

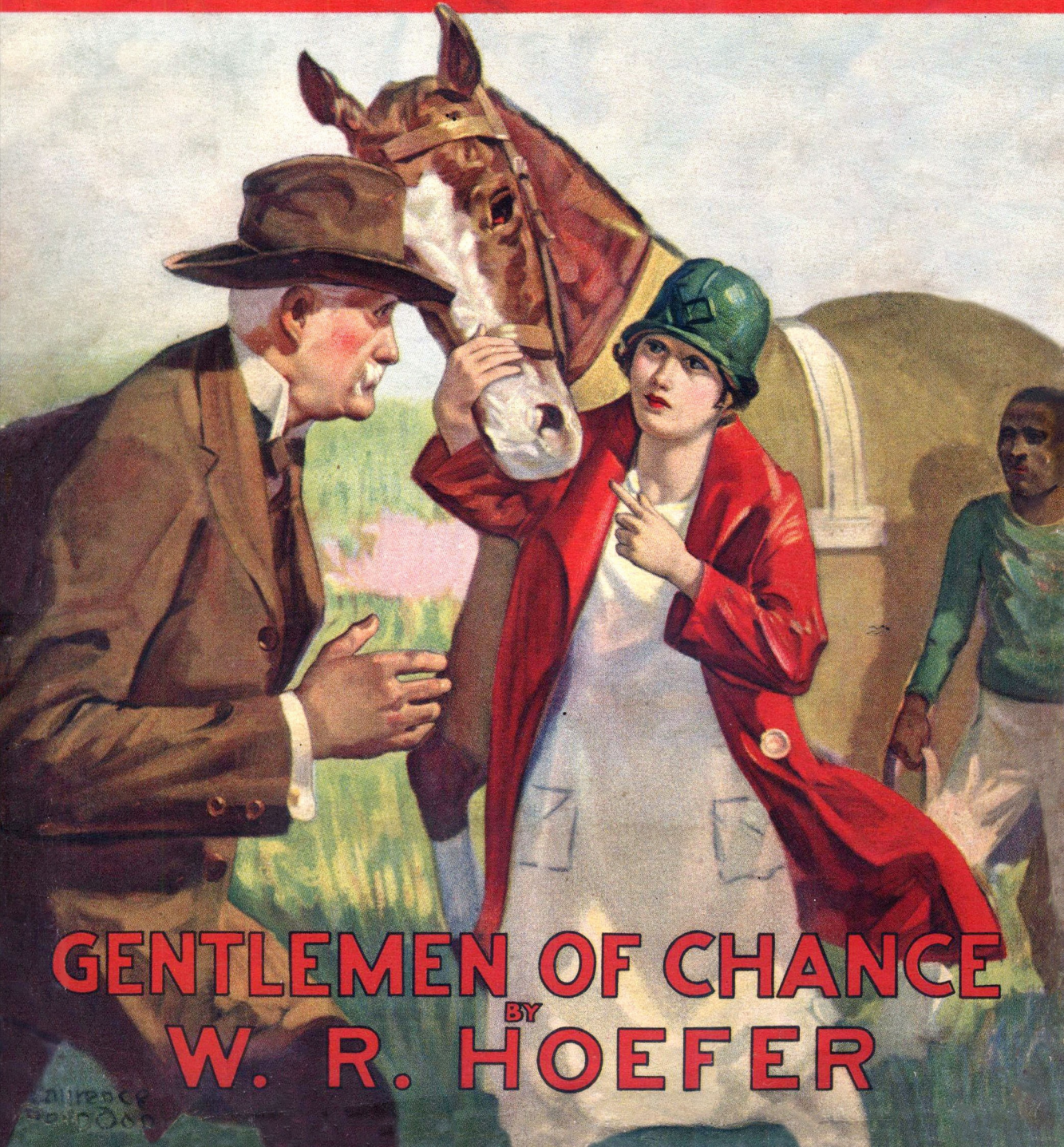
THE BIG NATIONAL FICTION MAGAZINE

TWICE-A-MONTH

★ *The Popular*
Magazine

JULY 7,
1926

25
cts.



GENTLEMEN OF CHANCE
BY
W. R. HOEFER

Electrical Experts are in Big Demand!
—L.L. Cooke!

I Will Train You at Home to fill a Big-Pay Job!



L. L. COOKE
Chief Engineer

It's a shame for you to earn \$15 or \$20 or \$30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert you could make \$70 to \$200—and do it easier—not work half so hard. Why then remain in the small-pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a real job in the great electrical industry. I'll show you how.

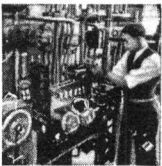
Look What These Cooke Trained Men are Earning



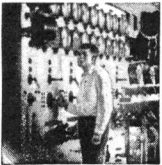
Makes \$700 in 24 Days in Radio
"Thanks to your interesting Course I made over \$700 in 24 days in Radio. Of course, this is a little above the average but I run from \$10 to \$10 clear profit every day; you can see what your training has done for me."
FRED G. McNABB,
848 Spring St., Atlanta, Ga.



\$70 to \$80 a Week for Jacquot
"Now I am specializing in autoelectricity and battery work and make from \$70 to \$80 a week and am just getting started. I don't believe there is another school in the world like yours. Your lessons are a real joy to study."
ROBERT JACQUOT,
2005 W. Colorado Ave.,
Colorado Springs, Colo.



\$20 a Day for Schreck
"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than \$500 a month from my own business now. I used to make \$18 a week."
A. SCHRECK,
Phoenix, Ariz.



Plant Engineer — Pay Raised 150%
"I was a dumbbell in electricity until I got in touch with you Mr. Cooke, but now I have charge of a big plant including 6000 motors and direct a force of 34 men—electricians, helpers, etc. My salary has gone up more than 150%."
GEORGE ILLINGWORTH,
63 Calumet Road,
Holyoke, Mass.

Be an Electrical Expert Earn \$3,500 to \$10,000 a Year

Today even the ordinary Electrician—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the Electrical Expert—who is picked out to "boss" the ordinary Electricians—to boss the Big Jobs—the jobs that pay \$3,500 to \$10,000 a Year. Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs." Start by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is simple, thorough and complete and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from \$70 to \$200 a week.

No Extra Charge for Electrical Working Outfit

With me, you do practical work—at home. You start right in after your first few lessons to work at your profession in the regular way and make extra money in your spare time. For this you need tools, and I give them to you—5 big complete working outfits, with tools, measuring instruments and a real electric motor.

Your Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, too, can get into the "big money" class in Electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my Course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made. And back of me in my guarantee, stands the Chicago Engineering Works, Inc., a two million dollar institution, thus assuring to every student enrolled, not only a wonderful training in Electricity, but an unsurpassed Student Service as well.

Get Started Now — Mail Coupon

I want to send you my Electrical Book and Proof Lessons, both Free. These cost you nothing and you'll enjoy them. Make the start today for a bright future in Electricity. Send in Coupon—NOW.

L.L. Cooke, Chief Engineer
Chicago Engineering Works

Dept. 7B, 2150 Lawrence Av. Chicago



L. L. COOKE, The Man Who Makes Dept. 7B, "Big-Pay" Men
2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago

Send me at once without obligation your big illustrated book and complete details of your Home Study Course in Electricity, including your outfit and employment service offers.

5 big outfits given to you — no extra charge

MAIL COUPON FOR MY FREE BOOK

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Occupation

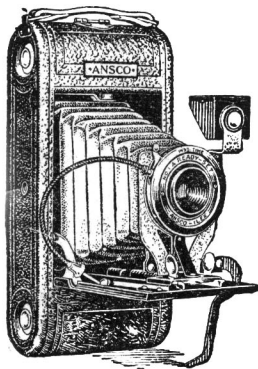
The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man



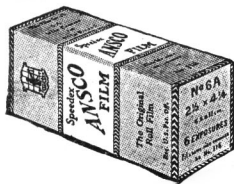
Keep open forever
the road to yesterday
—take pictures!

IT'S the play hours in your work-a-day life that are the happiest — and the most amusing—that you want to remember always.

Was it a brief excursion to some unusual place, or your pride in the new car, the upset on that picnic, or just some happy happening at home that you'd like to tell your friends about? The best and most interesting way is in pictures. For pictures say at a glance far more than you can tell.



Anso Speedex Film comes in the red box with the yellow band—and there's a size to fit every roll-film camera made. The Ready-Sets come in three sizes—so walk right into any good store today and make your choice.



It's pictures you want—live, clear, interesting pictures with a kick to them! You'll get them by putting Anso Speedex Film in your camera. You don't need to be a cracker-jack camera user because this new film is made particularly for inexperienced folks.

By the way—have you a Ready-Set camera? It's the camera that's made for inexperienced folks because it has no fussy adjustments to worry you. All you have to do is to shoot and get good pictures!

ANSCO

CAMERAS & SPEEDEX FILM

Pioneer Camera Makers of America

Anso—Binghamton, N. Y.

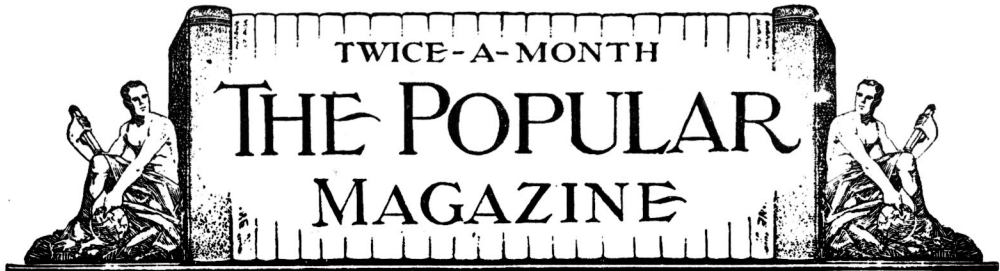


Did you buy a corner lot? Whether you did or not, you'll like "Where the Big Money Is," the story of the Florida real-estate boom, by Elmer Davis, that will be published, complete, in the next issue of THE POPULAR. It is a regular two-dollar book, printed in this magazine, which costs twenty-five cents. Ask your news dealer to reserve a copy for you.

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Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 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, 1926, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1926, 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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What is Personal Magnetism?

No leader of men has long survived without it. No great orator or musician or actor can hold audiences spellbound without it. No salesman, no business man, can win an outstanding success without it. Personal magnetism! It is your greatest capital—greater by far than wealth, than good looks. It is you, made magnetic! It is you, with a personality so fascinating and irresistible that people are drawn to you as steel is drawn to a magnet!

My Method Releases Your Personal Magnetism

No long course of study. No tedious mental exercises. Just a simple, clear, age-old principle that releases the full sweep of your magnetic potentialities—and makes you almost a new person. A principle that never fails to work, because it con-

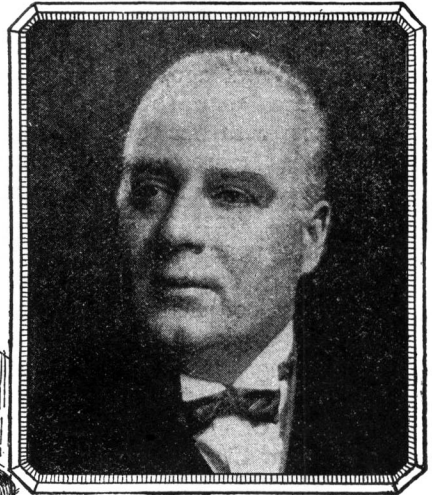


Think what personal magnetism will mean to you in business, in your contact with men and women. You will win! You will get what you want!

spires with Nature to make you the dynamic, forceful, fascinating person you were intended to be.

The fundamental principles of Personal Magnetism have been put into a beautiful extra large size volume under the title of "The Cultivation of Personal Magnetism." This book gives you the key to a magnetic personality in only five days—or it costs you nothing. That is my free proof offer to you.

The study and scope of Personal Magnetism is as broad as life itself. "Fires of Magnetism," "Sex Influences," "The Magnetic Voice," "Physical Magnetism," "The Magnetic Eye," "The Road to Power" and "The Winning Personality" are only a few of the subjects covered in this amazing book.



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Merely mail coupon below and this remarkable volume, with cover in handsome dark burgundy cloth, gold embossed, will be sent you by return mail. If you aren't stirred and inspired in the 5-day free period, return it and it costs you nothing. Otherwise keep it as your own and remit only \$3 in full payment. You are the sole judge. You do not pay unless you are delighted. Clip and mail this coupon NOW. Ralston University Press, Dept. 86 F, Meriden, Conn.

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Dept. 86 F, Meriden, Conn.**

All right—I'll be the judge. You may send me the volume "Cultivation of Personal Magnetism" for 5 days' FREE EXAMINATION in my home. Within the 5 days I will either remit the special low price of only \$3.00, in full payment, or return it without cost or obligation.

Name

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City State



It's a new brand of fiction that our writers are giving us these days, a more human sort than we had twenty or thirty years ago. It is interesting to compare some of the old-fashioned stories with the type of fiction that Chelsea House writers produce to-day—interesting and significant, too, indicating a great advance in the art of writing popular fiction and a corresponding development of the public taste. Good fiction is part and parcel of our national life—books that have the swing and go of the great West in them, books of real romance and adventure in everyday living. The publishers of Chelsea House books can well be proud of their contribution to history and the fact that they have constantly striven to improve the quality of American fiction.

Here are thumb-nail sketches of some of the latest Chelsea House offerings.



THE CRUISE OF THE "COLLEEN BAWN," by Frank Carruthers. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price \$2.

Frank Carruthers, author of "Terror Island," has turned out another smashing sea story, a real contribution to the literature of adventure on the deep. He tells of the shanghaiing of Sid Livingston, whom certain business interests wanted out of the way, of Livingston's experiences with a scoundrelly crew, of his desperate attempt to escape from his captors; and he tells it all so naturally that you can fairly smell salt water and hear the wind whistling through the rigging. Mr. Carruthers is a master of his art; he knows all about ships and men, and when he takes you cruising through the treacherous Bering Sea, you have had an experience you won't soon forget. I recommend this book for all lovers of the sea.

THE CLEW IN THE GLASS, by W. B. M. Ferguson. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price \$2.

Morney, the hero of Mr. Ferguson's story, walked into trouble the moment he set foot in the gossiping little town of Pinelake. Here he found that a woman he had loved, but who had jilted him, was married to the town's leading citizen. Then of a sudden came tragedy. Within a few moments of each other, the woman and her husband were killed, and suspicion pointed to Morney as the murderer.

Here's a story with not a dull page in it, an ideal companion for a summer vacation, one that will make you forget everything but your vital interest in its outcome.



TOUCHING CLOUD, by Ethel Smith Dorrance and James French Dorrance. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75c.

This is a story that takes you into a little-known part of the great West, where the Ute Indians still hold sway. It describes in colorful manner the adventures of a straight-talking, straight-thinking inspector of Uncle Sam's Indian Service, who saves the simple Touching Cloud, son of the Ute chieftain, from a group of white conspirators. The Dorrances have done wonders in creating live personalities against a fascinating background. A book crammed full of exciting action.



TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD, by Christopher B. Booth. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75c.

Mr. Booth has an uncanny way of presenting his readers with mysteries to solve. He can make you sit up with any of his detective stories until the last page is turned. He does the trick again in this story of the murder of a man who had made enemies everywhere. Several persons might have killed the cruel Vance Cunningham, whom excessive drinking had turned into an intolerable tyrant. Once you have started on the trail of his slayer, I'll wager that you will not put the book down. It's a story to test all the detective abilities you have, one that you will remember and recommend to your friends.

Laugh If You Like-!



- But I Did Learn Music Without a Teacher

IT was at a little social gathering. Everyone had been called on to entertain and all had responded with a song or with a selection on some musical instrument. And now it was my turn.

I had always been known as a "sit in the corner." I had never been able to either sing or play. So they all murmured as I smiled confidently and took my place at the piano. Then I played—played as no one else had played that evening. First ballads then classical numbers and popular tunes.

For the first time in my life I was the very center of attraction.

They had listened—dumfounded. For a moment, now that I had finished, they remained silent. Then thunderous applause! Then questions.

"How did you do it?" they chorused. "And you're the one who didn't know a note!" "Why didn't you tell us you were taking lessons privately?" "Who was your teacher?"

For a moment the questions overwhelmed me.

"Teacher? I never had one," I replied. "I learned by myself, at home."

They laughed in disbelief.

"Laugh if you want," I countered. "I did learn music without a teacher."

"A few months ago I didn't know one note from another. I loved music. But I couldn't afford a private teacher. And I couldn't bear the thought of monotonous exercises. Anyway, I thought a person had to have talent to become a musician."

"You all know how I've just sat around while the rest of you entertained. Time after time I longed to be able to play."

"Then one night I sat at home alone, reading a magazine. Suddenly my eye caught a startling announcement. It told of a new, easy method of quickly learning music—right in your own home—and without a teacher. It sounded impossible—but it made me wonder. After all, I decided, it 'doesn't cost a cent to find out.' So I signed the coupon, and—well you know the rest."

The course, I explained to them, was more helpful

than I ever dreamed possible. It was amazingly simple—even a child could learn to play this quick, easy way. I chose the piano. And from the very beginning I was playing *real notes, catchy tunes*—just like a regular musician! It was just like a fascinating game!

Now I can play anything—jazz or classical. I am never at a loss to entertain. No more dreary hours of solitude for me. And I even play in an orchestra and make money having a wonderful time!

You, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument by this easy "at home" method that has helped almost half a million people to increased pleasure and financial gain. You don't have to know a thing about music—progress is rapid because every step is easy to understand. Pick out the instrument you want to play. The U. S. School of Music does the rest. And it costs just a few cents a day!

Free Book and Demonstration Lesson

A wonderful illustrated free book and our free demonstration lesson prove how any one can learn to play his favorite instrument quickly and for just a fraction of what old slow methods cost.

If you really want to learn to play—if new friends, good times, social popularity and increased income appeal to you—act now! Sign the coupon and send it before it's too late. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3597 Brunswick Bldg., N. Y. C.



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Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with Introduction by Dr. Frank Crane, Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your Special Offer. I am interested in the following course:

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 Have you above instrument?.....
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Classified Advertising

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EARN \$10 DAILY silvering mirrors, plating, refinishing metalware, headlights, chandeliers, bedsteads. Outfits furnished. DeCle Laboratories, 1135 Broadway, New York.

AGENTS—WRITE FOR FREE Samples. Sell Madison "Better-Made" Shirts for large Manufacturer direct to wearer. No capital or experience required. Many earn \$100 weekly and bonus. Madison Mfgs., 564 Broadway, New York.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS. furnishing everything; men and women \$30 to \$100 weekly operating our "Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 29, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—\$60-\$125 A WEEK. Free samples. Gold letters for stores and office windows. Metallic Letter Co., 423 N. Clark, Chicago.

BIG MONEY, FAST SALES: everyone buys gold initials for their auto. Make \$1.44 on \$1.50 sale. Ten orders daily easy. Samples free. World Monogram, Dept. 12, Newark, N. J.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every owner buys gold initials for his auto. You charge \$1.50, make \$1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 179, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—90c an hour to advertise and distribute samples to consumer. Write quick for territory and particulars. American Products Co., 6132 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

\$75.00 TO \$150.00 WEEKLY TO INTRO-duce "Chieftain" 3 for \$4.95 Guaranteed Tailored Shirts. Samples and Style Book Free. Your Pay Daily. Cincinnati Shirt Company, Secy. 1927, Cincinnati, Ohio.

BUILD SPLENDID BUSINESS MAKING chipped glass number and name plates. Particulars free. Simplex Co., 1133 Broadway, New York.

Agents and Help Wanted—Continued

\$12 DAILY EASY (Sworn Proof) introducing New Style Guaranteed Hosiery. Cotton, lisle, chiffon, silk. Latest colors. Harvest, Frenchude, Orchid, Fawn, Blush, 35 others. You take orders. We deliver and collect. Samples furnished. Send for Proof of Profits. Macochee Textile Company, Card 4507, Cincinnati, Ohio.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. Carnation Co., Dept. 2860, St. Louis, Mo.

Help Wanted—Male

ALL Men, Women, Boys, Girls, 17 to 65 willing to accept Government Positions \$117-\$250, traveling or stationary, write Mr. Ozment, 398, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

EARN \$110 to \$250 monthly, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. We secure position for you after completion of 8 months' home-study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunity. Write for Free Booklet, CM-28, Stand Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

MEN-WOMEN 18-55 Make secret investigations, reports, must be good listeners, talkers won't do. Experience unnecessary. Write Ludwig, 426 Westover, Kansas City, Mo.

ONLY ONE POLICY A DAY MEANS \$150 per month profit. Permanent income from renewals. Our Special Policy pays \$5,000 death, and \$25 weekly benefit for stated injury or sickness. Premium \$10 yearly. Big demand. Easy to sell with our Direct-by-Mail plan. Write quick for territory. Underwriters, 729 Bonnell Bldg., Newark, N. J.

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS. Commence \$158 month, Men 18-35. Sample coaching lesson Free. Franklin Institute, Dept. S2, Rochester, N. Y.

Stammering

ST-STU-T-T-TERING And Stammering Cured at Home. Instructive booklet free. Walter McDonnell, 80 Arcade, 1126 Granville Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Help Wanted—Female

\$6-\$18 A DOZEN decorating pillow tops at home, experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 La-Grange, Ind.

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HERE'S YOUR LAND! \$10 down and \$10 a month buys 20 acres of my best land in Cent. Mich. for \$400, or 10 acres for \$250. Write at once for free 48-page picture book. G. W. Swigart, X1265 1st Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

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PATENTS—Write for free Guide Books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch of invention for inspection and instructions free. Terms reasonable. Victor J. Evans Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for inspection and instructions free. Terms reasonable. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENT-SENSE—Valuable book (free) for inventors seeking largest deserved profits. Write Lacey & Lacey, 719 F St., Washington, D. C. Established 1869.

Detectives Wanted

MEN—Experience unnecessary; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis, Mo.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Travel. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Write, George Wagner, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, New York.

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements



WORK FOR "UNCLE SAM"

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TRAVEL—SEE YOUR COUNTRY!

Railway Postal Clerks get \$1,900 the first year, being paid on the 1st and 15th of each month. Their pay is increased to a maximum of \$2,700 a year. While away from home they are allowed hotel expenses.

PAID VACATIONS

Railway Postal Clerks, like all Government employees are given a yearly vacation of 15 working days (about 18 days). On runs they usually work 3 days and have 3 days off duty or in the same proportion with full time pay. They travel on a pass, while on duty, and have a wonderful chance to see the country.

CITY MAIL CARRIERS, CLERKS

Clerks and Carriers commence at \$1,400 a year and automatically increase \$100 a year to \$2,100 and \$2,300. They also have 15 days' paid vacation.

Get Free List of Positions

Fill out and mail the coupon today—now. At once.

Franklin Institute
Dept T-269
Rochester, N. Y.

Kindly rush to me entirely free of charge (1) a full description of the position checked; (2) Free copy of 32-page illustrated book, "How to Get a U. S. Government Job." (3) A list of the U. S. Jobs obtainable; check the job you want.

- Railway Postal Clerk . . . (\$1900-\$2700)
- Post Office Clerk (\$1700-\$2300)
- City Mail Carrier (\$1700-\$2100)
- Rural Mail Carrier (\$2100-\$3300)
- Clerk at Washington, D. C. . . (\$1140-\$1860)

Name Address

Use This Coupon Before You Miss It.



Are you afraid you will be fired?

ARE you sitting on the anxious bench wondering what will happen to you if business slacks up? Are you one of the many small-salaried, untrained workers who are always the first to go when employers start cutting the salary list?

Why have this spectre of unemployment hanging over you all the time? Why not decide today that you are going to make yourself so valuable to your employer that he can't get along without you?

You can do it if you really want to, right at home in spare time, through the International Correspondence Schools. In just an hour a day you can get the special training that you must have if you are ever going to get—and keep—a real job at a real salary.

You're ambitious, aren't you? And you want to get ahead? Then don't turn this page until you have clipped the coupon, marked the line of work you want to follow and mailed it to Scranton for full particulars.

Surely it is worth at least a two-cent stamp to find out all about the I. C. S. and what it can do for you.



Mail the Coupon for Free Booklet

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Box 2051-B, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

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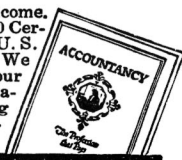
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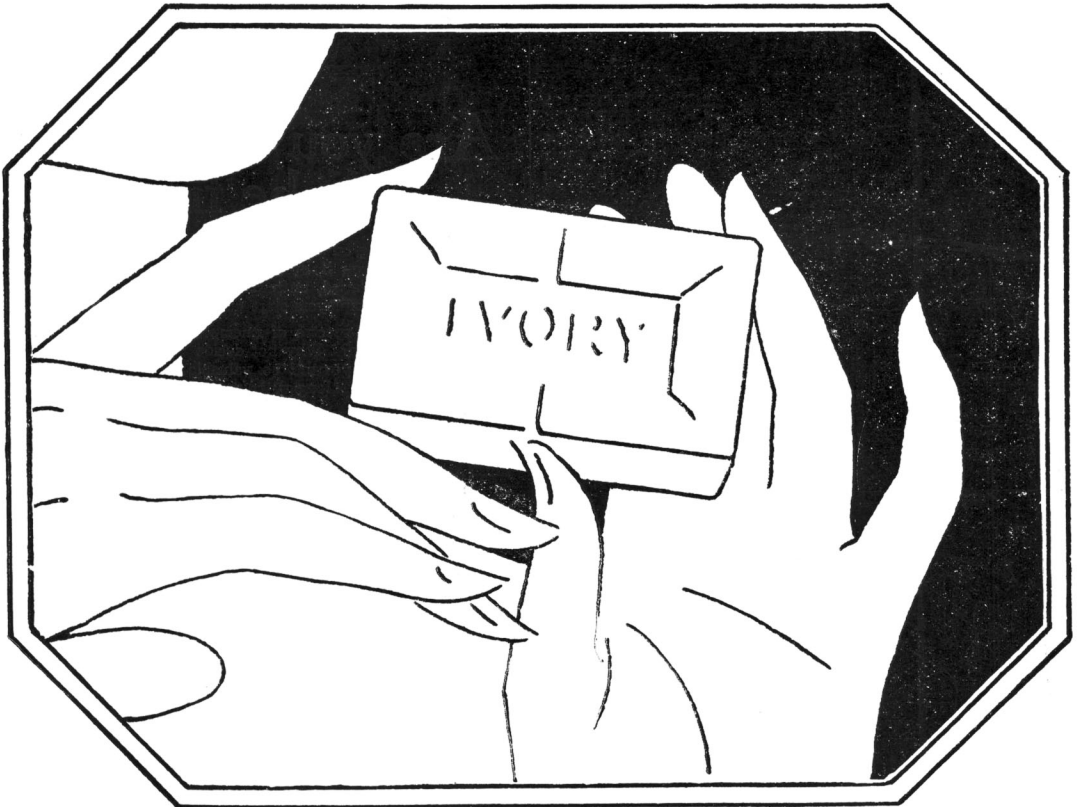


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Gentlemen of Chance

By W. R. Hoefler

Author of "As Per Sample," "Wise Gentry," Etc.

The setting was conventional, old Southern style. The Kentucky moon hung like a silver slipper over the purple quiet of the night; the perfume of late-summer flowers drifted in from the blue-grass fields to mingle gently with the aroma of golden honeysuckle hanging in a heavy network over the tall, white columns of a pale colonial mansion; on the broad veranda a young man and a young woman, the one handsome, the other beautiful, sipped a cool liquid from long glasses in which fresh mint was floating. And then it happened! A blue-steel gun glinted in the moonlight, a rough male voice spoke a command, memory recalled a fixed horse race—and the strangest of adventures began.

CHAPTER I.

SPEEDING THOROUGHBREDS.

AS the spindle-legged thoroughbreds swept under the wire in a cyclonic scramble of soft-drumming hoofbeats, Laurence Barrington Coulter lowered his field glasses with a trace of amazement in the cool gleam of his gray eyes. The

amazement was quite excusable, even in so self-controlled a young man as he, for Joraleen, the real class of the field, had just been beaten a good three lengths. And the winner, a little filly named Redolent, quoted in the morning line at better than forty to one, was the rankest kind of outside choice in the estimation of wily form players.

The amazement of the form players

was as frank and audible as it was great. The corpulent man with the saffron spats and mastiff jowls, at Coulter's left, turned from the rail opposite the judges' stand and addressed the heavens with fervor and scorn.

"Redolent!" His thick lips curled in disgust as the word exploded from them. "Now ain't that a fine name for the dog? There's something redolent of ancient cheese about this, if you ask me." He bit savagely into his fat cigar and glared at Coulter who, though he hadn't asked him, mentally agreed that the winner's name, in the circumstances, was perhaps a bit appropriate.

The dissatisfaction with this last race of the final day of the Latonia fall meeting seemed quite general. The flint-eyed man under the checked cap at Coulter's right yawned elaborately to display his nonchalance and conceal his disappointment, then voiced an opinion through one side of his twisted mouth.

"Some egg," he observed, "cuts a juicy melon. Wonder what she pays?"

"Plenty," the large man assured him. "Somebody's cooked up a real killing this time. And the cooking, by Godfrey, sir, smells to the stars!"

"Whaddaya expect?" inquired another, with the mirthless grin of the trackwise addict. "On get-away day? And here at 'Death Valley?' And the last race on the card?"

A thin man with a dolefully drooping nose tossed two ten-dollar tickets away and nodded. "'Death Valley' is right," he mourned. "What chance is there for guys with brains what can dope form at this track?"

"Guys with brains—and no hot info—are too wise to try to shoot form—on this track," replied the flint-eyed man. "'Specially on get-away day."

Little Sehm, the winning jockey, after a perfunctory splatter of applause from the astonished stands, had left the scales and with other riders was on his way to the jockey room. Over on

the track a two year old, from a stable that would not be shipping to Churchill Downs until the following week, was already getting a work-out, moving along rhythmically near the five-eighths pole, under the restraining wraps of a coffee-colored exercise boy. Yet the greater part of the throng in the grand stand and along the rail, financially uninterested though they were, remained through the unusual delay in posting the odds to learn the price on the winner.

When it was displayed, a gasp escaped the great crowd. The price, as the large man had predicted, was plenty.

"A hundred and twenty-six dollars for two!" A lady near Coulter, with a lady's racing luck and a winning ticket, almost shrieked the figures.

"Sixty-three to one!" fervently breathed a man near her. "And are the stewards gonna stand for that?"

THE stewards, with the winning numbers officially up, were indeed going to stand for it until the comparatively few lucky—and knowing—ones could exchange their bits of paper for good currency of the republic. Back under the grand stand the restive human queues at the machine pay windows were already slowly moving along.

Laurence Barrington Coulter, idly scanning the assemblage now slowly melting from the inclosure, remained at the rail until the park was almost empty. Then, turning to again read the odds posted across the track, he lit a cigarette, removed five tickets from a pocket of his smart topcoat, tore them to tiny fragments and tossed the bits over the rail to the hoof-churned track, watching, with a faint smile on his agreeable features, as they floated away on the autumn breeze.

The smile was just the least bit ironic. But then Fate, in one of her contradictory moods, had just played an ironic prank. For never before, in all the twenty-nine years of a generally care-

free and pleasant existence, had time, that fleeting commodity so much to be valued and utilized, according to our best moralists and copy books, been of such importance in Larry Coulter's scheme of things. He had usually had plenty of it for all purposes and it had been, generally, a thing merely to annihilate as agreeably and painlessly as possible.

And now here, just a few minutes before, the difference of a fraction of a second had meant the difference to him between continued comfort, for a short time at least, and his present state of financial nothingness or the nearest thing to it.

In a word, those five tickets on Joraleen, still gayly dancing in the jolly breeze, had cost a hundred dollars each. If Joraleen had been but a fraction of a second brisker on his recent journey, they would have been worth three or four times that amount. But as it was, they were worth exactly nothing. And save for some loose change in his fashionably tailored clothes, that five hundred dollars had been the last of Laurence Barrington Coulter's financial resources.

It was also the last that he was ever likely to get, save by the sweat of his brow or some unusual chance. A wealthy and hitherto indulgent uncle had promised that in an unpleasant and final scene back home in New York three weeks before. And the grim and autocratic old gentleman was a man of his word.

A LADY, as is not infrequently the case in this world, had caused all of the trouble. She was the most beautiful lady that Laurence, whose taste was excellent, had ever beheld. She twinkled her lively toes and otherwise frolicked in "Hey There!" the sprightly Broadway review and her name, at least in the profession, was Mercedes de Vilmay. And if her cultural attractions

were not much above the level of Tenth Avenue, her physical charms exceeded anything he had ever encountered in Fifth.

He had expended much time and money with the alluring Mercedes and it was no mean attainment, in the face of the stiff and expert competition by many gentlemen of various ages and considerable means, to have outdistanced all rivals in her regard. But old Daniel Coulter had small regard for this kind of achievement. He feared, and rightly, that the lady meant to attach herself to the Coulter entourage and fortune and so he had ordered his nephew to cease all attentions to her, definitely and at once.

Now young Coulter had felt no urge to marry the girl, but an ultimatum of this sort was at once a challenge to his stubbornness and good taste and an offense to chivalry. The edict had been defied. Whereat old "D. C." had forbidden him the house and promised to cut him off from both his current generous allowance and his legacy.

Whereupon the lovely Mercedes, whose interest in the matter seemed to have vanished with the financial prospects, had kissed Laurence playfully upon his left jawbone, gurgled her delightful, silvery little laugh and then gone out to dinner with a scandalously wealthy suspender manufacturer.

But what a lovely little thing she was! Laurence smiled, even now, at the memory of her. And what an illogical world it was, to be sure. Quite all right of course, despite unreasonable uncles and adorable ladies and tardy race horses—but illogical.

At least a thousand times the alluring Mercedes had protested her undying love for him and him alone. And at the first opportunity of acquiring him and him alone, she had turned to a creator of trouser supporters. And there was Joraleen. He had played that animal, the undoubted class of the field.

For once in his impetuous life, he had exercised judgment and restraint. He had stilled his inner urgings to flirt with a long shot and had heeded conservative and expert advice, none other than the advice of "Paddock" Riley, who made his living, a good one, by his horse sense. And the class of the field had been beaten; and the last of his financial resources, in the shape of five torn-up tickets, was fluttering gayly along in the distance upon the jolly autumn breeze.

There remained some other resources, though only time and chance and the pawnshop could determine their intrinsic worths. Energy, a sound and athletic body, an expensive if largely impractical education, an optimistic outlook upon things generally, a cool nerve revealed in the steady eyes that held a humorous glint, a good degree of determination that could not be mistaken in the length and angle of chin, an agreeable person and an engaging personality about comprised the lot of what might be termed the purely personal assets.

As against these there was the hotel bill, a large experience in and a natural gift for spending money, with a corresponding lack in acquiring that useful commodity. For the rest, there still remained a watch, a suit of evening clothes, two business suits—to use a customary rather than a descriptive term—besides the clothes he stood in, a Gladstone bag, a belabeled trunk which, with its owner, had visited many remote pleasure places of the world in a happier day, and the few coins in his trousers pocket.

These were so very few that Laurence felt obliged to decline the offer of the belated taxi driver outside the park.

"Take you to Cincy in fifteen minutes," that solitary individual optimistically insisted, pressing his starter.

The young man declined. "Joraleen

and I are in no hurry this lovely afternoon," he explained, and sauntered toward the trolley loop.

The taxi man, who also had guessed wrong and expensively that afternoon, though on a different animal, grinned his understanding and, on impulse, called after the other:

"Hey, bo! 'Sall' right if you're cleaned. Take you over the river, anyway," he invited.

Coulter, however, had already disappeared within the trolley car.

Going through Covington, he idly speculated upon the immediate future. On alighting at the Dixie Terminal, his speculations were still rife and idle. But back in the pretentious lobby of the Winton Hotel, his first move was decided for him by the management's statement, handed from his box with his key, announcing that it required eighty-nine dollars to liquidate his hotel bill.

AN hour later, in a pawnshop in Vine Street, Coulter had managed his bartering with surprising effectiveness, considering his total inexperience with such gentry. He came away with four dollars and fifty cents above the amount of his indebtedness. It was now nearly eight o'clock and he was hungry. But before dinner, he decided, he would dispose of a few mementos in his hotel room, check out and leave the past behind.

The mementos, a dozen or so of photographs of the lovely Miss de Vilmy, were each inscribed with the most fervent protestations of undying affection. Laurence read them all once more, bid each likeness of the lady a pleasant if slightly ironic farewell and, tearing them once across, deposited them gently in the wastebasket.

And now to check out and then to dinner. After that—well, chance and the gods must decide. He put on his topcoat and stepped back to turn out the light, but a bit of metal on the car-

pet, just past the threshold of the connecting door to the adjoining room, stayed his hand. The metal was a key, small, flat and thin, of a kind to fit a small safety box or compartment. It looked, somehow, a little familiar.

"Now here's a rum go!" mused Larry, running fingers through his close-cropped, brown hair reflectively.

The key had not been there before this last return to his room. He was certain of that, because his glance had been on that exact spot then in retrieving a fallen pencil.

He stooped to pick up the key, but what he saw near by held his eyes for several startled seconds. For, from under the door, in a sinuous, creeping dark thread, came a thin trickle of red.

CHAPTER II.

GOSSIP OF THE TRACK.

STRIDING to the track quarters after that surprising seventh race, Carter Demorest, the owner of the Oakhill Stable, glanced from Joraleen, just led into his stall by Eddie Daum, the apprentice boy, to Frankie Hill, the jockey, with a hint of anger as well as inquiry in his fine face.

"Didn't you understand your riding orders?" asked the owner quietly, a cutting note in his cultivated tones. "You were told to rate him along behind the pace to the five-eighths pole and then hustle him out in front. You got him away all right."

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"He couldn't come on," replied the little rider. "There was something wrong with Joraleen, Mr. Demorest. I could tell it the minute I tried to shake him up. He was all through at the stretch turn. It was only his gameness brought him on at all, sir."

"You didn't use your whip at all," reminded the owner.

"Miss Lola told me not to use a bat

—on Joraleen. Except in a pinch, in the last few jumps."

"That's right, dad," came in a girl's voice, liquid and warm, from the doorway. "You gave him to me, you know, and I won't have him needlessly punished."

"And I didn't have the heart to whip him," added the boy slowly. "He was giving everything he had."

"Of course he was, the darling!" said the girl. "He's a courageous, thoroughbred gentleman and he'll give his best without punishment. He resents the whip. Anyway, he handles better without it. Frankie gave him a good ride." Her perfect teeth flashed in an encouraging smile at the jockey as she stepped up to the group and glanced about, concern in the melting violet of her eyes.

Carter Demorest regarded the slim, eager figure of his daughter with a quizzical smile. "That's all right, my dear. Joraleen's yours, of course. But there's something wrong with this race and I want to discover what."

"There's something wrong with Joraleen," said the girl, with a little frown. "Look how he's twitching and tossing his head. And he hasn't cooled out yet. See how he's sweating."

"He's all nerves. Kind of acts like he'd been dusted with snowflake," observed old Mel Cullom, the trainer, examining the colt. "But his race sure don't look like dope."

"If some one's meddled with him —" began Demorest ominously.

The girl put an arm about the bay thoroughbred's neck, then stepped back quickly. "I believe some one *hcs!*" she cried. "Why, he's bleeding from the left nostril, dad."

Mel Cullom carefully inspected the animal and then nodded. "It's so," he observed. "Breathing's partly choked off."

Five minutes later Doctor Bolling, the veterinary, had extracted a piece of sponge from the restive colt's nostril.

The girl's eyes blazed with sudden wrath, but the next moment they were a little misty as she caressed Joraleen's velvet nose. "Baby boy!" she cooed soothingly, as the colt nuzzled against her affectionately. "And you kept trying all the time in spite of it. Oh, you darling!"

Little Frankie Hill, with adoring eyes, drank in the picture of the girl, her goldenrod hair glinting brightly against the bay and white of the colt's lowered face. He grinned abstractedly. "A couple of thoroughbreds," he was thinking, and envied the colt.

Mel Cullom's wrinkled, mahogany face was solemn. A stable hand coughed and shifted his enormous feet nervously.

"There's a crook in my employ," said Demorest, raking the group with frosty eyes. "Who is he? I'll find out if I have to get detectives in. Well?"

The reply was a heavy silence.

Then the trainer coughed and turned to the owner sorrowfully. "Guess it must be Davey Rainer," he said.

Demorest looked surprised.

His daughter turned swiftly to Cullom. "Oh, it couldn't be Davey!" she protested impulsively, thinking of the lively, likable exercise boy. "Why, Joraleen and Davey were pals. He helped school the colt—helped break him to the barrier!"

"I'd have gambled Davey was honest," said the owner.

The trainer nodded gravely. "So would I," he agreed, sorrow in his keen eyes. "But it couldn't be no one else."

"Why not?" demanded the girl.

"Because I was with the colt ev'ry minute until he was saddled for the race, except for about twenty minutes just before he went to the paddock. And Davey was alone with him then. I reckon somebody in the gang that cleaned up on Redolent got to him. And Davey fell," added the old man sadly.

"Where is he?" asked the owner.

Mel Cullom shook his head. "Ain't seen him since. Didn't think nothing about it then. But now it looks bad."

AT the moment, Davey Rainer was coming to his senses in a vacant lot behind a billboard on the edge of Covington. The exact manner of his reaching there was a mystery, but as he opened his eyes and swallowed hard, he began to have his suspicions.

His last recollection was of a burly, expensively dressed man with a gray fedora and a heavily studded diamond horseshoe pin chatting pleasantly with him, complimenting him and finally, as from one equal to another, offering him a drink of the "real stuff," from a half-pint bottle with the genuine label still on it.

"They were funny stories," mused Davey wryly, "and the big guy was certainly a comical bloke. Enough to make anybody laugh." But he wasn't laughing now. On the contrary, the youth was seized with apprehension as his senses gradually returned and he began to realize things.

"Knock-out drops," he muttered, shaking his blond head like a punch-drunk pugilist, to clear his misty brain. "Sleep pills—the big, crooked egg! And gosh, what a sucker I am! Gee, if anything happened to Joraleen, Mr. Demorest'll kill me!"

He got to still-shaky limbs, shook his head again violently and then gazed toward the west. The sun had set and that seventh race must be over long since.

Stricken with a sense of actual fear as well as guilt, he ran to the nearest news stand and bought a racing extra, only to let it slip through limp fingers at what he read.

"Beat three lengths in a field he oughta towrope with a anvil on his back," the boy mumbled miserably. "And he got off good, too. Frankie got

him away wingin'. And the winner! That hound Redolent, that no clocker ever caught in a trial fast enough to keep a fat man warm. Gee, what a killing they must of made! And what a slick gang to keep that Redolent colt under cover like that! Something *must* of happened to Joraleen."

He caught a car to Cincinnati, his trepidation and sense of guilt rising with the journey over the river. Carter Demorest, he knew, had bet more money on that seventh race than he usually chanced. He was not a gambling owner. He raced for the sport of the thing. But dropping Joraleen into this spot, with the colt at last "right," had seemed such a sure thing that the owner had laid more than he could afford to lose conveniently. The entire stable, in fact, had plunged on what seemed a remarkably good thing.

Davey Rainer blinked his eyes rapidly and groaned. "Oh," he mumbled guiltily, "Mr. Demorest'll kill me—if he ever sees me again. And Miss Lola! She'll never want to even look at me."

Plunging through the crowd at the Dixie Terminal, he raced into Fourth Street, turned into Vine and then into the dimness of Opera Place. There he entered Jake Bloom's café and, after a glance about at the tables and lunch counter, went to the back room.

WHAT he had in mind, he could hardly have told. He knew that in this place of unsavory repute, a rendezvous of the sporting element, where bookmaking was done and liquor was easily obtained, he might discover who was back of that killing on Redolent. His intentions after that were still unformed. His mind was a turmoil of guilt and desperation and rapidly mounting wrath. He must square himself somehow.

The room reeked of tobacco smoke that hung in clouds like drifting cobwebs and gave off a medley of sound.

Off in the alcove at the end of the room, the telegraph instrument, incessantly sputtering its message, was clustered about with sporting habitués, cigarettes pendent from flaccid lips, desire glinting in hard lights from narrowed eyes.

Davey slid into a seat at a table near a dim corner—the one under the fly-specked lithograph of the 1898-vintage, burlesque chorus girl. He ordered a sandwich and coffee, gazing with unseeing eyes at the picture of Bob Fitzsimmons on the end wall and listened to the overtone of chatter about him.

"Gee," he thought dolefully, "if Mr. Demorest'd catch me now, wouldn't I get hell? And Miss Lola——" He drew a curtain over that mental picture by the simple expedient of swearing in mumbling wrath at the absent big guy with the fedora kelly and the cracked-ice tie pin.

He couldn't face Miss Lola's melting look even in a mental vision. The fragments of talk that caught and hung in his waiting ears were of many things, but chiefly of the track and particularly of that day's seventh race at Latonia, over the river.

"Turned loose another sleeper in the seventh." "Yeah, that's Death Valley for ya." "I tellya Frankie Hill did pull that geegee! Look at the time of the race. He had him under double wraps way into the last furlong." "Hell, no! Somebody got to the dog. You'll see it all in the *Enquirer*." "Sure, Ike's right. And musta been Gus Kreybing fixed it. He's the main owner of Redolent." "Aw, that's a lotta hooley. Tell it to the marines!" "No hooley a-tall. Gus owns that hound." "Then why is she racin' under Matt Golding's colors?" "Because Kreybing is got the stewards on his thick neck so bad he can't get a owner's badge without stealing one, simp! 'Big Gus' owns Redolent and he put this sleeper over——"

Davey's nerves tingled at that last remark and he listened intently to the

group of three at a near-by table to catch some more, but the voices faded to a meaningless rumble.

He heard his name called and started guiltily, but, turning furtively, recognized a friend, one "Skip" Skelton, program seller, purveyor of tips and veteran of thirty years on the track. The miserable youth hurried over to the Skip's table; for Skelton, besides being a veritable catch basin of track gossip, to whose big ears scandal, true and not so true, seemed to be attracted like steel to the magnet, was an encyclopedia of track personages, great and small.

Skelton cocked a wise eye at the morbid-looking boy, grinned sagely and placed a bottle from his hip on the table. "Take a big one, kid," he advised friendlily. "Guess you need it—after what Big Gus dropped on the Oakhill Stable to-day."

Davey, the memory of the knock-out drops—the mere thought of which sickened him—still vivid, pushed the bottle away. "Listen, Skip," said he eagerly. "You know this Gus Kreybing?"

"Know him!" The hard, lean face twisted to the semblance of a grin, but the flinty eyes were a mixture of unwilling admiration and scorn. "I know that big egg like yesterday's form sheet. I own shares in a horse with him once even, kid. It's down in N'Awleans, way back, before Gus is makin' book and money. An' when we split, he owns the pup and I own the feed bill an' the halter. He's so crooked a watch spring looks like the shortest path between two points to him. Yes, I know him some."

"Is he a big guy with a hook nose and a mole on his cheek and a big cracked-ice stick pin and a lotta smooth talk?" asked the boy eagerly.

"That's him," replied Skip, and described Kreybing more minutely.

"That sure is him," said Davey, with suppressed excitement. "Say, listen, Skip! where does he live?"

"Out in Arlington. But he's around the Winton Hotel a lot nights. Keeps a room there sometimes, when the meetin's are on here. He's prob'ly over there right now—countin' up what he took out the machines to-day." The hard-faced track follower grinned mirthlessly. Then he glanced curiously at the youth, whose eyes seemed feverish with a kind of dancing madness. "But why're ye so hot about Big Gus?"

"Oh, nothin'—just heard some talk about him," said the boy evasively. "Well, so long, Skip!" and he was gone.

CHAPTER III.

DAINGEROUS MONEY.

HIS gaze still held by that tiny, creeping, dark thread at the threshold of the hotel room, Larry Coulter unsuccessfully tried the door of the connecting entrance, then took up the telephone receiver.

"You'd better send the house detective up to No. 427," he advised the desk clerk. "I think there's something wrong in that room. This is No. 428, next door."

Bryan, the house detective, swung along the corridor a few moments later, just in time to meet the slight figure of a youth of nineteen, dazed and frightened looking, emerging from room No. 427.

Bryan's steely grip caught the boy's arm. "What're you doing in that room?" he demanded.

"N-nothing. I wasn't doing nothing a-tall," stammered Davey Rainer, his eyes wide with horror.

Coulter, stepping from his room at the same time, recognized the house detective and glanced inquiringly at the boy.

"Caught this kid sneaking from in there," said Bryan. "You phoned the desk, didn't you?"

"Hardly two minutes ago," answered Coulter.

"What's wrong in there?" demanded the house detective.

"I don't know," replied Coulter, and explained what he had seen.

"We'll find out," said Bryan grimly. Opening the door, which he was surprised to find unlatched, he shoved Davey Rainer into the room ahead of him.

There, crumpled on the floor near the left wall, his head, face down, against the connecting door, lay the body of a medium-sized, middle-aged man. A pool of crimson extended from the edge of the thick rug to the top of the lintel, disappearing from sight in a tiny trickle beneath the door.

The man was dead, shot through the head. There had been some struggle, as an overturned chair and upset ash tray testified, and the clothing of the victim had apparently been searched, as a bunch of keys on a ring near by and an empty, turned-out trousers pocket indicated.

Bryan stooped over and turned the head a trifle, then nodded. "It's Dirks, the man registered in No. 427," he informed Coulter. Then he locked the door and telephoned the police.

A patrolman and a detective appeared in what, to Coulter, seemed an incredibly short time. The police detective, an aggressive, rasping-voiced man, after examining the body, confronted Coulter and the thoroughly frightened Davey Rainer with a disagreeable eye. Coulter immediately disliked him immensely.

"Who's he?" demanded the detective of Bryan, thrusting a thick thumb scornfully at Coulter.

"Oh, he's all right!" replied Bryan, with a grin. "Laurence Coulter of New York. Nephew of Daniel P. Coulter, the steel man, you know. He's the one telephoned the desk and tipped us off."

"All right," snapped the other.

"But this kid," said Bryan, "is the

one you want, I guess. I caught him coming from the room."

"I didn't do it—I didn't do anything a-tall!" protested the miserable boy. "I just come up to see Gus Kreybing and——"

"In another man's room!" The detective snorted derisively and turned to examine the room.

In the desk he found a short-nosed .38 caliber revolver, with one empty chamber and its barrel, even now, certainly not as cold as it might have been. A search of the boy disclosed no weapon, whereat McQueen, the detective, smiled disagreeably.

"Foxy kid," he grunted. "Wasn't going to have any rod located on him if they frisked him outside. So he puts it in the desk."

"It ain't my gun!" protested the boy. "And I didn't do a thing. I——"

"Shut up!" snapped McQueen. Before continuing his search of the room, he turned to Coulter. "You can go," he rasped.

Coulter fingered the little key in his pocket and smiled. "Just a moment," he said pleasantly. "I think I might be of a little help. I——"

"Don't need any help," barked McQueen. "Get out!"

Laurence shrugged and bowed. "It isn't my affair, of course, Mr. 'Holmes,'" he said sweetly. "So sorry to tear myself away." He grinned reassuringly at the frightened boy. "And if you really didn't do it, son, I wouldn't allow these sweet minions of the law to bluff me," he advised, and left, disliking Mr. McQueen more tremendously than ever. He descended to the desk, checked out and, after satisfying the curiosity of the clerk, was out in Fourth Street.

A MODEST dinner took sixty cents of Coulter's remaining four dollars and a half; a pack of cigarettes a quarter more. Then a dour-looking

man with a tobacco cud and a suspicious eye demanded a dollar and a half of the remainder, in advance, for a room for the night in a hotel near Race Street.

Before turning in, Laurence purchased two evening papers and, reclining on the rickety rocker in his room, perused the "Help Wanted—Male" columns between the blasts of a saxophone player and those of a lady berating her husband, down the hall.

Help was wanted, to be sure. The several columns of the want ads testified as much. But except for a comparatively few advertisers who desired experienced help in the trades or in business, the demand was for salesmen.

Almost every one, it appeared, wanted some one to sell something for him. And practically everything, it seemed, from apartment houses and Florida sunshine to raincoats and patent eggbeaters, was crying aloud to get itself sold. Some of the advertisements promised well, too, if the advertisers could be believed.

Brown, for example, of Purple Springs, Arizona, had made seven hundred and ninety-one dollars in sixteen days selling a combination can opener and lemon squeezer, according to one salesman ad, and the reader was informed that he could do as well.

But Laurence doubted that. Brown was unquestionably a wonder. Any one could see that. At a quarter apiece, he must have supplied hundreds and hundreds of the marvelous article each day to Arizona housewives to have earned that commission. And Larry knew positively that he himself could not do nearly so well.

He tossed the paper aside and lit a cigarette, his thoughts returning to the gruesome scene back in room No. 427 of the Winton. He wondered, at first, that no one in the hotel had heard the shot, fired in his absence. Then he recalled that the blasting operations for the foundation of a new downtown

building near by might easily account for that.

The flat little key that he had been on the point of turning over to McQueen, the detective, and withheld only because of the man's irritating exhibition of rudeness, remained on his mind a little guiltily. He should, he supposed, have turned it over. Well, there was time enough for that in the morning.

Coulter drew the key from his pocket and examined it musingly. One edge was notched, in the manner of a key to a tumbler lock, and the number "38" was stamped on one side. Again, as when he had first noticed it, the key seemed vaguely familiar.

That bunch of keys turned out of the dead man's pocket and the pocket itself, turned inside out, indicated a search for something. And that something was, apparently, a small article, to be searched for in a trousers pocket. Was this bit of metal the article that a man had been killed for?

COULTER consumed many cigarettes and an hour and a half puzzling over the affair and then, after the saxophone and the irate lady down the hall had subsided, went to sleep. In the morning, over his eggs and coffee in a cafeteria in Vine Street, he returned to the puzzle with more interest than ever. For the newspaper account of the affair in room No. 427, a heavily headlined, two-column story, held some interesting and apparently correlated facts.

The Winton Hotel murder, the papers disclosed, was probably the result of a race-track matter, and the race-track matter was connected in some way with that seventh race at Latonia the day before.

Davey Rainer's connection with the Oakhill Stable was brought out. So was the tampering with the colt, Jora-leen. And Andy Dirks, the dead man,

and Big Gus Kreybing, of the gambling gentry, who were rumored to have profited handsomely by the filly Redolent's winning were, it was brought out, on very friendly terms.

In the prosecutor's office, Davey Rainer's now sullen reiteration that he had entered the hotel room to see Kreybing was privately scouted. Kreybing had checked out the day before and his room, moreover, was on the floor above and at the opposite side of the building.

Kreybing willingly came in from Arlington Heights that day at the prosecutor's request and readily answered all questions that touched upon his movements at the time of the Dirks' affair. But when questioned regarding his actions just before the seventh race, he was neither so ready in his responses nor so communicative.

While the prosecutor privately dismissed him from any connection with the killing of Andy Dirks, he shrewdly suspected that the big gambler knew more that he would disclose about the tampering with Joraleen. The prosecutor was inclined, in fact, to credit Davey Rainer's story in so far as it concerned the knock-out drops and opined to himself of course that when it came to establishing his racing purity with the Kentucky Racing Commission, Kreybing was going to have more than a little difficulty. But that was the commission's affair.

Coulter, having digested the surprising story with his breakfast, turned dutifully again to the columns of "Help Wanted—Male." Again there were many linear feet of these wants, but again, save for a few employers desiring experienced toilers, the great cry was for salesmen.

The list of articles to be purveyed was still extensive and interestingly varied, running from secondhand automobiles and flea soap to dishwashing machines and fancy bottled pickles.

The opportunities, too, apparently had not diminished since the previous night. Evans, of Wauwautosa, Wisconsin, had made a hundred and three dollars his first week dispensing Munn's Magic Mirror Polish, one employer admitted, and *you* could do as well.

But Laurence was quite positive that when it came to disposing of anything except money, both Brown, of Purple Springs, and Evans, of Wauwautosa, were better men than he, and he freely admitted it.

So he consigned the proffers of the unknown employers to a waiting ash can and sauntered aimlessly down Vine Street, wondering how he was going to preserve the necessary balance between supply and demand in the matter of his daily bread, without selling something.

NOW an aimless walk in Cincinnati, by any one who has donated his capital to the mutuel machines over at Latonia, will almost always terminate at Fountain Square. For the stone steps of the long plaza and the occasional benches, to say nothing of the yards and yards of sitting ledge around the post-office building, are free and democratic and the cops are not too inquisitive. Then there is the constant parade of folk who have money, across the way on Fifth Street, to be observed as a diversion. Thus it was at Fountain Square that Larry Coulter arrived.

In perhaps three minutes, a dingy neighbor sidled up with an infallible system for beating the races and a request for some change. Laurence smiled his amusement at the first, but weakened in regard to the second to the extent of a quarter. A second neighbor, with another sure system and the same request, was forced to compromise with a dime. Then a third citizen of leisure, a thin and excessively hairy man with a black-linen collar and

a cough, hove to. He asked nothing in words, but his sunken eyes and gaunt features were eloquent.

Laurence put his rate back to a quarter in this case and decided to go away from there. But as he stooped to pick up the little key from the concrete, where it had fallen while getting his change, the man spoke.

"I'll get your bag for you, mister, if you want," he offered, in a voice that was as dead as his awful-looking eyes.

"Bag!" repeated Larry, puzzled.

"Yes, or the package or whatever it is."

"What makes you think I have a bag or package to be got?" smiled Larry, suspecting the creature of being a bit below par.

"Well, that's a key to one of those parcel boxes in the D. & P. station, isn't it?" inquired the man.

Coulter glanced from the man to the key and then back to the human wreck again and his eyes lighted with recognition. Sure enough! It was a key to one of those parcel boxes at the D. & P. station. The sense of vague familiarity he had felt on looking at the bit of metal now was explained.

He had used one of those boxes on first coming to Cincinnati. He had checked his Gladstone bag for a couple of hours at the parcels section. Instead of leaving it on a counter and receiving a check therefor, he had been given a key like this one and had deposited the bag and locked it up in one of many compartments—the one corresponding to the key's number. The system had been new to him and he had noticed it.

"Thanks, but I'll get it myself," he said, with a friendly grin and was off toward the station.

A desire to see what a turn of this little key would disclose suddenly possessed him. A dead man's property! Or, at any rate, property that had been in his possession. Coulter's intended

act struck him as an unpleasant sort of thing, yet something kept him going on toward the station.

Some one had wanted something from Andy Dirks pretty badly—badly enough to commit murder. And this little key, Coulter now had the feeling, was that something. It ought to unlock something interesting—and valuable. It might be the means of allowing him to aid the police in clearing up the Andy Dirks affair.

At each step toward the railroad station, Coulter's curiosity became more intense, until finally he found himself running along Third Street, through Butler Street and into the depot. He jostled more than one person in bursting through the crowd there and ran full tilt into a stocky, formidable-looking man at the entrance to the parcels section.

The man eyed him suspiciously and continued glowering at him as Larry sought compartment No. 38 and inserted the key.

A turn of the key and the catch slid back. A pull of the door and the compartment was open. A sense of sharp disappointment suddenly quenched the fire of Coulter's curiosity as he peered inside, for he saw a small, very disreputable-looking, brown-leather bag—and nothing else!

What he had expected to find there, Coulter did not know; surely, though, something more prepossessing than this ancient little receptacle. However, he took the bag, which felt disappointingly light, left the compartment and turned in the key to the man in charge of the parcels section.

AS he returned to the waiting room, a stocky man, with a short forefinger on his left hand, caught hold of the bag with a rough "Carry yer baggage, mister?" but Larry gripped it more firmly and moved on. At the cigar counter, he stopped a moment to

consider the situation. Though the disappointment, the feeling of anticlimax, had quenched the flame of his burning curiosity, he was still prodded by inquisitiveness, and he wished to satisfy that inquisitiveness in both comfort and seclusion.

He would need a room, anyway, if he was not to sleep out under the chilly stars. He first considered a furnished room in a rooming-house section out near Peebles Corner, but reflected that the rent would be asked in advance and his total capital now was little more than a dollar. For the same reason he discarded an idea of returning to his hotel of the night before.

He decided, finally, to go to a first-class hotel, register on his nerve and effrontery, if possible, and trust to luck. The Winton, where he felt confident of admission, did not appeal to him now. Though not probable, it still was possible that an acquaintance of Andy Dirks might recognize that bag.

"Hotel Barnes," he sang out, entering a taxicab and added, to himself, "and may the Lord be near when I get the bill."

Twice, in the brief journey, another car almost crowded them into the curb, and Larry joined in the taxi driver's anger as each time he barely avoided a collision. The taxi chauffeur relieved his passenger of the larger portion of a lone dollar bill, and Laurence, with his disreputable-looking bag and an easy air of confidence, escaped the hawklike bell boy and strolled up to the desk.

"Large room with bath," drawled the young man, in his agreeable baritone, deciding that if he were to be tossed into the street later, it might as well be for good accommodations, "and not too near the elevator."

The clerk glanced at the bag and a questioning light entered his observing eye. Then he glanced at Coulter's personable, fashionably tailored figure, and the light faded.

"Valuable cargo," said Larry, indicating the bag with a grin. "Can't trust it to porters. My baggage'll be over shortly."

The clerk said, "Booze!" to himself, grinned companionably and picked up a pen. When, up in the room, the bell boy had departed with ten of his remaining thirteen cents, Laurence carefully locked the door, set the little bag on the table, unsuccessfully tried the lock and then drew his knife and slit the bag open.

His eye caught a flash of yellow color. His inserted fist encountered a jumble of what felt like crisp paper which crinkled in his fingers delightfully. He withdrew his hand and in it there lay a fresh, crisp, hundred-dollar bank note.

He inserted and withdrew his hand again, and in it there were half a dozen more of the notes. He emptied the shabby little receptacle and the table top was littered with many crisp, delightfully crinkling bills, a few of smaller denomination, many of larger, but chiefly of the hundred-dollar variety.

"By all the gods!" he breathed, his eyes glistening at the littered table top. "So this is what was behind the turn of that blooming little key—and what Andy Dirks was killed for!"

Dangerous money! The words, heard long ago in some forgotten place, suddenly flashed bright in his mind, like a premonition. But he shrugged and grinned merrily. Wasn't it worth chancing a bit of danger for, if it came to that?

He placed the bank notes together in several piles and counted them. When he had finished, he sat back and lit a cigarette.

"Fifty-seven thousand dollars—in hard, beautiful cash!" he murmured, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "And I registered down at that desk with thirteen cents in my pocket!"

CHAPTER IV.

DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE.

IF Davey Rainer had felt miserable before, he was a perfect picture of misery when, in police headquarters on the morning after his arrest, he was confronted with the grave face of Carter Demorest and the compassionate eyes of his daughter.

The morning papers had been a very real shock to them both.

"Davey Rainer! Oh, I can't believe it," said the girl, looking up from her paper with a gasp. "You'll have to see that he has a good lawyer, dad, no matter what he's done. He's got to have his chance!"

Her father nodded, concern in his fine face. "I'll go right over, honey," he said. "Hurlbut, the prosecuting attorney, will probably want to talk with me anyway."

"I've got to go with you," she said, gazing from the hotel window with sober eyes. "What made him do it? Poor Davey!"

The boy, who had grown sullen and a bit defiant with the police officials, had up to now kept his nerve pretty well, but the presence of these two, the first persons to show anything but accusation, was too much for him.

Carter Demorest placed a friendly hand on his shoulder and the boy's eyes became a little watery.

"Oh, Davey!" said the girl softly.

At the compassion in her eyes, he broke down completely. "I didn't do it, Miss Lola—honest, I didn't!" he stoutly declared, hurriedly wiping his eyes. "I never put that sponge up Patsey's nose. Honest I didn't, Miss Lola!"

A smile broke through the sober sympathy of her lips at the boy's affectionate use of Joraleen's stable name.

"A man did that," said Davey. "I took a drink off him," he admitted guiltily. "And—and—the next thing I

know, I'm in a lot in Covington and the race is over. There's knock-out drops or something in that stuff. And then I see in the paper that Patsey loses. And—and—I know that I'm to blame!" Guilt fairly burned the boy's face. "But I never put that sponge up Patsey's nose, Miss Lola," he repeated.

"It isn't that we're thinking of, Davey," she said gently. "It's the—the other. Oh, why did you do it?"

"I didn't do that either," he replied. "But it's no use saying it. Nobody'll believe me. I just went up to that room to see this Big Gus Kreybing."

"Why did you want to see him, sonny?" asked Demorest, thinking to get at what was really in the boy's mind at the time.

"I *had* to see him," said Davey. "He's the guy who doped me—and I hear he wins a lotta money on the race."

"But just why did you want to see him?" persisted the owner kindly.

"Why—why—I don't know, Mr. Demorest. I just *hadda* see him, that's all. I thought I might get that money back for you—or—something. I just *hadda* square myself. I was scared when I see Patsey lose."

Demorest frowned musingly. The boy, it was clear, had been in a desperate mood, a mood for any sudden act. "But that wasn't Kreybing's room you were in," reminded the owner.

"I don't care, Mr. Demorest," said the boy stoutly. "That's where he went. I followed him up in the elevator. He went in there and he never come out. It's so. But it's no use my saying it. Nobody'll believe it."

Nobody was likely to believe it, mused the man. The boy's manner was convincing; but the story was so highly improbable. Andy Dirks had been in that winning pool, too. Was it possible, thought Carter Demorest, that Davey, not finding Kreybing, who had already checked out of the hotel, had then gone after Dirks with a wild sort

of idea of getting back the money from him?

Only Davey Rainer, of all living beings, knew. At any rate, the owner reflected, that seventh race at Latonia had been an unfortunate affair for the Oakhill Stable all around.

THE stock farm on the old Demorest place in the famous blue-grass region near Lexington had not been profitable for the past two years. Though Carter Demorest was considered a wealthy man, he had been urgently pressed for ready cash. And that seventh race at Latonia had appeared to him an occasion in a thousand on which to secure it.

Joraleen, a high-grade three year old, "bred to the skies," had not trained well through the early racing season, but at Latonia old Mel Cullom had pronounced him "right." Moreover, Clay Ewing, the handicapper, had assigned such a favorable weight for that mile handicap, and the distance was so perfectly to the Oakhill Stable's entrant's liking, that it had looked like a soft spot for Joraleen.

"With only a hundred and twelve pounds up, he'll cakewalk through that field without openin' his mouth," Mel had opined, when Joraleen was being saddled.

Carter Demorest had thought so, too. He was not a heavy-betting man, but backing his opinion in this instance had been more costly than was comfortable.

Lola Demorest, who was packing that afternoon for a visit to friends in New York, now rather suspected this. She suddenly paused in her packing, dropped the silk frock she had just taken from the closet to the back of a chair and studied her father's tall, pre-occupied figure, a little frown wrinkling her smooth brows.

"You had something down on Joraleen, didn't you, dad?" she asked, in a casual tone.

"The usual sentimental bet," he replied. "Have you seen my cigar case, Lola?"

"But this bet wasn't just a sentimental one this time, was it?" she persisted. "How much, dad?"

He glanced down quizzically at the upturned face and clipped the end from a cigar: "Why, honey, I reckon it was fifty dollars I told one of the boys to place. Yes, that was it, fifty dollars. But you'd better be packing."

"Oh, aren't you an awful fibber, dear!" she said sternly. "How much was it? Out with it!"

"Why," he returned, smiling broadly, "come to think of it, I did go back to the machines and buy another fifty-dollar ticket. But, Lola, if you want to make that train——"

She planted herself squarely before him and fixed him with a commanding eye. "Now, out with it! You can't fool me. We lost an awful lot of money on Joraleen, didn't we, dear? How much was it?"

"Well, honey, I reckon we did lose pretty much—for just now," he finally confessed. "But beyond a little inconvenient——"

"How much?"

"Well—fourteen thousand."

She was unable to stem a tiny gasp. "Dad!"

"You see," he explained, "it looked pretty safe. Mel had Joraleen conditioned to a hair. It was the right distance and a fast track. And when Clay Ewing allowed that impost, it looked like a good chance to make up for a poor year. Of course I don't usually bet them very heavy. But this looked like a gift from heaven," he excused himself.

"Why, of course it did!" she consoled. "I just wanted to know how badly off we are." She forced him into a chair and perched herself up on its cushioned arm. "No one could have resisted the chance. Why, I bet seven-

teen dollars myself. Dad, will we have to sell the place near Louisville?"

"I reckon we'd better take that offer, honey. It'll bring about twelve thousand and that'll help a lot just now. And we haven't used it much since you came home from school, you know. The house wasn't opened all last year. But get your packing done. You've not much time to get that train, Lola."

She kicked the trunk lid shut with a flip of a daintily shod toe and shook her golden-bronze head gayly in his face. "That for New York! I'm not going to visit Rita. I'll wire her this evening."

"But this needn't make any difference," he protested. "You've been anxious to go. And you've a lot of dresses and things to get there, anyway. That's really what you're going for."

"And that's really why I'm not going now," she retorted. "Why, it would cost just oodles and oodles of money. But listen, old darlings. I'm going to do something else instead. I'm going to stay at Riverview a few weeks while you're over home. Then I'll come back and meet you in Lexington, just before Mel Cullom ships the string to New Orleans." She gazed soberly out of the window. The old place on the Ohio River, where she had spent many summers as a small girl, returned to her mind. "Dad, I've just got to stay at Riverview again before it's sold. Those dear old birches down near the river bend—and the moonlight over the water on hot nights—and the smell of the honeysuckle— Oh, Dad!" she said softly, with a regretful little smile. "It would give me a headache to have it go before I stayed there once more."

"Why, honey!" exclaimed her father, at sight of her face. "If you'll miss it so, why, we won't sell it."

"We will sell it!" she said determinedly. "We've got to. I'm not going to have you worried to death. And Joraleen and I have cost you enough

already. But I want just a few weeks more there. I'll have one of the servants up from home," she announced, brightening. "Martha Lou would enjoy coming."

