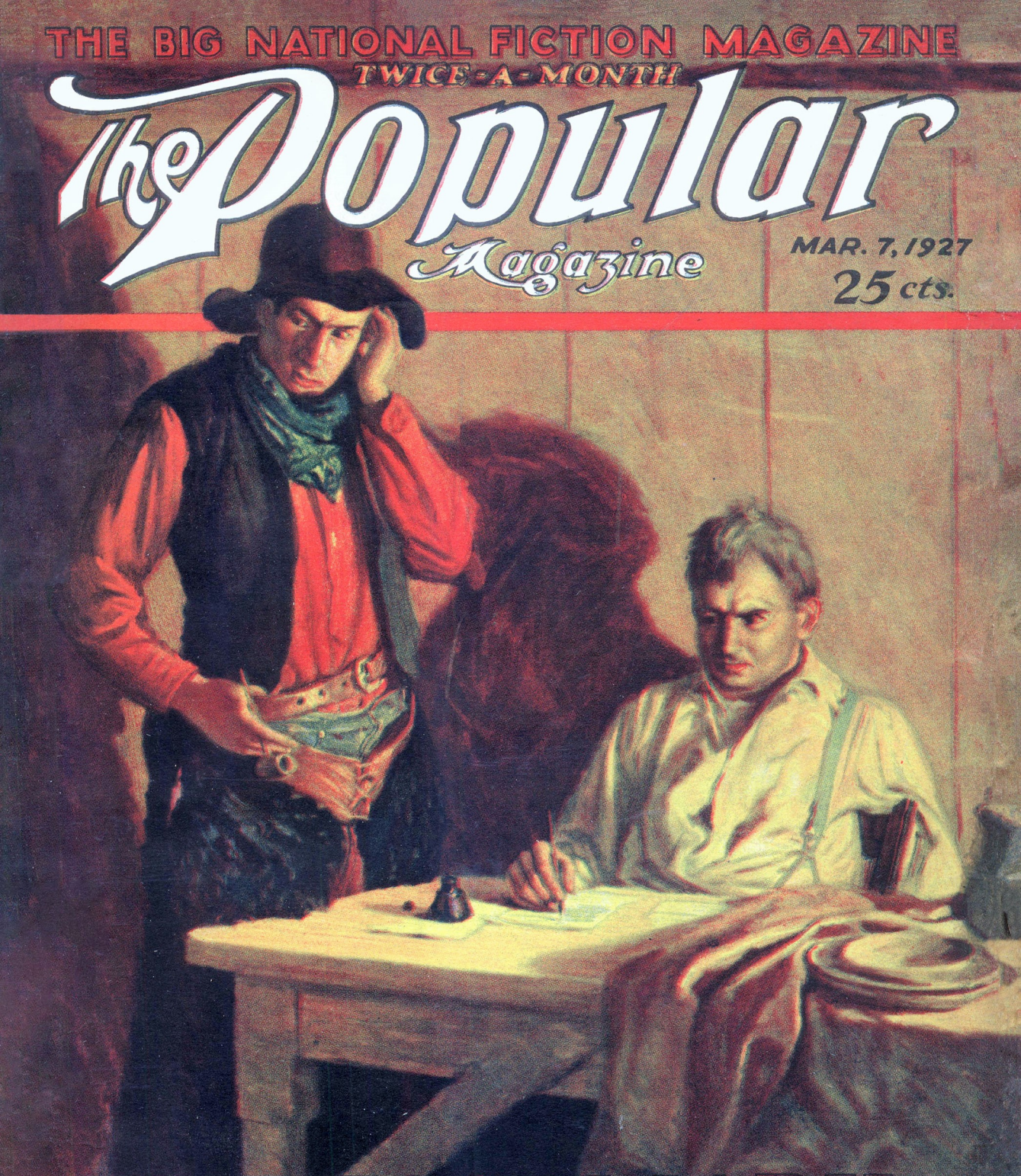
THE BIG NATIONAL FICTION MAGAZINE
TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

MAR. 7, 1927
25 cts.



THE EASY MARK

BY

FRANCIS LYNDE

"A Friend in Need!"

When you're hungry for good candy—when your appetite craves a wholesome sweet—**Baby Ruth** fulfills every longing. There's ten minutes of delight in every 5c bar.

It's good for you, too! **Baby Ruth** has all the nourishment and food value found in pure milk, good butter, refined sugar, crisp peanuts and rich chocolate. And all this wholesome nutriment is blended into a piece of irresistible deliciousness that captures your appetite at the very first taste.

CURTISS CANDY COMPANY, CHICAGO

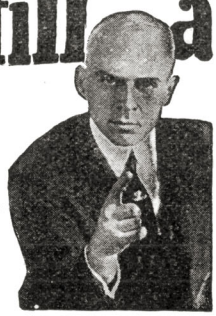
Otto Y. Schnering, PRESIDENT

Candy Makers to the American Nation

5¢

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

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



L. L. COOKE
Chief Engineer

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

Be an Electrical Expert

Learn to Earn $3,500 to $10,000 a Year

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

Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is simple, thorough and complete and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to get in this work which pays thousands of other Cooke trained men $3,500 to $10,000 a year.

No Extra Charge for Electrical Working Outfit

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

Satisfaction or Money Back

So sure am I that after studying with me you, too, can get into the "big money" class in Electrical work, that I will agree in writing to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my Course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made. And back of me stands the Chicago Engineering Works, Inc., a two million dollar institution.

Get Started Now—Mail Coupon

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

L. L. Cooke, Chief Engineer
L.L.Cooke School of Electricity
owned and operated by
Chicago Engineering Works

L. L. COOKE,
Dept. 73
2150 Lawrence Ave.,
Chicago

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

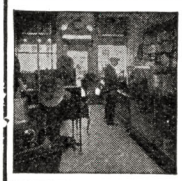
Name .....

Address .....

Occupation .....

MAIL COUPON FOR MY FREE BOOK

Look What These Cooke Trained Men are Earning



Makes $700 in 24 Days in Radio

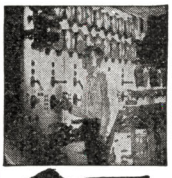
"Thanks to your interesting Course I made over $700 in 24 days in Radio. Of course, this is a little above the average but I run from $10 to $40 clear profit every day; you can see what your training has done for me."
FRED G. McNABB,
848 Spring St., Atlanta, Ga.

$70 to $80 a Week for Jacquot

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

$20 a Day for Schreck

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



Plant Engineer—Pay Raised 150%

"I was a dumbbell in electricity until I got in touch with you Mr. Cooke, but now I have charge of a big plant including 600 motors and direct a force of 34 men—electricians, helpers, etc. My salary has gone up more than 150%."
GEORGE ILLINGWORTH,
63 Calumet Road,
Holyoke, Mass.

5 big outfits given to you—no extra charge

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

If you are a POPULAR reader you don't need to be told that the two-dollar book published in each issue of this magazine is a unique feature which no other magazine in the fiction field attempts to emulate. If you are not a regular reader, try "So Sailed We," by Holman Day, in the next issue of THE POPULAR, and see for yourself how we make good.

Volume LXXXIII Number 4

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

CONTENTS FOR MARCH 7, 1927

COVER DESIGN — E. ROSCOE SHRADER

THE EASY MARK — FRANCIS LYNDE — 1
A Complete Book
Proving that a fat man can be a lovable hero.

THE BARKING DOG — C. L. EDSON — 68
A Short Story
A circus strong man mysteriously becomes a great boxer.

WHITE COAL — LAURIE YORK ERSKINE — 79
A Five-part Story—Part V
Something greater than water power.

THE TOTEM OF RESPECTABILITY — CAPTAIN RALPH R. GUTHRIE — 109
A Short Story
The servant problem in Alaska.

OUT OF THE AIR — FRED MacISAAC — 118
A Short Story
A man and girl stranded in a Mediterranean port.

REVENGE — ROBERT McBLAIR — 134
A Novelette
Mastering the spirit of revenge.

LEGUERRE OF THE LOST DIVISION
The Prisoner of Prayd-Amah — HOWARD FITZALAN — 164
A Short Story
The secret agent employs elaborate methods.

A HUMBLE HALL MARK — L. P. HOLMES — 177
A Short Story
You never can tell by appearances.

OLD BUT NOT FEEBLE — FREDERICK C. DAVIS — 185
A Short Story
Age is sometimes an incident, not a handicap.

A CHAT WITH YOU — 191

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary.
Copyright, 1926, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1926, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain.
Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.44.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $4.00 SINGLE COPY, 25 CENTS

See How Easy it is to Quickly Become a Powerful Speaker

THERE is no magic, no trick, no mystery about becoming a powerful and convincing public speaker. I will prove that you can quickly become a powerful speaker. By an amazing five-minute test I will show you how to discover whether you are one of the 7 men out of every 9 who have this "hidden knack" and do not know it.

Why Powerful Speakers Are Always Leaders

It is the man who can put his ideas into convincing speech—the man who can sway others at his will and dominate one man or a thousand who is sought out and asked to fill big, important, high-salaried positions. He is a leader; he stands head and shoulders above the mass. I am going to prove that you can be such a man by simply bringing out your "hidden personality."

What 15 Minutes a Day Will Show You

How to talk before your club or lodge.
How to address board meetings.
How to propose and respond to toasts.
How to make a political speech.
How to tell entertaining stories.
How to make after-dinner speeches.
How to converse interestingly.
How to write better letters.
How to sell more goods.
How to train your memory.
How to enlarge your vocabulary.
How to develop self-confidence.
How to acquire a winning personality.
How to strengthen your will-power and ambition.
How to become a clear, accurate thinker.
How to develop your power of concentration.
How to be master of any situation.

It is Amazingly Easy to Quickly Become a Powerful Speaker

You do not need a college education nor any previous voice training to become a powerful speaker. I will show you the secret that causes one man to rise from an obscure position to the head of a great corporation; another from the rank and file of political workers to national prominence; an ordinary trades-union member to the national leadership of great labor unions; a timid and retiring man to change suddenly into a popular and much applauded after-dinner and banquet speaker. Thousands have accomplished just such amazing things due to this simple, easy, yet effective training.

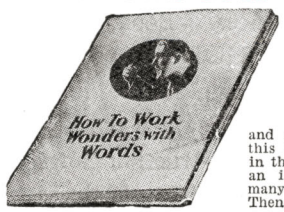
You Become a Good Speaker—Or I Don't Want a Penny

I will guarantee to make you a powerful, convincing, and easy speaker within a few weeks if you will give me 15 minutes a day in the privacy of your own home. I know what I have done for thousands of others, therefore if I cannot make you a powerful speaker, your training will not cost you a penny.

Amazing Book Free—Mail Coupon

If you will fill in and mail the coupon at once, you will receive a remarkable new book called "How to Work Wonders with Words." This book gives you an amazing test, by which you can determine for yourself in five minutes whether you are one of the seven men out of every nine who possess the "hidden knack" of powerful speech, but do not know it. Decide for yourself if you are going to allow 15 minutes a day to stand between you and success. Thousands have found this to be the biggest step forward in their lives. If it has played such an important part in the lives of many big men, may it not in yours? Then mail the coupon at once.

Now Sent Free



North American Institute

3601 Michigan Ave., Dept. 1753, Chicago, Ill.

North American Institute,
3601 Michigan Ave., Dept. 1753,
Chicago, Ill.

Please send me FREE and without obligation my copy of your famous book, "How to Work Wonders With Words," and full information regarding your Course in Effective Speaking.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

There is no yardstick with which to measure it. Statisticians cannot give you figures for it. No governmental department can weigh its effects. But the fact remains that one of the great influences in the lives of thousands of Americans to-day is that wielded by fiction.

Men and women in all walks of life dearly love a good story well told. Fiction serves to stimulate the imagination, to arouse the emotion and to transfer to the reader those characteristics of courage and fortitude which are part of the heroes and heroines of the story. From the time when the first cave man sat down in the evening to tell his offspring the first bedtime story, the art of fiction has always been a moving force in the life of man.

Nowadays the art is given new impetus through the fact that large publishing houses are able to afford to writers great audiences. Books published by CHELSEA HOUSE go to the remotest engineers' camp in the foothills of the Sierras. They are read by two-fisted men of the construction gangs in the far South. Bankers, business men, and lawyers in the great cities eagerly await the appearance of a new CHELSEA HOUSE title. Long is the list of those who have written to ask for announcements of the entire CHELSEA HOUSE offerings.

In these stories of the West, of love, adventure, and mystery, busy men and women find welcome release from the monotonies of everyday living. The service that CHELSEA HOUSE is rendering, cannot, it is true, be expressed in any black and white figures, but it is nevertheless a mighty one.

STRAIGHT CROOKS, a Detective Story, by Howard Fielding. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

"There exists in the City of New York a temple to Adventure—or shall we say a factory—an establishment wherein unusual and startling experiences are made, as if by machinery designedly installed for that special purpose. Its corporate name is the Practical Scientific Reform Association, but it is more often designated, in one way or another, by the name of its founder, Woodbury Newcomb, the world's most famous criminologist. Wide publicity has attended it from its birth, but news cannot reach everybody, and therefore the facts would better be stated here by way of introduction to the Burgoyne affair, in which the Association was so strangely and so dangerously involved."

That is the start of as fascinating a detective story as has come to my attention for many months. It raises the interesting question as to whether men who have gone wrong can ever go right, for the Association whose story it tells had as its principal officers three supposedly reformed men whom Newcomb had met in one of his countless adventures. How the acid test came to these ex-convicts and how they met that test is the theme of this book that I recommend to all those who like a good tale of intrigue and mystery.

Continued on 2nd page following

150 Pieces In All $1.00 DOWN

7-Piece Genuine Cut Glass Set — FREE

Extra special offer to those who hurry their order for this combination outfit shown here:—7 pieces GENUINE CUT GLASS: Pitcher of 2-qt. capacity and 6 tumblers of 9-oz. capacity. Each piece is pure, sparkling clear, thin and dainty; **hand cut decorations** consisting of large floral design with appropriate foliage. A useful and handsome set. Only a limited number — so act quick.

26 Piece Silver Set
Pleasing pattern and popular polished finish. Each piece heavily silver plated on nickel silver base. Set consists of 6 knives, 6 forks, 6 dessert spoons, 6 teaspoons, 1 sugar shell, 1 butter knife.

30 Days' Trial—$2.70 a Month

Yes, only $1.00 with coupon below brings this 150-piece outfit (7-piece Genuine Cut Glass Set FREE) on 30 days' free trial. If not satisfied after trial, send it back at our expense and we'll refund your dollar plus all transportation charges you paid. If you decide to keep the outfit, start paying only $2.70 a month until you've paid our rock-bottom price—only $29.95 for the entire outfit with 7-piece Cut Glass Set FREE. 150 pieces in all—only $29.95—and a year to pay! Where else can you find a bargain like that and such easy terms?

Outfit consists of:—**110-piece Ivory Ware Dinner Set.** Complete service for 12 people. Popular Ivory Ware. Rich, creamy ivory color. Stamped with **Gold Leaf Decorations** as illustrated. Newest Gloria shape. Set consists of:—12 dinner plates, 9 in.; 12 breakfast plates, 7 1-4 in.; 12 coupe soups, 7 1-4 in.; 12 fruit saucers, 5 1-2 in.; 12 oatmeal dishes, 6 1-4 in.; 12 cups, 12 saucers, 12 bread and butter plates, 6 in.; 1 oval vegetable dish, 9 in.; 1 round vegetable dish, 8 3-4 in.; 1 sugar bowl and cover (2 pieces); 1 platter, 11 in.; 1 platter, 13 1-2 in.; 1 covered vegetable dish (2 pieces); 1 gravy boat; 1 gravy boat stand; 1 bowl, 1 pint; 1 cream pitcher; 1 pickle dish; 1 butter dish, 7 1-2 in.

7-Piece Pure Linen Table Set. Large tablecloth, 54x70 in.; 6 napkins 14x14 in. made of **pure linen**, bleached to an attractive silver gray. Has beautiful Grecian self pattern. Will launder perfectly.

26-Piece Silver Set as described just below illustration to the left.

FREE 7 Pieces Genuine Cut Glass (as described above) if you send coupon **at once.** Shpg. wt., abt. 125 lbs. **Order by No. G9841A. $1 with coupon; $2.70 monthly. Price $29.95.**

SEND NOW!

Straus & Schram, Dept. 1923 Chicago

Straus & Schram, Dept. 1923 Chicago

Enclosed find $1. Ship special advertised 150 piece Combination Outfit, (7 piece genuine cut glass set FREE.) I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the Outfit, I will pay you $2.70 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the Outfit with the 7 piece cut glass set within 30 days and you are to **refund my money** and any freight or express charges I paid.

150 Piece Combination Outfit, No. G9841A, $29.95.
(7 Piece Genuine Cut Glass Set FREE.)

Name _____

St., R. F. D. or Box No. _____

Shipping Point _____

Post Office _____ *State* _____

Married or Single? _____ *Nationality or Color* _____

POISONOUS MIST, an Adventure Story, by Gordon MacCreagh. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Bill Blair was a difficult sort of person. He was headstrong and at times he was intolerant, as even he himself would admit. When people told him a thing couldn't be done, he would promptly set out to do that thing.

Bill had a way of drifting around the world, a way that finally found him in the little Brazilian town of Manaos, "that ghost of a city that had hewn a place for itself out of the farthest rubber jungles of Brazil, and was now struggling against all the odds piled up by a treacherous river, to keep from sinking into the grave that had suddenly yawned and engulfed the industry upon which it had mushroomed like a mining camp of '49."

To Bill came rumors of gold in the far jungles, and that was enough to start him out against the advice of all those who knew well the perils that lurked in the dark hinterlands. Read for yourself the strange adventures that befell Bill and thank me for giving you this tip on a book that you won't put down until you have read every word.

THE LOOTED BONANZA, a Western Story, by E. Whitman Chambers. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Apparently, from a mining point of view at any rate, it was a dead country through which the young engineer was driving. Only one old man still had faith in his mining property. It was faith enough at any rate to cause the engineer to make researches, and, before long, he found himself involved in a very complex situation. The game that was being played turned out to have millions of dollars for its stakes. There was villainy afoot and it took straight thinking, and a bit of straight shooting, too, before the game was finally won. If you like stories about men and women at odds in the great West, "The Looted Bonanza" is the book for which you have been looking. Ask your dealer for a copy of it to-day and treat yourself to as thrilling an adventure as you have been on for many moons.

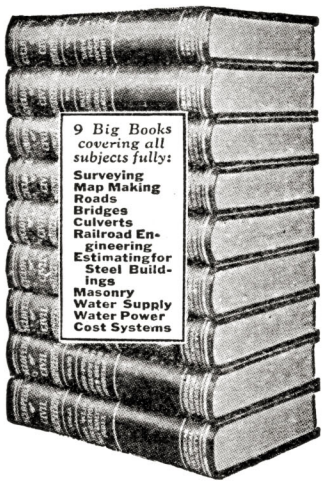
MARK TURNS WEST, a Western Story, by Mary Imlay Taylor. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

When Mark Brent came back from a life of adventure to the sod house on the prairie where his folks lived, he thought that things would be quiet and that he could live at last in repose in that Western home. But Mark had brought with him a pouch containing diamonds of great value, and those precious stones contained in them the seeds of adventure more hair-raising than Mark had encountered on all his journeying. "Mark Turns West" is a swift-paced story of adventure in the West that will delight every lover of fiction. Ask your dealer for this stirring romance to-day. It is one of the popularly priced CHELSEA HOUSE offerings.

THE DUMB-BELL, by W. B. M. Ferguson. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price $2.00.

In addition to its popularly priced seventy-five-cent novels, Chelsea House publishes full-length novels at two dollars, of which "The Dumb-bell" is an outstanding example. Here is as fine a story of the prize ring as I know of.

It starts with the mysterious employment of one Mr. Slade, a second-rate boxer, who is almost literally carried away to the little Jersey town of Milton Centre. He is brought there to double for the champion among champions, "Babe" Armstrong. Right away he and Joe Carp, Armstrong's manager, find themselves in the midst of adventure. There is a girl in this book and her queer Scotch father—two characters that you won't forget. "The Dumb-bell" is a novel that belongs on the reading table of any man, or any woman for that matter, who loves fast-moving but always clean fiction.



Want to make more money?

Be a Civil Engineer

Here is an easy way to learn. You hold your future in your own hands. If you have a grammar school education, and want the advantages of knowledge usually gained in college, you will welcome this new system of reading at home. No long hours of grinding study; just the meat of every subject told in such a simple way that anybody can understand. These books were prepared by men who are experts, they are full of boiled-down facts and easily-learned methods which save time and study.

Civil Engineers are more important than ever. Steel buildings, bridges, highways, railroad and harbor projects make Engineering more important than almost any other profession.

If you want to get ahead—try this easy way

We Ship Nine Books FREE

This is a "straight-from-the-shoulder" offer to men who want a big future. If you could hear half the stories of success we receive, you would not hesitate a minute. Send for the books now; just your name and address; and we'll ship the entire set of nine volumes. Keep them ten days, then if you realize how valuable they are to you, send only $2.00, and after that only $3.00 per month until the small total of only $29.80 is paid.

The special jiffy index puts facts at your finger tips

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, Dept. C-347, Chicago

You may send me, for Free examination, your nine new books on Civil Engineering. Unless I return them in ten days I will send you $2.00 as first payment, then $3.00 per month until the special price of only $29.80 is paid.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... *State* .....

Reference .....

Accounting

THE CONTROL OF BUSINESS

Accountants command big income. Thousands needed. About 6,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. Many earn $5,000 to $20,000. We train you thoroly at home in your spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is supervised by Wm. B. Castenholz, A. M., C. P. A., assisted by staff of C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write now for valuable 64 page book free.

This Book FREE!

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 376-H, Chicago

The only man who could talk to the Superintendent

"SOON after I began studying," a student wrote to us the other day, "we had a change in management at our plant. I certainly was glad then that I had decided to study in my spare time. For, thanks to my I. C. S. course, I was the only man in the organization who could talk to the Superintendent in his own language. As a result, I was promoted over men who had been here from ten to twenty years. My salary has been increased 90% in the last ten months."

THAT'S a true story of what just one I. C. S. student has done. There are thousands of others. Every mail brings letters from men and women telling of promotions and increases in salary due directly to spare-time study.

One hour a day, spent with the I. C. S. in the quiet of your own home, will prepare you for success in the work you like best. *Yes, it will!* Put it up to us to prove it.

Mail the Coupon for Free Booklet

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2059-B, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X in the list below:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
☐ Personnel Organization	☐ Better Letters
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Business Law	☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ English
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Private Secretary	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Spanish ☐ French	☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering	☐ Architect
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Architects' Blueprints
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Railroad Positions	☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Automobile Work
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Airplane Engines
☐ Metallurgy ☐ Mining	☐ Agriculture ☐ Navigation
☐ Steam Engineering	☐ Mathematics ☐ Radio

Name.....

Street Address.....

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

21 Jewel Burlington

Only $1.00 Down

The 21-Jewel Burlington is sold to you at a very low price and on the very special terms of $1.00 down — free examination — small monthly payments.

Free Book Send for the most complete watch book ever produced. 100 designs and engravings in colors. Write for it today. It is free. A postcard will do.

BURLINGTON WATCH CO. 19th St. & Marshall Blvd. Dept. 14-03 CHICAGO

Burroughs

Portable Adding Machine

Delivered **$100** Easy Terms

Ideal for the store or office. Adds to $1,000,000.00. Standard visible keyboard. Operated with one hand. Backed by Burroughs service.

BURROUGHS ADDING MACHINE CO.
6071 Second Blvd. Detroit, Mich.

LUCK

All around you there is abundant Success, Wealth and Happiness. Get Your Share. The "LUCKY SEVEN" Secret Rules are free to all who wear this Rare and beautiful Talisman Ring. On each side of this Odd and Charming Ring is moulded the figure of Fortuna—The "Goddess of Luck" symbolic of Success Triumphant. Ancient belief, that her emblem brings success to wearer in Love, Games, Business, Health and everything. Genuine 14-K Antique Gold S. Ring mounted with 32 facet, one carat Radio-Flash Mexican Diamond type gem. Wonderful reproduction of a $500 Genuine Diamond in brilliancy. Cut and Flashing Rainbow Fire. Guaranteed 20 years. Send strip of paper to show finger size and we will send this wonderful ring. When it arrives pay the postman only $2.95. Nothing more to pay. Yours to keep, wear and enjoy forever. Wear 7 days and 7 nights—follow the 7 rules that we send you. If not satisfied your money quickly returned. Address

Radio Flash Gem Imp. Co., St. Paul, Minn.—Dept. 73LX

Ford Runs 57 Miles on Gallon of "Gas"

A new automatic and self-regulating device for all cars has been invented by John A. Stransky, C-220 Stransky Building, Pukwana, South Dakota, with which automobiles have made from 35 to 57 miles on a gallon of gasoline. It removes carbon and reduces spark plug trouble and overheating. It can be installed by anyone in five minutes. There are already over one million users in United States, Alaska, China, Africa, and 69 other foreign countries. Mr. Stransky wants distributors and is willing to send a sample at his own risk. Write him today.

To get the names of Gem-lovers everywhere, and tell you about a Marvelous NEW GEM matching the finest genuine Diamond SIDE-BY-SIDE—same perfect cut, dazzling steel-blue brilliancy and flashing rainbow fire, GUARANTEED FOR LIFE, yet low in price, we'll give FREE this beautiful, fiery Mexican Rose Diamond (not a genuine diamond). For Free Gem and catalog send quick your name, address and 10c to partly pay handling cost.

Mexican Gem Importing Co., Dept. AF5D, Monterey, Calif.

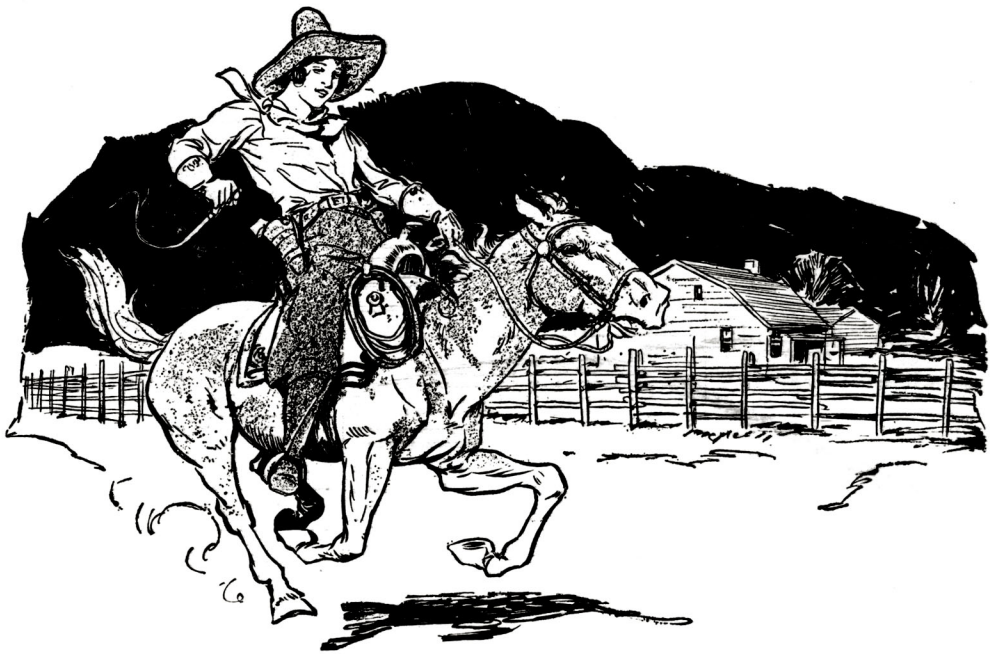
Win $3500.00 ***Find the Twin Bags!***

Here's a—NEW—puzzle. If you're a puzzle fan—CAN YOU FIND THE TWIN BAGS? NO, they're not all alike—even though they look alike. Only two of these bags are identical in every way. Some have the $ sign, others not; some have line under penny ciphers, some no lines, some have comma between the 3 and 5, some two tie strings, some none, some one string out to right, others to left.

Each one is different from the rest except two—find them—mark them with a cross—send your answer. $3000.00 first prize—399 others, and duplicate prizes in case of ties. If you find the twin bags I will give you 8000 points toward first prize and tell you how to get additional easy 1000 points that wins—only 9000 points wins the $3000.00.

$500.00 EXTRA FOR PROMPTNESS—making total first prize YOU CAN WIN $3500.00. SEND NO MONEY—nothing to buy now or ever—just find the twin bags—mark them and answer today.

F. G. STAYTEN, Advertising Mgr., Room 226 54 W. Illinois St., Chicago, Ill.



For Sheer Excitement
Read This Rollicking Western Story

It's the story of "Red" Conners, who eased himself out of a job as a movie cowboy to get employment on a real ranch run by a very real personality.

There's not a dull page, not a static moment in

TWO-GUN GERTA

By C. C. Waddell and Carroll John Daly

From the moment that "Red" set foot on the ranch he found it to be a place of mystery. There were wild cries of agony in the night, bullets fired out of the darkness—but you go to your dealer and ask him to give you your own copy of "Two-Gun Gerta." It isn't right to spoil the thrills of such a good yarn by telling too much of it here.

Remember that this is a CHELSEA HOUSE publication and that means that it's guaranteed reading of the best sort.

Ask your dealer for the full list of novels published by

75 Cents CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS 79-89 SEVENTH AVE. NEW YORK CITY **75 Cents**

Classified Advertising

Agents and Help Wanted

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

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

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

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every owner buys gold initials for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 170, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—NEW PLAN, makes it easy to earn $50.00 to $100.00 weekly, selling shirts direct to wearer. No capital or experience needed. Represent a real manufacturer. Write now for Free Samples, Madison Manufacturers, 564 Broadway, New York.

AGENTS—$60-$125 A WEEK. Free samples. Gold letters for stores and office windows. Metallic Letter Co., 428 N. Clark, Chicago.

AGENTS—Quick sales, big profits, outfit free. Cash or credit. Sales in every home for our high class line of Pure Food Products, Soaps, Perfumes, Toilet Articles, etc. Write today for money-making plans. American Products Co., 9056 Monmouth, Cincinnati, Ohio.

MIRRORS RESILVERED AT HOME. Costs Less 5 cents per square foot; you charge 75 cents. Immense profits, plating auto parts, reflectors, tableware, stoves, refinishing metalware, etc. Outfits furnished. Write for information, Sprinkle, Plater, 333 Marion, Indiana.

$75.00 WEEKLY TO INTRODUCE "Chieftain" 3 for $4.95 Guaranteed Tailored Shirts. Full working outfit Free. Your own Shirts Free. Cincinnati Shirt Company, Lane 1923, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS—Our New Household Device washes and dries windows, sweeps, cleans walls, scrubs, mops. Complete outfit costs less than brooms. Over 100% profit. Harper Brush Works, 201 3rd St., Fairfield, Iowa.

AGENTS—EVERY HOME NEEDS DRESS goods, silks and general yard goods. Wonderful exclusive line. Quick sales, liberal commission. 1,000 lovely fabric samples furnished. Write to The National Importing Company, Department P-69, 569-573 Broadway, New York City.

SALESMEN: Write your name and address on a postal and mail to us. We'll show you sure earnings of $20.00 a day. Will you risk one minute and a one cent stamp against $20.00? Mind you, we say we'll Show you. Address Dept. 83, William C. Bartlett, Inc., 850 W. Adams St., Chicago.

Agents and Help Wanted—Continued

STARTING WITH AN INVESTMENT of $1.00 in November, 1922, Warren Cobb has built a permanent paying business, whose sales amounted to over $20,000 in one year. Our proposition sells to everyone using tires, one sale per day means easy street. Fleet owners buy hundreds. An amazing invention that eliminates 95% of all ordinary tire trouble and makes one tire last the life of two. Exclusive territory—no capital required. It is an interesting story—do you want to know more? Write William W. Judy, Box 966, Dayton, Ohio.

Help Wanted—Male

ALL Men, Women, Boys, Girls, 17 to 65 willing to accept Government Positions $117-$250, traveling or stationary, write Mr. Ozment, 308, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

EARN $120 to $250 monthly, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. We secure position for you after completion of 3 months' home-study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunity. Write for Free Booklet, CM-28, Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

ESTABLISH YOURSELF—AT HOME—As a Photographic Expert. Make $75 a week while learning. Write at once for Temporary Offer. International Studios, Dept. 1406, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

MEN WANTING FOREST RANGER, railway mail clerk and other govt. positions, $125 to $225 month. Write for particulars, Mokane, A-41, Denver, Colo.

MEN, get Forest Ranger job; $125-$200 mo. and home furnished; permanent; experience unnecessary; hunt, fish, trap. For details, write Norton, 249 McMann Bldg., Denver, Colo.

U. S. GOVERNMENT wants men. $1,900-$2,700 at start. Let our expert (former Government examiner) prepare you for Railway Postal Clerk, Rural Carrier, Post Office, Customs, Internal Revenue, and other branches. Write today for free booklet, Dept. 982, Patterson School, Rochester, N. Y.

U. S. GOVERNMENT JOBS. Men—women, 18 up. $95 to $225 month. Steady work. Common education sufficient. Sample coaching and full particulars—Free. Write to-day sure. Franklin Institute, Dept. F2, Rochester, N. Y.

Help Wanted—Female

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

Farm Lands

$10 IS ALL I ASK DOWN ON 20 ACRES in Mich. Potato Belt. Very easy terms. Near markets, lakes, and streams. Write for particulars now. G. W. Swigart, S-1276 First Natl. Bank Bldg., Chicago.

Salesmen Wanted

MARVELOUS NEW LINE OFFERS tremendous profit to any salesman now selling to men. $20.00 outfit free. Address Salesmanager, 844 West Adams, Dept. 810, Chicago.

Coins and Stamps

OLD MONEY WANTED—Do you know that Coin Collectors pay up to $100.00 for certain U. S. Cents? And high premiums for all rare coins? We buy all kinds. Send 4c for Large Coin Folder. May mean much profit to you. Numismatic Co., Dept. 440, Ft. Worth, Tex.

Stammering

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

Patents and Lawyers

PATENTS. Send sketch or model for preliminary examination. Booklet free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 724 Ninth St., Washington, D. C.

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED. Patented or unpatented. Write Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 223, Enright, St. Louis, Mo.

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

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

Detectives Wanted

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

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

How to Entertain

PLAYS, MUSICAL COMEDIES AND revues, minstrel music, blackface skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 132, Chicago.

Business Opportunity

GET OUT OF THE RUT, $100 sufficient; learn privilege trading. Paul Kaye, 149 Broadway, New York.

Have You Ever Read **Sea Stories Magazine?** Good and Exciting

Be a Real Draftsman

—Earn the BIG SALARIES!

O. C. MILLER, DIRECTOR EXTENSION WORK

American School

"The day you get acquainted with the American School will be the turning point, the Red Letter day of your life!" That is the message which a hundred thousand students and graduates send you to celebrate our 30th year of service.

Did you know the American School is chartered as an Educational institution, NOT FOR PROFIT, like the best resident schools and colleges?

Did you know our service includes both TRAINING and EMPLOYMENT—*preparation* for a better job, then help in placing you in it at a raise in pay?

Mail the coupon—find out about your opportunities for success in Drafting.

3 Drafting Lessons Actually FREE

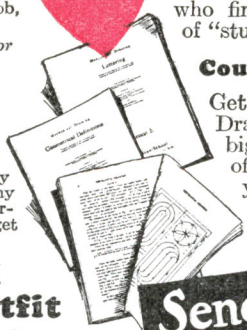
I can teach you enough "mechanical drawing" in 12 weeks to get a job as a TRACER. That's not what I mean. When I say *"Be a real Draftsman"* I urge you to specialize in Architectural, Machine, Electrical, Automotive or Structural Drafting—to learn how to design and calculate ORIGINAL WORK. Such jobs pay from $60 to $125 a week, depending on experience. I will prepare you at home, in your spare time, for this important, well-paid, fascinating work, and when you're ready for it, I'll help you get one of these jobs!

DRAFTING MADE EASY TO LEARN!

We start you doing actual Drafting room jobs from the very beginning. Even if you have only common schooling you will make rapid progress by our new one-step-at-a-time method of instruction, developed especially for men employed during the day who find it hard to do the old-fashioned kind of "studying" at night.

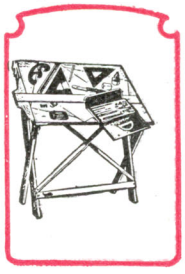
Coupon Brings Three Lessons Free!

Get them. Test your own ability to learn Drafting and get ready for a fine job and big pay. Coupon also brings surprise offer, and complete information about your opportunities for success in Drafting. Mail it today!



FREE Job Service!

Our employment department will help place you in a good job. Demand exceeds the supply. No charge for nation-wide employment service. Read want-ads for Draftsmen every day in Chicago Tribune or any big city paper—see the opportunities for yourself—and get ready for them.



Professional Drafting Outfit GIVEN!

You need a fine outfit like this to do precise, neat Drafting. Not one penny of extra charge for this complete, valuable, high grade outfit. Imported instruments. Table board, mahogany-edge T square, triangles, ink, thumb tacks, etc., everything you will need.

O. C. MILLER, Director of Extension Work

The American School

Dept. D-3192, Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago

Send 3 Drafting Lessons Free

Chief Drafting Engineer,
American School, Dept. D-3192
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago

Rush 3 Free Drafting Lessons. Surprise offer, complete information, money-back guarantee, etc., to prove I can become a real draftsman at home in spare time.

Name.....

St. No.....

City..... State.....

A Sweet Stomach!

What a pity when youth and vitality are set at naught by a disordered stomach, and bad breath! Don't have them at *any* age! Hearty eaters—hard smokers—high livers—find Stuart's a boon and blessing!

Eat what you wish. Drink what you like. Then chew a Stuart tablet. That gives the stomach sufficient alkaline; the result is a sweet stomach, serene digestion, no pains, no gas.

Full Box FREE!

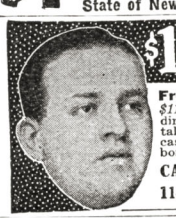
Every druggist has Stuart's tablets, 25c and 60c. Or, a full box *free* if you write the F. A. Stuart Company, Dept. 702, Marshall, Mich. Get a metal box of Stuart's for the pocket—and keep it filled! *A sweet stomach for twenty-five cents.*

STUART'S
DYSPEPSIA TABLETS

GET RID OF YOUR FAT
Free Trial Treatment

Sent on request. Ask for my "pay-when-reduced" offer. I have successfully reduced thousands of persons without starvation diet or burdensome exercise, often at a rapid rate. Let me send you proof at my expense.

Dr. R. NEWMAN, Licensed Physician
State of New York, 286 Fifth Avenue, N. Y., Desk M



$100 a week selling Shirts

Fred Frankel, Ills., *writes: "I earned $110 first week selling Carlton Shirts* direct to consumer." You can too. No capital or experience required. We pay 25% cash commissions daily and big extra bonuses. **WRITE FOR FREE SAMPLES.**

CARLTON MILLS, Inc., Shirt Mfgrs.,
114 Fifth Ave., Dept. 73, New York City

RESHAPE YOUR NOSE!

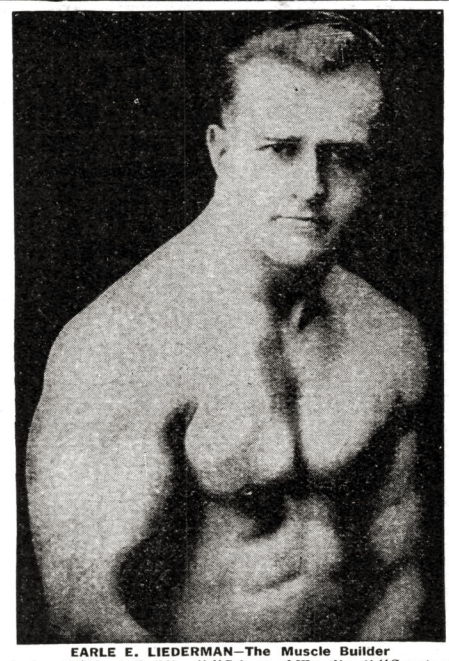
You can safely reshape your nose to beautiful proportions with

ANITA NOSE ADJUSTER

—painlessly, comfortably. Results speedy and guaranteed. Physicians praise it highly. No metal to harm you. Winner of Gold Medal, 1923.

FREE BOOKLET
Write for it today.

THE ANITA CO. Dept. C-58 ANITA Building Newark, N. J.



EARLE E. LIEDERMAN—The Muscle Builder
Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Here's Health," "Endurance," etc.

The Unpardonable Sin

A man may kick his neighbor, poke him in the nose or throw him down stairs. If he has any kind of an excuse we pass it by. That's all right. But what a fool is the fellow who deliberately kicks himself in the shins. He's a nut. That's all there is to that. It's a sin and offense to abuse others, but there are times when it will be overlooked. Never, however, can we overlook a man's abuse of himself. That is the unpardonable sin which brings destruction.

Are You an Offender?

Check up on yourself, fellow! Are you playing square with yourself? You've got a wonderful body there. Are you giving it all the breaks in life? Do you awake in the morning burning with pep and ambition? Do you still have the keen appetite of a kid? Do you have plenty of snap and zip as you go about your daily work? If not, you're just as bad as the chap who kicks himself in the shins. You're either a real, live, muscular, red-blooded, two-fisted, he-man or your body is being given a raw deal. Who's at fault? If no one else is abusing you, it must be yourself.

Stop It!

Cut it out right now. Determine this minute that you're nobody's fool. If you only knew what a strong, robust, healthy body meant, you would have had one long ago. Take it from me, fellow, it's great to be healthy. I've been both ways and I know. Let's you and I work this out. What do you say? I'm a muscle builder. I'm a pep builder. I've taken the sickliest looking scarecrows you'd ever want to look at and **I've built them up into real big powerful, virile men.** Listen to this and I'll shoot you off a few things that are coming your way. In just 30 days, I'm going to add one full inch onto those arms of yours. Yes, and two inches to your chest in the same length of time. But that's nothing. Get this. I'm going to broaden your back and deepen your chest so that every breath you take will drag a full load of oxygen into your lungs, shooting life-giving red corpuscles into every nook and corner of your body. I'll broaden your shoulders and strengthen your neck. I'll put an armor-plate of muscle over that old tummy of yours. I'll shoot a quiver up your spine that will make you feel like turning flip-flops. Meanwhile I'll work on every muscle inside your body pepping up your vital organs and putting fire into your whole system. Good? You're durn tootin' it's good. It's wonderful. And the best of it is—I don't just promise these things. I GUARANTEE THEM. You take no chances with me. It's a sure bet. Well, what do you say? Let's ride

Send For My New 64-page Book

MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT

It contains forty-eight full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness do not put it off. Send today—right now before you turn this page.

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN
Dept. 403, 305 Broadway New York City

EARLE E. LIEDERMAN,
Dept. 403, 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir: Please send me, without obligation on my part whatever a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

Name .....

Street .....

City .....State .....

(Please write or print plainly.)

IN ONLY 3 DAYS PLAY A SAW

I positively guarantee that you can produce wonderful, sweet music and play complete selections in only three days. Just to prove how quick and easy you can learn, I'll send you a genuine, specially tempered MUSICAL SAW for

5 Days' Free Trial

An exact duplicate of the saw with which hundreds of my pupils have won their way to fame and money at parties, in famous orchestras, in vaudeville and as radio entertainers.

No Musical Ability Required

No notes to read. No dreary practice. You master each new piece just as naturally and as easily as learning to whistle a new tune. Nowhere in my simple, three lesson course, can you find a single printed note. *Think how easy it must be.*

Hear the Saw—Free Record

Double-disc, demonstration size phonograph record of beautiful saw solo and duet, sent free for 10c (stamps or coin) to cover handling and postage. However, if you have already heard the "Musical Saw" and do not want the record, ask only for my big FREE TRIAL OFFER. No charge; sent postpaid. Write today — amaze your friends; play at the next party.

MUSSEHL & WESTPHAL
650 West Water St., Fort Atkinson, Wis.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME

Become a lawyer. Legally trained men win high positions and big success in business and public life. Be independent. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training. Earn

$5,000 to $10,000 Annually

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. conferred. LaSalle students found among practicing attorneys of every state. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 108-page "Law Guide" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 376-L, Chicago
The World's Largest Business Training Institution

Learn How to BOX

In 20 weeks, the System of Jimmy DeForest, **World's Greatest Trainer and Maker of Champions**, teaches you all there is to learn about boxing and physical training. Every 6 months 30 are selected from all classes and recommended to leading promoters for engagements. Send for famous book, **"The Golden Age of Boxing,"** full of valuable information, photos of great boxers and pupils who became successes over night. Enclose 10c to cover cost of mailing, etc.

JIMMY DeFOREST BOXING COURSE
347 Madison Ave., Box 1015, New York City

5 Big Auto Books

Can I Make
MORE MONEY?

Let us tell you how to put more dollars in your pay envelope in an easy, pleasant way.

Money comes through knowing how to do things, or from getting others to do them for you. No matter what your job or occupation, if you know more about it than your fellow workers, you pass them in the race for advancement.

If you like automobiles; if you like to work with them, you can become an expert—an authority on repairs through reading. Not by reading any books, but by having at hand the five big volumes which we have published on Auto Engineering.

Jiffy Index

You don't have to do a lot of reading; you don't have to do a lot of studying. Just have the books where you need them when you want them. One fact alone may mean a better job or a big raise in pay.

Shipped Free

We don't want you to pay anything. We just want your name and address, so that we can ship these five immensely valuable books for free examination. Yes, that's true—you don't send us a penny. We ship the books and ask you to examine them carefully. Note the new Jiffy Index, the great variety of subjects covered, and the tremendously interesting articles on automobile engineering. If you're satisfied—if you see the truth of our promise of more money for you, send only $2.00 after ten days, and pay the balance of only $22.80 at the rate of $3.00 a month. You cannot help but be benefitted. Results are certain. SPECIAL OFFER. Anyone sending NOW will receive a membership in the American Technical Society, with full consultation privileges and of greater value still, you will be entitled to our **employment service FREE.** Send the coupon today.

American Technical Society,
Automobile Division A-347, Chicago, Ill.

You may send your complete Automobile Engineering library, 5 big volumes bound in flexo covers, with the understanding that I am to have ten days to decide if I want to keep them. I will either return them then or send you $2.00 then and $3.00 per month until the special low price of only $24.80 is paid. Send 1926 edition.

Name .....Address .....

City ..... State .....

Reference .....

The Popular Magazine

A Perfect Companion for Leisure Hours

Travel—For "Uncle Sam"

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS—MEN—BOYS 18 UP

CARRIERS—POSTOFFICE CLERKS

$1700 TO $2700 YEAR

Steady Work No Layoffs
Paid Vacations
Common Education Sufficient

MAIL COUPON IMMEDIATELY

COUPON

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE,
Dept. G-267, Rochester, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush to me without charge, 32-page book with (1) Sample Railway Postal Clerk coaching; (2) List of other government jobs now open to men and women, 18 up; (3) Particulars telling how to get appointment.

Name .....

Address .....

Follow this Man

Secret Service Operator 38 is on the job

FOLLOW him through all the excitement of his chase of the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Telltale finger prints on the lamp stand in the murdered girl's room! The detective's cigarette case is handled by the unsuspecting gangster, and a great mystery is solved. Better than fiction. It's true, every word of it. No obligation. Just send the coupon and get—

FREE!

The Confidential Reports No. 38 Made to His Chief

And the best part of it all is this. It may open your eyes to the great future for YOU as a highly paid Finger Print Expert. More men are needed right now. This school has taken men just like you and trained them for high official positions. This is the kind of work you would like. Days full of excitement. Big salaries. Rewards.

Can you meet this test?

Can you read and write? Are you ambitious? Would you give 30 minutes a day of your spare time preparing yourself for this profession? Would you like a life of excitement, thrilling adventures and high pay? Answer "yes" and I'll show you how to attain all this.

Send the coupon and I'll send the Free Reports—also a wonderful illustrated book telling of the future awaiting you as a Finger Print Expert.

T. G. COOKE, Pres.

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCE
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 14-03 Chicago, Ill.

University of Applied Science
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 14-03. Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatever, send me the Reports of Operator No. 38, also your illustrated Free Book on Finger Prints and your offer of a FREE course in Secret Service Intelligence and the Free Professional Finger Print Outfit.

Name _____

Address _____

_____ *Age* _____

Play the HAWAIIAN GUITAR Just as the Natives Do

FREE when you enroll — **$15 HAWAIIAN GUITAR and Case**

Only 4 Motions used in playing this fascinating instrument. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Everything explained clearly.

Play in Half Hour
After you get the four easy motions you play harmonious chords with very little practice. No previous musical knowledge necessary.

Easy Lessons
Even if you don't know one note from another, the 52 printed lessons and the clear pictures make it easy to learn quickly. Pay as you play.

Free Guitar
and Outfit in Genuine Seal Grain Fabrikoid Case as soon as you enroll. Nothing to buy—everything furnished. No delay.

Write at Once
You'll never be lonesome with this beautiful Hawaiian Guitar. Write for Special Offer and easy terms. A postcard will do. ACT!

OTHER COURSES Tenor Banjo, Violin, Tiple, Tenor Guitar, Ukulele, Banjo Ukulele—under well-known instructors.

FIRST HAWAIIAN CONSERVATORY of MUSIC, Inc.
9th Floor, Woolworth Bldg., Dept. 139 New York, N. Y.
Approved as a Correspondence School Under the Laws of the State of New York

---

High School Course in 2 Years

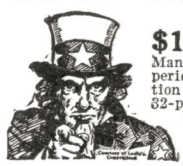
You can complete this simplified High School Course at home inside of two years. Meets all requirements for entrance to college and the leading professions. This and thirty-six other practical courses are described in our Free Bulletin. Send for it TODAY.

AMERICAN SCHOOL
Dept. H3192 Drexel Ave. & 58th St. ©A S 1923 **CHICAGO**

HEALTHY GOV'T JOBS $140-$300 MONTHLY OUTSIDE OR INSIDE WORK

Men-Women age 18-60, wanting Forest Ranger, Railway Mail Clerk, Border Patrol Guard, Mail Carrier, Special Agent, Matron, and other Govt. Positions, local or traveling. For particulars write Mr. Ozment, 490, St. Louis, Mo.

GET ON "UNCLE SAM'S" PAY ROLL



MEN—WOMEN 18 UP

$1140 to $3300 A YEAR

Many U. S. Government jobs obtainable. Experience usually unnecessary. Common education sufficient. Write today sure for free 32-page book with full particulars; list of positions and free sample coaching.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
Dept. G 281 Rochester, N.Y.

ADDING PENCIL

STARTLING INVENTION

ADDS
CALCULATES
COUNTS
CHECKS

GUARANTEED Absolutely accurate. Ends all mistakes. Fountain pen size. Send for yours TODAY.

AGENTS Make $20 or more daily. Easy. Millions want it. Great opportunity. Reserve your territory immediately.

Add-O-Graph Pencil Co., D-116, St. Louis, Mo.

I PAY MEN $100 a week

Make $100.00 a week and up selling our fine made-to-measure, all-wool suits, direct to wearer. **Biggest values — positively sell on sight.** Biggest commissions paid in advance. We attend to delivery and collections. 6 x 9 swatch samples over 100 styles all one price — furnished **FREE.** Part or full time men write at once.

W. Z. GIBSON, Inc., 161 W. Harrison St., Dept. C-403 Chicago

Have New Hair or Pay Nothing

At last a home method endorsed by science. Marvelous Infra-Red Rays simply applied

Dandruff, falling hair ended. Scalp tissues given new life. Then, within 30 days, luxuriant new hair! This is the amazing discovery of a noted surgeon. Once himself bald, his hair is now full and thick.

Famous Surgeon's Discovery

Here is his own personal treatment, called Derm Ray. *Guaranteed to bring you these same results in 30 days or you don't pay a cent.* You can use Dermo Ray in any home with electricity. The first easy home method scientifically correct!

These Facts Proven FREE

Full facts, opinions of authorities, and details of *special trial offer* sent free, if you mail special coupon below. To end your scalp and hair troubles, act at once. Print name and address clearly.

FREE TRIAL OFFER

The Larson Institute, Dept. 16
6 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: Send me at once without obligation full particulars—in plain envelope, about 30-day free trial of Dermo-Ray.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Have You Ever Read **Picture-Play Magazine?** Bubbling Over With Screen News

PRICE, 25 CENTS

---

10 DAYS FREE TRIAL - MONEY BACK IF NOT SATISFIED

THE NEW IMPROVED **INKOGRAPH** SELF FILLER GREATEST VALUE EVER OFFERED

Actual size 6 in.

DEALERS Send for Catalog

The Writing HEMISPHERE

The INKOGRAPH ACCOMPLISHMENT

The Perfect Writing Instrument $1.50

Writes with ink easy as a lead pencil. Won't skip, blot, scratch, leak or soil hands. Its steady uniform flow of ink improves hand-writing.

Makes three carbon copies with original in ink. Guaranteed—*Send No Money.* Pay postman $1.50 plus postage.

A hard, round, smooth ball-like 14-kt. Gold Point.

INKOGRAPH, CO., Inc.
195-23 Centre St., New York City

AGENTS Send for Inkograph or write for Sales plan booklet which tells how to make big money

---

TYPEWRITER PRICES CUT

Your choice of the World's best typewriters—Underwood, Remington, Oliver—full size, late model, completely rebuilt and refinished brand new. Prices smashed down to half. Act quick.

$2 and it's yours Free Trial

Just send your name and address and we will mail you our complete FREE CATALOG prepaid, fully describing and showing actual photographs of each beautiful machine in full colors. Tells every detail of our direct-to-you small-payment plan. Write now for tremendous saving. No obligation whatever. Still time if you act now.

International Typewriter Exchange
186-188 W. Lake Street, Department 339, Chicago, Ill.

Money-Making Tools

To those who enroll in near future—tools **FREE** of any extra cost whatever. Also, a drafting table! Act now!

I need YOU with 100 firms BEGGING ME to send them more DRAFTSMEN.

Many offer to take BEGINNERS, at $50 a WEEK. Graduates can start at $90 and $100! GET BUSY!

Drafting is the BIG field, men. Every industry you can name BEGINS with the draftsman. Without mechanical drawings—by the thousands—every shop in the land would be STOPPED.

In fact, it is the SERIOUS SHORTAGE of draftsmen that brings this offer: *I will furnish all instruments, supplies, even to the table, to those who start now!*

PAY AS YOU GO Don't give me the excuse that you have no ready money for this golden opportunity. I am not so interested in *cash;* I want your *application.* I want at least 200 men to start *right now.* I want them ready to recommend by Spring! We will get a flood of letters saying "send us draftsmen," from every sort of industrial and engineering concern, and we *must* make good.

The first week's pay envelope of many a Dobe-trained draftsman has held enough to cover the entire cost of the course! Most students learn evenings, keeping on with their old work until ready to step into somebody's drafting room. The first month equips you to take on simple drafting jobs on the side. It helps you learn; I gladly permit this.

Well-Paid Positions Every Way You Turn

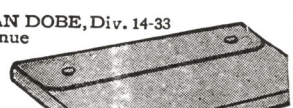
A draftsman soon forgets the days when he used to wonder where to get a job. Instead, he asks "What line of work interests me most?" And "What part of the country suits me best?" Twenty of my graduates went to Florida this year; three are in Japan; last month one wrote me from Ceylon. And I wish we had the count of how many Dobe draftsmen have become chiefs!

Positions loom up almost as soon as you are enrolled in a Dobe class! We receive requests *daily* for junior men—for men only partly through our course. "We'll take a *beginner*," some concerns write us, "so long as he is a Dobe-trained man and has begun *right!*"

IT'S EASY and interesting to learn drafting. For drafting isn't "drawing"! You don't need any "talent." A draftsman uses *tools* for every line and every curve. You couldn't make them crooked if you tried! That's why drafting is so easily learned—and so interesting. *For you do everything by rule.* So, I guarantee to make *anyone* a finished draftsman; if you can read and write, you can learn this line. One of my students is 51 years old; another is just seventeen. *But they'll all be making a grown-up salary by Spring!*

WARNING! The special offer of *tools* is for immediate action. Don't expect me to hold it open indefinitely. Clip the coupon *now* for free book:

CHIEF DRAFTSMAN DOBE, Div. 14-33
1951 Lawrence Avenue
Chicago



Special Tool Offer

Send me FREE and POSTPAID Successful Draftsmanship Book and material telling all about your home course, terms, etc.

Name ..... *Age* .....

Address .....

P. O. ..... *State* .....

When good taste smiles at money

CLAIRE'S long association with the good things of life has taught her that costliness is no guaranty of good taste.

Where many of her friends spend money lavishly and thoughtlessly, she spends careful thought and practical discrimination. So her dimes often buy more genuine fineness than do their dollars.

For toilet-soap—an important detail in any girl's life—Claire pays five cents a cake instead of the fifty cents she could well afford. Of course, she insists upon *pure* soap to safeguard her precious complexion, because she knows that purity means mildness and gentleness. So, instead of paying for expensive-sounding names, fancy wrappers, costly perfume—things that have nothing to do with purity—she buys Guest Ivory.

And, since she insists that her soap must be dainty, too, she is doubly fortunate, because Guest Ivory is a perfectly charming little round-edged cake of lovely Ivory whiteness wrapped in fresh blue.

PROCTER & GAMBLE

For the face and hands
As fine as soap can be

5¢

99 44/100% *Pure*
It Floats

© 1927, P. & G. Co.

THE POPULAR

VOL. LXXXIII MARCH 7, 1927 No. 4

The Easy Mark

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Split Canon Holdup," "Live Cargo," Etc.

"Jerry's not fat," Patricia would say; "he's just *big*." But, despite her defense, everybody kidded him. It was only when, to save his business interest, Patricia kidnaped the "big" chap, decoying him into the wilderness, that Jerry had a chance to show his two-fisted, big-hearted manhood.

CHAPTER I.

MASTER AND MAN.

THOUGH the windows of the fourteenth-story suite framed an always interesting, not to say inspiring, view of the North River and its stirring maritime activities, the two men in the private office of the suite were not regardful of the scenery. Of the two, the one tilting in a pivot chair at the handsome mahogany table desk—well groomed, middle-aged, and with the face and figure of a prosperous man of business—was known to an inner circle of New York bankers and financiers as a successful promoter and organizer in the field of industrials. The other was of slighter build, also middle-aged, with shrewd eyes masking their keenness behind horn-rimmed spectacles, and with a bald spot carefully concealed by the manner in which his thinning, sand-colored hair was brushed.

"You are trying to tell me that young Manning can't be brought into line?" asked the chief strategist, tilting in the desk chair. "In big business there is no such word as 'can't,' Bixby; you know that as well as I do. And in the present

case you simply haven't worked the right combination. Manning ought to be the easiest of easy marks. He is nothing but a money-spoiled play boy—and a fat slob, at that."

"I said Manning couldn't be persuaded; and though he *is* pretty well padded as to flesh, I wouldn't exactly call him a slob. I have just spent a full week with him, and every time I brought up the subject of the merger, he'd say, 'Apple sauce!' and give me the horse laugh."

"Whereabouts is he?"

"Just now he is playing around at the Alta Vista Inn, a resort place in the Rocky Mountains."

"You showed him what he stands to win by going in with us?"

"He doesn't rise to that bait. He is young and rich; or, as he puts it, rich enough. He inherited his majority stock in the Titan from his father, who spent a good many years perfecting the product of the mill and building up a market for it; so, with the son, a certain factor of sentiment has to be reckoned with. In addition to that, the Titan Company has retired its bonds, has a surplus big enough to extinguish its preferred stock, which is callable at par, and it has been paying twelve to fourteen per cent or better on its common for a period of years—to say nothing of cutting a melon now and then."

"That is ancient history," declared the man in the swivel chair, a trifle impatiently. "The present fact is that we are offering to buy the plant at a figure which amply compensates the stockholders. The Titan plant and good will are not worth a dollar more than six millions, and we are putting them in at eight. As the matter stands to-day, this cement merger won't go through unless we can swing the Titan into line. The underwriting bankers make that a hard-and-fast condition. Manning has simply *got* to be persuaded to listen to reason."

"Persuasion won't go; that's flat," retorted Bixby. "As I've said, he doesn't care a hoot for the money-making part of it. More than that, he developed another sentimental streak while I was trying to convince him. One of the elder Manning's fads, if you want to call it a fad, was to build up an organization of picked men, most of whom own their homes in Titanville and have their jobs, as young Manning puts it, 'for life or good behavior.'"

"Never mind the details. Make it brief."

"It seems that a delegation of these men, hearing of the proposed merger, went to Manning before he left Titanville a month ago, protesting that they would be mere numbers on the pay roll in the big corporation, and begging him to stand out. They made him believe that the success of the company in the past has been largely owing to their loyalty and good work—which is doubtless the fact—and he tells me he doesn't propose to take any step that will cause them to lose their identity by becoming so many inconsequent cogs in a big wheel."

"That is pure piffle! If business had to wait upon the approval of a lot of workingmen, it would never get anywhere."

"That is what I tried to tell Manning, but he made some joke about man's inhumanity to man and went off to play tennis with his crowd of time killers."

The strategic chief brought his chair to the perpendicular with a snap.

"You are losing your grip, Bixby!" he barked out irritably. "Are you willing to admit that you've wasted a week or more on this fat play boy without getting any results?"

BUT Judson Bixby merely took off his horn-rimmed spectacles and began to polish the lenses with his handkerchief.

"My time wasn't wholly wasted," he replied evenly. "What I have said was that Manning can't be persuaded. But, as you know, there are more ways of killing a cat than by choking it to death with thick cream."

"Well, come to the point: What is the other way—in Manning's case?"

"First, let me ask a question. Do you happen to know Manning's attorneys, Strickland, Boris & Strickland?"

"Of course I know them."

"Well, so do I; or, rather, I know the inner workings of their business, so far

as it concerns Gerald Manning, which is more to the purpose. John Strickland, the senior member of the firm, was one of the executors of the Manning estate, and he has acted, since the father's death, as a sort of ex-officio guardian and business adviser to young Gerald. By digging around a bit under cover, I learned, through a clerk in the Strickland offices, that when Gerald went to Europe last year for the summer he gave John Strickland a blanket power of attorney to act for him in his absence."

"All right; what of that?"

"Just this: that power of attorney has never been revoked. It still holds good."

"Supposing it does? Strickland wouldn't act in a matter involving the future of the Titan Company and young Manning's fortune—or the bigger part of it—without consulting his principal."

"Under certain conditions he might feel that he was compelled to act. Let us suppose a case. Here is this merger pending. Nobody outside of the inner circle knows that its putting over depends upon the inclusion of the Titan mill and market. That being the fact, it would be comparatively easy to make it appear that the shoe is on the other foot; that the salvation of the Titan property depends upon the acceptance of the merger terms; that, if these terms are not accepted, disaster is pretty sure to follow—ruinous competition and all that. You see what I mean."

"There won't be any competition or merger if the Titan is left out."

"Granted; but that is not public information—yet. The question is: What would John Strickland do if the case were put up convincingly to him in this light? Would he come in to save the Titan's bacon, or would he stay out and take the chance of losing it?"

"As I have said, Strickland wouldn't do anything at all without consulting Manning."

"But suppose Manning can't be found. And suppose the fatal day of decision arrives, and still he can't be found. What then?"

The chief strategist shook his head slowly.

"We are not exactly Chinese bandits, Bixby. We are skating too close to the law, as it is, to be able to afford anything that smacks of strong-arm methods."

The subaltern wire-puller's laugh was no more than a subdued chuckle, and what he said appeared to have no bearing upon the cement merger.

"You've never met my niece, Patricia, have you, Blandish?"

"No; but I have seen her; had her pointed out to me once in the Biltmore dining room."

The subdued chuckle came again.

"I am supposed to be her guardian; in these days. Needless to tell you, that amounts to mighty little. Patsy is of age, she is up to the minute, and she is pretty much of a law unto herself, like other free and unfettered young women of the present moment. She spent last summer, or a good part of it, at a 'dude ranch' in Wyoming; and this summer she is playing around with a bunch of high-flyers of her own kidney at a certain resort hotel in the same western State."

Blandish bit the end of a cigar and lighted it.

"I suppose, in your own good time, you will tell me what all this has to do with Manning and the Titan plant," he said, frowning through the cloud of tobacco smoke.

"The point is just this: The resort hotel happens to be the Alta Vista, where Manning is also one of the play bunch, and he and Patsy—well, I don't know how much there is between them. Maybe Patsy only wants his scalp to tuck under her belt along with the others she has accumulated. But don't you think the situation offers possibilities? Not illegal ones, of course, just extra legal, as you might say."

"You mean——"

"Never mind what I mean. If you don't know, you can go on the witness stand and swear you don't. The main question is this: If Manning should be—er—lost for a fortnight or so, could you bring pressure enough to bear upon John Strickland to make him use that power of attorney for the protection of his principal? The success of what I have in mind hangs upon that."

The promoter of great industrial aggre-

gations got out of his chair and went to stand at one of the windows commanding a view of the North River. When he turned to face the subaltern plotter at the desk end, he had made his decision.

"Bixby, you are a damned rascal, but I believe you have found the one way out of the mess. Go to it and wire me. When you pass the word, we'll put the screws under Strickland, and it will go hard with us if we can't make him believe he is obliged to act. Go to it and don't lose any time!"

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE JUDSON.

JUST forty-eight hours after the conference with his chief in the private office of the New York skyscraper suite, Judson Bixby, somewhat travel cramped and dusty, descended from the Overland Flyer at the way station of Alta Vista, the station being the railroad connection for the summer-resort hotel of the same name nestling in a scenic paradise at the mouth of Antelope Cañon twenty-odd miles to the north.

On the station platform he was met by a flippantly cheerful and piquantly attractive young woman in knickers and a rather gaudy sports coat, with a leather helmet pulled down over her bobbed hair and a pair of goggles hanging by their string around her neck.

"Here we are again!" was the young woman's breezy greeting. "Welcome back to the great open spaces, where men are men and women are angels or vamps, as the case may be. Your wire of this morning positively gave me a shock. Didn't you say, when you went East last week, that you'd had enough of the wild and woolly to do you for the remainder of your life?"

"My dear, I did, and I had. But, when duty calls——"

"Whoops!" exclaimed the girl. "I suppose 'duty' means me. What have I been doing that I ought not to have done? Or is it something I've left undone?"

"Neither, as it happens. But don't make me talk here and now, Patsy; I'm too dry and dusty. Have you your car?"

"I've something much jazzier than a car. It is around on the plaza. Come along, and we'll do a disappearing act, pronto."

When they had circled the small station building, Mr. Judson Bixby was a trifle startled to find that the "something jazzier" was a two-seater biplane, resplendent in yellow varnish and silvery aluminum.

"See here, girlie, what's all this?" he demanded.

"It's Tommie Bentley's new bus. I borrowed it, or rather stole it, in honor of the occasion. Hop in, and I'll show you how to strap yourself so you won't tumble out and mess up the scenery."

"But, hold on, Patsy. I didn't know you could fly one of these things!"

The young woman wrinkled her short nose and showed her pretty teeth in a boyish laugh.

"There are heaps of things you don't know about me yet, Uncle Jud. I'm not a licensed pilot, or anything of that sort, if that is what you mean; I've just learned by rubbering around and horning in on people who are lucky enough to be able to sport a plane. Climb in and be comfy."

"But are you sure you can handle this thing?"

"There's nothing sure in this mutable world of ours. But I managed to get here in it without crashing, and I guess I can get back. Let's not keep the audience waiting."

As the little group of station loungers gathered curiously about the plane, making way for him, Bixby, shelving the dangerous possibilities, climbed gingerly into the after cockpit. Here Patricia showed him how to buckle himself into the safety belt, patting him encouragingly on the back and saying: "You won't have time to worry; it will soon be over—one way or the other." Then she asked a couple of the loungers to start the motor, telling them how to do it, and swung up to take her place at the controls.

The unwilling flight passenger had a confused impression of seeing two men linking hands to pull at the propeller, while two others crouched to remove the chocks under the wheels. Then he heard

the word "Contact!" hurled back at him on a roaring blast that made him cringe and gasp for breath. Now he shut his eyes tightly and resigned himself to his fate, hardly daring to breathe until, some fifteen or twenty minutes later, the plane swooped, flattened out, and taxied to a stop on the only level fairway of the golf course at Alta Vista Inn.

"Never again—never in this world!" he panted, as Patricia unbuckled him and gave him a hand out of the machine. Then: "You are a frightfully reckless little dare-devil, Patsy! It's only a question of time until you will take just one chance too many. Don't you realize that?"

"We don't stop to realize nowadays," was the careless reply. "The present moment is enough for most of us." Then, as they walked together to the hotel: "What was it you wanted to see me about, Uncle Jud?"

"Give me a little time—time to get my breath and a bath and shave. Remember that I've ridden something over two thousand miles in stuffy trains—no light task at my time of life."

"But why have you taken all that trouble?"

"Because I thought your happiness might be involved, my dear. If you'll wait for me here on the veranda——"

"Of course; I've nothing else to do. The bunch went on a horseback trip up the cañon this morning, but your wire cut me out of it. Don't be long. I'm perishing to know about the happiness involvement."

HALF an hour later, when Mr. Bixby reappeared, refreshed and shaved and, incidentally, with his parching thirst allayed, he found Patricia sitting cross-legged on the veranda railing, throwing kisses to a party of young people ambling up the driveway on weary horses. These were the "bunch" returning from the cañon exploration. The emissary of big business broke in hastily.

"Don't mix me up in that mob, Patsy. I want you to myself for a little while. It's important."

"You needn't worry about the bunch. In five minutes every last one of them will be in a bathtub. Where shall we go—up to my rooms?"

"Oh, no; it is good enough out here," he declared, drawing up a couple of veranda chairs. After they were seated: "I'll begin in the middle of things, Patsy. Just how much do you care for Gerald Manning?"

Her laugh was almost a giggle. "So that is it, is it? What deep, dark, desperate thing have you been digging out of Jerry's past? Doesn't he figure as a mamma's boy, not too bad looking and especially easy to live with?"

"Oh, my dear girl; you mistake me entirely. I know nothing whatever against Manning as a man, except his—er—shortsighted pig-headedness in business matters."

"Well, that's rather a mouthful, isn't it?" inquired the modern young woman. "One wouldn't wish to marry a pig-headed person with bad eyes."

"Ah! That is precisely what I have traveled two thousand miles to find out, Patsy. Is it a question of marriage?"

"Who knows?" she flung back, with the carefree laugh that came so easily.

Judson Bixby shook his head in sober deprecation. "Don't you ever take anything seriously, Patsy?"

"Nothing so seriously serious as marriage—not yet."

"Then you don't care for Manning in that way?"

"W-e-l-l, I might, in some circumstances."

"As for example?"

This time her smile was an impish grin. "You press me too hard, unky, dear. How can I tell? For one thing, I'd want to know him a lot better than I do now."

"Why, Patsy!—you've known him for years!"

"Oh, yes, after a fashion—just as I have known a lot of other boys. But nobody really knows anybody, the way we're living nowadays. We are like a lot of well-painted boats; the paint is pretty, but the wood under it may be good and sound, or it may be just punk."

"I don't quite follow you. I thought there were no reticences in your generation—at least there don't seem to be."

"Oh, that!" she said airily. "Of

course, we say what we think; that's only decent. But that isn't just what I meant."

"Well, what did you mean?"

"What I said—or tried to say—that our manner of living doesn't give us a chance to get under the paint on the pretty boats. Life is too easy. Take this bunch here at the hotel. Not a single one of them, man or woman—including yours truly—has ever been up against the real thing in life. Plenty of money, you know, and nothing to do but to play around. Nobody knows what any one of us would be or do if the bottom should suddenly drop out. There's Jerry, now; a big, good-natured, good-hearted boy, and, as I've said, easy to look at and easy to live with. But some of us are just cave-womanish enough to ask for something more."

Bixby had a sort of mixed feeling that this light-hearted and apparently light-minded young person was somehow dragging him out beyond his depth. And he had not traveled upward of two thousand miles to be submerged in a deep sea of ethical abstractions.

"Coming back to Manning's obtuseness," he said, "I have been wondering how far you would go to save him from stubbing his toe and falling down."

"How far I would go? Is it a joke, Uncle Jud?"

"Nothing like it. Listen."

FOR five minutes he spoke rapidly and earnestly, realizing there might be an untimely interruption at any moment. The story he told held to the facts far enough to make it plausible, but not so far as to make it defeat the end he had in view. And the conclusion was a straightforward question. Did she care enough for Manning to try to save him from the consequences of his foolish, boyish obstinacy?

Her reply was unqualified.

"Anybody who knows Jerry, or even the outside coat of paint of him, would willingly do that much for him. He is a good egg, is Jerry. But I don't quite see the 'how,' so far as I am concerned; I mean, how I am to crash in on the plot."

"That," he hastened to say, "is a mere detail. I leave it to your nimble wit and ingenuity. I am sure you can manage it if you put your mind to it. The one point, as I have suggested, is to isolate Manning for a few days; to get him out of reach of the telegraph and telephones. In other words, to arrange things so that he can't handicap those who have his best interests at heart, and who, in his absence and unreachability, so to speak, will do what is best for—er—for all concerned, don't you see?"

She looked up quickly, and he had a fleeting impression that her wide-open gray eyes were reading his inmost thoughts.

"Where do you come in on all this, Uncle Jud?" she asked.

It was a shot straight to the bull's-eye, but the sharpest-sighted scorer would have failed to see the target wince.

"I? Why, my dear girl, is that generous? Where should I 'come in,' as you put it, save as your interests may be involved? If they are not; if you don't care enough for Manning to be his good angel in the matter; why, of course, that ends it."

"H'm! Anybody who knows Jerry would care, as I've said." A long pause, and then: "How much time is there?"

"Er—very little, if anything helpful is to be accomplished."

Another thoughtful pause, and at the end of it: "I must go and dress for dinner. The 'how' is going to ask for a bit of thinking. If we were at Palm Beach, now, with the cabin cruiser, instead of here in the Rockies, it would be much simpler. But we'll see. Maybe I can wangle it."

After she left him, Bixby found a cigar and lighted it, smoking it to the final inch in fairly comfortable peace of mind. The seed had been planted in the lush soil of an up-to-date young woman's mind, and —or so he hoped—without arousing her too-questioning suspicions of an ulterior motive. Having been planted, the seed would doubtless speedily germinate and bear fruit. Just what the nature of the fruit would be, he had no means of knowing; but that, as he had remarked, was a detail. Patricia had enlisted and signed

the articles, and her shrewd wit could be trusted to devise ways and means.

The only remaining hazard was the question of time. At any moment Manning might get a wire from New York upsetting everything. One could only pray to the gods of chicanery that nothing so disastrous might happen on this occasion.

At dinner, an hour later, Bixby had a small table to himself in an alcove, sitting where he could observe as he ate. Patricia was at a table for ten, with other members of the younger group; and so was Manning. It was a hilarious party at the long table, and though Bixby could not overhear what was said, he could see that eight of the ten were evidently jollying Manning about something; and that, whatever the something was, Patricia was playing up to it.

AT the group table Patricia had confessed her crime of larceny in helping herself to Tommie Bentley's airplane for the flight to the railroad station, and the crime had been joyously condoned by the plane's owner. But the confession had evoked a mild protest from one member of the group; a young man whose fair hair, round face and well-fleshed figure had, in his schoolboy days, earned for him the nickname of "Pudge Manning," or, upon more jeering occasions, "Mamma's Boy."

"You are going to pull off some giddy stunt like that once too often, Patsy," was the form the protest took. "One of these fine days your good angel is going to be caught napping, and you'll come a cropper."

The decently prudent admonition promptly drew a cross fire of defense for the reckless amateur.

"Don't you let Jerry scare you, Pat."

"There spoke a hundred and ninety pounds of good old solid caution."

"You wouldn't take a chance like that for a farm in paradise, would you, Jerry?"

"Take him along with you the next time you swipe my plane and do a few flops with him," said Tommie Bentley.

The butt of all this friendly ridicule laughed good-naturedly.

"Nobody loves a fat man," he remarked. "Just the same——"

"Wait a minute," Patricia broke in. Then to Bentley: "Tommie, will you lend me your plane to-morrow morning?"

"Surest thing you know. I'll risk the bus if you'll risk your neck."

Patricia turned quickly upon Manning at her left.

"Jerry, dear, to-morrow morning I'm going to fly Tommie's plane up to where I can peek over the top of the range and see what's on the other side. I dare you to go with me!"

In the applause which greeted this harebrained announcement Manning did not join. So far from it, he tried earnestly to dissuade the reckless one; but his earnestness proved the crowd at the table to clap and jeer and call out: "Go to it, Patsy! You've got him on the run! Atta boy!"

"You are trying to tell me you won't take my dare?" said Patricia, with the barest hint of a taunt in her tone.

Manning's reply was evasive. "You know you can't bluff me, Patsy; you've tried it before. But, with the little experience you've had in a bird machine, it's a crazy stunt. Besides——"

Patricia appealed to the table.

"You see!" she exclaimed. "Jerry says he loves me, and yet he'll let me go five thousand feet in the blue all by my poor little lonesome. Isn't it sad?"

"Probably he thinks the plane mightn't crash so hard if it doesn't have his hundred and all the other pounds in it," remarked the brown-eyed young woman sitting opposite Manning; and Bentley put in: "If Jerry kicks out, we'll hog tie him and throw him into the passenger cockpit for you, Pat."

Manning joined in the laugh that Bentley's offer brought forth, saying: "You people all know I'm too good-natured to refuse anybody anything. I'll take your silly dare, Patsy. There are good reasons why I shouldn't, but we'll ditch them. Will you lend me your flying togs, Tommie?"

"If you can manage to squeeze your royal heaviness into them, which is doubtful. But, perhaps, after a night of nervous apprehension, you'll be a bit less ele-

phantine in the morning. How about that?"

Again there was a laugh at his expense, and again he said, with an imitation of ruefulness: "Didn't I say that nobody loves a fat man?"

Here Patricia was moved to say:

"But you're *not* fat, Jerry; you're just big and, and—er——"

"Big and soft and fumblesome and no-account generally, in the useful scheme of things. You may as well say it as think it. Never mind; I've taken your dare in all of my poundage. We'll do the bird act together in the morning by the bright light, according to program, and, if you ditch us to make a Roman holiday for the audience, I'll let my estate pay for the plane and the human obsequies."

All of this, at his table in the alcove, Mr. Judson Bixby missed, as a matter of course, being out of hearing. Some things, however, he was able to infer. But later, when he was smoking his after-dinner cigar in a shadowed corner of the veranda, two young men of the party came to burn cigarettes in his vicinity. They were still talking and laughing over the table episode.

"We josh Jerry a good bit about his bigness, but I'll tell the world he has his nerve, just the same. He's a good sport, all right. Patsy could have kidded me until the cows come home before I'd have taken her up. I wonder what got into her to make her give him such a dare?"

"You never can tell what Patsy'll do when she is pushed to it," said the other. "And about Jerry's nerve: I'm not so sure. He fought off all he could until we deviled him into accepting. I'm not blaming him any. I'm like you; if Patsy had picked me for the goat instead of him, she'd have to bind and gag me first. Nothing like that for little Willie!"

"Sunrise to-morrow morning is the fatal hour, isn't it? Isn't that what she said?"

"Sunrise it is—on the links; and that's a beastly time to turn us all out of bed. But it'll be too much of a circus to miss."

"I'll say it will."

A pause for a moment, and then the first speaker began again.

"Did you see the bulletin posted up at the telegraph desk in the lobby?"

"No; what was it?"

"Another train robbery—biggest haul of the season. Bunch of bandits held up the eastbound flyer just west of the mountains last night and got away with a cartload of loot—half a million or so, the wire says. Shot the train engineer when he tried to pull out and balk 'em."

"Getting to be so those holdup fellows don't stop at anything. I saw a lot of people at the wire desk as I came out, but I didn't know what they were rubbering at. What became of the bandits?"

"Took to the mountains on horseback, so the bulletin says. Glad they are not on our side of the big hills."

"Here, too," said the other; and at that the two young men tossed their half-burned cigarettes over the veranda railing and moved away.

Judson Bixby clipped the tip of a fresh cigar and lighted it. He had paid little attention to the tale of brigandage; had scarcely heard it. It was what had preceded the mention of the train robbery that interested him. So Patricia had set the trap for the fat boy already, had she? Bixby, hardened as he was on the side of the natural affections, was still human enough to hope that her plan did not include anything so hazardous as the talk of the two young men seemed to indicate.

It was more than likely that it didn't, he concluded. Something might be charged off to the account of the exuberance of modern youth and the tendency to exaggerate. Whatever her plan might be, Patricia doubtless knew what she was about. He reflected that, with all her recklessness, she usually carried a pretty level head.

The next thing to do was to try to come to some understanding with the young woman telegraph operator in the hotel lobby, to the end that an inopportune wire from John Strickland in New York should not intervene at the wrong moment; and, after the second cigar was well lighted, Judson Bixby left his outdoor lounging chair to interview the telegraph operator.

CHAPTER III.

LOST VALLEY.

IN this Northern region the summer sun rises at an impossible hour for the city-bred man. Judson Bixby, however, did not fail to put in an appearance on the golf links to make one in a gathering of onlookers, including all of the younger guests of the inn and some who were not so young. The center of interest was the airplane which Patricia had flown to the railroad station the previous afternoon; it was placed in the level fairway, ready for the take-off, and about it three people, two of them helmeted, leather-coated and gloved against the cold of the higher altitudes—Manning looking as if he had been melted and poured into his borrowed togs—were busying themselves.

Bixby spoke to a young man beside him, one of the two whose talk he had overheard on the veranda in the after-dinner interval of cigar smoking.

"What's going on out there?" he asked, making his question appear the casual query of a disinterested spectator.

"Little stunt of Patsy Colemore's. She gave it out at dinner last night that she was going to borrow Tommie Bentley's bus and fly it to the top of the range and back, and she stumped Jerry Manning to go along. Don't think he was very keen to take the dare, but we all chipped in together and helped her push him over the edge."

"Why didn't Manning want to go?"

"Can't say—unless he's just naturally afraid of high altitudes. Some people are, you know."

"Anything particularly dangerous about this stunt, as you call it?"

"Wouldn't be, maybe, if Patsy were a trained pilot. But she isn't. She's a raw amateur—never been up more than a few hundred feet or so; and it's a good five-thousand-foot climb to the top of the big hills. But that doesn't faze her. She'd try anything once; she's that kind of a girl, you know."

"And the other fellow out there with them—who is he?"

"That's Tommie. He's the chap that owns the plane. He's taking his risk, too."

"The possible loss of his machine, you mean?"

"Yep. If they come a crash, he'll be out quite a little money."

Out on the fairway the three, who were going over the plane and tuning it for the high flight, separated; the two in flying clothes climbed into their respective cockpits, and the plane owner beckoned for volunteers to help in the take-off. Three or four men among the onlookers responded, and a boy in the bell-hop livery of the inn dodged in and out among them. Bixby did not have to look twice to see that the boy had a yellow telegraph envelope in his hand, with which he was signaling to Manning, and the emissary of big business gritted out a malediction aimed at the faithless young woman in the telegraph alcove of the inn. The previous evening she had promised to take her own time about delivering any New York message addressed to Gerald Manning.

At the angry imprecation, the young man to whom he had spoken, said:

"I beg your pardon?"

"Stepped on a pebble," was Bixby's excuse for the bad language he had used, as he marked the race of the boy messenger. He was hoping that the lad might stumble and fall down before he could deliver the yellow envelope.

THE boy didn't stumble, but he did something which promised to be as effective. Two of the volunteer helpers had linked hands to turn the motor over by pulling at a propeller blade, and two others were under the wings, ready to remove the chocks blocking the wheels of the ground gear. In his interest in the proceedings, the boy stopped and became a gaping onlooker. But, at the last moment, he remembered his errand and ran to the side of the plane.

Bixby swore again, this time under his breath, when he saw Manning reach down and take the yellow envelope from the bell boy's hand. Then he could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw Manning shove the message, unopened, into a pocket of his aviation coat and go on buckling himself in with the safety belt. He was still adjusting the safety

appliance when the motor took the spark and roared explosively; the chocks were jerked away, and the plane taxied down the fairway to take the air gracefully at the end of its ground run.

There were cheers and the waving of hats from the spectators, as the plane, quite skillfully handled, as it appeared, began to spiral in wide circles for altitude. If Judson Bixby experienced any belated compunctions or regrets, he did not betray them outwardly. In common with the others of the group of onlookers, he craned his neck to follow the movements of the glistening mechanical dragon fly until it became a mere speck in the sky. Afterward he walked back to the inn, where, having first had it out with the young woman at the telegraph desk for not keeping faith with him, he dispatched a cipher message to his chief in New York. This done, he bought a Denver paper at the news stand and put in the time, while waiting for the regular breakfast hour, reading a detailed account of the desperate, but highly successful, train robbery of two nights earlier at Siding No. 12.

