gun go up, aimed at the young man's back. Without thought, she fired, and Tony dropped his gun to clap a hand to his bleeding head, and fall silently to the floor. Kirk, meanwhile, had arisen and thrown himself upon the newcomer, but Jim shoved the muzzle of a gun in the big man's chest and hurled him backward, grunting. With almost the same movement, he swung about, and stood with his back to the partition, Barbara beside him. Their guns commanded the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GUNS DECIDE.

HARVEY KIRK turned and faced them, his face purple with a suffusion of blood, his eyes gleaming red.

"Stick up your hands!" snapped Jim. And Kirk obeyed.

"I thought you was dead. I thought I got you back in the cottonwoods!" Kirk gaped, with open mouth and open eyes, at the slight pale man who stood beside the girl.

"Thought's no good without a brain," remarked Jim. "Take his guns, Barbara."

Bravely Barbara stepped forward and took the gun from Kirk's holster with a little smile. He rumbled a curse at her as she did so.

"Look in his hip pocket," suggested Jim. She did so and brought forth another gun. "Now unload that gun you been usin' an' throw it over the partition." She obeyed him. "Hands up!" His voice snapped a deadly reminder to the room at large. "We got two dozen shots for you now!"

He turned upon Kirk.

"Harvey Kirk," he said in a soft, metallic voice, "when you killed the postmaster at Luling ten years ago I made myself a little promise to get you, if it was the last thing I did. Because that postmaster happened to be my father. That's what I came to Arizona for. You had come to Arizona, an' I followed you. Now I've got you."

Kirk laughed at him, sneering. "All right," he said. "Now take me away."

The young man smiled a little smile, and his eyes snapped terribly.

"I'm not calc'latin' to take you away," he remarked. *"Put up them hands!"* Fully three delinquent members of the company threw their hands more definitely aloft.

Kirk turned ashen pale.

"You don't plan for to shoot me in cold blood?" he gasped.

"I plan to kill you like men kill mad dogs; like snake-blooded skunks kill postmasters," murmured Jim.

Kirk gazed at him, fascinated. His eyes, his gaping mouth, his quavering voice testified to the limits of his manhood.

"You can't do that," he quavered. "You can't shoot me down like a dog."

The young man frowned, his eyes sweeping the room.

"No," he admitted. "It's all foolishness, but there seems to be something about a man that won't let him act that a way. I suppose I'll give you a gun, and let you have your chance."

The glitter came back to Kirk's eyes.

"Now!" he cried. As though his words had been a signal, three of Tony's henchmen acted almost simultaneously. The only warning of their action was a sudden disturbance. Jim and Barbara both fired at a brown figure which leaped upward at the center light, and brought the man down; but the lamp came with him, and the other two henchmen doused the other lamps with the swing of two chairs. The room was plunged into darkness.

"Get behind the partition!" Jim whispered into Barbara's ear. She felt herself in his arms, and stumbled against a chair as he swung her into the alcove. A moment of silence followed. Then shots rang out. She heard the bullets splinter the wall above her head, and knew that some one was trying to bring Jim down; but Jim, knowing his man, had leaped for the door. There was a jam of people there, fighting, trampling the women underfoot, madly seeking to emerge into the corridor. At the end of that corridor was the exit into Mexican territory.

Jim was blind in that sudden darkness as

were all the mass that struggled in the doorway, but he found Kirk out by the man's tremendous build, and jammed his gun into Kirk's side.

"Back, Kirk! Get back into the room!" His words bore an unmistakable menace, and Kirk tore himself from the throng, to charge back into the room. The young man cursed himself for having withheld his fire in that moment. He could have slain his man then, when his gun was close against Kirk's side. He should have done it. As long as Kirk lived Barbara was not safe.

He saw Kirk, as his eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, a dark form, charging across the almost vacant room, wildly trying for another exit. He fired, sending a bullet whistling past the man's head, and Kirk wheeled, ran into an overturned table and plunged to the ground. Jim would have leaped upon him, but some one was at his back with a knife. He took his assailant by the throat, flung him away from him, and fired twice into his body. Kirk, behind him now, hurled a chair across the space between them, and Jim's gun was torn from his hand as the chair struck his wrist. He swung his other gun on Kirk, but Kirk shot by him like a projectile, and flung himself to the floor, seeking the gun. He didn't get Jim's gun, but even while Jim strove to center his aim upon the moving, obscured form of his enemy, Kirk came upon the body of the man who had wielded the knife. Frantically he ran his hands over the limp, bloodstained form, and found a gun. Then, prostrate, with the dead man before him as a shield, he fired at the dim figure out on the floor.

Jim dropped, and returned the fire. His bullet found Kirk's pistol arm, and he heard Kirk's gun clatter to the boards. Then he leaped forward, discerned Kirk, limp upon the form of the dead man, and leaned over him. In that moment he should have done as much for Kirk as Kirk would doubtless have done for him. He should have emptied his gun into Kirk's recumbent body. As it was, he strained the quality of mercy to a moment's hesitation, and in that moment Kirk's left arm had shot out and grabbed his pistol hand, while the wounded arm grasped Jim's throat. Immediately Jim perceived that the gun must soon pass to Kirk, for the hand with which he held that gun was his right hand, and the wound which had brought him fainting into Barbara's gully was on his right side, so he flung the pistol from him and closed with his enemy on the floor.

Kirk's great, apelike arms closed about him eagerly, and the slighter man was rolled over like a child. At the same time he felt a piercing pain in his side, and knew that his wound had broken open. And he smashed tremendous blows on Kirk's exposed features, with the dull presentiment that this battle must end in victory for the heavier man, and his desired vengeance for his father come to nothing. Nothing more than the death of the son. Then he remembered the girl. He could not leave the girl behind with Kirk! The thought gave him new strength, and thrusting an elbow into Kirk's throat he strove with his utmost power to break the hold of his enemy's great arms. But the exertion brought with it a surging wave of pain that sickened him. While he strained in the toils he knew that he soon would faint. Kirk's arms tightened; the man seemed impervious to the pressure on his throat, to the blows which rained upon his face.

Barbara, meanwhile, had sunk into the chair in the alcove, and closing her eyes, abandoned herself to the relaxation which her body craved. In the kindly darkness, it seemed to her that she could find forgetfulness of that nightmare through which she had lived. It seemed almost as if she must soon awaken to a morning at her father's ranch. A morning as serene as the dawn of the day which now was ended. The sharp report of the guns in the room outside awakened her. She sprang to her feet, remembering. Jim was outside, and that other; that dark rider who had uprooted her childhood with so rude a hand and flung it, bruised beneath the heel of his own unlovely life. They were fighting!

Two more shots, and a silence. Then a long gasping, sobbing, cry, as though a wounded man were being choked.

The two guns lay on the table before her. It seemed that only nightmare could have brought her to this pass; yet here she was, with the guns in her hands, and the two men outside, fighting.

"Airgh!" Again that sobbing struggle for breath.

She groped her way to the exit from the alcove. Outside the room was a gray sea, but near the door she could discern a dark

heap, moving. She darted to that obscure, formless mass, and discerned the two men locked in one another's grasp.

She could see the larger man, at the bottom now, and the slighter man on top, tearing at the other's throat, and striving to break his body from his antagonist's strong grasp. She leaned over them.

"Let go!" she cried, as a woman might have cried to fighting dogs or to little boys. She remembered the wound the young man bore, and divining his pain, his danger, a tremendous rage against the dark rider filled her mind.

"Let go!" she cried, and struck at the bearded head of her enemy with the muzzle of one gun. She did not have it in her to shoot the man, but she struck fiercely at his head. Suddenly then, he let go and snatched at the muzzle of the gun. He caught it in his hand and wrested it from her, but at the same time Jim, released, sprang to his feet, and went reeling backward past her. In the split second which Kirk required to spin his gun about and fire, she had followed Jim up and thrust the other revolver into his hand. Kirk fired once, twice, blindly. He missed. Rage maddened him. Rage, and fear. With dreadful deliberation Jim brought up his gun, and deliberately took aim. Again Kirk fired, and again. Both his shots went wild in the darkness, but as the last one rang out, Jim fired a single shot, and Kirk fell, clutching at the air, his heart pierced through.

She ran to Jim then, and held him with her arms about him.

"Ah, Jim!" she cried. "He's dead. The dream is over. He's dead!" That was all she could say.

He leaned upon her for a moment, breathing deeply, rallying his failing senses, trying to make the world stop spinning so wildly about him. With an effort he thought clearly.

"Out!" he said. "Out of this filthy hole. Come on, Barbara, we must go."

They emerged into the corridor together; his arm about her shoulders, her arm about his waist, and the few who waited in the corridor to see the end of what was passing in that death-filled room drew back when they saw him with the blood upon his shirt and a strange light in his bright brown eyes. In his hand he still clutched the gun with which he had slain Harvey Kirk.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SHERIFF OF SANTA CRUZ.

SANDY SAM and the men from Santa Cruz had ridden like madmen down the long trail to the Four Corners. They had stopped only long enough to examine Barlow's ranch, and then, upon the discovery that Barbara was missing, and her pony gone, and that Thunder had gone as well, they had driven forward more madly than before. For the dead army charger, lying beside the road where Kirk had killed it, testified to what company Barbara rode in, and every man of the posse felt a bond of sympathy with Sam Barlow, as they rode.

They thundered into Tecos Four Corners after midnight, and found the town alive with flares and the movement of armed men. The guard at the border was now greatly augmented, and a barricade was stretched across the road. They found a very excited and dutiful young officer in command.

"I'm sheriff of Cochise County," Barlow explained. "We are looking for a man named Kirk who probably will be accompanied by a girl. There are two Kirks, brothers. They may have been together. The older Kirk is disguised as a United States officer. Have you seen him? Wears a heavy beard, his brother is small and slight."

The young officer frowned at him, and frowningly regarded the grim company of mounted men.

"Your man is across the border! The damn idiots let him through, a crass disobedience to orders. Now there's the devil to pay!"

Barlow exchanged glances with his men.

"Pass us through!" he demanded.

The officer shook his head.

"Can't do it!" he snapped. "We just let one man through who claimed to be a sheriff. He swore there was an American girl over there in trouble. I hope they shoot the fools who let her through."

"A sheriff? What was he like?"

Two shots rang out from the house across the border.

"Young fellow. Slight. Brown eyes. That's his horse." The officer indicated the strawberry roan which stood with its head wearily adroop near by.

"The Kirk kid!" cried Ridley.

"God! You've let his brother through,

too. Young man, you fool soldiers have let two of the dirtiest skunks unhung evade the law. An' Barbara!" He suddenly clutched at the young man's shoulders. "My girl's with them! We got to go through!" He turned to his horse. But the officer's voice assumed the ring of unmistakable authority.

"Sorry, but orders are that no one is to go through to-night without pass from headquarters. Civil officers are no exception."

The horsemen glared down at him.

"Which way did they ride?" blurted Doc Ridley.

"They didn't ride; they're right in that house." He indicated the shack on the other side of the barricade. As he did so they heard the sound of firing again. Barlow ran to the door of the American side of the house. A sentinel barred him.

"Let me by!" roared Sam. "My girl's in there!"

The officer approached him.

"Your daughter?" Again came the sound of firing. The men from Santa Cruz dismounted and pressed behind the officer.

"Yes, his daughter! His girl!" they cried hoarsely.

"Let him by!" snapped the officer, and Sam Barlow dashed by the sentinel, reaching for his gun as he ran.

"You can come into this house," the officer informed the others, and they thronged in behind him, entering the American bar of Tony's place just as the sentinel at the door between the two rooms opened it to let Sam Barlow pass. But he did not pass. For as the door swung open his daughter entered with the slight young man beside her.

"Barbara!" cried her father, and dropped his gun to gather her in his arms. At the same time the men from Santa Cruz rushed at the young man, pressing in upon him.

"Jim!" cried one.

"Jim Curran!" roared Bud Kendall.

"Jim Curran?" shouted Doc Ridley, coming up behind. "If that's Jim Curran, let me shake him by the hand!"

And he did. He wrung the hand of Jim Curran whom he had thought so long was dead, until Jim paled beneath the pressure of his friends and abruptly collapsed.

"It's nothing!" he declared. "Just burned me a little, that's all." But they sat him on a chair, and made way while Doc Ridley examined his wound, and a corporal sought a medical unit for first aid.

"Don't believe him!" cried Barbara, running to his side. "He's all shot up. He's been fighting a whole army like a barn full of grizzly bears!"

"Where's Kirk?" cried another.

Jim was in no position to answer, but Barbara replied with happy exuberation: "I don't know anything about that. But if Kirk or anybody else was in that room through there, it's ten to one he's deader than a carload of tombstones."

Very quietly Jim put a word in for himself.

"They're dead. Both of 'em," he said.

"Good boy," murmured Barlow feelingly. "An' I guess you saved my little girl." He hugged her to him.

"Don't know about that. She did some saving, too. But we got Harvey Kirk in there, and I brought Brother Jim down that morning in the mountains."

"Gosh, Jim, we saw that." Doc Ridley shuddered. "We thought it was him got you. How come he was riding your mare, and now you're riding his?"

"Why, I surprised them in camp that morning, and Injun—she was a right fine little horse—tried to follow me as I crept up on them. She ran right into their camp, and they jumped up and took to the first horses they saw. Jim Kirk got onto Injun that a way, an' I took all that was left, which was his strawberry roan; and I will say that that roan horse is the ridin'est pony I ever slung my leg over."

"Then why didn't you ride back and fetch up with us?" demanded Kendall.

Jim Curran's eyes narrowed.

"Because I'll tell you why, Bud. Ten years ago the Kirks killed the postmaster at Luling, Texas. Likewise, that postmaster was my dad. And I said then that some day I was going to get those Kirks. They moved into Arizona, an' I followed them. I ran for sheriff just so as I could devote all my time to that recreation I'd set out for myself. When I saw Jim Kirk go down that mornin', I decided that I wasn't goin' to let anything this side of Halifax stop me from pressin' on against Harvey's trail. I had a horse as fresh as his was, then, an' I was the lightest rider. I swapped lead with Harvey in the cottonwoods, there in the mountains an' he creased me this a way. That slowed me up considerable, because also I had been ridin' longer than him without a rest. So I kept on his trail but got

sort of weak and thirsty, an' I smelled water, an' made for it in a gully.

"There I met this little girl, who is the only livin' being that has taken my mind off the Kirks in ten years' time. She was an old friend, an' she helped me. I came to your house, Sam, when you was away, an' she gave me a bed to rest me in. When I woke up she was gone. Likewise I saw another rider had gone with her, an' likewise I found the horse he had shot on the roadside. So I read the signs all over the house, and among them I found a hatband. And that hatband was Harvey Kirk's. So I had two good reasons for following now, an' I followed; an' these tenderfoot soldiers told me where he had taken her to, an' I followed them in, an' we passed a lot of lead. It was the hand of Providence, I guess, that gave me that little lady for a friend, because there ain't another woman on earth that would have acted in that war dance like the daughter of Sam Barlow did. An' we won out. The Kirk brothers, you can tell the world, are dead!"

Barbara came to him, and placed an arm about his shoulders.

"And I thought you were Harvey Kirk's brother," she cried. Reaching up he took both her hands in his.

"We're all liable to make mistakes," he said with a smile; and he kissed her hands.

"What did he mean, Barbara, when he said you were an old friend?" whispered her father.

"Just what he said, daddy." She laughed happily. "We've known each other since last fall. He's the young man with the nice brown eyes."

"Well, I'm dad burned!" swore her father.

Young Ben Talmage who, having delivered Gideon up at Bainsville, had followed posthaste on the heels of the chase, pressed his way to her side and spoke bitterly.

"I s'pose you'll marry him, now?" he said.

"I hope so," she answered.

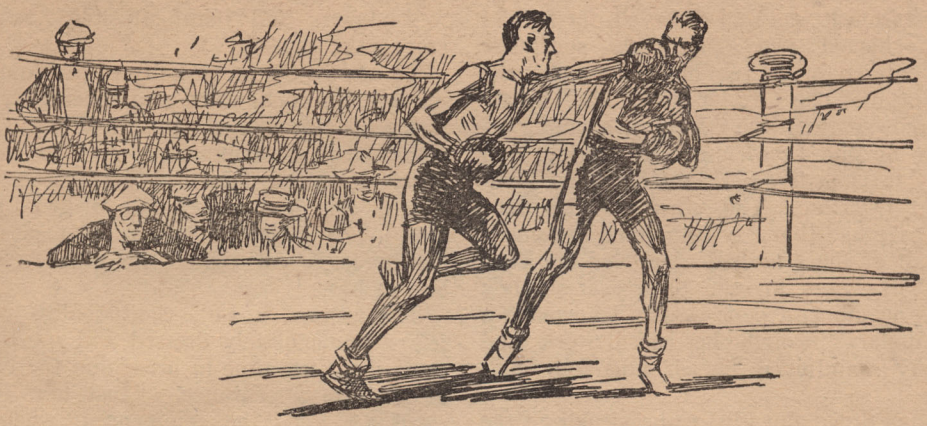
"She shore will," said Jim Curran, and he gathered the precious hands to his heart, hungrily.

Contest Announcement

ON PAGE 179 OF THIS ISSUE
YOU WILL FIND

AN ANNOUNCEMENT
OF TERMS GOVERNING
A PRIZE CONTEST

WHICH WILL MAKE IT WELL WORTH YOUR WHILE
TO TELL US ABOUT YOUR TASTES IN FICTION



Under Sicilian Rules

By Llewellyn Hughes

Author of "The Chester Emeralds," and other stories.

Tench Story, the cobbling criminologist, restores a champion to his rightful throne.

TO say the sporting world was flabbergasted when Harry Stoner got stopped by Frankie Manton is putting it rather mildly. And when, nearly a month later, a letter was made public clearing up the mystery of that knockout and specifically incriminating Stoner as having laid down to the gambling gentry, even the most ardent boxing fan admitted it presaged the death of the manly art of self-defense—that particular brand, at least, exhibited by professional boxers.

Even then nobody could figure it out right. For three years, and, in fact, long before he won the title, the world's champion welterweight had been known as one of the cleanest-living and most likable men in the ring. To meet him at his training camp, or in his apartment where he lived with his mother, it was indeed hard to realize that Harry Stoner was anything but a quiet young man whose smile and debonair geniality made him a favorite with all and everybody. In the ring that smile of his never quite deserted him, although it was accompanied by a gleam in his intense blue eyes that put fear into his opponent. A good-natured, smiling bear cat; that's what he was in the ring; thrusting, jabbing, sending over his well-timed blows with the force and precision of a piston rod, darting in and out with tireless energy until a swift right cross or uppercut struck home with all the devastating power of lightning—and the fight was over.

That, after all, was speaking of the past. Harry Stoner had quit. Stoner, the most popular fighter in American ringdom, had gambled away his title, his good name, and the high opinion of the public, for one hundred thousand pieces of silver.

There is perhaps no more fickle and vacillating assembly than that which gathers round the squared circle. They turned on Harry Stoner and metaphorically ground him under heel. The sporting editors had a whale of a time hammering out the most scathing adjectives and nouns in their vocabulary. The mere mention of his name by the official or unofficial announcer was the signal for a storm of hooting and yelling. He was a low-down bum. He was a crooked fighter who, on the level, couldn't beat a carpet. The king was dead; long live the king!

II.

About ten o'clock one evening, in his library at the back of his shoemaker's shop on Ninety-eighth Street, Tench Story was blissfully occupied in improvising a fugue on his harmonium. The enjoyment he

gained from it was well deserved, for he had just achieved two remarkable successes. One, entered in his reminiscences under the heading of "The Chester Emeralds," he attributed partly to the efforts of a young reporter on the *Courier* named Goring, and partly to Detective Sergeant Fera and Lieutenant Overton. The other was his very own. He had that day completed the smallest pair of shoes he had ever tried his hand at. They were for the three-year-old boy of his neighbor, a poor woman who made a few dollars through her needlework and thereby maintained herself and four children.

Tench Story chuckled as he visualized the hand-sewn "Peter-right" and "Peter-left" across the instep of each little shoe. He had labored long on those shoes, longer, in point of truth, than he had labored on solving the mystery of "The Chester Emeralds." In the one the police would as usual get the credit. But the thanks in little Peter's clear brown eyes would be wholly and irrevocably his.

Story did many a shoemaking job without expecting, or getting, a penny for it. He had a small income of his own which he spent mostly on old books and odd curios picked up at sales and in the stores of East Side junk dealers; but nothing could persuade him to give up his awl and hammer. There, he was fond of saying, he had his feet on the ground! He was a curious little individual whose hair was as peppery as his temper. His wiry body was capable of sustained energy and while engaged on some intricate problem he could remain alert and tuned up to instantaneous action for hours at a stretch. To those unaware of his amazing interest in criminology, the shoemaker's apartment would have been a revelation. One morning, while she was playing about in his shop, a little girl crept down the corridor and peeped into one of the ground-floor rooms; the sight of long spears and scimitars on the walls and a full-sized skeleton in the corner sent her screaming to her mother, and despite the little shoemaker's mediatory candy she could never be prevailed upon to come near his shop again.

Tench Story's interest in organic evolution was such that he had published a brochure on the "Contradictory Evidences of Neanderthalensis;" and his classification of modern and obsolete weapons was a well-known and authenticated treatise among the experts.

To add to the incongruity of his domestic ménage, his cook, valet, and general servant was a Chinese named Chuncin Wing. That placid-faced supernumerary entered the library now and informed his master that Mr. Goring had called and wished to see him. The little shoemaker went on with his fugue. "All right," he piped; "show him in here."

The visitor, a tall, good-looking young fellow immaculately dressed and sporting a cane, lost little time in broaching the object of his late appearance. "Just how interested are you," he commenced, when the little man spun round on his harmonium stool and nodded a good evening, "in the championship fight at the Garden to-morrow evening?"

Story produced his corncob and pressed down the ashes. "Too interested—tum, dee, dee, dum—to discuss it—tum, tra, la, la—rationally," he intoned with tolerant unconcern. "Excuse me a minute." He spun round again to the keys. "I must try out this new inversion. Tum, dee, dee, dum—tra, la, la, tumty—no, it won't do; it won't do. An improvisation of mine," he volunteered, "on a Bach theme. Wonderful how that old boy could make music." This time he rose and walked over to his armchair into which he precipitated his body with a good deal of energetic finality. "Now, what's botherin' you?" he inquired, striking a match with his thumb nail.

Alan Goring was compelled to laugh at the little man's eccentric behavior. "Well, sir," he said, deferentially, "I'm not sure whether you'll care to look into it. It's in connection with Harry Stoner."

"Late welterweight champion of the world, whom Manton bumped off in Philadelphia," chanted Story. "They do some queer things in that city, b'gosh, and I guess that sensation's in line with Sir William Howe's mischianza and Benedict Arnold's flimflamming."

An expression of amazement disturbed the regularity of Goring's features. "I didn't think you knew whom I meant," he said.

"A man should know a little something about most everything," was the retort. "Trouble is, too many of us know about Harry Stoner and his doings and not enough about Sir William Howe's." Vertical lines

appeared above his nose. "Well, come to Hecuba!" he snapped. "What's on your mind?"

"It's this way," hurried Goring. "I've been talking with Stoner and I'm convinced he's been badly victimized. If you remember, he was a foregone certainty to beat Manton any round he cared to name. But in the second, he says, he seemed to go all blah! Couldn't lift an arm. Got knocked colder than the north pole."

Story suggested the boxer's finish was possibly due to gay night life, but the reporter protested. "There isn't a man in the country," he defended, "who leads a cleaner, more careful life than Harry Stoner. I can vouch for that, absolutely. No, he's been framed, Mr. Story. There's something phony about the whole business. He's a prince of a chap, and you'd do him, and boxing, a good turn if you looked into the matter."

The little shoemaker grunted, switching his corncob to the other side of his mouth with a lurch of his lean jaw.

"Now here are the facts. Two weeks before that fight in Philadelphia, Stoner began to get letters asking him to let Manton take him for one hundred grand. He paid no attention to the damned insults until the final day. He then got a telephone call threatening him, and another letter delivered to his dressing room just before he went into the ring. He showed that letter to Micky Morris and——"

"Who's Micky Morris?"

"His manager. Morris laughed and told Harry to pay no attention to it and to go out there to win. Well, you know what happened. Unfortunately, Morris left the letter on the dressing-room table—it was typewritten and went on to say they hoped Stoner would keep his promise, because one hundred thousand dollars was to be placed to his credit the next morning.

"After the fight, and during the excitement, Morris forgot all about the letter, and when he began to hunt around for it he couldn't find the thing. In some way or other the boxing commission got hold of it later and last month it was given to the newspapers and published as evidence that Stoner had quit and was as crooked as a cubist's picture of a lady coming downstairs. Unless his name can be cleared he hasn't a chance to redeem himself."

Tench Story puffed away thoughtfully. "How long was he in the hospital?" he asked, after a while.

"About three or four weeks."

"So. What was the matter?"

"That's the strange thing about it," cried Goring, eagerly. "The doctors couldn't figure it out to save their necks. One said muscular rheumatism—another one said temporary paralysis of the triceps—all sorts of fool ailments."

"Is he right now?"

"He's out again, and in training. But he says his old speed is still missing."

"Where can he be reached?"

Goring was delighted with this inquiry. "He'll come round here now if you'll see him," he suggested hopefully.

"Call him up."

Goring leaped to the telephone. The little shoemaker went back to his harmonium; but the rifacimenti of Johann Sebastian Bach's themes were discarded in favor of some old elegiac ballades, and Alan Goring was soon wandering in a dreamy, arcadian world with the lovely Olive Chester, whom he had lately met during the adventure of "The Chester Emeralds."

Story was in the midst of "Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes," when Chuncin Wing announced the arrival of Stoner. A broad-shouldered young man of twenty-four or so, with an open, pleasant face, fair hair, and remarkably clear blue eyes entered. He shook hands with Goring, who introduced him to Mr. Story.

Without exaggeration or a trace of falsehood in his attitude, Stoner recounted his experiences in Philadelphia and told how his plea for fair play had been ignored by the boxing commission. "I'm not blaming Manton for making the most of his chances now he's the champ," he said. "He's a good lad—though I believe I could trim him any time I was right. But I don't understand why the fans have turned on me this way. I've boxed for them since I was seventeen, and always given the best that was in me."

Story said: "I take it you don't suspect Manton of any dirty work?" Harry Stoner blinked his credulous blue eyes. "Heard tell," explained the little man, pulling a wry face, "they sometimes use dope in their hair, and suchlike."

The welterweight smiled. "You can generally detect that sort of stuff, Mr. Story. It doesn't get by once in a blue moon. No, sir, Manton didn't pull anything queer ex-

cept"—he rubbed his chin significantly and grinned—"to plant a heavy one on the button. Telegraphed it a mile, too—but I was as helpless as a baby."

Goring asked: "Just when did that feeling of helplessness get to you, Harry?"

"Just after the second round started, Mr. Goring. I got weaker and weaker—see?—and it seemed to be in my right shoulder and arm. Like it was numb. At first I thought it was the effect of a kidney punch or a wallop that deadened my arm muscles. I didn't feel quite right as I left my corner and came up for the second round. A nail or something scratched me on the back just as I left my stool."

"What's that?" inquired Tench Story, manifesting a closer attention, the tip of his sharp nose palpitating a little.

"Nothing but a scratch, I guess," continued Stoner. "Perhaps a bit of loose hemp on the ropes."

"Where did you feel it, exactly?"

"That scratch?" Harry Stoner rose. "Would you mind standing up a minute, Mr. Goring?" The reporter did so, and the welterweight boxer put his finger on a spot three inches below Goring's right shoulder blade. "About there," he said, looking round at Story.

The shoemaker's eyes sparkled through his eyeglasses. "The latissimus dorsi and deltoid," he said, partly to himself, "directly governing the triceps and biceps." With extraordinary cheerfulness he whistled the last bar of a popular melody. "Looks kind of interestin', Mr. Stoner. Tell the doctor about that?"

"No. I wasn't worried about a little scratch on the back."

"Once knew a man," Story intimated discreetly, "who scratched his toe just before he dived into the sea and split open his head against a rock. They bid fair to patch up his dome—but he died on 'em, as they say. Yes, sir; died of tetanus. Don't look as though they amount to much, these little scratches, but——" He ended with the whistling repetition of the popular melody.

"If I remember right," he said a moment later, "they proved you'd got a whack of money after that Philadelphia bout."

"It was money I made on a real-estate deal."

"Tell 'em so?"

"Micky Morris tried to explain, but they wouldn't even listen to him. I got so disgusted with the whole business I let them think what they liked."

"Got papers to prove that deal?"

"Certainly." A flush spread over the healthy pallor of Stoner's cheeks. "Listen, Mr. Story! Before I'd stand for any of my bouts being fixed I'd sooner make a living slinging hash in a one-armed restaurant. Every fight I've had has been on the strict up and up." He clenched his big hands. "I'd just like to meet that bunch of dirty crooks who wrote those letters."

The shoemaker noted the expression that accompanied that threat and it convinced him of Stoner's integrity. "S'pose you don't happen to have any of those letters?" he inquired.

The welterweight thrust his hand into his breast pocket and drew out a pocketbook. "I kept this one as a souvenir," he said, producing it and handing it over to the little man. "It was the second or third one they sent me. You can see it hasn't any sig——"

"One moment, please." Tench Story moved over and examined the letter under his reading lamp. It was typewritten on an ordinary piece of ruled note paper, without address or date, and it contained a single message. "One hundred grand if you'll let Manton take you Thursday night!" Underneath was a curious hieroglyphic, or symbol, in the shape of a question mark.

Story reached for his magnifying glass, sat down, and after subjecting the type, the face, the back and the edges of the note paper to a close investigation he focused all his attention on the peculiar signature. It had been stamped on the paper, for around it was a faint milled circle. Story surmised a signet ring, small, and of the sort attached to a watch chain, worn as a charm. He studied it in silence for several minutes. When he eventually looked up, Goring could see he was at a tension.