"But you'll be pretty lonesome."

"I want to be pretty lonesome," she assured him. "I'm tired of crowds and excitement. And I'm just sick at what they did to Patsey and Davey Rainer. And if I get too lonesome, I'll have some one out from Louisville. Sally Gilbert would like to come and the Rاندalls and Dorothy Vaughn would be just dying for a chance to bring her young man to a spot like that on the river. Just a few weeks. Perhaps only one or two. You aren't going to mind, are you, darling?"

"Not if you're sure you prefer it to New York," he replied. "But do you think it's quite safe for you and Martha Lou to be alone out there?"

"Safe!" Her laughter came in a silvery tinkle of glee at the question. "Could Riverview ever be anything but quiet and peaceful and utterly, annoyingly safe? And there's a shotgun there," she added, with an amused crinkle of her violet eyes, "if the squirrels and crickets do get too awfully rowdy."

CHAPTER V.

TOO MUCH TROUBLE.

A FEELING of relief, vast and soothing, was Larry Coulter's first reaction to those tall stacks of crisp bank notes before his staring eyes. It was the feeling that money always gives to any mortal, king or beggar, after acutely needing it. Then came a sense of exhilaration at the pure adventure of the situation. But after that, out of the maze of his jumbled, shifting thoughts, a question clearly and persistently obtruded.

Whose money was this, after all?

Why, possession being nine points of the law, and the law not even knowing

the possessor, it was Laurence Barrington Coulter's, of course! Laurence grinned at his easy disposition of the question. But it persisted and he found himself considering it, in a detached, academic manner, from an ethical point of view.

Well, it was gamblers' money, for one thing. The newspapers left no doubt of that. And the gambler who had been in possession of it was now a dead man.

But had Andy Dirks been the real owner of that money? Nine points of the law said "yes" and the legality of the pari-mutuel machines over at Latoria corroborated the assertion. Race-track winnings there were legal gain. But, going farther than legality, that seventh race on which the money had been gained was dishonestly run. And the money had been, perforce, crooked money.

Now, if that race had been truly run, what would have been the result? Why, so Laurence answered the question, with a pleased look for his nice logic, Laurence Barrington Coulter would have cashed in five hundred dollars' worth of tickets, good in that guessing contest for anything from two and a half to three and a half times that amount. Indeed, with the field so large and the keen form players, rather than the general public, betting on the horse, the odds might have been even four to one.

It was true enough that the other Joraleen betters would also have won, but aside from the Oakhill Stable contingent it would be obviously impossible to locate the Joraleen betters. And Carter Demorest, Larry recalled Pad-dock Riley telling him, usually bet only a small sum, for sentiment's sake, any-way.

"So," concluded Laurence, with a grin, disposing of the matter with finality, as he thought, "two thousand berries of this beautiful mess of yellow

really do belong to me, considered from the highest ethical standards. And," he added, wafting a smoke ring aloft, "the rest of it is mine, anyway. And if any chaps don't think so, let 'em try to get it!"

How that little key had come into his possession now seemed fairly clear. Andy Dirks, perhaps with the key in his fingers at the moment, had been confronted by some one with a gun, whether Davey Rainer or another, intent on getting the money. A struggle had followed. In that struggle, reasoned Larry, Dirks had been on the floor, close to that connecting door and, in desperation and on the spur of the moment, had slipped the precious bit of metal under the door into the next room, safe from the intruder.

IT was now past noon, and Larry was hungry. But first, he knew, he must take means to preserve those nine points of the law in his favor. He hesitated about depositing the money in a bank at this time, for that tenth point of the law, legal right to the money, was all against him. A bank account or safety-deposit-box cache could, he thought, be legally enjoined or whatever the correct term was.

His discovery of the murder, through that tiny trail of red trickling under the door to his room, was public knowledge, heralded in the newspaper accounts of the affair. And an intimate of Andy Dirks or his slayer or any one knowing of that little key and what lay behind its turn might guess where, in lieu of any other possible place, it had disappeared to. And it would be a simple matter to trace Larry Coulter, that young man reflected, and to serve him with some of those annoying legal papers.

He believed this chance highly improbable, but he was taking no chances, not even this one. He placed the money out of sight in a dresser drawer and

telephoned the desk for a box, wrapping paper and sealing wax. When a bell boy brought them, he put a roll of a thousand dollars in his trousers pocket, packed the remaining money in the box and sealed the wrapper, then descended to the hotel desk and had the package placed in the hotel safe.

He had lunch, dining at leisure and ease and at satisfying expense in the hotel room, after which he strolled out to retrieve his clothing, watch and the Gladstone bag from the pawnshop. On the way he remembered that the very hairy and emaciated man with the awful eyes had really been the means of finding the correct use for that little key. Except for his remark about getting the bag from the station, Larry realized, he very probably would never have recalled why that key had seemed vaguely familiar.

So he turned down Fifth Street and searched about Fountain Square for the man, but with no success. He went over to the post-office building and scanned the gentlemen of leisure roosting like patient pigeons along the ledge; and there, the last figure on the Walnut Street side, he saw his human wreck.

The man, who had been gazing off at nothing at the aloof end of the ledge, turned at Laurence's voice. His gaunt lips formed a spiritless, death mask of a smile by way of recognition.

"How are you?" asked Laurence affably.

The creature tried another smile in appreciation of the banality of the question as applied to himself.

"You remember me?" Laurence asked, extending his cigarette package. "You wanted to get my bag from the station."

The man grabbed greedily at a cigarette and nodded. "Oh, yes," he replied, in a voice that seemed detached from all living things. "You said you'd get it yourself." He recalled the small incident perfectly. Both Laurence's

quarter and his friendliness had been big events. "Did you get it?"

Laurence nodded. "Thanks to your reminder. And in return, I'd like to have you accept this." He reached into his pocket, drew out one of the crinkly hundred-dollar notes and placed it in the grimy talon of the very grimy man.

The man looked at the money, inspected it closely and, as he realized its amount, as much life as was still left in him shone in a faint spark in his sunken eyes.

"Delightful day, isn't it?" said Laurence, with a friendly grin, turning to leave.

The man looked up from the money to Laurence and nodded. "A very delightful day," he croaked.

THE next day Larry took Andy Dirks' little brown bag around to a shoe-repair shop in a side street a couple of blocks north and had the slit he had made near the top of the receptacle mended. After all, it was a convenient size to carry and it might prove useful again. Then he had a locksmith make a key to fit the lock.

As he left the locksmith's, Larry brushed against a man, a burly, sullen, formidable-looking fellow who resented the incident with all the picturesque language and temper of his pugnacious kind.

"Look where yer goin'," advised the strange young man, when his adjectives had finally run out, "or I'll bounce a few off yer chin."

Though the man's expressiveness was quite out of proportion to the occasion, Laurence dutifully complied with the social amenities.

"I'm sorry. Beg pardon," he said, with deceiving mildness.

But the other's injured dignity was apparently unsatisfied with this and he continued to glower from beneath his dirty cap peak. "I got a swell notion to bust you one anyways, just for

luck," he mused, languidly sizing up his companion's trim hundred and sixty-five pounds or so from the physical eminence of his own two hundred. "Yeah," he murmured thoughtfully, "I guess I better." He smiled expectantly and blocked the way.

"Of course," began Larry pleasantly, "if you're really in search of trouble now——"

"I'll tell a cock-eyed world I am!" thundered the husky man fearfully, from one side of his mouth.

The news seemed too good to be quite true. Larry glanced at the big man almost affectionately. It had been some time since he had had an opportunity for whole-hearted, carefree physical expression. The last occasion had been at the national amateur boxing finals more than a year before in New York, when he had acquired the middleweight title in a round and a half. But even then, out of liking for his adversary, he had felt constrained to repress his bubbling animal spirits for the first three minutes. Larry placed the bag on the sidewalk and grinned joyously.

The big man lunged with his huge left fist. Laurence neatly ducked the effort. The big man swung violently, fiercely even, with his right. Laurence slipped inside the wide swing and in the same motion his left fist flashed in and upward, in a twisting, short arc that was half hook and half uppercut.

The timing was perfect, the marksmanship beautiful and the knuckles, cracking against the solid, incoming jaw, clicked with the impact, like the sound of a perfectly swung club head against a teed golf ball.

The big man tottered for a moment, like an oak shivering under the final blows of the ax, and then toppled against the side of the building and collapsed to the pavement.

Laurence knew he would, by the feel at the moment of impact of his knuckles. It was an even more beautiful

effort, he believed, than his knock-out of the ex-titleholder in the amateur finals, but of course he had been a trifle lucky in locating that exact jarring spot.

He picked up his bag and leaned over the man, who eventually groaned, rubbed his jaw and emitted a feeble oath.

"There," said Larry, helping him to a sitting position. "You'll be all right in no time at all. Those clean knock-outs right on the button never leave you very messy. A good strong whiff of ammonia would help. And you might get one of your charming set to rub some liniment on the sore lump you're going to have. But you shouldn't have extended me that invitation," he added, as the man sat alternately rubbing his face and staring at the little brown bag. "Really you shouldn't have, old man. Unless you were anxious for me to accept it."

BACK in the hotel Larry bathed his swollen knuckle in water, and by dinner time the lively little affair had about passed from his mind. His thoughts were on a quite different and more attractive object than the pugnacious but misguided chap, as he was enjoying an after-dinner cigarette in the hotel dining room.

The orchestra was playing "Shufflin' Honey-time Baby," the musical hit of "Hey There!" the famous Broadway review. It was the number in which Mercedes de Vilma's twinkling toes had been at their liveliest in the piece, and the compelling syncopation now brought the dazzling creature dancing right back into his mental vision.

A girl at the next table, with a friendly disposition and chopped-off hair of the mode, shimmied her shoulders and smiled invitingly at Laurence through the blue veil of her cigarette smoke. But Laurence never saw her. He was smiling dreamily, his thoughts

back in New York, his mind's eye upon an entirely different lady.

Mercedes was a lovely little thing, he mused, in spite of her nasal voice and an unladylike, Tenth Avenue vocabulary almost as vivid as Paddock Riley's. But, curiously, he was finding that though she had left him many pleasant memories, she had left him no regrets. To the contrary, indeed, his bank roll would always be much healthier in her absence.

But up in the hotel room, the incident of the burly man outside of the locksmith's returned to Laurence's mind. He was again bathing that swollen knuckle when his eyes chanced upon a half-opened dresser drawer. He had left it closed, he definitely recalled. The Gladstone bag, he saw, had also been moved and the bed was disturbed as though some one had looked under the mattress. The little brown bag, which he had checked in the cloak room downstairs on coming in, was, he supposed, the object of the search.

Was this incident of the quarrelsome man so accidental, after all? On reflection he recalled the entire string of little happenings that he had placed to mere chance at the time. There was the stocky man at the D. & P. station, who had roughly grasped the brown bag with a harsh "Carry yer baggage, mister." This man's manner and insistence had been a bit extreme, come to think of it, for even a station baggage toter. Then the two near collisions by the same automobile in the taxi ride from the station to the hotel. Then the man at the locksmith's, who had practically forced a fight, and now this search of the room.

These happenings were getting to be annoying. The situation was beginning to get on Coulter's nerves, and he was anything but a jumpy, nervous young man. The city, though a delightful place and one that had given him several thrills, was getting on his nerves.

Consequently when, the next evening, he received a telegram from Paddock Riley to come to Louisville if he wanted some "good things" at Churchill Downs, Larry was greatly disposed to accept the suggestion.

He got his money from the hotel safe and took a train away from there the following noon. Just before boarding the train, a stocky man caught firm hold of the brown-leather bag with a rumbled "Carry yer baggage, mister?" Larry snappily snatched it away. As he glanced back at the man on the platform from a window of the moving train, he saw that this was the same person who had been so eager to carry his luggage that day at the D. & P. station.

He was positive of this, even after so fleeting an examination. For this man, also, was minus the first two joints of his left forefinger.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER SURE THING.

IN Louisville that evening, Paddock Riley entertained Laurence at dinner. It was at a hostelry in Walnut Street, an ancient place of marvelous cuisine and mellow memory, that had housed in its time many celebrities from both sides of Mason and Dixon's line and was a landmark of the charming city.

Paddock entertained Laurence both in his rôle of host and in his private character of Paddock Riley. Larry had originally met him several years before on a beautiful and expensive spring day at Belmont Park. He was a lean, sharp-featured young-old man of many and varied human contacts and very few illusions. He was comparatively young in years, being still on the verdant side of thirty-five, and very old in experience. He knew people and horses and cities. His ability to extract pleasure and sustenance from a hard-boiled world, armed with no more visible

means of support than nerve and his wits, was really superb.

It was Paddock, whose acquaintance with celebrities of the pleasure world was extensive, who had presented Laurence to the charming Mercedes. That was up at Saratoga, and Paddock, who was genuinely fond of Laurence, had tendered a bit of excellent advice with the introduction.

"Some filly, kid," Riley had observed, in an aside, and then added sagely: "But watch the course and don't break a leg when she takes you over the jumps."

RILEY turned now to his guest, with a beam in his wise eyes. "Still got your clock, I see. Thought they leave you clean over at Latonia, when you hang your roll on Joraleen's nose."

Laurence nodded. He was busy with the fried chicken, the like of which he had not elsewhere met and devoured, outside of this place and a hotel in Baltimore.

"I was clean," he agreed. "In fact, I was so spotless that only a visit in Vine Street to my only forgiving relative kept me from leaving the Winton on my ear. But I retrieved the watch and clothes—and something besides," he added, with a knowing smile.

"Fine," said Paddock. "Because I'm gonna have some good things here at Churchill Downs." He lowered his voice. "Now there's a sleeper in the fourth to-morrow. It's dynamite for the machines, kid. A sawbuck pays your hotel bill for two weeks."

Larry, with the memory of Joraleen still green, appeared unenthusiastic. "What's the beast's name?"

Riley glanced carefully all about him, then spoke in a careful tone, without moving his thin lips. "Tommy O'Hare. The cakewalker's in the fourth."

"Another sure thing!" scoffed Larry.

"Sure thing!" Paddock smiled thinly. "Why, this is in now. All except

tradin' your little ticket at the pay-off coop for a mittful of velvet. Set the works in on this one."

"I did that at Latonia," reminded Larry.

"Sure," said Paddock. "And this is the place to get it back."

Larry turned back to his dinner. "Wonderful fried chicken," he observed. "Better have some more."

"Say, don't be a sap!" Paddock admonished. "Now listen, kid. This ain't any dope stuff. I know something. And it didn't come from a form sheet. This hound is going mile trips and longer all summer and the nearest he comes to the money is when they pay a feed bill near his stall. Why? To keep the wise railbirds and the handicapper off him. This pup is just a sprinter, kid. If he's got business in a distance event, my office is in the White House. They're waitin' all summer to level with him. And now they got it dropped in the right spot. A five-and-a-half furlong dash. A feather on his back. Flirtin' with a field of cheap sprinters. And this dog's just silly with speed."

"Isn't that fine?" said Larry politely. "I do hope no jolly joker stuffs a mattress up his nose or ties a grindstone to his tail."

"Joraleen still eatin' you?" said Riley impatiently. "Well, forget it. You and me get off easy on that baby compared to a couple of people I know; if you do get dry-cleaned. Now Carter Demorest drops maybe fifteen grand."

"The Oakhill Stable owner?"

"Sure."

"Why," said Coulter, "I thought he didn't bet much."

"He doesn't—mostly. But this race is a little different. Just like I tells you, it's safe as the mint unless they kill this thoroughbred to keep him from coppin'. And they do all but that when they make a game baby like Joraleen do a trip like that with his breathin' partly

cut off. Anyway, Mr. Demorest is got a couple of bad years with his breedin' place and a flock of bum markers from friends he helped out to make up. So he takes this chance. And *he* loses all the kale he can borrow."

"Do you know him?" asked Coulter, immediately thinking of the bag of money.

"Whitest owner I do know," replied Riley. "Him and his daughter. I ought to. He stakes me one time down in Noo Awlins for a grand just on my plain marker, when I ain't got a dime or a friend—except him. And the sandbaggers have to trim a guy like that!"

"And he's the owner of Joraleen," said Laurence thoughtfully.

"No. The horse runs under the Oak-hill colors, but Mr. Demorest's daughter is the real owner. Miss Lola gets him for a present when he's a yearlin'."

Larry Coulter stared at the tablecloth in frowning reflection for a full minute and then turned suddenly to his companion. "Joe," said he thoughtfully, "who would you say really is entitled to the money that was won on that seventh race at Latonia?"

"That's easy!" Riley grinned. "The guys that had tickets on Redolent. If you don't think so, try to get some money at a mutuel machine without a ticket—or a gun. They'll file you in the silly house, if you do."

"I mean theoretically—from a plain, sporting viewpoint."

"If you mean who ought to have that jack——"

"That's what I mean."

"Why, the birds who *would* have that jack—if the guy who put that sponge up Joraleen's nose had drank poison the day before—and the race is run true. And that's you and me and Miss Lola and Carter Demorest, that I know of. But don't talk like a sap, Larry. This theory runs for Sweeney at any race-track pay-off window I ever heard

of. Forget that Death Valley steal. The birds that got that money own that money. They oughtn't to. But they do. If you don't think so, try and get it."

"I did," said Laurence, lighting a cigarette.

"So did I!" scoffed Paddock Riley. "And so did Davey Rainer—in a different way. And look what *he* gets."

Coulter poured a string of tiny smoke rings toward the ceiling and grinned.

"What's the joke?" demanded Riley.

"It's on Andy Dirks—and some others, I guess," replied Coulter, his humor vanishing at thought of the huddled body in the dim electric light. "A pretty grim joke—for Dirks." He drank his coffee reflectively and absently lighted another cigarette. "Where's Carter Demorest now?"

"Couldn't say," Riley answered. "He goes to his place over Lexington way the day after Latonia closes, but Frankie Hill tells me he leaves for somewhere yesterday."

"Where is Miss Demorest?"

"At a place they got on the Ohio River about eighteen miles from here. Riverview, it's called. They got to sell it now and Miss Lola wants to beat it out there for a visit before it's gone, Frankie says."

"Losing it because of that seventh race at Latonia?"

"That's what I hear, from Frankie Hill, their jock," said Riley.

"They did get hit, didn't they?" commented Coulter, his forehead wrinkled in thought. He glanced at his watch and then pushed back his chair with sudden decision. "Let's get out of this," he suggested. "Come up to my room for a minute, old man. I want to show you something."

AT the desk, he had the brown bag returned to him from the hotel safe. Up in the room, he first locked the door and then unlocked the shabby receptacle

and removed the sealed package. He broke the seals, removed the string and wrapping paper and, with Riley's eyes wondering upon him, placed the piles of bank notes on the table.

"This is what I wanted to show you," said Coulter.

Riley glanced slowly from the money to his companion, then back to the money. "It's something to look at," he observed.

"Fifty-six thousand dollars," stated Larry.

"What I'd call real velvet," remarked Riley. "Does your rich uncle pull a fourth act and relent on you?" he asked, after a moment.

Larry shook his head. "No chance."

"Do you make it?" asked Paddock, in a dry tone.

"That's what cost Andy Dirks his life," returned Larry.

Paddock Riley's emotionless face came as near to displaying feeling as it ever would. "You kidding me?"

"Does this look like it?" countered Larry.

"How do you get it?"

Coulter told him.

"Well," said the older man, when his friend had finished, "it's all yours, kid. Gamblers' money. When you get that kind, it's yours—till somebody else gets it away."

"No," said Coulter thoughtfully, "it isn't mine. Not all of it."

"Don't be a sucker. It's yours, kid!" Riley drawled. "Was you thinkin' of turnin' it into the conscious fund, or maybe donatin' it to the Home For Feeble Crooks?"

"Any crook," responded Coulter, "that wants part of this lucre has to come for it with an awful lot of luck and a gun to get it. So don't get the idea that I'm breaking out in a rash of sentiment or ethics. I love my neighbor as myself, of course—when she's attractive—and I have heard that kind deeds are more than coronets—but I

don't believe all I hear. But this pelf has its complications. And anyway the damn stuff is a bit heavy on my mind at times."

"It never used to be," recalled Riley, in a tone as dry as dust. "I know the time you could go through it with great merriness and speed. And what's the complications?"

"Well, for one thing, how much did that delayed journey of our little Joraleen lower your resources?"

"Only two hundred. And it don't worry me any," said Riley.

"If that two hundred had had a market value that day, what should you say it would be?" asked Larry.

"About two and a half to one, if some of those wise clockers got that last time trial of the colt's. Maybe as much as four to one, if they didn't. But a good average guess is that a two-dollar ticket gets six clinkers at the window."

"Well," said Larry, indicating the money, "here's your pay-off window. Step up and get six hundred nice new berries."

"Be your mother's boy!" advised Riley. "This jack's yours, kid. Ain't I told you gamblers' money belongs to who's got it?"

Coulter took six hundred-dollar notes and placed them in his companion's up-turned hat. "Better leave 'em there," he advised. "You know I could knock you silly inside two minutes, Joe. And I don't get much exercise these days."

Riley shrugged, took the money and added it to the roll in his trousers pocket. "Have it your way," he said. "I never was known to crowd this stuff away from me. And I never saw the time I couldn't get along without a sock in the chin—from a murderous egg like you. But while you're makin' out these charity donations, maybe I could think up a few hundred more guys that draped their week's wages on the pony's nose. We could advertise in the papers. And if there ain't enough in that

bundle to pay 'em all off, you could give 'em your notes and work it out."

"Am I my brother's keeper?" asked Laurence. "Not so you could perceive it! But friends, even annoying ones, are a little different. Is there a telephone out at this Demorest place on the river?"

Riley glanced sharply at his companion. "The answer is no," he said. "They never did care a lot about havin' one in out there. But I don't seem to remember that the Demorests are friends on your callin' list."

"They aren't," Larry admitted, "but from what I've heard about them, I'd be more than glad to remedy the omission. But they rate the same as friends just now. How would a chap get out there?"

"A train in that general direction runs, some weeks, and you can get a bus part way there. But unless you dote on hoofing and delays, the only good answer is to drive it. It's maybe three miles in to the river after you turn off the Dixie Highway," explained Riley. He studied his companion curiously. "It ain't my funeral, kid, but I'm just sufferin' somethin' awful with curiosity. Do these Demorests go on the same friendship callin' list with this yellow stuff that crackles so pretty?"

"I rather had that idea, in a general way," replied Coulter. "Why?"

"Well, the way you seem to be scorin' this play, it makes some vacuum in this lovely yellow pile. Mr. Demorest drops somewhere near fifteen grand. And three to one! That's somethin' to let loose of."

"You're advising me against it, Joe?" asked Coulter quietly.

"I'd be tickled pink to see folks like them get their money back," returned Riley. "I'm only plumb curious. I don't quite get a guy like you."

"Why, you just admitted that part of it's theirs," retorted Laurence. "It's a part of the money that a gang of crooks

stole, isn't it? And Demorest is one of the ones they stole from, isn't he? Well, then, the answer's as simple as you are right now. Some of this is his money. And knowing what I do about a white man like him, I've got the insane notion that I'd like to let him have his own money back."

"And you don't even know him!" said Riley.

"I always know a thoroughbred when I learn as much about him as you've told me. And thoroughbreds aren't so numerous that I care to pass up a chance of being white with one. So sorry, though, that it's being a sap," said Laurence sweetly.

"Well," remarked Riley, with a grin, "a popular vote in this land of the free and the home of the bootlegger would sure elect you one by a ten-to-one margin, fellah. But I'd say that your uncle, who was prob'ly never sapped out of a dollar in his life, is a bigger sap than you are for ever letting a kid like you get away from him. When do you figure on makin' this expensive call?"

"Think I'll take a run out there tonight. It's a great night and I'd enjoy a drive." He glanced at his watch. "Only seven thirty. With a paved highway most of the way, it's just about an hour's easy drive, isn't it?"

"If you don't miss the road you turn off on from the Dixie Highway. From there to the place is just a narrow dirt road," explained Riley. "If you'd like to drive yourself why don't you use my bus? See's right oh side. I don't need it till to-morrow."

"Fine," agreed Larry, getting into his topcoat. "See you later, if you're going to be around." He put the money back into the bag and, taking the roll from his trousers, placed all but a hundred dollars of that with it.

"You going to tote all that filthy lucre out with you?" asked Riley.

"Not with so many playful little

stick-ups abroad in our fair land these piping days," Larry replied. "It goes in the safe downstairs. I'll just inform Miss Demorest that her daddy can still cash his bet on her animal whenever he wants to. And he'll probably want to right away, when he learns that he can keep that river place in the family realm."

They left the room, and Laurence had the bag put back in the hotel safe.

"Ought to make it out there by eight thirty, hadn't I?" he asked, when Riley took him to the car in front of the hotel. "With nice easy driving?"

"Sure—with nice easy driving," Riley agreed, as he stepped from the running board of his roadster. "But if you push this boat along at your regular crazy clip, you'll prob'ly never make it a-tall. You'll end up in a coop with bars, instead of at Riverview. Now you go out Broadway and turn left on Eighteenth Street. Keep along Eighteenth Street Road and you're on the Dixie Highway.

"But use what sense you got, ratin' this bus, kid," Riley advised, as Coulter started the engine. "If you gallop her over forty, I'm layin' ten to one she throws that off, hind shoe and lands you over in the next county. That tire's got a bowed tendon. Be easy!"

"Easy it is," agreed Larry, releasing the brakes. "By!" and he was off.

CHAPTER VII.

RATHER IMPETUOUS.

GOING through the city, Coulter heeded Riley's advice and the mandate of the law remarkably well for one of his hasty inclinations. Only once did a traffic cop flare at him and that was after he had turned off Broadway and was passing Kentucky Street.

A large touring car had crowded him close to the curb and, at the imminent risk of crumpling Paddock Riley's fender, Laurence shot the car forward,

to miss his reckless neighbor by the scantiest inch, after which he turned and cheerfully waved the offending driver an annoying good-by.

But out on the Dixie Highway, both Riley and the legal speed limit were left behind in his thoughts with the disappearing scenery.

"Nice little job," Larry conceded, listening to the satisfying purr of the motor under the smooth, long hood. "Guess she'll hit fifty without a squawk."

She did, until a moving truck ahead, as big as a barn, and an approaching car near the center of the road, compelled caution.

After that she hit fifty-five and then sixty without undue complaint and Laurence's estimate of Paddock Riley's taste in some respects rose a trifle. "Nice little job," he mused again. "For a horsy egg like Joe to own."

A long grade and an approaching curve checked his impetuosity, but Laurence's bubbling spirits continued to mount. It was a delightful evening. The October day had turned agreeably warm and the turquoise, star-sprinkled sky promised the fragrant balm of a perfect June night.

Larry felt at peace with himself and all the world and, holding the car at a mild forty miles, he lifted his voice in carefree song:

"Through a-all the da-a-ze
I'll sing the praise
Of bro-o-wn Octo-o-o-ber
A-a-a-ule."

With questionable pitch, but undeniable fervor, the baritone rose over the rushing countryside in enthusiastic honor of the outlawed refreshment. He started another song, but a noise, even more penetrating and unmusical, silenced his own efforts as if by magic.

Bang! S-s-s-zz!

The car lurched and skidded.

He dexterously straightened it and came to a stop. "Riley was right, dam-

mit!" he murmured, climbing out. "His off, hind tire has blown, sure enough!" He saw there was no spare and frowned. Then, glancing ahead on the opposite side of the road, he grinned. For he had stopped near a garage.

Another car, with battery trouble, was occupying the attention of the lone repair man, and Larry was delayed at the garage for forty minutes.

"There's a village just ahead, isn't there?" he asked, when his job was finished.

"Valley Station," answered the man. "Where you headed for?"

Larry told him the Demorest place.

The man nodded. "Sure, Riverview. Well, there's another little village about four miles below here. You pass that. And then maybe a mile or two beyond, you turn off to the right. And you got a two, three mile stretch through country and woods on a narrow dirt road."

The remaining distance on the Dixie Highway was covered with conscious heed to Paddock Riley's advice. After that, on the final leg of the journey, the condition of the narrow, uneven dirt road, that dawdled obliquely from the main thoroughfare, made caution and slowness a matter of strict necessity.

"For solitude and quiet and a fine chance of busting a spring, this is the road to take," thought Laurence as the car jolted and complained through a thick bit of woods where the roadway seemed to disappear like a hazy thread in the gloom of the trees and brush.

There were only the car lamps below and the stars above, for light. After about two miles of this travel, only the stars were available. With the taking of a particularly violent jolt, the lamps dimmed, flickered and then went out.

"And no flash light!" mourned Coulter, as he edged the car off the road into a cluster of saplings. "Riley ought to have a mule to drive instead of this thing, with what he knows about taking care of 'em both."

He groped ahead uncertainly in the blackness, stumbling in ruts and swearing softly but feelingly in the stumbling. At length, however, from the top of a sharp little grade, he saw, a short way ahead, what must be Riverview.

It was lighter now, too. The moon was riding higher and the stars, with the obstructing trees of the thick bit of timber left behind, picked out the nearby landscape on either side.

TO the left, the house, old-fashioned with broad veranda, rose in comfortable dignity above surrounding shrubbery and beyond, through the latticework of trees, the moonlit river gleamed like a rippling ribbon of pale gold.

There was no light visible from within the house. Coulter, missing the entrance driveway, approached uncertainly through an outpost of tall shrubs that rustled and crackled in the still night with his forceful advance. He was about clear of the bushes when a voice halted him.

"Who's dat! Don' yo' all come no clos'ah, whoev'ah yo' is!" came in a mixture of belligerency and apprehension from an unseen colored woman's throat.

Coulter grinned and stepped to the edge of the unclipped lawn.

"Yo' mind, man! We's got shootin' weapens heah, we has!" Coulter was informed.

His grin broadened and he advanced another pace as a second voice, liquid and warm, that lingered in his ears like a caressing strain of music, floated to him on the still, fragrant air.

"What is it, Martha Lou?"

"It's a man, Miss Lola. Out heah by de locust tree. Yo' see it?" was the reply.

"Yes, I see it." The tone had a hint of humor, but the humor sounded a little grim.

The next moment, from the river side of the veranda, Coulter saw the figure of a girl, slender and lithe and decidedly businesslike, step into the pale moonlight with what looked suspiciously like a gun.

"Raise your hands and tell me what you want," commanded the girl quietly. "And be careful. I've a loaded shotgun here."

It would require more than a loaded shotgun to keep him from clearly seeing the owner of that voice, Laurence knew, but he dutifully raised his hands with his own voice. "I want to see you—now more than ever," said he. "You're Miss Demorest?"

"Yes, I'm Miss Demorest," replied the girl, her figure a little less militant at the agreeable baritone. "But I'm not expecting any visitors. And it's pretty late. What is it you wanted to see me about?"

"I want to talk to you about your horse, Joraleen," replied Laurence.

"Jo'leen—Jo'leen!" The colored woman broke in excitedly. "We don' wanna heah nothin' mo' 'bout Jo'leen. We got trouble enough 'bout dat colt already——"

"Martha Lou! Please!" admonished the girl. "Well, what is it?" she asked Coulter.

"Can't I lower my hands?" Laurence grinned. "I've lived in New York so long I can't talk without them. And won't you lower that shotgun? Shotguns make me nervous. And I'd like to come closer—lots closer. I'm not a book agent and I'm not dangerous and I've simply got to see you. And I didn't injure Joraleen. Cross my heart, Miss Demorest. On the contrary, your animal injured me—five hundred dollars' worth. My name is Laurence Coulter and I'm an honest, peaceable, trustworthy young man who loves children and horses—when they win."

The girl smiled in spite of herself.

"I haven't any references from my

last employer," Laurence added, "but you can ask Paddock Riley——"

"Paddock Riley!" The gun barrel instantly dropped to the veranda railing. "Do you know Paddock Riley?"

"To my sorrow," said Laurence. "He is well meaning, but untruthful. He told me that Joraleen would go through that field like an express through a tank town, and he loaned me a car with a bowed tendon on its off, hind tire. In fact, he told me how to find you. But he never said you had a voice like—like—— Well, like you have, and he failed to warn me that you receive callers with loaded shotguns."

"Oh," said the girl contritely, "I'm so sorry. This is horrible hospitality, isn't it? But we're alone out here and after the trouble with Joraleen, I've been suspicious of almost everybody. I'm so ashamed. Won't you come up on the veranda?"

LAURENCE was up there in no time. As he stood silently gazing at the girl with hair the color of golden-rod and eyes as velvety as purple pansies, her slender figure bathed in the mellow moonlight, the lovely features and nasal tones of the dazzling Miss de Vilmay receded farther and farther from his consciousness.

"Won't you take this big chair, Mr. Coulter? Martha Lou will make some coffee—and a mint julep—if you drink anything?"

"Anything," admitted Laurence absently, his eyes still held by the figure before him.

"About Joraleen," she said eagerly, when Martha Lou's broad back had disappeared into the house. "Nothing's happened to him?"

"Nothing," the young man replied, "except that he's been turned from a loser to a winner without even being saddled. And your father can cash in that bet he had on Joraleen at about

what the machine odds would have been—six dollars for a two-dollar ticket.”

The girl's eyes danced. “Mr. Coulter!”

Coulter grinned. “Miss Demorest!”
“You're joking, of course!”

“Well, it is a joke on some chaps. But not on your dad. Paddock Riley said his faith in your animal went up to about fifteen thousand dollars.”

“Fourteen thousand,” she corrected.

“Then he cashes in forty-two thousand pretty plasters.”

“Forty-two thousand dollars!” she murmured. “Why, that would get dad out of the hole. And I wouldn't have to give up Riverview. But of course that's not possible. Why, Mr. Coulter, where would all this money come from?”

“Why, Miss Demorest, from me,” he replied. “It's in the safe at the Colonial Hotel in Louisville. And I came out to let you know that you can come in and get it to-morrow morning.”

“But—I don't understand!”

“It isn't a problem of understanding. It's just one of collecting. And such a simple one! And such a delightful one, too, for me. You just come in in the morning and I give you the money—in beautiful yellow cash—then we go to lunch and then to a theater or some place and then we have dinner and after that we dance or drive or just talk, or I'll even attend a lecture on ‘The Psychology and Benefits of Total Teetotalism’—anything, just so you won't go away.”

“You are an impetuous young man, aren't you?” she inquired amusedly. “I remember, now, that Paddock Riley did insinuate that once in telling dad something about you.”

“Paddock Riley,” retorted Laurence, “is inclined to be, as I said, a—well—an infernal liar. I'm steady and restrained. And I look before I leap. I would never count my chickens before they were hatched, if I had any to

count, and I always did believe that haste makes waste.”

“About that money, Mr. Coulter, you——”

“About your staying over in Louisville to-morrow, beautiful lady——”

The girl straightened severely in her chair. “Martha Lou!” she called.

“Yassum, Miss Lola,” came from within the house.

“Aren't those juleps ready? Mr. Coulter must have one immediately, to cool him off.”

“A'm comin',” said Martha Lou, bringing the tray. “Sho' is kinda wawm, ain't it, fo' dis time o' yeah?”

“And so sudden,” said the girl. “Now about that money——”

Coulter sipped his drink and musingly watched the moonlight playing in her hair.

“Where does it come from?” she persisted. “We'd have to know that, you see.”

“It comes from the pari-mutuel machines at Latonia, and much of it was put there by your dad and some by Paddock Riley and me, among others,” he replied. “It's race-track money and in the circumstances you needn't hesitate to accept it. I got it from one of the gambling crooks who so cruelly wronged Joraleen and Mr. Demorest and others of us. Paddock's wrong is now righted and so is mine—with a tidy bit left over for me. And now I want to pay yours and get the filthy lucre off my clean conscience.”

“The gambler gave it to you?”

“Well, he left it to me, sort of, just before he died. Perhaps he had a guilty conscience or a sudden attack of squareness.”

“You don't mean——”

He nodded. “Andy Dirks. He must have been conscience stricken, because he left the key to where it was with me.”

“Well, then it's yours, really.”

He shook his head. “No. I've got

mine," he replied, with an amused twinkle at her seriousness.

"But, Mr. Coulter——"

The girl stopped as a heavy step sounded on the river side of the veranda. The pair leaped to their feet.

"I wouldn't argue about that jack," said a rumbling, bass voice near by, "because it's going to be settled right now, my friends."

The girl turned swiftly, eyes wide, lips parted. Coulter stepped toward the shotgun, but stopped midway at a barking command.

"Get 'em up!" rasped the voice.

Coulter straightened, slowly raised his hands and stared into the barrel of a revolver that glinted ominously in the moonlight.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GAME GAMBLER.

THE man behind the revolver, a huge, expensively and obviously dressed man, with a large hook nose jutting above great jowls and a diamond horse-shoe pin glittering from his tie, bared his large teeth in the semblance of a jovial grin.

"I'm sorry to interrupt such a nice little party," said he. He bowed to Lola Demorest. "Moonlight, beautiful girl, mint juleps! Real Kentucky flavor. But my business is pressing. A little higher with the hands, Mr. Coulter. No—higher! That's it. However, it needn't take but a minute, if Mr. Coulter is businesslike—and sensible."

He whistled sharply and three men issued from the shrubby shadows, clumped up to the veranda from around the corner of the house and stood about, silent and menacing. They had neither the rather sumptuous taste in personal adornment of the huge man nor his ease and veneer of manner. They looked, indeed, typically like professional city bad men of the gangster type.

Yet, entirely apart from his weapon

and superior bulk, the leader was clearly a more formidable person than any of them. Danger lay revealed in the hard light of the intelligent eyes, in the cruel twist of the thick, smiling lips, in the constant hint of threat behind the thick pur of the heavy, bass voice.

Lola Demorest swept the quartet with scathing eyes. "What does this mean?" she demanded, with quiet anger.

"Just that your guest is retaining property of ours and that we've called to persuade him to return it," said the huge man.

"That isn't true, is it?" the girl asked, turning to Coulter.

"Only partly," he replied. "The property he speaks of is not theirs, considered from any viewpoint but that of possession, which would, it is true, give him nine points of the law. However, I have the possession. But it is undoubtedly true that our immense friend with the sartorial finery has brought his bravos here to try to persuade me to give it up."

His cool eyes inspected the quartet with interest. The little, weasel-like man with the tiny, darting eyes and the checked cap, he thought was the driver of the car that had nearly crowded him to the curb in the city, shortly after he had started out to Riverview. The huge man he believed he recognized from descriptions by Paddock Riley of a race-track follower of not-good repute.

This would, Coulter thought, be Big Gus Kreybing. The solid-jawed man under the slouch hat, himself a husky of six feet, brought a smile to Coulter, a smile which broadened as he examined the last arrival—a stocky man of middle age with two gold teeth and a slightly askew nose. For this man had left the first two joints of his left forefinger somewhere else.

"Let us hope," said the huge man suavely, noting the broadening smile, "that we continue to be so amusing to Mr. Coulter."

"It was merely that I recognized some friends," said Larry, "by sight and description. You are Mr. Augustus Kreybing?"

The huge man bowed ironically.

"And the gentleman next to you," went on Coulton, "the big one with the perpetually displeased look, I have met before, though I do not know his name. In fact, I was recently obliged to sock him on the chin."

The six-footer scowled.

Kreybing nodded. "His name is Matt Horgen. A fellow craftsman, though a professional. You should be one, too, Mr. Coulter," said Kreybing, with a trace of real admiration. "No one else had ever put Matt out in one punch, even inside the ropes. You are a gifted young man with your hands. I am glad to recognize ability always. And an audacious young man, too, I'm afraid. So I was careful to bring this." He smiled thoughtfully at the still-pointing gun.

"Your friend to your right, the one with the gilded teeth and the nose a bit on the bias, I also have met," said Coulter. "Once in the D. & P. station and again just before leaving for Louisville."

"Al Patterson," Kreybing smiled.

"He seems to have a mania for carrying other people's baggage."

"Not other people's, surely," purred Kreybing. "Al has a very real interest in that little bag."

"But this last friend you've brought," said Larry, "the thin one under the underworld-movie cap, I can't say I've chatted with him at all, though I know he drives a car."

"My little friend is known as Neely Parr," returned Kreybing. "His real name, by the way."

"Charmed, I'm sure," acknowledged Larry gravely.

"Go to hell!" suggested little Parr, who had been drinking.

Matt Horgen glared resentfully at

Coulter. "Aw can this cheap kidding stuff," he growled to Kreybing, "and get down to business with this fresh egg." At Kreybing's look, however, with the hint of threat in it, he immediately subsided.

"You appear to have covered my movements very well," said Coulter easily, his eyes carefully watching the huge man's gun hand.

"You were never out of our reach," Kreybing returned.

"Follow me from the Winton Hotel that night?"

Kreybing shook his head. "We had no interest in you then. But the newspapers the next morning gave us a hint. And when you appropriated the bag at the D. & P. station, we couldn't bear to lose you."

He stepped nearer to Coulter. "And now that the little social amenities have been complied with, we'll get down to business, Mr. Coulter—as Matt suggests." His manner suddenly changed, and he shed his urbanity as completely as he would remove a glove. "You, Matt and Parr! Tie his hands behind him," he barked.

The pair did so, roughly and securely. Coulter's hopes of catching Kreybing off guard and knocking the gun away vanished.

"You got a servant out here. Where is she?" demanded Kreybing, turning to Lola Demorest.

"Back in the kitchen," the girl replied. "But don't you dare to harm Martha Lou!" she added wrathfully.

"Lock the servant in an upstairs room," he ordered. As Horgen and Patterson disappeared inside, he turned back to Coulter. "You can sit down. We'll conduct this little business comfortably, consistent with safety—as long as you're reasonable and see the odds in this little game."

Coulter slid into a chair by the porch table.

Little Parr glanced at the girl, then

turned to Kreybing. "How about taking 'em inside?" he suggested.

"It's pleasanter out here—and just as safe," said Kreybing shortly, seating himself across the table from his captive. "Not another soul within three miles of here. He played right into our hands to-night."

"Tie this dame up?" suggested Parr.

Coulter's eyes glinted cold wrath.

Kreybing shook his head. "Not now. But watch her," he warned.

"That's easy," said little Parr.

THE sounds of scuffling and angry protest issued from an upper window, followed by oaths, and presently Patterson and Horgen emerged to the veranda.

"Got her tied good?" asked Kreybing.

Patterson nodded grumpily. "Yeah, at last. But that brown wild cat nearly smacked me with a poker before we did," he growled.

"Now," said Kreybing quietly, fixing his captive with hard, narrowed eyes, "where is that satchel of money? You didn't bring it with you. And you did bring it from Cincinnati to Louisville."

"That's where it is," replied Coulter. "Quite safe, I assure you."

"Where?"

Coulter smiled impudently. "I don't discuss such personal affairs with chance acquaintances," he replied easily.

"Frisk him," snapped Kreybing.

Horgen, the remembrance of that quick knock-out still vivid, did so with no gentleness. He tossed Coulter's wallet across the table to Kreybing. Big Gus, examining the contents, picked out a slip of brown, Manila paper. He inspected this with a pleased expression. It was a depositor's check, detached from the flap of a standard form of hotel safety-deposit envelope.

"Deposited in the hotel safe, eh?"

"And only to be delivered to the de-

positor," said Coulter, with easy complacency.

Kreybing shook his head. "You are evidently not thoroughly acquainted with hotel safety-deposit procedure," he murmured. "'Depositor,'" he quoted, from memory, "'unable to claim property personally, may have it forwarded upon receipt, by the hotel, of his claim check, B, properly attested before a notary public and accompanied by forwarding instructions.'"

He tapped the slip with a heavy finger. "I have deposited enough money in quite healthy amounts myself with hotels from Saratoga Springs to New Orleans, after races to know that this is so. And so would you, if you recalled the directions at the bottom of the envelope this check was detached from, Mr. Coulter."

"There still remains," returned Coulter, with a smile, "the requirement of proper attestation before a notary public."

"True," purred Kreybing. "And I chance to know—I might almost say own—the most accommodating little notary in the world. The small sum of ten dollars, paid cash in hand, will appear ample emolument to him for attesting your signature without even seeing you. I appreciate, of course, that I must keep you from meddlesome contact with your hotel until that little brown bag is delivered to where it properly belongs. Is there any other difficulty you see, Mr. Coulter?"

"Only one," replied Coulter. "The little detail of the signature. The hotel knows it well— It would have to be really genuine, I can assure you. It seems but a small matter. But the difficulty—"

"Yes?" Kreybing's voice was politely gentle.

"Is that at the present time I have no idea of offering my signature?"

"We must then change your idea, I'm afraid," said Kreybing, the hard light

returning to his eyes as he glanced at his captive through narrowed lids. He examined the revolver meaningly. He placed a fountain pen on the table before Coulter. Then he took out his watch.

"I shall give you," said the huge man, in a quiet, metallic tone that was ominous, "exactly three minutes to decide to sign this little slip, Coulter." He cleared his throat. "One minute is for your inevitable bluff. You will try it—for a while. You have fine nerve. The second minute is to actually make your decision. And the third minute"—he twirled the gun meditatively—"is to offer a silent prayer to your Maker—if your decision is not a happy one."

THE words, quiet, hard, dropping slowly and clearly, like cold drip from an icicle, upon the silent group, fell upon Lola Demorest's tense ears with a sickening ring. She glanced at the man Parr and he was nervously licking his lips. Then she gazed at Larry Coulter's grim face and his eyes were faintly smiling. Her own eyes were mutely begging him to sign. Her lips, full and warm and sweetly curved, were parted in silent appeal.

Kreybing pointed his gun, held his watch to the moonlight, waited for perhaps four seconds and then quietly said: "Ready."

The group, silent, straining, unconsciously bent closer to the ticking time-piece. The girl tried desperately to catch the swiftly racing sound, to see the speeding second hand. The interval was a vacuum of sound, of life itself, to her.

Then, "One minute," said Kreybing.

It wasn't so, the man was cheating, the girl told herself hotly. That little hand couldn't race over sixty of those spaces that swiftly! She glanced at Kreybing, then imploringly at Coulter. For a wild instant she thought of throwing herself upon the huge man,

but fear of the gun's accidental discharge restrained her.

"Two minutes." The huge man said it gently, like an apology, a touch of sorrow in his tone, almost.

Matt Horgen nervously cleared his throat and again silence, brittle, fragile, fell. A stir of wind faintly rustled some dry leaves near by. The man Parr scraped a toe on the floor. The plaintive note of a night bird drifted from the river like a tiny dirge. Again there was stillness.

The girl looked at the huge man with a trace of expectancy, a touch of horror, in her wide eyes, and again gazed at Coulter imploringly. His face was pale and sweat beads trickled from his forehead, but his eyes, that held Kreybing's in a steady look, had the faintest of smiles still lingering in them.

"Three minutes," said Kreybing.

A gasp escaped the girl. Coulter's drawn mouth imperceptibly tightened. Patterson unconsciously braced himself for the explosion. A second ticked by, another, some more. Then the huge man lowered the gun. With the movement, a small sigh came from Coulter's tight lips.

"Why didn't you shoot?" he asked, after a moment, the words breaking the tension like the snap of a guitar string.

Kreybing laid the revolver on the table. "Why were you sure I wouldn't—now?" he countered curiously.

"I wasn't—quite," Larry replied. "Your mind or your finger might have slipped in the tension, of course. But a dead man can't sign his name—and you're not a fool. I gambled on it."

"You're a game gambler," said Kreybing, with a trace of unwilling admiration in his look.

Coulter bowed ironically.

"And you win——" said Kreybing.

A look of vast relief came into Lola Demorest's pale face at the words.

Then the huge man smiled and added quietly: "This first little bet."

But though his lips were smiling blandly, a little impudently, even, Coulter did not share the girl's feeling of great relief. A feeling that was a little sickening seemed to seize him within, in the region of his stomach; for he knew the inquisition had just begun.

CHAPTER IX.

PERSUASION.

KREYBING picked up the fountain pen and turned it slowly about in his great hands, glanced thoughtfully from the pen to his captive, then replaced the pen before him.

"Well, why don't you untie him?" asked Lola Demorest. "You can't make him sign anything, you see. And it's all over."

The man turned to the girl with a bland smile and shook his head. "It isn't all over," said he. "The evening's entertainment has only begun. How long it will continue is a matter that lies entirely with Mr. Coulter. Most people would be quite satisfied with our next act. But a young man as stubborn as he may require an encore. And we can make him sign something, as we shall demonstrate. It's all a matter of sufficient pressure."

"What are you going to do?" she demanded hotly, her feeling of revulsion for the man increasing.

"Merely continue to try to persuade him," he replied suavely. "That first little act was mental. We shall now have to try some physical persuasion." He glanced at her meaningly. "And even, later on, some psychological influence. You may help us there."

He jerked a thumb toward little Parr. "Go upstairs and see that the servant's tied all right," he ordered sharply.

Parr suppressed a hiccup and left. On the way through the house he removed a flask from his hip pocket and on the return journey, out of Gus Kreybing's sight, repeated the act. Krey-

bing curtly waved him back to keep watch over the girl again. He teetered over.

"Watch thish dame!" Parr muttered thickly, now quite drunk, "thass some easy job."

She turned away from his leering face and suddenly he grasped her tightly by the wrist.

"You ugly little beast!" she cried hotly, furiously pulling free.

Coulter was on his feet in an instant. Patterson and Matt Horgen restrained the bound man and Horgen, with a personal spite to vent, flung him roughly back against the chair.

Coulter, furious in his helplessness, disregarded Matt Horgen's roughness entirely as a mere incident of the situation, but he shot a savage look at Parr.

"You little mucker!" Coulter said quietly, in a tone that cut with its hard fury. "One more move like that and I'm going to *kill* you."

Gus Kreybing bent his black brows upon the ugly little man in a threatening frown. "Cut that!" he barked. "I'm ordering the rough stuff here. I may want to use that dame. And if I do, I don't want her in that mood." He motioned to Patterson. "You stay out here and watch her." To Horgen and Parr, he said: "Take him inside."

The pair dragged their captive into the large living room, an attractive place of paneled walls and beamed ceiling, with latticed windows and a spacious fireplace at one end.

"Start a fire in that grate," commanded Kreybing. While Horgen held Coulter, the little man teetered over and laid a couple of logs over the bedwork of dry chips and twigs already there and touched a match to them.

"What are you going to do!" exclaimed the girl, from the porch, as the twigs crackled and sputtered and then leaped into curling flame. The night, if anything, had grown warmer.

Kreybing moved the screen guard in

place before the fire and mopped his perspiring face. "A fire's always nice," he said, with a bland smile. "So cozy looking. And it may get cooler during the night. You wouldn't want Mr. Coulter to get cold feet." He closed the porch door, leaving the girl out on the porch, staring at the door with eyes wide with apprehension.

"What are they going to do!" she asked Al Patterson out on the porch.

The man grinned. "Kinda looks like they're gonna get your fresh friend's fingers warmed up nice, so's he can use a fountain pen."

"You mean—torture him!" she cried. "They'd never dare."

"Not torture," returned Al pleasantly. "Big Gus wouldn't never pull nothing like that. Just a little persuasion, like he said."

She sprang to the door, but the man caught her arm and pulled her away.

"Now be nice," he advised. "I wouldn't wanta get rough with you."

IN the living room, Kreybing gazed thoughtfully up at the heavy ceiling beams near the fireplace, then turned to Parr. "Get a hammer," he ordered, "and dig up a couple of heavy nails or screws somewhere and some more rope. Look around for 'em."

The little man rummaged about in the kitchen, then turned on the cellar lights and teetered down the narrow stairs, finally returning with two heavy screw hooks and a hank of tough window cord. Kreybing dragged a table under one of the beams near the fireplace, stood on it and inserted the hooks about two feet apart to one side of the oak timber. He attached a length of rope to each of the hooks, got down from the table and, taking the hotel safety-deposit slip from his pocket, turned to Coulter.

"Still got writer's cramp?" he asked, holding the little slip before the captive's eyes.

"Worse than ever," Coulter replied.

"Perhaps our second little act of the evening will relieve it," said the huge man.

Coulter glanced at the dangling ropes and then at the blazing fire near by. He shook his head. "Afraid not," said he pleasantly.

Kreybing's smile was grim. "Tie his feet," he snapped.

Horgen did so.

"Put a couple more logs on that fire," Kreybing barked at Parr.

The little man obeyed.

"Now untie his hands."

When that was done, Kreybing again placed the slip before Coulter's eyes. "Sure you don't care to try a little writing exercise while your hands are still free?" he asked.

"Quite," said Coulter, through tightened lips.

Kreybing pushed him close against the fire screen and again mounted the table at his back. Grabbing Coulter's left wrist, he pulled it upward and slipped it through the running noose at the end of one of the dangling ropes.

With the aid of Matt Horgen, the right wrist was fastened in the same manner. When the huge man had climbed down, his captive was trussed the end of one of the dangling ropes. wrists, his arms extended wide, his toes just touching the floor, with the torrid breath of the leaping fire behind the screen guard already reaching the front of his body.

The room, save for the crackle and sputter of the blazing logs, became silent. The three men, themselves beginning to feel the thickening heat, somberly watched the hanging figure slowly wilt with the dragging moments.

Kreybing, studying the sagging form closely, noticed the convulsive twitch of the baking, shackled legs, noticed the unconscious tremor of the body as the parching crept upward and caught the first lines of suffering in the paling

face. Sweat, gathering at first in tiny globules on the victim's forehead, began to pour in trickles down the drawn face.

When Kreybing, watching from the side, saw the first droop of the head, he spoke. "Will you sign?"

The reply, issuing from set teeth behind lips of agony, was more of a croak than a voice. "No, damn you!"

Kreybing nodded to Parr, and the little man placed a fresh log on the flames. Again the only sound was the sputter of the logs.

The close-cropped brown head drooped a little, then a little more. Little Parr stepped forward with a poker and stirred the logs, then hurriedly teetered back from the heat. The fire sputtered angrily and flamed up brightly. A sigh, barely audible, came from the wilting figure.

Kreybing moved close and examined the hanging face. Then he stepped back and lit a cigarette. The head drooped a little more. Little Parr mopped his face. Matt Horgen retreated a step. When he had finished the cigarette, Kreybing again spoke.

"Want to sign?"

There was no vocal response this time, only a motion of the head. It was negative.

Again Parr stirred up the logs and then went back to the windows at the end of the room. From that perspective he was thinking that the hanging form, grotesque in the shifting fire-light, was remarkably like a huge Christmas-tree ornament and he grinned drunkenly at the conceit.

Kreybing lit another cigarette, and Matt Horgen sank scowlingly into a chair. The brown head sank another space. Kreybing tossed his cigarette butt into the fireplace and, moving back, glanced at his watch by the light of the electric lamp near the wall. He waited some more. A sound, half gasp, half sob, came thickly from the limp form

and suddenly the head sank full upon the chest. The body appeared quite lifeless now.

CHAPTER X.

MORE PRESSURE.

KREYBING nodded to Matt Horgen. Standing on a chair, Horgen took out his knife to cut the ropes.

"Don't cut 'em. Just slip his hands out of the loops," directed the leader.

"Going to put him back again?" asked Horgen.

"If he needs it."

"What are you gonna do now?"

"Try a little of this psychology stuff on him first," replied Kreybing. "He's just about ripe for it, I think. We'll let the girl in to see him for a few minutes. Those two are dead gone on each other. I could see that right away. And of course she won't want him to be hurt. When she sees him and begins to get a little soft, maybe she can persuade him to get some sense about sticking his moniker on that slip."

They laid the limp figure on the rug, and the trio went out to the veranda.

"You can see him for a few minutes," Kreybing told the girl. "Until he takes an encore," he added dryly, standing in the doorway as she hurried inside.

She gazed from the limp figure on the floor to the dangling nooses before the leaping fire and spun around toward Kreybing. "What have you done!" she cried accusingly, fear mingling with her hot anger as she turned her blazing eyes upon the huge man.

"Just tried to persuade him to be sensible," he returned, with a smile. "But he's a most stubborn young man, I'm afraid. We may have to use a little more persuasion before his writer's cramp is quite cured."

"You beasts!" she cried hotly, looking down at the wilted figure. "Oh, you contemptible cowards!" She bent over Coulter.

At the quick compassion in the melting violet of her eyes, Kreybing grinned and left them alone.

"Mr. Coulter!" she cried softly, kneeling beside him and bending close to the lifeless-looking face.

A faint groan escaped him, and his head lolled limply to one side. She felt of the hot clothing and examined the livid rope-marked wrists, one of which was slightly crimson, where the skin had been braised through.

"Mr. Coulter—Laurence!" she whispered gently, a mist gathering in her eyes, as she rubbed his arms.

Laurence stirred a little, half opened his eyes and with the fragrance of the goldenrod hair that caressed his cheek stirring his returning senses like faint perfume, his lips attempted a weak grin. "What's the matter?" he asked, his eyes staring stupidly at the dangling nooses.

At his effort at a smile, she turned her eyes away. A hot tear flooded from her lashes and splashed upon his cheek. "Those men——" she began.

He turned a little and looked up into the face so close to his own and his grin broadened. "Have they gone?" he muttered weakly.

"They're right outside," she replied. "They're going to be right back. And—they're going to—hurt you again, unless you do what they want. Laurence—Mr. Coulter," she hurried on softly, "please don't let them hurt you again. Do what they want!"

He shook his head, weakly but stubbornly.

"Please!" she pleaded. "You don't know these men. They'll stop at nothing. They're desperate. And they're—beasts! They'll do anything. The little man is drunk, now, too. And with that gun around! But if you'll sign that slip——"

He sat upright now, supporting himself on the floor, but he held to the soft hand that had been about his shoulders. "I'll never sign that!" he said a

little thickly, with another determined shake of the head. The first negation had been more instinct than reason, but with his gathering strength and the full return of his senses she saw that he realized what he was saying now.

"You must!" she insisted, a little desperately. "They mean to break your spirit to get that money. They're capable of anything—anything! They're coming back now," she whispered, as a thump sounded outside the door. "Laurence—Mr. Coulter—the money doesn't mean anything to dad and me—— It doesn't, really! Let them have it. Oh, you mustn't let them—hurt you again! Here, they're coming now. I'll get you some water and——"

Kreybing, entering at that moment, halted the girl on her way to the kitchen.

"I'm just going for a glass of water," she said.

"I'll attend to any refreshments," he returned, sending her back. "But the idea is good. A nice, cool, stiff drink will do him good. And he can have one—if he wants it badly enough." He called Al Patterson from the doorway. "Go back in the kitchen and see what you can find for a nice cool drink. Some liquor, soda, lemon, plenty of ice. And four glasses," he ordered.

"Four?" asked Patterson. "Only three of us."

"Mr. Coulter needs one worse than any of us," purred Kreybing.

Patterson returned with a tray bearing a soda bottle, several lemons, a dish of cracked ice, glasses and a nearly filled bottle of gin. Kreybing placed the tray on the table directly under the eyes of Coulter, who was now slumped in a chair, and mixed the drinks.

THE captive's eyes hungrily watched all this. As the tinkle of the ice sounded in the glasses, he moistened his parched lips with his tongue in spite of himself.

The huge man passed glasses to Matt Horgen and Parr. "Take that poker, Parr, and put the end of it in those live coals," he commanded. "Another log, too." He tinkled the ice in his long glass, mopped the perspiration from his forehead and tantalizingly sipped his drink.

Coulter watched him for a moment, swallowed two or three times, moistened his lips and then turned his hot eyes away. With his returning strength and the consequent increasing acuteness of his senses, this was positive agony.

Kreybing plopped another piece of ice into the extra drink and tinkled it about with a spoon. He glanced speculatively from the girl to Coulter, then moved the glass toward the thirsty man. Coulter stretched out a hand eagerly.

Kreybing stopped the glass just out of reach. Then he took the deposit slip from his pocket, placed his fountain pen before the captive and laid the slip beside it. He tinkled the ice again as little Parr stirred the fire once more and examined the end of the poker.

The sweat poured from Coulter's forehead in rivulets and his teeth, showing between gaping lips, gleamed in the flickering firelight like polished ivory in a face of pale parchment.

"There's a choice," said Kreybing musingly, as he tinkled the ice in the glass, "between this cool concoction—and as many more as you like out there in the cool of the veranda—and those." He waved a hand at the dangling nooses. "And something else goes with the nooses this time. A little brand, in a conspicuous place as, let us say, the forehead—as a permanent reminder of your stubbornness—"

"You wouldn't dare!" gasped Lola.

"How is that poker, Parr?" purred the huge man.

Little Parr removed the iron from the white embers and waved the yellow point about in crazy circles with a drunken grin.

The girl started forward, but Al Patterson roughly restrained her.

Kreybing pushed the deposit slip closer to the victim. "Have a drink, Mr. Coulter?" he asked politely.

Coulter hungrily eyed the tall, frosted glass and unconsciously licked his lips. Lola Demorest's eyes pleaded with him. The huge man extended the glass a trifle, nodded toward the bit of paper.

"Have a drink?" he repeated affably.

Laurence reached out a hand and swept the paper from the table. "Not thirsty," he croaked, between set teeth.

Kreybing rose and motioned grimly to Matt Horgen and Parr. Horgen jerked the captive roughly to his feet, which were bound. Parr examined the glowing poker point with drunken levity and gave it a final thrust into the live embers.

"Mr. Coulter!" the girl cried, "Laurence— Oh, *please*—"

Kreybing grabbed the victim's free hand. As he and Horgen dragged Coulter beneath the dangling nooses, little Parr withdrew the poker from the fire and teetered up to the trio. Horgen, already mounted on the chair, jerked the captive's wrist upward to one of the nooses and then suddenly stopped.

A thumping on the veranda and then a scraping of feet sounded outside. Kreybing dropped the wrist he held and started a move toward his gun, when a voice halted him.

"Keep reaching," snapped a man at the open doorway in a sharp voice, "till I frisk you!"

He stepped into the room, an active, businesslike-looking man with a drawn revolver. Patterson made a sudden dash for a window, but a bullet, singing past his ear and spattering against the window sash, halted him.

The newcomer took Kreybing's gun, searched Horgen, Patterson and Parr and herded them to a corner of the room. Lola Demorest was at Coulter's

side immediately, cutting the rope about his legs and pressing the iced drink on the table to his lips and then, suddenly remembering Martha Lou, she went upstairs.

Two more men entered, one with a drawn gun and the alert air of the first, the other with a cigarette dangling carelessly from his lips and a hint of amusement lurking in his wise eyes. Coulter drained the glass with a grateful sigh and, glancing up, noticed the last comer.

"Hello, Paddock!" he called with a grin. "Warm night, isn't it?"

CHAPTER XI.

A PACKAGE OF DYNAMITE.

QUICKLY Paddock Riley glanced from the leaping fire to the heated poker, its point still glowing on the hearth bricks, and mopped his lean face. "Is it warm?" he remarked. "Why, it's got a blast furnace in St. Louis in July feelin' like a New Year's night Eskimo party! Why all the temperature, kid, on an August night in October?"

"It was Mr. Kreybing's idea," said Laurence.

"He always did like 'hot parties,'" commented Riley, "but it kinda looks like this one might end up a little too hot even for 'Gorgeous Gus.' Whew! The porch for mine. And by the looks of you, I guess you better play the wide-open spaces a while, too."

Big Gus Kreybing and his three companions were also out on the veranda a moment later, sullenly moving with two guns at their backs. The huge man's urbanity was gone and the pur had vanished from his rumbling bass.

"Who are you eggs?" he demanded brusquely.

One of the men flashed a badge in the moonlight.

"Dicks, eh?" growled Kreybing. "Well, what do ya want?"

"Most of all," replied the shorter of the detectives, a man named Zeimer,

"we want 'Three Fingered Al,' here." He reached into a pocket and a pair of handcuffs appeared. "Hold 'em out, Patterson. You're under arrest."

"Me!" blustered Patterson. "What for?"

The detective dexterously clicked a steel bracelet about each wrist. "For the killing of Andy Dirks," he replied, producing a paper. "And I've got to tell you that anything you say may be used against you."

"You're all hopped, fellah!" bluffed Patterson. "That exercise boy of Carter Demorest croaked Andy Dirks. Why, you've even got him in the coop for it now."

"He'll be released to-day," Zeimer replied.

"Why, he was found right in that room. Where do ya get this stuff?" demanded Patterson, holding up his shackled wrists.

"From finger prints," answered Zeimer.

"Where?"

"On a black tin box in a trunk in Andy Dirks' room. The owner was looking for something Andy had, it seems. And he left only a thumb and *three* finger marks. And the marks are yours, Patterson. The forefinger print was missing."

Patterson's show of assurance vanished, but he attempted a confident smile. "That all you got on me?" he demanded.

Zeimer shook his head. "We've got a witness now, too, who saw something. Do you know a man named Croy?"

"No," lied Patterson.

"Well, you ought to," said Zeimer dryly. "He gets out a racing form and you've got information from him often enough. He knows you like a brother. Well, he had the room opposite Andy Dirks at the Winton. And he left his room to check out about ten minutes before Dirks was killed, figuring the time by Dirks' broken watch on the

floor that stopped. We checked Croy's leaving down at the desk. And when he was leaving his room he saw you go into Dirks' room. We located him at Churchill Downs."

"He lies!" blustered Patterson.

"But the finger prints don't!" said Zeimer. "If yours don't mate up with the ones we got, I'll resign my job tomorrow. We got it on you, Patterson. Better come clean. Might be able to make it a little easier if you do. Care to say anything?"

PATTERSON slumped into a chair, all his bluff vanished. "Guess you got me," he said gruffly. "Yes, I did it. But it was self-defense. And he had it coming, the crook. Big Gus and Dirks and me was in together on that Joraleen deal over at Latonia. We got Dirks to place the money in the pari mutuels while we was busy on—something else. Gus and me was outside the park before the race and couldn't lay the bets ourself. We were gonna give Dirks a little cut of our dough, besides what he bets himself for placing it and keeping his trap tight.

"It's fixed for him to leave the satchel with the dough in one of them boxes that you lock yourself in the D. & P. station. We ain't taking any chances on checking a bag like that the reg'lar way. And we have him leave it there because he's got to be at Jake Bloom's place before going to the Winton and we ain't taking any chance with a bag of that kinda dough in Bloom's, either, with the kinda eggs you find back there. Then we're all gonna meet at the D. & P. station for the bag, take a train to Louisville for the fall meeting at Churchill Downs and cut this dough in Louisville."

"But you didn't meet at the D. & P.," said Zeimer.

"No," returned Patterson, with a scowl. "I just take a sudden notion I'll run over to the Winton and see

Dirks before he leaves for the station and go over with him. So I phone Big Gus and he says he'll drop over, too. And when I get up to Dirks' room, the catch is back on the door and I just walk right in. And when I get in I see something." The man's scowl deepened with the remembrance.

"I see he's all packed up to leave us. Even got a suit case in his hand. Trunk all marked and locked ready to follow after him. Well, even that could of been all right. Early start before meeting us. But on the table I see a railroad ticket. And that ticket ain't for Louisville. It's for some place in Canada."

Zeimer's eyes smiled knowingly. "Double cross," he murmured.

"Double cross is right!" said Patterson, with an oath. "He must of got a sudden little notion that what's in that box at the D. & P. station is pretty big dough and it would stay bigger if it ain't cut three ways. Maybe just lookin' at the crooked eggs in Jake Bloom's in Opera Place gives him that notion," Patterson went on virtuously. "And so I guess he goes right off, before beating it back to the Winton, and gets his ticket at the downtown office near by. But, anyway, there he is."

"And what happened?" asked Zeimer's partner.

"Well, I'm hot right off. I describe him in grammer that must of burned through his hide. I tell him he doesn't even get his cut now and in a minute there's a battle. I went for him right away. We battle across the room. He gets away from me, runs around the table, stops at the desk and when I'm on top of him again, he's got a rod in his hand. We're on the floor in a minute, over near the door to the next room, and he's reaching for his vest pocket with one hand and hanging on to the gat with the other. Then the gat goes off and—and there's Andy Dirks laying dead—up against the door.

"I'm ready to beat it right off, at first," continued Patterson, after a pause. "But I want that little key to the box at the D. & P. And when I remember that even I didn't hear that gun go off so awful loud, I remember that they're blasting somewhere near by and the shot must of been fired during a blast. Prob'ly nobody else heard that shot. So I take time to hunt for the key. It ain't on him. I take his other keys and unlock his trunk and his suit cases and go through 'em. But I don't locate it. I go through his pockets and I don't find it there. And then I beat it."

"And a little after that," said Zeimer, "Kreybing comes along. And after that this exercise boy, Davey Rainer, follows Kreybing. But Rainer saw Kreybing go in the room and he never saw him come out. And he wasn't in the room when the kid entered. How come, Kreybing?"

"Didn't I furnish an alibi to the prosecuting attorney the next day, proving I wasn't in the hotel that evening at all?" demanded Big Gus.

"Sure," agreed Zeimer. "But it was a fake alibi."

"I suppose you believe what that kid says?"

Zeimer nodded. "And also what a maid on that floor says. She remembered your being on that floor that evening."

Kreybing looked thoughtful. "Do you believe," he asked curiously, "that I had anything to do with croaking Andy Dirks?"

Zeimer shook his head. "No," he replied. "But we'd like to know, for one thing, how come you're pulling some of this Thurston stuff and making yourself disappear. This Rainer kid saw you go in Andy Dirks' room. And he followed you right in—the door latch was off. And when he did follow you in, not two minutes later from down the hall, he didn't see you. You might

as well come clean, too, if you didn't help Patterson in the killing."

"I didn't," protested the huge man. "Al's giving it straight, far as I'm concerned."

"Were you in that room right after him?" demanded Zeimer.

"Yes," admitted Kreybing, after a thoughtful pause. "I went up there after Al telephoned, to go with him and Dirks to the D. & P. And when I got there, and saw—Dirks—I got out right away. I saw somebody else had been through his clothes for that key, so I didn't even wait for a frisk of the body. I know what circumstantial evidence can do. I figured I'd have a tough time clearing myself of that, if anybody saw me going in that room—especially after it was brought out that Dirks and I had been in on a money deal together. So I kept right on going."

