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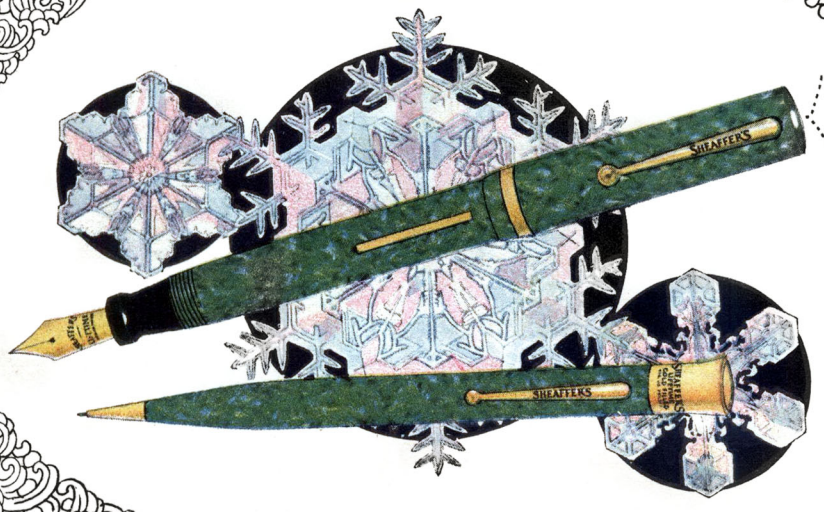

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Volume LXXXII Number 4

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

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From their presses come every year a wealth of Western stories, of stories of romance and mystery, so that good judges of good reading have come to look for the famous "CH" brand on the jackets of the new novels. Here are brief reviews of the latest Chelsea House offerings. Go to your dealer to-day and ask him for any of these together with the full Chelsea House list:

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Here is a story that holds your breathless interest on its every page. All the elements that make for thrilling fiction are cleverly blended, and the result is a book that grips. Get the novel and find out how Marcia finally solved her problems.

THE INCA'S RANSOM, by Gordon MacCreagh. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

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With such a colorful background, the author of this powerful story of adventure in a strange land brings on his characters, and as the reader follows every word, the quest for the gold is begun with greedy white men on

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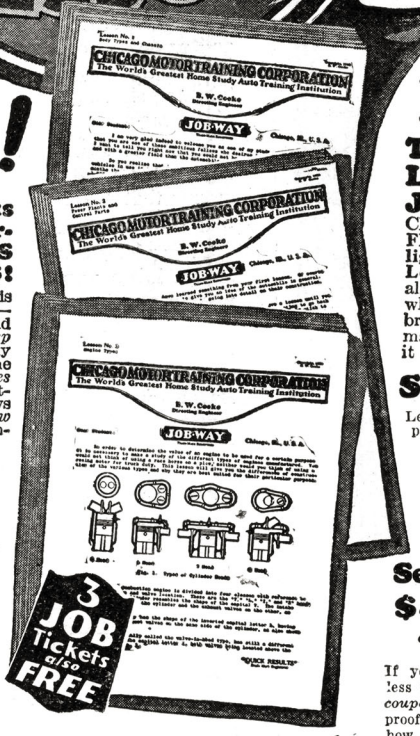

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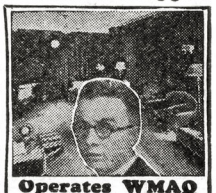

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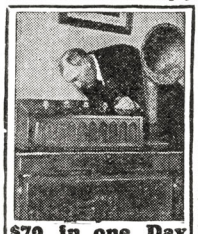

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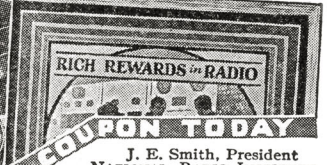

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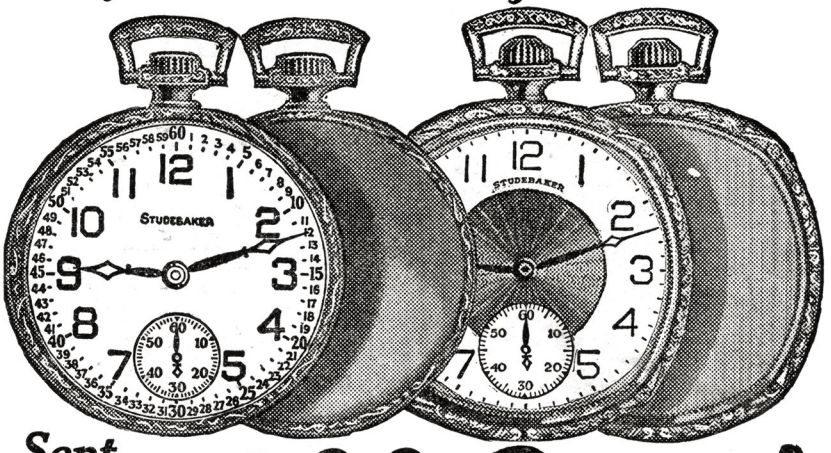

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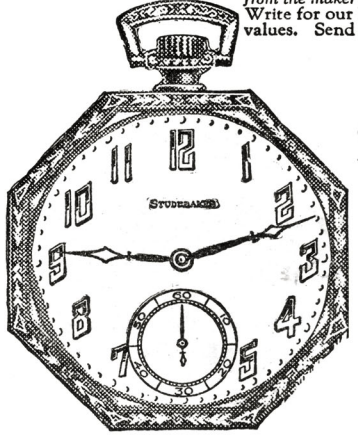

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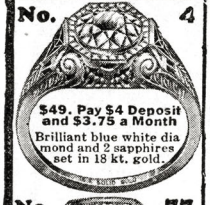

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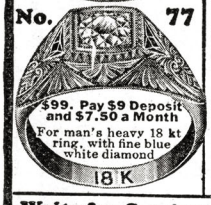

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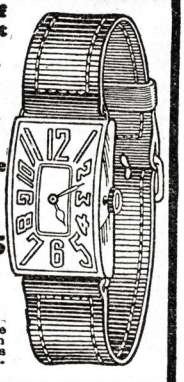

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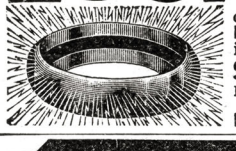

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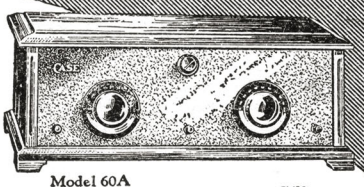

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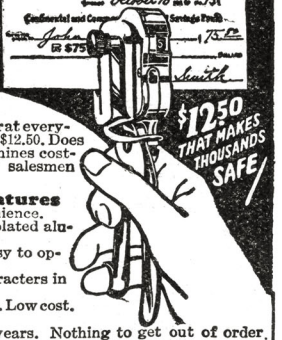

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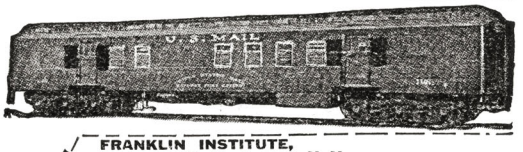

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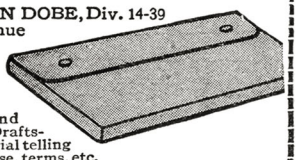

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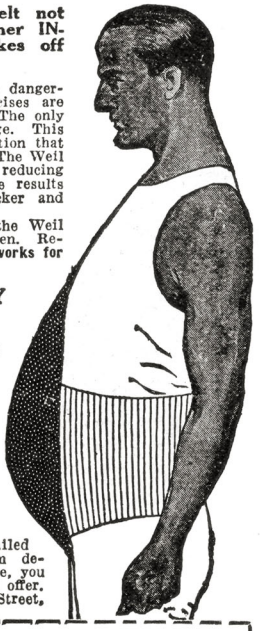

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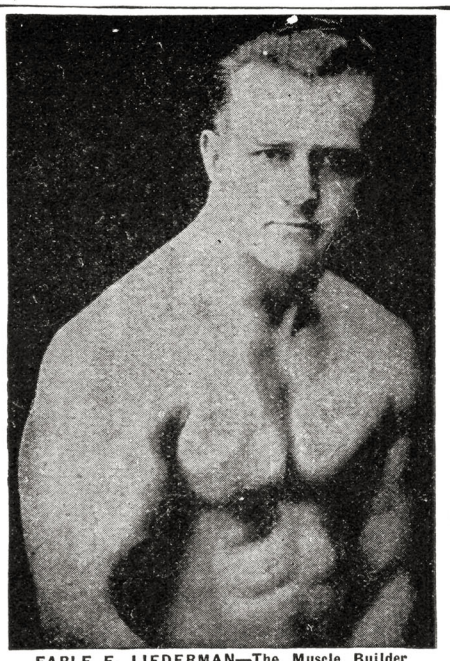

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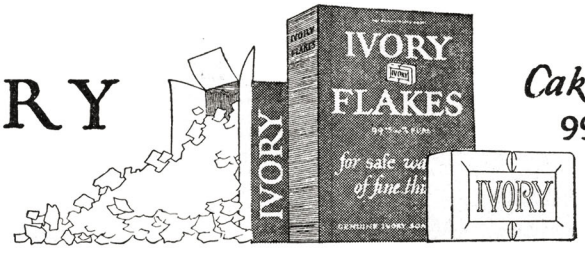

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXXII DECEMBER 7, 1926 No. 4

Who Hides Captain Reddy?

By Howard Fielding

Author of "A Bit of Inside Work," "Larry, the Listener," Etc.

After a robber has committed a crime he has a very limited choice of things to do. Usually he escapes and never returns But when a man is carrying on a veritable campaign of offenses in a town where he cannot walk along the street without being recognized; when that town is so small that its police know what is occurring in every corner of it; and when every possible means has been used in repeated intensified searches and traps for the criminal, without his capture—then the situation becomes uncanny, even preternatural. Captain Reddy was the unseen menace of Brantford, and he struck periodically.

CHAPTER I.

A BANDIT'S SISTER.

NOW, the Hamilton Bank, of Brantford, was an old and strong institution, a very big bank for a city of that size. Harvey Thompson was its president, and he ran it. He was young in years, but old in banking. His father, at whose death he succeeded to the presidency, had begun to train him for that job from childhood.

Harvey Thompson's ideas had outgrown the bank. He was scheming to enlarge it and extend its power through control of other banks in that part of the State. Absorbed in these designs of high finance, he worked hard in the daytime, meditated on banking in the evenings, and dreamed of it in bed.

He had a habit of getting down to business early and attending to some of his correspondence between eight and nine o'clock. Shortly before eight on a Fri-

day in May, he was alone in his office, reading the Brantford *Morning Herald* across whose first page ran a headline in letters an inch high:

CAPTAIN REDDY GETS AWAY WITH ANOTHER HOLDUP.

It was the bandit, not the crime, that made the affair sensational as news. The robbery itself was a small matter, but the young man known as Captain Reddy was a notorious character, a terror and a mystery; and the story of his latest exploit made Thompson grit his teeth and shake his head. Finally he started to put the paper into his wastebasket, but changed his mind and tucked it into a drawer of his desk. Then he pressed the button to summon his secretary, stared nervously at the door by which she would enter, as if he dreaded the sight of her.

She responded promptly—a tall, straight-built girl, with rather broad shoulders and a firm neck rising in glorious lines. She possessed beauty but no prettiness; a face for a statue, boldly carved. Her hair, cut to a boyish bob, was of a peculiar red, wavy and flame shot.

There was only one other head of hair like that in Brantford and anybody who could find that other redhead could win five thousand dollars. That was the reward offered for the capture of Captain Reddy, the notorious and elusive bandit whose sister was Harvey Thompson's confidential secretary—a position as conspicuous in that community as any woman could hold.

The young outlaw seemed to possess powers more suitable to a ghost than to a living man. For eight months he had operated in and around Brantford, nearly always within the city limits and never beyond its suburbs. Again and again he had been seen and identified at the moment of the commission of a crime, but the police had never traced him more than a stone's throw from the scene of any one of them.

Where did he hide in this city that had known him from the cradle. Who fed and sheltered him? By what secret means did he secure the accurate information necessary for his numerous holdups, always timed to the minute? These riddles were discussed on every corner and at every fireside. The *Herald* had not been altogether joking when it said, a while ago, that the mystery of Captain Reddy had driven cross-word puzzles out of Brantford.

His name was Redmond Kay. He was descended from an excellent family, all dead now except the boy and girl. And their money was gone, too. Their father, a well-known lawyer, had tried to be a millionaire during the war, but he had been "deflated" very speedily, when the vast boom was over, and had died bankrupt. His former residence was now a boarding house, but his daughter defied some part of her evil destiny by paying more than she could afford for the room in which she had been happy as a child.

NO one could suppose her to be happy in these days. Aside from natural sorrow for her brother's conduct, she herself was a part of the Brantford puzzle and she knew it. People were saying that she had loved and defended her brother throughout some earlier troubles of his, and that she was a girl who "never let go." Also, they were remarking that Captain Reddy seemed peculiarly well informed as to pay-roll money, most of which came out of the Hamilton Bank.

"How does Marcia Kay hold her position?" was the query on many a tongue. "Her brother can't stay hid in Brantford unless somebody helps him, and who's doing it? It's queer that Harvey Thompson lets her stay in the bank." And of course all sorts of reasons were suggested for the banker's conduct which really required no explanation except a kind heart and a sense of justice.

Well aware of all this gossip, Marcia was in a situation very hard to endure, and she was meeting it with hardness. She asked no sympathy, and shut herself off as far as possible from former friends. In fact, her only friend now was Harvey Thompson, and he hoped she understood his sentiments, but all idea of kindness seemed to have been beaten out of her.

As Marcia came forward, she lowered her eyes from the banker to his waste-basket, and missed the paper which was nearly always there.

"Didn't you have the *Herald* this morning ?" she asked, in what might pass for an ordinary tone of her rather deep-pitched voice; but Thompson knew that voice extremely well, and he detected a note of desperation in it.

"Yes, I saw the paper," he said, "but what of it? I'm very sorry, for your sake and your brother's, but that affair last evening doesn't make the situation any worse. It's just the same as before, and you're not to blame for any of it."

"If you think I ought not to stay here any longer, I'm perfectly willing to go. I've said so before."

"And what did I say to you? I haven't changed my mind about it. I see no reason why you should go. You've told me that you know nothing of your brother's whereabouts, and that you've had no communication with him."

"I tell you so again."

"It's all I want to know, Marcia. But there's one thing I want to say. You still retain affection for your brother. You grieve for whatever wrong he's done. Certainly you wouldn't do anything to make it worse."

"How could I? I don't know what you mean."

"I mean that you mustn't cause Reddy to do a wrong that he doesn't intend. He doesn't really mean to ruin your life, but he's doing it and you're helping him —to ruin it in more than a material sense. If his conduct should cost you your position in this bank, that would be a trifle in comparison. He's stealing the sweetness and the kindness out of your heart, and you're not resisting as I wish you would. You're letting this trouble embitter you. Don't do it. The world isn't against you. Brantford isn't. Certainly I'm not. I'm *for* you, every minute. Does that help any?"

She didn't reply in words, merely nodded slightly, keeping her glance steady on his face. Her eyes were cold. He couldn't see that his appeal had softened her in the least, even for a moment. And he remembered this girl when she was as amiable as sunshine, though already stricken by the disasters and disgrace that had engulfed her family.

Not knowing what more he could say, he took some letters from his desk and began his dictation. Before the dictation was finished, a man of some prominence came to see Thompson, and was obviously unwilling to state his business in Marcia's presence. When she was gone, he disclosed the fact that a secret conference was to be held in the City Club at luncheon time, on the subject of Captain Reddy.

"That little robbery last evening," said the visitor, "is the last straw."

"I'll bet it isn't!" the banker said prophetically. "But go on."

"The man must be caught. The police have made a total failure, even with the help of the State constabulary. We're forming a small and carefully chosen committee to take this matter up and get some action, and we want you to join us."

THE banker went to the meeting with a few other men of wealth and prominence. Not yet thirty-five and in the pink of condition, the banker looked like a college athlete among these old fellows with their heads gray or bald, but it was noticeable that they all deferred to his opinion. They were ready to back him with a fund to be limited only by his own judgment.

The result was that Thompson was appointed a committee of one to take the whole matter in charge. All agreed that it would be best to bring in private detectives, whose presence should be concealed from the local police. Thompson had heard of a man he wished to consult, and he decided to go down to New York that night and see him the following day.

Marcia should have a holiday. Heaven only knew what she could do with it, isolated by her brother's crimes and the horror of the fate that must overtake him at last. Reddy was not yet a murderer, though he had shot one man and broken the skulls of three others. All had been near death, but had recovered. Sooner or later the dice would fall the

other way; these bandits are always on the edge of murder.

Meanwhile, what could be done to make to-morrow a bit pleasant for Marcia, or at least different? She used to drive a car. But how could he lend her a car? There was gossip enough already; and he smiled grimly to think how mistaken it was. His relations with Marcia, which had once been hearty, frank and big-brotherly, were becoming so cold of late as to be hardly human.

There was no added warmth in the atmosphere when he made her the present of a day off, and yet somehow he got the impression that it was a very welcome gift, the one thing that she wanted. He made a mental note that he would find excuse for offering holidays to the unhappy girl quite often.

CHAPTER II.

THE VANISHING CROOK.

THE detective to whom Thompson took the case was Jerry Heath. He is not famous, but has been remarkably successful, for his clients and for himself. His bureau is a mighty profitable business with a large staff and the best of facilities and connections.

To a client of the banker's standing, Heath gave his personal attention, confessing at the outset that he had not followed this case in the published reports, and knew virtually nothing about Captain Reddy and his exploits. But on one point he thought he knew more than his visitor: Reddy couldn't stay in Brantford between jobs and not be caught. Eight months of that kind of side-stepping couldn't be managed in a town of that size.

"Born and brought up there, wasn't he?" Heath said.

"Yes, and that doesn't begin to express the difficulty. Reddy Kay has always been in the limelight. He was conspicuous in sports before he was three feet high, the captain of all sorts of school teams, and a prize scholar besides. For four or five years the Sunday *Herald* couldn't go to press without Reddy's picture."

At Heath's request, the banker went on to tell how the boy's career of glory had ended in sudden disaster. At the time when his father's bankruptcy was filling the local papers, Reddy had piled sensation on sensation by being arrested for complicity in the robbery of a store and the serious wounding of a clerk. The case roused great excitement, but the boy's innumerable admirers had seemed to fade away very fast, and the strongest influence visible at the trial was that of his father's revengeful creditors.

Reddy was convicted and sent to the Elmira Reformatory. He was then not yet sixteen, but would have finished his high-school course within a month. The ruin of the boy was the last blow to the bankrupt father, and he died. But Marcia in that crisis showed surprising courage and good temper, though she fought hard for her brother to the last minute.

"Would she do the same to-day?" the detective asked.

Thompson was afraid she would, if the chance came, but he didn't say so. Instead, he answered:

"She wouldn't do anything to help him continue in his present career. At any cost of suffering to herself and him, she would prefer to see him restrained from committing these robberies that are always likely to be murders."

It seemed a good speech and essentially true, yet he couldn't see Marcia betraying her brother to the police or failing to assist his escape from capture.

"When did Reddy get out of Elmira?"

"Last June."

"And he came back to Brantford. Any home waiting for him?"

"There might have been. His sister would have got him his old room, in the house where they were children together. She boards there; and I think it used to be her ambition to recover it for their own—hers and Reddy's."

"Just a dream?"

"No, a remote possibility. The place is worth a good bit of money, but Miss Kay is a girl of great ability. She is my secretary," he added, "in the bank." And he watched for the effect on Heath.

It was considerable, and the detective could be observed concealing it by putting on his best poker face.

"Reddy wouldn't consent to the arrangement," Thompson resumed. "Miss Kay went to see him in Elmira and he was very stubborn about it. He said it wouldn't be best for her to be seen with him till he had proved that he had been unjustly convicted. That was *his* ambition. It was the reason why he came back."

"They often talk that way," Heath remarked, "but they never do anything."

"Reddy didn't, but I can't blame him. The two ringleaders in that robbery—who perhaps had testified against Reddy in the hope that his great popularity would save them all—were both dead; and there seemed to be nobody else who knew anything. Reddy found out how matters stood, in his first few days at home, and he lost all hope. He told me so, and said he wouldn't stay in Brantford.

PEOPLE didn't treat him badly, but you can imagine what it was for Reddy Kay, who had been fed with flattery through all his boyhood. He was still conspicuous; the Sunday *Herald* still printed his picture, with titles that called him a jailbird in the most affectionate terms of sentimental hokum. It must have been awful for that poor fellow, proud and sore. Moreover, he had acquired in prison a resentful and ugly expression—a sort of man-eating look—that didn't encourage his friends to give him the glad hand.

"I gave him work in the glove factory, a corporation I control. It was reported to me that he was absolutely useless, that he didn't seem to know what he was doing. I wouldn't let him be discharged, and he hung on through the summer, without showing any improvement. He lived meanwhile in a little room in a cheap hotel, and wouldn't let his sister do anything for him or be seen in his company.

"His behavior caused perpetual talk; and in September, the Sunday *Herald* printed a sob story about Marcia and Reddy Kay, with their pictures. It was one of those stories without facts and without sense, written to be read by half-wits who can feel but can't think. The mere sight of it hurt Marcia worse than I had ever known the printed word to hurt any human being. That sort of thing makes an intelligent woman feel as if her heart had been ripped out.

"As for Reddy, he turned bandit within the week, and the front page of next Sunday's *Herald* was covered with the news of his successful beginning. That was eight months ago, Mr. Heath, and Reddy has staged another holdup about every three weeks, on the average. He has stayed in Brantford all the time, I believe. Known to every man, woman and child within twenty miles—his pictures so numerous that you can't look into an ash can without seeing one that has been thrown away—he has done this incredible thing. Will you tell me how?"

"No, and I don't believe it," the detective replied. "But we'll take that up later. What was it Reddy did—that first crack at banditry? I've forgotten."

"On the evening of September 19th," Thompson said, "there was the biggest boxing show ever held in Brantford. After it was over, the winner of the main bout and his manager, who was part promoter of the show, started for the railroad station with a satchel full of money. They were in a car, with a detective aboard for protection.

"Reddy held up the three of them, near the station, in a place where they had to slow down. He hit the fighter on the jaw and knocked him out of the car. The manager fell out, trying to dodge bullets. The detective opened fire, but was shot through the body and almost killed. It was several days before he could make any statement; he was thought to be dying, and Reddy was hunted as a murderer.

"But when the detective finally spoke, he said that Reddy hadn't fired at all, that he put his pistol into his pocket and fought with his fists. He himself was shot in the back by somebody who crept up on the off side of the car. He hadn't seen that person, and the fighter and the manager had testified that there was only one bandit. It's still a disputed point.

"If there really was another man, that is the only instance in which Reddy has

had a partner. It seems certain that in every other case he has worked alone."

"How much did he get, that time?" Heath inquired.

"Twelve thousand dollars, so it was reported."

"And what's his total to date?"

"Small, not more than fifty or sixty thousand, as a result of eleven robberies. He seems to play for sure things rather than big money. I'm praising his intelligence, you understand, not questioning his courage.

"He has to be stopped, Mr. Heath. His career is too romantic, too successful, too well advertised. It is encouraging a lot of young fools to think that they can do the same. A few of Reddy's imitators have got away with it, thus far. A dozen of them are under arrest, some charged with murder. That's the natural consequence, of course."

Heath nodded.

"Yes," he said, "and it's a wonder Captain Reddy hasn't killed somebody. That seems to be a good deal on your mind, Mr. Thompson."

"It is," the banker admitted. "I'm trying to insure against it, by means of your services. I think Reddy won't appear again for a week or more. There's always been quite an interval between his holdups."

The detective wagged a head full of experience.

"You never can tell. He may be operating this minute."

"He's operated only once in the daytime," Thompson said, and added uneasily: "That was on a Saturday afternoon."

"Well, let's get down to the one great feature of this case, as you state it," said Heath. "What's the evidence that Captain Reddy stays in Brantford all the time? How do you know he doesn't hop out in a car and ride to a hiding place a hundred miles away?"

"He doesn't use a car. His hiding place is where he can reach it on his own legs, and mighty quick."

"Then why don't your police find it? They've made a house-to-house search, of course."

"I'm told they're always making it," Thompson returned. "It never stops, but it never turns up a clew."

"That isn't possible, if the man's there."

"On the other hand, it doesn't seem possible that he can get away," the banker rejoined. "Listen to what Reddy did night before last. It illustrates the mystery of his performances. A man named Cole is a collector for a building and loan association. On Thursday he collected about two thousand five hundred dollars, mostly in the suburbs, and he got to my bank just too late to deposit the money."

"Who knew of this?" the detective asked.

"Nobody, so far as I've heard. Cole may have been seen near the bank, but I don't believe he talked to any one. He went home; and in the evening he was there alone. He lives in a small detached house.

ABOUT nine o'clock he was in the living room reading a paper, and when he looked over the top of it, he saw Captain Reddy leaning in through an open window with an automatic in his hand. The money was in that room, and Cole had to pass it over. Then Reddy made him lie face down on the floor, and went off around the corner of the house—not even running, Cole says. Reddy walked along the veranda.

"Cole jumped up and yelled, and a policeman was there in less than a minute. Almost at the same time a detective came across from a back street. They came from opposite directions, and one of them ought to have seen Reddy. If the detective had come past the house on the west side, instead of the east, he might have met him face to face. And both men say there was no car waiting on either street.

"Meanwhile, Cole had grabbed the telephone, as soon as he saw help coming, and had called up police headquarters. Headquarters turned on a siren that can be heard five miles. In connection with that, there is an electric-alarm system that lights signal lamps on all roads leading out of town, and at strategic points inside. The siren and the

lights stop all traffic; no car can go on until inspected. And Brantford is very hard to get out of, for a city of that size."

"That's right," Heath assented. "With only bridges on the east and the mountain on the west, there are very few roads that an escaping man can take. Under the conditions you describe, I don't believe Reddy could get away in a car. But how does he go through the streets on foot? You say he doesn't use any disguise."

"Only a handkerchief tied across his mouth and chin; and of course he can't wear that on the streets. The police think it covers a bandage, or a bad scar, due to a wound received at the time of his first holdup."

"I don't see what he gains by covering it," Heath said. "I'd sooner think he had a false beard under the handkerchief —or a real one, if he's had time to grow it. The handkerchief prevents the beard from being mentioned in descriptions, and probably he has some quick way of disguising himself from the beard up. How's he dressed, as a rule?"

"He wears a gray raincoat and an old baseball cap pulled down over his eyes. He may have the whole old uniform on, under the coat. Nobody has seen it, but he's described as wearing gray stockings.

"I can't regard any possible disguise as an explanation," the banker added. "He'd either be recognized in spite of it, or people would notice a strange man. Brantford isn't a large city like New York, you know."

The detective drummed softly on the desk and studied the face of his client.

"The sister!" he said suddenly. "You're sure she has no information."

This caught Thompson off his guard, and he answered, in a manner too defensive:

"Absolutely none. No more than I have."

Heath took up his desk phone and got into communication with No. 30, one of his operatives, evidently a woman. She seemed to be at home, resting after some peculiarly arduous job in which she had scored a success. Her chief apologized for asking whether she could go out of town that night.

"To Brantford," he said. "Do you remember Reddy Kay?"

Apparently No. 30 remembered him, and was much interested. Heath listened to quite a flow of language, and finally said:

"That's good. I'm glad you've read about the case. Come down between four and five, and we'll dope out your line."

He hung up the receiver and addressed Thompson:

"There's a real detective! Wonderful go-getter. In this case, she'll have the advantage of knowing Reddy. She saw him in Elmira shortly before he got out. He didn't figure in her business there, but she noticed him as a very unusual fellow, and had quite a talk with him. She said he was the sorest prisoner she ever saw, and she thought he might be innocent. But she prophesied that he'd be a hellion when he got out. Some eye, that lady's got!

"I'm going to send her to Brantford very strictly under cover," he continued. "I don't want you to tell your committee or anybody else that there's a woman on the case. Your police probably know already why you came to New York; they've been expecting it, and they'll be watching for my men. But I think No. 30 has a chance to get by."

The putting of a woman on the case made Thompson uneasy. It seemed to indicate a suspicion of Marcia Kay, but Heath denied this before his client had approached the subject.

"I've been thinking about Reddy's sister," the detective said. "She couldn't do anything to help him. She's shadowed not only by the police, but by the whole population of Brantford. I'm leaving her out of it entirely, except for the bare chance that Reddy might try to communicate with her, for some reason."

In spite of this statement, Thompson was worried on Marcia's account. He had seen desperation written on her face. He suspected that she had begun to regard herself as much an outlaw as Reddy, so deeply had she become embittered by the universal condemnation

of her father and her brother, those she loved the best.

The last thing Thompson wished to do was to set another spy on Marcia; there were already too many. But at least he could make his own spies watch the others, and so be in condition to check the girl before she could go too far on any dangerous course. And for Reddy's own sake, he must be stopped before it was too late. But to be too late is the easiest thing in this world.

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTAIN SCORES AGAIN.

SOON Thompson took leave of Heath and descended to the level of the Broadway pavement. Rain was falling. He hoped the day was pleasanter in Brantford, in case Marcia should be out of doors. But the weather was the same in both places, and the sidewalks around the Hamilton Bank were as wet as those of Broadway.

It was half past twelve. A teller in the bank was counting out the pay-roll money for Mr. Thompson's glove factory. For certain reasons, it was somewhat more on this day than the usual sum; still, it amounted to only a little above seven thousand dollars. Its transportation from the bank to the factory was in charge of two armed men.

All that the men had to do was to carry the cash in a flivver about a mile and a half through Brantford's streets at noonday. The same two men had done the same thing every Saturday for many months.

One of the men—Joe Tully—went into the bank to get the cash; the teller was now delivering it into his hands. The other man—Benny Morse—had halted on the steps where he could see that nobody stole the flivver. This car was always left opposite the entrance to the offices in the upper part of the building. The bank's marble-pillared portal was on the corner, a bad place for parking.

Glancing into the bank, Morse saw Tully receive the money, stow it in a satchel, and start toward the exit into the hall of the building. This route was shorter by a few steps, and Tully always took it going out, though he came in by the main entrance. Morse never followed him, but took a straight course from the bank's steps to the flivver. By such regularity of careless procedure, banditry is made easy.

Between the bank and the hall was a door with a glass panel in the upper part. An iron barrier would be closed there after banking hours, of course. Through the glass, Tully had a view of the hall at the foot of the stairs. As usual, he saw no one. The building was small and had few tenants.

Tully pushed the door open, its wooden lower part serving to conceal a figure crouching low behind it and watching through the crack. This figure, at the proper moment, flattened itself against the wall beside the door, and Tully did not see it till the door had closed behind him. Even then, he seemed to see nothing but the muzzle of an automatic pistol, miraculously visible, though it was held under his chin. It gave him the impression that his head would be found on the second floor, after the crash, and only his body on the first.

He yielded up the satchel without waiting to be asked. In mortal terror, he backed a few steps, but he got no farther from the pistol. The bandit followed him, stooping low till the paneled door was passed, and then standing erect. The crook was attired in a long, drab, baggy raincoat of a thin fabric, buttoned at the throat.

His face was covered by a handkerchief up to the level of his nose and tied at the back of his head. He wore an old gray cap, a part of a baseball uniform. The celebrated Kay hair flamed at each side of it.

"Don't shoot, Cap'n Reddy!" the frightened victim gasped. "I swear I won't ever say it was you!"

"Keep quiet and step lively," the bandit responded, in a soft growl, almost a whisper; and he continued to drive Tully backward till they came to a door leading down to that part of the cellar containing the furnaces.

"I see," Tully said. "You want me to go down."

He pulled the cellar door open and

turned to descend, but the paralysis of terror made him slow. The bandit was in a hurry; at any moment some one might come in from the street. He gave Tully a sudden push with both hands —one holding the bag and the other the pistol. It was a light push, but it caught Tully off his balance. He fell the whole length of the stairs and lay unconscious at the bottom.

He hadn't uttered a cry, and the noise of his fall happened to be covered by street sounds, so nobody was alarmed except the janitor, who was in the cellar. The janitor ran to the foot of the stairs, found Tully and suspected the truth, for he knew the man and the nature of his errand at the bank.

Precious moments were wasted in trying to make Tully speak; then the janitor ran up to the hall and saw Morse looking in at the street door, wondering what had become of his partner. Information on this point came out in a jumble of excited words, and the noise brought several men from the bank, among them the giant guard in his gray uniform.

Every way out of the hall had been blocked, except the stairs leading upward. There was no elevator. Morse, with pistol drawn, was already in pursuit, and the guard hurried after him. On the second floor, near the foot of the stairs leading to the third, they found a young woman sitting with her back against the wall and feebly trying to rise. She was recovering from a faint.

She gasped, "Captain Reddy!" and pointed wildly upward. They did not stop to question her, for the situation was self-explanatory. The girl was a stenographer employed in Sanford Breck's law offices, which occupied the second floor. They closed at noon on Saturday; her half day's work was done and she was going home when she met and recognized the famous bandit. After one feeble squeal of terror, she had fainted.

Morse and the guard went to the third floor—which was the last—and found a way open to the roof. A much higher building adjoined the bank, and a fire escape descended along its side. The pursuers climbed the escape one story upward from the bank's roof, and found a half-open window by which they entered a room, part of an unoccupied suite. No one was there, but in the middle of the floor was Tully's satchel, empty.

The door of the suite was fastened only with a spring lock, and there could be no doubt as to the path of Captain Reddy's escape. Morse and the guard attempted to follow the trail, but it really ended where they stood.

SOME detectives were already in the building. One of them had arrived within three minutes after the holdup. Leaving uniformed police on watch below they worked up toward the roof, meeting Morse and the bank guard on the way. But the whole force did not succeed in finding a single trace of Captain Reddy beyond the bare room where he had dropped Tully's satchel, after pocketing the pay roll of Harvey Thompson's glove factory.

No one had seen Reddy in the taller building, through which he must have descended as there was no means of getting off its roof except the fire escape already mentioned. Its upper part had just been renovated and was almost tenantless as yet. Reddy might easily have gone down the stairs without encountering any one; but how about the crowded street? This ghostly bandit must have walked away unseen, past hundreds of persons who knew him well. And every one of them would have raised an alarm instantly at sight of him, without needing to have heard of the crime he had just committed.

Nobody went to Tully's assistance. Morse and the guard left that matter to the janitor, who ran for a doctor and didn't find one. The report on the scene was that Tully had been driven upward; there was no search in the other direction.

The injured man regained his senses, climbed the stairs on all fours, and sat down at the top. The spot being inconspicuous, he remained unnoticed until found by Morse, who was searching for his partner.

Tully said he was all right, only dizzy.

With Morse's help, he went down into the cellar and put his head under a cold-water faucet. He told Morse that Captain Reddy had pushed him downstairs, but that it was probably unintentional.

"He was just hustling me along," he said. "Seemed to get a sudden scare, and gave me a little shove on the back. But I was standing on one toe, with my legs tangled, and I took the plunge."

"Are you sure he didn't tap you on the back of the bean?" Morse inquired. You've got a cut there, Joe. We'll ride around to the hospital——"

"Nothing doing. I don't take any chance on having a doctor shave a piece off my coco." But he let Morse lead him toward the stairs.

They were met by the janitor, a lieutenant of police, and a detective named Donald Vaughn. Vaughn was a distant cousin of Captain Reddy. The Kays had a strain of Irish blood, but Vaughn had much more of it. He was a smart-looking, graceful young fellow, blue-eyed and black-haired.

"Are you badly hurt, Joe?" he asked anxiously, but got no response. "What did he do to you?"

Tully was trying to answer, but his voice was a mumble and the words seemed meaningless. He pointed toward the stairs with strange, jerky gestures, then covered his eyes with his hands and would have crashed to the floor if the alert detective had not caught him and eased his fall. Morse didn't comprehend what was happening, but Vaughn instantly recognized the symptoms of this collapse.

"Fracture of the base," he said aside, to the lieutenant.

He meant the base of the skull, and his hasty diagnosis was correct. Though Tully was still partly conscious, he couldn't speak intelligibly.

"What did he tell you, Benny?" the detective asked.

"He said Reddy threw him downstairs," Morse replied.

The lieutenant was examining the back of Tully's head; he expressed the opinion that Reddy had hit him with the butt of a pistol. Morse didn't contradict this. He was thinking that he would better say as little as possible. He was going to be criticized anyway for negligence.

Tully was hurried to a hospital where the doctor found a heavy bruise under the low-hanging hair on his forehead. This was the origin of the real damage; the wound on the opposite point of the skull was not serious in itself. He had really got both wounds in falling, though this seemed improbable. Morse alone suspected that the hurt on the back of the head was caused by a corner of the rough newel at the foot of the stairs. Everybody else assumed that it was made by the bandit's pistol.

Tully was never again able to say anything that could be understood; and at dawn on Sunday, he died. As the climax of a dozen robberies in which deadly weapons had figured, Captain Reddy had killed a man by pushing him downstairs in a way so plainly accidental that the victim would never have accused him of doing it on purpose.

Reddy was a murderer, of course, no matter how the thing had happened. He had caused Tully's death while engaged in the commission of a felony, and he could hardly escape the chair, even if Benny Morse should tell the whole truth.

The only person who suspected Morse of lying was Detective Vaughn, whose shrewd eyes had noticed the shifty way in which the first questions had been answered. Before Vaughn could get a fair chance to cross-examine him, Morse had already bettered his story and couldn't go back on it. Thus the dying statement of Joe Tully came to be published in this form:

"Captain Reddy *knocked* me down stairs."

A little rough on the captain, but he was bound to meet a murder charge sooner or later.

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERY OF MARCIA'S HOLIDAY.

BY long-distance telephone, the previous evening, Harvey Thompson had learned of the robbery but had been deceived by a hopeful view of Tully's prospects. Reporters, waiting at the railroad station Sunday morning, gave him his first news that the case was a murder.

This was precisely what he had tried to prevent. He had tried to save Reddy Kay from the chair, not to put him into it. The bandit's capture was now the last thing he desired, and the idea of having a personal share in it affected him like a nightmare. Now he was paying to have a man hunted to his death. And Thompson had convictions against capital punishment.

Having put the hounds on the trail, Thompson couldn't call them off. To discharge Heath's bureau at this time would be a very queer-looking performance surely, but the banker would do it if the responsibility were his alone. It wasn't. He was the agent of six other Brantford business men and had spent their money as well as his own in retaining Heath. The money could be refunded, but the six associates would merely tell Heath to go on with the chase. There was nothing to do but remain in charge of it in order to slow it up as much as possible, meanwhile praying that Reddy would escape to the remotest corner of the earth.

It was uncomfortable to realize that he must go on posing before Marcia as her friend, knowing that she would sooner or later find out what he was really doing. Thompson would have preferred to tell the exact truth of his situation to Marcia immediately, but there had been pledges of secrecy exchanged at that committee meeting.

The banker spent several hours of the forenoon in his home, trying to find a way out, but he didn't succeed in reaching a satisfactory decision.

For Marcia's sake, he had always avoided any public show of friendly relations with her—which had been more than easy, as the girl had no social life whatever—but it seemed inhuman to neglect her wholly at such a time as this. He wrote a note to be sent to her room, and rode over to what had once been the Kays' private residence.

At first sight, the place had the deserted look to be expected on a Sunday forenoon that is pleasant for golf or motoring. Somebody was at home, however, for he heard a woman's voice from around the corner of the house as he was about to ring the bell. It was a gentle voice, tinged with sadness, but not at all a whine.

"I hope you'll consider me your friend," she said. "Confidentially, I'm in an excellent position to understand your feelings—except that you're plucky and I'm not."

A deeper, stronger and more youthful voice responded. It was Marcia speaking.

He found the two on the side veranda. Marcia was seated on the arm of a chair, smoking a cigarette, which she threw away with a swift turn of the wrist that sent it an extraordinary distance. He had not been aware that she smoked.

Her companion was a fair-haired woman whom he had never seen before. She was pale and pretty, and still young enough to get good value out of her large, innocent blue eyes. Her quietly smart black costume was not mourning, but it unobtrusively suggested affliction.

She soon departed, going in through a casement window. There had been no introduction, but Marcia had addressed her as "Mrs. Trent." And Mrs. Trent had said as she left:

"I think the expressman is here with my trunk."

A NEW arrival, perhaps from New York by the train that had brought Thompson home. Almost at the first glance, he had been vaguely suspicious of this woman.

The name settled it—an obvious derivation from the French word for thirty, *trente*. She was Heath's No. 30, the real detective, the wonderful go-getter. Apparently she deserved all the praise her chief had given her. In four hours she had managed to plant herself in this house where there was never a vacant room, and she seemed to have made much progress toward gaining Marcia's confidence.

It was plain that, somehow, the girl had gained from some source a new hope or a better courage. Her spirits were obviously higher, and her manner much more open and natural than they had been on Friday. If Thompson had been ignorant of what had taken place since

then, he would have supposed that it was something that decidedly improved the situation.

Never before had she shown willingness to discuss with him one of her brother's crimes, but now she wished to do so. There was nothing brazen or heartless in her manner of speaking about it, but evidently she saw it from some peculiar point of view beyond Thompson's power to guess.

Naturally he tried to take what would be her side of any possible argument, and he attacked the published stories as exaggerations of what must have been an accident. It was pure folly, he said, to believe that Tully had been knocked downstairs. Would any sane person in Reddy's position have risked causing a noise which would probably be more disastrous to him than the fall would be to the other person?

Moreover, striking a man from behind was not Reddy's way. He was neither cowardly nor cruel. Last September he had let a detective shoot at him point-blank, and had not used his own weapon.

"Then you don't believe Reddy shot that detective, last September?" she asked.

Before, he had never been able to make up his mind about it, but now he replied:

"Certainly not! I've always believed the detective's own story. Nobody wanted him to tell it. He did it because he was white; he wouldn't accuse Reddy of something he didn't do."

"The *Herald* said he did it because he was a coward, and was ashamed to confess that he was shot in the back while trying to get away."

"Yes, and the public believed it. They didn't stop to think that the *Herald* was shouting about Reddy as a lone bandit, a wonderful young outlaw who, single-handed, had held up three armed men, one of them an officer. But the truth is that Reddy didn't fire at all. The detective was shot by some one else who crept up on the other side of the car."

There was a silence. Then Marcia said:

"Have you ever suspected who it might have been?"

"No, and I never heard even a guess that was worth a second thought."

She nodded.

"But in the other robberies," she said, "several men have been hurt."

Thompson knew that one man, for instance, had been shot while running away, though only in the leg. But the banker had been making a sort of lawyer's argument, disregarding all facts on the other side.

"The conditions were wholly different," he said. "No case has been at all like this story about poor Joe Tully."

THERE was a little truth in that statement. He would have had trouble in pointing out those differences and whitewashing Reddy's later exploits, after his heart had been hardened by experience. The captain had been "soft" the first time, but he had quickly got over it.

Thompson was racking his brains for anything more to say in the bandit's defense, feeling that there was something he ought to say, something that Marcia was waiting for; but he failed to think of it. Evidently his failure was complete. She had noticed him glancing toward the room through which he had seen Mrs. Trent pass to the hall.

"You're still thinking of Mrs. Trent," Marcia said, "wondering how I came to be talking with her. I couldn't help it. I had to come down to see Donald Vaughn. After I had talked with him, Mrs. Trent spoke to me, not knowing who I was. But I told her. She took it very sensibly and kindly. She has a sort of silly look, but I think she knows life. I like her."

A sense of treachery and meanness made Thompson shrink till he felt too small for his clothes.

"How did she get in here?" he asked. "I thought there weren't any vacancies."

"She's visiting her cousin, Mrs. Lessing." Mrs. Lessing was a practitioner of some kind of faith cure, and occupied the large room that had once been Mr. Kay's. "Mrs. Trent wasn't expected till to-morrow, and her cousin is playing golf to-day. Mrs. Trent asked me where the links were, but she really wanted to talk,

so I had to tell her that I was the girl on the front page of the *Herald* in her hand. And presently she was telling me about herself."

Very clever. Mrs. Trent would be in great trouble, of course, and would disclose it deftly and pathetically. The wonderful go-getter would know that this girl couldn't be approached with an offer of sympathy, but might be induced to give it if her natural kindness had survived the torture of recent months. It was a neat snare for confidence.

But Thompson was almost as much afraid of Donald Vaughn, who was also a great go-getter and a winner of rewards.

"Why was Vaughn here?" Thompson asked. "Was he sent?"

"No, he came to tell me that two others are coming, and to advise me what to say to them and at headquarters. He says I'm likely to be arrested."

Vaughn had advised her before, and no harm had come of it; but Thompson was so prejudiced against him as to have no doubt that his object was to trick Marcia into leading him to Reddy's hiding place and to the reward.

"What is the special reason for this?" Thompson asked.

"The police think—or pretend to think—that I met my brother yesterday. In the forenoon, I rode over to Silver Stream in the bus, and took a long walk in the woods."

"That's on the other side of the mountain, isn't it?"

"Yes. And they're going to say I met Reddy there—after what happened at the bank. How can I prove that I didn't? I was alone for hours."

"Why did you go?"

"I wished to be alone, as much alone as possible."

"But didn't it rain here yesterday?"

"A little, but it wasn't wet in the woods. And in the early afternoon, the sun shone for a while."

She stood in a sort of trance. He wouldn't have noticed it except that she didn't hear him when he spoke, and as she was looking down she failed to see the movement of his lips. He waited till she raised her eyes.

"Did you meet any one at all in the woods?"

"No, and I wasn't followed. I'm positive of that."

"Then the police can't prove anything. There's only a wild guess behind this charge. And perhaps Vaughn wasn't telling the truth. Perhaps he was merely trying to question you himself. He's a sort of cousin of yours, and it's painful to be always condemning him. But it frightens me to think that you trust him."

"Why should you think so? You scold me for not trusting even you, who have been so kind to me."

"Kind? Only with words. When you've been persecuted, I've made windy offers to use my influence. You've always said no, and that has ended it."

"I'll tell you why I said no. I was loyal to my brother; I was waiting every minute for a chance to do something for him. I couldn't let you know. You were constantly urging me to forget him and consider myself alone. So I couldn't honestly accept your help." She paused and took a deep breath.

"But after hearing what Donald Vaughn told me to-day," she went on, "I was on the point of telephoning to your house, to ask you if you would save me from arrest."

HERE was a wonderful change! Never before had she wanted to accept his aid. Evidently in this crisis, Marcia had stifled her own conscience. It might be really dangerous to aid her now, but she was willing to let Thompson in for it.

"Donald frightened me," she went on. "He said I should be very badly treated. They think I know where Reddy is, and they are going to get the truth out of me if they can."

She said it well, but in the light of those steel-gray eyes, Thompson couldn't suspect her of any personal fear. Her dread of arrest was on Reddy's account, not her own. Imprisonment would wreck some plan of hers to save her brother from capture, or to provide him with some necessity of his mysterious existence.

Obviously she had a way of eluding

the police unless they held her in detention; she had done it before and expected to do it again. But that was just what Heath's detectives would be looking for, and they would almost certainly catch her.

All this went through Thompson's mind in a flash.

"I'll see Scott right away," he said. Scott was commissioner of police. "I've done several favors for him, and he happens to be expecting another. But in approaching him, I should like to be better informed. Did Vaughn give you any hint as to what evidence the police think they have?"

"None, so far as he knew."

"What did he advise?"

"He told me not to say that I walked across the mountain to this side. I told him I didn't."

"But in fact you did."

She hesitated and then said:

"Well, almost across. But I told Donald only what he seemed to think I ought to tell the others. I didn't want to tell two stories, one to him and the other to Chief Curran." Curran was the chief of detectives. "I don't believe Donald would do anything to injure me, but still I was afraid to risk contradicting myself."

There could be no question of contradicting herself unless the truth was dangerous. Thompson was now thoroughly alarmed, and he made a strong plea for her confidence. She replied:

"I walked across the mountain as far as the little old cabin in the woods on this side. The police have always said that Reddy hid there for a day or two, after what he did last September. I've never believed it, and of course he wouldn't go there again, but I had a feeling that I'd like to see the place."

"Did you find anything there?"

"No. It's been searched by the police, the reporters and everybody else."

She denied that she had gone there with any thought of meeting Reddy, or that she had held any communication with him, anywhere, at any time within the last eight months. Thompson would have been glad to believe her, but he couldn't.

When Thompson left her, he was the most puzzled man on the surface of this planet. He felt sure that, aside from the holdup which had become a murder, something else had happened on Saturday that profoundly affected the two Kays. But he could form no guess as to what this had been.

CHAPTER V.

VOICES OF THE NIGHT.

FROM the Kay house, the banker rode to the residence of his chief counsel, Sanford Breck, a lawyer of national reputation and a power in local and State politics. Thompson wanted to draw on the lawyer-politician's underground sources of information. As to his advice, there was no doubt what it would be.

"Keep out of this Reddy case," he had said innumerable times, in recent months. "Pension Marcia, if you want to, but don't retain her in the bank. She's in touch with her brother. If you start any wire pulling to make the police let her alone, you'll be shown up in a mighty bad light when this affair comes to a finish."

Breck had his own troubles in regard to it. His daughter, Constance, had been a playmate of the two Kays' up to the time of Reddy's early trouble, and had continued to be Marcia's closest friend through the following years till Breck's edict ended it. That was last October, after the bandit's continued operations and mysterious concealment had begun to excite the whole city.

Throughout the previous summer Breck had vainly tried to break off the friendship, and his repeated warnings had made trouble between him and Constance. When finally he ordered her to give up Marcia there was a bad scene, and Constance came near giving up her father instead of her friend. He had lost the confidence and affection of his only child, and naturally this did not make him love the Kays.

Therefore, he followed the case sharply, and he knew every futile effort and every exploded theory of the police

in their long hunt for Reddy's hiding place. He had heard of Marcia's excursion of Saturday, and he shared the suspicions of the police, though he knew that they had no evidence.

"All they know," he said to Thompson, "is that she didn't come home by bus. She came afoot, across the mountain apparently. They say she was out there all day, but the odd thing is that I thought I saw her in Brantford shortly after noon —on Liberty Street, two or three blocks west of the bank. Didn't see her face. It might have been some other tall, red-haired girl."

"Are they going to arrest her?" Thompson asked.

"They're thinking of it, by what I hear. Let them do it, though I'll have an awful row keeping Constance from visiting her in the city prison. Pleasant idea, what? But if they lock Marcia up for a while, it may queer Reddy's game. The police ought to hold her for a few weeks as a test to see if anything will happen."

"Do you think she'll try to help him escape?"

"Escape?" The lawyer made a noise between a laugh and a growl. "What for? What's the matter with the place where he is now? If he was my client, I'd advise him to stay there till his grub's cut off. I'd hate to have to find another place the equal of this one for safety."

"Won't Tully's death result in greater effort?"

"Of what kind? The police have searched every house in Brantford whose owner is worth less than a million dollars. They may visit you and me in the course of the week, but what of it? As matters stand, Reddy's got them beaten, and he knows it. The last thing he'll do will be to move.

"This is a very curious case," the lawyer went on. "We have an impossibility in conflict with a certainty. It's impossible that Reddy is hidden in Brantford, and even more so that he's hidden anywhere else. The coming and going would be more difficult to explain than the hiding. He can't be in this city, but he is. He was here Thursday and again yesterday, and I shouldn't be surprised if he held up the Hamilton Bank to-morrow."

An exaggeration, of course, but it was the lawyer's serious opinion that the bandit might emerge at any moment for another depredation.

"That boy is crazed with success and fame," Breck said. "He'll go on, right here, until he's caught—probably by a mere turn of his luck—in one of these holdups.

"And Heaven help the next fellow he tackles. He'll carve a man to mincemeat on the least provocation, now that he's sure to get the chair. Marcia will be charged with murder if she's caught helping Reddy now. He's an outlaw and a murderer, and the best news I could possibly get to-day would be that he was dead."

"For his own sake and doubtless for Marcia's, I could say the same," Thompson responded. "As to her arrest, could you protect her from ill treatment?"

"Yes. Curran is a hard-boiled cuss, but he's afraid of *me*. I advise you, however, that a little martyrdom might help that girl."

Fifty years old, Breck had the figure of a youth. His skin was fresh and unwrinkled, except for deep furrows on his brow. His gray eyes were clear and keen.

Thompson thought of Marcia's agile strength caged in a cell. He was tempted to put pressure on the commissioner, but Breck argued him out of it.

"If you coerce Scott in such a sensational case as this, he'll own you forevermore," the lawyer said. "Don't risk meddling with it, Harvey."

Eventually Thompson went home and remained there wholly inactive throughout the day, feeling meaner than ever before in his life. Breck had agreed to listen in on headquarters by means of his most private political wires, and to telephone immediately if the arrest was made or there was any other important development. No word came, and at eleven that evening, Thompson was still waiting for a call.

He was sitting on his veranda, smoking a cigar and looking out across the lawn toward his gate lamps, blurred in a fog.

He glanced aside only while flicking the ash from his cigar, so he thought, but when he turned again, he was confronted by a figure standing on the veranda steps, and seeming to have come from nowhere. He got the instantaneous impression of a gray raincoat and a gray cap; and even in so dim a light, distant and behind this apparition, the hair at the sides of its head showed a red gleam.

Thompson's heart skipped a beat, and his cigar went down the same way as the ash. He scrambled to his feet, and then a calm and well-known voice said:

"I'm sorry if I startled you, Mr. Thompson."

"Marcia! What's happened?"

"Nothing. The police have let me alone. I wanted to speak to you about it."

SHE had ascended to the top of the steps. He observed that her raincoat was one he had often seen her wear—more brown than gray—and that the cap, which had looked to his excited eyes like that always described by Reddy's victims, was in fact an ordinary tam on the back of her head. His failure to recognize her at the first glance had been due to a sudden scare much more than to the lack of light.

"You'll think it rather wild of me to have come here at such an hour," she said, "but I couldn't wait till to-morrow. Would you mind telling me what they're going to do? I saw your face when you lighted your cigar, and then I slipped in along the hedge so that I shouldn't be seen."

Thompson checked himself in the act of striking a match and the box slipped from his fingers. Marcia was outwardly placid beyond what could be called natural under the circumstances, but he felt as if she were charged with a million volts of electricity.

"You want to know how long a time you can count on—is that the point?"

She answered readily:

"Yes. And will Mr. Scott really protect me if Chief Curran should insist on arresting me? Donald Vaughn told me that the people were excited. Something may happen; I don't know what. If a great fuss should be made, would Mr. Scott let Chief Curran arrest me?"

"I can't give you any sort of assurance, Marcia. I'm very sorry; but the fact is that I haven't seen Scott. I was persuaded that it wouldn't be best."

"You went to see Mr. Breck," she said. "I thought you would. But this is very strange. Donald told me positively that Chief Curran meant to arrest me."

"I didn't understand you so. Have you seen Donald again?"

"No. Oh, yes, I forgot! He came back for a moment, after you'd gone. What do you think made Chief Curran change his mind?"

"I think Vaughn was frightening you."

Marcia slowly shook her head.

"Perhaps Breck may know something about this," Thompson suggested, "though he promised to telephone me if he got any information. Will you come into the house? I'll call Breck up."

They entered the dimly lighted mansion, beautiful in its design and graced with many treasures. The broad hall and the rooms through which they passed were unchanged since Marcia saw them last, years before, when she was a schoolgirl with a mind untroubled. In those days, Thompson's sisters, much older than he, lived here, and their children were of an age to be Marcia's playmates.

In the banker's bachelor den there was no illumination except from a floor lamp.

"You won't tell Mr. Breck I'm here," she said, as he put his hand on the telephone.

"Why not? In such circumstances as——"

"Mr. Breck isn't friendly to me. I don't wish him to know that I can leave my house without being followed. He'd tell the police, and it would be news to them."

Thompson judged that this wasn't quite the whole of it.

"You don't want Breck to know that you're out of doors on this particular night," he said. "What have you been doing, Marcia? You're on fire with suppressed excitement. And you've been crying, haven't you?"

She ignored the last question.

"It's *not* this particular night that I

care about, Mr. Thompson; and I've been doing nothing unusual. If I had, you may be sure I shouldn't have come to this house afterward. I'll try not to bring you any fresh troubles, ever again."

The buzzer of the telephone sounded.

"That's Breck," Thompson said. "Don't be alarmed. I won't tell him you're here."

He took down the receiver. It was Breck.

"Hello! . . . That you, Harvey? . . . What have you been doing?"

"Not a thing. I followed your advice. What do you hear as to that matter?"

"Well, this is queer," said Breck. "I've just had a report that some one has done what you had thought of doing. Influence has been brought to bear and action against your friend has been postponed, I don't know why or for how long or by whose interference. I'd have said there wasn't anybody on earth but yourself who'd be interested to do such a thing. But I get it very straight."

"Try to get more information. Call me later."

"Not to-night, I'm afraid. Perhaps I'll have some news to-morrow morning. See you at the bank. And once more, Harvey, I tell you not to lift your finger in this affair without consulting me. The whole case is loaded with dynamite. In inside circles, the rumor is already circulating that you've bought up—you know who. And you haven't done it. Good Lord, man, suppose you had? Sleep on that, Harvey, and wake up with better sense. Good night."

THE banker turned to Marcia where she sat at the table, and he saw that she had heard both ends of the conversation with the lawyer. She was thinking hard, though she seemed to be idly watching the smoke of her cigarette.

"It looks blue," she said, "for me, I mean."

"How many days do you need?" he asked.

She responded only with a puzzled look.

"You understand me perfectly, Marcia. You have something to do for your brother's safety, for his life. You came here to-night to find out whether my protection would carry you over the date you've set with Reddy."

She thought for a few seconds before replying.

"No," she said, "there isn't any date. And there isn't any question of my brother's safety. I'm perfectly sure as to that, and I don't have to do anything about it."

"Be careful, Marcia. This is a confession. You can't be sure that Reddy's safe unless you know where he is, but you've always insisted that you didn't. If you know now, you've known from the first, and have been assisting him to hide."

"I haven't known, and I haven't helped him in the least."

"But you will—within this coming week."

He knew she was hard pressed for a reply that would be both credible and prudent.

"I'll tell you something in absolute confidence——" she began.

"Let's have this understood clearly," he cut in. "Every word you utter I shall hold most sacredly confidential. Under no circumstances will I repeat it to anybody, ever; but I have decided not to take any serious action without legal advice."

Marcia smiled; and told him that she understood that perfectly.

"Reddy has escaped," she said steadily. "He's gone away. I've known of it since Saturday afternoon."

"You saw him?"

She hesitated quite a long time and then said : "Yes."

"Under what conditions?"

She was silent.

"Perhaps that wasn't a fair question," he admitted. "Do you know where Reddy has gone?"

"Yes."

"Do you think the place is safer than the one where he's been for the past eight months?"

"How could it be?"

"Then if there's no gain, why did he go?"

"There's no loss," she replied. "It's equally safe, just about the same."

"And yet I can see that you feel differently than you did."

"Yes, decidedly. As to my brother's account, the balance is on the better side. As to mine, what I have still to do will be much easier. For I *have* something to do, and may as well admit it. But it isn't dangerous, not in the least. And it can never cause you any trouble when the actual truth is known.

"Will you wait for that? Will you have faith in me for a little while, even though some strange things happen? Out of the depths of my heart, I say that, from this minute, you needn't have the least anxiety as to what I'm doing or as to any exposure of what I've done already—what I've *really* done. But to be imprisoned at this time, though for only a few days, might injure me terribly. If you are disposed to help me, and you yourself can see a safe and honorable way to do it, I ask you to be sure that Mr. Breck is sincere in advising you against it."

Thompson was deeply affected by her obvious need and by the feeling that she lacked any other friend, doubtless by her beauty also.

Yet ordinary business judgment told him that a line of spurious securities was being unloaded on him. Reddy hadn't fled; he was not safe; neither was Marcia. They both were walking a tight rope across a bottomless pit.

"I'll do what I can, Marcia," he said. "I'll talk with Breck to-morrow, but I'll respect your confidence and remember what you've said. I'll simply make Breck tell me how to deal with Scott. I don't understand such business, but Breck is a past master. His advice is essential. Must you go now?"

She had risen. He eyed her anxiously as they walked out together, for he imagined her to be desperate and discouraged. But for all he could see, she was occupied only with a polite interest in his conversation and in the elegance of his home.

Meanwhile he gave her somewhat vague promises of help, but chiefly he was trying to overcome her perfectly reasonable feelings against Breck. Of course the man had been infernally cruel in taking away Marcia's only friend, but he could be trusted all the same.

"I should have to confide in him," she said, "and I can't, nor even in you, at present."

He opened the outer door and they paused on the threshold, impressed by the incredible stillness of the night, the whole city silent as death. Then, from fully half a mile away, came a voice that for a moment sounded human, but resolved itself presently into the howling of a dog.

The clearness of the sound, as if the creature were on the lawn in front of them, was remarkable. They stood motionless.

"That dog is halfway over to Breck's house," Thompson said, at length; and still listening, they walked to the head of the veranda steps. "I shouldn't think a sound would travel so, through this sticky fog."

"I must go," she said.

"Not alone, Marcia. I'll close the door—— There's something wrong over there! Listen a moment."

The dog could still be heard, but with a different note, as if some one were trying to quiet him or to drag him away from something. And around that place a harsh murmur was centering and increasing, distinct from the ordinary noises of the city that had now waked. An automobile horn began to sound a continuing blast that was reënforced in a few seconds by several others. Then suddenly the great siren of the police shrieked like a thousand demons flying over Brantford.

Thompson glanced for an instant toward the echoing sky, then turned to Marcia:

"Are you frightened?"

"For my brother? Not in the least." She spoke quietly, but he seemed to perceive again that million-voltage tension. "Reddy isn't here to-night. You may take my word for that, no matter what this crime may be or what may happen afterward. And you've given me *your* word—absolutely and unconditionally—not to tell any one that Reddy is gone or that I have any information about him."

As if to bind the bargain she gave him her hand.

"Good night," she said. "It's better you shouldn't come with me, I think."

He thought the contrary, being afraid for her sake of what was in the wind to-night.

"I'll go far enough to be sure you get home safe. Wait a second." He crossed the veranda and closed the door. But when he turned, after this was done, Marcia had disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

A SHADOW SHADOWED.

THOMPSON hurried to the street, thinking that Marcia had gone through the hedge and out along the farther side, but his guess was wrong. There was no use guessing again; by this time the swift-footed girl was far away.

He suspected, however, that she had gone toward the excitement; and if she had deceived him, and the alarm now sounding over the city announced another crime of her brother's, she might get into trouble. A bank president's dignity didn't hamper Thompson in these circumstances. He ran, and a number of fast-stepping young men took his dust on the way.

The increasing uproar drew him toward Ashley Place, a street only one block long, between two avenues. It was jammed with people so tightly that the police hadn't yet succeeded in clearing a path into it. An ambulance and a patrol wagon, stalled with other vehicles in one of the avenues, were vainly clanging their gongs.

Thompson understood the situation before getting too deeply into it, and he took a short cut not open to everybody —through an apartment house that was a part of his father's estate. In the court behind it, he found the superintendent and half a dozen other persons standing on tables or whatever else they had been able to drag out, and looking over the rear wall. The windows above were full of other observers.

Beyond the wall were the grounds of the old Ashley residence, which for some years had been a ruin as a result of a fire. The grounds, neglected because of a lawsuit and overgrown with weeds and bushes, were a wild spot in the heart of the city, and nobody worth holding up would be likely to go there. But Thompson, knew that he was close to the scene of the crime.

The table on which the superintendent and his wife were standing wouldn't hold another person. Thompson had no view and he couldn't wait to ask questions. He gripped the coping of the wall and vaulted clean over, with the help of one foot on the table as he went up. He narrowly missed landing on the head of a policeman with whom, fortunately, he was well acquainted.

"What is it, John?"

"It's a murder, Mr. Thompson. A woman—killed."

"Who is she?"

"Don't know, sir. I haven't seen her. She's a stranger, by what I hear. Well dressed, probably wore jewelry. They're saying Captain Reddy did it, and that he's been hiding in the Ashley house."

"Piffle. It's been searched forty times."

"So's every other place," the policeman rejoined, "but he's got to be *somewhere.*"

The grounds behind the ruined house had been cleared of thrill seekers. In the center was a circle of spruce trees whose boughs grew close to the ground and were so tightly interlaced above that the numerous electric torches now within could not be distinguished as separate lights but tinged the whole mass with a yellowish glow. There was a narrow entrance at each end, and Thompson walked slowly toward one of them, preparing himself for what he expected to see.

The bare space in the midst of the trees was thirty feet in diameter, and the body of the woman lay in the center. A dozen men were loosely grouped around her, and at her head a costumed nurse was standing with a torch in her hand. Thompson's first glance was unobstructed, and he saw what he had feared to see—the body of the woman whom he himself had employed, to come here to this frightful death.

Mrs. Trent's face, from the brows

downward, was not disfigured. She had been killed by blows on the top and back of her head. She lay with her feet toward him, the head had been lifted a little. The effect was as if she watched him as he approached.

Her lifelike appearance startled him, for he had expected something very different. She had been killed by three swift blows struck from behind with some sharp weapon whose nature was as yet a mystery.

A lieutenant of police and a doctor named Nevin were discussing the weapon, as Thompson came up behind them, and he learned that its cutting edge was too long for a hatchet; it must have been a very heavy knife, or a sword.

"I can't see where Reddy got such a thing as that or why he should be carrying it," the lieutenant said. "Anyhow, this break certainly puts him in a new class."

BOTH men now became aware of Thompson, and their manner for a moment showed their appreciation of his interest in this crime. The doctor's voice had a note of sympathy as he said:

"Hello, Harvey! Awful thing, isn't it?"

"What's known about it, George? Has she been identified?"

"Yes, in a way," Nevin replied. "She was a detective from Heath's agency in New York. There's an identification tag sewn to her girdle; just Heath's address and 'No. 30.'"

"Her number in the agency," the lieutenant explained. "She came up here on the Reddy case. This woman was staying at the Kay house. I suppose there's no doubt what she was doing to-night."

Shadowing Marcia was what he meant, of course.

"Well, I must get home, if I can get through this mob," said Doctor Nevin.

"I'll go along," Thompson remarked. "I assume that everything proper will be done."

The lieutenant turned toward the dead woman and raised his hand to his cap; and this salute was imitated by the circle of his men.

"I thought you'd like a chance at me alone," the doctor said. "I know more than any of those men in there."

"You guessed right, George. Is there any real evidence against Reddy? Was he seen to-night?"

"Nobody was seen. Nothing whatever was known about this thing till almost an hour after it was done. The woman died instantly, without uttering a sound. The time was ten thirty-eight; that's when her wrist watch stopped, and the medical indications correspond. A dog found the body about eleven thirty, and his howling brought a number of men to the scene."

"She was dead, you say? Was there any talk of Reddy at that time?"

"No. It didn't look like a robbery. The first I heard of Reddy was when Chief Curran and Detective Vaughn came in. They were somewhere in the neighborhood, together, when the alarm was raised. Vaughn had seen the woman at the Kay house this forenoon, and he suspected that she was a detective. He asked me to look for an identification tag, and I found it.

"An unmarked handkerchief, a silver whistle and a small automatic pistol were in a trick pocket of her skirt. She hadn't made a move to get the pistol out. Under the body, Vaughn found a little red-covered memorandum book. That's what it looked like, but it wasn't shown to me. Vaughn and Curran glanced through it, and it seemed to hit them very hard. They were deaf and dumb when I asked them what it was. I think they've gone off to follow a clew that it contained."

"Aside from what may be in the book," Thompson said, "is there anything to show why she was here?"

"Yes. They know she followed somebody to that grove, and was listening—or prepared to listen—to a conversation between persons meeting there. She had crawled under those low boughs, and finally she crawled clear through. The marks are very plain, they say. But she wouldn't have come inside until the others were gone—not without drawing her pistol, certainly. And if Reddy was here, why did she let him get away? If she was afraid to tackle him, she could have blown her whistle."

"The answer is that Reddy wasn't there."

"Then who killed her?"

"The devil may know," Thompson rejoined. "There are plenty of murderers in the world. Were there any signs of a meeting in the grove?"

"A few cigarette stubs. It was safe to smoke in there. Those trees are a solid wall. No tracks were found that mean anything. The middle part was all trampled over by the crowd, and both entrances, of course."

Nevin knew nothing more.

Ashley Place had now been almost cleared, but both ends of it were jammed with people. Thompson and the doctor had to fight their way across the avenue to Nevin's house on the opposite side, and the banker went out by the rear door and across to another street.

He was now not far from Breck's, whither he was bound. There was no use going to the Kay house; the police would have taken Marcia away. His intention was to make Breck go with him to headquarters.

WHEN he arrived at the lawyer's residence, the front was dark, but there were lights at the side entrance and in the windows of the high basement at the rear. This meant that something was going on in Breck's business room and private political den. Two police cars were parked in the side street. Another came along just as Thompson was turning the corner, and a man jumped to the sidewalk. It was Detective Vaughn.

"Ah, Mr. Thompson! I've just been to your house. How did you happen to come over?"

"Let me ask the questions, Vaughn; we'll get on faster," Thompson responded. "What did you find under Mrs. Trent's body?"

Vaughn's head jerked back with a surprise he couldn't conceal.

"You know?" he said, and swore. "Marcia told you!"

"No, it was Doctor Nevin. He said you found a small red book. That's all I know from any source."

"Marcia was at your house. She says so. What time did she get there?"

"At the exact time that she says she got there, if she says so at all. What did you find——"

"Make that time eleven, when the chief asks you," Vaughn interposed. "Don't set it earlier. That'll look as if you thought she needed an alibi."

"I have no such idea. Quit being a monkey, Vaughn, and answer my question."

He knew that the detective enjoyed dramatic effects and the creation of suspense. To get action out of him, Thompson raised a hand toward Breck's doorbell.

"Hold on," the detective said hastily. "Don't ring just yet. Listen to this. What I found was a memorandum book belonging to Constance Breck. She and Marcia met in that grove to-night, and they were dated with Reddy." He paused to let that sink in.

"Can you beat it, Mr. Thompson?" he continued. "Isn't this the wildest sensation ever sprung in Brantford, and the biggest mystery ever known anywhere? For, confidentially, there isn't one damn sign of a clew to Reddy, even yet. I was riding with the chief when the alarm sounded, and we hopped right to it; but except for Conny Breck's book, we drew a blank. Reddy didn't drop his address, not so you'd notice it."

He covered the bell button with his hand to prevent Thompson from ringing, and went on:

"Marcia admits that she and Constance met in the Ashley grounds to-night, but she denies that Reddy had anything to do with it. They were dated with each other and nobody else, she says. They'd been meeting in secret, in that grove and elsewhere, ever since Constance crossed her fingers under the table and promised her father that she wouldn't see Marcia any more."

"When did Marcia tell you this?"

"While I and another officer were bringing her over here. I haven't seen Constance; the chief sent me to your house. But Constance will tell precisely the same story. I could see by the free way Marcia talked that the two of them had it framed as to just what they'd say if they were ever caught.

"Now, Mr. Thompson, you want to see Marcia get away with this, so have your story all set in your mind before the chief gets to you. He's inside. Why did Marcia go to your house?"

He put the question suddenly, and watched Thompson's face in the light of the door lamps. Thompson was compelled to consider what explanation Marcia would have made; he perceived that she had given Vaughn a reason.

"She came to discuss her situation in general," the banker said, determined not to stick closely to facts, "with special reference to her continuing as my secretary."

"Well, you guessed it, Mr. Thompson. That's what *she* says, and it's as good as anything else. I suppose she was looking rather wild. No? Well, don't jump in and tell Curran how cool and calm she was. Wait till he asks you, and then say simply that you didn't notice anything unusual. And be careful not to let the chief trick you into admitting that you tipped Marcia as to Mrs. Trent."

Thompson had tried half a dozen times to interrupt the detective's rapid speech, and now he got in his word.

"Marcia knew nothing of this murder when she came to my house. That was obvious from her manner and conversation. She was distressed about her work, offered me her resignation once more, and I wouldn't accept it. That's all."

Vaughn nodded as if in approval.

"Good stuff, and it might be true at that. I doubt if *anybody* saw Reddy tonight. Mrs. Trent didn't; that's a cinch. She'd have shot him sooner than let him get away, and what was to prevent her from doing it?

"The answer is that Reddy shadowed her and lay low till the two girls gave him up and went away. By the light of their cigarettes, Mrs. Trent saw Constance drop that book, and she went in to get it. Reddy and death were right on her heels and she didn't know it. I'll say it was smooth work."

The detective seemed filled with enthusiasm.

"I tell you," he went on, "Cap Reddy is the smartest player that ever broke into the big show. He's the class of them all, and he's proved it again and again! And how did he get this way? He had no brains to speak of. Marcia was the brainy one. And when Reddy came back from Elmira last summer, there seemed to be nothing in him but a grouch. Still, a man can't show anything he hasn't got, and Reddy certainly has panned out a genius.

"When he got sore at his reception here last summer, he threatened to stand Brantford on its head," Vaughn continued. "Well, he sure has done it now. I remember hearing him say——"

But Thompson had no time for flash backs. He had listened thus far in the hope of getting a hint as to the basis of the detective's excitement. There were alarming indications that he had found something besides the book, some clew that he had not been obliged to show to Chief Curran but would turn to his private advantage in the attempt to win the reward—already large and sure to be increased. But it was evident that Vaughn was guarding his secret.

Thompson pushed Vaughn's hand aside and touched the bell.

CHAPTER VII.

MAN HUNTERS CONFER.

THE door was opened by Breck's man, a kind of private secretary and politician's buffer. None of the ordinary house servants were visible to-night. Thompson and Vaughn were shown to a waiting room, where the detective was halted and the banker was sent on into Breck's sanctum.

The lawyer and Chief Curran and the two girls were present. Constance had been questioned before Marcia arrived, and the prediction made by Vaughn had been accurately fulfilled. Both girls had known precisely what to say, and their stories had not differed by a hairbreadth.

There was more, however, than Thompson had yet heard, and it had produced a curious result. By the girls' story, the meeting in the grove had been set for half past nine and both were prompt. They had talked for more than

an hour; they had noted the time—ten thirty-five—when they prepared to leave, and they thought that at least two minutes passed before they actually started. Their watches were right, and such a woman as Heath's No. 30 would surely have been careful of hers.

It appeared, therefore, that the murder had been committed about one minute after they had gone. Moving cautiously in order to avoid being seen, they would hardly have got out of the grounds before the deed was done, but they declared that from first to last they had neither heard nor seen anything to indicate the presence of the slayer or the victim—of any person but themselves.

Constance had left her little closed car parked at one end of Ashley Place, the least frequented street in that part of the city, bordered by a few old residences, none of which was occupied, except by caretakers. Formerly the girls had used the car itself as their place of rendezvous, but in recent months they had not dared to do so. To-night, however, they had risked riding together for a few minutes. Just before eleven, they went slowly past the Thompson residence, Marcia intending to go in if the indications were favorable.

Just then the banker lighted his cigar, and Marcia recognized him and saw that he was alone. She slipped out of the car and in along the hedge; and Constance drove around to the rear of the house, where she waited at an appointed place. That was why Marcia eluded Thompson after their interview. She rejoined Constance, but did not dare get into the car, because the alarm was sounding, and autos would be searched. She walked the short distance to her house, and Constance trailed along, keeping her in sight till Marcia was stopped by Vaughn and the other officer as she was about to go in.

Thus Marcia accounted for every moment of her time, and her story was corroborated by the president of the Hamilton Bank, for as much as he could know about it, and by the daughter of the last man on earth whom Chief Curran would venture to offend.

While this tale was brought out once more by cross-examination, Thompson observed that Breck did not interfere to help his daughter; he merely watched with a lawyer's eye, and occasionally took a witness in hand. His object was the same as Curran's. Both were trying to find a way to separate Marcia from Constance in this business, and they both failed completely.

