

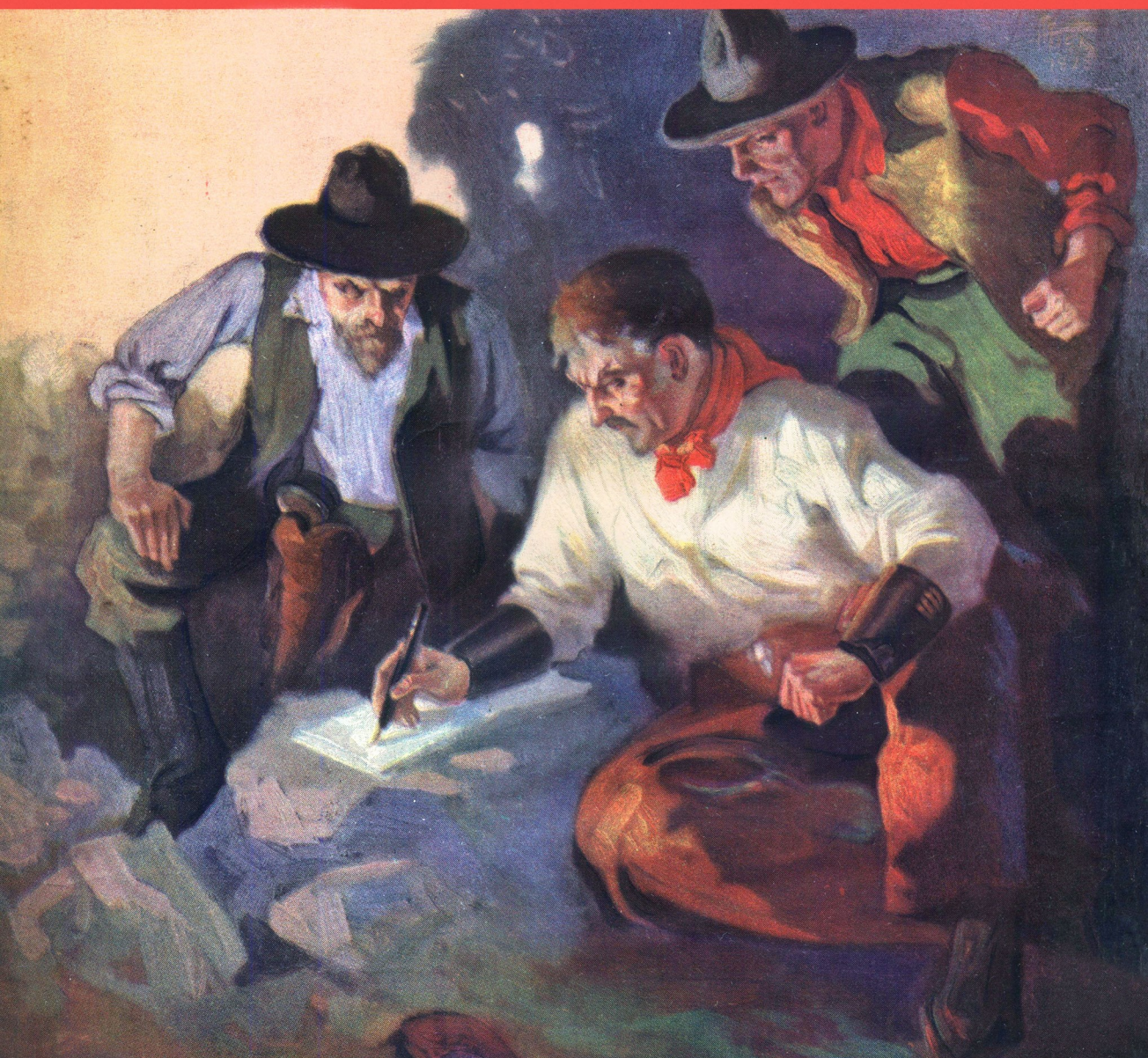
THE BIG NATIONAL FICTION MAGAZINE

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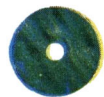
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The Popular Magazine

SEPT. 7,
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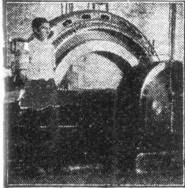
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Vol. LXXVII

SEPTEMBER 7, 1925

No. 4



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Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 73-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1925, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1925, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. All Rights Reserved. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$4.72. Foreign, \$5.44.

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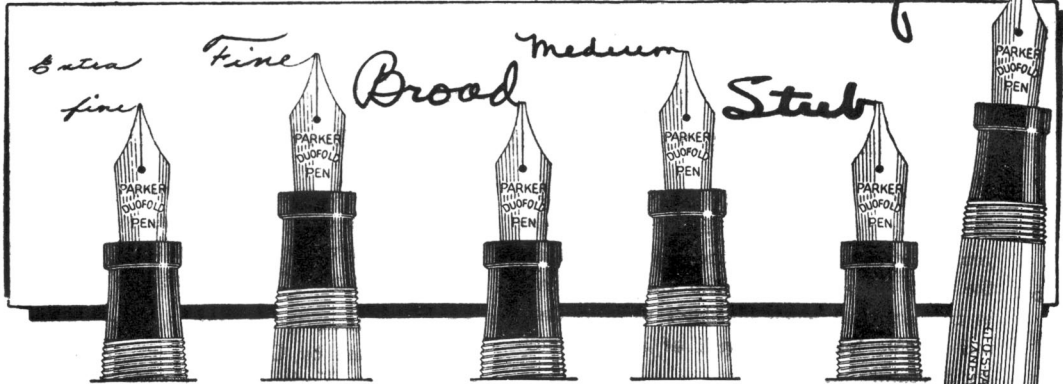
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Hard to put your fingers on it, isn't it?—this fascination that good fiction throws over you. There's something almost abnormal about the man or the woman who can't sink back in an easy-chair when the day's work is done, and become lost in the spell of a swift-moving adventure story.

It is a fine and comforting thing to know that we Americans have never lost the love for romance. We would have become a dull, drab people otherwise. Romance is in our blood, breath of our very breath. We are still an adventuring, pioneering people, despite our bathtubs and radios and telephones and "all modern conveniences," as the real-estate ads say.

It is true of all walks of American life, of all sorts and conditions of our people. Down in the parched flatlands of Oklahoma I have seen cow-punchers waiting eagerly for the trains that bring the latest copies of their favorite fiction magazines and books. And then I have seen New York business men enter Pullmans at the Grand Central with copies of these same books under their arms.

"Tell me a story," is one of the first requests of childhood, and the child's love for story-telling has never grown out of most of us, for which we may thank our lucky stars.

Some one has called the big brick building at 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, "Story-teller's headquarters." It shelters one of the oldest and best-established publishing concerns in America—Chelsea House Publishers. There come the leading fiction writers of the country with their best work, hot from the typewriters. There are editors with their fingers always on the pulse of the public, who know what you and I like to read and see that we get it. Whether the book that comes from

the Chelsea House presses costs \$2 or only 75 cents, you may be sure that you have between its covers the sort of writing that makes the best of reading. For example—

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THE SCARLET SCOURGE, by Johnston McCulley, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

There were a number of persons who might have shot Lorenzo Brayton through the back as he sat at his desk in the offices of his fraudulent rubber stock-selling company. It was up to Detective Sam Haynes to find the one hand that directed the fatal shot. Mr. McCulley takes you, the reader, along with Sam on his way through the labyrinth that finally leads to the light, and he does it in masterly fashion. A bang-up, thrilling detective story of the first water.



ANNE AGAINST THE WORLD, by Victor Thorne, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Victor Thorne tells a beautiful love story

(Continued on 2nd page following.)

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difference just a
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in this book with enough adventure in it to satisfy the most ardent thrill hunter. Anne faces the problem that confronts every one of us—what is really worth while in this world? She leaves her humble little home to enter the bizarre life of a manicuring establishment. Her wistful beauty brings many men to her, some good, some bad, but at length she finds true love. It is a clean, well-written love story that Mr. Thorne tells, one that you will read through to the very end with the keenest interest.



THE BOSS OF CAMP FOUR, by Emart Kinsburn, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Mr. Kinsburn is rapidly coming to the forefront of the few who can write convincingly of the great West. Here he paints unforgettable scenes against a New Mexican background. His hero is Chet Fanning, and he's the sort of hero that makes you want to cheer as he fights the battles of "Spookmule" Paxton, who bought twenty thousand acres and then found a lot of trouble on his hands. There's an adventure in a tunnel in this book which makes one of the big thrills of modern fiction.



WATCHED OUT, by Eugene A. Clancy, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Wall Street and huge sums of money, a crooked gang, led by the veteran of many a furious fight. Out of these ingredients you have in "Watched Out" the sort of adventure story that makes you forget all engagements until you have come to the very end. The battle of wits between Monk Markheim, gangster and woman hater, and young John Gore, who made big money on the Street, and then—for a while—dropped out of the public's eye, makes a swift-moving yarn that is told by Mr. Clancy with force and humor.



THE HUSKS OF LIFE, by Mary Douglas, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

Many a modern author has chosen as a fic-

tion theme the colorful, bohemian life of the artists' studios of New York's Greenwich Village. Few have presented this life as faithfully as does the author of "The Husks of Life." Mary Douglas depicts for us the adventures of Jennie Joyce, who is forced to leave the factory because of the unwelcome attentions of her boss and becomes a model to one of the city's best-known artists. Jennie meets many types of men, but finally finds that one alone is worthy of love. The story marches to its triumphant conclusion in stirring manner.



JERRY PEYTON'S NOTCHED INHERITANCE, by David Manning, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, Price 75c.

When the doctor told old Hank Peyton that he was about to die, Hank took another drink and called for his son, Jerry. To him he handed over his most precious treasure, the revolver, known and feared by Mexicans as "The Voice of La Paloma." That was Jerry's inheritance, his commission to a free life, and the way he used it makes an exceptionally interesting Western story, told as Mr. Manning knows how to tell these rousing yarns.



THE BIGAMIST, by John Jay Chichester, published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, 320 pages, Price \$2.

Some of the foremost literary reviews of the country, among them that of the New York Times, have been loud in their praises of this most remarkable book. Mr. Chichester, author of "The Porcelain Mask," knows how to tell a most complicated story and still hold the attention of his readers every moment. This time he introduces us to one "Wiggly" Price, lovable newspaper reporter, who takes up a murder trail where the detective leaves off and covers himself and his paper with glory. There is action aplenty in this story, mystery and enough romance to please every one.

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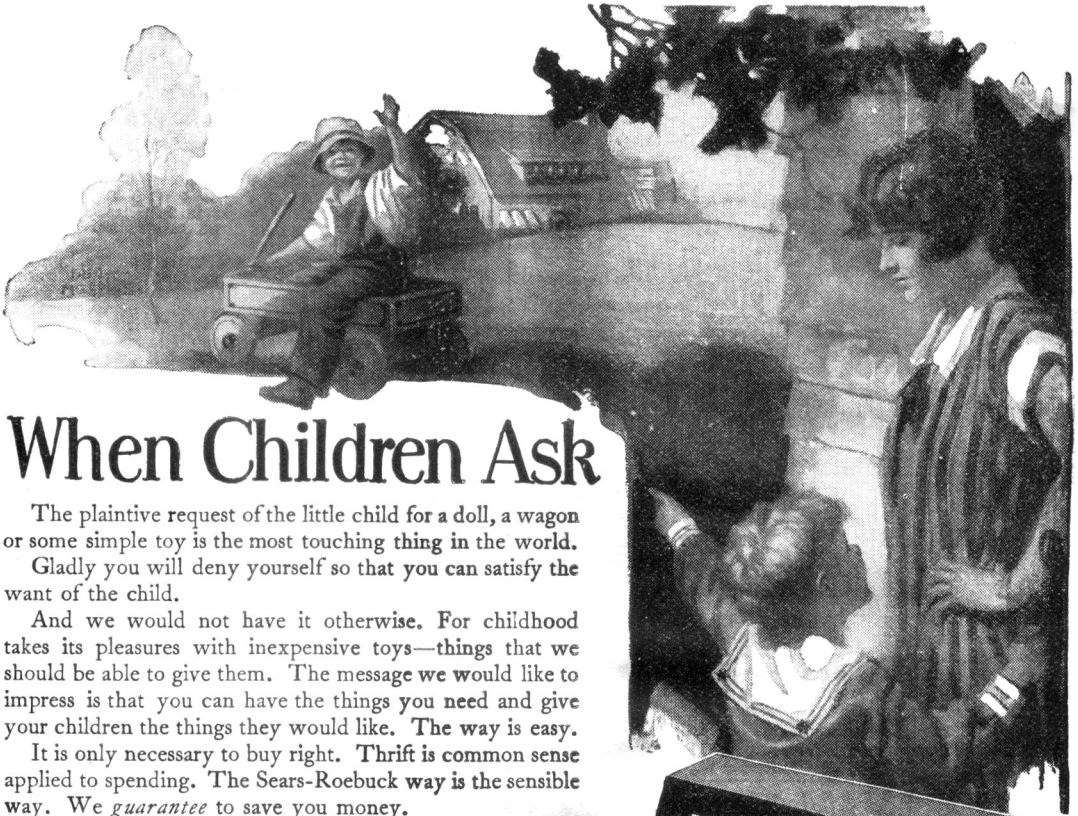
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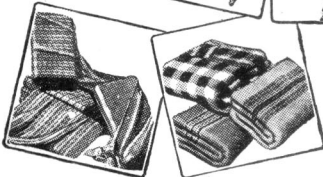
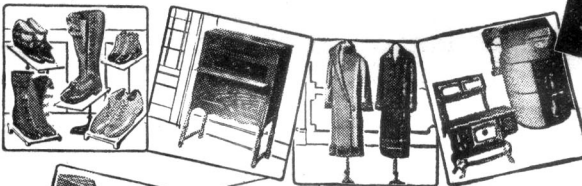
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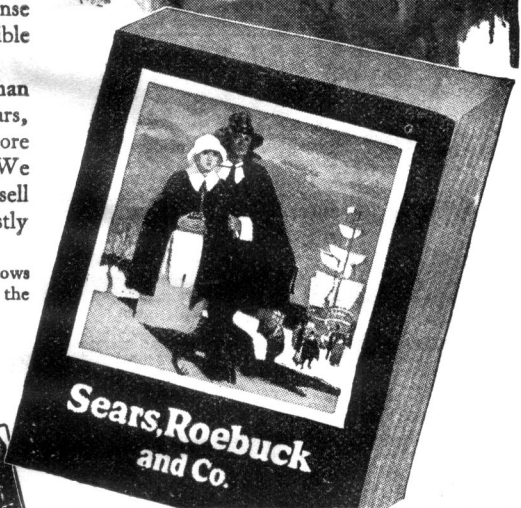
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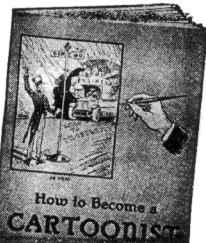
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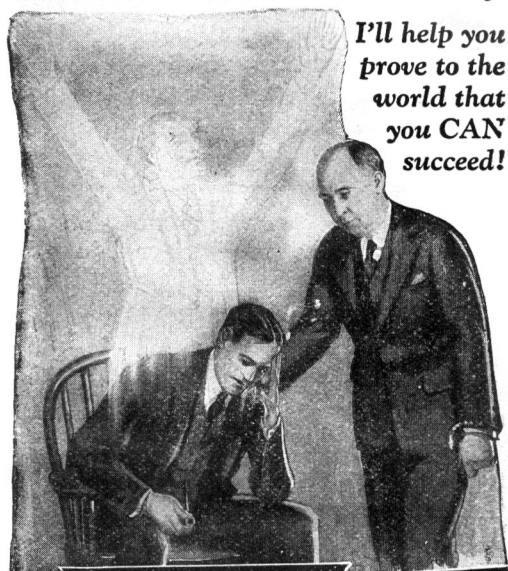
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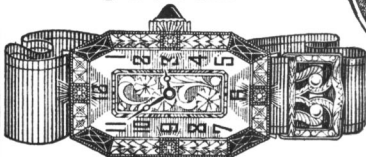
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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXVII.

SEPTEMBER 7, 1925.

No. 4



The Adam Chaser

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Black Thunder," "The Meadowlark Name," Etc.

Treasures of the storied past, records of prehistoric settlements of the American Indian, lure a young archæologist, Professor Abington, to the Sonora caves of Arizona where fate plays him a grim trick, and makes him arbiter of the destinies of living men.

CHAPTER I.

A BAD HOMBRE.

HALFWAY up a long cañon that cut a six-mile gash through rugged mountains thinly pock-marked with prospect holes, the radiator cap of John Abington's car blew off with a pop like amateur home-brew.

For a matter of a minute, perhaps, that particular brand of automobile developed a lively hot-water geyser. Followed a brief period of steaming, and after that it stalled definitely and set square in the trail which ran through deep sandy gravel and rock rubble—a hot car and a sulky one, if you know what I mean.

Abington harried the starter with vicious jabs of his heel, then crawled reluctantly out into the blistering wind which felt as if it were driving down the sunlight with sharp needle points of heat that stung and smarted the skin where they struck.

The canteens were buried deep under much camp paraphernalia, a circumstance which gave occasion for a few minutes of eloquent monologue. Curiously, the driver's vituperation was directed neither at the car nor the wind nor the heat, but at an absent individual whom he called "Shorty"—and at another named Pete.

Considerable luggage was shifted before the canteens were finally excavated from

the floor of the tonneau; both canteens, because the first one was so completely empty that it made no sound when Abington impatiently shook it.

He was standing beside the car, mechanically sloshing a pint or so of water in the second grimy, flat-bottomed canteen, when a dust-covered roadster came coasting down the four-per-cent grade of the cañon half a mile or so away. He glanced at the approaching car, set the canteen in the sand and helped himself to a cigarette from a silver-trimmed leather case. Abington was leaning against the rear fender in the narrow bit of shade when the roadster came down upon him, slowed with a squealing of dry brakes and stopped perforce. In the rocks and deep sand that bordered the road a caterpillar truck could scarcely have driven around the stalled car.

"In trouble?" A perspiring tanned face leaned out, squinting ahead into the sun through desert-wrinkled eyelids.

"None whatever," Abington calmly replied, smiling to make the words cheerful. "I'm waiting here for the car to cool off a bit. I hope you're not in a hurry?"

THE driver of the roadster slanted a quick glance at his companion, who slumped sidewise in the seat with his hat pulled low over his eyes.

"Kinda. Got plenty of water?" This in a hopeful tone, which his next sentence explained. "I'm kinda short, myself, but I'll hit Mina before long, so I ain't worrying. How much you going to need? Half a canteen do you any good?"

The stalled driver walked forward with a loose, negligent stride which nevertheless covered the ground with amazing ease. From under straight, black brows his eyes looked forth with apparent negligence, though they saw a great deal with a flicking glance or two.

"It might take me back to where I can fill my canteens, sheriff. I don't suppose there's a quart of water in the radiator, and everything's empty. My fault. I discharged a couple of men I had with me, and I should have been on my guard against some such trick as this. As it was,

I failed to stand over them while they unloaded their plunder from the car. At any rate, here I am for the present."

"Tough luck. I'll let you have what water I've got, but it ain't much. She kept heating on me, climbing the summit. How far you going?"

"Back to Mina. I want to find those two fellows I let off there." Abington's questing black eyes rested on the roadster's other occupant, shifted to the driver's hard yet not unkindly face, and he waved the cigarette significantly.

"Better give this fellow a drink, before I empty the canteen." He nodded toward the slack figure. "And if you'll pardon the suggestion, sheriff, I'd turn him loose for a bit. Pretty rough riding, even when you've got all your hands and feet to hang on by."

The other gave a short, apologetic laugh.

"Say, this feller's plumb mean—that's why I got him shackled that way. Car broke down, the other side of Tonopah, and I'm taking him through alone. He's a slippery cuss. Had us chasin' him off and on for two years. I can't take any chances."

"You're not." If the tone was ironic the eyes were friendly enough. "But the man looks sick. A drink of water and a smoke won't make him any more dangerous, I imagine."

"Yeah, I know he acts sick, and he looks sick. But it might be a stall, at that." The officer turned and eyed his prisoner doubtfully. "I don't want to be hard on anybody—and I don't want to be bashed over the bean and throwed out on the desert to die, neither! She's a lonely road—I'll tell anybody."

For all that, he got out, unlocked the tool box on the running board, took out a smaller box of screws, bolts, nuts and cotter pins, fumbled within it with thumb and finger and finally produced a small flat key.

"Never pays to be in a hurry to git a pair of handcuffs open," he muttered to Abington. "This way's safe as I can make it. He's a bad hombre."

Abington nodded understandingly and

stood back while the deputy sheriff walked around the car and freed his passenger from the handcuffs which were fastened behind his back.

For an appreciable space the fellow drooped indifferently where he was, not even taking the trouble to rub his chafed wrists, though they must have pained him considerably, swollen and discolored as they were with the snug steel bands and the awkward position forced upon him.

"Have a drink of water," Abington suggested, not too kindly. More as if he were speaking to a man who was free to go where he pleased.

THE fellow looked up at him, nodded and lifted a hand shaking from cramp. Abington unscrewed the cap and steadied the canteen to the man's mouth. He drank thirstily, pushed the canteen away with the back of his hand, lifted his hat and drew a palm across his flushed forehead where the veins stood out like heavy cords drawn just under the skin.

"Thanks!" He gave Abington another glance, a gleam in his eyes as of throttled speech.

"Have a smoke. Here, keep the case while we're getting the car started." Abington glanced at the officer. "You've no objection, I suppose?"

"Hell, no! What do you take me for? Just because I use some precautions against being brained while I'm busy driving don't mean I'm hard boiled." He sent a measuring glance toward either side of the straight-walled cañon. Within half a mile there was no cover for a man, and the cliffs rose sheer. "You can get out if you want to, Bill," he said to the prisoner. "Guess you won't go far with them leg irons."

"Thanks." The prisoner's voice was perfunctory, and he seemed in no great hurry to avail himself of the privilege. While the others walked to the stalled car—the deputy watching over his shoulder—the prisoner sat where he was, smoking a cigarette from Abington's leather-and-silver case.

The stalled car refused to start. That

mechanical condition, which is called freezing, held the cylinders locked fast until such time as the expansion subsided, and in the fierce heat of that cañon the motor cooled very slowly. Abington suggested coasting backward to the first place where a turnout had been provided.

"There's a turnout, back here a couple of hundred yards or such a matter. If you can give me a push over this little hump, I think the car will roll down the road easily enough," he explained. "I'll have to keep it in the road, sheriff, or I could manage alone."

The deputy rather liked being called sheriff, and he was anxious to reach Carson City that evening with his prisoner. Until Abington's car moved out of the way, he himself was stalled, since he could not move forward more than the hundred feet which separated the two cars. There was no other road down that cañon.

"If Bill Jonathan wasn't feeling so tough, I'd take off the hobbles and make him get out and help," he grumbled, looking back at the roadster. "But I guess he's sick, all right. He ain't left the car yet. Well, you get in and hold 'er in the ruts, Mister——"

"My name is Abington. I'm an archæologist——"

"That right? My name's Park. I'm sure glad to meet you, Doctor Abington. Heard a lot about you and them petrified animals and things you've been digging up. Got the brake off? All right——"

But the best he could do, just at first, was to rock the car a few inches each way. Between shoves he looked over his shoulder. The prisoner apparently preferred the shade of the car to the heat of the sun, and Park soon ceased to worry about him. Midway between Tonopah and Mina would be a poor spot to choose for a walk away, even if the man were free to walk, he reflected.

However desperate he might be, Bill Jonathan was no fool. He knew well enough that Park would shoot at the first hint of trouble. The deputy grunted and turned his attention to the work at hand.

Abington got out and helped claw the

hot loose sand away from behind the rear wheels, got in again and steered while Park braced himself and heaved against the front fender. The car moved backward nearly a foot, and the two grinned triumphantly at one another.

"Next time—I'll get her—Doctor Abington!" the deputy puffed, glancing over his shoulder as he mopped trickles of sweat from face and neck. A thin wreath of cigarette smoke waved out from the prisoner's side of the roadster, and Park grinned at Abington behind the wheel.

"Hope you're well fixed for cigarettes!" He chuckled good-humoredly. "Bill's trying to smoke enough to last till he gets outa the pen, looks like."

"He's welcome," Abington returned, a smile hidden under his pointed black beard. "I've plenty more."

"Just as you say. All right, let's give her another shove. Gosh, it's hot!"

Grunting and straining, Park moved the car three feet backward to where a nest of small stones halted it again. Encouraged by the small progress, the two knelt again behind the rear wheels and began to paw a clear path in the gravel. The "hump," one of those small ridges which characterized desert roads, would be passed within the next six feet.

At the precise moment when Park was kneeling with his back half turned from his own car, he heard his starter whir with an instant roar of the motor just under a full feed of gas.

The roadster shot backward up the trail, guided evidently by guess and a helpful divinity, since Bill Jonathan's head never once appeared outside the car to watch the trail behind him. Park jumped up, pulled his old-fashioned range-model Colt and fixed six shots in rapid succession, evidently realizing that he must get them all in before the car was out of range. With the sixth shot the glass was seen to fly from a headlight, then the hammer clicked futilely against an empty shell.

Park swore as he started running up the trail after the car, the driver's head now plainly in sight as he leaned out and watched the road. A good fifteen miles

an hour he was making in reverse; and unless a car came down the cañon and stopped him as Park had been halted, for the simple reason that he could not turn out, Bill Jonathan seemed in a fair way of making his escape.

"The damn fool! He can't get far with them leg irons on!" Park grunted, coming to a stop where the roadster had stood. "That's what I get for being so damn soft hearted! I *told* you he was a bad hombre, Doctor Abington!"

CHAPTER II.

SYMBOLS OF MYSTERY.

ABINGTON walked forward a few steps, stooped and picked up his cigarette case from the hot sand of the trail.

"Spencer founded his whole philosophy on the premise that there is a soul of goodness even in things evil," he observed with the little hidden smile tucked into the corners of his black-bearded lips. "Your man has made off with your car, but he very thoughtfully returned my cigarette case—not altogether empty, either. Not knowing I have a full carton in the car, he has left us a cigarette apiece; which proves the soul of goodness within the evil. Will you have a smoke, sheriff?"

"Might as well, I guess," Park grumbled, his eyes on the departing car. "This is a hell of a note! Doctor Abington, what we've got to do is make it in to Mina and get word out to the different towns before Bill can make Tonopah or Goldfield.

"Thunder! Who'd ever think he'd try to pull off a stunt like that? I was going to take the irons off his legs, but I kinda had a hunch not to. Never dreamed he'd pull out with the car while his legs was shackled; did you?"

"I'm afraid my mind was quite taken up with my own problem," Abington confessed in a slightly apologetic tone. "I'm not accustomed to chasing live men, you know. It's the dead ones I'm interested in, and the longer they've been dead the better.

"Nevertheless, sheriff, I realize your predicament. If there's a long-distance

telephone in Mina you can intercept the fellow at Tonopah, I should think." He was thoughtfully turning the cigarette case over in his fingers as if his habit was to admire its glossy brown leather and the silver filigree. Now he slipped it into his pocket and turned to retrace his steps.

"I suppose we ought to get the old boat headed down the trail, sheriff. Your prisoner went off with your canteen, you know, so we'll have to pet my motor along as best we can. But she'll roll down the cañon in neutral, and then we'll drive it as far as we can—which may not be far.

"At the turnout, down the road here, I'll get the car headed in the other direction, and it wouldn't surprise me if we beat your man in, after all. Will he have gas enough to take him to Tonopah?"

"Lord, yes! I filled the tank plumb full, and it's one of them old thirty-gallon tanks. But somebody'll maybe run across him trying to fill the radiator or something, and see the leg irons and take him in. Tires ain't none too good—maybe he'll have tire trouble. I sure hope so," he added unnecessarily.

Abington, leaning to push at the side of the car while he kept one hand on the steering wheel, did not answer. Park added his weight at the front fender, straining until his gloomy countenance went purple. The car rolled over the hump, and Abington hopped nimbly to the running board, watched his chance and straddled in behind the wheel.

SOME time was lost in negotiating the turn. After that, coasting down the road with a dead engine cooled the cylinders considerably. By skillful management Abington was able to start the motor and use what power was needed to drive the car up over certain small knolls near the foot of the cañon.

At the edge of the long valley, a hill gave them momentum sufficient to carry them well down toward a white, leprous expanse, called Soda Lake, with a tiny settlement a few miles beyond. Here, in the chuck holes of the soda-incrusted lake bed, the car refused to go any farther

without power, and power in that grilling heat required a full radiator.

Even so, the two made fair time walking, and at the settlement Abington was able to hire a man to haul water out to the car. Also, Park was successful in getting wires through to the sheriff's office at Tonopah, and also at Goldfield, the only points he believed Bill Jonathan would attempt to reach.

"If you like, sheriff, we can follow up your man at once," Abington suggested when Park came out of the telegraph office looking less worried. "I'm willing to postpone the pleasure of chastising Shorty and Pete, and drive you straight through to Tonopah. Water is the only thing I needed for the trip, and the man is waiting out here with a full supply, ready to drive us back to my car. At the most we will be only three hours behind the fugitive and, as you say, he can't do much with leg irons on.

"He'll need to have a remarkable run of luck if he reaches there ahead of us. For instance, your motor had been heating, and you had only half a canteen of water. As I remember the road, there's a long, hard climb for several miles beyond that cañon. He'll be compelled to fill up with water at that spring just over the summit; one stop, at least, where he will have enough awkward walking to hold him there twice as long as a man with his legs free. So——"

"Say, Doctor Abington, you sure can figure things out!" Park grinned while he bit the end off a forlorn-looking cigar he had just bought at the little store. "You ought to be a detective."

"I am. I've been trying to detect the origin of the human race, for years now," Abington smiled. "It's the same kind of figuring brought down to modern conditions. If you're ready, sheriff, we'll get under way."

So back they went, roaring up the long rough trail to the cañon and on to Tonopah. They did not meet a soul on the way, nor did they overtake Bill Jonathan and the roadster. Neither did they glimpse anywhere a sign of his turning aside from

the main highway, though Park's eyes watered from watching intently the trail.

Abington proved to be a scientifically reckless driver and a silent one withal. Within an incredibly short time he landed a grateful deputy at the sheriff's office in Tonopah, bade him an unperturbed adieu, drove his car into a garage and established himself comfortably in the best hotel the town afforded—all with the brisk, purposeful air of one who is clearing away small matters so that he may take up the business which really engrosses his mind.

In his room at the hotel John Abington dragged the most comfortable chair directly under the two-globe chandelier,

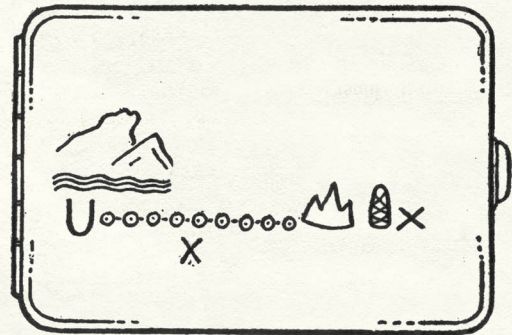
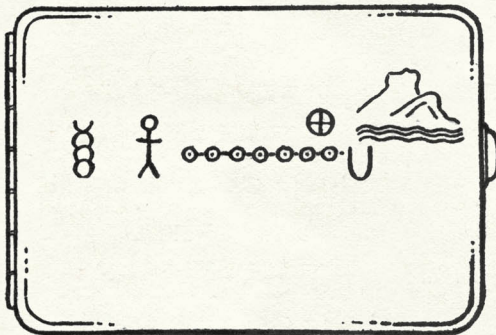
pocket—that's where it gives first. H'm! That's what he waited for. Knew he meant to escape, of course—saw it in his eyes. H'm! Let's see, now."

Abington blew a cloud of smoke and thoughtfully examined the case as he turned it over slowly in his hand, just as he had done when he picked it up in the cañon road.






As he studied it his lips moved in that silent musing speech which was his habit—the black beard offering perfect concealment for his soundless whisperings.





"H'm! Clever of him—hieroglyphics adapted to code work. Let's see. The old Babylonian 'chain of evil'—three links, meaning 'not so bad.' Following that, a

Bill's message, written in hieroglyphics such as are found among the rock carvings of Nevada.



Key

-  { Chain of evil (old Babylonian).
Something bad or unlucky.
-  =Man.
-  { =Suns.
=Days' journeys.
-  =Babylonian moon phases.
-  =Stopping place.

-  =Water—a river.
-  =mountains, premodified Manchurian.
-  =mummy—a burial.
-  =plural.

lighted a cigarette from the pasteboard box which he took from his pocket, and pulled out the leather cigarette case as if this was what he had been all along preparing to do.

"Got a tack from the upholstery, no doubt, for a stylus," he mused. "Old car—binding probably loose on the door

man. Humph! That's Bill himself, no doubt.

"Next—h'm!—that's Egyptian; the old Egyptian symbol denoting the number of days in a journey, but with the Babylonian and Manchurian moon month at the end. Probably meant a month's journey, and didn't know the sign for it. Bill, my

lad, you show intelligence above the average layman, at least.

"Now, what's all this? Water sign, mountains, stopping place—Bill descended to picture writing there, I see! That's the mountain across from my camp where I took Bill in and fed him—gave him my best hiking boots, too, by Jove! My camp by the river— Bill, you are ingenious!

"Without a doubt you wish me to understand that within a month you will be at my old camp by the river—counting on more food and more boots, perhaps! H'm! I don't just know about that.

"Don't see how you are going to make it. Handicap too heavy. Doubt whether I myself could overcome the obstacles—leg irons, officers on the watch, posSES on the trail, three hundred miles to go—Bill, old fellow, if you make it you'll prove yourself a man worth helping! You won't get half the distance—but if you do, you may have my next-best boots and welcome!"

ABINGTON turned the case over, held it closer to the light, frowned and gave a faint whistle at what he saw. He had supposed that the message had been repeated here as a precaution against his failure to notice the barely discernible markings in the leather on the other side.

But as he peered sharply at the fine indentations his eyes brightened with interest. For although the river and the stopping-place symbols were repeated, and the string of tiny circles which signified the number of days' journeying, the plural sign was there just below them. At the end of the journey, mountains—but they were indicated by the conventional, pre-modified Manchurian symbol and, close by, the sign of a mummy.

"What the deuce!" breathed Abington, pulling black eyebrows together. "He's blundered there—maybe means he'll leave my camp only in custody. No, by Jove! That can't be it, either."

For a long time he sat motionless except when he turned the cigarette case for a renewed scrutiny of the other side. The

message that had seemed so simple presented an unexpected little twist of mystery.

Bill Jonathan, pursued by the chain of evil, meant to journey for perhaps a month and arrive at John Abington's camp in the mountains that bordered the river. That much seemed fairly plain, and one would logically expect no further information at present.

But there was more to it, apparently. Bill had not sat in that roadster idly scratching hieroglyphics on the cigarette case of an archæologist just to pass the time away. Meaning to escape in the car, uncertain too of the number of minutes at his disposal, he must have grudged every second of delay while he worked out his message.

Abington permitted his cigarette to go out while he brooded over those crude lines. His thoughts harked back to the time, four months before, when Bill Jonathan had come limping into camp, crippled with stone bruises from traveling the rough granite hills in thin-soled shoes worn to tattered leather. He had been hungry, too, by the manner in which he wolfed his first meal whenever he thought Abington was not looking his way.

He had not told his name, and Abington had taken the hint and asked no questions. Bill had called himself a prospector, said he had an outfit back in the hills and had come down to Abington's camp to see if he could rustle a pair of boots and a little tobacco. A likable fellow, Abington had found him; one of those rare individuals who can display an intelligent interest in the other fellow's subject.

Abington at that time had been searching out and recording with a camera all the ancient rock carvings along the river. While Bill's feet were healing he had wanted to know all about the various symbols and their meanings. He had told Abington of two or three cañons where writings could be found, and he had discussed with Abington the possibility of finding petrified human remains—

"By Jove!" Abington ejaculated, straightening suddenly in his chair. "I

wonder if that is not what he means! That we'll both journey to a spot in the mountains where I can find my fossilized man!"

The idea once implanted in his mind, Abington could not seem to get rid of it. Without a doubt, that was the meaning Bill had meant to convey; that he had found the fossil man which would mean more to Abington than a gold mine—for such is the peculiar point of view held by scientists of a certain school.

"Told him that mummy symbol indicated a burial—remember we discussed it. He recognized the sign from having seen one on a rock. I told him it undoubtedly meant that some one had been buried there. H'm! Nothing else he *could* mean. Wasn't sitting in that car drawing marks for fun. Couldn't write a message. Afraid Park might pick up the case, no doubt. Too bad—handicapped too heavily. Never will make it."

Nevertheless Abington loitered for four days in Tonopah, though he had no business to hold him there. He heard nothing of an escaped convict being captured in that part of the country, so finally went his way.

He had meant to hire more men and carry his explorations over into Utah, but the sporting instinct for once prevailed over scientific zeal. He still believed that Bill would never make it—that the "chain of evil" was too strong. But being an archæologist, he had learned the sublime lesson of a patient, plodding persistence that simply ignores failure. Abington returned alone to a field already pretty thoroughly covered, and reestablished his old camp by the river. There he sat himself down to wait, with a brooding patience not unlike the eternal hills that hemmed him in.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE JUMP.

INTO the firelight Bill Jonathan came walking one evening, barely within the month he had given himself in the symbolic message. Face drawn and sallow, eyes staring out from under his hat brim

with a glassy dullness born of hunger, fever and fatigue mingled, perhaps, with that never-sleeping fear which dogs the soul of the hunted. But none of this showed in his manner, nor in his greeting which gave the arrival a casual note.

"Hello, professor! Got my message, I see. Well, I had one merry heck of a trip, but here I am." He dropped down where he could lean against Abington's favorite camp boulder—lean there at ease or crawl swiftly out of sight behind the broken ledge, Abington observed with that negligent, flicking glance of his. Another glance dropped briefly to Bill's ankles, and Bill laughed wryly.

"Didn't think I meant to wear them things permanent, did you, professor? Hell, I ain't no Aztec princess, going around with anklets on that'd sink a whale. No, I was up at the old Honey Boy Mine, in the blacksmith shop, setting on a bench with one foot in a vise, filing faster than a buzz saw when I heard you folks go past, down in the gulch. At least, I s'pose it was you folks, because it was a cinch nobody would pass you in the cañon, and I had it doped out you'd roll down to where you could get water, and come chasing me up. Hauled my nursemaid on into Tonopah, I'll bet!"

"I did that." Abington smiled, tossing Bill his cigarette case before opening a can of baked beans while the coffee heated. "I really didn't think you'd make it, though. Handicap too heavy."

Bill accepted the cigarette case, pausing to eye with prideful interest the markings. He lighted a cigarette and relishfully inhaled three gratified mouthfuls before he spoke.

"If you mean them irons, I didn't wear 'em long. Just till I could get the bus up to the old Honey Boy. Wonder you didn't spot the place where I turned off—maybe you did. It was on your side the road." He saw Abington nod, and grinned appreciatively. "Well, it rained some that night, and that helped dim the tracks. Nobody came near the mine; not while I was there, anyhow."

"Friend Park had a fair lot of grub in

the back of the car, and I rustled a little more at the mine. Waited till dark and beat it back down the cañon and over to Bishop. Made Randsburg, drove the car over a cliff into a brushy cañon just before I got there, walked in with an old bed roll I'd fixed up at the Honey Boy, as good a blanket stiff as the next one! Worked there a week and blew out again, first pay day—hit it just right, as it happened.

"Hoboed to San Berdoo, doubled back to Needles—hanging tight to my blanket roll and my time check to show I'd worked not so long ago. And I've been hoofing it up the river since then."

Abington nodded again and pulled the coffeepot off the coals, using a crooked stick for the purpose. It may have occurred to him that crooked sticks are sometimes more useful than straight ones, for he gave Bill Jonathan an unhurried measuring look as he extended a cup of black coffee.

"That mummy sign, Bill. Did you mean by that you had discovered more ancient writings, or did you by any chance refer to skeletal remains?"

Bill took a great swallow of coffee and set down the cup. His tired eyes brightened in the fire glow. "Maybe you'd call 'em skeletons, professor—I'd say they're rock. All you want. Thought you'd like to take a look at 'em. So when we met up with you on the way to Carson I made up my mind I wouldn't wait till I was turned loose. You might be to hell an' gone by that time, or some nosey Adam chaser might run acrost 'em. I seen last spring how you've got your heart set on finding the granddaddy of all men, or some such thing, and I'd kinda hate to see anybody beat you to it. So I made my git-away in order to show you where they're at."

HAVING thus explained the matter to his own satisfaction, Bill forthwith began to empty the can of beans in a manner best pleasing to himself.

John Abington poked absently at the fire, gently rapping upon a burning juniper

branch until it broke under the blows, spurting sparks as it fell into the coals.

"Adam chasers, as you call it, are not so numerous in this country," he said softly. "Not nearly so numerous as—er—deputy sheriffs."

Bill Jonathan leaned sidewise, reached the coffeepot and refilled his cup. "Yeah, I get you," he said finally. "But this is wild country we're going into. I ain't taking such an awful chance, now I got this far. I was duckin' sheriffs when I found these stone men. I've got to go on duckin' sheriffs anyway—that, or else let 'em ketch me and put me in for five or ten years. It's six one way and a half dozen the other."

"This is how I've got it doped out, professor. You and me throw in together. I'll show you Adam—or his wife's folks, anyway—and you furnish me with grub and tobacco so I don't have to show up where I can be nabbed. I'll draw on you for supplies and keep along close without trailing right with you. So you won't get in bad if it's found out I'm in the hills." He looked across the fire at Abington. "How's it strike you, professor?"

Over and over Abington had considered this very point during his month of waiting. It all depended on Bill himself, he had decided. Some men are so constituted that preying upon society is second nature to them. Others fall afoul of the law through no real criminal intent. There is a vast difference between the two types, Abington knew. It all depended on Bill.

"I never did function as guardian angel to escaped convicts," Abington said with brutal directness. "Laws are better kept than broken, as you will probably agree, and it ill becomes a loyal citizen to help any man dodge the penalty for his misdeeds. On the other hand, even law-breakers may contribute something to the general welfare of the world. Discovering the skeletal relics of a man of the Cretaceous period may not materially help to liquidate the national debt, but it would be a priceless contribution to the scientific knowledge of the human race."

"Yeah, and I can go on and finish that

argument, myself. I can't do no more damage to society while I'm herdin' with the coyotes, and if I can help you find what you're lookin' for, that's better than loafin' around doing time in Carson. So you won't be doing nothing worse than taking a boarder off the hands of the State. That's about the way you doped it out, ain't it, professor?"

"Essentially the same, yes," Abington admitted. "I'm glad you have so thorough an understanding of the matter. I think if your offense was not too great I could perhaps get you paroled and placed in my charge, but that would take time and— They've just discovered the skull of an ape man in Rhodesia, Bill! I'd give a good deal to be able to show them a Cretaceous man found in America."

Bill leaned back with a sigh of repletion and lighted his second cigarette. "Well, I dunno how Cretaceous they are, professor, but they're fossils all right enough. Stone, anyway, way back in a cave—you have to crawl on your belly quite a ways, where I went in. I guess maybe there's another opening somewhere. I didn't look for it. I had piñon knots for torches, and I lit a fresh one soon as I come into this chamber—or cave. And when the blaze showed them stone skeletons— Say, professor, I backed right out the same way I'd went in!"

"How do you know they were fossilized? They may have been modern—no more than a hundred years old! They may even have been frontiersmen trapped in there while trying to escape from hostile Indians." Abington's tone was crisp.

"I went back," Bill declared calmly. "Got over my scare and wanted to see for sure whether them skeletons was twelve feet high like they looked to be, or just plain man size. So I looked good, next time in. There was four, and the biggest wasn't over eight feet. And they was solid stone, far as I could tell."

"I don't suppose you could describe the geologic conditions—I shall have to determine that, of course, when I arrive at the spot."

During five minutes Bill smoked and si-

lently eyed the archæologist, who sat meditatively tapping another burned stick into coals.

"One thing I better tell you, professor," he ventured at last, vaguely stirred by the rapt look in Abington's dark eyes. "There's a lot more to it than just arriving 'at the spot,' as you say. When I went into that cave, I was scared in. There's something up in there that got my goat. I beat it outa there—that's how I got nabbed by the law.

"I can't tell you what it is, professor. Some kinda animal. Makes tracks like a mountain sheep—but it ain't a sheep; or if it is— All I can say is that us Adam chasers will have to keep our eyes peeled."

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOOTPRINT CLEW.

ABINGTON stood absolutely motionless with his head drooped forward, his narrowed eyes surveying with brief, darting glances his devastated camp. The small brown tent, lying in a tattered heap with slits crisscrossing one another in the balloon silk which was so light to carry—and so costly—received a second scrutiny. The camp supplies, which had been neatly piled just where he had unloaded them from the two burros that carried his own outfit, were strewn about in indescribable disorder, as if a drove of hogs had held carnival there for an hour or so.

Because of the view it gave of the fantastic, red-sandstone crags across the valley, Abington had pitched his camp on a smooth hard ledge a few feet above the level with a cliff at his back and a spring of good water hidden away in a tiny cleft in the cañon at his right. It was a cool, slightly spot, free from bothersome ant hills or weedy growth that might harbor rattlesnakes or other venomous creatures.

True to his word, Bill Jonathan camped apart from Abington. In this particular location he had chosen a cave half a mile up the cañon—and he had immediately set about walling up the entrance so that he must squeeze in between two rocks which he could move across the aperture at night.

"Getting close to the range of that gosh-awful thing, professor," he had explained. "Better hunt a hole yourself and crawl into it—specially at night. And you want to keep your eyes peeled, and don't go prowlin' around without your gun or a knife or something."

Abington liked his little brown-silk tent, however, and he was not particularly impressed by the gosh-awfulness of the thing which Bill Jonathan could not even describe—he having failed to catch so much as a glimpse of it, as he had been forced to admit under Abington's repeated questioning.

Here was the ruin left by some animal, however, and Abington found himself completely at a loss as he circled the camp, going slowly and studying the wreckage foot by foot. On the ledge itself he did not expect to see any tracks. He walked therefore to the edge of the hardpan and examined the softer gravel at the foot of the two-foot slope.

There, cleanly outlined in a finer streak of red gravelly sand, he discovered the imprint of a pointed, cloven foot; a gigantic sheep, by the track, or possibly an elk, though elk were not known in that country.

For some minutes he stood there looking for other tracks. When he found one, he whistled under his breath. From the length of the stride indicated by that second hoofprint he judged that this particular animal must be considerably larger than a caribou. "Gosh-awful" it certainly must be!

Abington stared down the wash, for a moment tempted to follow the tracks. But with night coming on and an empty stomach clamoring to be filled, he hesitated. There was the wrecked camp to set to rights and such supplies as had not been destroyed must be gathered together and placed where this malicious-minded animal could not reach them again.

Moreover, the tracks might not be fresh, for the damage could have been done at any time during the afternoon while he and Bill were exploring a complex assortment of crooked ravines, tangled at the

head of the larger one where Bill had prepared to hole up in gloomy security.

Abington was thoughtfully regarding a sack of flour that had been slashed lengthwise and dragged in wanton destructiveness half across the ledge, when Bill Jonathan's voice sounded behind him, swearing a dismayed oath.

"Looks like it's been here a'ready!" Bill gasped, when Abington turned and glanced at him.

"Looks as though something has been here," Abington agreed. "Very unusual incident, in some of the details. Certain incongruities can scarcely be accounted for until I have further investigated the matter. I have had a herd of wild elephants stampede through camp, and I know the work of every marauding animal from jungle tigers to the wolverines of Canada. But I have never seen anything quite like this.

"For instance," he went on, "the slits in that tent plainly started from the peak and extended downward, with an upward thrust near the bottom, leaving a triangular rent. Any horned animal that could rip a tent like that invariably lowers the head and goes with an upward toss. So does a hog. Certain indications would seem to point to a wild hog—or a drove of them!—but I believe the longest slits in the tent were accomplished while it was still standing.

"You will observe," he continued, "that the rents are spaced with a regularity impossible to attain while the material lay bundled in a heap on the ground. The cloth has not been chewed, therefore it could not be the work of wild cattle. Moreover, that sack of salt was not touched. Wouldn't you suppose, Bill, that any herbivorous animal would smell the salt and go after it first?"

"Yeah, but it don't ever touch salt, professor. Not as far as I know. Did it leave any tracks?"

"Down here in the sand are some enormous hoofprints resembling sheep or elk tracks, Bill. From its stride the beast must be as large as a camel."

"Yeah, and I've known it to leave mule

tracks behind it!" Bill declared glumly. "Now, maybe you'll want to crawl into my cave, professor!"

"I may decide to let you store what supplies are left, but I myself don't fancy caves except for research work. By the way, did you notice any coliths in that cave of yours, Bill?"

"I dunno. Killed a scorpion about four inches long and his tail curled up. You ain't afraid of bugs, are you, professor?"

ABINGTON gave him a sharp glance, but Bill was innocent and looked it.

"It doesn't matter now," Abington said, "since I shall probably spend a week or more exploring these ravines. There should be a good many artifacts left in the caves hereabouts. The carvings indicate that the ancient people lived here and I have an idea that their occupancy of this section of the country extended over a considerable period of time. This old Cretaceous sandstone gives every—"

"Yeah, and it'll give 'em just the same to-morrow, don't you think, professor? I'm going to take what's left of the flour and cache it away in my cave, and that can of coffee. Looks to me like the thing was scared off before it finished the job. All the times I've saw it get in its work before now, it sure was thorough! You must 'ave scared it——"

"In that case I may be able to catch it."

Abington turned and strode again to where the tracks lay printed deep in the packed sand. He stepped down off the ledge and followed the hoofprints, scanning each one sharply as he came to it.

"Hey! You can't trail that thing, professor!" Bill called anxiously. "I tried that—once when it was a sheep and another time when it was a mule. Tracks take to the hills and quit.

"Aw, gwan and find out for yourself, then!" he grumbled, when Abington merely flung up his hand to show he heard and continued along the wash. "Won't be satisfied to take my word—never seen such a bullheaded cuss. But it won't be long, old boy, till you'll be tickled to death if you're able to dodge it!"

Dusk deepened. Bill hurriedly salvaged what supplies were not utterly destroyed, looking frequently over his shoulder when his work would not permit him to keep his back toward the cliff. It seemed a long while before Abington returned.

Bill's uneasiness had reached the point where he threw back his head to send a loud halloo booming out into the darkness; but at that very moment Abington came stumbling up to the ledge, leaning heavily on a dead mescal stalk while one foot dragged. Bill leaped forward and pulled him up the slope.

"Rock rolled down the hill and started a slide," Abington explained in a flat, tired tone. "Dodged most of the rubble, but one fragment struck against my ankle. Temporarily paralyzed my foot. Be all right in a short time, Bill." He sat down, breathing rather heavily.

"Who done it?" Bill knelt and tentatively felt the injured foot.

"No one, so far as I know. I am not sure, of course, but my impression is that the slide was purely accidental."

"See anything of your sheep?"

"Too dark to detect any signs after it took to the rocks. Heard something—up the hill. Couldn't exactly locate the sound. Any coffee, Bill?"

Bill had been itching to get back to his cave and make coffee there, but now he looked at Abington and hesitated. Neither Abington nor any other man could laugh at Bill and call him a coward. There had been a small pile of firewood; it was scattered around somewhere among the débris. The coffeepot, he knew, had been flattened as if an elephant had stepped on it; but he could find a can that would serve.

HE groped for the wood, found it and got a fire started. A cheerful light pushed back the shadows, making them eerier than when all was gloom. He set about supper of a sort, keeping his back to the ledge with a persistence that might have amused Abington if he had not been wholly occupied with the mystery that had impinged upon an otherwise uneventful trip.

"I can't fathom it," he said at last, speaking half to himself. "It is not a mountain sheep, I'm certain of that. Those slits in the tent and the salt sack ignored—those two details alone place the depredations apart from the work of any such animal."

"Yeah, there ain't no such animal!" Bill looked up to remark. "Now you know why I wanted a gun, professor. You thought it was for killing sheriffs, maybe, but you was wrong there. I told you there was something up here we'd have to look out for. I asked you to get me a gun, because I ain't got much hopes of killin' this thing by throwin' rocks at it. That's why."

"I'm sorry, Bill, but I really couldn't buy you a gun," Abington told him gravely. "And I don't think you will need one. The beast keeps himself out of sight, it seems. It isn't likely to attack either of us."

"Well, I'd about as soon be attacked as scared to death," Bill demurred. "That's just it, professor. I wouldn't give a cuss if I could look the thing over, once. What I hate is coming in and finding camp demolished and the grub all throwed out and nothing you can fight back at. Well, here's your coffee. It's about all I could find to cook, in the dark."

They drank the coffee in silence, even the self-contained Abington pausing every minute or so to stare into the darkness, listening. It was a nerve-trying pastime which netted them nothing in the way of enlightenment.

What it cost Bill to shoulder a load of more-or-less damaged supplies and go off alone up the cañon, his way lighted only by the stars, Abington could only guess. In justice to the peace officers of the county he could not give the man a gun, and he sensed that Bill was really afraid of the unknown marauder, and with good reason, Abington was forced to admit.

Bill had been hunted from camp to camp by the thing which he had never seen. He had been robbed and his food supplies destroyed until at last he had fled the place only to fall into the hands of the watchful sheriff. Abington couldn't blame

Bill for his fears. All the same, Abington did not want to place a gun in the hands of an escaped prisoner. That, it seemed to him, would be going rather strong, even in the interests of science.

He was sitting with his back against the cliff with the dying fire before him, rubbing his numbed ankle to which sensation was returning with sharp stabs of pain, when Bill came up out of the cañon mouth with his bundle still on his shoulders and his eyes staring.

"It's been to the cave," he announced in a suppressed tone. "Clawed out the rocks I walled the opening up with and raised hell with my stuff. Professor, how bad do you want them stone Adamsses?"

CHAPTER V.

GALLOPING BURROS.

ACROSS the valley the moon peered over a jagged pinnacle, looking as if broken teeth had bitten deep into its lower rim. That effect was soon brushed away as the pale disk swung higher, and the blood-red sandstone peaks stood fantastically revealed in the swimming radiance. The valley straightway became enchanted ground wherein fairy folk might dance on the smooth sand strips or play laughing games of hide and seek among the strange pillars and jutting crags.

Beside the dying fire Bill Jonathan dozed, head bent with now and then an involuntary drop forward, whereupon he would rouse and glance sharply to left and right—the habit of a man who knows himself hunted, a man whose safety lies in unsleeping vigilance.

"Lie down on the tent, Bill," Abington advised him, after his third startled awakening. "Lie down and make yourself comfortable. To-morrow you can watch while I sleep."

"Aw, I can keep awake, professor. All that climbing around to-day made me kinda tired, is all. If I know you're asleep, I'll keep my eyes open wide enough."

"But I don't want to sleep, Bill. This little mystery must be solved before we

go any farther with our chief business. Couldn't sleep if I wanted to."

"You'll stay awake a darn long while, professor, if you wait to put salt on the tail of the thing that haunts this valley," Bill opined.

Abington calmly knocked the dottle from his pipe and began to refill it, ready for another long, meditative smoke. "For every problem in the universe there is a correct answer," he said quietly. "It is only our ignorance that makes mysteries of things simple enough in themselves. A peculiar arrangement of details has given this 'gosh-awful' animal of yours an air of mystery, but the explanation is simple enough, I'll guarantee."

"Yeah, but how are you going to find this explanation—that you think is so darned simple?" Bill stifled a yawn.

"Just as I find the meaning of the hieroglyphics; by studying the symbols already familiar to me, and from them arriving at the natural relation of the unknown characters. This thing left tracks, and it managed to accomplish a certain amount of destruction in a given time. To-morrow morning I'll take a look at your cave, and the answer to the puzzle will not be so hard to find as you imagine."

Bill mumbled a half-finished sentence and lay down on the torn tent, and presently the rhythmic sound of snoring hushed the strident chorus of stone crickets on the ledge.

Until the moon had swum its purple sea and reached shore on the western rim of the valley, Abington lounged beside the cliff, so quiet that any observer might have thought him asleep. For a time his pipe sent up a thin column of aromatic smoke, then went cold; and after that only the moonlight shining on his wide-open eyes betrayed the fact that Abington was very much awake.

An owl hooted monotonously in the cañon at his right, probably near the spring. A coyote yammered on the steep hillside across the cañon mouth, and a little later Abington heard the frightened, squealing cry of a rabbit caught unawares by that coyote or another.

On a cliff just over his head, shadowed now as the moon slipped behind the hill, the ancient people he was tracing had carved intricate tribal records. These had endured far beyond the last vague legend of those whose valor had thus been blazoned before their little world, a world that had seemed so vast and imperishable, no doubt, to heroes and historians alike.

It seemed to him that here was a land well fitted to hold the full story of these forgotten lives. Could he but find it, and read it aright, might not his own name be blazoned before his own people—to be forgotten perchance in ages to come, as these were forgotten now?

THE cave that held fast the bones of these ancients lay somewhere in the bewildering maze of cañons across the valley. Bill Jonathan would recognize the spot, so he had declared whenever Abington questioned him. A certain rock on the cañon's northern rim, shaped like the head of a huge rhinoceros with two tusks on his snout—Bill was positive he could not miss it, once he got inside the cañon. The opening to the cave was directly under the first tusklike rock spire. A matter of ten miles perhaps, Bill had guessed as he stood on the ledge and gazed across.

Here on this side were caves and even with the hope of finding the fossil skeletons Bill had described, Abington had wanted to explore these before going on. He still wanted to do so, if he and Bill could manage to hunt down the unknown pillager of camps, or at least guard their supplies against further depredations. If the raid on Bill's cave had been as complete as on his own camp, he would be compelled to postpone all research work while he plodded with the burros to the nearest town for fresh supplies. Bill could not go, that was certain.

At daybreak Abington was planning drowsily to send Bill up the cañon after the burros, load on what was left of the outfit and cross immediately to the other side of the valley, where they would endeavor to find the skeletons first of all and be sure of them before he went out for

supplies. He would then be able to take out specimens to send on to his museum, thus saving a bothersome trip later on.

His hand reached out to shake Bill's leg and rouse him to the day's work, when a great clattering sounded in the cañon mouth near by. Bill needed no shaking to bring him to his feet. As the two automatically faced toward the noise, there came the three burros in a panicky gallop out of the cañon and into the open.

In one great leap Bill left the ledge and ran yelling and flailing his arms to head them off before they stampeded down the valley. The leading burro, a staid, mouse-colored little beast, swerved from him, wheeled toward the hills opposite, stumbled and fell in a heap. The second kept straight on down the valley, the third burro at its heels. Bill let them go while he ran to the fallen leader.

Though it took but a minute to cover the short distance, the burro's eyes were already glazing when Bill arrived. As he stopped and bent over it a shuddering convulsion seized its legs and immediately it stiffened. It was dead.

Bill stood dumfounded, eying it stupidly for a moment before he turned to call Abington. But the shout died in his throat, for his glance had fallen upon a fresh disaster. The two other burros were down and kicking convulsively, just as the first had done. They were dead before he could reach them.

Abington was not in sight when Bill, walking heavily under the burden of this new tragedy, returned to the ledge; but presently he came limping out of the cañon and into camp.

"I thought I could discover what had stampeded the burros," Abington said, coming up with an indefinable air of surprise that Bill should be standing there passive with that blank look on his face. "Too late, again. If it was the gosh-awful, he'd disappeared before I could get up three. Did you head off the burros? I want to move camp this morning."

"Yeah—but you'll have to git along without 'em this morning. The damn things is dead."

Abington looked at him, looked past him to where Bill pointed an unsteady finger. He got off the ledge and limped over to the nearest carcass, looked it over carefully, walked to the others and examined them, and returned thoughtfully to camp.

Bill had kindled a fire and was starting off to the spring with an empty bucket when Abington stopped him.

"Hey, come back here! Don't use any water from that spring."

"Yeah? Where will I use water from, then?"

"From a canteen. I filled two yesterday. The burros were at the spring this morning and stampeded from there. I can't be certain yet, of course, but I think the water is poisoned."

Bill stared, his jaw sagging. Abington was looking out across the valley, his eyes narrowed and blacker than Bill had ever seen them.

"I may be wrong, Bill, but we can't afford to take a chance. One burro might suddenly pass out with heart failure, but when three of them turn up their toes in the same way and at the same moment, the coincidence will bear investigation, I think!"

"How could that sheep thing poison a spring?" Bill's tone implied violent incredulity.

"I don't know. I'm merely stating what appears to be a fact. Three burros drank at that spring and afterward stampeded out of the cañon and dropped dead in the open. I'm assuming that the water in the spring, or at least in the little pool below it, was poisoned. They must have been scared away, else they would have died right there near the spring. Yes, I think it will bear investigation!"

"Yeah, but in the meantime we've got to have water," Bill said gloomily, shaking a canteen gently before he poured a little into his makeshift coffeepot. "I don't aim to stick around till my tongue swells up, doing fancy thinkin' about a poisoned spring. Suit yourself, professor, but I'm going to hunt water, soon as we go through the motions of eating."

"I suppose in time the spring will clear

itself and run pure," Abington reassured him with a twitching of his bearded lips. "If we were to stay here, we could divert the trickle from the rocks and soon have another pool. But we could never be sure that it was not poisoned again. No, Bill, we'll have to get our belongings together and move across the valley."

"A darn hard job," muttered Bill, "packing everything on our backs." And he added: "That sheep thing can travel, too; don't overlook that fact, professor."

CHAPTER VI.

READY FOR A BLOW.

THE eastern rim of the valley stood crimson where the westering sun struck it full, bringing into bold relief each cañon and crag, the smallest fold and the smoothest boulder; as if a contour map had been painstakingly modeled on a gigantic scale in red sealing wax, or as if a world aflame had been paralyzed into utter silence.

Toward that garish pile of shattered hills, Abington and Bill Jonathan plodded with the low sun at their backs, which were burdened heavily with as much of their camp supplies as they had been able to retrieve and could carry.

The start that morning had been delayed until nearly noon while they searched vainly for some clew to the mystery that had in a few hours held an orgy of wanton destructiveness in two camps and had poisoned their water supply and killed three burros. Human malevolence had been displayed in that last attack, Abington was convinced.

Yet in spite of all his skill, all the careful attention to details which his scientific training had made second nature, he had failed to discover the slightest evidence of a human agency at work against them. Not a sign, not a track, save those enormous sheep tracks leaving the vicinity of the spring and going off up a narrow ravine in great strides which made it hopeless to think of overtaking it; for without water he did not dare attempt any prolonged search. Now, with a half mile of

red sand to plow through before they reached the first bold hillside, their eyes clung perforce to the seamed, broken rampart they were nearing.

A dazzling light that flashed and was gone, then came again and stood motionless for a space while one might count fifteen, showed high up on a ridge as evenly serrated as a rooster's comb, and quite as red. Abington came to a full stop which he made a rest period by slipping the heavy pack from his shoulders. Nothing loath, Bill did likewise. The two sat down on the sand beside their bundles, mopping perspiration from faces and necks.

"Bill, when I get up and stand in front of you, look past me at the sharp peak just south of the mountain—the first one on the ridge straight before us. Tell me if you see anything that might be a reflection of the sun—from a telescope, we'll say, or more likely a pair of field glasses. No, don't look yet. Remember that with good glasses a man could read the expression on your face, read your lips, too, if he's had any training."

At the first sentence Bill's face had hardened. "You don't have to preach caution to a man that's been on the dodge long as I have," he muttered bitterly, under cover of lighting a cigarette. "Shoot. What d'you think—that it's an officer, maybe?"

"I'm not thinking past the field glasses that I believe are focused on us," Abington parried, rising and standing so that his back was to the ridge while he held up his watch before Bill's face. "He may think I'm trying to hypnotize you, but it's an excuse. Look right past this watch, to a point between the second and third little pinnacles on the ridge. See anything?"

"Something moved, in the notch just below that pinnacle. I got it against the sky for a minute. There ain't any shine, though. Might have been a sheep."

Abington put away his watch, stooped and shouldered his pack.

Bill slipped his arms through the rope loops and wriggled his own burden into

place on his back as he got up. "Wouldn't think they'd be lookin' for me away down here," he said uneasily, after a few rods of silent plodding. "Not unless you——" He sent an involuntary glance toward his companion.

"Unless I informed on you when I went after supplies, and arranged for your capture after I had benefited by your information," Abington answered the look. "You don't really think that, Bill."

"I don't know why I wouldn't think it, if somebody's planted up there watching for us with glasses," Bill retorted, not more than half in earnest but yielding to the ugly mood born of nerve strain and muscle weariness.

"Of course, you can think any idiotic thing you choose," Abington returned, in that tolerant tone which he could summon when he wished to bite into a man's self-esteem. "Any other brilliant ideas on the subject, explaining why, if I were contemplating treachery, I should call your attention to that light on the ridge up there?"

"Yeah, I might have one or two," Bill growled. "I was a fool to start across here in broad daylight. Now, if they come after me, I ain't even got a gun!"

ABINGTON sent a quick, sidelong glance toward Bill's face. That gun question was becoming a touchy subject between them. "No, you haven't a gun. So you are not quite so liable to a few extra years—or a chair in the gas house—if you are caught!"

"Well, I ain't caught yet!" Bill's upper lip lifted away from his teeth. "Not by a damn sight!"

Abington gave him another sidelong glance. The snarl was not lost upon him, though he made no reply. Like many another man who is agreeable enough in ordinary circumstances, Bill Jonathan's good nature did not always stand up under hardship.

That blustery impatience at the physical discomforts of a long grilling walk was beginning to crop out in Bill, mostly in the form of a surly ill temper and a grumbling

against conditions which neither could help. Abington had reached the point of gauging the exact degree of surliness and to set up mental defenses against his moods.

Bill had taken the initiative in this quest and he was surely receiving full value for his efforts. From a sporting admiration for Bill's daring, and a certain liking for his whimsical shrewdness, Abington was consciously beginning to chafe at the man's crabbed temper; he felt a growing distrust, too, which was yet formless and only vaguely realized.

He caught himself wishing now that he had asked Park what crime stood against Bill Jonathan. No use asking Bill; he would say what he pleased and the other could believe it or not.

"If you've got any wild idea of finding out from me where them stone skeletons is, and then turning me over to the sheriff, you better revise the notion, professor," Bill said abruptly, having brooded over it for five minutes. "I'm nobody's fool."

"Then why talk like one?" Exhaustion was beginning to draw a white line beside Abington's nostrils and his bruised ankle ached cruelly. He began to feel that he'd had enough of Bill's grouching. "You've nothing to kick about, so shut up. I'm doing packer's work rather than have men along who might go out and betray you."

"Yeah. You knew mighty well I wouldn't stir a foot if you brought in a bunch of mouthy roughnecks," Bill growled back. "How do I know what you framed in town?"

Abington slipped his pack off his shoulders and swung toward Bill with a menacing glitter in his eyes. "That's going a bit strong, even for you," he said sharply. "If you've any reason for saying that, out with it! If not, I'll thank you to keep such thoughts behind your teeth. You're getting quite as much as you are giving, Bill Jonathan—and by that I mean to include loyalty and fair play.

"For all I know," Abington went on, "you invented the story of fossilized human remains as a temptation that would insure my protection and the food you'd

need in case you made your escape from Park. Do you suppose I was so blind I did not see that possibility from the start? A fossilized man, as you knew, was bait I'd be pretty sure to swallow. Well, I did swallow it—but not with my eyes shut, I assure you. Please give me credit for that much intelligence.

"I took you at your word," he continued, "and I have played the game straight. I shall continue to play it square, until I find that you have lied to me."

HE waited, balanced, ready for the blow he expected. Instead, he saw the expression in Bill's eyes change to a grudging mollification, as if the very abusiveness of the attack reassured him.

"I never said anything to put you on your ear," Bill hedged morosely, after an uncomfortable pause. "What are you razzing me for? I said I wouldn't be caught and I won't be. That goes, professor."

"Very well, let's have no more talk about it." Abington lifted his pack to his galled shoulders and started on, leaving Bill to his own devices; wherefore Bill presently overtook him and walked alongside.

The truce held while the clouds flamed with the sunset, a barbaric pageant that could not rival the sanguine magnificence of that wild ensemble of towering hills slashed with deep gorges whose openings were frequently hidden away behind bold, jutting pinnacles.

"Looks like the devil was practicing on these hills, trying to make a world of his own with nothing but fire for building material," Bill observed at last, wanting to appear friendly and awed in spite of himself before the spectacle. "When God came along and told him to knock off, looks like the devil just kicked it all to thunder and dragged his feet through the mess a few times and walked off and left it like that. Don't you think so, professor?"

"I've heard theories advanced that were not half so plausible," Abington replied, his voice once more calm and slightly ironic, as if he still doubted Bill's sin-

cerity. "A man could spend a lifetime in this country without exhausting its archaeological possibilities."

"Yeah—or without getting caught," Bill added, speaking as had the other of the thing nearest his own heart.

CHAPTER VII.

INTO THE BLACKNESS.

BILL and Abington came to and entered a narrow, straight-walled gorge. It had a loose, sandy bottom and every indication that ages before it had been a watercourse with the floods of glacial rainfall sluicing down to the valley. Presently Bill, plowing laboriously ahead to a certain spring he remembered in a cave up this ravine, gave a grunt and stopped short.

In the peculiar, amethystine veil of the afterglow which lay upon the hills like a cunning stage effect of colored lights, he pointed a finger stiffly to a certain mark in the sand. Abington limped forward and joined him.

"I see the gosh-awful is here ahead of us," he said listlessly. "Well, it will be obliged to wreck us personally this time, Bill, since all our worldly goods are literally on our backs. We may get a sight of it at last."

"That all you care?" Bill stared at him. "Maybe I'd feel that way about it, too, if I had a gun to defend myself with. You're making a big mistake, professor. You'll see it before you're through."

"Possibly." Abington's tone was skeptical. "How far is it to the spring?"

Bill did not reply. He was still staring at the strange tracks that were too large for any sheep one could imagine, yet not shaped like cattle tracks, nor much resembling the elk they had discussed last night. Blurred though they were in the fine sand, they were yet easily distinguishable to being the same hoofprints they had seen across the valley.

The tracks did not look very fresh, and after a brief study of them Abington took the lead, perhaps because he was armed and Bill was not.

Presently Abington stopped and pointed

to a cleft in the rocks. "Whatever it is, it turned out of the gorge and went up there," he said. "Pretty good climbing, even for a sheep."

"I'll go ahead and show you the spring," Bill volunteered and Abington chuckled to himself.

Bill looked back at him with sullen eyes. "All right for you, professor—with two guns handy," he said resentfully. "Put you in here with just your bare hands and maybe you wouldn't be so damn nervy, yourself."

"I'd probably wait until I saw some danger before I became alarmed."

Bill muttered something under his breath, and stepped out more briskly. Both were thirsty, but since they had left the western side of the valley with one canteen nearly full, the need of water had not yet become acute. It was the tramp across the valley with packs too heavy for them that had told on the tempers of the two men—with Abington's bruised foot and Bill's nervous dread of pursuit for good measure.

The spring proved to be well protected, in a water-worn cave that seemed to offer excellent shelter. A tangle of nondescript oak bushes grew near the entrance and drew moisture from the overflow which, though slight, was yet sufficient for the scant vegetation.

The cave itself was not large, with a fine sandy floor and a lofty arched roof of irregular blocks of the red sandstone which was the regular formation of these hills. A lime dyke broke through here and there in sharp peaks and ridges in a fairly continuous outcropping roughly pointing toward the river.

Abington slipped off his pack, drank from the spring and sat down against the wall of the cave to unlace his boot from his lame foot.

Bill began gathering dry twigs and branches and set about making coffee and frying a little bacon. "We oughta git a sheep or something," he grumbled, breaking a long moody silence. "This time of year there's generally sheep running in through here."

"I'll take a hunt, when my foot has had a rest. We can manage for a day or two," Abington replied without looking up.

"Say, you'd be in a hell of a fix if you broke your leg," Bill sneered. "You'd starve to death before you'd trust me with a gun, wouldn't you?"

"There's meat for to-night. 'To-morrow will take care of itself.'"

"Yeah, maybe it will—and it'll leave us to do the same," Bill retorted. "What the heck are you scared of, professor?"

"Nothing at all. Not even your gosh-awful. Will you fill that corn can with water for me, Bill? I'll try a cold compress on the foot."

Bill did as he was requested and a sight of the discolored foot stirred him to sympathy. Abington, he suddenly saw, must have suffered cruelly all day, though he hadn't said anything about it. Bill remembered too that Abington had remained awake all last night while he himself had slept. But it was not Bill's way to apologize.

"That's a hell of a looking foot!" he growled. "Hot water beats cold. After supper I'll heat a can of water——"

"After supper I'm going to sleep," Abington rebuffed him. "Cold water will do."

"Have it your way—it's your foot," snapped Bill, and relapsed into his morose silence.

IT was not an agreeable supper, and neither spoke while they drank coffee and ate bacon and fried corn from the same frying pan.

Bill was tired and full of uneasy fears and he bitterly resented Abington's action in regard to the guns. He was accustomed to the feel of a gun's weight against his hip and the thought of facing trouble without a weapon gave him an uncomfortable feeling of helplessness. Add mystery to the hazard, and Bill reacted with a dread not far removed from panic.

Abington ate and drank his share, then forced himself to explore the cave with a lamp. He chose for himself a niche in one

side of the wall near the entrance, where he would hear any intruder and would still be fairly well concealed.

At least, that was his idea when he settled himself in the recess. As a matter of fact not even his aching foot could keep him awake. He dropped almost at once into the deep dreamless sleep of exhaustion. When he opened his eyes it was to see the sunlight slanting into the cave—a circumstance which at first convinced him that it must be nearly noon, since the cave opening faced the south and the cañon walls were high.

After a brief space of mental foggi-ness, however, his mind snapped into alertness. He remembered that he had stooped to enter the cavern; the sunlight bathed the high-arched roof just over his head and brought into relief certain symbols—left there by the ancients, he had no doubt.

For a time he lay looking up at the roof, deciphering each crude character, his eyes tracing the lines which even in that sheltered place showed the erosion of many centuries. Some of the lines were dimmed; none retained the sharp outlines left by the engravers.

Now he knew that the cave had a high opening through which the sun was shining; a common occurrence in that old formation that had suffered the buffetings of wind and water for millions of years, and moreover had been rocked and twisted by many a primeval earthquake. He thought no more of the opening, but insensibly slipped under the spell of those ancient records, his imagination thrilling to each new sign as it caught his eye.

The story of a journey was depicted there, a journey of death, he judged from certain priestly emblems and the sign of burial. Perhaps they had attempted to depict the journey of the soul, though he could only guess at that, his speculations revolving around a figure of a dog or wolf, very similar to the jackal which in the belief of ancient Egypt was supposed to carry souls across the desert to paradise. He wondered, searching farther along the roof for further inscriptions.

Like an old rangeman riding up to a herd of strange cattle, unconsciously reading the brands and mentally identifying the owners, Abington could not seem to pull his mind away from that roof. Beyond the sunlit patch the carvings extended into obscurity so deep that, stare as he would, he could not distinguish the lines.

