

WEEKLY MAY 12, 1928

The Popular

15¢
20¢ IN CANADA

Beginning **War Paint**
By **DANE COOLIDGE**

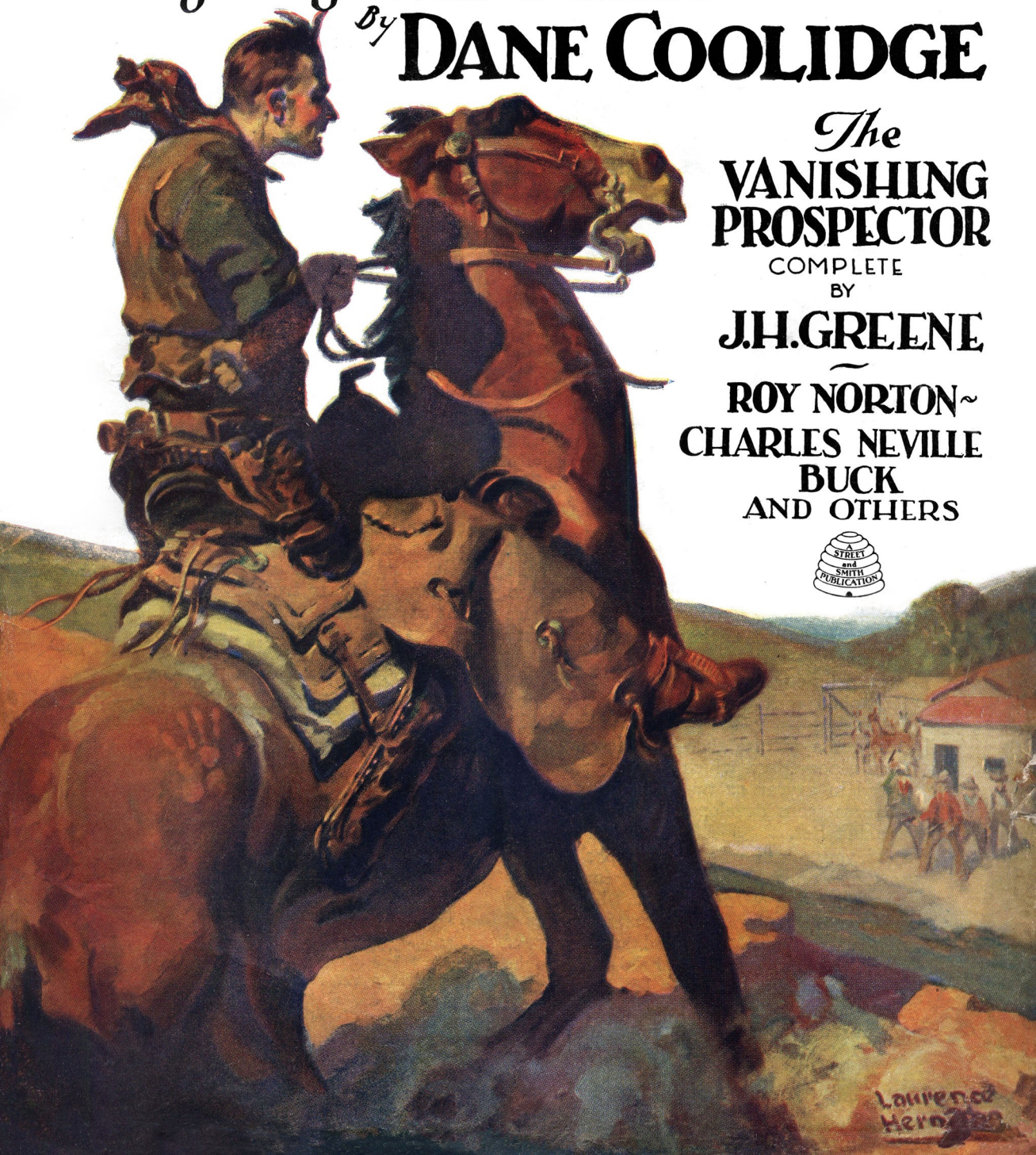
The
**VANISHING
PROSPECTOR**

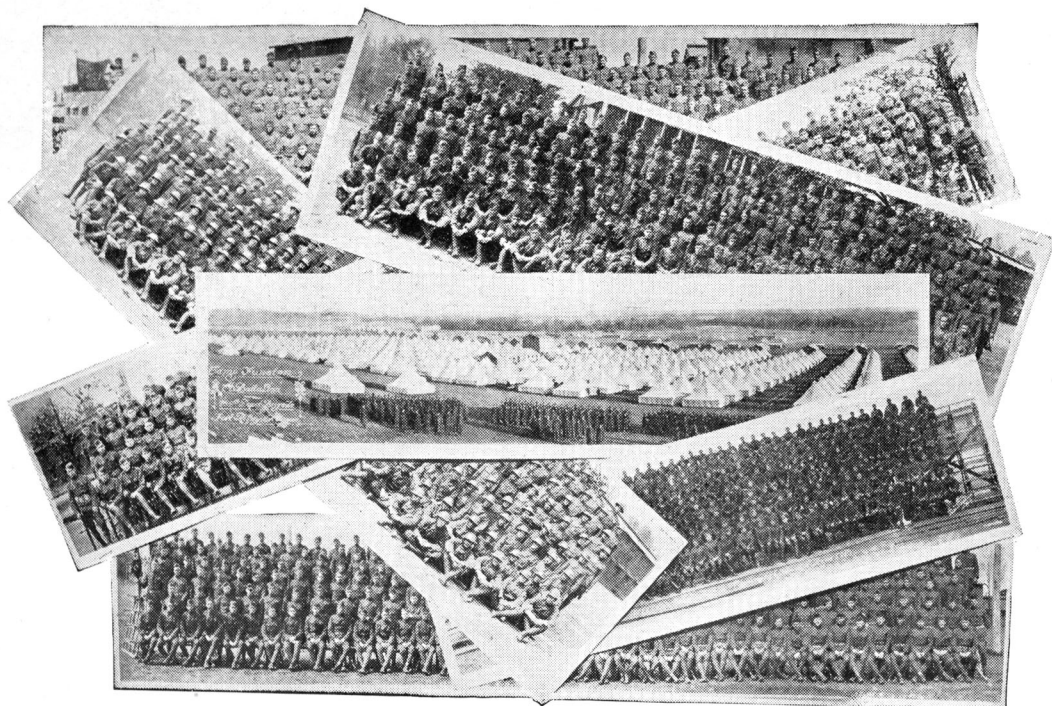
COMPLETE

BY

J.H. GREENE

**ROY NORTON~
CHARLES NEVILLE
BUCK
AND OTHERS**





We've got your Service Photograph

REMEMBER ten years ago, when your uniform was a campaign hat and a vaccinated arm? Remember Sour Hash, Canned Willie, Squads East and West? Remember Vin Rouge, the first trip up the line, the St. Mihiel Chase, Souilly, Bethincourt, Germonville, etc., etc.? And then at last home again to stay.

And now after ten years, whether you went overseas or not, you look back on it as the greatest experience in your life, and once in a while you are beginning to wish—but there isn't any war and, anyhow, the wife wouldn't let you.

Sometime while in service you were photographed with the whole gang, from the top kick down to the rawest buck. Maybe you got a picture then—but it may have been a poor print which turned yellow and faded in a year or two, for many of the pictures were developed in a "rush" and couldn't last.

If your outfit was photographed, either in Camp or in France, we can furnish you a print. It's a picture that can't be replaced—a picture that's made right and won't turn—a picture you'll be proud to show your boy, and that some day he's going to be mighty proud to show his boy. A picture that's going to be shown around and talked about long after you've gone west.

We've spent eight years gathering up these negatives—our men have traveled tens of thousands of miles to do it. A lot of negatives were lost—just dropped out of sight—but we have most of them and you ought to get your print now while it is available. A year from now the price may be higher, for it has been a long, hard, expensive job getting these in shape.

Get it while you can. Three dollars now, and maybe a year from now you can't get it at any price.

Fill in the coupon and mail today

COLE & CO.

ASBURY PARK, NEW JERSEY

References: Asbury Park Post No. 24 American Legion, Eastman Kodak Company, or any bank in Asbury Park.

Cole & Co.
Asbury Park, N. J.

I was with.....

I enclose \$3.00 for which please send me photograph of my outfit.

Name

Address

City

A mysterious, terrifying stranger, masked in black, shot Dave Hooper's father and brother, and Dave began a four-year quest of vengeance. And what a stirring quest that was! You can read this striking, thrilling story in the opening novel in **THE POPULAR** next week—"The Black Rider," by Robert McBlair.

Volume XCI

Number 2

The Popular

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office.

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

CONTENTS FOR MAY 12, 1928

COVER DESIGN	LAURENCE HERNDON	
THE VANISHING PROSPECTOR	J. H. GREENE	2
A Complete Novel		
A young man from the East helps justice in the West.		
THE LONG SCORE	ROY NORTON	53
A Short Story		
Captain Drake plans to settle an ancient grudge.		
WAR PAINT	DANE COOLIDGE	64
In Five Parts—Part I		
The tale of a West that is gone, but all too vivid in memory.		
FORCED DOWN	ROBERT J. PEARSALL	88
A Short Story		
Two men, opposites, face death in the desert.		
CROSSROADS IN JERICHO	WILL McMORROW	97
In Two Parts—Part II		
A case of lost identity is dramatically cleared up.		
FLYING HOOFS	CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK	111
In Five Parts—Part IV		
Romance and mystery of life and death at the tracks.		
JIMMY FREER TACKLES GOLIATH	WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY	133
A Short Story		
Fists enforce peace in a lumber camp.		
A CHAT WITH YOU	THE EDITOR	143

Weekly 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, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$7.50. Foreign, \$8.50.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

Yearly Subscription, \$6.00

Six Months, \$3.00

Single Copies, 15 Cents



The Vanishing Prospector

A COMPLETE NOVEL

A young man from the East who had become a cowboy prospector who dropped into town and out again. And

CHAPTER I

OUT OF THE ALKALI.

THE Bar J boys were driving their cattle into the truck on the siding at Ascension. "Dippy" James was an old cowman; and though "Smiler" Hayle was somewhat green to the West, he had established his competence with shorthorns. But the two were distracted by the presence of another man dressed like a cowman but with chaps too new, a Stetson just out of a shop, and a belt yet yellow with a glaring unhandled holster from which protruded the black butt of a Colt. The man and his bay mare seemed to be criticizing them.

"Pipe the dude wrangler," grinned Dippy. "Looks as if Ascension has just been diskivered by Hollywood."

"Can I give you a hand?" called the man.

"Sure," answered Dippy. "Once shorthorns gits a smell of laundered cowboy they nat'rilly head straight fer their Pullmans."

The man stiffened at the gibe. He sat his horse well, though his white face looked out of place against the sun-baked hills. Just then a freight engine let off steam explosively, and one of the bullocks whisked its tail, backed away from the car, and tried to head back to the ranges. For a moment something of a stampede was threatened. The stranger, however, quickly spurred his mare, followed the bull, and rounded it back to the herd. The work was done well enough even for the Bar J.

"Say, you're the real thing, mister," said Smiler.

"I used to herd cattle when I was younger," answered the man. "Let's go over to Heinie's and sluice a little."

Seen closer and clear of the dust, the



Author of "The Submarine," Etc.

**takes a great interest in a mysterious and pernickety
an outdoor girl had something to do with that interest.**

man appeared to be in his early thirties, running somewhat to fat, but muscular. He introduced himself as Rodney Mack from Salt Lake City, back here to get in touch with his old life for his health. He was careful to say he was not the usual lunger. All he needed, he said, was to breathe a little alkali, chase a few cows, spend a few days in the saddle, to get the doldrums of indoors out of his system. He was very frank and affable and ordered drinks not only for the Bar J men but for some men from the other ranches, as well. He seemed anxious to horn into the life of the cattlemen.

"I suppose my rig is a bit new," he laughed. "I should have let my mare spill me a few times in the sage."

"Rig's all right; but why the armor plating?" said Smiler, reaching for the man's handsome new gun.

Dippy saw an ugly gleam for a mo-

ment in Mack's beady black eyes, an instinctive shrinking; but Mack quickly recovered his suave manner, took the gun from the holster, and handed it to Smiler.

"You couldn't make a pass like that when I was on the ranges," he could not help adding, somewhat grimly.

Smiler handed back the gun, which was loaded in every chamber and looked as if it was yet to be fired. He was quite aware of his error. He had been long enough riding the ranges to know that back in their fastnesses there were places where to reach for a man's gun might be fatal. Of course he and Dippy carried guns—but just as often in their packs as in their holsters. Guns in quiet railroad centers like Ascension were merely equivalents for Fourth of July firecrackers.

Mack finished his drink and said he had to go to the post office for his mail.

"You've got to be more keerful with slack-jawed strangers, Smiler," warned Dippy, when the man had departed. "Never try to take a man's gun from him like that, till you take his senses first. You might as well try to be a dentist to a rattler. And if I know anything of men and horses, that feller's got poison fangs somewhere. Too many alibis and too much white in his eyes."

"He looks like money to me," said Smiler. "Did you see his roll?"

Dippy bit into his cigarette till the tobacco spilled and he had to roll another. Dippy could roll a cigarette and light it on top of the most obstreperously bucking pony. He was very patient with Smiler, to whom he had taken a great liking.

"Yer can't jedge a man by his bank roll till yer know how he got it," he said, while not wasting a grain of his tobacco. "That's something you Easterners don't never l'arn. I say look at a man's eyes. Watch his feet fer stringhalt, and listen to his breathing. Watch his grin, and see if his teeth shut when he laughs. Listen to his bark and try if yer kin hear wolf in it."

"We're talking about a man, not an animal," laughed Smiler.

"Men is animals," retorted Dippy.

Smiler accepted this wisdom with an open mind. Most of what he had learned in the West had come from this grizzled old cowman. Dippy himself had certainly an animal's quick likings and queer distrusts and he had taken a sudden and unreasonable prejudice against the man in the new outfit.

"How do you figger this gazabo, Heinie?" he asked of Holster, the proprietor and barkeeper of the establishment. This was before the days when bars became anathema. Heimie's was an oasis in summer, when the hot wind scoured the town with dust and alkali, and a haven of warm comfort in winter, when the snow line crept down the ranges and every canyon roared with

arctic blasts. He kept it spotless, in the best traditions of the beer saloons of his native Pennsylvania. He served the best meals for miles around and his noodles were famous. But he was careful and noncommittal about his customer.

"Don't know much about him," he said with the Allegheny accent which cannot be written down except in music. "He registered from Salt Lake City and he paid for his room in advance."

The Bar J boys were compelled to stay longer in town, as they were expecting a new cart by freight. Dippy determined to spend that time in investigating the pedigree of the man against whom he had conceived such a virulent dislike. Some of the old-timers around Ascension might remember this Rodney Mack.

Smiler refused to be interested in this; he could not follow all the quirks of Dippy. Dippy left him, and Smiler leaned up against the porch of the hotel watching the sun drop behind the hills. He was considering getting his pony from the corral, where it had been left unsaddled to feed, to ride out and watch that sunset from the desert. Those old shacks, that grimy depot, the intruding telegraph poles, formed a poor foreground for the splendor in the skies.

But he was hesitating, for he would have to make some excuse for leaving Dippy; to say he had ridden away to look at a sunset would be a jest to the boys in the bunk house. Smiler had learned to keep his sentimentalities about the West unspoken. Only greenhorns and dude wranglers went off half-cocked at mountains and sunsets.

He was looking past a few Lombardy poplars, planted by old Mormon settlers, to where the road dipped. Fifty miles away the setting sun was kindling buttes and bluffs to coals of fire. Farther to the north the backbone of the ranges rose, with the late snows turning pink against the coming dark.

Smiler was deciding on joining the men inside the saloon when out of a cloud of dust that was a moving pillar of golden, glowing smoke in the low sun appeared a man leading a mule. The man was a lone and forlorn-looking prospector. He and his mule seemed equally decrepit and disappointed; both walked with their eyes on the ground. The mule did not have enough spirit to bite at the geraniums in the road agent's garden. The man dragged his feet, careless of the dust he raised. With his white beard he looked like a patriarch. He was as lean as his mule, whose ribs could be counted by their ridges of dust. The pack was tied on the mule by scraps of rope very much knotted, and a rusty old frying pan dangled over the mule's forequarters.

The cowboys came out of the bar to get some amusement from these apparitions out of the alkali.

"He shore makes me think of what the circuit-riding preacher told us last summer," said the man from Circle Y. "I kin believe now in the grave giving up its dead."

"I never knew a prospector to carry a pup tent," remarked Smiler, noting a roll of canvas with a military number tied behind the food bags. The few prospectors Smiler had encountered had been above such luxuries.

"Hey, Rip van Winkle, come in and have a wet," cried Mack, with boisterous geniality. He had returned, and had obviously been indulging in his own prescription for the prospector.

By this time the prospector was close to the hotel. He lifted his head at Mack's invitation, shook it, and passed out of sight to the corral with his mule.

"When I rode these hills," fumed Mack, "refusing a man's drink meant shooting. I'm going to ask him what he has against drinking with us."

Mack was a little thick in his speech and toyed with his gun as he played with ideas out of date for Ascension.

He was for following the prospector, when Smiler got in his way.

"You're not going to quarrel with an old man," said Smiler persuasively.

Mack allowed himself to be led back into the bar, loudly venting his knowledge of cowboy etiquette. Smiler stayed outside for a moment to try and get into conversation with the prospector, but he soon returned to the bar.

"Half locoed and down on his luck?" queried the man from Circle Y.

"If he's as short of gold as he is of words," said Smiler, "we ought to take up a collection for him."

"You can't tell," contradicted Mack dogmatically. "I've seen miners beg chips to sit in a poker game—and their belts bulging with bullion. It's the way of the beast."

Smiler turned away from Mack; he was acquiring as great a dislike for him as Dippy's.

"Much gold round here?" he asked Heinie.

"Dunno," answered the Dutchman, after his usual little pause of consideration. "Gold's where you find it, and if it ain't, it ain't."

"These hills and gullies have only been scratched," proclaimed Mack; "and by desert rats like this fellow. Mining here ought to be reorganized on modern methods."

"Mining man?" asked Smiler, hoping to anticipate Dippy's inquiries into the antecedents of the loud-voiced man whom drink made blatant instead of friendly.

"Well, not exactly," answered Mack, with a quick return to sobriety. "Anything with money in it—like all of us."

Smiler then remembered that such an inquisitiveness about a man's past might be as ready an excuse for quarrel as reaching for a gun or refusing a drink. But Mack passed it. During the awkward pause that followed, Smiler, hearing some one talking at the back, opened the rear door.

"Say, fellers, look here," he called softly. "That prospector is giving his mule a banquet."

The men stepped quietly to the door. The mule's pack was now off him and he was feeding from the trough. On top of the mixture of chopped hay and alfalfa the prospector was throwing bunches of carrots and pouring out the contents of a tin of molasses.

"Feel better now, Sammy?" he was murmuring. "Ain't lost yer taste fer sweets, have yer? You've earned that, Sammy. I guess yer got enough, so I'll leave yer. I got a dry and empty canyon in my innards, too. Mebbe you could do with some more molasses."

Instead of returning to the hotel, the man started back to the store from which he had purchased these delicacies for his mule; but he paused a moment and looked over his pack. Then he began throwing away sundry articles. He tossed his coffeepot and his frying pan and a shovel over the side of the corral; but he still kept that old pup tent.

"He's going to buy an entire new outfit," growled Mack. "I'll wager all I own he's on a rich strike. I'm going to prospect that prospector."

"I think we ought to leave him alone," said Smiler, after the prospector had gone across the road to the store. "If that man is on gold, it is none of our business."

Mack let out a roar of contempt for such an opinion.

"Gold is everybody's business," he declared. "If a man has made a find he has no business to keep it to himself. You seem to have some personal interest in this coyote. Do you happen to be grubstaking him?"

"No," said Smiler quietly. "But it rather got me, seeing that old moss-back coming out of the desert. I'd like to talk to him, if he'd let me."

Mack who was standing nearer the door only grunted and went across the road to peer in the storekeeper's win-

dows. Heinie nodded at Smiler not to interfere, for the hotel keeper hated any kind of fighting. His liquor was always blamed for the bad blood brought into his bar. Dippy now appeared and drew Smiler aside.

"I got a line on that Hollywood hand-me-down, though he ain't a movie actor," he announced. "He's a well-heeled hotel keeper from Salt Lake City, down here courting one of those women from Grassy Flats. It's a goldarned shame."

"What's a shame? And what women are you talking about?" Smiler asked him.

"Why, ain't yer never met Mrs. Sanger and her girl Alice that runs the Grassy Flat farm? Bet you've eat their bacon. Ain't a man, married or single, for a hundred miles round, ain't crazy over 'em. Some fancies the mother, some the gal. Mrs. Sanger made a go of that farm since her old man deserted her. But if Mack has money, he's more likely to be after the gal."

"What sort of girl is she? What's she like?" asked Smiler unenthusiastically.

"Like?" snorted Dippy. "Like nothing this side of the ranges over the big divide where the Lord feeds His sheep—if it ain't bad religion making Him out a sheep-herder. That gal is the smartest, likeliest, prettiest, best-ridingest, quick-shootingest——"

Dippy began to bloat with his superlatives.

"Raised on the ranges, and been to college back East, too. Her mother dug that up for her out of hogs and cabbages. And you ain't never been to call on her?"

"No; I came West to escape calling on women."

Old Dippy had too sensitive a nature under his leather exterior to miss the unusual bitterness in Smiler's reply.

"Ain't a woman-hater, be yer?" he asked.

"No, Dippy; I just don't want to be bothered with them for a while."

Dippy had never struck this streak in his bunkie before; and, divided between his natural delicacy and his desire to be friendly, he floundered.

"They air a bother sometimes, I'll admit; but if that timber wolf thinks he's going to get Alice Sanger, Lord hoop me to hell but I'll start a war right here."

"Why should you worry who any girl marries?" asked Smiler. "You're too old, Dippy."

"Too old to marry her myself; yes!" snapped the cowman. "Ain't too old to be worryin' that she gets the right man. I'm crazy over her grandpaternally. Smiler, I'll stake yer to half my roll if you'll cut out this gazabo."

"I'm not doing any cutting out, Dippy. I told you just now I was not interested in women."

Smiler spoke with some asperity, and Dippy said no more. Dippy knew when he had inadvertently flicked a man on the raw. He also knew that the ranches, indeed the frontiers, of the world are maintained by men like Smiler, hard-riding, hard-living fellows who have come thither to forget the harder deals they have had from some woman.

Just then Mack entered the bar, beaming at proving himself right. That prospector *had* been buying a new outfit, as well as an unusually large stock of provisions.

"He bought a paintbrush—and paint, too. Got a shack in the ranges, I reckon, he wants to fix up. That means a permanent location. And he paid for everything in dust. He's on a bonanza."

Presently the man they were discussing entered the bar, and simultaneously Smiler and Mack asked him to have a drink. His blue-black eyes looked from one to the other out of a face heavily masked with hair and dust.

"Thank yer, stranger," he said to

Smiler, while he promptly turned his back on Mack.

Mack waited till the drink was dispatched.

"Now have one with me," he said threateningly.

The prospector shook his head.

"You refuse to drink with me again?" snarled Mack. "You'll swallow that."

Mack hastily poured into the man's glass a stiff allowance, and pushed it in front of him. Whether from bravado or not, his hand slipped toward his holster and the black butt of his Colt. The prospector was not taking any chances, for, with a quicker motion than any of the men would have given him credit for, he picked up the glass and deftly shot the liquor into Mack's eyes. The raw, fiery Kentucky fluid was painful and blinding. Then, before the cowmen had recovered from their astonishment at finding such pugnacity in the wizened little man, he had leaped at Mack and with a punch to the jaw and a knee to the stomach brought the big fellow to the floor with a resounding thump.

The cowboys saw there was no need of interference; that grizzled veteran of the desert had skill and strength enough to offset his years and lack of weight. He had wrested the gun from Mack and thrown it away before Mack had recovered his senses from the blow the back of his skull had taken from the floor.

Then followed the prettiest exhibition of rough-and-tumble clinch fighting Ascension had ever witnessed. Mack tried to rise with the prospector hanging onto him. The old man tripped him and fell on him again. Every time Mack tried to reach for the prospector's throat the old man butted with his head till all could hear Mack's teeth rattle. Mack tried to squeeze the breath out of his antagonist, but here the man's smallness was in his favor. Mack, somewhat muscle-bound, could get no lever-

age on that lean, wiry man who clung so closely.

They rolled over and over, and the prospector seemed to be able to direct their interlocking bodies so that Mack took heavy punishment from the foot-rail of the bar, the legs of tables, the bilges of barrels. Mack cursed, belowed and threatened. The prospector kept silent; but every inch of him was fighting—from his jabbing toes to his clawing finger tips.

After one more roll over the floor they were at the door, apparently about to carry the quarrel out into the street. The prospector let all his breath out and seemed to shrink into smaller dimensions; and so was able to slip out of Mack's grizzly hug. The prospector rose and started for the open door; but did not run out. He simply turned his back and clung to the jambs, as if leaning for support.

Mack rose more slowly, preparing for a last terrific rush. The prospector looked back again and, taking aim while holding onto the doorposts for a purchase, delivered a back kick that smote Mack on the jaw. Mack went to the floor—silent and absolutely out.

The cowboys cheered the game and clever little man, who did not wait but ran to the corral and hastily began packing his new supplies onto Sammy, his mule. Smiler and the others followed, guessing he wanted to get away before Mack recovered.

"Where did you learn that doorpost savate?" asked Smiler, recognizing the French adroitness of that crushing back kick.

"From Sammy," grunted the prospector, pointing to the mule.

They saw now that the man was not as old as he had appeared. His rather dark hair and beard had been merely powdered with dust and alkali, which the fight had brushed off. He was not more than forty-five. His fighting was wonderful, but no longer a mystery.

"Where are you heading for?" asked Smiler indiscreetly.

"Out of sight," snapped the prospector, who was allowing no one to help him.

"Why, we're all your friends," protested Smiler.

"Got all the friends I need," answered the man, jerking his thumb again at the mule. "Let me be, all of yer. No man's going to trim me nor trail me, nuther. I can shoot as well as kick, young feller."

He slapped his holstered gun, which he had not attempted to draw in the struggle. The boys left this crab of the desert to go his way down the road that had brought him, and returned to the saloon.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL FROM GRASSY FLATS.

MACK, with Heinie's assistance, was coming to his senses. His first demand was for his gun. Smiler pretended to look for it, till he was sure the prospector had been swallowed in the shades of evening now darkening all out of doors.

"It was a fair fight, Mack," pronounced Dippy judicially; "and you got yours. You ain't got no call to be bringing in lead. The mistake was yours. This gold grubber ain't so locoed as you thought. They get their claims jumped and their piles taken from them often enough to make 'em think town folks is varmints. He drank with us and not with you, 'count of yer rig. That layout of yours don't inspire brotherly love in men like him. If you take my advice, Mack, you'll put this experience down to profit and loss."

There was intense scorn behind the ranchman's quiet drawl. There was also readiness in his fingers, and an alertness in his eyes that announced that Mack's education in his way of handling desert men could be continued. But Mack said nothing and went up-

stairs to his room to repair his wardrobe and his face.

The boys were covering the fine points of the fight, when Smiler felt his heel turn on something hard. He stooped and picked up a small stone, unusually heavy for its size. He rubbed the dirt off it and saw it was a piece of gold. Everybody then began prospecting that floor and they found more nuggets, and even fine dust—the whole amounting, as Heinie estimated, to two or three hundred dollars' worth. Mack had been right, after all; that prospector was anything but poor and unlucky—for no one could have spilled that gold but he. Then Heinie put the gold in a tumbler and poured in water to clean it. It gleamed as he shook the glass. Smiler also found the wallet that had held the gold. It was an old and greasy squaw's beaded match safe.

"He'll turn back the moment he misses it," said Smiler. "But we'll have to keep Mack out of the way."

"Maybe he won't," declared Dippy. "And he mightn't miss it till he's miles away. He don't need gold to buy anything out where he is. He mightn't know he's lost that wallet for a long time. Then, if he did, this gold might be only a flea bite to what he's panning out—and not worth coming in fer."

"Then I'll take it to him," declared Smiler.

The others tried to dissuade Smiler from this quixotic undertaking, but the young man was determined to go. That tumbler Heinie was shaking with the gold clinking against the glass under a float of muddy water was fascinating Smiler. Heinie seemed to be concocting some marvel in mixed drinks that was fast going to Smiler's head.

"How air yer going to find him?" demanded Dippy. "The moon won't be up for some time and you're too green to read any signs but cattle and mobs. Men on gold don't leave signposts to where they are. Better leave

that gold with Heinie till he claims it. Ever see him before, Heinie?"

Heinie had not. Nor had most of the men, though the man from Circle Y thought he had run into him once back of Alto—and that was a long way south.