"Where?"

A glint of humor lighted the huge man's eyes. "Right through the connecting door and out the room next to Dirks—the one on the other side from young Coulter's."

"How did that door happen to be unlocked?"

"It didn't," said Kreybing.

"Then how did you get through it?"

"I unlocked it, with a key I knew would be under a corner of the rug." The ghost of a smile crossed the huge man's scowling face. "Andy Dirks' bootlegger had that room next door until the day before that night. And he got a key for that connecting door and used to leave it with Dirks, so he and I could stop in for a bottle of our brand when he was out. And Dirks kept the key under the rug. And I knew it. That's all."

"Well, you'd better come along back to Ohio with us and give your story to the prosecuting attorney."

Zeimer and his partner prepared to go. Paddock Riley, listening from the

end of the veranda, sauntered lazily over to the group.

"How about these two eggs, Dan?" he drawled, pointing to Parr and Horgen. "Can't you get 'em a hoosegow membership for arson and destroyin' private property or somethin'? They start a fire in another guy's house and melt all the ice in a lotta good drinks and the little gent is got a playful idea of insertin' a hot poker through my friend Mr. Coulter here, when we breeze in.

"Don't that win 'em the nickel-plated bracelets and a guest card to the Ohio State Country Club, kid?" Riley went on. "And what about bustin' the Volstead law? If that little wart ain't cock-eyed right now, Carrie Nation was a dove of peace. And me kept out of a swell game o' rummy back in Louisville. Do your duty, officer."

"Matt and Parr," remarked Kreybing, "are merely out here as hired assistants on a little—er—personal business matter. They've nothing to do with the Dirks' case at all."

"That's right," said Zeimer. "I got a warrant and extradition for Three Fingered Al on a murder charge. And we want Big Gus for a while as a material witness over in Ohio." He glanced at his gun reflectively. "But if Mr. Coulter wants to prefer charges against Parr and Horgen with the local authorities, I guess it might be—well—a little hard for 'em to get away from here before some one can come out from the sheriff's office."

Laurence shook his head. "As my friend Augustus so truly says, this was a little personal business matter. And we should all prefer to keep it personal. In fact, our little private business, despite a trifle of personal discomfort, has been quite satisfactory—to me." He smiled sweetly at the huge man.

Kreybing, losing his temper completely, glared at the speaker. "You're a pretty fresh egg, Coulter," he rasped.

"But don't crow. I'll get you yet. I'll get you right *now!*" he roared, mad with rage at the turn events had taken.

SUDDENLY, before any one could act, he had rushed upon Coulter and dealt him a blow with a ponderous fist that sent him careening against the railing. It was high up, on the side of the head, and not at all stunning, but he nevertheless blinked with the pain of it.

Childs, the detective from Louisville, quickly stepped forward to interfere, but Paddock Riley motioned him back.

"Don't stop it," Riley drawled. "You'll miss something good. This kid's a package of dynamite."

Coulter, whose strength had gradually returned out on the veranda, bounded off the railing with a joyful light glinting in his eyes at this unlooked-for opportunity to battle. He ducked a wild left swing, sidestepped a ponderous right-hand lunge, slipped easily outside another swing and still another. Then, his fighting brain sensing that his antagonist was winded by these vicious efforts, he stepped in close as Kreybing again lunged forward, and hooked his right fist to the huge man's stomach.

Big Gus gave a grunt and his thick arms dropped. Coulter shot in a left hook that curled like a whiplash. Hard knuckles smacked against flesh and bone with a solid sound. As the ponderous man wobbled, crimson came from a gash that extended from the high bridge of the hook nose to the flesh under the right eye. Again the swift knuckles flashed upward.

The huge man dumbly reeled as a thin stream of red coursed down over a heavy jowl from the thick, gasping lips. Then Coulter, taking the briefest moment to set himself, crossed his right hand over like a flicker of light; the fist crashed solidly against the heavy jaw; and the big body toppled to the floor.

"What a sap to invite that guy to whack you!" growled Matt Horgen, as Kreybing finally sat up and stemmed the crimson flow with a handkerchief. "Didn't I tell ya over in Cincinnati how he cracks 'em in?"

With Horgen, Laurence helped the great hulk to his wabby feet.

"Sorry to mess you up so," Coulter murmured pleasantly. "But I'm afraid you didn't give me a very pleasant evening either, Augustus."

Dan Zeimer placed Kreybing's hat on the still-singing head, grasped the man's coat sleeve and led him down the veranda steps. The detective from Louisville took the shackled Patterson's arm and followed. As Matt Horgen and little Neely Parr completed the exodus, Laurence watched from the veranda railing and waved in farewell.

"Good-by!" he called politely. "So sorry you must rush off."

Little Parr turned and hiccuped. "Aw go to hell!" he said thickly.

But as Laurence, glancing toward the doorway, encountered the deep violet of Lola Demorest's eyes, he smiled and answered, "I was never nearer heaven in my life, Mr. Parr."

CHAPTER XII.

LARRY WORKS FAST.

THE girl musingly watched the lights of the departing autos vanish in the distant foliage and then, with a little sigh of relief, turned impulsively to Paddock Riley.

"What a perfect duck you are, Paddock!" she breathed. "You came up just in time."

"Looks that way," admitted Paddock. "Gussie is about all set to render, 'Hangin' Danny Deever in the Mawn-in', with livin' models, by the looks of the settin', ain't he?"

"Dat was sho' a mos' unfeelin' man," sputtered Martha Lou, coming out with the tray. "'Ceptin' fo' Mistah Pad-

dock comin' 'long, we all been daid. Want Ah should make mo' juleps, Miss Lola, now we is got peace an' quiet prevailin'?"

"The answer is yes," said Riley. "And I've got to have mine pronto, Martha Lou." He took out his watch.

"Oh, put it away!" ordered Lola. "That's no way for a rescuing hero to act! Anyway, you're not going back to-night."

"He can't go back to-night," remarked Laurence, "unless he can fly."

"Why can't I go back to-night?" demanded Riley, hanging a cigarette from his lips. "It ain't one o'clock yet, and I still got time to see a bird about something good in the fifth at the Downs to-morrow."

"What you don't know about a good thing in the fifth to-morrow can't hurt you," said Coulter, "and you can't go back because you haven't any lights on your fool bus."

"And Martha Lou's going to make that coffee she started before that horrible man and his friends called," the girl put in. "We'll have a bite of lunch, and you can tell us how you happened to come along just in time to keep that nasty little man with the funny cap from boring a hole through Mr. Coulter with that hot poker."

Riley settled himself comfortably in his chair and lifted his feet to the veranda railing. "Well," he drawled, "I can't fly and I never yet paid an entry to a walkin' event in my life. So I guess I stay right here. Just shows what you get, lendin' a good car to a flighty egg. Do you make her throw a couple of shoes besides laming her lamps, fellah?" he demanded. "I bet a stop watch shows you doin' that trip in nothin' flat."

"Just one tire blew, and I hit sixty for only a couple of minutes," replied Coulter. "Why don't you carry a spare and have some one besides a stable swipe look at your battery once in a

while? Here, take this drink and pipe down."

Riley drank long and deeply from the tall glass and set it on the floor with a satisfied sigh. "Wild elephants couldn't pry me from here now," said he, crossing his legs as he contemplated the tray.

THE sound of dishes from the kitchen and the aroma of brewing coffee drifted through the window.

"Hope it's chicken sandwiches Martha Lou is dopin' up," he said, with a sigh.

Coulter, sitting near Lola Demorest, turned his musing gaze from the moon-burnished river. "You unfeeling heathen," he scoffed, "thinking of chicken sandwiches and good things in the fifth on a night like this! How did you happen to be out here with those two dicks?"

"I run into 'em right after you leave me at the Colonial," replied Riley, lifting another glass from the tray. "I know this Joe Zeimer from Cincinnati. He and this Louisville bird, Childs, are on the trail of Al Patterson. Well, just before Zeimer shows up, I see Three Fingered Al with Big Gus and them other two birds follow you in a touring car. That don't look exactly jake to me. I'm thinking about all that dough you just showed me, and I know Big Gus ain't the kind of egg to let real dough like that slide through his mitts if he can help it and knows who's got it. And it kinda looks to me like that touring car of thugs ain't right behind you accidentally."

"They tried to get me before I reached here," said Coulter. "Almost ran me into the curb, passing Kentucky Street."

"So when Zeimer comes along and tips me off about Three Fingered Al, I tell him what I know and I trail right with him. After you make the Dixie Highway, you're movin' so fast Big

Gus and his gang lose you for a little while. Then later they spot my roadster at a garage."

"That's where I blew that tire."

"So when they wait, out of sight, behind you, we're waitin', out of sight, behind them. We want to see what their play is with you. But we lose the road after we leave the Dixie Highway, and by the time we get on it again, they must of beat us up here by pretty much."

"Well, you did get up here just in time, at that," said Coulter soberly. "I sure owe you something for this, old man."

"Just in time!" the girl repeated softly, her glance melting into Coulter's as their eyes met.

Riley lifted a sandwich from the plate Martha Lou brought out and nodded. "We just nipped Big Gus and his playful little pals at the wire by a nod, I guess," he drawled. "Looked like that little wart with the skinful—Parr—was all set to sign his name on you with that poker, kid."

"The awful little beast!" The girl shuddered.

After that, silence fell upon the trio for several minutes. A night bird, in an old elm down near the bend of the river, broke the stillness with a clear, liquid note of song. Another answered from the cluster of birches nearer to the rambling house. Paddock Riley stirred a little restlessly and lifted another sandwich from the still-heaped plate. As he took a huge bite, he turned toward the two heads so close together in the single dark spot of the moonlit veranda and grinned.

"That egg, Larry," he reflected, "never did waste no time decidin' what he really wants."

COULTER and Riley returned to Louisville the next morning, but were back two days later; Riley agreeing to stay over the week-end, Coulter

determined to remain as long as possible. They arrived in the late afternoon, just before dinner, and Carter Demorest, who had received a wire from his daughter, was there to welcome them.

He welcomed Coulter, the cause of all the recent excitement there, with some curiosity and a hint of humor, as well as with his usual old-fashioned courtesy.

"I am afraid, Mr. Coulter," Demorest said gravely, in almost the exact words of Big Gus Kreybing, "that you are a most impetuous as well as daring and determined young man, from what I hear."

His daughter had told him of the young man's determination in her recital of the exciting evening's occurrences; but it was Martha Lou, who, though she liked Coulter, did not approve of undue haste in such matters, who had, in private, mentioned the young man's ardor.

"Sho' is a unhesitatin' young man, Mistah Demorest," she had confided. "Done kep' buzzin' 'roun' Miss Lola lak a bee in a honeysuckle, an' he don' min' who knows it. An' he ain't no mo' dan jus' meet up wid her!"

But Laurence defended himself at once. "I am a careful, hard-working—I mean steady-going—cautious chap, on the contrary," he protested, "as Paddock Riley will tell you, sir, in one of his truthful moments."

Riley, however, left the statement unsupported. "He's one crazy egg," Paddock drawled, "as flighty as an unschooled two year old. But Big Gus Kreybing will never forget him. He sure made Gussie's little coup on that pup Redolent look like a ticket on a selling plater in a stake race. And you can be glad he mixed in there, Mr. Demorest. A bundle of forty-two grand is awful pretty lucre."

Demorest, it seemed, was hesitant about accepting that money. Larry

Coulter brought up the subject during dinner and persisted in it after dinner out on the veranda, but the older man, thanking him, thoughtfully shook his head.

"I don't know," said he, "that I'm really entitled to it. As Paddock says, it's gamblers' money and it should go with the fortunes of gambling. I wagered and I lost."

"You don't think Kreybing and Patterson and Dirks were ever entitled to the money, do you?" Laurence asked.

"No, I don't," conceded the other. "They stole the race and so, of course, they really stole the money. It was never honestly theirs."

"Well, who did they steal it from?" demanded Laurence.

"Well, they copped six hundred of it from me," replied Riley. "If a ticket on Joraleen in that field of skates oughtn't to of been as safe as pay day at the U. S. Mint, then Earl Sande is an exercise boy. But I got mine. You two'll have to battle it out between you."

"If Kreybing and his gang don't own it, by right of possession or any other right you can think of, who, should you say, does?" persisted Laurence.

"Well, you've got it, son," replied Carter Demorest, with a quizzical smile. "And, as they say, possession, especially with gamblers' money, is nine points of the law. And rather than give it up to men who really stole it, by dishonesty, in the first place and who possibly injured a fine thoroughbred, drugged an innocent boy, killed a man and tried to torture you, in the second place—why, I reckon you'd just better keep it yourself!"

THERE the matter rested a while. But some hours later Paddock Riley pointed out to Carter Demorest the futility of resting the case on any such unsatisfactory decision. It was after midnight and Riley, despite the beauty

of the night, had about decided to turn in. The two men had been smoking alone on the veranda. Riley rose, glanced carelessly about and checked his inward progress at something that he saw.

He stepped back on the veranda, blew a smoke cloud up toward the stars and glanced soberly at the older man.

"About that money," he drawled. "No use battlin' about it any more, Mr. Demorest."

"Of course not!" agreed Carter Demorest. "It's all settled."

Riley nodded. "But not the way you think. Larry wins, I guess. You could hardly turn down a nice lotta dough that's yours by rights if it's slipped to you by your own daughter—or your son-in-law, now, could you?"

"Son-in-law!" Demorest exclaimed.

"Nothin' else," replied Riley. "And you might as well get used to the idea, sir. Look down there by the river bend."

Carter Demorest looked. And he saw, rising above a patch of shrubbery, full in the moonlight, two figures, sitting silent, motionless, gazing at the broad sweep of silvery water. And the head of the one, with hair that was like goldenrod, was pillowed on the shoulder of the other.

"Why, this is only the second time the young scamp has seen her!" exclaimed the older man.

Paddock Riley nodded. "'Wait' don't mean a thing in his young life when he's after something real hard. His uncle turned him out without any prospects a-tall. And inside a month he's got over fifty thousand berries in his mitts. But I warned you about him, sir. If he's got this far now, you'll have a son-in-law before you ship your string down to Noo Awlins."

Carter Demorest scratched his chin reflectively. "Well," said he, at last, "I reckon it must be all right. Lola always knew exactly what she wanted."

Speaking of Florida real estate, the long, complete story in the next issue of THE POPULAR is "Where the Big Money Is," a yarn of the days when the boom was at its peak. Elmer Davis wrote it, after spending some time on the ground, and you'll find it full of "inside stuff," action, and adventure. It will be published in the July 20th number.



THE MAN EAST OF SUEZ

WE who live in the aridity of the Volstead Act may find a deep and abiding consolation for our indirect methods of slaking our August throats in the conduct, in matters vinal, of the children of Mohammed, Arabia's flying prophet. Those who read their Korans find "The first drop of wine shall be your undoing." In consequence of which explicit injunction, your loyal Mohammedan, having filled his goblet with wine, dips his forefinger in the red depths of the liquid, slowly pulls it out, taking care lest he spill back the drop suspended on his finger tip, and then casts it off—all the while saying his prayers. The first and forbidden drop being removed, he drinks the satisfying remainder with impunity from divine wrath. And, what is more, the Koran forbids wine only—hence the Oriental, who is a casuist and reasons with feather-fine distinction, drinks his fill of vodka, rum and brandy.



Spreadeagle and the Black Art

By Captain Ralph R. Guthrie

Author of "Talking Savage to Langa," "'Coomin' Oop!" Etc.

Far from the busy marts of civilized society, deep in jungles which measure the age of the world, small bands of white men carry on the burden of government. It is so with the United States troops set down in the tropics of Mindanao. But there are times when the primitive mind of the Filipino needs governance of a different kind. And then it is that Private Henry Spreadeagle finds a fitting use for the lore of his forefathers, the Apache Indians who died fighting in the deserts of our West under their leader Geronimo.

THESE were days when peace reigned provisionally in Mindanao, the proviso being that nothing, *nothing*, occurred anywhere in its thirty-six thousand square miles of territory to disturb a volatile and unstable status quo.

Peace, with a string to it, bears discreet watching; so the army held its breath and overlooked much.

From the tops of white-painted poles, in more than one temporary cantonment, the starry banner flapped languidly, unchallenged by the unwashed multitude of heathen Moros who came and went—indeed, were born, married and given in marriage, but seldom or

never died—under its beneficent domination. It was an imperialistic flag, too, if you can believe the old soldier who lived a hard life, not devoid of romance and color, however, trying to keep it aloft so that the tragedies of past days might not have been in vain.

Tagoloan, then, was commanded by Brigadier General "Thunderhead" O'Malley, known to two infantry regiments and a squadron of cavalry as "The Old Man," and to his Uncle Sammy, halfway around the world, as "a safe officer to intrust with native policies." Just as kind internally as he was hard boiled on the surface, was old Thunderhead O'Malley. The gov-

ernor-general had no qualms at all in regard to him, because he understood savages good and well, since border days, and would be the last man on earth to scrape them on the raw. In Mindanao "the raw" always is hooked up with the religious nerve centers.

It was one of the army's policies to guarantee every man jack of our new-caught people a full and complete ration of his favorite religion, even to the point of ignoring the widespread institution of polygamy, a practice which, it was believed, brought its own retribution.

These things called "insular policies," Thunderhead knew and respected, though he was comparatively a stranger to Mindanao. No inspector general ever would catch him getting all mixed up with local religious beliefs and bringing on holy wars. It was too easy to keep hands off those matters, or at least so the general thought.

Figure out Thunderhead then, as an angular, desert-blown personage with a squeal in his voice, and a tendency to pull at a long, sunburned nose when agitated. Picture Tagoloan as a fetid, tropical barrio squashed between the jungle walls and Panguil Bay. Place the scene some distance from the U. S. A., and let your common sense credit The Old Man with all the despotic authority of a Persian satrap in the days of Darius.

There is now only one thing lacking before you can get the atmosphere in its entirety. It is this: His kingdom had its limits.

As far as the outermost sentry post, he was supreme. Beyond that point, neither the general nor that most puissant nation which paid him his salary and stood willing to back his judgment with twenty thousand rifles, and, if need be, by a hundred ships of war, were what you might call well and favorably known.

If he made inspection trips to the in-

terior, as he did every so often, his empire went along, opening up within battle-sight range of his advance detachment, and closing in behind the rear guard, with that passive contempt for disturbing innovations peculiar to the Orient.

Jangling sabers, reeking horseflesh, silken guidons topped by golden eagles, all the pomp and panoply of a commanding officer's entourage, meant nothing to the sleeping crocodile in his bayou or the fruit bat hanging like a soiled dishrag from his tree. The native looked enviously at the Springfields, promised himself that he would steal one at the first opportunity and relapsed into his habitual indifference. Only a monkey occasionally screamed after them, because he is of philosophical bent and the spectacle appealed to his risibilities. Such were the substitutes for glory in the days of the American empire!

Old Thunderhead was guilty of a little indiscretion on one of these trips out of his domain, though it was nothing worth mentioning at the time. He loved children. There were two particularly handsome ones at Popo Melangao, and he halted his horse long enough to swing them clear of the ground and plant a hasty kiss on their brows, heedless of the murmur which at once arose from the native spectators.

A WEEK or two later, he was sitting at his desk in Tagoloan when a guard entered.

"Sir," said the orderly, "Sergeant Hennessey is outside and wants to speak to the general."

"Bring him in."

Sergeant Hennessey, an old-timer, paused momentarily to salute, and then approached his superior's desk with the respectful familiarity of the old soldier favorite.

"What's threatening now?" de-

manded Thunderhead, clawing at his nose. "Army headed for the dogs?"

"No-o-o!" admitted Hennessey. "She ain't, just yet. But I've heard something that sounds like Moro trouble."

"Tax resistance?"

"No! Kids!"

"Eh?"

"Kids—Datto Tib's. A goo-goo from the hills told me just now. Does the general recollect having kissed a couple of children belonging to Datto Tib?"

"I kissed two very pretty children—a boy and a girl—one day last week over in Popo Melangao. Didn't care whose they were—big brown eyes, clean and intelligent. Made me think of my own, I guess. Who objects?"

"Rattabara, Tib's high priest, objects. They're Mohammedans gone nutty, the whole mess of 'em."

"Fanatics?"

"Yes, sir, that's it! Rattabara says your kiss put a curse on Tib's kids. Infidels can't touch his people, and especially can't kiss 'em. It's pollution. The unlucky devil who happens to so much as shake hands with a Christian has to be skinned alive to get him back on the preferred list for paradise."

The old general slumped down in his chair, and his sun-baked countenance seemed to contract like a dental patient's when the drill touches a nerve.

"When is this thing going to happen—this skinning of Tib's children?" he murmured, almost in a whisper. "Soon?"

"In about three weeks. Ordinarily it happens right away, but Rattabara, for some reason, wants to make a case of it before his people, so he has put it off until they are all excited by the Fast of Ramadan. That's why I said it sounds like trouble."

"Hell!"

"You see," went on Hennessey coolly, "these fanatics are peculiar.

They think it is us who are infidels, and if you ask one of 'em, he'll tell you so to your face. On the other side of the mountains, Popo Melangao is a holy spot, like Rome, for instance. Tib is political boss and Rattabara is hadji, prophet and holy Joe, all rolled into one. He's a sort of heathen pope. Funny, ain't it?"

Not so terribly funny to the man who lived inside the general's uniform. He understood the situation only too well from the sergeant's rough outline.

Had he not brought the thing about himself, he would have known what to do—a sudden descent on the Moro barrio, a few shots, the rescue of the children, and their departure by boat the next day for a convent in Manila. All very easy, had the motive been furnished by another man in the outfit. But—such are the responsibilities of high command—the States would never forgive *him* for jeopardizing lives in expiating a personal blunder. Never!

He lifted a haggard pair of blue eyes to Hennessey's, and asked a question, the answer to which he feared worse than the crack of doom.

"Sergeant! Can we do anything?"

"No," replied Hennessey, without a moment's hesitation. "Not unless the general wants to bring on a holy war. I've been down here four years and my advice would be to try to forget. It happens often up there that children get skinned alive on account of being contaminated by Christian touch."

"That's all, Hennessey. Wait a minute, though! As you go out, tell the chief of staff to come in here. He may have an idea."

Colonel Runyan, however, inclined to the raiding-party idea, and that, of course, had to go by the boards.

"But there must be some *other way*," protested Thunderhead. "Damn it! Think! For every plan, there should be a workable alternative. What's the alternative?"

Runyan scratched his ear and tried hard. "I'll tell you!" he exclaimed suddenly. "The quartermaster still has that bullet-proof vest somebody sent out here from the States. If this man Rattabara wants to stir up a holy war, and is skinning Tib's children to bring the datto in, on a grudge, as I suspect, he probably would be open for a deal. There's nothing these fanatical leaders desire more than a bullet-proof shirt, and the priest who shows up with one is a made man with the whole island. He might—I say he *might*—decide that it would be better politics to have the vest than to kill the kids. I imagine Tib himself would be willing to take up arms against us in a minute, if he thought we couldn't clean up on his warriors; whereas — well — children don't mean much, compared with religion, in Mindanao!"

"There again, I contribute to bringing on an insurrection," objected the general glumly. "Can't you think of anything better, colonel?"

"Better? Why the plan will work, general!" assured the other, warming up his enthusiasm as new ideas came to mind. "We'll get the Tib clan in here for a demonstration under the pretext of being neighborly. Then we'll offer Rattabara the vest, if he will remove his taboo against the children and state publicly that they are purged of the pollution. The loss of one vest like this won't hurt anybody."

"Well, we can try," acquiesced Thunderhead, at last. "How does this vest work?"

"Thin plates of finely tempered steel, under leather. The principle is to distribute the shock. They'll make one that's effective some day, but this one will only stop a bullet at close range, before it begins to spin on account of the riflings. A very slow, heavy bullet; a knife or a bayonet probably would go through easily enough. It's no bargain, as it is, but the idea is sound."

The following morning an amigo was sent to Popo Melangao with friendly greetings from the general and an invitation to the chief and his religious right bower to witness a "try-out" of a new and mysterious garment that, it was believed, would make its wearer invulnerable.

The messenger reported that news of the vest fell on the Moro camp like a bombshell. Tib hurriedly summoned Rattabara, and the two held a long conference. Finally Tib sent word that he would appear in Tagoloan with his retinue on the morning of the day after the next.

It was the opinion of the messenger that the idea of American invulnerability was not to the liking of the people of Popo Melangao. Tib, he said, appeared to be still in complete harmony with his priest, despite Rattabara's awful ruling in regard to the datto's children. This was to be expected on account of Moro fatalism, but it killed a sneaking hope in the heart of old Thunderhead that a rift might be developing between the civil and religious leaders of the hill people.

THE test took place, as scheduled, on the parade ground, about an hour before noon. The datto, dressed in silken, skin-tight pantaloons and a red-and-yellow jacket, turned out to be a little fellow, with a keen, beardless face on which character lines denoting deceit and moral cowardice were the most evident. A rather poor type of nabob, one would judge.

Rattabara, similarly garbed, but wearing the white turban of the pilgrim, was a study in savage arrogance and truculent fanaticism. He was rather tall for a Moro, thin to emaciation, and pop-eyed from goiter. The rest of the delegation were of the dirty, smelly mountain type that several years before had wrought such havoc among the invading troops. In five minutes,

the ground about where they stood was dyed red with their betel-nut chewing.

Careful, this time, not to touch any of those present, the general and his chief of staff welcomed them all to Tagoloan. A few minutes later, the ceremonies started. An enlisted man stepped into the center of the circle of spectators, wearing a heavy leather vest over his O. D. shirt. With a cavalryman's natural love for the spectacular, he bowed to his audience, lighted a cigarette and stood with hands on hips, waiting for the curtain raiser.

Next there sauntered out onto the field an ungainly sergeant, carrying an armful of revolvers of various calibers. He laid these down, selected one, examined the loadings, and then suddenly straightened his arm and fired with the muzzle not more than ten inches away from the cavalryman's stomach. Every Moro present, excepting the dignified datto and his priest, thought he felt the impact and involuntarily clapped a nervous hand to his stomach and winced. The human target looked up, blew a smoke ring and grinned.

After a dozen or more shots had been fired, the vest was taken off and passed among the visitors for their inspection. Tib took it first, glanced at it casually, and turned it over to Rattabara. The priest seized it in his bony fingers, examined the flattened bullets with avid interest, and exclaimed:

"Gookee! Magic!" He tossed it, caught it, turned it over and over. "Gookee! Gookee!" It seemed as if he was loath to relinquish it to the warriors who were crowding about in their eagerness to see the wonderful garment.

"Holy mackerel!" thought Sergeant Hennessey, who was standing near, taking it all in. "What that old sinner wouldn't give to get his hooks on it! The general had better sleep with it under his pillow, this night!"

The Moros were invited to stay over

until the following morning, when the great Americano general promised them an interview of importance, including a further discussion of the magic garment. Everything was all fixed to let Rattabara "sleep" on his desire for the vest.

Old Thunderhead was elated at the prospect, and consented to drink a light milk punch with the chief of staff. Before they turned in at their respective quarters that night, they had had at least six hearty laughs at the expense of their heathen guests.

NEXT morning came the blow. The officer of the day reported that Rattabara and "the impregnable shimmy," as the doughboys called it, seemed to have left town in each other's company during the night. Twenty Springfields also had been stolen and the lock of the ordnance warehouse was found to have been broken.

The chief of staff listened with his mouth wide open.

"I suppose we might as well forgo the hope that we will ever see any of the equipment again," said the officer of the day. "The Springfields are very much to be regretted, but the bullet-proof vest, of course, is not regulation, and means nothing."

Here he stopped, for Thunderhead's high-pitched voice filled the room with a song of wrath and disgust.

"Holy Jehoshaphat, jumping Judas and suffering cats!" quoth the general, and collapsed into a chair. "I knew the thing would fail from the start. Now get out of here, both of you. Send somebody in who can think like these people do. Send an orderly after Private Henry Spreadeagle. Get him up here at once. The next time I want to aggravate a blunder, Runyan, I'll send for you."

As the two officers made their exit, with such dignity as they might, The Old Man's vituperations sounded like a

jackass battery putting down a barrage on a stack of tin pans.

It was to be regretted, perhaps, that nobody had thought, up to this moment, of introducing into the narrative the main character in two thirds of it—the same being Private Henry Spreadeagle, full-blooded Apache Indian, and reputed relative of old Chief Geronimo. There was a good reason for this omission, however. Spreadeagle's person was not available, being safely lodged in the guardhouse under a charge of drunkenness and insubordination.

Once before, when he had been hard put to it to arrange a diplomatic understanding in that country, the general had tricked Spreadeagle out in his native nakedness, and sent him through hostile territory to talk "savage" to a belligerent chief. The Indian had been eminently successful, establishing a reputation for scoutcraft and wily bargaining that bade fair to last as long as the occupation.

WHEN Spreadeagle came, his eyes were shining, but there were no other signs that his shattered nerves were getting back into shape. He was a magnificent physical specimen of the Apache type, whom booze and dissipation were doing their level best to ruin.

"My boy," said the general, in his high nasal tones, "I want you to listen carefully. I knew Chief Geronimo. He was a big chief. He could do what I want done to-day, but he is dead. Poke weed grows about his grave house. There is no more Geronimo."

The general paused, looking into the sour face of his vis-à-vis.

Spreadeagle tapped his chest and spoke.

"Me just as good!" he proclaimed proudly. "Geronimo dead. What so? What Geronimo do, I do."

"This is a big job," deplored his superior, unheeding. "You see me with my heart troubled, because there are no

more men like Geronimo. I have a task not a living man in the world can do. I must send some one to Popo Melangao, though I know there are those there who will make a monkey of him. You must go! You must try in your poor way to make medicine with hill people. When you fail, I shall send another."

"Spreadeagle make big medicine!" snapped the Indian.

Then the general, careful not to inject instructions as to ways and means, outlined what was bothering him. He wanted the children "uncursed." He did not care about the recovery of the vest, but he thought knowledge of its theft by Rattabara might help in coming to a compromise. There must be no cause for war between the Moro and the whites. That was all.

"Go!" commanded the general, and Spreadeagle stalked out.

"I don't think much of sending that Indian on a mission that's too complicated for the staff to figure out," commented Colonel Runyan, later, when Thunderhead in an amicable moment told him what he had done.

"You and I failed, didn't we?" reminded the general, with a frosty smile. "This boy will put it over."

"I doubt it very much. The intrigue is too complicated and an Indian hasn't enough brains. All he's got is a low animal cunning."

"Ever fight Indians?"

"No-o-o-o!"

"I have, and I've made treaties with them, too. I've been licked by half my own numbers, and I've gone into the council tent with an illiterate chief, and a prisoner at that, and almost lost my shirt trying to maintain my prestige as a victor. That's how stupid Mr. Lo is, take it from me."

"This one's a drunk," declared the colonel lugubrously.

"We'll see," said the general.

Meanwhile, Private Spreadeagle had

returned to his barracks. From his trunk locker, he disgorged a purple breechclout, a feathered headdress, made here in the islands since his last adventure in scouting, and the bow and arrows of his famous kinsman. The bow and arrows were the gift of the general on account of a particularly fine piece of scout work in the Lintagoup expedition.

Beaded moccasins, a bear-claw necklace, which had been his very own since a youth, completed his equipment, most of which went into a canvas bag, so that he could sneak out of town without running a gantlet of gibes from his comrades. Spred eagle despised men who laughed at nakedness. It sounded as though they hadn't been brought up right. Thunderhead was a man more after his own heart. He believed the general would eat dog.

In the shade of a cane patch, he sat down and carefully attired himself. When he left, he was outwardly and inwardly the counterpart of his forbears, a lithe and soft-footed savage whom it would not be well to alienate or trust too far, even in friendship.

For a moment or two he stood with his back to the cane brake, blending his tawny form into this background, instinctively knowing he could not be seen from the village. He was like one of those wild animals which have protective coloration and seem always to be able to judge the limitations of an enemy's vision. At last he raised his arm full length, in an invisible salute to old Thunderhead and, with this bit of sentiment disposed of, glided back among the weaving stalks into the silence and oblivion of the jungle.

THE barrio of Popo Melangao steamed in the hot sun. It was miasmatic, malarial and mosquito infested. The streets were irregular in width, but mainly narrow, and lined with squat, thatched huts set on pegs

and approached by means of short ladders, cluttered at every rung with banana clusters and trout from the adjacent lake.

One would think a town like this would be a place of discord, filled with strange noises; but Popo Melangao was of the silent kind. One did not hear a great deal of laughter there, nor crying, nor clamorous talk. The people were healthy in body, being self-inoculated against climate and all the local germs, but restricted in spirit because fanaticism, like fungi, grows best where there is stagnation and unhealthy decay.

If you were looking for another place to put Popo Melangao, in the civilized world, you would have to drop it to the bottom of a well. Yet the main street had been known as an *avenida* since Spanish days, and the natives alluded to it in their own tongue as the "way of the thousand graces." They weren't trying to be sarcastic either. They meant it.

Rattabara lived at one end of the *avenida*, and Datto Tib at the other. Of the two, the high priest was the more powerful, had much of this world's goods and the largest harem anywhere around. When he was young, he had delighted as much as any warrior in the number of his kill and the size of the fish he could bring in on the end of his spear. His nickname then was "The Happy One."

As his harem increased, and life became complicated with women, children and goats, the term they surreptitiously applied to him was that of "Rattabara, the Sour."

It was about the time he annexed his twenty-eighth spouse that he began preaching a holy war, and left not a single Christian nation out.

Tib was good-natured, deeply and earnestly religious and a lover of compromise. He believed all the hokum Rattabara proclaimed as creed, but when it came to leading his five or six

hundred followers into action versus American rifles, he hesitated. His soul, no doubt, had been saved through love for his favorite children, Nola and Mundo.

These were now outcasts in the village, declared contaminated and without the pale by his own manifesto, given out at the instance of his spiritual adviser. No one dared to feed or shelter them, lest they in turn become polluted.

On the whole they did not fare badly. There is a superabundance of edibles in Moroland, and they could and did sleep snugly in an abandoned shack near the edge of the town. It was the sensitive natures of the children that received the full shock of their position and made them shrink from sight like homeless, lost dogs, and scurry away at the warning shout "Unclean!" which former playmates hurled after them at sight.

For this persecution they had the doubtful consolation of knowing that at the Fast of Ramadan they would be stretched upon the ground, and their poor little skins drawn off by long-handled pincers. Then would come another life, which they hated, because it was presided over by forces which they felt could not be very friendly to them.

"It is written!" mimicked Mundo contemptuously, and spat on the ground. "If they let me live to be a man, I shall go out of my way to kill Rattabara and burn his holy places. Then I shall say, 'It is written!' Tukee! I would pray to a devil if I thought he could save my life."

At such outbursts, Nola dug her fists into her eyes and choked back the sobs. She was afraid of her brother when he was defiant like this.

ONE day the boy proposed that they flee from their coming punishment, and cross over the mountains to the American camp to see the kind old sultan in the smart brown clothing,

whose word seemed to be law in Tagoloan. Surely he could help them with such numbers of warriors at his command. It was worth trying, at any rate.

They started a little after sunup, and by late afternoon were only at the foothills.

According to the army maps, it is twenty-three miles by trail from Popo Melangao to Tagoloan. The children, knowing the general direction, struck out with confidence, but noon found them hot and depressed, and as the sun slid down its course, the feeling grew, even in Mundo's stout little heart, that there was but a small chance of their ever finding a pass, even if they got so far as the mountains. Roads there were none, but once in a while they came across a carabao path. The most promising of these Mundo examined with interest, because it bore tracks.

He was a superstitious little savage, of course, and when he knelt and looked to see what manner of man or beast had come that way, and found it to have been a man with no toes on either foot, he was up and away with Nola by the hand, like a scared antelope.

They slept that night under the stars. They were very hungry. The next morning thirst also set in, as they worked their way up out of the well-watered low country into the foothills. Nola's tongue parched and her lips cracked. They were both footsore and infinitely weary from the long climbs, and rough, abrupt descents under the boiling sun. A few berries were eaten greedily, and helped, but the effect wore off. They wanted water worse than they had ever wanted anything before in all their lives, but it was not to be had.

The carabao path persisted in crossing in front of them until, at last, they grew accustomed to the misshapen tracks in its sandy trough.

Soon Mundo decided they must stop and prepare their beds. But this place

was lonely and desolate, with the great peaks of the mountains still far away. On all sides billowed the wilderness of smaller hills covered with cogan grass, with here and there a bush, looking lonely and soul-disturbing in the gathering dusk which precedes, rather than follows, sunset in this broken, island country.

"Mundo," wailed Nola, "we are lost, and I am dying of thirst!"

"Yes," acknowledged her brother, "but we will find our way soon. I am looking for something—the carabao trail we left an hour ago."

They found it within the next five minutes, and Mundo got down on his knees to examine the sandy rut made by the feet of the carabao.

"What are you looking for, Mundo?" asked Nola, eyes wide open with curiosity.

"Demon tracks!"

"Demon tracks? We should run away, then!"

"No, we will find this demon whose feet are soft and have no toes," declared the boy grimly. "He probably hates the church. We will ask him to help us out of our misery."

THE sun was setting on the foothills; its shadows were long in the valleys where the green crests of the ban-yans tossed in the sultry evening breeze. The two children were climbing a sandy slope, hand in hand. Suddenly Mundo stopped short and pointed swiftly toward a patch of bunch grass at the summit.

"What?" he demanded of himself, with a sudden intake of breath.

Nola beheld a thin band of brilliant red, from which radiated a half circle of dun-colored plumes, like the tail feathers of a buzzard. The wind, whipping them from behind, made them rise and recede—rise again!

At first terror-stricken by something she did not understand, Nola soon

calmed her fears with the thought that it might be, at worst, only a bird.

"A kite, Mundo?"

"I thought maybe it was the demon," he said, taking her by the arm, and forcing her along toward the place where it was seen.

Then the feathers did a curious thing. They dipped out of sight, immediately to come up again, gradually rising. Beneath the red band appeared a face, hideously streaked with paint, a muscular brown body, a pair of sinewy legs. With a stately gesture, the apparition raised its right hand and, in guttural accents, its voice came rumbling down the slope.

"How! Spreadeagle make good friend with the children of Tib!"

Mundo nearly broke himself in two making his best salaam, not understanding the text so much as the tone which he took to be ingratiating.

"You are the demon!" he retorted wisely, in his own tongue, equally unintelligible to the Indian. "And you are come to help me wreak vengeance on Rattabara. May Allah reward you with the hottest corner of Gehenna!"

Mundo thought this was a very tactful thing to say. Devils, being such, must be fond of fire. Later, on closer approach, he thought this might have been an error, because this particular demon was sweating like a man with a high fever, apparently from no other cause than the evening sunshine.

Anyway, he was not an unpleasant associate in a wilderness journey like that, for, being a fiend, he was able to lead them at once into a ravine where, by his magic, he proved that he could scrape away at the ground and make a little spring of cold water ooze forth. Then he started a little fire by rubbing sticks together, and the three of them fared very nicely on a sort of bread made out of grasshoppers and toasted inside a covering of wet clay.

As the moon rose, he talked—this

odd demon. Did just as well at it, too, as though he knew their spoken language, only he employed his hands.

At first the children were merely amused by the stately, almost stiff dignity of the gestures seen across the embers of the supper fire. Then Nola, who was a bit more of a savage perhaps than her brother, being younger, began to comprehend. How they talked, those hands! Mundo studied them furtively from beneath his knit brows, and with a feeling of rage at the superior wit displayed by the little girl when she began painfully, but accurately, to answer, in kind.

"This is an outrage!" he thought. "Nola is preëmpting my demon!" Perhaps not in those words, but something meaning the same.

But the Indian sign language meant for intertribal discourse, if used intelligently, could be read by any child with a little practice. If the child is a savage, so much the better. Grown-up minds, full of the complexities of life, have no business trying to master it at all. Mundo soon learned, and the conversation became three-sided.

This evil spirit, fresh from the pit, was full of questions.

Always the priest, and what he believed! Could a stranger, professing to be a magician, win the confidence of Rattabara? Was there anything in the Mohammedan creed which could take away the pollution of infidel touch, short of flaying alive? What happened at Ramadan? What did the people of Popo Melangao think of their local prophet and medicine man? How about Datto Tib? What did he think of Rattabara? And so on, and so on.

They told him everything they knew and, where knowledge failed, they guessed as children will, to make a good showing.

The Southern Cross was shining down upon them through the weaving banyan boughs, when their inquisitor

suddenly stood up and signified that they should sleep. Mundo burst into oral speech.

"Rattabara!" he clamored. "Rattabara? What will you do to him, Señor Devil?"

But the Indian only grinned in the starlight and said: "Rattabara! Uh-h-h!" He did not understand the Moro tongue, and after the manner of his race returned an answer capable of universal application.

At sunrise they were awake and hungry, but Spreadeagle gave each child a handful of berries and bade them follow him back down the carabao trail, from which they departed after a time, and came to an abandoned hut, nesting among some tree ferns on the banks of a creek. There were fish and berries to be found here, he told them, and they were to make themselves at home until he returned. Twelve times the sun would pass, and then he would come for them and take them home. They were not to be afraid.

He stalked away then, leaving a trail of toeless prints in the soft sand, and a haze of cigarette smoke in the air. Mundo, gazing after him musingly, wondered how so nice a person ever happened to take up the profession of bedeviling lost souls.

THE Indian showed up in Popo Melangao as any other traveler might come to town. There was a look of extreme indifference on his face, as his glance swept over the crowds of curious Moros of both sexes who promptly swarmed around him, babbling with excitement over his hideous make-up of paint and feathers.

He boldly cuffed a child when it darted out of an alley and laid hold of his bow, peered curiously into an open doorway at a woman combing her hair with a piece of pegged board, filched a banana and ate it. He did these things as if there was no multitude to observe

and chatter at his every action. No one would have guessed that he had lain flat on his stomach for three hours, with his eyes just level with the crest of a hill, studying every street and landmark in the village.

At last he came to a somewhat pretentious house at the end of the *avenida*. Here he stopped, as if by accident, and gazed earnestly at the moist loam of the path, stooped, made some marks with a stick, passed his hands lightly over them and began to chant.

"Hi-hi-hi-hi! Hi! Hi!" he sang, shuffling his feet in a stationary dance.

"What is this?" demanded Tib, coming suddenly out of his *bahai*. "Who is this man, and what does he want?"

"He is some sort of pilgrim, a holy man," replied an old Moro, grinning like an ape. "We know not what he wants."

"A holy man!" crackled the crowd, stepping on each other's bare heels to get a glimpse. "A very holy man. Perhaps a dervish."

Tib was no fool. He had never seen a man such as this one, but he suspected him to be some sort of primitive from the American camp. So he addressed him in English.

"Art thou a holy man, then?"

Spreadeagle replied, echoing the sentiments of the publican of the Scriptures: "Me much holy man. No man holy like me!"

The datto was curious. "Come within," he invited. "We shall eat. Enter, in Allah."

They ate in Tib's *bahai*, sitting on the earth floor among a huddle of the datto's wives, who squatted silent and grinning about the hut, chewing betel and spitting it hither and yon, without regard for each other's bare limbs.

The Indian saw one he thought he liked, made instant overtures, was repulsed and reverted to the phrase he had found so effective with her lord.

"Me much holy man!" he rumbled.

"You lucky have such a man in your shack. Maybe make big medicine, see? What so?"

Tib pondered a bit. "Rattabara is the holy man here, O stranger," he announced. "Dost thou claim to be holier than he, who has been to Mecca and seen the dervishes?"

"Can Rattabara make water run uphill?" inquired Spreadeagle.

"No," admitted Tib wonderingly.

"Huh!" grunted the Indian, dipping into the stew. "Pretty poor!"

Tib was terrifically interested. He would like to see this trick, he said. He confessed he had not known it could be done.

"Bah!" snorted Spreadeagle, killing the idea at a blow. "Me no do that one any more! Dead easy. Make um magic vests now, for sojers. Make fire with little stick. Catch um snake in hands—so! Put curse on women, too." Here he paused and looked hard at the harem lady who had not taken kindly to his advances, until she slunk out of the room. "Big medicine man—me!"

"How is it," inquired the datto, "that you, who are of another race, should be found with the Americano army, which is wrongfully occupying our country?"

Spreadeagle hesitated a long while, turning the question over in his mind. "Huh!" he exclaimed, at last. "Dam-fool question. Spreadeagle he got um power put curse on enemies. Spreadeagle he give American sojer shirt that sheds bullets like hail. Make um plenty shirts by um by."

This was a repetition of what he had indicated earlier. Datto Tib was wondering what could be done about it. Perhaps—

"It is my wish that you remain with me here in Popo Melangao," he declared smoothly. "I would have you show Rattabara the secret of your magic shirt and also the curse. Is this well said?"

"Uh-h-h!" assented the Indian.

It was soon rumored about the village that the inventor of a bullet-proof garment was the guest of their datto, and that he was planning to show them feats in the black art during the approaching holidays. The Indian stayed on with Tib, having nothing at all to do with the hoi polloi and, in fact, treating them with contempt.

Nevertheless, a specie of propaganda kept percolating out of the datto's quarters and spreading among the people. The stranger possessed a sacred relic which had belonged to his ancestors—a bow and an accompanying quiver of arrows.

"What could he do with these?"

"Ah!" said the datto's housewives and domestics. "He will not say, but they are very powerful fetishes. Also he can make a shirt that cannot be penetrated by bullets or bolos. He has taken a dislike to the Americanos, because they did not pay him for making shirts for them. Ah-h-h! The paint he wears makes him invisible to his enemies. He has thrown a spell on Hadji Rattabara, causing him to steal the Americano's magic shirt so that he, the stranger, can demonstrate its virtues at Ramadan. Ah-h-h!"

From the same sources issued news concerning the mysterious disappearance of Nola and Mundo.

The stranger knew where they were. They were in hiding under the protection of a fiery dragon which would not give them up to be flayed. The creature was so terrible that the stranger would not describe it. Then a description was offered by the datto. And Spreadeagle acknowledged it to be the same, and Tib himself had said it must be the Borok. Ah-h-h-h!

The Borok was the weird monster upon which Mohammed declared he rode a few nights before he had caused the moon to come down from its perch and pass through the neck of his tunic, coming out at the sleeve. This must

be a wonderfully holy man, if Allah had permitted him to see a Borok.

RATTABARA heard these reports and ground his teeth in rage. He had tried many times to get an audience with the dark-skinned foreigner, but had always been put off on one excuse or another. Meanwhile his prestige in the village was rapidly becoming weakened.

He thought of killing his rival, but had to give this up, fearing the situation to be already out of hand, and that an explosion might result among his fanatical followers, if they thought he had instigated the outrage. He concluded it might be better to appear to join forces with the new wizard, learn his methods and then expose them, at the proper time and place, as an imposition on credulous minds.

So Rattabara sent a very humble message to Tib, requesting the honor of Spreadeagle's presence in his hut. This done, the high priest called to himself a dozen of his most trusty henchmen and ordered them to take the trail into the wilderness and not to return without the missing children.

Spreadeagle came rather late to his appointment, slipping silently inside the doormat.

"Peace! Enter in Allah!" greeted the priest, squatting among his cushions, but his pop eyes glittered like a hooded adder's.

"You want me, I come," observed the Indian, placidly lighting a cigarette.

"May the Prophet remember you for your condescension," intoned Rattabara piously. "Maybe commend you to Allah so that you may walk in the paths of righteousness to the end that He may take you by the right hand and lead you into paradise."

Spreadeagle reflected that Rattabara spoke very good American talk, but with a crooked tongue. He did not reply.

"May you live to have many wives and children!"

The Indian began to take interest. "How many you got?" he demanded.

"As many as Allah would deliver unto a man of my merits. They are as many as my fingers, twice counted, and then again eight."

Spreadeagle refrained from spoken comment.

"And now," said the priest, with his most pleasant manner, "we will talk about how we can bring about the downfall of a common enemy, if indeed you have such a grudge gnawing at your soul."

"Good!"

"My magic is as great as my righteousness," proclaimed Rattabara calmly, watching the other keenly. "But what of yours? It has been reported that you have told of many wonderful things which you are able to do. That it was you who found and gave to the Americano infidel"—here he spat on the ground—"the secret of the bullet-proof sarong. I would know of this—and of the Borok which you have said protects the children of Tib who have disappeared from our midst.

"Speak plainly and without reserve to Rattabara, your friend and ally in this grudge, who desires both to secure the release of the datto's children from the Borok, and to have made many magic sarongs for use against our common enemy."

The old hypocrite's oily manner threw his visitor off his guard. His words struck a responsive chord, appealing to a suppressed desire to "splurge."

The Indian was not unmindful of his duty to Thunderhead O'Malley, whom he worshiped as though he were some kind of a demigod. He never once let slip from his mind the mission the old general had sent him out upon—that of clearing the commander's conscience from the weight of a great per-

sonal blunder that threatened to cause another holy war in the Philippines.

He even recalled, or rather the fact was imprinted on his brain in letters of living light, that above all he was to relieve Mundo and Nola from the horror of this man's curse. But he was human and a redskin, and he must brag. So he opened up all the rich stores of his imagination and Rattabara helped himself. When the Indian went forth, an hour or two later, the crafty fanatic had enough of his vaporings, so that by the mere act of exposing them as fakes to the people, he could have Spreadeagle completely discredited.

And in heathen Mindanao, a discredited prophet is a wonderful holiday gift to a populace burning with the lust for blood and torture, which can be indulged freely in the name of their religion.

AS the few remaining days glided by, the fame of Spreadeagle grew as that of Rattabara diminished. Pilgrims from far and wide began to enter the village, camping on the outskirts, living on the meager fare offered by hospitable residents. They came armed and excited, for this, it was understood, was to be a most significant fast at which men would run amuck and, at the end, the banner of the Prophet Mohammed raised in a war against the invading infidel.

By the morning of the first day, fully nine thousand of the faithful had assembled to mill about in the market place, gaze at the delicacies they were forbidden to touch until sundown, and at the feats of legerdemain by native jugglers. Through the throng, Spreadeagle strutted his stuff proudly.

At midafternoon, the first of the series of events scheduled was to come off—the annual address of the holy man, encouraging the zeal and piety of his followers.

Rattabara mounted a boulder which

protruded from the ground near the market. It was a platform which nature had provided the village for the delivery of public speeches, scrubbing of clothes, slaughter of goats and a hundred other uses, so that it was something of a local monument and show place. Centuries ago it might have been clean and sightly, but to-day there was the accumulation of ages on its surface and, therefore, it could be regarded as a sort of shrine or holy place among a people who apparently worshiped dirt.

For nearly half an hour the priest harangued the populace and their visiting pilgrims on general topics relating to the religious aspects of the occasion. It was a polite speech, full of euphuisms and flattering references to Mohammed, the all-wise, the all-knowing and the all-merciful.

It was evident to every one that he was working to some dénouement. They became silent, with a sort of underlying excitement.

He began to speak of miracles past and present, those founded properly on the faith and some recent innovations, perhaps very worthy, which were the propagations of strange spirits unknown to true believers.

He recounted then some of the things Spreadeagle had promised to perform, describing the vest, the production of fire by rubbing sticks together, the making of rain by prayer and ceremonial dance, the alleged kidnaping by the Borok of Mundo and Nola. He dwelt on this latter miracle with considerable detail, always crediting the description of the beast to Spreadeagle as the only eyewitness.

The Indian, not knowing the meaning of the words Rattabara used, because he had not the slightest familiarity with the language, felt that he himself was the topic and enjoyed the situation to the full.

Rattabara said: "This strange magi-

cian has assured us he can withstand the most utter and cruel tortures, because of the magic which is in him. As soon as he has spoken to you in the sign language at which he is an adept, we will bind him, and he will show you how this is, and if he is indeed able to withstand it or not. I shall now let him speak."

Then he held out his hand to Spreadeagle and said: "Come!"

The Indian was completely taken in. He mounted the stone and began to boast. He took two sticks and a handful of powdered bark and produced fire by blowing. To his audience this seemed a wonderful demonstration. They thought the fire came from his insides and responded with delighted grunts and chortles.

The tale of the Borok he was able to put before their vision by signs, with almost the clarity of vocal speech, telling them of its many heads and its capacity for spitting flame and smoke. No one, he said, could approach Mundo and Nola without obtaining the assistance of himself and his enchanted cricket.

Spreadeagle accounted this a great speech. Rattabara, with a cynical smile on his face, gave it his full approval. From his viewpoint, it left little to be desired.

THE priest again mounted the rock and raised his hand for silence. "Behold!" he cried, "you have before you Spreadeagle, the man whose magic is more powerful than my own. You have seen his trick with fire and understand not, for you are untraveled. But I, Rattabara, know it to be only a trick, for I have seen the negritos of Luzon do as much and think nothing of it.

"This stranger, Spreadeagle, is a fraud! He has told you of the sarong which bullets cannot pierce, but I have that sarong, having taken it from the Americano storehouses. I will show

you that it is strongly made and that, without employing my own magic, I can make it work for me as well as it will work for him.

"This stranger has come among you with wild tales of what he can do, and what he has seen. Yet has he done nothing of much account. The making of rain has not been shown. He is afraid to try and he will put you off, if you ask him to do it. Spreadingeagle is a fraud and a spy from the enemy's camp. He says he is insensible to pain, but I have seen him jump and slap wildly about when a bee stung him. He has imposed upon you."

There was a murmur from the crowd.

"The Borok?" they clamored. "How about the story of Tib's children?"

Rattabara had been listening for this. He raised his hand above his head, and in the answer thereto came a movement in the mass of people. Two powerful fellows fought their way to the rock, dragging after them the squirming, terrified forms of Mundo and Nola.

"Here," shouted the priest, "is my answer! Look upon the children of Tib. There was no Borok, and they were just where this impostor had secreted them. Now do you believe?"

Spreadingeagle, surrounded by angry natives, gave no evidence either of surprise or alarm. He folded his arms and failed to unfold them of his own volition, until they had set upon him and torn them apart to bind him. So quickly was he overpowered and stripped of his finery that the children, concerned mostly about their own dreadful plight, did not catch so much as a glimpse of their benefactor, nor did they learn what all the excitement in the multitude was about.

Under the personal direction of the priest, the Indian was bound hand and foot to a coconut bole. There he remained to be insulted and tortured by the fanatics until the setting of the sun heralded the opening of the first feast.

The faying of Datto Tib's children was set for the seventh day of the Fast of Ramadan, and all this time Spreadingeagle stood stoically in his bonds, uncomplaining, heroic, as only an Indian brave can be, and no one offered him either food or drink. His war paint washed away with the sweat of agony which was allowed this one means of expression, his body cut and smeared by countless indignities, the cold mountain air chilling him at night and the sun baking him alive by day, yet he held on to life, a mere shadow of a living man.

ON the fourth day, General Thunderhead O'Malley decided he would pay an inspection call to Popo Melangao. With all his staff behind him, but with an unusually heavy escort, on account of the irritability of the Mohammedian natives during Ramadan, he camped four miles northeast of the village that night, and at ten o'clock the following morning the troops trotted into town.

The general rode at the head of the column, with Sergeant Hennessey acting as guide and interpreter. The sergeant was the first to note the predicament of the scout and rode alongside his superior.

"They have Spreadingeagle a prisoner there," he declared, pointing. "He looks like he was about all in."

The general looked as the sergeant pointed, and his face turned a sickly white under its tan. Calling a halt, he rode up to the Indian, and with thousands of scowling Moros looking on, leaned over to make inquiries. Tib and Rattabara both approached to explain matters, if needed. No explanation was necessary.

"How?" greeted the general.

The Indian regarded him coldly.

"Get away!" he growled surlily. "Me gone native. No truck with anybody now. Leave 'lone."

"I see," commented Thunderhead.

He was hoping the Moros wouldn't crowd in, but they did, spoiling the interview. Some of them, no doubt, could understand rudimentary English, and the attitude of all of them was becoming more hostile with every moment he lingered with their prisoner. A glance at his men also showed him that they, too, sensed danger in the air, and were furtively unloosening their carbines. At last with a sigh, for he loved a fight, he straightened up in his saddle and gave the signal to advance.

As they trotted away, Hennessey again rode in and threw him an inquiring look.

"Hennessey," said the general, "there is only one way I can express how I feel at leaving that redskin in a situation like he's in at this moment; and the customs of the service forbid that I use profanity in the presence of troops."

All the way in to Tagoloan, Thunderhead was gloomy and taciturn, and for the next twenty-four hours it was all your life was worth to mention Popo Melangao to the general.

After the cavalcade had departed, the Indian fell back into his old attitude of impenetrable reserve, looking his tormentors coldly in the eye, like a defiant adder, or gazing over their heads at nothing in particular, with every appearance of being bored by their efforts to punish him in the flesh.

Although not noticeable, a great, but perhaps only temporary, change was taking place within him. Temperamentally, as well as physically, he was shifting back into benighted, ancestral depths.

Until the bonds bit deep into the muscles of his wrists and ankles, Spreadeagle was a semicivilized savage. He had alternately employed two accomplishments, the trickery of the reservation brave on scouting duty for white troops, and a naïve diplomacy of

army origin learned in the school of the soldier. Now he was different; the "semi" was wiped out. Only the Chiricahua Apache remained.

His body hung in thongs of raw carabao hide in Popo Melangao, but his spirit, mounted on a cayuse, galloped madly along the banks of White River in Arizona, a handsome, naked youth making his first grand-stand play in front of the bucks. He shut his sufferings out of his mind, grimly resolved to prolong life to the uttermost and die, at last, untamed. That was his legacy from old Geronimo—that he could do just this. He was glad the general saw.

Twice a day, Moro women, the lower halves of their faces prudently veiled, brought a pot of stew and a jug of water which they passed back and forth under the nostrils of the famished prisoner. He said nothing, did not change countenance. Finally they grew tired of the sport and abandoned it altogether. The worst treatment came from the flies, the mosquitoes and the midges.

Nevertheless, Spreadeagle took one punishment as blandly as another, grew thin, emaciated and hollow of eye. The cords began to fit loosely around his arms and legs. He had been wriggling about surreptitiously before he discovered this fact, but afterward he stood like a statue of bronze, for fear of chafing the corded members and causing swelling. A great hope began to pulsate in his bosom.

ON the morning of the sixth day, he was a bit irrational, and that night had an hour or two of delirium, but it rained along about midnight, and he managed to catch enough of the downpour with his tongue to relieve a little of his thirst. Then he slept a while, and awoke feeling a little better. But delirium returned as the sun mounted higher in the heavens, and he was back among the wikipups of his native village

—a warrior with a blood feud in his heart.

Still later that day, the tom-toms began to beat in the neighborhood and Moros came running from all directions, awakened from the sleep of the gorged. They had been feasting practically all the night before, as was their custom during this period. Something unusual evidently was afoot. Spread-eagle, partially lucid again, turned, as well as he might, so as to be in a position to observe.

He saw three or four men advancing, with Mundo and Nola in their grasp. Rattabara and two subpriests were following with pincers. They were dressed in ceremonial robes of many colors. The priest's turban was of snow-white satin, his blouse of corn-colored silk, his trousers of striped satin, purple alternating with pale red. Over all he wore a flowing robe of white, denoting his high religious office and the fact of his pilgrimage.

On a little plot of hard earth, about twenty feet from where Spread-eagle was tied, they threw the children on their faces, and the entire congregation of Moros prostrated themselves while their ecclesiastics chanted in a sort of barbaric litany.

The Indian's attention wavered. It was hard for him to keep it centered on any subject now.

Nola screamed.

Spread-eagle opened his eyes, marshaled his wandering wits, and saw Tib standing opposite him, praying with the rest, as imperturbable as a juju. The multitude had become so many stooping images. Rattabara was feeling over the little naked shoulders with one of his devil's claws, and holding the pincers aloft.

THE bonds seemed loose, somehow.

In the first place, emaciation had caused the Indian's wrists to shrink. Again, there was last night's heavy rain

on the green hide thongs. They stretched and gave. While everybody was intent on the sacrifice, Spread-eagle calmly untied himself unobserved and stood free.

"Stop!" he croaked, swaying. "Me, medicine man, tell you stop!"

The fanatics looked at the apparition and it seemed to them that his release must have been a miracle. Why, he should have been dead long ago! Then they concluded from his rolling eyes and flushed face that he must be insane. Crazy people are treated with the utmost respect by the Moros, who believe them to be inspired. Even Tib and Rattabara were inclined to hear more from him. Spread-eagle addressed Tib.

"No kill um kids!" he rasped, pointing a thin and shaky finger at the pitiful victims. "Me, Spread-eagle, say no!"

There was red foam on his lips. The sloe-black eyes, dangerously inflamed, rolled in their cavernous sockets, impaling one onlooker after another on their death's-head stare. The Moro who chanced to meet that look seemed to shrink down to his quaking bones.

Spread-eagle began to walk and, as he did so, gathered strength. Around and around he went. The long, uneven stride he started out with changed suddenly to a kind of prance, his croak to a falsetto pitch.

"Hi-hi! Hi-hi-hi-hi-hi!" He looked like a dancing skeleton.

Rattabara's truculent look had faded, and upon his thin face, disfigured at the base by the goiter, crept the calm, disinterested expression of fatalism.

"Allah is great!" he murmured. "The stranger is seeing visions not of this earth."

And Tib said: "The man should be given broth. Perhaps he will tell us what he sees!"

A lad disappeared into one of the huts and returned almost immediately with a thick, greasy soup which he held

up. Spredaeagle passed it twice, as if it meant nothing to him. Then he stopped and drank sparingly. They also brought him some water.

"Now," said the datto, "what dost thou see, crazy one?"

Spredaeagle raised hands and eyes to the zenith. "The Great Spirit, you call um Allah, he say all right go ahead skin um children of Tib. Skin um children of Tib then, say the Great Spirit, what so they be poisoned by touch of white man. So say the Great Spirit."

"Allah il Allah!" murmured the congregation, not understanding a word.

"Hearken ye to what he says, who is insane!" commanded Rattabara, gladly interpreting. "For from the mouths of the demented come only that which is put there by Allah."

"What so!" went on the hollow voice of the Indian.

"Allah il Allah!" intoned the congregation.

The children were released and allowed to stand so that they could see the crazy man from whose lips issued the voice of doom.

"What so!" repeated the madman. "The Great Spirit he is not satisfied that the children are poisoned. He say Rattabara know. He say let Rattabara put on the magic shirt. Let Spredaeagle take the bow and arrows of his grandfather. Let him draw and shoot. If shirt turn um arrow—good. So say the Great Spirit, you call Allah. Then let the children be skinned, for they are polluted."

Tib raised his eyes and looked at the priest, and Rattabara salaamed with hands crossed over his heart.

"It is well," he declared. "I will put on the sarong that turns away lead and steel. If it stop not the arrow, let my passing be a sign that the children are absolved."

"Rattabara, the Sour, will put on the magic shirt," mumbled the awe-stricken crowd. "It is the will of Allah!"

IN a few minutes the thing was arranged. The priest was not greatly perturbed, probably because he felt he had more than a fighting chance to survive the ordeal. He had tried out the vest and knew that it would turn bullets. How then could a mere arrow pierce it? And, being a Mohammedan, he may have argued: "If it does pierce it, who here below shall gainsay what is written?"

He stood upon the rock which had been the scene of so much of his oratory in past years, and the Indian poised facing him, bow in hand. Spredaeagle's eyes were like coals of fire. Slowly his left hand, grasping the bow at the middle, straightened; his right, grasping the thong string and the feathered butt of the arrow, approached his swarthy, sunken cheek, crept still farther back, stopped at a point directly beneath the lobe of his ear.

He must have been a powerful man to be able to do this after all his starvation and misuse at the hands of the Moros. Either that, or he had the mysterious strength of the insane.

The bowstring twanged, and the arrow was in flight. Straight as a taut line, it went to its mark. There was a clearly audible click as its barb encountered the steel plates of the vest. And then it was observed to be swaying, like the head of an angry cobra in the side of a hut, directly behind the high priest, whose body had been pierced and soon came tumbling down from its pedestal, dead as a canned salmon, before it even touched the earth.

It had developed that the arrow was one of those slow-moving projectiles which old Thunderhead's chief of staff had predicted could penetrate the bullet-proof vest.

No sooner was the evil priest dead and the children gathered back into the arms of the grateful datto, than Spredaeagle's shrunken frame became instinct with that almost diabolical energy that

kept old Geronimo on the warpath year after year. There was no time to lose, and he knew it, but an Indian's vengeance is to him a sacred matter and, once consummated, the ethics of his race demand that it be properly exploited in the presence of the dead and the quick.

With a bound Spreddeagle was once more up on the rock. There he struck a victorious pose, and sent his soul-harrowing cry ululating down the valley. Sweat and red froth marked his features with a terrible war paint.

Mundo saw the transfigured countenance and seized Nola by the arm:

"Look!" he exclaimed, in an awe-struck whisper. "It is the demon!"

Then, as the crowd gathered fury because of the death of their holy man Spreddeagle was down off the rock and putting distance between him and his enemies by long, easy leaps, like a pursued antelope.

SPEAKING of the chief of staff, the general had Colonel Runyan into his office a couple of days after the above scene took place.

"Colonel," Thunderhead declared, rubbing at his long nose nervously, "I've had about as much stress and strain on account of this town of Popo Melangao as any one man can stand.

Other stories by Captain Guthrie will be published in forthcoming issues of THE POPULAR.



THE GENESIS OF HONOR

ONE of the most interesting games to play in this world of paradoxes is that of tracking down the derivation of customs which at the present time regulate a given class of men. Take the taboo, which is as ironbound as a law of Moses, upon having any locks whatsoever in the fo'c's'le of a ship. The crew of the ship is considered to be a picked band of fellows, among whom reciprocal trust is natural and expected. And this custom was derived from the buccaneers of the Spanish Main, among whom flourished, possibly, the first general principles of democracy, self-trust and share-and-share-alike that modern history records. The early freebooters of the Caribbean formed themselves into a self-governing company, elected their captain and forbade any such innuendos upon the company's honor as the placing of locks upon dunnage kits would imply.

I'm going to raid it and see what has become of Private Spreddeagle and the children. Holy war, or not, I don't give any part of a continental damn!"

These were strong words, desperate ones, coming from a general officer accounted a safe man to handle our well-known insular policies. The colonel raised a protesting hand.

"It's your job, if you do, general," he said. "It will be monkeying with the religious beliefs of these people. I predict that your recall will follow within twenty-four hours."

"I don't care. I'll take the blame. This is humanity, and I've waited too long."

He jumped up suddenly and gazed over the chief of staff's shoulder.

"Colonel!" he commanded shrilly. "See what Sergeant Hennessey wants! I think he has heard something from — What is it, sergeant?"

The old-timer saluted punctiliously before he replied.

"I thought the general would like to know," he said, as unemotionally as if he were announcing the theft of a horse blanket, "that Private Henry Spreddeagle has returned to camp. He's hitting it straight for the chink's grog shop. But he's O. K., and the children of Datto Tib are uncussed."



THE GLOW WORM PEDDLER

BY BERTON BRALEY

GLOW WORMS for sale!"
Where the street lights burn low
Just off the Ginza in Tokyo town,
There is a seller of brilliants that glow,
Glimmer and shimmer like gems in a crown.
Fireflies! The stock of a huckster who squats
Hard by the path of the colorful crowd,
Offering glow worms in half dozen lots.
Crying his wares of enchantment aloud.
He should be blowing a faint elfin horn,
Tinkling a bluebell still dewy with morn,
But what we hear is a long nasal wail,
"Hataru-ura—Fine glow worms for sale!"

Where did he gather them—out of a garden
Just when the daytime was turning to dark?
Out of some Japanese Forest of Arden,
Trailing each flittering, glittering spark?
Nobody knows, but his lean yellow fingers
Gleam as he offers his stock to the view,
Though you pass by, on your vision there lingers
Radiance mingled of white and of blue;
Wares of a marvelous clear phosphorescence
Brought from some secret Arcadian trail,
Moving and breathing with soft iridescence.
What if the vender does cackle and wail,
His, none the less, is a magical hail,
"Hataru-ura—Fine glow worms for sale!"



By
Fred MacIsaac

Author of
"Ice," "Breakfast
at the Plaza," Etc.



Tin Hats

THE STORY.

The declaration of war by America threw Christopher Graham out of his groove. Although young and trained as an engineer, a family misfortune had forced him into a poorly paid, uninspiring clerking job in the city of Benton. And there he stayed, his ambition gone, his spirit broken. The girl he loved, Marion Stacy, was quite the opposite. Pretty, clever, and self-opinionated, she preferred Chris to her other suitors mainly because he seemed to need taking care of, and then he was easy to dominate. Chris was no ardent patriot; Marion was an out-and-out pacifist. But the young man reasoned that enlistment was better than the draft, and, besides, it would give him an opportunity to secure an officer's commission. When Chris informed Marion that he was going to the training camp at Plattsburg, her fury was unleashed—flatly, she wouldn't have it. But for once Chris prevailed and offered consolation with the plea that an officer stood a very fair chance of leaving the trenches alive. Not long after Chris had left, Marion heard that the life of an infantry officer in France was good for no more than twenty-four hours; in desperation she conceived the idea of getting Chris into what she thought was a safe branch of the service, a regiment of American railroad engineers, then being organized to operate the railroads Over There. The transfer was arranged with surprising ease, and Chris returned to Benton. And now Marion played her trump card—she proposed marriage to Chris, but great as the temptation was, he refused to employ this subterfuge for exemption and consented to nothing more binding than engagement.

Chris' new regiment was composed of the toughest crew of men that could be assembled in all America; and Chris, because of his ten days at Plattsburg, was made a first sergeant and became drillmaster of his company. Two of his huskies, Luke Manning and Jack Cunniff, took a liking to Chris and promised him any help he might need in handling his men. And then came sailing orders, and in the dead of night a big ocean liner carried Chris and his buddies out of Benton Harbor. After crossing the submarine-infested Atlantic without mishap, the regiment was landed in England and then, despite its noncombatant nature and undrilled ranks, was marched through London—the first of America's volunteers to arrive! Shortly thereafter the Yankees were taken across the Channel to Boulogne and thence to the front. And here their job commenced—no safe one as Marion had hoped, as Chris had expected, but that most dangerous of military tasks, running trainloads of shells up to the front lines to supply the heavy artillery. Though the perilous nature of their duties surprised Chris and his buddies, they had caught the war fever and were glad to be under fire. Then one day came another surprise for Chris. Out of a front-bound troop train stepped a pretty girl.