A sense of bafflement nagged at him. Just as the cattleman will follow a range animal for half a mile, seeking the vague satisfaction of seeing what brand had been burned into its hide, Abington sat up and put on his boots, and picked up the can of carbide and miner's lamp which he used in preference to candles when exploring dark caverns. He started climbing up a tilted shelf of rock that offered a precarious footing for a man tall enough to bridge certain places where the shelf had dropped completely away and left gaps in what may once have been a steep narrow trail.

From the floor of the cave it looked impossible for anything save a fly or a lizard to climb to the roof. When he started, Abington had not expected to do more than reach a point from where he could view the shadowed writing at closer range. He kept going, however, while the lame foot protested with twinges of pain that gradually ceased as the muscles limbered. Presently he stood on a low irregular balcony, the writings just over his head.

This was something he had not suspected even while lying on his back studying the roof. He made his way along the ledge, forced to stoop so that he was soon walking like a gorilla with his hands sometimes touching the balcony floor. He became suddenly aware of an odd variation in the rough sandstone. The sharp, granular formation was worn down to a dull smoothness in the center of the ledge where he walked. It was a pathway polished by many shuffling feet—nothing else.

He turned a corner and peered into blackness; an ancient water channel was there, no doubt. Abington lighted a match, saw that the hieroglyphics continued along

the wall. Waiting only long enough to light the carbide lamp, he set off along the narrow passage, pausing now and then to study the inscriptions as he went.

Broad chambers receded into blackness beyond the white light of his lamp and these he hastily explored before going on. Labyrinthine passageways were revealed as he turned the light this way and that, each opening inscribed with strange symbols carved in the rock at the sides.

"A gold mine of records!" Abington exclaimed to himself in the whisper that was his habit when alone. "The ancient people who lived here seem to have had a Scribblers' Club of very active members! An ancient catacomb, or I'm mistaken. That, or else these symbols were carved with the express purpose of misleading one. H'm! An attempt to confuse the devil and thwart him in his search for the souls of the dead! Now here's a pretty problem for an archæologist. Let's see if I am smarter than the devil!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GREAT CHAIN OF EVIL.

ORDINARILY John Abington thought fairly well of himself and he felt certain that these misleading characters could not prevent him from finding the way to the actual burial place. For one thing, he discovered that many of the passages—a miner would have called them drifts—had been hacked out by hand, with stone hammers and wedges. How long and arduous a task that had been, he could only conjecture.

In several of the drifts he found implements to prove his theory. After a glance or two that identified them with the early people he had been tracing, he went on and left the implements lying there for the present, knowing that he could return at any time and get them if he wished to do so.

It cost him several fruitless trips down long, winding ways that finally ended in blank walls, before he learned to mistrust the man-made passageways, which had evidently been cunningly constructed to de-

ceive the devil himself—and any other unwelcome intruder.

He began to study more carefully the carvings placed at the openings of these zigzag passages, but after a while he was forced to admit to himself that he could make nothing of them. So far as he could determine with a cursory examination they all looked much alike, though he knew there must be some secret differentiation. He could only avoid such corridors as seemed to him the work of human hands, and go on.

Going on was not a simple thing, however. Many times he was forced to crawl on hands and knees along an old water channel with fine red sand packed hard and smooth, and at such times he caught himself looking for human footprints. That he found nothing of the kind in any of the old water channels seemed to him a proof that the ancient ones had traversed these black passages before the time of copious rainfall, else the sand would not have been so smooth and untrodden.

Frequently he was forced to climb up through crevices where the rocks were worn glossy—always, wherever rock lay underfoot, the same smoothness prevailed—until it seemed to him that he must soon emerge upon the crest of the high-turreted ridge which formed that wall of the cañon.

After a time that to Abington had been timeless, so absorbed was he in the fascinating quest of a final destination which these signs seemed to promise, he was recalled to practical things by the dimming of his carbide lamp. He held it close to his ear and shook it, but heard no sloshing sound in the small water compartment above the carbide.

HE moved the tiny lever that permitted the water to leak drop by drop over the lumps of carbide to form the acetylene gas which burned with a clear white light until water or carbide—or both—were exhausted and the gas ceased to form, but the flame still burned feebly and threatened to go out altogether.

Abington glanced at his watch and gave a low whistle. No wonder the lamp was

going out! His watch said that the hour was eleven thirty-five, though he would have sworn it was crazy if the lamp had not begun to fail.

He must have been prowling in there for three or four hours. That was as long as the lamp would burn with one filling of water. The previous evening he had wanted to make sure of a steady light in case they were disturbed during the night and he had put in fresh carbide and filled the small tank with water just before going to bed.

"Damned idiot! Brought the carbide can along, and no extra water!" he anathematized his carelessness.

After all, he was not so culpable, however, for he had intended to use the lamp for only a few minutes, to study the carvings on the cave roof. The can of carbide, lying beside the lamp, had gone into his pocket from force of habit, a good habit, too. If only he had slipped the quart canteen over his shoulder! But Abington's work had taught him to manage comfortably with very little water and who would burden himself with a canteen when he was merely going to climb fifteen or twenty feet?

He shut off the lamp entirely, since it was folly to waste the flame while he sat there thinking over the unpleasant predicament in which his scientific zeal had led him. That little cat claw of light might serve to help him over a bad place, he reflected. As he sat there, he could recall several places which he would not care to negotiate in the dark. Furthermore, there had been trickles of water in some of the passages and one cavern held a pool.

It occurred to him that Bill would probably be worried. It was the first time he had thought of Bill since he started this strange underground journey. He remembered now that he had not seen Bill in the cave when he left it that morning. "He'll think the gosh-awful got me in the night!" Abington grinned to himself.

Abington hated to go back without having discovered the secret of these writings, but common sense told him that the thorough exploration of this place was

likely to take some little time. The problem now was to find his way back to the cave. He had little doubt that he could retrace his steps, though he realized that it would take some time, feeling his way along in the dark, as he would be compelled to do unless he found water.

He stood up, stooping under the low roof, and stared unseeingly into the blackness whence he had come, trying to recall the nearest point where he could find water. It was some little distance back, he knew. He had been climbing considerably in the last half hour or more and the walls were dry.

Well, he would have to help out with matches until he found water enough to fill his lamp. An inveterate smoker, he had a fair supply of matches; and now he lighted one and tucked it under the little lamp switch, so that he could have the benefit of the blaze down the full length of the wood.

That first match having helped him down a rough channel where the boulders were trickily piled, he felt his way along the wall as far as he dared go before lighting another. Walking in alternate darkness and light, he made his way for some distance.

Inevitably the time arrived when he paused, hesitating between a left-hand turn and a right, with a black hole directly in front of him. It cost Abington two matches to decide that he knew none of these passages, that he had not come this way at all.

He was about to retrace his steps to a point where he was sure of the landmarks when, far away, he heard the faint drip, drip, drip of water falling on rock. At first, standing there in black silence save for the intermittent tinkling, he could not tell where the sound came from.

By walking a few feet down each passage, however, he eliminated first the left passage and then the right, and so went straight ahead down a gentle incline with roof so high that a match flame failed to reveal it, and so narrow that his shoulders brushed the walls on either side as he walked. He judged it to be a natural fis-

sure running through the hill, an old watercourse; the ridge seemed honeycombed with them.

That particular match having burned itself out, Abington walked on in darkness, frankly relieved at the near prospect of water. He was willing now to admit to himself that he was very thirsty, and that the hunger gnawing at his stomach could be easier borne if he had a drink.

It would be a relief, too, to have a decent light once more and he promised himself grimly that this time he would not loiter along, studying hieroglyphics as he went. They could wait until he came in again prepared to explore the place thoroughly and chalk the different turnings so there could be no blundering in the future. So, thinking of future precautions, he stepped out over the lip of a small precipice and fell headlong into water.

He came up spluttering sentences which might have surprised Bill, who had found him always controlled in his speech. Abington fumbled for the edge of the pool, found it and hung on with one hand while he explored with the other for room to lift himself out on the rock. Grimly he clung to the lamp, which was doubly vital to him now, and when he had made shift to crawl out he turned and sat with his legs dangling in water to his knees while he prepared to fill his lamp.

"Well, I wanted water," he said with a chuckle, when his first startled rage had passed and he was smoothing the water out of his wet beard. "Sooner or later we do get what we want, I've noticed, even though the manner of getting is often unexpected." With the lamp cap opened, he leaned and dipped the lamp in the water, feeling for the depth.

ABINGTON'S nerves were scarcely more susceptible to emotion than wires, but the Stygian blackness and the silence broken only by that tinkling drip, drip, began to press rather heavily upon his consciousness. In spite of himself his fingers shook and fumbled the simple mechanism which provided for lighting the lamp with a spark when matches were not

available—as his emphatically were not, after their involuntary bath.

He whirled the little wheel again and again before he succeeded in striking a spark that would ignite the gas, and exhaled a long breath of gratitude when the slender white flame suddenly sprang into life. Solicitously he coaxed it into a brighter radiance and turned its full beam upward, looking for the spot where he had walked over the edge of the fissure. When he found it, his mouth sagged open.

"Call this hole a teapot, and I'd say I fell down the spout," he grunted. "A pretty problem—getting out again!"

In truth the problem was not pretty, but instead was as ugly a situation as any in which John Abington had ever found himself. The place was not unlike a huge teapot with bulging sides and the fissure for a spout. How deep the water was in the pool, he could only guess; considerably over six feet, he knew, because he had taken a dive of about fifteen feet and he did not remember that he touched bottom at all. As to the diameter of the pool, that too was a matter of conjecture, since the light did not show the farther rim.

He leaned over, dropped a wet match into the water and watched it, edging along the rim of the pool as the match floated gently away from the side where he had fallen in.

Abington's eyes brightened. "Thought there was a current," he said with a nod of confirmation. "Some outlet, of course. Some inlet, as well. This pool never filled drop by drop."

Carefully guarding his lamp, he worked his way along, following the match. He saw it hesitate, poise and sway like something grown suddenly fearful, then up-end and disappear under water as if invisible fingers had reached up and seized it. Abington leaned far over, flung another match into the water and saw it disappear as the first had done.

He dropped his hand into the water, let the fingers dangle passively, and felt the nagging pull of the undertow. The hope of leaving the cavern by following the outlet of the pool died before it had gained

more than a flutter of life. For the water flowed out by a subterranean channel which no man could follow.

Abington continued around the pool, turning the lamp this way and that upon water and walls. The place was not unlike a huge cistern, roughly round and slowly drying up, judging from certain marks on the rock rim which in places sloped steeply toward the water. Presently he discovered the inlet, a small stream running down through a crack in the wall. There was no hope whatever of getting out that way. It was here that the tinkly drip fell into the pool from a finger of rock thrust out of the fissure.

Even in his urgent need of finding his way back to the surface, his scientific mind ruled Abington, for he caught himself turning the lamp rays back for a second look at hieroglyphics carved high up.

"What the deuce!" he muttered. "That can mean nothing but evil—much evil—and the death of many. Aztec and Egyptian—not burial but death, and an evil death at that. Death to many—repeated over there. Well, the carvers were here, that's certain. Couldn't have come in as I came. H'm——"

He went on, stepping across the fissure where the water flowed in, and keeping to the dank rim which widened as he proceeded. Although the walls rose roughly perpendicular with here an outward bulge, there a falling back to a steep incline, there was visible no passage nor even a split, save where the water came sliding down the fissure that was no more than a seam. All along the wall, high up wherever a smooth surface offered, there were the carvings, with little variation in their sinister portent, the great chain of evil, and the death of many.

CHAPTER IX.

A JUMP INTO SPACE.

TWICE Abington circled the pool, pausing often to scan the carvings and to look up at the place where he had made his unexpected entrance. A real jump-off, that; more than twice the height of a

tall man, and no possibility of climbing back unless one had a rope. The water had undoubtedly saved him a nasty fall.

As a means of escape, Abington gave it up and turned his attention to the places where the walls slanted up into blackness. He was standing thoughtfully considering his next move—a matter that would bear thought!—when he was startled by an explosive report, muffled by distance, but nevertheless unmistakably a gunshot.

Something approaching a spasm of rage at his helplessness shook Abington and passed, leaving him again calculating and outwardly calm. The sound could not have come down the fissure from which he had fallen. He had come too far along a straight passage before he reached the three forks, for an outside noise to penetrate to him there.

The sound might have come down the narrow inlet to the pool, but Abington dismissed that possibility, probably because it was of no use to him, since he could not very well worm his way through an eight-inch crevice.

There must be some opening in the roof. If not, then one good archæologist was likely to be counted a martyr to science and finally forgotten—his own bones eventually becoming mere fossilized relics.

"Cheerful prospect, by Jove!" he grunted as he turned his back on the inlet and began to examine the walls with the speculative eye of a steeple jack. Now that he was fairly sure that the surface was near, Abington did find a place where it looked possible for an athlete to climb up, at least as far as the light illumined the walls.

He was resolved that there must be no more carelessness. Before he left the pool he took the precaution of emptying the carbide lumps from the can into his handkerchief, and filling the can with water. The tight-fitting top served to keep the water from leaking into his pocket, though he stowed the carbide in another for safety's sake. He kept out but one lump, which he put into the lamp, leaving himself in the dark for a minute or two.

With the lamp dry and warm the tiny flint wheel sparked at the first attempt and the white tongue of flame shot out in a friendly fashion that brought the ghost of a smile to Abington's lips. Even then he waited long enough to refill the lamp with water before rising to begin the hazardous climb—which, after all, might net him nothing, unless it were a broken bone or two if he lost his footing and fell again.

Abington's work had given him the sureness of a mountain goat. He took off his necktie, tied it like a bandeau around his head, hooked the lamp securely in its fabric and began to climb, resolutely pushing far from him the thought of failure.

How far he went, he did not know. All he was certain of was the impossibility of going back. There were times when he hung by a slender foothold and risked his neck while he rested his hands. There were other times when he was almost ready to give it up, almost but never wholly beaten.

"By Jove, this is a high mountain!" he gasped once when, having found a fairly comfortable perch on a knob of rock the size of a barrel, he very gingerly removed the lamp from his forehead and took a more comprehensive survey of his immediate surroundings and the wall above him. "I'll swear I've climbed ten miles!" This was a very unscientific assertion to make. He capped it at once by another. "Bet I've passed a dozen lateral fissures on the way up."

HAVING relieved the tension somewhat by that remark, he slowly turned himself about and illumined with white light an arched opening in the wall that half faced him around the curve of the cavern. "I'll be damned!" breathed John Abington but what he really meant was: "Thank God!"

The six feet of sheer wall which stood between his perch and the mouth of the passageway balked him for a time, until he saw that the rock immediately above the opening broke smoothly for several feet, even with the face of the wall. The

rock floor of the tunnel extended outward over the black abyss from which he had just climbed; it was like a pursed lip thrust out from an open mouth, he thought.

Upon that narrow platform he fixed his gaze, shrewdly measuring the width of the extension. He would have to climb above the opening and drop down to the out-thrust lip, trusting to good fortune to keep his balance and not pitch headlong into the cavern.

For a long moment he stood face to face with this fresh ordeal, the lamplight sliding back and forth, halting to contemplate a feasible niche for his feet, stealing upward to find some splinter or seam where the fingers could clutch.

Foot by foot he planned it, while he gathered his last reserve of strength for this supreme effort. Once he started, there could be no going back. He must work above the smooth stretch, where, at some time in the past, a huge fragment of wall had fallen away, and then edge sideways until he was directly over the lip of the tunnel.

After that he must let go all holds and drop. If he landed on the lip and stayed there, he would at least have a chance. If not—the evil death of a certainty would be his; for even if he landed uninjured in the pool he would never be able to repeat that terrific climb. He knew that he would not even attempt it.

Doggedly, with that persistence which characterized the man, Abington began the ascent. He reached the exact point which he had planned to reach, drew one long breath in the full knowledge that it might be his last—and dropped. The impact of solid rock upon his boot soles jarred him as he flung himself forward and fell face downward on the floor of the passage.

CHAPTER X.

TRACKS IN THE DUST.

WHEN Abington came to himself he was in darkness, the lamp having fallen on its side and gone out. Whether he had fainted, slept or merely lost consciousness

for a moment he could not tell, nor did he ponder it much. The fact that his toes hung over the edge set him crawling forward on his hands and knees, obeying the primal instinct of self-preservation.

He wanted no more of that particular abysm. Until he had put several yards between himself and what seemed to him now a black, bottomless void, he did not think of the lamp.

When he finally forced himself to stop and light it he discovered that he was in a fairly level passage, the walls covered with carvings wherein the same chain of evil predominated. These hieroglyphics won only a cursory glance, however, as he got painfully upon his feet and started forward, steadying himself against the wall as he went.

A cool breath of air in his face was his first intimation that he was nearing the outdoor world. In spite of a stiffness in his joints and muscles he found himself moving almost at a run and the consciousness of his nervous haste brought a faint grin of amusement to his face. John Abington was more anxious to see daylight than he ever had been in his life—and the first man to laugh over the experience would be John Abington himself.

Nevertheless he did not slacken his pace until he arrived at a sharp turning where a gray light dimmed the white flame of his lamp.

He stopped before a crack twice the width of his palm, through which the dawn wind came blowing gratefully in his face. Directly across from him, but fifty feet lower and separated by a hundred-foot chasm, a broad ridge extended out into the valley; and as he looked two big-horn sheep came trotting up a faint trail and disappeared among the higher crags.

"That's where the shooting took place," Abington told himself. "Wonder if Bill's been hunting? Took my rifle. Have to give it back. Well—at least I can see daylight!"

The lazy clouds above the valley blossomed suddenly into radiant hues. The gaunt hills blushed and the cañons all seemed bathed in crimson and yellow

flames. As through the narrow window of a belfry tower, Abington gazed down on a world of magnificent peaks and crags flaunting their bold reds and yellow beneath a redder sunrise.

For the moment the scene held him, then he turned back to the problem of finding a way out; for although a glimpse of the outside world was heartening, he could not squeeze through an eight-inch split in the rock. There must be some other exit. He turned away from the window and went on.

The passage took another twist and he entered a roughly outlined room into which the daylight seeped through several fissures between the shattered blocks of sandstone; high overhead most of them were, although two or three were low enough to serve as narrow windows.

A square boulder, the top hollowed in the shape of a rounded trough, stood in the center of the chamber. Otherwise the room was empty, unless the intricate mass of carved symbols might be classed as furnishings, for the walls were covered with them.

Abington's spirits rose, though he paid little attention to the writings. To him they proved, as did the boulder which he recognized as a sacrificial altar, that this was a chamber much used by the ancients. Since the route by which he had entered could not be called a thoroughfare, there would be another way out, possibly several.

Within two minutes he had found the passage, and something else. There on the rock floor which slanted down from the chamber on the side opposite the one by which he had entered, was a cigarette stub; it was one of the oval kind he himself always smoked. He stooped and picked it up, his black eyebrows lifted in surprise.

"Never reached this point yesterday—h'm! Bill not only borrowed my gun and went hunting last night, but did a little exploring on his own account. Looking for me, perhaps. No, Bill was scouting around for himself. H'm! Growing surly and quarrelsome, pretending a distrust he

can't actually feel, hoping I'd give him an excuse to turn on me. Wonder, now, if Bill didn't raid his own cave and hide the stuff!

"A full burro load of grub—with gun and ammunition he could live all winter—h'm!" He went on: "Looking now for a hideout—place where I can't find him! Bill, my lad, you should pay more attention to details; one little oversight—such as a cigarette stub—has hanged a man before now. A good inch and a half of tobacco wasted here. You'll be wanting a cigarette very badly, Bill, before you get another supply, remember."

He laid the stub down where he had found it and went on, haggard eyes peering this way and that, seeking further signs of the traitor's presence. If Bill had been looking for his partner, then it was an odd twist of circumstance that had sent them both wandering around in the same labyrinth of caves and complicated katabothra without once permitting them to meet. If, on the other hand, Bill had been hunting a hiding place which Abington would never find—and the archæologist was certain this was the case—he had a surprise in store.

Just now Abington wanted most of all to get out of there and find his way back to their camp, where there should be food. If not—well, he had his automatic; he had seen game; and he was a fairly accurate shot. He would not starve.

The passage sharply descended, as so many others had done. Abington went cautiously, lighting both walls and watching for obscure openings which for all he knew might be the one he should take. This whole country seemed to have been the playground of Vulcan, who rent mountains asunder, twisted whole ranges of hills and broke them into fragments and flung them aside when fresh land appeared above the great Sonora Sea and caught his sportive fancy.

Just here the shattered formation of the old volcanic fissure lay in blocks that had been roughly hewn into the crude semblance of steps, down which Abington went slowly, choosing his footing with the

deliberation of excessive weariness. His thirty-six-hour fast and that terrific climb up from the Pool of Evil Death—from the writings he had so named the place—had taken more out of him than he realized, until he began to negotiate this rather difficult descent. But he kept going, that cigarette stub serving now to urge him forward.

STUMBLING from hunger and weariness, Abington emerged into another cavern of considerable extent and showing unmistakable signs of human occupancy in bygone ages. Crude pots—most of them broken—stood against the walls. Stone implements of various kinds, all thickly covered with dust, lay scattered about; and on the dust-strewn floor were the plain imprints of hiking boots. Bill, then, had visited this cavern, which proved that so far Abington had kept to the right trail.

Tilting the lamp so that the light shone on the floor, he went forward, following the boot tracks in the dust. Through winding passages they led him—Abington might have become lost again had not those footprints pointed the way—and so into a chamber where was piled a little heap of things which Abington recognized as a part of his own outfit and the things Bill had declared were stolen from his cave across the valley.

The treachery of the act stabbed through Abington's weary consciousness and merged into a malicious satisfaction. At any rate the spot had been well chosen, for here was water trickling down a rift in the wall, tinkling into a tiny basin hewn out of the rock by some other hands than Bill's.

Abington sank to his knees and drank thirstily, then clawed at the pile of stuff, found a tin of corned beef and cut it open with his knife. It was not what he would have chosen for a meal, but it would serve. There was plenty of water at hand. He ate all of the corned beef, drank again and withdrew to a sandy niche where he felt fairly sure of hearing Bill if he returned; laid himself down under a shelv-

ing projection of rock, put out his lamp and went thankfully to sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

ROARING GUNS.

REFRESHED, Abington awoke with a sunbeam shining fair in his eyes. Just at first he failed to orient himself and thought he was in the cave with Bill. But this cavern was larger and the crevices high up on the wall, between the broken masses of rock, let in a westering sun and a breeze straight off the desert. He was hungry again and the salt beef had given him a burning thirst.

He wondered if Bill had returned while he slept. It was quite likely, he thought, and having no wish to be discovered just yet, he crept very slowly from his place of concealment, careful to keep in the shadows beneath the jutting wall.

For some time he waited and listened, but the only sounds he heard were the tinkling of the little spring and the shrill chirping of a few cedar birds that had made their home in the crannies of the roof and were very busy with their own small affairs.

Abington grinned to himself as he cautiously approached the little pile of supplies and began a more careful investigation than he had attempted that morning. Two pounds of chewing tobacco—most convincingly had Bill bewailed the loss of those plugs, he remembered. He counted half a dozen cans of corned beef, one of the variations in diet which had been made possible by having three pack burros. Had Bill really imagined he could make Abington believe that the gosh-awful had carried off chewing tobacco and corned beef in cans?

In the face of their loss of the burros Abington had not given much thought to the missing articles from Bill's outfit. He had visited the cave, viewed the apparent aimlessness of the demolition, had looked for tracks, and, having found the giant sheep tracks in the bottom of the cañon, paid no more attention to the wreckage.

"Bill must have hurried back across the

valley after this stuff—no, certain details contradict that," Abington said to himself. "He must have carried all this stuff on his back, along with what I gave him. Not very bulky—he could have concealed it all in his pack, easily enough. Pretty heavy load it would make! No wonder Bill was grouchy! Took advantage of the gosh-awful's work and held out a few supplies on me. Clever—but then, the sheriff's experience with Bill should have warned me to be on the lookout for tricks."

Abington helped himself to what food he could stow in his pockets, dined on another can of corned beef, took a long drink at the spring and refilled his carbide lamp before he started out again. His plans had changed altogether since he discovered the food cache.

He no longer wanted to get back to the cave where he and Bill had camped, for he did not believe that Bill would be there, nor any of the supplies, and if there were fossilized human skeletons in this region he felt that he would find them just as easily without Bill.

The way out of this particular cavern led him down through another crevice, blocky and splintered as if the whole peak had been twisted asunder; and for the greater part of the distance it was open to the sky.

There were places where it would even have been possible for a man to climb up out of the crevice. But the day was too far gone and Abington had no intention of spending another night underground in aimless wanderings, nor to roost on some dangerous pinnacle until morning.

He emerged at last on a narrow ridge that stood like the crest of a huge, petrified wave between the peak he was leaving and another not quite so high. Intuitively he identified it as the ridge he had dubbed the rooster's comb—and knew that if he were right he must have come a long way underground. For the cave where he and Bill had spent the night together and from which he had started on his subterranean journey was considerably more than half a mile from the ridge where he had seen the light.

Again the high peaks were gilded with sunlight while the lower slopes glowed scarlet and the deeper shadows merged into warm purple. No artist would ever have dared to mix those barbaric colors, even for a desert sunset; and if he had dared his hand must have lacked the cunning of the Master Painter who daily wrought his magic here on these wild hills where men so seldom ventured.

Abington looked down a sheer wall of rock to a deep basin where grass grew and a round pool of water held like a mirror the rose-tinted reflection of the cloud straight overhead. One steep trail led down the farther hillside to the pool and as he gazed a mountain sheep went bounding up that trail. On the brink of the pool stood a man foreshortened to the height of a boy. He seemed to be staring after the sheep.

"Bill! Oh, Bill!" Abington shouted between cupped hands. For the moment he had quite forgotten Bill's treachery, in his human reaction to the sight of a familiar figure after the ordeal he had just passed through. "Oh, Bill! Hey!"

The man's face was upturned, staring. Then he raised his rifle and fired point-blank at Abington. The bullet struck a rock close by, ricocheted and nicked Abington across the forearm.

"You poisonous reptile!" snarled Abington, and whipped out his automatic.

At his first shot the figure went sprawling; tried to get up, fell back and lay still. Abington watched him, a bit heart-sick over the excellence of his shot. He had never taken much to the manly sport of planting leaden pellets in living bodies, but since his work took him into the wild places of the world he had learned to shoot straight because it seemed to him a necessary accomplishment. Besides, straight shooting made an enormous saving in ammunition.

"You would have it," he grunted remorsefully. "Any jury would agree that my life is of more use to the world than yours—and since you are the killing kind it—"

Down in the basin the wounded man

struggled to hands and knees and began crawling; slowly, stopping every moment or two, going on, crawling in an aimless circle most horrible to watch.

An oath voiced at random jarred out of Abington's throat. He half raised the automatic, lowered it, shook his head. He couldn't do it. But neither could he leave man nor animal crawling blindly, aimlessly around until he died. Abington looked again and turned away sickened at that creeping, groping, stricken thing hemmed in by the crimson rocks that rimmed the basin.

WITHOUT any clear purpose Abington started down the ridge, looking for some break in the cliff that separated him from the basin by a scant two hundred feet. He had no doubt that Bill Jonathan was done for; the automatic was a wicked weapon; the range was short.

When in the dusk he came slipping and sliding down an old sheep trail long since abandoned for a more favored path, however, there was no wounded man to be seen in the little basin. Like a shot quail that flutters for a moment among the bushes and is lost, the man somehow had managed to crawl away and disappear.

Abington called Bill's name again and again while he lighted the carbide lamp. And as the white light sprang out and drove back the shadows, a gunshot roared just under the cliff for answer to his hail.

As he leaped sidewise, Abington shut off the lamp, then rushed the spot where the gun had flashed. By good luck he spied the vague bulk just as the rifle was being painfully lifted for another shot. He snatched at the barrel and wrenched the gun free—by the feeble resistance of the other gauging shrewdly his waning strength.

"Venomous kind of snake, aren't you?" Abington observed with pitying contempt, as he leaned the rifle against the cliff and started to relight the lamp.

The light flared up. Abington stooped, gave a shocked exclamation as he started back, recovered himself and stooped again. The man was not Bill Jonathan, but a

gaunt old fellow with high cheek bones and a straight gash of a mouth drawing an evil line through his grizzled beard. He was a total stranger, wounded and collapsed against the cliff; beaten and utterly passive now, like a trapped animal that will not move unless it sees some chance of escape.

"By Jove, I'm glad it wasn't Bill, at any rate!" Abington ejaculated as he knelt to make a superficial examination. "Shot through the side," he diagnosed to himself. "Well below the heart. Serious enough, but by no means fatal with the proper care—and that is going to be something of a problem in existing conditions. Might better have made a clean job of it—glad I didn't, though.

"Well," he asked aloud, "where's your camp? If it doesn't involve too much climbing I'll try and get you home." He waited while the old man's eyes remained fixed on him with a baleful stare. "Doesn't understand, maybe."

He tried French, German and a passable Italian, keenly watching the eyes that never once changed their homicidal glare. He sat back on his haunches and studied the glowering face with less personal emotion than he would have displayed before an odd pattern of the Maya death mask, and decided that the man had understood his first question well enough and was merely stubborn.

"Of course, if you want to lie here all night, that's your privilege, I suppose," Abington said finally, standing up and glancing around at the confining walls of the dusk-filled basin. He turned the light again on the old man's forbidding countenance, made more sinister by the pain he was suffering.

"Are your field glasses equipped with night lenses?" Abington asked abruptly, and silently laughed at the startled wavering of those colorless eyes.

"Thought so! Now, since you do understand plain English, let me urge you to tell me where I'll find your camp. Of course you have one, for you're too well nourished and too well dressed to be living off the country. You won't talk? Then

you are likely to catch cold in that wound, lying out here all night. And I can assure you that a bullet wound—especially in the body—can give plenty of trouble if neglected."

The thin, vindictive mouth, clamped shut in that thick unkempt beard, might have been dumb for all the sound that issued from it.

ABINGTON rose and went seeking here and there with a light hoping to discover some sign of a camp, or at least a trail that would lead to one. He did not succeed, but he did find the field glasses which had been dropped or cannily hidden under a bush, where they might have been overlooked if the light had not brought a reflection from the lenses. He was looking them over when, from up on the ridge where the sheep had disappeared, a voice that could belong to no man save Bill shouted anxiously:

"Hullo! That you down there, professor?"

Abington swung the lamp toward the sound, moving it three times up and down, the signal to advance which they had found convenient in old caves and tunnels where a shout might bring down upon their heads a small avalanche of loose rock.

"Was that you shooting? You hurt?"

"Come on down, Bill," Abington called. "There's a path, if you can find it in the dark." And as an afterthought, he added: "No, I'm not hurt."

Good old Bill, to ask that question with just that demanding note of worry in his voice! Abington remembered what he had been thinking when he pulled and aimed his automatic, and he had the conscience to blush for the thought. Of course Bill was no traitor! His eager, hurried voice betrayed long hours of frantic searching in that maze of narrow gorges that twisted and turned and crisscrossed so bewilderingly.

Abington smiled under his beard as he listened to the clattering of small rocks on the hillside beyond the pool. Presently Bill Jonathan's familiar figure—never had Abington seen a more welcome sight!—

came lurching into the light zone, half running, with that little swing of the shoulders that told of strength.

"My Lord, professor, I've been runnin' these hills like a rabid kit fox, lookin' for you!" he panted, laying both hands on Abington's shoulders and giving him an affectionate shake or two. "Why, you old vinegar-roon, I've been scared to look off a cliff or into a pot hole for fear I'd see a coyote sneakin' away from your ornery carcass! Thought sure that gosh-awful thing had got you!" He stopped to breathe. "Who was doing that shootin' You?"

Abington nodded, a bit surprised at the lump in his throat which prevented speech.

"Shootin' at the gosh-awful? You git it?" Bill's voice dropped to a vengeful whisper as he sent a wholly involuntary glance behind him.

"No, Bill, I didn't. Some one down here took a shot at me and I shot back. He's lying over here by the cliff."

"Yeah?" Astonishment pulled Bill's hand off the other's shoulder. "Who do you reckon— Was it an officer?" An indefinable change had crept into his voice.

"No, I don't think so. He isn't dead yet. Come over and take a look. We'll have to do something—get him into a shelter of some kind. These nights are too chilly for a wounded man to lie out unprotected."

Once more Abington was calm and cool and efficient. He turned and led the way back to the wounded man, Bill Jonathan following at his heels quite as if there had been neither quarrel nor separation to jar them out of the routine of the trail.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAN WHO VANISHED.

BILL got up off his knees, glanced this way and that as though looking for something of which he stood in urgent need, and turned a bleak gaze again upon the huddled figure on the ground.

"We better get a fire started," he said to Abington, unconsciously taking the initiative as if this was his own particular af-

fair and he alone must acquit himself well in the emergency. "I'll scout around with the light. Maybe I can find a cave—his camp, if it's down in here. Don't suppose he'll jar loose any information——"

Bill continued to stare down at the man, his underjaw thrust out and in his face a certain implacable hardness that brought him a second puzzled glance from Abington.

"Where's your camp?" Bill demanded abruptly.

The man seemed to draw himself together as if he feared a blow. The murderous eyes flinched away from Bill's relentless stare. "Find out—if you think—you can!" he snarled.

"Oh, I'll find it! Don't you worry a minute," Bill said viciously. "If necessary, you'll tell where it is."

"I won't tell you. You can go ahead—kill me—be done with it——" The wounded man defied him weakly.

"Who, me?" The savage bitterness of Bill's laugh was a revelation to Abington. "Me kill you? I should sa-ay not! You mind what I told you two years ago, Jack! That still goes. Don't think you can die and duck out from under in that way. I'll nurse you like a sick baby! You'll get well, see? Well enough to travel, anyway." He turned abruptly away as if he would not trust himself to say more.

Presently a fire was crackling beside the cliff and Bill had brought water in his hat for Abington's use in cleansing the wound.

"Fix him up best you can, professor," said Bill. "Then if you can make out with the fire for light, I'll borrow the lamp and beat it over to where I cached our stuff. There's that first-aid kit we saved outa the wreck; I'll bring it and some grub. It ain't far. Just over the ridge, half a mile, maybe."

He drew Abington to one side, out of hearing of the wounded man. "That's Jack Huntley, professor. He's got to be put in shape for the trip in to Vegas. It's a matter of life and death. So do what you can—I know you're a pretty good doc-

tor when it comes to a pinch. I'll be right back. Well—hang onto him, professor, till I get back with the stuff. Don't let him sneak out on you!"

"If he does," said Abington grimly, "it will be because he sneaks into the next world. I'll try and not let that happen, Bill, my lad."

He stood watching the round zone of white light go dancing away and up the hill without any visible means of locomotion, since Bill walked behind it, slipping from rock to rock, pausing and poising here, flitting on again like *Peter Pan's* good fairy *Tinker Bell*. A fantastic comparison in that wild glen where men of past ages had met for their wooing or their warring or to hide from strange beasts that roamed the valley; where even now the air seemed charged with a malignant kind of hate, and with fear that passed all reason—since the man called Jack Huntley had been assured of the best care they could give him.

All the while Abington sat by the fire and waited for Bill, he felt the cold malevolence of the soul behind those staring eyes and the close-shut lips. Though the fancy did not trouble him, it seemed too that the shades of those savage ones of long ago hovered inquisitively in the shadows that fringed the firelight; timid wild folk who dared not walk boldly among these strange men of a later age, yet lingered, curious to see what grim drama was about to be played here where the stage was set with the somber trappings more suited to an old Greek tragedy than of everyday life.

The return of Bill, heavily burdened and with the white light dancing impishly before him, did not spoil the illusion but served instead to deepen it; for the crudely efficient surgery was completed in silence or curt undertones that held a sinister quality of ominous reserve. The white light painted grotesque shadows on the brown-sandstone cliff beside them, gigantic caricatures of men in gruesome pantomime that might have been the enactment of a torture scene, with two fiends performing demoniac rites over some luckless victim.

Bill afterward boiled coffee and mixed a bannock in which he stirred small fragments of cold fried bacon left over from his supper. Abington ate ravenously, and afterward the two smoked beside the fire, Jack Huntley lying wrapped in their two blankets.

As the Great Dipper tilted more and more toward the polestar, fever unlocked the stubborn lips of the wounded man and he muttered endlessly, his sordid secrets betrayed with pitiless repetition. All about millions in carnitite, he babbled, and how "they" would never get it away from him, because he was too smart for them; it was crazy talk, interrupted whenever Abington bent over him ministering to his comfort, doing what he could to allay the fever.

BESIDE the fire Bill Jonathan brooded, lifting his head to listen when the fellow's delirium seemed to take a different turn, or some movement roused him from his somber meditations.

Dawn was beginning to work its daily miracle on hills and sky when Bill replenished the fire and turned to Abington, who was sitting with lean fingers clasped around his knees and a cold pipe dangling from between his teeth.

"What do you think of the case, professor? Think he'll get well, all right?" Bill's tone made the question seem only the preliminary to what was really in his mind.

Abington yawned. "No reason why he shouldn't, Bill. I recovered the bullet; it's a clean wound and no vital organs were injured. He should get well without much trouble—if proper care is used."

Bill turned away without a word, though it was plain that his mind was full of troubled thoughts. They cooked breakfast and ate in silence. The wounded man had fallen asleep, with the sunlight softly warm on his blanketed shoulder.

Once Bill turned his head and stared long at the man, then looked at Abington, lips parted for speech that after all was withheld. Abington lifted an eyebrow inquiringly and Bill looked away.

"What's on your mind?" Abington

asked finally, setting down his empty cup. "They say confession is good for the soul."

"Yeah. So's a few other things. Come on over here on these rocks, professor. That old possum is liable to be listenin'."

"I don't think so," Abington cheerfully disagreed, but he followed Bill to a pile of boulders some distance away, where they could talk without disturbing the patient, or being overheard by him.

"Now, there's a question I'd like to ask you, professor. Who did you think you was shootin' at last night, when you ventilated Jack Huntley's liver?"

Abington's lips twitched. "At you, Bill."

"Yeah?" Bill's jaw stiffened. "Want another try?"

"No, I don't think so. This man has complicated matters, but he has also cleared up a few things for me."

"Yeah, and he'll clear up more—for me," Bill opined. "If it's a fair question, I'd like to know where you've been since yesterday."

"Well, not to relate all of my thrilling adventures, I have been wandering around through a series of caves and in the course of time I found myself in a cavern in the top of that peak up there. I judge it to be the one where I saw the reflection of the sun on field glasses. While trying to find my way out of there, I picked up a half-smoked cigarette, of the oval kind which I use."

"Yeah? One of the flat ones? Kinda backtracked yourself, eh?"

"No-o—for very good reasons I knew that I had never been there before. I thought I had crossed your trail, Bill, my lad."

"Not mine, professor." Bill shook his head. "I've been huntin' the hills over by our cave, lookin' for you. I was workin' over this way when I heard the shootin' last night."

"Yes. Well, a bit later I came across a cache of food taken from our outfit across the valley."

"The hell you did!" Bill started, and nearly dropped his cigarette. "You sure?"

3A—POP.

"Absolutely sure. I ate two cans of our Imperial corned beef—breakfast and dinner. I expected you to show up there, but of course you didn't. It would make a splendid hideout, Bill. There's a spring, and cracks in the rock let in sunlight, a perfect retreat. Impossible to come at one from the rear——"

Abington paused and his shoulders moved involuntarily. He was thinking of the Pool of Evil Death. "I'll show you the place. When I am through in this country you'll find it useful, no doubt."

"Not unless Jack Huntley dies. If I can ever get him in somehow to the sheriff, I won't need to hide out in the hills. Unless," Bill added dubiously, "they cinch me for that car I run over the cliff." His eyes clouded. He had forgotten about the destruction of that car.

"I expect they'd hand me about five years for that," he added gloomily, after a pause. "Where's the way into that cave of yours?"

"I'd have to lead you to the spot and show you. There's time enough. I shall want to go back and make a thorough examination of the place for science."

Bill looked up. "I'll have to disappoint you about them stone men, professor. I run acrost the cañon yesterday where the hole went into the cave. There's been a big slide in there. I couldn't tell within a hundred feet, where the opening used to be. We'd have to tear down the whole mountain to find it."

Abington said nothing. Creeping into his mind again came suspicion. Had Bill ever known where there was such a cave? Surely that slide had chosen a most convenient time and place for Bill Jonathan!

"I know where it was," Bill said doggedly, as if he read the thought. "I can show you the slide; you can see it for yourself, professor."

"My college of science is not collecting slides," Abington drawled. "Well, I must be getting back to my patient. If he's awake, he may want to eat something."

He rose, but Bill had not finished, it seemed. He remained seated on the rock

hunched over his cigarette and staring morosely across the little lake.

"So you think I lied to you," muttered Bill. "You think I've been stalling you along! That goes kinda tough, professor. I've been dodgin' around in the hills—yes, sure I have! But I ain't going to dodge no more and you can go to hell and hunt your own Adamses. You wait till I lead that bird in to the sheriff and make him come clean! It's him that'll take a ride to Carson—not me."

"And the car?" Abington asked softly, his beard hiding a smile.

"Aw, hell!" growled Bill, jerked back to harsh realities.

In his bitterness over the sudden frustration of his hopes, Abington would not speak a word of comfort. Not even the rich storehouse of ancient records in the labyrinth of caves could quite console him at the moment, his heart had been so set on taking back to his college a fossilized man of the Cretaceous period.

He walked moodily over to the make-shift bed of his patient and stared blankly. There was no patient. A shout brought Bill and the two nosed along the cliff like hounds baffled over a warm trail suddenly wiped out with water.

Because the man had been obliged to crawl, it was manifestly impossible for him to get far. Even so, they were a good half hour in running him down and then it was the slight indentations of his knees in a skiff of sand behind a bush that gave the clew.

Bill went down on all fours and disappeared. After a minute or two, Abington followed.

It might have been an oversized badger hole, so far as outward appearances went. Even in his haste the trained mind of Abington noted a cunning arrangement of rocks deliberately piled haphazard against the cliff at some time long past, as the twisted roots of old bushes and trees clinging the twining down through the dirt-filled interstices gave mute testimony.

Yet the rock pile was in reality a solid, arched covering for the sloped entrance to another cave, in the mouth of which

Jack Huntley lay sweating with the pain of his wound, as frenziedly malevolent as a rattler pinned under a rock.

Kneeling facing each other with the wounded man gasping curses between them, Abington and Bill Jonathan locked glances; Abington's eyes coldly searching, Bill's defiant, hurt and trying to cover a certain wistfulness he would have denied with much profanity.

"He's got to clear me with the law!" Bill said between clenched jaws. "He's the only man on earth that can do it. He pulled the robbery they laid onto me and if he don't come clean I'll kill him inch by inch!"

JACK HUNTLEY turned his head and sent a glance to Bill's face; shifted his eyes to Abington's, that were black as ebony and quite as hard; turned again to Bill and met a cold stare that shriveled his courage to whining cowardice.

"Don't you, Bill! I—I'm done for! You can't hurt a dying man! You wouldn't have the heart!"

"Oh, wouldn't I?" Bill's laugh was in itself a threat. "Say! I got about as much heart as them stone men we're after. You wait and see how much heart I've got for you—you hound!"

"It's murder!" Jack Huntley's voice rose to a shriek. "You wouldn't stand by and see him kill a man that—that's all shot up——" His eyes turned glassily to Abington.

"Why shouldn't I?" Never had Abington's voice been more casually brutal. "You're going to die anyway, you know."

"Yeah, and you won't die so darned peaceful, either," Bill added darkly.

"Of course you can save yourself a good deal of suffering," Abington pointed out in his calm professional tone, "by writing a full confession. In that case I should feel obliged to protect you from Bill's vengeful nature."

"It's worse than Injuns!" Huntley cried, his fear rising to panic.

"Not if you write the truth," Abington pointed out, taking from an inner pocket a water-warped notebook. "Here's a foun-

tain pen which may contain enough ink, unless you wax overeloquent. Write the truth, Huntley. I'll take care of Bill."

"You'll have a hell of a time, professor, if he don't clean his dirty soul right down to the bottom!"

"I'll have to be raised up," whined the sick man, darting furtive glances here and there as if, even yet, he hoped by some miracle to escape.

"For legal purposes," Abington directed, holding Huntley up and giving Bill a quelling look, "begin like this: 'I, Jack Huntley, of sound mind—and of my own free will—do hereby confess—that on the——'"

It was Bill himself who named the date, snapping the words out with a savage click of the teeth.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CLEVER IDEA.

HALTING, hating to set down in plain words the full extent of his guilt, driven to it by the relentless promptings of Bill, Jack Huntley wrote three precious pages, that would make interesting reading for the county officials, before he signed his name. Abington saw the teary warning of the pen going dry and dropping blots on the book, and signed his name as a witness before all the ink ran out. The thing was done.

Bill threw back his shoulders with an unconscious gesture of relief, and stepped away. "Now, die and be damned to you!" he said as he turned his back and walked off.

Abington looked after him grinning. "This is where he holes up, Bill. He should have a pretty fair equipment. Better explore around a little. I have carbide tied up in my handkerchief, if you need the lamp. But the place seems well lighted from above."

"Yeah, I'm sure goin' to look around. I believe he's the one poisoned our burros. I bet——"

Abington looked up, got to his feet and started toward Bill, who had given a sudden bellowing whoop.

"Well, the hound!" Bill was balancing two large mescal stalks in his hands. Light they were as cork, tough as bamboo, large at the base as Bill's muscular leg above the knee. Three feet from the base of each was a foot rest, lashed securely to the stalk.

"There's the gosh-awful!" Bill said in the incredulous tone of one who can scarcely believe his own eyes. "Look at how them sticks is cut on the bottom, professor! Sheep hoofs to a T. Stilts! And that's how the thing took such long steps and got over the country so almighty mysterious!"

"Ingenious!" Abington declared, balancing the stilts in his hands before he stood them against the wall of the cave. "Simple, too. I had a suspicion of some such thing, but dismissed it as impractical in so rough a country."

"I dunno. They're light as paper. They could be carried easy enough on rocky ground, and just used for sand and gravel." He paused. "Now I *know* he poisoned the burros. He seen your camp set up in plain sight, and come straddlin' over there. A feller can cover a lot of country on stilts, once he gets used to walking on them. I used to when I was a kid."

Abington, however, was not quite satisfied. There lacked the motive and he spoke of it. "If he had raided camps and carried off the supplies, I could understand it. But this attempt at terrorization, and the insane destruction of good food, does not come within the bounds of logic."

"Yeah, but you don't know that bird like I do," returned Bill. "He's what God used for a pattern when He made the first drove of hogs. You mind all that talk last night? That about having millions in carnetite, and being richer than Rockefeller? Jack thinks he's got hold of something in here and he's been trying to scare everybody off. Maybe he's got something worth holdin' on to and maybe he ain't. If he has, I sure feel I'm entitled to grab it!"

Abington was walking around the roomy chamber, flicking this thing and that thing

with a glance, overlooking nothing. He stooped over a pile of whitish rock stained thickly with great blobs of bright yellow, selected a lump and looked up, seeking an opening where the strongest light fell through. He went over and stood under the light, turning the rock this way and that while he examined it through a miner's glass.

"So this is his millions in carnetite!" he said contemptuously at last, tossing the sample to Bill, who caught it dexterously as a catcher cups palms for a ball. "More than one poor devil has been fooled by limonite. That's what this is, if I am not badly mistaken, a yellow ocher, resembling carnetite. There's your revenge, Bill. Go tell him his millions in carnetite are just a dream. Tell him it's limonite. If he's greedy as you say, that will be punishment enough."

"Not when he thinks he's dying," Bill grumbled. "He won't give a darn. What's he flopping around like that for?" he asked sharply. "Something bite him, do you s'pose? If it did, it'll die," he went on sententiously.

ABINGTON ran over to where Jack Huntley lay on the ground. He could do nothing, with the primitive means at hand. Huntley had indeed been bitten—by death. Whether the wound had been more serious than Abington diagnosed it, or whether he had injured himself in crawling to the cave, they could not of course do more than guess. Within half an hour Jack Huntley lay dead on the floor of the cave.

A regular two-dollar book-length novel, "The Final Score," by Elmer Davis will be in the next issue of POPULAR.

"This means that I must go in and have a talk with the sheriff," Abington observed. "A mere formality, but one I prefer not to neglect. Want to come along, Bill? I'll pay them for the car, far as that goes."

"Yeah, I guess maybe I better go in and have it over with. I'll pay you back in work, professor, if you'll go ahead and settle for that darn car I wrecked. But don't let 'em stick you on the price of it. It wasn't worth more'n two or three hundred dollars."

"I'm a fair judge of cars," Abington remarked. "It will be all right, Bill."

"Yeah. And when we come back in here with a fresh outfit, professor, we better bring along a couple of good muckers and some powder. I believe I can maybe locate the hole into that cave, if I can take my time and have some help. Or maybe we can find another way in there. We sure oughta come fixed to spend the whole winter in here. I found a lot more carvings than I'd ever saw before."

Abington laughed to himself, and clapped a hand down on Bill's shoulder. "Bill, my lad, that's the true scientific spirit! You'll be an Adam chaser as long as you live, now you've started."

"Yeah," said Bill, staring around him at the encircling red hills. "They're in here somewhere, professor. Eight feet tall and big accordin'. No foolin'. I seen 'em myself. Well, let's bury the dead and get ready and beat it. We want to get back in here while the good weather holds."

PESSIMISM AND PATRIOTISM

POSTMASTER-GENERAL HARRY NEW was deploring the tendency of too many prominent men to talk pessimistically about the future of America.

"Whenever I hear that sort of stuff," he said, "I recall the best answer to it ever framed. It was spoken by 'Uncle Joe' Cannon when he was one of the stars of Congress. He said: 'These calamity howlers can howl all they want to, but they'll never howl down the fact that, in spite of all their howling, this country is a hell of a success!'"



The Pothunter

By T. S. Stribling

The author of "Birthright."

A Tennessee swamp dweller, though he have not the trappings and the suit-of-mail of a Galahad of old, may yet have the selfsame heart of gold.

MY friend Glamouran, special agent for the Mutual Assurance and Fidelity, told me this tale in rather irritating snatches from the time our Pullman drew out of Jacks-burg, Tennessee, which was about nine o'clock in the evening, until we were somewhere up in Kentucky, when we turned into our berths for the night. The intellectual fillip which set him going was a countryman standing on the station platform, yawning and holding up a lantern to look at the notices posted on the bulletin board.

Something in the unshaved yawning face silhouetted against the light made me remark that perhaps the Tennessee legislature had outlawed the theory of evolution because it was getting too personal.

I had meant for Glamouran to smile, but the special agent kept sober enough.

"I dare say he is as far from the Neanderthal as we are," he observed. "Any civilization is a question of checks and bal-

ances—where the people place their energy. That fellow is a pothunter. He hunts and traps out on Reelfoot Lake, about twenty miles east of here, or that is he did until he was ousted. I know his sort intimately, you might say." Glamouran gave a brief laugh.

As there was not the faintest amusement in his mirth, I remained quiet, receptive. The train moved off and I sat watching the lights of the village withdraw in the darkness and coalesce into a dim constellation. Glamouran asked me if I had seen in the papers news of the lynching of Judge Pettigrew of the Tipton County Chancery Court. I decided I had heard the last of the pothunters.

"Noticed the headlines," I said. "A fellow can't follow the details of those things in the South unless he's—well, a man of leisure."

Again I was fishing for mirth, but my once-gay-spirited friend pulled his overcoat up against the increasing blast of the

night air whipping into the platform of our observation car.

"That's what brought me down here," he said gravely enough. "I had caught rumors of it before it broke loose. This Judge Pettigrew, whose name you saw in the headlines, was a hundred-thousand-dollar risk in my company. Of course that isn't a great deal for a hundred-million-dollar company, but still— Anyway, I came on down. I had been in Jacksburg three days when the thing happened. Early that morning some one telephoned to my room in the hotel. When I got up and answered it, a man's voice, shaken with excitement, rattled in my ear.

"This Mr. Glamouran?" I told him it was. 'Mr. Glamouran, something terrible has happened! This is Combs, the banker.'

"The fellow's gasps bit my nerves.

"Yes, Mr. Combs, go ahead.'

"Judge Pettigrew was murdered last night. Called out of his home and lynched by unknown parties!"

I STOOD staring at the phone bells. 'Judge Pettigrew lynched! How do you know?'

"The darkies brought the news! It's—horrible—such a charming, such a fine old gentleman, to be done to death by a lot of—damned ruffians!' The banker broke off. I heard him swallow with a slimy throat. After a moment he spoke again in a more controlled tone. 'The reason I called you up, you'll want to go out there, won't you, to investigate his death? You'll have to do that, won't you, before your company can—er—arrange with the judge's estate?'

"Certainly,' I agreed. 'Of course!'

"Be right around for you in my car; will that be all right?'

"It'll be very good of you.'

"And I'll bring Peasley, my attorney. The man paused a moment. 'Do you think we will need a detective, Mr. Glamouran?'

"Why, no,' I said, 'settlement of the policy will be a purely business matter. It has no relation to the crime that was committed; that is, if there was any crime.'

"If there was any crime! Why, good heavens, man!"

"I mean our settlement will depend purely upon the fact of Judge Pettigrew's death, Mr. Combs. We are not interested in the criminal aspect of this affair.'

"Why, yes—— Sure, I see that. I'll be right around.' He rang off.

"A couple of hours later the three of us, I, Combs, the banker, and Peasley, a lean-faced attorney, were rattling along the lakeside road out of Jacksburg for the Pettigrew estate to the west of Reelfoot. The banker still was excited and began going over the motives for the lynching.

"Bound to have been the pothunters, Glamouran. Nobody else had any animus against the judge. You see, when the Memphis Gun and Fishing Club bought up the lake and then began injunction proceedings to keep the pothunters and market fishermen off their hunting preserves—right at the beginning of that suit the swamp men swore if the chancellor granted that injunction, they'd kill him!"

"Combs paused, then added with a generosity I did not expect: 'They have their side, Glamouran. They had been hunting and fishing on the lake all their lives. Made their living from it, so had their fathers before them, then suddenly to be ousted by a group of Memphis millionaires——'

"This isn't a question of motive,' I observed. 'It's simply a question of fact. Is Judge Pettigrew dead?'

"Combs looked at me oddly. 'Don't you think he is?'

"That is what we are going to investigate. Who is the beneficiary of the policy?'

"Nominally, Lida May Pettigrew.'

"The judge's wife?'

"His daughter.'

"You say—nominally?'

"In reality it will be paid to the Jacksburg bank. The Pettigrew estate owes us the entire policy and, I think, a few thousand more. Why, for the last four or five years our bank has been paying the premiums on Judge Pettigrew's insurance—frightful business methods, but then——'

"The attorney interrupted to explain: 'You know the type, Mr. Glamouran. Judge Pettigrew was one of those aristocratic old Southern bankrupts who cost so dearly to keep afloat, but for one reason or other somebody always does it. I never heard of any creditor shutting down on such a man, did you, Combs? They live from deficit to deficit by the grace of God and the charm of their personality.'

"'And conviviality,' added Combs.

"'Admitted,' agreed Peasley. 'In fact, I'll gamble Judge Pettigrew was drunk as a lord when he walked out of his house last Thursday night and answered the call of his murderers. Why, he knew, or he would have known, if he'd been himself, that every pothunter on the lake had it in for him. And still, it's almost unbelievable to me now that anybody in Tipton County could have actually murdered the old man.'

"The banker peered down the sun-dazzled road. 'Yonder is his house now,' he remarked, in the peculiar flatted tone men use when they come into the purlieus of tragedy.

"Peasley stopped his commentaries for the moment and sat squinting his eyes at the old plantation manor. 'You know,' he said, reproducing the same hushed tone the banker had used, 'that house always reminded me of the old judge himself somehow; the sag to the roof, some of the windows gone, gate dragging the ground, not a drop of paint for forty years, nothing quite right. And yet, you know, a modern architect couldn't reproduce that air of largeness and dignity and kindness offered every passer-by, not if he built manors for a thousand years!'

"The banker coughed, drew out a handkerchief and blew his nose. 'As for that,' he said, 'I fancy we'll never see another Judge Pettigrew again.'

AT this point, I think Glamouran was somewhat touched by his own recital. I could see him dimly in the reflection from the tail lights of the observation car, nursing his chin in his hand, pondering no doubt on the details of his investiga-

tion into the death of his aristocratic and bankrupt old client. He began again presently, rather at an uncomfortable distance along in his narrative and left me to bridge the gap as best I might.

"I am not a sentimental man," Glamouran continued; "my work rather cures one of that emotional instability; though why human beings should really cease to be sentimental, and pride themselves upon a certain hardness of heart, I don't know. Still, we all do—— I do!

"But did you ever see a woman; and your first glimpse of her somehow filled you with a feeling as if a hundred memories of her had been sleeping in your mind, but when or where you had seen her before, you could not quite recall? When this girl Lida May came down the sweeping staircase of the old manor, I kept wondering was it possible that I had met her somewhere before.

"She was a tall slender girl," he went on, "the only sort who can descend a stairway before æsthetic eyes without offense. And as I looked at her pale face against her corona of dark hair I began thinking of other women I had met, trying to place this teasing memory. My thoughts went here, there and everywhere; in New Orleans, in Venice, which I visited just after college; in St. Louis, where I was married once, and later, very happily divorced; in Lexington, Kentucky.

"Some women Lida May brought to my mind by resemblance and some by contrast; but this queer disturbing ticketing, docketing; this effort to remember, continued all through my introduction to her. And even when I was propounding the questions I had come to ask, I admit I was more curious to hear the sound of her voice than the substance of her replies.

"'You were here, Miss Pettigrew,' I queried, 'the night your father disappeared?'

"She nodded faintly. 'I am always here, Mr. Glamouran.'

"Even her voice, too, had something familiar in it and I spent a minute pondering it. 'Were you or your father anticipating any difficulty or danger?'

"We knew, of course the fishermen had—had been making threats. They—said——" Here Lida May's voice quivered to silence and tears filled her eyes.

"I waited on her, searching the sweet carving of her lips, the delicate alæ of her nostrils with my glances. 'Yes, I see. Won't you tell me what happened the best you can?'"

"The girl drew in her lips and bit them to stillness. 'We were in the sitting room and—some one—out in the road called father.'

"About what time?"

"I don't know; ten or eleven."

"Then what happened?"

"I was terribly frightened. I said, 'Papa, don't go out,' but he said nothing would happen and went on out. I was so afraid I could hardly move. I went and peered out the window, when suddenly I heard a shot.'

"How soon?"

"I don't know. I almost fainted when I heard it. The first thing I knew I was running out of the house, screaming to father and trying to find him.'

"You did that immediately?"

"Oh, yes, yes."

"Was it dark?"

"Just a glimmer of stars."

"You heard nothing, saw nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

"Your father had disappeared?"

"Lida May nodded, weeping silently."

"I stood looking at the girl," Glamouran continued, "with, I think, the saddest heart I have ever known, but suddenly a notion came into my head how to comfort her. 'Miss Pettigrew,' I asked, 'how far down the road did you hunt for your father?'"

"Until I ran out of breath and had to stop."

"You ran?"

"Yes, yes, as hard as I could."

"You have no idea how far that was?"

"I don't know. I think it must have been four or five hundred yards. I ran till my knees grew so trembly I couldn't stand up."

"And yet you saw nothing at all?"

"She gave her head a tiny shake."

"And your father has never been seen by any one since that night?"

"Combs answered for the girl, who could no longer speak for sobbing. 'Certainly not, Mr. Glamouran. His assailants undoubtedly flung the body into the swamp.'

"Just here I came to the little point of hope which I had to offer the girl. 'Miss Pettigrew,' I suggested, 'hasn't it struck you as odd that you did not see your father, or his body, if the shot you heard fired was directed against him?'"

THE girl looked at me with widening eyes. 'Why, no! Why should that be odd?'

"Because if he had been struck and wounded, or killed, no man or group of men could have carried away the body as quickly as you describe, without allowing you some sight or sound of them. If they had walked, you would have overtaken them when you ran. If they had placed it in a wagon or motor, you would have heard the noise. If the judge had been wounded, he would have resisted and you would have heard the scuffle. So I can say that he was neither killed, nor wounded."

"Lida May looked at me in painful bewilderment, 'Then what became of him?' she asked in a shaken tone. 'He's gone.'

"That I can't tell,' and my heart fell at her look when I said it, 'but I do know that, in order to disappear so quickly, the judge must have hurried off with whoever he met in the night. Therefore they must have been friends, not enemies. Personally I don't believe your father is injured at all.'

"A sudden doubtful hope came into Lida May's face. 'Why, Mr. Glamouran! Is it possible! Can it possibly be true that father——'

"The banker cut in sharply and angrily, 'Lida May!' he cried. 'Don't allow this Yankee to fool you with his absurd fairy tale. Don't you see he is simply planning his ground for his company to avoid paying your father's insurance?'"

"Peasley seconded his chief. 'Lida

May, his reasoning is the purest sophistry. Glamouran, I am ashamed of you, to arouse hope in this poor child only to strike it down again!"

"But look here, gentlemen," I defended and very honestly, too, 'Judge Pettigrew had no time to be taken away except on his own feet.'

"Then what was the object of the shot Lida May heard?" demanded Combs hotly.

"I flung up a hand. 'I don't know.'

"Why should Judge Pettigrew vanish from his home at eleven o'clock at night?"

"Mr. Combs," I replied, 'I told you early this morning that our settlement had nothing whatever to do with the motives involved in this mysterious disappearance. I don't know why Judge Pettigrew left his home, where he went, or what happened afterward. I do know that he could not have been murdered, as you gentlemen seem to think. That is an impossibility. Whether he was murdered later, I don't know. I don't think so. If, for some obscure reason, he fled with friends, no doubt he is still with them.'

"Peasley gave a snort of laughter. 'You put a desperate case most plausibly, Mr. Glamouran. But no jury would agree with such a March-hare argument. A chancellor of a Tipton County court, in the venerable evening of his life, flying his home, a shot without a purpose by a friend. No, no jury on earth would accept such a cock-and-bull story.'

"Gentlemen, you believe your version of this matter, don't you?"

"Certainly we do!" snapped Combs.

"Then credit me with the same sincerity and you will see that I must make my report to my company according to the evidence as I interpret it.'

"That simply means a long-dragged-out lawsuit," declared Peasley, 'and this girl here will probably lose the plantation the insurance was meant to save for her.'

AT this point Lida May interrupted the argument. 'But something else happened that night, Mr. Glamouran, something I didn't understand at all, and that may have something to do with this.'

"Yes?" I queried, looking at her curiously. 'And what was that?'

"After I got back to the house, of course I couldn't sleep or lie down or think or do anything. I put out the light in the sitting room and drew a chair to the window and listened and watched and cried. Well, after a while, in about an hour, I think, I heard something out in the road. Then I saw a flash of light. I thought it was father coming back. I jumped up to run out when the flash went out, then it was turned on again, and I saw it was one of those dark lanterns such as the pothunters use——'

"Yes," I encouraged, staring at Lida May with the greatest curiosity and the warmest interest.

"Finally I made out it was a man carrying stones!" The girl shivered.

"We three men gazed at Lida May. There was a ghoulish quality in this information which nibbled even at my nerves.

"Carrying stones? What was he doing with them?"

"Lida May drew a long frightened breath even at the memory. 'I don't know—they're out there now, in a row.'

"For God's sake!" ejaculated Combs. 'Let's go see' em.'

"All four of us went across the lawn to the great sagging gate. The girl paused at the fence and pointed at a row of stones of irregular sizes which lay like stepping-stones from the gate in the direction of the lake.

"Well, sir, that inexplicable row of stones made the most hopeless puzzle I have ever met in all my insurance work. I stared at them, trying to make a row of boulders fit in somehow with my theory of the case. My companions were just as much at loss as I.

"Perhaps they are to cover up the tracks of the murderer," suggested Peasley. 'The pothunters are dreadfully afraid of bloodhounds.'

"Couldn't be that," I reasoned, 'because while the man covered one track, he'd make a hundred more, running back and forth with the stones.'

"'Perhaps it's a mark, a sign of a murder accomplished,' put in Combs. 'You know the swamp men have an obsession to leave some sign of their crimes. They cut notches in their pistols, amputate the fingers of their victims. I think it's an inheritance of their old Indian-fighting grandfathers.'

"'I don't believe it's that,' I demurred. I turned to the girl. 'Lida May, when you watched the figure stringing out these stones, did you get the slightest clew to his identity?'"

"The girl hesitated and then said tremulously: 'I—I'm not sure, Mr. Glamouran.'

"I looked at her in surprise. 'Which means, of course, that you do have some notion of who it was.' I don't know why it was, but even this faint breath of concealment in Lida May filled me with a queer painful disappointment in the girl, although in my work I naturally meet concealment.

"She explained in a low tone, 'Occasionally against the light I saw glimpses of his legs or body or shoulders.'

"'And you thought you knew who it was?'"

"'I—I thought it was a man named Killen. It—it might have been him, but I don't know, Mr. Glamouran.'

"'Why, then I'll go see this Killen!' I cried. 'Where will I find him?'"

"I was surprised to see Lida May flush and at the same time Combs nodded me aside significantly.

"'Let's have a closer look at these stones,' he suggested.

"When we let ourselves out the gate and walked over to the stones with our back toward Lida May, the banker whispered out of the side of his mouth:

"'That settles our problem. You can be sure it was Killen.'

"'Why so?' I asked in the same undertone.

"'He's had a grudge against the judge for years.'

"'What was the trouble?'"

"'The real truth is, it was on account of Lida May there.' Combs nodded faintly backward toward the gate.

"'A pothunter—and Lida May?'"

"Combs nodded. 'Yes, the judge forbade him to come on his premises. That's neighborhood news.'

"I stared at the banker. 'You don't mean that this swamp man and—and Lida May—'"

"I suppose the expression on my face told Combs what I meant, for he blurted out with a shocked expression: 'No, man, not that! Killen was just wanting to come to see Lida May, trying to court her, you know, and the judge put his foot down on it. So, don't you see when the judge granted this injunction, the pothunter saw his chance to even up an old score?'"

"'I would accept that theory,' I returned thoughtfully, and to tell the truth, vastly relieved, 'I would accept it if I really believed Judge Pettigrew had been murdered. But somehow I don't. Still, these stones must have something to do with the mystery. I wonder——' I stood looking at them and suddenly came to a decision, 'I've got to see this Killen. Where is he?'"

"At this both men leaped into protest.

"'For Heaven's sake, do nothing of the sort!' they begged. 'Why, your life wouldn't be worth a tinker's dam down there in the swamp. The pothunters would take you for a clubman or a detective, or a revenue man, or a game warden, or just anything—it doesn't make a bit of difference what—and they'd shoot you from ambush without warning.'

"Peasley continued: 'Let's allow this matter to hang over, Glamouran. We'd better have a hundred lawsuits than another murder.'

"Their genuine concern for my safety touched me. 'Gentlemen,' I said, 'it is one thing to be cautious in the ordinary run of things, but when a man's profession involves a certain danger, a fellow can't sit down and say: 'I'll wait till things look safer.' It's not the game. You see, that's the point of my work. I am employed by the Mutual to do unsafe things.'

"Again the men tried to dissuade me, but since that was especially what I came to Jacksburg for—— Well, there I was!'"

And Glamouran made a little gesture in the roaring gale that eddied about us in the darkness.

THERE was another space in Glamouran's monologue and I had an impression that my friend was deliberating whether he should tell me some rather delicately intimate matter. He drew out a cigarette case; I saw him scratch a flint lighter and hold it to the blast to spread the fire. Then, almost as soon as he had taken a whiff, he tossed his cigarette into the gale and began again as if he had somehow resolved his doubts.

"The thing that moved and gyved me was the fact that she had faintly, but definitely, defended him even in the midst of her father's tragedy. It was an abnormal sort of thing; she, the daughter of a patrician, holding even a tentative thought of a pothunter, a swamp man, one of those fellows such as you saw at Jacksburg reading the notices on the bulletin board."

I NODDED silently, in the reddish glow of the tail lights.

"Lida May and I went walking back to the old manor through the melancholy weed-grown yard," Glamouran went on, "and I can never tell you, my friend, what pity, what sadness was in my heart for this unhappy, lovely girl. I could have put my arms about her and said: 'Lida May, somehow I will deliver you out of your grief. For you to be sad makes me miserable too——' I could have said something like that if this insinuation, this gossamer about a swamp man, this——' Glamouran made a nervous gesture and broke off.

"What I did say was—and I am afraid I spoke harshly, too—'Miss Pettigrew, do you believe this Killen had anything to do with your father's disappearance?'"

"No, I don't, Mr. Glamouran," she answered in a low voice.

"She has every right to suspect him," I thought dismally to myself, "and yet she defends him even in her thoughts!"

"And do you know what I thought as we walked through the weedy old yard

and I glanced down at her, at the white nape of her neck, at the turn of her cheek—do you know what I thought?"

"I remembered a masquerade I had once attended in New Orleans. I thought of a girl I had danced with at the Ball of Comus. She was masked as a princess with tiara and royal robes and her domino was of purple. Then we came to the hour of unmasking, and I was trembling as to who she might be, and there she was, a round-faced impudent fool, expecting nothing more than that I kiss and hug her and feed her pralines, she with her patois French and shapeless ankles.

"And now, looking down through the curves and delicate flatteries of Lida May, I saw, in the depths of her, this same tasteless creole's heart.

"And I said with the heaviness of it in my voice: 'Lida May, do you believe "Buck" Killen had any part in your father's disappearance?'"

"She shook her head. 'I don't, Mr. Glamouran.'"

"Then who did?"

"I don't know. It wasn't Buck's voice that called father."

"Then you know his voice," I observed, somehow pinked again.

"She looked at me quite simply, 'Surely, Mr. Glamouran. I have known him ever since I was a child. We have always been here. He, down on the lake, I, here in the manor.'"

"I took my mind off this harassing phase of the business. 'Do you think Buck came back later and piled that queer string of stones in front of the gate?'"

"She nodded mutely.

"But what for?" I cried uncomfortably. "A row of boulders, a line of rocks!" My teeth jarred on this hard fact like a gravel in food. "Anyway, how did he get here so quickly after your father disappeared? Where did he come from?"

"The faintest flush crept into Lida May's face. 'He—usually stays somewhere close around, when he's not following his traps or fishing.'"

"Stays somewhere close around here!" I ejaculated painfully, with the ghost of

my old suspicion suddenly staring in my face.

"'Why y'es. I think he has a shack down in the swamp on the edge of the lake.' She indicated the cypresses beyond the cotton field.

"'Have you seen his place?'

"'Why, no, of course not! I haven't even talked with him for a long, long time.'

"I stood looking at Lida May, oddly eased by this simple statement. 'It must be rather disagreeable for you, Lida May, this pothunter hanging around the plantation so much.'

"The girl looked up at me very simply. 'Why no-o, I see almost nobody at all, Mr Glamouran. I was sorry when father made him quit coming here.'

"Her naïveté, her gentleness, touched me in a queer way and I thought to myself: 'What a selfish pig I am to wish this girl had remained utterly alone all these years in order that I——' I broke off my reflection, and touching her hand, said in quite another tone:

"'Lida May, I wonder would you mind telling me why your father sent him away—— It might help me in my search,' I added in shabby afterthought.

"The judge's daughter hesitated a moment, then answered in a low tone: 'It was very simple, Mr. Glamouran. He brought us fish nearly every day.'

"I looked at her blankly, studying her face, my hand on her arm. 'But that isn't simple at all, Lida May! To be sent away because he brought you—fish.'

"She colored faintly and looked away from my eyes. 'He wouldn't take pay.'

"'Oh! I see.'

"'Papa offered to run an account with him for the fish, but—he wouldn't have anything at all. They were a gift.'

"A miserable squirm of humor went through my brain at this hair-drawn distinction. 'Was that all?'

"The girl nodded almost imperceptibly.

"'And they quarreled over that?'

"'They didn't quarrel. Father told him in a nice way, a serious way, if he couldn't charge it he would have to quit.'

"'And what did Killen say?'

"'Nothing at all. He just listened, and went out of the yard and never did come back.'

"I wanted to laugh; I wanted to console," Glamouran continued. "The pathos of this silent primitive courtship, the fantastic point of a bankrupt wanting his goods charged to protect the complete detachment of his daughter, and then the plaintiveness of the girl as this frail wraith of romance had entered and vanished from her life.

"'Oh, poor Lida May!' I cried, with my heart caught on the barbs of this irony. 'And yet your father—this Killen——' Then, almost before I knew it, my arms were around her. I hardly know from what mixture of motives, to try to console her for her loneliness, perhaps; for the tragedy of her father; for the loss of her impossible suitor.

"And yet as I held her, queer gusty shivers caught me by the chest and throat at the feel of her hair against my face, the soft flattery of her arms and shoulders against my own. Ah, well, no man's motives toward a girl are ever quite completely purged of himself, my friend, not even his kindest, gentlest thoughts. Somehow always he is a man; and always, she is a woman!"

MY friend Glamouran sat wrapped in his coat against the gale, musing on his first, and, I had an impression, his last gesture of love toward Lida May. My thoughts flickered out toward the girl herself and I wondered what could have happened to her after the death of her father. I wondered if Killen, the pothunter—— At this point Glamouran began again, leaving a peculiarly distressing gap in his story.

"When I reached the swamp," he went on, "I found it gloomy with cypresses, enormous trees which lifted vast trunks out of the water in great axial planes. They were like the buttresses of some cathedral springing up into the gloom overhead. So dense was the foliage above that scarcely a hand's breadth of sky

peered through at me. Below, out of the dark water lifted the 'knees' of the cypress.

"From a little tongue of land which ran out into the swamp as a take-off, some one had used these 'knees' as piers and constructed a very hazardous footway of felled limbs and floating logs. This, I reasoned, must lead the way to Buck Killen's shack.

"My impressions of Lida May, the warmth and sweetness of her arms and lips, still clung to me and I thought to myself with a sort of horror, 'Suppose he were her husband; suppose some day she should come scrambling along this miserable footing on the way to her hut and babies,' because, my friend, the wives or women of the pothunters do that very thing. Even along the swampy margin of Reelfoot, human beings still must mate.

"The only sound I could hear was the endless hum of mosquitoes and this was soon lost to the ear and became the very silence itself. Now and then a waterfowl shrieked; here and there a chromatic-scum filmed the water in grave hues as if a rainbow were in mourning.

"As I crept along my troublesome path in this silent funereal place, presently something made me stop and look all about me. I hardly knew why I did it. My thoughts were full of Lida May, but abruptly I felt that faint, almost impalpable stir in my back, in the nerves of my scalp and neck, which a man somehow feels when he is being watched. I could see no one.

I STOOD stock-still and peered all around me, a prey to this subtle, and yet most distressing, of human sensations. To be watched covertly; to feel eyes upon me without knowing where they were or what they boded; next instant my heart leaped as a huge figure lunged from a cypress bough immediately overhead. It wove away through the gloom in the curving, but perfectly noiseless, flight of an owl.