So much for the groundling plotter. At about this time, high above the cares of earth, Tommie Bentley's dragon-fly machine was attaining a height great enough to overtop the mountain summits, where the old snow was still lying like white scars in the bare gulches and capping the higher peaks, and its venturesome pilot had straightened it out upon a westward course toward the mighty barrier. The plane, latest product of the factories, was equipped with all the accessories which ingenuity could devise and money pay for, among them a speaking tube, making communication by word of mouth possible between the two cockpits, in spite of the deafening roar of the motor.

When the hotel at the cañon's mouth had become a mere miscroscopic dot on the earth's surface, Patricia wigwagged to her passenger. She was calling his attention to the speaking contrivance. Manning put the tube to his ear and heard a teasing voice say: "Everything lovely, Jerry, dear?"

"A bit chilly, but all serene, so far."

"Not even a bit queasy in your tummy?"

"What do you take me for—a landlubber?"

"Then you are still feeling friendly?"

"More than friendly—almost affectionate."

"Don't you realize that you're taking a frightful chance with a raw amateur? The altimeter says we're something over five thousand feet above the good old earth."

"Right-o! What's the difference? A crash at five hundred would be just as fatal."

"But, from what you said last night at dinner, I thought you were afraid of high altitudes."

"I was obliged to say something, wasn't I?"

"Then it wasn't nervousness that made you fight my offer?"

"No."

"What was it, then?"

"Might have had some little consideration for you, don't you think? It's a crazy stunt, if you don't mind my saying so through a piece of rubber with a hole in it."

A faint chuckle came through the tube, and then:

"Yes, Jerry, dear; it's a lot crazier than you think. You may not believe it, but I'm acting as your guardian angel just now. That's better than trying to vamp you, isn't it?"

THE mountains were drawing nearer, and, though it was really a windless morning, there were mountaintop eddies and swirls to make the amateur give her whole attention to the navigation of the ship. By gaining a slightly greater altitude the air pockets and swirls were left behind—or below—and a few minutes later the snow-capped summits were overpassed, and the plane was dropping, to float over a region of lower heights and valleys, a terrain, save in isolated valley depressions, blanketed by primeval forests of conifers, pine, spruce and fir.

Quite naturally Manning looked to see Patricia bank for a turn which should head the plane back toward the inhabited side of things, now that she had made

good her promise to fly to the top of the mountain world. When she failed to do so; when she merely flew the ship back and forth over the jumble of lower heights, cañons and valleys almost aimlessly, as it seemed; he supposed she was searching for a gap or pass which would enable her to return without again having to climb to the chilling altitude of the snowy summits.

In this ranging back and forth it was not until he glanced over the side of the fuselage and saw the forest, apparently rising to meet the storming plane, that he realized that something had gone wrong. Turning quickly, he saw that Patricia seemed to be fighting desperately with the controls. The plane would nose up for a short distance and then plunge downward again. Unless a two-seater has a second set of controls in the after cockpit, and the passenger occupant has a sufficient knowledge of the flying art to enable him to use them—two conditions lacking in the present instance—there is nothing that the unfortunate person in the rear seat can do in an emergency save to sit tight and hope for the best.

Manning did both, and he was much too well balanced to say or do anything to distract Patricia, who appeared to be straining every nerve to make the ship behave itself. Nevertheless, with each succeeding downward swoop the treetops came nearer, and a crash seemed to be inevitable. Manning glanced around. The descent, which had every aspect of being uncontrollable, was into a pocket-like valley with high mountains on one side and a lower, though quite precipitous, range on the other. Both ranges were heavily wooded. The valley itself was also forested, but not so thickly. There were open spaces at irregular intervals, meadowlike stretches on either side of a swift mountain stream which ran foaming over its boulders toward the western extremity of the shut-in gash between the two mountain ranges.

Since it became speedily evident that Patricia's struggles to regain control of the descending plane were apparently destined to fail, Manning unbuckled his safety belt and prepared for the worst. If a forced landing had to be made, he took it for granted that Patricia would do her best to bring the ship down in one of the larger, meadowlike openings. But she seemed to be unable to reach any of these, and when the failing power was finally shut off, and the plane came to earth and made a short, bumpy run to a stop, it was in one of the smallest of the intervals; a tangle of high grass and tiny evergreen saplings, out of which the most skillful aviator could scarcely hope to make a take-off.

When the defeated amateur twisted herself to look back at her passenger, she seemed to be registering the deepest chagrin.

"I wish you'd see what I've done, Jerry!" she exclaimed. "Don't you think I ought to be keelhauled or something?"

Manning's grin was boyishly good-natured.

"We're both still alive and undamaged; that's so much to the good. What happened?"

"The motor! Didn't you see how it kept going slower and slower? We simply *had* to land if the motor wouldn't pull, didn't we?"

"Sure thing. Not the best place in the world, perhaps, but at that, we're lucky not to be hanging up somewhere in the treetops."

"Isn't that the truth? Gee! I wish we could only have kept going until we reached one of those bigger fields!" she lamented. "I don't see how we are ever going to get Tommie's bus out of this mess of a place, do you?" With so much for the lamentation, however, she suddenly became cheerful. "But, you know, it isn't half as bad as it might have been. We might have come down in some place where we would have been frightfully lost."

"Meaning that we're not lost, as it is?" He had got out of the stranded plane and was lifting her to the ground.

"I'm hoping we're not. You remember, I told you I spent most of last summer on a dude ranch?"

"I do. Also, I remember that you crashed your promise to make one of my house-boat party down the coast to do it."

"Don't be spiteful, honey. It's a woman's privilege to change her mind. But, about the ranch—this valley is a part of it; or, rather, it is one of those places the cowboy guides used to take us to, to camp out and fish and do mountain-climbing stunts. There are some log houses down at the other end, where we had our camp, and I was trying to get as near to them as I could before we had to land."

Manning shook his head. "I didn't see any houses."

"I did; one of them, at least. That is how I knew the place. Let's go and find them. Maybe we can get help to clear a way for the plane and find somebody who can tell us what is the matter with the motor. There is sure to be a camping party in here."

Manning was grinning again.

"Say, Patsy, that's one of the things that makes everybody hand it to you. No matter what happens, you're never knocked all the way out of the box. How far is it to this camping dump?"

"Not very far. The whole valley is only about two miles long, as I remember it."

He stooped and looked under the plane.

"H'm! See here! It isn't only the motor. I thought I felt something give way when we hit the ground. When we get out of this trap, it won't be in Tommie's ship. Look at that wheel on the other side."

AGAIN Patricia proved her superiority to the unexpected happenings. The right-hand wheel of the ground gear had collapsed in the hasty landing, and until it could be replaced the plane was a fixture.

"Well! Of all the bad luck!" she exclaimed, with a little laugh. "Now we *are* in for it, and no mistake! But never mind. Maybe we can borrow horses at the fishing camp. Do you hate me fiercely, Jerry, dear?"

"Not yet," he returned, matching her laugh. "You're giving me too good a chance to make you eat your words."

"What words?"

"What you said, or intimated, last night at the dinner table—that I was a poor sport. Perhaps, before we are through with this——"

"No; you've got me all wrong, big boy. What I meant was—— Oh—I don't know just what I did mean; but, whatever it was, it applied to all of us play people. Let's go and find that camp. All we have to do is to follow the river."

Making their way out of the glade where the plane had come to grief, they set out in single file for the lower end of the parklike valley, following the general direction of the little river bisecting it. From time to time, Patricia, who was letting Manning break trail for her through the grovings and tangled grass of the intervales, cast questioning glances up at the heights on either hand, and if her file leader had had eyes in the back of his head he might have seen that the glances grew rather apprehensive, as they went along.

But, as they approached the foot of the valley, which seemed to be a no-thoroughfare, with the lower range of mountains on the left closing in to merge with the higher rampart on the right, Patricia gave a little cry of relief.

"What's the matter? Something bite you?" Manning asked, halting to face around.

"Something's been biting me, but it's stopped now. Do you know, for the last fifteen minutes I've been simply too scared to breathe!"

"What for?"

"As we came along, this end of the valley didn't seem as familiar as I thought it ought to; it seemed changed, somehow, from the way it looked last summer, and I had a frightfully sinky feeling. It would have been terrible if I had—I mean, if we had come down in a place that I didn't know. But it is all right now. See those horses grazing over yonder?"

He followed the direction of her pointing finger and saw the horses. There were five of them, grazing quietly in one of the grassy openings.

"And the horses signify?"

"That there *is* a party here from the Bar Diamond Ranch, just as I hoped there would be. Those are some of their mounts."

"All to the good, so far. Where is the camp?"

"It is up here to the left, on higher ground. There is a trail somewhere, but we needn't stop to look for it. We can climb straight up through the woods."

Accordingly, they faced to the left and began to climb. They found the steep ascent a rather breathless scramble, handicapped as they were by their padded aviation clothes. At an elevation of two hundred feet or more above the river level, they came out upon a natural bench or terrace, running along the mountainside. Like the slopes above and below, the bench was well wooded, but at a little distance to their right they could see a small clearing, with a single dilapidated log cabin on its farther edge. The split-shingle roof of the cabin was half gone, and its door was sagging by one leather hinge, but there was blue wood smoke rising from its leaning chimney. And at the mouth of a tunnellike opening in the mountain, not far from the cabin, three men were lounging idly, two of them smoking and the third squatting on his heels, with his back to the tunnel timbering, cleaning and oiling a gun.

With a stifled cry, Patricia caught at Manning and held him as he was about to lead the way to the clearing.

"No! No!" she exclaimed, white-faced and panic-stricken. "That isn't the Bar Diamond camp. It's—it's—— Oh, Jerry, we're in the wrong valley!"

CHAPTER IV.

REVELATIONS.

MANNING'S reaction to Patricia's excited exclamation was manlike and strictly practical.

"All right; say it *isn't* your Bar Diamond camping ground. I'll say we're lucky to find that it is somebody's. These chaps have horses, and I have money. We'll hire a couple of the nags and a guide and let Tommie's ship stay where it is until we can send a wrecking crew in after it. Anything wrong with that?"

"Lots," she returned promptly. "We don't know who these men are, or what they are doing here. I—I don't like the look of them."

"They are rather hard-looking citizens," he admitted. "But isn't ours a case of any port in a storm?"

"Maybe; but I've made one horrible blunder this morning, and there mustn't be another. You—you'll never forgive me when you know what I've done."

"'Never' is a long day, and you'll have to do something worse than merely mix your geography to make me really vindictive. You stay here out of sight, while I stroll in and interview these chaps. There's no need of letting them know there's a pair of us until after we find out who and what they are."

"Yes; we must find out first. But—but I don't want you to go. I—I'm scared silly, Jerry. My teeth would chatter if I'd let them. Don't go and leave me here!"

"But how are we going to find out who they are unless I go and talk with them?"

She pointed to a thick growth of small, low-branching trees extending almost to the tunnel mouth, where the three men were grouped.

"Couldn't we creep up behind those little trees and listen to what they are saying? Then maybe we'd know."

"Good notion. But I'll do the eavesdropping stunt by myself, if you don't mind. You just keep out of sight here among the trees until I come back."

Hiding behind one of the larger trees, she watched him go. Patricia was rent and torn by many anxieties in the process. The "how" which she had told her plotting uncle would ask for a bit of thinking had seemed exceedingly simple when she came to consider it. Jerry was to be bullied or jeered into joining her in the airplane flight, and, once across the range, she would find the Bar Diamond camping valley and make a landing in it in such a manner as to leave them stranded and out of communication with the busy world for a few days, as the uninvited guests of the Bar Diamond outfit. Up to the moment when she had landed the plane in the little glade where it was safe to stay until it was picked up bodily and carried out, everything had gone swimmingly. But now——

She was trembling on Jerry's account when she saw his rather clumsy but well-

meant efforts to stalk the three men at the tunnel mouth. The borrowed aviation suit was too small for him, and when he went on hands and knees to crawl under the little trees, his progress was like that of a baby elephant. She hated herself instantly for making the comparison, but it was so apt that she could not banish it. "He *is* fat," she whispered to herself, "but it's dear, lovable fat, every ounce of it. I ought to be strapped for letting him in for this. If we ever get out of this frightful mess, I'll let him beat me, if he wants to!"

IT was relief of a kind when the big bulk of him passed under the little trees, but she found herself holding her breath involuntarily until, some few minutes later, she saw him making his way back in the same laborious fashion as he had gone in. When he reached her tree, his first act was to take her arm and lead her swiftly into the deeper aisles of the forest.

"Your hunch was as right as rain," he began, after they had retreated in silence to the farther side of a great boulder, thrusting its gray bulk like a promontory into the sea of trees. "Those fellows are postgraduate desperadoes of some sort—that's as plain as the nose on a horse's face."

"I knew it! I was sure of it the very moment we saw them!" she breathed. Then: "Jerry, did you see that telegraph bulletin posted in the hotel lobby last evening?"

"No. What was it?"

"It was an account of a train robbery over on this side of the range; a ghastly affair in which the engineer of the train was shot and killed when he tried to go on. It said the robbers escaped and took to the mountains, with their loot."

Manning nodded soberly. "That fits like a glove—explains part of what I overheard. The man who was cleaning his gun was arguing for a move to some other place, which he didn't name. He was insisting that he heard an airplane a little while ago, and he told the others that their horses feeding down by the river and the smoke of their breakfast fire would give them away. But the other two hadn't heard the plane, and they wouldn't believe that the gun cleaner had. They accused him of getting rattled over nothing."

"Was that all you heard?"

"Not quite all. The alarmist still insisted that he had heard the plane, adding that the noise had stopped so suddenly that he was pretty sure the ship had landed somewhere in the valley. At that, one of the others agreed to go with him on a scouting expedition after they had had their breakfast, and with this they all got up and shambled off to the cabin."

"Will they find the plane, do you think?"

"Sure thing. They can hardly help spotting it if they go anywhere near it."

She drew a long breath. "It's just worse and more of it, Jerry, dear. What shall we do?"

"It's rather got me guessing, if you ask. There isn't much doubt that these chaps are the train robbers. There was something said about the 'swag,' which the gun-cleaning fellow thought ought to be hidden more carefully and left behind for the time being. The others didn't agree. One of them said that this 'Lost Valley,' as he called it, was 'as safe as a clock;' that not half a dozen men in the West knew of it, or of the one trail leading into it."

Patricia was sitting with her knees drawn up and her chin propped in her cupped hands. After a time she said:

"I guess I'm getting it, Jerry, boy."

"Getting what?"

"What I asked for—and what was coming to me. Yesterday I was saying to Uncle Judson that most of us nowadays are just time killers; that what we don't know about being up against it in any real sense would fill a moving van. Why don't you smoke?"

He began to feel half absently for his cigarettes, first in one pocket of the two-quick-fitting borrowed coat and then in another.

"Didn't know your Uncle Jud was back at the inn. Did he come to drag you out of the dizzy whirl of mountain climbing by day and dancing at night?"

"N-o," she said hesitantly. "At least, that isn't what he told me he came for."

"Good bit of a sticker—your Uncle Jud—if you don't mind my saying so. Wasted a lot of good time on me when he was campin' on my trail last week."

"Was it about the—the cement-company merger?"

"You've guessed it. A lot of moneyed men in New York want to gather the Titan into the fold. Your uncle's the chief high persuader for the bunch."

"And you wouldn't let him persuade you?"

"Nothing doing. We're sitting pretty at Titanville. Dad spent the best years of his life making the Titan brand stand for the best there is in the cement line and building up a market for it. We're not 'merging' any—not so you could notice it."

Patricia took her lower lip between her teeth for an instant before she could steady her voice to say:

"But—but, won't the big company, the moneyed men, smash you if you don't go in?"

"Not a chance. But, even if there were a chance, I'd still stick it out, you know. There are our mill people at Titanville to be thought of—picked men with families, most of 'em. They swear by us Mannings. Dad fathered 'em; helped 'em buy their homes and all that, you know. They'd be just so many numbers on a mighty long pay roll in the big combine; they know it and I know it. So I promised 'em we'd sit tight. What the dickens did I do with those fags? Oh, here they are."

THE search for the cigarette case was successful at last. In fishing it out of the side pocket of the leather coat, the last-minute telegram, still unopened, came with it. "M'm—what's this?" he queried. Then he remembered the inn bell boy and his dash to the poised airplane and opened the envelope.

Patricia watched him narrowly as he read the telegram, her sixth sense telling her that it was a portent in the sky; the precursor of a storm. She saw his round, boyish face grow sober as he read, but the storm didn't break. Instead, he said: "Ye gods and little fishes, Patsy! Don't you know, I ought to be kicked all the way around the block! This wire was handed me after we got into the ship—just as we were starting out, and I stuffed it into my pocket without reading it! And for that piece of asinine heedlessness—good Lord! It's unbelievable, even in me!"

"What is it?" she asked in a small, and exceedingly small, voice.

He handed her the message, and she read it. It was from New York and signed "John Strickland:"

> Pressure being exerted to force Titan into combine. Have it upon what appears to be good authority there will be reprisals if you refuse syndicate proposals. Advise your immediate return to New York; or, if that is impossible, wire me to act for you under power of attorney which I still hold. From what I can learn, acceptance of proposals is only recourse in circumstances. Answer before close of Exchange on the seventeenth.

"You—you were expecting something like this?" she asked, passing the telegram back.

"I was expecting to hear from Strickland—yes. That was the reason why I balked a bit at this stunt when you shot it at me last night. The seventeenth, he says, and to-day is the sixteenth, and we are stuck here in this ghastly wilderness, with a bunch of train robbers who will presently be combing the woods for us. That is what comes of being fat-witted, Patsy. I ought to be locked up in an asylum for imbeciles."

"But, listen," she protested. "Isn't it the best for all concerned that you should go into this merger, or whatever it is? Won't they smash you if you don't?"

"That's the keen edge of it," he lamented. "Before I left New York I had it from the inside that the merger wouldn't merge unless the Titan plant was included; the underwriting bankers made that a hard-and-fast condition. I meant to tell Strickland, but he was out of town; and, anyway, I knew he'd wire me if things showed a tendency to get thick. So, like a happy idiot, I rested easy."

Silence for a few portentous seconds, and then: "What is the date of that telegram, Jerry?"

He looked to see. "It was filed last night, and—say, by George!—it was relayed to the inn last evening while we were at dinner! What I'd like to know is: Why wasn't it delivered to me then?"

At this announcement a great light burst upon Patricia, and she had to take her lip between her teeth again before she could say:

"Have you—have I ever given you any reason to think I wasn't a good sport, Jerry?"

"Nothing like it. That's one of the things that makes everybody hand you the blue ribbon."

"Well, I've got to be one now. I was the cat's-paw in this miserable business. You may beat me if you want to."

"I don't quite get you."

"You wouldn't; you're too good and easy-going and straightforward. Uncle Judson made me believe that you'd be smashed if you didn't let the Titan go into this merger thing, and—and I fell for it. Isn't it perfectly sickening?"

"You framed me for this airplane blot-out?"

"I did. It was to get you out of reach of a wire. I meant to drop down on the Bar Diamond camp. I thought that was what I was doing when I choked the motor and—and——"

"And smashed the ship's landing wheel when you came down so we couldn't take off again," he filled out for her. "And now there is no dude camp; instead, we're in a train-robbers' hangout. Wouldn't the movie people gloat over a situation like this?"

"If you try to laugh it off I shall shriek!" she burst out. "I'd much rather you'd swear at me, beat me—anything!"

"But, don't you see, Patsy, I'm taking the will for the deed," he replied, with imperturbable good nature. "You thought you were doing me a good turn; and all the rest of it is just spilled milk."

She looked at him long and hard.

"You are just too good to be true, Jerry. How you can sit there and smoke and smile, when you ought to be ripping me to pieces with bad language, is more than I can tell. Don't you ever lose your temper at anything?"

"Not at you," he said.

"But what shall we *do?*"

"I'm thinking about that. Strickland says to-morrow, at the close of banking hours, three o'clock in New York, which means one o'clock out here, mountain time. Have you any idea where this Lost Valley is? Are we near any place that you are familiar with?"

"I'm almost sure it isn't far from the valley where we used to camp last summer. I remember one of the cowboy guides, 'Shorty' by name, said something about a lost valley an old prospector was always looking for and couldn't find. He told the story at the camp fire one night of an old, gray-bearded man who had a mine in the lost place. He had stayed and worked in the mine all one summer until he had to come out to keep from being shut in for the winter; and then he could never find his way back. We all thought Shorty was just making up the story as he went along."

"Perhaps he wasn't. Somebody built that log cabin and dug the tunnel where we saw the three men. Did your cowboy have any idea of where the lost valley was?"

"Only that it was somewhere this side of the big range; that range over there."

"And your camping and fishing valley was on the same side of the range?"

"Yes."

"The river you fished in—was it anything like the stream down below?"

"It is about the same size. It might be the same river in another place."

"Which is all to the good, as far as it goes. Now, where was your fishing valley in reference to the ranch and the railroad?"

"It was a day's horseback ride from the ranch, but the horses had to walk most of the way."

"How about the direction?"

She took a moment to think.

"It must have been nearly north. I remember we had the sun on our right in the forenoon, and it was on the left in the evening when we reached camp."

"How far is the dude ranch from the railroad?"

"I don't know that. It is something over an hour's run in an auto."

He made a hasty mental calculation.

"A day's slow horseback trip—say, thirty to forty miles. An hour's auto run—another thirty or forty. Any telephone at the ranch?"

"No; we had to drive to the railroad if we wanted to phone or telegraph."

He shook his head. "No chance at all for footwork, even if we knew the way, and we don't. About how far did we come in the plane?"

"I haven't any idea. We were up nearly an hour, weren't we?"

"Fully that long. But, anyway, we're out of the fight in that direction. We couldn't hope to back trail afoot over the range. We've got to have a couple of those horses that are grazing down yonder, and something to eat on the way, at that."

She was holding her chin in her cupped hands again when she said: "If you were here alone, Jerry, what would you do?"

"I hadn't thought of that. I guess maybe I'd try to steal one of the horses and make a break for civilization and take the chance of getting shot while I was at it. But I'm not taking any such chance for you."

"You'd be fully justified—after what I've done. But I've thought of something better. These men, or at least one of them, heard the plane, and they will soon find it. But they needn't know that two people came in it."

"Right! Suppose they don't. What then?"

"I'll go to them and tell them I was flying the plane and crashed, and I'll offer to pay them if they will let me have a horse and show me the way out of the valley. If they'll do it, you can be watching and can follow me, and when you overtake me I'll give you the horse."

He laughed. "Yes; I think I see myself riding away to leave you to the tender mercies of these bandit chaps! You can't do that."

"It looks as if I hadn't left myself any choice, don't you think?"

"Huh! I'm the one who hasn't any choice. I may be all kinds of a fatheaded fool, but I'm not letting you or any other woman stand in the breach for me. You can forget that way out of this fix."

Her answer was to spring up and start back toward the robbers' rendezvous.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"I've told you," she flung over her shoulder.

"Don't be a little idiot! Come back here!" And when she kept on doggedly, he ran after her and caught her in his arms. "You mustn't do anything like that! Didn't you hear what I said—that I wouldn't let you?"

"You'd better," she returned coolly. "If those men find you here they'll kill you, if only for safety's sake. And they won't know you are here if I go to them at once."

"Oh, hang it all, Patsy, you might at least give me the credit of being a man."

"Maybe I do."

"I guess not. I'd be a lot less than a man if I were to let you commit suicide; or, worse, to give me a chance to drop out of the picture. We'll settle this right here and now. I'll stand here and hold you till doomsday if you don't pass me your word to forget this Damon-and-Pythias stunt. It's worse than absurd—it's wicked. I know you'll keep your word, if you promise."

"And if I won't promise?"

"You'll just handicap me on end, that's all. If I've got to stand guard over you all the time——"

"You won't," she said, freeing herself. "But I still think it's the only thing to do. Even if they wouldn't give me a horse, it would leave you free to get away by yourself. I—I want to be a good sport, Jerry."

"There is nothing so awfully sporting about doing a thing that would make me follow you and probably get shot for my pains. Do you promise?"

"Yes, if you insist."

"I do. Now, that's better. Let's go back to the big rock and do a little plotting; or, better yet, let's edge back toward where we left the plane. It occurs to me that about the first thing we need to know is whether or not these chaps find the ship. If they find it, their next move will be to try to find out who came in it, and why. And if they don't find it, our chance for stealing a couple of the horses will be a lot better. Let's go."

CHAPTER V.

ONE AT A TIME.

IN pursuance of his suggestion that they find out what, if anything, was doing in the vicinity of the stranded plane, Jerry led the way along the mountainside terrace. He maintained that, if a search was making for a landed airship, the searchers would naturally expect to find it in one of the open spaces of the valley. From the elevation of the terrace they would be able to mark the movements of the searchers without betraying their own presence.

Before they had gone very far beyond the promontory rock, to which they had at first retreated, they found themselves following a dim trail along the terrace. This path was so nearly obliterated by the dead leaves from the trees of many seasons that it was almost indistinguishable; still, it was evidently a path that had some time been made by the treading of feet, human or animal. Patricia was the first to notice this, and she called Jerry's attention to it.

"It's a path, all right," he agreed, stooping to brush the leaves aside. "I wonder who made it."

The hope that it might prove to be the trail leading out of the trap valley was a sufficient motive for tracing its course; but, within the next few hundred yards, it came to an end at the mouth of a half-concealed opening in the mountainside, an opening which at first they took to be the entrance to another prospect tunnel similar to the one in the cabin clearing.

"What is it—another mine?" Patricia asked.

"I don't know much about mines, but I shouldn't say this was one. Looks more like a cave, don't you think?"

"But the path leads right up to it."

"So it does. Let's see what's inside."

As they stepped within the portal, Jerry struck a match, and by its small flare they saw at once that the cave guess was the right one. The gash in the rocks, too irregular to have been made by drilling and blasting, ran on indefinitely into the depths, with a slightly downward inclination. Just before the match went out, they both saw a miner's candle stuck in a crevice in the right-hand side wall. Quickly Jerry struck another match and lighted the candle, saying: "This shows that somebody's been here before us."

"Not once, but a good many times," Patricia put in; "often enough to make the path, anyway."

"Likewise, the path connects this place with the cabin back yonder," he said.

Patricia asked: "Why were the two places so closely connected, do you suppose?"

Manning hazarded a guess.

"Perhaps the prospector's drinking and cooking water is in here. Isn't there usually a spring of some sort in a cave? It would be a lot easier to carry water from here along the level bench than to lug it uphill from the river."

"Water?" she said. "Maybe we might get a drink. I'm frightfully thirsty."

"Since we have the candle we might have a look. Those chaps back at the cabin will hardly have had time to eat their breakfast yet."

After they had penetrated twenty-five or thirty yards from the entrance, they heard a sound as of water running to waste; and when they had doubled the distance, the crevicelike passage opened out into a domed chamber, on one side of which they found the spring, a natural basin in the chamber floor, with the overflow trickling away in a near-by cranny. Patricia knelt beside the basin and drank thirstily from her cupped hands, while Manning held the candle high and looked around.

The domed chamber was not the end of the cavern. In the side, diagonally opposite the spring, another passage appeared to lead on to farther distances in the heart of the mountain. Also, halfway around the other side of the chamber, there was another and smaller passage, and it was at a familiar object blocking the mouth of the smaller passage that Manning stared longest and hardest.

"It's as cold as ice? Don't you want a drink?" Patricia was saying.

Jerry did not reply. He had crossed to the smaller passage and found that the blocking object was precisely what it had appeared to be—a wheelbarrow. And in

it there were a pick, a shovel, a stone hammer with a broken handle, a few dulled drills and a small coil of blasting fuse.

"What have you found?" Patricia asked, joining him.

"Somebody's mine—at least, I guess that's what it is." Then: "Your cowboy guide's story about a lost valley and the old prospector seems to be fitting itself into a fact. I'm wondering now if the man who built the log cabin didn't dig that tunnel behind it merely as a bit of camouflage. Wouldn't be such a bad notion; not if he had found the real thing in here and wanted to keep it a secret."

"Oh! Is it a gold mine? Let's move the barrow and go in to see."

HE held the candle in the mouth of the tunnel, and saw that the barrow wasn't the only obstruction. A few feet from the entrance the passage was blocked by a pile of broken rock, spoil from the blasting and digging, with the end of a heavy, ax-hewn plank projecting over the top of the pile.

"No thoroughfare," Manning said; "and, anyway, the man's mine is no particular business of ours just now. If you've had your drink, let's get out of this and try to get a line on the airship searchers."

"Just another swallow," she said. "The water is so cold I couldn't drink all I wanted to." And she recrossed the vaulted chamber to kneel again beside the basin of the spring.

While he waited, Manning looked around again. He was wondering what the digger of the tunnel had done with the diggings—the blasted-out rock taken from the hole he had driven. There was no dump at the mouth of the cave, and yet there must have been many cubic feet of the spoil to be disposed of in some fashion. Thinking that perhaps the miner might have barrowed his quarryings back into the farther reaches of the cavern—concealment of the spoil being a necessity, if his object were secrecy—Manning took a few steps into the larger passage which formed the deeper underground extension of the natural rift in the rocks.

Almost at once he found himself recoiling upon the brink of a precipice, over which another step would have precipitated him. Kneeling at the edge of the sink-hole chasm and holding the candle at arm's length, he looked down into a pit, with perpendicular walls and a depth of possibly fifteen feet or more. And at the bottom of the pit there was a heap of broken stone to show that the unknown miner had used the chasm as his convenient and hidden dumping place.

Jerry was still examining the pit and noting the fact that, lacking a bridge of some sort, it made access to the extension of the cavern impossible, when Patricia came up behind him, to start back in shocked surprise at the sudden discovery of the yawning chasm at her feet.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed. "If anybody should come poking around here in the dark——"

"You said it," he exclaimed. Then: "I was just thinking, if we could herd those train-robber chaps in here and scare them into this hole, we could walk off with all the horses if we wanted to."

"Trap them, you mean? But, Jerry—it couldn't be done!"

"Not herding them, of course; that was only a figure of speech. There aren't enough of us to do the round-up act. But if we could cut them out, one at a time, and——"

"Don't be foolish. They're armed to the teeth, and we have nothing but our bare hands. Of course you don't mean it. What are you doing that for?"

He was holding a hand out over the pit, as if he were testing the temperature of the air, and noting also that the flame of the candle was flickering gently.

"I thought so," he said. "There's an opening through some crevice down there. It must be there, where the wall shelves under at the left; you can feel a draft coming up. I'll say the man who dug that tunnel had all the conveniences handed him on a silver platter; a dumping pit within a dozen steps and natural ventilation to keep the air sweet and wholesome. All of which, you may say, is less than nothing to us, a pair of lost-outs. What we're needing is a couple of stolen or borrowed nags—not a mine. Shall we toddle along and see what the

enemy is doing, and what, if anything, is happening to Tommie's airship?"

On the way out to the mouth of the cave Patricia was seeking to rearrange her preconceived estimate of the young man she had sought to serve and had served only to his disastrous undoing. As her uncle had reminded her, she had known Jerry Manning for quite a long time, and he had figured hitherto only as a moderately spoiled son of much money; an open-handed, generous, good-natured play boy, with whom it was pleasant to knock about in house boat or yacht, on the links or on the tennis court—though, indeed, he was too heavily built to cut much of a figure either as a tennis partner or opponent.

BUT now she was beginning to sense certain latent qualities which had never before been awakened. His generous acceptance of the will for the deed in her misguided interference in his affairs was quite what was to be expected of him; but, apart from this, there were indications of certain inward stirrings such as may come to a carefree boy when he begins to realize the strength which has heretofore been little more than an added burden of flesh to carry around. That remark of Jerry's about herding the train robbers into the cave pit was a jest, to be sure, but she had a feeling that the awakening mettle in him was quite capable of turning the jest into earnest, if the fortunate occasion should offer.

At the mouth of the cave there was a momentary halt to allow Jerry to blow the candle out and replace it in the niche from which it had been taken. In the act, Patricia, looking out through the half-concealed opening, saw a thing to make her gasp and clutch at his arm to try to drag him back into the shadows. At the farther edge of the terrace, as if he had just climbed up from the slope below, stood a man with a rifle in the crook of his arm. He was one of the three they had seen waiting in the cabin clearing for the breakfast summons.

From his alert attitude it was apparent that something—perhaps Patricia's attempt to draw her companion back out of sight—had attracted the man's attention to the mouth of the cave. While one might have counted ten, he stood motionless and watchful, with his gaze fixed upon the dark crevice in the opposing slope. Then, with a motion that was too swift for the eye to follow, he whipped the rifle to his shoulder and fired.

Standing together as they were in the cavern tunnel, a bullet aimed at the cave's mouth could scarcely have missed one or the other, if Jerry had not anticipated the trigger squeeze by the requisite half second, throwing himself flat and pulling Patricia down with him. There was a buzzing whine, as the steel-jacketed bullet sped over them, and before the marksman outside could work the reloading lever of the high-powered rifle for a second shot, Jerry was up and bounding across the narrow interspace, to hurl his one hundred and ninety pounds upon the assailant.

The struggle was short, savage, and decisive. Jerry, who in his college days had been a rather clumsy but weightily effective wrestler, got a left-arm lock hold around the robber's neck before the man could either fire again or drop his gun to defend himself with his hands. With his antagonist thus pinioned, he made a rapid-fire piston plunger of his right, hammering in short-arm jabs to the man's ribs. This had the double effect of cutting the fellow's wind, so that he couldn't shout for help, and made him drop the gun to use both hands in a frantic attempt to fight himself free from the choking strangle hold of the big arm locked around his neck.

Now Jerry suddenly released him, with a parting punch that sent him gasping and staggering, and caught up the dropped rifle, clubbing it for a swing. Dazed and breathless as he was, the robber contrived to duck, and the clubbed gun struck him only a glancing blow on the head. But that was sufficient. The man flung up his arms, spun around, and collapsed. The rifle, continuing its scythelike swing, crashed against a tree and was broken off at the breech, leaving only the barrel in Jerry's hands.

Three or four breathless minutes, no longer, had sufficed for the beginning,

the middle part, and the ending of the whirlwind battle, but in that brief period, Patricia, looking on from the mouth of the cave, had passed through half a dozen avatars of readjustment. This raging, indomitable fighting machine was a Jerry Manning whose existence she had never even faintly suspected, and the primitive woman in her leaped up in ecstatic rejoicing at this revealment of the primitive man in him. When he flung the rifle barrel aside and knelt to find out whether he had slain or only wounded, she was beside him.

"One down and only four more to follow," he said, grinning up at her and panting from his unwonted exertion. "You'd better run back in the hole and keep out of sight. That rifle shot will be sure to bring some of the others, don't you think?"

She let the warning go unheeded.

"Is he dead?" she asked, and she was surprised to find that she could speak so calmly.

"Nothing like it; but he might be if he hadn't ducked as he did. I sure had him going. Here"—handing her his match box—"it'll help if you'll go ahead and light the candle. While we have this chap where we can handle him, we'll do him, and do him good." And, as she ran to obey, he shouldered the unconscious robber and staggered across to the mouth of the cave with his load, directing her to go ahead of him when she had the candle lighted.

IN the vaulted chamber of the cold spring he put the stunned man down, stripped him of his coat, and with his pocketknife proceeded to cut the garment into broad ribbons, which he twisted into cords to bind the outlaw's hands and feet, while Patricia stood at his side and held the candle. The manacling completed to his satisfaction, he propped the man in a sitting position against the cavern wall and dashed handfuls of the ice-cold water into his face, until he came gasping and choking out of his daze to blink in bewilderment at the light of the flickering candle.

"What th' hell and blue blazes!" he burst out, making a violent effort to struggle to his feet—an effort which only resulted in making him fall back and bump his head against the rock wall.

Jerry stood over him like a reduced replica of the Colossus of Rhodes.

"As you perceive, there's nothing doing. You're out of the fight, my friend—all the way out. This is one time when you were a bit too quick on the trigger at first and not quite sudden enough afterward, if you get my meaning. Now you are going to tell us a few things, and then we'll put you away for safe-keeping. How many of you are there in your gang? It will help some if you'll talk straight and talk fast."

The outlaw's reply was a torrent of bad language; whereupon Jerry picked up a fragment of broken stone, the size of a man's fist, and said, with his most engaging smile:

"We are a bit pressed for time, I'm sorry to say. If you don't answer my questions I shall be obliged to hammer your face in with this rock. I asked how many there are of you."

"There's enough to give you what's comin' to you!"

"All right; if you really wish to nurse a broken jaw——"

"You keep away from me!" shrilled the hapless victim. "If you've got to know, there's five of us—and be damned to you!"

"Um!" said Jerry. "You mean there were five to begin with; you will observe that there are only four now. How many were with you looking for the airship?"

"Nobody but Pete. The others gimme the laugh—said I was pipe-dreamin'. What in hell are youse fellows—rangers?"

"Never mind who we are. Your troubles on that score are all in the past. Which one of you killed the engineer of the train you robbed?"

"I'll never tell you that. You can maul me to death with that rock, but I'll never tell!"

Jerry dropped the stone.

"You've told me what I wanted to know," he said genially. "You see, I wasn't sure your bunch was the one we were looking for. What have you done with the loot—'swag,' I believe you call it?"

For a third time the man swore lamentably, and this time the cursings were directed at his own ineptitude in admitting guilt that might so readily have been denied. Jerry didn't press the question of the hiding place of the stolen money. Instead, he asked:

"Have you had your breakfast?"

"Sure. What you askin' that for?"

"Just because it may be some little time before you eat again, that's all."

"Say!—you ain't goin' to leave me here in this damned hole, tied hand and foot till I can't move?"

"No; not just here and not tied. But one more question, if you please. Where is the trail out of this valley?"

"You won't find it in a month o' Sundays. That's one good thing, anyway!"

"Another little mistake on your part," Jerry returned quite pleasantly. "If we can't find it, you are going to show it to us—that is, if you happen to be the only member of your bunch left alive. Where is this man Pete who was with you?"

"To hell with your third-degree stuff!" was the rasped-out refusal to answer.

AGAIN Jerry picked up the stone. Now, the answer came, but it was only an evasion.

"I don't know nothin' about where he is—see?"

"I think you do, and I also think you will want to be able to chew your next meal—when you are lucky enough to get one."

"My God!" was the shuddering exclamation. "I believe you'd do it." Then: "Pete, he's down yonder at the airplane, I reckon."

"Hiding out so he can take a pot shot at us if we come back, eh? Thanks. That will be all for the present. Now I'm going to untie your feet and ask you to take a short walk with me."

While Jerry set out untying the outlaw's feet, the latter, who had been blinking dazedly at the candle, now turned his attention for the first time to the small figure with the candle.

"Dog-gone!" he exclaimed. "Strike me dead if it ain't a woman!" Then the unnerving uncertainties laid hold of him and shook him. "What you goin' to do to me, pardner?"

"Just be patient for another minute or so, and you'll see," was the affable rejoinder.

When the foot bindings were taken off, Jerry helped his captive to his feet and led him across the chamber to the passage in which lay the unknown miner's dumping pit.

"If you will bring the candle?" was Jerry's request to Patricia; and again she obeyed, like a marionette when the strings have been pulled.

When the upheld light showed the outlaw what was coming, he began to beg. Jerry's affability fell away from him like a cast garment.

"Yes; you're going down there, and it's up to you to say whether you go peaceably or make me throw you in with your hands tied. Say quick, which it's to be! Speak up."

The victim would have been something less than a man if he hadn't attempted to forestall the fate which was yawning for him, but he could make only a futile resistance with his hands tied behind him. At the close of the momentary struggle he was lying on his stomach, with his legs hanging in the pit, and Jerry was saying: "You'd better take it easy. If you'll hold still until I can untie your hands, you can drop without crippling yourself." Jerry loosened the knots. "Now, then, in you go, or I'll shove you in."

Having no alternative, the cowed bandit eased himself, cursing, over the edge, hung by his hands for a second or two, and then let go, with a cry which showed his fear that he was going to be dashed to death on the stones below. Jerry took the candle and held it so that its light shone into the pit. So far as could be seen, the prisoner was safe and not badly hurt. He was sitting on the pile of broken stone at the bottom of the chasm, rubbing his shins and protesting against his predicament. His voice rose to a despairing yell when the candle was withdrawn.

In silence they retreated a second time to the mouth of the cavern, and at the entrance Jerry once more extinguished

the light and restored the candle to its crack in the rock.

"Well, big boy, what next?" Patricia asked.

"Wouldn't you say that this little run-in with the man in the hole rather changes the face of things for us?" he inquired mildly. "If these chaps will only come at us one at a time——"

"But, Jerry, dear," she expostulated, "aren't you asking a frightful lot of your luck? I saw what you did a few minutes ago, and it was perfectly splendid. But they are all armed, and the next man might not let you rush him the way this fellow did. Besides, we are not exactly a sheriff's posse. All we want or need is to get out of this miserable trap, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes; I suppose the get-away is the main thing. But that has become a bit complicated now, don't you see? These chaps know that somebody—one somebody or maybe two—has dropped down into their hiding place. Under the circumstances they'll hardly rest easy until they've obliterated the somebody, if for nothing more than sheer safety's sake. In other words, the little war is on."

She looked at him with narrowing eyes.

"You're making it worse than it really is, Jerry; you know you are. What you mean is that you are fairly perishing to fight it out with these men."

"W-e-l-l," he admitted, with a smile that made his boyish face broaden into a full moon, "even a fat man may have a bit of ambition above golf and tennis. To quit now seems a bit like calling the game off right at the beginning of the first quarter. We've got the bunch for the first down, and I'd like to have a go at this Pete person who is waiting to ambush somebody at the plane. It's too good a chance to let slip."

She did not protest any more, save to point out that the robbers still numbered four to his one, with weapons to increase the tremendous handicap.

"Sure," he agreed. "It will have to be brains and brawn against steel-jacketed bullets. But if I can get my 'prentice hands on them, one at a time—— You're not going to make me call it off now, are you, Patsy?"

"N-no—not if you will let me help."

"You can help best by hiding out somewhere around here while I go stalk this Pete chap."

"Never in this world!" she exclaimed hastily. "I'll tag along with you, and if I can't help I shan't hinder. But—but I'm horribly afraid you'll get yourself killed."

As they crossed the terrace to the recent field of battle, Jerry kicked the broken rifle stock out of sight among the bushes and picked up the barrel.

"Sorry I had to be so awkward as to cripple this excellent weapon," he remarked. "I must try to be more careful next time. All the same, the gun barrel won't make such a bad club, if it comes to playing the cave-man game again."

Cautiously they began to make their way toward the place where they judged the stranded airplane would be. Jerry led the single-file advance and kept a sharp lookout for the ambusher who was to be ambushed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSING MAN.

As they approached from the new direction, with no remembered landmarks to guide them, it was some little time before Jerry and Patricia were able to locate the plane. When at last they caught a glimpse of its wings through the distant trees, Jerry promptly called a halt.

"No farther for you, Pat. I can't have you rushing in to stop a bullet, you know. You crawl under these little trees and keep out of sight, while I sneak up on the Pete person and do the bludgeon act."

"You'll be awfully careful, Jerry, boy?"

"Cautious—also cold-blooded," he declared. "Don't show yourself, no matter what happens."

Then he went on to reconnoiter. He had made almost a complete circuit of the small-glade landing place before he discovered the man for whom he was looking—a tall, sallow-faced ruffian, sitting upon a rotting log at the edge of the glade, with a rifle across his lap. Since a frontal attack upon the armed and alert ambusher would be fairly suicidal,

he made a wide detour to stalk the sitting bandit from the rear. But, when the circuit was made, he found that he had lost the chance to take the sitting enemy unawares. The tall man was now afoot, standing beside the disabled airship, and there was no cover near enough to conceal an approach.

Keeping out of sight in the thicket, Jerry waited. The tall outlaw was facing toward him, and there was no chance to make another circuit. With the man's watchful eyes searching the surroundings, he realized that any movement on his part would probably bring a shot from the half-poised rifle; and he decided it would be asking too much of the chapter of errors to count upon a second miss.

After a few minutes the man on guard at the plane began to move about, looking into the cockpits and under the fuselage at the wrecked ground gear, as if he were seeking some means of identifying the plane or its ownership. Twice, when his back was turned, Jerry measured the chances for a rush which would put him within striking distance, and each time he concluded he would be shot before he could race across the intervening open space.

Presently the bandit began to show signs of a growing impatience, either at the continued absence of his fellow searcher, or at the apparent futility of the watch he was maintaining. Hence, after he had looked and listened a little while longer, he strode off through the thicket, with his rifle at the trail, taking, as Jerry noted with a prickling shock of apprehension, a course which would lead him perilously near the place where Patricia had been told to conceal herself.

Gripping the rifle-barrel club, Jerry crawled out of his leafy covert and followed. Rightly estimating the brutal savagery of men who would kill to rob, he was shaken at the thought of what might happen if the tall villain should stumble upon Patricia's hiding place. She was in aviation clothes and would doubtless be mistaken for a man. In all probability, the retreating bandit would fire if he should get a sight of her. Completely indifferent to his own risk Jerry now hurried on, closing in upon the figure toiling up the slope in advance. Slipping from tree to tree, Jerry never lost sight of the climbing man ahead.

AFTER all, it was he, not the bandit, who came upon Patsy's hiding place, although the man with the gun must have passed within a few feet of her. With a backward wave of his hand, meant to warn her to stay where she was, he pressed on, alert to seize his advantage if it should materialize. For now it was evident that the tall fellow was heading for the place from which the sound of the single rifle shot had come. He was climbing the slope at an angle which would bring him out on the terrace in front of the mouth of the cavern.

Breathing hard, as he toiled up the steep ascent, Jerry continued the dodging pursuit. As matters were shaping themselves, there seemed to be an even chance that he would lose the advantage gained by the capture of one of the bandits. If the man he was trailing should discover the mouth of the cave, it was not likely that he would pass it without investigation. And an exploration of the cave would certainly result in the liberation of the prisoner in the pit. Jerry was hard-hearted enough to regret that he hadn't gagged the prisoner before dropping him into the pit. Now he registered a vow not to let his feelings hamper him a second time.

Mounting the slope in an easy, swinging stride, that made Jerry hurry to keep the man in sight, the bandit came out upon the terrace at almost the exact spot from which his fellow searcher had fired his rifle. Jerry, lying prone under some small trees a few yards away, waited breathlessly, muscles tensed for a leap and a rush, if the tall man should start across to the mouth of the cave. While he waited he heard, or thought he heard, a muffled shout; but that, he told himself, must be purely imagination. Surely no human voice could make itself heard from the bottom of the pit beyond the chamber of the spring. Besides, it was evident that the tall bandit had heard nothing; he was stooping to pick up something from the ground at his feet.

Jerry parted the low-hanging branches of the little trees to enable him to get a clearer view. The object the man had picked up and was examining curiously was a cartridge shell. It was the shell which had been ejected from the prisoner's rifle in the skirmish preceding the hand-to-hand encounter. Jerry got upon his hands and toes in a sprinter's starting position, ready for the dash. Surely, with the proof that the shot he had heard had been fired from this spot, the tall man would not go on without making some attempt to solve the mystery of his companion's disappearance.

But the only result of the discovery was a bit of pantomime which Jerry found difficult to understand. With a furtive glance across at the mouth of the cave, the robber turned and ran, disappearing among the trees to the right. Concluding, most naturally, that his quarry had gone to give the alarm to the others in the cabin clearing, Jerry was trying to decide what course to pursue next, when he saw that the tall fellow was edging back, slipping like an Indian from tree to tree, on the mountain-buttressed side of the terrace, thus approaching the cave from a direction which would keep him safely out of a line of fire.

Again Jerry made sure he was about to lose the results of his late capture. The tall bandit would easily discover that he had nothing to fear from the ambush afforded by the mouth of the cave. His first discovery would lead to the finding and rescuing of his companion who was a prisoner in the pit.

Nevertheless, the tall robber's precautions were farcially labored. When he had wormed his way silently into a grove of saplings, within a yard or so of the cave's mouth, he put his hat on the end of his rifle barrel and advanced it beyond his hiding place, as if to invite the fire of a hidden enemy. When nothing came of this, he crawled cautiously out of his covert on hands and knees and peered into the underground darkness, starting back with a strangled cry when a bat flew out of the opening.

Jerry, looking on, smothered a laugh. There was an irresistible element of farce comedy in the tall bandit's nervousness and fear of the unseen; an attitude curiously out of character in a man desperate enough to be a member of a gang of train robbers. And what followed kept even pace with what had gone before. Apparently, with a fresh grip on himself, the man crawled into the cave, then reappeared and ran to the biggest tree in sight. Here he threw himself on the ground and trained his gun upon the opening in the mountainside.

BY this time Jerry was beginning to be anxious about Patsy, left in hiding halfway down the slope. Divided between a determination to keep the tall bandit in view and a growing feeling that he ought to go in search of Patricia, he was both relieved and alarmed when he heard a subdued voice beside him say:

"It was lonesome down there. What are you looking at?"

He pointed to the rifle barrel protruding beside the tree behind which the robber had taken refuge. Then he whispered:

"Scene out of a Western movie. The tall chap has made up his mind that there's some one gunning for him in the cave, and he's waiting to get a crack at his imaginary foe. But this is a bit risky—your taking a front seat at the show."

"Never mind me. Why doesn't he go in and face it like a man?"

"He hasn't the heart for it. He tried it a minute ago and came chasing out as if the devil were after him."

"I know," she breathed. "He heard the other man shouting or groaning or something."

For a time that seemed like an age to the anxious watchers at the terrace edge, the timorous robber kept his gun trained upon the mouth of the cave. At last he rose silently and backed away, keeping in line with his sheltering tree until he was far enough from the cave to be out of danger. Here he wheeled about and strode off through the wood toward the cabin clearing.

Jerry had little doubt of what was to follow.

"Curtain's down on the first act," he

said. "He's gone to fetch the others, and in the second act all four of them will be discovered stalking the cave, which will mean that we'll lose our prisoner."

"We just mustn't let that happen," was the low-voiced reply. "You mustn't think of me as being a woman, Jerry. I'll come as near being a man as I can."

"Time—that's what we haven't got. It isn't more than a short half mile around to the cabin, and they'll be here before we can turn a hand."

"You're letting me hamper you," she protested. "What would you do if there were time, and you were alone?"

"I'd get that fellow out of the hole and take him to some place where they wouldn't find him so easily. But there is no time."

She started to her feet.

"We are losing time every minute! I see what you mean. Our best chance—our only chance—is to keep them mystified. Let's get that man out of the pit and run away with him. We can do it if we hurry."

He grinned approvingly at her. "You're the gamest thing I've ever met, Patsy, girl—no mistake about that. Come on!"

Together they ran to the cave and with the relighted candle hurried into the depths until they stood once more upon the brink of the jail pit. Jerry held the candle over the chasm, and they looked down. The pit was empty!

It was Patricia who first found voice to say:

"But he *couldn't* climb out, Jerry! Nobody but a human fly could do that! He is hiding down there somewhere. I'm sure of it."

He moved the candle about to make it throw its feeble beam into all corners of the irregular-shaped well hole. The maneuver revealed the mystery, or part of it. Under the overhanging wall to the left they could see a crevicelike opening, which had been partly obstructed by the unknown miner's spoil pile of broken stone. The débris had been cleared away from it, and now it was large enough to admit the body of a man creeping upon all fours. And through it came the draft of fresh air, which was making the candle flicker and threatened to extinguish it altogether.

"That's where he has gone," Jerry muttered disgustedly. "That crack probably leads to another opening, and we've lost him, good and proper. And that means that the sooner we get out of here the better—before the whole bunch comes up to pen us in!"

But when they turned back into the vaulted chamber of the spring they found that they were already too late. Looking out through the tunnel of escape they could see, in the bright patch of daylight framed by the cave's mouth, the figure of a man and a puff of smoke. The man was lighting a torch, and behind him there were other figures. The tall bandit had returned with his reënforcements.

CHAPTER VII.

TRAPPED.

FOR the first time in an unadventurous and rather too softly padded life, Jerry Manning was able to appreciate the sensations of the trapped rat. To try to fight out of the trap with no better weapon than the gun-barrel club, would doubtless mean quick suicide; a death in which Patricia, following him, would share. In the moment of appalled hesitation, it was Patricia's quick wit that suggested a possible means of escape.

"The pit!" she breathed. "If the other man got out that way, so can we!"

Retreating to the brink of the gulf, they looked down, and Jerry hastily considered the chance of a drop into it. Inasmuch as the vanished robber had made the drop apparently without injury, the thing could be done; but he would have to go first, and he had an unnerving vision of what would befall if he should fail to catch Patricia when she jumped in after him.

In the second of indecision he remembered the rough-hewn plank he had seen half concealed in the miner's tunnel; thrusting the candle into Patricia's hand, he moved the barrow and drew the plank out of its hiding place. It was only a hopeful guess that the unknown miner had some time used the plank to bridge the gulf, but the guess seemed to be con-

firmed when it was found to be long enough to span the gap, and that, with Patricia to help, he could thrust it across from brink to brink.

"You first," he ordered. "I'll come behind and steady you!"

But the girl ran across the narrow bridge as sure-footedly as a cat, turning quickly on the far side to hold the candle for him. With the rifle barrel for an all-too-short balancing pole, Jerry followed. The instant the crossing was accomplished, the plank was hastily withdrawn and carried back in the passage out of sight, and the candle was blown out in the nick of time. For the searchers were coming. Jerry and Patricia could hear voices and see the reflection of the light from the smoking pine torch, and presently they saw the flare of the torch itself.

"Better dig in deeper. They may see us here," Jerry whispered.

On hands and knees they groped their way into the unknown depths until a turn in the passage hid the growing light of the advancing torch.

By this time the bandits had reached the domed chamber of the spring, and their voices were echoing hollowly in the great vault. One of them was girding derisively at the tall one who had raised the alarm.

"You're one hell of a nervy holdup artist, Pete, to be fooled by a hole in the ground! Why didn't you bulge in here and look round f'r yourself, 'stead o' makin' us run half a mile f'r nothin'?" Then: "Hey! Lookit here! What's this?"

They had found the wheelbarrow with the mining tools in it, and there were profanely praiseful exclamations for the sly craft of the miner who had dug a barren prospect tunnel behind his cabin to camouflage his real mining operations.

Then, from one of the applauders: "Wonder if the guy found anything in here worth goin' after?" To which another replied: "Yeah, bo, I see you turnin' honest miner—I don't think!" And then a third voice: "What I'm guessin' at is what-all he done with his diggin's. There ain't no dump out in front o' this hole."

IT took them only a moment or two to discover the chasm in the right-hand passage, with its pile of broken rock at the bottom; and, as they gathered on the brink of the pit, the two in hiding beyond it had a fair sight of the faces illuminated by the upheld torch, as the four stood looking into the chasm. They were the faces of men who had lived hard and would die hard. Only one of the four was young; it was he who had scoffed at the tall man's lack of nerve, and he began it again.

"Scared stiff at yer shadder, wasn't you, Pete?"

The tall robber struck back. "You shut your meat trap, Cropsey! I've took about enough off'm you! There's that airplane down yonder to back up what I've been sayin'. I'm tellin' you we ain't got this hide-out to ourselves. And what's become o' Mart Glover? And what made him shoot off his rifle in front o' this damn hole? That's what I want to know!"

"Huh!" snorted the younger man. "Maybe he got buck fever, same as you, and shot at nothing. There ain't nothin' in here to shoot at—that's one shore thing."

"But where is he now?" persisted the tall one.

"More'n likely he's got on the track o' this here airplane butt-in, whoever *he* is, and is tryin' to run him down. We'd better be gettin' out o' here and seein' if we can't trail him."

This was the signal for a retreat, and presently the two hiding beyond the chasm were alone in the pitchy darkness. Patricia was the first to speak.

"That much of it, at least, is over," she sighed. Then: "Did you ever see four worse-looking miscreants, Jerry? Only the young one didn't have such an awfully bad face."

"They all look alike to me, and they'll all feel alike, when I get my hands on 'em," was the militant rejoinder. "Everything else aside, they're making me lose time that is worth more than diamonds and rubies." Then he relighted the candle and tucked it into a cranny in the passage wall, while he dragged the plank bridge out to serve its purpose again.

As he was doing this, Patricia, offering to help, stumbled over a pile of broken stone, heaped up under the candle niche, and fell down. Jerry promptly dropped the plank and turned back to pick her up.

"Not hurt, are you?" he inquired anxiously. When she laughed and said she was only clumsy, he went on: "I wonder what that little heap of rock is doing in here?" Then he stooped and picked up one of the fragments, holding it to the light of the candle.

"What is it?" Patricia asked.

"Another leaf out of the book of the lost and unknown miner," he replied. "This isn't rock; it's ore—gold ore. Look close, and you can see the little wire threads of yellow metal running all through it. That's what he had the plank for. Picked out his richest specimens and brought 'em over here for safe-keeping. He was a wise old chap, whoever he was —or is."

"Put a bit of it in your pocket, Jerry. When we get out of this and back into our own world—if we ever do—I shall need to have something to look at to convince me that this isn't all a bad dream. It's getting more and more unreal as we go along."

He pocketed the piece of rotten quartz and picked up the plank to carry it to the gulf and shove it across.

"All set," he announced, testing the bridge to make sure it was steady. But now Patricia, who had walked across it so fearlessly in the hasty retreat, drew back, saying, in the smallest of voices:

"I—I can't, Jerry. My nerve has gone. I can never go back over that bridge in cold blood!"

"Sure you can," he encouraged; "or, if you can't, I'll carry you. How about that?"

"That would be worse."

"All right; you go ahead, and I'll hold you."

"But—but the plank might break with both of us on it at once."

He laughed, thrust the candle into her hands, and, before she could stop him, he had gathered her in his arms and had walked the plank with her to safety on the other side.

"See how easy it was?" he said, putting her down and stooping to lift the bridge and restore it to its hiding place in the mine tunnel. "What's the use of being as fat as I am if the fat can't be used to some good purpose?"

Her answer was more or less enignatic.

"I'm learning, a little at a time, Jerry, dear. I told Uncle Judson I wanted to learn. And it makes little crinkles go up and down my back."

"What does?" he asked obtusely, taking the candle and looking to see that the fortunate plank was pushed back out of sight behind the débris in the mine tunnel.

"Lots of things," was the rather vague reply.

AND then they began the return to daylight, Jerry snuffing the candle as soon as they reached a point in the passage from which they could find their way without it.

Approaching the entrance with due circumspection, they found that the prudent precaution was not misplaced. The patch of daylight framed by the mouth of the cave held the figures of the four men. The bandits were grouped at the spot where the tall man had picked up the cartridge shell, and they were evidently speculating upon the meaning of the ground signs left by the short, but strenuous, battle of the early morning. Telling Patricia to stay behind and keep out of sight, Jerry edged as near to the entrance as he dared, hoping to be able to overhear what they were saying. But the distance was too great; he could hear the voices, but he couldn't quite distinguish the words.

Nevertheless, what they presently did was sufficiently explanatory. Three of them, led by the tall man, moved away to the right, as if following a trail, while the remaining one, the younger fellow who had been spoken of as Cropsey, started in the opposite direction, toward the cabin clearing. It was after they had separated that one of the three trailers, a stubble-bearded, heavy-set man, who appeared to be the leader, turned and shouted at the younger man:

"Hey, Jim! If you find Mart's come

in when you get to camp, you fire a couple o' shots to let us know."

Jerry heard this order distinctly, and when the coast was clear, he beckoned to Patricia.

"They're giving us another chance," he hastened to say, when she came up. "Three of 'em are trying to trail their lost man, and the fourth—the young chap—has gone back to the cabin, on the chance that the missing brother has turned up there since they left. He is to fire two shots if he finds the Glover fellow at home."

"Well?" she queried.

"It's right in our hands again, don't you see? I'm going after the camp keeper. When I do him up, we can pick the two best horses out of the bunch down yonder in the river bottom, saddle 'em, and ride for it. Anything wrong with that?"

"But the trail out of the valley," she suggested; "how are we going to know where to look for that?"

"That's easy. The camp-keeping chap is going to tell us how to find it when I'm through with him, or I'll know the reason why. The one fly in the pot of precious ointment is that I don't know just what to do with you while the show's going on."

Gray eyes met gray in the half light of the cavern gloom, and her answer was promptly submissive.

"So far, I've been only a drag on the wheels, Jerry, dear; and I don't want to be that. I'll stay here in the cave and give you a free hand, if that is what you want me to do."

He frowned thoughtfully. "You might be safer here than anywhere else, at that. They've just now satisfied their curiosity about this place, and they are not likely to come back to it. The other way around, there is no time to sell. If we can put the horse-stealing scheme over, things have got to move pretty swiftly before the gang can get together again. For that reason, perhaps, you'd better come along with me. You can stay on the outer edges till the thing's put across."

"Just as you say," she acquiesced meekly. "Did you say it was the young fellow who has gone back to the camp?"

"Yes; the one who was joshing the Pete person about his lack of nerve."

She shook her head doubtfully. "You will have to be careful. He isn't going to be so easy as the other man."

"Think not? Why?"

"Oh, I don't know; it's just one of those things you feel and can't explain. He—well, he laughs too easily, for one thing."

"And, for another, he is too good looking, eh? He *is* a rather handsome young jailbird; I'll admit that. But we're wasting the minutes. Let's go."

THE short half mile to the cabin site was soon traversed, and on the way they saw nothing of the man who had preceded them. Approaching the clearing, Jerry crept forward to spy out the situation. Apparently the camp keeper had gone into the cabin. At any rate, he was not to be seen. Jerry rejoined Patricia.

"I can't locate our man," he reported, "and we mustn't stay here where the others will stumble over us if they come back. We'll climb the slope and get in the rear of things."

Accordingly, they made a circuit up the boulder-studded slope behind and above the little clearing, halting at last upon a flat-topped rock from which they could look down, not only upon the clearing, but also over the terrace edge to the river level below, where the horses were feeding. The silence of the mountain immensities had settled down upon the scene; even the munching of the grazing horses came only as faint sighs to their elevated spying place.

While they waited, watching in the hope that the camp-keeping bandit would show himself, Patricia pressed her fingers to her eyes.

"Eyes tired?" said Jerry.

"No; I was just trying to make sure I'm awake and not dreaming," she answered. "Yesterday—in all the yesterdays—we were playing around, you and I, killing time in every silly way we could think of—butterflies, or gnats, if that is a better word. And now, Jerry, these men would kill us if they should find us, wouldn't they?"

"One of them has already taken a chance at that. Self-preservation, you know."

"And only this morning, a few hours ago, we were eating our early breakfast in the inn, with all manner of comfort and safety hemming us in, the bunch joshing us about the stunt we were going to pull off in Tommie's plane. And all this might have been ages and ages ago instead of a few hours. Don't I look a lot older than I did when we sat at breakfast?"

He examined the piquant face she turned to him, as he was in duty bound.

"Can't see that you do. Don't look quite so jolly as usual, maybe."

"You mean quite so idiotically reckless and empty-headed," she amended. "I don't believe I shall ever be that way again, Jerry."

"Sure you will," he asserted confidently; "I mean jolly, not the other. After we've fought our way out of this mess, as we're going to do, we'll——"

"Don't you believe people can change?"

"No doubt of it, if they want to badly enough. But I guess that doesn't often happen."

"You have changed, haven't you—since yesterday, or this morning, I mean?"

"Shouldn't wonder if it looks that way to you, Pat. In all the time we've known each other, you haven't seen anything but the perfectly useless side of me. It does me good to have something come along to stir me up. If I didn't have you along with me, I'd be having the time of my life."

"Then you are sorry I'm along? Don't say that, Jerry!"

"I didn't say it. Just thinking it was a bit tough on you; that's all. I'd like to spare you if I could."

"I oughtn't to be spared when I'm to blame for every bit of it."

"I haven't blamed you, have I?"

"No; but that is because you are an angel."

"I've been called an easy mark a lot of times, but you know I wouldn't lay it up against you, Pat."

"Why wouldn't you?"

He laughed again. "If I weren't a fat man I might tell you—and get a laugh. Let's talk about something pleasant."

"'Fat and well liking,'" she quoted softly.

"I know; that's what old King David said. But you'll remember he qualified it in the next three words: 'in their age.' Didn't say anything about fat yearlings."

As once before, she contradicted. "You're *not* fat, Jerry; you're just big."

"Sweet of you to say so, girlie, but the majority is against you."

"I don't care; I'm my own majority." Silence for a moment, and then: "I've been wondering what they will do at the inn when we fail to come back. They'll know something has happened and come to look for us, won't they?"

"H'm! The 'coming' will take some doing, won't it? No getting over here except by airplane, and the nearest plane would be at Laramie or Cheyenne. No; I guess it's up to us to work out our own salvation." A pause; then: "I'm not going to wait any longer for that chap down yonder to show himself. The other fellows will be coming back, and then it will be all up with us."

"What do you want me to do?"

"You stay right where you are and look on. There's bound to be a pretty bit of a circus when we mix it."

"You'll be careful, won't you, Jerry? I don't want to have your life to answer for, along with my other sins."

He put an arm across her shoulders. "You're a mighty good little scout, Patsy."

"You—you are just finding it out?" she asked.

"No; I won't agree to that. I guess I've known it all along."

"And you don't want to beat me now? I think you did a while ago, only you were too good-natured to admit it, even to yourself."

"Beat you? Well, hardly, my dear. I'll take it out in beating these bandit chaps, if the luck stays with me."

"You are going now? Would—would you mind kissing me, Jerry? Perhaps it might help the luck, you know."

"You little witch!"

He took her in his arms, but at the critical moment she held him off.

"Not unless you mean it, Jerry—please!"

"Mean it?—I'll mean it a lot more than you will—say, to-morrow or the next day. And, as you say, it will help the luck."

AND it was with her kiss warm upon his lips that he started toward the cabin clearing below the flat-rock observation post.

Stealthily he approached the tumble-down cabin, as the most likely place where the young bandit would be found. The caution, however, failed completely of its object, as the event proved, and it was the hunter, and not the hunted, who suffered the shock of a surprise. Before Jerry, keyed for a rush and a grapple, could reach the door of the shack, the young outlaw stepped out with his thumbs hooked in his belt and a grin on his face.

"Thought I glimpsed you up yonder on the rock, and I allowed maybe you'd come meanderin' down if I waited long enough," he remarked, the grin vocalizing itself in a chuckle. "Where'd you get the piece of a gun?" He pointed toward the rifle barrel in Jerry's hand.

Jerry weighed his chance coolly and found it wanting. Though the young fellow's hands were ostentatiously idle, there was a holstered Colt hanging on each thigh, with the holster tops cut away to permit the draw in which the hand is said to be quicker than the eye.

"Never mind about the piece of a gun," he said. "I'll throw it away if you'll drop those two gatlings and meet me like a man."

The outlaw grinned again.

"D'ye reckon I couldn't do you up without the gats? You got another guess comin'. I'm right handy with the mitts—or without 'em. Besides, you're a heap too fat. You're the birdman, ain't you? What you playin' a lone hand in this game for, with only a piece of a gun that won't shoot none?"

"We'll leave that as it stands," said Jerry amiably: "You say you saw me up yonder on the rock?"

"Shore I did. I been waitin' f'r you to come down. What you after—more'n what you've got right now?"

Jerry tossed the gun barrel aside and matched the bandit's grin.

"Just now I'd like to see if you can make your brag good about doing me up with your hands. I've had the gloves on a few times, myself. Suppose you try it?"

"Damned if I don't!" said the husky young train robber, with a laugh, as he unbuckled his pistol belt and stripped off his coat. "I been honin' f'r a chance to limber up on somebody 'r somethin'. You better shed that leather housin' o' yourn. You're shore goin' to need all the loose motion you got."

Jerry took off his leather aviation coat—or, rather, he struggled out of its too-close-fitting embrace—and flung it aside, hastening to cut the preliminaries short. Time was the essence of his bargain. Any moment the three searchers for the missing man might return.

"All right," announced the young husky, stepping out and putting his hands up. "Come on, and come a-shootin'."

Jerry led promptly, feinting with his right to cover a left hook to the jaw, and the ease with which the bandit ducked the hook and countered with a body blow, that was like the kick of a mule, told Jerry that he had caught a fighter, and that this time the battle was likely to go to the man who could stay with it the longest. Sparring for an opening, he tried for the jaw again, this time with his right, and again the blow missed the mark, the bandit taking it on his covering arm. Like a lightning flash the counter to the ribs followed, but Jerry had had his lesson, and he was not caught napping a second time.

"You got a good punch, fat boy. All the same, I can whale the daylights out o' you," said the husky, with the same satirical grin. "Throw in all you got. I'm a-comin'."

For the next two or three minutes Jerry was obliged to employ every trick of defense he had learned in his college days to stand off the husky's rushes. He had to save himself for the endurance trial which he was now more than ever certain would tip the scale in the end.

And even in the defense he did not come off scatheless. With a degree of skill

that proved he was no rough-and-tumble village boxer, the bandit landed two more of the body blows, these and a catapulting swing to the jaw which barely missed being a knock-out. Jerry grew warier and husbanded his breath. He could see that the fierce rushes were winding his antagonist; that his own chance would come later if he could live through to it. There was no referee to mark the end of a round with his stop watch and call "Time!" and this was the advantage that Jerry was counting upon.

But when the time did come; when the young outlaw, well breathed by his savage rushes, had to take the defensive, Jerry found that he still had his work cut out for him. Though he could now land with comparative ease, the young fellow proved to be a glutton for punishment, taking his medicine like a man and standing up to it even after his guard was beaten down and one eye closed. Pressing his advantage to the limit, Jerry finally got him with a lift to the jaw that was not to be denied, and the battle was over.

Well winded as he was, Jerry lost no time. Struggling into the too-small leather coat, he reeled across to the cabin doorstep and caught up the bandit's pistol belt and buckled it on. Next, he looked inside and secured the man's rifle, after which he picked up the gun-barrel club and flung it afar into the undergrowth. By this time the vanquished one was coming back to earth, with a puzzled expression on his battered face, and Jerry helped him to his feet and into his coat.

"It was a fair fight, and you lost out. Do you admit it?" he asked.

The young fellow attempted a grin, but the grin was only a grimace.

"You shore do pack a hell of a wallop in that there right o' yourn," he mumbled. "I reckon I was nigh about seventeen diff'rent kinds o' loco to take you up on your 'defy.' What-all you goin' to do to me?"

"You'll find that out later. Go on into the cabin and remember that it's no Marquis of Queensbury rules from this on. If you try to make a break, I shall be obliged to drill you with one of your own guns."

Inside the shack, Jerry quickly cut a bunch of leather thongs from the cantle of one of the saddles hanging on the wall, and with one of them he secured the fellow's hands behind him. Then he made him sit on the earthen floor in a corner, while he rummaged for provisions, found them, and hastily filled a haversack against later emergencies. By now he was realizing that his plan for stealing two or three of the horses for an escape was going to ask for more time than could be counted upon. Catching the animals, saddling them, and getting away —all this before the four bandits still at large could interfere, would take time.

Hence, leaving everything in the cabin much as he had found it, he marched his man out and up the slope toward the flat rock, uncertain as yet as to just what to do with him, but chiefly anxious to remove him out of sight and hearing before the other members of the original band should return to the cabin.

And it was in this order, the young bandit ahead, and Jerry following with the cocked rifle, that they came to the place where a rather white-faced young woman was awaiting them.

CHAPTER VIII.

"AS THE CAT ATE THE GRINDSTONE."

THE whirlwind battle, fought to its finish in plain sight from her lookout rock above the clearing, had stirred in Patricia many conflicting emotions. Primitive rejoicings in this fresh revelation of lusty manhood in Jerry; ungrudging admiration for the young bandit who had thrown his guns aside and accepted the challenge to a fair fight; palpitating anxiety lest the three absentees should return in the midst of things—all of these emotions conspired to make her tongue-tied, as Jerry, a more or less battered Jerry, came toiling up the slope with his much more battered prisoner.

But there was no time to be wasted in speech. The thing to be done, and quickly done, was to isolate the prisoner.

"You'll tag along behind," Jerry said to Patricia. Then to the young bandit, who was echoing his predecessor's explosion of mystified astonishment upon dis-

covering that the other half of the invading force was a woman: "To your right up the slope, and be quick and quiet about it. And don't forget what I said about the Queensbury rules. They're all off now."

With a persuasive rifle muzzle within a foot or so of his back, the bandit led the single-file march diagonally up the mountainside, winding about among the trees and scattered boulders and climbing steadily until Jerry called a halt in a labyrinth of the great rocks at what he judged was a safe distance above the terrace and the cabin clearing. Giving the captive leave to sit down, with his back to one of the boulders, Jerry drew aside with Patricia.

"I'm like the fellow who had the bear by the tail," he confided, with his best grin. "Now I've got him, I don't know what to do with him. If I could only be inhuman enough to hog tie and gag him and leave him here among these rocks, I'm——"

"Oh, no! You couldn't do anything so barbarous as that!" she protested. "He fought you fairly, you must remember."

"I know he did; that's what makes me so lenient about it. But I don't know what else to do with him. If that hole in the cave had only turned out to be a good jail, I could have stored him there. But it didn't, it seems."

She knitted her brows thoughtfully. "Of course, you'll have to leave his hands tied, and tie his feet to keep him from running away. It's just the gag that seems too awfully brutal. I can't think of any place but the cave. You said they wouldn't be likely to go there again, since they hadn't found anything suspicious when they explored it a while ago. Wouldn't the place where the spring comes out be safe enough, if he were tied so he couldn't get away? He couldn't shout loud enough to make himself heard outside, could he?"

"No, I guess not; guess that's the least of the evils. Will you stay up here while I take him down and hitch him? You must be pretty weary by now, with all this chasing around."

"I'm not tired. You've been doing all the hard work, and I haven't done anything but look on. We'll go on sticking together, if you don't mind."

Jerry crossed over to the bandit and helped him to his feet.

"We hit the trail again, fellah," he announced, "and it'll be more of the same: Quick and quiet, you know, or a bullet in the back."

The young bandit tried to fix him with his one good eye.

"You'd plug a poor cuss that had his mitts tied and couldn't help himself?"

"Surest thing you know, if you raise a yell or try to break away. They call me an easy mark, but I shouldn't advise you to bank too much on that."

"Easy nothing—I don't think!" was the bandit's comment, accompanied by a grin which the closed eye and swollen jaw turned into a gargoyle grimace. "Which way do we go?"

JERRY indicated the direction, and the march was resumed, at the risk of running into the three remaining outlaws if they should chance to be returning to the cabin along the terrace. But nothing so untoward as this happened, and the descent to the cave was accomplished without incident. At the entrance Jerry halted his prisoner until the candle could be lighted, and then he marched him on to the vaulted chamber of the spring.

"Say, big boy, ain't it about time to tell me what's comin' to me?" demanded the captive, after Jerry had made him sit beside the spring, and was tying his ankles with one of the saddle thongs.

"No objection to that," said Jerry affably. "I'm going to leave you here for safe-keeping, while I go after your buddies."

The young fellow tried to summon his sardonic grin.

"Hell!" he remarked. "D'you reckon they'll give you any such fool chance as I did? Not much, they won't."

Jerry matched the grin with his most attractive smile. "Now that I have your Colts and the rifle, I shan't ask them to."

Silence reigned for a moment or two, while Jerry went in with the tying of knots.

"Say, friend, who are you, anyhow,

playin' a lone hand this a way? You ain't one o' the railroad dicks, are you?" asked the bandit.

"Got you guessing, have I? Well, that won't do you any harm. It will give you something with which to occupy your mind."

It was after he had finished tying the fellow's ankles to his satisfaction that Jerry was moved to reconsider the matter of the gag. It was not a great distance from the spring chamber to the mouth of the cave, and a lusty shout might possibly carry to the outer air. He took the bandit's neckerchief and was knotting it in the middle, when the captive began to plead.

"Not that, f'r the love o' Mike!" he begged. "I ain't kicked none yet at what you're doin' to me, have I? You got me hamstrung and hog tied, ain't you? How am I goin' to roll over and get me a drink o' water if you tie that rag in my mouth?"

"Sorry," said Jerry; "but I can't have you raising the neighbors with your shouts for help. You know that."

"But, say—look here! S'pose I give you my word that I won't yell?"

"The word of a train robber? Strikes me that is asking a lot. Hold still!"

It was at this point that Patricia, who was again serving as candle holder, touched Jerry's shoulder and beckoned him aside.

"I'm hearing something," she whispered. "It sounds like somebody groaning. Listen! Can't you hear it?"

The sounds, which were something less than groaning, seemed to be coming from the passage leading to the jail pit. Jerry took the candle, and they went together to the edge of the pit. At the bottom of the chasm they saw the body of a man stretched out upon the pile of broken stone. Jerry chuckled.

"So the cat came back, did he? That air passage he dug into wasn't big enough to let him out. That's fine! Once again we're in luck!"

"Is he dead?" Patricia asked in a hushed whisper.

"Not at all. He's asleep and snoring. We'll wake him up in a minute or so and give him a bit of a surprise."

"Bit of good news for you," he said, going back to his latest capture and kneeling to unbind the young fellow's ankles. "You won't have to be gagged, after all."

"Say!" the captive broke in brightening up at once. "You goin' to turn me loose?"

"Not quite so good as that; just going to give you the freedom of the jail. Get up and come with me."

AS one in a daze of mystification, the bandit suffered himself to be led across the chamber, but when he reached the edge of the prison pit and saw what his reprieve meant, bound as he still was, he would have followed the militant example of his predecessor, if Jerry hadn't stepped back quickly, covering him with one of his own six-shooters.

"Nothing like that, you know. The fight's all over, so far as you're concerned. Just now you have the choice of being shoved in as you are, and getting a pretty hard fall, or going down with your hands free, as the other chap did. Which is it to be?"

The captive looked again into the depths and recognized the figure recumbent on the pile of rock. "My soul!" he whispered hoarsely. "It's Mart! Say, did you kill him and dump him down there?"

"Oh, no." Jerry was affable again. "He isn't dead; he's asleep. We'll let you wake him up. Lie down on your face and let your legs hang over. Then I'll untie your hands, and the rest of it will be up to you. Don't be too long about it. I might get impatient, you know, and dump you in, with a bullet in your body."

Reluctantly the young bandit got down and rolled over on his stomach, wriggling himself backward until his legs were hanging in the gulf. Jerry opened his pocketknife, stooped, and slashed the wrist-binding thong, springing aside in time to escape the swift grab the victim made at his legs with the freed hands.

"Oh, no," said Jerry, with his easy-going laugh. "Nothing like that." Then: "Down you go. If you're not in before I count three——" The big pistol was brought into play again.

Cautiously the man backed over the edge, lowered himself, hung by his hands for a moment, as the other had done, and dropped. At the same moment there was a startled yell from the depths, and the sleeper bounded to his feet.

"We'll leave 'em to swap experiences in the dark," said Jerry, drawing Patricia away. "That's two—two gone and three to come. We're doing fine!"

"But, Jerry, dear—with two of them down there to plan together, aren't you afraid they'll think up some way to get out?"

"It will take a bit of thinking. No; no fear of that; the jug's too deep. They are safe enough, and we are near to the horses. Now we'll see how quickly we can reach the other three."

"Mightn't we get the horses now, while the coast is clear?"

"We don't know that the way is clear. The others may have gone back to the cabin by this time." He held the candle to the face of his watch and exclaimed in surprise. "Great cats! Do you know that it's nearly noon?"

She shook her head repentantly. "Half a day gone, and we're still miles from a telegraph wire. How you must be hating me for getting you into this horrible mess, Jerry."

"Don't you think it for a minute. Far as it's gone, I'm rather enjoying it. Besides, didn't I tell you I was taking the will for the deed? You thought you were doing me a kindness. Let's stop for a few minutes and have a bite to eat. The tussle with that young husky made me remember that we breakfasted at a perfectly ungodly hour this morning."

Just inside the entrance to the cave they sat on the ground and investigated the contents of the haversack Jerry had filled in the cabin. The hastily gathered supplies were neither very plentiful nor varied; two tins of baked beans, one of tomatoes, one of deviled ham, and a couple of cartons of crackers. While they were eating, Patricia said:

"Then you do believe I was trying to do you a friendly turn when I kidnaped you, Jerry.

"Huh! If I didn't believe it, I should promptly lose faith in all humankind."

"That would be sad. But the implication is rather flattering."

"It's a lot more than an implication. I've always thought of you as a man's woman, Pat, and you are that. You're proving it to-day."

"Just what do you mean by 'a man's woman?' "

"A woman to whom a man can tie to and swear by, through thick and thin; a woman with that not-too-common quality, the capacity for utter loyalty. Some men have it, but a good many women haven't, you know."

"I don't agree with that last. A woman can be as loyal as a man—when there is anything worth being loyal to. I'm much obliged if you think I have it, Jerry."

"I know you have it. But tell me—weren't you just the least bit suspicious when your Uncle Judson roped you into this?"

"I suppose I ought to have been; that is the bitter taste in my mouth. I know Uncle Judson well enough to be sure he wouldn't scruple to use me, or any one, to further his own ends. But—but he made it so—I mean, he put it up to me in such a way—— Oh, please don't make me talk about it, Jerry. I'm ashamed enough, as it is."

"You needn't be."

"But I am. All your plans for the Titan smashed, and your father's whole life work gone to pot just because I was silly enough to be persuaded to meddle. I shall never get over it, Jerry."

"Oh, see here! Hold on! We're not stuck yet. We've got until to-morrow noon to reach a telegraph office, and we won't say die until we're dead."

But at this she only shook her head disconsolately. "It's as good as settled. If we could get the horses and start right now, I'm afraid we couldn't get to a wire by to-morrow noon. You see, we don't even know where this valley is—where we are."

"Don't worry," he cut in cheerfully. "Want a drink of water before we strike out again? I'll go back to the spring with you."

"I wouldn't mind. Those crackers were awfully dry."

THEY had put the candle out, but by now the passage was familiar enough so that they threaded it without difficulty in the faint light that came from the opening. Making their way silently into the vaulted chamber, they knelt beside the spring and drank from cupped hands. They could hear the two men talking in the pit, but they could not distinguish the words. After he had satisfied his thirst, Jerry stole over to the brink of the pit, feeling his way cautiously. When he came back he was chuckling.

"They've swapped stories and are scrappin' like the Old Harry, each blaming the other for the fix they're in," he explained, as they felt their way back to daylight.

"You think they can't get out?"

"Not a chance. Our first captive was telling his mate that he'd worn himself out trying; that they were due to stay there, as he put it, 'till hell freezes over,' unless somebody came to haul them out.'

"What do we do next?"

"It's moving day again for us. We want to be somewhere in the neighborhood when those other three brigands turn up at the cabin—if they haven't already turned up. When we find out what *they* mean to do, we'll know what *we* have to do."

"Yes, but, Jerry, don't you think we'd better wait now until night before we try to get the horses? I know it's a terrible waste of time, but——"

"Not much chance to turn the horse-stealin' trick even in the dark, now that the war's on. With two of their five missing, the three that are left are not going to be caught napping if they can help it. Besides, we'll have to have saddles and bridles, and these are hanging in the cabin."

"In that case we will——"

"You've guessed it. We've got to go on as we've begun. We must round up the rest of the gang before we can take the horses."

"But, Jerry, just you alone against three desperate men?"

He laughed. "I've been doin' pretty well so far as I've gone, haven't I? When we get back to the peopled world I'll probably be the same old easy mark I've always been; but just now I've ambitions. If you're a bit rested, we'll start out again."

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"What else?"

"I was just thinking. If you'd give me one of those pistols, I could go and sit by the spring and be ready to scare those two men back if they should try to get out of the pit."

"Fine!" he applauded. "I believe you'd have the nerve to do just that little thing, if I'd let you. But those two chaps are perfectly safe right where they are, and I shall feel a lot easier if you tag along with me. Let's go."

Again, for reasons of caution, they lost themselves quickly in the wooding of the slope above the mouth of the cave, retraversing a good part of the course they had taken with their latest prisoner. Reaching the flat-stone lookout above the cabin clearing, they saw smoke rising from the chimney of the shack. This was proof that one or more of the three remaining bandits had returned, and that a fire had been kindled for the cooking of the midday meal.

Handing Patricia one of the big revolvers, with a caution to her to keep well out of sight, Jerry freed himself of the haversack and began to work his way down toward the rear of the shack. After an interval, which seemed no less than an age to the young woman cowering on the flat-topped rock, he reappeared as silently as he had slipped away.

"They are all down there, eating their dinner, and we've got 'em going," he reported exultantly. "There's nothing like a bit of mystery to warp the nerves, even of a bunch of desperadoes. They know something's happened, but they don't know what it is."

"What do they say?"

"When I got to where I could listen in, they were wrangling over the disappearance of their camp keeper. One of them was arguing that the young husky would turn up presently, but the two others were more than doubtful. They were insisting gloomily that whatever had happened to the first missing man had also happened to the Cropsey chap, which places them in the class of good guessers.

Then there is the airplane, which they've all seen now, to add to the mystery."

"What will they do?"