The mud of France was on their boots; the sudden booming of guns was in their ears—for the American engineers had crossed a great ocean to fight in a war of Gargantuas. And through banks of black smoke, across fields and orchards torn and roweled by vicious cross fires, the Yankees guided long trains freighted with high explosives.

In Four Parts— Part II. :: ::

CHAPTER X.

A ROSE OF OLD ENGLAND.

WHEN England turns out a pretty girl, she is often so radiantly beautiful that she fades all the girls of other nationalities who happen to be in the vicinity. These English blossoms are apt to be blonde or red-headed, a perfect English brunette is as rare as a rose in February, and to find such a one is like discovering a pearl of great price in a North Sea oyster.

Such a gem suddenly appeared before Chris Graham in the gray-blue uniform of a "Waac." The "Waac," let it be explained, was a British abbreviation for Women's Auxiliary Army Corps; the Americans usually called them "Warks." The uniform she wore seemed to make her glow and sparkle as a plain setting enhances the loveliness of a fine diamond.

She was a small girl, a slight willowy creature whose little feet wafted her along as a summer breeze floats thistledown.

Her service cap was tilted saucily upon a mass of crow-black hair, which undulated as though it had been treated to a permanent wave—which it had. She had a pair of large eyes like pools of ink with sunlight reflected upon them, a straight little nose, and a mouth which smiled with the sweetness of a hive full of honey.

All Chris could do was stare. This creature could not be real! He waited for her to speak; the cockney twang would break the spell. But when she spoke, her voice was clear and resonant and her tone was the perfectly modulated, exquisite tone of the well-bred and genteel Englishwoman. What she said was:

"Do you happen to have a match?"

Chris felt in his pockets hastily and produced a box of matches, which he proffered without a word.

She accepted it, hesitated, smiled again, and said: "Now if I happened to have a cigarette, I would love to smoke."

"I've got plenty," he assured her. "Won't you take a package?"

"Aren't you nice?" she said, in her deliciously inflected tones. "But I could not think of taking all your cigarettes."

"Please do. We have an outfit near here which gives them away."

"Wonderful. You are a sergeant, I see."

"And you are a W. A. A. C."

"Amazing perspicacity! Have you been over long?"

"With the first American outfit."

"My dear man, I have been over two years."

"What do you do?"

"Mostly I drive a motor, but I have been a nurse's assistant and a barmaid in a canteen and a telephone operator. Are you enjoying the war?"

"Not perceptibly, until now. Do you come this way often?"

She looked him over appraisingly. "I might," she said, with a little nod. "What's the inducement?"

"Well—er—I don't suppose there is any."

"You are rather modest," she said, with a queer smile. "Don't you think that your personality might make some slight appeal?"

Chris blushed, which made her laugh outright.

"You are a nice, unsophisticated lad, and you haven't forgotten how to blush. Have you kissed a girl since you came to France?"

"No," he admitted. "What chance have I had?"

"Would you like to kiss me?"

"Is that an invitation?" he dared.

"Oh, no! Just seeking information."

"Well, I'd like it darn well. May I?"

"Perhaps, when I know you a lot better. I might get off and dine with you some night. It's against regulations to be pals with our men, but they haven't put up the bars against Americans yet. You're so recent."

"To-night?"

"Possibly. Can you stand treat?"

"I've got enough money for a good dinner."

"Then at the Golden Cock in Albert, at eight thirty."

"You bet I'll be there!"

"Au revoir!" she said, and whisked away.

CHRIS looked after her dizzily with excitement. What a girl! What a gorgeous, glorious girl! He had never seen any one like her, never dreamed there could be such a person—and she had singled him out! In truth she had flirted with him, almost fished for the dinner invitation. Darn it, she was bold, almost brazen. No woman had ever before treated him like that, and the worst of it was that he liked it. After all, it was war time. Girls over here lived on excitement. This one said she had been in the service two years. She must have come to think and act almost like a man. Yet how alluringly feminine she was, despite that uniform!

She had gone right to his head in the two or three minutes of their conversation. The light in her eye, the cadence of her voice, the warmth of her smile — Good heavens! He was an engaged man. He loved Marion Stacy. He knew he had no business keeping that dinner engagement, and he wouldn't.

Chris went into his hut and took Marion's picture from his kit bag. Her cool, sweet, honest eyes shamed him. The deuce with this saucy little vampire! He would be hanged if he would let her carry him off his feet like that. She could wait at the Golden Cock until the regular roosters crowed in the morning, for all he cared.

Yet all the time, Chris knew he was going to keep the engagement. He was palpitating with eagerness, he wanted to see this girl again. Curiosity, if nothing more, would drag him to town, and

he would be careful to remember that he was engaged to be married to Marion Stacy. After all, a fellow who had been months without talking to an attractive woman ought to be allowed some such relaxation. It would take his mind off the darn war.

CHRIS had no trouble in getting leave to go into Albert that evening, as there was a man on hand to relieve him, and the military regulations were more or less in abeyance while the regiment was split into small units. It was his first trip at night to a French town of fair size, and he started in on a flivver truck which happened to be going that way.

While Albert had been under bombardment upon several occasions and had sustained severe injuries, many houses were intact. A number of shops continued in business and there were lots of cafés. An excellent revenue was assured from the British officers and men who got a few hours' leave and came there, because they could not go to Paris or to blighty.

As Chris walked through the quiet streets, meeting only a few native males and several disheveled and frowsy French peasant women, he noticed that every clean-looking café carried a card in the window:

For Officers Only. Enlisted Men Not
Admitted.

Had Chris been in a U. S. regular-army regiment, he would have discovered quickly enough the social distinctions between a private or noncom and a commissioned officer, but in the engineers there was little of that sort of stuff. The officers were civilians in their ideas and most of them tried not to notice other soldiers as they passed, to save themselves the trouble of returning salutes.

It irked Chris to find that he was declassified in these little French restau-

rants. It annoyed him more to find the same prohibition including the Coc d'Or, where he had his engagement. As it lacked ten minutes of the appointed time, he waited in the street for the girl, hoping fervently that she would not come because it would humiliate him beyond words to be compelled to take her to some drab little den. And if she did not come, he would not have been disloyal to Marion. However, he saw her turn a corner and glide toward him as gracefully as Hebe, the cupbearer of the gods.

"Oh, there you are!" she said, with a thrilling smile. "Aren't you punctual!"

She extended a hand, which he grasped and was rather surprised to find the palm calloused.

"I'm frightfully sorry," he told her. "But this place is not for the likes of me, as the Irish say. It's for officers only."

"Oh, yes, I should have told you. We shall have to take a private dining room. Do you mind?"

"Well—er—not if you don't." Chris was a trifle flustered. Private dining rooms in Benton were preached against from the pulpit.

"We just slip in the side door and upstairs," she informed him. "The main café is reserved and, technically, so is the whole house, but the French don't care."

She ran, gracefully up a narrow, thickly carpeted staircase, and the carpet gave out a fine powder of dirt and a musty aroma with each step.

At the head of the stairs, they encountered a sleek, hand-rubbing maitre d'hôtel, to whom she said:

"A private room, if you please."

"Most certainly, madame, to be sure!" he responded in fair English, then led the way down a corridor, opened a door and ushered them into a sitting room.

The windows of the room were heav-

ily curtained to prevent light from showing in the street.

She swung out of her uniform jacket, revealing a pretty gray blouse with long sleeves. Chris threw his cap on a chair and they regarded each other. A slightly heightened color betrayed that the situation was not without its thrill for her, while his face was flaming.

And now the waiter bustled in with a table, threw a white cloth over it, set out a few knives and forks and offered a speckled menu card to Chris, who regarded it uncertainly.

"Let's just have a roast chicken and a bottle of wine," she suggested. "Do you prefer champagne or red still wine?"

"Whatever you please."

"A bottle of champagne and a poulet rôti," she ordered in her best French. "Let's be seated."

He helped her into her chair, then took his own seat. She placed her elbows on the table, rested her chin on her palms and flashed him a dazzling smile, a smile that was both mischievous and satirical.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROSE HAS THORNS.

"WE are here, my dear lad," the girl explained, "because you happen to be an enlisted man. It is the only decent eating place in town. But if you love me, get yourself a commission. You are the first man below the rank of lieutenant with whom I have ever dined in France."

"I appreciate the distinction. You are the first woman with whom I have spoken since leaving America."

"Oh, I felt that I was discriminating against the rank and file," she said, with a little laugh. "I presume I shall have to go out with a corporal and then with a private. I have already had experience with generals. Dreadful bores, the poor old dears."

"Then you dine out frequently?"

"Whenever I get a decent invitation. A girl can't visit these places alone and our food is abominable. They issue jam to the soldiers, but consider that the women can get along without it."

"They don't give us any jam," Chris said regretfully. "I begin to think we are the army's stepchildren."

"Tell me about America. What did you do there?"

"I didn't do anything much. I was a clerk in the office of the city where I live, a place called Benton."

"Don't be absurd! You are a gentleman, not a clerk"—she pronounced it like that.

"With us, clerks are often well bred and well educated, but it wasn't much of a job. I'll never go back to it."

"And you are married, of course?"

"No, I'm not."

"You know, I have never met a married man in France. Either married men are all slackers or soldiers are all liars."

"I'm telling the truth," he grinned.

"Yes, I believe so. Your eyes are honest. You know, I rather like Americans when they don't talk through their noses."

"And I admire the English when they don't drop their aitches."

"Quits!" she cried. "Why are you with noncombatants? Conscientious objections against blood and slaughter?"

"Only my own," he admitted. "I wouldn't mind killing numbers of the enemy if I were sure they wouldn't retaliate."

"Rubbish! You're not that sort."

"I am afraid I was. Just now I'd rather like to get into a fighting outfit."

"I saw some American troops in Paris. They had a parade. It was your first division, I believe. They looked to me like splendid soldiers."

"That was our regular army. For its size, I think it is the best in the world."

"Like our old 'Contemptibles.' Poor chaps, most of them are buried at Mons and Ypres. We are getting the dregs of England now, conscripts and physically unfits; anybody who can walk and carry a gun is good enough for our uniform after three years of it." She sighed. "Bother the old war! Let's talk of something else. Do you like me?"

"Immensely."

"Why?"

"Well—er—I don't know. You are so pretty and such a good fellow. You do daring things, but I think that you are nice."

The girl's eyes filled with tears, which she winked away. She stretched a slim arm across the table and touched the back of his hand almost timidly.

"Thank you," she said. "I've been knocking around, and I've been misunderstood a lot. War makes brutes out of most men. They are not satisfied with companionship, a pleasant chat, and they assume because a girl is friendly that she is a wrong one. And the poor fellows are in such a state of nerves and they are so harassed and they are apt to be killed at any moment— Well, lots of girls are kind to them from sympathy and for no other reason. But I have tried to hold myself together."

"Do you like the life over here?"

"It's better than being at home. We are working like dogs, and we have no time to think, during daylight hours. And it is rather a lark to meet and talk to new men, to do unconventional things. Oh, the excitement of war has got me! I practically picked you up to-day; you knew that."

"Not at all!"

"Don't fib. Look, here comes the feast!"

The waiter had entered, bearing the chicken on a platter in one hand and a bottle of wine under his arm. There was no ice, of course, but the sight of

the hot bird to a man who had been living on canned corned beef, hard tack, sour-dough bread and bad coffee was like a glimpse of heaven.

The girl was evidently hungry, too. They fell upon the chicken and sipped their wine and for ten minutes they hardly exchanged a word.

WHEN the last morsel had been eaten, they both drew back and sighed with satisfaction. The girl had drained three or four glasses of wine. Chris had drunk his share. The bottle was now empty. But the waiter appeared with a second bottle, opened it with a flourish and the party continued.

She lifted a full goblet and regarded him through the yellow liquid, with half-shut eyes.

"You are blond and clean cut and decent looking," she said. "I think I used good judgment to-day in my pick-up. Do you love me?"

Chris felt a pounding in his chest and a throbbing in his temples. His eyes, if he could have seen them, were blazing.

"I think you are the most wonderful girl I ever saw," he said disloyally.

"And you are unique! You are the first man who hasn't tried to kiss me after one bottle of wine."

"I'll rid myself of that distinction," he said hotly, and he started about the table.

She sat quietly, but as he passed an arm over her shoulder she hid her head in her arms. Chris thrust in his hand and lifted her chin until her dark eyes, which were glowing, were looking into his. He bent over her. Suddenly she gave a slight scream, and voices in the hall made them pause.

"There's a girl in there," said a heavy bass voice. "Somebody's got a girl."

The woman giggled.

"I heard her laugh," said a second voice. "It's a party. Let's join."

"It may be a general," warned the bass.

"More likely some beastly sub. Carry on!"

The door was flung open and two Allied officers stood on the threshold. They swayed unsteadily, evidently drunk.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the bass, who was a major. "It's a darn pretty girl."

"And I'll be blown if she isn't with a blasted Yankee, and a noncom at that. Get out of here, Yankee! We'll entertain the lady."

"I'll be damned if I do!" declared Chris, furious at the intrusion.

"No! Go away!" exclaimed the girl, who had placed herself behind Chris.

"Go to your quarters, my man," said the major stiffly.

"Get out of here before I report you," seconded the captain.

"If you were gentlemen, you wouldn't enter a private room," cried the girl scornfully.

"Gentlemen—what? Why, the rascal dines with an enlisted man!"

"She's nothing but a hussy," scoffed the captain.

"Take that back, damn you!" ordered Chris, beside himself with indignation. At that moment their rank, his own future, meant nothing; the girl was in his charge, under his protection.

"Attention!" bellowed the major.

"You get out of here or I'll throw you out!" cried Chris.

"The damn insolent Yankee!" exclaimed the captain.

Chris made a flying leap at the captain, caught him by the waist and flung him from the room. He gave the officer a last push. The fellow stumbled backward, swung against the railing of the staircase, attempted to recover his equilibrium, and suddenly fell headlong, with a series of loud bumps, down the flight of stairs.

The major had rushed into the hallway after his companion. He grappled with Chris, whom hard work had made

strong. The American gave him a shove. Both men fell, rolled along the hall and, arriving at the head of the stairs, he sent the second officer downward after his friend.

THE racket had aroused the crowd in the main salon, but they had to go into the street to reach the private entrance.

Three or four officers arrived in the lower hall to pick up their comrades in arms, then started up the stairs. Breathing fire, Chris was at the top to receive them, but he was suddenly pounced upon by the head waiter and the girl, and dragged backward down the corridor.

"This way," said the waiter, opening a narrow door and disclosing a service stairs.

Chris handed him a little package of franc notes, evidently too much, because he smiled widely.

While the pair dashed down the stairs, the waiter slammed the door shut, turned the key and put it in his pocket, just as two furious officers, followed by half a dozen others, arrived in the hallway.

"Where's the damn Yankee? Where did he go?" they demanded.

"*Hélas, messieurs! Je ne parle pas Anglais.*"

"Out of the way, you old liar!" exclaimed a lieutenant. "We'll dig him out."

They intruded into several unlocked rooms, but they did not know the lay of the land. By the time they discovered the back staircase and got the key from the waiter, by fishing his pockets, Chris and the girl, whose name he didn't yet know, were several blocks away and moving rapidly.

"Take off your funny hat," she told him. "It's a dead give-away. And I'll leave you here, it's safer for both of us."

"Shall I see you again?"

"I should say you would!" she exclaimed, with shining eyes. "You were perfectly marvelous. It was the prettiest fight I ever saw."

"When?"

"I'll find an excuse to stop at your shack in a day or two."

Suddenly pecking his cheek, she turned and ran down a dark side street. Chris fled as rapidly as he could, and was fortunate in encountering three members of his outfit, who had just left a café for enlisted men. Together they departed from the town and reached their camp without incident.

CHAPTER XII.

"FORWARD, MARCH!"

CHRIS worried all the next day over the affair. If an investigation was made, severe punishment could be inflicted upon him. For an enlisted man to strike an officer was a heinous offense, and he had not only struck two officers, but thrown them both downstairs.

His alarm was quite needless, however. European officers are proud and, when sober, very fair-minded. The victims were not hurt, and they were perfectly aware that they had no business bursting into a private room and forcing themselves upon diners. Furthermore, they were not eager to give publicity to the tale of one Yankee enlisted man's overpowering and tossing about a couple of officers. An hour after the incident, they were sitting in the main café submitting to the chaffing of a dozen comrades, who saw the funny side of the affair. Finally the major laughed and declared, with an amused smile:

"The blasted Yankee had a lot of pluck, I'll say that for him! Dare say any of us would have done the same to fellows that tried to steal his girl. Don't let it get any further, but make sure the scoundrel of an innkeeper doesn't

allow any more noncoms in the private rooms."

Chris, despite his alarm, found time to wonder what might have happened if the officers had not intruded. He was inclined to think that the invaders were sent from heaven. As the entire day passed without brass-bound visitors at the camp, his theory of heavenly intervention grew stronger. He looked a lot at Marion's picture, but despite himself he could also see a pair of luscious dark eyes, and ripe lips curled back over dazzling white teeth. The girl was a darling, and she had said he would see her again.

Weeks passed, weeks of wearisome plugging at stupid records in a miserable hut in a half-pulverized village, enlivened only by the puffing of toy locomotives dragging playthings of trains past the station, upon which were members of the regiment who waved their absurd hats and shouted witticisms at the loafers in headquarters. Artificial thunder was always rumbling in the distance.

At night in camp, things were rather more amusing. Chris had come to like his companions, and their views on everything under the sun were absorbing, because they were so different from his own. They were an ingenious lot. One night Jack Cunniff and Luke Manning with half a dozen assistants dragged into camp the engine of a wrecked enemy airplane and set it up in back of one of the bunk houses.

Two nights later they produced a small generator, a lot of wires and bulbs stolen from a passing supply train. It took them no time at all to illuminate the bunk house, which was occupied by Chris and his friends, with electricity. They enjoyed their bright lights for a week when allied tracers arrived, seeking an explanation of excess gasoline requisition and put a stop to the "White Light District," as the rest of the camp called the bunk house.

And now presents from America arrived to cheer them up. Most of the gifts came from loving relatives with more love than judgment in their selection. One man got a gold-initialed cigar case which was promptly stolen and sold for a round of drinks in Albert. Another got a collapsible bathtub, which would have been fine if there had been enough water to fill it, and even then it would have taken ten men to hold it when filled.

An unfortunate who received a suit of hand-knit pajamas made with soft, pink yarn was immediately nicknamed "Knit-wink." A sweet girl sent Bert Leslie a bottle of bath salts, while Chris' sister sent him a photograph-trimming knife and board—and any soldier having a camera would have been court-martialed. There were a number of harmonicas, which were not so bad, and jew's-harps, which enabled them to get up an orchestra, assisted by artists on combs and canteens filled to different levels with water.

To a soldier named Flower arrived a pair of pink yarn earlaps which caused him to be known as "Cauliflower." From Marion to Chris came a huge package of sweet chocolate and a big bundle of cigarettes. These delighted him inexpressibly and drew a love letter that was all the more affectionate, because his conscience still troubled him in regard to the beautiful Wark.

But of that "British Rose" no trace was seen, though he watched every train for a week. While he told himself that he hoped he would never see her again, his eyes ached for the sight of her.

TWO weeks after the evening in Albert, she appeared. Down the old road beyond the railroad track drove a swift-flying motor cycle. It drew up across the tracks and from it descended the girl.

Chris was out of the hut and on his way to greet her so fast that he at-

tracted the attention of a lieutenant, who happened to be looking out of the window. What he saw so interested the officer that he put on his hat, brushed some of the dust off his uniform with his hand, straightened himself, glanced at his face in a hand mirror, then stalked with great dignity after the dashing sergeant. Chris was not aware of this.

The girl met Chris with both hands extended. They smiled widely at each other. Her eyes were dancing and the delight in his was not concealed from her.

Suddenly a gruff voice snarled: "Attention!"

Chris sprang to position, and the lieutenant stood before them.

"About face!" commanded the officer.

Chris turned his back to his visitor. "Forward, march!"

Chris stalked away, while the lieutenant shouted after him:

"Get back to your desk and stay there!"

For the first time Chris had been ranked out with a girl. It was a custom in the army; captains took advantage where lieutenants were concerned, colonels upon captains, generals upon colonels.

The officer, who had been a round-house foreman in America, grinned at the young woman in comradely fashion. The girl took one step forward, then a hard little hand swept through the air and slapped him smartly on the right cheek.

"Why, you little devil!" he exclaimed. "I'll teach you to hit an officer."

His hat had fallen off and he stooped to pick it up. When he looked up, she was fifty feet away and running fast. He lumbered after her, but she reached her motor cycle, mounted, then turned and drove the machine straight at him. If he had not leaped out of the way,

he would have been run over. He saw her vanish in a cloud of white dust.

Chris observed the incident through his window and, chuckling, settled down to his work. He glanced at the crest-fallen *Lothario* when he entered, expecting some sort of rebuke. It would be human for the officer to take out his sore disappointment upon the enlisted man.

The lieutenant grinned at him without saying a word and resumed his own work. After five minutes, the officer said:

"Better keep away from that dame. She's vicious. Did you see her try to run me down?"

"You bet I did, sir!"

"And that crack in the mouth she handed me!" he sighed. "It's no use, Graham. Even in a uniform, I'll never cut any ice with women. Known her long?"

"Met her a few times."

"Yeh? Well, you can have her. I don't want her."

And that was the end of that. Chris waited, but the girl did not come back. In a few days he had something else to trouble him. He was sick. Ptomaine poisoning got him. He couldn't eat mess food, grew so weak he couldn't get out of his bunk, and finally was carried "armchair" fashion to the regimental medical major, the same fashionable practitioner whose society patients had followed him to camp at Eppington.

The doctor had not had many patients. It was a very tough regiment, and his post up to the present had been a sinecure. He made a thorough examination of Chris and delivered the following dictum.

"Go on a diet. Take only lean meat, preferably lamb, broiled, chew well, swallow only juice. Eat soft-boiled eggs and drink boiled milk."

Chris, badly as he felt, broke into a laugh. Not a single item of the diet

could be secured in camp. Even the officers never had such delicacies.

"What's the matter, my man?" demanded the medico.

"Where in hell do you think you are, you big stiff, back in society?" demanded Luke Manning, one of the bearers. "If this guy dies, I'll crash yer head in with a shovel if they hang me for it."

The doctor wasn't soldier enough to know that Luke should have been sent to the guardhouse for such language to an officer. He looked frightened, then ordered Chris removed to a near-by hospital.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BIG PUSH.

VERY tenderly the big railroad men carried Chris to a train and made him comfortable on a pile of blankets in an open freight car. The hospital was not far south of Albert, a British casualty clearing hospital made up of British marquee tents, with only two women nurses for several hundred men, and a lot of soldiers who hated their job as orderlies.

It is likely that he would have died had it not been for the medical colonel in command, who had just arrived from India. This officer interested himself personally in the young American. Chris began to mend immediately.

For several days he was too ill to take notice. Then he began to look about him and his attention was immediately attracted by a Scot who occupied a cot across the aisle.

The Scotchman was not much better than a ghost, but he had a toothless grin for the Yankee and talked to him with an accent flavored with mist and heather. As days passed and Chris learned something of his history, his admiration for the man grew into wonder.

Donald MacDonald was his name,

and he belonged to the Black Watch, the most fearsome fighting organization in the British army, as he quickly explained. Donald had come out with the old "Contemptibles" in 1914. Twice he had been discharged from the army as unfit and sent to blighty, and twice he had skullduggered his way back to service. Now he was such a wreck that he was sure to pass out or pass home, and he wanted to stay.

Mostly he quarreled with a wizened Welsh ex-cobbler, not about the war, but about the merits of Scotch and Welsh football teams and cricket clubs. The pair would have come to blows had either been able to get out of his cot.

Curious, Chris demanded why Donald did not take his blighty.

"If I'm na gude to the blasted army, I'm na gude to mysel'! I'm not cheatin' mysel', to let the army have what's left o' me."

As soon as lights went out at night, from every direction over the wooden floors of the hospital, dozens of trench rats scurried in search of the stray crumbs left on the invalids' trays. These rats were often as big as an ordinary-sized cat. As Chris had never seen them before, it terrified him to think of them crawling about when he was helpless.

One night, by chance, an orderly had left a whole loaf of bread—war bread, hard and heavy—on the small table beside the American's cot. After the lights were snapped out, Chris heard a commotion on the table within a couple of feet of his head, and called to the orderly:

"For Heaven's sake, put on the lights!"

As the place lit up, a huge rat was illuminated. He had the loaf of bread in his mouth, and immediately he jumped from the table. Like a flash, MacDonald let drive a hobnailed boot. Casualty: one big dead rat, thanks to

three years of hurling hand grenades at the front.

Such was life in a field hospital.

Chris remained on his back for two weeks. He got stronger daily and expected to rejoin the regiment in another week. "Scotty" was no longer in the opposite bed. It was now occupied by a Canadian. The old soldier had passed—not to blighty. Chris had turned on his face and sobbed when they carried out the body, for Scotty had been a cheerful old hero.

GRAHAM was dozing, on this very morning, when he heard the colonel's voice beside his bed.

"This, Lady Mary, was our first Yankee patient. He didn't have a chance under ordinary circumstances, but in India we learned how to treat such cases and he will be on his feet in a week."

Chris slowly opened his eyes, then he stared.

The young woman addressed as "Lady Mary" was the girl of Albert—the girl who had tried to run down his lieutenant with a motor cycle three weeks ago.

Before he could speak, he saw one of her eyelids droop.

"Oh, colonel," she said. "I haven't met Americans. May I talk to this one for a while?"

"Why not?" he returned pleasantly. "You'll not mind if I toddle along? Got lots to do."

"Hello, Lady Mary!" said Chris, with a weak smile. "Now I know your first name."

"You poor darling!" the girl whispered. "So this is what became of you!"

She was still in the uniform of a W. A. A. C., or Wark, but she had not boasted unduly of her friendship with colonels and generals, and she must belong to the nobility, since the colonel had addressed her as "Lady Mary."

Well, there had been something unusual about her.

"Didn't you ever go by the railroad headquarters again?" he asked.

"Yes, but you were not there and I couldn't stop and talk to that cad of a lieutenant." She drew up a stool beside the bed, laid a cool hand on his forehead and touched his wrist with the other.

Her touch sent a dart of flame through his weakened frame. A dozen curious heads were turned toward them and a dozen pairs of ears were strained to hear their conversation.

"I must have cut a poor figure in your eyes, letting that big stiff rank me out," he murmured.

"You are a soldier; you had to do it. Do you suppose I have forgotten that fight in the inn at Albert?"

Chris grinned. "They were not our officers and I had a lot of wine in me. It gave me courage."

"You don't need Dutch courage, lad," she assured him. "Listen! I came down here with a message for the colonel and I don't know when I can come again. Are you going back where you were?"

"Wherever the regiment is."

"I'll come again. You won't forget me?"

"Please!" he pleaded. "Before you go—what is your name?"

"Mary Yorkley."

"I heard the colonel call you 'Lady.'"

"My father is an earl," she smiled.

"I'm just a private in the Waacs, but I get a little extra consideration that I don't deserve. I must go now; the colonel is coming back. Are you going to make yourself an officer for me?"

"I'll do my best," he breathed.

She pressed his right hand in hers, leaned over him and whispered: "I'd kiss you if we were alone. Good-by, my American!"

She went away, leaving Chris in a golden haze. A dozen voices with cock-

ney, Scotch, Australian and Canadian accents were razzing him about his visitor and expressing their opinion of her beauty in uncouth soldier terms, but he didn't heed them. Chris Graham, a nobody in Benton, and an earl's daughter was fond of him! She must be fond of him or she wouldn't act the way she did. Poor Marion, three thousand miles away, was so confident in her meek lover, so sure of his fidelity. Her own assurance was so great that she would never imagine that any other woman could dim her image in his mind. Would she ever forgive him if she found out about it? Did he wish her to forgive him? Would he be content to marry her when the war was over, after he had looked into the deep, dark, thrilling eyes of Lady Mary Yorkley? He did not know, but he called himself a brute and a cur for his lack of faithfulness.

IT was mid-October when they discharged him from the hospital. The last week or so had been spent in watching the entrance to the big tent for a sight of the girl in gray-blue, and she had not come.

There had never been anything very demonstrative between Marion and himself; she was so reserved, so assured, so blonde and cool. To brush her lips, to press her hand, to pass an arm gently about her waist had been a privilege that was precious. She was like a goddess and he her worshiper.

This English girl was a temptation; her appeal was to the senses; he wanted to crush her against him so tightly that he hurt her. And he felt that she was worthy of any man's love, but she was as different from the beautiful girl in Benton as fire is from ice.

Her easy manners, her willingness to pick up a man, her talk about kissing—all these things he could explain by her curious and unconventional life behind an army of fighting men, a daily wit-

ness of death and destruction. Chris was clean and high-minded; he thought only of marrying Lady Mary. Yet he couldn't marry Mary without jilting Marion, and that would be dishonorable and vile. Being a man, it did not occur to him that the English girl might have been attracted to him because he was a new type and that she might be a heartless flirt. He was sure she had been serious that night at the inn, and when she visited him in the hospital, tears had been in her eyes when she gazed at him.

Well, maybe he wouldn't live to be untrue to Marion or to deceive Lady Mary. Quite likely an exploding shell or an air bomb would take him out of his trouble. He was in love with two girls; that was all there was about it, and though novelists claimed it was impossible, they didn't know life. In the meantime he was going back to work. If he could get a commission, he would take it. Even though Marion had commanded him to remain an enlisted man, her point of view was based on false information.

HE found his company had moved two miles forward and was overwhelmed with work. All sorts of things had happened while he was in the hospital. A bomb had hit an ammunition train and it had been obliterated, with it, ten men of another company. Colonel Grant had been given a fighting regiment; the lieutenant colonel was in command of the engineers.

A shell had got six men of A Company, none of them acquaintances. And something big was stirring at the front. Vast numbers of new troops were moving up and trains were running night and day, carrying up supplies of every sort. Although they did not know it, the great Cambrai offensive of the British in November, 1917, was in preparation. It was a huge thrust which succeeded at first, only to be followed by a

great enemy counter drive which forced the British back and cost them very dear.

Captain Spayde came up and thumped Chris on the back. The company orchestra played, "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here!" and the returning soldier got a welcome that warmed the cockles of his heart. Chris had not known how fond he had grown of the weird assortment of humans who were his buddies until he saw the cheerful, grinning faces and realized that every one of the crowd liked him and was delighted to have him back.

But there was little time now for lounging around the bunk huts, swapping stories and thinking up stunts. The British were going in and the engineers were working twenty-four hours a day getting up the supplies. Chris worked for thirty-six hours at a stretch as a brakeman on a trainload of three-inch shells, got four hours' sleep and took on another train. They were making new records in transportation during those days.

And then came the time of excitement while the battle was on. Less than a hundred thousand men went in, swept the enemy off their feet, held on for a few days to the ground they had gained, and then got shoved back because the high command had failed to supply enough reserves.

For a week the engineers moved casualties, drove longer and harder than they had ever worked during the preparations, staggered to their bunks for a few hours' sleep and started again. Long trains of wounded men passed. They should have been grateful that they had not been called upon to participate in such a ghastly affair; instead, they burned with fury because they were noncombatants. Chris came upon Luke Manning crying hysterically as he lifted out wounded. The big ruffian probably had never shed tears before, and these were tears of rage

because he was helpless to aid the miserable human creatures who were suffering so.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOT, ROAST GOAT.

GRADUALLY things settled down. The big guns ceased to bellow, the rattle of small arms dwindled; the work trains got back on a normal basis; and the company was able to make up for some of its lost sleep. The drive had failed. Both sides had dug in upon their new positions, and for a month or two all would be quiet around Cambrai.

The Americans heard that a wonderful treat was in store for them. The people at home had decided that every soldier should have a roast-turkey dinner for Thanksgiving. A special refrigerator ship had been secured to bring over enough turkeys for the whole army.

The report was confirmed by a Y. M. C. A. secretary, who turned up and informed them that the ship had arrived at Bordeaux and the birds would be on hand in ample time for the feast. Like a lot of children, the men anticipated the event. When they spoke about the turkey dinner, their mouths watered. In fact for a week before Thanksgiving, they talked of little else.

When the cook complained that the traveling kitchen couldn't roast a score of turkeys simultaneously, they turned to, tired as they were at night, and constructed a huge brick oven. They stole an ample supply of coal from the locomotive tenders and concealed it in the camp. The men who ran down to the junction with the standard-gauge railroad asked lovingly after the progress of the turkey train, which was also supposed to carry all the fixings.

As the days went by and Thanksgiving approached, they began to grow alarmed. Suppose the turkeys did not arrive in time! On Thanksgiving

morning, as a forlorn hope, a special train ran down to the junction, but it was all in vain.

The British took a kindly interest in the proposed event. Tracers had been in search of the turkey train for a week, but they found nothing. And on Thanksgiving Day, an unhappy lot of grown-up children sat down to army rations. To make matters worse, the cloud of enemy prisoners had to be fed out of the army supply and the rations were reduced. The dinner menu was a chunk per man of rat-trap cheese, and hard-tack, and a mug of unsweetened tea. As the kitchen police handed out the chuck they sang in derision:

"You're in the army now,
You're in the army now,
You don't get meat,
Not even pig's feet,
You're in the army now."

Three days later, the turkey train arrived. They could smell it coming.

Three weeks in the cars without ice—a burial squad was told off to get them underground, along with the fixings, as quickly as possible.

That night, Harry Dever grabbed an ax and assaulted the brick oven, but his arm was grasped by Jack Cunniff.

"Wait a minute, cul," he advised. "We got the oven. Let's get something to cook in it."

"Such as what?"

"I don't know. Let's get a gang and spread out to see what we can steal. If that medico was only good to eat, I'd roast him in a minute."

The idea was applauded and a dozen men stole out of camp upon rapine bent.

Now it happened that an East Indian regiment was quartered in the grounds of the Baron Rothschild estate, which was a mass of ruins. It had high walls, however. Here the English shrewdly kept their Indian troops away from the white soldiers. Furthermore, as the Indians could only eat certain things

because of their religion, the British supplied them what they needed and were not anxious to have the white soldiers see what these supplies happened to be.

The wall was no obstacle to Luke and Jack. With two or three others they scaled it in the dead of night, and, wandering around, they passed sleeping native sentinels and discovered a chicken coop. Two of the men took the coop with a dozen chickens in it upon their backs, and the party crept cautiously back toward the wall.

Suddenly a white object darted out from behind a dirt pile and attacked the thieves. Luke Manning was rear guard. He was the recipient of a terrific blow in the back and fell on his face. He rolled over to see, standing over him with his head down, a big white goat.

"Come to papa!" Luke said joyously, and seized the goat by the horns.

Jack Cunniff grabbed the hind legs and lifted Mr. Goat into the air.

In some miraculous fashion they got themselves, the goat and their chicken coop over the wall, and worked their way back to Company F's bunk houses without being discovered.

The entire company rolled out of its blankets and gloated over the loot. There were a dozen hens, a score of pullets and more than two dozen eggs in the chicken coop. The goat would feed a hundred men easily, he was so big and fat.

Although nobody had ever eaten goat, they had no scruples in their half-starved condition. Chris thought it was a shame to kill a goat with such lovely, long, silky hair—it was an Angora undoubtedly—but what chance has beauty in the face of hunger?

They hid their live stock in a bunk house until six o'clock next night. Then the fire was lighted in the oven. Luke personally assassinated the goat and the others massacred the chickens.

They had stolen a sack of potatoes from an officer's mess tent ten miles down the line and carried it up by train, and they baked the potatoes with the goat and chickens.

AT nine that night F Company held a feast that rivaled the celebrated affair at the house of Mr. Lucullus, the Roman. Gingerly they sampled roast goat and found it eatable, though strong. The chickens vanished like magic. There was much red wine to wash everything down and a happy troop went to its bunks that night.

But—in the morning! Captain Spayde came running up, looking very worried. He had eaten his share with the rest, but he was none the less indignant.

"You thieving swine!" he roared. "Bury the skeleton of that goat as fast as you can. There's hell to pay!"

"What's the matter, captain?" asked Chris.

"Matter? You swiped the sacred white goat of the Hindus. The Sikhs are on the warpath. The whole British army is looking for the goat and, if they find any trace of it here, we're gone geese!"

The Americans had been over long enough to learn to fear an angry Sikh. These savage troopers were marvelous fighters, but they didn't care whom they fought. Now they suspected the Americans.

On the way to work two men were attacked, on suspicion, by a furious Sikh sergeant. He was dragged away by passing soldiers, who happened to be armed. Within two hours of the discovery of the captain, an order from brigade headquarters was read, warning Americans not to go out singly or unarmed. The Sikh camp buzzed like an angry hive of bees, and they were quite capable of clearing the walls and going out to slay. Next day the Sikhs were ordered into the front line to take

their ire out upon the enemy. A British major came and inspected the American camp and, finding no evidence, gave them a clean bill of health.

A FEW days later Chris was called to the captain's hut and found that worthy railroad man with an expression of distress on his brow.

"Graham," he moaned, "you're going to leave us! You're going up to a commissioned officers' school. What in hell am I going to do? If you hadn't been my right guide in Benton railroad yard, I'd ha' led the company under a yard shifter, and as for London, I probably would have run over the king and queen. I never could get this damn soldier business through my head, and I can't now.

"What the whole crowd knew about military things you could have stuck in your eye, and you saved us in London and I know it and everybody in the company knows it, and we're damn sorry to lose you. That chaplain gave me a book called 'My Captain' and I read it, and if that's what a captain ought to be, I'm a bum. I can make a bunch of yeggs work till they drop, and if a couple of limited trains come head on, I know what to do, but as for this — Have a drink, Chris."

He pushed over a glass and a bottle of Scotch.

Chris' head was buzzing. "I'm going up for a commission!" he said to himself. He thought of Lady Mary. How glad she would be! She had asked him to get a commission for her, and he had said he would. But Marion wanted him to avoid a commission. Oh, pshaw, Marion didn't understand! You bet he would grab this chance.

The next morning he started at six a. m. The whole company got up to give him a send-off. He grasped the horny hands, found tears in his eyes and was surprised to see that there wasn't a dry eye in sight.

"Don't forget yer old pals, sarge," admonished Luke Manning. "We had a lot of fun together since that night me and Jack tried to get fresh—you know."

"I won't, old man. You've been damn good to me. I'll never forget the goat."

"Or the steak in England," said Jack eagerly. "You won't forget that feed, sarge? Come and see us when you get your silver bar."

"I'll be back on my first leave," he promised. Then he was on the train to regimental headquarters for further instructions.

The instructions gave him a thrill. He was to report to headquarters in Paris for orders to admit him to the school. Nobody knew where the school was, by the way, and he didn't learn until he reached Paris.

Paris! To every American soldier, every one of two million who got to France, the heart's desire was to see Paris. Chris had been over four months and hadn't seen a good-sized city, save Boulogne. Nothing in the world could have been as marvelous as his anticipation of Paris, a city of silver and gold, of brightness and splendor. He was surely doomed to disappointment, but his heart was singing as he took the train for the great capital of the French nation.

So immense was his excitement that he forgot Lady Mary for the time being. Now he realized with a pang that he probably would never see her again. He did not know where she was quartered. She would come to his company and find no one who could tell her where he was. Marion, of course, could reach him by letter and he could tell her his good news. After all, it was probably for the best. Lady Mary was bad medicine for a conscientious, engaged man.

Chris found five sergeants from the regiment on the train for Paris. Among

them was Bert Leslie, with whom he had forgathered on a number of occasions, notably when they had made a tour of the British front-line trenches.

It had been realized that there was going to be a great shortage of officers in France, due to casualties, to incompetents sent out from the States and for a number of other reasons. Training schools had been established where candidates for commissions could have the advantage of instruction from competent British and French officers and, in the course of time get some actual experience in war conditions. Schools were established for staff officers, for line officers, for the study of the science of war; and the scheme was to withdraw a few officers at a time from the line in quiet sectors, give them a few weeks' additional instructions, and send them back better fitted to lead their men.

Word had been sent, to all American forces in France, to pick out educated and likely noncoms and send them up for commissions. Thus Chris had been a marked man for several weeks before he learned the news. Compared to this new school, the training at American officers' camps was like a high school to a college; it was the plan to make all new officers serve a post-graduate course here. The war shook up the plans quite a little, but thousands of good officers were produced as a result of this wise arrangement by the home government.

CHAPTER XV.

NOT-SO-GAY PARIS.

WHEN the train reached Paris it was about seven o'clock in the evening, after twilight, for it was early in December. The Gare du Nord was very dimly lighted. Those who moved about in it seemed to be soldiers of one army or another, with here and there a uniformed woman, a nurse, a W. A. A. C. or a Frenchwoman war worker.

There were no such things as porters, but it bothered Chris not at all to tote his own pack. Such was their curiosity to see Paris that he and Bert almost ran through the station, after displaying their passes to a French official who obviously could not read English, and they found themselves in the big square outside the Gare.

The darkness there was almost stunning. Street lamps burned dimly through blue shades. No lights fell from the windows of houses. If there were cafés, they were not visible, probably operating also behind closed doors and curtains. Taxis poked about, showing no lights or a mere pin point in side lamps. How they managed to avoid collisions, the Americans never found out. As a matter of fact they didn't—collisions were frequent and somewhat disastrous.

The little group of American sergeants clustered together. Until now their lack of acquaintance with the language had not embarrassed them. They signaled for cabs. When a very ramshackle old machine creaked up, and the short, red-faced, gray-mustached chauffeur leaned down for instructions, they were stumped.

Chris had prided himself on knowing a little French. Behind the British lines he had had no opportunity to practice it. Now he mustered up nerve enough to tell the man to drive them to the Club Palais Royal, to which they had been instructed to report. A jeer came from the others as the chauffeur wagged his head despairingly.

With a shrug of impatience, the man stooped to shift his gears. A rich, Southern voice, resonant and unmistakable Senegambian, made itself heard.

"Evening, gents! What was it yo' was wishin'?"

They turned to see an American colored man in French clothes grinning affectionately at them.

"Hello!" said Leslie. "What's the use of telling you? You can't help us."

"'Deed I can, gen'man. 'Deed I can!"

"The Palais Royal Club, then."

The black man spattered a string of fluent French, to the astonishment of the soldiers. The driver motioned to them to tumble in.

"How did you learn French?" demanded Chris.

"I's been over here seven years, sah. I used to be a fighter and I came over as a trainer. I likes it, and I stays till the war. Now I can't get away. Awful glad to see folks from home."

He moved off with a genial grin. The cat-eyed chauffeur began to cover ground. They noticed that the streets were full of people, even though it was an unlighted city, mostly soldiers. A dozen different national uniforms were noticed. There were many young women abroad.

The buildings loomed up, brown-gray shadows. Suddenly Chris grasped the arm of the man nearest him and pointed. He had recognized the outline of the Paris Opera from picture post cards, although it was dark as pitch. Its works of art, the exterior statuary, were removed or covered with sand bags.

THEY had read that Paris lived in the dark by night, had done so for three years, but the awfulness of the situation really never made an impression upon them until they saw it. Here was a mighty town of two million people which had gone about its business for years practically under fire. If the enemy's guns had not yet reached Paris, later they did, and long-range guns dropped shells into the city for months from a distance of fifty miles. Airplanes raided Paris every moonless night, sometimes half a dozen times a night, and dropped enormous bombs by the dozen. Hence the blue shades over

the street lamps, the curtained windows, the barricades protecting famous buildings, the hundreds of caverns where the people took refuge when the whistles blew to announce the raiders.

To the Americans to whom "gay Paree" was a tradition, this gloom-befogged city, despite its multitude of sidewalk promenaders, was terribly depressing. If there was a gay life here, it certainly was not visible from a taxicab.

In time, and without more than a dozen near-collisions, the machine stopped at the club hotel, and then ensued an argument with the chauffeur. Apparently unpatriotic and unappreciative of the uniform of the men who had come three thousand miles to fight for France, he demanded ten times the price marked on the meter. The hotel porter who overheard the argument came out and settled the squabble for three times the legal fare.

"At that we win!" declared Leslie. "Think what a New York taxi driver would gyp us!"

The hotel was part of the old Palais Royal, long disused, but now utilized by the Americans as American University Union Headquarters. They were given rooms and immediately shouted for baths.

Chris and Bert Leslie had a room together. They were excited about having their first warm bath in months. Imagine their annoyance when the floor waiter informed them that there was no hot water that day, and cold water was limited.

Bathing, from the first, had been a grave problem with Chris. At the railroad camp there was nothing to do but go into a field with a bucket of water, strip and douse. To do this on a cold fall day was asking too much of the ordinary man. Usually the soldiers contented themselves with sloshing their faces and hands. At a British camp, about five miles away there were sev-

eral showers and a little bunch of Americans hastened to avail themselves of this opportunity as soon as they heard of it. But while they were bathing, some graceless Tommies went through the pockets of their clothes and stole likely looking underwear and bits of equipment.

And now, in the great city of Paris, they couldn't have a bath.

Bert Leslie was a youth of twenty-three who came of a very good family in Benton, was a graduate of a university and a practicing attorney, when the war broke out. He was alert, lively, good looking in a dark Spanish fashion, always ready to take a chance and make a bet. It happened that he enlisted in the engineers on a bet.

When the newspapers first printed the long list of qualifications necessary to get into the regiment, Leslie had scoffed and declared that anybody could get in who took the trouble to visit the recruiting officer. As he had none of the essential qualifications, a bet was quickly made, the only stipulation being that he should tell the truth in his application.

He frankly admitted that all he knew about railroads was that you bought a ticket and rode on them. The recruiting officer looked over his splendid physique, laughed and said:

"You will qualify as an expert telephone operator."

"But I don't know anything about telephones!"

"Ever talk on one?"

"Certainly."

"It's enough."

So Leslie had joined the engineers. Now his jubilation at going up for a commission in a fighting regiment was boundless. In Benton, Chris would never have had a chance to become friendly with a man of this type, who frequented the most exclusive homes and whose income was ten times that of the assessor's clerk. In the regi-

ment, they had found each other extremely congenial.

Bert had a lot of money in his pocket. Chris had a hundred dollars which, translated into francs at nearly six to the dollar, was an imposing total. In those days, the franc was still an important piece of money. For ten of them you could purchase the best dinner in Paris, always bearing in mind that most delicacies could not be bought at any price.

HAVING washed and brushed up, the pair started out for a likely looking eat shop. Bert had known Paris before the war and led the way without hesitation to a very famous café. It was closed. Turning, he sought another. This, also, was closed. In the end they contented themselves with a much-less-celebrated restaurant which had been able to stand the gaff of war-time economy.

This restaurant was divided into two sections, the outer for noncoms and enlisted men, a room with coverless tables, benches and wooden or iron chairs. They could catch a glimpse of a heavenly inner room, where brilliantly dressed women and officers in uniforms covered with gold lace were dining at tables, with snowy-white covers, laden with silver dishes and bottles with gold tops.

"Us for that!" declared Bert. They attempted to pass the maître d'hôtel who stood guard at the railing which separated the two sections of the salon.

"Reserved for officers," insisted the man on guard.

"Regardez," said Bert, showing him a ten-franc note.

The man put out his hand, took it, set the pair at a table inside the rail, whisked off the cloth, leaving it bare and then—moved the railing so that they were still cut off from society. It was an outrage, but it enabled them to have a good view of the brilliant part

of the room, and that, at least, was something.

Its disadvantage was that the deal with the head waiter drew the attention of half a dozen lady vultures who were lurking about the outer chamber. These hastened to fix themselves upon the two youths, rolling really beautiful eyes, smiling enticingly and saying to them in weird English:

"Oh, bebe! Beautiful boy, you buy us drinks? Hein?"

The young men wished to feast their eyes upon the more attractive beauties within, and were so self-conscious that they feared to be seen by the élite in such company. They slipped the girls five francs each to leave them in peace and the buzzards retired.

Bert then ordered a good dinner with a bottle of champagne and leaned back with a sigh of content.

"They won't be herding us with the goats much longer," he assured Chris.

"Next time we come to Paris, we can get in anywhere, if we have the price. For the love of Mike, look! Did you ever see such a lovely girl?"

Chris followed the direction in which Leslie nodded and gasped likewise but with even more reason.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARY DINES OUT.

COMING through the room was a girl in a red-and-black satin gown cut very low and revealing the graceful lines of an admirable figure. Her shoulders were as white as snow ice. Her cheeks were pink with excitement and rouge. Her big eyes glittered darkly under her crown of blue-black hair. It was Lady Mary. Accompanying her was a British officer with a bristling mustache, streaked with gray. On his sleeves were the insignia of a major general.

As she came near, Chris started to his feet, waiting to catch her eye. He

caught it. She looked at him coldly, then passed on without a sign of recognition. He knew he was not mistaken. It was surely Mary Yorkley, yet she had cut him dead. But as she passed, he saw a tinge of pink color the marble whiteness of her neck and shoulders. She had recognized him; she was blushing for her own cruelty. Piteously he followed her with his eyes as she picked her way through the ruffraff of soldiers and women in the outer room, then went through the exit into the street.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Bert, pulling Chris down in his chair by the simple process of kicking his feet from under him. "You were not trying to pick her up, I hope."

"I thought I knew her," Chris mumbled.

"You thought you knew her! Why, you poor fish, if you ever saw that girl in your life before, you would never think you knew her; you'd never forget her! Where would a mutt like you ever meet a woman like that? I'll bet she's the grand duchess of something or other, and if the old bird with her wasn't the Duke of London, I'll eat one of your hobnailed boots."

"Maybe I was mistaken," Chris said stupidly.

"It's a cinch she didn't know you," continued his tormentor. "Why, she looked at you as though you were a trench rat."

"For Heaven's sake, shut up!" Chris exclaimed. "I do know her, and if she cut me, she had a good reason for it."

"Oh, all right," Bert agreed, realizing now that his friend was deeply hurt. "You couldn't expect a girl to see a sergeant when she was with a general."

Their dinner arrived. Although it was good, it had no flavor for Chris. He didn't know what he was eating and drinking. He was struck almost senseless by her dazzling beauty, so much so that the affront did not seem important—that such a vision could stoop to com-

mon clay like himself was too much to expect. In her uniform, Lady Mary was beautiful; Chris had been fascinated by her. But in a becoming evening gown, she was overwhelmingly lovely.

The general had carried her wrap on his arm. It was a white affair and had escaped Chris' attention at the time. Now he realized that it was ermine. His little companion of the café in Albert wore ermine and satin and dined with generals!

The mystery of her heightened her fascination. Chris was depressed, and Bert saw it and pitied him. That is, Bert pitied him until a waiter approached, half an hour later, asked for Sergeant Graham and handed him a small envelope.

"Don't mind me," urged Bert. "See what's in it."

Chris tore it open with trembling fingers. It read:

MY FRIEND: Forgive me, it was impossible for me to notice you just now. There were big reasons. Will you come to the Grand Hotel at midnight for a moment? I shall be in the Winter Garden. MARY.

Chris smiled fatuously; his cheeks flushed with pride and satisfaction. While he might be an insignificant Yankee noncom, he was sufficiently important in the eyes of that lovely girl to win an apology and to have her wish to see him. Only the instinct of the gentleman prevented him from flaunting the note in the envious face of his companion.

"From her?" asked Bert incredulously.

Chris nodded. "Wants me to meet her later on. I'll have to leave you, old man."

"You're excused. I wish it was I who had a date like that. Good heavens, what a beauty! What is she, French—or Spanish or Italian?"

"English."

"My eye! You never saw an English brunette like that."

"Name's Lady Mary Yorkley. Daughter of an earl. She's a Wark."

"Nobility! You're doing well for an insignificant noncombatant. Does the husband of a British noblewoman get a title?"

"Don't be a darn fool. She wouldn't marry me. She's just a good fellow."

"When's your date?"

"Midnight."

"It's nearly eleven now. We'll mop up here, I'll go home to bed, and you'll be gassing with the prettiest English girl the world ever knew. Oh, you lucky bum!"

Chris laughed self-consciously. He was eating up the envy of his friend; it tasted like plum pudding. They emptied their bottle of wine, finished their dinner, loafed about for half an hour, then paid their check and went into the dark street. The Grand Hotel was not half a mile away, as Bert was able to indicate the direction. Chris decided to walk. Bert hailed a taxi and departed reluctantly.

FIVE minutes later the air was split by a loud whistle. Searchlights began to streak across the sky. The crowds on the sidewalk ceased their aimless promenade and scattered in mad haste. It was the signal of an air raid.

Every few blocks there were cellars for refuge from bombardment, and most made for the nearest. Some plunged into the entrances of the Metro, while others took refuge in deep doorways. In two minutes Chris was alone on the street, in his mind only the necessity of reaching the Winter Garden of the Grand Hotel so as not to keep Lady Mary waiting.

Now, from the various public squares and from the top of the Eiffel Tower, the antiaircraft guns began to snarl and roar. More searchlights brightened the sky, most of them going straight up as

high as the beams would carry. Chris began to run, but he looked up and saw for a second a tiny plane in the yellow streak of a searchlight, then it vanished into the blackness.

A moment later, not very far away, came an explosion which was so terrific that its vibration knocked Chris off his feet. A bomb had fallen in some street or upon a house close by. He heard the crash as a wall or a roof fell in. He heard cries of pain and fright. Then a second bomb fell, much farther away, and a third in the distance. Meanwhile the bombardment of the air guns continued unremittently, and up in the sky there were flashes of light where planes were fighting.

In five minutes, all was over. Chris walked into the hotel garden with several moments to spare. People had emerged from their holes and were carrying on as though nothing had happened. But he heard the clang of ambulances on their way to remove the dead and wounded.

THERE were a dozen couples in the big Winter Garden, seated under potted plants in huge leather chairs. Mary was not there, but it was not time for her. Chris seated himself, receiving a scowl from an officer who resented a noncom making himself comfortable there.

Mary appeared suddenly. She wore a neat street dress of black cloth and a small cloth hat. He rose to meet her, and she led him into the library, which was empty.

"Are you very angry with me for cutting you dead?" she asked, with a smile of apology.

"I was too delighted that you remembered me afterward to hold that against you."

"Sit down here, on this sofa. It's cozy."

They seated themselves. She sat very close to him. About her was a

subtle and intoxicating perfume that went to his head.

"Can't we go somewhere and have something to eat or a drink?" he asked.

"It's too late. I'd love to, otherwise. But we only have a moment."

"That was the first time I had seen you in an evening gown. Do you know how beautiful you are?" he demanded enthusiastically.

"I have received compliments," she said, with a little laugh. "To say I was astounded to see you in Paris goes without saying. What are you doing here?"

"Obeying your orders. I am going to school for a commission."

"Wonderful!" she glowed. "You have officers' schools in France, I know. Where is your school?"

"It's in a town called Langres. I don't know where that is."

"Langres," she repeated. "I know, and this is most fortunate. Will you do something for me?"

"Anything," he assured her recklessly.

"I won't hold you to that. Listen! There is a pastry shop in Langres kept by a Madame Govert. Will you give her a message from me?"

"Why—er—yes. A letter?"

"No. Just a few words. 'Raoul was wounded, but not seriously. He hopes to be in Amiens soon. His love is greater than ever.'"

"Her husband?"

She smiled. "Her sweetheart. When do you go?"

"Early to-morrow."

"Oh, dear! I won't see you again. I hoped we might have a real party in Paris."

"I'd give my eyeteeth for the chance, but I'm in the army. By the way, how do you happen to be able to doff your Wark uniform? I thought it was obligatory at all times."

Mary tittered. "Can you imagine dear old General Hawes taking a Waac

out to dinner? Of course I put on my glad regalia."

"But now!"

"I hate the uniform, and I have privileges that the rank and file have not. To-morrow I shall don it during daylight hours, and in three days I return to Amiens. When shall I see you?"

"The first leave I get I'm going back to the railroad outfit. I promised the boys I would. If you are going to be in the vicinity, that makes it all the more necessary. May I write to you?"

"Y-es," she said. "Better send your letters to Mary Yorkley, care Madame Touchet, Hotel Corona, Etoile. She knows where I am apt to be and will forward my mail."

"Will you write to me, Mary?"

Her eyes danced and she smiled coquettishly. "I might answer your letters—perhaps I will. Write me nice long ones all about yourself and what you are doing."

"You bet I shall."

"Good night, my friend."

"Oh, must you go?"

"I shall be on duty at six a. m. And they are suspicious of people who keep late hours in Paris just now."

"When are we ever going to have some time together?" he complained.

"Who knows? You won't forget me?"

"You're more likely to forget me, with all your generals and colonels."

"You have something they lack," she whispered. "Youth! Boy, nothing in the world appeals so much to a woman as youth—fresh, honest, unsophisticated youth. We admire brains, but we don't love them. And very few of our generals have brains, poor dears. Good night, handsome Yankee."

With a sweet little laugh, she fled. Chris picked himself up, pulled himself together and went away. He was wondering if that last remark of hers could be construed as a declaration of love.

Did he love her? She certainly disturbed him, and it hurt him that he had to depart in the morning and leave her in Paris.

All was serene without doors, though it was very dark. He would have taken a taxi to his hotel, except that he was afraid he could not make the driver understand his French. Besides, there were very few taxis in sight, and most of them were occupied. He was quickly lost, and accosted a gendarme in careful French. The officer replied with a string of unintelligible words, but he made a gesture in a certain direction. Chris followed the direction until he met another gendarme. The second man was equally impossible to understand, but his gesture was clear. With the aid of three gendarmes, Chris reached his hotel and found Bert in bed and asleep.

Next morning early they took a train for Langres-sur-Haute-Marne and arrived in a comparatively short time at the lower town. The school was in Castle Turenne, located on top of a mountain in an old, Roman-walled town. A cogwheel railroad made the ascent.

The little train climbed slowly. When it was halfway up, something gave and the cars began to slide backward down the mountain with ever-increasing momentum. They struck the terminal at the bottom with a terrific crash which knocked all the passengers over and wrecked the train. It was walk or never get there.

The men were heavily laden, and they encountered a dozen American volunteer nurses, loaded with baggage, who were also bound upward. So the gallant soldiers carried their own kits and the bags of the nurses and completed as painful a climb as they would ever encounter in the world.

They reported and were told that work would not begin until the next day.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BULL IN THE CHINA SHOP.

LATE in the afternoon Chris set out to find the pastry shop of Madame Govert. It proved to be a pretty little café on the Rue Didnot. She was a small, old, gray-haired woman who did not resemble the ordinary proprietress of a café. Her face was aristocratic, her speech refined and her manners excellent. Assisting her was a young woman, dark and pretty, whose age might have been twenty-five. The pair were huddled behind a counter watching the antics of an American lieutenant, fresh from home, who was full of brandy.

This youth was amusing himself curiously. He would take a plate, throw it on the floor, stamp on it, if the fall did not break it. Then he would toss a franc piece to the women. After breaking a dozen plates, he began on glasses—a veritable bull in a china shop.

The women were pleading with him to stop, in very bad English. He was heeding them not at all. A pile of franc pieces lay on the counter. He was scrupulous in paying for his amusement. Chris heard him mumbling as he broke a saucer:

"That's a seventy-five shell."

A plate was a six-inch shell, and a tumbler was an air bomb.

At first Chris thought it was funny, then he gathered from the protests of the old lady that she didn't want the money. Money would not replace the china; it could not be purchased at any price.

Looking around, he saw there was no other officer in sight, and the lieutenant was too far gone to resent an insult. Slipping up behind him, Chris caught him by the collar and quickly rushed him through the door into the street. The officer did not even look behind him. Following the initial impetus, he

lurched along the sidewalk until he was out of sight around a corner.

"Merci, monsieur, merci, merci!" exclaimed the older woman.

The younger was mournfully sweeping up the broken glass and crockery. Chris noticed that the drunkard had left a hundred francs on the counter. In peace time the damage would have been covered by ten francs, but with the great china factories at Lille closed up, he could well understand that the poor women could not replace the broken dishes.

"Which of you is Madame Govert?" he asked.

"Madame Govert, it is my niece, there," replied the old woman.

At the sound of the name, the younger dropped her broom and approached with anxious eyes and trembling lips.

"I have a message for you. Do you understand English?"

"A leetle, if you speak so slow."

"It is from a friend of yours."

"Oui, oui."

"Do you know a Lady Mary Yorkley?"

"Marie Orklee? Oui, monsieur!" Her eyes shone with excitement.

"She sends word that Raoul was slightly wounded and is coming to Amiens. He loves you."

"Eet was like that she said it?"

"Why, yes, that's the gist of it."

"Please, monsieur, write it down—not ze gist, just the way she said it." She produced a stub of a pencil and the back of an old envelope.

Chris smiled, took the pencil and wrote. He remembered now just what Mary had said.

Raoul was wounded, but not seriously. He hopes to be in Amiens soon. His love is greater than ever.

The girl grasped the paper from his hand and studied it. "Ah, that is better!" she said. "I compren' now."

"It's just about what I told you," he assured her.

"Oh, no, monsieur. You say, 'He loves you.' I know that. She say: 'His love is greater than ever.' That is something more, ze good news."

She pondered for a moment. "You will see her again?"

"I don't know, but I shall write her," Chris replied.

"Please for me say: 'I understand and am happy.'"

Chris ordered a glass of wine, insisted despite protests upon paying for it, then went on his way conscious, like a boy scout, of a good deed well done.

The general staff was convinced that the war was coming out of trenches and that it would only be won by fighting in the open. As soon as there were enough Americans, they were to drive the enemy out of their trenches. The Americans didn't want any part of defensive warfare.

This judgment was signally vindicated, for before there were more than a hundred thousand veterans in action, the enemy broke through to the Marne and trench warfare was at an end. And in the offensive started by the French and British soon after, the American training in open warfare made our troops of tremendous value in assault, as was proved at Château Thierry, Soissons, Saint-Mihiel and the Argonne.

Chris received, at Langres, a dozen letters from Marion, which had followed him up from the British front and had experienced many adventures en route, judging by the appearance of the envelopes. Marion had not yet heard of his shift from the engineers to the school for combat officers. Her letters were filled with admonitions about taking care of himself. They were sweet letters, for the girl had given herself up to the joy of loving and, despite her pacific protestations, was proud that she had a man at the

front. Indeed she spoke scornfully of men of their acquaintance who had avoided the draft or got into stay-at-home services.

ON his return to headquarters in town, Chris found twoscore non-coms in one group, and a bunch of ninety-day lieutenants in another, waiting for instructions. Finally a major emerged from the building and made the announcement:

"The army has secured the Turenne Barracks. You will go out there at once and quarter yourselves for the night. You may find it a trifle uncomfortable, but you are soldiers. Make the best of it."

The major looked guilty as he spoke, but he had not half prepared them for what they were to find. About a mile and a half from the little town stood the barracks, a group of four-story, stone buildings around three sides of a rectangle with a high stone wall on the fourth side. It was immediately evident that these barracks had been abandoned for a long time, perhaps since the days of the seventeenth-century field marshal after whom they were named.

The window openings were big enough for a cart to enter and there was not a pane of glass in the entire set of buildings. The floors were of stone, and everything was open and cold as the arctic. The men searched the whole place. It was deserted. No one was around to give them any instructions, not even a caretaker. They felt like a lot of explorers who had suddenly come upon an imposing ruin of the stone age.

They picked out the least exposed corners of a vast chamber on the second floor and then spread out their bunks on the cold floors. Few of the men had any money. There were no arrangements for feeding them, for they had arrived a week ahead of the

organization of the school. Those who had money loaned some to the penniless ones and all meals were snatched at little cafés in the town.

For comfort, amusement, excitement, joys and recreation, the barrenness and bleakness of the barracks upon their arrival was a true index. Chris looked back upon the months spent in that school as a polar hell.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BIG SHELL ARRIVES.

ALL soldiers will remember how cold was the winter of 1917-18. This officers' college, located in the stone mansions on top of the hill of Langres, was the coldest place on earth.

Even when the staff of the school turned up and sessions got under way, there was little improvement. They were allowed to draw water for ten minutes, three times a day, if the pipes were not frozen, which they usually were. No fuel was provided and anyway it would have been impossible to warm up the place. The wind and rain and sleet and snow blew in through the vast window openings, piled up in drifts and melted on the floors, which became like skating rinks. Except when they were lying on their bunks, the men never removed their overcoats. Often they slept in them.

Reveille was at five a. m. The routine was to turn out of the cold bunks in the chill and dark, light the butt end of a candle, hang up the trench mirrors, and obey the regulations for a daily shave with a few drops of water and tooth paste or hand soap, grit the teeth and pull the razor over the aching face. Woe to the men with heavy black beards! A splash of a handful of water on face and hands, then grab a rifle and run for reveille formation in the open quadrangle.

Next thing was to line up with tin dishes for mess, which was provided

for the embryo officers by a collection of soldiers who had originally come from all the little countries in central Europe, speaking forty different languages and not understanding a word of English. Their lack of English had secured them this job, as they were no earthly use to the army, and their cooking consisted of a mysterious mixture which they called breakfast, dinner and supper.

The food was usually cold when the candidates got it, and there was never enough to satisfy their hunger.

Chris had sampled many varieties of bad cooking, but this concoction, called "slum," was the worst ever. It faintly resembled stew.

After "refreshing" the inner man, they turned out for another formation and were kept going steadily until eleven forty-five. Then came lunch, and from one to five fifteen the grind of drill again.

By the light of their candles, the six hundred men studied what they had been taught during the day until nine thirty, when they rolled into bed to go through it all again the next day.

For the weekly bath, they stripped in the cold, rubbed down with a dry towel, put on clean underwear and socks. There was no water for bathing, even cold water.

They got a lot of grim laughs from the mottoes in French which were painted in black letters on the walls and over the doors.

"Enter Without Knocking." "Be Brief in Your Explanations." "Speak Little and in a Low Voice." "No Noise." "Work Hard." "Love Peace, But Do Not Fear War." "If You Wish Peace, Prepare for War."

These sage admonitions didn't help Chris, who dared not remove his shoes at night lest they be frozen so stiff in the morning that he could not get them on, or when he returned from bayonet drill dripping with perspiration and had

to sit in the cold, clammy barracks and let things dry on him.

The candidates made an arrangement to pocket every twig, scrap of paper, bit of board or anything combustible, bring the things to barracks and hoard them. On Sundays the total gleanings resulted in a bonfire on the floor, around which everybody huddled to get warm or to dry clothes. Heat once a week for an hour or so while the bonfire burned—only that and nothing more.

From this living hell there was a way of escape. No man need endure it any longer than he wished, for he could return to his unit and give up the hope of a commission. The government had not intended things to be as bad as they were, but the submarines were sinking millions of tons of supplies a month; the men in the trenches had to be cared for first; those who survived the ordeal would make fine officers.

The temptation to desert grew upon Chris. Had he been the man who sailed from America, he would have yielded to it. He saw burly, fighting, regular sergeants quit. The day Bert Leslie came to him with tears rolling down his cheeks and announced that he could stand the gaff no longer was the hardest day for Chris. He wanted to rush to the office and turn in his resignation, but he didn't do it.

Two reasons deterred him—both feminine. He had promised Mary he would get a commission, and he wanted to show Marion that she had underestimated him, that he was not the kind of a man who played safe. Like millions of other men who might otherwise fail in emergencies, what women would think of him was the plank that kept him afloat. He shook hands with Bert.

"I don't blame you in the least," said Chris. "Perhaps I will have to follow your example. But I'm going to try to worry through."

"You're a damn sight better man than I am!" the young aristocrat re-

turned. "You bet I'll tell the boys back in the engineers the stuff you are made of. As for the commission, to hell with it! To hell with an army that treats human beings like this!"

"Surely things will improve," Chris told himself, after his last friend had departed. But they didn't; they got worse.

On Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons and evenings, they were allowed to go to town. There they made up for their privations by drinking all the wine and hard spirits they could pay for.

IT happened one night that a drunk, on his way in, fell into a mud puddle at the gate, very brown mud, then crawled on all fours across the yard, up four flights of stairs, across the squad-room concrete floor in the dark and threw himself on his bunk. He made his progress shortly after lights were out and silence was supposed to reign. As the men in their bunks had been talking, they supposed it was the officer of the day quietly sneaking up on them.

When they saw what they thought was a big brown bear sniffing his way along, they bombarded him with boots and even hurled rifles at him, but he was impervious to assault. In the morning they found he had left a track of mud all along the barracks, and they turned to and cleaned it up to save him from a heavy penalty.

Supplies from America were slow in arriving and rarely got to an isolated post like Turenne Barracks. So, when clothes or shoes wore out, it was impossible to replace them. Chris wore the soles off his shoes, finally his bare feet were on the ground and he was drilling in January in that condition, his state being no worse than many others.

"Talk about Valley Forge!" said one of the candidates, as he rubbed his own

bare soles with snow to prevent them from freezing. "Washington's gang were never worse up against it than this here aggregation of soon-to-be-commissioned officers of this man's army."

The morning Chris' place in the line happened to be an icy puddle was the last straw. Risking a drubbing or perhaps loss of his commission, he appeared in a pair of borrowed rubbers which made the whole outfit roar with laughter. The martinet in charge promptly ordered him before the school commandant, a regular-army colonel who began by threatening to boil him in oil and wound up by cursing the quartermaster, which was the chief indoor and outdoor sport of all branches of the army.

The commandant then produced a pair of his own shoes, patted the boy on the shoulder and sent him away well shod.

Such was the awfulness of the ordeal that out of more than seven hundred who had been admitted, only a few more than three hundred remained to graduate. The others had been transferred back to their original units at their own request. Chris had stuck, and in March he got his commission from the government.