"The reaction after my apprehension was so sharp as to be painful. As I stood, breathing sharply, watching the owl van-

ish in the shadows, a most curious speculation fell upon me. I wondered how I ever came by the fantastic ability to feel the eyes of an owl. I wondered if somewhere, æons and æons ago, before the sunlight had organized the pigment of some unimaginable ancestor into eyes, I wondered if that ancestor did not feel the gaze of his enemies and escape them by sliding away into the ooze and darkness of Paleozoic fens.

"It was a provocative thought, my friend. It explained why there always attaches to the sensation of being watched such overwhelming horror. Because those long-gone forbears were surrounded with enemies of the most enormous and pitiless power. That feeling of being stalked always breathes the horror of sudden and utter destruction.

"While I stood in this queer reverie, the faint drip of water caused me to look around and a little shock tingled through my nerves to see a man seated in a dug-out canoe gliding toward me. The sound I heard had been caused by his lifting his paddle from the water and picking up a shotgun which lay in his craft.

"The man who stalked me had the bristly face and chopped features of the rustic you saw on the Jacksburg platform. A certain stare in his eyes gave me a swift impression of a hunter about to shoot his quarry. I knew I must say something quickly to establish human relations with the fellow. I hurried the phrase.

"'I'm looking for Buck Killen!'

"'You met him,' said the pothunter in a strange tone.

"'I wanted to ask about the—the fishermen on the lake. Are they still worked up over Judge Pettigrew?'

"'They think they've been tricked by a gun-club man,' snarled the fellow in a hard voice.

"Although he had his shotgun in his hands, and I could see it was a matter of seconds before he fired it, still I was so surprised that I asked in genuine amazement:

"'A gun-club man—how can that possibly be?'

"I think the humanness of my surprise delayed his fire for he growled.

"They think a damn gun-club man come here, made a raid on the judge and killed him so as to throw suspicion on us fishermen and make us lose the injunction suit."

"Why, man!" I gasped. "What an idea! Even if suspicion should rest on the fishermen, that wouldn't influence the injunction suit. That is a question of who has title, not who kills." I wet my lips and wished in my heart that some Tennesseans were more given to logic and less to impulse.

"My words had an extraordinary influence on the pothunter, however. He stood up in his boat and burst out in a very lashing of fury, 'Well, this here gun-club man thought if old man Pettigrew was out of the way, the judge's fam'ly would be left in the old house by their se'ves and he thought he would do what he pleased by them. He thought since he was a damned slicked-up city feller, he could git in with a country girl an'—an' do anything he wanted to. An' there I stood,' he finished huskily, 'ordered off the place, for years an' years not even speakin' to her a—'

"The pothunter was ashen under his stubble and his fingers twitched on his trigger guard.

"As I stared at him a sharp anger rose up in me and suddenly the gun I had been watching became negligible.

"If you mean I'm a gun-club man!" I cried. "If you mean I killed Judge Pettigrew with the hideous, the monstrous motive—his daughter—"

"Yes, I do say it!" yelled the pothunter. "No sooner had Combs and Peasley left the house than you began huggin' an' pettin' her up. But I'll see you in hell fust! You made way with the old judge, but I'll send you after him!" And he swung up his gun.

"Man," I shouted, "why in God's name do you say that!"

"Because you done it!"

"I didn't do it! I had no reason for doing it! Killen, you are crazy with jeal-

ousy. You don't know what you are saying or doing. You've been hanging about the old house, watching that girl so long, she's heaven, earth, sky, sunlight, everything in the world to you. Now you go mad if another man even touches her!"

"She is!" cried Killen in a sort of agony. "I've never said it to mortal before, but I'd go to hell jest to have her once in my arms like you done. I'd cut out my heart for her!" He made a grotesque yet tragic gesture which shook the canoe and sent a slow wave moving silently across the water. He stared at me a moment with a queer chewing movement of his mouth, as if he had a bitter savor. "Many and many's the time when I could slipped up behind her unbeknownst, but—I wouldn't—I couldn't!"

"Well, standing there, with my life hanging on the tremor of his finger, I never felt sorrier for a human being. I knew what nights and days he had burned in this endless flame of Lida May.

"Killen," I said at last, and, I believe, calmly, "I think you are going to shoot me in a few minutes. I want to say that I have done nothing by Lida May which any honorable man may not do by any woman. As for foul play by Judge Pettigrew, you are simply insane.

"I am an insurance man. I came here to investigate Judge Pettigrew's disappearance. If he is dead my company loses a hundred thousand dollars. You know I didn't kill him!" I stood studying the fellow, and finally asked him straight out, "Why do you imagine such a thing?"

THE pothunter returned a gaze as intent as my own. "Because Thursday night when the judge was killed, I wasn't far from the big house. I heard a shot fired. I come running, for I thought the fishermen had fin'ly done what they swore they'd do. When I got there, ever'thing had ca'med down. I took my dark lantern and went to the gate and picked up the judge's trail.

"It was easy to tell. I've seed it a thousan' times; a big half-soled trail with the left shoe heel run over. Then I looked

for who done it. I found a strange track, very clear. The murderer wore a heel with some wings in the middle of it.

"So I put some rocks over this strange track to keep it fresh. An' I thinks to myse'f, 'I'll see this trail ag'in some day, an' I'll know who killed the judge.'" So when I seed you foolin' aroun' Lida May, an' then come off down to the swamp, I follered. When I struck yore trail—it was the same man as killed her daddy!

"As the pothunter made this last amazing statement, I stared at him. Then I lifted a foot and looked at the bottom of my own shoe, for I had not the least idea what sort of heel I wore. When I had raked off the mud, I suddenly saw his mistake.

"'Killen,' I explained hurriedly, 'this brand of rubber heel is as common as buffalo nickels. Everybody wears them. For you to accuse me of murder because I happen to wear the same sort of heel as Judge Pettigrew's assailant—it's unreasonable! As I said, I am an insurance man. The judge's life means a fortune to my company. Besides, when this tragedy happened I had never seen Lida May.'

"This last sentence, I am sure, is what really saved my skin. The pothunter was half insane about the girl and could not imagine any human action without a motive resting in some way on Lida May.

"He eyed me somberly for several moments, then he noticed a print of my muddy shoe on the smooth bark of a birch log in the footway. He drew his canoe to this, took out a knife and cut out the piece of bark with my track on it.

"'All right,' he said in his nasal drawl, 'I won't do nothin' till I match this with the tracks I covered up in front of the big house. If I was wrong, I was honest mistook; if I was right—I'll see you ag'in.'

"And with that he paddled off through the cypresses."

AT this point Glamouran paused a moment and wet his dried lips as he listened to the muffled roar of the Pullman. I waited nervously, on the edge of a question, which, later, I was sorry I did not

ask, for when my friend began again, he had made a characteristic jump in his narrative.

"The thing that lashed my brain as I got back to the old manor was, what would become of her? Would she finally yield to this besieging madman? I knew well enough no woman on earth could hold out forever against such molten passion; especially when that passion, in the last analysis, had something in it of fineness, of self-sacrifice. And yet, what a tragedy for such a creature as Lida May!

"So intent were my thoughts on this impasse that I forgot the mystery of the chancellor, the pothunters, the question of insurance, everything. I stumbled along the path in the cotton field thinking, 'She mustn't stay here; I can't leave her here!'

"By this time the sun was setting; out of the west a great mass of dull-red clouds had boiled high and stood lording it over the flat desolate fields. As I moved along toward this sullen glory, I suddenly sighted Lida May coming toward me. She was running. When she saw me, she gave a little cry and held up a warning hand.

"'Oh, Mr. Glamouran!' she called in a tremble. 'I thought something had happened to you!'

"'No, nothing at all. I——'

"She hurried up to me with frightened eyes. 'You, must go away. You mustn't come to the house! You must go back to Jacksburg!'

"I stared at her, 'Why must I?'

"'Aunt' Creasy, our old negro servant. Somebody told her the pothunters were coming here again to-night. You know—the darkies know everything—I was afraid they had already found you!'

"I put an arm about her and began leading her gently back along the path to the manor. 'Why, Lida May, that's ridiculous. They are not coming here.'

"'Oh, but they are!'

"'What for?'

"'After you—you!' cried the girl, and began to weep.

"Something stirred in my heart. 'Even if they should come,' I said, 'I can't leave

you here alone. You'd be frightened to death. But they have no reason to attack me.'

"'D-did you see any one in the swamp?'

"'A little talk with Mr. Killen. We— understand each other much better. Now come on, let's go back to the house. This story of the pothunters is one of Aunt Creasy's hobgoblins. Nothing will happen. I am trying to arrange your father's estate. I—I couldn't run off in the middle of things like this. I——' I was talking breathlessly, hardly knowing what I said; the light of the sunset was all about us, and suddenly I cried out the real truth in my heart.

"'Oh, Lida May, this is a horrible place. I can't endure for you to stay in it. It's desolate; it's maddening! Let me take you away where life is gentle and sweet as you are, Lida May, dear Lida May——'

"Here Glamouran's voice caught and indeed my own throat was aching. He broke off, made a rough gesture and for a moment sat staring into the swirling blackness that resounded about our train. He went on in steadier tones:

"We must have been nearly an hour walking the little distance through the field to the old manor. It was twilight when we let ourselves into the weed-grown yard, the sweet endless twilight of southern midsummer. I remember I was telling her my fantasy of thinking I had seen her at some other place, at some other time, when first she came walking down the staircase into my life and my heart.

"'Because, Lida May,' I said, 'every man goes through this world searching for some one; he does not know whom nor where. Now and then he finds little traces of her in other women, hints which God perhaps, has dropped, to keep him from despair. And that was why I thought of Venice, when I saw you, the cherry-garlanded girls of Tokyo, a chorister I once heard in Notre Dame——'

MY friend, to be drawn from such a moment by a man, another lover, who, you suspect in your heart, holds a deeper passion than your own, that's bitter.

"I had quite forgot the pothunter and now became aware of him only through Lida May stiffening in my arms. Then I became rigid myself, and could feel the fellow's eyes on my back. Without glancing around, I said:

"'Killen, you are in time to see me happier than I ever thought man could be. May I have your good wishes?'

"I am not even sure the pothunter heard me. When I looked at him, his uncouth face was drawn into a grotesque agony. He came toward us, staring at the girl with open mouth.

"'Lida May!' he whispered. 'Lida May——'

"'Yes, Buck,' she answered, and then, still perusing his face, she cried in a different tone: 'Have you news of father?'

"'Yes—no—— No news of your father—I—I come to see Mr. Glamouran a minute.'

"I glanced at the fellow's shotgun as we walked together to the gate. When we were away from her, he said in a low tone:

"'It matched.'

"I moved over closer to him, gently, with an idea of flinging myself suddenly upon him.

"He must have understood, for he shook his head faintly, 'Everybody knows you killed the judge, Mr. Glamouran. We all understand you are bound to be a gun-club man and you must have done it to make it look bad for us in court——'

"I looked at him with a most curious sensation prickling my chest and throat. 'Everybody! Who do you mean?'

"'The pothunters. I've got twenty men lyin' out around this house, waiting for you.'

"I stared about the darkening circle of the woods. 'Listen, Killen,' I said earnestly, 'I haven't harmed the judge.'

"'Oh, yes, you done it. You're a club-man,' he whispered tensely, 'but the thing is, now, how can I git you out——'

"'Get me out!' I stared at him.

"'Yes, we might go down to the barn an' wait till it turns a little darker.'

"'But what do you mean, get me out,

when you've brought twenty men to lynch me!

"The pothunter groaned. 'I—I didn't know that Lida May was—was keerin' for you. If she——' He shuddered violently, and broke off to his plans again. 'Come on down to the barn. You can slip——'

"'But I can't! I won't run off and leave her. Listen to my plan. The judge is down at the clubhouse on the lake. He's in the wine cellar. I took him there myself Thursday night to keep the pothunters from murdering him. The only thing I could think of. He had too big an insurance to see him lynched. I've got a darky there with him. The judge will stay quiet as long as the gin holds out.'

"The pothunter stared at me with strange eyes, 'What was that shot I heard?'

"'My signal to a moonshiner. I told the judge we'd have a drink. I got him started.'

"Killen shook his head. 'No use telling the boys that. That would shore put the fat in the fire. They shorely meant to hang the judge that night.' The pothunter peered around the horizon in painful indecision; suddenly he thrust his shotgun in my hands.

"'Git in the house an' stan' by Lida May,' he whispered. 'Stan' 'em off as

long as you can. I'll try to git through and come back with the sheriff and the game wardens before it's—too late.'"

GLAMOURAN'S tale ended here. My friend arose stiffly from his chair, shivered, glanced up at the red reflections of the tail lights and turned into the door of the Pullman. As he entered he said:

"We must be in Illinois by now."

I began shivering myself, for the night was cold. "B-but did he get back?" I chattered.

"Oh, no. When the game wardens cut through, several fellows were hurt, and of course the pothunters picked out the man who had double crossed them. They got him. We brought him to the manor next morning."

We walked on silently into the Pullman. All the berths were down. Ahead of us stretched the narrow aisle of curtains with here and there, in the dim light, a pair of shoes peeping from under the hangings. The muffled roar of the train filled the compartment.

At the door of the second drawing-room, my friend paused and tapped on the dimly shining panel.

"Lida May, beautiful!" he called. "I've finished my smoke!"

And the door of the drawing-room opened.

A stirring story of a Malemute dog, "Moccasins of the Man-god," by Kenneth Gilbert, will appear in the next issue of POPULAR.



WHEN TWO WERE A CROWD

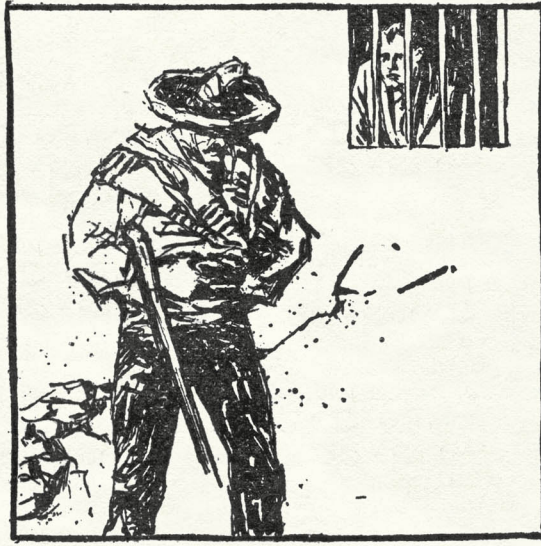
WHEN General Smedley Butler, the fighting leader of the United States marines, took over the job of cleaning up Philadelphia, he set out to learn all he could about the city's underworld population. One day, as he drove through a tough ward, the police officer with him suddenly pointed to a man looking into a shop window.

"See that guy, general? He's one of the hardest birds in Philadelphia. Two-gun baby. Shoots to kill. Done a dozen stick-ups. And yet, we can't get him."

Butler stopped the car and went over to the tough one.

"Fellow," the general said, "I'm told you're a tough guy, a very tough guy indeed. I'm glad to know it. I'm a tough guy myself, tough as you'll find 'em. That's why," he continued, turning back his coat to display his police badge, "there ain't enough room for both of us in Philadelphia. There ain't enough room anywhere for two guys as tough as you and I are. See?"

4A—POP.



The Lucky Leg

By Ernest Douglas

Author of "The Wooden-legged Man's Revenge," "The Black Stone from Heaven," Etc.

A leg lost in France saves the life of an American doughboy on the Mexican border.

WHENEVER Joe Bonner and I get into the newspapers, it is always my partner who does the talking for publication. As a usual thing I don't object to this, since he comes near enough to the truth for all practical purposes and it cannot be denied that he tells a much more colorful story than I would. But his account of the so-called battle of Chuparosa has created a lot of amusement and even downright suspicion.

What he had to say about a lucky leg was ridiculous on its face and the correspondents gleefully made the most of it. Of course everybody thinks we are holding out something incriminating to ourselves. We have been accused of fomenting revolution against the Mexican government and war against the United States.

For a time I had to hold my tongue, but now that Major Lopez has been transferred to Chiapas and taken his wife with him, there is no longer any reason why

the public shouldn't be given the plain unvarnished facts.

We were loafing around Nogales, that double-barreled city sprawled on both sides of the international line, waiting with what patience we could muster for something to turn up that would offer diversion to a pair of rovers who, after they got through fighting for whatever it was we fought for in France, had become soldiers of fortune in Latin America.

From time to time reports trickled up out of the Sonora deserts that some misguided zealot by the name of Garza was recruiting an army down in the Sierra del Carrizal with the object of making himself master of the West Coast and eventually of the entire republic. Just another overambitious bandit, was our surmise. We were rather fed up on two-bit rebellions by that time and hoped for something really worth while to engage our attention. So we kept on waiting.

That was the way matters stood when

we met Dolores Peralta at the *Café de los Serafines*, the poetic name affected by a little restaurant on Calle Porfirio Diaz that was conducted by her aged parents. Then, foreseeing another of those feverish love affairs that inevitably landed both of us in some ticklish situation, I conceived an eager yearning to get down to Chuparosa and find out whether Garza's threatened uprising was likely to amount to anything.

Tall, willowy and indolently graceful, Dolores was that rarity of rarities, a Mexican blonde. A throwback to some Andalusian ancestor, perhaps, for her father and mother were unlovely representatives of the peon class, swarthy and wrinkled. Her skin was marvelously clear but not colorless, for in her cheeks was the flush of spring roses—and it was natural.

Her long hair was yellow and slightly wavy. Teeth and lips were perfection. Above all, her eyes! Not blue, as one might expect from her hair, but a lustrous, liquid brown. And she knew how to use those eyes, did Dolores.

Her job was to sit on a chair near the entrance, thrum a guitar, sing passionate Castilian love songs in a pleasing if untrained voice, and thus attract custom to the *Café de los Serafines*. Mother was cook; father was dishwasher and general manager; two younger brothers were the waiters. And the establishment prospered, being ever crowded with caballeros who came to ogle the one-piece orchestra, to whisper as they passed that she was more lovely than the angels, to sip wine and to eat Señora Peralta's really excellent enchiladas.

"What a queen!" Joe exclaimed, the first time we saw her.

"A chili queen," I returned tartly, scenting danger from the take-off.

"Imagine finding such a beauty in a place like this."

Dolores was by no means indifferent to the admiring gaze that he bent upon her. She pretended to look out of the window, but her eyes were fixed on my big, good-looking, red-haired buddy as he scanned the bill of fare.

A sharp command of some sort was

shouted from the rear. As one in a trance, she picked up her guitar, fingered the strings dreamily and launched into "Yo Te Amo" ("I Love You").

WHEN our order had been given, Joe leaned back and looked at the singer in a manner that north of the border would have been regarded as extremely offensive; but we were in Mexico and it flatters Latin women to be stared at with a dying-calf expression.

The song quavered to its passionate conclusion and Joe's applause was more tumultuous than any one's. He drew an empty chair away from the table and, with one of his bland winning smiles, invited her to join us. She blushed, then rose and glided across the floor. But as she was about to take the proffered seat, a yell from the kitchen sent her scampering back to her place.

"It is 'papá' who objects," said an amused diner at the next table, with a shrug. "He is very strict with Dolores, for if he loses her he loses all his patrons. Why, he will scarcely allow her to converse with her betrothed."

"Ah! Then she has a sweetheart?"

"Of a certainty. It is Major Lopez, the comandante of the local garrison."

"Hope you'll have sense enough not to get a knife stuck in your back, or challenged to a duel," I growled.

We sat there an hour or more, eating and listening to the music. When we rose to go, Joe bowed elaborately before the girl and declared that in all his travels, which had covered the whole world, he had never beheld a woman half so lovely and charming as herself.

She blushed again, furiously, and dropped her eyes demurely. Her father came running from the kitchen, every lineament of his wizened countenance expressing fear and rage—fear that his café would lose its main attraction and rage against this presumptuous gringo who showed signs of aspiring to take her away.

I stood squarely in the old man's path, forced upon him the money for our check and included a liberal tip. Then I seized

Joe by the arm, intending to push him outside; he merely shook me off and went on with his blandishments. Then another hand, perhaps firmer and more insistent was clamped upon his other arm. He looked up into the scowling, mustachioed, handsome face of Major Lopez.

"*Buenas tardes, major,*" Joe said genially. "I was just congratulating Señorita Peralta and begging her for an invitation to the wedding."

Lopez did not reply; his sternly set features did not relax. I literally dragged Joe away.

KNOWING Joe Bonner as I did, I refrained from mentioning Dolores as we idled up the street, but diplomatically threw out the suggestion that in the absence of other excitement we might as well see what that fellow Garza was about.

"Oh, come out of it, Pete," he groaned. "Every time I look at a female you take it into your fool head that I'm going to marry her. If I kid along a restaurant singer, is it any sign that I've lost my heart to her?"

"Maybe not, but it's a sure sign of trouble on this side of the line," I snapped. "You know you don't mean anything, but she doesn't and that fiancé of hers doesn't. Alongside of him, *Othello* was just mildly peeved. If you insist on sticking around Nogales, better stay away from that dump."

"And why? Those tamales were the best I ever tasted. Why not eat where the food and the scenery are both good? It won't do Lopez any harm to tear his hair a little; it needs barbering anyway."

In spite of all my protests we had at least one meal a day at the Café de los Serafines, thereafter. Her father glared menacingly whenever we stepped inside the place, yet Joe flirted boldly and outrageously with Dolores.

Whenever Lopez was there the atmosphere was electric with hostility, but Joe simply laughed indulgently at my solemn warnings. I believed that Dolores was really smitten, but as Joe betrayed no impatience to bring their acquaintance to a

more intimate stage, I gradually became less uneasy.

What it would all have led to, had "Johnny War" not found us, I am unable to guess. Johnny did find us, however, and from there on the fireworks.

We knew him at once, although he had been at some pains to alter his appearance since last we met. He had grown a heavy black mustache; his hair hung almost to his shoulders; in some manner known only to the Mexicans his face had been made to look as though fearfully pitted. Yet when he arose and advanced smilingly, with both hands outstretched, we instantly recognized him for Juan Guerra, sometimes known as "Johnny War," reputed to have been an active and more or less prominent participant in every revolution that Mexico had seen since the days of Porfirio Diaz.

"Ah, my friends, I was told that you could be found at the Café de los Serafines," he said easily, ignoring the painful circumstances of our last parting, which had occurred just after he threatened to murder us for refusing to join in his scheme for overturning the existing government.

"So you were looking for us?" Joe returned coolly. "I thought you were in jail at Hermosillo and were going to be shot for inciting the Opata Indians to revolt."

"S-s-sh! Not so loud. Let us sit at this table in the corner. Did you not hear of the raid that my good friend and brave general, Don Anulfo Garza, made upon the cárcel?"

"So that bird turned you loose, eh? Well, you needn't worry about us. We're not interested enough one way or the other to put the rurales on your trail."

"I was sure of your loyalty and friendship, señores. We disagreed once, but what of that? It was over nothing."

"'Nothing' is right. Now what devilment are you up to?"

"You do me an injustice, Señor Bonner. I am only a true patriot whose sole desire is to see his native land take her rightful place among the great and free

nations of the earth. Those coyotes who are now in power! Bah! But I fear we will be overheard here. Come!"

"Come where?"

"We go to General Garza. Yes, he is secretly in Nogales and is very anxious to meet you. I have told him much of you both."

Joe looked at me inquiringly.

"Let's go," I proposed recklessly, feeling of the revolver beneath my coat. "Maybe we'll bump into something interesting."

Johnny did not leave by the main entrance, but conducted us through a side door into a smelly alley that was littered with tin cans, dogs and half-naked children. After we had followed him a few yards, he paused and stammered:

"I hope you will not be angry, but—but—General Garza does not like gringos. So I have——"

"Well, what have you told him about us? Spit it out."

"That you are outlaws in your own country, señores. And that you are fugitives hiding in Sonora."

"I see. Declines to associate with Americanos unless they are his equals, eh? Fair enough. Lead on."

WE doubled and turned a dozen times, never once emerging into the main-traveled streets, until we finally brought up at the rear of an adobe building on the outskirts of the town. A sort of chill ran down my spine when a barefooted, palm-hatted sentry, decorated with a cartridge belt that stretched from shoulder to hip, stepped from the shadow of an oleander and presented a rifle at our breasts.

Guerra spoke a few words of Spanish and we were admitted into a narrow hallway where a smoky oil lamp disclosed the presence of other sentries. One of these knocked at a door, listened for a muffled answer and hissed:

"It is Juan Guerra with two gringos."

We were ushered into the presence of General Anulfo Garza himself. He sat on a disheveled bed, arrayed in a nondescript uniform of khaki that was orna-

mented with many bars of gay ribbons and several jeweled medals. A cavalry sword lay among a litter of papers on a center table.

Johnny turned the lamp higher and we got a good look at the rebel leader. A tall, lean, hawk-eyed Mexican was Garza, with a nervous habit of fastening and unfastening the two lower buttons of his jacket. High on one cheek was a white scar and several similar scars marked his skinny hands.

Though the very air was charged with suspicion, he shook hands and welcomed us with elaborate oratorical flourishes. He was so happy to meet friends of General Guerra. His poor house was ours. Did we expect to remain in Mexico long?

"Quite a while," Joe replied meaningly. "We like it so well on this side of the border."

Garza laughed. The tension relaxed. He clapped his hands and a servant brought a bottle of wine with four glasses on a tray. We drank, at Joe's suggestion, to "the freedom of Mexico." This delighted our host and we drank again. Another bottle was brought. Almost before I realized it, a well-organized drinking bout was in progress.

The more Garza drank, the more friendly and amiable he became. One would have thought that he and Joe were old college chums. The conversation covered a wide variety of subjects and finally shifted to the Great War.

"And I am told that you were in the very thick of the fighting 'Over There,'" remarked the general.

"Were they!" exclaimed Johnny Guerra. "Señor Bonner lost a leg at the battle of St. Mihiel."

Garza looked at my buddy in amazement and unbelief. Joe pulled up his trouser and proved that his right leg was a contrivance of wood, metal and rubber from the knee down.

Now Joe was as proud of that wooden leg as a peacock of its tail and on this night he had imbibed just enough vino to loosen a tongue that was never tightly hung. In detail he explained that the leg

had been manufactured in accordance with his own original design, and boasted that it was just as good as the one he left behind in France.

In proof of this he rose and hilariously tripped a few waltz steps about the creaky floor. True, he listed a bit to starboard, but I knew this to be a consequence more of liquor than of artificial underpinning.

"Ah, it is indeed a marvelous limb!" praised Garza. "But I would not say too much about it if I were you. There are many one-legged men in this country and some of them might try to steal it."

"Huh! Several hombres have tried that very little stunt and all they stole was trouble. No, sir! Whenever anybody swipes this leg of mine, I camp right on his trail and make him wish that he hadn't monkeyed with anything more dangerous than a trainload of dynamite. And I'll tell you something else about my leg."

Joe dropped his voice to a confidential tone. "It's a lucky leg."

"A lucky leg?" Garza rejoined politely. "You mean a charm?"

"You bet it's a charm. Nothing but good luck comes to me and my friend as long as I've got it, but it brings calamity and sudden death to anybody who tries to take it away from me. Isn't that right, Pete? Remember Salazar? Remember Pecina? Remember Perrett?"

"It must be true," Johnny Guerra agreed thoughtfully and, it seemed to me, a little maliciously. "Without supernatural aid you would never have got away from that Opatá village where you deserted me and left me at the mercy of those savages."

Joe laughed indulgently and replied: "You met up with grief, Johnny, just because you didn't have a lucky leg. And after what you had tried to do to us, you could hardly expect us to go to much trouble to save you."

Garza tactfully led the conversation into other channels. In the course of time he got down to business. His proposition was that we go with him to Chuparosa as instructors in infantry drill and rifle practice.

"Most Mexicans are poor shots," he deprecated. "They shoot before they can see the enemy; they shoot into the air; they waste ammunition. And while our cavalry is splendid, our foot soldiers are seldom well drilled. Now I am going to put into the field an army of sharpshooters, men trained not to shoot until they are within range and then to shoot to kill.

"And my infantry is going to equal my cavalry," he went on. "That is why I need you gentlemen, who are trained in the arts of modern warfare. A thousand pesos a month for each of you, and the rank of colonel. How about it?"

"You bet!" assented Joe, waving his glass aloft. "And my lucky leg will insure your success. We're with you, general, for the liberation of Mexico. Aren't we, Pete?"

I nodded, but with inward reservations. A little later I would haul Joe away from there, ostensibly to get our baggage, and we would forget to return.

So pleased was Garza with the apparent success of the negotiations that he proposed we go to some café for a regular party. He was hungry, he said, and also thirsty. Johnny Guerra demurred that if General Garza showed himself in too public a place he might be recognized by an enemy, but the general brushed aside this objection with a curse and a sneer upon all Obregonistas. He was half drunk and in a mood of defiant recklessness.

STILL protesting, Johnny Guerra retraced the route to the Café de los Serafines. Garza was disgusted and insisted upon proceeding to some more showy resort. Then he saw Dolores and decided that he would stay right where he was.

The rules of Papá Peralta were shamefully flouted that night. Scarcely was the general in his seat before he imperiously beckoned Dolores to his side. She turned her head, pretending not to see. Whereupon he crossed the room, took her hand and led her to our table. She did not struggle any too much and I noted that she managed to slip into the chair between Garza and Joe.

"Vino!" shouted the general. "Wine for the queen of beauty! I would drink her health."

Peralta came running, waving his arms and ordering his daughter back to her station. But Garza nonchalantly shoved him aside and kept on yelling for wine until he got it. Muttering, the old man withdrew to the kitchen.

All of us, including Dolores, had a round of drinks. She was replying as best she could to Garza's disconnected and amorous questions, but her eyes were on Joe and in their depths was a warm, tender light.

At the general's behest she played and sang "Yo Te Amo" and he smashed his glass applauding.

"The most beautiful señorita in all the world!" he acclaimed. "Ah, but what a wife you would make for the president of Mexico!"

"And what a president you would make for Mexico, my general," she rejoined archly, to his vast delight.

"A seeress! A seeress!" he cried. "For in me you indeed behold the next president of our country. Soon my army will be ready to take from the gringos the supplies that it lacks, then march on to the capital. Those silly gringos! When I am in the saddle they shall pay for the aid they have given my enemy, Obregon. My army——"

He stopped suddenly, as though realizing that he had said too much. Uncertainly his eyes darted from Joe to me. But Joe was engrossed with an obstinate cork and I exploded bibulously into "Oh, How I Hate to Get up in the Morning!" Satisfied that we had not heard, Garza resumed his impetuous lovemaking.

His unguarded remarks had given me quite a jolt. I knew now that a raid across the border was a part of Garza's plans. What could be done to block him? I needed time to think but I had to go on croaking that silly song.

"Soldados! Soldados!"

The cry rang from the street outside. Federal soldiers were descending upon the Café de los Serafines. Of course the

noise there was bound to attract the attention of the authorities; perhaps the leader of our party had already been recognized.

There Joe and I sat swilling wine with a revolutionist who had a price upon his head. Five thousand pesos, I had heard. Or was it ten thousand? If we were caught in such company it would mean months in a Mexican jail and a lot of explaining, if nothing worse.

Garza and Johnny War were already crowding out at the side entrance and with them was Joe, frantically bawling for me to follow. Dolores was back in her accustomed place with the guitar, very much flustered, but trying to look unconcerned, as Major Lopez strutted through the door. Behind him I saw half a dozen olive-green uniforms. Knowing not what else to do, I sprang after my companions.

At the moment my only thought was to shake those insurrectionists without delay and get Joe over into Nogales, Arizona. After that I would report to the commanding officer of Camp Little what I knew and suspected of Garza's projected raid into American territory, and thus end my responsibility. It was never my luck to escape from a dilemma as easily as that, however.

We left the alley and turned into a street that was scarcely any wider or cleaner. At the curb stood a touring car with a to-hire sign on the wind shield and a chauffeur drowsing behind the wheel. The Mexicans clambered into the tonneau and Joe went with them. I was reaching up to pull him out when, some fifty yards away, a rifle cracked.

THE bullet whistled past our ears. Confused commands and oaths agitated the peaceful atmosphere of the night. Guerra was shoving a revolver into the driver's ribs and barking directions. The engine roared and the auto shot forward with me clinging to the running board.

In less than no time at all we had left the winking lights of the town behind and were speeding along a chucky road between low hills covered with oak brush and small pines. Whether I liked it or

not, I was headed for Chuparosa with General Garza and his second in command.

"This is the life!" Joe howled gleefully. "Some excitement at last, Pete. My lucky leg is getting in its work again."

"Ah, the most beautiful Dolores!" Garza sighed. "My heart is in her keeping. It is too bad that we had to leave in such a hurry. But we were outnumbered and the time to defy the *federalistas* is not yet. Not yet!"

The car slowed for a grade and I climbed into the seat beside the chauffeur. I was uncertain whether we ought to give those rebels—the slip or go on and learn the full details of their organization and plans. Had I been able to count on Joe's help I might have attempted to make them captives then and there; but he was about three sheets in the wind and went comfortably to sleep.

He knew nothing of his employers' designs against our country and was happy to be off on just the sort of harebrained adventure that appealed to him. There was no opportunity to explain the situation to him so I was forced just to let matters take their course.

Only once did the driver speak and then it was to complain that he was almost out of gas. So a stop was made at a wayside store; Johnny Guerra routed the proprietor out of bed and the tank was filled.

At daylight we drew up by a cluster of forlorn adobe huts in the midst of a waste of greasewood and cactus. In response to the horn's toot, a dozen Mexicans came scuttling out into the crisp morning air.

They looked like ordinary vaqueros, save that they were armed to the teeth with rifles, revolvers, daggers and machetes. At sight of Garza they formed a ragged line and went through some contortions that probably were meant for the rifle salute.

We were served by a corpulent and greasy old woman with coffee, frijoles and tortillas that compared most unfavorably with the tasty viands of the Café de los Serafines. Afterward General Garza

called the chauffeur aside for a conference that must have been satisfactory, for he gave the fellow a handful of coins and allowed him to return the way we had come.

Saddled horses were then brought. Flanked by brigands, virtually prisoners, though treated as honored guests, Joe and I rode into the desert.

It was not until noon, when we stopped for lunch at a foothill village called San Jorge, that I had a chance to speak privately with Joe and tell him that a border raid was on the program as a preliminary to the impending revolt.

"I'm not surprised," he said speculatively. "To loot some defenseless American town would be a simple way to provide his force with food and clothing and also attract to his banner every professional outlaw and gringo hater in Mexico. Well, it's for us to block that little game. We'll just go ahead as though we're with them heart and soul, and wait for our chance to upset their apple cart."

"I suppose that's all we can do, though it looks like we're headed straight for disaster."

"Don't you worry, Pete. Nothing can happen to us as long as I have my lucky leg."

"Do you mean to say that you really take stock in that superstitious nonsense? I know that you're part banshee, but I thought it was merely an alcoholic delusion that you were spouting to Garza last night."

"Superstition? Nonsense! Nothing of the sort. Just cast your mind back over the scrapes that we've got into and out of in Mexico. Can you deny that it was always my leg that brought us luck and worked the undoing of our enemies? Remember what happened at Lagarto, at Magdalena and at Sonoita? There's no other explanation."

AFTER leaving San Jorge we entered the Sierra del Carrizal. For long hours we traversed steep and twisted trails that led over high ridges and through narrow, gloomy cañons. For weary miles the

route lay across a black lava bed on the southern slope of a slender peak that punctured a sky of hard, brilliant blue.

Late afternoon brought us to Chuparosa, a collection of adobe shacks that straggled helter-skelter on both sides of a tiny stream that meandered through a wide valley, bare except for a few discouraged palms and bushes near the creek. Ragged peons, with their women and children and dogs, lounged in the shade.

The men came to attention and their "general" grandiloquently returned their salutes. A hastily collected band of six pieces struck up the "Himna Nacional." "Viva Garza!" was the cry that arose on every hand.

Garza gave us a house to ourselves, with a slatternly *moza* for cook and her daughter for general servant, hoped that we would be comfortable, and withdrew to confer with his officers. We were miserably tired, so after eating we tumbled into bed and slept dreamlessly until sunrise.

Johnny War brought word that we were to review the "whole army." Again on horseback, we accompanied him and Garza to a wide, dusty flat west of town that evidently served as a drill ground. About a hundred and fifty cavalry and perhaps two hundred foot soldiers were drawn up there. It was not a uniformed force; every member wore whatever clothes he happened to own and the effect was not exactly military or impressive.

The horsemen were merely armed cowboys, but they were well equipped when compared with the infantry. Few of the infantrymen even had shoes. Perhaps half of them bore rifles of different types and varying degrees of rustiness; some had revolvers, but all bristled with knives. Apparently there was no artillery.

GARZA made a short speech explaining the Americano "colonels" were veterans just back from Europe, who had come to instruct these sterling patriots of down-trodden Mexico in the arts of modern warfare. We did not know whether the chorus of vivas which greeted this announcement was for us or for the speaker,

but it sure made a couple of doughboy privates snicker to be thus offhandedly elevated to staff officers. And it began to dawn upon us that, whatever else Garza might be, he was certainly popular with his followers.

"It is not a large army," Garza defended as we rode away. "But what it lacks in numbers it makes up in valor. And it is merely the nucleus of a mighty horde of oppressed citizens who will soon sweep on to Mexico City and drive into the sea those tyrants who have my poor country by the throat."

Amusing as this was, Joe and I did not even dare to smile. Every bandit in Mexico who gathers a dozen highwaymen about him believes that the nation will hail him as a liberator and place him in the Palacio Nacional. The worst that this mob could do was to wreck a few trains, rob innocent travelers and sack some defenseless border town. This last possibility was the only one that gave us any concern.

We accepted Garza's invitation to lunch, which consisted mainly of wine. He prattled for a time about his own unselfish patriotism and then abruptly switched the conversation to Dolores.

"Ah, but she is *lindisima*!" he raved, like a lovesick schoolboy. "Tell me all you know of her, señores."

"Well, that isn't much," Joe replied. "I'll admit that I would have liked to know her better, but her affianced would not allow it."

"What?" The question popped from Garza like a revolver shot. "She is pledged in marriage?"

"Oh, yes," Joe went on maliciously. "To the major who broke up our little party the other night. The wedding is to be—let's see, Pete. Is it set for to-day or to-morrow?"

Garza leaped to his feet and went striding up and down the room. "It shall not be," he vowed, swiftly unbuttoning and rebuttoning his jacket. "I will not allow it. Why did you not tell me this before? Guerra, my horse. And my personal escort. I return at once to Nogales."

"But, my general, it is madness. Since they know you have been there once, they will be on their guard. You will be captured and executed."

"Bah! What do I care for danger? The girl must be mine."

"If you must go, go with your army at your back."

"There is no time for that. Speed! Speed or she may be lost to me. Do as I bid you. I shall go by the short route and take an automobile from Saric."

"Señores," continued the perturbed Garza, turning to us, "it grieves me deeply to be forced to leave you so precipitately, but you see how it is. I shall give orders that you are to be obeyed in everything. You may begin to instruct my troops this afternoon if you wish. Adios!"

It was with decidedly mixed emotions that we watched his hurried departure.

"Good Lord!" Joe groaned. "I sure pulled a boner that time. He'll abduct that poor girl just as sure as fate and it's all my fault. Wonder what he'd say if I called him back and told him I was just kidding him?"

"He wouldn't believe you. And it strikes me that you've achieved a noble bit of strategy. While he's cruising about on his love affair, he won't be doing any border raiding. And we're left here with the opportunity to disrupt his comic-opera army."

"Some gallant cavalier you are! Think of Dolores."

"I have other things to think about. Anyway, I don't believe she has much choice between Lopez and Garza. You're the red-headed half-wit she has her eye on."

"Do you really think so, Pete? All the more reason why I should do what I can to protect her from this highbinder. We've got to get to Nogales ahead of him. That's why I didn't offer to go with him."

"Well, if you can figure out some way to sneak away from here, I'm with you. But my guess is that if we try it, we'll find out in short order that we're nothing but a pair of prisoners. And if Garza ever learns the amount of our bank account in

Tucson, that will be exactly the size of our ransom. We're in a jack pot right, if you ask me. But here comes Johnny War."

Johnny urgently suggested action, hinting that we could not begin too soon to earn our promised pay. There seemed to be no way out of it. As I had two good legs, it was agreed that I should serve as drillmaster and Joe should direct the rifle practice.

Three hours in Mexico that afternoon brought me more unadulterated grief, exasperation and positive suffering than did eight months of campaigning in France. As it had been demonstrated in the morning that the Garzaistas were absolutely untrained, I started out by explaining, in my most fluent Spanish, some of the more simple infantry movements.

Then I undertook to exemplify these with a squad. It was like trying to teach a pack of wild cats to waltz; those brigands had just as much idea of what I was talking about. I tried out the whole army before finding a man who could hold his pivot for a right-about turn.

A lovely time was had by all. I got sore, maybe let out a cussword or two. In this I had the fervent and sympathetic assistance of Johnny War, but though he was supposed to be in command while Garza was absent, he had no more influence over those dusky sons of the desert than I had.

MARCHING in unison, even keeping step, was simply beyond their comprehension. At first they laughed at me; then they got sore, too. They would drop out of the ranks to roll cigarettes and the next thing I knew they would be gone. Then they deserted by dozens. Johnny War was furious.

"Captain Gomez, what does this mean?" he roared. "Call back your men."

Gomez laughed cynically, shrugging his shoulders. "What has all this child's play to do with fighting?" he demanded. "Surely General Garza does not mean for this bellowing gringo to drive Mexicans around like a bunch of cattle."

"Is it for you to say what he means, you goathead? When he comes back, you shall be court-martialed and shot."

Again Gomez laughed, defiantly and contemptuously. With studied insolence he drawled away after the others. I took a swig of fiery aguardiente from Johnny's flask, felt better and walked over to see how Joe was faring.

He met me with a bewildered but philosophic grin.

"A lot of them can shoot just as well as I can," he reported. "But none of them have any idea of obeying orders, of waiting for targets to be put up, or anything like that. Sure, I'm a failure as a rifle instructor. Johnny, I resign."

"Me, too!" I chimed.

"Resign? You cannot resign. You are officers of General Garza's army, pledged to fight for the freedom of Mexico. And these ignorant *paísanos* will act very differently when the general returns. He will discipline them."

"We won't be here when he returns," Joe asserted positively. "Señor Wayland and I hit the trail for Nogales to-night. You will kindly have horses ready for us. We're going and you'd better not try to stop us. Pete, let's see if we can find a hole in that creek deep enough for a dip. I never was so hot and sticky."

"Do you think it was wise to tell him that we intend to duck?" I asked, as we undressed in a clump of chamiso bushes.

"Wiser than to get shot in the back while trying to take French leave. Besides, we've got to have horses. Now we'll see how badly they want to hold us here."

"If you think they'll willingly let us trot back to Nogales with all our information about the strength and equipment of their army, you haven't learned much about Mexicans. A miserable rabble of Sonora riffraff, true, but much larger and therefore more dangerous than the federals think. If they knew how many men Garza has under his banner, they'd send an expedition into these hills right away and wipe him out. Now look at that."

Half a dozen cavalymen suddenly appeared on the east side of the creek, per-

haps a hundred yards distant. They came galloping rapidly straight toward us, as though they intended to ride us down. But when almost into the water, they swerved a little upstream. Laughing and chatting, they removed the bridles from their horses and let them drink.

"Bet my leg against yours that Johnny sent them to keep an eye on us," I conjectured. "He isn't going to be caught short in his gringo count when the chief comes home. But they're leaving now; maybe we can finish our swim in peace."

"I'm still betting that Johnny Guerra will back down when we walk right up to him and demand the horses," Joe argued hopefully. "Now let's get back to town and eat, for we've got a long hard ride ahead of us. Keep your gun close by you, for it won't do to be disarmed at this stage of the game."

Joe spoke too late, however. For when we got back to our clothes, both revolvers and both cartridge belts were gone. The pockets of our trousers had been turned inside out and our purses, each of which contained only a few dollars in silver, also were missing.

The prints of bare feet led away through the brush. Though we had never been entirely out of sight of the clothes, the thief had been given plenty of time to work while the cavalry on the other side of the creek held our attention.

"You see, Johnny isn't overlooking any bets," I observed grimly. "He was afraid we might get ugly when he refused us horses, so he sent a compadre here to draw our teeth."

JOE was seething with anger. "Just you wait till I get that double-crossing *cholo*!" he stormed. "I'll choke the life out of his filthy carcass. Where does he get the idea that he can pull anything like this on us?"

"Just you keep your head now. He holds all the trumps and would just as soon shoot the two of us as roll another cigarette. I believe that Opatá business is still sticking in his craw."

"Well, he's got us crippled, but he hasn't

got us licked," declared Joe. "For my lucky leg is with us still. Now the question is, what shall we do next? For we can't sit here and twiddle our thumbs while Garza is up there stealing Dolores."

"There's nothing we can do, but grin and wait for developments. I'd be for lighting out afoot if there was a chance in the world of getting away. It's just as I told you. We were the fair-haired boys as long as they thought they could make use of us, but when we wanted to break away, we were shown our exact standing in the community."

Cursing and fuming, Joe followed me back toward the village.

Probably Johnny War just couldn't resist the temptation to gloat a bit over the gringos whom he had so easily outwitted and made helpless. For when we reached our adobe, he was leaning against the corner, smoking and grinning mockingly.

With a strident cry of uncontrollable rage, Joe sprang past me and hurled himself at Johnny Guerra's throat. Johnny's grin vanished like a cloudlet before a cyclone. I looked to see him draw the revolver at his waist, but he was taken too completely by surprise to do anything except back away. As he retreated, he tripped over a loose stone and went down.

Quick as a flash, Joe balanced himself on his good foot and with the other, the one of rubber at the end of a leg of wood, he kicked Guerra in the seat of the pants. I dropped on my knees beside the writhing Mexican and groped for his gun.

Before I could find it, I was bowled over and my face was ground into the dust by four or five revolutionaries who had responded to Johnny's shrill squeals for help. Similarly beset, Joe was heaving and tossing beside me. Both of us, however, were so badly outnumbered that we were soon subdued.

MENACED by a score of rifles and as many scowls of hate, we were allowed to rise and face Johnny War.

"You would kick me!" he snarled. "Me, General Juan Guerra, hero of a dozen wars! I'll teach you to insult your bet-

ters. To the guardhouse with them! They shall be shot at sunrise for insubordination and for plotting to overthrow our cause. But wait!"

Guerra paused and glowered at us. Then he pointed to Joe.

"Take off that gringo's wooden leg and burn it. He shall never kick another Mexican with it."

"Take my leg? Not much you won't!" raged Joe.

"Shut up!" I snapped. "It's your leg or our lives."

"But it's my lucky leg. I don't give it up to anybody. Johnny War, do you know what happens to men who try to take that leg away from me? They die."

Johnny Guerra smiled. "And still the gringos laugh at the superstitions of the Mexicans! I am not one who is going to die."

Knives were already ripping and hacking at Joe's right trousers leg. His breath came in convulsive gasps as the wooden leg was unstrapped and carried away. Some one handed him a pole for a crutch.

Guerra led the detail that escorted us through a hooting and jeering mob to the "guardhouse," a one-room shack at the southern edge of the town. He opened the massive brass padlock, took Joe's pole, pushed us inside, and the heavy plank door swung shut with an ominous slam.

"Well, you and that temper of yours have gone and spilled the beans right," I accused.

"Go ahead, Pete. Cuss me out all you please. I deserve everything you can say about me. But I just couldn't help taking a poke at him when I saw him grinning in that superior way. And I got in a couple of good solid kicks, anyway."

"The most deadly insult you can pay a Mexican. Johnny War will never forgive that. He'll have his revenge."

"He said that he was going to burn my leg. I wonder if he'll really do it."

"He said that he was going to shoot us at sunrise. I wonder if he'll really do it."

"No, he won't. He's afraid to, without Garza's permission. Otherwise he wouldn't have waited for sunup. But—

oh—I don't know what he'll do. With my leg gone, my luck's gone."

"Maybe it'll work on him, with reverse English."

"That's our only hope. And it's got to work mighty quick. Still, it's got us out of some mighty tight places before."

"Never one as tight as this. Did you hear him telling off sentries to guard us?"

It cannot be said that "The condemned men slept soundly." Nothing like that. There were too many rats and bugs in that narrow cell for even the lightest slumber, so we sat up with our troubles.

Joe alternated between mourning for his leg, speculating upon what might be happening to the fair Dolores, and swearing at himself for getting us into our present mess. Every move that we had made since we left Nogales he now conceived to have been a bullheaded blunder.

At first I silently concurred, but upon thinking it over I came to the conclusion that the fundamental mistake of all was in not turning Johnny War over to Major Lopez the moment that he accosted us in the Café de los Serafines. Yet, knowing Johnny to be treacherous and vengeful, we had allowed ourselves to drift into the power of him and Garza, a rascal of the same stripe. For all that I was as much to blame as Joe and I told him so.

"We'd got away with so much south of the border that we thought we could get away with anything," I added. "After half a dozen hairbreadth escapes we took it into our heads that we couldn't live without excitement, so we deliberately went hunting for trouble. Well, we sure found it. Let there be no further talk of divided responsibility."

Through the dark he grasped my hand and choked: "It's mighty fine of you to put it that way, pardner. But I made most of the fool breaks and some way I'm going to get you out of this. And I haven't lost faith in my lucky leg, though I don't know what the effect will be if Johnny actually destroyed it."

A cicada buzzed merrily in a mesquite bush outside. The voices of the guards, sometimes laughing and sometimes quar-

reling, came faintly to our ears. Now and then one of us would light a match and look at his watch, for the sneak thief who disarmed us had overlooked our time-pieces.

It was along toward midnight when we heard halloos and vivas from the direction of the building that Garza called his residency. Could this mean that the general had returned? We hoped so, for there was a possibility, however slight, that he would countermand the order for our execution. But Johnny, of course, would not fail to exaggerate our alleged crimes.

High in the eastern wall of our squalid cell was a tiny barred window. By standing on a rickety box that was the prison chair, and stretching my neck to twice its natural length, I managed to peer through. The glow of a cigarette disclosed the location of a guard.

To him, I shouted a demand that we be taken at once before General Garza. We were two of Uncle Sam's favorite nephews, I said, and if we were longer subjected to the indignity of incarceration he would send down an army to wreak dire vengeance.

"Aha! Do you remember how terribly he punished Villa? He will find Garza just as easy to catch. Hold your tongue, gringo."

"You're just wasting your breath when you try to bluff those birds," Joe commented gloomily, as I thudded to the floor.

In the course of time the first rays of approaching day sifted through the window. Again I climbed upon the box, to gaze at a gorgeous presunrise display of pink and gold behind wispy clouds of purple and blue.

"Anyway, we have a nice morning for our party," I comforted. "I believe that already I can see the Pearly Gates, just to the left of that highest peak."

"Cut out the funeral oration, Pete. There isn't going to be any party. Men aren't shot for kicking another in the pants, even in Mexico."

"They're not, eh? They've been shot and they've been hanged for less than that."

WE observed the pale morning light turned to golden yellow. The sun was up, but nothing had happened. A little later, though, we heard the shuffle of approaching feet. The door creaked open, but we were not summoned forth. Instead, two tin plates of beans and an earthenware olla of water were passed in to us.

Joe fell to eating at once, arguing jubilantly that if the Mexicans intended to execute us immediately they would not take the trouble to feed us. I was not so sure, but managed to worry down the garlicky frijoles.

The next diversion came about the middle of the forenoon. The door was opened and Captain Gomez beckoned to me. I helped Joe toward the threshold, but Gomez interposed:

"No, not the red-haired one. Only the one with black hair."

So we were to be separated. Tears misted my eyes as I wrung my buddy's hand in farewell. I had no more expectation of seeing him again in this world than I had of dining off a cheese sandwich from the moon.

"If you're afraid, don't let those greasers see it," he whispered. "Throw a chest."

I stumbled out into the blinding sunlight. Guards fell in behind me and I was hustled along toward Garza's headquarters. Johnny War loitered at the entrance, leering malevolently. He followed me inside to the general's untidy office.

As I entered, I heard an inarticulate cry. A woman bounced from a chair at Garza's side and flung herself toward me. It was Dolores Peralta, pale as death, her eyes red from weeping, her once lovely hair hanging in tangled strings. When she was almost to me, she stopped, stared at me and moaned:

"This is not the one."

"I know it," rapped Garza, still at the business of buttoning and unbuttoning his jacket. The scars on his hands and face seemed whiter; his aspect was that of a perplexed, disappointed and well-nigh beaten man.

"Sit down, girl," he commanded gruffly. "I would ask this gringo some questions."

Dolores subsided into her seat and began to weep noisily into a handkerchief. Garza frowned at her intently before turning to me.

"Tell me the truth. What is there between her and that one-legged friend of yours?"

"Nothing," I denied.

"Don't lie to me. I will not be made sport of by a woman and a pair of Americanos."

"General, I am at a loss to understand why you should suspect that there is anything between them. Perhaps if you would explain what has happened——"

"What has happened! Ah, but you ask me to make a humiliating confession for a Mexican soldier and gentleman." The words came pouring from Garza's lips in a torrent. "Nothing makes sense. First, the red-haired one tells me that she is to be married immediately to Major Lopez. But when I reach Nogales and make inquiries, I find that is not true.

"I seek out the girl," he went on, "and she is eager to flee with me, swears that she loves no one else. She asks that I bring her here at once, but begs for a week to prepare for our wedding. To which I agree, for I am drunk with love. She steals away from the house of her people and joins me.

"But we are scarcely on our way," he continued, "before she begins to question me about the big gringo. Was he well when I left and would he certainly be in Chuparosa when we arrived? Still, I do not suspect, though she responds but coldly to my caresses.

"When we come to Chuparosa it is in the dead of night, yet she is looking all about as though in search of some one. And when General Guerra tells us that the Americanos are in the guardhouse, awaiting execution for insubordination and attempted desertion, she goes into hysterics. She screams that if he of the flaming hair is shot, she will poison herself, that she will never be mine. She says——"

"I will! I will!" sobbed Dolores.

"So I know now that it is Bonner she loves, not Major Lopez nor myself."

"That m-may be true," I stammered. "But he does not love her, so——"

I was interrupted by a prolonged shriek of agony, disbelief and protest from Dolores, who raised her tear-stained face and glared at me like a wounded tigress.

A LONG moment of unbroken silence ensued.

Johnny War was the first to speak. "You see how it is, your excellency. She tricked you into bringing her here, thinking to run away with her gringo lover. This is a time for that firmness and resolution that have ever distinguished your illustrious career and will eventually carry you to the presidency. The only thing to do is to shoot the prisoners without delay, for one is your rival and both are disloyal to our noble cause. Then you can deal with the girl as you see fit. Do not let yourself be bluffed."

Garza squared his shoulders, trying to achieve the careless, debonair demeanor that had been habitual to him before his devastating experience with Dolores Peralta. Her eyes were fixed on him imploringly, beseechingly.

Slowly Garza nodded agreement with Johnny War.

"No! No!" screamed Dolores, throwing herself upon the floor and clasping her shapely white arms about his knees. "Not that! You cannot be so cruel. Only spare him—and his friend—and I will do as you wish. You may call a priest as soon as they are free."

Such an appeal would have melted any heart not utterly barren of pity, but Anulfo Garza was merely a savage with a veneer of civilization thinner than the skin of an onion. He drew himself to his full height, folded his arms and gazed down at her contemptuously.

"So! You admit that you love the dog of a gringo. That you have mocked and deceived me and shamed me before my gallant men. General Guerra, your counsel is good. Take this fellow back to

the guardhouse and place him with the other traitor."

"And shoot both of them, your excellency?"

"Make all your preparations, but wait for me. I shall personally give the order to fire."

As calmly as I could, I intervened: "If you execute us, it means war with the United States."

"Every meddling gringo says that," sneered Johnny Guerra. "But there is never war. Besides, my general, these men are outlaws in their own country, which will not grieve overmuch if they drop out of sight."

With the lamentations of Dolores ringing in my ears, I was hustled away. Again the cárcel door swung outward, but I was not thrust within. Instead, Joe was roughly haled forth. As he blinked his eyes to accustom them to the sunlight, Guerra handed him a pole.

"This will serve as a crutch," purred that affable murderer. "It is a poor thing, but you will not need it long. We can provide you with nothing better, since that fine leg of yours was fed to the flames."

"Apparently the jig is up," said Joe with a twisted smile. "Pete, I was right. Call it superstition if you will, but that was my lucky leg. As long as I had it with me, fortune smiled upon us. When this greaser burned it, he burned our luck."

I tried to speak, but speech would not come.

Guerra pushed the two of us against the adobe wall and bade us stand still. He paced off twenty steps, drew a line in the dust with his toe and back of that ranged a dozen riflemen. Half of them, he crisply directed, should aim at me, and the others at Joe. Importantly he examined each gun to be sure that it was properly loaded.

Very briskly and practical was Johnny War, as though this business of executing gringos was nothing new to him. He was enjoying himself to the limit. The members of the firing squad, chatting and

smoking, were also having a good time. So was the rapidly swelling crowd that fought for places of vantage from which to view the promised spectacle.

"Cheer up, Pete," Joe rallied. "Everybody else is happy and it isn't like you to be a wet blanket. It's too bad I lost my lucky leg. Anyway, we'll meet Johnny War in hell and help to make it hot for him. What are they waiting for?"

"For Garza," I croaked. The words rattled from my throat like gravel falling down an iron pipe.

"Make way," bawled Johnny Guerra. "Clear the way for our brave commander who comes to make an example of the traitors."

THE crowd parted, forming a passage through which strode General Garza, armed with clanking saber and a German automatic that reposed in a holster at his right hip.

And to his arm clung Dolores Peralta, pallid as new ashes, but composed.

"She would come," the general muttered to Guerra. "And it will do her no harm to observe what happens to men who cross the path of Garza."

He took a station well off to our right, out of the line of fire. Even at that distance, however, I could hear the girl's breath coming in frightened gasps.

"Raise your guns!" ordered Garza.

Joe Bonner and I looked into twelve round, black muzzles.

"When I wave my sword, shoot to—What! She has fainted."

Dolores sagged against him. As she did so, a sharp, staccato bark rang out. The general was swaying on his feet, his scarred countenance overspread by a ludicrous aspect of utter astonishment. Beside him stood the girl, the smoking automatic in her hand.

As Garza sank to earth, Dolores, with a wild shriek, ran to Joe. From her nerveless fingers, I plucked the automatic. Then I shoved them both toward the open door, not three feet away. Waving the weapon from side to side, I backed after them.

In an instant the lane between us and

our executioners was filled by milling and screeching Mexicans, for the spectators in the rear surged forward frantically to see what had happened. This enabled us to get inside the cárcel, Joe lurching along between his pole crutch and Dolores. As I slammed the door, a bullet, probably fired by Johnny War, whistled by my head and made a tiny nick in one ear.

There was no way to fasten the door from within. I braced my feet to hold it shut, but was slowly forced back. A crack opened and through this crept a brown hand. I shoved the gun against it and pulled the trigger. With a howl of agony, the hand was jerked out of sight. The pressure on the door was released and I closed the aperture.

"Come on!" I challenged, simulating a defiant and confident mood that I was far from feeling. "Who'll be next?"

Two shots had been discharged from my weapon. How many cartridges did this automatic's clip hold, anyway? I had forgotten whether it was six or seven. Anyway, I was certainly not prepared to withstand any extended siege. All I could do was to sell our lives dearly.

I glanced backward into the gloom of our prison. Dolores was lying flat upon the floor, with Joe kneeling beside her.

"Fainted?" I asked.

"Wounded. That shot fired from outside struck her in the head. I can't tell whether it's serious or merely a furrow in the scalp. She's getting pretty weak. And all the water's gone out of this olla. But I think she's coming around. What are our chances?"

"We haven't got as much chance as so many rabbits in a den of wolves. They'll calm down in a minute and rush us. Did you ever hear such a racket?"

"Pete, look at the side of your face!"

"Just a scratch. What's that?"

From beyond the door came a crackling sound. The planks were hot to my touch.

"They're burning us out," I remarked. "The smoke will be pouring in here in a minute."

We waited tensely. I gripped the automatic until my fingers were numb.

All at once there came a change in the tone of the clamor without. From defiance and threat, it turned to fear.

"*Federales! Federales! Soldados! Valgame Dios!*"

The imprecations of Johnny War mingled with the tread of many terrified feet. I gave Joe the gun and climbed upon the box so that I could look out of the little window. All that I could see was the backs of flying figures.

ANGRY flames came licking through the door. The place was filled with acrid smoke. Again I took the automatic. I shot ahead of me, then threw open the door and dashed through the blaze. No one was near save Garza, still lying prone where he had fallen.

I kicked aside the burning brands, hurried inside and carried out the still-unconscious Dolores. Joe followed closely. Just as I was laying her down in the shade of the cárcel wall, a horseman came thundering toward us. He was in the uniform of the Mexican army. It was Major Lopez.

"Here she is!" I called. "Safe, we hope."

He tumbled from the horse and fell upon his knees at her side. He covered her red-stained cheeks with kisses until his own lips were crimson.

"Dolores, my beloved!" He wept. "Tell me that you still live."

"I've been probing the wound with my fingers and I'm sure the skull is not fractured," Joe told him.

"Ah! She opens her eyes. Thank Heaven I have arrived in time to save you, Dolores *mío*. I followed just as soon as I could organize a column. Where is the fiend who stole you away from me?"

I pointed to the lifeless form of Garza.

"So I am not to have the pleasure of killing him!" exclaimed Lopez.

"Your future wife killed him," I said. "The reward will make a tidy little dowry."

"Come on, Pete," urged Joe, hopping about on his pole. "The federals have chased all the Garzaistas out of Chuparosa, it seems. I don't believe Johnny really

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burned my wooden leg, for it's sure been on the job the last quarter of an hour. Let's see if we can't find it."

"And restoratives for the lady," I added. "That head must be bandaged."

"No!" Dolores moaned weakly. "Señor Wayland, please."

WE turned to her. Those great, brown eyes looked up pleadingly from a face framed in matted hair that had once been golden.

"I would speak to Señor Wayland alone," she breathed. "You will not mind?"

"Her mind wanders," I said. "But step aside for a moment, so I can hear what she has to say. We must humor her."

"No, my mind is quite clear," she declared, when Lopez and Joe were out of earshot. "But I—I would ask you a question. Please answer me truthfully."

"You have my word," I told her.

"When you told Garza that Señor Bonner did not—did not—love me, were you speaking truth?"

Sadly, dumbly, I returned her gaze. My heart ached with pity for her. Finally I nodded. "I spoke truth."

"You are sure? There is no hope?"

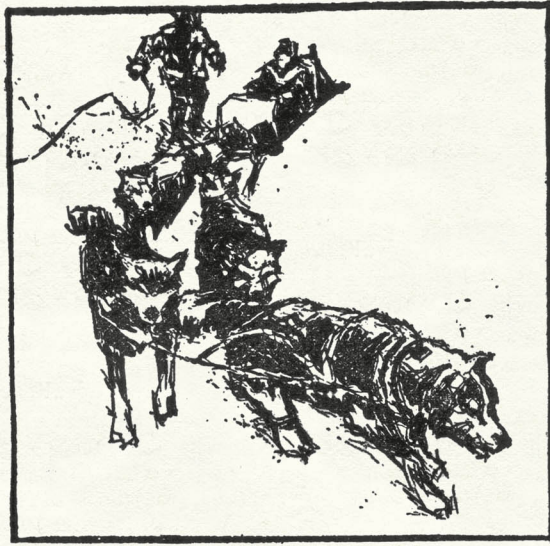
"Absolutely sure," I replied. "Señor Bonner is—— Well, I am afraid I could not make you understand. But Major Lopez is a gallant soldier and will make you a good husband."

"Yes. He is a brave man and of my own people. I should be sensible, but oh! My poor heart! My poor heart! Call him, please."

I beckoned to Lopez. Joe had disappeared, but an instant later he came running from the long adobe that had been Garza's headquarters. Below the fringe of his mutilated trousers leg, the metal work of his wooden leg glinted brightly.

"Johnny didn't burn it," he whooped. "Guess he was a little superstitious himself. Found it in his room. I knew he didn't dare. My lucky leg was working for us all the time."

That's what *he* thought. I have my own opinion.



Trouble's Partner

By Robert Russell Strang

Author of "The Banker of Koyokuk," "Cassiar Dixon Pays His Debts," Etc.

A tale of an Alaskan gold strike, wherein fortune juggles the scales of justice.

CHAPTER I.

CHANCE OF A LIFETIME.

THE air was so heavy with frost that had a musher accidentally run across Chatinaw Creek, unless he had the good fortune to bump into one of the new moss-chinked log cabins, in all probability he would have crossed it and kept on going, wholly unaware of the new outpost in the wilderness. It was one of those days that must necessarily come to pass in the interior of Alaska, during that period in winter when the bulge of the earth obscures the sun. It was still, too; deadly so, because the parkaed men who had turned the windlasses above the shafts, up and down the creek all morning, had entered their cabins to cook the midday meal.

In one of these, two men were seated opposite each other at a little table in front of a window whose panes were covered with a thick layer of frost. For some

minutes in silence they had been staring at the crescent of shotty gold in the bottom of a pan. One of them at length drew a deep breath and rose to his feet.

"There's no doubt about the strike now, is there, Tom?" he inquired in an excited whisper.

"Why, no, I don't think so," replied the other casually. "We've got a pay streak a hundred and fifty feet wide anyway and there's no doubt about the richness of it."

The night before these two had broken into another of Madam Alaska's treasure chests at the bottom of a thirty-five-foot shaft. Fifteen minutes previous, they had bed-rocked a second shaft and been rewarded with the same grade of pay. Because they were the only owners on Chatinaw who had a little thawing plant, by the help of which they had been able to sink two shafts simultaneously and within the space of a month, the work of the other two-and-thirty claim owners on the creek, who were sinking their shafts by

the slow wood-fire process, was still drudgery.

Indeed, a few of these chartered members of Clan Micawber hadn't even stuck a pick in their claims. In their own estimation, they were very wise men. If the hustlers struck pay, these would immediately get busy and reap the benefit of the bona-fide prospector's industry. If, on the other hand, the reverse came to pass, they would congratulate themselves upon having evaded a lot of hard graft during the coldest days of the winter.

No two men could scarcely have been less alike than Murray Gaindon and Tom Mason. Gaindon possessed the presence and subtlety of address which good bringing up plus education confer upon a man. Tom Mason was of infinitely finer material, but roughhewn. A year before, he had picked up and saved the life of Gaindon on the Kluwani Trail, the delay thus occasioned having cost him a claim on Valley Forge, a creek that turned out a rich payer. The partnership had resulted and a queer one it was. Bluntly, Tom Mason had been unable to get rid of Murray.

IT was Tom who staked the claim on Chatinaw. All the way up the Kenoa River, Murray had hindered their progress by his everlasting whining about his sore feet, or his headache, or the cut on his finger, insomuch that the dogs that been obliged to haul him the greater part of the way.

On the last stretch, fearful of getting disappointed again, Tom had hitched up the dogs early in the morning and hit the trail for Chatinaw without him. Because Tom passed everything on the trail that day, he arrived on the creek just in time to stake the last open piece of ground, a piece almost full-claim size that had been overlooked by the first band of excited stampedeers.

He picked up Murray again next night, from which moment it was "our" claim this and that. On the way to Fairbanks next day to record, they had picked up a young man on the trail named Jim Beaver,

who had stepped into an overflow in the Kenoa and got his feet badly frozen. To him, Tom applied first aid, then set out for Fairbanks, distant five days and leaving Murray, who couldn't of course keep up, to follow on foot. An exceedingly peeved man he was therefore.

Tom Mason didn't disappoint his partner, but recorded the claim on Chatinaw in the names of both. He also attended to this matter on behalf of Jim Beaver.

Shortly afterward, they returned to Chatinaw, Tom on this occasion taking along with him his little pipe boiler.

"Gold, gold!" muttered Murray in a thick whisper. He began to pace the floor.

"I guess there's an ounce and a half in that pan," declared Tom. "And by scraping bed rock with the end of my candlestick, sort of picking the dirt, I think I could get a fifty-dollar pan in either shaft." He pulled at his pipe for a moment. "I could see gold on all sides of me," he went on. "It lay on bed rock like half-crushed wheat. Yeah, I guess we've struck it," he added to himself, his mind racing back over the questing years.

With white face and blazing eyes, Murray paused in front of Tom.

"We'll be millionaires within two years!" Murray exploded. "Before the snow goes in spring, we'll have the two largest thawing plants in the country on our ground, for with such pay as we've struck we shall have no trouble getting credit at the banks and trading companies. By the time the water runs, we'll have two working shafts to bed rock, the summer's work blocked out and a hundred and fifty men working for us."

He had spoken fast and was out of breath.

Tom eyed his partner with something like amazement. Hitherto, and even in matters of no consequence, Murray had deferentially consulted him, left the direction of their mining affairs wholly in his hands. Tom didn't know this man.

"We'll take out a half million this summer," Murray resumed, after a few swift

turns about the cabin, "and our expenses ought not to exceed two hundred thousand—plants included. With our surplus, we'll purchase interests in other claims on the creek. In five years, we ought to have everything cleaned up—for I believe in having big machinery—and be worth at least three million each. In ten years from now, I shall be a multimillionaire——"

"Wake up!" snapped Tom smilingly.

No smile answered his.

"My plan is perfection itself, Tom!" cried Murray earnestly. "In anticipation of this hour, during the eighteen months I have been in Alaska, I have applied every leisure moment to my plan of procedure. Trust yourself to me, Tom!" he appealed in a tone of condescension, the first time he had ever employed such a mode of address toward his capable partner. "I'll make a rich man out of you."

THE crow's-feet about Tom's eyes were busy. He was vastly amused.

"I'll bet a prune," he good-naturedly declared, "that your plan isn't the miracle you think it is. You've forgotten something——"

"Impossible, Tom! Impossible!"

"Me, f'r instance."

"Oh!" Murray gave a short laugh of relief—that is to say, it possessed all the mechanics of a laugh. "You can be foreman," he told Tom. "I shall give the business and financial matters my personal attention."

Tom sliced some tobacco from a plug on the edge of the table, teased it between the palms of his hands, then stuffed it into his pipe. He lighted it thoughtfully. Murray, his chin on his breast and his hands behind his back, paced back and forth between the cabin door and the bunks.

"Your plan is wrong from the bottom up," Tom drawled, between puffs. "For eight-and-thirty years, a dozen of which have been spent prospecting in Alaska, I've handled my own affairs to my entire satisfaction. I've a plan about the development of the claim, too. It's the result of considerable experience and the

fundamentals of it bear no resemblance to yours."

If these words reached Murray's ear, evidently their significance did not impress itself upon his mind.

"Doubtless—plans after a fashion," he returned carelessly, just as if the matter were too trivial for consideration on his part. "You see, Tom," he went on, striking a pose, "I'm a business man and appreciate thoroughly the power of money. On the other hand, I have not yet met the miner who knew even the rudiments of finance! When one strikes it rich, he makes a big splurge, largely, I'm inclined to believe, because he doesn't know how to employ his wealth for his own benefit."

"Then," Murray went on, "he returns to the hills again, happy, no doubt, because broke. Did not one of the Klondike kings place a dance-hall girl on one end of a pair of crude scales, pour gold dust into a mining bucket on the other until a balance was struck, then make her a present of it? The incident is typical. Now I received my training in a large financial institution in the East——"

"Have you ever handled any money of your own in business?" Tom shot at him, still keeping his temper.

"No, I haven't. But——"

"Then a pop-corn peddler or corner grocer could give you cards and spades on a deal any day in the week," declared Tom. "I'll tell you why. For one thing, they're accustomed to handling their own money; for another, they're acquainted with every detail of their business; and for a third, they've got the business point of view, which is a different one altogether from that of men who work for wages or earn salaries. I know. Listen:

"In a mining town out in Idaho my father did a freighting, livery and sale business," Tom continued. "As a side line, he traded in cows—live stock of any sort. Any time he left his little office, he carried a long whip in his hand and just sort of stalled around—so I thought. The result of this was I grew up to believe that his business ran itself."

"I was just turned twenty when he

died," he went on. "And you can believe me that, before my father was buried, I knew that the business didn't run itself. In one barn were sixty horses, in another as many cows. There were a dozen teamsters and half a dozen men and roustabouts to find profitable work for and keep busy. Almost every hour of the day, some farmer would drop in to trade a cow or a horse. He knew all there was to know about the animals he wanted to get rid of; I knew nothing. It was my wits against his to make a good trade.

"Fortunately for me," Tom continued, "I had unconsciously picked up a lot about live stock, so in that first year I didn't get stuck so very often. After that, I held my own. The point is, an onlooker would have thought there was nothing doing around the place, just as I did; yet some days I turned over a thousand dollars. And it was a business that couldn't get along for one day without me.

"Well, sir, I ran that business until I was twenty-five. When motor trucks appeared, I took a squint a few years ahead, sold out and came to Alaska. I'll say I served my apprenticeship in business!

"Now, where placer mining is concerned," Tom went on, "I reckon I know as much as the next, plus my business experience. I've been all over Alaska, know the successful methods of separating gold from gravel and bed rock, and made a good trade here and there. And it may be news to you that some men would go broke even on rich ground like what we've got here. Let me state to you right now before you hatch out any more dreams: There's no expensive machinery coming onto this claim this spring. This summer we'll get along with my little pipe boiler."

BEFORE Murray could reply to this, the door opened and, out of the vapor occasioned by the contact of the warm and cold air, a man emerged in the conventional, knee-high moccasins and parka but with a red sash about his waist. Without a word, he stepped to the stove, slipped a hand out of a fur gauntlet and began to

remove the ice from his mustache, which had run down and solidified on the fur of his parka hood.

Charley Bruce was creek representative of the N. A. T. & S. Co., the largest trading concern not alone in Fairbanks, but in all Alaska. He not only took orders for his firm and collected the dust in payment, but was credit man also.

His business was to know not only the paying creeks in his district, but the owners of the claims on such as well—a capacity in which he also served a local bank, though this was not generally known, for credit plays a large part in the development of a new creek or camp.

Knowing that "Old Man" Turnbull had made a small strike on the right fork of Chatinaw the fall before and that the main creek had been stampeded shortly thereafter and was being prospected, Bruce had arrived on the scene to size up the situation. Needless to say, he knew placer mining from A to Z.

"Well, Tom, how goes it?" Charley Bruce asked, the lower half of his face at last clear of ice. He nodded to Murray.

"Good, Charley!" Tom lifted the pan from the table and handed it to him. "We've got pay like that in two holes, a hundred and fifty feet apart. I think it's the richest strike made in Alaska in twenty years."

"Whew-w-w!" Charley whistled, fingering the gold in the pan. "Heavy, shotty stuff, too! I'm glad you've struck it, old man. This will certainly make one stir in Fairbanks. Would you mind letting me have a look at your bed rock?"

"Come right along," invited Tom, picking up his Mackinaw coat and fur cap. "The bed rock is a blue slate and——"

The cabin door closed behind the two.

Murray stood in the middle of the floor and clenched his hands. Slowly his eyes kindled to a blaze and his jaw tightened.

"The chance of a lifetime!" he muttered thickly. "Three millions, too, at the very least. I'll do it!"

A minute more and Murray was striding up the creek. During the next ten minutes he passed three cabins, after

which there came a stretch on which there were none at all. He hunted up a corner post on this claim and examined the location notice, which was signed "James Beaver." Later, he examined the three other posts.