The girls placed themselves in a position of absolute equality toward the tragedy in the grove, and their teamwork was so perfect as to make it certain that if one of them had any guilty knowledge the other shared it. They denied that they had seen Reddy or dreamed of seeing him, or that they possessed a particle of information that would have made it possible for them to attempt to arrange a meeting with him.

What they had done to-night was wholly innocent, unless Reddy had come to the grove with their knowledge. He might have come without it. He might have been lurking near his sister's home, and have shadowed her shadow. But there was not a particle of tangible evidence to prove that Reddy had killed Mrs. Trent.

SHE was a detective. She must have made many enemies, and one of them might have followed her from New York. That was Thompson's theory. Breck inclined to the belief that she had been killed by a homicidal lunatic. But the opinion of Marcia was the most intelligent.

"You have no evidence against my brother or anybody else," she said, when the chief tried to trick her with a wild inference as to Reddy. "You don't know a single thing about it, Chief Curran."

What Curran knew was that he couldn't hold Marcia and free Constance, because Constance would immediately show up that performance and give her story to the four winds. She had been deceiving her father, not the public. Now that he knew, she would do as she thought right, and stand with Marcia before the world.

This forced Breck into the unwelcome position of Marcia's protector. It would

be utterly scandalous to arrest her, with Constance ungagged; and Breck couldn't gag her. She had deeply offended him, but he wouldn't see her dragged any deeper into this affair.

It was finally agreed that the police would regard both girls as witnesses who had told all they knew and were available at any moment. Constance, who traveled all over the State on her women's organization work, would remain in Brantford for a while—because of her great desire to assist the authorities.

Just as this had been framed up, a Mr. Wheat sent in his name.

"That's the bird I told you about," Curran said to Breck, "Heath's man, that butted in to-day."

Breck was not on the citizens' committee. Therefore, Thompson had not mentioned it to him. The lawyer had heard about it from Curran.

"Let him come in," Breck said to his watchdog, and then to Curran: "We'd better deal with him right away."

Wheat was a dark, thickset man with a round head resting directly on his shoulders. His usual manner was evidently that of a business person geared for high speed, but he was badly shaken by the shock of the night's tragedy.

Like a nervous man disturbed by an irritating noise, Wheat listened while Curran stated the situation to him. He seemed more interested in watching the girls, chiefly Marcia, on whom his attention finally centered. When he discovered that no action would be taken against her, he was well pleased.

Throughout the whole scene, Wheat said almost nothing except:

"We'll work down to this. We'll put it on the right party."

His "we" evidently did not include the Brantford police. It meant Heath's agency, but Curran was beyond taking offense. He was likewise filled with bitter personal interest in this affair. Watching these two men, Thompson felt that the capture of Reddy was something like a matter of life and death for both of them. Curran would drive his staff to the limit. Heath's agency would use all its own resources and every available connection.

It seemed impossible that Marcia could still believe her brother to be safe. She showed uneasiness when Curran bluffed in Wheat's presence about new clews and the certainty that his men would land the bandit in quick time. But Thompson, who knew her quiet ways so well, soon saw that she was merely pretending to be worried because she thought it better policy.

She didn't quite succeed, though she had Curran guessing. But Thompson now had a certainty. Marcia's tricky performance was proof that she had exact and positive knowledge as to her brother's means of safety.

THE end of the inquisition left Breck and Curran with their heads together. Thompson was nailed by Wheat. The two girls, as soon as their status was decided, withdrew to a corner near the door where they conversed in whispers.

Thompson viewed them over Wheat's head and knew that they would not welcome any interruption. Apparently they had resumed their conspiracy to conceal the whereabouts of a man now wanted for two murders. All that Thompson knew of these girls made their complicity in such crimes an unimaginable absurdity, yet by Marcia's own admission she had seen her brother on Saturday, after he had held up Tully in the Hamilton Bank Building.

Wheat had excuses to offer, first, for having disclosed himself to Chief Curran. He had been forced to take that action in order to prevent the arrest of Marcia, which would have spoiled Mrs. Trent's plan.

"I didn't have to put Curran wise to No. 30," Wheat said. "I told him I was here alone, and that I had a line on the Kay girl as being in with her brother. And of course I spent the rest of the day leading his boobs around this town and pretending not to know they were following me."

While making this disclosure, Wheat edged around till he got his back against the wall, where no assassin could creep up behind him.

"I couldn't reach you, Mr. Thompson, for instructions," he said. "I phoned

your house about noon, but you were out and not expected soon."

This explained a message that had been bungled by a servant, and had seemed unimportant. Thompson now learned that the supposed name which the servant had failed to get was No. 8 —designating Wheat.

"I couldn't do different," the detective pleaded. "The Kay girl was a sure thing, and we had her just right. You see what would have happened if No. 30 hadn't got out of touch with me this evening. I'd have been right there to save her from harm, and I'd have had this Reddy guy at the end of a rod." He meant a pistol. "I'll have him there yet, Mr. Thompson."

"You were to have followed Mrs. Trent?"

"Sure! That was the play. But she couldn't have thought anything was coming off this evening. She didn't put me wise. We'd arranged for that, but I didn't get it."

"What will be done?" Thompson asked. "Heath will come up, I suppose."

"No, he's on a train for Florida. Got a case down there. I'll be in charge here for the next few days."

"Are you alone?"

"I am now. There was a man here Saturday, doing advance work, but he's gone."

"How did you get a man here Saturday?"

"He was going West on a forenoon train," Wheat explained. "The chief flagged him, after hearing your story, and stopped him off here. Then he got him on long distance and told him to fix a plant for No. 30 as close as possible to Reddy's sister. He fixed it with a woman in that house."

"You'll send for more men, of course. How many?"

"That's up to the office, but I'll have all I need. The chief won't stand for any failure, nor for letting up on anybody." Wheat lowered his voice. "You wouldn't expect it, Mr. Thompson, after what was done to-night."

Instinctively Thompson glanced over his shoulder to where Marcia had been. Both girls were gone.

"You can catch her," Wheat said. "Go to it. I'll see you to-morrow."

In the hall, Thompson saw at first only Breck's man at his little desk just outside the door. Next moment he was aware of Constance, halfway up the stairs and looking down over the banister rail. She signed to him, and he ran up to where she stood.

"Donald Vaughn has taken Marcia home," she said.

"In a police car?"

"No, she preferred to walk. Don't be alarmed, Harvey; the police won't do anything. And as for Vaughn—I wonder if you know."

"What?"

"That he's father's confidential man, his most trusted source of inside information. Father couldn't get hold of him to-day. That's why he couldn't find out anything. Marcia won't tell Vaughn anything she doesn't want father to know. And you understand, of course, that father has been trying mighty hard to prove he was right in separating Marcia and me."

"For the love of Heaven, Conny, why don't you tell your father the whole story and get his help? Whatever the trouble is, you two girls can't handle it. You're headed straight for a disaster. You know it! You're white with fear at this moment."

"No, I'm only sorry." Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "Good night, Harvey."

"Wait! Do you know the truth, of your own knowledge, or are you depending almost wholly on what Marcia tells you? You're very much under her influence——"

"Yes, and I wish to be. She's my one friend, and I'll stick to her to the end of the world. I'll never think evil of her, and don't you do it. Don't worry about her and don't bother her. Just be kind."

She made a gesture of farewell and went up the stairs.

More puzzled than he had been before and more deeply disturbed as to Marcia's situation, Thompson walked toward the Kay house. While still at some distance from the house, he saw Vaughn come out by the gate in the tall iron

fence and start off afoot, after a glance around. No police car was in sight and no detectives were on watch. Doubtless they had been called off when Marcia was taken away, supposedly under arrest.

Vaughn was headed downtown by the shortest route, and not toward the trolley lines. Apparently he was going to walk to headquarters, in the business center of the city and not far from the Hamilton Bank.

Thompson passed the Kay house, on to the corner of the grounds, where he paused to look toward Marcia's windows, now dark. When they brightened, it would be a sign that she was safe for one more night here. Several minutes ticked away and no lights appeared.

Wild fancies bred of that night's nervous strain began to dance a devil's jig in Thompson's mind. They drove him to a groping search of the dark veranda, where he found nothing of the slightest value, nothing to indicate that Marcia had gone into the house or that she hadn't. He walked all round it, and except for the night lamp in the hall, there were no lights anywhere.

Thompson began to doubt that it was Vaughn whom he had seen coming out. It might have been some other detective. Vaughn might have had orders to take Marcia to headquarters. His being Breck's confidential man, which Constance had divulged, had hitherto been a well-kept secret. Breck was the trickiest man alive, and he would prove to his daughter that Marcia was unworthy of her confidence if he could.

Without some idea as to what had become of Marcia, Thompson wouldn't go home. He started toward headquarters, and walked more than halfway, till almost within sight of his bank. He had met hardly anybody.

In a bad light and without special attention, he saw what he took to be a man on the other side of the street, going in the opposite direction; and then the idea took hold of him that it was Marcia. This seemed nonsense, but he retraced his steps in a hurry and went all the way to the Kay house without getting another glimpse of the person he was pursuing.

Marcia's windows were dark as before, but the night was now turning from black to gray. Even so, the figure that he saw cross the lawn, sixty or seventy feet back from the street, was no more than a swiftly moving shadow.

At that point there was an uncommonly large beech tree, whose widespread level branches almost spanned the lawn from the house to the party hedge. The figure crossed under the tree and seemed to go down a flight of steps leading to a door of the cellar. A minute later the windows Thompson had watched were lighted.

Thompson now knew by what a simple trick Marcia had been going and coming as she pleased by night, through the patch of total darkness under that tree.

But what use could she have made of her liberty during a scant hour of this murder-haunted morning? In the heart of a city that had been searched a hundred times, what aid could she have rendered to her hidden brother?

CHAPTER VIII.

A FURTIVE FIGURE.

COMING down to business at his usual hour the next morning, Thompson found a small crowd on the bank corner, but it seemed to be dispersing. Two special policemen were on the sidewalk, and Detective Vaughn stood alone on the curving marble steps.

"Stage-door stuff," Vaughn said, indicating the crowd. "I knew they'd be here, waiting to see Marcia. But what's she done that should make her famous? Not very much, according to the *Herald*. They're right. Marcia knows no more about Reddy than you do."

He said it as if he meant it, but the man was a bundle of tricks, and one of them was to throw opinions at a person and watch his face when they hit.

It was obvious that Marcia was now in the bank. Thompson asked what the crowd had done.

"Nothing," Vaughn answered. "Leave that part of it to me. I'll keep my eye on Marcia every minute. She'll have to go to the central office this evening, with Constance, but the chief knows he won't

get anything. It's only a gesture for the public. The *Herald* will write it up as third-degree stuff, to show that no protection is being given. Breck has the *Herald* in his pocket."

Apart from gestures for the public, Thompson knew that real detective work was being done, but there was no chance that Vaughn would disclose any of it. Thompson went into the bank, wondering what the detective had up his sleeve.

His private office and Marcia's adjoining smaller room were in the corner farthest from the entrance. To reach them, it was necessary to walk past the front of the central inclosure with its marble base and row of tellers' windows, and then rearward past two or three more windows on the side. The turn was just opposite that exit—closed at this hour—by which Joe Tully had gone out to his death.

Thompson's office was next to the inclosure, and Marcia's in the extreme corner. Each had a door opening from a jog in the partition, where the banker's personal attendant sat during business hours. There was a door between the two offices, and one between Thompson's and the inner regions of the bank, from which there was no other way out on this side.

The heavily barred windows of the offices looked out on a patch of courtyard behind the bank, and to brighten this prospect, Thompson had ordered a box of flowers for Marcia's window, some weeks ago. Thompson greeted Marcia and they worked for an hour and a half. Neither mentioned Captain Reddy or anything concerning the case. At length, Thompson was called to another part of the bank.

A little later, Breck came in, and then Wheat; and at luncheon time there was a session of the citizens' committee. At this meeting and elsewhere rewards for Reddy's capture were multiplied until a full solution of the case might be worth as much as twenty-five thousand dollars —a prize hitherto undreamed of in that corner of the world.

That afternoon, Detective Vaughn called to learn at what time Marcia would leave. Thompson had intended to take her home in his car, but Vaughn persuaded him not to do so.

"We want to give the impression that she's virtually under arrest," the detective said, "a witness constantly watched. I'll take her home in a cab."

This was done without notable incident, and in the same way Marcia was taken to headquarters in the evening. For the sake of the effect, a sort of semi-public hearing was held, Curran, the district attorney and other officials being present.

THE girls stuck to their story without the smallest change. They were also helped by the testimony of a new witness. Several witnesses were examined, but he was the only one who had anything of importance to tell.

He was a servant in the Kay house. Between half past eight and nine on Sunday evening, so he said, he had twice seen a man lurking in the grounds, first on the west side and then on the east. He had supposed him to be a detective. Later he had read in a newspaper that there were no detectives in the grounds on Sunday evening when Miss Kay left the house, so he had come to headquarters with his story.

Under Curran's questioning, the witness tried to give a description that would fit Captain Reddy, but he was honest enough to admit that it had been too dark to see the color of his hair. A rather small man, he believed, but the fellow was crouching down each time. He might be big enough for the famous bandit, who stood only five feet eight. He wore a gray raincoat; that was certain. As to hat or cap, the witness could not swear, but to oblige Curran he favored a cap.

In general, however, the servant was telling the truth. He had seen somebody spying on the house, and that person was not a detective. Curran's men were all accounted for; four of them were in the neighborhood, but their orders had been to keep off the Kay premises.

Marcia had testified that she left the house by the east veranda, and Thompson judged this to be true. The big

beech tree was on the west side, and no mention was made of it at any time.

By her story, she must have passed very close to the spot where the lurking man was seen only a few minutes earlier. She went into the grounds of a neighboring house, and then to the street at the rear. The detectives admitted that she might have crossed without their seeing her. They couldn't deny it. She *had* got past them somehow, and so had Mrs. Trent; and nobody doubted Reddy's ability to do the same. He, or whoever it was that the servant saw, had eluded everybody else's observation, even that of Heath's cleverest operative, who had lost her life through failure to discover that she was followed.

This skill pointed to Reddy, and the meager description was confirmatory. A gray raincoat had come to be known in Brantford as a "Reddy." Tuesday morning's *Herald* spoke of the bandit's presence on the Kay grounds as if it were a fact not seriously questioned. And the reporter pointed to another fact that rested on a much more solid basis. He wrote:

> He had brought to that place the horrible and silent weapon with which Mrs. Trent was slain, and he must have had in mind the use that he would make of it. He had learned of her presence in that house and had determined to remove her.
>
> Why? If Marcia Kay knows nothing of her brother's hiding place and holds no communication with him, what had Captain Reddy to fear from having a detective so close to her? Perhaps, after the murder of Tully, the bandit dreaded being hunted down, planned flight, and needed Marcia's aid. But Mrs. Trent stood in the way, and in his fury against her, he resolved that she should die.

That was the nearest approach to a direct attack on Marcia. The *Herald* was tied up to Breck politically and to some extent financially. It had to take care of Constance in its reports, and was thus compelled to support the story told by both the girls.

The mystery of Captain Reddy was discussed everywhere. As his hiding place was absolutely unknown, he might come out of it at any man's elbow and at any moment. There was death to be risked and the rich reward to be won by any one who got an eye on him. Nobody believed that his activities had ceased, and there were frenzied speculations as to what his next crime would be.

The mail was full of anonymous letters addressed not to the police alone, but to everybody prominent in the affair. Thompson received several on Tuesday, and that afternoon he came into close contact with a person crazed by the strain of too much thinking about the case.

This was a little man known as Marcelino Vega, who for the past two years had conducted a beauty parlor on the second floor of the building next to the bank. He was supposed to hail from Mexico City, but was really a Cuban.

Success had attended Marcelino from the start, and it might have been much greater if he had been more liberal with his personal attentions, instead of turning the work over to his assistants. Only by special appointment would he give a patron the benefit of his own skill. He spent the greater part of his time alone in his living quarters back of the shop. He banked at the Hamilton, and his balance on the day in question happened to be exactly three thousand dollars.

Shortly before closing time, Thompson received a message from a teller that Marcelino wanted to close out his account, that he appeared to be crazy, or at least in an unfit condition to take care of his money. Thompson went out and found the little man at the teller's window delivering a long speech. His chin reached barely above the shelf, but his enormous head was pushed forward, and he was talking in a guarded and confidential tone.

At a word from Thompson, Marcelino readily accompanied him into the private office, where for two or three minutes he talked crazily. He had secret and mysterious information that Reddy was going to loot the Hamilton Bank. Warnings had come to him to remove his savings beyond the bandit's reach.

Then suddenly he laughed at his own nonsense, admitted that he was upset by the excitement, and especially by the fact that Reddy had passed his door while

coming down through the building after the murder of Tully. Also, he had been drinking, but he was all right now. He really wanted his money and had a use for it.

After he had talked sanely though obstinately for a while, Thompson consented to a compromise. Marcelino got twenty-nine hundred dollars, and kept his account open with a hundred.

When the money was paid, Thompson had his attendant follow Marcelino, and the report was that he went directly from the bank to his home next door. Probably he would cook his own dinner and be seen by nobody till morning. He and his dollars, so it seemed, would be safe from Captain Reddy, who had not yet added burglary to his known accomplishments.

LATER in the afternoon, Wheat called, but he had little to report. He introduced No. 10, known as Mr. Dix, and said that two other operatives had arrived. Dix was Heath's best hunter, the finder of men and things hidden; he was an odd-looking fellow with a face suggestive of a bloodhound.

He asked many questions about the mountain, and was greatly interested to learn that a large part of it was so rough as to be almost inaccessible. A glacier, in ancient ages, had taken a huge bite out of a granite ridge farther north and had deposited the wreckage on the slopes of Brantford's mountain, in fragments some of which looked like vast slabs of cut stone for the masonry of giants.

Out of this confused mess, a growth of heavy timber had come up, long ago, and had been killed by fire, and had fallen and rotted. A person might step on a trunk two feet thick, and go through it in a puff of dust into a hole as deep as a well.

"There'll be spaces between the rocks," Dix said, "some of them roofed over by those big slabs—almost like huts of stone, what?"

"Nobody could live up there in the winter," Thompson told him. "He couldn't have fire enough to keep him from freezing to death. The smoke would be seen."

"The right fuel doesn't smoke much, if it's dry," Dix remarked. "Anyway, it's warm enough up there now. By what I can learn that mountain has never been properly searched. We're going to give it the once over. There's two men up there now."

Dix had a peculiar rasping voice, fit to drill a hole in a safe. Thompson knew that Marcia in her room couldn't help hearing it. He listened for her typewriter and didn't hear it till after the detectives were gone.

When she came in with letters, he thought she seemed disturbed. Still, Thompson couldn't believe that Reddy was hidden on the mountain. He would have been caught either on the way out or in.

If she had any errand to be done tonight, he meant to know the nature of it. By her own account, she was to be at home; the police would allow her an opportunity for rest. Her windows showed a light when Thompson approached the house at eight o'clock, meaning to get into the adjoining grounds and hide behind the party hedge opposite the big beech tree.

There were no detectives to interfere with him; he was surprised by their absence. Both houses were brightly lighted. Though the evening was foggy, he did not dare risk being seen by persons on the verandas.

So he soon walked around to the rear, and found a way through the rear of the Kay grounds. When the lights in that house were dimmed, he crept along the hedge to the place he had selected, except that he was on the inside.

Nothing happened till about eleven o'clock, when he heard some one come in as he had come, and move around to the eastern front. Presently a man slipped in at the gate and posted himself in the total darkness alongside the west veranda. Evidently the house was being more closely surrounded than had at first been planned.

Shortly after twelve, there were small noises at the front of the house. They were caused in fact by pebbles falling there, though Thompson did not know it at that time. The man beside the

veranda crept out to investigate, and as soon as he was gone, a gray shadow darted through the hedge and vanished under the tree. A moment later, Thompson heard the faint sound of the opening of the cellar door. Presently the light in Marcia's room was extinguished.

There was no use watching longer. Walking home, Thompson wondered anxiously where Marcia had been, and on what errand. There had been time for her to go to the mountain with a warning to her brother, based on what she had overheard that afternoon; but it was not credible that she had really done anything like that.

Thompson solved no riddles in his dreams, and waked no wiser as to Captain Reddy—in which respect he was like the other inhabitants of Brantford that waked at all. The new information began to spread a few minutes after eight, just as the banker was getting into his car. There was much excitement. Finding all streets near the Hamilton Bank blocked, he sent the car home and shouldered his way with difficulty into the milling crowd.

Just ahead of him, among the vehicles that were involved in the crush, he saw a taxicab and recognized the chauffeur as the man Vaughn had employed in taking Marcia back and forth, when a police car was not used for that purpose.

As the cab was headed away from the center of the excitement, people were asking the cabman what had happened, and he was shaking his head to intimate that he didn't know. Thompson forced his way to him and asked whether he had brought Miss Kay down.

"Yes," the man said, "and we got there just in time. This thing broke loose before we were quite to the bank, but Miss Kay got in all right."

"What is it?" Thompson asked. "You know, don't you?"

"Sure, but I don't want to jam the crowd round me any tighter. It's Vega, the beauty-parlor man. Murdered. Reddy got to him last night. Killed him and took the money he drew out of your bank. Twenty-nine hundred dollars, I heard Miss Kay tell Vaughn. He was asking her if she knew the amount."

CHAPTER IX.

RED CLEWS.

THOMPSON managed to reach the door of the building next the bank, and the police guard admitted him. As he went up the stairs, he heard a woman screaming and laughing—Vega's chief assistant, known as Madame Julian or more familiarly as "Julie." She had become hysterical, and was being attended by a doctor.

It was Madame Julian who had discovered the murder. She had come down early to have a private talk with Vega, who had intimated the previous day that he would sell her the business at a bargain price. She knocked on his door, at the rear of the parlors, got no answer, and looked through the keyhole—into a room brightly lighted. Directly in range of her eye, the body of Vega lay on the floor, and even a keyhole view was amply sufficient as to his death and the manner of it.

Her screams brought the policemen on duty at the bank entrance, and Detective Vaughn, who had been barely a block distant, bringing Marcia in the cab. Chief Curran, on the way to his office, had been close at hand; and the sudden jam of traffic had caught two doctors in a car almost in front of the door. One of these was now attending Madame Julian, while the other was with Curran and Vaughn on the immediate scene of the murder.

All other persons had been excluded from that room, but Thompson was permitted to enter.

Vega had been killed by blows on the head and face, struck with a silver-headed cane that now lay across a table. Thompson was vaguely surprised that it had not been broken, for the insanely cruel and persistent violence of the assault must have continued long after death was sure.

Beside the cane was a blank sheet of paper, on which lay a pocket magnifying glass. Vaughn had another which he used at moments as he knelt beside the body.

Curran, who had admitted Thompson, began to question him about the twenty-

nine hundred dollars. How many people knew that Vega got it?

"You gave it to him in your office, I understand," he said.

Thompson explained that Vega had been arguing with a teller. At least a dozen persons must have heard him asking for the money.

Vaughn spoke.

"I don't find any more, chief."

"Well," Curran said, "three are as good as a thousand, I suppose."

"Three what?" Thompson asked, from a throat dry with nerve strain.

"Three hairs out of Reddy's head," Curran replied. "The first time he's left anything behind him. We found them under the nails of Vega's hands."

Curran held up his own hands in a clutching gesture.

"He grabbed Reddy like that—by the two sides of his head. Crazy thing to do, but he *was* crazy, and was made more so by the thought of losing his money. Vega was a strong little devil, I've heard, and proud of it. Lift that cane, Mr. Thompson. Take hold of it; there're no finger prints. Reddy used gloves, and that's something new, for him."

Thompson took up the cane and was astonished by its weight.

"Some bludgeon," Curran remarked. "Solid silver head and a steel core inside the wood. Julie says Vega kept it standing beside that door." He pointed to the one that opened from the hall. "That's how Reddy got in. There's no other way. Vega had the cane in his hand. But a fat chance he had against Reddy Kay."

The door had not been forced.

"Reddy disguised his voice," Curran said. "Spoke high, like a woman, and gave a name that was right. That fellow knows everything."

A counterfeit of a woman's voice might have worked the trick, but Thompson knew that Vega would never have opened that door to an unknown man.

"He found himself covered with an automatic," Curran was saying. "Before he could draw breath to yell, Reddy was in the room and the door was shut. It's likely Vega was frantic enough to try to use the cane, but Reddy would be too quick for that, and too cool to shoot. He'd jump inside the blow, and snatch the cane away. That was when Vega grabbed him by the head. And what happened after that, you can see for yourself. If Vega managed to yell, which is doubtful, he wasn't heard."

There was no disturbance of the room. The money had been taken from a coat, hanging over the back of a chair. The breast pocket was pulled partly inside out.

Against the wall was a bench partly equipped for work with human hair, but apparently never used. On the bench were playing cards, dealt out in a peculiar manner.

"He was telling his own fortune when that knock came," Curran said. "Can you beat it?"

LATER the *Herald* printed a layout of the cards, with a reading by a local seer, to the effect that they clearly indicated the approach of death. They did, the way the *Herald* printed them.

For other people, the cards supported more evidences that the murder was committed not very late, probably about eleven o'clock. A single elevator was regularly in service till midnight, and the man who operated it was supposed to tend the street door, closed after seven. But it was often left unlocked, and a person wishing to get in unseen had only to watch through the glass panel until the elevator went aloft.

Inside the building, Reddy was comparatively safe. His peril was in the streets. It seemed impossible—with his name on every tongue and the fear of him in every heart—that he should have penetrated to the center of the city and have escaped unseen.

"But he did it," Curran said; and showed Thompson the three hairs in a glass tube that the doctor had given him. "I know where there's a sample of Reddy's hair that I can get, but it's dated five years back. Still, his hair looked just the same last summer, and I guess we can prove our case with a microscope.

"Come back with that tube, Don!" he called. "It goes in my pocket."

Vaughn had taken it from Thompson

and was studying it by the window. He ignored the order to return it, an offense for which his chief would have scalped any other man.

"I have a feeling that I'll get Reddy this time," Vaughn said.

"You, all alone?" Curran growled. "Do you think you can dope out his address from those hairs?"

They would afford no help of that sort, and Vega's death had brought the police no nearer Reddy's hiding place, in Thompson's judgment. He left the building and went to the bank.

In the bank were several telephone booths for the convenience of the public. Marcia was just coming out of one of them, and she saw Thompson glance at the clock on the wall. It was past nine, and there should have been an attendant at the bank's switchboard.

"I was speaking with Conny," she said. "I thought it might be better to use one of these phones, though I didn't say anything that would matter."

"Did you say anything about last evening? You were away from your house till past midnight."

"Yes. I saw you by the hedge, but I had to get in. And Donald Vaughn may know I wasn't at home. I nearly ran straight into him, when I was coming out."

"He may have followed you."

"No. He disappeared somewhere. I don't think he saw me; he said nothing about it this morning—if that means anything."

"Where did you go?"

"I met Conny, in her car. We didn't go anywhere in particular, just round and round through dark streets, while we talked."

Whether this was true, Thompson was uncertain, and he was afraid that Marcia had arranged her alibi, at least in part, by telephone. She read his thought and answered it by saying that she had only told Constance what had happened.

He observed that she covered all natural emotion with unusual care, as if she were watched, though there was no one in the outer bank except the guard, who could not see them after they turned the corner of the central inclosure. In Thompson's office, however, she displayed some agitation.

"I heard them accuse my brother in the streets," she said. "They know nothing whatever. They are always mistaken, always deceived, but never ashamed of it. Is there any real evidence to show who killed this man?"

"Yes," he replied. With all possible consideration, he told her what it was.

SHE listened quietly, but for a moment she seemed to be stricken with a sense of final and complete disaster. He judged that all her secret hopes for her brother were utterly destroyed by this news, but it was presently obvious that she was waiting for worse to be told. Whatever she feared, it hadn't yet happened, or at least it wasn't in Thompson's story; and evidently Marcia could not understand its absence.

"You weren't there when the hairs were found," she said. "Do you know what was done with them at first?"

"Yes. The doctor noticed them and called Curran's attention, and he put them on a sheet of paper and looked at them through a magnifying glass."

"What for?"

"I believe the doctor thought he could tell something as to the person——"

"What did he say?"

"He thought they might be Reddy's."

"I don't understand this," she said. "Could you see them well, in that tube?"

"Perfectly. The glass was very thin. I was surprised to see the color so plainly."

She put up her hands to her head. Marcia's fingers brought several hairs out of that glowing mass, and they showed red in the white palm of her hand.

"Were they like these?" she asked.

He saw that she watched him intently as he bent over her hand.

"This is useless, Marcia," he said. "I was very much excited when I looked at the ones that were found. Perhaps I merely saw what I expected to see. For the same reason, these look precisely like the others, but they may be very different."

"Aren't these longer?" She waited till he shook his head. "Reddy's hair wasn't

coarse at all, but I suppose a girl's might naturally be finer."

"I have no such eye as that, Marcia."

She was not satisfied. She appeared interested vitally, and in some particular point.

"What is it that you want me to notice?" he asked. "Perhaps I could see it, but I'm too excited to find it for myself."

"There must be *some* difference. Did the others seem to have been torn out more violently?"

"No. There'd have been more of them, if much force had been used."

She evaded explaining the motive for her questions, saying only that the matter was so mysterious and so terribly unfortunate that she wanted to know everything possible about it. Then she very earnestly reminded him that all was in confidence.

"You have my word," he said; "but are there no obligations on your side?"

"To tell you the truth? Yes, so far as I possibly can. But my first obligation is to my brother. As to what was done last night, I can tell you something you may depend upon: Reddy didn't do it. I have positive knowledge of that. He was not in Brantford then, or on Sunday evening.

"But suppose you should repeat this, what could I do? The police would try to force me to tell *how* I know, and where my brother really is. I won't do it.

"Remember, we have had our experience of telling the truth, Reddy and I, in this city where we were born," she went on. "We told the truth to Brantford, five years ago, and you know what came of it. My brother's innocence was written on his face; his character should certainly have been known to every one; his honesty and the value of his word. But they believed the testimony of two thieves who had an accidental opportunity to bring him into their case, and were advised by their lawyer to do it.

"They expected to gain public support because of Reddy's popularity, and they were mistaken. Also, the thieves counted on the influence of my father's enemies, and from that they got a little benefit, in shorter sentences.

"As for my brother, they couldn't kill his body for *that* crime, but they did their best to kill his soul. They killed his splendid prospects and his hope. They sent him to a college where criminals are educated—chiefly by one another, the worst of them being the most influential as instructors.

"And you know why it was done? Because my father owed money. All his honest debts were paid eventually, but they didn't wait for that or consider it.

"Don't ask me to hold my brother responsible for anything he has done," she continued. "This city is responsible. Brantford is paying for it now, though not quite in the way that you imagine. But there is a natural justice that controls these matters, and the crime that was committed against my brother has to be paid for in the same coin."

"Individuals suffer," Thompson remarked, "not the city, and not the persons who were really to blame."

"Yes, and I'm sorry. I feel regret, pity, horror. But what could I do? Could I save Mrs. Trent, whom I never dreamed to be in danger? Her death was a complete mystery, yet all Brantford instantly accused Reddy, without one particle of evidence. Do you wonder that I won't take this community of idiots into my confidence? As for yourself, there are special reasons——"

"You mean Breck?"

"In part."

"But how can I believe what you tell me? You assured me that you had known nothing about your brother before Saturday, but in fact you and Conny have been planning for weeks, if not for months."

"We didn't know where he was."

"You told me he was safe."

"Yes, I thought so."

"But now you're afraid Heath's men will find him, hiding on the mountain."

"I depend on you to do nothing to help them," said Marcia.

"They're doing all they can, as it is, and I shall neither help nor hinder them. You may trust in me to keep your secret —the little that I know of it—under the conditions as they now exist. But if another crime follows these awful things

that have been done, I must exercise some freedom of judgment. You can't ask me to be an accomplice through my silence, or to let you continue in such a course."

She nodded slowly.

"That's precisely the point," she said. "I would keep my secret under almost any conditions. I am wholly devoted to my brother. But I can't expect the same of you. That's why I've never burdened you with all the truth."

He felt as if one of them must be crazy, and he suspected that it wasn't himself—as most persons do, in such a situation.

"Marcia, think! Suppose there should be another murder, to-morrow, any day, with evidence such as I saw this morning? How could you acquit yourself of responsibility?"

"I could acquit Reddy," she replied firmly. "He wouldn't be responsible, no matter what was done."

They were interrupted by the doorman's knock. He announced Mr. Vaughn.

"Good morning!" the detective said, most agreeably. "I came to say a word to Marcia—not in private. There'll be no trouble about last evening. Curran knows you were out of the house, but he has no idea of trying to connect you with anybody but Conny Breck. I've just seen her, and she's a good witness. She covers the whole evening, up to past midnight.

"Strictly between ourselves, the chief is satisfied that you two girls know nothing material. In his judgment, you've simply been trying to find Reddy, and you've failed, the same as everybody else has."

He had come up beside Thompson's desk, and it happened that a hair from Marcia's head lay on a sheet of paper. It was right under Vaughn's eyes.

"What's this?" he said. "Did you get it up there? You ought not to have taken it away, Mr. Thompson."

"I didn't." Thompson made a movement to brush it off the desk, but the detective quickly picked up the hair.

"I'm going to tell you something else in confidence," he said. "There are a number of red-haired people in this world, but there are only two Kays. I'm very well acquainted with both of them, and to my eye the hairs found on Vega's fingers are decidedly off the shade. Let's see if I'm right. This one is Marcia's, I suppose."

He took the glass tube from his pocket and shook out the three hairs beside the other on the paper. He inspected them with the naked eye and then with his magnifying glass.

"Well," Vaughn said, in a tone of disappointment, "there's less difference than I supposed. I'm afraid we can't make any point of it."

He gave the glass to Marcia, who used it briefly but intently and passed it to Thompson without comment. He could not see any difference between one hair and another, but he did not say so.

"A layman can do nothing with this evidence," the banker remarked. "Strictly scientific tests, in comparison with hairs that were known to be Reddy's, might have a value, if the experts were honest."

Vaughn was deftly restoring the three hairs to the tube. He crumpled the paper in his hand and dropped it into the wastebasket.

"Perhaps you're right, Mr. Thompson," he said. "We won't mention our own little experiment. Better let the matter stand as it is."

CHAPTER X.

STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS.

A SOMEWHAT ghastly silence pervaded the office after the detective's departure. Before Thompson could break it with any significant utterance, Wheat was announced, and Marcia withdrew.

Wheat was in a hurry, as always. He dropped his hat on the banker's correspondence, and gestured toward the room of death next door.

"You were up there," he said. "Pretty wild stuff. Looks as if one nut killed another. Did you ever hear of a lunacy defense for Reddy?"

"No. But I thought of it this morning."

"The sister never spoke of it?"

"No."

"That's funny. You don't seem to get her confidence. Why don't you demand it?"

Thompson reflected that this man was speeded up some distance ahead of the calendar. His rudeness might be only the accepted etiquette of ten years from now.

"Demand it? By what right?"

"Now, now, don't get hot! She's got a good job at stake, but this isn't New York. Still, there's other towns on the map that are just as hard boiled. The slavery belt runs all round and round."

"It doesn't run through this bank. Why did you ask if Miss Kay ever mentioned a plea of insanity for her brother?"

"Because she's been working it up," Wheat answered. "That's what she and Miss Breck have been doing. They're trying to get some kind of evidence on the quiet. I don't mean doctors—experts—though they're attending to that, too."

"How do you know?"

Wheat reduced the volume of his voice a bit, and muffled it with a thick and hairy hand beside his mouth.

"The sister was out last night. Did you know that?"

"She mentioned having seen Miss Breck," Thompson ventured.

"She did see her. She was in Miss Breck's car between ten and eleven o'clock, probably not later. But in the first part of the evening Miss Kay was out alone. She slipped past everybody, except Dix, who was lying around, just on a chance. Dix trailed her to the house of Doctor John Earle Clark."

Doctor Clark was the leading alienist in that part of the State, an expert witness in many cases turning on questions of sanity.

"She evidently had an appointment," Wheat went on. "She was there almost an hour. Then she walked some distance, side-stepping cops in a way that Dix says he never saw matched; and finally she met Miss Breck in the car. Dix wasn't prepared for that, and the car got away, but he thinks it went past him later with only Miss Breck aboard—as if she'd dropped the other girl somewhere near home. That was around eleven o'clock."

It was past midnight when Thompson saw her make her secret entry. But there was no telling how long it had taken her to approach the house. She might have encountered an officer where she couldn't side-step him, but must wait till he moved.

"I believe your theory is correct," Thompson said. "I have no idea what sort of evidence they've been trying to get, but there is no valid objection. They have a perfect right to prepare a defense."

"Sure, but they've got no right to keep Reddy under cover. And they're doing it."

"Have you any proof?"

"Not legal proof. But tell me this. Did either of those girls, on Sunday night, show the slightest sign of fear that Reddy might be caught?"

They hadn't, but Thompson did not wish to stress the point.

"Why should they?" he rejoined. "They didn't believe he killed Mrs. Trent."

"Right. They thought he had an alibi. Both of them were sure he wasn't in Brantford Sunday night. I could see it written all over Miss Breck. I took only one look at *her*. But Miss Kay is different. Anybody that gets past the outside of her eyes is some mind reader. She's got secrets that the other girl doesn't dream of. But I could see she knew that Reddy was safe."

Thompson could have supported that opinion by Marcia's positive statement, but he avoided the subject.

"If they really knew that Reddy wasn't in Brantford," he said, "then he didn't kill Mrs. Trent."

Wheat moved uneasily in his chair.

"Maybe he didn't. I've got hold of something that points to another party. But it isn't in shape to be mentioned yet, not even to you. It might not prove up. If it does, I'll tell you something that'll surprise you."

"A surprise is just what I don't want," Thompson informed him emphatically. "I want to know at the earliest possible

moment who this other person is, and what your grounds are for suspecting him."

Wheat declined to answer. He was too experienced a man, he said, to make careless statements relative to a case of murder.

"Next time I see you, Mr. Thompson, I'll have this matter in shape to talk about. It's in no such shape at present, and I'll have to ask you to wait."

HE consulted the desk clock, turning it for that purpose and leaving it so, remarked that he had a date to keep, and made his escape without having yielded any further information.

Thompson called Marcia in, and told her Wheat's story of her visit to the alienist.

"I think this will be all right," she said. "Every one will know why I went to see Doctor Clark—about my brother of course. The detective understood that, didn't he? I don't care if he tells the police, but not too soon. Could you make him keep it to himself for a few days?"

"To give you time to see Doctor Clark? And Conny Breck perhaps?"

"Yes. All three of us ought to tell exactly the same story. The police would make trouble over the most trivial contradiction."

This was true enough, but Thompson had a feeling that a lunacy defense for her brother had struck Marcia as a wholly new idea. She would have to tell Doctor Clark and Conny about it, because they would never have heard of it. But this seemed nonsense. There couldn't be a doubt that Marcia had gone to the alienist for an opinion as to somebody's sanity, and if it wasn't Reddy's, whose could it be?

Meanwhile she was speaking of her perfect confidence in the doctor. She gave a brief but perfectly natural account of the consultation. Doctor Clark wouldn't express an opinion, of course, without an examination, but he told her many things she wanted to know. The series of crimes indicated a certain kind of insanity. She had forgotten what he called it, but it gave a person an exaggerated sense of his own wisdom, power and importance.

As this was a delusion, it would lead eventually to monstrous and absurdly dangerous acts, certain to result in discovery. And so forth, and so forth—partly the truth, Thompson judged, but mostly invented on the spur of the moment.

Underneath this consultation, he perceived, lay a mystery so threatening that Marcia's mouth went dry as she spoke of it, yet there was no way to attack any of her statements. They were admissions of the apparent facts that he himself had felt sure of, a few minutes ago, but now could not believe.

His anxiety was aroused as to what others were doing toward the explanation of this mystery. Thus he was impelled to return to the scene of the previous night's murder, and he arrived in time for unexpected and startling developments.

They came from Madame Julian. She had recovered sufficiently to be questioned again, and as Curran looked for nothing of much consequence from her, he had no objection to Thompson as a listener.

All that the chief hoped to get was a fact or two about Vega's habits and history. A thorough search of his room and personal effects had yielded no more evidence as to his death, and singularly little as to his life. Of his previous places of residence, or any detail whatever of his career before he came to Brantford, nothing had been found.

Vega had never told Madame Julian much, and she felt sure that every word of it was a lie. He said he came from Mexico, not knowing that she had lived there. She had let him talk, and his absurd mistakes had satisfied her that he had never been in that country.

"He wasn't telling any one where he came from," she asserted. "He'd been in bad trouble somewhere, and I used to think he was paying for it, but now I don't know. You heard me say I thought he was hiding Captain Reddy."

Neither Curran nor anybody else had heard her say this. She imagined, however, that she had disclosed the secrets

of her soul, and Curran rose to the opportunity.

"Why, certainly," he said. "I heard you say that. Don't be afraid to speak out. I'll take care of you, if you tell me everything you know."

THE word "know" nearly frightened her into hysterics again. She called on the gods to witness that she knew nothing at all, and had never said she did. Curran soothed her with gentleness and tact.

Madame Julian then told her story. At various times since last fall, she had known that a mysterious man was in Vega's living quarters, but she had supposed that he was there for only a few hours at the most, on each occasion. She had never seen him, nor ever been able to detect precisely when he came or went. All she knew was that Vega would never let herself or anybody else in while the man was there, and he was sometimes greatly disturbed by those visits.

She had become convinced that Vega never spoke a word of truth about his past. She drew the inference that it contained some very lurid chapters; and this led her to surmise that the mysterious visitor was a blackmailer.

She had never thought of Reddy in connection with the matter until Saturday, after the holdup of Tully. Just before the alarm was raised, she wanted to see Vega for business reasons, and knocked on the door between the parlors and his room. He wouldn't answer at first, and she got the impression that he was just letting somebody in from the hall.

She knocked again, however, and he refused to admit her. He spoke in an excited, angry manner which caused her to suspect that the man of mystery was with him. Two minutes later the police were in the building. All exits were guarded, and every part of it was searched, but nobody was found in Vega's room except the little man himself.

Some one had come in from the hall, Madame Julian would have sworn, at just the time when Tully's assailant was escaping through the building, and the incident had tormented her mind ever since. If the visitor was Captain Reddy, why did he stop, wasting half the few seconds that remained to him for getting away? How did he dare go out on the street? And yet, how could he have been hidden in the room so that the police failed to find him?

She was familiar with its interior; there was no trick furniture, and the clothes closet and the tiny bathroom that Vega had installed could be searched at a glance. She decided that concealment was impossible, and that the bandit—so well known and so eagerly sought—must have walked out and away unrecognized.

Chief Curran was not inclined to disregard Madame Julian's story altogether, though it seemed to contain so little real evidence. At least, it was absolutely new. Neither Curran nor anybody else had dreamed that the woman regarded her employer with suspicion. Vega himself had not guessed it.

For several weeks Madame Julian had seen signs that the hour was approaching when she might buy the beauty parlors at a bargain price. Vega was increasingly restless and nervous. On Saturday, after the police were gone, he shut himself in his room and refused even to speak through the door.

Full of vague suspicions, and afraid of losing a business opportunity, Madame Julian worried all night and the better part of Sunday; and about three in the afternoon, she went down to the beauty shop.

She found Vega in the parlors, sitting by a window and peering out on the street from around the edge of a curtain. He wore a bath robe over pajamas, and slippers on his bare feet. As soon as he knew she was in the room, he flew into a frantic rage.

He cursed her in Spanish, and accused her of spying on him and betraying him. He rushed across the room toward an open trunk. When she saw him take up a weapon, she fled for her life. He pursued her through the parlors, but not into the hall.

On Monday, she came down late, so that one or more of her assistants would surely have arrived, but she was not much alarmed. Vega was calm. He

apologized for losing his temper. He certainly hadn't meant her any harm. It was a peculiarity of his, he said, that he couldn't bear to have any one creep up behind him, especially a woman.

HE made her promise not to mention the occurrence, and then told her that he was tired of Brantford and was going away soon. He would sell the business for a small amount, and she accepted the terms immediately, but she couldn't make him put his name to any paper at that time. Tuesday noon, however, he told her that he would close the sale next day—this day whose light he never saw—but he had made her swear not to reveal the transaction till he gave permission.

He had always been strange, she said, but had known what he was about every minute. His condition on those last three days was very different from what she had ever seen it until then. She was convinced that the change began at the time when Captain Reddy stopped at his door, while escaping after the crime that resulted in Joe Tully's death.

Of course she was merely guessing that it was Reddy. There was no evidence, except that the bandit descended through the building about that time. Certainly if he stopped anywhere, he must have had a mighty good reason for it. But why had he stopped?

Madame Julian had nothing to say on this puzzle, and Curran reserved it for subsequent meditation. Merely to test Julie's truthfulness, he tried her on what seemed an unimportant point and was rewarded far beyond his expectations.

She had said that Vega, on Sunday, had snatched a weapon out of an open trunk. In the top tray of that trunk, Curran had found a revolver of Spanish make, and with a rather long barrel. It had evidently been out of order for some time, but it might have served to frighten a woman.

Curran's own modern automatic was a very different looking firearm. He took it from his pocket, saying:

"Here's Vega's gun. I got it out of that trunk. No doubt it's what he had when he chased you, Sunday."

"No," Madame Julian said, without an instant's hesitation.

"Well, that's queer. It's the only one I found. What kind of a pistol did he have?"

"I don't know," she said. "I didn't see it."

"Then why are you so sure that this isn't the one?"

She might have lied easily enough, but she was too badly frightened; for what reason, Thompson could not guess. Curran was equally at a loss, but he looked as if he were waiting for Julie with a handful of trumps.

"It wasn't any kind of pistol," she stammered. "I didn't see it plain. He was pulling it out of something."

There was just an instant of highly charged silence. Then Curran barked:

"Out of a sheath? Was it a machete?"

The *Herald* of the previous day had flashed the headline, "Reddy's Mysterious Weapon Was a Machete," printing interviews with ex-soldiers who had served in Latin-American countries, and backing its theory with opinions of doctors who had viewed Mrs. Trent's body.

"You've seen them in Mexico," Curran added.

"I—think—it was one," Madame Julian gasped; and she began to weep and moan.

"Don't cry, Julie," said Curran soothingly. "You ought to have told this before, but that'll be all right. You knew Vega had a machete——"

She exploded with denials, evidently truthful.

The chief turned to Thompson.

"We've worked down to the weapon in the Trent case, but where is it?"

"Isn't it here?"

"No, we haven't found it, and we haven't found out who used it. Vega might have loaned it to somebody. We might find that machete, Mr. Thompson, when we find where Reddy is hid."

CHAPTER XI.

REDDY'S HIDE-OUT.

THOMPSON did not argue against Curran's view, though his own was different. He went to the Hotel Brantford, where Wheat had been staying, but

the Heath man had checked out an hour before. He was now on the express for New York, Thompson supposed. He crossed to the bank, and just as he was about to enter his office, the voice of Dix, the hunter, spoke unexpectedly, right in his ear.

"That party you were just inquiring for has gone down to the city," the detective said. "Anything I can do?"

Thompson took him into the office, told him the gist of Madame Julian's story, and demanded everything additional that Dix knew on his own part or from Wheat. Did Wheat think that Vega murdered Mrs. Trent, and did he know why?

Dix nodded.

"Mrs. Trent caught that little guy three times," he said, "if he's the right man. Wanted for murder. No reward, but Mrs. T. would have been mighty glad to get him. Once in a while they get *us*, you know. We have to take that chance.

"His name was Esteban," Dix went on. "Cuban, but he'd lived around New York since he was young. Three years ago, he and his son and another man were running a big hooch factory down on Long Island. They pretended to be making hair dye, and were drawing industrial alcohol on permits, hundreds of gallons at a time. Turning it into booze of course.

"Some officer reported them and they were arrested. That night they broke out, killing a jail guard and a cop. Heath was called in, and he rounded them up, through clever work by No. 30. The son was shot dead resisting arrest; Esteban made a get-away; and the other man went to the chair.

"Mrs. T. located the Cuban twice, after that, but he slipped past the police both times. Very smooth worker, little Esteban. Think of his settling down so near New York as this; and there's never been a whisper in two years. You'd think somebody must have been onto him. Maybe Reddy was. Esteban's son was in Elmira for a while, and no doubt his father went up there to see him. The boy got out less than four years ago. Reddy was there then."

"Why bring Reddy into this?" Thompson rejoined. "It's a clear case. Vega—as we knew him—not only had personal fear of Mrs. Trent, as the detective that had always run him down, but also he held her responsible for the death of his son."

"Yes," Dix admitted; "there was motive enough for a crazy man. If he knew she was in Brantford, he'd have killed her if he could, but how did he know? At the railroad station, Sunday morning, she hopped right into a cab that took her out to Dorlan's." Dorlan's was a hotel in the south end of the city. "There she had breakfast with Wheat, unseen, and they laid their plans. Then she rode alone to the Kay house, and she was never out of it till after dark. How could the Cuban have seen her?"

"He couldn't."

"Then somebody told him. It's a sure thing that he knew. He was watching at that window in a crazy panic, waiting for the house to be surrounded. I'd like to have been there when he saw a woman in that room. I'll bet he thought for a second that it was Mrs. T., and his heart turned upside down, also his brains. He knew that Mrs. T. would shoot at his shin bones at sight."

"Who could have told him she was here?"

"Reddy," the detective answered promptly and with confidence. "He saw her in Elmira. Nobody else in Brantford, bar Wheat, knew who she was. It *must* have been Reddy. He saw her, somehow; and that was a chance Mrs. T. didn't figure on. She thought it would be easy to keep out of his sight. She believed Vega was in the wilds of Mexico, or South America."

Thompson tried to reject this as mere guesswork.

"You believe Reddy robbed Vega don't you?" Dix said. "But why did he kill him? It wasn't necessary. He'd got in without any holler being raised—which is evidence in itself that they were acquainted. Being inside, and the door shut, Reddy could have tied up the little man so that he couldn't interfere with a get-away.

"Reddy killed Vega because the little man had gone off his nut. Reddy

couldn't stand for a crazy partner who knew his secrets. Last night's job was a murder with the definite motive of silencing a crazy talker. That's plain on the face of it. The Cuban signed his death warrant when he *talked* in your bank, not when he drew that money."

In addition, Dix pointed out that the game which Reddy had played so successfully, for all these months, looked as if it had been devised by a shrewd, experienced crook. The Cuban was an expert in the matter of hiding. Wanted for murder, he had stayed at liberty for three years without going outside the State of New York, so far as known. His room was not Reddy's regular hide-out, of course, but it was very useful as a place to dodge into and wait till an alarm subsided.

Thompson was by no means converted to this theory. How could Reddy have seen Mrs. Trent on Sunday? Was it imaginable that the bandit had been strolling through the streets or breakfasting at Dorlan's? Mrs. Trent's name was known to everybody in the Kay house on Saturday evening. It might have reached Vega's ears.

"Her name would have meant nothing to the Cuban or to Reddy," Dix rejoined. "She used a hundred. One of those men had to see her. And which of them is the best bet? Reddy walked the streets, Saturday, didn't he, and got away with it? Why couldn't he do the same on Sunday?"

Dix went on to admit that he was no nearer to Reddy's real hiding place than he had been when he started. He was satisfied that it wasn't on the mountain. There was a chance that the murder of the Cuban would upset the whole scheme, cut off Reddy's supplies, and force him into flight. This seemed to be what Dix chiefly feared—that the bandit would have to get out of Brantford, and would be caught in some other city by a lucky policeman.

THE rest of the day and nearly all of Thursday passed without an incident worth recording. Thursday evening Wheat returned from New York with witnesses who identified Vega as the hunted murderer, Esteban. The news came out Friday morning along with Madame Julian's story of the machete, which had been withheld till then.

Thompson had an appointment to attend a meeting in Middletown at one o'clock. It would probably result in the settlement of negotiations for the control of a bank, and there would be use for cash. He would have to leave his office shortly after ten o'clock and be gone all day. He was to take fifty thousand dollars to Middletown, the fifty bills of a thousand dollars each were in an old express envelope.

These *had been* the facts, and they were known in that form to Marcia through Thompson's correspondence, and to one or two other persons in the bank. None of them knew that he had decided not to go to Middletown, but to send Breck to represent him at the meeting. Thompson was to occupy himself with business of a very different nature.

He had given a large part of the night to an attempt at sane thinking on the case of Captain Reddy. It seemed to him that the police were holding to old opinions in the face of new developments. To Thompson's mind, the latest discoveries made a radical change in the situation. Openly he had never accepted the theory that Reddy and Vega were allied, but privately he believed in it.

He was half afraid Marcia had known of it. Perhaps it was to Vega's room that she had gone with a message to her brother, in the mysterious hour of Sunday morning. She had seemed to be returning from that place when, half recognized, she had flitted past Thompson on her way home.

If Reddy had such a haven of concealment, for a night perhaps, a peculiarly good disguise might enable him to leave the city in daylight hours when such an attempt was not expected and the stringency of the patrol was relaxed.

Reddy might ride to Silver Stream, in a bus, a newspaper open before his face. That was where Marcia had gone, on that Saturday when, by her confession, she had seen her brother.

She had given her word that Reddy was not in Brantford Sunday or Tues-

day, but Thompson now remembered that not all of the mountain was in Brantford. The western part of it was in Silver Stream.

Leaving the bank, ostensibly to take the train for Middletown, Thompson rode to a point on the Silver Stream Highway, and then walked across the mountain northward through a region pathless and dreary. There were more trees than he remembered from boyhood, but the facilities for permanent hiding were very much as he recalled them. The absence of anything like a cave in such a rock formation was so natural and so obvious that he was tempted to turn back after an hour's wandering.

He kept on, however, to the crest of a granite slope that rolled down more and more steeply till it fell into Bitter Pond, a piece of water incomparably desolate, useless. Thompson had never heard of any kind of craft being launched on its surface, not even a raft made by boys, for they never played there. It was too distant, too lonely.

He paused in the lee of a spruce tree to light a cigar, and to contemplate the scene. There was so little of interest to look at that his eye was attracted by an object on the ground under another tree quite a way off. It was a partly used lead pencil with the usual metal end carrying an eraser; all as fresh as if dropped there only a few days ago. He picked it up and read in gilt letters the words "Hamilton Bank."

If one person a year on the average came to this place, that would be Thompson's outside estimate; and what was the chance that the single visitor would have a Hamilton Bank lead pencil? This was Marcia's, as surely as if he had found it on her desk.

He examined the ground more closely. It was covered with dry, grayish moss and spruce spills, and they showed the imprint of a form that had lain face downward under that tree. Was it Marcia waiting for her brother? The position of her arms could be traced, and she seemed to have been lying with her face in her hands. Thompson was more inclined to imagine her in agony of soul after the meeting, alone in this forsaken spot above the lake that was cursed with bitterness.

IT was improbable that the two Kays had met by accident. There might have been an appointment, but most probably she had come to seek Reddy in his hiding place, which was close by.

Thompson walked out on the granite slope. He was not armed. In the remote past this whole outer part of the slope had broken away and dropped half a dozen feet, making a sort of terrace. The gigantic mass that fell had tilted back against the solid bulk of the hill. Though the crack between them probably ran down seventy or eighty feet to the level of the pond, it was closed at the top. Thompson jumped off the upper rock and inspected the whole length of the straight seam. There were a few openings, none wide enough for a cat to pass through.

At the eastern end, Thompson took another jump, into a gully that ran sharply downward toward the pond. It was bare stone, washed clean by snow and rain. A little way along, the right bank broke away precipitately into a chasm, the destination of everything that might come down.

The original gully tried to continue on its own course, but was blocked by a giant boulder, roughly wedge-shaped, and lying with its edge toward the pond. The back of the wedge, turned toward Thompson, was at least twenty feet high.

This was a pattern of a place for an ambush. He could get no view beyond the boulder, which looked like a projection from the sheer wall of granite on the explorer's left as he descended. A very narrow path led around the outer end, on the brink of the chasm.

A single obscure footprint which might be Marcia's—in the strong tramping shoes that he had often seen her wear—indicated that she had gone beyond the barrier rock. If the outlaw's den was there, it must be close.

Soil had accumulated at the junction of the rock with the cliff, and there was an arch of weeds and stunted bushes. All those strong enough to help a climber were out of reach, mostly on the very

top, but Thompson landed among them after a hard fight.

His first glimpse across showed him only the rocky way sloping to an abrupt end above the pond, and next moment he saw almost within arm's length the entrance of Reddy's hiding place.

The top of the boulder was not welded to the cliff, as it seemed to be from below. There was a sort of manhole in the arch of earth, opening diagonally downward into the granite wall.

Signs of some one's entry and exit were visible, but very scanty. It was incredible that Reddy had used this cave for so many months and had left so few marks at his door. Thompson didn't see anything that could fairly be called a footprint, but of course a man can avoid making them by using his hands and knees for so short a space.

Somebody seemed to have done this very recently, and with doubled fists. Thompson thought he could see where the celebrated raincoat had been dragged under knees that made faint markings for that reason. But the doubled fists bothered him, even in this tense moment. Why should Reddy fear finger prints? That was absurd; there must be some other explanation.

On hands and knees, the president of the Hamilton Bank pushed through the fringe of bushes, and with his head at the edge of the hole, he introduced himself.

"Reddy, this is Harvey Thompson—alone. I've come as a friend, unarmed, and on reasonable terms I will promise not to betray the secret of this place."

Faint echoes responded. Thompson lighted a match and tossed it into the hole. It fell twenty feet and landed very luckily so that it did not immediately go out. He saw the roughness of the boulder, steep as a ladder but practicable for descent; and after waiting for a few seconds he went down.

No one interfered with him. He reached a flat floor, turned, and lighted another match. He saw a cavern as large as the stone outside. The space was a trifle lower than the level of the extruded rock, which thus entirely concealed the gap in the cliff's side.

No one was there. Thompson's first glance showed him that and also revealed the furniture of this room—a piece of board supported by a box and a stone, and a few spruce boughs for a bed. On the board lay three candles, a pencil and a small pad of paper. Another candle, burned half down, stood erect on a nail.

Thompson lighted it and found that the pad was blank. Under it, he found a loose sheet, but this too was blank. It bore faint markings, however, due to its having been beneath another sheet which had been written on with a hard pencil. Holding it close to the candle flame, Thompson made out the words:

DEAR OLD REDDY: How can I——

It seemed that no more had been written. Doubtless two sheets had been torn off together, and the first destroyed. Thompson knew that the two Kays had called each other "Old" and "Young" Reddy, and that the words were the beginning of a note from the bandit to his sister.

He burned the bit of paper in the candle flame, caught the charred fragment in his hand, and carried it toward the far end of the cave where, in a sort of natural fireplace, were ashes and embers evidently a long time cold. Cracks in the rock above might have carried off the smoke without discharging it in dangerous volume at any single point.

He glanced at these narrow chimneys, none large enough or in any way suitable for hiding plunder, but he lit a match to explore the widest of them and saw that something had been thrust up. Though he could see only an end of it, he knew what he had found, and its touch thrilled him with disgust and horror. It was a machete, stained with red. The blade stuck to the sheath.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PUZZLE OF BITTER POND.

THOMPSON laid the weapon on the floor. It might as well be there as anywhere; whatever was in or near the cave would be found eventually. Then for some moments he contemplated the scanty ashes of the fire. These could

have been produced in one night, and there were no cooking utensils.

A few tins of food were in a corner. On a stone beside the rude table were an unopened can of jam and—in a paper bag—half a loaf of bread baked within the past three days. But the spruce boughs of the bed had been cut months before—the previous fall, probably. Near them lay an old coat which Thompson recognized as Reddy's. The pockets contained a handkerchief, and nothing else. Nowhere in the cave was any loot hidden.

How to account for the appearance of this place, Thompson did not know. It had been used, but not enough. There was plain evidence of some sort of tenancy, extending from the previous fall to the present week, but no one had lived here regularly during the winter.

The bandit could not have made any steady use of Vega's room, and here was another place of only occasional refuge. Where had he harbored at other times?

A detective would have felt amply repaid by the finding of the machete, but Thompson was seeking not for evidence, but for the man himself. Yet it seemed useless to wait for Reddy here; he might return that night or never.

Thompson climbed back to daylight, and slid down from the boulder on the side toward the pond. An ascent from that side would be difficult, but Reddy could have made it, leaving no tracks on the bare face of the rock.

Thompson went toward the pond, down the incline to where it ended in a sort of projecting lip, like the overhang of a ship. He could look along the whole shore or straight down into the ashen-gray water, thirty feet below.

Beneath the surface he could dimly see a tangle of rocks, only their jagged tops being visible, with dark holes between them. In one of those holes, perhaps a dozen feet out, he noticed a white spot which attracted his particular attention, because it seemed to be growing larger and changing its shape. This must be due to the movement of the sun. A round white stone seemed to be emerging from the underwater shadow of a tall rock fragment.

As he watched this object it rounded out till it suggested a human face. There was a small, white spot near—as if a drowned man's hand were lying on his breast.

Thompson tried not to deceive himself, but he was keyed up rather high for calm judgment. The cave and even the red-stained machete were trifles in comparison with this wavering and uncertain apparition in the pond. If it was not a mere illusion, it was Reddy Kay. Who else could it be?

For a long time, and from different positions on the rock's edge, Thompson strained his eyes and strove to control his tendency to see what he was looking for, whether it was really visible or not. After making all allowance for mere fancies, Thompson was inclined to believe that he had solved the Brantford mystery, that he had found Captain Reddy.

It was hard to estimate how deep the body lay; perhaps twenty feet, and it was at least fifty from the nearest point on the shore where any one could reach the water's edge. There was no better place for observation than the table rock where Thompson stood.

A breeze had ruffled the water, and nothing could now be seen. When the surface was smooth again, the sun had moved too far and the white spot was barely discernible through a shadow. It no longer suggested a face.

What to think of his discoveries and what to do about them, Thompson did not know. His first idea was that Reddy had killed himself immediately after returning from the holdup of Joe Tully. The machete did not prove that Reddy had murdered Mrs. Trent; Vega might have done it and have brought the weapon to the cave after the crime. But the little Cuban could not have thrust it up into that cleft of the rock, because he was too short. The place was barely within Reddy's reach, long for a man of his moderate height. And if it was not Reddy who had put the machete into the cleft, who could it have been?

On the whole, Thompson was forced to the conclusion that Reddy had been alive as late as Wednesday night or Thursday, and that if he was dead, the

fact was not yet known to Marcia. Possibly the murder of the Cuban, to silence his crazy tongue, had cut off Reddy from assistance without which he couldn't carry on. It had forced him to give up the fight, to commit suicide.

Thompson was aware of course that this was mere conjecture, and that it left questions unanswered. Now, how could he disclose any part of his discoveries without bringing destruction on Marcia? The mere existence of the hiding place on the Silver Stream side of the mountain, where she was known to have been on Saturday, would inevitably lead to her arrest as her brother's accomplice in the whole series of crimes, including the murder of Mrs. Trent. The machete would bring her into that.

Thompson went to view the angle of the rock where he had climbed to the entrance of Reddy's cave, and his fears were more than justified. He had used no caution in the matter of tracks; it looked as if a wild bull had gone up. The worst detective in the world couldn't pass that spectacle without wanting to know immediately what it meant. And any one could guess.

This ended all idea of sending Wheat and Dix to search secretly for the body in the pond, without telling them about the cave.

While walking across to the Silver Stream Highway, he tried to tell himself that he could handle this without help. He was resisting his ingrained habit of consulting Breck. In order to avoid the dangerous folly of deceiving his own lawyer, he ought to disclose all his present information and get more besides.

The situation was complicated and dangerous; the need of legal advice was glaring; but the banker was haunted by the idea that all he really had to do was to keep his mouth shut; and he was ashamed to lack the nerve to do it. His car was waiting for him off the road behind a thick screen of trees. He and his chauffeur had tested this parking place on arrival, knowing that the man might have to wait some while when he returned in the afternoon. According to instructions he had come at three, and it was now long past four.

"Has any one seen you here?" the banker asked.

"No, sir, not this time."

"You went right away, this forenoon, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir. But just as I backed out into the road, Detective Vaughn came along on a police motor cycle, and stopped."

"He spoke to you? What did he say?"

"He said, 'What have you done with Mr. Thompson?' and I said I didn't have you aboard; I'd taken you to the railroad station."

"What did Vaughn say then?" he asked.

"He just joked. He said, 'That's good. I was afraid Captain Reddy might have got him.' And then he went up the road."

Thompson wondered if Vaughn had followed him. In any event, a new search would now be made by the police. And how about those footprints, made by the bank president, up the broad ribbon of earth in the angle of the big stone?

CHAPTER XIII.

WILLING TO BARGAIN.

TO attempt direct communication with Marcia would be dangerous. An immediate meeting between them could not fail to become known, and it would be taken as proof that Thompson had been acting on information which Marcia had given him and he had withheld from the police. Of that crime he was guilty, and his guilt was becoming worse every time the clock ticked. At the very least he was concealing the weapon with which Mrs. Trent had been murdered, and a half loaf of bread which might solve the riddle of Reddy's food supply, and prove to be a more valuable clew than the three red hairs.

Thompson was extremely anxious to be better informed as to what Marcia knew, before telling her any part of his story. He decided to approach Conny Breck first. She might be induced to tell whether any recent word had come from Reddy. This decision was reached after long thinking over the matter.

He rode to the Breck house, arriving

about seven. At this hour, Breck's train from Middletown would be within a mile or two of Brantford station; and it was natural to suppose that Conny would be waiting to dine with her father, despite the rift between them that Marcia had caused.

Conny had already dined, however. She had received a telephone message which the maid, who was Thompson's informant, believed to have been from Miss Kay. He might find her at Miss Kay's house, the maid suggested, or possibly overtake her. She had been gone barely two minutes, not in her car, but on foot.

Thompson speeded in pursuit, but did not see Conny or any sign of her presence in the Kay house. If she were there, she would be in Marcia's room, but its windows showed no light. Considering that it was the dinner hour, the number of boarders on the front veranda seemed unusual, as if something of interest had happened. No detectives were in sight, and Thompson thought it safe to stop some distance beyond the house and wait for a man who had come out of the gate as the car passed.

It was the servant who, at the inquiry into the murder of Mrs. Trent, might have given a really serviceable description of little Vega, if the questioners had not been determined to make him describe Captain Reddy. On that occasion his efforts to be honest and truthful had so favorably impressed Thompson that he now decided to trust him with a message to Marcia.

Thompson introduced the subject by means of a ten-dollar bill which the man accepted with hesitation, and attempted to return as soon as he understood what was wanted.

"Miss Kay's gone out, sir," he said. "Mr. Vaughn and another detective came and got her a few minutes ago. She was just coming out of the dining room, sir. She'd had what we call the early dinner——"

"What was done?" Thompson interrupted. "What did the officers say?"

"I don't know, sir. I saw them coming, and I went in and told her. She thanked me, slipped into the telephone booth—not to hide, sir. She was just as cool as you are this minute. She asked me to give her a little time, so I fixed the maid that answered the bell, and we didn't find Miss Kay for a couple of minutes. Then she went out, and I didn't hear what was said, but it looked as if they only asked her to go with them."

It was evident, however, that the man regarded it as an arrest, and that it had caused excitement in the house. Also, it appeared that Marcia had sent an important message to Conny at once.

The indications were that Vaughn had tracked Thompson across the mountain and had found the cave. He would have been too late to see the body in the pond—if it was really there. He and Chief Curran would assume that Reddy was alive and that Marcia knew where he was hidden.

Thompson thought that Marcia stood in instant need of legal advice. This meant Breck must be consulted at once.

Hurrying back to Breck's house, Thompson found him just beginning dinner. On the table lay the express envelope with the money unused. Something must have gone wrong with the deal.

THE lawyer looked up as the tall figure of his young friend loomed in the doorway.

"Sit down, Harvey," he said. "You seem to have heard from Middletown, but you don't have to look that way about it. This is only a warning, not a catastrophe."

Thompson waved the bank matter away.

"Marcia has been arrested," he said. "I want you to get right over to headquarters and take care of her. You'll have to eat something, of course, but telephone Chief Curran that you're coming."

"If Marcia had been arrested, Curran would telephone *me*," the lawyer said, but his tone of confidence didn't quite ring true. "Who told you? Conny?"

"No, I haven't seen her." Thompson told how he had learned of the arrest.

"And I'm to blame for this; I've made a terrible mistake. I've found Reddy's hiding place, where Marcia went last Saturday." He swiftly gave the whole of his amazing news to Breck.

"Curran doesn't know a word of this," Breck said, when Thompson paused. "That's positive. He wouldn't dare hold out such stuff from me for one minute. Vaughn himself would have phoned me. They've taken Marcia to headquarters on some other development, relatively unimportant."

This seemed probable, and Thompson's worst anxiety was relieved.

"I was a fool to go on that hunt, Breck," he said. "If there's a possibility of keeping still about it, that's what I want to do. What do you advise?"

"I advise you to put the whole matter into my hands," Breck responded. "Leave it to me, absolutely."

"That's all right, if you know a way to handle it. But I'm not blind; I can see that you're almost as worried and uncertain as I am. Your mind is running forty ways at once, right at this minute."

Breck seemed irritated. He made a kind of angry sound, then controlled himself quickly.

"I'm anxious on my daughter's account," he said. "I'm uncertain as to her position in this affair. How much do you know about it? Has Marcia told you what Conny has been doing—or thinks she's been doing?"

"No. The nearest I can get to it is that the two girls have been trying to work up an insanity defense for Reddy. As to how they've been doing it I have only a vague idea; but I know that Marcia consulted Doctor Clark on Tuesday evening."

"The insanity stuff is a blind," Breck said. "I'm satisfied of that. But is Conny herself fooled by it, or is she fooling *me?* Did you suspect that my daughter had been running all over the State on Marcia's errands?"

"You mean in Reddy's interest?"

"What else? If you'll tell me, I'll be much obliged."

"Doing something outside of Brantford?" Thompson said. "What can it be?"

"That's what I'd like to know. Here are the facts. For weeks, for months—I don't know how long—Conny has been deceiving me about those little journeys of hers. All of them were supposed to be, and many of them actually were, connected with her women's organization work. But some were not. I've nailed her down on that, and specifically as to a trip to Norwood early last week."

Norwood was a little city about thirty miles north.

"I cornered her so closely that she couldn't deny that she's been doing *something* in this Reddy matter, on those fake trips and on some of the genuine ones—all over this part of the State and as far away as Rochester on one side and New York on the other. She tried to make me believe that she was hunting for a private asylum to which Reddy could be secretly committed, if she and Marcia found him. But that's absurd.

"My only definite information shows that the business has nothing to do with a lunacy defense. Wednesday I sent a detective to Norwood, and I got his report this morning. He says positively that the only thing Conny did in Norwood was to have her hair shampooed in a beauty shop. Some old faker up there is running quite a pretentious one.

"A beauty shop suggests Vega, but this was last week, mind you, before that little scoundrel had been heard of in this affair. Has my daughter known of his connection with it for months? Conny was in Norwood on the same line of work that she's been doing secretly, since early in the winter at least. Has Marcia ever given you any clew as to what this might be?"

"None," Thompson answered. "I'm afraid it looks like communication with Reddy through Vega's correspondents."

Breck shook his head impatiently.

"Vega had no correspondents outside the narrowest field of business necessity. And what would have been the use of roundabout methods when either of the girls could walk into Vega's shop any

day without exciting the least suspicion?"

"Still," Thompson said, "it's certain that Conny didn't go to Norwood to have her hair shampooed."

"That's all she did," Breck replied, "but she was a long time about it. Her car was parked in front of the place two hours, my detective says."

"What does the owner of the shop say?"

"He says she was only waiting for her turn."

"Is he lying?"

"Apparently not. He seems to be telling the truth as it appeared to him. In fact, however, Conny must have been waiting for something else. What was it? Nothing happened. She read a book all the time, I'm told."

"What do you get from Conny?"

"She says she heard he was a very nice hairdresser, and she gave him a trial. She doesn't expect me to believe that, but by the way she stuck to it, I'm well assured that the matter is no trifle. And that's only an incident in a long line of work that my daughter has been doing for the benefit of the most notorious criminal in New York State."

"Do any more beauty shops figure in it?"

"I haven't found out," Breck replied. "Conny says no. But in general she admits that the whole subject is dangerous and must be covered up, unless I want to do her a serious injury."

THERE was no doubt that this was an essential part of the affair, and that a correct answer as to its meaning would come very near solving the whole mystery. Breck, his appetite for food gone, picked up the express envelope and walked out of the richly appointed dining room, carrying fifty thousand dollars in his hand.

"You won't want this in your pocket to-night, Harvey," he said. "I'll put it in the safe downstairs and take it to the bank to-morrow morning."

"Yes," Thompson assented, "that's best. I won't own to being afraid of Captain Reddy, but I feel as if I might meet him on your doorstep. I'm not sure, but I suspect that he's alive, and that Marcia and Conny know where he is."

Breck seemed to welcome this with veiled eagerness.

"Then you understand my anxieties," he said. "My daughter is in a far worse position than the public yet knows. I hope you'll put this whole matter into my hands. You wish me to act as Marcia's counsel, of course. It would look very bad if I didn't."

A strange counsel for the defense—the bitterest enemy the accused girl had in all the world, but his services were indispensable. And the lawyer's unwavering fidelity to his clients had never been questioned by his bitterest political enemies.

"Certainly," Thompson said, but there had been a notable pause. "And I want you to get the best criminal lawyers in New York as your assistants."

"Very well, but the emergency is here to-night, Harvey, and you must let me handle it. No one else can do what must be done at once."

That was undeniable. Thompson saw no other possible course. They entered the room where the scene of Sunday night had been enacted. Breck tossed the money envelope on the desk, sat down, and reached for the telephone.

"What are you going to do?" Thompson asked hastily.

"I'm going to stop that business at headquarters. I won't have Marcia questioned any more to-night. I'll ask Curran to quit and send her home. Fortunately I have information which will stop their interview with Marcia."

"You mean my story?"

"Yes. We've got to tell it, and the quicker the better. We must deal fairly with Curran or he'll turn ugly. That cave and your tracks leading into it are sure to be found. Your own detectives will find that cave. They know where you were to-day."

Thompson made a negative sign, but Breck rode right over him.

"Oh, yes, they do! And we mustn't let them get that evidence ahead of our own force. It's got to come out, Harvey. You and my daughter," he added,

"are the only persons alive who are blind to the dangers of this case."

He called headquarters and was put in touch with the chief.

"Hello, Curran? . . . This is Breck. I'd like to see you right away, at my home. . . . Yes, I heard she was there, but you're wasting your time. The real stuff is here. It's so big that I don't dare hint at it over the phone. . . . No, you're through with her. She's going home. Drop her there on your way to my house. . . . Satisfaction guaranteed. This will knock your head off, Curran. . . . No, don't bring her here. If you want to see her again, you can wait till to-morrow. You'll understand after you've seen me. Good-by."

Then to Thompson: "He'll be here in ten minutes."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to trade what I know for everything that he knows. Then I'll make a deal for the delaying of Marcia's arrest to-morrow. It can't be prevented, you understand, but we'll put it off till I've prepared her for it. Are you sure there's nothing of hers in that cave?"

"Yes."

"How about the jam? Is it any peculiar kind?"

"No, it's sold everywhere."

"Good. Vega used to eat in his room. Reddy must have taken that food after he'd killed the man. It was the best in sight, and the last he was going to get from that source. Might the bread have been baked Tuesday?"

"Just about."

"Then Vega might have bought it. They can't pin it on Marcia. Of course the damn cave may be full of her finger prints, but we'll have to take that chance."