If Marion could have seen the man who appeared in a lieutenant's uniform and reported at the Specialists' School, still in Turenne, for orders! Chris had filled out; he had actually got fat on suffering and privation. His muscles were like steel; his chest as hard as Luke Manning's the day Chris had hurt his fist on it so long ago at Eppington. His shoulders were square, his jaw thrust straight out, his blue eyes cold and hard.

The colonel, in his graduation address, said that there wasn't a man left in school who wasn't now the equal of any officer in the army. All timidity had been ironed out of Chris. He had actually thrust himself into fights,

though his excuse was that they gave a chance to get warm.

Immediately orders were issued that some sixty of the new officers, who had hoped their hardships were over for a while, were to be sent into the trenches for some actual war experience. The plan was to send them into the French trenches, two officers to a regiment, and Chris found himself among the lucky or unlucky sixty. The very next morning they started, laden with everything they owned in the world. Chris carried nearly seventy pounds and felt as though he had the Flatiron Building on his back. The only bit of joy in the gloom was that they would pass through Paris. If they could remain overnight — Well, that would repay them for much of their suffering.

AS quickly as he could get rid of his load and acquire the essentials of a commissioned officer—Sam Browne belt, silver bars and so on—Chris hastened to the Corona Hotel to inquire for Lady Mary Yorkley. He found nobody there who knew her. Disappointed, he returned to the club hotel at the Palais Royal. He could not go to the theater, because he was broke. Among other things, the government had forgotten to pay the men at the officers' college. The bunch huddled together. They were all broke. No gay life for them. But it was something to sleep in a good bed and their notes were accepted by the officials of the club.

Being an officer had its drawbacks, as Chris had already discovered, for officers got no more free grub. They had to pay for all their meals and how to do it without funds was a poser.

The entire outfit started next morning at the usual uncomfortable hour of five thirty for Chalons-sur-Marne, where they were entertained at the French officers' club and where they were given individual assignments and

thrust into crowded automobiles for the front.

Fortunately for Chris, he had never stopped plugging at his French. By this time he could understand simple sentences and express himself awkwardly, but in an understandable fashion. When he found himself alone at a regimental mess where no one spoke a word of English, he was very grateful for his knowledge and could not help chuckling at the probable predicament of some of the others, to whom French was still as mysterious as Chaldean.

Coming from the ghastly "mess" of Turenne he enjoyed the palatable French dinner as far as the roast. Then a six-inch shell, with a terrific crash, struck the next hut to the one in which he was dining. The heavy guns had the range. His first impulse was to run somewhere, but he didn't know where to go. Glancing around the table, he saw that the other officers were eating as though nothing had happened. He stuck but enjoyed the food no longer.

As soon as the meal was finished, a major reached over and patted him on the back with the remark: "*Mes compliments, mon camarade.*"

Whereupon the whole mess rose and made for the door. Two or three other shells had exploded near by during this repast, but Chris had supposed that it was the thing to ignore them. Instead, the whole group had remained to watch the Yankee. Now they made tracks for a shell hole not far away and piled in with great haste. And a second or two later, a shell exploded and removed every evidence that there had been a dining hut on the spot just vacated.

"Why did you all wait so long?" he managed to ask the lieutenant, against whom he was leaning in the shell hole.

The officer smiled broadly. "You are the first American we have seen. It was worth waiting to see how you liked it."

"Might have been an expensive inspection," he grumbled.

"Besides, it was a special banquet, not our regular fare," admitted the officer.

Chris had supposed they were accustomed to Americans, since two or three divisions were in the trenches at the moment, but the French held a long line and this section had not met any before now.

CHAPTER XIX.

"FOLLOW MY LEADER."

IMAGINE a grave, extended for a long distance, widened somewhat, from six to eight feet deep, and that is a trench. Where troops were posted for months they embellished this elongated grave somewhat, dug caves below it, where they rigged up rude bunks, set up rough-hewn tables. Sometimes they had time to drain this grave, even make the floor of concrete, but usually it was just an open ditch, into which rain water poured and collected in pools.

It was muddy, very muddy. The trench boots often sank up to the ankles in the slimy, oozy goo, yet men had to lie down and sleep in it. Overhead was a slit of sky. By getting up on a ridge at one side, called the firing step, one might poke his head out, but a whistling bullet from sharpshooters on the other side discouraged such a dangerous practice.

In such graves the French had been living for three years when Chris came among them. They had become human rodents. They were immune from pneumonia and such diseases, as those who were not immune had long since died. Among these grave dwellers he came upon a tall, slender young Frenchman named Claude Macloux who spoke English. He fastened a skinny hand upon the young American.

"Did you ever go to the Metropolitan Opera?" he demanded.

"I never had the price," Chris admitted.

"But you must have heard of me. I sang there. I was a basso. I sang *Mephistopheles*, and the *High Priest* in 'Aida.' They even let me do *Scarpia* in 'Tosca,' though it was a bit high for me."

"I think I did hear of you," said Chris untruthfully, for he had never followed opera, either in person or through the musical columns of his newspaper.

The young man laughed bitterly. "Listen," he said. "I got a thousand dollars a night. I had been a poor boy and when I became a singer, I reveled in luxury. I loved America because of its steam heat, its porcelain baths, its richness and elegance. I determined to marry a rich woman so I should have these things all my life. Well, I did. She was a Frenchwoman, of the old nobility, a marquise in her own right. She lived in a palace in the Faubourg Saint-Germain in Paris. She was very rich, a little old, but what was that? To tell the truth, she was fifty and I was twenty-six. I loved beautiful women and I sold my soul for comfort and luxury."

"Very interesting," murmured Chris, embarrassed by the masked confidence.

"You think so. Let me tell you. I married her on June 15, 1914. I lived in her palace six weeks. Then I was called to the colors. I sought exemption because of my voice, but there were no exemptions. They dragged parish priests from their churches, and they dragged the stars from the Paris opera. They sent me to my regiment and my regiment fought at the Marne. This will be my fourth winter in the trenches. I have never been wounded, I have never had a furlough, though I have pleaded often enough. I was a man who loved perfumes. I put bath salts in my bath. I was manicured once a week. My own barber came to shave

me daily. I loved good clothes and silk underwear."

"Some change!"

"Now I am just a mole. I am dirty. I have had a thousand colds. Probably my voice is gone and I shall never sing again. If the war should end to-morrow, what could I do? My wife's fortune came from Lille and her factories are destroyed. She is dead, without leaving me a penny."

"I am dreadfully sorry. Is there anything I can do?"

The big, deep-set, mournful eyes of the hollow-cheeked artist suddenly lit with fire. "When you write home, tell Americans where I am. That Claude Macloux does not sing to them because he is fighting for France. Tell the newspapers to print my picture and say that one great artist has given everything in the world for *la patrie*. Have you got a cigarette?"

He took the weed and sauntered off along the trench, the duck board upon which he walked sloshing in the muddy water beneath his weight. Chris wondered how much of the long dissertation was true. Afterward, he learned that it was all true.

IN the officer's dugout, Chris had completed his evening meal of black bread and sour wine, a repast which insulted his stomach, accustomed by now to the rough American army fare. The bread was soggy stuff and the wine was practically vinegar. Nourishing it must be, since a million French soldiers lived and fought upon it, but nothing in the world was more unpalatable to him than this diet.

Yet the group appeared to enjoy it. They were merry; they chattered so fast that he understood very little; and they roared with laughter at quirps and jests unknown to him. When the meal was concluded, Lieutenant Raoul Renard rose and addressed him directly.

"It is my turn to make a tour of in-

spection," he said. "Would you, perhaps, desire to accompany me?"

Anything was better than the bad air and inaction of the dugout, so Chris assented eagerly. They crawled through the hole that led up into the trench, and brushed the mud off their uniforms as well as they could.

For a wonder, it was a fine night; the stars were bright and the moon sent a chill, cold light into the trench. He could see, here and there, the stocky figures of the soldiers on duty. Most of the enlisted men were snuggled in their dugouts. The young Frenchman preceded him as they walked along, and Chris noticed that the soldiers did not bother to salute, but usually had a cheerful word for the officer, who made a laughing reply.

They proceeded several hundred feet along the passage when they came to a place where a trench opened at a right angle. Looking ahead, the American saw that the ground sloped rapidly into a gulch about a hundred yards wide, and the trench feathered out to the surface. It was evident that the side passage made a circuit around the gulch, which crossed the lines of trenches and ran back for a distance unknown to him.

The young Frenchman stopped and was regarding the American with a mocking smile. "It is half a kilometer farther around the ravine," he explained. "It is my custom to cross directly, because it saves so much time. But if Monsieur the American is afraid to——"

"I am not afraid," returned Chris, though he really was. "I'll go where you go."

"Then follow."

He continued along the main trench, which grew shallow, and soon their heads and shoulders were above ground. Chris saw with horror that they were going to emerge completely and walk upon the surface, which the

moon was illuminating with a bluish-green light.

"Look here!" he called, in a low tone. "Won't we be fired upon?"

"Perhaps." The Frenchman smiled, pausing and looking back. "But there is time to return if you are afraid."

"You go to hell!" Chris retorted. "Continue."

The officer took him at his word and proceeded at a leisurely pace, while Chris felt that the eyes of the whole French army were glued tightly to his back.

Presently the trench became a low bank and then disappeared completely. They were walking across open ground. In his mind a wild rage against the show-off was rising—this was a piece of pure bravado, an attempt to bluff an American, and it was very likely to cost them both their lives. His cowardly legs screamed to be allowed to run him back under cover. His head told him that this was the most useless, stupid and insane performance of his life. Yet something bigger than himself forced him to move on behind the crazy Frenchman, carried him farther and farther away from security. His personal opinion of his own fortitude was low, but he would be damned if he would be shown up by a Frenchman. He was the only American in the sector and he would not be a cowardly American—a mad one, perhaps, but not a runaway.

NOW it happened that the enemy had placed a few machine guns so as to sweep the ravine. At the other end, the French had established several of the same kind of weapons. And when Chris and the French officer were one third across, their opponents decided to teach the promenaders a lesson. They opened fire.

At the first spat of a machine-gun bullet, the Frenchman dropped to his face, and it didn't take Chris a second

to follow his example. The French machine gunners were too far away to see at what the others were shooting, but upon general principles they returned the fire. The two young fools hugged the ground, while over their bodies zipped and whizzed thousands of leaden insects.

After two or three minutes, the enemy ceased firing, and the French battery also became silent.

"Pssst!" whispered the French officer. "Are you hit?"

"No!" snarled Chris. "But it's no fault of yours."

"Then forward," said the lieutenant, who pulled himself to his feet and continued his nonchalant promenade.

Chris dragged himself upright and followed, but he was no longer silent. He had hated profanity, had winced at the curses of the engineers, but he seemed to have remembered them. Now he directed at the trim, blue back of the officer a string of oaths which would have made a teamster turn green with envy, which would have edified an engine driver and made Luke Manning cheer lustily.

They had proceeded only a couple of score of feet when the machine gunners again became interested. For the second time they opened fire. The two men fell flat and lay motionless while a second fusillade passed over them. To lie supine under such a fire was a test of will power beyond anything which Chris had ever been compelled to undergo before. His impulse was to get up and run as fast as he could for cover, though his common sense told him that it would be sure death to do so. In time, the rattle and patter of the guns ceased and the Frenchman scrambled to his feet and continued to walk, unhurried.

What Chris had said to him before was mild compared to the verbal dressing he gave him now. The American had utilized all the regular oaths, and

he found that his ability to invent new forms of insult and blasphemous references was amazing. It was fortunate that the Frenchman's English was limited to a few polite phrases. If he had understood ten per cent of the language directed toward him, he might have emptied his pistol into the American.

This time they had reached the edge of the opposite trench before the machine-gun fire broke out again. When they fell on their faces, they were covered and were able to continue on their stomachs, then on their hands and knees, until the trench walls were so high they could stand upright.

As Chris stood glaring at his companion in this mad game of "Follow my leader," he was astonished to have that youth fall upon him, embrace him and kiss him on both cheeks. And from the trench came a mob of grinning soldiers to grasp his hands and thump him on the back and assure him that he was a man of heart, with the courage of the devil.

IT developed that the thing had been a wager made during dinner in the dugout. Renaud had been chosen by lot to risk his life to discover just what kind of a man the Americans had sent up to learn how to be an officer. Chris had passed his initiation; he was one of themselves; and with the French in that sector, he was no longer an alien.

When Chris had time to think it over, he decided that it had been worth all it cost to establish himself on such a footing, but he woke with a start a dozen times that night to hear the *spat-spat-spat* of the machine guns as they had sounded in the ravine.

Poor Marion! Chris smiled pityingly as he thought of the girl at home who had sent him into this, who, even now, assumed that he was conductor or brakeman of a train running, perhaps, between Nice and Mentone. What would Marion have done if she had

seen his promenade through the ravine? Probably she would have assailed the daring French braggart with her finger nails.

They were a gallant lot, these French; years in the trenches had not taken away their love of fun. Even with his scant knowledge of their language, Chris found them more spirited companions than the laconic and sardonic doughboys. Plastered with dirt and mud from head to foot, living on fare which would have made Americans mutiny, undersized, ignorant, ugly—they had something that wouldn't do our people any harm if they had it, too.

Well, he was glad he had shown them that an American would take any chances they were willing to take. Perhaps he had done good work for America that night when he had kissed good-bye to common sense and followed the nonchalant Frenchman out into the open and the moonlight.

CHAPTER XX.

IN AN ENEMY TRENCH.

CHRIS was not left long to rest on his laurels. About two the next morning, while he was sleeping in one of the huts, he was awakened by Captain Alexis Sand. The officer invited Chris to accompany him on a raid, as if he were asking him to have a drink or to meet a pretty girl. Chris sighed inwardly, but nodded gamely, rose and struggled into the few garments he had not worn to bed.

The battalion headquarters were located in a group of pine-board huts, behind the third line of trenches, and sunk into the earth about four feet; their tops were camouflaged with shrubbery. It was such a hut in which he had been given his introductory banquet by the regimental staff. Now he followed Captain Sand into a communicating trench. After trudging miles, or so

it seemed in the darkness, they reached the front line, where a group of about thirty men were waiting.

Meanwhile, heavy shelling was going on. The French were laying a barrage to prevent reënforcements going up to the trench about to be visited so informally. As Chris knew nothing about the arrangements, he stuck close to Captain Sand, who was in command. They slipped over into the darkness of No Man's Land, and took a devious path through openings in the barbed wire already prepared by a pioneer detachment. They moved along steadily until a burst of star shells suddenly illuminated the ground, then fell flat on their stomachs.

Chris marveled at the system prevailing. Without a word being spoken, they continued on, entered the enemy zone through a break in their wire already provided by the advance, who carried wire cutters and petards. There was pandemonium of artillery fire, yet the coolness and efficiency of the French raiders communicated itself to Chris, who was astonished at his own lack of alarm.

Teams of twos and threes, variously armed—rifles with fixed bayonets or hand grenades—worked their way into the trenches, as the enemy had retired to dugouts to avoid the bombardment. Chris found himself in trenches apparently deserted.

But the raiders knew what they were about. They found the hole leading to a dugout and ordered out the inmates. Half a dozen emerged with their hands above their heads and an expression of fright, which gave place to astonishment when they noticed the American uniform on Chris.

At a signal which escaped Chris, all the raiders suddenly withdrew, so suddenly that he came very nearly being left alone in an enemy trench. He realized that every man of the raiding party had a specific job, which was per-

formed on an exact schedule back of the curtain of protecting shells.

He realized that the raid had been conducted exactly as he had been taught at Turenne, quick, definite, sure and without real confusion. Before he knew it, he was back in the French lines. During most of the time he had seen only a few of their men, but he knew that a strong squad had been diffused throughout the raided section, each bent on a particular job at a particular time. He had heard the crash of a bursting hand grenade as it was hurled into a dugout, but even that explosion was insignificant amid the roar of bursting shells beyond.

From the moment they had left their own trenches until they were back again, not more than twenty minutes had elapsed. They returned with a dozen prisoners and not a single member of the raiding band had received a scratch. The purpose of the foray was to secure some prisoners in hope of extracting necessary information from them.

Captain Sand told Chris that they had been especially fortunate in this adventure, because of circumstances. The raid had been planned and rehearsed for days. It happened that this quiet sector had been shelled the previous day for no reason that the French knew, and the enemy had supposed that the box barrage laid down that morning was nothing but retaliation. Therefore, they had no suspicion that a raid was pending and the entire force in the section of trenches visited had retired into shelters to escape the bombardment.

As they discovered from several of the prisoners an advance was pending, and the raid enabled the French to make ready.

That evening the inspections of the front line were redoubled, for an ominous quiet seemed to hang over the enemy sector, only a distant rumble of

heavy guns and a very occasional *pop-pop-pop!* of a machine gun breaking the silence.

About three a. m., something woke Chris. He rolled over and tried to sleep again, assuming that the French were paying their respects to the enemy. But, as he lay, he gradually realized that the rain of shells was coming, not going. As yet none had landed near his hut, but they seemed to be on their way.

IT is generally held that human vitality is lowest in the small hours of the morning. Chris, who had behaved so courageously in previous tests, now felt his heart beating painfully. The thing that was approaching steadily and relentlessly terrified him. But he saw that the three French officers who occupied the same hut were not at all self-possessed. They were dressing frantically and two of them were muttering prayers.

Chris tried to be jocose as he sat on the edge of his bunk, tying his leggings. His gas mask, which he kept on a shelf over his bunk, he had placed at his side on the bed. By this time the shells were falling close, but they had not, as yet, got a whiff of gas.

Lieutenant Alexandre said suddenly: "*Vite! Vite!* to the dugout."

The three vanished from the room. Then a shell, exploding outside, took off the whole end of the little billet. Coughing, sneezing, Chris came to, in a moment, to find himself lying in a corner on the floor, candle snuffed out, in the inky darkness. It was time to depart, but he dared not go out without the gas mask and he couldn't find it anywhere in the awful blackness of the hut's interior.

Those were horrible moments while he poked and nosed about in search of the mask. Then he found it, but, by this time, gas had done its work. He pulled on the mask, then went out of

consciousness. When he came to, he was so groggy he could only cower in a corner of the half of the billet that was still standing.

For three solid hours Chris remained in the ruined hut, alone in the dark. A direct hit on the hut knocked him out again, yet he received no wounds.

The iron nerve which six months in the army had supplied to the former assessor's clerk finally broke. He sobbed; he prayed; he called on his mother; he appealed to Marion.

He rolled and writhed in agony and mortal terror. Had there been companions, he might have controlled himself, but he was alone, all alone, beneath a hail of shells, his end imminent, and he did not want to die. Seeking for some one to blame for his predicament, he thought of Lady Mary. If it had not been for her, he would not have gone up for a commission; he would have been comparatively safe with the railroad outfit. Marion had been right. Mary had brought about his demise!

After an eternity, he saw that it was getting light; a hazy, dull-gray dawn was coming. He picked himself up, thrust on the mask and began to hunt for the dugout, although he had no notion, in his condition, where it might be.

Outside the shells were dropping so thick that he thought of rain on a concrete roof where every drop seems to bounce. He staggered about, dropping into pits and shell holes, seeking in vain for some one to tell him how to get to the bomproof shelter.

Finally he spotted a laborer, one of an Italian labor company which he knew had been billeted down the hill at the rear, but they had been working in the dugouts. Since the man was running in a bee line, he must be headed for one. Chris jumped up and, heedless of exploding shells, ran after the Italian. He had come within thirty yards of the fellow when there came a

burst of fire where the man had been. When it cleared, the poor Italian had vanished. But Chris held his course and, a hundred yards ahead, he stumbled and fell down the steps of the dugout.

The place was jammed, chamber and gallery alike. He could hardly wedge in the door. Men, wounded, gassed to all degrees, were packed in, some quietly moaning, some steadily shrieking, some crying like children, calling on Nanette, Phyllis, Jeanne, as Chris had recently wailed for Marion.

Chris crumpled to the floor. He was ghastly sick. Now the shelling ceased. The men who were able tumbled out. Combat squads were formed and marched forward to the various defense positions, front line for some, communicating trenches for others, junction points in lateral trenches and various firing points.

Chris staggered about until he was suddenly joined by Captain Sand, who embraced him and assured him that he had been given up for lost. The captain's company was going into the front line. Chris staggered along with it, because he didn't know what else to do. He had inhaled some gas, not enough to put him completely out of business, but enough to make him frightfully uncomfortable.

WHAT happened that day, he could never recall clearly. He had a rifle and fired it with the others. Many times that day the invading troops advanced toward the trench, only to be so decimated before reaching it that the few who jumped into it were immediately killed or captured.

Orders came up by runners, for the telephone system had been put out of business. No medical officers or stretcher bearers could reach the trench. The sharp cracking of rifle fire was punctuated by the barklike shells from small-caliber artillery, and every little

while the terrific detonations of shells from the big guns which seemed to jar loose the world.

Perhaps the most dreadful noise of all was the demon shriek of a French seventy-five's rotating bands, the gun being placed in a shell hole directly back of the front-line trench.

Looking up from the trench, the blue sky was dotted with puffs of white smoke from anti-aircraft guns and with black specks of combatant airplanes fighting it out.

Chris gradually lost his horror and repulsion, the emotions being replaced by a grim determination to help stop that advancing enemy line at whatever cost. All sense of proportion and observation of things around were lost in the excitement and the intensity of the effort to kill.

Late in the afternoon, the seventh wave of enemy troops actually invaded the trenches. Chris pushed forward to the saddle of a machine gun, toppling over the lifeless body of the gunner that was still in his seat. He grasped the trigger and poured it into the advancing soldiers. That was the last he

remembered. At dark, Captain Sand found him on the floor of the trench and ordered him to go to the rear, in charge of a runner from regimental headquarters.

As if the day had not fed him completely enough with horror, the journey back through the communicating trench furnished him with nightmares for a long time afterward. As he trudged along, supported by a stocky little French soldier who kept one arm around his waist, an enemy shell buried itself in the side of the trench wall just ahead, causing a small cave-in of the chalky earth. He started to climb over the loose earth, when the runner began to paw at the place where the dud shell had disappeared.

Chris protested wildly, but the brave little man, who looked as though he had been a waiter in a café before the war, informed him that it was his business to get such information as a dud might give. Chris leaned against the trench and waited, knowing that the shell might not be a dud, that its fuse might be burning and the explosion come at any second.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, on the news stands July 20th.

STANDING ROOM ONLY

THAT any one should pay over one hundred thousand dollars for a seat—and then *stand*—seems an absurdity, but it is a fact. The seats are those on the New York Stock Exchange, and the term "seat" is a fiction, meaning membership in the Exchange.

How "seat" came to be applied to a Stock Exchange membership is now divulged by Alonzo Goodspeed, a Wall Street antiquarian. After intensive research in the records of the organization, Mr. Goodspeed is able to announce the origin of the use of the term.

About 1820, he explains, when stock traders decided to leave their market place under the buttonwood tree at the foot of Wall Street, they hired a small hall which was situated in the space now occupied by a skyscraper on that same thoroughfare. And in their contract with the landlord, they specified that a seat was to be provided for each of the fifteen or twenty members of the Exchange, and that each seat was to be kept in good repair. These seats in time became symbols of membership, and were bought and sold as such, and in that way started the fiction that has come down to the present day.



The Dude Comes Back

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Leander Plays a Part," "The Peacock's Eggs," Etc.

There was something peculiar about Zeno Stiles, something that the sawmill town of Midland couldn't quite make out. A lumberjack who rigged himself out in all the sartorial fopperies of a Beau Nash needed attention to keep him from becoming a scandal. But, somehow, Zeno managed to make himself a hero instead of that other.

THE conduct of Zeno Stiles presently became a subject of talk, mostly of a disparaging nature, yet his deportment in the woods during the winter just passed should have served notice on the town of Midland and his fellow lumberjacks that Mr. Stiles would do something of the sort. It was unheard of, this series of performances, and the crowd in the Oscar House barroom discussed it in the manner of men gravely offended. Something should be done about it.

Said Paddy Miles: "It's been most six hours sence he come off'm the drive, an' he ain't took a drink yet."

Paddy was so affected by the situation described by his own words that he himself took two drinks in rapid succession. The fact that he took them

from another man's bottle was readily forgiven under the circumstances.

As was the custom in the sawmill town of Midland when the log drives came down the rivers and the pockets of the woodsmen were stuffed with their winter's wages, uncorked whisky bottles and unwashed glasses lined the bar. Any man could garner a drink by the simple process of extending his hand and taking it. The loggers bought their liquor by the quart and left the bottles on the bar.

Dan Burns, the dapper bartender who had been caught in the act of manicuring his nails and who had never quite recovered the popularity hitherto enjoyed, had nothing much to do except occasionally to mop the bar, replace a depleted bottle with a full one, make

correct change in the early stages of the celebration, and incorrect change as time wore on and conditions seemed fit and proper, and to utter friendly rejoinders to unfriendly remarks. Lumberjacks, drunk and getting drunker, do not always address a bartender with the greatest politeness and respect. Yet Dan Burns possessed the prime qualities of a successful bartender—the ability to smile in the face of insult and the knack of removing the bottles the woodsmen had paid for while there still remained in them a goodly quantity of whisky. As to washing the glasses, that was done after the day's guzzling was finished and the customers were sunk in sodden slumber beneath the bar-room card tables, in the gutters outside, in the chairs of the hotel office, or, as happened on rare occasions, in the beds above, for which they had paid. When hotel trade was brisk, it was not an uncommon device for the hotel management to rerent the room of a lumberjack to a traveling man and then to avoid complications by selling the party of the first part so much whisky that he became incapable of climbing the stairs. This assured the hotel of a comfortable profit all around and the traveling man of a night of peaceful repose—and no one kicked, least of all the ousted lumberjack.

BUT the celebration attendant upon the arrival in town of the Larkins drive was still in the daylight stage when the name of Zeno Stiles began to be bandied about. Affairs at the Oscar House bar had run a normal course. There had been three or four fights, and crimson stains and a few human teeth were mingled with the three-inch layer of sawdust on the floor.

The countenance of Paddy Miles slowly untied itself from the knot induced by two drinks of the unpalatable whisky laid in especially for the spring trade. The lumberjack of Saginaw's

logging days thought himself cheated if his liquor didn't sear his throat and afflict his features with convulsions. Paddy wiped the tears out of his eyes with a pair of leathery forefingers, blew a whistling breath, and continued the interesting topic of Zeno Stiles.

"Yezzir, he ain't took a drink yet, as far's I been able to learn. I made enquirees about him down street, an' there ain't nobody seen him take a drink. What's more, some of us seen him through the winder o' 'Red' Green's Barber Shop, settin' in the chair, an' Red was performin' strange an' pee-culiar deeds on his head. No, I don't mean a hair cut. That ain't nuthin' to critercize a man fer, a hair cut. I aim to git one myself first spare time I have.

"On my way down to the Blue Goose S'loon I myself see Zeno settin' there draped in a bed sheet an' his hair full o' soapsuds. Red had his fingers in the suds an' he was kneadin' Zeno's head sumpin' fierce. Well, I knowed what that was. Shampoo. I've had a shampoo myself; I might git another this spring. I'll see. Be that as it may an' so to speak, I moseyed on down the street, an' invades myself with sev'ral drinks in the Blue Goose. There I heard talk about Zeno Stiles."

He paused for dramatic effect, then went on: "Somebody up an' said they'd seen Red Green settin' fire to Zeno's hair. Yezzir, that was swore to by sev'ral. Seems Red had a long slim stick o' sumpin' that was blazin' at one end, like a extra-long match, an' he kep' touchin' it to Zeno's head, but he'd no more'n git his hair to blazin' than he'd put it out by rakin' a comb through it.

"I ast partic'lar about this new-fangled hair cut, as it sounded like an uncivilized proceedin', an' Zeno's a mysteeryus cuss who'll bear watchin' by ev'ry man that don't want his camp disgraced. What I say is this here

Zeno Stiles b'longs to our camp, an' it's our bus'ness to see't he don't fetch us into disrepute. Other camps'll be comin' down with their drives, an' if Zeno carries on like he's been, they'll be joshin' us an' roastin' us fer lettin' such a man stay with us all winter. His strange an' pee-culiar speech is bad enuff, but I don't know's we ought to stand fer these new didoes.

"Be that as it may an' so to speak, this hair burnin' come up fer consid'able talk down there in the Blue Goose. It seems it's a system o' lightin' a feller's hair an' then ex-ting-wishing the blaze afore it can spread. It's sumpin' that maybe wouldn't irutate a man if he see it bein' performed on some savage heathen in the Cannibal Islands, but when a human individual that's passin' hisself off as a lumberjack carries on like that right in our midst an' in plain sight from the sidewalk, it's time we took a hand!

"Well, Red Green went all over Zeno's head with that fire afore he quit an' while them fellers looked on. If he aims to burn his hair off to save wear an' tear on his clippers, says they, whyn't he let it blaze an' burn to cinders right down to the roots, an' not keep puttin' it out afore it's got a fair start? An' before he's got it all burned off, Red blows that long match out. First thing ye know he's givin' Zeno a shampoo. Now——"

The bartender cut in at that moment. "Paddy," he said, grinning broadly, "that was a singe your friend was getting. A hair singe. I've had 'em."

"A what?"

"Singe. Makes the hair grow better and thicker. Don't you know how underbrush grows in the woods after a fire's burned the top of it off? Same thing. Some of the store clerks here in Midland get 'em. Barber shops in Saginaw give a lotta singes."

Paddy Miles and his group of friends seized whisky glasses bearing such a

maze of finger prints as to baffle the most adept of Bertillon experts. They gulped more fire water.

"It sounds reasonable," Paddy admitted presently, "if a man wants to treat his hair like it's a growth o' underbrush—but what I say is it ain't nuthin' fer a camp to be proud of to have such a man on its list. Strangers might think he learned them things in camp, an' look't what we'll have to answer fer if lumberjacks from other camps git to twittin' us of it!"

"That's so," some one agreed.

"Be that as it may an' so to speak," Paddy proceeded, "this here Zeno Stiles finished off at Red Green's with a shampoo an' a lot o' lick-dob on his hair, to say nuthin' of a shave an' rough handlin' of his face, with Red haulin' an' pattin' an' rubbin' his cheeks with corn salve or sumpin' that smelled as bad, like his face was a hunk o' taffy that Red was pullin' into the proper shape an' stiffness. All that was vouched fer by an impatient an' disgusted lumberjack that set in the shop waitin' his turn. Now all I seen with my own eyes was the shampoo, an' I wouldn't swear in court that Zeno had all them other things done. No, I didn't see 'em, but it don't seem like a feller could think up them things to tell if he——"

"Paddy," Dan Burns interjected again, "your friend got a massage. That's another trick the barbers here got from the Saginaw shops, and us fellows in town try 'em once in a while. It makes a man feel better to have his face gone over like that—massaged."

Paddy Miles looked long and intently at the bartender. "Y'say ye've had them things done t' ye?" he inquired.

"Certainly!"

Paddy meditated. "Well," he said, reaching for the bottle, "maybe that's all right fer store clerks an' bartenders, but what I say is that any full-grown lumberjack that'll let a barber perform

such unseemly antics on his own natural face—well, he ought to have his face gone over in an en-tire-ly differ'nt manner, an' I'd like to be nominated to do the job!"

The bartender laughed. "You don't know the half of it!" he volunteered. "This Zeno Stiles you're talking about—why, he rented a room upstairs as soon's he got his wages, and he had the cook to heat him a lot of hot water. He took a bath and changed his duds from head to foot. And what I know is he's spending a lot of money for clothes—new suit, hat, shoes, necktie and——"

"Necktie!"

"Certainly! He's getting dressed up."

There was a long pause and another drink all around.

"Boys," said Paddy Miles, "it's as I feared. I knowed it way he acted in camp—takin' a bath in the bunk house ev'ry now an' then, washin' out his socks, slickin' at his hair. To say nuthin' o' his pee-uliar manner o' speech. We might 'a' knowed he'd cut up in this hideous fashion time he got to town—an' he ain't took a drink yet, as far's anybody knows. I don't want to make no false charges. Maybe he's took some drinks that nobody's seen, an' if he has, it's a point in his favor—but all them other sins he's committed since——"

"Boys, it's as I feared," Paddy added gravely. "We been harborin' a dude in our loggin' camp!"

They nodded grimly.

"We'll have to do sumpin' to him," some one suggested.

"We cert'nly will!" Paddy Miles agreed. "Le's go hunt him."

IT was a fact that Zeno Stiles had slicked up. He bore not the faintest resemblance to a lumberjack. He was a young man with a pleasant countenance, straight as a pine and a good two

ax handles tall, which, translated, is about six feet. Shaved and massaged and barbered in general as no lumberjack had ever been in that region, his genial face became altogether too good looking to suit the taste of his camp mates.

It was a pleasant spring day, and Zeno's haberdashery was in tune with the season. He had discarded the peaked cap, the long, laced boots with calked soles, the corduroy breeches, the heavy blue shirt and the plaid Mackinaw jacket, all of which had been chosen, when he came into the woods, with as much care as a young gentleman of fashion might bestow on his wardrobe. His woods clothes had been of a finer texture and more becoming fit than any ever seen along those rivers. But now he wore the regalia of the town sport.

His selections of the day consisted of a brown derby hat, a soft-collared, white shirt adorned with a necktie of broad and oblique stripes in blue-and-gold, a two-piece spring suit of a light fabric and hue, and soft tan shoes that gleamed in the afternoon sunlight.

Zeno sauntered up Main Street, very well satisfied with himself. He descried a group of lumberjacks, a trifle wobbly in the legs, coming toward him, in the center of which was Paddy Miles. A good-natured grin dawned on Zeno's face.

His camp mates looked virtually as they did when they came off the drive, except of course that they were not so sober. They were looking at him fixedly, but not a man of them returned Zeno's grin.

"Mr. Stiles," said Paddy Miles, the acknowledged leader of the Larkins camp and who acted as spokesman for the men on most occasions, "we desire to say a couple o' words to you, maybe more—dependin' on the sort o' answers ye make to our en-qwirees."

Zeno scented trouble, but he con-

tinued to grin affably. He employed what Paddy Miles had described as his "pee-culiar manner o' speech," and rejoined, with an air of mock gravity:

"I am always glad to hold converse with my very good friends. Speak, Mr. Miles, so that I may again receive the benefit of your sagacious utterances."

"All right," Paddy said sourly. "What I got to say maybe ain't as fancy as the readin' books ye're in the habit o' devourin', but I aim to make it plain an' pointed."

Zeno nodded agreeably. The lumberjacks had grouped themselves around him. He maneuvered so that his back was to a store front and none of the committee behind. The voice of Paddy Miles was low and even. This was an affair to be settled among the men of the Larkins camp, a private scandal that they didn't wish to air.

"All winter," Paddy continued, "ye worked in camp with us. Ye wa'n't no slouch in the woods—ye done a day's work as good's the next man. I heard the foreman say he never had a better man top-loadin' than you. Be that as it may an' so to speak, ye was allus sort o' uppish. Come night, ye was readin' out o' books instead o' playin' cards an' cussin' like a lumberjack ought to. That's all right. We didn't mind if ye wanted to keep to yerself. We didn't kick 'cause ye was alluz washin' out yer socks an' stuff—an' we didn't raise much of a fuss that time ye took a bath from head to foot. All that took place in camp. But here we be now in a public town. The conduct o' ev'ry man o' the Larkins camp is sumpin' we got to look after. Other drives'll be comin' down. I hear the Homer drive is due in the booms in the mornin'. When the Homer crowd gets on Main Street, there'll be trouble enuff. We'll have fightin' to do, plenty of it—till after the river games. Now we got to look after the honor

o' the camp. We don't aim t' have no sideshow freaks pointed out as b'longin' to the Larkins camp."

One of Zeno's hands fumbled nervously with his gorgeous necktie. His face was grave. "As I understand it," he said, "you look upon me as an undesirable member of the camp?"

"That's it—as ye're now constituted an' decorated."

"Well, what can I do about it?"

Paddy nodded, as though he welcomed the chance to answer such a question. "There's one o' two things ye can do," he replied. "I hear ye're to take a job in the mills fer the summer, like we all do, an' that ye figger on' goin' back to the camp in the fall. Well, ye can give that up—have yer name took off'm the Larkins pay roll. We won't be ree-sponsible fer ye then. We can say ye come trampin' into camp, an' we didn't want to turn ye out in the snow. If ye don't feel like quittin' our camp an' lettin' it be known ye ain't one of us no more, then what we say is fer ye to go to yer hotel room right now an' take off that circus uniform."

Zeno couldn't help smiling. A bantering ring crept into his tone again. "You mean these clothes?" he inquired mildly.

"Pree-zac'ly! Them clo'es. Ye can't roam the open streets in that inhuman set o' raiment an' keep on bein' a member in good standin' o' the Larkins camp. When the Homer crew sets eye on that sassy-lookin' hat an' that suit that looks like it come out of a ice-cream freezer, to say nuthin' o' that sun-struck necktie an' them varnished shoes—they'll ast who's the dude in the spotted-adder clo'es, an' somebody'll up an' say he's a lumberjack b'longin' to the Larkins camp. Then they'll laugh an' hoot at the whole camp. Now we don't mind bein' insulted, but thing is we ain't gonna be laughed at!"

One of Zeno's hands stroked his

smooth chin. It was a clean hand and mighty strong looking.

"I see," he rejoined. "You're agitated by the ridicule you think I might bring down upon your sensitive heads. You may be right. I understand that considerable bitterness exists between the Homer crew and our crew. It is the custom, I believe, for one crew to seize every trifle which may be turned to making sport of the other. Granted and agreed, Mr. Miles. But I have, in the first place, very good reasons for staying on the Larkins pay roll for the summer and winter, to say nothing of the desire I have to continue the pleasant and profitable associations afforded by such a hardy and genial gathering as yourselves."

"Meanin' that ye don't want to quit yer job?"

"In plain words, that's the situation."

"Then," Paddy Miles suggested, "go to yer room an' put on some civilized clo'es. Ye must have the duds ye wore in the woods. Them was a bit fancy an' high-toned, an' fit ye a little too nice, but they're clo'es that a lumberjack won't laugh at. After ye change yer clo'es, come along an' have a few drinks."

A twinkle came into Zeno's eyes, but there was also a determined and unabashed tilt to his square chin.

"Boys," he said, "I'm sorry that I can't accommodate you. I agree that you're right—from your standpoint—and it's unfortunate that our wishes conflict. But every white man has certain inalienable rights which are self-evident. Among them are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It would seriously impair my happiness if I thought I couldn't choose my own clothing, and wear it wheresoever and howsoever I deemed desirable. Drinks I don't care for—thank you just the same. I don't object to others drinking, but I must regulate my own tastes and habits."

AS they picked the denial from Zeno's flowery verbiage, a grumble broke out among the lumberjacks. Paddy Miles lifted a restraining hand, to keep his friends from taking summary action.

"Mr. Stiles," he said, "it may come up that we'll see it as our painful duty to take them clo'es off'm ye oursel's. We've give ye fair warnin'. The honor o' the camp may call fer it. We can't be made the laughin'stock o' this town when it gets filled up with lumberjacks wearin' chips on their shoulders. We might not be gentle when it comes to undressin' ye, bein' unacquainted with that system o' garments an' the way they properly come off. I can't promise that that liver-colored hat won't be caved in, maybe hung around yer ears as a kind of a new-fangled headdress; an' ye mustn't put up a kick if there's some holes tore in that lace-curtain suit. If it happens that this disrobin' act comes up anywheres close an' handy to the river, I ain't sayin' that ye won't get a chanst to take a little swimmin' lesson.

"Be that as it may an' so to speak," he continued, "it's a nice spring day, ain't it? I hope ye'll enjoy the sunshine while it lasts. The Homer drive'll be comin' down in the mornin'. That crew an' our crew is mortal enemies. There'll be a sight o' fightin'. We don't aim to have them fellers see ye, an' then give us the hee-haw. So, Mr. Stiles, notice is hereby served that beginnin' at sunup t'-morrow mornin', ye're to keep off'm Main Street while yer han'some an' prepossessin' carcass is festooned in the garments ye're now paradin'. Does that sound plain an' undoubtful?"

Zeno grinned a wide grin. "I heard every word you said," he replied, turning solemn again. "It's plain that you have presented me with an ultimatum tied up with a blue ribbon. But the defense wishes to submit that your mani-

festo is so bitter and foreign to my taste that I hardly think I'll be able to digest it. To-morrow, you say? Very well. If the weather remains warm and pleasant, I don't see why I shouldn't find it desirable to take a walk—perhaps three or four walks—up and down Main Street in this outfit, which I regard as appropriate to the season."

"We give ye fair warnin'!"

"Yes, you've been fair. I don't think you'll be unfair. If you think it necessary to undress me, I hope that you will approach one at a time, and that the second man will not lend a hand until the first has been sent back with the news that the occupation of disrobing a man who doesn't wish to be disrobed is attended by certain difficulties and no little danger.

"And, as a member of the Larkins camp, I wish to ask a favor. When I appear on Main Street to-morrow, if you should hear any unkind remark concerning the clothing I chose with such painful care—if you should hear any of the Homer crew voice an opinion in any degree insulting, I hope that you will accord me the privilege of dealing with the gentleman."

Paddy Miles looked intently into the twinkling eyes of Zeno Stiles. He measured again the tall, strong body, the capable hands, the curbstone jaw. For the first time he began to think of Zeno as something besides a citified dude who had some mysterious reason for coming into the lumber woods for a couple of seasons.

Paddy stepped back a step or two. Zeno's smiling eyes continued to look directly into Paddy's own.

"I hope," Zeno urged, "that you won't deny me the privilege of fighting my own battles."

Paddy nodded. "We'll be fair," he agreed.

Zeno tipped his derby to them with exaggerated politeness, and strutted up the street.

Lined up again at the Oscar House bar, Paddy Miles said to his camp mates:

"Boys, I might 'a' been mistook about that dude. I seen sumpin' that's to be admired in his face. Wonder what he's doin' up here in the woods? I don't mind sayin' that maybe we'll have a lot o' fun when the Homer crowd hits Main Street, if they pick on this here Zeno Stiles." He poured a drink and added: "I don't feel ashamed o' him like I did; no, sir, I don't!"

That evening Mr. Zeno Stiles went walking with a young red-headed school-teacher named Sophronia Betts, and this circumstance, being duly reported to the Larkins lumberjacks, seemed to provide an excuse for the frills in haberdashery and barbering in which Zeno had indulged.

"Now why didn't we think o' that?" Paddy Miles asked. "If there's a woman at the bottom of it, he's more to be pitied than blamed. Maybe he was too quick to put his unseemly doin's down to a perverse an' heathenish disposition. He might turn out all right yet."

They weren't exactly ready to accept Zeno yet, but it is a fact that they felt a stronger loyalty toward him in the controversies which were sure to develop when the Homer lumberjacks clapped eyes on him.

THE river games in Midland were arranged as part of the local celebration attendant upon the arrival of the spring log drives. The games were contests of skill and strength and courage between the men from the various camps. Cash prizes were awarded, as well as other inducements for thrilling performances.

Individuals who came out of the games with the biggest honors were sure to get all the free whisky they could drink for several days, as well as clothing and various articles of mer-

chandise put up by the merchants of the town. Personal awards were made as well as camp awards. The camp having the greatest number of victors in the games profited in various ways. Gold pieces were distributed to the entire camp by the company which operated it. The men of the winning camp found themselves the center of adulation which manifested itself chiefly in invitations to drink and in cut prices for a day or so in the stores.

Bitter rivalry in the games had existed for years between the Larkins camp and the Homer camp, the two biggest in that region. It was nip and tuck. Honors, after years of contest, were about even.

Another phase of the games had developed within the previous three or four years. Gamblers from Saginaw and Bay City had seized on the river games at Midland as a likely field for their operations. They made a study of the contestants and the games as carefully and as professionally as the followers of the tracks study the races. Indeed, gamblers had come clear from Detroit the preceding spring. Thousands and thousands of dollars had changed hands.

The introduction of wholesale betting resulted in a disturbing undertone of rumor. There were complaints that some of the contests had been fixed.

This was generally resented in Midland. Attempts to run down these complaints had brought no result, except that the inquiries themselves gave impetus to the rumors.

It was said this spring that a big crowd of gamblers were coming from various parts of the State—a few from Chicago.

Logs played a big part in the games. There were rolling, spinning and riding contests. There were individual contests and crew contests, and in the very nature of things, the games grew out of the various duties performed by

lumberjacks among the logs in the river.

The river games lasted most of the day, and this of course was a local holiday. A boxing contest was usually staged, a formal affair apart from the dozens of impromptu bouts which sprang up in the saloons, in the streets and along the banks of the river. In the evening there were speeches in the town hall, a chicken-pie supper at the Methodist church, and riotous scenes in the barrooms.

The date of the games had been set for ten days beyond the day when the Larkins drive arrived. All the drives would be in the booms by that time.

THE first contingent of the gamblers came earlier than usual. In fact, six or seven of them stepped off the early train from Saginaw the same morning the Homer drive got in. They were good-natured individuals, prosperous, well dressed—some of them a trifle oily and sly looking. They started in at once to purchase drinks for every one in sight, as is the way of men who seek to buy the good-fellowship of a community.

There had been talk of running the gamblers out of town this spring, but there was no organized movement in that direction.

Zeno Stiles, dressed to kill, showed up on Main Street early in the forenoon in his spring scenery, as per his promise. He was at first taken for a gambler by the Homer lumberjacks.

Every one was getting drunk as rapidly and as thoroughly as possible. There had been several fights between Larkins men and Homer men. Paddy Miles had a black eye.

A Homer man looked at Zeno and discharged the overflow from his tobacco in such a fashion that it splashed on his new tan shoes. Zeno stopped and gazed intently at the man, who was big, drunk and mischievous.

"Who's that zebra from Zanzibar?" the Homer man inquired.

Receiving the information that this dandified young man was a lumberjack from the Larkins Camp, the Homer man let out a guffaw which drew a crowd from both camps. Paddy Miles sauntered that way.

"Now we'll see some fun," he remarked hopefully.

Zeno was speaking: "Did you mean to spit so close to me?"

"Haw! Lis'en at him—did I mean to spit so close?" He spoke with mock amiability. "No, sir-ee, young feller, I didn't mean to spit ezac'ly where I did."

"Very well," said Zeno. "Your apology is accepted."

"Y'see," the grinning logger added quickly, stepping in front of Zeno and barring his progress, "my aim's gettin' poor. Maybe it's the likker—I do know—but I missed by two inches. I was aimin' to spit right on that left shoe o' yourn. I'll try ag'in."

He prepared to do so.

Zeno's face underwent a change of color. Paddy Miles' heart sank. He'd seen that expression on the face of other men who flopped in the actual face of combat. Zeno looked for all the world like a man who had blown himself up to high courage, only to be punctured when the time came for action. The nerve seemed to have gone completely out of him. He couldn't go through with it.

Before the tobacco-loaded lumberjack could fire again, Zeno edged into the crowd.

"Well, I'll be——" Paddy Miles couldn't finish his bitter complaint. He had hoped for a public exhibition which would reflect credit on the Larkins camp. And here was Zeno running, with a Homer man in pursuit!

"I thought he had sumpin' in him," Paddy said weakly.

"So'd I."

"Way he talked yestiddy, thinks I, there's a man with spunk. But—— Look't him run!"

It was true—too true. Zeno ran into the Oscar House, the roaring lumberjack at his heels. He dodged capture by fleeing to his room upstairs.

AND then the news went the rounds. Every lumberjack from the Larkins camp found himself sooner or later called on to answer for this disgrace. There were many fights that day over Zeno Stiles. To his outlandish habiliments, Zeno had added a public exhibition of cowardice.

"Ye had that young galoot in camp all winter," a Homer man said to Paddy Miles, "an' still ye couldn't make a man o' him! What d'ye do in yer camp all winter—knit or crowshay?"

Paddy swung first one fist, then the other. He won his fight, but he was a melancholy man. That was the trouble. The Homer men wouldn't look on the thing as a personal affair. They would seize the shortcomings of Zeno Stiles as a pretext to belittle the whole Larkins camp. It was tinder for ridicule, and ridicule bites deeper than insult.

"The dude camp," the Homer men began to say in their references to the Larkins crowd.

Paddy Miles knocked on Zeno Stiles' door that evening. Zeno had clung to his room, sending downstairs for food. He was dressed now in the clothes he had worn in the woods. Though Paddy himself had insisted on Zeno resuming the respectable garb of a lumberjack, the fact that he obeyed caused Paddy to look on him with even greater contempt.

"I'll give ye the night to think it over," Paddy said. "If ye come down in the mornin' and pick a fight with a Homer man—an' fight him—we'll fer-give ye. It's no matter if ye whip him or get whipped. Thing is to fight. If ye fight till ye win or get knocked cold,

we won't run ye out o' town. If ye can't stiffen yer backbone up to that, ye'd better sneak out—if ye don't want to be beat up by a Larkins man."

Zeno, fright in his eyes, swallowed dryly and nodded.

Paddy Miles went away.

The culprit did not show up next morning. Some one said they saw him leaving the Oscar House late in the night, satchel in hand. He had probably walked out of town.

"Couldn't measure up," Paddy Miles asserted. "Tried it, with his brave talk, but when he come right up to it, he crumpled like an empty bag. I give him his choice o' fightin' a Homer man or leavin' town. He chose to leave. Good riddance!"

DRIZZLING rain set in on the afternoon before the river games. It continued into the night, and the flats between the railroad and the river became soggy. A chill crept in, too, with a lifting wind, and this, catching the fine rain, drove it through the air in stinging pellets. An unpleasant night to be abroad, and nothing short of urgent business or irresponsibility due perhaps to too much liquor could account for the presence on the flats of three men. It might have been both of these reasons.

These men certainly had an urgent task to perform, and they were not wholly sober, though the latter condition had not reached a point where the former would be imperiled. Two were lumberjacks from the Homer camp, but so skilled were they with logs that they could be relied on to accomplish their purpose, drunk or sober. One carried a satchel.

The third prowler was large and paunchy and muffled in a long slicker into which his head shrank, turtle fashion. His features were further obscured by a slouch hat hauled far down, though in that darkness and in that

place it didn't seem that extraordinary measures of concealment were necessary. His huddled attitude, however, protected his face from the rain and the raw wind.

He presented a furtive and sinister shape, as repelling as the bedraggled lumberjacks at his side. Beneath the slicker were a suit of clothes and various adornments, such as a handsome gold watch and chain and a diamond scarfpin, which told of a manner of life more prosperous than that of the coarsely dressed woodsmen. He wore rubbers over a pair of patent-leather shoes.

He was a gambler from Saginaw called "Big Neck" Crowder, on account of the tendency of his chin to overflow his collar, like dough rising over the edge of a bread pan.

They stopped on the flats and passed a bottle around. They entertained only slight fears of being observed by others, if they were careful. In all probability the nearest human beings were the night watchman and the fireman at the Larkins sawmill, at the far end of the flats.

"How long'll it take you to do this job?" the fat man asked.

"'N'our—maybe two hours," one of the lumberjacks growled.

"Don't drink too much," Crowder suggested.

The logger who had the bottle lifted it to his lips. There was a gurgle, then an expelled breath of satisfaction.

"Can't," this man said. "'Too much' ain't in this bottle. Like to know what's become of it."

Big Neck Crowder, seeking to conceal the fact that he had surreptitiously poured out some of the liquor, said with a short laugh:

"Guess you take bigger drinks than you mean to, in the dark."

This was reasonable. They put the bottle up and resumed their journey, skidding in the mud and catching them-

selves with grunts. The girthy Mr. Crowder breathed hard and wheezily, but he screwed up his determination to stand by until the job was done.

And when it was done, the plot of Big Neck Crowder and his clique would be fully laid. Next night they would have in their pockets the big winnings which this foray was meant to cinch for them.

They arrived at the bank of the river a considerable distance above the Larkins mill, which was on their side, and directly across from the Homer mill. There were two closely packed log drives in the river, with running water between—one belonging to the Larkins company and the other to the Homer crowd.

From these drives, the logs to be used in the games would be picked. The scene of the games had been chosen at a wide stretch of the river above the mills. The log-spinning contest, for instance, would be held there. It was a hundred chances to one that Martin Keeley, the most expert spinner of the Larkins camp, would pick his log from a certain spot in the drive, at the upper edge, close to the scene of the contests. So matter of fact would this operation be that a lumberjack might lay a wager, after an inspection, on the identical log that Martin Keeley would choose.

The three men were on the logs. The drive was a veritable raft, so firmly was it packed. The lumberjacks were on their hands and knees, looking, feeling.

"Martin likes a fat log," one said.

They found at that spot four logs, which, knowing Martin Keeley and the conditions of the game, they decided should receive their attentions. They conveyed this information to Big Neck Crowder. Martin Keeley would be sure to pick one of those logs, they thought.

"It'll take most two hours, maybe longer, to fix four logs."

"Fix 'em," the gambler returned, without hesitation.

The lumberjacks produced various objects from the satchel—two wood chisels with steel blades keenly sharpened, two small hammers, two augers and two keyhole saws. Three of the logs were situated so that the conspirators had ready access to their butts; the other they had to struggle with and rearrange in the jam. This was a difficult job, but they accomplished it.

They also accomplished their job with the tools, while Big Neck Crowder sat shivering on a wet log or walked about on the drive, scowling at the rain. The bottle was empty now.

"We're through," one of the woodsmen informed Crowder.

"Do a good job?"

"Yup!"

"You better had," the gambler told them, after a pause, "if you want to collect your pay."

The lumberjack shook the rain off his shoulders like a mastiff, and prophesied:

"When Martin Keeley sinks his calks in one o' them logs, he's due fer the wettest duckin' he ever got—an' that wins the spinnin' game, don't it?"

"It does!"

They hastened away.

ON the bank of the river, a young man, tall and strong and fast on his feet, emerged into the rain from the cover of an old tool shed. He went onto the Larkins drive and examined a dozen logs. Then he went ashore and hurried to the Larkins mill, puzzled.

The fireman and the watchman welcomed him in the manner of men who shared a secret with him. He explained, adding:

"I was on my way home, and heard them talking on the flats. Thought I'd better watch them. They did something to the logs, up at the end of the drive. I can't make it out, but the logs

up there will be used in the games tomorrow—one of them in the spinning game anyway. We'd better see about it."

The watchman got his lantern. They waited a few minutes longer, to give the three prowlers plenty of time to get up to Main Street and inside the Oscar House. Then they went out on the drive.

After an examination the watchman said: "Some o' these logs've been 'gingered.'"

"What does that mean?"

The watchman explained. "And they done a good job, too," he added. "I ain't never heard o' that trick bein' played in these woods, but it was common back in Maine. Played out there, as ev'ry log spinner watched fer it. Yes, sir—a good job; hardly a crack shows, if ye don't get right down an' look fer it. See here, I'll show ye."

The young man bent down, and was made to see.

"I count four of 'em gingered," the watchman said; "maybe there's more. It makes 'em hard to spin, an' the spin's a big thing in the games."

"What shall we do?"

"Well, I was just thinkin'. If we spread the news, them fellers maybe'd say we done it ourselves an' then tried to throw it onto the Homer crew, as an excuse if we lose the games. Why not keep our mouths shut about it?"

"But we'll have to do something!"

"Sure! We'll cut a dozen logs out o' this end o' the drive, to make sure, an' float 'em down to the other end."

They went back to the mill and got peaveys with which to work among the logs.

THE rain stopped along in the night, and the day of the river games was ushered in with a warm sun. Early in the morning crowds gathered along the banks of the river.

Five camps were to compete in the

games, but the real contest was between the Larkins and Homer camps, for on account of their greater numbers one of these was sure to carry off most of the points.

There were contests at building rafts, and these were entered in races on the river. Tom Dunn had set up a stand on the flats close to the river, and his vocal advertisements of what he described as his "unparalleled popcorn and peanuts, good for sore throat, lumbago, bronchitis and all other human ills!" could be heard above the cries and cheers of the crowd as the games went on.

Drunken lumberjacks joked and fought among themselves and bought peanuts and popcorn by the bushel for stray kids.

It was a gala day, and even the most ardent prohibitionists smiled at the antics of the woodsmen. It was a day of toleration, yet the undercurrent of bitter rivalry between the Homer camp and the Larkins camp made itself perceptible.

There were numerous thrilling exhibitions. The contesting woodsmen handled the logs in the river as easily and skillfully, it seemed, as a boy might manipulate toothpicks in a wash dish. Working with the logs singly or in rafts, riding them with long pike poles as balances, they looked fully at home.

The log-spinning game was the last of the river contests. It started about three o'clock in the afternoon. The Larkins camp put forward its most capable log spinner, Martin Keeley. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a strongly hewn face, as straight as the pike pole with the hook of which he now selected the log he meant to spin. The logs used in the other games had been taken from another point in the drive.

Martin Keeley took his log from the exact spot where the three conspirators had operated the night before. He

pulled it up to his starting place, walking on the shore. The Homer spinner had his log in the water across the river.

Big Neck Crowder was sure that Martin Keeley had picked one of the gingered logs, and he smiled with great satisfaction.

THE Homer camp had an edge in points on the Larkins crowd. The gambler felt that his game was cinched, for he was sure that the log-spinning contest and the boxing bout would be captured by the Homer camp. Crowder and his clique had bet heavily on the Homerites.

A rumor took wing that Joe Bushaw, the Larkins entry in the boxing contest, had been drinking more than was good for him. Joe, if he weren't too far gone, could be relied on to whip almost any lumberjack in that region.

The fighter entered by the Homer camp was a big, slab-sided man called "Fiddlefoot" Drake. He had large feet, but they didn't seem to handicap him when it came to speed in battle. The winter just closed had been his first in the woods of that region. Nothing much was known about him, except that he had whipped every man who ventured to tangle up with him, in the Homer camp and in town.

But Big Neck Crowder didn't care whether Joe Bushaw, the Larkins fighter, was drunk or not. Fiddlefoot Drake's real name was something else, and he was a professional pugilist, a little too old for fighting as a business, but still able to clean up on almost any nonprofessional. He had been "planted" in the Homer camp for the purpose that now engaged the gamblers, under the name of Drake, and his enormous feet quickly suggested the sobriquet.

So the Larkins crowd was considerably worried by the condition of Joe Bushaw, who at the moment was supposed to be asleep in the Oscar House.

Would he wake up with his head clear enough to enable him to step in the ring at four o'clock and put up a decent fight?

Martin Keeley, his feet incased in boots with calked soles, stepped out onto his log at the word from the starter. The Homer log spinner, across, did likewise.

It was a precarious game, this feat of treading a log and forcing it broadside across the river. If a man's feet slipped off, he was lucky if he got no more than a ducking. More than one log spinner had been knocked out by not throwing out his hands in time to save his chin from cracking against the log when he plunged downward. The spinners used only their arms for balances, their eyes on the spinning log most of the while, as busy as squirrels in the wheels of their cages. Spin, spin, spin—legs always in motion—first one foot, then the other; now fast, then slow, watching every turn and twist of the log, and constantly bucking the current of the river.

Big Neck Crowder stared. Martin Keeley had his log under control, and that log showed not the slightest indication of erratic motion.

The gambler had been given to understand that a gingered log is almost impossible to spin, at first. A chunk of the log is very carefully cut out of the butt. Then, with an auger and chisel, a considerable amount of wood is taken out of the log and water permitted to fill the space. The hole is then plugged with the chunk, and only the slightest outward evidence of the trick remains—nothing that would be noticed by the unsuspecting. This alters the weight at one end of the log, causes it to perform unlooked-for motions in the water.

The spinner on a gingered log is almost sure to slip off, for the log acts as no log ever acted under his feet. It dips and slues and responds to his ef-

forts with the crazy antics of an obstreperous broncho. In time he might become used to it and fetch it under control, but when a spinner slipped off his log, he lost the race.

Martin Keeley was out in the river, and making better time than the spinner from the other bank.

Big Neck Crowder looked around at the crowd with a scowl. He was searching for the two lumberjacks who were supposed to have gingered that log. They were nowhere in sight.

A great cheer went up from the Larkins side of the river when Martin Keeley's log thumped the opposite shore fully forty seconds before his opponent reached his objective.

THIS gave the Larkins camp a lead of three points, so that victory now depended absolutely on the fight. The winner of that would add ten points to his camp's string. With a roar, the crowd swarmed onto the flats, where a ring had been set up.

Paddy Miles came tearing down the hill, filled with disastrous news. Larkins lumberjacks surrounded him immediately.

"Joe Bushaw's too drunk to fight!" Paddy told them. "He sneaked a bottle to his room somehow, an' he's been leanin' on it like a cripple on a crutch. He couldn't whip a one-arm Injun with the itch. We're finished! I'm too old to fight longer'n a couple o' minits, an' I can't think of a man we got that'll have much chanst with Fiddlefoot Drake. He's a terror with his dukes!"

John Larkins, head of the company, standing near the ring, announced at that moment that another man from his camp would be put in.

"Our man'll take on any man you got in your camp crew," he was told by the Homer spokesman.

"All right. I'll find a man."

Paddy Miles went to John Larkins' side, but John gave him no information.

He dispatched a messenger. It wasn't long before the surprise was sprung.

The renegade, Zeno Stiles, smiling bravely, was pushed through the crowd. He was dressed in his spring finery. A few men in the secret worked on Zeno, until he stood clad only in his undershirt, trousers and soft tan shoes.

He got in the ring, and he and Fiddlefoot Drake began to fight with bare fists promptly at four o'clock.

Zeno Stiles had come back to carry out the command of his camp mates—fight a Homer lumberjack.

Paddy Miles gawped. He was wise enough, Paddy was, to understand that there was something besides chance behind all this, and his hope ran high. Joe Bushaw had got drunk by request. Zeno Stiles was a fighting man, held under cover by John Larkins to defeat some trick attempted on the part of the Homer crowd. Zeno, whose impulse was to fight when insulted, had recollected himself in time that day on Main Street to play the part of a coward and not reveal his fistic accomplishments.

Yes, it certainly—

Zeno's conduct in the ring bore out these surmises. He was hammering his antagonist's ribs at that moment with powerful blows. It was only the first round, but Fiddlefoot Drake was already in distress. His blunt face showed it.

It was one trained man against another, and with the advantage of youth on the side of Zeno Stiles. Drake wasn't more than thirty-five, but the span of twelve years between that and Zeno's age amounted to a lot in a fight:

Zeno's knuckles were broken—the knuckles of both hands—but he whipped them in like pistons. Paddy Miles watched the play of his lithe shoulders, the spring of his panther body, with awe-stricken admiration. The round ended.

"Boys," Paddy said, "there's the feller we bee-rated fer bein' a dude. All

I can say is I'm glad he didn't get sore at me when I was informin' him of my opinion."

It became a slugging match. Fiddlefoot Drake, incensed at the outset when he discovered a trained fighter had been worked off on him, sought to end it quickly. It was his only hope against a young man of surprising skill. Drake charged about like a wild man, his heavy feet thundering on the pine floor of the ring. He smashed and slashed, grated his teeth, and summoned to his normally forbidding countenance an expression unbelievably fierce. More than one man had lost heart in the face of that dark cloud of vengeance.

But Zeno Stiles didn't lose heart. He accepted the other man's lead, and there were thrilling moments when they slugged toe to toe. Zeno hit the mark with greater accuracy. At every turn Fiddlefoot was met by those hammering fists. He was baffled, bruised. He had moments of calmness, but he couldn't draw away for long. The youth wouldn't let him.

Zeno Stiles was carrying the fight to the other man now. Zeno took terrible blows himself, but his comebacks added to Fiddlefoot's conviction that Fate had, beyond all doubt, dealt him a losing hand that day.

Big Neck Crowder could feel his conspiracy crashing about his ears. He watched the fight with a grim, hopeless expression. If Fiddlefoot, his own plant, lost the fight, it meant financial disaster to Crowder and his fellow fixers. They had come to Midland for a clean-up, sinking almost everything they had in what looked like a sure thing, and their strong hopes and schemes were turning to jelly.

Disaster to Fiddlefoot Drake and the gamblers who sent him into the woods came in the fifth round. For just an instant Zeno stood still before his cornered adversary, like a figure of marble. Then he cut loose, and finished him

there in that corner. Fiddlefoot Drake lay on the pine floor kicking feebly, but unable to rise.

Zeno Stiles rode up to Main Street on the shoulders of the Larkins lumberjacks.

LATER that day John Larkins showed Paddy Miles and his friends the gingered logs.

"They intended for Martin Keeley to get one of these," John Larkins explained, and added: "That boy never left town at all. He came to my house and I've been keeping him under cover there. He's been going out at night, down around the mill and keeping himself in shape. I knew the gamblers were working a swindle on the town, and some of us got to the bottom of it. That fellow Drake is a professional. Zeno told me what he could do in a fighting way, and I gave him a chance. You fellows wouldn't leave Zeno alone—were going to make him fight—so he ducked. He didn't care about fighting too early in the game. And Zeno discovered these gingered logs, too. You can thank that boy for the spinning game and the fight also. He's the lad who won the day for the Larkins camp!"

"But who is he?" Paddy Miles asked.

"Well, he's a nephew of mine. Finished college down East last year, and wanted to come into the woods to earn a little money and learn something about the lumber business. Said he'd start in as a lumberjack, and didn't want to appear as a relative of the owner. That's all there is to it—except that he let me know he'd been quite a boxer at college, an amateur, but better than the average. Showed me prizes he'd won with his dukes. He begged for a chance at the other man when he heard it was a frame-up. There you are!"

John Larkins looked them all over. His eyes twinkled.

"Well, boys," he told them, "the river games are over. You're a hard-looking bunch. Been drunk, more or less for ten days now. It's time to straighten up, and go to work in the mill. How about it?"

"Just what I been thinkin'," Paddy Miles assented. "Me—I'm goin' to the barber shop. Ye know me, Mr. Larkins. When I go to the barber shop, that's a sure sign I'm gettin' sober."

"That's right."

"An' I don't mind tellin' ye," Paddy Miles asserted, "that I'm gonna do it up fancy. Sence I see Zeno Stiles fight,

I've come t' the honest opinion an' belief that a man can be fussy about his looks an' still be a man. Be that as it may an' so to speak, I'm gonna get me a hair cut an' a shave, not t' mention a shampoo, a singe and a—what d'ye call it, that bus'ness o' rubbin' an' pattin' yer cheeks? Massage—that's it! I'm gonna have one if it cracks my face! An' the first lumberjack," he warned, "that calls me a dude will be sent home lookin' worse'n Fiddlefoot Drake looked when he escaped from the clutches of our friend an' camp mate, Mr. Zeno Stiles!"

Other stories written by Mr. Hinds will be published in subsequent issues of
THE POPULAR.



THE LAST OF THE CLIPPER SHIPS

HER days of roving adventure upon the seven seas of this world are over, and the *Benjamin F. Packard*, mighty sailer in her time, lies tied up to her slip in the North River, above New York harbor. When she slid into the cold waters of the north Atlantic, in her maiden plunge from the scaffolding of a Maine shipbuilding yard, back in the late eighties, the *Benjamin F. Packard* was one of a select crew of American-built sailing ships, which, because of their stanch timbers and unsurpassed sailing qualities, were used to carry precious cargoes around the Horn and up to Santiago, Lima and San Francisco. For those were the days before South and North America had been divided into two distinct continents by the Panama Canal, and it was not only very expensive, but exceedingly dangerous, to send a steam vessel around the wave-lashed shores of Patagonia and the tip of South America—hence the need of stout sailers. And the *Packard* had her fill of adventure. Once in a race around the Horn with another sailer, the *Packard* lost because her skipper piled too much canvas upon her two masts, thus losing his yardage as well as the purse of five thousand dollars.

But the *Benjamin F. Packard* has not made her last sea voyage, if she has had her last adventure; for this Fourth of July she will act as flagship to a fleet of five boats, which, with the help of skeleton crews, will be sailed to Europe by the Junior Naval Reserve, an organization composed of boys between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. And it will be a fitting curtain act that the last of a line of ships that made the American sailor renowned throughout the world should, before she is made into a museum, carry to the Old World a body of adventurous American youths recruited from nearly every State in this Union.



One Dollar Down

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "Censored," "Bright Blue," Etc.

Forrester had reached the end of his tether, financially and spiritually, which is a dangerous thing for a lone man in a big city like New York. Yet there was one way left open to him—chance. And chance came in the guise of a blue-penciled envelope floating down out of the chasm of Wall Street.

SOMETHING of consequence had to happen that day, and Forrester knew it. In the very nature of things, something was bound to happen. A break surely must come; if for no other reason, simply because hard luck had overtaken and was passing his capacity for enduring it.

Forrester was at the end of his string, down to his last dime, out of work, without friends near, without prospects anywhere. He was footsore and soulsore. He had ten cents in his pocket and, uptown, a roof and bed for another night. These and the clothing he wore comprised his all.

The coin he might hang on to; the clothes, of course, he must; but the room he couldn't. Already he was in arrears, and he knew his landlady.

"Ah, I've been long in hot wather myself!" she'd told Forrester the week before, and literal consideration of the remark had brought to his mind the words of a departing and disillusioned roomer. The woman, this chap had said, was "as hard boiled as a picnic egg."

Forrester had started the day with the dime as his sole capital. To keep it intact he had gone breakfastless, had walked four miles downtown from his rooming house to the employment office toward which he had hopefully hastened, morning after morning, during this last luckless month. Now, with belt tightened and hope gone, he was on his way uptown again.

"You don't seem to fit, Forrester," the brusque person at the agency's regis-

tration desk had told him. "There's no use sending you anywhere else. You haven't stayed at anything long enough to get real experience, and that gives employers a bad impression at the start. The trouble is that you haven't found yourself. What you ought to do is consult a vocational expert, give him a line on you, let him tell you what sort of work you're best adapted for. Now, in your place, I'd go and invest ten or fifteen dollars——"

So Forrester, grimly smiling, had gone from there; and a shadow of the smile still survived as he retraced his steps north through lower Broadway. He could recognize, at last, an element of humor in the situation, even found himself glowing with an unaccountable sense of exhilaration. A strong body, a good mind, a college education, the appearance of a gentleman, loyalty, industry, a determination to make the best of any kind of work that came his way, no matter how uninteresting or ill paid—all these he had to offer, and there were no takers. He could do no more. It was up to the world, up to Fate, to deal the next hand to him. Yes, something—Lord knew what, but *something*—had to happen.