"Everything seems to be in order," he muttered. "No chance of a lawsuit if I do put it over. I must get to Fairbanks just as soon as I can. The—chance—of—a—lifetime!" he told himself, over and over again.

At the cabin door, Murray composed his face.

"I'd like to put a big thawing plant and outfit on your ground, Tom," Charley Bruce was saying, when Murray entered.

Tom carefully sliced himself a pipeful of tobacco.

"Charley," he at length began, "I don't approve at all of the system of gouging out pay streaks with expensive machinery and help before the road commission has had time to put a road into the diggin's. I'm aware, of course, that all sorts of machinery and supplies will be freighted over the trail between now and the time the snow goes—at a dollar a pound, or thereabout—but not for me.

"Besides, Charley," he went on, "I've always promised myself that if ever I struck it, that claim would become my home. There's no hurry. The gold in the claim can't run away or depreciate. It's in the safest place I know of. Anyway, I never hankered to own all the gold in the world, but I do want to handle what is mine with a little sense. A year from now, I'll talk business with you."

And although Murray did not see it, Charley was grinning appreciatively at Tom. Situated similarly, Bruce would have acted likewise.

Murray coughed importantly.

"Tom, I think we'd better divide the claim," he suggested. He turned to Charley Bruce. "I would like to have a large plant on my half before spring," he said.

Without rising from his stool, Tom reached a hand to the shelf above the window and dropped a deck of cards on the table.

"High card takes the upper half of the claim," he calmly announced, "the half the cabin and shafts are on."

This was going a little too fast for Murray; no way at all to do business. He was virtually a rich man now, and he, at least, appreciated that fact. He would have liked to explain at length and in wearisome detail by what sinuous mental process he had arrived at such a conclusion, being one of those men who never dream of giving the other fellow credit for having a lick of sense.

Furthermore, Murray wanted to impress Charley Bruce, wanted him to know that he—Murray—was no roughneck, but a business man and a gentleman to boot. In a word, he wanted to parade his superiority and, at the same time, show Charley just what a dub Tom was. All this Tom had spoiled with his coarse and unbusinesslike ways. Murray felt peeved. Nevertheless, as both men seemed to be waiting on him to make a move, he stepped up to the table with dignity and somewhat nervously turned over the ten-spot of diamonds.

In the next moment Tom turned over the jack of clubs. Murray gave a wry smile. It showed up his weak mouth. He turned to Charley Bruce.

"I wonder if you could take me to Fairbanks with you?" he inquired in his best manner. "I wish to open negotiations with the firm you represent for a large plant and outfit of supplies—everything for a large crew for a whole season. I mean to get some gold out of my ground this summer."

HE glanced at Tom, who was idly shuffling the cards.

Charley Bruce hesitated just the fraction of a second.

"I guess you can come with me," he decided. "You'll have to hurry. I mean to make twenty miles before I make camp to-night."

Murray hurriedly packed his blanket roll, then announced that he was ready. Charley and Tom shook hands. Murray followed Bruce out of the door without

a word. Tom sauntered over the threshold and cast his eye over Charley's dog team.

"You ought to make pretty good time with these," he observed.

"I do usually, Tom. Say, you'd better get in the sled and ride," he added to Murray.

Murray bestowed himself comfortably in his blankets. Charley cracked his long whip and shouted "Mush!" The dogs leaped into their collars and bounded down the trail. Charley sprang on the tail board.

Tom returned to the cabin and put on his coat and cap.

"I guess I'll take a walk up the creek and tell the boys their financial worries are over," he decided, "then have a game of crib with 'Dad' Laurie. And seein' I can't do much on the ground alone, and I need a new injector and some more pipe and fittin's, I guess I'll hit the trail for Fairbanks in the morning."

That night there was great rejoicing on Chatinaw Creek. The men gathered on No. 12, built a great bonfire and, despite the forty-below-zero weather, comported themselves like kids. After all but Dad Laurie had returned to their cabins, the old man spoke to Tom.

"Tom," he said, "I ain't so young or supple as I used to be. I've bin prospectin' and galavintin' generally up and down the mountains on the Pacific slope for forty years, but this is the first time I've ever happened to get in on the ground floor.

"Now, I'm too old to handle a rich claim like this yere," Dad went on. "I want you to take charge of it for me on your own terms, because I know they'll be just. How about it?"

Tom considered the proposition for a few minutes.

"A fifty-fifty lease would be about right, I think, Dad."

Dad sprang to his feet.

"Tom, you keep sixty cents on every dollar that comes outa No. 3 and I'll be tickled all to hell. And you can work the claim to suit yourself."

"You play a too-liberal game, Dad—like most prospectors. Within a month, there

will be men on the creek that will promise you seventy-five cents out of every dollar for a lease——"

"Yeah, I know!" Dad broke in. "And I'll get about ten cents on the dollar. You make out a lease paper right now on a sixty-forty basis—the sixty yours—and I'll sign it. Too, I'll consider my worries over, for I know I'll get the forty per cent."

Nor would he go home without a copy of a lease on those terms in his pocket.

"You're robbin' yourself, Dad!" Tom assured him.

"Like hell I am!" retorted the old man.

"I won't put any machinery on the claim until next winter," Tom told him, "but I'll let you have what money you need in the meantime. I figure on working three men this summer—all my little boiler can keep going in thawed dirt."

"Whatever you say, Tom, goes!" Dad lowered his voice and leaned toward his listener. "The possession of that rich claim plumb scairt me!" he confided. "I consider you've done me a great favor by takin' the lease. So long!"

"So long, Dad! In two or three years, you'll be a millionaire anyway."

"Forget it!" the old man flung over his shoulder, then departed.

CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING FOR LITTLE.

IN the afternoon of the sixth day thereafter, Charley Bruce and his deadhead passenger drove into Fairbanks. On the way, the credit man had taken the measure of his companion and his conclusions would have added nothing to Murray's opinion of himself.

After a few words with the manager of the company, who invited him to dinner that night, Murray hastened across the slough to the hospital and asked after the welfare of Jim Beaver. The male nurse led the way to a cot in the little surgical ward whose occupant, a mere boy, lay fully dressed, with the exception of his shoes.

"Well, son, and how are the feet!" in-

quired Murray solicitously, holding out his hand.

"They tell me," Jim Beaver replied, as he grasped the offered hand, "that I'm to leave to-morrow. I can walk fairly good now, but it will be some time yet before I'm able to do a day's work—worse luck! Anybody struck anything on Chatinaw yet?"

Murray ignored the question. "Why the 'worse luck,' Jim?" he inquired in an exceedingly friendly tone.

"I had some bad news from the Outside since I came here. My mother. I'm needed at home to wind up a small estate and sort of look after my sister. And here I'm lying on my back, broke and about four hundred dollars in debt. And nobody struck it on Chatinaw? I've been hoping some of you fellows would, sort of. Is your partner in town? I'd like fine to see him. I think he's an awful fine man," he rambled on.

"Say!" Jim Beaver cried suddenly. "Did you ever run across an old-timer named 'Shasta' Wheeler? No! He's my grandfather. He wrote to me on the Outside a year ago and told me he'd just about struck a million down in the Ruby district. So I came into the country last summer and went there, but nobody could tell me anything about him. I ain't never yet seen him, see? 'Cause he came into the Klondike before I was born. I sure wish you fellas had struck something on Chatinaw! You would, too," he concluded bitterly, "if I hadn't owned a hunk of it."

"Too bad, too bad," murmured Murray. "I feel very sorry for you, Jim. Would you like to go Outside?"

"Oh," Jim hastened to explain, "not on my own account, for I like Alaska. But my sister, she wants I should go out there and settle things up, then come back here with me, see?"

"Well——" Murray seemed thoughtful for a moment. "A stage leaves for Chatina to-morrow morning, doesn't it?"

"Yeah."

"Have you any property in the country besides your claim on Chatinaw?"

"Not a thing."

"H'm! Well, Jim, you're a young husky man and won't always be broke for——"

"Mister, I ain't broke—not once I get Outside!"

"Of course!" agreed Murray heartily. "What I meant to say was that you'll have money some day. Now if I let you have seven hundred and fifty dollars on your Chatinaw claim, with which to pay your debts and passage to the Outside, will you promise to pay it back to me as soon as you are able?"

With flushed face Jim swung off the cot, rose to his feet and offered his hand to Murray.

"Mister! You can bet your last dollar on that!" he cried feelingly, and a little louder than the occasion warranted. "If I have to walk back overland to Alaska to do it, I'll surely pay you back that seven hundred and fifty beans and take that claim back off your hands just as soon as I can."

"All right, Jim. I'll trust you. I'll go out and borrow that sum and return just as soon as I can."

After Murray had taken his departure, Jim, who was too excited to sit down, started to tell the nurse and the other patients in the ward of the trade he was about to make.

"Seven hundred and fifty bucks!" he repeated, over and over. "Which is more by six hundred than I ever had in my hand before. For a loan on twenty acres of plain land, mind you! That guy is surely a prince."

IT seemed no time at all before Murray returned, this time accompanied by a notary public. The latter filled out a form bill of sale for No. 9, Chatinaw Creek, in favor of Murray Gaidon. This instrument—which might have been his death warrant in so far as he knew—Jim Beaver signed with a hand that trembled but with joy in his heart. And the probability is that had some one at that moment told him that he had given away two million dollars, he would have laughed heartily. Murray placed a sheaf of bills

in Beaver's hand. While he counted them, the nurse witnessed the paper.

"Be sure to take the first stage in the morning now, Jim," cautioned Murray. "No lying around town, wasting your passage money to the coast. And good luck!" were his parting words.

"Never you fear!" Jim threw after him. "And you'll get every cent of this money back some day. And thanks, mister!"

"I've seen the last of him," was Murray's next thought.

Jim hurried to the office of the matron and paid his bill. Then he called up an expressman. Fifteen minutes later, he left the express shed and purchased a ticket to Cordova at the office of the stage company. The expressman then drove him to a little cabin on the outskirts of the town. Jim kindled a fire in the stove and began to pack up his belongings.

About an hour later, Tom Mason dashed along First Avenue. By "Gee" and "Haw" he directed his lead dog to the barn behind the Pioneer Hotel, his stopping place when in town. After unhitching and unharnessing the dogs, he made his way to the kitchen of the hotel and bought a bucketful of scraps from the cook, with which he returned to the barn and fed the huskies.

At a fruit store shortly afterward, Tom purchased a big bag of oranges and apples. His next purchase was at a stationer's and consisted of half a dozen of the latest over-the-trail magazines. With a bundle under each arm, he took his way to the hospital and asked for Jim Beaver. The attendant informed him that Jim had left the institution two hours before and that he couldn't say where the young man had gone. Tom left the fruit and reading matter and returned to town.

THERE he started to make the round of the hotels and public places, to see what friends of his might be in the city. In The Gold Bottle, he discovered two old men named Shasta Wheeler and "Deafy" Jones. They were seated forlornly on a bench against the wall, watching without much interest a game of pool. At sight

of them, a grin broke over Tom's face. Then he surveyed the old-timers critically. Their clothing, he noted, was patched and wholly inadequate for the severity of the weather. They were gaunt, hungry looking. The smile disappeared from his face.

"Poor devils!" he muttered.

In the past, and in camps many hundreds of miles apart, Tom had on more than one occasion helped these two sour doughs through a hard winter by grubstaking them to prospect for him. The business slant to his generosity had always fooled the old fellows completely.

He strolled in their direction and came to a pause in front of them.

"It's Tom Mason!" yelled Shasta Wheeler excitedly, coincident with which words he dug his elbow into the ribs of his companion. "It's Tom!" he shouted in Deafy Jones' ear, and at the top of his voice. "Don't you see him! Or have you gone blind—you old bean eater!"

Deafy was on his feet before Shasta had finished speaking and had assumed a threatening attitude.

"You dig me in the ribs again," he shouted, "and I'll pull out your whiskers and shove them down your black throat! The gall of you! Of course I see Tom—saw 'im afore you did! How air you, Tom?" he inquired, holding out his hand.

Tom shook it heartily, laughing meanwhile.

After shaking an angry fist at the back of his partner's head and mouthing some unintelligible words, Shasta came forward and wrung the hand Tom held out to him.

"And where have you two warriors been since I last saw you?" inquired Tom. "Ruby, wasn't it, that time?"

Shasta unceremoniously shoved Deafy to one side. "It was," he answered, "and with the grubstake you gave us down thar, Tom, we struck it rich. But, as usual, Deafy spoiled it——"

"You're a thundering liar!" cried Deafy, who had read his partner's lips. "We had to quit, Tom, because we couldn't eat grass or gravel. That was a year ago last fall. But after we'd abandoned the proposition, a couple of Swedes went out thar and,

after drivin' our tunnel into the bench three feet farther, ran into some pretty good pay——"

"And didn't I want to drift in three feet farther!" screamed Shasta. "Don't you remember me sayin': 'Deafy, let's go in three feet farther and we'll strike it sure!'"

"Not afore we abandoned the ground, you didn't!" returned Deafy indignantly. "Though I've hearn you say a million times since then that the next tunnel you drove you'd go in three feet farther—whatever that may mean."

Shasta chewed his beard in his wrath. He spoke at Deafy, so that the latter could not mistake his words.

"To-morrow, I'm gonna lick the stuffin' outa you!" he howled.

"Why don't you do it now?" sneered Deafy.

"Because here I couldn't do all I want to do to you—not half! The men wouldn't let me. I know," he went on fiercely, "that I should 'ave killed you about a hundred years ago, but beware! 'Tain't never too late to do a good turn! To-morrow, I manhandles you proper. I reveals to you in broad daylight more stars than you ever saw——"

Deafy tapped Shasta on the chest with a bony finger.

"If you had three mouths and started them all yappin' at one time, we'd have tropical weather along the Tanana within twenty-four hours—and she's forty below zero at this minute! You make me tired! You come pesticatin' around me to-morrow and I'll make dog meat outa you!"

Tom, who had been hugely enjoying the quarrel, interfered at this point to inquire if they had anything to eat in their cabin, adding that he was as hungry as a wolf.

A frightened look momentarily leaped into the faces of the old men. Tom intercepted the glance they hastily exchanged, a glance that said as plain as words could, "Now, ain't that hell?"

Shasta rose to the occasion—indeed, went somewhat beyond it, as was his custom. "Piles of grub!" he assured Tom

with a roll of his eyes. "Grub to burn—which mostly Deafy does——"

"That's a black lie!" Deafy cried angrily, "and well you know it. You make another break like that and there's gonna be a funeral in Fairbanks at which you'll be the only one that gets a ride." He turned to Tom. "We ain't got much," he told him, "but, by the Lord Harry, you're welcome to a share of what we do have. I wish it was more. Come along."

CHAPTER III.

OUT TO RAISE THE WIND.

ON the way to the shack on the flat back of the city, Tom gathered that the two old men had mushed every foot of the trail from Rampart, during the coldest spell of the winter, and that they had arrived in Fairbanks just three days before.

At the cabin, Shasta lighted a candle about three inches long. Deafy then shoved some wood into an old rusty Yukon stove. Tom threw a hasty glance about the cabin, but saw no food.

"Our grub pile," began Shasta cheerfully, "could be a lot bigger, Tom, but she's choice, choice! A fry and a boil we have every day. The fry is kinda low just now and the boil ain't as big as 'twas nuther; but they's plenty more where they came from, Tom, plenty, my boy!"

Tom, who could hardly keep from laughing outright, reckoned that there probably was. It had always been thus with the two old-timers since first he came to know them, away north in the Kobuk country years before. They were too old to do a hard day's work on a claim, in consequence of which their lives for some years past had been anything but the sort to be envied. Even so, often they had missed a meal rather than let their wants be known.

Deafy was placing a covered pot and a frying pan on top of the stove when, out of the corner of his eye, Tom caught Shasta making frantic signals to his partner. Deafy stepped over to the bare packing-case cupboard and, in a loud whisper, asked him what he wanted.

Shasta dug him in the ribs with his elbow. "We'll have a fry and boil both to-night, Deafy," he said in a voice meant to be a whisper, but which could have been heard over on the water front, "and to hell with to-morrow! Tom's broke, I reckon. To-night I'm goin' out to rob a cache or hold somebody up. He's always been a friend to us and he ain't gonna go hungry if I can help it."

Deafy looked worried. "Can't you make out for to-night? Somebody might give us a job to-morrow. You can't never tell——"

"You're whistlin', I can tell!" snorted Shasta. "They ain't nothin' won't turn up to-morrow, nor the next day nor no time. I mean to do something desperate to-night!"

Deafy returned to the stove. Shasta up-ended a flour bag and poured its contents into a sour-dough can. To this, he added a little salt and some water, then started to stir the whole with a spoon. Coincident with this, he tapped the floor with an old moccasined foot and made whirring noises with his lips in imitation of a band on the march playing "Dixie." Tom, behind an old newspaper, almost fell off his stool with laughter.

By and by Deafy dished up three plates of beans—which represented the boil—and beside each plate Shasta placed a flapjack—which was the fry.

"Dig right in, Tom," Shasta requested, and set the example by dropping onto a stool and shoving a spoonful of beans into his mouth, with an exhibition of relish he could scarcely have felt.

"Just a fry and a boil, Tom," he got out between spoonfuls, "but plenty in winter when you ain't doin' much. Them's 'Dixie' flapjacks. Best on earth they are, Tom, for I've tried mixin' 'em to every tune I ever heard. Tried to mix 'em once to the tune of 'My Country 'Tis of Thee,' and made an awful mess of 'em. Lumpy, they was."

Tom rocked on his stool. Shasta attacked the evil of overeating.

"On four or five quarts of oats," he enlarged, "a horse can haul a load of two

or three tons for four or five hours. Any day in the week, I can mush twenty miles on a plate of beans. I've got to be mighty careful about my eatin', I'll tell you, Tom. So's Deafy. If we was to eat a coupla eggs apiece, even the yearlin's we get in this country, or mebber a beefsteak, we'd jes' natchurally blow up from the superfluous steam they'd generate.

"Why, Tom," he went on, "when I used to eat three squares a day and was workin' hard at the same time, I never could keep a point on a pick five minutes. Fact! I worked so fast the points got red-hot, then curved like the hooks you see in a meat market. The point I'm tryin' to make, Tom, is that most people eat too much."

As he finished speaking, Shasta deftly tossed the last bean into his mouth and, judging from the hungry look in his eyes, Tom reckoned the old man was wishing it had been triplets. Tom wanted to laugh and he didn't want to laugh. At this juncture, the candle burned out.

"Now ain't that too bad!" exclaimed Shasta. "And I clean forgot to bring any home with me. But I like darkness, Tom, I like it fine. Did you ever notice how much better you can think when it's dark? you betcha! Why, if it wa'n't for the darkness, Tom, in a matter o' a coupla years the inhabitants o' this yere bargain-sale world would be strugglin' along without chickens and eggs. Fact, Tom!"

"'Black Jim'—which he wa'n't black a-tall—brung a dozen hens and a rooster into Dawson one spring," he continued. "'Bout the third week o' May, when the sun begins to hang around the sky day and night, that thar rooster began to wonder what the hell kind of a joke 'Old Sol' was playin' on him, for already he was beginnin' to get hoarse from crowin'."

"Well, sir, from then on till the middle of June, that rooster put in a terrible time. Crowed day and night, he did; crowed when he was rockin' on his roost for want of sleep. If he went to pick up a grain of corn, he cock-a-doodle-dooed hoarsely instead and on the night of the twenty-fust of June, he crowed his blasted head off altogether. Think, Tom, what an egg-

less world would be! Just think o' ham stalkin' to eternity without its old side-kicker? Darkness is great stuff, I tell you."

After Tom had finished his laugh, he suggested a walk to town. "I want to hunt around for a boy named Jim Beaver, who was discharged from the hospital this afternoon."

Shasta's eyes were wide. For a moment he seemed unable to speak. "Jim Beaver!" he muttered in a thick whisper. "Surely it kain't be my grandson from Furnace, Nevada! Twice he wrote and told me he wanted to come to Alaska. I wonder, now—— Strike a match, Tom."

TOM did that. From the bosom of his buckskin shirt, Shasta produced a worn pocketbook and extracted therefrom a few snapshots. One of these he selected and tremblingly held toward the light.

"Does—does the Jim Beaver you mean look anything like the lad there?" he asked.

Tom struck another match and scanned the picture, which he saw was one of a young man and woman strangely alike.

"That's him," he said. "The girl his sister?"

"Yeah," returned Shasta carelessly. "And the little skeezicks is in this country and me broke and in rags!" he wailed.

"You should worry, Shasta," said Tom. "Young Jim is the owner of a claim on Chatinaw Creek, the latest and best strike made in the country."

This piece of information, instead of allaying Shasta's worry, actually increased it a thousandfold.

"All the more reason why he shouldn't find me broke," he mumbled. "And me writin' out and tellin' him I was wuth about a million—the damn old liar that I am!"

For reasons of his own, Tom did not wish to tell the old men at this time that he, too, was interested in the new payer.

"Your grandson got his feet badly frozen on the stampede," Tom further enlightened Shasta. "But he's all right now. Let's go out and hunt him up."

One after another, during the next hour or two, they made inquiry at every hotel and rooming house in the city, but without success. And because he was a chechahco and not known to any great extent in the community, no one was able to furnish any information about him.

"Well, he can't run away," observed Tom at length, "for his feet can't yet be in condition to carry him very far. We'll find him to-morrow and he'll know about his good fortune soon enough. In the meantime, come on in here with me."

Tom led the way into a big clothing store. Shasta and Deafy followed gingerly, the face of each a hoary mark of interrogation. From the back of the store rushed a short plump man, whose face suggested a fat extra dividend.

"Hello, Dom!" was his greeting. "What for you I do?"

Tom placed a hand on Barney Goldstein's shoulder and invited him to a short walk.

"Do you see those two men standing just within the door, Barney?" he asked at length.

Barney looked. "Two scarecrows I see, Dom."

"There's men under the rags, Barney, and I want you to outfit them completely with the best winter togs in your place."

Barney placed one hand on the counter for support, slapped the other to his forehead, and the smile became a four-hundred-per-cent stock dividend. What a lovely place the world was!

"Everything, Dom?" he breathed in ecstasy.

"From moccasins to fur caps."

A great glory filled the countenance of Barney. Here was an order already to warm a man's heart. Nor was it the first sale of a Monday morning yet, either, so there would be no need to clip the price to put it through. On the sheep-lined coats alone——

"Jump to it, Barney!"

Barney sawed his dream short and went to work with a will.

An hour later, clad in their new warm clothing, Tom preceded the old pals into

The Northern Café. When pulling out his chair preparatory to eating himself, he took casual notice of the four men seated at the table beyond. The two seated facing him were Murray Gaidon, wearing a new white starched collar and a new dark-crimson tie, and the manager of a local bank. With the bank manager, Tom exchanged nods, but when he turned his gaze on his late partner, some object immediately behind Tom seemed to arrest Murray's attention.

TOM flushed. Charley Bruce turned and hailed him cordially and the fourth man, who was manager of the trading company Charley represented, gave him a friendly nod.

Tom seated himself and ordered for his guests the best that was on the menu. He still had Shasta and Deafy guessing, not yet having told them of his recent good luck.

Throughout the meal, Shasta was strangely silent and preoccupied. He had never yet laid eyes on his grandson, and the thought of being discovered broke and practically a down-and-outer was gall and wormwood to him. For the first few years after coming to the country, he had now and again sent a substantial present to his grandchildren; but the trouble was that in his letters to them he had always hinted that he was fairly well fixed. With a thousand dollars, Shasta could feel more set up than many another man on a million.

"If only I could borrow a couple of hundred!" he muttered between bites of fried chicken. Yet his mind recoiled from the idea. A lender he had always been when he had the wherewithal to lend, but never had he been a borrower.

"I've got to rustle up enough somewhere to make a showin'," his mind raced on. "The little skeezicks! Seems but yesterday that Ann was married and now she's the mother of a man that comes to Alaska and strikes it rich fust crack outa the box! Takes after his grandpaw, he does! Me, I'll run the claim for him—no, Tom'll best do that. But right now, before I

meet 'im, I've got to make a raise, that's all. And I can't borrow it from Tom, nuther. I wonder——"

Shasta had nothing to say regarding the evil of overeating. He disposed of everything the waiter placed in front of him, with the exception of the ice cream, which he reckoned Tom had ordered by way of a joke.

"You can't tell me," he declared, "that folks in their right senses eat ice cream at forty below zero. 'Tain't natural!"

Whereupon he lifted the finger bowl and noisily quaffed its contents.

After another turn about town, Tom invited the sour doughs to a picture show. Deafy daringly followed their host inside, but at the last moment Shasta turned on his heel and hurried out to the street.

Ten minutes later, he entered the shack and took from the cupboard a large, ancient and empty revolver and shoved it up the sleeve of his new sheep-lined coat. Trembling and white, he was.

"I'm gonna r-raise the wind," he stuttered, "if I've got to hold up somebody! The little skeezicks ain't gonna find his grandpaw a dead one!"

With which words, and trembling more than ever, he crept out into the night.

Before parting with Deafy that night, Tom slipped him a twenty-dollar gold piece.

"To get a few frys and boils with," he told him.

Deafy glanced at the coin, then at his new clothes.

"Tom, can't you put an old man to work?" he asked.

"You'll get all the work you want pretty soon," Tom answered. "Work for the rest of your life."

Deafy choked up. He tried, but couldn't speak, turned on his heel and hurried away.

CHAPTER IV.

A THREAT.

AFTER ordering his breakfast about eight o'clock on the following morning, Tom opened out *The Tanana Miner* and glanced at the headlines. Across the

top of the page in letters two inches high was the following announcement:

Murray Gaindon Makes Rich Strike on Chatinaw. Charley Bruce Considers it Richest Find Made in Fourth Division.

Tom smiled indulgently. "Well," he laughed, "Murray is welcome to all the glory he can get out of it!"

He began to read the story and presently followed into the second page. It was "Murray Gaindon" from beginning to end. Tom's name was not even mentioned, though the word "partner," in the sense of a hired man, cropped up now and again.

"A blown-in-the-glass snob," was Tom's quiet comment. "When dependent on me, he acted fairly decent. Now he's letting his money make a fool of him. It's all right with me."

The caption "The Mining Exchange" at the head of a column arrested his attention. A name immediately beneath caused him to start. This is the item he saw:

James Beaver, to Murray Gaindon, No. 9 Chatinaw Creek. Consideration \$1.

Tom's face turned a brick red and his eyes glinted like chips of blue ice. Murray did not possess money enough, Tom well knew, to pay a fair price for a hundred square feet of No. 9. Tom realized what had taken place just as well as if he had been present when the exchange was made. He folded up the paper, shoved it into his pocket and turned his attention to his breakfast.

Tom Mason was one of those men blessed with a deliberate disposition. He was never hurried or flustered, but, to Murray Gaindon, he had always appeared slow. The opposite was the truth. His mind worked with so little friction that its machinery was never heard. He was a man who seldom had to do a thing twice over, which predicates the fact that he possessed the ability of seeing several moves ahead of the matter momentarily in hand. Wiser men than Murray Gaindon have been deceived by the type of

man after which Tom Mason was fashioned.

The foregoing notwithstanding, on his way from The Log Cabin Restaurant to the Arctic Hotel, even a superficial observer would have concluded that Tom had a particular goal in view.

As he stepped into the hotel office, Murray, fully dressed in townsfolk clothes, emerged from the dining room. Catching sight of Tom, Murray raised his eyebrows infinitesimally, then frowned heavily. Tom stepped up to him, pulled the newspaper from his pocket and placed a finger on the item at the head of "The Mining Exchange" column.

"Would you mind telling me what you paid Jim Beaver for his claim?" he asked without hesitation.

"I shall certainly do nothing of the kind!" returned Murray haughtily.

"Did you tell him that you had struck it rich on Chatinaw?"

MURRAY flushed at the slam. "Do you think I'm a fool?" he sneered.

Tom measured his late partner contemptuously.

"If you were just that, I'd pity you," he observed coldly. "The law may uphold you in the possession of Jim Beaver's claim, but you stole it just the same—robbed a mere kid. And you can take this from me—me, who picked you up three parts dead on the Kluwani Trail and put you on your feet again!—if there's a way to reach you and make you return that ground to the boy who risked his life to stake it, I'll find it!"

Murray paled and essayed a laugh.

"I am requesting you to mind your own business, sir!" he at length managed to say. "You are meddlesome!"

Tom tapped him on the chest with a heavy forefinger.

"You'll think I am," he said quietly, "before I'm through with you."

Then he turned on his heel and left the hotel.

Ten minutes later, Tom was seated in the office of Charley Bruce. Charley, whose business it was to know many

things, had seen the newspaper report of the sale of No. 9 Chatinaw.

"I just want to advise you, Charley," Tom told him, "not to accept a mortgage from Gairdon on Jim Beaver's claim, because it's sure to be in litigation. "I haven't been able to find the boy yet, to get the particulars, but when I do, I mean to get him his ground back—somehow."

Charley chewed his cigar for a moment in silence.

"Tom, I'd like to see into the back of the head of a man who pulls a stunt like that," he at length observed. "Certainly such a one doesn't see straight. He'll get the gold out of that claim, Tom, but that will be all. Every man on Chatinaw—in the district—will be down on him. In mining circles, his name will become a byword. He'll get the gold, because I'm certain it will be impossible to make him disgorge. I had him marked up as a queer fish, but I never dreamed for a moment that he was crooked. I wish you every success, Tom, and if there's anything I can do to help the boy, why just let me know."

Once more Tom started to make the round of hotels and rooming houses, but, in so far as he could discover, Jim Beaver had disappeared from the face of the earth. Nor did those from whom he made inquiry regarding Jim Beaver betray other than a mildly polite interest in that young man's whereabouts.

The strike on Chatinaw was the one topic of conversation wherever Tom went and on every hand were signs of preparation for the second and larger stampede to the creek. In front of all the big trading posts were waiting lines of dog teams and single horses attached to long, double-ender sleds—which could follow wherever a horse could go—the owners of which were inside, competing with each other for outfits of supplies. Men and women in hooded parkas and knee-high moccasins rushed hither and yon with the unconcern of the old-timer regarding the forty-below-zero weather.

Already agents of these large concerns, traveling light, were on their way to the

new diggings. These would determine the location of Chatinaw "City," stake a plot of ground and get foundation logs in place as soon as possible. The smaller business enterprises would in time range themselves on either side and opposite these, whereupon the city would become a going concern.

A deputy marshal was already on his way to the scene of the strike. Scouts for road-house sites were also burning up the trail, each with a Federal license in his pocket—the name Volstead was still an obscure one—and a ten-gallon keg of hooch, some grub, an ax, auger and a tent on his sled. Partners or other interested parties would later follow with supplies. The location was the thing.

"Murray certainly started something when he made that strike on Chatinaw," remarked Tom facetiously.

Tom hunted all forenoon, then concluded that Jim must be holing up in a cabin. He returned to the Pioneer Hotel and wrote Jim a letter. In this, Tom gave as his reason for writing his desire to help him get his claim back. Tom also mentioned that Jim's grandfather was in town and told where he could be found. He concluded by requesting Jim to call upon him at the Pioneer. Tom then set out for the post office.

At the door of the post office, a huge placard caught his attention and he read this announcement:

NOTICE!

A stage of the Cannon Ball Express will leave for Chatinaw Creek at seven o'clock to-morrow morning. Letters, one dollar each. Express matter and passengers, a dollar a pound. All aboard for the new diggings!

"Hotcake Jimmy," Prop.

P. S.—Passengers bring their own blankets and grub.

"Yep," said Tom, "Chatinaw is on the map and a year ago it was known only to the moose and caribou." He laughed. "And Hotcake Jimmy's passengers will have to hoof it two thirds of the way."

He posted his letter, then took his way to Shasta and Deafy's cabin. When still

fifty feet from the shack he heard a howl.

"Take the huntin' knife, or the ax, why don't you?" Shasta screamed. Another agonizing howl followed.

Tom hurried forward and entered the cabin on the run. What he saw made him throw back his head and laugh. Seated on a stool was Shasta with one part of his whiskers gone and the remainder of his face covered with lather. Tiny streams of crimson ran down his face. Unconcerned, Deafy stropped a razor.

"Have you found him?" were Shasta's first words.

Tom shook his head. "I hate to be a bearer of evil tidings," he replied, "but the fact is that Jim has gone and sold his claim to the man who was my partner until a week ago. The deal smells crooked to me, for I'm certain Jim didn't know the value of his property at the time he sold it. I've hunted for him all morning, too, but he seems to have cut his suspenders and gone straight up."

SHASTA was speechless for a moment. "The Wheeler luck has landed on him, that's what!" he presently exclaimed. "It has reached him through me. I'm a crazy old fool, that's what I am! Know what I did last night, Tom?" he asked in a quaking voice. "I—I went out and held up a man and took two hundred and fifty dollars from him."

"You—what!" gasped Tom.

"I—I wanted to make a kind of a showin' before him, you see, Tom," Shasta cried miserably. "Now I'm wishin' I hadn't done it. But I did want to have a roll that I could casually pull outa my pocket when I asked him to have a drink with his grandpaw."

"Well, of all the crazy stunts!" gasped Tom. "Do you know who your victim was, or where he lives?"

"I know where he lives!" cried Shasta eagerly. "I followed him to find that out, though he didn't know it."

Tom pointed a finger at him. "To-night you'll take that money back!" he said sternly. "I'll tag along to see that the

man doesn't kill you. Have you spent any of it?"

"Not a cent, Tom; not a cent! I got so scared I was afraid to leave the cabin. Then I thought if I shaved off my whiskers——" He felt the shaven part of his face tenderly. "Gosh, Tom, it's been awful! Deafy started the job at eight o'clock this morning and this is as far as he's got. It surely is one just punishment. I'll take the money back, Tom. I'll go give myself up if you say so."

"I guess from the looks of things you'll have suffered enough by the time Deafy gets through with you. And when you need money, ask me for it. You'll be goin' out to Chatinaw with me in a few days and anything you borrow I'll keep out of your wages."

Shasta sprang to his feet and slammed Deafy between the shoulders with his fist.

"Did you hear that, Deafy?" he shouted.

Deafy hadn't; but he did feel the blow and took after Shasta with the razor.

"Hold on, Deafy! Hold on!" howled Shasta. "We're goin' out to work for Tom this summer. To work!" he repeated, at the top of his voice.

Deafy heard the magic word and grinned. "Hell, I knew that long ago!" he cried scornfully. "Tom and me settled that last night. Now come on over here and sit down till I finish you off," he invited, waving the razor.

As Tom went out of the door, Shasta walked meekly back to the stool, his eye on the razor in Deafy's hand.

CHAPTER V.

BEHIND THE MASK.

FOR ten years before going to Alaska,

Murray Gairdon had occupied a position in the accountancy department of a large banking institution in an Eastern city. In the office, the belief obtained that, in the event of a vacancy taking place at the head of the department—a day feared by those concerned—he would be the man selected to fill it.

The vacancy did occur and a man with less experience, less years of service in

the institution, was promoted over Murray's head.

There had never been any fault to find with Murray's work. The obstacle to his promotion was his personality, which revealed itself chiefly in his woeful lack of tact in dealing with those over whom his position as second in command gave him some authority. He was despised by them, rather than hated. He was a man full of little meannesses, probably because no occasion had yet appeared on his horizon favorable to the development of a big one.

When the vacancy became known to his coworkers, fearing his appointment over them, they resigned as one. A mild investigation was instituted, with the result that another man was promoted. The man selected to head the department had everything that Murray had, plus tact, plus the ability to command respect.

Like a petted child, Murray thereupon resigned his position and betook himself and his savings account to Alaska, resolving henceforth to be his own master. But a change of environment alone never made a good man out of a bad one, a successful man out of a failure. The man himself must change, too, and this he can accomplish without going anywhere.

For a year before Tom Mason picked him up on the Kluwani Trail, Murray had drifted, a queer figure, from one camp to another along the Yukon, but had got nowhere. Shrewd to recognize a high-grade man, a man he felt certain was bound to make a strike some day, Murray made himself so agreeable to Tom, displayed such a sublime ignorance in the ordinary affairs of frontier life that, when he begged to be his partner, Tom hadn't the heart to refuse the request.

When the occasion arose, however, when Murray deemed a mask no longer necessary; when the opportunity presented itself by the help of which he could be mean in a big way, and still have his independence, he had consciously reacted without regard to consequences.

Murray Gairdson had always wanted to be rich with the stroke of a pen—which,

6A—POP.

of the many sorts of riches, is the poorest. He wanted to be elevated to a position financially strong enough to warrant his return to the East at no distant date and tell certain gentlemen connected with a large banking institution what a valuable executive they had lost, when they promoted a man over his head. He was as small as that.

Had he had any common sense, any gumption, he would never have voluntarily placed a period to his partnership with Tom Mason, for by such a connection he had everything to gain and nothing to lose. But the knowledge that he was a potentially rich man drove everything out of his head save his profound egotism.

According to his brand of philosophy, the mere possession of a large sum of money or its negotiable equivalent conferred on its possessor the privilege of adopting and putting into practice a code of ethics which dovetailed with his purely personal idiosyncrasies. A rich man, he had long ago concluded, had a right to be himself, and laws written or generally accepted be damned.

Like the majority of men of a purely despotic turn of mind, Murray Gairdson was inherently weak, even simple. When putting the deal through with Jim Beaver, it never for an instant crossed his mind that he had signed a partnership with trouble. He was a rich man by this time, consequently he had a right to act in any way he pleased.

That other men should look upon his conduct in that deal with downright disfavor never entered his head. It had been a brilliant stroke of business, a stroke that had increased his fortune by at least two million. His supreme confidence notwithstanding, the threat made by Tom Mason caused him some uneasiness, a condition of mind in no small measure due to the fact that he knew his former partner to be a man who accomplished more than he promised.

"I shall consult a lawyer about it," Murray decided, and presently set forth to attend a conference with "those hick men of affairs," the manager of the N. A. T.

& S. Co. and the manager of The Miners National Bank.

Long before Murray's arrival, Charley Bruce was in possession of all the facts relating to the transfer of Jim Beaver's claim. Charley had means of securing such information. Needless to say, he passed this on to his superior.

"Raw work," the superior commented. "Had he had a lick of sense, he'd have had that transfer made out in the name of a third party, unknown locally, then presented himself with a power of attorney as manager of the claim. Better to have got a lease from the boy. However, is his half of No. 12 of itself good enough for whatever he may happen to want by way of machinery and supplies?"

CHARLEY BRUCE rolled his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other.

"In the hands of almost anybody else," he made answer, "it would be good for half a million. With him, it's going to be nip and tuck because, as a business man, a dollar is a great mystery to him. I would suggest that he be given credit in cash, machinery and supplies to the amount of one hundred thousand dollars, in exchange for a mortgage of his half of No. 12 until July 15th. On the trail coming down, he told me he would be a quarter of a million to the good by that date, if we let him have the machinery and stuff. There's miners in the country—and he had one of them for a partner—who could do that and even better with the grade of pay he's got, but he isn't one of them. His one hope lies in hiring a good foreman, then leaving him alone."

At this juncture, Mort Scott, the bank manager, bustled into the office. The trio had talked for perhaps five minutes before Murray Gaindon stepped importantly into the room. It was his intention to handle these little men of affairs rather roughly. After a brisk "How do!" Charley Bruce picked up the telephone receiver and called up the company's attorney, whose office was in the building just across the street.

Murray removed his coat, hat and gloves.

"Gentlemen," he began, frowning heavily, "let me——"

"Sit down, Mr. Gaindon; sit down," coolly interrupted the store manager. "Do you think that ground of yours will average ten dollars to the square foot of bed rock?"

The question threw Murray into confusion. He groped for a chair and seated himself.

"Why—I—er, I believe I heard my—er—former partner say something to that effect."

Thus was the lead deftly lifted out of his hands.

"And you want to get some of the gold out of the ground as quickly as you can?" inquired Mort Scott.

"Yes."

The attorney breezed into the room and deposited a brief case on the table. As quietly as if he were forecasting the state of the weather a year hence, the store manager stated the terms to Murray on which he would receive machinery and supplies and the cash with which to take care of his freighting costs and pay roll.

MURRAY squirmed, then protested mildly at being called upon to hypothecate his claim.

"Are the banking establishments in the East in the habit of making unprotected loans of this size?" Mort Scott inquired.

"They do, to men and firms of character——"

"And what happens when the owner of the character dies suddenly, or the firm gets into difficulties?"

Murray didn't know what they did. He saw the force of their argument and, without further parley, signified his willingness to give them a joint mortgage on his property. As the papers were all ready for the signatures, the conference broke up a few minutes later. Presently Murray found himself in tow of Charley Bruce.

"Come on over to the boiler warehouse," Bruce was saying. "I've got a couple of sixty-horse-power return tubu-

lars there that are just what you need. Each will supply steam to a hundred thawing points and still leave you plenty for your hoist and pump."

Murray was neither familiar with mining machinery nor values. He had seen machinery work, no more. Charley Bruce sold him three complete outfits, two of which were destined for the claim staked by Jim Beaver. Then Murray mentioned supplies. How much of this and that article of diet would, say, two hundred men consume in seven months? Charley Bruce rattled off estimates in tons and, at the same time, wrote down each separate item in his order book.

"And I'll tell you what to do first thing, Mr. Gaindon," he advised. "Get a good foreman and put him in charge of your entire operations and let him hire his own men——"

"I prefer to manage my own affairs," cut in Murray.

"All right! I'm just trying to help you. You can take or leave my advice. Another thing: When you arrive back on the creek, hire a couple of hunters to supply you with fresh moose meat. Men can't work the way yours will have to on canned and salt stuff. Give 'em good grub, plenty of it and a comfortable place to sleep and you'll attract so many workers that you'll be able to pick and choose. Too, you'd better call in at the land office before you leave town and make arrangements for the preëmption of wood lots for fuel, so that you can put choppers to work as soon as you get there. You'll need several hundred cords of wood. Have you talked with any freighting concerns yet?"

Murray admitted that he hadn't.

"Then you want to attend to that right away. In a very few days, teams and tractors are going to be at a premium. And if there's anything else I can do for you, let me know."

"This is business with a vengeance," Murray told himself on his way around to Fifth Avenue, where the freighting, packing and staging concerns were located. "Tom Mason was right," he grudgingly admitted. "Two hours ago a pop-corn

vender could have given me cards and spades in business." And although he did not admit it to himself, the pop-corn vender could still have bought and sold him at a profit on one corner.

He presently discovered that all the freighters were very much alive to the situation. The lowest offer he secured was one of seventy-five cents per pound and to this was added the provision that he provide a crew of swamper to clear a trail for the big teams and tractors where the way led through timber. These, with a cook and tent outfit, it was explained to him, could go out in charge of the firm's trail scout.

Murray signed a contract on these conditions. After placing a sum of money to the credit of the firm at his bank, same to be drawn upon as the work went forward—Mort Scott attended to this part of it for Murray—utterly fagged out he returned to his hotel.

After lunch, he changed his mind about employing a foreman and went out and hired one at an employment agency and gave him instructions to get a crew together and report that night to him at the Arctic Hotel. Then Murray went to consult a lawyer.

CHAPTER VI.

TALKING IN MILLIONS.

THOUGH Attorney Ossian Hay was a flyweight physically, he was a giant forensically. He was a spitfire, a terrier, a blackmailer and thief who, for years in the community, by sharp practice in and out and about the skirts of the law had lived like a prince. The peculiar thing about him was that he could have lived like a king had he been on the square.

Time and again he had become entangled in the net of the law himself and as many times had demonstrated that its mesh was too large for him. Even while taking no pains to conceal their antipathy, his brother practitioners of the noble profession in the city, who, as a class, ranked high, were just the least bit afraid of him as well. He was infamously known in the district as "The Wasp."

This little striped buzzer was the brains of a small ring of grafters whose specialty was the ferreting out of illegalities and irregularities of commission and omission in respect to the staking and holding of claims which had turned out rich. And even if nothing illegal or incriminating were discovered in a particular instance, the mere knowledge that The Wasp had alighted on his neck, so to speak, the hint that an injunction was about to be applied for on one trumped-up charge or another had not infrequently brought a victim to terms in dollars and cents. For the law is the miner's bogy. He fears it as a child is afraid of the mention of a mythical monster employed with the express purpose of frightening him.

Not knowing one lawyer from another in the city, Murray—like many another man in those happy wet days—had consulted the bartender in the Arctic Hotel on this important matter, after ordering his prelunch cocktail. It so happened that, aside from hiving in the arctic, The Wasp had tolerated, even invited, a degree of familiarity from this particular mixologist. So the bartender recommended Attorney Hay, for even the devil can scare up character witnesses.

"The smartest lawyer in Alaska!"

Murray was obliged to wait some time in the lawyer's outer office before he was given the opportunity for a consultation. Patience not being one of his virtues, Murray was scarcely in the mood to impress one in his favor when in the course of time he was shown into the attorney's private office.

Even then, it was just like Murray to conclude that the boyishly dressed little person, with his feet on the desk and who took no more notice of Murray than if he had been a creation of wood, was just another office assistant of some sort. He called up a black look to his face.

"Boy," he ordered, "show me in to Mr. Hay. Tell him Mr. Murray Gaidon wishes to consult him and that he's in a hurry."

Then he turned his back upon the other and stepped up to the window.

The Wasp grew red, then white. His small black eyes blazed like live cinders in a gale of wind. He made no move. Had Murray studied the personality of the little attorney with the express purpose of discovering his most vulnerable point, he could not have improved upon the success his first words established.

His physical diminutiveness was the bogy of Ossian Hay's life; the shadow that ever lay across the threshold of his sensorium. Call him a thief and he would hand you a smile through his glasses, a shyster and he would laugh in your face. But call him a little crook—or, as Murray had done, treat him like a boy—and a wave of rage swept over him whose intensity temporarily induced nauseous impotence.

Murray turned. "Haven't you gone yet?" he inquired in an irritable tone.

The Wasp took hold of himself.

"Sit down," he commanded in a deep compelling voice that revealed just a hint of a tremor.

Murray's face was a blank. "Are you Mr. Hay?" he asked in a surprised tone. This of itself sufficient to make The Wasp his enemy for life.

THE attorney nodded carelessly and reached for a cigarette case that lay on his desk. "I'm listening," he said, then lighted a smoke.

Murray removed his hat and sat down.

"I'm Murray Gaidon," he began, "the discoverer of Chatinaw Creek——"

"Didn't Tom Mason have something in that?" the attorney cut in.

Murray waved that aside and went on to relate how he came into possession of No. 9 Chatinaw, and concluded with Tom Mason's intimation that it was his intention to try and get it away from him.

"A nice little steal," breathed The Wasp.

"Sir!"

"What I said. How much do you reckon No. 9 to be worth?"

"Two or three million," Murray admitted.

"You certainly will need the services of a lawyer!"

"By acquiring the claim in the manner I have told you," Murray broke in, "can my ownership of the property be contested in the courts with any chance of success? That is what I wish to know."

The Wasp could truthfully have replied that the claim was his client's for all time—unless, of course, Murray had overlooked some little legal quirk in the transaction that seemed to him not worth reporting, but which, nevertheless, might constitute a hinge on which to hang a case. But his client had insulted him and his client would have to pay for his lack of judgment of human nature.

"Yes, several things could happen to that claim," the lawyer answered. "For instance, it could be jumped and held by enemies of yours; then it would be up to you to appeal to the courts to get them off. Can you imagine yourself standing up in court before a jury of miners and telling them how No. 9 came into your possession? Do you know what their verdict would be? Are claims worth two or three million dollars bought for seven hundred and fifty?"

This line of reasoning was beside the point altogether, but it successfully served The Wasp's purpose. Murray paled and fidgeted in his chair.

"How old was this boy you robbed?"

"Twenty or twenty-one, I should think," Murray replied in a faint voice.

"There you are again! If he is over eighteen, he is old enough to stake a claim, but if under twenty-one, his right to dispose of it could be contested by a guardian."

Murray recalled Tom Mason's observation about Jim Beaver's grandfather. He pictured to himself a wild old man, chasing him with a gun. His inherent tenacity came to his rescue, however. He would not give up those millions! He was going to take these back East and deposit them in a certain bank for a few days—then check them out. He would show them what sort of a man Murray Gairdon was! This thought nerved him.

"Listen!" he snapped. "I mean to hold on to that claim if I have to fight my way

through every court in the country to hold it!"

"There's but one way in which you can hold that claim and benefit from it, Mr. Gairdon," said The Wasp with just a trace of deference in his voice.

"Yes?"

"Give me a bill of sale for it. In return, I'll give you my power of attorney as manager of it. When the knowledge leaks out that the claim is mine, prospective contestants will think twice before instituting suit for its possession. Furthermore, the odium attached to the original transfer will be passed along to me. Which I guess I can stand."

"Fine!" Murray breathed. Ossian Hay was certainly a great lawyer. The color returned to his face. He eyed The Wasp with respect.

The attorney rang for his stenographer. The bill of sale and power-of-attorney blanks were filled in, signed, witnessed and delivered.

"You can now quit worrying about No. 9 Chatinaw," the lawyer assured him.

Murray departed happily.

The Wasp turned to his clerk. "Go round to the office of the recorder, Sam, and place that bill of sale and power of attorney on record."

The clerk picked up the papers and departed.

The Wasp smiled, seated himself in his chair, placed his feet on his desk and lighted a cigarette.

"Now, let's see!" he mused.

Fifteen minutes later, he shot into the bar of The Gold Bottle and ordered champagne for everybody in the house.

"He's off again," observed one bartender to the other, as he turned to reach for the bottled wit. "They'll be a hot time in the old town to-night!"

CHAPTER VII.

READY FOR A SHOCK.

APPARENTLY Jim Beaver had dropped completely out of sight. So thought Tom Mason about supper time, when he returned to his hotel with the

hope that the letter he had posted in the morning had borne fruit and been disappointed. Tom flung himself into a chair and abstractedly picked up the morning paper that lay on the desk in front of him and let his gaze wander over its pages.

Suddenly his eye was arrested by the name "James Beaver." It was in the list of passengers on the outgoing stage that had left on its long journey to the coast that morning. Tom slumped down in his chair.

"That ends the matter right now," he remarked bitterly. "I guess I might just as well get ready and start back for Chatinaw with Shasta, Deafy and another couple of men. It's too damn bad."

After supper, he went around to the cabin of his old friends. The face of Shasta, he noticed, was all crisscrossed like a skirt steak ready for frying. Too, the old man was dejected, nervous and worried looking.

"This has been the longest day, Tom, I ever put in in my life," he complained. "And it ain't alone bekus Deafy tried to skin me alive, nuther. It's been like the last day. Gosh, how I pity a thief if'n he feels as bad as I do after committin' a crime! Let's go round and give that man back his money. And if he decides to have me thrown into jail for forty years, nary a yelp will I let outa me."

"I'll square the matter for you in some way," Tom promised him. "And now prepare yourself for a shock: Young Jim left for the coast on this morning's stage."

"I just knew something like that would happen!" Shasta whimpered. "It's all my fault! He came under the evil influence of my hoodoo."

"Never mind," Tom tried to console him. "You and Deafy will have a home for the rest of your lives out on Chatinaw. Fries and boils, three times a day."

Shasta perked up. "Chatinaw will be a little bit o' heaven," he declared feelingly. "Well, let's go round and return this money. It's burning me up."

About twenty minutes later, Shasta came to a pause and tremblingly placed a roll of bills in Tom's hands and, pointing out

a dark rectangle in the center of which a candle burned behind a small window, quavered:

"That's it. You go in and fix it up with him and me'n Deafy'll follow in a little while."

Tom presently knocked at the cabin door with his gauntleted hand.

"Come in," a voice inside invited him.

Tom lifted the latch, entered and closed the door behind him. In the next moment he was shaking Jim Beaver by the hand as if he would never let go.

"Why, not an hour ago," Tom cried, "I read in the paper that you were on your way Outside!"

"I should 'ave been, mister," replied Jim. "I bought me a ticket to go, but when goin' over town last to get me some medicine I thought I might need on the way, a guy stuck me up and took my roll away from me. I've still got the ticket to Cordova, but there was no use hittin' the trail without money to pay my road-house expenses, or pay my ship passage from Cordova to Seattle."

"So," he went on, "I just decided to stick around until my feet got thoroughly well again, then go out and hunt me up a job of some sort. I was scairt to leave the shack, case I'd see the man who loaned me some money on my claim on Chatinaw to go Outside on, for I had promised him I would sure go."

"Loaned you some money!" exclaimed Tom excitedly.

"Yeah, so's I could pay my hospital bill and go Outside and settle up mother's estate, then come back with my sister——"

Tom actually shook him by the shoulder. "Have you any witnesses to prove that the money Murray Gaindon gave you for your claim was only a loan?" he asked.

"Why, yes, I guess so," Jim wonderingly replied. "I signed the paper right in the ward. The nurse and four or five patients over there know that the money was only a loan which I promised to pay back. I didn't sell my claim. 'Twant wuth nothin', he told me. Why, mister?"

"Because, my boy, the richest strike made in twenty years in this division has

just been made on Chatinaw. And Gaindon knew that, when he got you to sign a bill of sale in the belief that it was only a promissory note. But if you've got witnesses like you say, we can get your claim back for you."

Tom felt the roll of bills in his parka pocket. He thought hard for a moment, then presently placed it in Jim's hand.

"There's the money the holdup man relieved you of," Tom added. "He got cold feet and asked me to return it to you." He looked at the pole roof for a moment. "By the way, Jim, haven't you a grandfather named Shasta Wheeler?"

Jim was on his feet in a moment. "I surely have, mister!"

"Just a minute. He came along with me, but, being sort of shy, didn't like to come in."

Tom stepped to the door and called to Shasta. The old man presently entered like a whipped cur—indeed, Deafy had to shove him over the threshold in order to get in himself and close the door.

Tom placed a hand on Shasta's shoulder and pointed to Jim.

"There," said he, "stands your grandson." Then he turned his back to study the funny page of an ancient Sunday paper tacked to the cabin wall.

"You're as like your mother, son," Tom heard a quavery voice say after a while, "as one clam is like another."

Jim remarked quietly that his mother had died about two months before.

There was silence.

"It's the law, son," Shasta muttered by and by; "it's the law."

Tom wheeled. "Let's go over to the hospital right now," he suggested, adding a few explanatory words to Shasta.

A few minutes later, the cabin was in darkness. On the way along First Avenue, Tom saw a light in the office of Charley Bruce. Requesting his companions to wait a minute, he stepped inside and acquainted the credit man with the latest developments regarding No. 9 Chatinaw Creek.

Charley closed his desk with a snap.

"I'm a notary public myself, Tom. And

although most of my work in that line is conducted on the creeks when on company business, I did the square thing for Gaindon and I'll do as much for the other fellow. And it isn't just another customer I'm after, Tom, but right is right."

The nurse and five patients in the surgical ward of the hospital, who, it seemed, had talked all day of nothing else save the slick manner in which Murray Gaindon had got title to Jim Beaver's claim, were only too glad of the opportunity to swear to affidavits in support of Jim's contention that the money given him was only a loan.

With these sworn statements in his pocket, Tom led the way to a certain quiet room in the Pioneer and called for refreshments.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BROWN CANVAS BAG.

AT eight o'clock next morning, the same men—Deafy Jones excepted—waited on Murray Gaindon as he tripped downstairs from his room in the Arctic. Jim Beaver stepped forward and tendered him a roll of bills.

"There's your seven hundred and fifty dollars, mister," he said. "Now give me back my claim on Chatinaw."

Murray glanced haughtily from one to the other, then into his countenance crept a smile of triumph.

"I really don't know what you are talking about," he said in an impertinent manner. "And, anyway, yesterday I sold that claim to Attorney Ossian Hay."

Tom groaned. Charley Bruce gave an involuntary whistle. With shoulders thrown back, Murray stalked into the dining room.

"Tough luck," said Charley; "tough luck, Tom! It will take forty years to pry that shyster loose from that claim. It's too damned bad."

"I'm going to pay him a visit, anyway, and see what can be done, besides taking possession of the ground."

"He'll slap an injunction on it and have you thrown off first crack out of the box," prophesied Charley.

"I'm going up just the same. Best to

hear what he's got to say. Tag along with us."

"You're a little bit early to see him," remarked Charley, "but we can try any-way, I suppose."

The door to the outer office of the attorney being unlocked, the men filed inside. No one was in sight, but sounds of revelry came from the room beyond. Tom knocked at the door of this room. During the hush that followed, he was invited to enter. He turned the handle of the door and, followed by the others, stepped into the room.

Seated about the attorney's large table were a dozen men and women, all in that blissful state known as "feeling good." The table itself was covered with empty wine bottles, spilled wine and the remnants of a feast. At a piano, which had evidently been dragged from another room beyond, was seated The Wasp, a hilarious, mirthful Wasp, one whose movements were as airy and graceful as a humming bird's.

At sight of Tom Mason and Charley Bruce, the laughter left his face and was replaced by a smile so shrewd, so altogether Machiavellian, that premonitory scowls crept into the faces of his callers.

He jumped from his stool, pranced toward them and bowed low.

"Gentlemen," he began in mocking tones, "you are early. But I am the original early bird, the bird that stays up all night in order not to miss the glory of the dawn. I would ask you to be seated, but unless you care to sit in the lap of a—er—lady, I'm afraid you'll have to risk growing taller by standing where you are."

He turned and tripped to the large safe in the corner, opened it, selected a paper from a certain compartment, banged the door shut and returned to his visitors.

"Which is James Beaver?" he asked.

Jim stepped forward.

The Wasp handed him the paper.

"Allow me," said he grandiloquently, "to present you with a clear title to No. 9 Chatinaw Creek. From me to thee," he added, bowing low.

"But——" began Tom in amazement.

"And if," the little attorney interrupted him, "you meet up with a fool around town this a. m. by the name of Murray Gairdon, you may inform him that I have canceled the power of attorney he now holds as manager of that claim. Gentlemen, good day!"

JIM BEAVER'S sister, Helen, arrived on the stage that afternoon from the coast. She had left the States just as soon as she could get away, after receiving word from Jim that he had got his feet frozen. She said she could keep house for her brother and grandfather. Tom Mason thought otherwise.

The mortgages foreclosed on the lower half of No. 12 Chatinaw Creek in the third week of July for the reason that Murray Gairdon had failed to meet his obligations. In connection with which there is a deep mystery.

The double-drum hoisting engine Murray selected to keep—for he had canceled the two plants ordered for Jim Beaver's claim—was a sample engine of a new type for which the company carried no extra parts. After the plant was set up on the ground, when, in fact, everything was almost ready to begin actual development work, it was discovered that a certain brown canvas bag that contained bearings and bolts for the engine couldn't be found.

A man was sent posthaste to Fairbanks for another set. But there were none to be had, nor did the company have the measurements of the originals from which to have new ones cast in their own resident shops.

Much time was lost racing back and forth over the long trail and just before the break-up of the ice in the Kenoa River a new engine was started over the road. Three days out from Fairbanks, this broke through the rotten ice and went to the bottom. The teamster saved his four horses by cutting the traces of the wheel team. This accident put Murray out of business completely.

In view of the fact that the company had the freighter's receipt for the sack

of bearings in question, they did not consider themselves responsible for the loss. The situation developed a lot of friction between the three parties concerned. Had Murray acted the part of the gentleman he would have been given an extension of time on his loan. This he did not do.

This is how the brown canvas bag disappeared.

One night on the trail to Chatinaw, the freighters with Murray Gairdon's outfit of machinery made camp a short distance away from where Tom Mason and his company had located. During the night Shasta stole over to the Gairdon camp, severed the rope that held the bag of

bearings to the engine casting and shortly afterward dropped it through an air hole in the ice of the Kenoa River.

Doubtless remorse for this act may some day overtake the old prospector; it has not yet dawned. The nearest he has come to sharing his secret with another was when he dug his elbow into Deafy's side one day when Murray was passing No. 9, drew down the lid of his left eye and placed his fingers to his nose.

Murray Gairdon did not go idle. He "accepted a position" from "Nugget Ike" Frost as floor manager of the Palace dance hall, where he became a great favorite with the ladies.



AN UNDERWOOD RETORT

SENATOR OSCAR W. UNDERWOOD of Alabama, began his career practicing law in the city of Birmingham, and in his very first case found himself opposed by old Judge Bricknell, a former chief justice of the State supreme court who was famous for bawling out, intimidating and abusing lawyers on the other side.

During the examination of witnesses young Underwood went along as best he could, trying to bring out the facts and modestly bowing his head to the scoriac remarks with which his opponent roasted him to a dark, rich brown. When the time came for argument, he was brief, merely reading to the court in a low voice a court decision which, he claimed, called for a ruling in favor of his client.

That was old Judge Bricknell's big opportunity. He stood Underwood against the whitewashed wall of notoriety and flung linguistic knives so close to him that they grazed his ears, throat and temples. The old man exulted, roared and charged. He handled ridicule like a rapier. He poured forth sarcasm, satire and contempt. Then, turning from this artistic slaughter of his victim, he devoted himself to ripping up the decision which the lawyer had quoted. That, impossible as it had seemed, was an improvement in cruelty on what he had just said. After a whirlwind of verbal swords, daggers and snickersnees, the learned Judge Bricknell concluded with the contemptuous statement that the decision was misleading, sentimental, absurd and contrary to both the facts and the law.

Underwood ventured one more remark.

"Your Honor," he said, addressing the bench, "I nevertheless ask a verdict on the strength of that decision. I believe the decision is sound. It ought to be. It was handed down by that distinguished expounder of the law, Judge Bricknell, when he was chief justice."

That was how the distinguished senior senator from Alabama won his first law case.



Mr. Tompkins Sees a Derby

By Mildred Fitz-Hugh

Author of "Hard Riding Tony," "The High-priced Horse," Etc.

Tradition is unhorsed by a champion known as Faith, and a new tone is added to the glamour which has immemorably hung over the great Kentucky Derbies.

IF you know the South you know Mr. Tompkins' type, vague, slow-fingered gentlemen who serve you behind the counters of local stores. They wield a yardstick with the simplicity of the true aristocrat at home in any situation, but Northerners often protest at the waste of such lives. "Why don't men of that caliber get out and do something?" they demand.

Mr. Tompkins was the most courteous, the most wistful-eyed, and the least aggressive of this class. He made up prescriptions and did general clerking in the Louisville Supreme Drug Store. The soda fountain was in charge of a succession of alert, pimply youths, as Mr. Tompkins had proved a failure both at concocting milk shakes and at soda-fountain repartee.

Like nearly every male in Louisville, Mr. Tompkins played the ponies, but unlike the majority, it was the romance of racing rather than the excitement of gam-

bling which brought him out to the track on his free Saturday afternoons. The horses were such beautiful creatures with their lithe, gleaming bodies and their small, snakelike heads! When they broke at the barrier and came streaking around the first curve, emotion seemed to take hold of Mr. Tompkins' heart and smother it.

He would stand tense and still in the noisy, gesticulating crowd, a program clenched in his thin hands, while the flying hoofs on the track below stirred him till something of the vitality of the galloping colts took possession of the man. Then he, too, would wave his arms and implore the horse of his choice to win on the home stretch.

"Come on there, Wondercloud! Come on! Wondercloud!" Frenzied entreaty sounded in his voice. At these moments had it been of avail for him to give his lifeblood to the particular colt who sym-

bolized his hopes, he would have done so unsparingly.

He rarely picked a winner. His methods were too impractical and aroused the scorn of those to whom he confided them.

"Who are you betting on this afternoon, Mr. Tompkins?" Peterson, owner of the Supreme Drug Store, asked him one day.

Peterson had little respect for his subordinate because he was easy to bully, but like the rest of the world he paid him the tribute of the prefix "Mr." when addressing him.

Mr. Tompkins moved a jar of bath salts to a more advantageous position and straightened an ad for corn plaster.

"I think I'll get a ticket on Moon-sweeper."

"He's a long chance," Peterson answered. "Have you any good tips on him?"

"No," Mr. Tompkins replied a little apologetically. "I just sort of liked his name."

"You must have plenty of dough to throw away!" Peterson's tone intimated: "You must be no end of a fool!" He turned to include a customer in the jest. "Betting on a horse because you like his name! Moonsweeper! Ha-ha! If it were Carpetsweeper or Clothesbrush now, I suppose your money'd be safe."

"It would," Mr. Tompkins agreed mildly.

That afternoon Peterson took particular delight in seeing Moonsweeper finish sixth in a race of seven entries.

Mr. Tompkins was especially susceptible to names which bore the tang of foreign countries. He once won fifty dollars on a two-dollar ticket that he bought on Sandalwood, a mare with long odds. Geisha Girl, Harem Queen, Bombay, The Sheik, Desert Star, and Far East were some less-successful colts who captured his imagination and lost his money.

Kind-hearted women often wondered what lay behind the wistful expression in the clerk's deep-set eyes as he handed them a prescription, and would have been startled had they known he suffered from wanderlust. He had worked in the drug

store since the time ten years previous, when, at his father's death and the disposal of their farm, he had come to Louisville with a few hundred dollars and two badly painted portraits of Tompkins' forbears in Confederate uniforms. In the minds of the inhabitants he was as much a fixture at the Supreme Drug Store as the red-and-green glass bottles which stood in the front window.

Had he been less shy he might have found sufficient romance in Louisville, but the girls who made advances to him were common-bred little things whose cheery vulgarity repelled him. He preferred his dreams of veiled maidens with dark, mysterious eyes and languid gestures.

Sometimes he would wake in the night and imagine the walls of his room disappearing before great, open stretches, desert sands glittering silver beneath blue starlight, or a foreign street where turbaned men beckoned to him from the doorways of bazaars.

ONCE he broached his longing to his employer.

"Peterson, doesn't it worry you to think of all the places there are in the world to see, and that maybe you'll die without ever having a glimpse of them?"

"If it upset me any I'd get to 'em if I had to swim the Pacific Ocean!" the other retorted. Then he gave Mr. Tompkins a shrewd glance. "But don't you be having any such notions! You're not the type to shift for yourself in heathen countries without money. You'd starve to death if the cannibals didn't eat you first."

Secretly, Mr. Tompkins feared this theory correct. Each time his imagination spurred him on, timidity drew him back again. He had five hundred dollars in the bank, which had remained to him after the mortgage on his father's farm had been settled. This amount would cover his expenses to some desired land, but would hardly be sufficient to bring him back if he failed to make a living.

Peterson did his best to discourage him in such an enterprise.

"I saw in the paper the other day where

two Americans had been working as miners in China, along with the coolies for fifteen years," he'd announce. "They were down and out and the boss just shanghai'd 'em and kept 'em underground all that time." And again: "I hear as how in Australia, when tourists can't pay their hotel bills they feed 'em to the sharks so they won't go after the natives."

Two-dollar tickets on Desert Star and Harem Queen continued to be the extent of Mr. Tompkins' ventures, and sometimes he felt that his failure to collect on these colts was symbolic of his luck, should he put it to more drastic tests.

SUCH might have been Mr. Tompkins' procedure through life if an equine star had not finally risen, whose romantic history spurred him to appalling lengths. The Louisiana Derby that year was won by a colt ranked as a total outsider. The colt's name was Far Cry. His story, which four months later had become familiar to thousands of race fans, Mr. Tompkins first heard from Willy Bell, the youth who'd recently come up from New Orleans and taken charge of the soda fountain.

"That Far Cry must be some horse!" Mr. Tompkins remarked the morning after Willy's arrival as they were setting the drug store in order.

Willy arrested an impressive clatter of spoons and glasses to reply: "Say, weren't it uncanny about that old gypsy woman?" "Gypsy woman?"

"Here's the dope they handed me. The dam of Far Cry was owned by a gypsy who raced her at bush tracks. Romany Luck, that was the mare's name, was only a sprinter, three quarters of a mile being her stunt. When she broke down her owner bred her to a government stallion. The gypsy died soon after, and when the foal come along it belonged to her eighteen-year-old son."

Mr. Tompkins at this point climbed onto a stool and braced his elbows on the marble top of the soda stand.

"The colt was born at night in a tent during a thunderstorm," Willy resumed.

"The boy's grandmother, one of them fortune-telling dames with gold hoops in her ears, went in to see it. She mumbled to herself for a bit and then she looked up like she was listening and said in that singsong voice them old gypsy's have: 'I hear the voices of many applauding the foal of Romany Luck.'"

Willy paused to implant a fresh piece of gum in his mouth while Mr. Tompkins' mind feasted on the picture of a tent lit only by flashes of lightning where an ancient gypsy with prophetic eyes gazed upon the tiny colt at her feet.

"At first, the grandson thought the old dame must be just hearing the thunder," Willy went on, "but she swore it was voices. After that she made some more passes with her hands over the colt and said: 'It's a far cry from a Romany tent to the floral horseshoe, but a courageous heart will somehow reach its goal.' This is how the boy come to give Far Cry his name."

Mr. Tompkins drew a long breath. Here was romance greater than any fabric of his own imagination.

"Tell me more about him!" he begged eagerly. "What does he look like? Who rode him at New Orleans?"

On Willy Bell's round, common face there appeared that light which illumines the visage of the most stolid race fan when discussing the horse of his choice.

"He's right small and black as a crow. Not a white mark on him. He runs like hell let loose and he's trained and ridden by the gypsy boy who owns him. They say he can't afford a special trainer and that he ships Far Cry by freight."

"Willy," Mr. Tompkins gasped, "wouldn't it be wonderful if this gypsy colt should win the Kentucky Derby?"

"Sure it would! But whoever heard of a horse that arrived in Louisville in a freight car snaring the fifty-thousand-dollar stakes?"

"Yet if he's got the heart and can run fast enough, a little thing like that won't stop him."

From then on Mr. Tompkins' dreams of foreign climes were interspersed with one

of an ancient fortune teller bending over a black colt. "It's a far cry from a Romany tent to the floral horseshoe, but a courageous heart will somehow reach its goal." The words thrilled him. Like most timid, yielding characters, he worshiped courage and endurance. He determined to take a chance on the Romany horse, not a conservative chance like the two-dollar bets he usually placed, but a sum worthy of the colt's unusual history.

One lunch hour, he went to the bank that held his nest egg and withdrew two hundred and fifty of it which he took to a winter bookmaker. The odds then offered were twenty to one and a customer of the Supreme Drug Store, who entered with him, advised him against such a plunge.

"Far Cry won't stand a chance in a mile and a quarter race against the best Eastern horses," he was told. "Why, his trainer's an unknown gypsy! Those Eastern stables have from fifty to seventy-five colts from which to pick their Derby entries, and their trainers are men who've given their lives to their jobs and know every trick of the game. The racing world's a closed corporation and you can't expect a gypsy's one-horse string to beat the big fellows."

Through Mr. Tompkins' wavering mind there flashed the fortune teller's words—"A courageous heart will somehow reach its goal." He smiled apologetically at the man whose warning he was about to ignore. Then, with a flush which spread from his cheek bones up into his forehead, and the inward resolve to keep his hands steady at all costs, he proceeded to place five fifty-dollar bills on the bookie's desk.

FOUR months of tense waiting followed, months in which Peterson's jeers and bullying were the only elements that punctuated the outward monotony of Mr. Tompkins' existence. The fact that his subordinate had placed such a large sum on a long chance made the owner of the Supreme Drug Store consider the man a complete fool, and therefore one who could be unsparingly imposed upon. Since Mr.

Tompkins was honest, and popular with customers because of his courteous manners, Peterson, who owned two other drug stores in the city, shifted his activities to these, leaving his underling to do the work which heretofore he had shared with him.

It never occurred to Mr. Tompkins to rebel. He was so in the clouds that he mechanically accepted longer, more crowded hours. At times he felt very close to that beckoning world of romantic adventure whose gateways should be opened to him by the victory of Far Cry. For, at twenty to one, his two hundred and fifty would bring him five thousand dollars if the Romany colt passed the barrier first.

Of course, he had his moments of panic when he saw his deed in the light of a practical world. To risk such a slice of his bank account on a long shot! What if Far Cry lost? Mr. Tompkins realized that much more than his money was at stake. His speculation on the gypsy colt was his last fling at adventure. The other horses on whom he had bet small sums had almost invariably lost. Such hope and such faith as remained to him he had placed on Far Cry. Those five fifty-dollar bills were a final, quite magnificent gesture. If Fate failed him again the curtain would be lowered forever on drama and romance.

Before the Derby trial, the black colt's odds dropped to ten to one, due to the withdrawal of two of the most promising Eastern entries. Mr. Tompkins' hopes soared high. He asked Peterson to let him off the Saturday afternoon of the trial, but the latter said there was no one to leave in his place, and that if he expected to get away for the Derby the week following, he shouldn't demand an extra half holiday. Willy Bell, whose free afternoon it was, departed blithely, promising to bring back all the news of Far Cry.

The next two hours were almost intolerable for Mr. Tompkins. Practically the entire youthful population had decamped to the race track, and the customers who dropped in were old people

interested only in their ailments. As he produced bismuth tablets and listened to dissertations on painful joints, it seemed incredible that even these fossils should not sense the anxious excitement which consumed him. "At this very moment," he kept thinking, "Far Cry may be running. Perhaps it's all over and he didn't do well at all."

At last Willy Bell came back. Mr. Tompkins laid aside a prescription bottle he was filling and walked from behind the counter toward the boy. Now that Willy had actually returned with the news, he dreaded to hear it. He had a wild desire to clap his hand over Willy's mouth and force him to keep silent. Waiting was never as hard as to know the irrevocable truth.

"Say, what d'yer think? Our horse won! They declare he'll be the favorite and carry even odds next week."

"Far Cry came in first?" It was so easy to misunderstand Willy, who garbled his words.

"You bet he did! He's so light boned you wouldn't figure he could stand up against the rest, and he looks like a pony alongside some of them big colts. But, believe me, that pony can run!"

"Willy," Mr. Tompkins gasped, "think what it will mean for me if Far Cry wins again next Saturday! I'm going to see things, Willy, all the strange, far-off things tucked in the corners of the world." Mr. Tompkins might have been standing behind iron bars gazing out at promised freedom, so wistfully ecstatic was his face.

"Don't be getting your passport yet!" Peterson, who had stopped for his daily inspection, loomed in the doorway. "That gypsy who rides Far Cry don't know nothing but to sit still and let him run. They say some of the jockeys had orders not to push their mounts this afternoon. I noticed one colt myself that weren't even extended at the finish. Trying to get better odds is an old story in Derby trials."

The elation faded in Mr. Tompkins' eyes. There was truth in Peterson's words. Derby trials weren't always fair tests. The fortune teller's saying that a

courageous heart will somehow reach its goal was a splendid sentiment, but in this instance the odds against a valiant heart were great. The best horses and boys in the country would be pitted against the speed and endurance of one small colt, whose rider lacked the technique of the more experienced jockeys piloting the other entries.

ALTHOUGH he had attended many Derbys, Mr. Tompkins had never yet seen one run. Only the wealthy and influential in Louisville secure seats for that event which draws hordes of race fans each May to the Southern city. Without a seat there is but one way to obtain a view of the track. Arrive in the morning and hold down a few square inches of rail.

Mr. Tompkins had never been able to do this as Derby morning always brought a rush business. He had to content himself with the thought that at least he would be standing in the great inclosure, without a glimpse of the track it is true, but by raising his head he could study the vast expanse of faces of those who watched Far Cry make his run.