"That makes me more'n ever sure he's on big gold," declared Dippy. "That's why he's so far from his usual hangout. The farther a prospector goes from his grub, the more gold he's got. Bet yer that little hot tamale is doubling south over the desert like a jack rabbit. You ain't got a chance to trail him. More'n that, I bet from the way he carries his bank roll, he's got a squaw wife squatting on his claim; and she's likely to be a wild cat, too."

Dippy's argument only intensified Smiler's desire to go. Smiler had come West for experience, and this was something the West had not as yet offered. Hunting stray cattle was all very well, but this was a hunt for a man. Nor could Dippy's reminder of his duties to his ranch hold him. Smiler had come West to be free of all ties, to renounce jobs that held men to a daily jog trot, to disdain duties that tied him to routine. If the boss would not grant him a vacation, he would quit. Smiler was one of those men, daily becoming rarer, who are unafraid to put imagination above reason. That gold seeker and his mule trailing a cloud of luminous dust hung in Smiler's memory as a compelling picture, an idea with a drive in it. There was a splendor about that tatterdemalion of the desert impossible to resist.

But he could not fit Dippy's squaw into the picture. Despite the match safe, Smiler was confident that the prospector was no squaw man. His taciturnity, his ferocity and cunning in fight, were the marks of a self-sufficing man. To Smiler he embodied the ideal of a life he had set up for himself—a life foot-free, ready to pack saddle and

be off in a moment for any spot that called with new interest, to undertake any enterprise that deepened his sense of living.

"Always said yer had a wild streak in yer," mourned Dippy. "But we're going to be mighty sorry to lose yer, if it comes to that. Good cowmen are getting scarcer every year. I thought the West wouldn't hold yer long."

"You're wrong, Dippy. I'm going wester than west, that's all."

Dippy took a long, luxurious sip of his drink. The two men were apart from the rest and able to be confidential.

"If I hadn't seen yer throwing cows," he remarked slowly, "I'd be putting yer into the same corral as that word-wrangling Mack. Talk straight, boy. What kin be wester than west? Unless yer off fer China—and that's east, ain't it?"

"I'm not going off the desert or the ranges. All I want just now is——"

Smiler hesitated to continue. He could not explain his tangle of emotions to this simple, elemental cowman; he could hardly explain it to himself.

"All I want is to return that man his gold and get a line on what he's doing. Maybe try it myself for a while. Then I'll come back to the old Bar J."

"Some trails has no way back, son," continued Dippy solemnly. "I knew a first-class cowman that found his pony had strayed, broken his leg and been eaten by wolves. He got so mad he started hunting fer wolves. When he killed all the wolves he could, he went after bear till they all got killed. Got so used to holding up animals he lost his judgment and one day held up a stage. Now he's holding down a life job in San Quentin. Much better have stuck to cows."

Their colloquy was interrupted by distant galloping. Dippy went to the door. It was now night; the sky was sparkling with stars; a dry wind redolent with sage, the spicy breath of the country going to sleep, blew past the

door. The gallopers were coming close. But they were not from the desert; they were from the hills to the west. Dippy's ears told him there were two riders approaching Ascension.

"The women from Grassy Flats," he announced, as two lathered horses drew up in the light from the hotel.

Smiler saw two women on those horses. He had never seen horses better handled. They were hard to hold, after that exciting gallop, and started to plunge, buck and sidle. The older woman reined in her horse and dismounted first. She gave her mount a few clouts with her whip handle till the beast stood still, accepting them as punishment. The woman did not carry the usual quirt, but a whip.

"When I say stop, Tommy, you stop," she said. "I know you don't understand reining up at barrooms. But it's what I want, not you."

The woman was lithe and active. She had hopped on her toes with a strange little leap. Her voice had a harsh rasp and her mouth the set of a jockey's.

The younger woman seemed to have more trouble with her pony and Smiler went to assist her. His reward was a cut across the chaps from the whip of the older woman.

"Leave her be, Mr. Man," she said. "My gel don't need no help."

In a second the girl succeeded in reining in her pony.

In that dim light, obstructed by the men crowding the doorway and the windows, Smiler could not get a good look at her. All he could see was that she was of the same elastic build as her mother, and that when she dismounted she too rebounded from the earth. These women seemed to have springs in their feet. They tied their horses to the hitching rail, and then Mrs. Sanger, brushing aside the men in the doorway, entered the bar as if she owned it or was about to arrest somebody. The girl followed her.

Heinie ceased his eternal polishing of glasses at their approach, for Mrs. Sanger's loudly proclaimed temperance principles might have led her to be another Carrie Nation—but that her business principles held her from direct action. She was possessed of a certain rugged distinction—what must have once been beauty; her originally fine features were worn and lined; she carried herself defiantly though wearily, like some queen haggard with the affairs of state. She threw a small sack she had been carrying on the bar.

"I heard you cowboys were in town and I've come for a plain talk with you," she began.

Smiler's attention, however, was immediately diverted to her daughter, who was utterly unlike what he had expected from Dippy's account. Instead of the usual tomboy of the ranches, the good-fellow girl able to compete with men in riding, shooting and roping shorthorns, he was looking at a tall, aloof, coldly beautiful young woman who was calmly confronting that mob of curious young men as if they were beasts to be subdued by her steady blue eyes. "Statuesque" was the first word that came to his mind. She looked like something carved on an old coin. The culture of books and art he had discarded since he had come West began to suggest more comparisons. She was like the caryatid of a Greek temple; she was something in immemorial marble; she was like— No, Dippy was right: she was statuesque, but there was pulsing life under that pale skin and those steady muscles. She was like no woman he had ever met or read of, seen painted or carved.

Involuntarily he smiled, a mere tribute to her beauty, her poise, her power; but she frowned slightly as if she sensed something offensive, and her glance removed him to another planet. His smile froze on his face and a cold fury took possession of him. No woman, no god-

dess emerging from her clouds, had a right to look at one like that. Smiler hated her.

Mrs. Sanger had been saying something to which Smiler had been paying little attention. She was, however, choking from the dust of her ride, and now called for a drink. Heinie, nervously and absently, set before her his bottle of Kentucky's best. The woman swept the whisky off the bar and the bottle fell to the floor, gurgling out its contents. Dippy tried to save it, but she sent it rolling farther with her foot. A creek of fine bourbon poured from its neck all the way to the wall. The men stepped aside to let it roll. None of them dared stoop to pick it up; they were tamed by the women from Grassy Flats.

"Guess you've all had enough for tonight," said Mrs. Sanger. "Give me water, if you know what that means."

Heinie complied with her wish.

"Now, I want you rowdies to understand," she went on, "that my girl is not taking any presents, birthdays or no birthdays. I brought them all back in this sack, and you can sort them out, yourselves. It's bad enough sending her candies and keepsakes; but when you sneak in and leave packets of gold dust at her windows, I see red. Remember I carry a shotgun and can shoot just as straight as any of you. I hope you understand me, sir."

She had ended her harangue, to which Smiler could attach no meaning, by directly addressing him. All he could surmise was that the cowmen had been a little too pressing in their attentions to her girl. Strangely enough, for a moment Smiler took her part. It seemed crude and out of place to give a girl like that candies and cheap gifts. Smiler hated the girl; but after all, there is such a thing as fitness. But as he had not participated in those gifts, he was quite at ease as he removed his hat.

"I have not sent your daughter any

present, Mrs. Sanger," he said, this time smiling with his old confidence.

"Lord, how I hate a liar," she said. "Every one of Alice's birthdays and Christmases brings enough mail to start a fancy-goods shop. It's got to stop."

"I assure you, Mrs. Sanger," he went on, "I have never even seen your daughter till now—I much regret to say. But now that we are introduced, when will it be convenient for me to call and add my birthday gift, too? It will be a little late, but surely good will can be retroactive. Do you prefer Jacqueminot roses, Miss Sanger?"

If Smiler Hayle of the Bar J had used such language and adopted such manners on the ranch, he would have had to take on all hands. But Smiler had effected his purpose; for a moment he had silenced that domineering woman, and that statue of her daughter had deigned to stir a little. Mrs. Sanger was playing with her whip as if this time she would cut him across the face. Smiler stood ready to take the lash. He would like to see how the girl would behave at this. He was sure there was something hard and unfeminine about her; she was the kind of woman who would see men battle in arenas and die for her amusement. But Alice moved closer to her mother and whispered something. The lash did not come, but abuse did.

"Don't you dare come within five miles of Grassy Flats, or I'll set my dogs on you. They've been trained to tear men like you. We grow our own roses. My girl don't want any drunken, rip-roaring, forty-dollar-a-month cowboy calling on her. Least of all one who talks and grins like a book agent. Keep away, all of you. And if you want to do business, send your old men."

The girl was now trying to lead her mother toward the dining room, where the cook had been standing ready to sound his gong. The scene in the bar

had held his hand. He began now beating it violently.

"Yes; we've got to eat. We want supper, Holster," said Mrs. Sanger over the thunder of the gong.

"Afraid you'll have to eat with them cowboys," bellowed Dippy above the clamor. Dippy's courage had returned at seeing Smiler's handling of the woman.

"Aw, shucks!" she retorted. "I can eat with my hogs."

Alice remained a moment to recover one of her mother's gloves left on the bar.

"I hope I may be permitted to call, Miss Sanger," continued Smiler, "now that we have met."

"We have not met," said the girl, following her mother into the dining room.

The cook was still beating his gong. But the usual stampede of the men did not follow—the women from Grassy Flats were dining with them. There was an unusually large demand for soap and towels. Their comments on Mrs. Sanger were salty but not spiteful. It was generally conceded that Smiler knew how to get a rope over Mrs. Sanger's head, but that the girl had thrown him badly, with her last snub.

"Dictionaries," said Dippy, "is the only thing you can throw at a wild woman, and we must allow Smiler is well heeled with the gab."

"Don't always work," said the man from Circle Y. "Last time I tried it I got chewed up plenty. Then, when I put in a little action, I got a dent in my ribs that made me breathe lopsided for a week."

Dippy stopped scrubbing his week-old beard and glared at the man, while the others paused in their difficult jobs of making working clothes look like party dress. Even Smiler shared their rising indignation.

"Action?" said Dippy. "Serves you right; a man's got no right to breathe at all that gets fresh with that girl."

It looked as if the Circle Y man was about to get more dents for daring to desecrate the goddess of their idolatry.

"No; not the gal—her mother," quickly explained the man. "I've been figuring I'd like to hitch up to that farm of hers."

"Say, Spotty," grinned Dippy, "I'd as soon marry a mountain lioness that had her hide singed in a brush fire."

The men had been moving toward the door of the dining room, but stood stock-still in dismay when they beheld Rodney Mack, dressed in the finest of city clothes, trim as if just out of the hands of a barber, with all his bruises powdered out of sight, sitting between Alice and her mother. The three were conversing gayly. Mack had a fund of small talk, and both women appeared to be entertained.

"We're dished, boys," groaned Dippy. "It's what I heard. Mack's got our girl."

Smiler had stayed behind examining the presents he had poured out of the sack. He called to the men to pick out their rejected gifts. There were rattle-snake rings carved in silver by the Cheyennes, wooden statues of bronchos hacked by some of the boys with a talent for whittling, pretty pieces of embossed Mexican leather work. But none of the men claimed a small bag of Indian workmanship holding a few ounces of virgin gold. Disconsolately they picked up their discarded gifts and filed into the dining room.

Smiler examined the bag containing the gold. This was the gift that had aroused the most anger in Mrs. Sanger—the gift that had led to the rejection of the others. Smiler, took out of his pocket the beaded match safe that now contained the gold dropped by the prospector. The work was very similar in the beadwork design to the bag containing the gift to the girl. Smiler knew very little about Indian art, and was not going to allow that similarity to mis-

lead him; it was enough that his imagination should be stirred into activity.

He went into supper deciding to say nothing to Dippy until he had more facts to support the vague hypothesis that was beginning to tempt him. But men with cool heads and inflammable feelings like Smiler generally can find facts enough to support their wildest dreamings. If not, they create them.

Smiler ate his supper without looking at the girl, but he could not help hearing her. Her English was better than her mother's and her accent not so Western; she drawled a little, though there was a mental alertness under her slow speech, as there were vigor and energy behind her repose. Dippy, who was choking all through Heinie's tasteful and plentiful meal, was the first to rise, with a gruff excuse which the Sanger party ignored. Smiler followed him, for he wanted facts—facts about these people who did not belong in manners, tone, or speech; not even in horsemanship—with the people of the ranges. For there was something strange about their riding, too—good as it was.

"It's all right fer a woman to keep her eyes on her gal's fellers," said Dippy, suffering doubly from indignation and indigestion. "I reckon a mother with a fine gal is about the wildest animal the Lord has created. But letting Mack have her——"

"Tell me about them, Dippy," said Smiler. "Who are they? Where did they come from? Who was the girl's father, and why did he desert her mother?"

The two men sat at a card table and pretended to be going over ranch accounts, to secure privacy. Dippy opened his eyes at Smiler's last question.

"Don't yer think that any he-man with half a kick in him would be inside his constitutional rights in running away from such a catamaran? But from what I've picked up lately about this

man Sanger, there's something to be said on her side. Sanger was one of those men too clever at everything to make a living out of nothing. Don't know where they bust in here from, but they bought that old farm at Grassy Flats nobody had ever made a go out of. Sanger began trying out all sorts of contraptions fer getting water when the wells went dry and raising freak vegetables nobody around here wanted to eat—till Mrs. Sanger promoted herself to be boss and it began to pay."

"You never met Sanger?"

"No; I was down near the border with the Wright outfit till after Sanger ran away. I picked up these points about him to-day, when I was trailing Mack's record."

"What's Mack got to do with it?" said Smiler, trying to keep Dippy to pertinent facts.

"Going to marry Sanger's daughter, ain't he? Ain't that a hell full of everything? Yer never can tell where a sign will lead yer. I once knew a man picked up a set of store teeth."

"What's that——"

"I'm tellin' yer. He got off his horse to pick 'em up, and him so tired that living was hard work. Them teeth led to the breaking up of a gang of rustlers, and his share of the reward started him on his own. Yer never kin tell what a sign means till you're as old on the hoof as me, kiddo."

Smiler lit a cigarette and tried to be patient. He was burning to learn all he could about the Sangers, and also to tell Dippy about the suspicion that all through dinner had gradually been growing to a certainty.

"I got most of this from a man who knew Sanger," continued Dippy. "He said Sanger was the best card sharp he'd ever met. Could deal yer any hand he wanted and you didn't."

"Why was he allowed to live?"

"He never pulled his tricks in a game, and he generally lost. Too darned

clever to make money, as I told yer. He could do tricks with coins and keep plates in the air and all that."

"Something of a conjurer and a juggler?"

"Yep. Then he got the gold fever, and that finished him. Chucked his farm, his missus, and his kid, and goes prospecting; probably by this time his bones is out in the alkali. That comes of being too clever, Smiler. I'm warnin' yer 'cause I figger you've got the symptoms."

Smiler drew the match safe from his pocket.

"Afraid so, Dippy. I'm going to play a hunch. Don't holler, and sit tight; because I don't want any one but you and me in on this. Look at this match safe and look at this little bag somebody sent that girl gold in. Both Indian, both the same kind of beadwork. None of the cowboys would send that girl gold. First, they couldn't afford it; second, they know where to draw the line. These cowboys are as strict as maiden aunts, when it comes to knowing how to treat a girl. You know that."

"Yep. But where in thunder are yer heading?"

"Take it slowly, Dippy, and it will seem more likely. A cowboy wouldn't send a girl a present of money. But a relative could—a runaway father could. My hunch is that the prospector who beat up Mack is Sanger—that girl's father."

Smiler had to push a cigarette into Dippy's mouth to stop his incredulous outcry. Smiler went on with his argument, which, as is natural, helped to add strength to his conviction. He was certain, now, that the prospector was Sanger. He believed that in the bleak eyes of the prospector he could find some resemblance to the cold glances of Alice.

"But Mrs. Sanger claims he's dead—she calls herself a widow," urged Dippy.

"Maybe she wants to be."

Dippy pondered

"Though she won't marry nobody," he continued.

"Maybe she doesn't want to. But all that is immaterial. I'm going to find that prospector if it takes me a year," said Smiler, putting the match safe in his pocket and returning the bag with the discarded present to the care of Heinie.

Dippy ordered two drinks and lost the look of perplexity that Smiler's startling conclusion had spread over his usually serene countenance.

"Here's how, Smiler. I'll help yer all I kin, now I get the hang of this lay-out. Now I see it's all that gal. Now I see it's because she's got her rope over your head, too——"

"Nothing of the kind, Dippy. I never met a girl I so utterly detested——" began Smiler, indignant at the old man's inference.

Dippy laughed so loudly that the men at the bar wanted to be in on the joke.

"Shut up, Dippy," cried Smiler.

"All right, boy; but remember I'm with yer to the last dollar and bullet and rag off my back. You want to bring Sanger back to get him to bust up Mack. Alice has got a lariat round yer horns and is ready to throw yer."

Smiler, disgusted with Dippy's crude reading of his motives, went out to saddle Pat. If that girl had anything to do with his hunt for the prospector, it was only because he was sure the man was her father, and that he, Smiler, would compel her to admit that restoring an errant father to his family was an introduction. Smiler was trying to blot out the image of an unforgettable girl's face by hatred, by scorn, by pride; but this can only be done by indifference—or some other girl. Smiler had no indifference in his make-up, and there was no other girl.

He had opened the back door to go to the corral, when he heard women's voices coming out of the air over his head. He had learned that Mrs. San-

ger and Alice had decided to stay the night at the hotel. Their window was open. He could see their shadows moving across the oblong of light on the ground; they were having a bedtime talk before retiring. Not wishing to appear an eavesdropper, he half closed the door, when the voices ceased and the light went out. But his attention was then caught by the strange behavior of one of the horses in the corral.

The horse was the girl's gray mare, and it was licking and biting at the rope that tied fast the gate. Smiler had seen horses lift ropes and push open gates before—but never one clever enough to bite open a knot. He waited to see what the mare would do.

"Go to it," he whispered.

The mare interrupted her break for liberty. She tossed her head with a fine assumption of innocence, whisked her tail, and ambled round the corral. She had heard that whisper and knew perfectly well she was doing wrong in the eyes of the humans that ruled her. Smiler had considerable sympathy with that mare; he kept very still and hidden till the mare returned to her operations.

Sure enough, in a few moments she had succeeded in loosening the rope and was nosing the gate open. Smiler ran out just in time to hold the gate closed and drive the mare back with a slap on the nose. It was merely the instinctive act of a cowman; if that mare got loose his own pony and the others might be straying over the hills before morning.

"What are you doing to my pony?" called a clear, hard voice that he knew at once. Alice had happened to look out of the window and had seen his action and the mare's startled leap back.

Smiler explained.

"Let her be," said the girl. "I train her to do that."

Smiler apologized, let the mare out, and then roped the gate again to keep his own horse in. If that confoundingly attractive but infernally irritating girl

wanted to have her mare roaming round the town it was none of his business. Perhaps the mare was also trained to return to her mistress, was one of those horses that will not stray. That was all right; it was his mistake. But the curt command of the girl which conveyed the assumption that he had less intelligence than her mare, the way she banged the window without a word of thanks, put Smiler into a cold fury.

When he galloped out of Ascension on his man hunt he was quite sure that the man and his gold were all that was urging him on his somewhat vaguely planned expedition.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROSPECTOR VANISHES.

SMILER'S wild gallop along the clay-bottomed street brought faces to windows and the more curious questioners out of doors, for Pat's hoofs tattooed like a rousing drumstick. Ascension lacked excitement; horse thieves had not appeared for a long time and bandits were a legend. They beheld but one man galloping, followed by none on foot; and they heard no shooting.

Dippy, who had been sworn to secrecy by Smiler, gave out that Smiler had taken this ride to sober up. Smiler did not wish that his guess that the prospector was Sanger should be told to any one till he could produce the man himself. The town went back to its cards, its dance hall, its gossip over the store-keeper's cracker barrel, satisfied that the rider was some drunken cowboy spurred by Heinie's whisky.

Smiler soon picked up the trail of the man and his mule, when the road began to peter out among the sage. Old trails had been hidden with sage and alkali blown in from the desert, and places were swept smooth where pieces of loose, dry sage had become brooms in the breeze; so the new trail was easy to follow.

He had expected Sanger to double back to the hills after a while, for the gold was mainly there. He and Dippy had discussed all this and Dippy had given him all the points he could about those erratic animals, lone prospectors. But that double trail of man and mule kept heading toward the white sea of distant desert that was glimmering afar like frosted silver.

Soon it led him among the cactus and Spanish bayonet. The trail was harder to follow here, for the ground was mottled with queer shadows from that grotesque vegetation; it was hard to see, even when found in the weird, unearthly blue-and-green light from a moon unnaturally large and brilliant.

He was careful and slow, knowing he was trailing a clever and resourceful man as anxious to hide as any hunted animal. But he could see nothing out on that white sea, when a rise gave him a view of its distance. No light from a fire appeared anywhere around him. Remembering that he had heard the prospector tell his mule that he was hungry, that the man had taken but one drink before the fight began and had run away immediately it was over, Smiler was confident that he would soon camp and cook something. But then he was forced to conclude that such a man would know how to hide his fire.

Smiler saw that the trail was leading not exactly out to the extreme center of the desert but was crossing a strip of alkali to a spur from the ranges. As he came nearer, that spur began to loom up like a great beast, crouching with stretched paws on the level of the desert. Probably the prospector had his claim somewhere in there, with a creek to wash his dirt, where he could dig and blast and scrape out of sight and hearing in some crevice in the cliffs, some hell-hot canyon where none but a lone prospector with an alligator's hide could live.

As he came nearer, the spur took on other and more magnificent forms against the velvet sky pricked with stars. Deep gashes of gullies opened where the light on the sandstone edges kindled to white fire. That spur could hide a hundred such men.

Smiler was riding in and out between boulders that were the broken-down debris of prehistoric cliffs of a time when the desert had been the bottom of some paleolithic sea, among red, chrome, and orange rocks retaining ghostly suggestions of their daylight color in that dazzling moonshine. He paused to listen for some sound to guide him. Sanger might be talking to his mule. Perhaps the scraping of a frying pan, the clink of a coffeepot lid, would reveal the man's nearness. Smiler could hear his heart beating, the air hissing in Pat's nostrils, the creaking of the leather of his saddle—and nothing else. The spur and the desert were wrapped in a baffling silence.

Yet, between the rocks on the heavy gravel and more easily read sand he could see the trail led to those massive cliffs standing knee-deep in the wreckage of the rocks they had shed. If Sanger had taken his mule up those rocks Smiler could not follow him on Pat. That spur was a ladder only a mule or a goat or a man on foot could climb.

Smiler, while pausing to consider his next step, smelled something burning. He could see no smoke rising against the clear moon, but he noted a small red spark just below him. He might have taken the spark for some fragment of gleaming garnet but for that smell of smoke.

He dismounted and began kicking away the remains of a fire that had lately been smothered. It had been cunningly lit behind a pile of rocks, so as to hide its blaze, and the dry wood still smoldering was giving off only the most attenuated smoke. Sanger knew how to make his fire almost as invisible

as himself. From the state of that fire, from the warmth in some coffee grounds he had found close by, Smiler concluded that the man could not be very far off. He determined to trail him on foot in and out of that labyrinth of rocks, when, to his amazement, he came upon the footprints of more than one man.

Unquestionably, there were the footprints of three men, sometimes the first two abreast, sometimes the three in file. Sanger, then, was not the lone desert rat he had believed him to be, but one of a party. The party had been waiting here for him; that would explain the magnitude of his purchases—Sanger had been buying stores for three men. It would also sustain the theory of Mack and Dippy that the men were on big gold, for parties as a rule do not keep together unless their findings are big. They are apt to quarrel and split, if the luck is out. It is only the lone man who persists year after year on mere grubstakes, or nothing at all.

Smiler, who up till to-day had never talked with a prospector, who had only regarded them as semidemented hobos crawling over the ranges, arrived at these deductions from his liberalizing contacts with the ranchmen. Dippy had taught him that men were fundamentally the same whether in Wall Street or on the Mojave. Fine clothing, polished speech, the veneer of education, were only masks; underneath they were all animals—and animals to beware of.

The lone man who had aroused his pity this afternoon now began to appear as a cunning organizer. Smiler's experience in the life back East that he had abandoned, had proved to him that organizers for profit were generally animals, and predatory, at that. He grew cautious and more wary. The desert grew dangerous. Out here, where the alkali would whitewash crime and the sun would burn up evidence,

these men would not hesitate to give way to their latent barbarities. His reward for chasing them, for trying to locate their find, might be a bullet. He got down from the rock he had climbed, where he had been standing, an easy mark for any man ready to aim at him from out of those shadows.

Three men ought to be easier to trail or to see than one. He began examining the footprints again, and, to his utter stupefaction, he was unable to find any of the mule's.

Those signs said three men and nothing else. Sometimes he lost all trails, when the ground was hard gravel. Three men and nothing more. They could not have planted the mule anywhere and left him. What did they do with him, then? He went back along the trail by which he had first approached the fire and again picked up the trail. It was only Sanger's and his mule's. The party had not united until they met at the fire; but going away from the fire the mule was no longer with them. Could the men have wiped out the mule's hoofprints in any way? Could they have walked in them themselves? If so, what was their reason?

Smiler was so utterly perplexed that he began leaping to the most preposterous conclusions. Could the men have followed the sand between the rocks, while the mule kept to the boulders, jumping the little chasms between? Smiler went farther. The men's footprints continued; but there were still no signs of the mule's hoofs, and the distances between the rocks were often too wide for a mule to jump.

Smiler had to return to common sense, for imaginative solutions were leading him to insanity. The solution of all human problems lies in the nature of the men who create them. He recalled all he had been told of Sanger by Dippy. Sanger was clever, inventive, something of a conjurer. Sanger had caused that mule to disappear, as he

would flip a coin up his sleeve. The hunt for Sanger was becoming a trick to be found out, and that could only be done by logic and reason.

But this course of thought humanized Sanger and, of course, the men he was leading. No matter how much the wolves of the ranges resembled the wolves of Wall Street, the very care they took to avoid him proved that they would not immediately revert to violence. They were preferring brains to bullets. A hundred times during his chase he could have been safely potted, and his body left to mold and perhaps never be found.

That he had not been shot so far, gave him confidence to climb again to the summit of one of those large round rocks to try to see something of the runaway men and their hidden mule. The dark wall of the ranges, the glimmering face of the desert, were still inscrutable; nothing moved anywhere, except the Spanish bayonet, waving its long stabbing leaves, and little whirls of dust spreading spirals across the face of the moon.

Smiler's deliberations were given a fresh turn by the restlessness of Pat. The horse had been ridden hard and was probably thirsty. Smiler had brought only a canteen for himself, expecting to find Sanger camped by water. But Pat could not climb those rocks, and Smiler would not leave him to follow the men on foot. Even if the men went over the desert, Pat would be something of a hindrance.

Smiler was starting to come down the rock, when he received a sudden and violent blow on the top of his head. One hand went to the top of his Stetson to defend himself, while the other held him to the face of the rock. He found a large stone in the hollow of his hat, when his foothold gave way and he slipped all the way to the ground, scraping the skin off his palm.

He was quite dizzy from the blow,

and during the fall it seemed as if he heard the voice of Sanger. It was certain those men had found a means to keep out of his sight and yet were near enough to bring him down with a stone. That stone would be less incriminating than a bullet. A cowman lying on the ground with a cracked skull would imply merely a fall from his horse—nothing more.

Sitting up, where he had fallen prone, he tried to estimate the direction from which the stone must have been thrown. His hand was bleeding and he tried to bind it. Then he found that it was not blood that was running from his hand, but paint. There were smears of paint on the rock he had slid down and he could make out some lettering that his fall had half obliterated. The paint was dark red, almost the color of the rocks; but as it was still wet, it stood out dark and shining. He was able to read the letters which spelled: "Sacred to Sammy."

Then he noticed he had fallen on a mound of freshly dug sand. He had dropped on the grave of the mule from the top of its tombstone. He had never thought of the mule dying and being buried. He remembered Mack saying that Sanger had bought some cans of paint. Sanger had stopped to give his best friend a decent burial and paint his epitaph.

Thus was part of the mystery explained. But the shock of the stone was not; how and where the men were hidden was not. The stone must have been perfectly aimed and the only stone thrown, for he would have heard another rattling among the rocks in that silence. Nobody but Sanger, the juggler, could have done that. Sanger must be close by, watching him, laughing at him—for Smiler was sure he heard the man's laugh when he fell.

But it was useless for him to follow this maddening mystery any farther, burdened by Pat. Smiler wanted to

blaze away at every shadow, at every bush that might cover a man. But that might only invite more desperate reprisals. Cunning would have to be met by cunning; this bull rushing would not do; these animals would have to be stalked stealthily. He mounted Pat, to ride back and consult with Dippy.

"I'll call your hand next play, Sanger," he murmured.

Was it a delusion induced by straining his wits at an insoluble problem, by admission of mental defeat, by the confusion of that blow on the head? Smiler did not wait to think any more; he had reached the limits of his thinking. For a second he was sure he had heard the faint laugh of a man and the *hee-haw* of a mule. Nothing but a gallop would clear his brain.