"All the letters signed this way?" he asked, sharpening his words in a manner characteristic of him when he was aroused.

"Yes," said Stoner. "They all had that question mark at the bottom. I suppose it was another way of saying, 'Guess who's back of this big offer?' "

Tench Story sniffed at this display of artlessness. "Hardly so subtle," was his comment. "You flatter 'em. Maybe we can find who these gentlemen are before long.

They may be powerful in numbers, dangerous as reptiles, but their ingeniousness is of the dumb-bell variety." He folded the letter. "Like to keep this, if you don't mind."

"Go ahead," agreed Stoner.

"Got the envelope?"

"No. I destroyed it. It was posted in Philadelphia, though."

The little shoemaker addressed himself to Goring. "Find out all you can about this Manton bird, and let me know first thing in the morning."

"He's a dark-faced guy," put in Stoner, hurriedly. "An Italian. His real name's Antonelli."

"An Italian, eh? Um." Story's brows came together, and he pinched his mouth in a comical registration of brooding induction. "That so," he said, repeating his facial maneuvers. "All right, Stoner. 'Pears to me you lost you're title unfairly, and maybe with a little scheming we might get it back for you."

The pugilist grabbed his hand and pressed it until the little man winced.

"Thanks a whole lot, Mr. Story."

"Under Queensberry rules——" He stopped and shot a look of criticism at the boxer. "Say! next time you express your thanks try and remember I've a use for this hand!" He began to pry apart the crushed fingers.

Stoner laughed. "Sorry, Mr. Story."

"About to say," continued the little shoemaker, irritably, "that under Marquis of Queensberry rules you ought to knock Manton from under his ill-gotten crown, and if he——"

But the welterweight corrected him. "That fellow won't hold the title after tomorrow night," he declared soundly. "He's fighting 'Dutch' Sullivan, and Dutch'll take him good and early." He glanced from one to the other. "Would you like to see that go?" he asked. "I can get an extra couple of seats, and we can sit together."

"What's the betting on Sullivan?"

"They're laying three to one that Sullivan knocks him out," said Stoner, his eyes flashing a brand of steel. "It's this betting that's spoiling the game, Mr. Story. It's just killing it, that's all."

The shoemaker didn't appear impressed by this statement. "Three to one on Sullivan," he repeated. "Guess that's why the match was made."

"Eh?" said Goring and Stoner together.

"Maybe we'll see why, to-morrow evening. What say, Goring? Care to go?"

The young reporter declared it was his intention to go, no matter what the obstacle.

"All right, Stoner. Meet you outside the Garden at nine o'clock."

The late champion again expressed his thanks, putting less sinew into his goodnight handclasp, and accompanied by Goring he drove away feeling that the dark clouds around him were beginning measurably to lift.

Alone, Tench Story went to his bookshelves and found a volume he particularly wanted to consult. It was edited and compiled by the prefect of the Paris police. Turning the pages he came to a printed facsimile of the symbol adorning the foot of the letter, now spread out in front of him. That symbol, the editor claimed, represented the prow of a gondolier, and was the secret sign of a Sicilian band, a murderous gang who operated mostly in Rome and Paris, and the southern cities of the United States of America, chiefly New Orleans.

The little shoemaker solemnly took out his fountain pen and added the annotation:

"Also in Philadelphia and New York!"

III.

Any one who has attended a championship bout at the Garden knows the electrifying pandemonium reminiscent of a typhoon when the crowd is on its feet, swaying, bellowing, at some unexpected, thrilling tide of the battle. Those who had fancied Dutch Sullivan were doing most of the shouting—but their shouts were vain. He had opened up like a world beater and Frankie Manton took a terrific drubbing in the first round. It was merely a flash in the pan, however. The tables were turned in the second, and Sullivan went all to pieces, just faded away to a fizzle and took a dive. It was sensational. One had to give this bird Manton credit. He was some scrapper! Sullivan had to be carried from the ring.

"I couldn't lift my right mauler," the defeated man told his trainer in the crowded dressing room. His eyes were glassy, and despite his return to consciousness he seemed incapable of the least muscular effort. "Honest, I can't lift my right arm." He made a dismal attempt to do so, his head wabbling on his shoulders like that of a

helpless baby, his voice trailing to a pathetic wail.

His manager stood over him, tauntingly. "You poor dub! Why, you had him out on his feet in the first!"

Sullivan made a piteous effort to speak. "I know that, Ed; but—but I—I——"

Doctor, trainer, manager and attendants crowded round the gory, naked body, their voices, their conflicting commands intermingling, their stony faces devoid of sympathy or concern. "He's all right," the doctor determined. "It's just the effect of the knock-out. He'll be all right in a minute or so."

"Are you sure of that, doctor?"

The clearly spoken, succinct question caused Sullivan's handlers to lift their heads.

"Quite sure," confirmed the doctor.

"Say! Who let you in here? See that door? Get out through it—and get out quick!"

Tench Story's wizened little face betrayed no semblance of alarm. "Acting under orders of Mr. Ponsonby," he told them, calmly. The mention of the famous promoter's name gave him a momentary liberty and he utilized it by quickly edging his way through and making a rapid examination of the pugilist's right arm and shoulder. The man was now in a state of coma and every method to revive him failed.

"Turn your man face downward on the bench," ordered Story. The onlookers gasped as they saw the little gentleman produce a lens from his pocket and minutely scrutinize Sullivan's back. He soon found what he was looking for: a slight perforation, with an almost imperceptible bead of blood above it.

Story surreptitiously put his finger on the tiny scratch and obliterated all sign of it. Leaving the bench he approached the doctor. "Better phone the hospital," he advised sententiously, "without losing any more time!" In the vituperative argument that immediately followed, the little shoemaker slipped away and rejoined Goring outside.

"The work of the same gang," he said in his terse manner. "And judging by the riot when Sullivan hit the canvas they must have collected a fortune. At three to one"—he hummed a bar or two—"let's say three hundred thousand dollars."

"What!" shouted the bewildered reporter.

"Up to Ponsonby's office," urged Story, evading further explanation. "Let's go! I want a chat with him at once. Find Harry Stoner. Bring him along. And Micky Morris, his manager." On a sudden impulse he hurried down the ringside aisle and, displaying a badge he carried, spoke to a policeman and one of the ushers. "Don't let any one go near that corner," he commanded, pointing to the corner of the ring occupied by Sullivan. "I want to look it over. And see that the dressing room is not swept out until I return. Is that plain?"

"Guess it is," said the cop, entirely swayed by the badge and the little man's imperative manner, for he hadn't the slightest idea who he was.

Upstairs, in the promoter's office, Tench Story held them breathless and when he had finished what he had to say they knew that one of the rottenest gambling jobs men could conceive had been perpetrated that night in the historic Garden. It was, as Story convinced them, a duplication of the one pulled off in Philadelphia eight weeks ago.

Mr. Ponsonby swore he would use all the influence he possessed and not rest until he had rescued the boxing game from this outrageous menace. He agreed that the only way to bring the gang to justice was to proceed carefully. Following a nod from Story, he demanded an oath of secrecy from every man present. "Mr. Story," he said, savagely biting the end of his cigar, "if you help me clear up this nest of snakes you can fill in my blank check!"

"Don't require money, thanks," returned the little shoemaker, expressing his objection with a most amusing contortion of his nose and mouth. " 'Bout all I want you to do is to follow my instructions." His gaze rested on Harry Stoner. " 'Pears to me, Mr. Ponsonby, you might begin by reinstating this boy Stoner. They had to shoot him in the back to win that title."

"I'll see he's reinstated," said the promoter, determinedly. "Harry!" He offered his hand. "I'm sorry I ever doubted you. Couldn't figure out you were anything but straight and square, anyway."

"Say! get that bird Manton once more for us," begged Micky Morris in a shrill voice.

"Just a minute," said Story. "That's what I was coming to." He turned to Pon-

sonby. "Go to work," he instructed, "and sign up Stoner and Manton. Soon as the match is made we'll arrange a little trap for the Sicilian scrapper and his friends. Meanwhile"—his lean face was severe and his eyes flashed a warning to each man in turn —"let every one keep this under cover."

"We don't want to run any risk of Harry getting another shot in the back," put in Goring, defendingly.

"I'll take care of that," said Story.

Motioning Goring to follow, he hurried down to the arena and spent some little time nosing round the corner ropes and post of the ring. "Process of elimination," he told the reporter, vaguely. "Doubt whether Sullivan's back could touch these ropes, anyhow. Hand me a chair, Goring, and let's try." The young man swung a chair into the ring and Story, placing the back of it toward the ring center, straddled the seat and tried to touch the corner ropes with his shoulders. "See that?" he called, illustrating what he meant. "This part of my back comes between those two ropes. Obviously a man couldn't obtain a scratch where Stoner and Sullivan got theirs from these ropes, or any other ring ropes." He climbed down and cast his eye over the position of the ringside seats, sat down in two or three of them and measured the distance to the ring corner. "The man who knocked out Dutch Sullivan to-night sat in one of these chairs," he said, touching several in turn with his hand.

"But, in Heaven's name, how did he manage it?" asked Goring.

"Don't know yet. Let's try the dressing room."

The defeated boxer had long since been removed to a hospital and the dressing room was empty. A policeman stood guard by the door. "Since they left, sir," he said in reply to Story's query, "nobody's been near the place."

The lights were thrown on, and the little man began crawling about the floor on his hands and knees, Goring holding a flashlight and directing its light wherever ordered. "Guess it's time wasted," said Story, eventually, rising and dusting off his hands and clothes. "Can't do any more for the time being. Let's sleep on it."

Goring tried to curb his curiosity, knowing the little shoemaker's objection to a questioning of his methods; but he didn't succeed. "What were you searching for?" he asked, as they walked out of the building.

"For a little dart—about the size of a phonograph needle—maybe smaller. It carries more dynamite than Dempsey's left hook!"

IV.

In the center of the huge, dark auditorium, salient and dazzlingly white under its overhead calcium lights, the square patch of roped-off canvas swarmed with photographers and representatives of America's fistiana. Around it, stretching away to its far boundaries, the Garden was packed from ringside to rafter: an obscure, shadowy mass of indistinguishable faces, a great black pit, punctured here and there by thousands of match flares as cigar smokers violated the rule of the house.

The preliminaries provided by Mr. Ponsonby had afforded considerable satisfaction, and a well-known pair of lightweights had just put up a cockle-of-the-heart semi-final. A pulsating hum of excitement, preceding the entrance of the finalists, broke into a staccato roar as Frankie Manton, wearing a tweed cap and followed by his retinue of seconds and handlers, came down the aisle and hopped into the ring.

Several men were interested in seeing which corner the welterweight champion would take. His seconds deposited their water buckets and paraphernalia in the south corner—the corner, it was quickly noted and passed around the house, occupied by every winner that evening; three by knock-outs and one on a foul.

"Atta boy, Frankie! You've got the winning seat, anyway!"

Casually, unknown to any but those directly concerned with the maneuver, two men quietly changed their ringside positions. One was a little man, a very little man, on the bridge of whose sharp, inquisitive nose rested a pair of steel-rimmed eyeglasses. Accompanied by a tall young man he sauntered round and unobservedly occupied one of two mysteriously vacated chairs on the opposite side of the ring, directly behind the corner left vacant for Harry Stoner, the challenger.

The movement completed, Tench Story and Goring found themselves separated by a husky-looking individual, whose name on the city pay roll was registered as Detective Sergeant Fera. At present, however, neither man seemed acquainted. Their at-

tention, like the attention of everybody, was captivated by what was going on in the ring.

Micky Morris had promised to follow Tench Story's instructions with painstaking accuracy. Harry Stoner's dressing gown was of an extra thick quality to-night, and it was to remain over his shoulders when he crossed over to speak to Manton and examine his hand bandages, to remain there while the referee called them to the center to hear the rules governing the bout, to remain—despite protestations—while he posed for the photographers, and was to be unremoved during the putting on of the gloves. A boxer's seconds, attendants, come and go; so that there would be nothing unusual in Stoner's new forces; most of whom, by the way, were more used to swinging a baton than a towel.

A mixed reception greeted the challenger. His tardy reinstatement by the boxing authorities and the complimentary notices given him by some of the sporting editors had done much to dispel the gloom of suspicion which latterly had surrounded him. But he certainly was not the idol he had been in the past. As he entered the arena the booing and razzing almost drowned the applause for him. It chilled his heart a little. Ever since he had first boxed for them no such manifestation of the public's disapproval had reached his ears. Stoner, recoiling from a near-by, vicious remark, bit his lip during a surge of utter misery. It required an effort to keep on smiling. He needed their welcome, not their animosity. A man fighting for the world's championship has a tough enough job on his hands without having the spectators against him, too.

He bore his disappointment well, however, kept his head high and had a kindly glance for friend and foe alike. After chatting a moment with a couple of press representatives he sprang up, climbed through the ropes, and entered the ring. His face, thought Goring, watching him intently, looked a trifle drawn and pale.

Ribald utterances floated down from the gallery and grew into a torrent of impatient abuse, shouting and booing while the two fighters were being photographed, first separately, then together, squaring off. Manton, an ugly, thickset customer, his jaw and upper lip sprouting a two-day growth of beard, kept his beetle brows lowered. He wouldn't look at Stoner, in whose light-blue eyes burned a feverish, brilliant glint, hard as steel. He appeared the more nervous, and his smile, slightly pretentious, came and went as epithet or compliment reached him.

"Is this one on the up and up, Harry?"

"So long, Manton! The birdies for yours! Tweet! tweet! tweet!"

"Hey, Stoner! Pick out a soft spot for a dive."

"Let's go! Let's go!"

Strange to say, for all the criticism hurled at him during the past months and a few moments ago when he entered the arena, the greater volume of cheering now accompanied the introductory naming and weight of Harry Stoner. It put an additional fire into his heart. Just before the gong he stripped pink and clean and stretched his muscles on the ropes with tigerish activity. The house was on its toes, shouting mad, as the two men bounded out of their respective corners and instantly went into a savage clinch without the least sign of the usual handshake.

Tench Story wasn't watching the fight. His furtive eyes had finally fastened on the thick, swart neck of one of three men sitting together in front of him. They were undeniably foreign in color and appearance, and apparently were oblivious of the storm raging around and above them.

A left hook to the jaw, sending Manton back on his heels, brought a crescendo of cheering. Even then, the three swarthy foreigners in the third row remained unruffled.

Inside the ropes, the two men fought with the ferocity of wild cats, without let-up, putting all they had into each swift blow, separated by the referee only to smash into another toe-to-toe session, in all of which Harry Stoner's cleverer infighting inflicted tremendous punishment. Manton's left side was soon raw and, in comparison, the rest of his body appeared yellow. He managed to jar Harry with a right, but his head went back several successive times before he managed to get away.

It was a terrific fight, and the house was with Stoner. All however that he and Manton could hear was a confused roar—like the sound of a fearful storm heard below the decks of some ocean liner. But two cold blue eyes convinced the Sicilian that unless he could get in a lucky punch—delivered, more possibly, from a ringside seat—he was

in for a terrible drubbing. He took another left and right to the mouth, felt a warm, rather sweet trickle running down his lower lip and chin, and went to his corner, his head swimming.

At once, Micky Morris and another handler sprang up and sheltered Harry Stoner's corner, into which their man came on the run. There was too great an excitement in the Garden that night for the fans to notice the byplay between rounds. As a rule, no fighter's back and shoulders are covered during the minute's rest; but Micky Morris saw to it that Harry Stoner's back wasn't exposed for an instant longer than was necessary to cover it with a dressing gown.

"Oh you Harry Stoner! You've got him; you've got him!"

Tench Story was keyed up to a pitch of alertness. He thought he detected a suspicious movement on the part of the man he was specially watching, and he noted a surreptitious sign pass from one to the other. The gong rang, and the fighters rushed from their corners. Again, Stoner's terrific hitting power had Manton in a bad way; the latter's face was cut and bleeding freely now, and that disastrous sign, a loose, open mouth, was conspicuously in evidence toward the end of the round.

By this time, sensing a knock-out, the fans were standing on their seats, crazed with enthusiasm, rocking, swaying, spellbound under the thrill of watching their former favorite making a spectacular comeback. Stoner came smiling to his corner, to be received by his watchful seconds. In his anxiety, Micky Morris was physically unable to obey all of Tench Story's injunctions and he was guilty of casting a backward apprehensive glance now and then at the ringside seats directly behind him. Story's eyebrows met in a signal of annoyance, but his warning was not observed by the worried manager.

And then occurred an extraordinary thing! Bending over Stoner in order to say something to him, Morris permitted the protective dressing gown to slip and uncover the fighter's back. Tench Story, his eyes fixed elsewhere, didn't observe this, but what he did observe was the instantaneous stratagem put into effect, not by the man he had been watching, but by his companion on the left. The man whipped up his hand and inflated his cheeks to blow something through a short reed—like a boy's pea shooter.

Quick as a flash Story leaped at him and snatched the instrument out of the man's fingers. The gong sounded for the third round, and there were two or three fights on at the same time. Goring and Detective Sergeant Fera were implicated in one, while the little shoemaker ducked out of harm's way. A merry little hell sent chairs and spectators crashing. It appeared as if a score of men were implicated in the mix-up, in which, curiously enough, Stoner's seconds played a most important part.

It was soon over, and three dark-faced men were being hustled up the aisle by special policemen before the majority of the house knew what it was all about. Thereafter, Tench Story was the calmest man in the midst of the wreckage and Micky Morris the most excited. Goring had suffered a cut lip and was dabbing it with his handkerchief. Sergeant Fera had gone with his charges to the Twenty-second Street station.

"Danger still round," whispered the little shoemaker to Morris. "But not in this corner; unless they change round. Get me? If the fight lasts much longer, keep a sharp lookout—and tell Stoner not to let Manton work him into his own corner. They're waiting to shoot over there, too!"

A thunderclap of vociferous cheering caused the little man to look up. There was no necessity for further advice on his part. Manton was down, in a grotesque position, and all the referee had to do was to wave his arm over him ten times. It was all over! Harry Stoner had regained the world's title by a knock-out!

Calling to Goring, Story hurried across the intervening space and brushing past the frantic reporters he made a careful study of the corner post and ropes. In the direct line of fire he found a tiny dart, about half an inch long and made of some sort of hard fiber, sticking in the middle rope. He abstracted it gingerly and folded it in a piece of paper which he tore from his notebook.

"Half an inch, up or down," he said tersely, "and Harry Stoner would never have won that title!"

Mr. Ponsonby came up, his face showing signs of the strain he was under. "Well," he stammered; "what happened? I couldn't see from the other side."

"Got 'em."

"You did, eh?"

"Three. There's a gang present." He lowered his voice. "Go steady till we round 'em all up. Got a private exit?"

The promoter nodded. "This way," he said. Story signaled to a couple of policemen, and in a few minutes a taxi bore them to the Twenty-second Street police station. There, Inspector Jones willingly provided them with the entertainment required. The three prisoners were surly and incommunicable.

"Don't understand English, eh?" said Tench Story. "All right. We'll effect the most rapid knowledge of that language known to linguists. Searched 'em, inspector?"

"Yes." He shrugged, intimating that he had found nothing which, under the circumstances, would enable him to hold him.

The respective possessions of the three men lay on the table. The little shoemaker rifled through them with his forefinger. "Maybe I can show you something," he said, picking up a watch and chain. Quickly relating the history of Stoner's mysterious defeat in Philadelphia and describing the coincidence of Dutch Sullivan's serious breakdown, Story produced the typewritten letter that Stoner had given him and called the inspector's attention to the singular hieroglyphic adorning it. "Now," he said, going to the table, "take this little watch charm, press it down on the paper, and see how it jibes up."

Inspector Jones tried it, and the resulting symbol was identical with the original.

Confronted by this damning evidence, the Sicilians preserved their inscrutable front, a brooding immutability that even the sight of their blowpipe—suddenly thrust under their noses by Tench Story—failed to disturb.

"We've enough evidence to hold them on suspicion, anyway," asserted the inspector.

"I'll give you some more," said the irrepressible little man. Making a closer study of the heterogeneous articles on the table, discarding some quickly and dwelling over others, he finally unscrewed the top of what purported to be a fountain pen. It was a dummy, and hollow. Tipping it up on his handkerchief brought about the appearance of five little fiber darts, exactly like the one Story forthwith displayed folded in a piece of paper he had in his waistcoat pocket.

"Careful how you handle those things," he warned as Goring reached across to examine one at close range.

The inspector came round the table as though propelled by some hidden spring. He didn't mince his words. "What d' you call these things?" he bellowed at the prisoners, pointing to the white handkerchief.

"For gramophone," ejaculated one of them, rendered articular at last under stress of circumstantial evidence.

"A gramophone, eh?"

"Then," said Tench Story, "you won't mind a little prick with a gramophone needle, will you?" He winked at the inspector. "Let's try it," he suggested. "Stick it into his back."

Although the prisoner who had spoken made his objection a physical one he was quickly subdued, manhandled, and stripped to his waistline. But before one of the innocent-looking darts touched his skin he began to yell blue murder.

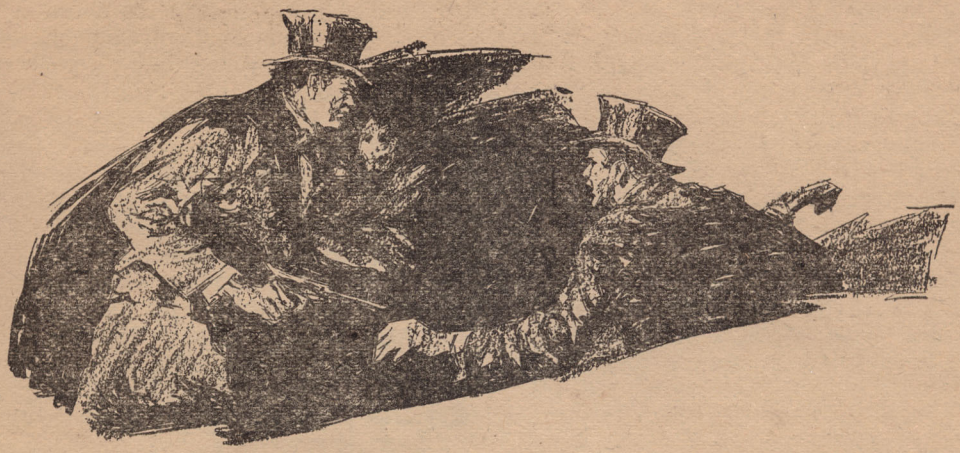
"It's poisoned—it's poisoned," he confessed, the whites of his eyes showing. "Quit it and I'll talk. I'll tell you all I know."

"Atta baby," said the inspector. "Come clean now and maybe it won't go so bad for you."

What he was prevailed upon to tell revealed the name of a man prominently connected with the turf and the boxing game, and it caused the listeners to gasp in surprise. A warrant for his arrest was made out, and Detective Sergeant Fera and a squad were soon speeding uptown to a certain address, Alan Goring deciding to go along with them, while telephones precipitated urgent messages in all directions.

"I think, Mr. Story," said the inspector, "we ought to land the whole gang."

"Maybe," returned the little shoemaker. "They're about as numerous as rattlers. Anyway, I think we can convince them that in America we box under Marquis of Queensberry and not Sicilian rules."



Selwood of Sleepy Cat

By Frank H. Spearman

Author of "Whispering Smith," "Nan of Music Mountain," Etc.

(A Four-Part Story—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XXVI.

COUNTER ATTACK.

HE got back without further incident and deposited his queer-looking bundle with care inside a cupboard in the harness room. Scott had returned and had covered the River Quarter, unmolested. His report confirmed all information that Bunty Bartoe's place had not been burned, and, Scott added, was now noisy with Starbuck's following, who, passing in and out, were celebrating their victory.

Pardaloe listened with snapping eyes. "How did you get through their guard?" he demanded.

Scott grinned. "Nothing much to hinder, Bill, till you get right down to Bunty's front door."

"Is Starbuck there?" asked Pardaloe.

It was a question Scott could not answer.

Selwood's mind worked as he listened. "I've got to know for sure where Starbuck is," he said, his eyes moving from face to face of those listening about him. "Where's Bull Page?" he asked after a moment's thought.

Bull was found rubbing down the horses.

"Get what men are in the office out, John," directed Selwood, "and call Bull Page in."

"Bull Page?" echoed Lefever as if Selwood's mind were wandering.

"Yes, Bull Page," repeated Selwood testily. "Get him here quick."

Facing Selwood within a moment, and alone with him in the office, the ragged but amiable Bull looked as surprised at being summoned at such a moment by the boss as the other men were.

Selwood spoke to him kindly and without haste and asked an odd question. "Bull, you haven't done the world very much good in your eventful lifetime, have you?"

Poor Bull, greatly taken aback, countered with a sickly smile. The words sounded to him like the dawn of a day of judgment. "Well—I—hope I ain't done nobody a whole lot o' harm—have I, John?" he asked in his quavering, throaty tones.

"Not to anybody except yourself, Bull, if the truth be told," replied Selwood evenly. "Not half as much harm as I've done, Bull, by a damned sight. But to-night there's a chance for both of us to do some good for somebody. You've seen that young girl whose father kept the mock-auction store downstreet, one of the stores that was burned to-night?"

Bull nodded. "I seen her, John."

"Somewhere in this row she's got lost. I'm afraid she's fallen into bad hands. You never can tell what will happen, you know, a night like this."

"Wouldn't want no wimminfolks of mine mixed up in it."

"Then listen," continued Selwood.

Bull, though appearing perplexed, listened very carefully to Selwood's further words.

"I've seen you many times drunk, Bull, trying to make me think you were sober."

Bull nodded as if confessing to the indictment.

"To-night I want you sober, trying to make everybody else think you're drunk."

Bull saw a flash of humor in the suggestion. "That," he returned with his chin pushed well into his throat, "ain't goin' to be so awful hard, John, I don't think."

"There's one feature you may not like. But you're entitled, fair and square, to know it now. We may, one of us or both of us, get killed."

"Willing to go most anywhere you go, John," Bull replied simply.

Selwood showed his own surprise at the unassuming assent by a longer breath than usual. "John Barleycorn spoiled a man when he got you, Bull," he said, regarding him gravely.

Bull's smile had long been in rags, but it shone brave through the tatters of his seamy face. He said nothing.

"When we do get into action," Selwood went on, "don't overplay your part. That's the trouble with these stage actors. They're sober men trying to look drunk; instead of drunken men trying to look sober."

Selwood believed that if any man at the barn could get into Bartoe's that night, alive, it would be Bull Page. Bull, though janitor at Selwood's place, left his wages impartially at the various dives along the river front. He thus enjoyed a certain standing in the lower town as well as in the upper. He was not branded as a partisan because none thought him worth enlisting as one, and he moved without prejudice among the different factions of the town.

"I don't want to ask you to do anything I wouldn't do myself—if I *could*," said Selwood, explaining to Bull what he meant to attempt. "But you can get through doors barred against me and against any stranger; and with you to guarantee a stranger, I might make it. Anyway, Bull, if you're game we'll try; and they won't get us both without *some* kind of a hearing. Don't take a gun. It wouldn't do much good and might do harm."

Pardaloe and McAlpin were called in. "If you'll hold your men together here for a while longer," said Selwood to Lefever, "we'll know exactly what we are going to do. In, say, ten minutes, John, bring all of them that want to fight down to Bartoe's and maybe they can be accommodated. I'm taking Bull Page with me—and suppose you and Scott come along, Bill," he added to Pardaloe. "If we don't all of us get back, some of us might."

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Lefever.

"I'm going down to Bartoe's to look around."

Scott, with the quickest instinct of the listeners, looked at the gambler with a skeptical smile. "You're not going inside?"

"I am, if I can make it," returned Selwood. He began to unbutton his coat. "And I'll borrow your hat and coat and boots if you're willing, Bob," he added. As he spoke he took a cap of McAlpin's, hanging on a near-by hook, and stuffed it into his trousers pocket.

Scott began to take off his coat. Lefever sat partly on the table, with one leg swinging over the edge. He slipped uneasily from his perch and stood before Selwood.

"John," he said, "what are you actually going to do?"

Selwood slipped his arms into the coat Scott held up. "I told you," he replied.

"You don't honestly mean you are going to try to go into Bunty's place to-night?"

"Why not?"

Lefever eyed him with indignation and contempt. "You're looking for death, sure!"

Selwood was already in Scott's rig. "Nothing is death sure, John," he retorted amiably. "When my time comes, it comes."

"As McAlpin would say, you're talking like a blamed fool, John," rejoined Lefever.

Pardaloe grunted. "I'd say you're talking like one yourself, John Lefever, if I didn't owe you sixty dollars. That is," he mumbled, "if you think you can make Selwood change his mind by talking to him. If you're ready," he snapped at Selwood.

looking around for his trusty shotgun, "let's go."

Selwood led the way out of the harness room through the office and down the dark gangway to the back door of the barn. Lefever, still persisting in protest and caution, fastened the door behind the four men.

Separating as they left the barn, Pardaloe and Scott, and Selwood with Bull Page, and a definite rendezvous named, worked their way downtown. Surprised at the lull in the fighting, they could only surmise that the Vigilantes were still at bay, with the gamblers still celebrating their victory.

The men stationed outside to guard Bartoe's place, the remaining resort on the river front, offered little impediment to a reasonably close approach. But Selwood, on one side, worked his way between the guards and the building only to find that some one had sensibly drawn every window curtain, and, where there were shutters, had closed every shutter. While Selwood and Scott scouted about the place, the front door could be seen to open at infrequent intervals for men to pass in and pass out; this much was all that a rapid inspection of the place disclosed.

Selwood joined Pardaloe where the latter awaited him on the river bank. "They've got it well hooked up, Bill," he said, looking toward the lone building where all was darkness save when a streak of light shot from the front door as it was opened. "I counted five men outside."

Pardaloe corrected him. "Count four now," he said with a certain grimness. "Rolled one of 'em down the river bank."

"You didn't kill him?"