"They're all up in the air about that. The tall chap, whom they call Pete, is all for a quick get-away with the loot. But the two others seem to have a bit more of the honor that is said to exist among thieves. They don't want to leave the two missing ones to whatever fate has befallen them; and they argue, very sensibly, that the airplane couldn't have brought more than two persons into the valley, at most. Just the same, they are all pretty badly on edge, and they'll be more so when they find that Cropsey doesn't come back."

AT this, Patricia offered a suggestion that made Jerry wonder how it came about that he had known her so long without having learned to know her better.

"You say they are eating; why can't we steal down there and surprise them? I'm not afraid."

Jerry laughed.

"You blessed little Amazon! I think I can see you aimin' that big six-gun and tellin' 'em to hold up their hands! But we mustn't risk too much on a single throw. We'll wait and see what they do after they've finished their dinner."

The wait was not long. A few minutes later, one of the three, the tall one, came out of the cabin, and he was shortly joined by the others. It was indicative of their state of mind that they didn't separate, and that each had already contracted the habit of looking over his shoulder at short intervals. Jerry fingered the stolen rifle.

"If I were only as merciless as I ought to be, I could pot them, one at a time, from here," he remarked.

Patricia shook her head. "You couldn't do that, Jerry, no matter how bad they are, or what they've done. It would be murder."

"Yes, I guess it would. No doubt they'd murder us quickly enough, however, if they were given the chance."

"Hush!" she cautioned. "They're listening!"

The three were not only listening; one of them was pointing up the mountain. Suddenly the pointer lifted his rifle and fired two shots in quick succession, one of the bullets cutting a twig from a tree and dropping it into Patricia's lap. Jerry's first impulse was to return the fire. As he had said, he could easily have brought down one of the three, and perhaps two, with a single shot at the point-blank range. But even at such a crisis the civilized inhibitions were too strong to be overcome.

"Down!" he commanded, drawing Patricia lower on the flat rock; and then: "He didn't see us; he was merely banging away at random." Then, remembering that two shots in succession were the agreed-upon signal: "They are trying to call the missing men in."

If that were the intention, the signal was not repeated; and shortly afterward the three men retreated to the cabin. With their disappearance there was another wait, this time a long and tedious one. Jerry was hoping that something would occur to make the trio separate, but at the same time he guessed that the continued absence of the two missing ones would warn them to be still more wary.

He gave them credit for ordinary penetration. It was only when two of their number had isolated themselves that they had disappeared. The conclusion would be apparent, even to the dullest intelligence. Since the airplane could not have brought more than two enemies, the trio would argue that they were still three to two and were measurably safe, so long as they remained together and were watchful against a surprise.

What was most to be feared was that the counsels of the tall man would finally prevail; that the three would take their loot and the horses and decamp, leaving the missing men to whatever mysterious fate had befallen them. This, Jerry knew, would leave him with two prisoners on his hands, and with no means of getting out of the valley; no means for Patricia and himself, or for the two captives, who could not be left indefinitely to perish of hunger and thirst in the cavern pit.

While they were waiting impatiently for something new to turn up, Jerry

talked all this over with Patricia; and, for once in a way, she had nothing helpful to suggest.

"It seems as if we had rather come to the end of the passage, doesn't it?" was all she could say. "And if the three men go away and take all the horses, that will be the end of everything. I wish we could know what they are doing over on the other side of the big range at the Alta Vista. Surely, long before this, the bunch will know that something has happened to us. Of course, Uncle Judson will know, or think that he knows; but the others won't."

"Um! Another plane would be the answer to that, but, as I've said, they wouldn't be able to get a plane and a pilot any nearer than Laramie or Cheyenne, or possibly Denver. And that would take time."

"Still, I think we are both important enough to make them hurry. And there would surely be an army plane at Fort Russell."

As if the bare mention of a rescue plane had evoked it, they both heard a faint and far-distant humming—a sound that is never to be mistaken by any one who has ever heard it.

"Listen!" Patricia whispered.

Jerry was listening, and he heard the welcome sound, realizing at the same instant what an infinitesimally small chance there was of the searching pilot spotting their wrecked machine in the small, tree-surrounded glade into which it had fallen.

"It's a plane, all right," he said; "but that's all the good it will do us, unless the pilot happens to spot Tommie's ship and makes a landing. Take a fresh grip on your nerve, Pat. You're going to need it."

CHAPTER IX.

THE THIRD DEGREE.

WITH help so near and yet as unavailable as if it were a thousand miles distant, they listened to the growing hum of the plane. From the manner in which the sounds swelled and then died away, they soon gathered that the pilot was quartering the upper air over the shut-in valley, coming and going in wide circles. Obviously he was searching for something that was lost. Though the flat-rock observation post afforded a view outward and downward, the surrounding forest narrowed the skyward outlook; and, even when the motor roar was at its loudest, they could not get a glimpse of the ship. Once they made sure the plane must be nearly overhead, a conviction which was confirmed when they glanced down and saw the three bandits crowding the doorway of the cabin, with their faces upturned to the sky.

"The pilot sees the cabin and the clearing," Jerry guessed. "But, if he is flying low enough, he will also see the dilapidated roof and argue that the shack is deserted."

"But won't he see the men standing in the doorway?"

"Not likely. You see, they're keeping pretty well out of sight."

"Still, he'll see the horses down there in the river meadow, won't he?"

"They won't necessarily mean anything to him; probably call 'em a band of wild horses and let it go at that. Just the same, if he's low enough to see the horses, he may see Tommie's ship."

But, as the roar of the motor alternately increased and diminished, the hope of a possible rescue grew less and less. Though the sounds indicated that the pilot was still circling over the valley, it soon became evident that now he was spiraling for more altitude, and Patricia was moved almost to tears.

"So near and yet so far!" she lamented, when the humming roar had dwindled to the faintest buzzing in the vast, upper distances. At which Jerry turned comforter.

"Now's when you need that fresh grip I was talking about," he broke in. "We're no worse off than we were before. You're not going to weaken now, are you, Pat?"

She smiled. "It was only a passing gulp. You'll allow that much to my sex, won't you?"

"That and a lot more, if you need it. Most women in your place would be——"

"No; you've got us wrong, Jerry. Hysterics went out with good Queen Victoria. It's only just that so many of us frivolous creatures never have to go up against the real thing."

"Huh! If it comes to that, I'm in the same class."

"Maybe. But you can brace yourself when it comes to the pinch. You've done it to-day."

"Thanks. Not altogether an easy mark, eh? Wait till we are back on earth again. I'm afraid I'll be the same old shoe, Pat."

"No, you never will—at least, not to me."

He looked at her with a grin that was half quizzical, half hungering.

"If I thought you meant that——" he began.

"I do mean it. What are those men doing now?"

"They are watching the plane disappear, and they are probably as greatly relieved and pleased as we aren't. Never mind; they're still tangled up in the mystery of their decreasing census."

After this there was another long and fruitless wait, endured with growing impatience on Jerry's part. He was hoping the three would sally out again in search of the missing members of the gang. This would open one or two doors for further action; if the men should separate, there would be another chance to bring the "divide-and-conquer" method to the fore; or, if they remained together and should go far enough afield, it would be easily possible to escape with the horses.

But, as the afternoon waned to its close, it became discouragingly evident that neither door was to be opened. As the shadow of the western mountains began to creep over the valley, the watchers on top of the flat rock were sure only of one thing—that the men had not left the cabin; an assurance that was made doubly sure when smoke began to curl again from the chimney, in token that the bandits were about to prepare their evening meal.

After the two watchers had made another inroad upon the contents of the stolen haversack, Jerry looked at his watch.

"We've lost the day; that's one safe bet," he commented, adding: "I thought surely they would have made some move before this time."

"Perhaps they are waiting for dark to take their plunder and the horses and run away," was Patricia's contribution to the guesses.

"Might be, at that. Just the same, this thing is getting mighty monotonous. If they won't make a move, I shall."

"But what can you do if they don't separate?"

"I'll wait until dusk and then see if I can't contrive to hold all three of them up in a bunch. It's the only thing to do. When they are satisfied that the two missing men have lost the number of their mess, they'll take their swag and the horses and vanish, as you say. And we've got to have at least two of those horses—that's flat."

"But, Jerry, they are still three to one!"

"Right. But it seems that we can't turn the divide-and-conquer trick any more."

WHEN the time for action came, as it did within the next hour, Jerry got up and stretched to take the cramp out of his muscles, and Patricia stood up with him.

"I'm going along," she declared firmly. "I can take one of the pistols, and they needn't know I'm not a man—not until after the fact, anyway."

But to this Jerry's negative was instant and positive.

"You'll do nothing of the sort! I don't question your nerve; but, as likely as not there'll be gun play, and I'm not going to take the chance of having you stop a bullet. So that's that, you blessed cave woman."

"But you'll be taking that chance yourself."

"Maybe. But there is no sense in multiplying the thing by two, don't you see? Besides, I've got to be free to do whatever has to be done."

"You think I'd just be in the way; but I wouldn't."

He took her face between his hands and kissed her.

"That's your answer, you little Amazon. I think a lot too much of you to let you take a risk that can be dodged. You're in badly enough as it is."

What she said was entirely irrelevant.

"Do you know, Jerry, that is the first time you've ever kissed me? I'm wondering if you really meant it?"

"Sure I meant it. And it isn't the first time I've wanted to—not by a long row of horses' heads."

"But you have kissed other girls. I've seen you."

He laughed good-naturedly.

"With all of your up-to-dateness, Patsy, dear, you don't know men very well. Of course I have. But this is different."

"Is it really?"

"It is really; so different that, if we ever get out of this damnable mess alive, I'm going to——"

"Don't say it," she interrupted quickly.

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"Because of a lot of things. For one, when we go back to the world—our world—you'll see how mistaken you were. You won't let me go down to the cabin with you?"

"Not an inch. I'll leave you one of the six-guns. Can you manage it if you have to?"

"Oh, I guess so. I've shot some at a mark. You'll be awfully careful?"

"Naturally, with your safety to think of."

"You should think first of your own. If one of them should shoot at you, you're so big, Jerry, dear, that he couldn't miss you."

"Well, if it comes to that, I'll try to shoot first, don't you see?"

"I hope you will." Then: "Will you kiss me again, Jerry—just so I'll know for sure you're not hating me for getting you into this horrible tangle?"

He did it, quite solemnly this time, taking her leather-coated little figure in his arms and saying: "You think I'll change my mind about what you stopped me from saying just now, when we go back to civilization? You have another guess coming. Don't do anything rash while I'm gone." And with that he slipped away in the gathering dusk.

BEING a city-bred person and no woodsman, and having a bit of weight to carry, he found the descent of the slope in the increasing darkness rather difficult without making more or less noise. Yet, as he paused from time to time to listen, he could hear nothing to make him think he had given the alarm to the men in the cabin. Approaching the building from the rear, he could hear voices and smell tobacco smoke, from which he gathered that the outlaws had finished their supper; a matter for regret, since he had hoped to be able to surprise them while they were eating.

Nevertheless, he went on, rifle in hand, circling the shack toward the open door, through which the firelight shone fitfully. At the corner of the building he stopped for an instant to cock the rifle and to make sure that the revolver he had retained was loose in its holster. These were merely precautions. If the surprise should be as complete as it was planned to be, there would be no need for guns.

This was what he was saying to himself, as he stole silently to the open door and looked in. What he saw in the firelighted interior gave him an unnerving shock. The slab table which, apart from a couple of rude benches, was the only piece of movable furniture the cabin contained, had been drawn out before the fire. On it were the tin plates and coffee cups and the remains of the supper. But where there should have been three men sitting at the table, there were only two.

So much Jerry saw, as he was raising the rifle to command the interior of the shack; then he had a fleeting impression that the black bowl of the heavens had fallen in upon him. There was a crash, as of an explosion, a coruscating burst of firework stars and a blank.

When he came back to the surface of things present and comprehensible, the emergence out of the sea of oblivion was painfully gradual. There was a roaring in his ears, and his head throbbed, as if some one were beating time upon it with a hammer. In the confused dimnesses out of which he was struggling, he heard a voice say:

"Hell! You ortn't to 'a' croaked him, Pete—not till we'd had a chance to make him talk. You never did have any sense!"

"I didn't, I keep tellin' you. He ain't no more dead than I am. Look at that!"

Jerry was conscious that he was gasping for breath, and that some sort of nightmare incubus was half paralyzing the effort. When the paroxysm passed, he found that he was lying on the earth floor of the cabin, surrounded by the three outlaws; also, he realized now that his stumbling descent to the clearing must have given the alarm, so that the tall bandit had had time to slip out and bludgeon him from behind, as he was looking in at the door. And with the clearing of his mind, he knew well enough what he had to expect—knew and steeled himself to meet it.

"Wake up and talk, you damn false alarm!" ordered the one who had spoken first, emphasizing the command with a brutal kick. "Who are you? And where did you come from? Talk fast, if you want to go on livin'!"

With clearing senses, Jerry scanned the overhanging faces of the three, and the searching look confirmed the impression made by his first sight of them in the torchlight across the chasm in the case. There was nothing human to be expected of such men as these. In such crises the mind acts swiftly. He remembered that as yet these three did not know that the airplane had brought two persons to the valley. So long as they could be kept unaware of Patricia's presence, there was a hope that she might escape somehow; at all events, there was a hope that she might not fall into their hands.

"You're barking up the wrong tree. You'll get nothing out of me," he said and tried to sit up; but the throbbing in his head made everything turn black, and he had to fall back.

"You won't talk, hey?" came the harsh voice, with another savage kick. "If you don't, we'll make you wish you'd died a-bornin'! How many of you lit down in that bird machine down yonder in the flat?"

Jerry saw his opportunity and caught at it.

"You've got the whole crew," he said, trying to compass a grim smile.

"Hell!" said the third man. "Playin' a lone hand, was you? If your nerve had happened to grow a little bigger, it would 'a' busted you wide open. What have you done with Mart Glover and Jim Cropsey?"

He sparred for time—time in which to get a better grip on himself.

"What makes you think I've done anything with them?"

"You needn't make any o' them false motions. You had Jim's rifle and one o' his side guns. What you done with him and Mart? Talk up!"

JERRY saw that he had another advantage, if only he had the fortitude to hold it. They wouldn't be likely to kill him outright so long as there remained the hope that they might make him tell what had become of the missing men. The fortitude would be needed if they should resort to torture, as they were likely to do. It was in full view of the possible consequences that he said:

"As I told you at first, you'll get nothing out of me; and if you kill me, you'll never find out what has become of your two mates. More than that, they'll both die a worse death than any you can invent for me."

"Is that so? We'll try you a few, anyhow!" snarled the tall man. Then to one of the others: "Get the rope off my saddle, Bill."

Despite the throbbing head and the sickness it entailed, Jerry did his best when they fell upon him to tie his thumbs together. He got a foot against the stomach of the tall man and sent him staggering backward into the fire, burning on the hearth. But it was three to one, and Jerry was already half disabled. In a few minutes they had his thumbs in a loop of the horse rope, and, with the rope thrown over one of the sagging rafters of the cabin, they were hauling him upright, first to his feet and then to his toes. The torture was intense, but Jerry set his teeth to endure it. His will never wavered, but outraged Nature came to his relief and drew a black curtain before his eyes.

When he came to, the tall man was kneeling beside him and dashing cold water into his face, while one of the others, the thick-shouldered, stubble-bearded one, who seemed to be the leader of the gang, stood ready to question him. The

pain in his tortured thumbs was keen agony, but it was some consolation to find that he could still move them. They were not broken or pulled out of joint, as he fully expected they would be.

"What you done with Mart and Jim?" The question came like a shot, the instant he opened his eyes.

There is a point beyond which all the reasoning faculties step down, giving place to sheer maniac rage, reckless of consequences. Jerry knew that these men would kill him the moment he had told them where they would find the missing members of the gang.

"Damn you!" he choked. "I'll see you in hell before I'll tell you! Do you get that?"

"Fetch me a stick o' wood out o' the fire, while I take his shoes off," said the tall man. "I'll make him tell."

At that, Jerry leaped up, no longer a reasoning being but a fighting madman, with the superhuman strength of madness to make him insensible to pain and to endow him temporarily with the might of an enraged giant. His first blow sent one of the three to the farther corner of the cabin, and when the two others fell upon him and strove to pin him down, the struggle became a wild-beast fury, in which the madman rolled with his clinging captors on the floor. Jerry struck out, bit, kicked, freed himself for an instant, then sprang up and reached for one of the guns leaning against the wall. Instantly he was pulled down again, and the battle on the floor of the cabin began again. This time the third bandit, recovering from the blow which had sent him into a corner, threw himself into the tangle of human bodies thrashing about underfoot.

In the course of the struggle the slab table was overturned, and one of its legs, making a scythelike sweep through the fire on the hearth, scattered the burning brands into the room. In the corner nearest the chimney the former owner of the cabin had built his bunk, and its thick mattress of fir tips was now as inflammable as gunpowder. Into this bed of kindling fell some of the flying firebrands, and in an instant the bunk was a mass of roaring flame that licked up the wall to the remains of the roof, where it found fresh fuel in the dry and resinous logs and timbers.

BUT the struggle on the floor did not stop. All of the combatants were disabled and blinded by the smoke, and they were forced to leave the cabin to escape being roasted alive. Jerry, bruised and bleeding, but still raging like the madman he had become, was held in the grip of the three. In the clearing two of them sat upon him and pinned him down, while the third, the tall man, ran back into the burning shack to save what he could. After flinging saddles, blankets, bridles, guns, cartridges belts and provisions out through the doorway in frenzied haste, he emerged presently, with hands and face blackened, and his clothes on fire.

With returning reason, Jerry was surprised that the bandits hadn't simply knocked him insensible with a rifle butt and left him in the blazing shack. Then, as his confused and befuddled brain began to function normally again, he remembered the one slender hold he still had upon life—the withheld information they had been trying to torture out of him. If he could only hold out long enough——

But apparently the bandits were not minded to continue the torturing at the moment. The two who were holding him now roped him into mummylike helplessness with one of the horse ropes and left him, while they went to help the tall man gather up their scattered belongings and carry them to a place of safety at the edge of the small clearing. Afterward, for a period that seemed like an endless age to the tightly bound captive, they sat on their heels beside the salvagings, watching the fire, the stubble-bearded one smoking, the one called Bill rubbing a lamed knee, which he had sustained in the cave-man struggle in the cabin, and the tall man nursing his singed hands.

During this interval, Jerry was suffering keener tortures than any the outlaws had inflicted. Over and over he asked himself what had become of Patricia. Was she still up on the flat rock, where they had watched and waited for the better part of the afternoon, looking down

from the high observation post, torn and distracted by the evidence of battle—and, perhaps, murder and sudden death—afforded by the burning cabin? He hoped that the light of the fire was not bright enough to enable her to make him out as he lay in the center of the clearing, where they had left him. If it should happen that he was never——

That thought brought another and a more maddening one in its train. The new Patricia, whom he had seen developing under the stress and perils of this exciting day, would not sit and wring her hands in hysterical helplessness. She would be much more likely to rush in and share whatever fate had befallen him, if she were where she could see and know. Here was reason in plenty for the maddening anxiety that was tormenting him. As yet the three men had no good reason to assume that he had had a companion in the airplane, and in that ignorance lay Patricia's one small chance of escape. The red glare of the fire went black before his eyes when he thought of what they would do to her to make her divulge the secret which he had thus far been able to preserve; the one unspoken work which, once extorted, would sign his death warrant and hers as well.

Throughout the interval of suspense, while the cabin was burning, Jerry, quite insensible to the batterings and bruisings he had accumulated in the fight, was hoping fervently that Patricia had fled. Perhaps she would find her way in the darkness to the valley, catch one of the horses and ride out of the reach of these savages who would first torture and then kill her if they should discover her. But at the same time, in his inmost soul, Jerry knew that she would do nothing of the kind. It was now that he cursed the rash impulse which had prompted him to dash out of the cave and fling himself upon the bandit who had begun the little war by firing his rifle at a shadow. If he hadn't shown himself, the man Glover would probably have gone his way, and they would have been free to escape from the dangerous neighborhood quickly, even though their flight would have had to be made on foot and without provisions.

But all this was past and gone, and what had intervened was now irrevocable. He was a prisoner, destined to suffer whatever his captors might make him suffer; and Patricia was left to save herself as she could—if she could. And when the "if" thrust itself in, the pangs of madness began to return, and he had to shut his eyes and struggle fiercely to hold them off.

At last, after the cabin had sunk into a mass of glowing logs, he saw the three men get up and come toward him; and again he tried to steel himself to endure. But all they did was to drag him roughly to the edge of the wood, where two of them held him upright against a tree, while the third bound him in that position, like an Indian victim at the stake. Indeed, for the moment, he made sure they were preparing to torture him again, this time with fire. But, as they finished binding him, the stubble-bearded man said:

"That's where you wind up for tonight, you damn fightin' fool! In the mornin' you're goin' to show us where you've got Mart and Jim hid out; or, if you don't, you'll shore wish you was in hell!"

CHAPTER X.

NUMBER THREE.

AFTER they left him bound to the tree, fixed so immovably by the many windings of a horse rope as to be unable to turn to see which way they went, Jerry again became a prey to anxiety for Patricia. He knew that by this time his failure to return, together with the burning of the cabin, had told her beyond question that his attempt at a wholesale capture of the three train robbers had ended in disaster; also, he was sure she would make no effort to save herself before finding out what had happened to him.

His greatest fear now was that she might come upon the scene while the three men, who, he supposed, would be camping for the night somewhere near at hand, were still awake and alert. But as to this, it was altogether likely that they would not all sleep at the same time; that they would maintain a watch. Though they might be fairly well assured

that they had the single disturber of their peace securely tied to a tree, there was still enough of the air of mystery involved to make them wary. If nothing worse threatened, the light of the burning cabin might have been seen by some member of the forestry force, which would mean another invasion.

On the other hand, Jerry knew that if he should be left for any considerable time as he was, he would be crippled. The horse-rope windings were drawn cruelly tight; his legs and arms were already growing numb under the constricting pressure. In a short time this new form of torture became a stupefying agony. It was as if he were dying by slow inches. Again he nerved himself to endure. Though the high-altitude night was chillingly cold, the moisture started out on his forehead and ran down into his eyes. His head was still throbbing from the effects of the knock-out blow given him at the cabin door, but now the pain of it was forgotten in the rackings of the new torture.

How long the paralyzing agony lasted he had no means of knowing; all he knew was that, after a time long or short, the tormented nerve centers refused to react, and the succeeding numbness, ominous as it was, afforded him a certain measure of relief.

It was while he was struggling to keep the numbness from mounting to his brain that he realized, as in a waking dream, that some one was standing beside him and tugging with trembling hands at the knots in the rope. Then a shaky voice whispered:

"Your knife, Jerry—is your knife in your pocket?"

In the half dream he found himself muttering: "Yes—if they did not take it while I was knocked out."

The knife hadn't been taken, but it might as well have been. Two of the rope windings sealed the pocket as effectually as if it had been sewn up. Again the trembling hands fell to work upon the knots, and Patricia's voice came to him as from a great distance:

"I've been waiting and waiting! Two of them rolled up in their blankets ages ago, but the third one sat up and smoked and smoked! He's still sitting up, but I think he's fallen asleep."

"Easy!" he whispered. "If he hears you——"

She worked silently after this, and in time the knots yielded, and she began to unwind the rope, turn by turn. As the last supporting turn was loosened, he slid down in a helpless heap at the foot of the tree. With a stifled gasp she knelt to untie his hands and feet, saying:

"Oh, Jerry, tell me—what is it? What have they done to you?"

"It was the rope; it was pulled too tight. There's no feeling in my legs or arms. I can't use them. You must get away—catch one of the horses and ride. They'll wake up and find you here. You can't do anything for me. I can't walk."

"Yes, you can—you must! I'll help you. Try—oh, *please,* try!"

By a sheer effort of will, and with her to tug and lift, he contrived to get first to his knees and then to his feet. As he had said, there was no feeling in his legs; but by a sheer effort of the will, he forced them to go through the motions of walking, though his feet dragged like those of a paralytic, and he was kept from falling only because Patricia drew one of his benumbed arms over her shoulders and held him up with a strength that made him marvel.

It was not until they were safely in the shadows of the wood that he ventured to look back. Then he saw by the fitful light of the burning logs that the three men were sleeping less than a dozen yards from the tree to which he had been bound, one of them sitting up, as she had said, with his rifle between his knees, but apparently as sound asleep as the others.

The sight made him hesitate.

"Wait a minute, Pat. Have you got the six-gun I left with you?"

"Yes."

"Give it to me. This is too good a chance to miss—too good a chance to break even with those devils. Give me the gun."

"Foolish!" she whispered. "Why, you couldn't even stand up if I weren't holding you. Come on! Don't you know every second is precious?"

Reluctantly realizing his helplessness,

he stumbled on, leaning heavily upon her and not knowing nor caring much which way the laborious flight was leading them. Neither did Patricia know nor care. Distance from the sleeping figures at the edge of the cabin clearing was the prime object, and she kept her stumbling charge going until they were deep in the forest of the mountainside and had slipped and staggered and slid into a dark gulch, half filled with huge boulders.

HERE, in a sheltered nook formed by three of the stones, she eased Jerry down, found the match box in one of his pockets and kindled a tiny blaze, feeding it with cones to make it give the needed light. By this time Jerry was suffering all the poignant pains of his half-resuscitated body. A million needles were stabbing him, as the stagnated blood resumed its flow.

"My Lord!" he groaned, trying feebly to rub some quickened life into the dead-alive members. When Patricia saw what he was doing, she got him out of his tightly fitting coat and made him lie down, while she rubbed and massaged and kneaded him like a trained masseuse, hard-heartedly disregarding his twistings and writhings when she chanced to hit upon some of the many bruisings he had received in the fight. After he had begun to respond to this treatment, he said:

"Patsy, you're a darling! I wouldn't have missed this day's experience for all it has cost or is likely to cost. Heaven knows I'm no pessimist, and you'll bear me out in that, but I didn't suppose there was a woman like you left in all this time-killing, luxury-loving world of ours. Honestly, I didn't."

"There are plenty of them," she replied soberly. "And, anyway, what would you expect? Would any woman worth her salt sit down and see you suffer when she could help? Now let me look at that poor bruised head. Hold it down to the firelight so I can see."

The knock-out proved to be something less than disabling, the force of the tall bandit's blow having been partly broken by the leather aviation helmet Jerry was wearing. When she told him there was only a lump, that the skin was not broken, he was able to summon a cheerful smile and say:

"Just the same, it was like *Mercutio's* wound, neither so deep as a well nor so wide as a church door, but it served. I thought the roof of the world had tumbled in on me." And from that he went on to tell her what had befallen after he had left to go on the holdup foray.

"And those brute beasts tortured you?" she flamed out, when he came to the thumb-hanging part. "Jerry, dear, I was awfully tempted a little while ago, when I was watching those men and waiting for a chance to get to you. I had the pistol and could have shot them as they slept. If I had known then what they had been doing to you——" She broke off and then added with a little shiver: "I guess most of us are just plain savages under our skins, after all. And to think that only yesterday we were—— But I *can't* think it, Jerry; I simply can't. Yesterday was a thousand years ago!"

"You said it, Pat. We've sure lived a lot since yesterday, and, from all the indications, we're due to live a lot more before we're out of this."

She was silent for a little time. Since he had spoken of the thumb torture, she had been softly rubbing and massaging the swollen joints, and when she spoke it was to ask him if he was feeling himself again.

"Pretty much so, yes; a good bit knocked about and battered up, naturally, but still on my toes. Why? Got a notion in that keen little brain of yours?"

"I was just thinking. While I was trying to get around to the tree where they had you tied, I am almost sure I found the trail out of this place. Anyway, there is a path leading down the side of the mountain toward the cañon, where the river breaks through at the lower end of the valley."

"All right. What next?"

"The moon is rising, and in a little while it will be light enough so that we can find our way down to the horses. One of them is sure to be picketed, if only to keep the bunch from straying. What is to prevent us going down there now, while these men are asleep, and

taking a couple of the horses to ride, and herding the rest of them out ahead of us down the trail? I know we'd be dead for sleep before we could hope to find a ranch with a phone connection; but, even so, we might possibly be in time to get that wire through to New York."

"Feasible, perhaps, but mighty uncomfortable. We wouldn't be able to get saddles or bridles."

"We could do without them. I can ride bareback, and I know you can. And we could knot hackamores out of the picket rope. Anything else?"

HE was tracing the boundaries of the lump on his head with his finger tips and wincing a bit at the lightest of the touches.

"For your sake, Pat, I ought to jump at the chance you're outlining. It's perfectly possible; with a little hustle and care, I guess we might pull it off. But I'm going to make a confession. I owe these three torturing devils a small debt that I'm fairly thirsting to pay. No bunch of highway robbers can do what they did to me a while ago and get away with it. Foolish, you say? Perhaps it is foolish, when the fate of a considerable industrial fortune is hanging upon our chance of reaching a wire before to-morrow noon; nevertheless, Pat, I'm just that kind of a fool."

She put an arm across his shoulders, and her warm lips brushed his cheek.

"I was rather hoping you'd say something like that, Jerry, dear. I am feeling pretty fighty myself, if you know what I mean. I'm with you to the finish. And about the money—if you lose it all, you must just take mine, because the loss will be my fault."

"It isn't money that I'll lose; it's dad's life work. The bank sharks in the big city are offering to pay more than the Titan's worth, so far as that goes. And as for your money—I couldn't take that, you know, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless I could take you with it—both you and it in trust."

She shook her head slowly.

"No, Jerry, dear; too much stress in the air just now. You wouldn't have said that yesterday, and you may not want to say it to-morrow. Let's go and get those three sleeping brutes and put them in the hole in the cave."

"My heavens!" he said, drawing a deep breath. "And all these years I've been thinking of you oftenest as a spoiled darling of too much money. God bless you, Pat! We'll fight it out and let the Titan go, if it has to!"

"In that case," she said, in a voice small no longer tremulous, "there is no time like the present—while these men are asleep; that is, if you feel fit enough?"

Jerry struggled to his feet.

"I'm not exactly in the pink of condition, of course, but fit enough, and I'll get fitter as we go along. Give me that six-gun and let's toddle."

Extinguishing the small fire, and with the risen moon now high enough to enable them to find their way, they began to retrace their steps toward the robbers' rendezvous. Approaching it along the level of the terrace, they halted at the mouth of the cave and groped their way in the darkness through the now familiar passage to the chamber of the spring, where they knelt and drank in silence. Afterward they crept as silently to the mouth of the pit passage and listened. The two prisoners were still there; they were talking in low tones, and a whiff of tobacco smoke, coming up out of the depths, told them that at least one of the captives was smoking.

"Just wanted to make sure they were safe," said Jerry, as they groped their way out to the open air and went on. "If we have any kind of luck, there'll be more of them down there before the moon rises again."

"But if there were as many as three of them, couldn't one climb out on the shoulders of the others?"

"We'll have to chance that. They are bandits, all right, but it's not likely they are trained acrobats as well."

FARTHER along, when the faint red glow around the burned-cabin site began to show above the trees, they held to the deeper shadows of the wood, advancing with due caution until they reached

the forest fringe at the edge of the small clearing. The first glance across the moonlit space showed them that they were too late to take the three men unawares. Two of the men were still rolled in their blankets under the trees, in the opposite fringe of the inclosing wood, but the third was awake and up, and when they first saw him he was standing with the horse rope in his hands and apparently staring in astonishment at the tree to which Jerry had been bound.

Instead of giving the alarm to the others, as they expected him to, he dropped the rope and stooped to examine the ground around the tree, as if he were looking for tracks. Not satisfied with the light afforded by the moon, he presently secured a brand from the cabin fire to serve as a torch. In his foot-dragging escape, Jerry had left a plain trail in the tall grass, and this the bandit soon discovered and began to trace. Again they looked to see him go to arouse his companions, but still he delayed.

"He's the one that got a lame knee in the scrap in the cabin," Jerry whispered. "He has his share of the curiosity that killed the cat. He's trying to find out whether I got away alone, or if somebody was with me."

"Why doesn't he wake the others?"

"He will in a minute. I suppose I ought to plug him before he does it, but I can't quite screw myself up to the point of shooting an unwarned man. A bit too savage, don't you think?"

"Much too savage, yes—though they all deserve it, after what they did to you."

As Patricia spoke, the bandit stood up and stopped. Obviously he was debating. Should he go on following the trail he had discovered or go back to awaken the sleepers? It was the prudent alternative that was taken, and a moment later he was shaking his companions and talking to them, pointing to the tree and to the rope lying at its foot. Prompt action followed this giving of the alarm, and the three went together to examine the trail in the grass. This move brought them near enough to make their talk easily overheard by the two crouching in the shadows of the forest fringe.

"I figger he was crawlin' off on his hands and knees," said the tall man, as he held the blazing-brand torch low and for a better view. "What beats me is how he untied that rope and got loose from the tree." Then to the lame-knee sentinel, who had slept on his job: "You're one whale of a pardner to keep watch, I don't think, Bill! Might 'a' cut all our throats after he got loose."

The lame-kneed one passed over the accusation, voicing profanely a different explanation of the escape.

"It's like I was tryin' to tell you last night, only you wouldn't listen!" he snapped. "That plane down yonder is a two-seater. You been holdin' out all along that this bull is playin' a lone hand, and he ain't; that's all there is to it. There's two of 'em, and I'll bet on it!"

"You're plumb crazy in the head," declared the third man, the stubble-bearded one who seemed to figure as the leader of the gang. "If there's two of 'em, do you reckon that fightin' fat boy would 'a' tried to hold three of us up alone? Not much he wouldn't!"

"Just the same," the other insisted, "it looks like there was two sets o' tracks along here; and, what's more, you can't make me believe he got them knots untied by himself. Somebody untied 'em for him."

At this point the tall man cut in.

"The horses!" he said. "Next we know, *they'll* be stampeded and run off. Maybe they have been already."

This was too vital a matter to be neglected; but now a heated discussion ensued as to which one of them was to go down to the river meadow to find the horses and bring them up to the clearing. Jerry's softly whispered comment hit the mark precisely. "You see," he said, with his lips at Patricia's ear, "they're rank cowards, like most chaps of their sort when they haven't the drop on the other fellow. Each one of them is afraid to go alone; and if two of them go, the third man is afraid to stay here alone. It's as good as a play."

"It's the mystery that makes them afraid," she offered. "It takes a really brave person to face things that can't be understood."

In the end a compromise was reached. The leader of the bandits and the tall man went after the horses, the tall one protesting sourly that he couldn't round up and lead the five animals by himself, and the lame-kneed man agreed to stay behind and stand guard over the camp belongings.

Jerry whispered again.

"That's what I've been hoping for—one more chance to add to our collection." The two horse wranglers disappeared down the slope. "We'll wait a minute to see what the camp guard does."

What the lame man did was as prudent a thing as he could compass in the more or less parlous circumstances. Choosing a tree near the camp dunnage, with a fallen log beside it, both well out of the moonlight, he sat down on the log with his back to the tree and his rifle across his knees. Patricia and Jerry, on the other side of the clearing, remarked that this time he was employing eyes and ears to be warned in time of impending danger.

"Lucky I've had a bit of experience stalking deer in the Canada woods," Jerry offered. "Take the pistol—I shan't need it—and wait here. You'll know what to do if I seem to be getting the worst of it." And with that he was gone.

It was a tribute to his deer-stalking ability that Patricia, knowing, as she did, which way he was circling, still saw nothing and heard nothing to betray his movements. It was not until a big arm stole around from behind the back-protecting tree to clamp the camp guard's neck in a strangling hold that the midnight stillness of the moonlit glade was finally disturbed.

The struggle was a furious one for the moment. Jerry did not change his position behind the tree, and for the time being Patricia saw nothing but the clamping arm and the strangling man's frantic and futile efforts to tear it away. It was only for the few seconds that one can live without breath that the struggle lasted. When it ended, Jerry had his latest captive stretched upon the ground at the foot of the tree, so nearly choked that his voice was gone, and Jerry was tying him hand and foot with the horse rope he had picked up in passing around the edge of the clearing.

CHAPTER XI.

"THE REMAINDERS."

BEFORE Jerry had finished roping the half-strangled camp guard, Patricia was beside him.

"I'm here. What do you want me to do?" she asked, apparently as unmoved as if such scenes of violence were everyday happenings in her young life.

"Might hold the gun on this chap until I get him tied. If he opens his mouth to yell for help, just bang away at him."

"My soul!" exclaimed the victim. "I told 'em there was two of you, and them sure-shots wouldn't listen to me! Say, what you aimin' to do to me, mister?"

Jerry's answer was wordless. Tying a knot in the bandanna he had jerked from the fellow's neck, he crammed the knot into the man's mouth, and thereafter there was nothing more than profane mumblings to be heard. While he was securing the gag, Jerry was giving directions to his eager helper.

"Now that we have the chance, we'll clean 'em, and do it right and proper. Just you roll up a couple of those blankets, with some of the provisions inside. Take my knife and cut pieces of the rope to tie the roll and make a carrying sling."

As she hurriedly made up the bedding roll, with its core of eatables, Jerry took two of the five saddles and a couple of bridles and laid them aside. Next, he dragged the remaining saddles and bridles, all the blankets that Patricia hadn't taken and the depleted stock of provisions over to the cabin site and flung them into the bed of glowing coals, heaving a half-burned log on top of the whole to expedite the destruction. This done, he untied the captive's ankles and hauled him to his feet.

"Sorry, old chap, but we'll have to make a pack mule of you for a few minutes," he announced briefly. "Hard luck, but it can't be helped. Don't try to run. You couldn't get far with that lame knee, you know."

Working rapidly, he loaded the two salvaged saddles upon the man's back,

securing them with the girths and paying no heed to the man's inarticulate, but none the less emphatic, protests. By the time the human pack mule was harnessed, Patricia was ready with her blanket roll, and the retreat was begun, Jerry carrying the weapons, the bandit's gun and pistol, and the extra rifle, which had again changed hands.

As the event proved, the hasty retreat was timed to the minute. As the procession of three left the fire-lighted scene in the clearing and took the dim trail for the cave, sounds were coming up from the slope below. The snorting of horses and the clinking of hoofs betokened the return of the pair who had gone down to the river level after the animals.

At the entrance to the cave Jerry told Patricia to wait, and, after he had found and lighted the useful candle end, he pushed the saddle carrier into the cave, prodding him along with a gun muzzle, when the victim would have sought to draw back. Before many minutes had passed, Patricia, standing guard over the blanket bundle and the extra rifle at the entrance, saw the tiny star of candlelight returning through the underground blackness.

"What did you do?" she asked, when Jerry joined her.

"I hid the saddles and bridles in the old miners' tunnel and chucked the third man into jail with the others."

"Did he give you any trouble?"

He chuckled. "Didn't know what was happening to him till I shoved him over the edge. Guess the pair at the bottom broke his fall; at least, I judged so from their language. It would have set wet kindling on fire. And, as I hadn't taken the gag out of his mouth, he couldn't hand any of the language back at them, which must have tried him a good bit, don't you think?"

"Well," she said calmly, "what next?"

He yawned sleepily. "Doesn't it strike you that a bit of a rest interval is indicated? We can't hope to go on living the strenuous life indefinitely, without sleep, you know. Besides, there won't be another chance to get either of the other two to-night. I'd give something to be able to look on when those two 'remainders' get back to the clearing and find out what's been done to them, but I guess we'll have to forgo that little pleasure. It's well past midnight, and we must be up and doing early in the morning."

"Doing what?"

"That, dear girl, is still on the knees of the gods. I only know that we can't hope to do anything more to-night. Those two thrice-bereaved chaps are going to stay awake, and they'll stick together like a pair of chestnut burs. It's all right, you know. Let's climb a mountain and hunt us a burrow. I can do with a little sleep, and I'm sure you must be feeling the same way. You are sleepy, aren't you?"

"Now that you mention it, I believe I am, though I could keep going for the rest of the night if there were anything we could do to hurry things."

"There isn't. As I say, those two will stick together and stay awake. Quite likely, if they had saddles and bridles, they'd dig up their stolen loot and make a run for it, but they can't very well do that when they have nothing left but the horses."

"But they've got to do something, haven't they?"

"Sure! They have nothing left to eat. What that something is to be, we'll probably find out in the morning. Strikes me we've got them guessing."

"If they should happen to guess right and come here to the cave, it would be five to one again."

"No; five to two. I'm not going to have you counted out in any such way as that. But that's a chance we'll have to take. I'm banking somewhat upon the fact that four of them, including the two who are still free, have already been in the cave and have found nothing suspicious there, thanks to our good luck and to the happy chance that our first captive was trying to burrow out through the air passage at the bottom of the hole when the others looked down into it."

"Don't you suppose they might track us here, in daylight?"

"They might, if they are any kind of woodsmen. Got something on your mind?"

"Only this: We might camp here in

the cave and keep them out. We have two guns and two pistols now."

"Spoken like a good little soldier. But it's the wrong slant; it puts us on the defensive, when it's the other way about. We're the ones who are pushing the little war. No; let's go and rest up and trust a bit to chance. If we don't, we'll both be fallin' asleep on the job. I don't want to plead the baby act, but the whirl these chaps gave me a few hours ago has——"

"Of course! You must be nearly ready to drop," she broke in quickly. "You ought to beat me for not remembering. Let's find some place where we can camp. No, I'll carry the blankets and the eats; you have the guns."

A half hour's steady climb through the forest of the mountainside above the terrace took them to the foot of the cliff barrier, and here, with no more preparation than a spreading of the blankets in a couple of leaf-filled niches among the rocks, they camped down and slept. Patricia, soundest of sleepers under ordinary conditions, was the first to awaken when the graying dawn began to blot out the stars. Unrolling herself from her blanket cocoon, she went to rouse Jerry. When she found him in his niche she hesitated for a moment; he was sleeping so soundly, and he looked so much like a big, overgrown boy who had been playing too hard. The thought that came to her was that it was no wonder that women loved him, or that their love, like her own, had more than a touch of the maternal in it.

"Time to rise and shine, Jerry, dear," she called softly, shaking him. "It's a new day."

At her call and touch he struggled out of his wrappings and sat up.

"Gosh!" he said, stretching a pair of beamlike arms and stifling a sleepy yawn. "Doesn't seem as though I'd been asleep more than a pair of minutes. Did you manage to get any rest at all?"

"Oh, yes; I slept well, barring a few rather frightful dreams. How are you feeling by now?"

"Just about as stiff as an old spavined horse, if you ask me. I had an idea, before yesterday, that I was reasonably fit, but it seems there was a world of room for improvement."

"After what you went through yesterday and last night, you've a good right to be stiff and sore. Shall I give you another massaging?"

He grinned. "It would be a heavenly luxury, but we're not going to begin the new day's work with any such squandering of your energy. Let's have a cold bean."

HE opened a can of beans and one of salty meat, and the beans and meat and a handful of crackers furnished the early-morning meal.

"Hard fare, but not so hard as our friends down below are enjoying," was Jerry's comment. "Neat little dodge of mine—burning up their eats."

"It was beautifully fiendish," she said. "With nothing to eat, what will they do?"

"In the cold light of this new day I'm asking myself that question with a good deal of interest. Will they pause, hungry, to hunt for the lost numbers of their mess? Or will they mount, bareback, and ride, leaving the lost ones to whatever fate has befallen them? In their case I believe I should mount and ride, and not stand upon the order of my going."

"No, you wouldn't," she contradicted. "The Jerry Manning I knew, or thought I knew, day before yesterday, might possibly dodge; but the you I know now wouldn't."

"H'm!" His mouth full of cold beans. "I'm not so sure you're not right, at that, Patsy, girl. Only you are a bit off in your time factors. I haven't been exactly reborn since day before yesterday, you know. The flop is in the environment and circumstances. Other times and places—other manners. And the same rule applies to you. We've both been obliged to dig back some little distance into the primitive and subconscious reserves, if that's what they are. We've peeled off some few strips of civilization's veneer, if you'd rather put it that way."

"I hope you're not hating me this morning."

"Hate you for tumbling into your Uncle Judson's little trap? I hope I'm not so small as that, Pat."

She turned her face away. She had thought she had made it plain that it was loyalty to him, and not to her uncle, that had led to the lawless kidnaping. But evidently he hadn't understood her meaning, and now she couldn't bring herself to the point of trying to correct the false impression. When she faced him again it was to say:

"You are not small at all, Jerry, though I never knew how big you were until yesterday."

His good-natured grin came again. "Because I didn't rip around and paw up the sod and beat you? Or was it because I did beat up and more or less got the better of our three jailbirds?"

"Both, I think. As I said last night, I guess we are all primitive under our skins—women more than men, perhaps."

"Why specialize women?"

"You don't need to ask that. The primitive instincts are stronger in us—sentiment, love, hatred—all those things."

"You can't prove it."

"Yes, I can. Last night, when you were suffering and angry, you could have killed those men who were torturing you. But this morning you couldn't and wouldn't. You'll get the better of them if you can, but you don't hate them."

"Of course I don't," he said. "They started the little war, and, as you say, I'll finish it if I can. But that's no reason why I should particularly hate them."

"That is just the difference," she cut in. "You are a man, and you are not vindictive. But I am vindictive, and I'll admit it. I'm just as bloodthirsty as I was last night when I found out what they had done to you. I—I'd like to make them suffer what they made you suffer. That's the woman of it."

He laughed again.

"You'd bite and scratch like a spiteful little cat, wouldn't you? Guess I can't find any fault with that, so long as your thirst for vengeance is on my account. But you needn't think I'm going to speak softly to these two remaining chaps just because I'm not specially anxious to burn them alive at the stake. If they haven't run away, I'm going to do them in. You'll see."

THE sun was just beginning to show above the eastern mountains when they finished eating. Patricia made the blankets into a roll, with what remained of the eatables, while Jerry looked to the weapons, unloading the big revolvers and cleaning the barrels with a strip torn from his handkerchief, and making sure that hammers and triggers worked easily. Afterward he went through the same process with the two rifles. In answer to Patricia's query as to what was to be done first, he said:

"A bit of scouting, you'd say, wouldn't you? Got to find out, if we can, what the remainders are doing or are going to do. Let me have that blanket roll and we'll toddle along."

"No. You have the guns, and you will want to have your hands free. I can carry the roll; it isn't heavy."

As silently as might be, they began the descent of the cliff, steering a diagonal course which they hoped might bring them out somewhere above the clearing. In due time they came in sight of the flat boulder, from the top of which they had kept their watch upon the cabin during the preceding afternoon; and when they reached the rock they found the haversack of provisions lying where Patricia had left it when she had gone to Jerry's relief.

From the watchtower boulder they could look down upon the ruins of the cabin, which were still smoking, and through the smoke haze they saw that the horses were picketed in the clearing. But the two remaining men were nowhere in sight.

"Have they run away, do you think?" Patricia asked.

Jerry shook his head. "Not that; the five horses are all there."

A rifle shot, not far distant, confirmed the negative, and before long the two bandits appeared at the farther side of the clearing, one of them carrying a freshly killed jack rabbit, dangling by its hind legs. As befitted men still in the thrall of at least a partial mystery, they made a stealthy half circuit of the cleared space, keeping well within the cover of the surrounding forest until they reached the cabin site.

HERE one of them, the tall man, deftly skinned the dead rabbit and raked out coals from the smoldering log heap for its broiling, while the other, the stubble-bearded gang leader, sat back, with his rifle across his knees, quite evidently mounting a watchful guard, while the tall one cooked the rabbit.

"We've still got 'em guessing," was Jerry's low-spoken comment. "The mystification medicine is still working good and strong. They're in luck in one way, if they only knew it. I could pot them both from here, and I suppose I'd do it if there weren't a few of the civilized inhibitions left."

"That is precisely what they'd do to you," said a hard little voice at his elbow. "Couldn't you shoot and wound them?"

"No; I'm not quite up to that. Think a minute what it would mean to leave two wounded men in this wilderness to live or die as might happen, while we were riding out to send help to them."

"They ought to be thankful they have you to deal with, and not me. All I can think of is what they did to you last night, and what they intended doing to you this morning, whether you did or did not tell them what you had done with the two missing men."

"Oh, that!" said Jerry. "That's a back number now. I can't quite see myself crippling them from ambush."

With the rabbit cooked, or half cooked, the two men squatted in the cover of the wood fringe and ate, tearing the meat apart with their fingers and picking the bones like famished animals, pausing once or twice to reach for the guns at some alien sound heard or imagined.

"Little old human nature's rotten with contradictions," said Jerry. "Those two beggars down there can hold up and rob a train, taking their lives in their hands doing it; yet when they have to face a situation with even a pinch of mystery in it, they're panicky. You can see it in every move they make. If we should jump up and yell at them, they'd have a fit."

"What do you suppose they'll do with the situation, Jerry?"

"I've a notion they're finding it a bit hard to decide. Of course, the door's open for a get-away, if they'll ride bareback; and perhaps they could manage to take their plunder with them, if it's in the shape of money or negotiables, as most likely it is. But that would mean leaving their three partners to whatever it is that's happened to them."

"And you think the honor-among-thieves thing won't let them abandon the three?"

"Mightn't be altogether that. We don't know definitely what they're making of the airplane invasion, but it would be a reasonable inference that I'm some new variety of thief catcher making a high-and-wide play for the sake of the advertising I'll get if I succeed in pulling it off."

"Wouldn't that be all the more reason why they should go while the going is—well, not exactly good, perhaps, but at least presumably possible?"

"In a way, it would. But in another way it might be like touching off a blast with too short a fuse. The men they would be deserting might call it base treachery and squeal if they are brought to book."

"I see," Patricia nodded. "Which means that they'll be afraid to run away and leave the others behind; that it will be safer to stay and fight it out with us."

"With me," he amended. "You heard what these two said last night. They think I'm playing it alone. We've got the only one who thought otherwise. I'm guessing they'll decide to go on the war-path in the belief that they still number two to one. But at that, there's an awkwardness in sight. They can't very well take the horses along with them; and if they leave the beasts unguarded, they'll argue that they stand a fair chance of losing them. So there you are."

"Wanted: A few brains able to do a bit of effective trick turning," Patricia suggested, with a little grimace and a tilting of her short nose.

"You said it. It's their next move, and it's dollars to doughnuts they don't know just how to make it. The one thing they won't do is to separate; they've found out what happens when one man is left alone. Beyond that, they know that a

move will have to be made pronto. They can't hope to have the good luck to pot a jack rabbit every time they go after one."

"I've been wondering where they've hidden their stealings."

"So have I; perhaps they are in the old miner's prospect tunnel down here under us. But that doesn't interest us particularly."

Their game breakfast dispatched, the two men squatting on the edge of the wood seemed to be arguing about something, judging from their gestures. Presently the tall one broke cover cautiously to catch and lead up one of the horses. With the picket rope he illustrated the method of knotting a halter, as if to demonstrate that the animal could be ridden and guided without a bridle.

"Nothing doing," Jerry said, when the stubble-bearded man shook his head. "When they got back last night, they doubtless found that only three of their saddles and bridles had been burned. That's why the fellow with the whiskers is unwilling to go. He means to try and find those missing saddles and bridles, and, more pointedly, perhaps, the chap who stole them. And the tall fellow wants to mount and ride."

Whatever the divided counsels may have been, it was the whiskered man who finally carried his point. The horse was freed and suffered to go back to his grazing in the clearing, and the two men, first looking to their weapons, prepared to move away.

"Here's where we come in," Jerry announced. "We must keep cases on them if we can. We'll leave the blankets and haversack; they'll be as safe here as anywhere, and we can't be hampered with them. I have a horrible suspicion that that those two brigands are going to head straight for the cave."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIRING LINE.

IT proved to be no easy task for Jerry and Patricia to keep track of the movements of the two bandits without betraying themselves. All they could do was to hold a course parallel to the terrace and well above it, considering themselves fortunate if they could catch glimpses of the pair, from time to time, through an opening in the forest. For a time Jerry's fear that they might be going to the cave seemed well founded; but the fear was allayed when, after a short disappearance, two figures were seen on the flat summit of a clifflike rock, half embedded in the slope just above the trail to the cave. It was the same big rock behind which they themselves had taken refuge on the previous morning, after discovering the character of the men who were camping in the dilapidated cabin.

From their own position higher up the slope they could see that the summit of the rock commanded a broad view of the valley and, consequently, of the cabin clearing, as well as of the bit of intervale almost directly below where the disabled airplane lay.

"Neat bit of strategy," Jerry commented. "They're taking it for granted that the chap they're after will sooner or later make some move, either toward the plane or the horses, and so give them their target."

"But the distance!" Patricia demurred at once.

"Well, it would be a long shot either way. But they have high-power rifles, good for longer distances, if they know how to use them."

"Well, where does this leave us?"

He shook his head. "Looks a bit like a stalemate, you'd say? They may stay there till they get hungry again. I'm afraid I shall have to scuttle some of the civilized inhibitions, after all, and open hostilities, so to speak," he said, after an interval in which the two distance-diminished figures seemed to have settled themselves for an indefinite period of watchful waiting. "Time may be no special object to them; but for us it's important. If you'll take cover somewhere farther up the hill and out of range, I'll go——"

"That isn't fair!" was the quick retort "If I were a man you wouldn't send me away."

"But that's just it—you're not a man. Don't be stubborn."

"I shan't go!"

"All right," he acquiesced good-natur-

edly; "then we'll just have to take it out in waiting."

Silence for a dragging five minutes or so, and then:

"You're the stubborn one, Jerry. This isn't the world we grew up in. Why can't you forget the silly sex traditions for the time being and treat me as an equal—as a man?"

"You know I can't argue the point with you, Pat. I'm not going to start something that will get you shot at. If you won't go away, we'll just have to wait and do nothing."

"Oh!" she snapped. But a moment later, when he turned to look behind him, she was gone.

Giving her time, as he thought, to gain a safe distance up the hill, he adjusted the rear sight of one of the rifles, took a long and careful aim at the bare rock summit, a good four hundred yards down the slope, and fired. The effect of the single shot was fairly electrical. Being enough of a marksman to know how difficult it is to align the trajectory of a shot fired downhill, he was measurably certain that his bullet had fallen short. But it had evidently struck near enough to throw consternation into the ranks of the enemy. As one man they leaped alive, ran to the uphill face of the great boulder, up which they had climbed to their observation post, and began to descend. This brought them partly under cover behind the intervening forest growth, but Jerry fired again, twice, and had the satisfaction of hearing a couple of crashes, as the pair, wounded or unwounded, dropped through the tree branches to the ground.

"That's that," the marksman muttered, slipping three fresh cartridges into his magazine. "If I wasn't lucky enough to make a hit, here's where I find out how much fight there is in them."

"Where *we* find out, you mean," said a firm voice at his elbow.

LOOKING aside he saw Patricia crouching behind a near-by tree. She had one of the big pistols in hand and was cocking it, using both thumbs to pull the hammer back.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "When you were once safely out of it, why didn't you stay out?"

"I didn't go very far—didn't intend to," was the calm reply. "My self-respect wouldn't let me, don't you see? Besides, I knew you'd be needing me pretty soon. If those men accept your challenge, they'll try to surround you, and you haven't any eyes in the back of your head."

"But, see here, Pat, with that short-range thing you've got——"

"I can manage it better than I could the other rifle. Don't bother about me. Just look out for yourself."

Fortunately, or rather unfortunately, as the event was shortly to prove, they had halted in an area where the foresting of the slope was more or less open; the trees were large and high, and there was no undergrowth. In a minute or so, Jerry, looking around his shelter tree, caught a glimpse of one of the men, the stubble-bearded leader, dodging from tree to tree in a zigzagging advance up the slope. Instantly he began firing again—with the result that the bandit dodged behind the biggest tree in his neighborhood and stayed there.

Marking the tree of refuge, Jerry began to look about for some signs of the tall man. He knew the pair would quickly see and seize their advantage. His shots having placed him for them, they would separate, one of them holding him in play in front, while the other flanked him. Proof of the correctness of this reasoning came a moment later, when a bullet from the bearded man's shelter tore a handful of bark from the side of his breastwork tree.

Though he realized now that he had begun what was likely to prove an unequal duel, Jerry's chief anxiety was for Patricia, and he pleaded with her again.

"For Heaven's sake, Patsy, get out of this while you can!" he exclaimed. "In another minute or two it will be too late! Work your way around to the horses, while this racket is going on, and both of them are busy. You can catch a horse and ride for it. Didn't you say you found the trail last night? Take it and go!"

"Don't say things like that to me, Jerry, boy—they hurt. If you think for

a minute that I'm capable of running away and leaving you to hold the bag of——"

"Oh, *damn!*" said Jerry, his easy-going nature abdicating for the moment, as another bullet from below, whizzing among the tree trunks, cut Patricia's protest short. But the bullet afforded her a stronger reason for denying him.

"You see!" she went on coolly. "I couldn't run if I wanted to. The minute I'd try, you would see how straight he is shooting."

Now that it was apparently too late to retreat, Jerry was bitterly regretting his choice of a battlefield. While the openness of the forest was an advantage in one way, it was a fatal disadvantage in another; it would reveal any movement they might try to make. Yet there was no alternative; a more defensible position must be found and taken if they were not to be surrounded and picked off at the enemy's leisure. He explained hurriedly.

"Listen!" he began. "We can't stay here in this open wood. It's a sure thing the tall chap is circling at a safe distance to get above and behind us. If I try to keep that fellow in front from bombarding us, will you crawl away up the hill and get into the thicker growth back in there?"

"Not if you are going to stay here," was the sturdy refusal.

"I'm not; I'll follow when I can. Be ready to start when I give the word, and keep down as low as you can!"

A succession of rapid-fire shots, some of which ripped the bark from either side of the tree behind which the bearded man was sheltering himself, silenced the fire from below. *"Now!"* Jerry snapped, hastily crowding more cartridges into the half-emptied magazine. *"Hurry!"*

HE snatched a single glance aside, to make sure she had gone, and then he fired a few more shots to cover her retreat and his own. The maneuver was successful. With bullets flying to right and left of him, the bandit below could not return the fire. With his magazine half emptied a second time, Jerry sprang up and ran. In the denser growth farther up the cliff, he overtook Patricia. Both were well winded by the uphill race, but Jerry had breath enough left to gasp out: "We're lucky to be out of that. I was a long-eared ass to begin the business down there in the open. A few minutes more, and they'd have had us for fair."

"You're always so truthful, Jerry, dear. But where do we go from here?"

"Depends. I'm hoping they'll chase us."

"And if they do?"

"That place under the cliffs where we slept last night—among the rocks. We can take proper cover and give them a good run for their money up there."

"But the time!" she said. "If they coop us up and hold us, you'll be too late for your telegram. You're forgetting that noon to-day, or one o'clock at the latest, marks the dead line for your Titan Company."

"I'm not likely to forget it. But that's spilled milk now. If we had nothing to do but to grab off a couple of the horses and ride, we couldn't hope to reach a wire in time. Let it go. We'll finish this job we've begun. We've gathered in three fifths of this train-robbing outfit, and I'm going to have the other two fifths before I quit."

"The lust of battle," she gibed softly. "I'm having a touch of it, too. I'm still remembering what they did to you last night. By this time I've gone hopelessly barbarian. Do you think they're following us?"

"Let's see if they are."

They had been climbing as fast as they could, while they talked, and they had entered a region where the forest had again thinned out, with the place of the trees taken by many boulders which had fallen in past ages from the cliffs above. Taking cover behind one of the great stones, they looked back and listened. The silence of the heights was unbroken, but far down the slope they caught glimpses of two figures dodging from cover to cover and climbing steadily up the hillside.

"They're still asking for it," said Jerry a bit exultantly. "I hoped they'd oblige. One more scramble, and we'll have the cliff at our backs."

"You say 'we' and 'us.' Does that mean that you're taking me with you—all the way, Jerry?" Patricia asked, as they resumed the toilsome climb toward the night camping place.

"Why shouldn't I? Haven't the fates jammed us into this thing together?"

She nodded.

"Yes; but have you quite made up your mind to forget that I'm a woman? That is what I meant."

"Not much! What I am remembering is that you are one woman in a thousand—a man's woman."

"Yes; since you put it that way—even a case-man's woman, if it comes to that. Didn't I say I'd gone barbarian? I wish you'd let this trigger thing down for me. I'm afraid it will go off if I try to uncock it."

She passed him the big revolver, and he saw, to his horror, that she had been carrying it fully cocked. "Good night!" he muttered. "You might have shot yourself!" Then he gave it back to her with the hammer down.

By this time they were among the rocks at the foot of the cliffs, near the place where they had slept, and here Jerry soon pitched upon a natural rifle pit, a stronghold from which, he decided quickly, no two men, however well armed and desperate, could drive them; at least, not while the ammunition held out. It was a sort of pocket niche between two great stones, with a smaller fragment lying across the entrance. With the great monoliths to right and left and the cliff in the rear, an attack must come from the front; and the front, for a distance of a hundred yards down the slope of the cliff, afforded but little cover for the attackers.

"Here's where we get them guessing again," Jerry panted exultantly. "Couldn't be better if it had been made to order," he added, with a grin. "'The trappers' last stand.'" Putting the rifles down, he rolled up a few more stones to complete the natural breastwork, and that done, he swung Patricia over the barrier and followed her into the little fort, saying: "Now they may come on whenever they're ready. How's the little old courage? Still good?"

PATRICIA had sat down with her back to one of the great boulders; her hands were locked over her knees.

"If only they don't make us wait too long," she said, in answer to the question of nerves. "I never could stand shivering on the brink. I always want to plunge and have it over with. Is that cowardly?"

"No; I'd call it the other way about. It's the shivering-on-the-brink thing that's cowardly. But we needn't worry; we shan't have long to wait, I'm thinking."

Silence for a long minute or so, and then:

"Jerry, dear, have you thought that possibly—just possibly, you know—things may not turn out the way we expect them to?"

"You mean that maybe these two remainders may get the better of us."

"Yes. There's a possibility, isn't there? You needn't be afraid of scaring me. I'll be a good sport."

"You don't need to say that; you've been a good sport every minute of the time—the best in the world. Since you put it up to me, I'll admit that there *is* a bare possibility, and it's one I oughtn't make you face."

"You're not making me. I want to face it—it and all the rest. After what I've done, it's up to me to face things. But I wish——"

"Well, what's the wish?" he asked, when the broken sentence threatened to stay broken.

"I was going to say that I wish the possibility were a bit bigger—in your mind, I mean. Then I could say something that ought to be said before—well, before it's too late to say anything."

"Can't you say it anyway?"

"If I say it, you'll not think I'm losing my nerve?"

"Sure I won't. You've more nerve, right now, than I have. Let her come."

"It's this: if anything should happen to you, wouldn't I be justified in saving one bullet in this"—touching the big revolver—"for myself?"

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. "If I thought there could be the remotest chance of its coming to anything like that——"

"It may, you know," she went on calmly. "You can't always tell. And if you should be killed, the least I could do would be to go along with you, wouldn't it? Besides, if I shouldn't, these men——"

"Good heavens!—stop it!" he broke in. "You've said enough—more than enough! I was too fatheaded to think that far ahead. You shan't face any such horrible risk, Pat. We'll get out of this and try to beat them in a race for the horses. The bare thought of your falling into the hands of these devils makes me tremble."

He was getting upon his feet to lift her over the barricading stone in front, when a shot rang out, and a bullet flattened itself against the back wall of their niche, serving notice upon them that the prudent impulse had come too late. But that wasn't all. In the impulsive leap to his feet, Jerry had shown himself above the line of the breastwork rock and had thus betrayed their hiding place to the enemy.

In his haste to duck out of range, and at the same time to reach for one of the rifles, Jerry stumbled awkwardly and fell. Thereupon two things followed in swift succession: Patricia shrieked, and by that means advertised her sex to any listening ear; and the two bandits, doubtless believing that the single shot had found its mark—as Patricia did—broke cover and started up the slope at a scrambling run.

Instantly, in the heartbreaking moment when she believed that the frightful alternative she had suggested had actually come to pass Patricia snatched up the big revolver, held it over the rock in front, aimed at nothing in particular, and, turning her face away and shutting her eyes, cocked and fired it once, twice, thrice.

BEFORE the echoes of the explosions had stopped reverberating from the surrounding cliffs the two train robbers had hastily taken cover again, and Jerry had caught up a rifle and was kneeling behind the breastwork, exclaiming in an enthusiastic aside:

"Good work, Pat—beautifully good work! That awkward stumble of mine might have given the whole show away if you hadn't stopped them!"

"A—a stumble? Then you're not hurt? Their shot didn't hit you?"

"Nothing like it. I fell over my own feet. Did you see which way they dodged?"

Rather shamefacedly she confessed that she had seen nothing.

"Never mind; we'll find out presently where they are."

It was a prediction speedily verified. From behind a rock less than a hundred yards down the fronting slope came a rain of a dozen shots fired in quick succession. Some of the bullets fell short, but most of them came over the barricade rock in angry buzzings. Immediately afterward a similar burst of fire came from behind one of the outpost trees on the slope to the right.

"All of which is for your special benefit," Jerry remarked. "Your little yelp told them there's a woman here, and they're trying the 'frightfulness' dodge and, incidentally, wasting a good lot of ammunition. If they keep it up, it'll soon come to the question of who has the most cartridges. Not making you too desperately nervous, is it?"

"I—I'm gritting my teeth. You see, I've never been shot at before."

"Neither have I, for that matter. It isn't ordinarily done in the world we've been living in. But don't let it get you. There's no special danger, so long as we keep down and out of sight, and they don't rush us."

"Won't they do that when they find they can't get at us in any other way?" asked Patricia.

He grinned boyishly. "They'd better come shooting, if they do."

Another burst of fire came from the tree on the right, and it was quickly followed by a crackling series from the boulder on the left. In the lull that succeeded, Jerry, who had been counting the shots as well as he could, said: "Between forty and fifty cartridges shot away, so far, and nothing to show for them but a lot of noise. Wonder if they're remembering they're carrying their total supply in their belts?"

Patricia crept nearer for the sheer comfort of closer companionship.

"How many cartridges have we?" she asked.

He ran his fingers over the shells in the belt he had taken from the third man.

"Twenty-six, besides those in the magazines of the rifles; none too many, but enough. And I've a handful of shells for the revolvers, if it comes to close quarters."

A period of silence followed the second waste of ammunition on the part of the besiegers, and it continued for so long that Jerry sought and found a loophole between the stones he had piled at the short end of the breastwork boulder. Looking to the right, he had a momentary glimpse of the tall man slipping quickly from cover to cover up the slope; a glimpse that was too brief to give him time to thrust the rifle through the loophole and aim and fire.

"They're closing in," he warned in low tones. "Don't raise your head. We'll get it again in a minute or two."

In less than a minute the fire from down the slope began again, this time at shorter range. But now the bandits were less wasteful of ammunition. The shots, alternating from right to left, came at measured intervals, and the aim was better, practically all of the bullets skimming the top of the breastwork rock. The purpose of this barrage was obvious; it was a covering maneuver designed to keep the besieged from firing over the barricade while the besiegers worked their way to nearer and better positions.

ALERT to checkmate this move, Jerry, lying flat, his rifle trained through the loophole, held himself in readiness. For a few seconds he was unable to place the two men who were advancing cautiously and keeping well under cover. He was hoping that his own continued silence might lead them to be less cautious, and his patience was rewarded when he saw a hatted head rise slowly from behind one of the scattering stones on the left.

Unhappily, the head was so far to the left that he had to change position before he could bring his piece to bear on it, and, by the time he had secured the requisite angle, the head had sunk out of sight. Nevertheless, he sent a single shot whizzing over the rock of refuge, for the psychological effect. It was time to let the bandits know that their lavish waste of ammunition hadn't put him out of the fight.

As he hoped it might, his single shot provoked a third furious bombardment, and for a short time the steel-jacketed bullets flew thick and fast. When the attack ceased, Patricia's eyes were large, and her lips were pale.

"No! *Don't!*" she protested in a strained voice, when Jerry would have tried to hearten her. "If you say one single man-to-woman word I shall shriek! How—how long has this got to go on?"

With wisdom far beyond his years, Jerry turned off the sympathy faucet.

"Oh, come—don't cry before you're hurt!" he snapped at her, purposely putting a rough edge upon the words. "You ought to be glad these fellows are willing to throw their ammunition away at nothing!"

The strained look left the fear-widened eyes, and she was even able to summon a ghost of a smile.

"Th-that's better," she stammered. "I guess I'm still enough of a woman to need to be sworn at in the pinches. I'm glad you understood. Don't let me fall down and shame myself, Jerry. I'll never get over it if you do."

"You're not going to fall down—nothing like it." Then: "That last burst ought to make them count their cartridges pretty carefully. And when it comes to that, we'll take our turn at the grindstone."

Later it became fairly obvious that the cartridge counting had taken place. The shots from the slope came at longer intervals and finally stopped altogether. Jerry, watching from his firing port, signaled to his companion.

"Be ready," he warned. "I think they're going to try to rush us!"

He had scarcely finished speaking before the two besiegers leaped into the open and came charging up the ascent, closing in with savage yells and firing as they came. The assault failed, as it was

bound to. Jerry, sighting deliberately through his loophole, opened up, and his first shot struck the rifle from the hands of the tall bandit. And when he found he was charging alone, the bearded gang leader stopped short, spun around and ran, with the tall man a close second in the downhill race for safety. All this happened with Jerry's bullets, too hastily aimed to be fatal, pattering behind them, as they fled.

But Jerry wasted little time.

"Now's our time!" he exclaimed, rolling his big bulk over the breastwork rock and facing about to lift Patricia over it with more haste than gentleness. "We've got them on the run—let's keep them going!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HERDED

ONCE started and quickened into flight by the crackling of the guns in the rear, the retreat became a rout on the part of the two outlaws, one of whom, the tall one, was nursing a wounded arm or hand, as he ran. Fully alive to his advantage, Jerry gave them no time to take cover. Thrice the bearded leader sought to check his flight and get behind a tree, but at each attempt a bullet from behind sent him plunging on in the wake of the tall man. With the too-small, borrowed aviation coat unbuttoned to give him breathing room, Jerry pounded on down the slope, Patricia following with the extra rifle. She was still running lightly and undistressed, when the chase approached the terrace level, though her file leader and pace setter was panting like a spent runner.

It was here that they lost sight of the racing fugitives. On the final descent, Jerry caught a foot in a tree root, turned an involuntary handspring and rolled down the declivity until a bunch of saplings stopped him. When he had picked himself up the two men had disappeared.

"The horses!" he cried hoarsely. "They're making for the horses!"

Whereupon Jerry and Patricia cut away to the left and ran in the direction of the cabin clearing. The short half mile along the terrace was done in record time, but they saw nothing of the two train robbers; and when the clearing was reached, they found the five horses grazing quietly and undisturbed.

"Missed it, by Jove!" gasped the amateur thief taker, leaning against a tree to recover his breath. "They've given us the slip. They didn't come this way, after all!"

"Wait!" Patricia broke in excitedly. "Weren't they somewhere near the cave when we lost sight of them?"

Jerry rapped his head with his knuckles. "Solid ivory—as usual. Of course, that's where they went! And by this time they've hauled the jailbirds out of their hole, and we're done! They'll come for us five in a bunch, and we'll be right back where we were when we landed yesterday morning. Nothing for us now but to catch a couple of these horses and do a quick runaway!"

But again Patricia cut in with a "Wait! We can't ride much of a runaway bareback, and without bridles, taking the three extra horses along. And, if we don't take the extras, it will mean a chase and more fighting."

"You'd rather face the fighting first?"

"Much rather. Let's go back and try to find out where we stand."

He laughed joyously. "Talk about cold nerve! My hat's off to you, Pat. They'll probably eat us alive or smother us under a sheer weight of numbers, but even at that, we'll try them one more whirl. Back we go."

The return to the vicinity of the cave was made with due circumspection, and at every winding in the dim, forest-shadowed trail they expected to meet the five men thirsting for vengeance. But, after some three fourths of the distance had been traversed, with no avengers in sight, they took fresh courage.

"Whatever's coming to us on the new schedule hasn't materialized yet," Jerry said. Then: "Suppose you take cover for a bit, while I do the sleuth act to see if I can find out what's what. Don't let the pause get on your nerves. At the worst, we still have the horses on our side of the fence."

Laying the rifle aside and taking only one of the six guns, he began a stealthy approach to the mouth of the cave, copy-

ing the cautionary tactics of the tall man, who had made a similar catlike reconnaissance the day before. Upon attaining a place from which the narrow gash in the mountainside should have been visible, he found that it had mysteriously disappeared. The rock-climbing vines and small growth, which had partly concealed it the previous day, now formed a screen across the opening, completely hiding it.

Though the young owner of the Titan properties freely admitted that he carried too much flesh, whatever adipose tissue there was in his physical make-up did not extend to his brain. The concealed mouth of the cave made it perfectly plain that the two bandits had ducked in for safety; also, that they were taking it for granted that their pursuers were not aware of the existence of the cave; otherwise they wouldn't have taken the pains to make the entrance invisible.

Cocked revolver in hand, and moving still more cautiously, Jerry crept nearer, drawn now by a murmur of voices behind the cunningly arranged curtain of vegetation.

GETTING near enough to posture as a listener, he was not surprised to find that the two men were arguing hotly over the mysterious aspect of the visitation which had fallen upon them.

"I'm tellin' you it's a plant!" Jerry recognized the whining voice of the tall robber. "That big lump o' fat ain't no amachoor. He's some highbrow bull the railroad's been importin'. Look at what he's done! Three of our gang have disappeared, and all our stuff is burned up!"

"You're locoed!" was the growling rejoinder; "crazy in your head! Would any bull come battin' in here, bringin' a woman with him? I been tellin' you, time and ag'in, that the other one's a woman. Didn't I hear her squeal?"

"And didn't I see 'em—both of 'em—when they took out up the mountain, runnin' for that pile of rocks? If the other one's a woman, she's wearin' pants."

"Huh! What o' that? Ain't more'n half the women wearin' pants nowadays? And because she *is* a woman is why the fat lad tried the hands-up game on us at the cabin last night, alone. I'm tellin' you ag'in that both of them just happened along here."

"Well, it's been one grand happening for us, I'll say!" came in the whine of the tall man. "Three of us wiped clean off the map, and me with a hand busted for life!"

"Lemme see that hand."

At this, Jerry heard the crackle of a match and then a groan, followed by gritting profanity.

"Just like I told you—shot all to hell. I knowed it was. You wouldn't listen at me when I told you we couldn't rush 'em in them rocks! And now see what I git out of it. I'll be dead o' blood poison before I can git that hand tended to!"

"Rats! You're yellow, Pete—always been took that a way when the cards happen to run agin' you"—this was spoken in the growling voice of the gang chief. "You're a long ways from bein' dead yet."

"That's all right f'r you!" was the snarling retort. "*You* ain't got a hand all tore up. Whatcha goin' to do? Are you going to stay cooped up in here till that baby finds us and smokes us out?"

"Keep it up if it does you any good. I notice you was glad enough to jump at the chance o' this hide-out when the fat lad had us on the run a little spell ago. He wouldn't find this hole in a month o' Sundays."

"You don't know that he ain't already found it. Wasn't it right out yonder that I picked up the shell from Mart's gun?"

"Well, what o' that? Didn't we all dig into this place right away afterward and find nothin'? You make my back ache with your whinin'!"

"Yes, but——"

"Shut yer trap and listen! What's all that racket?"

Though he was somewhat farther removed from its souree, Jerry heard the racket and had no difficulty in defining it. A chorus of shouts was coming apparently from an immense distance, but they were plainly recognizable, nevertheless. The three pit prisoners were yelling for help, as they had probably been doing periodically all along when they were not

sleeping. Jerry gripped the big revolver and waited. He felt sure there would be an attempt at a rescue. This would follow as a mere matter of course.

It did. The sound of a striking match broke the silence which followed the shoutings, and the sputter of a damp wick told Jerry that one of the fugitives had found the useful candle end and was lighting it. Then the voice of the stubble-bearded man came again, answering something that Jerry had not overheard: "All right, you can come along with me if you're too rattled to stay here by yourself. I'm goin' to find out who or what's makin' all that fuss."

Jerry held back only until he heard the sounds of their footsteps dying away in the passage before he crawled under the vine screen and followed. He had no well-considered plan of action; all he knew was that a rescue of the three outlaws in the pit must be prevented at all hazards. Far ahead down the sloping passage he could see the small nimbus of candlelight, and he was thankful for the darkness that enveloped him. With the mouth of the cave stopped up, he would not be silhouetted against a square of daylight if the men should hear him and turn upon him.

With the start they had, the two were in the vaulted chamber of the spring, while he was feeling his way in darkness down the passage. Now he quickened his pace, for fear the imminent danger of stumbling and making a noise would attract their attention. While he was beginning to despair of stealing up and coming to grips with them before they should discover the pit prisoners, the prisoners themselves gave him his opportunity. After the first burst of shouting there had been no sounds from them; but now, either because they could see the reflection of the candlelight or hear the footsteps in the spring chamber, they began again.

UNDER cover of this clamor, Jerry ran blindly on, careening here and there against the rock walls because he couldn't see well enough to avoid them, careful only to keep the cocked pistol in his hand from going off accidentally in the collisions. When he reached the vaulted chamber and could see across it by the light of the upheld candle in the gang leader's hand, the reunion of the band of five was all but a fact accomplished. The two late comers were standing at the verge of the pit, looking down into it, and a babble of eager voices was coming up to them.

In the midst of the excitement, Jerry saw at a glance how the rescue of the prisoners would be accomplished. One of the men in the pit was yelling:

"There's that plank in that miner's tunnel. You saw it, Jim! Get it and shove it down here so we can climb out on it!"

Carefully, as carefully as if he were about to try a distance putt for the final hole in a match game of golf, Jerry laid the big pistol down, crouched for a sprinter's start, and hurled his near-two-hundred pounds across the chamber, with his hands extended, palms outward. It was only the tall man who heard flying footsteps behind him and sought to face about. But at the same instant a firm hand was pressed against the small of his back. With a terrified yell that dominated the cries from below, he caught with his unwounded hand at the stocky figure of the stubble-bearded man with the candle beside him. But, because another firmly pressing hand was busy there, too, the human anchor failed to hold. Both men toppled over the brink and disappeared in the depths of the black pit, for the candle was extinguished in their fall.

Patricia, obediently waiting where Jerry had left her, seeing nothing and hearing nothing, did her best to possess her soul in patience. But he was gone so long that she had time to conjure up all the terrors of the abandoned before she saw him coming along the dim path from the mouth of the cave, carrying two saddles, with the stirrups trailing, and with the complementing bridles hung around his neck.

"Cheerio!" he called out, when he descried her in her hiding place. "The fire's out, and we can begin to reel up the hose."

"Oh, thank Heaven! You mean——"

"Yes; just that," he said, with the triumphant grin once more in place. "Caught them nappin' in the cave. At the right minute the fellows in the pit set up a yowl, and our two friends toddled back to see what it was all about. I crawled in after them and, at the proper second, just as they were discovering the jailbirds, slipped up behind and gave them a little one-two shove, and it was all over—certain! It's still early in the forenoon, and we're sitting on top of the world. Let's go away from here."

"But those five men in that dreadful dungeon—can we leave them there to die of hunger and thirst?" she protested, becoming suddenly compassionate, in the turning of a leaf.

"Sorry for that, of course, and we'll hope it won't happen. We'll mount and ride and see if we can't find somebody to send in after them. Nothing else to do, is there? Can you carry the guns, if I'll lug the saddles?"

Fifteen minutes later they were selecting two of the best horses in the little herd of five and saddling and bridling them. While Patricia, a born horsewoman, was gentling the mounts and talking to them, Jerry climbed laboriously to the flat rock above the cabin site and came back with the blanket roll and the haversack.

"Not knowing how long it will be before we come in contact with the stuffy luxuries of civilization again," he said, as he tied the light baggage on behind one of the saddles, "thought I'd better bring the provisions. If you're ready, we'll bid this charming wilderness good-by—that is, if we can find the trail."

Patricia glanced at her wrist watch.

"Only half of the forenoon left in which to try to reach a wire, Jerry. Do you realize that?"

"If I'm not worrying about the wire, you shouldn't. And I'm not worrying. If it wasn't for the promise I made to the men at the plant at Titanville—— But that's a back number now. Let's climb on and amble."

THE trail out of the valley was found easily when they searched in the right place for it, namely, in the cañon through which the little river found its way at the lower end of the valley. True, for the first half mile or so it led through the bed of the stream itself and was a wading venture, but the water was shallow, and there were no special hazards.

Beyond the cañon outlet they came into rough country, but it was passable for the sure-footed horses. They had gone little more than four or five miles before they found themselves suddenly confronted and surrounded by a group of armed horsemen, the men dusty and travel stained, and the horses showing signs of having been ridden hard. A big, clean-shaven man, with gloomy eyes and a hard-bitted mouth, did the talking. He wanted to know who they were, where they had come from, and where they were going.

"You're a sheriff's posse looking for a bunch of train robbers?" Jerry inquired; and the big man nodded.

"Have you, by any chance, heard of a couple of people being lost in an airplane yesterday morning?"

"Heard about it, yes. Man from the railroad overtook us last night with word of it and asked us to keep an eye out for a smashed plane. What of it?"

"We're of it," said Jerry, with his most disarming grin. "We landed in a valley a few miles back, Miss Colemore and I, and we're just getting out. Might have done it yesterday, but there was some little hitch about stealing the horses."

" 'Stealin' is right," said the big sheriff, still gruffly suspicious, as he indicated the brand on the animals. "Those horses you're ridin' are 'Lazy H' stock, and that's 'Curly' Short's hundred-dollar saddle you're settin' in. Better tell us how come; and while you're at it, you might account for all the artillery you're totin'."

Jerry made it short.

"As I've said, our plane crashed in a valley a few miles from here. Took us less than half an hour to find that we had neighbors—five tough-looking chaps armed to the teeth and—er—rather quarrelsome. One of 'em took a shot at us and——"

"Five men, you say?" the sheriff interrupted. "Know who they are?"

"Sure we do! We found that out

pretty early in the game. They're the chaps that held up and robbed a train three days ago."

"Well? Go on."

"We had to borrow a couple of the horses, you see; and, in order to do that, we had first to overcome the objections of their temporary owners. With a good bit of luck to help out, we managed to turn the trick. If you'll ride up in the valley until you come to a wrecked airplane and then go straight up the mountain on the right, till you come to a sort of bench or terrace, you'll find the mouth of a cave. Back in the cave there is a deep pit, and at the bottom of it you'll find the men you're after. Take it a bit cautiously, because we didn't have a chance to disarm the last two that went in. Sorry for that, but it couldn't be helped."

The gloomy-eyed officer of the law blinked, and his mouth came open.

"Meanin' to say that you and that young woman there got away with this Cooper and his gang, all by your lonesomes? Ain't you askin' us to swallow sort o' hard, young fellah?"

"Looks that way, doesn't it?" Jerry laughed good-naturedly. "But, really, you know, it wasn't so difficult. In the first place, we got them mystified and rattled, because they didn't know what was happening to them. They didn't stay together, and so we got them one at a time, down to the final pair—the one you call 'Cooper' and a tall fellow named Pete. As we captured our man, we took his arsenal along with him. When it came to the final show-down, with only two of them left, they'd lost their cabin, their saddles, bridles, and their provisions. That was last night. This morning the two tried to shoot it out with us, and they used up about all the ammunition they had left for the rifles. Then they ran away and hid in the cave, and when they were about to haul their buddies out of the pit, I got behind them and shoved them into the hole, along with the other three."

"Just like that, eh?" said the sheriff, with a grim twist of the hard-bitted mouth. "Excuse me. Your name's Manning, ain't it? A fellah that overtook us last night told us who you was; he said you was a money-spoiled young cuss that put in his summers playin' round out here at the big hotels, and his winters down round Florida, sailin' a million-dollar yacht. I'm here to remark that that fellah was a liar by the clock! I'd hate most mightily to have you stay over here in this county and run ag'inst me for sheriff. I shore would, for a fact. And that goes for the young woman, too. How far do you say it is to this valley you're tellin' about?"

"Not more than five miles. You follow the creek until you come to a cañon, with no trail through it except in the bed of the stream. There is possibly half a mile of the water route, but it's all shallow. At the end of it you come into the valley."

The sheriff turned to the man next to him, and the man said:

"That'll be Lost Valley, maybe; the place old Jim Vesey's always talkin' about and never could locate after he'd once come out. He says he's got a mine in it."

"He is right," Jerry offered. "The mine is in the cave, and it is fairly rich, judging by some of the ore samples we found."

"Didn't persuade any of Cooper's gang to tell you what they've done with their swag, did you?" asked the sheriff.

"Didn't try. But, from what we overheard when they were talking together, it will be hidden somewhere not far from the cabin they were inhabiting."

"Never mind," said an excessively hairy member of the posse. "They'll shore tell us where it's hid when we git to 'em."

And then the straight-lipped sheriff again:

"Anything we can do for you and the young lady, before we go on up yonder to clean up your leavin's, Mr. Manning?"

"Indeed there is. You can tell us how far we've got to ride before we come to a telegraph or telephone."