As he approached Ascension and Pat brushed through the sage, Smiler became aware of another rider just ahead of him. He drove Pat on, hardly wondering if this man could throw any light on the men he had been seeking. The rider drew up at his approach and Smiler recognized the gray mare and its rider, Alice Sanger.

"Do I have to be followed?" she demanded haughtily. "I am riding alone."

Cursing his impetuosity silently, Smiler apologized and drew away.

"Oh, it's you?" she said, thawing a little. "I forgot to thank you for looking after Bess. She is used to breaking out of her corral, but she never goes far. You can do all sorts of tricks, can't you, Bess, girl?"

Alice patted the mare's mane affectionately; she seemed more human in the saddle. Smiler took advantage of their common love of horseflesh to keep by the girl.

"I've seen ponies lift gate ropes," he said, "but never one that could untie a knot."

"Bess can do anything; I've taught her," said the girl.

"Must take a lot of patience."

"And knowing how. My father taught me."

So, thought Smiler, a trick horse trained by the trick daughter of a trick father. His interest in this man Sanger was growing intense. But brushing through the sage with both horses now at a walk, under the magic of that moon, Smiler admitted that the interest extended to the daughter. She had not attempted to ride away from him, though of course he would not have followed. She went on telling him of the marvelous things Bess could do. She was more friendly, though in a distant and impersonal way.

"I wish I had met your father, Miss Sanger."

She stiffened a little; and Bess broke into a canter, as if sharing the mood of her mistress.

"People have been talking, I suppose?" she answered shortly.

Smiler, however, was not to be rebuffed.

"Why not?" he came back. "It's natural, isn't it? Out here, especially. It's only in cities that no one cares about the man next door. They live too close to be human beings. But out here it's different. The more miles we have to ride to see our neighbors, the more we're interested in them."

Skillfully Smiler kept his talk to generalities. The girl for the first time faced him directly. Those regular, rather stern features of hers looked in that light as if they had been molded in silver.

"But you don't talk like a Westerner," she said with an interested smile. "You sound like Harvard to me."

"Class of 1917," laughed Smiler.

"Radcliffe, class of 1924," she laughed in return.

They were friends now; those two colleges of Cambridge had formalized the introduction of the desert and the moon.

"Do the Harvard men still hog the

sidewalks on the campus and make the girls walk in the snow?" he asked.

"No, indeed; the girls do the hogging to-day."

They took the last mile at a gallop. The perfect timing of the hoofs of those thoroughbreds, the swaying of the two riders to one rhythm, the soft padding on sand and the harder clinking on gravel, cleared away the last clouds of self-deception from the man who had come West to find himself. Such a mile in the saddle created an intimacy deeper and more lasting than could be attained in the overheated, oversexed, tango-trotting temples in the East. Diana, the chaste huntress, had descended from her clean mansions in the moon to ride with him. Her aloofness, her curtness of speech, her hardness of mind and muscle, aroused feelings and purposes in him never evoked by her silken sisters of the cities. She was a man's woman, able to spur a man to his best and beyond.

"Scandal, I suppose," she laughed, seeing the men come to the door of the hotel at their approach.

"Not from the cowmen. Your mother was wrong about them," said Smiler earnestly.

"I know. Don't mind mother. Her class was earlier and different from ours."

She let him take her horse to the corral, but turned to him as she reached the back door to the hotel.

"Oh, Mr. Hayle," she said, "I think I prefer American beauties, if you don't mind."

Smiler put both horses in the corral, tying a knot on the gate this time that would keep that trick pony busy all night. Then he went into the bar, where, as he had expected, the men refrained from remarks—except Dippy, who, acting on his privilege as a friend, drew Smiler aside.

"Is congratulations in order, Smiler?" he whispered.

"Rot! I met the girl by chance."

"Then I'll go my limit in backing every chance you take, after this. Did yer find Sanger?"

Smiler related the night's happenings. Under the influence of the girl and the ride, he dwelt rather emotionally on the way Sanger and his party had eluded him and on that stone which had struck him on the head. Dippy pondered, and then his usual slow grin softened his granitic features.

"That stone might have come without Sanger's tricks," he said. "Windy out there?"

"A little; I could see dust storms on the desert."

"Did yer never see a twister carry stones up in the air? What goes up must come down. That was yer bad luck—it hitting yer. Yer good luck is yer had a thick skull."

Smiler was annoyed at himself that he had allowed such an obvious phenomenon of the desert to perplex him. The desert had still much to teach him. He wanted to grapple with it again. He told Dippy he was going to return to his search for Sanger and how he intended to make it.

"Going to walk, like a common sheep-herder?" grunted Dippy in scorn.

"Yes; you always say you have to play the game of the animal you're trailing. I did a lot of hiking in the army and haven't ridden enough to hate walking. I'll play Sanger with his own cards."

"Don't forget there's a Queen of Hearts in the pack. Yer've got to win quick. I heard to-night that Mack had wired fer a parson."

Smiler fell out of his heaven.

"But she couldn't, she can't marry him; she's not that kind of girl," he protested.

"Gal's ideas is different from men's," said Dippy, shaking his head. "Mack's got money, what they think is good looks, and a line of talk. I heard, be-

sides, that Mrs. Sanger is in a hole over money. Been spreading herself a little too much, and the banks is worrying her. Quite natural that the gal would like to help her out."

"But she's not the girl to marry for money. A girl who's been raised on our ranges?" continued Smiler, indignant at this sacrilege to this dream-girl of his moonlit gallop. The idea of her marrying Mack was a more perplexing riddle than was the disappearance of her father.

"Raised on our ranges," answered Dippy, "but eddicated at one of them colleges. Since my missus died I lost my interest in women, but I like to read of their doings in the Sunday papers. There's a new breed being raised back East. From the way they treat their fathers and mothers, I figger they don't think they was raised at all. Fell out of the sky like the stone that hit your head. Wild women that don't believe in nothing. Gals that have passed an amendment against love and marriage and babies."

"Dippy, if you and me are not going to quarrel," said Smiler, who was not going to allow Alice to be classed with this type of woman he knew only too well, "don't you——"

"All right. I ain't exactly branding her like them, but she might be. All I want to know is: Are you het up enough to go after her father and get him back here to play his gold against Mack and save that gal making a fool of herself?"

There was no question of Smiler's eagerness to resume his hunt. Dippy suggested, however, that he should ride out to the big butte that overlooked the desert a little north of the road he had at first taken. He could spend the night there, and get an early-morning bird's-eye view for miles around. And if he sighted the fire or the dust of those men, he could make a bee-line trail to them on foot. Dippy would call for his horse later.

"The thing that gets me," said Smiler, as he went about his preparations, "is those men stopping to bury a dead mule when they were so anxious to get away. Of course, Sammy was more than a wife and daughter to Sanger, but——"

Dippy drained the last glass they had ordered.

"Did yer see if there was a mule in that grave?" he asked slyly.

"Why, no."

"Did yer see if the feet of them three men was all of the same size?"

"No; why should I?"

"Did yer never think of putting a man's shoes on a mule's feet to change a trail? I never seen it done with a mule, but it kin be done with horses. Makes kind of a heavy sign, but a greenhorn wouldn't see the difference. Yer never learned in yer college how to figger out a man's weight from the way his feet go into sand, did yer? No, I guess not."

Again Smiler had to admit the acuteness of this man of the ranges.

"So you think it was all a bag of tricks? There was no party, then—only Sanger and his mule," said Smiler, utterly disgusted with himself.

"Boy," said Dippy with grim and patient kindness, "I ain't trying to make yer feel like a fool. Yer ain't. But yer ain't had the natural advantage I've had. I want yer to remember yer trailing a man that has hoss sense and mule sense, as well as man sense. He's an animal with the brains of all the animals the Lord let loose. Didn't he fight like a butting bull, a kicking mule, a hugging bear, and a gamecock? He could have killed Mack, but he didn't; that's where the man came in. The only killer in this layout is Mack. If you see Mack, plug him on sight; and I'll swear yer did it in self-defense, even if I didn't see yer shoot."

"That's going strong," laughed Smiler.

"'Tain't. Mack don't have ter draw

to prove he's a killer to me. I seen bloody murder in his eyes when you came riding in with his gal."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEETING.

AN hour before dawn Smiler was climbing the great butte that was to give him his far view of the desert. He had slept at its foot and had left Pat there, fed from the food bag he had carried and watered from the little creek. Dippy would ride over for the horse later. Smiler hauled himself from ledge to ledge, burdened only with his pack and canteen. He had cooked himself a good breakfast before starting.

"When yer don't know what's ahead, and got grub, eat all yer kin," had been Dippy's advice. "Yer that much in, anyway."

But Smiler would not carry a frying pan and a coffeepot on a foot hunt, so all that was on his back was a liberal supply of Heinie's sausages and water crackers, together with a small canteen.

"Gold fever and girl fever will keep a man a long time on his pins," persisted Dippy, who had superintended these preparations. "But grub fever comes fust."

Dippy also saw that Smiler carried plenty of ammunition for his Colt.

"I don't think Sanger will try any shooting," he had judged. "But an animal cut off from his den is liable to use all his claws."

The gray dawn was just outlining the peaks to the east, when Smiler reached the flat summit of the butte. The morning was windless and still; only the dropping of the pebbles his climbing had abraded from the rocks broke the awesome silence of the coming of the day. He looked out over the wide, dark expanse that was the desert below him. If Sanger and his party—supposing there was a party—had been cooking break-

fast at any camp fire, Smiler could not see the slightest glimmer of it.

The gray distance began to turn to a pale gold; the pink glow on the snow peaks to the north dropped lower, and then the snow suddenly flashed an intense white. The lowering edge of white then hit the belts of fir and spruce, and suddenly a blinding, blazing arc cut into the eastern hills—and the day was upon him.

But that light right in his eyes only made the valley below darker; from some curious optical effect the whole world below swam in a sea of indigo. Only by shading his eyes could he make out the features of the landscape as the sun rose higher. He threw himself flat on the rock, suddenly aware how conspicuous he might be to the keen eyes of the man he was hunting. For that clear morning air brought distant objects close with a telescopic distinctness.

Sounds began to come to him. He could hear the hoot of the early-morning freight pulling into the depot and some one chopping wood. That air was just as marvelous a carrier of sound as of light. He could actually hear men's voices shouting in Ascension, five miles away. Those voices reminded him that his chase would have to be conducted silently. Gradually the sunlight poured into the valley. The far face of the desert glared up at him—a bad, white face, too pale for a man to consider friendly. The blotches of sage at its borders and its winding arroyos still carried shadows.

That wrinkled gray face was like a malicious old man's. The desert was ended at the north by the ranges, but at the south and east was an unending prospect of desolation and death, growing whiter where the alkali was thicker, where the salt of old dried lakes lay deeper. But on that vast expanse Smiler could not see the slightest speck of anything moving.

Aware that with every turn of an eyeball his roving glance covered miles, he began a systematic search. Backward and forward he peered, as he would search a map for a small name. His eyes were good. His books at college had not hurt them, and since he had come West, they had, as young eyes will, actually gained in keenness.

Something of his old wariness of war-time scouting returned to him. He knew that the desert was not as flat as it appeared from this eagle's view. There were little parched gullies, dried rivers, and choked water holes in that blank expanse that might hide a man or a party of men. Smiler tried to follow with his eyes the trail he had taken last night, when he had first galloped from the town after Sanger.

Of course he could not help thinking of Alice as he followed with his eyes that trail, which looked like a mere inch from where he was. The thought brought no softening to him; it merely deepened his purpose, made him strain his eyes harder. He was determined that she should not marry Mack, even if it were entirely her own inclination. At all hazards, he was going to bring home to her the crime of such a sacrifice.

Suddenly he saw an infinitesimal speck on the far face of the desert that appeared to be separating from clumps of the cactus. Straining his eyes till they ached, he saw that the speck was a double one—a man and something four-footed. Those specks were Sanger and his mule. Dippy had been right. Sanger was still a lone prospector; there was no party with him. Sanger must have deceived him by putting men's shoes on Sammy's hoofs, as Dippy had guessed.

Smiler did not start down the butte until he had got a line on the direction, that Sanger was taking. Obviously the man was not heading for the ranges that bounded the other side of the alkali,

but was wheeling round for the purpose of throwing off possible pursuers. He would return to the hills somewhere, and even now seemed to be on his home stretch. Smiler carefully calculated how he could cut north to meet him.

Smiler's descent was a series of dangerous slides and jumps. Gravel poured from under his feet; and he feared that the clatter of his fall might be carried to Sanger and betray him. He hid for a time behind a rock; and he considered next that, with the sun full on him, in his brown clothing, he would be invisible at that distance against the red and ocher of the rocks. He continued his descent, landing in one big jump in a pile of rubble and scaring a number of sage hens nestling in the brush.

Where the ground dipped to the desert there were sage and brush and rocks that hid him. He could not see Sanger now, for the ground was full of rises and hollows. That did not matter, for he had taken a bearing on a distant snow peak piercing a sky so blue that it seemed an arch of solid turquoise. There were spurs of granite sticking out from that peak and ribbons of pine woods below. By heading so that these kept their shapes, he knew he would be true to the direction he had started on.

Soon he was on the desert—no longer the mysterious green-and-blue landscape of dreams he had ridden on last night, but a blazing stretch of sun-burned pebbles and shining sand that glinted as if he was walking on acres of amethysts and diamond dust; for the sun struck sparks from everything.

It was a garden, too, for the cacti were of every variety. Huge strawberries were hidden in the hearts of some and great yellow flowers flaunted from others. He found a deep arroyo leading from the hills, and along its soft and sandy bottom he was able to walk very fast. He knew he could outspeed that man and his mule. He had been right to come without his horse.

Climbing the banks of the arroyo at times, he peered out; but it was not often he could see very far through the contorted trunks of cactus and clumps of hardy herbage. He should be nearing the prospector soon, he calculated; and he was very careful in his spying, for he was very uncertain how Sanger would receive him. He did not feel at all sure that the man would be pacific. That sudden and somewhat unprovoked attack on Mack advised caution. Dippy, while a fighter to his finger tips, was rather prone to make excuses for the other man. Good nature, despite his venomous talk about Mack, was Dippy's main characteristic; he had, perhaps, assumed too much humaneness in the prospector.

Taking another bearing by that peak, so that the winding of the arroyo might not lead him astray, Smiler kept on. The banks grew lower, till he was almost level with the desert, where that stream which had once dug that channel had died out. Lying full length Smiler looked out and now saw Sanger leading his mule with that slow patient pace of his, giving the sky one glance for a hundred he kept on the ground, though there was little chance of any gold around there.

Smiler hesitated for a moment, and decided to keep on abreast of him for a little while longer, so that he could come on the man suddenly, before he had a chance to make one of his mysterious disappearances, when he discovered that Sanger was once more heading out to the desert. Sanger was jerking Sammy to a faster pace, with his leading rope toward the flatter and utterly barren center of the salt lakes.

Smiler, taking what cover he could from rock and bush and accident of surface, followed till he came to the hollow of another arroyo deep enough to cover him as he ran. He looked out again to be sure that the man was not merely dawdling among the patches of gravel

that might halt him with their chances of mineral.

All Smiler's respect for the man's cunning returned. After last night he was ready to credit Sanger with almost any miracle in the way of legerdemain. Sanger was on his own ground and knew the desert better than Smiler. Luckily the tortuosities helped Smiler; he was able to run, though bent double. There was something of boyish fun in this. He figured on Sanger's astonishment at seeing a greenhorn appear right in his path. The man of tricks would appreciate this trick.

When he was sure he had outflanked Sanger, Smiler climbed to the bank and lifted his head carefully. He saw Sammy, nearer, and nibbling as usual; but there was no sign of Sanger. The mule's leading rope was trailing on the ground. Smiler waited for Sanger to reappear; the man was probably hidden in some hollow.

The mule did not stir from where it was standing; it merely switched its tail and dropped its nose, trying to bite at something that did not have spines in it. Smiler had last seen that mule as an almost infinitesimal speck on the desert. Now, close by, seen through the heated air, it seemed abnormally large; it even wavered, as if seen through smoke. Smiler had become certain that the mule had shared in Sanger's tricks; only a sympathetic and cunningly trained animal could have submitted so quickly to having a man's shoes tied onto its awkward hoofs. Sammy was standing too still for innocence; he was obviously at attention and under the eyes of his trainer.

Suddenly Smiler, with the hot sun beating on his neck and the blood throbbing in his temples, was assailed with that same sensation of danger which had come to him last night. He had a feeling that eyes were on him. It was like the ghastly suspicion of a snake crawling up his trousers or a tarantula about

to drop on his face as he slept. Danger, sudden, unknown danger, striking from where he knew not—danger that could not be forestalled. It was not fear, only a sudden tensing of all his senses. He seemed to see without his eyes, to hear without his ears, to have an intelligence beyond mere brain, to have attained to that higher instinct which is the gift of lonely living. He turned his head very slowly, for that instinct bade him do nothing hastily. Sanger was standing behind him holding a Colt and grinning at him.

"What do you want, young fellow?" demanded Sanger.

Smiler reached for his gun, as Sanger did not have the drop on him. Sanger, at this move, which was hard to consummate, as Smiler was prone on the ground and half lying on the gun, immediately covered Smiler; and his grin changed to a snarl.

"Never mind drawing on me," he said slowly. "I don't figger on shooting yer. I jest want to hev the bulge on yer. What do yer mean by trailing me and Sammy? Yer can't get my find. I got grub enough to mosey round for months looking fer another. No one else can find it. I got enough to go on. You go back to where you belong—pronto."

Undoubtedly, Smiler thought, the man was half mad; but there was a certain restraint in his ravings, a glimmer of humor, of enjoyment at seeing how completely he had outwitted and outguessed Smiler. That was encouraging. Smiler tried to be conciliatory.

"I don't want your gold, friend," he began.

"Liar. Don't forget I can shoot yer here and none but Sammy would know—and he'd give me a hand."

True enough, the mule had sidled up alongside Smiler and stood ready at any time to turn and launch with his heels at the man his master was holding immovable under his gun barrel.

"You're one of Mack's gang trailing

me to my pockets. You'd grab what I've got or offer to go partners or grubstake me. I know yer breed—worse than scorpions or tarantulas or gila monsters. Worse than loco weed or going blind. I don't want no partners, no friends, no grubstakes. No; you git as fast as you come. Down heels, Sammy, and give him a chance."

The mule turned away at the word and began foraging, since his services were not required to expel the intruder on the desert. Evidently Sanger would come very close to murder, however, if any one infringed on his privacy. But Smiler's curiosity was aroused by the man's mention of Mack. There seemed to be some bond of hatred between Sanger and Mack deeper and more virulent than the distrust of Dippy. Smiler was more anxious to get at this secret than he was to find Sanger's claim. Besides, he was not going to allow himself to be ordered off the free desert by a man with a trick mule.

"See here," he said. "I have nothing to do with Mack and he's not one of my friends. I didn't come to take your gold but to return you some. Let me reach inside my shirt. I pack only the gun at my belt."

Without waiting for permission to drop his hands, Smiler reached inside his shirt and drew out the match safe Sanger had dropped in his fight with Mack.

"That is yours, I believe?" he said, tossing it to Sanger, who recognized it at once and caught it in the air as a dog would snatch at a crumb. He opened it, weighed it in his hand, and something of a hard grin appeared behind his whiskers.

"Why didn't yer holler, instead of running rings round me like a jack rabbit?" he queried.

"How did you know, I was?" demanded Smiler in astonishment. "You couldn't see me?"

"No?" mocked Sanger. "You

dropped into that old water hole and then into the second arroyo. You stopped to take a taste of strawberry cactus. Then you pawed over some dirt, thinking you saw gold."

Again this man amazed Smiler. Sanger seemed to have had the same bird's-eye view of his progress as he had of Sanger's from the butte, for he had done all those things while he was below the level of the desert, and, as he thought, out of Sanger's line of vision. It was uncanny. Had Sanger, naturally cunning to begin with, acquired the magic of the Indian medicine man?

But Smiler was too much a sophisticate of the cities to rest in mythical guesses; there must be some perfectly rational explanation of the prospector's powers of divination. It was only one more of the many riddles this man had set him. Smiler was determined to unravel those riddles. But it was plain he could use no force; only guile would succeed with this hairy being covered with red mud from creeks he must have waded, covered with dust and alkali. The fellow seemed to be spawned out of sand and slime but able to handle the fighting tools of a man.

"Well, you've got me licked," said Smiler with his most vacuous and defeated air.

"You betcha. I got away from yer last night and I could have done it today, too. No one can come within a mile of me and me not know it."

Sanger was chuckling with vanity over his performance.

"How did you do it?" asked Smiler, with the air of a novice to a master.

"Sammy," grinned the prospector.

So far, Smiler had not broached his real reason for following Sanger. He was sure this perpetual reference to the mule was mere conjurer's patter intended to divert his attention. The prospector, who might be morbidly suspicious of his fellow man, who might be the victim of some antisocial phobia,

seemed sane enough in most ways. Smiler was therefore prepared for any trick, any display of truculence, as he warily made his next remark.

"I hope you don't believe now that I came after your gold, Mr. Sanger?" he said.

But the name provoked no immediate response from the prospector. He had started to adjust the pack on Sammy's back and did not interrupt his tightening of the new strap he had bought in Ascension. Smiler paused. He had expected some startling response from the man who for his love of life in the open had run away from his wife, his daughter, his home and—that name.

"Why do you keep calling me Sanger?" finally said the prospector, after he had adapted the strap without hurry or bungling. "I heard yer last night, too."

"Last night?" exclaimed Smiler, recalling his murmured words to himself as he had mounted Pat to return. Every moon-white rock, every shadow he had examined, came back to him as he recalled how, stunned by that blow from the stone, he had whispered his resolve not to give up that riddle.

"'I'll call yer hand next play, Sanger,' was what yer said," grinned the prospector. "Me and Sammy heard yer. We was laughing at yer when I hit you with the stone."

"But where in thunder were you? I looked everywhere."

"Except where I was. You don't know how to look, young feller. Looking takes thinking, and you thought wrong. See here."

Secretive and solitary as the man was, his vanity led him to pick up a stone and throw it in the air. Before it fell he had caught up another and then another and sent them flying after the first at regular intervals. Soon he was maintaining six stones of various weights in the air at once. First he did it with two hands, and then chuckled

as he proved he could do it with one. The one hand worked as swiftly and accurately as a shuttle in a machine. The stones fell as he wished. He did not have to reach for them. That parabola of stones was perfect. He was doing the double fountain, that most difficult of all juggling feats, and he was a master at it.

Smiler was spellbound.

"Watch me hit that cactus behind me. It'll come down in the middle of the flower."

With an extra jerk, one of the stones was diverted from its orbit and fell on the yellow bloom behind him without his having to turn his head. No legendary cowboy, no marvelous bad man who could shoot over his shoulder by a mirror, had ever displayed such marksmanship.

"Watch this," continued Sanger.

He caught another stone in the open collar at the back of his neck and another in the pocket in front, all the while maintaining his fountains.

"Nothin' to it, landing that stone on your head. Now do yer think I can't trick yer? Do you think you can play hide and seek with me? I practiced ball juggling for years and years, and I can juggle me and Sammy any way I want to. You go back and leave us alone, 'cause I can do just the same with bullets, if I have to. Hell, man, it's a crime not to leave a man to himself. I ain't hurting no one; leave me be!"

He shook his fist at Smiler with a sudden rush of passion, and the stones that had been fulfilling the orbits his skill had compelled crashed at his feet.

"It's a greater crime, Sanger," said Smiler, equally hot, "lettin' your daughter marry a man like Mack, if you can stop it. Mrs. Sanger is in a financial hole and Alice is marrying him to save her. I hope you didn't know this. Probably you didn't; but I came to tell you. If you've got enough gold to save your girl from this sacrifice, and you

don't come back to your wife and family for at least a while, you're meaner than a snake, yellower than a mangy dog."

The prospector took Smiler's abuse while standing as still as a monolith, though little beads of perspiration glistened through the dust on his forehead.

"She can't; she can't marry that coyote," he murmured. "He's no hombre. She can't. He killed her father—shot him in cold blood seven years ago in Weeping Canyon. I was there."

The words came from him as if he were under torture.

"You're not Sanger?" gasped Smiler.

"Course not; my name is Ruggles—Dave Ruggles, when I need a name."

"But I was sure, from your juggling and your tricks, that you were Sanger. Sanger was clever like that," pursued Smiler, unable at once to adjust himself to this new turn of events.

"Yes, he was. He taught me all I could learn, and it kept me from going crazy many a day. But Sanger died out yonder in Weeping Canyon six years ago and—and—Sanger's wife and daughter ain't no concern of mine. That gal ain't no call to marry the man who murdered her father. But I can't do nothing. Leave me be, will yer?"

CHAPTER V.

SAMMY SUGGESTS.

THE prospector was gathering up the slack of Sammy's leading rope and preparing to start on his lonely wandering once again. Smiler had no reason to follow him now; he had been blindly following a false trail. The man's gold seeking had lost all interest for him; he knew now that his sole purpose behind this foolish chase had been to save Alice from Mack.

"You ought to give Mack up to justice, Ruggles," he pleaded. "You've got to; you can't let that girl marry the man who murdered her father."

Ruggles hesitated; there was a tremulous uncertainty about the man's movements showing he was not quite dead to all human promptings.

"I don't want to be bothered with no law," he wailed, "hanging round courts and seeing too many people; it gets me rattled."

Undoubtedly the man was suffering from the fear of crowds. Able to face hunger, cold, starvation and thirst, to battle with all the demons of loneliness by talking to his mule and keeping up his sleight of hand, the man who had tackled Mack looked and sounded like a wreck in a psychopathic ward at the prospect of facing a crowd, of being shut in behind walls.

"Can't you tell me more about the murder? Where is this Weeping Canyon?"

Ruggles pointed across the desert to the range forming its northern boundary.

"Give me some details. If I have facts enough, maybe I can scare Mack out of the country."

"You can't scare Mack easily. He'll fight like a cornered rattler," said Ruggles.

"He can't shoot me if I ask him what happened to his old partner, Sanger—if I let him know there's suspicion Sanger was murdered when he was his partner."

"'Tain't suspicion; that's a fact," flared Ruggles. "He did murder him. Took his gold and mine, too—every pennyweight, and tried to plug me, too. Mack's the kind of man a big strike turns into a varmint; he was middling decent till we made that strike."

"Go on; tell me more," said Smiler, eager to get these details, every one of which corroborated the first suspicion Dippy had formed against the man from Salt Lake City.

"Aw, what's the use, young feller," said Ruggles wearily. "Mack'd say what's the word of some old drunken

prospector against his? Any smart lawyer'd turn me inside out in five minutes and get me dippy. You haven't a scrap of real evidence and no more have I. Say, what are yer bothering me for? Leave me alone, will yer? If you want to prospect, stake out yer own ground and leave me alone. I play a lone hand."

He waved his hand to the wilderness, claiming his right to be undisturbed. Smiler by now had too much sympathy with him not to feel a certain delicacy about infringing on that right. Smiler had cut loose from all social ties himself, though a girl in Ascension was reasserting their claims.

"See here, Ruggles. I don't want your gold, and I don't want to know where you got it. If I take up prospecting I'll turn my back on your trail. Just now all I want to do is to get something on Mack. Let's eat first. Sit down and I'll build a fire and you try some of my tobacco."

Ruggles allowed himself to be persuaded, while Smiler built the fire. More than that, he insisted that Smiler share his coffee and bacon. When the pipes were started he began a long, wandering narrative, proving that he was really longing to talk, as is the way of most silent men once the barriers of their reticence are broken. Sammy nosed in and out of the camp. He allowed Smiler to feed him with a slice of bacon; it was plain that the mule accepted Smiler now as a friend.

"Yer see, Mack and me and Sanger was partners. Mack was grubstaking us. He ran a hotel and gambling joint then in Ogden, but being a crook himself, he wasn't straight enough to trust us, but used to ride out and join us sometimes and see we was not holding back on him. We didn't do much for a long time; and we thought Mack was on the level then. He was till the big strike went to his head and brought out the black drop in him. I had met San-

ger in—I forget where; but he was a greenhorn just butting into the game. Ran away from his home 'cause he was sick of it—and I don't blame him. Most homes I've met is worse than hoosegows invented by women to keep men tied to their skirts. Hell! If women want to stay at home, no need why men should, is there?"

Angrily the prospector put this question, as if he had made Sanger's domestic troubles his own. Smiler only nodded, not saying a word to this diversion but letting the man's talk have its head.

"Nagging men to work at what they don't want, just for a home and kids—it's hell, I say."

He reached for a coal to rekindle his pipe, and Smiler could see that this man of iron nerve was trembling. The lit stick quivered in those fingers that had been so steady in juggling with the stones. Perhaps Ruggles, too, was a deserter from domesticity.