"Choked him a little, that's all. These birds of Lefever's have got to have somebody to hang when we get through, 'n' it might as well be this buck as anybody else. No," he repeated indignantly, answering a second pointed question, "I didn't kill him. He's just gagged, and tied up tighter'n a bull's eye in fly time. If he wasn't fool enough to roll plum' down into the river when I started him, he's all right. Now speakin' of plans, I've got 'em laid out for this place, John."

"What are they?"

"Why, simple. I'll fire the back of the place and you pick 'em off when they run out the front. What?"

"Bill," said Selwood impatiently, "you missed one big bet when you didn't set out to keep Sleepy Cat supplied with fresh meat. First place, I don't know who's in there. If I did, I'm not a public executioner. I'm not a Vigilante. I'm just a plain gambler—not a butcher. And how," he continued, overriding Pardaloe's indignation, "do I know that Starbuck isn't holding Christie Fyler or her father prisoner in there?"

Pardaloe drew a breath. "Well," he confessed, "to tell the truth, I didn't think about her; the old man wouldn't make so much difference."

Selwood regarded the dim, forbidding outline of the tightly closed, ill-favored joint with half-closed, longing eyes. "I'd like," he said, much as if to himself, "to get one look inside that dive for just one minute."

"A look from you in there wouldn't last one minute," observed Pardaloe significantly.

Selwood for a moment said nothing. "Well!" exclaimed Pardaloe impatiently.

"'Well,'" echoed Selwood, still reflecting, "before we do anything else, I'm going to take a look inside. I want to see just who's there—and what they're doing, Bill. We can talk a plan over afterward."

Pardaloe put some useless warning and much fervent skepticism into one ironical word. "Maybe!"

"Of course it's only 'maybe,'" admitted Selwood, not unamiably. "Got any whisky with you, Bill?"

Pardaloe, after having so lately declared that no one could budge Selwood in his decisions, tried vainly to dissuade him from the undertaking. It was hopeless, he knew. But there was one thing Pardaloe could do—that was to obey orders.

A few minutes later a man much under the influence of liquor, if one's nose could be trusted, for he strongly smelled of it, approached unsteadily the front door of the Bartoe place. In size, but in no other way, he resembled Selwood. Near the door, two men, as he lurched toward them, stopped him roughly. They demanded his business, denied him entrance, and when he staggered toward the door itself, insisting he would have a drink, one of the guards, seizing him by the throat, threw him with brutal indifference backward into the street, where he fell prone and lay for a moment muttering to himself.

Presently he began to sing somewhat uncertainly a teamster's song. But the more he sang the better apparently he liked it, for the longer he sang the louder he sang, much to the annoyance of the truculent guard, who finally strode with a curse toward him—failing in his eagerness to note that the drunken man now lay much farther out in the street than he had been thrown—to silence him. In the darkness, he reached the object of his wrath, lying prone, and tried to kick it into silence. Beyond that point of the action he had, afterward, for some time but the haziest recollection. His foot was caught in the air, he was snapped violently backward, and before he could utter even a warning cry his head struck the ground like a stone. Two minutes afterward, still unconscious, he lay, gagged and bound, stripped of his two guns and hat and coat, rolled to one side into the ashes.

The guard at the door had fared in the brief interval rather worse than better. Pardaloe timed his action to the thud he heard when the singing stopped. Slinking up from behind like a mountain lion, he clapped one big hand over the second man's mouth and with his other hand caught his victim's wrist in a vise; the next moment he had doubled him up in a bear hug and choked him into complete silence.

When the men were secured, Pardaloe dragging his prisoner, bound, around the corner of the building, arrayed himself, as far as he could get into them, in the accoutrements of his victim. Selwood ran up. Not losing a moment, he whistled into the night for Bull Page, who was awaiting his signal across the street. "Now, Bull," he murmured, as the old man hastened to him, "for a look at the inside!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

BARBALET IS PERSUADED.

BULL caught hold of the iron latch handle and pulled at the door. It resisted. Either bolted or barred on the inside, his efforts made no impression on it.

"Stand aside, Bull," said Selwood. He tried the latch, in turn, and using more force when less failed, jerked at the door violently. Still unsuccessful, he pounded on it with his fist.

A watchman, within, unbarred and opened the door a few cautious inches. Selwood, under the hat of the fallen guard, thrust forward his head. "It's Bull Page. Let him in! He's got a message for Starbuck."

The watchman took no chances. "Hold on!" he exclaimed gruffly, and at once slammed shut the door and barred it. While Selwood waited his return—with perhaps more impatience than Bull, who must have felt that to oblige a friend he was taking a good chance of getting shot—the watchman took counsel. He opened the door again presently and with the same caution. "Come in, Bull."

Selwood in the interval had thrown away the guard's hat and put on the extra cap pulled from one of his numerous pockets; and when the watchman opened the door wide enough for Bull to enter he attempted to walk in behind him. The vigilant guardian pushed him out again. "No, you don't!"

Bull raised his quavering voice. "Hit's all right—he's my partner."

"Nix," repeated the watchman, shoving Selwood roughly back as he tried to edge through the half-open door. "Keep out!"

"But he's got news Starbuck wants," persisted Bull, to whom the thought of entering the wolves' den alone was much more repugnant than of making an appearance under the wing of a man who could at least shoot if shot at.

"No, you *don't,*" persisted the doorkeeper with a truculent aspect. "You come in, Bull Page—nobody else." With that he jerked Bull in by the coat collar and banged the door in Selwood's face.

The gambler took the rebuff impassively. He could have slipped his foot into the opening and scuffled an entrance, but this would only have defeated his purpose. It would, in the end, probably cost him his life and do Christie no good. Bull had his instructions. He was to tell Starbuck that Selwood wanted to see him at the barn—and was likely to get rough handling for his pains. Outside the evil joint, Selwood felt he held at least one portal and could afford to wait.

But he was beginning to count Bull's effort a failure, and was trying to devise a new scheme, when, after what seemed a long interval, the door was opened again. Selwood, as he saw Harry Barbalet coming out, followed by Bull Page, slunk into the shadow. Barbalet, sober, alert, suspicious.

was the one man in the place that Selwood had most hoped not to encounter; at least, not until he had made more headway, for none, he felt, of the wolves within would so quickly penetrate his rude disguise. As the two men emerged, he retreated farther.

Bull looked vacantly around in the darkness as if to get his bearings. "He's here," declared Page in his trembling voice, trying as he spoke to penetrate the shadows. "I know that much; or he was a minute ago. He'll help, if I c'n find him."

"You don't need any help," insisted the busy bartender scornfully. "They're all locked up together in back of the barber shop. Get old Fyler out the back door. Tell him you'll help 'em get away—him first. He'll go out with you because he knows you. All you've got to do is throw him into the river. Starbuck wants to get rid of him. You'll get paid."

"The old man's wiry," objected Bull, spinning out the talk. "I want my partner outside the back door, so the old man don't throw me in. Right wrongs no man, Harry," persisted Bull, facing continued objection. "I don't want to get throw'd in, myself—not for no money. Of course, I'll try it alone if you say so, but if my partner——"

An outburst from Barbalet cut short the talk; Bull had said all he wanted to say, anyway. But, still maundering on, he was unceremoniously pushed through the partly open door back into the room. Selwood slipped around the corner to where Pardaloe, close to a window, was grimly awaiting action. Selwood repeated what he had heard, directed him to watch the back door of the barber shop, take any necessary measures, and to detain Fyler till Selwood could get back to him.

"Say the word," said Pardaloe, "and I'll fire the whole dashed joint. I've got everything laid right here, and good tinder to do it with."

"Don't set this place on fire till we get everybody out of it!" exclaimed Selwood. "Christie Fyler is more than likely locked up in there with her father. Hold your horses, Bill."

"Yes, but it takes a few minutes to get a fire going," objected Pardaloe.

"I must see the inside of the place, first of all," continued Selwood. "I can't plan anything in the dark."

"Here's a sash loose," mumbled Pardaloe, balked of his prey, "right here. Why don't you——"

Selwood, knowing the general layout of the inside of the big room, jumped at the chance. "There's a curtain in front of it," continued Pardaloe.

"Out with the sash," said Selwood instantly. "I'll take a chance right here. Easy, Bill."

The window was a rather small, square, single-sash affair, set breast high. It needed no more than the prying off of a sash stop, which Pardaloe managed with the blade of his bowie knife without making much noise. He lifted aside the sash. A curtain, tacked up inside, covered the window opening; and while Pardaloe noiselessly set down the sash, Selwood caught an edge of the curtain in his fingers and peered inside.

It looked like a fair chance. The corner was not dark, but it was not brightly lighted. A table stood close to the side of the window through which Selwood was looking. On one side of the table sat a man leaning forward with his head buried in his arms as if asleep. His hat lay on the table. Selwood watched him pretty closely for a moment—he was the nearest element of danger—but reached the conclusion he was stupid with drink. The curtain was short. Hung from hooks at the upper corners, it reached only to the window apron. Selwood could see men standing in small groups not ten feet away, but the entire room, probably for reasons of safety, was only meagerly lighted.

The gambler thought he could make it. He dropped the curtain from one hook. One end of the room stood pretty well revealed. No one, apparently, had noticed the partial fall of the curtain. He whispered brief instructions to Pardaloe.

"If you don't hear any shooting, Bill, you'll know I'm moving safe. If you hear *one* shot, just pay no attention. Have your shotgun up here on the sill; the instant you hear two shots, fire one barrel at that big lamp." Selwood pointed to the lamp hanging in the front end of the room. "Let the other barrel go into the middle of the crowd. That will give me a chance for the front door."

"John, I might hit y'," objected Pardaloe in a ferocious whisper.

"If I'm in that crowd, Bill, after *two* shots are fired, a few buckshot more or less won't hurt my feelings in the least," said

Selwood reassuringly. "Just let go quick at that lamp—that's the main thing. I'll make what noise I can with my gun to help you out."

Pardaloe, wrought up and listening with nervous intensity, was feeling in the darkness the hammers of the big gun. "Them hammer ketches is gettin' worn, John," he mumbled. "Sometimes when I fire one barrel the second goes off."

"Then get the lamp," returned Selwood indifferently. "Give it both barrels at once. Now set down your gun and give me a lift. I must get in there with my back to the window and both hands free."

The mule boss took him under the armpits, that Selwood's hands might be free, lifted him, and the next moment Selwood, watching the nearest men closely, stood inside the room with his feet on the floor. Pardaloe quickly rehung the curtain.

It was the work of the next moment for Selwood to reel to and sink into the empty chair opposite the sleepy man—and, peering from under his cap, to study the scene.

The interior of the place, of notorious repute even among casehardened men, was not wholly unfamiliar to Selwood, nor had it changed much in the long interval since he had seen it. The fierce yellow glare of the big lamps was missing; a murky haze of smoke dimmed the atmosphere and the heated air, with every door and window closed, was rank with the fumes of tobacco and the characteristic smell of liquor. The bar, in bartenders' parlance, was closed; but when drinks were demanded they were very carefully set out by one man only, the argus-eyed Harry Barbalet, evidently appointed to manage the motley ruffians—the refuse of Sleepy Cat and the aristocracy of Calabasas—who, filled with the success of their repulse of the Vigilantes, ranted, cursed, and boasted, or yelled and disputed, and drank when they could get drink, along the length of the bar. It was Barbalet's policy, as Selwood had no difficulty in discerning, to hand out enough drink to stimulate the fighting instinct but not enough to befuddle it. It was the eyes of Harry—sober, plotting, vigilant Harry—that Selwood rightly feared more than all other eyes in the room. Neither Bunty nor Atkins was in sight, and Selwood's nervous eyes searched the room vainly for a sight of the one man he had taken a desperate chance to see—Starbuck. Men came at intervals out of the back room, but each one closed the door most carefully behind him. It was there, Selwood soon found reason to believe, that the leaders were closeted.

To attempt the inner room, he knew, meant a show-down. Whatever eyes might be fooled in the front room, those in the back room would not be long in discovering his identity. But with a fatality either temperamental or due to his chance-taking career, Selwood made ready to penetrate the second room in a search for Starbuck. At the table where he sat, he felt now as much at home as if in his old gambling room. He pushed guardedly at the head of the man opposite him and found, after a little fussing, that he was fast asleep. The man wore about his neck a large bandanna kerchief, and this Selwood, keeping his eyes well on those about him, gradually disengaged with one hand—twisting it around to where he could loosen the knot and draw it from the man's neck. His victim having taken this liberty quite good-naturedly, Selwood doffed McAlpin's queer-looking cap at a moment that no eyes were turned his way, and after another moment tried on the sleeping man's hat. It fitted well enough and he did not take it off; but, proceeding slowly, keeping a clear eye on the men nearest, and handling his right forearm as if wounded, Selwood slipped one arm and then the other out of the coat he wore, and laid the purloined neckerchief over the right forearm.

Drawing his revolver from the scabbard in which he had replaced it when sitting down, Selwood, with the grip of the gun in his right hand, wrapped the kerchief loosely over hand and gun together. When arranged to his liking, he drew his small hunting knife and gradually slit the bandage on the lower side from end to end, so that it lay hiding his revolver but ready to jerk off with his free hand. Putting away the knife, he stood up, and facing the room, reached with his left hand up behind him and jerked the window curtain from its hooks. Sitting down again, he made a rude sling of the curtain, hung it from his neck under his right wrist, and with his left hand slipped his coat back again over his shoulders. Sitting now quite at ease, he drew a leaf of cigarette paper from a waistcoat pocket, laid it on the table, fished a tiny bag of tobacco from a coat pocket, opened

it between his teeth and his left hand, taking advantage of that proceeding to take an extra good look at the men in front of him, rolled his cigarette awkwardly on the table before him, pushed it between his lips, and rose to his feet. He drew his hat brim evenly down so it was neither high nor low but exactly shaded his eyes, and with the cigarette hanging from his lip moved toward a noisy group of men and asked the nearest one for a match.

Passing this inspection proved easy. One man asked him how he got hit; another, whether he was for burning the railroad station and everybody in it—which proposal Selwood heartily endorsed. Lighting the cigarette, and laying his left hand on his bandaged arm, he asked how soon they would be ready to begin action and was told they were ready now. He moved from one to another of the talking groups—some of the men were examining revolvers, others stowing cartridges into various pockets, others adjusting ammunition belts, trading tobacco, boasting and telling stories; but while Selwood recognized more than one of them either as Calabasas worthies or River Quarter "rats," none of them uncovered him.

His apprehension thus fairly well allayed, he made his way in easy measure toward the rear end of the room where the crowd was thicker. He had approached within a dozen feet of the back-room door and was thinking of just how he should maneuver an entrance when it was suddenly opened and out walked Harry Barbalet, followed by the redoubtable Bull Page, whose eyes showed mild stimulation.

The moment was delicate. It seemed to Selwood as if, of all men in the room, the bartender's sharp eye fixed instantly on him. To turn quickly away would only be, he well knew, to excite suspicion and even invite particular inspection. The utmost Selwood could do was to interrupt a conversation near at hand and ask whether the doctor had come.

Had Bull, the derelict, sold him out—disclosed Selwood's presence and told what he knew of his intentions? The gambler did not believe it. Men on the Rocky Mountain frontier staked their lives at times on what would seem very slender chances. But drunkard though Bull was, outcast among outcasts, Selwood would have risked his life that Bull, drunk or sober, would not betray him. The question that rankled in his mind was, had Barbalet in that brief, piercing glance, discovered him? Was it imagination that was already tricking him into thinking so? He could not be sure. But some instinct told him he had been detected and must measure accordingly. The next moment Barbalet, now following Page, passed Selwood without noticing him—and so close on his left that he brushed him with an impatient shoulder.

It needed only an instant for Selwood to reason that this was precisely the way he himself should act if positions were reversed; and he knew Barbalet's astuteness too well to believe he would act, in the circumstances, any differently.

Without hesitation, Selwood, taking advantage of Barbalet's broad shoulder, turned promptly to the left and, falling into step, walked on directly behind the two—third and last man in a procession heading straight for the lower end of the bar. For with his instinct, right or wrong, Selwood would not have kept his place and exposed his back to a shot from Barbalet until he could put at least a partial screen of men between himself and his enemy.

It seemed strange to find himself heading so briskly in such company and at such a businesslike gait for a corner of the room that he had such good reason to remember. The old archway had been boarded up and a batten door had been set roughly into it to lead into the barber shop; it was for this door that Barbalet was heading.

Nothing could have suited Selwood better. But just before reaching the door Barbalet caught Page's arm, told him to stop, and attempted to turn in behind the bar. Just at that juncture, Selwood in turn caught Barbalet's arm and stopped him.

"Don't bother, Harry; you won't need that gun. Face about—keep straight ahead."

Barbalet felt the quick and unpleasant sensation of a revolver muzzle held to the small of his back. A hand with fingers like steel slipped down his forearm and over his left wrist. Without trying to turn his body he looked back over his shoulder, surprised, but making no pretense of not knowing who spoke.

"First time I've seen you to-night, John," he said, quite undisturbed by his situation.

"No," retorted Selwood in like tones, "this is the second time, Harry."

"I noticed you had a long arm on when I passed you," responded Barbalet less amiably.

"Not for my friends, Harry. There's a good many strangers in town to-night. Open that barber-shop door, Harry. Do it quick."

"There's two men behind it with shotguns."

"They're friendly—you're walking right in there ahead of me. Go on! The way we stand now, there's not a man in this room that could tell whose gun went off if you got hurt, Harry. Open that door."

No frontier crook in his senses would choose certain death before a fighting chance. Barbalet knew perfectly well the alternatives. Selwood might not escape himself, but his fate would no longer interest Harry. With ill grace, but without imprudent delay, Barbalet advanced to the door, his left wrist gripped in Selwood's left hand.

"Key's in my left-hand pants pocket. Let loose my wrist."

"What's a right-hand man doing with a key in his left-hand pocket?" asked Selwood. "Page," he added, pulling Barbalet's arm back, "take the key out of Barbalet's left pants pocket and unlock that door, quick."

"Page," interjected Barbalet, jerking the words out viciously, "you'd better keep out of this."

Bull Page grinned brokenly. Perhaps the remembrance of old abuse at Barbalet's hands—the times he had come thirsty and broke, and gone from Barbalet's bar thirsty and broke, decided him. At all events, after a rapid search, Bull found the key in Barbalet's right-hand pants pocket, unlocked the door, pushed it open, and Barbalet, followed by Selwood and Bull, passed through into the barber shop.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SELWOOD FINDS CHRISTIE.

THE barber shop was dark. "What are you looking for in here?" asked Barbalet, lazily sarcastic. "Soap or towels?"

"Two men with shotguns," retorted Selwood, while Page fished a match from his pocket and lighted a lamp. "It may be they're in the back room. Push ahead. Open that door in front of you."

"Another man's got the key to that door," asserted Barbalet, surly now. "You'll have to talk to Starbuck about that."

Selwood, without raising his tone, tried out a double-edged bluff—one that would work either way. "Bull!" he said. "Go back to Starbuck. Tell him Barbalet wants the key to the barber-shop back room. He may give you an evasive answer. If he does, tell him Barbalet is in trouble in the barber shop and says to give you the key or come a-running if he wants to save what's in the back room.

"If he follows you back, Bull," continued Selwood carelessly, "come as far as the door with him. But keep out of the shop till the smoke settles."

Bull nodded. "I understand."

"If you know what's good for your hide, Bull," interposed Barbalet, "don't take any talk like that to Cliff Starbuck. Don't play traitor to Starbuck. He'll kill you—or I will."

"Why, Harry," said Bull Page, asserting what manhood Barbalet's whisky had left him, and though his deep, throaty voice shook, there was no hesitation, no fear in his utterance, "what do you think you're talking about? Do you think I'm afraid of you—or your kind? What have you ever done for me but fill me with poison when I had money and throw me outdoors when you got it away from me? Who told your cappers I had come to town with money from the mines? You did. Who got a rake-off when they robbed me in this joint? You did!" declared Bull, gathering force with his invective. "Where did I go for a grubstake when I was hungry? To John Selwood. Where did I go for money after I'd sold my breeches for whisky? To John Selwood!"

"Oh, shut up, Bull," blurted out Selwood.

"No!" exclaimed Page, rolling up resentment till it amounted to defiance of all comers. "I'm blamed if I'll shut up! This skunk's goin' to hear for once what's coming to him and his breed. Who let me sleep in the barn when McAlpin tried to kick me out? John Selwood. Who sent old Doc Carpy to me when I laid right here out o' doors under this cursed shack with lung fever—when Carpy asked me why the hell I didn't die and stop bothering people? Who bought the medicine? John Selwood."

"Shut up, Bull," snapped Selwood impatiently. "Dash it, do as you're told."

"Why, Harry," exclaimed Bull, paying no attention to the protest, "I'd take that man's message through hell and back. I'd crawl through that room on the floor to take it. I'd walk in on Starbuck with it if I knew he'd fill me with lead the next minute.

"But he won't. He'll never know what hurt him, when somebody gets through; nor you won't. You fellows are done. If Starbuck puts his head in here this boy'll get you both and be hanged to you!"

"Bull!" cried Selwood. "Get out! And get back here quick with that key or with Starbuck."

"I'm flyin' right now, John. Do you know what this rat asked me to do a few minutes ago? To knock old man Fyler on the head and throw him in the river—that's all."

With this parting shot, Bull was opening the door through which they had come in. Barbalet saw the jig was up. "Hold on," he said, bitterly sulky, "call off that rabbit. This key will unlock either door."

Bull lost no time in starting for the inner door. "Stop a minute, Bull," interposed Selwood. "Take those aprons on that chair to tie this fellow up with before you open the door. Got 'em? Now put out lights and unlock."

Page threw the back door open. Light streamed into the barber shop from a lamp set on an upended barrel in the apparently empty room. Silence greeted the opening. Selwood pushed his sullen prisoner forward across the threshold. A suppressed cry acknowledged the sight of him. "Harry Barbalet!" exclaimed an unsteady voice. "What do you mean by keeping us locked here all this time? You promised we should be free in a few minutes. When are we to get out?"

Margaret Hyde stood to the left of the doorway; and clinging with clasped hands to Margaret's arm, hatless and shrinking under a cape, her eyes filled with agitation and fear, Selwood saw Christie Fyler.

Christie's startled glance fell on him. He was looking fixedly at her. To their meeting eyes, the exchange was an electric shock. There was only an added mystery to Christie in his unexpected appearance. Of all men, she would have wished to identify Selwood last, despite what had passed between them, with these detestable surroundings in which she was held prisoner. To see him suddenly in this forbidding place in company with the ruthless tool of the man she had now so much reason to fear was like rudely stripping her of what faith she had left in men. It was hardly a moment before the situation cleared, but for Christie it was a painful moment.

Barbalet halted before Margaret's question. He nodded coolly back over his shoulder. "I ain't bossing this process on, perty." He spoke with a contemptuous spite. "This man with the gun is running things—for a few minutes, anyway. Talk to him."

Fyler emerged from the gloom of a corner, with a look of expectancy. His thin hair was pretty much on end, or would have been seen to better advantage if it had been, and his large eyes shone rather wildly in the lamplight. But as little as Selwood liked him, he realized that he had at least stuck to his daughter, and had just now escaped death by a mere scratch because of doing it.

Barbalet's words directed all eyes on Selwood. He spoke to Margaret Hyde. "If you are kept here against your wills, you're free to go now—or will be in a minute. This is a good place to get away from. It's likely to be burned before daylight."

"They brought us here because they said the hotel would be burned," explained Margaret Hyde in agitation.

"They dragged us here!" exclaimed Christie. "They threatened to kill us."

"What can we do?" asked Margaret Hyde, appealing to Selwood so quietly that it seemed as if she were anxious not to dwell on what had gone before.

"Who is 'they'?" asked Selwood.

Margaret Hyde hesitated. "All of these men," interposed Christie, tremulous and eager. She pointed to Barbalet. "This man, and most of all—Starbuck. It was he had us brought to this vile place," averred Christie with gathering anger and courage. "We don't know yet why we should be locked up in this way. Who are all these men we hear in the next room? That man"—with flashing eyes she pointed her finger at Barbalet—"and another tried to drag me here alone. Margaret wouldn't let them. They almost tried to kill my father!"

Selwood stood the sullen bartender facing the wall, with his hands up. "I'll have a job for you in a minute, Barbalet," said Selwood in an undertone. "You may want

to save your own skin with it. When these people get out of here, you can take word in to Starbuck that he's cornered. Lefever's men have surrounded this place and they're out to get him and his crew for burning their bunk house. Starbuck can either fight or come out and talk. If he fights there won't be any talk—not so far as I know. If he doesn't come out he'll be burned out. If he fights, he—and the rest of you—will get the rope."

He turned away without waiting for an answer. Bull Page had unbarred and knocked the rim lock off the flimsy back door and opened it. Pardaloe, waiting impatiently in the dark and itching to train the big shotgun on somebody, loomed up in the doorway.

"They're here," he said to Selwood significantly. He looked enviously at Selwood's victim, standing with his face to the wall—he offered so tempting a cushion for a handful of buckshot; but was appeased when Selwood seriously put on him the responsibility of taking the three refugees in convoy through the burned district to the barn.

Christie, listening eagerly to all the words passed, edged up so she could ask Selwood a question apart. "You are not coming?"

He hesitated as she spoke, and looked at her almost curiously. The old fever in his blood rose at the sight of her. But pride ruled his will and Christie, looking questioningly up at him as if she, too, longed to say and to hear more, saw nothing of what was hidden behind the unbending expression. "Not yet," was all he said when he answered. "But you oughtn't to lose a minute. Follow Pardaloe and keep close to him."

Pardaloe himself seemed in haste. "Don't lose no time, Christie," he urged. "Come along!"

She could not be hurried. "Then surely," she faltered to Selwood, "I shall see you again to-night—to—to say *something*—to thank you for——"

Selwood held onto his words as if they were diamonds. "Glad to do it," he murmured, stubbornly laconic.

His gaze was so steady that her eyes fell before it. However, she would not give up—and when she looked up at him again her eyes were glistening a little. "I know I hurt you terribly," she began. He offered nothing to help her out. "I did not want to," she persisted, resolved to soften him. "Can't you—come with us now?"

It was his turn to squirm. He did not risk his eyes directly on hers—only repeated, almost mechanically, "Not yet."

She dropped into a low, quite matter-of-fact tone—Christie knew how to close in on a man. "Then why not let father and Margaret Hyde go?" she urged. "Let me stay here till you are ready, too."

He replied with quick decision. "That wouldn't do."

"Are you going to—to fight?" She could hardly breathe the hateful word between her reluctant lips.

"I don't know. I may have to." Without looking at her, he raised his hand toward the open door. "Follow Pardaloe."

She made her last appeal—save, perhaps, that deepest appeal that until now had lain unspoken in her eyes. But Christie could say things, too. As she stepped toward the door her eyes flashed back at him. "If I didn't fear endangering your life, I'd stay anyway!"

The suddenness, the surprise, the intimate defiance, brought the carefree old laugh for a moment to Selwood's lips—the laugh of the summer auction days, the laugh that Christie remembered and had missed so long. But without giving him time for a word she stepped out into the night. It was not till then that he imagined he heard in the darkness something like a suppressed sob.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHOW-DOWN.

SELWOOD knew that for every moment lingered with Christie he had been gambling with a relentless enemy—time. He knew that when dangers multiply no moment can be called your own; that at such a time Fate holds many cards—you but one.

With Christie on the way to safety and Lefever's men at his call, he started Barbalet back to Starbuck.

But Barbalet had only disappeared when Selwood heard a woman's scream. Christie had but just crossed the other threshold—it was her voice.

He sprang out of the open back door and ran around to the front. In the street lighted by the gray gleam of daybreak he saw a little group of struggling figures. To his left, out of the wide-open doors of Bar-

toe's place, Starbuck's men were crowding. What Selwood feared had happened: a door guard, freeing himself, had given the alarm. As they ran out they were met with the gunfire of Lefever's men, and in what seemed no more than a second the two parties were at grips with clubs and guns.

Before Selwood could dash across the sidewalk the group in the street was surrounded by a crowd of yelling men. In the thick of it Selwood made out Pardaloe, whirling about like a bear and furiously shaking off a man that clung to his back. A second man, gun in hand, jumped around the two, evidently trying to shoot the mule boss without hitting his assailant. Christie, screaming, her father and Bull Page urging her away, stood by wringing her hands. And at that moment an active man, dashing out of Bartoe's and brandishing a revolver, ran between Christie and her protectors and caught her up with his free arm.

Had the confusion been less, had the uncertain light been less certain, Selwood would have been at no loss to recognize this man. The commonest instinct in the nature of men would have declared Starbuck to him in the man assailing Christie. He did not realize that smoke was now rising about Bartoe's place, that Pardaloe had made good his threat to burn it, and that the men running out of the door were crying, "Fire!" He had eyes for no one but Starbuck, and heard nothing but Christie's angry, rebellious cries as she struggled to free herself. And he ran toward her with an answering cry.

Starbuck saw him leap into the street, and still holding the frantic girl, he brought down his gun like a flash on Selwood.

It was a reckless, a useless shot. With Christie fighting him with her puny fists, the bullet flew wide. Not deigning to reply, not even drawing his own gun, but maddened to fury, Selwood dashed forward. Before Starbuck could pull up and cover the second time, the gambler was on him. Bull Page had caught Christie by the wrist and was dragging her away. She screamed at Bull and resisted him. She tried to get back to where she knew a deadly moment had come between the man she hated and the man she loved; but she could not.

Pardaloe, like a beleagured giant, had shaken off his enemies and recovered his shotgun. Above the sputtering crack of revolvers its roar sounded on Christie's maddened ears. Then, clubbing the gun and shouting imprecations at his enemies, the mule boss swept an open space between them and two men who, locked in a death struggle, rolled in the middle of the street.

Despite a terrific blow across the head from the flat of Selwood's revolver, Starbuck's weight and bulk had borne Selwood to the ground. And Starbuck, to avoid his fatal dexterity with a revolver, had clinched him.

