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FEB. 7
1925

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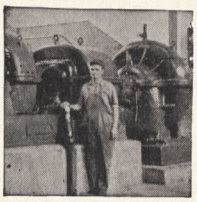
in the Big Pay Field of ELECTRICITY

20 Years Old—Makes Almost $500 a Month

Harold Hastings of Somers, Mass., says: "The profit on my electrical business amounts to $475 a month. My success is due entirely to your instruction. You make your men just what you say—Electrical Experts. No man will ever make a mistake enrolling for your course."

Dickerson Gets $7,500 a Year

"I earned $30 a week when I started with you—$50 a week when half through your course. Now I clean up at the rate of $7,500 a year. Thank you a thousand times for what you did for me. Electricity pays big on the farm." Herbert M. Dickerson, Warrentown, Virginia.



$20.00 a Day for Schreck

"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than $600 a month from my own business now. I used to make $18.00 a week."

A. Schreck, Phoenix, Ariz.

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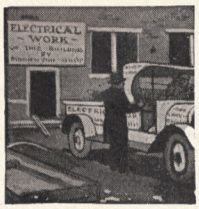
W. E. Pence, Albany, Oregon, says: "Your course put me where I am today, Mr. Cooke—making $750 a month doing automobile electrical work—think of it—$9,000 a year. Besides that I am my own boss. My wife joins me in thanking you for what you did for us."



$30 to $50 a Day for J. R. Morgan

"When I started on your course I was a carpenter's helper, earning around $5.00 a day. Now I make from $30 to $50 a day and am busy all the time. Use this letter if you want to—I stand behind it."

J. R. Morgan, Columbus, Ohio.

It's your own fault if you don't earn more. Blame yourself if you stick to your small pay job when I have made it so easy for you to earn $3500 to $10,000 a year as an electrical expert. **Electrical Experts** are badly needed. Thousands of men must be trained at once. One billion dollars a year is being spent for electrical expansion and everything is ready but the men. Will you answer the call of this big pay field? Will you get ready now for the big job I will help you get? The biggest money of your life is waiting for you.

I Will Train You at Home

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Don't let any doubt about your being able to do what these other men have done rob you of your just success. Pence and Morgan and these other fellows didn't have a thing on you when they started. You can easily duplicate their success. Age, lack of experience or lack of education makes no difference. Start just as you are and I will guarantee the result with a **signed money back guarantee bond.** If you are not 100% satisfied with my course it won't cost you a cent.

FREE—Electrical Working Outfit and Tools

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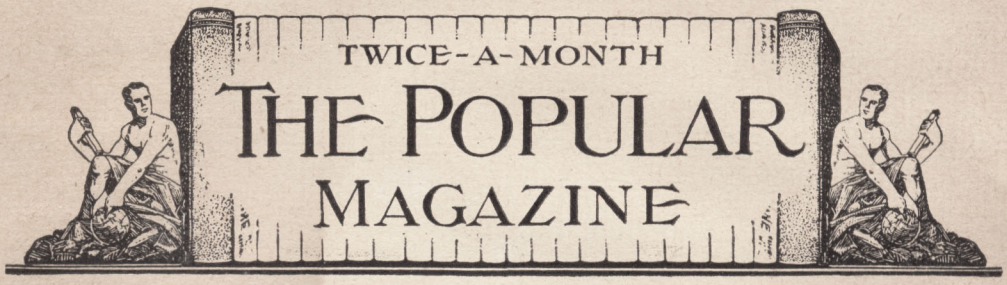
Vol. LXXV FEBRUARY 7, 1925 No. 2



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An adventure tale of the Northwest coast.

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22 Electrical Engineers

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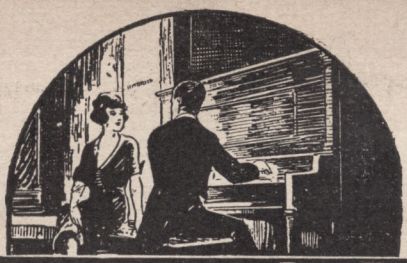

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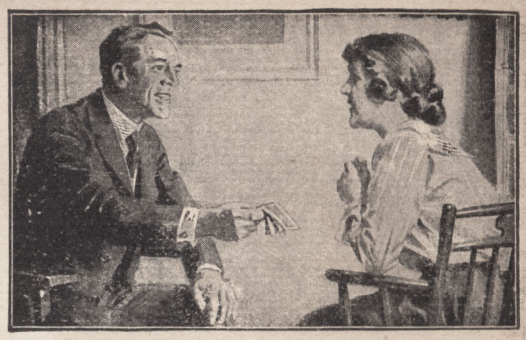

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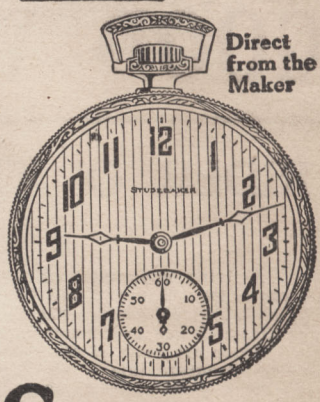

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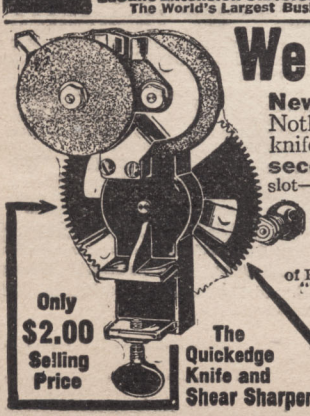

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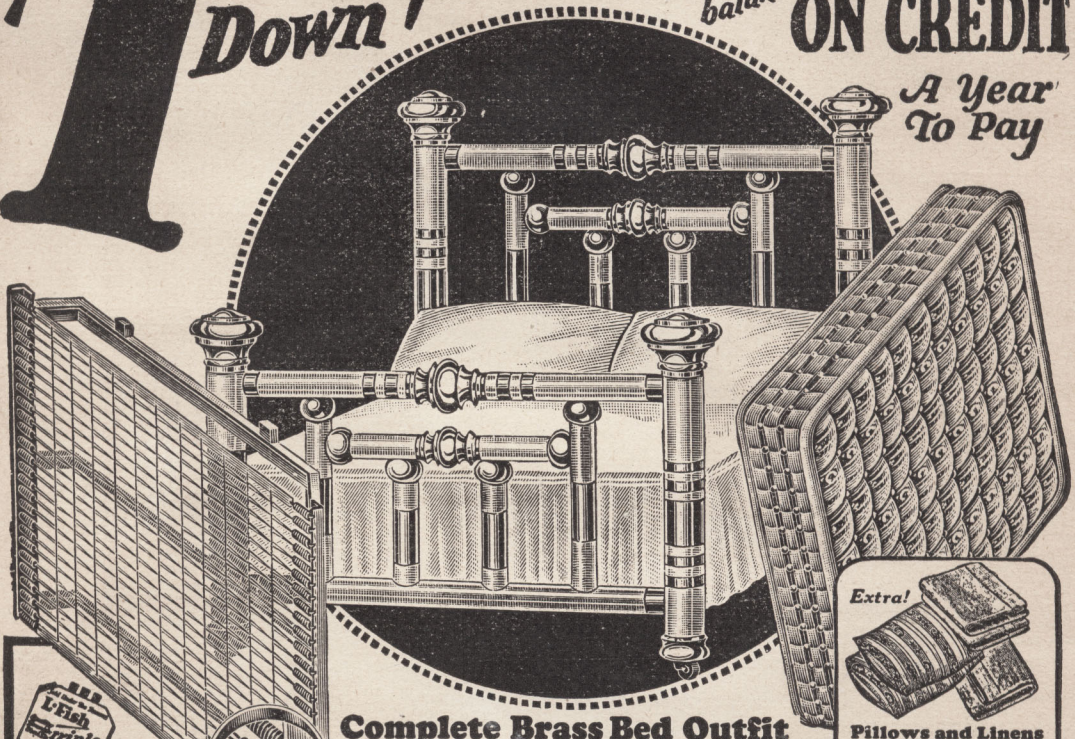

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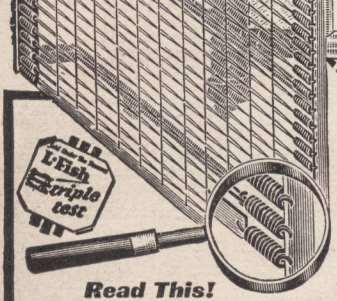

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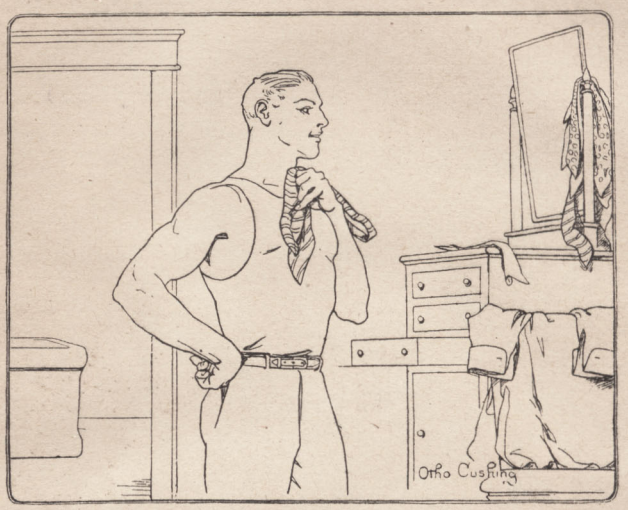

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

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Head Winds

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Twice in the Graveyard Watch," "North of Fifty-three," Etc.

It is surprising how much the matter of style adds to or detracts from the telling of a story. Many a first-rate yarn has been ruined in the telling. Bertrand Sinclair has mastered the difficult knack of easy, fluent style. His stories run with a smooth, effortless flow. There is a fascinating felicity about them quite apart from the spell of their close-knit, swift-moving plots. To the enjoyment of following a striking set of characters through a breath-taking maze of adventurous incident, Mr. Sinclair has added, in this tale of sea and land in the American Northwest, the satisfaction that comes of felicity in choice of words and that makes reading easy. "Head Winds" is written with such cunning skill that once you have fallen under the fascination of its plot you will forget the printed words and imagine you are watching life itself roll by in a rapid succession of romantic episodes against the majestic background of the Pacific and the snow-capped peaks of the West.—THE EDITOR.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

HIDDEN BAY.

SOMETIMES the unreckoned course of a man's physical activities—to say nothing of the mental or spiritual curves he may describe—is like that of a boomerang. From a given point, like a missile cast from the invisible hand of Destiny he returns, willy-nilly, to the spot where the initial impulse was given.

A fanciful comparison like that was passing through Johnny Akhorn's mind—passing not too pleasantly for there was a sore spot yet in the tissue of his recollection—as he stood in the door of the pilot house staring through a narrow cleft in a rugged shore line of granite cliffs

backed by dense forest. His gaze grew absent. A far-off look filled his eyes, as if he saw things beyond the horizon, things remote but vivid, such as any man can see if he looks beyond the material solidities of his immediate environment.

That was precisely what Johnny Akhorn was doing in this quiet hour when the afternoon westerly was dying to a whisper and the sun was on its way to bed in the Pacific Ocean behind the saw-toothed rampart of Vancouver Island, that deep-sea barrier which loomed purple and blue and white-tipped thirty miles to westward.

The yacht of which Johnny was master lay at anchor in the lee of a rocky islet. The slow outset of the tide from Jerome Inlet made an eddy that held her taut against her chain. Viewed from a little distance she was like a fat white duck at rest on the water; a sizable duck, however, since she was eighty feet between perpendiculars, with eighteen feet of beam and a nine-foot draft. Within the body of this wooden sea bird rested on massive timbers the latest type of Diesel motor, surrounded by engine-room equipment to gladden a mechanic's heart.

The *West by North* had been designed, constructed and powered to follow the course implicit in her euphonious name, even to the Siberian coast. She was on her maiden voyage. She had ability, speed, comfort. Johnny Akhorn was a little bit proud of his command. The only thing he didn't quite fancy about this voyage was being subject to more or less erratic day-to-day orders as to course and destination.

Of himself he would have shunned this particular spot. He had kept away from it a long time, deliberately. Of his own accord he would never have chosen to anchor in the lee of Granite Island, where he could look through Whispering Pass into Hidden Bay. Yet he didn't have to be physically present to see it. Sometimes he could see that reach of shore when he was far distant. A word, the name of a place, a familiar contour, would flash it across his mental vision and give him a curious feeling for a moment.

A man can never quite escape buried memories. A color, an odor, a word serves to make them rise unbidden from the depths of that curious reservoir which psychologists have labeled the subconscious.

Deep in his own thought, staring with that absent gaze, Johnny neither saw nor heard the approach of two persons along the deck. Yachting shoes are noiseless. The man and woman—or perhaps girl would be the more exact term—stood at Johnny's elbow. The man spoke and Captain Akhorn did not hear.

The girl smiled. She had the face and diminutive figure of an elf. She looked innocently mischievous. Her companion made an excellent foil. He was a large-bodied, slow-moving person, inclined to be pompous, impatient, to think well of himself, to be ponderously impressive.

"I say, captain," he repeated. "Sorry to disturb your cogitations."

Johnny came back to the present.

"Beg pardon," said he.

"Can you navigate that passage to a good anchorage in the bay?" Mr. Benjamin Allen indicated with a fat, white, hairy-backed hand the tiny notch in the line of cliffs. Within showed the faint sheen of water, a suggestion of open space.

"At high slack—yes," Johnny replied without enthusiasm.

"Please do so," Mr. Allen requested, "as soon as the tide is right."

"Yes, sir," Johnny acquiesced. He hadn't bargained for an anchorage in Hidden Bay. For four years, in his coastwise trafficking, he had never put a vessel's bow into Whispering Pass. He didn't wish to now.

But orders were orders, when they issued from a man who was paying the owner of the *West by North* a fancy price for her charter, which included Captain Akhorn's services as navigator.

High slack came within forty-five minutes. The anchor chain rose grumbling in the hawse pipe. The big engine began its rhythmic turning. The yacht moved slowly into the mouth of the Pass.

An hour earlier from within that cleft

there had risen a murmur like the drone of enormous bees. The tide race poured and broke to the lower level of the bay, a white-bordered, green incline that pitched down to a confusion of swirls, foam, broken water. Now it was still—the inner bay filled to the Gulf level—so still that as the *West by North* slid into that narrow water lane the loudest sound impinging on Johnny's hearing was the *whirr-oop, whirr-oop* of wireless in the room abaft the wheelhouse, where Sparks was flinging out a message.

The depth shoaled under her keel. The granite walls closed in. The bottom seemed to leap up out of the pale-green sea. The little vessel filled the Pass, bulked large in it like a liner beside a dock. A sheer of twenty feet to port or starboard would have put her aground. She moved at half speed, sedate as a matron across a drawing-room floor.

Johnny gave the wheel over to a deck hand who stood by him.

"Hold her steady in mid-channel," he said, and stepped out to the rail. Uncle Benjamin looked at him with an expression of alarm.

"We're going aground!" he protested. "Look how shallow it is."

Johnny shook his head. He leaned over the rail. The rocky bottom, brilliant starfish, dun-colored scuttling crabs, streamers of brown kelp, showed like images in a mirror of greenish hue. It did seem as if the yacht's keel must at any moment touch bottom. But she forged on while Johnny gazed calmly overside.

Suddenly the shoal vanished. There was nothing but immeasurable depths of gray green. The passage opened, widened like the flaring end of a funnel and the yacht steamed into a bay nearly a mile across, a bay ringed about by high hills growing shadow-haunted in the twilight. Johnny returned to the steering wheel, swung his ship toward a cleared spot on the northern shore where amid a low growth of paler green the weathered roof of a house stood gray against the dark forest.

Half a cable offshore the hook went down with a rattle and a splash. The throb of the engine stilled. For a minute or so the only sound in that tranquil harbor, in that fading pearly eventide, was the rasp of the wireless.

Johnny sat down on a forward skylight. The wireless annoyed, irritated him. Uncle Benjamin, he reflected, must have important connections to be so frequently having Sparks disturb the ether.

His glance turned aft, to the petite figure of a woman staring overside, leaning on the rail, her eyes fixed on something ashore. Johnny's gaze followed hers. Presently he forgot her in absorption that overtook him as his eyes dwelt on the object of her attention—the house on shore. The absent look crept back into his blue eyes.

A LITTLE later he roused from his deep reflection and went below to a cubby-hole of a stateroom. From this he presently emerged clad only in a bathing suit. The forward port landing stage had been lowered away for a purpose. The decks were empty. There issued sounds of laughter and phonograph music from the saloon.

Johnny went quietly down the ship's ladder and slid off into the cool sea without a sound, with scarcely a ripple. He swam with a slow steady stroke to the shore.

Picking his way over barnacle-incrusted rocks he passed through a tumble-down picket fence, traversed a waist-high growth of bracken and came out in a clear space before the house.

Here Johnny paused only for a second. He didn't even trouble to look in the broken windows. Perhaps a glance at the obvious desolation sufficed. Skirting the house he came out into a path, long untrodden. This led a hundred yards or so over a little rise from the top of which Johnny took a look into a neglected orchard. Apple and plum trees stood unkempt, scraggly, meagerly fruited. Grasses and ferns waved about their trunks. The evening airs rustled forlornly those twisted boughs and scant leafage.

Johnny turned back, his face expressionless. He came slowly into the door-yard once more. But this time he stopped, sat down on a sawed-off section of cedar which had been used as a chopping block. He leaned his elbows on his bare knees and stared at the silent house, its broken windows, its neglected porch, up and about the rustic pillars of which climbing roses and Virginia creeper and glossy ivy had twined a green canopy—vines planted by vanished hands.

In the dusk and the silence Johnny stared at this place. His imagination repeopled its rooms, put lights in the windows; he could almost hear voices and laughter within those abandoned walls.

Dark closed in. Johnny Akhorn didn't need eyes to see. He knew every rock, nook, hollow, giant fir, branchy cedar within a mile of where he sat. He knew how it looked in sun and storm. He had heard the great winter winds, the south-easter off the Gulf of Georgia and the nor'wester issuing from the mountain passes, go screaming through those woods. He had lain on mossy benches and been warmed by April suns.

It was old, familiar ground. And it slowly stirred up in his breast a buried ache that made him suddenly cover his eyes with one hand and set his teeth hard. For a few minutes he sat like that—Rodin's "Thinker" in a bathing suit, brooding in the night. Then he lifted his head with a curious, twisted smile.

"Hell!" he muttered under his breath. "I'm a fool to let *that* bother me again. It'll be all the same in a hundred years from now."

He nursed his chin reflectively. God only knew what he thought, but he thought hard. And he sat like that, immobile, silent, until a faint rustle that was none of the common rustlings of the small life which he could hear stirring in the thickets, made him turn.

The diminutive person off the yacht stood within arm's length of him. He could see her quite distinctly. She knew he saw her. She laughed, chuckled rather, a little pleasant throaty sound, and coming nearer looked down at Johnny with a smile that somehow transformed her small, round, deeply tanned face.

"Is it a regular practice of yours to swim ashore and sit in the dark in a bathing suit before abandoned houses to think great thoughts?" she inquired.

There was a suspicion of mockery in her tone.

"Studyin' navigation problems," Johnny answered.

"Not local ones," she observed—and dropped tailor fashion on the grass before him, where she peered, bright eyed, up into Johnny Akhorn's slightly clouded face. "By the way you made that narrow little pass and came up to this anchorage I'd say you know this place rather well."

"I know most of the British Columbia coast," Johnny replied.

"Not the way you know *this*," she stressed the last word. "Why didn't you want to come in here?"

"Where did you get that idea?" he asked, with well-simulated indifference.

"It isn't really an idea—more of an impression."

"I don't go much on impressions," Johnny drawled.

"Don't you? You must miss a lot." She smiled impishly. The segment of a yellow moon had thrust up above the hills and its glow lighted her face. Johnny steeled himself against the compelling quality of attraction that radiated from her. It was indefinable; but it existed.

She wasn't pretty. She had too wide a mouth, that was only redeemed by the pleasant curve of her lips and splendid even teeth. Her hair was straight and black as night; bobbed square, with a smooth band of it drawn across her forehead and caught by a little barette. Faint, fine lines ran out from the corners of a pair of very large, wonderfully expressive brown eyes. When a man looked once or twice into Jessie Allen's eyes and marked the luminous depths of them, the subtle hints and challenges and messages they seemed to convey, he forgot about her lack of beauty.

Johnny had been observing her steadily

for five weeks. There were other girls and other young men in the party. The girls hated her—not openly, but Johnny knew they did. The men were her slaves. And she was only amused.

Men, Johnny decided a little bitterly, were her game. They amused her. She could play with them. He didn't feel flattered by her interest—real or simulated—in him. He was a burned child. But he did feel her uncanny charm. It did not reside so much in what she did or said. It was a part of her—like a magnetic field.

"Not subject to impressions, eh?" she continued amusedly. "Yes, you miss a lot. Now, I do get definite impressions. They're pretty nearly always close to the mark."

She looked over Johnny's head, up at the waxing moon, and hummed a few lilting strains of a jazzy song under her breath. Her smile, when she looked back at Johnny was direct, infectious, disarming. Her eyes seemed to imply a great deal more than her lips uttered when she said:

"You're so darned serious. Are you trying to be like Uncle Ben?"

Whereat Johnny laughed aloud. Like Uncle Ben! That monument of pomposity. Uncle Benjamin Allen was Johnny's idea of a little less than nothing. The man seemed to have wealth. In the beginning of this cruise Johnny had heard a great deal of loose chatter about Mr. B. J. Allen's faculty for getting big things done in a big way. But Johnny had long since come to the unflattering conclusion that Uncle Ben's big things were accomplished, if at all, by the left-hand process of buying the services of abler men—as this three-month yachting trip was being carried on. And Johnny Akhorn had all the plain-thinking, active, resourceful man's contempt for gilt-edged incapacity. A mental picture of Uncle Ben marooned on an island in Queen Charlotte Sound quickened the tempo of his amusement.

"And yet you say you don't go much on impressions," Jessie reproached. "You're getting a whole bagful out of that one little remark. Why can't you be friendly with me?" she ended on a wheedling note.

"Gee whiz!" Johnny tried to make his tone casual, "haven't you got territory enough for your operations, that you want to extend 'em to the crew? Seven weeks to go, and you feel your style cramped already?"

The moon was bright enough now to show him the quick flush. But if he meant to draw her fire he failed. She disregarded the gibe.

"You evidently disapprove of my feeble efforts to kill the idle hour," she drawled composedly.

"Uh-uh," he grunted. "Not so long as you don't include me as a fellow assassin."

"You're improving," she responded brightly. "I knew I'd strike a spark."

"Sparks sometimes start fires—or set off explosions."

Jessie patted her hands in mock applause.

"Now you're shouting," she chuckled. "We could have a lot of fun, I know, if you'd act human like that once in a while. I rather like your style, Captain John Akhorn, even if you don't reciprocate."

"You're a grand little kidder," Johnny muttered with the first trace of feeling that had crept into his voice. "I dare say you can even kid yourself. But you can't kid me."

Jessie rose to her feet with an effortless twist of her small lissome body. Her elfin features were masklike in the moon glare.

"I suppose I brought that on myself," she murmured. "Do you think it's really quite the thing to be insulting to a woman who is simply trying to be friendly—in a frank and natural manner? Is that the way you really feel about me?"

Johnny stood erect. He towered over her like a young god in the black shadow of a lone fir. He was a very fair-skinned man. His hair had curled in waves and ringlets from the sea water. His powerfully muscled arms and neck and sturdy legs gleamed like marble in the moonlight. He folded his arms across his chest.

"Might as well have a show-down," he said tonelessly. "You were dead right

when you got the impression that I didn't care about coming in here. I don't like a lot of things that are associated with this place—only that isn't the fault of the place. I haven't been here for a long time. Once—you remember that old thing about sleeping dogs? The last time——"

He made a quick gesture with one hand —as if of brushing away some troublesome thing.

"Sounds funny to hear you say pretty much the same sort of thing to me that you once said to a shy, twenty-year-old kid sitting here on this same grass, by this same house—with the same old moon shining. The difference is that the kid took you seriously. A man, if he *is* a man, doesn't like to be fooled twice in the same place."

SHE stared at him with a strange mingling of incredulity and surprise, an expression that might have been pity. It maddened Johnny to think that it *might* be pity.

"If you really are Johnny Barrett—and you must be—why are you using an assumed name; sailing under false colors?" she demanded.

"Little thing like that disturb you?" His inflection was sardonic. "Barrett might have helped you recognize me and saved you this slight embarrassment, eh?"

"You're detestable—and you don't understand," she said tartly.

"Maybe I am detestable; but nobody ever accused me of being stupid," Johnny commented. "As a matter of fact my name *is* Akhorn. Barrett was my stepfather. I was always known as the Barrett kid. But when—when things got all twisted here—when I went on my own, I used my legal name."

"What happened here, Johnny?" she asked quietly. "I thought—I wanted to—it's so desolate."

"It was a home. Now it's just an old house abandoned to the rats and the weather," Johnny told her a little sadly. "You know, things happen that way sometimes."

"I'm sorry," Jessie breathed.

"Sorry!" he snorted. "Why should you be? It's nothing to *you*."

"Oh, you're impossible," she cried. "You're so——"

"If you had told me that those days," Johnny interrupted harshly, "it would have been better. I was even more impossible then than I am now. Yet you went out of your way to make me like you. Then you spread your wings and flew. And I came down to earth with a thump that jarred the bones of every one of my ancestors.

"You were just playing a game. I've seen a lot of it since. The same sort of thing, I suppose, is on tap whenever a man happens to strike your fancy. It amuses you. Probably it tickles your vanity. Men are your pastime."

"Do you really believe that?" she asked.

"That's the way it looks to me."

"That would make me feel horrid, if it were true," she said lightly.

She turned her gaze for a second toward the moon. Its silver bathed the distant hills, the nearer forest. Pools of shadow stood ebony black by contrast in the low places and along the cliffy shores of the bay. The girl flung her arms out in a sweeping, inclusive gesture.

"It's too perfect a night to quarrel, or to feel badly about anything—*anything*," she repeated with emphasis. "Let the dead past stay buried, Captain Johnny."

"You couldn't quarrel with me if you tried," he answered calmly. "I wouldn't take you that serious. Once is plenty."

"Labeled and pigeonholed, eh?" she drawled whimsically. "Like the road sign —'dangerous but passable.' Oh, you're funny, John Akhorn. You're so darned sure of yourself. I wonder——"

She spun on her tiptoes like a ballet dancer, did a graceful, artless little step or two—a small piquant figure in the moonlight, smiling at him, her lips parted. Her big, dark eyes mocked Johnny; as if she knew that however he disclaimed emotion she could still move him.

Then she came up close to him, put her hands on his bare forearms and stared up into his face for seconds that lengthened to

half a minute. She shook him gently at last.

"Kiss me," she commanded imperiously.

Johnny looked down at her. His face hardened. He shook his head.

"On a night like this? Under a lover's moon? Won't you?"

"Not in a thousand years," he said thickly.

"So long as that," she laughed, and pursed her lips impishly. "In that case—*good* night. *And* pleasant dreams. I'm sure you'll have 'em."

She moved swiftly away. Where the grass met the tall bracken she paused to look back. Johnny could see the flash of her white teeth. She was laughing. Then she waved a hand and vanished beachward amid the tall ferns.

Johnny drew a long breath, a breath that was half a sigh, and sat down on the cedar block until he heard voices hail her at the gangway. Then he went down to the beach and swam silently to the yacht.

His thoughts would have been worth a good many pennies in the open market—to say nothing of his feelings.

And as he sat on the side of his berth staring at the paneled bulkhead a slither of disturbed water, the swish of a stem parting the sea, brought his eye to a porthole. He beheld a schooner-rigged yacht slide under auxiliary power like a white ghost up the broad moon path. She came abreast and let go her anchor with a clanking roar that woke a hundred echoes in the silent bay.

CHAPTER II.

THE "FAFNIR."

TWO things captured Johnny Akhorn's attention in the morning. The first was an aërial strung between the schooner's topmasts; the second was her sailing master, an exceedingly hard-boiled egg named Joe McNaughton.

Johnny hadn't seen him for years. In the days of Johnny's careless youth McNaughton had been credited with a hand in various shady enterprises. Although he had come in for a good deal of attention by the provincial police, immigration inspectors, and revenue service, none of them had ever hung anything on McNaughton; he was too slippery. A moral certainty does not constitute evidence in court.

Then about the time the Volstead act began to function in the United States Joe disappeared from the British Columbia coast. Rumor had him simultaneously making a fortune in whisky-running operations and being killed by dry-enforcement officers while landing contraband liquor. Yet here he was now in yachting cap, brass-bound coat and white-duck trousers, skipper of a topsail schooner yacht hailing from Newport, Rhode Island.

That in itself would scarcely have made Johnny ponder. McNaughton was properly qualified for such a job. He was a seaman, a past master in the art of getting everything possible out of small sailing craft; and he knew the British Columbia coast like a book. There was no place a pleasure cruiser might wish to go that McNaughton couldn't pilot her with ease and safety.

What did interest Johnny in connection with McNaughton was the fact that the *Fafnir* crowd was making Hidden Bay a rendezvous with the party on the *West by North*. They knew each other to the point of intimacy. Johnny was wakened by them hailing back and forth. Two men off the *Fafnir* came aboard and had a before-breakfast drink with Uncle Ben under the aft awning. And with breakfast finished the *West by North* crowd piled in two dinghies and boarded the schooner.

Johnny had ears and eyes. This was no casual acquaintance. Uncle Ben paced the deck with a tall, youngish man, deep in converse. The others sat around in a group by the mainmast, laughing and chattering—all but Jessie Allen and a man. They perched on the forward end of the low deck house. Johnny turned a glass on *them* from the wheelhouse door.

One glance was enough for him. He had thought himself pretty well immune from a certain virus, but when he laid the glass down he realized with a pang

that he wasn't, and for a second he felt as if he would like to strangle Jessie Allen and the man sitting beside her talking so earnestly.

He knew the man. He had seen him once, learned his name; and that once had been enough. Dewey Saunders had sailed into Hidden Bay on a steam yacht. From a distant hill Johnny had watched that yacht go out with an idle curiosity, with no hint that her going meant for him a blank bewilderment for days to follow, empty days that were full of pain.

But that was long ago. When he looked across at Dewey and Jess, he reflected that if the wound had long healed the scar tissue was still tender. And he told himself that he was a fool to be stirred by any emotion whatever. It was nothing to him now, should be nothing.

From that conclusion, which wiser men than he have come to many a time where a woman was concerned, Johnny leaped to another. By some obscure mental process he got the impression that the messages Sparks had been flinging wide for three days had somehow brought the *Fafnir* into Hidden Bay. And he whimsically propounded to himself a question: When is a pleasure cruise not a pleasure cruise?

It was rather odd, he reflected with a sardonic grin. If he hadn't been stung into revealing himself to Jessie Allen there would have been three persons aboard those two yachts whom he knew, but who didn't know him—Saunders, McNaughton, and Jess herself.

He was quite positive Jessie Allen hadn't dreamed Captain Johnny Akhorn was the Barret kid from Hidden Bay. He didn't suppose Jess would mention him to the man beside her on the *Fafnir's* deck house—and McNaughton didn't matter. Probably the old skate had found it didn't pay to be crooked and got himself a respectable job.

They didn't any of them matter. It was nothing in his young life, Johnny assured himself, as he went down into the crew's mess room to eat a belated breakfast. Elaborate wireless equipment and messages, foreign schooner yachts, old loves and hurts, made no odds. The *West by North* was under charter to Mr. B. Jessop Allen and he, Johnny Akhorn, was skipper of the *West by North*. It was his task to take Uncle Ben and party wherever they wished to go so long as they paid the freight. Less rattling of dry bones would have pleased him better. Nevertheless this was his job.

As for the *Fafnir* and Captain McNaughton and the tall, good-looking young man smiling down at Jessie Allen—they wouldn't cut much ice with him if he didn't let them. Thus Johnny, over his grapefruit.

At the same time he couldn't help wondering why a windjammer on a pleasure cruise carried wireless, nor why the *Fafnir* should take a chance in Whispering Pass, when at top tide her keel would scarcely clear the bottom. He wished also that he could look at Jessie Allen's piquant face without feeling those disturbing sensations of sadness, that ugly touch of resentment. And again he assured himself that it didn't matter, that all he had to do was to do his job. It seemed simple enough.

The two cruising parties made a joint expedition in small boats and canoes all about the shores of Hidden Bay during the forenoon. After luncheon they went ashore. Johnny paid no attention to them once they embarked in the boats. He was responsible for them only when aboard and under way. It was no part of his duty to guide or entertain.

But he couldn't help hearing their talk and laughing voices as they moved about that abandoned homestead and that annoyed him out of all reason. He mustered up a grin when the thought flitted through his mind that he could legally order them off those premises, since a half-mile square surrounding the house belonged to him in fee simple. He could imagine those pert young women making pert remarks about the place. He wondered if Jess would take them to any of the quaint nooks they two had haunted during that wonderful three months, six years past.

Johnny's practical mind didn't take

much stock in hunches or formless impressions. Yet leaning on the rail of the *West by North* in the quiet afternoon, marking the peace and beauty of air and sky and sea and forest it seemed to him a calm before some sort of storm.

There was no basic reason for that feeling; merely an obscure intuition. Hidden Bay spread like a great placid pool, a sheltered lagoon mirroring alongshore the trees and green hills that lifted in tiers and rude terraces to far heights. The *Fafnir* rested like a gull, her white wings folded on varnished booms, her masts two lofty spars of beaten gold in the summer sun, her decks deserted.

The exploring guests had vanished into the forest. Everywhere silence lay like an invisible blanket. No breath of air stirred leaf ashore or loose rope end aboard. Peace, utter peace, infolded the bay and the two vessels and the green hills like a benediction. Yet there was that uneasy sense of impending clash, struggle; whether of persons or of the elements Johnny did not know. He only knew what he felt—and he did not trust his feelings. He had no faith in premonitions. He was uneasy; and he ascribed it to a mood.

The dinner hour revived all the varied noises of human activity. The two parties moved back and forth impartially between their own vessels. But dinner gathered them all in the *West by North's* dining saloon, and gave Johnny a close-up of the *Fafnir's* personnel.

The afterguard of the schooner was also her sailing crew. McNaughton as sailing master and engineer and a Chinese cook were the only paid hands. The other four might be guests or owners, but they sailed the ship. They were tolerably young men, this quartet, clean limbed, well dressed, well mannered.

It amused Johnny to notice that the noses of the two youths on the *West by North* were slightly out of joint so far as Miss Betty Marr and Ellen Carruthers were concerned. But it did not amuse him to note that Saunders, the outstanding figure on the *Fafnir*, hovered persistently about Jess. Once dinner was served Johnny's chance of observing them ended, and he went below to his own evening meal. Afterward he stretched himself on a lounge berth in the pilot house and buried himself in a book.

It was a good story. It took him, oblivious of time, well into dusk, and he was roused then by fading light and the sudden snapping of the wireless for the first time in twenty-four hours. Johnny didn't know Morse. He had nothing to do with the wireless. Sparks was Mr. B. J. Allen's private operator, a young man of an exceedingly saturnine disposition, who kept strictly to himself.

Johnny put by his book and went out on the forward deck. The long twilight was fading, deepening. Pearly shades tinted a segment of northwestern sky. The crickets and the tree toads lifted up their evensong ashore. A belated hermit thrush trilled once or twice and was still.

Johnny stowed himself in a coiled hawser. Besides the cook he had only two men in his crew. The deck hand remained below. The engineer joined him for a word or two before turning in.

PRESENTLY he had all the wide forward deck to himself. He lay there gazing up at the bright flicker of the stars until the *Fafnir's* tender put off amid laughing good nights, until saloon and galley lights blinked out and the white-aproned cook passed down the forward companionway to his bed, until the night silence shut down again.

When he lifted himself on elbow at last to glance down the decks of his vessel before he himself turned in he saw Jessie Allen leaning on the rail abreast of the wheelhouse door staring at the schooner, now a dim white shape under her high riding light. She was within fifteen feet of him. He could see her fairly well. And as he stared at her she turned her head, looked at him, beckoned.

Johnny kept his place, his position. The girl waited a few seconds, came over to him, sank to the deck by his side, curled her feet under her, a feminine Buddha in

a blue sweater and a white skirt, her black hair darker than the night. She looked at him soberly.

"You're an obstinate devil, aren't you?" she observed in a low tone.

Through Johnny's mind flashed the unwelcome, unkindly thought: "When there's nobody else handy she doesn't mind amusing herself with me. A man—just so it's a man." But he kept his thought to himself.

"You don't think much of me, do you, Johnny?"

And when he still refused to commit himself she answered for him:

"I don't blame you. Sometimes I don't think much of myself."

"Why?" Curiosity helped Johnny find his tongue.

"Lots of whys." She shrugged her shoulders. "I can't make things come out the way I want them to. At least not things I get serious about."

"Are you ever serious about anything?" Johnny inquired.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," she replied. "So I won't tell."

"No reason why you should."

"Except that I might want to," she retorted.

"That's the only reason you ever have for doing anything, I imagine," Johnny replied thoughtfully. "Because you want to. That's a pretty good reason, too, I guess. Some people do things because they have to. You don't."

"How do you know I don't?" she demanded.

"Don't know. Just speculating."

"Speculating on a woman's reasons for doing anything is more uncertain than speculating on the Stock Exchange," she murmured. "Now I did something inadvertently to-day that I had no intention of doing when I went ashore."

"Well," Johnny filled in the pause, "what's that to me?"

"It will have something to do with you pretty soon, if I'm not badly mistaken," she said. "Johnny, old scout, do you care anything much about this old place of yours here in Hidden Bay?"

"How do you know it's mine?"

"I happen to know," she assured him. "Do you value it sentimentally or otherwise?"

"Sometimes," Johnny's ingrained honesty of soul urged him to truth, "I hate it. I don't like to come here. It's so lonesome it makes me ache. Still, I don't know as that's any reason for despising its value. It has a value of a sort; any land has. I might come back here some time and make a home. I don't know. What are you getting at?"

"You'll get an offer for it in a day or so," she told him, "out of the blue sky. Will you sell?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Might. Might not. All depends on who, and how much, and the way I happen to feel at the time."

"You can name your own price, in reason, I'm pretty sure," Jessie said. "Sell it, Johnny. You'll get it back for a song, by and by."

"What's the mystery?" Johnny asked impatiently.

"If I knew for sure, I'd tell you," she answered. "There is one and I'm going to be mixed up in it. I wouldn't breathe such wild stuff to you, Johnny, if I didn't know you were like a clam.

"I want you to be wide awake the rest of this cruise. Eyes and ears open, mouth shut. If you see or hear anything that puzzles you, tell me. Maybe I'll have the key. You'll do that much for me, won't you—for old sake's sake?"

"Yes," Johnny muttered the promise; he was troubled a little, and mystified. "But I don't know why I should."

The girl looked away to the eastward. Behind the broken contour of the hills a mellow lighting of the sky heralded the rising moon. Her gaze grew abstracted, then moody. Johnny looked at her. His eyes grown accustomed to the dark rested keenly on her face.

He had climbed those distant hills with her. He had held her in his arms and kissed those lips that were shut tight in a firm line. He had seen her smile and laugh and tease. He had never been cer-

tain of her moods and tenses even when she put her head against his breast and told him that she liked him heaps and heaps. But he had never seen her sad. He had never seen her even vaguely troubled.

The spirit in her small, rounded body seemed unquenchable, too vital ever to be cast down. And a queer feeling woke in him now to see a bright wetness gather slowly in her dark eyes. He reached both his hands to her shoulders. She didn't try to evade him; but she did meet his gaze squarely and say:

"For God's sake, Johnny, don't try to pet me or make love to me, or even sympathize with me. I'll go to pieces if you do. And I've got to be hard as nails, and play the game through. I've *got* to." She ended on a low whisper.

"What is the game?" Johnny demanded. "Where do I come in; or you?"

"I don't know yet. But they'll ring us both in. I know it."

"Who? This *Fafnir* crowd? Or Uncle Ben? Is he the villain of the piece?"

"Uncle Ben? That stuffed shirt?" The scorn in her voice startled Johnny. "He's only a smoke screen. I've told you all I can, all I dare, Johnny. I didn't mean to tell you this much. Only there was this thing about your place. Ask a little more than you think it's worth. Sell sight unseen. The offer will come left-handed, anyway. You'll get it back if you want it, I'm sure."

"I'll see." Johnny took his hands off her shoulders. In that mood and moment it was hard to resist the temptation to gather her into his arms—even though he distrusted both her and the impulse. "Sounds funny. I don't like mysteries."

"I like 'em less," Jess muttered. "But I can't help this one—whatever it may turn out to be. I never was afraid of anything or anybody in my life till now. Will you stand by with a life line, Johnny? Just because—because I want you to?"

"If you put it that way—yes," Johnny repeated his promise. "All you have to do is holler when you get into deep water."

"Thanks," she said simply. "I take you at your word. I'm going to bed. Good night."

She vanished below, through the deck house, leaving Johnny Akhorn to ponder deeply on the significance of the things she hinted, while a fat moon swam up and laid a broad, glimmering path across Hidden Bay.

CHAPTER III.

THE OFFER.

WHEN he looked out in the early morning to find the *Fafnir* gone Johnny wondered idly if the *West by North* would encounter Saunders and McNaughton anywhere else along the coast, and then dismissed the schooner from his mind. McNaughton didn't interest him much. Joe was a bad egg on a coast where bad eggs were no novelty. But he couldn't so easily get Dewey Saunders out of his mind, because Saunders was too intimately connected in his thought with Jessie Allen.

Jessie had come to Hidden Bay out of a clear sky six years earlier. She had funds to pay her way, a trunk full of pretty clothes, and with her an elderly, tight-lipped woman who seemed to be a maid but who might have been anything.

Jessie wanted a quiet place to spend two or three weeks. She had prevailed on Johnny's mother to accept her as a guest. The two or three weeks lengthened to months. She didn't tell him where she came from, nor why—and to Johnny it didn't matter, because the mere fact that she was there soon became to him the only important one.

Dewey Saunders had turned up there one afternoon with a yacht flying the Stars and Stripes, with two or three guests aboard. Dewey was then probably twenty-five or six, a good deal slenderer than he was now. He came ashore and a tall, gray-haired woman came with him.

Jessie met them as casually as if she had seen them but yesterday. Johnny remembered as clearly as if it were but yesterday how Dewey shook hands with him, smiled a commonplace or two, and paid him no more attention than if he had been a stump or a boulder.

And the next morning Jessie and her elderly duenna boarded the yacht and steamed away while Johnny Akhorn was out in the hills hunting grouse to make a dinner for them.

Johnny's worldly experience had since informed him that a woman could play with a man, help him build air castles, love him by inference, and still brush him aside to walk her own road. But like other men Johnny found it hard to think of Jessie walking her own road alone.

He had somehow always visualized Dewey Saunders in the offing when he thought of Jess. He hadn't thought much about either for two or three years. Not until the chartering of the *West by North* brought him once more in contact with this girl whom he had never expected to see again, whom he hadn't wanted ever to see again. He had even been a little grateful that she didn't know him. He was certain of that. He had changed a lot. Jess hadn't changed at all.

He wondered if Dewey was involved in this promise of trouble Jess hinted at. There was such a gap between those old days and the present. He had no grounds for anything but vague surmise.

He knew nothing about either Jessie Allen or Dewey Saunders, indeed about any of these people. They were Californians. They had money. That was about all. Why should Jess go outside her own group to seek either moral or physical support against anything that threatened? Or was she just playing with him again? As a cat likes to play with a mouse. Stirring him up emotionally, for the fun of knowing that he would squirm.

Johnny shrugged his shoulders. He couldn't tell. He couldn't help thinking things like that. He was no longer a shy, sensitive, unformed boy.

Uncle Ben's party swam, wandered in the woods, danced on deck through that day. In the evening Allen issued orders: cruise to the head of Jerome Inlet, anchor overnight in a lagoon famous for its myriad waterfalls, back to the mouth of the inlet the following day and berth at Paden River the next.

Johnny registered instant objection to the Paden River berth. There was a huge pulp mill at Paden River. Its waste discharge polluted the sea with acids that ruined a vessel's paint.

"I don't think the matter of a little paint is of great consequence," Mr. Allen delivered himself with ponderous finality. "I wish to be in the immediate vicinity of Paden River for possibly three days. A berth at the wharf will suit better than a distant anchorage."

Johnny could only acquiesce.

Evening of the third day, during which interim Johnny did not exchange half a dozen sentences with Jessie Allen, found the *West by North* edging in to the pulp-town wharf. The lines were scarcely fast when Sparks came out of his cubby-hole and presented a message.

"SCX is Point Grey wireless station at Vancouver," he took the trouble to explain something Johnny already knew.

Have offer twenty-five hundred for S. E. quarter D. L. X95 N. W. District, registered your name. Wire acceptance at once if you wish to sell.

(Sgd.) PARKE & SON,
18 Davis St.,
Vancouver, B. C.

Johnny sat down on a coil of rope to think about this astonishing confirmation of Jessie Allen's prophecy. Two thousand five hundred dollars. The place wasn't worth that, as land prices went in that lonely region. Apart from the plot of cleared ground about the house, and a few acres of natural meadow where the neglected apple and plum trees grew, it was a rock pile from which most of the commercial timber had been stripped long ago.

A few ancient cedars and massive firs rose amid a jungle of second growth. Its half mile of water frontage might or might not be of value some time in the misty future. What could any one want of that? Yet Parke & Son were reputable land agents. Any offer through them was genuine. Who was the prospective purchaser and what did he want of that particular spot?

Johnny sat in a maze of reflection. He

didn't want the place. All that had endeared it to him was past, gone, not to be renewed. He could put that money with what he had and do something in the workboat field. He did not intend and never had intended to remain contentedly a hired man. The best job in the world left much to be desired in the way of independence. To render efficient and loyal service for liberal pay was good, but to be his own master and take his own chances was better. And then he recalled Jessie's suggestion—to ask more. If she knew *this* was coming she knew who was behind the offer, and how far they would go.

Johnny went down the gangway and took the path that led to where Paden River faced its sprawling area of pulp mill and employees' cottages upon a half-moon bay. He didn't care to use the yacht's wireless. He wasn't clear why, unless it was a distaste for Sparks' or Uncle Ben's knowing anything whatever about his private concerns. There was a government telegraph station ashore.

He worded his reply thus:

Will accept four thousand cash.

Before noon next day a boy brought him a reply through the Paden River cable office:

Client will pay four thousand. Quick action necessary. If unable to come Vancouver at once to make transfer of title suggest you forward power of attorney enabling us legally to complete transaction. PARKE & SON.

Johnny understood the value of quick action. He couldn't leave his ship. He could go before a notary at Paden River and execute a power of attorney. And he did. The document went down to Vancouver on that night's steamer and with it a letter asking who was the purchaser—a concession to the curiosity which grew steadily in Johnny's mind. He wasn't accustomed to bolts from the blue. He didn't like mysteries. This deal savored of both.

FOR two days the *West by North* swung between her fore and aft lines at the wharf and the fumes of the polluted water turned her white hull a dirty gray between water line and guard rail. She lay deserted from midforenoon till long after dark while Uncle Benjamin and his guests lunched and dined and danced and played mah jong with the official clique of the great pulp enterprise which chewed up the forest and spat it out in an enormous tonnage of news print per diem. Then upon the day, almost to the hour, that Captain Johnny heard from Parke & Son, Uncle Ben issued fresh orders; sixty miles northward to the Euclataw Rapids for salmon fishing.

Under way, up a smooth sea lane bordered by the upstanding mountain ranges of the mainland, rising sharply to their rugged heights on the starboard, and the low-wooded Gulf Islands flinging themselves away against the western sky to port, Johnny got out this letter and reread its formal paragraphs. Beyond stating that title had duly passed, that the funds, less usual commission, had been deposited to Johnny's credit in a Vancouver bank, there was little information. The property had been purchased by a local trust company, presumably acting on behalf of interests unknown. Johnny put away the letter. It was an odd piece of business. While he thus reflected Jess Allen looked in the pilot-house door.

"May I be quartermaster for a while?" she asked pleasantly.

He relinquished the wheel to her. He didn't know why she wanted to steer but he knew she could. He stood at her elbow half glad that she was there and half wishing she would keep her disturbing presence aft where she could not trouble him.

Her dark head came about to the level of Johnny's breast. When she looked up at him with that cryptic, challenging smile Johnny struggled between two impulses; to hug her and to wring her neck. Suddenly she asked:

"You sold the Hidden Bay place?"

He nodded.

"Who bought it?" Johnny demanded. "I couldn't find out. I'd like to know—just for fun. You know, don't you?"

"I'm not sure," she said. "I'm only guessing. I'm guessing at a number of

things. If I don't guess right, I may be out of luck."

"How?"

"You'll find out soon enough." She refused to be direct. "I'm not kidding, Johnny. This cruise is something more than a pleasure trip. That's about all I'm sure of. I wouldn't cheep a word if I didn't want you to be wide awake. I don't know exactly what's on tap. But whatever it is I'm pretty deeply interested in it whether I want to be or not. And you may be, too."

"I don't know what license you got to be so darned sure of me in any way whatever," Johnny grumbled. "If you'd talk plain English about what's on your mind, I'd like it better."

"I can't," she replied shortly, irritably. Then: "Do you know Morse?"

Johnny shook his head.

"I do. All this wireless stuff that comes in and goes out is in some impossible code. Nothing but numbers and conjunctions. I wonder," she sank her voice to a faint whisper, "I wonder if you could put that wireless set out of commission for keeps before we get into Queen Charlotte Sound. Would you?"

"I could, but I wouldn't unless there was a mighty good reason." Johnny looked at her in amazement. "And I don't know that we're going to Queen Charlotte Sound. It wasn't reckoned a possibility when the cruise was outlined."

"Nevertheless I've an idea Uncle Ben will decide to go there. And you have to go where he orders, haven't you, under the terms of the charter?"

"Well—anywhere in reason. She's subject to his orders until the first of September. Still, I wouldn't start for Honolulu, or even Alaska, if he issued orders till he was black in the face.

"What the devil is coming up anyway?" Johnny asked point-blank. "Is your Uncle Ben some sort of a scheming crook instead of a perfectly respectable citizen? Is he mixed up in some sort of skulduggery with this *Fafnir* crowd? The bird that's official sailing master on her used to be so crooked he couldn't lay straight in bed. Maybe your friends that are sailing her aren't any better. You know 'em better than I do. What *is* their game, anyhow?"

The girl looked up at him with startled eyes.

"My God!" she breathed. "And you say you don't take any stock in impressions—hunches. You're a wonder, Johnny Akhorn. Maybe it's more than just chance that you're skipper of this yacht."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOOMED SHIP.

WITHIN an hour of arriving at the Euclataw Rapids, Johnny Akhorn had occasion to revise his private opinion of two members of the cruising party aboard. From all he had seen of them in several weeks Bob Gentry and Walter Gage were simply gilded youths. He had classified them rather contemptuously as soft, lily fingered, and dismissed them from further consideration.

The Euclataw is a place haunted at certain seasons by tyee salmon, variously known as the Chinook, the Silver, the King, more commonly as the Big Spring salmon. Here the tidal flow pours through a constricted passage. On either side of the rapid current great slow eddies swing off, and in the slack of these eddies, close inshore, schools of herring take shelter.

The tyees feed on the herring and their dining hours are from the peep of dawn to sunrise, and all during the long northern twilight that comes between sundown and dark. The afterglow was painting scattered clouds a rosy pink when the *West by North* sidled in to a float landing outside the south narrows. Her lines were scarcely fast before her boats were out.

Within a hundred yards of her a flotilla of hand liners, rowboat men fishing for the market, drifted slowly back and forth on the edge of a great swirl. With them a strike meant a short, sharp tussle, a flash of iridescent silver yanked bodily inboard, and a blow with a club on the salmon's head to still his violent flopping.

Wherever Johnny looked some fisherman was struggling with a salmon. There was a constant succession of splashes, flops, thudding blows, jingle of spoon baits, and encouraging cries from one boat to another. They were not fishing for sport. This excitement was incidental, the result of swift action. The big fish were striking fast.

Into this piscatorial arena the yacht tenders put with rod and line. Hooked on slender tackle a forty-pound fish would run a hundred yards and make the reel scream and the rod bend like a drawn bow. When the salmon turned for a fresh dart he might go anywhere. Hence it was a matter of courtesy, a custom of the region, for rod-and-line anglers with their delicate sporting tackle to keep clear of the commercial fishermen. Otherwise fouled lines, delay, broken gear and lost fish for every one ensued.

Jessie rowed a boat for her Uncle Ben. In a larger one Gentry and Gage with the two girls tried their hand at the game. Gentry struck a salmon just as he drew up to the score or more of rowboats and the first dash the fish made took him fairly among the heavy hand lines. In a few seconds he was well tangled. A fisherman flung an impatient curse as he dropped oars to haul his fouled gear.

"You get wound up here again," he said tartly, "and somebody'll cut that darned fancy line for you."

"Cut it," young Gentry snapped back, "and see what'll happen. You don't own the ocean, you hunk of cheese!"

The man bent, drew a knife from under a thwart and doubled up a bunch of the snarled line."

"You blamed dude!" he roared so that all the fleet could hear, "I will."

And forthwith he did.

Gentry plucked a short, heavy-handled gaff hook from its place and hurled it without a word, missing the man's head only by inches. He snatched the oars from Betty Marr. Gage had the other pair. They drove the heavy yacht tender straight at the frail skiff and were on top of the man before he could free an oar from its rowlock to use in defense. He didn't seem to think of using the knife.

The two boats came together with a bang, and Gentry collared the man, ducking a swing of his fist as he did so. For a second it looked as if both boats would swamp. But they didn't and Gentry methodically hanged the fellow's head until the rest of the fleet closed and put a stop to the fracas. There was a lot of profanity and a fine, free expression of fishermen's ideas about cheap sports who interfered with men making a living.

When the boats finally drew apart to go about their business of fishing both Bob Gentry and Walter Gage were standing in the tender, each with an oar in his hand, apparently eager to do battle with the entire fleet. Johnny, watching this from the yacht's rail, perceived that both the girls sat quietly. They were the least excited of all.

Thereafter the two *West by North* guests hovered persistently on the fringe of the fleet. They struck another salmon or two and they did not seem to care whether their fish caused trouble or not. The man who had cut Gentry's line came in to the float, bleeding, muttering threats. And when all the boats were in Gage and Gentry stalked the float surface, shouldering among the fishermen, making caustic references to a variety of things, patently spoiling for a fight which no one cared to precipitate.

Johnny watched this proceeding until he was half minded to go down and call their bluff. It irritated him. But it was poor policy to quarrel with his own party and the fishermen were well able to back up their own resentments if they chose.

The bright deck lamps of the yacht cast a strong light all over the landing. Every detail of expression stood out as if it were day. He had certainly made a mistake in classing that pair as soft, Johnny reflected. They were tough and mean, more than willing to meet trouble halfway. The blaze of a quite-uncalled-for anger still glowed in Gentry's eyes. It seemed a great to-do about a small matter but there was no mistaking the vicious earnestness of

those two young men nor their ability to take care of themselves in a brawl. It struck Johnny that they were quite at home in rough going. And that didn't seem to fit in with their status as well-mannered sons of well-to-do people.

Ellen and Betty stood by themselves on one side of the float. Uncle Ben hovered about his party, visibly uneasy over the bellicose tactics of his guests. Jessie came aboard, halting, as she passed Johnny at the gangway head, long enough to say under her breath:

"Our two lambs have forgotten themselves long enough to show their wolves' teeth."

Thereafter Johnny regarded those youths with a heightened interest. Certainly they were far from tame. Dancing and playing cavalier to a couple of pretty flappers might not be the limit of their capabilities.

Johnny admired action and resolution. He didn't like sheer malice, vindictiveness; nor hair-trigger tempers. He ended up by being a little amused. Gentry and Gage had seemed such true samples of the lounge-lizard, jazz-hound type. They were much too dynamic for that. In fact, on that evening's showing they might easily be thoroughgoing ruffians.

When he arrived at that conclusion Johnny decided to ask Jessie Allen what she meant by wolves' teeth. But he had no chance that evening and the following day the *West by North* ran the Euclataws and cruised up an arm of the sea to anchor in the mouth of a river that promised trout.

The yacht lay there exactly one week. In that week Johnny had no opportunity for more than casual sentences with Jessie Allen. She didn't make opportunities; he wouldn't. The day's round for the yachting party was an expedition upriver after trout, or exploring alongshore; in the evening mah jong in the deck saloon or dancing on the after deck to phonograph jazz.

Invariably Bob Gentry paired off with Ellen Carruthers. Sometimes Uncle Ben appropriated Betty Marr and left Jess to young Gage. In any case they were three couples and they were sufficient unto themselves. Johnny himself had nothing to do at all. His years of coastwise trafficking had been full of activity. He agreed heartily, before long, with Thomas Fleming Day that a big yacht was a lazy man's palace and an active man's prison.

He would much rather have been under way. Sometimes he would sit on the forward deck looking aft at this group of devotees to pleasure and wish himself back aboard a tug fighting tide and fog with a heavy tow, or a seiner working her great net in oilskin weather. Yet he knew it wasn't because he objected to an easy life, but because the presence of this diminutive woman troubled him with vain longings, made a strange heaviness in his breast.

His feeling about her was complex beyond his understanding. She would pass him sometimes with her impish smile and he would wonder if those hints of trouble looming near, her pledging him to stand by if it came, wasn't just mere byplay—something to keep him stirred up, to make him—well, he didn't know what. When he watched her deliberately playing with either Gentry or Gage just to make Betty or Ellen furious he wondered if Jessie Allen ever had a serious thought or a steadfast purpose. She was so exuberantly alive. She had more energy in her small body than seemed natural. She was rarely still. She could always laugh.

First on deck and last below; and sometimes when all the others were in their berths, Johnny, wakeful and staring overside, would see her steal down the gangway and put off alone to go wandering in one of the canoes. Whether she meant to or not she kept him looking for her, at her, thinking about her. So that Johnny was glad when Uncle Ben ordered the *West by North* under way, because it gave him something else to occupy his mind.

That was the last protracted tie-up. For days on end they cruised in varied waters, up long inlets that were mere deep gashes between towering mountain chains. The *West by North* saw glaciers like blue-white diamonds gleaming in the sun, cas-

cades streaming in lacy spray over bold cliffs. Her party exclaimed alike over the seal and sea-lion-haunted rookeries of War-cry Sound and the majesty of the snowy summits hanging over Wah-shih-lah Bay.

And at length, when the first third of August had joined the procession of vanished days the *West by North* poked her flaring bows out of the mouth of Knight's Inlet and dipped gently to a long ground swell rolling up from Queen Charlotte Sound.

She drove out from a maze of islands and passages into this open body of water that reflected a blazing sunshine from its undulating surface. Yet twenty miles ahead, up where the Pacific came heaving in past the northern end of Vancouver Island, a bank of fog lay thick as smoke from shore to shore. And as they cleared the last rocky islet and let their gaze sweep the wide sunlit water to rest on that obscuring vapor, the eyes of every soul above decks turned with one accord to one spot, and each in his fashion uttered an exclamation of surprise, of wonder, of alarm.

THREE points off the starboard bow, perhaps a mile offshore, a vessel swung in that slow heave of the sea with a column of smoke rising from her, a pillar blacker and higher than ever rose from a steamer's funnel.

Uncle Benjamin and his guests surged forward with a chorus of inquiry. The deck hand had the wheel. Johnny stood in the bow with his binoculars leveled. Powerful lenses made the vessel fairly leap at him.

Smoke poured out of her waist. A tongue of flame licked around her foremast. He could see figures in white heaving stuff into a pair of rowboats floating astern. She lay stern-to and on her varnished counter Johnny could see her name and port in carved gilt letters:

FAFNIR
OF NEWPORT, R. I.

"It's your friend's topsail schooner," Johnny said quietly. "The *Fafnir*. And from the look of things she's a gone goose."

Allen almost snatched the glasses out of his hand. Johnny heard young Gentry whistle and look significantly at Walter Gage. Out of one corner of his eye he saw Uncle Ben's hands tremble. When he lowered the glasses the fleshy, pompous one's face was livid, his eyes those of a man full of fear or grief, or some powerful emotion. He ripped out an oath, a shocking oath, a most heartfelt blasphemy. His hands clenched. And while Johnny marveled at the man's passion, he regained his self-control with a visible effort.

"Better put on full speed, captain," he said thickly. "We may be able to do something."

Johnny spoke to his engineer through the tube. The big Diesel thrummed a little louder. Her propeller took hold until the *West by North* was smashing into the swells at thirteen knots' speed. But long before they drew near Johnny knew by the up-licking sheets of flame and the angry swirls of black smoke that the *Fafnir* was a doomed ship.

CHAPTER V.

A BATTLE.

UNDER open throttle the *West by North* bore down on the burning yacht with a bone in her teeth that stood white and curling for forty feet on either bow. Before she had traversed two thirds the distance the midship section of the *Fafnir* blew skyward with a dull *boom!* and a showering cascade of débris, sparks, a great puff of black smoke.

The boats at her stern pulled clear with hasty oar strokes when her mainmast went by the board. A banner of red flame leaped high, licked this way and that, a consuming tongue.

"Fuel tank went up," Johnny said. "She's gone."

She *was* gone before they drew up to the boats. The sea poured into her through planks burst by the explosion. Her bow dipped with a loud hissing and a cloud of steam. Her broad counter

lifted so that the carved gilt letters of her name and port flashed a last time in the sunlight.

The weight of her leaden keel and inside ballast dragged her down. She sank like a diver sliding feet foremost and the little swirls and bubbles were obliterated by the slow ground swells that marched one behind the other over the spot.

Saunders, McNaughton, the Chinese cook were in one boat. Riggs, Helby, Boorn, and a sooty-faced man whom Johnny took to be the engineer, sat in the other. They seemed dazed.

They came up the *West by North's* ladder and one by one turned at the rail to look, as if still incredulous. All but Saunders. He turned to look like the others. His face was a picture of anger, chagrin. A curious silence gripped them all. Saunders stood a little apart, his hands in his trousers pockets, singed, sooty, his thin lips drawn back from his teeth in a wolfish snarl. He stared out over the empty sea for long-drawn seconds. Then he turned on Helby like a tiger, without a word, his hands grasping first for the man's throat, then doubled into striking fists when Helby eluded his grasp.

He found speech. A curse snapped out of him with each blow. He missed once, twice, then backed Helby against the rail and knocked him sprawling in the scuppers.

Ignorant of the *casus belli* Johnny stood passive. If they wanted to fight, let them fight. But when Saunders, apparently demoniac with passion, jumped at the prone man and aimed a kick at his face Johnny stepped in—only to find the moment he put finger on Saunders' arm that he had a fight on his own hands.

Saunders was evidently in that peculiar state of fury which makes a man want to hurt some one, any one, regardless of consequences. He was no heavier than Johnny Akhorn, but he was taller, longer in the reach, a lean, lithe-bodied man, berserk in strength. He landed a blow on Johnny's cheek bone that made him see fiery sparks. And when Johnny went into a clinch to save himself Saunders wrenched him this way and that until Johnny thought the man would tear him to pieces. But he hung on until his head cleared then shifted his hold quickly and put everything he had in one heave that brought Saunders crashing to the deck, Johnny on top of him, his knee in Saunders' back and the man's right arm doubled across his neck.

Johnny thought he had him. One eel-like twist freed Saunders. He got to his feet like a cat. His fist grazed Johnny's jaw, missed by the fraction of an inch. Johnny Akhorn knew better than to stay away where superior reach and rapierlike blows would murder him. He went to close quarters again, taking a deflected uppercut and a body punch that made him grunt.

This time he picked Saunders bodily off his feet and threw him clean over his shoulders. He came down on the solid deck headfirst and stayed there stretched on the flat of his back, limp as a wet sack.

Johnny stepped back, glanced around. Jessie Allen was at his elbow. She looked up at him and the expression of her face gave no clew to her feelings. Johnny couldn't tell whether she was angry, grieved, or frightened. And for the moment he didn't care. He had a private devil of his own that he kept pretty well chained up except when it came to personal combat.

Saunders had stirred him up properly. Without any definite reason, except that his blood was hot and the bruise on his cheek smarted, Johnny was ready to fight any one present. And he looked precisely what he felt. So much so that the other men stood very quiet, waiting for him to make the next move.

When Jessie dropped to the deck and gathered Saunders' head into her lap and Johnny saw the look of pity and the quick tears start in her dark eyes, he motioned to young Gentry.

"Better get a basin of water out of the galley and revive your friend," he said quietly. "The rest of you," he addressed the others of the *Fafnir's* company, "can

go down into the crew's quarters and wash up, if you like."

They needed it. The grime and soot of the fire was thick upon them. Thus having coped with a situation which was not of his making nor seeking, Johnny went into the wheelhouse, into his own private domain, and shut the doors. The sight of Jessie with another man's head in her lap, dabbing with a bit of a handkerchief at the trickle of blood from his nostrils, made him feel queer inside, made him distinctly unhappy.

HE sat there a long time, until he had cooled off. He became afflicted with that strange depression that seems inevitably to follow an outbreak of passion, when some one rapped at the door.

"Come in," he invited.

Jess entered, closed the door behind her. She stood looking at Johnny in silence, bracing herself against the slow heave underfoot as the yacht, lacking way, rolled a little in the trough of those smooth swells.

"Well, did the patient revive?" Johnny forced himself to inquire.

She nodded, let go her supporting grip on the door casing and seated herself on the lounge berth beside Johnny.

"He's all right now. I almost wish you'd broken his neck," she murmured.

"Yes, it looked like it," Johnny snorted.

"I was sorry for him"—she caught Johnny's meaning instantly—"until I got to thinking."

"Don't think," Johnny counseled. "Bad for you—for anybody."

"Now you're being horrid," she remonstrated.

"I'll be horrider," he promised, "if this particular friend of yours ever swings on me again." He fingered his bruised cheek gingerly.

Jessie laid her finger warningly on her lips.

"Don't talk so loud," she whispered. "Don't let anybody overhear anything like that, anything you ever say to me. Be careful what you say and do, Johnny, while this bunch is aboard.

"I don't know what's coming next, but I do know that burning the *Fafnir* complicates matters. I'm an emissary—sent to ask you to join the party aft. They've got over their excitement and they're in conference with Uncle Ben. Dewey will be as nice as pie. I don't like it, Johnny. I wish you could set them ashore on the first land we come to and leave them there."

"I wish you wouldn't be so blamed mysterious," Johnny grumbled. "You're getting me all fussed up. What are you scared of?"

"I'm not exactly scared," she said in an undertone. "I can only tell you this, Johnny Akhorn. There are two things that are pretty important to everybody in this little, old world. One is personal freedom of action. The other is money. I've got a little of each. There are people aboard this ship right now who would deprive me of both. They think I'm simply a giddy little featherhead with a stubborn streak in me. I'll show 'em, if they'll just expose their hands a little more."

Her own hands, lying idle in her lap, clenched into hard little fists. Then she relaxed and smiled.

"Listen to me rave," she said lightly. "My troubles are nothing in your young life, Johnny. Come along and join the schooner party, and be amiable. They'll be on their good behavior. Especially Dewey. But keep your eye on him, Captain John. He might tip you over the rail the first dark night if he got a good chance."

"Why?" Johnny asked, startled in spite of himself.

"He has just lost a ship. He and his crowd need one for some sort of job they're deeply interested in. In fact, I'm sure they need one rather badly. The *West by North* would probably do very well in a pinch."

"Good Lord!" he muttered. "Have you gone batty? Do you mean to say that Saunders is the kind of man who'd go in for murder and piracy on the high seas? That's what getting rid of me and converting this yacht to his own uses would mean."

"A man like Dewey might pull anything he thought he could get away with, if there was a lot at stake," Jessie replied thoughtfully. "I'm on the watch. Come along and meet them, Johnny. They want to soft soap you. They'll wonder why I'm so long."

"All right," Johnny acquiesced. Then dryly: "If you're not just grand-standing I'd better be heeled."

He drew open a locker on the bulkhead, took out a Luger pistol and slipped it into his pocket.

The girl put her hands on his arm. Her lips quivered. Her big dusky eyes burned into his with a sudden fire.

"Do you really think I'm just grand-standing?" she demanded. "Why should I —with you?"

"God knows," Johnny answered soberly. "You did once. You went away with this bird as soon as he turned up, after playing around with me for months. You didn't even say good-by. I can't figure you out, Jess. But I'm darned sure I'm a little less than nothing to you—unless you wanted to have a little fun with me—or needed me to help you put something over."

The strained, tense look on her face vanished.

"You and Dewey Saunders have one thing in common," she said calmly. "You both hang to an idea like bulldogs. You can't either of you think of a woman liking a man without making him the center of her universe."

"You took a lot of pains to make yourself the center of mine," Johnny reminded her, "and then you turned it into chaos without a word of explanation. I'm not kicking. I got over it. But I don't fancy having my apple cart upset that way again. You could upset it, all right, I guess. You happen to be the kind of a woman a man can so easily make a damn fool of himself over."

"I wonder why," she mused. "What is there about me to get men so fussed up?"

"I don't know," Johnny said with a trace of bitterness. "Whatever it is, it works. You're an attractive little devil. You give a fellow the impression of wanting to be taken care of. You suggest affection. You —oh, darn it, I can't tell you. Only most of your cute little ways are probably all bluff. I expect you're as cold-blooded as a fish."

"I expect I am," she said calmly, "and self-centered as the devil, too. A proper little egoist, if you know what that is," a shade scornfully. "Anyway, it doesn't matter about me. Come on, unless you're going to be toplofty about everything. Uncle Ben asked you to come aft."

Johnny followed her obediently. The two girls, Gage and Gentry, Uncle Ben, the crowd off the lost yacht, were gathered in folding chairs about a table on the quarter-deck, said table being decorated with a bottle of Scotch whisky, a decanter of wine, a soda siphon and assorted glasses, several of which items held down the four corners of a small-scale chart of the northern British Columbia coast.

Saunders rose to his feet at once with a genial smile at Johnny's approach.

"Captain Akhorn, I owe you the profoundest apologies for acting like a maniac," said he, extending his hand. "The only excuse I have to offer is that I was wild over losing my little schooner. It takes a pretty good man to stand me on my head, and I don't hold grudges over things like that. I trust you'll overlook my swinging on your jaw."

In the face of that amiable frankness Johnny could only meet the man halfway. It seemed genuine enough and natural enough in the explanation. If Johnny accepted Saunders with a mental reservation it was only because Jess had, so to speak, put a bug in his ear beforehand. Barring that he would probably have taken Dewey at his face value. The man had a personality. Jessie's hint of his capacity for dark deeds seemed incongruous. His manner was disarming. His speech and appearance was all in his favor.

He followed this up by introducing Johnny to the other members of his party. McNaughton gave Johnny—or so it seemed to him—a keen scrutiny as he

clamped a powerful hand over Johnny's fingers. Captain John wondered if Joe recalled the "Barrett kid." Probably not. If he did it scarcely mattered.

The other three were apparently well-bred, well-set-up men around thirty. Helby in particular looked as if he could give a good account of himself. And Saunders seemed to get what flitted through Johnny's mind.

"I was in wrong all around," he grinned. "This bird might have trimmed me properly if he'd known what was coming. I blamed him for setting the *Fafnir* on fire. He *would* smoke cigarettes in his berth. But we'll bury that along with the old schooner deep in the sea. Have a drink, Captain Akhorn."

Johnny drained a glass and set it down. Mr. Benjamin Allen cleared his throat in his usual preparatory fashion and said in his heavy manner:

"I have volunteered to take these gentlemen to Sentinel Island, Captain Akhorn. They were to be joined there by another yacht which has been cruising Alaska and was going to sail in convoy with the *Fafnir* down the west coast of Vancouver Island. Unfortunately the other yacht is not equipped with wireless, so we can't get in touch with her. Therefore the best thing, it seems to me, is to make Sentinel Island and put Mr. Saunders and his crew aboard with their friends. You have ample fuel oil, I believe, and our larder is well stocked."

SENTINEL ISLAND. Johnny knew the bleak hummock, standing in the path of the swells that marched endlessly across the Pacific. He didn't need Mr. Allen's fat forefinger tracing a course. It lay beyond the wide mouth of Queen Charlotte Sound, offshore from the tide-troubled stormy headland of Cape Scott. A few acres of scrubby timber and a few acres of springy meadow atop of a granite knoll, with a little crescent of a bay on the eastern side. Why should two yachts make rendezvous at a spot like that?

No matter. He couldn't refuse to go. It was no great voyage at the worst. The *West by North* was under charter. Legally Mr. B. Jessop Allen could order him anywhere within a radius that would enable the yacht to return to her home port of Vancouver by September first.

This was an emergency of a sort. Going outside of Queen Charlotte Sound, through which the Pacific Ocean throws the full weight of its rollers against the British Columbia coast hadn't been included in the itinerary. Going to Sentinel meant going to sea. But the *West by North* was a seagoing vessel. There was no valid reason why she should not go.

Johnny agreed without cavil. If there *was* anything in Jessie Allen's veiled prophecy of trouble—well, Johnny Akhorn was slightly skeptical of various things in connection with that fascinating young woman, and even if he hadn't been he would still have felt confident of remaining master of his vessel under any conceivable circumstances short of shipwreck.

"Better get under way, captain," Mr. Allen suggested. "This roll in the dead swell is none too comfortable. We should make Sentinel Island to-morrow some time, eh?"

"Easily," Johnny assured him. "Although the fog looks pretty thick ahead."

He went back to the wheelhouse. He set the engine-room telegraph for "Full ahead." When the propeller began to turn Johnny laid the *West by North's* head straight for the densest portion of the fog screen that masked the sound.

Two hours later the yacht slid into a moist, clammy obscurity. She drove through it blind, walled in by gray stuff that swirled and shifted like odorless smoke. A hundred yards on every point of the compass the sea merged into fog. Her air whistle shrieked a long blast once every minute.

On the other side of a double bulkhead from where Johnny stood his trick at the wheel Sparks kept up a steady *whir—oop! whir—oop!* on the wireless, as if he were groping for communication with some one or something far off while the *West by North* groped her way in the fog.

CHAPTER VI.

MAROONED.

JOHNNY stared over the rail at the small half moon of sand and gravel pitching down at a slope that permitted the *West by North* to swing at anchor within two hundred feet of the beach. There was just the faintest heave from a ground swell that ran outside the two horns of the bay. Across Sentinel Island the surf broke with a spaced *boom, boom!* Half a mile either way the great swells marched past from the Aleutians, from Japan, from anywhere in the wide Pacific.

Beyond Sentinel Island there was nothing, nothing but another like hummock below the horizon on the west. And a man could see nothing beyond Sentinel Island now. The fog that filled Queen Charlotte Sound with its clammy folds lay well offshore. The tides that swirled around Cape Scott, the cape itself, all that might be seen in clear weather were hidden in that gray veil. Sentinel Island spread in a luminous haze, muffled in the fog, in a silence. There wasn't a sound except the beat of the ground swell breaking on the seaward side.

Thirty miles offshore. A lonely bight on a lonely island. No scenery, no fishing —nothing at all except a wooded bit of rocky land surrounded by salt water. A queer place for pleasure craft to meet, Johnny thought. Still—if they were going down the west coast, one place, he supposed, was as good as another.

The *West by North* had left the rock-strewn mouth of Knight's Inlet far behind, crossed Queen Charlotte Sound, driven through Goletas Channel and around the northern extremity of Vancouver Island with scarce a let-up in the fog. Just a brief, occasional lift now and then to give a glimpse of some known bearing. She had made good her time and courses and when the hook splashed down at Sentinel Island Joe McNaughton looked at Johnny Akhorn and said grudgingly: "I guess you ain't got much to learn about finding your way coastwise with a ship."

So far as Johnny knew they were all ashore now. Occasionally he could hear a voice far off. On the beach both tenders and two canoes were drawn up. He and his crew were pretty well marooned aboard ship. But lack of a boat did not trouble Johnny Akhorn when he decided to go ashore. He simply put on a bathing suit and slid off the foot of the gangway. The water was cold enough to give him a fine glow when a little later he stepped on the beach.

The sun, shining down through the fog, warmed the air and the earth. Johnny found a log to sit on, roosted there thinking, until the heat made him drowsy, moved back to a small bed of white sand washed by high tides between two great driftwood tree trunks and stretched himself there. When the sun in his eyes bothered him a little he laid two or three pieces of flat driftwood across the logs above his head. Thus shaded he presently fell asleep.