"Sanger was all right," he continued, "and soon picked up the prospecting business. Smart as a new whip, he was, and full of notions. He thought we ought to try Weeping Canyon, which had a bad name 'cause of the alkali. There's a lake somewhere underground back in the hills and the rocks are white where the water drips out. It's full of the bones of dead cattle and men. No one ever found nothing there, but Sanger says try it. Where men give up and die is the place to try again, he says. Sure enough, we landed a big strike. Layer after layer of gold hidden by the floods of carbonate and salt that had come down. Well, never mind about that."

"Any more gold there?" asked Smiler incautiously.

"Go and find out. Thought you said you wasn't after gold, young feller?" bristled the prospector, full of his old suspicions. "If there was gold there I'd have got it, wouldn't I? If I thought

there was more there I wouldn't have told you nothing."

"All right, Ruggles; keep your Weeping Canyon. I was only curious. When you've told me your yarn, I'm going right back to Ascension. You say Mack shot Sanger?"

"No; knifed him. Would have used his gun, only we had left them in the hut we had built. Didn't want to carry more than we had to, as it was blazing hot in that canyon and the salt everywhere made the air taste pickled. You got thirsty with every breath. Yer see, Mack and Sanger had been arguing the night before over the expense account. I ain't no head for figgers; but Sanger had. Smart chap, that. Chucked his money about like a drunken sailor when he had it, but he could slice a dime into little bits on paper and make 'em tot up into dollars.

"Mack didn't like such close shaving; and we all turned in sulky. I stood by Sanger, 'cause I seen Mack was trying to hog the whole show—charging us with every drink we had in his bar at Salt Lake City and getting greedier and greedier every time the pan showed more gold. Much better to go hungry and scratch like Sammy for feed than have a grubstaker like that.

"Well, next morning I was working some pockets some distance from Mack and Sanger when I heard a cuss and a groan. I looked up and saw Sanger falling back with a knife in his chest. Mack had knifed him, though I didn't know how it had come about. I was too sorry for Sanger to do anything at first but try and pick him up. Mack had run off, and soon I heard shots and bullets whistling past my ears. Of course Mack wanted to kill both of us and grab the whole pile. All the gold was back in the hut, except the little we had just panned.

"All I could do was to pick up the bleeding body of Sanger and carry him into the first cave I could find. The

face of the canyon was full of caves. Soon Mack came up and began blazing in on me, standing in the open and not giving a damn, for he knew I had no gun.

"'Come out, you damned thief, and let me finish you, too,' he yelled.

"Of course he claimed we was trying to rob him. Funny thing, when a man starts anything crooked he always puts up a lot of alibis to prove he's doing right. Mack was just crazy, wild as an Injun loaded with corn juice. I've seen men crazy with women, with liquor, with mescal and hop. First time I ever seen a man completely off his head with too much gold. He was quite safe, he knew, and felt he was cock of the whole world, with no one seeing what he was doing 'cept the eagles up in the sky. He kept on whooping and taking shots at me, hidden back in the darkness of the cave.

"First thing I did was to try and get cover behind the rocks. The place was full of long, streaky, twisty pillars of white rock coming from the roof and more rising up from the floor to meet them. What do you call 'em?"

"Stalactites," said Smiler.

"Yep. I got a little shelter behind them, while I attended to Sanger. But he soon went. Soon as I got the knife out of his chest, he dropped his head without a word. I lifted him up and tried to bury him but the bottom of that cave was hard as glass. Water was trickling from the roof and I knew that water was turning to stone every minute; you could hear the cave was full of drippings between every one of Mack's shots.

"All that time the lunatic outside was yelling that the sooner I'd come out the quicker he'd finish me. The brute seemed to think he was doing me a kind of personal favor. Then he began shooting at the roof, hoping the bullets would slide off and get me that way. That roof was soon raining lead on me.

For a moment I thought of picking up Sanger's dead body and using that as a cover to rush Mack. But somehow I couldn't do that, though Sanger was as dead as those stony pillars.

"Then, crawling 'round, I found a passage between two thin pillars that looked like salt but were as hard as quartz. I couldn't break them, but I managed to squeeze into an inner cave. That took me out of the range of Mack's bullets, which he never let up on. He reloaded almost as fast as he fired; so I didn't have a chance to rush him when he jerked out the shells.

"I found that cave led to another. Soon I saw daylight, and came out farther up the canyon, where I could see Mack. He stopped shooting after a while and concluded he'd done for me and began piling rocks over the front of the cave to make it my tomb. He hung 'round the place for three days, panning out the rest of the gold.

"I kept hidden. Had nothing to eat and nothing to drink but salt water. Sneaked out at night to get that—bitter, salt, alkali water. Do you wonder why I wouldn't drink with him to-day?"

Smiler rose to his feet, tingling with the narration, hot with horror at the idea of Alice even contemplating marriage with such a man. Of course, she knew nothing of Mack's ghastly past. The man had manners and money; and marriage contracts are often entered into with no better guarantees. He could not blame Alice, but he had to open her eyes, somehow.

"Don't see how it's going to do you much good, though," continued Ruggles. "Even if I was to go in and tell what I'd seen, Mack'd be smart enough to charge me with that murder."

Smiler admitted that possibility, but just then his attention was caught by a curious optical phenomenon. As he had been listening to Ruggles' story his eyes had been fixed on Sammy browsing in the cactus. That mirage effect created

by the heated surface of the desert had been distorting his vision of the mule's body into all sorts of queer proportions. Sammy had then run into some spines and had kicked at them in irritation. The kick raised a small cloud of dust which lifted in a bronze tinge against the blue of the distant ranges.

While giving intense attention to Ruggles, Smiler was still able to think that perhaps he had created such a cloud of faint dust in his run along the arroyo and that such a cloud had betrayed his presence to Ruggles. Now, as he rose to his feet, the mule entirely disappeared. Smiler realized that he had not been looking at the mule at all. Sammy was entirely out of sight down in the arroyo.

When Smiler slowly seated himself, the mule once more swam into his vision, lifted into visibility by the refracted light that had created the mirage. Ruggles must have seen what he had been doing in the arroyo by utilizing his knowledge of mirages.

"We've got to do something," Smiler said, as he sat by the fire once more, not betraying his clew to Ruggles' desert craft.

Smiler, while thoroughly understanding now Ruggles' hatred of Mack, appreciating his desire not to be dragged into the turmoil of a law trial, and perfectly satisfied that Ruggles was sane, still thought it advisable not to let the prospector know he had guessed one of his tricks. That might only antagonize him.

"Tell yer what I'll do, young feller. I'll take yer up to Weeping Canyon and show yer the cave where Sanger's body lies behind those stones. Maybe yer'd like to go into the cave?"

"What for?" asked Smiler.

"Yer'd find his mummy; they last a long time in this climate. But no," he wavered; "nobody would recognize him."

Smiler said nothing. It was plain

that Ruggles was trying to find some way of sheeting this old crime home to Mack without having to actually testify in court.

"Maybe you could bring a button or two from his coat," pondered Ruggles. "No; that won't do. You won't be able to convict a man like Mack on a dried bunch of bones."

Sammy had returned to camp and shoved his head up close to his master, as if urging that they continue their travels—for Sammy had eaten everything edible close by. Ruggles stood playing with the ear of the mule, murmuring to him his troubles.

"Sammy, boy, there's a rattler running loose among decent folk trying to put in his stakes for a fine gal. She can't size him up, 'cause gals don't know nothing about men till it's too late. There's a nice young feller here has his eyes on her, too——"

"See here, Ruggles——" protested Smiler, who thought he had been careful not to betray his interest in Alice.

"Shut up, you!" hissed the prospector, still playing with the mule's ear. "Let Sammy think. If that gal likes that feller Mack, nothing we just say will do any good, will it, Sammy? Mack's got a hotel, and a barrel of money that by rights belongs to this gal. Mack's got a record as red as hell fire, but it's buried in Weeping Canyon. If this young feller tells the gal what I told him, she might hate this young feller like poison. Gals is worse than mules that way, ain't they, Sammy? Harder to train than you, Sammy."

Ruggles went on, and Smiler was once more astonished at the perspicacity of the prospector. That was more important than the mere dexterity of his conjuring. The man had guessed his affection for the girl and had been able to see the very difficulties Smiler had been contemplating in the way of enlightening Alice. This man, who had cut himself free from all human rela-

tions, still seemed to possess a perfect realization of such trifles as the way of a man with a maid. Smiler was imaginative enough to appreciate this viewpoint of a man who had cut loose from humanity.

"What are we going to do, Sammy?"

The mule stood absolutely still, munching over his last bite like some wise old, long-headed judge chewing tobacco.

Smiler did not laugh or betray any incredulity; this was more than mere conjurer's patter. Some understanding did exist between this lone man and his mule. Sammy was something for him to fix his thoughts upon; and out there in that sun-saturated desert, mysterious as the world was before man was, everything conspired to lift Smiler out of the common ruts of thought. Who was he to deny the possibility that such communion was likely to be fruitful?

Has not man lost something by civilization, some instincts that might be retrieved by a more intimate living with Mother Earth and her animals? Smiler would have scoffed at these ideas back East, if such speculations had crossed his thoughts; here he was perfectly convinced that the mule and Ruggles were indulging in some sort of conversation, intelligible and inexplicable to him, but possible at that time, at that place, under that sun, to them. The mule gave a slight kick and a shuffle of his shoulders.

"What are you saying, Sammy?" asked the prospector, in a voice that was low and extremely kind.

Sammy gave another shuffle, as if the pack were galling him. Ruggles started to adjust it. The grub bag fell loose, and out of its mouth slipped Ruggles' one eating knife, a long, broad-bladed knife with a wooden handle. Ruggles picked it up and put it in the bag, which he tied back on the pack.

"Thank yer, Sammy," he said. "Next

time we go to town you'll have molasses and canned milk and tomatoes."

Ruggles turned to Smiler.

"Sammy's done it as usual," he said. "I forgot the knife that Mack killed Sanger with. That ought to be in the cave yet. We'll go and get it. Maybe that'll fix the varmint."

Smiler accepted this conclusion and offered no comment on the prospector's belief that Sammy had purposely loosened the bag to enlighten him, to recall to his memory the knife that had done the murder. It was enough for Smiler that Ruggles had enlisted whole-heartedly in bringing the crime home to Mack—and the mule had helped, if Ruggles thought he did.

The two started out again directly across the desert toward the distant ranges. The land sank to a white, blinding level crusted with alkali that flung the hot afternoon sun up in their faces. Neither spoke much, for that white dust was bitter and thirst-provoking. Smiler ventured only two questions.

"How was it Mack didn't recognize you, Dave?" he asked.

"Didn't have whiskers when he knew me, and he's lived too long in streets to see nothin'. Besides what d'ye think I threw the whisky in his eyes fer?"

Later, when Ruggles stopped to pick up a curious stone, Smiler spoke again.

"Gold?" he asked.

"No; bit of crystal. But I found a piece of stone like that with a speck inside that was worth more than its weight in gold. Scientific chap said it was rare, and I got a big price fer it."

"Ever get tired of gold?" asked Smiler.

"Yep, often. Not of chasing it," grunted Ruggles, after holding the stone up to the sun and then throwing it away.

They approached the hills, which appeared to be of a quite different formation from those they had left behind.

POP-3B

Vast cliffs, honeycombed with caves and supported by strange, contorting buttresses of red rock, began to rise above them. Arches opened into little gullies, admitting blue sky beyond. Pillars of granite and other rocks eroded by old waters lifted their gigantic shapes, suggesting statues to ancient gods. Red spikes emerged from the desert—immense ridges of them bristling like enormous jawbones with broken teeth.

An insufferable silence brooded over everything. The noises of their feet on the gravel, the creaking of Sammy's harness and the tinkling of the pots he carried, became intolerable desecrations of this august silence.

The towering cliffs, the bosses and buttes so magnificently shaped, so suggestive of the power that went to their making, drove Smiler to feel he was a mere intruding worm crawling on immensity, less than the smallest grain of its dust. He understood now why gold chasers sometimes went mad. They had to be possessed of something more than the mere lust for gold to keep them sane.

The ground began to rise in ridges of rubble sprinkled with huge rounded and water-worn boulders. The sheer sides of an immense cliff opened and they looked into the jaws of an apparently endless canyon gashed far back into the hills.

"Weeping Canyon. There's water hereabouts," said Ruggles, peering around.

They came to a little spill of water running slowly over the stones and losing itself farther out in mere dampness. Ruggles stooped and tasted the water.

"Tain't bad," he said. "Gets worse farther up the canyon; but the sand here filters it."

Ruggles said they would camp here for the night and tackle that rugged moraine of rocks that choked the mouth of the canyon next morning. He looked back over the desert they had just

crossed. The low hills they had left were rising in dark indigo ridges against the setting sun.

"Seems to be a lot of smoke," he said with that tremulous nervousness of his. "How many men saw you find my gold last night in the bar?"

"The whole crowd—about a dozen."

"Thought so. You should have shut yer trap. Looks like you've started a rush in them hills. Them's camp fires. Glad we got away quick."

Smiler remembered the excitement he had caused in town last night by his frenzied galloping. Border towns in dull times are apt to boil over for a gold rush—for anything to relieve their monotony.

"Get some firewood, while I unpack Sammy," said Ruggles.

Smiler departed to find firewood. It was not easy to find. Fragments of dried sage blown across the desert, withered stumps of dead cactus, limbs of pines probably torn by storms back in the hills and hurled out into the desert, were all he could secure. These were scattered far and wide. It was some time before he could get a bundle sufficient to last them for the night. He returned to the camp, but thought at first he must have mistaken the place, for Ruggles and Sammy were not there.

"Dave! Dave!" he called. "Where's the camp?"

He followed that winding, shallow little stream—a mere chain of puddles—when suddenly he dropped the load of wood from his arms. He could see the marks of the forefeet of the mule where it had drunk of the water. Close by a rock were a can of beans and some hard-tack. And to make sure these provisions would not be missed, a red arrow still wet was painted across the white-crusted sandstone. But Ruggles and his mule were not there.

Angrily Smiler leaped to the top of the rock. He looked round at the desert, palely purple in the setting sun, and

at the mountain of débris rising toward the mouth of the canyon. Ruggles and his mule had absolutely vanished again, and this time in almost broad daylight. He shouted loudly and angrily. No answer came to him but mocking echoes, and these took so long that their pause added scorn to their reply.

Smiler jumped off the rocks and tried to trail the mule's steps. The hard gravel gave him very little help; and he soon lost them. After a fruitless wandering in and out of the rocks, which were now casting heavy, deep shadows that suddenly gave way to a more bewildering twilight as the sun went down, he had to admit he was again beaten. That clever, grizzly, desert rat, Ruggles, had run away again, terrified at being chased by a mob of gold seekers from the town.

Smiler came back to the camping place where he had first missed Ruggles, recognizing that just then further search was useless. Not until the moon arose would he attempt it, though he was angry and mystified enough to hunt that baffling prospector till he dropped in his tracks. Ruggles' care in leaving him some of his food and painting a mark so he would not miss it did not mollify Smiler. He was going to find that man and beat some common sense into him.

Smiler lit his fire, heated the beans, and soon felt more reasonable. Even if Ruggles had deserted him, he could still go into that canyon and try to find some trace of that old crime. It ought not to be hard to find the opening of a cave artificially hidden by a pile of stones. Perhaps some scrap of identity would still remain about Sanger's body. From his little knowledge of ancient Indian mummies buried in stone holes, Smiler expected much. He hoped to find the knife Ruggles had expected to be there. That knife might cut Alice free from her delusions concerning Mack.

The meal, a smoke, and most of all the knowledge that now everything depended on himself, brought Smiler into a calmer state of mind. He could even afford to laugh at Ruggles now, and pity him with the pity that is not contempt but larger understanding. There was perfect peace here by this low trickling water, under those sheltering cliffs that loomed like protecting presences, under those calming stars.

Smiler understood now why men run away from crowds. Ruggles did not appear so eccentric to him now, as he gazed into the camp fire with no man to interrupt him, nor even a horse or a mule to care for. The blare of big business, the eternal elbow-to-elbow scrambles of back East, faded away and were as far off as those stars.

For a moment he wondered if he, too, were likely to become a scared misanthrope like Ruggles. It was plain now that it was not avarice alone that had kept Ruggles and perhaps Sanger on the chase for gold. Something a little finer urged them; they were not seeking gold so much as trying to find themselves.

Smiler knew only too well that men can get lost in the cities and perish there more terribly than on this desert. Smiler could recall many of his old friends still keeping to their dull, daily interests but dead all the same from the feet up and the head down—men manacled to a social mechanism, chained by their wives and families, suffocating for the gold they were seeking for its own sick sake. Not one of these men he knew but would pay heavily for one hour of such peace as this desert was now giving him, could they imagine it for a moment.

Then, out of the firelight, in the thin wreaths of its smoke, appeared a girl's face. All his dreaming focused on her. He was sure Alice was not the woman to keep a man in chains. She, too, was desert bred; that hardness of hers which had so attracted him was the

very spirit of the desert—the flower that bloomed in the heart of its stabbing plants.

Smiler threw himself by the fire, able, now, to sleep. The desert was going to teach him but not to hold him; the desert was only going to show him how to win that girl.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WEEPING CANYON.

SMILER awoke when the stars were just beginning to fade. He had overslept; the moon had come and gone. But perhaps daylight would be better for his search; and he laid the preparations for that day with a good breakfast. The dawn was just pouring silver light over the desert when he thought he heard voices faint and far off. As the light increased he saw a rider close by and others farther out. He recognized the crouching figure of the nearer one, bending over in his saddle and reading the earth, as Dippy. Smiler leaped to his feet and hailed him, waving his hat. He saw Dippy wave to the others, and those three began galloping close in after him.

"What's up, Dippy?" Smiler asked, when the cowman drew up.

"I spilled the beans," said Dippy. "That's Mrs. Sanger and the gal and Mack looking fer you and Sanger. I told Mrs. Sanger her husband had been in town; and that gal held up her marriage that was to take place to-day. Wouldn't think of it till she'd found her father. Mack's ready to shoot up the whole country, and you fust, so look out."

The other riders were rapidly coming nearer, the two women leading and taking the stones in light leaps. Mack was behind, as he was riding more cautiously. The whole party would soon be upon them.

"But I think ye've got a chance with the gal yet," continued Dippy, breathless to convey all his information before

the party arrived. "Mack and Alice has been fighting all night. I think she's getting wised up to the kind of varmint he is. It takes camping out and hard riding to find out a man. You got a chance, boy; and you better go ahead and play it."

By this the three riders had ridden up to the little level of gravel to the creek.

"Where's that fellow—that prospector?" demanded Mack.

"I don't know," answered Smiler.

"You were with him? You found him? We've been on your trail all night. Don't tell *me* you don't know."

The man's manner was provocative of every kind of assault, but Smiler kept cool—at least externally.

"He is my husband? He is Billy Sanger, ain't he?" queried Mrs. Sanger. She was almost tearful; she was not the harsh virago who had burst into the bar two nights before.

"Maybe he is, maybe he isn't," cut in Mack brutally. "But if a man wants to leave a woman, nothing will hold him. He probably disappeared when he saw us coming."

"Tell us which way he went," pleaded Mrs. Sanger of Smiler.

"I don't know, Mrs. Sanger," answered Smiler.

"You won't get anything out of him, Mrs. Sanger," sneered Mack. "The whole thing is a frame-up among these cowmen. A great joke to tell in the bunk houses—how they held up my marriage and sent me on a fool's errand. I've had enough; I'm going back. We can't keep the parson waiting, Alice. You won't find this man, and if you do, you're not sure it is your father. I don't believe it was."

"And let me tell you men," he said, including Dippy and Smiler in one glance of contempt, "you're liable to run into more trouble, starting this rumor of a gold rush. I've seen spreaders of false alarms like you dragged at

the end of a rope tied to a galloping pony with a thistle under his tail."

As Dippy had said, Mack was fairly frothing at the mouth at having his marriage delayed and at the men who had done it.

Smiler let him talk on. He had an unpleasant problem ahead of him, for Mrs. Sanger appeared to be anxious to recover her husband and forgive him his long desertion. The disappointment he was about to cause her had been created by his too sanguine delusion that the prospector was Sanger. Alice had dismounted and was saying nothing, seeming to be waiting on events. Her poise helped Smiler to bring matters to a speedy climax.

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Sanger, I have misled you. I did really believe this prospector, who gave me the slip last night and is gone I know not where, was your husband. I caught him yesterday and am satisfied he was not; but he knew your husband well and had worked with him. He told me Billy Sanger was murdered six years ago and that the man who killed him was Rodney Mack."

Smiler had expected shooting when he led up to this charge and had been slipping his thumbs out of his belt ready for the draw. Dippy had been prepared for the same by Smiler's deliberate drawl; he knew Smiler's way of tackling trouble. Mrs. Sanger gave a little gasp, and Alice threw her arms around her. But Mack did not move. He seemed more astonished than indignant. The two women got off their horses.

"Sanger been murdered? When? Where?" murmured Mack.

"Back there in Weeping Canyon. This man Ruggles said you knifed him and took all the gold of the party."

Mack leisurely dismounted now, but on the wrong side of his horse—away from Smiler. The big body of the animal covered the most of him. Only his

head and hands could be seen across the top of the saddle; his legs were hidden from the knees up. It was a clever maneuver.

"So you want to frame me with murder and highway robbery, do you?" he said. "Alice, these are the men you've been standing up for—rowdies of the ranges, drunken irresponsibles. This is worse than the knifing, you charge me with, Hayle. The two of you together don't amount to one decent man."

A deep growl came from Dippy.

"Don't draw," said Smiler through his teeth, for Smiler guessed at the methods of the man he had to deal with. Mack, in the presence of so many witnesses, was endeavoring to make the cowmen draw first. The law then would be on his side, if he shot them both, and the women would have to testify he had done it in self-defense. Smiler kept watching Mack's hands. He remembered Ruggles' account of that cruel knifing in the canyon, and allowed Mack to go on hurling abuse at him without stirring. Then he saw one hand had slipped out of sight while Mack was tattooing with the other on the leather of the saddle, as if he was tapping off his points against the men who had framed this outrageous charge.

But Alice, while attending to her mother, had not lost the significance of Mack's insults nor the meaning of the quiet endurance of them by the cowmen. She suddenly slipped behind Mack's horse. Smiler saw Mack's other hand disappear, his head go out of sight, and heard him cursing the girl. In a second Smiler had run to her assistance. She had pinioned Mack from behind and her arms seemed quite able to hold him.

"Get his gun," she cried to Smiler.

Smiler slipped Mack's gun out of his belt and the girl then let Mack go. Mack could do nothing more, for Dippy had him covered.

"Now give that gun to me," she said to Smiler. And she promptly turned it against Smiler. There was apparently no animus in her face or voice. Her brief but violent wrestle with Mack had not disturbed her; she moved like a piece of living steel—curt, impersonal and businesslike. Smiler had handed her the gun from the sheer compulsion of her personality. But when she demanded Dippy's gun in the same way, the veteran demurred.

"I merely want to stop all shooting while we thrash this out," she said. "Those guns will be safer with me."

Dippy handed her over his gun, relaxing into a large understanding grin.

"Yer right; yer dead right, gal," he said. "Let us be civilized while we kin. Let's hev a court right now. But understand, miss, when sentence is pronounced you gimme that gun back, because I'm going to be lord high executioner. The way you wrestled with that varmint was a treat. I'll bet you could handle a lion."

"I have handled lions," answered this amazing girl. "They're quite easy."

Alice had now three guns in her possession, besides her own. She slipped one in each boot, another inside her waist, and took out her own. No man would think it easy to get any of those weapons from her, for they all believed now that she could wrestle with lions.

"Now tell us all about this murder," she said to Smiler.

Smiler narrated all that had happened to him since he had started after that prospector; and as he approached his close, he was interrupted by Mack climbing into his saddle.

"You must excuse me," said Mack. "I'm afraid our wedding is permanently off, Miss Sanger. I trust soon to be able to congratulate you, Mr. Smiler Hayle. Shall I ask the clergyman to stay around?"

Dippy went to the head of the horse, and Mack might have ridden over him,

but that the girl covered Mack with her gun.

"This is not a matter of marriage, Rodney," she said, "but of murder. You will stay and hear what Smiler has to say."

Mack was quite at his ease and laughed at her as he gathered up his reins.

"I prefer to hear it in a legitimate court, if it ever gets there," he said. "You have my address. I will await the charge there."

"No, here!" cried the girl with the first touch of feeling she had shown. "I thought you were a man. I was going to marry you. I want to know all about you and see you clear yourself. I don't want to feel I've made a fool of myself just because you were nice and kind. I want to know the truth."

"You want to condemn me on the words of two cowmen and a half-crazy prospector."

"I want you to meet this charge now and not run away. You've got to stay."

"Let go that horse's head," snarled Mack to Dippy. "Madam," he continued, taking off his hat with mock politeness, "your wishes mean nothing to me now. I'm exceedingly grateful to this cowman for saving me from such a marriage. You can't hold me, and you will not shoot me. So put down that toy. And you, damn you! let go that horse's head."

Mack was on the point of charging Dippy when Smiler suddenly slipped to the side of the horse and, with a hoist to Mack's feet, threw him out of the saddle. Before Mack could rise the girl stood over him, covering him with her gun barrel, as if it were in the steady hand of a champion marksman.

"Get this straight, Rodney," she said: "You're going to stay. I'd shoot your horse to keep you, and nothing would hurt me more. If I am satisfied you killed my father, I won't wait for a

court. I couldn't bear to live unless I shot you quick and with one bullet."

Her words shrilled as if they were bullets.

"Then I would go to court myself," she went on, "and there isn't one in the land that wouldn't acquit me."

"And get this from me," broke in Dippy, almost with a cheer, "from us no-account, boozing cattlemen. I'm an old man but I kin give you jest as interesting a ten minutes as that prospector gave you."

Smiler said nothing; he had been embarrassed by Mack's assumption that the girl's attitude was caused by him. Smiler was too modest to believe that. The idea of his marrying Alice was as yet a far possibility, though Alice was smiling on him as she bade him finish his story. Mack picked himself out of the gravel and stood by, for Dippy never took his eyes off him. Mack was now a guarded prisoner at the bar.

Smiler completed his tale, not omitting any of Ruggles' comments on Mack. He also explained more completely how Ruggles had read his approach in the arroyo and ended with a tribute of admiration to the man's sleight of hand and to the intelligence of his marvelous mule. Alice broke into a laugh.

"Alice, dear," reproved her mother, to whom this inquiry was now an inquest on the husband she thought she had been about to recover.

"All right, mother," said the girl, encircling her with great tenderness. "We're going to find that cave."

"What for?" asked her distracted mother.

"Just for fun," said the girl with a tantalizing smile.

Now, Smiler had not said anything of Ruggles' idea of finding the knife that had been used for the murder. It would be better and more incriminating if they all found it without giving Mack time to think out some way of explain-

ing it away—if the knife could be identified as his. He could still plead self-defense with none to gainsay him. If the knife were not found something else might be that would substantiate Ruggles.

Mrs. Sanger rose to her feet with a sudden access of resolution. She seemed as anxious to find her husband dead as alive, and started for her horse.

"We'll have to go on foot," said Smiler.

Alice seconded Smiler and, after the horses had been tethered to some rocks, the whole party started climbing that pile of boulders which cluttered the entrance to the canyon. Smiler and Alice led; Mrs. Sanger came last, helped up the rocks by Dippy.

Mack was compelled to follow. He seemed resigned to this expedition. In any case, he could not escape from the cowmen's fists or Alice's bullets. He affected a cynical indifference.

"You ought to be as anxious as we are to clear all this up, Rodney," said the girl.

"Oh, all right," he said; "since you insist. But it's all a pipe dream."

The ascent grew difficult, for the obstructing rocks became larger and more confused in their piling. The two cliffs at the entrance of the canyon leaned over, shutting out the sky to a blue strip and concentrating the heat flung back from the harsh red of the rocks. They were stopped by a wall that seemed to bar all direct progress, as it was impossible to climb.

Alice had been leaping from rock to rock with absolute sureness. She could land on a little pinnacle with only bare foothold; and every time she did, she rose on her toes with that elastic recoil Smiler had first noticed. A spirit of recklessness that might be the exhilaration of the climb or joy at being released from a dubious marriage had taken possession of her.

"There must be some other way into

the canyon," said Smiler. "Ruggles said it was full of dead cattle, and no cattle could come up here."

"A mule could," cried the girl. "See?"

She was pointing to a smooth place on the rocks where an arrow painted in red was indicating to them the right way to go.

"Thanks," called Alice gayly, following the arrow, which led to a low arch created by two mutually supporting boulders. Confidently she ran under them, while Smiler followed. They soon emerged from a tunnel into broad daylight where the canyon opened its long perspectives and the creek—a broader stream, now, running between salt-incrusted banks—ran far into the distance. "I knew it," she cried. "He is guiding us all the time."

"Then we will catch him?" asked Smiler.

"You will never catch him," she declared.

There was mischief in her gayety—her surety that if they were balked again that vanishing prospector would direct them, but that he would still continue to be invisible and unattainable.

"Have you ever met this man Ruggles?" asked Smiler.