Neither of the infuriated men—seasoned to death grips—wasted another instant in trying to shoot. But Starbuck had a further resource lacking to his enemy. Selwood knew precisely what it was—the deadliest of weapons in a clinch. He knew as grips, like lightning, shifted, eyes strained in fury, blows rained remorselessly, and the gauge of life and death slipped from hand to hand, precisely what Starbuck was trying to do—he knew almost precisely where the heavier man carried the coveted weapon, and now not one man, but two, were exhausting every resource of strength and stratagem to reach the haft of Starbuck's bowie knife, slung at his hip.

It was an unequal struggle. Starbuck's weight and strength almost continually overbore the gambler's ability. Each advantage for the mastery hard gained by Selwood was soon lost to the heavier defense of Starbuck. With Pardaloe's piercing eyes taking note of every turn, he could see but one hope for the lighter man, a hope that vanished when Selwood seemed weakening. If Starbuck's wind should outlast the other's, Selwood, Pardaloe told himself, could not win.

So deep had become this conviction that more than once Pardaloe would have interfered, would have knocked Starbuck on the head or rammed him with his gun stock, would have taken for himself the badge of disgrace from the wrought-up teamsters, watching, had he not known that Selwood, living or dead, would never forgive a stigma put on him by the aid of a friend. With hungry eyes and ears the powerful mule boss watched the doubtful issue and listened to the sharp, broken breaths of the struggling men. But again and again Starbuck would roll his enemy under, only to have Selwood squirm free and slip himself out.

The contest fast narrowed to one point —the possession of the knife. Pardaloe saw and he understood; his fingers itched and

his muscles twitched in his fever to pass his own knife into Selwood's hand; and almost as if timed to the last moment of the encounter, Starbuck, once more freeing his right hand, restrained till then by Selwood's left, slipped it from the leash of muscles, and whipped out his bowie knife.

But in gaining this deadly advantage he had laid himself open to an unlooked-for danger. As a boxer, defeated in every tactic of defense, sees himself going and turns to the attack, Selwood's right hand, releasing Starbuck's left, shot out like a bullet and his fingers clutched Starbuck's windpipe. The sinewy fingers that could tear a pack of cards like a sheet of paper closed relentlessly on Starbuck's throat, and squirming from under him, Selwood threw himself across his enemy and overlay the arm slashing at him with the knife. Pardaloe, wild with anxiety, knew the end was in sight. But could Starbuck inflict a fatal injury before he succumbed to the grip that had cut off his breath?

Throwing himself frantically about as he felt consciousness going, striking blindly at Selwood from the forearm, Starbuck tried to land a fatal thrust. But Selwood, as Starbuck, plunging and rearing, slammed him from side to side to shake loose the deadly grip, took the slashing as best he could, clinging all the while like a panther to the throat of his foe.

Above the din about him, Pardaloe shouted and yelled. Hope had returned. He saw how the fight went. And stamping his clumsy feet in a frenzy, he watched Selwood's left elbow gradually straighten and saw his left hand slide slowly, unevenly, but certainly up to Starbuck's right wrist. Again the two men meshed. Pardaloe could see their straining muscles shiver in a climax of struggle. Then Selwood had wrested the haft of the knife from his strangling foe, let go his throat, and raised his arm to strike.

Not till then did Pardaloe jump in. He caught the uplifted arm. The gambler, covered with blood, looked angrily up. "Not yet, John," cried the big fellow, low and ferociously. "Hang him!"

Panting as if dazed, Selwood looked again to see who spoke. The voice that entered his ear sent no message to his brain. He shook away the matted hair that fell before his eyes. Pardaloe, gripping his arm, looked intently at him and repeated his words. Whether Selwood understood or not, he knew Pardaloe. He looked down on his gasping enemy and, stretching out his left hand, laid the ugly knife in Pardaloe's hand outstretched.

With a cracked laugh he staggered to his feet, groping about with his hands for support.

Pardaloe steadied him. "Cut much, John?" he asked, bending anxiously over him.

"Why—no." Trying to pull himself together, Selwood panted the words. "I guess—not."

"You're chipped a little," said Pardaloe, taking hold of his blood-soaked left arm and peering with melancholy sympathy into the strained eyes.

With the fingers of his left hand Selwood felt uncertainly around his heart. "One jab," he said, breathing hard, "I thought went through me. His grip must have slipped," he added, as his fingers ran vacantly over his chest, trying to find a particular spot, "or something—turned the knife. What's here, Bill?" he asked, feeling blindly the slit breast pocket of his woolen shirt.

Pardaloe set down his lantern and, using both hands on the slashed pocket, succeeded in fishing out the remains of a pack of cards. He stooped to examine the cards by the light of the lantern; the point of Starbuck's knife had gone halfway through them. "My cards, by gum!" exclaimed Pardaloe, as his face fell. "Plum' cut to pieces, too. That deck ain't worth shucks to nobody now! Look at 'em!" He held the pack up for inspection and looked indignantly down at Starbuck, whose wrists and ankles were already bound by Lefever and Scott. "No matter, old boy," he growled, "we'll fix you in a minute so you won't cut up no more cards for nobody."

Such of Starbuck's following as could escape the clutches of Lefever's angry men were scattering in the thickets along the river, where most of them had horses hidden, and by fording or swimming the stream could spur out on the Sinks for Calabasas.

Smoke was billowing from the doors and windows of Bartoe's place. Flames were lighting for the last time the interior of the empty barroom and hungrily licking up its evil trappings. Selwood, steadied by Pardaloe, looked blankly at the scene before him, and backed away.

The teamsters were dragging away their prisoners. In the crowd that closed in on the scene there rose up sudden bosses, and a confusion of orders as to how Starbuck should be disposed of. In the midst of the shouting, jostling throng, Selwood stood once more clear headed. When a cry arose to run Starbuck to a telegraph pole, he intervened. "Hands off," he said. "This man is my prisoner. Take him to the barn, Pardaloe, with the others, and hold him till I get down there."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PADRE.

TORN by anxiety and racked with fears, Christie hovered as long as she could on the edge of things. But poor Bull Page, with more sense of the fitness of things than should be expected, refused her entreaties that she be allowed to see Selwood.

"Safest place fur wimmenfolks to-night's inside," he insisted. "John is O. K., that I know," he declared; and with that assurance she had to content herself. "You two," he said to Christie and Margaret, when, with Fyler, they reached the hotel, "get into the kitchen and get some coffee going for the bunk-house boys. If they hadn't got out when they did, there wouldn't be any hotel now. Them fellows sent word to Carpy that if he didn't come down to Bartoe's to look after their wounded men, they'd burn the hotel on him. He told 'em—well, to burn and be hanged."

Selwood, refusing help, walked to the hotel. Scott trailed him close, and running ahead, lighted a lamp in the office. When he walked with the lamp into the dark hall he found Selwood sitting on the first tread of the bare stairs, twisting the tourniquet on his left arm, and storing strength to get up to his room. When he got on his feet again he waved Scott aside, climbed the stairs, and got to his room alone.

He had hardly thrown himself on his bed when Carpy's boisterous tread could be heard on the stairs, and the next minute Selwood was in the hands of the rough, cheerful surgeon—most cheerful now, for the night skies had cleared, his way.

While Carpy, with Scott helping, was dressing the wounds, Pardaloe came in to see how Selwood came on, and give him the news. Atkins had been killed in the street fight. Barbalet, sullen, and Bartoe, struggling and screaming, had been cruelly dragged from the barn to the fate of their kind. "Abe Cole," said Pardaloe in reciting the incident, "wanted me to go 'long and sit on the court. 'No,' I says, 'I won't sit on no court for nobody.' 'Why not?' he says. 'Why not?' 'Why, dash it,' I says, 'before they got through, they might take it into their heads to hang me!'" McAlpin, Pardaloe continued, had prevented "the boys" from taking out Big Haynes.

"The boys aren't afraid of McAlpin, are they?" asked Selwood, watching Carpy's bandaging.

"No," thundered Pardaloe mildly. "But he's got Haynes hid and they can't find him."

"I don't think it right, either, to hang him," said Carpy. "He's nothing like as bad as the others. Haynes claims Atkins and Bartoe threatened to kill him if he didn't turn in with them."

Scott proved a good assistant. But when Carpy had finished and Pardaloe was still talking, the Indian regarded Selwood with rather a peculiar smile. There were many lights and shades in Bob Scott's very homely smile, many varieties of meaning, and those who knew him well could read them pretty well. Selwood, taking keen note again of what was going on around him, perceived that the smile Scott now wore meant news; but the wounded man was too used up to ask for it. He only looked his own inquiry into his retainer's eyes and waited for him to speak.

The half-breed, treading about the room, even in boots, almost as lightly and silently as his moccasined kind, gathered up the odds and ends of Carpy's work, did not lose his smile of import, nor did Selwood's unchanging expression lose its demand for information.

"What is it, Bob?" he demanded at length.

Scott, lifting his eyes, answered the inquiry with a broader smile and another. "Got any money?"

No question could have surprised Selwood more. "Not a whole lot," he confessed with abating interest. "How much do you want?"

"Two thousand dollars."

Selwood took it for a joke. "Well, I'm broke just at present; but if it's coming to you, you'll get it. What do you want two thousand dollars for?"

"I've got a man down by the river you been wanting to see."

"Do I owe him anything?"

Scott shook his head. "I guess not."

"Who's the man *I* want to see?" asked Selwood with only moderate interest.

"The old padre."

Carpy was stowing his instruments away in his bag. He looked up with an exclamation of astonishment. Selwood regarded Scott searchingly. "You mean the old padre I wanted to see?" Scott nodded.

Selwood, who had taken a chair, rose to his feet and with one hand picked up his coat to throw over his shoulders. Scott helped him. "Where in thunder did the old padre turn up?" asked Carpy.

"McAlpin passed him on the Calabasas trail about an hour ago, when he was bringing in Dave. He had a couple of Gunlocks with him." Scott so designated the Indians from Gunlock Reservation. "McAlpin told me he met a blackrobe and that he was on his way up here and going to camp along the river. So I rode down there and talked with his guides. They told me they had a very old blackrobe along. So I talked to him. They're heading for the Blackfeet country. 'I saw the big fire in the sky,' he told me, 'and I said to my men the new town is burning; many people are in distress. We will go there before we start up the river!'

"I held my lantern up into his face," continued Scott. "He is gray-headed—an old man. But," added the half-breed, with the certainty of men of his kind, "he is the same man whose picture you had in your room up at the hall. And I told him there was a white man here wanted to see him. And to go to the horse barn if it wasn't burned. But he said he would camp down by the river. He's there."

If there was a surprise for Carpy in the recital there was a greater one awaiting him in Selwood's reception of it. For a moment Selwood did not speak. When he did, Carpy stood open-eyed. "Well," said Selwood deliberately, "if you've got the man, the money is coming to you—when I can dig it up. But don't hold him on my account. I don't care about seeing him."

Carpy for an instant was speechless with amazement. "What!" he exclaimed, recovering his breath. "'Don't care about seeing him?' Man!" he cried. "Don't want to see the man—if it is the man—that's got your whole story? Have you lost your senses?"

Selwood, standing unmoved, parried the attack with stubborn indifference. Doctor Carpy, unable to stir him with eloquent reproach, in the end lost his own temper. "Here, after all these years," he protested, "that that blamed old martinet Roper has been running over you, and you get a chance to nail him, by jing, you won't take the trouble to do it!

"All right. I'll do it myself," the doctor exclaimed. "I won't let that old buck run over *me* any longer. Bob," continued the incensed surgeon, pointing his finger at Scott, "hold onto your blackrobe and his redskins. If we can't find anything else for breakfast, bring 'em up here for a cup o' coffee." And with Selwood staring at the wall, and the half-breed grinning perplexedly, Carpy flung out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MARGARET'S STORY.

IN the gloom of the hall, Carpy, still exasperated by Selwood's obstinacy and talking resentfully to himself, almost ran into Christie, a pathetic figure, he thought, waiting as if for a chance to speak to somebody. As he stopped with an apology, she seemed encouraged, for she stepped close to him. "Doctor," she exclaimed in a frightened whisper, "*is* Mr. Selwood terribly hurt?"

"Well," said the surgeon, half smiling, "John's cut some—yes. Did McAlpin bring your things back?"

"He did."

"Did you take them away?"

"Selwood took them. There was no one left to guard the hotel, so he carried them down to the barn. Doctor," said Christie, "will he get well?"

Carpy laughed as he looked into her appealing eyes—one of those reassuring laughs that would bring life and hope back to the dying. "Christie," he murmured, "there's more the matter with that fellow than just Starbuck's slashing. I think," continued the doctor, eying her with a significant expression, "that if *you'd* talk you could tell —better than anybody else—what's a matter with him." Christie tried to brave it through with innocent astonishment. Her attempt did not deceive the doctor; he retorted in raillery. "Listen to the little

bird!" he exclaimed, still smiling. "Christie, you're a fine girl, good enough for the best, or I wouldn't talk to you so plain. But you're in love with John Selwood and he's in love with you. There, there! I didn't mean to make you cry, child."

She looked up. "What can I do, doctor?" she pleaded. "I thought the world of him—why shouldn't I confess it to you? You wouldn't betray me. I do yet. Now he has saved my life, and more than my life. But how do you think I felt when I was told by that vile Barbalet—and by him—that he was a gambler?"

The doctor looked perplexed. "I knowed it, Christie. I knowed that was what made the trouble 'tween you," he said. "I couldn't blame you so much, neither," he added regretfully, "even if I'm nothing but a poor, drunken doctor myself."

"You shan't say that!" she exclaimed indignantly. "You're nothing of the kind! You're the kindest, best doctor in the whole world!"

He shook his head. "Tell the truth and shame the devil. If I wasn't, girl, I wouldn't be wasting out my life in this hell hole. But I want to say only this: I wisht somehow it could be fixed up. I may not be able to speak it in words, but I know what goes into the making of a man, my girl; and whatever it is, it's in John Selwood. And if he ever quits the business he's in, you'll see a man all through him."

A flood of words broke through Christie's pent-up feeling. "Oh, I believe every word of it, doctor. You've no need to tell *me* that. He's just the finest man in the world, if he'd only——" A timid suggestion occurred to her. "You, doctor, if *you'd* ask him to give up that business—you have more influence with him than any one else——"

Carpy cut her off. "Christie," he said, emphasizing every deliberate word with a shake of the head, "you've got more influence over him in your one little finger than I have all over me.

"But, Christie, I've noticed this: It ain't so good when somebody coaxes a man to quit anything—even if he does quit it—as when he quits a thing himself, out of just his own free will. Now, if John Selwood ever quits the game of his own accord—bet on him!

"Well," he said in parting, "things is working, anyway; they're working right now to, maybe, clear things up, that I can't tell you about just now—only this: Count on me to stay with you, will you?" The look she gave him as she thanked him and went back to her room made him ten years younger. He strode toward the stairs only to encounter Margaret Hyde, hurrying to meet him.

"Why, the boy's chipped up a little," grumbled Carpy in answer to Margaret's manifest anxiety, for he was thinking of his own perplexities. "Nothing to hurt much," he added. "And, Meg, don't give nobody no more of our sheets to tear up for bandages," continued the landlord-surgeon emphatically. "Tell 'em to use buffalo robes. This hotel will be out of business, at this rate, before daylight. Dash it, you look queer. What's a matter with you? Ain't shot anywheres, are you?"

The drawn face and the sunken, anxious eyes of his housekeeper made his question almost an involuntary one. She answered to reassure, but she could not hide her distress. "I'm not wounded, doctor. But might I—I wonder," she managed to say in her low, restrained voice—a voice that, no matter how often it broke, never wholly lost a note of once-gentle breeding—"might I," she added, repeating her plea, "speak to John Selwood right away, just for a few minutes?"

Doctor Carpy lifted his eyebrows with a grating laugh, as if things were getting *too* complicated. "So *that's* what you're hanging around for? Why didn't you say so? Well, now, I'll tell you, if you're worrying about John, don't do it."

Margaret flushed. "But, doctor——"

"That boy ain't hurted, none to speak of. Shucks!" Doctor Carpy faintly grinned. "I never thought——"

She caught her breath. "It's *not* about him," she exclaimed, in distress, "far from it! But I *must* speak with him."

" 'Fraid it's too late to ketch him now," objected the doctor, still mystified by her strange interest. "The boys are waitin' to set up another little telegraph-pole party. And they're waiting for John to come down to the station before they begin. See him when he comes back, Meg."

Carpy knew nothing of what those words—and the last words—meant to Margaret Hyde. But he could not help seeing the suffering in her face strangely intensified. "You're sick, Meg," he exclaimed not un-

sympathetically; "that's what's the matter, girl. Go to bed till breakfast time—don't believe there's a thing in the house to cook, anyway."

Her lips could scarcely frame words. "I *must* see John Selwood," she repeated with a supreme effort at self-control. "I must see him now. Who is in there with him?"

"Bill Pardaloe and Bob Scott."

"Doctor," she exclaimed, stepping closer in her almost frantic appeal, "help me! Ask them to step out a moment. I tell you, I *must* talk to him alone—*now*."

It was impossible not to acknowledge her extremity. Carpy reopened Selwood's door. He spoke to Pardaloe and Scott. "Look here, boys," he said, beckoning with his head, "both of you. Step out here a minute. Meg wants to talk to John, private."

Selwood, cleaned up and brushed up as decently as he could be with his bandaged arm, stood before the table preparing to go to the barn. He was buckling on his cartridge belt; his coat was thrown over his shoulder. Hearing Margaret's footsteps, he looked around. One glance revealed the agony in her face. He laid unlighted on the table a cigarette that Scott had rolled for him, and spoke. "What is it, Margaret?" He pointed to a chair. "You're not hurt?"

Looking at him almost wildly and like one dumb with emotion, she sat down. When she spoke she had already forgotten the question he had just asked. "Mr. Selwood——"

He interrupted her. He had taken his revolver up from the table and was slowly slipping fresh cartridges into the cylinder. "When," he demanded with good-natured unconcern, "did I stop being just plain 'John?' "

"Never, to me—never," she said brokenly. "But to-night I come to beg my life at your hands—hoping, praying you won't deny me. Let me tell you what I mean—tell you my story. I was married ten years ago, when I was eighteen. Oh, yes," she said to cut off his surprise, "I know how old I look—trouble has done that. For three years I had the best husband in the world—kind, considerate, devoted. His friends persuaded him to go into politics. They elected him city treasurer of the little town where we lived in Michigan. That was his undoing, it meant being out nights, being a good fellow, drinking, spending, wasting.

"This lasted two years. And during that time I fell sick. I was very sick, a long time, and he did everything he could in the world to care for me—to relieve me. I cost him so much, oh, so much for doctors—more than I wanted him to spend; but he would try everything that gave us the least hope. He said I should have the best care, and he gave it liberally, extravagantly, to me. Then—one night he came home. He had been drinking." She stopped an instant. "It was the first time in my life, John, I had seen him in drink," she went on. "He told me that night his accounts were short, that the next day his books would be examined; that he must face the penitentiary—or run away."

In her agony, she sat, now twisting and clasping her fingers, now her hands; now looking at the floor, now looking at Selwood imploringly—her words wrung from her reluctant lips. "When he told me that," she faltered on, "I was frightened. I was weak that night! And I was wicked. I told him to go, John—to go at once. But to write me. And that when he found some safe place far away in the West, I would join him."

Selwood only looked at her, not unfeelingly, but as one who could say nothing because he knew not what to say. Margaret moistened her parched lips. "He never wrote me," she said in a low, hard voice. "If he did, I never got the letter. I made up my mind he must have been hurt or killed, and that I would find out, or find him, myself. And after weary, weary months of search I did find my husband—here—in Sleepy Cat."

Her eyes had dropped from her listener's eyes. Her head hung. Her voice fell still lower. "He was not hurt, not dead. But worse for me—his feeling—for me—was dead. He cared nothing for me—nothing——"

"But you," interposed Selwood coldly, "you cared for him. It's an old story, isn't it? Well, what then?"

"I stayed here while he was here; then I went to Thief River to be near him—not chasing him, not bothering him—hoping some time to repay him for his old goodness to me. But he had chosen bad company, and through drink was going from bad to worse. I can't excuse him for

the evil. But I *know* there is good in my husband. I've come to you to plead for his life."

"To *me?*" echoed Selwood, mildly astonished. "Why to me? What's his name?"

It took all her courage to speak. "He doesn't use his real name here," she said in low, strained tones. "You wouldn't know it if I mentioned it. He is known here—as Cliff Starbuck."

"Starbuck!"

She heard the name blurted out in hateful amazement. With dry, despairing eyes she watched the passionless features before her harden into the cold refusal that she saw was coming.

Leaning against the table, with his back to it, the gambler shifted from one foot to the other. His eyes, that he might avoid her eyes, fixed on the floor, he flattened his left hand at his side on the table and his right hand rested on the grip of the revolver he had slung in the scabbard at his hip.

"I'll tell you, Margaret," he said at last, speaking with apparent unconcern but with deadly point, "I'm sorry you're mixed up with that fellow. But I couldn't do a thing for you, if I wanted to—and I can't honestly say I'm looking to do anything for that man. They're going to hang him—and it's almost too good for him. That, if you want it, is my honest opinion. But you might go and talk to the two Cole boys, John and Abe, if Abe's alive yet, and to the teamsters. If they're willing to let him go"—he shifted again on his feet—"I won't say anything."

"But, John!" she pleaded in heart-breaking tone, "if you won't say anything, I'm lost. None of those men would have any mercy for me, or for him, but to hang him. They have no hearts, no feeling—you know, I might as well go out and beg the stones in the streets for mercy."

Selwood stood motionless. "He pulled a knife on me in that clinch to-night——"

Her plea was so swift! "He was drinking to-night!"

"He dragged Christie Fyler out of this hotel down to that——" Words could convey no more of hateful, bitter anger than his words carried.

"He was drinking, John—drinking! And the others were going to burn the hotel. I was here; I know! And *I* went with her to protect her, John. *I went with her!* I'd have given up my life rather than she should come to harm. I thought of her. I thought of you."

"My advice to you would be to let him hang."

"John!"

"I don't want to hurt your feelings by saying how I feel toward that man."

She sprang up from her chair and, clasping one of her bony hands in the other, at the waist of her poor, worn dress, stood, dry-eyed, before him. "John, listen! Have you never done things you wish you hadn't done?"

He snorted. "I hope they don't class me with that——"

"You know what whisky will do to a man."

"For God's sake, don't blame *his* meanness on whisky. It's got enough to answer for!"

"I don't. I don't! I blame it on myself. When I should have told him that terrible night to do right, I told him to do wrong. Pity me! Have a little mercy on *me*, John. Think of the old padre whose picture you kept here on the wall so long—who has spent his life forgiving men, helping them. Oh, I'll pray that you find that padre, John. If he were here, he would ask you, for the sake of Christ and His Mother, to pity me to-night, to let Cliff go. Think of Christie, John. You love her; she loves you. Would you spare him if *she* asked you? I've told her all this. She's in my room now down the hall. She'll beg for his life of you this moment if you'll let her—she told me she would. *She* has forgiven him. Oh, God!" Her words poured out in a torrent—low, tearless. She sank before him on her knees. "I'll do anything for you you could ask of a woman, John. I'll pray for you every day and night of my life. Have pity on me! Spare him to me for one more—just *one* more chance!"

She had caught his bandaged hand in her thin, knotted fingers and covered it with her forehead. He stood irresolute, wanting to pull it away and ashamed to do it—uneasily listening and thinking.

Then his face darkened. He jerked himself angrily up and drew his hand impatiently from her.

"What do you want me to do?" He threw the words at her with a rude savageness that would have frightened another.

But Margaret knew what his words meant. She scrambled to her feet and caught his hand again in her hands and broke into a flood of tears. "Oh, I don't know. I don't know," she sobbed; then she lifted her streaming face with the tender confidence of a child. "*You* will know, John."

"Sit down," he snapped. She shrank away. From the chair she only looked her hope and her gratitude, watching anxiously the play of his features. Selwood, with a vacant expression, took up from the table Scott's cigarette, put it between his lips, and slowly felt for a match. He felt first in one pocket of his waistcoat, vainly; then he felt in another; he felt for a match in a right coat pocket, and again he felt in his left coat pocket. It seemed to poor Margaret as if he never would find that troublesome match. In her wrought-up anxiety she was about to offer to run out and find a match for him when he felt finally in the first pocket he had tried and drew out the match he had at first missed. He lighted his cigarette, drew it from his mouth after a whiff, and spoke.

"I'm doing something I don't approve of," he said sulkily, and more deliberately than usual. Indeed, she had seen how much thinking had gone into the search for one match. "Nobody else will approve of it, that's a cinch. This buck has tried his blamedest to kill me, and done worse'n that. Nobody outside a lunatic asylum would turn a hand to help him. If I wasn't a blamed fool, *I* wouldn't."

Margaret, with only the tears that had been shed brimming in her eyes, sat looking at him. Her subdued fingers worked unseen together. "I'm doing what I do for *you*," he said harshly. "Not for him."

She bowed her head. "Ask Bob Scott," he said, "to bring McAlpin in here. McAlpin is waiting for me downstairs. But if you want to save your man, don't let Pardaloe come in. When Scott and McAlpin come in here, stay outside the door till I send for you.

"Boys," he said to McAlpin and Scott the moment the door of his room closed behind them, "Meg, out there, is the wife of this damned Cliff Starbuck. You didn't know it; I didn't—nobody around here knows it except themselves. I can't tell you everything she told me to-night—if I stopped to, they'd have Starbuck hanged before I get down there. And I can't tell you why I've promised her his life, but I've been just blamed fool enough to do it, that's all. And," he spoke low and with dangerous intoning, "when I make a promise, I don't allow any man to interfere, I don't care who he is. To begin with, Starbuck is my own personal prisoner. I want to get him away without hurting some people's feelings—you can understand that. Will you help?

"Well," he continued, as he listened to their protests of loyalty, coupled with an ungrudging assent, "I thought maybe you would. Now call in Meg."

Scott opened the door, and Margaret Hyde, looking questioningly from one to the other, as if to read her fate in their eyes, stepped inside, and the door was closed behind her. Selwood spoke again. "Starbuck and Big Haynes," he said to her, "are tied up and locked in the harness room at the barn. Lefever's men are guarding them. I'll go down with you all and take care of Lefever. He'll call off his men and leave me to look after my prisoners. Bob, you'll cut Starbuck loose. McAlpin, you'll have horses saddled and ready at the back door of the barn, and Bob will ride with 'em to the east end of town. Nobody," he spoke now to Margaret Hyde, "will bother you beyond that. Keep out of the way of travel and of our men, but get east as fast as you can. If you can get to Medicine Bend, you'll be all right—nobody there to bother. But between here and there you'll have to look out. Any of our boys or the Vigilantes will shoot him on sight. Leave the horses at Medicine Bend in our barn. Well, I guess that's all.

"Not quite, either," he added, still thinking. "Barbalet's gun is at the barn. Starbuck can take that. Pick up some grub at the barn for 'em, Jim, and a couple of canteens. Give 'em some matches and a flint and a pair of blankets. That's all!" He started forward on his feet. "We'll head for the barn. Hang it," he exclaimed, suddenly recollecting himself, "there's Bill Pardaloe yet! I'll never square it with him if I talked an hour. He'll never give in. Where is he?"

Scott grinned. "Hanging over the bar, when I come up."

"Who's behind it?"

"Bull Page."

"Tell him to hold Bill for ten minutes,

anyway—to lock him in if he has to. There's no time to lose."

CHAPTER XXXII.

REPRIEVE.

UNDER one pretext or another, Lefever, amenable to Selwood's plea for Meg Hyde, who had never refused to take care of a teamster when he was sick, got rid of the harness-room guards. It was more trouble for Lefever to dispose of the remainder of his fighting men, but on the strength of burning rumors, in the invention of which the wagon boss easily excelled, the men were sent on various but pressing wild-goose chases and Selwood's way was cleared.

He left Margaret in the office and took McAlpin well down the dark gangway, near one of the big oat bins.

"Where have you got Haynes?" asked Selwood.

McAlpin shuffled about and scraped his feet. "John," he said apologetically, but speaking fast to skate over very thin ice, "it's this way: Haynes wasn't the worst of them devils—now, was he?"

The barn boss looked hopefully for a sign of assent from his listener, but Selwood was silent and emotionless. It made it a little harder to go on, but McAlpin pushed ahead. "The teamsters was for stringing up everybody they ketched after this last fight down at Bartoe's. But I just stood 'em off on Haynes. He told me how come the bunk house burned. Starbuck and Bartoe sent him to tell you that they wouldn't touch company property if you stayed neutral. But he couldn't find you and gave the word to Lefever, and Lefever said the teamsters would stay out of it. But some of the teamsters had grievances agin' the gamblers and went out with the Vigilantes, so Starbuck said that released them, and they fired the bunk house."

McAlpin talked fast. "But I didn't think it right to take Haynes out, not till you come," continued the Scotchman artfully. "But now you're here and, of course, you'll do as you please," he added, tinging his submission with an appeal, "only, I——"

"Where is Haynes?"

"Right here in this bin," explained McAlpin, pointing to the bin at their hands. "He's under the oats—tied up and all safe till you decide whether you'll let them dashed Vigilantes hang him. But he wasn't the worst of them devils, John, not by no manner o' means, at all."

"Get him out," directed Selwood, still noncommittal.

McAlpin, handing his lantern to Selwood, sprang into the bin and began to paw down into the oats. In one corner he had left an air hole, cunningly contrived with empty sacks, and after digging at this corner so deep that Selwood felt confident his friendly offices had resulted in smothering the auctioneer, McAlpin uncovered Haynes, cut the ropes from his arms, and digging out his feet, cut the ropes from his ankles. He then waited for Haynes to get up. But Haynes seemed to take no particular interest in getting up. After some prodding and some assistance, however, from his self-appointed keeper, the big fellow pulled himself together and staggered to his feet.

Selwood held up the lantern. *Falstaff*, victim of the merry wives, presented no more desperate appearance than the old-time confidence man and mock auctioneer.