The murmur of voices wakened him. He sat up and as promptly lay down again. Dewey Saunders and Uncle Benjamin roosted on one of his sheltering logs a few feet distant, their backs to him. Dewey was speaking with much emphasis, although his voice was pitched low. Once or twice he smote his fist in the palm of his other hand.

"Chances—simple matter—can't monkey around at this stage of the game—damn fool—Gentry will have to—big money—the girls—puts us in the clear—one trip alone is as good—shooting at the moon—no use getting cold feet——"

All this from Dewey. Disconnected phrases, meaningless out of their context. Allen broke in once or twice with a reply, an objection. That seemed to be his attitude—uneasiness, objection. Each time Dewey beat him down. The tone he used toward the older man was tinged with contempt.

Johnny lay low, craning his neck. He would have given an ear to know what they were talking about, after he had twice caught something that sounded like his own name.

"We've got to make this play safe, and

that means making it strong. Paste that in your hat. I wish to the Lord——"

Dewey had raised his voice a little. Now he broke off to stare at the yacht.

"By Jove, he's got her!"

Sparks stood at the rail fluttering a slip of paper. The distance wasn't great. He could easily have called. But he didn't. He stood silent, fluttering the sheet, until Allen waved a hand. As if that had been what he awaited, he lifted one hand palm out, held it so for a second, then turned back into the wireless room.

"He's got her, sure as hell," Dewey said eagerly. "Let's get aboard. I wonder what the devil was the matter with 'em the last two days."

Who had Sparks got? And what was the matter with whom? The "whom" that was a "her." It was very odd, Johnny thought. The yacht that was to meet the *Fafnir* at Sentinel Island had no wireless. Yet Dewey was anticipating a wireless from some one, somewhere. "He's got her," rather argued a ship.

Johnny gave it up. These people were too devious for his direct mind. And he wouldn't have given them a second thought only for Jessie Allen's repeated warnings. Certainly Dewey had the Indian sign on Uncle Ben, for all his toplofty manner, and Saunders was up to something that Uncle Ben was in on, or knew about—and didn't much like.

IN the course of half an hour Johnny sauntered casually into the water and swam out to the *West by North.* He dressed and went on deck. The explorers were still ashore, all but McNaughton and Saunders and Allen, who sat under an awning aft partaking of Scotch and soda.

Dewey called Johnny and genially included him in a round of drinks together with speculation on when the *Sho-gun,* the visiting yacht, would arrive. Dewey expected her any time now. His rendezvous with her was, he said, set for August fifteenth. This was the fourteenth.

None of this greatly interested Johnny —neither the men nor their conversation. He wandered away forward again, and there to his surprise he found Jessie Allen, whom he had believed ashore with the others, perched on a coiled Manila hawser. He would have gone into the wheelhouse, but she beckoned him.

"If I could put that wireless out of commission, I would," she said in an undertone. "Can't you do it, Johnny?"

"Why should I?" Johnny asked.

"I think it would either stop something, or bring something to a head," she told him. "You've noticed, haven't you, how Sparks has been beating the air ever since we picked up this *Fafnir* crowd?"

He nodded.

"He's been trying to get something, and he's got it. Something at sea. I got that much clear. 133 west, 51 north. Does that mean anything to you, Johnny?"

Johnny reflected.

"That's longitude and latitude. Makes it about two hundred and eighty miles west and a trifle north of here," said he. "Right out in the deep stuff. What of it? He's liable to speak any station or ship within five hundred miles with that set."

"He's been calling 'XY answer Z' for twenty-four hours," Jessie murmured. "Dewey and Uncle Ben have been fussing because there was no reply. But XY did answer. I don't know what the message was—it's in that indecipherable code, all numbers and conjunctions. I heard Sparks mumbling to himself, he was so excited over picking it up.

"I was snooping. I've been snooping all the time. I came on this trip partly to get away from Dewey Saunders and partly to find out what this precious uncle of mine was up to. Now that I'm on the point of finding out, I'm a little bit afraid."

"What of?"

"Mostly of Dewey—and a little bit of that stuffed shirt of an Uncle Ben. I didn't know he had his fingers in any of Dewey's pies. The mere fact that they're working together complicates matters horribly for me."

"If you'd talk plain English instead of this mystery stuff," Johnny replied irritably, "maybe I'd know where we were

at, and what to do. I might be able to figure out something. If you know what you're talking about you must have *some* idea about what this crowd has up its sleeve. If it's something crooked——"

"It's bound to be something crooked," she muttered. "But I don't know, I can't even guess what it is. That's why it interests me so. That's why I warn you to keep your eyes and ears open. If I knew exactly what was on the tapis I know ways and means to protect myself and put a very decided spoke in their wheel.

"If I could just get hold of something definite. I can tell you one thing, Mr. Johnny Akhorn. You didn't commend yourself to Dewey Saunders by knocking him senseless. He's very nice to you, but unless he has changed his nature quite recently, he'll try to pay you off for that. He's very keen about this vessel that's talking to him out of the Pacific Ocean. If he should happen to need the *West by North* he might take her."

"I'd like to see him try," Johnny commented dryly.

"And if he did," Jessie whispered plaintively, "he might take me, too."

Johnny looked at her in frank unbelief. He had seen landsmen and seamen romancing, drawing the long bow, just for fun. Maybe this diminutive female, who seemed to enjoy disturbing him, was merely letting a too-lively fancy have free play. The pirate's day was done. Men only dealt in contraband within a fairly elastic law, or were active in petty crookedness. The cutlass and the boarding pike, the treasons, stratagems and spoils of lawlessness at sea seemed too remote for any sane man's consideration.

He laughed softly.

"You're having a pipe dream," said he. "Come down to earth. The idea that Saunders and his crowd might chuck me overside and steal my ship and start in to use her for some mysterious purpose is much too much. They couldn't get away with it. They're not fools. Good Lord, woman! this 'once-aboard-the-lugger-and-the-girl-is-mine' stuff went out of date when steam came in. Come down to earth. What's the use trying to get me all fussed up over nothing?"

"You think I'm just a silly little fool, trying to get you excited, do you?" she asked tensely.

"About that," Johnny admitted. "I don't know one good sound reason why I should take anything you say or do seriously."

"Maybe you will—when it won't do any good," she flung at him. "The wisest thing you could do would be to disable this wireless set, for keeps—unless you know a way to find out what all this aërial conversation is about. *I* know from scraps I've been picking up for weeks that there's a setting of eggs in a basket that has to be hatched in the dark. People like Ben Allen and Dewey Saunders, and that hawk-faced Helby and these precious apaches, Gentry and Gage, aren't up here for their health.

"Losing the *Fafnir* has upset their apple cart properly. Something they want to do requires a fast, able, roomy boat. And it isn't something they can charter a boat for. This is a pretty lonely spot. You can't whistle for a policeman around the corner. Don't be a stiff-necked optimist, Johnny. Watch your step."

She left him with that, and despite his incredulity the rather angry earnestness of her last sentences impressed Johnny. But the impression soon faded. Anything he could think of in the way of illegal but profitable undertakings which involved stealing a yacht in those waters was too melodramatic for serious thought. He concluded that Jess, along with her other alluring qualities, had a touch of hysteria perhaps from worrying over some complication that involved her and her uncle and Dewey. Whereupon he grew a little self-conscious and huffy in his mind, and dismissed the incident—but not the woman—from his mind.

At least he tried. That was all bosh. In a day or two Saunders' friend would come along. The *Fafnir* quartet would say farewell. The *West by North* would cruise by easy stages back through the Inside Passage. She would roll up the

Gulf of Georgia and berth at a dock in Vancouver harbor according to schedule. Jessie Allen would shake hands with a tantalizing smile, say good-by to him, and he would never see her again—nor want to, Johnny thought resentfully.

Then it occurred to him to wonder why Saunders and his three companions, if they were going to inflict themselves as guests on another yacht, didn't have the *West by North* stop at Alert Bay and ship home their paid hands. Why the devil did they bring along to Sentinel Island such impedimenta as a Chinese cook, an engineer, and a hard-boiled egg like Joe McNaughton?

Under the circumstances their action was quite illogical. It troubled Johnny a little, until he decided that what Saunders did with his crew was Saunders' own private affair. Johnny Akhorn thoroughly believed in letting other people mind their own business.

FOR the next twenty-four hours Johnny simply killed time. He read, curled up on the lounge berth in the wheelhouse. He talked to his engineer, a worthy but saturnine man who had no ideas outside of internal-combustion motors, their design, operation, and care. He watched with some amusement the sudden exaggeration of the cook's ego, now that he had Saunders' Chinaman as his henchman in the galley. He paced the forward deck, wishing the *Sho-gun* would blow in out of the vapor—for the fog still shut them in. Sentinel Island was for them the visible universe. Elsewhere the sea ran out to merge with fog that rolled and shifted and swirled like heavy smoke.

That night Johnny sat up fairly late. He walked the deck before the pilot house, on planks slippery with condensation out of that clammy atmosphere. Aft, under the big awning there was music and dancing and laughter. He hadn't seen Jessie Allen nearer than the length of the deck that day. He felt lonely, depressed, impatient with life in general as well as this special, monotonous phase of living.

"Man might as well be in the old men's home as skipper of a pleasure yacht," he muttered to himself. "Drive me crazy, this would, in a couple of seasons."

Before he turned in Johnny paid a visit to the galley. That was his nightly habit, born of long tricks on coasting vessels, where the cook always set out a night lunch for the men on watch. Johnny had instituted this same custom on the *West by North*. He was a regular patron of the buffet lunch before he turned in. A sandwich, a piece of cake, or whatever was provided, served him as a pipe or cigar at bedtime serves other men.

He ate and went below. His quarters were in a small stateroom apart from the forecastle. Johnny sat down on his berth. There was a sound of regular breathing with intermittent snores up forward where the *Fafnir's* crew was mixed with his own. He felt himself grow drowsy. He yawned, stretched his arms.

"By the signs I better turn in," he thought to himself.

The next thing that impinged upon his consciousness was an amazing brightness in his eyes. He sat up, gazed about him in sheer bewilderment. He was still fully dressed. He wasn't in his berth. He wasn't even aboard the yacht. The brightness was the morning sun shooting golden spears from the far blue summit of the Coast Range.

The fog was gone. So was the *West by North*. Johnny Akhorn was tempted to pinch himself in the proverbial manner to see if he were not dreaming. But the wide stretch of the sea between the beach at his feet and the rugged headland of Cape Scott, the silence and emptiness of the island at his back, were too definite, too real to be any part of an illusion.

He was there on the shore of the little bay on Sentinel Island. And his ship was gone.

He rose to his feet. His gaze, turning questioningly this way and that, fell on a couple of goods boxes with a sheet of canvas spread on top. He turned back the canvas. The boxes contained a variety of foods, canned and otherwise. A slip of penciled paper rested on one of the tins.

"Make yourself comfortable. The *West by North* will be back in two weeks or less."

Captain Johnny Akhorn crumpled the paper in his hand and breathed a fervent deep-sea oath.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM THE SEA.

THE absurdity of swearing into empty space choked Johnny's profanity but did not allay his impotent rage. He looked down at the food and bedding, across at the mainland, blue on the horizon, at Vancouver Island standing in bold contours against the morning sky.

Down the seaway between him and those far headlands ships did pass, but never within miles of Sentinel Island. It was off the coasting-steamer track. Once in a blue moon some deep-sea fisherman might haul into the lee of Sentinel. Weeks could go by without sight of a sail or the smoke pennant from a funnel.

To cross that thirty miles of open water a man needed a stanch boat to embark on. Any craft he could devise without tools would be the equivalent of suicide. He was properly marooned. He could build a signal fire and wait: nothing more.

All this flashed through Johnny's mind. Then he set out—as probably every mariner has done since the first castaway—to stride along the beach, hoping against certainty for some way out of his plight.

Three hundred yards along he climbed over a ledge at the end of the bay and found Bob Gentry sitting on his haunches on the beach, his head in his hands. A little beyond Gentry, on some dry moss under a leaning tree, two figures huddled under an outspread overcoat.

Johnny's heart jumped. The thing assumed different proportions. He wondered if Jess was one of those figures—if Dewey, McNaughton, et al., had made a clean sweep of the entire *West by North* party and crew. Mentally Johnny was prepared for anything now. But he didn't stand to reflect on this. He hopped off the ledge and as Gentry started at the thud of his feet Johnny demanded:

"What happened?"

Gentry looked at him blankly. His tone was peevish when he answered:

"How the hell do I know? Where did *you* come from? Where's the yacht—and how did we get *here?*"

"Don't you know how you got here?" Johnny asked.

"Would I be asking if I did?" Gentry snarled. "Damn it! I woke up here a few minutes ago. The girls haven't come out of it yet. What's been pulled off? That's what I want to know. I feel as if I'd been doped."

So did Johnny when he was reminded—although he had only a theoretical knowledge of "dope."

"I wonder what's the idea?" he said presently.

"Search me," Gentry growled. "Have you any idea who would stick us ashore on a desert island, and why?"

Johnny shook his head.

"We're here, that's all I know," he said. "I guess we better look around and see if there's any more of the crowd."

He cast a look at the sleeping girls.

"I shook 'em," Gentry caught his glance. "They're dead to the world. I guess they'll come out of it after a while. What the deuce are we going to do?"

"Don't know," Johnny answered laconically. "Figure something, maybe, by and by."

"We'll have to figure on eating, won't we?" Gentry inquired. "Unless that yacht turns up right away."

"She'll be back in two weeks," Johnny told him calmly. "Somebody left me a note to that effect."

"Two weeks!" Gentry echoed. "Good Lord! What'll we live on for two weeks?"

"They left grub and blankets," Johnny said.

Gentry brightened perceptibly.

"Oh, well," said he, "I don't get the idea, but so long as we don't have to live on clams and seaweed——"

"I'm going alongshore to have a look-

see," Johnny declared. "You better stay here. These girls will probably throw a fit when they wake up."

"All right," Gentry agreed. "I don't feel much like hiking anyway."

Johnny left the bay and the beach behind, crossed the northern end of the island, traversed the western shore where the ocean rollers broke thundering in lines of white foam. He completely encircled the island in less than an hour, no wiser for his pains, with no light on his problem. There was no sign of habitation, no life on the island save the gulls and the shore birds, himself and Bob Gentry and the two girls.

He found this trio investigating the food boxes on his return. He told them briefly where he had been, what the situation was, and the outlook. The language those two young women used rather startled Johnny. They grew more subdued in their expressions when their mouths were filled with food. They were as much in the dark as he. Not one of them voiced any theory whatsoever as to why they had been set ashore.

They looked across at the blue loom of Vancouver Island and asked Johnny petulantly how they were going to get home. And Johnny, because he was smarting under the loss of his ship after he had been warned that he might lose her, tartly replied that they knew the way as well as he. Whereupon Betty Marr smiled and told him not to be an old bear and Ellen pertly observed that since she had to be marooned on a desert island she was glad there was a man around—and showed her fine white teeth at Gentry when she said it.

Gentry said very little about the fix they were in. During the rest of that day Johnny found time to wonder at the philosophic calm exhibited by that capable youth.

Johnny was neither calm nor philosophic. He boiled within. He was responsible for his command and he had let a gang of pirates appropriate his vessel. How could he go back to his employer with such a tale—if the *West by North* were beached or burned or taken by customs or revenue officers in some unlawful venture?

No, Johnny, brooding on a log in the sun, was anything but calm. Still he was keen enough to wonder about Gentry's attitude. Gentry *was* capable. When they had thoroughly canvassed the situation and talked it out they had finished a pick-up breakfast. Then Gentry observed that since they were and might be there for some time they had better make themselves comfortable. It might rain, he observed, cocking a weather eye aloft. He proceeded to hunt driftwood along the beach, slabs, pieces of board. Out of these he fashioned a lean-to shelter that would keep them and their food dry. He portioned out the blankets, one pair each.

The more Johnny observed Mr. Robert Gentry the more sure he became that Gentry knew a little more about this episode than he would tell. The everlasting why nagged at Johnny. It was rather peculiar, he decided, that they would put a sleeping man ashore—and leave him armed.

Johnny Akhorn had the trained seaman's faculty of observing detail. The bulge under Gentry's left armpit, showing under his shirt as he stooped about the fire and about his work, spelled "revolver" to Johnny. He had carried a gun strapped under his left arm himself, once upon a time.

He had another worry that he tried to keep out of his mind, but which didn't make him kindly toward the idea that this was something of a lark—as Betty and Ellen finally agreed. His crew was able to look out for itself, singly or collectively. But the idea of Jessie Allen alone on the *West by North* with Dewey Saunders was not exactly a pleasing one.

He tried to tell himself that if she was there she wanted to be. When he took that tack with himself he would uneasily recall the trace of apprehension in her tone when she said: "If he takes the ship he might take me, too."

Evidently he had. Johnny chalked up another item on the debit score against the *Fafnir's* crew, and Mr. B. Jessop Allen,

whose intimate connection with Dewey Saunders had got him into this mess.

All that day Johnny moped about, racking his brain in useless speculation. He watched the sun go down, helped to cook supper and ate in comparative silence, being intermittently chaffed by Betty Marr for his lack of spirits in such good company. Dusk fell. Johnny set to and built a great fire on the beach against Gentry's protest that there was no use burning all the dry wood in sight—they might need it to cook with.

"Maybe you figure on staying here a long time," Johnny said pointedly. "I don't." Gentry said no more about wasting wood.

Above them the arched sky gleamed with stars. The dirge of the ground swell lifted across the island. Ellen drew closer to Gentry. He put out his hand invitingly and she cuddled her head down in his lap. Johnny got up and found himself a log on the beach, sat there gazing moodily offshore. Presently Betty Marr joined him.

"Three's a crowd at the fire now," she pouted. "Are you really as sore on life as you seem, Captain John Akhorn? Couldn't a fellow cheer you up?"

A fellow couldn't, it seemed. Johnny was in certain respects a singularly one-ideaed young man. With his mind full of his stolen ship and Jessie Allen, even so undeniably attractive a girl as Betty Marr didn't stir him by manifest complaisance. In fact, for some inscrutable reason, Betty's dead set at him only made him wary. He talked little and said less. And finally the girl, with a self-conscious little laugh, left him to his own thoughts.

JOHNNY kept to his log for a long time. Time grew meaningless to him in his self-communing. He didn't think about the hour, even when he went back to the fire to find the castaways had gone to bed.

His own blanket was folded by the dying embers. But sleep was far from him. He squatted on his heels for a while staring into the red coals. Then he wandered, restless in mind and body, northward to the ledge that marked the end of the beach and sat there to watch a fat white moon slide up from behind the Coast Range and lay a band of silver across the sea.

Brooding in the night, his eyes longingly on the moon path, he let the minutes slip past unheeded. He didn't know how long he sat like that; he didn't care; hours didn't count. Time was nothing to him while his brows puckered in thought, and his eyes followed the undulations of the ground swell down the highway of the moon.

Suddenly, far out, he saw something lift momentarily, vanish in a hollow, lift again on a smooth crest. Johnny straightened up. His first inclination was to whoop; his afterthought to keep silence. For his second glimpse of that dim object told him it was a boat, a small boat, with a bit of canvas spread to catch the faint offshore airs.

He looked at his watch—two a. m. He had been keeping lonely vigil four hours. He hadn't been conscious of praying, but this did seem like an answer to prayer.

He waited what seemed an age. The boat came on so slowly. Only the faintest breath of wind stirred and that only in fitful puffs. As the small craft drew up he could see the listless flap of the canvas; he could see the flash of wet oar blades rising and falling in the hands of a solitary figure.

It drew near enough at length for Johnny to see that it was a very small boat indeed to come out of that waste of open water—a broad-beamed tender not over fourteen feet long.

A hundred yards off the beach the oarsman rested on his blades. Johnny had the uneasy sense of a moment of indecision about landing. And the fellow *must* land. By hook or by crook, he, Johnny Akhorn, must get that boat. In another minute Johnny would have been in the water swimming out. But the oars dipped again. Slowly the little boat nosed in to the sand a few yards from where Johnny stood.

The moonlight was like bleached sunshine. He could see quite plainly. And he stood still for a moment, his heart thumping out of all reason. For the boat

was the *West by North's* power dinghy. The rower who had come down the moon path across a chancy stretch of open sea and sat now on the midship thwart, a diminutive figure peering fearfully about as if looking for some one, yet fearing to call, was Jessie Allen.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLEAR.

FOR all her apparent weariness, Jessie was set on a hair trigger of alarm. When Johnny moved and spoke she lunged instantly on the oars. The boat which rested its forefoot lightly on the beach slid back into deep water.

"Jess," he called softly. "Come back. It's me—Johnny."

She held the blades poised until he came down to the water's edge where with the moonlight full on him she could see his face. Then she shoved in.

"Where are the others?" she asked in a whisper.

Johnny pointed.

"Get in," she said. "Let's get away from here—around the point where he can't see the boat."

"He?"

"Gentry," she answered briefly—and Johnny stepped aboard.

She let him take the oars. As he rowed she huddled in a heap on the bottom boards. She laid her arms along the gunwale, rested her head on them. When Johnny beached the tender in a small notch of a cove far past the beach and bay, but still short of the open westerly side of Sentinel, Jessie didn't stir. She was asleep. He drew the boat up, made the painter fast to a bough, and she still slept.

Johnny stared down at her with strangely mixed emotions. He was eager to know, to ask questions and have them answered. But he knew exhaustion when he saw it.

How far had she come? How long had she been afloat in that cockleshell, alone on the open sea? How had she found her way in the night to Sentinel Island without chart or compass? Why was she afraid of Gentry? Why had she come at all?

He gathered her up in his sturdy arms, carried her to a level spot in the dark shadow cast by overhanging trees. She stirred a little to grasp him, to snuggle against him like a small tired child. When he laid her down one hand groped for him, for something, in her sleep. He put his coat over her.

The night was warm. He sat there in his shirt sleeves, her dark head pillowed on his knees. Her sleep was troubled. Once or twice she muttered. Sometimes her round, elfin face would darken and her lips twist. Once she opened her eyes wide to stare with the unseeing gaze of the somnambulist and said very slowly, emphatically: "No. Not ever. Isn't that plain enough? Why, I'd as soon be dead —dead."

Johnny looked at his watch from time to time. He was growing more uneasy. Finally, when daybreak was not far distant, he shook her gently. She opened her eyes, lay gazing up into his face, fully awake.

"How did you manage to get here?" he asked. "Where's the yacht? And——"

"And everything," she interrupted in that mocking, tantalizing tone Johnny knew so well.

"I came back for you," she said presently. "I don't know where the *West by North* is now, but I have an idea where she will be by and by. Let's get away from here, Johnny. You should have gone at once instead of letting me sleep. I was so near all in I couldn't think straight. I went to pieces when you got in the boat."

"How long were you on the way?"

"Since an hour or so before daylight yesterday morning. I was in the fog for a long time. I thought I'd never get here. I rowed nearly all night."

"Anything to eat?"

She shook her head.

"I had water. Went ashore and filled a pail just inside Cape Scott. I wasn't hungry. Too excited, I guess. I'm not very hungry now."

"You will be. I'll have to get some grub," Johnny said. "And what about these people here?"

"I wouldn't chance it," Jess murmured. "We should be able to reach Vancouver Island by night. There must be camps where we can get food. Let's get away right now, Johnny. Gentry was left here to see you didn't get away. Ellen is his girl. Betty Marr, I think, only stayed to make the play strong; besides they're not wanting her aboard. They're hard boiled, those three. Come on. Never mind food. Let's be on our way."

Johnny hesitated. He knew the chances better than she did. They might have to battle a capricious offshore wind. They might be blown to sea. An open boat with neither food nor shelter! They might weather days of storm but they could not live on air and half a pail of fresh water.

Yet he recalled the bulge of the pistol under Gentry's armpit. If Gentry was there primarily to see that no one left Sentinel Island until the *Fafnir* crowd had effected whatever undertaking they were bent on, then he had small chance to cope with an armed man. Gentry would probably use his gun and compel Johnny to stand aside while he smashed the boat, if he discovered them there.

And just as that reflection took form in Johnny's mind, Gentry himself stepped out of the bush, his gun leveled on them.

"Keep still, skipper," he ordered curtly.

Gentry grinned amiably from a distance of a few feet.

"Hello, little 'Sunshine,'" he greeted. "How come you butting in on our party? Betty won't like it. Didn't Dewey treat you right?"

Jess didn't answer.

"Were you fixing to take the captain away?" Gentry drawled. "I guess we couldn't all go away in that little boat, so we'd better all stay here. I'll set her adrift so there won't be any temptation for any of us to go to sea. Untie that rope, skip."

Johnny stood still, dumbly stubborn with something akin to murder in his heart. Gentry laughed.

"Oh, all right," said he. "I can do it myself. I don't want to crowd you, Captain John. But don't forget one thing. You're not going away from here for a while. If you get gay, I'll bump you off. See? You get me?"

He thrust out his jaw at Johnny—not with any malice, but with a cold-blooded determination that was more convincing than any amount of bluster.

Then with his gun still covering Johnny he untied the painter, took hold of the bow and thrust the boat off the beach, gave it a quick shove that sent it sliding free.

Johnny Akhorn, helpless under that pistol, stood watching his only chance of escape drift out to where the tidal flow would seize and carry it derelict upon those wide waters. Beside him the girl stood mute, hands clenched, while Gentry clear limned in the moonlight looked at them both with a contemptuous smile.

Something seemed to crack in Johnny's breast. He wasn't a foolhardy man; he had never been given to heroic stunts. But he had to do *something*. And what he did was suddenly to launch himself headfirst at Gentry's knees, diving under the muzzle of the automatic.

For a man who had never played football Johnny made a beautiful tackle. He was an exceedingly active young man; he was desperate; he weighed probably a hundred and seventy and it was all pliant muscle and springy bone. He brought his man to earth headlong. The crooked forefinger didn't even convulsively draw the trigger. And Johnny clawed for that gun hand as he had never clawed for a flying rope end in a gale.

He got it, too; doubled Gentry's arm up, wrenched the gun out of his hand. He struck Gentry once across the head with the weapon as he struggled like a wild cat and a second time for good measure; whereupon Gentry ceased to be a factor in the struggle.

"He'll be good for a while," Johnny panted. "Can you use an automatic?"

Jess nodded, held out her hand. He gave her the pistol, cocked.

"Keep a few feet away from him and

plug him if he lifts a finger," Johnny commanded.

With that he plunged boots and all into the sea. Already the tender was forty yards offshore, setting slowly out on a current. In a few strokes Johnny reached her, hauled himself inboard over the stern, shipped oars and rowed her back.

Gentry still sprawled on the sloping ground. Johnny dragged him well above high-tide mark, felt of his heart. There was a flutter there. Gentry breathed.

"I don't think I cracked his skull, and if I did it doesn't matter," Johnny said. "He's tough and he'll come out of it. Hop in!"

Jess obeyed. Johnny put the automatic in his pocket.

"I guess we've got the top hand now," he observed. "We'll get grub and my blanket and be on our way."

In less than twenty minutes they were clear. There hadn't been a move or sound from the lean-to when Johnny raided the camp for supplies. Now he pulled steadily on the oars. There was no air to fill the little sail. The ground swell rolled in long slow billows, two hundred feet from crest to crest, cradling them as gently as a mother sways a babe in her arms.

Sentinel lay behind them a dark blot in a silver sea, the only solid bit of the universe in a waste of water spreading away under a moon-shot, star-speckled sky. But Johnny knew that dawn would show Vancouver Island and the farther Coast Range faint and blue over their bow—unless the Queen Charlotte fog shut down on them.

He rested on his oars at last.

"Now, old scout," he said cheerfully, "what about it? What happened? What became of my crew? I'm bursting to know."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PERILOUS PASSAGE.

"THERE really isn't much to tell." Jessie rested her chin in her palms. "You were either knocked out or doped, I suppose——"

"The only way I could have been doped was from a shot of something in the night lunch," Johnny remarked. "I've wondered about that. Certainly nobody tapped me on the bean."

"I had gone to bed in the stateroom I shared with Betty Marr," Jess continued. "Betty sat up reading a magazine. I fell asleep. After a while I woke up. Betty was gone, and the light still burning. I didn't think anything of that, but when I heard quite a commotion on deck, feet running back and forth, and more or less talk, I slipped on a dressing gown to go up and see what the excitement was.

"You know I'd been uneasy, expecting almost anything to happen. Well, I couldn't get out. The door was locked. I called. In fact I made quite a fuss. All the satisfaction I got was to be told gruffly to shut up. It was impossible to get out. The door was too strong for me to break down. But the porthole in my stateroom faced on the beach and I saw them lug you down the gangway into the boat. I saw them put in the food and the blankets.

"Betty and Ellen were laughing, so I suppose they were in on the play—how much they know, of course I can't tell, because I don't know much myself yet. The fog was very thick. I could hardly see the island. Presently the tender came back.

"I could feel the main engine start. After a while the anchor hoist rumbled. She began to lift and fall and I knew we were under way somewhere."

She stopped.

"Then what?" Johnny prompted.

"Then Dewey came down and unlocked the door. I warned you, didn't I, Johnny Akhorn, that he might take your ship and that if he did he might take me, too?"

"Well?" Johnny muttered.

"You better row, hadn't you?" she suggested. "You can listen as well."

"Go on. What next?" Johnny demanded—but he gave way with the oars.

"Well, I suppose he thought he had me," Jess continued evenly, "and he seemed quite pleased with himself. He gave me to understand that I had fooled around long enough and that as soon as he had attended to some very important

business that would put us all on Easy Street he would attend to me—tame me properly, I believe he said."

She laughed quietly, reminiscently.

"I wonder why men always have to tell women what they're going to do to 'em?" she said scornfully. "Fools!"

"Don't lump all men together that way," Johnny growled.

"I don't include you," she said quickly, "or I wouldn't be here."

"Anyway," she sent on, "he left the door unlocked after he'd made his little boast about having the lugger and girl too. I dressed and went on deck. I'm not stupid, Johnny, even if I often seem a giddy goat. I knew something desperate was on. I was in a pretty desperate personal fix myself, but I've known Dewey Saunders a long time and I thought I could handle him if it came to a pinch. But I did want to know where we were headed, what they were up to before I quitted ship.

"You see," she explained, "I had made up my mind that I was going to get away and sound an alarm that would trap them all, if I had to swim for it. And I had to get my bearings first.

"They had everything running on schedule. Sparks was flinging out signals. The *Fafnir* engineer was in charge below. Your crew was penned in forward, with Riggs standing guard. The chink was getting coffee and biscuits in the galley. McNaughton steered.

"I went into the wheelhouse and made myself nice to him—the old pirate! So I got the course and looked it up on the chart without him realizing what I was up to. Dewey was in the deck saloon reasoning with that old stuffed shirt of an uncle of mine, who seemed almost hysterical. He was simply scared stiff at the high-handed way Dewey's crowd had taken over the yacht. It wasn't the sort of thing a pseudorespectable broker from Los Angeles wanted to be involved in. I think Uncle Ben has been mixed up in shady deals before now—but always on the safe side—with everything fixed for his own protection, and the other fellow taking the long chances.

"Anyway the yacht was headed due west, straight out to sea. Did you know there was another small island about an hour's run west of Sentinel?"

"Yes. End of Land, they call it. About ten acres of low rocky ground with a few trees and a spring of water. You can see it from Sentinel on an extra clear day."

"That's where they put off your crew. Marooned 'em with a box of grub. It was like a cheap melodrama—they put on handkerchief masks before they drove your three men out into the boat and ashore. Then the *West by North* doubled back, ran for Cape Scott, rounded it, ran alongshore for a few miles, groped through that dense fog into a bay and dropped anchor. I had to guess the location from her time and course and their talk, and what I could gather from the chart. That was all I had to go by—as a point of departure.

"They were cursing the fog, Dewey and McNaughton and Helby. They were expecting a ship from offshore and reckoning her chance of making that bay in the thick weather. They were in touch with her all the time, of course. And while they were talking—it was about an hour of daybreak—a steam whistle sounded. They whistled back. Immediately there was a discussion as to whether they should go out to meet her or have her come in. Dewey said she had to come in—they couldn't lie alongside her in the ground swell that ran outside the bay. They decided finally—with the whistles signaling back and forth—to put out in the power tender and board her.

"So they lowered away. In the dark and that fog and the excitement that took hold of them they didn't pay much attention to me, and I was careful to keep out of the way. You see, a man may be perfectly mad about a woman, Johnny—but when his material interests get really important the woman becomes merely incidental."

"That works both ways," Johnny observed. "It strikes me that it would take a good deal of a man to be much more than a mere incident in your young life."

"Perhaps. And that's just as well for me, I guess," she replied cheerfully. "I'd have been in an insane asylum long ago if I'd taken men seriously. Anyway, there was the tender at the foot of the gangway. Some one had started the motor. It purred away, running idle.

"I'd been nursing one sort of scheme in my mind. I was bound to get off that yacht as soon as possible. I was more afraid of Dewey than of the sea or that wild, unsettled country around Cape Scott. I'd intended to slip over the side some time before daybreak, swim ashore, and trust to luck getting somewhere on foot. I'd picked up a little pocket compass in the saloon. I had matches in a waterproof case, and I knew where there was a little belt ax I could take when I was ready.

"And then for a minute they were all clear of the gangway. There was the tender. A lot of possibilities flash through your mind in a second. I slipped out of the wheelhouse, ran down the gangway, cast off the line and shoved clear.

"It was thick as mud in that bay. You couldn't see a boat length. Before you could count five I was out of sight of the yacht. I put the clutch in and headed for the mouth, running by the direction of the steamer's whistle from outside.

"For a few seconds I could hear 'em shouting and cursing when they missed the tender. I doubted if they could hear the little engine running; it *is* very quiet. Anyway, I opened up the throttle and let her zip. In a minute I was outside the bay, out of hearing, sliding up and down among those long, slow swells. And I headed for Sentinel, steering a course by the little compass. I was scared, but I was clear of that mess.

"I wasn't very far out of the bay when I almost ran slap into a ship—the ship they were looking for, I suppose. I heard her give a short blast. It sounded away off. Next thing her bow was right on top of me, looming up like a small cliff. She was barely moving. No noise but the ripple of a little wash.

"I shaved her so close I could see the rivet heads in her plating—a steel tramp —not very big as tramp steamers go—dirty as sin. The fog wasn't so thick out there. It was sort of luminous from that big moon. I got away from there quick; dodged off to one side. I don't think they could make out the boat from the bridge. They might have heard the motor. I don't know. It didn't matter."

"You couldn't make out her name, I suppose?" Johnny asked. He was deeply interested, alert to every word.

"Yes. *Albacore,* of Hongkong."

She paused to look up at the bright moon, turned her head to gaze eastward where a faint lightness began to show.

"Day broke eventually. I found myself, in the thinning fog, not very far offshore, abreast of what I took to be Cape Scott. I was thirsty, and I thought I'd better get some water in case I was afloat a long time. Besides, I didn't want to get too far offshore if that fog was going to clear. If they were to cruise around looking for me, I could take to the woods.

"After I'd half filled a pail that was in the boat, I started again. The sun came out strong. The fog cleared altogether. I could see for miles, and there was no yacht in sight, so I decided to make straight for here. The island showed just a little smudge on the sky line. I figured that with the motor I could reach it in four or five hours.

"Somehow, by that time I wasn't afraid of being followed. I felt sure that steamer was much more important to Dewey than I was. He expected big things in connection with that tramp. They all did. You could tell it in their talk.

"So I barged out on the briny deep, all lit up over this scrape I had got into and was getting out of so nicely. I felt quite like a little heroine. And then the darned engine stopped!

"I tried the starter. It turned her over, but she wouldn't fire. The spark was all right. Tried the tank. Out of gas. Nothing I could do about that. Nothing but the oars for it. I rowed and rowed. Didn't seem to get anywhere. What wind there was blew against me. I couldn't

seem to make headway—you never do seem to get anywhere rowing if you're a long way from shore.

"My hands got sore. My arms got tired. I began to be scared, really. I kept going more or less all day. It got dark. At dusk it seemed to me I was a little nearer, but not much. I kept on rowing. Then when the moon came up the breeze came in little puffs offshore. I got the sail up. I got an occasional glimpse of a light that I took for your fire on Sentinel.

"I couldn't see Sentinel, of course. All I could do was to sail in its general direction. After a while I couldn't see the fire glow. I was afraid that measly little compass was playing me tricks. I was afraid I'd miss the island altogether. I was afraid the wind might get strong and blow me out to seat. Ugh! It wasn't nice at all, Johnny, old scout.

"And when I'd sailed and sailed forever, it seemed, I finally got sight of Sentinel Island, just a far-off dark patch. The breeze died away to nothing. I had to row and row. That's all, I guess. I hardly knew whether I was on foot or on horseback when I shoved in on the beach. The one thing I feared was that Gentry would see the boat before you did. I knew he was dangerous."

SHE sat silent, looking eastward to the growing light. The little boat rose and ran briefly on each smooth crest, sank gently into each green hollow.

"Isn't it lovely—now—away over there?" Jessie murmured.

But Johnny Akhorn wasn't in a mood to dwell on the beauties of dawn at sea, the play of changing light, the delicate tintings of a morning sky. His mind turned earnestly on practical matters. He bent to his oars, revolving several queries in his mind. For one thing he wondered if the dawn wind would be offshore or out of the west; he felt wind, with that curious intuition which is sometimes bestowed upon fishermen and coastwise sailors. For another—he looked at the diminutive person staring into the dawn and wondered wherein resided her resources of courage, of endurance.

"Why did you take a chance crossing to Sentinel?" he demanded. "You could have hugged Vancouver Island up to Goletas Channel much more safely. You could have found a logging camp or a fisherman, and notified the provincial police that way. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Of course. But I wanted you off Sentinel Island, away from Bob Gentry. The *West by North* is your ship. It seemed to me you'd be anxious for the first whack at them. You first—then the provincial constables. It will take all the wits available to nail these crooks and put them where they belong. I won't rest till that's done."

There was an inflexible note in her voice, a settled determination when she said that.

"I wonder where they are now?" Johnny speculated.

"I don't know precisely," Jess answered. "I think I know where they're headed."

"Where?"

"Hidden Bay."

"Good Lord!"

Johnny wasn't stupid.

"They bought my place there. Was that why they were willing to pay a fancy price? So they would have a legal right to use it for some illegal purpose, as a base for some crooked operation?"

"I think so," Jess answered reflectively. "Although I'm only guessing, because I don't know what they're up to yet. I know they bought it. I overheard that discussed pretty thoroughly. Uncle Ben put up the money. Dewey said it was just what they needed as a blind. McNaughton had advised getting hold of the Barrett place before the *Fafnir* got there. He seemed to know a lot about Hidden Bay."

"He does," Johnny informed her grimly. "He ought to. He was partners with a grand old smuggling party called 'Pirate' Kelly who hung out in Hidden Bay twenty years back. One of their crowd was killed by a party of Chinamen he was running across the line on a fast

launch. Nobody ever plastered Kelly or McNaughton with anything, but they were in on the deal.

"Yes, old Joe knows Hidden Bay and the coast pretty well. Haven't you the least idea what their game is? Dope, chinks, whisky running? And you think they'll head straight for Hidden Bay? Well, it sounds reasonable."

"That was the object—a place for the *Fafnir* to sneak in and out of, or to lie up in. Hidden Bay is pretty isolated—more or less inaccessible on account of the tides through that narrow pass. I never could find out what they were up to, but it was something that required an able, roomy boat. I'd got that pretty firmly in mind from listening in on their talk. That's why, when the *Fafnir* went up in smoke, grabbing the *West by North* seemed a natural sequence. They were aboard her and they were pretty desperate over something."

"They've sure taken a desperate chance," Johnny observed. "They can get twenty years apiece for that. They certainly overreached themselves when they stole an eighty-foot yacht and marooned her crew. They can't get away with that sort of thing."

"They have the nerve to try anything, I think," Jess reflected. "They're crooks. And I hate crooks. I've had experience with crooks. If I can get clear of this bunch, I'll try to give 'em a wide berth hereafter."

"You're clear now," Johnny pointed out.

"I am, yes," she admitted. "But my money isn't. I don't care such an awful lot about stacks of money, but a little is handy—in fact, it's necessary. This money that my father left in trust for me has never done me much good, but the income from it has kept my mother, who is a rather neurotic person with a good many demands in the way of living.

"I think that was the only mistake in judgment my father ever made—leaving that fund in charge of Uncle Ben. I'm quite sure the old false front has got it all, along with the remnant of his own fortune—which was a pretty big one a few years back—in this last gamble, this setting of off-color eggs Dewey Saunders is trying to hatch out.

"I wonder just what is the best way to go about rounding them up?" she asked, after a brief silence.

"Haven't thought much about that," Johnny replied. "We want to get in out of this deep stuff. Once inside the north end of Vancouver Island we'll come across somebody. I'll get the first fisherman or work boat in sight to run us down to Alert Bay. There's a provincial constable there that I know. He's a pretty wise head. Then we can figure out how to locate the *West by North*—and the *Albacore,* of Hongkong."

"I'd like to get Dewey with the goods, whatever they are," she said frowningly. "He's gone bad completely."

"Wasn't he always that?" Johnny asked.

"No," she shook her head pensively. "I don't think so. Still—maybe he was. He seems to be capable of pretty much anything now."

"He sure does," Johnny agreed. "Meantime here comes the westerly."

DAWN had come to full flower while they talked. The heralds of the day had painted the sky every shade from palest pink to ruddy gold, and now the sun stabbed at the sea from behind the distant land with his bright spears.

Far astern a darkening of the waters betokened the coming wind. It ruffled the tops of the swells. It breathed on them gently, a cool breath out of the vast ocean, a breath that presently came in gusty puffs and steadied at last to a breeze that lifted whitecaps here and there. To their tiny craft, running off under a little trysail on a mast no thicker than the shaft of an oar, it was the equivalent of a gale. In an hour that bit of canvas was all she could stand. She ran with a wild swoop before boisterous, high-crested rollers that threatened to fill and swamp her as they lifted and curled and broke with a hiss at her varnished stern.

But she kept afloat. She ran. She carried her little sail bravely. Water came

aboard, in spray, in bucketfuls of solid green. Johnny busied himself at the tiller, the mainsheet, which was but a cord, in his hand. Jessie bailed with a biscuit tin. They looked longingly ahead to the land as they rose on each sea. They saw only heaving green, tipped with white, when the tender labored in the trough.

In the end, with Cape Scott abeam, Johnny had to take sail off her. The wind had freshened. Ebb tide against a westerly sea, the currents that swept around that bold headland, made pressure of sail too dangerous.

He took to the oars.

Shore loomed within a mile; it might as well have been twenty. Surf broke on it with a deep, spaced grumble. In those breakers their little shallop would be thrown about like a bit of driftwood, swamped, capsized, themselves drowned in the undertow. They had to stand on, run before those sharp-topped seas along a forbidding shore. The westerly whistled now.

Cape Scott fell astern. Johnny watched the beach for a break, a jutting point, a rocky islet, anything that offered a lee and a chance to land. But there was no break, no opening, until they came to the bay in which Jess surmised the *West by North* had dropped anchor that foggy night. The mouth of it was a cable wide. In that mouth, from point to point the full width, the swells reared and broke one behind the other. Inside was shelter, the entrance a watery turmoil.

"We've got to chance it," Johnny told the girl. It's freshening every minute outside. We could never get over Nawhitti Bar into Goletas Channel if we lasted it out that far. It'll be fairly smoking on the bar. Hang tight to the boat if she fills or turns over. She'll float even if she goes awash."

Jess nodded. She was rather pale, but her dark eyes glowed with something that was certainly not fear as Johnny headed the tender into this line of breakers, easing her, jockeying her, with the oars.

They took a last soaring run on the crest of a roller. When it broke a smother of foam and spray and water leaped bodily over them, filled the boat to the gunnels. The next one tossed them high, swept them with a furious swooshing and drove them, clinging fast, soaked to the skin, half strangled, through into a dead swell that flattened to a ripple on the inner shores.

And as they looked about, sitting in water to their hips in the swamped tender, a man in sea boots and blue jersey clambered hastily into a skiff floating astern of a chunky gray fishing boat and came rowing toward them with hasty strokes and shouts of encouragement.

CHAPTER X.

ABOARD THE "ALBACORE."

SAUNDERS himself first noted the disappearance of the tender from the foot of the gangway. He barked an oath at Helby, who had made it fast there.

"You careless fool!" he bellowed. "You tied the painter so it came loose. Every time you do anything you make a hash of it. Damn you! get another boat over—quick."

He peered into the darkness, the opacity rendered impenetrable by the fog. In that murk he could hear faintly the thrumming of the small motor.

"She's drifting toward the mouth of the bay," he said and cursed again, commanding them to hurry.

"It *couldn't* come loose," Helby protested, even as he worked to sling another boat out by the davits. "Damn it! I tied that painter with a clove hitch. If it's loose somebody untied it."

Dewey, straining his eyes and ears, started. He knew gas engines inside out. Helby's assertion took on a different color. That faint drumming exhaust suddenly informed him that it was under load, that its speed had accelerated—and that indicated a hand on the throttle.

Even in the few seconds he listened the sound grew more distant. A drifting boat with the engine idling could not draw off so rapidly. He turned, halfway down the gangway to the second boat, already

launched, and darted into the deck saloon. Riggs, Helby, McNaughton, Boorn and Walter Gage were on deck, by the rail and davits. Sparks was at his wireless. The Chinese cook stood in the door of the galley. The engineer was by his machine. Uncle Ben sat by a table in the saloon, his fleshy chin nestled in his palms, brooding darkly. With the deck and after part accounted for, Dewey dived down among the staterooms, looked in each. He came back to Allen.

"Where's Jess?" he demanded harshly.

"She was here a minute ago. I think she went into the pilot house."

"Get busy and find her!" Dewey snarled.

Another minute's search demonstrated that Jess was no longer aboard—and Dewey faced a savage outburst from McNaughton and Helby, to say nothing of the querulous complaint of the girl's uncle.

"Blast you!" Helby roared. "She's away in the tender. The fat's in the fire now. Swell chance of catching her in the dark and this fog. I told you you had no business mixing a woman in this deal. You boob! You infernal idiot! You've been riding me pretty rough, lately, Saunders. If that black-eyed jane upsets our apple cart I'll get you if it's the last thing I do on earth. She's no fool, that girl, and she's dead sore at you. She'll get somewhere, and she'll holler, and then where'll we be? Oh, I could bust your thick head wide open!"

"Forget the girl," McNaughton said flatly. "The *Albacore's* outside. Let's get aboard her and get straightened away. Let the dame go to hell. She don't know enough to hurt us."

"Shut up and do what I say," Saunders faced them down, "or I'll spill some beans myself. Where can she get to? All this end of Vancouver Island is a wilderness. There isn't gas enough in the tender's tank to drive her fifteen miles. We'll pick her up at daybreak."

"And we're to go foolin' around lookin' for a girl with the home stretch in sight, eh?" McNaughton growled. "Not if I know it. Let's get to that ship and be on our way south. I'm in too deep, Saunders, to stand for any foolin' around over a woman. If you do, you 'n' me'll go to the mat."

Dewey laughed scornfully at the threat, at all their threats. He defied them, not so much in words as by his manner, his attitude. And this incipient mutiny died away in growls.

THREE of them got into the tender, Saunders, Helby, and McNaughton. McNaughton carried a dunnage bag and a roll of charts in a fiber case. They drove out into that mist-thickened night where a steam whistle droned at regular intervals. And though they swept—under Dewey's steering—in a few great circles, straining ears and eyes, even Dewey soon realized that it was a waste of time to look for any one or anything in that shroud of fog and darkness—anything save the vessel whose signals guided them at last to her sea-worn side.

A ladder came dangling down in answer to their hail when Saunders laid the tender alongside her rusty plates. She rolled—this *Albacore,* of Hongkong—with a slow, easy swing in the ground swell. A sailor stood forward heaving the lead, calling the fathoms in a singsong voice. The vessel's way was killed, but she drifted with the tide and the slow heave of the sea.

Saunders and McNaughton swarmed up the ladder, McNaughton carrying his chart roll, his bag coming later on a rope sling. A small, fat-cheeked man in a dirty uniform called down to them from the bridge. They climbed. He shook hands with Saunders.

"Hellish thick weather to be inshore," he said curtly. "I don't like this beach combing. Get me a pilot?"

"Here's your man." Dewey waved a hand. "Captain McNaughton, Captain Somers."

"We're rather closer to shore than I like," Captain Somers opined.

"She's all right as she lies," McNaughton assured him. "I can take her into that bay with my eyes shut."

They went into the wheelhouse. A man stood idle by the steering gear, barely outlined in the dimness above the binnacle lamp.

"Did you hear a small motor launch pass in the last few minutes?" Dewey asked.

"Yes. I thought it was you trying to pick me up."

"Never mind that dratted tender," McNaughton said testily. "She's gone. I tell you you might as well try to catch trout with your hands. Let's get under way—about our business."

"Not so fast," Saunders said coolly. "I'm still running this show, Mr. McNaughton. Don't forget that."

"Yeah, you'll run it into the ground, or the bottom of the sea, if this last break is a fair sample," McNaughton returned sullenly.

Dewey thrust his face up close to the older man's.

"You hold up *your* end," he said sharply. "Leave the rest to me. I'm competent to see it through. You'll get your whack if you deliver the goods. If you get to thinking about how much better you could put this through—and fall down——"

He paused suggestively. His tone, his manner, his attitude, constituted a threat. McNaughton didn't answer. He matched glances with Saunders for a second, and turned away with a shrug of his thick shoulders to unroll his charts on a table. The master of the *Albacore* stood with hands plunged in his coat pockets, impassively watching this byplay. Dewey turned to him.

"Have you got my freight handy?" he inquired. "I'll take it now in case of a slip. No use having all the eggs in one basket when it isn't necessary."

"I'll have it slung down to your boat if you say so."

"Do that," Saunders nodded.

The man pressed a button. A figure in blue dungarees flitted in. He spoke to them in the curious singsong language of the Chinese. The idle helmsman was a Chinese. So were the deck hands who had manned the ladder and the sailor slinging the lead. On this weather-beaten tramp only the captain, mate, first and second engineers were Europeans. This small, rotund man who commanded the *Albacore,* of Hongkong, seemed more fluent of speech with his Chinese crew than he did with his visitors.

From a stateroom off the wheelhouse two men presently lugged a square chest wrapped in matting to a set of falls on the boat deck. They slung it deftly and lowered away, Saunders issuing warnings to Helby to be careful, and directions for its stowage amidships.

"McNaughton will take you through," he said to the captain. "He may steer you into some ugly looking places, but that can't be avoided. You can depend on him absolutely as a pilot. You can't enter the bay. We'll meet you outside, though, the minute you signal. It is all arranged. Your papers are in order, of course?"

The captain nodded. Saunders said good-by. He went over the rail. As his foot rested on the top rung a faint commotion broke out below, somewhere in the dark bulk of the ship under hatches, a strange mixture of squeal and whine, nasal, prolonged, in various keys and tones.

Somers jabbered something to the nearest deck hand. The man struck sharply with a bit of wood on the deck, twice, staccato taps. The noise ceased abruptly. Saunders smiled to himself as he paused on the ladder.

"Don't try to get her up to anchorage until we whistle clear," he called to McNaughton on the bridge above.

"All right," McNaughton growled. "See that you're ready when we get there. We may need to make a darned fast transfer."

"We'll be ready for you," Dewey answered. "You can gamble on that."

When Saunders ran up the gangway Uncle Benjamin came to meet him.

"You see anything of Jessie?"

"No!" Dewey snapped. "Get out of the way. Here—you two get on those falls," he motioned Riggs and Boorn, "and be careful. Get a good solid lashing on that

box," he repeated earlier instructions to Helby in the tender.

He shook off the importuning old man until the chest was safe on deck and the tender hoisted to her chocks. Then he gave ear impatiently. Uncle Ben was pale and shaky.

"My God, Dewey!" he groaned. "I can't bear to think of that little girl floating around in that fog. Anything might happen to her. What are you going to do?"

"Get under way," Dewey muttered. He stood running his fingers through a fog-dampened tangle of fair hair. "I've got to. It's hell, but it can't be helped. The darned little spitfire! Things are tightening too fast, Allen. The next forty-eight hours may mean another busted expedition or a hundred thousand clear profit to be divided.

"I *was* a damn fool to keep Jess aboard. I shouldn't have tried to mix love and business. It never works. But I'm not going to be a bigger damn fool and lie around here to hunt her in daylight. No. She'll have to sink or swim on her own."

The old man looked ghastly in the glow of the saloon lights. His face was worried, nervous. His importance, his pomposity, had fallen away like a worn-out garment. He looked what he was, a rather cowed elderly person who had got in deeper than he liked and was very much afraid. And Dewey, a frown on his handsome face, a hard, reckless look in his eyes, stared at him a moment with utter contempt.

"Too late to get cold feet now," he grunted. "I'd give half what I expect to make on this deal to have Jess safe aboard —but I can't waste time looking for her."

"I wish to God I'd never seen you, Dewey Saunders!"

"I'd be considerably ahead if you hadn't," Dewey flung back at him. "You —you old four-flusher!"

He strode out, called orders to the engineer. Helby and young Gage stood by the winch gear. The anchor chain came rumbling in through the hawse pipe. Dewey tramped on the engine-room gong. The screw turned. The yacht gathered speed, cleared the bay, whistling signals as she bore out; and when she stood clear, Dewey laid a course to the entrance of Queen Charlotte Sound, doubling back into the sea lanes down which she had steamed the last, leisurely three weeks.

SOME few days later the tramp steamer *Albacore,* of Hongkong, duly entered quarantine at William Head, on the south end of Vancouver Island. She steamed in through Haro Strait instead of from the seaward end of Juan de Fuca. Her master explained that heavy weather at sea had forced him into northerly latitudes and he had consequently come up the Inside Passage.

When the *Albacore* had got a clean bill of health she proceeded to the port of Vancouver to discharge what was a very small cargo even for so small a ship—eight hundred tons of rice.

It was hardly worth coming across the Pacific with, but perhaps a fair cargo could be picked up for the Orient; freights were no longer what they used to be, her master observed to the shipping agent who handled the shore end of the *Albacore's* affairs.

CHAPTER XI.

PART OF AN EXPLANATION.

THE gray fish boat nosed out of the nameless harbor in the dawn of the day following that afternoon in which the westerly blew Johnny Akhorn and Jessie Allen into its welcome shelter. She was a stanch forty-footer. Forward, a narrow pilot house lifted over engine and steering wheel; amidships a hold with tight, flush hatches; aft a low, short cabin held food lockers, a small galley stove, and two narrow bunks.

In one of these bunks Jess slept the deep slumber of weariness when the launch got under way. She slept through the clank of the incoming anchor chain, the first wheezing turn of the big, slow-speed engine. She sat up suddenly, with a start, only when the small vessel lifted

to the first swell rolling up from the Pribiloffs; lifted high on a crest and swooped into a vast hollow.

Jessie darted a look out the companionway. She could see the fisherman's back through a small window in the wheelhouse. Johnny Akhorn sat on the hatch cover, gripping a stay with one hand, nursing his chin with the other, staring across the gray-green undulations of the Pacific; and she smiled, a queer, wistful sort of smile. Then she slipped on her clothes and came out on deck to sit beside Johnny.

"Well, we're on our way," she remarked.

"Yes, we'll get to Alert Bay some time this afternoon, with any luck," he said.

"Then what?"

"From there I can use the telegraph to set the provincial constabulary in motion. I can make some arrangement to get my crew off End of Land. After that I can make a start at locating the *West by North* and this *Albacore,* of Hongkong," he said. "Also the coasting steamers call at Alert Bay. You can go home from there."

She digested this soberly, crinkling her dark eyebrows, glancing at him now and then in a manner that did not altogether indicate pleasure.

"I don't want to go home," she said at last. "It hasn't so much attraction. I have only the clothes on my back. All my things are aboard the *West by North.* I haven't a cent. And besides, I want to be in at the death. Uncle Ben and Dewey Saunders have something coming for what they've tried to do to me, as well as what they've done to you.

"I don't suppose Uncle Ben has *all* his eggs in this one basket, but even if he has, if I could get to him before the authorities land him in jail I might pry something out of him. He has charge of over thirty thousand dollars that belong to me. I'm not legally entitled to it—only the income—for another two years. He doesn't propose ever to let me have it. If I could get hold of some sort of club to swing on him —— No, I'm certainly not going home—yet."

"I don't see what you can do," Johnny observed. "You can't run around man hunting, with me."

"Why not?" she asked calmly.

"I don't want you to," Johnny said wearily. "You—you——"

He threw out both hands. He couldn't put it into words. His memory was too keen for old hurts.

"I suppose you never will forgive me," the girl said evenly. "Nor ever trust me again. You're quite convinced that I'm nothing more than a flirtatious little featherhead. After all, I didn't do much to you, Johnny. I only went about my business—when I had to."

"If you had business to go about on such short notice, without a word or even a letter of explanation afterward, why did you spend those months playing with me, making me love you, helping me build all sorts of air castles? Was it just for the fun of kicking them down?" he inquired with a touch of bitterness. "You didn't have to do that. You could have passed me up. You could have played around with mother and Kitty, and let me go right along hand logging, fishing, hunting—all the simple little things that satisfied a half-wild twenty-year-old kid like me. But I was the only man handy so you had to have my scalp. Well, you got it. But you can't get it again. Once is plenty."

"What became of your mother and Kitty?" Jess murmured. "I've wanted to ask."

"Mother died of pneumonia the next year. Kitty got married," Johnny told her shortly. "That's why the place went to rack. I couldn't stay there alone. Too much like a graveyard. There was nothing left."

"I didn't much like going," Jess said absently. "Yet it seemed—under the circumstances—the best thing to do. And after I'd got home to what is called civilization I often wished I were back in Hidden Bay again. I wasn't fooling you those days, Johnny. I meant it. Only—only——"

"Tell that to the marines," Johnny snorted. "You blew in smiling. You went away smiling. You came back smil-

ing—after six years. Why, you didn't even know me for a month. Your friend Saunders, who seems to be a pretty thoroughgoing blackguard, came there to get you. He wasn't long turning up when you came on this cruise.

"No, the more I think of you, old girl, the less I think of you. I don't believe you care a whoop about anything or anybody except what you happen to want your own sweet self. And half the time I don't think you quite know what you want—unless it's just an easy life and a variety of men breaking their necks to be nice to you."

"You certainly don't do that little thing," she drawled.

"I did once," Johnny said grimly. "And, looking back, I can see where I must have furnished you with a good deal of amusement. But never again."

"'Methinks thou dost protest too much,'" she said quietly—and Johnny flushed.

"You're really sore at me, Johnny," she continued, "because during that summer you cooked up a very pretty little romance of which you made me the foundation. Those air castles were your own building.

"Think back, Johnny. You're really just as self-centered a person as you accuse me of being. You're very tenacious of an idea, of a feeling, whether it's right or wrong. It didn't seem to occur to you then, and it doesn't now, that a woman might like a man quite a lot and still have something to do, some object in life besides being somebody's darling. Eh, John? Did it ever strike you that I might have dropped out so completely not because I didn't care a whoop, but because I cared maybe too much—and had even then enough worldly experience to make me realize that a pair of headstrong kids like us could as easily go on the rocks as weather the storms of matrimony?

"You weren't a man then, Johnny; you were just a shy, handsome, romantic boy who had never been out of the woods—figuratively speaking. I had chucked quite a few illusions even then. But I'm not quite what you think I am—or what you say you think I am. I can't help it if men find me attractive. That's no crime, is it? I don't quite know why. All I know is that they do get fussed up over me without any effort on my part. You shouldn't blame *me* for that. What is there about me that makes men like me?"

"You fool 'em," Johnny said slowly. He was smarting a little under the implication of her words. "You say things with your eyes that you don't mean. You kid 'em along and stall 'em off until they don't know whether they're going or coming."

"In other words I'm just plain vamp. Oh, Johnny, Johnny!" she remonstrated demurely. "No, there's more to me than that," she went on after a little pause. "And I have a better opinion of you than you have of me.

"I don't think you'd ever cheat. I think you'd be loyal to the bitter end of anything. You wouldn't betray a confidence, nor take an advantage that would put the other fellow in a hole—not if you knew it."

"Thanks," Johnny returned laconically.

"I'm going to tell you something, and I want you to forget it after I've told you," she went on quite casually. "I'm not such an irresponsible as I appear. As a matter of fact, Captain Johnny, I'm a United States secret-service agent. I had been for two years before I came to Hidden Bay that time. Otherwise I shouldn't be here now—I don't think. I don't know, though; I might. But that is why I am so deeply concerned at present."

Johnny stared at her in open amazement.

"Don't you believe me?" she asked sharply.

"I've thought a lot of hard things about you one time and another," he answered slowly. "But I never thought of you as a deliberate liar. I'd take your word for practically anything, Jess."

"Then you can see why I want to be in on this thing, actively, not just passively," she continued. "I have no authority in Canada, yet these are American crooks. They have committed a down-

right crime in Canadian waters, under Canadian law. I have an idea that their real operations will come within the scope of the United States revenue or immigration laws, and I don't want them to have a loophole either side of the line.

"When we get to Alert Bay I can get busy as well as you. I can set a lot of United States border machinery in motion. We might get back your ship and put a full stop to their game—whatever it is—in very short order. I want to be in on this; I must be. I'm on a vacation, but in the service that doesn't count. We don't work by the clock.

"I told you I didn't like crooks. I've seen too much of their handiwork. Even if I didn't have that feeling, I draw a pretty good salary for seeing that crooks don't put over any little profitable deals at the expense of the United States treasury. If I had no personal interest in this bunch, it's still my job to find out if they're trying to put anything over on Uncle Sam. You see why I want to be in on this hunt?"

Johnny nodded. That did give her participation a different air.

The fishing boat gave a sudden heavy lurch. She had cleared the bay and a long point that jutted northward, a point that deflected the tide and lifted rips that could not be avoided. She tossed and tumbled for a minute or two, until she cleared this troubled area. Then the helmsman began to swing ship, picking a smooth space to make his turn. She poised broadside on the top of a great swell, slid at an angle down the green incline into a hollow. When she rose again she was facing east, headed for Goletas Channel, beyond which protected waterways wound east by south to the Gulf of Georgia.

"Did this man mind taking us to Alert Bay?" Jessie asked.

"No. He doesn't care where he goes so long as he gets paid for it."

"I suppose not," Jess commented. Then, with a friendly smile at Johnny, standing over her, his feet spread apart, swaying a little to the roll of the small vessel, she said:

"Let's quit being sentimental and snarling at each other and get down to practical matters. If you'll light a fire in that galley stove I'll cook breakfast."

CHAPTER XII.

PREPARATIONS.

BREAKFAST was cooked and eaten under slight difficulty as to equilibrium. Things wouldn't stay still. There was very little wind but a mighty heave to the sea from the push given by the westerly of the day before. And when in due course the gray fish boat drew up to Goletas Channel she spent a wild twenty minutes crossing Nawhitti Bar. The tide ebbed strongly out of Goletas. It met those incoming ocean swells and made them rear and break in white-topped pyramids.

"This fellow's game, I'll say that for him," Johnny observed when three successive seas sent barrels of the Pacific sweeping across the midship hatches and drove them into the after cabin behind closed doors to keep from being drenched if not actually washed overboard. Once in a smooth spot the fisherman grinned reassuringly at them through his little window.

"Is it really dangerous?" Jess asked.

"Any bad tide rip is more or less dangerous for small vessels," Johnny answered. "This packet is a good sea boat or he wouldn't have tackled Nawhitti Bar when it's like this. She'll go through, only it's going to be darned uncomfortable."

Those tide-troubled waters were soon behind. Once over the bar the narrow length of Goletas opened like a placid river. The fish boat logged off her seven knots hour after hour, finally clearing the island group that formed Goletas Channel. The inner end of Queen Charlotte gave her a gentle, sleep-inducing roll from a quartering sea and a day breeze that helped her speed half a knot. And late in the afternoon she nosed in beside the wharf at Alert Bay.

"Well, you want to use this packet of

mine any more?" the fisherman inquired when his lines were made fast to the dock cleats.

"I think maybe we will," Johnny said. "You stick around for a while, anyway. I'll know before night."

"All right," the man agreed. He cast an eye over his boat and strolled away toward a building labeled "General Store."

"What is going to be your first move, Johnny?" the girl asked.

"Get hold of Harper," Johnny replied. "Then get busy on the wire."

"You know, it strikes me that we stand a better chance if a general alarm is not sounded too soon," Jess said thoughtfully. "We can only guess what they are up to, and one guess is as good as another. It isn't whisky running, because these elaborate plans they've made wouldn't be necessary. The whisky-running crowd has a very simple and direct method of handling their contraband from Canada to the coast States.

"But whatever their game is, I am pretty sure it consists of getting something into the United States by sea. That's why they stole the *West by North.* Using Hidden Bay as a point of departure somewhere on Puget Sound seems the logical destination. Now I can fix it so that every port in the Puget Sound district will be watched for them. If *we* ran straight to Hidden Bay with two or three men we might bump right into them. If they're making trips from there to Puget Sound we could nab them on their first trip back —for whatever they come back for—and it seems reasonable that they wouldn't take the trouble to buy that place of yours if they didn't intend to use it for some little time.

"Now a general order to the provincial police, a report to your owner of what happened, means a leak, publicity. The papers will get hold of it and spread-eagle it as a sensation. Once they knew the trail was hot they'd scuttle the yacht and vanish. We've got to get them while they think they're safe. With you on Sentinel Island, your crew marooned on End of Land, and me supposed to be drifting around the north end of Vancouver Island, they're going to feel reasonably safe for at least a few days. No one would dream that anything was wrong aboard the *West by North* even if she cruised boldly down the coast in broad daylight—not as matters stand. You talk that aspect of it over carefully with your constable."

Johnny reflected on this. He didn't relish reporting the facts to his owner. He wasn't at fault. A yacht captain doesn't reckon on piracy as a thing he must guard against on the Pacific coast. Nevertheless, the prospect of finding the *West by North* and retaking her, even if he had to fight for her, appealed to Johnny far more than sending out distress signals and waiting for the law to recover his ship.

He had Gentry's automatic in his pocket. He would take a chance with Dewey Saunders' crowd anywhere, any time, wherever he found them in possession of his ship. That was how he felt. So that Jessie's suggestion found favor.

"I'll talk it over with Harper if he's here, anyway," said he. "And I'm going to find out, if possible, about this *Albacore.*"

"All right, let's go ashore. I want to get a wire to Seattle," Jess replied. "I do think that we ought to get to Hidden Bay as soon as we can. One or two constables would be plenty. More would be apt to ball things up.

"They're either there—or will come back there—or they've stowed some sort of plunder there and gone to sea. And I'm sure their game, whatever it is, is coastwise and not offshore. My goodness!" she ended ruefully; "I wish I had some clothes. And a bath. This is running light and roughing it with a vengeance, isn't it, Johnny?"

BY six o'clock that evening Jessie, Johnny Akhorn, and Constable Harper of the provincial police sat in consultation on the dock edge. They had before them sundry telegrams. One from Vancouver, a reply to the constable's in-

quiry, was illuminating as far as it went. It read:

Steamer *Albacore* clearing quarantine William Head. Cargo rice. Manifest and clearance proper order. Yacht *West by North* reported making night run Euclataws southbound, date uncertain but within two days. What's up? Wire full particulars. SMITH.

"That's the assistant inspector," Harper grinned. "He's a live wire. Smells something. Anyway, there's track of your yacht. She'll be headed where you thought, eh? What did you get, miss?"

Johnny had nothing because he had seen no reason to duplicate Harper's inquiry—and did not propose to inform his yacht owner of the difficulty he was in until he got a little more light—or possession of his ship. But Jess had a long wire.

"It's in code," she said, "and merely states that a sharp lookout will be kept for any of the men, ashore or afloat. They would rather like to catch them in the act of entering the United States with any sort of contraband. They state that the *West by North* will be returned to Canadian owners without any red tape even if apprehended in American waters."

"We must get on to Hidden Bay," Johnny decided. "How about it, Harper? Can you act with us?"

Harper was a man hunter, both by inclination and training. He liked the game; had been successful at it. He was a terror to thieving beach combers along the coast. No criminal had ever evaded Harper except by leaving the country. When he went after a man—or men—he meant business. He was tireless, crafty, courageous. His eyes sparkled now. This was something big.

"It's out of my district, but that's a mere detail," said he. "The original offense was committed off Cape Scott. Well, you come along to the J. P. and swear to a complaint against these birds, specifying the offense. Then we'll get under way.

"Keep this fisherman on. I know him. He's useful. I'll swear him in. I have my own launch and engineer, who is also a constable. We run all night, see, and pick up another constable at Van Anda, and make Hidden Bay some time to-morrow. That makes five of us. We're enough to take 'em, wherever we find 'em, even if they put up a fight."

"We're plenty—if they're there," Johnny agreed.

"How about you, miss?" Harper turned to Jess. "This is a man's job. Maybe you'd better leave it to us."

"I'm accustomed to men's jobs," Jessie replied coolly. "I might be useful—in a pinch."

"Let's go then," Johnny urged.

"Right-o," said Harper. "Come on with me and get out that complaint."

From the quarters of the local justice of the peace Johnny returned to the fish boat. He had arranged for a mail boat serving Goletas Channel to run out to End of Land and take off his three men. He had written them instructions to proceed to Paden River—and keep their mouths shut until they heard from him.

His fisherman was organized to go anywhere, any time. Harper was taking fuel oil aboard a lean, lead-colored government cruiser, flying the blue ensign astern. They were practically ready to go. And Johnny found Jess sitting in the low after cabin pondering over her telegrams.

"I didn't tell you quite all of it," she said. "My wire to them told them something they were very anxious to know. It seems that the Federal authorities were already quite keen to get hold of McNaughton and Dewey. They are suspected of having stolen that schooner out of San Pedro harbor after she'd been taken into custody by a United States marshal over a month before she turned up in the north. She'd been libeled for some reason, and Dewey couldn't raise bonded security.

"Of course they did steal her from the marshal. She was Dewey's old yacht, the *Lilac Time,* instead of Boorn's property, as they told me. I thought she looked too familiar. I remember her as a black-hulled, topmast schooner. Evidently they needed her and stole her, changed her rig a little, her name to the *Fafnir,* of Newport, R. I., painted her white and sailed

her up here. So the United States has a prior claim, an extraditable claim, against the whole bunch, if they should escape us or the British Columbia police."

"They're certainly a grand bunch of pirates," Johnny grunted. "Here's hoping they're in Hidden Bay when we get there."

"If they aren't, they will be," Jess said hopefully. "There'll be a clew there—something they'll come back for. I have that feeling. And I believe in hunches, Johnny, whether you do or not. I've seen them work out for me too often."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CAVE OF THE BATS.

HIDDEN BAY was a long run for a seven-knot boat. They left Alert Bay between six and seven in the evening. At five in the morning they hauled into Van Anda, a sleepy village on a long island that split the gulf a-twain, to pick up an apple-cheeked Irish constable.

When the midday pennant began to waver from the galley stovepipe the two boats, the lean government cruiser and the tubby fishing craft Johnny had chartered, hauled around the end of that great island which chokes the mouth of Jerome Inlet and slowed down. Johnny had the steering wheel. He nosed the fish boat in among a maze of spray-washed rocks, barren little islets, down narrow passages where streaming kelp warned of unseen shoals. Through a tortuous channel he worked his craft, the police boat's nose hugging his stern, until he came at last to anchor in a snug bight.

A high mountain loomed over them. The shore was a ring of cliffs, with a notch like a window in the middle—out of which poured a waterfall that filled the cove with its murmur and the trees with a mist of spray. The police launch drew alongside.

"I've been around this island plenty," Harper remarked, "but I never got in here before. Takes some navigating, I'll say. What you call this place? Where are we at, anyway?"

"We used to call it Peek-a-boo Cove," Johnny told him. "It has no chart name. We're about eight miles by water from Hidden Bay, but not more than two miles overland. There's a way up past the waterfall, and a blazed line that runs toward the head of the bay. I figured we'd better take our first look in from the blind side. Couple of us ought to take a run over as soon as we eat."

"Right-o," Harper assented.

"I'm coming, too," Jess declared as they ate lunch.

Johnny merely nodded. He would rather not have had her go, but he was sensible enough to keep that to himself. There was a quality of persistence, of determination, about this small person that was beginning to astonish him. And it was a quality he appreciated, perhaps because of its rarity. Men and women in Johnny Akhorn's experience were inclined to be the reverse of steadfast, even in little things.

All the way down the gulf they had talked at intervals. Most of it had been impersonal, detached; a curious contrast to the highly personal, rather emotionally charged atmosphere that always hitherto seemed to generate itself whenever they came together.

Somehow Johnny had got rid of that strange pain, that maddening sense of frustration, that had irked him at intervals ever since Jessie Allen had come into his life. It had seemed to him lately that she had come back merely to revive those old, passionate longings and to mock at them. He knew now that she hadn't. He had been thinking of himself as a more or less important figure in her personal concerns. And she had been thinking mostly of other things, of her job, of her pompous uncle who was a stuffed shirt, a false alarm, ostensibly a broker and a capitalist but in reality a dabbler in shady affairs that offered big profits.

Johnny smarted a little, as a man must when he discovers that he is not the sun in a woman's universe, but only a small, outlying satellite. Still, now, he could accept without rancor the fact that as a

man and a lover he meant a little less than nothing to Jess. He abandoned his ancient grudge. If he meant very little to Jessie Allen in the domain of her emotions, other men, he began to perceive, meant even less. She was too damnably self-sufficient. Only it wasn't a malicious or willful self-sufficiency. She was simply quite sure of herself. Her own feet were stout enough to stand on. She didn't feel the need of a prop, especially a masculine prop.

She appealed to him as a good deal of an enigma; a petite and desirable enigma who might conceivably ask him to kiss her on a moonlight night because she liked him; and who could still quite calmly walk out of his life to follow her own road. And Johnny couldn't understand a woman doing things like that. It made him regard her sometimes, as he did now, with a sort of wistful wonder. She was very close to him, at his elbow, and yet she was very far away in the sense that Johnny desired her to be near.

But none of this made him any the less keen for a sight of the *West by North* and a chance to square accounts with Saunders and company. He was on his own ground now. He assumed leadership as by right, although he put it in the form of a suggestion.

"It strikes me," he said, "that some one should get around to Whispering Pass. Suppose this gang *is* in Hidden Bay with the yacht? The tide is high, will be for some time. She can run that entrance any time for the next two or three hours.

"If we should happen to be spotted prowling around they'll likely run. They aren't fools enough to make a flight of it unless they're cornered. One man with a rifle could stop 'em in that narrow entrance."

"That's reasonable," Harper agreed. "But a police launch making anchor anywhere near the entrance to Hidden Bay would sure look suspicious to them."

"Send O'Connel," Johnny suggested, "around with my fisherman. Leave your engineer to watch the launch here. Fish boats are common as gulls in these waters. You and I and Miss Allen can go across through the woods and take a look-see."

IT was done accordingly. The fisherman and O'Connel chugged away. Each was well armed; both were Irish enough to welcome a scrap.

The other three got ashore. Johnny led the way. It was all familiar ground to him. He skirted the waterfall, bore up a hillside masked by dense thickets, out of which great cedars and rough-barked firs lifted their brown columnar trunks, spreading plumy tops a hundred and fifty feet above for the winds to sigh among.

After weeks afloat with hard decks underfoot, the uneasy shift of the sea, the scream of the gulls and the buffet of the westerly winds, it was pleasant to walk on earth, in soft, carpeting mosses, amid that cool shade and restful silence. In the depths of this virgin forest midsummer heat could not wither the tender green of delicate ferns nor dim the glossy brightness of the low salal.

All Johnny's early love of the hills and woods came back to him with a surge. He gained the summit of a divide and stood drinking in the smells, staring thoughtfully across a far-spread westward basin where the woods lay like a giant's carpet of green plush. About him there rose the sweetish odor of decaying vegetation mingled with a faint resinous smell exuded by the firs. Far beyond, the mainland ranges rose stark and grim, rocky knobs and spires, cliffs and granite pyramids and deep gorges, with here and there a bank of snow or a drifting bit of fleecy cloud. Johnny stared at it. Somehow it pleased him, soothed a vague unrest within him.