HE seemed to feel a profound personal, and almost demoniacal enthusiasm, justifying his reputation as a lawyer who fought every case as if his own life were at stake. Thompson was extremely encouraged.

"Shall I go to the Kay house?" he asked. "You'll want to see Marcia after you're through with Curran."

"No, sir!" Breck answered decisively. "I don't want to see her till I have all the facts. Then I can show her just where she stands."

"If you're planning to force a confession——"

"I don't want one; I'm her counsel. What this lawyer wants is the final story, the ultimate revised version, what he has to prove to the satisfaction of the jury. In order to get such a story out of a client who is guilty fifteen times over, I've got to be mighty well supplied with the evidence on the other side. No other lawyer could get that, Harvey, in this sensational case, but I can. The deal with Curran will be made in private, naturally. You'll wait upstairs."

Thompson rose.

"Hold on," Breck said. "Don Vaughn was with the chief. I heard his voice. He's got a terrible jolt coming to him. If you've found Reddy, you've done Vaughn out of money and fame, and he's a glutton for both."

"I shall lay no claim to the rewards."

"I'll bet you won't. We'll have to throw some of them to Vaughn, and I'll be glad to do it. He's all right; I've trusted him with many confidential matters in the past, and have never been thrown, but lately I've been doubtful about him. He hates you like the devil."

"Do your best with him, Breck."

"I shall do my best with every feature of this case. My personal feeling against Marcia will have no influence on my acts. I have only a single aim, to secure her acquittal. And I warn you not to interfere with me, Harvey. You must stay in the background as much as possible. I say this for Marcia's sake, but even more for yours.

"That affair at Middletown to-day is ominous. Those old mossbacks held off for one single reason—Marcia in the Hamilton Bank. They're afraid you're going to be involved in a scandal ruinous to your reputation, your influence, your standing in the banking world, where you hope to cut so prominent a figure."

Thompson leaned forward and tapped the envelope on the desk.

"I'll bet those fifty bills against——"

"My balance at the bank," Breck suggested with an acid smile. The "balance" consisted of an overdraft which Thompson was going to take care of the next morning with what amounted to a personal loan.

"I didn't say that, Breck. But I'll bet the money, on any terms, that Marcia has had no part whatever in her brother's crimes."

"You've got more than that at stake," the lawyer said. "You're betting millions, and you stand to lose them and your whole career as well. Marcia would be your ruin, except that she won't last long enough. She is a dangerous, embittered and malignant woman, perhaps not wholly in her right mind. When her brother turned bandit she took his side as naturally as dumb brutes fight their enemies. She's far the cleverer of the two. The two Kays have been engaged in righting a wrong, I suppose, in their own opinions. But that girl is as much an outlaw as her brother!"

"If you believe that," Thompson said, "you're certainly unfit to defend her."

"No, I'm ten times more fit! I know how badly she needs defense. *You* are unfit, not merely because you're not a lawyer, but because you are completely deluded. Try to understand that, if you're disposed to question my methods. Have you helped her any this past week?"

Thompson answered with a groan which Breck acknowledged by saying:

"That's the most sensible utterance I've heard you make in regard to this affair. Leave it all to me, my boy."

"For the present, I must," Thompson replied, "but Marcia probably will want other counsel. How soon——"

"We'll discuss that to-morrow, after I've heard Marcia's story. I expect to get something very close to the peculiar fiction that she must have told to Conny. It may be good enough to give to a jury."

"You seem to want it for your own information."

There was a silence; then Breck said:

"Well? What do you infer?"

"I'm too angry to draw an inference!" Thompson was suppressing his wrath with difficulty.

"Curran is due," Breck said. "Go upstairs, my son, and commune with your soul."

CHAPTER XIV.

MENACE OF THE CHAIR.

THE coming interview would involve a deal in a matter serious to the last degree, and Curran would not desire any witnesses unless they were his own. Thompson made no request to be present; he went upstairs to await a possible summons.

The hall was softly lighted; the living room almost dark. He let it remain so, and most of the things he saw during those long minutes while he waited were creations of his brain.

There was a legend that the substances which gave the water of Bitter Pond its repellent taste would bleach the skin of a person drowned in it. No drowning had occurred there in recent years, but in Thompson's boyhood there had been a case—a woman who was missing for many months and found at last in Bitter Pond, singularly unaffected by decay, but white as marble.

Time would be required to produce such an effect, if the pond really possessed the power ascribed to it; and the conviction began to grip Thompson that the white face under the water was not Reddy's. Whose could it be?

In Reddy's first act of banditry, when he held up the prize fighter and his manager, and the detective with them in the car had been wounded within an inch of his life, the young outlaw had a partner, doubtless some older criminal who had influenced him to embark on this career. It was the partner who had fired the shot, and that was the last that had ever been heard of him. His identity and his fate were unknown and unguessed. There was a chance that the two had fled to the cave, that the older man had tried to rob Reddy of his share, and had lost his life in the resulting fight.

Thompson tried to picture what had happened; and his imagination built the gray walls of the cave around him. He seemed to feel again the crushing weight of granite over his head, as he

had felt it that afternoon. The machete seemed to form itself in his hand, its blade, rusted, red-stained, sticking in the sheath.

With a shudder, he turned aside, and saw that he was watched from the doorway. Detective Vaughn stood there, looking as ugly as the devil, and pale and haggard besides. His hat was on the back of his head, and his black hair was ragged and damp on his brow.

Thompson naturally supposed this to be the result of disappointment at the loss of the rewards and of the glory that this lover of applause had expected to win by finding Captain Reddy. Evidently the detective had come up with his chief, and had heard at least the main facts of the latest news from Bitter Pond.

Vaughn came in and pushed a chair around, as if intending to sit close in front of Thompson, but instead he leaned on the back of it and glowered at him with undisguised hatred, strongly flavored with contempt.

"Do you know what you've done?" he demanded. "You've spilled your story to Breck, and what will be the result? Have you any idea?"

"The result depends on whether Reddy is dead."

"Is that all?" Vaughn sneered. "Only whether he's dead, eh? It seems to me that something depends on the question *when* he died."

"I don't understand you. It must have been Wednesday or Thursday, if that——"

"How do you know?"

"If he killed Vega——"

"He didn't. You ought to know that. I showed you the evidence."

"Those three hairs?"

"Yes. They're Marcia's. She killed him."

THE banker jumped. He was big enough to eat Vaughn alive, and he looked as if he would do it; but the detective remained leaning on the back of the chair, with no change of pose except the lifting of his head. For the moment, he seemed calm, viewing his adversary's excitement with cool eyes, hypnotic in their steadiness, like Marcia's.

"You told Curran this?" Thompson asked. "What was done? Where's Marcia now?"

"At home. Curran doesn't know this; I've told nobody till now. He got her over there to-night on a wholly different matter, not worth your time and mine."

"What was it?" Thompson demanded. "I believe it had to do with your crazy accusation!"

"I'll tell you, to get the subject out of the way," Vaughn returned. "It was a story that Marcia had a bunch of skeleton keys. We've got a woman detective in the house as a maid, and she reported seeing the keys in Marcia's hand bag. She didn't get them, and Marcia denies having had them. And it's a sure thing she used no skeleton key on Vega's door, Tuesday evening. He let her in."

"You don't believe that, Vaughn! Why do you say it?"

"To show you what you've done. Didn't it enter into your skull to imagine what would happen if Reddy had been dead too long? Well, he has. His body was in the pond Sunday afternoon. I saw it."

"Did you recognize it as his?"

"For one moment—yes."

"Was it white?" Thompson asked.

"White? It wasn't discolored any. He hadn't been there twenty-four hours."

For just a moment he had seemed in doubt how to answer. That was enough for Thompson, incurably suspicious of this man. He decided that Vaughn was lying, with some motive of trickery, and that he hadn't seen the body. Yet there was an intense sincerity in his manner such as he had never before exhibited in Thompson's presence.

"Have you told any one about this?" Thompson inquired.

"No. I held it for my own use, with Marcia. Understand me, Thompson, from the first minute—months ago—when I began to get a right view of this case, I have had only one aim and one interest. Rewards, reputation, duty and all possible questions of right and wrong —I ceased to care one damn for any of

them. I set myself the job of saving Marcia, not only from the dangerous and crazy game she was assisting, but from the true source of all her troubles."

"You mean her brother?"

Vaughn made a gesture of contemptuous impatience with stupidity.

"I mean Brantford—her environment, and the life she was leading. She's given up every proper human interest—friends, all kinds of pleasure, all rivalries and triumphs, all sports. Even in her work, she had no sense of competition. No Kay can stand that kind of thing.

"There's little of that blood in me, and yet in all essentials, I'm a Kay as much as Marcia is. I tell you we can't live without a chance for distinction, a chance to prove and to display our superiority. But Marcia has been living on nothing but a sense of injury, every day more bitter. She's had no tangible adversary, none but the law that had wronged her brother, and the city that had let it be done. And what's the result? For eight months, she's had the satisfaction of seeing Reddy have Brantford pretty thoroughly beaten, I'll say. Am I right?"

TO some extent he was, and a denial would have been a waste of breath. Thompson had seen Marcia shutting herself in with her bitter thoughts, and had regretted it, but he now realized that he had done very little to prevent it. He had been too busy.

"I have tried to advise her to——" he began, very feebly for so strong a man.

"You've tried to organize a banking combination; that's all you've done," Vaughan cut in. "It's certain that you've never organized Marcia's life—with all your social power and connections. You went no farther than to take good care that I should have no chance to do it. In the past two years I could never give her a word of advice, or even an invitation to a party where she might be gay for a few hours, without finding that you'd stamped me 'N. G., No funds.'

"I've been in love with Marcia ever since she was a schoolgirl," he went on, with utter disregard of ordinary reticence. "I've pursued her, sometimes rudely so that she was offended; sometimes with my natural shrewdness, so that I was a dangerous rival for even the president of the Hamilton Bank. For we *have* been rivals, though you were too deeply sunk in money-making schemes to take an active part in anything romantic. Well, here we are, Thompson, with the girl between us, so to speak. What are we going to do with her?"

"Have faith in her, I should say," Thompson replied. "I deny that she has done anything wrong. I very strongly doubt that Reddy is dead——"

"What good will that bluff be, to-morrow at noon? When Reddy comes out of the water, they'll know whether he's been dead two days or a week."

This was true. If Reddy did come out and had been dead a week, Marcia would be charged with the Vega murder immediately. Thompson still clung to his hope that the body in the pond was not Reddy's, but he was thoroughly alarmed by Vaughn's appearance of certainty—as if he had secret means of knowing that the bandit had died Saturday, after the first of his crimes that had resulted in murder.

"Remember," Vaughn was saying, "she saw Vega in the bank Tuesday afternoon, the first time he publicly betrayed his condition. She was the only person—except Madame Julian—who had anything to gain or lose by his insanity. As a talking lunatic, he endangered Marcia to the last degree, for of course he knew her complicity with her brother.

"She heard him talk in your office. His mind was running on Captain Reddy; and she listened, knowing that her secret was in his crazy brain. Next minute he might lose the last remnant of discretion, and shout her name. A hard strain on her nerves, I'll say. Eight hours later, the man was murdered—silenced in the only effective way. How will that story sound in court?"

Thompson turned away and walked the floor a bit, trying to balance his judgment so that he should neither be

scared into believing this horror nor commit the equally natural and foolish error of denying it because of mere desire to disbelieve. He saw that here was the chance to get the case against Marcia from the man who knew more about the whole affair than any one else. The thing to do was to get it, listen to what Vaughn had to say, and find out why he was saying it.

He turned again to the detective, who had been watching him in silence.

"Did you tell Marcia that Reddy was dead?" he inquired.

"No. I was with the chief, Sunday evening, up to the time when the Trent murder broke. Then he sent me to get Marcia, and I saw that there was no use telling her. She knew. You ought to have seen that yourself. When she was questioned in this house, she had absolutely no fear that Reddy would be caught, though the whole world was hunting him.

"Knowing the truth about Reddy," Vaughn hurried on, "and with no line at all on Vega as in any way connected with the Kays or with Mrs. Trent, I couldn't see how anybody except Marcia had an interest in putting that woman out of the way. But Marcia's alibi was so strong that I held off, trying to get more facts.

"Then came the Vega murder and changed the whole situation. It had to be completely cleared before I could take a decisive step. I could have taken it to-morrow. I should have had Marcia tied hand and foot, so that I could handle her like a bale of goods. I should have saved her, desperate as her position was, if you hadn't stabbed me in the back."

HIS eyes seemed to bore through Thompson's head as if to put sense into the brain it contained.

"Do you begin to understand?" he said. "Do you see that Marcia's life is in danger, and that you must save it, if you can?"

"I need no one to show me that," Thompson replied. "But there are a number of things that are not clear to me. By what you say, Reddy must have killed himself Saturday, soon after his meeting with Marcia or even in her presence. Why did he do it?"

"They didn't meet" Vaughn spoke impatiently, as if the fact was plain. "Reddy kept away from her, after what he'd done to Joe Tully. He'd lost his nerve, you understand? Shoved him down those stairs in mere nervousness, like a woman. He was ashamed of it. And what is more, he'd sworn that he would never go as far as murder. If he did, he'd pay for it, spot cash, with his life; but he'd never let the law collect that debt, of course. He thought he'd killed Joe Tully outright, and that ended it. This may sound melodramatic, but you can bank on it and not go wrong."

It did not sound melodramatic; it sounded like Reddy Kay.

"The claim will be that Reddy sent a last message which Marcia got when she went to Vega's place, Saturday evening." Vaughn spoke as if that visit were an admitted fact. Seeing Thompson's face go blank, he said: "She went there to tell Vega that Mrs. Trent was coming. Some one must have told him, and nobody but Marcia could have known that he was interested."

"How could she know?"

Vaughn's impatience and irritation exploded in an oath.

"Your mind simply won't take hold of this!" he said. "Haven't you asked yourself how Captain Reddy got his grip on Vega?"

"Through knowledge of his past, you mean? You think he'd mentioned Mrs. Trent to Reddy?"

"Mentioned her!" Vaughn choked on a sudden laugh. "You can bet he did, with curses and with prayers. He got down on his knees—probably—and begged all the Spanish saints and angels to give him vengeance on the woman who had killed his son."

"Dix says he didn't know her name."

"Bunk! Of course he knew it, and so did Marcia; and it meant more to her than merely a detective in the house. That woman was almost sure to get onto Vega unless he was warned to keep out of her sight. And if Vega was caught,

he might go soft—or crazy, as in fact he did—and spill everything he knew. The word had to be passed to him, and it had to be done quick."

Thompson's memory supplied the last link in this chain of evidence. He had proof that Marcia suspected instantly who had murdered Mrs. Trent. In the early hours of Monday morning he had followed Marcia almost to the building in which the murderer lived, and had seen her coming back.

"Marcia has no alibi for Tuesday evening," Vaughn said. "It's known that she wasn't with Conny very late. Conny put up her car before eleven."

And Thompson knew that Marcia did not get home till nearly one.

"All this has a plausible sound," he said, "but it won't stand examination. Why should Marcia have consulted Doctor Clark on Tuesday evening, if she knew on Sunday that her brother was dead?"

"You're dumb, absolutely dumb!" Vaughn retorted. "It was *her own case* that she asked about, using Reddy as a blind. She was making her last stand against an impulse so awful that it made her see hell's fire right in front of her. Of course Clark thought she wanted a strong case for Reddy's defense, and he gave it to her—filling her with despair for her own state. She went out of his office robbed of all power of resistance, and within two hours she had done the thing that had been haunting her mind.

"Wait!" Vaughn made a silencing gesture. "You've got another fool question coming, and I'll answer before you ask it. How about the fresh bread in the case? That and the jam and the machete can all be traced back to Vega's room. They were meant to be so traced. They'd put the murder on Reddy, sure, if you'd had sense enough to report the cave alone, not the body in the pond.

"Oh, yes, Reddy would have gone on eating there for a week or two, no matter how dead he was! In other words, Marcia would have put in a bit of food from time to time. It wasn't *her* cave, you understand; it was Reddy's. No trace of Marcia will be found there. No finger prints; she understands the use of gloves.

"Do you get the idea? If the Vega case ever began to look dangerous for her, she could tip us off to that cave in some roundabout way, and we'd all have gone chasing after Reddy again. His ghost would have laughed at us, delighted to protect. I call it one of the shrewdest defenses that was ever planned, but you spoiled it. You've come very near to putting Marcia in *this*."

He tapped the chair back on which he was leaning. It was a rather plain arm chair, and it suggested—largely through Vaughn's dramatic power—another chair which is sometimes pictured in the papers, the electric chair.

Sweat started out on Thompson's forehead like water from a squeezed sponge. His voice trembled.

"I admit Marcia's danger," he said. "I fear you're right as to Reddy's death. When the body is found tomorrow, Marcia will seem to have been the only person who had a motive for killing Vega. Robbery won't be considered. But there are these three hairs. They can't be hers."

"They are," Vaughn said. "But *suppose they were not?*"

"You mean—they might be changed?"

"It is possible."

There was a brief silence, while the president of the Hamilton Bank considered this invitation to become an accessory in a murder.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST CHANCE.

"IMAGINE Marcia on trial," Vaughn said. "The prosecutor is speaking. 'Gentlemen of the jury, I admit that the three hairs found under the nails of the victim of this crime were not the defendant's. They were not her brother's. They came from the head of some person unknown.

" 'The police have not traced him. I am unable to tell you his name or his relation to the murdered man or his possible motive or opportunity. I cannot prove any relationship between this

unknown person and the defendant. In fact, I can tell you nothing whatever about him. Nevertheless, I ask you to believe beyond a reasonable doubt that he did not kill Vega and that the defendant did.

"'How Vega got these three hairs from the head of a person who did *not* kill him, instead of from the head of this defendant who *did* kill him, I shall not attempt to explain, but——'

"I guess that would be enough, Thompson. If the jury hadn't laughed itself to death by that time, it would acquit, wouldn't it? And remember, those three hairs will have to be produced at the trial—if there is any trial. The comparison with Marcia's hair will be made immediately, of course, and I'll see that it is honest. If it fails, what will be the use of trying her? No jury would convict. No sane judge would let a verdict of guilty stand, if rendered."

"Do you mean to say that you've been permitted to keep those three hairs all this time?" Thompson asked.

"Certainly not. I had to give them to the chief, Wednesday evening."

"Where are they now?"

"In his private safe at the central office."

"Have you access to that safe?"

"Not directly. Through another man, I have."

"Through Curran?"

"My answer is 'No,' of course."

"Naturally. The hairs are still in that glass tube, I suppose. Do you suggest a substitute?"

"I do more than suggest it."

Vaughn put a hand inside the breast of his coat and drew out a glass tube which he held forward. The room was too dark for the contents to be visible, but suddenly the tube was illuminated by rays from the palm of Vaughn's other hand, in which he held some small electrical device concealed. The three hairs could be seen for a few seconds; then the light vanished, and the detective replaced the tube in his pocket.

"A close match," he said. "No one will know the difference."

"Where did you get them?"

"We had a rumor yesterday morning that Reddy had been killed in a motor accident beyond Silver Stream. I pretended to think there might be something in it, and rode over to the place. The dead man resembled Reddy in only one particular—his hair. The body was sent home to Philadelphia for cremation, as I happened to learn. So, you see, I have Marcia's life here." He touched the pocket.

"Why has no test been made with Reddy's hair?" Thompson inquired. "Curran said he had some of it."

"He was mistaken. He couldn't find that sample. And besides that, singularly enough, no hairs were found on a brush and comb that had been taken from the room where Reddy lived last."

Vaughn's lips were trembling with the suppression of a smile.

"Did you get there first and remove them all?"

"You couldn't prove it, Thompson. At any rate, no test was made. Nobody but myself thought of a comparison with Marcia's hair. It would never have been done except for you; but now it'll be done to-morrow."

"You want me to pay for the exchange of those tubes. How much will it cost?"

"Thirty or forty thousand dollars, perhaps more. I can't set an exact figure, but I can learn within an hour or two. The thing must be done to-night, and a first payment must be made. What is the most that you can raise in cash?"

Thompson did not answer. He paced the floor again, desperately tempted, cruelly afraid of subsequent regrets if he should reject this damnable expedient. But it was worse than criminal, worse than wicked! In spite of all he had heard against Marcia that night, and all that his common sense told him in support of it, his old-time thoughts of her remained unsullied in the depths of his mind. He felt that he was insulting her by even a moment's consideration of such a piece of villainy supposedly in her interest.

He halted in front of the detective.

"I have decided——"

Vaughn checked him with a pointing

finger, like a pistol aimed right between his eyes; and said slowly, in that tone of perfect certainty that he could command so well:

"I can see right into the middle of your head. I've tested you out, Thompson, and you're a dog. In the past two years, you've had Marcia's life absolutely in your charge, and this is what you have done with it, the most deplorable ruin that was ever made. In this past week, you have hunted her to her death—in mere stupidity, but you've done it. And now that I have shown you what is going to happen to her, you think yourself too fine-haired, but are really too yellow, to give me this last chance to save her. Very well! I hope to see you in court the day she's sentenced to die. I shall take pleasure in reminding you of our conversation this evening."

THEN he turned and walked out of the room. Thompson followed in a dazed and hesitating way, expecting him to stop, unable to believe that the man really meant to end such a scene on the basis of a refusal that he had got by mere mind reading. But from the threshold of the living room he saw the detective within one stride of the street door, where suddenly he stepped aside. The unexpected action stabbed Thompson within faintness; he had been watching Marcia's last chance walk out of the house, and now there was still time to call it back. He was near doing it, merely from the effect of the shock. But the door was hastily opened from outside, disclosing Conny Breck, alone.

For an instant the door was between her and the detective. Then she closed it, and he was suddenly revealed. Thompson heard her breathe with a gasp, but she spoke steadily.

"Good evening, Donald! Were you calling on father?"

He ignored the salutation and the question.

"You're frightened, Conny. What have you been doing?"

"Why, nothing. Just hurrying home. I think it's going to rain. Hello, Harvey!"

Thompson came forward. She had already taken a few steps toward him. He saw a dazed look come into her eyes, warning him of what was about to happen; and he caught her as she fainted.

He gathered her in his arms while Vaughn was picking up a hand bag she had dropped. Thompson held out a finger for the bag, but the detective seemed interested in the feel of some object which it contained. He opened it, took out a little bunch of keys, dropped them in again after a glance, and then silently hung the bag on Thompson's finger.

The big man had been too much encumbered to interfere, except with words such as the other's conduct seemed to deserve. They were of no account with Vaughn, whose response dealt with another subject.

"Think again of what I said to you."

This was spoken very softly; and as Thompson turned toward the stairs he saw the explanation of that cautious tone. Curran was approaching from the rear of the hall.

"What's wrong?" the chief inquired.

"She fainted," Thompson answered, "just from walking too fast."

"Is that so?" Curran responded, with the usual negative significance.

"Did you want to see me?"

"I did, but only to confirm the agreement I made with Mr. Breck. Does it go, as made?"

"Within reason—yes. I've no doubt it's all right."

Curran turned toward the street door by which Vaughn had already gone out. Thompson went up the stairs, carrying Conny as if she were a little sister of his. She was stirring in his arms as he passed along the upper hall toward her room.

"Don Vaughn was there," she muttered. "Did I say anything?"

"No, Conny, and don't say anything to *me* till you're all waked up."

She appreciated this warning, and rewarded him by saying that he was a dear fellow and she wished she could tell him everything.

"I can't," she added, "and I shouldn't quite know what I was saying. Please

don't call my maid. Put me in a chair, Harvey. I don't need to lie down."

She seemed fully conscious now, but it wouldn't have been fair play to question her. Moreover, Thompson was so hampered by the unknown terms of the agreement between Breck and Curran, to which he was a party, that he could not touch the subject of Reddy's death. If Conny knew of it, she would certainly guess that the secret was out. To give her the slightest hint of its discovery would be equivalent to telling Marcia, which would surely be forbidden in any deal with Curran.

It seemed necessary to speak of the matter of the keys—undoubtedly the same in regard to which Marcia had been questioned. He did not say that he had heard about them, but only that Vaughn had looked into her hand bag and found them.

She was stricken dumb for a moment, and then asked excitedly what Vaughn had said. Did he seem to know anything?

"He always seems to know everything; that's his habitual pose," Thompson replied. "He did nothing but get out of the house. Will he go to Marcia's, do you think?"

She made no reply except to murmur: "Poor Marcia!" She began to sob and then to laugh hysterically; not loudly, but it brought her maid. Thompson left the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOO LATE FOR TALK.

WHEN Thompson reached the foot of the stairway, he saw Breck coming from the rear of the hall, with the light step of a boy. His cheeks were somewhat flushed, accentuating at the first glance his youthful appearance, but on a nearer view his brow was seen to be furrowed as if with the accumulated anxieties of a long life. The current saying that "Sandy" Breck grew old only in the top of his head was never more amply justified than this night.

"How's Conny, now?" he asked.

"She'll be all right with a night's rest, I think. You knew she fainted?"

"Yes. Vaughn came around and told me what had happened."

"About the keys?"

"He said Conny had them. What for, do you suppose? Had she merely taken them off Marcia's hands?"

"No. I think Conny herself had a use for them. She didn't give me one word of information, but somehow I got the idea that she wanted to use them here."

"In this house?"

"Yes. You haven't taken anything away from her, have you? Letters, notes from Marcia, any sort of evidence? Conny wouldn't open locked places looking for anything not her own, of course, or Marcia's."

"I have nothing of the sort," Breck said, and seemed puzzled and disturbed.

Thompson suggested that if Reddy was dead, he might have left some hiding place locked up. Apparently he had made only occasional use of the cave, and it was certain that Vega's room couldn't have been his only refuge.

"That's what Curran thinks." Breck seemed not much impressed with the idea, however. "Something may have gone wrong there, so that Reddy was blocked off; didn't dare go back to it. Marcia wants to get the contents out of it, Curran says. He believes the money may be hidden there—Reddy's pile, quite a handsome sum by this time, if he's hung onto it."

"It isn't hidden in the cave," Thompson said. "And speaking of money, I think I'll take that fifty thousand off your hands. That'll save you the trouble of attending to it to-morrow."

"I'd rather attend to it then than now. It's locked in my safe. You don't care what time you get it, do you?"

"No." Thompson couldn't insist on having it, and wasn't sure he wanted it. He was merely afraid not to have it—in case Vaughn should see him again that night and show him Marcia's danger in a way to overcome all scruples. But these thoughts and feelings he kept strictly covered. Here at last was a matter on which he was not tempted to consult his lawyer.

"I must see Conny right away."

Breck seemed to dread it. "Useless, of course. She won't tell me anything."

"She's hardly able to do so, but naturally you want to see her, and I won't detain you. Is there anything that has to be said as to the understanding with Curran?"

"Your part of it is only silence," Breck replied. "Marcia will go to the bank as usual, and she mustn't know what is being done—not a word as to any part of this new phase of the case. She'd start something, if free to do it. On the other hand, her arrest, no matter how secretly managed, would be known immediately through her failure to appear at the bank. That would set the public talking and the reporters digging in.

"Curran is afraid of rumors that Reddy has been found especially if they had to be contradicted later. He wants to suppress all excitement till the half holiday has thinned the crowds in the business district. For that reason, he made no protest against delaying Marcia's arrest. He thinks it may take till noon to get Reddy's body, if it's there. Getting a boat into that rock-bound hole is a job, and the secrecy will cause delays.

"I'm going up with Curran early in the morning, and shall stay till I get the facts. Then I'll come down and have my talk with Marcia. If I don't shape up her story before Curran is due, I'll put him off, somehow."

He spoke as if from only half his mind, and Thompson was affected by a feeling of discouragement.

"I expect the best work of your life, Breck——"

"This case is life, death and desperation," the lawyer interrupted. "I'm going to acquit that girl if I have to prove that Cain didn't kill Abel, that Reddy never laid a finger on Joe Tully, and that Vega was clubbed to death by the police."

"You won't have to prove any absurdities," Thompson said, "only the truth."

They had walked to the street door and into the vesitibule. The night was dark and still, the air heavy.

"I can't see an inch into to-morrow," said Breck. "All I can say is it's a mighty dangerous day. Watch out for Marcia; she's virtually a prisoner in your charge, to-morrow forenoon, and you'll be held responsible for what she does."

A police car was standing just beyond the street that ran alongside the house, and Thompson suspected that Vaughn was waiting for him; but the car started as he was descending the steps. Why Vaughn or any other member of the police should wait merely to see him leave the house, Thompson could not guess. He had lost his confident habit of expecting to understand things that happened.

AT Marcia's house he halted at the usual place to look at her windows, which were bright. For a moment the shadow of her standing figure was thrown on one of the curtains. It vanished, to reappear on the other. This happened again and again, with regularity. The tortured girl was pacing back and forth—as she would soon be doing in a narrower space, behind a barred door.

Wheat was waiting for Thompson at home, but with nothing of importance to report. Then for hours Thompson paced the floors of various rooms in his big house, trying to make his business judgment serve him in this affair, so remote from the field of his abilities and experience.

Sunrise found him pacing the veranda —a sunrise so beautiful that it improved his spirits. He went to his bedroom; measured off a little sleep on the alarm dial of his clock, and woke to find that the day had darkened since he lay down. He reached the bank, a little after eight, in a sudden downpour of rain.

Marcia had arrived some seconds earlier. In line with Chief Curran's plan that everything should seem entirely usual, Vaughn had brought her down. Partly sheltered by the ornamentation over the entrance, she stood, in her gray raincoat, watching Vaughn in a blue one with the rain beating on its back as he bent over his stalled motor. He fixed it with conjuring speed, and

glided aboard like a blue leopard, without a glance at the banker, who had alighted from his car.

Before Vaughn could start, however, Thompson's head was thrust under the little car's top.

"I should like a word with you," he said. "Come into the bank."

"What for? Your vaults are time-locked still."

"I was going to suggest that you see me between two and three."

"At that hour," Vaughn said, "there won't be one chance in a million of doing anything. Besides, I'm compelled to go to Bitter Pond, and in this rain and darkness, there's no knowing when we'll find our man."

"Come when you can. I'll be prepared to talk to you."

"Be prepared to act," Vaughn said "The talking has been done." He started the car with a jump.

Marcia was waiting by the door which the watchman was holding open. She returned the banker's salutation in the sweetest of her deep-contralto tones. She was clear-eyed, looking her best, showing not a sign of an anxious night.

"I seldom ask annoying questions," she said. "Tell me that's true."

"It *is* true. Your perfection has many facets, Marcia, and that's one of them."

"Thank you, but I have a question to ask. I should like to know what's the matter with Donald this morning. Did you notice anything?"

"Yes. He has something on his mind."

"I think you know what it is."

"I think I do, in part. But I can't tell you, Marcia. I'm not at liberty to do so."

"Then I won't ask you any more." And she didn't, till they were in his office. "You heard about the keys, of course. That isn't a question."

"The keys?" For the moment they had slipped out of his weary mind, and his face showed that he had to make an effort to recall them. Therefore, they were not the thing that was on Vaughn's mind and known to Thompson.

"They were among my father's things," she said, "in one of his old trunks stored in the attic. He got them from a thief, a young man whom he defended many years ago, who reformed —or at least he went into business and was successful, I don't know by what methods. He was in Wellington, New Zealand, five years ago, and he heard of father's troubles and sent a draft for five hundred pounds. It came after father's death, and I sent it back as soon as I could."

"You remembered those keys and hunted them up—when?"

"A few days ago."

"What did you want with them?"

"To get into a place where I hoped to find something."

"Relating to your brother, of course. You didn't go to that place yourself; you sent Conny, last evening. Did she succeed?"

Marcia considered her answer, and then replied:

"We have failed, and it is very serious."

"Is there—or did you suppose there was—anything in her own house that you wanted to get?"

She seemed surprised.

"There's nothing anywhere—that we can find."

SHE paced the floor for a few turns, and Thompson was sadly reminded of the shadow on the curtain. Then she told him that she had seen Conny the previous evening, at the Kay house gate. This was after Marcia was brought back from headquarters, before Conny came home. Marcia must have waited at the gate for her some time.

"Of course all this isn't fair to Conny," Marcia said, "or to you. And it has become impossible for me, I think. I can't bear it any longer!

"But I don't wish to be emotional about it. This is a matter of business, so far as you're concerned, and it isn't going well. My presence and my troubles have disturbed you to such an extent that your affairs are becoming seriously involved. I can't help knowing that; and I must take myself out of the way."

"By what means?"

"By leaving Brantford—though that isn't all of it."

"You can't leave Brantford. You know that, of course."

"I can leave when I please," she said, "unless there's some new difficulty. Do you know of any?" When he hesitated, she asked: "Do they mean to arrest me this afternoon?"

"I can't answer that question," he replied. "I can't speak for the police. They may be entirely mistaken as to what they expect——"

"Oh, are they doing something important to-day?" Her tone showed interest, but no great anxiety. "I thought so, from the way Donald acted. He doesn't like this thing, whatever it is that's being done. Do you know why not?"

"If he'd told me, I shouldn't feel that I knew."

"I see. You don't believe what he said. Well, I mustn't ask you anything more. I've gone much too far as it is."

"We've both done that," he said. "We've gone so far that it would be folly to stop. You spoke of leaving Brantford. That will be impossible. You'll have to stay here and fight it through. Are you prepared to do it—with my help, with all the money that can possibly be needed, and with all the influences I can bring to bear?"

She seemed profoundly affected, expressing her gratitude in broken phrases, and evidently struggling hard to assemble her thoughts for the purpose of some critical decision.

"I'm tempted to tell you everything," she said, at length, "but I can't do it, now. You know why; I must see Conny first. Would it be possible for me to go to her house?"

"I'm afraid not. Telephone Conny. Ask her to come down."

"Yes," she said. "I will."

She looked toward the telephone on his desk, but did not approach it. He was afraid she might be changing her mind.

"You'd like to speak privately, of course," he said, and went into the next room and closed the door.

Naturally he was highly excited, believing that he was about to hear Marcia's story, the answer to Breck's accusation that she was the brains of her brother's banditry, and to Vaughn's far graver charge that she was the principal in the Vega murder. Eight months of mystery ever deepening, and the horrors of this final week, had seemed to culminate in his scenes with those two men last evening. They had beaten him; he had failed to defend Marcia against them.

But he had never heard her side of the case, and he believed that he was now going to hear it. He was willing to make sacrifices and take risks for that privilege. His eagerness to get that story before Breck got it proved that there was a part of his mind that didn't fully trust Breck in this matter.

What worried Thompson was the possibility that something would prevent an agreement between Marcia and Conny. Minutes passed—five, perhaps—and he became extremely anxious because Marcia did not call him back.

The dangerous subject would prevent any explanation or discussion by telephone; she could do no more than ask Conny to come down, and that shouldn't take so long a time. To avoid overhearing even the sound of a voice he had kept well away from the door, but now he slowly approached it until he was listening as best he could. He heard nothing whatever; Marcia couldn't be speaking. He knocked, and, getting no response, he opened the door. Marcia was gone.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTAIN REDDY APPEARS.

IT was as obvious an escape as ever was staged, but Thompson refused to see it so. He tried to tell himself that Marcia had preferred to use one of the public telephone booths, and he walked out far enough to see that all was empty.

There was no one in sight. The watchman was on the other side of the central inclosure. Within, the tellers were getting their cash ready for the half day's business, but their windows were closed.

Thompson turned aside to that exit into the hall made famous by the holdup

of Joe Tully. The heavy doors had been opened. The glass-paneled one that served during business hours had a spring lock which offered no impediment to a person going out, and very little to a person who desired to come in. The door was loose in its frame, and a knife blade would suffice to open it—a matter of indifference, as it formed no part of the bank's defenses.

The bank president stared stupidly at the door. It couldn't tell him whether Marcia had gone out that way, but he didn't need to be told. Of course she had. The only question was whether she would ever come back.

He believed that she would, but he couldn't be altogether blind to the inevitable consequences if she didn't. Her arrest had been postponed as the result of a bargain to which he was a party. She would have been detained at headquarters the previous night except for his interference through his lawyer; and he, being in the confidence of the police, had warned her of their intentions and had then permitted her to escape.

Her flight—if she had fled—would set the city wild within a few hours, and would be trumpeted all over the world, along with his share in the sensational occurrence. It would hurt him disastrously.

As Thompson entered his office, he saw his raincoat lying across a chair. He had dropped it there, and Marcia's on top of it, when they first came in. Hers was gone.

He walked over to his desk and saw a sheet of paper on which was written in Marcia's hand:

> Connie is ill in bed. I must see her, and shall go to her house. I evade asking your permission because you would be blamed for letting me go. Also, you might not permit it.

A perfect explanation—Thompson swallowed it whole and did not choke. He was prepared, of course, for Conny's illness after the previous evening. Everything looked right. Marcia could remember to be strictly honest, he thought, even if the sky had fallen on her head.

The room had darkened till he could hardly see the hands of his desk clock—at quarter of ten on a May morning. He glanced over his shoulder toward the window, and its frame and bars showed black against a dense yellow atmosphere, as if one of the copper-colored clouds had come down and enveloped the bank. It was not raining now, but there was an almost constant rumble of thunder.

IN the midst of that rumbling he heard a latch click. On his left was the door from the inner regions of the bank. This was locked, and for an instant he thought some one was trying it. Then streaks of light in front of him showed that the sound had come from the entrance door. He got the impression that some one was listening there before entering; and he started to close Marcia's door on his right, so that her absence wouldn't be noticed.

"Come in!" he called, and Breck appeared a most unwelcome visitor at that moment.

Evidently the lawyer supposed that Marcia was in her room. He nodded and gestured, indicating that he wished her door to be shut. The banker hastened to oblige him. Then Breck spoke, in a subdued voice.

"I don't want to see her yet. I've been up to Bitter Pond, but they don't know whether Reddy's there or not. They smashed their boat, getting her down over those rocks. Curran was trying to patch her up when I left, but he had almost nothing to do it with, and she'll never float. He'll have to get another."

He came up to the desk and laid down the express envelope.

"There's your fifty thousand," he said. "I stopped at my house to get it, and got my own car, too. I came down the path across the mountain in a police runabout—thirty minutes for the whole trip, including the walk from the pond to the path. My liver is shaken all to pieces."

"Of course they can't see the body on such a devil's own day as this," Thompson said.

"No, but Curran has some sort of light to use. He broke that, too, and has sent down for parts to fix it. He tried to do

something from the top of that rock where you stood, but it's too high; and they can't drag over such a bottom—a jumble of jagged rocks. They'll have to fish the body straight up, and they can't do it without a boat. You said the body lay some distance out?"

"At least fifteen feet. It must have slid away in a sort of dive."

"That makes it forty or fifty feet from the nearest point that can be reached on the shore," Breck said. "Nothing to do but wait for the boat. The cave didn't yield anything beyond what you found. Plenty of finger prints, but they'll prove to be Reddy's and yours. Vaughn is sure there'll be none of hers." He nodded sidewise toward Marcia's door. "Too smart. Does she seem excited this morning? Suspicious that something's going on?"

Thompson shook his head, and made a cautionary gesture. How he was ever going to square himself for this, he couldn't imagine, but he certainly wouldn't tell the truth now, and send Breck hurrying home to interrupt the scene which Thompson believed was taking place between Marcia and Conny.

"Well, don't let her get away from you, Harvey," the lawyer said. "That would be deadly. If things move too slowly at the pond, I'll get to a telephone and send you instructions—about one o'clock perhaps. Great heavens, how dark it is! Why haven't you turned on your lights?"

"I was going to."

Thompson went toward the wall button, but did not press it. Instead, he opened the door as if assured that Breck was leaving immediately. The trick worked, and Breck walked out, and glanced at the attendant's empty chair.

"Where's Johnny?" asked Breck, indicating the attendant's chair.

"He reported sick yesterday," Thompson said. "You knew that."

"Oh, yes, I remember! Don't bother to escort me out, Harvey."

But Thompson went with him as far as the corner of the inclosure, from which point the watchman could be seen in the vestibule, waiting till it was time to open the doors. No one else was in sight.

Returning to his office, Thompson sat on a corner of his desk, took up the telephone and called for Breck's residence. He wanted to assure himself that Marcia was there, and that Conny had agreed to the disclosure of their mystery. The worst that he now believed about it was that it involved some form of assistance to Reddy in his long struggle to elude the police.

In his hurry and excitement, Thompson had not stopped to touch the light button. The room was even darker than when Breck was there. The bank's doors were not yet open; no sound came from outside the office. But within, and behind Thompson as he sat looking toward the window, something so faint as hardly to be called a sound, some dim revelation of another's presence, made him turn—and he was face to face with Captain Reddy.

THE banker's heart gave one leap in his breast, stopped, and went on again, in a series of explosions. Every quick beat seemed to jar his eyes, so that the figure confronting him vanished and reappeared. He saw, in these swift intervals of vision, the gray raincoat, the white handkerchief across the lower part of the face, the little old baseball cap pulled low, with the unmistakable Kay hair at the sides of it.

The gray eyes of this apparition were cold and steady, while his own continued to do strange tricks, one of which was to magnify the size of the pistol that was pointed at the middle of his body. Also, his imagination magnified the size of the target, but that was unnecessary. The poorest shot in the world couldn't miss Harvey Thompson at two yards' range, and the big man knew that fact painfully well.

"Hello, Reddy! I thought you were dead."

"Not yet."

The bandit made a gesture, very slight, but Thompson understood it, and he began to grope on the desk for the express envelope. He couldn't look to see where it was; he had a feeling that the pistol would go off if he didn't watch it.

His hand went everywhere on the desk,

except the right place. No doubt it seemed as if he was trying *not* to find the money; and time was precious. In three minutes the bank's doors would be open to the public.

The bandit made a movement with the pistol, waving his victim away from the desk while at the same moment taking a step forward. A thought went through Thompson's head quicker than the flash of lightning which at that instant glared into the room.

"If I don't move, he'll do that again, a little wider."

So he thought, and he didn't move, and the bandit waved the weapon once more. It moved toward Thompson's left, and he dodged to his right and sprang forward, trying to catch his assailant's pistol arm. But the bandit was too fast for him, and Thompson's rush was checked instantly by a bullet in his chest.

The shock flung him back against the desk. He clutched at it, struggling to get his balance and sliding along till there was no more desk behind him. Then he fell, in a sitting posture, with his head striking the chair which Marcia usually occupied when he was dictating letters.

He was barely down when he was trying to pull himself up, with a hand on the corner of the desk. With that, the bandit fired again, the bullet missing Thompson's head, but passing so close that he felt a stinging sensation. He fell back at full length, clasping his forehead with his right hand, which had been pressed to his chest and was red-stained. Doubtless he looked as if he had been shot through the brain.

He had wit enough to lie motionless. He knew that the bandit got the money and saw him walk around, not over, the banker's long legs on the floor. This was done with a sort of graceful decorum. Even when in such haste, a Kay would be too polite to step on a person whom he had murdered. So Thompson thought, in a delirium of swift and absurd fancies, as he watched the bandit vanish into Marcia's room.

The whole scene had been enacted in the briefest time. The thunderclap which had followed the flash that came before the shooting was still making the building quiver with its grinding crash. It had drowned the shots to such an extent that they were unnoticed, except by two or three clerks whose desks were near the very solid partition between the inner bank and the president's office. They were uncertain as to what they had heard, and only one of them took any action. He carried a sort of still alarm to the watchman, who was on the point of opening the doors, but decided to investigate before doing so.

Thompson rose. Clinging to the desk, he got around to his chair and dropped into it. Except for a grunt when the bullet hit him, he hadn't uttered a sound. He was listening, now that the thunder had ceased, but he heard no outcry and he knew that Reddy had escaped unseen. One glimpse of him would have caused an uproar, spreading by this time from the bank to the street.

How badly he needed help, or whether he was beyond it, Thompson didn't know, but he had a feeling that his vital organs were in good condition. He was not all in by any means, and at the moment there was something that he wanted more than attention for his wound.

HE took up the telephone and got in communication with somebody in Breck's house. He gave his name and asked for Miss Breck, but before the connection was extended to her room, some one was knocking at his door. It was the watchman, and he entered after only an instant's delay.

"Is anything wrong, sir?"

"Yes, George. I've been held up and shot."

The watchman gasped, "Reddy!" and turned as if to run.

"Hold on there!" Thompson called sharply. "Come here. I don't want to raise a riot. See Mr. Holland, the cashier. Ask him quietly to tell the few who ought to know, and to keep the news inside the bank for a while. Say also that I wish to be alone till the doctor comes. I'm not badly hurt.

"Send somebody across to the Hotel Brantford for Doctor Lee," he added, "and have the man who goes put on his hat and not run. The same to yourself,

George; don't rush around the bank. Take your time."

Thompson made a gesture meant to be quieting to George's nerves, but it was done with a hand that had been holding a handkerchief inside his shirt and was red to the wrist. Its color was visible even in the yellow dusk created by the storm.

"I don't like to leave you alone, sir." George rolled a wild eye toward the open door of Marcia's room. "Wasn't Miss Kay here? I didn't see her go out."

"She went, some time before this happened. On your way, George."

The crimson-stained hand gestured again, and the president's open coat revealed the state of a silk shirt formerly white.

"Wouldn't I better call the hospital, sir?"

"No!" returned Thompson, in a voice that threatened George's job. "They'd send an ambulance and I don't want it. Do as I told you!"

There was a chance that Marcia would return. He would do his best to prevent her from walking into a mob crazed by this latest and most daring of Captain Reddy's crimes.

Alone again, he spoke into the telephone.

"Doesn't Miss Breck answer?"

"Yes, sir," came a voice over the wire, a servant in the Breck home. "Didn't you hear her?"

"No."

There was a moment's pause.

"She doesn't answer now, Mr. Thompson."

The servant's agitated manner reminded him that he had not covered the transmitter when talking to George. She, and probably Conny, too, had overheard what he had just said to George, the watchman.

"Send some one to Miss Breck's room."

"Yes, sir. I'm ringing for her maid. I'm afraid she's fainted."

"Miss Kay is not with her?"

"No, sir. Miss Kay has not arrived here yet. She called up about half an hour ago. Miss Breck was just asking about her."

"When Miss Kay comes, will you ask her to call me up at the bank? Assure her that I'm not seriously hurt."

There was no use ordering the servant to withhold what she knew. If Conny had fainted the reason couldn't be concealed.

Thompson's hand holding the receiver fell to the desk, and his head sank forward. There ensued a sort of nap, of only a few seconds' duration, but in even so short an interval, his immense vitality got a new hold.

Hearing the door hurriedly opened he looked up and saw Breck's figure on the threshold, sharply silhouetted against the light in the bank. The lawyer was without his overcoat and hat; apparently he hadn't started for the pond. He must have thought of something requiring his attention and have gone up to his office. So Thompson assumed, and so he was told a little later, but at the moment he cared nothing for an explanation of the lawyer's presence, but only for the fact.

"Shut the door, old chap, and come here quick," he said. "This is the devil of a situation."

BRECK looked as if he believed it to be all of that. His stare of horror at the red smear over Thompson's left eye showed that he supposed himself to be talking with a man shot through the head. He approached the wounded man as if afraid of him, and he talked the foolishness of panic.

"How do you stand it, Harvey? You must be in awful pain. What can I do?"

"Pull yourself together," Thompson said. "That's the first thing."

Breck was near enough now to see that the mark on the forehead was not a wound, but he still stared at it, leaning heavily on a corner of the desk.

"How shall I handle this?" Thompson was saying. "Marcia was going to tell me everything. She started for your house to get Conny's consent, but she isn't there yet. I'm afraid she's been arrested.

"Now, Breck, I'm determined to hear that story. She may never tell it to any one else—not to you, I'm certain. There's some strange feature of it that I can't even guess at, something that keeps you

out of it. And it's more vitally important now, of course, than before this infernal thing happened.

"I've got this bullet in my body and it will have to be dug out; and that means ether, with no positive certainty of waking up. A long delay anyhow, and I can't stand for it. I want you to find Marcia and take her to my house. I'm going to be carried there, not to the hospital. Arrange that I can speak with her privately before the doctors operate. Even if she's under arrest, your influence can manage this. Do it, Breck, and hurry."

Before Breck could reply, the watchman appeared at the door.

"Stand outside," Thompson called. "Don't let any one in, unless Miss Kay returns. Knock when the doctor comes."

The door was shut, and Breck said:

"I'll do my best, Harvey, but I may not find her. You realize that, don't you? You must think of yourself; you mustn't delay the operation."

"Not find her? Of course you will; at your house or here or at headquarters—the last, most likely."

"Yes," Breck assented, "I think so, decidedly. But she may not be there for quite a while."

"Why not?"

"I hate to go into it, Harvey. I feel as if I was talking your life away. Leave it to me; I'll find Marcia as soon as I can."

"You think she told Reddy about that money. How could she do it?"

"He wasn't far away," Breck replied. "He was here within ten minutes after she left. He must have known she was gone. They couldn't work openly together. And he must have known that your doorman wasn't here to-day. Those facts and the money are the essentials of this crime, and Marcia alone could have told them all."

"The money wasn't here when she left."

"But she knew it was coming. She telephoned my house, didn't she? I heard Conny speaking from her room. Conny would have told her I was just starting for the bank, and Marcia would have known what I was bringing.

"I don't pretend to understand just how this crime was planned, but the facts of its execution are too open, Harvey. I don't believe Marcia can hope to bluff it out. She's gone, my boy, and she isn't coming back till she's caught. At this moment she's either actually escaping, or in hiding till night comes——"

His voice was suddenly swept away by the blast of the police siren, its tremendous outcry more hideous on this day than ever before. Intensified by compression under the low and heavy pall of clouds, it rushed in through the window like some awful creature howling for its prey. Breck shied and put up his hands as if the thing had leaped for his throat.

The door opened. The watchman had knocked without being heard. Breck spoke close to Thompson's ear.

"I advise you to be very sure about Reddy," he said. "It was dark here, but you saw him plainly."

CHAPTER XVIII.

NEATLY CAUGHT.

HALF a dozen men were entering the office. Doctor Lee was among them, with Holland and other officers of the bank; but the police were represented by no more than a patrolman from the sidewalk. He merely stood guard, knowing that a central-office squad would be on the scene directly.

"Hello, doctor!" Thompson said. "I'm glad to see you, though I'm feeling better every minute."

His glance fell on the desk clock, and he was astonished to discover what a little handful of minutes had been counted off since Captain Reddy stood before his dazed eyes in the shadowy room.

He lay back in his chair, submitting to the examination of his wound and thinking so hard as to be indifferent to pain and to his own fate. The police would see this crime in the same way that Breck had seen it. They would accuse Marcia of direct complicity. And as a matter of plain common sense, how could Reddy have got the information requisite for the robbery, unless from Marcia?

Conny could be relied on to testify that

she hadn't said the money was on its way to the bank, but no one would believe her. No one would believe that Reddy got his first news of the money that morning. Marcia knew several days ago that it would be taken to Middletown and might come back. The theory would be that she had secretly kept watch on the transaction, had learned of the previous day's failure to put it through, and had told Reddy the facts.

Thompson utterly rejected that theory and all its implications, but he could not find an explanation of the robbery consistent with Marcia's innocence—or even with her guilt. He couldn't explain it at all. His fevered brain was hardly capable of coherent thinking, but he couldn't lose sight of the fact that the bandit had come into his office knowing just what he wanted, and that Thompson was alone, his door unguarded. How was this possible?

What had Breck meant by his caution to be positive as to Reddy? While Thompson struggled with this and other puzzles, Doctor Lee annoyed him by talking in his ear. The doctor seemed to think that the death of the president of the Hamilton Bank would be a calamity, and that the president ought to be interested in the subject. But Thompson had already learned that the bullet hadn't gone straight into him; it had glanced around. He was convinced that the doctor didn't know just where it was or what harm it had done.

"That's all that can be done at present," Lee said, at length. "Now we'll get you to the hospital as quick as possible."

"No," Thompson said. "I'm going home."

He opened his eyes, looked up into the face of the last man on earth he would have wished to see, the most dangerous and the hardest to deceive—Don Vaughn, whom he had thought to be well out of the way.

Evidently Vaughn had come from headquarters with Commissioner Scott and a captain who was Chief Curran's deputy. Vaughn stood beside Thompson's chair; Scott and the captain were on the far side of the desk, conferring with the officers of the bank. The siren's scream, just now ceasing, had covered the noise of their entrance and their voices.

Even after last night's scene, Thompson was without a reasonable guess as to Vaughn's motives and intentions, his real attitude toward Marcia or his private view of the mystery as a whole.

"Hello, Vaughn!" he said. "I thought you were at Bitter Pond."

"I came down to get something for the chief." There was a parcel under Vaughn's arm. "I was just starting back when this alarm came in."

"You heard who was here. Who's the man in the pond?"

"We shan't know that for several hours yet," Vaughn answered. "Where is Marcia?"

"She went out about half past nine."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Which way did she go out?"

"I don't know. What difference does it make?"

Vaughn lowered his voice. Lee had gone around the desk to ask the bank officers what to do.

"They'll say Reddy was waiting in the hall," Vaughn said. "He was there last Saturday, laying for Joe Tully."

"You told me last night that he was dead."

"This is another day." Vaughn tried to assume his superior and all-wise manner, but he seemed a good deal shaken by Reddy's reappearance. "If Marcia went out the side way—and of course she did—she'll have no witnesses. She won't have taken a cab near the bank. No one will know what she did or where she went. Who'll remember, for purposes of identification, a girl in a raincoat with an umbrella covering her head and hiding her to the shoulders?"

He seemed to be talking to himself. The commissioner, by a sign, had ordered Vaughn to cease his questioning. He came to Thompson's side. Official responsibility for this crime made Scott look as if he were accused of committing it himself.

"This is awful!" he said. "But the doctor says you'll come out all right.

Don't you think you'd better let us take you to the hospital?"

"Thank you, Scott, but I'm going home. They can operate there, can't they, doctor?"

"Yes," Lee answered, "but I advise against any loss of time."

"Then go right to it. Make all the arrangements, like a good fellow. Holland will give you a telephone. Meanwhile, I'm very comfortable here."

The strong voice that he used seemed to break half a dozen ribs on his right side, but the commissioner only heard it; he didn't feel it, and he was deceived as to the wounded man's condition.

"If you're really able, Harvey," he said, "there are a few questions——"

HE signed to Vaughn, who seemed to feel that he was wasting time. He was straining like a hound on the leash —impatient to go in search of Marcia, Thompson easily inferred. But Scott wanted Vaughn to ask the questions.

The detective began formally:

"Who did this?"

"Captain Reddy."

"I'm told you had no lights here."

"True," Thompson replied, "and it was really dark. I was badly rattled, scared half blind at first. But I got one good view of him—by a flash of lightning. He was facing the window and the glare struck him fairly."

"What did he do?"

"Do? Nothing. He was startled; he made a sort of angry sound."

"Any movement of the hands?"

"He raised his left hand toward his face. I thought he might be dazzled. That was part of the reason why I risked trying to grab his pistol arm."

"What happened then?"

"He shot me. I staggered away——"

"Where were you standing?"

Thompson pointed out his position and resumed his answer.

"I staggered over there and sat down on the floor. Reddy saw the envelope on the desk and made a dive for it. He hadn't known it was there; it was hidden behind me. He seemed tremendously surprised. Obviously he hadn't known anything about that cash. I think he meant to make me send into the bank for money."

That falsehood made no impression on anybody, Thompson saw, and despair was mingled with the increasing pain and weakness from his wound.

"Did Reddy say anything about sending for money?" the detective asked.

"I didn't give him time."

"How long was he in this room?"

"About one minute, I should think."

"That's time for about two hundred words," Vaughn said. "How many did Reddy speak?"

Thompson evaded a direct answer.

"I opened the conversation by saying that I thought he was dead, and he assured me that he wasn't."

"What else did he say?"

"I don't remember."

"But you recognized his voice?"

"Positively." Thompson was hazily following his counsel's instructions.

"You say he was surprised when he saw that money?" the detective continued. "What shape was it in?"

"Fifty bills—thousands."

"In an envelope?"

"Yes."

"How did he know they were large bills?"

"He pulled them out a little way so that he could see them."

The questioning was very rapid, faster than Thompson could think clearly in his present state.

"I'm told he fired at you twice," Vaughn said. "Was it the first one that hit you?"

"Yes."

"And you fell, as you've described, over there. Did he fire the second time before you fell?"

"No. After the second shot, I lay flat."

"And Reddy grabbed the money?"

"Yes."

"How did you see him look at the bills if you were flat on the floor?"

Thompson was neatly caught.

"I knew he did it," he replied. "I heard him gasp."

"Why did he fire the second time?"

"I was trying to get up. I suppose he thought I'd raise an alarm."

"Did you do it?"

"I couldn't. I didn't have voice enough."

"But when the watchman came, you spoke to him. Did you tell him to give the alarm?"

"Yes, but quietly. I knew Reddy was gone by that time, and I didn't want a mob around the bank."

"Was that your only motive?"

"Yes."

"Did you call Reddy by name while he was here?"

"I did."

"He showed no surprise that you knew him?"

"Surprise? Of course not. He was dressed as he always is—with a handkerchief across his mouth and chin."

"Then you saw only his nose and eyes?"

"And his hair," Thompson returned. "Anybody in Brantford would have known him at a glance."

"Then why was he startled? Why did he make that angry sound, when the flash of lightning showed him up? Why did he raise his left hand, to cover his face? Apparently he spoke hardly a word while he was here. Why not?"

"Because he's crazy, I believe."

"No, because he was a counterfeit. This was not Reddy Kay. You've described exactly the conduct of an impersonator, some one disguised as Reddy, some one known to you and afraid of being recognized."

"I've described Captain Reddy's invariable appearance and behavior," Thompson retorted. "The rig he wears is not a disguise. It's not intended to prevent recognition. It's the cover for the *real* disguise in which for eight months he has walked through the streets of this city past the noses of the police. It's a trick make-up that can be changed in a moment; and he was afraid I'd seen the trick of it by that flash of lightning."

"I think you saw entirely through the make-up, Mr. Thompson," the detective said. "And because of what you saw, you permitted this person to escape."

"From what motive?"

"A gentlemanly one." Vaughn was in too much of a hurry to develop his sneer to its full value. "You took what was done to you, and kept still. There are circumstances, sentiments, social conventions, which restrain a gentleman from raising the hue and cry after a woman."

Dazed and fainting as he was, Thompson had seen this coming, and had gathered strength to climb out of his chair.

"You cad!" he cried; and aimed a swing at Vaughn that would have caught him, quick as he was, if the commissioner hadn't seized the arm as it started.

A TERRIBLE pain tore Thompson's side. He fell into his chair, and his surroundings looked very misty for a few seconds. He knew what was going on, however. He heard the commissioner scold Vaughn as if he had disobeyed the most explicit orders, though Scott himself was to blame. He had been so interested in this penetrating cross-examination that he had let it run on to a cruel length and an outrageous climax.

Thompson saw that Vaughn didn't care one penny, that he was actuated by only a single impulse—haste. He had rushed through his questioning at lightning speed, without mercy for the wounded witness. And having brought out the evidence that the banker had been shot by Marcia impersonating her brother, the detective was eager to be gone.

Not being in condition to strangle the man, Thompson was trying to think of some other way of detaining him when the door was opened a few inches and instantly closed again. It seemed impossible that so stocky a man as Detective Wheat could have slid in, but he had; and his method of entrance might suggest that there was something outside which he had desired not to reveal to those within the room.

The star hustler of Heath's agency had evidently been hustling even harder than usual. His face was streaked with sweat, and with oil from a car engine. He was no figure of comedy, however. He was the messenger of fate, the bearer of news so important as to need no exaggeration by professional tricks.

Without a guess as to its nature, the commissioner instantly began to consult

Vaughn about it, catching the detective by the arm and demanding anxiously:

"What is this? What's happened? What's this fellow got?"

"Not the girl," Vaughn answered, and he tried to get away, but the commissioner wanted his help in what was coming across, right here.

Meanwhile, Wheat had hurried round the desk.

"Well, Mr. Thompson, this is too bad, but I'm glad it's no worse. You ought to be out of here, of course, but the street is jammed solid. If you want my report in private, ask these gentlemen to stand back; but I'll say it isn't any use. It's all got to come out."

"What is it, Wheat?"

"It's the answer, Mr. Thompson; it's the whole case. Listen! We've got Reddy. The police smashed their boat, but Dix and I showed up with a diving suit, borrowed from the gang that's building the railroad bridge. Dix walked out from the shore and brought the body in."

He spoke straight on, indifferent to questions.

"The body's in good condition, but white as chalk. Seems to have died of a bullet wound, about where you got yours. And he's been dead since last fall; since right after that first job when he got the prize-fight money. There's a few words of a note in his pocket, not important, except for the date, September 20th.

"So we come to the question, who's been doing all this smooth work, these past eight months?

"Mr. Thompson, I've got to give you a shock," Wheat went on. "It's the sister —*Marcia* Kay. She is Captain Reddy."

"That's an easy guess now," Vaughn said. "It wins no prize for you, Mr. Wheat. I gave the commissioner the right answer before you came in."

"Is that so, Mr. Vaughn?" Wheat retorted. "Did you tell him where to find the girl? That's the answer that wins the prize."

"Do you know where she is?" the commissioner demanded.

"Yes, sir, I do."

No one but Thompson got the full meaning of this reply. He alone had noticed the peculiar way in which Wheat had slid sidewise into the room. Marcia was outside the door, and Wheat hadn't wished her to be seen until he learned what the situation was inside the office.

CHAPTER XIX.

A FLASH OF RECOGNITION.

THE wounded man tried to rise, but for a moment was unable to do so. A wave of weakness was passing over Thompson. He had heard what Vaughn and Wheat had said, and he understood that it was the beginning of a quarrel over the rewards, but the voices sounded small and distant in his ears. He perceived, however, that neither the commissioner nor any other person present was doubting Marcia's guilt.

Meanwhile, Wheat was enjoying his triumph over the local police.

"Dix and I caught her on the mountain, as we were bumping down over that goat path," he was saying. "The girl was headed for the cave, of course. She didn't know it had been found.

"When she saw us coming, she gave up. She understood what was doing up above, and knew she had no place to go. She got aboard the car when we told her to, and made no trouble at all. But she wouldn't admit anything. She asked a few questions, but wouldn't answer any. She's outside there, in charge of Dix and two policemen."

This came as a surprise to all but Thompson. The others hadn't supposed that Marcia could have been brought into the bank through the crowd. Vaughn moved halfway to the door. It opened just as Wheat spoke the words, "She's outside," and Marcia appeared, with Dix following her and Chief Curran hurrying to catch up. The chief evidently had just arrived from Bitter Pond.

Thompson, meanwhile, had found strength to rise and move around the desk, and he was now leaning against it, almost precisely as he had stood when covered by Captain Reddy's pistol. He spoke Marcia's name and she advanced a step or two and halted, shifting her glance to Vaughn, as if selecting him as the man responsible for her disaster. If

Marcia had shot and killed Vaughn at that moment, it would not have surprised an observer with an eye to see. All were watching. There was not a sound in the room except the two murmurs, from the crowd in the streets and from the clouds in which perpetual thunder rumbled.

The girl controlled whatever impulse had possessed her during the moments when she confronted Vaughn. She turned toward Thompson, who had spoken her name again. She was not quite so near him as Captain Reddy had been, but the positions were very similar, and that fact was noticed by Curran's deputy, who had gone to the door. He pressed the black button in the wall, putting out the lights. They were not really necessary now, but by sudden contrast the room seemed as dark to Thompson as when "Reddy" was there.

He knew that the intention was to emphasize his identification of Marcia as the bandit, and in fact a pang of recognition went through him that was more painful than being shot. He saw with a peculiar clearness Marcia's hair under the sides of her gray tam—the inimitable Kay red. Yet it was necessary for him to believe that he had been deluded by a masquerader in a red wig; and he succeeded in hanging to a remnant of that belief.

The girl came to him at his call, and he put his left arm around her shoulders and whispered to her, swiftly and with beautiful words out of the depths of an awakened heart. Then he spoke aloud.

"I have asked Miss Kay to be my wife," said Thompson. "If it were possible, I would have her bear my name from this moment. This is my answer to the accusations against her, and I add my explicit testimony that she is not the person to whom I owe this wound. In my judgment and from all my knowledge of the matter, she has had no share in the series of crimes mistakenly charged against her brother. To shift the charge to her will be to blunder again, with the cruelty and folly of a witch-finding hysteria.

"Let us take our medicine like men. The truth is that we've been outwitted and thoroughly beaten. In an eight-month fight against one man, this whole city hasn't scored a point. We're as far from catching Captain Reddy, or from knowing who he really is, as we ever were.

"I'll make one guess, however," Thompson continued. "He is the crook who led Reddy into that first piece of banditry—the man who shot the detective. I believe he went with Reddy to that cave, killed him and took the whole of the loot, and then originated the idea of personating a bandit who *couldn't be caught,* because he was dead and hidden in the least-visited piece of water in New York State. Find that man, and you'll find the answer to the question which the *Herald* has printed day after day: 'Who hides Captain Reddy?' He hid him and his own guilt by the same clever stroke."

"It was more than clever," Vaughn said. "It was nothing short of genius. But the person who did it must have been possessed of one peculiar advantage —hair of the Kay red."

"Rot!" Thompson retorted. "He was possessed of a remarkably good wig, that's all."

"Hardly," the detective returned. "You forget the three hairs in the Vega case. If they'd been torn from a wig, I guess we should have known it. They came direct from a person's head."

That was the piece of evidence that Thompson had forgotten, and it staggered him. He glanced at Marcia with something like panic.

"It's true," she said. "I was surprised —when we looked at them, here."

"Was that what you tried to make me notice?"

"Yes. I didn't know how hairs were fastened to a wig, whether it would show plainly. But it seemed to me that those couldn't have been used in that way, and I believed they were really my brother's, they were so much like mine."

They were, indeed. Memory of Vaughn's proposal to change them for a price raged in Thompson's mind, causing the most frantic regret. The man's motive and intent—what he actually would have done if this offer had been accepted —were still beyond Thompson's comprehension; but he knew one thing surely.

that it was now too late for any tampering with that evidence.

He looked at Chief Curran, who was standing as if his legs were two iron posts. He hadn't spoken, hadn't moved an inch since he took his position after entering. He had done nothing but watch Marcia, studying every move and every word of hers.

A VOICE at Thompson's elbow spoke. Breck was there, having come in almost unnoticed by way of Marcia's room. The unnatural darkness was now closing down again.

"I advise Marcia to make no further statement," the lawyer said.

She looked up at Thompson and spoke almost in a whisper.

"I think it doesn't matter. Now that my brother's death is known, it's useless to conceal anything."

At this, Curran shifted his iron pose to the extent of taking a step forward.

"I warn Miss Kay that she is under arrest for this whole series of crimes, including Reddy's first one, and excepting the murder of Mrs. Trent. I charge her with helping her brother, that first time, and with shooting my detective. Whatever she says will be used against her."

He seemed to have felt that the moment had come for breaking the prisoner's nerve, but she showed no sign of being affected by what the chief had said. She addressed Thompson quietly, as before.

"I don't care in the least. I've done nothing except what Chief Curran has been doing, and everybody else. I've been trying to find out who was committing these crimes and putting the blame on my brother."

"I advise——" Breck began.

"No, no!" Thompson interposed. "Let's have the cards on the table. I'm not afraid for Marcia. I begin to see into this."

He turned to her as Breck made a hopeless gesture and stepped back.

"Marcia, how long have you known that your brother—*our* brother—was dead?"

"Since Saturday," she replied, "but I believed it long before, believed that he was dead and that his body was hidden on the mountain. And I went to search there as often as I could. On Saturday I saw him, only for a few moments, under that water that is poisoned with bitterness as his life had been.

"Think of it!" She spoke straight to Thompson as if they were alone. "Think of my leaving him there! But I thought that if I should tell what I knew, the robberies would cease, and the man who had wronged my brother in this terrible way would never be detected. So I am in some degree responsible for the horrors that have followed, and even for this."

She bowed her head until it touched his shoulder.

"You couldn't foresee any of it, Marcia, surely not this," returned Thompson. "Did you suspect this morning that your brother's body had been found? Was that why you went to the mountain?"

"Yes. But when I left, I really meant to go to Conny's house."

"Why did you think, months ago, that Reddy was dead?"

"Because the bandit was so evidently a different person," Marcia replied. "Five years ago my brother was convicted of a crime he couldn't have committed. It wasn't possible to him, individually or even racially. But nobody seemed able to see that.

"And the same thing was happening again. Take the first crime, the robbery of the prize-fight people. It was wrong, disgraceful; and yet there was a kind of chivalry in the way he did it. He put his pistol in his pocket and fought with his hands. I recognized him in that story; I knew he had done the thing.

"But in the very next case, though he was identified by persons who knew him well, I was sure they were mistaken. The robber held up two men, and only one of them was armed. He made that man give up his revolver and then struck him on the head with it, so as to have only one against him. Never in the world would Reddy have done that.

"I spoke of this with Miss Breck and she agreed with me, but we remembered the experience of five years before. What was the use of trying to convince any

one? So, very childishly, we made a vow to do this thing ourselves."

NO one interrupted. A cat is as likely to tell a mouse not to come out of its hole as a police officer is to stop an incautious prisoner's talking, until the prisoner has gone as far as he will toward convicting himself. The silence when she paused invited Marcia to go on.

"You remember that Reddy was always recognized on his own looks, apart from the way he dressed. We became convinced that there must be a very peculiar resemblance, only from the forehead to the mouth. The face as a whole must be extremely different, so as to prevent suspicion. Especially the lower part of the face must be very unlike Reddy's; we imagined a very heavy and ugly chin. And the hair must be of a different color, of course. We thought he must have had a wig especially made——"

"One moment, Marcia," Thompson interrupted. "Does this explain what Conny has been doing? Has she been hunting all over the State for the person who made that wig?"

"Yes."

"Vega made it, of course, but you never thought of him."

"We didn't know he made wigs, till his room was described after he was killed. We hadn't dreamed that the bandit had dared to get the work done in Brantford. We didn't imagine a wig maker who was a criminal under the other man's control."

She was speaking with a manner of perfect openness, but there suddenly flashed into Thompson's mind the memory of her mysterious errand before dawn of Monday, when he had followed her almost to Vega's door.

This seemed directly to contradict what she had just said, that she had not thought of Vega till Wednesday, after the murder was known. For an instant he was afraid to ask her a question, and then he was ashamed of the fear.

"Do you say that you didn't begin to suspect Vega till you read the description of his room?" he asked.

Marcia hesitated for the first time, seeming to scent danger in the question. But she felt the stare of many hostile eyes, all taking careful note of her reluctance.

"I began to suspect him—Monday."

"In the morning?"

She was startled.

"Yes."

"Don't be frightened."

"I am not, but you will lead me to accuse some one, and I have no proof. We have failed to get it."

"Never mind that," Curran said, in the voice of a fatherly gorilla. "We don't require proof; we only want you to talk perfectly free."

"Oblige him," Thompson said. "You left your house in the early hours of Monday, after you came back from Breck's. Why did you do it?"

"I thought a certain person knew who had killed Mrs. Trent and I was going to find him."

"You suspected that one of them was the man who had been impersonating Reddy. Which of them?"

"The one I followed. But I knew he didn't kill Mrs. Trent himself. I thought he might have got some one to do it."

"You followed him to Vega's?"

"Yes."

"Followed who?" Curran demanded. "What is this testimony? I don't get it."

"One moment," Thompson said. "You accuse Miss Kay of killing Vega!"

"Yes," returned Curran. "And I'll tell you that what she says about it is all fluff. She *knows* whose hair we found. It was Reddy's—and she put it there, under the nails of the man she'd killed. Why not? It would save *her* and it couldn't hurt Reddy."

"The hairs were Reddy's?" Thompson inquired. "How do you know? Did you have some to compare them with?"

"I did, and it's been done, by experts up to the college. I got the report last evening."

"From Vaughn? Did he have the original tube that evening?"

"Yes, and he's got it now." Curran held out his hand toward Vaughn for the tube. "What of it?"

"Wait, Curran," requested Thompson. "You want the truth, don't you? Then tell me this: When you and Vaughn were

in Breck's room last evening, was that money envelope on the desk?"

There was no use saying no, in Breck's presence.

"Well, what about it?" Curran said.

"Everything," Thompson responded. "Now I know the game that Vaughn was trying to play with me. It was any old story that would scare me so badly as to make me take the fifty thousand dollars home." He addressed Vaughn directly. "You weren't so anxious to have me give you the money!"

"What do you mean?" Vaughn inquired suavely.

HE stepped forward and was holding out the glass tube toward Curran, who was almost in line between him and Thompson, so that Vaughn was facing the wounded man. At that moment, a sharp flash of lightning glared on his face and glistened on the tube in his outstretched hand. Startled, he raised the other hand toward his face. It was a pose that Thompson accurately remembered.

"If I'd taken that money home, I should have met Captain Reddy in the darkest spot," he said. "You knew I didn't take it; you watched to see me come out of Breck's house, and if I'd got the money I should have come out the lower way. Vaughn, *you* are Captain Reddy!"

Vaughn turned as if to speak to Curran, but his real intention was to dart behind the captain and into the next room, where Marcia had her typewriter. Despite the number of persons on the scene, there happened to be a clear lane in the desired direction. Vaughn had glanced over his shoulder and had seen Doctor Lee entering the office, closely followed by two men bearing an ambulance stretcher. For a few seconds that door would be blocked, and there was one chance in a million of escape.

But he couldn't look all ways at once, and he failed to see that Wheat had stepped close behind him. At the instant when Vaughn started, Wheat caught him by the collar of his blue raincoat which was pulled off and turned inside out in the swift struggle that ensued.

The coat remained in Wheat's hands, and it was gray, not blue. Reversible coats are common, but raincoats in that style were not on the market in Brantford. Nobody had suspected that Vaughn's coat was reversible—except Marcia. It was; and he could wear it in the character of Reddy, and return to the scene of a robbery a few seconds later—as he had done in the Cole case and others—clothed in police blue. The red wig and gray cap would be stowed away in special pockets and his blue trousers turned down again to hide the gray stockings that were a part of the Reddy costume.

Vaughn had wrenched himself free of Wheat, and had staggered away, almost falling against Thompson, and drawing a pistol as he strove to regain his balance. With the dexterity for which the Kays were famous, Marcia took the weapon from Vaughn's hand as neatly as if it were a trick rehearsed to perfect execution; and when he flashed around to face her, she had him covered.

By this time, of course, all possibility of escape from the room was gone. Vaughn stood still, staring at the floor but too dazed to see the parcel he had dropped. Marcia recovered it, and passed it to Thompson, who ripped it open and disclosed a white handkerchief, a gray cap, a red wig, and an envelope containing fifty thousand dollars.

Forgetful of his wound, Thompson clasped Marcia hard in his arms. It seemed to him that she lifted him up as lightly as if he were a child, and carried him a long way; it didn't matter where. He was conscious only of a vague happiness which was interrupted by some one's trying to stifle him, while a man's voice told him to breathe deep. They were giving him ether; they were going to dig for the bullet. Well, that was all right. They wouldn't kill him. Life was going to be too good; he knew he couldn't lose it.

IN the afternoon of that day, Vaughn made a complete and very magniloquent confession, praising his own cleverness to the skies and without a sign of moral disgust. It is curious, yet not un-

usual, that after his exposure his vast vanity was easily detected as the quality of a mind disordered in a certain way.

Marcia had for some time suspected this, and under pledge of secrecy had consulted an alienist, as already told, her object being to learn what could be expected of a lunatic of that variety. Doctor Clark had told her that he would go on and on, and sooner or later betray himself by some monstrous act in which he would forget his cunning.

The general outlines of the confession were in line with what has been already disclosed. A few points need to be stated. Vaughn had tempted Reddy to that first holdup, through working on his sense of wrong that he had suffered. After the crime, the unfortunate youth had fled to the cave on the mountain, which he had discovered in one of his lonely walks.