"I have never met Ruggles, because there——"

She hesitated and looked back. Mack was painfully climbing down the rocks that led to the bank of the creek. The descent was more difficult than the climb on the other side, though Alice and Smiler had taken it at flying leaps. Dippy was helping her mother, who laughed at the old cowman, so clumsy on his feet. The vengeful fury Alice had seemed to be when she had taken possession of the guns and covered Mack now appeared to be transformed into a giddy, mountaineering schoolgirl.

"Poor old Dippy!" she cried. "He's quite winded; he's quite lost, out of a saddle."

Mrs. Sanger was standing on a boulder and encouraging Dippy to take a trying leap. She was laughing, too—uttering a strange cry that also echoed through the canyon:

"Hoop la! hoop la! hoop la!"

That call had the power to energize Dippy's stiff knees. He took the jump and landed in Mrs. Sanger's arms. She held him and herself with magnificent poise; and a laugh curiously alike united the mother and daughter.

"You're very wonderful women," said Smiler.

"Of course," cried the girl. "We're circus women. *Hoop la! hoop la! hoop la!* Bravo!"

Her voice was taken up by applauding echoes. Smiler now understood these women, the peculiarities of their riding, their elasticity, their hardness, their little trick of rising on their toes when they landed—they were athletes of the saddle and artists of the sawdust ring.

"Mother's always kept up some of her training," said the girl. "She used to be a star rider; and I jumped the hoops when I was ten."

"Was your father a rider, too?" asked Smiler.

"When he was young. Then he took up juggling and animal training. Father can do anything. You will see when you meet him."

"When I meet him?" demanded the amazed Smiler.

"Yes. This man we're after is not Ruggles. He's my father, Billy Sanger, the best animal trainer and ring juggler on the road. He tricked you again, Mr. Hayle. The quickness of the tongue deceives the brain. Father has got us all jumping through these hoops; he's ringmaster of this act."

"But why? What for?" demanded Smiler, as quickly as his bewildered wits would permit him putting together this jig-saw puzzle with this last missing piece—that the Sangers were circus

people. This man who had led him such a chase with his juggling, his conjuring, his delight in artful deception, was becoming intelligible.

"I don't know," answered the girl, growing serious. "Of course father would lie to work a trick. Perhaps he wanted to break off my marriage. I'm glad he did; father can size up a man like he can see sulks coming in an elephant. Father never could resist a chance to work a trick. That's one reason why he kept away from mother. I remember their last quarrel. He said he would do a disappearing act for good, and then he went. We'll never find him and he can always find us. I'm sure he's up in those hills, seeing everything we do and laughing at us. He's a star juggler and he's pulling off the biggest trick he ever invented."

The girl was no marble goddess now but a breathing, palpitating figure of enthusiasm, as she swept her eyes over that immense arena covered with the blue top of the skies.

"But why desert his wife and child?" demanded Smiler.

"He did not desert me altogether. He sent me little packets of gold when I was at college. Mother didn't know what my expenses were, and father helped. But I never told her, for she hated his gold chasing and she would have kept on sending me more. You see I pulled my tricks, too."

"I think you're splendid, girl."

The girl's face hardened as if she was urging a horse over a hard jump.

"I thought I made it plain to you, Mr. Hayle, that I hate compliments; those are tricks I despise."

"Sorry," said Smiler.

"You've been very good to me and mother, trying to get father; but—don't spoil it."

Smiler looked up the rocks behind him. The rest of the party were still far enough off to give him time; he determined to plunge for this girl.

"I didn't do it for your mother, but for you. I want you, Alice Sanger. You're what I came West for. I'm not going to pay you compliments or even say I love you—yet; that can wait till all this is cleaned up. But I'll say it a whole lot, later. That's my trick, and I'm giving it away before I pull it."

Smiler's directness and honesty had silenced the girl.

"You're quite sure this prospector is your father?" he continued, quickly changing from his main subject to forestall a direct refusal. He was clever enough to see that just now the only man she could think of was that father.

"Quite," she said. "I recognized the painting of those signs. If you haven't forgotten your college courses, you understand the value of style."

"Yes; but what's that got to do——"

"There is style in tricks, in riding, in juggling," she laughed, to recover her self-possession, which Smiler had temporarily disconcerted. "No one but my father could have done these tricks. He could not have taught them, because style is incommunicable. Those were Billy Sanger's tricks, from his throwing of the stones to his disappearing right under your eyes."

"But do you know how he did it?"

"I never give away father's tricks," she answered.

"But why didn't you tell your mother of what you guessed? Why let her think he is dead?"

Again the girl became that immobile statue of marble, of steel, of something harder than these.

"I want mother to miss him a little more," she said slowly. "She cried when she heard he was dead. Mother was always a little too hard on father and perhaps this may bring them together again. I suppose you think I'm a heartless brute? Well, I am—just now. You will say nothing to mother; this is my last trick, and I don't want to miss my tip."

The party then became united. They walked along the banks of the creek, their feet breaking through white saline incrustations and passing the bones of dead cattle. They came on an old log house and the remains of a chute. Gold seekers had been here. But this party did not stop to do any prospecting; they were intent on getting on to that cave. It was intolerably hot in that canyon, for by this time an almost vertical sun beat down on them. They were sparing of the water they carried, for the creek here was absolutely undrinkable. They hurried on, winding in and out round the jutting elbows of those enormous cliffs.

Not until Dippy had found a small fall of fresher water pouring from the rocks did they pause. After they had drunk and eaten a little and rested a while in the shade, Dippy drew Smiler aside.

"Seems to me there's no sense dragging the women farther," he said. "Why can't we go ahead and see if there's anybody in that cave ourselves?"

"And leave Mack with them? Not much!"

"No; bring him along. We can handle him."

Smiler told Alice and her mother that they would find the cave first and then would come back for them. They assented. Smiler curtly told Mack to follow them.

Smiler by now was fully convinced that the story the prospector had told him was true, with the substitution of Sanger for Ruggles. Ruggles was the man who had been murdered; Ruggles' desiccated body would be awaiting them in the cave. And Mack had committed the crime. Smiler could not believe that Sanger would invent such a crime even to pull off a trick. The man was level-headed underneath all his cleverness. He apparently wanted to save his girl from marrying the man he knew to be a murderer and at the same time he

wanted to be left to his foot-free privacy of the desert.

"You keep ahead of me Mack" said Smiler.

Mack sulkily obeyed, dragging his feet through the alkali under compulsion.

The three turned around a bluff losing sight of the women who had sought the shelter of the hut. Across the creek they could see vestiges of paths where thirsting cattle might have been able to creep down to these poisoning waters. Not a sound broke the silence and the farther they went the hotter became the air; they seemed to be crawling into the mouth of a furnace. At the next turn they faced the end of the canyon a towering wall of rock smeared with white streaks glistening with little streams that oozed out of its interior through cracks and crevices. Where the water had dried there were deposits of white mineral. These were the weeping rocks that had given the canyon its name. Some of the incrustations were soft; others were hard, shiny and like transparent glass.

Mack here stopped dead and refused to go any farther.

"I can't go any farther; I'm all in," he said.

Smiler interpreted his refusal, his dragging steps, his hangdog gait, as the remorse or fear of a murderer dragged to the scene of a crime he had tried to forget.

There was, however, some physical reason for this, as well as mental compulsion. The ovenlike atmosphere and the saline air took the strength from their limbs and even the capacity to think from their brains. For that canyon was not only a graveyard of the beasts lifting their mineralized bones from the bed of the creek, but was also a more ancient and more impressive mortuary. For on the walls of the sedimentary rocks sprawled the huge antique skeletons of extinct monsters

and lines of enormous vertebrae. And something hideously and gigantically winged seemed about to fly out from the cliffs above them—the fossil remains of some unbelievably large bat. It was a fit place to remind a man of a forgotten crime.

For this must have been the very scene of that crime. Here Mack had treacherously knifed one partner and tried to shoot the other. For three days Sanger had to lie hidden here drinking that bitter water under that pitiless sun. Smiler waited a while, watching Mack; perhaps the place in some way was giving Mack a third degree that would break his nerve and compel him to confess. Smiler looked up at the rocks, wondering if Alice's conclusion that Sanger was watching them could be true. If only Sanger would appear and confront the man he had denounced; but Smiler could see nothing except a lone eagle far above his head, its wheeling wings glittering in the sun.

Smiler was certain he could not rely on any further help from Sanger. He thought of those women trained to be hard by the necessities of their calling; he remembered how Alice was not above temporarily letting her mother suffer in order to get her to forgive her father. Smiler grew hard, too. It was useless waiting for Mack to confess. A touch of brutality was needed here. They were in a ghastly canyon of the desert, in the back abysms of time; primitive methods were necessary.

Slowly he undid the buckle of his belt, drew it out of the loops of his trousers, and then leaped on Mack.

"Hold his legs, Dippy!" he cried.

Mack struggled, with a tremendous effort. Smiler's guess had been a shrewd one. Mack had only been malingering in the hope that he would be left behind, perhaps free to wreak his worst on the women. The man had vigor enough to plunge and writhe

against the efforts of the two men, though all Smiler wanted was to be sure that his hands were powerless before he ventured with him into the cave. At last he succeeded in binding Mack's arms back with the belt. He then drew out the knife from Mack's pocket.

"You go ahead, Mack, and keep going till we tell you to stop."

Faced with the prospect of being prodded with that knife, Mack was compelled to go forward toward the great white-streaked cliff of the weeping rocks wherein was hidden the body of his victim. He had caught the glint of sunlight on the ring of the folding knife Mack had kept inside his shirt. Mack was a knifer. Smiler was not going to take a chance at letting Mack loose, even though Alice did have all the guns. Besides, Smiler wanted Mack to be brought face to face with that body.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE CAVE.

THE creek became deeper and wider, almost a lake at the extreme end of the canyon. They now understood why that sign had pointed to the right bank; if they had taken the other they would have come on a cliff rising precipitously from water too deep to wade through.

As they approached the weeping cliffs, the white streaks proved to be large deposits; the whole face of the cliffs was aced and decorated with grottoes, pillars of white shiny stone, curtains of translucent rock hard as marble but delicate and soft in appearance. The cliffs were marvelously beautiful; but for their purpose, extremely baffling. For, instead of one cavern at its under-shot base, there were hundreds, and most of them hung with curtains that were the solidified drippings of that saline water. Where were they to look for the one where the murdered man had been hidden? With a rock Smiler broke through some of these sheets

looking for a cave piled up with stones, for of course it was no use entering the open ones. Mack sat down, saying nothing, giving no clew that he recognized the scene of his crime. Smiler waded out into the lake to get a wider view of the cliffs; and high up there was a sign that was now familiar to him—a red arrow of paint pointing to a corner of the cliff where it ended on the bank. Sanger had left this last sign for their guidance, though how he had pointed it so high was a mystery. He must have climbed like a monkey up among those crystallizations.

Creeping under that beething cliff into the hollow guarded by a waterfall and a stream of rigid stalactites, they found the pile of stones they had been seeking. They tore away the rocks which Sanger had described and which were cemented together by the crusty deposits. They saw the opening to a cave.

"You come inside, too," said Smiler to Mack.

Mack bent his trussed body to enter the cave ahead of Smiler. Dippy had already entered and was holding a lighted match over his head.

The flickering match disclosed a large cave walled around with stalactites of every conceivable form—a very cathedral of white columns and architectural intricacies. The light flared and quivered in Dippy's hand, which was trembling with excitement, so that the place was alive with dancing shadows. Crystals sparkled with little green-and-blue flames; and opalescent bosses displayed rainbows, as if they were oyster shells. But there was no sign of anything human, or of what had been human, in sight. The match went out.

"I'll be damned!" cried Dippy.

"I hope you're satisfied," said Mack, in the dark. "As I said, it's all a frame-up. There never was a murder. There is no corpus delicti. Will you please release me?"

As Dippy lit another match, Mack

was seen smiling confidently at them. But Smiler, while disappointed, could not believe that Sanger's charge was entirely unsubstantial. He refused to release Mack, even at this collapse of the evidence against him.

"We ain't going to let yer go," said Dippy, "till we fix this on yer, somehow. If yer ain't murdered this man, I reckon yer murdered somebody else. I knew it fust time I set eyes on yer. I vote yer guilty no matter what yer did."

"Perhaps we're in the wrong cave," said Smiler, remembering that Sanger had told him these caves opened one into the other. "Let's look farther; but go easy on the matches."

Dippy, carefully husbanding his precious light, held it for Smiler to complete his explorations; for those dancing shadows were sometimes openings into darker distances, and there were more caves behind those pillars. The mummy might be back there, but, search as they could, they could find no space through which they could squeeze. Those stalactites hung between them and the farther caves like the bars of a prison.

Dippy kept lighting his matches continuously. He held a light between the pillars, illuminating the spaces beyond. They could still see no sign of any mummy. A man's body would easily last in that air, which was drier than outside, for there were no drippings from the roof here. The processes of crystallization had stopped; the marvelous growths of that cave were finished. But still believing in the prospector, Smiler used all his strength to try and tear apart those pillars and search farther. Dippy added the weight and the pull of his one free hand. The stone seemed to crumble somewhat, when Dippy gave a wild yell and the match went out.

"Light another!" cried Smiler, for Dippy was slow, having dropped the

box in his terror. Smiler in that last spurt of light had seen something that started him quivering, too.

"What's up?" asked Mack, who had been standing back against the wall and was yielding to the mysterious excitement he could hear in the voices of those two men scraping the floor of the cave in the dark for the matches.

"Hold Mack while I get mine," cried Smiler.

"I got him; he can't get away," cried Dippy.

Smiler lit one of his own matches, held it close to the pillar he had succeeded in cracking, and saw assuredly now that part of the stone was a petrified human hand. The mass of rock from which the hand emerged, which they had taken for an amorphous mass of coagulated drippings, was seen to be of human form, unrecognizable in feature, barely possible to make out as a man at all. They, on closer examination, were certain they were in the presence of the body Sanger said would be there—not a mummy but a petrified man, crusted with silica, looking like the crude modeling of some sculptor just beginning his statue. For a moment the three men became mad—Smiler with relief that his trailing had not been in vain, Mack with babbling attempts to deny the very evidence of their senses, Dippy with an absolutely gory but thoroughly human glee.

"We got yer, Mack! We got yer!" he cried. "Say yer prayers, if yer know any. Make yer will and turn over all yer property in Salt Lake to them ladies yer robbed. We got yer; and crying won't help yer."

"That proves nothing. You haven't a chance of convicting me. I'll admit the killing; but it's not Sanger, it's Ruggles. Ruggles tried to knife me."

"No matter; yer killed somebody, didn't yer? Thar he is—ready and waiting to convict yer."

Mack's face was beady; that white,

accusing statue was more awe-inspiring than an actual man. Mack shrank back in terror against the walls of the cave.

"You can't prove anything; you can't bring that into court."

Smiler had knelt by the petrification and was examining it carefully. Fragments of the cloth that had covered him were clear under the enamel of six years' deposits; his very boots were turned into shining black basaltlike stone. Smiler was searching for some marks of identity, when he saw something peculiar on the shining floor of the cave.

"Look here, Dippy!" he cried.

Dippy took one look at the long, dark object visible through the semiopaque glass.

"On yer knees, Mack, and you look too," cried Dippy.

Dippy forced Mack to his knees. The three men had to admit that if there was any truth in eyesight that there under the glass was the very knife that had been used in the murder. Only a smear of red rust remained of the blade; but the handle was well preserved, and on it they could read, roughly carved, the name "Rodney Mack."

"Sanger was right after all," cried Smiler. "He said the knife would be here."

"Sanger?" cried the confused Dippy. "Ain't this feller Sanger?"

"No; it was Ruggles who was murdered. That prospector was Sanger."

Dippy found this so hard to take in that he relaxed a little of his vigilance. Smiler was occupied in trying to pry that knife loose from the floor. Neither of them saw Mack give a last tug at that strap he had been abrading against the rocks. Neither saw that Mack had freed his hands and was getting ready for one double blow that would dispose at once of both his accusers.

Mack struck swiftly and surely, putting all his weight into his two fists. Simultaneously he hit Dippy on the jaw

and Smiler on the temple. Both men, if they had time to guess what had happened, knew nothing further. Both lay senseless on the floor, stunned by Mack's terrific blows.

Smiler's powers of thinking returned to him slowly, as if he was reviving from some potent drug. Gradually he became aware of his heart beating, his chest rising and falling, and the painful throbbing in his temples. But his physical being seemed one vast area of agony. He tried to stir and every muscle hurt; he tried to cry out and found there was a gag tied across his mouth. His eyes were open but he could see nothing but the red mist that blurred across his retina.

Slowly he became aware of little points of light at some distance; could make out the rough edges of stones in that dim twilight. The mouth of the cave was again covered up with stones. Then, suddenly, the full flood of his strength returned. His mind cleared and he knew he was lying on the floor of the cave, gagged and tied and thoroughly bruised from head to foot. He worked out a fairly clear idea of what had happened. After stunning him, Mack must have tied him up with something or another, gagged him to prevent all outcries, and then done his best to kill him with the only weapons he had—his bare hands and his booted feet. Somehow, and luckily for them both, during that first onslaught the knife that had been in Smiler's hand must have been jerked somewhere beyond Mack's finding. From the bruises round his larynx Smiler guessed that Mack had tried to strangle him, too.

By working his jaws, which were still stiff, Smiler managed to loosen the gag. He called out for Dippy. The desire for revenge and the fear of what Mack might do to those women spurred his returning strength. He groped toward those spots of light and pushed away

the stones with which Mack had intended to entomb them as he had Ruggles. More light poured into the cave. But it was still too dark for him to locate Dippy. He felt for his matches, and then recalled that he had been holding the box in his hand. They must have been knocked away, too. He found Dippy by groping on his hands and knees, and felt for the old man's heart. It was still beating. Quickly Smiler tore away Dippy's gag and loosened his bonds.

"That you, Smiler?" said the old man weakly.

"Yes."

"We're alive, ain't we?"

"Very much, old man."

"I was wondering whether I was or not."

Smiler lifted Dippy and carried him out into the open air.

"Yer don't hev to carry me, if I'm alive. And I never heerd of any one carrying a ghost," protested the cowman, though feebly. He was very shaken. Smiler felt his bones. Nothing was broken and Dippy did not seem to be as badly beaten up as himself.

"Yer see," said Dippy, "he must hev tried ter finish you fust. I remember him grabbing me. I played possum. When a man thinks he has killed yer and yer can't do nothing—let him think so."

"How did you do that?"

"When he reached for my throat and I found I was too weak to fight, I jest let my breath go and lay like a bit of rag. Maybe he thought my heart had stopped. That's why he didn't maul me so much."

"Then why didn't he find out I was still alive and finish me properly? I didn't pull any tricks like that."

"You was more out than me and you don't know what yer did. I've seen funny things done by animals after they ought to be dead. How do yer know yer didn't hold yer head down

and keep back his fingers, same as I seen a man cheat the rope of a lynching party? How d'ye know yer heart didn't stop going fer a while, jest to fool him? I've seen it, man; I've seen it."

Out of his strange experiences, out of a life packed with mysterious cheatings of death, the cowman convinced Smiler that something like that must have happened to save them. All the time Dippy kept feeling his bones, shaking his legs, and conducting various experiments with himself to satisfy himself he was still alive.

The two men were below the underlay of the cliffs, screened by that sheet of stalactites they had broken through. Before them they could see the creek and the long vistas of the canyon, now in the full flood of the afternoon sun. From the angles of the shadows they guessed they must have been lying unconscious for nearly an hour. Nothing living or moving could be seen down the canyon. Smiler wanted to hasten off at once on the trail of Mack; but his first consideration was for Dippy. The old cowman might have been imbibing some queerly potent liquor—he kept arguing with himself in a dazed fashion, as if Mack's assault had split his personality.

"Yer sound like Smiler, of the Bar J," he said. "And this is me, Dippy James, of the same outfit, ain't it?"

Smiler was considering that Mack's next move would probably be to get the guns from Alice by force or by cunning. He was certain Mack would hesitate at nothing now. Mack had torn the shirt off his back and taken the laces from his shoes to bind up Smiler and Dippy, the men who were the damning witnesses of the finding of the knife. A sudden uneasy surmise about that knife caused Smiler to go back into the cave. Feeling round on the floor he found it was still there. Nothing but a cold chisel could extract that incriminating bit of evidence. There had been noth-

ing left for Mack to do but to try to kill them both.

Thankful that the knife was still there, Smiler came back into the daylight, where Dippy was still muttering to himself.

"If I'm alive, I'm going to hound that feller 'round the world and back till I get him. If I ain't alive, the spirit of Thomas Jefferson James, once known to all men west of the Rockies as Dippy, is going to be the most uncomfortable ghost that ever chased a man through the bad lands of hell."

Dippy's mystical speculations were cut short by shots—a perfect volley of them, reverberating up through all the hollows of the canyon. Dippy blinked. The dreaminess went out of his eyes and a sharpness came into his voice.

"What the hell was I saying?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Smiler. "Mack's gone after the women and will try to get their guns. And perhaps——"

"By thunder!" cried Dippy, very much alive at the possibility that now smote the two men that Mack might think it necessary to commit more murders.

They hastened out from the underlay.

"That's a lot of shooting," cried Dippy. "There's a hundred barrels blazing down there."

"Perhaps Alice is giving him a fight," said Smiler. "Let's climb to the top of the canyon, where we can look down and see what's happening. There's a path across the creek."

They splashed through the briny creek to one of those steep cattle trails vaguely discernible in the gully. They began an ascent that was an anguish to their bruised muscles. The canyon facing east was fully lit by the lowering sun. More of it came into view, but they could see no fighters, though those shots were thundering away as if an army were engaged. Hastening with every

ounce of strength left in them, urged by the fear that the women were in deadly peril, the two men hauled themselves up hand over hand. Smiler was ahead, but he could see that Dippy was perfectly able to keep on going, though somewhat slowly.

As Smiler reached the summit of the cliff, the ascent became easier. He stood on the top of the mesa. The deep gash of the canyon opened below him and he could see the white horizon of the desert beyond. But, to his amazement, the shots were suddenly muffled and fewer. Instead of volleys, now, he could hear only single shots, one answering the other. Dippy appeared panting but eager to go on.

"There are only two fighting," said Smiler. "That volley was only the rolling up of the echoes; and I am willing to wager all I'll ever get that one of those fighters is Sanger."

They could now see to the shallows and the hut where they had left Alice and her mother. On a cape of rocks, almost an island in the stream, they could see something moving. Those spots were a party of human beings. One spot took a jump over the rocks, while the others remained behind. The one that jumped was Mack. The steady shooting went on—one shot answered by another. They could hear the echoes but very faintly now. By listening with more care they could hear that one of the shots was sharper and shriller than the other.

"Sanger is somewhere on top of this canyon and firing down at Mack," concluded Smiler. "We must find him."

Again they saw the speck they knew to be Mack jump and take cover behind another rock.

"Mack doesn't know where the bullets are coming from," said Smiler. "He's firing blindly."

"Why don't the women make for cover, too?"

"I don't know, unless—— Yes,

that's it. Alice must have told her mother that the prospector she thought was Ruggles was really Sanger. Dippy, the first thing is to locate Sanger. Dippy, you take one side of the canyon and I'll take the other."

The men parted. Smiler went to the right, Dippy to the left. Sanger must be lying hidden somewhere on the edges of those cliffs shooting down at Mack to avenge the murder of Ruggles. Sanger could do this without being tangled in the mazes of the law.

Smiler felt sure that Alice and her mother were in no danger now, for Mack had enough to do to dodge Sanger's bullets. Smiler could see Dippy across the canyon. The two were now several yards apart, and dared not shout at each other, for their voices might be magnified and carry to Sanger. That hater of crowds might be averted from his private vengeance by those voices. The best way to keep Sanger from doing one of his disappearing acts was to let him believe himself alone. Smiler stooped, keeping himself out of the possible range of Sanger's eyes as he crossed the little gullies that scored the face of the canyon, as he crept toward any bush that might hide a man. All the time the shots continued with a regularity that argued a slow aim at a target, not the wild, indiscriminate shooting Smiler had first imagined it to be.

But the shooting he was sure was Sanger's gradually became louder. He could hear the shrill whistle of the bullets. Mack's shots were plainly distinguishable from the shots off the cliffs. Smiler was sure he was very near Sanger now. So far he had been trailing Sanger by his eyesight; now he was hunting him with his ears, listening this way and that trying to locate the source of that regular shooting.

A gully full of loose gravel led him to the summit of a bluff. Throwing himself prone on this he had a clearer

view of what was happening below. He was nearly over Mack now, and he had entirely misjudged the man's distance from the women. They were far enough away to be quite safe, even if Mack shot at them. Mack was dodging from rock to rock, apparently trying to get ashore to the farther bank across that peninsular of boulders. A little stream of water—the freshest of drinking water they had found earlier in the day—was apparently his objective; but he was afraid to stir from that hole in the rocks where he was ensconced. Smiler knew that nothing provoked such an intense thirst as being shot at. Fresh water had not touched Mack's lips since they had taken him with them to the cave. The man was probably parched; and perhaps delirious, if he had tried to cool his throat with the brine that flowed round his hiding place.

But every time he stirred, a rain of bullets from above drove him back. In that clear air Smiler could see the bullets streak the rocks with lead. Sanger did not wish to kill his man at once, for Sanger had suffered, too, from the thirst of that canyon of salt and alkali. Sanger was remembering this bitter agony, and wanted to torture before he killed. It was the law of the desert—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Nothing else would explain how Sanger could go on missing Mack.

Smiler crept along that ledge. Sanger's shots were now very close; and Smiler moved carefully and silently. It was plain that Mack was not even sure from which side of the canyon he was being fired at. He apparently had plenty of ammunition. Somehow he must have acquired possession of the four guns and their belts of cartridges which Alice had been carrying. Sanger's shots were now so close that the reverberations rang in Smiler's ears. But he could see nothing except the rocks of the gully, a great butte before him, and the chasm below. There was

not a hole in sight big enough to shelter a lizard, not a bush that would cover a jack rabbit.

Yet Smiler could actually smell powder now, though he could not see any smoke. He tried to keep cool in this maddening perplexity. He looked and he listened, straining his eyes and his ears to the utmost, and trying to guess where and how this man could be hidden and yet be shooting so very close to him.

A rock in front of him seemed to be moving. For a moment he wondered if Sanger was hidden under a cairn of that gravel. But none of it looked as if it was built. Those rocks and those stones looked as if they had lain there for ages. For a moment Smiler wondered if he was still dizzy and liable to delusions, for that rock was moving. It was growing longer; it was reaching forward to the edge of the canyon; it was crawling like the back of a huge turtle. It wasn't a rock at all; there was something living inside that round carapace of stone.

To save his very sanity, discarding all precaution, Smiler rose to his feet as another shot rang close to his ears and a spurt of fire spat out of the very body of the rock. He stooped and caught at the rock. It came away in his hand. That rock was a cleverly painted piece of canvas—the strange pup tent Sanger had been carrying, artfully disguised with red and white paint; and under it, huddled close, were Sanger and his mule Sammy.

The mule seemed quite undisturbed and Sanger looked up with a quiet grin.

"Well, young feller," he said, "yer guessed this trick. I guess I played it too often before the same audience."

He then turned and resumed his operations on Mack.

Smiler examined the pup tent. The inner side was the ordinary canvas exposed to the world when packed on the mule, but the outer was a very fair

painting of rock formation, with a little flourish of green brush at the edges. It was a perfect camouflage. Sanger had learned this method of protective coloration from the lizards and rattlers he had lived with so long. At a little distance it easily melted into the background of the real rocks. No ordinary observer could pierce that disguise unless he was prepared for it or accidentally stumbled across it. It was Sanger's movements inside the canvas that had betrayed him.

Sammy, taking the removal of the canvas as a cue that the performance was over, rose and began climbing the gully in search of something to eat. Sanger called to him to return; but for once the mule paid no attention to his trainer. Smiler called to him; and the mule obeyed Smiler.

"Durn yer," cried Sanger. "Ye've made Sammy like yer. It's bad fer animals to have too many bosses."

Divided between his mule and the barrage he was keeping between Mack and the water, Sanger took another shot at Mack, without his usual deliberation. He now rose to his feet with a loud curse.

"Get to hell out of this!" he cried to Smiler. "Yer taking my mind off my work. I've missed; I've killed him."

Smiler looked over the edge of the canyon. Mack had turned over on his back and was lying quite still. Even from that height it was plain that that lax attitude was his last.

"Why in hell can't yer leave a man alone?" yelled this artist in straight shooting. "What d'ye want to butt in for? I gave yer the goods on him. I marked a trail fer yer. What d'ye want to drag me in fer?"

"Your wife and daughter are down there and they want you," said Smiler.

"I know," whimpered Sanger nervously. "I'm willing to do what's right by them, now that I kin. I'll send them a salary or alimony or whatever they want; only let me alone."

Sanger was whining like an animal in a trap. His voice shrilled across the canyon. A hail came from below. They could see Alice and her mother waving to them. For, discarding all concealment, the two men had stood up plainly on the sky line.

"They're calling to you, Sanger."