Forest and mountain and woodland smells were no great matters to Constable Harper. He glanced about, wiped the sweat off his face and lighted a cigarette. Jessie looked a long time at the distant hills, the glint of the sea showing through the timber. She broke off a bit of cedar, crumpled the green stuff in her hand and sniffed the fragrance. She moved a little

nearer Johnny to look up at him and murmur, unheard by their companion:

"If we weren't hunting big game I'd like to sit on this ridge all evening and just look my fill. Would you? Does this sort of thing"—she made a quick, inclusive gesture—"get you where you live, Johnny?"

He nodded. There was a momentary pang in the admission. He remembered that she used to say things like that. She fitted her moods to her surroundings, always with that spontaneous response to beauty. That was one of the reasons he had liked her so well, why he had missed her so much, why the sore spot had lingered.

From that point they dropped into a valley that ran to a lake out of which flowed the small stream whose outlet to the sea was almost by the threshold of Johnny's old home. In half an hour more they were within gunshot of the place, and Johnny led them through a jungle of fern, huckleberry brush and young cedar to a knob well masked by trees, from whence they could look down on what they wished to see—the full reach of Hidden Bay, the old orchard, the weathered house and tumble-down outbuildings of split cedar.

The bay was empty of what Johnny Akhorn most desired to behold—his ship. But there were other items of interest. The *West by North* had been there. How otherwise would young Gage be on the beach, working with another man at a small, rude float of logs, obviously intended for a boat landing?

Smoke wavered blue from a new stove pipe on the kitchen roof. On a projecting ledge that fell sharp to deep water an elderly Chinese, round cheeked, well dressed, his Celestial eyes shielded behind very Caucasian horn-rimmed glasses, sat fishing for rock cod. All this they gazed upon silently, themselves unseen, every detail of house, shore, men, brought near, magnified by the powerful lenses in Harper's glass.

"There you are," Johnny said at last. "Gage is almost a guarantee that the others will be back. They've got something on here."

"I wonder what?" Harper reflected. "Tain't whisky. Too complicated. Whisky running's simple."

"That fat old Chinaman on the rock could tell us," Jessie put in.

Harper was bending another look on him.

"I thought he looked familiar," he said presently. "I know him now. That's old Quong Lung, a Carral Street chop-suey-joint keeper. I'd say Quong ain't here for his health. Them birds don't take vacations."

"Still, there's no real reason why he shouldn't be here," Johnny hazarded.

"None in the world," Harper agreed. "He belongs in British Columbia. It's a free country. Just the same, old Quong didn't come this far from town just to fish for rock cod. I'm kinda anxious to scout around this place a little more. Sort of get the lay of the land.

"Say, if you had a bunch of contraband stuff and wanted to keep it darned well under cover so you could slip in and out of here and take a load to distribute, where would you cache it, Akhorn? Suppose it was bulky? You ought to know every boulder and gully for miles around this bay."

Johnny looked off to the right. A queer sort of expression flitted over his face. He turned to Jess.

"When you were all ashore together the day the *Fafnir* laid over in Hidden Bay, did you by any chance tell them or show them the Cave of the Bats?"

Something in his look, his tone, perhaps his mere question made a faint flush rise in the girl's cheeks. But she didn't evade Johnny's gaze.

"Yes. I showed Dewey where the creek flowed out."

"Why?" Johnny didn't mean to ask that blunt question. It snapped out of him involuntarily.

"I don't know. It just happened."

Johnny swallowed hard. He had never even told his mother and sister about the Cave of the Bats. They were nervous

women and underground caverns near their home would have made them uneasy. He had only discovered it himself a year or two before Jess came. And he had told Jess. More, he had taken her into that weird cavern. The first time he had kissed her was in the rather awesome gloom of the Cave of the Bats, sitting on a damp ledge with stalactites gleaming in the light of his flash lamp and the flutter of innumerable wings winnowing the dark places beyond. And she had shown Dewey Saunders the place.

Johnny grew hot—and then cold. After all, it didn't matter.

"If they needed a perfect cache for anything," he said a little absently, "the Cave of the Bats was made to order."

"What's the Cave of the Bats?" Harper pricked up his ears. "Where is it?"

"I'll show you," Johnny volunteered. "We better go careful, too. If they've got anything in there, they'll be on the lookout most likely."

He bore off to the right, moving stealthily as a hunting animal through brush, ferns, over down logs, skirting the half-rotted stumps amid the tangle of woodland that had suffered primitive logging operations twenty years earlier. Jess came at his heels. Harper brought up the rear, watchful, moving warily.

After half an hour of careful, noiseless advance Johnny stopped on the edge of a thicket of young firs. A rocky bank pitched sharply down to a creek. Below them the flow ended, vanished underground in a jumble of broken, splintered rock. The ridge they stood on crossed the creek bed like a great dam.

JOHNNY waved for silence, turned toward the bay again, traversed a distance of three hundred yards. On the south slope of this small height of land the creek reappeared. It poured out of an opening like a small tunnel over a bed of gravel.

"You get in the stream," Johnny whispered to Harper. "Takes you about to the knees. For about a hundred feet or so you have to walk stooped over quite a bit. Then you come out into the cave. It's big inside, big as a church. You stay here. I'm going down to see if there are any tracks below."

Harper nodded assent. Johnny dropped into the creek bottom among the ferns and brush. He didn't linger there. When he came back he said:

"They've walked quite a path between there and the beach. Stuff's all tramped down. I guess they're using the cave, all right."

"This'll bear watching," Harper said reflectively. "We overlook the bay from here too."

"There's a better place a little back," Johnny told him. "Over this way."

He retraced his steps a few yards and stole along the brushy top of the ridge which lifted directly over the Cave of the Bats. He wormed his way to a bare-rock patch fissured in the middle by a six-inch crack. Johnny lay down and put his ear to this. Jessie and the constable got down beside him. Their three faces were less than a foot apart.

"I hear something," Harper whispered.

"I *smell* something," Jess put her lips to Johnny's ear. "Punk sticks. Joss-house smell."

Johnny nodded.

"Chinks," he muttered laconically. "Don't surprise me."

"It's worth a thousand dollars a head to land 'em in the United States," Jessie breathed.

"And the five hundred dollars head tax on them coming into British Columbia is an item to consider, too," Harper grinned.

"Chinese and dope go together, somehow," the girl said thoughtfully. "I see now why they had to have the yacht. The *Albacore,* of Hongkong, had more than rice for cargo. Chink smuggling and dope. That's a big-money game."

"Let's get back into the heavy brush and figure out what we best do," Johnny said. He sat up. Jess put her hand on his arm to raise herself from the prone position. She smiled at him, confidently, eagerly, in a comradely fashion. And just as Johnny opened his mouth to speak a

voice behind him stilled the words on his lips.

"Hands up," it said harshly. "Put 'em up quick. I'll drop the first one that gets fussy."

Johnny's head turned slowly while his hands obeyed. He stared into the unwavering muzzle of a rifle. The man behind it was Walter Gage. Backing him, a few feet to one side, with a shotgun, stood Riggs, one of the *Fafnir* crew.

Johnny saw Jess go white. Harper's teeth set together. His lips drew back in a snarl.

But all three knew by instinct that a move for a weapon would be fatal. Gage's cold gray eye, his cool indifference, was a promise of that. Johnny rose to his feet, hands high, angry and helpless. The man with the shotgun went over Harper and then Johnny and took their belt guns.

"Now march," Gage ordered. "Follow this other fellow. I'm behind you. Don't get gay unless you want to be punctured."

Riggs led them down, across the creek into a path that came out at the house. Gage marshaled them into the kitchen, left Riggs on guard, and passed into the front room. He remained there some minutes. They could hear the indistinct burble of voices. Gage returned.

"Chase yourself back up the hill," he said to Riggs. "We're going to put 'em in with the rest."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ESCAPE.

FROM a benchlike shelf of rock the three watched Walter Gage and his shotgun attendant vanish outward by the beam of the electric torch Gage carried. When that light flicked its last on the clammy walls, and the low tunnel of the water-floored exit became a gloomy void they still sat silent, staring about them.

Under gun escort they had come to the upper end. Back of them the Cave of the Bats rose in abrupt walls, crevices, great masses of broken rock. Its roof rose high overhead, a Gothic nightmare of irregular arches, distorted girders, jutting points, deep shadows. Up in those shadows lurked thousands of bats. The place was immense. It dwarfed them by its lofty spaces. Down the middle of its uneven floor murmured the little stream.

Between them and the cave mouth a fire burned. In its ruddy nimbus figures moved, cast grotesque shadows; dozens of them; Chinese coolies in blue dungarees; curious, animal-faced creatures. Their low singsong voices rose and fell, echoing away into the farthest gloom. Bags of rice, copper pots, stacks of firewood were piled on a ledge beyond the fire. Chinese sat cross-legged, lay on matting, moved softly about. Without exception each turned at intervals to stare at the three Europeans penned in with them.

There were fifty or more Chinese between them and the exit. When Gage marched them past the coolies and left them he beckoned one Chinese and gave him a bit of paper. The man glanced at it, looked at the three prisoners, addressed a few sentences to his fellow Mongolians. He nodded comprehension.

The pantomine needed no interpreter. They knew that the dozens of Chinese constituted a guard and watch to see that they did not reach that exit. Harper tested that as soon as Gage disappeared. He walked forward. A Chinese rose, barred the way, motioned him back. Harper took another step or two. The man shook his head, drew a knife and made the suggestive motion of throat cutting. Harper shrugged his shoulders, returned and sat down.

Jess moved nearer to Johnny. He bade her sit still and himself slowly drew back until he was out of the faint fire glow, lost in the gloom. No Chinese moved. They stared impassively. That was all.

Johnny remained hidden in that obscurity for nearly fifteen minutes. Then he materialized out of the blackness and resumed his seat. Jess huddled up close to him. One of her hands groped for him. He could feel a tremor shake her, an involuntary shudder.

"Scared?"

She nodded. "We're trapped."

Johnny smiled faintly. He said nothing. His smile expanded, grew into a chuckle. She could see his face. Harper stared at him. Jessie's own features registered both wonder and disapproval at this unseemly merriment. But Johnny only looked at them and continued to laugh softly to himself.

"What's the joke?" Harper growled. "If there's anything to snicker about, pass it along."

"They think they've got us." Johnny lowered his tone discreetly.

"Haven't they? It kinda looks like that to me," Harper muttered.

Johnny shook his head.

"We can walk out of here whenever we want to," he said quietly.

"At the upper end?" Jess asked.

"Uh-huh. Sort of a chimney back of us. It's hard to locate in that pitch dark. But I knew it was there among those pillar sort of rocks. I found it long ago. And I managed to find it again without a light. Quite a climb."

"Maybe they'll be layin' for us to bat us on the head if we show up there," Harper said pessimistically.

"No," Johnny declared in a confident tone. "If they knew about that opening they'd have it blocked, I think. One man could roll enough rocks in there in a few minutes to make it tight as a drum. I went up till I could see light. It's open."

"Let's get out, then," Jess breathed. "This gives me the creeps."

"Too chancy," Johnny negated. "That bird with the shotgun is probably doing a sort of perambulating guard outside. They'll be keeping a good lookout. We ought to have thought of them doing that and we wouldn't have been taken by surprise. It's better to wait until dark."

HE looked at his watch. It was near five o'clock. Four hours to dark. It was a long wait. But if they could get clear they knew enough now to get action, to lay a trap that would clamp prison jaws on every man connected with this undertaking. They could deal with these first and then with the crew of the *West by North* when she returned. That she would return went without saying. Here was her cargo—a valuable freight if it could be delivered past the immigration barrier.

They talked in discreetly lowered voices of the course to follow once clear. Get back to the launch in Peek-a-boo. Arm themselves with rifles. Return and nab Gage, Riggs, the elderly Quong Sing, and whomever else they could gather in. Put *them* in the Cave of Bats. Stop up Johnny's secret exit and post a guard at the creek mouth. Then lie low for the yacht. Thus Johnny outlined the program. Harper agreed, indorsed it; he smarted under the humiliation of being worsted in the very first brush.

"None of these guys will get the drop on *me* again," he said significantly. And Johnny, knowing Harper's record, kept his thoughts to himself. Harper's reactions would be instantaneous and positive from now on. In any doubtful situation he would move first. He had the law at his back and these men were outside the law.

The hours dragged by. Once for a time the fire burned low. The gloom deepened. It was easy to imagine vague, monstrous shapes in that catacomb. Feet shuffled near, shuffled away. That curious mixture of whine and snarl and grunt that serves the Chinese for oral communication would wax to a crescendo over something and die away to a murmur. Sometimes it would cease altogether and the silence was more oppressive, more sinister than the sound.

But beyond staring at the trio with manifest curiosity, even to the point of coming up in groups of three and four to gaze at them, none of the coolies made a move. When Johnny Akhorn and Harper grew aware that the sweepings of Canton stared not at them but at the woman, they kept their own counsel and surreptitiously gathered at their feet a pile of loose stones of a size convenient to throw.

Johnny longed impatiently for darkness to fall outside. It wasn't particularly pleasant to anticipate what might happen in the Cave of the Bats. Those low-

browed, slant-eyed creatures with their queer yammerings and strange, penetrating smells, were not reassuring.

In time they judged it must be dark outside. Little by little in the last half hour they drew farther into the shadow and marked with satisfaction that the coolies ceased to stare after the figures they could no longer see. Many of them were asleep on their bits of matting.

Johnny led the way. They moved in a chain, linked by hands. Instinct, a vivid sense of direction, location, the feel of the damp rocks, alone guided Johnny. He worked his way at last to a funnel lifting steeply upward with rough, jagged sides.

They had to climb, hauling themselves up by fingers and toes, inches at a time. Finally, at a point where the opening narrowed so that it was a squeeze for Johnny Akhorn's broad shoulders, he bent and whispered for Jess to look up. A lone star glimmered far above, as at midday one may see a star shine in the blue from the bottom of a deep well.

In another five minutes they crawled clear through a tangle of blackberry vines and stood erect in the cool night. An hour later they came downhill to Peek-a-boo Cove and whistled the engineer ashore with a rowboat. The man had coffee ready. He had been worried, but hopeful enough to have food waiting.

"Now!" said Harper grimly, when they had finished eating. "Now for a surprise party."

His first act on boarding the launch had been to darken every port that could emit light, to lay out three loaded rifles. Now from one locker he brought forth cartridge belts, from another half a dozen pairs of handcuffs, manacles of polished steel. These he divided, two pairs to each man. He discovered a pocket flash light for each.

"Let's get back at 'em before they find we're loose," said he. "You better stick to this boat, young woman," he told Jess bluntly.

"I'm not tired. I'm not afraid. I may be useful," Jess returned quietly. "If you have a spare six-shooter I'd like to have it. I'm as deeply interested in this business as you are."

Harper looked at Johnny. That gentleman shrugged his shoulders.

"Better give her a gun if you have one," said he. "She's bound to be in at the finish, I guess."

Harper found a revolver for her. Thus equipped the four set out through the woods once more. It was dark everywhere, but doubly dark in the forest. They traveled slowly, but they did not stray wide of their course and presently they again drew near Hidden Bay.

This time they moved quietly but boldly down on the house itself. It was after eleven o'clock. Light shone in kitchen and living room. With strategy determined beforehand Johnny posted himself where he commanded one side of the house, and could back Harper. Jess and the engineer covered the other sides. Then the constable strode up the porch and kicked open the front door. Stepping quickly aside from the glare of the light, with his rifle lifted for action, he called:

"You're surrounded. The first man that moves gets it plenty."

The lamplight showed Walter Gage, Riggs, Quong Lung and the man Boorn playing cards. They sat stiff, rigid at attention for a second. Then Gage twisted in his seat to face the door and remark angrily:

"What sort of wild stuff is that to pull on a quiet ranch house?"

But his jaw slackened when he recognized Harper who, with his eyes grown accustomed to the light, now stepped into the doorway. Not one of them made a move under the muzzle of the constable's rifle.

"Don't get gay unless you want to be punctured," he mocked Gage with his own words of the afternoon. "Stand up there, every one of you."

They rose.

"Face the wall. Put your hands on the wall above your heads."

They obeyed; a little reluctantly, but they obeyed.

"All right. You come in, Akhorn. The

rest of you keep a sharp lookout," Harper called.

Johnny went over them for weapons. Every man, even to the moon-faced elderly Chinaman, had a pistol in his pocket. Harper's boldness had either paralyzed them, or they had lost their nerve in the pinch.

"Now, then, forward march," Johnny said, when he had gone through the lot. "Hike ahead of us up to the Cave of the Bats. See if you can get out the way we did."

Halfway up the path Walter Gage snarled over his shoulder:

"How in hell *did* you get out?"

"That," said Johnny, "is for you to discover."

Behind Johnny lighting the path with his electric torch came Jess and the engineer. Once the captured quartet had been forced to make that stooping entry into the Cave of the Bats after being warned that the first one who poked his head back out would be shot without parley, Johnny said to Harper:

"You fellows stay here. I'll run up on top and plug that hole with rocks. They probably wouldn't find it, but I'll take no chances."

In half an hour he came back.

"They'd need a box of dynamite to blast their way out there now," he announced. "So far, so good.

They left the engineer on guard behind a boulder where in safe cover he commanded the entrance to the cavern. Harper would relieve him by and by, and after that Johnny would take his turn. At dawn they would send Jess to call in the fisherman and O'Connel. They conceived themselves in absolute command of the situation, and the thought gave them a pleasant glow of satisfaction.

"Now let's go down and go through that house to see if we can find anything that's worth looking into," Johnny suggested. "We've got away with one exciting stroke of business to-night."

They were destined to another before long. As they came around the corner of the house Johnny Akhorn stopped so suddenly that Jessie and Harper collided with him and each other.

"Hark!" Johnny warned. "Listen!"

In the hushed night there rose a faint, far thrumming sound. It drew nearer. The land lay wrapped in the dark. The bay, ringed by forested hills, appeared as a slight paleness. On this paler sheen a dim shape began to loom in approach. The surface rippled away from it in sinuous undulations. No light showed. Yet they knew it for a vessel. There was the low hiss of water parted by a stem, and that rhythmic humming. They stood listening, straining their eyes.

"It's the *West by North*," Johnny whispered at last. "I'd know the beat of that Diesel exhaust if I heard it in my sleep."

CHAPTER XV.

THE CLEAN-UP.

"GOOD!" Harper grunted. "Now for the grand slam."

Johnny felt a little tremor shake the girl whose slender body momentarily pressed against him.

For himself he felt only a rather savage exultation. Here was his ship. Aboard her would be the man who had marooned him and stolen his command. And he would get them both. He never doubted that. He would get them both! Even in that moment of anticipated triumph Johnny's perceptive rather analytical mind found time to wonder if his eagerness to lock horns with Dewey Saunders had anything to do with his strangely mixed feeling about the girl by his side.

By that time the darkened yacht, guiltless of running light or yellow porthole, was feeling her way in to the rude float. She had slowed down. There was a thrash of water as the propeller reversed its thrust to check her way. And Johnny muttered:

"Here, we better be under cover in case they use the searchlight."

He darted across the comparative open surrounding the house. Once in the screen of a thicket higher than their heads he moved softly to a point within a few yards

of the improvised landing. They squatted in a growth of ferns to watch and wait.

They sat within twenty feet of the path that ran from beach to house. Their eyes, grown used to the darkness, could distinguish men moving on deck as the yacht nosed in beside the floating logs. They could hear low, curt orders. In a few minutes her mooring lines were fast. The big Diesel gave a last expiring *whuff!* The heavy night silence shut down again.

"Wish O'Connel and that fisherman were here," Harper whispered.

"We're enough," Johnny whispered in his ear. "One or two of them are bound to come ashore. I'll bet they're wondering right now why nobody has come from the house. Somebody is going to come off the yacht pretty soon. That splits 'em up. The minute they land we duck down to the float and climb aboard."

"All right. We'll take a chance. But mind you," Harper warned, "no foolin'. If they show fight, shoot first."

Johnny nodded.

The float and the yacht beside it formed a single blurred shape. Two figures presently detached themselves from this vague formlessness, came noiselessly up the path.

"Better get these birds," Harper counseled.

"No. We want the ship first," Johnny pointed out. "We have the whole works in hand once we get possession of her."

The two men passed. The lamps still burned in living room and kitchen. The front door stood slightly ajar, showing a thin streak of light. They saw it open under one man's hand.

"You stay right here," Johnny instructed Jess. "If we get the worst of it you'll have to take to the brush. Get back to Peek-a-boo at daylight. We'll try to get there too."

The girl nodded mutely. They left her huddled in the ferns and stole down to the beach. The *West by North* lay dark, silent, lifeless.

"Look," Johnny whispered. "Chances are the rest are below, or inside the deck houses. There's a breeze off the land. The tide's on the ebb. If we can cast her loose she'll drift out. Then the two ashore can't pile on to help if there's trouble. Savvy?

"If we walk out on the float the fellows aboard will probably think it's their own two men come back. You cast off the bow line. I'll loose the stern. Then run aft to me and we'll pile aboard."

"Right-o."

They strode, noiseless in rubber-soled yachting shoes, out on the float. No one challenged. Harper stooped over the line fast to a stick of timber. Johnny walked aft a handbreadth from the familiar topsides and let go the stern line. Rifle in hand he waited. Almost immediately Harper flitted back to join him.

"Let's give her a shove," Johnny whispered. "If nobody shows, we go up over the stern and sneak to the wheelhouse. From there we command the whole top deck."

They put their joint weight against the heavy rubstrake. She moved. They heaved themselves quickly up over the pipe rail. Without let or hindrance they tiptoed along decks and gained the wheelhouse, silent and dark save a pale luminosity on the face of the compass in its binnacle of polished brass.

There they waited secure in their advantage. Seconds grew to minutes. The men ashore could not now reach the yacht's deck. The tide shifted her. The gentle pressure of the offshore airs eased her along. She drew twice her length clear of the float.

And then a gun cracked ashore, one thin, sharp report. Nothing more. No voice. No cry. Only from below decks came the pad of hurrying feet.

Johnny Akhorn's heart beat a little faster. That shot on shore startled him, made him eager to get this unpleasant business over. Otherwise he was coldly determined.

"Here they come," Harper muttered. "If they bunch up we step out and throw down on them. See? If they scatter you take the ones aft and I'll get 'em forward. Don't parley. If they don't put their hands up quick, shoot. We got to

get them or they'll get us. This is no parlor game."

The yacht's crew boiled out of the forward companionway, McNaughton, the engineer of the burned *Fafnir,* another man —three all told. They rushed to the rail.

"What the hell!" McNaughton swore. "We're adrift."

He turned, to look down a rifle barrel.

"Put 'em up," Harper grunted. "Quick!"

McNaughton put up his hands. So did the others, instinctively, almost automatically.

"Any more below?"

McNaughton shook his head. But he lied, for as Harper stepped forward hauling the steel bracelets from his pocket a gun cracked at the hooded forward companionway.

Johnny fired at the flash, just as in his hunting days he had often fired at the flash of a leaping deer. The bullet went home. There was a thud, a stifled groan, and silence. And in that hesitant moment McNaughton dived at Harper headfirst, like a butting ram.

Harper went down. Into that scrimmage on the dusky deck Johnny dared not fire. He did not know which was McNaughton and which Harper; and there were the other two to watch lest they draw weapons.

"Keep your hands up!" He menaced them with the rifle.

It happened in a breath. McNaughton was for escape, however, not for battle. He shook himself free from the constable, cleared the rail with a flying leap. The splash of his body in the water found Harper erect, rifle in hand.

"Watch *them,*" he gritted at Johnny.

The moon had cleared the coast range while they lurked in the wheelhouse. Dense shore shadows still shrouded the *West by North.* But it was now a luminous sort of shade. The surface of the bay shone..

Overside the rings and bubbles marked plainly where McNaughton went down. Harper leaned tense over the rail, his rifle cocked, ready. All at once he cried:

"Swim back here, you. You hear me? Swim back or I shoot."

Johnny out of one corner of his eye saw McNaughton dive instantly. A few more strokes underwater and he would reach the float. Suddenly Harper fired. Once—twice—*pow, pow!* The echoes woke, staccato. For a second or two something floundered, thrashed water. That ceased. Harper turned to Johnny.

"Got him," he announced laconically. "That's two of 'em outa commish."

He handcuffed the captured pair to the foremast by the simple expedient of putting their arms around the mast and shackling them together.

"They can play ring-around-a-rosy till we get through," he remarked sardonically. "Unless they're husky enough to tear that twelve-inch stick out by the roots."

"That bird pretty near got me," he said to Johnny. "I felt the wind of his bullet. Good thing you're quick with a gun. We're not in the clear yet, with them two ashore. Let's look-see if there's anybody laying low around this packet."

The man who had fired on them lay dead at the foot of the companion stairs, a revolver beside him. It was Sparks. Otherwise the crew's quarters were empty.

Harper stood guard on deck while Johnny explored the engine room and the lazaret and after hold. These, too, were empty. Forward of the engine-room bulkhead were four staterooms and a bath. When he went down into this, the real living quarters of the yacht, through a stairway in the deck saloon, Johnny Akhorn's orderly seaman's soul filled with anger and disgust.

The place was in a mess, a filthy mess, the berths a foul litter of once spotless bedding. It reeked with that strange odor inseparable from Chinese. Johnny could easily gather that down there coolies had been stowed like sardines in a tin can.

But the mess was speedily banished from his mind when he entered No. 4 stateroom. Some instinct of caution made him overlook no corner. In a wardrobe closet, huddled behind hanging

clothes, manifesting every symptom of downright panic, he found Mr. B. Jessop Allen.

Whether Uncle Ben expected to be shot or scalped, made to walk the plank or be boiled in oil, Johnny didn't trouble to inquire. He was the last of the gang to be accounted for—unless they had acquired reënforcements. Johnny hauled him to the upper deck and shackled him with his companions to the mast. Then he called Harper to the ground tackle at the bow.

"We've got her," said he. "I want to put an anchor down to hold her where she is."

"Right-o," said Harper jubilantly. "Then we'll go ashore and finish the job."

Johnny said nothing to that. He knew the attempt must be made, but he looked for no success. The man he most wanted, the brains and force of the whole undertaking, was on shore. The shooting and commotion aboard ship would have warned the stupidest that the jig was up.

There was a possibility that Dewey Saunders and his bower Helby might in desperation try to retake the *West by North*. They were more likely to take cover, on the assumption that a raid in force was on. That single shot on shore puzzled Johnny; troubled him a little, but not greatly. So far as he was concerned, once he got Jessie Allen aboard, the job was done. He would be in possession of his vessel. The authorities could deal with piracy and Chinese smuggling as they saw fit.

The anchor went down with a rattle and splash. Harper and Johnny manned the davits and slung a dinghy overside. With oars in hand Harper paused. The moon had cleared the hills. Hidden Bay spread silver bright.

"Once we pull clear of the yacht they can see us plain as day," he said reflectively. "How are we going to get ashore without being potted?"

"We'll have to take a chance," Johnny replied. "I have to get Miss Allen. And there's your engineer on watch."

"Suppose, once we're ashore," Harper continued, "them birds spot this dinghy, row out and start the engine. They could slip anchor and make a break for outside."

"I've got a key bolt out of the fuel governor in my pocket," Johnny told him. "They couldn't get a solitary puff out of that engine."

"Right-o," Harper conceded cheerfully. "You're there with the headwork. I was just trying to figure what might happen. Let's take a chance on the shore proposition."

Johnny drove the dinghy with quick strokes. They reached the float without challenge. Once on the beach he bore straight for the place where they had left Jess. He made no mistake in the spot. The flattened ferns marked where they had squatted. But she was gone. He stood uneasy, troubled, a vista of ugly possibilities crowded his mind and just a faint touch of suspicion—that strange distrust that rose like a poisonous fog whenever he was forced to couple Jessie Allen and Dewey Saunders in his thoughts.

"Let's take a look over the house," Harper suggested.

THEY approached cautiously, wary of ambush. The front door stood wide. The lamp glowed on its table. Moving to a vantage point Johnny looked in.

A strange sight met his gaze. Dewey Saunders stood with hands uplifted as though he invoked Heaven. Beside him Sam Helby sat on a chair, his elbows resting on a table, the fingers of one hand clutching the fleshy part of his other arm. His lean, dark face was twisted with pain, with something else that Johnny took to be fear. Only when Johnny nudged Harper and walked boldly to the door did he grasp the situation.

Jessie Allen's diminutive figure was outlined in the door space between kitchen and front room. Her right hand rested against the door casing and it held the police revolver trained steady as a rock on the men. Helby's shirt sleeve was stained with blood. Johnny grasped the import of that single shot.

"Handcuff 'em," Johnny said to Harper.

"You're darned right I'll handcuff 'em," the constable growled. He set down his rifle and drew out the irons.

"Put down your hands," he ordered Saunders.

Dewey fixed his gaze on Johnny Akhorn the moment he entered the room. Now without even looking at Harper, without once deflecting that unwavering stare of hatred his hands lowered slowly until they were level with his breast. Then with one swift motion he plucked a gun from the Texas scabbard under his armpit, beneath his coat, and fired.

It was as swift as a flash of lightning. That movement of his hand outstripped thought itself.

Johnny felt something strike him in the breast with paralyzing force. He stood erect, his brain crystal clear, but his body numbed, rigid, incapable of stirring a muscle. With a curious mental clarity, a strange detachment from any emotion except surprise, he heard a second report echo the sound of Dewey's shot, saw the man droop, drop the pistol and sway with stiffly outstretched fingers, crumple at last in a sprawling heap.

He saw Jessie with her gun dribbling the faintest wreath of smoke look down at Dewey, across at him with a questioning agony in her eyes. He saw her suddenly put a hand to her face and half turn as if to shut out the sight.

And then he felt himself go floating off into a vast emptiness, in a sort of luminous mist that closed in about him. It was restful, soothing, delightful to escape in that manner from the pain that burned like a flame in his breast, and Johnny gave himself up gladly to that foggy sensation which rapidly deepened into a black cloud that blotted everything out.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT THE NURSE SAW.

CAPTAIN JOHNNY AKHORN cherished some very uncertain recollections of the succeeding hours. It was a hazy period. He felt himself being moved. He heard voices, saw flickers of light, felt the touch of hands. He was aware foggily of motion. Once—and that recollection was clearest of all, as the memory of pain is always clear—he was conscious of some one exploring his chest cavity with something that felt like a red-hot poker.

He came finally out of this shadowy borderland with a strange feeling of relief. Except for an obvious weakness, a lassitude of his body, all his faculties were as alert as if he had but wakened from a healthy sleep.

He felt very little pain. He opened his eyes. He lay in a hospital bed. The sun shone in a curtained window. A rubicund individual in spotless white ducks, with a red carnation jauntily in his lapel, gazed blandly down at him. A uniformed nurse stood by.

"Well, how do you feel?" the doctor inquired.

Johnny's throat and mouth felt like the Sahara. That burning thirst was his first clamant physical sensation, his first definite want. When the nurse supplied him with a sip of water, he grew conscious of other bodily disabilities.

But his bodily pains were not so overwhelming as his curiosity. He started agonizing pangs if he moved his arms quickly. Otherwise he felt well enough. And he wanted to know about a lot of things.

Between his last recollection and the present lay a blank which he wanted filled at once. He surmised that neither the doctor nor the nurse could close that gap. So he forbore question.

The medico told him that his wound had produced tremendous temporary shock, but that since he was strong as a horse he had rallied quickly. In a short time he would be on his feet again. Having delivered himself of this, the doctor went away.

Johnny stared out the window. He could see chimneys, bits of street. He could hear the whir of passing motors. Across the roofs on a slope that pitched north to a broad harbor filled with shipping he got a glimpse of mountaintops that were familiar. He knew where he

was but he wondered how he got there. And while he was wondering a telephone on a stand by his bed began to buzz. The nurse took down the receiver.

"Yes, this is room nine," she said. "Oh, splendidly. Quite conscious, and not suffering at all."

Johnny grunted. It seemed a trifle too optimistic to him. The nurse continued talking.

"Oh, I'm afraid not to-day. Excitement of any kind is bad for a patient, you know, and visitors are always exciting. Well, you might ask Doctor Hall. Oh, yes, he's well out of danger. In fact——"

"Some one wants to see me?" Johnny cut into what he considered unseemly garrulousness.

"Yes. A lady," the nurse told him with a smirk.

"Who is she?" He had a hope—but there were women in Vancouver who might inquire for him.

The nurse asked the caller's name.

"A Miss Allen."

"Give me that phone," Johnny commanded with such determination that the nurse gave in under protest. It cost him a pang to shift his arms, but he didn't mind that.

"Hello, Jess."

That well-remembered voice answered him over the wire. How was he? Could she do anything? Was there any one he wanted to see?

"Yes. You," Johnny answered briefly.

"When can I come up?"

"Right now. Come running. I can't hold this phone long. Hurts. And there are a lot of things I want to talk about."

"I'm only a couple of blocks away. I'll be right there. By-by."

Johnny gave up the telephone. He was glad to lie still. His chest *was* sore. The nurse fussed. She demurred against visitors. The doctor——

"I'm the doctor so far as this is concerned," Johnny shut her off. "When Miss Allen comes show her in or there'll be a vacant cot in this hospital right away. I'm not too sick to walk out of here, if I can't have what I want."

"Even if it's bad for you," the nurse railed. "That's just like a man."

Nevertheless she shook up Johnny's pillow and made him comfortable, and when Jess walked in she withdrew with a knowing smile.

JOHNNY looked at his visitor. He had never seen her in city clothes. The gray tailored suit and tight little round bonnet made her seem smaller than ever. With her round, piquant face and big, dark eyes, she looked like a little girl, demurely swinging her tiny feet that were inches off the floor when she sat in an ordinary chair. But that impression of childishness was an illusion, Johnny knew; the sort of illusion that led a man astray, since it made him want to cherish and protect her and she neither wanted the one nor needed the other. He was so intent on his thought about her that he didn't speak.

"Well," Jess echoed the doctor's inquiry at last. "How do you feel?"

It was on the tip of his tongue to reply truthfully, "Like the very devil," but he chose instead to say: "Oh, I'm all right. How about you. What happened after I faded out of the picture. What's the latest?"

"It's all over but the shouting," she told him rather soberly. "The trouble ended when you and Dewey went down. We put you and Helby aboard the *West by North.* I broke his arm when I shot him while you were raiding the yacht.

"O'Connel and the fisherman came as soon as they heard the shots. Harper knows wireless. He got Point Grey station with the yacht's outfit and started the provincial police moving. They locked Helby in a stateroom, left the others shackled to the mast, left O'Connel and the fisherman to guard the Cave of the Bats. Harper found the governor bolt in your coat pocket and his engineer started the motor.

"We left Hidden Bay at once. We scraped bottom once or twice in Whispering Pass. We got in here about six this morning and brought you right to the hos-

pital. Harper phoned me a while ago that he had made a flying trip with a steamer chartered by the authorities and had brought in all those Chinese and those three we put in the cave. The steamer *Albacore* is under arrest. They're all in jail but Gentry—and he will be as soon as they can get to Sentinel Island. McNaughton is dead. Sparks is dead."

"What about Saunders?"

"Dead too. I think he was dead when he hit the floor," she muttered.

"Was Uncle Ben still gibbering when he went off to clink?" Johnny asked. "He sure gave a grand imitation of a deflated tire when I found him hiding below. What'll be done with the bunch, do you suppose? And did you have a chance to use that club you wanted on Uncle Ben to make him come through with your money?"

"He was a burst balloon, wasn't he? I'm very unfortunate in my relatives, I'm afraid. No, Johnny, I'll never get anything much out of Uncle Ben. He's done. He confessed his sins to me and an agent from the United States department of justice in jail this afternoon.

"It was a very pretty plot. Uncle Ben and Dewey cooked it up to recoup themselves for losses on other crooked ventures that went awry. And Dewey double-crossed him near the end. The *Albacore* brought over a hundred and ten Chinese coolies for them. But what was worse, they had a big shipment of cocaine as well. The big manufacture of coke is in Germany, you know. It's simple to transport it from Europe to any Asiatic port.

"Well, they got it off the *Albacore* all right. The steamer came down and the *West by North* met her right outside Hidden Bay and transferred the Chinese to the Cave of the Bats. Then she loaded half the Chinese and made a run to a safe landing somewhere near Seattle. They got a thousand dollars per head for delivering them. Uncle Ben swears that Dewey must have collected at least sixty thousand for the cocaine, from the Seattle dope ring.

"We got a lot of inside information that is going to slow up the illicit drug business on the coast. But Dewey deposited all the loot in a Seattle bank, and calmly told Uncle Ben he'd split when he got good and ready. All Uncle Ben's resources are gone. It took the last money they had to finance this deal, and mine went with it. He's surely a crawling specimen. He's going to turn State's evidence in the hope of getting off—if the Canadian authorities return them to the United States for trial."

"Will they?" Johnny wondered.

"I think so—on the principle of letting everybody scotch his own snakes. But there's enough against them either side of the line to bury them in the penitentiary for life."

"Yes," Johnny muttered agreement. "It cost enough life. It was just luck none of us got it in the neck. Your friend Saunders certainly meant to get me."

"He's dead," she murmured. "Let him be."

Her voice was troubled, wistful, and she shivered once as if the memory of that lamplit room disturbed her. Johnny staring thoughtfully, visualized it for himself with appalling vividness. He saw Jessie's eyes fill. She blinked at him, and he looked at her silently, soberly.

"You look at me as if I were a murderer," she reproached.

"Good Lord! no, Jess," he protested. "I wasn't thinking anything of the sort. You had to shoot, just as you would have to shoot down a wolf that attacked you. He was a wolf. He would have bumped us all off if you hadn't bumped him."

"I didn't really," she said. "I meant to. I thought I had. But I was getting shaky. I missed him. Harper fired at the same time. His shot killed Dewey."

"Then why the weeps?" Johnny asked irritably. "He had it coming and he got it. I don't see you shedding any tears over putting a slug through Helby, for instance."

"That's different," she whispered. "It would have been an everlasting horror to me to have killed Dewey."

"Why?"

"He was my husband—once," she murmured.

Johnny blinked. It was like a blow in the face. Yet it made certain things a little clearer.

"I never lived with him," Jess continued moodily. "I was an impressionable kid, and Dewey was both fascinating and persuasive. There was a certain amount of opposition at home. So we ran away and were married. But the ink wasn't dry on the marriage certificate before my father appeared.

"He was a real person, that dad of mine. He was very, very wise. He had a way of getting things done without stirring up a great fuss. He made Dewey and me promise not to see each other except in public for one year. Then, if we still wished to go on, he wouldn't object. He was killed in a motor accident before the year was out.

"But in that time I'd learned a lot about my husband-in-name-only, and I knew it wouldn't do. But Dewey didn't see it that way. He was determined to have me. I was partly running away from him and his importunities when I first came to Hidden Bay—as well as taking a vacation from this job that I'd already been at for two years."

"Why didn't you get a divorce?" Johnny grumbled.

"I did what amounted to the same; I got the marriage annulled," she said wearily. "But that didn't make any difference to Dewey. He always declared that I belonged to him—and that he would some day have me. You see, Dewey was the sort of man who is very persistent in trying to get what he wants, and who doesn't value it very much once he's got it. He hated to be beaten. Probably he liked me as well as it was possible for him to like any one woman. At any rate he was a trouble to me. I was always meeting him and being plagued by him."

"Yet you went away from Hidden Bay with him as soon as he crooked his finger after—after——"

Johnny couldn't finish. Something swelled in his throat and choked him. Something in his breast hurt more than his wound.

"Not with him, Johnny," she said quickly. "He had my mother always on his side, for one thing. He had money. We didn't. Three of us had to live on the income from the funds my father left to me, and that was a good deal less than we were used to.

"Mamma and Dewey's sister were aboard his yacht when she steamed into Hidden Bay. They had come for me. There would have been more or less disagreeableness if I'd refused to go home with them. And—and——" She hesitated a little. "I'm trying to be frank, Johnny. I'd got in pretty deep at Hidden Bay myself. I was getting afraid of where I was going. You were a nice boy, but you were only a boy then, and you'd never been out in the world. I had. I didn't know—sometimes I—— Oh, fiddlesticks!" she broke off. "What's the use me trying to explain anything like that? I'd been through the mill even then, and maybe I'd got a little hardened.

"You've accused me more than once this summer of being self-centered and fickle—and several other things. But don't you see that it would have been rather terrible for me to have shot Dewey? And," she concluded, getting to her feet, "I'm afraid all this isn't good for you. I should never have excited you by talking about all this. It's all over and done anyway."

"I suppose so," Johnny muttered. "What are you going to do now? Go back south?"

"I expect. Same old thing in the same old way," she managed to smile again. "I've been a sort of prop for a long time. Mamma, who is a rather neurotic sort of a person, has very conveniently managed to get herself married to a moderately wealthy man, I find, since I've been on this trip. So the fact that Uncle Ben has got away with my little inheritance doesn't matter so much. I earn a fair salary. I can live well on my pay and still save something for a rainy day."

"And you're through up here now?"

She nodded.

"I've often looked at you this summer and thought to myself that you were about as self-centered a piece of humanity as I'd ever encountered." Johnny tried to make his tone matter of fact, but it cost him an effort. "I guess maybe I was wrong. I think maybe it's just that you're self-sufficient. There's a difference."

Jess stood beside his bed, a trim, dainty figure. Her dark eyes regarded him seriously.

"I've had to be," she said simply, convincingly. "I've had to stand on my own feet, or fall pretty hard. I've grown used to it. Even if things go badly I get along. I'd rather laugh than cry, any time."

"You're a funny little fellow, Jess, old dear," Johnny said with a sudden, inexplicable wave of tenderness. "Will you come and see me again before you go away?"

"If you want me to," she answered evenly.

"Do *you* want to?"

"If *you* want me to, I do," she repeated, faintly smiling.

"You're the most casual person I know," he said, smothering a little touch of resentment. "You wander into a man's life and make him love you. You drop out, apparently not caring a damn. You come wandering back after a long time, just as casually. And you'll go again the same way, I suppose."

THE red flashed in Jessie's cheeks. Her fingers plucked nervously at the white counterpane. She looked down at Johnny, with those two brilliant dabs of color widening on her cheeks. She stood silent for many seconds, and Johnny suddenly put his hand over his eyes to shut out the sight of her. She turned away; walked to the door; stopped with her hand on the knob; then very slowly came back to his bedside.

"You're a proud and stubborn devil, aren't you?" she breathed. The touch of passion in her voice made Johnny start. But he lay quiet, covering his face. He wouldn't look at her.

"Listen to me, Johnny Akhorn. I didn't go away casually. And I didn't come back so casually as you think. I meant to come back. I fibbed to you that night on shore, the night you swam ashore.

"I followed you because I wanted to talk to you. I knew you all the time. I knew you were in command of the *West by North* before I came at all. It doesn't matter how I knew. And I knew what you were thinking when you sat on that block in the moonlight. When I asked you to kiss me, it wasn't just a whim. If you weren't a——"

But Johnny Akhorn's hand came off his eyes and clutched her so that she stopped short in the middle of the sentence.

And when the prim, middle-aged nurse quietly opened the door some few minutes later she was properly scandalized to find a dangerously wounded man holding between his hands the tear-stained but happily smiling face of a young woman on her knees beside his bed. In fact, said dangerously wounded man was in the act of bestowing a kiss upon said smiling countenance. And when they looked up neither seemed particularly to care what the nurse thought. They really seemed to consider her an intruder.

MR. MELLON'S COMMENT

MR. MELLON, secretary of the treasury, many times a millionaire and a business genius, was discussing business psychology recently at a luncheon in the national capital.

"The difference between a business and a religious revival," he explained, "is that you don't make a business revival a success by crowding to the mourner's bench."

Any Color, So It's Red

By Harris Dickson

Author of "The Ape's Business," "The Fight at Boggy Bayou," Etc.

What "Loosh" wanted was an automobile. What he got was a plenty.

"YOU cheated! Cheated! Cheated!"

"Didn't! Didn't!"

Cheat! Lie! Hot vituperation passed the fighting point. The massive mulatto crouched as if he meant to spring upon and overpower the small white boy; yet the dauntless little fellow held his ground:

"Dare you! *Double* dare you to shoot!"

Eye to eye the fierce antagonists glared at each other in Doctor Lamar's garden, where yellow Lucius had hoed off a smooth space for their marble game. A thick hedge of mock orange concealed the vegetable patch from Lamarsdale residence, and gave the little boy his chance to play marbles with the gardener, crawling in the dust and squabbling like children of the same age, though "Loosh" was three times as old as Ranny Lamar, and four times bigger. The tomato plants that Loosh should have been setting out lay wilting in the sun.

Neither of the wranglers saw Doctor Lamar step down from his rear porch, nor suspected that he saw them; so when his forboding shadow fell across their marble ring, Loosh didn't even glance up, but scrambled around on all fours and grabbed his trowel, exhibiting to the boss nothing but the vast dusty seat of his overalls, and the great blue X of his suspenders.

According to Loosh Haver's notion there ought to be some law against anybody working on Friday afternoons, so nigh to Saturday. Yet here he was, sweating at hard labor, and while the boss hung around, watering his young plants, Loosh hadn't a dog's chance to escape.

"Lucius," the doctor reminded him as he led away his meddling heir, "we want to get our tomatoes in the ground before night, so they'll catch a rain."

"We! We!" Loosh snorted to himself. *"We* don't want to git *nothin'* set out. It's jes' *him.* Hear dat? Dere's de locus train."

Both ears pricked up like a rabbit's as the baby-faced gardener stood listening to the southbound local which blew for their plantation stop. Every tenant would be perched on the edge of the store gallery watching to see who went traveling and who got off; but Loosh wouldn't see a thing except work, work, work.

The local continued its journey without

his assistance, and left Loosh staring across the fields to the State highway along which an insolent little red auto went whizzing southward from Rolling Fork.

"Gee!" he grinned. "I'd love to ride in one o' dem things—on de back seat—smokin' seegyards—wid bofe legs danglin' out, like 'twas mine."

The picture tickled him. He could visualize his Sunday gray suit, sprawling on the rear cushion, surrounded by more smoke than a levee machine, hanging his legs over either door that suited him, while country negroes dodged out of the road and swallowed his dust.

"I'm goin' to have a *red* un," Loosh chuckled and nodded. "Any color, jes' so it's *red.*"

The bondman's imagination soared among a freedom of cigars and whirring wheels and scuttling pedestrians; his face brightened like an amiable full moon, then went dark again when he saw a gray derby hat bob up suddenly from behind the garden fence. At first glimpse Loosh recognized the derby of a certain brown-skinned stranger who scouted by night, exhorting Lamarsdale tenants to leave the plantation for easy jobs and big pay in Chicago.

"Sh!" The brown-skinned stranger beckoned. "Don't make no fuss, Mr. Haver. Come here."

"What you want?" Loosh queried cautiously over the fence.

"Has you decided to go with us?" Gray Derby whispered from his hiding place in the weeds.

"Sometimes I *is* 'cided; den ag'in I *ain't* 'cided."

"Fo' dollars a day to start on," the labor agent pattered. "Then six, ten, twelve dollars an' up. Easy hours, seven until fo'. All work in the shade. Theayters, dances. Circus six months at a time.

"All you've got to do is catch the northbound local to-morrow. Don't let nobody see you get on here. Go up to Rolling Fork. I'll be aboard with yo' ticket. Reserved seat nigh the window. Free excursion——"

"I 'zires one o' dem red automobiles," Loosh observed irrelevantly, giving his slow head a jerk toward the road where the same seductive car again went dashing past, just to tantalize him.

"Huh!" Gray Derby scorned cheap flivvers. "You'll drive a heap finer car. Fo'teen dollars a day, an' up——"

"Look out! Git away!"

Scared by Loosh's warning, Gray Derby vanished among the Jimson weeds, while the gardener himself tumbled backward and was busy setting out tomatoes when a little girl raced along the walk, shouting:

"Oh, Loosh! Loosh! Guess what? Julia's come back. Julia's come back. On the local. Run quick."

Rapturous Marion Lamar was thirteen now, her blue eyes sparkling with delight as she whirled and went flying through the garden gate to welcome a beloved nurse.

In a maze of fuddlement Loosh stood gazing after the child. Surprises were double teaming on him. He was still unsettled in mind about believing Gray Derby, still shaking his head over a suspicion of city negroes that sold anti-kink medicine and took orders for Bibles, when here came Julia, back from Chicago.

Julia could tell him the truth, so Loosh shuffled his sluggish body around a corner of the big house and watched the nurse as she came in at the front gate, clasping the tiny Margaret by one hand and Marion by the other.

Doctor and Mrs. Lamar waited on their porch, ready to shake hands. And Loosh took particular notice that Julia had hired a negro boy to carry her suit case. But it was Julia's stylish clothes that made his eyes pop. Even when she used to pick cotton, the girl's dresses had always fitted her slim young figure, for Julia sewed every stitch herself. Now she wore a most incredible stripety silk, with furs, a pocketbook swinging by its golden chain, and jingling contraptions at her belt. Julia sure was dolled up, while Loosh surveyed his own tattered overalls.

It must be grand to live in Chicago. The gardener halted, trowel in hand, his mouth propped wide open, envying Julia's recep-

tion. Doctor Lamar made her sit right down in a rocking-chair, while Mrs. Lamar called a house girl to fetch some ice water. And Loosh blinked as he witnessed the city nonchalance with which Julia tossed the boy a dime for toting her gripsack.

Everybody on Lamarsdale, white and black, knew how much sense Julia had. The girl was sharp as tacks and kept the white folks laughing at her management of a dressmaking department—twenty-two women working under her. Julia got thirty-five dollars a week, and chattered so swiftly that it was a long time before Doctor Lamar found his chance to say:

"Oh, Lucius, you'd better finish planting your tomatoes. Then come and listen to Julia."

Any boss can drive a mule to water. In the garden Loosh stood glowering down upon the tomatoes. Those plants would just be mean enough to grow. He must cut stakes and tie them up. Pole beans were peeping through the ground. Soon they'd need an arbor. Another job. Corn to be chopped out. No end of jobs for Loosh. And there sat Julia, in fine clothes, drinking ice water on the white folks' gallery.

Loosh considered. His arms began to droop. From relaxed fingers the trowel fell, and stuck up. He left it sticking up, beside a pile of shriveling tomato plants, and climbed the back fence.

THEIR train bowled on at thirty miles an hour, and Loosh bragged on at the rate of sixty about the red automobile that he aimed to buy. "Jes' watch me. You niggers is been in de country all yo' life, an' don't know nothin'."

Red was his objective when Gray Derby unloaded them in the black night at a place which everybody supposed to be Chicago. Stupefied by sleep, the squad of stumbling field hands went tramping, tramping, tramping, until their herdsman delivered his gang in a bunk house where they sat down to eat at a long table.

"What's I doin' here?" Loosh wondered. Before his breakfast had settled he found out. At daylight he found himself in a vast fire-scorched hole, digging among the stones with a pickax. Around him, through smoke and fog, he could dimly discern the shapes of about a million other negroes, maybe seven or eight more'n a million. And white men, too; men that didn't talk our regular United States talk. Above him a flock of flying buckets kept Loosh ducking his head, buckets bigger than wagon bodies, that swooped through the air like buzzards.

"Look out! *Blast!*" somebody hollered, and folks dodged every which way when all one end of the hole blew up.

"Golly," Loosh groaned. "Dis mus' be dat town what dey calls 'France.'"

The sky commenced raining rocks, and Loosh wanted to quit, but a bristly bearded foreman yelled for their crew to start work again. That foreman had the whole crowd bluffed.

"I don't like dis place," Loosh muttered.

"You an' me bofe," whispered a bandy-legged, blue-capped negro beside him. "I'd ruther go back to jail in Chicago—ef I had money to git there."

"Chicago?" Loosh's face contracted with infantile bewilderment as he asked, "Ain't us *in* Chicago?"

"See here, Country," the blue cap sneered, "can't you tell Chicago from a hole in de groun'?"

As they worked side by side with pick and shovel, blue-capped Henry put the country negro wise that, for such dangerous labor, agents like Gray Derby fooled the men here from a distance. And when Loosh eagerly suggested that he had money to pay railroad fare for both, they put their heads together—mainly blue cap's head, for Loosh didn't have much head.

All day Loosh drove down a nervous pickax, his white eyes glancing shiftily around to dodge the flying buckets, both ears cocked up to catch the slightest warning of a blast, and two nimble legs on the hair trigger, ready to jump backward, forward or sidewise. Daytime was harrow-

ing enough, but when night came, amidst the uproar of many explosions, he was worse stampeded—hiding in a gully while Henry stole their baggage, then running, staggering, blundering among the blasted pits until Henry dumped him in a seat on the train.

After sitting on so many hard rocks, a soft plush cushion felt powerful good. Loosh wriggled around, got luxuriously comfortable, and confided: "Henry, I'm goin' to buy me a red automobile."

"You is, is you? How much money you got now?"

"Plenty." Loosh slapped a hand on his pocket, then sprang up, slapped every pocket he had and was fixing to yell when Henry pulled him down.

"Shet up! Here's yo' wad—I swiped ev'ything you had in yo' clo'es. Let dat l'arn you, never take up wid no strange nigger. I'm crooked myself, but I'm goin' straight wid you."

Crooked or straight, Loosh followed him blindly, dazzled by Chicago lights, until his guide whispered at the shutter of a dark-front house. Loosh didn't see anybody unlock the door. It just clicked and let them up three flights of steps, where Henry pushed him into a stuffy little room and lighted the lamp.

"Now gimme ten dollars."

"*Ten* dollars?" Loosh balked. "For what?"

"Rent. In advance."

From a quick sale of his mule at home, Loosh had upward of fifty dollars left, and doled out the ten grudgingly as he observed:

"Now! *Dat's* over wid. Settles me fer dis year."

"Dis year? Dis *week,*" said Henry, nodding toward the bumpy bed. "Lie down fer a hour, den I'll help you fin' a job."

"A *hour?* Pay *ten* dollars rent, an' sleep a *hour?*"

It didn't seem nigh an hour, but less than a minute, when he was dragged out of bed; and after their long, long car ride Loosh was still walking in his sleep when Henry leaned him against a wall that showed a sign over a door: "Employment."

Mobs of shabby men, white men, black men, fought and scuffled to squeeze in first, and the whole bunch went bulging through when the door opened. By Henry knowing the ropes so well he grabbed corner seats in a room full of benches, like church pews, where the hiring boss couldn't help seeing Loosh. And Loosh being the biggest man in sight, it didn't take the hiring boss two seconds to pick him out. "Come here! You!"

"Now den," Henry whispered, "me 'n' you's square—an' through."

A FAT German led Loosh downstairs into a cellar that felt colder than an ice box, and showed his new stacker how to catch each milk case as it came down a conveyor, like sacks of cotton seed sliding down a skidway. Each case held six empty bottles; they were light, and the conveyor fetched them. Loosh didn't even have to move out of his tracks.

"Lordee, boss," he grinned, "dis here contraption does *all* de work."

"Yah," the foreman agreed. "Der machine does everyt'ings. You must only stack."

That was all that Loosh did, stack, stack, stack; finish one row, shift his conveyor, and begin another row. A case of bottles was always there, waiting to go on it. Stack, stack, stack. Cases poured down upon him from a cubby-hole in the wall, up near the ceiling, a ceaseless torrent of milk cases, more cases, more cases. If Loosh fumbled, or lost a second, they began to pile up.

He got scared. Suppose he couldn't handle 'em fast enough, he'd be mashed to death, smothered by millions and millions of milk cases. Stack, stack, stack.

Another negro passed through the room, shoving a funny little cart. Loosh had no time to turn his head, but inquired over his shoulder: "Say, don't dese bottles *never* stop?"

"*You* stops. At *fo'* o'clock."

"Den I'll git a good rest, Saddy an' Sunday."

"Huh!" The city-broke negro passed on with his cart. "Dis boss ain't never even heard o' Christmas."

Stack, stack, stack.

IT was well into the night, after riding all the wrong cars that he could catch, when Loosh dropped limp upon his own front step, rested a while, then hobbled across the street and down an eating-house stairway, which smelled much stouter than other stairways. The hungry stacker craved something stout.

"What's yourn?" demanded a short-skirted quadroon, with her gold tooth and chewing gum.

"Kin I git a bite o' supper?"

"This is our *dinner* hour," the waitress loftily informed him.

"Ain't you got no scraps lef' over?"

"Pork chops, ham'n'eggs——" She rattled off her bill of fare, to each item of which the ravenous Loosh assented.

"What's yo' order? Talk quick!"

"Please ma'am, fetch dat grub which you say."

"All of it?" Her gold tooth flashed, and rations began to arrive. The diligent feeder ate what came and sopped all dishes until he'd polished the bottom of his very last plate. Then the waitress dropped a ticket before him.

"No mo'." Her customer rose and gave the girl a quarter.

"Thanks," she snapped, and Loosh had started out when she grabbed his elbow. "Pay yo' check."

"Done paid," Loosh answered firmly.

"That's my tip. Git me, farmer!" Her gold tooth glittered in Loosh's face. "You ain't tryin' to settle for all you et wid no twenty-fi' cents? Cough up one ninety. Sudden."

Behind him Loosh heard a snicker, saw a roomful of black faces turned toward him, a roomful of rolling white eyes, of gleaming teeth, and the grins of sophisticated diners. They riled him. He bayed their jeering pack.

"Dat's right, niggers! Laff! Laff an' show yo' ign'ance. I'm got plenty money. Goin' to buy me a automobile."

No, siree, he didn't let those city negroes bullyrag him, not a bit, but paid his check, stalked across the street, and groped his way upstairs.

"Huh! Dollar ninety, wid two bits extry, jes for a snack. Now den, I'll git ten dollars' wuth out o' dis bed."

Ten dollars. The long-distance sleeper had already collected ten dollars' worth, maybe eleven, and was still getting value for his money when the landlady shook him.

"Git up! Git up!" the scrawny woman ordered. "Lemme clean dis room. It's way atter three o'clock."

"Three?" Loosh rolled over. "Den I better hurry to my job."

"Dat you needn't. You ain't got nary job."

A LOST job is a lost job, and wouldn't have bothered Loosh if he could only find somebody to listen when he talked. It was mighty lonesome fun, promenading the streets for a week, buying all colors of red automobiles through the windows, and bragging to himself how swift he meant to travel.

Chicago folks didn't behave sociable. They walked right away from him when he began to tell about it. He failed to locate the store gallery on which they sat and argufied as the steam cars passed by. Even his boarding-house neighbors slammed their doors in Loosh's face to keep from opening their mouths.

Suppressed conversation sizzled inside of him like a pop bottle, and was bursting out when he discovered an open door, and heard voices. He meant no harm, he only yearned for companionship in the boarding house when he rambled innocently to the open door and peered wistfully within.

"Howdy, folks!"

He saw the scrawny woman in her rocking-chair, sitting opposite a big-faced black man, flabby jawed, whose wooden leg stuck out straight in front of him. The couple didn't appear to be doing a thing except talk; and that's all that Loosh desired to do, talk.

"Howdy, folks!" His friendly face beamed upon them, but clouded when the peg-legged man spoke so briefly:

"What you want?"

"I bo'ds here," the intruder smiled most affably.

"You don't board in *dis* room," his own landlady took sides against him. "Can't you see dat me an' Perfessor Killian is conversin'?"

"Proud to make yo' 'quaintance, 'Fessor Killian." Loosh advanced with extended hand when the scrawny woman leaped up and stopped him. "I wa'n't interjucin' you to de perfessor. Git out."

"I jes thought——"

"Do yo' thinkin' in de street!"

"'Scuse me," Loosh retorted. "'Scuse me, 'Buttermilk,' I didn't know you was sour."

The scrawny woman bristled like an infuriated cat, while peg-legged Killian opened his blue-gummed lips and laughed.

"Buttermilk! Buttermilk!" he roared at the woman. "Here, stranger. Come back! Come back!" But Loosh had already started downstairs, and never even turned his head.

SADDLING the merry horse laugh upon his landlady made Loosh step proud as he strutted forth from the boarding house and purchased a walking stick with a blazing ruby in its handle.

"Dat color jes matches my automobile. Now I done got rested from stackin' all dem milk bottles, I'll pick me out a easy job—fo'teen dollars an' up."

By this enlightened period in his city career, "Employment" signs had become familiar; but such increasing crowds of scrouging, pushing, jostling men surrounded them that Loosh couldn't draw nigh. Big as he was, folks kept shoving him to one side; and if the "Employment" door opened at all, it was only for a man to poke out his head and holler, "Nothin' doin'."

Nothing doing. Nothing doing all that week, and on Monday morning, when the scrawny woman came to his room for her ten dollars in advance, Loosh could only dig up six eighty-three by scraping every pocket.

"I ain't projicked away no change," he blandly assured the lady, "'cept fo' bits here an' two bits dere. Dis pocketbook useter be plum full o' money."

"Don't make no diffunce what *useter* be in it, ef dat's all you got *now*."

That night Loosh toted his gripsack to a bed house—twenty-five cents.

The bed-house manager had only one eye; he saw only one thing, the quarter that Loosh gave him, and pointed to a bed. "Now watch yo' step."

Anybody would have suspected this for a deadfall where the craftiest stepper must watch his step in a big room full of cots, with only space enough to squeeze between. Under the single light and among the many shadows, Loosh could see a half acre of men lying still as logs. Here and there a haggard, sleepless one sized up the newcomer with appraising eyes, Loosh being well dressed, and a cotton plow line tied round his suit case advertising him for innocent prey.

He didn't step far, only to the cot, kicked his suit case underneath and promptly died away, coming to half life when he felt somebody fumbling at him with the soothing touch of an Oriental servant who massages his master's feet. In a state of semiconsciousness it made Loosh more drowsy, and he grunted like a sow in a wallow having her back scratched by a corncob. Then a rough jerk, and one shoe nearly came off. The thief waked Loosh, and Loosh waked the bed house. "Ketch dat nigger! *Yon* he go! *Yon* he go!"

"Shet up, fool!" The one-eyed manager tried to make him hush.

"He's got my gripsack! An' *all* my money!"

"Hush!" A one-eyed man cannot watch everybody. "Did you think you was registered at the Blackstone?"

DERE now! Picked cleaner'n a jaybird!" The Lamarsdale immigrant tottered into Chicago's streets with no place to go, so unattached and foot-loose

that it scared him. Even his gripsack, a link that had formerly bound him to the scrawny woman's kennel, that, too, was gone.

"Lucky I got dese shoes—an' dis walkin' stick; 'cause I sho' is 'bleeged to do *some* walkin'."

Loosh was thinking now, thinking with his stomach, and he started north. The instinct of emptiness guided him in that direction. To the north lay his best chance for breakfast, in the white folks' part of town, around the hotels where Southerners congregated.

It was a long and limping journey before Loosh reached the Auditorium Hotel, in front of which he took his stand and began to watch, but mainly to listen. By the ear can a Southerner be infallibly detected, though his Northern masquerade may deceive the eye. So Loosh held open his ear like a ship's funnel, catching every sound as two young men strolled out.

They were strangers, and the soft syllables of their speech rippled like molasses being poured on hot biscuit, like grits and gravy, like all the sub-tropical delicacies that Loosh never heard of in Chicago. Homesick, smacking his lips, he fell in behind and trailed them to a corner where they stopped to argue about which way to go.

"You wants to fin' de Sally Hotel?" Loosh stepped before them with his most engaging grin. "Jes foller me."

The strangers smiled and sauntered along, chatting with Loosh about their crops back home, until they reached the La Salle, where the taller young man took one real good look at their pilot. Loosh wore his only remaining clean shirt, a white collar and sporty necktie. His gray suit was quite presentable. He carried a cane.

"You seem to be doing pretty well in Chicago?" the Southerner remarked with amused amiability.

"Fine, boss. Fine. I'm fixin' to buy me a automobile—a *red* un."

Instantly Loosh could have bit off his boastful tongue, for the breakfast prospect, instead of giving him a quarter, handed him a cigar, with congratulations on his prosperity.

"Thank you very much. Good-by."

"Dere now!" Loosh collapsed on the hotel steps. "Did you ever hear de beat o' dat fer a fool?"

But Loosh never put his foot in that hole again. The next easy mark in a Panama netted him fifty cents, with the suggestion that he'd better go South. So Loosh immediately hustled southward, clutching the coin in his palm until he found a sign, "Coffee & Sandwich 15c."

From the street it seemed no more than just a common grub-in-the-cellar joint, down some trash-strewn steps which Loosh warily descended, then edged himself onto a stool at the oilcloth counter. His cup of slops disappeared at a gulp, the sandwich in two bites.

"Gimme another sandwich!"

By lingering over the second course Loosh could hold his seat, to rest and look around. Not much to see, only a vague and vacant room at the rear, the middle of its floor being cleared for dancing; tables along the side, a piano.

"Honkytonk," he decided without enthusiasm, for nothing can be sadder than a honkytonk in daylight. Then out of the gloom somebody called him: "Here, you! Haver. Come back here."

The voice sounded friendly, and Loosh's loneliness turned eagerly toward it.

"Who dat know me so good?" he queried, then saw a man, the only person in the room, sitting alone at a table near the front; and Loosh might not have recognized him except for his wooden leg.

"Lordee!" His big, round face illuminated. "Dere's 'Fessor Killian."

"Me, an' nobody else. Come back here. You sholy handed me a laugh on that 'Buttermilk' woman. Sit down. Where are you living now?"

"Ain't livin' no place. I done moved."

That made the professor laugh a heap louder, and one word brought on another until Loosh told about how he was robbed in the bed house.

"Bumped yo' head for a sucker, did he?" Killian haw-hawed, and slapped

Loosh on the back, which made all the empty insides of him rumble like a drum. "'S all right, Haver. This is my place, an' you won't sleep in the street."

"Dis yo' place?"

"My caffay. Sure." There could be no mistaking the tone of proprietorship in which Killian shouted for his counter man: "Jake! Jake!"

"What you want, boss?" His counter man bent respectfully over Killian's table, a saddle-colored thug in a red-striped shirt whose open collar showed the scar where somebody had unfortunately failed to cut Jake's throat.

"Jake," the boss commanded, "let Haver sleep here. In the mornings he'll sweep out to pay for his lodging."

"Sho will," Loosh agreed.

It made Loosh feel settled to have nice lodgings just for a little sweeping up. That arranged all his business, he thought. But Loosh had another think coming, and kept thinking, thinking all day as he hung around the lunch counter and gave the peg-legged professor plenty of chances; yet Killian never spoke one single word about rations.

Neither did Jake. Jake forgot to call the lodger when dinner time came; and likewise overlooked him at supper, looking over the top of Loosh's head while Loosh stood there in the middle of the floor where a blind man could see him.

KILLIAN'S honkytonk stank of stale tobacco, foggy in its pall of dead smoke, and foul with the overnight odor of many dancers. As Jake opened its front door for business, a morning freshness crept within, but only a little way. It seemed to stop, to bank up like a wall against the atmosphere of the tango room. Early customers at the counter swallowed their coffee and rushed out. Grouchy Jake kept busy sliding dishes across the oilcloth. Presently he paused to bellow: "Here! You! Back yonder!"

Back yonder, in a murky corner, a huddle of something barely stirred upon its bench, and Jake yelled impatiently: "Git up, I say!"

Loosh roused himself from a hard board on which he had slept with his wadded coat for a pillow, roused himself, sat up, blinked stupidly, and muttered: "Fo'teen dollars—an' up."

"Sweep out!" Jake shouted.

The lodger's toilet was already made. He had slept in it. Now he need only pick up his broom to sweep out a bushel of cigar stumps and litter from last night's revelry.

"Mornin', Jake——"

"Mister Walters," Jake scowlingly corrected him from behind the counter. Loosh swept on in silence, gathered his garbage into the can, and put aside the broom.

"Now den, Mister Walters," he tried to smile, "I'se through."

"Through, is you?"

"Uhu. Finished up jes in time fer breakfas', didn't I?" To which Jake returned no encouraging reply.

Folks came in, gobbled their grub and left, never saying "boo" to Loosh. He simply did not understand this town. At meal time on Lamarsdale no stranger could pass a cabin where they neglected an invitation to their table. Maybe Loosh wasn't dressed slick enough for a city—he fetched his hat, swung his cane, and waited.

"Huh! I'm jes' bound to know whar I gits sump'n' t'eat."

He glanced at the scar on Jake's throat, which seemed redder, angrier, more hostile. But Loosh *had* to eat. Possibly they expected him to help himself, as a member of the family.

When this happy inspiration dawned upon Loosh Haver, his broad face beamed. That's it. Of course he ought to save Mr. Walters the trouble of serving him. So Loosh grinned, kind of homelike, and sidled to the counter. The nighest ration was jelly roll. Nonchalantly and casually, as if he weren't studying what he did, Loosh lifted a big glass thing that covered the rolls and took two.

"Drop that!"

Startled by the abruptness, Loosh did exactly what Jake told him to do—dropped

the glass thing. On the floor. It broke. Then Jake made it plain, profanely plain to the precinct, that hobos who slept on a bench in the honkytonk were not entitled to privileges at the lunch counter—not while Mr. Walters stood behind it.

Of course Loosh had already decided to leave, and was going anyhow when a bottle of tomato ketchup slipped from Jake's hand and smashed against the door. That hurried him some, and Loosh kept going.

WHAT happened to Loosh on a seat in the park was no strained coincidence. It was bound to occur, sooner or later. At a certain corner in Paris the American may sit and sip his apéritif with the absolute assurance of seeing his friends. Every globe trotter ultimately passes Larue's. And white folks from the Lamarsdale neighborhood, when they visit Chicago, will soon or late pass the bench on which Loosh Haver sat, mopping his face with a dirty handkerchief.

No end of strangers went by, but empty and faint as Loosh was he scarcely glanced up. Everybody looked alike, until Loosh glimpsed one stalwart figure that was different. Here came salvation. Salvation approached him in a broad-brimmed hat, salvation with linen breeches that flopped about his sturdy legs. Loosh sprang up and squatted to squint again, to look real good, to bat both eyes, to make sure.

"Lawd Gawd! De jedge! Jedge Hamilton!"

"What the devil, Loosh?" The genial Southerner halted and stuck out his hand. "Glad to see you. Been here two days and haven't laid eyes on a soul I know."

"Me neither, jedge." Loosh pumped at the Hamilton hand some more, held on, clung to it, and laughed hysterically. "Jedge, is de bass strikin' in Pintail?"

"They ought to be next week. I'm laying in some tackle."

The two sat down together on their bench, just as many, many times they'd sat in either end of a fishing boat, Loosh at the paddle, Judge Hamilton with his rod.

Fishermen do not talk. They think. Words only muddy their limpid lake of thought transference. They understand each other in silence. When the judge would cast his dowagiac at the foot of a shady cypress, Loosh always knew precisely what he was thinking to himself: "Grab it, you old trout. Grab it." And when Loosh would back his paddle, noiselessly in the water, Judge Hamilton knew what Loosh was saying internally: "Jedge, ain't we gittin' too nigh?"

So Hamilton never questioned how Loosh was faring. The rumpled clothes told him; the dirty shirt told him; the drooping shoulders told him. And Loosh's eyes told him something more, something that his sympathetic soul already knew, that Loosh would starve here rather than return to the plantation, whipped, with his tail between his legs. Above all things Loosh wanted to save his pride, and his friend must find a way.

The judge thought a while and then confessed. "I'm up against it. You've got to help me out."

"Sho will, jedge."

"You see," Hamilton explained, "I've bought a carload of junk for the missis and the girls. Got it stuffed in a brand-new suit case, big as a trunk. The girls want to wear their new dresses on Sunday, and the express would not be delivered. So Loosh, you've got to take that suit case home for me."

"Well, jedge——" Apparently he considered his business appointments. "Well, jedge, ef de young ladies is jes' *'bleeged* to have dem dresses——"

"Good. Your train leaves in fifty minutes. Hurry. Get your things packed."

"Huh!" Loosh grinned. "I'm done already packed."

"Then go for your baggage—in a taxi."

" 'Tain't no baggage, jedge. Jes' me."

"That's fine. But you want a bath—first."

"Secon', jedge, secon'. I 'zires dat bath secon'."

"Oh!" Hamilton's eyes twinkled as he skinned a ten-spot from his roll, saying: "Buy a new shirt and underclothes. Dress

up. Put it all over those negroes when you go home. Have your suit pressed. Then meet me at this bench, quick as you can. And, Loosh, by the way, don't forget to eat a good, substantial lunch!"

"Yas, suh, jedge. Dat lunch ain't liable to slip my 'membrance."

THE Limited sped southward. On the seat in front of Lucius Haver a huge and expensive suit case seemed to prove that he had prospered. Through Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, the traveler bought peanuts, popcorn, striped candy, drank free ice water, and felt like a fighting chicken when the porter shouted:

"Rolling Fork! All out for Rolling Fork!"

The Limited does not even whistle for Lamarsdale. According to Judge Hamilton's instructions, Loosh would change at Rolling Fork and take the next local. But Judge Hamilton didn't realize half of the whole truth about the intentions of Loosh, for Loosh never had a notion of riding on anybody's local. No, sir, he swaggered off the Limited and signaled with his ruby-handled walking stick for Curt—Curt, the runty chauffeur who drove the little red roadster.

"Hey, Curt, I wants you to ride me home."

"Fo' dollars!" Curt answered with a "That ends it" expression.

"Huh. Is dat all? I mought ha' paid mo'."

"Show me yo' money!"

After exhibiting his cash Loosh climbed into the car and dispersed himself promiscuously throughout its interior.

"Now den, Curt," he ordered grandly, "step on dat gas. Step on it strong. I can't skacely ketch my bref when I rides slow."

Like a swift red comet trailing its dusty tail the roadster whirled into sight of Lamarsdale store. On the front seat rested a magnificent leather suit case, brand-new, its brass trapperies glittering in the sunshine. On the rear cushion Loosh took his ease, one foot dangling over the car door and one hand swinging out to display his ruby cane. Plantation darkies scuttled from the road, and a swarm of gasping tenants on the store gallery began to take notice.

"Look at Loosh! Look at Loosh!" a shirt-tailed youngster yelled when his snorting car halted at the store steps, where Loosh stretched himself indolently and observed:

"Whyn't you-all have a fust-class hotel? An' some caffays?"

The returning prodigal put it all over those stay-at-homes. With bulging eyes they watched his lavish expenditure as Loosh counted out the fare to his chauffeur.

"Here, Curt, take yo' little dab o' money—one dollar, two dollars, three dollars, fo' dollars. Dat's a heap less'n what I pays for taxis in Chicago. Boy"—to the shirt-tailed youngster—"tote my gripsack in de sto'. I don't feel like 'zertin' myself."

While the boy struggled up steps with Judge Hamilton's bulky suit case, Loosh strutted behind, twirling his jeweled cane and puffed at a highly combustible cigar.

"Loosh," Unc' Andy McGill ventured to remark, "you's got a mighty fine gripsack."

"Huh! Dat's pocket size. You oughter see my trunks. Dey's 'rivin' on de freight."

"But, Loosh," the patriarch persisted, "us wa'n't lookin' fer you to come back no mo'."

"Well," said Loosh, "co'se I ain't blabbin' *all* my bizness, but dem theayters an' dances in Chicago is got me plum' wore out. So I jes took a flyer down here to 'sult wid my doctor."

THE consultation between patient and physician occurred in the garden, where for some time Doctor Lamar had known that Loosh was diligently tying up tomato plants. And Loosh knew that the doctor knew.

With both of them knowing so well that Loosh had come home, what would be the sense of gabbling about it? They did not gabble. Doctor Lamar merely ap-

peared on his back porch and called across the hedge:

"Oh, Lucius!"

"Yas, suh."

"Supper's ready." Then Doctor Lamar turned back into the house.

"Supper's ready. Huh!" Loosh straightened up and chuckled. *"Dat's* de way I loves to hear a man 'spress hisself. Huh! Jake mought stan' behin' dat counter till Gabriel blows, an' wouldn't *never* learn how to say, 'Supper's ready.' "

So Loosh washed himself in the rain tub and went to supper, certain that nobody would pester him with questions about Chicago.

A MODERN BRUMMEL PASSES

THE Marquis de la Houdinière is dead. France will raise no monuments to him. It is doubtful if the Frenchman in the street could tell you who he was, what he stood for—or even knows that he has gone.

Yet, obscurely, and in his own peculiar way, he was a great man. He was one of the princes of romantic futility, one of the last of the Brummels, although the comparison does him injury perhaps, for he was no sycophant of dissolute royalty, and he did not ruin his tailor in order to pay his debts at cards.