He blew the oats from his mustache, blinked, and spoke huskily. "If it's time to move, boys, I guess I'm ready. I'll ask you to remember I've got a weak heart—don't hang me high. You'll get just as good results if I'm six inches off the ground as if I was six feet."

"Don't make a blamed fool o' yoursel'," sputtered McAlpin. "Here's John Selwood. Mind yoursel'; don't fall into the gangway."

"Ed——" began Selwood.

Haynes interrupted him. "Don't say anything, John. I can't help the way things have gone. But I'll say this: I don't know, no more'n a child unborn, who fired the hall. Bull Page told me the Vigilantes were coming up the hill after me, so I had to light out."

"Well, whatever's coming to you, Ed, there's nothing coming to-night. You know this country 'tween here and Medicine Bend?"

"Backwards and forwards, John."

"Meg Hyde has begged Starbuck from me. It's not coming to him, but I've been fool enough to give in. If they can get to Medicine Bend they'll be safe. If one of the teamsters catches sight of Starbuck he'll shoot him. They've got to get to the Bend by keeping off the big trail and sneaking through the cañons and behind the rocks.

It's your chance, Ed. I've got nothing like hanging against you—not a thing like it. McAlpin will have the horses at the back door and you can do your best to make it with Starbuck and Meg Hyde. Hustle."

Leaving McAlpin to explain, Selwood walked rapidly back to the dingy, smelly office. Margaret Hyde was feverishly waiting. He directed her to go into the harness room and apprise her husband, making only the request that Starbuck under no circumstances speak to him. After Margaret had gone in and come out again he told her to go to the gangway door and wait, took the lantern from her hand, went into the room himself, and bending over Starbuck, cut the ropes that bound him, steadied him on his cramped feet, unlocked the gangway door, threw it open, and pointed to Meg outside.

Starbuck, blear-eyed and blood-crusted, his hair disheveled and his trousers and coat awry, was a desperate sight. He gazed at Selwood, standing with the lantern in one hand and Bartoe's gun in the other. Selwood silently handed him the gun. He had been forbidden to speak. His lips were sealed. He tucked the gun into his trousers waistband and took a step toward the door that meant freedom. Before the threshold he stopped, turned to Selwood, and spoke.

"John," he said in a tone new to his listener, "I've been a——" He applied to himself a scurrilous epithet. "But if I can ever make it up to—Meg—and you——"

Selwood waved him on. "Never mind me, Cliff," he said evenly. "Your chance lies ahead of you." He pointed to the door. "Take it."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FACE TO FACE.

THE sun rose Sunday morning on a ruinous scene in Sleepy Cat. With a good part of the town burned, most of the people in hiding, with few provisions saved from the burned stores, Sleepy Cat lay stunned by its misfortunes. An effort to break away from the rule of the disreputable element and purge the town had reacted almost to the complete destruction of the town itself; and the tent colony of transients and emigrants had fled with stories wilder than the facts.

From the crossbar of the first telegraph pole planted in Sleepy Cat with grandiloquent words hung two sinister reminders of the work of the reënforced Vigilantes. But sensational was the upheaval when it became known that Starbuck, organizer and brains of the crooks, had, together with Big Haynes, made his escape.

No explanations were forthcoming from the stage barn. It had happened, that was all. The man captured by Selwood was his own prisoner, it was said, and he was the one to feel most aggrieved.

McAlpin had, from the first, claimed Big Haynes as his own take. And as McAlpin had never up to that time been known to brave a bad man, much less to capture one, it was believed by some that he had succumbed to the excitement of a night of terrors and fought and won a real fight. Others held that as between McAlpin and Big Haynes it must have been chiefly a contest as to which should surrender to the other first. But Big Haynes was gone.

Bill Pardaloe, when told that Starbuck was missing, stamped and snorted; but under the skillful ministrations of Bull Page was diverted from his noisy intention of heading a death chase after the fugitives, and was persuaded, instead, to go to bed.

The breakfast served that morning in Doctor Carpy's Sleepy Cat Hotel was unusual. At sunrise a barrel of salt pork was luckily found in, and rolled from, a dark corner of the stage warehouse, and together with a barrel of flour and a sack of green coffee, was commandeered for public need. The hotel was accorded these provisions and a barrel of army biscuits.

Not until he had assembled this provender could the busy surgeon-landlord get away to interview the padre, who, he was then told by Scott, had gone up to the railroad station to look in upon the wounded.

Carpy opened the waiting-room door to look for his man, and paused.

At the far end of the room, sitting on an upended keg, his back supported against the wall, Carpy saw one of his much-bandaged Vigilantes. Bending over him with a cup of water while the wounded man drank was a man of advanced years whose dark soutane easily identified him as one of that small but widely scattered band of men known to the Indians of every tribe of the West, from the Staked Plain to Hudson Bay, as blackrobes.

When the padre lifted the cup from the

bandaged lips he straightened up, and Carpy perceived how tall he was, and spare. The priest and the surgeon saw each other at the same moment. Carpy noted the straight iron-gray hair, brushed back from the wide forehead; the strong, almost stern, features, bronzed to the color of the red men to whom he ministered; and the long, lean hand holding the tin cup.

"Padre," said the surgeon, coming up with blunt raillery, "I'm glad to see you making yourself useful. If you want a job nursing, I'll hire you right now. I'm doctoring this outfit."

When the blackrobe smiled his features lost their stern repose. "It would not be new work," he replied, with a heavy, foreign accent, "but I'm sorry to see such warfare, such bloodshed—and what about?"

"Padre, some of this Sleepy Cat blood needed to be shed—in fact, a good deal of it," observed the doctor evasively. "I'll tell you all about it. First, though, I want to ask you a few questions, padre, about something that happened in this country a long, long time ago—going on thirty years. I want to see whether you can throw any light on it; then I'm on my way. But I've told Bob Scott, that half-breed you came in with, to bring you up to my hotel with your Indians for something to eat this morning. How long have you traveled this country, padre?"

Carpy was not a hard man to read. Single-minded, bluntly outspoken, his honesty of intent was written on his open countenance, and the experienced reader of men before him perceived it all. The composed blackrobe parried his question, all in good part, with another. "How old are you, doctor?"

Carpy laughed and shook his head. "Dog-gon'd near forty, padre—if I must say it."

"Then I crossed these mountains, first, a good time before you were born."

"Why, you must remember old Fort Pierce."

"I was here many years before Fort Pierce was built."

"Well and good. Do you remember an old fellow there named Colonel Roper? He commanded there a long time. Of course," added Carpy apologetically, "he wasn't as old then as he is now."

"I did not know him."

"Ever know his son, Lieutenant Roper?"

"I never knew any of the officers at the fort."

"Were you ever there?"

"No."

The good-hearted surgeon began to grow uncomfortably warm in his difficulties. "Well, then, you never married anybody at the fort?"

"Never."

"Was there any other blackrobe through this country, thirty years ago, padre?" he continued, with oozing hope.

The padre answered after careful thought. "No," said he.

"Dog-gone it," exclaimed Carpy, knitting his brows, but reduced in the clerical presence to his one effeminate epithet, "I can't see how it is—and Bob Scott swears you are the man!"

"What do you mean, my doctor?"

"Did you ever marry *any*body out here?"

"Many of the Indians, of course, my doctor. Sometimes a white man—a trader or trapper—and an Indian woman. Very rarely a white couple, very rarely—usually on the steamboat. Once, camping on the river below Fort Pierce, I married a young army officer to a young white woman. But that poor young man was killed soon afterward."

"In the Roper Massacre at Crawling Stone Wash! My God!" exclaimed Carpy, the perspiration starting from his forehead. "That's the very story!" He seized the padre incontinently by the arm. "Come!"

The padre looked at him, astonished, and pointed to the room. "But your patients here?"

"All attended to—most of 'em junk, anyway."

"'Junk!'" echoed the padre, shocked. "Men with human souls, junk! Doctor!"

Carpy hastily shook his head. "They ain't men—just coyotes, most of 'em. They ain't hurt anything much. Right over there in the corner," continued the doctor, pointing but forgetting his decorum in his excitement, "is that same damned old Colonel Roper himself. I'll tell you all about it—come right along with me, padre, and save a *man's* life. Then fill up with breakfast and come back here, fast as you want to."

Before the two men reached the hotel the padre, urged to a brisk pace by his companion, had all of the story the doctor had. Selwood had brought Tracy up from the

barn to the hotel, made him comfortable in a room, and was walking down the stairs when Carpy opened the front door of the hall and ushered his companion in.

Unable to repress a start at the unexpected appearance of the aged, venerable missioner, whose spotted, shabby soutane pictured well the accidents of mountain travel, Selwood paused. But apart from the rough exterior, it was the dark, piercing eyes, the gray hair, the bronzed features, the expression of a grave face that he had studied since he was a boy, that now walked out of a tragic past into life before him—it was this that shook the gambler to the depths. He knew before a word was spoken that this man was the man of the picture.

"He's got it!" cried Carpy to Selwood loudly, and before any one else could speak a word. "He's the man! He married them." Carpy, in his excitement, caught the padre's arm with one hand to urge him forward and shot the other like a semaphore out at Selwood. "He's got it, John," cried the doctor. "This is the man! He married them! He knows everything. Padre." Carpy turned to his companion and pointed to his friend, "that's their boy standing right here!"

Selwood had need of all his restraint. He stood, motionless, on the lowest tread of the stairs. The missioner scanned the serious features before him with composed and penetrating eyes. "Is this, then," he said, for Selwood made no attempt to break the silence, "is this," repeated the blackrobe slowly, "the child of my marriage of that young lieutenant so long ago?"

The gambler made no answer. Instead, he sat down on the stair and buried his face in his bandaged hands.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CARPY STARTS THINGS.

SELWOOD spent a long time that morning with the blackrobe. He urged him to come up to the hotel and remain overnight. But the old campaigner would not leave his Indians, and professed himself unwilling to risk sleeping in a room lest he take cold. He preferred to camp with his escort, who had pitched his tent down by the river, and could not be dissuaded. But he wrote out for Selwood all the details he could remember of that eventful night of the marriage of his father and mother, and gave the record to him.

Since he would not remain uptown as Selwood's guest, Selwood declared that he himself would spend the night with the padre down at the river; and having escorted him to his simple camp, Selwood, still much bandaged, returned to the hotel to forage for a blanket and filch what could be found in the way of delicacies and supplies for the Indians.

While getting together, with Bob Scott's aid, what could be found in the way of sugar, flour, meat, and tobacco, Carpy came in on the marauders of his storeroom. He dragged Selwood out into his office, planted him in a chair, and sat down facing him, eager to hear all the details of the padre's story. When the younger man had recounted the padre's story to the full, Doctor Carpy told a story himself.

"John," he chuckled with much enjoyment, "I've been kind o' mean."

"What you been doing now?"

"I've been ridin' the old general—told him the padre's here and proved all you claimed, up to the hilt. Then I says, 'What have you got to say to that?' "

"What did he say?"

"What the blazes *could* he say? But the old man's changed, John. He's broke—old age a-comin'. Then somebody planted a bullet close to his ribs last night and that annoyed him consid'able. He was hit in the back—they had the Vigilantes plumb surrounded one time. So when I poked him in the back with the probe I says, 'Which way was you running, general?'

"Well, if the old man had got mad, I'd had some fun out of it. But he never said a single word, and that made me kind of ashamed of myself, so I apologized and told him he mustn't mind an old army surgeon's jokes. Then I told him about you going down to Bartoe's alone and leaving directions for Lefever to bring the teamsters into action soon as you got Christie out, and how you cleaned up Starbuck and cleaned out the place and burned it. Well, that pleased him. I was poking him pretty hard with the probe but he just kept askin' questions about you and didn't wince. 'Dash it, doctor,' he says finally, 'blood will tell; it *will* tell! The boy's got it in him.' Takin' the credit all to himself!" laughed Carpy. "Could you beat that?

"Now, John," continued the doctor, "I

had him brought up here to the hotel. He's asleep now. After a while go up and see him. He wants to see you."

Selwood shook his head. "I don't want to see *him*."

Carpy raised his chin. "Don't be a mule. That's some of your old *grand*father coming out in you—not your mother. Some while later, go up like a man and see the general. To tell you the truth, he ain't a long time for down here, even if he gets well of this wound—which, I think, he will."

Then in Carpy fashion he sprang a further surprise. "How you feeling this morning, John?"

Selwood almost stared at him. This was a question the doctor never asked of anybody under any circumstances; Doctor Carpy's patients were told how they felt, not asked. But Selwood was ready for him. "I'll ask you a question, myself, doctor. Did you come out here in a wagon train?"

"I did."

"The first job I got west of the Missouri River," continued Selwood," was driving a team of mules."

"Same as I, John—same as me."

"I was a youngster, and you know I wasn't a husky one. By the time I drove those mules a week, if the owner had knocked me on the head I'd have thanked him for it. Everybody in the outfit was dead afraid the Indians would get us; after the first week I was dead afraid they wouldn't. I had sneezed and coughed and snorted in that alkali dust till my nose and eyes and throat were plum' burned up. Then one evening, after the hottest, scorchingest day I'd ever felt in my life, on the Platte bottoms——"

Carpy nodded hard. "Hotter'n blazes on those bottoms, wa'n't it?"

"Somebody up ahead yelled! I was just about able to raise my head and look over the mules' ears. There ahead of us—far, far away—I saw snow, the snow on top of the Rocky Mountains.

"You're asking me, are you, how I feel to-night? If it wasn't just for one thing I'd say I felt better than I've ever felt since that evening I saw that snow on top of the Rocky Mountains."

"What's the one thing?"

Selwood shrank in a little. "You couldn't mend it."

"John, you're a blamed fool."

"If I was saying it, I'd put it stronger."

"I know what's a matter with you. And maybe I *can't* cure you—not I, myself. But there's a little hussy upstairs with her head as full of you as your head is full of her. That girl can do a thing *I* can't do. And there she is a-sitting alone all this long morning, crying her eyes out. Now what do you think's wrong with her? That's all I'm asking. Go upstairs, man! Knock on her door, and if you can't tell her anything else tell her some of the good news you heard to-day. I gave her a hint. But she'd like to hear a few things straight from you."

"Did she say that?"

"That and a whole lot more," averred Carpy, making his prevarication violent, since he had gone too far to retreat. "Go on upstairs and have a face-to-face talk with Brown-eyes."

Perspiration dewed Selwood's forehead. He never did remember just how he got up the familiar flight that morning. But once above, he had wit enough to turn toward his own room to consult the looking-glass about his hair.

What was his surprise to find the door of his room open. And looking inside, Christie smoothing up the counterpane on his bed. He stood perfectly still, watching her. In a moment she finished, and turning as she straightened up, she saw him in the doorway. She gave a startled little cry, and her face was a picture of crimson confusion. "Oh!" she exclaimed, trying to speak and to laugh at once. "You can come right in! I'm all through. Margaret has gone, you know, and doctor asked me if *I* wouldn't tidy up his room and yours just for this morning. I—so I made the beds—and I—— Oh, Mr. Selwood, were you *very* much hurt in that perfectly dreadful fight?"

Selwood protested he had received no serious injury, but seemed unable to add much to his disclaimer. "And all this morning," continued Christie, hardly giving him time to speak on, "I've been trying to get a chance to thank you over and over again for all you did for me and for father last night. I don't know *what* would have become of us—where I should be *now*, if it hadn't been for *you!* You can come right in," she repeated, growing a bit hazy herself. "I think things are in some kind of

order," she faltered, not only out of breath but out of thoughts, for she had stood his silent eyes, and something she saw in them, about as long as she could and keep her senses. "And," she said, dropping her eyes before him, "I'm just going."

"Don't be in a hurry," he suggested, standing exactly in the doorway through which she was trying to make her escape.

"Oh!" she exclaimed for the fourth or fifth time—and her eyes bulked large with fear and apprehension. "I must go to the doctor's room now. His bed isn't made yet!"

If Christie's burning cheeks and distressed manner were to be believed, this fact pictured a terrible situation. But it did not impress Selwood. As Christie showed fright, he showed composure.

"If Doc Carpy ever saw his bed made, he wouldn't know where to get into it," retorted Selwood unfeelingly. "He sleeps in a buffalo robe. Christie," he added, "I'd like a little talk with you. Do you remember the morning I met you and your father on the Crawling Stone Trail?"

Christie spoke up promptly. "Indeed, I do."

"Do you remember whether you lost a shoe that morning?"

She looked at him with surprise. "How in the world did *you* know anything about that?"

"I think," continued Selwood, "I've got a nice, new girl's shoe that belongs to you. Did you happen to keep the mate to it?"

"Why, it's in my trunk, down at the tent—if the trunk hasn't been stolen. What about it?"

"I picked up a girl's shoe that morning on the trail. I thought it was about the prettiest shoe I'd ever seen. There was a horseshoe lying there on one side of the trail, and this girl's shoe on the other. I'd had nothing but horseshoe luck all my life out here, and it had been rotten luck. So I thought I'd take a chance on that girl's shoe for good luck—and I picked it up."

Christie laughed. "What a queer idea. And what did you do with it?"

"I've got it. And what I want to find out from you right now and right here is what kind of luck it's brought me. Sit down a minute, will you?"

Christie, somewhat flustered, sat down.

"I said to myself," continued Selwood, "it must be a nice girl that owned that shoe. If I could find her—and ever get some things in my own life straightened out a little—I'd ask her whether she'd marry me."

He seemed to be running out of words and ideas, and Christie came to his aid. "Well, of course, I *hope*"—her eyes fell—"it's my shoe, John. It's going to be a terrible temptation to—to claim it. Couldn't we make believe it's mine, John, anyway?"

"Do you really want it to be yours?"

Christie looked up into his eyes very simply. "How could I want it to be any one else's now, John?"

Five minutes later Doctor Carpy's loud whistle echoed up the hallway. Christie Fyler, in Selwood's arms, started like a frightened fawn and tried to break away. She could not. "John!" she whispered frantically. "Some one's coming! Let me go!" With tear-brimmed eyes she looked pleadingly up. He would not release her. "He's downstairs," murmured Selwood reassuringly. "There's nobody at all up here."

"You'll start your arms bleeding again, John," she whispered in alarm. "I can't get a breath!"

"Christie!" Selwood looked down at her face, her head cushioned in the hollow of his arm. "I've got to tell you this, too—I'm dead broke."

She laughed—who as well as lovers can face the world broke? "I guess everybody is broke in Sleepy Cat, John. Then, besides risking your precious life for me, you've had a terrible misfortune—they burned your hall, didn't they, John? And you lost everything?"

He looked down at her. "Christie," he said seriously, "I suppose you'll be willing to prove property by letting me try that shoe on you to see if it fits?"

"Oh, it isn't necessary to bother you. I can try it on, myself."

"If you'll let me try it on you, I'll tell you a secret."

"Go ahead, then."

"*I* burned the hall myself. Yes," he continued, as she looked at him amazed. "Why? Well, I was done with it—and done with everything that ever was in it. All that's behind me, Christie."

There was just an instant of breathlessness. Then she tipped up on her toes

just as high as she possibly could and flung her arms just as far as she possibly could around his neck and smothered the rest of his words in happiness.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DEATH IN THE CARDS.

AFTER supper James McAlpin with some ceremony drove Selwood's team —the rangy American bays—up to the hotel. Due to McAlpin's personal manipulation the coats of the horses glistened in the afterglow and the tan road wagon shone like a mirror. A canker of dull days in the barn had put the team on edge. They champed at McAlpin's bits.

Christie came out on Selwood's arm, bandages and all. It was their first ride together, and Christie was to be driver. Selwood went through the etiquette of seating Christie carefully in the wagon with various of his loafers peeking around the corners and out of the office windows and McAlpin officiously running in to spread the dust robe across her knees, tuck it in, and running back to the heads while Selwood got in.

They drove out on the divide for a few more minutes to themselves and then down and around by the river to the camp of the padre. They found him before a little camp fire. An Indian held the horses and the padre pointed them to a seat on a ledge.

"You married my father and mother, padre," said Selwood when he had told his own and Christie's story. "We want you to marry us."

They talked a long time, Selwood feeding the little fire with driftwood the Indians had gathered. The padre told of that other marriage—of the night, the storm, the flooded river, and the pine torches of the Indians.

After leaving the camp, loath to part, Christie and Selwood drove again out on the divide. The stars of the night shone in a glory. The Lady in her chair was slowly rising in the northeast and the Big Bear, Arcturus looking on, was retreating in the northwest. The Northern Cross stretched its broad arms across the meridian and the Eagles, almost overhead, looked down on these two mountain lovers, lost in the immensity of the desert spaces, as they had looked down so many autumn nights on so many millions of lovers gone before. Low in the west, the heart of the Scorpion burned in a red flame, and in the east the Sea Monster peered up into the sky. To the south of this, a single mass of cloud puffed out like a great explosion above the horizon and out of it darted incessant tongues of lightning.

They drove back to the hotel very late, hoping everybody had gone to bed, but in this they were doomed to disappointment. In the brightly lighted office a brave company of frontier adventurers, closely tuned to Selwood's movements, were tirelessly sitting in a suffocating atmosphere around a seriously overheated stove. McAlpin was there, waiting to take the team back to the barn; Lefever was there as hero of the secondary attack on Bartoe's; Scott, so quietly that no one heard him, had sneaked in out of the evening chill; Pardaloe, after trying all day to "locate" and lick the man responsible for Starbuck's escape, had come in to go to bed and forgotten what he came for. Tracy, in one corner, lay on his cot because he could get no one to carry him out into the hall. Fyler was there because he had no friends and was trying to make some. Bull Page was present to prevent bootlegging from the barroom, and Doctor Carpy was there, after his calls, to dispense general good feeling, of which he had, that night, an ample supply—and to keep his guests from burning the lining out of his office stove.

Christie was allowed to go upstairs unmolested; indeed, she was ignored with chivalrous ceremony. Selwood, on the other hand, was dragged into the office and held a victim till he could negotiate peace with his retainers; and effected his escape, in the end, only by inviting them all to a wedding at sunrise down at the river in the camp of the padre.

In the dawn of a glorious mountain morning they were married—perhaps on just such a spot as that to which Selwood's father had brought his bride-to-be, in the storm, so many years before. Selwood, taking on family responsibilities, was asked by Carpy whether he would elect to use his father's name, Roper, or retain his mother's name, Selwood. He found no difficulty in deciding. As Selwood he had been known, well or ill, from the beginning of his frontier days, and as Selwood, baptized John, he wished to be known to their end. His un-

fortunate father's family name had been to him too long, and too much, a source of humiliation and unhappiness.

After the wedding breakfast, attended by all the guests, with the padre as a special guest of honor, Christie persuaded her new husband to go up with her to General Roper's room. The old man, weakened by wounds and softened by years, broke and asked his grandson to forgive the past.

It was one of those happy moments for banishing resentments and forgetting the cruelties of pride and obstinacy. Christie wiped the tears from the old man's eyes, and he repaid her by throwing a bomb into her unsuspecting camp when he sincerely congratulated John and herself and begged, as the only favor he would ask, that the first boy be named John Roper Selwood and sent to West Point.

For a day or two no trip and no escape from work were possible for Selwood. He was up to his neck in work at the barns and the warehouse, straightening out the tangle into which the conflagration and the rioting at Sleepy Cat had thrown the stage-and-wagon schedules. During the day scattered lots of supplies began to filter in from Medicine Bend, and by nightfall the hotel cook was able to promise Doctor Carpy a respectable wedding supper as his compliment to the bride and groom and a company from which no loyal friend was excluded.

At nine o'clock in the evening, behind the closely curtained windows of the dining room, wedding guests made merry. Christie, flushed with happiness, had stolen from the table for a moment to run up to the general's room with a piece of wedding cake, when one of the two waitresses, coming up behind Selwood's chair, whispered something in his ears.

The bridegroom's face clouded. "Who is it?" he demanded in an impatient undertone. "Is it one of my men?"

"I don't know, Mr. Selwood. I don't think so. I never saw him before."

"Tell him," directed Selwood testily, "to come around in the morning. I've worked about fourteen hours to-day."

The waitress appeared perplexed. "I told him you wouldn't want to be interrupted," she said in an earnest whisper. "But it seemed like he was in terrible trouble. He told me to ask you for God's sake to come out to see him for just a minute."

Selwood muttered a protest. "Where is he?" he asked in an undertone.

"Outside the kitchen door."

The girl thought that Selwood's keen eyes would have burned her up during the instant before he spoke again. "Tell him," he said in a low voice, "to go around to the front door and sit down on the porch with his face to the street—understand? To go around to the front door and sit down on the porch with his face to the street," he repeated, "and his back to the door."

The waitress passed out into the kitchen. Selwood was lighting a cigar when she returned and whispered to him again. "He's gone around, Mr. Selwood."

The talk had all been going on around the table, but Pardaloe's snaky eyes had not lost sight of the low-spoken colloquy. "What's a matter, John?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Some stranger outside wants to see me a minute," said Selwood, rising. "I'll be right back."

Pardaloe was on his feet before Selwood had taken a step from the table. He put up his bear paw of a hand. "Hold on, John!" he said definitively, pushing back his chair. "You don't go out alone to see no stranger, 'specially not in your recent shape. Hold your horses."

The table rose as one man. There was a momentary upset and some conflict of claims as to who should accompany Selwood. Without passing on these in words, Selwood nodded to Pardaloe and the discussion ceased. The mule boss followed him in long strides toward the dining-room door. Hardly missing step, and with one swoop of his long arm, the big fellow snatched up his blunderbuss which stood in a handy corner, and stooping to get through the door, passed out behind Selwood.

Bob Scott at the table sat close to the door leading into the dining room from the kitchen. The other two men had not got out of the room when Scott, with his habitual smile of apology—the smile that drew about his mouth and retracted his lips in such homely lines that but for its kindliness it would be taken for a grin—rose and in perfect silence and with incredible celerity slipped out into the kitchen and was out of the back door and halfway around to the front of the hotel in the dark by the time Pardaloe had carefully drawn every shade in the hotel office and beckoned to

Selwood to come in from the hall. He himself then slipped across the hall into Carpy's private office and, throwing up the sash of the window that commanded the porch, trained his shotgun on the outer gloom.

Selwood, his revolver in his left hand, threw open the hall door without exposing himself. The hanging lamp at the foot of the stairs threw a light out through the opening. Seated on the porch, his face to the street, sat a large, loosely built man with his head hidden in a dark, pull-down cap. "Who are you and what do you want?" asked Selwood, inspecting his caller from behind the hall door and through the crack of the opening.

"You know me, John," answered the man, hoarse and short in utterance. "But I ain't very popular in these parts just now."

"What's your name?"

"I'd like to give it to you private, John. I'm keeping some under cover."

Something in the cadence of the words told Selwood that he knew the man. A question that followed was only a precaution, for from the cracked and husky tones he felt sure that the man was Big Haynes.

"Whoever you are, you're well covered where you sit," remarked Selwood with apparent indifference.

"I know it."

"Put up your hands. Stand up and turn around here," came the next order from the hall.

Selwood stepped from behind the door out on the porch. He could hardly credit his senses. It was two days since he had seen Haynes; but those two days had aged the old confidence man ten years. Selwood had but just seen this man, and seen him with the rope almost around his neck. Facing that situation the old man had not winced, not for a moment shown the white feather. Torn now, bedraggled, completely whipped, he stood before Selwood like a ghost of his former self.

"Put down your hands before they fall down," said Selwood, half in pity, half in disgust. "What in God's name has happened? Did our men catch you? Have you had a fight?"

"Not the kind you mean, John. Give me a drink, and le' me sit down and tell the story. I ain't had a bite to eat since yesterday noon."

They led him into the office, helped him into the washroom, and Scott went to the kitchen for strong coffee. Big Haynes drank four cupfuls before he could quit; then, sitting in front of Selwood, who leaned against the writing table, and with Pardaloe and the Indian listening, he spoke.

"We got away from here yesterday morning O. K.—after you turned back, Bob—Starbuck, Meg, and me, and we made time on the Medicine Bend Trail till daylight. When sunup come, we struck off into the rough country south and worked east, best we could, till noon; then we stopped for to eat and rest up. The going was pretty bad, especially on Meg. Her horse picked up a stone and went lame early in the morning and that held us back. Then we figured out nobody would molest her, alone on the trail, nor the teamsters wouldn't bother her none about the horse, for they all knowed Meg. So we rode her over to the trail and Starbuck and me made up to meet her at Crawling Stone Creek that night. So we parted." Haynes shook his head. "There was a game woman, John, if ever there was one."

"'There *was* a game woman, John,'" echoed Selwood, suspicious and angry. "What do you mean?" He sprang forward. "Is Meg dead?" he thundered at Haynes. "Did Starbuck kill her?" he asked in a rage.

Haynes put up his hand. In all the wreck of his sorry plight, whatever it might be, there was something, for the first time, that commanded respect. "Let me alone, John. You'll hear the whole story soon enough.

"She was there ahead of us at dark, waiting—down by the quicksand crossing. Meg said there was a good many teams along the road. We planned to take the trail when the moon come up and ride all night, but we was plum' tuckered, all three of us. So Starbuck said we would go up the cañon a ways and camp for the night and rest up Meg's horse all the next day—that was to-day—and ride all the next night—that was to-night.

"When we thought we was up far enough for to be pretty well hid, we staked the horses up above, where there was a little grass, and built a fire down on a ledge and had supper. I never knowed, no more than a baby, that Starbuck and Meg was former man and wife—never dreamt it. After sup-

per they told me their story. Meg said she told you——"

"What story?" demanded Pardaloe peevishly.

"Never mind now, Bill," said Selwood, adding sharply, to Haynes, "Go on."

"Starbuck said he'd got another chance from a man he never expected to get a chance from——"

"What man?" roared Pardaloe, starting up.

Selwood whirled on him, throwing up his hand at the same time to shut off Haynes. "Dash it," he cried, "let the man tell his story, Bill! Ask questions afterward. No matter what Starbuck said."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Pardaloe, pointing an accusing finger at Selwood. "Do you know the name of the man?"