There, next day, Vaughn brought him word that the detective who had been shot would recover. Reddy didn't believe it, and he was through, no matter what happened. He announced his intention to confess his own share—not Vaughn's—and then to kill himself. Vaughn feared that confession; it might lead to him.

Unable to turn Reddy from his purpose, Vaughn shot him, and threw the body into the pond. Entering the cave afterward, he discovered that Reddy had been writing. The murderer could not be sure how much had been written, but he suspected that he had thrown Reddy overboard with a confession in his pocket!

That explained his desperation when he learned that Thompson had found the body. Vaughn was obliged to prepare for instant flight. He had little money left, having lost nearly all the proceeds of his robberies in speculations jointly with Vega, and others on his own account. Seeing the money envelope on Breck's desk, Vaughn had determined to induce Thompson to carry it home, and to that end had told his wild story—a large part of it true.

It was he, of course, who had heard Vega curse Mrs. Trent. It was he who had warned the little man of her coming. It was he who had been obliged to silence Vega after he had lost his mind. It was he who had carried the machete and the food to Reddy's cave.

Confession so freely made seemed a weak ending for a man of so much cleverness and resource, but the inquisitors were not doing justice to their victim. He still had a card up his sleeve which no one suspected.

He submitted to being locked in a cell with the docility of a child; but in the morning he was not found in it. He had known long ago which cell he would occupy, if the worst should come. There was one especially reserved for prisoners of rank on the force. Escaping criminals usually have to toil at great disadvantage in digging a way out, but Vaughn had always had access to that cell, and he had prepared it at his leisure and with proper tools at his disposal. So he walked out easily, in the dead of night, and he reached Australia before being caught.

As for Reddy Kay, the city that had loved and hated him in turn would have given him a funeral of magnificent proportions, but at his sister's wish he was laid to rest quietly. In his hands were some flowers that had bloomed in Marcia's little window garden, that had been given to her by the man whose name she now bears, and whose love has dried all her tears.

"The Obituary Lottery," in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *is a regular two-dollar book. Mr. Boyden Sparks' story concerns a plodding young man, who had no nose for news, but an instinct for scenting crime as well as romance.*

By

A. M. CHISHOLM

Author of
"Larry,"
"McTavish the Spender,"
"A Dozen Eggs," Etc.

A Child Shall

CHAPTER I.

PASSED OUT.

BENEATH the dirty, smoke-stained canvas of a lean-to near the river bank, an old man lay on a carelessly constructed bough bed. He lay on his right side, his gray-bearded face turned wearily into the crook of his arm, in the posture of one who sleeps after a long, hard trail. His still figure was half covered by an old blanket. Flies swarmed and buzzed above it.

In front of the lean-to was a fireplace with dead ashes. Above them a pole supported a blackened coffeepot with a bail. Beside it lay a frying pan, the congealed grease in it white beneath a film of rain water, sprinkled with leaves loosened by the early frosts. Close to this utensil was an equally blackened pail, covered by a pan with widely flaring sides—the gold pan of the prospector.

In the foreground, beside the river, a patched and disreputable old canoe was turned bottom up, sheltering certain dunnage which apparently its owner had not required in his camp. The stillness, the motionless figure of the old man, the dead fireplace, the bottom-up canoe, combined to produce an effect of abandonment, of desolation, even of tragedy.

It was the canoe which first attracted the attention of the occupants of another, a slim, sixteen-foot craft which was leaping to the drive of two powerful paddles, a swirling wake behind it and a slishing ripple at its bow.

The man who plied the bow paddle of the speeding craft was past his prime, verging toward old age. A three-inch graying stubble concealed his lean jaws. His face was fretworked with innumerable fine wrinkles, and his eyes crow-footed at the corners and narrow-lidded from many years of staring from beneath bent brows, across glaring snows and crinkling waters. But the eyes themselves were a clear blue, frosty and cunning.

His lean, muscular old body swung in the stiff-armed paddle thrust as steadily and tirelessly as the running gait of an old hunting wolf. His name was Samuel Dobbs, his vocation prospecting, and he was quite as tough morally and mentally as he appeared to be physically.

His partner, William Hutchins—better

Those two delightfully hard-boiled prospectors, Sam Dobbs and his partner, "Skookum Bill" Hutchins, are with us again. This time they combine in a hunt over a long and difficult trail for a mysterious gold cache—and neither of the two could possibly have guessed the astonishing secret that awaited them in the end.

Lead Them

and unfavorably known throughout a vast area of northern wilderness as "Skookum Bill"—was in the prime of life. The stubble on his jaws was black. His eyes, coldly insolent and truculent, did not belie the disposition of their owner, who possessed an uncertain temper, no morals whatever, and an innate cussedness and capacity for excess which was at once the despair and envy of Dobbs, whose similar capacities as well as recuperative qualities were somewhat impaired by age, greatly to their owner's regret.

Bill was a handsome brute after a low-browed fashion. He was tall, beautifully built, tremendously strong, and practically tireless. Of violent and uncertain temper, and given to explosions of rage over trifles, he was coldly calm and highly efficient in crises. When things went seriously wrong, Bill was a man to tie to. He was afraid of nothing on earth, and reverenced nothing beyond it. At each thrust of his paddle, the canoe leaped.

The partnership of this pair was an odd one. Mutual acquaintances explained it on the theory that nobody but Dobbs could stand Bill's temper; and that nobody but Bill would have put up with Dobbs. But at any rate it had endured for years and bade fair to continue. Respectable members of frontier communities looked askance at both men. Both were tough birds. Each would have denied profanely and indignantly that he cherished the least sentiment for the other; and each, on a show-down, would have given the other his last drink, scrap of food, or chance of life.

Indeed, Dobbs, on one occasion when he was broken legged and both were starving in the dead of winter, had made a manful attempt to blow the top of his head off in order that Bill, who would not leave him, might have a chance of survival. But nobody save themselves knew about these things; and they did not talk about them, even between themselves. Their conversation, as a rule, was brutally frank, and marked by injurious personalities.

Bill and Sam were making time. They usually made it, in a canoe, in which both were expert. But now there was a cogent reason, namely that they were short of grub and, what was more important, to-

bacco, and were on their way to Gibbs' Portage to replenish their supply. Behind them lay a summer of not-very-profitable, fly-bitten, baking, starving, steaming and at times freezing quest for placer gold in ungodly country, during the whole of which they had not seen another human being.

Each was sick of the exclusive society of the other. This was merely a temporary condition, not at all affecting the continuance of their partnership. But at the moment each was full to the back teeth of the other, his speech, his looks and his habits. Each wanted to see and talk to somebody else. Wherefore Bill was in a cumulatively vile temper, and Dobbs, in spite of a fair working philosophy, in one not much better.

Under these conditions, which occurred every so often and were well understood, it was their custom to adopt a rule of infrequent and brief speech; because neither could offer an observation, however innocent, which the other did not find irritating. Thus when Dobbs, in the bow, saw the canoe on the bank, he was brief in announcement.

"Canoe!" he said, with an indicatory gesture of his paddle, which, however, did not affect the rhythm of his stroke.

"Think I'm blind?" his partner growled from the stern. "Lean-to, too."

But because human life and its evidence were rare on that lonely river, and because each longed to hear some human voice other than the other's, they paused in their paddle swing.

"Let's see who it is," Dobbs suggested.

"What for?" Bill wanted to know, out of sheer contrariness, though he felt the urge as strongly as his partner.

"To take the curse off," the latter replied frankly; and, without waiting for assent, turned the nose of the canoe shoreward with a cunning twist of the paddle.

When it grounded, he debarked stiffly, with a hand at the small of his back and a general curse directed at his physical structure.

Bill rose limberly in the stern, stepped cat-footed along the keelson and over their scanty outfit, and stood beside him. They eyed the scarred and battered bottom of the old craft, which had been patched here and there with canvas and tin.

"I b'lieve I know her," said Dobbs.

"You always know a hell of a lot," Bill commented disagreeably, on general principles.

"It's a good thing somebody does," Dobbs retorted, just as disagreeably. "I know this canoe, anyway, because I saw that patch on the bow go on. It's old Jake McNabb's, that's whose it is."

"That old blighter!" said Bill, whose opinion—which was the general one—of Mr. McNabb was not high. "Then let's pull out before he shows up. We don't want to see him."

"Wait a minute," Dobbs objected. "There's some dunnage under the canoe, and we may be able to get some tobacker off of him." He looked toward the lean-to. "His fire looks dead out, though, and that's funny."

"What's funny about it?" Bill wanted to know. "He's off somewheres, and I'm glad of it."

"If he was making a one-night camp, he wouldn't be off," Dobbs pointed out. "And if he wasn't, he'd pack all his dunnage up to camp instead of leaving it under the canoe. I'm going to take a look, anyway."

Followed grumblingly by Bill, he advanced. As they approached the lean-to, they made out the recumbent figure in the blankets.

"He's asleep," said Dobbs.

"Or drunk," Bill amended.

"He wouldn't be drunk, because he couldn't pack whisky this far without drinkin' all he had," Dobbs pointed out, from his knowledge of Mr. McNabb. "Hallo, the camp! Hey, Jake, wake up!"

But Jake McNabb was beyond waking. A rising cloud of flies apprised the partners of the truth.

"Why, darn it," said Bill, "the old rooster's dead!"

"Deader'n nails," Dobbs concurred, backing out after brief inspection. "He's sure awful dead. Now, ain't that one hell of a note?"

"I'll say it is," Bill responded, in injured tones. "And it's all your fault."

"How is it my fault? I didn't kill him."

"You made us come ashore instead of goin' on mindin' our own business and gettin' somewhere," Bill accused him ill-temperedly. "And now, I s'pose, we got to plant him."

"Course we got to," his partner agreed. "But we don't need to go down deep."

Bill, partly consoled, grunted.

"What do you s'pose fetched him off his limb?" Dobbs speculated.

"Search me. His number was up, I guess."

"It's up for all of us, sooner or later," Dobbs observed profoundly. "You can't tell a thing about it."

"Who said you could?"

"Nobody," Dobbs admitted. "There's you, f'r instance," he went on, with melancholy zest. "You're a big, skookum man. Maybe you think you'll live to be a hundred. But you may kick off next week."

"Shut up, darn you!" Bill commanded, with irritation.

Prudently, Dobbs obeyed. He cast an experienced eye around the miserable camp, reading its signs, and began to prowl about. Bill, less curious, retreated from the immediate vicinity of the lean-to, and sat down to whittle a few scraps of tobacco from a diminished plug. He lit the half load and smoked, achieving better humor. Dobbs joined him after a few minutes.

"Near as I can figure it out," he reported, "Jake was camped here about two days before he cashed in. There's about that much ashes where his fire was. No wood cut, and just a few boughs laid down anyhow for a bed, so likely he was feelin' rocky and just wanted to lie down as soon as he could. He cooked up a meal and ate some, but left most of it, and I guess he got into his blankets without washin' up. Next day he crawled out and boiled some coffee, but he didn't drink much of it. He used odds and ends of wood to do that, just trash lyin' around.

"He didn't cut no ax wood at all, though there's plenty of dry stuff standin' handy; so he was feelin' rotten. Then I guess he went back to his blankets ag'in and tried a smoke; but probably she didn't taste right and he put the pipe down and it's layin' by his right hand. After that I guess he didn't get out of his blankets at all, and whatever he had catched him. I sh'd say he'd been dead about a day."

"And that's too long," said Bill, expelling a smoke cloud through his nostrils. "Let's plant him and get done with it."

SO they brought a battered shovel and pick from their canoe and dug a shallow resting place. It was even shallower than they had intended, because they struck solid rock close beneath the surface.

"He'll have less to kick off when Gabriel toots reveille," said Bill. "He ought to be about first man up."

"It *is* darn shallow, for a fact," said Dobbs. "We'll roll some rocks on."

"You're taking an awful lot of trouble for him," Bill growled.

"It ain't for *him*," Dobbs explained frankly. "But I like to fool them wolves."

"Go through his clothes and see if there's anything on him worth anything," said Bill.

"Wish all them nice jobs on me, don't you?" Dobbs grumbled, but obeyed.

His search of the dead man's garments resulted in the finding of an old silver watch, a knife, part of a plug of tobacco —which he pocketed thankfully—a couple of rifle cartridges, a few odds and ends and a metal container for a stick of shaving soap. He put these articles to one side and drew the old blankets close about the still form. But the result did not satisfy him.

"Let's wrap him up in the lean-to canvas," he suggested. "It ain't fit for anything else."

So Bill ripped down the lean-to and cocooned its late owner in it, making all fast with a few expert hitches of a lash rope. Unassisted, he raised the bundle in his powerful arms and bore it to the grave, where he deposited it not ungently. But Dobbs, following him, was shocked.

"Gosh, Bill, don't you know nothing about planting folks?"

"What's wrong?" Bill demanded, mystified.

"You bury 'em facin' east, every time."

"What difference does it make which way they're headed?"

"They say it gives 'em a better chance, somehow," Dobbs explained vaguely. "Anyway, you turn him end for end."

Bill obeyed, grumbling, and picked up the shovel.

"He'd ought to have a prayer or some such said over him," Dobbs suggested doubtfully.

"What good would it do him—or anybody?" Bill demanded. "When the last card's turned for a man, all his bets are down, open or coppered, the way he's placed 'em all his life."

"Maybe it don't win much," Dobbs admitted; "but all the same it's the proper caper. It's a sort of a send-off, anyway."

"Are *you* thinkin' of prayin'?" his partner asked, with heavy sarcasm.

"I might," Dobbs returned, stung by the challenge.

"Do you want us to be struck by lightnin' or something?" Bill demanded, scandalized. "You try it, and I'll bust you with this shovel."

Dobbs, thus discouraged, sighed.

"Well, fill her in," he consented regretfully.

They did so, and completed the job by rolling loose stones over the grave. Then in the happy consciousness of having got a disagreeable job out of the way, they filled their pipes and looked around at the dead man's visible possessions.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOST MINE.

THERE was very little for the two to observe. Jake McNabb had not brought a lot of stuff with him.

"He didn't have much of an outfit," Dobbs observed.

"Makes darn little difference to him now," said Bill.

"No," Dobbs moralized. "A millionaire can't take no more with him than a poor man. We come into the world naked, and we go out of it in a wooden overcoat, like old Solomon said. Of course we couldn't build a box for Jake, but we did the best we could. Only I wisht we'd started him off with a prayer."

"Any prayer you could have put up would have queered his chances, right," Bill returned frankly. "And from what I knew of him, he sure needs all the breaks."

Old McNabb's reputation had been more of a liability than an asset in life, and might reasonably be supposed to constitute a handicap. One of his weaknesses had been an inability to distinguish between his own property and that of others, with a tendency to transmute the latter into the former. There was an old rumor, indefinite but clinging, concerning the mysterious disappearance of a former partner.

For the rest, Jake had been surly, unsociable, and given to drinking heavily by himself. He was an old-timer, but a lone one. Nobody knew where he came from, nor whether he had any relatives. The only person with whom he had been on anything approaching friendly terms was MacNicol, a dour Scot who kept the company's store at the Portage. MacNicol tolerated him, lectured him soundly on his shortcomings, now and then grubstaked him, and possibly knew more about him than anybody else.

On the whole, such mourning as his passage might occasion was apt to be perfunctory. Certainly neither Dobbs nor Bill was affected. The former looked at the outfit revealed in its scantiness by the stripping down of the lean-to.

"He sure didn't leave much here, and I guess it was about all he had anywhere. Don't it beat hell that a man can live for sixty years or so, and when he winds up all he has in the world will stow in a canoe?"

"And he's lucky to have the canoe—the way this darn world's run by crooks," said Bill, who held the opinion that worldly success and crookedness are synonymous.

"Well—maybe," Dobbs agreed, with reservation. "But at that, he was about as crooked as they make 'em, himself."

Bill refused to enter the wide field of argument thus thrown open.

"Let's go through his outfit and see what's worth packing with us. We can use his grub and tobacco. We don't need to say anything about that. And the rest of his *iktas* we'll turn over to MacNicol, and he can turn 'em over to the government agent." Which seemed fair enough, especially as the residue seemed to contain nothing which they wanted.

WHEN they came to investigate they found a good supply of food and several pounds of tobacco beneath the canoe. The food comprised flour, pork, coffee, rice and beans. The tobacco was both smokable and edible. The find went to show that McNabb had not been returning to the Portage, as they had assumed, but more likely had been outward bound when Fate had overtaken him.

It was a very welcome find. An unexpected legacy lends force to the *de mortuis nihil* maxim. They helped themselves generously to the tobacco.

"Old Jake wasn't too bad, some ways," Dobbs declared charitably, inserting a square inch of black plug between the remnants of molars.

"Why, no," Bill agreed, enlarging the capacity of his pipe bowl with a knife in order to take full advantage of his opportunities. "He wasn't such a bad old rooster at all—if you make allowances."

"We all need 'em, Bill," his partner observed humbly. "I guess we need 'em ourselves. It ain't for us humans to judge each other. We all got our weaknesses. *I* have."

"You bet you have," Bill agreed, with disconcerting heartiness.

"Well, so've you," Dobbs returned, somewhat acridly. "What with whisky, and women, and fightin', and other things I could mention, you ain't no star."

"Do I claim to be?" Bill wanted to know.

"Well, no," Dobbs admitted. "You ain't got quite enough gall for that."

"Then shut up," said Bill. "Where do you get off at, preachin', you old stiff? Cut it out!"

So Dobbs cut it out. But this was merely a ruffling breeze, aftermath of the cumulative bad temper that had possessed both. It meant less than nothing. Each—and especially Bill—was accustomed to express himself with brutal frankness as to the other's traits.

For some minutes they smoked in silence, attaining tranquillity. Bill picked up the discarded shaving-stick container.

"Funny he'd carry shavin' soap. He wore whiskers."

"Maybe he packed matches in it."

Bill shook it and, getting no sound, twisted off the cap.

"No matches. There's a paper rolled up inside." Inserting his finger, he drew out a sheet of cheap, ruled writing paper, cylindrically rolled to fit the tube. This he unrolled and uttered an exclamation. "Hallo!" he said.

"What is it?"

"It looks like a letter."

"To Jake?"

"I don't see his name," Bill replied, "but I guess it's to him. Anyway, he had it." He ran his eye down the sheet. "Well, I'll be darned!" he said, after a moment's perusal.

"Don't keep halloin' and darnin', darn you!" Dobbs said impatiently. "What's in it?"

"Why," Bill replied, "it seems to be about a rich placer, somewhere."

Dobbs exhibited active interest.

"Spread her out on that flat rock where we can both read her," he commanded.

Bill did so, and both bent over the letter. It was written in pencil, in an unformed hand and somewhat stilted in expression, apparently the product of one not entirely at home in the use of the written word. They read:

"I will tell you of the placer-gold strike my partner and I made when we were prospecting in the Liard River country a long time ago. It was then a very hard country to prospect in, for there was thick brush and fallen timber and no trails, and when you leave the river to go up the creeks many of them are too swift for a canoe before you go very far, so you have to leave it and go on foot packing your outfit on your back, and in the summer the flies are very bad, so that at night you have to build smuges to keep them off and roll up in your blankets head and all to sleep."

"What's the darn' fool gettin' at?" Bill grumbled. "Does he think he's writin' to a pilgrim?"

"It's true, anyway," said Dobbs.

"Everybody knows it's a hell of a country," Bill growled. "What's the use of writin' about it?"

The letter continued:

"My partner and I went up Burnt River, and at a point where you see red rocks on the hills to the east we found a big creek as big as a small river coming in from the west. We went up this creek until we came to some rapids, and there we cached our canoe and went on carrying our packs. Traveling slow, because our packs were heavy and the walking very bad, we went up the creek for some days. Whenever we stopped we would pan the gravel bars and sand for gold, but we did not find any and felt discouraged, but we kept on.

"At last we came to where the creek forked, and to decide which way to go we spit on a chip and threw it up, dry for the north fork and wet for the west one. It came dry, so we took the north fork and followed that away up into the hills, and at last we came to where it headed in a basin with hills all around except where it ran out.

"There we was much surprised to find a very old log cabin or shack. It was so old that the logs were rotten, and there was pack rats in it. We decided to stay there and look for gold, because it seemed likely that whoever had built that cabin had been looking for gold, too. That night the pack rats kept us awake rolling things around. They are also called trade rats because they take things like cartridges and bones and spoons from one place to another.

"When daylight came we went out to the creek which there ran over sand and gravel bars. First I found a gold nugget in the gravel and then my partner found one, and we knew that we had struck 'rich dirt' as it is called. We worked hard and at the end of a month we had a fortune in gold, which we put in buckskin bags and buried at the foot of a big boulder close to the cabin to keep them safe in case the rats might get at them when we was away working or in case bad characters came along, for there are some prospectors who are not honest."

"By gum, he said something that time!" Dobbs commented. "Outside you and me, Bill, they're a tough bunch."

"Why don't he get somewhere?"

"He's gettin' to it. Here it is."

Dobbs read aloud:

"We were working hard one afternoon when we were attacked by Indians. My partner was killed and I was wounded, but I hid under the logs of a jam with only my nose above water and escaped. The Indians took our guns and all our food but did not find the gold. I could not carry it, so I left it there, but before I got out of the country I would have given it all for a little food.

"After many hardships and being lost in the hills I was rescued by an Indian hunter of another tribe and treated kindly. He told me that the creek was the home of evil spirits, and it was the evil spirits that killed my partner. But evil spirits would not take guns and food.

"I have often thought I would like to go back there and get the gold. But then I think of my dead partner and the hardships I went through, and the gold loses its temptation. That was many years ago, and I am now too old to go prospecting. But any one who will go up that lonely creek and dig by the boulder beside the cabin will find the gold where we buried it. And this is my tale.

"JEAN GOULET,
"St. Boniface."

When they had perused this rambling story of the past, the partners looked questioningly at each other.

"What do you think?" Dobbs asked.

"I think the guy that wrote it is crazy," Bill replied. "If he wasn't, he'd have gone back and lifted that cache."

"Maybe havin' his partner killed that way put the fear of God into him."

"Talk sense!" Bill snapped impatiently. "If I was killed, would it stand you off from a cache?"

"Not by a darn sight," Dobbs admitted.

"Course it wouldn't," said Bill. "Nor me. I don't believe he had any partner killed by Injuns. They never killed no

prospectors in this country. They ain't got the sand."

"This was years ago," Dobbs pointed out. "It ain't so long since Injuns was bad med'cine. And as for not killin' a prospector now and then, how about the 'Crawlin' Man?'"

THE Crawling Man—or the "Frozen Man"—placer, is one of the lost. As the story goes, a rancher of the eastern foothills, riding one day after stock in early winter, came upon a man crawling on the ground. He was badly frostbitten and partially demented, so that he could not give a connected account of what had befallen him. But his story, pieced together, was to the effect that he had been one of a party of six who, starting at some point to the westward and working eastward through the hills, had found a very rich placer. While working it, they had been attacked by Indians.

Five men were killed, and this man alone, severely wounded, had escaped. Trying to get out of the hills, he had been overtaken by winter. He could not give any accurate description of the whereabouts of the placer. In a few days he died, leaving another mystery behind him. His story might have been the product of a disordered brain; but against that was the fact that his body bore wounds, and undoubtedly a party of six had gone into the hills at a point some hundreds of miles to the westward, and had totally disappeared.

The story was familiar to Bill.

"Well, that guy was crazy, too," he scoffed.

"And he had a right to be, if things happened like he said," Dobbs returned. "I s'pose you don't know nobody that an Injun has tried to kill, do you?"

This was distinctly a personal argument, for on more than one occasion, Bill had been the recipient of homicidal intentions on the part of the noble red man for certain misdemeanors.

"Well, they didn't get me," said Bill, with pardonable satisfaction. "And, anyway, that's different."

"Maybe," Dobbs admitted. "But, anyway, this old Jean Goulet lays it all out plain. He may be lying. But why should he take the trouble to write out a darn lie and send it to old Jake? Jake knew him, or he wouldn't have the letter. And if Jake thought it was a lie, he wouldn't be packing it about careful in a tin box. It looks like Jake believed him, anyway, and was out to find the cache."

Bill was forced to admit that the evidence pointed that way.

"Did you ever hear of this Goulet?"

"No," Dobbs replied. "He's French, by his name. There's quite a settlement of 'em back in St. Boniface."

"He writes good English for a Frenchman."

"English is easier to write than French," said the linguist. "Anyway, Jake couldn't read French, so Goulet wrote in English. No, I figure he's one of the old Wild Horse or Caribou crowd. He says he's too old to go into the hills now. I sh'd say he feels like he ain't got much time left, and so he hands on this dope to Jake."

"Well, it sounds like a darn crazy lie to me," Bill maintained stoutly. "He writes all over the lot. Why don't he just draw a map of the creek and the landmarks and tell about how far she is and let it go at that? That's what any man with sense would do."

"He's French," Dobbs pointed out, in excuse. "And then a feller rambles when he's old."

"Yes, I've noticed that lately," Bill returned brutally.

"Is that so?" Dobbs snarled. "Go to hell! Is that short enough for you?"

Bill felt better, as he always did when he got beneath Dobbs' fairly tough hide. Outwardly he scoffed at the letter, but inwardly he felt the pull which any story of a lost mine exerts. He had heard most of these yarns, some celebrated and others less widely known. Among the mass of fable surrounding most of them, there were salient points of possibility, even of probability.

Bill himself, in places where he had no reason to suppose that other white men had penetrated, had come upon evidences of a by-gone generation of prospectors—old holes in the ground, old

sluice boxes warped and split, rust-eaten tools, old shacks of poles fallen and crumbling, and even human bones. True, he had never found any evidence that these earlier prospectors had met with success, but there was no telling. These things were part of his rough life, and no man may escape his environment. There might be something in this letter of this unknown old-timer.

"Keep your shirt on," he said to his partner. "I was just kidding you."

"Oh, all right," Dobbs returned generously. "I know the thing sounds crazy in spots, Bill; but you know yourself how things happen now and then that just can't happen. 'Truth is a stranger to fiction,' like Solomon said. I've told darn lies that everybody believed because they sounded likely; and I've been called a liar for tellin' gospel truth that sounded unlikely. I've seen so many unlikely things happen that now I don't class anything as a lie just because it don't sound reas'nable. My tumtum is that this is worth lookin' into. So I'm for turnin' around and goin' up Burnt River, and findin' this creek."

"It'd be all of a month's trip," Bill objected. But that he merely objected, instead of flatly and profanely refusing to discuss the matter, encouraged Dobbs.

"Well, we got plenty of tobacker now," he urged. "And grub, too," he added, as an afterthought.

"I dunno about the grub," Bill doubted. "Jake had plenty for himself. But there's two of us. I ain't so sure he was goin' there. It's too late in the season. And it'd be a bad country to be short of grub in, with winter comin' on."

"Oh, we'll be all right," Dobbs prophesied optimistically. "There's moose, an' deer, an' fool hens, an'—an' so on." With a generous wave of the hand, he indicated bountiful resources of the wilderness such as our best nature writers thoughtfully provide for the nourishment of the children of their fancies.

"Yeh!" said Bill grimly. "And there's caribou moss and willow bark and the tops of your moccasins. Don't forget them. You know darn well you never see meat when you want it bad. Maybe you remember the time you and me had to shave the hair off of a fox skin and try to eat it. Lots of them things you speak of so easy, on *that* trip, wasn't there?"

On that trip, Dobbs had tried to blow the top of his head off as an easy out for himself and as affording a chance for Bill. He shivered at the recollection, but stood his ground.

"Well, we pulled through. We can get up this creek and back before real cold weather, if we hit her up. She may be a dead card, but at that she's no worse than what we've been on. I'm for it."

The initiative in their enterprises was usually taken by Dobbs, who had the keener and more crafty brain, as well as the constructive ability of the firm. True, in crises demanding unflinching courage, instant decision or quick action, Bill arose and took command, but at other times he was accustomed to trail along.

"Well, I'm with you, if you want to go," he consented. "Let's sort out Jake's stuff, take what we want and cache the rest. We'll camp here to-night and start in the morning."

CHAPTER III.

TWO TOUGH HE-MEN.

THEY went through the dead man's outfit, selecting and rejecting, and cached the discards beneath a shelving rock to await their return. Then they rammed up their own lean-to and started a cooking fire. Dobbs, engaged in building a bannock, an operation in which he took an artist's pride, was attracted by an unexpurgated exclamation from his partner. Looking up from his task, he saw a canoe with two occupants appearing around a downstream bend.

"Gol-darn it," Dobbs complained, "it's gettin' so there's no privacy no more in this man's country. You're runnin' into gents, dead or alive, all the time. And now, whoever it is, we got to tell them about Jake, and answer all sorts of fool questions."

"Answer nothin'!" Bill snorted. "We found him dead, and we planted him, and that's all there is to it."

"We've got his grub and some of his outfit," Dobbs pointed out. "That don't

look good. If we ain't open about it, some darn fool will say we bumped him off. Once a yarn like that gets goin', it never stops. And it sticks."

But here Bill's younger eyes identified the occupants of the oncoming craft, which was approaching with a speed that told of two exceptionally powerful paddles. And he swore whole-heartedly.

"By glory," he announced, "it's Jack Tonk and that big pea soup, Aubichon!"

"So it is," Dobbs agreed, when he had backed his partner's expletives with a selection of his own. "And every time yet that we've run onto that pair of pelicans, there's been trouble."

Between the partners and this pair, there was a grudge of long standing. On several occasions they had clashed. Tonk had a reputation for reckless courage and general deviltry second only to Bill's. Like Bill, he was big, muscular, tireless. Aubichon, a burly, thickset individual, who owned Quebec as his place of origin, also was hard boiled. He was a wonder in a canoe, and was credited with having packed six hundred pounds across a short portage on a bet.

"What in thunder do you s'pose they're doing here?" Bill speculated, for the ordinary range of this formidable pair lay more to the eastward.

"I don't know," Dobbs returned, "but whatever it is, I'll bet it's no good. And you can't tell what they're up to, because they're such ungodly liars. Specially Jack Tonk. He's crooked enough to tell the truth now and then just to fool you, so you can't tell when he's lyin'."

"They may go on when they see who we are," Bill suggested hopefully.

"Not them," said Dobbs. "They ain't got no gentlemanly feelin's at all. You can't even insult them. The worst you can call them they take as a compliment. And at that, they're right."

The canoe slackened way for a moment, during which its occupants presumably identified the men on the shore, and then turned in. Tonk, in the bow, checked its way and held it with a paddle thrust against bottom at the water's edge.

"Hallo, there, boys!" he greeted, with beautiful heartiness.

"Bo' jou', mes amis!" Aubichon's bass boomed, while he smiled beamingly. *Comment ça va,* wit' you, hey?"

"Pas trop mal, you darn pea jammer," Dobbs returned, with short courtesy. "Hallo, your own self, Tonk."

Bill's greeting was a scowl.

BUT Tonk and Aubichon, so far from being discouraged by this reception, shoved their canoe in till it nosed the sand. Tonk rose as limberly as Bill, and Aubichon stepped over their outfit with the foot-gripping springiness of the very strong man.

"Bit o' luck, running into you," Tonk offered cheerfully.

"For who?" Dobbs wanted to know.

"All around," Tonk replied generously. "We were goin' to camp the first good place we saw, and I guess we'll camp right here, if you don't mind."

"We don't own the country," Bill said ungraciously.

"It's always good to meet up with old friends," Tonk returned cheerfully. His keen eyes, of a raw fog-gray, glanced at the partner's canoe and then at McNabb's battered craft.

Your canoeman knows a canoe as a horseman knows a horse. Once seen, he can identify it again. Tonk's eyes widened in surprise and then narrowed in suspicion. He looked around, noting the evidences of the dead man's abandoned camp and the partners' recently established one, and a puzzled expression followed the surprise.

"Somebody else camped here recent, looks like?"

"Yes, it does look like it," said Dobbs.

"Seems to me I've seen that old canoe before. You ain't usin' two canoes, are you?"

"That other canoe is old Jake McNabb's—or it used to be."

Aubichon's mouth opened as if to speak; but he shut it again wordlessly.

"Where's Jake?" Tonk asked.

"He's gone on," Dobbs replied.

Tonk glanced at his partner, his eyes narrowing still more. Aubichon's face now expressed astonishment.

"They say old Jake's gone on, Joe!"

"I hear dat," Aubichon nodded. "Where he's pass himself on to, hey?"

"That's pretty hard to say," Dobbs returned charitably. "He didn't tell us."

"You saw him, then?"

"Oh, yes, we saw him."

"Did he say which way he was goin'?"

"No."

"Did he say when he'd be back?"

"No," said Dobbs. "But if you're thinkin' of waitin' for him, you'll have a long wait, because he won't be back."

"His canoe's here," Tonk pointed out. "He'll have to come back to it. He won't be fool enough to try to get back overland—unless he's gone crazy."

"Overland trips don't worry him none, now," said Dobbs. "Givin' him a little the best of it, maybe, he's got a set of wings."

"What!" Tonk ejaculated. "Do you mean he's dead?"

"That's what," Dobbs nodded. "Me and Bill found him dead in his blankets. We've just planted him."

The news seemed to affect Tonk and Aubichon. The latter rumbled a string of French oaths; but Tonk, scowling at the ground, said nothing for a moment.

"Well, that's tough," he said at last. "I'm sorry to hear it. He was a mighty good friend of ours, wasn't he, Joe?"

"You bet my life!" the big Frenchman corroborated. "We're frien's since long tam, him an' us, for sure." He nodded his huge, curly, black poll vigorously. "Well, well, well! Dat's mos' awful bad news. Dat poor ol' mans! Ba' gosh, I feel lak for cry, 'bout dat!"

"He must have owed you money," Dobbs commented cynically.

"It ain't monnaie," Aubichon disclaimed. "It's jus' for because I got one dam soft heart, lak leetle babee. I feel lak dat tam my ol' fadder, she's come dead, w'en log jam she's bus' up on de Gatineau!"

"What was the matter with him, could you tell?" Tonk asked.

"Not a tell," Dobbs replied. "He'd made camp and so on, and he was lyin' in his blankets. I guess he just left shore in his sleep."

"He died natural, then? He wasn't bumped off?"

"Gosh, no!" Dobbs shook his head. "What'd any one bump him off for?"

"I don't know. I was just askin'. He seemed healthy enough."

"Well, he wasn't healthy when me and Bill found him," Dobbs returned, with finality. "We rolled him up in his tarp and planted him best we could, but none too good at that. If you want to dig him up and prospect him for lead or a knife, fly at it."

"Nothing like that," Tonk refused. "Come on, Joe, we'll make camp. Then you can tell us more about it."

"No more to tell," said Dobbs.

TONK and Aubichon selected a site fifty yards distant and proceeded to make camp with a celerity that told of long practice, as well as an utter disregard for such comfort as may be obtained at the cost of a little extra time and care. They lifted their outfit from the canoe, selected certain articles unerringly, and turned the craft bottom up over the rest. Choosing their camp site without hesitation, they strung up a square of canvas for a lean-to. Aubichon attacked a clump of dry willows, which make a fire of little smoke and good coals, and got his cooking fire going. Tonk meanwhile slashed down a few armfuls of boughs for a bed.

A bough bed such as is dear to the pens of out-of-doors-stuff writers requires not only time to build, but special material in the form of the feathery tips of the eastern balsam, which are laid tips up and ends to the ground a foot or more in depth. In its perfection, it is a great bed. But the average bough bed of the West is intended primarily to keep the dampness of the ground and some of the dirt from the bedding.

It bears a strong family resemblance to St. Lawrence's grid, and its scoring effects upon the tender human body are much the same. Tonk's bed was that kind. But his body and his partner's were not tender. His boughs at the butts were as thick as a dog's leg, and he threw them down anyhow. He and Aubichon were as tough as the boughs.

Dobbs and Bill, at their own fire, returned to their interrupted cookery.

"What do you s'pose them two pelicans is up to?" the former speculated

uneasily. "I don't like the way they spotted Jake's canoe."

"You spotted it yourself, first thing."

"I know. But they're too darn much int'rested in Jake to suit me. Tonk asked too many questions about him before he knew he was dead. And Aubichon pretendin' to be sorry! Yah! He makes me sick."

Later, when both camps had disposed of supper, Tonk and Aubichon came over.

"You boys are on your way back to the Portage, I suppose?" the former suggested.

"We may get there after a while," Dobbs returned, "but we ain't in a hurry."

Tonk surveyed them for a moment.

"Well, anyway, me and Joe are sure much obliged to you for plantin' Jake."

"Don't mention it," said Dobbs generously. "We'd do the same for you, any time, and glad to. But where do you get in on it, bein' obliged?"

"Why, you see," Tonk explained frankly, "we was mixed up with him in a business way—sort of partners. We'd grubstaked him, and so on. He thought a lot of us.

" 'Boys,' he said to us sev'ral times, 'I'm gettin' old. If anything happens to me, I want you to see me buried right, and I want you to look after whatever I leave behind me.' "

"Oui," Aubichon affirmed, "he say dat of'en.

" 'I trus' you,' he say, 'for because I know you do de right t'ing every tam.' "

"Poor old feller," said Dobbs. "I didn't know his mind was givin' way."

"W'at you mean by dat?" Aubichon demanded, with some heat.

"And so," Tonk went on smoothly, paying no attention to his partner, "when old Jake makes a will, which he does a year ago, he makes us his executors."

"I see," said Dobbs, beginning to do so in actual fact.

"So," Tonk proceeded, "being his executors, as well as his partners, it's up to us to take charge of his outfit and so on, as part of our job. It's a bother, of course, but it's our duty, and, as I say, we're much obliged to you for your trouble in buryin' him."

"That's all right," said Dobbs. "Well, there's his canoe, and we cached his outfit under that ledge of rock—that is, all but his grub and tobacker. We were sort of shy of both, and we figured on usin' them, and squarin' up later."

"Sure, that'll be all right," said Tonk. "We'll just take a look at his outfit while the light lasts."

HE and Aubichon went to look at the dead man's effects. Their investigation seemed to be thorough. Afterward they walked over to the site of the abandoned camp and looked around.

"They're after something," Dobbs observed to Bill, "and I'll bet it's that letter. They're onto it, somehow, and I'll bet they were trailin' up old Jake. He must have got drunk back at the Portage and spilt something. Now he's dead, it throws them all out. They don't know where they're at."

"Let 'em sweat," said Bill.

Tonk and Aubichon returned to the partners' fire.

"Well, the old man hadn't much in the way of an outfit," the former said. "I thought he had a watch, though."

Dobbs fell into the trap.

"Sure he had," he said. "I forgot all about her. Here she is."

"Then you took a look through his clothes before you planted him," Tonk deduced, to Dobbs' chagrin.

Dobbs made a virtue of necessity.

"I went through all his pockets. But all he had, besides the watch, was a plug of tobacker and one or two odds and ends. He hadn't no money at all."

"No letters?" Tonk asked directly, his eyes boring into Dobbs', who met them with the candid gaze of a child.

"Not a scrap of writin' of no kind. Only paper he had was a circular about a cure for rheumatism, and I threw that away."

"Well, a man don't carry much when he's out," Tonk admitted, and cast a glance at his partner.

Aubichon stretched his great arms and shook himself like a dog.

"Well, w'at 'bout one leetle drink?" he suggested. "She's long day, wit' dam bad news dat ol' Jake come dead, an' I need somet'ing for cheer up on, me."

"Not a bad idea, either," Tonk agreed. "These boys have a drink or two comin', for all the trouble they took."

Bill and Dobbs could scarcely believe their ears. When in the field, they were perforce total abstainers for months at a stretch; but they made up for it when they returned to civilization. They looked forward to a drunk at the end of the summer's work as to a reward richly deserved. In the present case, they had been looking forward to it for some time, anticipating it, thinking about it, petting the craving. And here was liquor a week before they expected it. It was as manna in the wilderness. When Aubichon went down to his canoe and returned bearing an authentic gallon jug, Dobbs' old eyes sparkled and his tongue automatically caressed his lips.

He produced a couple of tin cups, which, besides being light and handy, have the merit of opacity and, if held high enough, effectually conceal the size of the dose they contain. Aubichon brought a couple more, and handed the jug to Dobbs.

When the latter hefted it, it seemed almost full; and when he tilted it, the angle at which it gave out its contents and the quality of the accompanying gurgle confirmed this good news. The liquid was of a beautiful ruby shade, with a strong molasseslike odor. And then Dobbs knew with certainty that he was not to dally with some feeble, waterlogged beverage, but was touching, handling and about to taste the real thing; which is to say, authentic rum, thirty-five over proof, guaranteed to float railway spikes and correspondingly uplift the spirit.

When Dobbs took a drink, he was accustomed to take a drink. So was Bill. Thirty-five over proof is bottled high explosive, but the partners, in case the first drink should be the last, took no chances of subsequent vain regrets for lost opportunities. They did not consider this hoggish, but merely common prudence.

THE first effect was a beautiful internal clawing, crawling and tingling, followed by a warm and rapidly spreading glow, mental as well as physical. All of a sudden their grim, drab world seemed to crack a genial smile.

"Good stuff, by gorry!" was Dobbs' tribute to the liquid.

"She's got teeth," Bill agreed, as his lining telegraphed this pleasing dental intelligence.

It was now growing dark, and they sat by the fire, the parson—which is to say the jug—in the middle of the parish. Dobbs eyed it from time to time with the soulful gaze of a cat for a caged canary. But politeness forbade him to hint at the longing which possessed him. However, Aubichon presently proved that he had a heart.

"Dere's somet'ing mos' awful lonesome down on my inside," he announced. "No bird, she's fly wit' one wing, hey, boys?"

These were words of wisdom, a great ornithological truth. The second shot went home, and the glow increased. Dobbs and Bill felt a decided uplift of spirit, and with it a certain charity. Tonk and Aubichon undoubtedly had done them dirt in the past, but after all they had some good points. They, Dobbs and Bill, were gentlemen enough to meet their enemies socially and behave as gentlemen. Besides, they had the letter, and they could afford to be forgiving. And then they had a third drink.

"You boys 'r' all right," Dobbs announced, with slightly slurring utterance. "That is, now 'n' then."

"Tha's right," Bill corroborated. "Now an' then, Sam, as you say."

Aubichon closed his right eye, which was nearest to his partner.

"We be all good frien's togedder," he said. "Mebbe dere's been tam w'en we don't get along so well, but we forget 'bout dose t'ing now. We let pass-bys be bygones, yes. W'at you call dat *bon entente,* oui! You boys be all right, too."

"Who says we ain't?" Bill demanded, with sudden ferocity. "I'm a man among men!" he declared truculently.

"You bet my life," Aubichon con-

curred pacifically. "You'll be good mans, every tam."

"Then what are you talkin' about?" Bill wanted to know. "I can take any pea soup apart and listen to him tick."

"Sure, sure!" Aubichon soothed; for Bill, when fighting drunk, was cyclonic. "You'll be de bes' man w'at I never see no place."

"You're a liar," said Bill, "and I can lick the very Judas outa you. An' Jack Tonk, too. An' I will."

Whereas Tonk, who knew Bill, silently gathered himself to repel boarders. But Dobbs intervened.

"Remember, Bill, you're gennelman," he reminded his partner severely. "These gennelmen is our guests, because we're drinkin' their licker. An' she's solemn an' sad 'casion, Bill, because we jus' planted poor old Jake. So no fightin', Bill, because the jug might get bust. Aubichon, he didn't mean no harm. He don't know much, an' I 'pologize for him, Bill. He's askin' us to take little drink to the mem'ry of poor old Jake. An' we can't turn him down, Bill, out of respec' for that mem'ry."

Aubichon welcomed this diversion. He filled the partners' cups, but barely covered the bottom of his own and Tonk's. The drink dulled Bill's fighting edge. He even became genial, which was proof that he was very drunk. But to Dobbs, the last drink brought a purple melancholy.

"Poor ol' Jake!" he said tearfully. "Look at all the country he covered in his life, an' all he has now is six feet of earth, like the song says. I'll sing it for you." He raised his voice creakily in a fragment of forgotten song:

"I'll sing you a song of the world an' its ways,
An' the many strange people we meet;
From the rich man who rolls in his millions of wealth,
To the strugglin' wretch out on th' street.
But a man, though he's poor, an' in tatters an' rags,
We should never affect to despise.
For time brings us all to th' grave in the end,
An' six feet of earth makes us all—of—one—size!"

"Tha's good," said Bill, who ordinarily repressed his partner's vocal efforts sternly. "Tha's true, Sam. Ain't it, Aubichon? Ain't it, Tonk?"

"You bet," Tonk agreed, tactfully nodding at his partner.

"For sure dat's one awful fine song," Aubichon approved. "Do him some more."

"I know 'nother," Dobbs announced proudly, thus encouraged. "This is good, too. Good an' sad.

"But they paid no heed to his dyin' prayer.
A narrow grave, jus' six by three-e—
They buried him there on the lone prairie."

"That's the end of it," explained Dobbs. "But before that, it goes:

"Oh, bury me not on the lone prairie,
Where the wild coyot-e howls over me,
Where the rattlesnake crawls——"

"Shnakesh don't go!" Bill protested. "Shnakesh ish poison. Shut up 'bout shnakesh!"

"All right, Bill," Dobbs consented agreeably. "You got fine feelin's. You're refined gennelman, Bill, an' I'm proud of you. If you say so, shnakesh don't go, not on day of fun'ral. Fun'rals is sad 'casions. Fun'rals and gravesh goes together. I seen a show once with a graveyard in it. They was a skull kickin' round loose, an' a tillicum of the skull, he come in an' picked it up an' talked to it."

"Ventriloquis'." Bill nodded wisely. "The skull talked back to him. He had one on each knee. Irishman an' black. Sambo an' Pat. An' they made wise cracks."

"This skull don't talk," Dobbs informed him. "The feller jus' talks to hisself. About worms an' such. His ol' man's ghost come in, too. An' there was a gravedigger. This skull feller was feelin' low in his mind—awful low. 'Le's talk 'bout graves,' he says, 'an' worms, and ep—hic!—ep——' "

"Epileps," Bill suggested helpfully. "I know 'em. The kind that froth at the mouth an' bark."

"No, Bill," his partner corrected kindly, " 'epileps' is cuss words that you call folks like Aubichon an' Tonk. You

mean rabbis. Rabbis is what froths an' barks. Rabbi dogs an' coyotes an' animiles like them."

"I'm wrong," Bill admitted generously, "an' you're right, Sam. You ain't often right, but this time you are. Rab—hic! —bis. They come right at you, an' if they bite you, you die yappin'."

"Not yappin', Bill," Dobbs amended patiently. "Your jaws lock so's you can't yap. You jus' die tryin' to get 'em open, all twisted up, an' frothin' like a p'isoned dog."

"G'wan with your story," said Bill, with dignity, but with some difficulty. "It was jus' gettin' good. You say you seen a show with a ghost carryin' his skull, an' mad dogs frothin' round him. Tell us s'more."

"Mon Dieu!" Aubichon protested, with strong distaste. "For why you talk 'bout skull, an' ghos' an' mad dog, an' frot' on de mout', an' all dose dam t'ing? For sure you give me de geese flesh on my back. Have nodder leetle drink, for cheer up on!"

No man may continue to imbibe thirty-five-over-proof rum in quarter-pint doses indefinitely. It simply can't be done. It may not sting like a serpent, but it is very apt to slug like a sandbag. Its cumulative effects are distinctly soporific, not to say anæsthetic. That drink which Aubichon suggested, and poured for them himself, did the trick most effectively.

Bill was the first to lay down the white man's burden. A few minutes afterward, during which period he had become inarticulate, he endeavored to rise for some unstated purpose; but instead he collapsed, and passed into oblivion where he lay.

Dobbs, who had been sitting staring straight ahead, turned a boiled eye on his partner and regarded him with owlish gravity.

"Billsh drunk," he announced, with difficulty. "I'm shober—shtric'ly shober! Billsh younger'n me. But me, I got more capashity!" And with this proud boast, defiant to the last, he went down with colors flying; and subsequent proceedings, as Truthful James puts it, interested him no more.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MORNING AFTER.

BILL awoke in the chill of a foggy dawn. Ordinarily he awoke with the swift completeness of a wild animal; but on this occasion, the process was slower and harder. Outraged nature was having her innings and she was making the most of them. Bill groaned as an insistent hammer began to beat inside his skull. With a curse, he turned uneasily, shivered, and heaved himself to a sitting posture, opening reddened eyes upon a gray and sodden world.

The fog lay dense along the surface of the river. It clung to bush and tree, an all-pervading and pervasive river fog that distorted objects twenty feet away and concealed anything much farther off. It dripped from leaf and branch like rain.

Being the possessor of what is technically termed a "hang over," Bill was slow to tune in with actualities. For a few moments he stared dully in front of him. He was sitting close to where the camp fire had given light and heat; but now cold charcoal and dead ashes met his gaze reproachfully.

Dimly he began to realize that he should not have awakened there, but under his blankets, in the shelter of the lean-to. He was soaked with the fog, cold to the bone. His head was throbbing; some devil had basely substituted a dry loofah for his tongue, and his stomach—an organ of whose existence he was usually happily unaware—was talking of revolution, if not actually uprising. Yes, Mother Nature undoubtedly was spanking.

Bill shut his eyes, swore, groaned, and opened them with a little more understanding. Two tin cups lying on the ground near him stared at him as mute, accusing witnesses. Bill eyed them with disgust and looked around. Then he saw his partner.

Dobbs lay where he had fallen, his face metaphorically to the foe, all his wounds in front. Somebody—presumably Aubichon—had thoughtfully covered him with a blanket, which had in some measure protected him from the prevailing moisture.

At sight of the tin cups plus his partner, memory returned to Bill. The fog was so dense that he could not see the lean-to of Tonk and Aubichon, but they, at any rate, had been sober enough to hit their blankets properly. He must have been very drunk, and so must Dobbs have been.

With unwonted stiffness, he rose, made shavings, split kindlings and struck a match. He held his hands to the pale flame rising in the fog. He added more fuel, and the fire took hold and began to throw heat. As Dobbs showed no recognition of what was going forward, he shook him.

"Hey, Sam! wake up."

Dobbs stirred, groaned, and, without opening his eyes, invoked anathema upon mankind in general and his disturber in particular.

"Wake up, I tell you," said Bill. "You're half froze, and you don't know it. Your rheumatiz will give you hell for this. Get up and thaw out or you won't be able to get up."

Thus admonished, Dobbs came to much as Bill had done, with added weight of penalty for age.

"What the blue, blinkin', flarin' blazes," he demanded, "am I doin' sleepin' out here in the cussed fog?"

"You had a blanket over you, anyway," Bill pointed out. "More'n I had. Come on to the fire."

DOBBS endeavored to rise; but as he did, a malicious little devil thrust a knife into the small of his back. With a shrill yelp of distress, he pressed his hand to it, and, leaning forward, expressed his feelings at length and with the eloquence of conviction. He finally got to his knees, and thence to his feet. But when he attempted to straighten his back, the kink was still there. Bent, as with a load of the wages of sin, he held fog-shriveled hands to the fire.

"G-g-gosh, I'm cold!" he announced, through chattering teeth. "The damp's got plumb into my bones. I wouldn't wonder if I get lumbago outa this, and be laid up for a week. Why in blazes did you let me sleep out here?"

"Because I was so darn drunk that I was lying out, too," Bill told him. "The last I remember was takin' a drink with Aubichon. Then I woke up lyin' out here."

"Who put that blanket over me?" asked Dobbs.

"I guess it was Aubichon. But he didn't put none over me."

"Where's Aubichon and Tonk now?"

"In their camp, I guess. Can't see it for fog."

"If they took drink for drink with us, it's a wonder they could get there," Dobbs observed. And then a horrible suspicion seized him. With a startled oath, he began to search his pockets.

"Are you crazy, or what?" Bill demanded.

"You bet I am, and so are you," Dobbs informed him bitterly. "Of all darn suckers, of all easy marks, of all perishin' idiots! Say, take me and kick me clear from here to Helangonia! And then I'll kick you all the way back."

"What's the matter with you?"

"It ain't me—it's us! Oh, I should have knowed it! Bill, them pelicans got us drunk on purpose. They didn't drink fair with us. Anyway, I had that letter of Jake's in my pocket, and she ain't there now!"

Betrayal in the guise of hospitality is no new thing. History relates that gentlemen invited to dine and wine with certain potentates of the past considered it prudent to put their affairs in order. But this time the damage was done. Bill, as had been stated, was a man of quick action. In crises, he arose and took command of the bark of the partners' fortunes.

"Come on!" he said, and strode purposefully through the fog toward the spot where Tonk and Aubichon had established their camp.

His sense of direction was accurate. It brought him to a dead fireplace and some cut boughs on the ground. But that was all. Lean-to, Tonk and Aubichon were gone.

For a moment Bill stared; and then without a word, he bounded riverward with the rush of a startled moose, Dobbs, his stiffness momentarily forgotten, at his heels.

BUT Tonk and Aubichon were not there. Neither was their canoe. And what was worse, neither was the partners' canoe, nor even the canoe of the dead man. The shore had been swept bare of craft.

The waterways of the continent were its first highways. In a vast area of the North, they are still the only ones, whether open in summer or frozen in winter. Overland travel is not impossible, but it is attended by difficulties and is correspondingly slow. Vast swamps, muskegs, thick brush, ares of devil's club, down timber crisscrossed like giant jackstraws, swift, bridgeless, fordless creeks bar the way.

Save for portages, there are no trails but faint game trails, which lead nowhere and vanish unexpectedly. Thus men, red and white, cling to the waterways, going inland only for some specific purpose. The canoe is home, transport and base of supply. It is as essential as a horse on the plains. Its loss is serious. The partners were practically marooned.

Human eloquence at times may rise to inspired heights. But there are occasions to which the rich resources of the English language, even on the tongue of a master, are inadequate. Dobbs made a manful attempt, but his effort fell flat. It did not satisfy even him. The fog seemed to smother his choicest expressions. No word artist can do his best facing a blank wall. True eloquence requires space, distance, receptivity, the impression that the effort is getting somewhere. These requisites being distinctly lacking, Dobbs faltered in his broadcasting, failing to get encouragement even from his partner.

"What the hell's the use of swearing?" said Bill.

"If a feller can't swear now, when can he swear?" Dobbs retorted feebly. "Ain't that letter gone? Ain't our canoe gone?" And here, suddenly, he realized that another and appalling calamity had befallen. "Holy Moses! Bill, wasn't most of old Jake's grub and tobacker lyin' under his canoe?"

It had been, and it had vanished. The partners had taken part of the supplies to their camp for their present needs, and they had taken a couple of plugs of tobacco. But otherwise they were now down to their original scanty stock of these desirable articles.

Bill, prone to explode over trifles, met real trouble with deadly calm.

"It's gone," he said, "and that's all there is to it. Let's get something to eat, and then we'll see."

"Eat!" Dobbs protested. "This morning? Not me."

"Suit yourself," said Bill. "You'll feel better when you've had a shot of coffee."

"I wisht I had a real drink," Dobbs longed vainly. "I need it."

"You ain't the only baby in the ward, neither," Bill returned grimly. "But you can forget it, same as I have to. It's goin' to be a long time before you have another, too."

He did not elaborate this melancholy prediction, but returned to camp, where he replenished the fire, threw a generous handful of their small supply of coffee into the pot and set it to boil, and then beat up a flapjack batter and greased the pan.

"Don't cook none for me," said Dobbs, with a shudder, as the aroma of frying grease struck his nostrils.

"You got to get something into you to sop up the booze and for your stomach to take hold of," the dietitian returned. "Coffee first, then a flapjack."

Dobbs dallied with the hot coffee. At first it struck no true note. But it warmed him some. Presently, with misgivings, he nibbled at a portion of flapjack. In the end he consumed it and felt better. He marked a stage of convalescence by a chew of tobacco.

"And now what?" he asked.

"And now," said Bill, "we're goin' after Tonk and Aubichon."

"Goin' after 'em!" Dobbs echoed. "How you goin' after them without our canoe? Overland? Nary! Not for me!"

"If them canoes are sunk, so are we, of course," Bill admitted. "But I got a notion they ain't. Both Tonk and Aubichon think a lot of a canoe, same as I do myself, and it'd go against the grain to bust 'em up. If they'd wanted to do that, they could have done it right here.

They might have just turned 'em loose downstream, but they'd know they might lodge a mile or so down and we might find 'em. So my tumtum is that they'd take 'em upstream a couple of miles or so, and cache them on the far side. They'd think we'd go hellin' down river lookin' along the bank, or else build a raft."

"Yes," Dobbs nodded, impressed by this reasoning. "You'll have to build a raft to get across, though."

"Sure," said Bill. "We'll get at it right away."

But when Dobbs tried to arise, his back said him nay.

"I can't do it," he declared. "She's lumbago, sure as shootin'."

"All right," said Bill. "Wrap up in a blanket and warm you all through. Keep the fire goin' and drink lots of coffee. I can make her alone."

When Bill really went into action, things flew. Timber ran small, so that he was forced to drop several trees for his raft, and he did so and cut them into log lengths in a steady spout of flying chips. He shouldered the logs and bore them to the shore, where he laid them side by side. They had no nails, but long experience had taught the partners that a small auger comes next to an ax in all-around handiness. With these tools alone, a man may build a cabin.

NOW Bill used the auger to bore three crossbars and logs, with wooden dowels to fit the holes. When he drove the pins home, he had a raft which would hold together and float one man. He trimmed a long spruce pole, took one of the paddles which remained to them, and shoved off. When he got beyond poling depth, the current took hold of him and swept him downstream faster than he could forge his unwieldy craft across it. He disappeared around a bend, but there was no doubt that he would get there eventually.

Dobbs, left alone, nursed his back with a dry-heat treatment and consumed tobacco frugally. The afternoon was well along when he heard a joyous hail and beheld Bill in the stern of their own canoe, swinging into the bank.

"I found her about two miles up, like I thought," Bill reported. "I overran her, and went up about ten miles. Got her comin' back, cached in brush you couldn't cuss a cat through. How's your back?"

Dobbs thought it was slightly better.

"Well, it better be," said Bill, "because we're pullin' out in the mornin'. And I'd do it now if you was in shape."

"I dunno," Dobbs demurred. "The way I am now, I couldn't swing my weight on a paddle."

"Nobody asked you to," Bill returned. "You lie down if you have to, and I'll do the paddlin'. But we're goin'."

"We can't go without grub, and we ain't got near enough."

"Who was talkin' about killin' a moose and so on a while ago?" Bill reminded him. "I'll tell you about grub. If we have to live on bark and bush cranberries, we're goin'. We're goin' if we have to eat our moccasins. We're goin', by the Lord Harry, if we don't eat at all, as far as we can paddle or crawl. I'm goin' to get them two guys, or I'll know why."

"But, darn it, we ain't got no tobacker —not more'n a plug apiece!" Dobbs protested clinchingly.

"Tobacker's just a habit. You can quit it if you have to."

"So's eatin'," said Dobbs. "You can quit that, too, if you want to. But you don't."

"Well, you may have to quit both, this trip," was Bill's consoling statement. "Anyway, you'll quit tobacker, because we'll run out, and you'll have to."

Dobbs knew argument to be useless. When Bill spoke in that tone, his mind was made up; and when Bill had made up his mind and determined on his course, the laws of the Medes were fickle and changeable things by comparison. Bill metaphorically took the reverse gears out of the box and threw them away.

So Dobbs said no more, and merely hoped for the best while fearing the worst. Tobacco was his chief worry. They might obtain food by the rifle and fishing line; but so far not even hardened nature writers have classed plug or fine cut among the manifold bounties of the wilderness. The best they have been

able to do is to suggest substitutes. Even that great and good man, the head of the Swiss Family Robinson, fell down in the matter of tobacco. And it is to be noted that the children of Israel themselves, who were certainly favored in the matter of gratuitous supplies during some forty years of wilderness wanderings, went tobaccoless.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIL.

IN the morning, long before daylight, Dobbs, sleeping the sleep of the night-after-the-wet-night, and waking to curse merely when he turned, heard the crackle of dry wood and beheld firelight.

"Your back all right?" Bill queried, as his partner sat up.

"I dunno, yet. She seems not too—— Ouch!" But Dobbs rose cautiously, splashed water in the general direction of his features, and took over the preparation of breakfast while Bill struck camp.

When they sat down to eat in the one-sided warmth of the fire, everything but the dishes they ate from had been neatly stowed in the canoe.

It was breaking daylight when they shoved off, Bill in the stern, Dobbs in the bow. The latter experimented cautiously with his paddle. He could not hit his usual stroke, and said so.

"Never mind," said Bill. "Pull what you can, and rest when you feel like it. I'm goin' to hit her up."

That was the way with Bill. When both were hitting the snapping, driving stroke that reeled off the miles, he would curse ferociously and demand to know if Dobbs expected him to do all the work. But when things went really wrong, Bill was there with the goods, pulling the whole load cheerfully and uncomplainingly. It needed a catastrophe or a run of very bad luck to bring out Bill's best qualities. Dobbs was about the only man who really knew them.

So Bill began to "hit her up" in the steady, driving stroke that was his canoe road gait. He paddled with the stiff upper arm and forward thrust to torso which mark the expert. At each stroke, the nose of the canoe lifted a trifle and a lisping ripple ran from the forefoot. Dip and swish, dip and swish, hour after hour, while the wooded wilderness slid past. Dobbs by and by was able to second his partner's efforts with some effect. His back limbered a little, and a little of his usual snap and drive came back.

"I'm feelin' better," he announced, as they took a brief nooning, more to shake out the kinks than for purposes of rest.

That evening, though they kept close watch, they saw no sign of any night camp of Tonk and Aubichon. But in the afternoon of the next day they thought they saw the mark of a canoe's nose in sand, and went ashore to make sure. They found a dead fire and certain footprints.

"That's them," said Bill. "That's Aubichon's moccasin tracks. He spreads out at the toes like a bear."

"They've sure been hittin' her up," said Dobbs. "They made this the first day; and it's afternoon of our second. I wasn't much good yesterday."

"Makes a difference," Bill agreed. "But they're travelin'! Taken together, even when you're feelin' good, they've got something on us."

"I guess so," Dobbs concurred sadly. "I'd say you had it on Tonk—a little. But that darn Aubichon was born in a canoe with a paddle in his hand. I never saw a man that could make a canoe walk like he can. And he don't seem to work hard, neither. Must be some knack he has. And of course, even when I'm feelin' all right, I ain't as good as I used to be."

This, unfortunately, was true. Time had taken its toll of Dobbs' resiliency. He could stay with it, holding on grimly. But a little of the snap and drive, the élan, the joy and pride of youth and prime in matching its strength and endurance against the day's work, had gone from him forever. Thus in straight paddling, hour for hour, Tonk and Aubichon might be expected to increase their lead, bar accidents.

THE obvious remedy was to paddle for more hours. Bill and Dobbs did so. They got going before day, and they camped after dark, groping about till a

fire gave them light. Thus their camps were sketchy and uncomfortable. Save in bad weather, they did not put up their lean-to, merely drawing the canvas over them when they got into their blankets. And their food was just as sketchy, hurriedly eaten and indigestible. As soon as they had eaten supper, they turned in, recruiting their energies as much as possible by sleep.

Naturally the pace to which they forced themselves told upon them. They were lean and hard to start with, but now they grew gaunt, red of eye from constant staring along crinkling water stretches. And it told, too, on their tempers. But the purpose which animated them helped them to hold these in check.

There came a day when Dobbs, in spite of jealous conservation, finished the last scrap of tobacco in their joint possession. Thereafter, he knew the unspeakable void of tobaccoless days and nights. He would have smoked tea, but they had none to spare. So he peeled, and was at pains to scrape and dry, willow bark and the leaves of a low-growing plant known locally as kinnikinnick, though that is more properly the inner bark of the red willow. But it was not tobacco; nor, save as the fumes of an ancient pipe mingled with those of this baser content, did it taste like it. Bill, less enslaved by habit, after a trial or two of these substitutes, gave them up, and declared for total abstinence.

"I feel better without it, too," he declared hardily.

"Well, I don't," said Dobbs. "I want something all the time, and I don't know what. I mean—I know darn well! I want a smoke or a chaw."

"Which?" said Bill.

"Both," Dobbs replied. "I want 'em bad, and I want 'em now."

"Quit thinkin' about them and you'll be all right," Bill advised. "The more you think of 'em the worse you want 'em."

"And the worse I want 'em the more I think of 'em," Dobbs countered. "I've smoked and chawed since I was about twelve."

"It's a wonder you grew up," Bill commented.

"When did you start, yourself?" his partner asked.

"Me?" Bill replied virtuously. "I didn't smoke steady till I was fifteen."

Lack of tobacco was an annoyance, a mental hazard, perhaps in the case of Dobbs a near tragedy. But the question of food began to obtrude itself. Their supply had been scanty to start with and now it was getting alarmingly low. Their coffee was gone; they had but a few pinches of tea left; and the flour was down in the sack. Bacon and sugar belonged to the past. They still had a few beans and a little rice, but that was all. Occasionally they caught a fish on a night line, but game had been scarce.

"We got to get some meat," Bill stated.

"Lay off a day and go huntin'?"

"No, we'll take a chance on comin' onto a deer waterin'. Keep your rifle handy."

Deer come to drink mornings and evenings. So Dobbs laid his rifle, a .44 carbine of ancient vintage, in the bow when they shoved off in the morning.

They were sliding silently through the morning mists when they came upon a white-tail doe, drinking. Dobbs reached for his rifle. The doe, lifting her head, gazed at these intruders. She stood broadside on, motionless, at less than fifty yards. It was a beautiful chance, a pot shot, one made to order for a boy or a novice. And Dobbs was neither.

BILL steadied the canoe with a deep paddle blade. It slid soundlessly and steadily forward. For a moment, Dobbs hung on his sights and then squeezed the trigger. At the report, the doe leaped, wheeling as she did so, her sharp hoofs sending up a spatter of spray, and bounded for the shelter of the woods. Dobbs fired twice more, but the doe disappeared, her white flag flying defiantly at the masthead. He had missed clean.

"Well, you *are* a dandy," Bill commented, with deep irony.

"What did you lurch the canoe for just when I was unhooking at her?" Dobbs demanded defensively.

"I never lurched nothing, and you know it."

"Oh, well, if you're that sure about

it——" Dobbs abandoned the alibi with regret. "Darned if I know how I missed. I guess goin' without tobacco has got me shaky."

"After this, I'll do the shootin'," Bill decided. "I'll take the bow, mornin's and evenin's."

He did so that evening and again in the morning, but no deer appeared.

"You never see meat when you want it," he grumbled that evening.

"Ain't it the truth!" Dobbs agreed, expectorating feebly and unconvincingly at the fire. "I wisht," he added wistfully, "that I had a chaw of tobacker so's I could spit right. I wisht——"

"Shut up!" said Bill. "What's the use of wishin'?"

"Not a darn use," Dobbs admitted sadly. "And that's the hell of it. I wisht I didn't wish."

"Then don't. You just think you wish."

"Bill," said Dobbs earnestly, "don't pull no Christian Science stuff on me—not about tobacker. About anything else—maybe. But not tobacker. I can't stand it, and I'm liable to break loose and cuss."

"You can't cuss much more than you do, unless you start talkin' in your sleep."

"Maybe I swear tolerable steady," his partner admitted; "but I got a right to, on a trip like this."

Bill was forced to concede that there was something in that. But this time they had turned up the Burnt River, and the going was hard. The current was consistently swift, and they were beginning to strike stretches up which they could neither paddle nor pole, but were forced to track. Tracking is not so bad when there is clear shore or even precarious footing. But when the banks are grown with brush and the beach vanishes so that the unlucky traveler is forced to wade in icy water, it is awful.

When they could not track, they portaged.

These portages were not the portages of the frequented streams of the East, mere carries, long or short, over a cut-out trail. They were plunges into an infernal tangle of brush or over maliciously piled rocks. Few travelers had come that way, and those who had, apparently had gone on the principle that they would never come again, and had cleared no trail. Occasionally they had slashed down a bush or two from necessity—Tonk and Aubichon had done so, as they could tell from fresh sign—but mostly they had worried through without recourse to the ax. Sometimes the partners were able to follow the way thus inadequately indicated, which helped a little; but at other times they missed it entirely and were their own pioneers.

And all the time their resentment against Tonk and Aubichon grew, fomented by hard work, shortage of grub, and lack of tobacco.

"What'll we do when we come up with them?" Dobbs wanted to know one night.

"Stand 'em up with a rifle," Bill replied promptly.

"S'pose they won't be stood up?"

"Any guy that won't be stood up takes his chance of goin' down," Bill replied accurately.

"Say we stand 'em up. Then do we just turn 'em loose after we've got the gold—s'posin' they've found the cache?"

"We'll see about that," Bill replied darkly. "The way I feel now, I'd like to beat 'em to a whisper, bust their canoe and set 'em afoot without guns, grub or blankets. And maybe I will."

FAILING to get venison, they had been conserving their food supply. But the next evening they came slap upon a fat young buck drinking. Bill was in the stern, but he grabbed for his own rifle, which lay in front of him.

"Duck!" he commanded tersely.

Dobbs, in the bow, promptly crouched and, as he did so, felt the blast from his partner's rifle stir his back hair. When he dared to raise his head, there being no second shot, the buck was down and kicking. Bill turned the canoe's nose for shore.

"We'll camp right here," he announced.

"And, by gorry, we'll have fresh meat!" said Dobbs, licking his old chops.

They skinned out the carcass and dressed it, after which they cut a generous supply of chops. The meat, though

freshly killed, was tender, and they fed ravenously. At length Dobbs, gorged, heaved a sigh.

"I can't hold no more," he said regretfully. "And now I wisht I had some tobacker."

"Don't you ever quit thinkin' about that?" Bill asked, with irritation.

"No, I don't," his partner replied. "It don't seem natural to be without it." He produced his pipe and filled it with the mixture of leaves and bark aforesaid. This bonfire he lit with a burning twig, and coughed as the acrid smoke assailed his throat and lungs.

"How does it taste?" Bill asked.

"It tastes like hell," the martyr replied candidly.

"Then what do you smoke it for?"

"I got to smoke something, ain't I? She'll be better when she heats up. There's a lot of flavor left in this old pipe yet." He coughed again.

Bill grunted scornfully.

"You're chokin' yourself just to fool yourself."

"A man that can't fool himself misses a lot of fun," Dobbs returned philosophically. "You pretty near got to do it in this world." He smoked in silence for a time. "Bill, we'd ought to make jerky outa some of this meat."

"We ain't got time."

"Yes, we have. An extra day don't matter, with the lead they've got. Then we'd have meat right along, in shape to pack."

"Something in that," Bill admitted.

"You bet," said Dobbs. "Let's cut her up now and build us a rack and start right in to smoke her."

So they made a bright fire to work by, constructed a rack of slim, green poles laid across larger poles, the whole supported by forked stakes, and, reserving what fresh meat they thought they could use, cut the remainder into thin strips which they laid across the rack. Then they roofed in the whole thing with green brush, the deerskin and a bit of old canvas, making it as smoke tight as possible, built a small fire under it and added green wood when the fire got going.

Much of the smoke got away, filtering through the brush, but enough would be retained to partially cure the meat. And as next day a strong head wind sprang up, against which they could have made little progress, the event justified their action. They lay snug in camp and kept the fire going.

The rest and replenished food supply cheered them. When they made a start next morning, they were in good spirits. The river, too, opened out; the current was slower; and they made good time.

"We ought to be gettin' somewhere near where this creek comes in," Bill observed. "Keep your eyes peeled for some red rocks."

That afternoon they saw a huge, red splash against the mountainside of the eastern hills.

"That's her," said Bill. "And now, unless that old Frenchman is a liar, there'll be a creek comin' in from the left."

Soon they struck the mouth of a tributary creek, itself a river. It seemed navigable.

"Just like the old man said," Dobbs nodded. "Now we better make sure them fellers has gone up it."

THEY turned up the creek, keeping a sharp lookout for possible camping places; and after several fruitless investigatory landings, Bill caught sight of a bit of brush on the bank from which several twigs, apparently broken, depended. Landing there, they found the site of an abandoned camp.

"Struck it," said Bill. "They're ahead of us, all right. We'll camp here. The way it looks ahead, I guess we'll hit fast water to-morrow."

The next day they reached the head of navigation. White water barred their way, and when they landed and went upstream, it was to find that beyond the rapids, the stream had become entirely too swift for a canoe. But this checked with the information contained in the letter.

Returning to the foot of the rapids, they held council. Somewhere in the vicinity, Tonk and Aubichon must have cached their canoe.

"Let's hunt her up and bust her up,"

Dobbs suggested vindictively. "Make 'em walk out, by the glory!"

Bill took a more forethoughtful view.

"We can do that when we come back, if we find 'em and have luck. But if we was to miss 'em and they was to get here first and found their canoe bust up, they'd know in a minute who done it. Then they'd start hunting for ours, and they'd find it, too. They'd take that, and then where'd we be?"

"In a hole," Dobbs admitted. "But I was thinkin' maybe they cached some tobacker with the canoe."

"Forget the tobacker!" Bill told him impatiently. "We're out for more'n tobacker. They know we're after 'em—or I guess they do; I would if I was them—and they'd cache the canoe good. We ain't got time to look for it."

"If they know we're after 'em, we want to watch out they don't lay for us. I wouldn't put nothing past that pair, specially if they've found that cache. They're tough birds, both of 'em."

"So are we," said Bill.

"Yes—and they know it. All the more reason they won't take no chances They might down us, cold."

"I guess not," said Bill. "Still, they'd hold us up if they could. We'll keep our eyes peeled."

They cached their canoe, taking great pains in its concealment. In the morning, they made up their packs and proceeded to tackle the rough job of following a mountain creek to its source.

Their packs were not as heavy as usual, because they were on a specific errand and did not anticipate a long stay—unless luck broke very badly, in which case their stay might be permanent. They had a blanket each, food, necessary cooking utensils, their rifles, an ax, a pick and shovel, and a gold pan. The tools and rifles were especially unhandy, but entirely necessary. Each used the pack board, a light, canvassed frame which fits the back and more than makes up in comfort and compactness for its own added weight. Bill took the heavier load as a matter of course. Dobbs grumbled as he adjusted the pack straps.

"Packin's no work for a man," he complained. "It's a job for a cayuse or a jackass. Every time I get a pack on my back, I feel like one."

"Only then?" Bill asked. He let his partner's hackneyed but forceful retort go by. "Come on, if you're ready."

He led the way, making no attempt to set a pace, slouching burdened along. Natural obstacles he avoided as best he could, always going around in preference to over or through, following the line of least resistance wherever it led. When it led to a cul-de-sac, he came back and tried some other.

At times they followed the creek close to the water's edge; and at others they were forced to leave it far below them and edge their way painfully through the brush of precarious, rocky side hills, split now and then by deep gulches which they must descend and ascend. Thus their progress was slow and hardly earned. On the whole, they were on an up grade.

Bill paused often to rest, more for his partner's sake than for his own, five-minute breathing spaces, brief but grateful. Now and then they drank from little spring creeks, but sparingly; for water, save in moderation, is poor stuff to climb on. They made camp that night without having come on any trace of Tonk and Aubichon.

"Maybe they went up the other side of the creek," Dobbs surmised.

"This looks like the best side," said Bill. "We'll run across sign of 'em, sooner or later."

THE next day they did, in the form of a tin tobacco tag, of a brand dear to Dobbs' heart. Primarily it was of the edible variety, but it might be smoked and was smoked by sufficiently hardened gentlemen, which included Dobbs and had included the late Jake McNabb. Dobbs handled the tag lovingly and sniffed at it; but its aroma—to call it that—had long departed. No grateful, juicy, scent of copperas or even of molasses lingered on the tin.

"To think of them pelicans smokin' and chawin' our tobacker!" he exclaimed indignantly. "It gives me a pain. I wisht——"

"Take it out in wishin'," his partner

interrupted rudely. "It shows they're on this side."

Which received further proof when, toward evening, they found water-doused charcoal and ashes beside a sketchy brush bed on a jack-pine flat close to the creek.