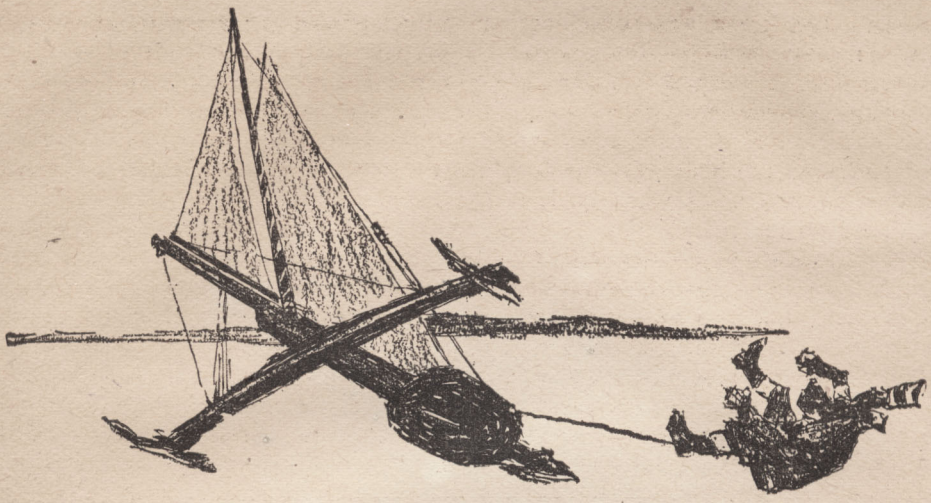
He was of that dead school of exquisites whom the gay boulevards once honored for their eccentricities. Such a one as, for instance, the famous old Prince Bibesco who, after the opera, proceeded gravely, always with the same cab and coachman, to the Café Napolitain where he supervised the pouring of a trayful of wines and liqueurs, the costliest to be had, which he sent to his cabby by the hand of none other than Alexis, the impeccable director of that brilliant establishment.

De la Houdinière did even better than Bibesco. Erect, sternly aloof, impassible behind his monocle, his face somewhat seamed with age but his hair dyed a youthful brown, he was the center of interest in whatever resort he singled out for patronage. Once seated he summoned the proprietor, the head waiter, and the entire staff of the wine cellar. Thus surrounded by the experts he proceeded to make selection of a bottle. This process never consumed less than half an hour. From an array of dusty offerings he would at length select one. Then would follow lengthy warnings about how best to draw the cork. And when this was accomplished to his satisfaction, and the wine poured, he would sit in magnificent isolation, contemplating the midnight diners through his inscrutable monocle. Finally he would pay the check and make sedate exit. But not once did he ever touch bottle or glass, not so much as with the little finger of his white-gloved hand.

For years this was his nightly program.

The war ruined him. The boulevards saw him no more. But in obscure drinking places he was observed from time to time. And his program had not varied. Excepting, pitiful detail, that the untouched drink he left behind was no longer some priceless vintage, but a humble glass of beer!

Fate outraged but never humbled him. He owned a house, that was half palace, in Paris. Its sale would have enriched him. He starved rather than give it up. It was there, a pauper in the midst of empty splendor, that he died. And his hair was still a youthful brown when they took him to his grave!



Swan's Song

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "The House That Black Built," "Jack and the Jills," Etc.

The special deity that watches over squirrel fodder rewards the greatest nut of them all in a manner befitting his greatness.

Into the lives of each of us
Fortune may come all unaware.

THE talented composer of this wise crevice coyly conceals his identity, but the fact he left his little witicism uninitialed fails to disguise the guarantee that there's more truth than blank verse in the statement.

Any successful bank president, bootlegger, cabinet officer, railroad official or merchant prince will undoubtedly scoff at the idea that luck had anything at all to do with their rise to riches, but don't let them kid you. A million or more obscure wage slaves are doing twice as much work as the boy who hands them their pay envelope, and that *they* are not at the helm instead of being at the wheel is merely a question of luck, believe it or not.

Luck is the selling plater that wins in the last jump, the something that keeps a wife sound asleep when her better half steals in from a club dinner, the twenty-dollar case note floating peacefully down the gutter and the impulse that prompts any one to insure his property the day before the baby plays with matches.

If luck isn't luck neither is consommé!

It was Dame Fortune and no one else that gave Ottie Scandrel, the supersix of conceit and the Shah of Slapstick, a lift under the chin, and it was the same lady who handed him a merry smile after a round of circumstances had taken the big squarehead for the bundle and had left him as clean as a soup bone in the paws of a ravenous terrier.

This exciting fairy tale, in no sense a treatise on poverty, has to do with the champ chump's battle to come back, a fox-trot song, a couple of ice yachts, a dizzy débutante and a wealthy young half-wit who romped around under the general title of Reginald Custis Barrington. Just so there'll be no mistake we hope to prove before the last round that Fortune draws no color line and balks not at stupidity, age, nationality, size, weight or disposition.

Yawn over this.

One frosty morning in mercenary Manhattan when the thermometers were low, very low, and the Bronx gym as chilly as the master's bedroom in an Eskimo's igloo, the door of my private sanctum opened and one of the dice experts who made the studio his headquarters, stuck his knob in.

"Some banana who registers as Algernon McGonigle looking to see you, Mr. O'Grady. He tells me that his business ain't none of mine, so what'll I do?"

"Show him the front door," I directed.

The ivory shaker disappeared, a couple of minutes elapsed, the door opened again and the world's most celebrated buffoon ankled in, grinning like a sea lion at the sight of salmon. He blew on his knuckles, helped himself to a glass of water and shook his head.

"Show me the door, eh? Mistakes will happen, Joe. That's why every stenographer owns her own eraser."

HE helped himself to a chair and put what bore some resemblance to a derby under it.

"Algernon McGonigle?" I murmured. "What does this mean—the chorus, at last?"

Ottie yawned.

"Be yourself, pal. That handle is the one I hand out so I can get in. When you're down and the world thinks you're looking for a noseful of nickels you never want to try and see no one on the name you were sprinkled with. I use McGonigle when I get tired of Astor and Vanderbilt. Er—pick out your warmest overcoat, put on your favorite ear muffs, look up your knitted wristlets and come with me. We're going places."

"Where?"

Scandrel's frightful pan, a positive reason for insomnia, was lighted by a sneer.

"If you could cash them questions at the bank, Joe, you'd be rich enough to afford a clean collar twice a week. Listen. I got an appointment between ten o'clock to see Reginald Custis Barrington down at his Park Avenue shack. Guffaw that off if you're able.

"Er—I'm giving you permission to roll me up to Reggie's front door in the sweetest taxi that ever come out of Ireland. It's downstairs right now, but don't get nervous. There's only one fish and eighty-five sardines on the cash register. Do we go?"

The name of Reginald Custis Barrington was as familiar to me as it was to those who got a kick out of the society columns of the morning dailies and a thrill from the "Blue Book." Barrington, a delirious dilettante who led a cruel cotillion and threw a terrible box party, was not only one of the rich little rich boys of the big city but the greatest indoor sportsman the upper crust had ever flashed an orb at.

From what I understood vaguely, Barrington shot more parlor lions, caught more drawing-room fish and braved more dangers when comfortably seated on a divan than any two others who took their excitement in the wilds of Africa or the Canadian Rockies. Curiosity, then, if nothing else, made me reach for my fur-lined jumper, look up a tile to match and take the boulevard where, as green as a country boy on Broadway, the gasoline fiacre that Ottie had chartered stood waiting.

Scandrel supplied an address, we piled in and immediately he tried to shut one of the windows up. Five minutes of this and then Ottie threw the strap away in disgust and borrowed a cigarette from the chauffeur.

"To shave a long story," he explained, "I was hepped to Barrington by a little stiff called Eddie Swan who tunes pianos for a living and writes songs to keep himself amused. This here Swan party while fixing up the strings in one of Barrington's music boxes the other day overheard a fistful of gab and passed it on to me for what I could make it worth.

"It seems that this sample of blue hosiery has a big estate up on Lake Sunapec known as Linger a While and has a tailor-made ice yacht for which he's searching for a skipper. Er—to make an immaculate breast of it, I wrote Barrington, got

an answer off him and a date for this a. m. Get me?"

"Ice yacht?" I murmured. "What do you know about ice boating—if anything?"

Scandrel looked at a pair of brogans he could only afford to have quarter soled and curled an immediate lip.

"What did Napoleon know about Russia until he got there, Barnum about lobs until he stung them or Columbus about circles? And how do I know I can't handle a dangerous rudder until I try it?

"I know you don't give me credit for nothing and, according to you, I think the Latin Quarter is worth twenty-five cents in Rome, but that's only the half of it. So much for that. I'm bringing you with me this morning on account of that well-pressed suit you're wearing. You stand a little in front of me when we get in Reggie's parlor and leave me do the talking. Righty?"

Forty minutes or so later we pulled into the gilded confines of Park Avenue, nudged the curb in front of a brownstone private dwelling that had regular windows and went up some real front steps. Scandrel kept his thumb on the bell until we got service.

"In front!" he hissed when the door opened. "Get in front!"

A footman peered out at us suspiciously.

"The marster," he whined, "don't want no books to-day, we have a vacuum cleaner and we subscribe now to ten charities. We're not interested in magazines, we've been trading with the same market for years, and——"

"Pipe down, will you?" Ottie interrupted with a bellow. "Tell Reginald Custis Barrington that Mr. Scandrel is here to see him and get going. What do you mean—we don't want no books and have vacuum cleaners?"

Once in receipt of the knowledge that we had an appointment, the lackey conducted us into a parlor that was as big as a dance hall and requested that we wait.

"The marster," he explained, "is finishing his breakfast but I will have him down, sir. Have a chair."

We did, Ottie accidentally tipping over a Japanese vase in his rush to the sofa. He had hardly thrown the last piece of it out of the window when footsteps sounded in the outside hall and the next minute Reginald C. Barrington limped in.

Flaming dachshund!

This hot heir to nearly all the wealth in the world was ridiculous in more ways than one. So anæmic that a dash of ordinary color would have made him suspect a fever, Barrington had a head shaped like a cold-storage egg, fox-terrier eyes and a hang-dog expression. He wore an excuse for a mustache that had enough wax on it for a dance floor, manicured fingers and a collection of clothing that might have been stolen outright from the wardrobe of the Prince of Wales.

"So this," Barrington began in his best Piccadilly accent, at the same time presenting me with three limp fingers, "is the Mr. Scandrel who is an authority on ice yachting. Oh, yuss. Charmed, y'know, old thing, absolutely. I see," he added, tossing a supercilious look at the amazed and smoldering Ottie, "that you brought your chauffeur indoors. Oh, yuss. It's so beastly cold in the street, is it not?"

"Which do you mean—chauffeur—it's so beastly cold in the street?" Ottie bawled. "Chauffeur me and I'll drive you plenty. You may be able to bleed indigo blood but you ain't got the politeness of an ordinary roughneck. Trap some sense. 'At jobbie you're holding hands with is Joe O'Grady from the city limits. He's not Scandrel. I'm him. I mean that I'm not him but I'm me. That is, he ain't me but I'm him. I mean—— You tell him, Joe!"

The error was corrected and we all sat down again.

"Really, y'know," Barrington went on, trying to catch a glimpse of the shoes that Ottie had pushed half under the sofa to hide, "offering your services to me at this time is fate, nothing more nor less. It so happens that my new racing ice boat was delivered lawst week and next week I shall be face to face with a vastly important issue. Shall I tell you about it?"

"Why not?" was Ottie's careless answer. "We can listen to anything."

Barrington's broadcasting was along the following lines:

He began by admitting freely that he was more than ordinarily interested in a young society bud whose name was Mary Mortimer. This young lady, he told us, had been introduced to him a few months previous at the Ritz-Plaza, where the silly set had put on an amateur play called "Ten Barrooms in One Night—A Comedy of Early American Customs."

Frankly confessing himself to be badly smitten, the wealthy young blade explained that he had cut largely into his social engagements in order to make room for seeing Miss Mortimer, with the result that some few weeks after their first meeting he had awakened one bright morning, pulled a Balboa and discovered he had fallen deeply in love with the fair daughter of Fifth Avenue.

"Such," Barrington sighed, "was the beginning!"

"Keep spreading your stuff and let's have the ending," Scandrel whinnied. "What happened in the next chapter?"

Plenty.

It appeared from the remainder of Barrington's narrative that Miss Mary was also being chased by another society hound whose mail man knew him as Amos Rutherford Chandler, and from listening in between the lines we gathered the impression that Chandler to Barrington was the same thing as slavery had been to Abraham Lincoln and the coming of the horseless carriage to the livery-stable industry.

With Chandler a hated rival and the pace twice as rapid as swift, Barrington had found the hurdles high and the going tough. He made no bones about admitting the fact that Chandler had severely defeated him at mah jong, bridge, tiddledywinks and charades. Not alone this but the other had outdanced him, outsuppered him and outtheatered him, with the result that the Mortimer girl favored him greatly.

"But now," Barrington declared stoutly, "my hour of revenge approaches. The unspeakable Chandler owns an ice boat which he had the audacity to rename the *Mary* after having called it the *Gertrude* for one season, the *Hortense* for another and the *Lillian* for the first winter it was out. He's won quite a few races with the craft and has been loudly boasting that at the annual Sunapec Ice Carnival, next week, he will again be triumphant. Chandler——"

"Stop right there!" Ottie yelped. "I get it all! You're going to send in your new tug against this guy's feminine directory and trip him for a spill. Am I right or wrong?"

Barrington sat up straighter.

"Deucedly clever, old thing!" he said with genuine admiration. "Right-o. I'm opening Linger a While and will have a house party there. During the first hour of it I will publicly challenge Chandler to a race, and he dare not refuse because Mary, deah girl, will be there, too. Then, on Saturday, you will sail the *F. O. B.* and we will severely trounce this rotter!"

"F. O. B.?" Scandrel mumbled. "What does that mean—Fur On the Bottom!"

Barrington coughed.

"Not exactly. The initials stand for Fleetest Of Boats, which the jolly old craft is. All the world loves a winner and Mary is no exception to the rule. She has seen me ignominiously humbled at mah jong, but witnessing my boat triumph is sure to remove the memory of that dreadful hour. Amos Chandler shall never marry her! I'll pay you five thousand dollars if, by your ingenuity and skill, you will bring my boat in first at the finish!"

It took five minutes or more to revive Ottie. He snapped out of it eventually, pushed the smelling salts aside and borrowed a handkerchief to mop his moist brow.

"Five grand!" I heard him mumbling. "Fiery mongrel! If I don't crash this baby for a loss I'll exercise a piece of pipe on the back of his conk directly afterward, and *that's* a promise!"

Barrington glanced at the timepiece he had chained to his vest and stood.

"You and your friend must come to Linger a While and be my guests for the carnival, y' know," he invited cordially. "Meanwhile, meet me to-night in the foyer of the Café Chien Chaud and we'll go deeper into this matter at dinner. Right-o?"

Ottie licked his lips.

"Yuss, yuss. Come, Joe. Ten more minutes of this and he'll make me break down and cry. Dinner, too. This strain is terrible!"

Out on Park Avenue, Scandrel secured his overcoat with the only button left on it and shot his one cuff.

"Now that's over," I said, "would you mind telling me what you know about ice boating that gives you any license to undertake a position like this? The chances are you'll not only help Barrington's rival to win but will lose the girl for him in the bargain."

"Yeah?" he sneered. "Don't be worrying about me. Ever since Eddie first told me about this job I've been studying up on two books. One's put out by the government and is called 'How to Be a Sailor.' The other one I borrowed off the public's library and it's entitled 'Sailing Ice Boats in Switzerland.' Five thousand cakes, Reggie said, did he? We win from here to Siam!"

MATTERS were arranged between Barrington and Ottie, and the next Tuesday at noon Scandrel chanced across me in a Times Square chophouse where I was engaged with a steak. He was not alone. Treading on his run-down heels was an ignorant-looking dumb Danny attired in what would have been a Tuxedo if it hadn't been a business suit. This number had an expression as vacant as a lot, a goofie grin, carried a small bag in one hand and a music portfolio in the other.

Scandrel docked at my table and dropped anchor.

"Meet Eddie Swan, Joe. Eddie lives in Bayonne but he's coming to America soon now. You wouldn't think it to look at him but he writes swell jazz. Did you ever hear 'You Can't Take a Bath With Sponge Cake'? Eddie wrote that one Saturday night and already they've sold more than six copies. Sit down, kid. Take the card and order what you want. Remember, you're treating us."

After a couple of glasses of water out of the milk bottle and a helping of Boston beans that must have come to New York by slow freight, Swan grew more animated. I learned that his father had been one of the few American missionaries to White Plains, that at an early age he had displayed marked musical talent and had been sent to study with the foremost instructor in Paris—Kentucky. Swan claimed that once he had received his diploma and had stepped out into the big wide world he had quickly discovered that as a composer he was the same kind of a success in the sphere of melody that Firpo was in the profession of swat.

Not so good!

Then he explained that with a few wolves at the front door of his attic studio and with nothing in the house to eat except a couple of dog biscuits and a can of condensed milk, he had been forced in self-defense to enter the busy marts of trade and snatch a job tuning pianos.

"It's a tough life, mister," Swan sighed. "I can write rings around these here guys that ride up and down Broadway in ten-thousand-buck machines, but the music publishers must have a grudge against me. My harmony is over their heads like a sombrero."

Scandrel, speaking a good word for the man who invented tomato soup, used his napkin on his eyebrows and shook his head.

"Don't be like that, kid. You're unusually thick, but don't forget the old saying—opportunity knocks like an ounce of prevention which is worth a stitch in time any day. I didn't mean to tell you this now, but rather than have you be low and moan about it I'll crack it.

"I was talking to my new friend, Reggie Barrington. It seems that he owns the Music Publishers' Building, and he says that if we will give him the manuscript of our new song he'll take it over to Milton

Minashifsky to-morrow. I guess you know what that means—the same as if King George requested Parliament to take a day off."

"Milton Minashifsky?" Swan hollered. "Why, he's the biggest publisher in America to-day! His latest hit, 'Let Me Make Your Blue Eyes Black,' has sold fifty million copies. Excuse me while I dash down to my boarding house and make a change in the first coupla bars. I think possibly they're a trifle too moderato to be allegretto."

"Keep your seat or I'll flatten you!" Ottie hissed. "I want Joe to hear this new number we wrote together. How does the tune of it go?"

"You don't mean to tell me you've written a song?" I cut in.

Ottie made an easy gesture.

"I'll not only tell it to you, but we'll sing it to you. The other afternoon Silly here pilfered a melody from the classics, threw a little jazz at it and I plumbered some words. I got a copy of them with me now. Grab this while it's hot, Joe."

Sorting through a pocket that contained everything from four cigarette coupons to a burned match and a letter he could not afford to mail, Ottie finally produced a much-corrected lyric. He kicked Swan in the shins to get service and both began to sing in voices that made half of the restaurant's customers drop their table tools in startled dismay.

The words of the touching Scandrel chef-d'œuvre were as follows:

When I took a slant at your beautiful face,
Sweetie, I started to slip,
'Cause you are the winner in life's human race,
Baby, a regular pip,
You got manners like pi-an-ers,
I love both your eyes so blue,
Be my pal all through life,
Be my sweetheart, my wife—
For even my arches have fallen for you!

The roundelay was finished at the same minute three waiters and the manager rushed up.

"Outside!" the latter ordered. "We don't allow no drunks in here and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for breaking the prohibition law."

Handing Swan a platter, Ottie grabbed a plate.

"You take the three little ones and I'll take the big one, Eddie!" he screamed. "We'll break something else except the law and no mistake there!"

When I left hastily the battle was still raging, with forty dollars' worth of ruined crockery on the floor, two waiters and Master Swan, whom Ottie was carelessly stepping on in his anxiety to get set to take the manager!

Two days later I learned that Swan's song had not only been accepted for immediate publication by the house of Milton Minashifsky, but that the famous publisher had made arrangements to have the song interpolated into the score of the revue at the Summer Garden, and advertised it as the sweetest ballad of human heart throbs ever written.

"Yuss," Ottie admitted, "this number is going to be as catching as the canine department of the S. P. C. A. To change the subject. Did I tell you I've wished dumb Eddie up to Lake Sunapec for the ice man's carnival? Reggie was looking for an entertainer and that was my cue to speak up and sell him. If Swan keeps his hat on so the woodpeckers don't get him and don't wise crack around, he'll get by. We're leaving Friday night about noon."

To resume.

Linger a While and Lake Sunapec proved to be in the distant reaches of Mr. Adirondack's popular mountains. It was reached by a Pullman train. During the journey Ottie and Swan tossed away several carefree hours by singing the fox-trot song. With no casualties other than the damage done to a traveling salesman who came around and made both a present of twenty cents after the concert, Lake Sunapec was finally reached, and we found one of Barrington's station wagons waiting for us at the depot.

"For crying out loud!" Ottie muttered when this vehicle gassed us away. "It's so cold here that it's nickels to nosegays they use icicles for hot-water bottles. Keep your hands in your pockets, kid—I

said *your* pockets—or you'll have to play the piano with your ankles. Warm kittens! I'll bet the feller who invented refrigerators has a summer home up this way."

Linger a While, as expected, was a rambling stone building as French in architecture as a handful of francs. It was built directly on the shore of the lake itself, and from a distance looked something like the Tombs.

Inside, to the left of a foyer big enough to stage a public lynching, was a regulation bar with a brass footrail, plenty cracked ice and a couple of busy boys in white coats. We learned later that the only time Barrington's guests weren't drinking cocktails was when they were putting away highballs or sampling the champagne that flowed like water and tasted practically the same.

A dime museum would have found exhibits among the guests.

The crowd that Barrington had dragged up to the château were drawn from all sections of the Four Hundred and looked it. There were blasé youths whose chins couldn't have been located with maps, elderly gentlemen with water on the knee and alcohol in the hand, blah flappers wearing diamond handcuffs and boyish bobs, their mothers and grandmothers, who couldn't be told from them, to say nothing of a few Wall Street members and some of the fox-hunting and trotting set from Long and Blackwell's Islands.

Among these gilded nonentities, Scandrel was as much at home as a moth in the lapel of a fur coat. He talked to the ladies and back to the men, used the bar as if it had been made to order for him, discussed the intricacies of ice boating as if he understood every word he was saying and loved every minute of it!

Edward Swan, on the other hand, was as lost as a quarter in the subway and, after wandering aimlessly about, tuned the piano in the music salon three times the first day he was present!

Reginald Custis Barrington, as busy as a host should be but seldom is, had little time to discuss either ice yachting or revenge until after dinner that night. Then he drew us confidentially aside in the lounge room and nodded toward a young man who, tacked down in a window seat, was gazing witlessly out into the night. This youth owned up to a whipped-cream complexion, ears like windmills, feet like a couple of deep-sea cruisers and was so thin that he wouldn't have weighed ninety pounds with a rock in each hand.

"That's Amos Chandler, y'know!" Barrington whispered hoarsely. "There's my rival, the despicable bounder who imagines that Mary will be his some day!"

"I'm glad you told me!" Scandrel giggled. "But why only beat him at ice boating? The next time he gets rosy with you, hit him with a piece of macaroni and you'll bend him in two!"

HE was about to add something to his statement when one of the six best-looking girls in the world tripped lightly into the room, nodded to Barrington and crossed to Chandler. This was a big-eyed brunette with more curves than a bugle, a face that would have been a fortune behind the footlights and a grace and animation that made her stick out from the rest of the flappers like a flagpole on a public school. She wore an expensive evening gown, shoes and hosiery to match and a comb studded with diamonds.

Ottie took one look and went in over his head.

"Will you please notice who's here!" he yelped. "Snapping turtles! She's the very gal I had in mind when I wrote the song with Eddie! I wonder what her mother calls her."

"She," Barrington coughed, "happens to be Miss Mortimer, herself, you know. Isn't she simply terrific? But look at her chatting with that cad Chandler. This makes my blood boil. More so, when I have no time now to interfere. Phelps, the butler, made a slight mistake in the guest list and has assigned eight people to the same room. Yuss, as a host I'm called away to straighten matters out."

With a long look in the direction of the window seat Barrington tottered out,

while Ottie buttoned his waistcoat, sent Swan rushing up for the only pair of spats he had saved from the financial wreckage and donned them the minute he came down.

"So that's Chandler and she's Mary!" the big numskull mumbled. "What a grand old name that is, I'll tell the confused universe! No doubt she's dying to dance, so watch me kill her with a tango."

Stopping merely to hide the frayed edges of his cuffs Scandrel sauntered nonchalantly across to the window seat, breezed up to the charming Miss Mortimer and gave her a bow a vaudeville act at the Palace couldn't have equaled.

"Three guesses who I am, Adorable," he began.

"One will be sufficient," the girl smiled. "You're the famous Swiss pilot who is going to sail Reggie's boat."

"Do we dance?"

"If Mr. Chandler will pardon me, and I'm sure he will," was the answer.

"So am I!" Scandrel guffawed. "Otherwise I'll be carrying his nose around in my cigarette case to-morrow as a souvenir. Er—I believe the ballroom is to the left, is it not?"

Helping himself to an arm, he escorted her out, leaving the astonished Chandler as stupefied as the amazed Swan.

"Sufferin' catfish!" the song-writing piano tuner finally stammered. "Can you tie that big eggplant? How does he get that way—walking off a smart doll like her?"

Amos Chandler shook his head weakly.

"I think," he said, arising, "that I need a drink. On second thought I'm certain of it. Blighter!"

While Ottie divided his time equally between learning how to chauffeur an ice boat and Miss Mary Mortimer, who seemed to love to dance with him, Reginald Barrington waited a propitious moment before flinging down his gauntlet. Chandler, evidently expecting the challenge for a race, accepted it eagerly and immediately there was as much excitement as the loss of a ten-dollar bill creates in the center of a Rialto crowd.

Really, Delirium never threw a better tremen!

With the conversation of the guests concerning nothing but the good ships *F. O. B.* and *Mary* and with the thrilling contest scheduled for that Monday morning, bets on the final results were made with so much enthusiasm that the drawing-room of the château bore a striking resemblance to the lawn at Belmont Park.

Barrington's friends divided themselves into two classes—those who took wagers and those who made 'em. By a Look Tour of the lower floor I was able to understand that the Chandler vessel, because of its consistent success in the past, was very much a favorite.

However, there were some who had overheard Scandrel's guff and bluff about the sport as conducted in Switzerland and who, picking him as a skilled skipper, at once sent in half of the mint to support their opinions.

Dollars at Linger a While were as loose as the body bolts on a three-year-old flivver.

Until Monday arrived the carefree crowd present entertained themselves in various ways. Some put on skates at the lake and others at the bar. There were some cruel bridge battles, terrible mah-jong duels and not a little backbiting.

Running true to form, Barrington amused with his parlor sportsmanship. The youth who had been reared in the lap of luxury slaughtered dozens of tigers, caught hundreds of swordfish and told how he had given many a mountain a head start in some long and dangerous climb. If his monologue bored his guests Barrington had at least one interested listener in the person of Phelps.

For a fact, the butler hung on every word, his eyes out so far you could have flicked them off with a yard stick, his mouth wider than wide and his color that of a Sunday tablecloth!

DURING this period of entertainment the talented Eddie Swan amused himself by taking out the upper treble of Barrington's piano and putting it back, Ottie

continued to hang around Mary Mortimer like a fly at a kitchen door and dashes of excitement were supplied by Chandler and the proprietor of the château himself. These two deadly enemies and rivals in love scorched each other with continual glares, wore their fingers out snapping them in each other's faces and once, when left alone in the billiard room, came to blows.

That is, Barrington savagely tossed his perfumed handkerchief at Chandler and the owner of the *Mary* retaliated by throwing it back and showing his teeth.

It was all play.

On Sunday afternoon while Swan was at the pianoforte, our host drew Ottie aside, put points on his waxed mustache and coughed.

"I say, deah old thing. You've taken a good look at the *F. O. B.* but don't you think you should take her out for a trial trip, y'know? Chandler has just brought Captain Izard, his skipper, up from the Shrewsbury. All morning they have been checking up on their rigging and at twilight they are going to take her out and tune her up."

"Tune her up?" Ottie sneered. "What are *they* sailing—a piano on runners? Leave them monkeys get their skiff out and run the chance of breaking an axle or something—not *me*. I do my stuff tomorrow and not an hour quicker, if you break down and soak me with tears. Which is that. Right now I've got a yen for a dash of ankle exercise. Don't worry, eat slowly and keep out of drafts. We shall meet again if not sooner."

He sauntered away leaving Barrington to follow and Eddie Swan to creep in. The young gentleman of notes looked more cheerful than at any time since tying up at the Linger a While wharf.

"Listen, Mr. O'Grady, don't say nothing but I'm cutting a slice of the big ship's private graft. I meet the Mortimer frill making a snow man out in the back yard this morning and after I give her my pipe and hat we talk about music.

"To-night, when the gang goes to drag a sled, I'm playing some of my choice stuff for her. Milt Minashifsky has already planted the song in the Summer Garden show, so I guess I got plenty reason to ace around with this high-class doll if I like. What do you think?"

"I think you'd better put your hand out—you're on a dangerous curve. Where do you come off to rush in where millionaires are treading?"

"Millionaires?" Swan giggled. "Them two put together wouldn't make half a real man between them—the lobby larks! Say, speaking of Chandler reminds me. Last night I seen 'Skinny' out in the garage talking to Scandrel and I wouldn't be surprised if there's something doing.

"I dope it like this. Ottie wins for Barrington but the gal blows with the other guy. Mebbe that's why Scandrel's been fussing so much. If I get a chance tonight I'll play 'Tell Me, Pretty Maiden' and find out. This is all under your felt shed, Mr. O'Grady."

Whatever was brewing and whatever plots were afoot, nothing suppressed the excitement of the next morning.

Those who were usually so somnolent they couldn't roll off the pad until around noon, beat the alarm clock to it and were up with the dawn. Reggie Barrington, tricked out in an Alpine costume that only needed a chorus carrying spears, was all set to sail his boat from the veranda of the château while Amos Chandler, as nervous as a speed demon in the presence of a heartless magistrate, split the breakfast hour up by patting the lily-white hand of Mary Mortimer and darting contemptuous glances at his rival.

Probably the coolest person present was the egotistical Ottie who, robed in something that was a cross between an aviator's costume and evening clothes, tied into the morning meal enthusiastically and only came out of the cups and saucers long enough to smack Swan when the other accidentally dropped a thumb in the cream pitcher.

"Phelps," Barrington declared when breakfast was over, "tells me that the bally old temperature is two degrees below. I'm having steamer rugs brought out on the

porch as well as foot warmers. I am seating you all in alphabetical order with one single exception. That is, deah Mary will be seated at my right and——"

"Haw-haw! Stupid mistake!" Amos Chandler interrupted. "Deah old Mary will be seated at *my* left! Won't you?"

Barrington immediately snatched up a handful of crumbs and flung them across at Chandler, but an outbreak of open warfare was averted by the young lady herself.

"If it's all the same to you," she declared in a voice that should have had the sterling mark on it, "I'll camp on the railing and swing my little feet."

The crowd rushed for the veranda, where field glasses were distributed. I found an empty chair beside the laconic Swan and sat down a minute or two before Ottie, smoking a cigar half as long as the Lincoln Highway, swaggered out, his volume on ice boating under an arm.

"Well, Joe, we're off now. Do me a favor and paste any of these here cash kids who slander me when I ain't around to hear them. And watch me run the *C. O. D.* You'll be amazed!"

The statement was no idle boast.

Ten minutes more elapsed and then the Chandler yacht made its appearance and with all canvas set heeled away up Lake Sunapec for an exercise spin.

The graceful lines and the jaunty tilt of the craft inspired a cheer and made Barrington ruin the nails on his right hand. He had finished with the last finger when there was another cheer and his own boat zigzagged erratically into view, Scandrel madly trying to get the flapping main sail up completely.

"Ha-ha!" Edward Swan roared. "The way 'at bim handles the sheet ought to sign him with a laundry. Why don't he peg the *Mary* a pillow and give it the slip? I'm going to enjoy every minute of *this!*"

From what I had gathered, the race between the two boats was to be over a course that ranged from the starting line in front of the château across to the opposite side of the lake. The second leg of the trip was north to the upper end of the Sunapec, down around its lower bend and then back and up to the finish. Because it was a match race, pure but not so simple, a number of regulations had been dispensed with and save for the faithful Phelps, hanging over a rusty cannon with a box of matches, and a collection of stop watches there were none of the usual formalities observed.

The *Mary* came back, Ottie managed to get his sail up and both boats tacked for the start, Scandrel with the tiller in one hand and his book in the other.

"This is hot!" Swan snickered. "Look at that conceited tomato doing it with literature. I'll bet all my royalties on the song that he thinks you anchor one of them boats with an ice pick. I really——"

Boom!

The ancient cannon that Phelps touched off shook the glass out of two windows and threw the butler back and into a ditch, but both yachts received an even break for a start and the next minute the porch hounds had hurled aside their steamer rugs and at the railing were loudly calling for the boat they had plunged on to come through and cop!

HOW Scandrel managed was more of a mystery than cosmetics but with the wind behind him and all canvas taut on the *F. O. B.* he tore away at a perilous angle. At the first turn the speedy ice boat lunged to the touch of the rudder and Ottie went overboard while the gang on the veranda had a touch of hysteria. The big buffoon, however, had taken the precaution of securing himself to the boat with a rope knotted about his middle and, after bumping over ice worth five or six dollars to any pushcart dealer, hauled himself aboard again and continued the race.

"Glorious hour!" Reggie Barrington bawled. "Nothing can defeat me now!"

Whatever strange fate worked in the Scandrel interests the fact remained that with no further mishaps the *F. O. B.* flew along, gained the lead and held it. I could see Mary Mortimer swinging her little feet excitedly while Chandler, his face as black as a felon's record, tore out a hand-

ful of his well-parted hair and groaned aloud. In his elation, the owner of Linger a While broke three highball glasses in succession, waved two steamer rugs at the same time and yelled his silly head off.

This is what happened.

At the lower end of the lake Ottie, trying to find a chapter in the book that explained how to go about, blundered, ran half up on shore and lost precious minutes while he jumped out and pushed the *F. O. B.* back on the ice again. In some perplexing fashion he got started again, straightened out and sailed fast.

In the charge down the lake to the finish the *F. O. B.* forged steadily ahead and it looked like a certain triumph for the Barrington romance until the unforeseen occurred. Within an eighth of a mile of the finish itself the stiff wind that had been tumbling out of the east suddenly swung directly around to the west, hit Scandrel's mainsail like an eighteen-inch shell, whirled him around like a corkscrew opening a quart bottle of wood alcohol and then, in a direct opposite line, sent the boat flying back toward the lower end of the lake.

Everything would have been good looking had not the *Mary,* coming on, been directly in the way. Like a five-ton truck giving a secondhand can everything it had, the *F. O. B.* smacked into the other ice boat, and together, closely locked, the two craft slid across to the opposite shore where Ottie, the rope still around him, and Captain Izard finished it on foot with their fists.

"You and your Swiss pilots!" Amos Chandler shrieked, throwing his field glasses at Barrington. "He's ruined my boat!"

The owner of the château cleverly dodged the binoculars, shook off a dozen restraining hands and threw himself forward with a bitter cry of rage and hate.

"Confounded cad! Impossible rotter! I intend to strike you!"

There was a little frozen hygeia on the top step of the veranda. Barrington slipped on it and with Chandler in his arms took the stairs hastily and disappeared in a snow bank, leaving Eddie Swan to laugh like a maniac.

"Honest, this is worth ten bills a seat! Look at them two babies going to the bank! And treat yourself to a stare at that Ottie parsnip. The skipper just sloughed him a couple and he's out like a cook on a Thursday off!"

THIRTY-ONE days, or a month, later Scandrel, in some stylish raiment he had retrieved from those shops that guard your goods for a certain annual percentage, invaded the Bronx and my private office, hung his walking stick on the hat-rack and put his nifty castor in the umbrella stand.

"Mr. Prosperity, himself again, Joe! You can't keep a good man down—as any elevator operator will admit under pressure. I didn't bring that scow in and the rope I had on kept me from clouting Chandler's skipper cold, but that cuts no ice here nor there. Like a broom I cleaned up on it!"

The look I gave him was as sharp as a school-teacher's tongue.

"You clean up? How do you mean?"

He pulled down the cuffs of a lavendar shirt and smirked.

"Up at the château that Sunday night our thin friend, Amos Chandler, traps me in the garage where I went to grab a little gasoline to clean my spats. Chandler, on the verge of sobs, tells me that Barrington must never have Mary and hands me a roll of money, begging me not to try too hard to win.

"So much for that. Yesterday, Reggie, y'know, gives me a buzz on the machine that made Mr. Bell famous. I do a lunch with him at the Top-hat Club and Reggie not only makes me a present of the five grand he promised but tries to kiss me in the bargain. Go get *that!*"

"Do you mean to tell me that after you ended all of Barrington's fondest hopes he actually gave you what he had promised for winning? What's the idea?"

Ottie tried out one of his best grins.

"'At's what I wanted to know and that's what I found out. Listen, there's

a streak of the same thing in all of us. Ain't it so? If I can't have what *you've* got I don't want you to have it neither. Thus with the ridiculous Reggie. He didn't get the Mortimer rib but he didn't want Amos Chandler to get her and when Chandler didn't——"

"Didn't?"

Scandrel chuckled.

"If you don't hear me it's your fault—your ears are large enough. The song Eddie Swan and me wrote is a million-dollar comedy hit and I practically own Broadway. Eddie tried out Mary's voice, learned that she's been stage-struck ever since she was in that show at the Ritz-Plaza and got Milton Minashifsky to stick her into the cast at the Summer Garden, and is writing the music for a new show she'll be in next year."

I waited.

"What's the rest?"

"Not a whole lot," Scandrel murmured with a glance at his solid-gold watch. "Eddie and her are engaged to be married—to each other. Right now I've got an invite to have lunch with them. After that I've got a date to see Chandler at the Waistcoat Club. Er—*he* writes that he feels that I kept Mary from marrying Barrington and he wants to present me with a little token of his appreciation in the form of a check. Tell me, what could be sweeter!"

I'm asking you!

Another story by Montanye in the next issue.

A DIFFICULT JOB

FURNIFOLD M. SIMMONS, United States senator from North Carolina and one of the Democratic leaders in the upper house of Congress, has an eye like an eagle's and a backbone like an elephant's. He is one of nature's strong men in the matter of character and temperament. Consequently he has no patience with the quitter and the man who will not "stay put."

"Trying to find out how some men stand on important questions," he said recently, "reminds you of Theodore Roosevelt's illuminating remarks about the difficulty of nailing cranberry jelly to a wall."

SUPERIOR TO FLATTERY

IN his younger years William J. Harris, United States senator from Georgia, took a whirl at the insurance business and hung up a great record in that as he has in everything he has tackled. The big factor in his insurance success was his gift of sizing up people and immediately acting on his judgment.

"Don't start to jollying me," a hard-boiled citizen told him one morning. "You ought to be able to see that flattery won't move me! I like hard, cold facts. I feel like throwing these bull artists out of my office. I——"

"That's exactly what I told my partner before I came around here," broke in young Harris. "When he suggested you as a prospect, I said: 'There's one man, Tom, who won't listen to soft soap and hot air. I'll have to sell him on facts and figures!' And he agreed to it. Everybody knows your reputation, Mr. Jones. And you don't know what a relief it is to call on a man who doesn't expect to be flattered and praised. There are mighty few like you. Most men want to be told what wizards they are, how rich they're supposed to be and what shrewd traders they are. But you've the name of being above all that. And I can see at a glance that you are. And it's refreshing to me. It puts me on my mettle. A man like you is the best——"

Twenty minutes later the man who couldn't be flattered took up his pen and asked the future senator to show him the dotted line.

LINCOLN AND LEADERSHIP

ONE of Abraham Lincoln's most recent biographers, Nathaniel Wright Stephenson, illustrates the unique quality of that great man's leadership by a story in which General McClellan, then commander in chief of the Federal armies, figures with little credit.

Late one night the president and his secretary of state, Seward, went to McClellan's quarters. The general was not at home, but was expected momentarily. Lincoln and Seward sat down to wait. In a little while McClellan came in. He was in a rage about some plan that had gone awry, and on being told that the president was waiting to confer with him he stamped off and to bed without so much as a by your leave to his chief. Instead of resenting the boorish slight, Lincoln took his hat and went home. Secretary Seward's remonstrances were of no avail. The president explained that he preferred to ignore the discourtesy because he did not believe it a time for making points of etiquette and personal dignity. "I will hold McClellan's horse," he said, "if he will win me victories!"

History offers few examples of men so great in leadership and yet so ready in humility. Lincoln, the captain of state, the heroic martyr who piloted his country safely through such a coincidence of storm and reef as few nations have ever survived, remained a simple brother in the brotherhood of man through it all. Other great men have confounded their personalities with the greatness of their stations. Lincoln never did. He saw himself as a man of common clay, sorely tried, subject to error, susceptible of temptation. Because he could thus keep a human perspective on himself, he was able to see his fellow workers, his people, even his people's enemies, with the eye of tenderness and understanding.

McClellan had slighted him. What of it? McClellan's business was not to be polite to the President of the United States. He might be as boorish as he chose so long as he won battles for the people of the United States. Lincoln was the peerless leader because, in his humility, he could forgive anything but failure to serve the cause to which the country was committed.

TOUGH TIMES FOR THE BOOK OF ROYALTY

MANY wars have come and gone since the founding of the *Almanach de Gotha* in 1763—the book of blue blood and crowned heads, the gilt-edged leader and model of all social registers—but no war ever affected its contents and fortunes like the last international upheaval. In fact, the wholesale dethroning of kings, princes and dukes in Germany alone almost ruined

its prospects except for the happy thought of still including its titled victims, with new designations describing their abdication or exclusion from succession.

And, incidentally, the ex-royalties in their altered circumstances have apparently taken advantage of their downfall by obtaining divorces, for many of them have parted—some to live in second-rate neighborhoods, others to vanish into convents or monasteries. So, for the first time in its history, the old *Almanach de Gotha* records the troubles and unhappiness of its high-born ladies and gentlemen.

Also, its publishers have been compelled to change a fundamental policy in their most exclusive book. Time was when the aristocratic *Almanach* defied the great Napoleon and continued to include the rulers he had deposed as if nothing of the kind had taken place. And it used to relegate the royalty of Asia and Africa to the subsidiary section reserved for high officials merely, and statistics.

Now the publishers of this bluest of blue-blooded books have turned to crowns wherever to be found. This is particularly noteworthy in the case of Japan For fifty years the Japanese royal family have fought the *Almanach de Gotha* people, insisting on a proper place among the European potentates, and bitterly complaining of being given secondary position. Until 1922 the publishers refused to heed Japan's protest, but at last the family of the mikado have won out. Others, too, will be promoted to first rank, no doubt, and the *Almanach* compilers, formerly so snobbish, will, like Lewis Carroll's smiling crocodile, "welcome the little fishes in."

THE THREE PIGS

ONCE upon a time—runs a modern French fable—there were three pigs in a sack. Their situation was lamentable. Each of the pigs had a different theory to account for their plight.

The first pig said: "This crowding is terrible; it is because we are in a sack."

The second pig said: "This crowding is a calamity; it is because we are pigs."

The third pig addressed the company in these terms: "This crowding is undoubtedly frightful, but you are both wrong as to the causative factors underlying it. Our hideous predicament results neither from the fact that we are in a sack nor from the circumstance that we are pigs. The calamity is the logical result, direct and inevitable, of certain spasmodic variations in the great law governing economic utility."

This sapient discourse made a profound impression on the first two pigs and, with one voice, they elected the third pig to be their leader.

This done, the crowding continued as before.

The moral of this brief satire is visible in the life all around us. Everywhere people originally gifted with common sense are being hypnotized into a surrender of reason by large words strung together in resounding periods that mean nothing. Why a man, who sets forth sound ideas in clear and simple language that anybody with a grammar-school vocabulary can understand, should receive less consideration than an animated dictionary, who utters the purest nonsense in cross-word-puzzle jargon, is one of those human mysteries that psychologists will never solve—although no doubt they will claim a solution.

Yet it is so. The world is full of people who will adulate and follow any upstart demagogue with a well-developed talent for incomprehensibility. Tell one of these people that two and two make four and you will receive a shrug and a lofty stare for your pains. But say that by a delicate and recondite process of

logarithmic manipulation you have achieved the interesting conclusion that five is the sum of two and two, and you will win immediate consideration and respect.

It is our observation that the harder it is to understand a man the less there is about him worth understanding. Large words do not necessarily mean great learning and intellectual power. They may be the sign of nothing more than a retentive memory. It is the easiest thing in the world to befog a simple issue with complex rhetoric. The really difficult and impressive feat is to state a complex proposition with such skillful clarity of phrase and such economy of words that it seems a simple matter.

WHEN THE RED BALL IS UP

KIPLING says somewhere in one of his books that he carries around with him a priceless picture gallery—the memories of sights seen on the Seven Seas and in the lands that border them. We go Mr. Kipling one better. With us we carry around a collection of memory-phonograph records of sounds we have heard and hope to hear again. It would be nice if we could say that these sound memories were of a wonderful orchestra playing Tschaikowsky's Symphonie Pathétique, or of Mr. Paderewski playing Chopin's Etude in G Sharp Minor, or—well, it would be nice, but it wouldn't be true. The sounds that we like best to remember are strictly lowbrow sounds—the slap-slap of ripples against the bottom of a lightly laden canoe as a six-foot paddle sends it skittering over a still lake, the clatter of troop horses' hoofs on a hard road, the soul-satisfying thud of a tennis ball that a perfect smash—the only one of the season—has sent to that place from which no short lob returns, and—to come to the point at last—the zip-p *zip*—zip-p *zip* of a pair of well-sharpened skate blades over hard smooth ice.

All over the part of the country where Jack Frost can be expected to provide ice, the red ball that means skating is awaited eagerly by youngsters whose ages range from seven to seventy—with an occasional enthusiast under or over those limits no novelty. Where on the long list of amusements can you find a pastime that is jollier, heartier, more blood quickening than ice skating? Grandpa, ear tabs snugly in place and a pair of club skates of the vintage of 1875 clamped to his shoes, cutting figure eights that would astonish his office boy; the youth who, hands clasped behind his back and his upper body parallel to the ice, glides along with long strokes on his first pair of racing skates; the schoolgirl who comes down in a flutter of bright-hued skirts, rolled sport socks and sheer silk stockings—which is oldest? When the red ball is up every one is young.

Of course, ice skating, like everything else, has degrees of excellence. There is skating in an indoor rink, where young men who wear derby hats and stiff collars, and young ladies who are dressed as if for a dance, go round and round to the strains of jazz. None of that for us! Give us a good big pond, with a full moon gleaming down on the black ice and the snow banked white at the sides; the night cold, but not too cold; a girl who doesn't have her skates come off more than once every ten minutes—and watch us go!

POPULAR TOPICS

FROM Berlin comes the startling news that the Krupp works are busy making artificial teeth of the steel that they used to use in the manufacture of sword blades and gun barrels.

Is this the newest German war weapon?

Perhaps, after all, the French military experts have been correct in their opinion that Germany is armed to the teeth.

ANOTHER bit of news from Germany is more reassuring. A man who stepped out into the street and gave three hearty cheers for the ex-kaiser was adjudged insane.

DESPITE the opinions of veteran commuters on other roads, the Death Valley Railroad is the lowest railroad in the United States. It is the lowest in altitude and the lowest in earnings. Although its net profits jumped from $1.32 in 1922 to the huge sum of $23.78 in 1923, the company that operates it is seeking permission to abandon the line because "it isn't worthy the distinction of being designated a common carrier." Officials explained that the increase of earnings was unnatural and temporary, being caused by the peak-load business of motion-picture companies who have been using the Death Valley as a background for their desert thrillers.

SLOWLY but surely the civilization of the white man is conquering the world. China is the latest victim. Back in 1910, you will remember if you are interested in such things, Jack Johnson knocked out Jim Jeffries in a fight in Reno, Nevada, thereby winning the world's heavyweight championship. As the showing of the motion pictures of the fight was barred in the United States, the films were shipped to China, and were popular with the Chinese movie fans for several years. This educational enterprise bore fruit, for not long ago a Chinese heavyweight who staggers around under the name of Long Fong Lee knocked out an American fighter in the first round of a bout.

It is quite likely that Mr. Tex Rickard will feel that this blow to the prestige of the Nordics should be avenged, and that Mr. Long Fong Lee will be invited to visit Madison Square Garden to engage in fistic debate with some of the exponents of American culture. There is an opening in the swat industry for another earnest young business man now that the Wild Bull of the Pampas has been tamed. Why not the Mad Monster of Mongolia?

THE treasury department is trying to "sell" the silver dollar to the American people. One of the cartwheels was placed in the pay envelope of each of five thousand treasury employees recently. During the last twenty years a stream of silver dollars has poured into the treasury to be exchanged for paper money. Now Uncle Sam has become economical, and as paper money wears out so quickly that it costs the government three per cent of its face value for upkeep and replacements, the watchdogs of our national money chests are trying to get the public to use the dollar of our daddies once more.

ANIMAL conservation pays. In 1912 there were only 32,000 fur seals remaining in Alaska. The great herds had been thinned almost to the vanishing point by poaching and indiscriminate slaughter. Then the government enforced careful methods of conservation. To-day the seal population is estimated at 600,000.

THE Prince of Wales has shocked conservative Britishers by telling the world that he prefers the new-fangled American belt to the safe-and-sane John Bull suspenders for the upholding of the princely trousers.

We hope that the prince doesn't go to the extreme of the Ritzie-American college boy, who has accepted so fully the doctrine of nonsupport that he has discarded his no-metal-can-touch-yous and let his sox roll unconfined at his ankles.

The entire question of men's clothes has become precarious. Every time we see a garterless, suspenderless youth whose wide-bottomed trousers are trailing at his heels we feel like sending in a hurry call for the National Security League.

Getting Close to Nature

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "So This Is Cairo!" "King Neptune Takes Command," Etc.

Shore leave in East Africa brings a thrilling adventure featuring an earnest pharmacist's mate, a determined hippo, a fateful saxophone, and the prettiest girl in port.

HENRY WEXTER was a pharmacist's mate, first class, in the Scout Cruiser *Toledo*. To explain the naval term, he was a competent nurse and doctor's assistant in the ship's sick bay or hospital. Not much romance of the sea in that. None of your dashing-bluejacket stuff. Henry was a serious-minded youth who saved his pay and hoped to go to a medical school later and become a real M. D. With his gold-rimmed glasses, pale complexion, and studious air, he could not be said to resemble a seagoing gob.

His duties absorbed his attention. He was happy in his work. The doctor called him his right-hand man. Henry Wexter would not have swapped places with the brass-bound captain.

He complained that the cruiser did not stay long enough in the various ports of this African voyage for him to make a thorough study of the diseases of the country and the habits of the natives. He did the best he could, however, by making a bee line for the hospitals whenever shore liberty was granted him. The restaurants, curio shops, dance halls and motor rides which attracted his flighty shipmates were so much wasted time to Henry Wexter. He preferred to investigate cases of leprosy, black-water fever, or bubonic plague.

Returning to the ship, he was likely to bring off, not baskets or strings of beads and carved ivory elephants, but microscopic slides of strange and fearful bacteria, or a deadly tsetse fly in a tiny bottle, or a drop of some peculiarly fatal snake venom.

These pastimes amused his comrades who poked good-humored fun at Henry. After one of his scientific tours, they were careful not to joggle him in a crowded launch. He was like a depth bomb with a contact fuse. One never felt quite certain that Henry was not loaded with devastating germs or bugs.

Apart from this failing, the pharmacist's mate was human and well liked. He would sit up all night with a sick man

and forget his weariness. Patient and cheerful, they called him a good scout.

The *Toledo* was steaming at an easy cruising speed of fifteen knots to pick up a landfall on the coast of Portuguese East Africa. In the dusk of a humid evening the men were lugging their hammocks to the upper deck to swing them from stanchions, davits, and ventilators. Down below the heat was intolerable. Some of them spread blankets wherever there was room to sprawl on the steel deck.

Henry Wexter came up to enjoy an hour's leisure. For once his nose was not buried in some abstruse medical treatise. The weather had wilted him. Seaman William Sprague found him gazing at the shadowy sea and asked:

"What about this next port, Henry? I don't mean hospitals and clinics. Delagoa Bay is a fine harbor—I heard the navigator say that—but is the town any good?"

"Lourenco Marques? Quite civilized and up-to-date, I believe, 'Kid,' " answered Henry. "I am disappointed. I want to get some glimpses of the real Africa, where it is wild and primitive. Did I ever tell you I was crazy to be a naturalist when I was a boy?"

"How to tell the bees from the buttercups and what makes the wild cat wild?"

"More or less. I was always collecting something or other."

"Too bad you can't go roaming in the jungle," said William.

"Great stuff," exclaimed Henry. "Getting close to Nature. It surely does appeal to me."

"Not too close," the Kid objected. "Lions, Henry, and bugs that bite while you sleep! Haven't you been scaring us most to death for the last month! I am strong for this Lourenco Marques if it has paved streets and taxis and a sewer system. No more tropical dumps for me. You go cuddle as close to Nature as you like."

"But I can't ask for overnight liberty, Kid, to make a little trip into the back country. There are two serious cases in the sick bay and the doctor needs me on the job."

"You take life too darned hard, boy. Ease up on yourself. Let George do it once in a while. Join the gang this time. Lay off the nature stuff and the Portuguese hospitals."

Henry Wexter showed no responsive enthusiasm. He could not be lured from his narrow path. In his opinion, these feather-headed young sailors lacked ambition. They showed too little interest in improving themselves.

Early the next morning the cruiser passed in between the distant green shores of Delagoa Bay. Rolling hills, smooth fields, cultivated orchards made the landscape look more like home than like Africa.

The approach to the city was indicated by a new hotel of imposing size which stood upon a bluff. It suggested Atlantic City or San Diego. Golfers were playing on a course that skirted the bay. An elaborate bathing pavilion and casino faced the beach.

Rounding a headland, the *Toledo* came to anchor in a spacious harbor where a dozen large cargo steamers flew their flags. Soon after midday, the liberty boats were called away.

Henry Wexter was still deaf to the persuasions of his frivolous shipmates. All he felt interested in was the hospital operated by the Portuguese administration. The pretty town failed to attract him. It had fine retail shops, pretentious government buildings, wide, shaded streets, and homes set in gorgeous gardens. But a fellow couldn't get very close to Nature in a spick-and-span place like this, grumbled Henry, as he trudged off alone.

AFTER weeks of sultriness and discomfort in other ports nearer the equator, the weather had turned wonderfully cool overnight. The wind that swept across the wide reaches of Delagoa Bay had the tang of September in New England. It was like a tingling tonic. It made Henry Wexter step along with his head in the air. He had a bit of a swagger, like a proper young seaman. The jolly wind whipped color into his cheeks. In his

fresh white clothes, with the round hat perched on three hairs, he was a credit to U. S. S. *Toledo*. Something had happened to Henry Wexter. He was surprised to hear himself exclaim:

"The stuffy old hospital be jiggered! Let it wait. Here is where I ramble."

He swung along with no destination in mind. It was the spirit of rebellion. Automobiles buzzed by him and dark-eyed Portuguese girls glanced with approval at the Yankee bluejacket. Henry actually took notice of them. It was almost scandalous.

After a while he came to the fashionable Hotel Polana which had been seen from the ship. Boldly he strode into the lounge and ordered a claret lemonade. Sipping it through a straw, he listened to the orchestra and wished he might dance with some nice girl who spoke English. Henry was coming to. Most decidedly.

From the hotel he drifted to the golf course. It seemed ages since he had stretched his legs in this carefree, leisurely manner. He was enjoying it. Perhaps he had been letting himself get stale.

It was too early in the afternoon for the golfers to turn out. Henry appeared to have the course to himself. He loafed along on the smooth turf until he came to a rustic bench near the eighth green. Here he could look out over the noble expanse of the bay and feel the joyous rush of the keen, invigorating wind. Henry whistled a snatch of ragtime. This was the life.

Presently he spied a girl who was playing around alone. Her caddy was a little Kafir boy as black as a crow. The wind bothered her. On the long shots it deflected her ball into the rough grass. She was poking about to help the caddy find it when Henry heard her scream. He rushed to the rescue. She aimed her club at a clump of dried grass and gasped:

"It—it went in there. I almost stepped on it. Snakes don't often scare me, but this—for Heaven's sake, do be careful! I just saw it wriggle. They run after you, so the natives say."

A supple, clear-eyed damsel of eighteen or so, she was so agitated that Henry felt perplexed. He had never taken care of a patient with hysterics. They were seldom found in a man-of-war.

"This snake isn't going to run anywhere," said Henry. "Lend me your club and I'll kill it. What kind is it?"

"A g-green momba," she faltered, wringing her hands. "And it almost bit my ankle."

"A green momba? How interesting," calmly observed Henry. "I never saw one alive. I wish I had a bottle of alcohol. The bite of the green momba is said to be fatal in never more than seven minutes. No serum has been discovered to neutralize——"

The girl stared at him. Her lips parted in a smile. The strain relaxed. "For the love of Pete, how do you get that way?" she cried. "I never heard a sailor talk like this. Are you a professor in disguise?"

"You talk like an American girl," retorted Henry. Apparently they had forgotten the green momba and its deadly seven-minute schedule.

"You guessed it," said she. "My father is a mining engineer in Johannesburg. We are spending a couple of weeks at the Hotel Polana."

There was a rustling noise in the clump of grass. Henry dashed forward with golf club upraised. The girl grasped his arm to drag him back.

Meanwhile the sensible Kafir urchin had found a heavy stick. With this he poked the grass clump. The green momba glided out and was promptly smashed by a stone which the caddy hurled with the precision of a trained marksman. Green mombas were nothing to make him nervous.

"Thank you just as much, Mr.—Mr.—— What's your name?" exclaimed the fair young golfer.

"Henry Wexter, U. S. S. *Toledo*," he told her.

"I am Edith Earle," said she, offering her hand like a frank comrade.

"I hope you will call at the hotel and meet my father. He had a fit of rapture

when he saw your beautiful ship pass by this morning with the good old Stars and Stripes flying."

Henry blushed and explained that his hours of liberty were limited. The question of naval rank troubled him. He wanted to invite Mr. Earle and his charming daughter to visit the ship. But they were the kind of folks who would expect to be entertained by the officers. An invisible social wall stood between the officers' wardroom and the berth deck where the four hundred men of the crew lived. Reading his mind, Miss Edith Earle quickly exclaimed:

"Oh, pooh with that! Forget it. What do we care if you are an enlisted man? Heaps of nice boys join the navy to see the world. Awfully sorry I am dated up for the rest of this afternoon. When can you come ashore again?"

"Day after to-morrow—until ten o'clock at night, Miss Earle."

"Oh, that reminds me, Mr. Wexter," she cried, with her jolly smile. "Some of the English people of Lourenco Marques are planning a picnic for that afternoon, with forty enlisted men as guests. I have been invited. They say your officers get plenty of attention—the British Club, the Portuguese Military Club, the Golf Club, a dance at the Polana to-night, and so on. It's time somebody did something for the sailors. How will the forty men be selected? Do you happen to know?"

"It will be left to the division officers," answered Henry. "So many men from each division—those with the best records and who know how to mind their manners."

"Then you will surely be on the list," said Edith Earle. "That's a perfect cinch."

This compliment embarrassed modest Henry to such a degree that he was speechless. The girl glanced at her wrist watch and discovered that she ought not to linger. Henry walked back with her but could not be coaxed inside the hotel. His courage was oozing. Finally he made a bold effort and ventured to say:

"If you care to see the ship, Miss Earle, I'll be glad to show you around. Of course I can't entertain you, for I am just a plain gob—pharmacist's mate, first class."

This confession appeared to make her like him none the less. It explained his scientific interest in the green momba.

"My uncle is a very distinguished surgeon," said she. "I may be a trained nurse some day. A girl ought to know how to do something useful. Thanks awfully for the invitation to go out to your ship, Mr. Wexter. I'll tell dad about it."

Left deserted and alone, Henry placed a finger on his wrist. The manner was gravely professional. His pulse was several beats faster than usual. It was a symptom agreeable and fascinating.

Here was a malady which he knew to be epidemic among the younger generation, but his own knowledge had been merely hearsay. His emotions veered to acute distress as he said to himself:

"Good Lord, that green momba might have bitten her ankle. What a frightfully narrow escape!"

Absent-mindedly he wandered back into the town. There he was unlucky enough to encounter Kid Sprague with three pals. They had been riding for miles in a taxi. After paying the bill, they were broke, as usual. Henry lent them money, also as usual. They adjourned to an outdoor café and ordered food. They were always hungry.

"What about the hospital, Henry, old top?" asked the Kid. "Did you find any nice disgusting cases?"

"Disgusting? I should say not. Don't get so blamed fresh," violently ejaculated Henry, jarred out of his trance.

"Here! What's happened to you?" demanded one of the others. "Why the vile temper?"

"None of your fool business," was the discourteous reply.

"Our Henry must have swallowed a naughty little germ, boys," suggested Seaman Sprague. "Stand him on his head and shake it out of him. He acts mighty queer."

With one accord they laid brutal hands

upon Henry Wexter and turned him upside down, with his legs waving in air. It was first aid to the injured. Sputtering his opinion of such a bunch of hoodlums who disgraced the uniform, Henry broke away and fled to the boat landing. He desired to flock by himself.

That night he was in a restless mood and slept poorly. The clinical thermometer registered one half a degree of fever. A new microbe was playing the mischief with the steady-gaited composure of the pharmacist's mate.

Seaman William Sprague persistently practiced on the saxophone. His favorite melody was "Yes, We Have No Bananas." It annoyed Henry, who wished to sit and dream in quiet. It was even worse when the blithesome Sprague strolled in to announce:

"I am elected for that picnic, you grouchy old pill box. And your name is on the list. The executive's yoeman slipped me the word. You will be the life of the party, I don't think. The *Toledo* Orioles will furnish some of the dance music. There is one classy, seagoing outfit of jazz babies, if I do lead 'em myself."

"That means spoiling a perfectly good party with your infernal saxophone," groaned Henry Wexter.

"Listen, 'Iodoform Hank,' there will be girls. I have the dope from an English guy that came out to sell fuel oil to the paymaster. Nice girls. And one of 'em is a pippin. Johannesburg is her home port—name is Earle. Make way for the good-looking gob that shakes a mean foot and toots a wicked saxophone. That's me, Henry."

"No girl with any sense would fall for your line, Kid," replied the disgruntled pharmacist's mate. "You surely do hate yourself, don't you?"

"They like my style, indeed they do. Leave a broken heart in every port. That's my motto. If you don't brace up and show some pep, Henry, you will be left flat on your back at this African picnic. Take it from a friend."

Henry spurned this counsel and told the insufferable nuisance to go fall overboard. Alas, there was something in the Kid's idle words. This much Henry Wexter sadly admitted to himself. He could not expect to shine in such beguiling company. And William Sprague was already setting his sights for that lovely creature at the Hotel Polana—Henry's friend, with the green momba as a bond between them.

However, Henry shoved the clouds away in the afternoon and felt suddenly radiant. He was on deck and off duty when he saw a ship's boat coming out from the pier. Beneath the awning was none other than the dearest of her sex. Beside her sat a solidly built gentleman with a clipped mustache who looked the part of a successful mining engineer.

Henry hovered near the gangway, suffering waves of diffidence and thrills of audacity. The spruce young officer of the deck, a telescope under his arm, greeted the visitors and asked if they wished to see any one in particular. Loyally Miss Edith Earle explained that she and her father would like to be shown about by a friend of hers, Mr. Henry Wexter.

THIS was the beaming Henry's cue. He stepped up and was cordially presented to Mr. Earle of Johannesburg. The officer of the deck was a susceptible junior lieutenant with an eye for beauty. His duties detained him at the gangway. He cast an envious glance at the pharmacist's mate and paced to and fro, reflecting that some gobs were shot with luck.

Henry thought so, too. Leave it to him and Miss Edith Earle would have received a salute of fourteen guns. Conscientiously he escorted his guests from one end of the crack cruiser to the other. The *Toledo* was the very latest thing in war vessels of her type. Her prodigious speed and horse power, the intricate electrical equipment, the catapults for launching airplanes, these and other gadgets of modern naval efficiency keenly interested the mining engineer. He bombarded poor Henry Wexter with technical questions and monopolized the conversation. The two young people could do no more than exchange an occasional word.

Henry was no expert in fire control, turbine engines, or navigation. He did his best to supply the demand for information but he perspired freely and frequently confessed that he didn't know. The girl would think him a dumb-bell. It was terrible!

His confusion was perceived by Seaman William Sprague, purposely loitering within earshot, who felt no sympathy whatever. He snickered audibly. It was inhuman of him. Henry's predicament offered a perfectly good excuse to step up and answer the bothersome questions. As a member of a deck division, he had the details at his fingers' ends. It was all in the daily routine of drill and instruction.

Henry had to introduce him to Edith. There was no way out of it. The beans were spilled, but Henry doggedly hung on. He still had a chance, if Mr. Earle would only keep Kid Sprague engaged in inspecting gun mounts and torpedo tubes.

Edith was gracious and seemed to feel sorry for her flustered pharmacist's mate. Just when they were left alone together and Henry was doing nicely, an impudent, freckled messenger came up from below and sang out:

"Hi, Wexter! The doctor wants you in the sick bay. Emergency case. Some guy in the black gang tried to smuggle a bottle of booze aboard in his sleeve. He fell down the gangway and smashed the bottle. It cut him in seventeen places. It's up to you to help pick the glass out of him. Make it snappy."

"Well, I will be——" Henry almost bit his tongue.

"Say damn. Don't mind me. This is the limit," consoled Edith Earle. "Good-by, Mr. Wexter, and thank you so much. See you at the picnic."

"Perhaps," said Henry as they shook hands. To him it seemed like a tragic farewell. Fate had thwarted him and smiled upon the perfidious Kid Sprague who was a fast worker. Henry Wexter had never learned the trick of leaving a broken heart in every port.

After mess gear had been cleared from the supper tables, Henry might have been seen to wander to the seclusion of the after deck. He was tired and low in his mind. Picking glass out of the bibulous fireman had been a long and difficult task. It had banished romantic reveries.

Kid Sprague discovered the melancholy pharmacist's mate but forbore to taunt him. It was unfair to hit a man when he was down. Taking a friendlier tack, William soothingly remarked:

"She admires you, Henry. She gave me an earful. A girl of bang-up good judgment, too. Brains as well as good looks."

"Quit your joshing, Kid. I am out. You win. I was mistaken when I said a girl like that wouldn't fall for your line of bunk. It's natural for her to be attracted by the kind of gink she can play up as a hero. You're not so much but you do throw a front. You know what I mean. Strike up the band, here comes a sailor! I am just a plug."

"Pipe down. Don't take it so darned seriously," laughed William. "I can't help strutting my stuff, but honest virtue holds the high cards."

"Not when the navy is doing social stunts," disagreed Henry. "Well, I guess I'll go below and dress the chief carpenter's carbuncle. You ought to hear him cuss."

Of course Henry went to the picnic. He could not have been kept away, although he looked forward to a harrowing afternoon. His mind would have been more at ease if he had not been diverted from hospitals and germs in the first place.

When the launch shoved off with the forty sailor guests, he wore an air of resignation. Whatever torments might be in store for him, he would bear them like a man.

The automobiles were waiting near a little park in the heart of the town. Henry caught a glimpse of Edith Earle, but, alas, the English people in charge of the affair had no idea of the pharmacist mate's serious condition.

The chairman was a methodical person who read the names aloud from a typewritten list and assigned the guests to the

various cars. Henry was tucked in with an elderly lady, quite deaf, and her portly husband, a shipping merchant of Lourenco Marques, who yawned a good deal and seemed to miss his afternoon nap.

Henry tried to be entertaining but his thoughts wandered. He scowled bitterly when Edith Earle rolled past. Beside her sat Seaman William Sprague who blew an insulting toot on the saxophone.

The road led inland. Luxuriant verdure crept close to it. The breeze was left behind. The air became heavy and hot. In this lush tropical world, Henry Wexter began to feel the ardor of the naturalist.

He was getting close to Nature. The birds and insects interested him. He expected to see monkeys swinging by their tails. This was something like the real Africa.

At a leisurely pace the procession of cars covered several miles before coming to a halt. The picnic party left them and strolled down to the bank of a small, muddy river. A dozen natives were waiting with a rudely built scow as a ferry.

They were wiry black men, almost naked, who laughed and chattered incessantly. As soon as the scow was filled with passengers, these Kafirs splashed alongside and shoved ahead in water to their waists. The turbid current dragged the scow this way and that, but the crossing was made without mishap. The noisy boatmen returned for another load.

From the river the picnickers walked along a grassy trail chopped out of the jungle until they came to a brick building with a tall chimney. This was the pumping station for the water supply of Lourenco Marques. Near by was the engineer's bungalow and a pretty garden with shade trees. A floor had been knocked together for dancing out of doors.

It was a pleasant retreat for a crowd of youthful bluejackets who had grown tired of ships and seaports. There was the charm of novelty. This was how it had appealed to the kindly hosts. They surmised that the crew of the *Toledo* had been unable to wander far from the beach during the liberty hours of the cruise. The brick pumping station could not spoil the impression of a landscape savagely primitive and remote from the modern scene.

Henry Wexter hovered in the background. He was routed by force of numbers. Edith Earle had been taken possession of by Kid Sprague and two or three of his buddies. Dance music had been provided by the committee. This was reënforced by the amateur jazz artists from the *Toledo,* when they felt so inclined. When Edith Earle danced with some other blissful gob, Kid Sprague displayed his prowess on the saxophone.

Henry lacked the easy manner and glib talk of these gallant shipmates. He seldom danced and was never sure he could make his feet behave.

The odds were all against him. He lost his nerve. Miss Edith felt sorry for him. This he gloomily concluded. His speed was too slow to maneuver in such company. Whenever he gazed in her direction, she encouraged him with a smile or a wave of the hand. If he tried to talk to her, some hateful suitor interfered to kidnap her for a dance.

AT length, Henry drifted away from the party. If he could get no closer to Edith, he might try getting closer to Nature. Here was his first opportunity to explore a bit of Africa. With sentiment barred, he could take refuge in the pursuit of science. Women were liable to play the dickens with a man's career, anyhow. Hereafter he would avoid all entanglements.

Following a path beyond the pumping station, Henry plunged into the rank undergrowth and trailing vines where the jungle had not been cleared. Here the mosquitoes swarmed. Henry made corpses of several and satisfied himself that they were not of the Anopheles variety that carries the malarial germ.

He discovered insects less familiar, such a fascinating profusion of them that he almost forgot his intimate sorrows. The distant racket of saxophone, fiddle, and drums came to his ears. The barbarous

jazz jarred Henry's sensitive soul, although it seemed to belong in such an environment as this. Strange bugs and plants and flowers, or the flash of brilliant plumage, lured him on.

He pottered about until a noise in the dense foliage startled him. Branches snapped. Leaves rustled. Henry stood and listened. He called out, but there was no response. He moved cautiously in the direction of the noise. It perplexed him.

Through a rift in the green curtain of trees he caught sight of the brown river. He could hear the squashing sound of trampled mud and more commotion in the foliage. Some large body was forcing a passage.

This was very odd, reflected Henry, who felt curious to find out more about it. No bulky wild animal would be prowling so near the picnic and the pumping station in the middle of the afternoon. The big game must have been driven out of this coastwise region of towns and railroads and automobiles.

Henry scratched his head and wiped the moisture from his glasses. With the ardor of the naturalist, he began to stalk the invisible creature. Probably it was nothing more exciting that a stray horse or donkey or a domesticated water buffalo.

Suddenly Henry Wexter stiffened with terror and was rooted in his tracks. His knees wabbled. His mouth hung open. With eyes that popped out he beheld no more than a dozen feet away an enormous animal that resembled a nightmare. Its unwieldy body was propped upon absurdly short legs. The skin hung in great folds and was plastered with mud. The grotesque head was as big as a barrel. The mouth looked vast enough to swallow Henry in two bites.

The little ears were moving alertly to catch every suspicious sound. The pig eyes had a wicked glint. Horror-smitten though he was, the scholarly Henry found himself muttering aloud:

"Hippopotamus amphibius! The largest living representative of the ruminating artiodactyl mammals."

The hippo saw Henry a moment later. This specimen was an ill-tempered brute who disliked society of any kind. This was the expression he wore on his face. Possibly the strains of the saxophone had completely ruined a disposition already warped.

Henry was given no time to explain that he detested a saxophone himself. Wrenching himself out of his petrified trance, he began to retreat. He had not the slightest desire to add an angry hippopotamus to his natural-history collections.

With a very nasty grunt, the hippo lumbered straight for Henry Wexter.

Already the lone pharmacist's mate was steaming under full power. He was turning up knots. He felt as though he were being chased by an armored cruiser.

It was amazing to discover how fast an indignant hippopotamus could get over the ground. The beast had changed its gait from a clumsy trot to a rolling gallop.

Presently Henry broke out of the jungle and scurried into the path where the going was easier. Glancing behind him, he saw the hippo still stubbornly in pursuit. There was room for only one idea in its stupid head.

THE intelligent Henry, rattled as he was, could think of two things at once. He was leading a race which moved rapidly toward the happy picnic party and the dancing floor in front of the bungalow. The older people were scattered about on the grass as spectators or engaged in unpacking the supper baskets. To permit this wicked hippopotamus to charge into the midst of this innocent, defenseless gathering meant hideous disaster. It simply couldn't be done.

Henry saw a chance to save himself, but it meant abandoning the party to its fate. At one side of the path was a timbered shed used by the power plant for storing coal. It appealed to the fugitive Henry as a blessed haven of refuge, a structure too stout to be wrecked in a head-on collision with a hippo.

Henry's impulse was to dive into the shed. He wavered for an instant, but the

nobler obligation propelled his legs on past the shed. It was for him to sacrifice himself and lead the monster safely away from the picnic party. The saxophone player deserved no consideration, but there were others. Among them was Edith Earle, lost to Henry Wexter but still adorable.

"This darned old blunderhead may stick after me if I keep on going," panted Henry. "And before I let him harm a hair of that wonderful girl's head, I'll run——"

The brave young bluejackets of the *Toledo* were anxious and willing to save the women first, but they were given no time in which to rally and organize. The raging hippopotamus burst upon their vision with no warning whatever, Henry Wexter careering in wild flight only a few jumps ahead of it.

Wild confusion was inevitable. Women screamed and turned to their bewildered husbands. Girls clung to the sailors for protection. In a twinkling it was an utterly disrupted picnic.

William Sprague threw away his saxophone and threw his arms around Edith Earle to drag her somewhere. He did not know which way to turn. Vainly his comrades sought weapons or missiles. It was up to them to fight a hippopotamus barehanded.

Pale and anguished, Henry Wexter veered sharply from his course in order to pass clear of the crowd and so coax his gigantic natural-history specimen away from the danger zone. The hippo looked neither to the right nor left. Henry was his meat. It was plain to Henry that unless something intervened, he was a poor bet. He was confirming the fact, previously asserted by African explorers, that the human being cannot outrun the full-grown hippopotamus.

The spectators could only stand and look on. Some of them may have comprehended the heroic strategy of the pharmacist's mate or perhaps it was their sporting instinct. At any rate, they cheered lustily and implored him to step on the gas. Henry heard them not. He was already running faster than he could have conceived as possible.

A bright object gleamed in the grass not far from Henry's course. It was the saxophone which Kid Sprague had hurled from him in the excitement. This was clutching at a straw, but Henry swerved and dodged like a rabbit. He lunged for the saxophone, snatched it up, and whirled in his tracks. Bang, with the fury of desperation, he smote the hippo upon its wide and tender snout.

The beast slowed down, hesitated, and waggled its huge upper lip. The impact of the saxophone had bruised it. In this moment of respite Henry Wexter scudded ahead. He gained a good dozen yards. The saxophone was badly battered but could be wielded again. It would serve to keep the brute occupied.

However, the one wallop had done the trick. It had convinced the hippopotamus that here was a musical instrument which was, indeed, a nuisance. He wanted no more of it. Forgetting his purpose of annihilating Henry Wexter, he proceeded down the trail to the ferry at a ponderous trot. It was more important to cool his damaged nose in the river.

By this time the engineer of the pumping station had rushed out of the bungalow with a rifle. A few minutes later a dead hippopotamus rested in the shallow, muddy water while a dozen Kafir boatmen yelled with delight at the gorgeous feast in prospect.