This year Mr. Tompkins regretted more keenly than ever his inability to witness the race. He longed to see for himself the little black three-year-old who would carry his own future down the long stretch at Churchill Downs.

Saturday morning Willy Bell was late. Mr. Tompkins opened the drug store alone, a gnawing fear at his heart. What if Willy, who was to take charge of the business that afternoon, failed to show up at all? At noon when Peterson dropped in, there was still no sign of the boy.

"I guess the young devil has beat it!" Peterson grumbled. "Sorry, Mr. Tompkins, but this means you can't get off today."

"Oh, look here, Peterson, couldn't we close up the store just for an hour? I won't leave till late and I'll not stay for the races after the Derby."

"Business first, Mr. Tompkins. Too bad! Know you're pretty keen to see Far

Cry. But you'll hear soon enough that he's been beaten without chasing out to the track. I understand most of the Easterners who're making the big bets are putting their money on the Randare Stables. They say Broadcast's to be pacemaker for Madcap, who's coming up at the finish."

From noon on, as crowds surged past the drug store on their way to the track, Mr. Tompkins was very busy serving race fans who dashed in for an extra package of cigarettes or chewing gum. By two thirty, congestion in the streets had begun to lessen. The cars that passed now were filled with those who planned to miss the preliminary races. At half after three a bus belonging to the Thoroughbred Line stopped by the corner outside the drug store.

"Last bus going to the track for the Derby!" a man shouted through a megaphone. "Step in, folks, and see your favorite win!"

There were no customers in the store at the moment when Mr. Tompkins heard that call. Had there been, he might have acted differently. As it was he hesitated, gripping the counter till the knuckles of his hands showed white. Through the window he could see people climbing into the bus. Finally there was but one seat left.

To the clerk it was like the last seat in a lifeboat before the ship went down. He seized his hat and dashed out, calling to the driver to wait while he locked the door. Mr. Tompkins took the empty space in front, and as they rumbled down the streets the throb of the engine seemed but an echo of his heartbeats.

At the gate he purchased his entrance ticket, carefully folding three one-dollar bills about the ticket on Far Cry. Then he made his way to the inclosure beneath the grand stand where he gazed up enviously at the lucky thousands who occupied seats. What did the sight of Far Cry mean to those rich curiosity seekers and gamblers compared with what it would have meant to him? He wished he was tall and strong like Peterson so he could

have forged his way a little nearer the rail. He thrust out his elbows and shoved, but the crowd was like a tidal wave whose sweep caused him to lose more ground than he gained.

Suddenly he became conscious that the wave was advancing with new force. Helpless, he was pushed forward, struggling to keep his feet in the jam. At last the wave parted sufficiently for him to glimpse the rail. Men were climbing over it and running across the track to the sacred infield beyond. He rushed for a gap and followed them. Mounted policemen rode threateningly up and down, but they only made him feel more reckless and determined. Mob psychology had Mr. Tompkins firmly in its grip. A policeman galloped by him and swung his club.

He ducked and received a glancing blow on one cheek. He raised his fingers to the cut, laughing as those near him voiced indignation at the sight. After a conference in the judges' stand, the police were withdrawn. Without serious violence they could not have dislodged that grim line which clung to the inner rail.

Mr. Tompkins glanced triumphantly about him. Across the strips of tanbark threading the green infield, the Derby entries were being led to the paddock. They shuffled nervously behind their lead ponies, stolid little creatures who seemed to fully realize their mission as sedatives. The sound of rapid hoofs on the track and a long drawn out "Ah—ah!" from the crowd caused Mr. Tompkins to turn his head.

A SMALL, black horse carrying a crouched jockey in red-and-green flashed by the grand stand. So even and collected was his stride that he reminded Mr. Tompkins of a dark stream of water flowing with tireless swiftness down the broad stretch.

"That's him!"

"That's Far Cry!"

Individual voices acclaimed the favorite, who, even while they spoke, had been pulled up and taken into the paddock.

There followed a period of restless

waiting till the colts should again appear, this time on their way to the barrier. Racing gossip hummed through the air.

"Fast horse, that Far Cry, but he'll never hold the pace against some of them big colts."

"Looks too light boned to be a stayer. His dam was no good in a distance race and most of his sire's get are sprinters."

"I've got my money on the little horse. I'd like to see him beat the millionaire stables."

"Did you notice his jockey, the gypsy boy who owns him and trained him himself? They say he don't know as much as the colt does."

"I wonder if the old fortune-telling dame is here to-day. I bet she's pretty keyed up to see if her prophecy comes true."

"Mapcap'll win, I tell you! Santley's going to set the pace on Broadcast."

THE bugle sounded and a hush fell upon the waiting thousands like the quiet before a curtain rises on the stage. And, indeed, it was as spectacular a setting as the greatest theatrical producers could have devised. The historic hills of Churchill Downs were mist blue in the distance. Women's bright clothes gave the towering grand stand the appearance of an endless, tightly bunched bouquet of flowers. Across the turfed infield the stable roofs were dotted with swipes, white boys and black boys waiting to see how their charges distinguished themselves.

Mr. Tompkins eagerly scanned the horses who had answered the bugle's summons. The Easterners' choice, the Randare colts, their jockeys looking like twin monkeys in orange-and-blue silks, jogged in front of the Hancock horses whose millionaire owner was said to have bet two hundred thousand dollars that one of them would show. All four were inspiring sights and overshadowed the single entries. Seen alongside of the rest, the black colt appeared much less formidable than when he had breezed past the grand stand alone.

Spectators resumed their remarks.

"Look at Far Cry's legs! You could put two fingers around 'em. See the big bone on some of them other colts! If it was four and a half furlongs now, it might be another story, but Far Cry'll never stay with 'em the whole mile and a quarter."

"Sure he will, if he's got the heart! I'm banking on that gypsy fortune teller. What was it she said about a courageous heart reaching its goal?"

"Bunk! Them Randare entries mean business and they've got experienced jockeys. Santley hasn't forgotten that he rode Zephyr last year to victory."

Such comments, Mr. Tompkins heeded less now that he'd seen Far Cry. Anxiety as to the money he'd placed on the favorite was dimmed by his interest in the horse himself. The wordless prayer for the Romany colt, which his heart uttered as he gazed down toward the barrier where the entries were forming in line, was purely an unselfish one. Far Cry, owned and trained by an ignorant gypsy, was the under dog not only in size, but in all preconceived standards of Derby lore, and Mr. Tompkins felt for him the kinship of the submerged.

A man standing near with field glasses announced that the black colt had the extreme inside position on the rail. "And they'll never let him through," he went on. "They'll be laying for him and crowd him out when he tries to make his run."

"Surely," Mr. Tompkins thought, "the gods were offering the favorite no advantage!"

A moment arrived when the horses' heads appeared to be on a parallel line and the barrier went up. The nineteen entries broke into stride, their pace a lightning rush which caused Mr. Tompkins to marvel. He'd seen many races but he'd never beheld concerted speed like this! They came so fast that in the first second or two it was impossible to distinguish individual horses or colors.

Soon it grew apparent that one chestnut colt led the field. Broadcast, the Randare entry, fulfilled the prediction that he would set the pace for his stablemate. But where

was Far Cry? Mr. Tompkins, straining to pick him out from the shifting welter of horses, saw him quite far back, hemmed in against the rail so closely that he seemed to struggle for sufficient space in which to move at all. The pity of it wrung Mr. Tompkins' heart. The colt hadn't a chance, and he looked so small and helpless in that jam of bigger horses.

When they passed the grand stand the first time Broadcast was well in the lead, and cheers came from the clubhouse where many of the Easterners watched their favorite's stablemate. Up the turn and down the back stretch Broadcast continued on top. Then another horse challenged him.

"Charon!" sections of the crowd roared. Fresh for his final run, the Hancock colt swept around the next turn past Broadcast, and it seemed to onlookers as though the race was over.

Mr. Tompkins, racked with anguish for the Romany colt deprived of a legitimate chance, clenched his hands frantically as he saw that, for the first time since the race had started, Far Cry was out of his pocket, running between two rear groups of horses who hugged the rail. An instant later the black colt had shifted his position to the middle of the track.

"He'll lose time doing that," Mr. Tompkins thought, "and it's too late for him to win, but it's his only chance to place."

And then a scream broke from the crowd; not the thundering applause which greets the expected, but a high-pitched, almost animal sound as primitive as a beast's cry, and only wrung from human beings when something appalling and totally unlooked for assails their emotions. Far Cry was coming up!

He came with a rush which seemed to change him from one of nineteen galloping colts into a single streak of dark lightning.

"Come on, Far Cry! Come on!"

THE crowd's roar was concerted now, a vast, sweeping sound like a wind storm, as the Romany colt, seemingly out of it and done for, challenged the Eastern horses.

7A-POP.

Mr. Tompkins shouted with the rest. As he watched that small, flying body pass one horse and then another with incredible speed, it was almost as though he himself were making that heartbreaking run. Tears dimmed his eyes and, falling onto his face, lodged in the open cut in his cheek, but he felt no sting. He was as valiant and as unconquerable as the little black colt with winged feet.

In that breath-taking second when Far Cry won the Derby, passing even Charon at the end and beating him by a good nose length at the wire, his supporters rendered him an ovation such as had seldom been heard even at Churchill Downs. The small betters chiefly profited by the favorite's victory. Far Cry's finish, which caused his name to be inscribed in letters of gold with the immortal Derby winners of the past, scored a triumph for the under dog, and thousands of his human counterparts welcomed it as such.

On the way out Mr. Tompkins caught a glimpse of the victor, his dark, slender neck half hidden by an immense, floral horseshoe. When he saw the gold cup handed to the colt's owner, a dazed, embarrassed gypsy boy in crumpled silks, he would have liked to doff his hat and thank the man who presented it. Honors paid to the horse of his choice seemed a personal tribute to himself.

He had to wait three quarters of an hour before he secured a seat in a homeward bus, but what was mere time or the fatigue of standing on pavements when one had just witnessed almost impossible heroics?

"Won anything on Far Cry?" a man beside him asked, and Mr. Tompkins replied truthfully:

"I've been so excited I'd completely forgotten until you asked me. Yes, I—why, I've won a lot! I have a winter ticket on him for two hundred and fifty with odds at twenty to one."

"Five thousand dollars!" The other whistled. "You can have a whale of a time with that!"

"I intend to. Always wanted more than anything else to travel and see what

the world looks like, but never had the funds."

"You're some lucky fellow!" the stranger replied, fraternally slipping his arm through Mr. Tompkins'.

The latter did not enjoy this close proximity of the man who smelled of whisky, but he was in too generous a mood to rebuke the devil himself. Moreover, escape appeared in the form of a newly arrived bus, and he had to dash to obtain a seat.

When he descended at the corner of the Supreme Drug Company, Peterson, his face black with anger, was shaking the handle of the locked door. Mr. Tompkins walked up to him eagerly.

"Peterson, I *saw* the Derby! Some of the crowd rushed into the infield and I followed them. A policeman's club laid my cheek open, but they couldn't drive up back. Sorry not to have stuck on the job. I'll finish up work this evening and I'll wait a day or two if you need me till you can get a man to take my place."

Peterson's intended threats of dismissal were knocked to the winds. "Say, what's got into you acting so high and mighty all of a sudden? First, you run off and leave the store, and then you come back damned pleased with yourself. Are you giving me notice that you're throwing up the job?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Tompkins jauntily, "I'm leaving for—er—foreign parts."

"So the travel bug's hit you again! Foreign parts! There'll be mighty few parts left of that spindly body of yours when the cannibals have done with you."

Mr. Tompkins flicked a grain of dust from his alpaca sleeve.

"Should I visit savage islands, it would only be under suitable escort."

"You think you're a millionaire and can hire a guard, do you? Oh, I know what you're driving at. I clean forgot the fortune you were going to win on Far Cry."

"So did I," Mr. Tompkins admitted, "until some one reminded me." He put his hand into his vest pocket and then hastily ran his fingers through the others. His purse with his ticket on Far Cry was gone.

Triumph lighted Peterson's face as he foresaw his most valued clerk returned to him. "Lost it, eh? You're so simple you never thought to look out for pickpockets, did you? I always said you couldn't take care of yourself. I reckon this'll knock the traveling notion out of your head. You're mighty lucky to hold down your job here after what you done this afternoon."

Mr. Tompkins stared at the other with wretched, dazed eyes while his hands continued to search his empty pockets. He might have known, he reflected bitterly, that such luck as he had thought to be within his grasp was not for him. Peterson's words were like blows on a raw wound. What was life worth now that he no longer possessed the means with which to reach those beckoning lands? He never had any good fortune. Things always broke the wrong way.

A newsboy's voice shrilled through the street:

**"EXTRA! EXTRA! FAR CRY
WINS THE DERBY!"**

Mr. Tompkins raised his head. The words echoed in his brain like a trumpet call. Once more he stood in the infield at Churchill Downs, cheering with every ounce of breath in his body a small black colt who defied the field. Again he grew valiant and strong as he recalled how the horse of his choice achieved victory in the face of appalling odds. The memory was a challenge as he confronted his former boss.

"I'm going just the same, Peterson!" He reached out thin arms. "And I'll get there if I have to swim the Pacific Ocean!" He was scarcely aware of Peterson's gaping presence. His pulses throbbed to the rhythm of galloping hoofs and the cheers of frantic thousands.

"Hey, Mr. Tompkins!" An old customer of the drug store, who had just alighted from a street car, hurried toward them. "Did you know you'd lost your purse? After you left the track a fellow who'd been buddying up to you was arrested and they found it on him with your

name inside. One of the policemen knew me and as I was coming by here I said I'd bring it right along. There's something inside I thought you'd be pretty glad to see." The speaker opened the purse and held up the ticket on Far Cry.

MR. TOMPKINS was grateful but calm as he took it from him.

Peterson regained speech then, his face still distorted in amazement. "Look here, Mr. Tompkins, what got into you a moment ago talking like you did when you

discovered your purse was gone? How'd you think you were going to reach those foreign lands with practically no funds?"

"EXTRA! EXTRA! FORTUNE TELLER'S PROPHECY COMES TRUE! FAR CRY WINS THE DERBY!"

Mr. Tompkins waved a hand in the direction of the voice as his eyes met the other's bewildered stare. "'A courageous heart,'" said Mr. Tompkins, "'will somehow reach its goal.'"

FIFTY YEARS OF BASEBALL

LAST month the National League celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its organization; next month the fiftieth race for the league's championship pennant will start.

Fifty years is a long time in any field of human endeavor. It is an especially long time in sport. Yet the opening of the 1925 season held the same appeal for lovers of the game as did the opening of the season of 1876; and in 1925 baseball is menaced by the same danger that led to the formation of the National League a half century ago—the menace of the sure-thing gambler who wants to use the game and its players for the purpose of fleecing the public.

When Albert G. Spalding, a pitcher on the champion Boston club of the old National Association, and William A. Hulbert, a Chicago business man, formed the National League, organized professional baseball had been in existence only five years, yet the public was disgusted with it because of collusion between gamblers and crooked players. Hulbert became president of the new league late in the year of its formation, and at once started an investigation that resulted in the life banishment of four players and the expelling of two clubs from the league. This drastic action was a warning to crooks that lasted for forty years. The next serious National League scandal did not occur until 1919, when the brilliant Hal Chase was banished for dishonest playing. This was followed last fall by the O'Connell-Dolan incident that almost wrecked the World's Series. There is still work for Judge Landis and the other baseball officials to do.

Of course the game of baseball has changed during the last fifty years. The players of the early days seem to have been a more hardy tribe than are the high-priced and fragile stars of to-day. Back in 1884, "Old Hoss" Radbourne, of the Providence club, pitched seventy-four games during the season, and won sixty-two of them. Now if a pitcher goes through thirty-five complete games in the course of five months he thinks that his manager is overworking him. Gloves and masks were new when the National League was born, and old-time fans love to tell of the unprotected catcher who, after being struck on the mouth by a pitched ball, spat out a few teeth and went on playing.

And the stars of the past—weren't they brighter than the stars of to-day? Sweeney of Providence, who struck out nineteen players in one game, "Pop" Anson, "Buck" Ewing, "King" Kelly—shall we see their like again? The modern fan has an answer ready for those questions. He points to "Babe" Ruth, to Rogers Hornsby, to Ty Cobb, to Walter Johnston, to Adolfo Loque—and laughs.

By
EDGAR WALLACE



The Squealer

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

JOHNNY GRAY.—Who has served a term in prison, due to a frame-up by Jeff Legge.

JEFF LEGGE.—The Big Printer, a notorious counterfeiter, but known as such only to Johnny.

OTHER CHARACTERS.—Emanuel Legge, the father of Jeff, an ex-convict. Peter Kane, a reformed criminal, who is passionately fond of his daughter. Marney Kane, Peter's daughter, who loves Johnny and believes him innocent. Lila Sain, an accomplice of the Legges'. J. G. Reeder, a secret-service man, whose methods are peculiar. Craig, a police detective.

THE STORY.—Johnny Gray returns to London after a term in Dartmoor Prison, only to learn that the girl he loves, Marney Kane, the daughter of an old friend, Peter Kane, has been duped into marrying Jeff Legge, the reprobate son of Emanuel Legge, an ex-convict, who hates Peter Kane, blaming him for his prison term and envying his success since reforming. This is Emanuel's revenge. Johnny knows Jeff to be the Big Printer, a clever counterfeiter, long sought by the police, and determines to protect Marney from his wiles. On their way to London, Jeff tells his bride the truth about himself and her father, and she, upon reaching their hotel, escapes and returns to her father's house. Emanuel tries to kill Johnny and thinks he has succeeded, thus preventing him from carrying out his threat to squeal on the Big Printer. He then calls upon J. G. Reeder, a secret-service man, the only other who has information about the Big Printer, but finds out that he cannot be bribed. Upon returning home, Emanuel learns that Johnny is alive and also receives a strange note. Jeff likewise receives a note, and father and son both go, though separately and unknown to each other, to the Highlow Club, a resort for shady characters, and under the Legges' control, of which Johnny and Peter are also members. Emanuel arrives first and stays but a short while. Soon after he has left, Jeff enters, goes to room 13, where he snaps out the lights, and sits down as if waiting for something. A few minutes later, Johnny arrives at the club and walks to room 13. He enters. There is a shot and Johnny emerges from the room. The porter observes a spot of blood upon his cuff as he is leaving the club. The police are called in, and Craig, a detective, finds Jeff in room 13, badly wounded. He learns that Johnny has been at the club and left room 13 immediately after the shooting, but that Peter Kane has not been there that evening. Lila Sain, an accomplice of Emanuel's, who has been outside the club, breaks down and confesses that she is the wife of Jeff. Craig then goes to Peter's home, tells him what has happened, and says he must arrest Johnny Gray. Marney is very much upset when she hears this news, and just at this moment Johnny enters.



Author of
"The Missing Millions,"
"The Valley of Ghosts," Etc.

A Mystery Romance in Four Parts—Part III.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ALIBI.

IN another second the girl was in his arms, clinging to him, weeping convulsively on his shoulder, her face against his, her clasped hands about his neck.

Craig could only look, wondering and fearing. Johnny would not have walked into the net unwarned. Barney would have told him that he was there.

What amazed Craig, as the fact slowly dawned upon him, was that Johnny was still in evening dress. He took a step toward him, and gently Johnny disengaged the girl from his arms.

"I'd like to see the right cuff of your shirt, Johnny," said Craig.

Without a word, Gray held up his arm, and the inspector scrutinized the spotless linen, for spotless it was. No sign of a stain was visible.

"Either somebody's doing some tall lying, or you're being extraordinarily clever, Johnny. I'll see that other cuff, if I may."

The second scrutiny produced no tangible result.

"Didn't you go home and change to-night?"

"No, I haven't been near my flat," he said.

Craig was staggered.

"But your man said that you came in, changed, took a suit case and went away."

"Then Parker has been drinking," was the calm reply. "I have been enjoying the unusual experience of dining with the detective officer who was responsible for my holiday in Devonshire."

Craig took a step back.

"With Inspector Flaherty?" he asked.

Johnny nodded.

"With the good Inspector Flaherty. We have been exchanging confidences about our mutual acquaintances."

"But who was it went to your flat?" asked the bewildered Craig.

"My double. I've always contended that I have a double," said Johnny serenely.

He stood in the center of the astounded group. Into Marney's heart had crept a wild hope.

"Johnny," she said, "was it this man who committed the crime for which you were punished?"

To her disappointment he shook his head.

"No. I am the gentleman who was arrested and sent to Dartmoor—my double stops short of these unpleasant experiences, and I can't say that I blame him."

"But do you mean to say that he deceived your servant?"

"Apparently," said Johnny, turning again to the detective who had asked the question.

"I take your word, of course, Johnny, as an individual."

Johnny chuckled.

"I like the pretty distinction. As an official, you want corroboration. Very well, that is not hard to get. If you take me back to Flaherty, he will support all I have told you."

Peter and the detective had the good taste to allow him to take leave of the girl without the embarrassment of their presence.

"It beats me, utterly beats me. Have you ever heard of this before, Peter?"

"That Johnny had a double? No, I can't say that I have."

"He may have invented the story for the sake of the girl. But there is the fact: he's in evening dress, while his servant distinctly described him as wearing a gray tweed suit. There is no mark of blood on his cuff, and I'm perfectly certain that Stevens wouldn't have tried to get Johnny in bad. He is very fond of the boy."

"Of course, he may be spinning this yarn for the sake of Marney, but it'll be easy enough to corroborate. I'll use your phone, Peter," he said suddenly. "I've got Flaherty's number in my book."

The biggest surprise of the evening came when a sleepy voice, undeniably Flaherty's, answered him.

"Craig's speaking. Who have you been dining with to-night, Flaherty?"

"You don't mean to tell me that you've called me up in the middle of the night," began the annoyed Irishman, "to ask me who I've been dining with?"

"This is serious, Flaherty. I want to know."

"Why, with Johnny, of course—Johnny Gray. I asked him to come to dinner."

"What time did he leave you?"

"Nearer eleven than ten," was the reply.

"No, it was after eleven."

"And he was with you all that time? He didn't leave for a quarter of an hour?"

"Not for a quarter of a minute. We just talked and talked——"

Craig hung up the receiver and turned away from the instrument, shaking his head.

"Any other alibi would have hanged you, Johnny. But Flaherty's the straightest man in the C. I. D."

IN view of what followed when Johnny reached his flat in the early hours of morning, this testimony to the integrity of Inspector Flaherty seemed a little misguided.

"Nobody else been here?"

"No, sir," said Parker.

"What did you do with the shirt I took off?"

"I cut off the cuffs and burned them, sir. I did it with a greater pleasure, because the rounded corner cuff is just a little *demode*, if you do not mind my saying so, just a little—how shall I call it?—theatrical."

"The rest of the shirt——"

"The rest of the shirt, sir," said Parker deferentially, "I am wearing. It is rather warm to wear two shirts, but I could think of no other way of disposing of it, sir. Shall I get your bath ready?"

Johnny nodded.

"If you will forgive the impertinence, did you succeed in persuading the gentleman you were going to see, to support your statement?"

"Flaherty? Oh, yes. Flaherty owes me a lot. Good night, Parker."

"Good night, sir. I hope you sleep well. Er—may I take that pistol out of your pocket, sir? It is spoiling the set of your trousers. Thank you very much."

He took the Browning gingerly between his finger and thumb and laid it on Johnny's writing table.

"You don't mind my being up a little late, sir?" he said. "I think I would like to clean this weapon before I retire."

CHAPTER XVIII.

RABBITS IN HUTCHES.

JEFF LEGGE reclined in a long cane chair on a lawn which stretched to the edge of a cliff. Before him were the blue waters of the Channel, and the more gorgeous blue of an unflecked sky. He reached out his hand and took a glass that stood on the table by his side, sipped it with a wry face and called a name pettishly.

It was Lila who came running to his side.

"Take this stuff away, and bring me a whisky and soda," he said.

"The doctor said you weren't to have anything but lime juice. Oh, Jeff, you must do as he tells you," she earnestly pleaded.

"I'll break your head for you when I get up," he snarled. "Do as you're told. Where's the governor?"

"He's gone into the village to post some letters."

He ruminated on this, and then:

"If that busy comes, you can tell him I'm too ill to be seen."

"Who—Craig?"

"Yes," he growled, "the dirty, twisting thief! Johnny would have been in boob for this if he hadn't straightened Craig. If he didn't drop a thousand to keep off the moor, I'm a dead man!"

She pulled up a low chair to his side.

"I don't think Johnny did it," she said.

"The old man thinks it was Peter. The window was found open after. He could have come in by the fire escape—he knows the way."

He grumbled something under his breath, and very discreetly she did not press home her view.

"Where's Marney—back with her father?"

She nodded.

"Who told him I was married to you?"

"I don't know, Jeff," she said.

"You liar! You told him: nobody else could have known. If I get a sentence for this marriage, I'll kill you, Lila. That's twice you've squealed on me."

"I didn't know what I was saying. I was half mad with worry."

"I wish you'd gone the whole journey," he said bitterly. "It isn't the woman—I don't care a darn about that. It's the old man's quarrel, and he's got to get through with it."

"It's the other business being disorganized that's worrying me. Unless it's running like clockwork, you'll get a jam; and when you've got a jam, you collect a bigger crowd than I want to see looking at my operations. You didn't squeal about that, I suppose?"

"No, Jeff, I didn't know."

"And that's the reason you didn't squeal, eh?"

He regarded her unfavorably. And now she turned on him.

"Listen, Jeff Legge. I'm a patient woman, up to a point, and I'll stand for all your bad temper while you're ill. But you're living in a new age, Jeff, and you'd better wake up to the fact. All that 'Bill Sikes' and 'Nancy' stuff never did impress me."

"I'm no clinger. If you got really rough with me, I'd bat you, and that's a fact. It may not be womanly, but it's wise. I never did believe in the equality of the sexes, but no girl is the weaker vessel if she gets first grip of the kitchen poker."

Very wisely he changed the subject.

"I suppose they searched the club from top to bottom?" he said.

"They did."

"Did they look in the loft?"

"I believe they did. Stevens told me that they turned everything inside out."

He grunted.

"They're clever," he said. "It must be wonderful to be clever. Who's this?" He scowled across the lawn at a strange figure that had appeared, apparently by way of the cliff gate.

She rose and walked to meet the stooping stranger, who stood, hat in hand, waiting for her and smiling awkwardly.

"I'm so sorry to intrude," he said. "This is a beautiful place, is it not? If I remember rightly, this is the Dellsea Vicarage? I used to know the vicar—a very

charming man. I suppose you have taken the house from him?"

She was half amused, half annoyed.

"This is Dellsea Vicarage," she said curtly. "Do you want to see anybody?"

"I wanted to see Mr. Jeffrey"—he screwed up his eyes and stared at the sky, as though trying to withdraw from some obscure cell of memory a name that would not come without special effort—"Mr. Jeffrey Legge. That is the name—Mr. Jeffrey Legge."

"He is very ill and can't be seen."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said the stranger, his mild face expressing the intensest sympathy. "Very sorry indeed."

He fixed his big, round glasses on the tip of his nose, for effect apparently, because he looked over them at her.

"I wonder if he would see me for just a few minutes. I've called to inquire about his health."

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Reeder—J. G. Reeder."

The girl felt her color go, and turned quickly.

"I will ask him," she said.

Jeff heard the name and pursed his lips.

"That's the man the bank is running—or maybe it's the government—to trail me," he said in a low tone. "Slip him along, Lila."

Mr. Reeder was beckoned across the lawn, and came with quick, mincing steps.

"I'm so sorry to see that you're in such a deplorable condition, Mr. Legge," he said. "I hope your father is well?"

"Oh, you've met the old man, have you?" said Jeffrey in surprise.

Mr. Reeder nodded.

"Yes, I have met your father," he said. "A very entertaining and a very ingenious man. *Very!*" The last word was spoken with emphasis.

Jeff was silent at this tribute to his parent's amiability.

"There has been a lot of talk in town lately about a certain nefarious business that is being carried on—surreptitiously, of course," said Mr. Reeder, choosing his words with care. "I, who live out of the world, and in the backwater of life, hear

strange rumors about the distribution of illicit money—I think the cant term is 'slush' or 'slosh'—probably it is 'slush.'"

"It is 'slush,'" agreed Jeff, not knowing whether to be amused or alarmed, and watching the man all the time.

"Now I feel sure that the persons who are engaged in this practice cannot be aware of the enormously serious nature of their offense," said Mr. Reeder confidentially.

HE broke off his lecture to look around the lawn and the garden that flanked it on either side.

"How beautiful is the world, Mr. Jeff—I beg your pardon, Mr. Legge," he said. "How lovely those flowers are! I confess that the sight of bluebells always brings a lump to my throat. I don't suppose they are bluebells," he added, "for it is rather late in the year. But that peculiar shade of blue. And those wonderful roses—I can smell them from here."

He closed his eyes, raised his nose and sniffed loudly—a ludicrous figure; but Jeff Legge did not laugh.

"I know very little, but I understand that in Dartmoor Prison there are only a few potted flowers, and that those are never seen by the prisoners, except by one privileged man whose task it is to tend them. A lifer, generally. Life without flowers must be very drab, Mr. Legge."

"I'm not especially fond of flowers," said Jeffrey.

"What a pity!" said the other regretfully. "What a thousand pities! But there is no sea view from that establishment, no painted ships upon a painted ocean—which is a quotation from a well-known poem; no delightful sense of freedom; nothing really that makes life durable for a man under sentence, let us say, of fifteen or twenty years."

Jeff did not reply.

"Do you love rabbits?" was the surprising question that was put to him.

"No, I can't say that I do."

Lila sat erect, motionless, all her senses trained to hear and understand.

Mr. Reeder sighed.

"I am very fond of rabbits. Whenever I see a rabbit in a cage or in a hutch, I buy it, take it to the nearest wood and release it. It may be a foolish kindness, because, born and reared in captivity, it may not have the necessary qualities to support itself among its wilder fellows. But I like letting rabbits loose; other people like putting rabbits in cages."

He shook his finger in Jeffrey's face. "Never be a rabbit in a cage, Mr. Jeffrey—or is it Mr. Legge? Yes, Mr. Legge."

"I am neither a rabbit nor a chicken nor a fox, nor a skylark," said Jeffrey. "The cage hasn't been built yet that could hold me."

Again Mr. Reeder sighed.

"I remember another gentleman saying that some years ago. I forget in what prison he was hanged. Possibly it was Wandsworth—yes, I am sure it was Wandsworth. I saw his grave the other day. Just his initials. What a pity! What a sad end to a promising career! He is better off, I think, for twenty long years in a prison cell, that is a dreadful fate, Mr. Legge! And it is a fate that would never overtake a man who decided to reform."

"Suppose, let us say, he was forging Bank of England notes, and decided that he would burn his paper and his water markers, dismiss all his agents—I don't think we should worry very much about that type of person. We should meet him generously and liberally, especially if his notes were of such excellent quality that they were difficult for the uninitiated to detect."

"What has happened to Golden?" asked Jeffrey boldly.

The eyes of the elderly man twinkled.

"Golden was my predecessor," he said. "A very charming fellow by some accounts of——"

Again Jeffrey cut him short.

"He used to be the man who was looking after the slush for the police. Is he dead?"

"He has gone abroad," said Mr. Reeder gravely. "Yes, Mr. Golden could not stand this climate. He suffered terribly

from asthma, or it may have been sciatica. I know there was an 'a' at the end of it."

"Did you never meet him? Ah! You missed a very great opportunity," said Mr. Reeder. "Golden was a nice fellow—not as smart, perhaps, as he might have been, or as he should have been, but a very nice fellow. He did not work, perhaps, so much in the open as I do; and there I think he was mistaken."

"It is always an error to shut yourself up in an office and envelop yourself in an atmosphere of mystery. I myself am prone to the same fault. Now, my dear Mr. Legge, I am sure you will take my parable kindly, and will give it every thought and consideration."

"I would, if I were a printer of slush, but unfortunately I'm not," said Jeffrey Legge, with a smile.

"You're not, of course," the other hastened to say. "I wouldn't dream of suggesting you were. But with your vast circle of acquaintances—and, I'm sure, admirers—you may perhaps be able to convey my simple little illustration."

"I don't like to see rabbits in cages, or birds in cages, or anything else behind bars. And I think that Dartmoor is so—what shall I say?—unæsthetic. And it seems *such* a pity to spend all the years in Devonshire. In the spring, of course, it is delightful; in the summer it is hot; in the winter, unless you're at Torquay, it is deplorable. Good morning, Mr. Legge."

He bowed low to the girl, and, bowing, his spectacles fell off. Stooping, he picked them up with an apology and backed away, and they watched him in silence till he had disappeared from view.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN EMANUEL IDEA.

WHAT do you think of him for a busy?" asked Jeffrey contemptuously.

She did not answer. Contact with the man had frightened her. It was not like Lila to shiver in the presence of detectives.

"I don't know what he is," she said a

little breathlessly. "He's something like a—good-natured snake. Didn't you feel that, Jeffrey?"

"Good-natured nothing," said the other with a curl of his lip. "He's worse than Golden. These big corporations fall for that kind of man. They never give a chance to a real clever busy."

"Who was Golden?" she asked.

"He was an old fellow, too. They fired him." He chuckled to himself. "And I was responsible for firing him. Then they brought in Mr. J. G. Reeder with a flourish of trumpets. He's been on the game three years, and he's just about as near to making a pull as he ever was."

"Jeff, isn't there danger?" Her voice was very serious.

"Isn't there always danger? No more danger than usual," he said. "They can't touch me. Don't worry! I've covered myself so that they can't see me for overcoats! Once the stuff's printed, they can never put it back on me."

"Once it's printed." She nodded slowly. "Then you *are* the Big Printer, Jeff?"

"Talk about something else," he said.

When Emanuel returned, as he did soon after, Lila met him at the gate and told him of Reeder's visit. To her surprise he took almost the same view as Jeff had taken.

"He's a fool, but straight—up to five thousand, anyway. No man is straight when you reach his figure."

"But why did he come to Jeff?" she asked.

"Doesn't everybody in the business know that Jeff's the Big Printer? Haven't they been trying to put it on him for years? Of course he came. It was his last, despairing stroke. How's the boy?" he asked.

"He's all right, but a little touchy."

"Of course he's a little touchy," said Emanuel indignantly. "You don't suppose he's going to get better in a day, do you? The club's running again."

"Has it been closed?"

"It hasn't exactly been closed, but it has been unpopular," he said, showing his teeth in that smile of his. "Listen!" He

caught her arm on the edge of the lawn "Get your mind off that shooting, will you? I'll fix the man responsible for that."

"Do you know?" she asked.

It was the first time he had ever discussed the matter calmly, for the very mention of the attack upon Jeff had hitherto been sufficient to drive him to an incoherent frenzy.

"Yes, I know," he said gratingly. "It was Peter Kane, but you needn't say anything about that. I'll fix him, I tell you."

"Jeff thinks it was——"

"Never mind what Jeff thinks," he said impatiently. "Do as I tell you."

He sent her into the house to brew him a cup of tea—Emanuel was a great drinker of tea—and in her absence he had something to say to his son.

"Jeff, there's a big call for your stuff," he said. "I've had a letter from Harvey. He says there's another man started in the north of England, and he's turning out pretty good material. But they want yours—they can place half a million on the Continent right away."

"Jeff, what Harvey says is right. If there's a slackening of supply while you're ill, the busy fellows are going to tumble to you."

"I've thought of that," said Jeffrey. "You can tell anybody who's interested that there'll be a printing next week."

"Are you well enough to go up?" asked his father anxiously.

Jeffrey nodded, and shifted himself more erect, but winced in the process.

"Reeder's been here. Did she tell you?"

Emanuel nodded.

"I'm not worried much about Reeder. Down in Dartmoor he's a bogy, but then, they bogy any man they don't know. And they've got all sorts of stories about him. It's very encouraging to get near to the real thing."

THEY laughed together, and for the rest of the day discussed ways and means.

Jeffrey had said no more than was true when he had told the girl he was well covered. In various parts of the country

he had twelve banking accounts, each in a different name, and at one of the safe deposits, an enormous sum in currency, ready for emergency.

"You've got to stop some time, I suppose," said his father, "but it is mighty tempting to carry on with those profits. It's a bigger graft than I ever attempted, Jeff." His son accepted this respectful tribute with a smirk.

The old man sat, his clasped hands between his knees, staring out over the sea.

"It has got to end some day, and that would be a fine end, but I can't quite see how it could be done."

"What are you talking about?" asked the other curiously.

"I'm thinking about Peter—the respectable Mr. Peter Kane. Not quite so respectable in that girl's eyes as he used to be, but respectable enough to have busies to dinner, and that crook Johnny Gray—Johnny will marry the girl, Jeff."

Jeffrey Legge winced.

"She can marry the devil so far as I'm concerned," he said.

"But she can't marry without divorcing you. Do you realize that, my son? That's the law. And she can't divorce you without shopping you for bigamy. That's the law too."

"The question is, will she delay her action until Johnny's made a bit, or will she start right in? If she gives me just the time I want, Jeff, you'll have your girl and I'll have Peter Kane. She's your wife in the eyes of the law."

There was a significance in his words that made the other man look at him quickly.

"What's the great idea?" he asked.

"Suppose Peter was the Big Printer?" said Emanuel, speaking in a tone that was little above a whisper. "Suppose he was caught with the goods? It could be done."

"I don't mean by planting the stuff in his house—nobody would accept that; but getting him right on the spot, so that his best friend at Scotland Yard couldn't save him? How's that for an idea?"

"It couldn't be done," said the other immediately.

"Oh, couldn't it?" sneered Emanuel. "You can do any old thing you want, if you make up your mind to do it. Or if you're game to do it."

"That wouldn't get me the girl."

Emanuel turned his head slowly toward his heir.

"If they found the Big Printer, they'll have to find the 'big printing,'" he said deliberately. "That means we should all have to skip, and skip lively. We might have a few hours' start, and in these days of airplanes, three hours is four hundred miles."

"Jeffrey, if we are caught, and they guess I've been in this printing all the time, I shall never see outside again. And you'll go down for life. They can't give you any worse than that—not if you took the girl away with you."

"By force?" asked the other in surprise. The idea had not occurred to him.

The father nodded.

"If we have to skip, that's the only thing for you to do, son. It's no offense—remember that. She's your wife."

He looked to left and right, to see if there was the faintest shadow of a chance that he would be overheard, and then: "Suppose we ask Peter and his girl and Johnny Gray to dinner? A nice little dinner party, eh?"

"Where?" asked the other suspiciously.

"In room No. 13," said Emanuel Legge. "In room No. 13, Jeff, boy! A nice little dinner. What do you think? And then two whiffs of sleep stuff——"

"You're mad," said the other angrily. "What's the good of talking that way? Do you think he's going to come to dinner and bring his girl? Oh, you're nutty to think it!"

"Trust me," said Emanuel Legge.

CHAPTER XX.

KEEP OUT OF KEYTOWN.

WALKING down Regent Street one morning, Johnny Gray saw a familiar face—a man standing on the curb selling penny trinkets. The face was oddly familiar, but he had gone on a dozen paces

before he could recall where he had seen him before, and turned back. The man knew him; at any rate, his uncouth features twisted in a smile.

"Good morning, my lord," he said. "What about a toy balloon for the baby?"

"Your name is Porter, isn't it?" said Johnny, with a good-humored gesture of refusal.

"That's me, captain. I didn't think you'd recognized me. How's business?"

"Quiet," said Johnny conventionally. "What are you doing?"

The man shrugged his enormous shoulders.

"Selling these, and filling in the time with a little sluicing."

Johnny shook his head reprovingly. "Sluicing" in the argot indicates a curious method of livelihood. In public wash places, where men strip off their coats to wash their hands for luncheon, there are fine pickings to be had by a man with quick fingers and a knowledge of human nature.

"Did you ever get your flogging?"

"No," said the other contemptuously and with a deep growl. "I knew they couldn't, that's why I coshed the screw. I was too near my time. If I ever see old man Legge, I'll——"

Jimmy raised his finger. A policeman was strolling past, and was eying the two suspiciously. Apparently, if he regarded Fenner with disfavor, Johnny's respectability redeemed the association.

"Poor old flattie!" said Fenner as the officer passed. "What a life!" He looked Johnny up and down amusedly. "You seem to have struck it, Gray," he said, with no touch of envy. "What's your graft?"

Johnny smiled faintly.

"It is one you'll find difficult to understand, Fenner. I am being honest!"

"That's certainly a new one on me," said the other frankly. "Have you seen old Emanuel?" His voice was now quite calm. "Great fellow, Emanuel! And young Emanuel—Jeffrey—what a lad!"

There was a glint in his eyes as he scrutinized Johnny that told that young man

he knew much more of recent happenings than he was prepared to state. And his next words supported that view.

"You keep away from the Legge lot, captain," he said earnestly. "They are no good to anybody, and least of all to a man who's had an education like yours. I owe Legge one, and I'll get him, but I'm not thinking about that so much as young Jeff."

"You're the fellow he would go after, because you dress like a swell and you look like a swell—the very man to put slush about without anybody tumbling."

"The Big Printer, eh?" said Johnny, with that quizzical smile of his.

"The Big Printer," repeated the other gravely. "And he is a big printer. You hear all sorts of lies down on the moor, but that's true. Jeff's got the biggest graft that's ever been worked in this country."

"They'll get him sooner or later, because there never was a crook game yet that hadn't got a squeal about it somewhere. And the squeal has started, judging by what I can read in the papers. Who shot him?" he asked bluntly.

Johnny shook his head.

"That is what is known as a mystery," he said, and, seeing the man's eyes keenly searching his face, he laughed aloud. "It wasn't me, Porter. I'll assure you on that point. And as to me being a friend of Jeff—he made a wry little face—"that isn't like me either. How are you off for money?"

"Rotten," said the other laconically, and Johnny slipped a couple of treasury notes onto the tray.

He was turning away when the man called him back.

"Keep out of boob," he said significantly. "And don't think I'm handing round good advice. I'm not thinking of Dartmoor. There are other boobs that are worse—I can tell you that, because I've seen most of them."

HE gathered up the money on the tray without so much as a word, and put it in his waistcoat pocket.

"Keytown jail is the worst prison in England," he said, not looking at his bene-

factor but staring straight ahead. "The very worst—don't forget that, Gray. Keytown prison is the worst boob in England; and if you ever find yourself there, do something to get out. So long!"

The mentality of the criminal had been a subject for vicarious study during Johnny's stay in Dartmoor, and he mused on the man's words as he continued his walk along Regent Street. Here was a man offering advice which he himself had never taken.

The moral detachment of old lags was no new phenomenon to Johnny. He had listened for hours to the wise admonitions and warnings of convicts, who would hardly be free from the cells of the prison before they would be planning new villainies, new qualifications for their return.

He had never heard of Keytown jail before, but it was not remarkable that Fenner should have some special grudge against a particular prison. The criminal classes have their likes and their dislikes; they loathed Wandsworth and preferred Pentonville, or vice versa, for no especial reason. There were those who swore by Parkhurst; others regarded Dartmoor as home, and bitterly resented any suggestion that they should be transferred to the island prison.

So musing, he bumped into Craig. The collision was not accidental, for Craig had put himself in the way of the abstracted young man.

"What are you planning, Johnny—a jewel robbery, or just ringing the changes on the Derby favorite?"

Johnny chuckled.

"Neither. I was at that moment wondering what there was particularly bad about Keytown jail. Where is Keytown jail, by the way?"

"Keytown? I don't remember—oh, yes, I do. Just outside Oxford. Why?"

"Somebody was telling me it was the worst prison in England."

"They are all the worst, Johnny," said Craig. "And if you're thinking out a summer holiday, I can't recommend either. Keytown was pretty bad," he admitted. "It is a little country prison, but it is no

longer in the prison commissioners' hands. They sold it after the war, when they closed down so many of these little prisons.

"The policy now is to enlarge the bigger places and cut out these expensive little boobs that cost money to staff. They closed Hereford in the same way, and half a dozen others, I should think. So you needn't bother about Keytown." He smiled bleakly. "One of your criminal acquaintances has been warning you, I guess?"

"You've guessed right," said Johnny, and advanced no information, knowing that, if Craig continued his walk, he would sooner or later see the toy peddler.

"Mr. Jeffrey Legge is making a good recovery," said the detective, changing the subject; "and there are great rejoicings at Scotland Yard. If there is one man we want to keep alive until he is hanged in a scientific and lawful manner, it is Mr. Jeffrey Legge.

"I know what you're going to say—we've got nothing on him. That is true. Jeffrey has been too clever for us. He has got his father skinned to death in that respect. He makes no mistakes—a rare quality in a forger; he carries no slush, keeps none in his lodgings.

"I can tell you that, because we've pulled him in twice on suspicion, and searched him from occiput to *tendo Achillis*. Forgive the anatomical terms, but anatomy is my hobby. Hullo!"

HE was looking across the street at a figure which was familiar to Johnny. Mr. Reeder wore a shabby frock coat and a somewhat untidy silk hat on the back of his head. Beneath his arm he carried a partially furled umbrella.

His hands, covered in gray cotton gloves—at a distance Johnny thought they were suède—were clasped behind him. His spectacles were, as usual, so far down his nose that they seemed in danger of slipping over.

"Do you know that gentleman?"

"Man named Reeder, isn't it? He's a detective."

Craig's lips twitched.

"He's certainly a detective of sorts," he said dryly, "but not of our sort."

"He is a bank man, isn't he?" asked Johnny, watching Mr. Reeder's slow and awkward progress.

"He is in the employ of the bank," said the detective, "and he's not such a fool as he looks. I happen to know."

"He was down seeing young Legge yesterday. I was curious enough to put a man on to trail him. And he knows more about young Legge than I gave him credit for."

When Johnny parted from the detective, Mr. Reeder had passed out of sight. Crossing Piccadilly Circus, however, he saw the elderly man waiting in a bus queue, and interestedly stood and watched him until the bus arrived and Mr. Reeder boarded the machine and disappeared into its interior. As the bus drew away, Johnny raised his eyes to the destination board and saw that it was Victoria.

"I wonder," said Johnny, speaking his thought aloud.

For Victoria is the railway station for Horsham.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LOVER OF GARDENS.

MR. REEDER descended from the bus at Victoria Station, bought a third-class return ticket to Horsham, then, going on to the bookstall, purchased copies of the *Economist* and the *Poultry World*, and, thus fortified for the journey, passed through the barrier, and, finding an empty carriage, ensconced himself in one corner. From thence onward, until the train drew into Horsham Station, he was apparently alternately absorbed in the eccentricities of Wyandottes and the fluctuation of the franc.

There were many cabs at the station, willing and anxious to convey him to his destination for a trifling sum; but apparently Mr. Reeder was deaf to all the urgent offers which were made to him, for he looked through the taximen, or over their heads, as though there were no such things as grimy mechanics or drivers of

emaciated horses; and, using his umbrella as a walking stick, he set out to walk the distance intervening between the station and Peter Kane's residence.

Peter was in his snuggery, smoking a meditative cigar, when Barney came in with the news.

"There's an old guy wants to see you, Peter. I don't know who he is, but he says his name's Reeder."

Peter's brows met.

"Reeder?" he said sharply. "What sort of man is he?"

"An old fellow," said Barney. "Too shaky for a busy. He looks as if he's trying to raise subscriptions for the old chapel organ."

It was not an unfair description, as Peter knew.

"Bring him here, Barney, and keep your mouth shut. And bear in mind that this is the busiest busy you are ever likely to meet."

"A copper?" said Barney incredulously.

Peter nodded.

"Where's Marney?" he asked quickly.

"Up in her boojar," said Barney with relish. "She's writing letters. She wrote one to Johnny. It started: 'Dear old boy.'"

"How do you know?" asked Peter sharply.

"Because I read it," said Barney without shame. "I'm a pretty good reader; I can read things upside down, owing to me having been in the printing business when I was a kid."

"Bring in Mr. Reeder," interrupted Peter ominously. "And remember, Barney, that if ever I catch you reading anything of mine upside down, you will be upside down! And don't argue."

Barney left the room, uttering a mechanical defiance which such threats invariably provoked.

Mr. Reeder came in, his shabby hat in one hand, his umbrella in the other, and a look of profound unhappiness on his face.

"Good morning, Mr. Kane," he said, laying down his impedimenta. "What a beautiful morning it is for a walk! It is

a sin and a shame to be indoors on a day like this. Give me a garden, with roses, if I may express a preference, and just a faint whiff of heliotrope——"

"You'd like to see me in the garden, eh?" said Peter. "Perhaps you're wise."

Barney, his inquisitive ears glued to the keyhole, cursed softly.

"I was in a garden yesterday," murmured Mr. Reeder, as they walked across the lawn toward the sunken terraces. "Such a lovely garden! One bed was filled with blue flowers. There is something about a blue flower that brings a lump into my throat. Rhododendrons infuriate me: I have never understood why. There is that about a clump of rhododendrons which rouses all that is evil in my nature.

"Daffodils, on the other hand, and especially daffodils intermingled with hyacinths, have a most soothing effect upon me. The garden to which I refer had the added attraction of being on the edge of the sea—a veritable Garden of Eden, Mr. Kane, although"—he wagged his head from side to side disparagingly—"there were more snakes than is customary.

"There was a snake in a chair, and a snake who was posting letters in the village, and another official snake who was hiding behind a clump of bushes and had followed me all the way from London—sent, I think, by that misguided gentleman Mr. Craig."

"Where were you, Mr. Reeder?"

"At a seaside villa, a beautiful spot. A truly earthly paradise," sighed Mr. Reeder. "The very place an intelligent man would go to if he were convalescent, and the gentleman on the chair was certainly convalescent."

"You saw Jeff Legge, eh? Sit down."

He pointed to the marble bench where Johnny had sat and brooded unhappily on a certain wedding day.

"I think not," said Mr. Reeder, shaking his head as he stared at the marble seat. "I suffer from rheumatism, with occasional twinges of sciatica. I think I would rather walk with you, Mr. Kane."

He glanced at the hedge. "I do not like people who listen. Sometimes one

listens and hears too much. I heard the other day of a very charming man who happened to be standing behind a bush, and heard the direful character of his son-in-law revealed. It was not good for him to hear so much."

PETER knew that the man was speaking about him, but gave no sign.

"I owe you something, Mr. Reeder, for the splendid way you treated my daughter when——"

Mr. Reeder stopped him with a gesture.

"A very charming girl. A very lovely girl," he said with mild enthusiasm. "And so interested in chickens! One so seldom meets with women who take a purely sincere interest in chickens."

They had reached a place where it was impossible they could be overheard. Peter, who realized that the visitor would not have called unless he had something important to say, waited for the next move. Mr. Reeder returned to the subject of eavesdropping.

"My friend—if I may call him my friend—who learned by accident that his son-in-law was an infernal rascal—if you will excuse that violent expression—might have got himself into serious trouble, very serious trouble." He shook his head solemnly. "For you see," he went on, "my friend—I do hope he will allow me to call him my friend?—has something of a criminal past, and all his success has been achieved by clever strategy.

"Now, was it clever strategy"—he did not look at Peter, and his faded eyes surveyed the landscape gloomily—"was it clever of my friend to convey to Mr. Emanuel Legge the astounding information that at a certain hour, in a certain room—I think its number was thirteen, but I am not sure—Mr. John Gray was meeting Mr. J. G. Reeder to convey information which would result in Emanuel Legge's son going to prison for a long period of penal servitude?

"Was it wise to forge the handwriting of one of Emanuel Legge's disreputable associates, and induce the aforesaid Emanuel to mount the fire escape at the High-

low Club and shoot, as he thought, Mr. John Gray, who wasn't Mr. Gray at all, but his own son? I ask you, was it wise?"

Peter did not answer.

"Was it discreet, when my friend went to the hotel where his daughter was staying, and found her gone, to leave a scribbled note on the floor, which conveyed to Mr. Jeffrey Legge the erroneous information that the young lady was meeting Johnny Gray in room No. 13 at nine thirty? I admit," said Mr. Reeder handsomely, "that by these clever maneuvers, my friend succeeded in getting Jeffrey Legge just where he wanted him at the proper time; for Jeffrey naturally went to the Highlow Club in order to confront and intimidate his wife.

"You're a man of the world, Mr. Kane, and I am sure you will see how terribly indiscreet my friend was. For Jeffrey might have been killed." He sighed heavily. "His precious life might have been lost; and if the letters were produced at the trial, my friend himself might have been tried for murder."

He dusted the arm of his frock coat tenderly.

"The event had the elements of tragedy," he said, "and it was only by accident that Jeff's face was turned away from the door; and it was only by accident that Emanuel was not seen going out. And it was only by the sheerest and cleverest perjury that Johnny Gray was not arrested."

"Johnny was not there," said Peter sharply.

"On the contrary, Johnny was there—please admit that he was there?" pleaded Mr. Reeder. "Otherwise, all my theories are valueless. And a gentleman in my profession hates to see his theories suffer extinction."

"I'll not admit anything of the sort," said Peter sharply. "Johnny spent that evening with a police officer. It must have been his double."

"His treble perhaps," murmured the other. "Who knows? Humanity resembles, to a very great extent, the domestic fowl, *gallus domesticus*. One man resem-

bles another—it is largely a matter of plumage."

He looked up to the sky as though he were seeking inspiration from heaven itself.

"Mr. Jeffrey Legge has not served you very well, Mr. Kane," he said. "In fact, I think he has served you very badly. He is obviously a person without principle or honor, and deserves anything that may come to him."

Peter waited, and suddenly the man brought his eyes to the level of his.

"You must have heard, in the course of your travels, a great deal about Mr. Legge?" he suggested. "Possibly, more has come to you since this unfortunate, indeed dastardly happening, of which I cannot remind you without inflicting unnecessary pain. Now, Mr. Kane, don't you think that you would be rendering a service to human society if——"

"If I squealed," said Peter Kane quietly. "I'll put your mind at rest on that subject immediately. I know nothing of Jeffrey Legge, except that he's a blackguard. But if I did, if I had the key to his printing works, if I had evidence in my pocket of his guilt——" He paused.

"And if you had all these?" asked Mr. Reeder gently.

"I should not squeal," said Peter with emphasis, "because that is not the way. A squeal is a squeal, whether you do it in cold blood or in the heat of temper."

Again Mr. Reeder sighed heavily, took off his glasses, breathed on them and polished them with gentle vigor, and did not speak until he had replaced them.

"It is all very honorable," he said sadly. "This — er — faith and — er — integrity. Again the poultry parallel comes to my mind. Certain breeds of chickens hold together and have nothing whatever to do with other breeds, and, though they may quarrel among themselves, will fight to the death for one another. Your daughter is well, I trust?"

"She is very well," said Peter emphatically, "surprisingly so. I thought she would have a bad time. Here she is."

He turned at that moment and waved

his hand to the girl, who was coming down the steps of the terrace. "You know Mr. Reeder?" said Peter, as the girl came smiling toward the chicken expert with outstretched hand.

"Why, of course I know him," she said warmly. "You have almost persuaded me to run a poultry farm!"

"You might do worse," said Mr. Reeder gravely. "There are very few women who take an intelligent interest in such matters. Men are ever so much more interested in chickens."

PETER looked at him sharply. There was something in his tone, of unsuspected humor in his eyes, that lit and died in a sound, and Peter Kane was nearer to understanding the man at that moment than he had ever been before.

And here Peter took a bold step.

"Mr. Reeder is a detective," he said, "employed by the banks to try and track down the people who have been putting so many forged notes on the market."

"A detective!"

Her eyes opened wide in surprise, and Mr. Reeder hastened to disclaim the appellation.

"Not a detective. I beg of you not to misunderstand, Miss Kane. I am merely an investigator, an inquiry agent, not a detective. 'Detective' is a term which is wholly repugnant to me. I have never arrested a man in my life, nor have I authority to do so."

"At any rate, you do not look like a detective, Mr. Reeder," smiled the girl.

"I thank you," said Mr. Reeder gratefully. "I should not wish to be mistaken for a detective. It is a profession which I admire, but do not envy."

He took from his pocket a large note case and opened it. Inside, fastened by a rubber band in the center, was a thick wad of bank notes. Seeing them, Peter's eyebrows rose.

"You're a bold man to carry all that money about with you, Mr. Reeder," he said.

"Not bold," disclaimed the investigator.

"I am indeed a very timid man."

8A—POP.

He slipped a note from under the elastic band and handed it to his wondering host. Peter took it.

"A fiver," he said.

Mr. Reeder took another. Peter saw it was a hundred before he held it in his hand.

"Would you cash that for me?"

Peter Kane frowned.

"What do you mean?"

"Would you cash it for me?" asked Mr. Reeder. "Or perhaps you have no change? People do not keep such large sums in their houses."

"I'll change it for you with pleasure," said Peter, and was taking out his own note case when Mr. Reeder stopped him with a gesture.

"Forged," he said briefly.

Peter looked at the note in his hand.

"Forged? Impossible! That's a good note."

He rustled it scientifically and held it up to the light. The watermark was perfect. The secret marks on the face of the note, which he knew very well, were there. He moistened the corner of the note with his thumb.

"You needn't trouble," said Reeder. "It answers all the tests."

"Do you mean to tell me this is slush—I mean a forgery?"

The other nodded, and Peter examined the note again with a new interest. He who had seen so much bad money had to admit that it was the most perfect forgery he had ever handled.

"I shouldn't have hesitated to change that for you. Is all the other money the same?"

Again the man nodded.

"But is that really bad money?" asked Marney, taking the note from her father. "How is it made?"

Before the evasive answer came, she guessed. In a flash she pieced together the hints, the vague scraps of gossip she had heard from time to time about the Big Printer.

"Jeffrey Legge!" she gasped, going white. "Oh!"

"Mr. Jeffrey Legge," nodded Reeder.

"Of course, we can prove nothing. Now perhaps we can sit down."

IT was he who suggested that they should go to the garden seat. Not until, in his furtive way, he had circumnavigated the clump of bushes that hid the lawn from view, did he open his heart.

"I am going to tell you a lot, Mr. Kane," he said, "because I feel you may be able to help me, in spite of your principles. There are two men who could have engraved this note, one man who could manufacture the paper. Anybody could print it—anybody, that is to say, with a knowledge of printing.

"The two men are Lacey and Burnz. They have both been in prison for forgery; they were both released ten years ago, and since then have not been seen. The third man is a paper maker who was engaged in the bank-note works at Wellington. He went to penal servitude for seven years for stealing bank-note paper. He also has been released a very considerable time, and he also has vanished."

"Lacey and Burnz? I have heard of them. What is the other man's name?" asked Peter.

Mr. Reeder told him.

"Jennings? I never heard of him."

"You wouldn't, because he is the most difficult type of criminal to track. In other words, he is not a criminal in the ordinary sense of the word. I am satisfied that he is on the Continent because, to be making paper, it is necessary that one should have the most up-to-date machinery. The printing is done here."

"Where?" asked the girl innocently, and for the first time she saw Mr. Reeder smile.

"I want this man very badly, and it is a matter of interest for you, young lady, because I could get him to-morrow—for bigamy." He saw the girl flush. "Which I shall not do. I want Jeff the Big Printer, not Jeff the bigamist. And oh, I want him badly!"

A sound of loud coughing came from the lawn, and Barney appeared at the head of the steps.

"Anybody want to see Emanuel Legge?"

They looked at one another.

"I don't want to see him," said Mr. Reeder decidedly. He nodded at the girl. "And you don't want to see him. I fear that leaves only you, Mr. Kane."

CHAPTER XXII.

A DINNER INVITATION.

PETER was as cool as ice when he came into the drawing-room and found Emanuel examining the pictures on the wall with the air of a connoisseur. He turned and beamed a benevolent smile upon the man he hated.

"I didn't think you'd come here again, Legge," said Peter with dangerous calm.

"Didn't you, now?" Emanuel seemed surprised. "Well, why not? And me wanting to fix things up too! I'm surprised at you, Peter."

"You'll put nothing right," said the other. "The sooner you recognize that fact and clear, the better it will be for everybody."

"If I'd known," Emanuel went on, unabashed, "if I'd only dreamed that the young woman Jeffrey had taken up with was your daughter, I would have stopped it at once, Peter. The boy had been brought up straight and had never met you. It is funny the number of straight people that never met Peter Kane. Of course, if he'd been on the crook, he'd have known at once.

"Do you think my boy would have married the daughter of a man who twisted his father? Is it likely, Peter? However, it's done now, and what's done can't be undone. The girl's fond of him, and he's fond of the girl——"

"When you've finished being comic, you can go," said Peter. "I never laugh before lunch."

"Don't you, Peter? And not after? I've come at a very bad time, it seems to me. Now listen, Peter. Let's talk business."

"I've no business with you." Peter opened the door.

"Haste was always your weakness, Peter," said Emanuel, not budging from where he stood. "Never lose your temper. I lost my temper once and shot a copper, and did fifteen years for it. Fifteen years, while you were sitting here in luxury, entertaining the lords and ladies of the neighborhood, and kidding 'em you were straight. I'm going to ask you a favor, Peter."

"It is granted before you ask," said the other sardonically.

"I'm goin' to ask you and Johnny boy to come and have a bit of dinner with me and Jeffrey, and let us fix this thing up. You're not going to have this girl brought into the divorce court, are you? And you've got to get divorced, whether he's married or whether he isn't.

"As a matter of fact, he isn't married at all. I never dreamed you'd be such a mug as to fall for the story that Lila was properly married to Jeff. All these girls tell you the same thing. It's vanity, Peter, a human weakness, if I may so describe it."

"Perhaps it was the vanity of the registrar who signed their marriage certificate, and the vanity of the people who witnessed the marriage," said Peter. "Your son was married to this girl at the Greenwich registry office; I've got a copy of the certificate. You can see it if you like."

Still the smile on Emanuel's face did not fade.

"Ain't you smart?" he said admiringly. "Ain't you the quickest grafter that ever grafted? Married or not, Peter, the girl's got to go into the court for the marriage to be—what do you call it?—annulled, that's the word. And she can't marry till she does. And they'll never annul the marriage until you get my boy caught for bigamy, and that you won't do, Peter, because you don't want to advertise what a damned fool you are. Take my advice, come and talk it over. Bring Johnny with you."

"Why should I bring Johnny? I can look after myself."

"Johnny's an interested party," said the other. "He's interested in anything to do

with Marney, eh?" He chuckled, and for a second Peter Kane had all his work to maintain his calm.

"I'm not going to discuss Marney with you. I'll meet you and the Printer, and I don't suppose Johnny will mind either. Though what you can do that the law can't do, I don't know."

"I can give you evidence that you can't get any other way," said the other. "The fact is, Peter, my poor boy has realized he's made a mistake. He married a girl who was the daughter of a respectable gentleman, and when I broke it to him, Peter, that he'd married into a crook family, he was upset! He said I ought to have told him."

"I don't know what funny business you're going to try," said Peter Kane, "but I'm not going to run away from it. You want me to meet you and your son—where?"

"What about the old Highlow?" suggested Emanuel. "What about room No. 13, where a sad accident nearly occurred?"

"Where you shot your son?" asked Peter coolly, and only for a second did the man's self-possession leave him. His face turned a dusky red and then changed to pale yellow.

"I shot my son there, did I? Peter, you're getting old and dopy! You've been dreaming again, Peter. Shot my son!"

"I'll come to this fool dinner of yours."

"And Marney?" suggested the other.

"Marney doesn't put her foot inside the doors of the Highlow," said Peter calmly. "You're mad to imagine I would allow that. I can't answer for Johnny, but I'll be there."

"What about Thursday?" suggested the old man.

"Any day will suit me," said Peter impatiently. "What time do you want us?"

"Half past eight. Just a snack and a talk. We may as well have a bit of food to make it cheerful, eh, Peter? Remember that dinner we had a few days before we smashed the Southern Bank? That must be twenty years ago.

"You split fair on that, didn't you? I'll bet you did—I had the money! No taking

a million dollars and calling it a hundred and twenty thousand pounds, eh, Peter?"

THIS time Peter stood by the door, and the jerk of his head told Emanuel that the moment for persiflage had passed.

"I want to settle this matter." The earnestness of his manner did not deceive Peter. "You see, Peter, I'm getting old, and I want to go abroad and take the boy with me. And I want to give him a chance, too—a good-looking lad like that ought to have a chance. For I'll tell you the truth—he's a single man."

Peter smiled.

"You can laugh! He married Lila—you've got a record of that, but have you taken a screw at the divorce list? That takes the grin off your face. They were divorced a year after they were married. Lila got tired of the other man and came back to Jeff. You're a looker-up; go and look up that! Ask old Reeder——"

"Ask him yourself," said Peter. "He's in the garden."

He had no sooner said the words than he regretted them. Emanuel was silent for a while.

"So Reeder's here, in the garden, is he? He's come for a squeal. But you can't because you've nothing to squeal about. What does he want?"

"Why don't you ask him?"

"That fellow spends his life wandering about other people's gardens," grumbled Emanuel.

A disinterested observer might have imagined that Mr. Reeder's passion for horticulture was the only grievance against him.

"He was round my garden yesterday. I dare say he told you? Came worrying poor Jeff to death. But you always were fond of busies, weren't you, Peter? How's your old friend Craig? I can't stand them myself, but then, I am a crook. Thursday will suit you, Peter? That gives you six days."

"Thursday will suit me," said Peter. "I hope it will suit you."

As he came back onto the lawn, Reeder and the girl were coming into view up the

steps, and without preliminary he told them what had passed.

"I fear," said Mr. Reeder, shaking his head sadly, "that Emanuel is not as truthful a man as he might be. There was no divorce. I was sufficiently interested in the case to look up the divorce-court records."

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I think your dinner party at the Highlow—is that the name?—will be an interesting one," he said. "Are you sure he did not invite me?" And again Peter saw that glint of humor in his eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. LEGGE DOES A KINDNESS.

MR. EMANUEL LEGGE had a great deal of business to do in London. The closing of the club had sadly interfered with the amenities of the Highlow, for many of its patrons and members were, not unnaturally, reluctant to be found on premises subject, at any moment, to the visitation of inquisitive police officers.

Stevens, the porter, had been reinstated, though his conduct, in Emanuel's opinion, had been open to the gravest suspicion. In other ways he was a reliable man, and one whose services were not lightly to be dispensed with. To his surprise, when he had come to admonish the porter, that individual had taken the wind out of his sails by announcing his intention of retiring unless the staff was changed. And he had his way, the staff in question being the elevator boy Benny.

"Benny squealed on me," said Stevens briefly, "and I'm not going to have a squealer round."

"He squealed to me, my friend," said Emanuel, showing his teeth unpleasantly. "He told me you tried to shield Johnny Gray."

"He's a member, ain't he?" asked the porter truculently. "How do I know what members you want put away, and what members you want hidden? Of course, I helped the captain—or thought I was trying to help him. That's my job."

There was a great deal of logic in this. Benny, the elevator boy, was replaced.

Stepping out of the lift, Emanuel saw the prints of muddy boots in the hall, and they were wet.

"Who is here?" he asked.

"Nobody in particular."

Legge pointed to the footprints.

"Somebody has been here recently," he said.

"They're mine," said Stevens without hesitation. "I went out to get a cab for Monty Ford."

"Are there any mats?" snapped Emanuel.

Stevens did not answer.

There was a great deal of work for Emanuel to do. For example, there was the matter of a certain house in Berkeley Square to be cleared off. Though he was no longer in active work, he did a lot of crooked financing, and the house had been taken with his money. It was hired furnished for a year, and it was the intention of his associates to run an exclusive gambling club.

Unfortunately, the owner, who had a very valuable collection of paintings and old jewelry, discovered the character of the new tenant—a dummy of Legge's—and had promptly canceled the agreement. Roughly, the venture had cost Emanuel a thousand, and he hated losing good money.

It was late that night when he left the club. He was sleeping in town, intending to travel down to his convalescent son by an early train in the morning. It had been raining heavily, and the street was empty when he went out of the club, pulling the collar of his mackintosh about his neck.

He had taken two strides when a man stepped out of the shadow of a doorway and planted himself squarely in his path. Emanuel's hand dropped to his pocket, for he was that rarest variety of criminal, an English gunman.

"Keep your artillery out of action, Legge," said a voice that was strangely familiar.

He peered forward, but in the shadow he could not distinguish the stranger's face.

"Who are you?"

"An old friend of yours," was the reply. "Don't tell me you've forgotten all your pals! Why, you'll be passing a guard in the street one of these days without touching your hat to him."

And then it dawned upon Emanuel.

"Oh—you're Fenner, aren't you?"

"I'm Fenner," admitted the man. "Who else could I be? I've been waiting to see you, Mr. Emanuel Legge. I wondered if you would remember a fellow you sent to the triangle—fifteen lashes I had."

"You've never had a bashing, have you, Legge? It's not so nice as you'd think. When they'd took me back to my cell and put that big bit of lint on my shoulder, I laid on my face for well-nigh a week."

"Naturally, that interfered with my sleeping, though it helped me a whole lot to think. And what I thought was this, Emanuel, that a thousand a stroke wouldn't be too much to ask from the man who got it for me."

Legge's lip twisted in a sneer.

"Oh, it's blackmail you're after, is it? Fifteen thousand pounds—is that your price?"

"I could do a lot with fifteen thousand, Legge. I can go abroad and have a good time—maybe take a house in the country."

"What's the matter with Dartmoor?" snarled Emanuel. "You'll get no fifteen thousand from me—not fifteen thousand cents, not fifteen thousand grains of sand. Get out of my way!"

He lurched forward, and the man slipped aside. He had seen what was in the old man's hand.

Legge turned as he passed, facing him and walking sidewise, alert to meet any attempt which was launched.

"That's a pretty gun of yours, Legge," drawled the convict. "Maybe I shall meet you one of these days when you won't be in a position to pull it."

A thought struck Emanuel Legge, and he walked slowly back to the man, and his tone was mild, even conciliatory.

"What's the good of making a fuss,

Fenner? I didn't give you away. Half a dozen people saw you cosh that guard."

"But half a dozen didn't come forward, did they?" asked Fenner wrathfully. "You were the only prisoner; there was not a guard in sight."

"That's a long time ago," said Emanuel after a pause. "You're not going to make any trouble now, are you? Fifteen thousand pounds is out of the question. It is ridiculous to ask me for that. But if a couple of hundred will do you any good, why, I'll send it to you."

"I'll have it now," said Fenner.

"You won't have it now, because I haven't got it," replied Emanuel. "Tell me where you're to be found, and I'll send a boy along with it in the morning."

Fenner hesitated. He was surprised even to touch for a couple of hundred.

"I'm staying at Rowton House, Wimborne Street, Pimlico."

"In your own name?"

"In the name of Fenner," the other evaded, "and that's good enough for you."

Emanuel memorized the address.

"It will be there at ten o'clock," he said. "You're a mug to quarrel with me. I could put you on to a job where you could have made not fifteen, but twenty thousand."

ALL the anger had died out of the burglar's tone when he asked: "Where?"

"There's a house in Berkeley Square," said Emanuel quickly, and gave the number.

It was providential that he had remembered that white elephant of his. And he knew, too, that at that moment the house was empty but for a caretaker.

"Just wait here," he said, and went back into the club and to his little office on the third floor.

Opening a drawer of his desk he took out a small bunch of keys, the duplicates that had been made during the brief period that the original keys had been in his possession. He found Fenner waiting where he had left him.

"Here are the keys. The house is empty. One of our people borrowed the

keys and got cold feet at the last minute. There's about eight thousand pounds' worth of jewelry in a safe—you can't miss it. It is in the principal drawing-room—in show cases—go and take a look at it. And there's plate worth a fortune."

The man jingled the keys in his hand.

"Why haven't you gone after it?"

"Because it's not my graft," said Emanuel. "I'm running straight now. But I want my cut, Fenner. Don't run away with any idea that you're getting this for nothing."

"You've got a couple of nights to do the job; after that, you haven't the ghost of a chance, because the family will be coming back."

"But why do you give it to me?" asked Fenner, still suspicious.

"Because there's nobody else," was the almost convincing reply. "It may be that the jewelry is not there at all," went on Emanuel frankly. "It may have been taken away. But there is plenty of plate."

"I wouldn't have given it to you if I'd got the right man—I doubt whether I'm going to get my cut from you."

"You'll get your cut," said the other roughly. "I'm a fool to go after this, knowing what a squealer you are, but I'll take the risk. If you put a point on me over this, Emanuel, I'll kill you. And I mean it."

"I'm sick of getting news about my murder," said Emanuel calmly. "If you don't want to do it, leave it. I'll send you up a couple of hundred in the morning, and that's all I'll do for you. Give me back those keys."

"I'll think about it," said the man, and turned away without another word.

It was one o'clock, and Emanuel went back to the club, working the automatic lift himself to the second floor.

"Everybody gone, Stevens?" he asked.

THE porter stifled a yawn and shook his head.

"There's a lady and a gentleman"—he emphasized the word—"in No. 8. They've been quarreling since nine o'clock. They ought to be finished by now."

"Put my office through to the exchange," said Emanuel.

Behind the porter's desk was a small switchboard, and he thrust in the two plugs. Presently the disk showed him that Emanuel was through.

Mr. Legge had many friends among the minor members of the criminal-investigation department. They were not inexpensive acquaintances, but they could on occasion be extremely useful and were worth remembering.

That night, in some respects, Emanuel's luck was in, when he found Sergeant Shilto in his office. There had been a jewel theft at one of the theaters, which had kept the sergeant busy.

"Is that you, Shilto?" asked Legge in a low voice. "It's Manileg." He gave his telegraphic address, which also served as

a *nom de plume* when such delicate negotiations as these were going through.

"Yes, Mr. Manileg?" said the officer, alert, for Emanuel did not call up police headquarters unless there was something unusual afoot.

"Do you want a cop—a real one?" asked Legge in a voice little above a whisper.

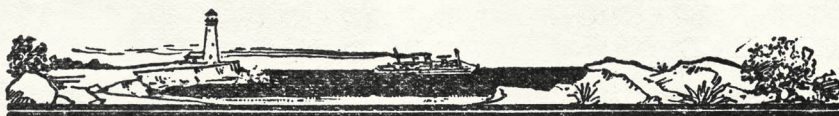
"There's a man named Fenner——"

"The old lag?" asked Shilto. "Yes, I saw him to-day. What's he doing?"

"He's knocking off a little silver from No. 973 Berkeley Square. Be at the front door; you'll probably see him go in. You want to be careful, because he's got a gun. If you hurry, you'll get there in front of him. Good night."

He hung up the receiver and smiled. The simplicity of the average criminal always amused Emanuel Legge.

To be concluded in the next issue of THE POPULAR, on the news stands September 20th.



INK HOUNDS IN HIGH PLACE

IN the picturesque jargon of the journalist an ink hound is the man who believes that the immortality of fame can be won through a baptism in ink. He is the individual who labors, conspires, plots, schemes and supplicates to have his name printed in the newspapers with a far greater frequency than is warranted by his achievements. In brief, he seeks to make publicity take the place of accomplishment as a means of establishing his "greatness." And he is found in every community from Horseshoe Gap to the Congress of the United States.

When Mr. Gillett surrendered the gavel of the speakership of the House in the last Congress to be sworn in as a senator from Massachusetts, he delivered a farewell address to his old associates in which he paid his sincere respects to these congressional seekers after notoriety, thus:

"I often think what a distorted idea of our membership the readers of the *Congressional Record* must form. They see the men who strive to make themselves conspicuous, they read the carefully revised and extended remarks of the men who use the *Record* for self-advertisement, and they most often imagine that men are leaders whose influence is the most insignificant and whose advocacy of a measure harms rather than helps it."