"Let's see. You'd ought to make it to Anaminta, a water-tank stop on the branch railroad that runs up to the Burned Mountain minin' district, in three

or four hours, if you push the cayuses. Can't miss the way if you foller our back trail. There's a one-man telegraph at Anaminta."

"Thanks," said Jerry. "We'll push on the reins. Think we can make it before one o'clock? It's rather important, you know."

"Um! It will take some tall ridin'. But here's hopin' for you. So long. Come on, boys! A li'l' more hard going, and we'll git the bunch we're out after."

"Let's hurry, Jerry, dear!" Patricia urged, as the posse filed away among the hills. "We've got to make it now. If we don't, after all we've been through, I shall die of shame and leave you all the money that daddy left me!"

And it was she, and not Jerry, who led in the galloping race westward, along the plain trail left by the sheriff's posse.

CHAPTER XIV.

PATRICIA'S PENANCE.

IN the race against time toward the goal of the railroad branch line they did not spare the horses. Now that the exciting experiences of the last twenty-four hours were things of the past, Jerry was free to dwell more pointedly upon the trap Judson Bixby had set for him, and to give place to the slowly awakening resentment of an easy-going, slow-to-anger manner of life which had hitherto been fairly impervious to disturbances of any sort.

As David in his haste said that all men were liars, so Jerry, in growing warmth, told himself that it was characteristic of big business at its worst to employ any means, however unscrupulous, to attain its ends; and Bixby's cleverly baited trap was a fair example. Moreover, big business, personified by Mr. Judson Bixby, had taken no thought for the possible consequences of the victim or victims. Bixby knew, or he should have known, the temper of the young woman to whom, during her minority, he had stood in the relation of a duly appointed guardian. That his use of her as a cat's-paw might be as the thrusting of a crowbar into the delicate machinery of two lives had apparently cut no figure.

Turning it over in his mind, as his hard-pressed mount hammered along, in the effort to keep up with Patricia's lighter-burdened animal, Jerry saw that the consequences to the machinery were likely to be far-reaching and disastrous. Jerry knew Patricia's temper and temperament, even if Judson Bixby didn't; he knew that her sense of fairness would make her stick to her determination not to marry a man for whom she had, however unintentionally, smashed an ideal. It was absurd, of course; utterly and ridiculously absurd from the man's point of view. But he was desperately afraid it would stand as a stubborn fact, if the race for a wire should be a lost one.

At each new opening between the hills ahead, Jerry looked in vain for the procession of telegraph poles which would be the welcome assurance that they were coming to the railroad; but each fresh vista revealed nothing but another stretch of the unbroken wilderness of mountain and valley. By half past eleven he had given up hope. If they should reach the line of communication with the outer world by noon, he knew it would be only by the barest chance that a through wire to New York could be secured from a small station on a branch line two thousand miles away, in a single hour. And, quite apart from the shortness of the time, the horses were beginning to show unmistakable signs of giving out.

"We may as well spare the poor beasts," he called out, pressing up abreast of Patricia, who was still leading in the hard-riding flight. "We couldn't put it over now, with all the luck in the world."

AS he said this, they were crossing a broad valley with mountains on its farther side, and against the dark-green background of the mountain slope a line of equally spaced poles was faintly discernible.

"No, no!" she cried, pointing. "There's the railroad! We *must* make it now, Jerry. I—I'm as sorry for the horses as you are, but——"

The interruption was mandatory. At the word "but," Jerry's weary mount put a foot in a gopher hole and fell, throwing its rider headlong. Before Patricia could

draw rein and fling out of her saddle, Jerry was on his feet and trying to get his horse up.

"No bones broken—none of mine, at least," he hastened to assure her. "But I'm afraid the poor old pony is done for." The horse had scrambled up and stood upon three legs.

"Oh, the poor thing!" she exclaimed. "Don't tell me its leg is broken. That would be the last straw!"

She went to the horse's head, gentling the hurt brute compassionately, while Jerry examined the injured leg.

"Not broken," he decided; "only a bad sprain. But he won't carry me, or anybody else, for a while. We're ditched, Patsy, girl; but we probably would be, anyway. The New York Exchange will close in a little more than an hour from now; and if we were sitting at a wire at this minute it would be a miracle if a message could be got through to Strickland in time to stop the merger mill from grinding." As he spoke, he was stripping the saddle and bridle from the lamed horse, preparatory to turning it loose.

"I can't have it that way, Jerry! I c-can't—and go on living!" she burst out. When he turned he saw that she was crying like a hurt child, openly and unashamed. "D-don't you see what it's going to mean to me all my life long? Take my horse and go on by yourself, *please!* I shan't mind being left behind. Oh, *please,* go!"

He tossed the ungirthed saddle aside and went to take her in his arms.

"Do you think I'd ride on and leave you here for all the business deals on the footstool, Pat, after what you've been to me in the past twenty-four hours? If you do, you've got another guess coming. You said yesterday, or last night, that I'd change my mind after we got out of the mess the crashed plane let us in for; but I haven't, you know. Have you changed yours?"

"You know I haven't. You've been reading me like a book, all the way alone; you know you have!"

"Think so? Just maybe. It didn't seem possible that you'd be willing to tie up to a fat——"

"If you say that again I shall shriek! When I say you're not fat, you're *not.* But if you were, I'd love you just the same, now that you've let me see how really big you are. For all that, I'll never marry you, my dear, dear big boy, if it turns out that I've made you lose the thing you wanted most to keep. I—I'd think of it every time I looked at you, and—and it would break my heart!"

"You don't mean that, Pat," he pleaded.

"I do! I do! It would be as if I'd murdered something for you. If you won't take my horse, let's walk. Maybe we can get there in time to make the miracle come true, after all."

Hastening on at their best speed and leading the other horse, until they took pity on its stumbling weariness and unsaddled and turned it free—Jerry saying that the sheriff's party would look after both animals on their way out—they reached the tiny tank station at a quarter past twelve. When Jerry had hurriedly outlined his need, the young telegraph operator shook his head.

"Not one chance in a thousand, I'd say, but if you'll write out your message, I'll try," he offered.

FOR three quarters of an hour of suspense they sat in the dingy wire office, listening to the tapping of the instruments, and one of them, at least, hoping against hope.

When the forty-five minutes were gone, the young operator twisted around in his chair to say: "I'm mighty sorry; I've just asked the main-line office how about it, and they say they couldn't make it through. There's a wire tangle of some sort at Omaha, and your message is hung up there."

Patricia choked at this announcement, and Jerry got up quickly to come between her and the young fellow at the telegraph table.

"Sorry the ball went into the rough," he said, "but I'm much obliged to you for trying." Then, peeling a three-figured bill from his pocket roll and laying it upon the table: "You've had inquiries about a couple of people who were lost yesterday in an airplane, haven't you?"

"I sure have!" said the operator.

"General alarm went out all over the line."

"All right; we're the criminals, as I suppose you've guessed before this. Spread the news that we are safe, and keep the change out of that piece of money for yourself. When do we get a train out of here?"

"In about fifteen minutes, if she's on time, and she was at last reports."

"Good! Let us have a couple of tickets to Alta Vista, if you please."

Looking back upon it after the fact, after they had reached the luxurious hotel at the mouth of Antelope Cañon and had endured the plaudits and congratulations of all and sundry persons therein, and he was changing to go to dinner, Jerry Manning told himself that the return trip from the water-tank station, on the Burned Mountain branch, would go down in the record as the most dismal one he had ever made.

At complete variance with her usual cheerful, not to say hilarious, outlook upon life, Patricia had proved inconsolable. It was an entirely new side of her, and he hadn't known what to do with it. Over and over again he had tried to make her understand that she meant more to him than any number of cement plants; but all to no purpose. She had lost her chance for happiness, she said; killed it with her own hands; and that was all there was to be said. She was never, never going to take advantage of his good nature and let him throw himself away on a fool—or words to that effect.

On his way to dinner he found her waiting for him at the door of her suite, looking more or less like a modern "Mariana in the Moated Grange."

"Yes," she said, as if he had questioned her, "the hall girl said you hadn't gone down, and I waited for you. I simply can't endure to sit at table with the bunch to-night. Won't you see to it that I don't have to?"

He smiled. "Compromise you if we go off by ourselves, won't it? Not but what I'd be hilariously delighted if it should."

"I don't care. I won't be talked at and jollied and made to tell what happened, and all that. I couldn't stick it to-night, Jerry, dear."

"You don't have to," he said. In the great dining room a tip to the head waiter secured them a small table for two in an alcove, far removed from the joyous bunch.

It was after the soup and the mountain trout, in a meal that was promising to be as silent and dismal as the journey from Anaminta, that the head waiter came to their table with a telegram. Jerry signed for the message and laid it aside dejectedly.

After a minute or so, Patricia said:

"That's your death sentence, I suppose. Aren't you going to read it?"

"Do you want me to?"

"Yes. Let's have it over with."

He opened the envelope and glanced at the typewritten inclosure. It bore a New York date line, and it was signed by John Strickland. He had to read it twice before he could grasp its full meaning:

> Yours from Anaminta delayed in transmission. Not hearing from you before closing hour, have acted for you under power of attorney, making best terms possible. Titan plant enters merger under special contractual conditions, insuring that your father's organization remains intact and undisturbed. In the reorganization you will be named president of the combined companies. Position nominal so far as active operations are concerned, but will give you complete authority to carry out your wishes concerning welfare of Titan employees and to protect them as heretofore. Congratulations.

He laid the astounding telegram beside Patricia's plate, and she read it, hastily at first, and then again, word by word. And even so, she looked up to say:

"Just what does it mean, Jerry?"

"It means that I've cleared a million or so on my Titan stock and, apparently, have lost nothing that I was fighting for. What I was expecting, as a matter of course, was to be kicked out bodily; fired so far that I'd be asked to show a card from the office if I ever wanted to step foot into the old plant. And, instead —— Say, Pat, you certainly did the right little thing when you kidnaped me in Tommie's plane! If you hadn't, I'd probably be a lone wolf in the cement

game this blessed minute. Does—doesn't that make a whole lot of difference in the way you're feeling? Strikes me it ought to."

For an instant her eyes filled, and she had to dab at them with a wisp of a handkerchief. Then the look of sweet insolence, which was the front she usually presented to a naughty world, swept over her face, and without a word she pushed back her chair and held out her hand to him.

"What is it?" he asked, getting up to take the extended hand.

"Just a minute," she said, her lips twitching, and she led him across the dining room to the long table where the "bunch" was gathered, and where they were greeted with shouts and laughter.

Patricia waited quite patiently until she could make herself heard.

"I just wanted to tell you," she said coolly, when quiet came, "that Jerry and I have decided to get married. That's why we took a table to ourselves. Now laugh that off if you can—only you won't, after you've heard what we've been through in the last two days. That's all, Jerry, dear. Let's go back. Our dinner will be getting cold."

"So Sailed We," by Holman Day, is the complete novel in the next issue of THE POPULAR. *Here is an attractive combination—a favorite author and a bully story of two sailors who went in quest of the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow and found their hearts' desire, which wasn't gold but something much richer.*

CHERISH THE DOG

FROM the Alaskan wilderness comes another story of malemute heroism. This story concerns Nigger, a husky, and two miners who owe their lives to the devotion of this valiant dog. These miners, who had borrowed Nigger, were injured in a mine explosion at Little Squaw. They were miles from help. In desperation they fastened a note to the husky's collar: "Come! Both seriously injured." Then they turned the dog loose in a night of forty degrees below zero.

All through the hours of the white Alaskan night Nigger pushed on over the pass. Before morning dawned his master heard the dog whining at the door. Post-haste the man made up a team of huskies and late in the day the two injured men arrived at Little Squaw. Here a radio call was sent to the United States signal station, ninety miles north, to send the patients by airplane to a hospital.

Naturally in Alaska these dogs are regarded with peculiar affection. But the dog hero is not confined to the malemute breed. Wherever men live, in every clime under the sun, the dog is rightly regarded as part of the household and entitled to his share in the good things the house affords. Almost daily the newspapers chronicle the intelligence shown by some dog when his human friends were in danger. On Christmas night more than a hundred people in a hotel on Mount Schoenberg, near Vienna, were saved from a frightful death, when the hotel took fire, by the barking of a dog, which aroused the porter.

These and many other instances of the dog's sense of the sanctity of human life prove the validity of the human instinct to cherish and protect the dog. At frequent intervals one hears of people who would banish the dog as a nuisance not only in our congested cities but in towns. These people overlook the fact that the dog in his relations with man is the giver rather than the receiver. He is the four-footed voluntary life guard of the community. If an occasional dog exhibits objectionable traits or vicious habits, in nine cases out of ten the fault is chargeable to the master rather than to the brute. Few dogs are given to snapping or biting, unless they are subjected to abuse. By nature and temperament a dog is the friendliest brute that wears a tail.

Eventually hydrophobia, the one black mark against the dog, is bound to disappear, with the new inoculation treatment. A preventative for distemper has recently been announced by a medical research council in England.

The Barking Dog

By C. L. Edson

Author of "Jumping Jackanapes," Etc.

Louis "Olympus" Bonot, strong man of Bell Brothers' Circus, was a mystery. From a placid ox, he could apparently change at will into a raging brute who could thrash even the champion of the ring. It wasn't hypnotism nor autosuggestion, nor anything that could be explained by precedent.

"IT cost me a thousand dollars to find out that he could fight," said Fred Bell, owner of Bell Brothers' Circus, as he clambered into his private Pullman at the end of the train. "And I am willing to spend a thousand more to learn the cause of his fighting talent—cause and cure, that's what I want to know; especially the cure."

"The cure?" said Bill Wildrick, the press agent, following at his boss' heels. "You mean you'd get some good boy to cure him of that ring talent, the way David cured Goliath?"

"The way Delilah cured Samson," corrected the circus boss. "She found where Samson's strength lay, and she promptly sheared him. If I could find what gland has been stimulated in our strong boy, or what kind of loco weed he has been eating that he has suddenly acquired this great fighting talent, I'd have it cut out as sure as Delilah cut Samson's hair."

The two men had just returned from the "athletic concert" of the night show, in which Louis Bonot, alias "Olympus," the strong man of Bells' circus, had been matched to box four rounds with the best boy the towners could produce. Ordinarily the circus boss does not attend the performance of an after show, but there were three extraordinary circumstances in the performance that night at Darlington, Iowa. Darlington was a boxing center; it was the home town of Bob Hammond, "The Iowa Giant," leading challenger for the heavyweight championship of the world. That was interesting to all sports followers; and Fred Bell, the circus man, was a great sport or nothing. The Iowa Giant happened to be in Darlington on the circus date and had

accepted the challenge to box four rounds with Olympus of the circus aggregation. It especially interested Fred Bell, because he had never seen Bob Hammond in action, and he hoped within the year to back Hammond in his try for championship honors. Now was Bell's opportunity to get a line on Bob for future-betting considerations. But the final and overwhelming motive for Bell's attending the bout was furnished by "Shag" Ackerman, the chief barker for the kid show.

Ackerman had badgered the boss to bet on Olympus "as a matter of loyalty to the circus," and when Bell had replied that he preferred to wager that Bob Hammond would knock Olympus through the big top, Ackerman had jeered:

"Betchu one grand that Olympus under my management knocks The Iowa Giant out in the first round."

Bell had taken this bet and lost it.

THIS was reason enough for the consternation that still fuddled his mind when he and the press agent reached the Pullman, after the amazing performance they had just witnessed on the lot. Bell pressed a button, lighting up the lounging room, and slumped into a soft-leather armchair. He was a figure of less than average height, a trifle plump, with large penetrating brown eyes that were a true index to the intellect behind them. The lean, red-headed press agent slipped into a chair opposite and, reaching to a half-opened drawer in the desk, helped himself to one of his boss' cigars.

"It cost me a thousand dollars to learn that Olympus could fight," repeated the circus man, "when he's all pepped up like a locoed buffalo. And, as I said before, I'm game enough to spend a similar sum to find out how Shag Ackerman pepped him up. And if you can tell me, old bean, the money is yours. By the way, did you bet on this fight?"

"Yes," said Wildrick. "They nicked me for a hundred, the same way they nicked you. Ackerman made the approach, and I fell exactly as you did, Bell. That proves he's got a combination that is a sure winner. Whatever his method is, and however he discovered it, it sure makes Olympus box. Maybe it's hypnotism. You remember the story about 'Trilby?' "

"Yes; and old 'Svengali' who hypnotized her," said Bell, proud of his erudition.

"Well, that old bird, Svengali, knew how to sing, but had no voice. Trilby had the vocal cords, but she was tone deaf. He hypnotized Trilby and made her sing like a bird."

"Made a sort of nightingale of her," declared Fred Bell.

"That's the idea. Now Shag Ackerman knows all about boxing, and Olympus has got the muscles for it. Suppose Shag mesmerizes him and puts his fighting will and knowledge into the big boy's muscles. Bingo! He bowls over the pugilists, like Trilby hitting the high spots in grand opera."

"That listens good as a literary motif," said the circus magnate. "You understand, I said 'literary;' it ain't science—real science. The regular scientists have learned that you can't hypnotize a singer or a pugilist that way. It's like the tramp that told the scientist he could make a fortune if he would take the wood out of wood alcohol. That was a tramp's idea of science. When I was a boy, the farmers believed that an organ in an animal's body, which they called the melt, was the organ of fatigue. If that organ was cut out, an animal could run forever and never get tired. They told a story about a man who was a foot racer, who went to a surgeon and had his melt cut out. Then he entered in a race and ran so fast he crossed the tape far ahead of all competition, but he couldn't stop running and soon disappeared over the horizon; so his friends telegraphed to a town forty miles down the line and got the police to shoot their friend to keep him from running off the earth.

"That's very much like the case of our Olympus," continued Bell. "He came out of his corner like a wild man, and he had Bob Hammond punched to pieces in twenty seconds. That final wallop knocked The Iowa Giant fully twelve feet. Just think of it! Bob Hammond weighs over two hundred pounds. Yet the blow of a fist lifted him out of the ring, and he traveled twelve feet. It's a

record, I tell you. It beats anything in the history of boxing. Take the famous wallop that 'The Wild Bear' from Brazil hit Champion Jim Halsey. It knocked him six feet out of the ring. Hammond was knocked twice as far. And Halsey weighed only one hundred and eighty pounds at the time. Bob Hammond weighs two hundred. Of course, I know that Olympus is a superhuman strong man, but I tell you he could never have planted that ferocious blow on Bob Hammond, if he hadn't had something done to his glands, like the foot racer that had his melt cut out."

"You believe in glands, then?" asked Wildrick. "You are a follower of Doctor Pishposhky of Vienna, who can put monkey glands in an old man and make a college boy out of him. Do you think he could make a timid, sissified, strong man into a fighting gorilla?"

"No, I don't believe in that kind of gland science; that's fake science. The idea is this. Some real scientific reason exists for this sudden fighting ability in Louis Bonot, who has always been a big, fat coward. You've heard of crazy men that couldn't be held down by less than six sane athletes. That's what I have in mind. Abnormal stimulation to a man's glands can give him superhuman strength and ferocity. Something like that has happened to Olympus. I am going to find what it is—and cure it."

THE circus train had been in motion for some time, and the men were being rocked in a gentle, soothing rhythm, as the lights of Darlington winked past them, to gather like a swarm of fireflies in the rear. The circus boss now selected a cigar and pushed a button to summon his negro butler.

"All right, George. Go up front and tell 'Shorty' Holt we want to see him back here."

With a comprehending nod and smile, the colored man disappeared, and the press agent took up a new side to the argument.

"You say you are willing to spend another thousand dollars to find a cure for this sudden fighting ability. That's a mistake, Bell. Just because you lost a thousand iron men you don't want to get mad and crab the act. The thing to do is cash in on Olympus' stuff. Ballyhoo him for a million. Why pay good money to detectives and doctors to find out how he does it, and then, as you express it, cut the fighting gland out of the big fellow? I can get you a million dollars' worth of publicity out of his new talent. That's good interest on your thousand dollars, ain't it? Why, the big boy's flash-of-fighting form is going to be the richest publicity for this circus that we ever got in our life."

"It's publicity, but not circus publicity," objected Bell, blowing a ring of smoke and burning it in two with the red end of his cigar. "It will be prize-fight publicity. Can't you see that the New York promoters will be after him? The story is on the wire now, and he'll be the leading contender among the heavyweights, as soon as those big-town fellows read the morning papers. Don't you realize that Bob Hammond was the unbeaten challenger for the championship? And our crazy Olympus has knocked him out in less than one round. Bob Hammond was being matched for a bout with the champion next fall. Louis Bonot is in line now! They may say it was a fluke and match Louis again with Bob Hammond in New York. But if he licks him again, then it is the champion or nobody. Who else could stop Louis Bonot? And old 'Reno' Taggert will surely offer him a contract to do battle for the championship of the world."

"But you've got a contract with him already," suggested Wildrick. "You can hold him to that."

"I can hold him? What chance have I got to hold him when The Iowa Giant couldn't hold him? Ask me to hold the kid-show dwarf or the ossified man, but don't ask me to hold the strong man of the side show nor the herd of elephants when they say, 'Let's go.' "

"How can he jump his contract?" asked Wildrick. "You've got a legal comeback."

"It's a circus contract, not a pugilistic contract," growled Bell, rolling his cigar in his mouth. "When the sport world acclaims Olympus as the pugilistic won-

der and the logical contender for the championship, how can I hold him to a contract in the kid show, lifting twelve men and a baby elephant for sixty dollars a week and cakes? He'll sign up for half a million to meet the champion, and when I sue him the court will hold that I am trying to keep a national hero in peonage. A man has a right to better his condition, that's one of the natural rights guaranteed by the Constitution, and when Olympus has a new contract for a thousand dollars a minute, and I try to lug him back to the previous job at sixty dollars a week, the court will tell the world that another 'Simon Legree' is out of luck. And yours truly will do a 'Little Eva,' going out to red fire and sad music."

HOLT, the black-eyed, hook-nosed, jumping clown, thrust his inquisitive head into the boss' car, gave a parrotlike nod and marched into the parlor, followed by Doctor Hall, the circus physician.

"I brought 'Doctor Watson' along to help us on this 'Sherlock Holmes' stuff." The clown's eyes twinkled; he perceived that no response was coming to his waggery, whereupon he emitted a loud laugh himself.

"How do you know what we're talking about?" asked Fred Bell.

Shorty grimaced.

"I'd be a bum detective if I couldn't surmise these things. Besides, I asked George. And I'll be frank with you, too. I lost fifty dollars on that fight to-night. I can't understand where this big boy gets his 'ring presence' as the sport writers call it. It's something like hypnotism, all right. At any rate, the impresario that controls the whole performance is that double-jointed crook, Shag Ackerman. The way I reached that deduction is easy. He's the man that won all the bets. And it's a dumb detective that doesn't dare state that the man that gets the important money must be the brains of the pirate band."

"Good enough," agreed Bell. "It's Shag who pushes some secret button that causes Olympus to perform. Now, is it dope, electricity, voodoo magic, or what? How does he do it? I'm assigning you to this case, Shorty."

"I think it's a case of old-fashioned fits," said the clown. "Ackerman has learned some way of causing Olympus to throw a fit whenever Shag wants him to. It's a fighting fit."

"By George!" exclaimed Bell. "That's my idea exactly. Didn't I tell you, Wildrick, that it was something like that?"

"I know it isn't natural fighting ability," continued Shorty Holt. "I boxed with Olympus when he was training. He wasn't quick enough to lay a glove on me. He could have killed me if he could have landed. But I punched him all over the ring. I stung him hard, too. I hit him some wallops that must have felt like that railroad engine hitting Jumbo."

"And yet he never touched you?" asked Bell.

"Never showed a fighting flash," said Holt. "I bet fifty dollars that Bob Hammond would chase him out of the ring. I'd have bet a thousand if I'd had the money. And yet he rushed out of his corner and slaughtered Bob Hammond—one, two, three!"

A groaning murmur assented to his description.

"I have asked Doc Hall if it is possible to give a man a fighting fit by biting his ear, giving him a sniff of chloroform, or something. You remember Shag acted as Olympus' second, and I saw him put his arm around the big boy just before the gong rang, and he seemed to be whispering into his ear or biting his neck or something."

Doctor Hall told the circus boss all he knew about the pathology of Olympus, the strong man. There was an overdevelopment of the pituitary gland, he felt sure, and of the subrenal glands which accounted for the abnormal muscular strength of the man. This would have a tendency to disturb the secretions that maintain balance and evenness of temper. It would be quite possible to stimulate such a man so as to induce a temporary ebullition of rage, a recrudescence of instinctive fighting ability. But medical science has not yet gone far enough in the isolation of the gland ex-

tractives to tell just how to stimulate any given emotion.

In conclusion, Doctor Hall told the circus owner that there was little doubt that Shag Ackerman had discovered how to stimulate this fighting fervor in the circus strong man, and the quickest way to learn the secret was to get it from Ackerman.

"Well, that's the nicest little sleuthing job I ever assigned a man to," declared Fred Bell. "Ackerman is the hardest nut to crack that any man could go up against. But that's your job, Shorty. From now on you swarm around Ackerman. Whither he goeth, thou goest with him—see? Wheresoever he lieth down, thou liest down with him. And if he talks in his sleep, you've got him."

IT was four days later, when the circus was showing Joliet, that Shorty had his most heartbreaking experience. Jim Halsey, the world champion, and his shrewd manager, Sam Shane, had run out from Chicago to look the new prodigy over, and they were dining with the big boss at his secluded table in the cookhouse. Shorty, knowing that the visitors had not yet been introduced to the mighty Olympus and his manager, conceived a little joke which might serve to pry open some seam in this air-tight mystery. He went to Shag Ackerman and tipped him off that "a couple of birds will be introduced to you as the world's champion and his manager. It's a frame-up on you. You can govern yourself accordingly."

"What's the lay?" asked Ackerman suspiciously.

"They're a couple of star clowns from Bannon and Haley's," said Holt. "I know 'em. They're eating chow with the boss. I think it's his idea—him and Bill Wildrick—publicity stuff. You see, if they can turn Olympus into comic publicity, it will be a big boost for show business and kill any chance of the big boy being taken seriously as a fighter."

"Leave it to me," snarled Shag. "The clowns will laugh on the other side of their faces."

The two strangers appeared a moment later, chaperoned by Fred Bell. Shorty retired, as they approached the main kid show, where Ackerman was nervously awaiting them.

"I suppose you know these gentlemen," sang out the genial circus boss. "Meet the champion and his manager."

"Sure, I recognize these distinguished gentlemen—unless they are a couple of professional impersonators in the best make-up I ever saw," said Ackerman, shaking hands cordially. "Come right in and meet the big boy." The party went into the men's dressing tent, where Olympus was discovered sitting on a bale of mattresses, reading a romantic magazine. He rose at the sight of his superiors.

Fred Bell made the introductions and asked Olympus if he would not do one or two feats of strength to show the visitors that there was no fake about his muscular preëminence.

"Sure he will," Ackerman said. He stepped close to the strong man, put his arm affectionately about his neck, and said:

"You realize, old boy, that you are gazing at the champion of the world. If you are ever lucky enough to see him again, it will be in the ring, and he will be there to close your eyes. When you open 'em again, if ever, he'll be far away. So now is your chance to show him some of your tricks." The last words came through clenched teeth, and it was evident that Ackerman was giving his man a bear hug of frightful intensity.

The next moment it happened.

Olympus was on the champion, swinging wild blows; two missed before the third punch landed in Halsey's ribs. The champion was down. Olympus was after Sam Shane who had rushed in to protect Halsey. A fist to Shane's face knocked him through the side wall of the tent. Shorty saw him lie there, white and unconscious. He called the circus cops. The champion had arisen and was running. Bell and Ackerman had already scattered. Behind them the champion ran slowly—lamely. Olympus was pursuing him onto the lot; he clouted him in the ear. The champion yelled for help. Two policemen barred the advance of the strong man. Clubs and fists mingled with the kaleidoscopic effect of windmills. Then the cyclone subsided.

The New York papers handled the story with all the extravagance of tabloid journalism. For three days the private car of the circus boss resembled a press-clipping bureau, snowed under with these New York papers, while the boss' secretary, the clown, Shorty, Bill Wildrick, and the big boss himself were sifting, sorting, and analyzing the published reports of the new Olympiad.

The leading newspaper of the metropolis declared:

> It is the first emergence of the true gladiatorial spirit since the high days when The Wild Bear from Brazil smote a world champion into the fourth row of the audience.

The other New York papers were in line with similar comments:

> The spirit of John L. Sullivan has returned from the land of shades,

said one.

> Here are two pugilistic marvels who will not fight for love nor money; the challenger does not fight for money, and the champion will not fight for love,

was the paragraphic gibe of another.

An editorial in a theatrical paper said:

> It is not cricket to poke ridicule at Champion Halsey for refusing to defend himself when being walloped by a pugilistic showman on the circus lot. The champion is under contract not to fight except under arrangements made by his famous manager. He is like a grand-opera prima donna, whose contract to sing only at the Pallazo prevents her from joining in the impromptu chorus of her friends at a jolly supper in a cabaret. If a prima donna can refrain from trilling a few notes at that gay time because of a sordid contract, why expect a hard-boiled champion pugilist to be swept away by his artistic temperament? The redoubtable Sam Shane was there to enforce his contractual rights, and James Halsey was reminded that the literary, dramatic, phonographic, and motion-picture rights, incident to his manly art of self-defense, had all been signed over; his art was no longer his; it was the vested property of said Shane. And it is greatly to the credit of Halsey that he refrained from thoughtlessly embezzling some of Shane's property in this moment of crisis. Although the champ sustained three broken ribs he did not lift a finger to defend himself, if the dispatches are correct. Such self-control is the stuff heroes are made of.

And so it went through all the papers, the funny men making a rich sauce of it. The news and sports editors had their teeth in real meat again, while the solemn editorial writers polished and reassembled the bones of this nine-day wonder of the news.

"They're handling this story like it was the opening of another war," Wildrick groaned.

"I told you they would," Bell answered. "You thought it would be circus publicity. You're a whale of a publicity man when you can't see the difference between the circus ring and the prize ring."

"It's so much like the war," continued Wildrick, "that they've got an expert on each paper analyzing the dispatches from the field—guessing at the whys and wherefores. One guy asks why Shag Ackerman had his protégé assault the champ. He answers that Shag knew the champion wouldn't fight back—outside the ring, and the public would thereupon demand a real match. Another expert says that Shag really thought the champ was an impostor, a clown from a rival circus; but, if Shag had known it was really the champion, he would not have dared turn his man loose. But, he explains, it worked out all right because the champion was not in a position to defend himself. Another commentator asks why Shorty Holt lied to Shag and told him the visitors were a pair of clowns and not the real champion and his manager. He winds up with the conclusion that Shorty is opposed to the pugilistic career of Shag's strong boy and is trying to queer the whole act."

"They're right at that," said Fred Bell. "I foresaw the whole thing. It's working out just as I doped it. Olympus left for New York to-day. I told you he'd jump his contract as soon as Reno Taggert wired him to come on to the metropolis. There's only one way to stop Olympus, as I said in the first place. We've got to find out what gland is being stimulated, and then shoot that gland out of

him—and that will be the end of his championship career."

"Who's to say what gland does it?" asked Wildrick. "How can we find out?"

"That's up to Shorty," declared Bell.

"How far do you want me to go in finding the dope?" asked Shorty Holt. "You tell me I've got a free hand, but you are kind of scrupulous about certain things. A detective has to use some mean clews. You know what I refer to. I can buzz around 'Babe' if you want me to, but I know you are pretty darn strict about circus ethics."

"Exactly!" roared the circus boss. "But this isn't ethical—this stunt that Olympus is doing—or, rather, what that crook Ackerman is doing *to him*. It's wrong, and I'm going to stop it. And I'll not be squeamish about small matters. It's a crime for the big fellow to be turned into a fighting machine by a mountebank's sorcery."

Then in a lower tone he asked:

"You say you could buzz around Babe. What do you mean?"

"Take her to dinner at some of these loud cabarets and do a little harmless spooning—that's all. You know she's incurably romantic."

"Romantic! That minx romantic?" exclaimed Bell. "What are you trying to tell me? A girl that's tattooed from her ears to her ankles! Romantic!"

"That's just the kind of people that are hopelessly romantic," declared Shorty. "I see you're no student of the human heart, Mr. Bell. Just tell Babe that she has the most soulful eyes, and that there is a certain indefinite something about her that makes her irresistible—all of that mush stuff, you know—and Babe is in the seventh heaven for the evening."

"But she'll be all wrought up about her hubby, now that he's the hero of the hour," suggested Bell. "If she's romantic as you say, she'll be plumb crazy about his new exploits, just as all the other romantic wild women are now."

"Yes, but I'll tell her how thoughtless it was for him to run off to New York without taking her along. I've got a technique, Brother Bell. None of us is perfect; we can't have everything. But let me tell you how I'll proceed."

"Don't bother to tell," said Bell. "You've got your orders to proceed."

SHE wore her heart on her sleeve; that is, Babe Bonot revealed a big heart pierced by Cupid's arrows on her arm—tattooed there. She had suffered much for love. That is, the Venuses, lovers' knots, clasped hands, and other decorations that covered her body from heels to chin had caused her no slight pangs in acquiring them. Not the pangs of "woman scorned," but of a brave girl submitting to the jabs of the tattooer's needle. Shorty Holt was right when he told the circus boss that this decorated lady was the living shrine of romance. He did not say she was amorous or erotic; he said romantic. Being a student of human nature, this clown was on to the different types of men and women with Bell Brothers' aggregation, and he had classified Babe Bonot rightly; she belonged to the romantic type and was an extreme example of it. She was just a good girl full of sentiment and no sense.

She had married the strong man, not because he awoke love in her heart, but because he suggested romance in her mind. "You're so big and strong!" That sort of stuff. Indeed, the tattooed lady was incapable of real conjugal love, as all romantics are. She dramatized her affections instead; and any heart affair that didn't fall into conventional dramatics was no affair of hers.

When Shorty came to her in the kid-show tent that afternoon, she was sitting like a Nile queen on her dais, reading the evening paper. The clown climbed onto the platform behind her; she was immersed in the dispatches from New York telling of the furore in the sport world caused by the arrival of Olympus, the "Twenty-second Wonder of the World," as a sports editor called him because he was touted to whip any man in the world in twenty seconds. Babe was devouring the news without any expression of countenance other than absorbed interest in the dramatic tale. She turned and smiled quizzically when Shorty drew a folding chair up beside her.

"Listen, Babe, I've been thinking of you ever since the big fellow quit us."

"Ah, go on, Mr. Holt," she said.

It is unusual for the big-top stars to fraternize with kid-show performers, and Babe seemed flattered by the great man's attention. The clown buzzed on with a string of sentimental small talk and was successful in arranging the rendezvous he had hoped for.

That night, when the circus band was blaring the signal for the grand entry, Shorty and Babe were not among the costumed performers thronging through the flag-decorated entrance into the big-top arena. They were speeding downtown in the boss' borrowed car, to dine and dance among the towners at a leading cabaret.

THE circus had made the haul, and the trains were ready to pull out of town when Shorty Holt rejoined his boss in his private Pullman. The funny fellow slouched into a chair and sat facing Bell, with a self-conscious grin.

"What luck?" asked Fred Bell.

"I've got your answer. Yea, bo. It was fast work, wasn't it? I played the great-lover rôle until it almost cracked. But Babe thinks I'm a great guy. I told her how all the women of New York are swarming around the mighty Olympus, now that he's sitting on top of the world, and he never gives a thought to that sweet little girl, that pretty little girl, the girl he left behind."

"Did she tell you how they make Olympus fight?"

"No! she didn't tell me that. But I found out. She would have told me if she had known. She's my friend now, and she told me everything she knew. She's such a flathead, or she would guess how it is they make him fight. It's awfully simple."

"You found out then? How?"

"I found out from Mike, the circus barber."

"Barber! What does he know about it?" asked Bell in surprise.

"He doesn't know anything about it. He's another bonehead like Babe."

"Are you kidding me or are you dopey yourself?" demanded the circus boss. "I've got no time for fooling. Tell me, do you know how they make Olympus fight, or don't you?"

"I told you that I know—that I just found out from Babe and Barber Mike," said Shorty indignantly.

"No, you didn't," insisted Bell. "You just told me that Babe don't know, and that Mike don't know. If you deny that, you're a liar." Bell's face reddened.

"I don't deny it," said the clown coldly. "And I'm no liar. I found the secret that you sent me out to find, and I got it from putting two and two together."

"How can you learn a secret from people who don't know it themselves?"

"I'll tell you, if you'll keep your shirt on. Here's the clew I got from Babe. I asked her when did Louis do his first fighting? She said the first time he ever did any real fighting was when he got mad, while Mike was shaving him, and he jumped out of the barber chair and licked the stuffing out of Mike. A couple of canvas hogs tried to help Mike, and Louis licked them, too. That's all she knew about his sudden birth of fighting zeal. She didn't know the significance of it."

"Well, what was the significance of it?"

"I tried to find that out from Mike. I went to Mike as soon as I got Babe off my hands. Mike said the big boy got mad because he tied the towel too tight around his neck.

" 'Olymp, he no lika tight on de neck. I no tie a towel around hees biga neck no more,' was Mike's conclusion.

"So then I went to Doc Hall," continued Shorty. "When I gave him my information, he said right away: 'That's it. Pressure on the pneumogastric nerve —that's what does it.'

"So there's the secret you wanted. You can call Doc Hall in if you want to verify it. I may be a liar, you know."

"Now, Shorty, I never said you were a liar," apologized Bell. "I said that if anybody else made such contradictory statements I'd think he was a liar. But you were just tangling me up on purpose to have a little fun with me, and any comeback you got was part of the joke. I know you've given me the straight dope. All right! Now how does Doc Hall say to correct it?"

"Correct what? His pneumogastric nerve?"

"Yes; can't we get him into a barber chair and have that nerve pulled?"

"Barber chair? When they touched that nerve in a barber chair he arose and conquered the world."

"I meant dentist's chair, of course."

"Worse than ever. If a barber's soft touch on that nerve made all this difference, what would happen when a dentist went at it with an electric riveter?"

"Call the doc in here."

THE old "family" physician of the circus, Doctor Hall, came back to the boss' car in his pajamas, chewing a peppermint lozenge to wake up his wits. He explained in terms comprehensible to a layman the nature of Louis Bonot's case. All animals are capable of "fits" of anger, as they are called. These emotional fits protect a man in the face of danger; a fit of anger strengthens his fighting; a fit of terror speeds his flight. From the ductless glands, somehow, comes this "juice" that electrifies the body. Through the pneumogastric nerve goes the impulse telling the stomach to quit and tighten for a blow, the lungs to work faster, supplying fuel for the muscles. The man can then fight like wild. So you see when you press the button on Olympus' pneumogastric, you galvanize your strong man into a fighting gorilla.

"Why can't we press the button on Champion Halsey and make him into a gorilla to lick Olympus?"

"Because he's normal, Mr. Bell. You don't know where to press the button on a normal man. Olympus is the only freak I know who can be sent into a fit that way. His nerve must be diseased, I should say."

"How can we cure him, then?" asked the circus magnate.

"Why cure him? It will 'shear him of his strength,' as you might say."

"Might say? I did say it, doc. I'll cure his case if it costs a fortune. It's that dirty dog Ackerman who is profiting by this pathological condition. A common side-show barker trying to take in the whole country on a snide. He bit me already."

"They say 'barking dogs never bite,' " said Doc Hall and laughed.

"Well, this one's going to bite the dirt. When an amateur Barnum like him goes against a guy like me, he's got about as much chance as a hobo army would have against the regular army."

"Here's a good gag," began the doctor.

But Bell interrupted:

"These gags are clown stuff. But you and I, doc, are supposed to be scientific men. If we can't handle this case and cure him or kill him, then we both better resign and turn the business over to the guys in clown alley."

The next morning Shorty Holt came to the executive's car before Bell had arisen. The clown unfolded his plan, a line of action calculated to get the unbeatable Olympus and his manager badly beaten, and abort their championship aspirations in short order. The boss listened eagerly and was delighted with the plan.

"I was afraid you had some crazy scheme like sewing gorilla glands into the champion," he said, "so he could meet our gorilla and have a chance. But your scheme is workable. Have you told anybody else about it?"

"No."

"Then don't tell anybody—not even the press agent. Wildrick told me he could get a million dollars' worth of circus publicity by letting Olympus go on in the ring. I'll get a million dollars' worth of circus publicity by keeping him out of the ring. I'll show Wildrick he don't know nothing about press agenting a circus performer.

"You take Babe Bonot with you to New York," he continued. "Have her go with my nephew; he'll take good care of that romantic lady and help you in any way you want him to. Billy is absolutely reliable."

Bell turned over a thousand dollars in currency, telling the clown to draw on him for more if he needed it. An hour later Billy Harmon and Shorty, accompanying the dashing Mrs. Louis Bonot, otherwise Babe, boarded a fast train at Elkhart and engaged Pullman reservations at Buffalo. The next morning they were breakfasting together at the Hotel Vendome, where the mighty Olympus and his party were still holding the attention of the metropolis.

THE morning papers, with undiminished sensationalism, still played the story of the battling giant sojourning on Broadway: "A modern Samson who has crashed the gate in Gotham as the ancient strong man carried off the gates of Gaza." A new angle to the story showed itself in a dispatch from the circus lot, saying that the strong man's wife, grown jealous of the attention he was receiving, had left for New York to claim some of the spotlight for herself. She was quoted as saying: "I shall park myself at the headquarters of this new champion and see that he steers a husbandly course among the sirens and gold diggers that throng those enchanted aisles."

Babe read this news and chuckled with the rest of the breakfast party.

"Who wrote it?" she asked.

"That's my uncle's work," declared Billy. "He composed that stuff without Wildrick's help."

Shorty corroborated:

"Yes, ma'am; Boss Bell is putting over his own private publicity, if you can speak of privacy and publicity together. Mrs. Bonot was loyal to the show, and Mr. Bonot wasn't, so Fred Bell is going to grab some of the prize ring's publicity and turn it back to the prize beauty of the kid show, and make Miss Babe Bonot the premier attraction of the circus world."

After they had finished breakfast, Shorty gave final instructions to the party, before deploying for the skirmish line. He himself would pay a visit to the barber shop and make arrangements for some one to get trimmed. The imperious Babe was to pose herself regally on a certain lounge in the lobby, opposite the little sign saying: "Nine Barbers. No Waiting." There he told her to wait until all the nine barbers came out, then she was to go away. It was to be a quick cue, and she must exit rapidly or take the consequences.

Billy Harmon was to call up the tabloid editors and tell them to send reporters to interview the jealous wife of the challenger in the lobby of the Vendome at ten o'clock. That was all he had to do until one minute of ten, at which time he was to summon the police.

Incidentally, in calling up the reporters, he let fall the hint that Mrs. Bonot's envy of her husband's eminence had reached the point where she was predicting his defeat—"Even if she had to lick him herself."

When Shorty Holt entered the barber shop he already knew that Olympus would sit for his daily tonsure at ten, for Shorty had fraternized with Pierre, the boss barber, and paid him a hundred-dollar tip to be permitted to shave the great man himself.

"I'm a boss barber back home," Shorty had confided, "and I'd like to go back to Indiana and tell the tinhorn sports in my shop that while I was in New York I shaved the challenger when he was training for the world's championship."

A hair, perhaps, divides the false and true, according to Omar. But no false whiskers were on this sleuth. Shorty's only disguise was a barber's white jacket. He intended to get a hot towel on the face of Olympus before the big boy got a good look at him.

Meanwhile, Billy Harmon had carried out all instructions as faithfully as his uncle said he would. When at last Billy saw Olympus entering the barber shop, he stepped into a telephone booth, called the police station, and said:

"Send the riot squad. Manager of the Hotel Vendome speaking. Olympus has gone crazy and is fighting the reporters in the lobby."

Coming out of the booth again, Harmon walked across the lobby, where a score of reporters and camera men were milling politely around Babe Bonot, now sparkling in the delight of the interview. Harmon skirted around the group and took a look into the barber shop. Olympus was there reclining, blindfolded, in his chair, the bulk of his mighty body shrouded in the barber's apron, like a mountain range drifted over with snow. Volcanic eruption seemed a distant and impossible thing.

Suddenly the barber drew the towel tighter and knotted it around his neck. Quickly the barber stepped back and slid out of his white jacket.

But none too soon. From the barber chair arose that mountainous man. The

apron covering his arms was ripped asunder. He advanced on the boss barber, who had stepped forward to urge him to keep his seat. A fist blow from Olympus left Monsieur Pierre hanging across the hat tree, like a wet rag thrown on a fence.

The "Nine Barbers" started running —"No Waiting"—through the exit into the lobby. Babe Bonot saw the barbers coming, remembered her cue, and —— Here came Olympus, like a snowplow, tossing that white drift of barbers in all directions and opening the line for traffic.

Now he was in the main lobby, mingling with the newspaper men. The towel was still knotted on his neck, and he was knocking sport editors and news cameras in a general demolition. House detectives and clerks ran up to argue points of law. He sent them sprawling, amid shrieks from women, panic among the men, cries for the police.

"Stand back and give him air!" came the dismayed yell from Shag Ackerman.

"We're standing back fast enough," growled an injured man. "Give him the air yourself, if you think you can."

Shag grabbed his man by an arm and tried to lead him out. A poke from Olympus sent him flying through the main door, where he landed on the pavement and broke his jaw.

The riot squad arrived.

Whatever comic implications may have been inherent in these actions, the "scene now definitely changed to one of tears," as a newspaper reporter put it. For it was with tear bombs that the police subdued him.

The circus was at Charleston, West Virginia, when the news dispatches came. Bell and Wildrick took the evening papers to the private car, and together they digested the story. Olympus was acquitted by the police judge on testimony that his fighting fits were pathological. On this ground the boxing authorities ruled him out of the ring forever. He was on his way back to join the show.

A telegram from Shorty said Babe had been offered vaudeville and motion-picture contracts, which she had been "compelled to turn down because Bell's circus had just signed a twenty-year contract with her before she came to New York." A tabloid newspaper had offered her twenty-five thousand dollars for her autobiography, they to write the autobiography, she merely permitting them to sign her name to it. This she had accepted and was on her way back to the show, with the money in her purse. The title of the story was to be: "How a Modern Samson Was Sheared by His Delilah."

"Isn't that a corking idea!" exclaimed Wildrick, with a whistle. "I'd give a thousand dollars if we had thought that out ourselves."

"Give me the thousand dollars," said Bell, "for I'm the guy that thought it out."

HUSKIES OFFICIALLY DESIGNATED TO CARRY MAIL

EVERY reader of THE POPULAR knows that in the frozen regions of the North, the Eskimo dog, the malemute, familiarly known as a husky, is used during the long winter months to carry mail and supplies from the trading post to the outlying settlements and scattered habitations. But the husky is coming to the fore in the East as well as in the North.

Only a few weeks ago Posmaster General New officially designated two dog teams as mail carriers. One team is made up of ten huskies, and the other of seven. Both teams are the property of E. P. Clark, of Milan, New Hampshire. Their first official journey was made a short time ago from Minot Corner, Maine, via Boston, to Albany, New York. In the four sacks of mail which the dogs carried were letters addressed to mayors of cities and government officials along the route, and a letter for the governor of Massachusetts and the governor of New York from Governor Brewster of Maine.

White Coal

By Laurie York Erskine

Author of "The Man with the Brown Eyes," Etc.

IN FIVE PARTS—PART V.

The mighty dream of an engineer comes true at last—together with the dawn of a love even more immeasurable.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WARFARE ON THE TERRACE.

STANDING upon the balcony which gave excuse for the French windows at one end of the Medrun music room, Harry Medrun looked down upon the two girls who sat in wicker chairs on the terrace below. His hazel eyes bore a shadow of melancholy in them, but the clean line of his bearded jaw was firmly set, and the lips above were stretched in a smile which reflected the satisfaction which he felt.

Frances Medrun, gracefully at ease in the comfort of her armchair, might conceivably have aroused that satisfaction; but it is not probable that even she would have aroused it in a brother. The girl who sat opposite her talked vivaciously, and her hair, catching the sunlight, glittered with a thousand sparkling tendrils of golden light. From his point of vantage, Medrun could see vividly the azure beauty of her eyes. Knowing nothing of sartorial wiles, he put down the fact that her dress of lovely blue so happily matched those eyes as a happy accident. For it was this girl who brought the satisfied smile to Harry Medrun's lips and caused him to watch her with such a steady gaze that he forgot the reprehensible rudeness of his conduct.

He wondered why he had never noticed before, when he saw her almost daily at his father's office, that Isobel Ferris was the most enchanting girl he had ever seen. He wondered why he had never remarked the adorable way with which she tossed her head when she smiled, letting the toss do duty for a laugh; why he had never noticed the variegated play of her bright eyes and the vivacious movement of her lips. It was, of course, that

such girls are not the same in their office hours as they are when conferring with Frances Medruns upon the organization of business girls' clubs. During office hours they act a part. Now, Medrun was seeing Miss Ferris for the first time as what she was.

Isobel had been discussing with Frances Medrun the reason for her inclusion in that lady's counsels.

"When I received your letter," she explained, "I didn't hesitate a minute to accept your invitation, because it flattered me. But my vanity has its limitations, and to go into this work with you, I think, is outside my province. I can't afford to enter society."

Frances met her frankness with a frankness quite as genial.

"That's why I'm asking you to do it. There are no end of girls who can afford society, without knowing that that's all the word means. To them a business-woman's club means only a new way of patronizing the working girl. But this thing we are organizing is a club in the real sense of the word. It is for business women, not wage slaves—a sort of feminine bankers' club."

"But why choose me for your secretary?" Isobel tossed her head with a smile. "I'm no executive."

"You are the best secretary my father ever had, and he's hard on them."

"That means I'm a good wage slave. I thought your idea was to include only women who *are*—not women who would like to *be*."

Frances Medrun leaned back in her chair.

"You think it over," she said. "I'm sure you'll do it. Now we are going to have some tea." She turned to an approaching man whose dignity suggested that he was a bishop, but whose burden of tea things proclaimed him a butler. "Ask Mr. Harry if he will join us," she said.

"Before he comes," said Isobel, "let me tell you why I can't be the secretary of your club. I don't believe any more in what you stand for, Frances. I believe that we are not made for business. I believe that we are women first, and women merely. The manner in which I left your father should have told you that."

Frances Medrun gazed at her very steadily.

"You are wrong, Isobel," she said coolly. "The manner in which you left my father proves that you are the woman we want. That was initiative—the peculiar initiative of a woman. Men call it weakness, but it is our strength. They will cease to call it weakness when they feel its increasing power in all the affairs of the world. Here's Harry."

AND, as they sat about the table, engrossed in the trifles which accompany the deeper currents of such meetings, Frances proceeded to exercise her strength.

She had known that Isobel Ferris would appear at her best in this carefully arranged environment, and she had seen to it that Harry Medrun would be present. She had estimated to the finest degree how effectively she could bait her lure, and the flattering inclusion of the erstwhile country girl and stenographer in the intimate councils of Frances Medrun gave testimony to the respect in which she held her prey.

Yet prey is perhaps not precisely the word which best describes the relationship which Frances felt with Isobel Ferris. There was an element which threw the two women into another rôle. It remained with Harry Medrun to bring it out.

He was watching Isobel's face, eager for every friendly light which illumined her eyes; studying the effect upon her of every word he spoke; catching each shade of expression which passed across her vivacious countenance. Indeed, it was as though he played with his words upon a sensitive instrument and took delight in each response which he achieved. Knowing thoroughly the occasion for her leaving his father's office, he chose deliberately to touch upon it.

"I lunched at the Drake yesterday," he said. "Quite by accident. And there was your friend, young Royd, puffing one of Dyrenforth's cigars. He's making friends quickly—Royd is." Medrun smiled inwardly, with an inward satis-

faction, as he saw Isobel leap to her guard.

"Not only quickly, but naturally," she said dryly.

"Mr. Dyrenforth is interested in power almost as much as we are," said Frances. "You must have been a great find for him, Isobel."

Isobel flashed Medrun a dazzling smile.

"That must have been womanly initiative, I think," Isobel said.

Then Frances betrayed herself; not openly—not in such a breach as would have revealed her resentment to the casual observer, but in an almost imperceptible acidity of tone which indicated the true relationship which existed between Isobel Ferris and herself.

"If you benefited by it, yes," she said. "I am having luncheon with Mr. Royd to-morrow. He must tell me how far Dyrenforth will go."

"I could tell you that," said Isobel brightly. "Only knowing John Royd as well as you do, you will probably want to discover it for yourself."

Harry Medrun laughed.

"I'll have to put this into my book," he cried. "Warfare on the terrace."

Both the girls frankly smiled upon him. They could laugh at themselves, but their laughter was not a truce.

"It will be a hard job for you to tell who is the master, if Dyrenforth turns against Royd," said Medrun to Isobel.

"I think you will find that it is the woman, Harry," flashed his sister.

"But which one?" He laughed.

Isobel looked at him gravely.

"The one who learns in time that she is really a woman," she said.

He returned her gaze without smiling.

"That will mean good fortune for one man," he said.

Frances signaled the pontifical butler.

"Your conversation is too abstruse for me, Harry," she remarked. It was noticeable that the repartee had lost its savor for her. "I'm going in to catch up with my correspondence. You have two hours before you need go back, Isobel, dear. I'm sure Harry would like to show you about the grounds for a few minutes. Will you excuse me?"

Harry Medrun did, with the greatest satisfaction. Frances, noting this, was not displeased. She reflected that it would be a desirable thing that Harry and Miss Ferris should be friends. Desirable, she meant, in a business way. Of course it was hardly probable that John Royd would see very much of Miss Ferris, anyway. That hardly entered her consideration of the matter. Anyway, it was as well that Harry should make the little secretary happy.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MAN AND WOMAN.

AT luncheon sat Samson and Delilah. That is to say, John Royd was separated by a damask-covered square of wood in a secluded corner of an impeccable restaurant from the engaging personality of Frances Medrun.

"I asked you to come," he explained, "for a definite purpose."

"Tell me what it is. That's fair," she answered.

"I want to know that truth."

"What truth?"

"The truth to which you referred before you asked the organist to play 'Butterfly' last Monday evening. I had been very pointed in making clear my opinion of the part you have played in my business with your father. 'What if you are wrong?' you asked me. And I promised you an apology if that were the truth."

"What more can I say?" she asked. "I said it was. Can I say anything more?"

"Yes; you can say that you went into the mortgage of timber lands for your own pleasure. You can say that you visited the Eagle House last spring merely to enjoy the country."

He did not say this bitterly, or, indeed, resentfully. He spoke merely with his grave, serious air of seeking what words would make the matter clear. And he achieved the unusual effect of rebuking a woman without offending her.

"You talk in a manner which suggests that you understand," she remarked. "But you don't—you don't understand at all."

"I can't if you talk in riddles."

"I mean that you never bandy words with me, as if I were a social scarecrow, such as most women are. You talk to me as you would talk to my father—to a man with whom you do business. And yet your whole quarrel with me is established on the fact that you cannot treat me in that light."

"I can, but it is hard. I should prefer to know you as what you could be—as what I believe you are."

"Why not?" She leaned forward a little across the board. "Why not?" she urged. "In the office all of us play a part. We are like athletes in the field. We are a little more or a little less than human. But when you meet your competitor at golf or cards, you meet him for what he is. Why can't you do the same with me? Why can't we reserve for the office the thoughts and actions which belong there, as well as the tone and the accents of our voices. Away from it, why can't we be friends as frank and unaffected as we truly are?"

He considered that, staring at the white pattern in the cloth.

"It is because you are not a man. When you enter the office—when you enter the lists as my adversary, you bring into the game something of your womanhood. It is unfair."

The effect of this dictum upon Frances Medrun was to bring forth at once a protest and convince her of his truth. For the protest itself was charged with a power which was above the power she sought to strip from him. Between them now was something more than the force of wit with which in her career she sought to cope. There was the inevitable fact that he was a man, and she a woman; that each exercised an attraction for the other, of which both were aware; both, in that moment, knew this attraction and sought to subdue and conceal it.

"But you bring your manhood to the contest," was the protest which she murmured. "And I do not complain of that!"

It caused a silence. Instinctively she retreated, as he retreated, too. But, whereas he retreated into silence, she retreated into another subject. She took refuge in the first which occurred to her, breaking the long silence with her remark.

"How do your plans proceed?" she asked him.

"They are somewhat involved," he responded. "Your father hasn't succeeded in simplifying them."

She raised her brows.

"Has Mr. Dyrenforth been any more helpful?"

"Now you are stepping onto the battlefield again," he said dryly. And then impulsively: "What is the use, Miss Medrun, of blinding ourselves to the truth? Can't you see that men can live and breathe in an atmosphere of business; that the conflict between them never ceases nor abates. We have only one refuge from it, and that is in the society of our women. If you have chosen to be a business man, all right. But I warn you that you will be judged not as a business man, but as a woman."

She bridled indignantly.

"You are wrong!" she cried. "Wrong and unfair! No one has ever confused the issue as you are doing now. Why should a single judgment be accepted in the face of fact?" Conquering herself, she became cool and spoke with her head proudly poised, her gray eyes calm. "I have been associated with my father for five years," she said coolly. "And I have gained a partnership in the greatest financial house west of New York before my brother, who was born to it, achieved a place on the pay roll. In those five years I have negotiated many deals which have baffled men who are years older. In the meantime, my place in the home, my woman's place, has never been challenged or denied—not until now." And she stopped abruptly as, her eyes meeting his, she realized the meaning of her words.

Not until now had a fellow creature denied her unquestioned right to womanhood. But not until now had that womanhood, in its true sense, been called upon.

"There seems to be nothing we can say," she admitted woefully. "All our words lead to the same end."

"Everything does," said John quietly,

And it occurred to him that, from the moment of their meeting before luncheon, he had not made mention by a single word of water power. In all the words that had passed between them, the single purpose which had, until now, occupied his mind, had vanished. His power was stripped from him.

And Delilah arose from the table without knowing what she had achieved; for her purpose, too, was no more in her.

CHAPTER XXX.

SOME PRIVATE MATTERS.

"I'LL come in with you," said Dyrenforth suavely, "but Conroy's got to be out of it."

"That's all I want to know," snapped T. Anthony Medrun. "I want you to get your power, Dyrenforth, and I want to see the proposition through. There's enough in it for both of us to make it worth your while to tie up with me, and Conroy will be out of it."

"What guarantee am I to have of that?"

"What guarantee am I to have that you'll come in after I've got Conroy out of the way?"

T. Anthony twinkled at the carbide magnate, with his merry regard for such advantages as each of them held.

"All we can do is to play the game together," he said. "We'll get after Conroy's credit first; he's a heavy borrower at about this time because of the cutting he has to do. Then you can take up that contract with the Fowler Valley people and force them to give you a big enough load to knock the Albany plant out of commission. They can't possibly generate power there if the Fowler Valley Company exercises its full rights. That will shut Conroy's plant down at Fowlerville."

"But Conroy's got the Illinois & Eastern Bank with him, and he's got the pulp wood that Royd has sold him."

Medrun chewed nothing for a few minutes, while he regarded his new ally.

"If we consolidate our resources we can make it healthy for the Illinois & Eastern to drop his line. As for the Royd pulp wood, I can attend to that myself."

Dyrenforth permitted himself a smile which worked as though lubricated.

"Not if you're counting on bulldozing young Royd," he said.

Medrun chuckled appreciatively.

"He's good, isn't he?" he cried. "But I won't bulldoze him. I'm going to freeze him out. Without Conroy he's helpless. I've got the money market closed against him."

"There's capital in the East."

"But he can't wait for it."

"You think not?"

T. Anthony shot a glance of brilliant suspicion across at his confederate.

"I know it," he snapped. "He'll have to sell the deal from the ground up, and they won't have it until they see a market for his power. Who would? I wouldn't. It's only that I saw the thing for myself, and I know that there's a hundred and fifty thousand horse power to be taken out of it by judicious development."

"I wonder you don't keep it for yourself," said Dyrenforth, deprecating his own interest in the affair.

Medrun grinned at him and uttered a warning.

"That's beside the point," he snapped. "Since I acquired that block of your stock last week, I've developed an interest in seeing you protected. Anyway, you are our logical market. We can count on some paper mills, too."

"Royd is a man with a single idea," mused Dyrenforth, as though protesting. "He isn't going to enjoy seeing this thing kicked around in the stock market. You can smash a man with one idea, but you can't control him."

"Well, we're going to smash him, and it will boost your stock, too. I can see five different ways of making something out of this."

"All right," said Dyrenforth kindly. "I'm with you, if it will help."

In this manner he was wont to cover his enthusiasms. Medrun knew that he had the carbide king not merely hooked by his clever acquisition of Newton Tarboy stock, but that he had him enmeshed, as well, in the dazzling opportunity of reaping a fortune by the combination of a power opportunity with Medrun's financial wizardry.

"We'll start to work on Conroy right away," Medrun said.

Dyrenforth picked up his gloves and stick. He emanated a great air of leisured nonchalance, as he took his well-groomed figure to the door.

"You'll keep me posted?" he said.

"You'll hear from me every day," promised Medrun. And then, Dyrenforth gone, Medrun gave notice that he would receive the waiting visitor who had shared the anteroom with Creadick for an hour.

THIS gentleman was neat to the point of niceness. The studied trimness of his attire and carefully trimmed mustache contrasted oddly with his sunburned features.

"Sit down." T. Anthony received him with a cordiality which was conspicuously lacking in warmth.

The visitor took his place at the chair opposite Medrun, which was usually sacred to the person of T. Anthony Medrun's secretary.

"I've looked up your references, Fenton," began Medrun crisply, "and they're satisfactory. You seem to be honest enough, and your experience as fire marshal certainly ought to fit you for the job. Did you study the maps?"

"Yes, sir. But I'd like to make sure of the exact acreage. Fire is a dangerous element to play with. Too dangerous to control within the limits of a mile or so. I wouldn't want you to expect too much."

"I don't! I only want to be satisfied that the particular area I've indicated will be cleared out. It's got to be done, and cutting is too expensive for my purpose. I'll go over the ground with you in detail before you go up there."

"Of course, if it's really in a basin, as the map shows, we can be certain of clearing it out, if the wind is right. But you're taking chances. A forest fire, well started——"

"That's nonsense!" snapped Medrun. "They have 'em every year, and one extra won't hurt 'em. Just be careful that you don't burn south; there ought not to be much chance of that."

"No."

"Of course this work is confidential. You understand that?"

Fenton nodded, eying Medrun cannily.

"Don't be afraid," grinned Medrun; "you will be taken care of. There's a great business opportunity for you in this, Fenton."

"I understand, sir. And you will give me a free hand with any expenses?"

"Of course. But use your head. We don't want to engage any men who might see things in the wrong light."

"No, sir."

"All right. Come to this address tonight, and I'll go over the maps with you. Be there at seven thirty and give the elevator boy my card. That's all. Better go out this way. You can become more familiar with my office force after the job is done."

Medrun twinkled gratefully after Fenton had gone. Creadick was turning out very well. This man whom he had found to do the work of cleaning Conroy out was manifestly a perfect tool. He would be able to use him again, and that was always satisfactory. No chance of a regular employee saying too much outside.

"Creadick!" he called, as he opened the door to the anteroom.

Creadick, however, wasn't there, so T. Anthony good-naturedly went about his errand himself. He followed the same corridor which John Royd had followed once before him, and entered Frances' office without knocking. She was at her desk.

"Frank," said Medrun, in the best of spirits, "how does it go with Samson?"

She looked up at him sharply. He had not expected that, for she usually refreshed him with her coolness and solaced him with her calm. He decided that she disliked the intrusion of his frivolity.

"Is Royd eating less fire these days?" he asked, as he seated himself in her easy-chair.

She had almost immediately adjusted herself to the even tenor of the office.

"He is the most difficult man to manage I have ever met," she said decidedly. "But he's not suspicious any more." Her eyes suddenly sparkled, as a rose of color

came into either cheek. As suddenly the color and the sparkle died away. "We are good friends now," she said.

"Good!" Medrun heartily approved, so that for an instant he was incongruously akin to the genial father, happy in the spectacle of the propinquity of two eligible young people.

"What's your next move going to be?" she asked him.

But he knew that he could never share with her the bargain he had made with Fenton. Far better than she, he knew the limitations of her usefulness.

"Nothing but diplomacy," he said; "or, if you like to be sentimental, friendship. I'm very glad you are winning Royd's friendship, Frank, because I believe we can win him that way. He'll see things in the proper light as our friend, and I want you to cement it."

"There are limitations to the opportunities I have of meeting him," she pointed out.

"Precisely. And we must see to it that you have as many of them as possible."

He regarded her for a moment reflectively.

"Somebody ought to go up to Climax and look over the work Conroy is doing there. Why shouldn't you go?"

She stared at him for a moment, trying to grasp his meaning.

"Don't you see?" he cried jovially. "There's nothing underhanded about that! He'd expect no more in the way of business. And you can cement your relationship with him by gaining an understanding with his mother! If you really mean to win him over, I think that your next move would be something like that!"

"But, good heavens, dad!" She was madly trying to rid herself of a wild impulse to snatch this chance of winning him completely. If her father knew how eagerly she desired it, he could not stand there and so complacently urge her. "You can't take it into his home!"

"Why not? When you're as old as I am, Frank, you'll know enough to follow your man into whatever retreat you can best bring him to bay. And you needn't worry about making friendships to betray them, because, at the rate we're going now, he will coöperate with us in the end, not because he has to, but because he wants to."

And Medrun was as innocent as an adolescent boy of what was passing in her mind, as Frances faced him, turning over the gist of what he said: "Not because he has to, but because he wants to!"

She found herself suddenly weary of the battle. She found herself terribly willing, impetuously desirous that this prophecy of her father might be realized. If she could so deeply, so profoundly cement her relationship with the mother and the son as to bring it about—— She smiled, as she contemplated the gulf between the relationship she desired and the relationship of which her father spoke.

"I'll go up to Climax to-morrow, dad!" she said.

And, while he returned to his office, congratulating himself upon this screen he had thrown up between his connection with the work which Fenton would do and his interest in John Royd's quest, she wrote swiftly upon private note paper a letter to John Royd.

"Send this immediately. Special delivery!" she instructed her secretary.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A SHORN SAMSON.

ROYD did not receive that special-delivery letter until the following morning, for he had been over to Detroit, tirelessly pursuing one of a hundred details which combined to perfect his project. His conscientious attention to the marshaling of such facts as would develop his markets had brought him options for a large part of the power he hoped to develop. He wanted a better distribution, however, and he had worked out estimates of transmission to markets which his investigation and salesmanship had made more than probable for street lighting and transit power. Already he had visions of the city which might yet arise about the site of the hotel his father had been forced to run, and his trip to Detroit had been to confer with the executives of a railroad who saw the opportunity for competition with truck and

interurban transportation, in a branch line which might run to the source of Royd's power.

The name of the city, John reflected, would be St. Margaret.

He arrived in Chicago on an early-morning train and, on receiving his mail, opened Frances' letter first. It read:

DEAR JOHN ROYD: I can't call you Mr. Royd, can I? Some one from our office has to go up to Climax to look after what work Mr. Conroy is doing there. I have decided to take the job, myself. It will give me an opportunity to meet your mother again, and this time our relations will be frankly in the open. I should like to have a talk with you before I go. Call me up if you can.

It was signed, characteristically, "F. G. Medrun," but it did not convey what time she would be leaving.

Royd immediately called up Medrun's office, where he learned that Miss Medrun had not come into town. So he called the house at Lake Forest and was told by the butler that Miss Medrun was out and would not be at home all morning. Yes, he believed she would be in to luncheon.

Royd thought quickly. It appeared that she would be going on the evening train. He must attend to his correspondence; work out the problems of transmission and cost presented by his electric-railroad scheme, inquire into the relative values of copper and aluminum conducting wire; study the topographical and financial aspects of long-distance transmission, with regard to the type of line supports to be used; confer with Glazier, the electrical engineer, upon details of generation and transforming, and get in touch with Conroy, so that he might keep that gentleman posted. And he must see Frances Medrun before she went North.

It required swift calculation and energetic action. It demanded the neatest coördination of time and accomplishment. It called for a certain generalship, the mastery of which is the foundation of success in large achievements. Royd was of that fortunate minority who do not have to learn this fact through the bitterness of failure, which makes the knowledge sterile. He was made by nature to be the master of his time and director of his every action. To-day he marshaled his minutes and hours, appointed for each one its allotted use, faced resolutely the limitations imposed upon him by the clock, so that what could not be done was put off until the morrow, lest it distract the mind which dwelt on the work of the day; and he caught a noon train for Lake Forest.

HE walked out to the Medrun house from the station and found a fine sense of serenity in the well-kept grounds and stately homes which lined the road. Entering the Medrun grounds, he swung along the pathway which wound through artfully planted woods beside the drive, and thus came without warning upon Isobel Ferris, who walked the pathway, also.

She looked up at him with surprise and some concern. When she caught the silent fixity of his stare, she realized that he was also startled.

"What's the matter?" she asked him. "Do I look like a ghost?"

"No," he said; "but I didn't expect to find you here."

"Nor I you. Are the great T. Anthony and the fighting Royd come to terms?"

He, too, remarked the engaging charm of her vivacity; but he seemed, as he had seemed when she brought him her warning, to be impervious to it. There was something in the stuff which formed his being that rejected sentiment. The unconscious charm of Miss Isobel Ferris was the very clay upon which sentimentality is founded.

"Yes," he said, "we have agreed upon the terms of battle."

He was gazing at her with a more apparent curiosity than she herself betrayed, for it was one of the traits that won him to Desmond Conroy, that Royd never dissimulated his emotion.

"You didn't take my advice, did you?" he said.

"No; would you have taken it?" she asked.

He smiled that serious smile which moved his lips but did not reach the earnest fire of his eyes.

"No!" he admitted. "And yet you are still within the fold."

"Socially." She tossed her head with

amusement. "Miss Medrun has conferred upon me the position of maiden in waiting. We are organizing a great movement between us, Mr. Royd."

"And you are no longer a business woman?" he smiled.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Dyrenforth lets me——" She stopped short, abruptly becoming Mr. Dyrenforth's private secretary. "I shouldn't have said that," she remarked coolly. "You must treat that information as confidential."

He was regarding her with his old gaze of formidable and guarded shrewdness.

"Then it was through you Dyrenforth learned of his opportunity," he said.

She dropped her eyes, pensively silent.

"That was very kind of you," he admitted stiffly.

"Kind?" She stared at him for a moment and then laughed. "Two weeks ago I shouldn't have laughed at that," she said.

"You seem bound to do my business for me." He tried in vain to inject warmth and gratitude into his voice.

She stared at him with the laughter still in her eyes. "Why not?" she cried. "That isn't an offense, is it? Dyrenforth's business is concerned with buying power; yours is concerned with selling it. I tried to bring you together—that's all."

They strolled toward the house, and he seemed to find no answer for her. She stole a glance at his grave face.

"Are you going to take him up?" she asked.

"No!" he said.

She stopped short and eyed him with astonishment.

"Who then?" she cried. "You don't mean to say you're throwing him over for T. Anthony?"

"No; there is a man who has helped me. I have promised him a large part of the power." He tried to dismiss the subject with that.

BUT she had planned otherwise, and she could not see her plan so abandoned. It was as though the sentimental heart of her, suppressed throughout her years of business, had surged in upon her mind to take control.

"You must be crazy!" she cried. "Can't you see what you're throwing away? Medrun will never give in until you're frozen out! Dyrenforth only wants the power. He will free you completely from Medrun!"

"I have considered that." They had now reached the terrace, and she turned there, confronting him. He frowned as he saw the indignant passion in her eyes. "I have considered that," he said. "But I can't do it."

"You mean that you can't be strong enough? Do you suppose Medrun or Dyrenforth or this man who backed you—and I'll bet he saw good business in it—do you think any of them would eat dirt just to do the sentimental thing? They are a lot of fighting men, and they don't know what quarter means! You've got to be strong enough to take your advantage when you see it. And here it is. I saw it, and I pursued it for you. Now you've got to take it."

He folded his arms, as he gazed at her vivacious countenance. Convinced that she was moved by a motive which was wholly romantic, he felt induced to face her with it.

"And why did you pursue it for me?" he demanded.

She started backward, divining in the timbre of his voice what thought was moving in his mind. She started backward, so that she brought up against the wicker table behind her. Her face was frozen for a moment in a mask of bewilderment and dismay. Then she braced herself, with her two hands upon the table, and cried out to him in hot denial.

"Not for that!" she cried. "Not because of that! Oh, what a foolish man you are! Do you think a girl can never desire to help a man unless she loves him?" And she was confounded by the realization of her complete ignorance of why she aided him. "It was because I could not work against you," she admitted thoughtfully, as though to herself. "It was because you needed help."

He was touched by the spectacle of her bewilderment.

"Some day," he said simply, "you will know that I thank you for that. I don't think I have misunderstood you as much

as you think I have. A man's business is his life. A woman's life is her romance. You have confused the two."

And in the face of this analysis, she stood by her guns. For the ego rises above romance or business.

"Will you close with Dyrenforth?" she asked hopefully.

"No; I have decided that."

She frowned engagingly.

"Then Medrun will eat you alive," she said.

"I don't think so. I have been assured that Medrun desires only to coöperate with me."

There was finality in his tone, and she, feeling it, knew that they had said all there was to say between them.

"Is Miss Medrun here?" asked Royd, turning toward the house.

"No." A sudden thought came to her. "Mr. Royd!" she cried. John Royd stopped short. "Was it she who assured you of T. Anthony's coöperation?"

"Why do you ask?"

She laughed aloud, and it surprised him, for Isobel Ferris seldom laughed.

"So you have partaken of the bait as well," she cried.

Royd was aware of the contempt which tempered her voice. "The bait?" He snapped his teeth together, resentment leaping like a flame in him.

"Yes, the bait! That is why I am here, and that is why you are here! Don't you know that in the firm of T. Anthony & Co., Frances Medrun plays no other part? When her father's hand slips on the rein, it is Frances who regains control. She is the official lure."

Formidable and threatening his voice bore down upon her.

"Be careful of what you are saying."

"Why? Is the truth too true? Haven't you learned to know the Medrun tribe? I can tell you that the old man's methods are so false that his own son will have no more to do with his business. It is only the daughter who can be made to play his game, and she plays it as ruthlessly as a she-wolf!" It angered her that he should be so easily duped, and her words fed upon her anger.

"I am Dyrenforth's secretary now, and Dyrenforth wants more power. Therefore I am useful. Dyrenforth must be won as an ally against you. So I am honored by a chance to work with her. You, meanwhile, must be quieted!" She mocked his resentment with her eyes. "So you must become her friend."

HE tore himself from the suspicion her words engendered. An effort was required for self-control.

"That's not true!" he cried; "these are women's tales! By Heaven, I wish you were a man!"

"I'll prove that it's true," she declared. "You've come here to see her to-day because she wrote you and asked it!"

He was taken aback.

"How do you know that?"

"Don't you think I know the way she works? She has left for the woods to-day. But you must not know why she left—why she is up there. How can she best mislead you? Obviously by writing you and giving a frank, but false, reason for her trip. Isn't that what she did?"

"Go on! What else?"

"Nothing else that you can't see for yourself. If she wanted to see you she would be here. She could have taken the night train and got there just as soon. But she must not see you, for a talk might betray the futility of the reason for going which she gave you in the letter."

"And what is her real reason? I warn you that she has already told me that she has gone to further her father's plans."

"How?"

"By checking up some work I'm doing there. But this is——"

"You fool! You dupe!" she cried. "Is that within her field? Have you ever known her to do any work which was not that of a lure? I'll tell you why she's gone up to the woods. She's gone up there to bait her trap for further game. If you follow her, you will find her winning your mother as she has won you; bribing your foremen, as she bribed your creditors; cutting the ground from under your feet, as she has cut it from under every adversary T. Anthony could not deal with himself. That's why she's gone North to-day!"

And he was impotent to answer her, for the words of the girl had aroused in his mind a fury of outraged faith and dark suspicion—a rage of anger which caused him to hold back with a physical effort from the indignant girl who stood before him. In the chaos of his emotions, one figure stood forth and one tortured thought. Frances Medrun, who in his mind had become a dominant entity, embodying he knew not what tremendous forces, stood high above the turgid passions which this girl had invoked; that was the figure which towered beyond the aspiration of his thought. And the thought itself was of her; but it was of another Frances Medrun. It was of the human woman he had come to know, and it revealed to him the intolerable possibility that she might really strip his power from him, for he knew now that he was helpless in her hands.

Power! The power of white coal—he had held it proudly, knowing the strength of his grasp. And Frances had come to wrest it from him—she—not Medrun! Not the men who stood behind her, but she! For it had been her find.

She had fought for it and brought all the strength of her world to take it from him. The power of gold, she had brought to bear against him, and he had resisted it. The power of prestige and a known might—he had coped with that; for his power had always been the greater. His had been the power of faith and vision, and his fuel had been white coal.

Yet, it seemed, he had lost. For she had invoked at last a power he was helpless to subdue. As he heard Isobel Ferris shatter the false security into which that power had enchanted him, he knew that he was beaten. His strength was gone, his relentless purpose was shattered. For Frances Medrun had used his love to bait her trap, and love is greater than man's resolution.

John Royd knew that, even if these things of which Isobel Ferris spoke were true, he could not fight against them; he could not fight at all. He could do nothing but forgive Frances Medrun.

"Oh, I am sorry!" said a voice which was very near to him. And John Royd was aroused to the fact that a long silence had passed on the terrace. He looked sharply up at Isobel and perceived that she was half frightened, half penitent. Then he knew that he had betrayed the deep emotion which had surged through him, so that she had detected it easily.

"Why did you make me say it? Why do you always carry me off my feet?" She stared at him with her wide eyes. "I—I'm sorry!" she cried.

"Because you told the truth?" he asked bitterly.

"No—no—no! Because I don't know the truth—that's why I'm sorry. Oh, it's all so mad and purposeless! Who knows what the truth may be?"

He clutched the back of the chair which stood before him. Her last words rang in his ears.

"I am going to!" he cried. "I'm going North! I'm going to see her and find out."

He turned away from her and walked blindly down the pathway, a Samson shorn of his locks.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A LETTER FROM THE FRONT.

STANDING on the overlooking veranda of the Eagle House, Margaret Royd watched the buckboard drive up the wagon road from the dirt road beyond. The trim figure, erect and stately on the driver's seat, held the reins with a smart poise of arm and wrist, which was alien to the horsemen of the country; and the driver seemed to win from the long-limbed team a responsive smartness which caused the animals to lift high their knees and hold proudly aloft their heads. It was Frances Medrun, returning in the morning from Climax. The hostess of the Eagle House descended to the hallway to greet her.

The wife of Angus Royd and the mother of John knew nothing of the antipathies born of business. She knew only such antipathies as entered the lives of the essentially human beings she had always lived with. Such antipathies are slow to develop, but they are terribly real; they last long and are founded upon depths of conflicting character. Her life

had been too intensely human to permit the aggressions of commercial conflict to arouse in her any passion darker than that of resolute opposition. Therefore, in spite of the fact, that she was aware of Frances Medrun's alliance with the powers which John Royd was contesting, she appraised the girl's worth by no other standard than that of a wholesome and deeply experienced woman. And she found that Frances Medrun was not wanting.

While the reserve of the pioneer woman —and Margaret Royd might have been a symbol of the type—defeated the girl's attempt to know her quickly, Frances Medrun had made a greater headway than she knew into the high estimation of John's mother.

Several circumstances contributed to this. In the first place must be put the loneliness of Margaret Royd. Since years before her husband's death, the great-hearted woman had concealed beneath the serenity of her manner, a loneliness for the companionship of intelligent womanhood to which she had become resigned through long waiting. The first visit of Frances had not satisfied her, for she had been occupied, body and soul, for her men, the dead and the living. It was a good thing, now, after the dreary loneliness of the weeks during John's absence, to have this stately and gracious young woman near her.

Second place must be given to the fact that Margaret was John's mother; and Frances could give her all she most delighted in, with her constant information about this man who, to Margaret, was still a boy.

For the rest there was Frances herself, who could be the most delightful companion in the world, under any circumstances whatever, if she so decided. And in the presence of Margaret Royd she needed no decision to move her. In the presence of Margaret Royd she wanted to be all that was most friendly, for Margaret, as Frances discovered her in the heart of a world which she herself had created, possessed an extraordinary individuality. Frances had not met, in all her experience, another woman such as John's mother.

"The Princess," cried Frances, as she delivered the mail to her hostess, "lived up to her name. I believed she could be groomed for a ribbon at the shows. Old Tom took his cue from her, as though he were teacher's pet."

"I guessed you'd like that team," said Margaret, with her eyes on the letters in her hand. "Here's news from John."

"I'll leave you to read it while I change."

Margaret conveyed her appreciation of the girl's thoughtfulness, with a glance, and retreated to her rocking-chair. She opened the precious letter and read:

> I hear that Miss Medrun has gone up to the woods. So she is probably with you now. I would have come immediately, but a press of work holds me back. I want to come and will, as soon as I can. But while I am away, mother, be wise and careful. You can't imagine to what lengths Miss Medrun's father will go to get a strangle hold upon our water power. That's all I can tell you now. You must think out for yourself why Miss Medrun has come to visit you. Meanwhile, expect me on any train.

Margaret dropped the letter in her lap. The serenity of her fine brow did not reveal the inward frown which troubled her mind. She frowned inwardly, but with no suspicion of Frances. She was troubled, rather, at the unreasonable obsession of which John's letter spoke. It troubled her profoundly that the intensity of his resolution should lead him to asperse the girl who, she was convinced, had nothing but sincere admiration for him.

She herself was of that diminutive army which has gathered from life the knowledge that contentment with small things, and even with failure, is, as an alternative to bitterness, the better part. One must live out of the world to attain it.

Moreover, Margaret Royd, having Frances Medrun isolated from the conflict in which John had met her, was able to perceive that thing in the girl which was also isolated. The older woman knew that the girl was in the North on her father's business, and that her father was, in business, opposed to John; but she knew, too, and felt, intuitively

sure of it, that when Frances discussed her son, she did not dissimulate. There were things in which Margaret Royd could not be misled; and these had to do with such genuine expressions of the soul as this.

At dinner Frances referred to the letter.

"What did John have to say?" she asked.

"He is coming up here," said the mother simply.

"Good!" Margaret felt the trouble return to her mind, as she remarked the genuine feeling in the voice of the girl. "Right away?"

"I can expect him on any train."

"That doesn't give me much time," said Frances lightly. "There is something I must do before he comes."

Margaret raised her eyes so that they calmly, but steadily, held the eyes of the girl. Was this the thing for which John had warned her to beware?

"You mustn't let his being here make you feel less free," she said. "Just go on about your business as if it had nothing to do with us at all. We've sold farms and bought land and live stock in our time, and there's no reason why you shouldn't 'dicker' with a man and have him right in the house while you do it."

"Oh, it wasn't that." Frances laughed. It was notable that, in the presence of this genuine and serene woman, she found a light-heartedness, a freedom from restraint, which was foreign to her in the city. "But I must take Princess out with a saddle to-morrow and ride to the summit of Bald Top. It's beautiful up there, and last spring I met him there. I want to visit that place alone now, and I must do it before he comes." She smiled at the older woman's direct and straightforward gaze. "It's just a whim," she said.

Margaret was thinking that she had known that whim in a year which was long ago gone by. She wondered how well this stately girl might know herself. And John? Was it possible that he in his headstrong purpose was impervious?

"I think it's a fine idea," she said. "I'll have Bud saddle the horses."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FLAME IN THE FOREST.

PRINCESS, feeling the hand of a master at the bridle and knowing that the fine balance of the lady who guided her proclaimed a perfect poise, was playful. She pretended that she was five years younger than her pedigree would have pronounced, and she furthered the pretense by performing intricate dances at every remarkable object along the trail. Bud, who rode a horse with no ambition, kicked his mount along in the wake of the exuberant Princess, and was lost in wonder and admiration at the superb figure which Frances Medrun was, as she moved rhythmically with the movement of her horse, and turned what Bud constantly felt was certain disaster into maneuvers of infinite grace and virile beauty.

They came to the trodden space which marked the point where the trail to Bald Top's summit left the wider way. Here Princess took occasion to leap with easy grace to the bank beside the trail and curvet in postures intricate but beautiful. Frances managed her with one hand, bringing her back to the trail with gingerly steps, to which she herself swayed like a sapling in the wind. She dismounted and handed the reins to Bud.

"Wait here, please," she said. "I am going on to the top."

And she broke from the screening timber to stride out upon the rocky summit all alone.

It was all as she had seen it before, except that the foliage was thicker, and the bright, clear summer air gave her a wider vision. It was in the afternoon, for circumstances had delayed her coming, and the sun shone rosily, touching the distances with a softer gold than noonday has to offer. She stood silent, receptive, and felt the soothing grandeur of the scene. Then she turned her eyes to the ground, as though she looked for something.

Yes, there it was; the place where he had stood. She found herself again in possession of the picture, as she had seen it when she first emerged from the woods.