The demoralized picnic party was reassembled. Henry Wexter sat down to rest with his head in his hands. Beside him was a crumpled saxophone as a trophy of the chase. First to congratulate him was a ruddy Englishman who exclaimed:

"Well played, my boy. Jolly well done. We had no idea at all that an old rogue hippo was barging about here. When they turn ugly like that, they are positively dangerous, don't you know. It was enormously plucky of you."

"Thanks. I started something that I was afraid I couldn't finish," murmured the exhausted Henry. "Glad nobody was hurt."

And now the crowd gathered round to tell Henry how proud they were of him. Greatly embarrassed, he confessed that he had been scared out of a year's growth. The real Africa had been more than he bargained for, he was prepared to tell the world.

The climax of the ovation came when Edith Earle sat down beside him and actually held his hand for a delicious moment. She paid no attention to any one else. Henry was her property, her own particular hero. The engaging Kid Sprague and his comrades were as if they had never been. It was with Henry that she ate the picnic supper. Later they danced together, when Henry's legs had ceased to feel trembly.

"What perfectly thrilling experiences you and I have had, Mr. Wexter," said Edith with the smile that he had privately appraised as worth a million dollars. "First a green momba, fatal in seven minutes, and now a hippo that I thought was going to finish you in quicker time than that."

"Well, I couldn't risk letting him step on you," earnestly replied Henry.

"Yes, I know," said she, with feeling in her voice. "I saw you when you came flying past the coal shed and didn't duck inside. I understand, Mr. Wexter. It was bully. You can trust the navy every time."

"But the navy has to move on, Miss Earle. Can I see you again before we sail from Lourenco Marques?"

"Sure thing! You are to dine with us at the hotel to-morrow night. Dad will be delighted. If you are not due for another liberty, I'll go see the captain about it. And we can dance in the casino."

"Lions couldn't make me break the date," declared Henry.

Somehow it was so arranged that they rode back to town in the same automobile. Henry had a new and masterful way with him. For once, Kid Sprague was cowed. On their way to the ship he was kind enough to suggest:

"Some souvenir, that saxophone, Henry. You can tell the folks at home how you beaned a big hippopotamus with it. Want to keep it?"

"I'll say I do," cried Henry. "First time I ever wanted to have one of the fool things around. Let me buy you a new one, Kid."

"Not on your life. Let the *Toledo* Orioles pay for it. A slight token of our esteem. Talk about getting close to Nature. You were there with both feet."

"Both feet is right," heartily agreed Henry Wexter, pharmacist's mate.

More stories by Mr. Paine will appear in future issues.

THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

WHEN navy officers were making their plans for the cruise of the *Shenandoah* over the north pole, one of their biggest arguments for the trip was that it would arouse the spirit of adventure among American people. "What we Americans need," declared Admiral Moffet, "is the spirit of Columbus." He meant by that the spirit of discovery in all things, in travel, in science, in sociology, in statesmanship. And he was right.

It is the spirit of Columbus that has put America where she is to-day. On it she depends for future achievement. On it every man depends for advancement. There are always frontiers to be enlarged. Edison discovered and explored new worlds with his inventions. Jane Addams did the same thing in sociology. Henry Ford did it in manufacturing and commerce. The spirit that leads men to adventure is an indispensable thing. The world belongs to the adventurers.

Hell's Nubble

By Holman Day

Author of "Scrambled Heroes," "When 'Tempery-ment' Came to Baldknob," Etc.

The old timber baron had never been beaten, and when at last he acknowledged defeat it was some comfort to know that one of his own flesh and blood was responsible.

IT attracted no especial attention in Onawa village that June day when old John Horton galloped his horse down the ledgy street, his antiquated sidebar buggy careening when he turned corners sharply.

His nickname of "Slambang John" suited his headstrong, violent, self-willed, uncontrolled temperament.

Onawa folks often heard the rattle of the buggy's wheels when he went tearing down to his big sawmill in the early morning, voicing loudly his disgusted opinion of "damn snoozers who are asleep at six o'clock!"

This day his descent on the village from his mansion on the hill was timed right around the noon hour. The workmen from the Horton mill were on the street, hurrying home to dinner. The high school had disgorged its pupils. In the main square pedestrians scattered when old John's rangy roan horse came leaping around the corner of the Horton general store.

Folks were quite accustomed to getting out of the way of old John; he never turned out for anybody. He was a tyrant well established; he owned townships of timberlands, the sawmill, the big store; and half the population of the village paid rent to him.

In the middle of the square he pulled the horse upon its haunches, leaped out of the buggy with his whip in his hand, ran to the sidewalk and began to lash viciously young Hollis Burnham, principal of the high school.

Burnham had been walking slowly along, reading a book.

He closed the book on his forefinger to hold the place, stood perfectly still, shoulders back and chin up, and took the lashing without even a grimace of pain, though the whip left weals across his cheeks.

It was a truly wonderful exhibition of self-restraint, because Burnham was a stalwart chap, and had hung up a high mark at college as center of the football team.

Physical prowess was playing small part in making Horton outwardly a victor in the encounter. The younger man was winning the real victory, and his demeanor suggested that he was perfectly well aware of the fact while he endured the atrocious assault.

This stoical immobility only made Horton more furiously angry. He interspersed his blows with oaths. Apparently, unable to relieve his rage in any other way, he broke the stock of the whip across his knee and flung the pieces in Burnham's face.

The throng in the square halted and gaped at the scene.

In that small community everybody knew what it was all about. Hollis Burnham had been daring to show a lover's attentions to John Horton's only daughter, Rega.

"Are you satisfied, Mr. Horton?" asked the young man firmly and loud enough for all to hear.

"Not by a condemned sight—not yet!" Horton was telling the truth about his feelings at that moment; he was conscious of the murmurings of the crowd, his side glances made him aware that they had viewed his performance with mingled indignation and amazement. He should have been ashamed; but he was conscious only of more furiously flaming ire, as if he had been crossed and defied when he had expected to feel the delight of victory.

"However, I am satisfied—perfectly so!" stated Burnham. "I have received only a few blows from your whip on my body. I'm afraid, Mr. Horton, that you have hurt yourself in your man's spirit, deeply and seriously. I would not care to be carrying your thoughts just now. They must be much more painful than my scratches!" He bowed, opened his book and went on his way, reading.

Persons behind the barricade of the first rows of spectators dared to applaud the young man by clapping of hands.

"Damn you, who's doing that?" shouted Horton, shuttling his hard eyes—they were like striated marbles under the little tents of the lids. But he detected nobody in the act; the hands were cautiously concealed.

Men and women, and the children from the school—they all turned their backs on him and went away. More than ever enraged, he clambered into the vehicle and with the ends of the reins lashed the horse through the square, on his way back to his mansion.

In the yard of his estate he yelled to summon the attention of the hostler and sent the horse running to the stable, slapping the animal violently with his broad palm.

In the sitting room Horton confronted his daughter, who had been standing at the window, observing her father's tempestuous return.

"I've done it!" he reported, his fury keyed to even a higher pitch. "I've done what I said I'd do when I left this house. I've used up my whip on him!"

The girl was pale; her mental anguish was apparent, but she did not lower her eyes under his savage stare. On the contrary, she returned that stare with resolution; there was denunciation in her demeanor. She walked slowly toward him.

"Are you satisfied?" By the repetition of that phrase, now hateful, she fairly lashed the wound that was raw in him.

He tried to vent his emotions in coarse profanity.

"Such language may help you in handling your timber crews, sir, but it is absolutely useless in this case. I am John Horton's own daughter, with considerable of his nature, and browbeating and bullying have no effect on me."

He glowered at her, finding it difficult to handle this phase of the thing.

"I don't say that you deliberately have shamed yourself and me in the village," she went on, "because you never stop to deliberate when you are angry. However, the thing has been done, and we are shamed. Father," she cried with sudden passion, "you can't make me believe that you can walk down the streets of Onawa this day and look men in the eye without shame!"

"I gave him what was coming to him

after I had warned him," Horton insisted. "It's what I've always done to every man who has bucked me after a warning. He was in my house last evening—and I had told him to stay away from you."

"He was here because I invited him—urged him to walk home with me and to come in!" She narrowed her eyes and puckered her forehead, more grimly resolute. "I am of age, and I claim the right to choose my friends. Yes! My husband, even! Hollis and I are engaged to be married."

Horton had swung to the end of the arc of vociferous wrath; hot speech was serving him no longer; he came back to menacing, pent-up, saturnine threat. For some moments he regarded her morosely in silence. Then he said through his lips which barely moved, "I'll see you in hell before you'll marry him. If it has got to be Horton against Horton—then the fight is on!"

She took time of her own to consider her reply. "I thank you for a very good hint which you did not intend to give me. You have begun the work of shaming the Hortons; now I'll join in and help you in making a thorough job of it."

"How?" he demanded, curiosity mingled with his wrath. "I'm going to have a whole lot to say about anything you do."

"You didn't ask my advice when you left the house to go into the village a little while ago. You announced that you were going to do something—and you went and did it. I choose to follow the same tactics."

The hardness which was set into the lines of her countenance did not accord with the beauty of the face; the Horton fighting spirit was registered in rather unlovely fashion.

"I didn't give you any hint for your actions, as you said a minute ago," he shouted, following her when she walked from the room. "I have only given you orders to have nothing more to do with a damnation stuck-up he schoolmarm! You're going to marry somebody who knows logs, men and caliper measures. You're going to have a husband who can carry on my business, as I've been running it. I've made it what it is so it'll be a monument for me after I'm dead—and I ain't going to have it knocked over by a dude standing off and pelting books at it."

"We'll leave the matter where it stands, if you please," she returned, halting halfway up the staircase and looking down over the rail. "You have stated that it's to be Horton against Horton—and as a daughter who has inherited her father's nature—even if he decides to keep his property away from me—I accept the challenge!"

She entered her room and he went out and stamped up and down the yard, trying to guess what her intentions might be.

II.

WHEN the Great Northern Paper Company built an immense concrete dam in Hagas Gorge, the structure drowned out two small lakes and raised ten feet the sixteen-mile expanse of Batticook, adding the other lakes to the body of that water.

Of all those whose lands were flooded by the ten-foot raise, Anson Burnham pulled down the largest damages. He owned a tavern and a considerable acreage at the head of Batticook. His hotel was one of the landmarks of the region. It was a rendezvous for woodsmen, a jumping-off place for those who were adventuring north or south by the waterways or were taking to the branching trails or tote roads which radiated from "Anse's Place."

He was a placid and tolerant sort of man. Probably no landholder except Anson Burnham would have stood for a certain squatter settlement located on the shore of the lake a half mile from the tavern. But the squatters did not come and settle all at once. They drifted in, singly or in families, and Anse found an excuse for their failings and overlooked their misdeeds of the past.

"There ain't none of us perfect, and we can't tell what we might do if we got jammed hard or was tempted. As long as they stay there by themselves, making a single patch of weeds, as you might say,

there ain't no sense in rooting 'em up and scattering 'em hell west to start other patches all over the North Country."

For a long time the settlement was called Devil's Acre.

When the lake was flooded back, the rising ground on which the log shacks were located was made into an island, and John Horton's field boss, Sam Poff, renamed the place as Hell's Nubble. He had a healthy hatred for all of them, claiming that every time the Horton supplies were landed at the head of Batticook and cached ready to be distributed to the camps, the Nubble hellions nibbled at the piles of goods like thieving rats. Both Horton and Poff used blistering language to Anse Burnham because he kept on harboring such a herd.

"I'll admit that I ain't pleased with 'em as pets or proud of 'em as property," said Anse. "But I'm gradually beating some sense of git-up-and-git into 'em. They're peeling popple, getting out hackmatack sleepers, cutting hoop poles and I'm handling their business for 'em.

"Furthermore, my boy Hollis is getting some eddication into the young ones in his vacation time and he says the wimmen and children are to be pitied, not persecuted. As long's he feels that way about it I'm going to give 'em credit at my store and let 'em work it out."

Whenever he said that to John Horton, the timber baron raved.

"If old John gets good and plenty mad he don't eat so much," Anse confided whimsically to listeners when Horton would go stamping into the dining room. "I never made a cent off'm him when his appetite hadn't been dulled some way!"

Boss Sam Poff was always similarly ready for a run-in with Landlord Burnham on the Hell's Nubble matter.

When Poff came for brief sojourns at the hotel he brought liquor with him and his temper was rasped by intoxicants.

However, on a certain June day, he sat in the tavern foreroom and grinned amiably on several persons who had come over from the Nubble and were waiting for the attentions of one Doctor Earuff whose presence at the hotel had been made known; the poor devils were suffering excruciating pain with the toothache.

Mr. Poff, well pepped by drink, surveyed the swollen faces and listened to the grunts and moans with manifest delight. For the first time in his experience he was finding bland satisfaction in the presence of the hellions whom he hated. And when Doctor Earuff entered the room with his black case in his hand Poff fairly beamed on him, displaying the expression of a vengeance seeker welcoming the executioner.

Doctor Earuff was a stranger in the North Country. He had come up to make the rounds of the timber camps, foreseeing profit in pulling the teeth of isolated humans; but more especially his mission was concerned with filing the teeth of horses, so that the grinding edges would engage more perfectly and insure better mastication of oats and hay.

The doctor was plainly a slick operator, out to make the most of opportunities. He looked the part. He was redolent of the kerosene torch. His black hair hung to his shoulders and his mustache was like a doormat. He had been a street practitioner, bawling promises of painless tooth pulling from a cart tail.

He had come into the North, desiring to confine his practice mostly to horses who couldn't talk back. But at the solicitation of Landlord Burnham, who promised to give the doctor credit on his hotel bill, the operator tackled the Nubble sufferers. Boss Poff giggled and rubbed his hands, having a fine relish for the resultant yells.

The affair attracted a good-sized audience.

While he was putting back his instruments Doctor Earuff noted the good humor of Boss Poff and inquiry elicited the information that this was John Horton's field foreman.

"If you want to see what I can do on a horse's teeth, go out and inspect the job I've just finished on Mr. Burnham's," urged Earuff, hot after the Horton business.

"The way I'm feeling now, after what you've just done to them critters, I'll give you a job worth while, so as to show some appreciation," averred Poff, embracing everybody in his simpering grin. He was in a jesting mood. "Get somebody to paddle you across the lake and make the rounds of our camps. If you find any cavities while you're filing, give 'em gold fillings. There's nothing too good for the Horton hosses!"

"Certainly!" agreed Doctor Earuff, looking around the circle of faces, making sure that the witnesses were sober, even if Boss Poff was not. "What about an order admitting me to the horse hovels?"

"Got a card?"

The doctor handed over one on which he had written, "Doctor Earuff, Sellerbrated Tooth Expert." Across the card Poff scrawled, "Admit Dock S. Poff."

"When you get back here," said Landlord Burnham, "I'll pay you to go over to the island and yank every tooth that needs to come out."

"Probably I'll hang around here and go along with you, doc," promised Boss Poff. "Nothing like grabbing in on all the fun while I'm on this toot!"

AFTER Doctor Earuff had secured a canoeman and had hurried on his mission, taking no chances on Poff coming back to sober sanity and reconsidering, the boss stalked to and fro in the big room. "I may feel like doing a little pulling of my own when I go over on that island with the doc. If I'm in the right frame of mind I'll take along a sackful of dynamite and pry up every one of them blastnation shacks. It'll take their minds off'm the tooth pulling. I'm looking for excitement, and I mean to have it!"

"Better look for it in a different place than on my land," advised Burnham placidly but significantly.

"Well, how about some excitement in a game o' two-handed stud?" pressed the boss.

"I'll go you," agreed Anse, "if it keeps your mind off'm mischief."

Anse Burnham was wont to preach little sermons on the power of temptation, usually making the unfortunates on the Nubble his text. But he did not absolve himself as one of the victims of enticing evil. He was always trying to fight down his spirit of a gambler. He made excuses for indulging in the vice. This time it was to keep Sam Poff from any freaks of devilishness. They sat down to the game.

However, Sam Poff and the others at Anse's Place soon found excitement in something else than stud poker.

A man looked out of the window and called the attention of all to what was coming down the deadwater at the head of the lake.

"It looks like a bateau race, gents—and a damnation lively one!"

The game was suspended; they all flocked out of doors.

It was surely a race—four rowers in each bateau; the boats were coming from the direction of the West Branch inlet, the water thoroughfare between Onawa and Batticook.

One craft had a long lead of the other.

Then they who waited on the shore saw John Horton standing up in the rear bateau; over the water, a good conductor of sound, came his hoarse profanity as he urged his men to greater effort.

The rowers of the leading boat did not cease their stroke when they approached the shore; they drove the prow of the bateau far up on the shelving beach.

All the men in front of the tavern recognized Rega Horton when she leaped over the rail of the craft and waited on the shore for the men to lift out her luggage. She was knickered and gaitered, and a rifle was slung over her shoulder by a hold strap.

"What th' 'ell's happened in the Horton family?" growled Poff.

In his curiosity he walked slowly down toward the beach and the others followed.

Having reached the shore, as if it were her goal, the girl gave no signs of being a fugitive. She turned and looked at John Horton's bateau and waited with composure. He leaped out, before his boat was

beached, and waded to dry ground, kicking up the water.

His daughter broke in on his anathema. "Father, nothing you can say to me will change or alter my plans. Why try the case over again, with all these men listening?"

"I don't care who's listening! How do you dare to run away, out of my house?"

"I did not run away. I simply came away!"

"Leaving me to know about it too late to head you off! You have raced me!"

"I hurried because I find it more comfortable for me to be standing here in the presence of witnesses—on land which you don't own, sir!"

"On the land of Anse Burnham, eh?"

"On the land of Hollis Burnham's father."

"Rega, if I have to take you by the scruff of the neck and lug you, you're going back to your home."

She looked him up and down with a scorn which countered against his rage. "In the old days, so I have read, fathers locked up their daughters. But these times are much different. Women do have something to say about their rights. You don't forget, do you, that I have already voted twice in the Onawa elections?

"But I'll not depend wholly on myself, sir! If you lay a hand on me I shall appeal to these men! They are honest woodsmen, and they'll stand up for a woman, even if you are John Horton!"

"As you might say," ventured one of the Batticook bystanders, "we wouldn't see John Horton's daughter put upon, no matter who tries to do it."

The men with the girl's luggage stood irresolute.

"Carry it along according to the directions I have given you," she commanded. "I'll follow in a moment."

She turned again to John Horton. "You said you'd see me in a certain place before a certain thing should happen! I'm getting as near to that place as is possible on earth. Whenever you're ready to cry quits in the shame part of our affair—when you're ready to hearken to sense and sane reason about my choice of a husband—I'll go back to my home and give you the respect that's due from me as a daughter. Just now it's hard to give that respect to a father who's putting his log business ahead of my true happiness."

"Listen, you men!" shouted Horton, wholly beside himself. "You don't know what you're doing when you threaten to interfere. This girl of mine has gone crazy! She is trying to twist the heart out of me so as to have her own way. She is going to live with that sculch on Hell's Nubble till I'll knuckle under to her!"

"Well, I'll be good and dingle damned!" blurted Boss Poff. "I'll stop her myself, from doing that—and kill the jazzbo who gets between."

He stepped into the girl's path as she started forward. He barred the way with his arms. Quite in the Horton manner, she advanced directly on him, gave him a ringing slap on the cheek and went on her way when he staggered to one side.

The men cheered this show of her intrepid nature.

ANSON BURNHAM hurried along and caught step with Rega.

"I'm afraid it's all on account of Hollis, Miss Rega," he faltered. "I wouldn't do nothing rash or foolish, if I was you!"

"My father needs that advice more than I, Mr. Burnham. You know what he did to your son on the street in Onawa a few days ago, don't you?"

"Yes, they have been passing the word along up this way. But my boy done exactly the right thing, they tell me."

"He took the only sensible course, in the case of a man with my father's nature. I am following suit in my own way."

"But it's an awful place over there on the Nubble, Miss Rega—awful!"

"My father knows perfectly well how to induce me to leave there!"

"But it's a terrible shame for him," protested Anse.

"He has started out to bring shame on the Hortons, and I'm helping him."

Burnham looked over his shoulder. Old

John had been following the girl for a little way, but he halted and stood alone, gazing after her.

"He's your father, all the same, and I'm pitying him—I can't help it," declared Burnham, hurrying on at her side. "I know how it would be if my boy stood up and twitted me before all listeners!"

"You and your son are not Hortons, Mr. Burnham. Matters between you wouldn't come to a pass like this. With my father it's rule or ruin. I have used up all my arguments, tears and appeals. I'll skin my knuckles against that stone wall no longer!" she cried, phrasing her defiance quite as old John would have done. "I'm fighting for absolutely the dearest thing which has come into my life. I'm speaking of my love for your son and of his for me. Under those circumstances, you're the last man to make it harder for me than it is!"

"I reckon so!" he admitted ruefully. "But I'd be a mean rat and I'd feel like one if I turned round and encouraged you to do anything of this sort, even for the sake of fixing things for you and Hollis. I know how much he is in love with you!" She looked into his wistful eyes and found tears there.

Her manner softened. "It isn't going to be so terrible for me, Mr. Burnham. I know how Hollis has been trying to help those poor folks over there." She pointed to the shacks on the Nubble. "I know also how grateful they are and how they worked hard to build the little schoolhouse. I'm going to live in it! I'm going to carry on the work he has begun as best I'm able."

"Does he know you've come up here?"

She shook her head and smiled. "My fight with my father is all I can handle at one time! I just came away, that's all! It will make me happy and contented over there to be carrying on what Hollis started. I'm going to teach the women how to sew and to cook better food and how to make their homes neater.

"Why, Mr. Burnham, they'll be changing the name to Happiness Isle before long! Don't worry about me. If my father does, it will do him good and bring him back to his right senses!"

"He has had his own way with all men for a long time," said Anse, wagging his head. "I reckon he has got into the habit and can't help his actions now. But I'll say it took somebody as bright as a Horton to think up this way of bringing him to his milk, as the saying is! That is, if old John gives up beat in the end."

"If he doesn't meet me at least halfway, after the folks of this region begin to talk about this thing, then he is lost to all shame and cares nothing for my respect for him, as a father," she retorted tartly, getting back into her mood of combativeness.

They had reached the shore opposite the Nubble. The flatboat which served as a ferry was pulled up on a muddy beach. Several men of the island were in the boat and gazed with stupid amazement at Rega who came, followed by her men with the luggage.

The islanders shifted their humble attention to their patron saint, Anse Burnham, when he addressed them sternly. "Boys, this is Miss Rega Horton—you know whose daughter she is. She's going to stay with you for a while and try to make something out of the whole pack of you. Take her across! Then come back to my store and get stuff to fix up that schoolhouse to the queen's taste!"

"The queen!" gasped one of the men. "The queen of Hell's Nubble—that's what she is!"

"If ever another of you calls my island by that name again, I'll dumwhackle him into pieces so small they can't be sorted together again."

"But can't we call her the queen and look up to her like she was one? It's the biggest honor that's ever been done to the island, whatever it is we'll call the place from now on!"

"I don't think I care for such high honors," cried the girl, smiling on this enthusiasm. "I'm coming to be a neighbor—just that—only that!"

Burnham stood on the shore until the men poled the boat across to the island.

Then he walked slowly toward John Horton.

If the timber baron felt regret, humbled pride or any of the softer emotions in that crisis, he hid them all under a mien of ferocity. "Condoning, siding in and helping 'em, are you, Burnham? Expect to make it a fine speculation for your son, hey?"

Anse confronted the railer. He was calm under the lashing of speech, even as the son had been serenely patient under the whip.

"You're talking only nonsense—and you know it, John! The Burnhams have got enough so as to need none of yours. You have horsewhipped my boy in public. But I ain't going to rant and rave and fight with you about it. You're really the one who was licked, and I pity you, John. Yes, I do!"

It was said with honest feeling. This condolence was more of that hateful stuff with which the turbulent Horton could not grapple in a way to satisfy his craving for real conflict.

"I'll give you five thousand, cash down, for that devilish island out there, Burnham! You can use the money to send that two-legged dictionary of a son through a few more colleges!"

"A first-class college has already gone through *him*, John, and I reckon he's holding of it in his system to make good in the world when he gets ready to take another step. You ain't got money enough to buy that island."

Boss Poff had ventured sufficiently close to hear the conference; he was showing the anxiety of one who wants to do something to please an employer. "Leave it to me, Squire John! I'm making plans to blow every damnation shack off with dynamite."

"And have the Burnhams come back on me as one liable for the acts of a servant, hey?" Horton had been cracking his fists together, in default of anything against which to pound them. He swung and knocked Poff down.

"What do you mean by being off your job and hanging around this low-down dive of a tavern, drunk?" demanded the timber baron when the boss struggled to his feet.

"I'm on my reg'lar, middle-o'-the-summer toot, and you know I claim it and am entitled to it—and it's going to last two more days."

"I'm a good mind to fire you, Poff!"

"Oh, no, you won't!" returned the boss, not a bit ruffled by the blow or the threat. "I'm too good a man to let go—and you know it!" He walked away, humming a "Come-all-ye."

"What in the sulphur-crusted hell have you got to do to a man in these days to make him fight?" raved Horton.

Burnham started toward his store; he saw the island men poling the flatboat on its return. "John, I'm afraid you're starting a lot of folks to fight. You mustn't be a mite surprised if they ain't fighting you back in the way you want 'em to! Better look out, or else you'll be everlastingly licked!"

Horton squinted at the distant island and marked Rega by the identity of her striped sweater. He saw the white flash of her waved handkerchief and found still more of a triumphant challenge in that little banner of independence.

He rumbled oaths in his threat, went back to his bateau and ordered his men to row him across the lakes to his camps. With Sam Poff off the job, there was a possibility that this surprise visit of the master would catch the crews lagging; he might find an opportunity to discharge some of his venom, he reflected, doubling his fists.

III.

TWO days later, just before the supper hour, John Horton slammed into the tavern at Anse's Place. He darted swift glances at the faces in the big foreroom, located Sam Poff, strode to him and yanked him up from the chair in which he was sprawling.

"What have you been putting over on my horses, you drunken fool? What kind of a jumping frog did you send into my camps? He has been keeping one hop

ahead of me for two days, or I'd have caught him and killed him."

"Do it now!" stuttered Poff. "I'll help you do it! He has come back here and is twitting me about welshing! There he is!" He pointed to Doctor Earuff who was sitting at a table in the middle of the room, absorbed in a game of solitaire.

Horton flung the limp boss back into the chair and marched over to Earuff, getting the latter's attention by clacking hard knuckles on the table. "So you're the crested woodpecker that's been tapping gold fillings into the teeth of my horses, hey?"

"Exactly! Though I'm not a woodpecker," said the doctor, unperturbed. "Your boss, in the hearing of a dozen honest witnesses, gave me orders for gold fillings and I have done the job—and here's the bill!" He brought out a big wallet, pinched a folded paper daintily between thumb and forefinger and extended the bill, his little finger, with its elongated nail, poised and apart from the others in that affected manner which a he-man finds so aggravatingly finikin.

Horton swooped with his big hand and cuffed the paper into the air. "You stand a better show of selling that hair of yours to bobolinks for birds' nests than you do of collecting from me for gold fillings for woods horses' teeth."

Doctor Earuff, with his little finger still stuck up, assembled the pack of cards and riffled the pasteboards in the artistic fashion practiced by operators in legerdemain. While Horton gazed on the performance, his interest attracted by the dexterous feat in spite of his anger, the doctor picked a card from the pack, bent the corner slightly, leaned back in his chair and scaled the card; it circled old John's head and came back to the doctor's hand.

"What is coming to me always drops into my palm, sooner or later," stated Earuff blandly. "You'll pay, Mr. Horton! If it does go to court, it will make an interesting case."

"Come on to court, you faker! And I'll bet you're a card sharp as well as a crook in other ways!"

"I used to make a very good living doing card tricks on the stage," stated Doctor Earuff, not a bit put out of countenance. He shoved the pack close to Horton's hand and forced a card on the timber baron before the latter could get out of reach. Horton tore it up, flung the bits on the floor and stamped on them.

"I was going to ask you to do that, sir!" said the doctor. He did not glance down at the fragments. "That card was the jack of clubs—and I'll request some gent in the room to prove it by hunting for a corner of the pasteboard. In the meantime" —he made a pass over the pack—"we'll have another card circle Mr. Horton's head." The card was scaled and it returned and the doctor displayed it. "Lo, it is the jack of clubs!"

Finding that he now had an attentive audience, the doctor pattered the lingo of the legerdemain artist and did more tricks. Horton sat in a chair at the side of the room and viewed operations. A strange look settled on his face.

The same peculiar expression was on the timber baron's countenance while he was eating his supper. He devoured his food without speaking.

When Earuff walked on the shore of the lake, smoking a cigar after the evening shadows had descended, Horton took advantage of the darkness and unobtrusively intercepted the doctor.

"See here, my man, you play your tricks with marked cards, don't you? If that's so, and you can help me turn a trick of my own, I'll pay that tooth-filling bill."

"Certainly the cards are marked! They are printed with special designs on the backs—'readers,' they're called."

"Give me a pack and show me the how of the trick reading," commanded Horton curtly.

The two went into the concealment provided by a storehouse. The doctor's glowing cigar furnished light enough for the studying of the simple but iniquitous scrolls.

Horton grunted his satisfaction.

"I don't need to get any man's money by cheating him at cards. I want you

to understand that, my man! But there's a certain thing that's out of reach just now! I've got to get up to it!

"If I'm obliged to climb by stepping on this one and that, it's my business, and so much the worse for them that gets in my way. But it's none of your business and I want you to keep that mouth of yours closed. If it stays shut up here I'll hand you five hundred dollars at Onawa on your way out of the region."

"That's all the interest I take in the matter—the money part!" returned the trickster airily. "I'm looking solely after myself in this world, and the other fellow has got to peel his own bananas or eat 'em skins and all, even if his mouth does get puckered."

Horton handed back the cards. "Go in and play solitaire with 'em and then leave 'em carelesslike on the table. I'll come along later and tend to my business."

While Horton walked on the lake shore, giving Earuff time to attend to the preliminaries of the plot, a canoe came hurrying down the dead water. The lantern of the July moon, lifting in full radiance above the horizon, lighted the surface of the lake. The paddler was dipping deeply —the frothing ripples spread in a wide fan behind the craft.

Old John guessed shrewdly that this was Hollis Burnham; the day was Saturday; the week-end recess of the school would permit the young man to make the journey from Onawa. Still more of the impertinent prying into the troubled affairs of the Hortons!

The lord of lands gritted his teeth when he made sure of the identity of young Burnham. The new arrival beached his canoe and hurried to the hotel.

When Horton entered the foreroom Hollis and his father were in earnest conference behind the counter of the office.

As soon as the two ended their talk, Hollis marched out into the night, not giving Horton as much as a glance when he passed the latter who stood in the middle of the room.

Old John growled wordless threats. Young Burnham was on his way to Rega, there was no doubt about that! She was no longer barred from him by the doors of the Horton mansion. And even those doors had not prevailed; they had been opened to the lover by the girl's stubborn disobedience.

John Horton felt the rancor of one whose authority had been flouted at last after all his years of undisputed tyranny. His autocracy had been his fetish. Here was a fellow who strode off to make love to Rega Horton without as much as a "by your leave" to her father. Ignored as completely as if he had been one of the lounging timber jacks in the place!

Old John gazed malignantly after the young man and turned to look into the complacent face of Anse Burnham. In all his long life Horton had never been conscious of such relentless hatred as that which surged in him at that moment! Under his breath he swore vicious oaths. "They're asking for it—it's coming to 'em —they'll get it good and plenty!" he told himself.

When he walked toward the table on which the doctor was studying his solitary lay-out, Earuff left the cards as they were and rose hastily. Anse Burnham grinned as did the others in the room. This precipitate retreat indicated that the intimidated stranger, after what Horton had said previously, was in no mood to proceed with the topic of the gold-filled teeth.

Old John sat down, slowly gathered the cards into his hands and shuffled them. He controlled his features, hiding all signs of revengeful ire. He even winked at Burnham.

"Anse, don't it seem a devilish shame to have a perfectly good deck o' cards wasted on a long-haired critter who'd better amuse himself with a tin rattle if he wants to play by his lonesome? What say?" He pointed to a chair on the opposite side of the table.

"I hadn't ought to do it, John!" hedged Burnham. "My boy is dead set against me gambling—and he's right! I ain't got no human sense in me when I get a pack o' cards in my hands—and you know it!"

Horton laid the cards on the table. His

face hardened. "You remind me that I ain't got much sense of my own, sitting here handling cards when I ought to be putting these hands to a better job." He looked significantly toward the door, the portal by which Hollis had departed.

In order to indulge a mania, Burnham had made an excuse of Sam Poff's threats that day. This exigency furnished a much better excuse. There was no telling what John Horton might do that evening, if his thoughts were not kept off the Nubble.

Burnham hurried to seat himself at the table. "A few games of draw poker won't hurt none, seeing it's between friends," he paltered.

"Penny ante, if you say so! I've got plenty of money of my own without taking yours away from you, Anse. However, we'd better make it fairly interesting, so as to take up my attention." There was more of that menacing suggestion in his tone.

Burnham hastened to suggest a five-dollar limit.

So the game started.

The men in the room pulled up benches and chairs and became interested spectators.

IV.

THE moon was kind to the settlement on the Nubble that evening. Limpid light garnished the rude structures and gilded with a transforming radiance many of the squalid features of the place.

The lovers sat on the rude steps of the schoolhouse which had been built wholly by Hollis' instigation and partly by his own hands. Rega allowed him to peep within in order that some of his apprehension on her account might be allayed.

"It's a cozy little home for me, Hollis, dear!" she assured him. "I'm really very happy here. It's a wonderful experience. But, of course, I want to keep my father thinking I'm living in perfect misery. It's what folks outside will think. I'm hoping they'll speak up to him about the shame of leaving me here. It may work on him. But my appeals and arguments never will!"

The schoolhouse was located apart from the other houses, on higher ground. She directed his attention to the windows at the foot of the hill. They were outlined by the glow of kerosene lamps within.

"That was my first work—pretty curtains to drape all the windows. Such a touch means so much for women. Your father sent over the sewing machine which your dear mother used when she was alive. We've had sewing bees here at my house for two days.

"The men have been working hard, cleaning up all the litter around the houses. Every garden has been weeded. All that in only two days! They are so ready to respond to a bit of encouragement, Hollis!"

"I proved that much in the little time I have been able to give them, dear! But your work with the women and children will bring the best results. I came up here full of anxiety. I was going to urge you to leave this place. It seemed too much of martyrdom on my account. But I haven't the heart to say anything which may interfere with your happiness. It does seem to be real happiness!"

"It is!" she assured him honestly. "I'm doing something really worth while. There are too many servants in the big house at Onawa. I have the workaday nature of my mother, Hollis! She could not bear to sit and see somebody else do all the things which needed to be done. But father raved every time he caught her with a kitchen apron on. She had to work when she was first married and she never wanted to play the lady, any more than I do.

"When I'm cooking on that little stove of mine up here I catch myself laughing out loud because it's so jolly. And I have all the children standing around, taking lessons in cookery." She smiled up at him. "They all embarrass me so! They insist on calling me 'The Queen.'"

He rose suddenly, kneeled before her and lifted her hand to his lips.

"Allow me to be the most humble and fervent worshiper in your court!" he pleaded. "But I have a bone to pick with

these new adherents of yours. The title they've given you is the one I've been keeping sacred, for myself!"

"However, you must remember all the time that I'm only the poor, shamed, cast-out daughter of John Horton, living in misery with other outcasts," she reminded him, with a chuckle of pure delight.

Later she walked with him down to his canoe as his guide, to make sure that he did not tread upon any of the scattered garden plots. "We're very fussy about our gardens on the Nubble these days, Hollis. We're going to have plenty of flowers, too. Flowers, a bit of muslin at the windows, new gingham dresses—and the floors scrubbed. We are told that there are sermons in stones! And speaking of sermons! I don't expect you to deliver one, Hollis," she said with a ripple of laughter, "but to-morrow is Sunday, you know. Please come over and stir my folks up with a good man talk."

He promised, delighted with this call to service in her self-set task, and they parted.

When he reached the hotel he glanced in at the window and saw his father playing cards with John Horton.

Hollis was troubled by the spectacle; the money won at cards was sufficiently hateful, in the young man's estimation, but money lost at cards was a sad waste of resources. His father was easy-going and credulous; he was temperamentally unfitted for gambling.

Hollis was tempted to go in and protest; but after parting so recently from Rega young Burnham was in no mood to relish another collision with his sweetheart's father.

He entered the hotel by a side door and went to the room which had been his in boyhood.

V.

THE rising sun flooded the foreroom of the tavern and shot a broad shaft across the table where Horton and Burnham were playing cards, but nobody bothered to extinguish the smoking oil lamps. One by one the spectators had tired and had gone to their beds. Sam Poff snored in a chair at the side of the table.

Haggard, whitened by the strain, heavy-eyed, Anse bent forward and studied the five cards which Horton laid down. "I'm cleaned, John!" he said huskily. "I'll give you bills of sale of the property and they'll take up them I O Us."

Horton leaned back, threw up his arms and yawned. He looked about him, a grim smile of satisfaction wreathing his thin lips.

"It's been a tough session, but I reckon it has been worth the loss of sleep. I own this tavern, your barns, your hoss-and-cattle kind and your land, saying nothing of what money you have in the bank. That's so, ain't it, Anse?"

Burnham bowed his head.

"I guess I'll have a cigar—on myself! Hand me my keys!" He put stress on the word "my."

He crossed to the office counter, jingling the keys, unlocked the cigar case and helped himself; the old landlord swung one glance at the new proprietor of the Burnham possessions and then fixed his disconsolate gaze on the table with its scattered cards; he was a pathetic figure, stricken numb and dumb.

Old John lighted a cigar, puffed complacently and leaned against the counter; he rolled the cigar to a corner of his mouth. "Got anything else? Haven't overlooked anything, have you?"

After a little hesitation Burnham struggled up from his chair and stumbled across the room. He borrowed the keys from Horton and unlocked an oak chest behind the counter. He brought out a small box.

"They may bring me luck," he muttered. "They're sacred to me, John. My woman was all her life saving 'em." He opened the box; it was filled to the brim with old-fashioned copper pennies—the big coins nicknamed "bungdowns." "Bring me luck, Marshy!" he prayed under his breath as he went back to the table, carrying the box. "I wouldn't be doing this last thing if it wasn't my last chance."

Horton followed, sorting some papers.

"Tell you what, Anse! You made the Nubble Island a special bet, you remember, after we started to play with no limit. Here's the paper! I'll lay it against that junk! It's mighty liberal—but it's only junk against junk, after all! Hope your luck changes. Them bungdowns and that island are both liabilities."

As it had been before, it was again—merely the cat playing with the mouse. Horton won.

With the manner of an animal mortally wounded, seeking a covert for its final throes, Burnham staggered away without a word, went into his room which communicated with the office and threw himself across the bed.

Horton grinned as he looked at the poor treasure which had been Marshy Burnham's only indulgence in whims. He dipped up a heaping handful and flung the coins into the face of the sleeping Poff. The latter snapped upright and spat out one of the pennies which had lodged in his mouth, opened wide as he snored. With the penny he ejaculated a startled oath.

"I hope you've slept some of the poison rum out of you," said the tyrant. "Now get onto your job! Rout out my bateaumen, get across the lake as soon as an ash breeze can take you, and come back here in a hurry with a crew of the heaviest hitters you can find, every man bringing a cant dog.

"I'm glad this is a Sunday! I'm not taking my men off'm their real chopping job for the little chore I'm going to set 'em to do!"

"Will I report to you right here?" asked the boss humbly.

"This is where you'll find me—running this tavern!" Horton rose and blew smoke in Poff's face. "I own this stand to the last shingle on the roof! I own every inch of land—Hell's Nubble included. And I'm going to make the name fit the place before I get done with the job. The quicker you're back here, the sooner the fun will begin. Now hump yourself!"

He flung another handful of the big coins after the hurrying boss.

VI.

AS he entered the tavern, so Hollis went forth in the morning—by the side door. Rega had invited him to breakfast with her, in her new pride as a housekeeper. Their enraptured interest in each other made the affair peculiarly blissful.

Then together they made the rounds of the little houses and received deferential greetings and grateful pledges to be on hand at the meeting to be held in the pine grove on the crest of the island.

Later—men, women and children—the pathetic populace sat on the needle duff of the pines and listened to the young man. It was not a speech; it was hearty, honest encouragement from one who had earned the right to be called a friend.

Suddenly he paused in his talk and looked over their heads, beholding men coming in bateaus from the shore of the mainland. He found menace in the spectacle and mutely confessed as much to Rega when the two exchanged glances.

"All of you stay where you are!" he commanded the people of the Nubble.

Although the defender made all possible haste, Poff and his men were on the island, pulling up their boats, when young Burnham reached the shore.

Poff stepped forward from the others and insolently broke in on the young man's protests. "Trespass nothing! Go and talk with John Horton. He played poker all night with your father and owns everything you Burnhams ever had—down to the chips in the dooryard. Talk with John Horton, I tell you! I'm taking orders from him."

This swaggering boldness argued for the truth of what the boss was saying, such was the young man's bitter conviction. He had no appetite at that moment for the details of Anson Burnham's folly.

"And what are your orders?"

"To clean off this island—and blow the shacks to damnation with dynamite! It's John Horton's orders."

"But legal notice of eviction must be given, Poff!" declared Hollis sternly.

"Go talk to John Horton. He told me to go ahead, and to hell with law! He

said he had plenty of money to fight law later."

"There are squatters' improvements here, and——"

"I tell you to talk with John Horton!" yelled the boss. "When he gives orders to me I follow 'em!"

"All right! Allow me time to go across to the hotel and talk with him!"

"Suit yourself! But in the meantime I'll be carrying out his orders!" There was no mistaking Poff's malignant intention to act at once and let the talk follow later after the mischief had been done.

He was standing at a little distance from Hollis; a plot of garden was between them. On the evening before Rega had called especial attention to that garden as a model she had set for copying.

"Come on, boys!" commanded the boss. "Pile the dynamite boxes on the shore! We'll herd the hellions off'm here first!"

He tramped forward over the small plants, the string which marked the boundaries of the garden tangling about his heavy boots.

This display of contemptuous ruthlessness put the spark to young Burnham's tinder of righteous wrath; he leaped forward and knocked Poff flat on his back. The boss scrambled up quickly and assailed the champion with fists and oaths, in blind fury. The invading men stood in their tracks and surveyed the combat, yelling profane encouragement the while to their leader.

On the crest of the island the men of the community leaped to their feet and picked up such cudgels as they could find.

"Mr. Burnham told you to stay where you are," Rega reminded them, and she added imperiously. "I told you the same! There must not be any pitched battle here. Mr. Burnham will take care of that man!"

She had not shifted her eyes off the conflict at the foot of the hill. She was justified in her confidence in the champion. The woodsman, kicking with his boots and whirling his windmill arms, was no match for the science of the college athlete. Hollis repeatedly drove in blows which sent Poff reeling and spinning; his last fall carried him almost to the feet of his crew.

"It's John Horton's orders!" he stuttered through froth and blood. "Snuff the damn dude with a cant dog!"

The cowards, most of them offscourings of cities, sent north by employment agencies, attacked in a pack. They beat down the young man with their cant dogs; he lay prostrate and senseless in the wreck of Rega's little garden.

The girl had been trusting to the fair spirit of true woodsmen, as she had known them.

When she saw the beginning of the attack on Hollis she ran down the hill and dashed into the schoolhouse. She secured the rifle which was always her companion when she went into the woods; an achievement on which she prided herself was her ability to pick off the head of a partridge at twenty paces. "Nobody wants to break a tooth on bird shot," had been her dictum.

When she came out on the porch, Poff was on his feet, staggering forward and urging his men to follow. Without hesitation, Rega selected a meaty place on Poff's calf and fired very deliberately. He yelled and fell.

"The next bullet goes into a box of that dynamite, you miserable whelps!" she informed the crew, with the full vigor of the Horton manner. "Get into your boats! I'm going to count ten! Leave Poff where he lies!"

The men leaped over the threatened dynamite and tumbled into the bateaus and churned the water into foam as they made all haste with splashing oars.

IN full command of the situation, Rega led her men down to the shore. She kneeled and kissed Hollis and assured herself that he was alive, though stunned by the blows. She told off four of the Nubble adherents and ordered them to carry the young man into the schoolhouse. With the help of some of the women she ministered to Hollis until he had revived. "The rest lies with me, dear!" she assured him. He tried to rise from the couch but

he obeyed her impetuous orders and lay back in order to recover his strength.

After a makeshift tourniquet had been applied to Poff's wounded leg under her direction, the men carried him aboard the flat boat and he was ferried across.

She led the little parade which entered the foreroom of the tavern where John Horton was lording it. She gave curt command and Poff was dropped at the feet of old John. The girl rested the butt of her rifle on the prostrate boss and bored her father with a defiant stare.

"If you demand this sort of stuff you can have all you're looking for, sir!"

Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were brilliant, she was more radiantly beautiful than ever in that moment of supreme resolution.

Doctor Earuff, standing at one side of the room, goggled at her and gasped. "For the love o' sweet Cicely, who is that?" he asked a bystander.

"John Horton's daughter!"

Old John flamed under her gaze. "I own that island. I'm going to clean it off! Dumblast it, I'll blow it out of the water!"

She looked away from him, seeking confirmation of this new ownership claimed by her father. Anson Burnham was slumped in a chair beside the table, his fingers weakly plucking at the scattered cards. He replied to her mute questioning with a despairing sag of his chin and shifted his mournful gaze from hers.

"I lost everything to him, playing cards, Miss Rega! I'm an old fool and I reckon I'd better go jump into the lake."

She turned to her father. "And you'll keep that property, sir, after getting hold of it in such a despicable fashion?"

"Of course!" he returned defiantly. "He was after my property, wasn't he?"

Doctor Earuff sidled around in order to scrutinize this handsome and fearless heroine; his eyes caressed her with frank admiration.

"This is worse shame for you and me than all the rest, father! It is nothing less than theft!"

The doctor muttered to himself. He shook his long locks. "Dammit, I ought to have been a knight-errant instead of a tooth tinker! I'm all for the ladies—and I can't help it!"

Old John found the situation uncomfortable and walked away from Rega.

Doctor Earuff noted how all interest was centered on the girl and Poff and managed to slip a few words to Horton. "You didn't tell me anything about a beautiful damsel being mixed up in this case."

"Why should I?" demanded old John.

"Because it makes all the difference in the world, sir. I may be crooked with the men, but I'm always straight with the womenfolks. It's my nature!"

"Nature! If I wanted to bother with you, you low-lived snoozer, I could tell you what your nature is."

"Oh, no, you couldn't! You wouldn't know till I show you. And this is how!" He raised a monitory forefinger. "I didn't figure you as a wholesale robber when I traded with you. I didn't know a real heroine was mixed in.

"You give back all the property you have stolen away from that poor cuss over there, or else I'll blow the gaff about those marked cards. You've been pretty high and mighty with me, Mister John Horton, and now I see a chance to rub your cocked-up old nose in the dirt—and I'm going to do it. Get busy, else I'll stand up and make a hit with the young lady!" He stroked back his hair. "I mean business! They'll be riding you on a rail in about two minutes—and you know it!"

The venom of the reckless rascal was apparent.

Horton took a few moments for thought; Earuff kept urging with more virulent threats.

John Horton, publicly accused of cheating at cards, no matter what his animus had been in the affair, would surely be so absolutely discredited that he would be bereft of all power in the North Country! He surveyed the doctor as he would have looked at a strolling cur that had bitten the hand offering a bone!

Then Horton walked across to Burnham and laid a hand on the stricken man's

shoulder. "I reckon we'd better call the whole thing off, Anse! We got foolish, the two of us! Take these papers and tear 'em up!"

But Anse thrust away the proffering hand. "Whatever they can say about me being a fool, John, they can't ever say that I cheated or welshed! I can't take the stuff back—I won't take it back! Don't argue! What I say stands!"

Whipped again! That was the feeling in John Horton—and his countenance showed it!

Rega came to the men. "Father, I don't blame Mr. Burnham for his honest pride. But if you are sorry for what you have done, I'll try to help you. Give the Burnham property to me!

"Under the circumstances, I believe you'll be glad to get rid of it. In my heart I'm excusing much in regard to this affair. You are merely trying to get control of that island in order to pry me loose. Isn't that so?"

Old John understood that style of language and the quick thrust she had made to the heart of a subject.

"That's so, my girl!"

"When the Hortons fight they must not walk over other folks in order to get at each other," she said in stern rebuke. "Will you turn that property over to me?"

"Like I'd get out from under a bobcat that was ready to claw me," he declared earnestly. "Here are the papers! Tear 'em up! To make all right and solid I'll hand you a quit-claim deed." He dusted his hands thankfully after she took the papers from him.

"Now you'll take your property from me, won't you, Mr. Burnham?" she queried wistfully. "I'm an innocent third party, you know!"

"I won't ever touch it!" he said stubbornly, pushing back her hand, even as he had thrust away her father's. "I ain't fit to hold property. I'm a gambling fool! I ain't to be trusted."

"Then there's only this to be done," she insisted. "We'll go across to the island and make Hollis take it over—it will be for the good of all of us. I think—I really do think, I have considerable influence with Hollis," she added demurely.

She turned to John Horton. "Won't you come, too, father? We can make it a —a sort of family affair, can't we?"

Old John slowly slid his arm about her neck and put his mouth close to her ear. "I know when I'm licked, but it took a Horton to do it!" he whispered.

The chivalrous Earuff hurried to the door and opened it for the party and bowed low to the girl when she led the two fathers out. "I want to say, in all deep respect and earnest admiration——" he began.

But John Horton cut him short. "None of your salve talk, my man! If you feel like doing any poulticing, go and put one onto Sam Poff's leg! Hand me the bill."

He winked at Earuff in the way of a promise of satisfactory hush money, and the doctor smiled amiably.

More stories by Holman Day in early issues.

AN ALL-AROUND CITIZEN

SENATOR GEORGE WHARTON PEPPER of Pennsylvania, who is the country's greatest authority on law as it affects the affairs and dealings of baseball players and club owners, was for thirty-two years one of the leaders of the Philadelphia bar. In addition to a distinguished career as an attorney and a writer and lecturer on law, he has done a lot of work as one of the leading laymen in the Episcopal church, having represented the diocese of Pennsylvania in that church's general conventions for many years. Along with that he was incessantly busy in educational and philanthropic movements. His appointment to succeed Senator Penrose was a tribute to his all-round excellence as a public-spirited citizen. Prior to that he had had no ambitions for political office. Incidentally, he has a son who covered himself with glory in the World War.

Temescal

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

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

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The early chapters of this story were unusually fine. But those herewith and to follow are even finer. You can read on from this point without the least difficulty, for the tale is one which depends for its charm not so much on the continuity of a complicated plot as on the beauty and majesty of wild settings described with graphic mastery, on the swift succession of dramatic incident, and on the novelty and distinction of romantic characters. Dominating the story is the mysterious figure of Temescal—Temescal, the gay, the gallant, the courtly, the compassionate, and sometimes the terrible. He has another name, so he says, but for reasons of his own he roams Mexico cloaked in an alias. Where he is going he does not say. Why he has chosen to label his honorable incognito with the name of a villain—Temescal, the bandit, "The Thief of Cabazon"—he does not say either. He first appears at Cabazon where, arrested by insurrectos, he outwits and kills their colonel, and proceeds across the desert to Santuario accompanied by the deserter, Lieutenant Juan Sepulveda, a young man skilled in violence but of a good heart withal. On the way they pause at the ruins of a bandit-ravaged ranch and rescue a baby girl whom they christen Temescalita and leave in safe hands at Santuario. From that place they depart in some haste occasioned by Temescal, the bandit, who chances on them there and questions the usurpation of his name. Again they ride a desert trail that leads at length, and after diverse adventures by the way, to a remote hill country where they take refuge at the cabin of the philosophic shepherd, Alejandro. There they meet Pepito, the half-wit Indian mozo, and La Luz, beautiful as the light, who wears, against all men, a little knife in her garter. And there begins the love story of Temescal. They ride on after some time, leaving behind two gallant hearts and bearing away one lovely one. And on their heels arrives The Thief of Cabazon. Alejandro, Pepito, and La Luz flee along the trail of Juan and Temescal. From the heights above the valley they watch the bandit horde invade their peaceful homestead and put it to the sack. And Pepito, peering down the mountainside, dances with rage as he remembers that the greatest treasure in the world, the beautiful guitar of Alejandro—which he was sometimes let to play—is lost to them now, abandoned to the alien hands of evil men.

(A Five-Part Story—Part III.)

CHAPTER XVI.

TO SANCTUARY.

HAD Alejandro continued on across the range instead of making camp on the crest, no doubt Pepito would have found enough interest in the adventure to keep out of mischief. He resented the interruption to their journey. Moreover he was grieved because the beautiful guitarra had been left behind.

So, waiting, until La Luz was absorbed in arranging their belongings, Pepito stole out across a jutting ridge which overhung

the valley, and squatted on his heels, wondering what was going on in the meadow below. Curiosity, resentment and the ceaseless and irritating pressure of the wind strung his nerves to a high pitch. He grunted like an animal, hunched his heavy shoulders as though being whipped, peered down into the valley. By constantly thinking of the guitar, visualizing it as an ideal, his jumbled thoughts, like bits of flotsam in an eddy, were finally drawn together in a momentarily central cohesion. When darkness came he would return to the casa and get the beautiful guitarra!

The long and toilsome journey down the mountainside and back meant nothing to him. No wild goat was more at home among those perilous, rocky ways, either in sunshine or starlight. And no Galahad yearned more ardently to behold the mystic beauty of the hidden grail than the half-witted shepherd boy to touch the murmuring strings of the magic guitarra. Pepito imagined he could hear the guitar calling to him as it had called when that bold and fearsome stranger, Temescal, had made it sing and laugh and twitter to the primitive, mad rhythm of "The Dance of the Haymakers."

With intense glee, Pepito imitated the slinking retreat of a marauding panther, as he disappeared like a shred of mist among the rocky terraces and crags of the mountainside.

Deep in the shadows of the timbered valley, he circled the meadow, where, round a huge fire lounged many ragged, swarthy men who laughed, jested, or argued whiningly, or sat morosely staring at the flames.

Creeping round to the back of the adobe, Pepito crawled up and huddled against the wall beneath the high window. He heard men talking. He gathered from their conversation that they planned to cross the range of El Gata that night.

Pepito forgot all about the beautiful guitarra. His proximity to the bandidos frightened him. He realized the actuality of that which upon the mountain crest had seemed but a vague picture and a very distant menace. And as the mood of fear seized him, he seemed to hear Temescal's voice: "The Señor Alejandro is my good friend. Guard him from all evil as you would guard me."

Trembling up from his shadow against the adobe wall, Pepito stole out across the narrow clearing back of the house. Once within the befriending forest he moved swiftly toward the somber bulk of the mountain, struck into the starlit trail and pattered up the ascent with the sureness and ease of a goat.

HALFWAY up the mountainside he stopped. Through the dark, still air, like the ethereal, sweet warbling of some viewless bird in a deep cañon, came the sound of singing. Pepito groaned, flung his hat down upon the trail and danced on it with the quick viciousness of an antelope stamping a snake to death with its sharp hoofs. "They have stolen my beautiful guitarra!" he wailed.

Snatching up his hat he trotted to the crest. "The bandidos!" he cried, as he came to the opening in the rocks. "They come!"

"Idiot!" said La Luz, "cease your howling. Where have you been?"

"Is it thus that you obey me?" queried Alejandro.

"Señor! I have been down there. I heard the ladrones say that they would cross El Gata very soon. I heard them say it! I am a good boy, señor!"

"You have been among the thieves!"

"But they did not see me. I heard them say they would cross El Gata."

After they had eaten bread, and having drunk the goat's milk, they gathered together their few blankets and utensils, hastily packed the white burro, and beneath the cold brilliance of the stars they drew out from their shelter, to face the chill and unceasing wind which warned against their progress like the steady pressure of an invisible hand.

Pepito led the way, his eagerness restrained by Alejandro, who persisted in

testing each doubtful shadow with his staff, fearing it masked the edge of some precipice. Yet once upon the actual descent, with the white burro occasionally sniffing at the tracks made by the horses of Temescal and Juan, Alejandro urged haste.

He had given up all hope of ever returning to his valley and his home. The ladrones had discovered the spot, and at least some of them would eventually return to it, no matter where they journeyed in the meantime.

Only too well aware that they might not survive the desert should they escape from those who followed, Alejandro silently petitioned The Mother of Sorrows to retain them in her mercy. The future seemed very doubtful. Only one hope remained; through some great good fortune they might overtake Temescal—whose arm reached far, and who had many guns at his command.

While Alejandro, trudging down the trail along the dark mountain slope, speculated upon the future, La Luz and Pepito attended to the immediate necessity for haste by urging the burro, who, for once in his indolent career stepped briskly, as though pricked by a sudden resolve to atone for much past laziness and stubbornness.

The drone of the upland wind had long since ceased. Occasionally a puff of warm air eddied up from the dim floor of the desert. Their very haste, made possible by the easy trail, served to accentuate their fear. They fled from an invisible danger as though it were visible and in actual pursuit. Slowly the vague, gray reaches of the desert floor, glimmering softly in the starlight, rose to meet them. Presently they were beneath the giant palm.

With a match cupped in his hands, Alejandro knelt and examined the ground. Discovering the feathery ashes of Temescal's camp fire, Alejandro rose. "Here they camped. See if the burro will drink. Already Evil Face has discovered the spring. Make haste!"

Pepito, on hands and knees, explored the vicinity to determine the direction Temescal had taken. "This way they went!" he called, finally.

"Toward the hills of Santa Rosalia," said Alejandro. "Sanctuary!"

Dread of discovery, of capture, warred ceaselessly against his hope of safety. Within a few hours at most, the ladrones would have reached the crest of El Gata. Before dawn they would be traversing the western slope of the range. Daylight would uncover tracks round the desert spring—tracks which the bandidos would read instantly and instantly understand.

"We have the night, and a few short hours of vantage," declared Alejandro. "Let us go."

They had progressed but a mile or so beyond the giant palm at the foot of the range when La Luz realized that the milch goat was not following them. Yet La Luz said nothing of this to her father. If the goat had gone back to the green meadow, it was as well. It would seem that Evil Face knew on which side of the range the grass grew.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VULTURE.

A HOT wind drove across the trackless reaches of the great llano which lay between the barren foothills of El Gata and the far-seen range of Santa Rosalia, a dim, blue ridge against the western sky. The morning sun, like a huge, inflamed eye, blinked red through a coppery haze of desert dust. The faded green of the mesquite, the richer hue of yuccas and tornilla accentuated the bleak aridness, the sinister austerity of the sandy plain, known to the natives of the hills as "The Valley of Desolation."

As the extreme heat had not yet burned through the thin haze which masked the sun, Temescal and Juan rode briskly, pursuing, as it were, their long, angling shadows which danced mockingly ahead in ragged caricature of man and horse.

Within an hour the sun had surmounted the coppery haze. A blinding glare lay

upon the glittering white plain, dotted with forlorn islands of cacti and mesquite. Like the stealthy undulations of a belated tide, light films of sand heaved lazily across the placid surface of the desert, discovering the erratic currents of the subsiding wind. The desert floor seemed in motion, suggesting the slow awakening of some Gargantuan beast.

But recently, in the cool perspective of memory, Temescal had eulogized the desert, declaring the waste lands sanctuary, alluring, and strangely beneficent. In the furnace itself, he gave his gaze to the ground, and his consciousness to the condition of his horse. Possibly Temescal's subconscious self was aware of great vistas inducing romantic imaginings. Yet the heat, biting through the back of his leather chacqueta, warned him to subdue his pace to the slow rhythm of the immediate universe—or find himself on foot in high-heeled boots.

As Temescal's mount shuffled from lope to walk, Juan reined alongside, and glanced back at the red sun. *"Socorro?"* he queried.

"But no." Temescal shook his head. "A trick of the llano. Even now the wind runs no higher than a fetlock. It will die upon itself. Then the heat."

"You know this country, señor?"

Temescal shrugged his shoulders—to lift the heat from his back. "Are you acquainted with the devil? You have never seen him, yet you know him, perhaps? So I know the Llano de las Gatas, which, like a cat upon the knee, purrs and works its claws gently into one's skin. Now the cat merely purrs. The claws are sheathed."

"Yet its breath is hot enough."

"Si, amigo. And its paw reaches far." Temescal turned in the saddle and gestured toward the hills from whence they had come. "There sits the cat, its back arched against the sky. The cat watches this gray floor for stray mice. Some ancient humorist must have suffered a pawing and clawing before he dragged himself into a crevice of escape and named the range El Gata. Of a truth it is shaped like the back of a cat—yet the real cat is the sun, the inexorable red panther of the desert.

"I prefer a cooler theme. Do you know the hills of Santa Rosalia, yonder; the hospitable haciendas, the pomegranates, the apples and pears of the higher slopes, and oranges and figs and wine of the valley? And there are cool acequias which are music, and the shade a prayer of rest. In Santa Rosalia one quickly forgets El Gata and the heat."

"Ai! But we are here. It is only that which lies behind us which may be forgotten."

"Or remembered, perhaps?"

"But what good does that do?" queried Juan. "Why should one bother about that which has happened? That which is going to happen is the best."

"It depends on whether one saves a little, or spends all."

Juan visualized money. "For one who carries much money, you journey in hard places, señor."

"Like a bandido, eh?" And Temescal smiled. "Yet I must pay my way, even here. Set your gaze toward the hills and hold the journey as accomplished. Play with the idea. Imagine yourself in Santa Rosalia, a lieutenant of rurales—say, the Rurales of Zacatecas. Imagine me your captain-general. Would such a distinction please you? Or perhaps you would prefer the shepherd's staff and a life of indolence?"

"A man does not think of kissing a woman when his mouth is as dry as a snuffbox," declared Juan, who thought of La Luz.

"But rather the cool mouth of a jarro of wine out of its earthen cellar in the shady hillside. Of a truth, the tasting of wine is better than the drinking, though we all drink after tasting. Some of us, even, get drunk. I think repentance prepares the way for future thirst. I never repent."

"Yet you do not refuse good wine, señor."

"And I hope that I may never. We have wound a few more miles on the spool.

How far do you make it to yonder group of palms?"

"I see no palms."

"Doubtless my eyes are at fault as often as my judgment. I will study the ears of my horse that I may not again salute a mirage." And Temescal fixed his attention, seemingly, on his horse's ears.

Within the hour the ears of both horses were pricked rigidly toward a distant rise in the plain, from which sprang a cluster of slender grasses with tufted tops. Nearer, the rise flattened to a rolling sweep of white sand round a group of miniature palm trees delicately etched against the turquoise sky.

Temescal gravely saluted these beneficent sentinels of a desolate outpost by raising his sombrero and bowing. Nor did Juan smile. Instead, he fingered the edge of his own sombrero, almost a convert to Temescal's peculiar creed.

Neither Juan nor Temescal had suffered great fatigue or thirst while traversing the tierra caliente, though, beneath the incessant hammering of the sun, the horses had begun to show signs of distress. Their hitherto sleek coats were ruffled and blotched with dried sweat, their flanks drawn, their eyes dust-rimmed and dull. Having smelled water, however, the horses became excited.

Arrived at the oasis, Juan dismounted and held them while Temescal explored the spot, searching for the spring. On the farther side of the oasis he found a meager flow of water, choked by sand and litter. He cleaned out the spring until it bubbled clear, that the horses might drink freely.

Meanwhile the thirsty animals fretted, tossed their heads, stamped impatiently. They could not understand the restraint which had been wisely imposed upon them. Temescal's horse, pulling back on the reins suddenly, cut his mouth with the heavy spade bit. Rearing and lunging backward into a tangle of dried palm fronds, its hind feet broke through the withered mat. Juan, clinging to the reins, was jerked from his balance. One of the horses' wildly pawing forefeet flashed down and struck him on the head. Juan collapsed like an empty glove.

Free, the horses swung round to where Temescal knelt, cleaning out the spring. He caught them, and allowed them to drink. Tethering them to a palm, he hastened round to the eastern side of the oasis. He found Juan face down amid a litter of fronds. Temescal knelt and examined his stricken companion. "And so, little soldier?" he murmured as he carried Juan to the spring. He gave Juan a little wine, yet the young soldado did not recover consciousness.

Philosophically Temescal accepted the situation. He again allowed the horses to drink, stripped off saddles and bridles and tethered them farther apart, and fed them grain in the morrals. Then he took off his boots, chacqueta and shirt, and sat with his back against a palm trunk, watching his companion. Juan's face was ghastly yellow, his eyes ringed with purple shadows.

Slowly the silhouettes of the tall palms drew round and lengthened. The stagnant heat pressed hard. Temescal's head nodded. He blinked away the haze in which Juan's face had become a mere pallid blur. Rising, Temescal took the morrals from the horses.

For a minute or so he stood gazing out across the glaring emptiness. A wide shadow flicked past on the white sand. He glanced up. A vulture hung circling just above the tops of the palms.

"But no!" cried Temescal. "Not my companion—and not here!" Stooping he drew his rifle from the scabbard. The gun leaped to his shoulder like the hand of a friend to a friend. The muzzle swept in a brief arc. The echo of the shot snarled out into space. The circling vulture collapsed as though it had dashed against a cliff. Turning over and over, it splashed through the spreading green top of a gigantic palm and crashed down upon the brittle fronds below.

"My eyesight is improving," declared Temescal as he sheathed the rifle.

Juan raised his hand and gestured feebly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RED PANTHER.

UNABLE to continue the journey because of Juan's condition, Temescal wasted no effort in combating the inevitable, conserving his energy against the insufferable heat, which seemed to increase in intensity with the setting of the sun. All his philosophy, his sense of humor, the vigor of his will, evaporated, leaving but the dregs of physical habit as evidence that he was a living animal and not a stone or a dead yucca stalk.

Nor could he, between the intervals of giving Juan water and bathing his own chest and shoulders, amuse himself by introspection and intimate communion with his soul. He was neither asleep nor fully awake. Juan's occasional request for water was a welcome distraction.

By slow and tortuous degrees Temescal climbed, as it were, out of the deep, black pit of the stagnant night, relieved when the steely edge of dawn slipped between the earth and the sky, and the first thin wedge of gold pried the cover of dusk from the slumbering world.

He watered the horses, made a fire, drank black coffee. Unable to sleep at night, he now slept heavily. About noon he arose, sweltering. Urged by some instinct to activity he strode out across the white sand to the rise east of the oasis, where the sting of the sun's dry heat was a momentary stimulant. Far out on the eastern reaches of the desert lay a mirage, a wide, blue lake, edged with the palms, its serene surface mirroring a shadowy mountain range.

"It is like the lagoon of Ramora," said Temescal, "but never a white burro and three folk wading knee-deep in the phantom water!"

He closed his eyes, covered them with his hand. When he again glanced at the mirage, the phantom travelers seemed to be nearer its palm-fringed shore. "Of a truth, my brain is touched by the sun! The Red Panther plays with my reason."

Stubbornly disregarding the mirage, Temescal returned to the oasis. Juan, on hands and knees, was crawling toward the saddles at the base of a palm.

Temescal paused. Reaching the saddles, Juan found the bottle of white wine and drank greedily. He crawled back to the spring and lay with his arms outflung, seemingly in a stupor. Temescal secured the firearms and hid them among the fronds. Juan's delirium might take an aggressive turn.

As for himself? Temescal shook his head. A mirage was nothing new to him. But a white burro wading across the serene blue emptiness of a phantom lagoon! For perhaps an hour, while Juan lay motionless, Temescal pondered the illusion. The intense heat warred against his inclination to rise and view once again the mirage.

Finally curiosity overcame his lassitude. He went out to the ridge. The mirage had vanished. Yet the white burro still persisted, plodding across the gray emptiness. With him journeyed three folk, plainly discernible as they topped a low rise, for an instant tiny silhouettes against the turquoise sky.

"Yet nothing is impossible," declared Temescal, now assured beyond all doubt that those who journeyed toward the oasis were Alejandro and his family. So, patient upon his little hill, Temescal waited to meet those who were so soon to become his guests, his charges and his companions in adventuring.

Was he irritated or distressed by this added burden of responsibility? Did he frown upon the absurdity of this awkward circumstance? Was he bitter toward the fling of fate that would make him cicerone, provider, protector and captain of this rural and impoverished cavalcade? Did he who held the confidence of potentates and whose lifted finger could command ten thousand armed horsemen to his bidding, regret this additional interruption to his plan and purpose? It may be cheerfully assumed that he was never more generously disposed than at the moment. Of this there could be no more convincing proof than his utterance as he rubbed his unshaven chin reflectively: *"Sacaton!*

But I forgot to shave this morning—and there is a lady approaching."

Thus great men are never greater than when they are themselves.

Pepito, leading the white burro, was first to observe the figure of a man, standing straight and immobile upon a distant ridge of sand. Yet it was La Luz who named the figure "Temescal." Alejandro, plodding wearily behind her, followed her gesture with his eyes. He breathed the name, echoed it in his mind, and felt its potency as it had been a draft of cool wine. "We escape!" he murmured. "We have a friend!"

At the foot of the low sandy hill, the travelers stopped and instantly extreme fatigue was evident in every line of their bodies. "Welcome!" cried Temescal as though receiving them upon the threshold of a palace.

Pepito, Alejandro and La Luz gazed up at him, their weary eyes suddenly lighted with a radiance akin to that in the eyes of the forlorn when beholding the image of a saving deity. In three gigantic strides Temescal was among them. The white burro nosed his arm. Alejandro grasped Temescal and embraced him. Pepito, upon his knees, brushed the dust from Temescal's boots with his battered hat.

Only La Luz remained aloof, her white teeth pressed against her lower lip. Yet her eyes were Temescal's. She wondered why Juan had not come to meet them.

As he dusted Temescal's boots, Pepito babbled of bandits, of slaughtered sheep, of the guitarra, until Alejandro silenced him.

Moving toward the oasis, Temescal gave his arm to Alejandro with a sprightly, "May I show you the way to my casa, señor?"

"And Juan has suffered an accident," explained Temescal as they arrived at the spring. "He sleeps. Thus we have been delayed, most fortunately, by his misfortune."

While Pepito unpacked the burro and La Luz made her father comfortable with a serape spread in the shade, Temescal gave his attention to Juan, who was presently revived from his lethargy and acknowledged the presence of Alejandro and his family with an oath of astonishment.

"The soldier has returned," observed Temescal. "He is weak, and may not travel immediately, but his mind has cleared. So, Señor Alejandro, you have brought good fortune to us."

"Yet you may not say so when I tell you why we are here," said Alejandro. And incensed by the outrage to his flocks and home, the shepherd recounted with bitterness the vivid happenings of the past few days.

"And I think it is that we bring misfortune," he concluded pessimistically. "Even now the ladrones follow us. That we have escaped them is a miracle. That we shall escape them again seems impossible. We are fordone. And were we not, what could we do against twenty?"

"Much," said Temescal, "that they may not anticipate. Rest, until the sun is below the mountains. Meanwhile I will snatch a plan from the sky."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PARTING.

THROUGHOUT the long hot hours of the afternoon, Alejandro, La Luz and Juan slept. Meanwhile Temescal and Pepito busied themselves arranging for the departure at sundown. The horses were fed, saddled, and allowed to drink. Pepito prepared food for the evening meal while Temescal divided Alejandro's provisions into three portions, disposing of all the remaining effects by burying them in the heart of the oasis and cleverly thatching the hollow with dead fronds in such a manner that the cache could never be discovered save by sheer accident.

Returning to the spring he found La Luz and Juan conversing quietly, the young soldier apparently having recovered sufficiently to sit with his back against a palm trunk and reiterate trembling vows of admiration and fidelity. Temescal roused Alejandro and talked with him apart from the others.

"I have buried your belongings in the

oasis, and disguised the cache completely," declared Temescal.

"But señor——"

"That the burro may be used to better advantage," continued Temescal. "I have also concealed the packsaddle, and replaced it with a blanket. You will ride the burro, Señor Alejandro. Juan will ride his horse. Pepito is tireless—filled with a mad energy that knows no fatigue. He will walk. My horse will carry double."

"But my silver crucifix, the clock, my flagon——"

"And La Luz?"

"Ai! La Luz! There is no argument. I am ungrateful, and a fool. You shame me by your wisdom, Don Ricardo."

"Peanuts! Eat. Drink a little wine. Pray, if you will, but sharpen a stick and prod the burro if he lags. Should mischance separate us before we reach the hills, here is a note which you will carry to Captain José Hermanos of the Zacatecas Rurales. You will find him in either San Domingo or Santa Rosalia. He will see to your welfare. Return to the spring and make ready to depart."

Brusquely Temescal turned and strode to the ridge east of the oasis. He could discern, far down the long, sunset reaches, an occasional twinkle of metal and of movement. "They will arrive two hours behind the sun," he muttered. "Were Juan himself, and I had two more as loyal, we could subtract enough from twenty to teach the dogs practical arithmetic. As it is, I can but mark minus on the sand. Let them read the sign and howl. The moon will take no offense."

Stimulated by additional responsibility, by the presence of La Luz, by the realization that his companion Juan had recovered from his stupor, Temescal, having eaten and warmed his imagination with a thimbleful of white wine, gathered his retainers together and like a true patron, fathered the exodus with tact, encouragement and not-to-be-gainsaid decision.

When Alejandro intimated that he could carry some of his buried belongings while riding the burro, Temescal seemed to have become suddenly deaf. When Juan, from the dizzy eminence of his saddle—for he was still weak from loss of blood and shock—suggested that La Luz mount behind him, Temescal squashed the suggestion. "I have arranged. You are too weak to more than hold yourself in the saddle. Pepito will walk beside your horse. If you fall off, do not forget which side he is on. It may save your head."

A phantom cavalcade, they moved slowly from the deep shadows of the palms out into the hot, velvet dusk of the starlit desert, Alejandro, a fantastic shape on the white burro, Juan following, with Pepito at his stirrup, and Temescal's horse carrying double.

The white burro shuffled across the sand briskly, possibly because Alejandro had resorted to prayer, more probably because he employed Temescal's suggestion, a sharpened stick. Pepito, sullen because he could not walk beside Temescal instead of beside Juan, wished that the young lieutenant would fall off his horse, on the far side, and break his neck, and thus cease to be an encumbrance to the expedition. Only fear of Temescal's wrath restrained Pepito from slyly jabbing the horse in the stomach and causing an accident. Great churchmen have entertained temptations quite as sanguinary.

La Luz, her hand upon Temescal's shoulder, as she sat sidewise behind him, gave to the motion of the plodding horse like a young willow in the breeze. In the exultation inspired by the desert night, their strange journey, and the nearness of Don Ricardo, she forgot for a while the abandoned home, the green meadow, the slaughtered sheep and even the reason for their flight. And because he did not speak she longed to hear his voice. If she bit her pretty red lip and frowned petulantly, how could his sturdy back realize it? Finally she found something to say. "Do your eyes still trouble you, señor?" she asked.

Had Don Ricardo been pondering problems of state, or finance, or war, politics, oil leases or social economy, that his rein hand came up so suddenly and his horse

stopped? Not so. Rather, because of the strange exultation inspired by the desert night, their journey, and above all by the nearness of La Luz, he had forgotten all such inconsequential matters. Because she had not spoken, he had longed to hear her voice. And perversely, because La Luz was behind him, he longed to behold her face. But now that she had spoken—and solicitously!

With an utterance rich, resonant and altogether convincing, he acknowledged her question. "Only, señorita, because they are not in the back of my head!"

"The horse has stopped," said La Luz, a bit startled by Temescal's ponderous compliment.

"Quite so. My heart, however, has begun to beat again. Are you comfortable?"

"Ah, señor! Can't you see that I am?"

"No!" And Temescal's "no" rolled from his chest like the reverberation of drums, challenging, portentous. La Luz quivered with delight. Here, beneath the touch of her hand was the cavalier of the green meadow, who sang one's soul into ecstasy, who drank regally, yet rose in the morning with sunshine in his eyes, and who was courteous to humble folk.

"Don Ricardo——" breathed La Luz, and hesitated.

Temescal urged his horse along again. Presently he was close to the vague figures of Juan and Pepito. "How is it with you, compadre?" he called.

"Well enough," replied Juan. "I need no one to hold me in the saddle."

"So?" murmured Temescal. La Luz laughed softly. "But I will walk beside him for a while," she said.

"You will not!" declared Temescal. "If my comrade needs assistance, he will not deny me the privilege." And Temescal glanced over his shoulder, possibly to emphasize his words. He saw the edge of a woven straw sombrero—a cheap sombrero such as peons wear—yet then and there it became a halo, an arcadian penumbra, and beneath it the downcast eyes of La Luz. "So, señor," she said obediently.