Sanger looked down for a second and then scurried up the gravel after his mule. Smiler hurried, expostulating with this man—so resourceful, so courageous, so ready to face all the terrors and vicissitudes of the desert, but not daring to face a home and wife.

"Alice wants you, Sanger," he pleaded. "She knows why you left home. She'll sympathize with you; she'll stand by you."

Smiler held him by the arm and Sanger did not attempt to struggle. He was trying to load the pack on top of Sammy.

"See here, young feller, you can't hold me. And laws mean nothing to me. Put me in bars and I'll get out. Rope me in and I'll untie any knot ever made. Why should I go back? My wife's done better without me. I never was no use about a house, anyway. I'll keep her, but I'll be durned if I'll live with her. I can't stand staying too long on one pitch. That was the whole trouble between us. We should never have left the road. I got to keep moving. I'm going to keep moving."

Smiler had been wondering where the wind was coming from that had been blowing up the legs of his trousers—a cold, bitter wind, though the air on the mesa was still and hot. He looked around, prepared for any sort of a trick from this elusive prospector, this juggler who created a stage for his performances out of the desert and the ranges.

"I've seen my gal, too; and I'm proud of her," continued Sanger. "But once yer under a roof with women, yer helpless. You tell 'em from me, Smiler,

that I ain't crazy and I ain't a beast—I'm just the same man I always was. I don't see no reason a man ain't entitled to live the way he wants to, so long as he hurts nothing but varmints. And I'm going ter."

Suddenly Sanger disappeared before Smiler's very eyes, down into the hole that had opened when he kicked away the rocks. He slid from sight as he would down a trap in a stage—and so quickly that he was gone before Smiler could jump to catch him. Only the cold subterranean air blew in Smiler's face as he peered down into that dark air hole in the rocks. He could hear Sanger scuttling below.

"All right, Sanger," called Smiler. "I'll tell them. But how about your mule?"

"Don't you worry about Sammy," came a muffled voice. "Give him a hoist with a stone. He'll find me."

Smiler rose to his feet. It was quite useless trying to go after Sanger down that burrow; his only course was to return to his party.

"Hold on, Sammy; you've got to come with me first," said Smiler, catching at the mule's leading rope. Sammy, however, with considerable obstinacy was bent on going his own way, to keep the rendezvous with his master. Then Smiler remembered he had some chocolate in his pocket—the last of Dippy's emergency rations. Not until the mule had absorbed this sweet stuff did it obediently follow Smiler. Smiler had won the mule's allegiance at least for a while. Sammy, he hoped, would be the joker in the pack that would turn the game against Sanger.

The two soon found a trail leading to the bottom of the canyon, where they joined Alice, her mother, and Dippy.

"That's Billy Sanger," said Mrs. Sanger, when Smiler told his story. "He never was happy till we were pulling our tent pegs."

"I got the mule to follow me, Mrs.

Sanger, thinking that would bring him home. He can't get along without Sammy," said Smiler.

"You don't know Billy Sanger," she answered, shaking her head. "He's got all the bad habits of all the animals he ever trained. He's the most cussed, ornery, meanest, pig-headed, monkey-brained——"

Alice was springing to her father's defense, when Mrs. Sanger's last attack of bitterness faded out in tears.

"He is! He is!" she cried. "But he's my husband and your father, and if he won't come to me, I'll go to him. Young man, give me that rope."

Mrs. Sanger took the rope and, to be sure of it, tied it around her waist.

"You said this mule knows where Sanger will camp?" she said. "Then the mule will take me to him if it has to drag a bag of bones. There's grub enough in that pack to keep me a long time and I've been hungry on the lot before. I'm tired of staying on one pitch, too. You two kids can run Grassy Flats yourselves."

"But Sanger will never come out if he sees you," said Smiler.

"Won't he? You don't know my man. When that mule has decided on his location I'm just going to holler, 'Hey, rube!' till I bust. And if that don't bring Sanger running out to help me he ain't a circus man no more and I don't want him."

She drove the mule ahead of her across the creek and the two began climbing the trail Smiler had descended. Alice had not stirred. Neither of the men had said a word more to stop her. This woman going after her man was too elemental, too splendidly primitive for them to interfere; she fitted in with the gigantic cliffs and somber canyons. But after she was out of sight, the thought of her dragged by that mule about the mesa and giving that old circus call for help smote the sentimental heart of old Dippy.

"We'll let her get ahead a bit and then trail her," he said.

"We will not," decided Alice. "Never interfere with a jump. Mother has done her leap. She's in the air. It's her life; it's her trick. Let her land."

It was nearly dark when they reached the old camp. Nobody said much. Alice was more worried over her mother than she would admit. Dippy, too, kept throwing questioning glances at the hills and stopping to listen. Smiler had so much to say that he could not say it.

The Sangers' horses had material enough for a fine meal, which Dippy attended to. Alice wandered off into the starlit dusk and Smiler followed her. What he said all men know. It was whispered in the caves of the neolithic man; it is being spoken in millions of tongues everywhere every minute—the same speech, the same feelings. Smiler was not talking blank verse; but what he said was "Romeo and Juliet" sprinkled with alkali and decorated with sage.

But for all that, his Juliet was not responsive. Women have changed with the ages more than men. Other methods than serenades and soft speeches are needed with these fine flowers of evolution, the athletic amazons of today.

"That's very pretty," she whispered softly and earnestly. "But we—I don't believe in marriage. In Radcliffe we voted it down as an effete institution."

Smiler summoned all the hardness that a man must command when he is fighting for his life. And this was more than his life.

"The trouble with you college girls," he said, "is that you've got printer's ink in you instead of red blood. We're going to have a war some day just to make this a man's country. We won't ask you to marry us, then; we'll take you as the Romans took their wives. They soon liked it."

"Bravo! But only high-school girls believe in cave men."

"Do you believe in anything but your own conceited selves? Has common humanity, has love, no meaning in your classes?"

"We prefer to be uncommon," she retorted. "Love is merely a trick of nature. I refuse to be the victim of biological necessity."

Smiler girded himself for further argument. He knew he would have to win this girl's brains as well as her sentiments. The ardent discussion, however, was interrupted by a strange call from the desert.

Alice started, with a deep gasp. She actually clung to Smiler as if weakness had for the first time assailed her. The artificialities of education seemed to drop from her. She tried to answer that call.

"It's mother."

Dave Hooper had seen his father and brother shot down by the Black Rider, and for four years he had rode the West to find the murderer. This situation develops into one of the most colorful and most dramatic Western stories you've ever read. Next week—"The Black Rider," by Robert McBlair.

But something held the words back in her throat. Some of the feelings she had tried to despise overwhelmed her. All she could do was point across the desert. Smiler saw figures moving across the alkali toward their fire. The group was composed of a mule, a man, and a woman; and the two last kept step as one.

"She's found him!" cried Alice. "Mother! *Hoop-la! hoop-la!*"

Smiler released her; but she still held his arm.

"What were you saying?" she said softly. "I merely wanted to have no misunderstandings. Please say that pretty speech again. It really sounded rather nice."

Smiler did not; he found action better. She melted into his arms in the same old and eternally new way.

PLANES RESCUE INJURED

IN Alaska airplanes serve as ambulances, as well as ordinary passenger conveyances. During the last season, one plane working out of Fairbanks, in the interior, brought more than fifty ill or injured persons to points where medical attention could be given them.

The fact illustrates the importance of aviation in the Territory to-day. A. A. Bennett, in the Alaska commercial service for more than two years as chief pilot of the Bennett Rodebaugh Corporation, has flown 237,000 miles delivering express, mail, and passengers. During this time he has not suffered one accident. At present he is in the continental United States obtaining additional equipment for the Fairbanks concern.

Their hangar in the Far North measures 220 feet in length, and will be increased 100 feet next year. It is steam-heated and of fireproof construction. The company has five airplanes in operation. Four of these carry three passengers each, while the fifth is of a cabin type that will transfer five persons at a time.

The pilot is enthusiastic over aviation possibilities in the Far North.

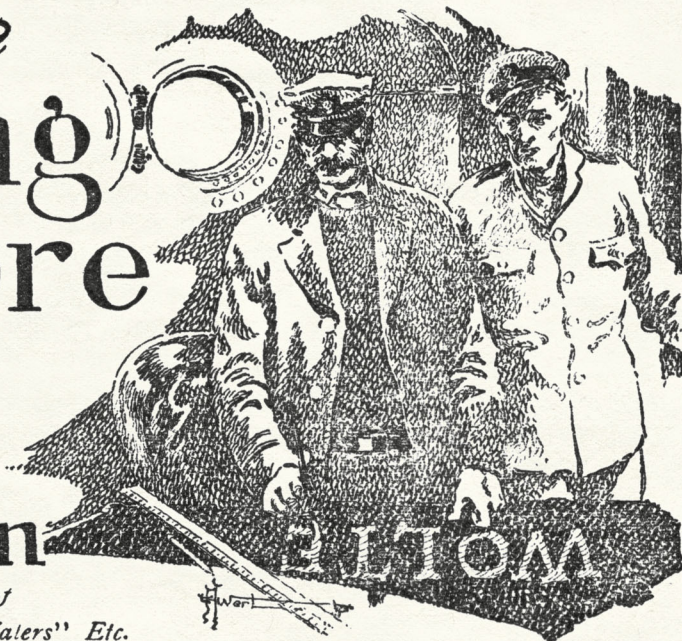
During the last few seasons, commercial companies operating farther south have carried big-game hunters from Anchorage and Seward to their destinations. Thus the hunters literally swoop down out of the sky to bag the rare specimens that have been taken out of the Territory. Traveling men also make considerable use of the airplane in making their rounds. Prospectors who can afford it employ the planes to take them to their scene of operations.

The Long Score

By
Roy
Norton

Author of

"Oil Upon the Waters" Etc.



A tale of the Opportunist, in which Captain Eli Drake, of the steam schooner *Malabart*, gets his chance to settle an old grievance

A COMPLETE STORY

CAPTAIN ELI DRAKE, who had more or less idly watched his own ship, the steam schooner *Malabart*, overhaul a ship ahead, hummed a hymn tune as he trudged aimlessly to and fro on the bridge; and his chief officer and admiring friend, William Catlin, smiled at this certain evidence of good humor and content.

"The Old Hyena's always happy when he can pass somethin'," he thought, not admitting that he also had much pride in the *Malabart* which for all the years since Drake's ownership had been his own home. "Ain't a tramp on the seas that can kick her heels in our face for long," his thought carried on. And then his eye shifted in answer to a splash, and he became vociferous with "Hey, you! What the hell do you mean by dumpin' that stuff

to wind'ard? Get a mop and clean that mess up, or I'll come down there and scour it up with your bally snoot!"

The new galley boy, who was making his first venture to sea, jumped like a startled hare, scuttled into and out of the galley and began to make frantic efforts to efface the marks of his carelessness. The "doctor" appeared, gave him a cuff to expedite speed, and in a hoarse growl educated him as to the difference between dumping potato parings to "lee'ard or wind'ard," in the meantime commenting on the intelligence of landlubbers when they first come afloat. Evidently he held them in no great esteem.

When Catlin again looked ahead, he saw that what first had been a smudge on the windless horizon, then a defined plume of smoke, had now brought up

a hull like an enormous sea plant. Drake, still humming "Cling to the Lifeboat, Sailor," trudged to his cabin abaft the chart house, where Catlin surmised he labored over accounts with his stiff, exact handwriting. They made the landfall of Gallipoli which arose bleak and tragic as if brooding over the brave who had so vainly died there in the World War, and Catlin steadied his glass and stared at it; but his mind was traveling ahead over the route of the *Malabart*, up through the Dardanelles, the Bosphorus, into the Black Sea and on to Odessa where she must deliver a cargo before returning in ballast to Constantinople to find part of another waiting, then back to Symrna to complete.

He tried to recall the appearance of Odessa as it had been when last he was there, some years before the great conflict, and wondered what it would look like under the dreaded Bolshevik rule. When his mind returned to the ship the *Malabart* was overhauling, he stared at her and chuckled:

"She's even a little bigger nor us; looks like a good craft, and yet us can steam rings around her! Shows that looks can't go very far—at sea!"

He watched her idly now and then, as she pushed steadily ahead; had his attention distracted by a destroyer flying the British flag which came past them, throwing a high bow wave as if making a speed test, and felt his heart warm a trifle with patriotic pride, and then again looked at the tramp. They were abreast of her now, and he stopped aft alongside the chart house and called to Captain Drake:

"Passing that tramp, sir. Dutchman."

He heard the humming noise inside stop, and a moment later Captain Eli appeared with his cap visor jammed down over his eyes and trudged to the wing of the bridge. Catlin heard a sudden grunt and saw his superior

reach for his binoculars that hung on a hook just inside the chart-house window. Then he saw the glasses replaced, heard a growl of anger, and saw his superior shake his fist at the perfectly innocent wayfarer.

"Damn 'em! Hope she sinks! *Woltendam* of Rotterdam—one of Carlesen & Methens' tubs, eh?" Captain Drake exploded like a kettle boiling over with steam.

Catlin whistled the customary passing salute before remarking:

"You know her, sir?"

"Know her, Mr. Catlin? No. I don't know her, but I know her house." And then for a full single minute he cursed the names of Carlesen & Methens backward and forward, upside and downside, inside and out, after which, with another scowl at the offensive *Woltendam*, he gave a final grunt and returned to his cabin. Catlin scratched his head with his stubby fingers and exchanged grins with the man at the wheel.

"They say, sir, as how the Old Man never forgets," the man said very quietly.

"No, not ever, even if it was somethin' as happened forty year ago," Catlin agreed. "And most always he keeps an open account in his mind until he evens a score." After which he spent an hour wondering what Carlesen & Methens had done to provoke such an outburst. It was currently reported on the seas that Drake had "tamed down" since he had become a master-owner, and with advancing years had become more placid; but Catlin, who knew him more intimately than any living man, had his doubts. The latest vindictive outburst indicated otherwise.

Drake, after an hour's solitude, came out in a better temper, although he had not returned to "Cling to the Lifeboat, Sailor;" and after lounging about for a few minutes he asked:

"Did you ever hear of Carlesen & Methens, Bill?"

Catlin surmised from the unusual familiarity of address that the Old Hyena was in a communicative mood, so replied:

"No, sir, I haven't; but you don't seem to like 'em."

"I like 'em just the way I seem to, Bill," Drake growled. "I've only been in jail once since I got a master's ticket, and—blast 'em—that Dutch firm put me there. You think I'm holding a grudge for something that maybe didn't amount to much—well, I'll tell you what they did to me!"

He spat over the side as if to relieve his mouth of a bad taste, and, glaring off at what was now but a smudge of smoke on the western horizon, said:

"Ten years before the war, it was, and—I'm not likely to forget—not me!—they got me to chuck up a steady berth on one of the blue-funnel cargo boats to take over one of theirs. Long voyage. New trade for them—down around Guinea coast way. Did well for them. Came back pretty well pleased with myself and could have been bowled over with a feather when young Carlesen fired me. Going to turn the ship over to a Dutch fathead that had been my chief mate on the round. Got me to come with 'em because I knew that trade so this pet of theirs could learn the ropes. Admitted it. Carlesen, a young squirt who'd inherited the business, got fresh. I told him what I thought of him. And—well—they got me in jail."

"But you must have done somethin' else besides tell him off! They couldn't cop you for that," Catlin objected.

Drake grinned as if at a happy recollection and said:

"Nothing to put a man in jail for. All I did was to sock Carlesen in his port lamp, then when Methens horned in I chucked him through a window and took a stool to clean up a gang of

clerks and counter strappers that came in when Carlesen bawled like a scared calf. No, the mistake I really made was in cleaning up the first two policemen who showed up. The Rotterdam Dutch just naturally hate to have anybody thump their policemen about, and—they couldn't see the joke. It cost me ten days and most all the money I had, and then I'm hanged if they didn't send me down to the docks with a couple of constables who looked like wooden soldiers and who put me aboard a ship and told me not to come back. The last was the worst, because I'd made up my mind to call on Carlesen & Methens again before I left and—I was disappointed. I hate to leave little things like that unsettled. And—never yet had a chance to play even! Now you see why the sight of their house flag is just like having to swallow an asafetida sandwich. Hang it! It hurts my eyes to look at it!"

He stopped, gave an inarticulate growl, and walked out to the end of the bridge where with hands in his reefer pockets he stood and stared back at the smudge, as if it were impossible to weigh all the injustices it represented. Catlin regarded him a moment, grinned and shook his head with commiseration, and then quietly chuckled as he thought:

"Maybe it's unlucky for that *Wolendam* that she showed up to remind the Old Man of her owners. It'll wake him up to the fact that he's let something slip past too long. And he's a bad un to wake up. Just like a sleep-in' lion," he concluded. With an audible "Tchk! Tchk" of his tongue, he said: "It's a pity—what with him so peaceful for so long!"

They reached Constantinople where Drake unexpectedly announced that he had business ashore, and that the *Malabart* would lie outside the Dolma Batchi for a day. Catlin loitered about, and stared at the Yildiz Kiosk,

at the shabby buildings spread on the hillside, up at Pera, and now and then at the British and American destroyers of which those under each flag lay nested together, side by side, moored and tethered one to another like a lot of old ladies with their heads together at a tea party, discussing the fallen glories of Constantinople. The crews of the destroyers evoked the only sounds of life—they were having a dog fight between two mascots. A great battleship came stodgily, ponderously and slowly in, impressed with its own dignity in such an assemblage, and the British destroyer men scampered and stood at salute as a three-balled flag broke out, disclosing the arrival of an admiral.

Drake came off in the boat which had been ordered to call at the wharf for him at three o'clock, and he had an air of secret happiness which he could not entirely conceal. Indeed, he was in high good humor, and when Giles, the white-headed second, remarked wistfully, "Constant's one place I've never seen since the war. I'd like to have gone ashore here—for a little while," Drake looked at Catlin with a suggestive stare and said: "Nothing to prevent you that I know of. We can't pass the narrows until morning." And his look at Catlin meant "Good man afloat, but a drunkard ashore," as he added: "If Mr. Catlin wants to go for a while, you might go with him. But—get back aboard by midnight."

Catlin, who had read shore longing in Giles' face, promptly said:

"Thank you, sir," and busied himself with routine affairs.

They went ashore, peered into Toqatilan's magnificence, wandered down the street to the Pera Palace, and, after a pause in front of the Petit Champs decided to return to some more congenial-appearing place. A merry quartet of American gobs sing-

ing "We Are the Heroes of the Night," emerged through a double-swinging door, and Catlin from his height peered over and said: "This looks all right," and barged inward, wading through a smoke-laden atmosphere where "a hundred-and-one-score" sailors of all nationalities had congregated as if it were a headquarters.

"Blime! Bill Catlin!" a voice bawled, and he found himself seized by a man who he had last met at "Mother" Murdock's saloon in Punta Arenas, down where the waters of Magellan rip through straits and sing their song.

They fell to beer and conversation, exchanging reminiscences, asking questions when vagrant memories were aroused. Catlin heard that so-and-so had disappeared, and so-and-so had climbed upward.

"You mayhap recall Tom Bates, him as was second on the old *Albian*?" the new-found man asked.

For a moment Catlin looked puzzled and then his face brightened.

"Bates? The bloke who held up four rurales at the head of Calle San Y'cidro in Havana until Captain Drake could do a bunk?" he asked, staring.

"The same! Well, he's got a master's ticket now, and has a ship called the—what's this its name is?—oh, yes, the *Woltendam*. Dutch boat out of Rotterdam, I think."

"Lord! Lord! And us passed her to-day," Catlin said, with an air of wonder at the coincidence, as if coincidences at sea were not the regular, rather than unusual, occurrences arranged by fate.

"That's a bit of all right! Comin' this way, is she?" the man said. And then he chuckled, looked at Giles who was engrossed in finding the depths of his third glass of imitation "Bitters," and leaned forward to mumble confidentially: "Tell you a secret about that ship. They been tryin' to hide her

identity for the last two or three years. I know a man or so that was mixed in it. She's Russian. Yes, sir. From Riga. And when the war come, the enemy grabbed her. Then she worked back and for'ard across the Baltic until the war was over, and her crew slipped her into a Dutch port—not certain whether Amsterdam or Rotterdam—and somebody there bought her, and dolled her up, and sent her out under made-up papers to keep the English from puttin' a plaster on her mainmast.

"Everybody got suspicious of her, and the things the Dutch did to her papers and registry would make a book. But I dare say all that's forgotten now. Funny what ships go through once they fall in bad luck, eh? Now I remember the *Belle Harvard* of Baltimore. She was a fine, clean ship as was——"

For a few minutes Catlin did not grasp what he said, and when he did begin to heed, he was again disturbed by the banging of a clock that struck eleven heavy strokes.

"By crumbs!" he exclaimed, thrusting back his chair. "Hey, Giles! We got to get on steam. The Old Man'll murder us if we don't get back aboard ship. Come on!"

They shook hands with Catlin's friend and hurried out. The tram down the hill to the harbor had stopped, and they piled into a ramshackle horse cab whose driver tried to bargain for his fare in advance, doubtless having had sad experiences with other sailormen at such hours of night. And finally they rattled away past the neglected cemetery with its turbaned stones or upheld Fatima hands, and succeeded in boarding the *Malabart* just as Drake was beginning to consult the huge watch he carried in his hip pocket. It had been a pleasant and sober night, Giles volunteered, and Drake made some sarcastic remark

about its being unusual; gave an order for a call, and they fell back into ship routine.

Up through the narrow thread of water, the Bosphorus, one of the most important and beautiful passages in the world, and out into the depths of that great inland sea fittingly called "Black," the *Malabart* went her cheerful way. Drake seemed to have taken a new lease on happiness and hummed his everlasting hymns until the men on the bridge wearied of the monotone. He was, however, less communicative than usual, which meant long watches when he never addressed a man, and those beneath him knew from experience that it was a part of his discipline that none should address him conversationally unless his was the overture.

The *Malabart* reached Odessa and quickly discharged her cargo, the unloading facilities of that once marvelous port being one of the features that Soviet slackness had failed to destroy completely, although the docks were decimated. The hatches over the emptied holds were battered down just at sunset, and an officious wharf master insisted that the ship draw out into the roadstead.

"These damned land scum haven't any more sense than a lot of sheep!" Drake growled when his protests were of no avail. "I can't get my clearance until they open an office to-morrow morning, but instead of letting us lay here at the wharf, for which they can't possibly have any use until to-morrow forenoon, they make us pull out into the roadstead and lay at anchor. The swine! Well, all we can do is—to do it." He rang for the engine room and vented the rest of his annoyance through the tube.

The lines were cast off, and the *Malabart* backed out, swung around and made her way to an anchorage. The dusk fell, veiling the unkempt stretch of stairs that climbed upward

to the park behind and rendering of their colossal sweep a thing of beauty and nobility. The fringe of lights high up at their edge leaped into brilliance like a string of scintillant jewels, and, as the heavens darkened, the stars shone in a cloudless, moonless sky like other lights, far aloof, imbedded in a vast field of purple. The *Mala-bart's* riding lights threw dull rays on the surface of waters that were as still and motionless as the body of an inland lake.

Drake, still vexed by the useless trouble and shift, stood with his elbows on the bridge rail and moodily regarded the city, the glow of his pipe being the sole indication that he was not asleep. A voice from the deck hailed:

"Bridge! Ship coming into port, sir, from sou'-sou'west."

To Catlin's surprise Drake displayed interest and walked to the far wing of the bridge where he could stare almost directly aft in the direction of the approaching lights. He chuckled as if inwardly pleased, lost his air of gloom and said to Catlin:

"That'll be the *Woltendam* of Rotterdam—damn her! I learned while ashore in Constant that she was Odessa bound." And again he chuckled softly as if pleased.

"Oh, by the way, forgot to tell you, sir," Catlin remarked, glad that the long silence had broken. "You can't guess who her skipper is. I learned it when I was ashore with Giles up there in Pera. It's old Tom Bates as was second on the *Albian*——"

"What? What's that? Tom Bates—that's his ship—the *Woltendam*—that's coming in now?"

Drake's voice had a quality in it that startled even Catlin, who through long years of intimacy was well beyond surprise. There was something tense in it, not of joy at hearing of an old friend, but of bitter disappointment.

"Yes, sir. No other. He's a master now, and—first time I've heard of him for a donkey's years. He's got a ship and——"

"My Lord! My Lord!" Drake exclaimed, suddenly shaking both fists upward. "Tom on that ship, and her sticking her head in here where——" He suddenly stopped and moved distractedly. "I suppose you know that she is really a Russian bottom, and that the Soviet outfit'll grab her if——"

"Yes, I heard that, too, sir, confidentiallike. But I dare say her owners are taking a chance that the Bolshies won't find out who she is, after all, this time, and the way her papers have been cooked, and names changed, and all that. They've taken good care of that, you can lay a hundred to one."

But Captain Eli seemed not to hear and moved restlessly, as if uncertain of something, stood motionless as if in deep thought, and then suddenly became once more alert—decidedly so.

"She'll not be able to dock to-night, Bill," he said, with a note of decision in his voice. "She'll most likely come to anchor not far from us. Swing a boat over our stern, quickly, and leave a line so a man can drop into it over the taffrail if we want it. We've got to get word to Tom Bates about this, so he'll be warned, in case he doesn't know, and it's a certainty that Carlesen & Methens would never tell him, because they never confided any of their dirty work to anybody—the cunning, treacherous shysters! Do it quickly and quietly; then come down to the fo'c's'le mess. You'll find me there. What I'm going to do may be wasted work, but—I must make a try and be ready if—can pull something off!" His last words came brokenly, for he was hurrying down the bridge steps as he spoke, and the chief was following obediently at his heels.

Catlin called the astonished men he needed, cautioned them, and the boat

was lowered and pulled around under the stern counter, after which the men in her came up the line over the taff-rail to the deck. The dull rattle of an anchor chain at a couple of cable lengths away proved that Drake's prediction as to the *Woltendam's* lying to in the roadstead for the night had been justified; and Catlin saw her lights swing as she lost way and came around to rest.

"Hook's down," he muttered, as he heard the distant shrill of a bos'n's whistle; and then, wondering what Drake had in mind, and why he had gone to the men's mess, he turned and went for'ard and below. The commander, scowling and intent, glared upward as Catlin entered, and under the light looked once more the "Old Hyena" with the fighting light in his deeply set eyes. But Catlin did not observe this so much as something else that filled him with amazement. Drake had drawn careful lead-pencil marks with the aid of a long ruler on the black-oilcloth top of the mess table, and with a pot of white paint was hastily working. Catlin saw the first letters "*W-O-L-T-E*—" already done, and said nothing until Captain Eli had painstakingly added an "*N*." Drake did not speak until it was completed, bending above and engrossed in his work, and then paused and looked up with a dry grin pulling the corners of his thin, firm lips.

"Now go up, Bill, and notify all hands that, if we are hailed or boarded, the name of this ship to-night is the *Woltendam*, and she's of Rotterdam. I hate like hell to disgrace my ship by calling her such a name, but—better go and do it now."

"Yes, sir."

When Catlin had performed his task he returned just as Captain Eli was, with his huge clasp knife, carefully cutting the oilcloth from the edges of the table and regarding a fairly neat sign,

"*Woltendam* of Rotterdam," with some pride.

"We'll get this up now and cover our stern plate with it," he said. "It'll be good enough for night use, anyhow, and—— Wonder if that paint'll run?"

The mate, taciturn as usual, but still questioning the reason for such extraordinary efforts, followed Captain Eli to the deck and aft, and with his own hands, while swinging over the stern, fixed the top of the faked name plate, then went down the rope and carefully smoothed out and fastened the lower edges. Drake went down the line to the boat, struck a match, shielded it with his hands, and stared upward. His chuckle was audible. He swarmed back to the deck and said gleefully: "Good work! Would fool anybody on earth—unless in strong daylight. Now for the bow plates. Can't take a chance on time. Hate to do it, but must get some black paint and paint 'em out."

They had barely accomplished this when the watch called, quietly:

"Light putting off from the custom's steps, I think, sir. Looks like it might be a launch—— Yes, sir, a launch it is."

Drake watched for a moment, then hurriedly spoke to Catlin:

"Bill, you keep out of sight. If that proves to be a government launch, and they come aboard, I want you to drop into the boat astern with a couple of smart men—better take 'Tarpaulin' Jones and 'Three-finger' Gates—smart at the oars—and get a note across to the *Woltendam* as quickly as you can. Must run up and write it."

He went up the bridge steps three at a stride; the light in his cabin flared, and a minute later he came running downward and thrust an envelope into Catlin's hands, saying:

"There it is. Where's that launch? Ah, there she comes! You'd better find Gates and Jones and stay aft until we find out what this is about."

They stood in suspense on the deck as the light came churning nearer, throwing a thin beam ahead, and Drake suddenly discerned the huddled and curious men of the crew forward and called:

"Scatter out of that, you blamed fools! Want 'em to think we're prepared to repel boarders? Don't all stand there together; and when they come, stow the gab. Keep your faces shut!"