She turned toward the grove where the

cabin stood, and she walked over to it, treading the brown, scented needles which lay underfoot. She peered into the little blind window beside the door, picturing him at work among the papers which seemed to litter the interior. She recalled the day when he had forbidden her entrance to that rough cabin, and she recalled why she had desired to enter.

He had been working there upon his dream of power. He had been plying, without rest, the calculations with which he had finally captured the avaricious regard of her father. She frowned at the thought of that, and then she lifted her eyes and gazed out over the illimitable spaces which were flung far about her. She was free of that now. She who had brought the plunderers into this paradise was no longer engaged in furthering the plunder.

She turned again to the window and was suddenly invaded by a wave of emotion. She felt suddenly weak and without control; she passed her hand over the rough wall of the cabin, as though she would have caressed it. She felt that tears were conquering her self-control—and laughter. She desired to sink upon the soft ground—to press her face against the grass. Delilah!

It was a long time before she arose from the needle-carpeted bank on which she sunk, all unresisting. When she did so, it was with a sense of great serenity. She had lost something in that moment of abandon, and she had gained something, as well. She had found the solace of emotion; she had found the contentment of giving way to it. She had not known that before.

As she arose, she knew that she was her father's tool no longer. Business was out of mind. She would help him now. She would serve him. His power would be hers, for he had shown her a greater power than that of the great machine which glittered in the valleys at her feet. She recalled John Royd, as he had stood between her and this tiny cabin. He had been firm then, like iron, and like iron he had rebuffed her father's strength. Like iron he had attracted her irresistibly to him. She stood upon the summit of his lookout and knew that her change of heart had come on that day when he had stood between her and her purpose to disarm him.

HER eyes scanned the splendid panorama, seeing the deep gold of the sunset and its reflection on the waters. His great machine glittered golden all about her. The glistening finger of Long Lake was linked by a chain of golden beads to the gaunt, square conformation of Casket Lake; and she saw the falls, ruby gold, as they tumbled down to the basin of the Overflow. It was all revealed with moving beauty in the clear air—clear, save for a wisp of smoke which screened the distant, basinlike valley, where Royd's power lay.

Smoke!

Her eyes, which had dwelt upon the curling vapors and passed them by, leaped suddenly back to them again. Smoke! Out in the forest! The incongruity of it was what first attracted her. And then the peril of it. Smoke—which tells of flame—flame in the forest. Forest fires!

The woods were alight! She felt for a moment helpless at the realization that this wisp of smoke might portend all the frightful things which she had read and heard of holocausts in the Northern woods. Then she knew, as her cool, efficient mind functioned again, what she could do, and she turned to the trail, with the easy lope of a tall boy who knows how far he must conserve himself. Despite her riding boots and the heavy stuff of shirt and breeches, she kept up that even pace, as she plunged down the steep trail, until she reached Bud and the horses, more than a mile away.

"I was just goin' up after you," Bud cried, as she emerged from the trail. He saw her flushed face then and stood astonished.

She ran to the horses which he had tethered to the low branches of a tree, and loosed the reins. Then she stood for a moment, regaining her breath.

"We've got to ride!" she cried finally. "The woods are on fire to the west of the Overflow! Don't wait for me, and I can't wait for you." With which as-

tonishing command, she leaped into her saddle without waiting for him to mount, and set Princess galloping furiously down the trail. Clumsily Bud mounted and followed her.

Frances Medrun rode that trail through the woods without thought for herself, and with only such thought for her mount as would conserve the animal's ability to keep its fastest pace. She rode recklessly, yet cunningly. She plunged into the precipitous declivities of gulch, ravine, and hillside, without counting the cost of a stumble or a fall. She set the lovely mare at barring logs, trees fallen across the way, streams and narrow gullies, with all the high heart of the hunting field. And Princess kept her pace magnificently, sure of her mistress' touch.

Yet the low branches caught her hair, as they early in the ride swept off her hat. Fortunately this did no more than tug her chestnut hair from the neat knot in which she wore it, and set it streaming out behind her. But there were less comfortable hazards. She rode through every short cut of which she knew, and this led her into tight places. She found brambles which tore at her boots and upset her balance, so that Princess pitched unhandily. It was then that she went off, and it was a painful fall. Scratched and bruised, she clambered to her seat again and set the big mare forward. Stumbling, leaping, wallowing in swamp and staggering up pine-needled hillsides, Princess bore her on, and Frances dismounted at the Eagle House, a disheveled, battered, and weary conveyor of bad tidings.

"I'm not as bad as I look!" she exclaimed to Margaret. Frances was in the doorway, with her hair about her shoulders, and her torn waist revealing an ugly scratch on one arm. "The woods are on fire southwest of the Overflow! I rode in to tell you about it!"

A flurry of light in the eyes of Margaret Royd betrayed the grave importance of this news.

"That's one of the two things we fear most in this country," she said quietly. "The other's a cloud-burst. Fire can wipe us off the face of the earth."

Frances gained an effect of tremendous danger from the other's quiet words. That was because the thought of what the danger was appealed to her in precisely the same manner as it did to Margaret Royd. Both women had in mind the homes—the children.

"I'll call the fire marshal!" said Mrs. Royd firmly. "Then we'll send the men out to the camps. Thank the Lord, Conroy's got those men on the railroad!" She turned to the telephone.

"I'll ride down to the railroad camp," cried Frances. "I can get more out of a horse than the men, and I know what I want."

"No, no! You've done enough!"

"It's quick action—that's what we want. And I can get it!"

"Send Petterflame!"

"You get the marshal! I'm off!"

WITH cool, untrembling hands, she coiled her hair behind her head; then, like a boy again, she went to mount her splendid Princess. The great mare whinnied, as she advanced, and pranced madly her objection, as the girl turned her to the road. Superbly Frances brought the obstinate horse to hand, and superbly she rode into the gathering gloom.

Margaret Royd looked after her with an exuberance of admiration and turned to her telephoning, to spread the alarm and complete the fire-fighting line. This done, she made her way to the stables to see that the trucks and buckboards were hitched up, and everything made ready to carry men and supplies where the marshal would want them. Among other things, she arranged a coffee wagon, which was to care for the fire fighters, and she selected two women who would run this primitive canteen. When she arrived at the stables, however, she found that Frances had been before her with the orders for the conveyances. Margaret had not expected such efficiency; she had not thought it lay in the girl's power to command this situation which was so entirely out of her field.

She was still at the telephone, sending the alarm by relays, cunningly arranged to far homesteads and threatened clearings. She knew of every conveyance

in the country, where it might be most usefully engaged, and how many people it might carry. She was sitting at her telephone, calmly, yet urgently, providing for the effective use of every one, when Frances returned.

"I've visited Conroy's railroad camp and telephoned the lumber camps. They've got their bearings and will get out to cover the area immediately. Conroy's men can be depended upon to fight, for, with the wind where it is, their jobs are threatened. The only reason Conroy has them here is to take out the spruce from the area the fire will sweep," said Frances.

"Oh, no!" cried Mrs. Royd in dismay. She turned on the girl, with a sudden hard light in her eyes. "Hold it! We've got to hold that fire back! John told me that Desmond Conroy's interest is his only hope!"

"Why are you looking at me like that?" cried the girl. "You don't think that I——" She paused. She who had many times faced the suspicion of her adversaries and laughed at it, though she knew it to be justified, now saw suspicion in the eyes of John Royd's mother, and she could not tolerate it. Her polished, gracious restraint dropped away from her, as she protested: "It is nothing to do with me! Believe me! It isn't! You don't believe that I could——"

And Margaret Royd broke in upon her:

"Of course not!" she said, and it was as if she pronounced a judgment. Her voice was big with the broad, common sense which always came to her support in time of mental stress.

"Now you are tired, and your nerves are raw," she said, with a quick sympathy which was born of penitence. "I'm getting to be an old fool. You go up and lie down. When I get back I'll come to you."

"Oh, no!" cried Frances firmly. "You've got three buckboards, a surrey, and four wagons outside. And the good Lord knows we'll have enough need for the men in the woods. I'm going to drive one of the wagons."

Margaret Royd had had in mind doing that same thing; but she revolted at the thought of Frances entering such a wild arena.

"Not you!" she cried.

"Yes, me! Come on!" And Margaret Royd found herself following the girl to the barns.

THERE were four conveyances left, and a group of men waited to occupy them. The hotel was the headquarters for mobilization, and the men poured in through every trail.

"Martin's gone with the big truck!" cried Bud, who held a team of big horses steady. "I'm taking this load."

"No, you're not!" snapped Frances. "Move over! I'll drive."

She clambered up to the seat, appearing wondrously agile in her boyish clothing and marvelously graceful to the astonished woodsmen.

"You can't hold these horses, ma'am; they——"

"The reins!" snapped Frances, so that Bud obeyed without a word. "Now guide me, as we ride, and give me time for the turns, because I'm giving them lots of head!"

A number of the men who crowded the great wagon shouted with consternation, as the horses plunged forward under her expert hand, and their shouts, combined with the picture which the animals and the lurching wagon made in the flaring light of the torches, gave the scene the weird aspect of tense drama. There was a noise of cursing, as the wagon lurched out of the yard and creaked into the grooves of the dirt road, but Frances had driven thoroughbreds in a coach and four. She gathered the great horses splendidly, and, as Princess had, they responded nobly to her mastery.

Margaret Royd stood in the light of the torch, after the wagon had careened away, and felt strangely alone. The girl had been like a bulwark to her own fine spirit, and with her gone, the woman's responsibility seemed to her, for the first time in her life, too heavy, too grave, too unreasonable.

She knew well what one of many accidents might befall Frances Medrun, if those horses got away from her; and, even if they didn't get away, she knew

what perils faced them in the dark and hidden hazards of the rough, hill trail. She turned back to the house after instructing the men at the barns. There were many details to be attended to, and she must be ready for instructions from the fire marshal, for no one knew whither the fire might trend.

At the foot of the steps which ascended the porch, she paused. Why was it that she felt so tired—so weary—so utterly alone? It seemed almost intolerable to her, that this burden must be carried through the night. And it occurred to her that she must take her place, as Frances had done.

Ah, that was what weighed her spirit down. She should not have let the girl go. She was not made for the stress and strain of that mad ride which she was taking. She should not have let her go. And it came to her that she must overtake her. No! That was not possible. Yet some one must overtake her, some man be with her who would take the reins from her hand and bring her back to take the woman's natural part. But who?

"Mother! Where is she?"

She turned. John Royd was at her elbow.

"Ah, John!" she cried. Even in the heat of his pressing need, it occurred to him that he had never heard his mother cry out like that before. "She has taken out a wagon. The woods are on fire!"

"I know!" he cried. "But where has she gone?"

"To the fire line! She's driving Burk and Thunder, and the wagon's overcrowded! I ought not to have let her go!"

There was the quality of a wail in his mother's voice, and John, taking her in his arms, sought to console her.

"But, mother," he cried, "what cause is there for you to worry? Ah, mother, don't fear for her!"

She stared steadily into his eyes and spoke more evenly.

"I feel as if I had sent my own daughter out! And I'm afraid it is to her death," she said. "There is no one with her, John, and she drives recklessly!"

A peculiar fire came into his eyes then. He pressed her very firmly in his arms and kissed her.

"I'm with her!" he uttered. Then he shouted, as he ran toward the barns: "Run out a saddle horse."

Margaret Royd saw him disappear for a long ten minutes in the group about the barns. Then he suddenly leaped above them, as he mounted, and she saw him careen away, with his mount flying like a mad thing. He was riding into the darkness in pursuit of something as evanescent as a dream.

So it seemed to Margaret Royd. Yet with his departure, the fear and the weariness left her. She was content.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A NEW LEADER.

BUT Mrs. Royd need not have feared for Frances Medrun. There was not a man in that woods country who could have controlled the horses as well as she, or better judge the thousand hazards of that ride. She had the two finest horses in five counties under her reins, for Angus Royd had loved good horseflesh and spirited, working animals. Frances knew their worth before she had felt for ten minutes the quality of their response to her intelligent hands.

And they knew, with the strange instinct of horses, the quality of their driver. Before she was well down the dirt road with them, she had established a thorough understanding with those two great animals, and they answered so well to her controlling hand that Bud, who shrieked warnings at her, as they swayed madly along the trail, was horrified at the narrow margin she gave for maneuvering team and wagon, until experience showed him her complete mastery.

And the men, who had been uneasy in their places, regained their composure and buttressed it with exuberant admiration, as they learned the splendid power she wielded. It was as though the lovely, boyish figure, which yet possessed the stately dignity of the woman she was, exercised a dominance over men and beasts which served to quiet all passion, save the high excitement of serving her with mad devotion.

Far down the trail, as they swept about the side of a rounded hill, was the flicker of lanterns.

"Brake!" cried Frances into Bud's ear, and iron shrieked on iron, as he strained at the lever at his side. With sheer strength, tempered with feeling, she arose in her seat and threw her weight upon the reins. Her feet braced on the running board, truant tendrils of hair streaming behind her, her body, clad in the neat-fitting habit of a horseman, bent backward with the straining tension of a beautifully modeled spring. The horses reared nobly back—back on their haunches. And she turned them out, to the accompanying cries of twenty deep-voiced males, as she missed by inches the hubs of another wagon which barred the road at the hill bottom.

"All out!"

It was the voice of a lean man who seemed to marshal the men who were grouped about the stationary wagon. The horses had been unhitched. The wagon had been drawn to the side of the road. A score of lanterns dimly lit the scene.

"Where's this?" asked Frances of Bud.

"Bennett's," he said. "There's a cabin back in the woods."

"We're makin' a fire line here," cried the lean man hoarsely. "Take your horses, kid!"

"Is it the same as Quarterville Corners?" pressed Frances, still holding Bud in the seat.

"Don't set there waitin'!" ordered the lean one. "Get your wagon out the road!"

"No; Quarterville Corners is three miles farther on," said Bud.

"Hold those reins!" Frances leaped from her perch, so that she landed directly under the nose of the tall, lean man.

"What's the matter, Martin?" she cried. "The fire line should be run three miles farther on!"

Petterflame frowned sourly.

"Don't take no orders from kids!" he said. "Get the——"

"Shut up, Mart! That's Miss Medrun!" yelled Bud.

A twisted smile of peculiar deference came into Petterflame's face.

"Oh, now I'm real sorry, Miss Medrun," he said. "I thought you was some kid. We're makin' the fire line right here, ma'am."

"You're not. I took it up with Conroy's foreman. He showed me a map. The fire line should run from Quarterville Corners, southeast!" Her voice was hard and sharp. It suggested a verbal scourge. "Why are you holding up these men?"

Petterflame made peculiar gestures with his head. He seemed eager that she should draw away from the listening men who craned necks to hear them.

"Just a minute, ma'am—just a minute!" he pleaded.

Frowning, she followed him a step away from the road.

"It's all O. K., ma'am," he murmured intensely. "Your dad's got it all fixed. If we let these men through, they'll simply spoil things. The fire ain't got rightly started, anyways."

She stared at him dumfounded, recalling the suspicion of Margaret Royd.

"My father!" she exclaimed, as if Petterflame had struck her. Bud leaped from the wagon, and several men closed in.

Then Frances was aware of the men who moved in the eerie light of the lanterns. She turned upon them.

"Get back to the wagons!" she cried. "Get those horses in! This man is trying to hold up the fire line!"

The men moved uncertainly.

"Every man to the wagons!" Her voice rang out with an irresistible command. She was superbly their leader.

"Like hell they will!" snapped Petterflame. "The fire line's here, and here you stay!" With an ax in his hand, he moved toward the horses. Obviously he intended to cut the traces.

"Stop him!" cried Frances, and she leaped in front of him. "You lying dog!" she cried and, with the whip she still held in her hand, she cut him across the face.

He cried out furiously and struck at her; and the knot of men, who would have leaped forward to obstruct him, was sundered by a horseman who plunged into their midst, hurled himself from his

mount, and, leaping forward, sent Petterflame, ax and all, hurtling across the road. The man picked himself up slowly, for he was dazed, and his mouth was bleeding from Royd's blow.

"What are you stopping for?" roared Royd. "Get into those wagons and ride like hell for the Quarterville Corners!"

He oversaw the harnessing of the unhitched team and saw the wagons filled.

"You walk back to Climax, Mart!" he snapped to Petterflame. "I'll hear what you have to say in the morning."

He climbed to the seat, where Frances sat, reins in hand. Bud was at the horses' heads.

"I'm driving!" she warned, as Royd reached for the reins.

"No, you're not!" he said. But she held the reins firmly in her hands.

"It is I who am in command now!" said a voice which had the sound of iron in it. It rang in her ear and caused her to turn upon Royd with a little, startled exclamation.

"Give me those reins," he said. Frances surrendered the reins to him.

With a swirl of hoofs and the creaking protest of strained hickory the horses were away. It was not long before they smelled the tang of wood smoke in the air, and Conroy's overworked men were greeting them on the fire line.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A MISERABLE BLIND.

IT was late in the morning after that alarm before Frances Medrun came down from her room at the Eagle House. John, who had been awaiting her, met her in the hallway.

"Have you had breakfast?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Your mother sent it up."

He found himself somewhat abashed by the transformation which she had performed. The disheveled, boyish figure of the night before had become the stately lady of the great house in Chicago. And for John Royd, the transformation was made the more disquieting in that she was preternaturally pale.

There had been no time for further talk the night before. He had been silent during the mad drive to the corners, and there he had lost her. She had worked with Margaret Royd, preparing coffee and food for the fire fighters. She had returned with the older woman, after their efficient generalship of the mobilization had done its work in bringing the fire quickly under control. Now, when she entered the living room with Royd, it did not appear that she had slept. Indeed, so marked was the strain to which the events of the night had evidently subjected her that, she observed languidly, mother and son treated her with the consideration of an invalid. John ushered her to an easy-chair.

"Frances," he said—"Miss Medrun, I mean——"

"I prefer 'Frances,' " she said quietly, and her face was serious.

"I want to know the truth about Petterflame," he said.

Inwardly she started, her heart sinking with the thought that he knew her father's connection with the night's alarm and linked her with it.

"Don't talk like a jury, John," said his mother quietly.

Frances was relieved. He did not know.

Royd frowned at his mother's rebuke. He was conscious of his pedantry, and yet he felt gravely troubled by the scene he had interrupted the night before. He was resolved that Petterflame should be punished for his brutal attack which he had witnessed.

"I've got him in the kitchen," he explained. "I questioned him, and he demands that I let you explain. Is that too much to ask?"

She could not for a moment answer him. She felt cornered.

"Yes," she said at last. "He's a foolish laborer. The best thing you can do is drop it."

"You're mistaken," he said. "Petterflame is not stupid. I'm convinced that he was up to some deviltry last night, and I'm going to find out what it is. But you can help me." His voice changed as he addressed her. "I want you to tell me what led up to his attack on you."

"He thought I was a man," she said.

"And he resented my claim to leadership."

"But why? He had no such claim!"

"He thought he had." She shrugged her shoulders.

He regarded her quietly.

"I hope you will help me," he said simply. "Petterflame is not worth protecting. I can assure you of that."

SHE arose and stood for a moment over at the window. Her heart was filled with an overpowering sense of fear. It was not for her father, or for her good repute. It was for herself. She feared the revelation of what part Petterflame had played because she divined the menace it portended to her happiness. She turned back to the room.

"I wish you would drop this affair," she said. "I want you to let Petterflame go. It was my fault. I irritated him."

Royd spoke in the hard, sharp tone which made him formidable.

"I can't drop it! For God's sake, don't ask me to!" he said.

"Why not? It isn't much to ask." Her voice rose sharply.

"The fire marshal believes that fire was incendiary!" he snapped. His face paled, as he revealed his suspicion.

She turned from him to his mother, with a mute appeal.

"Let me talk to him!" she cried out. "Bring Petterflame in here to me!"

Royd left the room to return a moment later with Petterflame, sheepish and wary, in his wake.

"What do you want ma'am?" he asked, appearing superlatively thin, as he stood among the heavy, comfortable furniture of the room.

Frances Medrun looked at him quietly, and with the same quiet she gazed from John Royd to his mother. She was at bay now, and she knew that there was a thing more precious than any advantage of business at stake. So she met it quietly, with the self-control she had for great emergencies. Royd was relieved by her calm, but his mother feared it; and, because his mother was right, Frances' words, when she spoke, struck him like a cruelly unexpected blow.

"Petterflame," she said, "how much did my father pay you to set those woods alight?"

"No! Oh, God! No!" uttered Royd, and he stood staring at her, with a singular effect of being barred by some tangible barrier from rushing to her.

With a gesture she begged him to be calm.

"How much?" she demanded.

Petterflame shot a defiant glance at Margaret Royd, who sat with unruffled brow and silently eyed the girl.

"Not a cent!" he snarled. "Somebody else did the firing. All I had to do was to keep the men away. Who wouldn't do that for two thousand dollars?"

"Who paid you?"

"A man named Fenton. Medrun paid him."

There was a silence in the room. Frances ended it with a sharp note of finality.

"That's all. You can go."

Petterflame stood dubiously before her.

"Go!" cried Royd savagely. "Did you hear her? You can go!"

The lean man shuffled out.

"Now," cried Frances, "are you satisfied?"

She stood with a deathly pallor upon her face, staring at him. But he couldn't speak. Isobel Ferris had been right; and the realization of that fact was too much for him. He stood, speechless and horrified, as he became aware of what had befallen him. Speechless, he stared back into her eyes, and, despite his lack of words, she read his thought.

"I had nothing to do with it!" she cried out with sudden vehemence. Her cry rang out in the room with the sound of her despair and bitter anguish. "It was my father's work—his alone. He has used me as a blind—as a miserable blind! I had nothing to do with it whatever!"

Still he was silent; and she, seeing the pain in his eyes, gave no heed to the like pain which rent her heart. When she spoke again, she spoke for him, seeking to alleviate his anguish.

"You must believe me!" she cried. "You must! I am telling you the truth."

And then he regained control of his voice and mind. He gazed at her heavily

for a moment before he spoke in a flat, grave voice which seemed to have nothing of feeling in it.

"You tell your father," he said, "that it's all off. His ten days are up on Monday; but he might as well retire now. He will never touch this power! Tell him that! While I am alive he will never touch it!"

And then he turned away from her and left the room. She stared after him for a moment. Then she drew herself up and poised her lithe body with pride against the humiliation of this moment. But her pride did not last. She turned without a word and walked slowly to the chair, where Margaret Royd was seated. She parted her lips, as though to speak. But she did not speak; instead, she collapsed; suddenly and completely she collapsed to her knees at Margaret's side and, burying her head in the older woman's lap, she fell to weeping.

Margaret placed her hand on the girl's thick chestnut hair.

"Don't cry," she murmured softly, as though this were the little girl she had never had. "Don't waste your heart with crying. He will come back. I know it. He will come back again."

But Frances Medrun left Climax on the afternoon train, and she did not see John Royd before she went.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

INNER CONFLICT.

WHEN John Royd returned to Chicago he went at once to the home of Desmond Conroy. It was early morning and the pulp manufacturer came down in his dressing gown. They breakfasted together, while John told Conroy of Medrun's attempt to burn him out.

"I see how right you are," he said bitterly. "They are not to be trusted."

"They are not!" shouted Conroy. "Not any member of the tribe can be left in your wake."

He was aware that Royd flinched at that. Not physically, but beneath the skin. Then he knew that John was near to the end of his tether; he could hear the burden of it in the boy's voice.

"Be steady!" he reassured him. "He did not succeed, you say, and we still have the whip hand."

"But for how long?" Royd glared at him with the eyes of a man who is hunted. "He has too much power, and he's too crooked. I told his—his—representative in the North that Medrun would never touch that power now. And, by Heaven, he won't!—not while I live, he won't! I'm through with them."

Conroy was amazed at the ungovernable outburst of rage with which Royd delivered this ultimatum. The younger man leaned fiercely across the table, as he spoke, and his voice reverberated with the passionate indignation of his spirit.

"Who, then, will you have do it?" challenged Conroy.

"Dyrenforth. You were right when you urged me to take him up. I've been a fool. I thought that I turned him down for the sake of sticking with you. I did not. It was——" Knowing what it was, this brought him to a pause.

"The truth is that I believe—I know—that Dyrenforth will see me through and agree to give you your power into the bargain. I'm going to see him now."

Conroy pondered this.

"You are quite right, Johnny," he said. "Why could you not have seen this before?"

"Because I have been cheated out of clear vision!" said John with a great wealth of bitterness. And Conroy looked at him sharply, for the bitterness came from Royd's heart.

ROYD gave Dyrenforth time to open his mail. Then he walked in to give his ultimatum here. A cold lady of uncertain years came into the anteroom, where he waited to see Dyrenforth's secretary.

"I want to see Miss Ferris," he said.

"She is not here any more. I am Mr. Dyrenforth's secretary."

Royd looked at her curiously.

"How long has Miss Ferris been gone?" he asked.

"Since yesterday."

There seemed nothing more to say regarding that.

"Please give my card to Mr. Dyrenforth," he said. And ten minutes later

he faced the suave president of the Newton Tarboy Company in Mr. Dyrenforth's office.

"I came to say that I have terminated my negotiations with the Medrun firm," said Royd directly. "My power is in the open market."

Dyrenforth played with a bronze paper weight, which was one of many objects of art about his office.

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said.

"Not if you are of the same opinion as you were a week ago," said John firmly. "You haven't discovered a new process for making carbide without electricity, have you?"

Dyrenforth smiled genially.

"No," he said. Then very frankly: "Tell me why you have changed your mind," he asked.

"You reminded me so often of the advantage of the backing of the actual consumer as against the backing of professional capital that I have become convinced."

"And have you broken with Medrun?"

John reviewed in a fleeting moment, all that he had dreamed of: The wide distribution he had laboriously planned for his white coal; the splendid service of building and creating he would have had it do, and the work he had put into it; the city it was to have reared, and the long transmission lines which were to have carried its mighty power many miles. Dreams, and, in the ultimate, dust! Now he was bargaining to sell out to a single man—to harness his magnificent machine to the work of an industrial hack. The muscles about his lips were drawn into tight, haggard lines.

"Yes!" he cried emphatically.

Dyrenforth regarded him with curiosity.

"I am going to give you some advice, now——" he began.

But Royd cut him short.

"I have no time for advice, Mr. Dyrenforth!" he cried. "I must act quickly. I have come here to offer the terms which you have offered me. I want only to make an insignificant change in one condition."

He spoke with great eagerness, for he had sensed something in the other's bearing which suggested the intolerable thought that Dyrenforth was about to withdraw that offer.

"Otherwise, it is as you suggested," urged Royd. "You build the plant, and the power is yours. There is only one man who must be protected. What do you say to that?"

"What I would have said if you had listened to my advice," said Dyrenforth coldly. "I was about to advise you to go back to Medrun. Make what terms you can with him. I have no use for the proposition now."

Royd called upon all the self-control he had to buttress him against that stunning blow. Yet it was not enough. His protest burst from his lips in a cry which had the sound of mortality in it. It was as if he had been dealt a mortal wound.

"Oh!" he cried. "He's tampered with *you!*"

He leaped from his seat, and for a moment Dyrenforth had the uncomfortable suspicion that the man was about to leap at his throat.

"Careful!" he cried gutturally, and started up in his chair. He sank back again, as John laughed in his face contemptuously.

"Medrun is infallible when choosing tools!" he sneered. "It's a strange thing how many little men there are for his using."

Dyrenforth raised his lips and brows in a grimace which was at once a sneer and a smile.

"You are young," he remarked cynically. "You will be working for him yourself, some day. Men do it all over the world."

"You are wrong, Mr. Dyrenforth." Royd's voice clanged with a hard, dry resonance. "I shall never work for Medrun, save on my own terms. He can never buy me, for I'm too nearly his own kind. If he'd been straight, he'd have had me. If he'd been clean, he could have controlled me. But the man is crooked, and a strong, straight man will never be the tool of a strong, crooked man. One will be the victor, and between myself and Medrun it will always be me. I will get the better of him, Dy-

renforth, because I am ready to starve before I give in."

Dyrenforth walked to the door and significantly threw it open.

"I must go on with my correspondence," he said. "As far as your resolution to starve is concerned, I am afraid that Medrun may soon give you the opportunity of doing it."

"It should afford him some pleasure to find a man who can," said John.

He had the advantage of leaving an excessively uneasy man behind him when he left Dyrenforth's office; but that was at the cost of carrying forth for himself, a mind which was stunned by the catastrophe of Dyrenforth's disaffection. Conroy could not see the thing through; Dyrenforth was hand in glove with Medrun; Conroy's backing could support him only a little longer; and then what? Medrun's claws would take their hold. His only chance, it appeared, was to find capital from some new source; and he knew the long and weary waiting which stood between him and that solution of his problem. It was hardly probable that he could do it before Medrun had his clutches on the power for which he had made this Herculean fight in vain.

There was no coherent question in his mind, as he strode the heated streets, but a single, subconscious query pounded terribly behind his brows. What can I do? What hope have I left? . . . Ah, God! Why do I love her so?

And a hurrying stranger yanked him back, as he blindly stepped off the curb into the path of a taxicab. Confused, he stood, transfixed upon the sidewalk. He stared straight before him, his thought suspended, and his heart as heavy as a stone. He found himself staring at the front page of a newspaper.

"Forest Fires in the North," ran the headline.

A great rage flared up in him, as he recalled Medrun's desperate attempt to ruin him. The man would stop at nothing. A terrible enemy, old Medrun. Royd could understand why men bowed so quickly to his will. He would break them to it; tear down the works of their lives; burn up their houses over their heads. He dared to tread where other men stopped short. He risked a jail sentence as easily as another risked a fortune. Arson——

Royd suddenly started into life, as though galvanized. Arson! Sabotage! Terrorism! Royd smiled. It was not the old smile with which, from time to time, he had faced the obstacles which met him. It was a smile that seemed to harden his face, as though, knowing nothing in the world worthy of his mirth, he smiled at what bitter satisfaction could be derived from a dark and private passion. Vengeance, for instance.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"IT'S BLUDGEONING!"

ON the morning following the abrupt and unconventional marriage of Mr. Harry Medrun and "a college chum of his sister, Miss Frances Medrun," as the newspapers blithely described Miss Isobel Ferris, T. Anthony Medrun strode into his office, high-hearted and "loaded for bear."

The unexpected marriage of his son had not greatly disconcerted him, for he infinitely preferred Isobel Ferris as his son's wife to Isobel Ferris as another man's private secretary. Her loss would place Dyrenforth at a disadvantage.

Creadick had the morning papers ready for him when he arrived, and T. Anthony read the carefully marked passages with grim pleasure. All of them dealt with forest fires in Minnesota.

The fire has been burning for more than two days in the Eagle River district, according to one inspired article. Considerable property damage had been caused. The Northern Pulp & Paper Company of Chicago was said to have lost heavily by the fire, for it owned many acres of timber in the burning area. That, reflected T. Anthony, was very neat. He read one after another of the reports. All had been sent out from Climax by Fenton, as had been prearranged, and the papers had published them elaborately or in brief paragraphs, according to T. Anthony's influence.

"That's good stuff, Creadick," admitted Medrun. And Creadick beamed under the first praise he had received since he

took the job. Then Medrun plunged into the correspondence.

At ten o'clock Frances entered his sanctum without announcing herself.

"When did you get in?" asked her father sharply. "I thought you were in the North."

"I came in last night."

"You ought to have stayed up there until the fire was over," he said, worried. "They might think I had something to do with it."

"Why?" She was completely cool.

"Royd's capitalizing some of the timber that's been destroyed."

She saw the papers on his desk and the marked articles. She forbore to tell him they were lies—that his use of fire had proved abortive.

"I heard you were having a meeting," she said coldly, "so I came in."

"Just some financial details," he said. "We didn't need you. How'd you get on with Royd's mother?"

"Very well. He came up there himself."

She enjoyed his start of surprise and consternation.

"What did he have to say about the fire?"

"He was too busy trying to fight it to say much. That first night was a strenuous one."

"Why, strenuous? I thought they were fairly used to 'em."

She bridled at his callous tone.

"It means their lives and fortunes, that's all. Those people live on a tinder pile which waits only for the match. How you can say——" She controlled herself abruptly. She must not give herself away; she was too experienced a tactician to do that. She must play in with this extraordinary old man who was her father until she learned how the land lay.

"I'll be in at the meeting," she said, rising suddenly. "Eleven o'clock?"

He nodded, and she left him to plunge once more into his tireless scheming.

SHE felt at that time a virulent and passionate hatred for the self-centered old warrior. Not understanding the mainspring of his wiles any more than he could understand the power he had invoked when he called upon her to win Royd over, she saw only the ruin he had wrought. She remembered her own part in the ensnaring of Royd's white coal, only with an unbelieving regret. In the light of the love she bore John Royd, it did not seem possible to her that she had voluntarily played so guilefully against him. She had for the past, indeed, scarcely more than a memory of that scene in Margaret Royd's sitting room. Past life seemed to go no farther back; at least, beyond that, everything was obscured in the amorphous figures of a remote and irreclaimable antiquity. She only knew that she had lost him; that her father, with outrageous violence, had torn him away from her. And for that reason she nursed against her father a hatred which sickened her.

Yet, when she entered the board room where the partners sat, she seemed clad in all the cool assurance they were accustomed to find in her.

Tyler was speaking when she entered, and he stopped courteously, while they greeted her, until she was seated, gracing the board with a high stateliness. Tyler continued monotonously. He was engaged in the exposition of some routine matter of Stock Exchange procedure, and he liked to hear himself talk. She listened to his voice without hearing his words. The only words she heard were from her own mind: "Stand fast!" They reiterated themselves ceaselessly. "You must stand fast."

Other routine matters were brought up and disposed of. Then T. Anthony sailed into action.

"We will have to move on the Royd water-power affair," he said clearly. "It's time we closed it."

He twinkled upon them all for a moment, filling the room with the dynamic forces of his personality.

"You all know how we stand," he continued, "and I just want your approval of the next move we are taking. It will need a mobilization of cash."

Banton took advantage of the pause.

"You're not going to buy——" he began.

"No!" snapped T. Anthony cheerily.

"We won't need to. When we discovered that Royd had the support of Conroy, I checked up on Conroy's resources. I found that at this time of the year he needs every cent he can get, and he's in no position to stand a loss. Outside of him, Royd's only hope was Dyrenforth, and the young fool turned Dyrenforth down when he offered to see him through, because of some fiddling arrangement he'd made with Conroy. He didn't have the nerve to sell Conroy out." He beamed his contempt of this pussillanimity upon all of them. Frances held her teeth tightly clenched. She could wait.

"I got in touch with Dyrenforth," said T. Anthony, "and he's with us. It only remains for us to close down on Conroy's credit to leave Royd high and dry. As it happens, luck is with us, for Conroy has gained an asset of considerable value in the acquisition of millions of feet of pulp wood on the Royd properties. That would have made it difficult to undermine his standing at the banks." He paused a moment, while he separated some papers from the pile on the table before him. "But look!" he remarked triumphantly. And he scattered before their noses clippings from newspapers neatly clipped together. "He's been burned out," he snapped.

They sat silent, while they reviewed the clippings. Frances hardly looked at them.

"Supposing this paper lies?" she said clearly.

HER voice was the cold voice of business discussion, but there was in it a hint of the acid which burned her spirit, for her father shot an angry look at her which was not free from bewilderment.

"It doesn't!" he retorted. "Even if it did, the effect would be the same. We are aiming only to undermine Conroy's credit, and, even if this report was false, I believe we could do it before Conroy could prove the facts of his denial."

"What do you want us to do?" queried Tyler.

"Give me money enough to swing the banks!"

"How?" asked Banton.

"Conroy's chief bankers are the Illinois & Eastern, and the LaSalle Trust. All the rest we can handle easily. Now I have arranged with Dyrenforth to pool ten million dollars between us. Meredyth, of the Illinois & Eastern will drop Conroy's line like a shot, for a deposit half the size of that; and we'll offer him the use of seven million dollars. The LaSalle crowd will take any orders I give 'em, if I attach a three-million-dollar loan."

"How much does Dyrenforth put in, and why?" asked Frances.

"Three million; and he gets an option on the power. We can probably modify that later."

"Well, I don't see any objection to that," deliberated Tyler. He didn't care to obey T. Anthony's orders too eagerly.

"I do!" Frances Medrun gazed straight into her father's face and voiced her protest with indomitable resolution.

"What's the matter?" Medrun glared at her, completely bewildered.

"It isn't business!" she cried. "It's bludgeoning!"

A familiar hardness crept into Medrun's voice; a familiar glitter appeared in his eyes.

"That all you got to say?" he snapped. "Banton, we want your decision, too." In this manner he passed over her completely.

"If this money pool is passed over my objection," said Frances, "I shall sue the firm as a dissatisfied partner." Even T. Anthony was not impervious to the acid-like cutting quality of her voice. It rang with the glittering clash of falling icicles in the heavy board room. There was a galvanizing challenge in it.

Banton eyed her doubtfully, but hesitated not a moment to make his decision.

"I shall withhold my vote until we've heard what Miss Medrun has to say," he declared heavily.

"Nothing!" rang the voice of Frances Medrun. "There is nothing for an honest man to say after what T. Anthony has said. His proposition is untenable. That is my only objection."

T. Anthony's eyes bulged dangerously. His face had taken a ruddy hue which

verged on purple, as the blood suffused his head. There was concentrated fury in his eyes, as he controlled it with clenched teeth.

"I should like you to excuse me, gentlemen," he said thickly, "while I talk this matter over with Miss Medrun in the anteroom."

Her face was strikingly a contrast to his own in the icy dignity it bore.

"I have nothing to say," she declared, "which cannot be said here."

Her father arose and towered over her.

"Come outside!" He pressed the words upon her with a furious effort at power.

"It is only in the publicity of open court," she flung back at him, "that this thing cannot be discussed."

He might have given in then, for his battle was only for the pursuit of a ruthless and indomitable purpose. But he was not able to divine that she possessed the advantage of fighting for the protection of the high vision of the man she loved. Still, he contended with her.

"Do you know what you are doing?" he barked at her. "You are playing the traitor! You must be mad!"

"I have nothing more to say," she said with unquenchable firmness. "I refuse to let this motion pass. I think we had better adjourn."

Banton gazed at her intently, striving to read her motive in the cold ardor of her eyes. From them he received an inspiration.

"I move we adjourn," he boomed and arose from his chair.

T. Anthony poured upon his daughter the baleful fury of his gaze.

"We'll take it up again to-morrow," he said.

"Before you go, Mr. Banton!" cried Frances hurriedly. She flung the whole force of her spirit upon them. "I think you ought to know, gentlemen—and you, father, most of all—that this report of the forest fires is made up of calculated lies. The fire which threatened Conroy's timber in the Eagle River basin was started by paid incendiaries, and it was completely extinguished four hours after it began."

With that she would have swept from the room, but her father quickly barred the way.

"I want to talk with you!" he cried gutturally.

She turned on him with a fury with which he could not cope.

"Not now!" she cried. "Not here! I leave this office as soon as it's physically possible, and I shall never return again. If you must see me, see me for what I am. Not a decoy—not the tool for your lowest purposes. See me as your daughter—in your home!" He knew better than to stop her; and she was gone.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GREATER THAN WHITE COAL.

BECAUSE Frances Medrun had known that her stay in her father's offices that morning would be limited, she had instructed the man who drove her car to wait near the building, ready for her instant call. He waited, and when she emerged into the torrid street, he was at the curb almost immediately. She entered the tonneau.

"Home!" she cried. "Quickly! Quickly!" But she gave no other evidence of her agitation.

In the deep-seated tonneau, under the soothing influence of the big car's smooth career, she sat alone and very still. Her eyes were intently fixed upon the plate-glass window in front of her, but she did not look through it. She was struggling against an emotion which impelled her to unthinkable outbursts. Only the impassive glitter of the window calmed her. Regarding it, she could hold her mind in strained suspense and keep her nerves in check. She did not relax the fixity of her gaze until the tires struck the gravel drive, and the car stopped before her door.

Leaving the car with the same, unyielding tensity of control, she swept through the lower rooms of the house and upstairs. It was not until she entered the seclusion of her own room that she relaxed, and there she abandoned herself to a fury of emotion. All her poise fell from her, and she gave herself to the contending passions which moved her, as though

she might have flung herself into the fury of a storm, plunging, arms outstretched, to meet the elements.

She had been duped! Sold! Her father had drawn her into his net, as she had drawn a hundred victims for him. She had built up an edifice of pride and called it life. She had overreached herself and seen her pride stripped from her. She had duped herself. She had traded love for—for what?

A wave of self-pity surged upon her. She then cast herself down upon her bed, but she did not weep. She caught herself up, tore at her own weak impulse, as she would have torn with the curb at a vicious horse. Why should she weep? She had gone into this thing with open eyes. She had known the power she played with. To take power from him, she had invoked a greater power than his white coal held, and she had fallen victim to it.

She remembered Isobel Ferris. Once she had felt contempt for the romantic weakness of the girl. Yet that romanticism had been stronger than her sophistry. Its weakness had made it strong, whereas this power John Royd had brought to life in her heart was terribly cruel. It possessed her with a grip she could not loosen—ah, there it was!—a grip that she would not loosen if she could! Love wracked her, as the hurricane can wrack a splendid tree. It tore at her heart and tortured her mind with a violent confusion of emotions. And yet she would not give it up. She would never, never give it up.

She would go away—take it away with her. Away—where she could be free of every memory of what had led to this. Yet the only refuge she could think of was the wooded refuge where she might know the companionship and solace of his mother's presence.

She remembered the light which had shone in the eyes of Margaret Royd when she had parted with her. And the memory brought what self-pity could not bring—tears—a storm of weeping—a paroxysm of sobs which rocked her soul. For the light in the mother's eyes had been a light of inexpressible pain and hope—for him!

FRANCES was still in her room when T. Anthony came in, three hours after she had, and inquired for her. At his request Frances came down and entered the great living room, where her father paced restlessly, awaiting her. As she entered, he indicated a chair. She remained standing, straight, defiant, queenly. He stared at her.

"What's the matter?" he cried out suddenly. His thin, tenor voice had an effect of breeding, of dignity, which fitted that great room.

"Everything in your life," she said. Then she dropped her eyes wearily. "It is no use talking," she murmured. "Words and words—they only tell of thoughts which change with every word we utter. Why should I reproach you?"

"Why? That's it. Why?" He tried to fathom this incomprehensible situation, but could find no clew to her veiled emotion. "What have you got against me?" he cried, with unconscious pathos.

She stared at him very intently with her wide, intelligent eyes.

"Oh, there is nothing you have done that equals the wrong which I have done myself," she said. "Harry was wise, and, because I am not a man, his wisdom led me to take the course it led him to avoid. I shouldn't have let you take me as you did. Our lives should never have been linked together. We are different."

"For pity's sake, stop talking like an oracle!" he cried harshly. "I want to know why you have turned against me?"

"Not against you!" she cried. "Not you! It is against myself, as you have used me!"

"Used you?" His voice was edged with disgust. "It was you who led me into this Royd affair!"

She turned away from him wearily, but his voice pursued her.

"Yes, led me into it! And who was it followed the poor devil up, when he was driven to meet his payments?" Then, suddenly recollecting himself, he abruptly abandoned the stridency of his tone. "For pity's sake, Frank, let's drop it. Come back to your desk, and we'll forget it!"

She turned on him then with a clear and ringing indignation.

"Do you think you can rule me like

that?" she cried, with a magnificent note in her voice. "Do you think you can alternately abuse and cajole me? Oh, your whole life has been the triumph of stupidity. Always you have used the bludgeon for your logic. Everything subtle, everything persuasive in your business you have done through me. And I have been your instrument, while I have thought myself your peer." Her voice changed abruptly to a note which appealed directly to his finer sense. "Isn't that enough?" she asked him. "Is there anything more for me to say? Can't you understand how we are opposed, from that?"

"No!" he retorted brutally. "There's something else. Something's got into you that's turned all your senses against me. I want to know what it is."

"Very well!" she replied. "I will tell you. Your diagnosis is not completely wrong. Something has altered my attitude toward the methods you employ; but, to a far greater extent, it is something——" She caught her breath, with a little click in her throat. "It is something which has turned all my senses to another man. Do you remember what I had to say to your simile of Samson and Delilah?"

"You mean I have humiliated you?"

"Oh!" She laughed tremulously. "Humiliated me! Oh, dear Heaven, yes. Yes, you have humiliated me!" She turned away from him, with the tremulous laugh still upon her lips.

Alarmed, he strode over to her, seizing her by the shoulders.

"Tell me what it is!" he demanded.

She drew a deep breath.

"Samson and Delilah," she said, with a despairing smile. "I warned you that you played with a power greater than all the white coal in the world. You played with the deepest of human passions, then, T. Anthony. I warned you of it. But I didn't know that I was to be the victim!"

He stared at her, unbelieving.

"This Royd!" he shouted. "You mean to say that he has——"

"Open your eyes!" she cried sharply. "Must you use the bludgeon always? Can't you see? Can't you feel?"

"You mean to say that you're——" He found himself embarrassed before the mention of an emotion he had never recognized. "You are in love with him?"

"I knew it when you played that last low trick with fire," she said contemptuously. "As if it weren't enough that he should show me a better way than yours, you showed me a baser cunning than I had thought a man could use."

He stood silent for a little while, working his jaws. He was not vanquished yet. He was not chastened by her scorn.

"All right!" he barked suddenly. "Royd will pay for this. He has bucked me long enough, and this is more than I will take from any man. Do you understand that? You can do what you like about it, Frank. You can run off and marry him to-morrow if you like; but, by Heaven, you'll marry a pauper. I've got him where I want him, and I'll smash him to a pulp before the week is out."

His voice and his body trembled with the vehemence of his rage. He twinkled upon her in a very exuberance of fiery determination.

"You can have him," he cried, "after I'm through with him!"

He started back suddenly, as though he saw an apparition. She turned, following the fixed gaze of his eyes, and cried out her surprise. In the doorway stood John Royd.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TRAPPED.

"I'M glad you're at home, Mr. Medrun," said Royd, in the familiar voice which combined a self-confident ease with a gravity that purged it of offense. "I followed you from the office."

T. Anthony and his daughter gazed at the man in bewilderment. He seemed so thoroughly the young man they had first met in the woods that his presence had the extraordinary effect of almost causing the past weeks to disappear. It was as though, in the heat of the present, they had been magically taken back to the beginning. Then Royd's gaze fell on the girl, and a hard glint came into it. The spell was broken.

"Dyrenforth tells me that I shall have to deal with you," said Royd.

T. Anthony pounced on him with the fierce accent of savage satisfaction.

"He's right," he snapped. "And I tell you frankly, Royd, that the gloves are off. You can come down to my office to-morrow morning and take the terms I offer you, or you can take the consequences."

"And what are the consequences?" Royd demanded. His voice rang in the room with a resonant sound of triumph, that filled Frances Medrun with a sudden emotion of high hope; but T. Anthony, obsessed with his own power, ignored it.

"Ruin!" he snapped. "You can give us the property on our terms, or we'll take it away from you."

Royd turned to Frances with a question in his eyes.

"And will you help in the taking?" he asked.

T. Anthony uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Don't appeal to her!" he cried. "She is out of it!"

"Out of it?" Royd's cry filled the room. "You are out of it?" he exclaimed, as he strode to where she stood.

"No!" she said steadily. "I am in it as long as you are in it. We are fighting together now." She turned on her father. "There is nothing you can do which will take that power away," she told him. And it was not as though she defied him; she spoke as it were, thoughtfully. She seemed merely to enunciate a truth.

Royd advanced upon Medrun, with the same contemplative air of measured thought.

"That let's you out," he said gravely. "Lord, what a farce it's been! There was power in the hills which my father saw, and he gave that power to me. You thought you could turn it into a power for yourself, Medrun, but it was a wrong, perverted power you tried to use, and it has given all the power to me. I came here to make my own terms with you."

"It's too late for that!" snarled Medrun viciously. "It's too late now!"

"No;" said Royd, "not too late. You can meet my terms in the morning. But God knows it would be hard to force them on you now."

"Are you crazy, too?" shouted Medrun. "Force them on me! You pauper! What power have you got to force terms? If you think you can marry it——"

"The power *you* have given me!" cried John. "You will take my terms, or you will go to the Atlanta penitentiary for any one of three counts which I have against you, on the evidence of the men you bribed to burn out Conroy's pulp wood. And if you do choose to go to prison, you will face prosecution by the State when you come out."

"You fool!" screamed Medrun instantly. "Do you think you can buy witnesses against me?" He was planning immediately to secure his defense, as he had secured the crime.

"It's too late for that!" warned Royd. I have the affidavits all on file. You're trapped, Medrun."

But Medrun never flinched. He did not know the meaning of panic; and, with the realization of Royd's advantage, the anger which had shaken Medrun cooled magically. He thought swiftly for a moment, and then, turning away from Royd and Frances, walked deliberately to the windows. When he returned, he twinkled in the most genial manner possible, for he knew his power with a sure knowledge which would never in his life desert him. He knew it to the uttermost limitation of its most intricate details. He could measure his power to the last extremity; and it was vast beyond the measuring of any other man.

"Young man," he said, "we understand each other thoroughly. You come down to the office to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock, and we'll be ready to enter contractual relations upon any terms you say."

CHAPTER XL.

IN HIS ARMS.

WHEN Medrun left the room, Royd turned immediately to the girl.

"Your father has no confidence in my magnanimity," he said.

"I am glad of that," she answered. She turned away from the table, where she was standing, and walked to the long window, which was tinted by the twilight.

"Have *you?*" he asked and followed her to the window.

She did not face him. She was thinking of what his mother had said.

"Oh! I was afraid you wouldn't come," she murmured. She pressed her hands over her eyes. She felt excessively weary. She was surfeited with deep emotion.

"When you came in, I knew that I had been wrong to doubt her," she added; and a strange fear lurked in her eyes.

"Whom do you mean?" he asked. He took her hands away from her face and held them in his own, drawing her toward him.

"Your mother said you would come back. I didn't think you could." She was very close to him now. Her head was bowed, so that her face was against his shoulder, and her hair was near his lips. "I am tired of struggling," she sighed.

He buried his face in her rich, soft tresses, as he passed his arms about her; and she was close to him.

"Then you shall not struggle any longer," he murmured. His voice had not been so deep before. "Not again. We shall have peace together. Ah, Frances! Ah, my love!—my dear!" She was weeping in his arms.

He led her to the great Chesterfield which spanned the windows, facing them. She crumpled into the deep luxury of it and pressed a flimsy handkerchief to her lips with one hand. She stared at the dying daylight which filtered in through the windows.

"There is nothing I have done to deserve you," she whispered, and with one hand she drew him down to sit beside her. "There isn't one worthy thing." Her hands fell to her lap with a gesture inexpressibly peaceful. "Can you understand me?"

But he was on his knees at her side, and his head was bowed, as he grasped her two hands in his and kissed them again and again.

"There is nothing to understand!" he cried. "There is only love between us, and we can't understand that or question it! We can only know it as ours. We can only forget everything but that!"

She did not struggle any more.

NOT A VANISHING RACE

THE Assistant United States Indian Commissioner, Edgar B. Merritt, recently declared that the current notion about the vanishing Indian is a mistaken one. We are frequently told that the red man has degenerated into a shadow of his once picturesque glory; but the commissioner insists that the facts do not bear out either statement. The Indian is not only increasing in numbers, but he has more wealth, per capita, than any other race or tribe in the world.

Mr. Merritt said that in 1900 there were 270,544 Indians in the United States, and to-day we have 349,876. The Indians are increasing at the rate of 1,500 a year —an increase which has been largely due to the educational and health work undertaken for the Indians by the government bureau.

Thousands of Indians are being released from the jurisdiction of the department of the interior and granted complete freedom of action. The large number, however, dispose of their lands and securities and depend on the department for their security.

The latest reports show that the Indians own live stock and poultry to the approximate value of $30,000,000. Indian timber is valued at $120,000,000. Their oil royalties last year yielded them $12,711,296.

The Totem of Respectability

By Captain Ralph R. Guthrie

Author of "The Chandalar," "The Conquistadorial Complex," Etc.

The servant problem made its appearance in that little Alaskan town, when "Dish-face Annie" became a maid for one of the leading families. And when "Walrus-mugged Pete" was made to buttle for the rival family, the affair grew complicated—and "worser and worser, too."

THE arrest and trial of "Dish-face" Annie had some of the classic features that distinguished the illegal and illogical proceedings that brought Marie Antoinette to the block.

Annie, though only a kitchen queen, was a victim of envy, jealousy, and popular unrest. She, too, knew what it was to be carried away to vile imprisonment in a tumbrel, fighting its way through a jeering throng. It happened, though, that her tumbrel was an express wagon, and the place of her imprisonment was the city lockup of Uklik, Alaska, which in no way affects the vital essence of the story.

Here was a woman of humble avocation, whose chief distinction and stock in trade was her deftness with a skillet and her innate and exterior unloveliness. Witness her, then, yanked into stellar altitudes as the town's most popular woman, and then conspired against by the public servants of these United States, later to be violently arrested on insufficient grounds and tried by a biased judge.

Some eyewitness may arise to assert that this same judge was biased for, instead of against, Annie, and that he discharged her without prejudice. That may be. Eyewitnesses never see anything but surface facts and only a few of those. It is cause and effect that become of interest here. The cause goes back to the days when "Big Jim" Hard and "Little Sam" Todd, prospectors and for years bosom friends, fell out and started a cleavage among Uklik's socially élite. Jim is called "big" and Sam "little" for reasons that would be recognized only by the Alaskan Eskimos, who gave them their titles on girth measurements. Hard

is thick-bodied, erect and muscular—one of those men who seem to make the best bosses. Todd, though aggressive enough for a miner, has not the physique usually associated with his calling. He is tall, thin and hollow-chested.

Now let us take a look at Uklik. The village nestles in an elbow of the Yukon, surrounded by low, rolling country, on which birch grows sparsely, with roots flattened on frozen subsoil. In Uklik there are, besides a hundred moss-chinked cabins, three public establishments that give the place all the airs of a frontier metropolis. These are the Greek Catholic Church, built in the days when Alaska was part of the czar's empire, a combination courthouse, post office and general store, and a jail.

The jail is a flimsy, semibasement affair, under the residence of the United States deputy marshal. Its windows, grated only with barrel staves, look out upon the main street. Tourists who find their way to Uklik always look curiously at this structure and laugh. Nevertheless, jail deliveries are unknown on the Yukon and are considered in very bad taste.

There is no use in describing the church because it has nothing to do with the tale. The courthouse, post office and general store can easily be pictured with a few words. They are all jammed together in the front room of the United States deputy commissioner's long, red cabin.

Hard is commissioner, and Todd is marshal, and the ambitious social life which bubbles up in Uklik, as soon as the September snow falls, centers around these two important government officials and their families, as naturally as the Yukon ripples around the sprawling government pier, where the river boats tie up during the summer.

Having introduced the corpus delicti. which is Dish-face Annie, the concern of this story is with the estrangement of Hard and Todd, which happened years ago.

This happened, not at Uklik, though they were both residing there at the time, but at Olivato Ledge, six hundred miles north and west on the Seward Peninsula.

They had been boon companions for years. In '98 they had mushed down from Nome, young, energetic and deplorably unlearned in the tricks of prospecting, because they had come freshly from the building trades of Little Rock. They knew lump gold and dust when they saw them, but since everybody in those days was looking for "free" gold, their ignorance was no particular handicap.

At Olivato they thought they saw signs and began to sluice. In the course of two years they had filled a few pokes and constructed a beautiful white-stone cottage, which was a nugget in itself. Two years later, the "pay" gave out. Both, being crafty and not too scrupulous, they "salted," with a few nuggets, and sold out the diggings to a capitalist, a big-game hunter who happened along at the opportune moment. The capitalist gave them five thousand dollars in cash. With this they mushed over to the Yukon and settled down.

Here they were still great friends. Jim married one of the government schoolmarms at Uklik, and Sam married the other—ambitious, well-brought-up girls who had seen better days—and the two families grew together because of the common interests and experiences of the sour-dough husbands.

IN after days, what always gave them their greatest pride was the manner in which they had got rid of their Olivato Ledge holdings.

"You'll have to give it to me for thinking of the nuggets," Hard would say, chuckling in his whiskers. "They only cost forty dollars and made the old dump look like an El Dorado. That sucker grabbed at 'em like a trout swipes a salmon egg."

"It was mighty shrewd of you," Little Sam would acquiesce with his one-sided grin. "But it wouldn't have brought home no bacon if I hadn't gone out and got the sucker and pretended to be showing him martin tracks, just about where you'd planted the pay."

"That's right, and no argyment," the other would return generously. "It war both of us did it. Shake, old pard! We

was two wise gazabos!" Their shaggy hands would meet in a firm grip of undying friendship and admiration, and their ruddy beards split in a guffaw that made the rafters ring.

About this time, Mrs. Hard got social ambitions and organized a bridge club. Not to be outdone, but very amicably, Mrs. Todd followed with a series of home entertainments.

Pushed into it bodily by his wife, Todd accepted the high-sounding title of United States deputy commissioner and was instrumental in securing the appointment of his old chum as deputy marshal, whereupon the social status of the two wives became assured in the budding town. To the intense surprise of their husbands, although they ought to have expected it, they thereupon became active rivals and very cool friends. This continued for a time without causing an open break in the two households. There is a possibility that it might have kept on indefinitely, without the germs of discord getting into the veins of the men themselves.

However, one evening, after a long session of "crowing" over the capitalist whom, they believed, they had duped, the idea dawned on these old sour doughs that it would be a fitting climax to their prosperity if they could mush back to the old diggings and review the results of another enthusiast's folly.

"I'll bet he's got a gang working the diggin's yet," chuckled Todd. "Why, them there nuggets set that gink as crazy as a loon. The way he picked 'em up and looked at 'em, through them thick glasses of hisn, and squinted at all the rocks along the crick was a dead give-away of ignorance."

"Yes, sir!" snorted Sam. "I'll bet the whole valley looks like a passell of gophers had been diggin' with steam shovels. Say, Jim, wouldn't it be great just to stand and guy them miners and tell 'em what's what, if we durst? And then—our shanty! Gosh, all fishhooks! She'll be there when Gabriel blows his bassoon. They ain't no better constructed house in the Territory."

"I'd sure like to see it," mooned Jim. "Me, too!"

So they mushed back six hundred miles, and this was what they found: A huge quartz mill, with a smug-looking city foreman. The latter was loquacious. He said the "company" had a million-dollar property on the creek and was acquiring more every year.

"Where has the house gone?" demanded Todd gloomily.

"We ground that up, along with all the ledges along the creek," chuckled the foreman. "Say, the two boobs that built it used some of the best quartz in Alaska and didn't know it. The boss swears he bought the whole claim for less than fifty thousand cash."

"I'll say it was less!" groaned Sam. "Come on, Jim! This place no longer is the home of a good laugh."

THE two old sour doughs spent a week on the trail, bemoaning the fortune they had missed, and then began to quarrel.

"Sam," declared Hard, "why did you have to let that city sharp in on our bonanza, after we had done gone and did so much work clearing the ground for a strike? We might have been millionaires to-day if you hadn't."

"What d'ye mean—let him in?" bellowed Sam. "Why, you ornery old herring choker, didn't you spend forty of our good dollars buying nuggets and then go and plant 'em? I just follered your lead, that's all."

"I was just salting up to show we had a combination," snapped Hard. "Figgered to get hooked up with a stampede and make a pile of dough. We'd have got a million if I had had my way. But, no! You insisted we sell out for five thousand. Hell's fire! I can't imagine why I ever paid any attention to you a-tall."

"You didn't!" yelled his partner. "I wanted we get ten thousand, and you cut the figger to five. We'd better cut this talk out, or else we'll get into an argument. I know who's right, and that who ain't you."

"And you laughed right along and said that feller was an easy mark, while I knowed he was a sharper, looking for something soft. I know what I know, dang it all!"

"And I know what I know, and we ain't going to be such mushy friends no longer, you and me. I've always been fair and square and wouldn't rook nobody. And I ain't going to have nothing to do with rooks, neither."

"Nor me! We're quits from now on."

"Suits me. We'll do business together when we got to, 'ficially, but beyond that nothing stirring."

"That's all right."

"I ain't one to carry a grudge, but being a crony to a dumb-bell ain't going to keep my poke full of dust."

So the bad blood was out—a fact about which Uklik did not concern itself to any great extent. Men fall out that way in the lonely great spaces of Alaska's hinterland. However, the rivalry between Mrs. Hard and Mrs. Todd became more intense, and soon the social life of the little town was split in twain under these two energetic leaders, who now could claim the moral and financial backing of their lords. When one got a new dress from the States, the other showed up with an ermine-trimmed coat. When Mrs. Hard, for instance, gave her mammoth bridge tournament, with a land-otter neck piece for the grand prize, late in the fall of '16, Mrs. Todd countered with a Christmas tree on which were hung gold nuggets worth from four to ten dollars, one for each of her guests. It was give and take between them, with no appreciable gain on either side, until one day the servant problem showed up in Uklik and practically tore the town asunder with dissension. And into the tale plods this uncouth Indian woman, Dish-face Annie.

Ordinarily they never have a servant problem in Alaska because they have no servants. The native women won't domesticate as a rule, and whenever the exception occurs, there is always some sour dough to marry them off in order to change diet. White women help each other, when need arises, and accept high wages therefor, but they call it accommodation, which, of course, it is.

Dish-face Annie, however, was a domesticated Indian woman who had been reared and educated at a Sitka mission, and she was so ugly of visage that there was little chance of any man, white or red, ever wanting her for a mate. She had migrated North as cook for a hunting party, lost her billet, and became marooned in Uklik.

TO the average native a general store is like a clubhouse. Annie went to Hard's place to gaze on the bolts of colored cloth and purloin a handful of dried apples, and there met Mrs. Hard behind the counter. To the latter's amazement, Annie confessed she could cook and wanted a chance.

"Sure," beamed the commissioner's wife aristocratically. "I am about the only woman in town in a position to hire a maid. Have you any references?" Annie looked blank.

"No, I've always been fired before I got any," she admitted with the honest bluntness of her people.

"Do you drink?"

"Like a fish."

"Smoke in the kitchen?"

"No."

"Are you one of those women who talk back to their mistress?"

"Not me," declared Annie stoutly. "When I get mad at the boss I go off and get a few drinks. Then I come back and wreck the whole place."

"You are not a very good servant then?"

"No! Pretty poor."

"All right," said Mrs. Hard, with the discomfiture of Mrs. Todd gleefully in mind, "I'll take you on."

But Annie turned out to be a very good servant, indeed.

She could cook wonderfully with canned milk and eggs, months old; she could bake and broil and fry the meats and vegetables of the locality, and the vegetables of the subarctic are the most delicious under the heavens. She could wait on table and chore around for card parties; and, when dressed for indoors, with her mukluks cast aside, was not so very unattractive, at that. Mrs. Todd, when she heard of Mrs. Hard's good fortune, literally blew up with envy and indignation. In six months she lost nearly half her following through their curiosity to see the new servant at her

tasks. She informed her husband that something had to be done about it, but Sam couldn't just figure out what. Neither could Mrs. Todd. So chance intervened and delivered into their custody the person of "Walrus-mugged Pete."

Walrus-mugged Pete was supposed to be of Russo-Indian extraction, and he got his name from the fact that Nature had equipped him with the features of that grotesque sea monster, including the round, questioning eyes. His long, blond mustache added the effect of tusks, for it hung well below his collar bone and curved in toward his chest. His forehead sloped sharply back into his flat, always-on-the-job fur cap. He was supposed to be "not very bright," and Annie hated him because whenever they met in public the bystanders laughed. You see, Annie's face was concave, while Pete's was decidedly convex.

The two had often met before in their peregrinations, and Pete appeared to be profoundly attached to the Indian woman who disliked him so much. She seemed to prey on his mind.

Where he originated, is hard to say, but every summer, for years, he had been showing up with the salmon run, first at Ketchikan, then at Valdez, and last of all at Bristol Bay. His job was that of herring choker, during the herring season. This entails seizing the fish about the neck with one hand, while disemboweling it with the other. When fall came, sifting her white pack on the mountains, Pete's thoughts turned lightly to love, like a caribou. He was up and away to find Annie. In this he seemed to be guided by some unerring instinct, for, no matter where she happened to be, he went there, and Annie promptly lodged complaint against him for annoying her and sent him to jail.

This happened at Uklik. Soon after Annie arrived Pete came. The woman went to Todd. When the case came before him for trial, Commissioner Hard gave his servant's unwelcomed admirer a term of nine months in jail, thus, Solomonlike, pleasing everybody. Hard was happy because Annie had declared that if Pete were allowed to roam at large, she would pack up and leave Uklik flat on its tundra. Todd got a "kick" out of having a prisoner he could trust to cut his wood and run his errands, while Pete was overjoyed. There is no such thing as a jail confining anybody on the Yukon. Prisoners remain only because they are snowed in and are getting a good bed and three square meals.

PETE fixed himself up for comfort, purchased a small rifle and had target practice every afternoon out of the window, unless he was out baiting Todd's fox traps.

One day Mrs. Todd said:

"Sam, how about you and me having a butler?"

"Yes, how about it?" demanded Sam. "Don't see no chance, nohow, little one. If one came to town, Hard would grab him before he could wade ashore."

"How about Pete?"

"Pete! What about him?"

"He'd make a good butler—very docile and tractable and all that. It is really more tony to have a butler than it is to have a maid."

"I dunno! Mebbe. He might not stand for it, you know. If Pete got mad, he might not come back next winter, and then we wouldn't have no prisoner."

"Tell him it's more respectable, and we will put a uniform on him, like the stewards have on the river boats."

"Gosh! That would fetch him! He'll think he can make a hit with the Indian woman, and if Hard objects, I'll pinch Annie the next time she goes on one of her bats."

Pete didn't object, but was overjoyed, and so it was ordered, done, and approved by all of the Todd faction, and the two rival social leaders were running neck and neck again. The prisoner, now known alternately as "Trusty" and "Butler," liked his new trappings immensely. Mrs. Todd's prestige was fully restored. It was Mrs. Hard's turn now to feel the bitter pangs of a blighted victory, because every woman in Uklik was aware that a butler meant more to a well-appointed hostess than a maid. The commissioner himself thought it was time to act and paid an official call at the office of his deputy marshal.

"Sam, this thing has gone too far a'ready, so it's time for it to stop," he declared sullenly, elevating his moccasins to the top of Todd's handmade desk.

"What has, Jim?" inquired Sam innocently, with a twinkle in his eye.

"This here butler business. You ain't got no right to call a trusty, what is only a prisoner on good behavior, a butler, like you and your wife have been a-doin'. It's against all reason."

"How you goin' to stop it?"

"I think I'll release Pete so as to watch him better. He almost shot my hat off my head with his durned twenty-two-caliber rifle yesterday afternoon. I think that's cause to get him out of your custody."

"Oh, you do, eh? How about Dish-face Annie? If Pete gets out, he ain't goin' nowhere, for the trail's closed by the drifts, and he couldn't afford a dog team, nohow. So he'll just stick around and pester your cook."

"She ain't a cook. My wife says she's a maid, and that goes."

"Well, maid, then! I ain't argying. I don't give a damn what she is—she's going to quit when Pete gets out and goes back to peeking at her making doughnuts."

"That may be so, but I'm judge here, and I'm going to take action according to my rights. Send for Pete! I'm going into session here and now."

"What you going to do—pardon him, yourself?"

"Naw! I'm going to put something up to him. If he says 'Yes,' I win; if he says 'No,' then I'm going to let the matter drop. I'll tell you right now I ain't got no idea how the thing's going to pan out if he takes his liberty, but I've got to do something, or"—his eyes dropped in an ashamed scrutiny of his reeking moccasins, marking pools on the marshal's desk—"my wife says she won't let me come home."

"I see," said Sam. "Gosh! Don't I? My woman's the same way. If I lose Pete, she'll just about slam the door in my face. Well, you're the judge."

"Pete!" Sam shouted toward the basement. "Oh, Pete! Come on up here for court. Lock the door after you, so's the snow won't drift in, and bring me the keys, in case you don't get to go back."

THERE was a banging of doors below, and at last, Pete, scrumptious in his steward's uniform, but looking restive and suspicious, stamped into the room.

"Hello, judge!" he greeted. "Ye ain't goin' to turn me out, are ye? Ye know ye promised me it would be jail for all winter."

"Shut up, Pete. That wasn't a promise, it was a sentence. What I want to know is, do you want me to let you off, me to be responsible for your actions and everything?"

A crafty, bargaining look came into the prisoner's eyes.

"Where do I sleep?" he countered.

"You can sleep over in my cellar."

"Where do I eat?"

"You can eat in the kitchen, mebbe, but you're not to bother Annie."

"Better talk it over with me before you answer," advised Sam, noticing a strange, moony look on Pete's face. But the prisoner could hear only one thing, and that was the sizzling of Annie's hot cakes and doughnuts in fresh bear fat on a coal range.

"Judge," he gurgled, "I'm yourn. I'll be over at your place to-night." He turned to lumber back to his basement abode when the stern voice of the marshal called to him:

"Take off that there uniform and get into your own clothes. The duds are mine—see?"

"No use gettin' out of jail 'less I have my good clothes," remonstrated Pete.

"Take 'em off!"

"Judge?"

"Better do as the marshal says," advised Big Jim. "You may want to come back some time."

"Annie will fire me out," mumbled the trusty. Then, after a moment's hesitation: "So she will!"

The logic of Pete's contention was driven home to everybody concerned the next afternoon, when Dish-face Annie made formal complaint before the United States commissioner against one Walrus-mugged Pete, for spying on her in her kitchen. When Hard informed her, with

a most unctuous manner, that Pete was permanently out of jail and would be only a lodger in the Hard basement, along with the "root vegetables," Annie gave him a bitter look and walked out. Somewhere in the prohibition Territory of Alaska there must have been a bootlegger, for in exactly one hour she was back with a sizable jag. Just ten minutes later Hard called the marshal over the telephone.

"For Mike's sake, Sam," he yelled into the transmitter, "let's bury our differences. Come over here and get this wild woman what's throwing chunks of wood through my windows."

"Want me to take Pete, too?" inquired Sam hopefully.

"No! I'll keep Pete here. You can have Annie for a gift."

"He ain't much on the buttle, is Pete; while Annie is a good cook. Yes, I'll take her," assured Todd. "Wait until I call the express wagon."

The town dray and Todd arrived at the scene of the uprising simultaneously and in time to witness the wreck of the Hard's front window.

Little Sam essayed to close in on the Indian woman, and was promptly slapped, slugged, mauled and hauled around in a vicious circle by the coat collar. He bawled loudly for help, and the whole village turned out as to a fire. Hitherto the good people had been watching Annie's onslaughts from behind their storm windows.

It took more than the first handful of sour doughs to overcome the simple soul, whose gentle ways had warmed the hearts of Uklik's Five Hundred to the hospitality of the Hard ménage.

After the repulse of the first wave of attack, new storming parties formed. The whole town eventually became embroiled. Annie was overthrown, her hands tied and herself bundled into the express wagon. In this manner she was taken to the jail and strapped to the bed. Uklik citizens then went sulkily home to lick their wounds.

The question of what to do with Annie was paramount at the trial. The commissioner's first views on the matter were later complicated by the outspoken and uncompromising declaration of Mrs. Hard that she wanted Annie back in her kitchen for a forthcoming bridge tournament. Hard himself was inclined to forgive the broken plate glass and let bygones be bygones. However, Todd and half the men of Uklik who had been kicked, clawed or bitten in the struggle, were out for summary justice. Although the trial opened formally, it soon drifted into a general discussion.

"What I want to find out," declared the commissioner testily, pulling at his whiskers, is: "Who sold this woman the liquor?"

THERE was an uneasy shuffle among the fifty male witnesses. Every one looked at Moses Killrap, who operated the Uklik Soft Drink Parlor and was reputed to be the town's worst man in a scrap. Moses stepped forward.

"If there's goin' to be any insinuations about liquor," he informed the court, "I wants to state that when Nick Slappey died on Lynx Hole Creek five years ago, we all got tergether and bought him a coffin from Jedge Hard's store. The day of the burying it was snowin' blazes and none of us went out with the body. And the next day the coffin was back in Jedge Hard's store winder, full of white beans. It has been sold twicet since, by my own count."

"Shut up!" rasped the commissioner. "This ain't no lying match. The other coffins were out of stock."

"Them's truthful words I just uttered, gentlemen," insisted Moses and sat down, after casting a challenging look around the room.

Todd got to his feet.

"We're not argying the p'int," he declared, "and none of what's been said is legal. Judge," he queried, "what was that charge I filed against Annie?"

"You charged her with being drunk and disorderly, and, at the request of my wife, who received the most damages, I have struck out the word 'disorderly,' leaving it read 'drunk and——' "

" 'Drunk *and*'—what?" demanded Sam.

"I'll leave that to you. If I remember the law, you never make a charge of just

'drunk.' It's always 'drunk and' something—like 'disturbin' the peace.' But my wife says it can't be that, because Annie gave her fair warning when she contracted up. It was my wife's right to make such agreement, as the high contracting party," he concluded loftily.

Sam turned toward the expectant faces of the multitude.

"What do you say, boys, to making it 'drunk and raising hell?' " he asked them. The court rapped for order.

"Address your remarks to me, Sam," he warned. "Besides, them words don't look well on the record. They ain't dignified."

"Drunk and still more drunk," suggested the marshal, in disgust.

"That's technical," decreed the court, "but I reckon it covers the law. But when that is proved," he persisted glaring at Killrap, "this being a prohibition country, we must find out and ascertain who furnished the liquor."

"The lady wasn't drunk, and I dare any son of a sea cook here to say she war!" thundered Moses.

"Sam, do *you* say the defendant was drunk?" asked his honor.

"No," replied Sam, very red of countenance. "I didn't have time to look; but there were others who thought she was."

"I'd like 'em to stand up."

No one stood but Moses, and it was obvious he was only interested in counting noses.

"Then has this criminal before the bar no accusers?" thundered the court.

"I guess she ain't," acknowledged Todd, with a fallen face.

"Then the lady is discharged, and Sam pays the expressman for hauling her to jail. Annie, you stay in jail until I get Pete out of my house. I'm going to send him back to Todd's to complete his sentence, as he sees fit. When he shows up in that cell opposite from yourn, better give him a piece of your mind to avoid further trouble."

"I'll bust his head open if there's anything handy to do it with," lashed out the model servant, who hitherto had not spoken a word.

"There won't be nothing to throw," assured Todd. "And if you do find something, you'll stay down there with him until the next thaw."

ANNIE was sitting on the edge of her bunk that night when the door of the jail was pushed gently open, and Pete, again resplendent in his uniform, slid in like a scared alley cat. Very gingerly he sat down on the edge of his bed, and the eyes of the two met through the gloom of lantern light.

"You——" began Annie, searching for the proper expletive. Then she paused. She was taking in the details of the steward's blouse, with its gilded buttons and braided sleeves. It struck her suddenly that he was not such a bad-looking chap, after all. If she had seen him that way at first, perhaps—yes, she was quite sure she would have liked him.

Pete looked forlorn and inoffensive. Annie began to ponder with her chin buried in her palms. At last she broke the silence.

"Pete," said she impressively, "the whole town is upset about me and you."

"Yes," admitted the other, "that is so."

"Down in my country, close by Sitka, when a family they have something to be very proud of, they put it on the top of their totem pole. Whatever it is that makes 'em better than anybody else, they make a picture of it, see?"

"I've seen 'em many a time," agreed Pete, his heart a riot because of the unaccustomed gentleness in the woman's tone.

"Well," pursued Annie, "if Judge Hard was to put up a totem in his front yard, he'd have a figure of me wearin' a lace cap, and if Sam Todd put up a pole, he'd have you on top of it."

"I guess he would."

"There ain't nobody in this village but what would be proud to have us workin' for 'em. It would give 'em respectability."

Annie arose and came close to the barred partition. "Pete," she cooed, "suppos'n' we'd pull together once and make 'em pay for this popularity we gives 'em?"

"Gosh, Annie! What are ye drivin' at?"

Annie said nothing but reached her fat, brown hand between the uprights and pulled at a shiny brass button. Involuntarily, it seemed, Pete's agile fingers closed about it. Both were silent for a long time.

And though they did not know it, the people of Uklik, slumbering beneath their wolf robes, were assured of a second and more poignant phase of that bane of larger communities—the servant problem. They were about to meet an amalgamation of domestic workers. And the "teeth" in the new organization was the power of the contracting members either to break into jail in a corporate body, or to stay out of it until the end of the social season in Uklik.

INDIANS IN ATHLETICS

TWO Mexican Indians of the Tarahumare tribe may develop into important competitors in the next Olympic Games. Sporting authorities and government officials in Mexico are planning to petition the international sporting heads to accept the records made by the two runners. Although these records are not official, it is hoped that this difficulty can be brushed aside, in view of the extraordinary speed exhibited by the applicants. The men are Thomas Zafiro and Leonicio Sanmiguel, and their record was established on the highway which leads from Mexico City to Pachuca. This is a distance of about sixty-two miles—slightly more—and it is claimed that Zafiro and Sanmiguel covered the ground in nine hours and thirty-seven minutes. This item might possibly be added to the evidence that Nature is quite as apt as a trainer of athletes as we scientific mortals.

HANDS OFF YELLOWSTONE

THE Congressional Committee on Public Lands of the United States is faced with a decision which is of vital concern to all those who wish to retain intact our great Yellowstone National Park. The State of Idaho has made a proposal to the Federal government to exchange a tract of land, about twelve miles square in the southwest corner of Yellowstone, for an equal area to be turned over to the park by the State. The tract in the park for which Idaho is so anxious to bid is known as the Cascade Corner or the Bechler Meadows. Cascade Corner is not only a valuable feeding ground for the animals, but contains a valuable stand of timber. This tract stands on the edge of some magnificent scenery and at present it furnishes an ideal camping ground for park visitors.

There is enough water in this coveted corner to irrigate parts of two counties in Idaho, and for this reason Idaho sought to obtain permission to erect reservoirs there seven years ago. Congress at that time defeated the plans of the State to get a footing in the park. A real principle is at stake here. Yellowstone is the oldest and most valuable of our national parks, and the country cannot permit adjacent States to slice off sections of it for their own purposes. If Idaho can take a piece of the Yellowstone, a precedent will be established by which other States can proceed to demand a piece of other national parks.

These lands have been set aside for future generations, and the action of Idaho, if upheld, would be a serious blow at the policy of conservation which the nation heartily approves. In this issue, which is really exploitation versus conservation, the sentiment of the public is surely on the side of conservation.

Out of the Air

By Fred MacIsaac

Author of "Spirit of the Mist," "The Flying Gun," Etc.

Jasper Billings, novelist and one-time baseball catcher, started out on a Mediterranean cruise just because he had money enough to do it. He hardly thought that his whole life would be changed by the most thrilling adventures imaginable, when Fate left him in an Adriatic port.

THE fascinating phrase "Voyage of Discovery," which camouflaged a cruise to the Mediterranean of the twenty-thousand-ton steamship *Durango,* and which justified, in a way, the title by touching at ports in Africa, on the Adriatic and in the Ægean Sea not ordinarily visited by cruising ships, captivated Jasper Billings and made him a passenger—or, explorer, if you wish.

Billings was a novelist—rather an obscure novelist—whose income was hardly sufficient to rescue him from an office desk and regular hours, but he forced it to do so, hoping always to hit a popular theme and burst into fame and affluence. When he had graduated from Princeton six or seven years before, with a record of holding two of the best pitchers the college ever produced, speed merchants, who are now burning up the big leagues, he had refused an offer to join the catching staff of a famous American League team because, even then he had literary aspirations. Often since, however, he had sighed to realize that catching would have profited him more than writing.

When the flaring advertisement of the "Voyage of Discovery" captured his imagination, he happened to be in possession of three thousand dollars, the largest amount he had ever owned, his bills were paid, and there was nothing to detain him in New York. Accordingly, assuring himself that he could beat out on his folding typewriter enough work to pay for the voyage, he passed across the counter of the steamship company the sum of one thousand dollars, in exchange for which he received a ticket which entitled him to an upper berth in a two-berth stateroom.

Billings, like most persons who have never crossed the ocean, had an impression that acquaintances were easily made on shipboard, that social barriers were down, and, after a few days, everybody knew everybody else—just one happy family. He soon decided that those who were most sociable were least desirable.

There were expensive individuals in the smoking room who chewed on toothpicks and drank too much; there were eager elderly widows and old maids and herds of young girls, too tender in age, to interest a man of twenty-eight; but he saw no males who seemed to him congenial traveling companions. In his stateroom he found a hay-and-grain man from Duluth, an honest, but uninteresting individual. Moreover, he drew a dull lot at the dining table. On the whole, rather a depressing aggregation, he decided, and he would have been depressed if he hadn't seen a certain girl.

When he boarded the ship, she had been standing beside the rail, inspecting the arrivals, in company with another girl. His heart gave a glad leap when he met her great dark eyes, as she regarded him impersonally; then she turned her head to say something to her friend, and he saw a smile that was enchanting. She wore a little blue head covering, something like a tam-o'-shanter, a blue traveling dress, and a silver-fox piece around her neck. What did the other travelers matter, when he would be locked up on shipboard for two months with a girl like that?

However, the girl disappeared after the first night in the dining saloon, when he caught a glimpse of her at the captain's table. With the coming of rough weather, she had vanished. The weather having moderated, Jasper was pleased to see her again in the dining room. After dinner he made his way to the big "Social Hall" on the top deck, where dancing occurred nightly. He was hoping that he might meet her, or at least have a chance to feast his eyes upon her.

Finding a small vacant table against the wall in one corner of the room, he planted himself expectantly, while the hall quickly filled with the younger element among the passengers, and the orchestra gave agonizing evidence of an intention to burst into cacophony. Just as the first dance began, he saw her enter, look about, then move directly for a vacant table a few feet from him. Surely luck was running his way to-night. The young woman faced him, while her friend—Jasper did not notice her—sat at the side and did not obstruct the view. He saw that she had lustrous black hair —quantities of it—prettily dressed, and he approved of the fact that it was long. Evidently she was a sensible girl. The eyes were more brilliant than he had expected, and he had expected much; her complexion was dazzling, with hardly a suggestion of artificial coloring.

Her nose was thin, but perfectly formed; her mouth spoke of sweetness; her chin was firm, rather self-assertive, and her lovely gown of white satin revealed very beautiful arms and shoulders. If Jasper Billings had wished to create a girl, he would have created one exactly like this. Not by an iota would he have changed her.

"Crash! Bang! Brrrs! Smash!" challenged the orchestra, and black-coated, white-shirt-bosomed young men were weaving their way through the throng at the table, seeking partners. One paused before the girl and bowed; he was unctuous, sleek, and objectionable, thought Jasper. He murmured a request.

"No, thank you," said the girl coldly.

THE young man faded, to be replaced by a stouter, more impudent fellow, with greasy hair and foxlike eyes.

"No, thank you," repeated the young woman.

Jasper sighed, relieved. Although he would not have dared to approach this girl with a proposition to dance, yet he would have suffered had more daring persons carried her off. The girls tittered and began to talk in low tones. He wanted to hear her voice, so he listened.

The nondescript girl was saying rather scornfully:

"They have plenty of assurance."

His girl answered in a mezzo-soprano voice, haunting in tone, now rather contemptuous.

"Both of them have spoken to me before. Of course I was courteous, but I let them see that they were presumptuous. Why men suppose they may meet, unconventionally, on shipboard a girl whom they could not meet in that manner ashore, I do not understand."

"Bad breeding. There seems to be many of that sort on board."

"Yes; I have had to snub half a dozen already, including several who were introduced by that ridiculous hostess. She seems to think that anybody who bought a ticket is entitled to the companionship of every one else."

They were interrupted by the purser, who sought out the beautiful girl, called her "Miss Reynolds," and invited her to dance. She smiled acceptance, and, while they were on the floor, Jasper Billings escaped from the room and sought the deck.

Mr. Billings was angry. Although he had as poor an opinion of their fellow passengers as the two girls, he considered they were unnecessarily severe, and their conversation stamped them as nothing but a couple of snobs. Had he not been fortunate enough to overhear their views upon the men on board, he might have been foolish enough to try to meet a girl with whom he was to travel for two months. Extremely sensitive, it might have taken him some time to pluck up courage enough to address her; but, if he had made an overture and been treated, as she boasted she had treated others, he would have jumped overboard.

Sitting in a corner and sneering at poor chaps who were polite enough to invite them to dance! Conceited little beasts. And their fling at the hostess, whose assistance he had contemplated invoking to bring about an introduction. How lucky he was to have learned that presentation by the social mentor of the voyage carried no more consideration than an unconventional attempt at acquaintance.

Compared to the men whom she had snubbed, he knew he was not personable. Holding out his big hands, almost deformed from catching speed pitching for four years and more, he laughed self-contemptuously. While he might consider himself refined and well educated, his roughhewn visage and massive shoulders made him look more like a farm hand than a novelist.

No matter how beautiful a young woman may be, if her nature is hard and cold and repelling, she is not a desirable acquaintance; and, so far as he was concerned, he was through with her before he began; in fact, this experience would end his desire for shipboard friendships; she was impossible, and nobody else interested him in the slightest degree.