Temescal said "Ahem!" expressively—meaning, "Well, that matter is settled."

Past clumps of ghostly cactus and deep-shadowed rocks, down smooth shadowless reaches of vanished lakes, across low ridges rounded by the winds, along crisp-sounding flats of scattered gravel, yet ever bearing west they made their slow way, the white burro's long ears thrust forward into the darkness, and Alejandro's gaze fixed upon their guiding star.

Gaining confidence because of the befriending night, and his companions, the shepherd became genial toward himself, expanding, in imagination, to the full stature of a man, by choice a martial figure mounted upon a snow-white charger, leading a vanquished but unconquered host toward a far, fair sanctuary of pastoral quietude. Yet the bobbing ears of the white burro persistently emphasized the actual, until Alejandro, with quick, querulous impatience signified his return to earth by prodding the patient animal with the sharpened stick. "There is little difference between us," he remarked, "save that you have the longer ears."

Feeling a tug at his sleeve, Temescal turned, his gaze directed by the outstretched arm of La Luz. Far back in the heart of the night he beheld a tiny flame that, flickering, cast a faint crimson glow on the tops of the distant palms. He nodded and touched his finger to his lips. "It is my business to extinguish all such fires in Mexico," he said.

PUZZLED, La Luz was silent. Her father had told her that Don Ricardo was a great man—one who had many guns at his command. Yet he seemed not too great to ignore the afflicted, the distressed, the destitute. La Luz thought of the infant, Temescalita, toward whom she had felt a strange, unaccountable jealousy until Alejandro had told her that which he had learned of the foundling's history. As they journeyed through the still night, La Luz explored chance highways and by-ways of imagination, yet ever aware that her hand rested on Temescal's shoulder.

Finally, being a healthy young animal, she drifted to sleep, her head against Temescal's broad back. Her hand slipped

from his shoulder. As the horse crossed a stretch of rough ground La Luz lost her balance, but lithely caught herself as she slipped, awake instantly as her feet touched the ground. Temescal reined up sharply. Leaning down he swept his arm around her and drew her up. "If you will sleep," he said with affected sternness, "here is your place."

"You are a very strong man, señor," breathed La Luz. "Yet here, in your arms, I would tire you."

"Your face is like a golden flower in the dusk," murmured Temescal. "Of such fragrance I drink sparingly. Thus do I seal the chalice. La Luz, my golden one, there is no to-morrow. All is in this hour."

To La Luz came happiness undreamed, a magic awakening. Her dark eyes were dimmed with a mist of tears. This Temescal was no longer a stranger, inexplicable in his attitudes, his moods, his sprightly pleasantries. This man was simply Temescal.

"If you would sleep," whispered Temescal.

"But no. I will ride behind you. I will put my arms around you, señor, that I may not fall."

"Not around me 'señor,' but——"

"Mio Ricardo!" murmured La Luz. Swiftly she drew his head down, fiercely she pressed her mouth against his mouth. Then she slipped from his arms, stood at his stirrup, which he made empty that she might mount behind him.

Again upon their way, La Luz dreamily content with the silent companionship of Temescal, they drew toward the sound of voices. Alejandro's guiding star had thoughtlessly descended behind the mountains of the west. Juan, Pepito and the shepherd were arguing as to which way to proceed, each of a different mind, yet each positive that he was correct. Just before Temescal halted to direct their further course, La Luz leaned forward: "For all men, save one, I have the little knife in my garter."

"Quite so," said Temescal.

Thenceforth they journeyed steadily until, an hour before dawn, Juan toppled from the saddle, falling, most fortunately, against Pepito, who instinctively caught him and instantly regretted having done so. "The sick one is now dead," exclaimed Pepito enthusiastically, as they gathered round the unconscious Juan. "He said if he died suddenly, I was to have his horse and his gun and his money."

"He has fainted from weariness," said Temescal, kneeling and raising Juan's head. "The wine, señorita, is in my saddlebags."

Presently Juan was revived sufficiently to declare that he could continue the journey.

"Good!" said Temescal. "We are not far from the hills. The dawn wind is awake. Set your courage against another hour of travel, and we shall be among our friends, the trees."

The quickened energy of the horses, the slope of the land, the washes of gravel and scattered rock assured the travelers that they were near the foothills. And, as though to inspire the weary cavalcade to a last, gallant effort, the dawn came swiftly, seeming to lift the great Santa Rosalia range up out of nothingness, its rugged lower battlements filmed with a haze of amethyst. Green above the lower reaches of the range, the timberlands ran north and south, winding away into invisibility.

"Sanctuary!" cried Alejandro, his voice breaking with weariness and emotion.

With a businesslike air, the white burro made directly for a clump of foliage set in the narrow clasp of a rocky defile. Topography inspired him only when it hinted of water and grass. The clump of foliage presently became a group of stalwart trees shading a pool. A game trail led on up into the shadows of the morning hillside.

The horses and burro were watered and fed. Pepito made a fire, and the family ate a scanty breakfast, following which Alejandro immediately lay down to sleep.

La Luz was cleaning their few utensils when Temescal gestured to her. She rose and came to where he stood. Her gaze followed his out across the morning desert.

Of a color with the desert, yet separated from it by movement, a sinister, crawling thing dragged itself along the smooth gray floor. The sunlight struck occasional faint flashes from bandolier and belt, from concha and carbine. "The bandidos!" whispered La Luz. "They did not camp at the Place of Palms."

"I do not think they follow us so much as that they are followed. For so large a company, they move swiftly. Let your father sleep until the burro is again packed. You must captain a new plan, my golden one."

When the horses had been saddled and the burro again packed, La Luz awakened her father. To his startled questioning Temescal raised a silencing hand. "We are followed closely. Waste no time in words. Make ready to depart. Of you, señor, I shall require the pair of new shoes which you have salvaged for a more devout usage. You will have to be content for a while with the old ones that you wear. And of you, Juan, I shall require your carbine and bandolier. You may retain your pistol.

"Of you, La Luz, I ask nothing but fidelity to my purpose—which is to assure the safety of yourself, your good father and my friend Juan. You will take my horse, señorita. Noon should find you on the crest of the range. Somewhere along the foothills of the western slope is the town of Santa Rosalia. I will give a note to you, Señor Alejandro, which you will deliver to one there who will receive you hospitably. I have use for the boy, Pepito. We will follow as we can."

"But why not journey with us, Don Ricardo?"

Temescal pulled off his boots. "The shoes!" he demanded. Then to La Luz: "I shall feel honored, señorita, if you will wear my boots until such time as I may reclaim them. Here, on foot among the rocks, they would be a hindrance to me."

"Si, señor." The dark eyes of La Luz were exceedingly bright as she realized Temescal's intent, which was to remain and check the progress of the bandits by harrying them from the vantage of concealing rock, or ledge, or protecting tree trunk. Her man could do no less.

Juan, however, protested that alone and on foot Temescal ran serious risk. Alejandro implored Temescal to reconsider, and flee with them.

"My patience is raveled to strands by these outlaws," declared Temescal. "I will braid a whip and teach them a custom of the penitentes. My farewell is said. Yet a word with you, Señor Alejandro."

A few paces aside, Temescal stripped off his money belt and gave it to the shepherd. "Use what you need, freely. And, finding Captain Hermanos, send him to me here with a knowledge of that which detains me. Go with God, my friend."

CHAPTER XX.

TEMESCAL PAYS SOME DEBTS.

WHILE Temescal filled a canteen at the pool, Alejandro, Juan and La Luz rode slowly up the game trail leading toward the shadowy timberlands. And with them, as Temescal was wont to say in the calm perspective of after years, went most of his equipment, all his money and half his heart. The other half, it would seem, he retained for a stern, immediate purpose. The ragged outlaws of Cabazon, though still distant, were steadily approaching the foothills.

There was too much of the poet, the philosopher, the humanitarian in Temescal's peculiar cosmos for him to love battle for its own sake. In fact, his compassion and generosity had more than once all but ended his earthly activities. That upon occasion he realized the inevitable necessity for combat is evident even in these intimate, arcadian annals. It is more superlatively evident in the conventional record of his official performances emblazoned upon an especially sanguinary page of history, which, with strange inaccuracy, accounts him as dead.

It is true that when the imperious, challenging trumpets of his land shout, "Temescal!" he does not appear. Though he hears their searching echoes murmur his name in faltering cadences among the

farthest hills, he is silent. When the poor, the destitute, the harassed, fearful that even their stark walls will betray them, whisper in prayer, "Return, O Temescal!" they but conjure a phantom from the shadows of memory, at most a hope forlorn to cheat their troubled eyes. And perhaps it is as well. There are enough torches abroad in the land.

When La Luz, without protest, argument or trace of hesitation, mounted his horse and turned to the upland trail, Temescal was so pleased with her calm obedience that he could not quite contain himself. "There," he said as he immersed the canteen in the cool mountain water, "goes a woman!" Bubbles gurgled up from the mouth of the submerged canteen—bubbles which seemed to chuckle at his somewhat trite observation. Yet Temescal's resonant intonation, the caressing eloquence of his utterance, the history-defying, wholehearted emphasis of the word "woman," was not alone a lyric tribute to La Luz, the shepherd's daughter, but a veritable melody of adoration—a song that would have enthralled the unsophisticated Eve, charmed unblushing Aphrodite from her morning bath, suffused the broad white brow of ardent Sappho with rose envy.

However, Temescal had little time to revel in the echoes of his poetic intensity. He rose briskly, slung the canteen across his shoulder. "There goes a woman!" he had said. "And here goes nothing!" he said, as he summoned Pepito and hastened along the gravelly slope of the foothills. Hazard always inclined Temescal toward humor. Moreover, he was born in the United States. Delighting in his own rhapsodies, he as often laughed at them.

Emerging from an arroyo farther up the rocky slope, they concealed themselves behind a huge cube of granite. Temescal took off his chacqueta and folded it carefully, dropped a handful of cartridges in his upturned sombrero, loosened his shirt collar and drank from the canteen.

"And now," he said—he was a master of continuity—"we will get to business. Pepito, this carbine is operated thus. Here are the cartridges. I have unloaded the magazine. Now I reload it." He gave the carbine to the youth. "Remember," he said sternly, "you will shoot at ladrones, not at gentlemen engrossed in the intricacies of shaving themselves."

Pepito grasped the carbine, delighted with the weapon, and the obvious possibilities approaching.

"Yonder ride the outlaws who slaughtered your sheep and ravaged your home," declared Temescal. "That your family may not be overtaken, we remain here to entertain the bandits. If I should be hit, take to the hills. Follow the tracks of your family. Yet, if we have the good fortune to come out of this enterprise unscathed, I will make you my mozo for life."

Surprise, affection, gratitude transfigured Pepito's homely face until it glowed with the fanatic rapture of a martyr visioning the divine. "I am a good boy, señor! I am strong. I will fight for you——"

"You are a rotten shot. Do not fire at anything unless I tell you to do so. Keep in front of me. I don't want to get it in the back."

Arriving at the pool below, the bandidos watered their horses, made camp and cooked meat. Watching them, Pepito trembled with excitement and suspense. Was the great one afraid to shoot? Many could be killed, and easily. Perhaps the great one would wait until the ladrones were asleep and then steal nearer and kill them all.

Temescal, however, seemed content with observing the raiders. He knew that these men, heavily armed and not in uniform, were plunderers, murderers; and if not those, at least akin to those who had made the infant Temescalita an orphan, had infested Santuario, and later who had discovered and ravaged Alejandro's hermitage. And among them was one, a broad, thick and commanding figure, whom Temescal could have sworn was The Thief of Cabazon himself. Yet he hesitated to fire upon them. From his vantage of concealment, and in the tumult of their surprise, he could snuff out a half score of

lives before they could intrench themselves.

The morning sun, exploring nook and crevice, shone blazing upon the scarred brown cliffs above, the graveled foothill slopes, the shimmering desert below. Round the pool, cluttered in the shade, the bandidos squatted, eating their scanty breakfast. A sentinel stood guard over the horses, which had not been unsaddled.

Temescal glanced up at the sun, then at the shadow cast by the granite cube. The increasing heat rebounded from the tumbled rock and shale of the hillside. Pepito wondered why Temescal did not kill these men. He ardently desired to see men killed, to see the great one wage war against those who had slaughtered the sheep, driven Alejandro and La Luz from their home, and possessed themselves of the beautiful guitarra.

Yet Temescal sat with his back against the granite cube, seemingly indifferent to a providential opportunity. Temescal's eyes were closed. It is possible, though not probable, that he slept. Perhaps he had but retired within himself to recreate the vision of a face like a golden flower in the dusk. Below, the bandidos lay stretched in the shade, asleep.

An hour, two hours—and Pepito roused Temescal. "Señor!" he whispered. "They make ready to go."

Temescal's eyes unclosed calmly. He glanced at the shadow of the rock, at the camp of the bandits. "Time has chosen," he declared somewhat regretfully. He moistened his handkerchief and bathed his eyes. "Stay where you are until I need you," he told Pepito. Temescal picked up his rifle.

The sharp report snarled down the hillside, its ragged echoes hurtling along the cliffs above. In the distant camp a horseman weaved in the saddle, toppled and slid slowly to the ground. "Temescalita!" murmured Temescal.

His hand shot forward and back. Another shot barked above the tumult and clamor round the pool. And another horseman, about to mount, seemed to suddenly change his mind. He let go the horn and pitched forward on his face. "The mother of Temescalita!" murmured Temescal.

Again the report of his rifle crashed into shivering echoes. One of the ladrones, spurring out toward the desert, fell forward on the neck of his horse. "Temescalita's father was kindly and industrious," murmured Temescal. A bullet buzzed up from the distant camp and splashed against the face of the granite cube.

"The quail have scattered," said Temescal. "We will occupy a higher position. Crawl back into the arroyo and make your way up the hill. I will follow, presently."

"But, señor, I will stay! I am not afraid."

"Go!" thundered Temescal. As he spoke something whistled across the top of the granite cube, spattering stinging fragments in the herd boy's face. Pepito dropped to his hands and knees and crawled toward the brink of the arroyo.

CHAPTER XXI.

BATTLE.

HAD the rifle fire from above been of more volume, even though less disconcertingly accurate, undoubtedly the bandits would have taken to the desert and spurred a hasty and final retreat south. Yet the most stupid among them realized they were not attacked by the rurales, who would have followed their advantage of surprise with a swift and merciless assault.

As it was, the outlaws broke for cover among the foothill ridges, each man for himself, the riderless horses too jaded to do more than drift together and mill slowly round the flat below the spring.

From their hastily assumed concealments the outlaws exchanged oathful opinions as to the identity of the unseen marksman. Their chief, The Thief of Cabazon, the spurious Temescal, shrewdly aware that an excellent and daring marksman commanded the approach to the only pass across the range within thirty or forty miles, directed his followers to scatter up the slope and surround the distant granite cube which concealed their enemy.

His followers, however, remained strangely silent and inactive. The Thief of Cabazon immediately enhanced his suggestion with an interesting postscript: "A hundred pesos to the man who brings me his ears."

The proffered reward inspired the ladrones to sudden and concentrated action. Ignoring the mute significance of the three separate, huddled shapes on the sand below, the bandits crawled from rock to rock up the hillside, working as a ragged unit, yet each viciously determined to force the solitary rifleman from his intrenchment, make the kill, and exchange a mere pair of ears for a hundred silver pesos. Although their hidden enemy had cost them three fighting men, the reward seemed munificent. Less has been offered and earned for a general, complete.

Did Temescal anticipate an attempt to surround him when he sent Pepito farther up the mountainside? One might assume that in doing so he merely wished to test the alertness of the bandits, to ascertain whether or not a rifle commanded the more or less open stretch between his stronghold and the brink of the arroyo. Or one might more generously conclude that Temescal wished to assure himself of Pepito's safety before he himself gave up the keystone of the situation.

Knowing Temescal, it is difficult to deny him credit for either astuteness or unselfishness. Yet it is only fair to his native integrity that the rigid and immovable facts be inspected before burdening him with more glory than he could comfortably bear.

Once, when questioned as to why he did not immediately retreat with Pepito while —as the questioner put it—the retreating was good, Temescal shrugged his shoulders, spread his hands politely, convincingly, and regarded the toe of his highly polished boot.

"I would be loved or hated for that which I am, and not for that which I might so easily affect," he declared. "I will not be an oracle of convenience for those who deal too carelessly in eulogies! Nor will I ingratiate myself with fame by affirming an excellence possessed, yet which fame may deny me. If the intuitions of my friends are at fault, it is not my desire or my business to adjust them."

It is possible that Temescal, like a famous prototype, hereby "contrived an evasion." However, one might as well let the tail go with the hide, and pocket the peso without biting it.

The facts, however, are undisguised.

Temescal refrained from shooting down the exposed and helpless horses of the bandits.

He withheld his fire while the bandits scurried to shelter, although he was accounted a good wing shot.

Following the disappearance of his enemies, one of their number ventured out on the flat below the spring and deliberately hazed the horses toward the foothills, while nothing emanated from Temescal's lone citadel of defiance save an eloquent and impressive silence.

Hot noon glared down upon the wooded mountainside, the bleak brown lower reaches strewn with tumbled rock, the long, smooth sweep of pebble-dotted bench land, imperceptibly merging with the wide gray barrens of the desert floor.

It is true that Temescal donned his chacqueta, not, however with immediate retreat in mind, but to protect his back and shoulders from the biting sun. The granite cube now stood naked, shadowless.

He slipped the unused cartridges back into his belt loops and put on his sombrero. His mind, so recently active in planning and performing, became less energetic in the stagnant heat, the silence, the apparent cessation of hostilities. And then it was that intuition, so easily frightened from a task by logic and its myrmidons, tiptoed up to Temescal, and whispering advised him to make the most of his present vantage.

Even more portentous was the instant shot which reverberated in the resounding woodlands above, as Pepito, crouching behind a tree trunk, hugged the stock of his carbine to his cheek and cut loose at a slinking figure obviously stalking the unwary Temescal.

"Idiot!" snorted Temescal. "I had them burrowing for shelter. Now he has stirred them up again!"

Snatching up his rifle he made a crouching dash for the brink of the arroyo. Nor did he stand upon the order of the topography, but slipping and sliding, descended in a dusty avalanche of loosened earth and clattering stones. Leaping from rock to rock, trotting up the occasional sandy stretch, and finally swinging with Pepito's tracks up and out upon a gentle slope shaded by stately trees, he discovered the shepherd boy dancing an impromptu tarantella on his long-suffering hat, and gesticulating wildly.

Pepito ceased as he saw Temescal, ran to him and grasped his sleeve.

"There!" he whispered, pointing far down the hillside. "He kicks, but it is that he will not get up again."

"Quite so," said Temescal, instantly realizing his recent danger, Pepito's fortunate accuracy of aim, and the disruption of his plans.

Amply screened behind the noble rotundity of a great cypress, Temescal strove to regain his breath. He gestured toward the carbine in Pepito's hand. "You have done me a service, although you disobeyed me. You now have my permission to use the gun when necessity demands."

"I do not waste the cartridges," said Pepito, pointing proudly toward the distant, conclusive evidence. "I saw him walking thus"—Pepito imitated a crouching figure—"and watching the rock where you were hidden. In here, señor"—and the shepherd boy touched his chest—"a voice said, 'Kill the thief who slaughtered your sheep!' It was your voice, señor! I am a good boy. I made him kick! Perhaps very soon I will make another one kick."

"Possibly." Temescal was still a bit short of breath. "Yet I had planned otherwise."

"Perhaps it is that we go now, quick. There are many trees. We will not be seen."

TEMESCAL was not displeased with the suggestion. Henceforth the ladrones would proceed with extreme caution, especially when traversing the thickly timbered reaches of the higher country. Already Alejandro, Juan and La Luz would have gained the western slope of the range, with the visible promise of sanctuary in the valley of Santa Rosalia.

Moreover, Temescal ardently desired to escape from the secluding canopy of the shadowy forest, which, obstructing his view of free spaces and the rounding sky, strangely oppressed and subdued him.

Turning to reconnoiter the upper slope before he ventured from his sheltering tree, Temescal's gaze was defeated by the blank wall of a cliff, hitherto unnoticed. Apparently this unanticipated barrier ran east and west for a considerable distance. The face of the cliff was scarred by a narrow ledge, and above the ledge another, and still another. The sun struck a path of gold down through an opening in the towering forest. The trunks of the trees glowed as though alive with creeping fire.

Temescal's quick eye caught the movement of a shadow along the cliff. A ragged figure was crawling along the lower ledge, peering down. Temescal's rifle swung to his shoulder and he fired, even as the bandido discovered and fired at him.

The shots crashed together, their shouting echoes rolling along the mountainside. With outflung arms the bandido plunged down through the swishing branches and rolled almost up to Temescal's feet. Pepito, watching the lower hillside, jumped round, chattering like a startled ape.

The bandit was not dead, yet he had not far to go. Temescal raised the stricken outlaw's head. "Who sent you?" he demanded.

"Temescal."

"The Thief of Cabazon?"

"Si," whispered the dying outlaw. "He will give a hundred pesos for your ears." The blue lips grinned hideously. The nerveless jaw dropped.

"So?" murmured Temescal. "Come, muchacho, let us save our ears."

With Pepito trotting ahead, they reached the cliff, moved swiftly from ledge to ledge, until they were above the tops of the trees, when shot after shot barked up from the hillside below and leaden wasps buzzed and splattered round them as they ran.

Temescal's somber mood had vanished. His face shone with a strange ecstatic radiance. He cried encouragement to Pepito, although the frightened herd boy had already outdistanced him along the narrow ledges. A shot ripped Temescal's sleeve from wrist to shoulder.

On the topmost ledge, from which he could view the long sweep of the mountainside below, Temescal paused, sadly out of breath. He took off his sombrero, wiped his forehead. The pause was a rest, and a perilous recreation. Immediately he became the target for an especially lively fusillade, which spread silvery blotches on the face of the cliff, in front of him, behind him, and above him. He leaned forward and fled up the trail. He stopped. A bullet smacked against the cliff not six inches in front of him. Another step and he would have stopped the bullet. His most fortunate pause was due to his having caught sight of a track in the shale dust—the faint imprint of a high-heeled boot.

"Sacaton!" breathed Temescal. And then, "La Luz!" Evidently La Luz, to save the weary horse, had led it up the steep ascent. Temescal's heart skipped a beat, then resumed its valiant pounding at his ribs. The pulse of his spirit quickened. Unconsciously he straightened to his full height. A bullet whined and splattered on the rock close to his head.

"Not yet!" he said, and with his finger drew a cross on the silver blotch that had all but been his final monogram. Crouching, he strode swiftly along the narrow ledge.

Reaching the final level of the crest, Temescal turned and gazed across the magic distances. The light in his eyes danced like sunshine on rippling water. And there he launched a stentorian challenge which rolled out from the height and resounded down the mountain like the tolling of a great bell—"Tem-es-cal!"

Far flung, the tone sang true, even beyond the volume of its sound, slowly diminishing. The awakened echoes retold the name in quick, rude clamoring, until, from some distant hollow, came the faint and final syllable muffled like the voice of one who mocks behind his hand.

One might surmise that Temescal's sudden change of mood, and his succeeding outburst were inspired by a lofty disdain, or by contempt, or the excitement of escape, or again, that once above the oppressing shadowy canopy of the forest, he had thus lifted his heart to the sun and his voice to the heavens. Not so.

Coming upon the footprint of La Luz, he had stopped. Starting forward again, he had disconcerted the searching rifles that had anticipated his continued progress and had held their fire the least bit ahead of him. An accident of Providence had woven the various threads of circumstance into a garment of salvation. This accident of Providence was the footprint of La Luz. And realizing this—after he was well out of rifle shot—Temescal flung his melodious defiance, not merely to a band of ragged outlaws, but to the four winds of heaven, to Fate itself.

CHAPTER XXII.

PEPITO.

PAUSING only long enough to assure himself that Temescal was following, Pepito turned from the rim of the cliff and set off at a brisk trot, dodging in and out among the dwarfed and twisted cypresses that writhed and whimpered in the wind of the height. No snarling, importunate bullets now nipped at his heels or snapped at the fluttering folds of his blouse, yet he maintained a deliberate pace until he had disappeared beyond the low, curving sky line of the crest. Nor was his apparent haste inspired by the thought of escape, so much as by the tracks of shod horses—occasional fresh scars upon the rounded rocks.

Below the crest, along its wooded, west-

ern slope, Pepito discovered the unmistakable hoofprints of the burro. Pepito "followed the tracks of his family."

To Temescal, however, the abrupt level of the cliff edge was somewhat like the final sentence of a lengthy and involved paragraph, wherein the period is welcome, the succeeding space restful to the physical eye, even though the mind be perturbed by an altogether unanticipated climax.

Pepito had vanished.

Temescal was surprised, puzzled, irritated. His dignity, swelled by a high pulse, was affronted by that which he termed a desertion. Pepito should have been there, on the mountaintop, because Temescal had not imagined that he would be anywhere else.

Accustomed to exacting obedience by sheer personality, accustomed to commanding men who were keen and quick to anticipate his wishes, Temescal resented the shepherd boy's dereliction even while he reproved himself for losing patience with the lad. A slight trembling of the legs influenced Temescal to sit down and rest. His breathing became more measured. Yet echoes of his resentment still rumbled and grumbled in his chest, like the muffled booming of retreating thunder.

"He was scared to death, and he stampeded!" declared Temescal. "Yes! My logic is sound, yet despicable, even though he has decamped with our precious sack of goat's meat and bread."

His back against a sheltering rock, his arms folded and his legs crossed, Temescal gazed down upon the wide valley of El Gata, its distant reaches deepening to shadowy purple against the farthest hills. While not unaware of the distant activities of the frustrated outlaws, reassembling at the pool, and doubtless preparing to advance across the range, Temescal remained the serenely undisturbed arbiter of their immediate destiny. Two hours, at least, before they could gain the crest —or, eternity, if they dared the narrow steep, from whence he could drop them one by one, like flicking pebbles into space.

So, ignoring the antlike hurryings and scurryings below, Temescal gave his attention to three vultures as they swept in easy circles back and forth across the contemplative level of his gaze. Presently a fourth and fifth vulture drifted from invisibility into that rhythmic, leisurely waiting. "Who summoned them to the feast?" Temescal asked himself.

He drew his notebook from his pocket, intending to jot down a name for the hitherto unnamed pool below. He would have named it "The Feast of the Vultures." Yet he did not write it down. The little, leather-bound notebook had been so chewed and crumpled by a bullet that, as Temescal ruefully observed, it looked more like a rat's nest than a neatly inscribed record of observation and comment. He recalled having felt an importunate nudge in the ribs as he had hastened up the last, long slope of the ascent.

"So?" he murmured, and rising, shook himself, as though he expected a shower of spent bullets to drop from his clothing. Drawing off his chacqueta he viewed it solemnly. The back of the short leather jacket had been whipped almost to shreds by the rifle fire of the bandits. "There is still one sleeve intact," he declared, "yet I must part with it. A memento of Santuario."

Exploring farther, he poked his finger down a slit in the close-fitting leg of his trousers. "Not so bad." He observed another hole in the wide bottom of the same trousers leg. "Inventory!" He took off his sombrero. The wind flipped the crown over as though it had been hinged.

"Yet the mirror is unshattered!" Temescal observed cheerfully.

His smile faded as he gazed at himself in the mirror. He rubbed his chin. He had not shaved for three days, and he was, as they say below the border, "a man of vigorous beard."

Pepito, finally realizing that Temescal was not following, hastened back to the edge of the cliff. His arrival seemed a matter of utter indifference to the great one, who gravely took stock of his furnishings; his mind, evidently, as detached as his chacqueta.

Intuitively aware that the great one was

displeased about something, Pepito grew even more puzzled and fearful as Temescal fastened what was left of his chacqueta to the nearest cypress, and hung the rim of his sombrero on a stub directly above the jacket. He tied his handkerchief about his head.

Pepito trembled as he gazed at the great one, who, shorn of the dignity of the sombrero and the conventionality of the jacket, appeared even wilder and more ferocious of mien and feature than the fiercest ladrone of Cabazon.

Having satisfied himself that his person concealed no further unpleasant surprises, Temescal calmly sat down. Pepito advanced hesitatingly. Still Temescal remained darkly aloof, deliberately unconscious of Pepito's presence. Most evidently the great one was so angry that he could not even utter his displeasure. Perhaps he was hungry. Pepito swung the small leather sack from his shoulder and, opening it, placed it cautiously within Temescal's reach. It was past noon.

As Pepito came within immediate range of his vision, Temescal noticed that the youth's clothing was literally in shreds and tatters—in fact, quite like his own discarded jacket and sombrero. Instantly Temescal leaped to his feet, seized the startled Pepito, turned him round in his tracks, inspected him from head to foot.

"I had thought to reprove you for your haste. Now it is that the rents and rags of your escape reprove me for my hasty inference." He laid his hand affectionately on Pepito's shoulder. "Man, you could have parted with less, and lost more. A few more bullets—and you would have had but a waistband and a collar to distinguish you from Señor Adam before he parted with his regretted rib. SACATON! That I should censure the loyalty of your feet in taking care of your head! There are those who might call you a hoodoo. I prefer to consider you a mascot. Henceforth you are my boy, my mozo. Ten pesos a month, bed, food and a new uniform.

"Attention, little rabbit!"—Conejo was Pepito's family name. "From this desolate and breath-snatching height even down into the final valley of forgetfulness —which means from now on—you will follow me and defend my back. I will take care of all approaches from the front. We are companions in a survival extraordinary. Also we are vagabonds—externally. In fact, I have little left, save you and my shadow.

"Take up the sack of food. We shall eat as we travel. To heel, rabbit! And do not hop ahead of my shadow as we go!"

Manfully endeavoring to follow the great one's flight of eloquence, Pepito snatched dizzily at such reassuring stabilities as "mozo," "pesos," "food," "bed," and "new uniform." The rest of it he valiantly ignored, as most of us do when oratory reaches an altitude beyond our ken.

For one unaccustomed to much walking, Temescal set an exceedingly fast pace across the crest of the range which separated the somber wastelands of El Gata from the verdant valley of Santa Rosalia —and himself from La Luz. Having disciplined Pepito by example, having all but stunned him by a remarkable and largely uncomprehended address, and having distinguished him by making him his mozo or boy-of-all-service, Temescal promptly and judiciously forgot him. The proverbial inch of intimacy should never become a mile. Meanwhile, Pepito, following Temescal down the wooded western slope, literally hopped in the great one's shadow with antic fidelity to his master's final injunction. Temescal had said "Hop!" so Pepito hopped.

Upon leaving the crest they had shared the goat's meat and bread, munching it as they journeyed. Coming upon a tiny stream far down the mountainside, Temescal knelt to drink. Observing that the shepherd boy was also about to drink farther upstream, Temescal gestured with his thumb. "Downstream—always!"

"Here is where the horses drank, señor," said Pepito, to whom food was food, water was water, and a straddle bug a straddle bug. The youth, however,

moved a few feet downstream, but not below Temescal.

Temescal's frown became an arch of perplexity. "I have a mozo!" he reflected, shaking his head. "Also a preference." And rising he walked round Pepito and drank above the hoofprints of the horses.

Refreshed by the cool water, enheartened by the frequently recurring evidence that Juan, Alejandro and La Luz had suffered no accident or delay in their pilgrimage—in the softer earth of the woodlands the tracks of the two horses and the burro were as printed words—Temescal and his mozo struck on down the winding descent, nor paused again until among the treeless foothills.

Below and beyond spread the fair green valley of Santa Rosalia. Directly in the pathway of the descending sun stood the town itself, a sharp-edged miniature of low-roofed adobes, a slender spire, the arched tops of street trees—suggesting in the aggregate the attempts of a child to build a house of blocks, leaving here and there a block for which there seemed to be no place in the structure.

To Pepito, accustomed to the rugged and untilled prospect of his native hills, the vista of fertile fields, orchards and garden plots was an enchantment: to Temescal, even more.

Up from the valley came the faint, melodious sound of a bell tolled slowly. Temescal's hand went up to the brim of a sombrero that was not there. *"Sacaton!"* he breathed, "but I still have my head."

Strange that, thenceforward, Temescal seemed depressed. His step was less brisk, his sprightliness had evaporated. His brow was heavy and his mouth stern. He walked as one on his way to perform an unpleasant duty, rather than to meet an inamorata. And naturally Temescal anticipated meeting La Luz within the next hour or so. He would find her, with her father and Juan, hospitably cared for by Captain José Hermanos, his officer and friend.

A not-unpleasant prospect—yet Temescal was depressed. Indigestion, fatigue, reaction from danger escaped, any of these might account for his depression. Or, like the war horse of the Bible, he may have scented battle from afar.

Still hopping in Temescal's shadow—a still-longer shadow in the setting sun—Pepito followed down the meandering foothill trail, turning occasionally to glance behind—guarding the great one's back. The hillside brush merged with the shadows of the brush itself. The afterglow of sunset faded into dusk. The trail, suddenly rounding a hill, was lost in the sand and rock of a deep barranca. From the nearer rocks, dimly discernible, rose each an elongated shadow. *"A ese!"* called a voice. The shadows closed in and swiftly disarmed Temescal and Pepito.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"YOU HAVE DUG A GRAVE."

AFORETIME and officially Temescal had visited Santa Rosalia to inspect the headquarters of the rurales operating in that district. Their captain, José Hermanos, was an efficient and trusted officer. Hence, when the rurales who had arrested Temescal escorted him to the office of their commander, Temescal was prepared to carry on the joke in case he was not immediately recognized, and finally, disclosing his identity, enjoy the captain's chagrin and surprise. Yet it was with chagrin and surprise that Temescal faced, not his old friend José Hermanos, but Captain Esteban Vaca, successor to Hermanos, and an officer of whom he knew nothing.

An unshaded lamp cast conflicting shadows of shoulders and sombreros on the whitewashed ceiling of the office as the rurales withdrew, leaving Temescal and Pepito virtually prisoners before the captain. Temescal would have at once declared himself, had he not noticed that the picture of the president—which had hung above the desk for years—was missing.

This he resented deeply, yet he said nothing. He decided to find out just what manner of man this new captain was, before informing him that his men had ar-

rested the captain-general of the rurales of Mexico. He realized that his presence in the environs of Santa Rosalia, armed, on foot, ragged, and accompanied by the equally ragged Pepito, called for a convincing explanation. It was evident that Captain Vaca did not recognize him.

Captain Vaca turned to Temescal, who gazed frowningly at the spot on the wall which should have been covered by the picture of the president. "My men looked for a captain and a company, not a ragged ladrone," declared the captain.

Unheeding, Temescal gazed at the wall above the captain's head. Vaca smiled. "In fact, if you were shaved you would look something like the late captain-general"—Temescal's frown tightened at the intimation that he was extinct—"who was executed at Cabazon by Colonel Sylvestre Sanchez. Perhaps you were aware of it? Colonel Sanchez was found buried under a rock in the cañon of Cabazon. It is said that Temescal the bandido had a hand in the business."

"He did," declared Temescal, endeavoring to discover what the other was getting at.

Captain Vaca laughed. "I thought you would know something about it. Who is this boy?"

"My mozo."

"Send him out. His ears are too long."

Temescal told Pepito to go. "Tell my family I will be with them soon," he said casually. And then to Vaca, "Let one of your men direct the boy."

"They are across the street, in the fonda," said Vaca, gesturing. Pepito did not want to leave the great one, but the great one had said go, so Pepito went.

"You know why Pancho sent you to me. You no longer have to act stupid. Where are your men and how soon can they join us?" Vaca spoke brusquely.

Realizing that he had been mistaken for The Thief of Cabazon, Temescal immediately accepted the mistake and played his part. "My men cross the Santa Rosalias—five hours away," he declared, affecting the sullen, abrupt manner of the spurious Temescal.

"How many?"

"Twenty."

"And horses?"

"Twenty—and eight pack mules."

"Good! But why did you not arrive with your family?"

"Did not my father-in-law explain?"

"The old one?" Vaca laughed. "His jaw moved like the jaw of a goat, yet he would say nothing, save that Temescal followed."

"Which was enough. I am here. I am also thirsty. Let us get through with this business."

"Your woman—but she slapped my face!" declared Vaca. "She is a wild cat."

"Si!" said Temescal indifferently. "Did not my lieutenant tell you that I was on my way with my men?"

"He with the wounded shoulder? He was too sick to talk."

"He must have been very sick. Let us get through with this business."

"Sit here," and Vaca indicated a chair near his desk. He gestured toward the spot where the president's picture had been. "I saw you looking for it. Evidently you know this room. Well, the old war dog of Oaxaca has lost his teeth. His big man, Don Ricardo Rayon, was executed at Cabazon, as you know. Naturally, he is no longer captain-general of rurales.

"From Cuidad Juarez comes word to make ready. Your old companion Doroteo has a grip on the peons of the north. Sonora waits only for the word. Chihuahua, Durango, Coahuila have had enough of the dictator. Only the rurales have remained loyal to him. That is why Captain Hermanos got it in the back. I had the pleasure of attending to that."

"A good job!" growled Temescal, who could have strangled Vaca then and there. José Hermanos had been almost as a brother to Temescal.

"Then you are with us?"

"Not so fast," said Temescal. "What do I get out of it? I furnish twenty fighting men, equipped and mounted. Thus far all I get is an arrest. Open the sack."

"If the Maderistas win, you get a com-

mission as captain in the regular army. Then are there not loot, women, aguardiente, ranchos and horses—and more peons willing to be shot that you may become a general?"

"Talk!" exclaimed Temescal. "I would see money."

"As for that, I would see your men."

"But you will. Even now they approach Santa Rosalia."

"With the rurales of Durango at their heels, no?"

Temescal snapped his fingers. "That for the rurales."

Vaca smiled at Temescal's vindictive gesture, at his unshaven face, distorted by a peculiar grimace, at his rags, at his clumsy shoes. "I have touched him in a tender spot," mused Vaca. He had.

"I would see my woman," declared Temescal, frowning at the wall.

"You will find your family at the fonda." Captain Vaca's white teeth showed beneath his heavy mustache.

Temescal swallowed hard. "I will eat."

"Who is this lieutenant of yours?" queried Vaca.

"A deserter from the army. He will do."

"He knows how to keep his mouth shut."

Temescal shrugged. Captain Esteban Vaca flattered himself that he had taken the measure of this peon outlaw, this notorious leader of bandidos, to the end of the tape. The Thief of Cabazon was obviously stupid, ignorant, greedy, and withal, forceful. He would be of use, because he was unscrupulous. In fact—Vaca rose, stretched, yawned. Taking up Temescal's rifle and belt and pistol he gave them to him. "A good gun," observed Vaca, as he glanced at the polished ivory handle of the pistol.

"Where is my woman?" grunted Temescal as he buckled on the belt.

"With the others, at the fonda, across the street."

"But who pays? I am a poor man," said Temescal.

"Quién sabe? The old man complained that they had no money—that they waited for you."

"Let them chew their tongues till I come," said Temescal. The Thief of Cabazon himself could not have expressed himself more naturally.

Vaca smiled at this little pleasantry. Still smiling he held out four golden hidalgos. "Among us is one—Manuel Mercado of Zacatecas, who served under Captain Hermanos, whom I removed. I kept the old man because he knows this district better than the rurales who came with me from the city of Mexico. But I have no further use for him. He asked me what I had done with the picture of the president. He is surly, and not difficult to quarrel with. It is said that you have a handy gun and a quick temper."

"Both, Señor Captain."

"Good! I will speak to him as we go out, so that you may make no mistake."

"You have dug a grave," declared Temescal, taking the four pieces of gold and biting each one before he thrust it into his pocket. He would not make a mistake as to the man.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"ONE FRIEND—THE NIGHT."

AS they came out into the dimly lighted and all-but-deserted street—Santa Rosalia seemed aware of some impending danger—Captain Vaca paused to speak to a short, wizened and singularly bright-eyed rural lounging beside the doorway. Temescal, directly behind the captain, yawned audibly, brushed his forehead with his knuckles, his thumb held toward the ground; a clumsy, bucolic gesture, quite in keeping with his appearance.

The old rural acknowledged Vaca's recognition with a gruff, "Si, Señor Captain." Yet his salute, as Vaca strode on, was for the ragged Temescal.

"A surly dog," said Vaca, as they crossed the street, "who will bite before he barks."

"I have marked him," declared Temescal. "Now I will see my woman."

"But first I would show you where

your men will camp," and Vaca indicated the plaza on their left. Though regretting the delay, Temescal was obliged to follow Vaca to the plaza, and manifest an interest—not altogether assumed—in the suggested rendezvous of the bandidos.

From the broad steps of the church of San Marcos, Temescal surveyed the deserted plaza—the shadowy pillars of the long, low portals, the darker oblongs of the closed doors, the occasional blank windows of unlighted shops, and the central and ancient fountain murmuring in the starlit dusk. Vaca cast a quick glance at Temescal's expressionless face, and smiled to himself contemptuously.

"Your men will camp here," said Vaca. "There is water. And there is convenient shelter for the horses." He waved his hand toward the darkened portals.

Temescal turned and gazed at the great archway of the church behind them. "And here is a good fort—if we need it, eh, Father Vaca?" And his laugh was like the rumble of distant cannon as he slapped Vaca familiarly upon the shoulder.

"I see you know your trade," said Vaca, shrugging the ache from his shoulder, for Temescal's stroke had been bearlike and heavy. "Then it is settled?"

"They will camp in the plaza—or in hell!" declared Temescal. The bear was awake at last.

"First, I will see my woman. Then I will eat. Then I will find excuse to quarrel with this Mercado." Temescal counted upon his fingers as he spoke.

"You will find me in my office," said Vaca, as they turned down the steps and walked toward the corner.

"Very soon you will hear from me." Temescal touched his chest. Vaca strode across the street.

For a few seconds Temescal paused, gazing up and down the sparsely lighted highway, as though looking for the inn which harbored his family. And in those few seconds he reviewed as many months. On a secret mission for the government, he had been absent from headquarters almost half the year. Meanwhile he had been in communication with his office, which was seemingly blind to conditions in the northern States of the republic, or had deliberately ignored them. He could not believe that any of his own officers were in league with the rebels, in spite of the significance of Vaca's appointment as chief of the Zacatecas district, and the murder of Captain José Hermanos.

"Yet," reflected Temescal, "I have neither dispatched nor received a report since I arrived at Cabazon. Much may have happened in the meantime. Has rumor spread a notice of my death, and has the president appointed my successor? I will get at the throat of this thing, and choke an answer from it!"

Thus far Temescal had managed to contain his rage at the treachery and treason which threatened his country. Not that he had been unaware of a whispering unrest throughout the northern States of Mexico. His months of personal investigation in the rural districts had recorded many sinister undercurrents of dissatisfaction among all classes; undercurrents not then deep nor seeming to converge toward any definite point. Yet now they were about to rise in a devastating torrent which would sweep the twin citadels of law and prosperity from the land.

As he turned and walked slowly toward the patch of light which marked the doorway of the distant inn, his anger cooled, crystallized, became a lump of ice, chilling his blood, contracting the arteries of his natural tolerance. Only one obstacle remained in the straight pathway of his swiftly perfected plan—the question of his official identity. Was he or was he not captain-general of rurales?

Nor did it strike him as a strange coincidence that Manuel Mercado should step from the doorway of the cantina adjacent to the inn and seemingly blunder abruptly into him. Nothing was impossible!

"I excuse myself, general," apologized Mercado.

Temescal seized Mercado's arm. "You recognize me? Good! You caught my signal? Vaca would have you shot. Here is the price of your death—four dirty little hidalgos. Take them. Ride

to Zacatecas. Inform Don Bernardo Venegas that rebellion is awake in the north. Then take the first train to the city of Mexico, and report to my office."

The old rural shook his head. "Too late, Don Ricardo." And further than the unofficial "Don Ricardo" Mercado need not have gone—yet Temescal experienced a certain bitter satisfaction in the gratuitous finality. "Salvador Ruiz is now captain-general of rurales. The Lion of Oaxaca has become toothless."

"So!" cried Temescal softly. "Then indeed the buzzards will gorge themselves. Go with God, my friend. I go alone."

"And these bandidos of Cabazon come," said Mercado. "I think it is that there will be a good fight, pretty soon."

"Fight! You mean chaos! The president is president—but my rurales were the law of Mexico!"

"Si, Don Ricardo. But you have a little piece of the law left, no?" Wizened old Mercado tapped his own chest. "Me, I think it is that I go with you. But first I will kill Vaca. You wait here a little while, no?"

"Are you married?" queried Temescal abruptly.

"Me? Four times. The last one——" Mercado brushed his sleeve as though he flicked off a pestiferous insect.

"Quite so. Do this. Leave Vaca to me. Get your horse and go round to the rear of the posada and wait."

The old rural saluted, and turning walked stiffly up the street.

Temescal, swinging into the general room of the posada, told the innkeeper's wife—who stared suspiciously at his rags, the handkerchief bound round his head, his fierce, unshaven face—to take him to his family. His manner was blunt, his voice lacked its usual courteous inflection. The innkeeper's wife lighted a candle and padding hastily down a dim, narrow corridor, indicated a door.

TEMESCAL knocked, declared himself, entered the suddenly hushed room like a burst of wind from the desert.

Alejandro, lying upon the narrow, rickety bed, raised on his elbow, opened his mouth to speak, but had no chance. Juan reached for his pistol on the window ledge. La Luz, having shrewdly recognized Temescal's voice in the corridor, was standing expectantly in the middle of the low-ceilinged room, her lips parted, her dark eyes eager bright, her brown hand clasped about the little silver crucifix at her throat.

"Mi corazon!" cried Temescal, dropping his carbine upon the bed and barking Alejandro's shins. In one gigantic stride, Temescal reached La Luz, swept her up into his arms, held her close for an instant, and then, taking her face between his hands, he kissed her upon the mouth.

"And now that that is understood," said Temescal, his tone matter-of-fact, incontrovertible, "we will proceed to business."

La Luz may have gasped in sudden wonder at Temescal's unexpected appearance, his all-embracing and soul-staggering impetuosity. If so, none but Temescal could have observed it. How she had hungered for his return, hungered desperately, silently, since Pepito—now staring blankly at the great one as though he had risen from the tomb—had rushed into the room to tell them that the great one stood disarmed before the chief of the rurales—a prisoner! Yet here he was, superlatively himself!

Old Alejandro most assuredly gasped—not so much because of Temescal's startling advent, as at his vigorous and obviously acceptable salutation of La Luz—to say nothing of his carelessness in disposing of the carbine. "Already he treats me like a father-in-law," reflected Alejandro, as he rubbed his shins thoughtfully.

Temescal seemed to have become taller of stature, broader of chest—and he was in no manner of speaking a small man. His suppressed ego filled the room with a disturbing pressure, like electricity imprisoned in the sultry calm of a hot summer day. The sinews of his sturdy arm showed through a rent in his sleeve. "Misfortune has hurled me among you again.

But I have landed on my feet. Have you had supper?"

"Si!" chorused his adopted family, glad to relieve their accumulating emotions in speech.

"Good! Señor Alejandro, my money belt, if you please."

"But has my man eaten?" queried La Luz, moving swiftly to Temescal and laying her hand solicitously upon his ragged sleeve.

"I have no appetite. I am full fed on treason, mi corazon. Forgive me. I am abrupt. But my time is in the hands of a thief."

"Treason!" Alejandro, sitting on the edge of the bed, ceased fumbling with the buckle of the money belt, and employed his hands in vigorous expostulation. "But no treachery was intended! Juan is guiltless! He did but suggest that if you were dead we would employ a new plan for our safety.

"This town of Santa Rosalia seems unfriendly. It scowls at us from empty portals and unopened doors. And your arrest distressed us, Don Ricardo. Here is the money—all of it. I have spent not one centavo."

Temescal caught up the belt, thrust it into his shirt. "Fetch me some water!" he commanded the staring Pepito. "Pronto! I have but a borrowed handful of time. Already the sand runs through my fingers."

Juan rose and buckled on his pistol. "What was wrong, señor? Did the rurales mistake you for the bandido Temescal?"

"None other. But if that were all! How is your shoulder?"

"Since La Luz washed and bandaged it anew I have less fever. It was the kick of the horse——"

"Quite so. But where is La Luz?"

"Gone to fetch your supper, señor."

"Then I shall have to eat it. You will find a friendly rural waiting at the rear door. Fetch him here."

Temescal turned to Alejandro, who was tenderly inspecting his damaged shins. "What grace of fortune kept you from giving my letter to Captain Vaca—that black assassin who did for my friend and loyal officer, Hermanos?"

"Your friend assassinated! But that explains much! When I inquired for your friend as we entered the town, one told me, whispering, that he had been removed from office; that Captain Esteban Vaca was now chief of rurales. Not knowing what kind of man this Vaca might be, and recalling our recent discussion in regard to political conditions, I destroyed the letter.

"Arrived at the posada, this Captain Vaca questioned us. Juan played the invalid, and I—I employed the misfortune of my deformity. Using the precedent of a jester's privilege, I wagged my chin, and showed the curious captain an open mouth and an empty mind. 'Temescal follows,' I told him, as if it were a monstrous jest, a cunning secret shared. He laughed, as fools will always laugh at fools. When he asked me if this Temescal was The Thief of Cabazon, por Dios, señor, but La Luz flew into a fury and boxed his ears!

"I saw my grave open at my feet; for had he lifted his hand to her I would have strangled him. Yet he smiled through the flame of his face, the while his eyes ravaged the bright color of her cheeks. 'I see you are his woman,' said this Vaca. And then I thought that La Luz would surely use her little knife. But, señor, she smiled, though her eyes for Vaca were hard and contemptuous. So he left us to ourselves."

"You did well. The saints inspired you."

"Even so, I am not entirely unfamiliar with the history of the Latin princes, Don Ricardo."

"You may have opportunity to continue the study of intrigue, if my plan runs true," declared Temescal. "Mexico is in revolt."

"Santa Maria! And the many guns at your command?"

"Serve under Ruiz. The Lion of Oaxaca has become toothless. Should he roar, it would be all the more evident."

"But what of you, Don Ricardo?"

"As you see me, derelict." Temescal paused, listening; he stepped to the door and opened it to Juan and the old rural.

"How goes it out there, Mercado?" he queried, gesturing in the direction of the plaza.

"The streets are empty. There is a breeze from the mountain. Santa Rosalia is too quiet."

"Even so, your hand from your gun, old warrior. A girl wears the high-heeled boots that you hear." As Pepito and La Luz entered, Temescal announced his guest and sweepingly introduced his family. Then he excused himself, washed hurriedly, readjusted the handkerchief about his head, and drew up to the chair on which La Luz had placed a platter of bread and cheese and a bottle of wine.

TEMESCAL'S supper was incidental—a grace note in the hurriedly executed theme established by the old rural Mercado, who wanted to know what was to be done about the anticipated arrival of the other Temescal and his bandidos.

"Can we make a regiment of these?" And Temescal indicated his family with an ironic nod.

"This one has seen service," declared the literal Mercado, his thumb toward Juan. "The muchacho might do to care for the horses. The girl will fight if she has to. But as for the old one—it would be well to leave him behind."

"Blunt—though sound enough. But five of us against the universe? The idea would be pitiful if the picture were not so ludicrous. Where may I find a refuge for Señor Alejandro and his daughter?"

"Not in Santa Rosalia, Don Ricardo. To-night the bandidos of Cabazon arrive. To-morrow, three companies of rebels from Durango will come. Doroteo recruited them. Vaca will command the new army. So it is told among us."

"Perhaps Vaca will. He has yet to meet The Thief of Cabazon and hatch more treason. I would break that egg on their heads. But of Señor Alejandro and his daughter—have you no friend you may trust?"

"None—unless the Padre Anselmo would care for them. He is a good man, but he isn't my friend. He is a priest. Padre Anselmo and his acolyte live in some hole back of the church like a couple of gophers. The rest of the long robes have skipped out. There is much loot in San Marcos."

"The church! And I was this minute thinking of the church," mused Temescal. Rising he brushed the crumbs from his shirt, emptied the bottle of wine and cleared his throat. "I will find this Padre Anselmo and talk with him. Meanwhile, you and my mozo will fetch four horses to the alley back of San Marcos. Hold them at the postern. The finding of the fourth horse is a difficulty which I leave to you. We shall need four horses."

"Horses!" groaned Alejandro. "These reprisals, these midnight rides! My bones ache. I am too old for such rough work. I despair that we shall ever——"

"Old! Despair!" Temescal shook his clenched hand toward the ceiling as though challenging the elements to launch a heavier calamity upon him. "Old?" he said softly, his hands gripping the front of his ragged shirt. "Despair?" He laughed bitterly. "I have lived to become the grandfather of all despair.

"Behold me, but yesterday Don Ricardo Rayon of Escobar, captain-general of the Rurales of Mexico: Law and defense of the law, adviser to the president, his public friend, his private counselor. And more" —Temescal bowed his head, gazed at the floor—"I was his companion. His shadow moved with mine. We were in tune. Together we saw the jest before the tale was half told. At cards, at chess, at wine, we were relentless antagonists. Neither would yield a finger other than to unquestionable defeat. Great was Porfirio, and I was his friend."

Old Mercado coughed, shuffled. Temescal glanced up, smiled. Affection and admiration for the loyal old rural lightened Temescal's somber eyes. "You recall me to my duty. Allow me but a word, that you may understand my position. I am dishonored, dead, forgotten. The wheel

turns. I have no office, no authority, no power. My estates will have been confiscated. Envy and treason have consumed my fortunes. I have not even the hope of a pordiosero, for I will not beg. Nor have I any hope to offer you. I am a roofless house, an unhinged door, an empty well. My shadow lines the bottom of the pit."

"Nay, but I think you are always Temescal," said La Luz.

"Name of a name!" cried Temescal. "I chose it in jest, yet for a purpose. Now it has chosen me." He flung out his arm as though tossing away an empty sack. "I am the jest! Henceforth I bear no name, save Temescal."

Though not unmoved by Temescal's misfortunes, old Mercado still kept one foot on the uneasy neck of chance. "Temescal is as good a name to fight under, as any. Have I your permission to fetch the horses, Don Ricardo?"

"Horses! Ai, fetch a thousand, and a thousand rurales and we'll play marbles with these Liberals."

"I think I can find four," declared Mercado. He saluted, and followed by Pepito left the room.

"Horses!" whispered Temescal. "The word commands me! We ride with the moon. *Sacaton!* But I am dizzy with memories. Señor Alejandro, gather what things you have—and you, La Luz. Juan, you are lucky—you have nothing. Meanwhile I will pay the good woman, who must be worrying about the money for our fare and lodging."

"We are as dust before his breath," murmured Alejandro as he rose stiffly. "And what may dust do when the wind harries it?"

Temescal had but stepped from the room to the dim corridor when La Luz was at his side. "You will fight the bandidos, Temescal?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"The horses, mi corazon. I still have one friend—the night."

"But what of me?" whispered La Luz.

"This—till the fight is ended, golden one!" Stooping, Temescal caught her yielding body in his arms. Her upturned face was as a golden flower in the dusk—her lips a flaming passion and a tender benediction.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE CHURCH OF SAN MARCOS.

PADRE ANSELMO and his acolyte, a young Indian from the suburbs of Morelia, alone remained to guard the treasures of San Marcos church. The good father had received a letter from the governor, advising him to close San Marcos and retire to some distant and inconspicuous village where he might rest and recover from the fatigue of his ardent labors among the flocks and herds—so the governor included both the sheep and the goats—of his community.

Padre Anselmo, a mildly stubborn, benign and, withal, shrewd spirit, read much between the lines, as had been intended. He observed the warning—in reality a friendly command—by sending all those who served with him, save his acolyte, to San Salvador, a monastic retreat in the Santa Rosalia hills. In acknowledging the governor's letter, Padre Anselmo stated that much to his regret he had closed the church. Yet it seems that Anselmo neglected, or possibly forgot to mention that he and his acolyte still remained in the town of Santa Rosalia, and in possession of the sacred keys, the chalices and vestments.

They lived, meanwhile, in the dark, narrow cloisters overlooking the stone-walled court at the rear of the church, their seclusion undisturbed and largely unsuspected. They ate little food—and that uncooked. Fruit and raw vegetables were healthful, and easily obtained. Water they had from the fountain in the court.

Serving their respective offices faithfully, they upheld the austere traditions of their calling and their house. They dwelt, as it were, in the spirit, yet were obliged to face an occasional fleshly actuality—the necessity for secretly procuring food with which to sustain their passive vigilance. It

was the acolyte's duty to observe this more or less worldly ritual.

Each night at nine o'clock this faithful servitor—a stupid mozo had one met him upon the street—stole out from the shadowy postern of San Marcos and venturing along remote byways, secured provisions from a devout mestizo living in the squalid Calle Aparfado. Returning to his refuge and his superior, the acolyte would receive a nod of approval, which meant more to the brown fanatic than all the legend gold of his Aztec sires.

On such an occasion—their larder empty—the youth had silently opened the postern door and had glided out, his sandals scarcely lisping on the cobbles of the alley, when he was seized from behind, and vigorously. An arm like the constricting folds of a python, bound his arms to his sides. This arm, which had seized and bound him, seemed to realize that while the acolyte served the church, provoked, he might serve heredity by resorting to a concealed knife.

"Do you serve Father Anselmo?" questioned a hot voice close to his ear.

"Give me breath!" gasped the acolyte.

Temescal's hug relaxed the least fraction. "I see you are a churchman. You have breath for three indeterminate words when a nod would suffice. Return then, to his eminence, and say to him that Señor Alejandro Contrario and his daughter, fleeing from danger, wait at the postern, petitioning sanctuary. Repeat me, word for word!"

Yet the stubborn acolyte, now aware of the figures of a man and a woman standing near, refused to obey, or speak at all.

"So!" said Temescal softly. "Then, if in your mistaken loyalty, you will not convey our petition to the good father, our unmistaken necessity will. March as straight to him as the devious channels of your mind permit. No tricks! Else my knee is in your back, and out goes your candle!"

Padre Anselmo's startled eyes absorbed the details of the strange group that stood uncovered in his stark and narrow cell. Having done with the details—rags, bandoliers, rough garments, profane weapons, and attitudes, the latter deferential in spite of the wild ensemble, the priest turned to his acolyte: "These asked for sanctuary?"

The acolyte bowed to his superior. "Yes, padre," he answered humbly.

"And you would have refused them?"

Temescal raised his hand. "We had no time for formal overtures, good father. The youth is blameless of this rude intrusion. We present no threat, but a petition. I speak for all. Yet, if it please you, I would talk with you alone."

"As you wish," said Anselmo, bowing. "We will retire to another room."

Father Anselmo showed Temescal to a distant, similar narrow cell, with its meager bed and low, wooden stool. Anselmo gestured toward the stool. "You are not accustomed to standing before priests or officers? Will you not be seated?"

Temescal bowed. "You have answered your own question. I await the privilege."

Father Anselmo sat upon the edge of the narrow cot. Temescal drew the stool close. "Here is the core of it. Treason has filled our land with marching men. Within an hour or so, twenty bandidos, summoned here by Captain Vaca of the rurales, will camp in the plaza. To-morrow three companies from Durango will arrive. Santa Rosalia will suffer.

"I ask sanctuary for the old man who is with me, and for his daughter. Upon a recent occasion they befriended me. They have committed no crime, nor have I. I shall leave money for their maintenance. But yesterday—you would have received me without question. To-day——"

"To-day I receive you as a known friend, my son. Your beard is a poor disguise, Don Ricardo."

"You knew the captain-general?"

"Knew him for a just man, as did all. Know him, at least, as one might know the president."

"You speak with Temescal—none other."

"A dangerous name, Don Ricardo; the antithesis of your former self and office. He of Cabazon——"

"Even now descends upon Santa Rosalia. Hence I am here, with my family. You say I am disguised. I was never more myself. As for these bandidos, they may not attempt to loot the church. But do not depend upon Captain Vaca to stay them. He would recruit these ladrones to his treasonable uses. He gathers an army. Yet the ladrones may take things into their own hands. I would warn you——"

"Already I have had warning. Hence I have closed the church. As for Captain Vaca, I think you do him an injustice. He has offered to protect this holy property. I have some evidence——"

"Your pardon, what is this evidence?"

Father Anselmo hesitated. Temescal did not press the question. Then, abruptly, "I would no longer intrude upon your authority. Yet I would arrange for the care of the old man and his daughter." And this Temescal contrived by leaving with Anselmo half his decreasing stock of gold, and a promise to secure their maintenance so long as they were obliged to dwell within the shelter of San Marcos.

Returning with Father Anselmo, Temescal introduced his family. The priest assigned to Alejandro and La Luz each a room and such meager conveniences as the place allowed. With the conclusion of the arrangement, Temescal signaled to Juan, intimating that they would observe their devotions before leaving the church.

While the acolyte again adventured to secure provisions, and Alejandro, desperately weary, slept, La Luz, alone in the close-walled darkness of her cell, suffered a loneliness and a dread of loneliness that drew her to the narrow window, where she stood gazing up at the dusky sky and the far and strangely unfamiliar stars. She did not reason that her father and herself were safe and that she should be content that this was so. She thought only of Temescal, of his once great name and of his misfortune and desperate plight. She grieved that she could do nothing to help or comfort him. Indeed, it would seem that he had no need of her. She knew that soon he would say farewell, and that he might never return.

"But he shall not go!" she said, and her mouth trembled. She listened eagerly for the sound of his step in the corridor.

Meanwhile Juan and Temescal explored the aisles and angles of the unlighted church, a sacred candle serving a profane utility. Satisfied with his inspection—ancient San Marcos was a veritable fortress—Temescal would have returned immediately to Father Anselmo and asked for the keys that he might admit Mercado and Pepito to the court, where they might hold the horses in readiness for an instant retreat, but he was delayed by a peculiar accident.

IN turning to retrace his steps he shouldered Juan, who in the dim light did not anticipate his sudden movement. Juan stepped back, tripped over a shrouded something behind him, and fell heavily. They had been inspecting the timbered doors of the portal. Temescal turned to discover Juan wrestling with what appeared to be a heap of white canvas.

"The font," said Temescal. "The good father has covered it."

"Has a font wheels?" queried Juan, rising. Temescal held the candle aloft. Seizing the edge of the canvas he pulled it toward him. The fluted cylinder of a machine gun gleamed dully in the flickering light.

"So!" said Temescal. "And that is why Vaca would have had my men camp in the plaza?"

A brief examination disclosed several thousand rounds of ammunition in cases from which the covers had been loosened, and replaced without the nails, evidently in anticipation of a possible and local emergency.

"This explains much," declared Temescal. "Thus Vaca has made San Marcos a blind, and Padre Anselmo his dupe. You will remain at your devotions while I return to Anselmo. If he was aware of this he was singularly reticent; if not aware, singularly blind. Guard the gun, meanwhile."

"You will defend the church if those of Cabazon should attempt to loot it?"

"Could we do less?" And Temescal turned abruptly, leaving Juan a somewhat disgruntled and nervous sentinel.

Crossing the chancel to reach the narrow stone stairway leading back to the cloister, Temescal paused, as a faint vibration, like the distant rumble of heavy wheels upon cobblestones, disturbed the hushed air of the church. "That would be the horses of The Thief," he murmured. Hastening up the stairway he came upon Padre Anselmo bearing an antique, iron candle lantern, and a ring of huge, tinkling keys.

"Your friend?" questioned the padre, noting Juan's absence.

"Remains at his devotions. May I serve you, father?"

"There is some one at the postern. I fear that my acolyte forgot to lock it."

"My fault," declared Temescal briskly. "Allow me to retrieve the oversight." And taking the good father's acquiescence for granted, Temescal grasped the ring of keys, and was gone before the gentle padre had quite realized it.

"That would be Mercado." Temescal paused within the shadow of the lower doorway as he beheld the dim blur of moving horses within the court. "He tried the door, and entered, when another would have knocked and asked for entrance. Assuredly he is one of mine."

Following down the stairway came the curious lantern of Father Anselmo, its soft rays flickering slowly forward as though to determine the meaning of trampling hoofs within the court. Bearing swiftly toward the postern, Temescal passed Mercado with a whispered word, locked the door, and turned to face Anselmo's inquisitive lantern.

"You look for an honest man?" said Temescal. "You find him here; Manuel Mercado, whom, no doubt you thought you knew."

"The rural? Yes. But why here, with this other, and these horses?"

"Does sanctuary discriminate, Father Anselmo? Even the horses may have souls—quién sabe? I have known men less noble."

"You evade my question, Don Ricardo." The padre's tone was sharp.

"I evade nothing, your eminence."

"Plain Anselmo, if you please."

"Plain Temescal would also please me more."

"Then Señor Temescal," Padre Anselmo's thin, dark face was stern, "lacking authority of your former office, I warn you to commit no aggression, contrive no reprisal or attack beneath this sacred roof. Defend San Marcos, you may."

"This sacred roof, Anselmo?" And Temescal gestured broadly toward the stars. "Are not your towers aggressive toward the sky? But should we dissect a futile subtlety, when the bandidos of Cabazon are encamped before your doors?"

"It is so!" declared Mercado. "Shall I tie this one and put him on the shelf until we have made the fight, Temescal?"

"Tie me!"

"Not so, Friend Anselmo. Mercado is a plain fighting man. The church has employed many such. The wheel turns. Are the horses ready, Mercado?"

"A morral for each, with two feeds of grain."

"Good! It will be south, across the open land. Carbines, Mercado?"

"One extra, for the soldado, and an extra hundred rounds."

Temescal turned to Padre Anselmo. "We are prepared to leave you, but not undefended, Anselmo. The hour of our departure is not set, but it is assured. I will join Juan in his prolonged devotions. You, Mercado——"

"I think it is that I shall go outside a while. I have a little message for Captain Vaca. I will give it to him—then I will come back."

"Quite so. Pepito, stay here and look after the horses."

Unlocking the postern to let Mercado out, Temescal told him in three startling words of the machine gun, closed the door and again locked it. From in front of San Marcos came a murmuring of voices, the shuffling of many feet. A faint glow spread about the plaza, hovering above the camp fire of the bandidos.

"Forgive me if I have distressed you," Temescal took Father Anselmo's arm. "I am outworn with the weight of a thousand calamities. For you I have only respect and admiration. I have trusted you with those dearest to me. Will you not rest, and leave me to guard the doors?"

"I would view the plaza from the north tower," said Anselmo.

"I will accompany you," declared Temescal.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THE SHOEMAKER" SPEAKS.

PEERING through a slot in the ancient, massive wall of the north tower of the church, Father Anselmo contemplated the rude activities in the plaza below. Near the fountain burned a huge fire which flung a sinister red flare across the battered sombreros, the dark faces and the glittering bandoliers of the bandidos. But recently arrived, they adapted themselves handily to their new environment, watering their horses at the fountain, kindling a smaller fire for cooking, and individually preparing to camp for the night.

The glow of the central fire hung like a blood-red mist above the plaza. Beyond loomed the black, serrated bulk of the Santa Rosalia hills, against a velvet curtain jeweled with stars.

"By whose authority?" murmured Temescal, gazing over Anselmo's shoulder.

The broad, solid figure of The Thief of Cabazon was not apparent among the outlaws. Though not aware that Captain Vaca already had sent a rural to meet them in friendly parley, Temescal surmised that something of the kind had occurred. He wondered how this other Temescal would explain himself.

"They seem quite at home," observed Temescal. "Witness, Anselmo, they do not keep close to their horses, but have tied them to the posts of the portal. They have built a fire—and a smaller fire for the cooking. Their bold insouciance is more of an insult to Santa Rosalia than an attack. My neck bristles. I sweat cold."

"True, Vaca does not dispute their possession of the town," said the priest.

"And thus he guards your church."

Anselmo shook his head. Then instantly, "There is Captain Vaca!" As he spoke, six mounted rurales rode into the plaza and halted near the fountain.

"And yonder comes The Thief of Cabazon," whispered Temescal, as the broad and solid figure of the outlaw chief appeared on the farther side of the plaza. The bandit captain, astride his horse, was accompanied by his lieutenant, also mounted.

Recognizing—as he thought—the bandido Temescal, Captain Vaca rode forward to welcome him formally. The bandidos had become suddenly silent, each caught in the attitude of his immediate occupation. About to make a speech of welcome which would include the information that his was the ultimate authority, although they served The Thief of Cabazon, Vaca raised his hand.

A shot, like the crack of a whip, snapped the tense silence. Vaca flung up his arms —dropped forward on the neck of his horse.

"That would be Manuel Mercado," murmured Temescal.

The alert rurales, enraged by the killing of their captain, spurred straight for the group about the bandit leader, firing as they charged. The surprised bandidos scattered right and left, then, as the rurales swept on across the plaza, each outlaw turned and emptied rifle or six-shooter at the speeding horsemen. The sheer volume of rifle and pistol fire literally blew the six rurales from their saddles—annihilated them.

Father Anselmo, in the window of the tower, thrust out his hands in futile expostulation. Suddenly he realized that Temescal was not beside him. Even as he turned in surprise, Anselmo heard the tower door close softly, heard the key click in the lock. He rushed to the door, called Temescal's name, swept back to the window, clenched his hands and stared down upon the tumult and the horror.

Wrought into frenzy by the unprovoked assault of the rurales, by the sight of men down and dying, by the screaming of

wounded horses, and the ever-present fear of treachery, the bandidos massed round the fountain. "We have been betrayed!" they cried. "Santa Rosalia shall pay."

"Loot!" shrilled a nasal voice, and "The church! Kill the pigs!"

Temescal, behind the huge portals of San Marcos, peered through the keyhole, then straightening up, thrust the key into the lock. "Ready?" he asked Juan.

"Si! But first I will blow out the candle."

The heavy door swung slowly open. Black against the plaza fire loomed a tumultuous mass. Temescal stepped round to the breech of the weapon and depressed the muzzle. He grasped the crank. "Welcome!" he shouted as the massed bandidos swayed forward. And straightway Temescal put "The Shoemaker" to work.

The imprisoned air of the church entrance shook with the roaring stutter of the machine gun. The dark bulk of the approaching bandidos wavered, disintegrated, disappeared as though swallowed by the sea. Remained the flotsam—an arm thrust up against the red glare of the fire; a figure on its knees, bowing toward the church as though performing some ghastly ritual; a shape that writhed in horrible contortions; a hand feebly clawing at emptiness.

Above, in the dark room of the tower, Padre Anselmo knelt, his head bowed, his frail hands clutching the coarse fold of the cassock beneath his throat. Stunned by the sudden horror of the midnight carnage, his numb lips refused to even shape the words of a prayer. Yet his spirit, burning up through the shell of his body, ascended to the Omnipotence he served, in an anguished petition of mercy for the writhing wounded, the souls of those already sped, and for the soul of him who had wantonly killed Captain Esteban Vaca.

Limned on the naked walls, Anselmo beheld, as in a vision, a sequence of reprisals, outrages unspeakable, starvation, disease, and all the untold misery of war and wanton devastation. Against the sanguinary screen appeared a rough-hewn cross, upon it a somber vulture, gorged, motionless; a phantasy of rifles borne by mere boys; of dead, bestial faces, swarms of myriad flies; of homes abandoned, fields desolate with weeds, herds scattered and destroyed, industries idle, and the Holy Church ravished of treasure. The pity and the shame of it!

Yet had the devout Anselmo been capable of reasoning in that moment he would have realized that the murderer of Vaca was but the blind tool of the very Omnipotence he implored. The chancel is ever narrower than the body of the church, the vestry narrower still.

Temescal, treading upon empty cartridges, closed the ponderous portal of San Marcos and locked it. He rubbed the acrid smoke from his eyes.

Back through the dark nave he found his way, walking unsteadily. Juan followed, chewing the knuckle of his forefinger and staring into the darkness. Through the chancel, the vestry and out into the court he followed Temescal, who walked as one in his sleep. Unlocking the postern, Temescal admitted Mercado, yet had no word for him.

"The fountain bleeds," said Mercado. Temescal nodded and passed on up to the cloister.

Old Alejandro, a blanket about his misshapen shoulders, sat huddled on his bed, aware of desperate happenings, unseen, scarcely echoed in his cell. Temescal thrust out his hand. "Farewell," he said, yet he gazed at the floor.

"The battle? The bandidos?" exclaimed Alejandro, and found no answer.

Nor did La Luz, who ran to Temescal, caressed his sleeve, implored his eyes with eyes expectant, questioning. "Is my man wounded?" she asked, suddenly alarmed.

"Aye, deep!" And Temescal turned away.

The next few minutes found him in the north room of the tower, silent before Anselmo's scourging voice. Of what was spoken, no man has record save the priest and Temescal. Yet it is known that Temescal came from the naked room, his dark face flushed, his hands clenched, his eyes glowing dully, his attitude that of one who finds restraint a heavy task.

Meanwhile La Luz had descended to the court and talked with the rural, Mercado. Juan, seeing, bit his lip, frowned, fingered the buckle on his belt. Presently Mercado laughed. "It shall be as Captain Temescal commands." Then to Juan, "Tell Don Ricardo I will return very soon."

"If you have a message, here is his mozo," said Juan, gesturing toward Pepito, who held the horses.

Mercado turned sharply, his elbow up, his hand hollowed above the butt of his pistol. "*You* will tell him."

And Juan decided that he would.

It seemed most natural to Alejandro that La Luz should seek his sympathy.

"Has Temescal departed?" queried Alejandro.

"Not yet, my father."

"A strange man, and, I think, a little mad."

La Luz gazed at her father with unreadable eyes.

"You should be in your room. It is late," said Alejandro.

"Good night, my father. I go where I belong."

DOWN in the court, Pepito and Juan led the horses through the postern and held them in the alley, awaiting Temescal. As they waited, one came running toward them. Pistol at hip, Juan would have halted him, but recognized Mercado's voice, then Mercado himself bearing a bundle in his arms. "Temescal waits for me?" he asked as he saw the horses.

"We wait for him," grunted Juan.

Mercado slipped past, pattered across the court and ascending the stairway to the cloister thrust the bundle into the outstretched hands of La Luz. "Hasten!" he whispered. "I will make excuse to wait for you, when the others have gone. But hasten!"

Swiftly La Luz braided her heavy hair, whipped the little knife from her garter, and holding the braid close, sawed it off. For a second or so she gazed at the glossy braid, then tossed it on the cot. She blew out the candle, undressed and donned the shirt, chacquetilla and breeches which Mercado had stripped from a dead rural. With much difficulty she pulled on Temescal's boots because the legs of the buckskin breeches were so snug.

Hastening down to the court she found it empty. She called Mercado's name, pattered over to the postern, gazed up and down the empty alley. "But no!" she whispered, "Mercado is an honest man. He would not deceive me. An he did, I will tell Temescal to kill him!"

She waited, holding her breath, listening. Presently she heard the clap and clatter of shod hoofs in echoes tossed back and forth between the walls of the street. A rider, with a led horse, swept round the corner and up to the postern. Mercado tossed to her the reins of a big, restive horse. "A present from Captain Vaca," said Mercado. "This was to have been his war horse. But Vaca does not ride."

Lithely La Luz swung up into the saddle, checked the impatience of the hot-blooded animal. "But Captain Vaca would make me no present. I slapped his face to-day."

"A present from Vaca," reiterated the old rural. "But I give him to you."

"There was a fight? I heard the shooting," declared La Luz, as they moved briskly down a remote and silent street.

"A good fight, señorita. Six rurales down, and if there are any bandidos left to groan, I did not hear them when I stripped this one," and Mercado gestured toward the clothing La Luz wore.

"Yes. There is a hole through the chacquetilla and the shirt. I will have to wash them and mend them," said La Luz.

"Yes. But the best I could find. And Vaca will not need them."

"They were his?"

Mercado did not answer.

"Where does Temescal ride?" La Luz queried, presently.

"Across the faces of the dead, until he is killed. Have you the heart to follow him, señorita?"

To be continued in the next issue, out February 20th.

Mail for Roaring River

By Calvin Johnston

Author of "The Pay-day Game," "The Stocking of Snow," Etc.

Circumstance, which betrays the railway mail clerk, relents and makes amends.

THE old crossing flagman stood at his shanty window muttering and wagging his chin whisker with an air of cynicism. Though there had been a full two minutes of loud talk between the two men down the track, it had wound up only in a tame scuffle and more threats as they parted.

His day-before-pay-day acquaintance, the boomer brakeman, however, had made the loudest threat, and now shuffled toward the shanty with an air of victory. Putting his moonface against the windowpane and meeting the hard eye of the flagman, he shouted: "Did you see it?" And brandished a hamlike fist in illustration of the blows he had struck.