"Yes," retorted Selwood severely, "and I'll give you his name in good time."

Pardaloe drew in a long, hissing, satisfied breath. "I'll kill that dog," he muttered to Scott, "if it's the last thing I do on earth!"

"Well, there they were," continued Haynes. "Meg had three cigars; she gave me one and gave Starbuck two. He said she'd saved his life, and they would head for the Panhandle and start over again. We didn't talk long. All Meg said was she wanted me to know she was Starbuck's real wife and she didn't like to be called just Meg, but Margaret Starbuck.

"Anyway, the two of 'em went to sleep close to the fire. I moved off a way. I was so blamed done out I just couldn't sleep. So there I was lying on my back on the rock, thinking where'd I land next, when I began to hear a funny kind of noise. And it kept getting louder 'n' louder, 'n' funnier and funnier, up the cañon. I lifted up to look, and there, away up the cañon, I seen a big, white streak stretching clear across it, right from wall to wall, and roaring. I set up and called to Starbuck and pointed. 'What's that white?' I says.

"He jumped up like he's shot. *'Water!'* he yells. 'Margaret!' he yells. 'Cloudburst! Quick, for your life! Grab your saddle, Haynes. Get to the horses. Up! Up!'

"He grabbed their two saddles. I grabbed my saddle, and we made, hard as we could, up on the cañon wall. You know about what kind of time we'd make on loose rock in the dark. There was a little moon over the wall—not much. I'd got maybe ten feet above 'em when I heard Meg scream—she's fell down. The water was crashing and roaring down on us like all hell was let loose. She yelled to Starbuck to save himself. But Cliff dropped the saddles and picked up Meg and started climbing with her—and the water struck us.

"I was maybe twenty feet higher than Starbuck and Meg. If I'd been forty feet it wouldn't have helped much; that water was a hundred feet deep. It picked me up like a match, and picked them up, and picked the horses up. I never knew anything till I come to, on a shelf away down the cañon. I was pounded clean to pieces. How I ever lived I don't know—but there I was.

"It was dark; the moon was gone. I yelled out their names, both of 'em, loud as I could. Didn't get no answer. So I shivered and shook and stomped around till daylight to keep alive. Then I walked on down the creek bottom toward the main trail. The water was down. I looked careful for signs and kept calling Starbuck and Meg, but didn't have no hope much of ever seeing 'em again till I spied something, down at the mouth of the cañon and pretty well out in the creek, on a gravel bar. First I thought it was a big piece of driftwood; then I thought it was one of the horses. I seen, when I got closter, it wasn't. It was Starbuck and Meg.

"I waded a ways out into the creek and got pretty near the sand bar to see if either of 'em was alive. Meg's skirt must 'a' caught in a snag on the bar and that held 'em there when the water went down. There they were, lying on the up side of the bar with their arms tight round each other—and their heads part under water; Starbuck's head was clean under water."

Haynes, as he paused, wiped his forehead with the back of his grimy hand. "I waded back ashore and kept on down the wash till I got to the main crossing, and set down there to wait for help. Inside an hour a couple o' your wagons, headin' west, come along. I told the boys the story jus' ez 'twas. They'd heard about the trouble at Sleepy Cat but didn't know nothin' about it. They agreed to help me. We unloaded most of the hay on one wagon and drove it up the creek, close as we could to where they lay. We waded out and one of the boys took a-holt of their feet and the other one and I took their shoulders together, so

we got 'em out to the wagon the way they lay 'n' got 'em into the wagon. I asked the boy to take 'em to Medicine Bend—offered him what money I had, 'cause I knew I could get coffins at Medicine Bend, and I hated to see Meg put under like a dum' animal. He wouldn't hear nothin' to turnin' back—said this was closter and he was due here in the mornin' for a return trip, anyway. So John—well, we're here."

Hollow-eyed, he said no more. Selwood, after a moment's silence, spoke to Scott. "I guess everybody's out of the kitchen," he said. "Get hold of Bull and tell him to cook some supper for Haynes and hunt up a bed for him." He turned back to Haynes. "Where are they?"

"John, we laid 'em down at the barn in the harness room. There wa'n't no other place, 'n' I jus' plum' didn't know what to do with 'em till I seen you. If you don't think it's right——"

He hesitated. Selwood finished the sentence. "It's all right," he said, rising. As he started toward the dining room, Pardaloe laid a heavy hand on his shoulder. And he looked down at him with serious eyes. "John," he asked solemnly, "are you remembering what the cards said, Saturday night at Calabasas? We couldn't figure out how it was coming, could we? But the old deck didn't lie. There was death that night, sure enough, in the cards."

It startled Selwood, when he stepped into the hall, to find Christie wide-eyed at the open door. She caught his hands. "When I came downstairs and they told me you had been called out, I was frightened and I ran out, John, to see where you were," she whispered. "And I heard the terrible story! John, what shall we do?"

They called Carpy out, and while Pardaloe and Selwood told the story to the merrymakers, Selwood and Christie told the doctor.

"Caught up the cañon in one of them blamed cloudbursts," mused the doctor. "Them blamed twisters form right out of the blue up there in the Crawling Stone mountains. They circus around like a balloon till they strike against a peak; then they burst—and God help who's camping below. Why, in thirty minutes they'll tear the whole side of a mountain. Well, it's done!"

But the doctor vowed with hardened oaths that Meg Hyde should have the best there was to be had in Sleepy Cat; and the three started for the barn—for Christie would not be denied. "Let me go, John," she pleaded. "I'm a woman—she's a woman. Let me go."

They lay on a blanket rudely spread on the harness-room floor, still locked in each other's arms. Carpy held a lantern to their faces; Selwood and Christie stood at their side.

"There's a considerable bruise in his forehead," said Carpy, speaking after his brief examination. "When the water struck him, I guess it knocked him flat as a pancake onto the rocks. That water that comes down the Crawling Stone hits a man just like a sledge hammer would hit him. It slams you down like a ton of brick on the rock 'n' then whips you up like a cork and away you go! Starbuck knew all that, too; but with Meg in his arms he maybe tried to break her fall and, that way, struck the rocks wrong himself." The doctor walked slowly around the bodies. "Starbuck was a powerful man," he went on. "If any one could have landed in the clear out o' one of them hell twisters, Starbuck could. But two of 'em, and one a woman—that's different. Load 'em into a wagon, John. We'll take 'em up to the hotel."

"To the hotel, doc?" echoed McAlpin, who with the rest had followed from the hotel and crowded into the room to listen.

"Where else?" roared Carpy. "Up to the hotel 'n' into my office."

Christie knelt at Margaret's side. The men stood by in silence. Her tears moistened the dark, sandstrewn hair as she tried to gather it up somewhat and knot it a little at Margaret Hyde's neck.

When she rose from her knees, she buried her cheek on Selwood's breast.

"At least, John," were her half-whispered words, "she died where she would have asked to die—in his arms."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THEY STAY.

"WHAT'S Selwood going to do?" asked Wentworth. He was sitting with Carpy in the sunshine on the hotel porch, having come up to see where the losses of the Vigilante outbreak, and its reprisals, had left him. A week had passed since the Crawling Stone tragedy, and Sleepy Cat, though badly scarred, had already profited.

rather than lost, by the efforts to exterminate its crooks and murderers.

Doctor Carpy took Wentworth's question seriously. "It's not so much, Ben," he replied, "a question of what *he's* going to do. There's two figuring in that camp now!"

Carpy hardly paused to continue: "Selwood talked about California. 'California!' I says. 'California! Sand! Fleas! Greasers!' Well, he thought he was goin' out there, anyway, to get hold of a little freighting business of his own, and 'live down' some things he claimed he wanted to forget. I says to him, 'You'll live 'em down faster right here, John. The population of this town changes every three weeks. In three weeks nobody here will ever know you run a place here, and things will be lived down a week before you'd get to California if you traveled night and day.' But I'm kind of afraid the cuss is going, anyway. Don't seem to be no business here he likes. I offered to sell the hotel to him."

"Well," said Wentworth, "if a freighting business of his own is all he's looking for, he need not go to California for it. I came up here to offer him a third interest in our line. When the railroad gets here we'll have to run wagons west to Bear Dance for another year. Then the business is growing all the time at Thief River—that line across the Sinks will be running ten years yet. If he'll live here and spend part of his time at Thief River, he can run this west end of the line to suit himself."

"Well, by gum, I'm thinking that'll settle it," averred Carpy.

"How's old Dave?" asked Wentworth.

"Goin' to get well. It's what I'm telling you—you can't hardly kill 'em out here. He and old Roper are in bed yet. Their rooms are next to each other upstairs and they get out of bed every day now for a little game of poker, first in one room and then in the other. You can't kill 'em and you can't stop 'em neither—they're too-old dogs. Dave has sent old man Fyler down to Thief River to run the mine for him. He give Fyler a share in it. I fixed that up," said the innocent-looking doctor. "You see, Christie didn't want to go clear out to California and leave her father here! —so that put her agin' California. Now let's hunt up John!"

It was not, perhaps, most of all, the bribe of an already well-established, profitable, and congenial business that held Selwood on the crest of the Rocky Mountain Divide. Every morning he walked down to the barn after he had announced he was going to California, it made him sick to look into the faces of his men. Gone was the snap and the dash of their normal manner; gone the smiles, the "joshing," and the jokes. And what was as painfully significant, gone were the carefree fits of anger and "cussing" and complaints and of arguments hotly threatening blows, that he, Selwood alone, was always called on to settle.

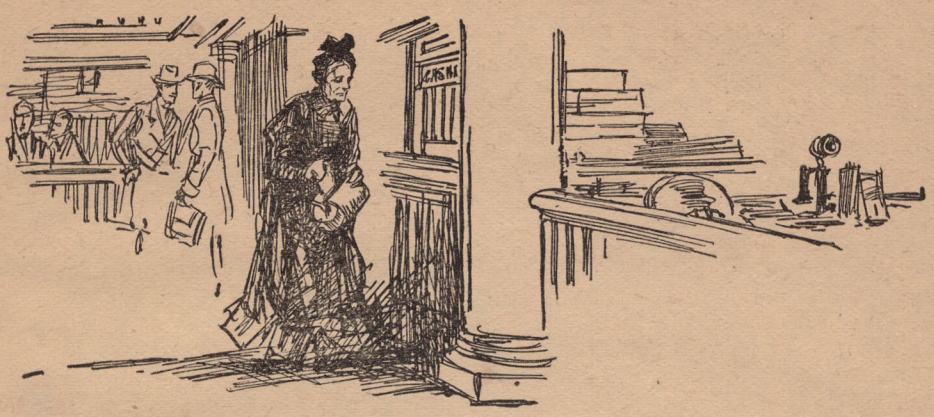
McAlpin's tail feathers plainly drooped; Lefever's snug trousers waistband grew a world too wide for his shrunken sides and new notches had to be cut to tighten his cartridge belt; Pardaloe moped in and out of the stable like an ailing mule, peevish, stooped, and hollow-eyed; Bob Scott, in desperation, had had his hair cut, and no respectable Chippewa squaw would longer have acknowledged him as a brother in blood.

And with all of this, the work went on quite as capably as before. It was the spirit that had fled—not the faithfulness.

How much of this desperation was weighing on Selwood's heart as he listened, sober faced, to Wentworth's calm proposals? How much did the claims of such a man-for-man friendship as men never know, and never can know, outside the wild life of a mountain frontier, pull at his heart while he was debating what to do in a grave crisis of his checkered life?

But one morning there was heard at the barn more noise, more shouting, more profanity, more laughter, and more arguments —more fights were in the offing and more symptoms of crude, heartfelt rejoicing were heard than had been known there since before the days of the Sleepy Cat riots. For that morning Selwood and Christie had come down to their hotel breakfast just as Carpy and Wentworth were leaving the dining room. And there was that in their manner that Carpy read the moment he saw their faces. He was not a bit surprised, even if Wentworth by any chance was, when Selwood—holding Christie on his arm—said to them both, "I guess we're going to stay!"

THE END.



Obediah's Money

By Eugene Jones

A case of a fig that grew from a thistle.

JOHN CORNWALL, president of the Merchants' Trust Company of Cypress, Florida, found himself facing a most disagreeable duty. Disagreeable to him because his heart was big.

Sitting in his private office, he listened proudly to the voice of the bank which filtered through the translucent glass panels of the partitions—the hum of conversation, the shuffling of feet on the tiled floor, the metallic crash of adding machines. For Cornwall had nursed that bank through much adversity! Time and again he had issued his orders to the finance committee when ruin hung over the directors' room like a pall; and time and again Cornwall's wits, Cornwall's nerve had stood between the institution and disaster.

Everybody admired him, even the crafty and unscrupulous Obediah Nale, who enjoyed the reputation of being the richest man in Cypress—and the meanest. Nale would never have intrusted his enormous account to other than John Cornwall!

Now on this bright November morning Cornwall at his desk suffered from conflicting emotions. Out there in the teller's cage worked Sydney Fitch, young, quiet voiced, efficient. The colossal nerve of him! Of course the depositors halting before the barred window would never dream the assistant teller was a menace. Little did they guess to whom they were passing their money. That was the damnable part. Cornwall writhed inwardly. *His* bank, the product of his life work, threatened by this professional crook! And then another picture flashed before the president. Jail. The horrible monotony of it! He had once visited a State penitentiary to identify a forger. And Fitch was so young, so respectful——

"Good morning!" said the president as Fitch entered.

The teller returned the greeting quietly, his blue eyes incurious. He was very young, clean shaven, his delicate, almost effeminate, features lending him a deceptive air of frailness. Cornwall found it difficult to believe the information he had received. This boy one of the cleverest of rascals, an expert at disguise?

But the president remembered his duty toward the innocent depositors who had placed their faith and money in the Merchants' Trust.

"Fitch, you have been with us three months, due to our gullibility."

The teller stiffened. "What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean the game's up. You forged your references. You did five years at San Quentin for bank robbery."

So still was Fitch, he might have been a wax image.

The president continued. "You man-

aged matters very cleverly—that letter of recommendation from the First National Bank of Melville, California. I suppose you arranged with a confederate to mail it in Melville. You guessed rightly that we would be content with a direct communication from the institution. May I ask how you intercepted *our* letter?"

"Offered to post it for your stenographer, sir." This in almost a whisper.

"I see. You were moderately sure the company carrying blanket bond on our employees would be satisfied with a single letter, provided it came *direct*. Excellent reasoning! They were. The thing might have worked, if a man from Melville hadn't dropped in yesterday. I mentioned you. He has been cashier of the First National for some years! Just a slip, perhaps; yes, but Providence has a way of arranging such slips. Now, Fitch, I've given the best of my life to building up this bank. What would you expect my attitude to be toward a person of your—accomplishments?"

The teller wet his lips.

"Have you anything to say before I turn you over to the police?"

"No—no, sir."

"Aren't you going to attempt some last-minute explanation?"

Suddenly Fitch clenched his hands. "What's the use? You wouldn't believe the truth any quicker than a lie. I did five years, all right. Go on, call in the cops."

Cornwall wore a puzzled expression. "One question first: If you came down here to clean us out, why have you waited so long? Only last Saturday you had your chance. Heaven knows how many previous ones you've passed up!"

Fitch raised his eyes. They were like the eyes of a fox when the hounds close in.

"There's no use my telling you!"

"Why?"

"Because nobody ever believes an—ex-convict!"

Cornwall leaned forward. "Listen. I've met and measured all sorts of men. It's a banker's first duty to recognize a thief—not after he has committed a crime, but before. Doesn't it strike you peculiarly that I trusted you?"

"You were fooled."

"I was *not!*" The other brought his fist down on the desk with a crash. "You haven't touched a cent that didn't belong to you. You have been the best assistant teller we ever employed. Now, young man, take your choice—tell me the whole thing or give yourself up to the police."

"It wouldn't help any. I'm not crazy enough to think you'd spare a safe cracker."

"Nor would I, but this is your chance to prove to me you didn't intend to crack our safe. Look here, I'm not deaf to the troubles of young men. My son died in college—automobile accident——"

Fitch lost his rigidity. Stumbling across the room to the desk, he sank into a chair beside it.

"All right," he said.

And then his head went down on his arms thrown across the corner of the desk.

"God!" he sobbed. "If only you *would* believe me! Nobody ever will! I—I've tried——"

Cornwall touched the bowed head. "I will believe you—for my son's sake."

After a while Fitch spoke, chokingly, not looking up, almost hypnotized by the man's fingers. "All I wanted was a—chance, sir. When I got out of jail—that was two years ago—no bank would have me. I didn't know anything else. I tried all sorts of jobs, but every time, one way or another, my employers would hear I'd done time. Then—*you* know! Last summer I thought maybe by forging references I could come South and get a bank job. And after I'd proved I was running straight I could tell the president. It seemed to me he might believe me. The—the fellows here have been so decent, I was beginning to respect myself, sir. Oh, it's no use—no use at all!"

The room was silent in spite of the sounds filtering through the partitions. Cornwall, the wrinkles of his face like minute, time-worn cañons, allowed the compassion in his heart to fill his eyes. His hand still rested on the boy's head, but his gaze was far away, bridging the years.

The life of his own son had been wiped out ruthlessly; was not this life about to be destroyed in even a more terrible manner? To forgive was God's own motto; yet Cornwall, a bank president, was not master of his own desires. And Fitch's future? A series of imprisonments, the gradual disintegration of all that is worth while in manhood. Potter's field eventually. Both boys dead, one by the hand of God, the other by the hand of man!

Perhaps it was the all-wise power above,

operating through Cornwall, that found the solution; perhaps it was the Lord's way of combating human prejudice and narrowness. Cornwall did not know he was inspired; he merely knew he spoke from his heart.

"Brace up, son! You're not going to jail again. You're going to hold up your head in this town, and San Quentin be damned!"

"You mean you *believe* me!"

Cornwall couldn't stand that. He looked away, trying to concentrate on the water cooler in the corner, fighting to maintain the self-control which now threatened to desert him.

"Of course!" he choked. "The world is all before you—here! I am going to help you, as I would have wanted other men to help my son. And you will try always—for me—for yourself——"

"Try? *Try!*"

Presently Cornwall was able to continue in a more matter-of-fact tone.

"Obviously I cannot keep you as assistant receiving teller; it would endanger you as well as myself. The directors—if they ever found out—would instantly ask for my resignation, and all you wish to forever hide would be made public. But I have a plan. Can you drive a car?"

"You bet I can!" Fitch's reaction left him pitifully eager. "Why," he almost shouted, "I ran away from a New York motor cop with a Ford! Can I drive a car!"

The other smiled. "Good! I need a chauffeur. Now get this: You came South because of lung trouble. You find bank work too confining. Nobody would censure you for taking an outside job; and nobody would have any inclination to hunt up your past. Before long there will be a worthwhile position open in one of our affiliated interests, and you shall have it. That is how much I believe in you, Sydney Fitch!"

Slowly the young man got to his feet.

"There's nothing to say, sir, except that your—your son had the best father that ever lived! Maybe some day I can square accounts——"

The town of Cypress, being largely financed on orange trees and paper, kept its bankers on the jump. The legal rate of interest was eight per cent, the illegal rate much higher. When oranges condescended to grow peacefully, without blight, the banks made money. When frosts arrived the banks had to accept paper the value of which was subject to change without notice—Cornwall's bank among others. It worried Cornwall a great deal—this forever gambling with Old Man Weather.

The winter of 'twenty-two came into Florida with a rush of northern winds and half-frozen tourists. Crude-oil stoves sprouted in the orange groves. The growers prophesied the trees would live, but what would happen to the present crop was problematical. The Merchants' Trust got rid of a vast amount of negotiable paper, its officers wishing heartily it might unload still more. The other banks followed suit. Had all the financial institutions of Cypress joined forces to fight a common enemy, no doubt they might have kept their doors open. But cutthroat business was the policy of the town. "Get your neighbor before he gets you!" had been the unspoken slogan of Main Street. 'Twenty-two found everybody "getting" everybody else. Even found the wise and silent Cornwall enmeshed. Crops were mortgaged, sold on the trees, the trees mortgaged. Packing houses became the unwilling owners of questionable fruit.

Then, as if not to disappoint the most pessimistic, there descended upon Florida a real, manufactured-at-the-north-pole freeze!

The next day Obediah Nale walked up to the cashier's cage in the Merchants' Trust.

"Good morning!" he wheezed.

Obediah had lost his voice some years previous in a fit of temper when his wife had returned to her family home in the North; and like his wife, his voice had never come back!

"Good morning! Cornwall here? Ah, ask him to step to the window."

Cornwall stepped.

The banker found Obediah's small and spare frame swathed in a fur-lined overcoat. He wore a muffler about his scrawny neck, gaiters over his shoes. The skin of his face apparently had contracted from the cold until it stretched tightly from nose bridge to cheek bone, like the canvas of a dog tent. It was blotched, unhealthy skin, as dry as his personality—but more polished! His small eyes, sunk beneath tufted brows, watered continually, and he was wont to mop a tear at odd moments. He

foreclosed mortgages with his crocodile tears and his husky voice, giving strangers the impression that he wept in sympathy.

"How's business?" wheezed Obediah, daubing his eyes.

"Better for us than for the growers," replied Cornwall. "I am sorry for them."

"Yes—'um—yes. A great pity. And you have no excess paper? Nothing to make you sorry for yourself?"

The president temporized. "Every bank carries a quantity of good but nonnegotiable security."

"Not going to close your doors, eh?" cackled Nale.

"Hardly, sir!"

Several depositors were lending their ears. Cornwall took in the significance of the situation at a glance.

"Come around to my office, Mr. Nale, if you have anything to discuss."

"Won't bother you, Cornwall. 'Um—no, wouldn't think of it!" grinned Obediah. "Just tell your cashier to give me my balance. I brought a satchel along."

Silence settled over the group, isolating those around the cashier's window from the rest of the room. With the speed of poison gas that ominous silence spread until it held in its grip the entire line of waiting people. Depositors craned their necks expectantly, eyes glued to the man with the satchel. Only the crash of the adding machines prevented the more distant from hearing every word.

Nale withdrawing his account! A crippling blow in the dark! Crisis? Yes! The president thought rapidly. To plead with the man, to remind him the bank required two days' notice of withdrawal of accounts over ten thousand dollars, would be to admit to those listening that the Merchants' Trust was tottering. Nothing to do but pay, and pay gracefully. Twenty thousand out of the vaults! To-morrow Saturday—pay-roll day! And Nale was asking for *cash*. It might be a frame-up to put the Merchants' Trust Company out of business.

"Certainly," agreed Cornwall with a smile. "We shall be sorry to lose you, Mr. Nale. We are, however, grateful for your past patronage. How will you have it?"

"Easiest way for you!" Obediah's chuckle was positively fiendish. "Don't suppose you're loaded up with cash. 'Um—no!"

"On the contrary, we have plenty to accommodate you, sir."

"Eh? Ah, all right." Then, wiping his eyes: "Bad days, Cornwall, bad days! No affront to you. You can tell the directors I'm not changing banks. Don't trust any of 'em. Banks down here need oranges—good ones!"

The president drew an inward sigh of relief. So it wasn't a frame-up. The old miser was actually planning on trusting his dollars to some common safe. A poor compliment to the Merchants' Trust! Foolish. Safes without time locks were vulnerable, but that was Nale's affair.

The cashier had returned from the vault. The eyes of the waiting depositors popped as he counted out twenty thousand dollars in twenty-dollar notes.

"There you are, Mr. Nale. Right, I believe."

Obediah, his fingers trembling, stuffed package after package into his alligator-skin satchel.

"Want a messenger to go with you?" inquired the president. "That's a lot of money to carry about."

" 'Um—er—no. Only crooks in Cypress behind desks!" Nale winked, which started him weeping again. "Good day, Cornwall; good day, gentlemen! B-r-r! Cold this morning. Poor weather for oranges. 'Um—yes."

He went out to his waiting Ford, satchel in one hand, the other buttoning his ridiculously heavy coat. Behind him in the bank remained a splendid fire-and-burglar-proof vault, with a few packages of currency in the round safe at the farther end—very few! The president turned from the window. A farmer took Obediah's place, his air apologetic, almost furtive.

"Hard times, these," he muttered. "Got fertilizer to buy. Gimme all of it."

"Entire deposit, sir?"

"Yes, sure. Nothing against the bank, y'understand."

The cashier understood; Cornwall, pausing at his office door, understood.

That evening the directors sat late, on the table before them telegrams and letters. Cornwall reiterated the gravity of the situation in his closing words:

"Nale's withdrawal of twenty thousand cash is a blow I didn't expect. Eventually he will bring it back. He is a miser, and

somebody has frightened him. To-morrow, being Saturday, gentlemen, we shall likely be called upon to pay to depositors between fifteen and twenty thousand before twelve o'clock. We haven't it. I have wired the Federal Reserve. Nothing doing. An old disagreement—you remember. Needless to tell you, not a bank in this town would help us if they could. I wouldn't be surprised to find them demanding cash to-morrow when we clear. Not only because they want to see us go under, but because their finance committees are at their wit's end. We own—or control—a number of orange groves laden with frozen fruit. The groves are excellent security a year from now; worth nothing at present."

"Good God!" muttered a prominent merchant from behind a much-chewed cigar. "What'll we do—close our doors?"

"Unless Providence intervenes!" replied Cornwall soberly.

"How about Wall Street—high interest?"

The president shook his head. "Not a chance. Nobody knows better than Wall Street what frozen oranges are worth. I have one slender hope to offer. This afternoon I wired a friend of mine in Georgia. He may have enough capital—and faith in me—to help us. I shall hear from him to-night. Let us meet again at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, gentlemen."

The directors filed out the side door, nodding to Sydney Fitch, Cornwall's chauffeur, who stood waiting respectfully in the hall. They did not notice the tenseness of the man—nor the fact that the transom into the directors' room was open.

Late that night Cornwall received the following telegram at his home:

Sorry. Money tied up. Next week maybe.

The president of the Merchants' Trust returned to the living room, his eyes far away. Next week! And to-morrow Saturday with its pay rolls!

He put out his hand, touching his favorite chair by the fireplace. His! The whole house—the woman upstairs asleep, *his!* And deep inside of him something else that was his—to-night. The respect and confidence of the best element in Cypress. To-morrow that, too, would perish along with his life work. Across the town slept Obediah Nale, with twenty thousand dollars lying useless in an old-fashioned safe. The money would have saved Cornwall. For a moment he lifted his face unmasked. It was gray, hopeless, very old in the shaded light.

Loot!

Obediah Nale, his little alligator-skin bag in one hand, and his life in the other, had walked out of the Merchants' Trust. For years large quantities of currency have been carried in little alligator-skin bags; and for years highwaymen have been taking advantage of the fact. But Nale thought he knew Cypress. His miserliness led him to believe that the twenty thousand would be safer in his own home than it had been in the vaults of the trust company. Let the Merchants' Trust go to the wall so long as Obediah Nale escaped with his alligator-skin bag! Let the town smash financially so long as Obediah could mount guard over his rusty safe and chuckle! Selfishness. Miserliness.

Nobody who had witnessed the passing of the money followed the little man to the street; nobody would have dared, under the eyes of the bank officials. Yet everybody intended to make the most of the story.

Before night the news would spread to the most distant farm and grove that Nale had withdrawn his account, placing it under his personal protection. Then darkness, with his trust-company vaults sealed by time locks, protected by modern burglar alarms! Pitifully empty vaults, mocking directors and stockholders—and in Obediah's establishment a fortune of twenty thousand dollars behind the door of a rusty safe.

Nale jounced home in his Ford, the bag on the seat beside him. Once there, he put the Ford in a tumbled-down shack, removed the switch key, took off the distributor head from the engine, unscrewed and pocketed three of the four spark plugs, and went into the house. Obediah had heard that Fords were the favorite swag of auto thieves! He also would have drained the gas tank, had he not been afraid of losing some of the precious fluid during the operation. As a rule it took Nale a solid half hour to reassemble his car in the morning, yet the labor was cheaper than theft insurance.

Once within the four walls of his domicile, he pulled down all the shades before placing his money in the old safe, the door of which was hidden by an oil painting.

Nale cooked his supper with one eye on the oil painting, ate his food in front of it in the living room, and later went to sleep in a morris chair, clutching an ancient pistol of enormous caliber. He had not intended going to sleep.

Evening and night were one in Cypress. No passing of cars during the earlier hours, no pedestrians on the streets except where the lights of the picture shows beckoned. Ten, eleven, twelve o'clock. The shriveled figure in the morris chair slumbered audibly. Now and then his body would twitch. Perhaps he was dreaming of the money in his safe.

A shadow crossed the road a block distant, darted into the gloom of the parkway between sidewalk and street. Presently it drifted along the fence bordering Obediah's property. The marauder—whoever he was—knew his business. He selected a rear window, pasted adhesive tape over a portion of the glass, and cut a hole in the pane with a small instrument. Then he removed the fragment silently—thanks to the tape. How easy to insert his hand and turn the catch!

The kitchen—dark, faintly odorous of food. Rubber-clad feet padding across it; almost inaudible steps in the dining room.

Suddenly a flash light painted a white circle in the living room, revealing Obediah asleep in his chair, pistol in hand. Loot and miserliness!

The intruder smiled. Very simple! Not even exciting. Removing a bottle from his pocket, he wet a handkerchief with the contents, and spread the cloth over Nale's unattractive countenance. Obediah choked, would have sat up, had not strong hands held his shoulders. He muttered through the cloth:

"Good day, gen'lemen; poor—weather—for—oranges."

The man bending over him grinned, adding a little more fluid to the handkerchief—which, by the way, was uninitialed. After a moment Nale slept profoundly. Then the intruder switched on a reading lamp, and deliberately felt his victim's pulse. Fine! Good heart action; no need to worry. Although the silent-footed miscreant was of slight build, he found Obediah far from heavy as he carried him upstairs and placed him on his own bed. Making doubly sure, he trussed the sleeping form with a clothes line brought for the purpose, locked the bedroom door, and descended, still grinning.