They built their own fire there, and availed themselves of the bed. Dobbs, arranging the brush to his better liking, suddenly uttered a cry, a veritable yelp of joy comparable to that of a dog which sights his master after long absence. He swooped and pounced on some object in the bough bed.

"Has something bit you, or have you started to throw fits?" Bill demanded.

"Fits—and I got a right to!" Dobbs chortled joyously. "Look-ut, Bill, to-backer! Most of a plug of it. It's the plug the tag come off of. One of 'em must have lost it out of his pocket."

"Well, you needn't go crazy about it."

"I darn near went crazy without it," Dobbs confessed.

He looked lovingly at the formidable, swart plug, sniffed it with rapture and, inserting a corner of it in his mouth, bit at it savagely. And the next moment he withdrew it and clapped a hand to his jaw.

"By the great, wheezin' jehollikus, I broke off a tooth!"

"Serve you right," said Bill. "You'd ought to know better than to bite plug with them teeth you're always kickin' about."

"Oh, well, it couldn't have been much good or it wouldn't have busted," Dobbs returned, with resignation, flipping the fragment of faithless tooth into the bushes. "I got ten left, anyway, not countin' roots." He cut off a generous piece and rolled the delicious morsel with his tongue. "Um, she's good! Have a chaw, Bill?"

"Naw," Bill refused.

"Have a smoke, then?"

"Naw," said Bill. "I been off it so long I don't want it. I dunno's I'll use it ever again."

Which noble resolve met Dobbs' approval, as leaving more for him.

"A man's better without it, of course," he said. "You got lots of will power, Bill. I wisht I had. Only I ain't."

"See if you got enough to get some dry wood," his partner advised somewhat brusquely.

After supper they sat by the fire, and Dobbs, having carefully whittled a pipeful, rubbed it in his horny palms. When he had kneaded and rolled it to the proper consistency, he loaded his pipe with equal care, scooped up a live coal and landed it deftly on top of the load. He drew the vapor deep into his lungs, allowed it to trickle slowly from mouth and nostrils, and heaved a deep, contented sigh.

"By golly, Bill, that's good!"

Some of the smoke drifted to Bill. His nostrils twitched like a dog's, and he shifted uneasily.

"Smells rotten, to me."

"She's good as bread dipped in red gravy."

"Yah!" said Bill.

Dobbs smoked gratefully, appreciatively, savoring the heavy plug as a connoiseur savors a fine cigar. He was too content for further speech.

"Tastes good, does it?"

"Um," replied Dobbs.

"It's just a habit, like dope."

"Um."

"Not as bad for you as dope, of course."

"Um."

BILL shifted again, conscious of a certain void, a longing as of hunger, and a stimulation of the salivary glands. Automatically his hand entered his pocket and encountered his pipe, long cold. He caressed it furtively. Presently he took it from his pocket and put it in his mouth. Dobbs observed with apprehension this dalliance with temptation.

"I couldn't do that," he said. "I'd want to fill her up. You sure got great will power, Bill."

"Huh!" said Bill, disconcerted.

"All kinds of it," Dobbs pursued admiringly. "There you can sit and suck onto a cold pipe and me havin' a smoke, and it don't bother you a little bit. You don't even want to smoke. Even if you wanted to, you wouldn't. Will of iron, that's what you got."

"Throw me over that plug," said he of the iron will.

"You ain't goin' to smoke?" Dobbs exclaimed.

"I just want to see what it tastes like now."

"It don't taste so darn good—not near as good as I thought it was goin' to."

"A minute ago you were sayin' how good it was."

"I was just foolin' myself—tryin' to make myself believe it tastes better than it does."

"You're a liar," said Bill. "Gimme that plug."

"Oh, all right!" said Dobbs. "But honest, Bill, she's got sort of a dirty taste, now. If I was you, I wouldn't start again. You've busted the habit so's you don't feel no cravin'. Let her stay bust. Call on your will power, and when you quit, quit."

"Think you can keep all that tobacker for yourself, do you?" Bill deduced accurately.

"What!" Dobbs exclaimed, outraged by the base suggestion. "Why, I never thought of such a thing! Here's your darn plug."

Bill filled up and smoked, and his longings were assuaged.

"And after this, don't you make no more bluffs about quittin' nothing," Dobbs told him severely. "You got all the bad habits they are, and some they ain't; and you'll stay with 'em till life everlastin', and you know it."

The next day they struck the forks of the creek, and followed the one which led in a northerly direction. Here they found sign that Tonk and Aubichon were before them. What they could not tell was the distance to the headwaters of the fork they were following.

"And now we'd better be careful," said Bill. "It won't do to let them see our smoke."

So they did not build their evening fire till dark, and then in shelter whence it could not be seen by any lookout; and they doused their morning fire before daylight.

They seemed to be approaching the headwaters. The stream shallowed and broadened, running easily over gravel bars, instead of tearing pent in rocky guts. There were little lakes set in swampy meadows now brown with frosts. The going was a great deal better. They entered a broad basin in the hills where presumably the stream headed. All was checking out.

But now they went cautiously, stopping often to listen. They struck a faint trail paralleling the creek. Suddenly Bill, in the lead, stopped.

Fresh chips littered the trail, and a raw stump stood beside it. A small tree had been cut, and a log taken. This meant that they were close aboard.

"We're right on top of them," said Bill. "They wouldn't carry that log far. We'll leave our packs here, so's not to be bothered with them if anything starts."

He leaned his rifle against the stump while he freed his arms from the encumbering pack straps. Dobbs did likewise. And as they were slipping their arms loose and for the moment entirely helpless, a well-known and cordially detested voice said:

"Stand right still, boys, just as you are!"

CHAPTER VI.

MADE TO CHOOSE.

THE speaker was Jack Tonk, who had arisen from the concealment of a boulder just behind them, close to the trail. As they turned to face him, his rifle muzzle bore directly on Bill's belt buckle. Too late the partners realized that the stump and fresh chips were the bait for a very simple but effective trap. Tonk had them dead to rights.

"So it's you, is it?" Bill growled.

"Yours truly!" Tonk nodded. "We were expectin' you along about yesterday. I guess you're looking for us, ain't you?"

"And you know darn well why," Bill told him.

"Well, don't make no move for them guns," Tonk warned. "Just let them stay there, and you walk ahead of me to our camp. Then we can talk."

"Talk—hell!" said Bill. "What do you want to talk for? If you hadn't a gun on me, I'd take you to pieces."

"You'd try, anyway," Tonk agreed.

"That's why I've got the gun. Walk ahead, like I told you."

Having no choice, the partners obeyed and shortly came to a little flat on which, in close proximity to the creek, were the ruins of an old log shack and the lean-to of their enemies. Aubichon, in the act of kindling a fire, waved a greeting.

"Hallo, dere! Now we mak' four of a kind—four damn fool all in one bonch!" He grinned broadly.

This cryptic observation was too deep for the partners. They scowled at the burly Frenchman.

"All right—grin while the grinnin's good," said Bill. "It's your joke—now!"

"Sit down," said Tonk. "Make yourselves comfortable. Light up and have a smoke. I had to hold you up, but I meant it friendly. What Joe means is that the joke is on all of us."

"How?" Dobbs asked.

"Well," said Tonk, "in the first place, that letter is a darn lie. There ain't no gold cached where it said. And we've panned the creek a couple of miles each way without findin' a sign of pay dirt."

"That's what *you* say."

"We don't expect you to believe us without bein' shown, of course. We're free to admit that we put over a pretty hard play on you. On the other hand, it didn't do us a bit of good. So why not overlook it, and be friends?"

"You got a gall!" Dobbs exclaimed. "Get us drunk, steal a letter off of us, steal our canoe, grub and tobacker—and then talk of bein' friends! I'll bet you've dug up that gold and cached it somewheres."

"You'd lose," said Tonk. "We ain't found an ounce, and there's no pay in the creek. That's why I say the letter is a lie from beginning to end."

"Then what did old Jake have it for? The way me and Bill doped it out was that he was goin' to look for the cache. And you and Aubichon knew about that letter, somehow."

"Yes, we knew about it. The way we got onto it was overhearin' old Jake and MacNicol talkin' one day in the store. They come in from the warehouse at the back, and they didn't see us at first because we were behind the rack MacNicol hangs Mackinaws and such up on. So we heard what they were sayin'."

"And what was that?"

"Why, it went something like this!" Tonk replied. "The old man was sayin' something about a grubstake he was buyin', and MacNicol asked him why he didn't go after that old gold cache he had information about."

"Then MacNicol knew about it, too?"

"Looks like it," Tonk agreed.

" 'Maybe that's where I *am* goin',' says the old man. 'Only, of course, I ain't tellin' it around for fear it might start a stampede.'

" 'Aye,' says MacNicol in his Scotch way, dry as chips, 'it might do that. Anyway, ye have preceese written information for findin' it.'

" 'You bet,' says old Jake. 'The paper lays it all out plain enough, don't it?'

"And then they come around and saw us, and didn't say no more."

"MacNicol knew the old man better'n anybody else," Dobbs observed thoughtfully. "I guess he'd seen the letter. If *he* took stock in it, you'd think there'd be something in it."

"That's what me and Joe thought," Tonk nodded. "So that night we tried to get the old man drunk enough to talk. But he wouldn't talk much, and he wouldn't get drunk enough for us to go through him."

"He had more sense than us," Dobbs stated frankly.

"Oh, I dunno!" Tonk doubted generously. "Anyway, we couldn't get anything out of him, and a couple of days after, he sort of slid out on the quiet. It took us a couple of days more to find out which way he'd gone, and then we started out to trail him up, and we took along a jug in case it might come in handy to try him again. Then we run into you, and you told us he was dead. After that, you know what happened."

"I dunno's we do," said Dobbs. "You only *say* you ain't found anything."

"We haven't," Tonk asseverated. "That's gospel truth, ain't it, Joe?"

"Dat's true as hell," was Aubichon's way of expressing agreement.

"If you expect us to take your say-so," Bill told them, "you're out."

"I ain't asking you to believe *us*," Tonk replied. "I wouldn't believe you, either. But you can go and pan the creek, and you won't find no pay in it. And maybe you'll tell me how anybody could have cached gold here unless it came from the creek. The letter says that's where it came from. And it didn't. There's no gold there, and there never was. If you can find any, you're welcome to it. And now here's what we want.

"You got a right to be hostile, maybe, but we've got you cold. Under the circumstances, you give us your word not to start anything and forget the whole thing as long as we're together, and we turn you loose, and if you're short of grub, we'll stake you. You can prospect all you like and there's no strings on you at all. We'll show you the ground, and what we've done, and when we leave, you can go through our outfit and travel along with us to make sure we ain't holdin' out on you. Does that go?"

"S'pose we say it don't?"

"Then, by thunder," Tonk said grimly, "we'll rope you up till we get ready to leave. And then we'll take you down to wherever you've cached your canoe, and we'll bust that up. And then we'll leave you without your guns or grub or matches. You can walk out—if you can. If you like that better, just say so."

The alternative thus stated in reality offered no option at all. The partners knew that Tonk and Aubichon were quite capable of carrying out this threat. To be left weaponless, foodless and fireless, with winter coming on, and without a canoe or means of obtaining one, was not to be thought of. So after a brief exchange of glances, they made up their minds to swallow the pill. Bill, characterisically, did it as ungraciously as he could.

"I don't believe a darn word you say—except that part about settin' us afoot," he said. "I guess you'd do that, though."

"No guess about it," Tonk assured him.

"No," Bill admitted. "Then we take you up on that peace proposition because we have to. We won't start anything. But we got it in for you, and some day we'll play even, and don't you forget it."

"That's good enough," said Tonk, laying aside the rifle with which he had backed his peace proposals. "Make your camp, and then we'll show you what prospecting we've done."

And when they were shown the boulder which should have marked the site of the cache, the partners admitted that it had been prospected thoroughly. The shallow soil there, merely a few inches of dirt above bed rock, had been turned over for a large surrounding area.

"Why, darn it," said Dobbs, "the dirt ain't deep enough here to cache nothin'!"

"Sure it isn't!" Tonk agreed. "It's no place at all for a cache."

"Maybe this ain't the boulder."

"Well, find another one anywhere near the shack."

There was no other boulder in the immediate vicinity. And when they tried panning the creek the next day, they found no indications at all of pay.

"It looks like you've been tellin' the truth—for once," Dobbs was forced to concede.

"We want you to be satisfied," Tonk returned. "You're sure there's no pay in the creek and nothin' cached near that boulder?"

"Yes," Dobbs admitted.

"All right," said Tonk. "We'll show you every darn' thing in our outfit when we make up our packs. And now we better leak out of here as fast as God'll let us, if we want to beat the ice in the river."

CHAPTER VII.

TIME TO LAUGH.

FOUR gaunt and gloomy adventurers landed from two worn and ice-scraped canoes one chilly dusk at Gibbs' Portage. They packed their scanty dunnage to the shack, which was as home to Bill and Dobbs, made a fire in a rusty stove, and thanked their stars that they had just beaten the ice, which they had been breaking ahead of their frail craft with poles at intervals for the past couple of days. When they had cooked and eaten, they turned in, Bill and Dobbs in their bunks and Tonk and his partner in their

blankets on the floor, and all slept the sleep of dead-beat hounds after a hard-run trail.

"We need some grub," Dobbs said to Bill the next morning; "and anyway we want to tell MacNicol about Jake."

So they sought the company's store, finding MacNicol, a dour Scot, smoking the clay pipe which was his inseparable companion, and made their purchases. This done, Dobbs said:

"You were a friend of old Jake McNabb's, weren't you, MacNicol?"

"I ken the auld mon," the Scot replied cautiously. "What about him?"

"He's dead," Dobbs reported, without circumlocution. "Me and Bill planted him." He related the circumstances. "We couldn't come in right then," he continued, "because we wanted to go some place else. But we cached his outfit, and on the way back, we lifted the cache, and we'll hand over everything to you, and we want you to report it to the government agent."

"I'll do that," MacNicol promised. "I doubt he left no will or other testamentary disposeetion. Not that he had much to leave, I take it. But ye found nothing o' the sort?"

"The only paper he had on him," Dobbs replied, "was a letter from some old-timer about a gold cache somewhere."

"A letter?" MacNicol queried. "Are ye meanin' a paper signed by one 'Jean Goulet?' "

"That's the identical," Dobbs nodded. "And it's all a pack of—I mean this Goulet, whoever he is, must be crazy. His letter read like it, to us."

"It's no a 'he,' " MacNicol responded; "it's a 'she.' Jean Goulet is auld McNabb's granddaughter, a bit lassie maybe twelve years old."

"His granddaughter!" Dobbs gasped.

"Preceesely," MacNicol nodded. "McNabb had a daughter married to a man named Goulet, livin' by St. Boniface, an' the lassie is their daughter. As for what ye ca' a letter, it's a school composeetion of the child's, and verra creditable as an effort of imagination—or partly so. The auld man showed it to me, an' verra proud of the lassie he was."

"But—but," Dobbs almost stuttered, "how could a twelve-year-old kid give landmarks, and tell about a creek with an old shack and a boulder, just as—er—I mean——"

MacNicol slapped his thigh.

"By the Lord Harry! Ye've been there!" he accused. "Ye found the paper and went after the cache on the faith of it. Dinna stop to think to lie about it. Didn't ye?"

"Well, suppose we did," Bill admitted sullenly.

MacNicol roared, choked on his pipe and wiped his eyes.

"Men, men, ye'll be the death o' me! Sic a rich, juicy, self-pairpetrated joke was never heard of in this man's country or any other."

"Ha-ha-ha!" said Dobbs distinctly and grimly. "And now we've laughed, maybe you'll tell us how that kid could describe that shack up that creek just the way it was?"

"Verra easily," MacNicol replied. "I asked the same question mysel' o' the auld man when he showed me the child's composeetion. A year ago he went up that creek prospectin', and came upon yon shack. In the winter, he went out to visit his daughter, and in the evenin's, he'd spin yarns to the bit lassie. He minded describin' the creek and the auld cabin and landmarks to her; and he also told her stories, the like o' which ye've heard yersel's, o' ghost placers, an' prospectors bein' killed, an' so forth.

"Ye'll ken that a child's memory is amazin' retentive for details. So when the lassie's school tasks included a composeetion of an imaginative nature, she took these stories told her by her grandfather, or some one of them, an' gave it a setting on a creek he had described to her, telling the tale in the first pairson—I mean, as if it had happened to hersel'. For the story, she received a sma' prize—a book or the like. Her mither was proud o' that—naturally—an' had her send a copy o' the bit story to her grandfather, who was just as proud of it, and carried it about wi' him. An' there ye are."

The partners looked at each other.

"Yes, Bill," said Dobbs, "here we are."

"MacNicol," Bill promised grimly, "if

you ever tell a soul about this, I'll murder you and burn this dump."

MacNicol's shaven lips contorted around his pipestem in what he meant for a grin.

"I'll no tell," he promised. "But, men, did ever ye hear of Isaiah?"

"No," said Bill, "I don't know no Injun of that name."

"Do you mean Isaiah in the Bible?" Dobbs queried, from almost forgotten Scriptural lore.

"Aye," MacNicol nodded, "the prophet. I doubt ye have no copy of the Word; but should ye come across one, ye'll find—from what I've heard of the relations of Jack Tonk and Aubichon and yerselves—that the sixth vairse of the eleventh chapter o' the writin's of Isaiah is mair or less in point."

IN THE OCEAN DEPTHS

MOUNTAIN ranges, plateaus, cliffs, level land—all these are beneath the surface of the ocean, frequently giving no hint on the surface. Measuring the depth of the water is important, particularly when there is a cable to be sunk to the bottom of the sea, and ingenious methods have been invented, not only to discover the depth, but also to get some idea of the composition of the sea floor.

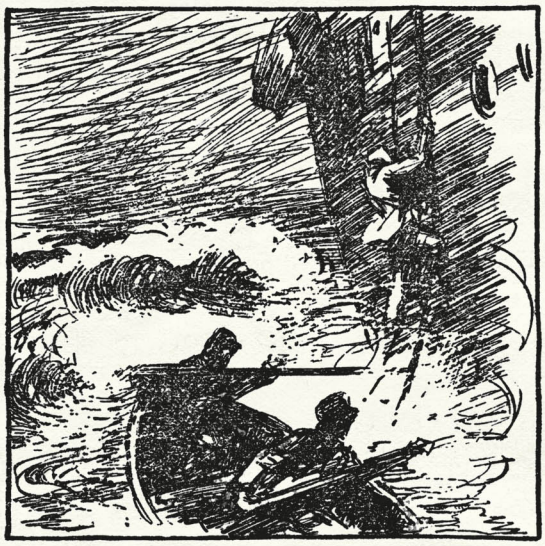
Formerly a heavy weight was hung on a sounding tube so that the weight was dislodged when it struck the bottom, and the tube was brought to the surface with a sample of the earth at the bottom. Modern surveying ships now use steel piano wire to which to attach the weight—the wire is not more than one thirtieth or one twenty-fifth of an inch in diameter—and the soundings are made with a special machine fitted with a break, so adjusted that the revolution of the drum is stopped the instant the lead touches the bottom. An indicator attached to the machine registers the depth. The wire is hauled in by a steam or electric winch, and the tube containing a sample of the bottom deposit is rapidly brought to the surface.

OUT FOR A SWIM

DURING last summer, when the English Channel was being conquered so frequently, a humorist remarked that a line of floating buoys, with traffic policemen atop, should be placed in the Channel in order to guide the swimmers and keep them from getting lost.

The swim is not an easy one, no matter how many people succeed in making it. Though twenty-one miles from shore to shore, about double that distance has to be covered, on account of the changing tides. And these tides are extremely swift; even the strongest swimmer has difficulty in making progress against them.

The covering of grease with which these long-distance swimmers are coated is some protection against the coldness of the water, but it is not cold-proof. The water is extremely rough, at times; this also makes the feat more than a mere swim from shore to shore. It takes more than the ability to endure cold, and to swim in a rough sea—remaining hour after hour submerged in paralyzing iciness, fighting on when, perhaps, a fog has covered landmarks and doubts have arisen as to whether one is struggling to go in the right direction, the Channel swim demands a grim, unyielding courage of the highest kind.



The Girl of the Bark *Mystery*

By Fred MacIsaac

Author of "Spirit of the Mist," "Tin Hats," "The Flying Gun," Etc.

The vital points with the newspaper men of the dear old days they like to tell about, were, first, to get the story; second, to get it into the office. When MacNabb of the *Journal*, and "Stuffy" Thompson of the *Tribune* unexpectedly ran across this most romantic and dramatic tale of the sea—with a lovely girl and everything—they had a wild time of it; and the end was surprising.

JUDGING from my business card, you might be apt to consider me as a far more important person than I am. The card contains my name and title and the name of the bank for which I work. It reads:

JOHN Q. MACNABB,

Vice President,

Mammoth National Bank of New York City.

It happens that there are fifteen vice presidents of the Mammoth, so the title doesn't mean a great deal. I am in charge of the department of public relations, which is a flossy way of saying "press bureau," but it is a pretty good job at that. And I haven't yet got used to the title of vice president.

I've come up in the world. I'm forty-two years old, a little bald, twenty pounds overweight from sitting behind a big, flat-topped desk, not much to do save get up prospectuses, issue dignified statements in the name of the president, and glad hand the present breed of reporters. For this I draw down ten thousand dollars a year. It's a great life! Of course I wouldn't go back, but once I was a real newspaper man and—those were the days!

Having gobbled up a bank in Boston, the Mammoth sent me over there to explain it to the sensitive natives, which gave me a chance to drop into the *Journal* office, my old shop, where I had not set foot for fifteen years.

When I stepped into the poky, slow-moving elevator, a change began to come over me. I am afraid I looked a little

pompous, with my banker's walking stick and my big diamond ring and my hundred-and-fifty-dollar suit of dark worsted. I suddenly was ashamed of my prosperity. I felt something like a renegade.

I hadn't come there to four-flush. All I wanted was a drink of old times, a whiff of the past, to breathe the air of the dust-laden city room, to fill my eye with the untidy den, its rubbish-strewn floor. Newspaper offices in New York have changed. They sweep them and keep them clean, but I felt that the *Journal* would be just the same. It was.

Though there was an office boy in the anteroom to keep out peddlers and romantic old fossils like myself, I passed him by without a challenge and pushed open the swinging door. Fifteen years fell off my shoulders when I stepped inside and saw the row of assignment boxes on the opposite wall. Mine had been in the third row, first on the right. My eye fell upon it instantly. It was empty.

Nothing seemed to have changed in the old city room. They were always going to paint it in my day, but apparently they hadn't got around yet to doing it. The battered round table of pine, with the slit in it where the head copy reader sat, had not been moved. Four round-shouldered, shirt-sleeved men, gray or bald, with green shades over their eyes squatted under the electric lamps and read the copy that the man in the slot was distributing to them. Though it was midafternoon, little light penetrated through the windowpanes so that even the managing editor, whose ancient oak roll-top desk stood beside one of the windows, had to keep his electric bulb burning.

I glanced at the managing editor, a little man with iron-gray whiskers. He was a stranger to me, as were the desk men and the group of reporters at the far end of the long room. One of the desk men, glancing up, inspected me insolently and suspiciously. After all, I had no business there. What did these men care if I had worked on the *Journal* fifteen years before?

Just then a man came out of the telephone booth with a sheet of yellow copy paper in his hand and shuffled over to the city desk. I recognized him. It was "Stuffy" Thompson who, in my day, had worked for the *Tribune* and whom, naturally, I had hated. We had never fraternized with the staffs of opposition newspapers; it was against the code of the bitter period of journalism. Now I was glad to see Stuffy. After all, he had been a wonderful reporter, a star when the word meant something. He had been a fat, good-looking blond youth; now he was stooped, thin and gray. Although he could not be forty-five, he looked sixty.

"Hello, Stuffy!" I said cheerfully.

He stopped, glared at me through his bifocals. Probably he had not deserved his old nickname for years. I saw that he knew me.

"'Black Mac,' the water-front man!" he exclaimed cordially. "Come over to the light and let me look at you."

So we had a reunion. He asked about me and I asked about him.

"Vice president of the Mammoth National of New York?" He whistled. "You always had all the luck."

"Believe me, if I could afford it, I'd rather be back in the old game."

"The old game is dead," Stuffy declared, with a bitter laugh.

"Of course it isn't. You're getting old, Stuffy."

He picked up a copy of the paper, opened it and showed it to me.

"Comics, syndicated editorials, signed features, wire services, city news dispatches," he said. "We are a carbon copy of a New York paper with a few columns of local items. It's features today; we don't bother about news. Do you suppose one of my reporters would take a chance to get a story? Mac, this business is as exciting as running a peanut stand."

"Guess you're right," I admitted. "*We* took chances, hey, Stuffy?"

The city editor's old eyes kindled.

"I'll say so! Will you ever forget the bark mystery? Of course you wouldn't!"

His eyes filled with tears. Understanding his emotion, I choked a little myself.

"I nearly murdered you," said Stuffy, "but the story was worth it. How is she?"

"Great," I said carelessly.

The bark *Mystery*, and the girl, the turning point of my life, my biggest adventure, and I hadn't thought about it for years. That's the way things go, and here was Stuffy, after all that time, a crabbed old city editor with tears in his eyes.

Eighteen years slid back in a moment as we regarded each other. I was the water-front man of the *Journal* and Stuffy was the star reporter of the *Tribune*. As their water-front man was a dead one, they used to shoot Stuffy out on sea stories.

THAT March afternoon, I dropped into the marine office of the chamber of commerce to look over the wire reports. I found a note that the dismasted bark *Mystery* had passed Provincetown and was being towed into Boston, which meant that she ought to drop her mudhook in the lower harbor about nine in the evening.

The *Journal* was having a hard time, so hard that often it couldn't meet the pay roll. Instead, we would be given orders on advertisers for goods. One man would get a requisition for a suit of clothes; another, for groceries; a third, for dry goods. We would swap until we got what we needed. The *Tribune* was big and prosperous. To-day it's out of business and the *Journal* is going like a house afire, because it was the first to board the feature-syndicate band wagon.

When I turned in my expense account, in the old days, I would have an argument with the city editor about every dime. Yet the spirit of the game held us. We fought our opponents like fiends for the news. An "exclusive" was a triumph which brought everybody from the publisher to the truck drivers to shake the hand of the man who brought it in. Miserably paid, driven like slaves, we were as loyal as bull pups. The chances we took then to get a story, I wouldn't take now for a check for a million dollars.

I knew that a disabled bark would probably have a good story on board, but to get it meant a trip down the harbor. I dared not spend the money without authority, so I called up the city editor and put it up to him.

"Suppose there isn't a story. We're stuck," he expostulated.

"If there is, we're scooped. The *Tribune* will get a tug and go down to her."

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, hire a launch. We can't afford a tug."

"It's blowing outside. I doubt if a launch would go below."

"The tug would cost twenty dollars, and we can't afford it. You find a launch, and don't pay more than a five-spot."

I went to Pie Alley and dined royally on baked beans, doughnuts and squash pie, washed down with two cups of coffee, all for a quarter. "Old Joe," who ran the alley joint, prospered so that he finally owned a string of restaurants, but he never learned efficiency. Rising food costs during the war put him out of business. Heaven bless him! He's in the poorhouse now.

About eight o'clock, I went down to Driscoll's Landing, so named because it belonged to a saloon where you could get a schooner of beer as tall as the Woolworth Building for five cents. There I could be sure of four or five launches waiting for hire. They were on hand, but the boatmen gave me the laugh.

"It's rough as hell below," said "Big Jerry" Sherry. "You better hire a tug."

It was no use to plead. Launches were valuable if my life was not. So I finally crossed to T. Wharf, where a flock of Portuguese fishermen tied up their power dories, men with lots of nerve and much respect for a five-dollar bill. Nevertheless, they had no more desire to go below than the Irish boatmen at Driscoll's until, in despair, I raised the offer to ten dollars. A pair with a sixteen-foot power dory agreed to take me. Dropping my little camera and box of flash-light powder on board—the *Journal* paid me a dollar for every picture it used—I followed the boxes into the boat which smelled of fish as the fishermen smelled of garlic.

As soon as we got off the end of the pier, I realized that it was a bad night. The wind blew cold and hard from the open harbor and we began to pitch even in those comparatively quiet waters. There was no moon or stars, which meant it was going to be difficult to find the

bark in the wide stretches of black water below. But we were off!

When we had passed Castle Island, the old revolutionary fort off south Boston, we were in it for fair. A very heavy sea was running, a forty-mile-an-hour gale howled; it was cold as Greenland. When we poked our nose past Governor's the boat began to stand on her head. It was four or five miles to President Roads, where the sailing ships anchored, a huge expanse of bay where the gale would have full sweep.

In the teeth of the wind we made slow progress, but in time we knew, by the increased size of the waves and more furious whistling of the wind, that we had reached the ship anchorage. Here and there on the inky waste of waters were pin points of light, indicating vessels at anchor. There was no way of finding the bark save by visiting them all.

From the report in the marine office, I had learned that the bark had lost her foremast and maintopmast, but we would have to run very close before we could distinguish spars in this black night.

THOUGH Portuguese fishermen are good sailors, when the dory shipped water, which sloshed around in the bottom as she rolled and pitched, these two fellows began to protest volubly. They lacked my urge to drive ahead. Yipping angrily they kept on, however, until we got near enough to one vessel to make out that she was a four-masted schooner, loaded with coal. Coming out of her lee, we met the force of the gale and swung broadside to the heavy seas. One of the waves splashed on board, almost smothered the engine and came over the tops of my rubbers.

Soon I had no feeling in my feet; they were absolutely numb. The motor was sputtering and so were the fishermen, but I had the wheel and steered for the second riding light. This turned out to be a square-rigger with all her masts standing; but when I turned to head for a third vessel, they were growling ominously.

Mutiny came when I left that craft, a five-masted schooner. One of the fishermen tried to take the wheel away from me, but I gave him a shove which sent him backward. He landed flat in six inches of icy water. I roared and threatened, but I was getting weary, was drenched with spray and as eager as they to quit. Something drove me on, though.

"Da gasolina give out!" whined the man at the engine.

"We be swamped!" moaned the fellow I had thrown to the bottom of the boat.

I was inclined to believe him, but by this time we were within a few hundred yards of the fourth ship, just a blot of jet on the ebony of night. Unexpectedly the moon peered out from behind a bank of clouds and showed me her masts—unshrouded skeletons—but the second mast had square yards and was foreshortened, while the foremast was broken off about ten feet above the main deck.

I gave a shout, then turned to see my crew creeping toward me, probably intending to knock me on the head, go through me and drop me overboard, after which they would call it a night. I had no weapon, but remembered my spectacle case of gun metal. I thrust my hand into my pocket, drew the spectacle case with a flourish and pointed it at them.

"Go back or I'll blow you to pieces!" I bellowed.

Sullenly they returned to their posts.

"Now put me on board that bark," I commanded. "One of you take the wheel."

I knew that if I tried to approach the bark, I would probably shatter the launch against its side. With both of the fishermen busy, they could not start another uprising. We were half full of water, though the wheezy old engine continued to grunt. We came up in the lee of the bark, an ugly greenish-black craft, rather low amidships. Responding to my hail, a sailor tossed over a rope ladder. I clambered up it clumsily with my boxes.

Then the fishermen pushed off and slid into the darkness while I swore waterfront oaths and threatened them with dire punishment, until I remembered that I had not paid them. If they had fled without their ten-dollar bill, the danger must have been greater than I, in my ignorance, had supposed.

"Where's the captain?" I demanded of

the seaman, who jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the stern.

"Cabin," he replied.

Stopping for a moment, I considered my situation. I was stranded on the bark with no chance of getting ashore until morning. I was soaked to the skin, shivering like a leaf, probably going to get pneumonia. And it was all for nothing, since no matter how good the story might be, I had no means of delivering it at the office. However, it seemed the intelligent thing to see the captain, find out what sort of a yarn he had to tell and beg something hot to drink and try to borrow dry clothing. Therefore I picked my way along the dark deck, stumbling over coils of rope, running head on into a pile of timber, part of the wrecked foremast which had been neatly sawed, split and piled for firewood. Then there chugged alongside a big tug, which set a ladder against the rail. Over came Mr. Stuffy Thompson, of the *Tribune,* much drier than if he had been spending the evening in a saloon.

"Hello, Stuffy!" I said, as cheerfully as I could.

He looked at me meanly. Supposing he had the story all to himself, he was not pleased to see me there to share it with him.

"How did you get here?" he demanded.

"Tug," I replied nonchalantly.

"Where is she?"

"Went to another ship. Pick me up on her return."

"That so?" he grunted. "Got the story?"

"Just going after it."

"Come aboard, Finnegan," he shouted, whereupon a big rowdy of a man flopped over the rail, with his huge camera and his plates and flash-light box swung over his shoulder.

We moved together toward the cabin. When we came under the rays of the lantern hung over the cabin door, Stuffy got a good look at me.

"Hanged if I don't think you swam down!" he exclaimed.

I laughed, though my teeth were chattering, then yanked open the cabin door and stepped inside. The place was as hot as an oven, was lighted by a couple of big ship's lamps, which disclosed that the skipper was eating his supper. He was a big raw-boned Scandinavian, with a scar on his right cheek and a drooping, heavy blond mustache, sitting in his shirt and trousers. He was drinking hot tea out of a saucer, while opposite him sat the prettiest girl I have ever seen, before or since.

SHE was one of those gorgeous blondes with a mass of very light yellow hair; I supposed it would have fallen to her heels if she unbound it. Her eyes were like big blue dinner plates, her cheeks pink as strawberries, not rouge, just natural color accentuated by the heat of the cabin. She was at least five feet six and weighed about a hundred and twenty-five pounds.

To think of that clumsy brute of a captain's having a wife like her! Looking at Stuffy, I saw he was thinking the same thing, and we both realized she would show up wonderfully in a photograph to go with our story, if there was one, instead of the picture of the usual group of a shipwrecked crew, looking like an assortment of murderers.

It was obvious that the skipper was annoyed by our intrusion. We were reporters and we were there and couldn't be ejected, so he decided to be amiable and tell us what we wished to know. Then the girl saw I was soaking wet and that my lips were blue.

"Oh, the poor boy!" she exclaimed, in a voice as sweet as silver chimes. "He is wet through, captain. You should make him drink some spirits."

"Yah," agreed the captain. "All right."

He dug a bottle out of a locker, set it on the table and motioned to me to pour, an invitation I was pleased to accept. Stuffy was dry, but took a drink for luck. The girl was smiling at me sympathetically, which warmed me more than the whisky.

Then the captain began his story, telling it in a long-winded manner. He went into details about his sailing date, his cargo, what kind of weather he had during the first few weeks and how he finally encountered a sixty-mile gale which blew him a couple of hundred miles off his

course. When it was over, he had lost his foremast and his main topmast and most of his sails, as well as a couple of sailors. He had rigged up a jury mast and staggered along until he fell in with a tug off Provincetown.

It was a typical square-rigger yarn, nothing to get excited about. I was thinking what a fool I had been to risk my life for this. If we didn't leave a picture of the girl to save it, the story wouldn't make more than a few sticks on the marine page, and my city editor would growl about the ten dollars which was going on the expense account, even if the Portuguese hadn't collected it.

"And now," said Stuffy, being diplomatic, though we didn't care a rap about the captain's photograph, "will you and your wife kindly pose for a picture for the *Tribune?*"

The captain threw back his head and cackled.

"She ban not my wife," he assured us.

"Not your wife?" I repeated stupidly.

"No, indeed," said the girl, with a blush and a smile. "Certainly not. Captain Swanson picked me up at sea. I was floating on a piece of wreckage."

Great guns! The old fool had drooled his long-winded yarn for half an hour and omitted the only incident worth while. This lovely creature had been clinging to a log in midocean! He had picked her up and forgot to tell us about it!

"Well, well!" exclaimed Stuffy, his eyes snapping with excitement. "Tell us about the rescue, captain."

"Oh, it was nodding. I yust picked her up."

"But how? Why?"

"It was easy. Calm. I yust lowered a boat."

"Miss," I pleaded, "will you kindly tell us what happened? How were you shipwrecked? Who are you?"

"I'll try," she said plaintively. "But my loss is so recent. It's so terrible. I suppose you must know for your newspapers."

"If it won't bring too many unpleasant, harrowing memories," said the gallant Stuffy.

"My name is Rose Murray," she told us. "My father, Gilbert Murray, was captain of the brig *Mary Murray,* named after my dead mother; he was half owner. We sailed from Plymouth, England, five weeks ago, bound for Rio with cargo. I had just been graduated from a school for girls in Bournemouth and I persuaded him to let me make a voyage with him.

"Two weeks out," she went on, "we were hit by a heavy gale which blew us far west of our course. It cost us one sailor and some spars. We were already short handed, only ten men before the mast. A few days later we sighted a ship's longboat with a dozen men in it, and we hove to and permitted them to come on board. They were a rough lot and told a tale of being wrecked several days previously. Their vessel was the four-masted ship *Minerva,* of Liverpool. The mate of the *Minerva,* a man named George Wilson, was in command of the boat. My father made him welcome aft, and there was plenty of room in the forecastle for the crew.

WILSON immediately began paying attentions to me that I resented, and I told my father about them. He spoke harshly to Wilson and made him promise to behave himself. Two nights later, I was alone in the cabin, father was on deck. Wilson crept up behind me, grasped me tightly and kissed me. I screamed so loudly that father came rushing down and saw what was going on. He struck Wilson, knocked him down. The man got up and they fought.

"I watched in terror and saw Wilson draw a knife and stab my father, who fell dead almost at my feet. I ran on deck, shrieking for help. Our sailors came to the rescue, headed by our mate. The *Minerva* people attacked them and a horrible battle waged up and down the deck. The *Minerva* men were using knives and several of our men were down.

"I hid behind some barrels on deck, and heard Wilson calling me. And then somebody shouted that the ship was on fire. They had knocked over an oil lamp in the cabin, and Wilson had rushed out after me without observing it. Soon the whole after part of the ship was burning. The fight went on for a long time.

I heard boats being launched, but did not dare show myself. I preferred death in the fire than to fall into Wilson's hands. The heat got so terrible that I had to leave the vessel. I threw over an empty barrel and leaped into the water. We were in the Gulf Stream and the sea was warm.

"The boats must have been launched on the other side of the ship. I saw nothing of them when I came to the surface, though the glare of the brig made everything as bright as day. I pushed the barrel away from the ship. Presently the *Mary Murray* sank. After a long while, a big piece of wreckage came floating by and I climbed upon it. I was afloat all night and all next day and a second night. Of course I suffered for lack of water and food, but most of all for my dear father——"

She broke down and could tell no more. She sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Then the *Mystery* came along," said Captain Swanson. "I noticed the wreckage and saw the girl on it through my glass. I yust lowered a boat and saved her life."

Stuffy looked at me, and I looked at him. Though we were rivals, we respected the other's judgment. We each knew that this was a marvelous yarn.

Simply, directly, briefly the girl had related a tremendous tale of horror and tragedy at sea. The rewrite men would expand it, dilate upon it, color it, give it its proper dramatic value and make three or four columns of it. They had done as much in the past with a tenth the material she had given us in five minutes of talk. But they couldn't secure the effect of the sweet, lovely, heartbroken girl telling her story in person, her eyes tear-dimmed, her voice faltering.

Until that time, I had not wasted much thought on girls. I had escaped love. I had a notion that it was a fictitious emotion, fostered by writers, ravaging weak-minded persons perhaps, but having no power over intellectuals. And I considered myself an intellectual. Now a billow of love had swept over me, almost drowning me, leaving me gasping and sputtering—figuratively speaking. I was gazing at her like a seasick calf, and meanwhile Stuffy was getting in his good work.

"What are you going to do now, Miss Murray?" he asked, most sympathetically.

"I don't know."

"Have you any friends in Boston, anybody to whom you can appeal?"

"I don't know anybody in America."

"Then I have a suggestion to make. Let us take some photographs of you and your heroic rescuer. Then come ashore with me on my tug and I will put you up at the best hotel as the guest of my paper, the Boston *Tribune,* where you may remain until you have decided upon your future. We'll supply you with funds to cable home to your friends; in short, take care of you. Can you go ashore immediately?"

She smiled gratefully at him.

"Yes. And thank you so much. It is wonderful of you to do this for me."

I couldn't let him get away with that. She mustn't be grateful to him. I thrust myself forward.

"Let me amend that, Miss Murray. I want you to be the guest of the Boston *Journal,* as well as the *Tribune,* during your stay in our city."

STUFFY laughed. I could have murdered him for that. He knew the *Journal,* knew that they wouldn't pay a cent toward the girl's expenses, but he did not know that I had resolved to spend the few hundred dollars I had in the bank in the name of my newspaper.

The smile was transferred to me.

"You are both so good!" she said.

"We will now have our pictures took," declared Captain Swanson.

Finnegan set up his tripod and prepared his flash. I opened my camera, looked at my flash powder and discovered that it was wet, ruined. But I edged close to the *Tribune* photographer, proposing to catch the picture on his flash. As Swanson stood up beside the young woman, he was a comical figure. It had not occurred to him to put on his coat. However, that didn't bother us, for we would cut him out of the photograph when it was developed.

With a bang the flash went off, illuminating the room for a second, then filling it with a cloud of yellow smoke. The girl screamed. Swanson swore. We clicked our cameras and that was all.

"It's over," said Stuffy. "Please get your things together, Miss Murray."

"I have nothing except what I have on."

"The *Tribune* will provide you with an outfit as soon as the shops open tomorrow," he said generously.

How liberal the fathead was with his paper's money! I knew, however, that he could get away with it, and that I couldn't.

"I got an old overcoat. I give it to you to go ashore," said Swanson, with the first gallant impulse of his life.

He dug out of a locker an old yellow ulster, hideous but warm, which covered the girl from head to foot. She shook him by the hand and thanked him for his kindness, then accompanied Thompson and Finnegan from the cabin.

I trotted along, followed by the captain, and we made our way along the deck to the amidship section where the tug was waiting. They were keeping the tug from crashing into the side of the ship with boat hooks, and had extended a ladder from the deck house to the ship's rail. The ladder was almost horizontal and by no means tranquil, for the tub was lifting and dropping with the swell of the sea.

A tug deckhand stood on one end of the ladder, to make it steady, and held up a lantern. A second man came part way out on the ladder and extended his hand. Thompson perched on the rail, one foot on the ladder, and Finnegan and I lifted up the girl, so that Thompson could pass her along to the waiting deckhand. She uttered a faint shriek as the ladder sank a trifle, then landed safely on the tug.

Finnegan sprang upon the rail and ran across like a monkey. I was preparing to follow, but Stuffy jumped down upon the deck and blocked me.

"Where do you think you are going?" he demanded sharply.

"With you," I declared, with a propitiatory grin.

"Like hell you are! Use your own tug."

"She may not be back for some time."

"I should worry," he retorted, with a sneering laugh.

"Be a good fellow, Stuffy!" I pleaded. "Let me go back with you."

"Not on your life."

"Aw, come on! I'll do the same for you some day. We got this story together. Play the game."

"How did you get here?" he demanded.

"I came down on a launch with some Portuguese fishermen. The cowardly rats were afraid to stand by."

"Then you have no way to get back," he exclaimed triumphantly.

"I've got to go back with you, don't you see?"

"Of all monumental galls," he jeered. "So I am to carry you back! My paper hires tugs and pays big bills to get exclusive stories. It looks to me as though I had a real scoop. Good night."

"You can't leave me here!" I exclaimed.

"You bet your life I can! Stay here till you rot. The *Tribune* is going to have the biggest scoop of the year. Remember, kid, there are two important things about reporting: First, get the story; next, get it into the office. Ta-ta!"

Laughing, he climbed on the rail and ran nimbly across the ladder.

I threw a leg upon the rail, stood up and was about to follow, when he yanked the ladder and pulled it aboard the tug.

"Shove off!" he commanded.

It was too far to jump. Already a couple of yards of water intervened. The tug began to back away.

"Take me with you!" I pleaded futilely. I was so mad I was almost weeping.

"Go to hell!" he shouted.

I saw the girl touch his arm, but he paid no attention to her. The crew of the tug were laughing. The captain, who had his head out the window of the wheelhouse, hollered:

"Swim, young feller, swim!"

To understand part of my anguish, you have to be an old-fashioned news-

paper man. With a marvelous story in my possession, I was marooned on this old bark, doomed to remain all night and miss all editions, while my rival steamed away and turned in the best yarn of the year. The *Tribune* would play it up all the more because they knew the *Journal* wouldn't have a line.

My personal angle was that the loveliest girl in the world was going off with Stuffy on the tug, to be the guest of his paper. They would hide her in some remote hotel where I couldn't find her and print stories about her for a week. As Stuffy must be as much in love as myself, he would be engaged to her by the end of that week. I had to get aboard the tug.

SHE had backed until she was twenty or thirty feet away and was now about to go forward. The moon was out again, throwing a faint light upon the black sea. I tossed my camera to the deck of the ship and swung myself out of my overcoat. Then I said a silent prayer and jumped overboard. I heard a scream from the girl as I flew through the air. Then, *plop!* I struck the water and fairly screamed as its icy waves engulfed me. Down, down, down, I sank, in an ocean so cold it's a wonder my heart didn't stop beating from the shock. Then I struggled upward until my head broke the surface and a wave slapped me in the face, stinging like red-hot needles. I swallowed a mouthful of salt water that choked me.

The agony of that cold bath cannot be described. But I saw the tug had stopped. Though she was forty feet away, I tried to swim toward her. One of the crew with a boat hook was running along the deck, and I saw Stuffy grasp the boat hook from the seaman's hands.

"Let the ship pick him up," he yelled to the captain of the tug.

"I won't be taken on the bark!" I yelled. "I'll drown first!"

Captain Swanson was standing on deck, swinging a rope. It came flying through the air and struck the water a few feet from me. My first impulse was to grasp the end of it. My shoes and clothes made it almost impossible for me to swim and the icy water was paralyzing me, yet, somehow, I turned away from the rope and struck out for the tug.

The tugboat captain must have been perplexed. He had been hired by Thompson and wanted to obey orders, but he realized that I was crazy enough to drown rather than be pulled on board the ship. Stuffy was bellowing to him to leave me to my fate, but what decided the captain was a yellow tornado that fell upon him.

"Captain!" screamed Rose Murray, grasping him by the shoulder, for he had come out of the wheelhouse and was standing on the top of the deck house. "What are you thinking of? Pull that man on board at once. He's drowning!"

"Right!" exclaimed the skipper. He landed on the deck in one jump, grabbed the boat hook from Stuffy, giving him a shove which almost knocked him overboard, then reached over the side and deftly twisted the boat hook in my collar. By that time, I had swum within three or four feet of the side of the tug. Numbed, almost ready to sink because of the cold and my heavy clothing, I was about through. The next thing I knew, I was lying on the deck of the tug with Rose Murray, an expression of deep concern on her lovely face, bending over me solicitously.

"This is an outrage!" Stuffy was howling. "I refuse to pay for this tug!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Rose. "What a brute you are!"

"You damn fool!" said the skipper. "Do you carry newspaper rivalry as far as murder?"

"I demand that you put him back on the bark!" shouted Stuffy. "I won't have him on board this tug."

"He needs a doctor's care as soon as possible," said Rose firmly.

That settled it. The captain climbed back into the wheelhouse, after ordering them to take me into the engine room and strip me, and the tug started for the city, which was six or seven miles away.

A fireman gave me a rubdown with a rough towel. In five minutes, my skin was pink and I was feeling pretty good. They had taken my clothes and hung them close to the furnace, and in a quar-

ter of an hour they were dry enough to put on.

AS I dressed, I was grinning contentedly. I was on my way back to town on my competitor's vessel and at his expense, to furnish my paper with the best sea story in an age and to prevent the *Tribune* from having it exclusively. I would stick with Stuffy until I found out at what hotel he intended to leave Miss Murray. If my acquaintance with the delectable young victim of the ocean ended on this night, it would not be my fault.

The only fly in the ointment was that I had been compelled to abandon my camera. Although I could probably recover it next day, the picture taken in the cabin of the *Mystery* was not going to be of any use. If I hadn't been so excited or had more time, I could have wound the roll of film and thrust it in my pocket before I jumped. However, salt water probably would have ruined it any way. The *Journal* couldn't complain, in view of circumstances resulting from its own penuriousness. Though the picture had been left on board the *Mystery,* at least we would have the story.

I went out on the narrow deck, but the wind cut through me, so I dodged hastily into the tiny cabin of the tug. There Stuffy was sitting talking to my girl—at least, I hoped she was going to be my girl. He looked up and treated me to one of his sneers.

"I have arranged with the captain to hold you on board this tug until morning," he said. "So your grand-stand play isn't going to do you a particle of good."

I suppose I must have been half out of my head as a result of my excitement, the plunge into the sea, and so on. I let out a bellow and flew at Stuffy like a wild cat. The room was so tiny there was no chance for science. He couldn't get away from me. I couldn't get away from him, but I didn't want to. The result was one of the most savage scraps, the most violent rough-and-tumble arguments, ever pulled off in Boston harbor. It was biff, slam, crash, bang, clinch, wrestle, and finally we rolled over and over on the deck.

First, I was on top, then Stuffy. I was weak from my bath, and he was very stout. But Stuffy didn't fight fair. When I had him almost out, he used his knee. Then the skipper intruded. He had enjoyed the argument up to then. Besides, he had been busy preventing Rose Murray from trying to stop the fight. I was groaning with pain and crying with disappointment, until the girl bent over me.

"Are you badly hurt?" she asked, deep concern in her blue eyes.

Stuffy was on his feet, breathing heavily, but his clothes were half torn off and his face was all cut. Two black eyes and one front tooth gone was my score on him. I suppose I came off as badly, if not worse, but I couldn't see myself.

"I'm not much hurt," I said. "The big bum made the captain promise to keep me on board until morning, so I can't print my story."

Rose stood up and looked indignantly at Stuffy.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "How mean and unfair you are! After this poor boy risked his life, actually jumped into that horrible black sea to perform his duty, would you stop him now?"

"All's fair in the newspaper game," retorted Stuffy. "Look at the way he's treating me!"

"And serves you jolly well right," she declared. Then she whirled on the captain and pinned him with a glance.

"Captain, this newspaper article these foolish boys are quarreling about belongs to me. It is my miserable, sorrowful experience. I have the right to say what shall be done with it. And I insist that you give this man who jumped overboard the chance to publish it. You must not detain him."

"Lady," returned the skipper, a bearded veteran of the harbor, with a twinkling blue eye, "you know what you're talking about! Thompson, don't bother me any more. Both you kids start off together and I'll trot along behind to see you don't murder each other on the way."

Again the girl had come to my rescue. Evidently she was on my side. But she would not let me thank her. Stuffy turned his back on us and went out on

deck to walk off his anger. In time, we reached the landing on the end of Lewis Wharf, and both Stuffy and I scrambled to help the girl ashore. Seeing my hands empty, she said suddenly:

"Where is your camera?"

"I lost it," I replied. "I'm lucky to be alive."

"Does it mean very much to have a picture of me?"

"Does it?" I exclaimed. "It's the best part of the story."

She was silent for a moment as we trudged up the pier, then she asked:

"If I went with you to your office, could you take another picture of me?"

"I should say so!" I exclaimed delightedly.

Flash-light photos usually were horrible. In all probability, my picture was no good, because I wasn't in the right position. It had been the *Tribune's* flash. Finnegan, right behind us, cocked up his ears at her suggestion. He knew that if she let us make a time exposure in the office, the result would make his flash-light picture look very badly.

"Would you do that for me?" I asked.

"Of course I shall!" she answered.

"Miss Murray, I protest!" exclaimed Stuffy. "You are the guest of the *Tribune,* traveling at our expense. This fellow is an interloper."

"You have your picture and article," she said, perplexed. "Why should not he?"

"You don't seem to understand the value of an exclusive story!" declared Stuffy.

"I'm afraid I don't," she returned. "So I'll let this *Journal* reporter make his picture."

"If you do, I must withdraw my offer to pay your expenses."

The girl threw back her head. Although she was in a strange country and didn't have a cent nor know a soul except us—in fact, would probably be grabbed by the immigration authorities when they found she had landed without passing an examination—she was a dead-game sport.

"I refuse your kind offer," she said scornfully. "It has too many strings to it."

"You will be our guest," I declared happily.

Suddenly Stuffy's hostility dropped from him. He grinned good-naturedly. He knew when he was licked.

"You win, Mac," he assured me. "Will you slip me one of your prints of Miss Murray? She can be the guest of both papers. I've done my duty trying to make this an exclusive story; now I'll make the best of it."

"Shake, Stuffy!" I said, with a grateful laugh.

He shook hands.

The girl was regarding us in wonder.

"But I thought you were enemies!" she exclaimed. "You," she went on, to Stuffy, "wanted to let him drown!"

"Oh, no, I thought the ship would pick him up," he protested.

"You," she turned to me, "assaulted Mr. Stuffy and nearly killed him!"

"I had no hard feelings," I assured her. "When we're out on a story, we do anything to keep the other fellow from getting it."

"But a newspaper paragraph—surely it's not worth such dreadful effort!"

We both assured her that it was worth the effort, but time has proved that she was right and we were wrong. Finding a hack, we climbed in and drove to my office, where we threw the whole city room into a frenzy of excitement, made our pictures, then both Stuffy and myself escorted her to a hotel.

YOU know," said Stuffy, as we sat recalling the ancient experience, "I was batty about the girl from the first. I knew I was ruining my chances when I tried to abandon you, swimming in President Roads. The paper came first."

"Yes," I admitted. "Rose liked you best at first. She told me so afterward, but your despicable conduct turned her against you. If the tug had been mine and you tried to horn in, I suppose I would have treated you exactly as you treated me."

"Of course! How is she? Does she still hate me?"

"Well, you know how women are. I've tried to explain, but I can't seem to make her understand."

"I suppose she is still beautiful?" he asked wistfully.

"You bet! Looks about twenty-five."

"Got any children?"

"A boy of twelve, and a girl, seven."

"Think of that!" He shook his head mournfully. "I never married, Mac. Never saw but one girl I wanted, and you got her. Beautiful and looks twenty-five! I look like an old man. Say, could you send me a snap shot of your wife and the kids?"

"You bet, Stuffy, and if you come to New York, call on us!"

"No." He smiled. "Women and Indians never forgive. Get along with you now. I've got to line up a big story for the morning."

So I left the old shop and went out into the street, as Stuffy started to pep up his imitation reporters. Poor old vet, scheduled for the gate in a few years more. If it hadn't been for Rose, I suppose Stuffy and I would have been two burned-out old-young men together.

Turning into a telegraph office, I sent her a wire to accompany a bunch of flowers. A married man gets so matter of fact it takes something special to remind him of the treasure he has in his home.

DANGER SIGNALS

WHEN "cussin' contests" were held in the West, being affairs that drew competitors for miles around, lurid language flowed even more than usual. Profanity was frequent ordinarily, but this was understood to be custom and to be ignored, and no one paid any attention to it at all.

Some men saved innocent-sounding phrases to be used when the really great occasion arrived. When these phrases were used, the danger line had been passed, and the time had come for action.

"Snake" Wheeler, "Pinto Bill," and "Nebrasky," each fluent in his own way in ornate and vigorous language, were three men who had put aside certain phrases that were understood to be danger signals. No matter how unrestrained and explosive their remarks, listeners continued the even tenor of their ways, knowing that this was merely "talkin'."

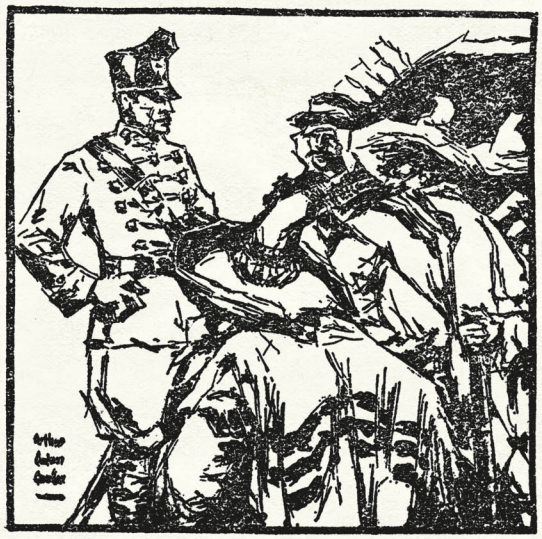
However, if Snake said, "My own Aunt Mary!" or Pinto snapped, "My dead sister's doll!" or Nebrasky murmured, "Little Willie's goat!" the man to whom he was speaking either tried to escape, or "dug for his cannon."

WITH OPEN EYES

ONE of the most marvelous of the cowboy's accomplishments, in the eyes of an Easterner, is his ability to observe so swiftly and with such accuracy. While riding with a cowboy along a trail in the West, an Easterner and his companion approached a herd of horses, led by one rider, with others bringing up the rear.

There were thirty horses in the bunch, some on the trail, some alongside it, in bunches of two or three or solitary. The animals passed by; occasionally one halted for a second for a mouthful of grass, or to slam a hoof viciously into another horse. The cowboy swung off the trail, permitting the herd to pass by, and chatted for a couple of minutes with the riders at the rear, then continued with the Easterner.

Mentioning one particular animal to the cowboy, the Easterner was astonished to find that the puncher had seen it, remembered it, in fact could tell the size, brand, markings, and peculiarities of every animal in the herd. One horse, for instance, did not try to dodge before being kicked upon its right shoulder. The cowboy had even noticed that, and had deduced from it that the horse was blind on that side!



The Conquistadorial Complex

By Captain Ralph R. Guthrie

Author of "Regenerated," "Spreadeagle and the Black Art," Etc.

To paraphrase Mr. Patrick Henry: Joseph, the prophet, had his Pharaoh; Daniel in the lions' den had his Nebuchadrezzar; and "Goosebone" McGorglum, of the *Daily Journal* had—well, Goosebone was put in prison, too, when he tried to start a revolution; but, unlike the prophets, Goosebone was up against it for a stunt by which to escape.

IT was Albert King, of the *Daily Journal,* who first dubbed "Goosebone" McGorglum "the man on horseback."

Albert happened to glance over Goosebone's shoulder one Sunday afternoon. Goosebone was supposed to be having his day off, but was in the city room apparently working like a Trojan on Sunday-feature stuff. Albert read the following:

Therefore I, General McGorglum, having accomplished the complete subjugation of the last of the Central American republics, unfurled my personal banner from the main parapet of the citadel overlooking the fair city of San Salvador. It was an ensign of jaundiced hue, like the rag I used to work for, and it contained three sparkling stars. The stupid natives were led to believe that these represented each a conquered republic; but, in reality, they stood for the three sterling scoops which I, the modern conquistador, in less palmy days, had put over on that bum and insipid sheet, *The Morning Twinkler.*

"My gawsh!" exclaimed Albert in Goosebone's ear. "What's that you're writing?"

The other had the habit of hammering the keys with both long legs on his desk, one on each side of the typewriter. Goosebone untangled these precipitately and rose like a nettled cobra.

"What are you snooping around here for?" he yapped. "Can't a fellow do any private and confidential work around this joint without an idiot of a reporter spying over his collar bone?"

"He can, no doubt, but the odds are against him," acknowledged King. "At least I've never been able to get away with it. When does this subtle attack on the unwashed nations of the earth begin?"

"I'll trouble you to mind your own business," snapped Goosebone. "Can't a guy come round this office on Sunday afternoon and do a little idle speculation without being spoofed? Even the proverbial goldfish has his little castle where he can retire and think his own thoughts."

"I have seen 'em ponder," scoffed King. "Their little black eyes twinkle and the evening zephyrs ruffle their scales as they look out of the half-hidden orifice of their mossy bowers. They think deep thoughts, unless the bowl is very, very shallow; but no goldfish ever got out of his dish or figured much in heroic action. Now a little well-regulated supervision might do a great deal; but if the goldfish were a man, and were writing his thoughts, he'd jump up at the first attempt to set him right and get mad just like you're doing. Poor fish!"

Interruptions were always occurring in that office. The city editor came sauntering into the room.

"What are you doing this p. m., King?" he inquired.

"I've got a big batch of short stuff and a couple of important church meetings," alibied the reporter quickly. "Why, Mr. Cline?"

"Somebody's got to go out to the boss' house. He expects a new arrival," replied the city editor briskly. "What're you doing, McGorglum?"

"Sunday feature—I—guess you'd call it. This is my day off, you see."

"Never heard of a day off in a newspaper office. Let's see your yarn."

McGorglum handed it over shamefacedly, but Mr. Cline did not smile as he glanced over the smeared sheet alive with the wriggly lines which were the hall mark of Goosebone's typewriter.

"Want to be a conquistador, eh? All right! Since it's your day off, better go home by way of Mr. Dangerfield's, and sit up with him waiting for the glad event. He's looking for an heir to this newspaper, some time before morning. You'll be first on the ground to receive him and it may insure your job when the old man passes away.

"By the way," he called, as Goosebone grabbed his hat, "the boss is president of the Central American Fruit and Product Company. Might ask him if he'd stand for you starting a revolution down there. King'll do your stuff on the weather."

"Goosebone has got funny notions," observed King, after the reporter had banged his way through the swinging doors. "He's the original 'man on horseback.'"

"So's the boss," remarked Cline dryly. "He figures it would get him a strangle hold on the banana crop, mebbe. The old man could finance a bust in Central American politics if he wasn't too stingy."

"Funny guy, Goosebone," pursued King thoughtfully. "Talks Spanish like a native."

JUST the same, he came on this rag with a brand-new idea and made it stick," retorted the other. "There are a quarter of a million subscribers who swear he has it all over the weather bureau in his predictions. When he first reported for work, he was a regular Scotch freak. Pants came halfway down his calves to save cloth. Had a grouch against everything. I sent him out on a country assignment one day without a raincoat, because the weather man predicted a fair day, and it rained so hard it washed out all the bridges. When he got back, he wrote his first 'goosebone' prediction, taking the opposite of the local forecast.

"I wrote the introduction, stating that Goosebone McGorglum was an ancient customer with a long, white beard who lived in a cabin at Blue Gorse Gulch with a flock of geese. Ever so often he killed a goose, I said, and looked at its wishbone.

"We did it as a sort of joke, but it increased our circulation by fifteen thousand in less than two months."

"What made it take?"

Mr. Cline laughed.

"Well, it was the last day of April. The weather man had predicted fair with rising temperature for May Day. Goosebone said it would snow, and it snowed, breaking all records for a late spring in thirty-six years. He's learned a lot about weather since, but for a long time he just took the opposite. An odd genius! I

shouldn't wonder if the old man takes to him right away."

Everybody on the paper had a turn at writing Goosebone McGorglum's predictions when he was sent out on another assignment. King had done it before. He slipped in a sheet of flimsy and dwelt briefly on the following from the government bureau:

Fair and warmer with increased cloudiness in western portion of State. Low barometric pressure in vicinity of Salt Lake. Fresh southwest winds.

The typewriter began to click. King wrote:

Goosebone McGorglum, the ancient prognosticator of Blue Gorse Gulch, announced yesterday that he had just killed a young goose and found the weather bone very dry, with a greenish tinge at the edges. This indicates, he says, a heavy rain in the western portion of the State. The dry condition of the bone, Goosebone declares, shows definitely that the rest of the season will be moist with a nine-inch rainfall in the month of July. The greenish color indicates a long, hard winter.

The palatial home of Mr. Dangerfield was brilliantly lighted from basement to garret when the reporter arrived and was ushered into the library. The owner of the *Journal,* for obvious reasons, had no other guests that night, which, McGorglum was beginning to think, was an oversight, for Dangerfield was working up to a high nervous tension while he waited. Goosebone found him walking to and fro with his thin hands locked behind his narrow back.

"Good evening, Mr. McGorglum!" He beamed. "Damn glad to see you! I suppose this is quite an event down at the office, eh? Quite an event here, too, I assure you. Take a cigar! Have a chair! Make yourself at home. I'm a proud father already. Two children have arrived—two boys. Another expected before morning. You'll have to wait up with me."

"Triplets, eh?" gurgled McGorglum, forcing a wide grin.

"Triplets? Damn me, yes! Who'd have thought it!"

He was a small man with white side whiskers and looked like an expert accountant, rather than a business man of big affairs. He began to resume his pacing. McGorglum, trying to calm him, at last thought of the city editor's advice and pulled out of his pockets several soiled sheets of his imaginative diary.

"See here, Mr. Dangerfield!" he exclaimed. "Since we've got to entertain each other for several hours, how'd you like to discuss a revolution in Guatemala? You know they've got a revolutionary junta here. Lot of gumps. I've been talking to 'em about my schemes. You furnishing the money and me the military brains, as it were, we could put it over. I've read a lot about Napoleon and General Lee Christmas——"

Dangerfield collapsed into a chair.

"Talk on!" he commanded gratefully. "I will welcome it. Revolution and triplets are close kins. Proceed!"

McGorglum was an excellent expounder, once he got started. He assumed his most convincing front and began by reading a few pages from his diary.

"You understand," he declared, "that this is written just as though in retrospect, but it is really a plan. When I have overthrown this tyrant, or whoever he is, I'll unfurl my personal banner. It will contain three glittering stars."

Dangerfield leaped to his feet, his cherub's face alight with enthusiasm.

"Three stars—one for each member of my infantile trinity!" he exclaimed. "By Jove, Mr. McGorglum, you are a diplomat as well as conspirator. Why not? The Dangerfield children emblazoned in history, and the interests of the Central American Fruit and Product Company extended at the same time. Damn me, when you came in I was trying to think of something I could do to show proper appreciation for my good fortune. Wanted to do something heroic—unusual. There it is! Draw up your plans and bring them to me to-morrow. How much money would it take, do you suppose? Well, never mind," as the other hesitated, "I'll write you a check for a thousand dollars. No use being tight about such things.

"War is war," he concluded sagely. "If you need more, let me know. Besides, if you get into any difficulties I'll help you out. But for all purposes whatever you will allude to me simply as 'Jones,' the master mind behind the transaction. I won't get mixed up in it further than to put up the money. Get me? 'Jones!'"

It was arranged, shortly before the advent of the third youngster, that Goosebone should go fully credentialed before the local revolutionary junta and that what followed would be ably supported by the *Daily Journal*. The articles to be written about the enterprise, of course, would be left to the discretion of Goosebone, hereafter to be known as General Malcolm H. McGorglum, and Mr. Cline, the city editor. Goosebone himself was in doubt about the advisability of having anything at all in the daily print.

He was overruled a day or two later when King got wind of the venture.

"I hear up at the hotel that you are all mixed up with a revolutionary junta," said King, with a twinkle in his eye. "Come spin us the yarn."

"I can't," replied Goosebone. "If I do, I am a traitor to the cause and, besides, I'll land in jail."

"Snap out of it!" sneered King. "You are a heck of a newspaper man, if you don't. The other papers will beat us cold, the first thing you know, and then —— Well, you'll be looking for a job some time. We won't forget."

"I'd like to."

"What's going on?" demanded the city editor, drifting up at that moment. "Holding out on us, Goosebone?"

"I've got a pippin of a yarn, but I hesitate to spill it," declared McGorglum. "Believe me. it's a grand and glorious scoop, but it would be my finish."

"Tell papa," advised the city editor.

And in full detail, McGorglum told.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," declared Mr. Cline. "If you let King handle the story for a column spread, I'll put it in the 'hold-over' basket for nine days, and then make a 'scare' out of it. I think maybe we might give you an advance of two hundred dollars on it. What do you say?"

"I say 'be careful,'" replied Goosebone, "but go ahead. Money talks. Credit me with the scoop, too, will you? By the way, don't mention 'Jones.' He has to remain here to look after the bairns and he's the Alexander Hamilton of the budding republic. I don't want any one to offer a bounty on his pelt until I get home."

THE night when the nucleus of an expedition left on the nine forty-five train for the South, every reporter on the *Journal* staff was at the station, and nine days later the *Journal* astonished the world with the story of the threatened invasion.

Twenty days later, a wire was received from McGorglum stating that he was importing seventy-five cases of hardware, fully packed, into Guatemala, which brought out another spread on the front page. The "cases of hardware," of course, were men.

Those were thrilling days with the *Journal* staff. Everybody talked "McGorglum." Little paragraphs concerning his maneuvers to reach the Central American state leaked through from the Mexican *Herald* and were generously acclaimed. One of them, quite lengthy, quoted the "Liberator" as saying:

"In three more weeks we will launch our magnificent legions at the very heart of the tyrant. I fully expect to eat an old-fashioned Guatemalan boiled dinner in the president's palace on Christmas Day."

The interviewing correspondent declared that General McGorglum was dressed in a marine-blue uniform with gold facings and wore a gold-ornamented, high-crowned cap, with a yellow-and-cerise pompon. The correspondent continued:

He made a wonderful figure of the soldier-patriot. Tall and spare, with the battle spirit glinting from a pale-gray eye. I am assured from many quarters that he will sweep the Guatemalan army aside. McGorglum himself is full of confidence. He asserts the battle is already won and that the government is preparing to flee. I have it on the highest possible authority that the chief of the revolutionaries has completed arrangements for a triumphal entry at the head of his cohorts and

has planned to make an American, named Jones, secretary of the treasury, and another American, named King, secretary of state. Other cabinet officers will be named in a few days.

The following day, from the same source—evidently inspired—came word that the capital of Guatemala was rumored to be in a state of panic. Then came this astounding paragraph under a one-line heading:

DISORDERS IN GUATEMALA

MERIDA, September 16th.—A detachment of Guatemalan frontier police sent to the border by President Gonzalez y Ortega to-day swooped down upon a party of malcontents headed by an American, named McGorglum. All of the members of the party were placed under arrest and sent to the capital, to be tried on the charge of importing small arms into the republic without paying the customary tax. Information of the intended smuggling expedition was obtained from newspaper reports. McGorglum, on account of seditious utterances, will be shot, it is believed.

THERE was, at that time, in the city where the *Journal* was published, a saloon called the Turf & Field. There the reporters of all local newspapers forgathered after midnight for an hour of rest, meditation and vicarious amusement. Tales of mighty achievement went shuttling back and forth along the mahogany bar. Claims for a niche in the hall of fame were there filed and duly considered. It was an emporium of higher thought, but often tears were shed on account of unrighted wrongs, mingling with the icy, amber fluid in the foaming cup.

The biggest and best sessions of the week were held on Sunday night, or rather on Monday morning, between the hours of midnight and one. Solemn matters were taken up then. Reporters who had attended five or six churches of varying denominations during the day, and were fed up on conflicting views of spirituality, took this occasion to reorient themselves and resume normality. They laughed and slapped each other on the back, jollied Fritz Heinrico, the barkeeper, about his latest matrimonial adventure, listened with the deepest respect to his opinions on Billy Sunday, politics, social life and horse racing. He was far and away ahead of any barber in town when it came to dispensing information.

In eighteen years, it was said, he had never lost an argument when he bought drinks on the house.

It was Fritz who suggested that something ought to be done to get Goosebone McGorglum out of his predicament.

"I'll tell you what you do," he said. "Next Sunday night you guys call a mass meeting here in this place. Don't forget to bring the chief of police, so we can hold open all night, if necessary. Then we'll get down to business and see if we can't get the government to do something. Why, gosh, boys! McGorglum was one of the best citizens in the country, and a good customer. Always drank Scotch and paid for it.

"He never treated much, of course," he added apologetically. "We all know he was a little tight. But he did patronize this bar and we can't deny that he knew his cucumbers."

Since his incarceration in a Guatemalan prison, no word had come of General McGorglum. It was as though the earth had swallowed him without a pang, a condiment or a courteous word of compliment. Obviously Goosebone had found his way into one of those one-way hold overs for which the banana republics are famous. Sooner or later, no doubt, he would be led forth to die from the dread malady called musketry.

As a matter of fact, McGorglum was housed in as mean and smelly a dungeon as ever held a yokel who fell afoul of baronial law or lady's whim in the days of chivalry. He had dreamed somewhat of this in his diary, but his dreams there pictured solitude. He would have much preferred a lonely and sequestered donjon keep to being crated with men, women and children of Grade A disreputability.

Twice a day, a guard in a thin, white, loose-fitting uniform entered and filled a tin cup, which was Goosebone's only item of prison equipment, with a ladle full of red beans, and once a week several soldiers replenished the barrel of water and later played a hose on the prisoners. Not-

withstanding the heat, scanty food and dirt, children gurgled happily on the floor, men and women chatted interminably, and love blossomed where youthful eyes found response in mellow orbs, half hidden in the perpetual gloom.

AFTER a week of prison life, McGorglum was accorded a visit from the American consul and was informed that it was obvious to that high and mighty official that the situation was very bad indeed and that something *must* be done about it. Nothing was done and the consul never came back. He did send a Bible, however, so McGorglum, being a sturdy Scotch Presbyterian, found means to extract part of the iron that had entered his soul. The messenger who brought the Book took away with him a cablegram addressed to Albert King of the *Journal,* appealing for succor. It concluded as follows: "IF YOU FELLOWS DON'T GET BUSY COMMA I WILL BE SHOT SEMICOLON AND THEY WON'T MAKE ANY BONES OF IT STOP"

Albert King took the yellow slip with him to the reporters' mass meeting at the Turf & Field.

Every reporter who could get away from his assignment was present, when Fritz called the assemblage to order with a rap of the bung starter and the growled admonishment:

"Youse guys shut up, will yeh? We're goin' to get busy. Dis is on the house."

King read the cablegram and made a speech. He pointed out that McGorglum was a local celebrity and a hero of sundry parts. With lucid, and flowery, particularly articulate English, he painted the absent brother's hardy nature, tremendous literary talents and general decency as a member of the Fourth Estate. Then he began to ramble into a highly imaginary discussion of international politics and the inalienable right of every American citizen to meddle therein to his heart's content.

There was applause, slightly misplaced, when he told of the horrors of a Guatemalan jail. Fritz gleaned the row of empty steins and filled them up again. George Leader, political reporter, who still wrote his stuff in long hand and despised everybody who used a typewriter, followed and lauded Goosebone as a prophet whose conscientious meteorological research had saved millions to the Middle Western farmer. He thought he saw in the laxity of the state department the insidious hand of the jealous weather bureau and predicted there would be ghoulish laughter in high places when the firing squad had done its cruel work.

John Craig, of Sunday-feature fame, arose grandly after the fifth round. He appeared calm and tried to be intellectual, but he mixed his drinks and his geography, and at one time located the jail as far south as Venezuela.

"I hold no brief for the splendid character," he bawled, and hesitated long enough to take another sip from his glass. Then he shouted: "I am one who stands not in fear of any man! I speak my own mind, not knowing when the assassins of the perfidious Porfirio, who holds the Republic of Mexico"—applause—"will stab me in the back. Fill it up again!

"This perfidious Porfirio," Craig went on, "has the whole weather bureau on his pay roll. He would have me shot this minute if he heard me say so, but there it is! I fear no one. We will never have a free country until the shackles are shook off our feet. This man Goosebone was a hero and a patriot, and when he raised an army and went down there to Nicaragua——"

"Honduras," corrected King, pouring some more salt into his stein

"Honduras, or wherever it was. I wish you wouldn't interrupt me, King," Craig continued. "He was aiming his bayonets right at the heart of the weather bureau whose chief, I repeat, is no other than that ingrate Porfirio Diaz. Bartender, do your duty!"

Fritz filled them up and the oratory went on in a hoydenish flood far into early-morning hours. At three o'clock, the captain of that police precinct looked in, was given the assurance that liquor was not sold but given away in a good cause, wondered how the thing would end and if he oughtn't to call the "wagon," and finally withdrew. They drafted a telegram to the state department first demanding the immediate release of Goose-

bone McGorglum. But it didn't suit anybody, so they revamped it and addressed the appeal directly to the secretary of war.

UPON the demand of two thirds of the members present, this was redrawn, to be followed by a harangue to the postmaster general, urging him not to permit any weather-bureau maps to be circulated through the mails. Doug Meng was the first to think of the president as a possible resource and suggested the message be made strong. This was realized to be a ticklish step. Discord and even tears resulted. The original cablegram from Goosebone was read and reread with sundry flourishes.