That is to say, the man who has to be his own press agent usually falls down on his job.



Twenty-one and Three Fourths

By C. Maxwell

Let a man set out to dupe the world at large, and he won't be long without keen competition. Tobe Hammond discovered this truth and a kind of race horse he had never seen before.

THE cashier of the Haleyburg State Bank, Amos Pinckney, sidled into Tobe Hammond's tiny private office.

"Here's the statement, Mr. Hammond."

"What statement?"

"The condition of the bank at the close of business the end of last month, Mr. Hammond."

"Well, why didn't you say so? Give it here."

Hammond was not expert in reading balance sheets. His mind persisted in being confused by the fact that such highly respectable items as capital, surplus, reserves and deposits must appear under the hateful heading, "Liabilities." He stared at the statement and scratched his head.

"Let's see now: Capital, fifty thousand; surplus, sixty-one; that means the bank is worth a hundred and eleven thousand, don't it?"

"Yes, sir. Or to be exact one hundred

and eleven thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars and fifty-seven cents."

"How much did we put away to surplus last month?"

"A little over twenty-four hundred dollars, Mr. Hammond."

"That's right good, this time of year."

"Yes. I thought it was very good. By the way, Mr. Hammond, there is a matter which I have been wanting to mention to you for some time. Even here in Haleyburg it is very difficult to support a family of five on one hundred dollars a month."

Tobe Hammond's moonlike face became stern and his little eyes narrowed.

"Look here, Pinckney, as I told you a year ago when you struck the bank for a raise, we got to consider the stockholders. Cotton don't look none too good and you know there ain't no money in cattle. I reckon we got to stop lending money on cattle except maybe where a man is raising heavy stuff and sells 'em as yearlings. No, sir, Pinckney, it wouldn't be

fair to the stockholders. It ain't like I owned all the stock. You got to have patience, Pinckney. Now give me a chance to study on this statement."

Hammond fished a note broker's circular out of his wastebasket and frugally made use of a blank space to prepare a rough outline of his own financial condition. There were no liabilities to confuse him, but there was a problem in arithmetic which taxed his faculties. His solicitude concerning the stockholders of the bank was not surprising in view of the fact that he owned ninety-three per cent of the bank's stock.

How much was ninety-three per cent of one hundred and eleven thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars and fifty-seven cents? To simplify the calculation, he eliminated the odd dollars and cents. His first result was one hundred and thirteen thousand two hundred and thirty dollars. That couldn't be right. He threw the circular away and figured on the back of the envelope in which it had been mailed. This time he got one hundred and three thousand two hundred and thirty dollars as the answer to his problem.

"Reckon that's about right," he muttered.

Tobe had the habit of talking to himself when wrestling with figures.

"Put the ranch down at thirty thousand," he continued. "The Herefords, bulls and all, are worth twenty thousand. Them thoroughbred stallions and the half-breed mares and the polo ponies that are coming along would bring another twenty. The house here in town is good for eight thousand and I got fifteen thousand on deposit.

"Without counting nothing else, that makes me worth within four thousand of two hundred thousand dollars. And I didn't put in Red Fox. He's cheap at four thousand just as a betting proposition in quarter races. Two hundred thousand—not so bad for a fellow that had as much to contend with as I did. Getting a hold of this bank was the best move I ever made."

He reviewed in his mind the tedious

processes by which he had acquired control of the bank from Darcy Haley, who inherited it from his father, old Colonel John, the founder of Haleyburg. It had taken over two years to win thirty-four thousand dollars from Darcy at stud poker.

The rest of the money had come out of Tobe's pocket in the shape of usurious loans to finance young Haley's trips to New York and his repeated attempts to beat the races, the stock market, roulette or any other game that was difficult to beat.

TOBE was struck by momentary self-commiseration that Darcy had not been content to lose all of his money in Haleyburg, but reflected that perhaps it was just as well, since there had been considerable talk about the way the cards ran in several of the stud games when Darcy had partaken liberally of the whisky which Tobe obligingly provided for the players.

Hammond closed his desk and yawned. By this time some of the usual group would be seated under the big cottonwood in front of the Alamo Hotel. He decided to join them and see what gossip was in the air.

Doc Montgomery's farsighted eyes observed Hammond emerge from the bank and turn up the street toward the Alamo Hotel.

"Here comes our local Shylock," he remarked.

"Appears like you don't care much for Tobe Hammond, the way you are all the time slurring him," remarked "Sim" Bradley, who ran the implement and fertilizer store.

"Do you think he's justly entitled to respect?"

"Well, he's the richest man in town and he made it all himself. He might be a little overreaching, but I reckon most of us would like to have what he's got."

"Not if I had to cheat a girl and teach a boy to drink and gamble in order to get it," Doc asserted.

"You mean Mary Lee Haley? How could Tobe cheat her? Colonel John

didn't leave her nothing but the house and the personal effects."

"No, but the will stipulated Darcy was to provide for her and you might say Mary Lee had a half interest in every dollar Hammond won away from Darcy or encouraged him to squander up North. And he wasn't satisfied with that, but had to turn in and help Darcy persuade her to mortgage the roof over her head so Darcy could take a whirl at an oil-well proposition that Tobe steered him against. I understand Tobe got half of that money. Do you think that's honest money?"

"It was the colonel's fault," Bradley defended. "He should have left Mary Lee's share in trust. The way it was left, if Tobe hadn't got the Haleys' money somebody else would."

"Colonel John didn't want two factions in the bank and had no reason to think Darcy would turn out the way he did. You know yourself, Sim, that the boy was all right until Tobe got him to drinking and playing cards."

The quavering voice of "Uncle Ben" Atkins interrupted: "I heard this morning that the mortgage on the Haley homestead is due next month. I don't guess Mary Lee can raise the money. You reckon Tobe will foreclose on her? Maybe she can get somebody to take up the mortgage and carry it. What you think?"

Sim Bradley shook his head. "It ain't a real good loan. I never quite could understand why Tobe loaned ten thousand on the property, even though the house did cost twice that. It's too good a house for Haleyburg. I always suspicioned that Tobe figured things might work around so Mary Lee would be willing to become Mrs. Hammond and that maybe was what made him so liberal."

"Tobe Hammond marry a girl like Mary Lee Haley!" Doc exclaimed. "He ought to be lynched if he tried anything like that. He isn't fit to marry a Mexican."

"Oh, I don't know, Doc. Worse things might happen to Mary Lee. She's got nobody but Darcy and he's up North and ain't worth the powder to blow him up."

Doc Montgomery's retort was checked by Tobe's near approach.

"Good evening, gentlemen. How are you-all?"

"How are you this evening, Mr. Hammond?"

"Tolerable, Sim. I can't complain. Feels a little like rain, don't it?"

"Wouldn't be surprised if it didn't rain before morning," Sim Bradley agreed, although his language seemed to imply disagreement.

A stranger lurched down the steps of the Alamo Hotel and approached the group beneath the cottonwood.

"Any of you fellers got a match?" he inquired.

The man was loudly dressed and appeared to be under the influence of liquor. Tobe looked at him with disapproval and replied tartly:

"Most probably they got matches in the hotel."

"I know they have, Hiram, but they got 'em locked in the safe and the clerk's asleep. Nice little feller and I don't want to wake him up. He can't stand more than about four shots of this high-powered hooch."

"Who you calling Hiram, mister?" Tobe demanded.

THE brilliantly attired stranger swayed slightly and leered at Tobe.

"Ain't your name Hiram? You look like a Hiram to me."

Hammond spat in disgust.

"You better go buy yourself some matches and then sleep off that jag you got."

"I can buy what I want," the stranger asserted as he exhibited a large roll of money, which seemed to be chiefly in denominations of one hundred and five hundred dollars. Tobe observed a thousand-dollar bill and thought that he saw a second one, but could not be sure.

Carelessly restoring the money to his pocket, the man reentered the hotel.

"Who is that hombre?" Hammond inquired.

Sim Bradley paused, in the act of de-

taching a generous chewing portion from a twist of Burley, to reply:

"He's a Yankee drummer that's been on a drunk. Got fired by telegraph this morning, so the depot agent told me. His name is McClintock."

"Where you reckon he gets himself all that money, Sim?"

"They say he got lucky in a big crap game down to El Paso with a lot of North-erners and maybe some of them El Paso sports. Most probably that's what starts him off on this bat."

Tobe pondered for a moment.

"Appears to me, Sim, like it would be a good idea to invite him up to the club-room to-night for a little game of poker."

"I can't very well get away to-night, account of Christian Endeavor. I promised Mis' Bradley I'd sure take her."

"Well, you can drop in later. We won't hardly get started until after Christian Endeavor is out. You see if Levi or that hotel clerk can't put the card-playing hanker into this Yankee's head. I'll speak to 'Slim' Ricketts and Joe Kilgore and maybe get Levi to fill in."

DOC MONTGOMERY smiled. He had noticed a bulge under McClintock's coat which he first had thought was caused by a whisky flask, but it wasn't in quite the right location for that and Doc decided it must be a pistol conveniently holstered under the man's left arm.

He reflected that men who carry pistols under their armpits are sometimes rather dangerous to fool with and he wondered if Tobe had not misjudged the drummer. However, with Slim Ricketts and Joe Kilgore in the game, there wasn't much that one man could do with a gun as they were both quicker than the average when a dispute arose.

Tobe chanced to look down the street.

"Dogged if there ain't a rider with a pack horse! First time I seen that in years."

The rider pulled up at the watering trough directly in front of Hammond and his companions. He was an undersized man of doubtful age. Contrary to the

custom of the country, he offered no word of greeting, but silently dismounted and, detaching a bucket from the small pack on the led animal's back, filled it at the pump, unbridled his mount and allowed the horse to drink sparingly. The pack horse was permitted to drink his fill from the trough.

Tobe Hammond was a horseman and appreciated the significance of the care which the little man was bestowing upon the handsome black horse from which he had dismounted. The pack horse was a raw-boned chestnut and, although he showed signs of breeding, evidently deserved no greater attention than he had received. If he contracted some equine malady from the watering trough, it would not greatly matter.

The black was a thoroughbred and built to be a distance runner—short-coupled, short-legged, deep through the heart, a beautiful head; in fact, he seemed to have everything a stayer should have.

Tobe broke the silence.

"Brother, that's a right nice horse you got there."

For a moment it appeared that the little man would not reply, but he finally said in a listless tone:

"He's a fair kind of a horse."

"Going to the races?"

"Wheelock."

"Did you run at Dodgetown?"

"Won the Derby and a couple of mile dashes."

"Did they have any betting at Dodge-town?"

"The sheriff let 'em run three mutuel machines until after the last race the last day. Then he pinched the guys that was with the machines."

"Get any price on your horse?"

"He was a fair price account of me running against that horse Buckhorn that was so good at Tia Juana last spring. They seemed to keep thinking I couldn't beat him the next time and so there was plenty money showed for Buckhorn all three starts."

"You must have cleaned up good."

"I won considerable for a bush meet-

ing. Say, is there a livery stable here where I could put these horses to-night?"

"Yes, sir, right up the street where you see that sign, 'Garage.' It's next to the garage on the other side. Same man runs both places."

The little man slipped the bridle onto the black horse, picked up the chestnut's halter strap and trudged up the dusty street toward the livery stable with his charges.

Tobe squinted reflectively.

"That fellow must won a right smart of money down to Dodgetown. Do you reckon, Sim, I could get him to match his black horse a quarter of a mile against Red Fox?"

"That black horse ain't no quarter horse and I think this fellow is too wise to run him against a quarter horse."

"Maybe he might do it, Sim. Them race-track fellows don't think much of our quarter horses—not until they've seen 'em run. I've heard race-track men say us country fellows don't even know how to catch time with a stop watch and that we time a horse too fast. If this man ain't wised up on quarter racing, he might run me. Anyhow it won't do no harm to ask."

"Suppose it rains and gets muddy so you can't run Red Fox. Is Thunderclap ready?"

"Yes, I've had him in town for almost a month, breezing him and Red Fox together. They went an eighth this morning, head and head, in eleven and two fifths."

TOBE HAMMOND had a method of his own in matching horses. He believed Red Fox to be the fastest horse in the Southwest for a quarter of a mile on a dry track, but Red Fox could not run well in muddy going. On the other hand, Thunderclap, originally meant to be a polo pony and trained on turf for that purpose, could beat any horse in the mud that Red Fox could beat on a fast track. Accordingly Tobe, where possible, matched a race to be run rain or shine with no horse named in advance by either party.

In due time the little man returned and without a word started to ascend the steps of the hotel.

Hammond called to him: "Come and rest yourself, brother, and cool off."

The man hesitated, but finally seated himself in the remaining vacant chair.

"I see you're roading it instead of shipping on the train," Tobe observed.

"Yes. Where there's plenty of time, it's better than shipping in box cars and besides you don't have to unload at them shipping pens where there might have been sick horses the day before for all you know."

"You take mighty good care of that black horse."

"He had distemper once and I come near losing him."

"He looks like a stayer, Mister—I don't believe I got your name."

"Mooney, Tom Mooney."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Mooney. My name is Hammond. I own the bank down the street. You may have noticed it as you rode by. As I was saying, he looks like a stayer and I was wondering if he also has speed."

"Nowadays," Mooney replied, "you're out of luck in almost any kind of a race unless your horse has got early speed. My horse run the first quarter of the Dodge-town Derby in twenty-four and a half over that slow half-mile track they got down there."

"That's flying—for Dodgetown," Tobe agreed. "Say, Mooney, I got a little horse I'd like to have you look at. He's three quarters thoroughbred and I've won a right smart of quarter races with him around in the country here. It's only three blocks and won't take but a few minutes. We'll look at the horse and then I'll have my house boy mix us a toddy from real pre-Volstead bourbon."

The toddy seemed to produce a favorable decision in Mooney's mind. As he and Hammond departed, Tobe reminded Bradley to be sure to see Levi.

"Reckon I might as well do it now," Sim remarked, and entered the hotel in search of its proprietor, Levi Leadbeater,

or his clerk, Lon Blodgett, who on more than one occasion had steered unwary strangers into No. 53, the so-called club-room.

"Ain't Tobe a wonder, Doc. The minute he sees a dollar, he lays plans to snare it and most generally lands it. Them that has, gets, as the saying is."

Doc Montgomery did not reply to Uncle Ben's question, but got slowly to his feet.

"Reckon I'll go homē, Uncle Ben, and water my garden before supper."

As he strode away toward his residence, Montgomery turned over a question of ethics in his mind. Should he warn the drummer to stay out of room No. 53, and perhaps inform the race-horse man that Red Fox recently had run a quarter of a mile in twenty-two and one fifth seconds?

IN speaking of his plans with such indifference as to who overheard, Hammond had obviously relied on the small-town tendency to make common cause against a stranger, so Doc Montgomery decided that his lips were sealed by the fact that the banker had virtually made a confidant of him.

Montgomery conceded that small-town people must necessarily have small-town ways, but marveled at the meanness of spirit which caused the people of Haleyburg to treat Tobe Hammond as a respected citizen. His reflections were interrupted by Mary Lee Haley, whose approach he had not observed.

"Listen, Doctor Montgomery, please won't you get your medicine bag and call on Maria Santa Ana—you know whom I mean—that old Mexican woman who lives down by the railroad track? She's right sick and she doesn't want a doctor because of the expense, but I told her it wouldn't cost anything. I'll pay you, doctor."

"You'll pay me?"

Miss Haley's lithe body stiffened slightly and there was a momentary flash of annoyance in her brown eyes.

"Yes, indeed! I'll pay you in advance, too. For how many visits shall I pay?"

"My dear young lady, I'll look after Maria, but don't imagine you can pay me anything for it."

"Doctor Montgomery, are you saying that because you think I haven't any money?"

"If you had a million, it would be just the same."

"No, I don't believe it would, doctor. I know every one thinks I am practically a pauper and I can imagine what they say about Darcy, but I'd like to have you know that since he went away he has been sending me an allowance every month. For certain reasons it was sent in currency by registered mail, which is probably why the town gossips didn't hear of it. And, another thing, Doctor Montgomery, you know about the mortgage on the old place—every one does. Well, it's due next month and Darcy says he is pretty sure the money will be here to pay it."

"Mary Lee, I am mighty glad to hear that, mighty glad. It will put Darcy in a different light in the eyes of the people of Haleyburg."

"But, doctor, you please mustn't say a word. When the mortgage is lifted will be time enough for them to know."

Doc Montgomery looked somewhat disappointed as he replied: "I won't say a word, Mary Lee, but I'd like to—particularly to Sim Bradley. But I reckon it's best to keep quiet. Something might happen to upset Darcy's calculations."

"Yes, that's true, but he seemed very confident. Now you won't forget to call on Maria right after supper?"

"You can rely upon me for anything except murder, and if you pick the right people I might not draw the line there."

"Doctor, you really are a dear. Adios!"

As Doc Montgomery's eyes followed Miss Haley's retreating figure, he remarked to himself:

"She knows how to walk, has good teeth, fine eyes and a good skin, but she's a little under weight—wrong diet most likely. I'll have to find out what she eats."

When Sim Bradley's negotiations with the hotel proprietor were concluded, he

returned to his former seat under the cottonwood, where Uncle Ben Atkins was patiently waiting for something to happen.

"Is everything all fixed, Sim?"

"Is what fixed?"

"What Tobe told you."

"I reckon so, but it ain't a good idea to talk about it."

"You can trust me, Sim. I wouldn't say a word. All I hope is you get that Yankee drummer into a game. Do you calculate Tobe can prevail on that other stranger to run his black horse?"

"Here they come now. Don't have anything to say, Uncle Ben."

Mooney's reticence seemed to have been largely dispelled by Tobe Hammond's toddies.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Hammond, that's a nice little horse of yours, but I'll be honest with you and say I don't think he's got a chance to beat any good thoroughbred—not even an eighth of a mile, let alone a quarter."

Tobe understood the psychology of making match races. The proper procedure is to make preposterous claims concerning your own horse in a way that not only irritates your opponent, but also leads him to form a very low opinion of your sagacity.

"Mooney, you don't know my horse. Let me tell you something. Bob Wade holds the record at a quarter of a mile, don't he? Bob run a quarter at Butte, Montana, in twenty-one and a quarter. Well, I honestly think Red Fox is as fast a horse as Bob Wade ever was. I admit I ain't ever timed him that fast, but I got confidence no horse ever looked through a bridle that can outrun him a quarter of a mile."

"How fast did you ever time him?" Mooney inquired.

"Better than twenty-three seconds."

"Maybe you was slow in starting your watch. I seen lots of horses timed a second faster than they run and that makes a big difference when they're only going a quarter of a mile."

"Is that so?" Hammond retorted. "I

can time a horse just as good as you or anybody else. I bet I timed horses twenty different times."

"And I clocked that many or more, every morning, day after day for years. That's the difference between me and you."

"All right, maybe I didn't time him right, but I'm still a-bettin' my horse can beat your black horse a quarter of a mile."

"What's the use of us talking, Mr. Hammond? We're friends, ain't we? Then why should I wish to beat you, specially when I got to get along the road to-morrow morning? I tell you there ain't a chance for a cold-blooded horse to beat a good thoroughbred doing anything. The way they used to train thoroughbreds, it was different. In them days they didn't know how to fit a horse to go a distance and still keep his speed. Your little horse wouldn't have a chance with my black horse."

"Bet you five hundred I can beat you. We can run to-morrow evening and that will give you plenty of time to get up to Wheelock."

"Mr. Hammond, I don't wish to take your money."

"Are you sure you ain't afraid?"

"Afraid? No, sir, I ain't afraid. If that's the way you feel about it, go get a stakeholder."

"Here's one right here. Mr. Mooney, meet Mr. Bradley, one of our leading merchants."

Mooney gave Sim an indifferent glance as the introduction was acknowledged and began to fumble around his waistline beneath his shirt. He produced a money belt and placed its contents on his knee. Tobe's hasty appraisal placed the total amount at close to ten thousand dollars.

HOWEVER, Tobe did not regret that the match was for only five hundred a side. It had been his experience that the original side bets are only a small part of the total amount usually wagered on a quarter race.

Mooney selected a five-hundred-dollar note from his bank roll and Tobe produced

five one-hundred-dollar bills from a dilapidated note fold.

"What are the conditions of the race?" Sim demanded.

Tobe promptly replied: "Three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, rain or shine, quarter of a mile straightaway at catch-weights. Either party is privileged to run any horse he has on the grounds fifteen minutes before the race."

"What's the idea of that last part?" the race-horse man inquired.

Hammond took a squint at the lowering sun before answering.

"Just a custom we got around here so there won't be no argument about ringers. It helps you, because you're a stranger and your horse is a stranger. Don't really amount to much. I ain't got a better horse than Red Fox and if you got a better one than your black horse, you're welcome to run him."

"All right; here's my dough, Mr. Stakeholder."

As the three separated, Hammond remarked: "I might drop in at the hotel after supper, Mooney; maybe you'll feel like bettin' another hundred or so."

"Yes, maybe I might."

It was nine o'clock and Slim Ricketts and Joe Kilgore had been idling around the hotel office for some time when Tobe Hammond strolled in. He spoke in an undertone to Levi Leadbeater and the latter said:

"That drummer McClintock is in the billiard room, shooting dice on the pool table with the little race-horse man."

"How come they got hooked up together, Levi?"

"Why, when the word got around that the little fellow was fixing to run you a match against Red Fox, McClintock appeared to get right much interested and scraped up an acquaintance. Maybe you could get a bet out of McClintock. He appears to think no country horse can beat a race-track horse."

"Did you get him interested any in a nice friendly card game?"

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Hammond, I didn't. He's taken too much interest in

the horse race to get his mind onto anything else."

"Well, I reckon we might go in and watch the dice game. If they get their betting fever up, they might like to try stud for a while."

The dice had just been passed to McClintock, who appeared to be laboring under considerable excitement. Mooney was calm and seemed to be only slightly interested in the game. Each held a large roll of money in his hand.

"Shoot a hundred," McClintock announced.

"You're faded. Shoot!"

"It's a seven. Shoot two hundred."

The dice bounced back from the rail of the table and turned up two sixes.

"Can't get going," complained the drummer as he pushed the stakes over to Mooney and produced a five-hundred-dollar bill. "Shoot five hundred."

"Faded. Roll 'em out."

An eight came and then a seven. McClintock tossed the dice to his opponent. Mooney bet conservatively and succeeded in winning a hundred dollars before he was obliged to surrender the dice.

The drummer rolled the cubes between his hands, rubbed them on his trousers and finally blew on them, but indulged in none of the entreaties that amateurs and colored men frequently address to the dice in a crap game.

"Shoot five hundred."

"Shoot."

"Shoot a thousand."

"Shoot."

"Shoot two thousand."

"Shoot."

"Shoot four thousand."

"Shoot."

Tobe and his companions held their breath. Two fours showed and they were followed by a five and a three.

McClintock looked at Mooney's devastated bank roll and remarked: "Shoot any part of it."

"Wait until I count up." In a moment he said: "I got two thousand and fifty. Fade you for two thousand."

The next throw was a seven.

"Fastest crap game ever I saw," Slim Ricketts remarked in an awed manner.

TOBIE HAMMOND covetously eyed the pile of bills in front of McClintock. The two players stared at each other across the table. The door of the billiard room opened to admit Sim Bradley who, after intrusting his wife's homeward escort to next-door neighbors, hastened to the hotel as soon as the Christian Endeavor meeting was dismissed.

"Tell you what I'll do, McClintock," Mooney said. "I think them dice has cooled off and I'll fade you the five hundred I got bet on my horse. This gent who just came in is the stakeholder. I guess I can fix it with him."

"See anything green in my eye, Mooney? If I took you up and you lost the five hundred, what object would you have in running your horse to-morrow? If you don't run, I would lose the five hundred, wouldn't I?"

"Sure, but I'm going to run. If I don't run, I'll give you my black horse."

"Will you put that in writing?"

"You write it up any way to suit yourself."

McClintock laboriously scribbled a brief agreement and handed it to the race-track man.

Mooney read the paper carefully and said: "Let me have your pen."

McClintock tossed the signed agreement and a five-hundred-dollar bill upon the table.

"I'm faded for five hundred and I'm coming out—with a natural."

His prediction was fulfilled. A six and an ace were up when the dice stopped rolling.

The race-horse man showed no symptoms of emotion as he remarked: "You had a nice run of luck. I'm broke except for this fifty. I guess I'll go to bed. Don't be afraid to bet another five hundred on my horse to-morrow."

"Game little rooster," Tobe Hammond commented as the door closed upon the departing Mooney.

Levi Leadbeater cleared his throat.

"Mr. McClintock, let me make you acquainted with Mr. Hammond, our banker. He's the gentleman that owns Red Fox, the horse you're betting against. These other gentlemen are Mr. Bradley, Mr. Ricketts and Mr. Kilgore. We-all are aiming to go upstairs and play a little cards for a couple of hours. Maybe you would like to join us."

McClintock's lips curled as he observed "Must be fast workers, if two hours is enough."

"What do you mean, suh?"

"Oh, nothing much, except I never had any luck sitting in single-handed against a bunch of home talent down in this country. But I'm liable to be around to-morrow and bet a little more on that race. Good night, gents!"

Tobe spluttered: "The—the insulting Yankee hound! I would make a personal matter of his remarks only I want a chance to cut his comb to-morrow. After that, I don't care what happens to him."

Ricketts looked at Kilgore significantly.

Sim Bradley remarked: "Reckon there won't be no game to-night."

Dawn broke without hint of the rain which Tobe Hammond had predicted. That was well, for despite Thunderclap's ability as a mud runner, Tobe felt a trifle more secure when Red Fox was running for his money. As he pulled on his socks, he planned ways and means of inveigling McClintock into a large bet. The drummer's evident fondness for the bottle seemed to indicate the most practical method.

LEVI LEADBEATER and Lon Blodgett must see that McClintock was supplied with liquor and both of them must drink with him to insure the consumption of an ample quantity. Tobe decided to stop at the hotel and have this arranged. His methods were primitive, but they were usually successful.

Despite his stop at the Alamo Hotel, Hammond reached the bank before nine o'clock. He opened the mail which Amos Pinckney had laid upon his desk, but made very little sense of the letters. The remit-

tance items were handed to Pinckney and the remainder of the morning's mail was stuffed into a drawer of his desk for future attention. Tobe's mind temporarily had refused to concentrate on banking.

"Can I speak with you a minute, Mr. Hammond?"

He looked up and saw Mooney in the doorway.

"Certainly, Mooney, come right in. What you got on your mind this morning?"

"Mr. Hammond, it looks like I got to lose my black horse."

"Do you mean he's sick?"

"No, but I breezed him an eighth this morning and he pulled up lame. He won't do to run this afternoon."

Tobe got up and closed the door.

"You could run him anyway."

"No, I wouldn't do that. I'd rather lose him to that fellow McClintock than to ruin him. The race is off; that's all there is to it."

"Have you told anybody about this, Mooney?"

"No, I ain't said a thing."

"Does anybody down at the livery barn know he went lame?"

"No, I don't think so. I cooled him out as well as I could before I brought him to the stable. I come in the back way and there wasn't nobody around when I put him in his stall."

Tobe reflected a moment.

"You don't need to lose that horse, Mooney. The conditions of the race is that you can run any horse you have on the grounds fifteen minutes before the race."

"I don't see as that helps me any."

"Course it does. You can run that sorrel that you use as a pack horse."

"I'd get lynched."

"Who's going to lynch you? None of the home folks will bet against Red Fox. I might get a bet out of this McClintock, but he's the only one and it's certain sure we won't let him do you no mischief. Now let me make you a proposition, Mooney. You keep it quiet so nobody won't know about your black horse being lame and

I'll work on this McClintock and see if I can't get a bet out of him. You do that and I'll give you ten per cent of what I win from him, not counting the side bet."

"Looks kind of raw to me."

"Nothing is raw in the quarter-horse business, Mooney. Besides, nobody is going to suffer except this drummer and I don't guess that will worry you much after what he done to you last night."

"Well, Mr. Hammond, if you say there won't be trouble, I guess it's all right."

"Course it's all right! Now you go down to the stable and see that nobody gets a chance to find out that the black horse is lame. I reckon you got him in one of them box stalls?"

"Yes."

"Well, tie him up so he can't walk around and put straw in the stall clean up to his knees. Run along now and watch everything close."

Tobe Hammond rarely indulged in a smile of real joy. For the most part his smiles were of the make-believe kind, but this was an exceptional occasion. He smiled sincerely and ended with a chuckle.

Although he had instructed Levi and Lon to see that McClintock got two or three stiff drinks before breakfast, it was probably too early to expect the desired results. But he would better go over to the hotel and direct his aids to keep McClintock shut up in a room with themselves and plenty of whisky, so that he would hear nothing if any information did happen to leak out in regard to the black horse's lameness.

Tobe summoned Amos Pinckney.

"Make out a countercheck and bring me fifteen thousand dollars in the biggest bills you got."

Stuffing the money into his pocket, Tobe started for the hotel at a faster pace than he usually traveled.

"Where's McClintock?"

"Up in Lon's room. They've taken up two bottles of liquor and they sent down the second time for ice water. I reckon everything is rocking along all right, but I feel right sorry for Lon. He ain't recovered from yesterday yet."

"Never mind Lon. He'll be well paid for his headache. Reckon I'll sit down back of the desk and see what happens."

HOWEVER the news may have traveled, the people of surrounding ranches and near-by towns appeared to have been promptly informed of the match race at Haleyburg and by ten o'clock the main street was lined with buggies and automobiles.

The lobby of the Alamo was soon filled with men who wanted to bet on Red Fox, but were unable to find any supporters of his opponent. The cautious ones among them had visited the livery stable to see the black horse, but were firmly denied the privilege of inspection on the ground that strangers made him nervous.

The situation was developing in a disappointing manner. Usually there were plenty of betters on each side of a match race and no end of excitement.

Tobe Hammond from his listening post behind the hotel desk heard enough of the general conversation to satisfy himself that the unanimous sentiment in favor of his horse was likely to discourage McClintock from betting on Mooney's entry. He beckoned to Levi and whispered: "If McClintock comes down here into this crowd, he's mighty liable to get scared off. Let's go up to Lon's room where we can talk with him privatelike."

"I can't very well leave the desk with all this crowd here. They'll be wanting seegars," Levi protested.

"You come on, Levi. Missing the sale of two or three seegars ain't going to hurt you."

WHEN Tobe and Levi reached the stairway that led to the rooms, they observed two swaying figures with locked arms making a cautious descent. Tobe scrutinized McClintock carefully. Obviously he had been drinking, but he might not have reached the foolhardy stage. This could be quickly tested.

"Howdy, Mr. McClintock! I got to be getting over to the bank, but I understood last night that you might want to bet a

little mite more on Mooney's horse, so thought I'd speak to you about it."

"Maybe I want to bet and maybe I don't," McClintock responded. "In the first place, I'm not sure the race will be run; that is, I ain't sure enough to make any big bet. That horse of Mooney's might not be worth more than the five hundred I already got bet."

"That part is very easy fixed, Mr. McClintock. If there ain't a race, we draw our bets."

"Would that include the side bet?"

"No, that wouldn't hardly be fair and anyway you get the horse if there ain't a race."

"I'd rather have the five hundred than to take the fellow's horse away from him. I'll see you in a few minutes. First, I want to circulate around and get the noise. You be up there by the desk and I'll talk with you after I find out how they're betting."

Hammond bitterly reproached himself that he had not foreseen this development and planted some boosters in the crowd to bet among themselves and thus create the impression that Mooney's horse was being backed.

Presently McClintock and Lon Blodgett joined him at the desk. They were followed by a group of men who had learned that the drummer was backing the strange horse. McClintock shook his head.

"The way they're all talking, your horse will walk in. I wouldn't bet unless you laid me three to one."

"I'll lay you two to one, Mac," Lon Blodgett interrupted. "I got forty dollars here to put up against twenty."

"All right, Lon, you're on for that much at two to one." McClintock tossed a twenty-dollar bill upon the desk. "Let Mr. Leadbeater hold the stakes. Now we'll sneak into that sample room and take another little drink."

Tobe was irritated. Giving odds in quarter racing was not usual. Even money was the correct basis for betting on match races. Of course this was an unusual case and practically any odds were justified,

but he disliked the idea in principle. Acquaintances crowded around him, some seeking information and others offering advice. The advisers believed that Hammond should offer odds.

"What do you fellows know about it?" he snapped at them. "None of you ain't seen the other horse. He might be the fastest horse in the world for all you know."

"He'll have to be pretty nigh that to beat Red Fox," a grizzled rancher observed, and the nods of his companions confirmed this opinion.

When McClintock returned, it seemed apparent to Tobe that he had indulged himself with more than one drink in the sample room. Perhaps he had now passed the border line between discretion and bravado.

McClintock swaggered up to Tobe and remarked in an insolent manner: "Hammond, or whatever your name is, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you two hundred to four hundred, Mooney's horse beats yours."

"That's a chicken-feed bet," Tobe sneered. "Don't guess you got the nerve to bet much unless it's in a crap game. Down in this country it's mostly darkies that shoots craps and the darkies are some like you—they're afraid to bet much on anything but dice."

The bystanders laughed.

McClintock glared at them and replied to Hammond defiantly: "Is that so—is that so—'Mr. Big Better?' I suppose you want to bet a million. Just how much would you bet with all your friends looking on?"

Tobe hesitated for an instant. Would McClintock back down if a big bet was offered? He decided to take the chance.

"Listen to me, stranger," he said. "You Northerners have a habit of coming down here and making yourselves obnoxious. I know you got a little money with you and I reckon it has swelled your head some. Now you either put up or shut up. I'll bet you fifteen thousand to seventy-five hundred on my horse."

There was a ripple of approval in the

crowd and Joe Kilgore called out: "Watch the Yankee wilt!"

Tobe cast a grateful glance in his direction. Joe could usually be depended on to do and say the right thing without coaching.

The drummer's reply came quickly: "Get your stakeholder—same fellow that's holding the side bets."

Sim Bradley came forward and twenty-two thousand five hundred dollars was placed in his custody.

THE awed silence was interrupted by McClintock: "I notice fifteen thousand was all you had. I've got some more money that I came by very easily and as you're showing off before the yokels here and making bum cracks about Northerners, I'll give you time to go over to your little one-horse bank and pry loose another fifteen thousand. You claim you got nerve. Let's see you show some."

Those in the crowd who understood the meaning of "yokel" were offended and urged Tobe not to be bluffed. Hammond felt that he had a sure thing. Of course, there was the chance that Mooney and McClintock were working together and that the black horse had not really gone lame, but this possibility struck Tobe as a very slight one. He regretted that he had not examined the horse. However, even if Mooney was attempting to double cross him and run the black horse instead of the pack horse, Red Fox would have no difficulty in winning.

These reflections occupied less than a second.

"I'll be back in five minutes," he declared. "Get your money ready."

Tobe was applauded as he hurried out of the hotel. "Nobody can't bluff old Tobe Hammond!"

The spectators who assembled at the quarter-mile race track on the outskirts of the town were somewhat mystified by the events of the morning. They had seen forty-five thousand dollars bet on a horse race by two men, but no one else had been able to bet a dollar.

They were curious to see the black

horse. Perhaps his appearance would create some sentiment in his favor on the part of those who did not realize that Hammond's horse was practically unbeatable.

Red Fox was already at the track and was being led around by a colored boy. Tobe's jockey, in breeches and racing boots, stood near by. He was a lean, little man with the evidence of horse wisdom stamped indelibly upon him. This was Chet Chase, reputed to be the best quarter-horse rider in the Southwest.

The crowd waited impatiently for the arrival of the other horse.

"Here he is!" some one finally said, as Mooney was observed coming at a dog-trot and leading a horse whose neck and body were completely enveloped in a gaudily colored sheet.

It was not until Mooney was close enough to enable Tobe to distinguish the horse's chestnut head and legs that he could be certain which horse was being brought to the course. Evidently Mooney was not trying to double cross him.

When the sheet was removed, a laugh greeted the pack horse. His fetlocks were uncut, his mane and foretop had not been trained and his chestnut coat was full of dust.

McClintock entered a vigorous protest and insisted that all bets were off. The stakeholder coldly informed him concerning the conditions of the race. McClintock took a look at the threatening group which had gathered and subsided with bad grace.

"Who's going to start this race?"

"Not much starting to do," Hammond explained. "They both got to be headed the right way and they start from the tap on a drum. Joe Kilgore here has got the drum."

"I know when I'm trimmed. That horse doesn't look as if he could run a lick, but nevertheless I'm going to have every chance that I should have. I not only want to be sure that both horses are headed the right way, but I also want to be sure that one isn't ahead of the other when the drum beats. You can have this Joe Kilgore beat the drum. I want a man

down there at the starting post to see that he beats the drum at the right time."

"All right; pick your man."

"I see a gentleman over there who has been pointed out to me as Doctor Montgomery. I pick him."

Doc protested: "I don't want to get mixed up in this."

"May I speak with you for a second, doctor?"

They moved away from the crowd and held a whispered consultation. Doc Montgomery was seen to nod his head.

"Reckon that fellow must have give him some lodge sign," Joe Kilgore remarked.

When Doctor Montgomery returned, he announced: "Inasmuch as this gentleman is a stranger, I have decided to act for him, although I realize his apprehensions are unfounded."

"One thing more!" McClintock shouted. "I want Lon Blodgett to go down by the eighth pole and act as patrol judge and see that there is no rough riding."

"All right," Hammond agreed. "Now if that's all you got in your crop, let's run the race. Riders up!"

Mooney was in street clothes and did not trouble to remove his coat. A rancher gave him a "leg up." Hammond performed a similar service for his rider and the two horses departed for the starting post in the wake of Doc Montgomery, Joe Kilgore and the man who was to drop a flag for the benefit of those who desired to time the race. Red Fox pranced proudly. Mooney's chestnut had a dispirited, shuffling gait. The race was obviously going to be a farce.

There was little delay at the start.

"They're off! Watch Red Fox run away from that other horse. Come on, Red Fox! Look at him come!"

At that distance it was practically impossible to tell which horse was in front, but the spectators assumed that Red Fox was leading.

When the horses had drawn closer by a sixteenth of a mile, Tobe confided to Sim Bradley: "Looks to me like they're running head and head. I reckon Mooney

has rung in a hot horse on us, but I figure Red Fox will make him stop."

At the eighth pole it was apparent to every one that the horses were on even terms. A second later Tobe uttered a muffled oath. Chet Chase had gone to the whip. Tobe saw it rise and fall against the side of Red Fox who had never felt the sting of a whip before. Hammond had often boasted: "You don't need to touch my horse with no whip. Just shake it at him—that's enough."

ROUSED to desperation, Red Fox plunged forward and gained half a length, which he held for several seconds. Then he seemed to falter. The whip was brought into play again, but Red Fox had cracked and the chestnut began to draw away. At the finish he was nearly two lengths in front.

"Chet threw the race away when he used his whip," Tobe bitterly asserted.

Slim Ricketts shook his head and inquired: "Did you forget to stop your watch when they finished?"

"No, I stopped it, but I forgot to look at the time."

"Then look at it."

Hammond drew out his watch and an expression of stupefaction spread over his face.

"Twenty-one and three quarters. That can't be right!"

"Yes, it is, Tobe. As a matter of fact, I caught the race in twenty-one and three fifths. That's close to the world's record and this path ain't no world-record track. We just got outrun, that's all there is to it."

"I'm going to protest the race."

"How come?"

"Didn't you see Mooney grab Chet's saddle cloth when my horse started to go into the lead?"

Slim shrugged his shoulders and replied: "Yes, I seen it if you say so."

Hammond beckoned to his jockey.

"Chet, I want you to tell the stakeholder about Mooney grabbing your saddle cloth when you was passing him just this side the eighth pole."

The jockey blinked in amazement, but nodded submissively.

"Come with me—both of you."

Sim Bradley was the center of an interested throng waiting for the "pay off." McClintock and Mooney stood next to him. When Mooney dismounted, a stranger had stepped from the crowd and taken charge of the chestnut horse, whereupon the little race-horse man had rapidly pushed his way to the stakeholder's side.

"Mr. Bradley," shouted Hammond from the edge of the crowd, "I protest this race. My horse was fouled and I've got the proof."

A MURMUR of dissent ran through the crowd.

Chet Chase testified that Mooney had seized his saddle cloth and impeded the progress of his mount. But for this, Red Fox would certainly have won. Tobe and Slim corroborated the jockey.

Sim Bradley assumed a judicial manner and said: "In that case I can't pay over the stake money. I got to take time to decide what to do. Maybe I got to give the race to Red Fox and pay the money to Mr. Hammond and maybe I only declares all bets off."

"Here's the patrol judge, ask him about this foul," McClintock demanded.

"How about it, Lon?"

Lon Blodgett cleared his throat and announced in a high-pitched tone: "Gentlemen, you-all know nothing like that happened. It's just a lie that Tobe Hammond has cooked up."

McClintock smiled grimly.

"I guess, Mr. Stakeholder, we will take that money now."

The crowd surged back as the alleged drummer pressed a revolver against the pit of Sim Bradley's stomach and Mooney whisked out a wicked-looking automatic which he held in alert readiness.

Sim produced the stakes and tremblingly handed them to McClintock. The drummer waived the money exultantly above his head before handing it to Blodgett.

Blodgett made a hasty count and returned the money to McClintock with the

statement that the amount was correct—forty-six thousand dollars.

"Arrest them fellows!" Tobe Hammond screamed. "Arrest 'em. Don't let 'em get away!"

Two men who had recently arrived in a travel-stained automobile pushed through the crowd and flourished revolvers.

"One side, please, this is the law! You men are under arrest. Give us those guns. And you, too, young fellow. Come along, all three of you."

The spectators made way for McClintock, Mooney and Lon Blodgett, as the officers herded them into the waiting car. The motor was running and the car darted away before any questions could be asked.

"Wish that had happened half a minute sooner," Tobe remarked in a tremulous tone. "What you reckon it was for?"

"Dogged if I got any idea, unless it's a whisky case. I don't see what else Lon could be mixed up in. And them jaspers acted like Federal men."

Some one inquired what would become of Mooney's horses and the station agent answered: "The way freight spotted a car for them at the chute just about noon. The car had stalls in it and everything. They loaded the black horse right before the race and I reckon that fellow who took the other horse away is loading him now. This fellow came in on the way freight. The five-o'clock passenger is going to pick up the car. It goes through all the way to Enid, Oklahoma, by express."

A crafty look came into Tobe's eyes.

"I'm going down and take them horses."

"I wouldn't do that, Hammond," Doc Montgomery advised. "You have no legal claim on the horses and you would simply get yourself mixed up in a horse-stealing case. Remember that those horses are in the custody of the express company."

"I can swear out papers before Esquire Lonsberry, so it won't be no stealing case."

"No, you can't even do that. Lonsberry went to El Paso yesterday and won't be back for several days."

"Then I reckon I got to wait. But I

ain't whipped. No Northern crooks can come here and trim me and get away with it. I'll locate them fellows through the Federal authorities and make 'em sweat."

Two weeks had elapsed. Tobe Hammond had been unable to learn the whereabouts of the arrested men. Evidently they had been secretly taken to some distant jurisdiction. All trace of the horses had been lost at Enid.

Amos Pinckney had resigned and he and his family had gone North. The new cashier was an annoying person who persisted in asking questions which Tobe could not answer. Hammond had become morose and irritable.

The noon mail contained but one letter. Tobe stared at it curiously. The handwriting on the envelope was vaguely familiar.

AT length he opened the letter and read the following:

"DEAR TOBE: The mortgage on my sister's home will be paid the day it is due. You provided for that when you matched Red Fox against Yellow Pine, the fastest quarter horse since Bob Wade's time. My share of the money you lost is just enough to pay the principal and interest of the mortgage.

"It may be some satisfaction to you to know that you were trimmed by experts—'Dusty' Wade and 'Lush' Hawkes. They call Wade 'Dusty' because he squirts dust into a horse's hair and makes it look as if the horse hadn't been rubbed in a year. Lush used to play drunk parts on the stage.

"Pinckney is up here in New York. I got him a job in a broker's office at a hundred a week. Lon Blodgett is also here and doing very well. I suppose it never occurred to you that I still have some friends in Haleyburg.

"I expect you feel like making a squawk of some kind, but I advise you not to do it. Pinckney knows too much. You get me, don't you?

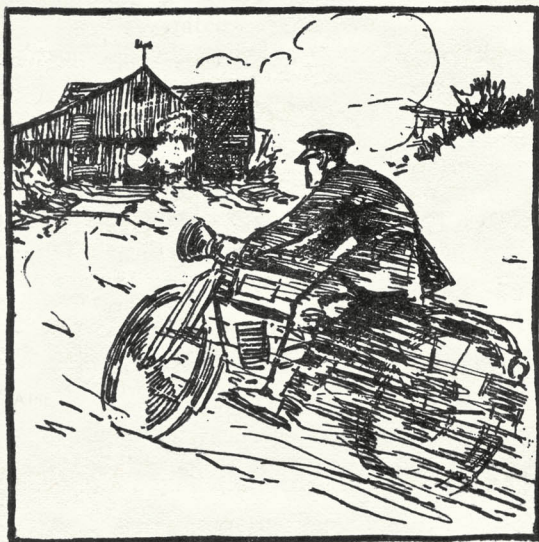
"I may try something else on you after you have put back that fifteen thousand you borrowed from the bank and built up your bank roll again.

"Kindest regards,

DARCY HALEY.

"P. S. I almost forgot to tell you that the arrest of the boys was a fake. It's a get-away they use if they expect trouble. When Lush—McClintock—waived that roll of bills above his head, it was the cue for the two 'officers' to make the 'arrest.'"

Hammond tore the letter into shreds.



“Useless”

By Mark Reed

Author of “Tie, You Hellions, Tie,” and others.

Wealth, a girl, and an enviable social position didn't spell happiness to Wallie Baldwin. So he sought it elsewhere.

HHEY, officer! This the way to Montreal?”

Trooper Baldwin of the State police looked up. A limousine had drawn up in front of where the rangy trooper was standing beside his motor cycle. Through its lowered windows came the odor of heliotrope, like a whiff of hot-house air in the clear Adirondack morning. Inside the car Baldwin caught a glimpse of several languid souls and a well-groomed Chow dog. With a curt, almost military gesture, he indicated that the joys of Montreal lay precisely in the direction in which their radiator was pointed.

“Mushrooms under glass!” was his feeling, as he watched the long black car pur down the road.

Then he grinned contentedly and, drawing in a good breath of mountain air, reflected that less than three months before he himself had been under glass.

THE crisis that put Wallie Baldwin, ex-hurdler, bank president's son, and fiancé of one of Albany's prettiest débutantes, into the gray uniform and purple-corded hat of a New York State trooper may have had its roots far back in his ancestry. At any rate before the family fortune had been established, Baldwins in buckskin had carried long rifles under Herkimer at Oriskany and with Benedict Arnold to Quebec. His father, however, and perhaps the city at large, would more likely have set Wallie's dereliction down to mere freakiness.

When Wallie took his cap off the hat tree that April morning and stepped out on the stoop of his State Street home, he honestly meant to wait for his father.

“We'll walk downtown together,” the elder Baldwin had said from behind the financial section as his son got up from the breakfast table.

Out on the stoop, however, Wallie felt

an irresistible desire to be moving. Before him was a strip of parkway where the elms were just coming into leaf. In contrast to the hard gray of the street and the harder red of the old brick fronts, that veil of green was hypnotically soothing. He let his gaze sink into it gratefully—and found himself walking down the steps.

It occurred to him he might just walk along slowly; his father would catch up. One long leg began to swing after the other, each foot falling precisely ahead of its mate, as if he were traveling a narrow forest trail instead of a broad city sidewalk.

"Hi, Wallie, old scout!" a fellow he knew called. "You look as though you were out for bear."

Wallie's mouth made one of its phenomenal ear-to-ear grins, but he said nothing. He had one of those scrooged-up, good-natured faces that leave the impression of being wrinkled. When he smiled, the sockets of his eyes seemed to narrow horizontally until only a glint of light showed through, and his hard-fleshed cheeks furrowed into deep ridges that circled from his lantern jaw, under his high cheek bones, to his generous upturned nose. In the dead of winter his skin always carried a ruddy tan. Altogether, it was a homely, cryptic, weather-beaten sort of face; and when Wallie told people he was twenty-four they only believed it because they knew he was honest.

"Out for bear!" he muttered to himself. "Out for *bank*!"

He strode on, and it was not until he stood before a side entrance of the Albany Loan & Trust that he realized he had forgotten his father. He looked back. There was no sign of that short energetic figure bringing its morning constitutional to a brisk conclusion.

"Well, anyway," thought Wallie, "I've missed a lesson in banking."

He looked up the steep wall of the bank with a contemplation outwardly imperturbable, but inwardly hostile, then drew out his big open-faced watch. He was not late, for once. In fact he was five

minutes early. An expression came to his eyes as though he had thought of something pleasant. Entering the bank, he made his way to a small circular staircase back of the tellers' cages which led to the mezzanine floor above.

Certain he was unobserved, he clambered up the staircase with an alacrity surprising in a man whose movements were so leisurely. Arriving at the top, he took a key from his pocket and let himself into a tiny room not much larger than a fair-sized closet. Within this closet were mops and brooms, a few pieces of broken furniture—and a machine gun.

During the post-war scare, the Trust & Loan had set up a machine gun, but when the scare was over and the red peril repulsed, the gun had been thrust aside into the nearest place. Here Wallie had found it, rusting away.

THE long-nosed thing, looking like some three-legged spider in the shadows, must have awakened something akin to pity in his breast. For though he had no particular love of firearms, he had adopted the big spider at once. In a short time, by liberal use of emery paper and muscle, he had nursed it back to a respectable appearance.

Until this morning he had not been near his charge for several weeks. Squatting down, he began to remove the parts from the breech block and wipe them over with an oily rag. It was sheer joy, and he began to hum to himself like an affable teakettle, balancing nicely on the flat of both feet, his knees drawn nearly to his chin, as savages and cowboys sit to keep their bodies clear of the damp ground.

As yet the bank had not opened for business. But already scores of clerks bent over their filing drawers and whole batteries of typists and adding-machine operators clacked away behind their sound-proof partitions.

Only the main banking room, around which the mezzanine floor ran, was quiet, its marble floor deserted save for a solitary attendant filling up the inkwells at the check desks. Time passed, and soon

it lacked but a few minutes of that impressive moment when the big bronze doors would swing open.

"Hey, seen 'Useless' this morning?"

The words spoken by an office boy to the attendant at the check desks traveled up the mezzanine floor and into the broom closet. Wallie, lost to the world, came to with a start. Though he had never heard that nickname before in the bank, he knew that it had been applied to him. He was jamming the remaining parts back hurriedly into the breech block when the office boy appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Brainerd wants ter see you. T'wonce! If you're not too busy."

The boy's tone was respectful as became one addressing the son of the president of the bank, but his eyes danced with amusement at the sarcasm with which he had managed to enrich his message. It was a juvenile reflection of the general attitude.

From janitor to vice presidents the talk ran that young Baldwin was not making good. Yet even derision could not entirely fill the office boy's soul as he watched Wallie with deft greasy fingers fit the queer-shaped bits of steel into their positions.

"Was you a soldier in the war?" he asked with eyes ready to admire.

Wallie seemed to ponder. He remembered various squelchings of his eighteen-year-old ardor in recruiting stations and his father's library.

"No," he said at length curtly, "I was a Boy Scout."

Then, taking his time about it, he locked the door and went down, to wash his hands. In fact, he washed them twice, recalling with painful clarity the day he had put a finger print on a legal document that did not require a finger print. Mr. Brainerd, in the mortgage-and-loan department, the latest branch to which Wallie had been attached for "study," motioned him to wait till he had finished some dictation. Wallie might have taken a vacant chair, but he preferred to lean against the wall, his legs crossed like a big pair of scissors, his gaze fixed on the

group of girls typing noisily all about the room. As he waited, it seemed to him that never before had he smelled such a vile assemblage of perfumes and toilet soaps. Finally Mr. Brainerd beckoned.

"Baldwin," he said, in a kindly, indulgent tone, "here's a nice little job for you. There's a mortgage fallen due on a dwelling house at No. 38 River Street. A Mrs. Willoughby. She's in arrears on her interest, too; but we don't want to foreclose. See if you can't buy outright. You're authorized to pay as much as eleven thousand dollars."

Wallie memorized the amount audibly.

"Above the mortgage; that's right. It's quite important. I'd go myself, only there's a meeting of the department heads." He patted the young man's arm encouragingly. "This is a nice opportunity for you to show us what you can do."

"Yes, sir." Wallie tried to look snappy and on the job, the way he saw the other young embryo bankers look; but all he achieved was a grin and a slightly worried expression about the eyes. As he turned to go out, his coat tails, unbeknown to him, whisked a pile of papers from a typist's desk.

"Lord!" said the typist. "That feller needs a vacant lot to turn round in."

NO. 38 River Street he found standing well back from the sidewalk, shielded from the roar and bustle of modernity by four great maples. A freshly swept walk led up to an old-fashioned knocker. There was a sense of green blinds and a fine old portico through the low-hanging branches.

This didn't look like a business call. Wallie was relieved, so relieved he failed to notice the bulky apartment houses on either side, eager to swell out and gorge themselves upon their ancient and more fragile neighbor.

Mrs. Willoughby admitted him herself, in a big apron, her sleeves rolled to the elbow.

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed. "I fully intended to see somebody about that mortgage. However, it's all right. In a few

months I'll be able to pay it outright. You see I've gone into business."

She smiled upon him sweetly. Business! This was too much. Even Wallie could see this guileless motherly person of forty was no business woman.

"Come and look, sir," she said.

Wallie trailed after her into the dining room and there upon a long table he saw more pies assembled under one roof than he had ever seen before in his life. He identified them—mince, apple, custard, pumpkin; like gold with beautifully browned oases in the middle. The air held a pleasant odor of spices and, blinking, he looked through an open door and saw two girls busily engaged cutting apples and rolling crust.

"First," said Mrs. Willoughby briskly, "won't you sample my goods?"

While Wallie sampled, she enlarged upon her financial prospects. Each pie netted fifteen to eighteen cents, according to the filling. She had two girls to help with apple paring and cleaning.

None of the women marrying nowadays knew how to cook and she could dispose of forty pies a day easily in the apartment houses right outside her own door. She told him all this frankly and he replied, with equal honesty, that it looked like a good business proposition. She warmed under his sympathetic encouragement.

"You see, in this house," she exclaimed, "my husband died and also my father. My two little girls were born in this very same room where I myself was born and I hate terribly to give it up. But I won't have to if——"

Tears glistened in her eyes. Wallie hastened to assure her that the great bank he represented was not an institution to drive widows and orphans from their places of business. Ten minutes later he was back telling the same thing to Mr. Brainerd—with the additional information that the bank would of course want to extend the mortgage.

Mr. Brainerd looked at him.

"Am—am I to understand you actually didn't take a step to acquire the property?" he finally managed to ask.

"Not in the circumstances," said Wallie bluntly. "Why should I?"

The older man did not waste further speech. With the sad nod of a man who had borne too much, he indicated that the interview was at an end. Wallie, well satisfied, returned to his desk. But he had scarcely lighted his pipe to battle with a column of figures when another office boy was breathing heavily at his elbow.

"The president wants ter see you. T'wonce!"

In the elegant, sparsely furnished "President's Room," as it was termed, Wallie found his father a-tiptoe on the rug before an unlighted fireplace. The elder Baldwin had been pacing furiously to make his mind work better, and his puffy chest rose and fell rapidly under its broad expanse of waistcoat, giving him the appearance of a very energetic robin.

Wallie nodded and, crossing, leaned against the mantel, as though seeking the strategic advantage of being behind his father's back.

The elder Baldwin wheeled.

"Sir!" he snapped. "Do you see that chair?"

WALLIE looked. Behind the big flat-top desk was a dignified armchair with a high leather back. Its brass studs seemed to wink at him derisively. He screwed up his eyes as though to make sure that he saw it, then he nodded soberly.

"Well, how the blazes do you ever expect to occupy it? We send you out to buy a property, and you extend an over-run mortgage—without even collecting the back interest!"

Wallie started to explain about the pie business.

"You idiot! That woman can't make a cent with her overhead of taxes and the interest on her mortgage."

"She says she can. We ought to give her a chance."

His father's white, well-groomed hands made feeble gestures of utter despair.

"Look here, how long before you're going to snap out of this—and learn

something about the business? Here you are engaged to a mighty fine girl——"

"I——"

"You listen to me! You've been here two years. Other men who came in when you did are head and shoulders over you. Wilson is head of a department. McHenry—assistant cashier. We're making Peale head of the statistics department this morning. And what have you accomplished these past two years? Shot half a million clay pigeons! Cleaned up a machine gun! I've been pretty all-fired patient, but it's about time I saw some results."

"Do you think I exactly—exactly fit here?"

"You've *got* to. You can't marry that girl on two thousand a year."

"Annette says she's willing to wait——"

"Huh!" He blazed sarcastically. "I suppose I might make you a director—but damned if I will!"

Wallie uncrossed his long legs and stood on both feet. "I suspect maybe if I tried some other line——"

"Other line—nonsense! Any line in mind?"

A baffled look came to Wallie's eyes. He studied a steam pipe which was hissing, then his gaze traveled to the small patch of blue sky visible through the single high window.

"Well?" demanded his father impatiently, looking at his watch.

"I've often thought I'd like to try something out of doors——"

"Street cleaner, maybe!"

The younger man remained imperturbable.

"Not so bad," he drawled. "Anything for exercise! I feel as though my muscles were rotting in this—this——" He noticed the heavy carved mantel against which he was leaning. "—This museum!" he concluded guilelessly.

The elder Baldwin's face turned a fiery red.

"Oh, now see here, dad!" said Wallie hastily. "I didn't mean to insult your bank! Don't take me so to heart."

"Then stop acting, and talking—and

grinning so like a fool! Get down to business and the first thing you do, you go back and fix up that mortgage right!"

Wallie's wide mouth tightened.

"Sure!" he said simply. "I'll fix it up right."

The bank president turned with sudden apprehension. "See here," he began, "no monkeyshines, or by Heaven——" But his son with three long strides had already departed, and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

A moment later Wallie was standing in the center of the main banking room. Outwardly he was as imperturbable as ever, but inside he seethed. Becoming aware that Perkins and several of the other tellers had seen him leave his father's office and were watching him with high interest, he tried to look as if he were waiting for some one.

Several clients of the bank, high up in business and law, nodded in friendly fashion. Wallie grinned, his elbows on a check desk, and wondered how the devil they succeeded in looking so prosperous, so alert and useful. Just then he saw an office boy dart from his father's office, as a messenger from high Olympus. He turned, wrote a check for his full account and moved across to Perkins' wicket.

"How'll you have it?" Perkins asked suavely. He was an airy young fellow, with close-cropped hair and mustache and dark circles under his eyes.

"In hundreds, I guess," replied Wallie pleasantly.

THE teller counted out the bills with his delicate agile fingers. Some obscure instinct made Wallie count them over again. It was a precaution his own father probably would not have taken.

"I—I think you're a hundred short," said Wallie, after considerable mathematics.

Perkins counted the bills again.

"By George, Useless, old scout," he said unabashed, "I believe you're right!"

Wallie grinned back at him as though being short-changed and called "Useless," all in the same breath, were the most nat-

ural things in the world and the next minute his tall, awkward figure in its loose-fitting brown suit had disappeared into the savings department.

When Wallie placed the proceeds of his two accounts in Mrs. Willoughby's hands, she stared at him with amazement and then began to cry.

"Oh, sir, if—if only I could do something for you!" she sobbed.

"You can. I'll take another piece of pie," said Wallie without a ray of emotion. "Pumpkin, this time!"

As she cut it, some one began to knock at the front door.

"If it's a man from the Loan & Trust," he whispered, "just pay him and say nothing. I'm taking the mortgage over personally."

Mrs. Willoughby looked dubious.

"It's the way we do business," he assured her.

Outside of the house, Wallie ate pie and through a closed blind watched Mr. Brainerd argue and explain. Nothing, however, could prevail against Mrs. Willoughby's determination to keep the abode of her beloved memories. When, finally, in a burst of wrath Mr. Brainerd grabbed up the money and fled, Wallie winked gleefully at the portion of pie still in his hand.

Later, however, walking slowly down the street, he saw it was not quite so funny. Something told him it would be just as well—better—if he did not see his father for some time.

Wallie counted his remaining bills. Barely fifty dollars! He was broke, as good as disowned, without a job—more useless than ever. Then suddenly it dawned on him that he was free. He could go anywhere on the entire globe that he pleased—except back to the stuffy marble elegance of the Loan & Trust!

For a long time he prowled the streets aimlessly, content with walking and breathing. About noon he reached a small park at the outskirts of the city. Boys just loose from school were playing "migs" along the paths. The spring air was deliciously lazy. Under the trees,

water, newly turned on in a fountain, splashed and danced into a huge sea shell.

By the fountain a well-built chap in a gray uniform and wearing a rakish campaign hat with a purple cord was bent over a motor cycle. Wallie recognized the uniform. Acting on a sudden impulse he stepped up and drew the well-built chap into conversation.

That afternoon Wallie joined the State troopers.

I SAY, officer! What's the road to Mont-real?"

Another limousine had drawn up. Reluctantly Wallie withdrew his gaze from the tip of Hurricane Mount, its sides still deep-forested as when roamed by Mohawk Indians. He caught another whiff of perfume, took in the standing car, the tonic stand up the road with its gaudy signs, the roadsides littered with the waste papers and boxes of nature lovers, gave the direction—and growled fiercely. This was about enough of being a signpost! He swung his motor cycle around with the idea of a quiet patrol on a back road to Saranac. But the patrol never came to pass.

Honk! A streak of blue whirled by. The trooper turned in time to see a long, low, blue machine try desperately to avoid a hay wagon, fail, neatly remove a rear wheel, pitching one corner of the wagon in the dust—then dash heedlessly on, avoiding a fatal skid only by the barest chance.

"Come on, *Harriet*!" said Wallie. "This looks like a little action."

When headquarters had assigned him a motor cycle instead of a horse, he had dubbed it *Harriet* to offset the impersonality of the machine.

Slowing up at the crippled wagon, he saw a barefoot boy, his eyes round with dismay.

"Hurt, son?" he asked.

"No, but I will be," replied the boy. "My father's waitin' for us down in the field."

"Did you get their number?" Wallie

was noting the imprint of the tires where the car had skidded off into the dirt.

"No, but it was a man and a lady drivin'!"

"Hitch your horse to that elm, and wait. I'll bring your dad back some damages."

The car was long since out of sight. Wallie throttled *Harriet* up to sixty miles. At each diverging road, one sweeping glance was enough to show no diamond-shaped imprints in the dirt ruts. When the pair in the car failed to turn off up the Keene Valley Road, he knew he had them.

"People," Wallie muttered, "you're headin' straight for Elizabethtown and the county jail!"

Sure enough! As he tore down the hill into the town, a long roar of staccato explosions behind him, the blue car was disappearing up the drive to the Glen House. Scarcely diminishing his speed, he turned in after them.

The car had disappeared, but he caught a glimpse of it through the doors of the garage, from which a man and a girl, both in white tennis clothes, were emerging. Making a wide sweep, he put himself between them and the hotel.

As Wallie looked at the girl, a flush mounted to his cheek bones, crimson embarrassment showing even through the tan. It was Annette, whom he had not seen since April, though he had written vaguely that he was working hard to make good. Only for a fraction of a second did he waver.

"You're both under arrest," Wallie said bluntly.

The man and the girl drew up haughtily. Wallie felt Annette's eyes squarely upon him. Hoping against hope she would not recognize him in the garb of a trooper, he looked at her companion. He was a vital, heavy-set man of maybe thirty-four, with an air of prosperity and of knowing how to enjoy it. Wallie saw he was going to deny everything.

"Officer!" he blustered. "This is ridiculous! You——"

The girl stopped him. "Barney, it's all

right," she said. "Don't get excited. He won't do anything. I know him—don't I, Wallie?"

"Yes," the trooper admitted. "You know me—also, you're under arrest."

"No, really? What for?"

"Speeding!"

"We didn't come as fast as you did!"

The smile and joyous little ripple of laughter with which she accompanied her retort was wasted.

"You'll have to come with me," said Wallie doggedly.

"Nonsense!" intervened the thickset man. "Of course if we injured the kid's rattletrap, I'll be glad to settle for it."

"It's not my job to collect damages, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Pardon," said Annette, "social error on my part! Mr. Baldwin, may I introduce Mr. Barnes, otherwise known as Barney?"

The two men nodded and glared.

"Barney, I bet many's the time you've cheered yourself hoarse over Wallie," said the girl.

"Maybe," admitted Barney, "but not this morning."

"Wallie used to be a great hurdler," she explained.

Barnes looked at the trooper. "You're not *that* Baldwin?" he said, in a tone plainly implying: "My Lord! How have the lofty fallen!"

The trooper flushed.

"Wallie's up here to get a thrill," remarked Annette. "He's awfully keen for excitement."

"We better get down to business," said Wallie curtly. "It's your car, isn't it?"

Annette nodded.

"Then you'll have to cross over to the courthouse with me."

She looked pensively at the neat brick and white façade of the Essex County jail and courthouse. "I simply can't take the time." Her tone was exasperatingly airy. "Barney and I are late as it is for some tennis finals——"

"See here, Baldwin," broke in Barnes, "if you're a friend of Annette's, of course you'll fix this up for her."

WALLIE eyed him. "I'll need you along, too, Mr. Barnes," he remarked.

Barnes turned on his heel. "Come along, girlie," he said. "I'll take the responsibility. This fellow's making a great fuss over nothing."

Wallie seized him by the collar of his white shirt and spun him around. "You'll go to that courthouse," he declared simply, "if I drag you there!"

Their eyes met squarely. Barnes' face was flushed, his fists clenched. Then civilization conquered; he shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"Fear I'm no match for a star hurdler equipped with a gat and a blackjack," he said. "Come on, Annette, let's go to jail!"

Jail was a brief matter and ten minutes later the three of them were walking down the courthouse steps, the single change—materially, at least—being that several bills had been stripped from Mr. Barnes' ample roll, two of which remained in the courthouse as bail for the girl's reappearance, and two of which reposed in the trooper's pocket as heart balm for the owner of the damaged wagon. Atmospherically, however, there was feeling.

"And now justice has been administered," began Barnes suavely, "how about that tennis?"

"I should say so!"

"First, Annette," said Wallie bluntly, "I'd like to talk with you a few minutes please."

"Impossible, Wallie!" returned the girl.

Barnes' eyes laughed silently till she added: "But come round to the Glen House this evening."

"Hold on!" cut in Barnes. "You're dated up with me for that dance at the Champlain Club to-night."

"I'm no end sorry, Barney," she said, "but I've got to see Wallie."

Wallie watched them go, glumly. In college his hurdling, even his bony architecture and his grin, had been assets with Annette. Indeed, he had proposed on the strength of a track victory. Then came "Bank!" As each new instance of mis-

fitting made his attitude toward himself change, he had felt that the attitude of the girl he loved must change, too. For two years, grinning but with troubled eyes, he had watched eligible money-earning blades prance around his fiancée. But none had looked as serious a rival as this Barnes.

"Damn these go-getters anyway!" he muttered as he started *Harriet* up the road with a jerk. "Damn 'em all!"

THAT night Wallie came into Elizabethtown and, having obtained a room at the small year-round hotel where he sometimes stopped, he went over to the sheriff's office and reported his whereabouts. Then, with a haunting sense that the bubble of his agreeable out-of-door life was about to burst, he crossed to the Glen House.

The huge summer hostelry was a blaze of light. Through the windows of the dance hall came the racket of a jazz orchestra. In the dining room he could see elegantly and lightly gowned matrons lingering over the coffee.

Sleek youths in white trousers, portly prosperous men in white trousers, elderly men entirely in white hung about vivacious girls on the veranda who kept impatient time with their bodies to the intoxicating rhythm. Cars chugged up under the porte-cochère, bearing still more youth and gayety. Even to the street the night breeze carried the odors of rare perfumes and high-priced cigars.

Something within the State trooper quailed. Though he was born into the world of pleasure and luxury, he didn't belong; a dogged something told him he did not want to belong. Yet here he was atremble over a girl to whom pleasure and luxury were the breath of existence. Were they? Perhaps, deep down, she was fed up with this tamed, caged existence.

HE came up to the veranda steps, conspicuous in his uniform, six feet of lithe muscular body, his thin, bony, heavily tanned face with its piercing kindly eyes contrasting sharply with the smooth

well-mannered faces which looked up at him. He attracted attention. Several flappers fervently prayed he had come to dance; others watched, wide-eyed, for a raid, while one or two middle-aged men became painfully conscious of their hip flasks.

Annette quickly excused herself from the liveliest group and came toward him, over her shoulders a scarf of heavy cream-colored lace. His uncertainty as to her attitude was quickly cleared. She extended her hand cordially and her eyes met his, bright with fondness. Yet between them, making him brusque and Annette especially gentle, he felt—failure!

"Let's get off somewhere, Wallie, where we can have a heart-to-heart."

"Suits me."

She led him to a secluded corner around the far end of the porch. Only the faint sound of the orchestra shared the nook with them.

"Now tell me all about it." She settled into a chair and leaned toward him confidently.

"First—strikes me I better know something about this Barney."

"Really!" She thought better of being indignant. "Oh, Barney's just a good little pal."

"Pal?"

She laughed. "Well, I admit he's asked me to marry him."

Wallie looked at her uneasily.

"Of course, dear, I pleaded a previous engagement." Her tone seemed light but sincere.

"What's he do?"

"Oh, he's one of those regular business geniuses, who just get things done," she launched forth enthusiastically, then, sensing his discomfort, she added more carelessly: "I believe he's been rather successful making mergers, as he calls them. Taking a lot of little businesses and making them into one big one."

ANOTHER successful man! Wallie studied his black puttees dismally.

"Of course he's much older than you are, dear."

"Not so much," muttered Wallie.

"Wallie, tell me. What really happened at the bank? Your father was awfully vague. I thought maybe it was his fault."

Coaxed, Wallie finally told of Mrs. Wiloughby and how he had prevented the bank from taking the roof from over her pie business.

Annette was overjoyed. "Then it was your father's fault. I'd never believed he'd do a small thing like that. I think you were splendid!"

"A splendid boob!"

"Why, Wallie!"

"When I went back there a month later—good-by pies! That widow had up and sold out!"

"But she wouldn't sell——"

"Oh, yes, she would. The First National sent over a man—one of those business geniuses who get things done." He interpolated with faint sarcasm. "This fellow explained to her she wasn't even splitting even and she sold out to him for a thousand dollars less than I'd been told I could pay her. Dad was all right; I was the dumb-bell!"

"But why didn't you explain to her?"

He made a gesture of hopelessness.

"Even so, why run off and 'join the army?'" she asked.

"Oh, I was fed up with this indoor game of arithmetic and telephoning and signing pieces of paper. I'd never have made good in half a century."

She moved the jade bracelet on her wrist up and down nervously, slightly bewildered.

"I knew you found it rather hard, but this"—she indicated the uniform—"won't get you anywhere. I think you ought to go back to the bank and try that all over again."

"Watch me! Know what my nickname was there—is yet, probably?"

"Why, no. Did you have one?"

"Useless!" he exploded, then grinned.

"Useless?" She studied him thoughtfully. "I can't understand. You're not at all like your two brothers, or even your father and mother."

"I don't think I'm adopted," he remarked. "In fact, I had a great-uncle who looked exactly like me. I remember seeing a tintype of him. His Adam's apple was bigger than mine, if anything."

"Maybe you're a throwback."

"Maybe."

"This great-uncle of yours must have shone in some way."

"He was a Forty-niner. I think he found gold, too. I don't know how much money he ever made, but I found his name once in a history of California."

Annette politely concealed the tiniest yawn.

"Anyway, Wallie, whether you've a big Adam's apple or not, the thing for you to do is to find something to do where you can make money."

"What?"

"Oh!"

"Do you know of any way left to make money that doesn't involve sitting at a desk and doing paper work?"

"Well, if that's the way, why not make it that way?"

Looking at her there, pretty, dainty, complacent, it dawned on him like a jolt that she didn't understand him—what he was up against. He rose abruptly and sat on the arm of her chair.

"Look here, Annette!" said he with apparent irrelevancy. "Do you love me?" "Wallie!" she exclaimed. "Of course!"

For the tiniest speck of time she hesitated, then nestled her head on his shoulder and raised her mouth to his. He kissed her happily, his doubts fled at once.

"Better marry me to-night then," he said, "and we'll worry about making good afterward!"

She stood before him, startled, her eyes starry and big.

"Wallie, marry without a wedding! I couldn't—with mother and my friends and everything!"

He felt cheap.

"All I can say," she went on, "is that if you'll go back to the bank or somewhere, and work hard to make good, I'll wait. I think that's fair."

"For anybody but me."

"Other men would think it fair for you!"

Something within him became unreasonable, obstinate, fighting powerfully to the fore. Again he saw his father's office—the brass-studded chair, the steam hissing from the pipe, the single patch of blue through the window; the other side of the door was that droning organism of figures, machines, documents, terse-speaking men, which make up a modern bank.

Against this flashed the wild weathers of the mountains, the mysterious calm of the woods, the power of *Harriet's* motor. The new-found energy singing in his muscles!

Annette was eying him critically.

"My tough luck was being born too late to get into the war!" exclaimed Wallie. "If I'd been in it, I'd got my finish, or a medal—something to justify my existence!"

For a moment she didn't grasp his sudden twist of thought, then an impish look came into her eyes.

"Don't you get a medal when you arrest girls for speeding?" she asked in a mocking tone.

He winced and turned abruptly away, gazing out into the darkness.

She followed. "I'm sorry," she said.

"Occasionally we do something useful," he returned, after thinking hard for a comeback.

The dance music started up. Irresistibly her satin slippers tapped to its invitation.

"Oh, let's cut being cross and serious—and dance!"

He shook his head.

"Considering I gave up that dance at the Champlain Club, you might at least be agreeable," she coaxed.

"I'm in uniform," he gave as an excuse.

"Oh, it's a free-for-all," she said with a disparaging air. "Miscellaneous, but lively!"

So Barnes' dance had been exclusive. Wallie stood motionless.

"Well, there's a lot of agreeable men inside," she went on pointedly.

"Don't let me keep you." He turned to go, then quickly came back and took her firmly by the arms. "Annette! Isn't there some way we can straighten this matter out?"

"Yes," she replied sweetly. "All you need to do is to get a regular job. I'll wait."

Already he felt a deep loyalty and fondness for the troopers. "Sorry!" he said. "I couldn't be a financial genius—even for you."

"Very well," she returned curtly, "that's that!" and hurried indoors.

SLOWLY he wandered off. An unpartnered coryphée made eyes and a wriggle, but he was beyond fleshy things of eighteen in any mood. Mechanically he turned down the walk toward his room. At the point where the garage road crossed the sidewalk, a derisive motor horn brought him to a standstill. A long blue car wanted to cross. In it was Annette, alone.

"Better trail along, trooper!" she cried as the car sped by. "I'm going to break all the speed laws between here and the Champlain Club."