AS days passed, he saw Miss Reynolds out on deck with her friend. Apparently they were enthralled by each other's conversation. One night, as he paced the promenade deck, he very nearly bumped into her, walking alone. But he drew back in time, with a muttered word of apology, and he did not see a gleam of interest in her eyes.

A few evenings after this incident, the purser, with whom, like every passenger, he had a slight acquaintance, found him in the smoking room, sipping a long drink and reading. The purser seated himself beside Jasper.

"What's the matter with you, Mr. Billings?" he asked. "You are a young man, and we have lots of pretty girls who need attention. If you are too shy to do your own picking, let me introduce you around."

"Thanks," he replied. "I appreciate your good intentions, but I really think I am happier alone."

"Nobody is. Have you noticed a very lovely brunette, rather tall, looks like an old picture I have of Maxine Elliot?"

"I don't think so," lied Jasper.

"Miss Reynolds, a very intelligent girl. She would be good company for a literary man like yourself."

"How did you know that I wrote?" he asked hurriedly, in an effort to conceal his emotion at the mention of her name.

The purser chuckled. "Our press agent looks all the passengers up. I know you wrote a novel and a lot of short stories."

"I'm nobody in particular."

"On board the *Durango* you could be a celebrity, if you liked. Come into the hall, and I'll introduce you to Miss Reynolds."

"No, thanks. There is nothing about me to interest a young lady."

"Don't be uppish. Miss Reynolds will interest you."

"I have seen the young lady," he said, his carefully nursed resentment making him more emphatic than he supposed. "I particularly do not wish to make her acquaintance."

Baxter looked astonished. "But she's a raving beauty. Say, you haven't approached her, or did she throw you down?"

"Certainly not. I have never approached her—never addressed a word to her. I do not speak to people without an introduction."

"Or with one, apparently," said the purser coldly, as he rose. "Well, see you later."

"Well-meaning jackass," grumbled Jasper, as he walked away. "Imagine my walking into that proposition."

Soon the ship began to make the ports on her schedule, and Billings went ashore and prowled, drinking in impressions of sun-bathed cities, hearing with delight the clatter of foreign tongues, visiting historic spots and making copious notes for future use. For the first time during the voyage he was beginning to enjoy himself in hermit fashion.

In Naples he encountered the purser and captain escorting Miss Reynolds and her friend through the old castle; he received a cold nod from the officers and an impersonal glance from the other girl; but Miss Reynolds did not appear to see him at all.

He shrugged his shoulders. She was featherbrained—vapid enough to be mad about brass buttons. But what a wonderful creature she would have been if the Lord had given that beautiful body a soul to match.

In the course of time the steamer entered the harbor of Taliglio, capital of Yugo-Monrovia on the east coast of the Adriatic, with only six hours allotted for the inspection of a city full of relics of the astonishing civilizations that flourished here, first under the Greeks and then in the days of Rome's supremacy.

Following his customary routine, Jasper poked around old towers, went out to a Roman theater, and finally entered a picturesque-looking inn, halfway up the side of the mountain on which the city clung. Here he ate his lunch.

It was a poor luncheon, and the wine was rather unpleasant and soon began to have a soporific effect upon him. Struggling against the craving for sleep, he half rose from his chair, then dropped heavily down again, his head fell on his breast, and he slept.

WHEN he awoke it was pitch dark, and his bed was hard. His eyes pained, and his head ached. Throwing out his arm it struck against a stone wall, and then he appreciated that he was lying on a pavement, an astonishing thing, for he had been sitting in a chair at a lunch table. What the deuce? With an exclamation, he scrambled to his feet and saw that it was night—that he had been lying in a narrow alley, which, to judge from the smell, was a dumping place for garbage and refuse. He clapped his hands to his breast pocket. It was empty. Then he felt for his watch. It was gone. The pocketbook had contained five hundred dollars in American money and one thousand dollars in travelers' checks, also a few dollars in Yugo-Monrovia currency.

Half dazed, he staggered toward a lighted street below. The alley was a series of very wide steps, and, as his head cleared, the calamity began to impress itself. Of course the wine had been drugged. It had a peculiar taste, he now remembered, which made it evident that they had gone through his clothes and tossed him into the alley to come back to life or not, as he pleased. It was nighttime. Good heavens! The *Durango* must have sailed, for she was due to depart at four in the afternoon.

He was penniless and abandoned in a remote port. All his capital had been on his person. While the travelers' checks were supposed to be an insurance against loss, it would be necessary to wire to the nearest office of the concern which issued them, and weeks might elapse before he was reimbursed. In the meantime, what?

In a distracted state of mind he reached the street and turned aimlessly into another thoroughfare, which debouched

upon the central avenue of the city. This street was brightly lighted and filled with a multitude who were making a great noise.

Instinctively he approached the crowd and bright lights, and when he reached the avenue he found it filled, from wall to wall, by a capering mob which shouted, sang and rejoiced; ruefully he wondered if Yugo-Monrovia was celebrating the augmentation of the national wealth by the contents of his pocketbook.

The blare of a brass band added to the din, and the movement of the multitude, which immediately engulfed him, was southward toward the central plaza of the city, where something was evidently about to take place. Ordinarily this animated scene would have interested Jasper, for a large percentage of the people on the street wore the picturesque costume of the hill folk, not unlike the traditional gypsy garb of our musical comedies, and the place was obviously *en fête*. His predicament, however, took up all of his attention, and he was in no carnival mood; nevertheless, when a band of laughing young men and women, who were dancing along, hand in hand, surrounded him and pulled him along with them, he had sense enough to submit, although their shouts were quite without meaning in his ears.

In time they entered the Plaza, a space several hundred feet square, with a small central park, where he had rested earlier in the day. On the farther side was the palace of the king, resembling the home of a minor executive in New York; the cathedral was on the left, and the university on the right. Close to where he stood, rose the whitestone façade of the six-story Bristol Hotel.

Upon a platform in the park stood a man in a brilliant uniform, making a speech, while behind him sat a row of other uniformed individuals, who probably also intended to make speeches, to hear which was the cause for the gathering of so many thousands. Jasper's merry captors began to wedge their way toward the rostrum, which left him to his own devices.

It seemed to him that he should enter the hotel, where there were persons who spoke English and might advise him, or, at least, direct him to the refuge of American strays in all ports—the office of the consul.

Taliglio, teeming with excitement, paid no heed to the anxious alien who elbowed his way to the gate of the courtyard of the Bristol Hotel; but Jasper, looking back upon the animated scene, sighed to think he would have enjoyed it under other conditions. It was a pretty little city, with the general characteristic of east-European towns, which wedge themselves uncomfortably between ocean and mountains. Taliglio was just a few, broad, well-lighted avenues, which ran parallel to the water front, lined with substantial five and six story stone buildings. At right angles to the water front, narrow, badly lighted streets began to climb the hills and speedily became winding mountain roads, passing villas tucked securely on ledges, but resembling in their bright coats of paint so many butterflies resting on a wall. Oh, it was colorful, vibrant, fascinatingly picturesque, but no place for a penniless Yankee.

THE lobbies of the hotel were thronged with people in evening clothes and brilliantly garbed army officers, but, though the clatter of tongues was deafening, he did not distinguish an English word in the babel, and when he had won through to the booking office, he could not attract the attention of a clerk who understood his language. In the general hysteria, he felt he could not expect to interest a soul in his personal difficulties, and, despondent as he was, he began to wonder what the tumult was about.

Somehow he would get through the night, and in the morning, when things were quiet, he would find the consul and try to make some arrangements. In the meantime, he might as well wander around and discover what was going on. Picking his way through the throng in the lobby, he was passing the entrance to the women's salon when he was astounded to hear a woman call his name and, swinging around in delight, he came face to face with Miss Reynolds.

There was nothing haughty now about

this girl; her eyes were alight, and her electric smile drenched him with its effulgence, as she came forward with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Billings," she said delightedly, "it is so good of you. You came back for me, and I'm so glad."

Jasper was so completely astonished that his face was without expression, and it chilled the young woman, who suddenly colored and became confused.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered. "I know we have not met, but I was a fellow passenger on the *Durango*. I was so frightened and distressed that, when I saw a familiar face, I was at once impelled to speak to you."

"I do not understand," Jasper mumbled. "Hasn't the *Durango* sailed?"

"Hours and hours ago. I was left behind."

"Oh, I see! And you thought I had come back to find you."

Her hands were clasped, her fingers were working nervously, her eyes fell, and she faltered.

"I really didn't know what I was saying—it was just my excitement. Of course, you wouldn't do that, since you never met me—perhaps, never saw me on the steamer."

"I saw you, all right," he said with a faint smile. "I just do not understand how it was possible for the ship to sail without you. They would not be apt to miss me, but—well, it's incomprehensible."

"Then you were left behind, too—we are fellows in distress?"

"I'm afraid so. Do you know what this uproar is about?"

"Don't you?"

"I don't seem to know anything about anything," he said ruefully.

"It's a declaration of war. This afternoon Yugo-Monrovia declared war on Albania. They closed the port and ordered all foreign steamers to sail. Didn't you hear the siren of the *Durango?*"

"No," he said stupidly.

She regarded him in perplexity. "I do not see how you could have failed to hear it."

"I'll explain later. Please tell me how you happen to be left behind."

"Can't we go somewhere out of this mob? I can hardly hear myself think."

"I saw some benches in the courtyard; perhaps we can find a vacant one."

RATHER timidly she tucked her little hand in his arm, and he conducted her through the brilliant assemblage. Outside they found a stone bench, under a neglected-looking palm tree. The girl, having found a man of her own nationality and class, was no longer so troubled; for, uninvited, she had piled her burden on his back, confident of his willingness to carry it.

"Now," he said, "please tell me how the steamer happened to leave without you."

"It was driven out by a warship, and I would have been on board, only a very terrible thing happened. Miss Jackson, the girl with whom I am traveling—you must have noticed her, she is charming——"

He nodded.

"She had a headache to-day and decided not to come ashore, and I accepted the invitation of Count Madrone, who came aboard at Naples and sat at my table—the captain's table, you know. We wandered about the town and were lunching here at the hotel, when suddenly all the bells began to ring, and the whistles to blow, and a waiter rushed in and told us that war was declared. We had finished our lunch and were smoking a cigarette, when the siren of the *Durango* began to blow. At first, we supposed it was just joining in the celebration, but the waiter came to us and told us she was leaving immediately. All the *Durango* passengers were hurrying away, and we followed; but in the lobby the count excused himself for a moment, and he never came back, Mr. Billings."

"The dirty hound!" exclaimed Jasper.

"I waited for more than half an hour and then decided to take a cab to the quay. I was stepping into a cab when I discovered that in the excitement of leaving the dining room I had left my bag on the table. I returned for it, and it was gone. Nobody would pay any attention to me, Mr. Billings, and, after I had wasted half an hour without getting

the slightest assistance, I decided to walk to the quay. I walked rapidly, but, when I reached the water front, judge of my dismay when I saw the *Durango* outside the breakwater, escorted by a torpedo-boat destroyer."

"Why didn't you hire a tug and chase her?"

"I had no money," she said in tones which proved that it was an entirely novel experience for her to have no money. "I was terrified, but I thought that Count Madrone must have returned and would be looking for me at the hotel. So I returned there and looked, but he was nowhere to be found. What, do you suppose, happened to him?"

"I don't know, but I'd like to lay hands on him—the rat!"

"So I just sat in the hotel, growing more and more distressed. I was never so frightened in my life. I searched the crowd for an American face; I listened eagerly for somebody speaking English, but they were all foreigners, and gradually it grew dark, and the bands were playing in the streets, and the people shouting, and in the lobby, officers in uniform began to appear, and women in evening gowns. Then it was dinner time, but I had no money to buy dinner, and I just sat and sat and wondered what was going to become of me. Finally, just as I was ready to die, I saw you, and that explains why I rushed upon you madly and was foolish enough to suppose you had come to look for me, when you probably didn't even know who I was."

"Oh, yes," said Jasper, "I knew you, all right."

As the girl had told her story, he had understood what an opportunity was offered to him to win her interest and gratitude. Although he had tried to convince himself that she was a worthless little snob, had sneered when he saw her in the company of the ship's officers, and told himself that he wanted nothing to do with her, deep down, inside, he craved her just as much as he had on the first day, when she stood near the gangplank.

When a woman's smile has enchanted a man, it doesn't help him to have his reason assure him that she is not worthy of his interest, for reason has nothing whatever to do with the behavior of the heart. Her voice was an exquisite instrument, and her pretty friendliness delighted him, even if he considered it based entirely upon self-interest. Doubtless she would have greeted the most obnoxious passenger upon the *Durango* as warmly, upon the same principle which causes a drowning man to grasp at a straw. She was hungry; she wanted to eat; she was homeless; she had to have a place to sleep; she was friendless and needed a friend; almost anybody would do. Most decidedly she had descended from her high horse. She was purring contentedly now, confident that Jasper would take care of her. How quickly she would change her attitude when she learned that he was in quite as parlous a condition as she.

JASPER would have rejoiced if he could have accepted a whipping in lieu of making a confession, but it had to be done. He cleared his throat.

"I'm very hungry," she murmured.

He winced, hesitated, coughed and plunged into his explanation.

"So far as I can be of service, you know that I am at your disposal," he began uncomfortably. "I wish from the bottom of my heart I could buy your dinner. I'd like to dine, too, Miss Reynolds, but unfortunately I am absolutely penniless."

"What! How can that be?" she asked in wide-eyed dismay.

"I lunched at an inn near an old castle, on the outskirts of the town, and my wine was drugged. When I woke up I found myself lying in an alley, my pocketbook and watch had been taken, and everything was dark. I knew the ship must have sailed, and I made my way to this hotel in the hope of finding somebody who understood English, to whom I could tell my story. That's the sort of protector you've found," he said bitterly. It had cost him so much to make the explanation.

"Oh," said the girl, her dismay changing to sympathy. "How terrible! It's perfectly dreadful."

"I would give anything to aid you. A

man can get by somehow, but a girl in such a position—it's unthinkable! I'll do something—really, I will."

Suddenly Miss Reynolds began to laugh softly. Looking at her in astonishment, Jasper saw that it was not hysteria, but mirth, which shone in her eyes.

"It's really funny," she explained.

"Oh, highly comical!"

"I mean my hurling myself upon you when you already were deep in trouble, with quite enough to do to take care of yourself."

"I don't care anything about myself—it's you I'm thinking of. What the deuce can we do?"

"Please pardon me for laughing. My sense of humor always works at the wrong moment. It is funny—really, it is."

"Just as funny as a murder. I've got to get money to hire a room for you at the hotel and get you something to eat, and I haven't got a thing I can pawn. They cleaned me out."

"And I haven't a ring or a bracelet—not even my watch. The purser warned me always to leave my valuables in the safe when I went on these shore excursions, and I only had twenty-five dollars in my bag; but it was a lovely bag."

"What do you suppose they are doing on the *Durango?* They must know you are missing."

"I am sure the captain will be distressed, but he had no option except to sail, and they probably won't let the steamer return."

"He can wireless your loss—perhaps mine—to the American consul. If we could find him, he'd help us. He'd take you in, anyway. Have you a small coin to pay for a phone call?"

"Not a stivver."

"Nor I."

"I am deeply humiliated, Miss Reynolds."

"Don't be absurd," she said, with a sweet little laugh. "It's something to have found you."

"A broken reed!"

"No, really. I was frightened almost to death, but I am not terribly concerned now. You are a countryman, and you are not a weakling," she said, with an approving glance at his brawny arms and heavy shoulders." Misery loves company. We can talk to each other. In a way, it's an adventure."

"But you are hungry."

"Missing a dinner won't do either of us any great harm, and we'll find a way out. Let's see if we can find the consul's address."

"You are a darn good sport," he said admiringly.

"I try to make the best of things. At least, I have an escort—a fellow vagabond."

THEY entered the hotel and found the crowd rapidly thinning out. A great bell began to boom the hour, and they counted ten strokes. A clerk who spoke English gave them the address of the American consul, who lived only a few blocks distant, and the pair set out hopefully through the crowded street. Without much difficulty they arrived at the consulate. It was a private house in a block distinguished from the rest only by a small flagstaff, poking out from the second-story window; a house which was completely dark. They ascended the steps and punched the bell, waited a few moments and rang again. After ten minutes they were forced to conclude that there was nobody in the house, and they went down the steps to the street.

"What now?" asked the girl.

"I suppose we had better go back to the hotel."

Again they moved through the avenue, no longer so thick with people, but many of those who remained were waving the queer-looking flag of the nation and singing various songs.

"Poor, foolish people," commented the girl. "A declaration of war ought to be cause for mourning instead of rejoicing. Were you in our war, Mr. Billings?"

"Not exactly. I was a buck private in a regular-army outfit that never got across."

"Think of these little toy countries, with their comic-opera uniforms, flying at each other's throats."

"Thought the League of Nations was supposed to prevent that sort of thing."

They discussed the subject of war and

international policy during the walk back to the hotel, in order to take their minds off more intimate troubles. When one is compelled to go without dinner because he has no money to pay for it, the pangs of hunger are very hard to control, and Jasper was miserably sure that the girl suffered equally with himself.

Again they entered the hotel, where Jasper suggested that the girl seat herself, while he sought the manager to throw himself upon his mercy. Under ordinary circumstances the manager of the Bristol might have been interested in the story of two passengers left behind by the cruising steamer and without funds, but he had more weighty problems before him to-night, and he dismissed Billings very ungraciously.

"Seek your consul. I can do nothing. You had no business to miss your steamer," he replied, when Jasper had finally succeeded in locating him in a tiny office at the rear of the main desk of the hotel.

The droop of his shoulders told the girl of his ill success, but she greeted him with a smile which heartened him.

"By morning there will be search parties on our trail," she said, "and somehow we shall survive until morning. Sit here and talk to me."

Before the conversation was well under way, a porter approached them rudely.

"Guests of the hotel?" he asked.

"No; that is——" stammered Jasper.

"Then you must go. Orders. War is declared."

Pink with shame, Miss Reynolds rose, and Jasper followed her out into the court, the porter on their heels to make sure that they passed the gate.

"Driven from home," she said with false gayety.

"Don't see what war has to do with refusing to let us sit in the lobby," grumbled Jasper. "Do you suppose we've got to walk the streets all night?"

"Look!" she exclaimed. "Even that seems to be forbidden."

Policemen with drawn swords were driving the crowd from the avenue, and the pair were carried by the throng along toward the south, the multitude dwindling as they drifted. Jasper and Miss Reynolds had walked half a mile when they were alone on the avenue, the lights of which were suddenly extinguished.

"What on earth is the meaning of this?" he asked. "It's only eleven o'clock."

"Let us go into that little park," she suggested, pointing to a green spot directly ahead, a breathing space in the city, heavily wooded and surrounded by a high, iron picket fence, the gate of which was invitingly open. It was so dark that she timorously took his hand, as they entered the park, and they moved cautiously forward until they found a bench upon which they dropped, already fatigued.

"What a situation!" she said nervously. "Two people who never met, thrown together by mad circumstances, outcasts in a land where nobody understands us, penniless, compelled to spend the night upon a bench in a park. Yet I am so glad we encountered each other. Heaven only knows what would have become of me—alone."

"I appreciate your attitude more than I can tell you. If my own folly had not thrown me into this situation, I would not be compelled to ask you to spend the night in such a place."

"But if you had not been drugged and robbed, you would have boarded the *Durango,* and then I would have been alone. It terrifies me to think what might have happened—into whose hands I might have fallen. In the insanity that prevails to-night, neither police nor anybody else would bother about the fate of an American girl."

"And a beautiful one."

"Do you really think so?" she asked, and, despite the fact that they could not see each other's faces, he felt her warm smile. "Yet you do not like me, Mr. Billings."

"How can you say that?"

"You avoided me on the steamer. When people have been passengers on the same ship for three weeks and have not even a bowing acquaintance, it is obvious that there is dislike on one side or the other. And, as I did not avoid you, therefore you must have deliberately kept away from me."

"I knew hardly anybody," he protested, his cheeks on fire.

"But I am not to be classed among the mob. I gave you numerous opportunities; once I bumped into you deliberately."

"No!" he exclaimed.

She nodded. "You wouldn't even look at me, just mumbled an apology and turned your back."

"I hesitated to speak without an introduction," he parried.

She lunged again.

"The purser offered to introduce me, and you refused."

"How did you know?"

"He told me."

"It was just that I was rather shy about meeting people."

"I'm not talking about 'people'—I mean me. He mentioned my name, and you said you particularly did not wish to meet me."

"Oh—there must have been a misunderstanding."

"There was not. I sent Mr. Baxter to bring you over, and he described me, but you said you had seen me and did not wish to meet me. What is the matter with me, Mr. Billings?"

"How can you think there is anything the matter?"

"There must be. You say I am pretty. I know you are a distinguished writer, and I am just a girl who has never done anything. I can understand your not wishing to be bothered talking to your fellow passengers, but why were you particularly determined not to make my acquaintance?"

"Well," said Jasper, backed into a corner, "do you remember early in the voyage, coming with your friend into the hall? I think it was just after the storm, about three days out. I was sitting near you."

"Yes, I noticed you. You never came again to the hall."

"I overheard a conversation between you and your friend. After you refused to dance with several men, you made some very sharp reflections upon passengers who addressed you unconventionally, or who were introduced by the hostess."

"Oh!" said a very small voice. "That was it."

"I naturally felt that you did not wish to make acquaintances, and I had no desire to be snubbed, if I sought an introduction; therefore I avoided one."

"But I didn't mean you," she said reproachfully.

"You turned down better-looking men than I."

"You don't understand," she pleaded. "We were two girls alone. There is a certain type of man on board ship who tries to take advantage of such a situation, and an intelligent girl can tell one a mile away. I am not a prude, and if a man who impressed me as a gentleman, and interesting as well, had scraped acquaintance, I would not have resented it. We were talking about certain persons and certainly had no idea we were being overheard. You had no business to eavesdrop."

"I know it," he said meekly.

"And for that you prevented us from meeting weeks ago and perhaps having a lovely time. You humiliated me by refusing the purser's introduction—hurt me deeply, Mr. Billings, because I did want to meet you. I saw you when you came on board. I deliberately led my friend to that table because I thought there might be an occasion for a word or two—perhaps you might ask me to dance."

"Would you have danced with me that first night?"

"I expect so," she said with a slight laugh.

"I'll be hanged. Why did you talk like that?"

"Well, my friend started the conversation, and I had to agree with her. Besides, I did not like the men who came over."

"What an ass I've been!" he exclaimed. "Please forgive me, Miss Reynolds. What is your first name?"

"Marion."

"May I?"

"In view of the fact I am sitting up all night with you in the dark, you may."

"Marion, I was crazy to meet you, and, because I wanted to do so much, I resented what I thought was your attitude."

"Well, it's all right now."

"Rather."

Silence for a moment. "My hands are getting cold," she whispered.

"May I take them in mine—to warm them?"

"That was why I mentioned it." She laughed. Two little hands crept into his big ones. More silence.

"Listen!" she exclaimed. "What was that?"

In the distance they heard a sound which he recognized instantly.

"Troops on the march," he said. "They are coming this way."

"But there is no music, no drums."

"It's war time."

On the pavements sounded the clatter of horses' hoofs, the rumble of artillery wagons, and the *clod! clod! clod!* of thousands of marching men.

"Let's go see the parade," she said. "It will kill time, and we can look at them through the park fence."

Hand in hand, they moved across the thick grass, under the trees until they reached the high, iron fence, and by that time the head of the column was passing. It was the army of Yugo-Monrovia going forth to war.

A regiment of cavalry moved by at a walk, followed by a brigade of field artillery. The gaudy uniforms had been packed away. These troops wore dark gray; the cavalry's silver helmets were covered with dark cloth, and even the spikes in the helmets were painted gray. Jasper approved their businesslike appearance; if this were a comic-opera kingdom, its army had good training, was well armed, and likely to fight savagely. The artillery was succeeded by infantry, just a multitude of gray shadows moving through the black night, their rifles without the betraying glint of bayonets, the officers minus their ornate swords. Company after company glided by, with no sound save the trample of leather on wide-stone flaggings. One regiment after another, until ten had passed. Then came a second division, preceded by its cavalry and artillery, its commander in a big, closed motor car. They had been peering through the fence for an hour, and imperceptibly the girl had crept closer to the man, until she leaned against him, and his right arm passed protectingly over her shoulder. She was shivering slightly in the chill night air. And then men poured on them from behind, the girl was violently dragged away, and Jasper found himself confronting four policemen, who menaced him with their swords.

"God in heaven! They take us for spies!"

As a soldier, he should have known better than look out from a dark garden through a picket fence at an army in war time. Had they stood on the sidewalk, they would not have awakened suspicion, but they were concealed, furtive, and in a war-crazed nation their actions were a confession of guilt.

THE army marched in the dead of night through streets which had been emptied of spectators, without lights or beat of drum, secrecy its purpose. The enemy would give much to learn how many divisions passed, how strong was its artillery, how effective its cavalry. What more likely than that spies would hide in the park to count the effectives of Yogo-Monrovia?

That their situation was deadly serious he understood at once, and he shuddered for the girl, innocent victim of his own stupidity. But the police were already driving them both before them, and when Marion called to him they were harshly bidden to be silent.

They left the park from the farther side and were bundled into an automobile, while four policemen crowded in with them, and four more clung to the side of the car, standing upon the running board.

"What are we arrested for?" she whispered.

"They take us for spies. Don't worry."

"How ridiculous," she said, with a clear laugh, whereupon all eight policemen roared the local equivalent for "Silence!"

In no time at all they were passing into a forbidding gray building. For a moment they stopped before a desk in a dimly lighted hall, where they were ar-

raigned, in a language they did not understand, and then thrust into separate cells.

Not a chance for a word with Marion was given him. Spies must not be allowed to communicate, and he dropped upon a dirty cot in a squalid cell and buried his head in his hands. Jasper remembered the spy hysteria at the beginning of our late war, when innocent people were arrested on absurd charges and sometimes kept for months in jail. In some countries they execute men and women on equally ridiculous complaints. He and Marion were foreigners, enough to condemn them in an isolated Balkan kingdom, suddenly ablaze with hatred of an equally obscure enemy.

Their disposal would be summary. If a miracle did not happen, they would be tried and convicted in the morning, to face a firing squad an hour later. The American consul must be reached; a wireless must be sent to the *Durango*. All depended upon whether their judges were intelligent or stupid, and whether the court troubled to provide an English interpreter.

His personal plight was insignificant beside that of the lovely innocent girl whom he had just learned to be so sweet and wonderful, who had confessed so bravely her liking for him, and whom he had been insane enough to avoid on the steamer. Whatever happened to him, she must be saved. All night he writhed in agony, born of his impotence.

Marion, conscious of her innocence, rather amused by the preposterousness of the charge against her—think of being a spy for an unknown country—confident that everything would be explained in the morning, was grateful for the warmth of the cell, dirty though it was. After a few grimaces Marion lay down on the cot and slept soundly all night.

At eight in the morning she was awakened by a policeman and ordered to follow him. She marched into a chamber at the far end of the hall, where were seated seven officers in the gray uniforms of the marching troops. At the same moment, Jasper, wild-eyed and disheveled, was driven into the room through another door, and the pair were forced to stand before what was passing for justice in Taliglio that morning.

THERE was a conversation between the officers. An officer, whose eyes displayed very boldly his admiration for Marion, addressed her, first in Yugo-Monrovian, then in Turkish, finally in French.

"I understand French," she said gladly.

"You are charged, mademoiselle, with spying upon our army from behind the grille of the Prater Park last night."

"We were looking at the parade. Is there any harm in that?" she demanded.

"You are Albanian spies."

"Do not be absurd. We are Americans, left behind by the *Durango*, when you drove her out of the port yesterday."

"Why were you hiding in the park?" he demanded in some surprise.

"We had no money. We were turned away from the hotel and driven off the avenue."

"Americans without money—that is droll!" He laughed and then explained to the court, which seemed to be impressed. At that moment a policeman hurried into the room, walked up to Marion and gazed at her intently then said something to the judges.

"Ho!" exclaimed the interpreter. "Mademoiselle, you lunched yesterday at the Bristol Hotel with a man named Madrone."

"Count Madrone? Certainly," she said eagerly.

"The Albanian secret agent," he shouted, then talked rapidly to the other judges. All looked grave and conversed together. The young man looked sad, shrugged his shoulders, and spoke again in French.

"You were the companion of Madrone, who has already been executed. You are caught with your accomplice, enumerating our forces. You are condemned to be shot."

Jasper turned pale, cast a look of agonizing commiseration at Marion, but she thought her French must be at fault. Shot for looking at a parade? Nonsense!

The oldest of the judges spoke to the officer, who listened intently and then suddenly smiled.

"There is a chance for you," he said. "You will be sent to general staff headquarters. If you reveal your system of ciphers and a list of your fellow secret agents, you will be imprisoned for life instead of executed."

"But we—I—I don't know what you mean," she replied stammeringly. Jasper, who understood very little French, but who had gathered the gist of the conversation, now mustered enough of his college French to make a statement:

"We are American citizens. I demand to see the American consul."

With a laugh the young officer repeated the demand, and the judges all unbent enough to smile.

"We have no time for consuls," said the young officer. "You are guilty. You have the choice of betraying your confederates or being shot within an hour. Take them to headquarters."

"Jasper, are they serious?" exclaimed the girl.

"My heart is breaking, Marion. It's all my fault," he said.

"Silence!" roared the interpreter.

A file of soldiers now entered with rifles, lined up on either side of the boy and girl, and, at a command barked by a sergeant, marched them out of the room. For some reason they were returned to their cells, left there for an hour, and then taken forth again. Although he was soon to be shot, Jasper was ravenously hungry. He had had no dinner the night before, no breakfast this morning. It seemed strange that he could think of eating under the circumstances.

They waited in an anteroom, attended by a dozen soldiers—little dark men, with rifles too large for them, who glowered at them fiercely, and then a whiskered sergeant entered. Immediately they were escorted down a wide flight of stone steps into a courtyard, where they were told to halt. For a second they stood side by side.

"Marion," he whispered, "we are going to die. I want to tell you I love you—it's our last chance."

The girl looked up at him with a brave smile. Weak as they are, women have a way of facing terrible events.

"I love you, Jasper," she whispered back. "I learned it last night. Don't give up hope. Something may happen."

"God bless you," he said brokenly.

NOW a platoon of infantry, gray and warlike, marched into the courtyard and, at a string of commands from a lieutenant, divided into squads, the first of which halted in front of Jasper, while the second closed in behind him. Marion was led to a position in the rear, while a third squad drew up behind the pale and trembling girl. With a protesting squeak, the great gate swung open, and the march of doom began. Jasper wondered why he had not been handcuffed nor his arms bound behind him; and, despite his alarm, he grinned at the thought that they had probably arrested so many possible spies that they had run out of manacles. If they had only permitted him to walk beside Marion, he might have been of some help to her. Marion had confessed that she loved him, and then she was instantly torn away from him.

They moved from the prison down a narrow street, which entered the central Plaza, which, he could see, was packed with humanity. Throngs were moving with the detachment toward the square, and many of these, observing the alien prisoners, jeered and taunted and cursed, probably to demonstrate their own patriotism.

He heard music—an incongruous melody for such a remote and barbarous region—the "Manhattan Beach March" of John Philip Sousa, its strains recalling almost forgotten scenes and incidents of a life soon to be snuffed out. The soldiers had to force a way through the mob, which blocked the end of the narrow street, and reached open ground just as half a dozen mounted police came galloping along from the north side, clearing a route for a procession. Behind was a mounted band, and in the rear were the tall beaver hats of the cavalry. The lieutenant in command of Jasper's escort ordered a halt, whereupon the squad behind closed in upon the heels of the prisoner, and Jasper saw Marion, when he looked back, only a few feet behind

him, separated by two ranks of soldiers. She threw him a brave, but rather piteous, smile, which he returned before his head was forcibly turned front by a hard hand on the back of his neck.

He saw that they had entered the Plaza from a street which ran along the side of the Hotel Bristol, and he observed that its windows fronting on the Plaza were occupied by guests in holiday attire, who had small flags or streamers in the national colors of red, black and green.

The cavalry were already moving past —household troops, to judge from their brilliant uniforms. Already he had surmised that it was a royal procession. Behind the cavalry, coming from the left, was a train of automobiles. The first car to approach was a splendid machine, which drew a roar of applause, and now the people on every side were dropping on their knees, while the soldiers of the guard of Jasper and Marion presented arms. All these things he observed with bitter indifference. What did he care about the stupid rulers of an idiotic nation, which had condemned two innocent people, one of them the loveliest girl in the world, to death? In a defiant mood he inspected the king and queen in the open automobile. A chauffeur in magnificent scarlet-and-gold livery drove the car, and beside him sat a military aid, whose green coat was almost hidden beneath medals, crosses, and other decorations. He saw the king, rather a noble person, with a long, white beard, a green coat, with a white sash, and huge gold epaulets. Beside him was a stout, motherly woman in black velvet. His majesty carried in his hand his head covering, a gold Roman helmet, with black plume, and he was bowing, unsmiling, to the noisy plaudits of his subjects.

Above the rumble of obeisance there penetrated the shrill scream of a woman who stood upon the opposite side of the path of the procession, and who was pointing upward. Immediately her scream was echoed from a hundred throats, and others pointed. Jasper involuntarily followed the direction of her finger.

ON the roof of the Hotel Bristol, leaning over the parapet was a tiny figure, some seventy feet above the ground, a black-bearded person, with menace in his attitude.

The creature bellowed something, and Jasper, ignorant of Yugo-Monrovian, understood what he said. It was the Latin battle cry of all political fanatics. The man on the roof shouted:

"*'Sic semper tyrannis.'*"

As he spoke, he lifted his right hand which held a round, black object.

Immediately fifty thousand people went mad with terror. The kneeling mob was upon its feet. What had been a sea of faces was a sea of backs. The soldiers surrounding the prisoners melted, joining the futile stampede. Jasper saw the magnificent chauffeur stop the royal car and make a flying leap into the street, where he began to claw at the backs of the crowd. Women were already lying on the ground, trampled. The military aid cowered in the front seat, his arms held protectingly over his head.

As though turned to stone, the king and queen sat in their car. Some of the cavalry ahead were trying to turn their horses, others were driving forward. Soldiers may be brave, but they flee from a bomb.

The madman, with a shriek of laughter, swung his bomb out, so that it would drop into the car; but Jasper saw it would strike the ground, six feet or so in front of the radiator—where it would be equally effective.

The poor queen was making the sign of the cross, and the king's eyes widened, as he saw a slender figure rush forward where all were moving away. Jasper was standing in front of the machine, his eyes fixed upon the black ball which was falling. He was on the balls of his feet, swaying slightly; now he moved a pace to one side, now he ran forward a couple of feet. To him the scene had faded. King, castle and pageant were gone. He stood in the Princeton diamond, on the day of the deciding game with Yale, waiting. There were three on bases; it was the ninth inning; the score was Princeton, three; Yale, two. There were

two men out, and the clean-up batter of the blue had hit a swift one and sent up a high-fowl fly.

The Yale stands were howling like dervishes, but the Princeton stands were silent as the tomb, probably praying. He had judged that ball correctly, and at the proper second his cupped hands closed round it, though he had to bend backward. But *this* ball drove his hands against his chest, with sickening force, and knocked him flat on his back, where he lay—the ball safe, the game won.

The bomb had weighed a pound, filled with a high explosive, which would go off by percussion. Only such trained and massive hands as those of Jasper Billings could have caught it and retained it.

He was dazed, but conscious; he had hit the back of his head against the stone flagging, but he heard the thunder of the multitude and, above it, what was sweeter to his ears—a woman's voice, shouting in English:

"Hold it, catcher!"

King Nicholas of Yugo-Monrovia was out of his car and upon his knees beside the man who had caught the bomb. The multitude of backs had become fronts, and the soldiers were drawing around. The cheering might have been heard in the hills of distant Albania and caused the enemy to quake.

King Nicholas heard the girl's quaint call, and his waxen face broke into a smile. In perfect English he said:

"By God's great mercy, a baseball player came to Taliglio. Permit me to assist our preserver to rise that I may shake the hand which saved her majesty and myself."

Jasper grinned up at him. "Don't shake it too hard, your majesty. I think I have a couple of broken fingers."

Aided by the king, he got upon his feet, the diabolical instrument clutched to his breast.

"I took a chance that it wasn't a fuse bomb, sir," he said. "You must have seen a game of baseball."

"Before I came to the throne, I visited America," replied the monarch. "Come with me that her majesty may thank you."

"Listen, sir: I'm condemned to death as an Albanian spy, and that young lady, too. We're both Americans—tourists from the *Durango*."

HE talked fast because he saw that the guards were returning and again surrounding Marion Reynolds.

King Nicholas looked angry.

"I saw the cowardly dogs run. Of course, you are free, sir—you and your wife."

"Not my wife—not yet."

"Approach, mademoiselle," commanded his majesty, and Marion came timidly, her face aglow, her eyes betraying her wonder. This was her first king, but she saw him dimly. She was adoring Jasper, still with the bomb in his hands.

"Your fiancé, mademoiselle," Nicholas said, offering her his hand, which she knew was to be kissed, not shaken, "is the bravest man I have seen in my seventy years. To catch a bomb in his hands, knowing it would probably explode and obliterate him—to run forward where everybody else ran away!"

"Except your majesties," said Marion.

"We rulers must face our fate," said the king, with dignity. "Here, Dimitri," to his aid, "dispose of this bauble. It won't hurt you now."

The officer, crimson with shame, took the bomb from Jasper.

"Come, young Americans. Her majesty will wish to thank you."

He took Jasper by the arm, and offered his other arm to Marion. As they moved to the car, they passed through a lane of kneeling people, who were singing the national anthem with tears on their cheeks. Some of the women kissed the hem of Marion's rather short dress.

Police and soldiers were overflowing the Bristol in search of the would-be assassin; and, as they reached the car, several rifle shots told that they had probably found him.

"Americans, my dear," said the king, when they stood beside the automobile. "We owe our lives to a baseball player whom they were going to shoot as an Albanian spy."

The old queen smiled at Marion. "The

fools!" she said in English. "Nicholas, turn these cowards out of the car and let this lovely young girl and her brave man ride through the city, so that our subjects may see those who saved us and whom we delight to honor."

So, through the capital of Yugo-Monrovia, rode Marion and Jasper, sitting in the tonneau of a royal car, with a king and queen. If they both wore clothes in which they had slept in a prison, the people knew already what they had done for the nation, and for an hour they moved through a multitude delirious with joy, as they showered every species of blessing upon their uncombed heads.

That night they dined at the palace, after the court physician had set and bandaged two broken fingers of the man who caught bombs, after which they removed to the finest suite in the Bristol, the manager of which was ready to lick the polish from Jasper's shoes. Marion's bag and Jasper's watch and money miraculously appeared upon the table of their sitting room, and the king had assured them that the *Durango* had been summoned by wireless to take them on their way. On the breast of Jasper Billings glittered the gold star of a Knight Commander of the Dragon of Yugo-Monrovia, which the king had taken from his own uniform coat.

"I am still dazed by the wonderful things which have happened to us," declared Marion, "yet I am most unable to understand how you ever had nerve enough to try to catch the bomb."

"It was like this," said Jasper. "Very shortly they were going to shoot us. If the bomb hit the stone pavements, we would have been blown to bits. So why not take a chance?"

"But if it had had a fuse?"

"Only another chance."

"I think you are just the bravest man!" she exclaimed. "But I am so sorry for your poor broken fingers." To prove it she kissed them.

"I'll catch a bomb every day if you'll do that?"

"If you ever take such a chance again like——"

"Pooh! I'd sooner catch a bomb than try to hold some pitchers I know."

"Jasper," she said, "of course I'd love the wedding to-morrow in the palace, with the queen as matron of honor and the king giving me away; but if you think it too sudden—if you don't really love me—after all, you hated me on the steamer——"

"Do you want to know how much I love you?"

She nodded eagerly.

"Like this," he said.

In motion pictures they would have had to cut most of that kiss.

ALL THE INGREDIENTS OF ROMANCE

THE reward of a king for a subject's valiant service—buried treasure—smuggling—and one of the most beautiful settings on the face of the earth. Around these ideal conditions is woven a true tale containing a very pretty mystery.

Back in 1805 the King of Spain rewarded his good and faithful subject, Don José Bartolome Tapia—who had shown his loyalty by a worthy service not now known. Don José was granted a piece of land out in southern California, then under Spanish rule. In the text of the grant, the description read: "From the sea to a range of mountains, and from Topango Cañon along the coast to a cañada called 'Sequit.'" When Don José died, his son, who was called Tiburcio, inherited the great stretch of country. It was said that Tiburcio was a smuggler, but this information was not too-well founded, for back in those days men in that part were few and far removed from each other. But the story persisted, even to the extent of a rumor that Tiburcio left, when he in turn died, hidden treasure somewhere on his property. Whether or not this last matter is based on fact, the tale certainly smacks, like rare old wine, with a colorful and intriguing quality.

Revenge

By Robert McBlair

Author of "Red Moon," "The Ace of Spades," Etc.

Ben could hardly wait until the train pulled into Plunkett Corners, for there, waiting for him, would be Betty, his fiancée. And how could Ben know that presently he would find an unlooked-for crisis which would tax not only his love for Betty but his faith in his fellow man?

CHAPTER I.

BETTY WASN'T WAITING.

THE young man's blue eyes wore an absent expression. He was good looking, despite the wood smoke which had smudged his straight nose and the strong chin beneath the sensitive mouth. With slender, smudged hands he brushed the cinders from the knees of the dark suit. He was smiling faintly, as at some happy memory or anticipation, but the talkative mountain preacher, who had got on the mixed freight-and-passenger train at the previous station, seized upon this show of animation as an expression of interest.

"Thirdly," the preacher shouted above the clatter of the wheels on the narrow-gauge rails, "we got to remember what the Good Book says about turnin' the other cheek!"

Ben Hundley nodded, although he was not listening. He was on his way to be married. At least, he and Betty Plunkett had been engaged when he had left for Huntington. He had not heard from her for the past three weeks, but he had waved this worry aside, now that he was at last on the way toward her. For eight endless hours he had sat on this lengthwise bench, laved in the smoke and sparks from the bell-funneled, wood-burning locomotive, which puffed along at the head of seven freight cars and this caboose hitched on at the end.

The train had seemed to him to be continually standing still. It had stopped at several places, while the fireman and the engineer had gathered armfuls of cordwood from the piles beside the track and had returned leisurely to throw the wood into the tender. It had stopped again and again to load and unload freight, and for water. Once, to Ben

Hundley's impatient rage, it had stopped and backed up a quarter of a mile, because the engineer, looking behind, had spied an expected old lady who had arrived too late at the track to make a signal. Fuming inwardly, Ben had watched the conductor and the brakeman play a game of seven-up while the old lady returned up the path to her farmhouse and retrieved a purse which she had forgotten. But, now that they had passed Stone Coal, they could reach Plunkett Corners easily in half an hour of steady running.

The flat wheel on the freight car ahead beat out a happy rhythm of words:

Jour-neys end in lov-ers' meetings. Jour-neys end in—— Whoo—whoo—who-who!

The silvery spurts of sound leaped from the mouth of the locomotive's tiny whistle, raced up the dark green of the hemlocks on the mountainside, and sped upward into the unflecked blue of an afternoon sky in spring. Four white puffs of steam, like the swaddling clothes of sound, raced with the saffron wood smoke and the flying sparks past the dingy windows of the coach, as if they were hastening to be at the spot where the spurs of sound would come down. And next, from the bottom land across the sluggish, yellow river, leaped back the silver echo, faint but clear: *Whoo—whoo—who-who!*

"And, fourthly," the mountain preacher was saying, "we got to call to mind them other words in the old Good Book. I mean, where it says: ' "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," saith the Lord.' I don't rightly recollect the verse and the chapter, but it's in the Bible somewhar, that I know. Anyways, I'll have time to search it out before the sermon time tomorrow. An' it appears to me it's a right-good line of sermonizin' to give to them folks at Plunkett Corners. This is the first time I been so far. But the preacher up thar got took with a misery. They called me plumb from Stone Coal, they did. The engineer of this here train brung me the message on his down trip yestiddy. And I allowed, as long as the day after the weddin' comes to be a Sunday, I mout stay over and put in a word for the Lord. They tell me they's a heap of violence up thar of a Saturday night, and that's what brought to me the idea of this here text. You acquainted at Plunkett Corners, mister?"

"Are you going to Plunkett Corners?" asked Ben. Immediately the tall, lanky mountaineer, holding a rusty Bible in the lap of his rusty and frayed frock coat, became a subject of interest, because it would interest Betty. He could hear her already, in her soft, slow drawl:

"There's a new preacher here to-morrow, darlin'. Came up for a weddin', because old Mr. Parsons got sick. Let's you and I go to hear him. I want to show Peggy Hatfield and Mary Damron what a good-lookin' beau I got."

BEN could see her, as she said it—see the peach bloom of her skin crinkling about her chestnut eyes, so alive and laughing with their flecks of gold. The vision of her always came to him as something fresh and new. There was something always miraculous to him in the honey yellow of her hair, flowing so bright and golden above the arched black of her brows and the dark of her long-lashed eyes. The very shape of her pert little nose seemed a divine dispensation. Her skin, so clear that it seemed almost to glow; the living color in her cheek; the peach-down ringlet beside the shell of her little ear—these things partook of the nature of that unbelievable miracle which had happened when she first had slipped into his arms. He could still hear what she had said:

"Yes! Yes, I do, Ben. How long have I? I think I always did—before I had ever even seen you. I reckon I was waitin' for you all this time—all this time."

"Yes, sir." The mountain preacher was shouting to be heard, as the train rattled over the frogs and switches at the Powder Creek siding. "Yes, sir, they called me plumb from Stone Coal. And I allowed 'Revenge Is Mine' would be a mighty good text to preach to Plunkett Corners. They tell me there's right smart of shootin' goes on round that fellow Dick's saloon."

"Well," agreed Ben, smiling, "there

is some shooting there, sometimes, on Saturday nights. The men come over from the coal mines and from the railroad-construction gang across the mountain. Some of them walk ten miles for a drink, so naturally they hit the stuff pretty hard when they get it. But the fights don't usually come from any idea of revenge." He thought he would have a little discussion with the preacher. It would be something to tell Betty about. He made a note of the man's collar, turned with the opening toward the back of the neck. He wore no vest nor necktie. The rumpled white shirt was not very clean, and the knotty, weather-bitten hands, folded upon the ancient Bible on his bony knees, had the broken nails and the ingrained crisscrosses of dirt of a man who works in the fields. The dark mustache drooped in the shape of an inverted horseshoe to the pointed chin; a spare beard, short and transparent, softened the outline of the gaunt jaw and hollow cheek. But there was something compelling about the man's eyes. His black Stetson, unclipped hair, clumsy, mud-crusted shoes, were commonplace. The aquiline nose, heavy brows, and high cheek bones were rather usual in the West Virginia and Kentucky mountaineers. But the eyes themselves were black and deep and bright, too, from some inner fire.

"Usually the fights are on the impulse," Ben added. "If the men waited till the next day, there wouldn't be any fights. But I can understand where there might be occasion for taking revenge, can't you? In some of these feuds, for instance. Suppose somebody had shot your brother, say, from ambush. Suppose you knew who did it, but wouldn't be able to prove it in court. How could you help taking revenge? You'd be a coward if you didn't, wouldn't you? Besides, you'd feel it so strongly, you'd *have* to do something. Otherwise it would drive you crazy."

Ben Hundley became conscious of a worry he had been trying to keep down in the dark of his mind.

"Suppose some one took your girl away from you—while you were away, I mean—by some dirty trick. No, that wouldn't be possible, would it? If she loved you, she'd stick by you in spite of everything. But, anyway, there are times when a man would be justified in taking revenge."

Ben Hundley felt disturbed at this thought he had allowed to creep up into his mind. If Betty hadn't written, there was some good reason. He knew her too well to doubt her, even though their romance had been, as yet, so brief. He experienced a gust of irritation against the preacher, who, with a half smile on his strangely twisted mouth, was staring absently through him with those burning eyes.

"No," said the preacher, "there is something bigger than revenge." He spoke vibrantly, as if to some memory within himself. His lips parted in a gentle smile. "There's something bigger than revenge," he said again.

HUNDLEY turned impatiently away to look out the near-by window. Half of the glass was coated on the outside with dirt, as if dirt on the roof of the car had been dissolved by the rains and had run down to cover the wavy window-pane with a thin skim of mud. The glass mirrored his countenance; he was surprised to see his heavy, black brows drawn together above his narrow, straight nose; his blue eyes were serious within their smoky ring of lashes; his lower lip was pushed up till it protruded beneath the upper, and the muscles stood out on his strong jaws.

He thought how Betty would laugh at him for becoming so abruptly angry over a casual conversation. She was always amused at his furies, and they dissolved quickly when she was near. He laughed, and the sight of his even, white teeth in the glass, of his smiling blue eyes, reminded him somehow of how near they were to Plunkett Corners. Betty would be at the train to meet him, of course. He would tell her about this conversation, of how he had got mad without reason, and she would chide him and laugh. He would tell her when he slipped his arm under hers, carrying his pigskin suit case in his other hand, and they walked across the tracks and across the ruts of

the dusty red-clay road, and along the grass-bordered earth sidewalk of the little crossroads settlement, taking an added pleasure from the knowledge that the people they passed looked around and smiled at the happiness of two lovers.

Whoo—whoo—who-who!

The train blew for the Plunkett Corners curve, short blasts, as if it shared Ben's excitement. He took off his black-felt hat and brushed it free of the gray-and-black wood cinders, ran his hand through his mop of crisp black hair, then glanced to see if his suit case was still safe under the opposite untenanted bench.

A tingle of happy expectancy ran through him; he and Betty would have so much to tell each other. Having heard that the railroad was going to construct a standard-gauge line in the place of the present road, cut tunnels through the three mountain spurs between Naugatuck and Kenova, and fill in the slides and cuts, so as to have a fairly level road on which to haul the rapidly expanding production of coal, Ben had gone down to Huntington and Columbus to see if he could raise the capital to start a contracting company, so that he could put in his bids for the construction work.

Betty would want to hear of his success from his own lips, and, on the other hand, she would have much to tell him of the little, human happenings of the village.

"Did you say you were going up to the Corners to perform a wedding ceremony?" he asked.

The preacher looked up, holding a horny finger on the verse in the Bible which he had been reading.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you will stick around for a week or two, I will give you another job. My girl and I have been planning to get married as soon as I got started in my new business. I've got my home all built; you'll see it when you get off the train—the two-story, white-clapboard house, with green shutters, right opposite Major Plunkett's hotel. Whom are you going to hook up this time?"

"One of Major Plunkett's daughters," the preacher said.

Ben Hundley laughed.

"You must be mistaken in the name," he said. "The major hasn't got but two daughters. One of them married Gray Durfin, and, after he shot himself, she married Bill Hall. The other one is Miss Betty Plunkett, and you're not likely marrying her. I mean," Ben laughed, "if you were, I'd know about it. It isn't likely they'd plan the wedding without consulting me. You see, she's the girl I was just telling you about. She is promised to me."

"Maybe it is a surprise for you," ventured the preacher, his teeth showing white between his mustache. He looked thoughtfully out of the window for a moment. "I reckon, then," he asked, turning to Ben again, "that they call you Art Shipley?"

"No; my name is Ben Hundley."

"That's funny," said the preacher, frowning and blinking his bright eyes. "You don't reckon they could have been no mix-up in that message they sent me, do you? No," he said, answering his own question and shaking his gaunt head, "they couldn't 'a' been. That there note was writ by Major Plunkett hisself, on the letterhead of the Plunkett Hotel. Yes, sir," he repeated, feeling in the pockets of his long frock coat, "I ain't got it with me, but I remembers the look of it plain."

"What did it say?" Ben demanded.

"Why," said the preacher, "it ast me to come up to-day and marry his daughter Betty to a gentleman named Art Shipley. Said he had got the license hisself, and the wedding would take place some time this evening. Said he wouldn't make the hour definite, 'cause they wa'n't no telling if this train would be late, or how much."

The train began to slow up for the station.

"There's some mistake somewhere," said Ben, as he crossed the car and drew his bag from beneath the bench. He tried to smile, but the muscles of his face were stiff. Holding the bag in his hand, he walked down the narrow aisle of the car. Betty would be waiting for him, her gold-flecked eyes misted with happiness. He would tell her what the preacher had said, and they would laugh

together at the mistake which had been made.

The train banged to a sudden stop and jolted Hundley suddenly onto the outside platform. The brakeman was calling, "All off for Plunkett Corners," as Ben descended the car steps. On the cindery platform he dropped his bag and looked around. He had written Betty when he was coming, but she was nowhere in sight. Art Shipley, looking red and excited, was helping the conductor lift a package down out of one of the freight cars.

CHAPTER II.

A LETTER INSIDE A HAT.

THE station agent came over from the scales, where he had been weighing a trunk, and helped Art Shipley lift the package down from the freight car to the cindery station platform. It was a paper-wrapped bedstead, crated in white-pine wood, on which was stenciled the name of a Huntington furniture store. The station agent tore off a piece of the paper wrapping, said something, and laughed.

"Yes," replied Art Shipley, laughing, as he took off his felt hat and brushed the oily brown hair back from a retreating forehead. "Can't set up housekeeping without a bed."

Ben picked up his bag, as the mountain preacher joined him, and fell automatically into step. He felt as if the power of thought were momentarily in abeyance. His mind refused to accept the idea that Betty had deserted him, without a word of explanation, to marry some one else. So many illusions of beauty, so many bewitching ideas clustered about his belief in her, that his faith remained aloof and untouched in his consciousness. At the same time, something had gone out of him. The happy buoyancy with which he had started on his journey had changed to a tense awareness. Art Shipley, whom he had never seriously regarded, became now very vivid and close to his senses. He detected in the dapper, slender figure in the carefully pressed maroon-colored suit a certain affable plausibility, a certain suave and easy-going generosity of nature, which women like. There was an engaging vitality in his perhaps too-ready laugh, and in the full, sensuous lips beneath the small and fluffy mustache, which wandered, like a brown and overfed caterpillar, from the tip of his down-curved nose out to the smile crease in his swarthy cheek.

Ben had thought to pass by without speaking. A taut uncertainty possessed him. Until he should have a talk with Betty, he felt as if he were walking on quicksand. But Art Shipley jumped back to avoid a bundle falling from the open freight car, and he and Ben collided.

Shipley turned around quickly, his small, sharp teeth shining between his full lips in a laugh. Then, when he saw who it was, the laugh died on his face, the swarthy skin turned to a muddy yellow, as if from shock and surprise.

"Why, hello, Ben," he said, and held out his hand. "Glad to see you back."

Shipley's pale-brown eyes flitted briefly to Ben's and then quickly away, as they shook hands. He turned back to the freight car, suddenly busy. "Let's have those other packages, Joe," he called, and went over to peer into the open door. As Ben swung along after the gaunt figure of the mountain preacher, he noticed that the station master, when he nodded to him, wore a covert smile.

The way to the village led along the train, across the track in front of the locomotive, and then across the rutted, red-clay road to the path which did service as a sidewalk. The sun, going down behind the mountain on the right, threw a cloudless gauze of pink over the sky, tingeing the rocky summit above the dark hemlocks on the mountainside, and dropping spots of salmon and orange upon the slow eddies of the turgid river, which ran, yellow and sullen, between the sycamores and weeping willows which grew along the bottom land. Beyond the river the fading light was caught by the ripples of white where the rhododendron was beginning to bud on the side of the opposite mountain.

"Here is the Plunkett Hotel," said Ben,

indicating the dun-colored frame dwelling, with a two-storied porch across its front, which stood to the right of Dick's Saloon and a little back from the street.

"Ain't you comin'?" inquired the preacher.

"I'm going over to my place first. That's it, right across the street. Want to leave my bag and get washed up. You tell—you tell them," he added, "that I'll be over to see 'em pretty quick."

AS Ben crossed the dusty, unpaved street, he became aware that he had changed the plan of his home-coming. He had intended that Betty should be the first one to enter his new house; he had thought that they would go into it together, examining with an intimate pleasure the dining room, the kitchen, the parlor, the closets—all the aspects which they were to own and share together.

There it stood now, sharply defined against the glow of evening, clean and white beneath its new shingle roof, its green shutters closed demurely, as if awaiting the kisses and the laughter which would fling them open and make of the house a home.

Ben stopped in his tracks. It wasn't too late to go after Betty now. It was incredible that within a month of his leaving, and when they were so much in love, she could have decided to marry Art Shipley. As he hesitated, he saw two men, carrying a long bundle between them, stagger across the track and the road and disappear up the stairs which led to the two connecting bedrooms above the railroad's storage barn. Before he had left for Huntington and Columbus, he had had one of those rooms; Art Shipley had the other.

The contractor who had built his house, and who had mailed him the keys, had been instructed to move his cot and bureau and clothing over to the new house when it was finished. The windows of the old place were open, and Ben saw Shipley and the man who had been helping him with the bundle go from one of the old rooms to the other, with their burden. It seemed evident that Art Shipley was moving his new furniture in and was occupying both of the old rooms now.

Ben Hundley continued across the street. His hand trembled a bit with haste as he fitted the key into the shiny brass keyhole. Inside, the hall was dark and pungent with varnish and paint. His desk and unpainted wooden chair from his old room were standing just inside the door. He hurried up the stairs to the bedrooms. Here he threw open a shutter for light, in the room at the head of the stairs. Then he took off his coat and vest and shirt. The water was running in the bathroom, he found, when he opened the faucet; the tank on the roof was supplied by the windmill which pumped the water to the hotel. After he had washed off the grime of train travel, he opened the pigskin bag lying on the mattress of the single bed, which in his absence had been brought over from the old room; he took out a clean shirt.

While he was unbuttoning the front of the shirt his attention was caught by a package, wrapped in Manila paper, tucked in a corner of the bag. It was the only piece of mail that he had received from Betty since he had left Plunkett Corners a month ago. He put down the shirt and pulled the package forth, unwrapped the paper, which bore his name and address in Betty's round, honest writing, and took out the old felt hat and the old letters, which were all the package had contained.

Ben sat down on the bed, the old, weather-stained hat in his hands, the old letter inside the hat, and stared at them, as if they could give him the secret of why Betty had not written. They only puzzled him the more. The letter was one of Betty's which he was pretty sure he had left in the inside pocket of his red-and-black Mackinaw jacket, and he had left the jacket hanging up in the room which he then had occupied, the room next to Art Shipley, up over the place where the railroad contractors stored their picks and shovels and gasoline torches. He thought the felt hat had been left there, too, but he wasn't sure of either memory; he had always been careless about unimportant things.

It was possible that Betty, who had promised to superintend the moving of his stuff over from the old room to the new house when it was finished, had found the hat and the letter in his room. But why should she have sent it to him? He could understand her having sent him the letter; she perhaps might not have liked to have it lying around; but the old felt hat, rimmed with perspiration stains around the band, wrinkled and discolored from many rains, worn to a tissue thinness where it folded at the top —there was no reason why she should have sent him that. Ben puzzled in vain.

He shook his head, dropped the hat back into the suit case, and began to dress rapidly. He brushed off his dark-blue-serge suit, polished the brown Oxfords, combed his crisp, black hair, parting it as usual on the side, to avoid the stubborn cowlick which ran down like a V in the center of his high, broad forehead, and tied very carefully the striped tie he had bought in Huntington for his home-coming. After a last look at himself in the mirror, he went down the stairs and let himself out into the growing dusk.

HIS heart was beating hard, as he crossed the road and the sidewalk, pushed open the paling gate, and walked up the path to the wide, wooden steps of the porch that spanned the whole width of the dun-colored hotel. His mind still had refused to believe the defection of Betty, who had loved him so much, with whom he had shared so many tender dreams and hopes, whose nature had become intertwined with his, until he found himself perceiving life with her eyes and listening with her ears. The happiness he had had with her—had shared with her—rose up in arms, like a beleaguered city, to defend his belief in her against attack. But, at the same time, the mountain preacher's words, the expression upon Art Shipley's face, and the station master's smile had seeped into his inner self and aroused a conflict which made his throat tight and his hand moist and cold as he crossed the porch and pulled the knob of the bell, which jangled harshly far in the interior of the building.

The front door was open. He could catch a glimpse of the diners in the large room at the end of the hall. Ordinarily he would have walked in without ceremony, would have gone on back to the dining room, calling out salutations to the folks at the tables. He would know them all, except, perchance, some traveling salesman. Betty and her mother would be waiting upon the table. He would sit down for his dinner. Betty would wait upon him, and they would share, in secret glances, the pleasure of seeing each other again and of being together after the meal was over.

But he couldn't bring himself to go in. And the unusual character of his visit was emphasized by the sudden appearance of Mrs. Plunkett from behind the wide staircase. She did not have on the usual checked apron she wore at dinner time, but was dressed, it seemed to Ben, rather carefully in her heaviest black, with a black-lace shawl around her narrow shoulders. She must have been sitting on the haircloth chair behind the staircase, awaiting his call. And now she hurried forward over the linoleum of the wide, high-ceilinged hall, an anxious smile disturbing the faded prettiness of her childlike face, as the oil lamp in the crystal chandelier spread its mellow light upon the untidy mass of her graying, golden hair.

"Why, Ben!" she said, holding out a wrinkled and freckled hand. "I'm so glad to see you. Won't you come in?" And, as if to divert him from going farther into the house, she pushed aside hastily the brown-velvet portières and led him into the musty grandeur of the hotel parlor.

"I want to see Betty, Mrs. Plunkett," said Ben abruptly.

"Why, of course," said Mrs. Plunkett, picking nervously at the black-lace shawl. "You and Betty are such old friends. But the poor girl is so distraught, so awfully rushed——"

"Too rushed to see me?" asked Ben, surprised at the harshness of his own voice. "What business could make her too rushed to see me?"

"Why," exclaimed Mrs. Plunkett, a note of false surprise in her voice, "didn't Betty write you?"

"I haven't heard from Betty since I left here a month ago," said Ben Hundley. "At that time it was understood that when I returned we would be married. For that reason, I am surprised to hear of her being too busy to see me. I refuse to accept that, Mrs. Plunkett. I've got to see her, that's all. I am going to see her."

"But Betty said——" Mrs. Plunkett hesitated nervously. "Wait a minute," she begged. "I'll go get the major."

And she hurried out, with a rustle of silks, her black dress trailing over the carpet, and left Ben alone in the parlor.

CHAPTER III.

BETTY SPEAKS.

BEN walked back and forth in the parlor over the red Turkish rug, avoiding in his stride the haircloth, ancient chair, the hassock by the iron fender around the hearth, the marble-topped table bearing the large vase made of varicolored pieces of glass and china and porcelain, glued together. His blood was drumming hotly in his ears. A fever seemed to be boiling within him, until he was surprised, almost, at the coolness with which his limbs obeyed his commands and at the perfect clarity of his mind.

He had to see Betty. That fact reiterated itself to him, while his mind ran back over the recent months, trying to find some explanation for the change which apparently had occurred. Art Shipley he had never considered as a serious rival. He remembered that a year before, when he first had started going with Betty, he had been jealous of Shipley, just as he would have been jealous of any man who evidently was in love with the girl of his choice and who took advantage of every opportunity to be with her. He remembered that at first he used to question Betty about how many times she had seen Shipley, if they had been separated by his trips to his contracting job up the road.

But that was when he and Shipley were on an even basis; that was before Betty had made her choice between them. And lately, after she had confessed her love, and they had agreed to be married, he had gone away each time without a thought of anything, except the happiness and faith and trust which they were sharing.

"Hello, Ben, my boy!"

It was Major Plunkett, pulling in embarrassment at his upcurled, creamy mustache, while he held Ben's hand. Mrs. Plunkett followed him, with a burning taper, and in the light of the oil lamp on the side table the major's plump cheeks and his veined nose glowed with the ruddy fervor of good health, good whisky, and embarrassment combined.

"Major," said Ben, "what is this I hear about Betty?"

"My son"—the major shook his creamy head—"I'll be darned if I know. I thought maybe you could tell me. You know I've always liked you; and, to tell the truth, I never cottoned much to that fellow Shipley. He always struck me as kind of slick. I never caught him in anything, although they do say that over on Tug River somebody got after him about something funny in a card game, and that's why he left. I haven't been able to prove it, though. Look here, Ben! Tell me the truth. How come you and Betty to fall out?"

"When I left here last month, major, it was understood that Betty and I were to marry. We haven't had any falling out. That's the God's truth."

"Wasn't there something between you about that blonde that came through here with the opera players? I don't mean to doubt your word, Ben, but I want to get to the bottom of this."

Ben took a deep breath.

"Nothing to that, major—nothing at all. Betty *was* a bit jealous of me for talking to that blonde. You remember, I sat at the table with her during dinner before the show, and she was pretty jolly, so we had a good time. As a matter of fact, however, she was an old friend of Art Shipley's. She told me that's how they happened to come here.

Shipley wrote to her, suggesting it, and she suggested it to the manager, who wrote back to Shipley; and Shipley guaranteed they'd have a full house, so they came. No, sir, nothing to that."

"Are you sure?" The major's red-rimmed blue eyes were fixed upon Ben intently, and Mrs. Plunkett was nodding her untidy golden head.

"Positive, major. I remember I had planned to take the midnight train to Huntington after the show, and Betty was as sweet as pie to me—kissed me good-by right here in the parlor. She was tired, and I made her go on upstairs to bed, while I went back to my room. You know, I was living over there next to Art Shipley then. When I got over to my place I found a message which required me to stay over. I came right back over here and went upstairs and knocked on Betty's door, to tell her. She wasn't in, so I went on home and to bed. I got hold of her the next day, and she saw me off on the train, as sweet as ever. No, sir; there's nothing to that."

"You say Betty wasn't in?"

"No. She explained to me the next day that she had slept with her mother that night, so that the theatrical troupe would have room to sleep. No, sir, there's nothing to that. And I just can't believe Betty has suddenly stopped loving me and loves Art Shipley. I just can't believe it. And I won't agree to this wedding going on, Major Plunkett." Ben felt the blood rush to his head. "I won't permit it, sir, unless I hear from Betty's own lips that she doesn't still love me."

"Don't shout," said the major. "Damn it, sir, I am on your side! Damn it, sir, you are right! Mrs. Plunkett has said all along that she doesn't think Betty is happy. Mrs. Plunkett, you go upstairs and tell that young baggage that Mr. Hundley and her father are awaiting her in the parlor. Tell her to come down at once."

"But she said——" began Mrs. Plunkett.

"I don't care what she said!" shouted the major, forgetting his injunction to Ben not to shout. "You tell her her father says she will come down here and answer this young gentleman, or, by gad, sir, there'll be no marriage in this house to-night!"

"Major," said Ben, as Mrs. Plunkett, rubbing her thin hands nervously over each other, disappeared through the portères, "it is inconceivable that Betty should so quickly have changed her heart. Why, sir, if a person could love, truly love, and change so quickly, there's nothing left in the world to hold to. It flies in the face of everything that we believe in. Why, sir, there's more loyalty than that between two birds of the air, or in the heart of a dog in the gutter."

"A woman isn't a bird, Ben," retorted the major, "or a dog, either. She's a curious creature, unknown to biology or science. That's what I've been telling Mrs. Plunkett when she said she was sure Betty still loves you. I have told her that even in the Bible her sex is reported as being as unstable as water. I reminded her of Minnie Eley, who ran off with the undertaker two days before she was booked to marry that cross-eyed fellow over on Marrowbone Creek. I reminded her of Helen of Troy, who ran away with a young scalawag and set the whole ancient world to fighting about it. I told her it stands to reason——"

"Please, please!" Ben interrupted.

"Excuse me, my boy," begged the major. "I realize that this isn't what you want to hear. But I've always said it's better to swallow a bad dose of truth than to die of the disease it would cure. Listen! Here comes Betty and her mother now. You had better let me talk to her."

The rustle of silk, of Mrs. Plunkett's silk, and the click of light, high heels were heard approaching down the wide stairs leading from the upper floor. Ben could have told Betty's step among a thousand. His heart seemed to stop beating, seemed to go out of him and into the hall to accompany her, as she approached him. And he didn't begin to breathe again until the portières parted at the touch of a slim, white hand, and Betty, his Betty, seemed to float rather than walk into the room.

HIS first impression was as if a ghost confronted him; he did not immediately grasp the meaning of the costume that she wore. Her eyes and brows were very dark against the blanched skin; and her waxy whiteness seemed of a piece with the white dress, which fitted close about her slender figure, but fell full below the waist and trailed far across the floor. A diaphanous white veil was caught by a spray of orange blossoms to the miraculous honey-yellow of her hair, and drifted in angular planes, like imprisoned air, down past the slender pillar of her neck and the ivory smoothness of her round young shoulders. Then he knew that she was dressed as a bride, and he stiffened at the shock of the exquisite pain which ran through him.

Major Plunkett's voice, mellow and kind, broke the silence.

"Betty," he said, "my friend, Ben, here, says you were pledged to him when he went away, about a month ago, and that he came back thinking you were pledged to him still. He has insisted that he was entitled to hear from your own lips that you had decided to marry some one else, and I agreed with him. Let me ask you now, and you can answer so he may hear you, are you going to marry Art Shipley to-night?"

For a moment she closed her chestnut eyes, flecked with gold; the lashes lay black on her cheek, and it seemed to Ben that she swayed, so that he thought to catch her lest she fall. But, before he had moved, her eyes were opened and fixed steadily upon her father. Her lips, usually a blood red, were drained now to the pink of a geranium petal; they parted; her throat moved; but no sound issued. Then she nodded her head slowly —twice.

Ben had never doubted his love for Betty. Seeing her now so discomposed, so twisted by her emotions and crushed to pallor by this crisis in her life, he knew that his love for her was the very core of his being. His pity for her, for himself, shook him close to agony; he stepped near to her and took hold of her reluctant hand, which was as cold as ice.

"Betty!" he said, though his throat was tight with pain. "Betty, don't you love me any more?"

She withdrew her hand and looked him in the eyes. As she looked, she seemed to withdraw into herself; the flecks of gold in her hurt dark eyes turned to little, cold points of fire.

"I despise you," she said slowly and clearly. Her veiled golden head held high, she turned and went out of the door. The portières swayed together behind her; the last tip of the long, white train disappeared; and the next moment Ben heard the click of her high-heeled slippers, as she ran lightly up the stairs.

"I am sorry, Ben." It was the sympathetic voice of the major. "It's just as I told you. There's no accounting for women. They're as changeable as the weather, as unstable as water. I'm frank in saying I wanted you for a son. But you know Betty. You can't talk to her if she once makes up her mind. She gives no reasons to anybody—just goes her own sweet way.

"Heigh-ho!" The major heaved a tremendous sigh. "Well, Ben, I've lived longer than you have. In a case like this, there's only one thing to do—take a drink. I know you are a temperance man, as a rule; but this time you'd better follow an old war horse's advice. Let's go over to Dick's Saloon."

Ben felt numb and dazed, as he allowed the major to lead him from the parlor. He barely noticed the crowd which evidently had gathered in the hall to listen to the scene in the parlor. He caught a glimpse of a few familiar faces, staring at him strangely. There was Izzard, the train conductor; Sheriff Hatfield, with his long, black mustache; Mrs. Plunkett, crying and twisting her hands. Still in a daze, he went with the major down the stairs from the front porch and across the strip of sward to Dick's.

CHAPTER IV.

FUTILE FURY.

BEN had taken several drinks before he became fully conscious of his surroundings. Major Plunkett, standing beside him at the mahogany bar, had kept

up a continuous flow of talk which, to Ben, had been but a meaningless accompaniment to the tortuous windings of his own thoughts. Gradually the hot liquor had filled his veins, warming him to the tips of his hands and feet and dulling his pain. Then the Plunkett's colored man cook had come into the saloon and whispered something to the major, who had ordered another drink rapidly and had followed the cook out into the dusk.

"The madam is scairt he'll git drunk an' spoil the weddin'," some one said, and everybody laughed.

For a moment Ben thought they were laughing at him. The men were lined up, two deep, along the long bar, but there was a space between him and the nearest one, and they were glancing in his direction. One of the men he recognized as a fellow with whom he had had a dispute a month ago; the fellow had tried to overcharge him for hauling timbers to the new house. His pain and anger focused itself upon this man. He recalled that the fellow, at the time of the argument, had drawn a gun, and this reminded him that Art Shipley, too, always carried a gun on his hip. He slapped his own hip and recalled that his automatic was in the pigskin bag which he had left open on his bed.

The man with whom he had had the dispute now went quickly out of the door and disappeared into the dusk. Probably he had observed that Ben was drinking and looking for trouble, Ben thought, and had decided to run. This made Ben feel bold and strong.

He peered around at the other men, to see if there was any one else looking for trouble. He had a secret hope that Art Shipley would come in the door, or would discover himself down at the far end of the bar. But all that he saw were friendly faces—men from the coal mines on Tug River; men from the railroad engineering corps, which was laying a preliminary line for the proposed new right of way; foremen for the contractor who was putting in the culverts, three miles down the line. Nearly all clung to the conventional black Stetson and laced leather boots, although some had changed from flannel shirts to white shirts with collars; they wore rumpled sack suits and freshly shined shoes.

Their faces were unusually clean and well shaven. He recognized, then, that it was on account of the imminent wedding, and he saw that they were standing away from him and staring at him curiously, in the same way that a crowd will gather to stare morbidly at the victim of an accident. They knew that Betty had turned him down, had jilted him, and it had made him into something different from them for the moment—something strange. It startled him. And it startled him, too, to fancy that he had glimpsed a pale face, with burning black eyes, staring at him through the glass of the closed front door—a gaunt face, rimmed with a beard.

"Come on, men!" Ben was mildly surprised at the thickness of his tongue. "Have a drink on me."

There was a shuffle of heavy feet, as they lined up closer to the bar. Dick, the pudgy barkeeper, handed out a couple of black bottles, one at the far end of the bar and another, to save time, at the middle. These were passed along until each glass was filled.

"Here's how, Ben!"

"Over the river!"

"Down with liquor!"

Ben drank his drink. The friendly voices of the men unnerved him.

"Fellows," he said, and put his arm around the shoulder of the man next to him—"fellows, it ain't right."

"That's right, Ben." The men crowded around him. Some slapped him on the back. His admission of the situation had relieved their self-consciousness toward him.

"It ain't right, Ben, but what the hell——"

"Plenty more where she come from."

"Plenty good fish in the sea, Ben."

"Better to find it out now than later. If it was, I'd say that, now."

"Women are all alike. Soon as a man's back is turned——"

THE men drifted back to the bar in groups. Arguments rose as to the merits of the matter. Ben was lost sight of in their interest in the theory. Most

of these men thought he had been given an unfair deal. Ben caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror that ran along the wall above the rows of glasses and bottles. He had left his hat in the Plunkett parlor. His black hair was rumpled; a lock fell across his damp forehead. His usually ruddy face was white; his blue eyes were wild and rimmed with red. The new striped tie had come out of his vest. He remembered that he had bought that for Betty to see. Just then he heard some one say something about Art Shipley.

"Wonder Shipley don't come by and set the boys up to a drink before the marriage," the man had said.

"He promised he would."

"Be fun if we could git him drunk before the weddin'. That would be right smart of fun, now."

Into Ben's mind came the thought of the automatic lying in the bottom of his pigskin bag on the bed in his new house, the house he had built for Betty. He straightened and buttoned up his coat. If Art Shipley was coming over to the barroom to buy the boys a drink—well, Art Shipley always toted a gun.

Then he became aware of some one shaking him by the arm. It was his friend, Dick, the barkeeper, who had come around the bar.

"You ain't had nothing to eat, Ben. You can't drink liquor and not eat. You ain't used to it, boy. Why don't you go over to your place and lay down?"

Ben nodded and moistened his lips.

"I'll be back," he said. "I'll be right back."

"Now, listen, Ben. We don't want no trouble. There's been too much of that; the State'll be mixin' in down here, if we ain't careful, and close up everything. You go on over and lay down. They'll be married shortly, and they're going off on the early train in the mornin'. Then it'll be over and forgotten. You go on over and lay down. Here, take this with you." He slipped a pint flask of whisky in Ben's coat pocket. "Drink some of that and lay down."

Ben permitted Dick to lead him out of the front door. He wanted to go that way, anyhow. There was an oil lantern hanging on the porch to light the steps. Dick, standing under it and looking up at him, wore a troubled expression on his veined and pudgy countenance. His brown, bloodshot eyes glanced worriedly up the road, past Ben, as he stood there, with his thumbs in the stringy shoulder straps of the white apron which covered his bulging stomach.

Ben went down the steps and across the road, hearing the barroom door slam shut behind him. He bumped into some one in the shadows, felt a hand on his arm, but kept on going. The automatic was in the pigskin bag, right under the hat and the letter. He was sure of that. He had fitted the key and unlocked the door to his house before he realized that the hand was again on his arm. He shook it off and turned around.

A gaunt figure, taller than himself, was standing before him on the porch. In the shadowy half light the long, pale face, rimmed with beard, seemed to float and shimmer before his eyes—seemed circled by a faint nimbus of light, as it drifted between him and the bright windows of the barroom.

"I done heerd what happened," the mountain preacher said, "and I come to speak to you about it. You are a likely feller. Look ahead in life."

The deep voice echoed hollowly in the silent porch; the door of the barroom opposite opened to a burst of laughter.

"Don't do nothin' quick," the mountain preacher said. "Remember that revenge ain't no kind of thing to live with. They's something bigger than revenge. Something good to-day and to-morrow, remember."

"Listen," demanded Ben Hundley hotly. His tongue was hard to manage. "Are you going to marry them to-night?"

"They done ast me to. I aims to shorely. Yes, sir."

"Then," Ben shouted, "I advise you to keep 'way from me. You hear? I advise you to keep 'way. Don't be here when I come down."

"Love is a bigger thing than revenge," the preacher said steadily. "That is good to-day and to-morrow."

"I've told you!" cried Hundley. "Don't speak to me of love, when you

are marrying them to-night. Get out, and don't be here when I get back!"

HE turned and stumbled rapidly upstairs in the dark. His blood seemed cold, but his head was as if filled with fire; red sparks ran before him in the black room at the top of the stairs. There was no light. His feet slipped, and he fell upon the bed when he leaned over the bag. He lay there for a few minutes, gritting his teeth and grinding his fists into his eyes. Then he climbed up and found the automatic in the bag, under the old hat and the old letter of Betty's. He slipped the gun into his hip pocket, pulled the old hat on his head, and went down the stairs.

There was no one on the front porch.

"Art Shipley's going to buy the boys a drink," he said to himself, as he crossed the dusty, rutted road. "Art Shipley totes a gun on his hip, always."

A stream of men was passing across the barroom porch in the direction of the Plunkett Hotel. He could see their shadowy figures outlined against the inside illumination. As he climbed the side steps and neared the door, he observed that the barroom was empty, and that Dick, with a coat on now instead of his apron, was locking the door from the outside. His back was toward Ben, and after he had locked the door he hurried after the men who were surging up the hotel steps and into the open hotel door.

Ben Hundley followed and pushed his way with the crowd into the hall of the hotel and then into the parlor, which had been converted into an auditorium. Chairs from the dining room had been set in rows from the front windows up to beyond the mantelpiece, painted to imitate black marble. At the far end of the room, near the wall, had been placed a table, and the wall behind was covered with flowering rhododendron. Two lines of white ribbon ran from the ends of the table back to two chairs, situated at the front of the rows of spectators.

The gaunt mountain preacher came in the door at the other end of the room and stood behind the table, looking solemnly over the men, with a sprinkling of women, who sat in the chairs and lined the walls of the parlor. He opened a prayer book, cleared his throat, and nodded toward the young girl in dotted blue-and-white muslin, who sat at the organ against the wall. She bobbed violently forward and back, pumping, and her hands played over the keys, bringing limpingly forth the strains of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March:"

Ta-ta-ta-ta,
Ta—ta—ta-ta.
Ta—ta—ta-teee
Tee-ta-ta-ta—ta-ta.

Ben, leaning against the wall, his hat crushed against his chest, became aware that the people in the room were staring at him curiously. Art Shipley, followed by a man Ben did not know, came in the door behind the preacher and walked around to stand beside the table. Dick, the barkeeper, got up from his seat in the congregation and, accompanied by Izzard, the conductor, came over to stand beside Ben, who was listening raptly to the rhythmical footsteps approaching from the hall.

The portières were drawn farther open by two little girls dressed in white. Through the door came Major Plunkett, standing very straight, and on his left arm hung Betty. They went slowly up the aisle in time to the music, the major swaying from side to side, as he adapted himself to the unaccustomed stride. Ben noticed that Art Shipley, catching sight of him leaning against the wall, had blanched and murmured something to the best man. But when the major and the bride reached the table, the major stepped over the bride's train and retired to the left, and Art Shipley moved over and stood beside her. They stood there, very still, and the room fell very silent, as the mountain preacher, bending to scan the prayer book, began to read the marriage ceremony.

"'Dearly beloved,'" the preacher's voice vibrated through the assembly, "'we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency——'"

The familiar old words, reverberating out of his childhood and young manhood, like voices from the past, pounded upon Ben's consciousness, like strokes of a bell. He remembered that this very scene had been planned by himself and Betty—the rhododendron on the wall, the ribbons running back from the table. And the word, "an honorable estate," smote him like a mockery.

A cold flame rose and swelled in his breast. If this thing could be allowed to happen, then there was no such thing as honor, no such thing as love. The group at the table merged in his sight to a fiery blur. Such a thing as this was an affront to the most sacred beliefs of mankind.

" '——reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly,' " the preacher was saying, " 'and in the fear of God.' "

Ben recalled a little thing from his and Betty's mutual past. Art Shipley had got drunk one night when he had had an engagement with Betty; Ben had taken care of him, had kept him away from the Plunkett Hotel, and had put him to bed. The next day Art had explained to Betty that he had not kept his engagement because "me and Ben got drunk," although Ben had not touched a drop. Hundley had let the false tale stand, thinking it too petty to contradict. Now, in his drink-befuddled, jealous mind, it grew swiftly to huge proportions.

" 'If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together——' " The mountain preacher paused.

A breath, a ripple, passed over the audience; then all was still. A chair creaked. From some distant place sounded faintly the bark of a dog, ending in a howl.

" '——let him now speak,' " the preacher continued deliberately, " 'or else hereafter forever hold his peace.' "

"Wait!" cried Ben. "Stop!" He started for the altar table, but felt the weight of Dick on his arm. On his mind was stamped the white triangle of Art Shipley's face and the caterpillar mustache, curved affrightedly dark across it. Then Art disappeared under the table.

"Stop!" Ben shouted, dragging wildly at the arms now around him. "She is mine. She is promised to me, I tell you! Let me go! He lied to her! Let me go! By Heaven——"

But the men had risen from their places to overpower him. They might sympathize with him in the barroom and agree at any time that he had been wronged; still, they could not stand to see this invasion of the proprieties. They were scandalized.

Ben saw coming toward him, arms outstretched, the man with whom he had had the argument about the price of hauling timbers to his house. Ben snatched his arm free of Dick's embrace and swung his fist. The man stopped in his tracks at the impact, then went slowly over backward, like a felled tree. But the next moment Ben was being swept out of the door, helpless, two men carrying his feet, three more at his arms and shoulders.

He writhed in futile fury, as they stumbled with him down the porch steps, paused while some one ran to unhitch the lantern from the saloon veranda, and then conveyed him across the road and up the stairs to the bedroom of the new house which he had built for Betty. They deposited him on the bed, next to the pigskin bag, left the lantern on the bureau, and bustled out hurriedly, finding a key in the lock and locking the door from the outside.

CHAPTER V.

A BIG IDEA.

WRIGGLING to his feet, Ben jumped across the room and tried the knob, but the door was securely locked. His legs trembled from the reaction of the scene he had just passed through and because the liquor, which he had poured into an empty stomach unaccustomed to alcohol, had begun to lose its effect. He sat down on the bed and listened to the footsteps of the men as they returned across the road and mounted the steps to the hotel porch.

Into his mind floated the vision of Betty's face, as he had seen it while he was being swept out of the door. Art

Shipley had ducked under the table. Major Plunkett had stepped forward; his arm was extended as if to go protectingly about Betty's smooth, white shoulders. Betty alone seemed unalarmed. Her slim hands were clasped at her breast. The honey-gold head was bent slightly forward beneath the filmy white veil. She was no longer pale. Her parted lips were red. It was just for the flash of a second that he had seen her. Perhaps hope had misled him, but he could swear he had seen tenderness in her eyes. It had not been, at any rate, the cold, unyielding expression that she had worn before. It had been a look that he could understand.

He felt for her a fleeting rush of love and pity. After all, she, like himself and the rest of mankind, was merely seeking happiness. And she was a woman, more a victim of emotion than its master. If, through some twist of heart or of motive, she had turned to Art Shipley in her search, it was no more nor less than what her nature had dictated. Her discomposure, when she had confronted him the first time in the parlor, showed what the change had cost her.