Murphy intoned it pathetically. Enochs mouthed it in a deep bass. Finally, it was passed from hand to hand, and there was evidenced a general tendency to sleep over it then and there. Some voice began to inquire insistently if there wasn't to be another round. The floor was littered with paper on which were words and more words. These the porter gathered up in a great bale.

"What you-all goin' ter do wid dese all?" he demanded.

Bill Amick, who happened to be the addressee of these remarks, gulped and then waved his hand in the direction of the folding doors.

"Send 'em all," he commanded.

"Good Lawd! Who-all you sendin' 'em to?" gasped the porter.

"Send 'em all to the—the—the President of the United States," said Amick. "We want action. Meetin's adjourned until the president replies to each and every message of this august body. Fritz, call about fifty cabs! We're going home."

The next day the newspaper world went briskly about its business, dimly remembering that some vital step was taken in the McGorglum matter, but remembering nothing specific. Only the porter of the Turf & Field knew—and the trash-cart man who read some of the telegrams on his way.

Meanwhile, that sterling patriot, General McGorglum, languished and grew tired of coffee-colored companionship. He believed firmly that the end designed for him was sudden death with his back to a stone wall. The Bible turned out to be a great solace in time of need, and he read it industriously. Joseph, whom Pharaoh jailed, he sympathized with; also, Daniel in the lions' den. He perked up his ears as he noted with new and personal interest how each of those wily old-timers played upon the superstition or cupidity of their jailers to attain liberty. He thought day and night, striving for a plan. It wouldn't come. Not a chance to interpret a dream developed. The president of Guatemala spent dreamless nights, or if he did dream, forgot them the next morning, or said nothing about them to the Potiphars who lived in the palace.

One day a corporal and two men appeared and took McGorgium out of his prison and removed him to a solitary cell in a stone building with an inclosed courtyard. From his grated window, Goosebone could see a gray wall stuccoed on the inside. In places, the plaster had been pecked with bullets. He drew somber conclusions therefrom. A day or two later, the door opened and there was admitted to his cell another prisoner he had not seen before.

This man bore an unmistakable air of authority, and one look at his large flat feet convinced McGorglum that he was a detective, probably bent on obtaining a confession. Now, getting men to talk was McGorglum's own pet accomplishment, and before noon he was in possession of important information. He was to be shot as soon as the president became convinced he could get away with it, without bringing to pass an international incident.

"I don't like the way they take their own blessed time about everything else and then rush an execution," complained Goosebone. "It shows a low animal nature."

"Think of the expense it saves our already overtaxed citizens, and rejoice!" admonished his companion indifferently, rolling a cigarette.

McGorglum was peering listlessly out of the window, his eyes riveted on the government-building tower. Certain

flags were fluttering on a short mast above a device which looked much like a large pigeon crate.

THE Guatemalan, the Señor Toredos, assistant prefect of police, had seen the same thing often, but hadn't given it much thought. However, his prisoner read them with practiced ease out of cynical eyes as weather signals.

"A storm to-night," mused Goosebone. "A storm with a northwest wind driving the rain in torrents down unkempt, unsanitary streets. Nature intervenes and gives Guatemala a bath!"

"It would be the surprise if such a thing did occur," declared Toredos. "This is the arid season—just now."

But it did rain terrifically that evening—rained with a driving wind from the northwest. Gazing through the bars beside his ward, the native official could not suppress his astonishment.

"Are you a prophet?" he inquired.

"I can predict the weather—when things are right," admitted McGorglum. "In my own land I was famous for my prophecies."

He produced with pride from his pocket a bundle of frayed newspaper clippings which he translated painstakingly to Toredos. The name of Goosebone McGorglum appeared at the bottom of each. His custodian was visibly impressed.

"Could you tell me the lucky numbers in the lottery?"

"The lottery?"

"Day after to-morrow the drawing takes place. There is a fiesta in the Plaza de Bolivar and the president himself will draw the number at the palace, immediately after his speech there."

"Does he ever have dreams he thinks ought to be interpreted?"

"Never, so far as I know. But the lottery, señor?

"Let me see your tickets."

McGorglum took the large red squares of paper and held them to his forehead while he thought rapidly. He was thinking of Joseph and again of Daniel in the lions' den.

"Toredos," he declared solemnly, holding out his hand with a glowing smile, "you are a lucky dog."

"Aha! I shall win!" gurgled the Guatemalan.

"You win!"

"Do I get the grand prize?"

"Thousands of pesos are yours, Toredos. Without the turning of a hair, you are a rich man. ' 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd,' as *Hamlet* would put it, if you ask me."

The lightning flashed its blinding light into the cell and illuminated a sallow countenance gleaming like gold.

Then Toredos, fairly exploding with joy, clasped his prisoner in his arms and waltzed him around in the barbaric gyrations of one of his native dances. He thumped Goosebone on the back. He even kissed this condemned man, drunk with the anticipated pleasure of getting drunk later on, and there was nothing he was not in the mood to do, although with him moods were moods and passed rapidly.

"While you are effervescing on account of your good fortune," caustically reminded McGorglum, "let me notify you that I am under sentence to die. I need your help."

He paused and looked away into the path of the storm. A group of Chola women were clinging to their flying blankets and gazing eagerly at the distant government building.

"Why should they stand there in all that downpour?" he asked himself apathetically. "No one else is doing it."

He looked again and saw something. The tossing skirts displayed sturdy bare legs—hairy legs, and the dangling butts of rifles.

"No one else is doing it and that is the answer," McGorglum told himself, a great light dawning in his mind.

A conspiracy! Where could one be hatched with greater secrecy than on a street corner in a storm? They were plotting something that was to take place soon. The fiesta! The president would speak at the market after the lottery drawing. Those were not women, but men, and they would kill Gonzalez, this alleged tyrant.

"Toredos!" Goosebone exclaimed, turning suddenly upon the prefect and grasping his arm in a grip of steel. "You are

a lucky dog, indeed! You shall be minister of police. Honors will be heaped about you! Get out of this place and tell the president that I, General McGorglum, who also am a prophet, know of a disaster which will take place the day of the fiesta. He must not go to the Plaza de Bolivar if he values his sweet life. Tell him I said so, and I know what I'm talking about."

Toredos' face fell.

"How can he do otherwise when always it has been done? The people, if there really is a revolution afoot, will esteem him a coward if he refuses to face them. The president would be very angry should I tell him not to do so. He would laugh in my face."

"Then let me see him," demanded McGorglum. "I will tell him everything. I will even tell him how it may be that he can go to the fiesta and make his speech and they will not dare to touch him."

Toredos sighed.

"I will try," he promised, "but it is foredoomed to failure. I go because I have received my present great fortune at your hands. At least I feel as though I already had it," he amended thoughtfully. "Since you told me, I can see how just it would be of fate to give me the lucky number. Certainly I am the most worthy caballero in the republic!"

LATE that afternoon, a great, gray foreign-made car drew up before the prison and the soldier guard threw his shoulder against the iron door to usher in Don Emelio Hernando Ernesto Gonzalez y Ortega, president of Guatemala and doctor of laws.

He was a plumpish individual, was Don Emelio, with a wiry, upturned mustache and thick red lips, always slightly parted and showing a double row of moist white teeth. Good living and excellent grooming each had played a part in making his cosmos what it was—the personification of genial urbanity. A soft brown hand shot out and closed warmly about the dingy digits of the prisoner who had traveled all the way from a far country to accomplish his undoing.

"Hello!" beamed the president, in a deep voice. "You are Don Goosebone? I am glad to make with you the acquaintance. It might have been, but for my pests of police, that we had met differently. But what would you? The fortunes of war sometimes get funny with the best of us, Don Goosebone. You are in jail and I am still the first gentleman of Guatemala."

The pale Scotch eyes of the reporter twinkled humorously. He sort of liked this president.

"I who am about to die, salute you," he remarked. "After all, I don't know but that it is just as well to pass away decently before a firing squad, as by an assassin's bullet in the Plaza de Bolivar."

"I know about your predictions," declared President Gonzalez, shrugging, "but I shall have to speak to the people notwithstanding. Such is the custom of my country. If I dared not do it, even in the face of threats of violence, I could not maintain my position overnight."

"Listen then," said Goosebone. "I would give you some advice."

For nearly twenty minutes, the two talked in soft whispers, the president nodding his head knowingly and in acquiescence.

"And now," said he, after McGorglum had had his say, "what would you have in return for your services? For I shall do as you advise."

"An unpunctured person," returned the other. "That and a safe conduct beyond the border."

"I see your sporting spirit," declared the president urgently. "I suppose you are willing to wager your life that the information is correct?"

"I am. If I am not, then I don't care to live."

"Fairly spoken. I yield to your pride," declared the hospitable Don Emelio. "If what you have said is a sheer prophecy and not information given by a traitor to save his neck, you will be safely conducted and you will not go empty-handed."

The president paused. "Do you trust Toredos?" he asked suddenly.

"I believe he is my friend," replied McGorglum, not without reason.

"Let him be the judge then, as to whether it is prophecy inspired by

Heaven, or the devil, or the forced confession of a traitor. I am content to leave it thus, though I should be more careful. I know that he leans mightily to your side. Day after to-morrow we shall see, and I shall conduct myself exactly as you have advised, not doubting, by the way, that things will turn out as you expect. You see, I know my people!"

IT was hardly to be expected that Goosebone would be turned out of his cell and left to his own devices. And this did not happen. However, he was removed under guard to a suite in the palace, given an excellent bath and a change of clothing. Also a servant waited upon him at mealtimes and the food that found its way to his board was wholesome and appetizing. He could hear the band play from a lofty platform in the park in the evening, and see an endless procession of beautiful automobiles on parade below his grilled window.

Goosebone, always romantically inclined, would have been immensely happy in his new surroundings and with his goodly prospects of being released, had it not been for one thing After the departure of the president, he suddenly remembered a humorous gleam in the eyes of his excellency when he placed his fate in the hands of the prefect of police. Goosebone recalled that he had predicted to Toredos that he would win the grand prize. Well, Toredos had one chance in about a million to win. If he lost, his disappointment would be great, exceeded only by his desire for revenge on the gringo who had duped him.

When McGorglum thought of this aspect of his case, beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead and his feet turned cold. He was not to learn, until long afterward, that a very auspicious thing was, at that very moment, on its way to happen.

The evening before the fiesta, Henry P. Dangerfield, president of the Central American Fruit and Product Company and of the *Daily Journal*, having responded to the urge of his conscience, appeared in the city, took supper with his excellency and heard in detail the story of McGorglum's fight for freedom When Dangerfield learned of the reporter's promise to Toredos, his face grew grave, and, before midnight, he had summoned the prefect to his suite and handed him a certified slip of paper on which he personally undertook to underwrite the potency of the prediction that Toredos would win the grand prize.

He was not a charitable man, this Dangerfield, but it had occurred to him that a little money spent now might keep him from paying through the nose later on. His heart glowed within his pongee suit when he left for Panama City the following morning, without waiting to apprise McGorglum of his timely liaison with Fate.

The Plaza de Bolivar was jammed with people hours before the time came for the appearance of the president. Thoustands of those present, no doubt, were revolucionarios and bent on mischief. One could not tell which were friends and which foes of the administration in the ruck and riot of colored ponchos, for the skies were overcast and rain again imminent.

A large official car drew up at the speakers' stand at precisely four o'clock. Eyes snapped in eager excitement and brown hands vindictively fingered revolvers and rifles cleverly hidden beneath the blankets. But it was only Toredos.

The prefect mounted the stand and raised his hand gracefully for silence

"The president, the illustrious Don Emelio Hernando Ernesto Gonzalez y Ortega, first magistrate of Guatemala and doctor of laws," he proclaimed grandiosely, "is on his way to pronounce his annual oration! Prepare to receive your president with vivas befitting his high station."

A rumble of disapproval with an undertone of hisses greeted the announcement.

Toredos raised his hand again to calm the multitude.

"His excellency," he declared "already has drawn the lucky numbers of the lottery. The minor prizes he will declare at this place, for he has retained the numbers. The grand-prize slip, however, he has seen fit to destroy and its

secret is locked within his official bosom. When he has safely returned to his palace, amid roars of your vivas, he will make the number known to me and I shall post it here. Prepare to receive your popular and esteemed president."

It took the crowd a few seconds to digest the import of what they had just heard. Every person there was interested in the grand prize. Every man, woman and half-grown child in the republic was at that minute clutching, with the hand which did not hold a Martini or a machete, the reddish-brown ticket of the national lottery. Each hoped fervently that the lightning of fortune would strike him or her in the depleted pocketbook. The Cholas and half-breeds began to murmur and then to break up into chattering groups.

There couldn't possibly be an assassination of the president that afternoon. Did not the Señor Prefect announce that the secret would remain locked in the bosom of Gonzalez until he returned safely to the palace? Ha! A bright one, was this Don Emelio! He had discovered a strategy better than a thousand coats of mail to protect his excellency from bullet and knife. And he was brave, too! Evidently he knew all about the projected revolution and yet there wasn't a soldier or a policeman in sight.

"Viva el presidente!" roared the throng.

A cavalcade was coming down the street—the president's magnificent car traveling slowly, surrounded with the perfunctory khaki-clad soldiers of his guard.

"Viva Gonzalez!"

He made his speech ring from the platform that day, did this urbane and rotund little first magistrate, and all the time his teeth gleamed moistily between his full red lips. He laughed at them from the grand stand, as many a politician has laughed elsewhere when he has thwarted a popular impulse.

There was another thunder of vivas as his entourage swept away and out of the cheering thousands.

The tossing breeze of late afternoon bore the acclamations dimly to the ears of General Goosebone McGorglum, who had been given his liberty that very morning, on parole, pending the decision of Toredos.

McGorglum, mounted on a stolen burro, was making for the mountains.

A fat wallet and a decoration for supreme merit were waiting for him, did he but know. And he was fleeing from the wrath of the prefect, who happened not to be worrying at all about the outcome of the lottery. Toredos already had cashed in his certificate for twenty thousand pesos and was engaged in letting the rest of the world go by, without let or hindrance.

THREE years later, one Sunday midnight, the reporters of the daily press were "setting 'em up" at the bar of the Turf & Field, when in walked Goosebone McGorglum. He was lanky, sunburned and his clothes looked as though he had walked all the way from San Francisco. King saw him first and shouted gladly as he seized him by the shoulders—the prophet who was not without honor in his own bailiwick.

"Goosebone!" he yelled.

"Peel off your coat," snarled Goosebone belligerently. "We're going to fight!"

"Fight nothing!" shrieked King. "Why you lucky hound, the Republic of Guatemala has erected a statue to you in the yard of the president's own palace, and the city editor has been holding a check signed by a guy named Gonzalez for ten thousand dollars—made out to you. Set 'em up! What's the weather prognostication, old-timer?"

"Moist locally, to-night. Fair and dry as the dickens from now on," replied the canny Scot. "Loan me a fiver, King. I came all the way from Mexico City to lick you, but I guess I'll have to admit that I am no militarist. Better phone the old man and tell him I'm on the job, as soon as I can find a cheap rooming house. Hoist!"

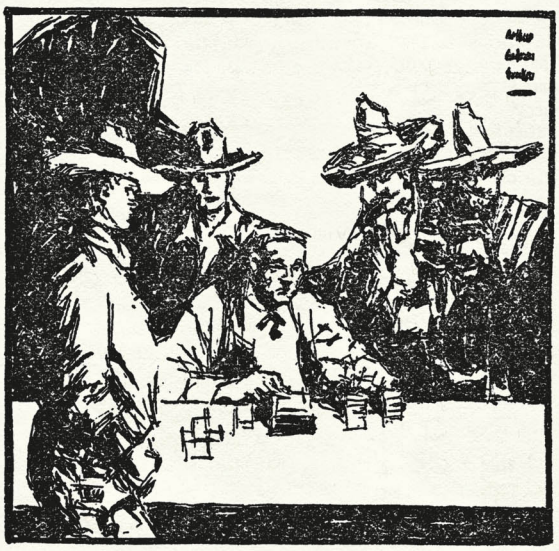
Lightnin' Calvert

By

W. B. M. FERGUSON

Author of
"Garrison's Finish,"
"The Dumb-bell,"
"Deep Water," Etc.

In Six Parts—Part IV.



THE STORY

Although white, Peter Calvert was raised by foster parents in an Indian tribe. The tragic death of Star Eyes, his foster sister, sent him to the land of the paleface, seeking vengeance. He met "Colonel" Moon, a card sharper, with whom he formed an alliance. After traveling in the West for a while, the two went to New York. There Moon unsuccessfully tried to establish a claim that Peter was the natural son of a Major Gracie, prominent in New York politics, and whose son, Freddy, Peter had met en route to the East. Moon and Peter now went into vaudeville with a shooting act, for Peter was an expert with a gun. Meanwhile, Peter learned that Major Gracie was mixed in with grafting politicians. He undertook to expose the major by obtaining certain incriminating ledgers, but was frustrated by hired gangsters. In the fracas, Moon was killed. A marked man, Peter returned to the West, where his fame as a gun fighter grew, until he became known as "The Lightnin' Bug." At the town of Timberly, he had an encounter with a gambler who, while trying to shoot Peter, was himself killed by Peter's famous "mirror shot." The dead man was Freddy Gracie. Sick of gun fighting, Peter rode on to Sagebrush, a near-by town. There, in a dispute with "Flash" Ullman, a desperado, he was wounded. Julie Vickers and her uncle, owners of the general store, took care of him. When he was convalescent, he was told that his mother, whom he had thought dead, was present. She proved to be Mrs. Gracie, now blind, who had come from New York to find her wayward son, Freddy, after the major had deserted her. She had mistaken Peter for her dead son, but Peter carried on the deception for her sake, planning to care for her with the devotion she had never known. When Peter was well again, Mrs. Gracie suggested that they buy an interest in the Vickers store. Peter could not reasonably object, although he would be running the danger of recognition by those who knew him as a desperado.

CHAPTER XIX.

PAID IN GOLD.

THE town of Sagebrush had to revise its opinion of Freddy Gracie, though that revision was in no sense drastic nor even flattering. They did not suspect that Freddy Gracie was really Peter Calvert, "The Lightnin' Bug," though there was always a chance that this would be discovered. They conceded that the Freddy Gracie they knew, and saw before them, had been saddled unjustly with the vices and sins of another, but wrongdoing denotes at least a certain strength of character, even if misdirected. It takes courage to do evil as well as good, and some of us are law-abiding merely because we lack the pluck to be otherwise. Denuded of this, Freddy stood revealed simply as a pretender and prevaricator.

His fear of firearms—a very real fear whose inward meaning none knew but himself—became self-evident, as did his careful avoidance of everything that might lead to their display. He carried no weapon, and therefore no one could or did believe for a moment the tales of his Nevada daring that Mrs. Gracie was never tired of voicing. He did not gamble; he did not drink; he did not swear, while an occasional cigarette took the place of the strong "terbaccer" chewed so assiduously and universally. In short, his proper place was behind a shop counter.

"There's some fellers made for that sort of thing and who ain't good fur nothin' else," said Biggart. "Freddy's one of 'em. He's a real lady."

They had to admit that he knew his business, though. While the pessimists sat back waiting for the shop to fail or for Freddy to elope with the joint capital, the new administration began to prove a success. It was hard work. Freddy was on the job early and late, behind the counter or down at the freight station, turning his hand to anything that needed doing and working in perfect harmony with Julie. One of his first actions, after consultation with the girl, was to erect a large sign in the store that was destined to become famous and to be copied elsewhere. It read:

IN GOD WE TRUST AND NOBODY ELSE.

"Pop" Vickers, while all too conscious of the bad debts he had succeeded in piling up, was frightened at the audacity of this.

"We can't refuse a neighbor credit," he said. "They'll refuse to trade."

"Let them," said Julie. "Better no trade than no pay, and we haven't so much to lose as it is. Whatever we do get must be sound. We're starting on a new basis. It's Freddy's idea, and he's right."

Mrs. Gracie agreed. She was showing a shrewd head for business.

"This isn't like a town where you can get bank references or count on customers having stable employment. There's a floating population, too—people who are here to-day and gone to-morrow. I think it's necessary to have a policy like that, though it needn't be enforced against every one. And, of course, you can work far cheaper and better on a cash basis."

"It not only does away with bad debts," said Peter, "but a lot of clerical work. We can afford to cut prices, because we haven't to pay for that or add anything to cover interest and bad debts. The giving of credit is one of the biggest problems of any business, and, of course, none can be conducted without it. At present, we've got to do something drastic. That sign is for the general customer, and those we offend we're better without. We know there are men like 'Doodah' Day, 'Pod' Tupman, Jase Webb, 'Pretzels' Stein, whose credit is good, but we also know there are others who've no intention of paying, except with promises."

"You've been a philanthropist long enough, Uncle John," said Julie. "Let somebody else try it. There are people here, quite able to pay, who have practically lived off you for years. They've money for gambling and drink, but not for you. This needn't stop us from being charitable, but we'll keep it separate from business. The two don't mix, and there could be no charity if there was no business."

"Well," said Pop, plucking at his goatee, "it's certainly a new thing for Vickers' store, and I haven't a doubt but you're right. But I'm wondering how I'll have the nerve to ask spot cash from, say, Sam Biggart or Joe Sidebottom. It'll scare me and them most to death."

"That's the advantage of having partners and a sign like that," returned Peter. "All you have to do is point to that sign, heave a sigh and say that nothing would please you more than to let them add to their debts, but that your partners have outvoted you on this new policy. You can do nothing but obey. It's hard to place individual responsibility in a company or corporation; the other fellow is always to blame. But I don't mind being responsible for this thing."

"No," said Julie, "it's share and share

alike, thanks to your and your mother's generosity, and that includes responsibility. We've the right to do what we please with our own business, run it any way we think best. We aren't compelling people to trade, and it will be cash from now on, except in such cases as we decide."

PETER, however, was held responsible for the new policy which aroused consternation and indignation in the sturdy breasts of those who had come to look on Vickers' store as a sort of public philanthropic institution.

"I never heard nothin' like it in all my born days!" declared "Uncle Joe" Sidebottom, his tobacco-stained beard trembling with emotion. "I've knowed this yere town when it was only a whistlin' post——"

"Ye did not! I was here long afore ye," contradicted Mr. Webb, who had left the forge for his morning stimulant. "I'm the original inhabitant of this yere place, Joe Sidebottom. I remember it when the old Santy Fe Trail used to start from Independence 'stead of Westport——"

"I know it long afore that!" shouted Uncle Joe. "I knowed it afore Franklin was wiped out by the Missouri, when the trail run from Franklin to Taos. I did so! And I've patternized Vickers' store since it fust set up, when there was nothin' and nobody here but Jack Vickers and me. He'd have failed, only fur me. I patternized him; I made him what he is to-day——"

"A bankrupt!" snorted Mr. Webb. "Yes, I reckon you did."

"I've patternized him faithful and dutiful," continued Mr. Sidebottom, ignoring the remark. "I bought off'n him day in and day out fur more years than you ever was here, Jase Webb And what sort of gratification does he show me? What gratification do I get? Why, I git nothin' 'less I pay cash down! It's a public outrage to treat the fust inhabitant like that. It's all the doin's of this mean young varmint, Freddy, who's tryin' to ruin the town."

But Sam Biggart was more than indignant; he was temporarily paralyzed, and, following a futile argument with Pop, he went looking for Peter, whom he found down near the freight office. Samuel was breathing murder and sudden death. He, who also claimed to be the first citizen of the town, the representative of law and order, had been mortally insulted, his feelings "wownded." The Vickers would not have dared to act thus unless compelled by the weight of the Gracie money. By the beard of General Grant, he'd teach Freddy a lesson! He'd eat him alive. The town came running, anticipating much pleasure from this meeting of braggart and coward.

But the town soon discovered that Freddy possessed moral courage if not physical, just as Biggart discovered that it takes two to make a fight. Or, rather, Freddy, so the town believed, had the courage of the weak, the sort of courage a woman shows when she knows a man won't strike her.

Doctor Day did not subscribe to this belief; there was something at the back of Freddy's smiling eyes, his calm reception of the threats, imprecations and gestures, that escaped all but him. But then Freddy had intrigued him from the first. Freddy was a puzzle worth studying. Day was not at all sure that anybody, even Mrs. Gracie, had really solved him.

Sam Biggart was in his element against this insignificant opponent. Several teamsters urged him on, with jeering side remarks about the peril of tackling such a ferocious creature as Freddy, and this added to the deputy's emotion. He flourished his gun, offered to fight Freddy blindfold, cursed, implored, threatened, threw his hat on the ground and jumped on it, cracked his heels and said he was a curly wolf, a living devastation from the mountains of Moab that could lick his weight in wild cats. He would crack Freddy across his knee, pluck the marrow from his craven bones and throw them to the coyotes. Frontier braggadocio was lurid in those days, and Biggart was a master of it.

"There ain't nobody, let alone a city counterjumper, who can git high-heeled with me," he concluded. "There ain't nobody who can insult me 'thout

payin' fur it. Step out here, you pore, short-horned maverick, and take yore medicine!"

"No, thanks, I'm not a fighting man, Mr. Biggart," said Peter seriously. "I don't believe in fighting, but if I did, I think I should be very foolish to try conclusions with such a well-known warrior as you. And it wouldn't do you any credit to maim or kill such an inferior opponent as myself. I'm not ashamed that this is so and there's no reason why I should be. Fighting is your business, while trading is mine. I could beat you buying or selling a yard of flannel, just as you could beat me with your fists or a weapon. Every man to what he's been brought up or what he can do best."

"Well, there's some sense in that," admitted Biggart, mollified by the public tribute to his prowess. "You ain't got the sperrit of a fighter. All the same, that don't give you no call to insult a man who is a fighter. You can't do it 'thout takin' the consequences. I goes into Vickers' store to-day to buy me a flannel shirt——"

"I know," said Peter. "The cash policy is mine, Mr. Biggart, but no insult was intended to you or anybody. Trading is my business, and, as I can't buy anything without money, I can't sell anything without it. We can only buy cheaply if we pay promptly, and we can't pay promptly unless customers pay promptly. We're not in business for our health or to make another failure, and there never should have been a failure if Pop had been paid what he's owed."

"Good for you, Freddy!" said a burly teamster named Farrell.

"And I hope some of those present will take it to heart," added Doctor Day.

"We're perfectly willing to give credit to those who've proved a credit to this town, for the man who doesn't try to pay his way isn't a credit to any place," continued Peter. "We aren't going to extend credit to those who've made no attempt to pay what they owe. Promises don't pay any bills."

"If I ain't paid Pop the few dollars I may happen to owe him, it's simply because I ain't thought of it," said Biggart. He saw that the majority of those present were against him, but he was a fair-minded man at heart and Freddy had put the matter in a hitherto-unconsidered light.

"I don't doubt that," said Peter. "I'm sure that thoughtlessness has been responsible in most cases. Somehow, it's easy to get the idea that a store doesn't have to pay bills like any one else. And Pop's been too sensitive about asking for what's due him. But I'm not. I'm the guardian of Miss Julie's money, as well as my mother's and my own, and I'm going to collect on those old debts. Those who don't make some attempt to settle will have to go elsewhere for their goods.

"We're going to try and make Vickers' Store one of the finest in Texas, and that means that Sagebrush will be one of the finest towns," he went on. "What benefits us will benefit you, and we ask for your help and coöperation. The easiest and quickest way to bring the railroad here is to have a town worth coming to, and the only way to achieve that is by hard work, pulling all together, and a fair deal all round."

THERE were ironic cheers, and a gruff voice, owned by a beetle-browed man in a frock coat and red-flannel shirt, said:

"We don't need the likes of you tellin' us what to do. Mind yer own business, Freddy, and we'll mind ourn. This town is good enough fur us as she is and as she always has been, and if you don't like it, you can light a shuck outa here. The sooner the better."

"Now you're shoutin'," said a blue-jowled man at his elbow.

The first speaker was Tim Scoby of the Lone Star saloon, the second his henchman, Burke.

"I see nothin' to brag about in this yere town, Scoby," spoke up Farrell. "If it's good enough for you and Burke, that don't say it's good enough for us all. And it don't foller, neither, that what's good fur your trade is good for everybody's. I guess, if we're ever to git anywhere, we could do with less drinkin' and gamblin' and more workin'."

"There's no question of that," said Day.

"Well, you set the example, Doodah," jeered Scoby. "Knock off on the bottle, doc, and we'll believe it. And, speakin' of payin' bills, I'm open any time to receive somethin' on account. That goes for more'n you, too. I guess Freddy ain't the only one who's got a right to draw the credit line."

Day flushed painfully.

"All right, Scoby," he said. "But the next time your head's opened with a bottle, you can get somebody else to sew it up."

This incident was destined to have far-reaching results, for Peter had said things in his impromptu speech which many of those present had been thinking for some time, even if unconsciously. He had stirred emotions, awakened thoughts, fired ambitions. He himself might be a negligible factor, yet, as is often the case, he proved the instrument which set in motion certain powerful forces, as the falling pebble may start an avalanche.

He had struck a spark of civic pride that, feeble though it was, waxed at length into a steady flame. He had divided the town, brought into the open and hardened the views of those who had the makings of good citizens and those who had not; those who really hoped to make something of the town some day, and those who did not care, who saw in it simply a place for making money, for catering to all that was worst in humanity.

"He's a womern," said Sam Biggart, referring to the incident, "and a man can't fight with a womern. He's a womern with a womern's ideas, but all the same I'm free to admit that there's somethin' in them. And though I'm only a dep'ty, it's my dooty to be on the side of law and order and the promulgation of civilization. I'll set an example to these fellers that ain't paid Pop Vickers. And by grab, if I've got to pay, I'll see that they do, too! You betcha!"

Thanks to Biggart's example, coupled with the very dire threat of supplies being cut off, together with Peter's mild but persistent efforts, a good percentage of what Pop had looked on as hopelessly bad debts began to be transformed into liquid assets. Even Uncle Joe Sidebottom dug down into his well-lined jeans, for, retiring early from the California gold fields with a small fortune, his sponging was not the outcome of necessity, but habit. As the putative oldest inhabitant, he chose to believe that the town should consider it a duty and honor to contribute to his support.

HE paid under protest and with much inward agony, but he paid—temporarily at least.

"Thar, take that, drat ye!" he said, flinging a buckskin bag of gold dust at the astonished Pop. "Weigh her up and gimme what's left after toting up yer books. And don't ye go chargin' me no interest, nuther, you bald-headed old vulture, you! This yere town has come to a nice pass when the fust inhabitant is dunned like he was a crook. I'm cruelly disapp'inted in ye, Jack Vickers, after me patternizin' ye like I done. I be'n on yer books fur fifteen years and more. I were the fust pusson on em——"

"But I ain't dunned you, Joe. In fact, I never expected you to settle up. That's whatever."

"Ye didn't, hey?" shouted Mr. Sidebottom, his stained white beard almost horizontal with indignation. "Mebbe ye think that that big-mouthed Sam Biggart's the only pusson in this yere town who can pay his debts, hey? Mebbe ye think I'm like them bums that patternize the Lone Star? Mebbe ye think Tim Scoby has a holt on me like he has on Doodah and a lot others? Drat ye, I'll show ye, Jack Vickers!"

Breathing heavily, Sidebottom produced a much larger bag and threw it on the counter.

"Thar, take it all out, every cent of it," he commanded with a regal gesture. "The hull fifteen years, Jack Vickers. Let it be known that I've patternized ye fur nothin'. I make ye a present of all my trade's done fur ye. Go on, weigh her up."

"I can't," said the paralyzed Pop. "I ain't got no record of it, Joe. It takes me all my time to keep track of one year, let alone fifteen."

"Ha!" said Mr. Sidebottom. "It's likely, then, I don't owe ye nothin' Howsomever, no matter. Keep that thar bag and I'll 'low the account's squar', even if she ain't. Thar ain't nothin' mean about me and I never was a haggler, Jack Vickers."

He quickly pouched the larger bag. The account was by no means square, as none knew better than Uncle Joe, but he made a great parade of generosity, even prodigality, and forbearance.

"No, ye ain't dunned me," he admitted, "but that ain't sayin' nobody else has. Sam Biggart's as good as threatened me, and even Doodah 'lowed he mightn't fix my rheumatics 'less I squared up. Pod Tupman wouldn't play checkers or stand treat, and Stein wouldn't let me set in my reg'ler seat, and he give me pizen, 'stead of whisky, that near ruined my vitals. I be'n conspired against by the hull lot. Nice treatment fur the fust inhabitant!"

"I know nothin' about it," protested Pop.

"But that varmint, Freddy, does," said Mr. Sidebottom. "It's all his doin's. He's demoralizin' this yere town. And, bein' a womern, he fights like a womern, which is to say he gits others to do the fightin' fur him. But," he concluded magnanimously, "he gits you to do what he says, too, and so I ain't holdin' ye responsible. He's got the money holt over ye and ye can't help yourself. And that bein' the case, and havin' showed ye I can pay fur anythin', I'll continue to patternize ye. Ye may gimme that thar side of bacon and some coffee and beans and terbaccer. And I need me a new pair of pants——"

He gave a handsome order and retired triumphantly with the goods before Pop realized that he had made no attempt to pay for them.

CHAPTER XX.

THE JACKAL.

FROM dealing cards over a table to selling goods over a counter; from being one of the most notorious characters the Far West had ever known to being the insignificant joint keeper of a small country store; from the reputation of killer to that of coward. The change was sweeping, and in the beginning Peter had smiled derisively at himself. It was a game, a burlesque, a quixotic piece of sentiment, a matter of paying the debt he owed Mrs. Gracie, atoning for the death of her son. Fate had dealt him the hand and he would play it for all it was worth, as he had learned to play every hand, good or bad, but it could be done in a detached manner without enlisting his real interest or stirring the deeper emotions. Thus he had played many a hand.

It was a game, a joke—the town, the people, himself. Everything secretly amused him, especially the attitude of Julie Vickers. Their verbal sparring matches promised to be a source of constant delight. They helped to make the situation tolerable. He did not consider the future nor how it was all to end. He never had; he was content to live from day to day, from hand to mouth, taking what the fates sent. But no doubt when Mrs. Gracie had gone the way of all flesh and time had dimmed the memory of Freddy's death, he should go back to the old life, the life of the cards, the bottle, the gun.

He had no abiding faith in human nature nor his own reformation; at best, it could be only reformation, not regeneration, and a temporary affair. He had been caught in the backwash of pathos and swept into this thing; when the necessity was removed, he would slump back into the old ways, the only ways he really knew. Perhaps he should not even have the character to wait until Mrs. Gracie were dead. Why, she might live to be a hundred!

Such was Peter's initial view, born of cynical experience, even while his liking for sympathy for Mrs. Gracie was real and true, his regret at Freddy's death sincere.

But he had reckoned neither with the power of propinquity and environment nor the deep, unplumbed depths of his own heart. Like many of us, he was made of finer stuff than he thought. To his astonishment, he soon began to find more than a source of amusement or

ridicule in the town and its people, more than an impersonal interest in the situation, more than sympathy for Mrs. Gracie, more in Julie Vickers than entertainment.

As he made new discoveries about Sagebrush and its people, so did he make new discoveries about himself. As he got to know them better, so did he get to know himself better. He uncovered and brought to light hitherto-unsuspected qualities and abilities, hopes and ambitions, thoughts and impulses. He found himself wanting to play the game not merely for Mrs. Gracie's sake, but for his own. He found himself anxious to make the store a success, not merely to help the owners nor to justify his participation, but for the sake of success itself.

He found himself for the first time in his life struggling toward a goal that could be gained, not by an appeal to fortune or mere physical dexterity nor by exploiting the failings and weaknesses of others, but by the utilization of all the faculties of heart and mind that were his. He was no longer a strutter on the stage, a roving gambler, but a business man on whose success or failure much, very much, depended. And with this new sense of responsibility there came a new feeling for the town and its people. In his talk with Sam Biggart, Peter had struck a spark of civic pride not only from others, but from himself.

He found himself regarding with repugnance and dismay the thought of ever returning to the aimless, shiftless life he had once led. How much time he had wasted; how little of worth he had accomplished! He had benefited none, not even himself. He found that there could be as much excitement and more sustained interest in running a legitimate business than in staking a fortune on the turn of a card. Every day brought him new problems to solve, new hazards to face, new demands on brain and brawn. Also, it required at least as much skill and far more stamina. It was no picnic even with the new capital, this putting Vickers' store on its feet and making a success of chronic failure.

HE found that time, rather than dimming the memory of Freddy Gracie's death, made it stand out clearer and clearer in more uncompromising, damning colors, as his own moral eyesight sharpened. He thought a great deal about it, no doubt too much. It seemed to be ever before his eyes. And he found that the repugnance he had taken to firearms and all forms of physical violence also increased, instead of diminished. It had, indeed, become a sort of horror. He found himself lying awake of nights thinking of all these things, planning for the store and the town. And always his thoughts came back to his active partner, Julie Vickers. By George, she was a partner worth having! The man would be lucky who got her as a partner for life. No doubt it would be Doctor Day.

Peter had reason to believe that, though Day's neighborliness was proverbial, his constant visits were inspired by something warmer than mere friendship. Julie and he were always off in a corner, talking confidentially, when opportunity offered; they seemed to have something between them that no one else shared, nor did they make any pretense of hiding their obvious liking for each other. Well, that was as it should be, and Julie might have any one she pleased.

The town was not conspicuous for young and eligible suitors, but Sam Biggart and Pod Tupman, among others, would have been only too glad to officiate in that rôle. Nor were her admirers confined to Sagebrush; more than one puncher, as Peter shrewdly suspected, visited the store more for the sake of seeing Julie than buying anything.

Perhaps the girl herself suspected this and was not above profiting by it, though in no sense did she make a business of charming. She was just her natural self, pleasant and obliging to one and all, but never forgetting why she was behind the counter. And those who came to dally, under the pretense of inquiring for letters, soon learned their mistake. As the store began to flourish and its new reputation was noised abroad, this circle of admirers naturally increased.

But Day, so Peter saw, still had the inside track, for Julie was not the sort to discard old friends for new. Day was an educated man, a lovable character, and, though nearly twice the girl's age, by no means lacking in romantic charm and appeal. A fine-looking man if he troubled to take some care of his person, a man who might be anything if he quit the bottle.

"Why don't you get him to pull up and make something of himself?" he asked the girl one day. "Oh, I know that curing habits like his isn't any cinch, but I guess he'd do for you what he'd do for no one else."

"Do you think I haven't tried?" she asked, coloring faintly. "I've said what I could, and so has my uncle; but he only laughs. I only wish something *could* be done before it's too late. He's his own worst enemy, and so good and kind that everybody imposes on him. He never thinks of sending in a bill, and precious few ever think of paying him. He would go anywhere at any time for anybody who was sick and never ask for a penny."

Apparently she had been waiting for such an opening as this, for she added:

"He could stop drinking so much if he wanted to—I mean it isn't a disease with him—but he just doesn't seem to care. He's in debt to that man, Scoby, as you heard the other day, though it should be the other way round. Stein's a different type and he won't sell a man more than is good for him, but Scoby doesn't care how he makes money. He encourages people to drink and gamble themselves into debt, and then they go on paying and drinking and gambling, never getting clear. He has acquired a lot of property that way, for, of course, he comes down sooner or later for the last penny. I think most of the trouble in this town really starts at the Lone Star."

Peter nodded. He had discovered that the most influential citizen of Sagebrush was not Mr. Sidebottom nor Jason Webb, Sam Biggart or Stein or Tupman, though each and all might think they were, but Mr. Timothy Scoby. An unobtrusive gentleman who was seldom seen outside his own premises, and whose sole public utterance was confined, perhaps, to the remarks he had leveled at Freddy, his influence was none the less potent because it was unseen and little understood. And it was not a good influence.

INDEED, it might be said with truth that the Come Inn represented the best type of frontier saloon, the Lone Star the worst. It was a hard-riding, hard-living age, and even Julie Vickers regarded many things with toleration that the present age has come to frown upon—at least officially. There was no inherent evil in a man taking a drink or placing a bet; the test of virtue and manhood was to do both, if need be, in moderation, prove the master and not the slave.

The frontier was not a place where weaklings were hedged round with protective legislation; either they fought everything, including their own failings, and won out—or they went to the wall. The survival of the fittest, moral as well as physical. A stern code but one by which the empires of the world have been built.

That Peter was a total abstainer proved no particular virtue in Julie's eyes, any more than that he refrained from brawls. Indeed, it seemed to be another of those characteristics that exasperated her more than she cared to admit. He was proving a splendid partner and he had shown undoubted courage of a sort; day by day, as fresh demands were made on him, he brought out new stores of amiability, energy, resourcefulness, diplomacy. But these were all qualities that a woman might possess.

He was too amiable, too diplomatic; she would have liked to see him throw an obnoxious character into the street—or at least try to—instead of reasoning cleverly with him. He was an admirable business associate, a devoted son, a considerate and entertaining companion—but he was not a man.

Perhaps the root of the trouble lay in the fact that some women, consciously or not, liked to tame and reform the

devil in a man, especially if he be young and attractive, and that Julie had discovered there was no devil in Freddy to reform. She could not forgive the deficiency. He had promised much in that respect and performed nothing.

Thus it was no puritanical prejudice that caused her to hold the opinion of the Lone Star that she did. She had formed a very accurate idea of Tim Scoby.

"He's not a bad man, as we know the term out here," she said, "for that takes courage of a sort. He's just mean and vile. He has henchmen like that chucker-out, Burke, to do his fighting. He works underground all the time, attending strictly to business, and that business is grabbing other people's property. If he keeps on like this, by the time the railroad comes and the town amounts to anything, he'll own about everything. The owners will have drunk or gambled it away to him. He has ruined many people and he'll ruin more if something isn't done.

"You know, of course, that Doctor Day has one of the best properties around here, but he won't have it long at this rate. That's the trouble; it's not merely the worst people that Scoby gets into his clutches, but the best. He exploits their vices and failings for his own ends. And the Bargendy gang wouldn't be quite so overbearing and arrogant when they come here, if it wasn't for the Lone Star. Others are afraid of them, but at least they don't pander to them like Scoby."

"No, he hasn't a good influence," said Peter. "We'll have to consider means of combating it."

"Oh, there's nothing *you* could do," she replied kindly but emphatically.

Peter, however, thought otherwise, though he said nothing further. He called at Day's house that night and, learning he had gone down to the Lone Star, proceeded to the Come Inn, where he knew that Sam Biggart, Pod Tupman, Bob Farrell and Jase Webb would be having their usual game of draw.

Stein did not run a gambling parlor, his business being confined to serving food and drink; but he supplied cards and checkers to those who wished. Peter often dropped in after hours to have a soft drink and to watch the card play, of which he professed to know little or nothing. The habitués of the Come Inn had begun to like him, even respect him in a sense, and if they joshed him and said, "Tell us about this yere turrible fight you had with them desperadoes up in Nevada, Freddy. How many was it you killed?" or "What have you done with all that hardware you used to pack?" it was with a new note of friendliness and good humor.

THEY had begun to respect him. Indeed, an element of protection had crept into their attitude, first voiced by Farrell, the teamster. None suspected that, apart from being the boss gunman of the West, Freddy knew all the gutter-fighting tricks of the old Bowery and that his quite ordinary-looking figure was most extraordinary in action. It was steel and whalebone, India-rubber and chain lightning.

Had they but known, no man ever stood in less need of protection. He could balance the two legs of a four-legged table on his knees and with his teeth alone—the white teeth that looked so pretty—raise the other end until it stood level. He could bite through a tin cup with ease. These were favorite stunts of famous frontier fighters in the open days, when a man's teeth were useful for more than eating.

"I say, Mr. Biggart," began Peter, after watching a hand or two, "I'm sorry to disturb your game, but duty must come before pleasure, and I've a duty for you to perform, if you'll be so kind."

Biggart laughed good-naturedly, winking at his companions.

"You hev, hey? And what mought it be? Anythin' to oblige, Freddy, I'm sure."

"It's the duty of protecting me, Mr. Biggart."

"Waal, I don't know that it's exactly a dooty, Freddy."

"But isn't it your duty to protect the citizens of this town, and am I not one now?"

"It's the dooty of the marshal, and

I'm only the dep'ty," replied Mr. Biggart cautiously. "What's up? That feller Ullman ain't blown in again? If he has, my advice to you is to scatter and lay low until he blows out. I'm only a dep'ty, and I dassen't interfere with him, accordin' to law. And you hadn't oughter provoke him, Freddy. Yes, I know you didn't go fur to rile him, but thar must be somethin' about you that just nachally provokes him."

"It mought be his face," suggested Uncle Joe Sidebottom from his favorite corner. "But Flash Ullman's a womern hater, anyhow."

Peter joined in the laugh at his expense.

"But it has got nothing to do with Ullman," he said. "I haven't heard of any of Bargendy's men being in town. Besides, Ullman was drunk that time and didn't know what he was doing. I've no quarrel with him. And I wouldn't expect Mr. Biggart to act outside his jurisdiction."

Biggart looked relieved and gratified, seeking for no ulterior meaning in the words. That was a good phrase to remember when next somebody suggested the suicidal policy of interfering with one of Bargendy's men.

"You got more sense and a better understandin' of the law, Freddy, than a lot of fellers I could name," he said, looking darkly at Tupman. "I sure will protect you wherever my jurydiction allows. Thar ain't a man in this yere town I can't lick, and I'll lick anybody that starts crowdin' you." He glared about the room. "P'int out yer man, Freddy."

"Why, he isn't here," said Peter. "I hope everybody at the Come Inn is a friend of mine. But I'm going down to the Lone Star, and, as I'm not a fighting man, I'd appreciate the protection of your company, Mr. Biggart."

Biggart blinked. He had not counted on this, but he had been maneuvered into a position from which there was no public retreat.

"That's within your jurisdiction, isn't it?" pursued Peter innocently.

"Oh, sure!" Biggart nodded. "And what I said goes for the Lone Star, too!" he added, as somebody snickered. "It goes for the hull town. I ain't afeared of Tim Scoby or any of them boys. Scoby ain't got no holt on me, like he has on some fellers I could name." And again he looked darkly at the inoffensive Tupman. "But thar's no sense huntin' trouble, Freddy, and you've no business at the Lone Star, no more'n a sheep in a jackal's den. They'll skin you alive. What in tarnation's takin' you thar?"

"Doctor Day," replied Peter. "They're skinning *him* alive. He's drinking and gambling away all he has. He's too good a man to let go to the dogs. I'm going to bring him home."

THE four men glanced at one another and shuffled their feet. Stein came from behind the bar, wiping his pudgy hands.

"Dem is goot words, Freddy. I like to hear dem speeched at last. It is dime somebody speeched. I shut down on Doodah here, for his own goot, and den straight he goes down dere. Alvays he goes and comes back drunk—drunk like a pig. Scoby iss a bad man and he runs a bad blace. I don'd say it shust because he's a business rival. Even his games dey is nod straight. For der down and beoples he cares nod a damn."

Peter had brought this question of Scoby to a focus, again put into words what many had been thinking for long enough. Other customers got up to join Stein at Biggart's table. There were nods and mutterings.

"But what can you do?" demanded Biggart defensively. "You can't prove that Scoby runs a crooked game, even if we all know he does. He ain't breakin' no law, not that we got none to break. Ain't we all talked with Doodah, told him he was a damn fool and tried to reason with him? You can't stop a grown man goin' to the dogs any way he durn pleases."

"I guess none of us has tried extry hard, Sam," said Tupman. "What's everybody's business ain't nobody's."

"Mebbe not, Pod," agreed Biggart, "but we ain't runnin' no Band of Hope. Live and let live, that's be'n our motter. Any man who patternizes the Lone

Star steady knows the chances he's takin'."

"From all I hear," said Peter, "he gets precious little chance. And there's a difference between a Band of Hope and the duty we owe our neighbor. The Lone Star has a bad name from here to Colorado and back. Scoby doesn't practice the motto of live and let live. If we mean to make anything of this town, we've got to try and stop this sort of thing."

"We could stop it quick enough," said Farrell, "by startin' a jail and makin' Scoby the fust inhabitant."

"Thar ain't no real fust inhabitant but me!" protested the somewhat deaf Mr. Sidebottom.

"Say the word," exclaimed an enthusiast, "and we'll go down now and clean out the hull place! Thar's far more'n us than them. Scoby's ruined too many good men."

"Oh, there must be no violence!" said the shocked Freddy. "And, after all, Scoby couldn't be so successful if his victims didn't connive at their own undoing. More can be done by persuasion and argument than by force, at least so I believe. No man has the right to conduct a business that proves a menace to his fellow man; perhaps Scoby can be made to see that. I think the best way to combat the bad influence of the Lone Star is by building up a public spirit that will affect not only its patrons, but Scoby himself."

There was a general laugh, and Farrel said:

"You may know a lot, Freddy, but you don't know Tim Scoby. Thar's only one argument that goes with him and his kind, and that's force."

"Well, that's why I want Mr. Biggart," said Peter, and raised another laugh. "I don't expect any trouble, but a noted fighter like Mr. Biggart would be sure to prevent it. And his presence would show that the best men of this town, including the representative of law and order, are against such principles and practices as flourish at the Lone Star. We can't let it be said any longer by visitors that they've been drugged and robbed in Sagebrush."

"We're agin' them, Freddy," said Farrell, and there was a general assent. "We've be'n agin' them practices fur some time without rightly knowin' it."

Biggart got up, filled with a new sense of importance and civic pride.

"If Scoby or any of them fellers tries to git biggety with you, Freddy, I'll fix 'em!" he said, hitching at his gun belt. "You needn't to be afeared. I can handle anythin' within my jurydiction. But how mought you intend bringin' Doodah home—by the slack of the pants?"

"I'll persuade him," said Peter. "Let me do the talking, Mr. Biggart. It's all I *can* do."

"Well, boys, if you need any help, you know where to find it," was the parting chorus.

CHAPTER XXI.

TRICKERY UNCOVERED.

SCOBY'S dislike for Peter became intensified, as well it might, after that night in the Lone Star. The obnoxious Freddy not only persuaded Doctor Day to leave, but he had exposed the working of the trick faro box in such manner as to impress even its most drunken victim.

"Think of Freddy, of all people, doin' it!" exclaimed the astonished and admiring Biggart, when explaining events later at the Come Inn. "It took a feller what don't know nothin' about the game to spot what nary a one of us has been able to. They allus said that a feller what looks on at a game sees more'n them that plays it, and I guess that's sure right."

None, of course, suspected that Peter, unlike the rest, knew precisely for what to look. They attributed it all to accident, the dumb luck of the ignorant, and he supported the idea.

"As I didn't know anything about the game," he said, "I was watching the box all the time, instead of the bets, and I saw that little bolt move. I saw it move ever so slightly, many times. And then I noticed that when Doctor Day took over the bank that some of the cards were the least bit wider than others. I had noticed before that that when the

bolt moved a card came out that seemed a little broader than the rest. It made me curious."

"Nobody else ever noticed that them cards weren't exactly the same size," said Biggart. "And nobody else ever seen that bolt move, ne'ther. Me, I seen nothin', and I thought faro was the one straight game even at the Lone Star. I didn't see how Scoby could crook it. I d'dn't know there could be a trick box like that."

"You was a dum fool to hev bust it," said Farrell. "You should have let us seen how she worked, if you'd any proper feelin's. I know the dealer could stack the deck, h'm bein' the only one to cut and shuffle, but I don't see what he can do if a man switches his play."

"That's where that bolt and them different-size cards comes in," replied Biggart. "We d'dn't rightly understand it, either, until Freddy helped us figure it out. Day was the bigger plunger and first-off he was backin' the low cards, and so Scoby simply stacked the deck agin' him. Then, halfway through, Doodah switched to the high cards, and so Scoby rings in another card so's to change the run."

"How?" demanded Tupman. "I guess it could be rung in all right without folks seein', but it has to be drawed out, don't it? And 'less everybody was drunk and not keepin' tabs, they'd spot a fifth card, an extry queen or any other."

"Not with that box," said Biggart pridefully, as though he had invented it. "With that trick box you can draw *two* cards to once, instead of one. The extry card is cut a leetle wider than the others, and so it moves that bolt on the side, the dealer knowin' then when it's comin'. He can draw it out, without bein' seen, or let it go by, accordin' to the play. And then when Doodah took the bank, Scoby rung in a pack of different cards, half of 'em bein' a leetle wider than the rest. All the low cards was narrer, the high ones a leetle wider, and all Scoby had to do was to watch that bolt to see what was comin'. Oh, it was a great box, and I'm sorry now I bust her. We might have used her with profit agin' some of Bargendy's men—outrobbed 'em."

"I guess it was a good thing to git rid of temptation then and thar," said Farrell. "But I sure wish I'd seen her. I'll play no more faro, 'cept with my mother."

"I wish you'd all be'n thar," continued Biggart. "Say, it was funny. Thar was Scoby dealin', Doodah and some others at the table, Freddy and me standin' casuallike, me not knowin' what was comin', but ready fur anythin'. And then all to once Freddy says, in his polite voice:

" 'I say, Mr. Scoby, I wish you'd explain this game to me. Why are some cards different sizes and why does that little bolt on the side of the box move? Oh, yes, it does; if you go on dealing, you'll see pretty soon!' "

There had followed a sensation, Scoby's victims being sober enough to grasp a glimmering of the truth. And had Peter been alone, he would have been hustled out, knocked on the head or shot, before his words had time to take effect. But as Burke and another henchman came up at Scoby's unobtrusive signal, Biggart had whipped out his gun. It was not idle boast that he was more than a match for any local talent, if not in the same class with men like Lon Bargendy and Flash Ullman.

SCOBY had then tried to laugh the matter off, while adroitly attempting to replace the offending box with an honest one, but in this he was frustrated. Nor did his quick change to bullying and blustering avail him.

"Keep your hands off'n that box!" Biggart had warned. "We propose havin' a look-see. Freddy mought be mistook, seein' he don't know nothin' about the game, but, ag'in, he mought not. I guess thar's plenty here who think it's worth findin' out."

There were, and Scoby and his henchmen had to sit by sullenly while the working of the trick box, which was destined to attain to greater perfection in later years, was investigated and demonstrated. Biggart then had smashed to splinters the ingenious contrivance,

which few but professional gamblers like Peter had ever seen, and concluded the proceedings with an official address to Scoby.

"Ary a man who's lost anythin' on that layout don't owe you nothin'," he said. "You can't collect, Scoby, and you needn't try to. And I guess mebbe it ain't the only game they be'n robbed at in this yere place. Thar's diff'rent ways of thievin', but I guess you've picked the meanest, robbin' your own feller citizens. I'm servin' notice on you that this sorter thing don't go no more, not in this town. We've got plumb sick of it. I'm warnin' you fair, Tim Scoby, that if the Lone Star don't change her ways, and purty durn quick, we'll close her up and run you outa town! And that goes fur any jasper that's backin' your play."

"You talk mighty big," said Scoby, with a sneer, "but you act mighty small when Bargendy's men come to town."

"That ain't in my jurydiction," replied Biggart triumphantly. "I'm only a dep'ty and consarned with the citizens of this yere town. And if they ain't a credit, they'll be a corp'. Take your choice. I'm tellin' you how you'd better act in future fur the good of your health."

Peter had gone home with Doctor Day, whose steady tippling culminated at intervals in a grand spree, as on this occasion. He was properly drunk, though quite aware of all that had happened, able to keep his legs and talk quite rationally. He regaled Peter with further verses from the Camptown Races and excerpts from his own life, which included an ancient love affair that had misfired. And it was characteristic that, while mourning Scoby's turpitude, he bore him no ill will.

"What does it matter?" he said cheerfully. "We all have our failings, and I'd have lost anyway. I'm not lucky in anything. You're a good soul, Freddy, but I'm not worth bothering about. You can't teach an old dog new tricks."

"Oh, yes, you can—if he wants to learn," replied Peter. "And you're not so very ancient; quite young enough to make something of your life yet."

"I'm forty-five, Freddy. In the sere and yellow, my boy. It's all right for a young fellow like you to talk. I used to feel that way, too—full of hope. But it's different when most of the road lies behind, and not a very beautiful road, either. When we're young we think it's going to be wonderful, but when you've tramped it as far as I, over potholes and through muck, you'll be content to plod along any old way. It all leads to the cemetery, anyway."

Peter smiled. If his road was the shorter of the two, he would wager it had been more diversely unbeautiful than any Day had trod.

"It might have been different," pursued the doctor, with maudlin sentiment, "if I hadn't been jilted. It has been a lonely road. Did I ever tell you about that affair of the heart? It's something I never breathe to a soul."

"I'm not surprised," said Peter unfeelingly. "It's worse than no excuse, Doodah. You've set about proving that the lady was wise to throw you down. If she saw you now, she'd congratulate herself. It's not an old love affair, but the old Adam, that's bothering you."

Day blinked and then laughed.

"I guess that's right. It's no good trying to fool you, Freddy. As a matter of fact, I see now it was only puppy love. I didn't know then what real love was. But I thought my life was wrecked, and it was more interesting to play the martyr than to go to work. I didn't have to work; that was the trouble. I'd a bit of money—it wasn't enough for *her*—and so I drifted out here. And here I'll stick to the end."

"You could do worse," said Peter. "This place will be worth sticking for some day. But what's the end to be?"

"Eh?"

"I say, what's the end to be? When Sagebrush is one of the leading towns in the State, will you be one of the leading men? Or are you going to be a bum, cadging for drinks? That's the end you're aiming for, Doodah. Don't make any mistake about it. There's no halfway. You've done a lot for other folks, and it's about time you did something for yourself. And by helping yourself

you'll be helping others. Putting it on the lowest basis, the sick are entitled to some consideration. If a doctor isn't skillful, at least he should be sober."

He had struck fire at last from Day's good-natured pulp, reached the metal core. Day stiffened and his blue eyes darkened.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Gracie. I've never gone drunk to a sick bed. Whatever else I may be guilty of, I've never been guilty of such unprofessional conduct. When I'm drunk I stay home. As for skill, it's not for me to boast, but I graduated head of my class at Physicians and Surgeons and had honors at Heidelberg. I know you mean well, but there are limits to advice and criticism even from a friend. My habits are my own and concern none but myself. My life is my own and I can do with it as I please. I've neither kith nor kin and I'm not dragging any one down but myself. It's nobody's business how I act, so long as I don't hurt my neighbor."

"That's where you're wrong," said Peter, returning look for look. "Nobody can live to himself alone, unless he lives on a desert island, and there are more ways than one of hurting your neighbor. There's such a thing as example, and the more a man's liked and loved the more his example counts. Why, haven't you ever thought that you might lead *me* into gambling and drinking?"

Day smiled, chuckled.

"No, I could never imagine that, Freddy. You couldn't, either. You're what you are, and I'm what I am, and you'll have to accept me as I am, like the rest of the town does. You can't make a surplice out of an old dog's hide, my boy. Too old to learn new tricks, Freddy! It's no use and it doesn't matter."

"It matters a whole lot, Doodah—particularly to Miss Julie. I've got to tell you what she said. She's said to you all she possibly could, and it's for me to say the rest."

DAY seemed to experience an electric shock; his eyes widened strangely and he flushed. By some miraculous chemical change, he looked younger, handsomer, as though he had effaced the marks of time and intemperate living.

"I thought——" he began, glancing at Peter, and then paused, only to add, with feigned matter-of-factness: "Yes, I suppose it matters to Miss Julie in a way. I'm very sensible of her friendship."

"I'm not talking of friendship," said Peter bluntly.

Day drummed nervously on the table.

"What—er—did she say?" he asked at length.

"It's not so much what she said as what she left unsaid," replied Peter. "A girl doesn't even tell her own heart such things. But a blind man could see what she thinks of you, Doodah. She said she'd give anything if you'd take a tumble to yourself. It was really she who got me to make a nuisance of myself like this. She said you could quit it all and make something of yourself if you only wanted to. You didn't care enough, see?"

"Care!" breathed Day.

"A girl who's worth anything," said Peter oracularly, "won't marry a man who's worth nothing, no matter how much she cares. It's only the soft-headed, as well as soft-hearted, who do that. There's nothing the matter with Miss Julie's head. And no girl can show her feelings beyond a certain point."

"You seem to know a lot about these things," murmured Day.

"I do," said Peter modestly. "Women aren't mysteries and they aren't angels, either. They're just human, like us. They've got their pride and their reticences. And if a man proves he doesn't care, if he shows it by not trying to better himself, why, then it's not for them to plead with them. The more a girl cares, the less she can say. Miss Julie has done all she can; the rest is up to you. Of course, if it's only friendship with you——" He shrugged. "But I think she's worthy even of a sober friend."

"You're no nuisance, Freddy," said Day slowly. "You're a wizard, a bearer of good tidings and a friend worth having. You've brought inspiration and a whole lot of things to a soul that badly

needed them. I won't indulge in any promises, except to say that you'll soon see the result of this night's talk. And, Freddy, if you could complete your great service by managing to convey to a certain party that it wasn't that I didn't care, but that I didn't think she could, and that when I've shown myself worthy to speak—— You understand?"

Peter nodded.

"And about Scoby, you've got to get quit of him, Doodah. I dare say he really owes you money, counting what he's robbed you of and the services you haven't been paid for, but I suppose you'll insist on paying him. Well, I've got the money to clear his clutch on your property and you must use it. Yes, you must; there's no two ways about it."

Peter left in a glow of conscious rectitude, of a hardy duty well done. Of course, there was no reason why it should have proved hard; he himself was not in love with Julie nor, if he had been, could it have mattered. There is no renouncing what one does not possess. Julie loved Jim Day, and Day loved Julie. That was obvious to all but the two immediately concerned. There was no sacrifice about it, absolutely no reason why, as Peter walked home under the stars, he should feel this sense of loss.

Julie was amazed when she learned what had happened at the Lone Star.

"It was wonderful of you!" she exclaimed, flushed and happy. "There isn't another person in Sagebrush who could have done it. I never imagined you could. It—it was *brave* of you."

"Oh, no," said Peter. "I'm immune, you see. They know I can't fight. And then I'd Sam Biggart back of me and most of the town back of him. Scoby knew that. And it was all luck about the faro box."

"I don't care," she retorted. "It took courage, too. I know it did. And it took brains to understand about the box, just as it took brains to get Sam Biggart and most of the town back of you."

"Oh, I'm good at the talking," said Peter. "You can get things without fighting if you know how to talk."

"It's more than talk. Other people talk, but nobody listens to them."

"I appeal to their sense of chivalry," said Peter. "They like to protect me."

This appeared to annoy her.

"You talk as if you were a—a woman! You seem to revel in the thought of possessing no manly qualities!"

But she was more than astonished when it became evident that Doctor Day was making a determined and successful fight against John Barleycorn. He said nothing; his visits to the store had practically ceased; and he seemed to be avoiding her. Apparently he had no longer the time to drop in at any and all hours. He seemed to be taking his practice seriously, to be putting it on something like a business basis. He had hung out a shingle and he was getting a proper office, having his house cleaned and decorated. He had also cleaned and decorated himself. When Julie and he did meet, there was a new shyness and diffidence in his manner.

"It's wonderful!" she said to Peter. "I only hope it lasts, and I think it will. You must indeed be good at the talking. What did you say to him?" And she eyed him searchingly.

"No more than what you said."

"Well, it's remarkable. He never seemed to mind before what anybody said."

"Perhaps they didn't happen to present it in the right light," returned Peter, "or I happened to catch him in the right mood. But the credit for this is yours, not mine. Doodah knows that, and some day he'll show you how much he appreciates it."

She looked at him searchingly again, faint color staining her cheek.

"I—I hope you didn't tell him anything that wasn't true?"

"I did not," replied Peter with conviction. "Why should I? I'm really capable of telling the truth sometimes. And I'm also capable of seeing it, too, sometimes when others aren't."

"I wonder if you are," she said slowly, with an enigmatic glance. "However, the real credit is yours, and I'm sure we're all very grateful. I may have given you the idea, but you carried it out as no one else could. And I'm quite aware that it was your money that enabled

Doodah to get clear of Scoby. Oh, you needn't deny it; he told me himself. Do you know, Freddy—I suppose that, as partners, it's time we called each other by our first names—you're rather wonderful?"

Peter laughed.

"Now you're flattering me, Miss Vickers."

She shook her head, frowning sightly.

"I never flatter. I haven't the art nor wish. But, by the way, I—I've said that you may call me Julie. I'm Julie to my friends, and you've proved a good friend to me and my uncle, to Jim Day and everybody in Sagebrush but people such as that man Scoby. I do think you're rather wonderful. You're making great changes and you've done it all without raising a hand or even voice. I don't know how you've done it, Freddy, but you have."

"Oh," said Peter, "you can get things without fighting! I've learned that, Miss Vickers."

Miss Vickers! Not even Miss Julie, though she was that to the whole town, but Miss Vickers! Was Julie such a detestable name that he couldn't use it? Well, never again would she suggest his doing so. Never! Always did it end like this. She would go out of her way to be especially nice and then, just when she thought they were reaching a real understanding, when she was about to lay hold of and grasp firmly the elusive personality that she sensed behind his seemingly simple manner, he would slip away and perpetrate some such unforgivable thing as this. He was really a detestable character, whatever his virtues, and not worth bothering about. He exasperated her beyond endurance. Miss Vickers!

"Oh, indeed, *Mr. Gracie,*" she said with polite indifference. "I thought one always had to fight for the things really worth having. But I'm sure you know best. Anyway, it's a very convenient belief."

"Now what's she mad about?" asked Peter of himself.

In spite of his confident assertion to Day, he wondered if his knowledge of women was really so complete and profound. Certainly Julie was a puzzle at times, a creature of the strangest moods. However, it was a symptom of the malady called love. She would be all right when Day spoke his heart.

"It wasn't for me to tell her anything more," he thought. "There are things a man has got to say for himself, and Doodah doesn't want to speak until he has proved he's cured. But I've got it all fixed for 'em when he does toe the line. It's funny how blind she is. But he was just the same. You can bet *I'd* know if anybody loved *me.*"

CHAPTER XXII.

SCOBY STARTS SOMETHING.

THERE came a day when Peter discovered that there are distinct limits to peaceful influencing, and that a persuasive tongue and agile brain may accomplish so much and no more. It was not a new discovery by any means, for he had every reason to believe that force rules the world and that every civilization in our imperfect society is based on the right of might. He had deliberately, and of necessity, closed his eyes to this fundamental truth, but they were opened the day that Bargendy's men next came to town.

The vanguard of the visitors was led by that amiable gentleman Flash Ullman and his crony, "Beef" White, and they had come on business and pleasure, business that had to do with the fatality in the Golden Glory. As a matter of course, they made the Lone Star their first port of call, and they were received most graciously by the proprietor. Apparently, to his way of thinking, no visitors could have been more welcome.

Scoby had been finding business very slack since the public demolition of his trick faro box, and though he had supplied another, which he swore was "straight," trade had not improved. All his games had become suspect, and his clientele had dwindled until it practically represented the irreducible minimum of irreclaimable human depravity.

These were in a hopeless minority and had quite failed to impose their dominion on the town. More than Day had

got clear of his clutches, some by the simple expedient of claiming that they had been cheated into debt, and Scoby contemplated the day when he must choose between reforming his methods completely or moving his business elsewhere.

The former course did not commend itself to him, being against all his principles and training, while moving elsewhere was a last resort. Scoby belonged to that class that kept moving with the mobile frontier, finding his profit and pleasure where law and order were not, and he had no use for a civilized and progressive Sagebrush, unless it followed the lines of progress which he himself mapped out, which was to say that license should flourish under the name of liberty and pay tribute to him, the boss of the town.

This pleasing prospect was now fading rapidly, and Scoby knew the person really responsible, the influence that inspired this sudden and sickening wave of civic virtue, a wave that, mounting slowly but steadily, threatened to swamp him. His real enemy, his most formidable antagonist, was the oily tongued, whispering Freddy, who possessed the art of influencing others. Remove that influence and all should yet be well. Was Scoby to be driven out of the town, the town he had hoped to own some day, by such a creature?

It is not to be supposed that Scoby sat down and made no attempt to remove this menacing influence. He had done his best, even though handicapped by the fact that Freddy was what the present age calls a "conscientious objector" and therefore could not be inveigled into a brawl that would see his satisfactory end. Burke and another trusty henchman by the name of Wyman had lain in wait for him at various dark corners, only to have their diligence and patience at length rewarded in most ungrateful fashion.

Sam Biggart and Farrell had come upon them as the ambush was sprung, Burke and Wyman catching the thrashing of their lives. Owing to the darkness, it was impossible to see what had actually happened, and thus none suspected that it was Peter who inflicted most of the damage. Biggart, however, shouldered all the credit and headed a deputation that waited on the proprietor of the Lone Star.

"In course, we know you ain't got nothin' to do with this yere bushwhackin' of Freddy," Biggart had said, "but, all the same, we've come to say a friendly word. And now we tell you, Scoby, that if anythin' like this happens to Freddy ag'in, the fust thing that'll happen to you will be the last. We'll hang you from your own doorpost and inquire into the justice of the proceedings arterwards. Just a friendly word, Tim Scoby."

Thus another item was added to Scoby's bill of wrongs, and he considered himself a very injured and misunderstood gentleman. But although promoting a further attempt to reassert his sway, a fiasco that resulted in several casualties among the clientele of the Lone Star, he made no further move against Peter. Not that he had abandoned all hope.

MATTERS stood thus, Scoby vicious but checkmated, when Ullman and White walked in. They were *persona grata* with such followers as Scoby now mustered, and they were received with a mixture of adulation and awe. Places like the Lone Star were really recruiting grounds for the lawless bands such as Bargendy's, and Scoby was responsible for the education of more than one criminal. That he was practically one of them in all but name, these lieutenants of Bargendy well knew. A mean soul who lacked their qualities, a jackal who stole in the shadows, while they robbed in the open, but a friend and not an enemy.

"We wanta word with yuh alone," said Ullman brusquely, and Scoby led them to his private room and stock.

Bargendy, it need hardly be said, had waited in vain for Freddy Gracie's return. And he had waited long, because the real Freddy's movements were dictated by expediency and his value lay in none suspecting his connection with the gang. He was a field scout, a spy, with no fixed radius of action, but go-

ing wherever he struck the scent of profitable information, and this was often secured without any directions from his chief. He was often absent for weeks without Bargendy knowing his exact whereabouts, and thus it was some time before Bargendy thought of making inquiries and learning of the tragedy in the Golden Glory.

Even then Bargendy was by no means sure of the truth; information had to be gained in roundabout manner, and the buried victim was beyond identification. Then had come conflicting evidence pointing to the possibility that Gracie was still alive; in fact, had deserted his comrades in crime. Bargendy knew how to deal with such.

"A friend of ourn ain't showed up for quite a while," explained Ullman, who had no intention of saying more than he must. "We was told he was gunned in Timberly, and then we heard he was livin' here. Do you know anybody here called Fred Gracie?"

"Do I? I should say I do!" exclaimed Scoby, coloring darkly. "Freddy, that's what he's called here, and he's the feller that's puttin' this town on the bum. Why, say——" And he began to pour out his troubles.

"Don't yuh worry none; the boss'll put *him* on the bum," broke in Mr. White. "Nobody can throw him down and live to brag about it. Turned respectable, huh? Bought an interest in Vickers' store? Say, he must be locoed, settin' up like this so near us. Are yuh sure his name's Fred Gracie?"

"Of course it is," replied Scoby. "But you'd oughter know him. You seen him last day you was here. He got bigotty with you then and tried to get funny. Ullman plugged him, set him on his back for three weeks. I wished it had been for good."

Ullman had served so many men in such fashion that this particular incident had been forgotten long since. Moreover, he had been drunk on that occasion. He now strove to recall it, aided by his companion and another drink.

"Say," exclaimed White, "*that* feller wasn't Gracie! You remember, Flash, the rabbit we run into outside the Come Inn? I guess he didn't mean nothin', but after yuh'd got on yuhr bronc yuh decided yuh'd be'n insulted, and yuh let him have it for luck."

Ullman nodded.

"I remember now. I *was* insulted, Beef, and yuh was too drunk to know it. But that feller wasn't Gracie. What yuh givin' us, Scoby? We knowed Gracie as well as we know ourselves. That feller was dark as an Injun, while Gracie was fair. He was light-complected, had blue eyes and a blond beard. Two fellers couldn't look more diff'rent. Yuh're mistook, Scoby. If there's a Fred Gracie here, he ain't that hombre."

"He is," said Scoby gloomily, "and I ain't mistook. I wish I was. Wouldn't his own ma know him? He's livin' here and so's she. The fact is there must have been two fellers by that name. They said there was, but I didn't believe it. Now I've got to. No, they ain't relatives. This feller's a diff'rent breed of pup and he wouldn't have the sand to herd with boys like you. He's one of these here damn reformers, the kind that lays behind the bush and makes the bullets for others to fire. I tell you that he is——"

THE others had lost interest when the conflicting evidence of Gracie's death had been reconciled, but it awoke again as their host generously furnished more whisky and continued his talk. This was too good an opportunity for Scoby to lose, and he meant to make the most of it.

"He's got the whole town agin' me," he said. "It won't be a place much longer for you boys to come to. He don't only boast that he's gonna run me out of town, but that he'll keep fellers like you out."

"What's that?" Ullman asked, with a laugh.

"It ain't no laughin' matter," replied Scoby, shaking his head. "I thought so, too, but it ain't. You don't know how things is changin', but you can see for yourself how my trade's fell off. And he's done it all with talk! He's a spellbinder, and he could talk a dog's hind legs straight. Why, say, he's talked Sam

Biggart so full of hisself that he's swellin' round like he was a real marshal! It's a fact. Next thing you know, Biggart'll be makin' you boys hand over your guns when you come to town, like you was a lot of sheep. They're even talkin' of buildin' a jail! Biggart'll clap you in it if you even dare so much as to look cross-eyed."

"That big bladder knows better'n to get high-heeled with us," said Ullman contemptuously. "If they try any of this reformin' stuff on us, the boss'll ride in and clean the hull town. You can tell 'em that from me."

"And you can tell Mr. Bargendy from me," retorted Scoby, "that this place is becomin' a real danger to him. I'm tellin' it to you boys private, as a friend. This feller Gracie, with his talkin', will next be gettin' the cattlemen together, and they'll be sendin' a bunch into No Man's Land to clean you out. He'll egg 'em on, talk 'em into thinkin' they got a real grievance agin' you—and mebbe they have," he added significantly. "I guess you know there ain't much love lost as it is."

Ullman and White laughed loudly and slapped their chaps.

"Aw, sassafras!" said Ullman. "Let 'em come a-runnin'. We could take care of Uncle Sam's army, let alone these flea-bitten cow hands. They ain't so plumb locoed as that. This rabbit seems to have got yuh scared, Scoby. If he's the nuisance that you say, why ain't yuh fixed him long ago?"

"Ain't I tried?" demanded the exasperated Scoby. "I ain't no fightin' man, like you fellers, and he's always got Sam Biggart or somebody around to protect him. I got friends, but we're outnumbered ten to one. If Biggart and Gracie was cleaned out, there'd be no more trouble. Fellers would come back to me who're scared of Biggart. He can lick anybody in town, and he's even braggin' he can lick you or any of Bargendy's boys. It's a fact. You don't know how swelled up he's got, just like a poisoned pup.

"Well, you may laugh, you fellers, but go up the street and see for yourself. Anyway, there's a gal in Vickers' store that's worth lookin' at. Old Vickers' niece. Didn't happen to see her the last time you was here, did you? But mebbe you've heard of her."

Ullman shrugged.

"I ain't got no use for gals," he said sourly. "But if any jasper in this town's lookin' for trouble, we'll show it to him pronto. C'm' on, Beef, let's see if 'Cottontail's' changed such a danger lot. I'd kinda like to see how rabbits fight."