The watchman did not answer by word or nod and would doubtless have locked his visitor out in the winter cold, but for a sudden desire to express his disappointment at the entertainment.

Gradually the boomer edged through the door, his huge bulk filling half the shanty, and general aspect of bearlike health belying a husky, pleading cough.

"As you can see, I am out of condition," he broke the silence, "and the cold making me shiver—yet I put over the haymaker on the big stiff——"

"Have done," commanded his host angrily. "Always before pay day you are scheduled to stop here without flagging, and take up my time and borry tobacco and a dime. And the first chance you have to repay me with a bit of a shindig, you lay down. Yes, I saw it, and you did not fight enough to keep warm, but must hurry to a stove——

"Arrah," wheedled the boomer as indignation choked off his host, "but did you hear what I said to him? Anybody can strike a blow, but 'tis the masters of prize fighting who put over the haymaker with a word!"

The flagman continuing to regard him contemptuously, was nevertheless mastered by curiosity, and muttered into his whisker.

"The word I handed him?" repeated the boomer, and ground his teeth. "But no matter; 'tis why I handed it that inter-

ests you personally. A goat, he called you; an ould rag-flopping ram, and him almost a stranger to you. It was too much to call even yourself. Of course if he had been content to call you——"

"Baa," interrupted his host in a rage at the stranger. "Why go into what he might have said?" Still he could not help feeling more kindly toward the boomer who had defended his good name, and determined to learn before they parted the epithet which the latter had used as a hay-maker. He even offered the tobacco to fill the boomer's cavernous pipe, and after reflection took the tone of a host to his guest.

"It is not for nothing that I have accumulated experience," he observed finally through the smoke, "and I am well informed on the damage a word can do. 'Twas one applied to Tim Flanders, mail and baggage clerk on the old P. D., which came near ruining himself and Superintendent Rivets, and costing the company a contract."

It was only required that the boomer flag for No. 36 approaching down the yard, and stoke the heater, to hear the old flagman's story.

'TWAS fifty years agone that old man Flanders arrived in an ox-wagon train on the bank of Roaring Fork River with the intention of crossing over and settling in one of the valleys. But the river was deep and two robbers who had set up a log ferry on the immigrant trail charged fifteen dollars to float each wagon across.

The other immigrants in the train managed to raise the price or collateral and went on; but Flanders, having the power to reason that the ferry would pay better than a farm, drove the other robbers off and took over the ferry himself. Later he built a store and, until the railroad came, had a good thing in the immigrants.

There Tim, the only child, grew up, being schooled by his mother, who had the education, but when the P. D. poked the first rails of the Foothills Division up to the river, she had long passed away. And old Flanders himself pined when the peace of the wilderness was broken by the whistle, as though feeling that the locomotive was running him down in his last refuge. And soon only Tim, tall, rawboned and strong, was left of the pioneer Flanders.

The P. D. came up to the river by a gorge about a mile below the old ferry and trail, which was now a road between the ranges and scattered farms; from this gorge the rails lay downstream along the valley to the bridge five miles farther on. But when the trains passed in and out of the gorge, their whistles could be plainly heard by old Flanders in his last days, like the trumps of judgment.

But to young Tim, born of the forest, they sounded a different strain; the old one would bow his head, the young one raise it. Only on his dying day did old Flanders pay the whistles no attention, having fixed all his mind on completing the education of Tim, which all his life before had been left to his mother.

On that spring afternoon, "Pioneer" Flanders, wrapped in bearskins and braced up in a big chair, sat in the store, looking out on the river. Pondering this last instruction to Tim, he could see the ferry-boat, successor of the one from which he had driven the robbers twenty years before, and the grim face of him wrinkled with its farewell smile and his eyes beckoned.

" 'Tis time," he whispered to Tim, leaning close, "that I gave you my lesson in education. Niver"—his voice rose clearly to its old command—"niver, though you die for it, let a robber—get—away with the goods. Now, Timmy—carry me out—and lay me on the ground—in the sunlight."

And the earth of the clearing was the dying bed, and the sun the candle, and the great pines the confessor of Pioneer Flanders.

But the blood still crept in the hand which Tim held, kneeling by, until faint above the ripple of waters and intoning of forest rose a silver chanting—and the old head dropped back and the young head flung up to the far whistle of the train.

Now the burial was over and the few

far-scattered neighbors who had attended gone home again, and Tim would stand in the clearing listening to a call which nobody else could hear. And presently he was down near the mouth of the gorge watching the trains go by. He made the acquaintance of the operator at the office there, and told him: "I like the passenger trains the best. And if I rode on one I would want to be on the front car next the engine."

"That is the mail car," said the operator, and Tim, who had seen only a few letters in his life, was astonished to learn that people wrote them by the carload. When the train mail service was explained the lad of the wilderness pictured in his mind the postal clerks among their pouches and pigeonholes on the swaying trains, with the messages of all the world streaming through their hands. " 'Twould be almost the same as getting them yourself," he said.

One day he walked for hours by the graves in the edge of the clearing, as though the old wilderness had stationed him there in a sentry beat. It seemed a dread thing to leave them there unguarded; but they had no message for him, neither did the woods. And at last, listening to the whistle, he turned away, and, saddling his horse, rode to the nearest neighbor, who had a poor farm and a big family across the ridge.

"You will take over the store and the ferry," Tim told him, "while I am gone. And take the profits. The family can get in the crop."

"And how long will you be gone?" asked the farmer.

"The operator at the gorge says I can get a job on the railroad. I may never come back," answered Tim. And with no more settling of his affairs than this he took his first train ride next day with a few keepsakes in a box and the four hundred dollars of the Flanders fortune in his pocket.

Now, Superintendent Rivets of the Foothills Division sat in his office at Barlow next morning, with his desk full of grief and his soul full of bitterness at his employees. He was a small wiry man with a hawk face and an eye of bright, new steel.

"Day by day," he said aloud to himself, for he had driven all other listeners away, "day by day, it is proven to me that the longer a railroad employs a man, the dumber he gets. I would favor the policy," he said, glaring with disgust at the messages and reports on his desk, "the policy of retiring every employee to an insane asylum at the end of the first year, with a pension. There they would feel at home and not try to escape and work for a railroad again——"

He stopped to look at a young man who walked in on him and asked for a job without ceremony.

Rivets, who was short of men, asked, in bad humor: "What department? What road fired you last? What do you know about railroading, anyway?"

"Nothing at all," replied Tim. " 'Twill be my first job."

"Nothing," almost whispered Rivets. "He has not worked on a railroad and knows nothing! Glory be, here is a man who can be trusted on my division." He called through a window to a man on the platform: "Send in the yardmaster."

In a minute the yardmaster came uneasily, for he had been on the carpet only an hour before for scrambling a carload of eggs against a bumping post.

"You have been in the service ten years," Rivets said to him, "and know all about railroading. Here is a young man who knows nothing about it. Now you, Flanders, if you were handling a car of eggs with a yard engine, would you scramble them up before serving to the consignee?"

"No, sir," answered Tim.

"You see, yardmaster," said Rivets, "he would not know how to go about causing the damage you fellows do, not having the experience. Now, take him out and teach him the signals. That is enough for him to know.

"Flanders, I forbid you to learn anything else. If I catch you at it, you're fired. Report back when you learn the

signals. And if you have any friends who know even less than you do, send them in. The Foothills Division needs them."

Rivets rubbed his hands as they went out. "'Tis a rebuke that will go all down the line," he grinned. So it did, and because Tim Flanders was the means of his bitter joke on the old employees, Rivets was in good humor with him thereafter and never saw him without scowling and asking: "Have you learned railroading yet?"

"No, sir," Tim would reply, grinning, and the superintendent would warn him against it so that all might hear.

Of course, during the year he worked in the Barlow yard, Tim did learn railroading, but the big interest of him was always in what went on in the varnished car with the boiler-plated ends which set next the engines in the through passengers. Never a chance he missed to pull himself into the door of the mail car and chat with the clerks; they told him how to get a job in the service and 'twas a famous day when he received from the postal department the forms covering the examination he would have to pass.

"All that is necessary for me to learn," he said, "is every town and route and connection in the United States. But when it is learned and I have a job the old folks will be proud to look down and see me sorting so many letters, who never in all their lives had a dozen between them."

He hung maps on the walls of his rooms and read the railroad guide at night, as famous scholars would read the dictionary. But often he would trace the line of the P. D. with a feeling of sorrow and indignation.

"To think that at this moment No. 6 is flying along past this station, and No. 7 past this one," he would say, "with the mail car half empty because the P. D. has no contract for the through mails to the coast. 'Tis a prejudice the post-office department has against us who have a line straight as a ruler half across the West."

And so the P. D. appeared on the map, y'understand, that being the business of railroad map makers to draw a trunk line which was surveyed like a streak of chain lightning, as straight as the crow flies. When Tim mentioned his grief to the mail clerks, they also mentioned the thousand S and hairpin curves of the P. D. with as many curses, and laughed at his notion of a flying train scheduled at thirty miles an hour. "The P. D. will never contract for the through mails," they said.

And yet before that year was ended a new management was cutting grades and changing curves to tangent for the swifter movement of traffic—and the rumor sped that the P. D. was going in for the contract for the through mails.

Sure, Tim crowed over the postal clerks, who turned pale at the thought of increasing speed on the Foothills Division, and practiced leaping and holding on to the cross bars of their cars, which is their chance of safety when a train jumps the rails.

'Twas when this rumor was current that Tim went to Rivets and told of his ambition. "I am not ready to take my examination yet," he said, "but 'twill break me in if you give me the run on the Sundown Branch in place of Casey, who is transferring."

On that branch, d'ye mind, the baggageman also handled the mail, and though sworn in regularly his appointment was left to the superintendent.

"You can have it," said Rivets, carrying out the old joke, "because having now learned enough about yard work to damage a lot of property, you have consideration enough for the company to quit the job."

A PROUD day it was for the rawboned boy when he hung out the car door, leaving Barlow with the cap on his head and a pouch of mail in his hand. He gripped it with a thrill of pride and a solemn remembrance of the tradition of the service which had been drilled into him by the old mail clerks. A soldier may forget his cause, or friend desert friend, but through fire and flood and wreck a clerk must stand by his pouches. And in one case he must fight for them.

"If I am ever held up——" said Tim with a deadly grin, and repeated the last lesson of education which old Flanders had given him—"Never let a robber get away with the goods."

He often thought to himself with wonder: "The United States trusts me; and yet once I was only a poor boy running a ferryboat and had no standing with the government whatever." He distributed his letters as if each one was a special charge from the president, and, on occasion when there was a registered sack from the mine at Sundown, kept his hand on his revolver.

'Twas on the return run of a winter evening, when he had one of these registered sacks aboard, that the train stopped suddenly about ten miles from Barlow. "'Twas the emergency brakes," thought Tim, picking himself up from a corner, and with the fear for his mail flashing into mind, came a hail outside and a heavy blow on the door. Ahead he heard shooting, and blew out his lamps.

"Robbers!" he said.

And, at the second hail: "Open up, you mail clerk, or get killed," sent a shot through the door.

For a few moments there was silence, then a roar and shock that sent Tim down again. But the stick of dynamite thrown at the door had struck the jamb without blowing a way inside.

"They will pot me next time," thought the mail clerk. Filled with indignation of robbers, he slid back the door on the far side from them and dropped out—and on to a guard stationed there. Both of them rolled yelling and shooting down the embankment. At the foot the guard ran, and Tim, starting up the embankment, shot at a shadow and heard a bullet whiz by; at the moment he realized the train was moving and rushed, grabbed, was thrown.

Then he was standing in the dark, listening to the roll of the train from one direction and clatter of hoofs from another.

'Twas two hours later when he arrived in Barlow, and the first man he met at the station was Rivets, pacing the platform. The superintendent stopped, his hard eyes raking the other, but all he said was: "You will draw your discharge check at the office."

"I jumped out——" began Tim, but Rivets, knowing the squawk the postal authorities would put up, refused to listen.

"You abandoned your mail," he said. "Your duty was to stand by; if the fireman had not slugged the guard in the cab and started the train, you would have let the robbers get away with the goods." And this terrible accusing of him in the very words of his father, d'ye mind, struck Tim Flanders dumb.

"'Twas poltroonery," said Rivets, and walked away.

Tim found himself then, and afterward, repeating the word laid on him like a curse. "Poltroonery," he would repeat, and shudder to think what it might mean. But he was afraid and ashamed to ask, and at last was glad that his lessons in education had stopped where they had. To have Rivets accuse him in the words his dying father had used was sad enough, and two days later he had returned to the ferry, a shattered young man, if you know what I mean.

The store was empty, the big boat frozen in at the bank. In winter it was not needed, for the ice held up the trail.

Again Tim took up his life in the three-room log home of his childhood; where the father had driven off the robbers and held his own on the storming borderland, the son found only a burrow where he could hide after the outside world had driven him back. The forest had no message for him and the echo of the whistle had become only a taunt of defeat. Once the President of the United States had trusted him with the letters; now he was ashamed to hold up his head in the presence of the graves at the edge of the clearing, and avoided them.

The people of the back country who came by took it as a matter of course that he would return after seeing the outside world, and hoped he would restock the store. But he put them off and arranged with a freighter to bring him only supplies

for himself. They were used to working the ferry themselves, but as spring came on the river rose and sometimes he would help them. There would be a flood, they prophesied, that year because of the big snowfall in the back ranges. It was all the same to Tim Flanders if the river washed him away to the sea.

Strangely enough, in spite of the taunt it flung, Tim would listen for the whistle; and never he failed to picture the mail clerk with his cap tilted, shooting the letters in the rocking car. "They will be putting on the flyer," he thought, "to carry the through pouches under the new contract," for never did he have a doubt that the old P. D. would get it. Sometimes he would start down to the gorge to ask the operator about it, and watch the trains, but never went all the way, for misgivings arose to stay him.

One day he noticed the flood had come and covered even the landing. "Sure, the old boat is tugging to break away and get outside," he said, and would have let it go but for the queer sympathy he had for it. "You would only smash into wreck like I did," he told it, and, working it some distance down to a high bank, tied it up to a tree.

THAT afternoon he wandered to the spot where he always halted, within two hundred yards of the gorge, and stood smoking his pipe. At the scream of a whistle he answered with anger: "Blow—but you will never tempt me outside again, you traitor!"

But blow it did, never ceasing, never falling, minute after minute, and a stir was felt in the blood of Tim Flanders, his head flung back as of old, and he answered.

Y'will remember that where the P. D. came out of the gorge it curved and followed the bank five miles down to Bridgetown station and the bridge across Roaring River. Well, in the mouth of the gorge the big water was lapping the curve, and the softened track had slid outwardly under the thrust of No. 7's locomotive, and neatly laid the locomotive and first two cars on their sides, after breaking them from the rest of the train.

There they lay in the mud inside the curve, the cracked whistle screeching and the river sending its first waves through the breach in the low embankment between the derailed and standing sections of the train.

They had hauled a senseless mail clerk out of one car and a battered baggageman from the other, when Tim Flanders came clambering on the wreck. The two engine men floundered to the rear through the mud, limping and cursing the new schedule. "It is strung up too tight, superintendent," the engineer called. "We have not a track that will stand it."

Tim, gazing down into the confusion of pouches and parcels, looked up to meet the eye of Rivets across the open door of the mail car. And 'twas not the steely eye of the division tyrant, but that of a defeated, battered man.

"Why was the time of No. 7 strung up?" said Tim, aghast at the thought. "Is it north-coast mail?"

His sharp tones become dull and heavy, Rivets answered as if talking to himself: "It is the lot they let us handle to see if we could make the time. On that depended the contract. This kills the chance."

All at once he stiffened, the blood rushing into his face; blood seemed choking him as he shook his fists and cursed the river. And the river roared back at him, taunting him as the whistle taunted Tim Flanders.

"Between us and the rest of the train the water is coming through the break in the track," said Tim, "and will be flooding the mail." And as Rivets looked at him with blank bloodshot eyes: "Sure, the President of the United States trusts you," said Tim.

The superintendent gathered his wits and studied the condition a moment. The baggage car lay higher and drier. "The ditch is filling below us," he said. "We will get out the mail and stack it up here ready for transfer when the relief train ordered from Bridgetown arrives."

"Then you may still make the connection?"

"I can try for it," answered Rivets, with a bitter smile.

"Where is the mail clerk?" asked Tim.

"Knocked out. What is that—look—look——"

Beyant them, a hundred yards toward Bridgetown, the track moved like a snake waking up in the slime, one long, slow wriggle it gave, then, far as the eye could reach, slid quietly into the lapping river.

"Get it out; get it out! We'll have to transfer it back and wade the stream which is coming through the break," Rivets told his men. Though they had run onto the curve slowly and the rest of the train had by a miracle stayed on the shifted track, it was plainly leaning and getting ready to turn over.

"If those coaches ditch, we'll have the whole river in on us," said Rivets. The crew already were throwing out the pouches and he was dragging them along the side of the overturned car to the end.

"Whist!" said Tim, seizing him. "'Twill be a slow job, this long transfer through the water and through the train. I have a ferryboat which can carry a team and loaded wagon a few hundred yards upstream. 'Twill help——" And he was gone, plowing through water and mud, and disappearing in the train.

Rivets forgot him in the work of getting out the contents of the car till at last it was done and the job of transfer to begin.

"We have this much luck, at least," he said, "that the rear part of the train has weighted and held down the track for us against the river. Now one of you carry to the coaches and the other two carry on through the coaches to dry land." But even as he looked the coaches quietly rolled over into the river and the track followed with a wriggle of joy. A cascade of mud and water a hundred yards wide and deepening every instant was pouring over the roadbed between them and Gorge Station.

"Good-by mail," said the brakeman. "We will have to swim for it ourselves."

A moment the superintendent listened to the splashing around the car, his hand on the pouches. Never before had he been driven from duty by threat of disaster, but it seemed that the very Foothills Division, with its sliding tracks and overturning, vanishing trains was going to pieces around him. The three members of the crew dropped off, the shadowed river bellowed as it closed around him, and Rivets, stubborn as he was, followed the retreat and floundered his way to dry land. But this abandoning of the mail was the heaviest grief which had ever befallen the veteran official, and when half an hour later he came up to the platform at Gorge, he stood apart, like one stricken, from a group of passengers and the crew.

Sunset had failed and dusk was creeping over the valley. The operator walked up to him. "The ferryboat upstream must have broken loose; not thirty minutes ago I saw it—and I believe a man was aboard. Then I had to answer a call from Barlow, who said the wrecker is on the way——"

"A boat?" repeated Rivets, and for the first time remembering Tim Flanders, peered toward the river, though the lower end of the curve where the train had jumped was hidden by the point of the gorge wall. "Well, he was too late. Just as the relief from Bridgetown was too late, and we were too late starting the transfer of the mails."

It had all been a matter of minutes, this contest with the flood, he realized, and glanced at his watch. "Even now No. 7 is only fifty-five minutes late and it seems hours. Fifty-five minutes since we passed here, and now the train is in the river, the mails lost.

"I am a ruined man," thought Rivets. "Divil an excuse will be accepted for a wreck at such a time. And the loss of the mail, the through mail, and the contract ——" He was groaning in spirit, y'understand, and paced up and down repeating: "Fifty-five minutes, and the work of a lifetime destroyed."

He had the passengers informed that they would be sent back to Barlow in the caboose of the wrecker. "We will hold the crew here to guard the track and have the wrecker return to-morrow," he said in

answer to a question, and walked away to the very edge of the water to be alone in the misery of him. And he was still there when a cry for him rose. "You are wanted on the wire by Bridgetown," called the operator.

"Take the message," shouted the superintendent.

"'Tis personal and important——" And Rivets, with a curse, strode back up the platform to the office. And at the touch of his signature on the key the wire still holding to Bridgetown began to pour shock after shock into the drooping superintendent, till he sat straight and rigid and white as a corpse.

"No. 7 out," reported Bridgetown. "One hour and fifty minutes late. Request connecting line hold for west-coast mail——"

"No. 7 wrecked here; abandoned out of Bridgetown," thundered the key of Rivets as he cursed the Bridgetown operator for a lunatic.

"Relief train from here stopped by washout three miles of Gorge Station, picked up mail from boat——"

"Saints in glory!" thought Rivets, numb, dumb, and paralyzed. For days the Foothills Division, extending two hundred and fifty miles west from Gorge, had been polished and dusted for the first try of No. 7 on its shortened schedule.

"In charge of regular mail clerk——" ran on the message.

"Flanders," was shocked into Rivets.

How the trick had been turned he didn't care. He waited only to learn that a No. 7 of one mail car and one coach was on its way with orders from the west-end dispatcher, and broke with Bridgetown to begin calling along the line to see what speed it was making. Watch in one hand, key in the other and the schedule before him, the superintendent of the Foothills obstructed regular business all that night, by turns shivering and praying and laughing aloud as the light train licked up the miles on tangent, curve and grade alike. And plainly as he pictured in his mind's eye that screaming meteor of the rail bursting out of cañons and taking the air along the thousand-foot precipices, not half the truth could he imagine till long after.

When the tale was told of the gaunt, wild-eyed mail clerk who had tossed the heavy sacks like pillows from the boat into the relief train; and from Bridgetown to the end of the line howled out the curses of the President of the United States and the superintendent of the P. D. at the crews when engines were changed or water taken on. Till into the yards with connection waiting they had torn with flaming journals, five and a half minutes late.

Then Rivets, far back at Gorge Station, had crumpled in his chair; but the clerk, turning over the first P. D. run of the transcontinental mail, had borrowed a cap and pulled it over one eye, as he read the order deadheading him back to Barlow. Signed Rivets, superintendent, which he still was by grace of Tim Flanders.

AND three days later when they met in the Barlow office, before shaking hands the boy asked: "What is poltroonery?"

"It is," answered Rivets, scratching his ear, "the state I was in when I abandoned the mail—for you to save."

Then they shook hands. "And why did you do it?" asked the superintendent, puzzled still.

"The last word of education which my father spoke to me," explained Tim, "was not to let a robber get away with the goods."

"Yes?"

"And you had robbed me of a chance to prove I was no poltroon."

"Saints rest the old gentleman," said Rivets, "he was an educator of merit. And the gentleman behind you is Post Office Inspector Ryan, who has laid over to see that your education in the railway postal service is as thorough."

"I will guarantee him a diploma as a man of letters," said the inspector.

More stories by Mr. Johnston in early issues.

Gold Bullets

By Gilbert Patten

Author of "The Jumper," "The Revenge of Billy Christmas," Etc.

A heap of bleaching bones, a buckskin sack of yellow pellets—and the grim story they might have told if dead men talked and gold had tongues.

WHEN Trundy came back from his trap line, bringing the pelts of two beaver and an otter, and found the cross-blood again lounging and smoking near the deerskin camp, he was exasperated. There was no fresh meat hanging from the stout pole that lay in the crotches of two other poles which were set in the ground a short distance from the camp, and the trapper knew at once that Carver had made, at best, no more than a lazy, half-hearted attempt to keep his promise.

"Where's that deer?" Trundy demanded, flinging down the pelts and turning resentful eyes upon his partner.

With his back against a rock and his glazed hat—a relic of his peacock days in Santa Fe—tipped to protect his eyes from the sunshine in which he was basking, the younger man languidly took his pipe from his mouth and gave Trundy a half-insolent upward look from beneath the hat brim.

"Too bad I find no deer to-day, amigo," he answered in the smooth drawl that had become so irritating to the trapper in the two months of their close association. "Maybe to-morrow I get one—or maybe an elk. Quién sabe?"

The trapper's cold-gray eyes narrowed. "You darned lazy dog!" he said, slightly shifting his long-barreled muzzle-loading rifle until it pointed at the half-recumbent man. "You ain't worth the powder to blow you to hell!"

Carver paused, his knife suspended and poised. His glance met Trundy's for an instant and a faint smile bared the white teeth in the midst of his beard.

"So many waste powder when they try to blow me there, señor," he returned softly. "You know I carry three bullets now, and they dig a heap more out of me at different times. Even the execution squad at the Palacio de Gobernador waste powder on me. Don't forget, Señor Trundy."

Trundy remembered. He had heard the story from other lips ere Jim Carver had told him of being stood up with two oth-

ers before a firing squad in the patio of the governor's palace at Santa Fe and afterward pronounced dead, and carted away to be dumped into a ditch and buried. Yet Carver, dug up at midnight by the bare hands of a Mexican girl whom he afterward deserted, still lived, having recovered from wounds that should have killed any human creature.

The trapper sneered. "If that there firin' squad had been American soldiers you wouldn't be doin' no braggin' about it now," he asserted.

"No difference, señor. One bullet of the three I lug now it come from the gun of an American soldier. I am here. He is dead."

FAMILIARITY had bred contempt, yet Trundy was disturbed by a feeling of awe that crept again through his body. Like most ignorant men he was excessively superstitious, and four years spent among the Arapahoes had increased that superstition.

Even from the Indians, he had heard the stories which had led the credulous to believe that the cross-blood bore a charmed life. Lead, it was thought, couldn't kill him. It was said that an old witch doctor had told Carver so, adding that he could be slain only by a silver bullet. The latter portion of the rumor was something Carver refused to talk about.

"Waugh!" said the trapper disgustedly. "You don't do a consarned thing but laze round and eat and smoke. Why, you damn maverick, you don't even take care o' the hosses."

"It is nothing to do that, señor. You picket or hobble them. The grass is good, water near. I did not come to trap. You tell me you know where we can find a great cache of furs that we can take, and they will make us rich; but when we get there the furs are gone, the cache is empty. Somebody find them first, or maybe the real owners come and remove them.

"That is bad luck for us, but I do not complain. I stay and keep you company when you find here the beaver dams and set the traps you bring."

"Durned willin' you are to do that when you know they're a-lookin' for you for that mess you got into at Bent's Fort. Mebbe you can carry off all the lead that can be shot into you, but you couldn't go far with one end of a rope round your neck and t'other end hitched t' the limb o' a tree. It's a right good thing for you t' stay under cover somewheres till that there fracas is sort o' forgot."

Carver's yellow skin took on a darker hue as he rubbed the cut tobacco in his palm with the heel of his right hand. "And you, Señor Trundy," he almost purred, "is it not also good for you to keep far from the 'Rapahoes because when you are drunk you choke your squaw wife until she lose her breath and get it no more? *Mira!* A white man's memory is short; a redskin never forgets."

Shielded by the rock from the movements of a wind that was sharp in spite of the warming sun, Carver smoked again, satisfiedly. They talked no more.

Around their valley, through which ran a tributary of the Platte River, rose the great Rockies, craggy, their cleft sides raggedly covered with pines, their pinnacles rising barrenly against the blue sky. Their shelter, framed of bended willows over which some deerskins were stretched, was set in a protected niche almost against the foot of a steep bluff. Not far off was a small meadow where their tethered horses grazed.

The stream, along the wooded valley above and below the meadow, was choked in places by dead wood and beaver dams. There the trapping would have been excellent had Trundy brought more traps, but his object had been to rob other trappers of their hidden furs rather than to labor at catching the animals and curing their pelts himself.

Far to the north lay the trail over which a great number of wagon trains were creaking and rumbling into South Pass, on their way to California; for the gold rush of '49 was on, and the fortune hunters were eager to put the Rockies far behind

them before real cold weather overtook them.

Trundy and Carver had talked of the fever that was sending all sorts and conditions of men flocking to the new gold fields as bees flock to a sugar barrel, but lack of contact with the emigrants had left them without infection. Yet the old trapper knew something of rudimentary methods of mining, which he had somehow picked up from the Indians, from whom he had once or twice heard vague hints that there was both gold and silver in the Rocky Mountains.

Silver! He thought of that now as he built and lighted the fire while the indolent cross-blood lazed and smoked, watching him with insolent contempt. If he could only find enough silver to make a bullet——

They ate in silence, Carver claiming one of the two beaver tails which Trundy roasted by holding them before the fire, on the sharpened point of a long stick. The manner in which the young desperado put out his hand for his share of this delicacy was fuel to the trapper's now brightly burning hate, but, like the Indians with whom he had lived, he hid his feelings.

Later, smoking his vile-smelling pipe, Trundy stretched the three fresh pelts over hoops of small willow branches, after having first scraped them well of flesh and fatty particles with an Indian "dubber" that had an elkhorn handle. Then, taking his rifle, he went off, ostensibly to look after the horses in the meadow; but the stars were beginning to wink above the mountaintops when he came back, packing the hind quarters of a black-tail deer.

Carver laughed as Trundy hung the deer meat on the high pole where it would be above the reach of prowling animals. "You have good luck, Señor Trundy," cried the cross-blood lightly. "Now I do not have to make a hunt to-morrow, and we have a nice juicy supper to-night. *Gracias!*"

"Oh, don't speak on't," said the trapper with pretended indifference.

They turned in, wrapped in buffalo robes; for the nights were sharp now, no matter how warm the autumn days might be. Always they kept their weapons within reach of their hands. They didn't attempt to keep up a fire to cut the chill, as it might be seen by unwelcome eyes. Their clock by night was the Great Dipper, swinging round the Pole Star; by day they told the hours with surprising correctness by the sun that was declining to its winter solstice.

When Carver rose the sunlight was just beginning to lacquer the mountain peaks. Trundy had gone again to his traps, having left behind him the coals of a fire over which he had cooked his breakfast of venison and coffee. Carver looked in vain for the short-handled ax with which they cut firewood. The trapper had taken that with him.

It was close to nightfall when Trundy returned, bringing the ax. The cross-blood complained because the implement had been taken away, and the older man answered that he had needed it to cut the crotched saplings with which he anchored his traps under water. Hitherto his huge, heavy hunting knife had sufficed.

When Trundy went down to the meadow to shift the horses to fresh grass Carver examined the ax. The blunt part of it, opposite the cutting edge, seemed to be battered a little. Brushing over the battered spots, Carver's fingers found a few tiny clinging particles like sand or fine-crushed rock. He put down the ax and did some thinking.

Carver was awake in his robe when the trapper cooked his own breakfast the following morning, but he pretended to sleep on as usual. When Trundy went away, taking the ax again, the younger man rose and followed him.

It was necessary to exercise the greatest caution not to let the trapper know he was followed, and Carver lost track of his partner completely in a barren alluvial gorge, through which ran a clear gurgling stream. He went back to the camp to smoke and ponder over the mysterious behavior of Trundy, who hadn't visited his traps before proceeding to the gorge. But not a word of hint fell from

the puzzled man's lips when his companion returned in the early dusk, bringing the ax and four beaver skins.

Luck gave Carver a better deal the next day. Again he lost Trundy in the same gorge, but, continuing cautiously to search for him, he was finally guided by a tap-tapping sound caused by blows with the blunt part of the ax against an outcropping ledge. The cross-blood, from a distant cover to which he had laboriously crawled, watched the trapper hammering off pieces of the ledge and examining them. Carver did some more thinking that day.

"Amigo," he said as they were lounging near their shelter after supper, "what you think of the fools who go all the way to California for gold, right through these mountains, and never stop to look for it here?"

The trapper, chewing tobacco, spat sizzlingly into the ashes of the smoldering fire and squinted sharply at the speaker. Twilight masked Carver's face. His manner was innocent enough.

"Waugh!" said Trundy. "I don't calkerlate anybody'd find enough gold in these here mountings t' plate a watch case."

The cross-blood shook his head. "I've heard that the Injuns have found it here, but they'd never do the work to mine it. I think there is gold—and silver, too. Last night I have a dream, Señor Trundy. I dream that we find here a gold mine and it make us both very rich. To-morrow I shall look for it, maybe."

Trundy laughed scornfully. "I reckon I know how much lookin' you'll do to-morrow—or ary other time," he retorted.

FROM the midst of his buffalo blanket, Carver watched the older man slip silently away into the gray light of the next morning, taking along not only the ax but the frying pan also.

Hours later, searching again for the trapper in the gorge and listening in vain for the tap-tapping sound of the ax, Carver gave both himself and Trundy a surprise. He stumbled unexpectedly upon the older man, who was squatting at the edge of the stream that flowed over a bed of the alluvial deposit which had accumulated during spring freshets.

Trundy had the frying pan in his hands, and he was slowly moving it in a semi-rotary manner and cautiously tipping it to pour off the surface of the water and coarse gravel which it contained. Beside him lay a piece of buckskin the size of a large pocket handkerchief. Upon this some dull-yellow grains and particles were drying in the sunshine. Trundy's rifle was within easy reach; Carver's was in his hands.

They looked at each other in silence. A greenish gleam crept into the trapper's gray eyes.

"You durned cat-foot cuss!" said Trundy presently. "If I'd ever heerd or seen you a-sneakin' up on me I'd nateral mistook you for a Injun or somethin' and shot you daid."

"Oh, no, Señor Trundy," returned Carver, grinning in his beard. "You can shoot at me, but never kill me, you know. I think you beat me in the hunt for that mine. You find it first, and now we shall both be rich as I dream it."

"Is that so?" growled the trapper, dropping the frying pan and rising with his rifle in his hands. "What I find's mine and there don't no part o' it belong to nobody else."

As Trundy had risen the muzzle of Carver's rifle had risen also, and the weapon was now pointed straight at the trapper's breast, the cross-blood holding it with both hands. They stood like that for some seconds, moveless as the rocks.

Then Carver laughed softly. "You forget, amigo," he reminded, "how we agree to be equal pardners when we start to get that cache of furs."

"That don't have nothin' to do with anythin' else we find," retorted Trundy sullenly. "What you find's yourn, and mine's mine."

But the cross-blood coolly argued to the contrary, contending that they were full partners in everything. He pointed out that Trundy couldn't very well mine his

placer discovery alone, and wouldn't want to if he could. He dwelt on the probability that there was enough gold to make them both rich, and insisted that they must share it equally.

As the trapper listened the superstitious fear of Carver came back upon him with full force, and, though his hatred was swollen instead of abated, he finally yielded.

Thereafter they worked the placer together as well as they could, Trundy, as always, doing the greater part of the labor. They built a crude sluice of hewn wood, and a still cruder rocker. Having no nails, they were forced to peg and wedge these arrangements together, and they were continually making repairs on them.

They lost at least half the values from the gravel that was washed through these wabbly extractors, but each night they added more yellow dust and grains to the contents of a buckskin pouch that daily was growing heavier. The fever had them, and it grew with their growing hoard. Trundy's traps, holding more than one drowned beaver, were completely neglected.

They had to talk to each other sometimes. Even deadly enemies thrown into close association and coöperation in a vast solitude where there are no other humans cannot continually nurse their hatred in silence. So each betrayed to the other his dreams and plans for spending the riches he would have, and each was bitten deep by jealous envy and a yearning somehow to obtain possession of all the gold for himself. Sensing this, they watched each other with unfaltering distrust.

As the days slipped away and winter marched closer upon them, the nights became more uncomfortable in their shelter of skins, and their dilapidated and patched clothing of buckskin didn't protect them properly from cold by day. There was snow on the high peaks, and once a light flurry swept into their valley.

There was talk of building a cabin or dugout and remaining there all winter, but this they finally realized would be folly; for they were neither provisioned for the stay nor equipped to work the placer in any but the most laborious and inefficient manner. And there were times when their meat supply failed for a day or two and they felt the gnawing of hunger.

At last they decided that they must get out soon if they hoped to make the long journey to the nearest settlements, and both wished, for good reasons, to avoid the military posts and the traders' stations.

It was Carver who suggested, one night, that the time had come to divide the gold; but they had no way of weighing it, and they were nearly at each other's throats when they attempted to heap it on a smoked deerskin spread upon the ground and make a division by eye measurement. Finally Trundy proposed that they should run it into bullets in his bullet mold and each should take the same number of the golden balls as the other.

The balls came out of the mold bright and beautiful, causing the eyes of the men to shine with cupidity. They watched each other to make sure that neither slipped some of the precious little spheres into concealment upon his person.

There was one odd bullet when all the gold had been melted and run, and they "pulled straws" for that, the straws being two twigs of unequal length held gripped in Carver's hand with their ends in sight at one extremity. Trundy pulled the shorter twig, and the cross-blood got the odd bullet. The trapper swore over that.

They agreed that the sluice and rocker must be destroyed to protect their secret from human beings who might wander into the gorge through some chance, and this work, together with other preparations for starting, would take another day. They, themselves, would have no trouble in finding the place again when they came back in the spring, properly and fully outfitted.

They were separated much on that last day, each attending to certain duties. As usual, Trundy cooked the meal and made coffee when night came. Carver, through

laziness or ineptitude, never performed that work when he could avoid it.

The night was on the wane when Carver awoke with a strange feeling all through his body and a dull, sickening cramp in his stomach. He knew at once that he was very ill, and when he attempted to get out of his buffalo robe he was vaguely shocked to find that he seemed to lack even the strength of a newborn babe.

Trundy was snoring, a few feet away, and in a moment or two a confused suggestion, more a feeling than a coherent thought, wormed itself into the cross-blood's brain. This was that he had been poisoned by the trapper, probably with the root of some wild herb or plant infused with the coffee that night. He seemed to recall that Trundy had scarcely touched the coffee; probably he hadn't taken as much as a single swallow of it.

Fear followed. Benumbed though he was, both physically and mentally, Carver hazily concluded that he was dying. Trundy had done it! Trundy—gold—Trundy—poison—gold! Like little smothered explosions in the cross-blood's brain.

Drops of cold perspiration beaded the man's brow. He struggled against the paralyzing weakness, fumbling for his knife and praying silently, incoherently, to both the Blessed Virgin and the devil himself for strength to rise up and drive that knife between Trundy's ribs.

The feeble movements and panting of Carver awoke the trapper, who roused up suddenly out of his robe, startled by the realization that he had lapsed into slumber; for he had meant only to pretend to sleep when he lay down.

He was on his feet in an instant. In another instant he had swept aside the deerskin that covered the entrance, and was outside. A faint groan sobbed from Carver's lips as Trundy escaped.

With only the frosty stars to give him light, the trapper went down into the meadow for the horses. Carver would be utterly helpless in another hour or less, if he were not now. Trundy knew the stuff would do the job. Not only would it make the man deathly sick for hours, it would also render him nearly blind, in which condition he could be destroyed by a child or by almost the feeblest carnivora with courage to attack him.

When Trundy came back with the horses the cold stars were dying and the colder light of morning was sifting into the valley. He approached the camp slowly, cautiously, prepared to drop the lead ropes and use his rifle.

Through the gray dimness he saw a form lying half outside and half inside the deerskin shelter. The cross-blood had managed to drag himself that far before giving out entirely. The trapper set the picket pins again and crept forward, thumb on the rifle hammer, finger on the trigger.

Presently he stood over the defenseless wretch and poked him with the muzzle of the rifle. Carver made no move, didn't even utter a groan; nothing but the sound of his breathing through locked teeth, a mingled gurgle and hiss as of water and steam, was heard.

Trundy rolled the body over with a moccasined foot. A white froth in the cross-blood's beard, at the corners of his mouth, pulsed and bubbled. The man's eyes were rolled upward beneath nugatory eyelids.

"Well, well," said the trapper with great satisfaction. "Don't look like you was goin' t' go along with me to-day, Jim. You 'pear to be in sorter a difficulty. No shape to travel a-tall, and prob'ly won't be for some time. Too bad I can't wait round for you t' start, but I got a pressin' call to be movin' 'cordin' to schedule."

He found and took Carver's pouch of golden bullets, chuckling with triumph. Next he collected Carver's pistol, rifle, and all his ammunition, overlooking only, in his haste, the knife that had escaped from the cross-blood's numb fingers and slid down into the tips of balsam boughs which served for a bed.

He made up a pack that included the furs, robes, and practically everything of value except some of the battered deerskins covering the framework of the shel-

ter, and his hunting knife ripped the skins he didn't take into useless tatters. The pack was roped upon the back of the grunting and objecting pack mare, the animal being first protected by a Mexican aparejo that had been strapped securely in place. He saddled both horses and fastened up the stirrups of Carver's saddle so they wouldn't dangle.

"Adios, you mungrel dorg," he called, swinging up to the back of his own horse. "Mebbe bullets can't hurt you none, but the bears and wolves'll take care o' you all right, and next time we meet'll be on t'other side o' Jordan's wave."

With a mocking laugh and a scurrilous gesture of insult, he rode away, leading the pack mare and the saddled horse of the man he was deserting to die.

TRUNDY naturally wished to avoid Indians, and he had no desire or intent to encounter the California-bound emigrants unless necessity forced him to that. He believed, now, that the Rocky Mountains were rich with gold, and he was filled with supercilious contempt for the fortune hunters who were pouring through South Pass on their way to the beckoning treasure land of the Pacific coast.

Why, the fools didn't have to make that long journey of hazard and suffering to find their fortunes! They were hurrying by—perhaps their feet were passing over—undreamed-of fields of treasure. He had proof of that in the heavy pouch which now held all the golden bullets. And he alone knew the mighty secret, for days had passed since his abandonment of Jim Carver, and Carver must be dead from exposure and starvation.

After the second day of Trundy's journey to the settlements his progress had been slow, for he had met with two misfortunes to retard him. He had been forced to shoot the pack mare after she had stepped into a gopher's hole and broken her leg, and Carver's horse, to the back of which the pack had been transferred, had strained a tendon in climbing out of a ravine, and was very lame. The trapper swore a great deal over this bad luck.

The bite of early December was in the air, and Trundy dreaded the discomfort and danger of being caught on the open plains by one of the bitter storms which occasionally swept them at this season; but fear of rendering the lame horse not worth powder and lead caused him to proceed slowly.

Always his keen eyes were pricking the distances. Once he mistook a line of treetops along a creek for moving horsemen, and once he remained concealed in a ravine while a train of white-topped wagons passed, miles away. For fresh meat, he shot an antelope and a buffalo, but the latter was an old bull that had been driven out of the herd, and he took only the beast's tongue, leaving the rest of the carcass for furred and feathered scavengers.

He was imbued by a feeling of power, of transcendence, of exaltment to the top of the world. He saw himself, the central figure, in beautiful dreams of coarse pleasures. Each night, in the shelters where he built his small fires, before extinguishing the fire that it might not be seen by hostile eyes, he counted over the heavy little pellets of yellow, now dulling a trifle in the pouch that held them. And he thought, with contemptuous triumph, of Jim Carver's bones, bleaching in the mountains which lay like blue mole hills on the edge of the western horizon.

It was while those mole hills could still be discerned that he turned toward them, late one afternoon, from the top of a blufflike hill near the Platte, up which he had ridden to look around for a camping place. Back there lay the Golconda of which he, alone among living men, knew the secret.

Long and exultantly he gazed. The sun was dipping low, and he shielded his eyes with his hand, from beneath which he looked. Presently he gave his attention to a tiny speck on the sepia plain, a speck so small that weaker eyes or a scrutiny less keen would not have noticed it. He thought it might be a buffalo. It was miles

away upon the course he had passed over hours before.

A strange uneasiness attacked him as he was making his bivouac that night. He thought of the distant speck that he had seen upon his trail, and grew annoyed because the thought persisted. He cooked and ate the last of his fresh meat—he would have to get more to-morrow—smoked, extinguished his fire, and rolled himself into his robe.

But he couldn't sleep. So he moved. He shifted the picketed horses to a more secluded spot and transferred himself and his possessions to a place that only the nose of a bloodhound would be likely to discover. In the morning he tightened his belt and moved on again, without breakfast.

Fortune favored him in that he came upon a herd of buffalo before the sun was many hours up and killed a fat cow with little trouble. He was famished by this time, so he gathered *bois de vache,* made a fire where he was, and filled himself with broiled buffalo beef. As much of the choice cuts from the cow as he could carry went with him when he resumed his journey.

He was led to look back when he reached the next high ground. Beyond the spot where he had breakfasted, between that spot and the cottonwoods in which he had spent the night, he saw a speck upon the plain. Not a buffalo that had strayed from the herd he had encountered, he told himself. Something, man or beast, upon the course he had traversed! Nearer, now, than yesterday.

For fully fifteen minutes he watched the speck until he was certain it was moving, coming. No horseman, probably not a wild animal of any sort; but perhaps a human being, afoot, upon his trail! A tiny chill touched Trundy's blood and he shivered.

At every favorable opportunity during the remainder of the day the trapper surveyed his back trail, looking for that haunting speck. Twice he felt relief over failure to find it, but many times afterward his eyes did not search in vain. He knew, long before nightfall, that he was really being followed.

"Waugh!" he exclaimed. "Injun or white, you'd better not come in shootin' distance."

During more than an hour preceding sunset, he squatted on high ground, beyond which the horses were hidden, and watched the trailer creep closer. And all the while the chill crept deeper into his blood and crazy fancies grew in his puzzled brain; for surely it was craziness to imagine that the pursuer was a dead man who should be lying somewhere in the blue mole hills beyond the horizon.

He didn't build a fire that night. His hunger had to be assuaged with pieces of raw meat. He slept little and fitfully, all the time with his hand on his rifle.

It was very cold and his teeth chattered. He didn't dare wrap himself closely in the protection of his robe lest the robe bother him if he were forced to move quickly and shoot at something creeping upon him. His nerves, of which he had never before been conscious, were unstrung when morning came.

Again he moved onward before breakfasting. Again he built a fire of buffalo chips upon the open plain, but this time he did so that he might cook and eat where there was no cover to hide anything that might try to steal up on him. And, while he was ravening at the hot, dripping beef, he saw the pursuer coming. Still far off, yet near enough for Trundy to be sure that it was an unmounted man; a man who followed him with the implacability of Nemesis.

The trapper had succeeded in sweeping some of the crazy fancies out of his brain. Already he had reached the conclusion that the pursuer could be Jim Carver, alive and in the flesh.

THE cross-blood, recovered from the benumbing drug, had taken up the trail and clung to it. The misfortune which had compelled Trundy to travel slowly had favored the trailer, who had managed to exist off the remains of the antelope and two buffalo killed by the trapper.

Cursing himself for his failure to cut the heart out of Carver's body, Trundy fled again.

He had arrived at the truth at last. Sustained by the fires of hatred and a searing thirst for Trundy's life, as well as by the creatures the trapper had slain to provide himself with food, the cross-blood had nearly accomplished the superhuman. He had his knife which Trundy had overlooked, and that would serve his purpose if he could only come within striking distance of the man he pursued.

The knife was in his teeth that night as he inched himself along on his belly toward the glow of a dying camp fire in a small cottonwood growth. He took every precaution. He made no more noise than a snake sliding through the grass. He had found the picketed horses where they were feeding outside the grove, and he crept in time to a place where he could dimly see a recumbent figure, wrapped in a robe, and stretched with moccasins toward a mass of coals which were now and then fanned into a dull gleam by the cold night breezes. No sounds except the distant yapping and howling of coyotes were to be heard.

Carver watched the still form a long time before he crept forward upon it, ready to spring or hurl the knife at the slightest movement beneath the robe. In time he was on his knees beside the figure, the knife was gripped in his hand, and mad exultation was almost bursting his heart open.

A stronger gust whirled the ashes of the fire and fanned the coals so that they cast a glint upon the knife that the cross-blood lifted, summoning all his strength to drive it home. That freshened glow from the coals showed Carver that the thing wrapped in the buffalo robe was a dummy made of grass that had been stuffed into Trundy's buckskin breeches and molded beneath the cured buffalo skin. The moccasins, also stuffed, were placed at one end and the trapper's fur cap barely showed at the other.

In the moment when Carver made this discovery Trundy fired from ambush. The cross-blood pitched forward across the dummy.

Trundy, half naked and almost frozen, came out of his hiding place. He advanced hesitatingly, on the alert but filled with wild relief and triumph.

"There, damn you!" he cried. "Mebbe lead couldn't kill you, but a gold bullet done it just as well as a silver one could."

He began to laugh, stopped abruptly. The figure lying across the dummy heaved itself, struggled to its knees again, coughed chokingly, and threw the knife. Trundy cried out, dropped his empty rifle, corkscrewed all the way round, and plunged forward upon his face.

THE bones of two men, stripped clean by wolves and vultures, were found there, a week later, by a party of California-bound emigrants. They found also a pouch that contained bullets of pure gold, which created great excitement and speculation. Yet, with winter snapping at their heels, they made haste to get through the Rockies, stopping nowhere to do any prospecting.

For nine more years the snow-capped Rockies silently, sardonically watched the flow of fortune seekers to the Pacific coast, and then the country was electrified by a report that gold had been found on the Platte River, in Colorado, by James H. Price, of the Green-Russell expedition.

THE BEST DECORATOR

WOMEN, I note," remarked Litt Mallory, the Virginia philosopher, "are making a hit nowadays as interior decorators, but any sane man knows that the interior decorator who makes the biggest hit is the woman who's a good cook."

The Taming of Zero

By Kenneth Gilbert and Frank Cotter

Nature takes an interest in a savage mule and prepares him to lie down with the lamb.

PIERRE L'ANSE, his swart face gray with mingled fear and anger, stepped back, and with folded arms surveyed his team of blue mules—Arctic and Zero. Arctic, the smaller, placid and docile as always, was in his stall, munching contentedly. Zero, the devil, was tensed, ears laid back dangerously, and heels ready to let fly the instant his master came within range. In fact, he had just tried an experimental shot, and had missed through no fault of his own but the agility of Pierre, who, from long and bitter knowledge, had come to accord Zero a fearsome respect.

"So, peeg of a devil!" rasped Pierre. "You would keel yoh papa, *hein?*" The wicked-looking eye which Zero bent on him seemed nowise softened by this reproach.

"Thass vair' bad mule, Pierre." Old Prosper Gaspard stood there, sucking at his lifeless pipe. "Ah t'eenk some tam you keel thass mule. *Oui!*"

"Sacré!" Pierre spat out the exclamation. "You spik ze mouthful." He had spent three months "outside" that summer, and prided himself upon the acquisition of fluent slang. "Keel heem? Some tam I tie heem up, skin heem alive, zen give him ze vair' worst lickin' he know. Zen I build a bonfire under heem, and let heem roast in hees own fat."

Old Prosper nodded, outwardly impressed. Yet he, as well as others who knew Pierre L'Anse and his famous team, knew likewise that the vexed mule skinner would do no such dreadful thing.

To Pierre the mules were more than mules; they attached to him an importance that he might not otherwise have enjoyed. They were his livelihood; his boon companions. Not in all that vast region loosely termed the headwaters of the Fraser was their equal to be found. Deep indeed was the snow that the mules could not wallow through, over invisible trails, as they hauled supplies to the far-flung outposts of the back country; no marsh or bog could trap them, and as for mosquitoes, black gnats, "no-see-ums," and that winged fiend, the moose fly—pests that would have driven a horse mad—their casehardened hides were shields and bucklers.

Moreover, Pierre loved both of his

charges. Arctic, the good-natured, to whom treachery and meanness were abhorrent, was his special pet, scarcely second, however, to the willful and temperamental Zero, who for days would be disarmingly tractable, only to suddenly try to drop-kick his master into the next lot.

The two mules were aliens in this land, with its sky line of snow-clad peaks, dense forests, rushing rivers, bitterly cold winters and blazing-hot summers. A lank Kentuckian, who had conceived the idea that in this almost virgin wilderness lay a rare opportunity to become a wealthy landowner, had brought them as colts from their Southern home—together with his wife and brood of youngsters. But the ungentle North, with its rigorous climate and unyielding aspect, had proved too much for the easy-going Southerner, and he had been glad to dispose of Arctic and Zero to Pierre L'Anse for a modest sum.

Three years of snaking "go-devil" sleds over marshy ground in summer and frozen bogs and lakes in winter had served to bring out the widely contrasted viewpoints held by the pair. Yet both were gluttons for work, and although Pierre sometimes swore until the tears came into his eyes, he would not have parted with either for several times the price of any mule on earth.

Now, Zero, the untamable, aware that his master was on guard, permitted his long ears to slant forward peacefully as he resumed his lunch of oats. Pierre, astutely reading by this sign that danger was past for the moment, cautiously approached the recalcitrant from the near side, and managed to harness him without further trouble.

"So, my children," said Pierre good-humoredly, when once the two were hitched to the "go-devil" sled, and they had started toward "Papa" Pappilons' store to load a supply of goods for the camp on Bannock Creek, "we are friends again. *Voilà!* You, Zero," he went on, flicking a black-snake whip gently over the rump of the intractable one, "you should nevair forget, my son, that beside you walks the prince of mules. Be like him!"

Zero switched his ears as though in understanding; indeed, it seemed that he was even impressed, for he humped his shoulders contritely, and hung his head—then reached over and nipped his long-suffering teammate on the shoulder. The outraged Arctic, indignant at this unwarranted affront, reared wildly and snorted, then plunged ahead, dragging Zero with him.

The movement all but threw Pierre from the "go-devil." In a split second the outfit was racing toward the store, while the fiery little French Canadian, purple with rage, danced and gave vent to strange cries, a string of sulphurous expletives trailing behind him like a wisp of smoke. With the rattle and thud of a load of wood being dumped the sled stopped before the store, both mules panting and panicky, and eying each other with misgiving.

Pierre, spitting out a sizzling swear word, leaped to the ground and swung mightily with his right fist on the short ribs of the offending Zero. Thereupon, that animal, sluing himself around with athletic agility, accurately kicked Pierre behind the opened door of Pappilons' store, and then earnestly set to kicking the door on top of him.

Papa Pappilons himself, rotund and jolly, appeared, an elephantine grin on his face—a grin which was instantly wiped off as Zero's heels whistled close to his ear. Then and there he went berserk. Seizing a new adz handle, he dealt the kicking and plunging Zero a tremendous wallop on the rump, a blow that would have stricken an ox, and it brought the mule upstanding.

Encouraged, Papa Pappilons tried again, with such sincerity that the adz handle broke off short. With a shrill bray of agony, Zero reached back with a left hind foot and felt of Pappilons' jaw. That stanch Frenchman, unyielding as the ranks of the Old Guard, merely grunted—and *whack!* went the stump of the adz handle.

Zero all but leaped out of his own skin. As it was, he snapped the traces as though

they were pack thread, and with another bray of pain, free and untrammeled, went galloping over the flat at a speed somewhat less than sixty miles an hour. The last glimpse they had of him was when he vanished into a devil-club thicket—that "wait-a-bit" thorn of the North—disregarding the long, sharp spikes as though they were spirilla of thistledown. Pierre extricated himself from the fallen door and joined Papa Pappilons in cursing the mule and his ancestry as far back as the seventh generation.

"It is I, Pappilons, who have tamed that devil," boasted the storekeeper, still gripping the stump of the adz handle. "You are too kind, too forgiving, Pierre L'Anse. He will come back, beaten, whipped. It will be as I say."

But Pierre laughed derisively.

"You are great man, M'sieu' Pappilons," he said, "but nevair will you tame thass mule. It will be something bigger even than you—for he fears no man—that will take him, son of a peeg as he is! *Oui!* You shall see."

Old Prosper Gaspard, sucking at his lifeless pipe, nodded agreement.

WHEN Zero halted he was in the depths of the cool, moist autumn woods. Although it was broad day in the clearing, here was a twilight, a place of sepulchral silence. Mosses dripped hoarily from low branches; long-dead windfalls were covered with vividly mottled lichens. Tall and narrow aisles, forest chancels whose echoes were not aroused by so much as a bird song.

Yet Zero was not minded to meditate upon his surroundings. He was chiefly concerned with the fact that the adz handle had raised welts on him half the size of a bee's nest; and, reaching backward as far as he could with his head, he licked the places solicitously. Thereafter he cropped a few mouthfuls of tough, half-dead grass; was beguiled by a more tender-looking, greener clump farther on, and so lured, wandered deeper into the woods.

There was no gainsaying the fact that Zero was hurt—body and soul. He was not minded to return home; for one thing, he feared the adz handle, and, perhaps, in his mulish mind, there was the apperception that dire retribution awaited him at the hands of Pierre L'Anse. Moreover, he reveled in freedom, now that he had tasted it.

Deeper into the woods he went, while the shadows became longer on the hillsides, and twilight grew. By and by he came to the edge of a great area of aspens, red and gold in the dying rays of the sun. Yet he had no eyes for the beauty of the scenery; he was looking for a place to sleep. And he found it, there among the aspens, just as Fate confronted him with his first test.

Before him was what appeared to be a spiny growth. It looked prickly, but this was encouraging rather than a matter for caution, for Zero, like most mules, had a passionate fondness for thistles.

Then he stiffened, for his eyes had detected motion in the strange growth on the ground; it had actually moved! Here was inexplicable mystery. A domestic animal, despite the fact that he had lived for three years on the fringe of these great forests, Zero had never encountered a porcupine; and curiosity was now a thing to be gratified without the restraining hand of Pierre L'Anse.

He moved closer to the porcupine, which was now making its sluglike way toward the base of one of the largest aspens. The porcupine, indifferent always, for he well knew that only under the urge of the greatest hunger would any animal, save the wolverene, dare face his panoply of spears, was utterly unconcerned whether Zero was a moose or a mouse. Yet he did keep one beady little eye fixed on the bulky beast towering over him, but he was unhurried, and continued his awkward, shuffling way, quills rattling loosely, and his progress marked by querulous grunts.

Zero took two steps forward, and with nose held close to the strange animal, sniffed; then blew a great breath of curiosity.

It was much too much. The porcupine, veteran gnawer of poplar bark, and irritable at best, was not minded to permit such familiarity. As the mule's muzzle all but touched him, he went into action.

With an astonishingly quick movement he spun about and flipped his quill-armed tail in the mule's face. Zero leaped back in sudden fright, his nose fuzzy as though from an instantaneous growth of long whisker. Voicing his rage and agony in a shrill bray, he reared, pawing with forefeet, then fell to rubbing his nose in the earth. Instead of dislodging the quills, this only served to break them off short, or work them in deeper.

Seemingly startled, the porcupine hunched himself contritely and waited, quills erected stiffly over his back, and nose between paws. Meanwhile, Zero, snorting and plunging was learning one of life's great lessons—that curiosity is frequently costly, having once killed a cat.

At last the porcupine, deciding that his adversary was not minded to follow up the attack, uncoiled and resumed his slow march toward the tree. Zero, the first shock of surprise over, was filled with consuming rage. By no means a coward, his pride now demanded revenge. His rolling eyes saw the porcupine slipping away, and he pranced forward just as the quill pig set his stout claws in the tree.

The porcupine was perhaps two feet from the ground when Zero was upon him. The mule struck with forefeet like a boxer, but missed, and his muzzle lunged forward. Quick as a wink, the thick, meaty tail of the porky, spirillated with spines, lashed out again, and a fiendish squall from Zero told that it had landed.

Then, deciding that haste was imperative, the porcupine, with a remarkable burst of speed, scuttled up the tree and out of the mule's reach. Perching himself on the first strong limb, he looked down forgivingly upon his late foe; then fell to nibbling at a toothsome twig still juicy with sap. The mule, strong yellow teeth bared savagely, tried vainly to reach him. Modestly content with his victory, the porcupine continued his supper.

His muzzle inflamed and swollen, and throbbing as though from a thousand bee stings, as the barbed quills worked their way deeper into the tender flesh, Zero at last gave up his futile attempt to mete out vengeance. Thereupon he departed in search of water. Half a mile away he found it, despite the growing darkness; a tiny stream whispering its way through the rank glades. For a long time he stood there, muzzle buried in the cool liquid, while he drank.

By and by the moon rose, and peered inquiringly down, but still Zero stood there by the pool, lifting his head only to breathe, and quickly plunging his nose back into the water as the throbbing pain resumed.

Yet ever his ears twitched this way and that, as they recorded mysterious sounds in the forest night. The muffled croak of the last of the season's frogs, nearly ready to seek their winter couch in deep ooze, seemed to symbolize the eeriness of Zero's surroundings. There were strange rustlings among the brittle, dried-out leaves; and once there came a soft pad-pad of feet so close that the mule whirled in sudden alarm. A fox, no less startled than he, vanished abruptly in a clump of fireweed, billowy tail floating over him and seeming to cloak his disappearance.

The booming hunting cry of an arctic owl, already almost white in his late fall-and-winter coat, set Zero's nerves twanging, and he lifted his head from the water in determination. He wanted to be moving; he wanted to go somewhere. Although he did not know it at that moment, he was gripped with a poignant loneliness —for his mate, his own warm stall, and, yes, even for Pierre L'Anse himself.

Picking his way through the brush with a care and skill remarkable in him, for he was unused to the stealthy ways of the wild kindred, he came at last to a cleared space, and stood there revealed in the thin moonlight, an oddly grotesque statue in blue clay.

The air, chill, was quiet, save for infrequent puffs that stirred the treetops, and set the forest giants whispering to each

other. Zero's nostrils twitched as he sought to read what messages the atmosphere held. Frankly, he disliked to go on; out here, where he could see in all directions, was safety, at least, while in the somber depths of the conifers all about him were hidden menaces. The great trees, with their interlaced screen of limbs, were black with shadows. It seemed to him that now and then these shadows moved!

AT last, however, he resolutely set off, following what seemed a dim trail, along which intuition rather than sight guided him. He was passing beneath the spread of a huge spruce, a pit-black spot, when the thing happened.

Apprehension by all senses, sharpened to a spear point of foreboding, saved him. As the shadows swallowed him, he felt rather than saw a deeper shadow detach itself from a limb above and drop straight toward him.

That moment's warning spared him, for he flinched at the same instant that red-hot irons seemed to sear his side and flank. Braying his fright, he plunged ahead, something clinging to his back, while in his ears rang a fiendish scream. A full-grown male cougar, somewhat of a rare visitor in these Northern latitudes, had missed by less than two inches in his downward drop, but was earnestly determined to rectify the error. Like all of his kind, he had a weakness for horseflesh, and as he had never seen a mule, he concluded that this was merely a sturdy colt, albeit of a strange color.

Chance again came to Zero's aid. With that devilish thing astride him, tearing at his tough skin, he tore madly through the brush, ducking his head just in time as a thick and low-lying limb appeared almost before his eyes. There was a dull impact, and the cougar was dislodged.

At the same instant the mule let fly with his heels—and reached his mark! A bewildered and battered cat extricated himself from a devil-club thicket in time to snarl rage and disappointment after the fleeing Zero, whose progress through the woods was marked by the diminishing crashing of brush. For more than a mile the mule fled, not stopping to care in which direction he was going, if only he could remove himself from the vicinity of the cougar. When he paused at last, winded, to take stock of himself, he discovered that he was almost on the shore of a little lake.

The second encounter with the denizens of the wild left him sadly torn and lacerated. Thoughts of the cougar made him shiver. He knew now that he wanted to go home; and if there is such a thing as contriteness in the heart of a mule, Zero had it. He would have welcomed the sight of Pierre L'Anse that moment as he would Arctic himself.

He worked his way through the brush to the lake, and drank long and deep. A pall of fog hung close to the water; the air was very still and dank, but the sky seemed to be lightening. The moon hung low, still outlining him grayly as he stood knee-deep in the rushes and muck.

A poignant loneliness gripped him. He was lost, utterly lost, and without friend and companion. To be sure, that sixth sense of direction with which all dumb animals are endowed would presently show him the way he wished to go; at that moment he felt himself without guidance. Raising his head from the water, he stretched his neck, laid back his ears, closed his eyes soulfully, and brayed.

It was not an unmusical bray, in a rough, wire-edged way, and with a little catch at the end of it, and Zero was well pleased. The startling sound sent the echoes skittering up the lake, and all the wild folk who heard it moved uneasily.

A blue heron, just about decided to launch his long Southern flight, but loath to leave the shores of this lake, where the fishing was unusually good, heard, and with a raucous *kr-r-uk!* flapped out of the reeds a hundred yards away, and set about putting distance between him and that fearsome noise. The last of the white throats, hidden in an alder thicket, chirped sleepily among themselves, and broke into querulous song. Grouse, perched in the

spruce jungles, craned their necks in alarm, as they froze into sudden rigidity.

Into his mournful plaint, Zero put all the surcharged pathos of a grieving soul. The effort so soothed him that he tried again. Once more the echoes raced mockingly from shore to shore—*Braw-w—hic! Braw-w—hic! Braw-w—hic!* Loud at first, but diminishing as the sound waves fled to the opposite end of the lake.

Yet one echo took on a new note strangely persistent; a fierce, nasal tone, rough and uncouth—*Bwa-bwa-bwa!* Puzzled, Zero listened. He was thrilled by the thought that he had made that lordly, commanding sound. He tried once more.

A twig cracked behind him, and he whirled nervously. A tall, sleek animal, slightly larger than himself, stood there, eying him. The newcomer was as long eared as his own mate, Arctic, and with the same mulelike head, yet a more curved, proboscislike muzzle. Zero had never seen a cow moose, but he read in the mild, curiosity-filled eyes of the visitor that she intended him no harm.

At that instant there came from a spot less than fifty yards away a thunderous crashing of brush, and that bellowing call —*Bwa-bwa-bwa!*

Zero jumped guiltily and wheeled. At the edge of a birch thicket near the water stood a ghostly form in the waning moonlight; a bulky thing with a gigantic spread of antlers.

In the pale luminescence of the moon the eyes of the bull moose burned red with a vindictive rage. For weeks now he had been convinced that the world was in a conspiracy to keep him from the side of the mate intended for him somewhere in these wilds.

Time after time he had sent his challenging summons ringing through the forest glades, and had heard the response of a mate. Always, however, he arrived too late. Either the cow had coyly vanished, or had been charmed by some other bull. More than once the great moose had vanquished these truculent rivals as he came upon them, but without reward. The strange call of Zero he had interpreted as the noisy boasting of another bull; and now he was here to do battle.

Zero, sensing that the atmosphere had taken on an inexplicable menace, but undecided just what to do about it, stood fast. There was a vengeful snort from the giant bull; then, lowering his head until the stubby lance points bore straight ahead, he charged.

There was a frantic bray, and Zero was being thrust ahead as though struck by the pilot of a locomotive. Bravely enough he turned to fight, but he might as well have battled a tornado. He was scored, torn, clubbed; and suddenly he knew that he had enough.

IT was Pierre L'Anse's shout that brought old Prosper Gaspard hobbling to the barn; brought Papa Pappilons, and others.

"That son of a gun Zero; she's back once more!" exclaimed Pierre. "And, *mon Dieu,* look w'at has happened to heem! I t'eenks she fight a pack of dose *loup-garou* wolf; *hein?*"

It was true that Zero was back. He was munching oats with all the fervor of a prodigal son assimilating the fatted calf.

Pierre started into the stall, to examine Zero's hurts more closely.

"*Ma foi!* Take care!" warned old Prosper Gaspard, and the others drew in their breaths apprehensively. But it was too late. Impulsive Pierre, moved within easy reach of those terrible heels.

For a tense second the tableau held, as Zero left off eating and turned his head as though measuring the distance, and picking out a likely looking spot to drop his master. Eye to eye they stood regarding each other.

The battle was brief. What Pierre saw was something he alone could read. As a little gasp went up from the onlookers, he stepped forward, and slapped Zero confidently on the shanks. The mule trembled, as though with an emotion long dormant—gratitude toward his master—and rubbed his sore nose on Pierre's arm in a manner that could not be mistaken.

Zero, the devil, was tamed.

King's Ransom

By D. Stockbridge

Author of "Custody of the Child," "The Gilded Youth," Etc.

They were very different people, Crabtree with a knife in his ribs, Riverton and the sailor, with murder in their hearts, and the girl from Maine. But they were curiously alike in one particular.

SINCE late afternoon Riverton had been aware that the ship's engines were stilled. It seemed curious that, in the midst of the deafening uproar of the storm, that thin thread of silence should be noticeable above everything else. The motion, too, had changed. It was not only that the vibration had ceased but that, where heretofore there had been a definite guiding purpose through all the senseless pitching about, now there was only a helpless, incoherent tossing.

It was true that the captain had managed to keep steerageway by means of jury rigging hastily contrived before the early dark set in. Miraculously it had held already more than six hours. When it went, there would be nothing more to be done.

Alone in the little smoking room, Riverton was thankful that it was not a passenger ship, to be filled now with terrified women and perhaps children. Besides the crew, there was only himself and Crabtree, a round-faced, bald-headed little man of the traveling-salesman type, whose card announced him as "C. M. Crabtree, Agent," and who was bound on some mysterious errand from Capetown to the States.

Riverton had no objection to Crabtree, but he was glad he had stuck to his cabin on this final evening. After all, what could one say to a man with whom one had played chess every night for a week —under these circumstances?

Riverton had always lived in cities where man's power and inventiveness triumphed over insensate natural forces. He had never before been in danger of his life. He realized with a half smile that he was lamentably ignorant of the etiquette proper to such occasions. He should not have known what to say to Crabtree; whether to be flippant or serious. It would have been—horrible, if Crabtree had wanted to pray.

No, it was much better as it was. For all he knew, when the final moment came, he might be afraid. He thought of it as a man thinks of an inevitable attack of seasickness, during which he prefers to be alone.

And yet, as the hours passed, his isolation began to wear on his nerves. It was not this waiting for death that bothered him. It was the contemplation of the vast means used to compass this puny end; this theatrical extravagance of howling wind and mountainous water, when another attack of the fever that was sending him home to the States would have achieved the same end much more economically.

The air in the close-sealed cabin stifled him. He staggered to the door opening onto the lee deck, pulled it open, and stepped out. Even here he found himself in a whirlpool of spray-drenched wind, obliged to cling to the door handle for support.

And then he saw, by the dim light from the porthole, a very curious thing. Between the cabin and the rail, on the slippery, tilting plane of the deck, two men were fighting. Their deadly intent was evident in every line of their crouched, taut figures. Balancing like circus acrobats on the wavering foothold, they circled and feinted and attacked, backed by the gaunt gray shadows of waves that would speedily engulf them both.

Riverton stared in amazement. It seemed incredible that, in the face of a common destruction, two men should put themselves to the trouble of trying to kill each other.

He saw the light flash along a drawn blade and cried out a warning, but his voice was plucked from his lips and flung aside so quickly that he hardly heard it himself. At the same instant the knife descended, and a sudden movement of the ship threw a dark, limp form into his arms.

Almost in the same breath—so quickly did instinct work in him—he kicked open the door behind him, drew the wounded man into the cabin, slammed the door to, and shot the bolt. He heard the instant, heavy impact of a body against the wood, and then nothing more. He turned his attention to the victim of this extraordinary encounter, and saw that it was Crabtree.

The knife had caught him in the breast, and it was clear to the most hasty examination that he could not live. But he was quite conscious, and his hands dragged purposefully at the fastenings of his shirt. With some little difficulty he unbuckled and drew out an odd belt of folded chamois, with hard little lumps sewed into it at intervals, and thrust it into Riverton's hand.

"Diamonds," he whispered hoarsely. Riverton started, and the chamois belt swung in his shaking hand. He looked at Crabtree incredulously, his senses troubled, even in this extremity, with the magic that clings to the idea of treasure.

"Diamonds," muttered Crabtree again, his breath laboring, and he motioned for Riverton to fasten the belt about his own waist. "King's ransom!" Seeing that the young man was obeying his imperative gesture, he fell back on the crimson carpet.

For an instant the cabin seemed filled with perfumes; the rustle of fabulous silks; lights shining on jewels in the entr'acte of an opera; flowers; the movement of spirited horses; pictures; the beautiful bindings of great books, carefully loved and known. Curious how one's secret dreams leap to the surface in moments such as this! As a drowning man reviews his life——

Riverton returned with a gasp to the present, and found that he was trembling. Crabtree, raised on one elbow, with outstretched, wavering hand, the nails catching the light like little gleaming claws, seemed trying to convey something further—one more idea of the hundreds he would never utter.

Or was he pointing? Riverton, turning his head this way and that, saw in the round disk of a porthole the face of a man, nose flattened against the heavy glass, lips drawn back from the greedy mouth. Impossible to tell how long that

face had been there, or how much it had seen! Instantly it was withdrawn into the darkness.

"He—he——" Crabtree's voice broke in an incoherent shriek. His desperate hands clutched at his breast. He fell forward on the crimson carpet and lay still.

But Riverton was still staring at the blank porthole. That face was the face he had seen for an instant as the cabin door swung open—the face of the man who had killed Crabtree. Who had, perhaps, seen Crabtree give him the diamonds. An instinctive contraction of the muscles put him on the defensive, as he had seen Crabtree on the defensive, and his hand went to the belt now buckled around his waist.

Then he paused in amazement. What curious instinct was it that made the three of them kin—himself, and the little diamond buyer, and the rough sailor who had murdered for gain? A terrible thing, this greed, that changed the proportions of all moral codes, and neutralized every civilized instinct. It was infecting him now with a new fever of determination, and the hope that he might somehow win free of the peril in which he found himself. He felt a disdain for the immense power of nature, as compared with this power that was strapped around his waist, if he could only get away—if he could only get away!

THE actual moment of shipwreck was different from any of the many pictures his fancy had painted for him.

There was the sharp report, like a gunshot, as the sail tore free, and then the feeling of being tossed helplessly, like a cork in a mill race. The swivel chair, clamped to the floor, to which Riverton was clinging, broke loose, and he narrowly escaped being crushed against the wall. Then he realized—just how he could not say—that in the midst of its erratic plungings the ship was taking a definite angle, was tilting—tilting perilously.

He flung himself toward the door, and wrenched open the bolt just as a white-faced steward was trying to force an entrance. For an instant they clung to the door frame, staring at each other, and the steward's face and body dripped wet on the red carpet.

"Boats on the lee side, sir," he said, gasping for breath. "Where's Mr. Crabtree, sir?" As he asked the question he saw the body crouched against the wall where a wave had thrown it, but his surprise was deadened by this greater terror. "Praise Gawd, we ain't a passenger ship!" he said, and was gone again into the darkness.

Riverton made his difficult way to the place where a half-seen group of seamen were trying to lower boats into the sucking depths.

"As well jump overboard," thought Riverton, but he climbed in when ordered to do so, conscious of no terror, but only a detached interest, and a growing inner excitement. He had become consumed with the conviction that the end of the adventure was not yet. He found himself holding his breath, as though each moment safely passed put danger that much farther behind him.

Overhead he caught fragments of commands, broken off and twisted by the wind. Something appeared to have gone wrong with the falls. He saw shadowy figures of sailors clinging to the davits, working at the ropes, and then one of them leaped into the boat beside him.

At the same instant a cry broke out above them; there was the sensation of being swept up against the clouds, of hovering over the deck, of being sucked down, down into the open mouth of the sea. He seemed to remember sailors sawing wildly at the ropes—the sudden wrench as they broke free.

But of this he could not be sure. For the first time fear stifled him. He could no longer see the ship. He lay flat in the bottom of the boat, his arms clenched under one of the low seats, cowering before his first encounter with the infinite.

Then a hand shook his shoulder and a voice shouted in his ear:

"Bail 'er out, if yer don't wanna be swamped!"

He raised himself then, and accepted the metal pail that was thrust into his hand. Through the age-long night he was comfortably conscious of the presence of the other man beside him.

By morning he was so exhausted that his arms moved mechanically, attached to a body that was almost asleep. He failed to notice that while the sea was still high the wind was almost gone and the sky had cleared.

The first light of dawn roused him abruptly. Still bemused by exhaustion he looked out across the sea with a feeling that he had never known before—a gratitude for the blood in his veins, the breath in his body. It was fully a minute before he thought of his companion. Then he turned his head and looked straight into the face of the man he had seen at the porthole, the man who had killed Crabtree, the man who had seen Crabtree give him the diamonds.

And he saw in the man's eyes that his life hung by a hair—on less than the toss of a die.

Seen thus in daylight, he remembered him well: an enormous, slow-moving creature with a wide face, huge as the countenance of the moonfaced giant of Riverton's childhood, and abnormally long, corded arms, and a mop of childishly blond hair. He had seen the fellow many times, scrubbing down the decks, barefoot, in a sleeveless jersey displaying his massive chest and short, sinewy neck. Riverton remembered particularly the man's hands, strong as steel traps, and his small eyes, set close together in his wide expanse of face.

Instinctively he glanced down at his own hands, and thought how womanish they looked by comparison.

His slight physique was wasted by illness, worn down by the exhausting experience of the night. He saw himself again at the mercy of a force that could not be reached by reason, that could be countered only in kind.

Instinctively he looked about for help, but the ship and the boats were gone. The sea was a bare welter of tossing waves, above which the rising sun shone as through a mist. The last wisps of wind-blown cloud were a bouquet of tinted flowers against the blue bowl of the sky. It seemed a pity to die on such a beautiful morning. If he only had some sort of weapon!

The sailor, interpreting his movement, laughed. He seemed good-natured enough, and in no particular hurry.

"Why don't you call a cop?"