She was on her way to Barney! Wallie took a walk to think things over. A heavy halo ringed the moon and he detected a restless wind brushing the black hills above the town. Wetting his finger with his tongue, he stuck it up. The wind had shifted to the southwest.

"It'll rain before morning," he said to himself as he roamed on.

The hills and stars enthralled him. The same hills and stars, he reflected, as when Indians used to sweep down through here to harass Albany and Saratoga one hundred and fifty years ago. He replaced the Glen House with a stockade and sprinkled lurking Indians generously in the woods around it.

Transplant him back there with Annette, and Barney, and this bunch of summer fluff, and wouldn't values be changed! He saw himself a leader and Annette, de-

mure and prim, not averse to marrying him on twenty bushels of corn a year! A pipe dream! He snapped himself out of it. According to to-day's standards, the man toward whom Annette was speeding at fifty miles an hour was the better man of the two.

"Six feet two, one hundred and sixty pounds, and not worth a single solitary damn," he muttered disgustedly to the stars and went in to bed.

IT seemed to Wallie that he had scarcely fallen to sleep when he became conscious his name was being called. He jumped up with a bounce and went to the window. It had been raining and the eaves were still dripping. Everywhere was an impenetrable fog, through which from all quarters struggled a gloomy half light, brighter toward the east. It must be about dawn. Looking down, he made out a hatless figure in a raincoat under his window.

"Hey, Baldwin!" the figure shouted. "Dress quick's you can and come down."

It was Barnes' voice, now strangely hoarse and excited. When Wallie emerged from the hotel, he found the financier outside the door, waiting for him.

"When did you see Annette last?" Barnes shot at him instantly.

The trooper eyed him coolly.

"About ten last night, streaking up the road for the Champlain Club."

"Seen her since?"

"No."

"Well, she never reached the club!"

Wallie felt Barnes' tone implied that he—Wallie—was entirely to blame, had kidnaped her or something.

"If she never got there," Wallie said sharply, "how did you know she started?"

"She called me up from a garage in Upper Jay, said she was on her way and asked me to reserve her some dances."

"And she didn't come?"

"No."

"Maybe you didn't promise her dances enough," drawled Wallie.

Barnes made an impatient gesture.

"See here, Baldwin! This is no time to rag each other. I want your word as a trooper you haven't seen that girl since you left her last night."

Wallie sobered.

"I give you my word—as a gentleman."

In his agitation Barnes had moved out from under the gloom of the porch and for the first time Wallie could see his face. The maker of mergers was a sorry contrast to his immaculate appearance of the previous morning.

His soaked hair was plastered to his temples; across his nose ran a long scratch; and the rain had coursed freely through the mixture of blood and mud on his face. He was shivering and, despite his efforts to stop them, his teeth began to chatter.

"Come on round to the kitchen," said Wallie. "The cook's probably up. We'll get some hot coffee and you can tell me the rest."

A cup of hot coffee in his hand, crouching so close to the cookstove that he steamed from head to foot, Barnes told how he had thought nothing of Annette's nonappearance till nearly eleven, when he had called up the Glen House.

Finding she had not returned, Barnes had started out to try and locate her. As he talked, in clipped emotional phrases, Wallie gained a vivid picture of the man, sick with dread, driving through a pouring rain, cutting the murky woods and meadows with his spotlight, always fearing to see an overturned car with something shapeless and still under it; then finally in desperation, clambering down the banks of the Ausable where it skirted the road, finding nothing, pulling himself up again through the brush, slipping, stumbling, soaked to the skin—only to repeat the same performance and always in vain.

"No sign of her anywhere, eh?"

"The only thing out of the ordinary was an abandoned car this side of Jay, but it wasn't hers."

"Huh!" said Wallie, getting into action. "We better call up the hospitals."

"I have."

"Yeah? Well, I'll go notify the police of every city in the State."

"I've already done it."

"How about the American and Canadian officials at the line?"

"I called them up about three o'clock."

Wallie gasped. What kind of a man was this?

"Seen the sheriff, too?" he inquired.

"He's up and on the job. He suggested I call you; at first I rather hesitated."

"It's my business," said the trooper curtly.

"Over the phone I gathered, from Annette—you'd had a little trouble, and as she was coming to me—it—it seemed kind of rubbing it in to call you to help find her."

Wallie ignored this. "Guess we better be starting along," was all he said as he walked away.

"Do what you can by yourself," remarked Barnes authoritatively. "I've some other lines to get into action."

Wallie started off.

"I'll be in and out of the sheriff's office," called Barnes after him. "Keep in touch with me there."

Again the tone of the man accustomed to giving orders! It flashed over Wallie uncomfortably that, if he and this Barney had been born in the days of besieged stockades, he might be taking orders much as he was now.

Barnes was still waiting when Wallie reappeared. The trooper swung his leg over the saddle, adjusted his automatic and looked to his shifts. Barnes thought of a tense little animal crouched for a spring, patient, matter of fact, secure in his strength, and experienced a twinge of regret for fifteen sedentary years spent in an office. He regretted, too, having blustered so like an ass about being arrested.

"Good luck, old man," he said, "and no hard feelings!"

"Sure not!" said Wallie.

They gripped hands warmly with sudden respect. Then the trooper twisted his grip and throttle, and the red motor cycle sped out onto the macadam and dis-

appeared in the fog. Barnes walked slowly up to the sheriff's office.

An hour passed—two. Wallie, unmindful of the water which was showering down on him from the overhanging branches, was on his knees at the edge of the road beyond Jay, apparently picking a flower.

BY a simple process of elimination he realized that, though the accident or crime, whatever it was, might by this time have carried Annette several hundred miles away, the only thing for him to do was to devote himself to the twenty miles of highway between Upper Jay garage and the Champlain Club. At the point where he was kneeling, an old wood road led off into a section of scrubby oak.

"Humph!" said Wallie, straightening up.

He tossed aside the bit of weed which he had found unwilted in one of the wheel ruts. The stump from which it had been broken had not started to heal. A little farther along he noticed that several leaves had been scraped from an overhanging limb. They lay still green at his feet.

Yet yesterday the sun had been scorching. It was not such a wild guess that a car had driven down that wood road within twelve hours. With the number of picnics and petting parties loose, it was a decided probability. Still, there was no harm in going on a bit. Twenty yards up the wood road, a white object glistening in the wet grass met his glance.

It was a jade bracelet. Was it Annette's? Wallie remembered seeing her move something white up and down her wrist the night before. With a throb of the heart that was half relief, half dread, he put the bracelet in his pocket and went back for *Harriet*.

A moment later he was slowly wheeling the motor cycle up the wood road. Neither man nor machine made a sound. Only the drip, drip of water was heard in the underbrush, against whose misty green the gray uniform of the trooper was so nearly invisible that the red motor cycle seemed to be moving forward alone.

After perhaps an eighth of a mile, the woods on one side opened into a broad low field where at some previous age the Ausable had dropped a rich deposit of soil. The grass in the field was unmown. At any rate the vehicle which had penetrated thus far had not come on any agricultural errand. In the center of the field stood a dilapidated weather-beaten barn.

The instant Wallie saw it, he dropped to the ground. A sixth sense, inherited perhaps from some ancestor in a fringed hunting shirt, had told him he was in the presence of danger. He wriggled along, and from the security of a tumble-down wall eyed the barn long and closely.

ITS black bulk, tilted out of shape, suggested a huge piece of wreckage in the green expanse of grass. A score of swallows skimmed nervously in and out of the upper windows and, as he watched, Wallie became aware of the faint sound of hammer blows. A dull click-click, as though struck against metal.

"It's a cinch," he muttered, "no farmer's out here mending his mowing machine at seven o'clock on a Sunday morning!"

The hammering suggested an explanation of the abandoned car five miles back which Wallie had found, exactly as Barnes had described, with the number plates missing. Had Annette been waylaid by a gang of motor thieves? Wallie's heart sickened at the thought.

As he lay there, the sun burned through the mist and the morning suddenly became hot and sultry. With the increase of light he was almost certain that he had made out a white blotch, like a face, at one of the windows. If so, it had instantly disappeared.

A motor snatcher, cornered the month before up near Malone, had nicked a trooper in the shoulder. It looked to Wallie that if he didn't reach that barn suddenly, he might not reach it at all. He studied the layout. To go back for help did not occur to him. He might have been alone in the universe except for the possible crooks in that ramshackle building.

He scowled. It was a bum layout, for him. Three sides of the big field were bounded by deep woods receding up the hillsides; the fourth by the river; and no matter from which direction he approached it, it was a good two hundred and fifty yards to the barn.

The grass was tall, soaked and in places matted down by wind and rain. It would be almost impossible to crawl through, he decided, and there was not even a half-way bush or rock toward which he could creep and take shelter for a final spurt. Yet the surprise attack was ninety per cent of the capture.

He turned and looked at *Harriet*, then at the field. There was no definite road to the barn, only the faint suggestion of two ruts made by the wagons of previous seasons and also, possibly, by the car he was seeking. That car must have gone in before the rain, as the water-soaked ground showed no fresh-cut grooves. It was a tricky path over which to race a motor cycle, an almost impossible one, and a toss would spoil everything. Still, there was *Annette*—and he had got to get his man!

Crawling slowly back to *Harriet*, Wallie cocked his gat, leaving the holster flap loose, felt for his handcuffs, then made sure his night stick was handy. His movements were leisurely, his face imperturbable, infinitely less moved than had he been preparing for "inspection." He allowed himself ten seconds to make the trip and mounted.

The roar of the motor reverberated against the woods and across the field. The red machine rushed through the opening in the wall like a solitary contestant entering a gigantic stadium in which the only spectators were the three slopes of close-packed trees. But to his surroundings, or even the armed men waiting in the barn, Wallie had then become utterly heedless.

His one concern was a six-foot width of ground a seventh of a mile long, extending from the wall to the barn. It had assumed colossal importance and his eyes followed its surface with a concen-

tration that magnified each black lump of turf, each bit of stick, even the grass blades, to a size out of all proportion.

Ahead was the ridge of an old furrow. He shoved up the throttle and the tires of the motor cycle cut it with mathematical squareness. Just beyond bobbed up a round white stone, no larger than a baseball. To glance it going sixty miles an hour might spell disaster. To swerve out in that slippery ground was equally hazardous.

He hit it squarely and drove it out of sight beneath the front wheel.

Ten yards farther was real trouble. Water was still standing in a depression that reached farther ahead than he dared lift his eyes to look. No one could guess what kind of ground lay underneath. There was no holding back, however. He twisted the throttle until he could twist it no more.

The front wheel cut the water glistening in the sun with a force that threw spray dozens of feet to the right and left. But he was always far beyond before the drops fell, ruffling the surface of the long puddle.

A tremor went through the machine. The back wheel had begun to skid. His hands gripped the handlebars like clamps of steel. An eternity seemed to pass. The skidding became a slue. He threw his weight to offset it, at first cautiously, then as far as he could lean. Muddy water spurted up into his eyes. The rear wheel lagged more.

His arms held the bars rigid until it seemed as if he was maintaining the verticality of that three hundred pounds of metal through sheer strength alone. The wheels suddenly began to sink into a bottom of soft mud. He was gone! Yet, one escape remained.

Using all his weight, Wallie jerked the front wheel up. The momentum of the machine carried it on; the wheels straightened; and he came out upon dry land—and into a rut, which, like a flash, ended in better going.

Suddenly something black loomed ahead. It was the barn, hurled upon him

as though out of a gun. The two big doors, propped shut by long poles, two windows—some of the panes were broken, their places stuffed with hay—a roof of torn and twisted shingles, a small side door of warped boards recorded on his mind in a single glance.

He had picked the spot where he would dismount, throw down the props holding the big doors, and jump in, when there was a sharp crack and a long singing hum above the noise of the motor. From between the big doors curled a thin twist of smoke.

To dismount as he planned would be fatal. Wallie saw that the small side door was level with the ground and of the sliding variety, hung on inside wheels. Quicker than he could think, he swerved in his course and headed for the center of the door with a yell.

"Come on, boys! Get your man!"

The impact of the motor cycle took the door from its fastenings with a splinter of wood and the noise of rusty nails torn from their beds and tossed it inwards. It fell on something that seemed to hold it from the ground a second; then, as *Harriet* sped over it and on, Wallie jumped, revolver in hand, letting her plunge where she would.

For a moment in the gloom he could see nothing—a figure half held by the fallen door was struggling to reach a revolver lying just out of reach.

"Put 'em up!" said Wallie, giving the weapon a kick.

THE figure ceased to struggle and extended its arms along the floor. Wallie heard a movement somewhere in the semidarkness.

"Put 'em up!"

The answer was the flash and crack of an automatic. His own gat replied and at the same instant he jumped for cover behind what he took to be an old wagon. It proved to be better than that—a heavy sled with several old wagon bodies piled upon it.

A bullet splintered through them, above his head. But beyond the barricade it

was easy. His eyes, readjusting to the gloomy interior, made out a man standing by the big doors. The set of the hatless close-cropped head seemed vaguely familiar. The man's automatic had jammed and he stood there, confused, desperately trying to move the slide.

"Put 'em up, you there by the door—or you'll get hurt!" Wallie's drawling tone suggested a pleasantly ironic warning more than it did a threat.

Before the words had all left his mouth, the jam was apparently remedied. Wallie saw the tiny black hole of the muzzle as it was raised and leveled at his barricade. He fired and the hatless man slumped loosely to the floor with a sighing groan.

At the same time the trooper became aware of two new figures coming from the rear of the building. They had rushed back to stand off the attack from that quarter which Wallie's yell on entering had suggested. At sight of the huddled body they wavered.

"Put 'em up, you two bums!" said Wallie encouragingly, from behind the battered sled.

The two bums, unable to locate the direction of the command, hesitated.

"Up, boys, up!" The patient drawl of his voice had the bored quality of a man leading a class in calisthenics.

The pair still wavered and Wallie let loose a bullet over their heads. Four arms and two automatics were pointed toward the cobwebby beams.

The barn lay in intense silence, the only movement being the rising blue smoke which the sunlight, coming through the cracks and knot holes in the roof, pierced in long slanting lines. From the security of the sled Wallie peered about, inspecting the darkest nooks and corners first. Then, at what in stage parlance would have been called "rear center," he made out a long low car.

Its outlines suggested the blue car; but this machine was a dismal, wet-looking black, and in the front seat, unnaturally close to the steering wheel, he saw what seemed to be a human figure with the

head heavily swathed in an old blanket, as though to keep out the sound of the shots.

"How many of the bums are there, Annette?" he called.

"Four!" came from under the blanket faintly.

Wallie added up the enemy. The two with hands so piously lifted on this Sabbath morning; the huddled heap by the big front doors; the man stretched under the fallen side door.

"All present or accounted for," he said.

Then, without shifting his gaze from his three animate prisoners, he slowly extricated his long legs from the tangle of rubbish under his feet and circled around the two men near the car. When they were handcuffed together, he unloosened Annette from the wheel to which she had been tied.

"Oh, Wallie," she moaned, "I heard you coming and I couldn't stop you. Are you hurt?"

"Noo-o," he answered. "How about you?"

"Give me a cigarette," she requested.

AS he held a match for her, he saw how white her face was, except the heavy black crescents under her eyes, still unnaturally bright. Tears had coursed grimy traces down her cheeks. Her frail, gently nurtured person seemed horribly out of place in the damp cobwebby gloom of the barn.

He felt tremendously protective. He longed to protect her always.

"These birds treat you all right?" He tossed his revolver menacingly in the palm of his hand.

"That one there got fresh; the others stopped him." She pointed to the black huddle of clothes by the door.

"Glad he's the one I winged then." Baldwin turned to the men handcuffed together. "Why put up such a fight over a stolen car, boys? Seems kind of reckless!"

The two men glared at him sullenly.

"They were trying to escape from somewhere, I think," said Annette.

"How'd they stop you—if you were going at your usual speed?"

"I saw a man lying in the road. I thought he was hurt."

His question recalled why Annette was out on that road alone and where she was going. His lips twisted with slight sarcasm.

"Too bad to make you lose a nice dance!" he said. "Want me to shoot 'em for it?"

"Don't, Wallie, don't!"

He opened the rear door of the car. Inside were several black bags. He opened one and several thick green packages met his eye. He grunted and lifted the other bag. It was very heavy.

"My Lord, Annette!" he exclaimed. "These fellers had seven hours of darkness ahead of 'em and it's less than an hour to the border line. Why didn't they try to sneak across in the rain?"

"They read in a newspaper the line was being watched. They were planning to transform the car and go back somewhere, I don't know where."

MEANTIME, back in the sheriff's office, having given all the orders he could, Barnes was working himself into a frenzy. Outwardly, however, he appeared immaculate as ever, except for a narrow rectangle of court-plaster on his nose.

After watching Wallie off, Barnes had hurried to his hotel for a bath, some breakfast and a generous drink of Scotch. Now his eyes roved continuously from the window to the sheriff sitting comfortably by his telephone.

A heavy, important-looking man in a long, incongruous yellow slicker had just come in and was making a loud pother about something. Barnes watched him resentfully, catching scraps of talk about "a dead-certain clew at Glens Falls" and "a need for all the men you can get."

"Damn this yellow-slicker chap!" thought Barnes.

If Annette was to be neglected for somebody's petty troubles, he had better be phoning up some detectives from New

York. His fingers clenched and unclenched. It seemed to him that if he didn't have Annette back, fresh and dainty, tantalizing as ever, he would go mad.

He loved the sparkle and zest with which she entered into the good times his money made possible. He must have that girl. She must marry him. That rough-neck trooper must be kept in his place. Where was he, anyway? Hadn't even called up!

At this moment, if Barnes had but known it, a procession was nearing Elizabethtown which would have filled him with mingled joy and apprehension. It consisted of the blue car, now topless and black, with Annette bareheaded at the wheel, while in the tonneau behind, slouched three morose, unshaven men.

Wallie on his motor cycle brought up the rear, his eyes never leaving the backs of the men in front of him except for an occasional glance at the road. He drove one-handed, his cocked automatic ready for instant use.

They had been compelled to proceed at a moderate pace and the Sunday traffic had piled up behind them, thus lengthening the procession and making it especially impressive for travelers in the opposite direction. Even the most blasé turned and craned their necks.

"Did you see that bullet hole in the trooper's hat?" they asked, or "Do you suppose he has captured them all by himself?"

It was Baldwin's hour, excusably so. It had been his first real "party" and he had got his men. One against four was fair odds; though, of course, it was nothing unusual for trained men to take on even a mob single-handed. Also, he suspected that the affair had changed him in the estimation of the girl whose brown hair he occasionally caught fleeting glimpses of ahead.

A big money-earning capacity must have seemed rather nonessential in the small hours of the night while four unknown men feverishly painted and remodeled your car while you sat in it. For the

first time in two years, he felt, not cocky, not even elated, but serene, egotistically at peace. He had justified his right to live. It gave him a calmness of spirit equal to his composure of expression.

In the sheriff's office, Barnes suddenly jumped to his feet.

"Listen!" he cried.

Outside in the corridor rose the scuffling of feet and the door was flung open by Annette. With a groan of relief Barney had her in his arms: For a moment she rested there. Then, as Wallie filed his three prisoners into the room, she hastily tried to turn the embrace into a handshake. It was then that the conduct of the portly man in the yellow slicker forestalled any embarrassment which this episode might have caused.

"Where'd you find these fellows?" he demanded, turning to the trooper.

The recognition was instant.

"Hello, dad!"

The banker drew back as though he himself feared arrest at the hands of this nonchalant and extremely dirty young swashbuckler.

Wallie grinned.

"You asked about these birds," he drawled. "I happened on 'em in a barn up the line a ways."

"Only three?" His tone implied that as usual Wallie had omitted the essential detail.

"The other one's still up there."

The banker caught the significance. "Was it Perkins?" he asked.

So that was why the man he had out-shot looked so familiar. "Yeah, it was Perkins all right," replied Wallie, "and he called me 'Useless' once!" he went on slowly, with faint irony.

But his father was driving ahead. "No doubt about it," said he to the sheriff. "This is the crowd that cleaned out our bank Friday night."

"Honestly?" Annette became unaccountably interested.

"Do you know what they did with the money?" continued the bank president, getting down to essentials.

Wallie's head indicated that it was ap-

parently out of the window. Handing his automatic over to the sheriff, he left the office. Whereupon Annette saw her chance.

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin!" she cried, her face aglow. "Wallie was simply wonderful! He charged the barn all alone on his motor cycle—right through a solid door! You will forgive him and take him back, won't you? Even if he can't make money?"

The banker's face softened. "Well," he said, "the boy'll make a little money out of this. The various rewards will total about thirty-five hundred." He scowled at the handcuffed trio. "These crooks got away with nearly a quarter of a million dollars!"

"Then you'll take him back into the bank?" persisted the girl.

The bland smooth face with its close-cropped mustache looked stern and dubious for a moment. "Yes," he answered slowly, "I'll make him a director——"

Her exclamation of satisfaction and Barney's look of black despair were interrupted by Wallie, who entered and lifted three bags to the desk.

"Sheriff," he said, "I'll just trouble you for a receipt and be on my way."

"Wallie, listen!" broke in the girl. "The most wonderful thing has happened! You've won a reward and your father says he'll take you back into the bank—and make you a director!"

"That's right, son!"

The trooper's face, as he gazed fixedly at the eager girl in front of him, became a study. Annette had found time to use her vanity case while he had put a new inner tube in *Harriet's* front shoe. The cloak in which she had started off the night before was thrown over her slender shoulders.

ALTOGETHER she presented much the same picture of loveliness he had seen on the veranda of the Glen House. The same crying need of all the comforts and luxuries that money could buy showed in her delicate frame, the sensitiveness of her features.

Already, Wallie saw, the terrible ex-

perience in the barn had become for her only a lively adventure. Chance, in an unperilous age, had given him one opportunity in a thousand to protect her. But the other nine hundred and ninety-nine opportunities would be to protect her from the heartaches and drab commonplaces which such small earnings as his bring to a girl accustomed to every luxury the world has to offer.

That spontaneous rush to Barney, friendly outburst though it may have been, had not escaped Wallie's notice. Then, too, he felt the underlying fear that made her determined he should return to his father's bank.

With a quizzical smile that wrinkled his face into what seemed a good-natured rather helpless grin, he took her hand and led her to where Barney was moodily watching.

"Hope you two'll be happy."

His tone sounded careless, but none of them saw the convulsive jump of his Adam's apple. In a couple of long strides he had regained his hat and gun and strode toward the door.

"So long, dad!" he said, and was gone, so quickly that they could only stare after him in amazement at this latest unaccountable action.

A FEW minutes later, Wallie was back where twenty-four hours before had begun the pursuit of the blue car. But now neither the steady stream of motor cars nor the roadsides littered with the waste paper of the nature lovers annoyed him. Raising *Harriet* onto her stand, he sat down upon a rock and began his report for headquarters.

"Captured the four men who robbed Albany Loan & Trust at 7 a. m. this morning," he wrote. "Also a stolen car. Car and funds returned. Turned over two men to sheriff, one to undertaker, and arranged for fourth to be sent to hospital——"

"Hey, offisher!"

A limousine had stopped and a middle-aged man in copious gray knickerbockers was proceeding in a zigzag path toward

where Wallie was seated. The man's air was one of joyous defiance and his eyes twinkled gleefully in his fat, indulgent face. He was determined the officer should enjoy his little joke.

"Mishter Offisher," he said with bland and deliberate dignity, "whish is the way to New York?"

The trooper, however, was about to play a little joke of his own. With a

curt, almost military gesture, not even looking up, he indicated the road to his jovial questioner—and continued with his report.

"P. S.," he concluded. "Herewith please accept my resignation. Have my eye on the Northwest or Alaska. I find the East too damn effete."

Then with a bold, self-confident flourish he signed his name.



A CANAL THAT HAS MADE GOOD

THE Panama Canal has made good. Despite the big investment for building it and the large cost of operation it is showing a profit. Other nations have benefited from the digging of the big ditch that joins the Atlantic and the Pacific, but the United States is the biggest gainer. Since the Canal was opened to traffic ten years ago, thirty-nine per cent of the cargoes that have passed through it have been American owned. Much of this sea-borne traffic was from one coast of the United States to the other. Great Britain ranks next to us in ownership of cargoes that have gone through the Canal, with thirty-six per cent. Other nations have owned Canal-transported cargoes as follows: Norway, seven per cent; Japan, seven per cent; Denmark, three per cent; Holland, two per cent; twenty-three other nations, six per cent.

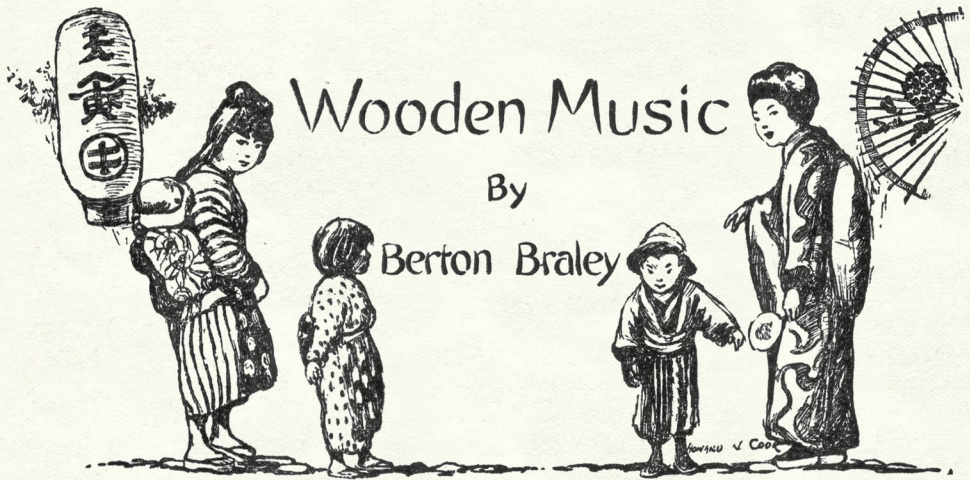


THE MIGHTY MALCONTENT

THERE has never been anybody in Washington like William E. Borah, the bulging-browed senator from Idaho. Mr. Borah, though a Republican, is a political nonconformist, an insurgent and an independent. Usually, when a member of Congress refuses to walk straight at the crack of the party whip, he is banished to the No Man's Land of politics, the light of the president's countenance is withdrawn from him and he is left to tread the wine press of political patronage alone and unassisted.

Not so with Mr. Borah. When the death of Henry Cabot Lodge, who was the sovereign of all the regulars and conformists, vacated the chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the post went to Borah. And immediately the White House automobile was sent out to haul the party rebel to the White House for a conference. It has gone after him many times since.

The administration realizes that, although the man from Idaho wants Russia recognized and has opposed the party plan on other issues and is liable to oppose it on more that may come up, he is so able and carries such an influence that neglecting him is poor business. The leaders are glad to have his support when they can get it. They fight as best they can when he is against them. But always Borah, the mighty malcontent, the Senate's star troublemaker, knows that the White House doors will open to him at the first light blow from his knuckles.



Wooden Music

By

Berton Braley

AS you come to Yokohama, in the sky gleams Fujiyama,
 Magic mountain, white and misty, dim to scan;
 Then it fades and you are docking. Down the gangway you are flocking
 In Japan.

Ricksha coolies yell and chatter, on your ears their voices batter,
 Then you note a sort of syncopated beat.

(Clitter-clatter, clitter-clatter!

On the street.)

It's the clatter of the getas on the street.

IN the nighttime or the daytime, in the worktime, in the playtime
 On the byway, on the wider thoroughfare,
 There's a queer reverberation, there's a rhythmical pulsation
 In the air.

Multitudes that swirl and scatter—silk and satin, rag and tatter—
 They are making wooden music with their feet.

(Clitter-clatter—clitter-clatter

On the street.)

It's the clatter of the getas on the street.

FAR away is Fujiyama, farther still is Yokohama
 Where I heard the coolies talking as they sunned;
 While amid the anchored shipping fishermen their nets were dipping
 Near the Bund;
 Peddler's droning, cymbals clanging, and the samisens twing-twanging
 These are clamor that I shall not soon forget,
 But when time these sounds shall scatter, I shall hear the getas clatter
 Even yet.

(Clitter-clatter, clitter-clatter),

Other memories are fleet

But I'll always hear the getas

Clitter-clatter on the street!



A Fighting Chance

By R. K. Culver

There was trouble brewing in San Francisco's Chinatown when the gods of battle beckoned "One Punch Ferguson" to the fray.

THE discouraged fan-tan player turned from the table at Hop Wong's resort and edged through the fringing group of chattering Chinamen. "No use," he commented gloomily. "Same old jinx. I guess it's the bay for mine—I'm through."

Another player quickly took his place, and he slouched away, unheeded by all but the proprietor.

Hop Wong's fat eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he observed the square jaw, the well-developed shoulders, and particularly the crumpled rim of a "cauliflower" ear that showed above the shabby upturned collar of the passing figure. As the desperate loser disappeared down the narrow stairway leading out into the night, the old Chinaman half closed his puffy lids and nodded contemplatively.

Then he glanced across the room, raised one hand and crooked a pudgy finger. An attentive Oriental with a bullet scar across one cheek glided to his side and

the two were soon engaged in a whispered conversation.

Brooding on his many troubles, the discouraged fan-tan player had wandered out into the night, shambled despondently along deserted Clay Street and stumbled to a bench in Portsmouth Square. A blur of fog that drifted in from the Golden Gate seemed slowly to be blotting out the universe. The world was a dismal place and he wished himself well out of it.

The droning of the foghorn from the bay below reminded him that a short walk would take him to the end of some dark wharf where a final step would end his troubles. But something in him suddenly resented as unfair the continual buffetings of fortune that had brought him to his present plight.

"If I only had a chance," he challenged, "just a fightin' chance to win, I'd sure be there with bells, I'll tell the world!"

As if the words had called it forth, a

shadowy shape appeared from out of the fog and glided toward him; it was as though some occult power had heard his challenge and accepted it. Slowly the apparition materialized into a slippery, silk-clad Chinaman. The gliding figure finally paused before him with the placid manner of an Oriental oracle accustomed to such urgent calls, and ready to inform the desperate loser of a final fighting chance.

BUT to the "Fan-tan Kid"—as he was called by other patrons of the game at old Hop Wong's—it was merely Chang Foo, one of Hop Wong's handy men whom he had often seen about the gambling resort. Coming from that disastrous quarter, Chang Foo seemed an omen of more bad luck, but the Kid would hear him out and see.

"Plenty bloke now, huh, Kid!" grinned the yellow oracle.

"Me? I just won a million," wheezed the moody loser, ending in a cough that shook the bench.

"Me savvy! No luck fan-tan," nodded Chang Foo with apparent satisfaction. Then he added glibly: "Jus' now lose'm, by'm by you ketch'm."

But the unlucky player had heard that empty phrase too many times around the gambling tables at Hop Wong's.

"Bunk!" he jeered. "Old stuff! That joint up there's so crooked the cops can't find their way inside. I'm off the dump for life. On your way, chink; you don't listen good to me."

The Chinaman stepped closer.

"You say me no listen good!" he scowled; and then, as one who justifies a prophecy, he added rapidly and in a lowered voice: "Me come say Hop Wong need'm heap slma't fightee man—big job—plenty money. Pletty soon you ketch'm good."

He eyed his listener shrewdly for a moment.

"Me listen much mo' betta now, huh, Kid!" he added dryly.

The shoulders of the figure on the bench had squared a trifle. It flattered his pride

to be referred to as a fighting man, for he had once been known as "One Punch" Ferguson, and not without good reason. Whenever he had landed squarely on the chin of an opponent, that part of the program at the Dreamland Rink arena—that place so aptly named—had ended suddenly and in a way most pleasing to the fight fans.

Remembering those triumphs now, the dull look went out of his eyes. He was no longer the shabby Fan-tan Kid, shivering on a park bench, but the shifty lightweight of a former day, sitting in his corner waiting for the gong to sound and nodding confidently to his admirers packed about the ring. But the gloomy present was too real and too imperative; the vision of past victories soon vanished.

"Forget it, Kid—you ain't nobody now," he muttered with a shiver.

Yet the fact remained that he had been remembered as a fighting man, and that was something these depressing days. But this hiring out to do the fighting for so unscrupulous a Chinaman as old Hop Wong would be a risky matter. It was a proposition to be carefully thought over. He wondered just what the big job was, but veiled his curiosity in an apparently cynical query.

"Who does the old crook want croaked now?" He put the question in a bantering drawl and with a tinge of scorn not entirely assumed.

But the wily spokesman of Hop Wong would reveal no details of the venture; his announcement of assured prosperity could be trusted to bring quick enough results.

"Some talk—good; too muchee talk—no good," he answered sagely, as became an oracle, and turning abruptly vanished in the thickening fog. "You go see Hop Wong—him wait!" came trailing back from out the night.

For a long time the Fan-tan Kid sat staring at the wall of fog into which Chang Foo had disappeared. It would be no easy job that Hop Wong would want done; he felt sure enough of that. The crooked old gambler undoubtedly had

many enemies and perhaps this was a scheme for getting rid—

"Come out of the trance, Kid; say—know anything about that dead chink we found up in Ross Alley?" Patrolman Ryan of the Chinatown squad stood teetering on rubber heels beside him.

The quick-witted loungeer stretched his arms in simulated drowsiness.

"Nix—not me," he answered in a sleepy voice. "I went and lamped him at the morgue, but I never seen his map before."

"Thought maybe he might be one of Hop Wong's men. You'd know for certain if anybody would."

The Fan-tan Kid was silent for a moment. What he had told the patrolman was all true enough, but now, in the light of Chang Foo's recent message from Hop Wong, the matter of the slain man began to take on a deep significance.

"So that's the way you're dopin' it!" he answered slowly. "Never thought of that."

"But you say you never saw him before. That ought to settle it. You know all those slant-eyed yes-men up around Hop Wong's."

"That don't cut no ice. The old crook's so foxy you can't always tell who's workin' for him. Maybe it's some outsider imported for the job, or maybe it's some local guy you wouldn't think has the nerve to croak a rat."

He coughed and shuffled his feet uneasily and wondered why he had been fool enough to make that last remark, for perhaps he was on his way to becoming that kind of a local guy himself. He recalled the wise words of Chang Foo—"Some talk—good; too much talk—no good!"

But the patrolman merely yawned and answered: "If that's *all* you know about the killin', Kid, I'll tell you somethin'. It sounds like there's the rumblin's of a tong war goin' on. We're workin' on the theory that this dead chink we found was a gunman of Hop Wong's, but that he fell down on the job—the other guy gettin' to him first.

"We don't know who this other party is," he went on, "but we're figurin' we'll find him one of these fine days—bored through just like the one he croaked himself. But maybe we'll run onto him before that time. We've got a clew. The chink that did the killin' tossed one of those old-style .45s over that high board fence around the back yard of Lee Fat's chop-suey joint and there was a piece of torn yellow silk caught underneath the hammer."

"Some clew!" murmured the Fan-tan Kid. "All you gotta do is to give the once-over to all the yella silk in Chinatown. You're gonna be the busy guys, I'll say!"

"Maybe so," replied the patrolman thoughtfully. "It's not the most uncommon color in the world," and coming out of his rubber-heel teeter, he strode leisurely into the fog. "And there's a good deal of it sittin' back there on that bench," he mused, a block away. "Hasn't even got the kind of fightin' nerve old Hop Wong is lookin' for, or he'd sure be usin' him these busy times. But it's a good thing for the Kid, at that. He's harmless and he knows that whole bunch of highbinders. Maybe we can use him some day."

LEFT to his meditations, the Fan-tan Kid was musing along the lines of his possible usefulness—but not to the Chinatown squad. He was wondering if he had the kind of fighting nerve Hop Wong would probably require. When he stepped into a ring it was not a matter of life and death, but this business of a finish fight in which a coroner's jury would probably be called in to act as referee was a different proposition.

He fell to pondering again the mysterious message delivered by Chang Foo. If it related to the dead man, he had carefully concealed the fact. But if it did, why, then, should old Hop Wong select a white man to even up the score? And what advantage did he figure even an armed prize fighter would have over a trained gun fighter with a .45-caliber knock-out jolt, good for a city block!

It was too much of a riddle to be solved by idle speculation. No one but Hop Wong could explain the situation; after the Kid had seen him there would be time enough to decide on what course to pursue. But remembering the waiting bay again, he frowned at the thought of hesitating to accept whatever meager chance this unexpected opportunity might offer in the way of life and profitable action.

After all, it was a fair enough old world! With a fighting chance left in it, life was yet worth living. Off in the direction of Hop Wong's resort the lights of Chinatown still glowed dimly through the fog, but with a subtle lure that had been lacking half an hour before. He decided to see Hop Wong and find out what was doing, and again he wondered if he had the kind of fighting nerve the old Chinaman might require.

From the excitement of it all he felt a little shaky and the damp night air had chilled him through. He thought of the steaming coffee boiler at Keefer's restaurant, less than a block away.

Old Keefer himself was no philanthropist, but he was not always in, and perhaps he could get a hand-out there, the Kid reflected—if the tired-eyed little hasher who always seemed to understand a guy's luck was still on the job. She was all right, she was—a good, game little sport; and say, if the old berry bush ever shook down right he'd sure slip her the price of that fresh-mountain-air stuff she was always ramblin' on about; she looked like she needed it, all right.

Yeah, Keefer's was the place. He'd take a chance and drop in there for a hand-out, including a bracing jolt of Java—black, before the big gabfest with old Hop Wong, the promoter of this little bout. Boy! with all this fight talk in the air it was almost like old times again! He adjusted his surprised cap at a jaunty angle, rose from the bench and plunged into the fog.

It would be strange if One Punch Ferguson did not see to it that the fortunes of his other self—the shabby, ill-starred

Fan-tan Kid—were not greatly bettered by the final terms of this contemplated interview with the old gambler at whose tables he had always been a loser.

WHILE the needy ex-prize fighter was busily engaged in San Francisco's Chinatown, bargaining with old Hop Wong and finally preparing to carry out his orders, rumors of the tong war prophesied by Patrolman Ryan had reached the press and were being spread throughout the State. In a quiet mountain region up in Calaveras County, where even small news items frequently formed the basis of much talk leading to deductions wise and otherwise, a conversation occurred which concerned more vital matters than the speakers realized. It was a lazy Sunday afternoon at the Notch Pass Mine, when this chance dialogue enlivened a dull interval for the two mine owners lounging in their cabin on the ridge.

"I see by the papers," said "Colusa" Smith, laying aside a copy of a San Francisco weekly, "where them chinks in Frisco is fixin' to break loose and start in fillin' one another full of lead again."

"And I see by the chimley smoke a-curlin' up from down at Shanty Flats," replied his partner, Luke McTade, from his station in the doorway, "where there's a chink moved into Pack-rat cabin. Them rats is up against it now."

"You don't say!"

Colusa strode to his partner's side and stood peering out of the doorway curiously.

Their cabin rested on a shoulder of the mountains overlooking a jumbled wilderness of cañons and ravines. The column of smoke referred to appeared above the gray tops of a grove of pines that covered Shanty Flats in Timber Cañon.

"Moved in to work them panned-out gravel beds," commented Colusa Smith. "Beats all how them Mongolians can keep on findin' the stuff; this here's the third one since we been here, ain't it?"

"Yeah, but he won't stay long. Neither of them others did. Funny the way them stray chinks glides in here and out again;

always drift in alone and always pack a gun. If this one's like them last two was, he'll set down there a-whirlin' a pan, with a six-shooter layin' on a rock clost by, like he's expectin' some trouble any minute."

"That's them—always scared somebody's layin' to rob 'em, I reckon. Can't blame 'em much—they ain't up here for their health."

"Then again, that might be the very reason of 'em glidin' up into here."

"Git out! Them chinks don't never die of nothin' but old age. They just dry up and blow away. You never heard of one of 'em travelin' for his health—they don't have to!"

"No? How about them chinks in Frisco bustin' loose and fillin' one another full of lead, like you was sayin' a minute ago? Seems like maybe that might start a few of 'em to travelin' for their health. And if this here last one that's come in figgered he could make good money pan-nin' dust up here and at the same time not be in the way of a lot of stray lead, ain't it logical he'd hit out in this direction? It sure is!"

"And another thing!" went on McTade. "Maybe one of these here days you'll notice that the news has blowed that chimney smoke away. About the time you're readin' how things has quieted down in Frisco's Chinatown, the chances is them pack rats will be movin' back inside that cabin to clean up the stray rice left stickin' in the floor cracks. Anyhow, that's my guess."

"What you givin' me! That chink can't read United States. And whereat would he be gettin' hold of a newspaper, anyhow?"

"Wouldn't have to," replied McTade. "He's got a better way of keepin' posted. Ain't there a Chineese cook down at the Mountain House? Ain't there a Chineese laundry down at Valley Springs? And how about that vegetable raiser down the road a piece from there—and all the rest of them Mongolians, scattered out like that, clean plumb from here to Frisco—or to Oakland, which is clost enough?

You just watch the news and then see what happens down at Shanty Flats."

"Kind of a wireless Chineese telegraft, you mean," said Colusa. "Well, maybe you got the situation sized up right, but what gets me is how them tong wars ever ends a-tall. You'd think one killin' would keep on callin' for another till there'd only be one live chink left anywhere in the entire world."

"It does seem kind of puzzlin', but what gets me is how them rackets ever starts. Now I don't reckon that piece in the paper tells how this here last one happens to break loose?"

"Nope," answered Colusa. "Don't even say it's got to goin' real good yet. Just only states they found a dead chink in a alley, and they're figgerin' it means the huntin' season's on and that they'll find a whole lot more dead Chinamen before the open season closes—like they generally do. It looks real promisin'."

"Uh-huh, just like I thought—it don't tell why the first one happened to be killed—never does. Be kind of interestin' to know if this here one's mixed up in the beginnin' of the trouble like I'm guessin' he is. Chances is, though, we won't never know for certain. Most likely he'll just disappear some day and that'll be the end of it."

"I reckon so," nodded Colusa, returning to his paper. "Nothin' ever happens up around here. We'd be the same as dead and buried wasn't for the paper—and you got to walk four mile for that." He turned to the sporting section of the bulky weekly. "I ain't seen yet how them four-round goes come out down at Frisco last week."

"Wonder whatever become of that scrappin' lightweight I lose a bet of a week's dishwashin' and cookin' to you on, one time?" inquired his partner pensively.

HIM? One Punch Ferguson—the one I took a chanst on, you mean? Why, after he lost out to 'Battlin' Protrero on that fluke, he had a lot of other trouble—different kind, but maybe losin' that fight had somethin' to do with it. Any-

how, seems like some smooth, good-lookin' gent from down Tijuana way blew into San Francisco about that time and run off with the girl this Ferguson party has been aiming to settle down with. Worst of it was, the two of 'em was found killed under a tourin' car that jumps the grade somewheres on the road south. There wasn't no comeback left for this fightin' One Punch Ferguson; they was both gone—and for good and all. Seems like when he got the news he quit the ring and kind of went to pieces. Don't you recollect me readin' you about it?"

"Sure, I do. I was just wonderin' whatever become of him, that's all. He was one of them scrappers who used to tackle 'em outside his class. Seems like all he ever wanted was a gamblin' chanst to win."

"Well, he won't never get it now—been out of the ring too long. Probably up against it now, panhandlin' his way around. Too bad. You can't help feelin' kind of sorry for a kid with a bunch of trouble like that. But he ain't got a Chinaman's chanst—not as far as fightin' goes."

AND so the haphazard conversation, touching unconsciously the interlooping strands of a tangled web still in the weaving, ended—temporarily.

But even while it was occurring, the desperate lightweight—without "a Chinaman's chanst"—was traveling recklessly in that direction, in appearances quite different from the gloomy figure of despair imagined by the two men in the cabin on the ridge.

Had Patrolman Ryan been present he would scarcely have recognized the Fan-tan Kid as the driver of the battered car that jolted up the mountainside, toward the crest of a brushy eminence overlooking Shanty Flats in Timber Cañon. Instead of the threadbare, faded clothes in which he had lately roved the Chinese Quarter, he wore a khaki outing suit. It had been purchased secondhand at a Kearny Street misfit "parlor" with the hope that its slightly worn appearance

would lend the impression that its owner was not entirely unaccustomed to such mountain trips as this.

Further to deceive such strangers as he might chance to meet, he had brought along the usual vacation outfit of the city dweller. In the tonneau of the car was stored a camping kit and a week's supply of provisions. He had also brought fishing tackle and a shotgun in a canvas case; either of these would serve as a pretext for exploring Timber Cañon, where he hoped to locate one Sam Kee, whom old Hop Wong was so desirous should be gathered to the bosom of his ancestors with neatness and dispatch—especially dispatch.

For this purpose a blued-steel weapon that could be wielded handily at close quarters rested in the right-hand side pocket of the innocent-appearing visitor's coat. Old Hop Wong, having recently lost an overzealous gunman, had recommended this surer method of attack; it might scorch the lining of a pocket and leave the coat a trifle frayed and powder marked, but what of that so long as the bullet did its work?

The wily old Oriental had carefully considered the peculiar circumstances of the case before employing the Fan-tan Kid. A power in his own little world and supplied with unlimited resources, he had not been long in discovering the whereabouts of his intended victim. But he had realized that it would be a difficult matter to find a Chinese gunman who could be persuaded to forsake the comparatively safe hunting grounds of Chinatown's protecting alleys and byways for the unfamiliar mountain region into which Sam Kee had disappeared.

Pondering the problem, he had thought of the Fan-tan Kid, living by his wits and grown unusually desperate of late by reason of his long run of bad luck at the fan-tan table. Here was the very man. Moreover, Sam Kee had never been a patron of his place and probably did not know the Fan-tan Kid.

Besides, it was reasonable to suppose that he would hesitate to kill a white man

on suspicion, being too well aware of the swifter consequences of the law. All in all, it would be a comparatively safe undertaking for the Fan-tan Kid, Hop Wong thought, and the more tempting to him for that reason.

Then had come the decisive moment when the unlucky fan-tan player had turned from the table, penniless and desperate. The smooth old strategist, remembering the latter's ring experience, had alluded to him through the messenger, Chang Foo, as a "heap slma't fightee man," and the flattering phrase had helped to bring results.

The upshot of the matter had been several whispered conferences ending with Hop Wong's agreeing to pay one thousand dollars for the "big job," and advancing about three hundred for a used car and other incidentals of the journey.

Two days later the Fan-tan Kid crossed the bay to Oakland at daybreak. From there he drove to the State highway and north along it for five tedious hours. This brought him to an unpaved crossroad lined with poplar trees.

Following Hop Wong's instructions, he turned to the right and sped east along this crossroad, passing through miles of orchard-covered uplands. The grade grew steadily steeper till at last the way wound through a maze of hot, brown hills and had finally dwindled to a mere wood road, leading into this wild and rugged mountain region.

And now, at the crest of the ridge, he stopped the car to ease his aching arms and shoulders and to spy out the territory just ahead.

There was the cañon with the broken line of cliffs off at the left, and at the right the steep stretch of mountainside, scarred by great white gashes where landslides had occurred. And down in its mysterious depths he could see a grove of pines on a small flat above a strip of darker green that wound and twisted in and out along the tortuous bottom of the cañon, marking the contour of the gravel-bedded stream he knew was there.

Without a doubt this was the spot Hop
11A-POP.

Wong had described as Sam Kee's hiding place; and without a doubt a stranger threading his way up through that timbered maze might come upon him suddenly at any turn.

Although still seated safely in the car, the anxious-eyed explorer reached toward the right-hand pocket of his coat and muttered apprehensively. This deep-blue cañon with its labyrinth of unfamiliar ways half lost in the shadowy gloom of towering pines, and even this brushy region bordering the car, seemed filled with sudden danger.

He would tell the world it was going to be no merry little wild-flower-gathering trip to round up this slant-eyed party who had been quick enough to put a bullet through one of Hop Wong's men and was wise enough to pick a place like this to "rest up" in.

The Kid began to realize how artfully Hop Wong had minimized the dangers of the trip, with all that smooth talk of his. As for his claim that a Chinaman would hesitate to kill a white man, that might possibly hold in the more thickly populated districts, but in a place like this, with the chances of escape all in his favor, there was no telling what an apprehensive Chinaman might do.

It was a disquieting thought. His uneasiness increased. He saw a black speck gliding slowly up the cañon. It gradually took definite form as the buzzard, flapping lazily higher, finally straightened its huge black wings and veered in a sweeping circle, spiraling above him curiously. The solace of a cigarette seemed suddenly desirable to the superstitious Fan-tan Kid.

AS he drew the "makings" from his pocket, a narrow slip of crimson paper, covered with Chinese characters, came with them. He stared at it blankly. There it was again—the mysterious slip of paper he had picked up following his last interview with old Hop Wong!

It was after he had descended the dark, narrow stairway and reached the street again, that it had fluttered to the sidewalk from the direction of an iron-shuttered

upper window. He wished more than ever now, that he had taken it to Yow Chong, the amiable and harmless old shoemaker on the corner, for deciphering. And he would have done that if a member of the Chinatown squad had not happened to be standing near. You could never tell about a member of the squad. So he had put the matter off and ended by neglecting it entirely.

And now as the Kid rolled a cigarette and lighted it, he touched the match to the edge of the puzzling bit of paper. But before the spreading flame had more than scorched the nearest delicate black brush mark, he snuffed it out and thrust the paper back into his pocket.

"Maybe it don't cut no ice," he reflected casually, "but just for ducks I'll get old Yow Chong to give it the once-over after I get back to San Francisco. Yeah—after I get back! Boy! it's a million miles from here to San Francisco and I ain't gettin' nowheres just at present!"

He started the machine again and proceeded cautiously along the dim wood road. It dipped gently down the mountainside and ended abruptly in the center of a spacious clearing thickly dotted with pine stumps that loomed through the ragged growth of weeds and grass like tombstones in some long-neglected graveyard. Through this desolate area the Kid steered the car toward a welcome fringe of living timber just beyond.

After much maneuvering he turned the machine about and parked it snugly behind a drooping screen of gray-needed branches, beneath a group of pines. There was a short, comparatively level space ahead of it; it could be started easily and would take the grade nicely to the crest on high.

The rest of the journey to the floor of the valley would be a matter for the brakes to handle. Contemplating these convenient conditions for a hasty departure, he felt the first flush of confidence he had experienced since entering this depressing region that old Hop Wong had so persuasively alluded to as "Plenty much mo' betta clouded city stleet."

BUT the position of the car was merely an added safeguard, unnecessary, after all; for the strategist in khaki was not forgetting the advantage of the rôle he was to play, in which he would appear as a tenderfoot, strayed from the trail—a harmless visitor.

That would be Sam Kee's appraisal of him when they met, he hoped. The job at present was to locate him; the rest should be an easy matter. It would be the wisest plan, he thought, to wander down into the cañon on a pretended hunting trip, as though in search of smaller game than an apprehensive Chinese gunman.

From the provisions in the car he made a hurried meal, not taking the time and trouble to pitch camp. Then he removed the shotgun from its canvas case. After assembling it, as the pawnbroker, from whom he had purchased it on Montgomery street, had done to show him what a fine weapon it was, he slipped a shell into either barrel, dropped a few extra ones into his pocket and started diagonally down the mountainside. He calculated he had ample time to explore the cañon, find Sam Kee and return to the car long before the sun had disappeared behind the ridge.

The timber, growing denser as he approached the bottom of the cañon, soon began to shut the sunlight out. As he passed through dwindling golden patches of it dappling the pine trunks and the leafy mold beneath his feet, his spirits sank; he felt himself a fool for having ever listened to the bland assurance of Hop Wong, sitting snugly in his little den in Chinatown. This was no place to be looking for as dangerous a Chinaman as Sam Kee had proved himself to be.

There were banks of ferns and tangled thickets just ahead now, shot with dark recesses. These and the shadows all about began to assume fantastic shapes; and suddenly the Kid thought he saw one of the shadows move. It seemed much lighter than the others—much the color of a Chinaman's blue blouse—not unlike the color of the giant blue-gray boulder be-

hind whose rounded side it seemed to vanish in the channel of the creek below.

He changed his course as silently as possible, intending to avoid the boulder, to give it a wide berth. As he pressed on through the tangled underbrush, there came a sound like thunder roaring and reverberating through the cañon. It seemed to split his eardrums, to lift him from his feet and hurl him through countless miles of crashing underbrush and timber.

Then came silence and a drowsy numbness. The Kid seemed huddled on a bench in Portsmouth Square again, staring dully toward the dreamy lights of San Francisco's Chinatown, which danced and flickered dimly through a blur of fog that was slowly blotting out the universe.

AN hour later, in one of the little shacks on Shanty Flats, Colusa Smith sat beside a bunk piled high with fresh-cut pine boughs from which the Fan-tan Kid looked up at him with blinking eyes.

"Feelin' a little better, son?" he asked.

"Kinda groggy yet. Guess I got a charmed life, Doc! That guy sure handed me an awful wallop. How'd I get in here?"

"Oh, we packed you in—us and a chink that lives down here. It was him that creased you up. This here shack is down in Shanty Flats, right clost to his. He's out at present gatherin' more roots and yarbs; if you can stand the stuff he's already got stewin' on his rusty old cookstove, you've sure got a charmed life like you say and no mistake!"

"So that's how it was! Yeah—I kinda seem to recollect it now."

"Well, I wouldn't get sore at him, son, if I was you. He didn't go to do it like maybe you might think. Seems like he's got some Chinees enemies a-lookin' for him, so when he seen you crawlin' through the brush, he wasn't takin' no chances. But when he finds he's shot a white man, he comes b'ilin' up the grade and tells me and Luke about it, and we fetched you in. He sure done the right thing when he found out the mistake he's made."

"Some mistake, I'll say!" muttered the bandaged invalid with subtle irony.

"Sure was, but you couldn't hardly blame him; he might ha' made a bigger one if you'd happened to been one of them enemies of his and he hadn't ha' stopped you in your tracks. But I reckon he didn't even search you, when he seen you was a white man, else he might ha' changed his mind; them Mongolians is plumb leery of pocket shootin' irons—their's what they use when they go on the warpath.

"I brushed up against your side coat pocket when we was a-carryin' you in; that's how I come to know," went on Colusa. "You city fellers always seem to think you're goin' to meet up with a catamount or grizzly b'ar—and at clost range, too. It's plumb ridic'lous the notions you gents gets."

"Seems like I met up with *some*thin' that knows how to fight!" retorted the gun toter, wincing as he gently pressed the red stain on the saturated pad above his "cauliflower" ear.

"Oh, you ain't hurt bad. He just only brushed your ha'r a little, up around that frost-bit left ear of yours. You'll be around again in no time. Why, a little bullet scratch like that, it don't amount to——"

"Danged if he ain't a-settin' up as chipper as a chipmunk!" The bulky form of Luke McTade had suddenly darkened the doorway. He strode in, carrying a roll of blankets and a box filled with paper packages and canned goods.

"Run acrost the snake tracks of that outfit you come in on," he announced, "so I trailed 'em down, thinkin' maybe you was aimin' to camp out for a spell and has fetched along the fixin's. Good thing you done so—just tea and rice gets kind of tiresome to a white man, and it looks like you got to put up at this Chinees hotel a day or two."

"I'll say so," grimaced the Fan-tan Kid, securing papers and tobacco from his hip pocket with an effort. "I feel like I been knocked out with an ax. But I got time to take it easy; I ain't up here on no hurry-up job. I just blew in to bum

around a while; I ain't worryin' none. This place suits me, all right, all right."

AT this point the worried Chinaman, appearing in the doorway with a supply of roots and herbs, noted the improved condition of the victim of his supposed mistake and began to jabber a long apology. The monotonous din seemed jarring to the frayed nerves of the invalid.

"Can the chatter, chink!" he shouted "Shut up! All I wanta know is—can you cook?"

Behind the query was a deeper motive than appeared. To make assurance doubly sure, the cautious Fan-tan Kid wished to check up a little on Hop Wong. And the answer, too, might prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that this Chinaman was not dissembling through fear of slaughtering a white man, but instead had not the slightest suspicion that this one before him was the hired agent of his enemy.

"Can cook? Me tellee wo'l' can do heap good," replied the unsuspecting Chinaman. "Fo' long time me one high-pliee cook big chop-suey place, San Flancisco."

The answer seemed to settle matters. The Fan-tan Kid exhaled a cloud of smoke. He was thinking of Patrolman Ryan's words—"The chink that did the killin' tossed one of those old-style .45s over that high board fence around the back yard of Lee Fat's chop-suey joint and there was a torn piece of yellow silk caught underneath the hammer."

He eyed the Chinaman curiously. It was difficult to imagine the rough-appearing figure, clad in its soil-stained blue blouse and overalls, as having ever been attired in yellow silk. And but for his own narrow escape, it would have been as difficult to imagine him whirling swiftly, extending that now harmless-looking lax right arm, and walking on again, leaving behind him a dead figure sprawled in the shadows of Ross Alley.

The Kid wondered what Patrolman Ryan would give to be in his place now! But he had not come up here in the interests of the Chinatown squad, even

though the result of his visit might ease it of a little work. The situation resolved itself into a simple matter of arithmetic—or, more exactly, a matter of simple arithmetic. He was to get one thousand dollars for the job, but of that amount he had already received three hundred dollars for the car and sundry incidentals; one thousand minus three hundred left seven hundred—seven hundred dollars velvet!

"Pretty soft!" he cogitated.

This conclusion seemed verified by the booming voice of Colusa Smith.

"Well, son, I reckon we might as well be goin' now. You're fixed up all O. K. Couldn't be located better."

"I'll say so!" returned the "harmless tenderfoot."

"Of course I ain't so stuck on the place but what I'd trade it for a soot at the St. Francis, but maybe I can make out with this high-priced chef. If he don't go to puttin' rat poison in the biscuits, I guess I'll pull through all right."

The two departing miners laughed.

"Lucky you ain't one of them enemies he's lookin' for, or you'd be a dead rat sure enough!" replied a chuckling voice.

The Fan-tan Kid consoled himself with the thought that these two were not members of the Chinatown squad.

"Just a coupla mountain boobs," he reflected. "Probably don't even know enough to read a paper. I should worry. There ain't nothin' to this little trip."

He was in no condition now for action, however. Weak and feverish from his wound and the reaction from the day's events, he fell into a troubled sleep. He was soon mumbling, half deliriously, thoughts and impressions he had thrust aside during the last few days of bargaining and plotting.

For the most part they concerned the words and manner of the tired-eyed little waitress who had staked him to the bracing hand-out that cold, foggy night when this opportunity for future affluence had come to him so unexpectedly.

For a time Sam Kee stood listening intently to the half-formed words and

phrases, then turned and shuffled out the door.

"Ketch'm plenty tubble," he commented. "Him leave Flisco too qlick—no stop say 'much 'blige—goo' by.' Wha' fo', no can savvy. Flisco him one hellee place fin' plenty tubble—me heap know!"

He returned to his own cabin thoughtfully, a faint suspicion of the stranger for the first time entering his mind. It occurred to him that this was quite a distance for a San Francisco man to come for a few days' outing.

THE situation did not greatly worry him, however. It seemed out of reason that Hop Wong would send any other than one of his own countrymen to "get" him. And even if this white man was an enemy, it would be some time before he was sufficiently recovered to cause any trouble.

This last conclusion proved to be correct enough. During the days of his convalescence the Fan-tan Kid lounged lazily about, much like a wounded reptile basking in the sun and not yet strong enough to strike. Regularly each morning Sam Kee disappeared on his gold-hunting expeditions down the cañon.

Toward nightfall the plodding, blue-bloused figure would reappear along the darkening trail that wound in and out among the gray pine trunks and crumbling shacks of Shanty Flats. There was still much gold in Timber Cañon, but it was "where you found it at," as the saying goes; this did not discourage Sam Kee, for in common with his kind he had the knack of finding where those places were, and he was rapidly cleaning up a tidy stake.

The steadily increasing hoard lay hidden in a row of rusty tea cans tucked away behind a pine log in a bramble of wild strawberry vines, just off the dim trail leading out of the cañon. In case of a hurried departure, it could be picked up handily.

The half-closed, dreamy eyes of Hop Wong's emissary showed no curiosity regarding the results of Sam Kee's daily ex-

peditions, but he had his own ideas about the matter. It was at least a pleasing field for speculation. The simple mathematical problem that had been running through his mind became a trifle complicated; there were several ways of figuring the situation now, and it was more interesting than before.

The Kid had not counted on these possible additional funds. But if at times this new and somewhat uncertain factor seemed to complicate affairs, at others, it seemed as logically to simplify them; it all depended on the varying moods in which he analyzed the possibilities.

It may have been this problem that was causing him to linger in the cañon longer than was necessary for the accomplishment of his mission, for his strength had now returned. But one day an event occurred that brought things to a sudden crisis.

AS he was returning to his shanty late one afternoon, after a visit to the spot where the car was parked, the Kid heard the muttering voice of Sam Kee from within and saw him stirring restlessly about. Upon entering he was suddenly confronted by a half-demented figure flourishing a heavy six-shooter; the other hand waved aloft a crimson slip of paper covered with Chinese characters.

The infuriated Chinaman motioned toward an empty tobacco sack lying on the floor and entangled with the elastic of a flat, blue cigarette-paper book. As though these carelessly discarded objects were in some way responsible for his discovery, he kicked them forward viciously and thrust the crimson slip of paper to within a scant foot of the Fan-tan Kid's bewildered eyes.

"You go out, you dlop'm floo'!" he exclaimed. "Why you no say bling plenty tubble?"

The cornered Fan-tan Kid gathered his wits as best he could.

"Who—me?" he answered with unfeigned surprise. "Where do you get that stuff? I ain't no messenger boy—you got me wrong."

"Where you ketch'm?" insisted the scowling inquisitor. "You talkee lie—me kill!" The lean, yellow finger seemed to twitch beneath the heavy cylinder.

"Don't get excited—wait a minute," replied the nimble-witted agent of Hop Wong. "You savvy Chinatown guide—show 'Melican man around? Well, that's how me ketch'm. I was trailin' along with a bunch down there and I lamps that layin' on the sidewalk, so I picks it up as a kinda little keepsake; that's all there is to that."

The scowling Chinaman seemed puzzled at the answer. He pondered for a moment.

"Where you find?" he finally asked. "You think see lemembra place."

The easy manner of the Fan-tan Kid was fast returning.

"Sure, I remember now," he answered. And then, with whimsical audacity, he added: "It was in front of a kinda wide, narrow buildin' facin' north and south on a corner right in the middle of the block. The guide says its a closed-down Chineese mission or a wide-open Chineese gamblin' joint—I forget just which."

As hazy as this information seemed, it had the strange effect of changing Sam Kee suddenly again into a half-crazed being. Wailing and lamenting, he paced aimlessly about the room, his eyes fixed on the crimson slip of paper fluttering in his fingers.

"Him say plenty tubble!" he moaned. "Him say heap plenty tubble!"

"That ain't no news to me," replied the Fan-tan Kid. "I seen that the minute I stepped in. You ain't told me nothin' yet. But you're goin' to, all right, all right," he added beneath his breath, and his hand stole toward the pocket of his coat.

"Him say no can live—him say likee die!" wailed the distracted Chinaman. "Too muchee tubble—no can tell."

"You got another guess," replied the Fan-tan Kid, drawing from his pocket the weapon he had carried there so long. "Lay down that gun. Now set down over there. I ain't had any news from San Francisco for so long I'm kinda losin' track of things

down there. I wanta know what all them chicken tracks on that red piece of paper says and I wanta know what's on your mind—all about this bughouse proposition—get me? Now come through."

The frightened Chinaman began to talk. The Fan-tan Kid sat listening moodily, remembering, planning, scheming—thinking his own thoughts. The melancholy voice of Sam Kee, coming from the farthest gloomy corner of the room, was recounting many things that bore directly on the mission of his pensive listener. None but one long familiar with the abbreviated words and phrases of pidgin English could have followed clearly the monotonous, singsong narrative, feebly enlivened, now and then, by a slow gesture of despair.

In brief, it was the story of Sam Kee's betrothal to Moy Ming, an orphaned Chinese girl. At an early age she had been forced to make her own way in the world. Her last position had been that of waitress at Wing Fat's restaurant, and it was there Sam Kee had met and wooed her.

Her beauty had attracted others. Among these was Hop Wong, the powerful one. He soon learned of her betrothal to Sam Kee, and from that time on the latter's life was never safe. Open hostilities had been declared one night as Sam Kee was leaving the fateful restaurant with Moy Ming.

One of Hop Wong's men had attacked him and he had killed him in self-defense. The experience had filled the girl with terror and with so great a fear for Sam Kee's life that she had tearfully entreated him to leave the city and remain away till such time as she could arrange for their passage on a steamer bound for China. After attending to the preliminary details necessary for their transportation, he had come to this secluded spot, intending to return at a given time.

"Him time be t'-morrow!" moaned the disconsolate Chinaman, rocking in his seat and pointing to the crumpled message which had brought disillusionment. For in the meantime, as he now explained, his eyes fixed on the fateful message, two of Hop Wong's men had stepped out of the

fog one night, kidnaped Moy Ming and carried her to Hop Wong's quarters.

There, through a sympathizing old domestic, she had learned that a white man known as the Fan-tan Kid was a frequent visitor at Hop Wong's gambling rooms adjoining. She believed her chance of rescue would be greater if this white man knew her peril, and so she had dropped the message from her window as he had left Hop Wong's resort one night, hoping he might discover its contents—in some way known only to the all-wise gods, who could be trusted to attend to all such matters.

And there the narrative of Sam Kee ended—brokenly, abruptly.

"Too muchee tubble allee time," lamented the half-crazed Chinaman. "You shoot Sam Kee—him leddy die—him wish die plenty qlick!"

"Fair enough!" replied the Fan-tan Kid. "Nothin' like bein' ready when your time comes. You're gonna take a long trip pretty quick now and you won't never see this place again, so we better go dig up all that yella gold you got hid out. Step this way and out the door. Hop along there, shake a leg; action—that's my middle name right now. Plenty tubble, huh? Well, I'll end 'em for you plenty, savvy?"

THE following morning the two miners on the ridge noticed the absence of chimney smoke from the grove of pines on Shanty Flats.

"Must ha' both pulled out," commented Luke McTade. "I guess maybe that tenderfoot got fed up on mountain scenery and hit out for home, sweet home. And I told you that chink wouldn't stay long—probably seen a chanst to get a free ride out and packed up his carpet bag and climbed aboard. Wonder to me he ever stood for that smart Aleck's fresh talk—jokin' that a way about the chink maybe puttin' rat pizen in the biscuits! He sure was a reckless one, the impolite danged little cuss!"

"Yeah, didn't seem to care for nothin'. But, say, Luke, whereat is all that news statin' things had quieted down in China-

town, like you was sayin' there'd be along about the time that chink moved out of here. I ain't saw none in the daily paper yet."

"Too soon," countered the prophetic one. "But it's a cinch that wild-eyed Mongolian with all them enemies got some kind of word from San Francisco callin' him away from here. Might not all be in the paper when you get her, but I'll bet there'll be enough to kind of explain the situation; you wait and see."

COLUSA SMITH shook his head and laughed at the prophecy. But a day later, as he sat beside his partner on a log of the woodpile just outside the cabin, turning and returning the pages of the latest copy of the San Francisco weekly, he finally found the piece of news he had been looking for.

"Danged if you wasn't right," he said, his finger on the first paragraph. "Listen at what it says here:

"It is hoped by the police that no more killin's will occur in the Chinese quarter. A raid was made on Hop Wong's gamblin' resort last night, which netted three notorious gunmen, besides Hop Wong himself, by whom, it is alleged, the others were employed.

"A peculiar feature of the raid was the findin' of Hop Wong, battered and unconscious, on the floor of his private office, which adjoins the main gamblin' room. His jaw was broken as if from a terrific blow. But stranger yet was the discovery of a rusty tea can restin' on his chest and containin' a quantity of small gold nuggets amountin' in value approximately to three hundred dollars. A door leadin' from this room into his richly furnished livin' quarters had been broken open from the other side, and the iron bars of a rear window openin' from the apartment to an adjoinin' roof had been sawed away.

"It is the theory of the police that Hop Wong's assailant entered and departed just prior to the raid; but the three hundred dollars' worth of unmolested gold in the rusty tea can remains a fascinatin'

mystery. Hop Wong, with his fractured jaw, is naturally silent on the matter.'

"Knocked out cold—and with three hundred dollars' worth of gold reposin' on his chest!" concluded Colusa Smith, his finger lingering beneath the last perplexing sentence. "Ain't that a stemwinder of a puzzlin' proposition now! How'd all that gold get there?"

"And in a rusty tea can too," mused Luke McTade. "Some Mongolian panned that gold. Kind of interestin'—in especial when you cast your eyes down yonder where one of 'em was whirlin' a pan not more'n three, four days ago." He waved a hairy arm in the direction of the pine-clad flat below. A thin column of smoke was again appearing above the gray pine tops.

The two began a long discussion of the mystifying situation. The discussion grew to a debate and then an argument. In the midst of the animated talk, the newspaper dropped out of sight behind the log on which they sat; and presently the branches of a mountain laurel parted and the Fan-tan Kid stepped lightly out before them.

"Fine day, gents! I guess you noticed I been away," he volunteered.

In keeping with a theory he had just voiced to Colusa Smith, Luke McTade showed no surprise. "We noticed you *both* been away," he nodded. "I reckon that chink cook is gone for keeps; I see he didn't put no rat pizen in them biscuits, after all."

"Nope, he never did get around to that, and now he's gone for keeps, just like you guessed. It seems this Sam Kee—that's his name, I learns—seems he had a case on a chink jane down in San Francisco. The day he left, he gets one of them underground Chinese messages, which says some slant-eyed gambler has stole the girl away from him. The news near drives him crazy; he can't hardly think straight.

"Believe me," the Kid went on, "I knew how knocked out he felt; I'd had some troubles somethin' like his once myself and I seen right away that there wasn't no time to lose. I had to treat him kind of

rough to bring him to and get him started out, but by the time we got there he begun to understand and says I'm 'heap fine flend.'

"I'd been tellin' him it wasn't much for me to do, 'cause I had to go to town anyhow to square up with a guy I owed three hundred berries to on account of a little business deal that ain't workin' out the way I guaranteed it to.

"Well, that's about all there was to the proposition; only Sam Kee he shows me a pile of gold he took out of here and gives me a little stake for helpin' him over them troubles of his. I kinda like this place. I'm gonna stick around a while this trip. Of course this gold-huntin' game's a gamble all the way, but I got a gamblin' streak in me and this layout suits me fine—you've got an even break; and this square sport, Sam Kee, he tells me right where——"

"But how about them troubles of his?" broke in Colusa Smith. "How'd he make out—find the girl the feller stole?"

THE ex-prize fighter glanced casually at the bruised knuckles of his left fist.

"My name's Ferguson," he said. "One Punch Ferguson they used to call me, down at Dreamland Rink in Frisco. Maybe that don't mean anything to you two guys away off up here where nothin' much ever happens, but when you ask me, did this Sam Kee find that little dame the guy stole, why, I gotta say the chances is he done so. Anyhow, the last I seen of him they was both of 'em standin' on the deck of a steamer that's headin' out toward the Golden Gate, and they was both wavin' good-by to me.

"But that ain't all that's happened along them lines since I left here," the Kid continued. "I ain't forgettin' what you old-timers done for me that time I almost got croaked on the way in; and so we both want you two gents to come down the Flats and help us celebrate—Friend Wife and me. She's got the little old shack all fixed up with flowers and ferns and a lotta junk like that.

"Be sure to bring 'em both back with

you,' she says. 'I'll have the table all set and waitin'.'

"So we better be travelin', 'cause she's been cooped up in a dinky little beanery down in San Francisco for so long she's kinda dippy about these mountain places, and if we don't show up on time she's liable to beat it for the next blue range, chasin' butterflies and wild flowers, what I mean.

"Say, I'm a lucky guy—winnin' out the way I done on that fightin' chance I took—a winnin' streak, that's all—I didn't hardly have to do a thing!"

The modest victor reached up absent-mindedly and brushed aside a leafy spray of mountain laurel that a discerning breeze, as though mindful of a certain need of valor due the fighting Fan-tan Kid, had tossed about his temples.



LONGER LIFE

FROM experiments and results tabulated to date, it is probable that one of the epochal discoveries of the twentieth century will be the prolongation of human life. Already, we are informed that the death rate has fallen in several of the more advanced nations, including our own, and mortality experts have issued statements assuring us of an increased expectancy of life from eight to ten years. The inference is that we are only beginning to learn how to live so as to lengthen our days, and, presumably, enjoy them in proper ratio to their extension.

Bernard Shaw, it will be remembered, in the preface to his "Back to Methuselah" argued that the generally accepted concept of threescore-and-ten years as man's age limit was the chief cause of its being so. Man, he said, should live hundreds of years, that Nature wanted him to live that long, but that he deliberately thwarted these intentions by his disobedience and obstinacy, thus curtailing his rightful heritage to some sort of real maturity.

Many thought Shaw was merely entertaining himself and us with his idea jugglery. But there are a number of decidedly serious scientists on his side. One of them, an English chemist, Barton Schammell of Dover, whose radium researches are well known in the scientific world, says:

"Every animal normally lives for five times the period of its full growth. A human being continues growing until the age of twenty-five. His span of life should be one hundred and twenty-five years, not seventy. Duration of life depends greatly on diet. Regard the human body merely as a chemical organism and treat it as such. To keep it at its highest efficiency it requires the continual replacement of certain chemicals. If unsupplied, the body wastes and dies.

"We have discovered that one of the most important constituents of this organism is the alkaline metal potash. When there is a full and adequate supply of this substance the body remains vigorous for long over the Psalmist's allotted span. But the trouble has been to supply potash in a form in which it can be assimilated by the body and taken into the blood. We have now discovered how this can be achieved. Experiments in the last five years have shown that if potash is mixed with radioactive solutions it can be taken into the system with most amazing results. It not merely prolongs life, but it keeps people in what we regard as advanced middle age in a state of perfect health and efficiency. So far as the actual physical indications are concerned, after a few months of the treatment, the hair begins to grow afresh, the nails grow, the muscular system is completely braced up, and we are now experimenting, and facing with some hope, the problem whether a human being can grow a third set of teeth."



The Strange Affairs of the Texan Wasp

By James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Fear Drunkard," "Some One Had Blundered," Etc.

I.—THE TERRIBLE THING

More than a year ago, we left Robert Henry Blane secure in fortune, and with a prospect of apparently unending future happiness—in a word, he was to conclude his career of daring adventure with the greatest of all adventures—matrimony. But Fate never sleeps, nor does she choose her victims with justice; so we find "The Texan Wasp" unwedded, in the great metropolis of New York where an experience overtakes him, the like of which he had never before encountered.

AT the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, northwest corner, Robert Henry Blane, of Houston, known in many lands as "The Texan Wasp," stood and lazily watched the tide of battle ebb and flow as joyful jay walkers fought with charging chauffeurs for possession of the crossing. Mr. Blane was vaguely amused at the courage which the human beetles exhibited in contesting the strip of road against the hooded horse power of the Avenue.

He wondered what errands urged little mouse-faced men and old ladies to challenge the limousines de luxe, the slinky roadsters and the stately sedans who were all born with the freedom of Fifth tied

to their radiators. Great errands, he thought. Great, because those errands had made the throbbing city in which they lived.