Perhaps, Ben thought, she had even now discovered her mistake, and in time. He leaped to his feet. His imagination pictured her waving contemptuously aside the idea of continuing the marriage to the craven Shipley. Suddenly he heard, at this moment, slow footsteps on the porch below, then footsteps on the stairs.

His heart stood still. In his imagination he saw Betty, her brown eyes streaming tears, calling for her lover: "Ben! I want Ben!" And the steps on the stair were those of her emissary, coming for him.

The steps stopped outside, and the key turned in the lock. The door swung open to admit the round and pudgy figure of Dick, the barkeeper. In addition to the derby on the back of his head, he carried in his hand Ben's old felt hat. The lantern on the bureau traced the lines of veins in his plump, doughy cheeks and on his ruddy nose. There was a worried, uncertain look to his bloodshot brown eyes as he seated himself on the room's single chair and puffed his lips out with each noisy breath.

"Them stairs——" he began.

"Listen, Dick," Ben demanded eagerly. "Is the wedding—I mean, did they take it up where they left off? Was there any delay or—or anything? Were they —was the——"

Dick's worried expression changed slowly to a gold-toothed smile.

"Delay while they hunted for that there groom," he said. His three chins and his round abdomen undulated in unison to his raspy chuckle. "Almost had to fight to git him out from under that table."

"Then they were married?" Ben sank down on the bed.

"Married fast enough, after Art got through drappin' the ring. His hand trimbled so, he drapped it three times, and it took the best man ten minutes each time to find it. I was afraid the last time the best man was going to sock him in the eye, he was so plumb erritated at havin' to do so much crawlin' round. Then, after the preacher had done said 'man and wife,' and they was started back down the aisle, the best man knocked the Bible offn the table behind Art, and Art jumped so high we all thought he was goin' to stampede right smack through the crowd. But Miss Betty, she hilt onto him, and they got out of the room, somehow. That gal's got pride and spunk. It shore made us all feel sorry for her to see her marryin' that——"

Dick broke off and tried ineffectually to brush some beer stains off the front of his black sack coat. The worried expression came back into his bloodshot eyes.

"Look a-here, Ben. I been talkin' to the major, and I been talkin' to—— Look a-here, is this your hat?"

"Yes," said Ben dully.

The pity and love which he had been feeling were changing to a hot bitterness and hate. She had gone through with it. She was determined to cheat him thoroughly, and she had done it. From beyond the cut came the locomotive's whistle:

Whoo—whoo—who-who!

THE engine passed, the glow from its fire box lighting the windows of the rooms where Betty and Art would live, the shower of sparks from its bell-shaped funnel rising like a procession of fireflies. It came to his memory that the storage barn beneath Art's rooms was full of the railroad's gasoline torches, lined with cans of gasoline. His fingers in his pocket felt the outline of a paper of matches. A flame of hate and anger rose in his heart till it hurt.

"Listen, Ben. I want to ast you somethin', and maybe you'll think it ain't none of my business. But did you leave this here hat in a room in the hotel the night before you left here the last time for Huntington?"

"No," said Ben. He wanted to be left alone with his thoughts. "No, I didn't. I left it in my room over the railroad's storage barn."

"H'mph! Well, tell me, Ben—was you in any one of the hotel bedrooms that night?"

"No, I wasn't. I told the major what happened. I went home after the show. Then I learned that I wasn't going on the night train, as I had expected. There was a note for me at my room from Art Shipley, saying that a contractor I wanted to see was going to be here early the next morning. So I went back over to the hotel to let Betty know. She wasn't downstairs, so I went upstairs and knocked on the door of her room. There was nothing unusual about that, of course; her mother had the room next door. At least, she usually did, although the major tells me that that night they shifted around to make room for the opera troupe. Anyway, when I couldn't find Betty I went on back home and turned in."

"When you left the room over the storage barn, did you see anything of Art?"

"Let me see. Yes, he was coming out of his door into the hall when I started out. He mumbled something—I didn't catch what it was—and then he went back in. I didn't see him any more that night, nor the next morning. The next time I saw him was on the station platform when I got in this afternoon."

"H'mph! I seen him later that night. He come over to my place and joined that blonde. We was all three settin' in the little side room what I keep open nights and Sundays. We set there and talked till after midnight, I reckon. I remember all the lights was out everywhere when I went to bed. She and Art used to be pretty thick, I judged from the conversation, and it seemed to me she was pretty keen about him still. Certainly seemed like it to me. I got the impression she persuaded the show to come here jes' so she could git to see Art. Could Art have got in your room while you was out?"

"Certainly. The door between our rooms was never locked. It was usually left standing open, as a matter of fact. But what of it? I haven't lost anything." But when he said the words, "I haven't lost anything," Ben felt a pain like a sheet of fire go through him. His temples began to throb with anger and sorrow and hate.

"H'mph!" Dick, the barkeeper, stared down at the old felt hat which he was turning in his fat, pudgy hands. "I was thinking," he said slowly and paused. "But then," he continued, "it ain't likely a gal who likes a fellow is goin' to do nothin' that will help him with another gal, leastwise, not if he——"

Dick stopped suddenly. His brown, bloodshot eyes stared into vacancy, and his mouth fell open in the expression of one who has just been struck by a club or by a big idea. He hit his hand against his thigh, got up, rolled the hat into a cone, thrust it into his pocket, stood a moment blowing out his lips, and finally, without a word, went out of the door, which he pulled to after him.

After a moment the door opened again, to admit only Dick's veined and pudgy face. He blinked his bloodshot eyes.

"You say Art Shipley left you a note sayin' a contractor would be around to see you in the mornin'? I mean, the mornin' after the night that opera troupe was here. Well, did that there contractor show up in the mornin'?"

"For Heaven's sake go away and leave me alone!" said Ben.

"Yes. But did he?" Dick, the barkeeper, persisted.

"No," said Ben, "he didn't show up."

"Ah!" Dick murmured profoundly, and once more disappeared.

"Now, if it was a business deal——" Ben heard him murmur outside the door; and then the sound of his footsteps.

CHAPTER VI.

A WORLD OF FLAMES.

AS soon as Dick's footsteps grew fainter, Ben Hundley saw afresh the picture of Betty going through with the wedding, willy-nilly, as if she were determined, whatever happened, to cheat him. He realized that his mental state wasn't normal. He was naturally high strung, quick to tempests of anger, which wrought him to a great pitch while they lasted, but their duration had always been brief. This was more violent, more fundamental, more serious. It came to him that, at last, he could understand the men and the women who, in a fit of jealous rage, had killed those whom they loved, or those who came in their way. For the merest instant he felt a kinship with all such violent lovers, as if they were right—the only ones who ever had really loved; as if the placid lovers of every day knew nothing of the meaning of the word. And then through his mind floated a sentence which his dead mother, long since, had been fond of quoting. It was from Shakespeare, he thought:

> For to be wroth with one we love doth work like madness in the brain.

The words repeated themselves in his mind, haunted him, till, in the fever of his imaginings, he wondered if he were really sane. The blood was hot like fire in his veins. His heart was beating so hard and so fast that its efforts seemed in danger of pounding it loose from its place. He felt the pint whisky bottle, which had fallen out upon the bed; he picked it up and took out the cork and drank several swallows. The hot stuff warmed him within; he waited a minute, but it did not soothe the fever of pain and unrest in his breast; he drank again and again, till the bottle was empty.

The hot fluid coursed through his body like radiant heat, warming him to the tips of the toes and fingers. It made him feel strong. The maze of restless thoughts, the uncertainty as to what to believe, tended to focus now in his mind. Betty had determined to cheat him. That was clear and plain. It strengthened him to believe it. It brought into one channel all the impulses of hate and rage. It was the only belief that could save him. If he thought of her as sweet and pure, desirable and lovely, and yet not his to own and cherish, his mind raced close to madness. To think her vile, dishonest, a cheat with a cold, hard heart —this gave him some relief, although, even as he said the word "cheat" aloud, a hundred voices within him answered: "You lie! In your heart you know she is adorable, straight, and clean!"

He felt he could stand this inaction—this introspection—no longer. He got up and went to the door; but, although he had heard no sound of the key turning when Dick had left, the door was locked. He shook the knob and kicked the panel, but to no avail. And then, when he had stepped back to fling himself against it, he paused. From across the street had risen the sound of voices. He went to the window. Art Shipley's two rooms, over the storage room, were dark and deserted, the shades raised at the windows. From the right, beyond the cut, came the quiet puffs of the locomotive, like sighs of pain, while a slow swirl of bluish smoke, dotted with sparks, rose above the birch saplings at the top of the near side of the cut and drifted on the balmy night air toward the storage house and Art's rooms.

Ben Hundley's heart began to beat fast again. Around the door of the storage room, beneath the rooms now held by Art, he spied, on the pale, dry ground, an area much darker, as if some liquid had been spilled. Often he had seen the railroad men, when they were preparing to do construction work at night, standing by the door of the storage room, filling the gasoline torches with gasoline from the bright tin cans.

A spark on gasoline would leap like a flash of lightning into flame. The storage

room was filled with gasoline cans and torches. A spark from the locomotive, and then a sheet of flame; a wall of flame, rising about the four sides of the two-story frame building, running like flaming snakes up the space between the plaster and the sheathing boards, eating greedily at the floor of the rooms above —announcing its approach with little wisps of smoke, winding eerily into the upstairs bedrooms through unsuspected crannies. Smoke, strangling to the throat, blinding to the eyes. And flame, like an acid, dissolving, destroying, returning matter into its original elements of gases and spirit. Then smoke and embers. Cinders. Dust to dust. And peace.

"I wonder if Art Shipley will go over there first, alone!"

Ben didn't know that he had spoken aloud until the words themselves startled him. He shuddered and passed a hand over his eyes; he had had a dream. And then to his muddled mind came again the sound of the voices which his dream had shut him away from.

He leaned far out of the window. A water pipe, leading to the roof, wrapped to protect it from winter freezing—a pipe, wrapped in layer after layer of packing and then painted white—obscured his view. But he could see part of the hotel porch. The major, his plump, tall figure outlined against the light from the hall chandelier, stood in the doorway, curling his mustache and staring down the road. Mrs. Plunkett's voluminously swathed thinness became visible, pushing past the major; her thin arm swung under and forward, as if she were throwing something in the direction of the major's stare.

The major turned, and Ben saw that Dick, the barkeeper, had just come up on the porch. He spoke to the major, and the two of them retired into the hall, under the chandelier, where the major beckoned, and in a moment they were joined by a third, the colored man who cooked the meals for the hotel; and next by the colored woman, his wife, who helped take care of the hotel rooms.

The whole scene, to Ben, was like a meaningless episode from some moving picture, of which he knew neither the beginning nor the end. The road, dark in the shadow of the trees, the lighted windows and door of the dark hotel, the paler outline of the road in the glimmer of starlight—these things wavered, advanced, and receded before his eyes—seemed to writhe and interweave in some mysterious plot of nature against his reason. And then he found a clew.

TWO figures emerged from the black shadows over near the hotel and walked along the road in the direction of Art Shipley's rooms—a man and a girl. The man was slight and dapper and carried a small hand bag. The girl Ben had no difficulty recognizing, even in the starlight. He would have known that youthful, rounded figure anywhere. It was Betty. She wore now a traveling suit of some dark material and a small, dark hat. Her head was erect, her shoulders stiffly outlined against the grayness of the road. She walked slightly in advance of Art Shipley.

They were not speaking, nor were they touching each other. It was not a cheerful going away for the bride and groom. Something had happened. Doubtless, it was the way Art had ducked at the wedding. Through Ben's drink-befuddled brain ran a wave of pity for Betty, a wave of tenderness. She was not finding the happiness she had been seeking.

"Man is born to trouble while the sparks fly upward." This floated through his mind. It was as if all of mankind were the victim of the gift of life. "Man is born to trouble——" So she, too, was unhappy—was suffering! He longed to take her in his arms, to comfort her. For a moment he was happy, holding her close to him to share her pain, kissing away her tears, murmuring encouraging words.

Then he saw the bride and groom mounting the steps on the outside of the two-story frame building. Betty went first; Art followed her, carrying the bag. They were lost to sight in the darkness of the small roof which sheltered the head of the outside stairs. In his mind Ben was conscious of Art pushing past Betty in the doorway, going ahead down

the unlighted hall to show her the way to his rooms—now their rooms.

A light sprang out in the first of the two rooms. Art's figure appeared at the window; he pulled down the shade, and his shadow showed against it as he turned. The shadow grew larger, as he left the window and approached the inside light; it flitted to one side, and in its place came the shadow of Betty. She sat down in the chair beside the window. Her back was very straight, and her chin was held high. A light sprang to being in the second room and made yellow oblongs of the shades, as Art Shipley pulled them down. Then Shipley's shadow returned to the first room, and Ben saw it walking to and fro, stopping now and again and gesticulating before the still shadow of Betty sitting in the chair at the window.

The light springing to life in those rooms, making an intimate place that shut Betty and Art Shipley in together, and shut the world away, was more than Ben Hundley could stand. It fused to a white heat the torment of his jealousy. He became conscious of the gun on his hip. The paper of matches in his coat pocket seemed to weigh down his shoulder. He wet his lips and leaned out of the window to consider the drop to the ground.

The distance was too great to drop without danger of breaking a limb, because of the pile of field stones beneath the window. But the wrapped pipe was within reach and seemed strongly joined to the clapboards on its course from the ground to the tank on the roof. Hundley glanced cunningly around. There was no one in sight. The men retired early because they rose early for work. He blew out the lantern on the bureau. The burning flame in his breast lighted fantastic visions in his brain. He deemed himself in a conspiracy against the world. He swung out of the window, hooked his foot in a staple around the pipe, caught the pipe with his hand, and, half slipping, half falling, descended from staple to staple and reached the ground, where he knelt for a moment, peering around into the swaying darkness.

HE applauded his own cunning; for, as he watched, two gaunt figures came out of the hotel door and walked in unison down the porch steps. Not till they had crossed the sidewalk and started directly across the road toward him did the figures merge into one. He recognized the shimmer of white face, the lank outline of the mountain preacher. It seemed miraculous to him that two figures had become one, even though a soberer intelligence somewhere within him told him it was an optical illusion caused by drink. Cold ripples flowed along his spine. The man was coming directly toward him, as if he had arrived by some supernatural means at a knowledge of Ben's wild ideas.

Ben's muddled senses tried to think of an excuse—a defense for the expected accusation. It was as if he were about to be faced by the embodiment of his own mortal conscience. And, brought face to face with himself in this moment, he realized with the fleeting clarity of an unblurred emotion that he could never harm Betty. Once again he knew how essentially he loved her. As to Art Shipley—— The red blur of rage came over his thoughts.

He noticed that the preacher had stopped and was looking up, as if at his window, which was dark. The faint starlight filtered through the budding branches of the mottled sycamores and lighted the white shimmer of his face with an illusion of subtle radiance. He had removed his hat, and the long hair melted into the background, the soft beard was lost in the dark breast of the invisible frock coat.

As Ben watched, the face descended gradually and smoothly until it was on a level with him. He felt a cold wind brushing his scalp, for the face had suddenly disappeared. Then a deep voice, muted but vibrant, trembled on the silence, and he realized that the mountain man was praying. He could not hear the words. The locomotive over in the cut had begun to sigh and then to cough. Sharp on the night came the rattle of coupling pin against coupling iron, as the locomotive and tender jolted into motion, heading for the mines, where

a train was to be made up against the morning.

The preacher rose and turned and walked slowly back to the hotel. Ben looked over his shoulder. Betty's shadow was gone from the window. He could no longer know where she was.

Jealousy leaped into flames in his mind, to consume his reason. He rose to his feet, with a half shout of protest and of anger, and, without concealment, ran unsteadily down the road toward Art Shipley's dwelling. He felt the automatic slapping against his hip. He was conscious of the paper of matches in his side coat pocket and of the dark stain of gasoline on the earth floor of the storage room beneath Art Shipley's apartment.

He saw, as he ran, the twisted arms of the huge sycamore which leaned over Art Shipley's roof, like a hungry ogre, awaiting its chance. The open fire box of the locomotive, coming out of the cut, lighted the white façade of the Shipley building with an angry, ruddy glow, which, to Ben at that moment, was the color of the world. For his pain and his defeat and his jealousy had caught his breast and his mind on fire. He ran through a world of licking flames.

CHAPTER VII.

AN AMATEUR DIPLOMAT.

DICK, the barkeeper, had locked the door noiselessly behind him when he left Ben Hundley's room, because he didn't want an argument. He had enough on his mind, as it was. In the first place, he had always been very fond of Ben, and he was worried to see "the lad" so overwrought. In the second place, he had begun to suspect that the old felt hat was the symbol for a bit of deep chicanery on the part of Mr. Art Shipley; he knew that he must get to the bottom of this, and his mind, unaccustomed to complicated stratagems and their discovery, was beginning to feel the strain. And, finally, and worst of all, he had to keep his suspicions to himself.

Dick had been a barkeeper in the Klondike, in Denver, in the earlier days on the Barbary Coast; and he had landed finally, through a concatenation of circumstances, which was a long and interesting story in itself, as bartender and part proprietor of Dick's Saloon at Plunkett Corners, in the mountains of West Virginia.

There were many things which he had not learned during the course of those years. He had not learned Latin, nor astronomy—except enough to find his way home at night—nor the names of the gods of Greek mythology. But he had learned how to cut ninety-proof liquor three ways—make it go three times as far over the bar—and still retain its bouquet and the bead around the neck of the bottle. He had learned to look as though he were listening sympathetically to a drunken man's epic of domestic and financial sorrow, while, at the same time, his mind was figuring out whether the beer pump needed to be worked, and was watching to see that some one paid for the last round of drinks. He had learned to mix anything from a sloe-gin fizz to a mint julep, and the things in between and beyond; and, if a customer asked for something new, to invent its components on the spot, swearing he had served it that way for seven years in the old Knickerbocker Grill on Broadway.

But one thing in particular he had learned. If you have a suspicion affecting a man's fortune, or his standing in the community, or the way he cuts cards, or the way he deals, there is a rule to follow carefully. And that rule is: Keep your mouth shut until you are absolutely positive that your suspicions are correct, and then don't say anything until you have the law and the majority with you. And, even then, it is best to let somebody else do the talking.

So there was a pudgy pucker above Dick's veined and colorful nose, as he clumped heavily down the unlighted stairs from Ben Hundley's room, crossed the dark road, and waited for Betty Plunkett and her new husband to be off the hotel porch before he went up to speak again to the major. He had to work this thing out; he had to keep his ideas to himself, and at the same time he needed assistance.

"Look here, major," said Dick, when

the major had come in from the porch to the lighted hall. "You told me I could talk to your cook. Is he hereabouts? Oh, yes!" The major had beckoned to the colored-man cook, who was standing with his colored wife behind the curtains at the window next the door, watching the cheerless bride and groom depart. "Look here, Sam. You ever seen this hat before?"

Dick drew Ben Hundley's old felt hat from his pocket and unfolded it. Sam rolled his prominent, yellowish eyeballs and shuffled his wide, flat feet.

"Yas, suh."

"Where 'bouts?"

"Two or three months ago, Mist' Dick. My wife, Lucy, here, war cleanin' up in de room upstairs what had been slep' in by dat pretty blond lady what was de big lady in de play actin'; it was de nex' mornin' mah wife was cleanin' up in dat room, Mist' Dick, an' she foun' dis here hat, an' a letter 'dressed to Mist' Ben Hundley. Yas, suh. She didn't see no use leavin' it dar, so she brung it down to me to ast me what to do wid it, an' it jes' so happen, Mist' Dick, 'at Miss Betty, she was behin' de do' in de corner, a-leanin' into de apple barrel——"

"You mean she heard you and took these things from you?"

"Didn't hear *me!* Naw, suh. I got mo' sense dan dat. She heerd my wife, Lucy, here. I was tryin' to stop her fum talkin', but she kep' right on. I kicked at her, an' she say: 'What you kickin' me for?' Lucy is kind of slow in de understandin' when it come to——"

"I ain't, neither!" put in Lucy belligerently.

"Never mind about that," said Dick. "What did Miss Betty do?"

"She ain't done nothin', Mist' Dick. She jes' took de hat an' de letter and look at 'em; an' she went white as flour; yas, suh. She went up to her room, an' Lucy say she didn't come out, for food or nothin', till de nex' day, when she went down to de post office. Lucy say she wrop up dis hat in a package an' mail it to Mist' Ben Hundley. An' dat nex' evenin' she told me to go over an' tell Mr. Art Shipley to come over to see her 'bout somethin' important."

"I see," said Dick, the barkeeper. "All right—that's all."

"I am sorry this thing happened," said the major, pulling at his creamy mustache, after the colored folk and Mrs. Plunkett had returned to the rear of the house. "I always liked Ben Hundley. In fact, between you and me, Dick, I am as tolerant as anybody, but I am quite a bit surprised at Ben."

"Yes, sir," said Dick absently. "Look here, major—can I put in a call over your telephone?"

"Certainly, sir. There is the booth, right behind the stairs. You can shut the door and be perfectly private, Dick."

SHUT in the phone booth, Dick put in a call for the Miners' Hotel, in Bluefield, a long-distance call. The wait was longer; drops of perspiration ran down from Dick's low brow, down his veined and pudgy cheeks to his shaven jowls, and hung ticklingly from the end of his veined red nose; he breathed heavily out through his lips and rolled his bloodshot eyes in vain appeal to the gods of telephone centrals. Finally there was a painfully loud click, and the clerk at the Miners' Hotel gave answer.

"Yes, Miss Molly Gratzle just came in from the theater. I'll connect you with her room. Go ahead."

"Hello, Miss Molly," said Dick, perspiring still more profusely. "Is that you? This is Dick. . . . No, not Dick Jones. . . . No not Dick Hardy, either. It's Dick, the saloon man, down at Plunkett Corners. You remember? . . . Well, look here, Miss Molly. Seems to me I recollect you and Art Shipley was pretty good friends when you was down here; I mean, I thought you and him. . . . Well, what I mean is, did you know Art had done got married?"

"Oh, he couldn't have, Dick!" replied Miss Molly Gratzle's somewhat edgy voice. "You're crazy."

"No, I ain't," said Dick. "He married Betty Plunkett this evenin'. I seen 'em git hitched up myself."

There was a period of perfect silence.

"Hello! Miss Molly? You ain't cut off, have you? . . . Well, look here.

The reason I called was, Betty Plunkett was kind of keen about young Ben Hundley, and he's a friend of mine. She switched around all of a sudden, and I was wonderin'——"

Miss Gatzle interrupted him:

"That low, dirty dog!"

"You mean that Art Shipley kind of double crossed——" continued Dick.

"I mean"—Miss Gratzle's edgy voice was near the razor edge of hysteria—"that—that Art Shipley is a low-down hound!"

Miss Gratzle, despite an occasional gasping sob, was fluent to the point of eloquence in her description of Mr. Art Shipley. Stringing together the pearls of her rhetoric, Dick, the barkeeper, forgot the heat and the humidity in his pleasure over the resulting jewel of truth—that Art Shipley had for months and months been promising to marry Miss Molly Gratzle. In their last conversation, at Dick's very room behind the saloon, Art had explained that the time had finally arrived. Major Plunkett had some money to invest. He was impressed by Art Shipley's investment proposition; so much so that he would turn over two thousand dollars in hard cash for Art to manipulate. And this two thousand would provide the means for an elaborate and enjoyable honeymoon.

This had been Art's story. And there was only one hitch. Betty Plunkett looked kindly upon Ben Hundley. In fact, their engagement was known, if unannounced, and their marriage imminent. For this reason, Major Plunkett had been hesitating. If Ben married Betty, he would feel obliged to lend the weight of his savings toward furthering Ben's new business. Of course, there was, Art had explained, but one thing to do—queer Ben Hundley with Betty Plunkett. After that, it was a matter merely of collecting the two thousand and going on the honeymoon together—Molly Gratzle and Art Shipley, wife and husband.

"So Art give me that hat and letter of Hundley's, when he said good-by to me on the hotel porch, after we left your place that night. And I left it in my room, the hat and the letter. Art said that wouldn't be enough. So I wrote Art a letter, telling him that Ben Hundley had sworn he was in love with me, and how much trouble I had in getting him out of my room. I said, he knocked at the door and pushed his way in. And then that dirty Art Shipley goes and gives me the run-around, does he? Well"—a gasp—"I'll show him! You wait till Betty Plunkett hears from me to-morrow!"

"I wouldn't do that," said Dick earnestly. "You wait——"

"Wait—nothing!" shouted the lady. "That brute—that——"

DICK, the barkeeper, mopping his jowls as he went along the hall and out into the balmy spring night, found, like many a more diplomatic diplomat, that he had only solved one puzzle to discover himself confronted by a greater one.

"After all," he murmured to himself, "they're *married* now. They ain't no use tryin' to unmarry 'em. They ain't no use makin' a bigger hell out of a little one. Ben'll git over it. So will she, in time."

Dick stopped in his tracks, struck by a sudden realization. The windows of Art Shipley's two-room apartment were oblongs of yellow against the darkness. Beyond the road, the locomotive was just appearing from behind the cut; the light from its fire box spread ruddily across the grass and weeds between the track and Art Shipley's place; sparks were flying from its smokestack.

"Great, jumpin' Jupiter!" exclaimed Dick. "That train's goin' to ketch Art's house on fire yet." But his thoughts jerked back to the idea which had dawned upon him. "She don't love Art Shipley!" he exclaimed aloud to himself. "Betty Plunkett don't love Art Shipley! She jest married him to git even with Ben Hundley for something he never even done!"

Dick stood appalled at this.

"She jes' married him to git revenge!" He pushed the derby over his eye and scratched his head. "Now, ain't that foolish? Jes' like Ambler Peters—held a grudge for seven years against Luke Harley, finally kilt him, and got hanged

for it. That's the way with these fool human beings. Don't know that the man who looks for revenge, nine times out of ten, is jes' punishin' himself."

He thought of Ben Hundley and looked up to the lad's windows. They were dark.

"Never mind," said Dick, as he crossed the road. "I'll wake him up. Can't tell him nothin'; he's crazy mad enough as is; he'd go plumb loco then. He won't be so cheerful company, neither. But any company is better company than no company on a night like this."

Dick, climbing heavily up Ben Hundley's unlighted stairs, thought he heard a voice from the road, but he wasn't certain. He unlocked Ben's door, went in, struck a match, and lit the lantern on the bureau. Not till then did he notice that what he had taken for Ben's figure in the bed was only a pigskin bag on top of it.

"I wonder, now, if he was crazy enough to jump out of the window. I really shouldn't 'a' left that lad alone. He looked as wild as a trapped wolf. Oh, I reckon that he's in the bathroom, there."

But Dick didn't find Ben in the bathroom adjoining the bedroom. And when he returned to the bedroom he noticed a curious glow upon the newly plastered white walls. He held up the lantern for inspection, but it wasn't smoking, nor was the wick unduly high. He set it down upon the bureau, and a ruddy glow struck his eyes.

He went to the window. Then for a moment he rested his weight upon his hands on the sill, because he had begun to tremble.

"God have mercy on us!" said Dick, the barkeeper.

Art Shipley's place was on fire. The whole frame building was walled in an almost-unbroken sheath of light. The flames were leaping straight up, far beyond the roof; even the budding top twigs of the tall sycamore beside it were filmed with a ruddy gold.

"God have mercy on us!" Dick, the barkeeper, repeated with a dry throat, as he ran heavily down the stairs.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE CENTER OF DARKNESS.

WHEN Ben Hundley had risen from beside his house and had begun to run unsteadily along the dark road toward Art Shipley's house, his vision had been obscured by a red blur of jealous suffering. But the cool air and the exercise of his blood began to restore an equilibrium to his brain. The outline of the locomotive, turning the bend—the pale-blue plume of smoke, spotted with sparks, like dying fireflies drifting on the soft night air—the Shipley apartment, bulking whitely against the dark of the hill—these things were like a dream.

He caught a glimpse of the silhouette of Betty Plunkett's head; the piquant shadow was framed vividly for a moment in the yellow oblong of a window shade; and the rhythm of his breathing was broken by something near a sob. He loved her, and it was too late. He loved her, and she was married. He knew now that he should turn and go away. But something drew him along the road with the invisible pull of a magnet. It was as if he heard a voice: "If she has loved you, she loves you still." And if his reason rejected this, another voice, more compelling, seemed to give answer: "Here is where you have suffered most; this is where you belong."

The turmoil within him drove his body toward her. And as he ran his mind, with the instantaneous magic of thought, made pictures of the scenes that were about to have life. He would confront her in the face of her new husband and demand if she still loved him. If Art Shipley objected, they would battle to the death, and she might have the victor.

A desire flitted through his brain to find a hiding place where he might listen upon their conversation, unremarked. Some fantasy of hope inspired him to think that he might discover her hysterically telling her husband that she had been wrong—that she loved Ben Hundley, after all. He remembered that there was a skylight opening from the roof upon their sitting room; he and Art Shipley once had climbed up through it on a summer night to find a breeze. The

house was built up near the sheer of the hill; about ten feet separated it, but he thought he might work from the slope of the hill along a branch of the sycamore to the tree's trunk, and thence along the branch which hung over the roof.

Not till he had neared the house did the fantasy of this last scheme leave him at the return of reason. She was married—and of her own free will. What else could she have to say to him? He stopped in the dark shadow of a cedar beside the road and, breathing hard, stood leaning against the knotty trunk. He saw the stain of the gasoline on the gray road outside the storage-room door. There was a glint to it, near the door, of a depth of liquid; there was perhaps a leak from one of the cans or from a hanging torch. Had he touched a match, the whole building, in an instant, would have been a burning torch.

Ben Hundley shuddered and felt sick. He sensed that some saving generosity within him would have prevented his ever doing so ignoble a deed, but he experienced, nevertheless, a dizzy revulsion, as of one who has peered over a perilous precipice. He observed that the flaky sparks from the now-invisible locomotive were drifting on a balmy breeze across the weedy field and were dropping, still alive, to the ground. They had not neared the house, but it was dangerous to have that spot of gasoline there; the engine would return, drawing the coal cars, and would shuttle back and forth, making up its train against the morning.

He felt a freshening of the breeze upon his damp forehead. He was thinking that he should cover up the gasoline puddle with dirt, and he was wondering how he could do it without attracting attention to himself, when across his abstracted gaze floated a large, flaky spark. It swirled upon the eddying gust, struck against the door of the storage room beneath Art Shipley's apartment, and floated straight down, lighting the white paint of the door with a pale glow.

IT seemed to Ben Hundley that the gasoline leaped up to meet the spark. For, quicker than the eye could see, a flame flashed out to cover the ground where the gasoline had been, and leaped high against the big closed door. Almost instantly there was a roar from within, and a sheet of flame spurted through the small opening at the top of the window at the far end of the storage room; the next instant all three of the windows along the side of the storage room burst outward, as at a single impulse, and were followed by the two smaller windows at the front. Before Hundley had had a chance to take in what was happening, the whole building was enveloped in a thick sheathing of writhing, hungry flames, and the heat was scorching his face.

Ben Hundley, suddenly sobered, suddenly sane, was galvanized into action by the terror of Betty's danger. He rushed toward the stairs; the flames beat him back. They shot out from the window beneath the stairs and curled upward to lick at the wooden steps which already were popping into disintegration.

With a cry, Ben Hundley raced distractedly past the furnace of heat and scrambled up the side of the slope behind the house. Two people were trapped in the burning apartment; there was no outlet for them through either window or door.

The shadow of the sycamore lay sharp and dark upon the fire-daubed carpet of hemlock needles upon the hillside. He emerged beyond it, holding his hand to shade his eyeballs from the heat and glare, and ran to where the hill overhung the immediate rear of the house. He noticed the outstretched arm of the sycamore at the side of the house. Already it was curling up in little spurts of smoke and fire.

Hundley took no time for thought. He did not know, if he should get to the roof of the burning house, how he should ever get off. He knew only that two people, Betty and Art Shipley, were in the heart of the roaring flames. Each whipping lance of fire, topped by smoke, seemed to him like the honey gold of Betty's hair, consumed by death. He ran back up the hill to get a start, flew down the slope as fast as his legs would go, and jumped. Even while in the air, he saw the burst of smoke through the

edge of the roof, where the hungry, restless flames had emerged from some tunnel within the sheathing. He caught with his outstretched arms at the sycamore branch which hung about ten feet over the roof. It swayed down with him, as its twigs lashed his face, whipped him free, and flung him, sprawling on knees and elbows, across the easy slope of the shingles of the flat roof.

He had been scorched by the edge of the rising draft of heat above the roof. Once past it, and on the roof itself, the heat for the moment was less terrific. The flames shot up past the gutter in ribbons taller than a man, fencing the roof with fire, while from below sounded a roaring which told of the growing giant of fire, soon to swallow the house whole. He crawled to the skylight, a window sash laid flat, bright now with the reflection of flame. He tried to lift it and remembered that it was fastened on the inside. As he raised his hand to break the glass, he saw a movement below. The skylight rose and fell over backward on the roof, as Art Shipley, his oily brown hair on end above the mottled yellow of his hatchet face, rushed up from the well of the house and scrambled out upon the roof. The knuckles of the swarthy, manicured right hand, which had been gripping the skylight frame, Ben had noticed, were freshly cut and bleeding.

"Betty?" cried Ben, looking up from where he was kneeling. "Where is Betty?"

Art Shipley had run toward the edge of the roof and had as sudden fallen back at the sight of the wall of flame. His face, as he turned upon Hundley, was like a gargoyle's. The pale-brown eyes, the small, separated teeth, glittering brilliantly; the arch of fluffed mustache above the thick, sensuous lips; the arch of brow against the terror-bleached face —all seemed as if painted, each with one stroke of a dripping black brush. The dapper, maroon-colored suit, so neatly pressed, so carefully molded to the slender figure, made a wax-work, unreal shape against the glare.

"Damn you!" Art Shipley's voice was a shriek between his heavy, quivering lips. "Damn you! I was afraid you'd do something like this! Oh, God!"

Ben Hundley leaped over the frame of the skylight to the ladder that went down into the well of the house beneath it. He forgot the dapper figure raising its hands and its voice in an appeal to the Almighty, above the roaring tinder of the building. Betty was below. In a minute he had found her.

SHE was lying, fully clothed in the dark, tailored suit, at the foot of the ladder leading to the roof. The glare of the flames, outside the window of the room adjoining, lighted the small skylight closet, or well, through the half-open door. Her small hat was on the back of her head; her golden hair was loose and disarranged, as from a struggle. She lay on the floor against the foot of the ladder, so that to pass her and mount to the roof one would have to step over her body. And her rounded chin was all crimsoned from the upper lip, which had been crushed against her teeth.

Her chestnut eyes were open, but unseeing, as Ben lifted her over his shoulder. He climbed the ladder swiftly, and, as he stepped out upon the roof, he heard her moan. He had made up his mind what he would do. The branch of the sycamore which hung over the roof was out of reach. But there was a heavier branch which ran out toward the side of the building. Ben stripped off his coat and wrapped it about Betty's head. Then he took her in his arms and walked toward the end of the roof, seeking an aperture in the flames.

"Follow me, Shipley!" he shouted, and glanced over his shoulder at the man, who was kneeling by the open skylight, his jaw hanging, his pale eyes distended, paralyzed with fear. The roof was a furnace of heat, and the shingles were curling and spitting into spots of smoke and flame.

Hundley marked the edge of the roof which seemed to be over the sycamore branch. Then he closed his eyes, took a deep breath, made the four forward steps, and leaped. He felt the skin of his hands and face blister in an instant;

the roar of heat seemed to scorch him Then followed a crash, as he struck the sycamore. He reached out with an arm and found no purchase. But the downward plunge was broken, as the branch snapped at the trunk and sank, throwing them, rolling over and over, upon the ground.

Gasping and choking, Ben staggered up and leaned to drag Betty's limp body from the radius of the furnace of heat. But strong arms lifted him and pushed him aside. He saw Betty caught up and hurried away. He broke loose from the men who were half carrying him, and ran to the spot where they were laying her upon the ground. His heart leaped up to see her open her eyes and try to rise. She would be all right.

"My God!" He recognized Major Plunkett's voice. "My God! It's Ben Hundley! Where's Shipley?"

"He's on the roof!" Ben tried to say. His voice was choked from the heat and smoke. "The poor fool! The poor fool! Look out! Let me be!"

"Where in thunder is he goin'?"

"Stop him!"

"Hey, Dick! Stop Hundley, there! He's trying to go back."

"Head him off, Dick!"

The pine needles on the hillside were as red as blood in the glare; the shadow of the sycamore lay across them, as black as ink. The lining of Ben's lungs felt raw and scraped, and his face and hands were an agony, as he ran up the slope to get a running start. The face of Dick, the barkeeper, came up out of nowhere, as Ben turned. Behind it was the face of Major Plunkett, the skin now the same creamy white as the mustache and shaggy hair, the nose a purple spot against it, the eyes a china blue.

"Wait, Ben! Don't be a fool!"

HE felt Dick's clasp on his arm, on his shoulder, heard the long rip as his shirt sleeve was left behind.

"Stop him, major! Stop him!"

A picture of the major, wheezing for breath, holding out futile hands. Then the leap, the blinding flame, the sycamore branch, hot and searing to the body, the thud of their impact on the shingled roof. Then lying there, gasping helplessly for the breath which was stopped from entrance by some constriction within the chest; the first breath, a wheezing moan, drawing the hot air in to sear the nostrils. And from somewhere a crash and a great shower of sparks. A new tilt to the roof.

"Go away! You murderer! Just give me a chance—they'll come and get me. Get back, I tell you! Oh, God!"

Art Shipley backed away, screaming, as Ben crawled toward him; his little, separated teeth were the teeth of a frightened puppy in the blinding glare; his pale-brown eyes were polished stones; and the maroon-colored suit was smoking.

"You infernal fool! You infernal fool!" Ben's voice was a croak in his throat, as he rose and moved forward. "You infernal fool, you've got to jump, I tell you. Drop that, now!"

The hand with the bleeding knuckles had wrenched a short board from the skylight frame. They circled the skylight, as Shipley moved cautiously backward.

"You infernal——"

Ben rushed as the board swung up. But his legs moved slowly. The arm that he brought up to fend the blow was an arm of lead. He felt the shock go over him like a douche of warm water, from head to heel. A film came over his sight.

"Now, you murderer!" A crazy intonation, almost of glee.

He knew the board was rising for another blow. But he could not see it, and he could not move. He was still and silent, bound as in a nightmare, standing motionless in the center of darkness, around which rose a roar of sound. He heard a crash and felt the roof tilt slightly. Then came the blow against his skull.

For a second his darkness was lighted by a stream of colored light. It was as if life itself had passed before him for a moment of farewell—the life of man —a moment of light between darkness and darkness. He thought for a fleeting instant, in surprise: "Why, death is not so bad!" Then to the accompaniment

of a great crash and roaring, the light went out, and he thought nothing more.

CHAPTER IX.

TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW.

THE curtain lifted from Ben Hundley's darkness—lifted and fell, lifted and fell. It rustled slightly as it moved, lessening and increasing the light that filtered through his closed eyelids. A soft breeze seemed to drift across his cheek bones. He opened his eyes.

The white plaster of the ceiling and walls above him were unfamiliar, yet he was sure he had seen them before. He essayed to lift his left arm and throw off the bright quilt that lay over him, but he found it was bound to his side. He freed his right arm, which was swathed, from the thumb and exposed index finger up to the shoulder, in layers of gauze bandage, threw back the cover, swung his feet down, and sat up. He recognized his pigskin bag in the corner and his bureau by the bathroom door, although the bureau was covered now with an embroidered linen scarf, and a row of labeled bottles ran along beneath the mirror. His head felt tight and dizzy; he lifted his free thumb and forefinger to touch it, and found that it was bandaged, too. He got up and, after leaning against the head of the bed to recover from a surge of dizziness, swayed over to the mirror.

The sight in the glass made him smile.

"Ouch!" he exclaimed and put his bandaged hand to his aching cheek.

His head and face and neck were swathed in bandages. The sleeves had been cut out of his white pajamas to make room for the bandages on his arms, and his left arm was wrapped against his side. Of his face, only the nose and brows and mouth were uncovered, and the skin there was red and sore. His heavy, black brows were entirely burned off, and his blue eyes stared past his narrow, straight nose, like the eyes of a stranger. They had no lashes.

"Pretty!" he commented. Then the dizziness returned. He clung to the bureau and after a moment was glad to sway back to the bed, finding, as he lay down, groaning, new bruises, new burns all over his body. He rested a while, then shot up the shade by his window and looked out.

A beautiful spring afternoon, balmy and bright. The sun shone mildly from a cloudless sky upon the dark-green mountain, the curving yellow sword of the river, and gleamed upon the two silver rails where they turned the bend. The side of the hill beyond the hotel was blackened and bare; where the huge sycamore had been, now only a charred, pointed stump rose up, as if to mark the black oblong where the Art Shipley building had been. Here and there, up and down the roadside and the hill, were blackened patches, marking the fall of sparks and the fires that had been stamped out.

Ben Hundley lay back upon his pillows, suddenly tense in the memory of his struggle with Art Shipley. He recalled the blow upon his head, a crash and a roar—then darkness. Somehow, he and Shipley must have been rescued from the roof. Perhaps it had tilted and, falling, thrown them free of the flames.

He became aware that organ music had been going on over in the hotel. Now it had stopped, and on the silence rose the voice of the mountain preacher. Evidently it was Sunday; the man had said that he would stay over, to put in a few words for the Lord; and his text, Ben remembered, was to have been the futility of revenge. "A good text," thought Ben, and he listened. But the preacher had changed his text. The shuffling of feet in the hotel parlor had subsided, and the preacher's vibrant voice rose clear:

"——to talk to you, brothers and sisters, on one of the oldest and greatest texts. Something has just happened, or almost happened, amongst us, which brings this strong to mind. I'm goin' to talk to you to-day on that verse which quotes the Lord Jesus, where he said: 'Greater love can no man have than this, that he shall lay down his life for his friend.'"

Tears came into Ben Hundley's eyes. He was weak and in no condition to resist emotion. Yes, he himself had done

that, or had almost done it. For Betty, not for Art Shipley. And he had done it consciously, instinctively. He had gone to their apartment seeking revenge; but the occasion had arisen, and his actual behavior had been that of service.

"It was just instinctive," Ben thought to himself. "Any man would have done it. The big war was full of things like that, done by everyday fellows. There's a lot of good in old human nature, I reckon. It comes out under stress. It isn't the act that's done on impulse which counts for so much. That's comparatively easy. It is the business of being decent when you don't want to be—that's the hard thing. It's the business of learning to think about the other fellow, instead of thinking about yourself all the time. By George!" Ben lay very still. "By George! That's what that mountain preacher was trying to tell me, in another way. It's the difference between revenge and—well, love. He said love is good to-day and to-morrow."

Ben was still very weak. The tears once more came to his eyes.

"It's to-day and to-morrow that counts," he said aloud. "I got Betty out of the fire, and Art Shipley got out, too. But that isn't the big thing. The big thing is, what am I going to do for Betty, not just on the impulse, like during the fire, but to-day and to-morrow?"

He lay there, blinking his lashless eyes at the ceiling, thinking.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed. "It's funny, too, how happy it makes me. I was unhappy when I was thinking about taking revenge; when I'm thinking the other way, it's just a lot of fun. That's what I'll do, all right! I'll give Art a good job in my construction work. When I get going well, I'll take him in partners. He never makes anything in that speculative stuff he's been doing, and, besides, it leads him into temptations. And, yes——"

Ben grinned at his second happy thought.

"Ouch! Yep, that's what I'll do. I don't need a big house like this if I'm not—not going to be married. No, sir. Besides, I can manage to do a good deal of traveling up and down the road, superintending the construction work. Yes, that's it! Instead of sending Art out on the road, I'll go. That'll give him all his time at home, which is just the way it ought to be for a married man. By George! This is working out fine. I wonder who that is on the stairs? I hope it's Dick. He can help me work this thing out."

BUT it wasn't Dick. The footsteps came up the steps more rapidly than Dick could walk. The knob turned, the door opened softly, and Betty came in.

She stopped, and her dark eyes widened when she saw his eyes open. He observed that, although her soft cheeks had less than their usual color, she seemed unharmed, except for a small bandage around her wrist.

"Why, Ben! You have come around! How *are* you?"

She hurried to lean over him. His eyes fed upon the soft gold above her low, pure forehead, the peach-down ringlet beside the shell of her little ear. Her slim, white throat rose unmarred from the cream collar of the pale-blue dress. She looked happy.

"You are not burned?" he asked.

"No." Her red mouth was solemn. "You saved me from that, Ben. And after the way I had treated——" Her soft voice broke. The flecks of gold in her chestnut eyes became blurred through a lens of tears. "After the way——"

"Now, listen," Ben interrupted positively. "We are not going to have any of that. The past is past. I am happy, and you are happy. Let's keep that way. I just want you to promise me you will agree to do what I ask you to do."

"I'll promise you anything, Ben—anything in the world."

"All right. I'm going to hold you to that. The first thing, you've got to come and live in this house as soon as I get out. I mean, you and Art will need a new place now, and I won't need this, because I'm going to be on the road. Do you promise?"

"But, Ben——"

"Now, stop crying and look at this thing sensibly. I want to do this;

it will make me happy to be doing it for you. The second thing you've got to promise——"

"But, Ben, listen!" She stooped over and touched her lips to his forehead; her tears fell upon his cheek. "But, Ben, darling, won't you let me——"

"Please don't," said Ben. "I—I'm kind of weak, and—please don't, Betty!" He blinked back his own tears. "I've got a confession to make to you," he said. "I hated you when I heard about you and Art. I—well, I couldn't have harmed you, but I wanted to kill him. I was actually thinking of it. I went down the road to your place with a gun, and even with some matches, although I really don't think I would ever have used them. What I am getting at is that I wanted revenge, and I was unhappy. I was burning up with unhappiness. But now I see that there's something bigger than revenge." The words had a familiar sound to his ears. "There's something bigger than revenge," he repeated.

"But, Ben, don't you see? That's just it! There is, and we've both found it!"

She slipped to her knees beside the bed and laid her fingers gently on his bandaged arm. Her eyes were strange.

"Art is dead, Ben," she told him.

"What?"

"Yes, Ben. We could see it all from the ground. When he hit you, you staggered and fell backward over the edge. Your body hit the roof of the porch over the steps and bounced out far enough for the men to drag you away. You aren't burned much. It was the way your head struck the ground which knocked you senseless, and that's the only thing that has worried us. And, just after you had gone over, the whole roof collapsed. There was nothing there but flames. There was nothing any one could do. It was a furnace."

Ben Hundley turned his head and stared out of the window.

"And now I am going to make a confession to you, Ben. Let's get these things said, so we won't have to say them again. Art Shipley is dead, and we can forgive him, but he lied to me about you, Ben. I—I learned that your hat and that letter were left in the room of that Miss Gratzle. Art Shipley got her to leave them there. I didn't think much about them, Ben, even though I was a little jealous of her. I sent them to you, and I thought you would write and explain how they got there. But you never said a word about them. I see now that you didn't know any explanation was expected, for you didn't know where they had been found. Anyway, you kept quiet; and then Art Shipley showed me a letter that woman had written him about you.

"I know now it was all a scheme. The Gratzle woman came down here to get even with Art Shipley. She got here too late for that, but she told me all that had happened. So that's my confession, Ben. And Heaven knows I wouldn't blame you if you never forgave me. I mean, to think of my not trusting you, in the face of any evidence whatever; and then for me to go off and marry Art Shipley, just out of revenge. I think I must have been crazy. You know, jealousy does make a person crazy, I think."

"Yes, it does," agreed Ben. He turned and looked her in the eyes. "You mean," he asked, "you mean that you are——"

"I mean," she said, "that I love you, and I have always loved you. And if you will forgive me——" She stopped. Tears filmed her gold-flecked eyes. "If you will forgive me," she went on bravely, "I want to give my life to making you happy."

"Why?" Ben demanded. "Tell me again."

"Because I love you and have always loved you."

"Love," said Ben, reaching for her with the tip of his free hand—"that is something good to-day and to-morrow, Betty."

"Let's thank God for ours, Ben. You know, I believe in God now stronger than ever. Even Dick, the barkeeper, says that he used to think God was made for women, so they could wear new hats to church. But, he says, after he saw you jump right into the middle of that furnace, and get hit on the head, and

come out safe, he believes there's a God for men, too. He says he believes it because, when he saw you jump, he prayed."

Into their happy silence stole the regular beat of the organ from across the road. Then a chorus of voices, male and female, young and old, rose strongly upon the opening bars of a hymn. Some were off the key, some were off the pitch, others were off the tune, and still others out of time. But out of their hearty discord emerged a harmony, as imperfect as man, but, like the hope and the heart of man, strong and brave.

"To-day and to-morrow," Betty repeated, "and forever and ever."

"Amen," said Ben.

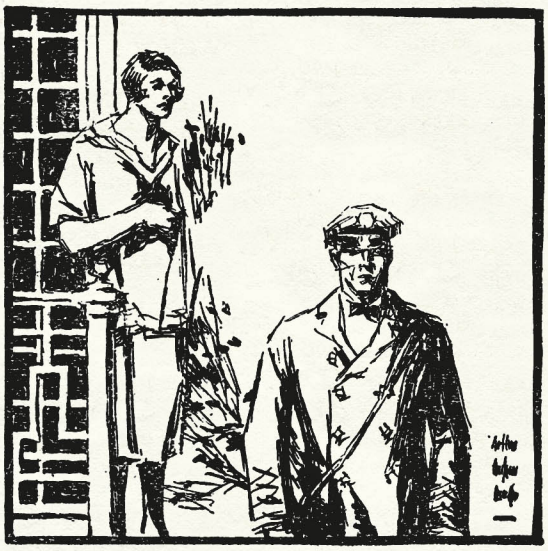
Other stories by Robert McBlair will appear in future issues of THE POPULAR.

AN EGYPTIAN ROMANCE

WE know a lot about King Tutankhamen. He was the chap who got so much publicity not long ago because he happened to be the tenant of a brand-new tomb in the country of camels and sand. But we haven't heard much about Mrs. Tut. Now it comes out that she was an up-to-date young lady who believed in the sweet prerogative of a Leap Year of her own making. All of which is meant to say that, when King Tut moved from the imperial palace into his more famous dwelling place, Mrs. Tut, then a widow, looking around at the neighboring countries and, for the good of her kingdom, wrote a little billet-doux to a Hittite king, asking if he had a son eligible for marriage. There is not any record, so far discovered, to show what answer she received. But one may hope; for H. H. von der Osten of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, who has just returned from a year of exploring the buried Hittite cities in Asia Minor, has in his possession many manuscripts, and these may contain the sequel. And in this way, after four thousand long years, we may come upon as sweet a romance as ever twinkled on the movie screen. It is to be hoped that Mr. von der Osten will supply the final close-up of the story as soon as he has deciphered it.

A NEW RACE

ANOTHER new race of human beings, so primitive in the scale of advancement that they are enslaved by Indians, and light enough in their coloring almost to evoke a theory that they belong to the "white Indian" species, has been discovered by an expedition into the interior of South America. Doctor William M. McGovern, who recently returned from the jungles of the Amazon region, reported that Indians whom he met showed him samples of gold and diamonds which they had found in the Guiana hinterland. He did not locate any of the deposits of these riches, although the reports were that they abounded. Doctor McGovern was more interested in the race of beings whom the Indians called "pogna," or animal folk. Like the earliest humans, these people have receding chins and foreheads. From skulls found near their jungle habitations, it is deduced that the race descends directly from an ancient people who arrived long before the Asiatic invasion. It is not improbable that our own American Indians emerged from these beginnings. Much of interest and importance has been and is being unearthed in South America by such expeditions as this. At one time it was thought that the Inca civilization was the oldest known. Doctor McGovern's efforts, however, have revealed at least three earlier civilizations beneath the Inca ruins. Strangest of all, those earlier folks were evidently more advanced than their later Inca conquerors, as shown in the superior designs of their weaving and pottery.



Leguerre of the Lost Division

The Prisoner of Prayd-Amah

By Howard Fitzalan

Author of "Miss Allison's Elopement," "The Heart of the Eagle," Etc.

The impecunious Mr. Nugent Leguerre decided that a splurge would be pleasant, so he chartered a yacht in which to cruise the Mediterranean. Not even Hopkins, the skipper, was aware that, beneath the diplomatic sleuth's indolent manner, there was a purpose of international import.

THE passenger list of the *Samaria* was thickly studded with four-carat notables. There was a lovely lady of the screen, who had just acquired a titled husband in Rome, and an equally lovely lady of society who had recently jettisoned a like prize in Paris; also a famous journalist, a distinguished financier, an explorer of high renown, a new open-golf champion, and an aristocratically decorative ambassador extraordinary, home on one of those flying trips which yield so many columns of speculative grist to the mill of the Washington correspondent.

Yet with all this array of first-page material ready to hand and unreluctant, the ship reporters had elected to corral and assail one small, dark, unimportant-appearing voyager, who, with eloquent coördination of hand and shoulder and word, protested that he brought no tidings from abroad.

"Will the failure of the counter revolution cause a postponement of your daughter's marriage to Prince Karl?" was one of the leading questions which the sallow traveler answered characteristically with another:

"In this generation," he blandly inquired, "can the father speak for the child?"

Another reporter, an older man, drew a newspaper clipping from his pocket.

"This was printed early in the week, Mr. Kuraffis—a cable dispatch from Vienna," he said. "It tells, in a sketchy way, of the romance of Miss Haidi and

Prince Karl and your backing of Karl's campaign. But, of course, your own story——"

Nikolai Kuraffis, head of the exclusive and opulent Kuraffis Tobaccos, Inc.—Depots: Cairo, Alexandria, and Beirut—lifted a thin hand.

"But I have no story," said he. "Business in general seems on the mend in Europe and the Near East. I am truly glad to be home. That is all."

A tall reporter, who looked and talked as if his origin were Western, took a breezy inning.

"There's been a pretty well-defined rumor circulating," he said, "that you were arrested by government troops when the revolution flopped, and held prisoner in Prayd-Amah—were in danger for a while of being stood against a wall. That seems to emanate out of a pretty authentic source in Washington. It looks interesting, if true. Come on, Mr. Kuraffis—won't you tell us what's what? You're certainly far enough out of harm's way now to open up. You ought to appreciate that we're all men with a public to serve—and a living to make."

There was a sudden nervous eagerness in the manner of Nikolai Kuraffis, as in his smile.

"Oh, that!" he cried. "Prayd-Amah! Is it not remarkable, this enterprise of the press? If you would have the simple answer to all this pother, I was for a time the guest of the governor there—a singularly honored guest in his castle—I, born a Zanolian peasant! Perhaps you could build a romance out of that. But I cannot do it for you. I am not gifted—and, indeed, I must beg now to be excused. Just say, please, that Nikolai Kuraffis is glad to be home. It is sufficient, I think, and it is true."

Mr. Kuraffis having thus politely escaped the newspaper men, much to the chagrin of the cinema countess, turned their attention to the ambassador extraordinary.

"It is reported, sir," said their spokesman, in a velvety voice suitable to diplomatic conversations, "that your return is in connection with the Kuraffis incident."

At this, his excellency twirled a slender watch chain between the thumb and forefinger of one hand, and between the thumb and forefinger of the other, a waxed spike of mustache.

"Dear me!" he sighed. "How I've let myself get out of touch with the papers! What is the Kuraffis incident, boys?"

IT was rather as a forlorn hope, than because of any bright promise of eliciting information, that a third *Samaria* passenger was questioned, as the tugs were nosing the big liner to her pier. This person, recognized by one of the reporters, as he lounged alone at the rail, was immediately pounced upon by the pack.

"Hello, Mr. Leguerre," said the reporter who knew him. "You're just the man who may be able to help us out."

Nugent Leguerre, war-time ace of America's once mighty Intelligence Control Division, but since the armistice the most confirmed of idlers, faced the committee with a rueful smile.

"Sorry," he said; "but I can't accommodate. I make it a rule to comply with all the laws of the land, with prejudice to none. I haven't so much as a drop in my luggage, and the bar's been locked up for hours."

The man with the Stetson and the open-spaces aura cut in:

"We're not thirsty. We're hungry for news. Haven't you been yachting through the Mediterranean during the last couple of months?"

"Oh, not quite so long as that."

"Call in at Prayd-Amah, did you?"

"Naturally. I don't think there's a more beautiful harbor in the world."

"Fine! Then you must have heard plenty about the Kuraffis matter. Tell us!"

Mr. Leguerre rubbed his chin with the crook of his slender malacca walking stick.

"Kuraffis?" he repeated dubiously. "You don't mean the fellow who manufactures the Boulevard Cigarette—and some others? I believe he's a passenger on this very ship. What of him?"

A chorus of groans greeted the question.

"You were in Prayd-Amah and didn't

hear!" exclaimed the reporter. "I'd have given an ear and a couple of fingers to have been on the spot. S'pose you knew about the revolution in Zanolia? Well, the story behind it seems to be that Nikolai Kuraffis played angel for Prince Karl. And then, when the Zanolian government nipped the scheme to put Karl back on the throne—which would have given Kuraffis the pleasure of seeing his daughter queen of the country he emigrated from, with something like twenty piasters tied up in his bandanna—old Nikolai was bagged.

"He'd been in Prayd-Amah, you see, waiting for the big celebration. Anyhow, that's the whisper out of Washington."

Leguerre grinned amiably.

"Oh, come, come!" he murmured. "You're telling me the plot of a comic opera."

The wide brim of the Western hat flapped in emphatic negation.

"Listen," said its wearer. "It's not all comedy—not if we've got the real lowdown. There was a mighty serious situation for a time, it appears, all under cover. Under Zanolian law, once a subject, always a subject. And it was under the Zanolian law that Prayd-Amah proposed to deal with Kuraffis. The fact that he'd become a citizen of the United States many years ago cut no ice. With an open-and-shut case against him, he was to have been tried for high treason, and, after that, of course, duly executed.

"Now, not a word of this ever got into print until a few days ago—and then only a lot of ring-around-a-rosy hinting. But Washington had made up its mind, just the same, that Mr. American Citizen Kuraffis shouldn't be harmed. We were ready to use force to save him—or, if we couldn't move in time—to avenge him. And that wouldn't have meant just sending a couple of cruisers to Prayd-Amah to slap Zanolia's impudent nose. You've heard of the treaty called the Big-Three-Little-Three Pact? Well, Zanolia'd been hiding behind that. She knew that if we so much as dropped a shell into one of her old mud forts by way of repartee, we'd be inviting the whole world to come out in the lot again and fight; and for a long time she apparently didn't think we had the nerve to do it."

Leguerre had listened with a stare, at first incredulous, and at last completely blank.

"I hope," he said, "that you're not going to rehash such piffle. If Kuraffis is home aboard the *Samaria,* that settles everything, doesn't it?"

His acquaintance in the ship-news group shrugged.

"Everything," said he, "but public curiosity. There's a mystery in the thing—this sudden popping up of Kuraffis under the elbow of Lady Liberty. Did we win a diplomatic victory, or did he buy his way out—or what?"

Leguerre's face lighted with the reflection of a rising, brilliant thought.

"Why," he suggested helpfully, "don't you find him and ask him?"

The reporter who knew Nugent Leguerre looked curiously after him, as he strolled away, his stick tapping the deck in a swift tempo of triumph.

"They say," he observed, "that that bird once made a name for himself running Intelligence Department errands out of Washington. Would you believe it, now? Imagine the massacre if he ever had to go to work for a living!"

THERE had been something faintly humorous, to those familiar with his chronic financial decrepitude, in the magnificent gesture which Nugent Leguerre made that night in the Chadan Club, in London, a couple of months before his return aboard the *Samaria.*

Ever impecunious, yet with as small regard for money's value as if the bottomless purse of fable were at his command, Leguerre had suddenly conceived the thought of grandly voyaging, for once, aboard a yacht on which he should enjoy the prerogatives of owner rather than the accustomed privileges of a guest.

He had astonished an after-theater party by blurting, out of the blue:

"I say, Terry, why don't you consider turning a penny with the *Claimant,* instead of letting her eat her head off down below? I mean to say, if you're bound to skirmish around on shore, I

wouldn't mind taking her off your hands for a month or two. Chartering her straight out, that is, at the current market for steam and sail."

Terence MacCracken, of the eminent Baltimorean MacCracken clan, who owned the *Claimant* and knew Leguerre, was amused; the more so, since the charter proponent gave every evidence of being both sober and serious.

"It happens," said he, "that I'm thinking over an offer at this minute, Nugie; and, for your information, the price, over all running expenses, is ten thousand a month. Can you guess what it would cost simply to find the crew?"

"My soul!" gasped Leguerre. "You don't tell me they've come ashore and got lost in Limehouse!"

There was a chuckle around the table, which was not an unusual thing, at the innocuous Leguerre's expense.

"I mean 'find,'" explained MacCracken patiently, "in the farm-hand sense—how much it costs to feed them. They eat like truck horses, even if the hardest work aboard the *Claimant* is polishing brass. And the turbines have prodigious appetites, too. A man would be up against an additional expense of at least five thousand a month, above charter fee."

Leguerre, whose annual income was generally suspected to be very little, if any, more than MacCracken had been promised for a month's use of the yacht, yawned ostentatiously.

"Figures bore me—always have," he complained. "If you'll take twelve thousand a month and close on the spot, I'll hand you my check over the table."

His check book was out, as MacCracken stared; obviously he was willing to carry the play farther.

"What—Nugie?" cried the *Claimant's* owner. "Is it possible you ran over to Monte Carlo when you slipped away last week?"

"Monte Carlo," observed Leguerre calmly, "is an institution appealing to the small fry. If you'd been watching the papers, you'd know how Griproad Rubber's been performing on the Stock Exchange back home. You'll find my check as good as a bag of sovereigns, if you care to take me on. Don't fret about my ability to afford the splurge, Terry. I truly owe myself a taste of high life."

So Nugent Leguerre, persisting in his insanity, acquired the seagoing *Claimant,* under charter and, coincidentally, a wider reputation on both sides of the Atlantic for spectacular irresponsibility. For, although the cables carried only a few terse words concerning the *Claimant's* charter, the facts and circumstances of the charterer's newest folly were duly chronicled in several widely quoted letters home.

Leguerre's prodigality, though, went even farther than the letter writers knew. The yacht, as he took her over, already had a crew of twenty-odd men, a company quite sufficient for all purposes of navigation and decoration. But Leguerre, on the day of sailing, turned up with a round dozen more, parading in four-wheelers behind him.

HOPKINS, the *Claimant's* thrifty old skipper, plucked his beard in anguish, as the pick-ups came over the side. They were a hard-bitten lot, swaggering men in oily dungarees, with surly faces and almost enough black eyes among them to allow one to the individual, if redistributed. Quite obviously they could not be guests, so Simon Hopkins very correctly deduced they were intended by the mad charterer as additions to his crew.

"Blisters!" he groaned.

"As opposed to brass polishers," remarked Leguerre cheerfully, "I rather fancy them. You don't mind?"

"What'll I do with them?" the sailing master demanded. "I have all the hands I can use."

"I thought," murmured Leguerre, "we might carry them for spares."

Hopkins glared down over the bridge rail.

"I'd say, Mr. Leguerre," he remarked, "that a good half of 'em was in liquor."

"My fault, perhaps," remarked the tolerant charterer. "You see, I invited them to wet their whistles at my expense. That was the delay in our getting aboard. Some of the poor chaps were absolutely parched. And I dare say that gin and

bitters do take a grip when one attempts to slake a long-standing thirst with the combination. They'll be better for a little salt air blowing over them. And now, isn't there some such formality as signing them on?"

There was a formality—one so involved that there was a delay of several hours in the *Claimant's* departure into the channel. The sailing master was both angry and anxious when it was done with. As the yacht felt the lift of deep water, he sought out Leguerre, luxuriating in the magnificence of the owner's suite.

"D'ye know, sir," he asked, "what kind of mob you've brought in on us? They're the crowd from the *Georgia Cross!*"

"Well?" queried Leguerre placidly.

"Hellions fresh from admiralty court —from the very shadow of the gallows," the skipper persisted. "Give me my choice in the matter, Mr. Leguerre, and I'd not ship 'em for a hundred dollars a head—no, nor a thousand!"

The *Claimant's* charterer remained complacent.

"I'll surely have that in mind, captain," said he, "when I come to write your bonus check. In the meantime, we have them aboard. So——"

"I'll not," avowed Hopkins stoutly, "be responsible for these men, sir. If trouble comes, remember that."

"But I'm sure there'll be no trouble," said Leguerre. "Conditions aboard the *Claimant* won't be like those aboard the *Georgia Cross*. We've got no crazy skipper, no bucko mates, no spoiled stores, and no disposition in any way to treat the crew otherwise than as men.

"These may not be yacht sailors we've shipped, but they're deep-sea sailors. You may see them as hard drinkers. I know them as hard fighters. I liked the way they handled themselves when conditions aboard the *Georgia Cross* became more than they could stomach. Apparently the admiralty court did, too. At all events, they were acquitted."

"Doesn't alter the fact, sir," interjected Hopkins, "that they're mutineers at heart. I'm sorry I've lived to see the same bottom under them and me. That's all that I'll say to you, Mr. Leguerre. They're on your shoulders, not mine!"

Leguerre reached languidly for his cigarette tin.

"I don't think they'll be much of a weight," he observed. "And, as a matter of fact, I'm of the opinion you ought to thank me."

"You'll give a reason, sir?"

"Well, the *Claimant's* a yacht of American registry, isn't she?"

"Why—er—of course, sir."

"Then, what was her crew before I brought these *Georgia Cross* fellows aboard? Oh, I looked 'em over with a deal of care, captain. Not an American aboard except just you and the mate. Swedes in the engine room, Frenchmen in the galley, and a swarm of gentlemen's gentlemen—cockneys all—in the deck watches. I *did* think we could stand a few Yankees—what?"

Hopkins, having touched his cap and rolled away, turned at the door for an exit speech.

"Patriotism is patriotism, sir," said he. "I'll grant you that and respect you for the sentiment. But blacklegs, mark me, is blacklegs, too, whatever the flag they claim!"

EVEN Captain Hopkins was constrained to admit, when a fortnight had passed, that the men of the *Georgia Cross* were, as Leguerre had asserted, old-fashioned deep-sea sailors. Although duck uniforms were found, which approximately fitted them, and they were decked out in the jaunty, little round white caps, designed for the *Claimant's* crew by a famous yacht chandler in New York, they never did quite achieve the proper yachty look; yet, for all that, they showed themselves smart and willing seamen, while afloat.

On shore leave, they fulfilled both the skipper's worst expectations and Leguerre's prediction. They drank hard, and they fought hard. Frequently they overstayed their time, and when they did eventually return to the fold, it was too often with faces cut and knuckles bruised and their natty ducks in tatters.

In Brest, Leguerre paid more than a thousand francs to redeem three of them

from the hands of the police, after they had wrecked a café, celebrated over seven seas for the potency of its cognac and the formidability of its patrons. In Gibraltar, he was obliged to abandon a man in hospital, after a fracas, in which an enemy, of allegedly larcenous intent, had resorted to steel in order to avert an imminent and violent partition of their several persons.

To the scandal of Simon Hopkins, Leguerre persisted in regarding the rioting course of his sailors ashore as a quite comprehensible and pardonable explosion of animal spirits.

"The men," he said, "are not accustomed to the rather restricted and formal life of a yacht's crew. They've simply got to blow off steam when they have the chance. And, of course, they have their own way of doing it. I never held they were gentlemen, captain."

"But, sir," burst out the skipper on that occasion, "you pamper them like they was children. To my own knowledge, you've given them money out of your pocket to spend on shore, and you've stood against curtailment of their liberty, as a measure to tone 'em down. Of course, yours is the final say aboard the *Claimant;* but I tell you that what you're doin' is against all decent ships' discipline, Mr. Leguerre!"

And, indeed, in other ways than his amazing leniency with the ill-favored flotsam he had brought aboard, his charterer and temporary employer was a mystery to the old sailing master.

Leguerre, for one thing, had the most peculiar notions of getting returns in pleasure on an investment which Hopkins rightly estimated at a figure close to five thousand dollars a week. He seemed to have none of the tastes of other yachtsmen whom the skipper had navigated on voyages, regularly punctuated by halts and fêtes at foreign clubs.

The *Claimant's* charterer neither offered entertainment nor sought to be entertained. He gave no dinners aboard and attended no functions ashore. No cronies appeared to join him; not a single guest turned up at any time, to be his companion, even on a port-to-port trip. And the strait-laced Hopkins missed a guess, and thereby discovered a certain new respect for his pro-tem chief, when Leguerre came back from a lone trip to Paris quite himself—and by himself.

If Leguerre had an objective in his cruise, he declined to burden the captain with his confidence.

"Just keep on into the Mediterranean," was his vague stock reply to hints toward an eliciting of specific instructions. "There's no fun under the sun like being a tramp, don't you think? It's the only life, captain, when a man can afford it."

THAT his charterer was quite ignorant of navigation, Hopkins took for granted. Most yachtsmen of his acquaintance were, although sometimes their pretensions had been large. Consequently, the skipper's astonishment was the greater when Leguerre appeared on the bridge early one morning in the third week of the cruise—this, after the *Claimant* had been steaming easily along for three days and nights without a shore call—and remarked:

"I think that if we veered our course about three points east, we might be picking up the island of Santa Bella, along toward noon."

Hopkins had replied: "That's right, sir!" before he took a second thought. Then he stared. "Beg your pardon, Mr. Leguerre," he said, "but I didn't think you knew——"

Leguerre laughed.

"I don't know," said he. "I'm guessing. I've been amusing myself by pricking out the *Claimant's* course on a chart of my own, and trying to keep track of her position."

"You beat me, sir!" exclaimed the sailing master. "Was you thinking of makin' Santa Bella?"

"Might as well," said Leguerre diffidently. "I haven't been there for years. It's a gorgeous spot, and I've generated a fancy for going ashore and stretching my legs. Do you know that sparkling-red Santa Bella wine, captain—the Marquis Russo? I believe I'll fetch aboard a case or two."

Leguerre's calculation may have been a point out of the way as to direction,

but he had struck the time within the hour. Before one o'clock the *Claimant* had raised the cliffs of the tiny Spanish island, which has been the stronghold of the blue-blood Russos, since days antedating the Armada, and at a little after three the chain was clanking through the hawse pipe, as her anchor dropped through the soft-blue water of the harbor.

For a little time, after the yacht's motor yawl had deposited him on the ancient stone quay, Leguerre stood gazing out over the bay. He remained there until the cigarette which he had lighted, just before he stepped over the thwarts, had burned to a short end; then he turned and, with a briskness significant of sound wind and strong sinews, began to ascend the steep hill, whose foot was almost at the water's edge.

To a uniformed and beplumed official, who had appeared on the quay behind him, he waved a casual greeting.

"I have nothing of interest for the customs," he called back, in a very fair Spanish. "But when I return, señor, we shall confer."

Crowning the hill, at the head of the path which Leguerre followed, a villa, that was evidently the residence of a person of consequence, lifted walls of vine-bodiced plaster out of a garden colored with all the splendor of a Maxfield Parrish canvas.

On the lower gallery of the villa a tall, slim man of military erectness, with penetrating black eyes and a wisp of dark mustache over a mobile mouth, lolled in a chaise longue of gray reed.

He had been observing the maneuverings of the yacht, as she came to anchor, through a pair of field glasses, and now with a still livelier interest he studied the figure climbing toward him. He was on his feet, as Leguerre came to the brow of the hill.

"M'sieur!" he cried, advancing. "You come from——"

He had spoken in French, and Leguerre, more at home in that tongue than in Spanish, replied in kind:

"There is no need to say it, your highness. I bring a message which will speak for me."

THE master of the villa opened the sealed envelope which Leguerre proffered him. Screwing a single glass into his eye, he proceeded straightway to a scrutiny of its contents.

"But, no, Monsieur Leguerre!" he exclaimed, when he had finished his reading. "I can tell you at once that it cannot be done—not that way!"

"A million American dollars," said Leguerre, a little stiffly, "should go far almost anywhere along the Mediterranean seaboard—off the Riviera. And, I believe, you have read the pledge of them, your highness."

The tall man made a gesture of protest.

"Oh, you misunderstand!" said he. "It is not that. The money would be enough. But Valoroff, the man on whom we depended—he can no longer be counted upon. He has been removed from the governorship—transferred to an obscure post in the mountain country. Their spies have worked too well. If they know little, they have yet suspected much. And with Valoroff gone to——"

"I am authorized privately," interrupted Leguerre, "to raise the pledge to two millions—three, if necessary. Even that is by no means all that would be available for the purpose."

They had walked together onto the gallery, and Leguerre, at a motion of invitation, had seated himself in a broad, low chair beside the chaise longue.

"Gold is nothing now," his host said bitterly. "The new governor is General Borzak himself—Borzak, who, before many more months have passed, sees himself clothed with absolute authority as dictator. He is power mad—war mad. There is no room in his soul for a money madness. What is needed is force—overwhelming force—nothing less will serve."

Leguerre nodded.

"I've had certain instructions along that line as well," said he.

The other straightened and lifted his monocle.

"Your country will—go to lengths?" he asked eagerly. "It is at last decided?"

"As a last resort, only."

Again the dark face showed disappointment.

"But you must act at once. The date of the court-martial has already been set, I have heard. It will be at the end of this month. There will be only a travesty of a trial, followed by a swift execution of sentence. Then, whatever is done, will be too late."

"There can only be a reckoning in that event," said Leguerre.

"You say, though, that you have instructions for action. If you will reveal —explain——"

"I am sorry, your highness," Leguerre inrerrupted brusquely. "I am bound not to repeat my instructions, even to you. I can only say that if the original plans fail, I am commanded to go on."

The dark eyes narrowed. For an instant they had gleamed with a sudden hopeful light.

"May I infer, m'sieur, that you bear an ultimatum—or its equivalent?"

"I am afraid not, your highness," said Leguerre. "I have letters of credit, and, shall I say, sealed orders! Nothing more."

The tall man's ejaculation of despair awoke an echo within the villa—a softer voice.

Light steps nearer. Leguerre leaped to his feet as, behind him, a girl came out onto the gallery. His host was as quickly up.

"It is the princess," he whispered. He bowed toward the girl. "Haidi, I present Monsieur Leguerre. He comes in your interest—in the interest of us all."

The girl was dark, too; fragile, beautiful, curiously pale. Her eyes had been shadowed, but the shadows fled as, with her hand gone to her throat, she gazed breathless at Leguerre.

"I would not need to be told you were American," she said, with a glance of apology toward the prince for her use of English. "That I would know anywhere. And you bring good news? Oh, tell me quickly!"

It was Prince Karl who answered, swift to Leguerre's rescue.

"We have every reason to rejoice, Haidi," he said quietly. "We are assured of the fullest measure of support by the most powerful of nations. Monsieur Leguerre has brought the promise of it. In deed, I may tell you that he comes himself to be active in our cause—the first of a legion that no Power, no group of Powers, could long stand against. For a time, I think, he will remain as our guest."

"For only a little time—a few hours," said Leguerre. "I must speak with your highness further. But to-night I must be on. Time is too short, and I can serve no good purpose by lingering."

So it came to pass that the absurd spendthrift charterer of the million-dollar *Claimant*, having landed at Santa Bella to stretch his legs, tarried on the glamorous isle to dine with a prince, who might have been a king, and with a princess who, but for one of America's miracles, might have been a peasant.

But it never came to his knowledge that, as he walked down the silvered path toward the quay, the princess, looking after him, with eyes suddenly misty, paid him one of the prettiest compliments of his not unflattered career.

"Oh, I've faith in him, my dear!" she cried. "He's adequate. Do you see how he carries himself down that steep way, Karl? Like—like a young god, riding a moonbeam!"

A couple of minutes after that, alas for poesy, the young god was fashioning speech in a most energetically ungodly fashion. Three of his old-fashioned, deep-sea sailors from the *Georgia Cross* had been waiting for him for hours with the yacht's gig, and they had found a bottle.

"Spill the boat, and I'll certainly break your heads," he was telling them. "You rum-soaked, giddy, fourth-rate barnacles!"

It was a kind of conversation he'd discovered that they liked.

FROM Nugent Leguerre, the ship reporters in New York had the truth, but not the whole truth, when he told them later that he had looked in at Prayd-Amah.

That port, for centuries the commercial capital of Zanolia and, since the revolution which had driven the dying king

and the Crown Prince Karl into exile, the political capital as well, was the second call of the *Claimant,* after she had weighed anchor at Santa Bella.

Before the visit to Prayd-Amah, Leguerre had directed a call at an obscure village, whose little harbor, as his sailing master was at pains to inform him, seldom sheltered any craft other than the native feluccas.

Here, again, the *Claimant's* charterer permitted it to be seen that there might, after all, be method underlying his madness and point to his seeming aimlessness.

"It's just possible, captain," he had said in that uncertain way of his—"just barely possible that I may pick up a friend here."

And, quite to Hopkins' astonishment, the friend had appeared no sooner than the *Claimant's* hook was down. He came off from shore in a harbor bumboat, without waiting for the yacht's gig to be sent in for him—a very elegant sort of person, with a splendid watch chain and a habit of plucking at an end of his mustache, waxed to needle fineness. Hopkins thought, privately, that the guest bore a most striking resemblance to newspaper photographs he had seen of a recent youngish governor of his native Maine, still more recently appointed to be ambassador to—was it Rome?

But Leguerre saw no necessity for introductions, and the skipper was left to wonder, while the two, locked off to themselves in the owner's quarters, talked and smoked far into the night. The last thing Hopkins heard before he dropped off to sleep was the murmur of their voices; and when he turned out in the morning, the *Claimant* no longer had a guest.

"My friend," Leguerre casually explained, "is a man of mercurial temperament. At three o'clock this morning he decided that a yachting trip would be a bore, and fifteen minutes afterward he was on the beach. We go on alone."

"On?" queried Hopkins.

"Oh, almost anywhere," said Leguerre, yawning. "But I s'pose that'll hardly do for sailing orders. Let's see. There's a place called Prayd-Amah along the line, isn't there? I'm sure I've seen it on the chart. The name rather interests me. What do you say if we give the town a look-over?"

It was rather as an empty formality that Hopkins, when the *Claimant* came to anchor in the harbor of Prayd-Amah on the afternoon of the day following, put the question:

"Shore leave for all hands as usual, sir?"

But Leguerre had yet another surprise for the skipper.

"No," he said briefly. "Hold everybody aboard. I count on doing Prayd-Amah alone."

In solitary state, in the stern sheets of the tossing yawl, Leguerre went ashore; and he stayed ashore, sending no word to relieve the rising worriment of the *Claimant's* sailing master, through that day and night, and through all the second day and the second night.

It was early on the morning of the third day in Prayd-Amah harbor when Leguerre returned to the yacht. The sun was hardly risen, but Hopkins was already on deck.

"I've been a bit uneasy about you, sir," he said. "I thought you might have sent me a message, at least, to let me know you'd come to no harm."

"I'd certainly have got word to you, captain," said Leguerre, "if I'd merely been amusing myself in the port. But I've been inland—and upland. As a matter of fact, there was a man I wanted to see who used to be stationed in Prayd-Amah, but who lately's been shunted back into the mountains."

"I hope you found him, sir," said the skipper politely.

Leguerre smiled grimly.

"I found his grave. He'd lost a certain degree of his popularity with the Zanolian government, and some one in a position to have the final word had him shot a few days ago."

"A heathen people!" cried the sailing master. "I could have told you, sir!"

"I'd already heard it—somewhere," said Leguerre. "Save your sympathy, captain. The poor fellow was no close friend of mine. In fact, I'd never met him. Just had a small reason for looking him up. Well, we might have come ahead faster. That's all."

"You'll be sailing to-day, then, Mr. Leguerre? I'd like to know as soon as you've decided, for I haven't watered ship. Took your instructions by the letter, you see, to permit no one ashore. We haven't stirred from the anchorage, and there's been no boat dropped since the yawl came back. But I would remark, sir, that the men have been acting up a little restless—especially, your zoo."

Leguerre grinned.

"Is it astonishing?" he asked. "Let's be human, captain. We'll give 'em a night in port. You may prepare to steam on the early tide to-morrow, but we'll hold over until then."

ASHORE in Prayd-Amah, the men of the *Claimant* divided into separate groups, with separate ways that evening, as ships' companies will. Off the quay, the Frenchmen of the galley and the steward's room found a compatriot established in a small restaurant, who hailed them with ecstatic cries and folded them severally to his wide waistcoat. The Svensk and the English traveled farther afield in search of shoreside adventure; but the Yankees, who had tamed the bucko mates of the *Georgia Cross,* gave their exclusive attention, as one who knew the fearsome reputation of the place might well conjecture, to the sailor trap which is called the Café of the Seventh Daughter, and faces the Penguin Line docks.

It was in the Café of the Seventh Daughter that the trouble started, along toward midnight. High spirits, *arak,* and a stupid error in the making of change may each have had something to do with it; but the specific cause of the outbreak, beyond question, was a bottle that went flying across the dance floor and smashed the highly prized mirror—the only one on all the Prayd-Amah water front—behind the Seventh Daughter's saloon bar.

Who threw the bottle did not appear, then or subsequently. But the sailors from the American yacht had been declaiming loudly against overcharges, and it had come from the corner where they sat.

In the Café of the Seventh Daughter, where tempers are quick, resources strong, and the shrift of the inimical patron short, that was quite enough.

There was a second of dead, shocked silence after the mirror crashed. Then a wild yell arose, and a rush began for the corner. Joyously the hangers-on of the injured Daughter piled to the scrimmage, riffraff of the wharves, beach combers of a dozen races, and soldiers of the Zanolian Republic, drunk upon *arak* and the pride of arms.

It might have been over in a couple of minutes, for there were no less than half a hundred actively and enthusiastically engaged against a dozen; and the half hundred, moreover, were habituated to and zestfully accomplished in public strife. But so also, as they well demonstrated, were the dozen.

Bottles, glasses, feet, and fists, chair legs and whole chairs and tables, were the weapons, and all flew at once.

Gradually the terrain shifted. The battle moved from the corner to the center of the dance floor. Not only were the low-rated yacht sailors quite able to hold their own, but they had the ability to mill steadily over space held by superior numbers.

It became a question presently, indeed, of who was attacking whom; and that, it began to dawn on the minute men of the Café of the Seventh Daughter, was a question to give one pause.

On their side, at least, pause was had. But the *Claimant's* men were of no mind to enter into a gentlemanly understanding. So far as they were concerned, there was no truce—no rest between rounds. Busily, earnestly they continued to mop up.

The attention of the police was first commanded by the shouts of running men, intent on departure from the vicinity of the Penguin docks. It appears from their outcry that pestilence was loose in the Café of the Seventh Daughter and threatened to spread through the city.

The first policeman to venture a peep into the afflicted café saw that the reports had been scarcely exaggerated. The saloon bar was now not recognizable as the place it had been. Not only the

mirror was smashed, but the great crystal chandeliers, that through generations had thrown a prismatic glow upon the dance. Curtains were down, floor coverings up, furniture ripped into segments.

Something of consequence plainly had happened. Indeed, it still was happening; for, as the petrified officer stared, a man who had a deep cut across his nose, and yet could sing cheerily through it, raced along behind the bar, sweeping bottles from the shelves.

The policeman did not enter. But presently, after bugles had sounded through the city, their sweet notes rising clear above the din in the Café of the Seventh Daughter, many policemen did.

That was the end. In Prayd-Amah sailors from American ships had not theretofore been distinguished for respecting Zanolian laws and their sworn upholders, but these men whose business was the sailing of yachts were of another stock. They deferred to authority. Havoc ceased, as soon as the bright-blue uniforms of the Prayd-Amah police were apparent. With an unexpected but thrice-welcome, most highly commendable docility, the erstwhile wild men permitted themselves to be surrounded and placed under arrest. They even drooped, as the captain of the Zanolian police strutted along the file of them.

He issued a command of which only the general purport was plain. The prisoners were to be taken forthwith to the mud-walled castle on the eminence at the harbor mouth and there incarcerated. That, at least, was a valid deduction. The castle was called Fort Grijlik, and its name had been unmistakably pronounced by the police officer. Further, and notoriously, it was the one strong place of forced detainment in all the city of Prayd-Amah.

Lagging, as if their efforts of destruction had utterly exhausted them, the offenders were marched along the docks and out upon the rocky point that broke the sea to the east of the roads.

THEY came at length to the ancient moated fortress, were prodded across the bridge that was lowered to span it, filed through a gate of stout bronze bars, and lined up in a courtyard whose walls were pierced on three sides by embrasures for anachronistically modern guns.

And there, or so it seemed, a diabolic second wind came to them. There was a sound, as if a sigh or a whisper had passed along their rank. They breathed deeply, straightened, threw back their shoulders, began to look boldly about. At one end of the line a giant yawned lazily and stretched out prodigious arms. At the other, some one raised his voice.