FATE at the moment appeared to be getting ready with one more chastisement. A damp, puffy wind had blown up. Rain was on the way, and Forrester's shoe soles were worn through.

Forrester, looking up apprehensively at the darkening sky, saw a square of paper dancing above the hats directly in front of him. An eddy of back draft would send it scooting up to the level of the second or third story, and then again it would come fluttering down. Always it kept just ahead of Forrester, and he followed its fortunes with fascinated eyes. Hadn't he become something like that himself—a scrap of paper on the wind?

The paper struck an air hole, came straight down. It brushed a hat brim and a shoulder and passed from view, but not before Forrester had observed it was an envelope. Hurrying feet had trampled it when he picked it up. Under the sidewalk grime ground into it, he could make out words scrawled with a blue pencil and heavily under-scored:

EASY MONEY! OPEN ME!

Forrester's heart gave a leap, but immediately it sank again. He couldn't, he told himself, expect a solution of his dilemma to come so swiftly or so simply. Not in this age, certainly not in this particular neighborhood, would there be any such thing as money showering out of the air upon the needy.

He was still in the financial district. The building out of which the envelope must have come was filled, he knew, with small brokers dealing in unlisted securities and fly-by-night promoters. This envelope with its bright-blue promise would be only part of some brand-new advertising dodge worked out by one of the skyscraper's tenants.

It was Forrester's impulse to consign his find to the gutter. A faint stirring of curiosity caused him to change his mind and drop the envelope into his pocket. When he had walked on a couple of blocks, he opened it—and his startled eyes were witnesses to a miracle.

Out of the envelope fell a folded bill. Forrester, with anxious alacrity recovering it, discovered it to be an unquestionably authentic dollar. He gloated over it. Here was his skipped breakfast, the means to the dinner he hadn't expected to have, a pledge of a turn in the tide.

His fingers explored again in the envelope and brought forth a sheet covered with crowded blue sentences. Forrester walked another block or two and settled down on a bench in City Hall

Park to find the reason of his good fortune. He read:

This dollar goes to you in trust. It will pay for a "Personal" in the morning *World*. If used for that purpose, and if other directions are followed, it is worth one hundred dollars to the finder. Will you gamble or be a piker?

Forrester stopped reading there and looked once more at the dollar. There were so many other things it would buy besides space in a personal column—important, savory, filling things that his neglected stomach was crying out for.

But then a hundred dollars—there was wealth! A great deal might happen before so magnificent a stake was exhausted, and Forrester decided that it would be worth while at least to look into the stipulations of the hundred-dollar contract.

He found the personal written out for him, with a blank space left wherein he was bidden to insert his own name and phone number. The advertisement was addressed to one "C. V." It advised that by getting in touch with the advertiser, "C. V." could obtain an important message from "J. J. J."

The further instructions, though they appeared to have been written in haste, were exact. The finder of the "Easy Money" envelope was to meet "C. V." and explain that a hundred dollars had been promised upon delivery of the message. There was an assurance that "C. V." would understand and would pay over the money without demur; but at the same time it was pointed out that the finder was obviously privileged to protect himself. He'd be under no compulsion to deliver any sort of message, of course, until his reward was in his hand.

Thus far it was an altogether astonishing proposition; but still more astonishing in its simplicity was the intelligence to be conveyed to "C. V." The thing was absurd, preposterous. All Forrester need say was "Broadway

and Twenty-eighth Street," and magically the hundred dollars would be his.

As an out-and-out business proposition, Forrester decided, this was much too good to be true. Scenting a practical joke, he looked warily about to see if he was being watched; but he observed no one in the throng milling along Broadway who had eyes for him, and the occupants of the benches near him appeared absorbed in their own affairs. Across the park, the golden dome of the World Building flashed a challenge. Was he going to "pike" or be a sportsman?

Forrester arose and walked toward the dome. Decision had come to him suddenly, based on no question of noblesse oblige, or right or wrong, or any ethical consideration whatsoever. A while ago he had put the problem of his future squarely up to Fate; and now, since Fate had jerked so promptly at the leading strings, a failure to respond would be a sign that he looked for no more favors.

THE rift in the traffic through which he crossed Park Row led Forrester to fresh temptation to embezzle Fate's dollar. He arrived on the east sidewalk of the Row directly in front of the inviting door of a lunch room. Savory odors wafted out to him, with a siren whiff of steak and onions dominant. He hesitated, started for the door; with his hand actually on it he squared his shoulders and threw out his chin and turned away.

"No," he said, "we play the game!"

The advertising office of the *World* was in the block above. Forrester put his "Personal" and his dollar on the counter. Both were kept by the clerk. "Just even money," he explained. "One dollar's the minimum under this classification."

So Forrester finished his uptown journey afoot, went to bed hungry and prayerful, and in the morning still had

his dime. It was eight o'clock when he awoke and dressed. Forrester found a few crumbs of tobacco in the bottom of a sack and rolled a cigarette.

"After yesterday," he promised himself, "smoke will be solid enough to give me indigestion. Then I won't want to eat." Yet something whispered hard times were over.

Early as it was, the landlady was at Forrester's door before his thin cigarette had burned to the end.

"Did you want to see me before you went out?" she asked.

"Always glad to see you, Mrs. Flannery," said Forrester. "Jove, it's rent day, isn't it? That comes in just right this week. I'm sitting here waiting for a telephone call. When it comes, I'm going out and collect a very large sum of money—what amounts to an independent fortune. You've heard of money dropping on a man out of the clouds, Mrs. Flannery? Well, it's that kind."

Forrester was surprised at the convincing ring of his voice. He saw he had impressed the woman—for the first time probably, it occurred to him, since he had admitted that a small rear room, high up, would do for him. Long immersion in "hot wather" might have hard boiled Mrs. Flannery, but the gasp with which she received his assertion revealed her as a romantic at yolk.

"A legacy, is ut?" she murmured.

"Something of the sort," replied Forrester.

Immediately he saw himself in for an inquisition, wished that his speech had not been so sanguine. But the Fate which had taken service with him the day before stepped into the rescue. Far below the telephone bell jingled. His name came floating up through the stair well.

It was a strange voice and a husky one that came to Forrester over the wire a moment later.

"Was it you had the ad in the *World* this morning? Well, that message you've got is for me. What's the word?"

"It doesn't seem to me," said Forrester, "that it would be good business to tell you over the telephone."

He meant something else, but the man at the other end of the line put an interpretation of his own on the remark. He clucked approval.

"Guess you're using the bean, at that. I'll hand it to you there. It's what I'd expect from a—friend of Johnny's. How do we get together?"

"Suppose I call on you," Forrester suggested.

The man with the husky voice hesitated. "N-o-o," he demurred. "That'd be putting you out too much. It's a long way. Besides, I—I've got an appointment. Fact is, I'm starting out right now; got to get down Columbus Circle way. I could meet you in an hour, say, at the Circle. How's that?

. . . Well, even if you don't know me, that'll be easy. I'll be over by the entrance to Central Park. Just you go there and act like you're looking for somebody. Leave it to me to pick you, Forrester!"

It struck Forrester that the other had suddenly generated a suspicion of him, and of the validity of his message. Ready acquiescence seemed the best way to allay it.

"It's all the same to me," he said. "Look for me in an hour, then."

He turned from the telephone to find Mrs. Flannery awaiting him in the front hall.

"I was thinkin', Mr. Forrester," she said, "that you'd care for a cup of Javver, and a bit of toast, and maybe an egg before you went out."

The thing was unprecedented. Fate was speaking again, and Forrester could only stare.

"Would ye have the egg boiled, now?"

"Not," said Forrester firmly, "more than three minutes, please!"

THE husky voice had sounded as if it belonged to a man who might have something to do with the stevedoring industry. Forrester went to the rendezvous at the Circle expecting to meet a large and probably uncouth person whom he would be able to identify at sight; but the man who came to him after he had waited for a quarter of an hour at the park entrance presented no such formidable figure as his imagination had pictured.

This man was slender and well groomed and freshly barbered. He wore spats and a pince-nez and twirled a Malacca walking stick. In appearance he was altogether elegant. And yet it seemed to Forrester, quickly taking stock of him, that there was a predatory glint in the eyes behind the trim glasses.

"Forrester, aren't you?" he had demanded, in the same brusque, saw-edged voice that had spoken over the telephone wire. Then, a nod having acknowledged the accuracy of his guess, he wanted at once to know: "What's happened? Where is she?"

"She?" echoed Forrester.

"Johnny," said the immaculate one impatiently. "What's the idea in playing dumb? Brought a message from her, didn't you?"

"I've got a message," Forrester told him, "but I don't know who it's from. If your friend Johnny isn't a man, it's certainly news to me. I've never seen the lady."

Briefly he explained how the envelope containing the dollar bill had been cast on the wind and fallen at his feet.

"So far as I'm concerned," he wound up, "I'm only an errand boy. What's your little affair—and—er—Johnny's—isn't mine. The thing that does interest me hugely is a promise that I'm to be paid for my trouble. That's to be un-

derstood before the message is delivered."

The dapper man regarded him with eyes screwed up and sharpened. "Well, what's the price?"

"I'm not the one who's setting it," said Forrester. "I've got the agreement in black and white to show you. You're to give me—don't faint, please!—a hundred dollars."

"The hell you say! I hope you've got something worth a hundred to tell me."

"So do I," said Forrester devoutly. "I certainly need the money."

"What is it?"

Forrester hesitated. Studying the other, he decided he wasn't in general of the type, nor at the moment in a mood, to assent readily to a money-first proposition.

"Maybe," he said, "the message will mean more to you than it does to me. I'm simply to say to you: 'Broadway and——'"

The dapper man's chin went up; his eyes narrowed behind their rimless lenses. "I think I begin to get the drift," he murmured. "Go ahead."

"Broadway," said Forrester, "and Twenty-eighth Street."

"Well?"

"You've got it?"

"Come on, man! What else?"

"That's all. 'Broadway and Twenty-eighth Street!' That's the whole thing."

An incredulous smile twisted the dapper one's thin lips. "A hundred for that!" he jeered. "Be yourself, Forrester! I could as well come back at you with 'Sixth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street!' or some quick one like that and tell you that you owed me money! If we're going to do business, don't stall. That's good advice; I won't stand for it. Now come through quick. What's the rest of it? And make it hotter than the sample, understand?"

"Where do I come off?" blurted Forrester. "I've acted in good faith.

Here's your Johnny's note to prove it. See for yourself what it says about the money!"

The paper was snatched from his hands and swiftly read. The dapper man looked up from it, puzzled.

"Guess you've played straight, all right," he emitted grudgingly. "But you're crazy if you think I'm going to fork up for this—just as crazy as she is!"

He had lifted a hand, and an empty taxi veered out of the vehicular jam swinging around the Circle.

"No, you don't!" cried Forrester. "I'm desperate! Look here, you've got to——"

But the other was already in the cab and had slammed the door as the restraining arm shot out.

"If you're desperate," he said, "try a stick-up—on somebody else!" And the taxi, with a derisive hoot from the exhaust, darted into a hole in the traffic and was lost.

Pursuit would probably be hopeless. It became absolutely so in the moment that Forrester dazedly considered the idea. With the vanishing of the cab, the incident of the dollar from the sky appeared irrevocably closed. It had contained some sort of joke, after all—an obscure and a cruel one.

Forrester wasn't up to entertaining the thought of returning, still broke, to his room. He wandered into the park, kept walking aimlessly until he had come upon a lonely bench which invited him to rest and turn his mind toward the dubious morrow.

BUT even solitude was denied him. He had his bench to himself for only a minute or two before acquiring a neighbor.

"Nice day," observed the newcomer.

Forrester glanced up from the man's hard, blue-jowled face to a bluer sky embroidered with clouds of sheerest fleece.

"Rotten," he said, and hoped that would be the end of the conversation.

His neighbor remained undiscouraged. There was an empty bench farther on to which he could have taken himself, but he chose to stay.

"I don't see anything the matter with it," he said cheerfully. "Not me."

Forrester stared, shrugged and turned his back. The man at closer inspection appeared no more prepossessing. He, too, was silent for a little. Forrester had a feeling he would speak again. The man did—and quite astonishingly:

"Puttin' on the ritz, hey? That ain't hardly right, bud, when you and me's got a mutual friend. Maybe a lot of 'em."

"That so?" said Forrester. "Who?"

"Dave Rucker."

"You're mistaken."

"Not so as you could notice it, I'm not. Who was it you were talking to a while ago? Wasn't that 'Dandy Dave'? Get the memory workin', bud. I *seen* you!"

Forrester swung around and faced his inquisitor with jaw and shoulders squared. "I don't know what the devil it's all about," he snapped, "but get this straight: I don't know any Dave Rucker, I don't know any Johnny—and I don't know—you! Don't want to!"

The hard-faced individual had caught his breath; the red lids blinked rapidly over his small eyes. "Johnny!" he exclaimed. "Well, now! What do you know about Johnny?"

Forrester found himself suddenly interested. The curiosity stifled by his recent disappointment returned with a surge. Here, no farther off than the length of the bench, was one who surely held the answer to the riddle. He'd play this man along, keep him guessing, draw him out. A wild hope flared. Perhaps, given a little inside knowledge, he'd still be able to cash in somehow on the hand-out of the Broadway breeze.

"Suppose," he suggested, "you tell me where I can find her?"

His neighbor gave him credit for having made an attempt at humor.

"Yeah—suppose!" he chuckled. "Don't worry; we've got Johnny safe. Rucker ought to know it by now. Say, you're not so bad at actin', bud! You had me stumped for a minute. Still don't see how you head in. Oh, *you* don't know Dandy Dave, don't you?"

Forrester, keen now for the fishing, let out a little more line. "Think what you want to. I had a message for him—from Johnny."

"Yes, you did!"

"I'm telling you the fact."

"How'd you get it?"

"Out of the air. Think that over. It's the truth again."

The blue-jowled man looked at him with what seemed to Forrester a dawning comprehension.

"Out o' the air, hey?" he repeated. "It'd have to be. Sa-a-ay——" He edged nearer. "Maybe so, maybe so," he conceded, in a softer voice. "Now, maybe I've took you wrong, bud. It would sorta explain the stand-offish way Dave was actin'. What was it you told him? We're good pals, Dandy Dave and me. Let's hear it, once!"

"If that was Rucker I met at the park entrance," said Forrester, "being a friend of his isn't very much of a recommendation. He was to pay me for delivering the message—and he didn't. Any one else who gets it pays in advance."

Thick, blunt fingers, on one of which a big solitaire diamond gleamed, stroked the blue chin. "I begin to see better and better. Sure. You got something out of the air—for Dandy Dave—and he done you. Well, that's *him!* It's Dave all over. He'd double cross his own brother, he would. Now, if I could help you get back at him—how'd that be? You just slip me this here message, and we'll see."

"What I want to see, and all I want to see," returned Forrester, "is the money that was promised to me."

"How much was it?"

"A hundred dollars."

"It must," said he of the solitaire, still more softly, "have been the good news for fair. And he trimmed you, at that! Can you beat the guy?" He moved still closer, and his eyes and his tone sharpened. "Come on, bud! You tell me what all this was! Tell me quick!"

"I'll tell you," replied Forrester, "when the money's in my hand."

The hand on which the diamond blazed dropped into a pocket; and Forrester, through the cloth of the coat, caught for a flash the outline of a pistol. Then he was crowded suddenly to the edge of the bench and the muzzle of the gun was digging into his side.

"This," whispered the blue-jowled man, "is something a lot more important than any hundred dollars you ever dreamed about. You kick through or I'll—rub you out! Right here, where you sit! Understand? Give it to me, and give it straight!"

The man was one of the gifted few who can be emphatic without being noisy. There was a menacing chill in his lowered tone, and, to accompany it, an expression of unpleasantly efficient purpose on his face.

Even with things running as badly as they were, Forrester had no enthusiasm for the prospect of erasure. A glint of brass, glimpsed through a bush just then, was a sight more welcome to him than a sudden gleam of gold at his feet could have been.

A policeman was coming along the path. The rubber-out heard the officer's footsteps a moment after Forrester had seen the sun on his buttons, but evidently he did not recognize in them the tread of the law.

"You sit tight until this bird passes," the man directed. "If you open your

mouth, I'm goin' to plug you. And that ain't maybe!"

Forrester nodded. But when the policeman was abreast of the bench, his neighbor's swift intake of breath and a momentary dropping of the blue jaw reënforced his resolve to make a break.

This, unfortunately, was not a very formidable-looking policeman. He moved with a plump and placid dignity which argued that he would be both slow to appreciate a critical situation and to act in one. Forrester, anxiously appraising him, took a quick breath, too, and deep.

"Oh, officer!" he called. "I—er—I would—"

He felt the muzzle of the hidden gun jabbing harder against his ribs, and was suddenly speechless.

The policeman had halted and was looking from one to the other of the pair on the bench, evidently in doubt as to which had hailed him.

"Yep," said he. "I'm listening."

Forrester recovered his voice as the bluecoat stared. "I—er—wonder if you could direct me to—to the Museum of Natural History."

"Sure," said the benign sparrow cop. "That's easy," and information flowed. "You can't miss it if you just follow this path to the gate at—"

Forrester, not daring to risk a glance at his companion, jumped up. "Oh—and you're heading that way? Then if you please, I'll walk along with you!"

With chills chasing one another over his vulnerable and anguished back, Forrester turned from the bench and fell into step with the law. When he ventured to look around, the bench was empty.

THE winning of safe conduct from the vicinity of the rubber-out more than satisfied Forrester at the moment of his departure. He saw nothing to be gained by demanding the man's arrest, and so kept his own counsel.

"This has been a bigger favor than you know," he assured his convoy warmly, when they stood at the park gate.

"Don't mention it, young felly," said the policeman, and pointed with his club. "That's the Natural History up to the left. Me regards to the diplomadocus!"

Fear that the man with the pistol might still be stalking assailed Forrester as the obliging bluecoat strolled away. He walked rapidly west to Columbus Avenue, and ran up the "L" steps.

"Here's where we lose that gentleman," he promised himself, "if it costs half the fortune."

A train was pulling in. With his dime reduced to a nickel, but comfortably sure that he had definitely eluded the company of Dandy Dave Rucker's older acquaintance, Forrester settled back in a corner seat to reattack the problem of the parachuting dollar. Already he had several threads in his hand, and as the elevated train clattered downtown he proceeded to weave them together.

In the first place, the singular means of communication evolved by the "J. J. J." of the personal was now sufficiently explained. The owner of the initials was a woman who rejoiced in a nickname that was the diminutive of a man's given name—a woman called "Johnny." He had been assured that Johnny was "safe" and the implication had been plain. She was under duress, a prisoner. Somewhere in that building far down Broadway, dubious rookery that Forrester knew it to be, she was being held against her will and to some end beyond present fathoming.

Rucker evidently was one whom the woman felt she could trust and to whom she looked for aid. She had information for him, and woman's wit had pointed a way of sending it. She must have known that Rucker was in the habit of reading the *World* "Per-

sonals"—probably had been used to reaching him through the column. Promising more, but gambling only the cost of the advertisement, she had floated her message on its course; financing the experiment on woman's favorite purchase plan of "one dollar down."

The personal, of course, had been addressed to "C. V.," and these certainly were not Rucker's initials; yet Forrester, canvassing over the occurrences of the last hour, could not doubt that it was for Dandy Dave the message had been intended.

Patently, it had been anticipated by her captors that this mysteriously restrained Johnny would try to communicate with Rucker, and so they had set a watch upon him.

IT was all a very fantastic business, thus viewed. But to Forrester the strangest part of it was Rucker's failure to make sense of the message. The words "Broadway and Twenty-eighth Street" had meant nothing to him; there was no question of that, and again no question but that they held somehow a vital significance. The answer must be that Rucker wasn't as keen as he looked. His brain hadn't been equal to making some certain deduction which Johnny had assumed to be self-evident.

As well as a fantastic business, Forrester decided, it was in all probability a crooked business; and stronger than his curiosity as to what it might be was his hunch, deep down, that he had not become entangled in it without purpose. It wasn't written, he felt, that he was to pass out of the picture now. Somewhere ahead, if only he could find the way, his big chance awaited him.

Forrester's train went only as far south as Rector Street. Alighting there, he still had no definite program, but as he stood on the platform it occurred to him that he was only a block or two from the starting point of his adventure.

He walked over to Broadway, and from across the street studied the bleak facade of the Cromwell Building. But it gave him no inspiration. There were at least five hundred windows staring down enigmatically at him; the dollar that had carried the specious promise of a hundred other dollars to follow might have come through any of them.

Scrutiny of the building directory was equally unfruitful, and Forrester was starting away, discouraged, when a glimpse of a familiar face halted him. It was the hard, blue-jowled face of the rubber-out.

Forrester, sure that the recognition had not been mutual, watched the man pass through the Cromwell Building rotunda and into an elevator. When the car had ascended, with the rubber-out as its only passenger, he walked to the starter after a quick glance at the directory and played a long shot.

"Did you notice if that was Mr. Junger, of Junger & McReady, who just went up?" he asked.

The starter shook his head. "On car No. 4?" he asked. "Hell, no!"

"But it looked like Junger," Forrester insisted.

"Not to me," said the starter. "Mr. Junger is way over six foot, ain't he? No—that was a Mr. Gleason you saw. With the Rich Lode Mining Company, *he is!*"

Forrester didn't bother with the directory board again, but stepped into an elevator.

"Let's see," he said. "The Rich Lode Mining people are on the——"

"Eleventh, all the time," said the operator, and the car shot aloft.

Forrester, when he had disembarked, made a scouting trip through the eleventh-story corridor. He found the "Rich Lode" legend on the door of an office at the extreme south end of the hall, facing Broadway. The room adjoining to the north also appeared to be used by the same people, and the

next offices had a firm of lawyers as tenants.

This much knowledge of the terrain Forrester took with him to a seat in City Hall Park. Shortly before five o'clock he returned to the Cromwell Building with a carefully developed plan of action, and rode again to the eleventh floor.

Now the law office was his objective. He glanced in, and discovered that the only occupant of the room was a girl clerk. She was putting on her hat. It was such luck as Forrester had hoped for, but had scarcely dared to expect. Immediately he launched into the speech he had rehearsed over and again during the last couple of hours. It was a sales talk for a subscription set of books. Forrester was not in the least chagrined to see that it left his audience cold, for that was what he had counted on.

"Maybe some other time," said the girl. "I'm in a hurry now. Gotta meet somebody."

"And I'll say," sighed Forrester, courteously closing the office door for her, "that he's a lucky man!"

He bowed the girl into an elevator, rode down with her—and then rode back. The door of the law office now presented no obstacle to him, for a swift pressure of a finger had released the spring lock when he was closing it.

Calmly Forrester walked in and took possession.

LUCK served again. The lawyers' office had once been part of the suite occupied now by the extraordinary Mr. Gleason and his Rich Lode Mining Company. Forrester, who had been looking ahead to a course of dizzy acrobatics on a narrow ledge, was vastly relieved to discover a communicating door in the south wall of the private office beyond the reception-room rail.

The door, as a gentle pressure assured him, was bolted on the far side; but on Forrester's side there was a key.

Softly turning and withdrawing it, and putting his eye to the keyhole, he found more than half the adjoining room in range.

There was light in this room; a desk lamp had been turned on, and beside it some one sat reading a newspaper. The wide-spread sheet hid the reader's face, but such a visible and intriguing item as a pair of French-heeled shoes, comfortably disposed on a second chair, revealed Forrester's neighbor as a woman. This, he felt sure, must be "Johnny." But was she alone?

Undecided, debating, he let many precious minutes go by, and then rated himself for having permitted them to slip without acting. The woman had been by herself, but was no longer. A door at the far side of the room had opened, and a man stood there grinning ironically. The paper slowly descended.

Forrester had happened on no enterprise of gallantry. Instinctively he had realized that Johnny would be a person quite capable of handling whatever situation she had got herself into, and her appearance now confirmed the estimate.

The woman, he judged, had passed thirty by a year or two. At first glance Forrester reckoned her beautiful. Good looks she had, but her face was as impassive as a gambler's—and as cold. She lifted chilly gray eyes to the man at the door.

"Well—Ed's gone," he announced.

"What of it?"

"He's boiling over. Lucky thing for you, Johnny, that you're—a woman. But you'd better be coming to your senses. He's likely to forget, and——"

"A hard man, ain't he? He slips out and leaves it for you to throw a scare into me. You can tell him I'm not scaring, though—no more to-day than yesterday, or before that. When he comes to me right, I'll do business. Not till then. *I'm* sitting pretty enough!"

The man on the threshold rubbed his

heavy chin. "Maybe," he said, "not as pretty as you think for. You can be thick with Ed only so long before something happens—and I'm here to tell you that you ain't never going to razzle him for no fifty-fifty break. You ought to know it by now."

"I know," said the woman coolly, "that I don't have to stay here any longer than it suits me. And I guess you know it, too, Weber."

Weber laughed. "Can it, Johnny!" he succinctly advised. "You ain't going to raise any squawk, because if we ride—you ride with us. Where you are is where you stay, until you tell us what you done with the bag."

"And I'm never going to tell," said Johnny. "You've got to trust me, or lose——"

"We trusted you once," remarked Weber significantly. "And what kind of a deal did we get?"

"Just the kind you had coming to you. I wasn't cut in right for the chance I took, and that's why I took the other chance."

"Chance, my hat!" scoffed Weber. "It was us and the machine they was looking for. You could 'a' walked right up to one of Fenston's store detectives with the bag in your mitt, and he wouldn't 'a' batted an eye. That was the reason for ringin' a woman in. A grand was plenty—lib'ral. But you're a crook, Johnny. You just can't help it, I guess."

The woman shrugged, opened a shiny yellow compact and dabbed at her nose with a powder pad, studying the improvement in the tiny mirror held at arm's length.

"One grand, Weber?" she murmured. "One thousand for my end, with only five other ways to split a hundred thousand? Say, don't make me laugh! What do you mean—plenty? Wouldn't you have pulled the same holdout, now, if you'd been in my place?"

The man came farther into the room.

"What's the use of chewing it all over again, Johnny?" he complained. "You say what you wanted was only an even share, but what's to prove you didn't mean to breeze with the whole works? If we hadn't been lucky enough to nail you quick——"

Weber had dropped into a chair facing the woman's, and had modulated his voice so that it no longer carried across the room. Forrester could catch only a word here and there; but he had heard all that was necessary. Just the name of Fenston's—Fenston's, that sedate and exclusive department store in the Avenue near the Waldorf—had been sufficient to let him know what sort of game he had walked into.

"Help Wanted" advertisements weren't all that he had been reading in the newspapers during the last week, before even newspapers became unattainable luxuries. He knew what had happened at Fenston's, and knew at last the stake for which he was playing—knew what was in this secreted bag!

FORRESTER had an impulse to steal from his listening post, get to a telephone; but that impulse he held in check. He had picked up the hand dealt by Fate and, he decided, must see in through on his own. For nearly an hour he waited before Johnny's jailer left the room. Then he went into the front office, found a scratch pad and scribbled a note. Truthfully enough, he wrote:

Have had devil of a time locating you. Have learned how you're fixed. Rucker doesn't understand what you mean by "Broadway and Twenty-eighth Street."

Forrester pushed the edge of the paper under the bolted door. Not venturing to call to the woman, lest the sound carry into the room beyond, he tried to attract her attention by drawing the note back and forth along the doorsill. She was interested in her newspaper again, and more interminable minutes

passed before the movement caught her eye. She straightened, turned and stared.

Forrester's wigwagging became more strenuous, and finally the woman arose and tiptoed toward the door. Forrester saw her stooping; then his view was blotted out and the paper drawn from his hand. Whispered words came to him after a little. Johnny was using the keyhole as a short-line speaking tube:

"Hello, hello! You hear me? Who are you?"

"You don't know me," breathed Forrester. "But Dave does. There's no time for explaining now, is there?"

"Can you spring me out of this?" the woman asked eagerly.

Forrester might have told her that by drawing the bolt on her side of the door she could free herself—but he withheld the suggestion.

"Forget that now," he said. "What about Broadway and Twenty-eighth Street, Johnny?"

The woman giggled softly. "I guess Dave thought I was crazy. And I was—like a fox. Did he think I was going to spill the beans in one message, and me not knowing who'd pick it up or what they'd be apt to do about it?"

A STIRRING in the far room brought her erect. She listened a moment, and stooped once more to the keyhole.

"Maybe," she breathed, "I didn't play wise from the start-off! It wasn't ten minutes after they slipped me the bag when I'd sunk it—and sunk it good. I knew nobody could be spotting me then, so I laid it where they couldn't find it in a thousand years from Sunday. Not with any one that knew me, I'll tell the world. Because I had it figured that the mob——"

"Cut it short!" urged Forrester.

"No, you listen," insisted the woman. "Dave has got to know I didn't have

a thought of double crossing him. I was on my way to meet him when two of the crowd rounded me up, yanked me into a taxi and brought me down here. I guess it wasn't lucky I'd got rid of the bag quick!

"I thought I could bluff Ed out, but it didn't work. He won't make any deal unless I tell him first where I planted the stuff. Now if Dave gets the bag and offers Ed fifty fifty, it's something else again. I know it. We'll be through working together, but we'll be—friends. Get me? You'll tell Dave that?"

"I will—the minute I see him," promised Forrester. "But where *is* the bag? That's the thing!"

Johnny refused to be hurried. "I want Dave to get it straight," she ran on. "Ed said he'd hang onto me until I told him where the bag was. You know what that means for me and Dave—not a red!

"All I had with me was two dollars—bills—when they landed me here. It took me the whole night, what time Ed and Weber weren't hammering at me to come through, before I figured out a safe way of getting word to Dave. I dropped two envelopes out the window, an hour apart, with a dollar bill pinned to each. Neither made any sense by itself. And Dave only got one message?"

"One," said Forrester, "is all that he'd got up to the time I left him."

"Even that was a good batting average," the woman whispered. "It was a dizzy chance. I knew it—but it was worth trying. Anyhow, it brought you." She paused, and demanded: "Say, you haven't told me yet how you got onto Ed's hide-out!"

"It's too long a story," demurred Forrester. "I'll leave it for Dave Rucker to tell. He——"

Light was streaming through the keyhole again; and Forrester, knowing he was talking on a "dead line," broke off.

Johnny had risen hastily and slipped back to her chair. She was rattling her newspaper as the far door opened and the man Weber rejoined her.

"How about something to eat?" she asked him. "It must be way past dinner time. I'm hungry."

"And goin' to be hungrier," predicted Weber. "Ed said to cut off your rations for a while, and see if that didn't make you reasonable. I told you, Johnny—his patience is about out!"

The blunt-chinned jailer lingered to finish his cigarette and light another, and when he sauntered into the outer room, he left the door ajar behind him. After a time Johnny noisily discarded her paper. Forrester, whose knees were aching insufferably, observed that under cover of its crackling she had torn off a slip of margin. Pausing between words to watch the half-open door beyond, she began to write.

On paper, Johnny could be brief. When she had put down her pencil, she risked no further whispering, but walked quickly away after she had shoved her note under the door to Forrester. He read it a couple of minutes later by the light in the roof of the descending night elevator. Johnny had written—again in blue:

You say Dave knows my first message. Broadway and Twenty-eighth Street. Right. The second message was: Drug store—ask little bald-headed clerk for Miss Simpson's bag. There you are. Put them together, grab the bag, and get me out of this. Ed's bent on starving me—and Dave knows how I suffer when I skip meals. If something doesn't happen by lunch time to-morrow, then Ed wins, I guess. Now, you tell Dave. J. J. J.

Forrester, with this adventitiously won key to fortune nestling against the last nickel in his pocket, hesitated briefly at the subway kiosk in the block above the Cromwell Building. His instinct for economy dominated. Recollecting that he was still a poor man, and that the only certainties under the stars are death and taxes, he kept on.

An hour's forced march brought him to Twenty-eighth Street and Broadway. There was, quite as indicated, a drug store at the intersection; but no small, bald pharmacist was awaiting a call for "Miss Simpson's bag." The drug store was closed for the night, and on the corner outside, as if posted especially to guard the unsuspected treasure within, a policeman stood and twirled his club and whistled.

IT was an old-fashioned druggist who had the shop at Twenty-eighth Street. Tall jars filled with rich-hued liquids formed the cornerstones of his window display, and to Forrester they seemed symbolic of rainbow's end. Somewhere near them, invitingly, tantalizingly near, sat his pot of gold.

If only the plate glass of the druggist's window lay between him and fortune, Forrester might have followed the urge to burglary and search and seizure which arose out of the bitterness of his disappointment. But plate glass plus a policeman became a shutter of invulnerable steel. He hesitated only a moment on the opposite corner and then, fearful lest his loitering awaken an embarrassing official curiosity, walked wearily on.

The next few hours Forrester spent in walking and worrying. Half a dozen times he was tempted to return to Twenty-eighth Street and stand guard there until morning. There still were chances against him not to be lightly discounted. True, the imprisoned Johnny had indicated her determination of holding out until lunch time on the morrow. But a skipped breakfast after a skipped dinner might take the heart completely out of one who suffered from the skipping of any single meal—and weren't women quite incalculable creatures, anyhow? What odds that Johnny wouldn't be surrendering forthwith at some early-morning suggestion of a couple of poached eggs on toast?

And if she did stand pat, wasn't there still a chance of that second dovetailing message getting through to Mr. Dandy Dave Rucker?

They were disquieting possibilities, both, and Forrester was so absorbed in the dismal consideration of them that time fled unnoticed, and even hunger was forgotten. It was well past midnight when he found himself in front of a "coffee pot" far uptown, meditatively fingering the ultimate nickel.

The eating place was an unpretentious one, frankly catering to the low in funds. It was a card in the corner of the window that had caught Forrester's eye—"Unsurpassed Coffee with Roll—5 Cents." The combination at the price was irresistible.

EVEN though the plunge left him flat broke, Forrester felt much more cheerful after he had taken advantage of the lunch-counter bargain. He was able, for one thing, to see the Mrs. Flannery matter in its true perspective. There was no need for him to face the woman, now or in the morning, with apologies and explanations—no need to face her at all until he could settle with her in full. The solution of that problem was simply to spend the night out; the weather was mild, and it would be no hardship. Then in the morning—well, what to do but wait and discover what the morning would bring?

Forrester yawned. He was tired enough to sleep anywhere. Central Park was only a few blocks away, and a thousand benches would be waiting for him there. He turned east toward the park, hopped the wall to save the walk to the Eighty-sixth Street gate, and settled himself in the lee of a rock with somebody's discarded newspaper thrown over him to serve as blanket.

The long hike had insured sound rest. Forrester slept well, slept until the glare of the warm sun was no longer to

be evaded by turning. It wasn't until the celestial alarm clock had got him wholly awake that he recollected, with a start and a glow, his pressing errand downtown. He rinsed his face and hands at a park fountain, aroused the ghost of a remote polish on his shoes by vigorous rubbing with the newspaper, and swung into his practiced marching stride.

Others were beginning to drift into the park, but Forrester saw them only at a distance. He had come to a gate which he judged to be a mile from his starting point before he had a chance to ask the time. The answer was both disconcerting and alarming—"Must be just about nine!"

A moment after he had received this information, Forrester's alarm rose to a point of panic. A newspaper tossed into the grass just inside the gate had caught his eye, a morning *World*, and a swift glance through this new day's "Personals" had discovered one more advertisement addressed to "C. V." Some one else had a message for Dandy Dave from his captive Johnny!

Certainly, Forrester thought, he must get to Twenty-eighth Street faster than his feet would carry him, for even now Rucker might be on his way there. But what sort of rapid transit would be available to a man without a cent to his name? The subway and the elevated both got you somewhere in a hurry and at small cost, but they were equally insistent on having their nickel in advance. Surface cars, slower in the collection of fares on some lines, were also slower in covering ground—and you'd have to give up your money before they took you far.

A taxi cruising along Central Park West offered a solution of the problem. Here, though trouble might descend later in multiplied measure on the rider who couldn't pay, was one style of transportation not afflicted with the disadvantages of the nickel-in-the-slot sys-

tems. Forrester halted the cab, climbed in and in penniless state went rattling down the Avenue.

Columbus Circle was already filled with traffic; Times Square was worse to negotiate. From there on the way south to Twenty-eighth Street was comparatively clear rolling.

The drug store of the rainbow window was open for business—looked as if it had been open for a considerable time. It was enjoying a rush of patronage.

Even as the cab drew up, Forrester had a glimpse through the window of the adequately described custodian of the Fenston pay roll. The little bald clerk was in the front of the shop, engaged with a customer.

As this customer turned and came jauntily forth, Forrester sat rooted. He'd lost—lost in the stretch! The man was Rucker. He wore an expression of supreme happiness, and he carried a small black bag.

Immediately, as he sat dazed, another face that Forrester knew swam into the blurred picture; the hard, blue-tinged face, this, of the man whom the elevator starter in the Cromwell Building had called Gleason.

Gleason looked, even more than yesterday, as if "rubbing out" were his line. He had flattened back against the window of the shop next to the druggist's, and his small gimlet eyes were fixed on the black bag. He made a rush and snatched at it.

Although his back was turned, Rucker evidently had some forewarning of the attack. Retaining his hold on the bag, he wheeled and faced Gleason. There was a brief tugging match; then blows were passed; then the two clinched and tumbled out of view in the center of a swiftly collected sidewalk crowd.

Forrester was stepping out onto the running board of the taxi as two large men in black telescope hats ran heav-

ily past and went boring into the throng—plain-clothes men, patently.

The lane which the thick, swinging shoulders had cut through the crowd remained raggedly open. In close to the storm center a man stumbled over something underfoot, and took reprisal with a vicious back kick. Another man behind him tripped, and he, too, lashed out with an avenging heel. Then through the swath, straight for Forrester, a black and abused object came somersaulting. It struck his shins violently, almost spilled him. Forrester picked the thing up, tossed it into the cab and crawled in after it. He was suddenly faint, incredulous of this miracle.

The chauffeur turned at the slamming of the door. "Thought you wanted something here, cap'n."

"Not any more," said Forrester. "Drive along!"

WHEN the taxi had traveled a few blocks the driver turned again. "Where to, now?" he wanted to know. "Keep on!" commanded Forrester. "Take me—to the park. Central Park. Just drive around. I—I guess I need the air."

The jehu eyed his aimless fare in shrewd appraisal. "There's cheaper ways of gettin' air, sport," he said. "Park ridin' is three dollars an hour, flat. Cost you more on the meter."

"Devil with the cost!" cried Forrester. "Step on it!"

Under his breath, patting the little brass-mounted black bag gripped tight between his knees, he kept repeating "Devil with the cost!" as the machine jounced obediently on its course.

An agonizing fear of pursuit obsessed him until the cab was at last in the park and had lost itself among the winding roads beyond the Swan Lake. Then a new and devastating doubt arose. Had he really got the right bag, after all? Weren't there tens of thousands of small black satchels in New

York exactly similar to this which had been Broadway's football? Would he find now, with that appalling toll winking at him through the peepholes of the taximeter, that he had nothing better to pay off with than somebody's toothbrush and razor and other shirt?

It was easy enough to find out—easy enough, physically. The satchel wasn't locked; the catch which secured it had sprung out spryly as Forrester's nerveless fingers fumbled at the button beneath it, and now he had only to flick up the swivel fastenings at either end to have the bag open. Before he could do that, though, he'd have to gather heart, steel himself for the worst, be prepared for whatever consequences might attend upon the pastime of cab riding sans cab hire.

Forrester, watching the figures on the "clock" as they faded off to reappear as bigger ones, put a limit on this limp procrastination. When the tariff reached three dollars—on the very click of it—he'd see what he'd taken flight with. Riches—or rags!

He stared grimly and unblinkingly at the meter. A mysterious, inscrutable thing it was, anyhow, a show in itself, when a man came to study it. It seemed to work on the principle of the motion-picture "dissolve." The figures didn't drop, but retreated, became hazy, trickily changed their shapes without having the decency to go off stage, and then came dancing forward again in the new rôle. They were—now, what the deuce did they call it in the theater? "Pro-tean?"

Forrester's faintness was increasing. It was a faintness that began deep within him and had ascended to his head. He'd ought to be having breakfast, instead of sitting here, an audience for stupid marionettes.

An 0 became a 5, and presently shifted back to 0 again, precipitating a general stirring. A 9, next left, caught the fever. It became an 0. Off still

farther to the left a 2, which had been making a vain and protracted exhibit of its curves during a score of chorus changes, curtsied and bobbed away. Then a new tableau by the entire cast:
3 . 0 0.

Forrester dimly recognized the finale. He couldn't keep sitting on his hands after this; it was mandatory, somehow, that he use them. Gropingly, shifting his gaze to the back of the driver's head, he attacked the brass clasps. A hand crept into the satchel. It wasn't cloth his fingers touched, but something smooth, stiff, papery.

THERE was no time now for more exploration. The taxi was slowing, pulling over to the side of the road.

Hastily transferring a sample of the bag's contents to his pocket, Forrester snapped it closed. A premonition of peril rallied him to straight thinking. Had the chauffeur, in that little mirror above him, seen more of the inside of the satchel than he?

"What's the trouble?" he demanded, fighting to be casual. "Out of gas?"

The man faced him, looked from his unshaven chin to his soiled collar. "No," he said. "Just wondering if I'm out o' luck. You didn't get home to the hay last night—did you, sport?"

"I—didn't. Why?"

"Just wondering," repeated the driver. "You looked like a bad night to me the minute you flagged me. Well, a short haul's all right, sport. I'll take anybody home if he's drunk himself out of dough. But there's got to be a limit in this racket. Only last week a night-outer used a side door on me, and ducked me for six eighty. Get me, sport? I mean, you can read all right, can't you? See what's on the clock?"

Forrester found his lips dry. "I haven't begun to worry about the price—yet," he said.

The driver recognized his uncertainty, and made a swift deduction.

"It's time," he said gruffly, "that you did. You pay me what the clock reads now. After that we'll start again, if you want to. Three bucks, sport, and you and me's as square as Dolan's dice!"

Forrester's hand had remained in his pocket. Already he had made one discovery. It was an envelope he had taken from the satchel, and now he was prying assiduously under the flap with a finger nail.

"I ought to have plenty of money," he said. "Any amount of it."

"It ain't what you started with, sport," sagely admonished the chauffeur; "it's what you got left. Coin don't go as far as it uster, see? So dig away!"

Forrester met his eyes. "Suppose I couldn't pay—or wouldn't, then what?" he queried. "You mean that you'd put me down here, and let me walk?"

The driver laughed disagreeably. "Hell I would! I'd haul you over to a police station and let you talk!" He craned farther around, and glimpsed the black satchel. "You got baggage, hey? Damn if I noticed that! Say, maybe the cops'd award me your pie-jammers, sport!"

The thought of his bag, if it were *the* bag, being gone through by the police struck Forrester as singularly unhappy. He paled in contemplation of that tragedy.

"Wait!" he said. "We'll see!"

The finger nail had done its work; the envelope was open. Something crisp, folded, promising, was in it. With a prayer he drew it forth. A loud and contrite exclamation smothered his cry of relief.

"I'll say you're heeled!" exclaimed the chauffeur. "I gotta ask your pardon, cap'n. But you know, on account o' the class that's ridin' now'days—I guess you understand all that. Say, you ain't expectin' me to break a *fifty*, are you?"

JUST the one fifty-dollar bill, first yield of the magic satchel, proved for a time an embarrassment of riches. Cigar clerks to whom it was offered begged Forrester to take his trade elsewhere, restaurant cashiers threw up fat hands and suggested a return later in the day, and so it was Mrs. Flannery who eventually "broke" it.

Her eyes widened at the size of the taxi bill and again at the liberality of the tip garnered by the chauffeur who, cap in hand, had come to the door with her lately delinquent lodger.

"It's a good sign, Mr. Forrester," said she, "that you're bringin' in another bag. A sign, I take it, that ye'll be staying on with us just like—before?"

"I'm not sure," he told her. "My plans aren't definite. I haven't had time to think. Perhaps—I don't know—perhaps I'll be going abroad."

"Now, I hope not," averred the landlady. "Of course, you'll not be wanting to climb so many stairs, now, but the second floor front is ready for you to step into—a grand big room with its own bathtub set into the closet, absolutely private. Only this morning, I was thinkin'—"

"I'll think, too," promised Forrester. He stopped at the foot of the stairs, inspired. "I—I don't feel like going out for breakfast, Mrs. Flannery," he said. "Do you suppose you could— Oh, thanks awfully!"

Then with his door locked and the shade drawn, he had the black bag to himself. It held nothing but envelopes like the one he had slipped into his pocket in the taxi—was fairly stuffed with them. There were certainly many hundreds of these envelopes, probably thousands, and each one held a good, substantial, negotiable week's pay!

This was the bag which, last week, had been taken from the cashier's office on the fourth floor of Fenston & Co.'s big, populous store in what the news-

papers had called "THE BOLDEST DAY-LIGHT HOLDUP EVER ATTEMPTED IN NEW YORK."

It was the bag which the too-well-trusted Johnny had taken from the hands of the robbers; the bag which Rucker and Gleason had fought desperately over until all at once, with detectives prying them apart, they had discovered a mutual desire to disclaim its possession.

What the bag held had been Fenton's pay roll. Now it was Forrester's pay roll. For Forrester no more worry over the elusiveness of jobs. Once a week for many years—for as many years, perhaps, as he should live—he had only to help himself to an envelope. That was one way, the simplest way, of cashing in on his prize. And of course there would be other and better ways. The money could be gradually invested in a business or in bonds, made to return handsome dividends while the principal remained intact.

Forrester's head was aching. Calculation made him dizzy. The future would take care of itself. It was more interesting just now to speculate on the breakfast probabilities. Would Mrs. Flannery be preparing eggs again—or possibly, and far preferably, chops?

It was steak, round steak beaten into a surpassing tenderness—steak and fruit and cereal and coffee and toast. Great!

Forrester napped after he had eaten, with the door locked again and a chair propped under the knob as a secondary defense line.

WHEN he awoke, after an hour, his headache was gone. And gone too, incomprehensibly, was the exhilaration he had taken to the pillow with him.

Forrester fished the black satchel from under his bed. It was a solid fact. The stacks of envelopes were

facts, yet the reassuring sight of them gave him no thrill. He sat on the edge of the bed with his chin in his hands, staring down into the open bag full of paper and responsibility.

"Anybody's money," he had whispered to himself, as he was dropping off to sleep. "Anybody's! Mine!"

And now he wasn't so sure. There was a hitch somewhere in that empty-stomach philosophy of his. He'd have to find it.

Forrester's chin was rough in his palms. Mechanically he shaved, and he found himself uncomfortably avoiding his own eyes in the mirror. As he got into a fresh shirt and collar, the accusing thought recurred. He'd flunked a test. He'd better not start that way, wherever the new road would lead.

Presently the challenge became intolerable. He walked to the dresser and confronted a stranger. The face was drawn, the eyes unsteady.

"It's been tough going these last days," he said, "and it shows."

But that, some inner voice told him, was a weak compromise. He returned to the mirror and made a closer, less sympathetic study of the new Forrester.

"Old man," he said softly, "we're not very well acquainted yet, and all that. And, of course, I may be mistaken. However, you'll pardon me, I hope, if I suggest that you look to me just a little—oh, a *little*—like a crook!"

The mirrored expression changed, not greatly, but encouragingly.

"Tell me," said Forrester, still more softly, "tell me, Forrester, *are* you a crook?"

He waited, watching.

"No," he breathed. "I *don't* think you are!"

He put on his coat.

Mrs. Flannery caught him at the front door. "If you wanted to look at the second floor——" she began.

"I'm not sure I'll want to change

rooms," he told her. "Not sure about anything."

"But you're carrying your valise again. You'll not be off on a trip somewheres?"

"Oh, I'm not going far, Mrs. Flannery," said Forrester, and smiled. "Don't let the bag deceive you. You see, it isn't—mine!"

IMPRESSIVELY Mr. Ira Fenston—that institutional Mr. Fenston whose name inevitably suggests dry goods of the better class to the minds of people who matter—tapped his desk with a polished finger nail and cleared his throat for speech.

"Fennister—er—hem—er — Forrester," said he, "I saw the wisdom many years ago of laying down certain rules. That is to say, it has become my practice never to permit myself to be interrupted in conference, never to interview a stranger until after his business has been thoroughly explained to my secretary, and never in any circumstances to spend more than two minutes of my time listening to any man's story."

Forrester had begun to feel strangely at ease in the big private office. He inclined his head. "*Mea culpa!*"

"Eh?" cried Mr. Fenston. "Oh, certainly, of course! You've had an education. I knew that." He glanced at the tall clock. "Hem! I'm not complaining, young man—merely commenting. You have a faculty for getting past—ah—barriers. Overriding rules.

"I was busy with three of my chief department heads when you came; you virtually intimidated Mr. Brookins into bringing me your note under seal. And now, by gad!—now you've been here for half an hour!"

"I hope," said Forrester politely, "that you'll count the time well invested."

The merchant's eyes lost a little of their warmth. "Your story, Forrester," he cautiously admitted, "has been

diverting. Extremely so, indeed. But as to the money, you know—we were thoroughly covered by insurance. As a matter of fact, the five-thousand-dollar reward which we offered really comes out of the pockets of the underwriters."

Forrester was gazing through a glass panel of the partition into the next room. The black satchel stood on a desk there in plain view. Clerks were checking the envelopes against a card-index record, ripping them open and verifying their contents.

"I'm still too dazzled by news of the reward to worry about the source," said he. "I—I can't believe it yet!"

Fenston turned upon him again that queer, fascinated scrutiny which Forrester had several times surprised.

"I wonder," said the merchant, "what I'd have done in your place? I want to ask you a frank question, young man. Whether you knew of the reward or whether you didn't—that doesn't concern the issue. But, truthfully, now, didn't it at some time occur to you that you might have retained the whole pay roll by simply standing pat?"

"You bet it did!" replied Forrester promptly. "This way's better, though. I'd rather have five thousand that I could almost feel I'd earned."

Mr. Ira Fenston resumed his drumming on the desk. "You're—ah—not employed, Forrester?" he asked, after a space. "Didn't I understand you to say you were looking for work when you found——"

"That's what I was doing," replied Forrester.

"And now that you'll have five thousand dollars behind you, what do you think you'll do?"

"Pray," answered Forrester seriously, "that I land a job before the money runs out!"

Mr. Fenston drummed again. "Do you think," he queried, then, "we could—ah—suit you here?"

"In Fenston & Co.'s!" cried Forrester. "Could you!"

Mr. Fenston's telephone buzzed as great men's phones are wont to—discreetly, apologetically.

"Yes, yes. Good!" And the receiver went back on its hook. "That, Forrester, was the insurance company," explained Fenston. "They've got your friend Rucker and are rounding up the rest. He's got another name, they tell me—Charles Vokes. So there's where your 'C. V.' came in. I think we are right in assuming that the robbers did not carry the satchel from the store with them, but gave it to a woman confederate, ostensibly a shopper, who then

cached it on her own account. Well, I can offer you a position as——"

A clerk came just then from the office dominated by the black satchel. He looked worried.

"We've made a triple check, Mr. Fenston," he reported, "and there still seems to be an envelope missing."

Forrester sat up. "Right!" said he. "I'd almost forgotten. Cut me down to forty-nine hundred and fifty, and we'll be as square as—as square as Dolan's dice." He grinned at Ira Fenston. "I don't know if it's usual in such cases, sir," he said. "But, you see, I simply had to make an advance to myself for expenses!"

Mr. Rohde is now engaged in writing a book-length story that will be published in THE POPULAR.



THE JOLLY ROGER

WE who, while comfortable in the depths of our armchairs, have gone adventuring with Captain Kidd, Sir Henry Morgan, and Blackbeard across Caribbean and South Sea waters, in search of galleon and merchantman to plunder and with nothing to guide us back to port in safety but the whim of our favorite author, have come to think of the Jolly Roger, that terrifying flag when it flew at the topgallant mast of a black-hulked schooner, as a conventional insignia in black-and-white cloth, bearing a pattern representing a human skull and beneath it two crossed thigh bones. In a great many cases this was the emblem used by the buccaneers when they wished to advertise their business, but assuredly it was not the only sign of the freebooter. Some crews chose the skull-and-crossbones pattern, but had it worked out in red and white instead of black and white. Others were more enterprising, however. In particular, there was Captain Bartholomew Roberts, considered by many authorities the greatest pirate "who ever declared war upon the world." Roberts was an exceptional man in more than one way, original and daring beyond any of his fellows and possessed of a touch of erratic genius. He never flew the conventional Jolly Roger, but designed several emblems of his own. One depicted "the human anatomy" holding a rummer, or glass, of punch in one bony hand and a flaming sword in the other. Another favorite of the doughty sea pirate's was a flag bearing upon its right side a huge portrait of Roberts himself, embroidered with red silk upon a background of white, a sword in the warrior's right hand and two skulls at his feet. This we say was individuality.



The Drums of Spain

by Henry Herbert Kibbs

WHEN the bright harbor of the sunset fills
With cloudy caravels and golden mist,
When fires of amber flood the desert hills,
And glimmering hollows drown in amethyst,
When crimson banners, flaming in the West,
Trail down the darkening courses of the plain—
I dream of Coronado's gallant quest,
Conquistadores and the drums of Spain.

I see grim warriors gaunt and travel worn,
The tattered surcoat and the rusting blade,
The Cross, the girded cassock stained and torn
In desperate marches of the cavalcade;
The far mirage, illusive temptress fair,
The dumb retreat from bitter shores and white,
The evening camp, the priest intoning prayer,
An early star his only acolyte.



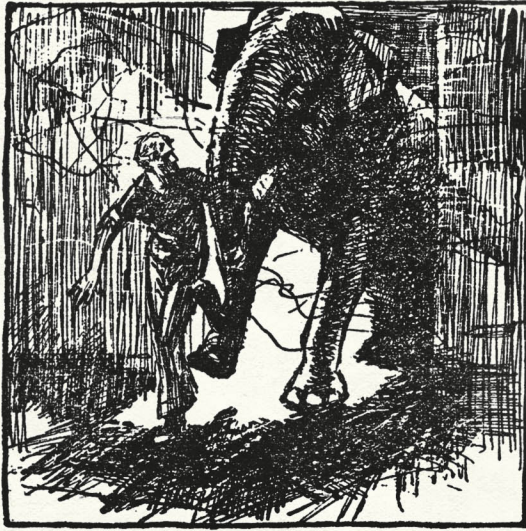


I hear the trumpet clamoring to the dawn,
The clang of arms, the tethered stallion's neigh,
And like an ancient host of Avalon,
The stubborn cavalcade winds on its way.
I see the reeling lance, the narrow mound,
Where lies a soldier by the desert slain.
"March on!" the trumpets shrill; invading sound,
"Conquistadores and the drums of Spain!"

I see bold Coronado in amaze,
Scanning the heights of Ah-co-mah afar,
The where he dwells a span of warless days,
An unknown god, a glittering avatar.
The stern, barbaric citadel his friend,
He bids farewell to Ah-co-mah the old,
Through regions lone his fading banners wend,
Seeking Quivira and the towers of gold.

And here the argent moon's pale wonder falls
On Ah-co-mah, the City of the Sky;
Veiled in the shadowy splendor of its walls,
A white, a silent army marches by,
Bearing the guidon of an alien kind,
Vanguard of empire, soldiers of the Fane,
Still in sequestered realms adventuring,
Conquistadores and the drums of Spain.





Barriers Within

By John S. Lopez

Author of "Mister Slensky Gets 'Square,'" "Preacher Jim's Debt," Etc.

Fire and wreck were reducing "Red" Duffy's carefully laid plans to heaps of ashes and piles of broken timber. But within him was raging a struggle which dwarfed that which the elements were waging over the stalled circus train, for hatred had seared his soul, yet the memory of intense physical pain was urging him on to rescue from a death by burning the man who inspired his rancor.

THE world's first circus treasure wagon, as an idea, germinated amid a depressing pall composed chiefly of alkali dust, humid vapors from the Rio Grande and viscid vapors in the bedeviled mind of a press agent with Panum and Pelly's Wonder Show of the Universe. The treasure wagon as an actuality blazed as a meteoric luminary for part of a prosperous road season, then dropped suddenly from public sight. Simultaneously, the aforesaid press agent suffered a total eclipse.

The name of this publicist—as he called himself—was Gregory G. Goliff, known to his familiars, after the apt nomenclature of the sawdust world, as "Triple G." Behind his back the name

usually given the gentleman by his subordinates was that of a certain nocturnal animal distinctly minus in public esteem because of certain olfactory outrages laid at its door.

Goliff was a man ridden by insatiable ambition. He likewise possessed a quality of initiative that was blind to everything but the particular target in view. Having started with the Wonder Show of the Universe as third publicity agent he had—in less than a single season—climbed to second place, contemptuous of the fact that the job formerly had been filled by a close friend. He shaped his course by a composite business motto of his own invention which ran: "Life is a game of dog eat dog, and the one that eats first gets

furtherest!" However, something seemed to be wrong with the axiom in this instance; because, having eaten first and consumed the other dog, Mr. Goliff, instead of getting furtherest, was getting what might be termed indigestion.

In brief, the blue devils of press agenting had been raising the merry-merry with the gentleman. For some harrowing weeks past he had been the shuttlecock, batted back and forth in a vicious game by the particular demons which cause all the nightmares for ineffective publicists. At the one end were his employers, at the other the newspaper editors—the former waxing increasingly sarcastic at his poor showing in the papers, the latter informing Goliff that the public was sick of all this circus dope. Mr. G. had reached that state of mind where he drew his salary furtively and dodged whenever one of his employers came on the lot.

THEN one sizzling afternoon in a small Texas burg, Chance reached out and punched Goliff in the ribs. The matinee was over and the heavy, acrid dust kicked up by the outpouring audience almost strangled him, as he leaned against the window of the office wagon, and settled on his moist face to a consistency that reminded him poignantly of Skin-em-Aliva, the famed beauty clay, whose exploitation he had abandoned to enter the fascinating world of sawdust and spangles. As he dabbed abjectly at his face with a handkerchief, he was wondering whether he hadn't better resign to escape being fired, when Bill Mannister, the circus treasurer, poked his head through the window for a breath of fresh air.

Across the lot under their eyes, some cow-punchers had staked their ponies, and at this moment they began to indulge in an outburst of horseplay that was unbelievably riotous, considering that Mr. Volstead had long since put through his famed reform legislation.

"Tough bunch," observed the treasurer gloomily, following a nerve-racking display of pistol practice. "Country's full of 'em. I'll be nervous till we make San Antonio."

Then, regardless of Goliff's obvious lack of interest, he proceeded to orate a set of facts with which the press agent was already familiar.

Within the office wagon at this very moment were the receipts of the show for three days, approximately sixty thousand dollars, and there would be twice as much by the time the show made San Antonio, the first town on their route with adequate banking facilities. Double guards would have to be on duty and Mannister go almost without sleep till the money was turned over to a bank, for transmission to circus headquarters in New York.

Goliff, in his selfish lassitude, had followed the recital without the slightest stirring of sympathy. True, Mannister was his oldest and best friend, in fact the one who had got him his job with the show. But Goliff was not a sentimentalist—a fact he needlessly boasted. So far as he was concerned, anybody might steal the whole circus and welcome. In his present mood the publicist rather hoped somebody would do just that.

"Lord!" said the treasurer. "If some one would only dope out a safe way to carry circus money! I've been thinkin' of suggestin' an armored wagon. You know—somethin' like what the New York banks use, only all dolled up, of course."

Goliff managed to suppress an involuntary start. Then he turned jauntily and fixed Mannister with jeering eyes. "Rats!" he scoffed. "They'd think you were crazy or pickled again—and you have been blotting up a lot lately."

Then he yawned capaciously, stretching wide his arms and mouth, mumbled a languid good-by, and dragged himself off with emphatic nonchalance. Mr.

Goliff's portrayal of aimlessness was entirely worthy of a Broadway star.

But when he was safely out of Mannister's view around the end of the big top, a marvelous transformation took place. His languor dropped from him. He stepped out briskly in time to an exultantly whistled march. His brow was ironed smooth of worry, his shoulders thrown back. The big idea had been born. From the acorn carelessly dropped by his friend, Mannister, Mr. Goliff was determined should grow an oak that would henceforth furnish ample shade to protect him from the withering glare of financial adversity.

Panum and Pelly, founders of the Wonder Show of the Universe, were of course but a hallowed memory. A close little corporation, consisting of two gents from the cloak-and-suit business, now kept green their fame, submerging their own identity, not through modesty, but because their own names didn't in the least suggest circus daring and they were willing to surrender personal vanity to the music of the box office.

These gentlemen, always alluded to as "The Owners," had achieved a business miracle in their conduct of the show. They had brought about the felicitous wedding of the financial antipodes, extravagance and thrift. In a word, they considered no expense too great if it was intended to nourish the box office or advertise the show; while on the other hand, they held, ever poised, the razor of economy, ready to shave so close to the skin that it hurt, provided always there was no outward sign of the scrape.

SINCE Goliff's big idea fitted to both ends of this system, it is easy to understand why he was in high fettle when, fifteen minutes after Bill Mannister had dropped the acorn, he sought private converse with The Owners.

Encouraged by the flattering atten-

tion of these gentlemen, Goliff rattled on glibly anent the many advantages of the circus treasure wagon which had taken ornate form in his mind, touching at an early point the great saving in salaries it would make possible by dispensing with the force of private detectives now employed chiefly to guard the circus money.

"Always have to have 'em to be safe," said one owner.

Goliff had been hoping for this. His eyes sparkled.

"Safe!" he purred, with a tinge of respectful sarcasm in his voice. "That's a joke. Your detectives are only a big bluff—like the trainers waving little whips at lions. If some real crooks ever get wise to what's what, Heaven help the show's bank roll! Now, my treasure wagon would be absolutely thief proof—absolutely. Why, even the treasurer himself couldn't start away with a red cent. No one would have to be watched—that's one of the big features. Why even one of you gentlemen couldn't take any money without the other knowing it."

"So?" said one of the owners dubiously, yet invitingly.

Encouraged, Goliff swept onward.

"The treasure wagon will be a safety-deposit vault on wheels," he explained, "every bit of it armor plate. There'll be little windows with bars so close a cat couldn't squeeze through. After the treasurer locks himself in at night, one of you gents will set a time lock on the outside. Then the wagon can't possibly be opened by anybody, inside or out, till next morning."

"It don't sound bad," mused one of the owners, which meant that it sounded particularly good.

Here Goliff drove in his clinching argument.

"And just figure out the publicity we can grab off with the world's first circus treasure wagon! The papers are always yelling for something new, and

here it is. We'll gingerbread the wagon and stack up bags behind the bars labeled 'Gold;' and we'll use it in street parades, and talk about a million dollars inside, and——"

"No, we won't," interrupted the taciturn owner who, being the elder and the most forceful, was known as "The Big Boss." "We won't do no such thing. If these here jay townies get to thinkin' too much of their dough is bein' carried away, up will go the license fees and every town hall grafter will spread his hands as wide apart as he can reach!"

Goliff managed to subdue his sudden exultation. "Then it's a go?"

"It is!" replied both of the owners, in unison.

Then the younger went on: "After the season closes next month, you stay right on at winter quarters and look after the building of this here treasure wagon. Get a bunch of real live press matter ready and start it going about a month before the show is ready to open. I don't mind sayin' it's a good all-round idear, Goliff. We'll promote you up to Mannister's place, beginning next season. As you say, he's been drinkin' too much, anyway."

WIND and sleet were dashing drearily against the windows on the river side of the prison. It was a night in early March, blustery and scolding, seemingly a protest of expiring winter against its imminent surrender to spring.

By force of contrast, the tempest outside only helped to emphasize the cheeriness of the quarters of the warden, where three very pleasant-looking gentlemen were at work. These were the warden himself, the chaplain and the prison doctor. Good humor was in the air, because these three workers who radiated it were engaged upon the most agreeable of all their official tasks. They were compiling for the prison-

board symposium reports concerning the bodies, the minds, and the souls of those lucky convicts who, having paid their score to society, were soon to pass through the wicket door in the big gate to whatever awaited them in the outer world.

The air was pleasantly heavy with smoke. On the table in intimate proximity stood an agreeably depleted decanter and a siphon flanked by a battery of glasses. The warden, who was ruddy and stout, thumbed the card index while he chewed incessantly on a thick, black cigar. The chaplain, also tending to comfortable embonpoint, puffed at a brier. The moon-faced doctor, frankly and shamelessly fat, was puffing away at a cigarette, and thereby making himself look all the more like a mischievous boy.

"Richard Duffy"—read the warden, exhaling a cloud of smoke—"alias 'Red' Duffy." He laid down the record card, almost filled with entries, and reached for his glass. "Poor old Red—I wonder how soon he'll be back!"

"In all my experience," he went on musingly, "I never saw such a change in a man. I've known Red for years and, bar none, he was the toughest prisoner we ever had. He hadn't a heart. You couldn't soften him by kindness, and you couldn't scare him by punishment. He was bad all through and he wanted everybody to know it. But now—since he's been sick—he's as gentle as a lamb. If I didn't know Red, I'd think he'd learned his lesson at last. But he'll come back! He always does."

"No, chief," said the chaplain, "Red Duffy will not come back." In his earnestness he laid aside his pipe. "A miracle has happened. The man is transformed. I won't say he shows strong religious convictions, but I'm satisfied with even a crumb as a beginning. Red Duffy's soul is awakened. I call it a most wonderful manifestation of the Divine Spirit."

The doctor knocked the ashes off his cigarette and reached for the record card. "The parson is right in one respect," he said. "Red Duffy will not be back. But"—turning to the chaplain—"not to be irreverent, old man, the miracle that changed Red Duffy is not a manifestation of the Divine Spirit. It's a manifestation of the salty dose of neuritis he's just got over."

"The Spirit works in strange and divers ways to reach a soul," reminded the chaplain reverently.

"It does," said the doctor, "and far be it from me to seem unbelieving. But Red Duffy hasn't a soul! Hope of heavenly reward or fear of hell's fire are only words to him.

"Do either of you know what acute neuritis is? I mean from personal experience. Well, if you've ever had it, you don't need any description, and if you haven't, I couldn't ever make you understand. Agony is too weak a word to describe it. To a man like Duffy—all nerves and imagination—acute neuritis is—— Well, Red himself said that whenever the paroxysms came he felt as though every nerve was a red-hot poker being thrust back and forth through his quivering flesh.

"I'm burning!" he used to shriek over and over, by the hour, until even the hard-boiled nurses could scarcely stand it."

"The trouble is Red'll get to drinking and forget," interrupted the warden. "They always do."

The doctor shook his head. "Red knows that another stretch in a damp cell is a sure ticket to neuritis, and he'd rather go straight to hell. I've convinced him that booze is the one thing on earth he mustn't trifle with. He'll be afraid to drink."

The parson nodded his approval. "That's true—Red will keep out of bad company and temptation this time. He was a farmer's son and he wants to get

a little place in the country. He has a respectable daughter in Minnesota and I'm working out a plan to reunite them later on."

The warden had been regarding the record card thoughtfully. "It's logical, I suppose, for men to figure every problem that deals with the future from the viewpoint of their training, their personal experiences, or their natural inclinations. That's why the parson is measuring Red's future prospects by his soul, while you, doctor, measure by his body. It is also why I, being experienced with jailbirds, am forecasting by human nature.

"Crime gets to be a habit, and Red's too old to learn new tricks. I hope I'm wrong, but—— Well, we'll see!"

THE crowded billboards were shrieking to the populace that Panum and Pelly's Wonder Show of the Universe was about to begin another season, when the matter of the treasure wagon came to the attention of a certain professional gentleman, at the moment living unobtrusively in the back room of a lodging house in Greenwich Village.

Bill Flynn, known professionally as "Silver" Flynn because of the uncanny persuasiveness of his speech, having read last evening's sporting final twice through and yearning for further mental refreshment, presently scanned the old newspaper in which his shoes had come back from the cobbler's. It was a Sunday magazine section, and in it, spread over a full page, was Mr. Goliff's most elaborate story of the world's first circus treasure wagon. There were pictures of the armor-plated vehicle, together with diagrams and a complete description.

Having read the story with quickening interest, Silver started again at the beginning and spelled his way through once more. His bored expression melted to a pleased grin. Presently he reclined on the couch, elevated his knees

and placed the newspaper open upon them, forthwith sinking into an abstraction so profound that he scarcely moved for an hour, except to trace out certain parts of Goliff's story with a stubby forefinger.

Darkness having fallen, Silver posted himself in a deep shadow near a street corner whence he could observe all who approached without being himself observed. His position gave him full view of both the front and side entrances of McKenna's Rest, a Water Street hang-out known to the police and by them permitted to exist only because it was a pool in which to net particularly wanted fish.

The figure he watched for having entered McKenna's, Silver dispatched a street urchin with a message. This message received, the wanted individual, one "Blinky" Davis, so named because of an optical peculiarity, presently emerged and strolled carelessly to the trysting place.

"Just think of it!" mourned Silver some time later, as the pair sat snug in his back room. "For years they been carryin' round barrels of coin so open no one thought of coppin' it. Then some bird gets this swell idear of the armored wagon, and takes particular pains to advertise the full and complete directions how to crack it."

Blinky Davis sniffed. "He ain't told everything," he asserted. "He ain't so crazy. There's some more safeguards 'hey're holdin' back."

"There couldn't be," returned Silver. "More safeguards ain't been invented. Listen to what he says—the treasurer will sleep in the wagon, and if any attempt were made to force the door, he would, simply by pressing an electric button, summon assistance from the sleeping cars—"

"Think of that smart guy," he went on, "he gives everybody notice to please cut the wire. It ain't entered his skull that a mob of professionals could join

the show, study the layout, an' some night crack the wagon wide open before they knew what was comin' off. All I'm worried about is that some other mob will get hep an' beat us to it."