The launch, which had more noise than speed, and barked irregularly, indicating that some of its cylinders were out of action, came toward the bow of the *Malabart* which rose out of the water like a huge black rock, and suddenly a searchlight hurled a beam of light upward from a distance of twenty or thirty yards. After a momentary and futile probing, it was lowered, and the launch continued around in a wide sweep until astern when again the white ray swept upward, held, and the engines of the boat were suddenly shut down. The men of the *Malabart* heard a muffled and broken conversation, and the starting of engines.

"Blast 'em! Are they going over on to the other ship, or are they coming aboard?" Captain Eli growled. But just then it made a swing, came in closer, and a voice hailed:

"*Woltendam*—ahoy!"

"Well, what is it?" Drake shouted back. And the voice called in English with scarcely a foreign accent:

"Lower your side ladder. Harbor commissioner of the Soviet government coming aboard."

"Lower it is, sir," Drake responded, giving Catlin a significant thrust to retire aft, said to the second mate: "Mr. Giles, lower the port-side ladder for them."

"Aye, aye, sir," Giles said; and within a few minutes the ladder swung downward to the surface of the star-spotted black water, and the launch

came slowly up to it, bumped, and was held by a man in uniform. Drake called a sharp order, and a deck lamp with a white, hanging reflector threw a broad light downward, almost blinding the occupants of the launch.

"Coming in official state, all right," Forbes growled. "Plenty of gold lace and brass binding for a plain, simple government of, for, and by the people."

"*S-s-sh!*" Drake warned, as he took his place at the head of the ladder and waited while a fat official wheezed and puffed upward. Drake, watching him intently, reached the swift conclusion that this was no man familiar with boarding boats, or of the sea and its usages. He hadn't the sailor's unconscious grasp and step that comes from long familiarity, but climbed heavily, cautiously, until at last he stood on the deck with three other men in uniform immediately behind him. He turned and said something in Russian, and a man in civilian garb climbed upward and said:

"I'm the interpreter for his excellency, the harbor commissioner. He says you are to consider your ship and yourselves under arrest, and to turn your bridge over to Captain Bedalsky, here."

Drake pretended a vast surprise and roared objections until the commissioner rapped out some more sentences which were again interpreted.

"If you make any further objections, his excellency says we are to seize you, your engineers and chief officer, take you in the launch and lodge you in prison. He doesn't say so, captain, but if you take my advice you'll take things calmly and try to be nice. It'll be far better for you. I know what I'm talking of."

Drake suddenly removed his cap and said:

"Sorry. Tell him we don't want any row, and will do as he says. But —won't you all come down to the

smoke room where we can have a drink, and I can find out what all this means? We haven't broken any port laws that I'm aware of. Been here two days discharging cargo and——" He held his big paw out to the commissioner with such a disarming grin that the latter accepted it and, proving that he had got the drift of the conversation, said:

"I no spik great Engleeses, but think you say——" He turned to the interpreter who promptly rattled off a string of slithering Russian. The port official said something more, and the interpreter said:

"The commissioner says you are showing good sense; that he gladly accepts your hospitality for himself and the officers; that he will then explain."

Drake shouted:

"Bridge there! Mr. Giles, turn the bridge over to this Russian officer who is taking charge and see that he is not interfered with. His orders are to be obeyed."

The Russian delegation seemed to have caught the drift of the speech and were highly satisfied. The man indicated as Captain Bedalsky saluted the commissioner, and when Giles appeared climbed upward to the bridge where he stood looking downward as if regretting that he was not to be one of the party for whatever libations might be forthcoming. Drake looked up at him, pretended good-natured fellowship, and said to the interpreter:

"That seems hard luck. I've got a pretty good line of stuff on this ship—bought by a crowd that had her as a yacht—and that officer looks like a good fellow. Can't the harbor commissioner send that sailor up from the launch to watch my bridge until Captain—what's this—his name is—has at least one or two with us?"

Again proving that his understanding of English was more adequate than his expression, the Soviet leader burst

into a fat laugh, slapped Drake on the shoulder and called upward. The Russian captain with a grin of relief on his face descended, barked an order over the side, and the launch tender moored his boat, climbed upward, and in obedience to a curt command, mounted the bridge where he assumed solitary state. Captain Drake led the way to the saloon, but upon reaching inside the door seemed to be having vast trouble with the light switch.

"What's the matter here, Mr. Giles?" he bawled. And when the latter crowded close to him in the darkness, he whispered: "Get that false covering off our name plate at once!" And then as he turned the lights on he said aloud:

"That thing ought to be repaired. Come in, gentlemen. Come in."

Giles slipped out as his visitors blinked about in astonishment, and the chief official sputtered a remark in Russian which his faithful interpreter voiced:

"His excellency says he is amazed with such a commodious and luxurious lounge on a cargo boat, and that it's more like a private yacht."

Drake laughed loudly.

"Tell him," he said, "that there's a funny story about these fixings, and I'll tell it to him while we're having a drink." He rang for the steward who appeared, and Captain Eli shouted: "If we're under arrest we might as well have the best there is on board. Open up a case of the choice champagne, Hartley, and serve the gentlemen drinks. The very best you have—that French stuff that is prewar." And then, jovially to his guests: "You'll not find such wine as this nowadays. Can't be had. Now about this saloon——" And he proceeded, as if he had not a care in the world, to make a long but entertaining story of how the boat had been chartered by a crowd for a treasure search off Madagascar, and had at

their own expense overhauled and altered her cabins and deckhousing. He took a long time in the telling and surprised himself by the interest and laughter he evoked. Once he interrupted himself, almost at the commencement of his tale, to ask Giles where Mr. Catlin was and got the answer:

"Why, have you forgotten, sir? He went ashore in the small boat some time ago."

"So he did! So he did!" Drake said, and continued with his story. Once, through the open door, his acute ears caught the sound of a distant splash, and his seasoned mind thought: "Good! The *Woltendam's* let her anchor go by the board rather than bring it in. Wise man, Tom. Rather lose an anchor and some fathoms of chain than his ship!" But his voice trailed on with his long story. He had barely finished when there was a bump outside, some exclamations, and Catlin soon afterward appeared in the door, respectfully removed his cap, started to back out with the remark, "Didn't know you had visitors, sir," and was invited in.

The introductions took more time. More bottles were opened. The hands of the clock over the saloon mantelpiece seemed crawling, but had advanced a full hour since Catlin had returned before the port commissioner had in his turn told a story that also required the labor of translation. The hands, with what seemed to Drake unusual slowness, had advanced to an hour and a half before the Soviet official seemed to recall the cause of his visit.

"I suppose we ought to get down to our business," he said, in painful English, blinking his eyes and becoming grave and officious. And then, as the interpreter translated his remarks: "We have positive information that this ship is in reality the property of the Soviet government, and we are

therefore compelled to appropriate her in the name of the said government."

"But—but—sir—how can an English ship, built in England, registered as a British bottom, be seized in this way?" Drake said, becoming gravely serious.

"Her papers are false. I must see them. We had best do that now," the commissioner said.

"I will get them for you, or—will you come to the chart house with me?" Captain Eli asked, with extreme politeness; and the port official and his followers arose and followed out and upward. Drake turned on the chart-house lights and pointed at the neatly framed registry hanging on the wall. The official, his interpreter and one of the other officers who had a knowledge of English stared upward, and as they read the carefully and boldly inscribed words, "Steam Schooner *Malabart* of Plymouth, England," gasped and stood for a moment as if transfixed.

"But—but—thees paper is for anuzzer sheep—not zis *Woltendam* what we wants," the commissioner shouted.

"You want a ship called the *Woltendam*? Then there must be some mistake, sir. You didn't ask me the name of my ship, but she's not the *Woltendam*. She's the *Malabart*, and those are her papers, and I can prove it by others, and my bills of lading, and clearances, and—full records, sir."

"Impossible! We made sure of the name on her stern before we came aboard!" the commissioner shouted angrily. "I tell you, we saw it!" He turned to his companions as if for confirmation and babbled almost incoherently in their native tongue, and they in turn raved and made furious declarations until Drake interjected pacifically and almost humbly with:

"But, gentlemen, I am certain you are mistaken. Your eyes must have tricked you in the darkness. Those toy searchlights are no good at thirty

to fifty yards' distance. You know that. The way to prove it is to go now and have a look. I think we saw another ship come in just after dark. Maybe it is the one you are looking for. Let us go and see."

They ran out onto the bridge and stared around through the darkness. There were gleams of stars, their reflected sparks on the surface of the sea, the line of city lights high above them, but not one ship's riding light.

"She must have decided to go on into the docks, somewhere," Drake suggested; and Catlin said he thought that when he came aboard he saw her moving toward the freight docks. Swearing, angry, mystified, and inclined to show their fangs, the Soviet officials hastened below and at the commissioner's command Captain Bedalsky went down to the launch. She was started up, and slowly nosed back full astern where her light played from a distance of but twenty feet upward at the clear-white, but somewhat wave-worn legend: "*Malabart*, Plymouth, England." The captain stood up and came closer as if to reassure himself, or make an examination. Drake's heart lost a beat, but Giles had done his removal of the false screen so well that not even a microscope could have betrayed that it had ever been there. Bedalsky removed his cap and ran frenzied fingers through his hair and shouted to the others. Then in a fury he had the launch swung back to the side ladder, and the visitors started to scramble down it.

"I'm mighty sorry you made such a mistake, gentlemen, and if there's anything I can do to help you——"

"Get from out the way—you doddering Yankee fool!" shouted the port commissioner, forgetful of his recent entertainment and the courtesies which prevail between gentlemen.

At sunrise a decrepit prewar destroyer clanked and groaned past the *Malabart*, evidently struggling hard to do ten knots, but with her officers displaying highly burnished gold-braided uniforms, and the Soviet flag fluttering at her peak.

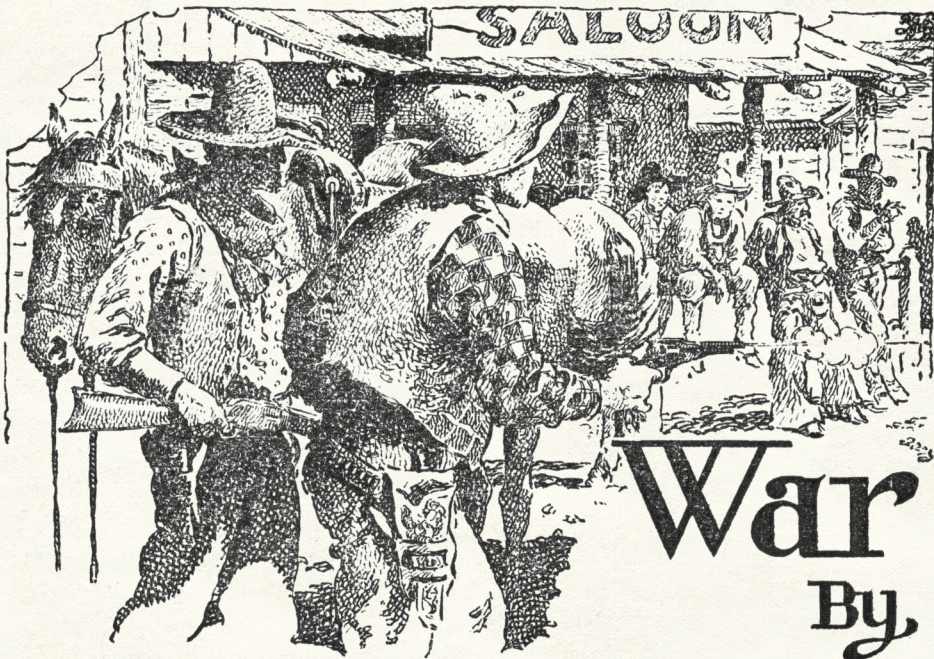
"With the start Tom's got and only a forty-hour run, he'll be through the Dardanelles before ever that tub can overhaul him," Drake grinned.

When, some hours later, the *Malabart* had brought in her hook and was heading southward at regular speed, Drake turned to Catlin and said, with his shore familiarity:

"Bill, you did well. You don't know how glad I am. I'd hate to have had Tom Bates lose his ship—any ship. He'll go back now with a feather in his cap and a reputation for cleverness and caution that'll get him a berth on a decent boat with a decent company. I thought—I thought I had Carlesen & Methens at last—after waiting nearly twenty years to get 'em! But—I'll get 'em yet! You can bet your head on that! Damn 'em to hell and farther if there's anything worse than that! But—you see, Bill, not knowing that Tom Bates was responsible for the *Woltendam*, and commanding her, it was I who dug up her records and sent 'em on from Constantinople through a Soviet agent there, and—it was mighty tough luck that Tom was aboard."

And then, in a burst of wrath at his failure to wipe out that old, old score, he shook his fists skyward and devoted such a torrential address against fate and his failure, pouring it out into space and spreading it over the winds, the sky and the sea, that Catlin discreetly slipped away and left him alone while the man at the wheel with equal discretion made himself a wooden statue intent upon his work.

There will be another "Opportunist" tale by Roy Norton next week.



War By

Author of "Gun Smoke," "The

This is the colorful and romantic tale of a land that was the Lincoln County cattle war. This is a saga of the West,

CHAPTER I.

THE WOOLLY WOLF.

A COLD, high wind from the bare plains west of the Pecos swept in on Ganado Crossing, snatching up clouds of sand from the horse-trampled flats and driving them against Johnson's Store. A thousand cattle dotted the landscape, the cows and calves in friendly bunches, the steers and morose old bulls by themselves; while on the salt meadows below a herd of cow ponies grazed, watched over by a huddled wrangler. Against the closed door of the barroom a Mexican dog crouched shivering, his ear cocked to catch the voices inside. Then suddenly he leaped up and ran cringing around the corner and the Rafter J cowboys surged out.

In the lead came "Tuffy" Malone, showing his shining buck teeth as he

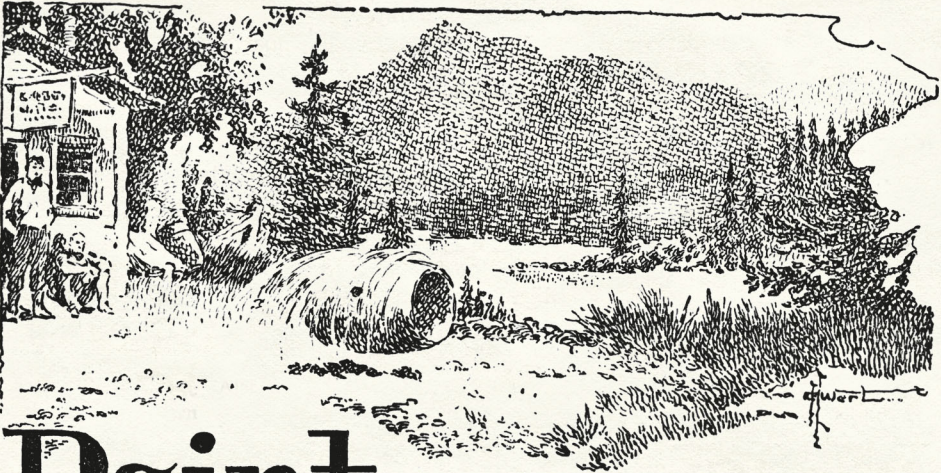
burst into a high-voiced laugh, and with a swift grab at a tin can he chucked it into the air and whipped out his heavy .45.

"How's that?" he challenged as they watched the smashing shots, and the tall riders laughed indulgently.

"Pretty good—for a kid," responded one at last; and Tuffy snatched up another can. He let it sail on the wind, then with three lightning shots he knocked it down the breeze into the river.

"Beat that!" he said, "and I'll show you some real shooting. Come on, Harry—I'll match you for the drinks."

"Handsome" Harry was the boss, as far as any man could be boss, of "Hard Winter" Johnson's warriors; but he did not rule by the gun. There was an urbane intelligence in his smiling black eyes, a deep line of thought between his brows; and as he looked down at Tuffy,



Paint *In Five Parts Part I* *Dane Coolidge*

Gateway of the Sun," Etc.

still young but a few years ago. Old Westerners remember founded on fact, but as thrilling as the wildest romance.

swaggering about with his big pistol, he shook his head and shrugged.

"No," he decided, "I've tried that before, and so have the rest of the gang. But I tell you what I will do—I'll bet you the drinks you can't bunghole this whisky keg five times."

"Aw!" protested Tuffy. "Somebody come and shoot against me. I'm tired of practicing alone."

"Thar's an hombre that will shoot with ye!" shouted a long-legged Texan, suddenly pointing across the river; and on the edge of the high bluff, gazing down at them warily, a lone horseman stood outlined against the sky. On the right side of his saddle the butt of a rifle stuck up, ready to hand if he dropped off his horse. Two pistols hung at his hips. And his head as he leaned forward against the wind had an angry, fighting pose. But more than the man the cowboys noticed his horse,

one of the much-prized Apaloochies or strawberry roans brought by the Spaniards from far Andalusia.

It loomed clean cut and agile against the dusty eastern sky, a young horse, full of power; and on the white of its right hip there was stamped like a Comanche war sign the mark of a bloody hand.

"Hel-lo!" exclaimed Tuffy, after a long look at the stranger whose curly hair was blowing in the wind. "Who's this wild, woolly wolf? He's shore got his war paint on!"

"Fine hawse he's got, too," observed the gangling Texan. "Must've stole him to outrun the sheriff. See him looking back over his shoulder?"

At this well-worn jest a roar of laughter went up from the renegade Texas cowboys and the wind bore their words to the stranger.

"Bunch of horse thieves yourselves!"

he shouted back defiantly, and spurred impulsively down to the ford.

"Go easy, boys," warned Handsome Harry anxiously. "That hombre has got hell in his neck."

"I'll tame him," promised Tuffy Malone, rolling his eyes at the gang. "But we'll string him along first and git him to betting—because I've shore got to have that horse!"

He strode back and forth impatiently, his keen, amber-colored eyes lighting up with the joy of battle. And across the river the stranger spurred recklessly as he came clattering down over the rocks. He was a big man, but gaunt, with a month's growth of beard; and after giving his mount one sup he splashed into the turbid water, drawing his boots up under him as they slumped. The next minute the river lapped his saddle skirts and he jerked his rifle up out of the wet. Then, catching his stirrups, he charged up the bank at them and all but Tuffy Malone gave back.

"Hello, 'Curly!'" Tuffy mocked, facing the drawn rifle fearlessly, "you came away without yore hat. What's the matter—somebody shoot it off?"

"No!" responded the stranger, "but some low-down whelp just sent three bullets mighty close!"

"Aw, sho, sho!" laughed Tuffy. "Don't get ranicky over that. I was shooting a tin can, in the air."

"Oh, you was, eh?" returned Curly, still regarding him balefully as he thrust his gun back into its scabbard. "Well, maybe you're the smart Aleck that called me a horse thief when I rode up onto the bluff?"

"Nope," replied Tuffy. "That was Hank, over there, but he didn't mean no offense. You see," he went on, showing his teeth in a horselike grin, "Hank is kinder under a cloud, himself. He was walking along the road back in Texas when he seen a nice, new rope. 'I better take that along,' he says, 'before some feller comes along and

steals it.' But when he got home, by grab, there was a *horse* tied to the other end of it!"

His high, teasing laugh rose up again as Hank Swope hung his head, and the cowboys joined in the shout.

"Of course," explained Tuffy, "Hank knowed that his neighbors wouldn't listen to no story like that. So he stepped up on that horse and came out here on the Pecos, where horse thieves an' sech are common."

"Shore—'an sech!" jeered back Hank. "Lemme tell you something, stranger, about how Tuffy Malone come to be hyar. He was walking along a road up in Coloraydo when the stage-coach came galloping by. The black flies was mighty bad and Tuffy had took a handkerchief and tied it over his face, and when he held up his hand for the stage to stop the driver misunderstood. So he threwed off the express box and drove away down the canyon, leaving Tuffy about forty thousand dollars. Waal, he knowed them detectives wouldn't believe no story like that, so he took the money and came out hyar on the Pecos, where he found another 'an sech'—Handsome Harry!"

He grinned maliciously at Handsome Harry Vail, and as Curly joined in on the laugh Hank finished his slurring remarks.

"Harry," he said, "was riding on a train when he heard a lot of shooting up ahead. So of course he went forward to investigate. When he opened the door, thar was a big, tall man, collecting the purses and watches from the passengers. And he was looking the other way! Well, Harry had lost his watch in a poker game and he seen one thar that he liked, so he lammed that man over the head with his six-shooter and come out hyar on the Pecos for his health."

The cowboys rocked with laughter at this slam at their chief, and to put an

end to their merriment Handsome Harry stepped inside and came out with an empty keg.

"Stranger," he began, "when you came in sight we were engaged in a little friendly contest. Are you pretty good with a six-shooter?"

"Well—fair," admitted Curly as all eyes were fixed upon him; and Handsome Harry nodded.

"All right," he went on. "Just the man we've been looking for. I'll match you for the drinks against Tuffy Malone, shooting this bunghole while it rolls downhill."

The stranger's smile disappeared and he glanced about grimly at the crowd of hard-faced men.

"Nope," he said. "I'm not shooting or drinking. All I want is some corn for my horse."

"Shore! Shore!" spoke up Tuffy Malone cordially. "Hey, Juan! Bring the gentleman some corn! That's a mighty nice horse you're riding, pardner. Would you mind if I look at his teeth?"

"No—you leave him alone!" answered Curly Wells shortly, and Tuffy raised his eyebrows. But the time had not come for his taming act and he picked up the empty keg.

"So you're a good shot, eh?" he taunted, starting the barrel down the hill. Then, whipping out his pistol, he shot from the hip, making three bull's-eyes as the bunghole came up. But the last two shots, purposely fired to one side, splintered the oak near the edge of the hole.

"Beat that," he challenged, "and I'll buy you the drinks. That's shooting, now ain't it, boys?"

"It shore is!" chorused the well-coached cowboys; and Curly smiled at them wisely as he looked up from feeding his horse.

"All right," he said. "Just to pass away the time I'll try it a whirl myself."

He set himself and rolled the barrel

and as the bunghole came up he bored it five times in succession. Every shot had been timed, and so accurately were they placed that not a splinter flew.

"Pretty good!" he observed as nobody spoke, and then Tuffy gave a laugh.

"Aw, hell!" he scoffed, "you can't shoot for sour apples. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you my roll against that horse you're riding I can beat you, shooting both guns at once. Two guns—two barrels! Roll 'em both down at once! Come on, if you ain't afraid!"

Once more the shaggy stranger scratched his head and considered, squinting shrewdly at the men behind; and something in their pose suggested the beginning of a play, well-rehearsed and drawing toward its close. Yet his poker face did not change.

"Haven't spent much time shooting at whisky barrels," he said. "How much have you got in that roll?"

"Four hundred and eighty dollars!" cried Tuffy, flaunting the notes. "That's a whole lot of money for one horse."

"Nope. Don't need it," grunted Curly; and Tuffy Malone turned pale as some one in the crowd guffawed.

"Seems to me, my friend," he said, "you're taking a heap for granted. You ain't won this money yet."

"No, and I don't intend to try, kid," answered Curly briefly. "So run along and roll your hoop."

"Say," spoke up Tuffy after a moment of ominous silence, "I reckon you think I'm some boy. Well, I'll bet you my roll against whatever you've got, I can beat you, shooting two barrels at once."

His little eyes were gleaming and there was death in his steady gaze; but Curly still kept his slow smile.

"And I reckon," he retorted, "you think I'm some kid, that never heard of the Rafter J. But I'll tell you right now you boys have got a name, over in

Texas. You're known, in fact, for a bunch of damned cow thieves. And I sure would be a sucker to empty both my guns——"

"Hey!" challenged Tuffy, stepping from the crowd and facing him with one hand above his belt. "Are you looking for trouble, Mister Man?"

"No," answered Curly, "I'm looking for a horse."

And Handsome Harry laughed, long and loud.

"Oho!" said Tuffy, suddenly taking his cue. "So that's what's biting you, eh?" And he in turn gave a short, cackling laugh.

"Well, by grab," drawled Hank Swope, "he shore come to the right place, then. What say if we all have that drink?"

"The drinks are on the house, gents," announced Handsome Harry suavely; but as he turned he gave Tuffy the wink.

CHAPTER II.

A LADY KILLER.

SO you've heard of the Rafter Js and Hard Winter Johnson, eh?" inquired Harry as they lined up at the bar. "Well, I'm sorry the old rascal isn't here, so he could hear what you had to say. But he's down at Deep Springs, gitting religion at the camp meeting!" And he grinned as he tossed off his drink.

"That's good," observed Curly, tasting his liquor and setting it down. "Religion is something like whisky—a little of it don't hurt anybody."

"Well, Uncle Henry is sure gitting l-lots of it," went on Handsome Harry unctuously. "Wearing the knees out of his pants at the mourners' bench——"

"Yes, and to-morrow," cut in Hank with a Texas yupe, "he'll be back hyar wearing the *seat* out—backsliding!"

"You bet ye!" yelled the cowboys, slapping Hank on the back; and as their whoops of delight showed no signs of

abating Handsome Harry beckoned Curly aside.

"That's a good one!" he laughed. "Wait till old Hard Winter comes back! The boys will sure hoorah him scandalous!"

"He's learned to take a joke, eh?" said Curly, grinning dubiously.

"He has to," nodded Harry, "with this bunch around. How'd you like a little something to eat?"

"Sure appreciate it," responded Curly. "I slept out last night—haven't had a square meal since yesterday."

"I'll get Tula to fix you up—guess she'll do it for me," said Harry. And with a swift glance at Tuffy and a jerk of the head he led the way into the patio.

The stone house at Ganado Crossing was built around a courtyard, for purposes both of convenience and defense, and as they passed in through the gateway Curly glimpsed a flying skirt and the scared face of a woman as she fled.

"These Mexicans are kind of shy," explained Handsome Harry affably, "but Tula will wait on you—for me. She's old Hard Winter's daughter and the belle of the rancho—only don't you try to cut me out!"

He laughed and gave Curly a dig in the ribs, as if that was highly improbable; and at the sound of his voice a woman stepped out quickly from a darkened door ahead. For a moment she stood staring, a pretty girl in blue; but at a word in Spanish from Harry her dark eyes softened and her full lips parted in a smile.

"W'y, yess," she said with a faint, Spanish lisp. "Of course, if this gentleman is your friend." And her eyes, which before had been blue-black, like polished agate, suddenly took on a velvety glow.

"That's mighty nice of you, Tula," replied Harry, his voice caressingly sweet; and as she hurried into the

kitchen he turned to Curly, meanwhile thrusting a black pipe between his teeth.

"How's that for a girl?" he inquired triumphantly; and Curly saw he was dealing with a lady killer.

"She's shore a peach," he admitted. "And I can see," he went on, "you've got her nicely trained, so she'll eat out of your hand, like a horse."

"Women and horses," observed Harry portentously. "I've never seen one yet that I couldn't tame, if I wanted to."

"You're quite a winner, eh?" suggested Curly, leading him on. "Didn't you ever have one turn you down? You know:

"There ain't no horse that can't be rode
And there ain't no man that can't be
throwned."

"Not me," smiled Handsome Harry, unconscious of his raillery. "But you've got to keep 'em guessing. Never let 'em know for sure whether they've got you or not."

"It's a gift, eh?" nodded Curly. "But say, tell me something—who is that little straddle bug, Malone?"

"My Lord, man!" exclaimed Harry, "you've been monkeying with dynamite. Never heard of Tuffy Malone? He's killed thirteen men, not counting Mexicans and Indians. Sure death—quick as lightning—either hand!"

"Tuffy Malone?" repeated Curly. "Seems to me I've heard the name somewhere. But say, now, if he's so bad how come he never drew? You can't say I didn't give him a chance."

"A chance!" echoed Harry. "Man, you've been so close to heaven you must've heard the angels' wings rustle. If I hadn't laughed, and announced the drinks on the house, you'd be wrapped up in a blanket, right now."

"Think so?" inquired Curly. "You might be planting him. I don't like the little wart, at all."

"Well, now listen," confided Harry

with a quick look behind him; "that's what I brought you out here for. Tuffy Malone is all right—unless you beat him at shooting. I just thought I'd warn you in time."

"Huh, huh—much obliged," grunted Curly contemptuously; and Tula came hurrying with the food. "But you tell him," he ended, "to leave my horse alone, all the same. By Joe, that beef shore looks good!"

"You are welcome," said Tula with a curtsy and a smile; but the smile was for Handsome Harry.

"Well, treat him right!" spoke up Harry abruptly; and, clamping his teeth down on his pipe, he was gone.

The girl gazed after him curiously, then glanced at her guest, who was helping himself to the beef.

"Are you a new man?" she asked, "to work for my father?" But Curly shook his head.

"Just stopped," he explained, "to feed my horse some corn." And once more he returned to his food.

Tula went to the kitchen for a second cup of coffee, then regarded him with a shrewd, coquettish smile.

"I was watching you," she said, "when you called Tuffy a 'kid.' That makes him very mad."

"I'll call him worse than that," promised Curly, "if he goes to chawing my name."

"He killed a man one time," she observed reminiscently. "Right out in front of the store."

"Kind of putting on a show for the ladies, eh?" he said; and Tula smiled briefly at the jest. Then she turned with a start toward an inner door, where a Mexican woman had suddenly appeared.