The golden dust of the spring afternoon filled the great artery, and Blane, as he watched, made comparisons. In the little windows of memory he put up, one by one, the important streets of the world and judged them beside the Road of Wealth. He had seen them all. Piccadilly, rolling carelessly from the Circus to Hyde Park Corner; the Unter den Linden, sweeping from the Schlossplatz to the Brandenburg Gate; the Avenue de l'Opéra with its faëry charm. Others rose before his mental eyes as he stood half hypnotized by the swirling traffic.

The Rambla at Barcelona; the Prado of Madrid; the Avenida de Liberdade of Lisbon. He smiled as he pictured them. They were little dirt tracks in comparison with the mighty thoroughfare at which he gazed. Old they were without a doubt, hoary with historical associations, picturesque in their way, but they lacked the thunderous force, the splendid pulse, and the overwhelming wallop of old Fifth Avenue!

The Wasp came out of his daydream with amazing suddenness. A thin-legged, quaint and overburdened girl of some fifteen years attempted a jay sprint. A section of unmobilized pantaloons fell from her bundle when safety seemed in sight and, foolishly, she tried to retrieve the piece as a chauffeur with "Hell or Harlem!" in his eye spurred his flivver.

The athletic Blane hurled himself onto the roadway; he seized the thin arm of the girl and swung her clear, leaving the machine free to print a greasy crisscross pattern on the scrap of tweed. The Wasp, by a second dive, recovered the cloth and presented it to the rescued demoiselle.

"Gosh! Wouldn't that give yer an ear-ache?" gasped the girl, as she examined the section of unbuilt pants on which the flivver had wiped its flying tire. "The swine! That'll set mommer back more'n a dollar an' I'll get a lamming!"

Robert Henry Blane smiled. There was an elfin wistfulness about the girl as she contemplated the greasy cloth. She looked up at her tall rescuer and twisted her mouth in a manner that suggested a conflict between comedy and tragedy. A few loungers paused to listen; a traffic policeman, eyes upon the Avenue, wheeled a mammoth ear toward her.

"The cops are with the choffers," said the girl, her large dark eyes upon Robert Henry Blane. "Granny useter hump these pants home, but a choff got granny an' gave her a free ride halfway to Central Park on his bumper. She's had more pains than a whole hospital ever since he hit her. Mommer did it then, but she's gone an' got scared an' now they nearly got me, only you pulled me clear. But

this hunk of a pants is all spoiled an' I haven't got the choff's number."

The Texan Wasp stooped and placed a folded bill in the thin hand of the girl. He doubled her fingers around the offering and patted her head. "Never you mind," he said softly, "One of these days you'll ride around in a car that will be all blue and gold and all the folk on foot will have to step swiftly to get out of your way."

The girl took a sly peep at the bill in her hand. A little gasp of astonishment came from her as she discovered that the tall rescuer had presented her with a ten-spot. Hurriedly she gathered up her bundle and prepared for another dash across the Avenue, but a new thought struck her as the smiling cop offered his hand. She turned and rushed toward The Texan Wasp, who had moved away.

"Please tell me yer name?" she cried. "I'd like to tell mommer who it was that gave me the money."

"My name is Blane," answered the tall Texan. "Blane."

"Thank you," said the child. "I'll remember. Thank you again."

Robert Henry Blane sauntered slowly up the Avenue. Tall, handsome and carefully dressed in clothes that showed his athletic figure to perfection he attracted attention from both sexes. Elegantly gowned ladies glanced shyly at him and wondered; men examined him with a puzzled air.

HIS perfectly fitting suit was American, so were his shoes, the hat was probably made somewhere between Graz and Vienna on the order of a Fifth Avenue hatter, but in spite of all the proof his clothing gave to the curious, they felt that there was something exotic about the tall Texan, something that whispered "of perilous ports and cities whose copper gates bar out the stranger." And well they might think so. For the world was a dog-eared volume to Robert Henry Blane, a volume tattered and torn.

The Wasp paused before the window of a fashionable jeweler. His strong, shapely left hand stole softly to the top pocket of

his vest as he contemplated the choice pieces in the elaborate show cases. The fingers found something and carried it gently forward so that the flashing gray eyes of the adventurer fell upon it.

It was a locket of gold, heavily encrusted with diamonds and adorned with soft traceries that would have done credit to those cunning, old jewelers who worked under the patronage of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

The locket fell open and the eyes of Robert Henry Blane looked down upon the sweet face of his sweetheart of the long ago. Smiling up at him was the wonderful face of Betty Allerton, his affianced bride, who had been stricken down on the eve of her wedding and had passed with appalling suddenness beyond the ken of the man who loved her dearly.

Blane, for a long minute, looked at the glorious face of the girl he had loved greatly, then he detached the locket from its chain and entered the jeweler's. The hinge of the beautiful piece that carried the miniature of Betty was out of order and he wished it repaired.

A large, pompous salesman bowed before the distinguished-looking customer. Blane returned the bow coldly. The pompous one did not look a lovable fellow and, for just a moment, The Wasp had a curious dislike to show the locket to him. He conquered the momentary repugnance and spoke.

"The hinge of this locket has been broken," he said. "I would like to have it repaired promptly."

The salesman took the locket and opened it. His round, piggy eyes fell upon the picture of Betty Allerton and the beauty of the girl held him. Without looking at Blane, he spoke his thoughts.

"Say, what a charming girl!" he observed. "I never saw any one as beautiful as her in——"

He got no farther. Blane leaned across the counter and brought the back of his hand smartly across the fellow's wrist, then, as the salesman spluttered, the same hand deprived him of the locket.

The gray eyes of The Wasp were

rapiers that beat down the pompous one's torrent of indignation. He sensed danger and backed away before the angry Texan.

"I—I didn't mean any offense!" the man stammered. "I just meant it in a pleasant way."

"No one asked you for comments," snarled Blane. "I spoke to you as a workman, not as a judge of beauty. If you keep up that habit, some one is going to kill you."

A suave manager showing out a lady customer was attracted by the discussion. He stopped and came closer.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked, then as The Wasp turned, he gave a glad cry of recognition and held out his hand.

"It is Monsieur Blane!" he cried, his voice showing the slightest foreign intonation. "It is years since I have seen you! Years and years! You remember me? You were my very good client when I was on the Rue de Castiglione. Tell me what has annoyed you? Tell me! I am your servant."

The Wasp told and the manager forgot his lady customer as he listened. She found the exit unattended while the manager begged the Texan to leave the locket for his own personal attention. He would attend to it himself immediately.

Blane, soothed by the other's apologetic manner, gave him the precious locket and departed. Slowly he continued on his way northward, his thoughts of Betty Allerton and the hundred and one adventures that had befallen him in the years before she had promised to be his bride.

He had reached the corner of Fifty-fourth Street when a soft voice coming from the rear halted him.

"Pardon," came the voice, "I heard your name in the jewelry store. The manager was showing me out and I heard him call you 'Monsieur Blane.' Is it—is it possible that you are Robert Henry Blane?"

THE TEXAN WASP turned and examined his questioner. Some bell upon which the finger of caution had been placed by his inner self was ringing within

his brain as he regarded her. He asked himself why. Who was the woman and why should he be afraid of her? An elegant lady as far as the piercing gray eyes could discover in a lightning scrutiny, yet there was something that upset the comparison. Something that did not go with the general run of grand dames that he knew.

He told himself that it was intelligence. Intelligence of a startling kind! Intelligence that ran riot over her chiseled features! Intelligence that flamed from her green-tinted eyes, that flowed over her brow, that showed in the straight nose and the well-formed mouth.

Then memory, like a magician who drags a rabbit from an empty paper bag, handed the solution to Robert Henry Blane. He laughed softly.

"You know me?" asked the woman.

"I have seen your eyes," replied The Wasp cautiously.

"Where?" she inquired.

"At Cherbourg. I was boarding a steamer for New York and I felt that some one was staring at me. I saw your eyes behind a pile of cases. Only the eyes. I had heard of them and I knew who you were."

A smile that was like a flash of pure sunlight fled across the face of the woman. She regarded Blane quietly and The Texan Wasp felt a little thrill of pleasure as he stared at her. He knew that he was face to face with one of the most extraordinary women of the day. A woman whose interest in a wrongdoer pushed him into the very élite of criminality. Ordinary rascals, lightweight crooks, assassins even—of these dilettantes she took no notice.

THE great disturbing units of the world were her prey. Rumor had it that she had been at the court of Potsdam before the war; long-tongued gossip said that she had supped with Lenin and sent his daily utterances to listening ears in Washington, London and Paris; she had the entrée to the Kremlin; she had earned the Grand Cordon of the Order of Leo-

pold and was the only woman to receive the Cross of the Precious Light.

She was spoken of in council halls, in the salons of kings and presidents. Spoken of in whispers. She was "The Mystery Woman," "The Green-eyed Countess," "The White Witch" mentioned in the final correspondence of Lenin.

Into the mind of Robert Henry Blane came a question that screamed for an answer. What was the woman doing in New York? What amazing thing was in progress in the United States to warrant her presence? What deep, underground and terrible complot had she been commissioned to unravel?

The woman spoke in a soft whisper.

"Last evening your name was mentioned by a friend of mine," she said. "He is a friend of yours, too. He expressed a desire to see you, but he had no idea where you were."

"Who is he?" inquired Blane.

The woman glanced around. Her flashing eyes swept over a disfigured beggar at the corner, examined a slouching young man balancing himself on the curb and then returned to the face of The Wasp.

She didn't speak, but to Blane, in a startling manner, she conveyed the hint that he should look downward. He did so. In the little dust eddy at her feet, the woman had scratched two figures with the point of her parasol. A three and a seven!

The Texan Wasp, schooled in the art of controlling his features, gave no outward indication of the thrill he received at learning that his old antagonist, No. 37, who later became his admirer and friend, was in New York. But the news brought to him that tingling sensation that one sometimes receives from a bugle call on a spring morning. The information was a bugle call!

It was the clarion of Dame Adventure, bidding him to seek beneath the old-gold flag of romance for an anodyne that would allay the pain within his soul. The pain brought by the loss of Betty Allerton. He desired a drug, a powerful potion which would blot out the pictures that stained his imagination during the long

days and nights that he knew since her passing. He realized now that the hashish for his soul was action!

"Where is he?" The Wasp asked.

The woman glanced again at the slouching young man on the curb, then answered in a hurried French patois that would have defied the sharpest listener.

"He is in room No. 74 at the Plaza," she murmured. "He has been hurt. Don't go there till this evening." Dropping back into plain Americanese she said: "It has been a pleasure to meet you. I hope I shall see you again."

The Wasp bowed. The smile that was like a flash of sunlight appeared again on the face of the Green-eyed Countess as she turned and tripped down the Avenue.

THAT evening, Robert Henry Blane eluded the flunkies whose duty it is to announce the arrival of visitors. He found room No. 74 and knocked softly.

There was no answer. He knocked a second time with like result. Yet he sensed that the room was occupied. In some mysterious way he knew that the great man hunter was inside.

The Wasp knocked three times with a deliberate pause between each rap, then, after a longer pause, he struck the door seven times. It opened softly and the face of the extraordinary sleuth appeared in the opening. A strong left hand was thrust quickly out and the tall Texan was drawn inside.

"Robert Blane!" cried the detective. "Suffering bobcats! I'm glad to see you!"

The Texan Wasp regarded the man hunter with a friendly eye. He showed no signs of wear. He was the same No. 37 that Blane had first met in the gilded Shrine of the Spinning Ball at Monte Carlo.

There were the same cold merciless eyes that looked like hard-frozen hailstones, the mouth that was a lipless line with down-turned corners, the big-nostriled nose bred of battles and the chin that had thrust peace to the winds.

The sleuth thrust The Wasp into a chair and stood before him, contemplating

him in the manner that a child might view a new and expensive toy that had suddenly appeared in the nursery. After a long minute of silent observation he spoke.

"Something has happened to you," he said kindly. "Something has gone wrong. Is it—is it your marriage?"

"My marriage did not take place," answered Blane. "Miss Allerton died before the formalities could be arranged."

No. 37 stepped forward and took the hand of the Texan.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I'm awfully sorry. I thought a life of happiness was before you both."

The man hunter dropped into a seat and for a few minutes they remained without speaking. The song of the city came up to them, a wonder song that the scented breezes of spring carried to the little stars.

It was Blane who broke the silence.

"I want action," he said. "I want something to do that will make me forget all sorts of things that torment me. This afternoon a lady met me on Fifth Avenue and told me that you wanted to see me."

"That's true," agreed No. 37. "I spoke of you last evening and longed for your address. You see"—he paused and tapped his left shoulder—"one of my friends put a hunk of lead into me a few days ago and I am not at my best. That is why I longed for a helper. I thought of you."

"To do what?" asked The Wasp.

"To do man's work," snapped the sleuth.

"Tell me."

THE great detective stood up and walked to the window. For a second he stood staring out into the soft night, then he wheeled and walked toward the Texan. He began to speak, his voice tense, his eyes lighted by little fires of indignation.

"The world is coming to a point when a single madman will be able to destroy it overnight," he began. "I mean a scientific madman, and the Lord knows there are plenty of them. A scientist who is working for the good of the world is a blessing to mankind; one who is working

to destroy and kill is an unchained devil. A devil that we know nothing of till he cuts loose.

"I am in New York because a scientific fiend is here," he went on. "The lady you spoke to this afternoon is here for the same reason. To block him, hunt him down and put him behind bars for the rest of his days is my present work, and in that work I wish to enlist you."

"I am interested," said Blane quietly, "Tell me more."

A queer passion came into the voice of the man hunter as he went on with his story. There was a note of fierce resentment in his tone, something that the keen ear of a musician might detect in the bay-ing of a bloodhound who has lost the scent of a fugitive. The big nostrils expanded and contracted hurriedly.

"Do you know how many scientific devils are working away in European laboratories to find out means and methods to kill and maim?" he cried. "Do you? No, you don't! Neither do I! But this much I know, Blane! Those boys are beginning to make good. Quite a number of them! And the biggest fiend of them all has brought his invention to perfection."

The sleuth dropped into a chair and leaned forward.

"Nine months ago the people for whom I work heard of a scientist in Warsaw whose experiments were considered startling," he continued. "So startling that several European powers, fearing that their own subsidized experimenters might be outstripped in deviltry, sent special information seekers to find out what was doing. I was sent because I am employed at different times by a body of good people who wish to preserve civilization. I was sent to report on the stories that came drifting down to Paris and London. Possibly the American government had a spy on the spot. I do not know. Your people are alert.

"I think that of all the watchers I was the only one to see anything," he went on. "I mean, to see anything that would give proof to the tales that we heard. I am sure that I was the only one. For nine

weeks I watched the laboratory and trailed the spectacled devil who worked there. Trailed him night and day. I am thorough. If I am set to watch a man I know what he eats and drinks, when he goes to bed and when he gets up. This matter was a big business and I did not let up for a minute.

"Listen! I will tell you something that will surprise you. If you did not know me, you would not believe me. I would not blame you for disbelieving me now. No, I wouldn't. One afternoon I followed that fellow across the Vistula to Praga, the suburb on the right bank of the river. He met another man and they strolled in a park. I followed them, taking cover behind the bushes.

"I knew that something was going to happen. Knew it by the manner in which they walked, knew it by the backs of their heads, by the swing of their coats, by the way they lifted their feet. Their nervousness came out to me so that I caught it on the tips of my fingers as I followed. What do you think I knew? It was this. The spectacled fiend was going to give his friend a test of the thing he had discovered.

"They found a seat before a small iron table. One of those three-legged tables that you see in cafés. They sat down before it and I crept up through the shrubbery till I was within ten yards of the spot where they were sitting. I waited, and I did not blink my eyes while I waited. Not at all. The people who had sent me told me to expect anything. They said that they had heard it was something to do with atomic energy, something connected with the slicing of the atom. Do you understand?"

THE TEXAN WASP made a quick gesture with his head. The way in which the sleuth told the story held him speechless. It seemed that there had come into the room a listening presence, a queer ghostly presence that set him wondering. In the interval before the great detective went on with his narrative, Blane had an idea that the phantom listeners were the

long-dead master builders of that great and wondrous civilization which the insane scientists were attempting to destroy.

"The park was deserted," continued No. 37. "The afternoon was cold; there was a little fog. The scientist and his friend sat there for nearly an hour and nothing happened. Then the spectacled man that I was trailing took something from his pocket. I couldn't see what it was. A vessel of some kind, I think—I do not know.

"He tilted it above the iron table, at the same moment he pushed his companion back. I got to my feet and thrust my head forward. I was mad with a desire to see what would happen. And I saw! I saw, Blane! The two of them got to their feet hurriedly and I had a clear view of what took place. I saw it all. *The three-legged iron table at which they had been sitting started to disappear!*"

The prince of man hunters paused and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. The recollection of what he had seen stirred him greatly. The Wasp, who had wondered always at the calm self-control of the man, was surprised to see this exhibition of emotion. He waited, his curiosity keyed to a high pitch by the story.

"It disappeared from the top," went on the sleuth. "That is, the flat sheet of iron to which the legs were attached was the first part of it to go. The legs fell to the ground, but each leg was consumed swiftly. Consumed by what, you ask? I do not know. Wait and I will tell you what others think. What the greatest chemists of Europe think. Wait!

"The scientist and his friend stood and watched the thing go," he continued. "I should say that it was a matter of three minutes. It was no more, I am sure. Less, I think. The friend seemed dazed. His arms were thrust out and his head was pushed forward. I too was dazed.

"The scientist laughed, clapped the friend on the back, then they both walked hurriedly away. Walked toward the park entrance. I waited till they were out of sight, then I came out of the bushes and

ran to the place where the table had stood. There were no signs of it, but on the ground I found a little heap of red rust. Not more than a teaspoonful. I scooped it up in a piece of paper and put it in my pocket, then I sat down on the seat that the two had occupied.

"I sat down to think the thing over. I told myself that something had happened to my brain. I told myself that the table had never been there.

"'You are a fool,' I said to myself. 'There was no table there when they sat down. A wheel in your brain has gone wrong and you are seeing things that do not exist.'

"I must have sat there for hours," he continued. "It came time to close the gates of the park and a keeper went round to see that no one would be locked up for the night. He spoke to me, telling me of the hour, then he stopped and stared at the place where the table should have been.

"'Where is the table?' he asked.

"'What table?' I snapped.

"'The iron table that is always here,' he replied.

"'There was no table here when I sat down,' I answered.

"'Then some one has stolen it,' he said, and he rushed off to tell the head keeper.

"The head keeper came in a hurry and the two searched the shrubbery. Of course they found nothing and when they were tired of searching I left them, carrying in my vest pocket the spoonful of red rust that I had scooped from the ground.

"That night I sent the rust to London and two days later I received a wire that the fiend I was watching should not be allowed out of my sight. The wire came too late. On the evening before, I had trailed him home to his laboratory and had seen the light go out in his bedroom. Then I went back to my hotel. That was the last I saw of him. He disappeared in the night. Disappeared without leaving a trace."

"And the red rust?" asked The Wasp.

"That is the point!" cried the sleuth.

"The red rust! In the letter that contained it I took a chance and told of all that I had seen. Everything! I told of the disappearance of the table after the scientist had uptilted a vessel above it. It was my story that brought the urgent wire.

"The people who employed me were certain that the devil had found out something that was extraordinary. Something that would upset the world. Something that in the hands of a fiend would wreck civilization. Queer that a power like that would fall into the hands of a chemist in Warsaw. Strange that a fellow——"

"But what in thunder was it?" interrupted Blane.

THE man hunter smiled at the Texan's desire to learn the mystery.

"My people think, Blane, that the fellow has discovered a solvent of metal, a powerful acid that, speaking plainly, consumes the atoms at an extraordinary speed. It releases them, feeds on them, and leaves the little heaps of red rust as the sole proof that they ever existed. They do not think this. They are sure of it. They think it one of the greatest forces for evil that has ever come into the world. For evil, mind you! For it destroys! It destroys!"

Into the room as the great detective finished his amazing story came the wonder song of the city. The song of Manhattan! A song of happiness, of content, of endeavor, of honest toil. The Texan Wasp, as he sat watching the sleuth whose stubby fingers opened and shut as if seeking something to clutch and strangle, was possessed of a strange belief. He thought that the clean, sweet song of New York and of all the big cities of America went up and up to the little stars that swung in space.

"In other lands hate and greed and envy were plaited into the whisperings that went upward, but in America this was not so. For just an instant he had a belief that the spiritual song of America reached the door of heaven, the heaven in which he was certain Betty Allerton occupied an honored place. The belief brought him a

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great contentment. He felt that he was dimly in touch with the girl he loved.

No. 37 took up his tale.

"Since the day the fiend slipped away from me, I have hunted Europe to find him," he said, his voice curiously quiet now that he had told of the incident in the park. "Here and there I have heard scraps of news, but I have never laid my eyes on him. This only I was sure of: there was something for sale at a tremendous price. Something! It was for sale at a price that the impoverished countries of Europe could not consider. It was offered to France, I believe. I mean that there were whispers of a force that would make junk out of battleships, eat up hundreds of miles of railway track in a night, gnaw the iron ribs out of a skyscraper in an hour.

"Later," he went on, "I heard that it was offered to Japan. Possibly in all Europe half a dozen men knew of the existence of something which was spoken of as 'The Terrible Thing.' No one had seen a trial of it except myself and the man who was with the fiend in the park at Praga. I have cursed myself for months in letting him escape me. If I had shot him on that day when an iron table turned into a spoonful of red rust, I would have done the greatest service that a man could do to the world."

"And now?" asked The Wasp. "Is he here in New York?"

"I think so," said the sleuth. "Two weeks ago I picked up a trail in Paris. Three men were grabbed for forging American passports and on the lists that were found in their possession I found a name that my scientific friend had used. The name is Thugutt—Stanislas Thugutt.

"Fourteen days ago a man of that name landed here from the *Leviathan*. He gave an address, but he did not go there. Somewhere in New York to-night he is plotting with the men who have made him an offer for his secret, an offer much greater than the war-ridden leaders of Europe could offer. And the buyers are as bad as the fiend who has the secret. That much I know. They are against the government,

against the law, against everything that tends to cleanse and purify the world."

The telephone tinkled in a nervous, hesitating manner. The man hunter looked at it, but did not move. It rang again, disjointedly, apprehensively.

"No. 37 rose and took the receiver. "Yes," he murmured. "Yes. Go ahead."

THE TEXAN WASP, his eyes upon the man hunter, saw the shoulders hunch themselves suddenly forward in a manner that suggested a terrible desire to absorb the information that came over the wire. The fierce spirit of pursuit was noticeable in the way the man listened. Ears alone were not detailed for the duty; the watching Texan thought that every inch of skin on the sleuth's sturdy body was helping to gather in the message.

"Yes, yes!" he cried, and the words were gasped out as his throat dried with the ash of expectancy. "Go on! Go on! I hear!"

The listening crouch became painful to watch. Blane wondered what precious clew was winging its way to the extraordinary man who wielded the lariat of Madame Justice in a manner that made his numerical *nom de plume* a terror to evildoers on three continents.

The man hunter gave voice to a queer gurgling cry of delight that was akin to the happy yelp of a hound who has picked up a lost trail. He thrust the receiver into place and wheeled upon Robert Henry Blane.

"You're going to help, Blane?" he cried. "You didn't pledge yourself, but you will! You will! It's your country, man! The country that you love!"

"I'm with you," said The Wasp quietly.

"Good! Come on! I'll tell you as we ride along."

In the taxi that carried them down Fifth Avenue the man hunter told in short clipped sentences the message he had received.

"It's just a clew," he growled. "The lady who spoke to you this afternoon found it. We learned that the head of the gang that forged the passport for

Stanislas Thugutt had a brother in New York. Fellow named Yananski. Russian. The directory showed five of them. We took a long shot and watched them all.

"This one we're going to has been signaling," he continued. "At least we think so. Stockings strung across an open window. Whole words spelled out by the number of black stockings strung between the reds. Three blacks, one red, stands for 'c'; one black, one red, 'a'; twelve blacks and one red, 'l.' That's what he's got up now. It's his way of spelling call. He's telling some one that the coast is clear."

"Where is he?" asked The Wasp.

"Third Avenue between Twenty-eighth and Twenty-ninth," answered the sleuth. "Be there in a minute. Wish my arm was right. Troubles me a little. Glad you're with me, Blane."

They rode on in silence. Robert Henry Blane had a strange feeling regarding the man at his side. He thought that the tremendous passion of pursuit came out from the man hunter and charged the atmosphere around him. He was a human bloodhound, fierce and relentless pursuer of evildoers.

There came into the mind of the Texan the words of Pierre Chabanier, the French convict, who had secured a lengthy engagement at the nickel mines of New Caledonia through the activities of No. 37. Chabanier was certain that the man hunter could run a trail like a dog. He had whispered fearfully of the power possessed by the big-nostriled nose. And Blane, sitting beside the man without a name, felt that Chabanier was right.

No high powers of deduction, no elaborate reasoning processes, no cleverly worked-out plans showed in the captures made by No. 37. He had, on the contrary, a contempt for the intellectual student of crime who builds a weak-backed theory on some clew the size of a fly's hind leg. Instinct, swift and animallike pursuit, the leopardlike spring, the extraordinary belief that no mistake had been made—all these traits were identified with his work.

The taxi halted at the corner of Twenty-ninth and Fourth Avenue. The sleuth and Robert Henry Blane descended. Without speaking they walked swiftly to Third Avenue. Before reaching the corner, No. 37 halted The Wasp and spoke in a hurried undertone.

"Listen, Blane," he said, "we have no plan. We know nothing outside what I have told you. The house is on the middle of the block, east side. Second-floor apartment, two windows on the avenue. You'll see the stockings. We'll separate.

"You'll do your best," he went on. "No man in the world can give you instructions. What we want to find out is the address of the fiend who has invented this stuff or the address of those to whom he has sold the invention. Go to it. I'll be around. You might see the first chance."

ROBERT HENRY BLANE turned southward along the avenue. He felt delighted with the adventure. Life had become dull and tiresome; the thrill of the old days in the capitals of Europe seemed far, far away. Thoughts of high adventures in Paris, Seville, Venice, and a score of other places rose within his mind. He remembered the Roost of the Ladrones in Barcelona, the affair with the chief of the Scarlet Jackals at Seville, the tilt with the Mystery Man of Prague and many other episodes in his romantic and colorful past.

And now New York, the most wonderful city in the world, offered him an opportunity to gather up the excitement he craved, the fierce stimulant that his nature demanded. He blessed his old-time antagonist, No. 37.

Blane located the apartment of Yananski. The line of stockings could be plainly seen strung before the illuminated window. The swift glance of the Texan told him that they still carried the message of which the detective had spoken.

Blane crossed Twenty-eighth. He looked at his watch and found that it was nine forty-five. The warm spring night had lured many folk out of doors. The air seemed incense laden, intoxicating.

He pondered over the task for which the man hunter had recruited him. What chance was there of locating the mad scientist who had brought a new and terrible force into the world?

On the southeast corner of Twenty-eighth a well-built cop made his stick into a bull roarer as he whirled it meditatively. His glance fell upon Robert Henry Blane, followed him as the Texan passed. Possibly the cop thought the tall, debonair adventurer was out of place.

THE policeman's stare annoyed Blane. He wheeled and walked toward the house that sheltered Yananski. The man hunter had given no caution regarding precipitate action and The Wasp had a great desire to speed things up.

He came to the door. It was shut tight, but four pushbuttons, each with a name attached, offered a means of entry. Blane chose the top button under which was the classical name of Mulligan. He pushed it and the latch clicked spasmodically.

The Texan pushed the door, entered, closed it softly and waited in the dark hall. From high above him came a hail. A voice with a thick brogue inquired who it was, then, as no answer came up from the hallway, the inquiry was followed by a neatly expressed wish that the bell ringer would take himself to a hotter clime than that of Manhattan. A door banged fiercely.

Blane felt his way to the rear of the stairs and waited in the darkness. From the cellar drifted up an assortment of odors that fought for supremacy in the hall. The Wasp had an opinion that the apartment house of "Yananski, Mulligan & Co." was not one that he would choose for his own residence.

Ten minutes passed, twenty, then a bell pealed loudly. Blane became alert. A door on the second landing opened, a voice called in Russian for a light.

The Wasp sprang to the street door. As he touched it, the latch started to click madly. Some one from without pushed against the door; Blane threw his shoulder against it. Looking out through an

aperture of some six inches he saw four men who were evidently anxious to get inside the house.

For the moment The Wasp had no definite line of action, but the Fates were kind. As he peered into the bearded face of the man nearest to him, the fellow spoke. He barked out a word, barked it out in a manner that suggested it possessed a magic power.

"Praga!" he cried. "Praga!"

Into the quick brain of the Texan flashed the story of No. 37. The test of the extraordinary solvent had been made in a park at Praga, the suburb of Warsaw, and The Wasp had an intuition that the name of the suburb was being used as a password for the evening.

He took full advantage of the information that had come to him. He stepped back from the door, leaving the four to stumble after him, then, not waiting for them, he leaped up the stairs to where a candle on the landing showed dimly the tall and bulky figures of two men. Robert Henry Blane was making a daring attempt to incorporate himself in the visiting party.

One of the two men thrust himself forward to meet Blane. The fellow lifted the candle so that its light fell on the face of the Texan. Deep-set and vicious eyes showed no welcome.

The Wasp paused, waited for an instant in the hope that the other would speak, then barked out the word that had been thrown at his own ears by the quartet climbing the stairs behind him.

"Praga!" he cried. "Praga!"

The man with the candle nodded. In Russian he put a question. "How many?" he asked.

Robert Henry Blane blessed his linguistic powers. "Five," he answered, and the lucky stumble of one of the four prevented them from hearing the reply intended only for the ears of his questioner.

The two turned and led the way into the apartment. Blane and the four newcomers followed. A thrill of delight possessed the adventurous Texan. The simple ruse had been successful. The two in the

apartment looked upon him as one of the visiting band; the visitors looked upon him as a friend of the two!

It was a large room, rather poorly lighted by a feeble gas jet and a large oil lamp, into which the seven passed. The quick eye of The Wasp examined it. The nationality of Yananski was made clearly evident. Immediately facing the door was a huge, highly colored portrait of Lenin, the frame that inclosed it draped awkwardly in crape.

Supporting the archpriest of bolshevism were smaller portraits of his chiefs; Trotsky, Chicherin, the butcher Artamonovitch, and others. A big table in the center of the room was covered with pamphlets and newspapers; half a dozen wooden chairs were scattered around.

The four new arrivals, the two men who received them and Robert Henry Blane grouped themselves around the table. No one spoke. An air of great tensivity was upon the six, while The Wasp himself was keyed up to an unusual pitch of curiosity. He felt that some one was expected, some one whose arrival was a matter of great concern to the others.

The man to whom the Texan had given the password looked at his watch. He glanced around the group and spoke, still keeping to the Slav tongue. "He will be here in five minutes," he said quietly.

The four visitors bowed their heads, Blane followed their example.

The five minutes passed, then the man with the watch spoke again.

"He comes now," he said, and as he uttered the words the doorbell pealed violently.

The two men who appeared to be residents of the flat returned to the landing with the candle; the four visitors and Blane turned and watched the door. From below came the sounds of stumbling feet, a petulant complaint regarding the gloom.

The acute ears of Robert Henry Blane gathered up the few words that were addressed to the unseen visitors. They were told that "the others" had arrived and were waiting for them. There was much shuffling of feet, then the two residents

of the untidy rooms brought in a tall man who was followed by a woman whose intensely masculine face seemed to challenge her feminine attire.

It was the tall man that held the eyes of The Texan Wasp. Blane knew instinctively that the fellow was the scientist from Warsaw who had invented the tremendous solvent that was known to a few as "The Terrible Thing." The belief settled down on him the moment the tall man entered the room, evicting all doubts.

Curiously the man, although of weak frame, carried about him an air of enormous and horrifying power that was beyond analysis. Possibly the possession of the dreadful secret had bred a peculiar kind of egoism, a strange form of megalomania that uplifted him.

His black, shining eyes darted from one to the other of the group that awaited him. They fell upon the face of Robert Henry Blane like flaming pin points. They drifted away, came back again for a fresh scrutiny, then, to the relief of The Wasp, were turned upon his companions.

One of the four, a bulky, bearded man, spoke, addressed himself to the scientist. He spoke with a queer sort of humility, using the Russian tongue.

"We have brought it," he said. "Everything that you have asked."

The thin hands of the scientist came from the pockets of his long overcoat; he made a gurgling noise that suggested an animal in an advanced state of hunger. He took a step forward; the man with the candle brushed the papers and pamphlets from the table; the quartet to which The Wasp had attached himself became active.

The motion of the scientist's lean paws and the drooling noise he had made with his lips had the effect of a command. It swept away the feeling of constraint, the inaction, the strange torpor that had held them while they waited the arrival of the fellow.

Robert Henry Blane, as watchful as a panther, pushed forward to the table. The four first callers, the two residents, the scientist, the woman, and The Wasp made an expectant circle; all eyes were upon

the man who had intimated that everything that the scientist demanded had been brought.

Solemnly the bearded man stripped back his coat, revealing a long black cloth bag that was suspended from his shoulder. He swung this to the front and from it he commenced to take packages of bills, neatly wrapped packages that he placed one beside the other on the table.

The Wasp was astounded. Leaning forward he noted the denomination of the notes that were uppermost. They were thousand-dollar bills!

One, two, three! Each package, so Blane reasoned, contained ten notes. Four, five, six! The drooling noise of the scientist increased. Seven, eight nine! The big, hairy hand of the magician was again thrust into the bag, then with a dramatic gesture he banged another package on the board!

The old predatory instincts of The Texan Wasp were aroused by the sight. One hundred thousand dollars! He had difficulty in controlling a little whistle of amazement. And the enormous sum was evidently brought in payment for the secret possessed by the scientist with the darting eyes and the chalky, unwholesome face!

For just a moment the Texan forgot the story of No. 37 regarding the terrors to which the world would be exposed if the man from Warsaw unloosed the power that he possessed. Mr. Blane was thinking of the money. Thinking of a means of transferring it into his own possession. It was money used for the purchase of a terrible power that was inimical to law and order, therefore the hijacking possibilities that flitted through the brain of the tall adventurer were not altogether in bad taste.

The Blane of other days urged an immediate raid on the treasure, pictured a quick dash to the door, a wild leap down the stairs, a get-away that would fool the well-built cop who was flailing the night air on the corner.

The scientist made a gesture to the woman at his side. The two advanced a

step, thrust out their hands and clutched the packages. Swiftly they dropped them into capacious pockets, their eyes as they did so glancing from one to the other of the faces around the table.

POSSIBLY Robert Henry Blane showed at that moment upon his face the whimsical thoughts that had entered his mind. It must have been so. In some way the woman detected a difference between his semiserious gaze and that of the crazed fanatics beside him. Her eyes clung to his face; she thrust the last package of bills into her pocket and walked toward him.

The Wasp pulled himself together as he saw suspicion flame upon her face. The woman spoke.

"What do you wish, little brother?" she asked, the Slavic words harsh and threatening as she flung out the question.

"Destruction," answered the adventurous Texan.

"When?" cried the woman.

"Now!" snapped Blane, and his swift glance at the table told him that he had answered in a manner that was not displeasing to the group.

For the space of half a minute the woman remained silent, her keen eyes upon The Wasp. Then, in a louder tone, she flung another question at him.

"Where!" she cried. "Where?"

Robert Henry Blane felt that he was up against a problem. He knew that the swift-flung query had an effect upon the group at the table. Without glancing at them he knew that their bearded faces had been thrust toward him in an effort to absorb his answer the moment he had uttered it.

The harsh Russian word fled through the brain of The Wasp, screaming for an answer. And he had no answer to give. He had blundered luckily upon suitable replies to the first two queries, but the whole United States sprang up before his mental eyes as he tried to think of an answer to the third.

"Where?"

Ten thousand cities and towns offered

him a choice. Places from Pelham Manor to San Luis Obispo and from Galveston to Duluth rose from their mental cache and made signs to him. Never before was he so impressed with the greatness of his country. One hundred thousand places offered themselves as a solution to the question.

The careless deviltry of Robert Henry Blane made him choose a name that would be altogether new to the ears of the group he confronted.

"Pottawatomie!" he cried, and as he yelled out the name he acted with a suddenness that was startling to their slow intellects.

The Wasp stooped quickly as he called out the name. A bundle of the pamphlets upon the floor was hurled at the gas jet, another bundle traveling at a terrific rate crashed into the lamp and sent it flying. The room was plunged into utter darkness.

A wicked knife ripped the sleeve of Mr. Blane's coat. He repaid the little attention by sending out a stiff left into the darkness and miraculously finding a jaw to obstruct it, then, with a quick leap, he was upon the table. Curses, cries of alarm, high-pitched questions came from the eight around the table. They groped for the outsider and cannoned wildly into each other.

A match flamed in the darkness. Blane stooped, seized a felt hat and hurled it at the pin point of flame. Then, leaping lightly over the heads of two of the plotters, he reached the door. He unlocked it swiftly, reached the landing, turned and sped upward into the gloom. As he mounted he heard the rush of heavy feet on the stairs leading down to the street door.

The Wasp wasted no time. He reached the roof, found the fire escape and scuttled down it to the first floor. A wall showed up within a few feet of the escape. He leaped at it, clutched the coping, dragged himself to the top and dropped over. The retreat by the roof seemed the most desirable when he left the room, now a tremendous desire to reach Third

Avenue in time to pick up the trail of the plotters drove him forward.

A dark door showed in the tiny walled space into which Blane had fallen. He pushed it open. A long black tunnel led to a yellow gleam. The Wasp reasoned that the light came from the janitor's quarters. He ran toward it.

Without ceremony he thrust open a glass door and found himself in a kitchen-living room. Two women sat with bowed backs at the table, their fingers busy with needles and thread on a pile of job work that lay between them; a man dozed before the stove.

"Pardon," said The Wasp, advancing, "I dropped into your back yard and I want to reach the street in a hurry. Can I pass through?"

The man seated before the stove was on his feet before Blane had finished his request. The two women had also risen. Their faces expressed anything but welcome.

THE man, big and truculent looking, growled out a negative as he thrust himself directly in the path that his visitor wished to go.

"You'll stay here till I get a cop!" he cried. "Just wait till I call one!"

He backed toward the door at the other end of the room and his heavy shoes clumping along the boards roused a little girl sleeping upon a pile of rags in the corner. She sat up, rubbed her eyes, and stared at The Wasp. A strange, elfinlike child with pipstem arms.

For a few seconds her big dark eyes were fixed upon the intruder, then she sprang to her feet and rushed toward him. She cried out to the three adults as she ran.

"Mommer! Granny! Daddy!" she screamed. "This is the gentleman who gave me the ten dollars! The gentleman who pulled me from under the auto when that swine of a choffer ran over the pants leg. This is him!"

Robert Henry Blane smiled at the child's enthusiasm. He shook her hand but he didn't wait for the thanks of the

astonished grown-ups. Somewhere outside, the eight persons whose company he had left in such a hurry were dispersing, so he ran through the quarters of the janitor and dashed up the steps into Twenty-eighth Street.

The Wasp ran toward the avenue. He reached the corner and paused for a second to look around. A taxi was swinging out from the curb, its nose thrust northward. Blane rushed forward. Thoughts of No. 37 and "The Mystery Woman" flashed through his mind. He wondered if they had picked up the trail after the stampede from the house.

An arm shot out of the taxi to grab the door that had swung open and The Wasp running swiftly along the pavement gave a little yelp of delight. The woman who had taken one half of the money paid over by the four had worn a plaid coat, and the sleeve of which he had a glimpse was of the same material! How many of the others were in her company he could not tell, but her trail at least was fresh enough to follow.

The Wasp dashed across Twenty-ninth, the taxi containing the woman gathering speed as it streaked northward. Before the door of a cheap restaurant stood an empty cab, its driver busy within.

Blane rushed to the door and shouted. The driver, with a section of pie across his face, waved a hand to show that there was nothing doing. A humorous fellow was the driver. He turned to wink at the waitress, then, as he again looked toward the street to see the effect of his refusal, he dropped the section of pie and unloosed a yell of rage. His machine had come to life with surprising suddenness and was shooting northward with Robert Henry Blane at the wheel.

THE TEXAN WASP was an expert driver. He was more. He was a wizard. He had driven racing cars at Santa Monica and Daytona; once to uphold the honor of America he had taken the wheel at the famous Monza track outside Milan and had made spectators gasp by his daring.

He was in sight of the car at Thirty-third. He clung to it as it swung eastward at Forty-second and rolled down Second Avenue as it doubled on its tracks and made southward. The sprint uptown had been made to throw possible pursuers off the track.

The Wasp reviewed the happenings of the evening. He wondered about the four who had brought the enormous sum of money to the scientist. It was a payment. Payment for what? He recalled the cold eyes of the woman as she had flung the first question at him, that "What do you wish, little brother?" to which he had replied, without a moment's hesitation, "Destruction." He asked himself why he had answered so promptly.

Why had the word "destruction" sprung to his lips? It was easy to guess. In the bare room whose walls were decorated with the sinister faces of the apostles of destruction, it was reasonable to think that those who plotted under the Mongol eyes of Lenin & Co. longed to destroy and shatter the things that held them in check.

The taxi carrying the woman crossed Fourteenth and halted. The Wasp on the uptown side pulled into the curb and watched. From the machine he was following stepped the woman who had questioned him and the big man to whom he had given the password "Praga" at the head of the stairs. Their manner as they turned from the car suggested that there were no other occupants, so Blane slipped from his seat and started after them as they crossed the avenue diagonally.

"Here, you!" cried a policeman as Robert Henry Blane deserted his stolen taxi. "Where are you going? You can't leave your garbage can there."

The Wasp turned, stared at the officer for a moment, then rushed back to him as if impelled by a sudden desire to communicate a secret. To the Texan it was a ticklish moment. The taxi was a stolen one and this fact might be made known to the law at any moment.

"What's your name?" gasped Blane. "Quick! Your name?"

The look of simulated interest on the

face of the tall Texan startled the policeman. There was authority in the tone of Robert Henry Blane. From the position of an impertinent investigator the cop was thrown into that of a stammering information seeker.

"What's wrong?" he cried. "Why—why, my name is Gilligan!"

The Wasp took a chance, gambling on the reproductive qualities of the Gilligans. "Your brother has been killed!" he shouted.

"Paddy!" screamed the officer. "Is it Paddy that works at Macy's?"

"It's Paddy," said Blane. "Hustle now! I've been hunting for you. Get the station and tell them to send a spare bull to do your work. I'll run you home in the machine."

The policeman turned and rushed for the phone, The Wasp wheeled and dashed across Fourteenth Street in pursuit of the woman and the man. He felt a little sorry for Gilligan. He wished that he had the time to scribble a line to tell the fellow that it was a hoax, but he hadn't a minute to spare. The two he was trailing had already disappeared around the corner of Thirteenth, heading eastward.

Blane picked up the couple on the block between Second and First Avenues. They were moving at a jog trot. Heads thrust forward they plowed across First Avenue, turned into Eleventh Street and, their speed increasing, ran southward along Avenue A.

The Wasp was some fifty paces behind them at Tompkins Square. They scurried along East Eighth and swung into Avenue B. For the space of ten seconds they were out of sight of the Texan as he rushed to the corner. When he reached it he found that they had disappeared. Disappeared completely!

Blane ran along the block. There were no signs of the two. He doubled on his tracks, his keen eyes upon the dwellings, one of which he was certain had given shelter to the two. He was a very angry Blane at the moment, angry because the pair that he had trailed over fifty blocks

had ducked into their hole without being seen.

A woman whose dress suggested a social outcast whispered something as he passed her hurriedly. The voice seemed familiar. He turned quickly and stared at her. A shawl covered her head and the lower part of her face, but Blane knew the eyes.

They were the eyes that had examined him as he stepped aboard the steamer at Cherbourg, the eyes of the woman who had spoken to him on Fifth Avenue. The woman who was known to kings and presidents—"The Mystery Woman," "The Green-eyed Countess," "The White Witch."

There was no need for Blane to explain his predicament. She knew. In swift, short sentences she explained the perilous situation.

"It is the house beyond the coal-and-ice sign," she said. "After the stampede from the place in Third Avenue I followed one of them here. I saw your two go in a few minutes ago. We have lost the real man, the person we want more than any one else. The woman is his friend. Who stampeded them? You?"

Hurriedly Blane told of what had happened in the room on Third Avenue. He told of the payment of the immense amount of money to the scientist, of the questions which had been put by the woman, the manner in which he had escaped.

The woman listened attentively.

"He should know of that," she cried.

"You mean No. 37?" asked The Wasp.

"Yes, yes."

"Where is he?" questioned Blane.

"In the house," replied the woman. "The door is open, I believe. Do you think you could find him?"

"I'll try," said Blane.

"Tell him of the third question," whispered the Green-eyed Countess. "That is important. Very important. If we could find the place where the attack is to be made. If we knew that much! Why, it might be to-night and— Hurry! Tell him what you know!"

ROBERT HENRY BLANE walked swiftly to the corner, crossed the avenue and approached the house which the woman indicated. The great man hunter was somewhere inside the building and from what the woman said it was necessary that he should be informed of the questions that had been put to The Wasp.

Blane skipped up the worn steps and pushed the door. It opened, admitting him into a hallway, the darkness of which seemed to be of a concrete quality. He moved forward cautiously, every faculty alert. Somewhere in the dark, smelly building was the woman who had badgered him with questions, also two of her companions.

Close to them was the extraordinary man hunter whose passionate desire to capture the scientific devil who had invented a power that was appalling had led The Wasp to volunteer in the pursuit.

The outstretched hand of the Texan touched a scarred newel post. He stood listening intently. From above there came down to him scraps of conversation, an occasional laugh, the yelp of an infant. He decided to ascend.

Blane reached the first landing. He paused outside a door and listened. The landing reeked with odors, odors that carried the Texan to places far away. The fumes of a defunct risotto that had been heavily charged with saffron and cheese swept The Wasp back to the Via Carlo Alberto at Genoa, where all the damnable odors of the old town, with its crooked narrow streets, stream down to the harbor. The risotto had been consumed hours before, but its breath remained.

Blane listened at the first door. A man was berating his wife for extravagance, using the soft Italian of Piedmont. The Wasp moved to the second door. A boy's sleepy voice questioned some one regarding a lost shoe and the sharp answer to his query came in a Catalonian patois. Again the listener moved.

From the third flat came loud, irregular snores. The occupants had retired and

the sounds they were making gave no definite clew to their nationality. The Wasp climbed silently to the floor above.

He reached the landing and crept quietly toward a door from beneath which came a faint gleam. He had covered half the distance when he paused. Some one was on the landing. Some one whom the Texan could not see, but whose presence was made known to him in a peculiar manner. Blane felt that the unseen one was making a tremendous mental effort to find out his, Blane's, identity, and this effort made itself felt.

There flashed through the mind of The Wasp the amazing stories that he had heard regarding the bloodhound qualities of No. 37. He waited, motionless. If the unseen one was the sleuth, he would quickly discover that it was a friend who shared the landing with him.

And No. 37 did. By what means he made himself certain that it was The Wasp who had mounted the stairs were not apparent to the Texan, but a soft whisper "Blane!" came from the darkness.

Robert Henry Blane crept toward the spot from which the whisper had come. The man hunter was crouched behind a ladder in one corner of the landing and he had built himself a shelter by means of a few lime bags and some buckets left by a whitewash artist. He reached out a hand and guided Blane to the hiding place.

With mouth close to the ear of the sleuth, The Wasp told swiftly of the payment of the hundred thousand dollars and the questions that had been put to him. Blane knew that the information affected the man hunter greatly. In the stampede from the Third Avenue house the master mind of the group whose slogan was "Destruction" had been lost sight of, and now the sleuth was wondering as to the answer of that third question which the woman had put to The Wasp.

COMMON sense suggested that the persons who had paid the sum to the scientist would be keen to have an immediate return in fat deviltry for the money

they had paid out. They would not wish to postpone the gratification of their unholy desires.

They hungered for destruction, for chaos, disorder and ruin. The answer "Now!" which Blane had given to the woman, and which had evidently been satisfactory, proved that an early trial of the strange power was to be made, but where would that trial take place?

Crouched in the dark of the landing there flashed through the minds of Blane and the man hunter the immense field that offered itself for the fiendish activities of the scientist from Warsaw. The city ran before their eyes like a great film. From the Battery to Van Cortlandt there were ten thousand great nerve centers that might be paralyzed or destroyed.

Silently, malignantly, fiendishly the human rattlesnake who had formulated the dreadful compound whose destructive powers the detective had witnessed could maim the city. The city that Blane loved! The city whose voice went up to the low-hanging stars so that he felt that he was in communion with the girl who had passed so swiftly beyond his ken!

No. 37 leaned toward The Wasp and the Texan knew that the great sleuth had decided upon some definite action in an endeavor to find an answer to that "Where?" that the woman had barked harshly in testing the bona fides of the adventurer.

"We must find out at once where this job is to be pulled off," whispered the sleuth. "At once, Blane! I know what they can do because I have seen! They—they could make a ruin of this city! Of New York! Come! I'm going to burst the door in."

The door was a flimsy thing. The strong shoulder of No. 37 shattered a panel and tore the lock from its fastenings. An unleashed bloodhound was the man hunter. The immediate necessity of finding out the place where the crazy scientist would operate stirred in him some force that made him rather terrifying.

For an instant the two intruders stood at the entrance, then they sprang forward

to the door of an inner room that led from the first. Two men had rushed the window leading to the fire escape when the crash of the falling door came to their ears, but their hatred of fresh air foiled their escape.

They were still fumbling with the catch of the window when the sleuth and Robert Henry Blane fell upon them. A pair of invincible fighters were No. 37 and the Texan at that moment. There was no necessity to use guns. They beat down the two men with terrific blows and the detective neatly tripped up the woman, who had seized the opportunity to make a rush for the stairs.

Robert Henry Blane was impressed with the cool deftness of the man hunter. No. 37 trussed up the two men with a speed that would have done credit to a bulldogging cowboy, performed with less brutality the same service for the woman, then stood back and cautiously examined the capture.

"We must make one of them squeak," he growled. "Give me a hand to drag this fellow into the other room."

The Wasp helped, a little curious to know what methods the great detective would take to secure a confession. They tossed the fellow onto a couch in the front room, thrusting the door to the landing back into place so that the operation would not be observed.

The man had recovered consciousness and was glaring at No. 37 through slitted eyes that suggested Tartar origin. The man hunter spoke.

"Now, my lad," he said, "something is coming off to-night or to-morrow or some other old time and we've got to know where. Understand? Tell us as quick as you can where the performance takes place."

A demoniacal grin spread over the face of the man. He shook his head. Blane, thinking that the fellow might not speak English, translated the demand of the man hunter into Russian. The grin on the face of the prisoner widened.

"Well, we must make you talk," growled No. 37. "Got to know, old chap. Untie

his right arm, Blane, while I slit his sleeve."

THE snakelike eyes of the captured one watched with interest the actions of the sleuth. No. 37 ran a sharp knife along the seam of the man's coat, exposing a thin, white arm.

"Quick!" he growled. "We want the place where the trouble is going to start. Cough it up!"

The grin fled from the face of the prisoner. There was something in the voice and manner of the great sleuth that would chase the smile from the face of a faun. The cold eyes, the grim mouth, the nose and battling chin told of a determination that trampled on difficulties.

There was a moment of inactivity while the sleuth waited for an answer, then a yelp of pain came from the prisoner. The strong hand of the hunter of criminals had come smartly down upon the funny bone of the fellow's arm. Cunningly and accurately No. 37 had smitten that sensitive ulnar nerve that when struck sends exquisite pains through the arm and fingers.

The Texan Wasp watched with some astonishment. The man hunter struck again—again and again. From the yelps of the prisoner it seemed that each succeeding tap on the delicate nerve increased the agony. The torture was multiplied by the continuous application of the sleuth's hand.

The prisoner screamed. The Wasp, at a signal from No. 37, thrust a cloth into the fellow's mouth.

"Nod your head when you are ready to tell," growled the man hunter, addressing his victim, then to Blane he added: "The French police have found this a most efficacious way of loosening the tongues of tough scoundrels. You must know how to do it properly or it doesn't work. Watch! He'll talk directly."

The man hunter was correct in his diagnosis of the prisoner's inability to withstand the stinging pains produced by the smart blows delivered cunningly to the nerve. The fellow nodded his head vigor-

ously and Blane removed the cloth from his mouth.

"Quick!" cried the sleuth. "Tell us! Where are they going to do it?"

"At the bridge!" gasped the man.

"At what bridge! Hurry now!"

The prisoner was silent for a moment; the great pursuer of criminals lifted his hand.

"The big bridge!" gurgled the fellow. "The big bridge that goes to Brooklyn!"

Robert Henry Blane startled the sleuth by a little cry of alarm. No. 37 glanced at him. The face of the adventurous Texan had become suddenly gray with horror. The slight scar on his right jaw showed like a streak of chalk in the wash of nausea brought by the confession.

"Brooklyn Bridge!" screamed Blane, his strong hands clutching the shoulders of the prisoner. "Brooklyn Bridge?"

The prisoner saw the light of murder in the gray eyes of The Texan Wasp and tried vainly to wriggle out of his grip. He dropped into the Slavic tongue, screaming protests regarding his own innocence in the plot.

"When is it to happen?" roared The Wasp. "When? When? Speak, you hound, or I'll throttle you!"

"To-night at midnight!" screamed the frightened devil on the couch. "At midnight! At—at— Don't choke me! Don't!"

No. 37 restrained The Wasp. He pushed the Texan aside and took up the questioning.

"Where do they meet?" he cried. "Out with it! It's twenty minutes to midnight now. Talk, damn you! Talk!"

The terrified believer in the gospel of destruction had difficulty in expressing himself. In mixed Slavic and stammering Americanese he explained. There was to be a meeting at a house on Greenwich Avenue, and later, some minutes before midnight, the scientist from Warsaw would meet the other conspirators at the corner of Bank and Hudson and ride with them to the Brooklyn side of the bridge where the attempt would be made.

"Steady, Blane! Steady!" cried the

sleuth. "Something has rattled you. Pull that door aside. We'll take this baby along with us and go. Give me a hand to get him on my shoulder."

BUT Robert Henry Blane forestalled the action of the man hunter. The strong arms of The Wasp wound themselves around the waist of the prisoner, jerked the fellow onto the broad shoulders and held him there without apparent effort as the detective pulled the door away to let him pass. A fighting fury was The Wasp. Down the dark stairway he stumbled, the weight of the man on his shoulder unnoticed as the wave of horror produced by the confession swept through him.

The detective was the first to reach the avenue. Behind him came Blane with his burden, the prisoner uttering little squawks of fear. There was a terrible earnestness about the man who carried him, a fearful earnestness that crumpled the spirit of the rat and shot him through and through with the darts of fear.

The Mystery Woman rushed across the street when she saw the little procession emerge. Hurriedly No. 37 gave her an explanation of what had taken place.

"Go up and guard them," he cried. "Get a policeman to help. I'll be back. Don't worry! We'll beat them!"

The detective marveled at the strength of Robert Henry Blane as he followed the Texan at a jog trot to the corner. Blane carried the prisoner without an effort. He ran with his burden, ignoring his companion's offers of help.

"Round here!" cried The Wasp, swinging toward St. Mark's Place. "We've got a better chance of getting a machine."

A home-going chauffeur, halted by the yell of No. 37, swung his machine to meet them. He saw the prisoner on the back of The Wasp as the Texan came closer and he immediately objected.

"Huh! Kidnapin'!" he cried. "Nothin' doin'." Tell it to the cops. Here's one now."

A policeman came around the corner and the man hunter hurried toward him. The interview was short. The officer

rushed the machine, helped The Wasp to load his prisoner into the body of the cab, then sprang up beside the driver.

"Let her whoop!" he cried. "Corner of Bank and Hudson and everything goes!"

The chauffeur showed himself a repressed speed maniac. He tore across the town with that splendid contempt for life and limb that grips a driver who has the law at his side. He gurgled with delight as he smashed up friendly formations and made night birds hop for the pavement. Ordinarily he hated the police, but he found himself glancing affectionately at the officer who sat beside him.

The taxi swung into Hudson and drove toward the place of meeting. The man hunter, watch in hand, leaned forward and peered ahead. Midnight was chiming.

It was Robert Henry Blane that gave the little groan of anguish as they swung across the street. The Wasp saw defeat. A black roadster sprang away from the curb as the taxi tore down upon the corner. It was a slinky, belly-to-the-ground roadster that talked speed with all cylinders. It flung back a snort of defiance as it straightened out along Hudson, leaping southward at a speed that made the taxi driver curse.

Blane glanced at the man hunter as the taxi followed bravely. There was no despair visible on the face of the great hunter of criminals. The eyes, hard as frozen hailstones, looked directly ahead; the thin lips, tight-drawn, hardly showed the line of the mouth; the chin was thrust forward belligerently. In the mind of No. 37 there was a fixed conviction that the criminal never won.

THE cop on the front shouted encouragement to the driver of the taxi. The chauffeur crouched over the wheel and prayed to the little tin gods that look after taxicabs. But the roadster was a monster kangaroo that drove triumphantly through the night, each leap widening the distance between it and the lumbering pursuer.

And then Fate, heavy-footed, triple-armed Fate, interfered.

A lumbering milk truck, loaded with empty cans, came stumbling down Tenth Street. It was a roughneck camion, gruff and greasy, a street hooligan in its way, chock-full of a belief that roosting roadsters and willy-boy sedans would keep their groomed carcasses out of its path.

It bellowed to the oncoming roadster, but the roadster unloosed an hysterical yelp and held to its path. The camion was astounded. For a second it looked as if the impudence of the roadster had left the big truck powerless to defend its street rights, then it recovered itself, waddled forward like a tank going into battle, and struck.

There was an appalling crash. The roadster squealed. It was lifted suddenly upward like a decorated matador hoisted on the horns of an angry bull, then it staggered forward with strange, epileptical movements, struck the curb and capsized with a crazed spluttering of shattered parts.

No. 37, the policeman, and Robert Henry Blane were the first upon the scene. The officer dragged the driver of the roadster from the wreckage; Blane pulled out a badly injured man that he immediately recognized as the person who had paid the hundred thousand dollars to the scientist, but it was left to the man hunter himself to get the madman from Warsaw who had found the terrible destructive force.

The scientist had been thrown from the car at the moment of the collision and driven with great force into the regiment of empty milk cans that filled the camion. His head had struck the containers and it was a lifeless form that the sleuth carried to the sidewalk.

The driver of the roadster was alive; so was the man who had hired the scientist; but the great inventor had passed on, knocked out by a little tap from the paw of fate as he was preparing to astonish the world by a campaign of frightfulness.

A crowd gathered. Police arrived. The driver of the hooligan camion denied negligence and sought witnesses.

"The roadster had cut in under me nose an' had got wot wuz comin' to it." He called upon the stars to witness his innocence. He was kind to small machines. Always!

An ambulance clattered up. The crowd milled around, tossing scraps of news to late comers sucked toward the group that grew like a cluster of bees in swarming time. It was great stuff for the crowd—two dead and one knocked unconscious.

Suddenly the voice of the camion driver was lifted up in a great shout of rage, a shout that was so impregnated with fierce indignation that it broke the mussellike formation of packed humans clustered around the bodies. Heads swung swiftly as the fellow screamed.

"Me cans!" roared the driver. "What thievin' blighter has gone an' stolen me milk cans?"

The cry came to the ears of No. 37. It flicked him like a whip. An unsatisfied hunger within his brain drooled as the shout of anguish came to him. He turned and rushed to the camion.

The milk cans from between which the man hunter had hauled the dead scientist had disappeared. Disappeared completely. At the moment of the collision they had stood valiantly together, handle to handle, now only one solitary can that had stood by itself at the rear of the camion was left out of the battalion.

The hands of the sleuth pawed the floor of the camion. His fingers found little mounds of red rust. Red rust and the broken fragments of a bottle made of some peculiarly hard substance that resembled jade! The terrible solvent which the scientist was carrying had been spilled at the moment when he was hurled into the milk cans and it had hurriedly devoured the containers during the minutes of excitement that followed the accident.

The man hunter spoke to the driver of the camion.

"Take the machine to your depot," he ordered. "Don't let any one touch it. I'll be there in a few minutes. Don't worry. There will be no trouble for you and I'll

pay for the loss of the cans. On your way."

Hours later Robert Henry Blane sat at breakfast in the elegant bachelor apartment that he occupied in The Montespan. The room reflected the character of the distinguished adventurer who occupied it. It was furnished with excellent taste, so that pieces whose points of origin were separated by thousands of leagues were skillfully placed in harmony.

A pleasant, smiling colored valet served Robert Henry Blane. A deft colored man who cooked and tended for the master that he loved. As he placed the hot sausages and toast upon the table, he spoke.

"Mistah Henny Blane, yo' uncle tally-phoned jest after twelve, suh," he said. "He jest wanted to tell you that he an' yo' cousin, Miss Kitty, had motored back from Brooklyn after the darnce at the Hotel Margaret. Yessuh. Miss Kitty spoke up an' says I wuz to tell you that she jest darnced her head right off. Yessuh. It was jest thutty minutes after twelve when they tallyphoned."

Robert Henry Blane smiled softly. "That's good, Peter," he said quietly. "I thought of them in the evening and wondered a little about their safety. I knew they would come back over Brooklyn Bridge."

"Yessuh," murmured Peter.

BLANE paused in his eating, thrust a hand into a pocket of his coat and brought forth five packages of bills which he placed beside his plate.

"Yes, I worried a trifle," continued The Wasp. "You see, Peter, there was a real bad man out on a rampage. A fellow who thought he could destroy the city. Fools paid him some money to do it. He fell in, Peter. The Lord grabbed him, and I managed to grab half the money that had been paid to him. It's quite a bunch of money."

The negro stared open-mouthed at the packages of thousand-dollar bills. "Gollyhop!" he murmured. "Gollyhop!"

A Chat With You

THE first time we saw Elmer Davis he came in here and asked us for a job. That was about eleven years ago. Davis was a tall, dark young man and he wanted any kind of a job. We had none for him—and he finally landed one, on another magazine, at fifteen dollars a week.

We forgot Davis' name but we remembered his personality and we had a hazy feeling about him that he probably could write. Then too he told us he came from Indiana. Indiana is the State of Booth Tarkington, of James Witcomb Riley, of General Lew Wallace, author of "Ben-Hur," of George Barr McCutcheon, of Meredith Nicholson and a host of other notables. In Indiana authors grow and flourish naturally. Then too, young Mr. Davis looked a little like Booth Tarkington. That was promising. Besides that he was a Rhodes scholar, having acquired an A. B. degree at Oxford. We were sorry we had no place for him. It seemed a pity that such an education and such evidences of ability should have to walk the streets of this town looking for a chance.

* * * *

WE did not see Mr. Davis again for seven years. In the meantime, unknown to us, for we had forgotten his name, he had been manufacturing a little history for himself. He went to work on a magazine, as we have said, at fifteen a week. A low salary, you say, for a university man and a scholar! Money though, as the fellow remarked to the treasurer of the club who wanted him to pay his dues, is not everything. Mr. Davis, on leaving Oxford, had just started instead of completing his education.

Working on the magazine taught him things about writing that the most distinguished professors of English could never impart. The low salary too was a benefit in disguise for it made him all the keener to land something else. He finally got on the *New York Times* as a reporter. He stayed with that paper six or seven years and wound up as an editorial writer. In that interval he had practically all the varieties of experience that the newspaper business can give a man. From heavyweight prize fights to national conventions, from Constantinople to Chicago and points west, Davis has been an eyewitness of about every sort of interesting thing that happens in this interesting world of ours. He began to write fiction in 1921. By that time he knew something to write about—and he knew how to write. We won't say that we bought his first story. We are not sure of that—but it was one of the first. We bought it through an agent and we had no idea that Elmer Davis was the dark young man from Indiana who had tried for a position here. Then he came in to see us, and we remembered him. After reading the first story we had of his—it was a novelette called "Lost and Found"—we were quite sure that he could write and we tried hard to persuade him to give up the newspaper game and take to fiction.

* * * *

THE BIG TOWN GAME," was his next story. Then came his novel "The Winning of Hollisburg," then another novel, "They See in the Dark." And now we are ready to send to press the best novel, in our estimation, that he has

ever written. It is one of the best we have read in a long time—and we've read a lot of good ones too. It is called "The Final Score." That is not a colorful title, nor an adequate title—but it does fit the story. It is a book-length novel, an unabridged two-dollar book. It is a story of intercollegiate football—but it is much more than that. It is the story of two or three men and a girl. The girl is human flesh and blood, a really strong and lovable character. And the men are real and all interesting. This is like no college story you have ever read. Some of the scenes are on the football field in the Middle West, others are in central Europe in the throes of a revolution. Always the story moves, always it is colorful and dramatic, always it discloses the unexpected and original. Davis knows football, he knows European politics, he knows men, he knows girls—but better than all this he knows how to write. We would like to tell you more of the story—but why spoil it? It is told too well as it is and we want you to have it at firsthand. It is a full-length book and you get it complete in the next number of the magazine.

* * * *

IN the same issue are stories—the best of their kind—by Kenneth Gilbert, Bert Mohrman, Delos W. Lovelace, Calvin Johnston, J. Frank Davis and James Francis Dwyer, as well as a poem by Henry

Herbert Knibbs. Also there is the concluding installment of the serial by Edgar Wallace.

* * * *

WE are sticking to the policy of one serial and the biggest and strongest novel possible complete in each issue. The letters from readers indicate an overwhelming majority in favor of that arrangement. But if you have not expressed yourself, please may we hear from you. Your opinion, even if this is the first copy of the magazine you have ever seen, is worth while to us.

If you like good book-length novels you have the best of them coming to you in future issues of the magazine. There is a novel by "Sapper" for instance. It is called "The Nameless Terror." The central figure is "Bulldog" Drummond, whom Sapper has made famous in play and story and who is, we think, one of the most striking and virile characters in fiction since Raffles and Sherlock Holmes. Then there is a marvelous tale of adventure, "The Town in the Sea," by H. de Vere Stacpoole. There is another great book, "Mountain Dew," by William West Winter. That's six weeks ahead—about as far as we can see at the present writing but there are more good things coming after that.

J. G. Houston writes us that he wants fewer short stories in the magazine and more novelettes. What is your idea?



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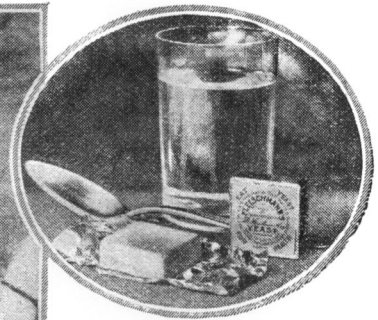
BELOW

"AS A YOUNG MOTHER, having given birth to eight children within nine years, complications setting in and my nerves badly shattered, I was fast losing my vitality. I tried eating Fleischmann's Yeast. I soon developed a fondness for it, and my health started to improve wonderfully. Within eight months I felt as if I could do the work of a longshoreman. It certainly did restore energy to my wasted body. For clearing the complexion there is nothing like it. And it has also proved a life-saver to my husband for boils." MRS. FLORENCE MURRAY, New York

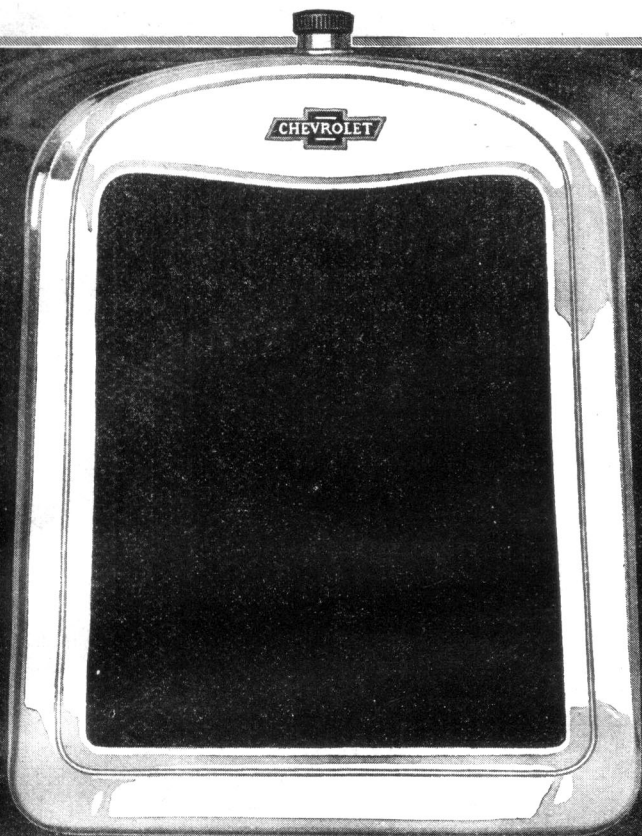


"A SEVERE AIRPLANE CRASH while serving as Flying Instructor during the war resulted in derangement of internal organs. My health failed rapidly for two years. Extreme gas pains, boils and other effects of aggravated auto-intoxication combined to make existence a thing of almost constant pain. Malnutrition helped lower my vitality. My wife started me on 2 cakes of Fleischmann's Yeast daily. Within a week natural functions were normally resumed. Immediately I gained strength. Rest became possible and proper nourishment. Thanks to Fleischmann's Yeast, today I am in normal rugged health."

REN V. BIXBY, Culver City, Cal.



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Capless tube with new device

Original tube with threaded cap

Tu-be or not Tu-be?

Way back in 43 B. C., Publius Syrus said: "Powerful indeed is the empire of *habit*."

Sixteen centuries later Shakespeare wrote: "How use doth breed a *habit* in a man!"

Since the copyrights of both these authors have expired, I'll use their nifties to illustrate a point.

The Mennen Company perfected an ingenious opening device for tubes that replaced the old-style threaded cap. This invention, applied to Mennen Shaving Cream tubes, was hailed as a masterpiece by millions of men. My mail was flooded with enthusiastic letters.

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Now I know that no Mennen user would give up the cream, even if we packed it in burglar-proof safes. But I want every Mennen fan to know that he can have his cream in the tube that suits him best. We have kept right on producing Mennen's in its original package.

Every druggist has Mennen's in the old tubes as well as the new. "You pays your money and you takes your choice."

Either type of tube costs 50c and contains the shaving cream that has created more goodwill and honest appreciation than any other man-product ever made.

Jim Henry
(Mennen Salesman)

Rusty nails
Clamshells
Fish-hooks
Gun-wounds
Campfire burns
Cuts, scratches
Blisters
Insect-bites
Poison ivy
Sunburn



Don't risk blood-poisoning

IN the summer time the dreaded scourge of infection creeps on its victims unaware. The camper or vacationist naturally must have his share of cuts, burns, and insect-bites. Broken bottles and clamshells infest even the nicest bathing beaches. Barbed wire and fish-hooks and poison ivy are always with us. Mosquito bites and sunburn, too, are dangerous sources of infection. Tennis, rowing and hiking cause blisters which may have extremely serious consequences.

But you need not carry a whole medicine chest full of special preparations for all these purposes. The same bottle of Zonite which prevents infection from knife-cut or gunwound will soothe your sunburn and insect-bites or, as a mouthwash, will prevent colds and more serious diseases of throat, nose or gums.

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Pyorrhea Claims 4 out of 5

Vain regrets won't restore lost beauty

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This condition—one of the first stages of Pyorrhea—is very common and something that ordinary tooth pastes are powerless to prevent. If not checked promptly, it will lead to loss of teeth and serious organic diseases.

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Forhan's
FOR THE GUMS
More than a tooth paste—
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Relief



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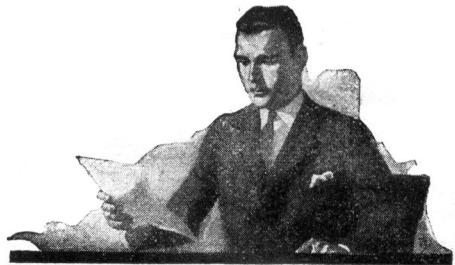
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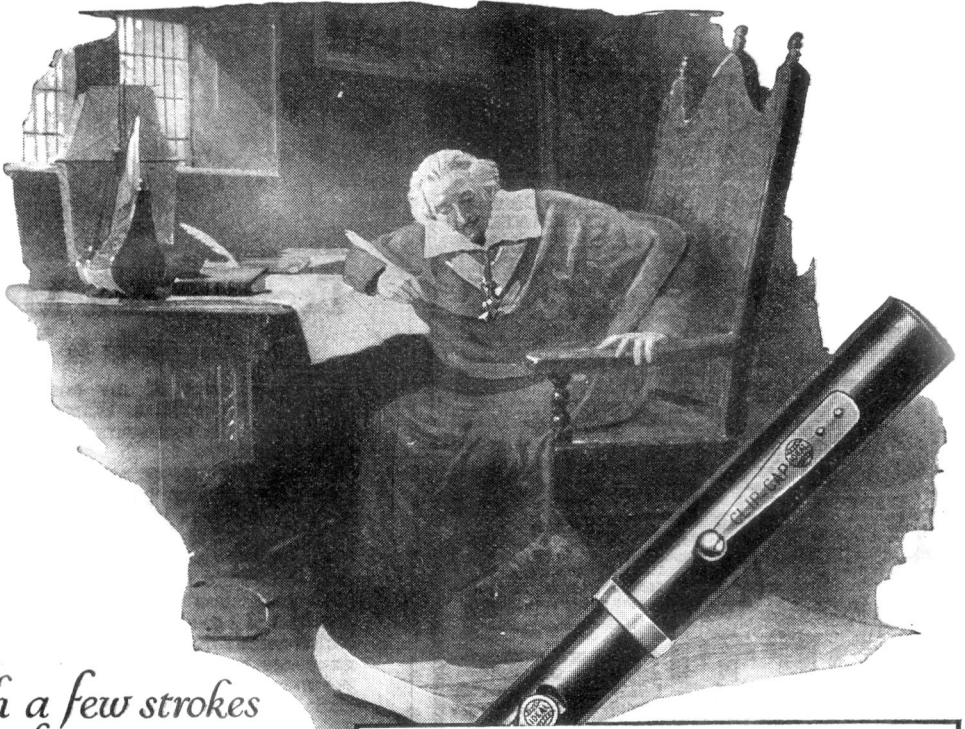
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Slightly higher prices west of Rockies and far South

Shave every day—be comfortable

COLGATE'S

for better shaving



YESTERDAY—

What a difference a few years make in fashions! How absurd some of them seem to be, when we look backward!

Would we be willing to adopt the grotesque styles to which our grandfathers submitted? It would take a constitutional amendment, at least, to drive us to such things.

Perhaps the purpose of whiskers that reached from ear to ear, and skirts that left no room for doubt was to eliminate difficulty in telling the sexes apart.

If so, its effectiveness can hardly be questioned, but here a disturbing thought intrudes. Since women have gone in for knickies and bobs it is conceivable that whiskers may in time be needed again to show that men are men.

The horror of such a possibility becomes evident when we see how the well-groomed man of today would look with such facial fol-de-rols as were fashionable sixty years ago.

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It emulsifies the oily coating upon each hair of the beard, permitting moisture to penetrate and soften it *at the base*, where the razor's work is done.

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