"It sounds so easy, I'm scared of it," objected Blinky. "Besides, you talk about joinin' a circus like it was nothin'. And, anyway, under no circumstances would I put on tights an' come out before a lot of wimmen an' children."

Silver laughed quite immoderately. "Blinky, you're cuckoo!" he declared. "We get a job as canvas men or some-thin'. They always need 'em, I been told. Furthermore, it ain't considered necessary to watch that kind, because they ain't got enough ambition to steal anything unless it was shoved in their hands and light weight enough not to cause exertion to carry away."

"Say," demanded Blinky, suspicion suddenly aflame, "what are you makin' this so strong to me for?"

"Because," replied Silver, "there's arrangements to be made and it ain't safe for me to be seen in public. We got to find a man to blow the wagon door. How about 'Big Clutch?' You and him, I know are good pals."

"He just started a five-spot in Dan-nemora," replied Blinky gloomily. "And all because of him wearing loose rubbers on a job. Tight ones, he says, draws his feet—so he trips on a stair-way an' they nail him."

"Well, then, somebody else," persisted Silver.

"There's Red Duffy," suggested Blinky. "He'll be out in about two weeks. Give Red a spoonful of soup an' in five minutes he could almost blow the U. S. mint. But he's a hog. Won't join a job unless he gets half of everything, no matter how many's in on it."

Silver Flynn waved his hand resignedly. "Offer him half. We got to have him. You be waitin' outside, the night they turn him loose from the pen."

AS Red Duffy limped through the prison gate Blinky Davis had met him and, after much urging, had coaxed him to a conference. Red Duffy had gone, protesting that it was useless. He lay stretched out now on the couch in Silver's room, hollow of eye and unwholesomely sallow with the prison pallor. He was saying pettishly:

"Silver, you can't tempt me. Another stretch an' I'm a goner with this here neuritis. Nothin' on earth is worth it."

To which Silver, his voice never more persuasive and reassuring, made reply:

"But, Red, old man, how are you goin' to get this here farm you're talkin' about? Is some kind friend goin' to slip you one? Or do you figger workin' an' starvin' till you save up enough to buy yourself one? Why, Red, you say yourself that hardship causes this here neuritis! By the time you wake up to the mistake you're makin', you'll be down again with the damn thing! Here is positively your only hope—this one last job and you clean up enough to buy the farm—an' then you quit!"

For hours in various alluring forms this argument had been poured into Red's ears. And invariably his answer had been "No"—a "No" in the beginning unequivocal, toward the last wavering. And Silver had become increasingly forceful.

"Just think," he said, with a concluding flourish, "your share would run to thirty-five thousand—maybe more."

Red flared up venomously.

"Wha' d'you mean thirty-five? You say the clean-up is a sure hundred thousand. If I did help—which I won't—I'd take half, not third!" He was dignity assailed.

Silver smiled victoriously. Without wasting another word on the subject, he dispatched Blinky for the makings of breakfast. Then, without prelude, he began to disclose his detailed plans of

campaign, Red Duffy at first listening in sullen silence, but presently offering objections and suggestions.

A week later, Silver, appropriately disreputable in garb, walked onto the circus lot in Brooklyn and was put to work. Two weeks later in Philadelphia, Blinky Davis applied for a job and, being husky in appearance, was taken on.

In Buffalo, Red Duffy appeared and made his application, and because of his pallor and emaciation came within an ace of being refused. His boyhood training on a farm stood him in good stead. Demonstrating his skill as a driver of a six-horse team, he was put on as teamster.

Could the foreman have seen inside the innocent-looking bundle that Red carried so carefully, he would have discovered as fine a set of yegg tools as ever was made. There was also a generous quantity of nitroglycerin held secure from accidental shocks in a yegg's carrier, a device that suspends the glycerin receptacle by springs within an outer case.

There opened then for the triumvirate a season of hard work that was not less painful because it was intermittent. But they bore up with fortitude, buoyed by the vision of the financial elysium that dangled as their future reward.

Then, too, there happened a break in their favor. Red Duffy, partly due to his skill as a driver and partly through good luck, had been selected to drive the treasure wagon. Thus Red was able to get the lay of everything without taking the least risk of arousing suspicion. That assignment to the treasure wagon brought about another thing which either helped or hurt, according to the viewpoint.

This was a most exquisite hatred that Red acquired for Mr. Goliff, now treasurer of the circus and monarch supreme of the treasure wagon. Red had never

in his whole life hated any one so thoroughly and venomously. He brooded over it so much that it became his ruling obsession. Indeed, he made so much of this hatred that he became a positive bore to his partners.

Goliff himself was chiefly to blame for the hatred, though at their very first contact Red had felt an instant antipathy for the treasurer that would have precluded anything but dislike. The feeling was mutual, explaining why the treasurer immediately started to be particularly nasty to the driver of his wagon. There is no denying it, however, that Goliff would have been nasty anyway, being one of those people who fawn upon all those above them and balance the account with their dignity by riding rough-shod over everybody beneath.

Goliff carried his persecutions so far that even *he* began to wonder that a roughneck like Red, quick to take offense from others, hadn't quit a dozen times or at least exhibited enough resentment to warrant a demand for his discharge. But Red held on tenaciously, curbing his feelings in public—though if Mr. Goliff had heard some of his comments to Blinky and Silver, he might not have continued to pile up indignities upon the big teamster in such a debonair way.

There were times when this hatred was the only thing that held Red to his purpose—times when twinges of his old enemy revived all his fears and good resolutions. Then, while Red wavered, Mr. Goliff would feed the fire with more of his meanness.

Red talked so much about this hatred to Blink and Silver that finally they refused to listen. It was always the same refrain and it made them nervous.

"Just wait till the night I get that dog alone in the wagon!" Red would say ominously. "I'm goin' to knock at his window with the butt of my gun, an' I'm only hopin' that when he pokes

his head out he starts to raise a fuss—that's all I'm hopin'!"

Hatred, like misery, loving company, it was not strange that Red, denied encouragement by his pals, yearned for and found an outlet for his obsession elsewhere. Thus is explained the entry into the plot of "Big Tim" Leary, built, as his moniker implied, on heroic proportions, and unmistakably tough in speech, in thought and in action. Starting with a solo of denunciation of Mr. Goliff by Big Tim, loosed in the approving presence of Red, the pair developed soon between them a duet against their common enemy, a duet in which the wildest sorts of reprisal were first wished for and then threatened.

AT Detroit, Blinky Davis got in the way of a bull elephant. He remained behind in a hospital when the show pulled out. Silver and Red conferred. Theirs was a three-man job and the time was arrived when it must be pulled off or abandoned forever. So Big Tim, being by this time in the confidence of Red, after much cautious soundings, was inducted into membership in the plot to blow the treasure wagon.

Thereupon, confidences being now in order, Big Tim announced modestly that he himself was a stick-up of repute, and that he was only hiding out with the show after a flivver in New Haven, when a flattie got bumped off by accident. He certainly knew all the stars in the profession by name and achievement, had an expert knowledge of technique and, what was more to the purpose just now, had a knowledge of local geography that could be utilized. Big Tim, it seemed, knew every foot of the country they were passing through, and it was he who picked the time and the place for the job.

Two nights later they would be passing through a desolate strip of country and safe from the possible interference

of natives. The ideal spot was in a deep cut in a wood where the railroad ran at a steep upgrade. The spot Big Tim favored was a short distance from a water tower at the bottom of this grade, where every train must stop for water. After the train pulled out, the trio could uncouple everything behind the flat car on which the treasure wagon rode, leaving behind the sleepers and the work cars in which all the employees would be quartered. Then, immediately the job was done, they could hustle to a certain near-by town, a railroad center where they could scatter, to meet later in Chicago.

LATE on the night selected, Red Duffy, waiting till the train had gained momentum after its stop at the water tower, let himself down from his shelf in the box car—called, by courtesy, the “work sleeper.”

Although he assured himself that he wasn't at all nervous, sharp pangs of his enemy had been stabbing through his left arm and shoulder, giving him particular hell all the time he had lain awake waiting. The very possibility of colliding with anything was mental torture, and Red braced himself against the lurching of the train with his right arm, holding the carrier of nitroglycerin balanced perilously in his aching left hand. Presently he gained the front platform, to be joined shortly thereafter by Silver and Big Tim.

Even before the train had pulled out this night, it had been clear to the trio that if they waited till doomsday there never could be a more propitious time for their undertaking. The last frantic work on the circus lot, done in the midst of a terrific electric storm that had blown down the side show and driven out the audience in panic, had left the circus people so worn out that all hands would sleep as though drugged.

Then, so hurriedly had the trainmen

worked to dodge the fury of the storm, and so tolerant the circus trainmaster, that the cars now rode all out of their usual position and decidedly to the advantage of Red and his aids. Just one car forward of the sleeper where they rode, the treasure wagon was riding on its own flat car.

The storm had grown in intensity as the train rolled westward, the lightning and thunder so continuous that the flashes lent a cinematographic effect and the crashes merged to a continuous roar. From the elephant car right behind came the trumpeting of the frightened beasts rising shrilly above the pandemonium of the storm.

The three men crouching on the platform paused to gain breath for their expedition, clinging to the handrail, collars up and caps down to repel the dashing rain—paused while Red Duffy surveyed with anxious eyes the plunging, slippery flat car over which he must pass to reach the treasure wagon, while holding the glycerin receptacle tightly to his body to avoid jarring.

Out of the night, unheard in the roar of the elements, there plunged suddenly in the opposite direction a huge Mogul locomotive, snorting along on the down grade with a string of empty box cars. There followed an interminable wait for the nerve-tensed men. They did not know, of course, that the string was sixty cars long and that it was proceeding slowly through the deep cut.

Conscious of the uneasy expression on Red's face, Big Tim leaned over and bellowed in his ear:

“Great night for the job, ain't it?”

“Too great,” growled Red. “I don't like it. I feel like somethin's goin' to happen.”

Now, whether this prophecy was wholly due to Red's mood, or whether he had received a telepathic message, the fact remains that at this very moment something did happen.

A single box car in the long string

suddenly jumped the tracks and, plunging off the rails, pulled the next car with it. It happened up front, near the Mogul locomotive and, almost automatically, the engine driver stopped and whistled for brakes, to the engine pushing the train far in the rear. He might as well have whispered the signal against the elemental roar. The engineer of the pusher only noticed the added strain and applied more power. It all happened so quickly that the undiminished headway of the train answered the sudden push with a forward plunge.

The long train of empties, wedged at the front and pushed relentlessly from behind, buckled in a dozen places, the light cars rising high in the air until their couplings broke, then plunging down and piling the tracks deep with wreckage.

Despite the crashing and rending and pounding, there was no disastrous crushing of the circus cars, partly because the engineer had applied full air before jumping, but chiefly because both trains had been proceeding slowly through the storm. The wreckage of the empty freight train simply toppled over on the circus train like falling dominoes, covering roofs and smashing windows and wedging between trucks and wheels.

The circus people, hurled from their bunks, were yelling in a mad panic, although none was hurt beyond a bruise or strain. The car on which Red and his colleagues rode suffered barely a scratch. They scrambled through the storm like the others, swarming up the steep side of the railroad cut like rats from a wrecked building. There, Red Duffy discovered that he still clung to his nitro carrier and tools, and simultaneously he missed his automatic pistol. He must have dropped it in the flurry. He hid the yegg outfit back in a cornfield and then returned to the wreck.

One side of the elephant car had been crushed, and the maddened beasts were screaming and tearing at the woodwork and hurling themselves against the sides. One side gave way suddenly, precipitating the animals to the ground. Immediately, with trunks uplifted and shrilly trumpeting, they charged up the bank and into the fields. Only two of the better trained of the elephants held back, drawing close to the men and whimpering for attention like frightened children.

Even in the few intervening minutes, the panic was wearing itself out. The nerveless followers of the sawdust arena had been nurtured on adventure and surprises. They stood now on the bank, drenched to the skin, half dressed, congratulating themselves and each other on their escape from death or injury. At the forward end of the cut, a ruddy glare was beginning to show through the blanket of falling rain. The wreckage had taken fire. It drew the chilled bystanders like a magnet, the two elephants following them with dog-like docility.

RED would not move, but Big Tim urged that they stick with the crowd. The need for quick planning was too acute. As they argued, two men ran by. They saw the trio and stopped. One of them was The Big Boss, the other the foreman of Red's section. He formed a trumpet of his hands.

"Hey, youse, go forward and help!" he shouted. "It's spreadin' fast. The wind through the cut draws like a chimney!"

He plunged on after The Big Boss. Big Tim followed him. Then came the sounds of puffing and wrenching. The locomotive evidently was being used in an effort to pull the forward cars free. In the crisscross wedge of wreckage, it was wasted effort.

Men were running back and forth

and shouting, and a new note of terror began to pierce through the diminishing storm. The elephant trainer passed, leading the two trembling beasts, one holding fast to the tail of the other as a scared child would hold the hand of its parent. From where they stood, Red and Silver could see the flames leaping forward like prairie fire. Presently the clamor became so insistent that they made their way in its direction.

THEY came to the group gathered on the bank above the treasure wagon. The elephant trainer had fastened a cable to the harness of his animals and was trying to pull away the pile of wreckage that lay heaped about the car. He might as well have tugged at a mountain, so densely tangled was the débris. Men ran to and fro, shouting advice and orders to other men, who were busied about the car below. The treasure wagon lay tilted slightly, so that the largest of the barred windows was in full view, and Goliff stood there wild-eyed and pallid even in the rosy glow from the fire.

His eyes bulged, and his mouth sagged, and from the movement of his lips, he was frantically urging something. Meanwhile he was pushing bags and bundles of money through the bars to The Big Boss, who was throwing it into a square of canvas which two strange men guarded with drawn revolvers. At one end of the treasure wagon, a group of men were attacking the steel door with axes and crowbars.

Silver pointed at them sneeringly. "They might as well use toothpicks. Even if they had the combination, they couldn't get in before mornin'. Though why they should want to, I don't see."

A thickset man in a mackintosh to his heels and a soft hat pulled down over his eyes grunted. "It's a case of tryin' to get out, not in," he said. "When the fire reaches here, that steel

car is goin' to heat up like an oven—and then good-by Mr. Maninside! No wonder he's squawkin'."

The man was a stranger. There was a certain definite officiousness in his demeanor that awakened the caution of Red and Silver, rendering them mute.

A canvasback from Red's own section read the question in the glances he and Silver exchanged.

"He's a railroad detective," the canvasback volunteered. "Him and two others happened to be ridin' in the caboose when the smash come."

Red and Silver drew back into the crowd.

"Why in hell don't they get a fire engine?" shouted a ticket seller, who at times worked under Goliff. "I ain't strong for him, but it ain't right!"

A lanky bystander in boots and overalls, obviously a native and tremendously thrilled, answered him.

"There ain't a fire engine in ten mile," he said, almost triumphantly. "Some of the show folks is carryin' water in buckets. Huh! Might as well spit on the flames, I reckon."

Red presently led the way toward the fire. The flames were leaping merrily in sardonic disregard of some tired-looking men with buckets, eating the wreckage like cardboard and warping the metalwork like tin under a blow-pipe.

Silver Flynn broke the silence. "Nothin'll save that bird!" he said. He looked fixedly at the treasure wagon, then turned his eyes on Red. "Positively nothin'—unless—"

Red glared at him. "Don't say it!" he snarled. "Don't go suggestin' for me to blow open the wagon and get him out! I should do a job with burglar tools with a flock of bulls all around me? It serves him right, anyhow—damn him!—the way he treated me!"

Big Tim had rejoined them just in time to hear Red's tirade.

"Ain't you got human feelin's!" he

shouted. "He'll be roasted alive! If I knew where the nitro was hid, I'd try to blow the door myself. Listen, Red, these bulls won't touch you for doin' a human job like this. I'll guarantee it!"

Red laughed immoderately. "You'll guarantee! And a lot of good your guarantee will do me when I'm layin' in a cell an' screamin' with neuritis! You sure got a childlike trust in human nature. These bulls will lay off me on account of me doin' a human job! Say! small-time bulls like the one that was talkin' to us only gets one real chance in a lifetime to make the front page of the newspapers. Why, they'd pinch their own mothers an' say it was duty!"

He turned away.

Big Tim grabbed him by the shoulder and wheeled him around. "No bull won't take you—I'll bump him off first!"

"You won't have to," said Red doggedly. "I sure ain't goin' to furnish cause."

THEIR attention was caught by the arrival of two natives, one an undersized man with intentionally professional whiskers and snappy black eyes, a leather physician's bag in his hand. The other was a tall, old man with snow-white hair and benign blue eyes, his garb announcing the country parson. The newcomers, being directed, hurried to a spot on the bank above the treasure wagon. The trio followed, but merged discreetly in the throng.

Goliff now stood back from the barred window, unable to stand the intense heat from the near-by heap of burning wreckage. The rescue party had stopped chopping at the steel end door of the treasure wagon and stood helplessly on the bank, measuring the onrush of the flames with fascinated eyes.

The country doctor stopped beside The Big Boss, near Red and his colleagues, and, after a quick survey of the situation, began nervously to load a hypodermic syringe.

"I'll give him a big dose of morphine," he said. "Then he won't know when it comes——"

He crept down the bank, slipping and sliding on his way, but holding the hypodermic syringe aloft, drawing as near as he could to the barred window.

It was not near enough. The flames had by now spread until they interposed a barrier. The doctor turned and waved his hand to the onlookers: It was a gesture of defeat. Goliff was back at the window now, his face strangely distorted in the smoke and flying sparks. The onlookers began to swear hysterically as an outlet for their feelings. The old parson had dropped to his knees, tears welling from his gentle blue eyes.

"Hush!" he said rebukingly. "Do not blaspheme—pray! Our only hope is in the mercy of the Father."

The Big Boss was tugging at his collar. "It's awful," he groaned. "I'd give ten thousand dollars to get him out!"

Big Tim clutched Red by the arm. "Heard that, didn't you? And you can keep it all—every penny of it! It'll buy you your farm." Then, as he caught the implacable set to Red's jaws: "And if you're hog enough to refuse, I'll bump you off, here and now!"

The appearance of the doctor and his hypodermic outfit had reminded Red poignantly of his own physical ills. The retrospective terror thus engendered surged into the old hatred of Goliff.

"Go ahead an' bump!" he sneered. "Listen—I wouldn't save that fellow for a million dollars and a pardon in advance from President Coolidge. Damn him, he made me suffer plenty!"

Through the barred window, screams were beginning to come. Goliff, awak-

ened now to the utter hopelessness of his plight, had his face against the bars oblivious of the scorching atmosphere and was shrieking, at measured intervals: "Save me! I'm burning! Save me!" He kept it up in a singsong fashion. The end was sure—but it was going to be horribly slow. And Goliff knew it better than any of the spectators on the outside.

The forward end of the treasure wagon was beginning to glow under the roar of the flaming wreckage, the ruddy hue of the metal changing to a whiter, more intense tinge and spreading rapidly under the gaze of the eager watchers. And all the while Goliff kept on screaming "Save me! I'm burning! Save me! I'm burning!"

Red had stood quietly licking his lips, the picture of relentlessness. He continually twisted his aching arm to quicken his hatred of the imprisoned man. He needed all his mental resistance. Gradually the singsong of agony by the frenzied treasurer was spurring the memories of when he had, in torture, hours at a time, shrieked practically the same refrain.

The Big Boss was wringing his hands helplessly. "Can't somebody do something!" he screamed suddenly. "I'll give twenty-five thousand dollars to any one who gets him out!"

Big Tim pushed his way through the bystanders and stood at his side. "You promise to pay that," he shouted loud enough for every one near by to hear; "an' no comebacks on the way it is done?"

"Sure—of course!" yelled The Big Boss. "On my word of honor. "Only hurry—it's awful!"

Big Tim turned toward Red. Deadly menace was in his eyes. "You heard that," he shouted, "an' now if you don't an'—"

But before he could continue, Red turned and was running off into the cornfield.

THE throng was gone from about the treasure wagon when Red returned. Big Tim had sent most of the bystanders off, ostensibly to throw dirt and ballast to retard the spread of the flames, actually so Red could work unobserved. Sparks and cinders, driven as though by a giant bellows, filled the air. Goliff had fallen back from the window by this time and his rhythmic plaints came but feebly.

Red knew from persistent study of the door of the treasure car exactly how to proceed. He intended to use a double charge of explosive, dangerous, of course, but quicker. He worked frantically, looking like a maddened gnome in the distorting glare, finished his preparations, affixed the detonator and finally the wire to his battery. He stopped at a point dangerously close and with a push of the battery plunger exploded the heavy charge of nitroglycerin.

Before the sound of the explosion had finished reverberating through the hills and while the falling timbers were still trembling, Red plunged back to the treasure wagon and began to make his way to the door, crawling under and over the smoldering barriers of wreckage. The force of the explosion had wrenched flaming planks from the nearest box car and these now kindled the débris thrown over the treasure wagon.

Up on the bank stood Big Tim and the doctor and the parson and The Big Boss. They saw Red fight his way into the treasure wagon, and they began to cheer and clap each other on the back. The parson was sobbing aloud, without shame. It was a spontaneous ovation to bravery—and to nothing else.

This act of Red's was tainted bravery, of course—shady in genesis, criminal in execution, and inspired by greed—so they thought. Nevertheless, it was bravery. And in such cases, emotional humanity concerns itself only with the deed itself.

WHEN Red crawled from the treasure wagon dragging Goliff's body, Big Tim and the doctor and the parson were waiting down on the side of the bank as near as they could get to the door. They saw Red brush the cinders from his face, rub his hands against each other with a gesture of repugnance as though to rid himself of contamination, then stoop and peer into the face of the man he had rescued. Red was so intent he did not realize he was watched. He did a strange thing for a hero. Reaching down to Goliff he deliberately raised the man's head, then slapped his face viciously.

Big Tim was at his side in a bound. He thought that the strain had crazed Red. He was still palpitating with hero worship.

"There, there, Red!" he said soothingly. "Take it easy. Man, you did a mighty big thing and the reward's all yours."

"To hell with the reward!" screamed Red. "I don't want any dirty money that paid for his life. I'll never forgive myself for savin' him—the hound!"

Big Tim was regarding him open-mouthed. The doctor and the parson held back, amazed to silence.

"It was his damned squealin'," went on Red. His manner was apologetic. "He keeps yellin' he was burnin' up—burnin' up—burnin' up! If he had said anything else, he could have croaked and been damned for my part. But I knew what he was goin' through—I went through neuritis. I could feel it all over again. An' now I s'pose the bulls will grab me. An' I deserve it for bein' a damn fool!"

Big Tim wheeled him around until they stood face to face. "No, Red," he said, "you ain't going to get pinched. But the thing you just done is the only thing that saved you from going back to jail for a sure salty stretch. Your friend, Silver Flynn, right now is handcuffed to the bull you were scared of."

Red was regarding him intently. "What d'you mean?" he growled.

Big Tim threw back the lapel of his coat with one hand and almost simultaneously produced an automatic pistol with the other. Red had glimpsed the headquarters shield and was reaching to his hip pocket.

"Don't!" said Big Tim, pushing the automatic against Red's stomach. "I don't want to have to plug you, Red—an' anyway I got your gat when the smash came to-night. Red, I've been framin' you ever since I spotted you fellows in Cincinnati an' knew you were up to something. We had it all set for you to-night—four of us—to nab you red-handed. Then the storm put everything wrong."

Red loosed at him a flood of invective. The old minister covered his ears with his hands. And after Red had got the worst of it out of his system, he stuck his face defiantly into that of Big Tim, who had listened patiently but who had held the automatic ready in his clenched fist.

"You sneakin' Judas!" concluded Red. "So you're a bull yourself! Well, to hell with you—go as far as you like!"

For reply Big Tim produced a fat roll of bank notes from his trousers pocket and held it out. "Seein' you don't want the reward, Red, you better take this and make a get-away quick, before the others from headquarters get wise and pinch you in spite of me."

Red took the money and backed off, snarling and swearing in impotent rage and not sparing Big Tim. And suddenly Big Tim lost patience.

"Shut up!" he shouted. "And thank Heaven your conscience woke up before it was too late! I didn't expect it from a crook like you!"

Red, halfway up the bank, paused. "Conscience!" he jeered. "Conscience—hell! I'm crazy—that's what. Crazy from neuritis. Right now I'm sorry I

did it, even if it did save me from jail. I'm goin' to hate myself for the rest of my life for doing it."

The doctor nudged the parson. "Strange, isn't it, how human nature always plays true to form? It's only after a man has gone through a lot of physical suffering himself that he can truly understand the suffering of another. Nothing else in the world would have made a criminal like this relent

and risk his own life and freedom for a man he hated so intensely."

The old parson had his face upraised, a rapt, worshiping light in his faded blue eyes.

"That," he said gently. "was the way of the Father—His hand reaching past the barriers within, that block the hearts of all hardened sinners, to place the awakening touch on a human soul before it was too late."



LIKE A BALLAD OF LONG AGO

A ROBIN HOOD has died and with his body will be buried the love of a people—the people of Corsica.

Far from Sherwood Forest, in the little rocky island which at the turn of the eighteenth century sent from its wooded shores "The Man of Destiny," that Napoleon who plastered the map of Europe with battlefields and then rang down the curtain on his melodramatic career with the thundering hoofs of the Imperials at Waterloo echoing in his ears, there lived until early this spring the brigand Romanetti.

Romanetti began his outlawry with a murder, which he, however, gallantly declared was an affair of honor—the result of an unwise fellow's betrayal of him to the gendarmerie. In the long list of killings attributable to "the King of Bandits" since that first spilling of blood, all, so he claimed, were undertaken in self-defense. And we who read the story of his life know that this cannot be an absolute falsehood, for the populace of Corsica looked to Romanetti and not to the administrators sent from Paris, to mete out justice to them, to protect their persons and their chattels; for Romanetti, like his legendary forbear in Nottinghamshire, when he robbed, took from the fatted merchant and gave to the weak and the poor. And Romanetti had faith. He boasted that there was not a man, woman or child in all of Corsica who would betray him to the gendarmes—and his proud boast was given the proof by the very men who hunted him, for these pursuers, in despair of capturing unaided the famous brigand, placed a price of twenty thousand francs upon his head. Yet, in the eighteen years that Romanetti held sway over his island home, no one—though the people of Corsica are notoriously poor—ever attempted to claim that reward.

It was the foreign tourists whom Romanetti feared, and last summer the Paris *Temps* published a dispatch from the brigand warning all Americans that should they venture into the interior of Corsica he would be obliged to shoot them on sight, the reason being, he explained, that the gendarmes were trying to entrap him by disguising themselves as American tourists.

And in the dog heat of last summer the island Robin Hood passed fittingly into the dim land where legend weaves her shrouds. Trapped with his small bodyguard, he died fighting his way out of ambush—outnumbered fifty to one!



On the Sweeny Wire

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "The Sweeny Motor Car," "Mr. Sweeny: Financier," Etc.

A party telephone wire is like a political picnic—lots of strangers on the ground and all full-fledged listeners-in. And Belle Sweeny, the race-track gambler's widow, found her neighbors' conversation irresistible, but, sad to relate, almost as disastrous.

A TELEPHONE inspector was in the Sweeny apartment, looking over the instrument. Mrs. Sweeny stood by, evidently suspicious, and watched the man as he worked. Sometimes telephone inspectors turned out to be evil-disposed persons, bent on loot. If one's back were toward them, they would deftly collect whatever property happened to be available and decamp. So Mrs. Sweeny gave this man no opportunity at all to develop a burglarious streak, but watched his every move.

At last he finished brushing out the transmitter, tapping here and there with an inquisitive finger, tightening contact screws and the like, and went his way. His observer, now off duty, made her way to the Boarder's rooms for a chat.

"Good mornin'," she said, as she entered.

He returned the greeting and offered her a chair.

"Thanks," said she, seating herself. "One of them telephone fellers was just here, fixin' the thing. I been watchin' him. You don't find me takin' chances on parties that comes around like that, bein' flat workers. Not me!"

"It's best to be careful," agreed the Boarder.

"That's what my Danny usta tell me b'fore he was shot," she continued. "We was on a party line then——" She broke off abruptly, as if memory had flashed a message. "Say," she resumed, "was you ever a party liner?"

"A what?" the Boarder asked.

"A party liner," came the repetition.

"You're one when you and three or four other people all listens to what each other says on the phone, b'cause they're on the same line and can. Anybody that would listen like that would peek through a keyhole—and I never met nobody that wouldn't listen. After you've been a party liner for a while, you've got more of a rubberneck disposition than a astronomer. You watch a show from beginnin' to end, through op'ry glasses, b'cause it makes you think you're peekin' at somethin' on the sly. It's a worse habit than whis'lin' through your teeth; but there's times when it comes in handy for some folks. The fine young one I had almost put Mr. Dan Sweeny and wife down and out."

"I suppose the telephone company got after you?" the Boarder hazarded.

"You don't get no coupon with that guess." Mrs. Sweeny assured him. "Nothin' like that happened; but somethin' else did. Me and Danny seen our bank roll all made up and ready to go on in a disappearin' act. It was a scary time for me, I tell you, mister."

THE Boarder left off whittling the end of a pencil and began to make himself comfortable.

Mrs. Sweeny continued:

"About that time Danny had had a fallin' out with a feller named 'Mike the Wop' that was workin' at one of them race-track books. My husband wouldn't stand for somethin' he done, and told him so. They quarreled somethin' outrag'ous; but afterward they made it up. Danny brought him out to dinner, and we treated him real stylish, like he was in the legislature and willin' to be bought on the racin' question. But that there Mike wasn't no kind of a man. He had a low, backbitin' disposition—he said he had Sicilian blood in him, and I believe it. Them Sicilians is great on that revenge thing, mister."

The Boarder nodded.

"And," his landlady went on, "I didn't trust him; and afterward I told Danny to watch him like he was a tack on a dark floor. I remember that time at dinner that the telephone was talked about—somethin' brought it out—and our party line got a hearin'. And Mike, bein' one of them fellers that alwus likes to pan out wimmin for bein' mutts and havin' no principles, says he bet I listened on the line.

"Well," I says, 'bein' that I'm honest by nature,' I says, 'I'll say this much: If I happen to take down the receiver and the line's busy,' I says, 'mebbe I don't put the thing right back up on the hook,' I says.

"Mike laughs.

"'Haw-haw-haw!' he says, 'you're like all the rest of 'em, Mis' Sweeny,' he says. 'Wimmin would listen on a telephone line, if what they heard was that their own house was burnin' down,' he says. 'They'd stick till the folks got through talkin' and then take a chance at gettin' out alive,' he says.

"Well, I didn't have no argument with him, seein' that he's nothin' but a rowdy. And then the talk turns to who's on the line with us. You know how them things will come off. You bring up somethin' to talk about and tell all you know about it, and then begin to lie. We told Mike that a Presbyterian minister was the L party; and a clairvoyant was the X party, and a feller named Doyle, that run a corner saloon over on Amsterdam Av-noo, was the R party, and we was the J party. I knew, for I'd called up the information operator from downtown and asked. Mebbe I was buttin' in, but I just had to know. At first I was goin' to kick about havin' a saloon on our line, but the phone wasn't there; it was at the man's house. Of course all this patter didn't mean nothin' much to Mike at the time. It was just somethin' that comes off between ladies and gent'm'n. But wait! I seen the time

when I wished we'd never said a word about who was on our line. All the trouble come from that."

The Boarder was showing considerable interest.

"I don't see how——" he began.

But Mrs. Sweeney had the floor, and reminded him of it.

"Sometimes," she declared, "you don't seem like you had sense. Ain't I doin' my best to tell you how?"

He subsided, and she went on:

THAT evenin' when Mike left, Danny walked to the corner saloon with him and interduced him to the proprietor, Doyle. This here Doyle was crazy about the horses, and had more respect for Danny, who was a book-maker, than for the man that made the subway. Danny didn't stay, though, but come home right away. He wasn't one of them stay-out-all-nights, except when there was somethin' special to celebrate, like makin' a big winnin' at the track. When he come in, he says to me:

"'Belle,' he says, 'Mike ain't such a bad feller.'

"'There's worse,' I says, 'but they're in jail. Take it from me, Danny, the Wop is the kind that'll meet you with a glad face and then forget that he ever looked pleasant—he's a smile-that-won't-stay-on feller,' I says. 'I like him much,' I says; 'about as much as you'd like doin' the housework,' I says.

"You see, mister, a woman's got a' instinct that's wound up all the time and rings up people and things like a cash register."

The Boarder was moved to comment.

"Woman's intuition is a strange thing," he said.

"I bet on mine," she assured him, "and I don't have to walk home much, as you might say. And when it told me the Wop's number—which was 00—I was sure that the right record was playin'. I tried to make Danny listen to it, but he was goin' to sleep in his

chair and wanted peace. So we let the thing drop.

"One mornin' not long after that our telephone rung, and some party ast for Mr. Doyle.

"'You're in the wrong pew,' I says.

"'Ain't this the R party?' says the feller talkin', and his voice sounded familiar.

"'No,' I says, 'this is the J party.'

"I heard him laughin'."

"'Hello, Mrs. Sweeney,' he says, 'rubberin' in on the line again? This is Mike talkin'.'

"'No,' I says, gettin' mad, 'I ain't rubberin' in on the line. Our bell rung,' I says, 'and a lady's got a puffec' right to answer her telephone if the bell rings,' I says.

"He laughs again.

"'Correct,' he says; 'go to the head of the class.' Then he told me he didn't mean nothin' and for me not to go away mad. But I hung up, and throwed a salt cellar across the room, I was so put out.

"After a while, though, the thing got to easin' up on my chest, and I begun to wonder what the Wop's business with Mr. Doyle was. I knew that Doyle was makin' considerable money out of his place; so, puttin' two and two together, it looked to me that mebbe the Wop was after it. Now, mister, we've brought up at the place where there's a curious woman to deal with—and somethin' usually happens when one of them persons is turned loose, don't it?"

"I believe so," laughed the Boarder.

"You better had," she told him.

"Oh, don't they know human nature, though!"

"Who?" inquired he, not knowing where he stood.

"Them gamblers," she replied. "They know it better than a s'ciety woman thinks she knows bridge. Well, let me go on with my story. The next day, about the same time in the mornin',

our phone rings again, and it is another case of wrong number and another case of Mike. After we'd rung off, I gets to thinkin' again: 'What does he want with Doyle?' And the next minute I've got the receiver down, and there I am, a peeping Tomerino, waitin' for what's comin' off. I didn't stay in suspense. Right off I heard Mr. Doyle sayin':

"'Hello!' And then come Mike's voice. They was talkin' about a winner that was bein' held for a killin'. Mr. Doyle was to play it on Mike's tip.

"'I ain't quite sure yet,' says Mike. 'They're keepin' that horse covered up; but I'll give you the info in time. You'll know in two or three days. Then get on, and get on hard.'

"Mr. Doyle was for it, mister. And mebbe you think I ain't the curious little girl about that time! What horse was goin' to come through? If I could find out and tell Danny, we'd have a fine, soft place to cut loose in, after the horse had got home ahead of 'em all. The thing got me all excited. I couldn't hardly wait till the next day, for I meant to listen in again—that telephone had took all my morals away from me, and I just didn't care what happened, as long as I got that information. I didn't even excuse myself on the grounds that I was doin' a' underhanded thing for the husban' I loved—and at that, I figgered on gettin' a swell dress out of the killin'. This money thing, mister, is somethin' that's awful quick and sure in givin' wimmin a crool attack of bein' wicked. Ain't it?"

The Boarder thought so.

"Well," Mrs. Sweeny went on, "it took me out of the Sunday-school class right away. And to make the temptation all the stronger, Mike the Wop alwus seemed to get our number b'fore he got what he wanted. You'd ought to of heard him pan out the service! He was real worked up about them girls makin' so many mistakes. But I

didn't care. When the bell rung, I knew that them two men was goin' to talk, so I got right on the job. And I stuck like garlic smell on a' I-talian. I got crazy to know the name of that horse; and you can know how anxious I was, when I tell you that I almost cut out bein' company for Mrs. 'Big Joe' Goss——"

"Er——" the Boarder began.

"She was a sick lady I was sittin' up with afternoons," Mrs. Sweeny hastened to explain. "And there's more telephone stuff to her side of the story. But just you wait. It'll all come out in time. Mrs. Big Joe was the wife of a pool-room keeper that me and Danny knowed real well, and her bein' all in with neuritis, I was puttin' out a helpin' hand and gnawin' on the rag all afternoon, so's she wouldn't have a relapse thinkin' how Big Joe abused her. I'd been doin' it about ten days; and lately I'd of gave my right mitt to stick around and listen to what might come over the telephone. Gee! but I was anxious to get the name of that horse, mister! It was real deep anxiety, the kind that makes you forget hatin' people."

"I think I can appreciate your position," the Boarder assured her with sympathy.

"You don't have to be a bettin' man to do it," she said. "If you've ever walked down street in a new suit, without no umbrella, and you're dead sure it's goin' to rain, and it don't, then you have went through somethin' like I did about that horse. But things have a habit of comin' to ends, and this here pony business wasn't any exception. A day or two later, it all come out. My bell had rung, as usual, and when me and the Wop had quit roastin' the telephone company to each other, I hung up and waited long enough for Mike to get his number. Then I kicks in. Mr. Doyle took down his receiver at just about the time I did—say, I had the

thing timed to a second—for I heard him say:

“Hello!”

“Mike says ‘Hello!’ too. Then he went on:

“‘Doyle,’ he says, ‘I’ve got it. They’re goin’ to pull it in the fourth race to-morruh,’ he says.

“‘What is it?’ says Doyle.

“‘Whirlwind, Junior,’ says Mike, ‘and go to it, Doyle, like it was beef-steak and mushrooms,’ he says, ‘and you hadn’t et in a week. It’s the best thing that’s happened since Doc Cook discovered easy money,’ he says. ‘And don’t let this info get away. There’s twenty to one, if you get on early, and half that, anyway,’ he says.

“Mr. Doyle didn’t take a second to answer.

“‘You’re on,’ he says, ‘and I’ll carry fifty for you.’

“‘Fifty?’ says the Wop, in a voice that might mean anything.

“‘I mean a hundred,’ says Doyle. And then they babbled along for five minutes about the horse, and the best pool room to put up the money in, and such a line of stuff. Doyle never went to the track, b’cause if he did he couldn’t help bettin’ on every race, and that alwus busted him.”

Mrs. Sweeney paused a moment, a bit out of breath.

“I can’t help rememberin’,” she continued, “how fine I felt when I’d got that tip away from them men. I couldn’t wait till Danny come home that night. Once or twice I thought of tryin’ to locate him in some of them Broadway bootleggeries, but I stopped to think that mebbe some one else might be in on the line—some telephone girl—and spread the Whirlwind, Junior, stuff. You see, mister, when you’re bad yourself, you find yourself believin’ that everybody else is a crook, too. It’s caused by what you tell me is the sighological moment——”

“No,” interrupted the Boarder, “it is

a psychic phenomena—a brain condition——”

“Put that in storage,” Mrs. Sweeney indignantly cut in. “Don’t you s’pose I know what I’m talkin’ about? Sighological moment is good enough for me. I heard Mrs. ‘Gold Dollar’ Cohen say that a few evenin’s ago, and she ain’t got nothin’ on me. If she can use them there words, I guess Belle Sweeney can. They don’t cost nothin’ and——”

The Boarder smiled.

“I meant no offense,” he said. “Won’t you please go on with the story?”

Mollified, the good lady gave her up-turned nose the “going down” signal, and sailed forthwith into her yarn.

“WELL,” she continued, “I was fidgety as a crate of hens till Danny come home. Then I told him all about what I’d heard.

“‘Belle,’ he says, when I’d shook it out of the trap, ‘you get a nice, new dress just for this. What does that there one cost you was tellin’ me about—the grape de foy grass?’ he says.

“‘Danny,’ I says, ‘it ain’t grapes, it’s crêpe,’ I says. But I didn’t bother him with the rest of the name, b’cause I knowed he wouldn’t understand. I only mentioned somethin’ like two fifty, which was nearer his idea of information, and he stood for it.

“‘To-morruh,’ he says, ‘when I bring home the money,’ he says, ‘you get yours. I’ll go to it for a thousand,’ he says, ‘and when everything’s added up, there ought to be enough to pay our hired girl with, anyhow,’ he says. And with that he went to readin’ his paper, after havin’ asked when in—well, he wanted to know when dinner would be ready, he bein’ as hungry as never no man was b’fore. So I left him go ahead and read his paper, and we didn’t mention the horse again till the next day.

“I tell you, mister, I was just about

crazy to go out to the track and see that Whirlwind, Junior, eat 'em up. I could see in my mind about how it would be. The horse would keep pretty well in front for a while, till the jockey seen just what he had to beat, then he'd give Whirlwind his head, and mebbe beat him up, down the stretch. And there'd be a gang of howlin' maniacs, yellin' for the fav'rite to make good.

"You bet there'd be excitement enough to satisfy a modust young thing like me, and I wanted to mix up in it. Also, I wanted to set around with a knew-it-all grin all over my face and collect my bit, me havin' gave Danny fifty to put down for me. Did you ever make a surething bet?" she asked.

"No," replied the Boarder.

"Then," Mrs. Sweeny said, "you don't know the thrillin' feelin' you get, waitin' for things to come across. I can't describe it to you, but it sure is some feelin'. It begun with me as soon as Danny went out of the house, and kep' up right along. At noon, I slips over to Mrs. Big Joe's house for lunch and to stay there with her all afternoon. I couldn't go to no track, with her feelin' like she wanted to jump out of the window and spendin' her time quarrelin' with her nurse. She wouldn't row none with me, b'cause she kept too interested in what scandal was goin' on in our set.

I GUESS mebbe I'd been there a' hour, when the phone, that was set on a stand by her bed, begun to ring.

"I wisht," she says, all nervous, "I wisht, Belle, that some one would kick this thing in the eye for me. It like to drives me bugs," she says, puttin' the receiver to her ear. I was sittin' close b'side her, and when she says 'Hello!' I could hear the voice at the other end real plain.

"Is Joe there?" it says. And you can just guess that I set up and took notice. That there voice belonged to

Mike the Wop, and I seen, just as clear as anything, that Big Joe was in on the deal, too. Somethin' told me he was. Mrs. Big Joe said her husban' wasn't nowhere around. He was down at his pool room, she was sure.

"No," says Mike, "he ain't there. I called up. Say, Mrs. Goss," he says, "I wisht I knew where to find him."

"What you want with him?" she says.

"There's a bad tip loose," he says, "on Whirlwind, Junior," he says, "and I don't want Joe to fall for it," he says. "Nobody's supposed to play it," he says, "but Sweeny. It's a plant," he says.

"Mrs. Big Joe looks up at me, and I'm bendin' down close to the receiver that was against her ear. She pulled it away a little bit, so I could hear better. 'This here's too good to be true,' she says, forgettin' that anything was the matter of her. Then to Mike:

"What's this you're sayin'?"

"Sweeny's goin' to get his this afternoon," Mike tells her, "and I guess him and his rubberneckin' wife is goin' to have somethin' to study about to-night," he says. Then we heard him laugh. 'Ha-ha-ha!' he says, 'I bet they have their telephone tore out by the roots,' he says. 'And I bet she never rubbers again, as long as she lives.'

"Mrs. Big Joe gets awful anxious at that. 'What you drivin' at, Mike?' she says.

"You'll hear later on," he says. "I'm showin' Dan Sweeny that he can't make a monkey of me and get away with it," he says. "And I'm flatterin' myself today that I'm clever enough to walk home alone, anyway. So Joe ain't there? Well, I got to hunt him up. If you should happen to get him on the phone, tell him I said not to play that Whirlwind thing. It's goin' all up and down the line, and how it got loose I don't know. Tell him, if you find him. Good-by.' And Mike hung up b'fore we could get any more out of him.

"Mrs. Big Joe was so interested that she couldn't hardly stay in bed.

"Tell me, Belle," she says, "what all this here funny business means," she says.

"I just set there and bowed my poor, whirlin' head in my hands. For I seen it all now. The Wop had been nursin' his grudge against Danny, and he had played a slick hand. He'd been callin' up our number right along, figgerin' that I'd rubber in and hear what was goin' on. I s'pose he kept at it so long to be sure that I'd get the phony tip. He'd prob'ly been listenin' for that little click you hear when somebody takes down another receiver on a party-line wire, and he'd found out when I was listenin' that way, takin' a chance, like all them gamblers does, that it was me, and not somebody else. And right now he was havin' his little giggle and warnin' his good fr'en's off the information.

"It sure had me goin', mister, and for a while I was so flustered that I couldn't get my head workin' even good enough to tell Mrs. Big Joe what had happened. Wasn't it a' awful thing, mister, me gettin' my husban' in wrong, through my sneakin' ways?"

"I suppose you felt decidedly unpleasant," the Boarder said. "But what of Doyle? Was he being slaughtered, too?"

"It looked like this to me," Mrs. Sweeney told him. "What do you think the Wop cared about Mr. Doyle? Nothin'. He wasn't no fr'en' of the Wop's—just a' acquaintance—a fr'en' of a man that the sneakin', lyin' Sicilian didn't like, anyway. Doyle was only a tool, that's all. Nobody cared what happened to him."

"I see," said the Boarder.

"Well," she resumed, "I fin'ly got settled down enough to tell Mrs. Big Joe the whole story. I didn't hide a bit of it. But she didn't have a word to say against me.

"I'd of did the same," she said. "A

lady has got a puffec' right to listen if she wants to. What do we have party lines for, if they ain't to listen at, when a pusson ain't got nothing else to do?" she says. And I thought it was real lovely in her. Some folks is too narrow-minded to take her kind of a view of things.

"But she was full of the idee that we ought to find Danny and make him run away from that Whirlwind stuff. For the life of me, I didn't know where to telephone to, for sometimes Danny left his pardner run the book and stayed in town, even when he was bettin'. And them times he was usually in a hotel room, playin' poker and such a line of work.

"Be-lieve me," I said to Mrs. Big Joe, "I'm clean up in the air," I says, "for I don't know where to look for him."

"But she wanted to do somethin'.

"Belle," she says, "call up all the live dives along Broadway, close to Forty-second Street," she says, "and if he ain't in one of 'em, we'll get the track. Now begin." She takes the book from the table and hands it to me.

FOR a while, it seemed as if the type just danced around, but soon I was able to read, and then I begun to call up numbers. My only hope was that, as Whirlwind, Junior, wasn't to start till the fourth race, Danny might fool around with some of his pals till late, and then ride out to the track in a' automobile. When I got that far in my reasonin', I kept repeatin' that word, 'automobile, automobile, automobile.' It struck me like a hunch, but it was several minutes before I knew what it meant. After that, I didn't telephone no more places. I rung up Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen.

"Say," I says, "somethin' turrible has happened," I says, "and I must get to Danny," I says, "b'fore the fourth race. And will you lend me your car for a

fast ride, and your choofer?' I says. Follerin' which, I told her of the mean trick that the Wop had pulled on me and Danny. Mrs. Gold Dollar spoke right up, as soon as she seen what was happenin'.

"'Belle,' she says, 'you can have the French car,' she says, 'and, what's more, I'll go along. Where are you now?'

"'At Mrs. Big Joe's,' I says.

"'Then,' she says, 'get trimmed up, Belle,' she says, 'b'cause it won't be more'n ten minutes till I'm yellin' my head off out in front of that there place for you,' she says. Then we hangs up, and I'm the busy party for a while, gettin' fixed for the trip. Oncet I says to Mrs. Big Joe that I'd ought to stick around and take care of her, but she let out a awful holler at that.

"'There is big things to be did this day,' says she, 'and I'm sure I'm able to take care of myself,' she says, 'for there's the nurse to bawl out,' she says, 'when I want somethin' to do. And, anyway, I want Mike the Wop to understand that ladies has a puffec' right to listen at a telephone. I do it myself,' she says, 'and I ain't goin' to stand for no call down from no cheap Sicilian,' she says. 'Our husban's ought to beat him up.'

"'Ain't that the truth!' I says, real emphatically. And then I was on my way, hopefuller than I'd been since the Wop showed us his hand.

MRS. GOLD DOLLAR was waitin' for me when I got downstairs.

"'Belle,' she says to me, 'wait till we get over in Brooklyn,' she says. 'I've told my man to hit it up and make Sheepshead Bay quicker than it was ever did b'fore. I don't care if we do get pinched,' she says, 'for the Gold Dollar is havin' a great season with his book, and his wife ought to be allowed a little fun now and then,' she says.

"'My eyes was shut all durin' that

trip, mister, so I can't tell just what happened. All I know is that them new French-make cars hits only every sixteenth high spot, and even at that they touch so light that you can't notice it. Mrs. Gold Dollar screamed all the way out. When she begun, the choofer stopped the car, but she hollers:

"'Ferdunund, if you do that again, I'll scream! Go on! Make them wheels go round like they was paid for it. I'm havin' the time of my life!'

"'And you can take it from me, mister, he done just that. Whee! We sure did go; and it didn't seem hardly ten minutes b'fore the thing stopped, and there we was. Both of us set right out on a hunt for Danny, and pretty soon we found him talkin' with a couple of gents.

"'Danny,' I says, 'we been bunked,' I says.

"'Give it a name, Belle,' he says.

"'The Wop,' I says, 'has handed us somethin'.'

"'Whirlwind, Junior?' says he.

"'Yep,' says I. 'It's bad. He ain't goin' to win.' Then I told him the story as fast as I could patter it out. When I was through, he only kinda laughed.

"'Well, Belle,' he says, 'I'm sorry you and Mrs. Gold Dollar took the trouble to come way out here and tell me,' he says, 'for I didn't get on Whirlwind. They was a big tip out that he was to make a killin', and it didn't look good to me. I don't never fall for them hot ones, Belle, for I never seen many of 'em get across,' he says, 'but thanks, just the same, for the bother you and Mrs. Gold Dollar has went to on my account,' he says. 'It makes a man think he's got fr'en's.'

"'I was so surprised, mister, that I couldn't do nothin' but stare.

"'You didn't get on?' I managed to say, after a while.

"'Nope, I didn't,' he says.

"'Well,' says I, comin' to my senses, 'it looks to me as if the only man that

gets stung is Mr. Doyle,' I says, 'and I guess somebody ought to call him up.'

"Danny looked at me hard when I said that. In another minute he was runnin' away as hard as he could go.

"I'm goin' to phone him,' he says.

"And five minutes afterward he was back, mister, with a grin on his face that made it look like a half-opened steamer trunk.

"'Belle,' he says, 'nobody has got no worries but Mike the Wop. My fr'en' Doyle didn't make no bets,' he says, 'b'cause he was in on the plant. He was stallin' for Mike; only he didn't know it was us,' he says.

"'Who was meant, then?' I says.

"'Haw-haw-haw!' says Danny, 'who do you s'pose?'

"'The minister on the line,' says I.

"'You lose,' says he. 'Doyle said that

he thought they were after the clairvoyant!'

"'My sakes!' I says.

"'Yes,' he says. 'Mike the Wop says to Doyle that the clairvoyant had trimmed him some way. And Doyle didn't have no use for her, b'cause his wife kept goin' there and spendin' money for bum information. So he got in on the plant, and there you are,' he says.

"Mrs. Gold Dollar and me was so surprised that we couldn't chatter. And that's some surprised for a woman. Then Mrs. Gold Dollar come to. She dug down in her shoppin' bag, and brought out a hundred.

"'Well,' she says, 'somebody's got to lose somethin' this day, Mr. Sweeney,' she says. 'Go put this on Roller Skates for me, to show,' she says."

More Mrs. Sweeney stories will be published in THE POPULAR.



TURN THE DIALS

PERHAPS the next time the radio set begins to howl as if a dozen cat fights were mewling inside of the loud speaker, it is not static that is interfering with the reception from the broadcasting station, but a newspaper photograph which is being sent through the air.

For an event has occurred that has been anticipated for some time—it has been found possible to send pictures for long distances by wireless. Though the apparatus has not been brought to that point of perfection where we can sit at home and see, cast upon a screen, moving pictures, the while spoken or sung words of the performer issue from the loud speaker—this development will probably come later—photographs can be transferred as great a distance as across the Atlantic Ocean.

The picture to be sent is first translated into radio impulses by photoelectric cells. These radio impulses are broadcast, received on the other side of the ocean, where they actuate a receiving apparatus which reproduces the picture as a sketch in hot brown wax. The wax flows from a fountain pen, which is operated by radio impulses. The reproduction is a sketch in wavy lines of wax, which is deposited on the paper a little thicker than the ink on an engraved card.

So, the next time the loud speaker emits squeaks, howls, squeals, or absolutely impossible-to-be-identified noises—don't blame it on static! Just turn the dials and try to get something else, for you may be listening to a drawing or a photograph flying through the air in bits.



The Clever Ones

By Percival Wilde

Author of "The Fifty-third Card," "The Adventure of the Fallen Angels," Etc.

There were three of them—a young man full-blown with ambitious conceit, an older man patched with the knock-about wisdom of the world, and that other, a timber rattlesnake. By following the desires which were prompted by their several needs they crossed trails and eventually clashed wits. And the one who won didn't miscalculate by the slightest bit—because he let the others come to him.

CHAPTER I.

BEST OF THE THREE.

THEY were clever, all three of them, each in his own way. One of them was Harris, who admitted that he was clever; and another of them was Carson, who was clever—and clever enough not to admit it—and the third of them, who was not human at all, attended cleverly to his own business, and was therefore perhaps the cleverest of the three.

Into the cities, into the busy marts of trade, where men congregated and where the pavement was worn smooth by the shuffle of thousands of feet, he never penetrated, this third one. But along the limestone ledges and rocky

hills which hemmed in the thriving city which Harris and Carson and a hundred thousand others inhabited, he wandered as he would—and, for all his diminutive size and his exceeding youthfulness, was treated with a respect which would have gladdened the heart of a less self-conscious individual.

Small animals saw him, and either fled aghast or stiffened into motionless horror. Larger animals saw him, or scented him, and, panic-stricken, gave him a wide berth. Birds of prey, owls and nighthawks and shrikes, that lived on his kindred, cast a single glance at his black-and-sulphur-yellow scales, and soared away. Even man himself respected his privacy.

Yet in spite of the deference ac-

corded to him by high and low alike, he indulged in no vanities, but held the even tenor of his way. Quietly, methodically, inoffensively he rustled through the timber that his ancestors had lived in for generations, taking no particular pains either to conceal or to reveal himself. Man might kill for the love of killing—but he killed only for food and in self-defense. He was small, barely fifteen inches long, for his existence had commenced only two months ago; and the amount of food required to satisfy him was inconsiderable, for his habits were abstemious.

When he was hungry, he ate, slaying his prey with a swiftness and with a mercifulness strange to the other denizens of the wilds. When he was full, he loved to sun himself on a flat rock, feeling the life-giving warmth penetrate every last inch of his powerfully muscled body, lying motionless for hours at a time, content and at peace with the world.

If a chance visitor ventured near, he did not move. It was only when the visitor came very close indeed that he flashed into a coil, deadly and indescribably menacing, buzzing the miniature rattle at the end of his tail, warning all the world to keep its distance or take the consequences.

Death stalked through every corner of the woods; death by tooth and claw, by beak and talons, by bullet and hunting knife; but no other killer played so fair, took so little advantage, gave such scrupulous notice before resorting to extremities. Here was no savage, thirsty for blood, slaughtering on the slightest provocation or on none at all, taking a life bit by bit by indescribable tortures, wasting half a dozen kills for every one consumed.

Quite the contrary. Here was the aristocrat of the open places, dignified, quiet, well mannered, asking most of all to be left alone with his own kind, wishing neither to be molested nor to mo-

lest, leading a life apart, and killing, when hunger drove, with scientific skill. A single stroke, as perfectly aimed as a rapier thrust, two tiny punctures inflicted almost without pain, and the timber rattlesnake, obedient to the instincts handed down to him through the centuries, would settle down to await the oblivion which but a few seconds or minutes would bring to his victim.

From among the miscellaneous inhabitants of the wilds, brutish in their lusts and vicious in their behavior, he stood out as sharply as a gentleman in a throng of ruffians. With them he was, but not of them; master of a defense—and of an offense—which they did not understand, but feared mightily nevertheless; slow to anger, but terrible in wrath; a personality sharp, clear-cut, and unique, not lightly to be deprived of a place in the sun.

IT was with the humans that he had more in common than with the four-footed folk—not with the humans who massacred with traps and snares and poison bait, and slew the survivors with instruments that could strike in safety from far off—but with the humans who selected their prey with cold-blooded deliberation, and waited for it in deadly ambush, with the humans, for instance, like Carson.

Had he wanted to, which he most emphatically did not, Carson could have shed much interesting light on his beginnings. He could have narrated how he had commenced a turbulent life in the anthracite districts of Pennsylvania, and how an unusual ability to take care of himself in rough-and-tumble combat had been supplanted by developed shrewdness which declined to recognize the necessity of rough and tumble at all. Gradually it led him to order his life in such a manner that desired ends might be achieved with a minimum of physical force.

On the face of it, a hand-to-hand

fight indicated that neither participant in it had obtained so strategic an advantage that an appeal to muscle might be avoided. It justified the inference that mental equality lay back of it. Moreover, its results were not sufficiently decisive; from a beating—even from a dozen of them—a man might recover, might continue to be a dangerous antagonist. Victory obtained in such a way was merely a temporary state of affairs, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and risking reversal at any moment.

Carson was an acute thinker, and it did not take him long, even in his early days, to become an exponent of subtler methods. While a man injured was one enemy more, a man crushed was one enemy less; and the process of crushing required merely cold, calculating thought and no physical exertion worth mentioning. It was a process highly congenial to Carson's temperament and, in resorting to it, he made use of the exceptional mentality with which he was endowed.

Labor-union politics, whose mazes he had threaded with an expertness amounting to genius, had given him his start and the nucleus of his capital. But the field was not rich enough to content him long. He had moved to a larger city, had ventured into the contracting business, and had had some success at it until the very qualities that had made for his success led to his undoing. Business was largely a matter of shrewdness; but it was also a matter of faith in mankind. Plenty of the former Carson had, and very little of the latter—and inspired still less in those who dealt with him. Still, he was farsighted enough to retire from the scene of his activities before an involuntary retirement was forced upon him.

HE shifted his base of operations a second time and, reaching his level by a slow process of gravitation, found himself at last. His fellow townsmen—

Harris, for one—to whom he was a man of mystery, would have been puzzled to describe Carson's occupation. Had Carson been penniless, the appellation of vagrant would have fitted; but he was far from penniless and his means of livelihood, while unknown, was clearly profitable.

His acquaintanceship was large, and it included the unobtrusive persons who ran the town's politics to suit themselves. From them he could extract favors; and through them he was in a position to obtain advance information of a nature that was often valuable. Carson, for instance, knew when and where a new franchise was to be granted long before the news became public. He was not admitted on the ground floor—that was reserved for his superiors—but he qualified easily for a place among the select few who were permitted to scramble for the scraps after those in still more favored positions had eaten their fill. This was profitable to Carson's friends, and thus to Carson—and it was the reward for services rendered.

Carson, drifting about the town, a member of a club or two, with ears that were always open and with a mind schooled for years in the art of drawing inferences, was a gossip collector second to none. A stray phrase picked up here, another overheard there, a cautious investigation which wove the two into a single fabric, and the result was a weapon which one might lock up in a card catalogue, secure in the knowledge that time was more likely to sharpen than to blunt its edge.

For gossip, as such, Carson's superiors cared nothing. They were not chatty; they were not given to idle small talk. But they cared much for gossip, demonstrably founded on fact, dealing in an authoritative manner with embarrassing events in the lives of chronic reformers, their enemies. Every now and then such persons, consumed with

a desire to benefit mankind, would project themselves into the limelight. A friendly admonition, based on materials supplied by Carson, rarely failed to put them back in their places. If it did fail, publicity, backed by the aroused opinion of a Puritanical electorate, could always be relied upon.

A few, and only a few, who sat in high places knew the precise nature of Carson's duties. The general public, and that included Harris, found him a pleasant enough man of forty, always well supplied with money and always a good listener.

If his clean-shaven face, scarred across the lips with a memento of some long-forgotten battle, was singularly expressionless, and if he seldom contributed more than a few leading questions to any conversation, it did not make him any the less a welcome companion for the many men who liked to hear themselves talk to attentive audiences, even if such audiences numbered but one pair of ears. And Carson, biding his time, storing away future ammunition in his retentive memory, found abundant grist in the miscellaneous matter that came to his mill.

Each piece of news, each bit of information, had its value, if not to Carson's superiors, then to Carson himself. Like a meat-packing establishment, he might have boasted that with him nothing went to waste. Scandal of the first water, touching upon the lives of important men, was passed on immediately to his appreciative clients; it was in exchange for such tidbits that they flung Carson crumbs from their own table. But scandal of lesser dimensions, information lacking political significance, could often be made to yield handsome dividends to Carson by a genteelly discreet process of blackmail.

There had been such episodes in the past; in all probability there would be more in the future. In them Carson himself had not figured visibly. Taking

his cue from his employers, he had been careful to keep his own personality in the background, while a lieutenant, understanding little of the errand on which he was sent, but trained to follow orders unquestioningly, attended to the painful details. This precaution—and others—had helped to keep Carson's many activities a secret from the individuals who would have been most interested in them. The result, his undoubted prosperity, was apparent to the world at large. The fact that he did not visibly engage in gainful labor classed him agreeably with the select group of the city's idle rich.

TO an observer unacquainted with truth about Carson, his intimacy with Harris would have been puzzling. On the surface of it, it was strange. A man of forty usually chooses his friends from among those of his own age, not from a generation ten or a dozen years younger; and if he is quiet and reserved, he does not select as a boon companion an individual in whom these qualities are conspicuously lacking. Moreover, a man of substance, well provided with the world's goods, does not admit to a footing of equality an impecunious assistant bank cashier, plodding along on a salary of something less than two thousand a year.

The points of dissimilarity between the two men, when one took cognizance of them, were somewhat striking. Harris' face, pink and white, and adorned with a wisp of a mustache, was the antithesis of Carson's, severe, almost ascetic, with a mottled skin stretched over it so tightly that it almost glistened. Harris' figure was above the average height—a full six inches taller than Carson's; but the muscles were flabby and undeveloped, whereas Carson's were in prime condition and nearly as powerful as they had been in his rough-and-tumble days.

Harris' clothes, despite his banking

connections, affected extremes. His coat, form fitting, was secured by a single button in front. Its pockets were cut on a rakish slant. His tie was as conspicuous as he dared wear. Carson, on the other hand, avoided eccentricities. His garments were of dignified cut, and he wore the simplest kind of bow tie at his collar.

Harris smoked cigarettes. Carson used cigars exclusively. Harris was given to gesticulation. Carson's hands rarely left his sides. Harris was a voluble conversationalist. Carson said little and listened much. Harris talked largely about himself, his accomplishments, his abilities, his future. Carson was never autobiographical, and any attempt to draw him out spent itself against the wall of his reserve.

YET the association of the two was not so unusual as it seemed. Harris, being vain, was glad to be noticed by a substantial citizen; and Carson, being shrewd, made it a point to cultivate a man who had access to the ledgers of the largest banking institution in miles around. In those ledgers every transaction of any magnitude undertaken by the bank's depositors would appear sooner or later as either a draft or a credit.

It mattered not in the least how anxious the participants were to keep their business secret, what precautions they indulged in to cover up their trails. Eventually there would be an entry in black and white, and Carson, learning of it, would set his ferretlike mind the task of tracing it back to its origins. Often the hunt would lead to a legitimate transaction, and Carson would have his pains for nothing; but sometimes, frequently enough to warrant him in following up any and every promising clew, his perseverance would be rewarded by a discovery valuable to him—and to his superiors.

In such a manner, more than once,

Carson had unearthed highly interesting facts. In such a manner, for instance, he had collected the ammunition which, let fly at a most embarrassing moment, had induced the most annoying of the many reform candidates for municipal office to withdraw from the race without a word of explanation to his mystified friends.

It is not to be inferred, however, that Harris was an intentional accomplice and knew the use to which his confidences were put. Harris was merely loquacious—that, and discontented—and there was something in Carson that made it very easy for Harris to pour out his innermost thoughts in his presence. That another man of his age should draw out or deposit in one lump sum an amount largely exceeding his own yearly income—should do it, and should think nothing of it—was a circumstance which the assistant bank cashier looked upon as a personal affront. It was as such that he recounted its details to the attentive Carson.

He longed for sympathy. Carson was always ready to extend it. Without uttering a word, he could look sympathetic and, when that was not sufficient, he was always ready to add comment pitched in the properly sympathetic key. It never occurred to Harris that that did not end the matter, or that Carson, listening and making mental notes, regretted only that every moneyed man in town was not a depositor in the First National.

There was still another reason for Carson's unconcealed interest in the young man. Coming events cast their shadows before—if one is acute enough to observe them and to correlate them—and Carson, forgetting nothing, storing away scraps of conversation in his retentive memory, had begun to foresee a happening which could hardly fail to be profitable to himself.

Carson's suspicions had not been aroused by the first conversation in

which Harris had alluded to the subject. Harris had begun, as so often before, with a bitter tirade upon his fancied wrongs.

"For twelve years I've been working for them, Carson. For twelve years! I've worked hard. I've worked faithfully. I've got ability, you know that. Well, I ask you, where have I gotten? Nowheres! Exactly nowheres!"

In this vein he had continued for nearly ten minutes.

His statement was not altogether correct. In twelve years Harris had climbed from office boy to assistant cashier—surely no small upward step. Beginning at the bottom, with no friends to smooth the way for him, he had risen to the select inner circle of those whose names graced the bank's letterhead—surely no inconsiderable advancement.

To be sure, he had reached merely an outer fringe of officers, and had a long road to travel before he might consider himself a man of real consequence. But the achievement was an achievement none the less, and might have been the source of great satisfaction to him had not his thoughts turned so persistently upon the rungs of the ladder which still lay above him—and upon the men who stood in his way.

By a combination of luck and some moderate ability, he had risen with unusual speed. Superiors had died at most convenient moments. Positions had vacated themselves at junctures most auspicious for him. He had mounted from one to another. But having finally reached his present berth, his luck had seemingly deserted him and his progress had been brought to an abrupt halt.

Beyond lay the really lucrative posts. They were filled by comparatively young men who had preceded him up the ladder and whose expectation of life was nearly as great as his own. A retirement—a resignation—a death

would clear the way for further advancement. The prospects of either were so remote that Harris could not delude himself about them. In all probability he would remain what he was and where he was for years to come.

"I'm stuck," he complained. "I've gotten just so far, and I'm anchored there. An assistant cashier! I've been an assistant of one kind or another all my life. I'll be an assistant to the end of my days."

"Too bad," murmured Carson, in honeyed tones, "tòo bad." Sympathetic—always sympathetic—but never a word which might lead Harris to change the subject.

Presently, Carson knew from long experience, Harris would begin to mention names, would begin to rail at this or that fortunate individual whose income exceeded his so greatly, would begin to bolster up his arguments with amounts and dates and specific facts. For that moment Carson waited and, in anticipation of it, was willing to listen to the song of self-commiseration which Harris sang so eloquently and so feelingly.

But upon the occasion which first should have made Carson suspicious—and did not—Harris did not run true to form. As abruptly as he had launched into his diatribe, he ceased, and accomplished the remarkable feat—for him—of remaining silent for nearly twenty minutes.

THE two men were on their favorite walk—on the well-beaten trail in the forest that lay north of the city. They walked abreast, treading the thick carpet of pine needles underfoot, and glancing up, every now and then, at the irregular patches of sky visible through the treetops.

On either side rose massive shafts, straight as beams of light, unmarred by any branch for a sheer fifty feet. Underbrush there was none, for full sun-

light never visited the shady depths of the forest in which the pines ruled; and the air, cool and refreshing even on the hottest days of summer, was vibrant, this October afternoon, with tingling, resinous odors.

Carson glanced curiously at Harris. He wondered if the majesty of it all was affecting him. He himself was decidedly less than sentimental; yet he never failed to react strongly to the presence of the century-old pines. Encompassed by them, his own insignificance was somewhat forcefully borne in upon him. Unconsciously he was wont to lower his voice to a bare whisper.

But Harris, it appeared quickly, was indifferent to his surroundings. "I see by the paper," he remarked, "that McMurtrie got eight years."

"McMurtrie?"

"Haven't you followed the case?"

"No."

"McMurtrie used to be connected with a bank in Webatuck. He embezzled fifty or sixty thousand dollars, did it over a period of ten years. Then he ran away, and they caught him."

Carson nodded. "I remember now."

"He was underpaid—like most of us. He made up his living expenses by dipping into the bank's moneys. He never took much at one time—a few hundreds, at the most a thousand, perhaps. But it mounted up to a good deal in ten years."

Carson nodded again. "Yes," he remarked. He seldom permitted himself more than a monosyllable; and he knew that Harris, being unable to endure silence long, would soon have more to say.

"They had just promoted him," Harris pursued. "There's the irony of it. What didn't come out at the trial was told to me in confidence. They had raised his salary to a figure on which he could live well, to a figure which would have made it possible for him to pay back what he had taken in the

course of ten years more, but at the same time they lifted him out of the job which allowed him to doctor the books and cover up his defalcations. If he had gotten the raise without the promotion, all would have been well. As it was, he saw what was coming. He ran away. He didn't run far enough or fast enough. They caught him."

Carson listened, but he was far from interested. While gossip about men in positions of power had its value, it was a waste of time to expend breath in discussing the affairs of unfortunates. Only the man who could be injured, who possessed something worth keeping, who might, for some conceivable reason, be envied by others, was worth consideration. A man who had lost everything, whom nothing at all could harm, was entitled to no place in Carson's card index.

Harris was speaking again.

"Fifty or sixty thousand, spread over ten years, stolen in dribblets, spent in dribblets, none of it put away. He could have had twice as much—or three times as much—and he could have stolen it in one lump sum."