"I wouldn't take no chances," said Scoby, as he pushed over another drink. "You're liable to get shot in the back. And I wouldn't go near Freddy. You can't make him fight. He'll give you a lot of lip—and then have somebody gun you when you ain't lookin'."

"We'll be lookin'," said Flash grimly, as he hitched at his gun belt. "And we'll see how much talkin' he does, him or anybody. If they think Bargendy's boys can't come in here and do as they damn please, or anywhere, it's time they learned diff'rent."

"Well, I'm warnin' you," said Scoby. "If I was you, I'd do the shootin' first and talk later. You wanta be ready to drop them at the first move. They may plug you from a windy, too."

"Let 'em try!" snarled Ullman. "Come on, Beef."

SCOBY, as he watched them ride stiff-legged up the street, in single file instead of abreast, was well satisfied with his efforts. He had primed them with more than whisky, and they were born trouble hunters in any case. It was practically a foregone conclusion that there would be an affray of some kind before these men left town. By good luck, both Freddy and Biggart might be killed; but even if Ullman or White should be injured, the result would be the same. Bargendy would come to exact vengeance, and this obnoxious reforming element would be completely wiped out.

Scoby's hatred of the reforming element extended to Julie, for he was by no means unmindful of her hostility. Indeed, he considered her the prime instigator of his troubles, in that she had got Freddy to influence the rest. He was

quite sure of this, and the thought of causing her any annoyance was pleasing in the extreme. If Ullman was a woman hater, White was not. Moreover, he reasoned that, when all other expedients fail, a woman can be depended on to provoke a fight. Freddy might be drawn into one through her.

"Well, I guess that oughter start somethin'," he remarked, with satisfaction, to his chief henchman, Burke. "At the worst, it should open up a sore between Bargendy and these bums. It's the only way we'll get his help, and the Lord knows we need it!"

Burke was still nursing the result of the unsuccessful ambush on Peter. His face was discolored and swollen. He had less of Scoby's low cunning, but more capacity for patient, if difficult, thought. He had heard much of what passed between his employer and the recent guests.

"It seems kinda funny," he said ponderously, "two fellers havin' the name of Freddy Gracie, don't it? And yet they ain't relatives and never knowed each other."

"There's nothin' funny about it," replied Scoby shortly. "It often happens. It's what they call a kwincidence."

"Uh-huh. And it's another kwincidence, boss, that, a few days after the first Gracie was killed in Timberly, the second shows up here."

"Well, what of that?"

Burke shrugged.

"Nothin', I s'pose. But, say, boss, did you ever happen to see 'Smoke' Calvert, this feller they call 'The Lightnin' Bug?' No, I ain't, neither; nobody has, down here. But he's the man who gunned the first Gracie, ain't he? And they say he's dark as an Injun. I met a feller once who'd seen him clean out the Wilson brothers."

Scoby turned and stared at Burke.

"What are you tryin' to get at?"

"I dunno," said Burke truthfully, as he scratched his head. "But this here Freddy—was it another kwincidence that he happened to find out all about the workin's of that trick faro box? Or, bein' a crack gambler, did he know what to look for? And that horse he sold, he said himself he got it off'n The Lightnin' Bug. Another kwincidence that he carried three guns and had all them scars that Doodah seen, and that he was in Timberly the night the first Gracie was killed."

"Bah!" said Scoby, with a loud laugh. "You're crazy, Burke."

"I s'pose I am. But I'll tell you another thing, boss. The night Bill Wyman and me got so beat up—well, I ain't so sure that Biggart and Farrell done it. Everythin' happened to once, and it was so durned dark—well, I dunno."

"You're crazy," repeated Scoby. "That beatin' you got ain't improved your head none. I never heard such a joke. What in the name of sin would Smoke Calvert be doin' here? Why, Flash, with all his record, is only a piker, compared to him! Calvert don't have to fight with his mouth. If he ever come here, he could stand the town on its head."

"I guess he could, if half what they say about him is true." Burke nodded. "That's what makes it so durned funny."

"Funny's no name for it," said Scoby. "The funniest part is Mrs. Gracie. Why, you chucklehead, don't you think she would know her own son?"

"But she can't see him, boss. She's blind."

The significance of this fact seemed to strike Scoby for the first time. His smile disappeared and he looked startled, dismayed. But it was only for a moment.

"That don't make no diff'rence," he said. "She ain't deef, is she? She'd know his voice, wouldn't she? Two fellers can't talk alike 'less they're brothers or somethin'. And he'd have to know all about her family, wouldn't he? And why should Calvert make a fool play like this, take up with a strange woman that ain't his mother and work like hell? There ain't a bit of sense in it nowhere."

"Not that I can see," agreed Burke, still scratching his head. "I can't figger it nohow. All the same, boss, it strikes me there's a bit too many of these here kwincidences. I dunno, but there's somethin' about it all that don't seem just right."

"I know what it is," said Scoby indulgently. "It's your head."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BAITING.

A FEW of the townspeople—Sam Biggart, Uncle Joe Sidebottom and some others—were sitting outside the Come Inn, and Biggart was telling anew how he had handled Burke and Wyman—a weary tale in which Farrell's assistance steadily dwindled the oftener it was told—and what he purposed doing further in the way of promulgating the civic virtues, when a dust cloud at the end of the long street resolved itself into the two gentlemen who had just left the Lone Star.

Biggart, who recognized the pair first, swallowed his prominent Adam's apple in the middle of a valiant sentence and arose with the manner of one remembering suddenly an urgent engagement.

"Drat it all!" he exclaimed hastily. "Here I be'n a-settin' and a-settin' like a hen and forgettin' I had to see Pod Tupman special about a strayed shipment——"

"Yere comes a couple of Bargendy's boys!" piped Uncle Joe shrilly. "It's them toomultuous fellers, Ullman and White."

Biggart, to his secret indignation, was compelled to follow the skinny pointing finger and to feign surprise.

"Why, so it is," he said, with bogus indifference. "Well, I got to git along and——"

"No, ye don't!" exclaimed Uncle Joe, and laid firm hands on him. "Thar ain't no better time than this yere fur promulgatin' them civic vartues ye was talkin' of. Don't ye go runnin' away, Sam Biggart. It's yer dooty to stay and pertect the citizens of this yere town, specially the fust inhabitant."

"Who's runnin' away?" demanded Biggart angrily. "But I can go or stay, jest as I like. 'Tain't my dooty to pertect nobody who ain't in my jurydiction. I'm only a dep'ty and I got business to tend to. Drat you, Joe Sidebottom, leggo your holt!"

But Uncle Joe only clutched the tighter, and in the middle of the scuffle Ullman and White rode up. Biggart, finding escape impossible, now pretended that he had been merely indulging in a little horseplay with the amiable Mr. Sidebottom, whom he cursed inwardly, and, simulating ignorance of the visitors, presented his back to them and began to talk volubly about the weather.

If there was something very theatrical about the two who had pulled up their mounts in the middle of the dusty street, there was also something very impressive. Efficiency, of whatever kind, is always impressive. These men were masters of their trade, however nefarious that trade might be, and they knew it. And apart from their own personal prowess or reputation they had that of the redoubtable Bargendy to back them. So might two of Attila's or Tamerlane's followers have looked on the shrinking inhabitants of a ravaged town, as these men now looked on the group outside the Come Inn. That group was plainly nervous and ill at ease.

"Hey you, Biggart!"

Biggart spun round at the whiplike crack of Ullman's voice, as though he had been struck by a bullet. The gaudy, poisonous-looking little man, lolling with apparent negligence on his bronco, was eying him balefully, while White sat a few paces back, his pale-blue eyes coasting up and down the street.

"Why, howdy, gents!" exclaimed Biggart, as though overjoyed at recognizing them. "Ain't seen any of you boys fur quite a spell. Nice day, ain't it?"

"C'me here!" snapped Ullman, with a jerk of the head.

Biggart hesitated and was lost, not for the first time. He hated his own cowardice, but the reputation of this couple and all they represented was too much for him. Formerly he would have obeyed automatically, without thought, but he had now progressed to the point where he despised this craven fear. Freddy had talked him into a fine opinion of himself, and recent events had sustained that opinion. He had even pictured himself capable of braving the notorious Bargendy.

If only Freddy were here to give him confidence! Freddy thought him so brave, such a great fighter, that, somehow, it made him so when Freddy was

present. Or if only he could outshoot these men as he could outshoot the town. Perhaps, with a little luck, he could if he tried. If he could only bring himself to try, dare to defy them. If there wasn't the fear of the unknown, the dread of their reputation!

He stepped gingerly into the street, swallowing his Adam's apple and sweating generously.

"What do you boys want?" he asked, with dry throat and meek voice.

THEY glared down at him in silence. Ullman's squinting black eyes gave off the light like those of a snake. They were beads of jet, while White's were crumbs of blue china. Ugly eyes, both. Biggart tried to return the concentrated stare, but failed miserably. His feet began to shuffle in the dust of the street.

At length Ullman spoke, loud enough for all to hear.

"Yuh-all remember the day, Biggart, that Jake Williams got high-heeled with me? Thought himself a crackerjack gun artist, didn't he? Yuh-all been 'lected to his place, Biggart?"

Biggart swallowed.

"No, I ain't. I'm only a dep'ty. A dep'ty I was, and a dep'ty I remain."

"That's good—fur you," said White. "We never cared much fur marshals, did we, Flash? Dep'ties ain't so bad if they know their place."

Ullman's stare had become sardonic.

"Well, we heard, Biggart, that yuh-all seemed to be trainin' to fill Williams' shoes. Williams had a fatal idea that Bargendy's boys couldn't come in here and act any way they seen fitten. Yuh-all got that idea, too? If so, now's the time to start workin' on it. Whitey and me, actin' fur the boss, is shore ready to listen to any argyments in that line. Surge right up and declar' yourself promisc'us."

"I got nothin' to declar'," said Biggart. "I'm only a dep'ty and consarned with the citizens of this yere town. It ain't fur me to engage in furrin relations. It ain't my dooty. And, besides, I knows you gents allus acts as sich when you pays us a visit."

The gentlemen grinned impolitely.

"We heard yuh'd got right martial and virtuous, Biggart," said White. "We heard yuh'd come to think we wasn't good enough fur this holy town."

"Somebody's allus talkin', and I got enemies," replied Biggart injuredly. "I guess mebbe I know where you heard it. And I guess mebbe they was hopin' they'd get you gents to do their dirty work for 'em."

"Who yuh-all meanin'?" snapped Ullman.

"Oh, nobody partic'lar," said Biggart hastily. "But, as a dep'ty, I got certain dooties to perform, and there's fellers in this yere town that don't like me interferin' when their stuff gits too rawr. I'm no reformer, but a line has to be drawed somewhere, don' it? But that's got nothin' to do with you gents. You're entirely diff'rent, and you allus act as sich. You ain't in my jurydiction, nuther. I allus said there never was no better-actin' gents, when they come to town, than Lon Bargendy's boys. That's whatever! I ain't got no call to interfere with 'em, even if it was my dooty, which it ain't, nohow."

"Quite sure about that?" drawled Ullman.

"That's whatever!" replied Biggart with fervor. "And now, if you gents will excuse me, I got an important business matter to tend to." And he backed off, then vanished in the direction of the freight station at the other end of town.

Biggart despised himself. He had not even given Freddy warning to lie low, much less stayed to support him in the event of trouble. He had sold out shamelessly and unconditionally; sold his newfound civic pride and self-respect, sold everything. But all that a man has will he give for his life. And he was no worse than the rest of the town, those who had talked so much and done nothing. Not an eye nor a tongue, much less a hand, had been lifted against these hectoring outlaws. Nor would there be. Why, then, should he be expected to function in the rôle of sacrificial goat?

Meanwhile, Stein had slipped out the back way and into the store next door, where Peter was busy opening a new

shipment, while Julie checked the invoice.

"Dey haf arrove, Freddy!" Stein exclaimed. "Dot scoundrels, Ullman und his bartner. Dey iss caming up der street already und dey may came in here."

"Well," said Peter, "if they've got anything to spend, they're welcome. All dollars look alike to us."

"I dink you'd oughter vamose, Freddy; go by der house upstairs until dey haf vent. I do sure, you bet me. Dey haf been to Scoby's blace already yet, und vat badness dey don't think of he vill haf put in der heads mitt his bum whisky. For you, love he has none, nor dey, eider."

"I'm much obliged for the warning, Mr. Stein," said Peter, "but my place is here. You see how impossible it would be if I had to run away and hide every time these men come to town. I don't see why there should be any trouble anyway."

STEIN threw up his arms and returned hastily, by the back door, in order to look after his own property. Freddy had the courage of ignorance, and there was no time for further argument. And perhaps Freddy's vocal abilities would prevail even over these two.

"I think," said Julie, who had listened in silence, "it might be better, perhaps, to follow Mr. Stein's advice. It might avert trouble. I think it would be better for me to wait on these two men if they should come."

"I don't think so," said Peter.

She had expected him to grasp the opportunity for escape that she had generously offered, a retreat that could be conducted without utter disgrace. She had been ready to sneer at him had he taken Stein's advice, but now she was angry. Since the night of the unsuccessful ambush she had become more concerned about Freddy's safety than she cared to say.

"I think you're perfectly stupid!" she exclaimed. "There's no sense in courting needless danger. You think that talking and a peaceful attitude can do anything, but it didn't stop Scoby trying to kill you. And this Ullman nearly killed you before. You don't know these men. But they wouldn't make any trouble if I was here alone."

"Perhaps I know them better than you," said Peter. "In fact, I want you to go upstairs until they have gone."

"Who, me? I'll do nothing of the kind. How perfectly absurd! Why should I go?"

"Well, they can't make trouble for me, but they may for you. With a very pretty girl, Miss Vickers, there is always the possibility of trouble."

She flushed vividly. So he actually considered her that! Never before, by the smallest sign, had he shown what he thought of her looks. But he was like the cow that upsets the full milk pail. He had spoiled it all by using that exasperating "Miss Vickers."

"I can look after myself, Mr. Gracie," she said shortly. "I'm not afraid of any trouble they may try to give me."

"That isn't the point," said Peter. "It's the trouble they may give me through you."

"Oh, indeed! Well, you needn't be afraid. I can look after us both, if you can't."

And with that Ullman and White swaggered in with ringing spurs and creaking leather.

Julie and Peter were at the back of the store, where a door gave on the private premises, and, before the girl had an inkling of what was to happen, he had whirled her through the door, closed and locked it. Astonishment was her first emotion, not merely astonishment that Freddy had dared to act thus, but that he was capable of such strength, quickness and dexterity. She had never seen anything like it.

Momentarily blinded by the plunge from the sun-drenched street into the comparative darkness of the store, the visitors were ignorant of what had taken place. They saw only Peter coming forward behind the long counter to greet them.

"Good day, gentlemen," he said, rubbing his hands like a true trader scenting a promising sale. "What can I do for you? Hats, coats, socks, shirts, ties,

underwear—we've just got a nice new line from St. Louis. Quite the latest and best. Coffee, beans, salt, tobacco—bacon, sugar, flour—boots, gauntlets, cartridges, rifles——"

"Aw, shut up!" barked White. *"We'll* do the talkin'."

"As you prefer," said Peter amiably.

THEY had been disappointed in finding the trouble they sought. A visit to the Come Inn, where they had strutted and hectored all they knew how, had failed to produce any satisfactory result. Their efforts had bounced off Stein's indulgent amiability like hail from glass. No one had shown resentment or even interest. They might as well have postured and talked to the everlasting hills or the blank, unfeeling desert. In spite of what Scoby had said, this was still a town of rabbits, and now their last chance of getting some action lay here.

Ullman swaggered against the counter and looked Peter up and down in his most insulting style.

"Hello, 'Vi'let,' " he said at length. "I reckon yuh-all and me has met before. I sorter trod on yuh-all down in your green and shady nook, didn't I?"

"You very nearly killed me, Mr. Ullman," said Peter, shaking his head. "However, accidents are bound to happen. That's the danger of carrying firearms; they're liable to go off so unexpectedly."

"Accident?" echoed the amazed Ullman. "The only accident about it was that yuh-all didn't stay dead. What yuh mean by r'arin' up like this and sheddin' your bloom on the desert a'r, after I've done took the trouble to trod yuh-all down proper? What yuh mean by 'sultin' me like that? Surge up and declar' yuhrself!"

"But I never meant to insult you, Mr. Ullman. If I ever did so unconsciously, I certainly apologize. And why should you want to kill me?"

Ullman pondered this unexpected query. He had killed more than one man without ever asking himself the reason. He never went into particulars.

"I don't like vi'lets," he said at length. "I never could stand 'em, nohow. The jasper what wrote that blasted pome turned me agin' 'em from the start. I had to stay in and l'arn it at school when I might have be'n stealin' apples. I don't like your face, nuther, Vi'let, nor nothin' about yuh-all. It just makes me natcherally ill to look at yuh-all. It shore does."

"I'm very sorry for that," said Peter. "It's my misfortune, but not fault. I'm sure I'd rather look and act like you and this other gentleman if I only could. I'm sure a mouse would prefer to be a lion, but it has to play the hand given it by nature. We all have to play the cards we get the best way we know how."

Ullman was mollified, even impressed in a sense, but not convinced.

"Yuh-all ain't got the courage of a mouse," he said. "What yuh mean by tradoocin' the reputation and traditions of that valiant animile? Are yuh-all meanin' to 'sult an animile I'm most partial to? What yuh got agin' it? Surge up and declar' yuhrself."

"I consider it an animal of the highest virtues," said Peter. "It is renowned in song and legend. I have the greatest respect for it."

"Aw, what's the use, Flash?" demanded White plaintively. "You'd get more action outa a flapjack. These rabbits may 'a' scairt Scoby, but that ain't sayin' nothin'. Let's breeze. This ain't no place fur us."

"I don't know that she is even a womern," said Ullman gloomily. "I reckon it's tradoocin' the sex. I don't holt with womern nohow, but I've knowed some with plenty of sperrit. Yuh-all ain't a womern, Vi'let. Yuh ain't nothin'."

"Oh, yes, I am," said Peter briskly. "I'm a trader. And if you gentlemen will allow me to show you, say, a new line of Stetsons, I'm sure you shan't find your time wasted any longer. Of course it's a waste of time, and I'm sure you've got something better to do than to stand here cracking jokes with me. For it's certainly a joke that men like you would really think of bullying me. I know you've far more sense of humor and fair play."

It is quite probable that, but for an interruption, the men who had come to

fight would have remained to purchase some of the admirable goods that Peter now hastened to display. Certain, at any rate, that they should have left without further trouble. Both had drunk enough, and were naturally inflammable enough, to quarrel at the slightest pretext, but they were not drunk enough to do so on no pretext whatever.

If they had any real grievance, it was directed against Scoby, who had so flagrantly engendered false hopes. For the rest, their reception had been such as to soothe their wounded feelings and fortify their self-esteem. White had even forgotten Scoby's remarks about Pop Vickers' niece, for, if he was no woman hater, neither was he a character like his master, Bargendy. And so in all probability he would have ridden away and thought no more about her had Julie not appeared.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BARGENDY APPEARS.

INDIGNATION had followed quickly on astonishment, and then had come hot contempt as Julie overheard the conversation between Peter and the visitors. He had dared to lock her in, not through any thought for her safety, but that she might not be a witness of his utterly craven reception of these bullies. Small wonder he desired no witness, and doubtless he thought she could not hear what passed. Afterward, of course, he would claim that he had appealed to their reason, won another victory for peaceful persuasion. He would not tell at what cost.

He had pocketed the key, but, after a search, she found another that fitted. Mingled with her contempt, her anger, was anxiety for Peter's safety. With the duplicate key, she brought down her uncle's shotgun, which she loaded in both barrels and stood immediately behind the door. Then she unlocked the door and entered the store.

Beef White was trying on a Stetson, Ullman fingering some gaudy handkerchiefs, when she suddenly appeared. Peter pretended not to see her; he went on extolling the virtues of his wares, trying to hold the attention of the two. Ullman merely stared at the girl, but White, flinging aside the new hat, swaggered forward to meet her.

It is possible that Julie, at this moment, realized her mistake; possible, too, that the desire to see how Freddy would act in this new situation had had some part in her decision. Was he right about these men, and, if so, would talk avail him if he should try to stop them from annoying her? Would he try? Or would he do nothing?

It is safe to say, however, that she had no idea of White's real nature, any more than most people knew that of Lon Bargendy. There were few outlaws who made deliberate war on women. But something in White's step, the step of an animal sighting prey, his suddenly and acutely awakened interest, the light that sprang to his eye, caused her to pause.

"Well, well," said White, "here's a bit of goods that Vi'let mebbe wasn't aimin' to show us! It's the purtiest piece of all, too. Hello, girlie, I clean forgot all about you and might have went and left this metropolis without even sayin' how-do! For which you'd never have forgive me. You're old man Vickers' niece, ain't you? Let's get acquainted."

Ullman had not stirred, but his interest in the handkerchiefs had waned and he was staring at the couple with hopeful, sardonic eyes. There might be trouble yet, and if Freddy was even an apology for a man there should be.

"I see now, Vi'let, why yuh-all set up here," he said, with an evil smile. "Partnership, huh?"

Peter said nothing. He was leaning on the counter against which Ullman lounged in profile. He had fought a good fight in which his great store of self-control, backed by the imperative necessity of keeping secret his true identity, had been tested to the utmost. But now he saw the end clearly in sight —not that the necessity or his self-control had grown less, but that he had been precipitated into a new situation where nothing but force could answer.

For the insults, the bullying of these men, he cared nothing so long as his end was gained; indeed, he found a certain humor in it, as he should not have

done had he been what they thought him. But if they insulted Julie—or any other innocent woman, for that matter—he was done, his hand would be forced.

While seemingly engrossed with his wares, the handkerchiefs he was folding up, Peter's eyes were on the ivory stock of Ullman's off gun. Peter had measured the distance. He would only act at the very last moment, but when he did act it should be in a way that none could ever forget. If suspicion of his identity should then be aroused, it must look after itself. He had no alternative.

THE matter, however, was settled for him by Julie before he knew what was coming. White had said he preferred to be waited on by her. Peter did not hear White's next remark, but the girl's cheeks crimsoned and she replied quietly:

"If you wait a moment, I'll see if there's any in the new shipment that has just come in."

She stepped through the private door and appeared in a moment with the leveled shotgun.

"Now get out of here, you low brute, and stay out!" she commanded. "Get out, both of you!"

There was no need for Peter to interfere. These men were ready to face anything but a shotgun in the hands of an angry and determined woman. Julie's eyes were blazing, her face white and hard, her hands steady as she took deliberate aim.

"Clear out! And if either of you dares to set foot in this store again I'll fill you full of buckshot!"

She advanced, and they backed away, not daring to say a word. Their only fear was that they might not be able to leave quickly enough. In her anger or ignorance, she might pull the triggers inadvertently. The result would be calamitous, for in that small space there could be no escaping the blast of shot. No, they were ready to face any man with any weapon, but they had no use for a ten-gauge shotgun and a furious woman. It was an unbeatable combination.

As they backed quickly to the door, there came a great clatter of hoofs and half a score of men rode up in a swirling cloud of dust. Theatrical, gaudy, like Ullman and White, they made a parade of their horsemanship and carried themselves with the same arrogant air. Most of them were dark-skinned Mexicans, but their obvious leader was a big spade-bearded man of the true Saxon breed.

Peter knew it was Lon Bargendy, the man of whom he had often heard, even before the outlaw spoke. He came stalking in, shoving White and Ullman unceremoniously aside, half a dozen men at his heels.

"What's goin' on in this shebang?" he bellowed, and then paused as he caught sight of Julie and the shotgun. His eyes narrowed, then widened, as he took her in slowly from head to heel. At length he let out a great roaring laugh that went echoing through the building.

"By the corns of Santa Anna!" he cried, slapping his thigh. "Look what's stickin' up two of my pet man-killers! Hold that attittood, boys; I never seen nothin' funnier. You'd ought to have your pitchers took."

"Aw, there ain't nothin' funny about it, boss," growled White, as he tried to edge behind the other's bulk. "You'd best watch out. That scatter gun's loaded, and this female is plumb locoed. She shore is."

"If you're Mr. Bargendy, the leader of these two apes, you'd better leave with them," said Julie. "Clear out, the lot of you!"

But Bargendy did not flinch.

"I reckon, as I ain't had the honor to meet you before, ma'am, you've got no call to treat me this way," he said. " 'Tain't hardly fair, is it?"

"I know you by reputation," retorted Julie, "and as the leader of clowns like these. That's more than enough."

"You hadn't ought to believe all you hear, ma'am. And what have these boys of mine done? If they've been liquorin' too much, and ain't treated you like a lady, I'll make 'em sweat for it or my name ain't Lon Bargendy!"

"They've insulted me," said Julie, the gun now in the crook of her arm, but still directed straight at the group. "And

they've bullied and terrorized my—my partner."

She found a certain satisfaction in the word "terrorize." Peter was leaning back against the shelves, and his face looked white and drawn. He seemed speechless with fright. Bargendy had flung him one glance, no more. So might he have glanced at any fixture of the store.

"Insulted you, huh?" And Bargendy suddenly turned and caught the two offenders by the scruff of the neck. "What's the meanin' of this?"

"Aw, it wasn't nothin', boss," protested White. "Flash and me be'n liquorin' and we only meant a bit of fun. We didn't aim to be took serious."

"I'll teach you the meanin' of fun!" said Bargendy, his grip tightening. "Don't you know a lady when you see one? And ain't I warned you about liquorin' when on my business? Ain't there enough lies told about me without you two givin' a handle to 'em? Apologize to this lady at once!"

"I ain't said a word to her, boss," protested Ullman. "It was Beef. You know I don't holt with womern, ladies or no ladies."

"I'm right sorry if I scairt you, ma'am," said White, bobbing his head awkwardly at Julie. "I be'n liquorin' plenty and I hope you'll excuse me accordin'. I didn't mean nothin', ma'am, and no womern has ever had cause to complain of me before. It was just plumb foolishness, and there ain't nothin' I reverence more'n womern."

"Now get out!" said Bargendy, and flung them toward the door. "You're a disgrace to my service, and you'll pay for it later. That's whatever."

He turned to a thin, sallow-faced man at his elbow.

"Get these men out, Royce. Get out, all of you!"

When his followers had gone, Bargendy removed his hat and leaned against the counter opposite Peter.

"You can put away that gun, ma'am," he said, "and I'm right sorry you'd any call to use it. You won't have to again, wherever any of my men are concerned. I don't believe those two really meant any harm—it was just the liquor—but I'll teach them a lesson they'll never forget. I'll quirt the hide off'n them, as sure as my name's Bargendy."

Julie put down the gun. Reaction had set in, the quicker because this man was proving so agreeably different from popular report. Although nearing middle age, Bargendy made a fine picture of vigorous masculinity as he stood there bareheaded against the sun. And, whatever report said of him, at least he was a man among men, not a cowering craven like Freddy.

THE menace of Bargendy's name no longer seemed terrible, now that she had met him in the flesh, and this was her opportunity to remove it altogether, where Sagebrush was concerned. He had shown that he was not sponsor for the conduct of Ullman and White, that he had no sympathy with such actions.

"I hope you won't punish them in that way," she said, "but we've had reason to complain of them before. They think they can do as they please here. Ullman shot my partner without provocation, and he also killed Marshal Jake Williams. But of course you know that."

"I heard about Williams," returned Bargendy, "but I understood it was a fair fight and that Williams started it by sayin' things he'd no call to. I don't set up for a saint, ma'am, but there's been a lot of spite talk about me and my outfit because I hold water-and-grazing rights that men like Sam Long ain't been able to gobble. They'd like to drive me out, and as they can't do it with their guns they're tryin' to do it with their tongues. That's the long and short of any stories you've heard about me. There's men who think nobody has a right to the free range but themselves."

"Oh!" said Julie, interested. "I didn't know you raised cattle."

"Mebbe you heard I rustled 'em," said Bargendy, with a short laugh. "That's part of the talk, like my robbin' stages and freight stations. And why? Because I beat Sam Long and the rest to the best slice of range in the whole country. I've built up a nice property, by

hard work, and now they'd like to grab it. I've as much title to it, and more, as Sam Long has to his. They grabbed theirs off'n the State, but I took mine where no State has a title.

"I don't set up my outfit for saints, neither," he continued, "but I've had to get men who could help me keep what I hold. They've had to do a lot of fightin' for my rights, and mebbe at times they've got a bit out of hand. Then, again, this town—— But how long have you been here?"

"Oh, not very long. I'm Mr. Vickers' niece."

"Proud to know you, ma'am. Well, the boys call this town 'Cottontail,' but they shore started somethin' right here to-day that didn't act like no rabbit. I haven't been backin' their play, and I'm right sorry if you've been put to any trouble. I'll see that it don't occur again."

"Thank you," said Julie, coloring faintly under his admiring gaze. "I think they've learned their lesson. And I'm sure, if it wasn't for drink and that man Scoby, they wouldn't have acted like this to-day."

"Scoby? You mean the owner of the Lone Star? Well, I'll tend to him, too, if he needs it. Anybody who aims to make trouble for *you* has got to reckon with Lon Bargendy, I don't care who he is. That's whatever!"

It was evident that he wished to prolong the interview and that the girl was at loss how to end it—or perhaps she was finding a certain pleasure in it because Peter obviously was not—but a trio of punchers from the Long home ranch now entered. Stiff-legged and watchful, they passed Bargendy, and after a few more words with Julie he took his leave. He had a smile for her, a cold stare for the punchers, but not even a glance for the despised Freddy.

"When did that yaller wolf start nosin' round here?" asked one of the punchers, when the gaudy cavalcade had clattered away. "Yuh done right, ma'am, to have that scatter gun handy."

"A customer is a customer, and he has as much right here as you," replied Julie shortly.

Anderson, a youthful giant, flushed under his tan. With "Shorty" Higgins and "Piggy" Simmons, they represented three of Julie's most recent and ardent admirers.

"There's customers and customers, ma'am," said Anderson. "That hombre's a bad one. I'm tellin' yuh."

JULIE was in a brittle humor. Everything had got on her nerves, especially the still-silent and immovable Freddy, who seemed to have gone asleep among his boxes.

"His money's bad, too," said Simmons.

"If a store inquired into how a customer came by his money, before deigning to accept it, there would be no such thing as trade," said Julie tartly. "It's nothing to me how Mr. Bargendy earns his money, but I dare say it's no worse than the way you earn yours."

There were astonished and indignant protests from the trio.

"And he ain't fit to talk to—to no woman!" said Higgins.

"I know all about it," broke in Julie. "There are two sides to every story—and I've heard quite enough of the side you're paid to tell. Now, what can I do for you? I've wasted enough time today and I'll talk no more."

But she did, when the perplexed and injured trio had gone. In fact, she was only getting ready to talk.

"Well?" she demanded of the still-silent Peter. "Perhaps you realize now that I was right and that the dove of peace doesn't stand much chance with a hawk?"

"I wish you hadn't appeared, Miss Vickers."

"Oh, is that all you have to say? I suppose you think that I caused all the trouble?"

"I haven't said that."

"No, but you might as well. You think that if I hadn't appeared you could have got rid of them peacefully? Well, perhaps you might have. But at what cost, *Mr. Gracie?* The cost of your self-respect!"

Peter was silent and this seemed to aggravate her further.

"No doubt you'll say it's better to be

a live coward than a dead hero, *Mr. Gracie?* But some things can be bought too dear—even life. I heard what those men said to you, and it was shameful. Shameful! They treated you like a dog, like a doormat, and—and you don't seem to mind. That's the worst of it. Why don't you say something? Have you *nothing* to say?"

Apparently he had not. He stood in his old position, from which he had not stirred, leaning against the shelves, arms crossed and eyes on the floor.

Julie unloaded the shotgun, taking out the shells with a vicious jerk.

"I suppose it's not your fault if you're afraid of firearms," she resumed. "I'm not blaming you for that. I shouldn't expect you, either, to fight those men. But you could have done *something,* shown *some* spirit, a flicker of courage or even resentment. Or you could have left; you shouldn't have stayed to be disgraced. It was awful! They called you a woman and a violet and—and everything! They insulted, mocked you, and you took it all with sickening complaisance! They robbed you of everything a man should hold dear—and—and you only smiled!"

Suddenly Julie, to her own surprise, burst into tears. Peter stirred, but did not glance up. He seemed lost in his own thoughts.

Julie dried her eyes in a most vindictive manner.

"At least," she said in a new voice, "we shan't have any more trouble, thanks to Mr. Bargendy. And the town need never know what happened here. Let it be known as a final victory of the persuasive tongue and peaceful heart."

Peter looked up at last. His eyes were inscrutable.

"If Bargendy comes here again—and he will—you mustn't see him on any account."

"What! And why not?"

"Because, if you've changed your opinion about him, you couldn't make a bigger mistake."

"Pooh!" She snapped her fingers. "I'm glad I heard his side of the story. He has shown himself to be altogether different from the pictures his enemies paint of him. He has shown himself anxious and fit to be our friend."

"You're mistaken, Miss Vickers. I heard of Bargendy when he was station boss on the old Overland, and he wasn't fit to be anybody's friend. The stories told about him had got nothing to do with jealous cattlemen. There isn't a word of truth in what he said about Sam Long or anybody else. He's a bad egg, rotten all through, and you'll oblige me by having nothing to do with him."

"I shall not oblige you, *Mr. Gracie.* If he should come here again I shall treat him like any other customer. I should be a fool to make an enemy of him for nothing, and he has as much right to be believed as any one else. Actions speak louder than words—even peaceful words. He may not be a saint, but at least he's a *man.* And it's a great relief and novelty to meet a real man."

Peter strode past her and up the stairs without another word.

He closed the door of his little bedroom, which faced northwest, sat down on the hard bed, clasped his hands and stared at the floor. In a neighboring room he could hear Mrs. Gracie singing softly to herself as she knitted and did crochet work by the open window. She was very busy, very happy, these days. Her cough had almost gone and she was learning in wonderful fashion how to do without her sight. She was happy and useful for, apart from her suggestions and advice, her working capital, she made articles that sold well.

By the law of compensation, her other senses had sharpened with the loss of sight, particularly her hearing, and she had called him in as he came upstairs and asked what all the talking was about and who were all those men who had ridden up. He had made her a plausible and evasive reply, but doubted if she quite believed it. As her window overlooked the front street, she might have overheard something of what passed between Ullman and Biggart.

IN the same mechanical manner as he had entered the room and sat down on the bed, Peter now arose and, going to the window, stared out fixedly. It had

become a habit to gaze thus the first thing in the morning and the last at night. Somewhere out in that rainbow-hued vista, or under the blazing stars, in sunlight or in shadow, lay Bargendy's lair.

If Peter could not see it, neither could he forget it. It had called mysteriously and imperatively to him from the first, exerted a strange attraction to which he had been unable to find a plausible answer. But now he could; the mystery was resolved. For hatred can attract more powerfully even than love, and Lon Bargendy was "Blond Beard," the ogre of his childhood, the slayer of Star Eyes. Not only that; the man whom Bargendy had addressed as Royce was "Pockface." Pockface, leaner and yellower, just as Bargendy was stouter and more gross.

Peter was still dazed by the discovery and all it portended, still shaken by the old passion it had called up, still awed by the logical truth masquerading as the incredible. These men whom he had sought as far as Carson and New York had been here all the time; or at least, if not in the Panhandle, their movements, since the day of Star Eyes' death, had been confined, doubtless, to a definite area.

He had heard of Bargendy time and again, had even worked for the same employers, and had never known him for the man he sought. How like life's little ironies! How like it, too, that when he had put aside thoughts of vengeance, when time had healed the wound of Star Eyes' death, the wound should be opened by the very hands that caused it, the pain and fury started anew.

He had recognized Bargendy almost instantly—the peculiar blue eyes, the glazed red lips, fringed by the golden spade beard. He had also recognized the yellow, saturnine face looking over the other's shoulder. And if anything else were needed, there was the semicircular cicatrix, the scar of his hunting knife, on Bargendy's wrist. Peter had sought for and found it as the outlaw leaned against the counter; Bargendy had removed his fringed gauntlets with his hat, and the white mark was very plain on the sunburned wrist.

Not terror, but rage, had sent Peter white and speechless, and the fight for self-control which he had made against his two baiters was as nothing to what followed. This was the man whom Julie said was worthy of her friendship and belief, this man who would treat her as he had treated Star Eyes, and doubtless many another.

Peter had not the faintest doubt of that; he had seen how Bargendy looked at her, and he had seen more than that, seen what Julie could not. The whole scene had been a mockery, a farce, in which Ullman and White played up to their leader. No doubt it was a scene that had been rehearsed before when dealing with the Julie type or a loaded shotgun.

By his opening words Bargendy had given the cue to his followers, and then, as he turned and seized Ullman and White, Peter had caught his wink. The lion had given the cue to the wolves that he wanted this prey for himself. And as Royce and the others left the store, Peter had seen them nudge one another. It was all a joke, a joke on the despised Cottontail. And the arrival of Long's punchers had cut it short.

Bargendy would come again, come as often as he pleased or thought necessary. It might please him to pose as an injured honest cattleman and win Julie by her own consent, but he would not try that long. He was not one to play the waiting game, and the only law he knew was that of force. Peter remembered his face that day of tragedy when he snarled at Royce: "What I have, I hold." Yes, and what he wanted, he took. He would come again, and the town could do nothing to prevent it. Even Julie herself would not—not until it was too late.

Instinct might warn her, if nothing else, but she seemed in the mood to defy even that. He, Peter, could not warn her further than he had; he could not tell her how and why he had knowledge of this man. Nor would she mind anything he said. Bargendy would come again, and he had at his command fifty men, at least, criminals all.

Peter turned from the window and, from behind the door, lifted down the

twin short Colts and the long hip gun, with their belts. He looked at them curiously, picked them up one after the other and spun them mechanically. Somehow, their cold, blue hardness had a soothing touch, and he experienced a little of the old pleasure as he "hefted" their balance. It was the pleasure that a perfect tool gives to the expert craftsman.

He went to the cheap little dressing table, brought out bottle and rag and procceded to oil the weapons carefully, though he had done that before putting them away. Then he strapped on the shoulder holsters and thimble belt with its open scabbard. Next, he began to go through certain exercises which, to the old gun fighter, were the equivalent of the modern fist fighter's shadow boxing.

It would have paralyzed those who knew Freddy to see him now as he stepped noiselessly about the room, wheeling in a flash and whipping out with crossed hands the twin breast guns, aiming in the mirror, drawing and throwing down in every imaginable position, and executing some very astonishing antics with the hip gun.

He performed these strange and complicated exercises for the best part of an hour, as though he were back in the old days and preparing for his nightly appearance as *Panhandle Pete;* or, later on, anticipating a meeting with some notorious killer. For years and years it had been part of his daily work; first his bread had depended on it, then his life. To be eternally fit was the price of safety.

There would inevitably come a time, and that soon, when he would need all of his old skill. Peter was getting ready for that moment.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands December 20th.*

FAMOUS HERMITS

AT some time or other in our lives, we've all thought how wonderful it would be to slip away from the worries of everyday life and select a friendly mountaintop on which to live in solitary independence. Many have done it and are doing it. Not all of them go to the mountains, though. Not all of their motives are the same.

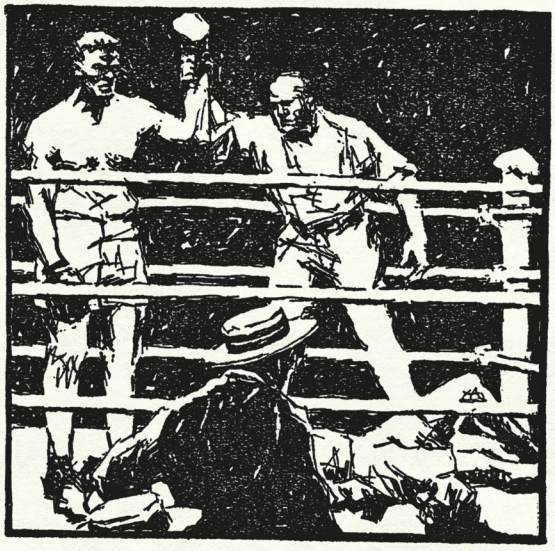
Zoroaster, the Persian prophet, and perhaps the most famous of all hermits, found a mountain cave, and history suggests that his heart had as much to do with it as did his soul.

Oliver Goldsmith, author of "She Stoops to Conquer," failed at college and straightway took a nice new portmanteau and some good script paper and took to the open road, the byways of Europe. Robert Louis Stevenson had what we all long for, a South Sea island. A millionaire who recently died could not stand noise, so he built him a soundless yacht and cruised the seven seas. Just before his death, it was necessary to put into port for repairs, and he was forced to live temporarily in a hotel. It is thought that the effect on his nervous system was fatal.

Many well-known writers and artists of the present day are living out in the wilderness—some of them because they are gathering material for their works, others because they work best undisturbed. Henry David Thoreau had a little cabin on the shore of Walden Pond, and wrote enthusiastically of the charms of nature.

In India, the ascetics prefer the silence of the mountains for their meditations. Rabindranath Tagore, the celebrated Hindu poet and dramatist, tells of the calm of such an existence.

A prominent landscape painter of to-day has built a cabin for his wife and himself out in the Rocky Mountains, and they live there all year round, returning to civilization for provisions only at long intervals.



In the Ninth Round

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Alone and Broke," "Paid Back," "Below Stage," Etc.

"Jumbo" Hoop's chin during that ring argument with "Sawmill" Jones, might just as well have been a lantern—it was so easy to see and sock. Just why a scrapper, who had a wonderful defense, ordinarily, and who had everything at stake, should have been wide open like that, was a mystery to Rufe Pringle, Jumbo's manager. And when Rufe solved the mystery, there was, as Homer never said, the dickens to pay.

ON the lower East Side of New York, the Hammer and Tongs Social Club was an ancient institution. Formed originally for political purposes and bearing some appropriate name long since forgotten, the members were wont to gather around a beer keg for their meetings, in the days when beer with a punch in it was a lawful beverage. The arguments at these assemblages were numerous and noisy, and so often did the meetings end in a free-for-all fight that the nickname, "Hammer and Tongs," given the club by a police lieutenant who was called on to lead more than one pacifying expedition into the clubrooms, came into common usage in the neighborhood, later into official usage.

For various reasons, the club members had given up the ancient and honorable pastime of polishing off every meeting with a general exchange of fisticuffs, but the organization, housed in a ramshackle building in a dingy street in the slums, still carried on under the name of the Hammer and Tongs Social Club.

There was a reason for its continued existence, and an even weightier reason for the quiet and orderly club life that seemed to go on there.

Club quarters consisted of one big room and a few smaller ones on the third floor, access to which was gained by way of gloomy staircases. Whispers attaching to the club an unsavory reputation were sometimes heard in the district. It was said that it was now a gathering place for operators in the illicit liquor traffic—nothing more or less, in fact, than a bootleggers' chamber of commerce. Being such, the Hammer and Tongs So-

cial Club was under the necessity of putting on an innocent front. This it offered under the guise of a political and athletic organization, and as such was enabled to renew its charter from time to time. To bolster up the pretense, rallies were held there during political campaigns, and athletic events in the shape of prize fights and wrestling matches were often staged. In these contests of physical skill and might, neighborhood talent was usually employed.

But one night in early winter, a stranger in the neighborhood, a stranger indeed in the city, battled for fistic honors at the Hammer and Tongs Social Club, in the big room, in the center of which a ring had been set up. He was a heavyweight, fetched down from his stamping grounds in Canada because, up there, he had shown sufficient promise to imbue his manager and friends with the idea that he would quickly become a contender for the world's championship.

He was a beefy, bull-necked lumberjack from the Canadian woods, known as "Sawmill" Jones. He fought with the plodding stamina of a truck horse, and the battle was scarcely two minutes old, when it became apparent to ringsiders that Sawmill Jones relied for victory on his ability to take anything and everything the other fellow had to offer. He was one of those freaks of the ring whose dull sensibilities defied the knock-out.

His opponent was a product of the East Side, a young man who had been born just two blocks away from the Hammer and Tongs Social Club, one "Jumbo" Hoop. Jumbo's weight and general physical dimensions equaled those of Sawmill Jones, but from the very first it was plain that Jumbo had a big edge in speed and knowledge of ring tactics. True, he socked Sawmill Jones with a variety of terrific punches without fetching him even to his knees, but it seemed that all Jumbo had to do to win the fight on points was to keep out of Sawmill's way and occasionally to whip in a telling wallop.

That was the way in which Rufe Pringle, Jumbo's manager, sized up the fight at the end of the first round.

"Don't think y'u got steam enough to knock that baby out," Rufe whispered to Jumbo, as the seconds waved a towel and otherwise sought to refresh the East Side fighter. "He ain't got nuthin' to knock out—see? Y'u can't put a hunka bone to sleep, an' that's all his head is—solid, no nerves runnin' through it. What little brains he's got are buried so deep in ivory it'd take a safe blower to git at 'em. Way y'u be'n whackin' his chin shows that. Wallops y'u give him, by rights he oùghta be the chief exhibit at a coroner's inquest by now, instead o' settin' over there in his corner grinnin' like there ain't nuthin' happened to him.

"Don't tucker yerself out on him, Jumbo. That's his game, stickin' his chin out fer a target till y'u git tired whalin' at it, then sinkin' one home while y'u're recoverin' yer breath. Y'u got this fight won on points, Jumbo, if y'u keep outa his way—tha's all. Y'u're runnin' up a score. Take it easy; don't let him rush y'u; keep outa the corners; an' slip in a wallop ev'ry so of'n—an' don't lose yer head 'cause y'u can't knock him out. It's our fight on points, an'——"

The bell sounded for the second round.

THE fight went along nicely, from the standpoint of Rufe Pringle. His man, Jumbo Hoop, ran up an easy lead on points so decisively that even the most rabid of Sawmill Jones' partisans, of which there were quite a number in the house, would not dare venture a boo nor a hoot when the fight should be awarded to Jumbo at the end of the tenth round. At least, it looked that way to Rufe Pringle.

Between rounds, Rufe continued his counsel to Jumbo Hoop. During the fighting, he watched things carefully, and so easily did Jumbo dodge the wild swings of his antagonist that Rufe told himself he had nothing more to worry about. He found time, in fact, for meditation.

He began to wonder and to marvel at the way in which Mother Nature provided for her children. Take Jumbo Hoop, for instance. To Rufe Pringle's certain knowledge, Jumbo had not eaten a meal that could fairly be termed square for at least two months. Rufe was an

old hand at managing prize fighters. Well along in years after a series of ups and downs—the last fluctuation of which had left him very much on the nether side of fortune—he and his latest acquisition in the fight game had been struggling along on little to eat and with the problem of bed and shelter in a highly uncertain state.

They had, as a matter of fact, roosted in Bowery lodging houses and on park benches. They had slept among the lumber and freight along the docks. They had been driven, at unseemly hours of the night, from one place to another by watchmen and patrolmen. They had got up at dawn, hungry and broke, still sleepy and yawning, to walk the streets and lounge on benches until night fell again. Summer had gone into fall, and the nights had chilled with the first breath of winter. Still there seemed to be no relief.

And then, miraculously, Ben Glooker, secretary and manager of the Hammer and Tongs Social Club, had offered Jumbo Hoop a fight, seventy-five dollars to the winner and twenty-five to the loser. The meeting was accidental, in the street. They were not well acquainted with Ben Glooker, and Rufe Pringle forbore to ask him for an advance through fear that, if Ben discovered their impecunious state, he might decide that Jumbo was far out of training and hesitate to match him.

So, for the intervening ten days, Rufe had striven to protect the physical vigor of his fighter. What little money he had been able to borrow from friends he spent on Jumbo, feeding him as well as he could and living on crusts himself. Rufe had put Jumbo to sleep in beds, too, in cheap lodging houses, while he, Rufe, walked the streets.

But at no time did Jumbo have the food and the ventilated bed chambers that a pugilist should have while training for a fight. By all the rules of training and from every standpoint of common sense in athletics, Jumbo Hoop, in that ring, should look like a scarecrow. His eyes should be hollow from indifferent sleep. His muscles should be stringy and flabby from insufficient food. His wind should be short from lack of training in a gymnasium. Yet Mother Nature had brought up her reserves in the case of Jumbo Hoop.

He appeared lean and hard. The leanness did not surprise Rufe Pringle, but the hardness did. Certainly youth can stand a good deal! Of course, Jumbo, in time of physical hardship, had tremendous reserves on which to draw—youth, an iron constitution, freedom from dissipation. He seemed to be fast on his feet, and his wind was holding out. His breath did not heave and wheeze when he came into his corner between rounds. Rufe Pringle observed this, and was pleased.

Not until the eighth round did Rufe grow nervous.

Jumbo Hoop had a clever trick, in all set-tos, of protecting his chin and covering. He was wont to drop his chin into the saddle of a hunched shoulder and to play his long arms up and down in front of his body, when in a pinch, play them so rapidly that he caught his adversary's gloves on his arms, thus guarding the vulnerable points of his chest and abdomen. He was usually able to keep this up until he worked himself out of the hole and got set again to box and shift.

ABOUT the middle of the eighth round, Sawmill, floundering in, taking a world of punishment in order to get close, worked Jumbo into a hole, and began hammering him. Jumbo seemed to forget the trick of saddling his chin. He protected his body, his heart and solar plexus well enough, but, curiously, he kept his chin up, a shining target.

And Sawmill Jones was too dumb to take advantage of that brief opening.

Rufe Pringle had an uncomfortable few moments. But Sawmill, striking blindly, let the chance slip, and Jumbo presently eased out of the hole into comparative safety. Jumbo weathered that round.

But Rufe Pringle knew that Sawmill's manager and seconds must have noticed this let-down in the defense of Jumbo, and that they would put Sawmill wise, instruct him to watch for another such opening in the two rounds to come. If that let-down was due to a flagging nerv-

ous system—if lack of training and food and sleep were beginning to tell—the thing might occur again—yes, a number of times—in the six minutes of fighting that still stretched ahead. A pugilist out of form can go completely to pieces in much less than six minutes.

"Lis'en, Jumbo," Rufe told him earnestly, "y'u flopped fer a few seconds. Clean fergot all about yer chin. Left it stickin' up like a bull's-eye. On'y thing that saved y'u was that baby's dumbness. Yes, sir! He clean overlooked it—an' there was yer chin wavin' in the air with a red lantern on it to show him the mark. An' he never seen it! Y'u're a lucky boy, b'lieve me! Don't fergit to make a little nest in yer shoulder fer that chin, Jumbo—if he works y'u into a hole. They'll put him wise now, an' he'll be watchin'. Ain't weakenin', be y'u?"

"I git dizzy spells," Jumbo confided.

Rufe nodded, with sympathetic understanding, although Jumbo, sprawled out in his chair and soaking up, with closed eyes, the furious towel fanning being given him by a second, did not see the gesture.

"Sure, y'u're dizzy," Rufe assented. He was hunched down at Jumbo's side, rubbing his wrist. "It's a funny thing to me y'u ain't keeled over afore this—short like y'u be'n on grub an' sleep. But there's on'y two more rounds, Jumbo, an' y'u got a big lead on points. He can't win on'y by a knock-out. Fight off the woozy spells, boy—an' duck that chin when y'u feel yerself slippin'. He can't hit y'u if y'u keep half yer senses."

They went up for the ninth round.

Thirty seconds later, the thing happened again. There was Jumbo Hoop in another hole, guarding, covering, foiling with his arms, but neglecting to drop his chin. Rufe Pringle gasped. Rufe was a thin little man with a walrus mustache, a man grown old in the service of pugilism—in shabby clothes, his lean cheeks treated that afternoon to a five-cent shave in a Bowery barber shop which specialized in the down-and-out trade—a pathetic figure, hungry, watching his latest ring protégé stick his chin up for the knock-out!

After the gasp, Rufe ceased to breathe for the space of time in which Jumbo's "button" waved invitingly in the air. Sawmill's style of fighting, boring in with lowered eyes, seemed to prevent his detection of the target. Miraculously, Jumbo Hoop escaped the second time. Rufe's held-in breath was expelled in a sigh of vast relief as Jumbo emerged from the crisis. Rufe looked now like a deflated balloon, weak and lifeless.

Once he caught Jumbo watching him with a curious sidelong glance, a shrewd glance, which was turned away the moment their eyes met. Rufe did not think that Jumbo's eyes were the eyes of a dizzy man, of a man whose strength was spent, whose nervous system was about to topple under the strain of battle. He was decidedly uncomfortable; and something like resentment, vague, disturbing, stirred in his heart.

Yet Rufe Pringle hadn't long to think about that curious glance shot at him by his man in the ring. It seemed only a few seconds later that Jumbo Hoop was trapped again, in his own corner this time—trapped for the third time, and fighting to ward off the terrific onslaught of his antagonist. For the fraction of a second, Jumbo's chin sought the protecting cover of his shoulder.

Then Sawmill's right fist circled in a wide swing, got under Jumbo's left elbow—smash into the short ribs. Jumbo's body sagged, all but the chin. His head rolled; the chin came up.

Sawmill saw the mark this time. His eyes were illuminated with a gleam of delight and victory. He struck.

A few seconds later the right glove of Sawmill Jones was lifted aloft in token of victory, just as Jumbo Hoop was brought out of the trance. Rufe Pringle, in his pocket the twenty-five dollars which came to them as the loser's end of the purse, piloted the silent and morose Jumbo Hoop to a modest little hotel.

A WAITER from a near-by restaurant brought in food to them on a tray. It was the first square meal either had had in a long time. They ate wordlessly and voraciously, for a long time, for the order had been heavy. Occasionally they studied each other covertly.

Rufe Pringle lighted a cigar. They pushed their chairs back from the table. For the first time they looked straight into each other's eyes; then Jumbo's glance lowered, and wandered toward one of the beds.

"Guess I'll hit the hay," he announced, abashed.

"Guess y'u won't," Rufe rejoined, in a quiet, even tone. "Not till we have a little talk."

"Don't feel like talkin'."

"Shouldn't think y'u would." Rufe knocked the ashes off his cigar into an empty coffee cup. "Jumbo," he proceeded, "look up here! Look at me. I want y'u to look me square in the eye while I'm sayin' what I got to say. I be'n managin' pugilists fer thirty years. I don't hafta mention the names o' some winners I had in my string—big winners. Y'u already know 'em. I've managed losers, too. But I never was on the losin' end of a fight that worried me like this one does."

"Worryin' don't git nobody nuthin'," Jumbo rejoined sullenly.

"Maybe not. I just aim to git the straight o' this thing, an' then stop worryin'."

Jumbo bristled. He scowled at his physically insignificant manager, scowled fiercely, due to the contusions on his countenance.

"Whatcha hintin' at?" he demanded. "Mean to say——"

"Just this," Rufe interrupted quietly. "I think y'u laid down to-night. I think y'u let that Canuck slam y'u in the jaw. I think y'u opened up fer him in the eighth round. He passed it up. Y'u opened up ag'in in the ninth—an' he passed that up. Finally he seen the chin y'u was flauntin' in his face, an' he let y'u have it. That's what I think, from the best o' my knowledge an' belief."

Jumbo Hoop had straightened up in his chair, and sat now perched on the edge of it. He continued to frown in a threatening manner, and his big hands kept opening and closing.

"If it wasn't fer yer size," he began, "an' yer age, I'd——"

"Y'u'd beat me up, eh? Well, that wouldn't prove nuthin' to me. When I come outa the hospital, I'd still hold the opinion that Jumbo Hoop laid down in a fight. It's a mighty evil yarn fer a fighter to git started about him. It just about closes up all the clubs to him. If I was sure that y'u sold out just outa pure cussedness an' greed fer money, without no mitigatin' circumstances, I wouldn't waste my breath on y'u. I'd walk out an' leave y'u, an' never have no more truck with y'u. But I got a kind of an understandin' o' human nature.

"I alluz banked on Jumbo Hoop as bein' square. Thing I'm thinkin' of is, did Jumbo Hoop, bein' hungry an' homeless an' ragged, with winter comin' on, let some clever an' connivin' crook take advantage of him? That has be'n done afore this, in the fight game. Now I could see by the look in yer eye, Jumbo, in the ninth round, that y'u was up to sumpin y'u didn't want me to see. I'm a purty good judge of a fighter in the ring, an' out of it, fer that matter. Y'u might fool me in the eighth round, but y'u can't keep on doin' it through the ninth. I'm bound to catch on, if y'u keep repeatin' the trick—speshly if y'u look at me in the singular an' peculiar manner I caught y'u at.

"If Sawmill Jones'd knocked y'u out in the eighth round, when y'u first presented him yer chin on a silver platter, I'd 'a' thought nuthin' of it. I'd 'a' put it down to a sudden lapse in vigilance that all fighters're li'ble to, speshly one that ain't in trainin'. But when I see yer eyes look clear, an' kinda cunning, Jumbo—an' ye keep repeatin', I'm bound to git suspicious.

"Now maybe I'm wrong," Rufe continued, "but I don't think so. If I'm right, I know y'u'll tell me, as y'u're square at heart. I know it! If y'u did sell out—an' I can see purty clear how the fellas back o' that Canuck'd wanta work such a thing—y'u was imposed on, taken advantage of, behind my back. But I'm entitled to know, Jumbo. We went through a lot together, an' I borrowed an' begged money to feed y'u, an' slep' in parks so's y'u could——"

Jumbo Hoop had ceased to scowl. There was a peculiar expression on his countenance, an abashed expression, a

look of shame and sorrow. He flourished his hands.

"Yuh got me, Rufe!" he cut in. "I can't——"

"Sh-h-h! Don't holler," Rufe cautioned. "No need to spill the story all over town. Fellas in the next room—— Now go ahead, Jumbo. Quiet down. Here, come back an' set down in yer chair. Now tell me the whole thing."

THEN Jumbo poured out the miserable story. When it was finished, Pringle got to his feet and paced the floor, gnawing agitatedly on his cigar. Suddenly he paused in front of the big pugilist, a pathetic figure in a rage that appeared to be so futile in such a small and helpless man. He shook his skinny fists in the general direction of the Hammer and Tongs Social Club.

"The crooks—the dirty crooks!" he piped. Then Rufe remembered his admonition to Jumbo not to holler, and went on in a quieter but no less emphatic tone of voice: "Buncha poison-peddling bootleggers, tha's all they be. Time was when the Hammer and Tongs was a square man's club. Good fights put on there, straight fights. Square guys hung out there. Done a lotta drinkin' an' quarrelin', but they didn't frame no fights. What are they now? Nuthin' but a gang o' cheap crooks—stiffs in the bootleggin' bus'ness.

"It ain't a club no more—just a clearin' house fer booze deals. They meet there an' fix up their schemes to peddle rum. Well, I ain't no prohibition-enforcement officer. It ain't none o' my bus'ness how much poison they sell—but when they start in framin' prize fights—— That *is* my bus'ness. I'm a fight man. I allus be'n clean. Broke er flush, I alluz be'n clean. I never bought a fight er sold one. Best man win, tha's my system—an' I never thought I'd come to handlin' a fighter that'd sell out. I——"

"They waved their money at me," Jumbo cut in. "I couldn't stand it."

"I ain't blamin' you—much," Rufe assured him. "They knowed y'u was busted an' hungry—Ben Glooker knowed it. He had a whisky friend up in Canada that was managin' a prize fighter on the side. Him an' Ben an' their booze crowd had a deal on to ship a truckload o' rum down here from Canada, an' Ben wanted to keep on the good side of 'em. They told him about their fighter—how they'd like to git him started off right here in New York. That meant he'd have to win the first fight er two, er nobody'd pay any attention to him. They had to cinch the first fight anyhow. They couldn't take no chanst. So they framed it.

"They didn't let their fighter know it. That guy thinks he won on the square. Y'u had to stick yer chin right under his nose afore he had sense enuff to smack it. An' now he thinks he's some punkins as a prize fighter. They'll frame some more fights fer him, gittin' in on bigger money alla time—clean up afore their man gits socked clear back to the river St. Lawrence."

Rufe strode up and down the room.

"Why don't the crooks stick to their own game?" he demanded. "Why don't they run their booze deals an' leave the fight game to them that wants to keep it decent? It's their greed—tha's what it is. They stick their paws into ev'ry game they can steal a dollar out of. Them booze crooks, dickerin' with a buncha bootleggers in New York, see a chanst to put over a fight fraud. Ben Glooker is willin' to do anything to keep 'em friendly. Ben fixes a fight fer 'em as a favor. He sneaks around an' gits in his work with you when I ain't watchin'. Says he'll slip y'u two hundred dollars next day after the fight if y'u'll let the lumberjack knock y'u out, an'——"

"Wisht I had it to do over ag'in," Jumbo Hoop cut in once more. "Way it looked, Rufe—— We're flat broke, so flat that seventy-five bucks won't do us no good. Both of us need clo'es, lots of 'em. We need a place to live, so's I can keep in shape, if ever I'm gonna fight ag'in. If I drag down the winner's end o' that scrap, it's seventy-five bucks. Not on'y that, but if I don't sell out, they ease me outa the match, an' we don't git nuthin'. We——"

"Y'u never stopped to think that it's better to quit the fight game than to sell out?"

"I didn't think o' nuthin' but keepin'

us from starvin'," Jumbo insisted. "I'm ashamed of it, Rufe—an' tell yuh what, I ain't gonna go near Ben Glooker fer that two hundred bucks."

Rufe Pringle continued to pace the floor, meditating. Presently he halted in front of Jumbo and looked him straight in the eye.

"Yes," he announced, "y'u're gonta take the two hundred. Y'u're gonta go to Ben Glooker an' act like y'u didn't tell me nuthin' about it. Take the two hundred an' say nuthin'."

Jumbo looked at him searchingly, and inquired:

"Yuh framin' up sumpin, Rufe? Fixin' to put Ben Glooker an' his booze gang in a hole?"

"Well," Rufe Pringle replied enigmatically, "I'm gonta show them bootleggers that they gotta stick to their own crooked deals, an' leave the fightin' game alone."

THE front that Ben Glooker presented to the world was that of secretary and manager of the Hammer and Tongs Social Club, a political and athletic organization on New York's lower East Side. Behind this front, Ben Glooker operated as captain of an extensive liquor-smuggling ring. He was a pudgy little man, sly and soft-spoken, who sought to look learned and bookish behind a pair of balloon-tire spectacles.

Ben's activities were widespread. He had connections which enabled him to engineer liquor shipments by way of the Canadian border as well as from landing points on Long Island and the Jersey coast. He was, as a matter of fact, a sort of filling station for several uptown cabarets and night clubs.

At the present moment, Ben Glooker was chiefly concerned in a big truckload of Scotch whisky en route from Canada to New York. This shipment was already contracted for by two night clubs, at a figure which meant an enormous profit to Ben and the ring in Canada which arranged the shipment.

The fixed fight, as a favor to his Canadian friends, was a mere insignificant detail in the life of Ben Glooker. It was a favor that one booze smuggler did for another. The effect of the fight had been to gain favorable notice for Sawmill Jones on the sporting pages of New York. It meant matches for the Canadian lumberjack, who was wholly oblivious of the fact that his antagonist, Jumbo Hoop, had laid down. Sawmill's manager was in all games for the money there was in them, liquor games and fight games. Ben Glooker, being chiefly interested in liquor, had fixed the fight in order to retain the business frendship of the Canadian rum runner.

It was close to noon. Ben Glooker and a business friend were sitting in Ben's office in the quarters of the Hammer and Tongs Social Club. At first glance, it might have appeared that Ben and his friend were calm and unconcerned, yet that was not the case. They sat silently for the most part, somewhat tensely waiting.

A telegram lay on Ben's desk. This had been received at a neighboring garage four or five hours previously and delivered to Ben by an oil-besmeared mechanic. It read:

> Foley, Ludley Garage, New York: Tire trouble here. Delayed two hours, but everything O. K. now. Pulling out seven thirty.

This message was dated at a town up State, on the route from the Canadian border to New York. It was signed "MacReedy." It seemed to be nothing more than a report by a truck driver to his employers that tire trouble had delayed his trip in that particular town two hours. On a slip of paper beside the telegram, the names of several towns had been written and beside each a figure had been set down—figures running from one to twelve.

The figure accompanying the town from which the telegram had been sent was eight. This message meant to Ben Glooker that the truckload of Canadian liquor had safely pulled into station No. 8 and that MacReedy, the driver, had stopped there for two hours' sleep. Such was the significance, in their code, of the term "tire trouble." MacReedy was tired. Real tire trouble, if any occurred, would be reported under quite another term.

The Ludley Garage, a block or so

away, was simply another station in the rum-running activities of Ben Glooker.

As MacReedy had instructions not to file a telegram at any prearranged station until he was on the point of leaving, Ben Glooker was reasonably certain that station No. 8 had been reached and passed without interference either by revenue officers or hijackers. The thing that worried Ben now was that it was past time for MacReedy to report from station No. 9.

"It's only sixty miles, from No. 8 to No. 9," Ben Glooker said.

"That's right," his friend agreed. "Sixty miles. Well, we oughta hear any minute now."

They continued to stare at the door, with ears attuned for the noise of steps on the stairs. But no one came from the Ludley Garage with a telegram from station No. 9 on Ben Glooker's booze route to the Canadian border.

THE town that Ben Glooker knew as station No. 9 was officially listed in the United States post-office directory as Camberwell, in the State of New York. It lay in a valley. The highway from the north dipped down into the town, ran through it, and up a steep incline to the southward. From the top of this grade, a magnificent view could be had of the valley and the mountains thereabouts and a shining river far below.

A thin covering of snow lay on the countryside. The air was clear and crisp. A leafless fruit orchard, acres in extent, presented its intricate network of branches and twigs as a gigantic pattern delicately traced in the sunlight.

MacReedy, the truck driver, his machine parked beside the road at the top of the grade, sat looking down into the valley. For just a few moments he remained under the spell of that panorama of beauty, then turned his attention to the grim business of the moment.

He climbed down and walked to the edge of the cliff. He surveyed the drop and the nature of the ground below, surveyed it with a calculating air.

"Nothing down there," he told himself, "but rocks and brush. Can't hurt nobody."

Then he started the motor, but did not put the truck in gear nor make any move toward driving on. Instead, he climbed down to the road again, studied the angle at which the front wheels were twisted as well as the edge of the fenceless cliff several yards off the road. The wide level of the ground there, with the paved road far away from the cliff, accounted for the fact that no fence had been erected. The motor was idled down as far and as quietly as possible and still kept running.

MacReedy listened intently. He heard the noise of an approaching car, and did nothing until that had passed. Then he listened again. No sound except that from his own motor. He moved swiftly.

Standing on the ground below the driver's seat, he reached up and pulled the gas throttle open. The motor roared. Then, working only with his hands, he threw in the clutch and jerked the gear lever into first speed. Then he released the clutch pedal and jumped back.

The truck moved toward the cliff, gathered speed on the sloping ground, plunged downward and out of sight, with none but MacReedy as witness.

MacReedy walked to the edge of the cliff. The echoes of the thunderous crash on the rocks below had died away. No fire followed the wreck, a contingency upon which MacReedy had reckoned, and he was pleased. The absence of fire would give him plenty of time to get out of the neighborhood before an investigation could be started. As he stood on the cliff, MacReedy became conscious of a scent rising from the rocks below—a scent in which were mingled the odors of gasoline from the crushed tank and bootleg Scotch whisky from the wrecked cargo belonging to Ben Glooker.

"For the old gang," MacReedy muttered, as he walked along the road toward Camberwell—station No. 9.

There he sent the following telegram:

> Foley, Ludley Garage, New York: Tire trouble near here, off abandoned road. Returning New York train. Impossible salvage.
>
> CLIFF.

There was no code between MacReedy and Ben Glooker which enabled the truck

driver to tell the story so that they only would understand, but Ben Glooker got enough out of that telegram to apprise him that the truck had met with disaster and that a cliff was involved. And, curiously, MacReedy did not show up.

But a sinister figure did show up in Ben Glooker's office one morning—a figure sinister to Ben Glooker because of the story he told and not because of his physical appearance. He was, in fact, decidedly harmless looking, but he had a way of expressing himself in no uncertain tone.

"All y'u got outa that message," Rufe Pringle said, "was that MacReedy stopped to sleep again near station No. 9, an' that sumpin happened to the truck while it was off'n the road—sumpin about a cliff. Well, I ain't seen nuthin' in the papers about it—an' I know y'u think MacReedy run off with that cargo o' whisky—sold it some place. Y'u're lookin' fer him. Well, le' me put y'u straight."

"Go on—put me straight," Ben Glooker urged impatiently, as Rufe paused for dramatic effect.

"That truck's a wreck," Rufe assured him, "over a cliff, near Camberwell, which y'u call station No. 9 in yer booze route. An' that cargo o' Scotch has evaporated by this time."

Glooker restrained himself.

"How did MacReedy come to let the truck go over a cliff?" he asked, twisting his hands.

"He didn't come to let it go over," Rufe informed him. "He sent it over, as a favor to me."

"Why've you got it in for me, Rufe?"

" 'Cause y'u put a bum finish on my life," Rufe Pringle told him. "I'm an old man, an' fer the first time in my life, y'u make me handle a fighter that sold out. Oh, y'u can't say y'u didn't! Jumbo Hoop told me the whole story. Y'u think it's just a little thing that don't amount to nuthin', to fix a prize fight, eh? Well, maybe it ain't—to you! But it's a lot to me. Y'u offered my fighter two hundred dollars to lay down in the ninth round—stick his jaw up fer a knock-out. I offered yer truck driver the same two hundred dollars to lay down on y'u at station No. 9. Both of 'em accepted. That's fair enuff, ain't it?"

Ben Glooker said nothing. He was meditating upon just what he ought to do—what he could do.

"Y'u can't collect no insurance on that truck," Rufe continued. "Insurance companies don't pay no damages on cars that're wrecked haulin' booze. I looked into all that. I didn't want nobody to lose except you. I ain't out to make no war on bootleggers, but when one of 'em buys my fighter, he better look out. I ain't got no fighter now. I wouldn't handle a man that sold out. But I had to do sumpin. MacReedy's an old friend o' mine. Don't y'u remember he's an old prize fighter, knocked out eleven years ago by 'Sailor' Gorkin?"

"Yes, I knew that."

"Sure. Well, I was his manager," Rufe went on. "There ain't nuthin' MacReedy wouldn't do fer me. I found out he was drivin' a booze truck fer you. I told him the story. He agreed with me y'u done me a bum trick. Jumbo Hoop gi' me the two hundred dollars y'u paid him. I give it to MacReedy. MacReedy an' me think alike about any guy that'll fix a fight.

"Me an' him're part o' the old gang on the East Side here, an' we figgered sumpin' oughta be done to you an' yer kind. MacReedy told me the secrets of yer booze routes—yer stations. Y'u needn't worry. I ain't gonta squeal. I just wanted to know 'em fer my own game. You bought my fighter. I bought yer truck driver. Y'u can't kick, can y'u? If it's all right fer you to make me a loser in the ninth round, it's fair enuff fer me to make you lose at station No. 9, ain't it?"

Being a wise man and realizing that a bootlegger who keeps his mouth shut in time of anger runs less danger of betraying himself, Ben Glooker said nothing.

Rufe Pringle went away—broke, but with a grin of satisfaction on his face.

"Tommy Snaps the Handcuffs," Mr. Hinds' latest story, will appear in the next issue of THE POPULAR.

The Rhyme of the Elder Brother

By Harry Kemp

I AM the Elder Brother; you've heard of the Prodigal Son,
But little of me, I'll warrant, who stuck till the job was done
While he was off carousing at Cæsarea and Tyre
With dark-eyed dancing women to sound of tabor and lyre.

I am the Elder Brother; I brought the sheep to the fold
When, spite of the wool he carried, the black ram shivered with cold,
When frost gleamed white on the rooftops as thick as a fall of snow
And the great, pale star of evening shone out like a lamp hung low.

I am the Elder Brother; I worked till far in the night
To see that the cows were foddered and the horses bedded right;
The Boy, he took his portion and scattered it far and near,
But *I* held on to my wages to buy more farming gear,
And I looked about for a woman, and married, and settled down,
And kept so busy I've seldom gone twice in the year to town.

I am the Elder Brother—when *he* came strolling back
I strove to send him packing to follow his former track,
Yea, I who had heaved and lifted along with the other men,
I urged the Old Man blackly to let him shift again.

And ever I grew more bitter to see that the Right was done
To me, the Elder Brother, in re the Prodigal Son,
And each plea knotted me harder, I stood as firm as a rock—
Till one day down in the village I heard a Young Man talk

(A queer young chap from somewhere—folk said from Galilee)
Of God—and Love—and Brother—and He seemed to speak to me,
As He told of the lost sheep straying far from the wonted track—
For only that day a fortnight, I brought one in on my back,
And I hadn't stopped to chide it, but I had carried it in—
And I saw I'd treated it better than my own kith and kin;
And I went back home, and was decent, and joined the Boy at the fire
And I even laughed at his stories, though I knew he was half a liar!

But I'd like to know what happened to The Lad who was young as he,
Who talked so plainly to people and who seemed to speak to me!

Wooden Luck

By Ernest Douglas

Author of "Truly Brave," "Three Rousing Noes," Etc.

This story is really about a wooden leg—not the wooden leg of ghost-story fame—but a pedal appendage which had all the attributes of a magician's wand. At least, Joe Bonner, who owned it, believed so. He was positive that it could be depended upon when he and two companions were captured by villainous Mexican bandits, At the wrong moment, however, the lucky leg was gone—lost, strayed or filched.

THE idea that an ex-doughboy's wooden leg, borne down a Sonora arroyo on the crest of a violent flood, could even remotely influence the movements of the New York Stock Exchange, is preposterous on its face. I didn't come to Mexico from Missouri, yet I'm still to be shown that the whole notion isn't superstitious nonsense. But as I've said before, Joe Bonner is part banshee; and the leg was his, which may make a difference in the point of view. Oh, well, read the story of "Plunger" Geezle and judge for yourself.

Prospecting was our excuse for roaming around the Altar Desert with a couple of saddle horses. two pack mules, lazy old Marco Sotelo for a guide, and a radio set as part of our equipment. I may as well admit right at the start, though, that we were looking more for thrills than for mineral.

Three long, weary months had passed without any border fracas interesting enough for us to mix into, and our A. E. F. experience had bred in us an appetite for adventure that must be fed. So, when we got tired of waiting for something to turn up in Nogales, Agua Prieta or Douglas, Joe proposed that we scout through the wild country below the border.

"Not on horseback," I demurred.

"Why not? How else are we going to get into the bad lands of Altar, where you never can tell what sort of hell is brewing?"

"But your wooden leg——"

"Pete Wayland, how often have I got to remind you that if I didn't have any leg at all, except this wooden one, I'd still be a better man than you with your

two original pins? Besides, my leg always brings us luck. Come on, let's go find some excitement!"

We found excitement all right, but in a way that we did not exactly foresee. Sleeping in the bottom of a dry watercourse, against all rules and regulations laid down for desert travelers, was what ultimately landed us square in the middle of Old Man Trouble's front yard.

For two days after setting out from Nogales, we drifted down the pleasant green valley of the Magdalena River. Then we turned west into the grimmest, lonesomest, dryest region that lies out of doors, with the vague plan of working through to the mining camps along the Gulf of California coast.

Until the middle of the afternoon we struggled over rocks and sand and through forests of chollas and organ-pipe cacti. Then the tired animals pricked up their ears and led us to a water hole in a narrow arroyo along which grew a fringe of mesquite and paloverde trees. The shade felt mighty good, so there we camped.

In the evening, after we had dined on white-wing pigeons potted as they flew in to drink, and for half an hour had gazed silently at a gorgeous desert sunset that almost compensated us for the discomfort of the day, Joe unpacked our radio outfit. Both of us had recently been bitten by the bug, and for this trip we had bought a compact but powerful portable set with loop aërial.

Foolish as it may seem, we had also brought along a doll-sized loud speaker. When we were packing, I had protested against adding it to the load, but Joe overruled me.