First he satisfied himself that the light from the reading lamp was not visible in the street; then he began his search. It must be near by, of course, else Nale wouldn't have been mounting guard in the living room. The second picture he moved revealed the door of the safe. A laugh sprang to his lips. What a joke—this antiquity. No oil on the tumblers; they would drop with the noise of shot striking a hardwood floor! And within this flimsy, century-old strong box, twenty thousand dollars! Greed again!

The man knelt with his ear to the lock, rolling the dial carefully, swiftly. Now and then he would pause with a tense expression. But always came the sound he *felt* in his sensitive fingers.

The house was very still, Obediah, roped to the bed upstairs, sleeping peacefully in spite of the hard knob in his hip pocket, which consisted of three spark plugs and a distributor head. No, he would not lose his Ford!

In the little circle of light from the lamp the man worked. The first time he missed by a single tumbler; the second he swung open the door. An alligator-skin bag, nothing else that mattered. He jerked it forth, holding its gaping jaws under the lamp. Greenbacks—neat packages of them. His fingers trembled as he felt the crisp paper. Then he glanced toward the stairs. Miser!

With a sudden motion he shut the bag, drew a flannel cloth from his pocket, and industriously polished the front of the safe, including the dial and handle. No finger prints left! The pictures he had moved, and returned to their places, received the same attention. It was evident this person was no amateur cracksman.

And then, as the town clock boomed one, he mounted the stairs, taking the bag with him.

But this time not to Nale's chamber. Across the hall was a closed door. He entered the room beyond, pulled down the shades, found the light, and went to work. Every subsequent action of his showed forethought. As a matter of fact he was taking advantage of casual remarks dropped by the woman who came once a week to clean Obediah's house. How he had overheard those remarks was *his* secret.

From the closet the man extracted an

armful of women's clothes. He vaguely realized that they were a bit out of date, the garb of a past generation. Why had Obediah kept them? Hidden sentiment possibly; cupidity probably. Nale never parted with anything unless he received more than its value in cash.

Other clothes in the bureau. It took him a half hour to select what he wanted and to arrange his small make-up box. The remainder of the stuff he jammed back in the drawers. Then he crossed the hall to administer another sleeping potion to his unconscious host, should such a proceeding seem advisable. It was typical of him that he eventually went to sleep in Mrs. Nale's bed, quite content with the night's work.

Morning. The marauder, much refreshed, found Obediah slumbering heavily, although his pulse remained normal. Nale was good for another six hours. As for the person who had so calmly brought about this astonishing state of affairs, he brewed some coffee and consumed it, later returning to the room where he had slept.

First he divested himself of his own clothes; next he used his grease paints with results that would have intrigued Sarah Bernhardt. But he had trouble with those accursed clothes—an hourglass corset, shoes that pinched, a small pillow tastefully arranged upon his manly bosom, and held in place by an unnamable garment. The dress he chose was actually littered with hooks and eyes, yet he mastered its intricacies after much fumbling. A bonnet came next. A bonnet, no less! He tucked beneath this headgear a wisp of hair hastily extracted from the mattress, lending a certain rakishness to his appearance. And then, having completed the finishing touches, he stood off, with air of an artist, to view the result.

Certainly nobody could have remotely connected this veiled and dowdy old woman, with a stray lock escaping her bonnet and a figure found exclusively in old prints, with the slim, silent-footed burglar of the night! She might have been anywhere between sixty and eighty, and she walked with a stiff, rheumatic gait. Suddenly he sat upon the bed and laughed until the corset punctured his ribs.

A moment later "the old lady" was bending over Nale, a damp and odoriferous handkerchief in her fingers.

"There!" she shrilled in a falsetto voice. "You'll sleep peaceful, Obediah, dear!" And in more manly tones: "Damn your stingy hide!"

The Merchants' Trust at nine fifteen a. m. Business apparently normal, but every official from the president down knew that in a few brief moments the institution must refuse to honor checks. Because there was no cash in the vault—nothing but non-negotiable paper!

Cornwall, pale, heavy-eyed, sat in his office. Not an avenue of escape open. And he had watched over this bank as a mother would her child. At home his wife following her happy domestic routine, unaware of the descending tragedy. He did not shoulder the blame on other officials; it was typical of him to trace backward his business transactions in an effort to find the basic error. It was his fault, Cornwall's! He might blow his brains out, leaving his family to face ruin, but it would still be his fault. True, extradition had never been established with the other world, but he rather thought he would face punishment nevertheless. He did not realize he was facing it now—hell could be no blacker than his present sufferings. And although he refused to admit it, he was the victim of circumstance—of a frozen orange crop, as Nale had said.

Nale! He clenched his hands. Nale, the miser! Cornwall remembered many favors he had done that wizened person. If only he might see Obediah writhe in agony of body and spirit! Twenty thousand dollars. The sum would have tided over the Merchants' Trust. With all day Sunday to arrange exchange of securities, Cornwall could have pulled through. Monday was always a day of deposits. But now, *now* he faced pay rolls, a steadily increasing demand for cash which was not to be had even at ruinous interest.

Yet in the stress of the moment the president found time to think of his chauffeur. Thank God, the boy was out of this! Nobody could attach stigma to him. He offered up a little, inarticulate prayer for his wife, for Fitch, for all his friends who had trusted him. Of course he would carry on, not elsewhere but here in Cypress, with the hope of making good every cent he had unwittingly taken from the pockets of others——

An excited receiving teller burst into the

room without knocking. News such as he bore might safely ignore formalities.

"Mr. Cornwall," he gasped, "what do you think, sir! Nale has—has sent his money back!"

"What!"

"Fact, sir! By some relative. I don't understand exactly——"

Cornwall was through the door before his employee had finished. At the cashier's window he found an old lady who apparently had acquired her present costume immediately after the Civil War. A veil partially hid her features. On the marble counter sat an alligator-skin bag.

"Who are you?" came from beneath the outlandish bonnet. "Oh, yes; you be Mr. Cornwall. Obediah told me to see you. Here, take this money. My lands! I like to have died of heart failure, trampin' the streets with it."

"But my dear lady——"

"Don't 'dear lady' me! Give me one of them receipts like Obediah says he wants, and let me get along back."

Every man in the long line behind her strained his ears. So Nale trusted the bank! So Nale was returning his money! One or two depositors went so far as to abandon their places. No use withdrawing their accounts when that miser felt safe! Let the joke be on the other fellow.

Cornwall controlled himself, but the paying teller was shaking as he made out the deposit receipt, and shoved it through the window.

"May I ask," ventured the president, "why—er—Mr. Nale didn't come down in person? Is he sick?"

"Sick? No!" she sniffed. "He ain't any sicker 'an you. Got the rheumatiz, he thinks. I know 'im. I ain't been his sister for sixty-two years *without* knowin' him!"

"When did you—arrive?" asked Cornwall with pardonable curiosity. He had been unaware that Obediah possessed a sister.

"Me? Last night, evenin' train. First thing he told me was he had a lot of money in the house. No place to keep money. Fool notion! It didn't take Mirandy Nale long to make 'im see it neither. Good day, Mr. Cornwall!"

She turned from the window, stowing the receipt in her alligator-skin bag. Curious eyes followed her lumpy figure to the door. Thankful eyes, too!

The president returned to his office, where he broke down for a moment.

His prayer of thanks was even more inarticulate than had been his prayer for help. But it erroneously included the name of Mirandy Nale.

The "old lady" returned to her "brother," who still slept peacefully. Having made sure of this, "she" doffed her uncomfortable garments, placed everything exactly as "she" had found it, and thankfully climbed into a pair of trousers. Mirandy Nale perished with the removal of the last vestige of grease paint, but her spirit marched on.

Having made certain the room was in its former order, the man carried Obediah to the morris chair below stairs, after which he reopened the safe and placed the alligator-skin bag inside. It was quite empty except for a deposit receipt signed by the teller of the Merchants' Trust, for twenty thousand dollars. Yes, Nale would sleep until noon. And by then the time locks would close on whatever cash remained of his twenty thousand. Monday morning Cornwall would be in a position to part with the entire sum, should Obediah demand it.

As an afterthought Mirandy's spirit caused the intruder to leave a scrawled note on Nale's knee. It read:

> Don't make the mistake again of trusting a safe, you old miser. Your money is where it belongs! Your loving sister,
> MIRANDY.

At ten thirty Sydney Fitch telephoned his employer. He said:

"I'm sorry, sir, I overslept. Do you wish the car?"

"Oh," replied Cornwall absently, "that you, is it? No. Meet me here at noon. I walked downtown. And by the way, it may interest you to know, Fitch, that Obediah Nale returned his account to us this morning. You remember him, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed, sir!" replied Fitch after a moment's hesitation.

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***Contest Editor,* POPULAR MAGAZINE,**

79 Seventh Ave., New York

The names of the winners will be announced six weeks after the close of the contest.

The Diamond of the Diplomats

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "The Christmas Spirit," "The Ambassador's Watch," Etc.

The Great Macumber traces a diamond which, for all no jeweler would have bid a sou marqué to add it to his stock, was worth a princely ransom to the right parties.

THE grillroom of the Hotel Rawley has no better satisfied patron, and none more consistent, than the Great Macumber. When we are in New York City, which latterly has come to be for at least seven or eight months of the year, Macumber and I habitually take our breakfasts and luncheons "in the house," as the phrase is. As a rule we dine at the Rawley as well; but there comes a night every now and then when the Great One declares for a change.

On these nights, sometimes journeying by taxi, sometimes jouncing along remote and exotic thoroughfares in queer, obsolescent little street cars whose polyglot conductors are also their motormen and whose passengers are stolid-faced peasant people from an alien world, we plunge into gastronomic adventures during which I give my word I've had my fortitude as sorely tried as ever when facing hazards not of the cuisine.

If you imagine there can be nothing sinister in a sauce, nothing downright rascally in a ragout, I recommend you to the company of the Great Macumber when he takes his dinner out. There seems no end to the man's knowledge of out-of-the-way restaurants and out-of-the-ordinary foods. He is at home not only with French and Spanish and Italian and Hungarian menus, but with those of the Russian, the Egyptian, the Hindu and the Turk. And well I remember one evening when, having been promised a taste of real African cooking by the Great One, I found set before me not the expected chicken and waffles but a dark, dry mystery which Macumber later informed me was the only decent roast of rhino to be had in town.

The restaurant of Signor Giuseppe Farone, much favored of Macumber by reason of its matchless ravioli, is contiguous to that meeting of sometime-perilous ways known by an older generation as the Five Points. Signor Farone, who has imagination, calls his place the Café of the Diplomats; yet when one has come to it, it is no more than a little box of a room at the summit of many dim, steep steps leading from an entrance no more impressive or inviting than the run of tenement doorways.

There is a saying, I think, concerning a maker of peerless mousetraps and remarking the fact that there is great congestion on the sylvan path to his door; and as with mousetraps, so it must be with ravioli. The cooking of the Café of the Diplomats, which is the cooking of Signor Farone himself, draws many a party of gourmets up the precipitous approach.

It was surprising, walking in at what

should certainly have been the height of the dinner hour one evening, that Macumber and I should have found the proprietor-chef sitting alone with the swart son who serves him as combination waiter and bus boy.

Signor Farone bounded from behind a month-old copy of a Neapolitan newspaper to greet us.

"Maestro!" he cried joyfully. "The Professor Macumber! Be quick, Tony! Bring to me that hat which he has used before for the miracle of the rabbits!"

The Great One regarded him soberly.

"Ravioli before rabbits," said he. "We magicians are like the rest of the world; we cannot work on empty stomachs. When you've fed me, Giuseppe, you may expect magic. Not before. But what's gone wrong with business, man? It's nearly seven o'clock."

"I know the hour," said Signor Farone calmly. "The night is a dull one. Such times must come. One night it is the rush. People will complain because the service is not like that of the subway express train—because the preparation of what is good to eat requires good time. There will be evenings of many parties. Of too many. Nights such as this are endurable, if one is not mad for money. But nights like the last one! No, no! I would close the doors of the Café of the Diplomats forever before the threat of another!"

Macumber shook his head over the blue scrawl of the menu, and smiled at the chef's sudden expression of anxiety.

"Tush! I'll require no cooking to order. There's food for gods listed here. It was only my reflection that you Latins are beyond a Scottish understanding. You have a good run of business, and it puts you into a panic. You're a slothful lot, Farone. Instead of having your hearts lifted by a decent consideration of the money coming in, you think but of——"

"Ah, Signor Macumber!" protested the genius of the Café of the Diplomats, and his voice was tragic. "For the money coming in I have due regard. The labor of the cooking is nothing, if I am not pressed to be quicker than is well; for that I love. But last night, I tell you, I would not live through again. I speak of the excitement, the raid, the robbery—of what came after!"

The Great One looked up quizzically.

"Raided and robbed, eh? I'm sincerely sorry, Giuseppe. But those things appear to go together nowadays when a man stocks a bit of wine for his dinner guests, and when the revenue department inquires less closely than in former days into the character of its agents."

"But you mistake. With the robbery the agents had nothing to do; and it was not I who was robbed. Instead, I am accused as the robber. I am put to humiliation, menaced with pistols, searched. So likewise is Tony, my son; and so my customers. Other patrons are excluded when they come to the door. The whole of the Café of the Diplomats is held under—what would you say?—the martial law? These Chinese, they are of the devil!"

"Chinese!" echoed the Great One. "I knew yours was a cosmopolitan clientele, Giuseppe, but——"

"Yes; they were Chinamen. All five of them. And what can one do? What would be worth doing? They were from the neighborhood—from Mott Street, or Pell, or Doyers. But who can tell one Chinaman from another? If I could point my finger at the fat one who spoke the good English, the one who said he had lost the jewel, what then?"

The thoughts of Macumber dwelt no longer upon ravioli. He put aside the bill of fare of the Café of the Diplomats and faced his chair around.

"Giuseppe," said he, "I fear I visit you a night too late. I think I should have hugely enjoyed the situation in which you found only distress. A jewel stolen from a Chinese, man! Here, under your nose! Tush, you've no sense for the melodrama! He would have been a renegade priest of Confucius, by the book; and the stone an eye from a monstrous idol! Not a bite shall I eat until I've heard from you the story of the play!"

II.

The spirit of Signor Giuseppe Farone was the spirit of the artist. Although he darted into the kitchen when Macumber issued his ultimatum, his thoughts too had gone from ravioli. Reappearing, he came in the apron and cap of the chef, costumed for his part.

"Now," said he, "I am as I was last night. I can tell it better so, I think. You understand, Signor Macumber?

"How to start? Shall I say there had been an exceptional business at dinner—what does it matter?

"The time, when this excitement started to begin, was close to eight. Only one party lingers then, a gentleman with his lady. I am in the kitchen when I hear new customers arriving. I look through the door to see if these people are friends to be greeted by Giusepp' himself—and to my surprise, they are Chinamen. One wears a loose-sleeved coat of silk; the others are dressed in the American style.

"Though Chinatown is so near, signor, it is the first time I have been honored by its people; for the Chinese, you know, seldom eat any food not cooked by their countrymen. They are without curiosity in the matter of cuisine.

"The gentleman and lady of whom I speak are in this corner, where you sit now. The Chinese go in silence to the large table in the corner farthest away, by the kitchen door. No sooner are they seated than more trade comes, a little man who has been elsewhere in convivial company, it is plain to see, and after him two gentlemen who dine here many times.

"These two I make welcome, and then retire to my range. Almost at once I am called back by Tony. The little man who likes drinks must be talked to. He is pressing whisky from a pocket flask upon all present. He has invited Tony to drink, and upon receiving a polite refusal has gone from table to table urging that all be cheerful. He has visited the gentleman and lady who talk over their coffee, the two gentlemen who are my good customers—even the Chinamen.

"To me, the proprietor of the Café of the Diplomats, coming to reprimand him, the disturber has the effrontery to offer his liquor. Meanwhile he continues to sing a senseless song whose refrain, Signor Macumber, repeats itself horribly in my memory. The words, as I clearly recollect, are: 'And another small glass will not be harmful.'

" 'You will be quiet, sir,' I direct this person, with all the resolution at my command, 'or you must be expelled into the sidewalks.'

"Having said this, I retire again into the kitchen, for there are pots to stir and I am certain that Tony will have no difficulty in coping with this fellow who flourishes the flask.

"But my troubles, signor, are only at the beginning. Immediately I am called to the front once more. The gentleman and lady friend have departed. At their table sit two others, just arrived. I am aghast to recognize one of them as Abie Gottlieb, the famous agent of the revenue, who has been pointed out to me not long ago by a cousin who conducts in Mulberry Street an establishment like the Café of the Diplomats, though less pretentious.

"For only one second I stand and I stare. Then all at once descends the confusion. Of a sudden there is a raising of the voices of the Chinamen, who have been talking quietly among themselves. At the same time the revenue officials, having been assured by Tony that the Café of the Diplomats is not among the places serving drink in violation of the law, place on display their shields and say it is their purpose to make search of the premises.

"How can I say what transpires then? The noise of the Chinese becomes more boisterous. They all have risen, and are looking about beneath the table. In other things happening they betray no interest.

"And many things are happening. The agent Gottlieb has shouldered himself into my kitchen, and is tearing at the doors of the ice box and the closets. Even he is looking into my ovens.

"The small man in the condition I have described, rising to go, has been checked at the door by the companion of Gottlieb. He does not realize the character of the person who stands in his way. For only a minute he sits himself back at his table. Then, waving his silver flask, he starts again for the door; and—this is the truth before Heaven, signor—he demands that the official join him in drink!"

Signor Giuseppe Farone, lately accused of lacking sense of melodrama, flung wide his arms and lifted his eyes toward the regions he had invoked to bear witness to his veracity.

"Well," queried Macumber seriously, "did the gentleman accept?"

"He accepted," replied with equal seriousness the proprietor of the Café of the Diplomats, "he accepted—the flask. I say it was accepted. Rather it was snatched. It was in a way pathetic, for the offense was not great, while the flask was as I say of silver and of some value. The official put it to his nostrils; shook it to make certain it held more than aroma, thus justifying seizure, and then slipped it into his pocket.

" 'You are lucky,' he said, 'that I do not take *you*, too.'

"But I am digressing, Signor Macumber. What you have heard up to now is *prologo*. The visit of the revenue officials is brief. Gottlieb finds nothing. They speak insultingly of keeping watch upon me, and they go.

"Yet we are not free. Command of the Café of the Diplomats has passed only from them to others. One of the Chinese has slipped to the door. He now stands guard there. In his hand, openly displayed, is a pistol.

"From the table in the corner one of the other Chinamen speaks up. It is the fat one of whom I have mentioned. His English is no less faultless than mine.

" 'No one will leave,' he says. 'I have been robbed.'

"You will picture my consternation, signor. For a moment I am alarmed that Tony may have been guilty of error in the check; but when I suggest that overcharges may be made correct without the use of revolvers I am informed by the fat Chinese that this is not the case.

" 'Then,' it is my question, 'may I ask what has been stolen?'

"The fat one looks about the circle of his friends. One of those smiles of the Chinese, which are not smiles at all, comes upon his face. It is as if to say I already have the information.

" 'It is,' he answers me, 'a diamond.'

" 'A diamond of value?'

" 'Of great value, though the diamond is not a large one,' replies this gross Chinaman, with another of his offensive smiles.

"I have then an instant and intelligent suggestion to make. It is that we call the police. Not, signor, that I did not feel I had had enough of officials for one night; but the spectacle of this Chinaman standing at the door with his gun gave me, frankly, a feeling of uneasiness. You will understand?"

The Great Macumber smiled and nodded.

"I understand," said he, "absolutely. Firearms in the hands of possibly inimical strangers have given me the same feeling at one time and another. It isn't precisely pleasant, Giuseppe. They'd have no police, eh? Then, what?"

Signor Farone lifted clenched fists on high in the strong man's gesture of utter helplessness.

"Ah, then, professor, I am like this. Without power to protect my patrons of the Café of the Diplomats, where never such a contretemps has come to pass before. My two who have dined with me so loyally —will they come back? Will even the small man who sang wish to return? Can it be expect'? I think not, signor, for the Chinese make search of every place and all.

"They are thorough, these people. They look even in the shoes. They sweep the cloths from the tables, go even to the length of pulling up the carpet. They are like madmen, signor. It is impossible that a jewel of the size of the head of a pin escape them. Yet the fat Chinaman will insist that he brought his diamond with him into the Café of the Diplomats. After arriving, he says, he has seen it in his wallet. Which is a strange place, signor, for one to wear a diamond!"

"No," objected Macumber mildly. "Not of necessity, Giuseppe. I have the acquaintance of a gentleman who wears—if that be the word—a million dollars' worth of precious stones in a travel-scarred black box. They are his pride, yet never does he display them on his person. Consider him. So your Chinese friends, I gather, left without their diamond?"

"They did, signor. After two hours of insupportable outrage. And all for nothing. The fat one was assuredly wrong. No one had left the place, you see?"

The Great One's gaze had returned to the scribbled carte du jour.

"How," he inquired presently, "about the revenue men? Are you sure they were what they seemed? Sure that one was really Gottlieb?"

"Of certainty. It was a face that, once I had seen it, I would not forget. For sometimes, as you know, there is a bottle or two of wine in the house for those who appreciate it and can be trusted."

"Then," decided Macumber, "the revenue agents may be eliminated. I know Abe Gottlieb. He'll turn a dollar, I suspect, in what might seem to him a regular course of business, but he has his code. He's no thief. Yet we must take into consideration, Farone, that Chinese are the most deliberate of men. Light talk is a lost art among 'em. If the fat chap said his diamond disappeared while he was here, chances are that's the truth."

The founder and proprietor of the Café

of the Diplomats gazed reproachfully at Macumber.

"Oh, signor, you have not the thought that I——"

"I have the thought, Giuseppe, that you have presented me with an astonishingly well-rounded little problem. It embraces a possibility which—— Upon my word, man, it's fair darling. But that I'll not wish to discuss until I've taken opportunity to look into it. Just now my mind's running persistently back to ravioli. We'll have the dinner as written, please; and you'll confer a favor on me by rushing it along!"

III.

I had anticipated that Macumber might have a question, while we lingered over our coffee, in regard to the couple who had lingered over theirs on the night preceding. And, indeed, he did. But it seemed to me that he asked it perfunctorily; and he was quick, and I thought pleased, to accept Farone's passionate assertion that these were good people, regular patrons of the Café of the Diplomats and as such above suspicion.

"Mind," he said, apologetically, "I was not intending to accuse them of theft. The Chinaman's diamond might, after all, have been lost. It could have fallen near the two as he passed them, and one or the other could merely have picked it up. There are many who keep what they find, and see no dishonesty in it. Reproach me no more, Giuseppe. I'll say that, though I know them not at all, I'd be more disappointed than yourself if this last suggestion of mine prove to account for the vanishing of our idol's eye. Isn't that enough for you?"

I wish I could say that the loss or the theft of the fat Chinaman's diamond made nearly so much an impression on me as it did upon the Great Macumber. Whichever way, I couldn't regard the matter as one of moment. By its owner's own confession, the diamond had been a small one; and knowing well how much size and weight count for in the appraising of a precious stone, regardless of its quality, I was inclined to set down the crime as petit larceny and dismiss the whole thing from my mind as inconsequential.

So far as memory serves, I don't believe I made a single reference to it while Macumber and I were journeying back from the Café of the Diplomats to the Rawley. The omission, I fancy, was noted and resented by the Great One. On the following morning he artlessly introduced the subject.

"Well, lad," said he, "I've the notion to spend part of the day getting straightened on this business of Farone's."

It was possible for me to be diffident; no trouble at all to make my comment unenthusiastic, and even languid:

"Are you? It seems to me you might easily have saved yourself the trip downtown, maestro."

Macumber eyed me dubiously.

"Downtown, youngster? Where do you think I'm intending to go?"

"Back to Giuseppe's place, naturally. And I meant to suggest that you could quite as well have asked more questions last night, and had 'em disposed of."

"But," said the Great One, "I have no questions for Farone. He's told us all he knows. I'm taking the trail of the diamond now. Why not?"

"Oh," I breathed with a factitious deference, "I get the idea. You're going to find Giuseppe's five Chinamen. That shouldn't be so hard, for you do know that one of them is fat. What *is* the population of Chinatown now, maestro? About five thousand, isn't it?"

Now it was a jaded eye that regarded me.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Macumber. "And I'm not thinking to count 'em. It's highly unlikely, I think, that my travels will take me anywhere near Chinatown."

He was goading me to a direct question. I knew it—but I asked it.

"Where the deuce are you going, then?"

"I'm going, first of all, to look up Abe Gottlieb."

"What do you expect to get from him?"

"An introduction to his partner of night before last—the agent who guarded the door of the Café of the Diplomats before the Celestial garrison took over the establishment."

That jolt rocked me. I knew that my eyes had involuntarily widened, and that that was what the Great One had meant should be.

"Great Scott! You think that *he* stole the diamond?"

"Not at all, dear lad," said Macumber sweetly. "But I do expect he'll be good enough to let me have a look at it. And

then—oh, well, we'll hunt another mystery."

This, I thought when the Great One had gone, had been bravado. There had been just a little shade of doubt in the Great One's voice; yet I will admit to an immoderate curiosity when, early in the afternoon, he rang me up at the hotel.

"I wonder, lad," said he, "if you'll spare me a couple of hours—between three and five, say? Nothing else on, have you?"

"Not a thing, as you may have surmised. What do you want me to do?"

"In the first place, to turn up at three o'clock in the Flannery Warehouse in West Forty-third Street. There'll be an auction on at that hour, at which I expect to do a bit of bidding. The watchman will direct you to the room."

"Yes. And I'm to meet you there?"

"Lord, no! Meeting me—even recognizing me—is exactly what I don't want you to do."

"Then what?"

"Have patience, youngster. Let me tell you. I've said I plan to be a bidder. There's just one article in the sale that I'm interested in. I anticipate there'll be competition. The price may rise high. Finally, I think, you'll find only two of us bidding. Mark my rival well. Glue yourself to him. Follow him when he leaves the auction room. When he has come to light, and not before, phone me at the Rawley. Have you the orders of the day?"

"Pat," said I. "What's it all about?"

The wire fairly shook to Macumber's chuckle.

"Orders are sealed, lad. You'll know what's behind them when the proper time comes."

There was a tentative pause at the Great One's end of the line, and I made the most of the opportunity it offered.

"You were going to see Abie Gottlieb's friend," said I.

"Ah," remarked Macumber pleasantly, "so I was, lad."

"Well, *did* you see him?"

"Why, yes. You won't fail me at three?"

"I won't," I said, hanging on grimly. "And how about the diamond?"

Sounds came over the wire, but I could make no sense of them.

"I can't hear you," I complained. "Please speak up!"

And then came a sharply painful realization. The Great One hadn't been speaking at all. He had been laughing.

"Yes, lad, I saw the diamond," he said. "I had to, of course, after putting myself to all the bother."

I think I will not be blamed for harboring a certain bitterness.

"And that," I concluded shortly, "is all you intend to let me know?"

Gentle reproof came into the voice of Macumber.

"Now you do me an injustice, youngster," he protested. "It was my intention, upon all that's honorable, to tell you more."

"Tell it!" I challenged.

"John Chinaman was truthful."

"In what respect?"

"His diamond was a little one; aye, and not more than half a diamond," said the Great Macumber. "Three o'clock, my boy!"

IV.

I didn't forget the time, nor fail to find the Flannery Warehouse. At three o'clock I walked into a vast chilly room, whose walls were lined with high stacks of cases and many pyramids of barrels. A heavy odor, reminiscent of whiffs through the swinging doors of a bygone age, hung over the place; and it was quite unnecessary to read the stencilings on the boxes to know their contents.

The air was thick with smoke. A hundred men were contributing to its growing opacity; not least liberally, the Great Macumber. His pipe was going with all drafts open. I tried to catch his eye a dozen times, and found it couldn't be done. Not only did he fail to recognized me; he failed to see me.

I gathered from snatches of conversations going forward about me that the liquors in the room had been seized by the government, and that these auctions were periodic events. The prospective bidders were, I judged, druggists and perhaps hospital purchasing agents.

But Macumber? I didn't have to look far for an explanation of his presence. Never had he confessed to me the source of the mellow and unquestionably authentic MacVickar which he served without stint to our guests at the Rawley. I wondered how, without medical degree or apothecarial license, he had contrived to win a standing at the sales; and while I marveled, the auction was on.

It was a tame affair. Although the stuff was offered in large lots and bids were correspondingly high, there was little competition. Usually the third or fourth bid was the last. In the course of an hour I grew weary, and began to think of other things.

The amounts I had heard offered had been in the hundreds and, more often, the thousands. The familiar crisp voice of Macumber brought me out of my daydream with a start. Surely he hadn't called out, "*One* dollar!"

But that appeared to be the proper bid. I was assured that I had heard aright when another voice offered casually: "Two dollars!"

A third voice came into competition:

"And the half!"

Then I heard the Great One again:

"Three!"

Following it an echo:

"I'll go the half!"

As the bidding passed five dollars, there were four contesting with Macumber; and I was so intent on fixing the face of each of them in memory that when finally it occurred to me I hadn't the slightest idea what they were all after the chance to learn had slipped by. The auctioneer had ceased to expatiate upon the merits of the article offered, and the thing itself was not to be seen.

At ten dollars the bidders were only three. At twelve, there was only Macumber and one other—a tall man with an undershot jaw who stood not more than a dozen feet from me. I saw that his small, red-rimmed eyes would glare, now and again, in the direction of the Great One.

"Twenty dollars!" shouted this individual, announcing a five-dollar jump.

"Twenty-one!"

The hammer of the auctioneer crashed onto the barrel head that served him as desk.

"Sold—to the gentleman with the pipe! Now, men, forty cases of eight-year-old Monongahela, bottled in bond and never uncorked!"

The thing had the look of steam-roller tactics to me—and to the man with the undershot jaw, as well. The thump of the hammer had caught him with a new bid on his lips. He stepped forward, as if to register a protest; then suffered a change of heart, and with a last hard look at Macumber walked from the room. As he made his way down the stairs from the auction floor, I was one flight behind him.