"Let's go, lads!" he shouted. *"Round two!"*

They went—went, in the opinion of the company of Zanolian artillerymen who formed the peace-time skeleton garrison of the Castle Grijlik, quite unopposedly mad.

Early in the mêlée a gun or two popped; but after that, because there was no telling who was friend and who was foe in the blackness of the court, and an exclamation of pain, unquestionably Zanolian, told of a bullet gone wrong, firing ceased.

That simplified matters. Except with firearms, the revived Americans, merrily bashing heads right and left with the butts of borrowed rifles, were unconquerable. Presently cheers, a little maudlin, but given with the proper will, told that Grijlik was theirs.

One of them, just then, was seated on the bemedaled chest of the chief of the fallen garrison, his hands rapidly exploring the prostrate warrior's pockets. The treasure he sought and found was a ring from which three vast keys of brass were suspended.

He took them and fled, and at once he found a use for his prize.

The first key opened a metal door set into a wall of the castle court; a second fitted another gate at the end of a long, stone corridor, and the third threw back the lock in the grating of a dungeon cell, appreciably below the harbor level.

"Hullo! Come out! It's a friend!" called the sailor who had stolen the keys.

He had a flash light. Along its beam, out of the dank cell, a small, dark man, who managed to look unimportant, despite the deep lines of suffering etched into his face, advanced uncertainly.

"I—I dream!" he stammered.

"Come awake quickly, then!" snapped the man with the keys. "We've got to get out of this inside two minutes. My name's Leguerre. I'm an American. I've got a yacht. Other explanations in our next."

For a moment the small man was incapable of motion. He placed a bracing hand against the side of the opened gate.

"Lord!" he whispered. "How can I ever——"

"Don't bother now," said the man in the corridor. "I really owe you more than you know, Mr. Kuraffis!"

The stealer of keys and liberator of the imprisoned seemed to have an uncanny instinct for time. Within the two minutes prescribed, Castle Grijlik had gone back to Zanolia. Its quondam stormers by then had swarmed over the west wall and piled into a bumboat which, possibly by accident, and possibly not, had been made fast to the little pier. With eight of them pulling at the sweeps, the boat shot off toward the distant *Claimant*.

After a time the lurid tongue of a searchlight shot forth from the castle tower. It picked up the rowers, as they came under the yacht's side, and held steadily upon them while they were climbing over the rail. Nor did it leave the *Claimant* even then. Slowly it swept her from bow to stern, back and forth, menacing as a pointed gun and, like a peaceable citizen under a highwayman's threat to stand and deliver, the yacht stayed put.

IT was perhaps a half hour later, when a launch put out importantly from the quay. It made for the *Claimant*, and up her boarding ladder in due course came an official of the military, all epaulets and gold and glare.

Tersely, in crackling but comprehensible English, the official introduced himself to Captain Simon Hopkins.

"I am General Borzak. Me governor from Prayd-Amah."

There was a queer light in the sailing master's china-blue eyes, but his voice was hearty.

"Pleased t'meetcha, general," said he. "Come aboard."

In the governor's manner, as he crossed the deck, there was that which indicated he was one who needed neither invitation nor permission.

"To-night bad things have happen," he said. "Men from this boat have commit many crimes in Prayd-Amah. They have wreck a 'otel, and disturb the garrison in the castle, and run away with a mans who have conspire against this Zanolia gover'ment. For this they must pay."

Hopkins shrugged.

"Maybe there's a mistake, general," he said, with placating geniality. "All my men are aboard."

The governor snorted impatiently.

"I know—I know! They have been seen to come on the ship. They must come back with me to the city."

"Well," drawled the sailing master, "I'm sure I can't say as to that. You'll have to speak with the owner. Here he is now, general."

Leguerre, immaculate in ducks, had sauntered onto the deck out of the smoking-room door.

"Oh, I say, captain," he exclaimed, "what's the row?"

"This man says he's the governor of the town," replied Hopkins, turning a coldly suspicious eye on the soldier. "He says some of our men have raised a rumpus ashore, and he wants to take them back to see the judge."

"Oh, but we can't have that, you know," said Leguerre. "We really can't be detained. Is every one aboard?"

"All hands," said the sailing master.

"Then up anchor," directed Leguerre. "We'll leave now."

A mighty shout escaped Borzak.

"Hold! These men will not go! Not the yacht, too."

Leguerre took a step closer to him.

"Easy, general," he urged. "The deck you're standing on is all the same as American soil."

"Devils!" cried the governor. "Devils, with soil Americain! If the boat is moved, my orders to the castle will be 'Fire!' Into all this we shall see in the to-morrow morning."

And then General Borsak, military governor of Prayd-Amah and dictator prospective of Republican Zanolia, found himself looking into the barrel of a pistol.

It was the "insane" Leguerre who held the automatic.

"I don't think the fort will fire, general—really, I don't," he said gently. "For you'll be coming with us until we're out of Grijlik's range. Now, don't you think you'd better tell those people in your boat?"

AS has been earlier recounted, Leguerre was an obscure passenger aboard the *Samaria,* on the voyage on which Nikolai Kuraffis and the ambassador to Rome elected to sail for home.

Although New York was officially his residence, the temporary yachtsman spent only a few hours in the city before taking train for Washington. And there, on the evening of the day of his debarking, he held certain lengthy conversations with a shabby man in a shabby library—the shabby man being by name Judge Gunther, and by occupation chief of America's Intelligence Control Division, sometimes, because of its later state of innocuous desuetude, known as the "Lost Division."

When they had talked for some hours, Leguerre yawned. Indeed, he had yawned earlier. In fact, if one carefully observed him, he seemed to spend a very considerable part of his time yawning.

"It was the lark of my life, chief," he said. "That's the truth of it. I don't know when I've extracted more genuine satisfaction from a chore."

There was reproof for his levity in the older man's grave eyes.

"You might leave it for me to surmise, Nugent," he said. "You have acquitted yourself beyond my highest expectations. What would have been the consequences of an ultimatum to Zanolia, you know as well as I. All Washington knows it. You have cleared the situation—risked your life, knowing that if you had fallen into the hands of the Zanolian authorities, you could have had no recourse to your own government, no hope of protection. Your country and my country——"

Leguerre was flushing painfully.

"Oh, I didn't mean that sort of thing!" he protested. "I mean, for the man's own sake——"

He dropped a long ash onto the tray at his elbow, puffed, inhaled deeply, and sighed gratefully, as with his cigarette held up before him, he studied its golden monogram.

"Not the nation, not the principle—the man!" he repeated earnestly.

Gunther regarded him earnestly.

"Eh?" he demanded. "What's this?"

Leguerre inhaled again, exhaled, relaxed.

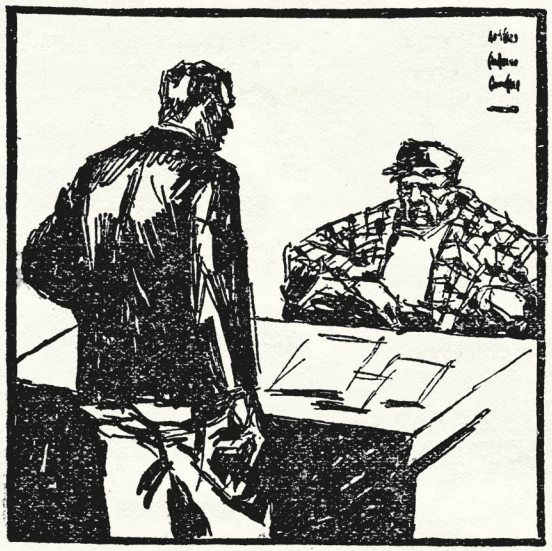
"This Kuraffis," he murmured comfortably; "by gad, he makes a fine cigarette!"

Another story in this series will appear in a forthcoming issue of THE POPULAR.

ANCIENT STATUE UNEARTHED

MORE and more we are coming to revise our estimates of the length and type of civilization which obtained in ancient Mexico. Excavations are being made in Mexico and Central America which tend to show a high degree of social life in these regions. Agriculture has always gone hand in hand with social advance, for it insures a permanency of land and home which are necessary before even a primitive culture can spread among a people.

A statue to the Goddess of Agriculture was recently unearthed in Mexico City by workmen who were rebuilding the National Palace. Four snakes and ears of corn are carved on the block which supports the figure. It is supposed that the statue was buried on the spot where it once stood.



A Humble Hall Mark

By L. P. Holmes

You never can tell by appearances. Now take the case of Henry Durfee, the little cockney who wanted to be a log driver, away up there in the Northwest. That little cuss looked like poor material, if ever a man did. Why, everybody laughed at him. But in a crucial moment—Gosh!

THE superintendent for the Hartlow interests, Henry Marshall, looked up from the slip of paper he had glanced over, and now he fixed his gaze upon the shrinking object that had just been delivered him from the sleigh of Edwards, the camp freighter.

His eyes were cold and openly contemptuous. A trace of a sneer—the kind of sneer to which a strong man sometimes yields in the face of timidity and weakness—held his grim lips.

"Ho! 'Scotty!' " he called, beckoning to a bearded giant who was lounging in the doorway of one of the near-by cabins. "Come here and get the latest from Dunlop.

"I can't figure just what Dunlop is up to," he explained further, as Scotty arrived at his shoulder. "I'm getting to the point where I've got to have a little coöperation from the city office at Starett, or we might just as well throw up our hands and quit. I've sent Dunlop seven suggestions in the past two weeks, and he's turned down every one of them. Last Friday I got him on the wire at Camp Four and asked for a dozen more white watermen—dyed-in-the-wool river hogs—men who could give us the extra push we need at the Trap. I asked for a dozen men, mind you—*men*—and he sends me this! Hell!"

Without another look at the hunched-up, cold-shaken figure before him, Marshall stamped back to the roaring, pot-bellied stove which graced the center of his office floor. Scotty, left alone with the object of his employer's wrath, hesitated a moment and then thrust forth one mighty paw.

"Scotty they calls me," he rumbled pleasantly. "And who might you be, may I ask?"

" 'Enry Durfee Hi was christened," piped the stranger. "Me friends call me

'Duke.' Hi say—can you show me the cook'ouse?"

"It stands yonder," replied Scotty, pointing with the stem of his pipe. "Cookie can feed you and maybe put you to work. I heard him say last night he needed another helper."

Nodding his thanks, the stranger picked up his meager roll of belongings and shuffled off to the cookhouse, his shabby coat pulled tight across his hunched shoulders, his thin shoes, upturned at the points, offering the scantiest of protection against the snow.

Henry Marshall, watching from a window, cursed again.

"Dunlop—boss or no boss—you're a fool," he muttered. "Here you've given me orders to put my drive into the main river ahead of Ryan's and, instead of giving me help to do it, you send a thing like that. If that is your idea of a joke, it's a ghastly one."

Marshall's rancor was not without apparent justification. Twenty-two years he had spent with the Hartlow interests, beginning back in the old days when Tom Hartlow had planted the first foundation for the now tremendous holdings which bore his name. In those days Marshall was king of Hartlow's river camps and his slightest suggestion was heeded without delay.

But a cold winter had got Hartlow, and with his death came reorganization. Marshall's position was no longer what it had been. No longer could he hire and fire, order and reorder, as had been possible under the old régime. New and more modern ideas had crept into the accounting end of the business, and there were such things as costs and overhead and dividends to worry about. At the same time competition had grown keener, and market conditions were such that it was imperative that the year's cut be early at the mills at Starett.

Marshall had a letter under the pillow of his bunk. It was a long letter, full of many details, and with it was a blue print. The print was an exceptionally accurate drawing of the immediate country and showed how the Tulsa River, upon which Marshall was making his cut, flowed into the Niponitche River at a point some two miles up from where the Deep River reached the parent stream.

Joe Ryan, who with his army of men represented the competition, was cutting along the Deep River and would start his drive down that stream. It was obvious that the first of the two drives to reach the Niponitche would be the one whose logs would first be turned into merchantable lumber. This, in brief, was Marshall's task—to put his drive into the Niponitche ahead of Ryan.

The break-up would be earlier on the Tulsa; it had always been, owing no doubt to topographical reasons. On the other hand, the course of the Deep River was singularly free from obstructions, and driving on it could be done with a very minimum of delay. Marshall, on the Tulsa, had to contend with the Trap. And the Trap was a big task. Each year its hungry rocks had ground up many precious logs and, at intervals, more precious lives. Always a bugaboo to Marshall, this year it had become an obsession or a nightmare. Ordered to make time through the Trap, and then refused help to accomplish the task! Marshall shook his head wearily and reached for his pipe.

IT was early the next morning, as Marshall was bent over some miscellaneous paper work, that a timid knock sounded against his door. He sighed in annoyance and looked up.

"Come in!" he growled.

Slowly the door swung back, and Henry Durfee sidled into the room, with an air not unlike that of a yellow pup who yearns to ingratiate himself, yet is in constant fear of the punishing effect of a boot.

"Well?" snapped Marshall.

"Beg pardon, sir. Hi'm 'Enery Durfee, sir, and Hi wants a job, sir—a real job on the river. Hi wasn't cut out to be a bloomin' flunky to a 'arf-carst cook. Hi carn't stand the beggar's language, sir, and that's the truth of it."

Marshall stared at the little man in amazement. Here was something without precedent. To complain about anything in a Hartlow camp was tacit admission of dissatisfaction, and in the past

it had resulted in but one thing—the kicker got his time. It was bad enough to tender a kick to one of the under or straw bosses, but to face Marshall, the big boss, with such a complaint was unthinkable.

Perhaps it was the incongruity of the thing which saved Durfee, or, again, it may have been the hint of wistfulness about his pale, apologetic eyes. Marshall dropped his gaze to the work before him.

"River work is hard, Durfee," he explained, not unkindly; "devilishly hard and dangerous. It takes men who are born and bred to the game to make good at it. You better stick to the kitchen. Don't mind Moskowite's language. He's not as bad as he sounds."

"But—but Hi came clear from Lunnon, sir, to be a riverman. Hi—Hi would like the charnce to try, sir."

"Very well," snapped Marshall, his patience short. "Go hunt up 'Big Leon.' Tell him I sent you. If you don't drown inside of an hour, you'll probably be glad to get back to Moskowite's pots and pans."

Big Leon François, Marshall's river boss, leaned on a worn peavy and listened to the cockney's message, with deceptive calm. His black eyes, deeply set and shrouded with the great tufts of his eyebrows, glinted with wicked humor. A long time he stood silent, then suddenly he broke into roaring guffaws of laughter. For the others who gathered around, wishing to share in the humor, he pointed one huge forefinger at the shrinking Durfee and explained between outbursts of laughter.

"Bien," he whooped. "Dat skinny little feller would be one river hog."

With this the laughter became general, while Durfee seemed more of a yellow pup in appearance than ever. Yet, while Big Leon and his men laughed on, a suspicious hardness set about the cockney's mouth, and he moved in closer to Leon.

"See 'ere, you big oaf," he snarled. "Hi bloomin' well didn't come down 'ere to be larfed at. Hi came down 'ere for a job. Mr. Marshall sent me—understand, Mr. Marshall!"

Big Leon sobered slightly.

"Can you ride a log—birl it? Eh, m'sieur?"

" 'Ow do Hi know when Hi ain't ever had a charnce? Hi can try, carn't Hi?"

"Of a certainty m'sieur. See—there is a stray log in dat backwater! Take my peavy, and if m'sieur can ride the log to yonder cove, then I say dat you join my band of bully boys."

DURFEE, wetting his lips with his tongue, lifted the heavy peavey. He was astonished with its weight. It was almost a job for him to carry it. With a gesture of resolution, he shouldered it and marched over to where the log jutted against the bank. Balancing on one foot, he placed the other gingerly against the rough-bark surface. With the first pressure the log rolled sluggishly, almost precipitating him into the pale depths of the water.

That water was dim and green and icy. The spring break-up was at hand. In some of the more sheltered coves ice still rimmed the shore. Out in the main channel, however, the freed waters were lashing by in foam-tipped ridges. Durfee marked their mad flight, and the fact that the backwater, in which rested his log, traveled in a continually circling movement, with the outer edge of the circle close to that icy chaos. If, by any chance, he should retain his balance on the log, and the log were sucked into the main current, his life would be extinguished like a bubble.

The cockney's face drained white at the thought. He slumped down on the bank, his head in his arms.

"Hi carn't," he muttered hopelessly. "So 'elp me, Hi carn't!"

"Oh, he 'carn't,' " mocked one of the rougher men. "The bloomin' Duke carn't ride 'em. Well, let him go back to scourin' pots for Moskie."

And Durfee went back, his wizened face hopeless and sullen. Moskowite, the burly, half-breed cook, cursed him ferociously and heaped work upon him. The cockney did not complain outwardly, but within him a rancor was storing up that boded an ill moment some time in the future for the cook, if the opportunity ever presented itself.

One day Marshall and Big Leon stood talking, when Durfee slouched past on some errand, and Marshall, for the second time since Durfee's arrival, remembered that the cockney was in his employ.

"He wanted to be a river hog," he remarked to Leon, smiling.

The big Frenchman nodded.

"I gave him his chance, m'sieur. But he lacks the courage—dat I know."

Which may, or may not, have been true. What Big Leon did not know, however, no more than did Durfee himself, was that the fight the little cockney was putting up has been mankind's oldest and most strenuous battle—the battle of heritage. There were a thousand ancestors behind Durfee, bred to the squalor of the slums of a big city and the doubtful principles occasioned by such an origin. There were ignorance and puny health rampant in his own generation. The wonder of it was, not that Durfee apparently lacked the courage to become a riverman, but that he had such a desire at all. The metallurgist has yet to appear who can manufacture gold from the baser metals.

THEN came the order for Marshall to move his camp down to Oroanoke. Half of his men he took with him. The remainder were sent upriver to where the winter's cut of logs was stacked along the river bank, awaiting the twitch of a peavy to plunge them into the hungry waters.

For Big Leon the move was one of joy. The big woodsman's home was at Oroanoke, and during the long weeks in the woods he had hungered much for the comely matron and pair of lusty youngsters who waited his return.

Durfee went with the down-river gang. He bore his cross uncomplainingly, and so self-effacing did he become, that the other men shortly paid no more attention to him, and he was spared the cutting gibes and witticisms which had been so largely his portion of late.

Left thus to himself, some small atom of confidence sprouted into being, and one day he slipped unobserved into a small general store in Oroanoke and reappeared, jealously hugging a tightly wrapped bundle.

That night, when the last pot had been scoured, and Moskowite had departed to sample the doubtful pleasures of the town, Durfee unwrapped his bundle and, in the privacy of the kitchen, tried on a brand-new pair of riverman's boots. They had high tops and were waterproof. The heavy, stiff soles bristled with calks. The cockney's shrewd, wistful eyes glistened with pride and pleasure. Here was a start!

The next day he coaxed a worn, old peavy from Scotty, who of all the men in the camp had shown him the most consideration. Then at night, his duties completed and with the white blare of the moon to light his way, Durfee sought out the still waters of the pond behind the town's old-fashioned mill, and on one or two forgotten logs undertook his novitiate.

Night after night he struggled through his thankless labors, always to come in soaked to the skin and half frozen, for he was more often in the water than out. With characteristic British tenacity, he never thought of quitting, however, and in the end, as always, persistence triumphed. This night he came home as dry of skin as he had gone forth. He had learned, to some degree at least, to ride a log!

Durfee was as a man new born. The following morning, while waiting on table, he hummed a sprightly tune and, to one or two quips thrown at him, replied in kind.

"Wonder what's come over the man?" rumbled Scotty to himself ruminatively. "The queer little devil seems almost happy."

Scotty's answer was not long in developing.

Moskowite was in a particularly devilish mood, and the roll of blasphemy and abuse from the kitchen had been almost continuous. While Scotty was lighting his pipe, the interruption came.

The cook's river of tirade rose suddenly to a point of hectic shrillness, then broke off abruptly, like a stick snapped clean in half. It was replaced almost immediately by a more placating tone and a patter

of French-Canadian patois that held a strong note of fear. Scotty, who was a sort of straw boss, poked his head through the door. There he halted—open-mouthed!

Moskowite was backed in a corner, his face a sickly gray, his hands half lifted, as though for protection. Poised before him, with an uplifted cleaver, Durfee, the cockney, was enjoying his great moment.

"Ye overgrown swab," he shrilled. "For 'arf a quid Hi'd split your bloomin' gizzard. No more of your guff—you hear me! If you ever curse me again, Hi'll bleedin' well bash your head in. Ye—ye——"

"That's enough, Durfee," broke in Scotty gruffly. "I'm not sayin' he don't deserve it, but we can't start any fighting at this stage of the game. There is action enough ahead without any time wasted on private rows. You, Moskowite, don't let me hear you cursing this man again. If you do, we'll be needin' a new cook around here. So get along, you two."

THAT afternoon Marshall had a visitor. He gasped when he caught sight of the newcomer, and, if the truth be known, probably cursed to himself. His feeling did not show in his greeting, however.

"Glad to see you, Dunlop," he said, with outstretched hand. "It's somewhat of a surprise to see you up here at this time."

Dunlop, a large, aggressive, self-opinionated sort of an individual, with a thin, merciless mouth, smiled icily.

"No doubt. The drive is about to start, isn't it?"

"About four days yet. The water is in good shape, but I've a crew of men working in the Trap, doing what is possible to clear up the channel. A single jam will defeat us, and I want to do everything possible to stave it off."

Dunlop shook his head.

"Not so good, Marshall—not so good," he stated brutally. "All wasted effort. We've had a jam at the Trap every year so far, haven't we?"

"Yes."

"What made you think this year might prove an exception?"

Marshall flushed.

"Nothing; only——"

"Just taking a thousand-to-one shot, is that it? Marshall, let me tell you something. Successful business is not founded on thousand-to-one shots. I've made arrangements with the mills to handle our drive on a date which renders it imperative that the logs be there before Ryan's. Plainly your method of handling the timber bears small promise of getting it there on time. I was afraid of such a contingency, so I thought I'd run up."

"Of course, if you have some better plan to offer, why——"

Marshall finished his remark with a shrug. His anger was rising.

"Yes," answered Dunlop, "I have a better plan to offer. We will get to work on it immediately."

An hour later Dunlop stood at Marshall's desk and traced queer diagrams on a blue print for the edification of Marshall, Scotty, and Big Leon.

"You all are familiar with the physical characteristics of the Trap. It would require six months and a good many thousand dollars to clear the channel at that point. But here, at the third curve above, we have the head of Caribou Gulch. By actual measurements, furnished me by a field man whom I have had looking over the project, only eighteen feet of the dirt and rubble, together with a central supporting spine of granite, some three or four feet thick, keeps the water of the Tulsa from flowing down Caribou Gulch into the main channel again below the Trap.

"Now, then," and he paused to give his announcement more weight, "what I intend to do is to throw a chain boom across the Tulsa, just below the head of Caribou Gulch. Marshall tells me the drive is due to start in four days. It will take a day and a half, possibly two days, before the first logs arrive. That gives us practically six days to work in. By that time we should have the head of the gulch cleared away to such an extent that several big shots of dynamite will give us a new channel. The chain boom will back the logs up and raise the

water level to some extent, all of which should aid us. How does it sound?"

"Good," said Marshall crisply. "Providing the excavation goes through as per schedule."

"It will. We'll use plenty of dynamite."

"*Sacre!*" muttered Big Leon. "Dat Caribou Gulch—she be one piece of fast water."

Scotty, sucking on a stubby, black brier, nodded slowly.

"'Tis a sound idea and well worth trying."

"Very well," stated Dunlop, gathering up his map and notes, "let us get to work."

WITHIN the short space of an hour Caribou Gulch had become a veritable beehive for activity.

On both sides of the wedge of rock and dirt at the head of the gulch, men flocked like ants, burrowing feverishly into the surfaces. Another crew were at work cutting logs and chaining them together in a long line up the bank. When this line was long enough, its upper end was towed out far enough for the current to catch it, and thus it was swung across the river. Then its ends were anchored tight with heavy cables and chains.

Down in the gulch still another crew were at work felling and clearing out the few trees that grew within its confines. Within twenty-four hours surprising progress had been made, and even Marshall, the doubtful, had to admit that the plan bore evidence of success.

For Durfee the period was one of nightmare activity. The men, working in shifts and under pressure, consumed prodigious amounts of food, and the big range in the cook shanty was never cool. Sleep became almost foreign to the little cockney, yet he found time to enjoy it all. The spirit of the undertaking had gripped him, and the same hidden flame that had driven him from the slums of London in search of mighty adventure, reacted magically to the fight.

And no longer was Moskowite the driving force in the kitchen. Surly under the overwork, the half-breed had several times threatened to quit. It was Durfee who kept him at his task. Curses, cajolery, threats—all of them the cockney used—and one way or another he managed to keep the men fed.

Day and night he was among them, carrying huge loads of bread and meat and equally huge pots of scalding coffee. The men noticed his spirit and muttered in approval. Marshall also noticed and marked it with approbation. Even Big Leon found time to lean on his ax for a moment and voice profanely his mistake in his estimation of the cockney's qualities.

"By gar," he snorted, wiping his dripping brow with one huge hand. "Dat leetle feller—he all right. He work as hard as any of us. Me—I'm sorry I laugh at him dat day."

Somehow Leon's words got to Durfee. After that Leon became more or less of a divinity to the cockney. Leon's family lived in a cabin perched on a high point above the gulch, and Durfee marked often the serene, buxom mother and the two black-eyed youngsters playing about the place, and he felt a queer ache within him at the sight of the scene. He wondered vaguely if some day such a home as this might be his.

The undertaking of Marshall and his men had stirred up considerable interest in the town of Oroanoke. Daily there were crowds of spectators on the scene, and bets on the outcome of the project were not infrequent. The toiling men were dirty, bearded, and half drugged with insufficient sleep, yet, to their credit, Moskowite was the only one who spoke of quitting, and even he was being held to his task by the remorseless little Durfee.

The days slid by. The log boom was complete and in place. The course of the gulch clear of trees and underbrush. Here and there a stump jutted up somewhat, but not enough seriously to impede the course of the waters nor the logs they were to carry.

The excavation work had progressed to such an extent that only the backbone of rock remained between the placid slopes of Caribou Gulch and the hungry waters of the Tulsa. Now this face was being drilled cunningly, and box after

box of greasy, brown, paper-colored cylinders were being carefully packed into the holes.

One evening, just as the first shadows of night came creeping out of the isles of the forest, the task was done. Dunlop waved his men to the kitchen and bunk houses, then turned to Marshall triumphantly.

"It's done!" he ejaculated with satisfaction.

Marshall nodded.

"A good job."

"As soon as the logs arrive we'll blow it. The logs, backing up against the boom, will give us a good head of water, and the men will be able to shunt them into the new channel easily. As the water piles up high enough, most of the logs will move themselves. Marshall, we've beaten the Trap!"

THE following morning Durfee was the first man awake. His tasks about the cookhouse made his early rising necessary. As he stumbled, still half asleep, from the bunk house, he recognized a new note in the roaring of the river. Curiously he traced the sound and on the river's edge halted in wonder. In the half light of the dawn he saw them—logs! Thousands of them! From bank to bank they stretched, great burly fellows, their gray, serrated backs not unlike huge saurians.

Against the boom they had piled, rearing in stark, tangled ferocity, and the water, backing up against the tangle, was rising. Against this new obstacle the river raged, explaining the foreign note which had first attracted Durfee.

The cockney raced back to Marshall's cabin, where Dunlop had made his headquarters since arriving at the camp. Here he beat excitedly on the door.

"The logs—the logs!" he shrilled. "They're 'ere—they're 'ere!"

Dunlop stuck a tousled head from the door.

"What's this—what's this?" he demanded testily. "Why the row at this time of morning?"

"They're 'ere, sir," repeated Durfee, somewhat abashed. "The logs is 'ere."

Dunlop brushing the cobwebs of sleep from his brain, suddenly comprehended. His eyes lighted.

"The logs, you say?"

"Yes, sir," nodded Durfee eagerly. "Millions of the bloomin' brutes!"

"Get 'em up," snapped Dunlop in quick decision. "Get everybody up. We've got to open the new channel before the pressure on that boom gets too great. Fast now!"

Broad daylight found them ready. Scotty and Big Leon, down before the face of the excavation, gripped a handful of fuse ends and waved torches of pitch pine to flame. Word had spread to the town, and knots of spectators were grouped at safe distances from flying fragments. Booted rivermen, peavy in hand, swarmed over the face of the jam. Dunlop waved the others back. Cupping his hands he shouted the signal.

Scotty and Big Leon bent to their task. Fuses began to sputter, and a cloud of white smoke crawled sluggishly up the face of the drift.

Swiftly the two men worked, crouching over one fuse, then leaping to another and yet another. As the smoke thickened, the pair of them seemed like gigantic gnomes playing some strange game.

Dunlop waited, watch in hand.

"They should be through," he remarked anxiously.

He looked up in relief, as a shout of applause swept over the watchers. Scotty, still smoking serenely, climbed up the crest of the bank, and at his heels came Leon, his black eyes snapping with excitement.

"*Sacre!* She's all lit!" panted the latter. "In one minute she's hell of a noise. And then we know if she's turn dat trick."

A deep, pregnant silence settled down. People were holding their breath in tension. Dunlop, his head bent, counted the ticks of his watch.

"A matter of seconds now," he muttered. "The fuses were timed carefully."

Then Durfee, the cockney, lurched to his feet from where he was crouching to avoid the impact of the blast and started in a stumbling run down the newly cleared sweep of the gulch.

"The nippers!" he shrieked over his shoulder. "My Gawd!—the nippers!"

There was a stump down in the gulch, a stump large in diameter, with a smooth, flat surface that had proven especially inviting for several days to Big Leon's two youngsters. Seizing upon this opportunity, when the usually watchful eye of their mother was anxiously bent upon the broad back of her man, as he played with his torch across the face of the dynamited wall, they had scuttled joyously down to the spot of allurement and now stood, chortling gleefully, upon the broad surface.

Durfee did not know why he was racing down there. He knew, as he started, that he would be too late to avert this mocking tragedy. Seconds—and seconds only—marked the space of time before a wall of raging water would be thundering down the gulch, to sweep everything in its path to destruction. Yet something drove him on—forced him down to where his own life could not help but be the forfeit.

Behind him he heard the shrill scream of a despairing mother—the great rumble of Big Leon. Then a blast of air buffeted him. Another—another! The thunder of explosions deafened him. It was like the steady roll of gigantic cannon. And a new note came to him, the snarl of the released river beast. He chanced a single backward glance. The head of the gulch was a wedge of speeding, foam-crested water. He screamed aloud, stark terror in his voice. But he kept his way unfalteringly.

He reached the stump and was upon it, the youngsters in his arms. Then, with a gasping prayer, he turned and faced the onrushing doom.

The first lip of the water passed him, hissing with terrific speed. Swiftly it mounted until the stump was buried, and the water was foaming about his knees. A log shot by him; then another, half tumbling, crashed against the stump.

A dim moment it seemed to pause, whirling, and Durfee, the cockney, saw in it the hand of a merciful God. Swiftly he leaped, the keen, polished spikes of his boots biting deep into the heavy bark. Then began the greatest ride of white water ever seen upon the Tulsa.

One moment in water half to his waist, the next riding high on the back of the leaping log, Durfee turned sick with the speed and turmoil. Unconscious almost of the two small bundles of terror he clasped against him, he fought the whirl of his treacherous craft and somehow retained his balance.

Such an inferno could not last long. Abruptly Durfee found his speed decreasing—found the log easier to ride. He had cleared the mouth of the gulch and was riding in a swiftly circling backwater formed by the convergence of the new waterway with the parent stream.

Then it was Big Leon who waded to his shoulders and swept Durfee, with his precious freight, clear in one great armful, and it was Big Leon who blubbered openly, as he handed the now wailing youngsters into the arms of their frantic mother.

Unashamed of the tears on his great, bearded face, he hugged Durfee to him until the little cockney's ribs cracked under the pressure.

"*Bien,*" he growled, facing the crowd of men who were fighting for a grip at Durfee's hand. "He's one man—dat little feller. He's greatest river hog in all dat North countree. I, Big Leon, say it!"

Durfee, white of face and shaken, grinned up at him happily.

"That being the case, ye big brute, let's go and move those bloomin' logs!"

INDIANS NOT PROFANE

IF the modern Indian is given to profanity, it is but one more vice he has learned from his white conqueror. According to James Smith, an early Ohio pioneer, who was held a prisoner among them for many years, the Indians of Ohio frowned upon the profanity common among the traders and other whites who were the first to come in close contact with the Indians.

Old But Not Feeble

By Frederick C. Davis

Old Walt Ames, meteorological scout up in the Great Divide country, was getting beyond his time. By all the regulations, he should have been laid off long ago. Perhaps, though, he was retained for a reason.

TO a few men, a few of those who spend to-day foretelling what to-morrow's weather will be, the United States is not composed of forty-eight States, but of two parts. The line which separates these parts is not one which was decided on by statesmen and laid out by surveyors; it was put down by God. Generally speaking, it extends north and south, reaches beyond the Canadian and Mexican borders, and consists of ranges, peaks, crags, and spurs in cosmic confusion. It is called the Great Continental Divide, and it is brushed by the winds which blow between the worlds. The water which streams off it is of vital importance to the lowland farmers and the "hill-billy punchers;" they talk of the Divide as so much territory "stood up on edge," and they regard it as a giver of life.

Men are hired by the department of meteorology of the United States government to observe the moods of the elements over the Divide. One of these men is Walt Ames. Though, to be sure, Walt was once young, his very name sounds old, and actually he is aged. He has, as a matter of fact, no business to be watching the weather at all, for he is past the age limit. He should get out of the service and let a younger man take his place. Not because Walt Ames is incompetent; on the contrary, he is one of the keenest observers ever listed in the service; but the regulations stipulate that he is too old, and the regulations, if they are to exist at all, ought to be enforced. The fact that Walt Ames is still measuring the snow, up in his little hut, fifteen miles from a town in Colorado, is not, however, his fault, really, but something ought to be done about it. If Walt is not relieved, he'll finally die on the job, and if some one else isn't ready to take up his duties, nobody knows what will become of the station.

You would have great difficulty finding

the station. A single unworn road leads up to it, a road covered by snow almost all the year and indistinguishable. A pair of telegraph wires, which Walt himself helped string up, lead to it from town, and you might find the station by following these, but that would entail a hazardous climb over ice-covered ridges. It is a very small hut, scarcely twelve feet square, perched on the mountainside, and Walt is there all alone. Mail comes once a week, or sometimes less often, to a box two miles down the ridge. One day Walt snowshoed down to the mail box and found a letter from headquarters, saying that, in accordance with "28, Statute L, 727, 736," a man named John Lester would be along soon to assume the duties of the station.

Walt Ames climbed to his hut again, watched the clouds skimming over the Divide, and remade the log fire in the stone fireplace. He pulled off his sheepskin and his top sweater and sat down to reread the letter. He disliked these letters. Even though he was over age and needed work no longer in the service, he had no desire to leave it. He had no wife, of course, and no relatives that knew of him, and not even a dog at the time, and he wanted to hold to the work because it was all in the world he had. A man who has only one interest in life doesn't want to sacrifice that. Regulations and rules and others' opinions notwithstanding, Walt Ames wanted to stay where he was. The John Lester who was due, however, was coming to take his place away from him. To judge from the letter, Lester ought to be right along now, too. He'd have to be brought, of course, in a two-runner.

While he waited, Walt Ames read the only book he had in the hut. There were magazines about, which had collected through the years, with covers torn off and pages missing, but Walt liked the book best of all. It had been left there by a man who had a literary turn and wrote essays and it was, oddly enough, a book of synonyms. Walt read the words of like sense under any given head and ruminated long on the fine shades of their meanings. A day after the letter, John Lester arrived.

Walt heard the tinkling of the horse's bells, and he opened the door to look out, for the window was completely covered by snow. The horse and the two-runner came into view below, and the driver hallowed up. Beside the driver, bundled in a long, new sheepskin, was another man, whose eyes blinked from beneath his cap, which had become covered with hoar from his moist breath. The pair struggled up to the hut, and Walt welcomed them warmly.

AS he put a pot of coffee in the fireplace, Walt studied the newcomer. Lester was a young man of about twenty-four, with a hatchet face and girlish lips, and a worried set of his eyebrows. He was plainly puzzled and disconcerted by the isolation of the hut, and his first question was to know if this was the station. On being assured that it was, his eyebrows set still lower, and he heaved his shoulders in resignment. The three of them had their coffee, and Walt bid good-by to the man from the ranch below. So he was left alone with Lester, and so began their days together.

Walt explained that he would teach the newcomer all he knew about the winds and the clouds and the snows.

"That's about all you've got up here —winds and clouds and snow—isn't it?" Lester asked.

"Sometimes we have sleet," said Walt amiably.

"Exciting variety!" the young man commented sarcastically. "What is there to do around here?"

"Use the gauge and telegraph the reports, information, messages, data in," said Walt, showing the effect of the book of synonyms on his speech.

"Any movies close to here?" Lester asked.

"Reckon there must be one somewhere around—within a hundred miles—don't know—couldn't say," answered Walt. "Where you from? What's your last station?"

"San Antonio. I didn't know this wasn't a regular station."

"All's done here, son, is measure the snow. The rest of the regular work, the routine duties, the usual run of observa-

tions, is taken care of, handled, over at Wagon Wheel Gap."

"I don't see any chances of excitement around here," Lester complained.

Walt pointed to the general westward. "Over there is the breedin' ground of most of the hell-twistin' storms of the Rockies," he said. "That ought to be excitin' enough for you. Anyways, you've come to take the place of a man who was killed on the job. Ain't that givin' you any excitement, thrill, anticipation?"

"What you mean—take the place of a man who was killed on the job?" Lester demanded quickly. "Who was that? What happened to him?"

"Man name Holmes," Walt answered. "Man name Holmes. He come to relieve me. He was goin' from A to B when a snowslide caught him. At least, it must 'a', 'cause there came a slide, and Holmes didn't show up again. Dunno. Never found him."

"Damnation!" Lester exclaimed.

"I reckoned that'd give you somethin' to ponder, think, ruminate about." Walt smiled.

Lester heaved a great sigh. "Well, I'm in for it, I see, but I don't care. There's no place to spend money around here, and so I'll be able to save one hundred per cent of my pay. That'll count up in no time. Then I can count on bein' transferred some place back to civilization, and I'll have enough to get married on and settle down. I'm engaged."

"Congratulations," said Walt, without much zest, and added under his breath —"Felicitations, good wishes."

He could not interest Lester in the book of synonyms. Lester had read all the tattered magazines and rebelled at reading them a second time, and he ached for something to do. But he was at a loss to find an interest in words, as Walt did.

"Take the word 'save,' since you're wantin' to save," Walt said, the thesaurus on his knee like a Bible. "Save is a little diff'rent from accumulate. You can accumulate without savin'. And it's a little diff'rent from keep. You can keep without savin', too, and you can save without keepin'."

"What do I care?" Lester retorted.

Walt gave it up and turned to the weather, their business, for a topic. He took up a recent map which was covered by his broad marks.

"The 'mometer says it's gettin' colder," he stated. "Well, you notice, now, these lows. They're pretty well marked." His information of conditions at distant points came to him over his telegraph. "These lows is movin' eastward. Well, there's distinct, well-marked highs movin' to the northward at the same time. Know what that means?"

"Snow," said Lester.

"That's right," Walt approved. "But it's going to get colder—lots colder. Those northerly winds are pretty high. And the map says that there's a high temperature over the Gulf. Know what that means—designates—indicates?"

"Heavy snow," Lester said.

"Sleet," corrected Walt and went on: "And the barometer has been 'fallin' fast."

"Barometric gradient steep," paraphrased Lester, mimicking the old man.

"Yep. Know what that means?"

"More sleet."

"Worse 'n that. A norther."

"Blizzard?"

"Listen."

ON the roof of the hut, which was kept clean by the winds, could be heard a faint sound like the crinkling of tissue paper.

"That's the first of it," said Walt.

When he opened the door a gust of icy air rushed in and fluttered the flames in the fireplace. Already snow was falling thickly, and the flakes were intermixed with sleet. Evening was beginning to come, and over the broad vista of mountains beyond a purpleness was settling. The winds were rising and howling through the crags below. Walt Ames closed the door and noticed that Lester was shivering.

"Day after to-morra," he said, "we'll go down to A."

"Where's that—and what?"

"A's another hut, down the mountain. We get a different reading of snow down there. The snow up here is blown a bit and packed by the winds, and its water

content is above normal. Down there it settles naturally, and it's about right. Down in the woods, where B is, for instance, it's lots lighter, finer, because of the shelter of the trees. I make the rounds every week. It takes about four days to do it. Two days at A and two days at B."

When seven o'clock was well past, the old man scampered out and came back, carrying a tin can containing a measure of snow and sleet. He placed it by the fireplace, allowed the snow to melt, and read the height of the water. He telegraphed the result to town, over his tarnished instrument.

"How long you been here?" Lester asked curiously.

"Seven year," said Walt.

"Good Lord! Seven years, here, alone? Where were you before you got sentenced to this place?"

"All over the States—a dozen different stations. I like this one best. It gives me time to think about things, mull 'em over, wonder about 'em."

"Too bad," said Lester, "your day is done. You must be sour on the world. Give all your life to the service and get next to nothing out of it when you're through. Pushed out of place by a younger man who knows less about it."

"Well!" was all Walt said. "Well!"

Lester, when he wasn't eating or listening to Walt's instructions, slept. The whine of the wind outside increased steadily, and the sleet gave way to a lighter snow which covered the hardened crust. On the morning of the second day after, Walt bundled himself up and filled a pack with canned stuff and strapped it on. He made sure of his matches, also. Lester got into his long coat. Then the two started out and put on their snowshoes.

Almost immediately Lester, being unaccustomed to the shoes, stumbled and went sliding in a cloud of snow dust on the coaming, a hundred yards down the slope. Walt's huge guffaws followed him. Lester said nothing. Walt could see him thinking: "What you laughing about? If you'd taken that fall you'd be plumb dead now, you old mummy."

The snow driving in their faces, they went down steep descents and along the edges of dangerous crags. Walt led, and Lester followed. They tramped for several hours. The white-covered mounds of the mountains loomed above them, as they drew to a halt.

"Rest?" asked Lester through his muffler, seizing an opportunity to demonstrate his superior strength.

"This is A," said Walt, indicating a heap of snow.

HE trudged to the mound and, with sweepings of his arms, dislodged the snow and crust from the roof of the hut. Then he tugged on a ring and opened a door upward, disclosing a bare room below. He jumped in and Lester climbed gingerly down.

"We stay in this place two days?" Lester snorted, staring.

Hut A had no windows. It consisted of four bare wooden walls and a single bunk—nothing more.

"How about a fire?" Lester demanded, noting the lack of a fireplace.

"Snow'll keep us warm," Walt said, shedding his pack. While Lester sat on a bunk, he ripped the top off a can of beans and handed it, with a tarnished spoon, to the young man.

"Lord, how can we stay in this hole like rabbits for two days?"

"You can stand it," Walt answered. "You're young." He added: "B is a little smaller."

Walt climbed through the roof, leaving the door open. Lester could see him pulling a long, graduated pole up from the snow near the corner of the hut. Walt read the depth and returned it to its place.

"More 'n nine feet," he said.

Then he brought in a rain gauge and melted its contents over a small alcohol lamp. The time spent in the hut seemed interminable to Lester, who soon exhausted his supply of talk and took to staring at the four walls. Walt was content to be silent. They ate beans and crackers. They slept, both in the narrow bunk. After years had passed, it seemed, Walt took readings of the depth of the snow and its water content again. Then he bundled himself up and ex-

plained to Lester that they would now proceed to B.

They set out as before, Ames leading and Lester in the rear, struggling with his snowshoes. Walt, after they had trudged for an hour, abruptly brought himself to a stop. He signaled Lester to listen. A low musical note was singing through the air, sad and moaning, but rising and falling in a smooth cadence.

"What's that?" Lester asked.

"Snow groanin'," Walt answered. "It's the world, still bein' made."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the world ain't finished yet," Walt explained. "God ain't done with it yet. Think of all them peaks around us, all the snow on 'em, 'way, far up from the ground below. What's keepin' 'em up? Every single minute, while we're wakin' and sleepin', the pull of gravity is workin' on 'em. It don't let up for a minute. All those mountains, now—gravity is pullin' at 'em, attractin' 'em, tryin' to get 'em down. And sometimes it does get 'em down. It pulls hard enough, and the mountain comes down."

"What're you talkin' about?" Lester scoffed.

"You know it as well as I do, son," Walt persisted. "The mountain finally comes down. Not all at once, but a little at a time—slides. When the day comes when you and I are long forgot, and maybe even the race of man is forgot, too, those mountains won't be there any more, and the Divide'll be smooth like a plain, and the world will be nearer done, finished, more complete than it is now."

He paused and lifted his hand again, as a signal to listen to the continuing musical note in the air.

. "Th' snow is bein' pulled, too," he added. "Every minute it's bein' pulled."

He had no more to say and went on. The tone in the air, the strange, ghostly crescendo continued, sometimes rising like a wail and again falling to a low moan, but never entirely disappearing. Whenever Lester stopped to listen, thinking it had vanished, he could still discern its soft continuance. He stumbled several times and fell because his attention was gone from his feet to the tone, and Walt, at these times, pretended not to notice Lester's confusion and awkwardness.

They were progressing slowly under the frowning brow of a peak, when Walt stopped and pointed to something below. Lester looked and saw a small sphere of snow rolling smoothly down the slope. Its nucleus was probably a bit of ice started tumbling by the wind. The white ball gathered momentum and speed, whirling silently, until it struck a flat-faced ledge and burst with a dulled thud. Walt, without speaking, went on.

They sloshed along for half an hour longer, with Lester falling slightly more in the rear. Walt kept eying the plane of the peak above him, as the musical note began to maintain a place higher in the scale. He paused again, alertly peering upward, shading his eyes. Lester looked in the same direction, but he no sooner had turned his head than a shout from Walt startled him.

"Quick! Run! Run!"

Seeing Walt hustling on at an alarming speed, Lester began to follow as fast as he could throw one cumbersome shoe in front of the other. He fell, struggled up, ran on. He glanced upward and saw that the white side of the mountain was moving. It could plainly be seen; the mountainside was humping up, like the back of a frightened white cat. This was happening somewhat to the rear of Lester; he understood vaguely that the snow of the mountainside, unable longer to support its own immense weight, had begun to avalanche, and that its gathering sweep might catch them if they did not hurry out of its path. Even as Lester watched, the white mass began to swell the roar, and an arm of it began to reach out straight for him. He propelled himself forward at a crazy speed, with the voice of Walt bellowing in his ears.

Deflected by a ridge of rock, which acted like a buffer and a guide, the pouring mass of snow turned slightly to the rear of Lester at a moment when it seemed inevitable that it should engulf him. He ran on desperately. Because he looked at the slide and not at his path, he stumbled and wavered wildly. He saw the flood of white begin to wash over the reflecting ledge, and he realized

that this rock had served to delay the edge of the avalanche slightly, but not, after all, to divert it.

Walt was a good distance beyond Lester when he turned and saw the younger man racing with the slide. Its thick edge was shooting straight down, and Lester's progress was too slow for any hope of his escaping it entirely. Ames shouted again, but, realizing the futility of warnings, turned back and raced toward Lester. As he reached the younger man, a huge wave of snow splashed upward, blotting out the sky, and covered them. Flinging his arms around Lester's waist, while swirling flakes thickened the air, Walt pulled him wildly aside and struck him down into the snow under a sheltering boulder, wind-cleaned and vertical-faced. As they thumped against the rock, the slide poured over them—tons of rushing whiteness mixed with jagged rocks. They vanished—completely vanished.

SEVERAL weeks later the two-runner driver from the ranch below came up to Walt Ames' hut in answer to a message relayed by phone from the telegraph station in town. Walt's shoulder was bandaged tightly, but he assisted the driver to load John Lester onto a makeshift litter, stretched across the back seat. Lester's broken legs had set sufficiently that he might be moved, and, since he had written in his resignation to headquarters, effective immediately, he wanted to get back to civilization as quickly as possible.

The news of the accident had filtered through Walt's telegraph some two weeks before, and so Walt did not need to relate again how he had dug himself out of the snow, which the edge of the avalanche had thrown over them in passing, and how, after getting Lester back to the hut, he had set both the young man's legs and his own shoulder. Their injuries had been caused by falling rocks in the snow.

Lester's leave-taking gave signs of being an entirely wordless affair until the driver observed laconically:

"Lucky it didn't kill him, like the last one!"

Walt said nothing.

"When do you suppose the next one will be along?"

"Oh," said Walt, "before long, soon, shortly."

"He's the fifth one, ain't he?"

"Seventh," said Walt Ames softly.

Walt is still measuring the snow in the little hut fifteen miles from the town. He has no business at all to be there, watching the weather. The regulations say he is too old, and the regulations, if they are to exist at all, ought to be uniformly enforced. If Walt Ames is not relieved he'll finally die on the job, and if some one else isn't ready then to take up his duties, nobody knows what will become of the station.

HOMEMADE CURRENT

THE department of agriculture has been experimenting with home-brewed electricity. Observation shows that the wind blows more or less frequently in the Great Plains region of the West. At present this wind is apparently blowing to no purpose beyond occasionally blowing out the kerosene lamps in some remote farmhouse. Reasoning from cause to effect, the department decided that the abandoned windmill could be revived, or in regions where this machine has too much water to pump, a wind motor could be set up. Either of these, it has been found, will charge storage batteries and provide enough current to electrify the farm.

Experiments show that a minimum of ten miles an hour is necessary in order to charge the batteries. This rate is not required to be continuous; all that is required is about five hours' charging power every two or three days.

The comparative cost between the home-brewed and company power has not been estimated, but there must be thousands of remote farmhouses where this method of procuring electricity would prove a boon.

A Chat With You

A HEADLINE in a recent paper announces the fact that were Mr. Henry Ford to take his entire fortune and lend it out at five per cent, the income derived therefrom would be seventy-five million a year. Now, five per cent is not an exorbitant rate of interest. One might say that one could get good security for the principal at that rate. Many widows, advised by the most conservative of lawyers, are deriving that income from first mortgages on real property or on gilt-edged bonds.

Yet think what an income it is! Seventy-five millions a year would amount, according to our figuring, to almost a million and a half a week, since there are fifty-two weeks in the year. Of course there are the income taxes, the fees to lawyers and accountants who handle so great an estate. These all cut into the gross and make the net smaller. But, even so, there ought to be coming to Mr. Ford something like seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars every Saturday night.

* * * *

THERE is the tale of the longshoreman, used to poverty and plain but hearty meals, who was taken by some misguided philanthropist into an extremely fashionable and expensive restaurant.

He scanned the bill of fare looking for some familiar item. There was the good old stand-by, corned beef and cabbage. But opposite were the figures $2.50.

"No," said the longshoreman, "that's too big a portion. There isn't a man living who can eat that much worth of corned beef and cabbage at one sitting."

We have a similar feeling that there is not a man living who can spend seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars a week and keep it up as a steady diet. Mr. Ford being a man of simple, almost ascetic habits, may well get by for his own, personal expenses with less money a year than many a gilded youth spends at college. He must, of course, have a force of competent secretaries to answer the begging letters, and the letters from salesmen of wildcat propositions which come in to him. But that is only a drop in the bucket. The money keeps coming in so fast that he can't possibly keep it down to a tolerable level. His investments are sound ones. And each investment must so bring him in new riches. The snowball has grown so great that now it increases by leaps and bounds, and, do what he will, the owner of it cannot keep it down to moderate, or even tolerable, proportions.

* * * *

WE know that there must be something wrong about this. Not morally or ethically wrong, but wrong in the sense that it is illogical and unreasonable. Were it to keep on for many years, Mr. Ford would one day own all the wealth of the world. And we know he won't. It can't happen any more than water can flow uphill, though we cannot prove it with figures on a sheet of paper. Furthermore, Mr. Ford doesn't want it to happen. He has no Napoleonic delusions about rising to be ruler of the world. He is contented to splurge now and then in the way of buying an old wayside inn and restoring it to the pleasant condition it was in the days of our forefathers. He started life as a mechanic. He has the shrewd and homely virtues, peculiarly American, that altered the whole social life of the world through invention, mechanical ingenuity, mass production, and a democratic view of things.

* * * *

FORD, Edison, Westinghouse, as well as the inventors of the marvelous agricultural machinery that the United States has given to the world, have set

in play other forces beside the material ones. Just as Columbus did, they have opened out a new continent full of riches. They have made life easier and pleasanter, they have made the hours of work shorter, and the hours of pleasure longer. This is a splendid thing and good, but like every good it casts its shadow. It is easier for the criminal with the modern automatic and the modern car to commit his depredations. It is easier for the waster to do nothing but harm with the money that careful and self-denying generations have accumulated. It is easier for the dispenser of intellectual and moral poison to find fresh customers, released suddenly from hard toil and the pressure of want, without the discipline and knowledge only acquired through hard education, and ready for any fresh sensation.

* * * *

WE have crime waves; we have plays that in their implications would have been beyond the most terrified imagination of a generation ago; we have books and magazines that go the limit and then some.

There is no time that we can think of when any one offering reading matter to the public has a greater responsibility than at present.

Kipling wrote a poem to the effect that "the copy book maxims" are always true in the long run. He meant the sayings to the effect that honesty is the best policy and other things like that. This is the time to remember them. Remembering them is not enough. They must be lived. Every man to have any kind of a successful life must have some personal ideal. Fiction, at its best, gives that ideal. Boys like to read about men, and men like to read about heroes. That is to say, they like to read about the sort of men they would like to be at their best.

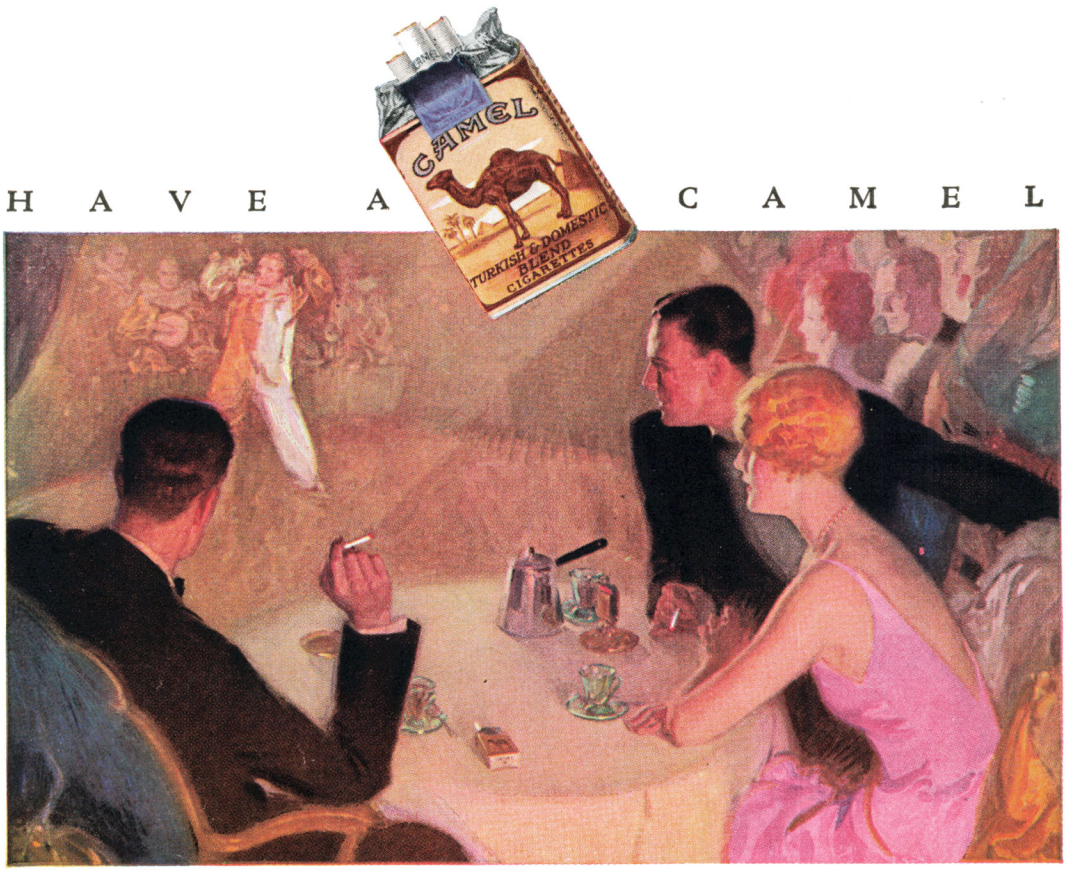
We are trying to give you in this magazine, first of all, interest and entertainment, but beside that, straightforwardness, decency, and now and then a picture of that heroism and self-sacrifice that stir the heart.

The Popular Magazine

In the Next Number, March 20, 1927

So Sailed We	HOLMAN DAY
Blood Atonement	PATRICK and TERRENCE CASEY
The Wooden-legged Mule	ERNEST DOUGLAS
The Broadening Trail A Five-part Serial—Part I	DON McGREW
Anything to Oblige	LAURIE YORK ERSKINE
Leguerre of the Lost Division A Message to Don Miguel	HOWARD FITZALAN
Inclosed Please Find $500,000	ROY W. HINDS
Mr. Kelly's Corpus	ROBERT McBLAIR
The Jawbone of an Ass	JOHN D. SWAIN

H A V E A C A M E L



Camels add to the joy of living

SMOKING is one of the keen pleasures of life.

The choice of a cigarette deserves your most careful judgment because it determines the degree of enjoyment you will have.

Camels welcome comparison on every count. Compare their goodness in every way. Each successive Camel brings a fresh pleasure no matter how constantly you smoke.

Such mellow mildness can come only from the world's choicest tobaccos, supremely blended, with the sole purpose of giving you, the smoker, a cigarette which you can enjoy to the fullest.

The verdict of the experienced smoker is—

"Have a Camel!"

R. J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO COMPANY, WINSTON-SALEM, N. C.

© 1927

Thousands of Doctors Recommend it

because . . . . it is quick

because . . . . it is efficient

because . . . . its tremendous tonic power has been amply demonstrated by hundreds of scientific tests at the hands of experts

because . . . doctors know the high value of its organic iron and manganese in this ideal form

because . . . they know it will not disturb the weakest stomach in young or old

Your friends may suggest trying this or that tonic. You do not know the ingredients or whether or not they may upset your entire system.

But your doctor KNOWS. When he prescribes Gude's Pepto-Mangan, you can have every confidence that it is the very best tonic made.

For physicians are the most careful and skeptical persons on this earth. They must know not only ingredients but in what proportions. They insist on numerous scientific tests by experts.

This conscientious care is of vital importance to YOU. When you know that Gude's Pepto-Mangan is ONE tonic that has been prescribed by thousands of the best doctors for over 34 years, there can be no question in your mind of its prompt and undoubted tonic power.

Its quickness and efficiency have been abundantly demonstrated by hundreds of carefully conducted blood tests at the hands of experts. And here are a few examples of what well-known physicians have written us:—

What Doctors Write

"I have used Gude's Pepto-Mangan (liquid) for about 25 years and I have recommended it professionally to scores of people in need of a good tonic, with very gratifying results."

"I have long known of Gude's Pepto-Mangan and have prescribed it for a number of years. An excellent tonic."

"The results obtained with Gude's Pepto-Mangan are very good and I highly recommend it."

So if you need a good tonic, prescribe Gude's Pepto-Mangan for yourself with full confidence that there is no better made. You can get Gude's Pepto-Mangan in either liquid or tablet form at all druggists.

Trial Package FREE

Mail the coupon and we will gladly send you a generous package of Gude's Pepto-Mangan tablets entirely free. Send today to Gude's Pepto-Mangan, Dept. 145, 51 Warren St., N. Y. City.

GUDE'S PEPTO-MANGAN
Dept. 145, 51 Warren St.
New York

Send me, free of all charges, sample package of GUDE'S PEPTO-MANGAN TABLETS.

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

Gude's Pepto-Mangan

Prescribed by Physicians for 34 Years

WARNING—THERE IS ONLY ONE PEPTO-MANGAN, THAT IS GUDE'S PEPTO-MANGAN

Broadcasting calls for intense concentration and I find I am more comfortable and "at home" when enjoying a cigarette. I am fully convinced that there is nothing injurious to the voice in doing this—otherwise I wouldn't do it —and I find the height of smoking enjoyment in Lucky Strikes.

J. Andrew White

"This is WJZ"—A Voice Millions Hear

Clear, resonant, appealing, J. Andrew White's voice is constantly safeguarded

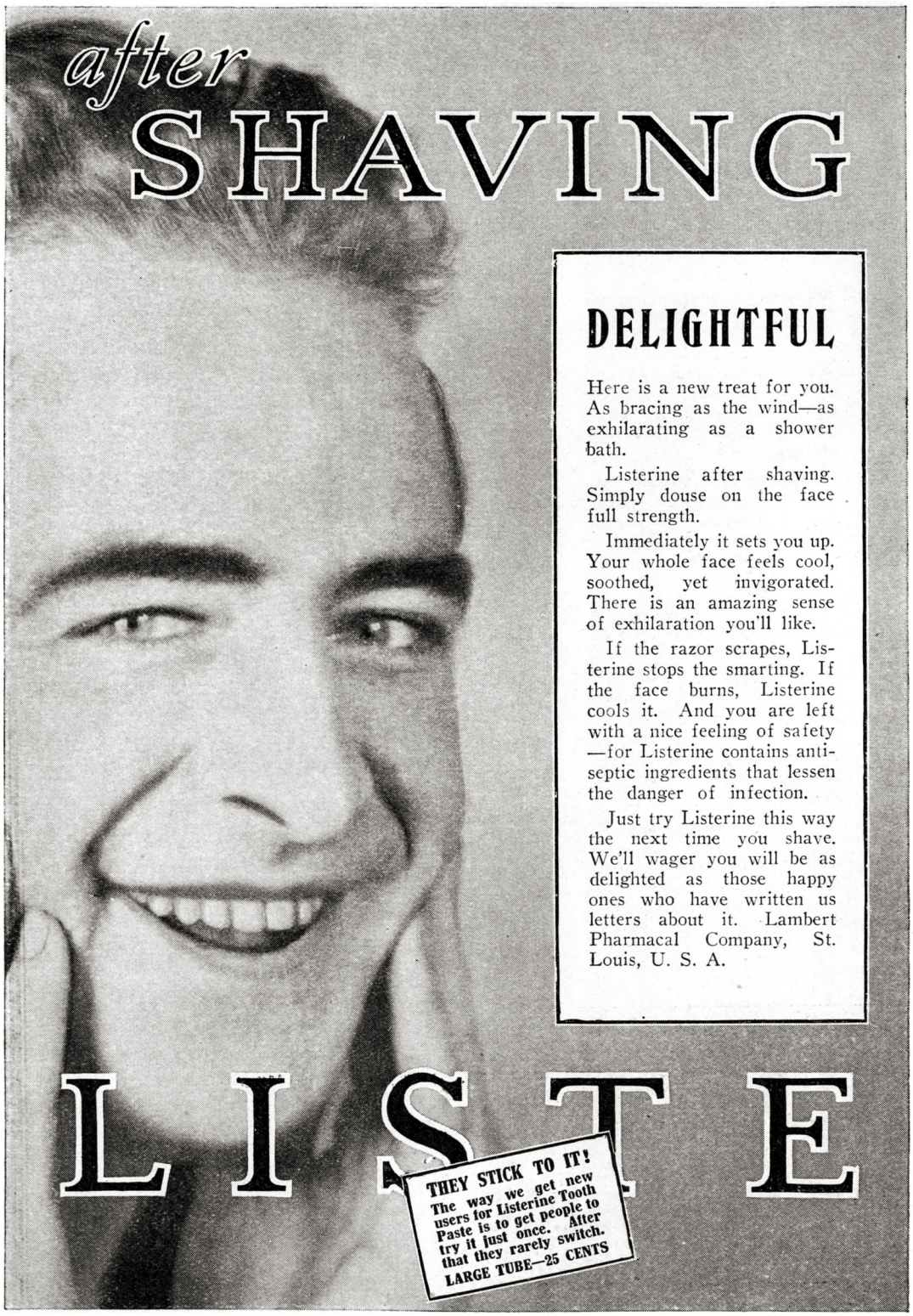
AS the dean of radio announcers, J. Andrew White's voice is known to people throughout the land. Mr. White has won a large following of admirers because of the constant dependability of his voice, ever in perfect condition. He smokes Lucky Strikes, both for finer flavor and throat protection.

Lucky Strikes have become the favorites of men whose priceless voices thrill their audiences, as they have with the millions because, first, they afford *greater enjoyment*, and, second, they are certain not to irritate even the most sensitive throat.

Smoke Lucky Strikes. They give added pleasure—you'll like them.

"It's toasted"

Your Throat Protection


after
SHAVING
DELIGHTFUL
Here is a new treat for you. As bracing as the wind—as exhilarating as a shower bath.
Listerine after shaving. Simply douse on the face full strength.
Immediately it sets you up. Your whole face feels cool, soothed, yet invigorated. There is an amazing sense of exhilaration you'll like.
If the razor scrapes, Listerine stops the smarting. If the face burns, Listerine cools it. And you are left with a nice feeling of safety—for Listerine contains antiseptic ingredients that lessen the danger of infection.
Just try Listerine this way the next time you shave. We'll wager you will be as delighted as those happy ones who have written us letters about it. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, U. S. A.
LISTE
THEY STICK TO IT!
The way we get new users for Listerine Tooth Paste is to get people to try it just once. After that they rarely switch.
LARGE TUBE—25 CENTS

and as an

ASTRINGENT

INEXPENSIVE

Here's good news for any woman who has rebelled at paying the remarkable prices usually charged for astringents.

Listerine is a natural astringent, neither too harsh nor too weak. One that is safe for all types of skin, yet ridiculously low in cost.

After removing the cream you merely douse it on the face full strength. Dilute if you prefer.

You can feel it firmly closing the pores. You can feel it draw up lazy, sagging muscles. Your entire face is stimulated. You look—and feel—younger.

So many women have told us how delighted they are with Listerine used this way that we want you to know about it. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, U. S. A.

R I N E

— the safe antiseptic

The New Merriwell Stories

By

BURT L. STANDISH

will begin in the April 8th issue of

SPORT STORY MAGAZINE

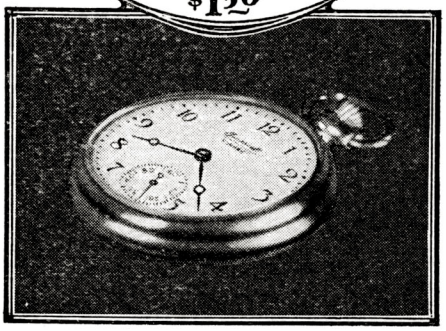
You remember how eagerly you used to follow Dick and Frank Merriwell in sports, and in all of their activities.

Sport Story Magazine will again present them. The stories will be new, the activities different; but the characters will be the same thrilling, interesting, clean-cut Dick and Frank Merriwell.

Don't miss a single story!

Sport Story Magazine is on the stands the 8th and 22nd of every month.

Ingersoll
YANKEE
$1.50



High *in* Quality
Low *in* Price
A Trusted Name
and a
Famous Guarantee

PISO'S

Conquer that Cough! For quick relief take PISO'S — a pleasant, effective syrup used for over 60 years. It soothes—but contains no opiates. 35c and 60c sizes.

for Coughs

In conjunction with PISO'S Syrup use PISO'S Throat and Chest Salve. This ointment, applied *externally*, quickly penetrates. 35c.

BE THE Jazz Queen Of Your Town

Be Popular. Have fun. Step. You can be the Queen of the land with a

BUESCHER
True Tone **Saxophone**

Ideal instrument for girl or boy. Buescher made it easiest instrument to play. Simple lessons given with new instrument, teach you. Get genuine like big stars use. Send postal for beautiful free book and details of home trial and easy payment plans.

Buescher Band Instrument Co. (9x)
1882 Buescher Block Elkhart, Ind.

Why Buy a Burgess Flashlight?

WHY buy fire, life, theft or automobile insurance? Or, why lock your doors?

Simply to guarantee that in emergencies you will receive definite assistance and protection in one form or another which will overcome the immediate danger and possible loss.

Burgess Flashlights have for many years been a convenient and positive guarantee that will guard, guide and aid you against the dangers and inconvenience of darkness.

Don't buy just a flashlight. Ask for Burgess. Look for the distinctive package. The success of Burgess Radio Batteries has proved conclusively the quality of all products of the Burgess Battery Company.

A Laboratory Product

BURGESS BATTERY COMPANY
GENERAL SALES OFFICE: CHICAGO
Canadian Factories and Offices:
Niagara Falls and Winnipeg

BURGESS FLASHLIGHTS & BATTERIES

The Quick Magic of Calcium!

Do you want a beautiful complexion *this week?* A skin that fairly *sparkles?* And color that is all your *own?* Then give your system just a little *calcium!*

Calcium clears away *every* impurity that keeps the skin sallow or dull. It keeps pores purged, and the cuticle clean. You'll feel and see the difference from the very first day you take a tiny, sugar-coated Stuart calcium wafer!

The most marvelous, and gentlest regulator in the whole world, and your druggist has the new purse or pocket size—for a dime!

FREE: A full box, and valuable book, if you write the F. A. Stuart Co., Dept. C336, Marshall, Mich.

STUART'S CALCIUM WAFERS

MUDDY, OILY SKIN

quickly improved and usually cleared entirely if properly treated with

Resinol

Grow Taller

Science has found the way to add inches to your height. No need to envy and look up to the big fellows. No need to have the disadvantages of the little man. This course makes it possible for you to be on a level with your fellow men. Course is easy, inexpensive and results sure. Mail coupon for free information today!

L. GLOVER,
Room 92, 70 Bulkley Ave.
Sausalito, Calif.
Without any obligation to me, send me full information on how to grow taller.

Name.....

Street .....

City .....

Stop Using a Truss

Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made **self-adhesive** purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached**—cannot slip, so **cannot** chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

Reduced Fac-Simile

Grand Prix.

Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We prove it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**. Write name on Coupon and send TODAY.

Plapao Co. 633 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Name.....

Address .....

Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao.....

DON'T WEAR A TRUSS

BE COMFORTABLE—

MR. C. E. BROOKS

Wear the Brooks Appliance, the modern scientific invention which gives rupture sufferers immediate relief. It has no obnoxious springs or pads. Automatic Air Cushions bind and draw together the broken parts. No salves or plasters. Durable. Cheap. Sent on trial to prove its worth. Beware of imitations. Look for trade-mark bearing portrait and signature of C. E. Brooks which appears on every Appliance. None other genuine. Full information and booklet sent free in plain, sealed envelope.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO., 159 State St., Marshall, Mich.

PIMPLES

Cleared up—often in 24 hours. To prove you can be rid of Pimples, Blackheads, Acne Eruptions on the face or body, Barbers' Itch, Eczema, Enlarged Pores, Oily or Shiny Skin, simply send me your name and address today—no cost—no obligation. **CLEAR-TONE** tried and tested in over 100,000 cases—used like toilet water—is simply magical in prompt results. You can repay the favor by telling your friends; if not, the loss is mine. WRITE TODAY,

E. S. GIVENS, 413 Chemical Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

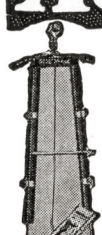
BUCHSTEIN'S FIBRE LIMB

is soothing to your stump,—strong, cool, neat, light. Guaranteed 5 years. Easy payments. Send for Catalog Today.

Also fibre arms, and braces for all deformities

B. Buchstein Co., 610 3rd Ave., S. Minneapolis, Minn.

AGENTS



Folds to 15 inches

NEW! GRAB THIS FREE OUTFIT QUICK!

STAY-PREST Trouser Presser—wonderful new invention—looks efficient, and it is. That's why 250,000 have been sold already.

My First Week I Made $93

"Since then I have earned over $100 every week," says S. L. Patterson, of Iowa. Many others making big money. No wonder! Millions of interested prospects. A quality product. Puts lasting crease in trousers. Takes out bagginess—smoothes entire surface—demonstrates in 40 seconds. Sells quick to every man.

FREE Selling Outfit

Your profits paid in advance. Simply write orders. We deliver and collect. Test it without cost, full time or side line. Send postcard for offer of free demonstrator. Join the big money-makers. Write today.

THE GETGEY-JUNG COMPANY
C-117 G & J Bldg. Cincinnati, Ohio

The Old Reliable Credit Jewelers

LOFTIS BROS. & CO. Since 1858

Dept. L222 108 N. State St. Chicago, Ill.

QUALITY GIFTS

Satisfaction Guaranteed, or money back. Goods sent for your free examination on request.

GENUINE **Diamonds** GUARANTEED

Cash or Credit

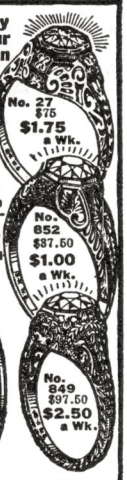
Our Diamonds are all sparkling blue white Gems of amazing beauty, set in exceptionally artistic Solid 18 karat White Gold mountings. Credit Terms: Pay one-tenth down; balance weekly, semi-monthly, or monthly at your convenience. All goods delivered on first payment. Send for Big Diamond Catalog—Absolutely Free.

Man's strap watch, nickel, cushion shape, 6-jewel, high-grade movement, fine leather strap $9.95

17-Jewel ELGIN No. 15

Green gold, Elgin Watch; 25-year quality case; 12 size; gilt dial; $30. $3 down $1 a week

No. 857 Ladies' wrist watch, solid 14-K white gold, 15 Jewels. $27.50 $2.75 Down; $2.75 a Month



No. 27 $75 $1.75 a Wk.

No. 852 $87.50 $1.00 a Wk.

No. 849 $97.50 $2.50 a Wk.

Our References: Any Bank or Banker in the U.S.A.

Must Men Fear 40?

65% of all men past middle age, authorities say, have prostate gland disorder. Here is the known cause of frequent nightly risings, aches in the back and legs, sciatica, weakness and lack of vitality. Now a new scientific, drugless hygiene usually restores this gland to normal functioning without medicine or electric rays. 20,000 men have found quick relief and grateful recovery. Send name for FREE book. Address **Electro Thermal Company, 7667 Main St., Steubenville, Ohio.** Western Address **Suite 76-K, 303 Van Nuys Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif.**

Match Your Coat and Vest

With New Trousers. FREE SAMPLE

DON'T DISCARD YOUR OLD SUIT. Wear the coat and vest another year by getting new trousers to match. Tailored to your measure. With 90,000 patterns to select from we can match almost any pattern. Send vest or sample of cloth today, and we will submit FREE best match obtainable.

AMERICAN MATCH PANTS CO.

Dept. G. B., 6 W. Randolph St., Chicago, Ill.

Factory Sale

Catalogue FREE

New Model Boiler

Made of EXTRA STRONG, heavy pure copper, with a 5-inch Solid Brass Cap and Spout.

Easily cleaned. No Screw cap, no threads to get out of order. No burning of hands, no trouble in taking off cover. Cap can be put on or taken off in a second by a simple twist of the thumbscrew on the top. Safe, practical, simple and durable. No article of such quality and utility ever sold at such low price. It's a low pressure boiler and pasteurizer. An ideal cooker for the home. Nothing better for general usages. It lasts a lifetime and gives real service and satisfaction.

Above are strictly cash with order Factory prices. Send money order or check. Prompt shipment in plain, strong box.

HOME MFG. CO., Dept. 2363, 18 E. Kinzie St., Chicago, Ill.

Infantile Paralysis

How proud I was to see Raymond coming home walking flat down on the sole of his foot. Too bad I didn't know about your sanitarium sooner. Will never forget your wonderful institution and will advise others to take their cripples to you.

MRS. ROSE RACZYK, 50 Peck St., Buffalo, New York

Raymond Raczyk came to McLain Sanitarium 10 years after an attack of Infantile Paralysis crippled his left leg and foot. Photos and mother's letter tell the rest. McLain Sanitarium (established 1898) is a private institution devoted to the treatment of crippled children and young adults. No surgical operation requiring chloroform or general anaesthetics. Plaster Paris not used. Patients received without delay. Parents retain full charge of children if desired.

WRITE FOR FREE BOOKS "Deformities and Paralysis," and "References," which show and tell of McLain Sanitarium's facilities for treating Club Feet, Infantile Paralysis, Spinal Diseases and Deformities, Hip and Knee Disease, Wry Neck, Etc. Also illustrated magazine, "Sanitarium News," mailed free every 60 days.

McLAIN ORTHOPEDIC SANITARIUM

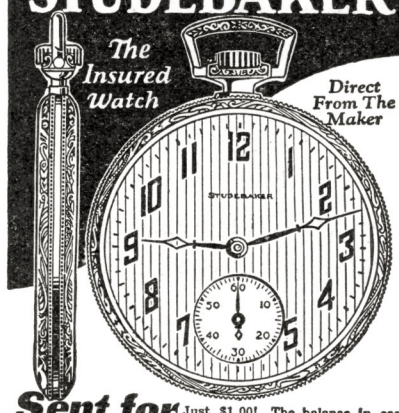
954 Aubert Ave., St, Louis, Missouri, U. S. A. KR731

21 JEWEL-*Extra Thin*

STUDEBAKER

The Insured Watch

Direct From The Maker



Sent for $1.00

$1 DOWN

Just $1.00! The balance in easy monthly payments. You get the famous Studebaker 21 Jewel Watch direct from factory at a saving of 30% to 50%.

Your choice of 80 new Art Beauty cases and dials. Latest designs in white gold, yellow gold and green gold effects. 8 adjustments including heat, cold, isochronism and five positions. Insured for a lifetime.

Ladies' Bracelet Watches, Men's Strap Watches, Diamonds and Jewelry, too. All sold on easy monthly payments. Your credit is good! Write today for free book of Advance Watch Styles or Jewelry Catalog.

Watch Chain FREE!

For a limited time we are offering a beautiful Watch Chain free. This special offer will be sent to everyone who writes at once. Don't delay! Get this free chain offer today—while it lasts.

STUDEBAKER WATCH COMPANY

Directed by the Studebaker Family—known for three-quarters of a century of fair dealing.

Dept. J-719 South Bend, Indiana

Canadian Address: Windsor, Ont.

It Was a Strange, Wild Country

On a quest of vengeance a man went down to the wilds of the back country of Alabama where the natives led an isolated existence, cut off from the laws of God or man.

There came into his life, however, a stronger motive than his desire for revenge. How the love for a maid by a man changed the whole course of events, is told in striking manner in

Rainbow Landing

By FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK

There are thrills aplenty in every colorful chapter of this striking novel. Mr. Pollock's style is one that holds the reader from the beginning to end of a story set against a most unusual background.

This is a CHELSEA HOUSE publication, and that name CHELSEA HOUSE on a jacket of a cloth-bound novel, means the best of good reading at an absurdly low price to you. If your dealer has not the full list of CHELSEA HOUSE publications, write to-day to

75 Cents

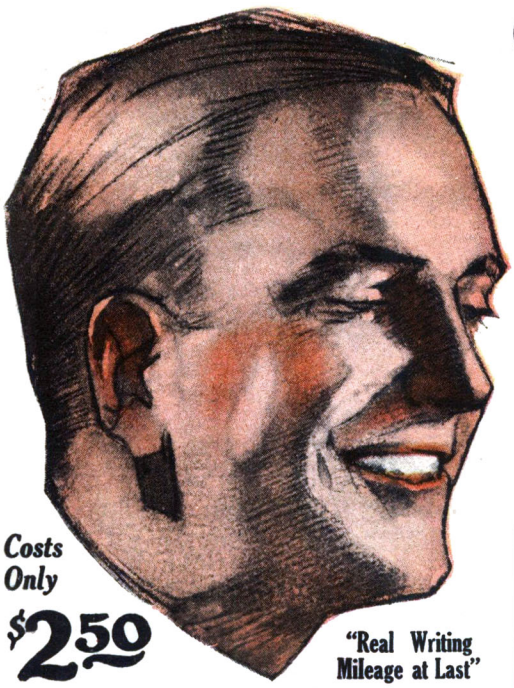
CHELSEA HOUSE PUBLISHERS
79-89 SEVENTH AVE.
NEW YORK CITY

75 Cents

Only 1 Way

You Can Get This Remarkable Pen

You Must Try It Five Days Before You Can Keep It!



Costs Only $2.50

"Real Writing Mileage at Last"

THE man who invented this amazing pen consented to let us sell it only under one condition—that we work out a plan whereby the price would be within the reach of everyone, instead of selling it at $7.00 or $8.75, the price of other pens of equal quality.

Of course, it was impossible to sell this remarkable pen through the stores. Their profit alone on a $7.00 or $8.75 pen ***is more than what you actually pay for the POSTAL RESERVOIR PEN.*** And so we decided to let Uncle Sam do the selling for us—through the United States mails.

The Pen That Says "Fill Me Up!" BEFORE It's Empty!

The POSTAL RESERVOIR PEN (named POSTAL because it is sold by mail only) is distinctive in design and contains features which are not found in any other pen. It is transparent, so you can always see when it needs filling. It is self-filling—employs an entirely new method, the easiest ever devised. Holds 3 to 4 times more ink than any other self-filling pen. Manufactured from same materials as used in highest priced pens. Never before have so many improvements and refinements been combined in a single, handsome, smooth-writing, never clogging-pen that you will be proud to own and delighted to use.

POSTAL PEN CO., INC.
Desk 205, 41 Park Row, New York City

You may send me a Postal Reservoir Pen on 5 days' trial. If I am not entirely satisfied with it, I have the privilege of returning it and you are to refund the full purchase price. I am also to receive 5 premium post cards, each worth 50c on the purchase price of a new Postal Pen. I reserve the right to sell these cards at 50c each or dispose of them in any way I wish. I will pay postman $2.50 upon receipt of my pen. Send me the model I have checked. ☐ Men's Size ☐ Women's Size.

Name .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

If you live outside the United States send International Money Order with coupon.

Read These Amazing Features of the Postal Pen

It is Transparent—You can always see exactly how much ink you've got. Can't run unexpectedly dry.

It is Unbreakable—You can even ***step*** on it without injuring it. A wonderful pen for red-blooded men.

It's the Smoothest Writing Pen You Ever Saw—Big, Solid 14-Karat gold point, tipped with the finest iridium.

It is Self-Filling—The easiest of all pens to fill.

It Holds 3 to 4 Times More Ink Than Any Other Self-Filling Pen—Fill it once a month—and get real "writing mileage."

And Remember—The materials and workmanship are guaranteed to be equal or superior to those found in ***any*** other pen, whether sold at $7.00, $8.75 or more.

How to Get the Postal Pen

SEND NO MONEY

Simply fill in and mail the coupon. Do not send a penny! When you get your Postal Pen, you will also receive 5 post cards, each worth 50c on the purchase price of another pen.

Every Postal Pen owner finds that his friends admire his remarkable pen and ask where they can get others like it. You can easily sell your premium post cards for 50c each and earn back the full price of your pen. You do *not* have to sell the cards—dispose of them any way you wish—whatever you make on them is yours to keep.

Five Days' FREE Trial!

Send for your POSTAL pen NOW. State whether you want men's or women's model. Use it five days and if you are not delighted with it return it and your money will be promptly refunded. You are to be the sole judge. Compare it with *any* pen at *any* price. *Remember the price is low only because our sales policy of manufacturer-to-user eliminates all in between profits, commissions and handling.* Send the coupon NOW and learn what real fountain pen satisfaction is.

Postal

RESERVOIR PEN

Desk 205

41 Park Row New York City

Actual Size Men's Model

Black Jack

"that good old licorice flavor"

$1000

FOR TITLES TO THIS BLACK JACK PICTURE

8 cash prizes will be paid as follows

1st Prize	$500
2nd Prize	250
3rd Prize	100
4th Prize	50
5th to 8th Prizes ($25 each)	100

Here's fun for every member of the family. This picture needs a title. Perhaps chewing Black Jack and enjoying its good old licorice flavor, although not a condition of this contest, will help you to find the winning title that fully expresses the story this picture tells. Everybody residing in the United States or Canada is eligible except employees of the manufacturers of Black Jack Chewing Gum.

• RULES •

1: Each entry must contain a title suggestion in 10 words or less and the name and address of the sender. **2:** Contestants may submit as many answers as they wish. In sending in suggested titles white paper or the reverse side of Black Jack wrappers may be used. **3:** All entries for this contest must be sent to "Black Jack Titles", Dept. 1, American Chicle Company, Long Island City, New York, and must be in before midnight, May 25th, 1927. Winners to be announced as soon thereafter as possible. **4:** Each entry must be sent first class mail, postage prepaid. **5:** Originality of thought, cleverness of idea, and clearness of expression and neatness will count. **6:** The judges will be a committee appointed by the makers of Black Jack and their decisions will be final. If there are ties, each tying contestant will be awarded the prize tied for.

Study the picture. Think of Black Jack's delicious licorice flavor. Then send in your title or titles on plain white paper the size of a Black Jack wrapper (2¾x3) or on a Black Jack wrapper. Contest closes at midnight, May 25th, 1927.