"It weighs hardly anything," he argued. "The radio will be a great novelty down where we're going. Maybe we can make ourselves solid with the natives by furnishing music for their bailes and fiestas."

Reception, we found to-night, was not so good as down in the valley. All that we could get out of New York was a squawk. San Francisco and Los Angeles stations came in fairly well for a while, and I'm here to tell you that it sounded uncanny to hear the jazz of the Hotel Biltmore orchestra mingling with the howls of coyotes over that dreary mesa. Then "Valencia" was drowned in static that no amount of dial manipulation could tune out.

"No wonder there's interference," Joe remarked finally, waving his flash light toward the north. "Look at that."

I could see nothing at first; then a lightning flash disclosed a horizon banked with burly clouds. The rumble of thunder reached our ears.

"Means we've got to get out of here," I said. "One little shower and this arroyo will be a torrent—for a few minutes anyway."

SO we went up on the open mesa, pitched our small tent, and piled our duffel inside. But we could not sleep up there. The earth and the boulders radiated heat stored through the day. Marco, Sonoran born, snored away peacefully; but Joe and I were driven back to the comparative coolness of the arroyo, where the trees had shielded the ground from the direct rays of the sun.

"If it starts to rain it'll wake us and we can move again," I suggested.

"Umph-humph!" Joe agreed sleepily, as he unstrapped the ingenious contrivance of wood, rubber and metal hinges that had replaced the leg he lost at St. Mihiel, and deposited it carefully on the gravel beside his pillow.

What both of us forgot was that there could be a cloudburst farther upcountry without a drop falling on us. That is exactly what happened.

When I awoke, my body was bathed in some liquid warm as new milk. I sat bolt upright. The soft light of the stars revealed a seething, foaming flood that was already up to my neck.

With a wild screech of warning to Joe, I seized my blankets and dragged them to the bank. Turning, I made out his great red head bobbing about in the stream fifty or a hundred feet below.

"Come on out of that!" I yelled, as I dashed in to retrieve his bedding, which was floating along behind him. "This will be a real flood in about a minute."

"It's gone!" he shouted, above the roar of the rushing water.

"What's gone?"

"My leg."

In my excitement I had forgotten my buddy's physical handicap. Again I plunged into the water and caught him by the shoulder. He released the overhanging branch to which he had been clinging and I piloted him to dry land.

"It's gone," he groaned, as he squatted on the bank and stared mournfully into the swirling tide. "I dived after it, but I never caught up. What an idiot I was to risk it like that! Now what'll happen to us, out here in the middle of this hellish cactus patch?"

"Happen to us?" I scouted his fears, practical minded as always. "Why, we'll trail down the arroyo in the morning and hunt your leg. If we don't find it, you'll just have to get along with a peg until you can order another."

"It's not just a matter of finding a leg to walk on, Pete." Joe spoke patiently, as though explaining something to a backward child. "That's my leg of fortune. Every bit of luck we've had since we started to cruise around this border country has been hooked up with my leg some way or other. Didn't it get us out of some tight holes at Lagarto, Sonoita and Chuparosa and bring us a flock of rewards that put us on easy street financially?"

We had been over all that ground repeatedly so I forbore to argue. I wrung out our sodden blankets and we sat in silent misery until daybreak. By that time the sudden freshet had subsided to a mere trickle.

Stringy, grizzled, pock-marked Marco Sotelo awoke and was volubly amazed to learn what had happened. After a hurried breakfast we saddled and set off down the wash, leaving Marco with instructions to pack the mules and follow later.

Just before sunrise is the pleasantest hour of the day on the desert. It is always cool then, and many small birds and animals seldom seen in the heat of the day may be seen scurrying about after food. This morning we disturbed a swarm of red-and-gold butterflies settled on the fragrant flowers of a desert-willow thicket. I felt at peace with all the world, and even Joe's heavy gloom was lightened.

"Yeah, we'll locate the old peg along here somewhere," he predicted confidently. "Then watch the Goddess of Fortune make goo-goo eyes at us!"

But it wasn't so easy as we had expected. For all of five miles we inspected every drift and gravel bar, every bush or tree that was not clear above high-water line. There wasn't a trace of the missing limb. Joe ceased to murder "Madelon" and again voiced dismal forebodings of dire disaster sure to befall us if we did not get his lucky leg back in a hurry.

In our anxiety we became careless of the ordinary precautions that experience had taught us to take in Mexico, even at times like this, when it looked as though we had the whole world to ourselves. This was brought home to us when a dozen ugly rifle muzzles were suddenly thrust through some cat's-claw scrub and the Mexican equivalent of "Hands up!" crackled through the atmosphere.

WE obeyed, of course. It would have been suicide to reach for our guns or for the carbines that we carried in saddle boots.

"Come on out," Joe growled disgustedly. "What is it you want?"

Our captors warily emerged from the brush. Fierce-looking ruffians were they —bearded and mustached and bristling with such a collection of knives and firearms as I had never seen off a comic-opera stage. They wore a miscellaneous collection of straw and felt hats, upon which they had lavished the decorative genius of their race. Here, however, their picturesqueness ended, for they were clothed in American overalls and chambray shirts.

"Well, what do you want?" Joe demanded sharply, still not taking this holdup quite seriously, although he kept his arms well elevated.

"It is for the gringos to say what they seek in *our* country," retorted a tall fellow, with a bullet nick in his chin.

"Oh, we're looking for my wooden leg." Joe jerked an elbow toward his empty stirrup.

"The señor has lost a leg of wood?"

"*Si.* The flood carried it away while I slept."

The Mexican seemed impressed by the probable truth of this story.

"But why," he persisted, "did you dare come unbidden into the land that is ruled by Don Alberto Calderon?"

"Whew! Does *he* rule here?"

Both of us were startled. Calderon was an industrious and elusive bandit leader, who for some time had been causing the Mexican government more grief than its foreign debt. Holding Americans for ransom was his long suit and his activities in that direction had drawn several really severe notes from Washington. But we had supposed that he operated exclusively in the mining districts below Cananea and never ranged this far west.

"Don Alberto has established his headquarters in Altar," continued the rascal with the notch in his chin. "This district is now forbidden to gringos."

"Sorry, but we didn't see any 'No Trespass' signs. We'll be glad to get out, though, because we don't like your climate. But I'd like to find my leg first."

"It is for our brave chieftain to say what you shall be permitted to do. He may wish to hold you for ransom."

"Ho-ho! Hold two penniless prospectors for ransom? Do, pray, and give us a share of what you collect."

"Close that cave of a mouth, you with a tin pan for a tongue and a fire for a head. Take their weapons, my brave soldados."

"Didn't I tell you that we'd run into calamity as soon as I lost my leg?" Joe muttered.

In short order we were relieved of everything that we had in the way of armament, as well as our pocketbooks. I was compelled to give up my horse and walk while "Sergeant" Sigala rode beside Joe.

A few minutes brought us to the bandit encampment, which was under some straggling ironwoods on a flat above the creek. Other members of the band, who had been lounging about in the shade, scrambled up to surround us and jabber questions. Sigala stopped to explain how he and his detachment had courageously risked their very lives to arrest the Yankee invaders of fair Mexico.

"I say, my friends, what's the price of Empire Sausage?"

This amazing query was shrilled in English above the general din. I peered about for several seconds before I could be sure whence it came. Then I noted a hatless, dirty, unshaven little man, in the soiled remnants of what had once been a natty gray business suit. His reddish whiskers, more than an inch long, bristled like those of an enraged Airedale, and his pale-blue eyes glowed with feverish anxiety. He was tied to a tree by the simple process of passing a chain around the bole and padlocking the ends to his ankles.

"Empire Sausage?" Joe repeated reflectively. "Why, I don't know. I hardly ever eat sausage."

"The stock, I mean. The stock——"

"Move along, gringos," interrupted Sigala. "It is high time that Don Alberto have a look at you."

WE were led to the door of a tent, above which the Mexican national flag hung disconsolately. There we had our first meeting with Don Alberto Calderon, who had evidently been roused out of a sound sleep by the noise.

Calderon was a paunchy, pig-eyed little man, well past the prime of life. He glared at us speculatively as Sigala spoke:

"*Mi comandante,* I have the honor to report the capture of two more prisoners."

"Have they money?"

"Of a certainty." Sigala passed over our pocketbooks, which Calderon scornfully flung behind him.

"Bah! Are they wealthy? Can they pay ransom?"

"All gringos are wealthy."

"You are a fool, Sigala. Some gringos have no more wealth than brains or manners. I have lived in their country and I know. But these spies now know the location of our camp, so they must never be allowed to escape and betray us. Tie them up and we will consider them later.

Be sure to bring me the keys. In the meantime, where is Diego Verdugo?"

"He has not yet returned, Don Alberto."

"Say, as a personal favor to me I wish you'd send some of your crew up and down the arroyo to look for my wooden leg," Joe requested earnestly.

"Dog! He speaks of a wooden leg while my mind is so sorely troubled about that—that *thing* there, with its gibberish about the price of sausage. Remember, I am to be called the moment Diego arrives!"

Calderon retired into his tent. Joe was told to dismount and our horses were led away. We were chained to a couple of ironwoods, close by the other prisoner. Soon we were left pretty well to ourselves except for a guard who kept us under desultory surveillance.

"I say, my friends, do either of you happen to know the latest quotation on Empire Sausage?"

It was the little man with the pink whiskers again. Joe, despondent and pessimistic since the loss of his leg, had been so quickly followed by misfortune, turned a moody scowl upon him.

"Naw, we don't. Who are you and how did you manage to get yourself into this mess?"

"Why, I'm Plunger Geezle."

This statement was made with an oratorical flourish and an air of pride that, coming from a man shackled to an ironwood tree on the Altar Desert, was nothing less than comical. He seemed to think that he had explained everything, but we were no wiser than before.

"That so?" Joe continued, after we had shaken our heads and grinned at each other. "Where are you from?"

"Why, from New York, of course. Don't you understand that I'm Plunger Geezle?"

"Brother, we caught the name but we never heard it before. Just what sort of plunging do you specialize in? High diving?"

"High divin'!" shrieked Geezle. "I am the Plunger, the most darin' and spectacular stock-market operator that Wall Street has seen in years. It was me that engineered the corner in Lehigh Steel Tube and the pool in Portsmouth Cement. Don't either of you ever read the news?"

"Not that kind."

"Then you don't know nothin' about the price of Empire Sausage Corporation stock? You don't know whether it has gone above thirty-five or dropped below?"

"I didn't even know there was such a stock."

Geezle looked from Joe to me and back again, as though such abysmal ignorance were utterly past belief.

"But surely you read about these bandits takin' me off a train below Cananea and holdin' me for ransom," he protested.

"Seems to me we did notice some such item. Didn't we, Pete? But we didn't pay any attention to it. Things like that are happening right along. Now suppose we dispense with the social gossip and analyze the fix we're in, which we're likely not to squeeze out of unless I can get my lucky leg back somewhere. Why all this fuss about the price of sausage shares?"

"I plunged in Empire Sausage. I had a red-hot tip so I staked my whole fortune. Then I come down to Mexico to see the Cobrita Mine because I was thinkin' about cornerin' its stock next. But I meant to be back before the movement started in Sausage. Then these bandits captured me, and they're demandin' a hundred thousand dollars. If they don't get it, they're goin' to cut off my fingers and toes and ears, one at a time, and then they're goin' to shoot me."

"Buck up, Plunger. Maybe they won't. Pete and I have had our backs to an adobe wall two or three times. You say all your money is tied up in that stock deal?"

"All except a little I held out to live on."

"But won't somebody put up the coin to save you? Your relatives or your friends?"

Geezle laughed cynically.

"My folks," he said, "couldn't ransom a pup out of a pound. And if you knew anything about Wall Street, you'd know I haven't got any friends."

"And Calderon? How much does he savvy about all this?"

"Oh, I got it through his head finally. He talks English pretty good and thinks he knows everything about the United States. I think he sent a code wire to some agent in New York who must have confirmed what I told him. Anyway, he's as anxious as I am about the price of Empire Sausage, and yesterday he sent a messenger over to Nogales to bring back the late papers. Maybe my brokers have already made the big clean-up for me. Maybe I can start home to-morrow.

"And by glory," he added generously, "I'll buy you fellers off, too."

Joe held up his hand.

"S-sh! Not so loud. For the present we'll just stick to the story that Pete and I are hobos, flat broke. Maybe he'll reduce the rates for us, or even give us a free pass. I wouldn't worry a minute if I only had my lucky leg."

AND then Joe told the history of his wooden leg from the time he had it manufactured in accordance with his own original specifications up to the tragical night before. It was all old stuff to me so I didn't take the trouble to listen. Instead, I fretted about what would happen to Marco Sotelo, cruising down the arroyo in our wake.

There was only one thing that could happen, and it did. Marco was captured and brought into camp. He waved amiably to us as he was hustled on toward Calderon's tent.

Don Alberto did not pay our guide the compliment of an inspection. We could hear his querulous voice through the thin wall of canvas:

"Chain him, I tell you. I don't care if he does want to join us; keep him chained until we dispose of the gringos. I fear treachery. Where is Verdugo?"

So the group of prisoners under the ironwoods was increased to four. Marco expressed polite regret at our plight, finished his cigarette, curled up and went to sleep. Our camp outfit was unloaded from the mules and dumped a few yards away.

Presently came Sigala, who leered at us insolently and began to shuffle the pile, evidently with the intention of appropriating whatever might strike his fancy.

"Hey, keep your paws off our stuff!" Joe yelled.

Sigala merely grinned again.

As our money had already been taken, I reasoned that confiscation of all our possessions was about what we could expect and that we might as well submit to the robbery with what philosophy we could muster. But Joe, always of uncertain temper when separated from his wooden leg, was in no philosophic frame of mind. He heaped abuse upon the Mexican, dared him to approach near enough to fight. He even strained impotently at his chain, the two ends of which were fastened to his remaining leg, until I begged him not to be a baby.

His face was as red as his hair and beads of sweat stood out on his brow as he paused to look around. His hand closed over a stone a little larger than his fist. Impelled by an arm well trained in heaving trench bombs, the stone sailed through the air and caught the bandit just behind the left ear.

Sigala let out a "Whoosh!" and slumped forward upon our bed rolls, completely knocked out.

Several onlookers witnessed the occurrence. In an instant the whole camp was in an uproar. Mexicans came running from every direction to lift up their unconscious comrade and shriek that he was slain. The sentry set to watch us jammed his rifle into the small of Joe's back and kept it there. Calderon stumbled out of his tent.

Sigala sat up, howling. He had been assaulted by the one-legged gringo and nothing less than immediate execution would avenge the insult.

"Quite right, sergeant," Calderon agreed. "It is evident that both of these 'prospectors' are dangerous men. Shoot them at sunrise to-morrow."

The order was greeted with howls of glee from the whole band.

"He was stealing our camp outfit," roared Joe. "Are we the captives of honorable bandits or of petty thieves?"

Calderon, who had started back to his quarters, swung heavily on one heel and barked:

"Don't wait for sunrise, sergeant. Shoot them now."

"Now!" I gurgled faintly, striving to master an odd quivering sensation amidships that felt as though some of my innards had abruptly taken flight. "You've spilled the beans and spilled 'em right."

"Oh, stop your whining. I've got an idea."

"Don't wait for sunrise. Shoot it now," I imitated.

"General Calderon, I understand that you desire to know the present selling price of Empire Sausage shares."

Calderon gaped at us stodgily, as pleased at being addressed as "general" as he was surprised at Joe's question.

"What do you know about that?" he asked suspiciously.

"I can soon obtain the information you wish. Among our possessions yonder is a radio set, something like a telephone only it works without wires. You have heard of the radio?"

"*Si.* I have listened to it. Some gringo fraud, but——"

A SMILE broke over his bloated features, the most beautiful and angelic and altogether wonderful smile that I ever beheld upon a human face.

"If you can make the air tell us what that man's shares are bringing in New York, you and your friend shall both be spared," he promised. "That is, I shall wait a while before I have you shot."

"You can't get New York with that set," I wailed.

"Keep your hair on, Pete." Joe was now cheerful. "There's a San Diego station, KNP, that relays stock-exchange quotations. And they're just about closing in New York now, allowing for the difference in time. If only the tubes haven't been smashed by all that rough handling—— Bring us that little brown box under your feet, Sigala, and be careful to keep it right side up. That one off to your left, too."

Sigala sullenly refused, but others, prompted by Calderon, were more obliging. In a minute or two Joe had the aërial and the horn connected, and with a spare had replaced a tube that seemed to have gone dead. Then he glanced at a radio log to get the wave length of KNP. "Told you that this thing would come in handy and might get us in right with the natives," he jubilated. "Maybe you'll believe me next time."

As he twirled the dials I thought of a thousand reasons why he must fail to get any station whatever in daylight, in the summer rainy season, on that sun-baked desert. It seemed absurd, fantastic, that our very lives depended upon the vagaries of that fragile apparatus. Yet such was most certainly the situation. If Joe failed to fulfill the promise so blithely and confidently made, Calderon would immediately renew his order to "shoot them now." There would be no waiting for sunrise.

At length I became aware that Geezle was demanding frantically to know what it was all about. Not understanding Spanish, he was rather hazy as to the trend of events. I explained to him briefly and pessimistically.

The radio began to emit a series of raucous groans and buzzes. I began to catch a word here and there. Some minister was broadcasting a sermon upon the iniquities of border resorts and urging his hearers to stay out of "sin-sodden Mexico."

"Good advice," I croaked. "Wish I'd followed it."

"What does it say?" Calderon grated impatiently. "I speak English, but not that language."

"That's mostly static language," Joe replied. "They'll get around to the stock market pretty soon."

But more than half an hour elapsed, with the Mexicans and myself getting more fidgety every minute, before the announcer rattled off a review of the day's trading on the New York Exchange. It had been an uneventful session. Then he gave the closing quotations, beginning with American Can. When the Es were reached, Joe held up one hand and admonished every one to keep quiet.

"Empire Sausage, thirty-five and one-eighth," wheezed the radio.

"Practically no change," wailed Geezle. "It has been right at thirty-five for two months. The movement hasn't started yet."

"Buenos dias, compañeros!"

The cry came from up the arroyo. A Mexican approached on a jaded, sweat-covered horse, holding a bundle of newspapers aloft. Somehow his face seemed vaguely familiar, but I could not place him.

"Here are the *periodicos, mi capitan.* The very latest. Only two days old."

"Too old, Diego," replied Calderon. "We have fresher news, right out of the air."

Diego Verdugo glanced down at Joe. Recognition and amazement spread across his countenance.

"'Señor Lucky Leg!'" he exclaimed. "But without his leg of fortune. Strange indeed!"

"Do you know him?" Calderon asked eagerly.

"Of a certainty. You, my friends, are from Chihuahua or you would know him also. He has a wooden leg that is a charm, that protects him from harm. With it, he is the equal of an army; without it, he is nothing. Why, at Chuparosa——"

THE account of the part that Joe and I and Joe's leg had played in suppressing the Chuparosa rebellion was sputtered in such swift and excited Spanish that I caught only fragments. I will say, however, that it was considerably garbled and exaggerated.

"You say," pursued Calderon, when he had finished, "that this gringo's leg is a talisman that brings him good fortune?"

"Oh, yes, *mi capitan.* There is no doubt about that."

"Then I must have it. I need some good fortune myself. All my luck has been bad since I captured that little idiot who risks on the stock market the money that should be mine. Scatter along the arroyo, my brave men, and search for the gringo's leg. A hundred pesos for him who finds it."

"But what about the execution?" interposed Sigala, feeling the knot on his head.

"We must have some one to work the devil talker. Wait till sunrise, anyway."

The bandits scattered to saddle their horses and take the trail of the wooden leg. Joe talked Calderon into letting us have our beds, and we threw Geezle a couple of blankets.

"Now for a nice, quiet snooze." Joe yawned. "That gang will find my leg; I'll get hold of it somehow, and then all will be lovely."

"But what if you don't get it?"

"My leg works with reverse English. It's my leg of fortune, but a leg of misfortune for anybody else."

We dozed in the heat until late in the afternoon when we were aroused by a couple of Mexicans fogging back to camp. One of them triumphantly bore the wooden leg, apparently none the worse for its wetting. The pair dismounted at Calderon's tent and disappeared inside.

"Umph-humph!" Joe grunted with vast satisfaction. "Now things will start to work around our way."

Thus began the dreariest and most nerve-racking week of my life. Chained to those ironwoods, fed on terrible messes of beans and garlic and red pepper, even denied exercise, we had nothing to do but listen to that infernal radio. There were thunder showers around us most of the time, so reception was poor indeed. Joe managed to get KNP at least once a day, but Empire Sausage never fluctuated more than a point.

We told stories. Over and over Geezle recited the details, all highly improbable, of his career as a plunger. Over and over Joe assured us that his lucky leg would soon be getting in its work in our behalf, until he himself began to doubt it.

Calderon seldom emerged from his retirement except to ask the price of Empire Sausage; then he would curse fervently and hurry back to his tent. His manner and appearance told us that he was on a prolonged tequila debauch, which made it more difficult than ever to guess how he would react in any set of circumstances.

One afternoon the morose brigand squatted down near us and heard KNP announce that Empire Sausage had closed at thirty-four and three quarters.

"Bah!" he sneered. "Señor Plunger, I am weary of all this foolery. You assured me that long before now you would be able to pay your ransom. Unless

there is a change in the price of that stock by to-morrow, I shall remove one of your ears, and the next day a finger, and so on until there is nothing left."

"That," I suggested sarcastically, "will no doubt send the price up."

Calderon did not deign to reply. Instead, he returned to Joe.

"And your lucky leg! Pouf! I have had it close by me for six days and nights, and what luck has it brought me? None! Verdugo is a liar. Anyway, I do not believe in charms. Such mummery is for women."

"Then give me the leg," Joe proposed. "I'm not taking many walks, but I'd feel more complete if I had it."

"No! There may be something in the story, after all. If there is any good fortune in that leg, it shall come to me."

"Looks like I'm the one that needs some luck," quavered Geezle. "Unless something happens to Empire Sausage, I'm due to lose my ears and fingers."

Calderon glowered at the speculator.

"That is right," he purred, with suspicious good nature. "Sergeant Sigala, bring the wooden leg here. Also a small chain."

In a jiffy the wooden leg was padlocked fast to Geezle's tree.

A drunken man's whim, certainly. But don't try to tell Joe Bonner that. He's positive that something more than distilled cactus juice put that outlandish notion into Calderon's inflamed brain. And in view of what happened afterward, I don't know that I find it in my heart to disagree with him very violently.

THE next morning Joe couldn't make the radio work. There was a storm close by that brought the water in the arroyo up again; and we agreed that if the restless black clouds overhead meant anything, the camp was due for a drenching before night.

In the afternoon the weather was even more unsettled. The sky was darker and the thunder was nearer. There should have been all kinds of interference; yet Joe, hopelessly fiddling with the dials, suddenly brought in KNP, strong and clear.

"This means something," he told us solemnly. "We're going to hear some real news now, see if we don't." Then, to the sentry: "Better tell your captain to come here and listen to something interesting."

Calderon came, disheveled and bleary eyed. With a petulant snarl he seated himself on his usual boulder.

We heard—or, rather, waited through—a couple of songs and a lecture on chicken raising. Then came the scratchy tones of the announcer to tell us what happened that day on Wall Street:

"Scenes of the wildest disorder prevailed on the New York Stock Exchange this morning, following the announcement that Empire Sausage, thought to be one of the soundest of the food specialties, had gone into the hands of a receiver. In less than an hour the stock tobogganed ten points, and it closed at eighteen asked, with no takers. Scores of bulls who had been touting Empire Sausage for a rise were ruined. The reason for this——"

We heard no more from that radio set. Not ever.

With a howl of demoniac rage, Alberto Calderon seized a chunk of malpai and hurled it into the throat of the loud speaker. Another stone crashed into the battery case.

Literally foaming at the mouth, Calderon rushed forward and stamped on that defenseless radio apparatus until there was nothing left of it but scattered, splintered, twisted junk.

This, of course, brought him within reach of Joe. My crippled buddy groped and found one of those malpai chunks. With all his might, he struck Calderon on the back of the head.

Down went Calderon. Before he hit the earth, Joe had seized his revolver and shot the sentry through the heart.

Joe threw me the Colt.

"Stand back!" I screeched at the astonished Mexicans, who came pelting from the direction of the arroyo.

They scattered in confusion. Several shots were fired, but they all went high. Both Geezle and I scrambled to cover behind our prison trees. I wasted a couple of bullets.

From the pocket of the fallen Cal-

deron, Joe wrenched a bunch of keys. His big fingers worked swiftly; I'll swear that he was as cool as a chunk of ice as he tried one key after another until he freed himself.

He threw the keys to me, then lurched over to the dead sentry and got his rifle and cartridge belt. Lying flat behind an ironwood, he pumped lead into the brush where the startled bandits had taken refuge.

I unlocked myself and the pale, trembling Geezle, and also Joe's leg. Then I tossed the keys to Marco Sotelo. I scurried to Joe and grabbed the rifle from his hand. While he strapped on his leg, I fired until the barrel blistered my palms.

Badly outnumbered as we were, it would be impossible to maintain our present position when our enemies recovered from their surprise. Without a word, Joe and Marco and I made a bee line for the tent. Geezle followed.

"Look out!" screamed some one, probably Diego Verdugo. "He has his wooden leg now!"

We wanted nothing out of that tent except arms and ammunition. And we got them without trouble, since Calderon's one servant did not happen to be there, fortunately for him.

When we had three more rifles and all the cartridges that we could carry, Joe touched a match to a sack and threw it on the open ammunition case. Whether this had the effect of blowing up the arsenal, I do not know. I doubt it, for at that instant a deafening clap of thunder sounded just overhead. Burned oxygen filled the air with a sulphurous odor.

The heavens opened and the rain poured down in one stupendous Niagara. It doesn't rain often in Altar, but when it does, it rains!

Probably that cloudburst saved our lives. We charged out into a world that seemed to be all water, and as black as the inside of a vault, except for vivid flashes of jagged lightning. The crackle of gunfire blended with the thunder, but we made poor targets as we zigzagged eastward through the greasewood bushes and giant saguaro cacti.

"Stop!" implored Geezle, gasping for breath. "I can't run. Not another step."

"You can't?" growled Joe, as he floundered on. "Then watch a wooden-legged guy show you how."

When I next looked back, Geezle was still pounding along at our heels.

An arroyo, running bank full from north to south, finally brought us to a halt.

"Which way now?" puffed Joe. "Or shall we swim it?"

"They'll naturally think that we'll turn north toward the United States," I answered. "Suppose we fool 'em by heading south and cutting over toward Magdalena, as soon as the water goes down?"

"Good strategy," Joe approved. "Closer than Nogales, anyway. And all the tracks we've made so far are washed out, which gives us that much better show to get clean away. I don't expect them to follow, though."

"You don't? Why not, pray?"

"Afraid of my lucky leg. They won't have the nerve to take our trail unless they've got Calderon to prod 'em on, and I believe I killed him. Come on."

Perhaps he was right. Anyway, we never saw any sign of pursuit.

There is no use in dwelling on the story of our miserable flight across the desert. We were cold and wet with rain; then the sun came out and we were hot and wet with sweat; night came and we were cold again.

We would rest for an hour or two and then move on. How Joe stood it, I do not pretend to explain; but he kept right up with Marco and me and always ahead of Geezle.

For breakfast we had unsalted eggs and broiled squabs lifted from doves' nests. Along toward noon, we hit an outlying rancho and traded a rifle for horseback transportation to Magdalena.

It was past seven that night when we slid from our gaunt mounts in front of Charley Hong's café and limped through the door to the nearest table.

"Bring us everything," Joe ordered hoarsely, as the moon-faced Charley, an old friend of ours, approached. "Everything in the house that you've got to eat. And a bottle of beer all around."

"No, not beer, champagne," corrected Geezle, laughing for the first time since we had known him. "Tubs of champagne. We're celebratin'."

"Oh, are we?" Joe glared resentfully at the grimy, hairy, shaggy, half-clothed Plunger. "Who's paying the bill?"

"I am. And I want champagne. All the champagne in town."

"Seems to me you've got pretty expensive tastes for a bull that just got wiped out in the stock market."

"Who said I was a bull? You jumped at conclusions, just like Calderon. I knew that receivership was comin' so I was a bear. I sold short. While me and your leg of fortune was tied up to that tree together, my brokers was coverin' at twenty. I cleaned up a quarter of a million dollars."

CATTLE EAT CACTUS A LA CARTE

NO fooling. They really feed it to the cows and oxen down there in Mexico. Imagine how a New England cow would look if you tossed a cactus leaf into its stall! She'd be shocked. But the Mexican cattle are more sophisticated. Of course, they don't meander out into the desert and have free lunches from any adjacent cactus trees. They're particular, and have their meals served up and cooked.

Sounds crazy, doesn't it? But no, the ranchers have been doing it for generations. They take a little cart called a *"caretta"* and hitch a couple of oxen to it, and start out for the harvest. The cactus, being an unfriendly plant, has to be induced into the cart by means of a long knife, the familiar machete. Some ranchers have a long forked stick to lift the severed leaves into the cart, while others use the common hay fork.

And then they toast the leaves over a fire, but the idea is not to cook them, after all. Those little spines have to be singed off, just as you singe off the pin feathers of a chicken.

Now it's all ready for the hungry cows—cactus salad à la carte.

A BAD YEAR FOR CHAMPIONS

DURING 1926, many champions in various lines of athletic endeavor met with defeat. In the "boxing business," Jack Dempsey, the world's heavyweight champion, lost to Gene Tunney in Philadelphia. Paul Berlenbach, the light-heavyweight champion; Harry Greb, the middleweight champion, and other padded-mitt experts were overthrown.

The outstanding surprise in the tennis world was the defeat of William T. Tilden, 2d, the amateur lawn-tennis champion, by Henri Cochet. Miss Helen Wills, the woman's amateur lawn-tennis champion, was compelled to default, thus losing her title.

Robert T. Jones, the national amateur golf champion, was forced to bow to the playing of George von Elm. Willie MacFarlane, the national open golf champion, no longer has that title.

Baseball had its share of upsets. The previous year's world's series contenders weren't able to repeat. The National League batting championship was taken from Rogers Hornsby by "Bubbles" Hargraves. In the American League, Heinie Manush was credited with a better average than Harry Heilmann.

The "Flying Finn," Paavo Nurmi, who seemed to shatter a record every night when he visited this country, was beaten several times in 1926. And Douglas Lowe, the world's middle-distance running champion, saw the heels of at least one competitor during the past year.

Other stars in the sport firmament had their luster dimmed. Truly, 1926 was a bad year for champions.

Just Over the Border

By **Henry Herbert Knibbs**

JUST over the border, where strife and disorder
Make living a difficult trade,
The bandit, Mercado, his watchword *"Cuidado!"*
Delighted to pillage and raid.
And each ragged fellow, who didn't show yellow,
Was given a chance to recruit,
Or, lacking ambition, soon took the position
Inspired by the simple word: "Shoot!"

With followers twenty and vino aplenty,
This sprightly Fulano de Tal,
Stole horses and chickens, and stirred up the dickens,
From Alamos down to Parral.
Then riding like thunder he'd fly with his plunder,
And hide in the heart of the range,
Where weary with sticking and thieving and picking,
He'd pick the guitar for a change.

"The valley for forage and loot,
The hills for the hunted ladrone;
High life and hot liquor to boot,
And every man out for his own.

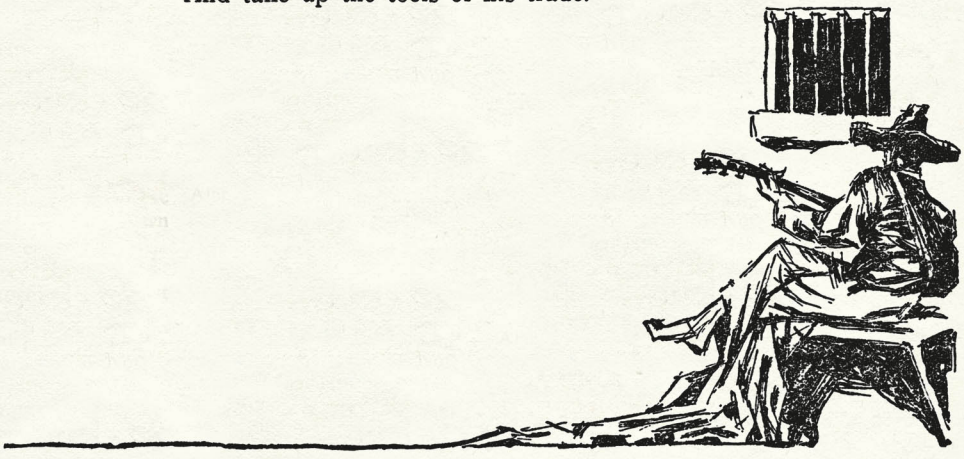
"With you I wore leather and gold,
A hunter of thieves—a *rural,*
But now I am hunted—behold!
I follow Fulano de Tal.

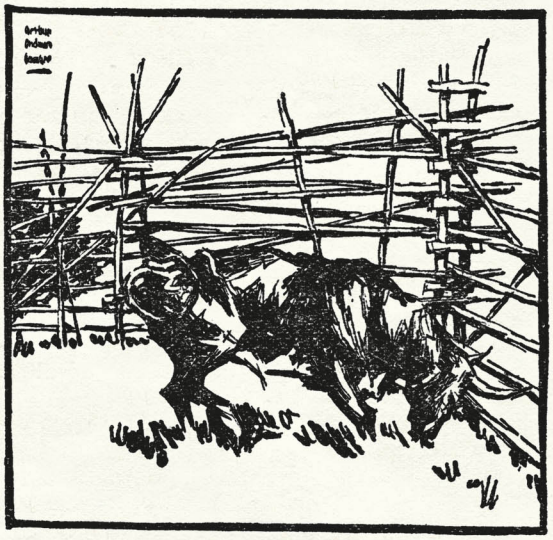
"I raid and I plunder the great,
And much to the lowly I give;
When pesos are plenty, why wait?
Por Dios! a fellow must live!

"I take what I need when I will,
I drink till the bottle is dry;
Though Fate bring good fortune or ill,
Por Dios! a fellow must die!

"Red wine is the advocate's ink,
So beware of the liquor that's free;
Por Dios! but hand me a drink!
And beware, my bandidos, of me!"

Thus Manuel Mercado with tuneful bravado,
A Spanish guitar in his hand,
Sang gayly of bullets, gold, liquor and pullets,
To please his illiterate band.
When Time took a hitch in his open-air kitchen,
He'd lay his guitar in the shade,
And with brisk dots and dashes he'd curl his mustaches,
And take up the tools of his trade.





The Golden Badge of Chivalry

By Mary Shannon

Author of "Beak of Top Range," "Ginger Blue," Etc.

Freedom has always been one of the most precious things in a man's life. Surely, there is nothing more symbolic of vast, unlimited, glorious freedom than the colorful and stirring infinity of range and mountain in the West. To Chev Manly, who worshiped that symbol, because he was a living part of it, there came one day the gloomy portent of a confining cell, and he found himself torn with two emotions.

IT had been a great chase, and Chev Manly spurred his horse forward with a ringing cheer, as the red bull charged desperately down the last slope of Big Ravine and straight into the dawn-misted pass that opened to the green range. Would some nether instinct warn the range-bred bull of the great corral hidden among cleft rocks just outside the pass? Ah-h-h! Right into the trap of log walls he dashed and, close behind him, Chev leaped from his horse and flung to the stout bars.

Not a moment too soon! Driven, wise in the fierceness of wild leadership, the red bull swung and charged. At the impact of his mighty bulk, the raw logs of the corral creaked and groaned. He charged again! He flung himself, ramping and raging, against the prison walls. Dawn shot a streak of flame across the world. It blazed upon the red bull, upon his frothing mouth and bright eyes. In the glimmering half light he was like some dim, ancient terror!

Planting his hoofs he flung his ivory horns and bellowed a challenge to the dawn. Deep, throaty with rage, it echoed and rolled far out over the range. A moment he waited for the herd far beyond reach of the faintest echo. Again and again the solitude shook and trembled with the thunder of his furious kingliness. The starting eyes fell upon the man watching through logs of the corral. His nostrils spouted rage; his hoofs flung clouds of earth into the rose-rayed mist.

Chev rode through the broken rock to the dewy range. He was dripping with sweat; his horse was lathered with the toil of the long chase. He swept off his broad hat. The breeze rippled his crisp,

black hair, cooled his face so flushed with youth and victory. Behind him Big Ravine ran north and south at the foot of the hills that stretched, a ring of solitude, around that high Northern range.

Over a ridge deep in bunch grass, he saw riding toward him the one human being who shared with him that isolation. This was Jake, the old squatter with whom Chev had lived since coming to the range, trapping, ranging cattle, gathering in such strays as might climb from the big stock ranches far below. The old man swung his pony warily around the corral, peering through shaggy grayness of beard at the frothing, bellowing bull.

"Well, by cricky!" he muttered, turning awed eyes upon Chev. "You *did* land him!"

Chev nodded. He was a little dazed yet by his success.

"I'd never believed you'd ever do it single-handed!" marveled Jake. "How in tarnation——"

"Exactly as I'd planned it," returned the younger man, his voice quivering with triumph. "Just twenty-four hours it took me. Found him with his herd up north here in the foothills. Kept the bunch moving this way, cutting out when I could, till I headed them right into Big Ravine. Pretty soon I had him alone. I worked him down to the pass here and right into the corral."

Even in the glow of victory he omitted such details as the bull charging him, of his torn clothing, of a slight gash in the leg.

"Well, now!" murmured Jake admiringly. "He's one devil, that bull! Suppose you can keep him?" he hazarded.

"Keep him!" scoffed Chev, turning challenging eyes upon the corral.

The bull stood breathing fiercely of exhaustion and defiance, but his swinging shoulders and lowered horns faced his captor with the spirit of battle.

"An' you landed him single-handed! Gotta hand it to you, boy. He's worth it! Good breed. He's a three year old ain't he?" speculated Jake.

"About that. Think of him at the head of the herd, eh?"

"I dunno. There'll be things a-doin' before that. Look out! Sure that corral'll hold?" asked Jake, as a shower of earth and gravel spattered the two men.

Exultant, wondering, Chev watched the bull. To tame that wild strength, to master, to brand, to own him! The long chase of capture was only the beginning. He stretched, strong and lithe, toward the fiery dawn. Ah, life was a glorious thing! In vivid moments like this the world was his! And in moments like this, hot with the triumph of combat, dreams, dim shadowy dreams, hovered just beyond the grasp of memory.

Like radiant butterflies they flew ever before him! They ran far back into the days when he was really too young to remember—blurred visions of a great house above the silver gleam of a river, behind it a sweep of fields where sleek horses grazed. At times the dim past gave him back other fancies—a lovely lady in a garden all hedged with green, a room with shining swords hanging above pictures of men in uniform. He had a feeling that he had been born in that house, of a line of men courtly and gallant and brave.

HIS first real memory was of riding in a circus wagon beside a woman with flaming hair whom he called "Grandmother." There were thrilling days when he rode around the circus ring on a small white pony, and the people on the benches stood up and cheered him. But the glory and the shouting ended suddenly. His grandmother died in a small New England town.

After the funeral, a solemn-faced minister took Chev home with him. It was a shabby country house, austerely clean, but after the glamour of the circus ring, the days of tasks and studies hung heavily upon him. At fourteen, he ran away, lured by the blaring band of a traveling circus. But through the drifting, checkered years, it was the earliest dreams that recurred when he was living life to the full.

As he grew to manhood, the dreams became so vivid as to obsess him. He had gone back to New England, but the minister could tell him nothing, though he was strongly of the opinion that Chev was not the grandchild of the circus woman. None of the old troupe could

be found. The years had swallowed them up.

Chev had turned his searchings south, listening hungrily to the soft mellow speech that struck a responsive chord in his memory. But he had found nothing —nothing upon which to fasten his dreams. Flung back upon himself, restlessly he had followed the trail of wild adventure. And his wanderings had ended here.

Jake's brittle voice broke in upon his musings:

"Must be mighty near starved. Let's get back to the cabin. Fella dropped in last night. Trapper that's been down to Fort La Beau with his furs."

Chev had an instant memory of the frontier town of Fort La Beau—its shacks and unpainted frame buildings, its bars and dingy card tables, its carousing nights and meaningless, mad revelry. His thoughts went tracking back to the night last fall when he had taken a wild dash out of a mix-up there, that had driven him on and on, higher and higher into the hills, until he had stopped, hungry and weak, at old Jake's cabin. For a moment, an old doubt stirred, a doubt that had disturbed him vaguely during the months since. He flung it aside. That old affair would have been forgotten long ago.

With a final look at the bull he rode with Jake over a ridge of bunch grass, splashed through a lustrous stream, and dismounted before a log cabin. A straggle of corrals and the remains of haystacks marked the nucleus of Jake's ranch. On the bench outside the door a man sat, swarthy, burned with the sun of the open.

Chev nodded to him, unsaddled his horse, and turned the animal free. In the ice-cool creek, he vigorously scrubbed the dust from his face and hands. Presently, when all three were seated at breakfast, old Jake bubbled into talk.

"So there's a trial on down to the fort! Well, now!"

The trapper nodded. "Yeh. Likely you heard about it last fall, time the stage was held up at Bridge Hill and the driver got scared and run?"

Old Jake shook his head. Chev waited. The doubt, held in abeyance for months, faced him with a shock of reality.

"Well, the guard was shot and most killed, and the stage robbed! Big trial! Pretty close to murder. Country's all stirred up."

Chev's hands were suddenly wet. For a moment he saw the two men faint and indistinct. The table, the cabin, the square of sky through the open doorway danced in blots and rings of crimson. Guard shot! Stage robbed! The words beat in his bewildered brain. A whirl of conjecture closed like ice about him.

"Yeh, guess he's in for it all right," resumed the trapper. "Life term, likely, from the way evidence is closing in. There's witnesses."

"What witnesses?" asked Chev, suddenly finding his voice.

The trapper's placid eyes stared.

"Why, there's the driver. Caught him beatin' it out of the country. He swears they've got the right man, even if he was masked that night. The guard, too. But the witness that clinched the evidence is a fella called 'Link.' "

"Link!"

Passion raged through Chev. Link! Link giving evidence about the stage holdup!

"Yeh. Link. That's the name. Kind of a champion wrastler. Know him?"

Chev caught himself in time.

"What evidence is he giving?" he asked, as carelessly as he could.

"Why, he seen this fella they're tryin' sneakin' around Bridge Hill not long before this all happened, and he heard the shots, too. But he didn't think nothin' o' that till after."

"Who is it—that's up for trial?" The question broke in Chev's throat.

The trapper's brows creased.

"Fella that's got a bit of a ranch down on Virginia Crick. Kind of a no-'count gentleman, I guess."

"Rand?"

"Believe that's the name. One o' these cool, sharp ones. Found him asleep in a shack not far from Bridge Hill next morning. Swears he's innocent. Won't tell where he cached the gold. It'll be a life term likely. Wisht I could've seen the finish."

Chev's hand gripped and quivered on the edge of the table. A horror was upon him. He pushed away his plate, swept by a dizzying nausea. His unsteady fingers fumbled with a cigarette. Blankly bewildered, blankly wondering, his mind groped in the chaos of details. Presently, when the talk drifted to trap lines and the drying of pelts, he got up and walked steadily enough through the door and out to a dilapidated corral.

HE must think things out alone. His mind seemed frozen. A terrible stillness held all life in suspension. He looked queerly down at his right hand. The fire of guilt seemed to sere and burn it. No, no, it couldn't be! It couldn't be! There was crooked work—crooked work somewhere! What diabolical scheme was Link working out, swearing an innocent man to prison?

Prison! From across the range, behind the corral bars, the bull roared hoarsely to the solitude. Chev started, flung out his arms as though he would beat down imprisoning bars. The scent of dew and wild grass swept over the range, breathing of cool creeks and of lone glens waist-deep in wild flowers. Oh, it was a grand thing, this freedom! And he had been so free, so free all his life! Still, it was behind the bars for Rand, for an innocent man! And there was Rand's wife! Chev's head dropped upon the corral fence. Motionless he stood in the spring sunshine.

He heard the bull bellowing, challenging his prison walls. The man's throat tightened. He could have cried out, too, for freedom. Just to stay here on the range! He had grown to love the long solitary rides over stretches of high pasture. His thoughts turned again to the trapper's story. Rand guilty! But how? How?

Chev heard the little stir of good-by as the trapper left the cabin. Quiet hung over the range, a stillness that sighed and died among the grasses. And suddenly loneliness rushed in upon Chev, and intolerable longing for sympathy, human sympathy.

He walked uncertainly toward the cabin. Old Jake sat on the bench outside the door. Over an old clay pipe he blinked a welcome.

"Been out havin' a look at yer pet?" he asked.

Chev sat down on an overturned keg. "Jake," he began, "about that trial now —— I ought to go down. I ought to go down right now. That's an innocent man they're trying. That star witness, that Link, he's lying!" he burst out bitterly.

"Is, eh?"

Jake's mild tone fired Chev to decision.

"That Rand from Virginia Creek didn't hold up the stage that night. *I* did it."

"You!"

Old Jake's beard tilted in stiff surprise. Its softening was a mingling of incredulity and admiration.

"It was this way." The truth rushed from Chev's lips in a burst of relief. "I was out of town all last summer on a job. I rolled in one day just spoiling for fun. I'd never liked this Link. He's a giant of a fellow, a queer mixture of tinhorn and athlete. I'd often wrestled with him, though I'd never been able to throw him. He challenged me first thing. The boys backed me pretty strong. Well, I threw him easily. The crowd went wild. I—I felt sorry for him—kinda took up with him."

Chev paused, his face hardening at remembrance of that night. He had been so flushed with dare-deviltry!

"I happened to be standing alone with him," he hurried on, "and out of a clear sky he stumped me to hold up the stage single-handed. I took him up. I'd have taken any dare you'd have put up to me that night. We picked the place, at the turn of Bridge Hill, a few miles below the fort. Rand, he'd been in the crowd, but he'd started for home. Didn't get far, though, for I came across him asleep in a shack on the hills. Well, I went on, and when I heard the stage coming, I slipped on a mask and waited. I did it all right, held up the stage single-handed, and the driver jumped and ran!"

Jake chortled and slapped his knee. But Chev was groping in the crypts of memory for some definite remembrance of what followed.

"I fired a shot or two into the air for fun," he added slowly, as though dragging the details from obscurity. "But the guard was on, and first thing I knew, a bullet whizzed along the side of my head and I saw stars. I knew there was some kind of a mix-up. I jumped for my horse and lit out. At daylight, I was way up in the hills, pretty light-headed, and I just kept climbing till I got here."

"Got clean away! Damn good joke!" Jake chuckled.

"Joke!" echoed Chev, in a sharp, shaken voice. "I—I can't make it out. But I know I had nothing to do with any real holdup, and I didn't intentionally fire on the guard or rob the stage. I didn't even know the guard had been shot. I wish—I wish——"

He stared wildly out over the range that was shimmering in golden sunlight before him.

"Why, I don't see as you got any call to bother your head," consoled the old man, "so long's that Link don't squeal on you."

"But they're fastening the crime on an innocent man!" retorted Chev. "About that time, Rand was asleep in the shack. I know it and I'll bet Link knows it, and I hope death and judgment'll get him for swearing an innocent man to prison!"

"You listen to yer dad an' keep out of it," advised Jake.

"Keep out of it and let an innocent man go to prison?" cried Chev, starting up. "Jake, Jake, don't you see? It must've been me—my shot—that hit the guard!"

The moment the words were out he sank down and covered his face with his hands. In the blank stillness, he heard the rumble of the bull.

"But you don't know if it was or not!" protested Jake vehemently. "Anyhow, you didn't mean to do it. But if you was to go back an' tell that, how you gonna clear yourself—of the rest? If this Link's such a shark, you'd go behind the bars that quick! No tellin' what he'd swear to. You must be plumb crazy!"

Fear swept like a blanching wind over Chev. Jake's brutal directness flung the bald truth in his face. That was exactly what he would do—put himself behind the bars! But still—— He lifted his head for his final argument.

"There's nobody in the whole world to care if I did go to prison! Rand—he's got a wife and baby."

"If he's a worthless no-'count, they're better off without him," retorted Jake gruffly.

CHEV caught at the words with a flicker of hope. The magic of spring on range and hill bade him be free! But there rose before him a vision of Rand's small ranch on Virginia Creek. The memory gripped him so vividly that he spoke his thoughts aloud.

"He's got a mighty pretty place at Virginia Creek. I was out hunting one day when I came out of the woods close to it—a low log house beside a shining creek, with green meadows behind it. It slipped into my mind like a picture I'd seen long ago. Flower beds in a yard with clipped grass and a trimmed hedge around it. I walked along the creek opposite the house, trying, trying somehow to remember. And when I saw Rand's wife come out of the house and down the path——"

Chev stopped. He had been speaking to something that was not Jake. Of what use to explain that at first sight of the house he had thrilled and stirred with a strange certainty that he was looking upon one of those old pictures that yet haunted his dreams? That the woman coming down the steps and through the garden, holding her gold-crowned head with an inborn grace, had been as a light leading into the sealed past? That when she had come close to him, waiting bareheaded on the bank, he had seen the heavy shadows under her eyes that told of weary waiting?

"I—I thought at first that you were my husband," she had faltered. "He went out hunting yesterday. Have you seen him?"

The wan lines of her face had deepened as he shook his head. She was turning away when Chev, coming out of the dazzled dream, started desperately to speak. The sound of her voice had opened wide the gates of the past. And before he quite realized it, he was explaining why he had stopped to look at

the house, telling her of those early dreams that he had never quite understood.

She had answered only with the compassion of her eyes. He had gone on to speak of his childhood, and the years of wandering that had told him nothing of his own people, of the yearning to know that tugged at his very heart strings. A little silence, then he was listening entranced to her voice. It was as though her heart beat in the words. Oh, her dear old Virginia home! She couldn't go back to it, so she had tried to bring it here. The flower beds, the hedge, and—would he come inside?

He had followed her reverently, wonderingly, through the hedged garden and up the flagged steps into the house. Again in the big room, with a wood fire blazing in the chimney, he had had a fleeting, illusory impression of dim, forgotten days. As she had left him in answer to a baby's cry, he had moved about the room, touching bits of quaint bric-a-brac, gazing with baffled eyes at old-fashioned pictures. Somewhere, somewhere he had seen all this before!

BUT Jake was impatiently knocking the ashes from his pipe. "Well, you said you seen Rand's wife——"

Chev shook himself free of the trailing dreams.

"She was alone at the house, she and her baby. There she was, worrying about the stock straying off. I rounded them into the meadows and fixed up the fences. He's a nice fellow, is Rand, but no good. How she ever come to marry him? I was so mad I lit out to find him, but when I did find him I—I wouldn't have wanted her to see him. She's—she's a lady, you know."

He stopped miserably. He could never speak of what he had seen that day as he looked back from the edge of the clearing—Rand's wife in the doorway, her baby in her arms, watching out over the range. He felt as though a heartache hovered over the log house, the hedged garden. He had ridden back to the fort and the old life, but the day had been as an added memory.

A brief silence fell upon the two men; a flute-voiced bird called across the bunch grass.

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" old Jake broke in emphatically. "I knowed there was a woman in it! They're at the bottom of every man's ruination. She got around you all right. You'd even go to the pen for her, you poor——"

Chev stared a moment, shaken with rage. Then he was standing over Jake, gripping him with terrible hands.

"You—you crawling reptile! I tell you she's a lady, a lady! Know what a lady is? If you don't, I'll teach you if I have to pound your old hide to jelly!"

He released Jake with a final thrust that sent him reeling against the wall. But the old man, with a hitch of his trousers, coolly retorted:

"Then if you're so dead set on her, let him go to the pen!"

Chev stood; swaying a little, breathing hard. In that vivid tingling moment, that was like a burst of life, he woke to a sharp realization of all that this miserable business must mean for her—curious eyes, the hateful publicity, disgrace, her broken heart. What she must have suffered during those months, those long winter months! The memory of the slight, proud figure trailing down through her garden, the garden she had brought from her old home—the thought of her with her baby in her arms watching out over the range—— Disgrace for her! No, no, he couldn't stand it! He knew this for his big moment, calling to him through generations of the past. Quietly he held out his hand.

"Good-by, Jake. I've just got to go. That's all."

But old Jake was gripping the hand and crying brokenly:

"Chev, boy, I can't bear to see you doin' it. It's clear suicide, that's what it is!"

From across the range the roar of the bull trembled into the stillness.

"Hear him? That'll be you penned up ——" But the hard note in Jake's voice broke.

"I've got to let him go free," said Chev, choking.

As he swung upon his horse, Jake called quaveringly:

"Remember this, boy. No matter—what happens, or how long 'tis, your bunk's waitin' fer you when you—get back."

Chev dashed across the creek, the bunch grass hissing against his horse's sides. The voice of the bull seemed to carry a note of wild pleading, of desperate command. Behind the logs of the corral, the red, sinewy body paced, calling, calling to the solitude. The flashing eyes shot hate at the man who sat so still looking in upon him. But the bull did not charge. So much had he learned of the devices of man.

With sudden fierceness, Chev struck down the top bars of the gap. A moment, with blowing nostrils and pawing hoofs, the bull watched. Another moment and he reared his mighty bulk over the bars and crashed through the broken rock to the green range.

The man swung his horse warily aside. But the bull's eyes were on the far reaches of the range, on the hills where in royal freedom he had led the wild herd. A moment of utter immobility, then through his great throat thundered a summons to the herd. He did not wait. Straight across the range, he strode, a gleam of long, stately horns and crimson coat.

CHEV watched until the golden shimmer of sun on waves of grass took him. Going back to freedom and the sweet high ranges and the cycle of seasons that were all his! And he knew it, he knew it! His kingly stride and swinging horns said it. It was he, Chev, who turned his back on the range and passed into the prisoning gloom of the cañon.

The ring of his horse's hoofs on the stones echoed like the bell of doom. Even now they might have passed sentence! And Rand's wife—— His keen mind measured the distance over swift, unfooted ways, straight and wild as the flight of a bird. Down the rough beds of cañon streams, through willow growths, through stretches of rank grass, he drove his horse, a cloud of wild life flying and scurrying before them. All the forces of body and soul became fused, concentrated on the will to ride into Fort La Beau with the truth.

He felt the glory of life go by. A thousand chance scents and colors, called to him, came from little safe places to bid him good-by. He rode with no thought of time or distance. For hours, the sun glared into his face. Then he was riding through the white, whispering night, under the unpitying stars. Was this the end of it all, the dreams, the wild years? But fast as he could ride, the danger to *her* swept after him on threatening wings.

The world lost all bounds. How many times did the morning rise supremely to beat upon him riding, riding? How many times did the night tower into stars? He could not have told. If he was tired, he knew it not. It was as though another man were riding, and he, Chev, urged him on, on. He knew when he reached the trail, for cabins began to flash past. They crowded at last into a ragged huddle that was the fort. He dashed down the street and slid from his horse before the log courthouse.

A familiar face greeted him, said something about being almost too late for the fun. He pushed through the loiterers at the door. The room was packed to standing. Among the back rows he halted, held by a tremendous intentness. His wavering vision steadied.

That was Link on the stand. How cool he was, how confident! His voice, hard as iron, met the grilling cross-questioning. That was Rand up there, sitting with lowered eyes where everybody could see him. There, a little apart, sat Rand's wife. A spirit of steel, the spirit of fighting ancestors, looked out of that white, beaten face. Chev's hands closed.

What was this Link was swearing to so assuredly? Chev leaned forward, alert to the brazen details.

Link had been riding over the hills that night, intending to go down country. He had caught sight of Rand loitering near Bridge Hill. He could swear to the man, though he, himself, had not been seen. He had ridden on. Soon after he heard the stage rattle across the bridge, and in a few minutes there were shots. He had thought nothing of it until next morn-

ing, when he was arrested. Of course he had been cleared on evidence of both guard and driver. It was only after Rand had been arrested that the incident of that night recurred to him.

"And you'll swear the man you saw near Bridge Hill was the prisoner?"

"Yes, your honor!"

A cry of anguish broke the hush that waited. Chev crashed through the crowd, flung forward by a hot flush of rage. He heard his own voice ringing into the startled silence.

"That's not true! That's not true, Link! *I* was the man held up the stage that night, and you know it!"

There, the words were out at last! Something loosened in his head. He clutched at the edge of a table. He had a reeling vision of faces shifting and changing. Voices, rough, angry voices, surged threateningly close. He turned and flung out a hand to ward them off. He must tell them the truth first.

"Yes, 'twas me held up the stage, and Link here dared me to do it! A joke to scare the new driver! Rand was asleep in a shack below here——"

A WILD cry of joy and relief broke his rush of words. Dreamlike, the face of Rand's wife sprang out of the tilting room. Her tear-filled eyes were blessing him, like stars of gratitude. He was glad, glad, though heavy bars seemed to cross the sunlight streaming in through unshaded windows. The room rocked with mad cheers. Rand's face was hidden, his shoulders heaving.

Chev was calm now, wonderfully calm, ready to face the thing to the death. He told his story as clearly as he could recall it, from the time Link had dared him to hold up the stage to the end of his wild ride at Jake's cabin. He finished with the trapper's remark that had roused him to a sense of responsibility in regard to the evidence he could give to clear an innocent man.

Unflinchingly Chev met the cross-questioning. On his way to Bridge Hill, he had passed the shack and had seen Rand asleep there. The holdup was a joke to scare the new driver. He had not known there was gold on the stage. He had no clear idea of how many shots he had fired after the driver had jumped and escaped.

Yes, one of them might have wounded the guard, though he had not fired on him intentionally. He had not even known the guard had been struck, had not seen him fall. He, himself, had received a wound in the scalp, and knowing there was some sort of mix-up, he had jumped on his horse and made for the hills. The joke was over.

And when he had finished and stood waiting for the end, through the still room wavered a force like the trembling of the tide. He met a film of kindness in the eyes resting upon him. A rough voice, the voice of a mob leader, rang out:

"What about Link now?"

"Yes, go after him!"

"Look at him! If you can't drag the truth out of him, we will!"

Chev turned. Link's eyes had the look of a creature hemmed in by pointed guns. Threatening faces edged closer, pushed forward by the crowding, growling mob. He backed involuntarily, his face ashen and wild. He tried to speak. Suddenly he cried out broken words in hoarse hysteria.

Even behind the shelter of stalwart officers, it was not the probing law but the threatening mob that dragged the truth from Link. Chev, listening, felt the fog clear from his brain before an understanding of the man's perfidy. He saw it all —how Link had followed him to Bridge Hill and from behind a rock had fired on him as he, Chev, was firing into the air to scare the fleeing driver. Of how, as Chev had jumped for his horse, Link had fired on the guard, then robbed the stage and cached the gold. After his arrest and acquittal, and when suspicion had fastened upon Rand, Link had seen a chance of quick escape out of the country, if Rand could be proved guilty.

"In any case you'd have put the guilt on an innocent man," declared the judge scathingly. "It's a good thing all men have not your idea of honor. Young man," he turned to Chev, "you've done something to-day! You have——"

But Chev heard little of the commen-

datory speech, for the grim walls of the courtroom were spinning about him in wheels of blinding color. He had not fired the shot! His hands were clean! He was free, free!

He felt reality coming back to him. The trial was over. Men were shaking him by the hand, women, too, with wet eyes and broken words. But when Rand's wife came to him, her mouth all trembling, her eyes a glisten of tears, yet with that valiant smile and proud graciousness, he could have fallen upon his knees.

He rode up the trail, lifting his face to the hills, dim and immense. From far up on the high range, he seemed to hear the red bull thundering of freedom. The vague, beautiful dreams hovered about him, so close, so close to reality. And suddenly, like a hand reaching out, fancy had captured his dream. High up on the range, he would build a house with a garden all hedged with green. He would have fields and horses and great herds. And some day he would find a girl with golden hair and a proud little head—— The leafage, luxuriant and deep, the honey-breathing grasses, closed around him and his dream.

WHITE-HANDLED GUNS

TO a gunman anything that shoots is a "gat." He has no interest or taste in firearms for their own sake. All guns look alike to him—something to kill with. A sportsman or a lover of firearms, on the contrary, has an artist's appreciation for a pistol or a rifle. Frequently the hero in a Western tale is provided with a gun which has a remarkable handle. There is a foundation in fact for this practice.

The famous white-handled guns of "Wild Bill" Hickok, whose real name was James Butler Hickok, were the prototypes of these fancy-handled guns. Senator Henry Wilson, of Massachusetts, who later became Vice President of the United States under the Grant administration, invited Wild Bill to act as a guide for himself and a party of ladies and gentlemen who desired to make a trip through the Far West. The letters of Henry M. Stanley to the New York *Herald*, in 1866, had spread the fame of Wild Bill as a scout. On the strength of these letters, Senator Wilson chose Wild Bill as his guide, and in June of 1869 the Wilson party set out for a visit to the cañons of the Arkansas and the point on the Republican River where the Cheyennes had killed a number of whites. On this expedition Wild Bill gave frequent exhibitions of his skill with pistol and rifle.

At the conclusion of the expedition, Senator Wilson gave a dinner at Hays City in honor of Wild Bill and referred to him in his speech as one of the men who had done much for the settlement of the West. He then presented him with a case which contained two ivory-handled pistols. These exceptionally beautiful pistols are the historical justification for the white-handled guns of fiction.

"Adios, Señor!"

By Mark Reed

Author of "Useless," "'Tie, You Hellions, Tie!'" Etc.

One single hour to live and no possible chance of escape—that is the time when a man faces what he has always wondered about. What would he do? What does he do? Hendricks was closely guarded in an adobe hut, and his executioners were approaching. After an eventful life and many escapes, he had one and only one hour to live.

THROUGH the doorway of the adobe hut, Hendricks studied his guard. The fellow was a villainous specimen in tattered linen that once had been white, and as he sat there, cross-legged before the fire, rifle across his knees, the flames threw his face into high relief. The eyes were beady, the teeth tobacco stained, a saber cut extended up into his tangle of iron-gray hair, and the heavily lined cheeks and leathery neck were gnarled. It was a gorgeous mask of treachery.

"Little hope there," thought Hendricks.

Groping about in the darkness, he made another tour of his prison. The sun-baked walls were a good ten feet high, and the three slots which served for windows were so small they permitted only a star or two to be seen at a time. The door was the sole means of escape. He strolled out, and leaned against the jamb.

"Warm night, Señor José," he said.

Sourly José admitted the night was warm, also that the gnats were kin of the devil.

Ha! at any rate the ruffian understood his Spanish. That was something.

"You know my government will make it warm for you fellows when they hear of this?"

"Your government will never hear."

"No, señor?"

"No!" the guard replied viciously. "No one saw us capture you."

It was true. Hendricks had been jogging along at the rear of the train of burros. At a moment when a turn in the road had hidden him from the rest of the train, five horsemen, until then invisible in that interminable panorama of brown sand and green sage, had dashed out upon him. Five guns had been leveled at his head, and before he was fully aware what it was all about, they had whisked

him up a side ravine. What a tenderfoot he had been! He, a world-famous engineer, who had roughed it for years in Chile, Manchuria, the African veldt—in Mexico two days, and caught like a kid at a picnic with nothing but a thermos bottle, his violin, and a knapsack.

"Also," went on José grimly, "no one will see you die. So your damn government will not know, will not care, and will not make it warm for us."

"When does my—er—execution take place? Daybreak?"

"I wait for Capitán Quelite."

"Your captain, eh?"

"No! What the devil! I am no soldier of Quelite. He is my cousin. We stop you from working our Los Dios Mine."

Then Hendricks recalled a letter from his new employers. It had explained how the Los Dios had been bought from a gay but decrepit old gentleman who craved whisky, black cigars, and entertainment to color his waning years. José and this Quelite must be his heirs, starting their own peculiar form of negotiations to get the squandered mine back.

"Señor is afraid to die?" leered José.

"Afraid to die?" exclaimed Hendricks. "Good Lord, no! I am fifty. I have seen all there is to life. If this is to be my last night, all right."

"Last night? Your last hour! My cousin is on his way from Tixtla. When he arrives—in a few minutes—*ping! ping! ping!*" Here José gave an excellent imitation of several rifle shots. "Then, adios, señor!" And he kissed his fingers in a mocking farewell.

"Fine!" said Hendricks. "Always say 'Good-by!' quickly, get it over with. That's a good rule. In the meantime, do you mind if I join you here?"

He went into the hut, took a flask of whisky from his knapsack, unsheathed his beloved violin from its battered case, then returned to the fire.

"I've often wondered," he said, "how I would spend my last hour. Feared it might be in bed. But always hoped to spend it with wine, music, and the señoritas. As it turns out, I have whisky, my fiddle, and *you*."

A twinkle in José's beady eyes showed he was not above appreciating humor.

"My playing is not noteworthy, but it has kept me company through many a lonely night. Do you mind?"

"Si, señor! Not at all."

Hendricks took a hearty drink, then struck briskly into "La Paloma," his ears straining, despite himself, to catch the sound of the hoofbeats.

"Not bad," muttered José.

"Much obliged for the appreciation. Come! Have some whisky."

But the wily José took only a gentleman's pull at the flask.

Hendricks, his eyes fixed on the stars, played on, sometimes briskly, sometimes dreamily. All his old favorites! Waltzes that brought back memories of his college proms! Bits of opera—the execution scene from "Tosca!" Funny, he was about to be shot, too! Would they just stand him up against the wall and blaze away? Or would they more considerately conduct him behind some sagebrush?

From "The Rosary," he slipped into something in minuet time, and thence into the "Cradle Song" from "Jocelyn." He had always liked that cradle song, perhaps because he had never been a father. The notes sounded softly. Doubtful if ever these brigand-infested hills had wakened to such a lullaby before. It sounded incongruous. Incongruous even to Hendricks as he played it amid the buzz of the myriads of gnats and mosquitoes, the busy crackle of the fire, and the damp rustle of the sleeping landscape.

A *thud-thud* of galloping horses rang out, and Quelite, at the head of a score of men, dashed up.

There by the fire they found José, his eyes closed, his forefinger hooked around the trigger of his rifle. Opposite him on the ground lay a violin and bow. Quelite leaped down and lifted his cousin's head. José was sleeping peacefully, his villainous countenance wreathed in a babylike smile of contentment, as though his mother had just rocked him to sleep.

At the feet of the sleeping man was a piece of paper, pinned to the earth by a stick. Quelite picked it up. It read:

Adios, señor!

A Chat With You

DID you ever take a chance in a raffle? We have, on various occasions. We have tried for Ford cars—and more expensive makes as well; we have bought tickets for ten cents giving us a chance to win a ton of coal; we have drawn numbers for building lots; but we never won anything. All we got out of it was the excitement. That, after all, is what we paid f ".

* * * *

THERE was a time when this sort of gambling was sanctioned by various governments. One of the ministers of finance of France before the revolution saw his country on the verge of bankruptcy. It was impossible to make the taxes any heavier; they could not collect those that were already levied. The army and the public servants had not been paid in a long time. The peasantry were starving. And yet this financial genius devised a way of lifting oneself by one's boot straps. It was one of the first life-insurance policies ever devised. They called it, after its originator, the Tontine. It gave all the sense of security of a life policy with the additional thrill of a suicide club. It was so popular that it is only within the memory of the present generation that it has been superseded by a more businesslike, if less sporting, form of policy.

* * * *

UP to within the last few years a public lottery was the big sporting event in Naples. Every one in the town took a chance, and the day when they drew the lucky numbers was the big day of the year. We do not know just what has happened to this feature of Italian life under the régime of Mussolini, but we think it likely that he has put an end to it. The Louisiana Lottery was once a widely patronized institution in the United States. And, although all lotteries are under the ban in this commonwealth, if a man cared to hang around the docks in seaports he would find opportunities for trying his luck in lotteries operated in Spanish American countries.

* * * *

LOTTERIES are a waste of ti ne and money in the long run. The less a man depends on luck and the more on his own efforts for his success, the better luck he is likely to have. To take blind chances on anything, unless forced to, is foolish. It is throwing away the reason, the judgment, the resolution—everything that makes man what he is. It is letting go with both hands and letting things slide. At the same time there is a trace of the primitive, superstitious gambler left in most of us, and perhaps the lottery is not quite as sinister a form of gambling as some others. At dice or poker the money you win comes directly out of some one's pocket. In a lottery what you win comes directly from no one. So many people have contributed to make up the price, and each contribution has been so trifling, that a man may pocket his winnings without so much as a sigh for the losers.

* * * *

THE long story, a complete two-dollar book, which opens the next number of the magazine, is called, "The Obituary Lottery." It is by Boyden Sparkes who is new to this magazine, but who has long been a contributor to the *Saturday Evening Post*. You will find, when you get it, that no matter how much you disapprove of lotteries on principle, they are interesting to read about. They make good stories, and this is one of the best.

THEY say that nothing in nature goes to waste. Perhaps this is true just as much of the foolish and irrational actions of men and women as it is of material things. The follies of the past make the good stories of the present. All art and literature have for their origins that struggle which man continually makes to get rid of his lower impulses. If all life were like one grand Chatauqua there would be less drama in it. We would hate to meet with pirates, yet in reading a good story about them, we cannot help a feeling of gratitude to them for furnishing the raw materials. We are sure that lotteries are irrational and wasteful, and yet on reading this new book by Mr. Sparkes we pass a vote of thanks to the man, whoever he was, who invented the lottery. It is a new kind of story by an author new to these pages, and we hope you will like it.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

The Obituary Lottery

A Complete, Two-dollar Book by

BOYDEN SPARKES

To Effect an Arrest

A Novelette by

HARWOOD STEELE

Lightnin' Calvert

By **W. B. M. FERGUSON**

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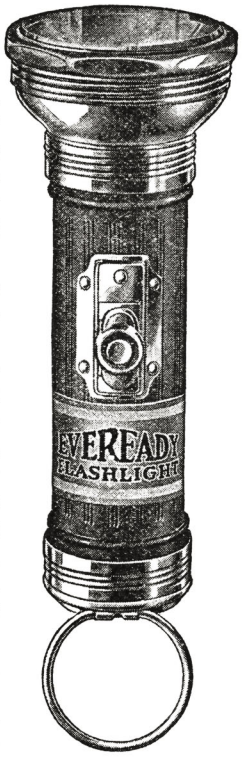

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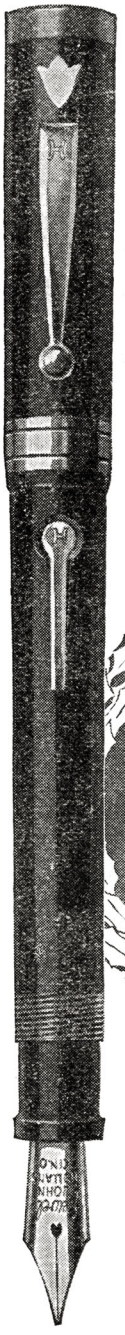

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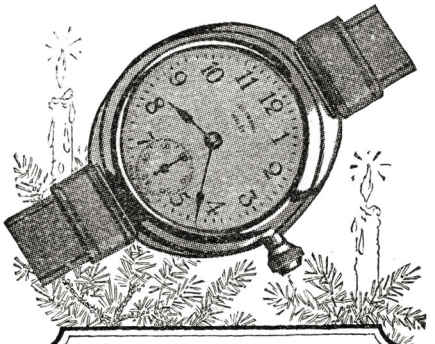

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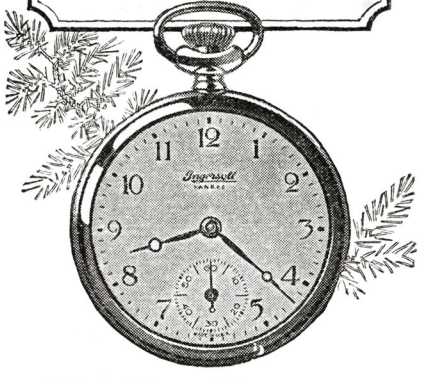

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What a whale of a difference just a few cents make

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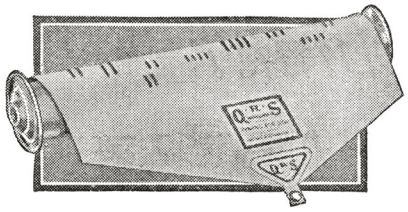

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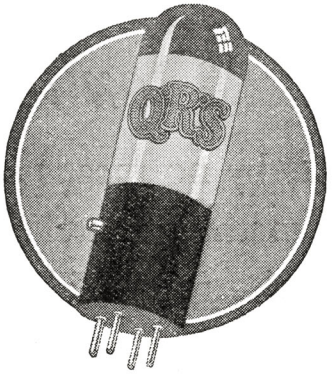
PLAYER ROLLS *are Better*

WHY?

BECAUSE they are not arranged mechanically — like ordinary rolls .... but are the actual recordings of the personal playing of real artists.

Make a comparison on your own player piano.



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Radio Tubes *are Better*

NO

NO! They are not better because they cost more .... The price is more because Q·R·S Redtop Radio Tubes *are* better. Money back if they're not.

Try a set on *your* radio.

ASK YOUR DEALER

They cost him more but they cause him no worry

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Quick! Hide the Kodak— Here comes dad

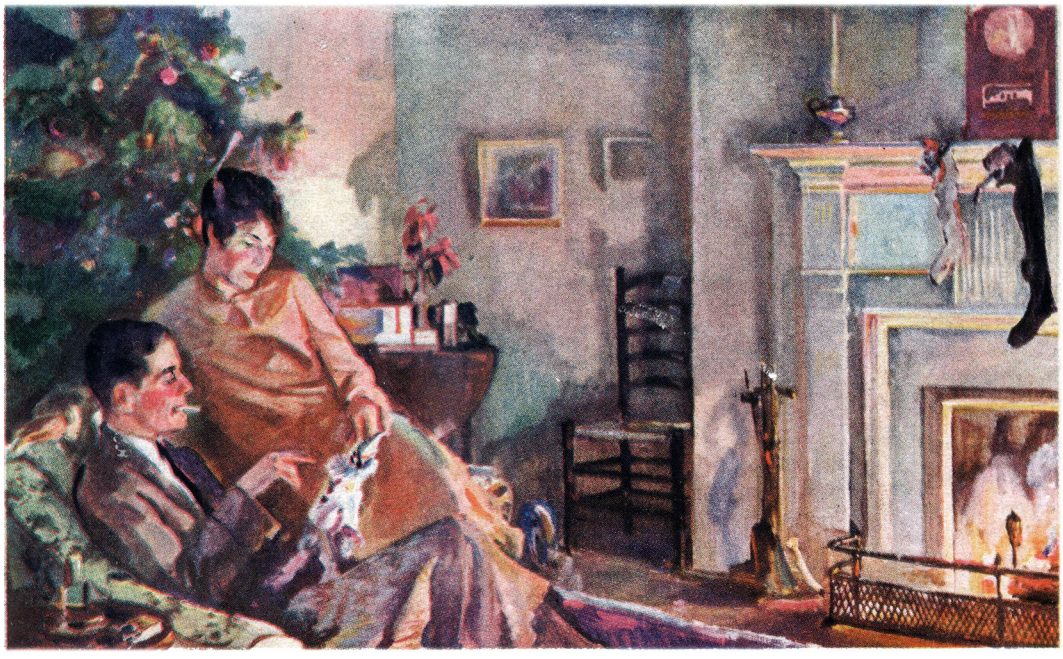
Keep it a secret till Christmas day and then—think of the fun you'll *all* have.

Autographic Kodaks, $5 up

Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., *The Kodak City*

When the tree is trimmed for the great day—when the peace and good cheer of Christmas are almost here

—have a Camel!



Camels represent the utmost in cigarette quality. The choicest of Turkish and Domestic tobaccos are blended into Camels by master blenders and the finest of French cigarette paper is made especially for them. No other cigarette is like Camels. They are the overwhelming choice of experienced smokers.

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