Carson pricked up his ears.

"When McMurtrie leaves prison," said Harris, "he won't have a cent in the world. He'll be broke, and he'll find it next to impossible to get a job. If he finds work at all, it will be manual labor, which he isn't accustomed to; nobody will trust him with anything better. For the comforts he gave himself with the stolen money, he'll pay over and over and over again."

Carson felt it incumbent upon him to say something. "You got to pay for everything sooner or later," he philosophized.

"I wonder," said Harris.

IT was not a week later when he returned to the subject in a second conversation. Harris, it seemed, could not keep his thoughts away from it.

"McMurtrie was a fool," he proclaimed to the silent man who walked at his side, listening to his every word. "McMurtrie got nothing out of it, absolutely nothing!"

"McMurtrie?"

"I spoke of him last week. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes. The defaulter."

"The defaulter. He stole—in driblets. He took his comfort—in driblets. But he's not paying in driblets. He's paying just as heavily as if he had stolen ten times as much."

Still Carson did not see the drift. "Yes?" he ventured.

"He could have done so much better for himself if he had only put his mind on it, as he would have done with any matter of business. If it had been a question of buying a house—or a car—he would have thought it over for weeks, after deciding to do the thing itself, and he would have made no mistake. It was a question of stealing, so he decided the first question—whether to steal or not—and he decided no other. He didn't bother with details. He simply went ahead and stole. He stole a hundred, five hundred, a thousand at a time. He didn't think much about what was to come. He doctored his books, because that allowed him to keep on with his stealing, because that pushed the day of reckoning farther and farther off into the future. But it never occurred to him to lay his plans against that moment, to take steps which would protect him after they found out what he was doing with their money."

Carson's eyes narrowed. It needed no keen psychologist to hazard a guess upon what was in Harris' mind now; but Carson, acute thinker, was surprised that he had not foreseen still earlier. For Harris to be interested in the McMurtrie case was not unnatural; but for him to be so intensely interested was suggestive—highly suggestive.

HE risked a leading question. "You say that McMurtrie made a mistake. What should he have done?"

It was as long a speech as Carson ever permitted himself, and it brought a smile of condescending pleasure to the pink-and-white face of his companion.

"What should he have done?" echoed Harris. "I'll tell you. Having made up his mind to steal, he should not have stolen in driblets. That way there was nothing in it for him. A moment's comfort—a temporary relief—a fifty-dollar overcoat instead of one for forty dollars—no more. The game wasn't worth the candle. It was bound to cost too much in the end—any fool should have known that. Instead, McMurtrie should have settled on some large amount—an amount large enough to support him the rest of his life—and he should have stolen it at one time."

"How would that have helped? They would have caught him still sooner."

"What of it?"

"You mean that he should have reckoned on being caught?"

"Of course."

"What then?"

"He would have been arrested—tried—sentenced. He would have gone to prison for some years——"

"Some' years might be a great many."

"Not in this State. The legal maximum is ten—and there's time off for good behavior."

"They'd give him ten for the stealing itself; and they'd give him a string of other sentences for every false entry he made in the books," remarked Carson.

"So they would! So they would, indeed!" crowed Harris. "if he made false entries! But why make false entries? Why commit two crimes—or twenty crimes—when one is enough? Why commit the crime of stealing, and then commit the unnecessary crime of

trying to cover it up? Why risk two sentences—or twenty sentences? Why risk additional terms in prison for crimes which are of no earthly use?"

Again Carson's eyes narrowed. "How should he have done it?"

Harris grinned. "He should have stolen. He should have stolen all that he wanted at one time to make sure that he could not be tried for a whole series of thefts. He should have secreted the money—in bills small enough to pass without too much comment—in some safe place known only to himself. Then he should have given himself up.

"At the trial he should have told how he lost it all in speculation—that's happened before, you know. He should have refused to give details, to protect some innocent man—an innocent man, it goes without saying, who doesn't exist—but he would have been given the benefit of the doubt, and it might have made them more lenient with him."

"And then?"

"He couldn't have escaped prison. He would not have figured on that. He would have served his term. He would have been a model prisoner. He would be released at the earliest possible moment. And then——"

"Well?" encouraged Carson.

"At the proper time he would make his way to the spot where he had hidden the money. He would recover it. With it, he would go to some other country—Canada, Mexico, Europe. He would invest it safely, like some thrifty capitalist—and he would live like a lord on the income for the rest of his life."

Carson mulled over the matter. "An eight or ten-year term in prison; that wouldn't be pleasant."

"Why not, with a fortune waiting at the end of it?"

"Suppose," said Carson, "suppose the defaulter has a wife and children?"

It was a carefully aimed thrust, well directed, and well timed. It found its mark before Harris, exulting in the

thought of his cleverness, realized what a confession his answer would be.

"Suppose," Harris shot back, "suppose the man isn't even married?"

A third conversation, early in November, transformed Carson's suspicions into certainties, for upon that occasion Harris could not be induced to discuss the subject.

CHAPTER II.

A PERFECT PLAN.

AT a line drawn about a mile from the city, and in as orderly a fashion as if they were a regiment of foot soldiers assembled in parade formation, the thronging pines came to an end. Gazing south, the eye beheld nothing but their lofty trunks; gazing east or west, their battle front, straight as if laid down with a gigantic ruler, receded into the distance; but gazing north one discerned only a miscellaneous array of smaller trees—and not a single pine.

First came the hemlocks, black-barked, and, despite their height, dwarfed into insignificance by their loftier neighbors; then, struggling for each precious inch of soil, came the broad-leaved trees, the ashes and maples, the birches and pignuts and witch-hazels, with mountain laurel rioting along the ground, green in winter as in summer, flashing and glistening in the snow. And then, suddenly, the terrain became lumpy, uneven, precipitous and grew smaller trees.

Here and there a red cedar, firmly anchored to some deep-buried rock, bent its olive-green foliage to the February wind that came biting from the North; here and there a naked dogwood, lithe and ruddy-branched, shone through its icy incrustation; and here and there a limestone boulder, a great, snow-covered mass, its harsh lines softened by its frozen covering, rose through the ground like some gigantic swelling.

Beyond, and less than quarter of a

mile from the last pine, lay the cliffs and ledges, immense rugged shapes, heaped together in a jagged line from east to west as if flung down in play by some Titan's hand. Up a hundred and fifty feet and more they towered, crowned along their parapet with twisted trees and with rock-loving shrubs; and underneath, in thousands upon thousands of caves and nooks and crannies, in uncountable myriads of clefts and fissures in the rock, slept a large part of the forest's animal population.

The warm-blooded creatures chose more comfortable spots in which to hibernate—hollow logs, holes scooped out of the earth at the roots of trees, well-lined nests in the centers of decaying limbs; but here, in a place as bleak and forbidding as himself, he, the third one, coiling his black-and-sulphur-colored scales into a compact ball, waited until the coming of spring should call him back to consciousness. The fissure in which he lay in a pleasant torpor was hardly four feet long and less than six inches high, and he occupied only the farthest end of it, but from its orifice, heavy and unmistakable to the inhabitants of the wild, came a scent which made them hasten by without pausing.

He had spent a brief but profitable autumn. Small game, young frogs, half-grown rats and mice had been plentiful. He had captured the little he required with ease and, had he hunted longer, might have had more. But he had followed the customs of his kind, had retreated to the rocky ledges early in November, had sunned himself industriously during the brief span of Indian summer and, with the first touch of cold weather, had withdrawn altogether to his winter quarters in the rocky ledges.

The last leaves had turned yellow and had fallen; cold rains had brought colder snow in their train; thaws and

freezes had succeeded each other and ice had gathered thickly on groaning branches, while the timber rattlesnake, unconscious of it all, passed the time in sleep.

Life, however, had not ceased in the forest. Deer, searching anxiously for fodder, flashed through its depths like tawny ghosts; hares and rabbits scudded noiselessly over the crust of snow; the fur bearers, immune from cold in their lustrous coats, drew their crisscross of tracks along accustomed hunting trails. More than once Harris, who had taken to solitary rambles through the woods, had seen wild creatures fleeing before him. Intent upon other matters, he had hardly noticed them.

FOR reasons best known to himself, the assistant cashier had avoided Carson's society. For other equally good reasons, doubtless, he had purchased an expensive compass and a steel tape. For still other reasons, he had spent every Saturday afternoon and his whole time on Sundays marching back and forth on the beaten track through the forest—and upon another track known only to himself from the point at which the pines ended.

An observer, seeing him leave the well-marked road with a six-foot leap to one side which left no telltale tracks in the snow, would have been puzzled to account for his actions. He would have been still more puzzled to see Harris spending hours and hours threading and rethreading an intricate path through snow-covered shrubbery, along fallen logs, up and down, right and left, verifying every step and every change of direction very assiduously with tape and compass.

There was no apparent reason why a young man, apparently sane, should give up the ease of the broad trail for the hazards of exploration through virgin forest. Yet Harris, who took the most elaborate precautions to make sure

that there were no observers, knew exactly what he was doing.

He had reduced nothing to writing. What one man may write, another may read. It was essential to his plans to store the necessary facts in his memory, and nowhere else. From the last pine on his left hand, due west ninety-three feet to a sugar maple which he had blazed, thence north fifty-two feet through tangled underbrush to a young ash which he had blazed, west again eighty feet to a red cedar, and north again once more to a maple—thus his formula began, and thus it carried him through the quarter mile of riotous growth which lay between the pine forest and the cliffs.

He might have marked his entire path with blazes. He decided against it, because they would make it too easy for some other person to follow. He might have avoided blazes altogether, and he decided against that because the underbrush made his measurements doubtful at best, and because an error at any one point might throw him out fifty feet at the end. Blazes separated from each other by large distances, he reasoned quite correctly, conveyed information to himself alone. The combination of two methods—measurements as exact as they might be under the circumstances, and perhaps a dozen trees marked where they checked his results—seemed most practical.

He had traversed every tack of his zigzag way many scores of times before he had ventured to go farther. He had filled his mind with its details one by one, adding nothing until he was sure that he had memorized what he had already mapped out. Now he could recite the complicated directions which he dared not trust to paper. At least once every day he made it a point to do so. He could thread the twists and mazes of his path with certainty and with assurance, and no other person, he knew, could imitate him.

HE emerged from the outskirts of the forest at a drear and craggy spot. At his right, a red cedar, at his left, a white elm, long-lived trees, both of them, would mark the location for many years to come. Far to the east, out of sight, and on the other side of an all-but-impassable chasm, the traveled road dwindled to a narrow path, turned sharply to the right, became still narrower and wandered on. To the west, nothing broke the irregular line of underbrush. And in front of him, stretching for miles in either direction, and dotted with hiding places innumerable, lay the rocky ledges toward which he had set his course.

Harris smiled as he gazed, and as he reviewed his plans. Even if one knew that some object of great value was secreted hereabouts, the chances of one's finding it, without specific directions, were infinitesimal. Hardly a crag, hardly a ledge, hardly a tumbled mass of limestone that did not offer three or four places of concealment. To search them all would be the work of a lifetime; and even the most careful searcher would miss many of them.

He bent over the azimuth circle of his compass, adjusted it to a bearing known only to himself, sighted over it carefully, picked out one definite cranny from among the thousands of others and, keeping his eyes on it so that he would not lose it, made his way over the ice-coated boulders until he reached the fissure he had chosen.

Its opening was irregular, and little over eight inches in diameter. It was shallow, and a pile of leaves had accumulated on its floor. But the feature which had recommended it to Harris most of all was the fact that its roof sloped sharply upward as it receded from the opening. A searcher, he reflected, as he applauded himself for his cleverness, might investigate the floor, the pile of leaves, the sides; might even run an exploratory hand to the full

depth of the recess. But it would occur to no one that the object which was to be concealed here would be firmly cemented to the ceiling, protected as well against the weather as against observation and examination.

He turned over a flat rock at his feet. All was in readiness—a sufficient quantity of cement, a trowel, even a stick, carefully cut to the correct length, and sharpened at both ends so that it might be wedged from side to side beneath the valuable object, holding it in position until the cement hardened. At the proper time he would bring a canteen of water, strapped to his body under his clothing, where it would not freeze.

He shook the cement in its container to make sure that it was dry; he had been at pains to select a water-tight box in which he would be able to mix the small batch he needed. Then he covered up his materials carefully, made his way to the spot where his compass waited and, for the time being, secreted it as well. He could retrace his route without its help; he would need it only once more in the immediate future.

IT would have been simple, Harris reflected as he buttoned his coat more tightly, to have chosen a cache fifty feet up from the ground, somewhere in the tumbled mountain of rocks. It would have been too simple, for its interior would have been on a level with the eye of a chance climber, and a single glimpse might have encouraged investigation. It was not so simple to select a nook located only a foot or two above ground level, into whose recesses no human eye would ever peer. It was not so simple, but it was safe.

For some time he had considered the advisability of walling up the orifice of his cache, but he had decided against it. It would not be difficult to roll a boulder against the opening, but it would be dangerous. Heat and cold, alternate thaw and frost, might accomplish un-

pleasant wonders, might pile a wall of rock against his seal, or might, given the help of a suitable anvil, grind the cache itself, top, bottom and walls, into impalpable powder. It was best not to interfere with nature's arrangements.

He lit a cigarette as he plunged confidently into the snowy forest. His own tracks were still visible in it, and he might have followed them had it been necessary; but he was so sure of his way that he refrained, purposely, from glancing at the ground. The blazed trees guided him—and he had been careful to avoid choosing any short-lived ones for his landmarks. He picked up those he had chosen with the greatest certainty—ashes, maples, a single pin oak, then a maple, a cedar, an ash, a sugar maple. A six-foot leap, and he was on the beaten track again.

He smiled his satisfaction as he noted that the snow was unbroken save for his own footprints; the wind was too cold, the forest too cheerless, to tempt others to wander in it. Yet he took a final precaution, and tramped several hundred yards farther in a direction away from the city before turning around and setting his course for it.

Unlikely as it was, some hardy nature lover, some enterprising soul whom the weather could not discourage, might follow the prints Harris had made and which he could not erase. If so, he would note where they came to an end, and curiosity might lead him to investigate. It was improbable, but possible, that such a person, casting about from side to side, might pick up the second line of prints, leading from a spot six feet from the beaten track straight to the cache Harris had chosen. Then there might be a catastrophe, for the searcher might return to the cache a second time. Methodically Harris eliminated all chance of such a happening by prolonging his tracks to a point hundreds of yards distant from the secret trail.

He tramped back in high spirits, listening happily to the crunch of snow under his boots, and with his pink-and-white face even more pink and white than usual. The exercise and the cold weather had sent the blood tingling through his veins, and the thought of the astuteness with which he had laid his plans had sent a cheery glow of self-approbation through his entire being. He had been clever—and he was fully aware of it.

He followed the paved streets to his boarding house, to find Carson, wrapped to his ears in a fur overcoat, waiting for him on the steps. It was the one unpleasant feature of an otherwise perfect day, and the assistant bank cashier found it difficult to conceal his annoyance.

"What do you want?" he challenged gruffly. He did not voice a single phrase of greeting.

Carson peered keenly into his eyes. "Thought I'd stop around to pay a little call on you. I haven't seen much of you lately."

The friendly overture could not move Harris.

"Sorry," he said, "you picked a bad time to-day. I'm over my head in work and——"

"Work? Here? At home? On Sunday?"

"I work wherever I am," snapped Harris, "and all days are alike to me." Once it had appeared advantageous to make a friend of Carson; now it no longer mattered. He found his latch-key, opened the door of the house and let himself in. "Too bad I can't invite you up to my room," he said ungraciously, "some other time, maybe." Then, without another word, he closed the door in Carson's face.

Left alone, it would not have been illogical for Carson to have exhibited signs of anger at the discourteous treatment he had received, to have shown, by some change of his expres-

sion, that he resented the affront. Harris was much his junior, and should have managed some show of respect.

But if Carson was vexed, he dissimulated admirably—either that, or he was not vexed at all—for the vestige of a smile actually flickered on his thin lips as he descended the short flight of steps and made his way into the street. His eyes gleamed; his hands, enveloped in heavy gloves, clenched triumphantly. According to his way of thinking, everything had been most satisfactory.

Accustomed to look deeply and suspiciously into men's motives, he had divined what was in Harris' thoughts even before Harris himself had realized it. It was no part of Carson's program to acquaint Harris with that fact.

HE had followed the workings of the younger man's mind from the moment that the seed had taken root in it. He had seen the insidious germ grow from a haphazard thought to a well-developed plan. He had assured himself that that had actually taken place by maintaining a deliberately casual contact with the bank official. The briefness of the present interview, Harris' evident avoidance of Carson's company, and the long, lonely tramps he was taking in the woods could mean only one thing; and Carson read and interpreted the symptoms as accurately as if they had been signed confessions.

His suspicions once aroused, he had kept a discreet watch upon his whilom friend. He had seen him enter a hardware store and purchase a steel tape; upon another occasion he had seen him purchase a trowel; he had observed that he had outfitted himself with waterproof shoes, reaching almost to the knees. A dozen times, trailing him far to the rear, he had watched Harris disappear into the forest.

Carson had reached conclusions, and they were entirely correct conclusions. Harris might keep silence if he wished;

his actions spoke so loudly that Carson longed to be able to follow him to the cache he was so evidently preparing. He did not dare to do so for the reason that his tracks in the snow would inevitably betray him, and that Harris, once frightened, might abandon his plans. That possibility Carson proposed to avoid.

If Harris actually committed the crime he was planning, Carson would benefit by it in one way or another. Carson could lose only if Harris gave up the attempt. And it was better to forgo exact information for the time being than to chance any step which might, in some way, alarm the assistant cashier.

Carson walked home ruminating contentedly. By blackmail of various kinds he had profited many times in the past. But all of those profits, rolled together, would be less than the amount that Harris, masterfully handled, might be expected to yield him. Carson himself would take no risk. Harris, acting as the cat's-paw, would not only encounter every danger single-handed, but might be depended upon to work out the details competently without help. If he failed, he failed alone. If he succeeded, Carson would be the chief winner.

Most decidedly Harris was a melon worth the cutting. A little patience, a little tact, a little shrewdness—and Carson had plenty of each—and pleasing results might be looked for. It was almost too good to be true, and Carson nodded in grim anticipation as he threaded his way through the streets.

This happened on Sunday. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were clear, with not a cloud to mark the brilliant sky. On Thursday afternoon Harris, watching anxiously, saw the first signs of an approaching storm. The newspapers had already reported snowfall in States farther west. Friday, the sky was overcast, and a high wind began to drive through the streets. It was

not until Saturday, however, that the first huge flakes began to fall.

Harris, looking out of the windows of the bank, chuckled. His luck could not have been better. The storm had come at the precise moment when it would be most useful.

He had completed his plans. He carried them into execution without a hitch. At noon, when the vaults closed, he substituted a previously prepared parcel for a package which he knew to contain nearly two hundred thousand dollars in notes. He slipped it under his overcoat and into a pocket that had been made ready for it, walked casually into the street with the other employees of the bank, and proceeded directly to his home.

Once in the privacy of his room, other details were attended to as expeditiously as thoroughness permitted. It would have been possible to place the money in a large glass jar, made watertight by a screw cap, or in a metallic container, hermetically closed with solder. Harris had decided against these long ago, for the sufficient reason that any rigid container might be crushed and broken open by a fall of rock, exposing its contents to the destructive action of the weather. Were that to occur, the bank notes would be nothing but a malodorous pulp when he returned to his cache at some time in the distant future.

Having foreseen, he had prepared a container which would yield, if necessary, without exposing the treasure packed in it. The notes, carefully flattened out, were wrapped first in oilskin, and that rendered waterproof by a liberal application of molten paraffin. Next came a layer of heavy tin foil—it would discourage insects, if by any chance they penetrated so far—and then one of dental rubber, sealed in its turn with a suitable cement. Next came a second wrapping of oilskin, paraffin-sealed like the first, and over all, as a

final protection, came an envelope of heavy tarpaulin, tightly closed with waterproof glue.

During these operations the parcel had increased considerably in size. Harris, however, had made correct allowances, and it was accommodated neatly in a pocket of the shaggy coat which he wore on his expeditions into the forest. Another pocket swallowed up what was left over of his materials. There was no need for surplus oilskins, rubber, or tin foil to be found in his room, to give evidence against him at the time of the trial.

He had hidden a canteen under the washstand. He filled it, corked it, and strapped it about his waist, next to his underwear. The heat of his body would keep the water warm until he needed it.

He concluded his preparations without hurrying. He was not excited, and he was pleased to find that he was not. But he had rehearsed the performance so frequently that there was no element of novelty left in it—save only the presence of the actual money. He reflected, not without amusement, as he drew on his heavy boots, that there would have been thrill to spare for another man in the possession of nearly a fifth of a million dollars in lawful currency. For him, accustomed for years to handling bank notes as casually as if they were blank paper, there was no thrill at all.

CARSON, safely concealed, saw Harris enter the forest, and itched to leap to his feet as he passed his hiding place, to thrust a revolver into his pink-and-white face and to search him. On some one of his many trips, Harris would be carrying a fortune with him. It might well be this trip—the thickly falling snow would obliterate footprints quickly, and Harris would doubtless choose such a time—and Carson might possess himself of the treasure in the twinkling of an eye. But Harris, as so often before, might be empty-handed,

and if searched once would give Carson no opportunity to search him a second time.

In an agony of indecision Carson saw Harris approach—saw him pass—saw him enter the forest—and made no move.

"If I only knew!" he breathed, "if I only knew! But I don't—and I can't take the chance."

He had hoped that there would be something in the assistant cashier's gait—in his face—in his manner—that would enable him to call the turn, to say positively that the loot was in his possession. But Harris had not hurried, had smoked a cigarette as unconcernedly as ever, had not even glanced back to see whether he was being followed.

On Monday, when Harris was arrested, Carson knew that he had played his first card, and that it had lost. Opportunity had been near—very near—and he had allowed it to pass him by. He might have stretched forth his hand and seized a fortune. He had not done so.

He cursed himself for his timidity. Somewhere in the open, somewhere in a radius of less than a mile, a treasure was hidden. But Carson respected the assistant cashier's cunning sufficiently to dismiss the thought of searching for it. Harris had had months to select a cache, and the snowstorm had blotted out his tracks to and from it. Carson knew that the booty would be so well concealed that only Harris himself would be able to find it.

He waited ten days, and then he played his second card. He sent Somers, his trusty lieutenant, to visit Harris in the cell in which he was awaiting trial.

"I've been sent here by a friend of yours," Somers introduced himself.

"Yes?" said Harris coldly.

Somers nodded gravely. "It's your friends that don't forget you when you're in trouble; it's your friends that

show they're real friends when trouble comes."

Harris waited for him to continue.

"You're a lucky man, brother," Somers assured him. "There's others that have done what you done—others that ain't had no friends to help 'em—and they got what was coming to 'em, they did!" He lowered his voice. "Brother, I come here to tell you that they're fixing it to send you up for the limit; they're fixing it to make an example out of you."

Harris was not perturbed. Under the State law, he could not possibly be imprisoned for more than ten years. With time off for good behavior, he would be free long before then. He was prepared for the worst and fully aware of what that worst might be. Moreover, there was something about his visitor's face which inspired the reverse of confidence.

"Who sent you here?" Harris demanded.

Somers raised a deprecating hand. "Let's keep names out of it."

"Who sent you here?" Harris reiterated. "Was it—Carson?"

"It don't matter who sent me, does it, brother? I'm your friend—and the man that sent me is your friend, too."

"Was it Carson?" Harris persisted.

"Let's say, for the sake of argument, that it was Mr. Carson."

Harris smiled. The "mister" was a dead give-away. He prepared to enjoy the interview.

"What's the proposition? Come down to brass tacks."

Somers rubbed his hands. "That's the right spirit, brother. If your friends want to help you, let 'em help you. If they want to make you a present of something, why, take it!"

Again Harris waited. A benignant expression oozed over the countenance of his visitor—like spilled molasses spreading over a dirty floor.

"You go to trial in a week, don't you?"

Well, did it ever strike you that a lot could be done between now and then?"

"For instance?"

"A good lawyer could prove that you didn't know what you was doing when you took the money. That would help, wouldn't it? We could get a couple of fellows on the jury who like your looks, and who'd keep on voting 'not guilty' till the crack of doom. That would help, too, wouldn't it? And suppose—just suppose—your friend got hold of the judge who's going to try you, and whispered a few words in his ear! It's been done before, brother."

Harris concealed his amusement. Uppermost in his mind was surprise that any one should expect him to rise to such bait. But he found it entertaining to lead his caller on.

"A good lawyer—a hung jury—and a friendly judge," he checked off. "Do you think it could really be done?"

"Surest thing you know!"

"What will it cost me?"

Somers looked pained. "Your friend wouldn't take a cent if he had money enough of his own to pay the bills. That's how good a friend he is to you. He was saying to me only this morning that he'd like nothing better than to pay it all out of his own pocket. But he ain't got it, and a lawyer, a jury, and a judge—they come high."

"How high?"

"No matter how high, it's worth it. You'll get off scot-free."

"How high?"

Somers grinned temptingly. "It would be a lot of money to another fellow, but it ain't much to you. Why, it's hardly more than half of what you got away with! A hundred thousand would do it."

"Where am I going to get a hundred thousand?"

"You got it put away some place, ain't you? I know! You're a cute one!"

"How do I get out of here to get it?"

"They'll let you out on bail."

"Yes—quarter of a million."

"It could be arranged."

A light broke upon Harris. The anonymous friend who balked at a hundred thousand could nevertheless raise the huge sum required to guarantee his presence at the trial. Harris would be released, would be transferred from the safe custody of the jail to the exceedingly menacing custody of his friend—and of the other friends who had clubbed in with him.

Harris had an excellent imagination, and it reeled at the thought of what might happen to him if he accepted the offer. He would be requested to disclose the location of his cache. He would refuse. The request would be made again, and it would be accompanied by blows, by the infliction of physical pain, by the use of every instrument of torture which the ingenuity of his "friend" could devise.

Under such persuasion Harris would eventually give in, and his captors, even if they could not make off with the loot, could legally claim the munificent reward which the bank had offered for the return of the money.

As if in a vision, he saw the unlovely visage of his caller bending over him, glaring into his eyes, wrenching the information that he wished out of his torn and quivering flesh. Harris placed his hand on the stone wall of his cell with a sigh of relief.

"What do you say, brother?" Somers inquired.

Harris smiled. "Are you going to see my friend?" he inquired.

"Inside of ten minutes," Somers assured him.

"Well," said Harris, and his lips lingered lovingly over the words, "you tell him to go straight to the devil!"

This took place in February. Early in March, Harris was brought to trial, pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to ten years in State's prison.

Among the dozen people who saw him board the train, securely shackled to a sheriff, was Carson. Harris discerned him, and deliberately lowered his left eyelid in a wink.

CHAPTER III.

OUT—AT LAST!

IT is the popular belief that the age of a rattlesnake may be determined by allowing a year for each segment of the rattle. As so often, popular belief is wrong.

The newly born snake commences life with a single soft button on the end of its tail, a button which hardens rapidly after the first skin is shed, but with which no sound can be made. At the age of two months the snake sheds its skin a second time, and the first true ring, or segment, is uncovered. It is now able to produce a faint, buzzing sound. It hibernates over the winter, and thereafter sheds its skin every spring, summer and fall, adding a new button with each slough, a process which continues through the rest of its life.

It follows, therefore, that the usual one-year-old rattle will consist of a terminal button and four rings, that a two-year-old rattle will have seven rings, and that rings, at the rate of three a year, will be added to the snake's remarkable appendage. A dozen rings will mark a four-year-old specimen—not a veteran of twelve years.

Almost invariably the rattle will be broken, and the terminal button, accompanied by one or more rings, will be lost. But the rattle will continue to grow, adding three rings a year, even though it indicates the age of its possessor only by the size of its segments.

Sometimes the rattle will be unusual in character, diminishing in diameter toward its base as a result of some event which has caused a protracted scarcity of food. Such an event occurred dur-

ing the late fall less than three years after Harris had been sent to prison.

It began, as nearly all such catastrophes begin, with human carelessness. Some person, identity unknown, threw away a burning cigarette butt while walking through the woods, thought nothing of it and continued on his way.

But the cigarette, falling into a mass of dry leaves, communicated its fire to the nearest. The leaf smoldered and went out—but a second leaf caught, smoldered, and passed along its slow combustion to the others. For many minutes, while a child might have extinguished the fire, thin, searching lines of dull, glowing red and yellow ran through the mass in many directions, and an acrid smoke began to ascend.

Then suddenly the leaves were ablaze, and the fire began to spread at a hundred times the rate. The floor of the woods was thick with many years' accumulation of leaf mold, rotted twigs, decayed and insect-eaten branches. The fire swept over their surface at the speed of a slow walk, gradually marking a larger and larger circle on the ground. Underbrush was consumed with a single hiss. Larger bushes began to blaze. Dead leaves, clinging to the limbs of an occasional oak, caught the conflagration and, like huge lighters, began to lift the flame into the treetops.

Presently the fire was spreading more rapidly, radiating its intense heat before it, drying out and scorching its fuel preparatory to attacking it. It began to leap small obstacles, to run swiftly in the irregular lines that the driest wood marked out, to hurdle along rotted logs with six and eight-foot leaps. It began to hiss and to crackle, and living trees which had hitherto resisted it began to steam and smoke as the savage heat licked at their bark. Heaps of moldering leaves vanished with an incandescent puff.

The fire had started slowly, radiating from leaf to leaf, a weak, puny thing;

but it had become a devouring monster when it came to the line where the deciduous trees ended. With a roar it plunged from the maples and the birches, the ashes and the hickories, into the richer feast spread for it by the towering pines. Their needles sputtered into coruscating flames which seethed from branch to branch, nearly keeping pace with the billows of fire that rolled hungrily along the ground. Their great trunks oozed fiery, resinous rivers which hurtled downward in awful cataracts to meet the sea of flame at their roots. A dense, black cloud, lit by red-and-yellow flashes, rolled upward toward the heavens.

Tree after tree succumbed to the white-hot inferno which roared about it, resisting first, then resisting no longer, but becoming itself a living torch, never more majestic than in the moment of its surrender, and in countless hollow logs, in innumerable decayed branches, in myriads of holes scooped out of the yielding earth and in the leaf mold, a whole world of animate things, insects and four-footed creatures, passed so quickly from one sleep to another that they hardly felt the pain of the fire which consumed them.

ONLY the rock dwellers, the cold-blooded animals which lived in crevices and fissures and caves in the limestone, escaped the holocaust. The fire marched to the edge of the woods, leaped out to seize the nearest cedars that grew among the boulders, leaped up to grasp an occasional shrub that thrust its branches too far from the rocks, and marched no farther.

It stopped at the north just as it presently stopped on its other fronts—when its fuel came to an end. Before that happened hundreds of sweat-and-smoke-begrimed men had fought it for days and for weeks, opposing their feeble efforts to its limitless strength. They had felled trees in its path; they

had started back fires; they had dug ditches.

Their efforts had had little effect. Some standing timber—ash and hemlock—had been saved; but when the fire was sated, every tree in an area more than a mile wide and several miles long had gone to feed it; and the pine forest, which had been one of the glories of the region since time immemorial, was a thing of the past. In their wake the flames left only smoking ashes, huge, charred logs, ready to crumble to pieces at a touch, baked and cracked earth, desolate and cheerless ruin.

The following spring and summer the timber rattlesnake found that game was scarce. Insect larvæ, by the billions of billions, had perished and, without them, there were no birds to feed on them. The dead hickories bore no nuts; there were no squirrels to store them away in their nests. The tender roots which might have nourished the field mice had been baked and rotted away—and the field mice, themselves, had been exterminated.

Even frogs and toads were rare. Without an abundance of their accustomed insect food, they could not multiply rapidly—and in the charred and blackened area there was nothing to attract insects. The wise balance of nature had been upset, and as a result everything suffered.

The forest was dead and nearly uninhabited. Its soft and yielding floor, the accumulation of ages, had been stripped away, and instead there was calcined earth; no tree, worthy of the name of tree, remained standing; and when the wind whistled through the desolate waste, it carried ashes—not leaves—before it. And when the spring freshets came, they carved paths for themselves through the ground that the trees had protected against their inroads for centuries; and old paths ceased to exist, and new paths came into being.

Only the ledges had escaped destruction; but that fall the snake moved from the fissure in which he had hibernated, and which was all but choked with débris that had fallen when bushes higher up on the cliffs had been consumed, into a larger fissure—a fissure with an irregular orifice, little over eight inches in diameter.

HIS new home was shallow, and the leaves on the floor had escaped the devastation. He was comfortable, sheltered against wind and weather; and when he wished, he might glide out to sun himself on a near-by flat rock. He was not particularly concerned with the fact that the roof of his den sloped sharply upward as it receded from the opening, nor with the other fact that a heavy tarpaulin envelope was wedged against it, supported by a stick sharpened at either end.

But he was greatly concerned with the scarcity of food, for he had reached maturity and a length of four feet, and required greater quantities than before. The shrunken rings which he added to his rattle that year showed how often he had met disappointment on the hunt.

The pine forest was gone—gone certainly for a hundred years, gone perhaps forever—but other trees, more quickly growing, came presently to seize upon the burned-over area. The tons of wood ashes had enriched the soil, and before the summer was over a rank underbrush was fighting with grass for dominion over it. Then came the trees, battling with the shrubbery, second-growth hickory, elm, maple and ash, and great multitudes of young birches, thriving in abundance where they had never before been able to maintain a foothold. Locust came, too, and witch-hazel and sumach, and in three years the denuded oblong was thick with growth.

The humans in the near-by city took note, wandered through the regenerat-

ing forest, and new trails began to mark themselves out. Spring freshets had determined their lines. Human feet, following the path of least resistance, accentuated them.

With the passing of the years, vigorous maples began to crowd out the birches; elms, growing with great rapidity from the root systems which the fire had left, began to demand a place in the sun; and in the spring a great variety of wildflowers, bloodroot, anemones, violets, columbine, thronged where once the empire of white pine had barred them out. And the timber rattlesnake passing his seventh year and the six-foot mark, began to find game as abundant as in the days of his far-off youth.

IT was then that the doors of the prison opened; what was left of Harris came out. His face had been pink and white when he entered; there was only white in it when he emerged. His muscles had always been flabby; years of prison routine, during which he had served as a bookkeeper, had done nothing to improve them. On the contrary, they had softened still more, had dwindled, had degenerated into pulp.

He had never been an athlete, but he had always been able to carry his weight gracefully. Now that ability had departed, and the weight itself had diminished. It did not need the testimony of the scales to inform him that he had lost twenty pounds. And he was greatly annoyed by a hacking cough which had persisted for months.

In making up his mind that the fortune which awaited his release was worth a long period of incarceration, Harris had overlooked one detail—the fact that his punishment would take not only the best years of his life, but would send him back to the world a broken man, a mere shadow of his former self. Yet he assured himself as he boarded the train that a few years of careful

attention to his health would make him sound and whole again. From now on he would always be well supplied with money—and with money one might purchase anything.

The streets of his home town, when he passed through them, stabbed him with their familiarity. Small buildings had given way to large ones, but old landmarks remained, and the First National Bank, solid as the day that it weathered the storm his defalcation had brought upon it, still occupied the choicest corner in town.

He glanced curiously through the windows; his former assistant would doubtless be seated at the desk which had once been his own. A strange face greeted him. He tried to place it, but could not. And it was with a shock that he identified the features of the prosperous-looking individual who sat at the vice president's desk with those of his former assistant. The man had risen far and rapidly. If Harris had remained, he himself might have risen still farther. The jam which had kept him from promotion had evidently broken suddenly.

These thoughts flickered through the defaulter's mind as, for an instant, he peered through the windows. Had he held on only a little while longer, he might have achieved his ambitions, might have been a man of property and position to-day, respected by his neighbors, instead being a pariah, slinking through the town, with his hat pulled well down over his eyes lest he be recognized.

But he concentrated upon another and a more agreeable thought—the treasure that awaited him on the other side of the forest. As rapidly as he could, he shuffled through the streets—there seemed to be more of them than there had been when he saw them last—and set his feet on the familiar trail toward the pines.

In his pocket he carried a compass

and a steel tape; and in his head he carried the complicated directions which would guide him to his cache. From the last pine on the left, due west ninety-three feet to a sugar maple; thence north fifty-two feet to an ash; west again eighty feet to a red cedar, and north again once more to a maple; he was letter-perfect.

He was conscious, presently, that the pines were farther away than they once had been. For some minutes he had been following a winding path through thickly grown maples and birches, witch-hazel and sumach. He could not recall ever having threaded it before. He plunged on more rapidly, quite unaware that at a distance of two hundred feet a sinister individual followed his every move.

The empire of the pines had commenced barely an eighth of a mile from the last paved street. He should be among them now. He gazed to right and left. Trees, trees everywhere, lusty birches, slender maples, slim ashes, saplings all of them—and not a pine in sight. He glanced down at his feet. The familiar carpet of pine needles was missing; instead, his hands, when he bent over and clutched at the ground incredulously, were filled with moldering leaves.

A great log, to one side of the path, riveted his attention. It was charred unmercifully, yet Harris knew that only one kind of tree, in that region, could have provided so massive, so straight a shaft. He knelt over it, scraped away the carbonized wood with his knife. It was what he had dreaded to find—white pine.

AN icy hand clutched at his heart as he tottered to his feet, and the realization of the awful truth came upon him. "From the last pine on the left, due west ninety-three feet." That landmark, the first of the many he had chosen, was gone forever. The zigzag

path he had marked out for himself no longer had a starting point. Yet the fire might have spared some of the trees which he had blazed. In the hope he staggered on. And two hundred feet in the rear, a sinister figure followed him step for step, keeping well out of sight.

He must have traveled a second half mile before the full extent of the disaster became apparent to him. His eye could glance in any direction, and not discern a single tree which was more than five years old. His landmarks had perished—every one of them. He had chosen long-lived trees. They were sprouting from the stump, many of them. But the blazes which had identified them were gone forever.

In a panic, he seated himself on a stump and reflected. What a fool he had been! With an equal amount of effort, he might have selected stones and boulders for his landmarks, might have chosen objects which not even the unforeseen fire could destroy. With his head bowed in his hands, and his heart beating rapidly, he pondered. How might he reconstruct his route?

When first he had laid it out, he had made his way through a virgin forest, but through a forest in which thousands of large trees had choked out the smaller ones, and had made progress not too difficult. Now a million small trees of the same age struggled with each other for a footing.

In time to come, there would be the survival of the fittest. In time to come, the victors would crowd the vanquished to the wall, and there would be easy passage beneath the survivors. But for the present the riotous growth constituted a formidable barrier—and a barrier through which exact measurements and compass bearings would be out of the question.

Harris was a clever man, and it struck him at length that since all of his directions had been either north or

west, he might tabulate them and, instead of attempting to traverse a zig-zag, might travel the entire northerly distance and then the entire westerly distance. The possibility of error would be smaller.

With paper and pencil he made careful calculations. And while he jotted down distances and added them up, Carson, well out of sight in the rear, waited for him to continue.

If he could have located his starting point with exactness, Harris might have reached the general neighborhood of his goal with certainty. This, however, he could not do. It was possible to say that pines had once grown in one area, and that they had not grown in another; it was possible to separate these areas from each other roughly; but to draw an accurate dividing line, and to identify the spot at which the no-longer-existent path had intersected it long ago, was beyond human power.

His tape was useless. He found it easier to assume that a stride through the brush measured something under three feet, and to count their number. It was not easy travel. Continuous progress in a straight line was impossible, and branches lashed his face incessantly as if they resented his invasion. At no time could he see more than a few yards ahead.

When last he had visited the ledges, he had rejoiced in the fact that an all-but-impassable chasm had lain between them and the main trail. The chasm still existed, he found, sheer and precipitous as ever, when to his dismay he emerged on its brink—and on the wrong side of it. He realized his mistake instantly; he should have traversed the westerly distance, and not the northerly distance first. He had forgotten that there was a chasm.

He gazed down and gazed back. He had the choice of two evils—retracing a large part of his path, and plunging into the barrier of underbrush in a new

direction, or attempting boldly to cross the chasm at once.

Had time been plentiful, he would doubtless have adopted the more prudent course; but he realized, as he glanced at his watch, that he had already used up too many precious minutes. And after waiting so many weary years, further delay was intolerable. He strapped his compass to his belt—where it was broken by a falling rock almost immediately—buttoned up his coat tightly and, clinging to bushes and small trees, made his way, a perilous forty feet to the bottom. A shower of stones accompanied him.

In cold blood, at another time, he could never have accomplished the descent. The mere thought would have made him dizzy. But he could not be so near his goal and draw back. It mattered not at all what hardships were to be encountered. They meant less to him than the terrible uncertainty that would not be relieved until he found the cache intact.

He clambered up the far side of the chasm, ducking his head to avoid an incessant shower of gravel, pressing himself closely to the wall so that the larger rocks which he dislodged would tumble harmlessly over him. He made the top, paused only an instant to recover his wind, and hurried westward along the edge of the woods. His face was covered with welts where branches had whipped him; his hands were dripping crimson and the finger nails were broken, but he had reached the open at last, and could move more rapidly.

CHAPTER IV.

BITS OF PAPER.

FROM his concealment in the shrubbery, Carson had watched—had watched and had wondered. He had given Harris credit for care in the selection of a hiding place for his loot; he had not credited him for care of such

a degree. It was annoying that the path should be so difficult, but where one man had gone, another and a more athletic one might follow. Carson waited until Harris had passed out of sight. Then he began the precipitous descent.

When Harris had first located his cache, he had particularly noted that he emerged from the woods with a red cedar on his right hand and a white elm on his left. From that point he had sighted toward the ledges. As he now approached the same spot, he observed elms in abundance, tall saplings growing from the stumps of older trees which the fire had consumed; but apart from a handful of specimens growing near the ledges, the cedars had been wiped out. Lacking the ability to sprout from the stump, one of his landmarks had vanished. The fact that the other was probably represented by a sturdy young tree helped him not at all. Without the conjunction of the two, it could not be identified.

With no starting point, with no blazed trees to guide him, Harris had fought his way near, very near to his goal. It remained only to set up his compass at the proper spot, to sight over it to the ledges and to claim his reward. But the proper spot might be any of a thousand; and the compass, he found when he examined it, was wrecked beyond repair.

He looked up toward the ledges. He had dreamed about them countless nights. He had visioned them in every kind of weather, dotted with green shrubbery in summer, covered with snow and ice in winter. He had seen himself completing the final lap of his journey, straight to the recess in which was secreted a fortune sufficient to support him all the rest of his life. It was brought home to him now that he had hidden the treasure so excellently well that neither he nor anybody else might ever be able to find it again.

The realization swept over him like

a wave of nausea, and left him staggering. And it was then that a miracle came to pass. While Harris stumbled on in an agony of disappointment, with a mind filled with a turmoil of vain regrets, his feet, which had so often found the path before, found it again unguided, carrying him straight as light to his destination.

He was conscious, presently, that he could go no farther without climbing. He stopped. He gazed stupidly about him. His eyes fell upon a familiar fissure in the rocks, a fissure with an irregular opening a little over eight inches in diameter. On the ground, at his feet, he identified the flat rock he had placed there so many years ago.

Harris did not scent the heavy, metallic odor which hung about the place, and which would have driven any animal away in a frenzy of terror, nor did his eyes, blinded by the brilliant sun, discern another pair of eyes, awful, fixed, unwinking, blazing into his from the dark interior of the recess. He knew only that he had reached his goal, and that his quest was at an end.

IT was then that lean, muscular arms closed about the defaulter's neck, that long, merciless fingers began to compress his throat, shutting off his wind. Unheard, unscen, Carson had followed.

Harris struggled in the agonizing grip that had fastened upon his throat. He flailed wildly with his arms, writhed, attempted to free himself. His strength, sapped by years of confinement, was as nothing to the strength of the man who was strangling him. His eyes began to protrude; his tongue began to hang out of his mouth.

Not until Harris was about to become unconscious did Carson relax the pressure. He gazed at the gasping figure at his feet, smiled, rubbed his hands.

"How de do, Mister Harris?" he greeted. Then he squatted at his side. "Didn't expect to meet me here? Too

bad! Too bad! You remember me, don't you? Yes, I thought you did."

He paused while Harris drew great gusts of air into his bursting lungs.

"By and by, Harris, I'm going to ask you a question. When I ask you that question, I want an answer. See?"

His hands leaped down and seized the felon's throat a second time. "We'll have our little unpleasantness first." Carson remarked, as his fingers tightened again, "then there won't be any argument; no, no argument at all. You'll know that I mean business." His grasp tightened still more. "Any way you look at it, I owe you this."

He released Harris just before merciful insensibility would have drawn a curtain.

"You're not strong," Carson commented; "no, not strong at all. I've whipped men that could lick three of you. But you've made me wait a long time, Harris, a long time."

He smiled into the thief's bloodshot eyes, into his contorted face.

"Very soon now I'm going to ask you that question—just one question. Will you try to remember that I want an answer?—a quick answer?—a truthful answer?"

He waited until his victim's frantic breathing had become more regular, and then, for a third time, while the unfortunate man struggled feebly, his fingers fastened upon him. "An answer, Harris," murmured Carson, and his grip tightened savagely, "a quick answer—a truthful answer."

He flung Harris aside at length, a thing with shattered nerves and bursting lungs, that sobbed and gasped and made strange sounds.

"Now, Harris, where's the money?"

A thousand times Harris had resolved that he would sooner die than answer that question. But every instinct of self-preservation in him revolted as Carson's hands again neared his throat.

"Where's the money?" Carson demanded.

"There!" gasped Harris.

"Where?"

Trembling all over, the thief pointed. "There," he said.

Carson's glance followed his quivering finger. The sheen of the tarpaulin caught his eye. He leered his satisfaction.

"You've been a good little boy, Harris," he said, and patted the quivering wreck of a man on the head. "Teacher doesn't want you any more. You can run along now."

A smile curled on his lips as his victim rose to his knees, to his feet, stumbled feebly away over the rocks. His patience had had its reward. For years he had foreseen the opportunity. It had come.

HE waited until Harris had tottered out of sight. Then he put his arm into the cranny.

Came a *whirrr!*—a whir like that of an alarm clock without a bell, only louder, more abrupt if possible, possessing a quality all its own, a quality indescribably terrifying. Almost simultaneous with the whir, from somewhere in the dark recess, came the lightning-like stroke of a flat, triangular head, jaws opened wide as a pair of inch-long fangs buried themselves in the soft flesh between Carson's thumb and fingers.

The great snake, a six-foot coil of muscle, had lain motionless until an arm had actually entered its retreat. If it had been possible to avoid an encounter, it would have done so. That being impossible, it had given an instant's warning, and had struck.

Carson jerked his arm back, trembling in every limb, unaware that his cuff had caught a narrow stick wedged across the opening, had dislodged it, and had brought a heavy tarpaulin envelope tumbling to his feet. Harris had indeed cemented it to the roof of

the fissure; he had not allowed for the weather; the cement had frozen, had never set.

But Carson, for one of the rare times in his life, was not thinking about money at the moment. A nameless horror shone in his eyes as he looked at his hand. Between the thumb and the index finger gaped two punctures, the diameter of thirty-penny nails, and as clean cut as if made by them. And from each, mingled with red, oozed a tiny stream of yellowish-green venom.

Carson had begun life in the mountainous districts of Pennsylvania, where rattlesnakes were plentiful, and he knew much about them. He had heard the ominous whir before; he had seen men who had been bitten; he knew how the bite should be treated. He knew how the ligature should be applied; how the wound should be made to bleed freely; how antiseptics should be used; how stimulants should be given.

But he knew also that any man whom a full-grown timber rattlesnake bites severely has less than an even chance of recovery, even with the most competent treatment, and he knew that in his case antiseptics, stimulants and physicians were miles away, through dense woods.

These thoughts flashed through his mind in a fraction of a second as he stood gazing horror-stricken at his wound. With Harris to pilot him, it had taken a full two hours to make his way here. Without Harris, it would take at least as long back, for he would be compelled to guess at the path, to take bearings by the sun, to study the bushes he had thrust aside, the branches he had been so careful to avoid breaking. And there was a forty-foot chasm to be crossed, a chasm which had been difficult enough for him half an hour ago, but which would present a fearful problem to a man handicapped by a useless arm.

Whatever the odds against him, there is always something in human nature

that makes a man hope that he will be an exception to the rule. It may be easy to advise another to resign; it is hard to follow the same counsel. Had any one else stood in his boots, Carson would have told him that to struggle was useless, that it remained only to surrender with as good a grace as possible. But the flame of life, never fiercer than just before it is to be extinguished, burned high within him and unhesitatingly he took the few steps that could be taken.

HE made a ligature, twisting his handkerchief tight with the sharpened stick that had come from Harris' cache. He lanced the wound freely, gritting his teeth as he did so, but applying the heroic treatment unflinchingly. Lacking antiseptics, he sucked out as much as he could of the venom. His eyes fell upon the tarpaulin envelope. Here was a stimulant, more efficacious than any other. He picked it up in his uninjured hand, and started resolutely on the long journey back to the city.

He actually reached the brink of the gorge before the virus began to take effect. Then the first convulsion seized him, and he tumbled gently down the slope, small trees breaking his fall, and depositing him in a heap at the bottom.

He regained consciousness and, first of all, located the tarpaulin envelope which had fallen near him. He glanced upward. The far brink was silhouetted against the clouds. A forty-foot climb would bring him to it.

Regretfully he decided to leave the envelope where it was. His right arm had begun to swell; and his other limbs were strangely disobedient to his will. They moved in jerks; they followed orders slowly. If he could control them sufficiently he might reach aid—and if he survived, he might recover the envelope at some future time.

He began to climb. A foot here—the other foot there—the one good hand

here—a deliberate act of will for each leaden motion. This rock to be seized—this to be trodden on—this tree to be grasped with unresponsive fingers. He had ascended less than ten feet when blackness again infolded him.

He came to, to find himself lying on the envelope. He pushed it away, tottered to his feet—and fell.

It would not be literally correct to say that Carson gave up. He never gave up. It would be nearer the truth to say that in his delirium his mind returned naturally to the subject which had occupied it so constantly—the subject of money. He opened his knife by holding its handle between his teeth. Then he slit open the envelope.

Within, he found wrapping of oil-skin. He found it highly amusing, and laughed aloud. In succession he slit open the wrappings with which Harris had covered the treasure. They were the source of huge merriment to the dying man. The last wrapping fell away; the money burst the hardened rubber bands about it, and scattered itself about his feet.

He ceased laughing suddenly, and took up a handful of bank notes—hundreds—five hundreds—thousands.

“Harris lied to me,” he remarked gravely. “He said he was going to steal only small bills.”

Evidently Harris had altered his plans. That fact took on exaggerated importance in his fast-ebbing consciousness. “He lied to me,” Carson repeated over and over again. “He lied to me.” Then he smiled. “But what’s the difference?” he inquired. “What does it all matter?”

He seized a handful of notes and flung them up into the air. He watched them fall upon him like a shower of leaves. He flung up another handful—and another. Then he began to laugh again—to laugh loudly—to laugh insanely—

It was about at this time that Har-

ris, staggering away through the rocks, stopped to rest his aching body. Four or five miles more would take him to the main line of the railroad. He would follow it. Presently he would reach a station. He would attempt to board a freight train.

And then? He closed his eyes and saw only years of poverty awaiting him, years of the hardest kind of hard labor, of penury, of hunger, of suffering. He had already given years to prison; an inexorable fate would demand more years, would demand all the rest of his life to finish paying.

His thoughts wandered back to a walk in the pine forest long ago. “You got to pay for everything sooner or later,” Carson had remarked. Harris had doubted it. He knew better now. Presently he bowed his head into his hands and sobbed.

Miles away the snake, which had lain motionless long after the humans had departed, uncoiled its glistening length and crawled out to a flat rock which caught the rays of the sun. Beyond, far beyond, lay the city, where men toiled and struggled, where they fought and sacrificed life itself for little engraved slips of paper. They were clever, some of them—and some of them were still cleverer; but the snake, being cleverest of all, fought only when he wanted to eat—and did not eat much—and knew that game was plentiful.

Presently he raised his head, and rustled away into the forest.

CHAPTER V.

A TOUCH OF IRONY.

TOWARD evening a scout of the entomological survey, homeward-bound, passed near the chasm in which Carson’s body lay. He had put in a long day searching for the eggs of the gypsy moth.

When he reached the brink of the chasm, he discerned something unusual.

It was clearly not an egg mass; but it was as clearly something else which was even rarer in the forest. He whipped out his field glasses incredulously, focused them, and to his boundless amazement distinguished a bank note caught in the twigs of a bush near the bottom of the gully. He bent over the edge, caught sight of another object—and needed no glass to recognize that the sprawled figure which lay on its back far below was human.

As quickly as possible, he made the descent. Carson was dead; that was apparent at a glance, and the ligature and the swollen arm about which it was tied made evident the manner of his dying. It was not upon the man himself, however, that the scout fixed his glance, but upon the extraordinary pall with which his body was covered.

The scout rubbed his eyes in wonder; his vision had not deceived him. Oblongs of paper, engraved and colored, crisp and crinkly to the touch, few of them worth so little as fifty dollars, many of them worth a thousand—these made up Carson's pall. Yellow and green and white, heaped together like fallen leaves, they lay upon him.

Carson himself was beyond aid; the scout covered his face with a handkerchief. Then he collected the notes methodically and with rather less emotion than if he were collecting evidence of the existence of some new insect scourge. He counted them before he slipped them into the box with which he was equipped; there was nearly two hundred thousand dollars.

HE had found several paper bands printed with the name of the bank from which the money had been stolen. He put them carefully in his pocket. They would be useful in determining the ownership of the fortune. To keep it himself, as he might have done so easily, never occurred to him, nor, for that matter, did it strike him that a

reward so large that it would make his year's salary look like nothing at all would go to the man who restored the treasure to its rightful owners. He would return it as a matter of course.

Uppermost in his feelings as he finally stood erect was the thought that Carson, whom he knew by sight, had perished when so great a sum was in his hands. It had not helped Carson.

A gentle wind was blowing from the west when he reached the lip of the chasm a second time. He stood motionless for an instant, gazing into the depth from which he had ascended, and inhaling the perfume-laden air. Then, borne by the breeze, faint and low, came the distant whistle of a locomotive. A second's pause, and there came a series of short, sharp blasts, that terrifying series that has only one meaning the world over. There followed, muted to a whisper by the intervening miles, the scream of suddenly applied brakes, another series of whistles—and silence.

The scout shook his head. "Another poor fellow got his," he murmured. Yet it is doubtful if his sympathy was needed. Harris, trapped on a trestle, had been permitted mercifully to cross the very greatest bridge of all.

If the defaulter had had time to think as the train thundered down upon him, he might have agreed that it was better so. For him the future had held only a long defile of threatening years. He might have seen that the fate that had obliterated them in one cataclysmal second was a kindly one. Harris was a clever man, and so logical a conclusion should have been apparent to him.

But whatever his thoughts at that climacteric moment, the scout who stood on the brink of the chasm, gazing toward the west, knew nothing of them. He noted only that the sun was sinking, and that the air was already cooler. He turned his back upon the ledges, and started for the city.

A Chat With You

THAT fiction has a great educational value is evidenced by the fact that courses of supplementary reading in fiction are part of the program indicated in college courses. We have heard a great authority on real-estate law suggest the reading of Scott's "Ivanhoe" as the best means of understanding the position of the serf under the feudal system—the idea being that one must understand the feudal system in order to thoroughly grasp modern real-estate law. Also in medicine—in more than one textbook—the medical author suggests reading a work of fiction as the best means of learning to recognize the outward manifestations of various diseases. The scientist is able to dissect the thing, to analyze it, to show its component parts, but the fiction writer is often better able to picture the thing as a whole. One great physician, the late Weir Mitchell, was a distinguished novelist as well. Another, Doctor Osler, was so fond of fiction and so touched with general culture that many of his addresses, intended only for the ears of medical students, fall into the category of general literature.

* * * *

WHEN we come to the study of history, the debt of the educator to the writer of stories, whose first intent is to amuse and entertain, is even more evident. The most effective of historians—men such as Carlyle, Macaulay, Froude, Motley—gave a definite story form to their accounts of various periods. More than this, we remember at least two stories—Scott's "Quentin Durward" and Read's "The Cloister and the Hearth" which, better than any

textbook, give to the reader the spirit, the color, the drama of their periods.

As for contemporary fiction—if you have good taste in fiction, any sort of luck in picking it, the habit of reading and a retentive memory, even though you never enter the doors of a college, you are on your way toward a liberal education.

A good education consists of an intimate knowledge of one thing and the ability to do it well—and a smattering of practically everything else that human beings are interested in. In the sense of a man's business or profession, his way of earning a living, this is an age of specialization. Fiction can't help you that way. But in the sense of general culture, the thing that makes you a better and more interesting human being and therefore a better specialist in your own line, it may do wonders. We see advertisements of sets of books warranted to make you a better conversationalist by teaching you a lot of wise cracks to spring on the company at dinner. A good conversationalist was never made that way. Better read what you please in the way of either fact or fiction and make up your own wise cracks. From fiction you may get a smattering of almost everything that people talk about, from medicine through geography to salesmanship. The good, contemporary story writer deals with all the materials of the best conversation.

* * * *

THERE never was more fiction published than at present. A lot of it is trash, and some of it worse than trash—poisonous. But a whole lot of it is sound, bracing narrative by people of

real talent and observation. There may be no Dantes or Shakespeares writing now, but the general level, considering the quantity of the output and the number of people to whom it appeals, is probably higher than it ever was. Only the great ones of the past remain to us. The trash has gone the way of all trash. You must use your own taste as to what you read. Forcing oneself to read something that does not interest is like forcing oneself to eat a food for which there is no appetite. It seldom pays. We are trying in this magazine to give stories that are lively, of wide popular appeal and yet sound and worth while. We are trying to show, in story form, glimpses of the various human dramas that are being enacted every day. You may say you get this from the newspapers. We doubt it. You get the baseball scores and the result of the golf and tennis matches, you get a faithful record of any crimes that are committed, you get a day-to-day account of politics and business in which only an expert could find any vision of the inside facts, you get all the cartoons and some humorous columns. You may get a lot of snapshots and occasionally what

is known to the trade as a "human-interest" story. If you are interested in stocks, in what buyers have arrived in town, in the box scores, in any specialty, the paper is invaluable. Otherwise, the magazine is likely to be the better educational force—if it is a good magazine.

* * * *

HERE is the title of a new book—a sample of the fiction of to-day—"Where the Big Money Is." Interesting. Where is it? Florida, just at present. If you want to know what Florida is like, read it. If you want to know the real heart of a get-rich-quick financier, read it. If you want to know how great fortunes are actually made and lost, read it. If you like a first-rate, entertaining story, read it. It is by Elmer Davis, well-known newspaper man and brilliant fiction writer. It is a regular two-dollar book. It comes out complete in the next issue of THE POPULAR. You would do well to order it at the next news stand now. If you look below, you will see other things just as good, slated for the same number.

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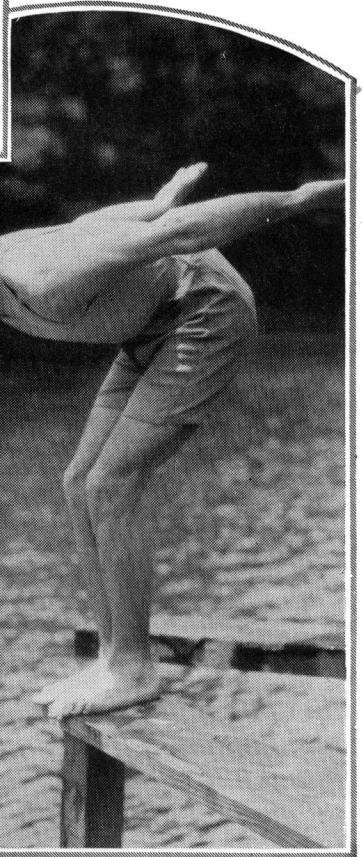
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"MY ENTIRE BODY, on account of chronic constipation, was completely run down. This condition brought about heartburn, dull eyes, a sallow skin blotched with pimples and recurrent boils. On the advice of a specialist, I began to take two Yeast cakes every day. The result: Within five weeks my stomach was restored to normal working order. Today my body is vigorous and healthful."

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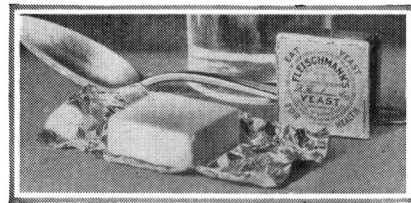
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BOB MILLER and I had both been getting bald for years. We had tried almost every hair restorer on the market. But we might as well have used brass polish.

One day Bob left town—a business trip. Weeks passed. I began to wonder if I'd ever see him again.

One afternoon at the office I heard a familiar voice—"Hello, Baldy," it said. I glanced up, annoyed. There stood Bob.

"For Pete's sake!" I exclaimed, "where have you been keeping yourself?"

We shook hands. "Take off your hat," I suggested sarcastically. "Let me gaze on that 'luxuriant hair' of yours. I haven't seen it for weeks."

"Luxuriant hair is right," he retorted. "I've got the finest growth of hair you ever saw!"

I laughed out loud! "Know any more jokes?" I said.

Bob stepped back and swept off his hat. I couldn't believe my eyes. The top of his head, once almost bare, was covered with a brand new growth of real, honest to goodness hair!

A New Way to Grow Hair

That night I went to Bob's house to try his new hair-growing treatment. He sat me in a chair and placed a strange apparatus on my head and turned on the electricity. The treatment lasted 15 minutes. At the end of the treatment I rubbed the top of my head. "Well, Bob," I chuckled, "I don't feel any new hair."

"Of course you don't," Bob came back. "But just you wait a while."

On my way home I read a booklet which Bob had given me. It described a new method of growing hair—discovered by Alois Merke, founder of the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York. It was the only treatment I ever heard of that got right down to the roots of the hair and awakened them to new activity. Bob was prof. I decided to send for the treatment immediately.

I Get the Surprise of My Life

Every night I spent 15 minutes taking the treatment. The first two or three days nothing happened. But I could feel my scalp beginning to tingle with new life—new vigor. Then one day when I looked in the mirror I got the thrill of a lifetime. All over my head a fine, downy fuzz was beginning to appear. At the end of a month you could hardly see a bald spot on my head. And after 60 days my worries about baldness were ended. I had gained an entirely new growth of healthy hair.

Here's the Secret

According to Alois Merke, in most cases of loss of hair the hair roots are not dead, but merely dormant—temporarily asleep. To make a sickly tree



grow you would not rub "growing fluid" on the leaves. You must nourish the roots. And it's exactly the same with the hair.

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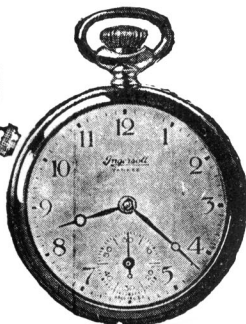
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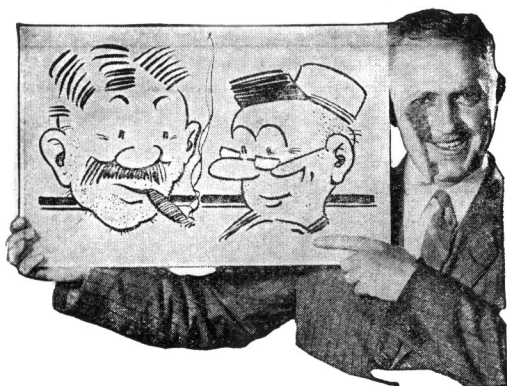
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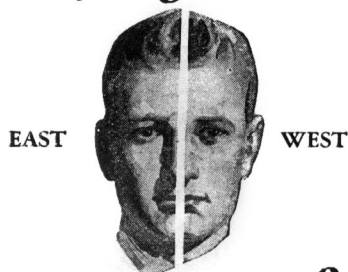
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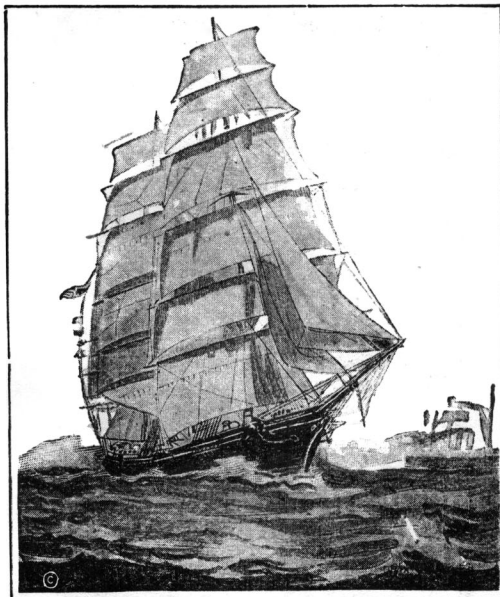
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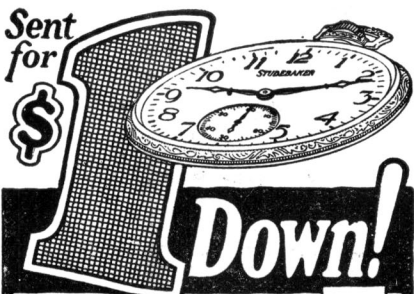
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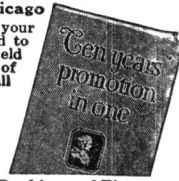
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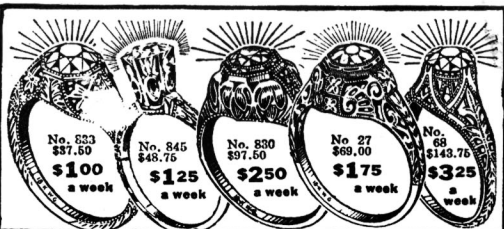
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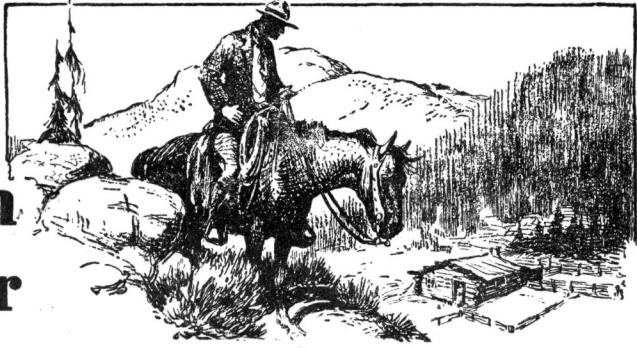
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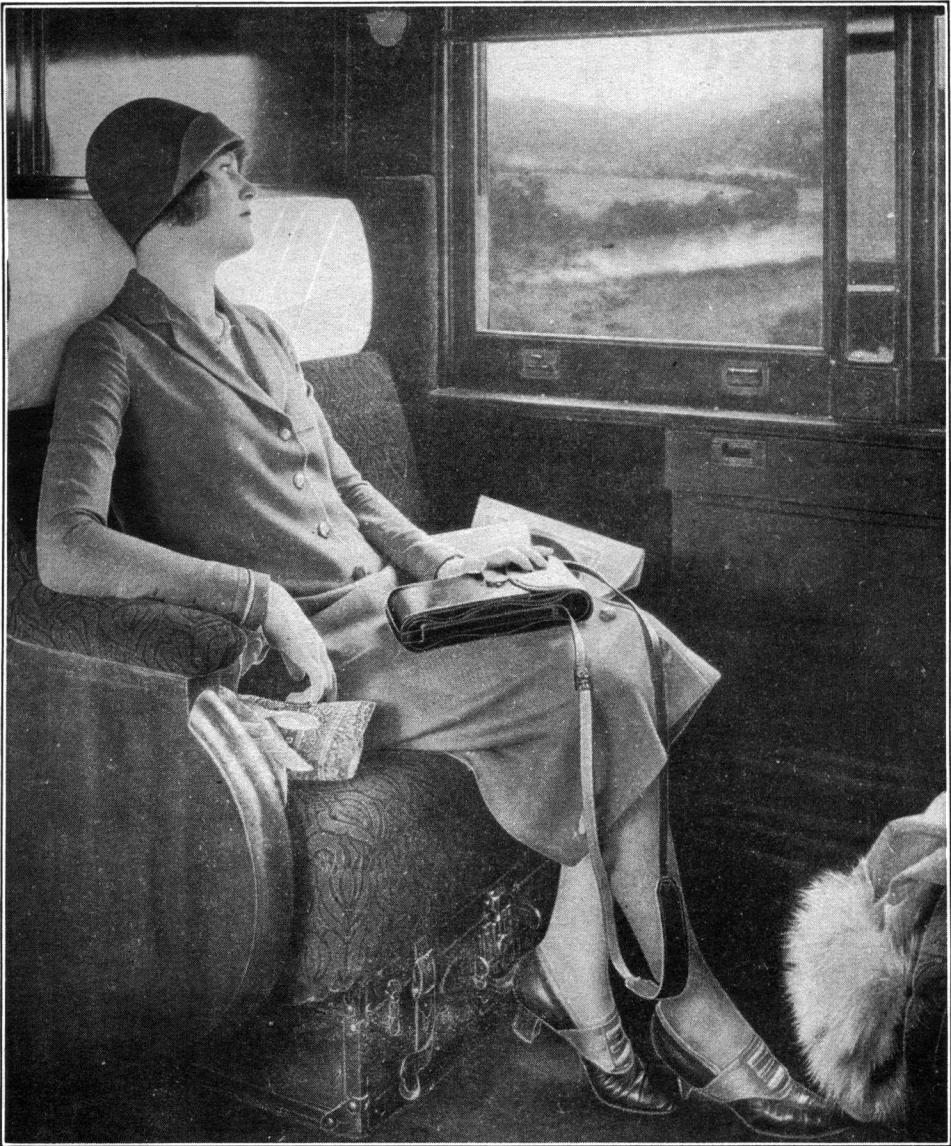
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