My man was in no hurry, apparently, to leave the neighborhood. He took up a position across the street, and stood staring at the blank façade of the warehouse. After a little the Great One came forth, and started east toward the Rawley. A minute later the fellow with the jaw lost interest in the scene of his discomfiture, and he too turned his face to the east.

That seemed natural enough. To the west lay only the river. It wasn't until I was in sight of the Rawley that I knew the man I was trailing had been shadowing Macumber. The Great One had gone into the hotel, and into it my man had marched at his heels.

I waited for him to come out; and when he did, which was almost immediately, I lost him. A cab was standing near the Rawley entrance. The unsuccessful bidder climbed into it. I looked about for another taxi. There wasn't one in sight. I forgot dignity and caution and started on a run for Times Square. I wasn't a match for the motor. The traffic of the square had swallowed it; it was any one of a thousand taxis now.

When I faced the Great One I had no hope of mercy.

"He got away from me," I confessed. "I'm ready to listen to what you may have to say."

Macumber's hand fell onto my shoulder.

"Chin up, lad!" said he. "It would have been no fault of yours—and no harm's been done. I'm really pleased that you wasted no further time on the fellow. Don't you think I know that he followed me here? What I feared was that he wouldn't."

"He knows who you are," I told him. "Found out at the office."

"Oh, he'd have inquired. Directly or indirectly, in person or by proxy, we'll hear from him again. And soon. You'll realize that, having now at least some small insight into the mystery of the diamond of the 'Diplomats.' Pretty, was it not?"

"I have no insight into anything, maestro."

"But surely you saw what it was I bought at the auction?"

"I don't even know that."

"And why not?"

"My eyes were where I thought it more important they should be."

Macumber stood off and surveyed me thoughtfully. There was approval in his nod, and appreciation.

"Lad," he said solemnly, "you have qualities which are more precious than large wisdom. It's perhaps a trifle by reason of your gr-rand curiosity that I'm fond of you—but, by the Forty Thieves, it's for the stand you'll now and again make against it that I'm proud of you. Don't say another word of explanation, youngster. You rise another notch in my esteem this day, Archie, though close to the summit of it you were before!"

It was like him. When the starch is out of me, the Great Macumber can square my shoulders with a word; and does. A moment before I'd thought my next smile would be a long way in the future.

"Thanks," said I. "Out of gratitude, I'll not ask what the purchase was."

"No need to. Here, examine it for yourself!"

It was a small silver flask which Macumber had slipped from his coat pocket and into my hand.

"The property of the little man who sang, in the Café of the Diplomats, of the harmlessness of one more little drink," he explained.

I stared at the flask and then at the Great One.

"Yes," I said uncertainly. "But the diamond?"

"Can't you see? The songster knew where the diamond was. Being expert in a line not entirely dissimilar from ours, he made it his own while urging the Chinese to warm their souls from his flask. The theft was discovered prematurely, and the thief was balked in his get-away by the presence of the revenue man at the door. He did some quick thinking, and reached a truly brilliant conclusion.

"The diamond was highly valued; the owner and his friends were men who would go to lengths to regain it. Our singer saw in prospect that contingency which did in fact arise. The Chinese were watching him already. They would not suffer him to escape. He would surely be searched. How to safeguard his spoils was the problem, and by a stroke of genius he solved it. He placed the diamond in the flask, and then saw to it that the flask went into the custody of the United States government. In brief, he impressed the very law itself into service as receiver and guardian of stolen property. He counted, of course, on getting back his flask—perhaps paying a fine to regain it, or handing out a bribe. That part would be comparatively simple, you can see, for so nimble a crook.

"And the little man who sang lost no time in getting after the flask and the stolen diamond. A pretty and engaging woman called at the prohibition-enforcement offices yesterday morning. Her husband, she said, had indiscreetly showed a flask in a public place, and a revenue agent had taken it from him. The flask had been a gift from a brother who was dead. Surely it would be returned. If there should be charges, money would be paid. In such a matter of sentiment there could be no question of haggling.

"The young woman went away without her flask, but obviously happy in the knowledge that the flask would be included in a batch of seized goods to be offered at public auction to-day. This I learned at the enforcement offices and by my information I laid my plans."

I turned the flask over, removed the cap.

"But," said I, "how could any one have expected a diamond to remain undiscovered in this thing? Surely, the revenue people would have emptied out the liquor, and the diamond would have come with it."

"No," said the Great One, "there was, on the contrary, not a chance in a thousand of the diamond being discovered. It wasn't actually inside the flask, you see, but between the glass and the silver sheathing."

"Impossible! There's scarcely room for a finger nail between silver and glass, maestro. See!"

My demonstration failed to impress Macumber.

"I'm well aware of that, lad."

"I know you used an incomprehensible sort of phrase—said this diamond was only half a diamond. But only a sliver of a diamond could be concealed here."

The Great One smiled.

"And this is a sliver of a diamond, one might say. Don't forget, youngster, that there are other diamonds besides those sold by jewelers."

"You are mad!" I cried.

"It is you, lad, who are obtuse," said Macumber gently. "Suppose you slip the silver from the glass and enlighten yourself. It comes off easily enough."

He was right about that, and right about the diamond of the "Diplomats."

It was a diamond, certainly, and readily to be recognized as such by even the inexpert eye. A small diamond; indeed no more than half a diamond. It had been the diamond deuce in a deck of playing cards until somebody had torn it jaggedly across its middle, and now one part of it was gone!

V.

I think I should have been rescued from my absolute befuddlement then and there—for Macumber was in a mood of exposition—had not the phone bell jangled an interruption. I hastened to answer, and when I turned to the Great One he had reassembled the singer's flask and was looking eagerly about the room.

"A Mr. Bradbury calling on you," said I. "Know him?"

"No," replied Macumber. "But that will be our man. Time will be short by now."

"What shall I say?"

The Great One's eyes still were roving. They rested briefly on the glass paper weight on his table, and brightened. Then they flitted to the bookshelves.

"I am as anxious for action, lad," said Macumber, "as this Mr. Bradbury. And I've a thought of how to handle him—a flash, thank the Lord. Have him up."

He dropped the silver flask into his pocket and strode to the bookcase. When I went to answer a rap at the door he had lifted out a heavy volume and was rapidly thumbing through it.

Perhaps it was because he was small in stature that I at once associated the visiting Mr. Bradbury with the singer of the Café of the Diplomats. Or again, it may have been because he had the swift eyes and the weasel face and the nervous hands of the professional pickpocket. He wore an ingratiating smile.

"Mr. Macumber?" he inquired.

"That's mysel'," said the Great One.

"You don't know me."

"I thank you for confirming the evidence of my eyes. Ordinarily I'm good on faces."

"But you can do me a great favor."

"If it's reasonable," said the Great One, "I invite you to show me why I should."

"You bought a small pocket flask at auction this afternoon."

"I did. What concern is that of yours, please?"

"I'd like to buy it from you."

"I am not in the habit, Mr. Bradburn, of making purchases on speculation."

"Bradbury's the name," corrected the little man meekly. "I know what you gave for the flask. I'll double the figure."

"I'm not sure I'd be tempted at any price."

"It's an heirloom."

"I can't understand that. I thought we were now in the dawn of the pocket-flask age. Did any one's ancestors have use for the things, ever?"

"I got the wrong word. I meant a present. The flask was taken off me by a revenooer," said Mr. Bradbury, and more of the weasel came out in his face as he slipped a little from character. "I'll pay to get it back."

"I think," mused Macumber, "that the flask is really worth more to me than to you."

"You're kind—I mean, that can't be."

"I know what I'm talking about. You're aware of my calling, Mr. Bradbury?"

"Sure—that is, certainly. You're the magician Macumber."

The Great One shrugged.

"More than that, sir. I am a student of the occult. Your call, I may say, interrupted a very interesting experiment with a gazing crystal. You know what they are?"

"Heard of 'em."

"Queer things. That's one on the table, yonder."

"Looks to me like a kind of paper weight."

"Yes; a good many would make the same mistake, Mr. Bradbury."

"I'll know a crystal when I see one next time, I hope. But it's that flask I want to talk about."

"I'm talking about the flask—in connection with the crystal."

The Great One was watching the weasel face shrewdly, and now it betrayed unmistakable interest. Superstition, Macumber says, will out before murder.

"What's the connection?" demanded Mr. Bradbury.

Macumber shook his head.

"I can't pretend to tell you that. It was just by accident I discovered an apparent affiliation. Put the flask below the crystal, and immediately an image forms. It's remarkable. Perhaps *you'd* call it uncanny."

"What kind of image?"

"Well, if you're curious, it's a ship."

Mr. Bradbury, plainly, experienced a moment of anxiety.

"That's funny, now, ain't it?" he said after a moment. "Wonder how that could be?"

"I've been wondering, too. The ship appears to be in trouble. She flies a signal of distress—or what looks to a landsman to be one."

"Show me!"

The Great One hesitated.

"Well, can't I see?" persisted Mr. Bradbury, plaintively. His small eyes were larger.

"I don't like to satisfy a merely idle curiosity," demurred Macumber. "The thing's too deep for that. If you had an interest in the ship, perhaps——"

"Maybe I have," said Mr. Bradbury breathlessly.

"How so?"

"I've got an interest in a ship, I may as well tell you."

"Perhaps. But it's the association of the flask, after all, that has created the image. You're not responsible for that, Mr. Bradbury."

"It's my flask."

"On the contrary, it is mine."

"All right. But let me see in this crystal, will you? Please, will you? Maybe I'll stop bothering about the flask if you do." Mr. Bradbury was wheedling, begging.

"Oh, come ahead," invited the Great One. "I see you're in earnest. Look here. Don't see anything in the crystal, do you?"

"Not a thing."

"Very well. Now we'll place the crystal on the flask—and what do you see?"

Mr. Bradbury bent over Macumber's hand and peered earnestly into the glass.

"My God!" he cried huskily. "If it *ain't* a ship!"

"You see it, too?"

"Didn't I say I did?"

"Clearly?"

"Good enough for me."

"Can you make out her name, Bradbury?"

"No, I can't."

"My eyes are exceptionally sharp, Bradbury. I can almost get it—almost. There are some letters I can't—exactly——"

"Strain it, doc."

"I'm straining. But I don't quite make it out. Perhaps if I knew the name of the ship you're interested in, I could tell you whether or not it's——"

Mr. Bradbury leaned closer to the crystal.

"Say, doc, on the square, is it the *Ventura?*" he whispered.

The Great One's reply was cool and immediate.

"No, Mr. Bradbury," he said, "that's not the name. You can save your eyes and your fears, whatever they may be. In regard to the flask, what's your best price?"

Mr. Bradbury had made a swift recovery of poise. He swept Macumber with a calculating eye.

"What's your lowest?" he queried calmly. "And don't add in nothing for the peep show because I probably won't pay it."

"I gave twenty-one dollars for the bauble," said the Great One. "That's more than it's worth, but I won't take anything less."

The magnanimity of the man who scorned a hundred-per-cent profit aroused the suspicion of Mr. Bradbury. He took the flask from Macumber's unresisting hand, and for an instant turned his back. His expression showed a profound relief when he faced us again.

"You're on," he said quickly. "Here's your money. And thanks, and good-by!"

The Great One was at the telephone as the door closed behind Mr. Bradbury. He called a number in the "Battery" exchange.

"It's the *Ventura,*" I heard him say. "Go to it! Good luck!"

He faced me with a smile when he had hung up the receiver.

"Now, lad, is everything plain?"

"I can almost get it—almost!"

Macumber flushed as the source of my line came to him.

"Of course you're a wanderer in the dark," he said. "I was myself until I dug up the flask and saw what sort of diamond John Chinaman's diamond was. And then I knew."

"Knew what?" It was painful.

"Knew that we were in on some sort of big smuggling business."

"Indeed? A torn deuce of diamonds told you that?"

"Certainly. Any torn bit of paper or pasteboard to which great value would be attached must have spelled smuggling to me. Such things class in the rum-running world as undisputable and absolute credentials. They can't be counterfeited or forged.

They are swindle proof, if not pickpocket proof."

"I'm adrift."

"You won't be long."

Macumber picked up a sheet of writing paper from the table and ripped it in two.

"Let us say, lad," said he, "that I am sending a cargo of contraband into the United States. You are the master of the vessel which will carry my wares to the edge of American territorial waters. There you will deliver to my agent, who will wait upon you in a speed boat, goods that will perhaps have a retail value of one hundred thousand dollars. Naturally, it is desirable that the shipment should not get into the wrong hands. I give you one part of this torn sheet. I send the other to my representative in America. Your orders will be to deliver only to the person who carries a scrap of paper which exactly completes your scrap, making a perfect whole. Then I am safe, youngster, for tears are as infinite in their variety as finger prints—or the blessings of God!"

I studied the tear, and could understand it was so.

"What," I asked, "of the *Ventura?*"

"The name of the vessel was one key I lacked, lad. Seeing the card, I knew we had to deal with contraband—with drugs, with opium. And I knew the ship carrying it must be near if not actually anchored off the coast. The revenue people, having agents everywhere in these times, keep closest tally on arrivals and departures of vessels in the great American smuggling trade. I was at their records this morning, and I can tell you from memory that the *Ventura,* in addition to a deck load of doctored Scotch, carries opium which would sell here at the figure I lately used for an example—one hundred thousand dollars, youngster. Of course I didn't know until the last little while that the *Ventura* was our ship."

"And you gave the card up!" I gasped.

"I gave up a part of a deuce of diamonds," smiled Macumber. "But the ragged deuce that counts is in the hands of the revenue people. A crew of them have been waiting with a speed boat at the Battery all afternoon for word from me. I thought I might have it."

"The drug will be given up to them?" I demanded incredulously.

"'Twould be given up to the devil if he bore the proper card!"

I had another question. How had Macumber known that the contraband over which the torn deuce gave control was opium rather than whisky. I was bidden to consider the race of the original holder of the card and blasted with an eye.

"Is the MacVickar made for coolies?" demanded the Great Macumber.

Another story by Mr. Rohde in the next issue.

STATESMEN AS PEACOCKS

LIFE in the national capital affords much and moving proof that Rhadamanthine wisdom was in the man who said: "Men are peacocks." The woman never stepped who could surpass some of the grave and reverend statesmen in petty vanity. It was no less a person than a one-time chief justice of the United States supreme court who turned on his heel and started to walk out of the White House and ruin a fine party because he did not think that he had been placed sufficiently high up in the dinner line to honor his official position. He raised such a row about it that arrangements for that function were changed in a way to insure all chief justices in the future a place nearer the head of the procession.

On another occasion a high-strung speaker of the House of Representatives got an idea that he had been slighted by being relegated too far to the rear in a White House procession to suit a man of his greatness. His kick was so emphatic that a special act of Congress had to be passed defining the place to be awarded the speaker thereafter at functions of that kind.

A Chat With You

ARE you interested in cross-word puzzles? Many are. They are better, on the whole, than any solitaire game and they teach people strange words and their meanings. We have studied a few of them—some were good ones and some not so good. And now we have one presented to us, dedicated, as you might say, to THE POPULAR, and it is all about the magazine. It came to us from a reader of the magazine.

* * * *

FOR several years," he writes, "I have been a constant reader of the magazine. I know as much about it almost, I believe, as the editor himself. Nothing in it has escaped me and there is little in it that I have not admired. My other indoor sport recently has been the cross-word puzzle. My idea about cross-word puzzles is this: The use of a dictionary should be barred. It should depend entirely on the education, the background, the imagination and ingenuity of the one who is trying to solve the puzzle. If a dictionary is used it becomes largely a question of the size of the dictionary and the diligence and time given to the affair by the solver. That takes the sporting element out of it entirely. On the other hand, many of the cross-word puzzles are unfair. They include words of a technical nature which no one not a specialist in some branch of science, no matter how well educated, could be expected to understand. Now here, I submit a cross-word puzzle which needs no dictionary for its elucidation. Any one who is a consistent reader of the magazine can solve it. I don't claim it is a great cross-word puzzle. Other readers, now that I have opened up the trail, will be able to do much better. I do claim, however, that this is the first cross-word puzzle ever built about the personality of a magazine. THE POPULAR has a personality, as you know, or ought to know.

"ROBERT GASTON."

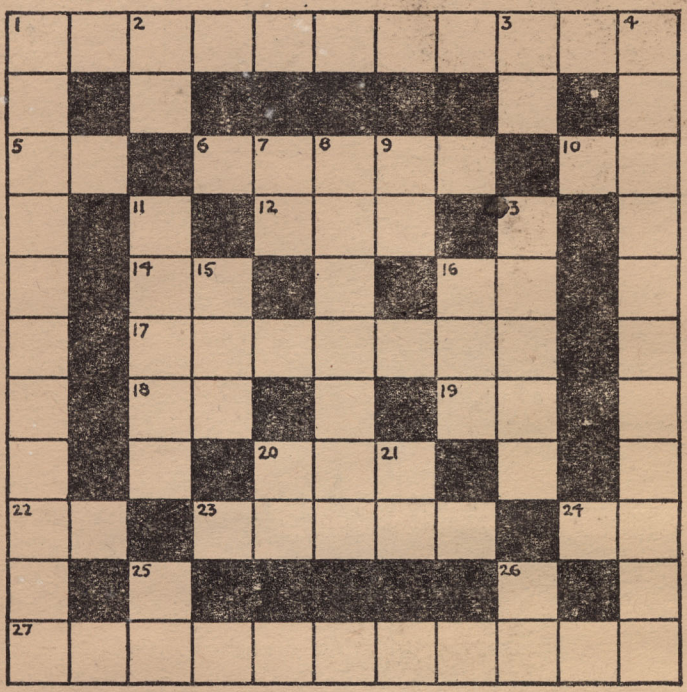
* * * *

YOU will find the cross-word puzzle complete on the next page. It would be inconvenient to break it and carry it over from one page to another.

In the meantime, to get away from the puzzle for a moment, we want to say that the next issue is one of the best. It contains a complete book-length novel by William Morton Ferguson, the big, stirring second part of "Temescal," by Knibbs, as well as short stories by Rohde, Holman Day, Montanye, Ralph Paine, Calvin Johnston, Alan Sullivan, and Kenneth Gilbert.

And now it is almost time to turn the page to the cross-word puzzle devised by Mr. Gaston. It is as he says a trail blazer. It is the first cross-word puzzle ever made about a magazine. Doubtless there will be many others to follow. Perhaps you yourself will send one in. Mr. Gaston's must be fairly easy for we solved it ourselves without outside assistance, then compared our solution with the answers he kindly sent in a sealed envelope and found that we were one hundred per cent correct. We will print the answers next month so that you may check up. You don't need a dictionary for this puzzle. If you read the magazine at all steadily you will have no trouble.

Is the cross-word-puzzle habit dangerous? Is it a waste of time? No more than the majority of human activities. Unlike solitaire it makes for sociability. Ten people can solve a puzzle as well as one. Besides, it is educational. How many people knew what a gnu was before the puzzles made him famous? So try the one on the next page.



HORIZONTAL.

1. An author who writes wonderful stories of romantic adventure.
5. What you say when it is suggested that you stop reading THE POPULAR.
6. The kind of magazine THE POPULAR is.
10. A preposition.
12. What a ship's radio operator sends when he can't get THE POPULAR.
14. The part of a letter in which a woman puts the most important thing she has to say. (Abbr.)
16. An exclamation often heard at news stands on the 7th and 20th of the month.
17. The greatest magazine of to-day.
18. Sixteen ounces. (Abbr.)
19. A line position on a football team. (Abbr.)
20. The way you feel when you can't get your POPULAR.
22. What a tramp calls his friend.
23. Something a barber uses.
24. The way you send a letter when you want it delivered quickly. (Abbr.)
27. One way in which THE POPULAR differs from other fiction magazines. (Two words.)

VERTICAL.

1. The name of the author who writes the best Western stories.
2. An adverb, a conjunction, or an interjection.
3. An exclamation.
4. What a wise reader does to make sure of getting his POPULAR twice every month. (Two words.)
7. An important nation. (Abbr.)
8. The greatest magazine of the future.
9. The part of Vertical 7 nearest the Atlantic. (Abbr.)
11. Eating one a day is almost as good a method of keeping the doctor away as reading THE POPULAR.
13. The kind of circulation THE POPULAR has.
15. What readers would do if THE POPULAR were not published.
16. A man's nickname.
20. A highway. (Abbr.)
21. Accomplish.
25. The way the old Romans wrote twice twenty.
26. A holy person. (Abbr.)

Keeping Down the Cost of Shop Service

Hupmobile—not satisfied with building the best car of its class in the world—makes sure that the owner will receive the utmost in prompt, economical and efficient shop service.

When the time finally does come that your Hupmobile requires mechanical work, you find that you are as thoroughly safeguarded in that direction as in the economy and long life which are built into the car.

Hupmobile dealers all have the special tool equipment necessary to assure lowest cost and quickest, most efficient service to the Hupmobile owner.

These tools are designed by Hupmobile engineers. Many of them are built by Hupmobile.

Therefore they help to save labor-cost for the owner, give him a better job, and enable him to have the car in the shortest period of time.

Hupmobile goes still farther. It has a standard cost for every repair and replacement job. The Hupmobile owner knows in advance what any mechanical work is going to cost, based upon charges set by the service experts of the Hupmobile factory.

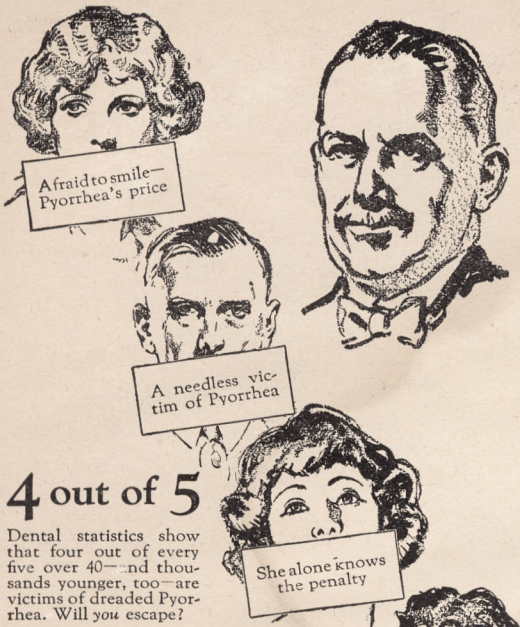
Hupmobile's economy record cannot be accounted for simply by the low cost and efficient service available to its owners.

Only the in-built goodness as established by the parts displays in any Hupmobile dealer's showroom, could result in maintenance costs so low as to seem almost unbelievable to men not familiar with the Hupmobile.

Hupp Motor Car Corporation
Detroit, Michigan

Above are illustrated only a few of the many special tools designed and built by Hupmobile for its hundreds of service stations throughout America. These special tools, plus Hupmobile flat-rate system, enable Hupmobile mechanics to save minutes, and in some cases hours, on a given job.

Hupmobile



4 out of 5

Dental statistics show that four out of every five over 40—and thousands younger, too—are victims of dreaded Pyorrhea. Will *you* escape?

Protect your gums and save your teeth

Just as a ship needs the closest attention under the water-line, so do the teeth under the gum-line. If the gums shrink, serious dangers result.

The teeth are loosened and exposed to tooth-base decay. The gums become tender and bleed easily. They form sacs which become the doorways of organic disease.

If used in time and used consistently, Forhan's will prevent Pyorrhea or check its progress. Forhan's is safe, efficient and pleasant-tasting. It preserves gum health, hardens gum tissues so they will offer proper support to the teeth, and keeps your mouth fresh and healthy.

Forhan's is more than a tooth paste; it checks Pyorrhea. Thousands have found it beneficial for years. For your own sake ask for Forhan's For the Gums. All druggists, 35c and 60c in tubes.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
Forhan Company, New York

Forhan's

FOR THE GUMS

More than a tooth paste—it checks Pyorrhea

"And now she's so slender!"

"Did you ever see such a change in any one? Grace used to be positively stout. Now she's one of the smartest dressed women I know. She must have done something to regain her youthful figure."

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One simple food to banish them

"A physical wreck—I was irritable, nervous, debilitated. I tried nearly every curative treatment known to science, but to no avail. I was simply depleted of nervous energy. When I heard of Fleischmann's Yeast I was skeptical of the wonderful results attributed to it. After using the yeast, my digestion became better, my complexion brighter, and I slowly regained lost vitality."

(Clair C. Cook
Los Angeles, Calif.)

"We restaurant eaters must force greasy, quickly fried food into our stomachs in a hurry. And our next move is 'take one of these pills each night!' Even the best stomach cannot stand such treatment. On the advice of a friend I ate my first yeast cake. Now I feel like the man who puts coal on a fire. He gets heat units, while today I'm enjoying health and vigor units, and am glad to be out of the 'glass of water and pill' class."

(Thomas Leyden
Elizabeth, N. J.)

"I knew my headaches and unwholesome complexion were caused by constipation. To take frequent cathartics was my regular program and even by doing this I was tired and dopey. 'I like what yeast does for me' said one of my customers and asked if I had ever tried it. I began to drink yeast in milk regularly. Soon people began to comment on how well I was looking—my husband said I grew younger—the mirror told me my complexion and eyes were clear and bright. Cathartics are now a thing of the past."

(Maybelle Conomikes
Marathon, N. Y.)

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 system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles, making them healthy and active.

Fleischmann's Yeast for Health comes only in the tinfoil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. All grocers have it. Start eating it today! You can order several cakes at a time, for Yeast will keep fresh in a cool, dry place for two or three days.

"'And my Fleischmann's Yeast cakes as usual.' For almost three years I have given this order to my grocer several times each week and will continue indefinitely. As a young mother in a run-down condition, with boils rendering me almost helpless, I felt that the end of my endurance had been reached. In desperation I sent for Fleischmann's Yeast cakes. The boils began to dry up. I slept better—had a keener appetite, felt better and regained my strength and vivacity."

(H. M. Raup
Linthicum Heights, Md.)

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.

Write us for further information, or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-12, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.

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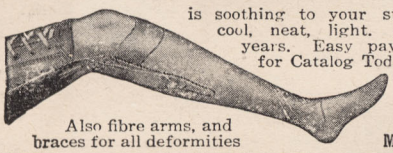

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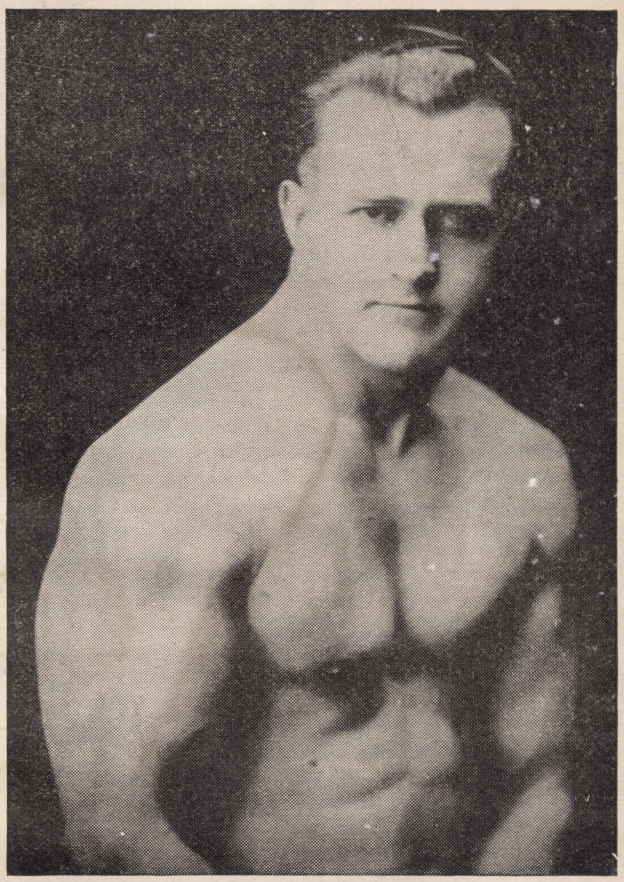
But how about the fellow who slowly but surely kills his own body by neglect? He's the craziest one of all.

Stop! Think this over! What are you doing with your own body? Surely you don't want to be put in this class. But, if you are not doing everything possible to prolong your life and keep your body just as clean and healthy as your Maker intended, you are inviting death. You are slowly but surely killing yourself.



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This is your birthday. Today you start a new life. I'm going to make a real live, "rip-snortin'," go-getter out of you. I'm going to expand that chest so it will give your lungs a treat with life-giving oxygen. This will put real vim into your blood and shoot it throughout your entire system. I'm going to broaden your shoulders and strengthen your back. I'm going to put a ripple of muscle up and down your body that will make a big powerful he-man out of you. You will have the arms and legs of a modern Hercules. I'll clear your brain and pep up your entire system. You will be just bubbling over with vitality. You will stretch out your powerful body and shout for bigger and greater things to accomplish. Nothing will be too difficult for you to tackle.

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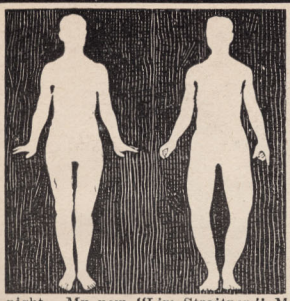

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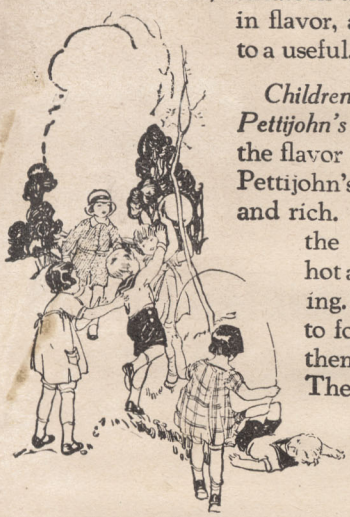

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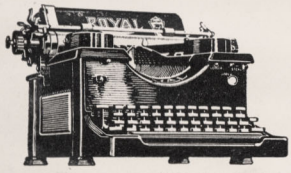

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