Riverton's thoughts were racing now. No good, of course, to offer the fellow the diamonds. As long as Riverton lived there would be a witness to the killing of Crabtree. Riverton dead, and there would be no witness to anything, if once the sailor could escape this smiling Circe, this ocean with her bland silver miles of untraveled waters. If he could escape! That was it, of course—the weapon in Riverton's hands—this subtle brain of his, stronger than knives and pistols.

"You might as well hand over the belt," said the sailor. His tongue did not speak the word "diamonds," but his eyes held it. They burned covetously under his ruffled blond brows in the midst of his wide, good-natured face. "If you hand over the belt wit'out no fuss, I ain't in no hurry—about the rest," the man went on. His eyes blazed and his tongue wet his dry lips.

"I guess I'll keep the belt," said Riverton. He saw the man's hands clench and unclench on the gunwale of the boat. The look between them was as close as the look between duelists fencing with rapiers. And like a duelist, Riverton poised himself as he delivered his thrust. "The diamonds won't do you much good, if you can't get away—from the sea."

The fellow winced.

"Touché! Touché!" thought Riverton exultantly.

"Aw, you can't bluff me. I'll get away right enough. There's provisions, and there's ships passing."

"Not here. We're way out of the course—somewhere in the middle of the south Atlantic. There won't be any ships passing here."

"Well, I'll take my chance. And I'll take—the belt, too." He half rose, and Riverton had the feeling of a mountain about to fall upon him. He must strike up at that threatening mass, swiftly, with keen words.

"Suppose I were to get you back into the path of ships—that would be worth waiting for, wouldn't it?"

For a moment he didn't know whether the man had heard him, so contorted with desire was his face. Then the sailor relaxed again against the thwart.

"Well, speak up! Whaddo you mean?"

"I mean that I understand mathematics—enough to find out where we are—enough to set our course. I suppose there'll be charts and a compass and a sextant in the locker. Well, with luck and good weather I can get us back into the way of ships where we'll stand a chance of being picked up. If you'll agree to let me alone, I'll do it, and when we *are* picked up, I'll give you half the diamonds—and I'll hold my tongue about Crabtree."

There was a long pause, broken only by the slap of waves against the side; a ridiculously trifling sound to be filling this immensity. Riverton remembered hearing it against the canvas of a canoe on a Maine lake, with a girl in a shade hat sitting opposite. His heart in this moment yearned over that girl, although he had never loved her.

His mind followed each shade of thought passing behind the sailor's light-blue eyes on which his own were undeviatingly fixed. The fellow was weighing the chances of what he said being true. He was thinking that it would be worth his while to wait, to contain that longing that was urging him to hold in his hands those shining pebbles of his desire, if by waiting he could escape.

And then there was that faint wavering that meant doubt—doubt of Riverton's good faith; and then again that shining look of greed. Why be content with half the plunder when the whole was within his grasp? His eyes dropped. Riverton knew as though he had heard the words that this man would accept his conditions, and the instant that land rose above the horizon, or a sail bore down on them, or a funnel smudged the sky, he would kill again, quickly and without malice, leaving no trace.

Well, so be it, if in the interval Riverton's shrewd brain, that served him so well, could think of no trick. At least he would have time—hours, perhaps days, for thinking and planning.

The sailor's grudging voice broke in on his thoughts:

"The locker's behind you. There'll be grub and drink there. I'll rig a sail when you're ready to take our bearings."

"You agree, then?"

"Sure! W'at else can I do?"

Their glances met and wavered and fell away. It was clear that each was thinking his separate thoughts.

YET in the days that followed they were outwardly friendly enough. They took watch and watch about, holding the boat's nose to her course across the blue plate of the Atlantic. Calm seas and brisk breezes favored them. The ocean upheld them tranquilly, as on a round blue dish that moved as they moved, so that they were always in the middle of it. The sailor doled out their grub in modest rations, and every noon Riverton took their bearings and set their course.

As yet they suffered no privation, unless it was the loss of sleep. In this way only their distrust was apparent. A dozen times in the night watches the sleeper would start up, broad awake, look aft to the imperturbable figure at the oar, and then, momentarily satisfied, compose himself again for slumber.

Much of the nights Riverton spent lying on his back staring up at the brilliant stars that looked like open windows of radiance in the close heavens; or else seemed so infinitely remote that, computing their distance, he felt sick and dizzy, and clung with damp hands to the thwarts of the swaying goat, feeling himself about to plunge off into that star-sprinkled void.

Then he would close his eyes, thinking,

thinking; sometimes he thought of fantastic ways of outwitting the sailor. Sometimes he thought of things and places and people forgotten for years; perhaps now never to be seen again. Then he would drift off to sleep, and start up, feeling crushing hands on his neck—hands strong as steel traps—and wake to the bare sea, the heaving boat, and the motionless figure sitting in the stern.

During the day they would sometimes talk together. Once Riverton, rousing from a long reverie, heard the sailor singing—of all things—"The Sidewalks of New York." His voice bellowed impudently over the wide ocean:

"Out in front of Casey's old brown wooden stoop
On a summer evening——"

"You from New York?" he asked idly. He had been speculating on this personality, known intimately now for several days, and yet not known at all.

"Yup! Avenoo A."

"How'd you happen to go to sea?"

"Kid foolishness. Stowed away aboard a tramp, and they made me work for my grub. Been sailin'—or stokin'—ever since."

And then came the question that Riverton had asked himself many times, with amusement, with curiosity, with speculative wonder:

"What are you going to do with the diamonds—when you get them?"

The seaman shot a glance at him, suddenly distrustful.

"None o' your damn business."

"I know it isn't," said Riverton coolly. "Don't tell me if you don't want to." He turned his head away indifferently, but his thoughts were busy with his companion. What, he wondered, could be the ideal of happiness of such a man? What dream would he try to buy for himself with his belt of diamonds? For that, unless one were a miser loving gold for its own sake, was what fortune meant—the power to buy a dream.

He knew well enough what he would buy for himself, but he was sufficiently the philosopher to question whether the reality, once bought, would have the fascination of the dream.

It was drawing on to sunset. The sharp edge of the sea was veiled with spilled color; sky and water became an empty crystal ball filled with floating light. It was the hour of deck-chair confidences, spoken softly between long glances. The seaman broke the silence with an extraordinary sound: a long-drawn sentimental sigh.

"I'll buy me a grog house in Shanghai, down by the wharves." Spoken so, the words had a pleasantly reminiscent sound, like the words of old popular songs. "And I'll have me some of them dance girls, with ukuleles——"

Riverton's lips twitched, but he lay still with his head turned away and said nothing.

THE next phase of their adventure began when their grub ran out and the water got low, and the scavenger fish began to follow the boat, lying just under the water. Riverton remembered stories of men lost in the desert, watching the vultures circling, waiting——

Nursing hunger, the seaman became moody. His sullen eyes hardly left Riverton, and his mouth was close, greedy. His face became again the face in the porthole, ferocious with desire.

Riverton's sleep was filled with nightmares. Except when exhaustion overcame him, he lay craftily with closed eyes, plotting. In the daytime he scarcely took his eyes from the horizon, for he calculated that they had reached again the path of ships, and he knew that the first time that curved line of the sea was broken by a hull, the moment had come.

He did not tell the seaman what he knew, but he fancied that the other guessed. He seemed to read a mounting tide of determination in the hollow, burning glance that followed him.

On the third day of fasting they cut down the sail, and used it for a shelter from the sun. They lay still, one at either end of the boat, their eyes alternately on the horizon and on each other. Around

them the water boiled with the waiting fish.

Riverton thanked God when the dark came on, shutting from him the sight of those staring eyes in which he saw the beginnings of delirium.

Weak as he was, his own brain was clear. He made a last reckoning of his chances. If the sailor went mad with fever, he, Riverton, had no chance, ship or no ship; if a ship appeared while the sailor slept, he might win through; but if a ship appeared, and the sailor saw it —well, the fish overside would dine well, that was all.

He thought again of waiting until the other slept, and of creeping upon him. The thought was not a new one, but now, as before, he dismissed it. He knew he would have no chance against the other man's waking. Nothing but a miracle could save him. With a wry smile he admitted to himself that he was not in a position to demand a miracle.

The night wore on. The seaman's delirious wanderings died down in heavy slumber. Toward dawn Riverton relaxed and slept, for he had decided, when the moment came, what he would do.

The sun rose into a sky without a cloud, and by its light Riverton saw the peak of a sail cut by the horizon line. His heart shook with mingled joy and fear. Suppose it passed by and left them! Suppose it came on and found them!

He turned toward his companion and found the man's eyes fixed not on the ship but on him. He knew that the moments of danger passed were as nothing to the peril in which he now stood. The seaman, maddened with privation and the near attainment of his dearest desire, was beyond the power of reason to stay. And Riverton had no force to oppose to this madness. His weakness was so great that the world swung about him when he lifted his head.

Now suddenly civilization was swamped. For these two men it might never have existed. Until this instant they had held to some vestige of illusion that it is possible for man to rise above his prehistoric ancestor. But now, as though that shining sail had been a signal, pretense fell from them and the situation emerged for what it was—raw desire to kill against the determination to survive.

Hatred burst between them like a flash of gunpowder. It had been there all along, but quiescent. Now it flared into life.

The seaman rose unsteadily, bracing himself with his knees. Joy was in him, for his enemy was in his hands. Blessed is it to slay and satisfying to the heart of man! He was blinded by the flash of unseen stones, brighter than the sun. Before his eyes danced fantastic visions of a tidy little grog shop overlooking the broad Pacific and the wharves of Shanghai. He heard the tinkling bracelets of dancing girls.

Riverton lay still, holding himself steady. He saw that the difficult thing about dueling is not to strike, but to refrain from striking too soon. The thing to do is to wait for your opening, and then to thrust home so there will be no need of a second blow.

He saw that the man advancing on him was essentially mad, and rejoiced that it was so. He unbuckled the chamois belt and held it in his hand.

"Hi!" he shouted. "Come get your share of the loot. It'll buy you a hundred grog shops! There's nothing you can't buy for half a belt of diamonds!"

"I'll have it all." The voice of the sailor was rasping soft; it seemed to shake the boat.

"Half of it's mine," taunted Riverton. "Half of it's mine!"

"Not one shiny sparkler of it's yours. Here's days and weeks I've been lying here, waitin' for the time to take 'em——"

"Take them, then!" taunted Riverton. "But you never will. You haven't the nerve. You'll lie thinking of your Shanghai wharves and your slant-eyed girls, and the jingle of their ukuleles——"

He stopped. His words seemed to have pulled the crouching giant toward him. He was standing upright, swaying. "Mad as a loon," thought Riverton, timing his

blow. He lifted the swinging belt tauntingly over his head.

"Diamonds!" he cried. "King's ransom!" He watched the sailor reach out his greedy hand, heard his laugh of triumph, and, with the last vestige of his failing strength, he threw the diamond belt into the sea.

It splashed among the circling fish, lay for an instant on the surface, and began to sink, too far out for any oar to reach it. The sailor, seeing only his prize eluding him at the very moment of capture, hurled himself into the sea, reaching for it with long strokes. The waves, with the sound of a giant kettle boiling, closed over him.

A YEAR later, Riverton, following the lead of the girl with whom he was riding, drew rein on the crest of a hill overlooking his pleasant suburban estate in Westchester. The afternoon was crisp and clear; the ride had been exhilarating; the girl was very pretty; the horses were good—and his own. Yet, for all that, there was something wrong with the picture. Perhaps it was that odd note in the girl's voice when she spoke.

"It's a divine place, isn't it? But I think the best thing about it is the way you got it—your fortune, I mean. I do think these—er—sudden fortunes are so romantic. Gold, wasn't it?"

"Diamonds," said Riverton shortly. Then, looking down into the pretty, excited face, he softened. "I nearly lost them once, too. A man tried to take them from me, but at night I worried them out of the seam of the belt where they were sewed. He went after the belt and never discovered the diamonds were gone."

"Never?" she breathed, hanging on his words.

"Well," said Riverton grimly, "not until —too late."

"How thrilling! And you never lost them—not one?"

"Not one!" He looked into her eyes, wondering how much of that softness was due to the fact that he had "never lost any—not one." But after all she was so pretty, and he was rather fond of her—deucedly fond, if the truth were told. He said something he hadn't meant to say.

"They're pretty diamonds. Shall I give you one?" The soft eyes dropped and he went on persuasively: "When I was tossing around in my lifeboat I promised myself to buy myself this—all this—the house, the horses, the life. And—and I quite had a thought of you as fitting into the picture. I remembered that summer in Maine, you see. But you never were very nice to me there."

"You're not pretending you were in love with me then, are you?" she demanded.

"You're not pretending you're in love with me now!" he retorted.

"Yes, I am," she said. "I'm pretending just as hard as I can!"

Her eyes held him and drew him. Her lips enchained him. After all, it was not her fault if the captured reality would never be as sweet as the uncaptured dream.

Curious thing—this greed, that made them all kin—himself and Crabtree, and the moonfaced sailor, and this girl with the reflected glint in her eyes of little shining stones.

A GOOD PLACE TO START FROM

STENOGRAPHERS who think they have no future are confessing their own limitations and not describing the opportunities given them by their jobs. Some of the biggest men in professional and business life to-day began with the stenographer's pencil. Among them are George W. Perkins, the millionaire; Frank W. Vanderlip, the great banker; Joseph P. Tumulty, former secretary to Woodrow Wilson and now an attorney in Washington; Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis; George B. Cortelyou, president of the Consolidated Gas Company in New York; H. P. Pope, of the United States Steel Corporation; Edward Bok, the writer; and William Loeb, Jr., former collector of the port of New York.

A Chat With You

FEBRUARY is notoriously a disagreeable month. In December we are fresh and eager for the sharp frosts and for Christmas. In January we still carry on well. In March we have the first soft winds that carry a promise of a welcome spring. But February! Then, it is true that the days begin not only to lengthen but to seem longer. Then, if ever, we look at the pictures of wealthy folks sunning themselves at Palm Beach in gay bathing suits and think that sometimes we might envy them. We never do envy them. It is better, to our way of thinking, to take seasons just as we try to take people—as they come. It takes all sorts of people to make up a world and all sorts of seasons to make up a genuine year. To duck February by flying South is like ducking marriage, or having children, or experiencing vicissitudes of various sorts. It may be easier, but you miss something. Half the pleasure of old age must lie in the ability to describe vividly to one's grandchildren the terrible winters one has known in the old days.

* * * *

SLEET and icy pavements, muddy roads and northwest winds, chill mornings and frosty midnights, blizzards of various sorts and degrees—these things are charming to look back upon and boast about.

There are other good points about February. There are two holidays, for instance, the birthdays of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. If February gave us two such Americans as these there must be a heart of gold in the rough old month after all. The old almanac makers who still half believed in astrology placed the month under two signs. Aquarius, the water bearer, ruled the first half of it—not a bad idea for a prohibition land like this. And the last half lay under the domination of that mysterious sign of the fish which in old days had somehow become identified with the beginnings of Christianity. You will find it inscribed over and over in the catacombs of Rome. Abraham Lincoln was born under Aquarius. He never took a drink. George Washington came under Pisces. He, like Timothy, occasionally took a little wine for his stomach's sake, was strict about taking the communion and also was a vestryman in the church. The only other holiday in the month is the feast of St. Valentine. He lived so long ago that we scarcely know what his habits were. At any rate his memory lends a little glamour to the frozen time of year.

* * * *

HERE is another reflection suitable for the slipperiest, sleetiest day in the month. We have always felt that the times which seemed most unpleasant, when misery came closest to us to chill us with her frozen breath—we have felt that these were the most productive and creative times. When we are happy and smug and comfortable we are only laying up for ourselves future days of depression. When we face a buffeting gale we are stimulated to the thought and energy that makes for happiness some later time. In a land of perpetual summer—either of the seasons, or of the emotions and intellect—people

wax lazy and indolent. We would not care to be Eskimos, nor have we any desire to be South Sea Islanders with garlands of hibiscus in our hair. We take our stand somewhere between the two. Were February taken from us we would miss her. No longer might we boast how we fell down the ice-coated steps without breaking our neck, nor how high the drifts were between the house and the barn. A frostbitten ear is a sad thing at the time, but later it may be an object to which one points with pride.

* * * *

THE weather bureau says that January is the coldest month in the year, but somehow February feels colder. It is the shortest month in the year, but somehow it feels longer. It is perhaps the best working month in the year. Always there has been something doing in February. For instance, gold was discovered in Australia in February. Captain Cook, the alleged pirate, was hanged in February. The Russo-Japanese War started in the same month of another year. It was in February that the *Maine* was blown up and one year later in February the treaty of peace between Spain and the United States was ratified by the Senate. Upper and lower Canada were joined in February eighty-four years ago. The first presidential election occurred in February, 1789. If we only had the proper almanacs at hand we might keep this up for a long time. Discovering important things that happened in February is almost as good as cross-word puzzles. We will stop, however, by announcing that the most important thing for February at the present writing is the next number of THE POPULAR which comes out two weeks from today.

* * * *

IT opens with a splendid new serial of outdoors in the Northwest, "The Sleeper of the Moonlit Ranges," by Edison Marshall. It has a complete novel, "The Reader of Faces," by Howard Fielding. There is a corking funny story, "Jimpson the Benevolent," by Hamish McLaurin. There is a sea story by Oswald Wildridge, a railroad story by Calvin Johnston, a tale of New York at its jazziest, by Montanye, a Western story by Arthur Chapman and a tale of the Great Macumber by Rohde. All these are exceptional pieces of fiction. There is not a commonplace one in the lot.

To get back to February for a moment. As we said it is a good month for work, also for play. Ice boating, skating, snowshoeing, skiing, billiards, squash and basket ball are all to be recommended. But the king of all February indoor sports, the most seasonable, satisfying and agreeable is reading THE POPULAR. All you need is a lamp, a chair—maybe a pipe. If you order in advance the news dealer will be sure to furnish the magazine.

Cleopatra's Cup

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "Fires of Fame," "The Diamond of the Diplomats," Etc.

Time and tide wait for no man, but the Great Macumber makes the clock reel off five hours in a minute flat.

THE Great Macumber had been philosophizing on the subject of stocks as we came from the tall and spidery building below Trinity in which his old-time brokers, the Messrs. Faraday & Fellowes, have their offices.

"It may seem a paradox to you, lad," he'd been saying, "but it's during times of deepest depression that the soundest investments are made. That's why it was my choice this afternoon to fly a modest and cautious kite on margin. Prosperous days like these, youngster, are the kind for sane speculation. A body may——"

Macumber broke off in the middle of the sentence, and in the abrupt discontinuance of his discourse on the higher finance I sensed a rebuke. That rankled. Although I had been keeping my eyes to the front, as is wisdom's part when one wears freshly polished shoes and walks through Wall Street in business hours, he'd had my respectful attention.

"Oh, I'm listening," said I with a suitable flash of spirit. "Not particularly interested, as you may imagine, but listening nevertheless!"

All the hauteur of outraged innocence was in the side glance which I threw to my right, but the Great One wasn't there to receive it. Instead I looked into the amused eyes of a freckled youth in the uniform of the District Telegraph messenger service who had materialized in Macumber's place at my elbow.

"*I* ain't your friend, mister," the boy quite needlessly informed me, and he jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "Somebody just give him th' hook!"

A half dozen paces to the rear I saw the Great Macumber. The "hook" still was upon him—the crook of a walking stick that had been thrust from the window of a closed automobile and fastened to his arm as he strode at the sidewalk's edge.

"Come back, lad!" he called. "We're spared the subway, by the grace of the Lord and the benign hospitality of Larry Ketterin!"

The tanned and smiling face in the limousine's window was no unfamiliar one, although it had been months since I'd seen young Ketterin. During the winter before he had been one of the fixtures in the

bridge game at the Troubadours, Macumber's favorite among his dozen clubs.

The big car's passenger nodded to me.

"Hop in," he invited. "I'm bound your way. Hotel Rawley, isn't it?"

When he had climbed into the machine the Great One sat gazing at Ketterin under quizzically puckered brows. We had turned north in Broadway and were approaching the dusty green oasis which surrounds city hall when he spoke.

"I'm sorry, Lawrence, genuinely sorry."

Ketterin had been staring out abstractedly over the heads of the pedestrian crowds. He seemed a little startled.

"Sorry for what, professor?"

"I was hoping that your uncle's illness wouldn't prove serious. He's a man I hold in high regard, Larry."

"How do you know that it *is* serious?" demanded Ketterin quickly. "Please don't tell me the newspapers have——"

"They've printed no alarming reports, so far as I am aware."

"Then how did you come to know——"

"I add well, Lawrence. John Fellowes chanced to mention to me a while ago that the old gentleman hadn't been downtown for a week; and what would keep him away but sickness? Then I ran across you. Last week I saw your name listed among the members of a party starting from Bar Harbor for the Caribbean aboard the Dillingwell yacht, yet here you are in town. Do you wonder I'm led to the unwelcome assumption that Lawrence Ketterin the elder is suffering from no small indisposition?"

"Simple—and at the same time uncanny," said Ketterin. "Who'd have fancied *you* a reader of the society columns!"

"All the columns of all the newspapers are amusement columns to me," said Macumber soberly. "Hardly a day passes but they point me, somewhere, a way to diversion. So you find no fallacy in my mathematics, Lawrence? It's bad, then?"

"Damned bad," replied Ketterin. "Pneumonia."

"They called you back?"

"Didn't have to. Clive Dillingwell had some odds and ends of business to straighten up in New York, and the *Artemis* came into the Hudson last Sunday. I went to call on Uncle Lawrence, and found him in bed. For a man close to seventy he's devilish careless of his health. He'd let another cold go too long without attention, and it finally had him down.

"I had a talk with Doctor Canby in the evening, and the *Artemis* sailed without me on Monday afternoon. Good thing, too. That night Uncle Lawrence's cold had developed into pneumonia—and there's no telling. I'm standing by, naturally. You'll treat all this as confidential, won't you, professor? I won't need to explain to *you*——"

"I know the Street," interrupted the Great One. "Depend on it, I'll set no direful rumors going to unsettle the market. Indeed, I've taken a bit gamble that the general rise of stocks will continue, and Amalgamated Metals is one of my lines."

The favored nephew and namesake of old Lawrence Ketterin smiled.

"I won't criticize your judgment," said he. "And Ketterin Copper might not be a bad hunch, either. Call it a tip, if you wish."

"I'd call it more than that, coming from a Ketterin. Thank you, Lawrence. May I say you surprise me, though? I hadn't thought you troubled your head about trifles of trade."

"I haven't, much, until this last week," said Ketterin seriously. "That's been because Uncle Lawrence hasn't wished me to. It's been his pleasure—yes, you could call it his hobby—to see that one young Lawrence Ketterin got the good times out of life that an earlier young Lawrence Ketterin missed.

"Playing the gilded youth, you might say, has been a duty with me. It's what has been expected of Lawrence Ketterin, second. I honestly believe, Macumber, that if I'd been given my own head I would have been making myself useful in business within three months after my graduation from Yale."

"You astonish me, Lawrence!" ejaculated the Great One. "Must I believe that

you've really no taste for the absolute romance you've been living."

"Romance!" scoffed Ketterin. "I've been bored stiff most of the time. All my adventures to date have been personally conducted, with somebody's valet worrying about my linen. Thank God, I've never descended to having a man of my own! I balked there."

"But this voyage of Dillingwell's."

"Three valets on board; captain who used to be a lieutenant commander in the navy and crew enough to man a gunboat. There'd be more sport and thrill on a United Fruit Company boat. At least a man wouldn't know every one else's poker game and drinking songs. If you want to know where romance is, professor, it's here—time, the present!"

Macumber blinked.

"You're refreshing, Lawrence. I've envied your carefree existence more than once. And in what form, may I ask, have you found romance in New York this trip?"

Some passing sight appeared to claim the vagrant interest of Lawrence Ketterin, second.

"I wasn't talking of anything specific," he protested, peering interestedly out the window. "I mean there's more romance in business, in getting out on your own, in building——"

"Oh, come, Lawrence!" chuckled Macumber. "Who's the lady?"

I thought Ketterin had flushed before; now I was sure of it. His eyes went to Macumber's, and dropped.

"Who said anything about women?" he complained.

"You did," replied the Great One. "Plainly enough for me. I've an extremely sensitive ear. There was a quality in your voice, Lawrence, that I'm sure I couldn't mistake. Don't try to make me think you're huffed, my boy. You're dying to tell me about her. Aye, they always are!"

Ketterin shrugged impatiently, and for a matter of a mile conversation languished. Macumber filled his pipe. Smoke dense and vitriolic assailed the delicate, rich fabrics with which the limousine was trimmed.

Looking up at length from a prolonged study of the nickeled robe rail, Ketterin found the Great One's eyes fixed contemplatively upon him. He spoke with a note of defiance.

"There are girls aboard the *Artemis*, of course. Damned nice girls of their sort. What'll it all amount to with 'em? Champagne and chaperons. Three or four or five weeks of it. Maybe an exceptional moon one night, a pair of useless people engaged. In the spring a wedding, and a column of names in the newspapers for you—after which it'll take more useful people to take care of 'em than they needed before. Only difference is they won't be needing the chaperon."

The Great One nodded his sympathy with the sentiments of Lawrence Ketterin, second.

"I'm acquainted with the type," said he. "Merely ornamental. A girl who does something——"

"Yes. That's it. There's—there's more *to* her. Substantial. You know. Take a girl, for example, who's set out to be a cheer to the afflicted; more than that, a help to 'em."

"So-o," murmured Macumber. "A nurse, is it, Lawrence?"

"Bosh!" cried Ketterin.

"Just now occupied, I suppose," persisted the Great One, "in bringing cheer to Uncle Lawrence?"

The master of the limousine gave a moment to consideration.

"Well," said he, "I do think Miss Perrin is a mighty wonderful young person. She's so capable. Looks like a débutante, I swear, and yet she says she's been nursing four years. I didn't exactly have her in mind, though, when I spoke of romance. Look here! What do you say to this exhibit?"

Lawrence Ketterin had produced for our inspection a long and narrow panel of cardboard which had been reposing under a flap of his wallet. On this was mounted the photograph of a woman who, though young and pretty, had the look of

capability Ketterin had attributed to the nurse.

"This isn't your Miss Perrin?" queried Macumber.

"No," replied Ketterin. "Almost the direct opposite in type. Opposite in complexion. Miss Perrin is—well, you know that extravagantly gorgeous white gold that people are turning to? That's her hair, Macumber!"

The Great One still was eying the photograph. He appeared to have found something challenging in the direct and steady gaze which the sitter had turned upon the lens.

"And this lady, Lawrence?" he said softly. "Would it be indiscreet to ask you who she is, or is the question expected?"

"Ask ahead," invited Ketterin. "Your curiosity can be no greater than mine."

"Eh?"

"I mean I can't answer. I don't know who she is, myself."

"Oh, tush! There's an inscription in the lower corner of the photograph. It is only partly covered by your thumb."

Ketterin grinned.

"The thumb isn't where it is for any purpose of concealment, professor. You shall read the written word. But first I want to let you know how this darkly lovely lady came into my life. I know what a hand you are for mysteries—well, listen to this!"

"I listen," said Macumber, and settled back in his corner of the Elysian tonneau. Ketterin lighted a fresh cigarette.

"You mustn't get the idea that I've been philandering around," said he, "since I quit the crowd on the *Artemis*. I've been too worried about Uncle Lawrence to think of much else but him. Of course, I couldn't help noticing Miss Perrin, for she's become the high commander of the town house. Got the housekeeper subdued for the first time in *my* memory, and even has old Canby buffaloed for all that she's sweetly deferential when he's around. We struck it off from the first. Nurse Perrin and I—but that's not in the story.

"I'm coming to the lady of the photograph directly. She made her grand entrance yesterday. I was sitting in the library looking over the morning paper while Pillsbury ran over the mail. Uncle Lawrence's private secretary, you know—smirky sort of chap that I've never much liked, anyhow.

"I heard a sort of cluck and looked up to find Pillsbury facing me with his pussy-cat grin.

" 'Pardon me, sir,' he said, 'but this was in with your uncle's mail. I didn't realize until I'd opened it that it must be intended for Mr. Lawrence Ketterin, *second*. May I say she's indeed a beauty, sir?'

"Yes; that's about verbatim, professor. Way the fellow talks. Every time he opens his mouth I freshly regret the death of old Burdick. *There* was a real secretary.

"I glanced first at the superscription on the long envelope that Pillsbury handed to me. The writing didn't look like any I'd ever seen before. And I was absolutely certain I'd never seen the original of the photograph which the envelope contained.

" 'Don't think this is for me,' said I. 'I'm not acquainted with the lady.'

"The grin stayed on Pillsbury's face. He just murmured, 'Oh, Mr. Ketterin!' and went on ripping envelopes.

" 'Sure there wasn't a letter with this?' I asked him, freezing up. 'No other inclosure?'

" 'Nothing, sir,' he said. 'But there's something written on the photograph, I believe. I didn't read it, sir.' "

Macumber leaned forward. Ketterin had shifted the concealing thumb, and the photograph's inscription was before us. It was surely a strange one:

Millions like this! Everywhere! Pleasant prospect!

When their eyes lifted from the picture and met, Lawrence Ketterin was smiling, the Great Macumber frowning.

"Tell me what it means!" demanded Ketterin.

"Supply me with a clew," countered Macumber.

"You ask too much."

"It means nothing to you?"

"Less than nothing."

"How about this writing? Same as on the envelope?"

"Identically."

"It's not a woman's."

"I didn't think it was, at first glance."

The Great One glanced at me.

"What do you think, lad?"

I had an opinion on tap.

"Know any practical jokers, Ketterin?" I asked.

"Plenty."

"Then," said I, "single out the joker with the worst taste, and ask him for an explanation. A damned cad, I'd say, to make such use of a woman's photograph—any woman's!"

Ketterin shook his head.

"Wait a bit. Your view is the one I settled on, after I'd decided I wasn't being hooked on some new advertising dodge. I've never been much for women, and some of my friends are forever joking about it. But this thing isn't any joke. I've seen the lady herself—talked to her!"

Macumber, sacrificing the comfort of the cushions, sat suddenly erect.

"So soon! You have a feeling for words, Lawrence. Romance! Aye, that's it! The very essence of romance is speed. A man receives by mail the photograph of a beautiful stranger, and within a day he has met her! No wonder, son, you don't regret the *Artemis*."

I looked again into the bold eyes of the brunette. They seemed harder than they had before; calculating.

"So *that* was it!" said I

"*What* was it?" snapped the Great One. "What gleaming thought is in your mind, lad?"

"I don't think Ketterin needs to tell me the rest," I remarked. "The device becomes transparent. This woman is an adventuress of a type with which we're all more or less familiar. She saw, quite understandably, certain possibilities in an acquaintance with a man like Lawrence Ketterin, second. And she was enterprising enough, and original enough, to——"

"To direct his attention," interjected Macumber dryly, "to the fact that a million like herself are available to him? Tush, youngster! The writing's a man's, and the words have a sting of sarcasm.

"Your theory's untenable. If you've no objection, I'd much rather hear further from Ketterin. Come, Lawrence, tell me where you met her, and when and how!"

"The lady of the photograph materialized before my eyes last night," said Ketterin, "in the Gold Room at the Rhinelander. I was dining there, alone. While I was ordering a couple were brought to the next table. They had been seated before I looked up from the menu card and discovered in the woman a person in whom I could claim a considerable interest.

"She wore an evening gown of jade green, and made such a stunning picture in it that others stared as hard as I. My word, she was the best-looking woman in the restaurant!

"The tables were so arranged that her companion's back was toward me, and yet she and I were not directly face to face. I was at liberty to study her with no appearance of rudeness. Except when she was in conversation, which I observed was not often, her eyes were cast down. And the fellow who was with her, for a fact, wasn't any treat to look at.

"He was in evening dress, too, of course; and yet he managed to appear slovenly. He was obese, partly bald. His features, of which I got a glimpse several times when he turned his head to gaze around the room, were decidedly coarse. He wasn't the sort of man one sees most often at the Rhinelander, and to me he seemed a surprising companion for the lady in green. For, by heavens, she *is* a lady, Macumber!"

"I'll not argue the point," said the Great One placidly. "Keep to your story, Lawrence. How did you circumvent the escort?"

"I didn't have to bother my wits about that. In fact, I dare say the lady and I would be strangers still if she hadn't contrived a meeting.

"Ten or fifteen minutes must have passed before her eyes fell upon me. I quickly averted my gaze, but when I ven-

tured to look again toward her she still was staring. If I read her expression aright, it was one of amazement. She seemed to have recognized me—and yet not to wish the man opposite her to know that she had.

"From my own end, it was an extraordinary situation. She didn't nod, and yet her eyes seemed somehow, subtly, to hail me as a friend. Now understand, professor, I've been flirted with, but flirtation wasn't in her look. Rather a kind of restrained eagerness, so plain to be read that I expected momentarily she'd be calling me to her.

"Nothing of the sort happened, though. I made a devilish uncomfortable meal of it, being at so decided a disadvantage. Ordinarily I linger over coffee. I didn't last night. My impulse to get out of the place was stronger than my curiosity. She must have observed my preparations to leave. How she accomplished the thing, I don't know; but when my waiter brought the check a slip of paper was beneath it. On it she had written: 'Wait, please!'

"I was in more of a box than ever, then, but when I met her eyes again there was such pleading in them—absolutely, *pleading*—that I resolved to see the thing through.

"The bald person, too, was ready to go within a minute or two. He called for his check with a snapping of his fingers that sounded through the Gold Room like a racket of firecrackers. When the two rose, the woman's eyes commanded me to follow. I saw them halfway to the doors, and sauntered after them.

"I met the bald man on the way out. He was coming back toward the table he'd just left, and growling to himself. Beyond the entrance the woman in green was waiting. She addressed me breathlessly.

"'You're Lawrence Ketterin, aren't you?' she asked.

"'There's no mistake there,' said I. 'But you——'

"She didn't let me finish.

"'I know, I know!' she whispered. 'I'm a stranger to you *now*. But we have something in common, I assure you. We share an interest. You must help me! We must meet again!'

"'If you'll say just a word to enlighten me, madame,' I began, and once more she broke in.

"'I fear there's no time. I made an excuse to send him back to the table.' She glanced into the room, and her face filled with fright. 'Go, now. Please. He's returning—my husband!'

"The bald man came from the Gold Room so suddenly that I feared for a second he had surprised us in conversation. He scowled at me, but I returned his glare coolly enough to allay whatever suspicion he may have had. I took my time getting into my topcoat, and saw the two of them off together in a taxi before I got away from the check room."

Lawrence Ketterin leaned across Macumber to deposit an uncomfortably short cigarette end in the silver ash receiver fastened to the limousine door.

"That, professor," he said, "concludes our synopsis of preceding events. In the next installment——"

"In the next installment," spoke up the Great One quickly, "our hero'd better have a care for his skin."

"What do you mean?"

"That you're being invited, Lawrence, to walk in a wilderness that you may find peopled with beasts of prey. It behooves you to go with open eyes and well armed—or to go not at all."

"You think I'll hear from the original of this photograph again?"

"I wish there were as sure a gamble in Wall Street!"

"And your advice is not to make an appointment with her?"

Macumber didn't reply at once. When he did speak, his words were slowly delivered and cautious.

"Now, I'm not saying that, Lawrence. It's your party, not mine. The advice which I have given to you may be universally applied to the affairs of men. It's always wise to be on guard, alert, wouldn't you say?

"That you'll have opportunity to see the lady again I've not the slightest doubt.

and I'm curious mysel' to know what the game is. But go slow. Be wary about committing yoursel', my boy. If it pleases you, as I earnestly hope it will, keep me informed of your progress with the lady of the Rhinelander. I might prove able to be of service to you. Mind that, Lawrence, and—— What, home so soon! It's been a far shorter trip than by tube, eh, lad? You'll come in for a nip of the MacVickar, Ketterin? Ah, well, another time we'll drink together to Romance!"

II.

IF speed be the essence of romance, as Macumber holds, then his singular achievement in the case of Mr. Lawrence Ketterin, second, must be numbered among the most romantic of the Great One's exploits.

Downtown again we went that day after the quickest of luncheons, for we were not playing that week and the afternoon was free. Once more I found myself in Wall Street, studying a board covered with figures that to me were meaningless while Macumber had further indulgence in the mysteries of the market.

"Now, lad," said he, when his business had been transacted and he came striding out of Fellowes' office, "now we'll devote ourselves to Larry Ketterin's little problem. We shall have a try at a game called 'stalking the stalkers,' which is cousin to the contest known as 'cheating the cheaters.'"

"The game would be interesting," I confessed, "but I can't see that we're equipped to play it successfully. What would our move be?"

"First, youngster, we look up the jade-green lady of the Gold Room."

"What do you intend to use for a clew, maestro?"

"Ketterin supplied the best of clews in the photograph."

"You think she'll be about the Rhinelander?"

"Hoighty-toighty! Do you think I'm insane? No, lad, we'll proceed by subway to Madison Square."

"What do you expect to find there?"

"The studio from which the photograph came. Wasn't the name plainly embossed on the mounting? Unhappy youth, was it only the writing on the picture itself that you observed?"

A quarter hour later the Great One led the way into a not particularly prepossessing photographer's shop in Broadway just north of the square of the Garden and laid a bill on the show case.

"That," said he, "is payment in advance for a bit of trouble you'll be put to. I'm trying to locate some one who sat for a portrait here."

"How long ago?" asked the proprietor, with a respectful eye on Macumber's bank note.

The Great One, to my surprise, had an immediate and definite answer.

"Within the last month."

"That ought to be easy. We don't keep records only from one year to another. What's the name?"

"It *was* Miss Castle," said Macumber uncertainly, "but I can't for the life of me recollect the name of the chap she married. You save prints of your subjects, don't you? If I could just run over them——"

"Sure. They're all in a jumble back there, but you're welcome to look all you please. This way. I'll light up for you."

In a stuffy rear room Macumber and I sorted through great piles of unmounted negatives which had been thrown helter-skelter onto the shelves of a dusty closet. I grew discouraged after having been confronted by a hundred or so uninteresting faces.

"What if the photograph wasn't taken this year?" I asked. "I'm afraid, maestro, that——"

"Tush!" snapped the Great One. "It *was* taken this year."

"Why do you think so?"

"It's no thought of mine, lad. It's knowledge—aye, and here's the lady hersel' in the same pose we saw her before. Will you note it's a new fall suit she's wearing? And the month is September, isn't it?"

"Luck makes your guess good," said I,

after a glance at the negative he was waving triumphantly beneath my nose. "But you'll admit, maestro, that there have been other Septembers before this."

Macumber surveyed me scornfully.

"Will you never be learning to use your eyes, youngster?" he demanded. "The women haven't been wearing those long-pointed collars, I'll guarantee you, for more than thirty days!"

The proprietor of the studio came at Macumber's hail.

"Oh," said he, *"that's* your friend! A hurry job it was she wanted—just a couple of days ago. She left her name and address, but came back and got the photos herself the same afternoon. Half dozen that she needed right away. Let's see, what's the number on the negative?" He consulted an index file. "Downing's the name you were trying to think of, mister. Mrs. Henry Downing, your friend is now; and she's living at the York Arms Apartments."

"That's somewhere in the neighborhood?"

"Twenty-ninth Street, I think. Big new building. Walk on up Broadway, and you'll see it to the west."

To the York Arms we went, thus specifically directed. Without difficulty we found the building, but Mrs. Henry Downing we didn't find.

"Ain't been anybody of that name in the house for a year back, anyhow," the elevator attendant informed us.

"Trail's end," said I, but the Great One seemed highly pleased.

"What I expected, lad," he said. "Now I feel fully justified in taking the negative—didn't think I'd left it behind, did you?—down to police headquarters. It's barely possible, don't you think, they may know the lady at the bureau of identification?"

Macumber's errand at headquarters, as he pointed out, was an errand for one. I went on alone to the Rawley, and in no more than an hour he joined me there. He was glowing.

"The lady hasn't exactly a record, youngster," he said, "but I was lucky enough to run across a fellow who knew her. In the light of the new knowledge, I'd better telephone to Lawrence Ketterin and emphasize my warning. Get him on the wire, please."

"What's the game?" I asked, looking about for the phone directory.

"One too deep for me to fathom just yet. But there's time enough to get to the bottom of it. Ketterin may thank his stars, I'll tell you, that he offered us a lift this day."

I had found the book and the number, and put in the call. A moment later I turned blankly to the Great One.

"Ketterin's not there," I reported. "He left the house a couple of hours ago, and carried a week-end bag with him. Said he might not be back for a day or two. They don't seem to know where he's gone."

"I'm afraid," said Macumber, "he's gone to a funeral. Not literally, perhaps—but it's a blow, lad. Bad!"

But before we sat down to dinner we had news of the vanished Ketterin. It came in a hastily scrawled note bearing a special-delivery stamp which was brought to our rooms as we were starting for the grill.

Ketterin had written:

My Dear Macumber: I scribble this in haste, for I've a train to catch. Matters have developed swiftly in re Rhinelander friend. Had phone call from her soon after I reached home, and went to meet her on learning what was in the wind.

Briefly, here's the story behind that photograph. The woman is a Mrs. Downing. Has a no-good husband—the person with her in the Gold Room—and left him, having means of her own. Met Uncle Lawrence by seeking advice on financial matters. He took considerable interest in her—absolutely fatherly, and all that. You know him well enough to understand.

It seems uncle wrote a letter to Mrs. Downing that was susceptible of two interpretations. Husband got hold of it, and threatened trouble. Nothing more than a damned blackmailer. Was trying to hold Uncle Lawrence up when L. K. was ordered to bed. That photo was intended for uncle; and the sentences enigmatic to us represented a polite but forceful suggestion that the newspapers would be filled with well-illustrated scandal unless there was a settlement.

Mrs. D. is a damned fine woman. Been doing

what she can to protect Uncle Lawrence. Even pretended to become reconciled to bald-headed scoundrel in the hope of regaining possession of letter.

D. started West last night. Mrs. D. follows this afternoon. I'm going on same train. She has some sort of scheme I haven't been fully let in on yet, but in which I'm to play a heavy part. Thus my sudden departure. When I see you again I'll probably have a better tale to unfold—and a letter for L. K.'s own hands to destroy.

L. KETTERIN, SECOND.

"Clarifying," I remarked as I handed back the letter to Macumber.

He eyed me solemnly.

"Aye, it is that. And the devil of it is that poor Lawrence will likely be on a through flyer which won't be stopping for telegrams for many hundred miles."

"Why'd you wire him?"

"To call him back, of course. I've a thought—and it's come to me suddenly, lad—that young Mr. Ketterin would be doing better in New York than riding out into the open spaces."

"You don't think he's in actual danger?"

"Not himsel', perhaps, but—well, just what the danger is may be quickly learned. A single phone call will do it."

It wasn't until after we had dined that Macumber made his call. He put it through from one of the booths beside the Rawley's switchboard. His expression when he came forth held a queer contrast of relish and rue, and in his eyes was the light of battle.

"I've at least a partial corroboration of my brand-new theory, lad," said he. "If I'm right there'll be a deal to be done—aye, a miracle to be worked—between now and eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. 'Twill be faster work than we've ever tried our hand at before. We *might* scheme out a kidnaping, to be sure; but what a mess we'd be in if I couldn't prove my point!"

The Great One met my stare with a tight-lipped smile.

"It's a remarkable mind we're pitted against in this matter," he went on, "and in the circumstances defeat would be no disgrace."

"Who," I demanded, "is the possessor of this remarkable mind, do you think?"

"If only I knew," replied Macumber, "our problem would be largely simplified. There'll have been a monstrous web in the spinning around old Lawrence Ketterin's sick room, I judge. To get at the spider, though, I must be seeking an ally." He jammed on his hat. "And it's not too soon now to be looking her up."

"Her?"

"Aye. Who but the golden-haired Miss Perrin, R. N.?"

III.

I SAT up long for Macumber, and was preparing to turn in when he finally showed up.

"A little luck is with us, lad," said he, "and I've evolved a plan which may serve us if it holds. I'm satisfied I have the enemy spotted, and I think the choice of terrain will be ours. Everything depends on that last, youngster. He may march around us, may come nowhere near—in which case we're beaten. But I think he'll come to us; I think he'll come!"

Shortly before nine o'clock on the morning following the sudden departure of Lawrence Ketterin, second, on his altruistic enterprise, the Great One and I set forth from the Rawley. Only one of us knew whither we were bound—and that wasn't I.

Our taxi deposited us in front of a large and imposing residence in West End Avenue. We'd been expected. No sooner had Macumber pressed the bell button when the big glass-paneled door swung in. A servant in livery was hurrying along the hall as we entered, but it was a girl in starchy white who had admitted us.

By the uniform, and by the escaped ringlets of white gold that modified the severity of her headdress, I recognized Miss Perrin. She and Macumber, too, appeared to have "struck it off." Their actions were those of two whose friendship has run the course to thorough understanding.

"Pillsbury gone?" asked the Great One.

The girl nodded.

"He went at nine, as usual."

"Brackett?"

"Not yet."

"And Doctor Canby?"

"Don't worry about him. He won't arrive until noon. I just had him on the phone." A shadow of anxiety came into Miss Perrin's face, but her voice remained cool and impersonal. "Have you had any new word from Mr. Ketterin?"

"Not yet. But he's well able to look out for himself. You've made the arrangements I suggested?"

"Hours ago."

Macumber glanced concernedly at his watch.

"Nine twenty-five. I hope——"

"It was a little later than this yesterday and the day before," said Miss Perrin. "If what you think is so, I'm sure he'll be here. There's a Power, Mr. Macumber, that we may count on to work with us."

She had led us into a spacious and tranquil library opening off the main hall, at the rear. Somewhere below a gong clanged mellowly.

"The door!" cried the girl, and slipped away. A few seconds later I heard her voice in the hall.

"No, Mr. Brackett. Doctor Canby hasn't arrived yet. I don't look for him before twelve. . . . No, really I can't. The orders are absolute. You'll have to see Doctor Forbes."

A voice that had been an indistinguishable rumble before spoke up.

"Doctor Forbes, eh? New man here, isn't he?"

"The lung specialist. Doctor Canby called him into consultation last night. I understand Doctor Forbes is here to inaugurate some remarkable new methods of his in the treatment of Mr. Ketterin. Here's Doctor Forbes, Mr. Brackett. Speak to him."

The library door was drawn open. A tall and deep-chested man stood before us. His hair was graying, and he had a grayish face; there was a touch of iron in each gray note.

"Doctor Forbes?" he demanded.

The Great One had seated himself behind the long mahogany table which occupied the center of the room.

"I'm Doctor Forbes," he said crisply, "and you see also Doctor Deems, my associate. Well, sir?"

The caller cleared his throat.

"I am Mr. Brackett," said he. "Mr. George W. Brackett."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Brackett," said Macumber, "that your name doesn't mean to me what it should. Doctor Canby, of course——"

Brackett shrugged impatiently and interposed:

"Canby isn't here, is he? I've had to come to you. Let me explain my status. I am vice president and general manager of one of Mr. Ketterin's larger corporations, the Ketterin Copper Company. I wish to see Mr. Ketterin on a most important matter of business."

"I believe I heard the nurse inform you that his condition was unchanged," remarked the Great One.

"She did say that. But my business with Mr. Ketterin is vital. I must see him. I demand to see him."

"And your demand," said Macumber, "is refused."

"There will be trouble," predicted Mr. George W. Brackett, calling into play the deepest of his chest tones. "It will be yours, and not mine. Don't forget that I have been most emphatic in stating my wishes."

Brackett had seated himself beside the big table. He brought a fist down upon it, and Macumber's hand shot out to rescue a slender and fragile vase which held the bud of a single rose.

"No mind, Mr. Brackett," he said, smiling. "There's no harm done. But you'll not be hurrying away? You have convinced me that you're really anxious to talk with Mr. Ketterin. Well, sir, it might —it *might* be arranged!"

Brackett had started to rise. He looked sharply at Macumber and sank back into his chair.

"What's this?" he ejaculated. "You've had a change of mind? I can——"

"You must permit me a moment for consideration," said the Great One.

"My time's short," snapped Brackett.

"Too much of it has been wasted already. At eleven——"

"It still," the Great One reminded him, "lacks twenty-five minutes to ten. Your own watch confirms that, eh? How long, tell me, do you wish to be with Mr. Ketterin?"

Mr. George W. Brackett's face and chest fell simultaneously.

"Do you tell me he's improving—able to——"

Macumber inclined his head.

"If the business were *very* important, Mr. Brackett, we might stretch a point."

The deportment of Ketterin Copper's general manager had undergone a swift and startling change. His austerity had left him, and with it some of his color.

"I am not one," said he, most pacifically, "to try to tell a professional man his business. If you knew what responsibilities have been thrown onto my shoulders by the illness of Mr. Ketterin, you would understand how it was that my nerves got the better of me. Perhaps I owe you an apology for my abruptness. I can, indeed, see the question from your viewpoint, Doctor Forbes. And I wish to say, upon due reflection, that if you feel it would be better that Mr. Ketterin not be disturbed I shall bow to your judgment. The burden is one which if necessary I can continue to bear alone."

Mr. George W. Brackett mopped his forehead with an oversize handkerchief. The room was oppressively warm. I'd been growing steadily more uncomfortable since stepping into it. Despite the warmth of the late September day, the windows were tightly closed, and steam was simmering in the long, low radiators.

Only Macumber appeared unconscious of the clammy heat. He walked down the room, and beckoned Brackett urgently to him.

"I'm sorry, doctor, but it's not business that could be discussed through a third party," I heard Brackett say. Then he burst forth. "Gad, it's hot in here! Don't see how you stand it!"

A moment later there was a tinkle of ice in a glass. Brackett had poured himself a drink from a water pitcher on a side table. Immediately he began to splutter.

"*That's* not water!" he exclaimed. "Damned salty! What the devil——"

At the moment the Great Macumber's back had been turned. He wheeled.

"Good Lord, Brackett! You drank from that pitcher?"

"A swallow or two. Thought it was ice water."

"Mr. Ketterin," said Macumber, smiling grimly, "thinks it's vichy."

"What—what is it?" gasped Brackett, obviously impressed by the Great One's concern.

"If I were to give you the chemical formula," replied Macumber, "you would probably not understand—and I should be violating a trust. But you've taken the most powerful of bromides, Mr. Brackett. It is called, fancifully and yet perhaps properly, 'Cleopatra's Cup.'"

Brackett had dropped back into his chair beside the long table.

"Not likely to—to upset me, is it?"

The Great One shook his head.

"Quite the reverse. You will forget your cares."

"Eh?"

"I mean you will sleep. It's a fortunate thing that I observed you taking the dose. If you'd left the house, there might have been a serious aftermath. Now you are safe. Sit where you are, or lie down if you prefer, and you——"

"What are you talking about?" growled Brackett, reverting to the blustering manner of his entrance. "I *must* leave here. At once."

Macumber stood in front of him, preventing him from rising.

"I can't permit you to go, Mr. Brackett," he said. "Any responsibilities you may have would be nothing, then, to mine. Let me explain to you exactly what you have taken. What there is to the legend which came to me with the formula, I can't say. It's not the sort of thing that a man of scientific turn would speculate much upon; but as to the efficacy of the medicine there can be no doubt. You'll have none yourself.

"The formula is neither a discovery of mine, nor of the Egyptian gentleman through whose friendship I came into possession of it. *He* said that it had come down through many generations to him, and he actually showed me the stone tablet on which he alleged it to have been originally engraved. I guard my speech carefully, you see, for the story is fantastic.

"It will doubtless be in your memory, Mr. Brackett, that when her unparalleled profligacies had turned Egypt and the world against her, Queen Cleopatra became vastly interested in chemistry. She sought a poison that would bring death to her quickly and without suffering when her last avenue of regal pleasure should have been blocked. That much is history. But, most of all, she sought nepenthes; bromides to speed the dull hours between revels. That I have been told.

"One compound she discovered, so the legend has it, which was the veritable arch-enemy of Time. A draft which annihilated hours and memories was this, inducing a state rather closer to that of suspended animation than of sleep. And, again by the legend, her secret was confided by Cleopatra to a learned man of her court; and by him handed down from eldest son to eldest son to the present. And you, Mr. Brackett, have drunk from Cleopatra's Cup!"

Brackett had been staring incredulously at the Great One.

"Rubbish!" he cried. "The stuff may affect some people, but I'm as wide awake at this moment as I've ever been in my life. Don't worry about me, doctor!"

"I don't intend to worry," Macumber calmly assured him. "You will begin to feel the pull of the bromide in a very few minutes—and then, I promise you, you'll have no further thought of leaving us. It's harmless, the Cup—but potent, potent! Soon enough your eyes will be closing. You'll not be able to keep them open. To me they seem heavy now."

"I must get downtown! It's vital!"

"I'm sorry," said the Great One.

"If this medicine is what you say it is, then there must be something——"

"There is nothing which will counteract the Cup."

"But it's not working on me. Absolutely not. I'm not in the least sleepy."

"But your eyes, man! They're closing! Blinking!"

"That's your imagination, doctor. Could they be wider open?"

And Brackett's eyes were opened wide; strained, distended.

"You won't be able to keep them open. Ah, Doctor Deems, *he's off!*"

The prolonged staring had been too much for the overstrained optical nerves of Mr. George W. Brackett. Slowly, as if weighted, the lids dropped over his sharp gray eyes.

For an instant I held the thought that Macumber possessed powers heretofore concealed from me—that he had induced a mesmeric slumber. But Brackett's eyes did not stay shut. The lids went up much more quickly than they had gone down.

"I don't care what you say!" he cried. "I'll fight it off. By God, I'm going!"

In the instant that Brackett's eyes had been closed, the Great One had stridden from him and seated himself in a chair beyond the table.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Brackett!" he called cheerfully. "Accept my congratulations, sir. You *have* fought it off, nobly. I thought you'd sleep on until evening. I've spent the last hour with Mr. Ketterin, and you'll doubtless be glad to hear that he——"

"You've *what?*"

Macumber glanced significantly at me.

"D'ye see the way the Cup works, doctor?" he queried. "There's absolutely no break in the continuity of the sleeper's thought. He doesn't realize he has slept. He'll swear that he's only closed his eyes; and, until he's had one experience with the stuff, will hold to it until the proof of time's passage is before him."

Brackett grunted.

"*I* haven't been sleeping. That's too silly. Utter nonsense!"

The Great One smiled.

"Astonishing, isn't it, Deems?" He turned to Brackett. "Shake into the real-

ity, man! You've lost a little more than five hours out of your life. Feel rested? Any after effect? Heaviness?"

Brackett glared at him wildly.

"Have you gone mad?"

"Easy, easy," counseled Macumber. "Don't excite yourself, Mr. Brackett." He lifted up the vase that had held the rose-bud. "Here's an evidence before your eyes. What was a bud when you closed your eyes is now a rose!"

A rose it was. Brackett regarded it stupidly. Behind his back the mantel clock struck—just once.

"What's that?"

"The half hour. It's two thirty by the clock, Mr. Brackett, but the clock's a trifle more than a quarter hour slow. I noticed that, but didn't bother to set it."

Brackett shot to his feet. His eyes went to the clock, back to the rose.

"Do you mean to tell me it's quarter to three?" he shouted.

"You have a watch of your own," suggested the Great One.

The hand that Brackett reached for his watch was trembling. He groaned as his eyes met the dial.

"Twelve to three! By all that's holy, you've been telling me the truth!"

A desk phone stood on the table. Brackett snatched it up and called a number. When his connection had been made he spoke excitedly into the instrument, for the nonce oblivious to the presence of Macumber and me.

"Miller? Heh, Miller? G. W. Brackett talking. Cover my shorts in Ketterin Copper, Miller—and get it done before the market closes!"

The voice of Macumber rang out jubilantly as the receiver clashed onto its hook.

"I thank you, Brackett!"

"Heh? How's that? Thank me! For what?"

"For responding so magnificently to suggestion; for delivering yourself so wholly into my hands! A fine furry fox you may be, my friend, but you've reckoned without hounds—and traps."

The Great One caught my eye and nodded toward the door.

"I'll ask your indulgence, youngster. Mr. Brackett and I will have a deal to say to each other—a private understanding to reach. You'll let us be alone?"

IV.

FROM the Ketterin drawing-room, a matter of a half hour later, I saw Mr. George W. Brackett pass like a wraith along the corridor. In the brief glimpse I had of it, his gray face seemed grayer. His carriage had no longer the arrogance of the master of men. Leaving the house, he closed the door very softly behind him.

Macumber called me back to the library then. He had flung up the windows. The air was cooler by many degrees, and already thickening with the raspy smoke of his saw-toothed black tobacco.

"I have lately enlightened our friend Brackett," said the Great One, "concerning the magical means by which the bud became a rose and the bit legerdemain that set his watch forward. I won't say he was not vastly annoyed; but before taking his leave he had so far forgiven me as to let me be the first to know of his intention of severing all connections with the Ketterin Copper Company as soon as may be. Indeed, his announcement was in the nature of a promise."

Macumber settled back in the chair which Brackett had occupied.

"I know that talk of finance is a bore to you, lad," said he, "but I would nevertheless ask you to consider the complexion of the Ketterin Copper Company. It is a very prosperous subsidiary of Amalgamated Metals, and for many years has been absolutely dominated by Lawrence Ketterin, the elder. One might call the directors his 'creatures.' Besides himself, there are four on the board—Brackett, the secretary Pillsbury, one of the old gentlemen's lawyers and Lawrence Ketterin, second.

"This last had been an excellent year for Ketterin Copper. The elder Ketterin had decided that an extra dividend should be declared at the meeting scheduled for to-day. In one way or another—you've had evidence, youngster, of how that might

be—news leaked that Ketterin Copper was a canny buy. The stock has experienced a sharp advance based on the expectation of a melon cutting.

"Something like two weeks ago, old Lawrence Ketterin was ordered to bed by his physician, as you know. It became apparent in the course of a few days that he would not be able to be at the dividend meeting.

"Brackett's scheme for rigging the market was born of this knowledge. There would be, he expected, only three directors at the meeting—a bare quorum. Pillsbury he could count on to stand with him. Between them they could override whatever protests might be made by Ketterin's lawyer and, instead of declaring an extra dividend, pass the dividend payment entirely.

"You can imagine the sharp decline such a procedure would bring about in Ketterin Copper securities, lad. Brackett began to sell short on the rising market.

"Already he had committed himself heavily when young Lawrence popped into New York. In the event of a difference in the board he would surely vote with the Ketterin lawyer.

"It was really an extraordinarily clever plan which Brackett and Pillsbury worked out, between them, to get rid of Mr. Lawrence Ketterin, second."

"So," said I, "there hadn't been any attempt to blackmail Mr. Ketterin."

"Certainly not. The whole business was a ruse to take Larry safely away while Brackett and Pillsbury played out their game. That, indeed, was my instantaneous thought on reading the boy's letter.

"It was to my friend Jeffers, the financial editor of the *Standard,* that I phoned last night. He told me of the directors' meeting and of the persistent rumors of an extra dividend—and the 'Directory of Directors' showed me the strategic possibilities of young Lawrence's position in the board.

"It was while I talked with Miss Perrin that the inspiration for the experiment of Cleopatra's Cup came to me. Brackett, she told me, had been a daily caller here. He had been almost too tremendously interested in Lawrence Ketterin's condition.

"My major problem, as you've seen, was to make our man drink something—anything—with no suggestion from us that he do so. So I made him hot, and I made him nervous—and thus, praise the Lord, I saved Ketterin Copper a scandal and myself a thousand good dollars and more."

"Yourself a thousand dollars, maestro?"

"Aye, that I did. D'ye suppose I neglected to take on a line of Ketterin after getting Larry's tip?"

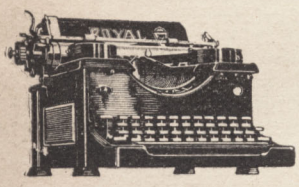
I had sauntered over to the table on which the liquid bait of "Cleopatra's Cup" had been set for parched Mr. Brackett. Some impulse led me to sample the pitcher's contents.

"Holy mackerel!" I exclaimed. "It *is* salty! What's that from?"

"Salt," said the Great Macumber.

Another Macumber story in the next issue.

Private Secretaries of FAMOUS MEN



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Dissolve one cake in a glass of water just hot enough to drink—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast when taken this way is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation. Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day — spread on bread or crackers — dissolved in fruit juices or milk — or eat it plain. Fleischmann's Yeast 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.

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"FIVE years ago I could answer to the description of the 'rundown, nervous, suffering woman' in the patent medicine ads. My sallow complexion was my greatest worry and I was always troubled with constipation. I had taken medicine for four years, but the doctor said that drugs could not effect a permanent cure. I learned to eat Fleischmann's Yeast. Today I am frequently complimented on my fresh complexion and am told I don't look more than twenty-two. I hold the championship record for swimming and tennis in our club. I still have one incurable habit—half a cake of Fleischmann's Yeast daily with a glass of milk."

(Mrs. Ella Fitzgerald, of Ypsilanti, Michigan)

"AT the age of forty I found myself slipping in health. I was troubled with indigestion, constipation and nervous debility. I had read about people taking Fleischmann's Yeast, and ordered some. A while later, in answer to a friend's inquiry, I was surprised to hear myself reply, 'I feel like a prize-fighter' and realized then that I had not felt any sign of indigestion for some time, and was putting in ten to twelve hours' hard brain work daily. I knew I was back again."

(A letter from Mr. W. L. King of Washington, D. C.)

No off-days for him

—*on account of sore throat*

A PERFECT record of attendance! More than most little folks can say during the cold, blustery, sore-throat days of winter.

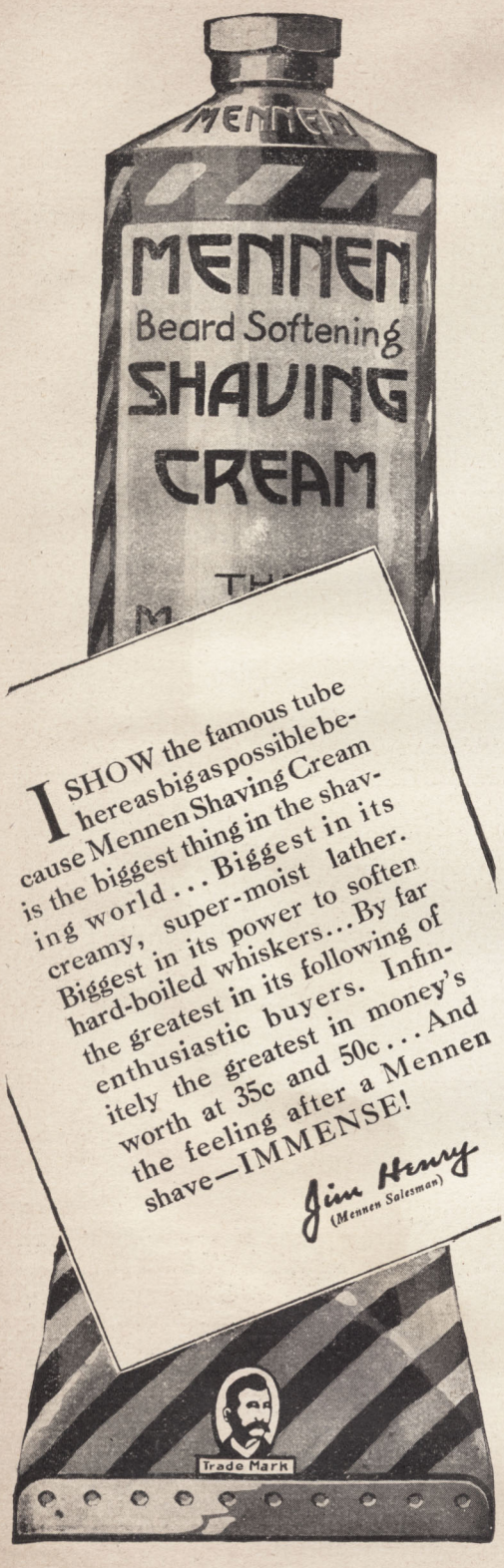
Naturally, he's proud of that report card he brings home. And his mother is, too.

Both mother and son have a secret—which, after all, needn't be a secret at all. Simply let the children form the systematic habit of using Listerine, the safe antiseptic, as a mouth wash and gargle.

So often it will ward off a bad case of sore throat and the more serious ills that may follow.

Sore throat is a nuisance—and, usually, it is the danger signal of other troubles that start with throat infections.

Listerine, the safe antiseptic, will put you and your family on the safe side. So do not be without it. It has dozens of other uses—all described on the circular that comes wrapped around each bottle.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*



If you lack this one thing

Many of your friends have lost it—many others are losing it—and if you lack this one thing . . . .

But it's no use dwelling on the unpleasantness of being over-weight. Every woman hates it. Every woman fears it. Yet, it is so unnecessary!

Slenderness can be acquired easily and pleasantly. For many years Marmola Tablets have brought the health and vigor of a slender figure to thousands of men and women. No diets, no exercises—just Marmola Tablets. Try them.

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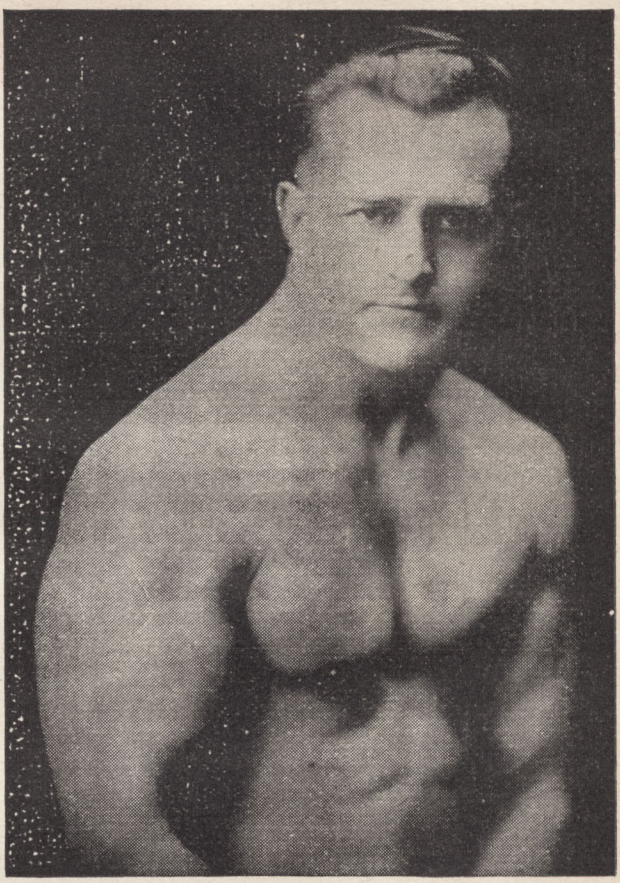
A Wart On Your Nose

would not be noticed nearly as much as a frail, weak body. Yet, if you had a wart on your nose, you would worry yourself sick—you would pay most any price to get rid of it. But what about that body of yours? What are you doing to make people admire and respect you? Wake up! Come to your senses! Don't you realize what a strong, robust body means to you? It makes no difference whether it be in the business or social world—everybody admires the strong, robust fellow—everyone despises the weakling.



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The Muscle Builder

I Will Transform You

I make weak men strong. That's my job. That's why they call me "The Muscle Builder." I never fail. A bold statement, but true. I don't care how weak you are, I can do the trick. The weaker you are, the more noticeable the results. I've been doing this for so many years, it's easy now. I know how.

In just thirty days, I'm going to put one full inch on those arms of yours. Yes, and two inches on your chest. But that's nothing. I've only started. Now comes the real work. I'm going to broaden your shoulders and strengthen your back. I'm going to deepen your chest so that every breath will literally penetrate every cell of your lungs, feeding them with rich life-giving oxygen. You will feel the thrill of life glowing throughout your entire system. I'm going to tighten up those muscles in and around your heart, kidneys and stomach. I'm going to shoot a quiver up your spine so that you will stretch out your big brawny arms and shout for bigger and harder tasks to do. Nothing will seem impossible.

Sounds good, doesn't it? You can bet your Sunday socks it's good. It's wonderful. And the best of it is, I don't just promise you these things—I guarantee them. Do you doubt me? Come on then and make me prove it. That's what I like. Are you ready? Atta boy! Let's go.

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"MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

It Is Free

It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Many of these are leaders in their business professions today. I have not only given them a body to be proud of, but made them better doctors, lawyers, merchants, etc. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. All I ask is ten cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send today—right now, before you turn this page.

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Dept. 5002, 305 Broadway, New York City

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Dear Sir:—I enclose herewith 10 cents, for which you are to send me, without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development." (Please write or print plainly.)

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Straightened 5 Years Ago

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We will gladly call on prospective patients near here, to show them what marvelous and permanent work you do. I know what a wonderful thing it has been, to have my brother's feet made straight and useful. Will answer any inquiries.

GUY L. REYNOLDS,
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For Crippled Children

McLain Sanitarium is a thoroughly equipped private institution devoted exclusively to the treatment of Club Feet, Infantile Paralysis, Spinal Diseases and Deformities, Diseases of the Hip, Knee, and other Joints, Wry Neck, etc., especially in children and young adults. Write for these FREE books: "Deformities and Paralysis" and "Book of References."

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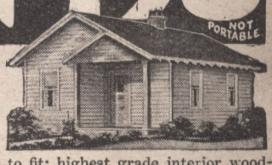

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Nearly everybody knows that charcoal is the safest and most efficient disinfectant and purifier in nature, but few realize its value when properly prepared and taken into the human system for the same cleansing purpose.

Charcoal is a remedy that the more you take of it the better; it is not a drug at all, but simply absorbs the gases and impurities always present in the stomach and intestines and carries them out of the system.

Charcoal sweetens the breath after smoking, and after eating onions and other odorous vegetables.

Charcoal effectually clears and improves the complexion, it whitens the teeth and further acts as a natural and eminently safe cathartic.

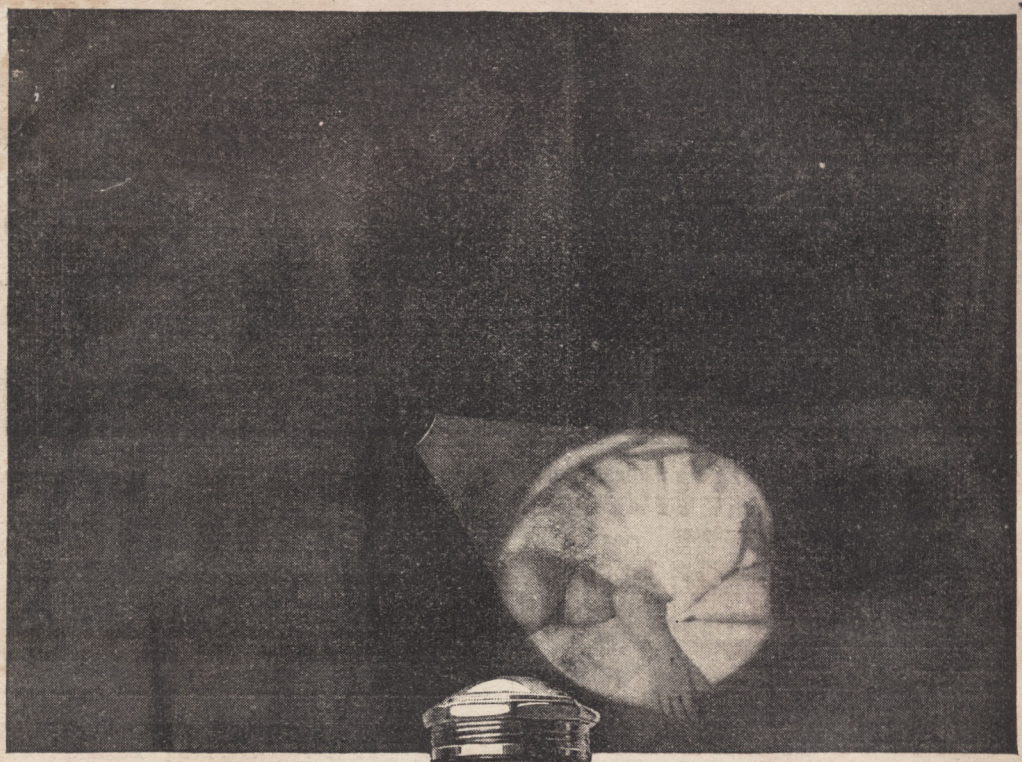
It absorbs the injurious gases which collect in the stomach and bowels; it disinfects the mouth and throat from the poison of catarrh.

All druggists sell charcoal in one form or another, but probably the best charcoal and the most for the money is in Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges; they are composed of the finest quality Willow charcoal powdered to extreme fineness, then compressed in tablet form or rather in the form of large, pleasant tasting lozenges, the charcoal being sweetened to be smooth and palatable.

The daily use of these lozenges will soon tell in a much improved condition of the general health, better complexion, sweeter breath and purer blood, and the beauty of it is that no possible harm can result from their continued use, but on the contrary, great benefit.

Many physicians advise Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges to patients suffering from gas in stomach and bowels, and to clear the complexion and purify the breath, mouth and throat. They are also believed to greatly benefit the liver. These lozenges cost but thirty cents a box at drug stores. For a free trial send your name and address to F. A. Stuart Co., 13 Stuart Bldg., Marshall, Mich. You get more and better charcoal in Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges than in any of the ordinary charcoal tablets.

To invade Slumberland—*use your flashlight!*



IN THE children's bedroom, in the dark of night, use your flashlight! No blinding glare in its soft, reflected rays . . . no clicking electric switch to wake the sleeping one. Keep an Eveready up-stairs for night duties and emergencies. Keep another near those dark cellar stairs. And another in the automobile. Silent sentinels of safety, with countless uses.

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Manufactured and guaranteed by

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The type illustrated is No. 2604, the Eveready 2-cell Tubular Flashlight with bull's-eye lens. Handsome ribbon black-metal case. Sold complete with battery and bulb—everywhere.

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Eveready Unit Cells fit and improve all makes of flashlights. They insure brighter light and longer battery life. Keep an extra set on hand. Eveready-Mazda bulbs likewise last longer.

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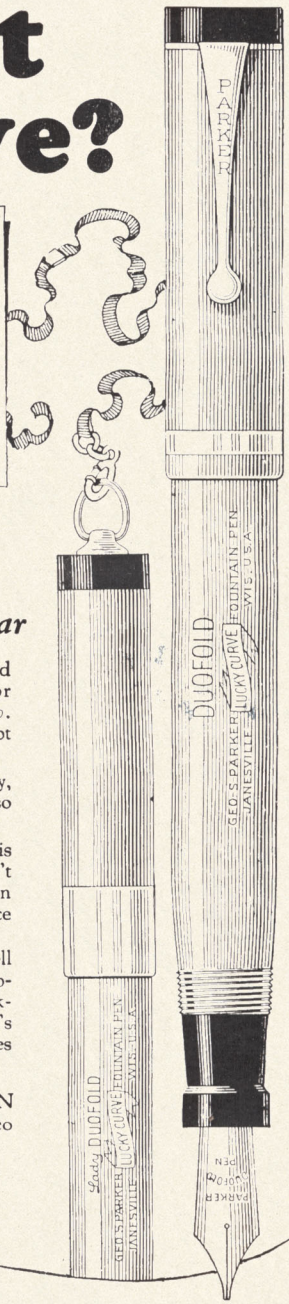
FLASHLIGHTS
& BATTERIES
—they last longer

RIVALS THE BEAUTY OF THE SCARLET TANAGER

Which Point Will You Have?

1- Extra fine - like this
2- Fine - like this
3- Medium - like this
4- Broad - like this
5- Stub - like this



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And All Points Guaranteed for 25-Years' Wear

FOR what kind of writing do you use a pen? How do you hold it? And what style of writing is entirely natural to your hand?

Close figure work or fine memoranda, for example, call for a fine or an extra-fine point. But the medium point, the broad, or the stub—these give one's penmanship a personality and character that make mighty valuable impressions in a letter or a signature.

These are reasons why, in the classic Duofold Pens, Geo. S. Parker gives the world the whole five degrees of points that the five degrees of writing require.

Points you can lend without a tremor, for no style of writing can distort them. Points that are tipped with super-smooth Iridium, for which we pay a premium of 200%. Points that we guarantee, if not mistreated, for 25 years' WEAR.

And every point set in a shapely, hand-balanced barrel that feels so inspiring you hate to lay it down.

You can buy cheaper pens, but is the saving worth it? For you can't compete with the world on even terms if your pen can't keep pace with the Duofold.

Any good pen counter will sell you this beauty on 30 days' approval. Flashing black, or black-tipped lacquer red, the color that's handsomer than gold and makes this a hard pen to mislay.

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