"This is my mother," she murmured, moving away apologetically; and Curly rose to his feet.

"Good evening," he greeted, with a deferential bow; but at his words she threw up her hands.

"Another Texan!" she exclaimed in Spanish, angrily motioning her daughter to be gone. And Curly gazed at her curiously.

"How do you know?" he demanded bluntly.

"They are all the same," she replied in English. "They call the afternoon the evening. But sit down and eat. What difference what you call it, so long as this wind will never stop?"

She sank wearily down on a bench and gazed out into the patio, where the dust eddied in from outside. And after a long look at his hostess Curly did as he was bidden, though he did not like her remarks.

"You are hungry," she observed at last as he filled his dish again. "All the Texans, when they come, are hungry. But when they have filled their bellies they begin to gamble, and drink, and shoot. What a place to live!"

Curly glanced at her again, then went on with his eating, for he was gaunt from long days on the trail.

"But you," she went on, with a swift, approving smile, "are different from some who are here. When a lady comes in, you rise to your feet. You are a gentleman—*muy caballero*."

"Yes, ma'am," he responded, rising and bowing at the compliment. "You haven't got much use for Texans!"

"Oh, well," she sighed, "nothing is gained by complaint. But when they come into my house and make love to my daughter—that is something I cannot endure. And when my husband is away, as he is most of the time, my maids are afraid to work."

"I see," nodded Curly, tending strictly to his eating; but the settled discontent which had marred her handsome face drove her on, in the end, to talk.

"First he goes away to Sumner," she continued drearily, "to sell some herds of cattle at the fort. And then to Fort Stanton—to Camp Apache—to

Arizona! And always he leaves me alone, with these devils carousing in the bar."

"Kind of a tough bunch, eh?" suggested Curly noncommittally; and her mournful eyes flashed fire.

"They do nothing," she declared, "but drink and gamble and eat. Yes, and shoot all our cartridges away! My poor dogs are always frightened—they come creeping back to hide. And then I hear a gun go—*bong!* But work? They do nothing, not even to brand the calves. And my husband only laughs at me—*bah!*"

She stamped her foot impatiently, and Curly pushed back his chair, though he could still have eaten more. But there was an atmosphere of tragedy, of apprehension and discontent, in these shut-in walls of stone which made him long for the light. It was as if a darkened pall had settled over the house, like a thundercloud before a storm. There was something in the air, something tense and electric, like the silence before the first crash. And this woman, shrouded in black after the custom of her people, sitting and watching him with her melancholy eyes, conveyed to his sharpened senses the last touch of presentiment, a foreboding of some gathering storm.

"Got to go," he spoke up hastily, "and look after my horse." But she stopped him as he strode to the door.

"Are you looking for a job—a position as cowboy?" she demanded with nervous insistence. "Then please stop and work for my husband. He has many, many cattle and no one to brand them. He could hire a hundred men. But these creatures are not cowboys. They call themselves warriors and do all their work with the gun."

"Nope, nope," replied Curly; "I'm not looking for a job. Much obliged for the meal. Good day!"

"But, my friend!" she pleaded. "You are a gentleman, no? You onder-

stand to be polite to women? Then stay a little while till my hosband comes back. I am afraid to be alone with these men."

"What's the matter?" he inquired, glancing uneasily out the gateway to catch a glimpse of his horse. "But say, I can't stop—I've got business down the line. Why don't you talk to Handsome Harry?"

"Handsome Harry——" she began, her eyes beginning to smolder; and then she waved it aside. "No matter," she went on; "he is afraid of Tuffy. But you are more quick with the gun."

She smiled, and behind her he saw Tula nodding assent; but as he hesitated he heard the sound of running horses. He whipped out the door and was gone. A flock of chickens in the courtyard scattered and ran before his rush; and at their sudden, frightened squawk a group of men outside the gateway looked up with a guilty start. They were gathered in a circle about the regal Apaloochie; and while it held its head high, emitting loud, defiant snorts, Tuffy Malone was examining its teeth. One hand still gripped its jaw, but as Curly Wells appeared Tuffy let the paint horse go.

"Heh-heh!" he laughed, with a shamefaced shrug. "Jest looking at his teeth."

"You let that horse alone!" ordered Curly after a silence; and Tuffy backed meekly away.

"No use getting ranicky," he said at last. "I want to *buy* him, maybe."

"You can't do it," answered Curly, "He isn't for sale." And, snatching the bridle from the horn of his saddle he slipped the bit into Paint's willing mouth. Then with a single, swift movement he swung up on his back and turned to ride away.

"What's your hurry?" called Handsome Harry, emerging from the gateway and motioning Curly to wait. But the thunder of the horse herd, coming

in from the flats to drink, had already brought him to a halt. They came on the run, heads up and tails like banners, their long manes floating in the wind. And behind them, popping his rope, the negro wrangler raced and shouted after sitting his horse all day. It was a glorious sight, but the trained eye of the cowboy was scanning every horse as it passed.

"I say, Curly," urged Harry, "don't go off mad over nothing. That's just the kid's way—he's always getting stuck on some horse, or maybe some other fellow's girl. But he's a good-hearted boy. How'd you like to take a job here? Stick around till old Hard Winter gets back!"

"Nope. Better be on my way, before we tangle," responded Curly. "And, besides that, I haven't lost any job."

"What have you lost, then?" jested Harry; and Curly's blue eyes gleamed dangerously.

"I've lost a horse," he said. "The pardner of this one here—the finest trail and cutting horse in Texas. And if I find him in that remuda, I'm going to take him, savvy? I don't give a damn who claims him!"

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" assented Harry lamely; and as he spoke Curly pointed into the herd.

"There he is, then!" he said. "Over next to that little gray! Now watch!" And he gave a shrill whistle.

A tiger-striped dun threw up his head and rolled his eyes. Then with a neigh like a trumpet call he quit the galloping herd and came cantering over toward Paint.

"What'd I tell you?" laughed Curly as the two horses touched noses and whickered in recognition. "Here, Tige!" he called, holding a loop in his rope, and the dun put his head in it obediently.

"Anybody claim this horse?" inquired Curly of the cowboys. But something

in his voice had tamed their boisterous spirits and no one made reply.

"Who owns that herd?" he asked the sweating wrangler; and the colored man touched his hat before he spoke.

"W'y, w'y—some of 'em, sah, belong to these gentlemen heah, sah. But mostly, you might say, they belongs to Mistah Johnson. Do you reckon this heah is yore hawse?"

"He shore is!" responded Curly, "and I'd like to see the man that will try to tell me different. I've trailed old Tige close to four hundred miles; and if no one objects I'll just take him."

"The horse is yours," nodded Harry. "I see he's got the same brand. He must have got mixed in the herd."

"Yeah—I reckon so," observed Curly dryly. "Only there were eighteen others took with him."

He touched Paint with the spurs and rode off toward the south. But as he left, a gray cayuse which had been running with Tige came galloping after them and joined his partner.

"You done stole a horse yourself!" yelled Tuffy Malone mockingly, as Curly tried in vain to cut it back. "And you'll ketch hell for it, too!" he added.

"He shore will!" echoed the cowboys; and as Curly rode off they gave way to uproarious laughter.

CHAPTER III.

HORSE THIEF.

THE keen wind, which at Ganado Crossing had kept the dirt flying, lost its edge as Curly Wells rode south, and, reaching back of his cante, he untied a crushed sombrero and pulled it down over his curls. Then he unbuttoned his leather coat and rolled a cigarette, and as Paint jogged along at his tireless Spanish trot Curly turned and gazed reproachfully at Tige.

"Well, Tige, you old rascal," he said, "you wasn't looking to see War Paint again, eh? Went and took up with an

Injun cayuse, like Johnson getting married to a Mexican."

He waved his hat threateningly at the pot-bellied gray pony which had never left Tige's side, but after trying again and again to turn him back Curly grunted and slumped down in disgust.

"You knot-headed little runt," he grumbled, "ain't worth any man's stealing, nohow! But them Rafter J boys laughed like hell over something—might follow me up and shoot me for a horse thief."

He dropped down by a pile of clods on the edge of a cut-bank and pelted the cayuse out of range, but no sooner had Curly mounted and ridden out on the open prairie than the pony came nickering up to Tige.

"Yes, and you, you old scoundrel," railed Curly, as Tige turned to answer his new mate, "you've got so low-down, associating with these Mexican plugs, you think that ornery skate is some good. If it wasn't he's so gentle, like some kid's pet pony, I'd shore put a bullet between the eyes!"

He flipped the rope at Tige and rode on down the trail, which followed the winding river on the west; and far ahead in the dusty haze he could make out a grove of cottonwoods, like an island in a sea of grass. At his feet the rich, black grama curled up in dry bunches in whose heart there still lived a core of green. The broad benchland and distant ridges were dotted with grazing cattle, whose winding paths led down to the stream. But as he worked over to the west Curly fell into a broad highway, tramped deep by thousands of feet.

It was the old Goodnight Trail, where every spring thousands of steers passed through on their way to the north—steers from the Brazos and San Angelo and the rolling plains of western Texas, following the Pecos through the desert for its water. Twenty cow paths, side by side, writhing and turning over hill

and swale, until far to the north the trail circled the Raton Mountains and struck back toward Denver and the mining camps.

But now the grass was sprouting on the edge of the trampled ruts, for the drive had not begun. There was good feed everywhere; and in the west, behind long ridges, the high peak of El Capitan notched the sky.

"By Joe, boys!" exclaimed Curly, "this is a cow country, right! Might as well look it over, eh?"

Paint turned one ear back, Tige jerked his head and sighed; but the pony, mogging behind, whinnied eagerly and ran up closer until he trotted neck and neck with Tige.

"Aw, shut up, you inbred runt—I wasn't talking to you!" burst out Curly. "And by grab, there's a dust, coming this way from Ganado Crossing. I'd shore hate," he ended, spurring savagely up a rise, where he could look out the country behind, "I'd hate like a dog to get hung for a horse thief on account of stealing *you*!"

He slapped a rope at him insultingly, but the gray ran close to heel, and as he topped the ridge Curly beheld a rich valley spread out before his eyes like a fairyland. By a lake that gleamed like silver in the light of the setting sun there was a grove of stately cottonwoods. A broad stream led away from it toward the salt meadows below, its banks lined with hackberries and willows; and on the plains beyond the lake, strung out like a necklace of pearls, there was parked a huge circle of covered wagons. Herds of horses in little bunches were being brought in to drink, men and children carried water from the lake; and from within the inclosure of wagons the smoke of many camp fires told of women preparing the evening meal.

Curly glanced back for the last time at the dust point that followed after him and jumped his horse down the slope.

Here were people, a train of emigrants on their way into the West; and among them he could find some one to keep the little gray horse that followed him like a Nemesis. For the times were rough in frontier New Mexico. The Pecos country was swarming with horse thieves. And to be caught leading off even a pony like this might be fraught with unpleasant consequences.

The broad trail swung down past a spring of clear water that gushed up at the foot of the hill; and as Curly stood, bridle in hand, watching Paint as he drank his fill, the gray cayuse nosed in with the rest. He was gentle as a dog, evidently somebody's spoiled pet, and while he drank Curly built a quick loop. Then as the pony raised its head he flipped the noose over it and swung up into the saddle.

"Come on, here, Mister Cayuse," he said. "I'll just put you in that corral where the emigrants are camped and tell them to keep you two days. And meanwhile," he went on, as he jerked the rope taut, "I'll take old Tige away."

He rode off laughing, but as he glanced back up the trail the grin was wiped off his face. Over the ridge behind a single horseman came charging down at him, brandishing a shotgun and yelling shrilly; and like one not unaccustomed to attacks and defense Curly swung off behind his horse. Yet as he fell he did not fail to snatch the rifle from its scabbard and the next moment he thrust it quickly out over the saddle.

"Halt!" screamed the rider. "You give me back my pony!" And as Curly's eyes became clear he saw that it was only a woman. She was a girl, hardly come to her full growth and stature, but her blue eyes were like firebrands, and the huge work horse that she rode fairly made the earth tremble as he charged.

"You blamed horse thief!" she cried, reining up and towering over him as she swung the heavy shotgun to the

front. "You let that pony go or I'll fill you so full of buckshot——"

"Shore! Shore!" assented Curly, ducking his head down lower. "But for Heaven's sake, lady, turn that gun the other way. It's liable to go off and hurt somebody!"

"Well, that's just what it's going to do," she shrilled vindictively, "unless you turn my pony loose, right now. I saw you sneaking off, but I'll tell you right now you'd better look out what you do. Because I told Jack Moore—and he used to be a Ranger—and he's out looking for Croppy, this minute!"

"Well, turn that gun away!" bel-lowed Curly impatiently. "Who wants your little old plug? He's been following me around all the way from Ganado Crossing, and danged if I could turn him back!"

"You don't need to swear!" she warned. "I'm a lady, and I can shoot. Now you march right out there and turn that pony loose—and you put your gun up, too."

"Huh!" grunted Curly, shoving his carbine into its scabbard. "You must think you've got me scared!"

"Never mind what I think! You Rafter J toughs had better leave my father alone. Because Jack Moore promised, unless you brought back our work horses, he'd come up and get them, personally!"

"Who's Jack Moore?" demanded Curly as he flipped off the rope and pushed the mild-eyed pony away; and she glared at him, smiling contemptuously.

"You'll find out," she said, "if he ever starts after you! Where'd you get that other horse?"

"None of your business," he answered evenly. "You must take me for a horse thief."

She gazed at his uncut hair, his month's growth of curly beard and his sunburned, wind-sharpened face, and held out her hand to her pony.

"Come on, Croppy," she said, reining her clumsy mount away. "Yes, I do," she answered over her shoulder. "You don't look too good to do anything."

"Have it your own way," retorted Curly. "But if you think I'd steal that plug you certainly don't know much about horses."

"You hush up!" she retorted. "He's the best horse in this country. Here, Croppy!" But the pony stopped short.

"He's took up with Tige," laughed Curly as Croppy followed after him. "Go back, there, you little devil."

He waved his hat at him menacingly, but Croppy ran up close and nudged his nose against Tige.

"He-ere, Croppy!" she called; and then with a jerk she wheeled her lumbering work horse about. "Oh, come, Croppy!" she pleaded, riding up and catching his foretop; and Curly saw that the little hand that grasped the hair was all a-tremble with eagerness. The blue eyes which had blazed at him had suddenly turned soft and appealing; but Croppy, with brutish obstinacy, set back and pulled away, and Curly saw her wipe away a furtive tear.

"Here," he offered, suddenly forgetting his resentment, "let me lend you this rope to lead him."

"No!" she answered angrily. "Oh, come on, Croppy, darling! Don't you want to go home and have some honey?"

She twined her fingers in his mane and laid her face against his cheek, but Croppy had forgotten his mistress. He pulled away again when she tried to lead him off, and Curly shook out a loop in his reata.

"There's no use monkeying with that *caballo*," he said. "I've been trying to turn him back all day. But he's been running with Tige in the Rafter J remuda and——"

"Don't you dare to rope that horse!" she cried accusingly. "So you're one

of those Rafter J Heel Flies? I just hate the whole bunch of you! And that Tuffy Malone—if he ever comes near me I'll kill him!"

"Suits me!" grinned Curly. "He's no friend of mine. But what you going to do about this horse?"

"Well——" she began, gazing helplessly about. "Oh, Croppy!" she burst out reproachfully. "Have you forgotten all the nice things I've done for you?"

She put her arm about his neck and tried to lead him away, but a new love had found its way into Croppy's fickle heart, and he turned and came running after Tige.

"I'd better rope the little skate and lead him home for you!" proposed Curly. "Or I'll leave him in that pole corral."

For a moment she sat half sobbing on the slow-footed work horse, then she turned and lashed at Croppy with her quirt.

"Oh, *take* him, then!" she cried. "I—I hate him, the ungrateful thing! But don't you dare to steal him!"

"No, ma'am," he replied soberly, but with a twinkle in his eye. "I'll put him in that big corral."

He dropped the loop over Croppy's head with a deft turn of the wrist and started toward the distant corral, but suddenly her heart misgave her.

"You'd better," she called after him, "or I'll tell Uncle Jack, and he just hates a horse thief!"

He glanced back over his shoulder, a wry smile on his rugged countenance.

"Don't let that prey on your mind," he answered. "Because when I turn horse thief I'll steal a real horse, and not some little, grass-bellied cayuse that——"

"You hush up!" she shouted, raising her shotgun threateningly. But Curly had swung down behind the shoulder of War Paint and, as he galloped off, he looked back and laughed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GROUND TREMBLED.

THERE was a merry grin on Curly's wind-burned face as he loped down the trail toward the lake, and as he rode he kept an eye on the girl who had held him up at the spring. Here was one little lady who had her opinions of horse thieves and was not afraid to tell them to the world, but his closing remarks about her pony had evidently given her pause. For a long time she sat watching him, astride her slow-footed mount; then suddenly she turned and rode east across the plains toward a wagon that was parked under the trees.

"Throw up your *hands*!" mimicked Curly. "Don't you *dare* to steal my horse! I'll make you hard to *ketch*!"

Then he laughed and slapped his leg, towing Croppy at a run in the wake of the fast-loping Paint; but as he drew near the lake he was aware of a single horseman, riding out to intercept him. Appearing first from a bunch of hackberries, he had started quartering across his course as if heading for a herd on the plain, but as Curly slowed down and turned aside toward the wagons the stranger cut across and confronted him. He was a big man with a black beard, trimmed to a brush on the chin like the whiskers of a buffalo bull; and something in the set of his massive head and shoulders made the resemblance even more pronounced.

"Good evening, young man," he said with asperity. "Where you going with that little horse?"

There was something about his tone which Curly did not like and he answered with equal brevity.

"Over to that corral," he said, "if it's any of your business."

"I'm going to make it my business," returned the stranger with heat. "You Rafter J boys are carrying things too far when you rob old 'Honey' McCoy of his work horses. You've been mal-

treating these poor Mexicans and holding up trail herds until it makes my Texas blood boil. But I'll give you to understand Honey McCoy is my friend, and I won't have him abused, not by nobody!"

"Ain't you taking a good deal for granted?" inquired Curly defiantly. "What makes you think I'm a Rafter J hand?"

"Because you're leading that horse—and the Rafter Js stole him. He belongs to Melissa McCoy."

"Yes, and I'm leading another horse—and the Rafter Js stole *him*! But that don't make me out a Heel Fly!"

"Well, how did you get him, then?" demanded the horseman, somewhat mollified. "I'll give you a chance to explain."

"Took him away from 'em," responded Curly. "And this little runt followed me. Say, you think a man would steal that horse?"

He pointed derisively at the puffing pony, but the stranger did not crack a smile.

"All the same," he said, "the horse has been stolen, and you've been found with him in your possession. Now speak up, my boy, and tell me the truth, because I'm not a man to be trifled with. Of course it's all spite work, but Tuffy Malone and his gang——"

"I don't know a thing about them!" broke in Curly impatiently. "Never saw 'em in my life until this morning. But if you'll examine the brands you'll see that both my horses are marked with a Flying W. I'm Curly Wells, of War Bonnet, Texas, and that's my registered iron."

"I've seen the brands already, and I don't doubt they're in the book. But the question is, Mr. Wells, how do you happen to be over here, leading another man's horse on a rope?"

"That's easy," smiled Curly. "My zebra dun was stole, and I trailed him to Ganado Crossing. But when I rode

away this Croppy horse followed us—and he's been a danged nuisance, ever since."

"You know his name, eh?" queried the stranger, a dark suspicion in his eyes; and Curly threw up his hands.

"Oh," he said, "I'll have to tell the whole story. Up here at the spring a girl came riding in on me and accused me of stealing her pony. Well, she finally spared my life provided I'd take him right down here and leave him in this pole corral. But while she was talking she called the cayuse 'Croppy'—if you want him you're more than welcome."

He held out the rope end, but the rider shook his head.

"I'm afraid I've misjudged you, young man," he confessed. "No offense, you understand—you can go on about your business. I'm Colonel Jack Moore—that's my ranch."

He nodded toward a ranch house, half hidden beneath the cottonwoods, and thrust out his hand impulsively.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Wells," he said. "Come on home with me and have some supper. Mighty sorry all this has occurred."

"Oh, that's all right," grinned Curly. "Reckon I do look pretty rough—been sleeping on my hat for a month."

"You look rough," admitted the colonel after a final appraising glance, "but you look honest, Mr. Wells, and that's what counts with me. I used to be a Ranger—four years in Company D—and we learned to read men's faces pretty well. But supper is most ready and Julia hates to be kept waiting, so we'll put Melissa's horse in the pen back of the house and send him over to her later."

"But she told me pointedly," objected Curly, "to put her horse in this big corral."

"That's all right," sputtered Moore. "Melissa and her father are our neighbors—she comes over to the house

every night. My wife is a good cook—finest cook in the country—but she won't stand it to have the food get cold."

"I don't know," grumbled Curly as he followed along behind, still towing the reluctant Croppy. "She's liable to go out there and find her horse gone and——"

"Leave it to me," promised the colonel. "I can square myself with Melissa, but Mrs. Moore likes folks prompt at their meals."

He proceeded at a lope past the bottomless lake, the famous Deep Springs of the Pecos; and, still at a lope, he crossed the big stream which ran out of it and watered his fields.

"Porfilio!" he shouted as they clattered into the horse yard and threw their reins on the ground; and as a Mexican came running to care for the stock Jack Moore took his guest by the arm.

"My boy," he said, "I've got the finest wife that a man ever had. She's a treasure, and I want you to meet her. But you'll be marrying some day, and while we're on the subject I want to offer you a few words of advice. Never keep a woman waiting with the meals."

"No, and I won't," agreed Curly. "To say nothing of the fact that I've only et twice in three days. Hard pickings, across those Staked Plains."

"I've been all over them," enthused the colonel, "chasing Comanches and killing buffalo——"

"Jack!" called a silvery voice, and he cut his talk short as he hurried in to wash for supper.

"We've got company, Julia!" he announced. "Mister Wells, from War Bonnet, Texas. I've been right to your place, my boy, on War Bonnet Creek and——"

"Now you hurry," chided the voice, "or the biscuits will fall. What *have* you been doing, Jack?"

"Hunting horses," he answered hast-

ily, combing his iron-gray hair. "Mr. Wells picked up Croppy and brought him back."

"He—did!" she cried, and as Curly was led in, Mrs. Moore came hurrying to meet him. "Oh, I'm so glad!" she exclaimed, shaking hands with him warmly. "Melissa has been hunting for him everywhere for days. But sit right down, Mr. Wells, before the food gets cold." And she took her place at the table, beaming.

She was a young woman, dark and vital, with shining black hair and brown eyes that fairly danced with delight.

"Oh, how glad she will be!" she cooed. "The poor little thing. She just thinks the world and all of that horse!"

"The Heel Flies stole him," spoke up the colonel bluntly. "Mr. Wells found him running in their herd. But when he came away Croppy followed his dun horse—seems the Heel Flies stole him, too."

"That's right," spoke up Curly, "but I trailed him, close to four hundred miles. He's a horse that people always notice."

"Yes, he is," agreed the colonel. "But that strawberry roan you ride is one in a hundred thousand."

"One in a million!" boasted Curly. "I have to watch him night and day or some Indian or white renegade will steal him. And that reminds me," he went on. "Tuffy Malone got so stuck on him he even offered to buy him!"

"Tuffy Malone, eh?" repeated Moore, gnashing angrily at his food. "You refused to sell, of course?"

"Well, it wasn't exactly a sale," qualified Curly. "He offered to bet his roll, four hundred and eighty dollars, against Paint in a shooting contest. Roll two whisky kegs downhill and shoot the bungholes with both hands, but I didn't like the looks of the crowd."

"Perhaps you were afraid," suggested the colonel, "that after you'd emptied

both pistols they'd throw down on you and take your horse anyhow."

"That's about it," grinned Curly. "And when they crowded me to it I told them what their name was, back in Texas—the worst gang of cow thieves in the country."

"You did?" exulted Moore. "And what did Tuffy say?"

"He wasn't talking much," replied Curly evasively. "Yes, I will take another biscuit, Mrs. Moore. Lightest biscuits I ever et."

"Julia's a wonderful cook," praised the colonel. "But I'd like to know how Tuffy took it."

"Well, he stepped out from the bunch and kinder patted his pistol and says:

"'Are you looking for trouble, Mister Man?' But I thought at the time he was nothing but some kid, come out West and trying to be tough.

"'No,' I said, 'I'm looking for a horse.' And passed it off with a laugh. But Handsome Harry warned me later the kid was bad medicine, especially if you happened to beat him shooting."

"Did you beat him?" inquired Moore, looking up. "He's considered the best pistol shot in the country."

"Yes, I beat him," admitted Curly, "but I could see he was throwing off on me. Trying to cap me into a contest and win my horse."

"Well, well," observed the colonel, "so you refused to shoot against him? But you'll hear from him, mark my word! There is one of the worst characters on the whole frontier—a city tough, gone wild in the West. Quick as lightning with a gun and absolutely fearless—he's got the whole country terrorized. But here's one man, Mr. Wells, that he's never dared to monkey with. I have been a Texas Ranger, and we're trained in the service to handle just such characters as him!"

"Now, Jack," smiled Mrs. Moore as she filled up his cup again, "you remember what you promised me, out under

the cottonwoods, that night I promised to marry you!"

"Yes, yes!" responded her husband impatiently. "But I can only be crowded so far. And when they rob Honey McCoy, the most inoffensive old man in the country, they've got to answer to me—that's all!"

"No, it isn't all!" she said. "Because Honey can get more horses, but I can't get another husband like you."

She patted his hand affectionately and his stern eyes softened.

"Well, all right," he sighed. "You seem to take it for granted that the Rafter Js will get the better of me. But I'll tell you, Mr. Wells—if they ever burn my brand I'll drive the last Heel Fly out of the country!"

"But they won't do that," chimed in his wife, beaming proudly. "Because Jack used to be a Ranger, and he never failed to bring in his man. They leave our cattle alone—and perhaps after all, dear, Mr. McCoy's horses just strayed away."

"Well—perhaps." The colonel shrugged. "But Mr. Wells here found Croppy, right there in the Rafter J horse herd."

"Oh, yes!" cried Mrs. Moore. "Do tell us, Mr. Wells, how you came to get him back. And here's some of the honey that Mr. McCoy gives us—he keeps bees, you know, right on his wagons!"

"Don't they sting him?" demanded Curly incredulously. "That's one thing I'm afraid of—bees!"

"Yes, that's it! But Honey knows how to handle them. He says their sense of smell is very, very sensitive; and at the first sign of fear the human body gives off an unpleasant odor. But if you go among them fearlessly you can brush them up by the handful. Now do tell us about getting Croppy!"

"Nothing to tell, much," stated Curly. "When I took my dun away this little gray pony followed. And when I rode

off I remember now Tuffy Malone hol-
lered after me:

"'You're stealing a horse yourself!' he says. 'And you'll ketch hell for it, too!' And then all them Heel Flies laughed."

"That made me uneasy, because I'd had a little trouble with them; and I thought, by Joe, they might follow along after me and try to have me hung for a horse thief. So I kept a close watch, and shore enough I saw a dust cloud following right along behind me from the store. But when I got to this spring up here I gave up the notion, because it was only a little ways to that corral. So I put a rope on Croppy and started to lead him off, and right there I shore did ketch hell."

Curly's eyes lighted up as he remembered his fright and he showed all his teeth in a grin.

"Just as I rode away the ground began to tremble. I heard a noise like thunder and looked behind. And there was a big woman, about ten feet tall, on a horse about twenty feet tall, riding down on me like a windstorm. She had a shotgun in one hand and a six-shooter in the other, and when she seen me she screamed like an eagle!"

He threw back his head and laughed consumedly; but as his eyes strayed to the door he saw the girl herself, looking in at him.

"What's the matter?" cried Mrs. Moore. And as she caught sight of Melissa her laughter, too, suddenly ceased.

"Why—Melissa!" she exclaimed. "Why, what is it, darling? We didn't know you were here!"

The girl rocked to and fro, her angry eyes blazing, her slim hands still gripping the old shotgun; and for a minute she could not speak.

"I came over," she said slowly, "to get my horse. And mister, I want him, too!"

"Oh, my Lord!" ejaculated Curly,

rising up in a panic. "I—I put him in Mr. Moore's horse yard."

"Yes, and you promised me," she stated, "to put him in the corral. Some people would call that plain lying."

"Now, Melissa," broke in the colonel, "I want you to blame that all on me, because Mr. Wells insisted upon stopping at the corral, but I made him come on to the house."

"You can talk all you want to," answered Melissa vindictively. "But I heard you all laughing, and I know he just did it to tease me. Now I want—my—horse! Understand?"

"By grab, yes!" exclaimed Curly, jumping contritely toward the door. "I wouldn't have had this happen for the world. But Mr. Moore was late for supper and he——"

"Well, Mr. Moore can come then and help me catch my horse. I don't want anything more to do with you!"

She gave Curly such a look that he stopped dead in his tracks and the colonel leaped into the breach.

"Yes, yes," he soothed, "I'll ketch him for you, Melissa, and get all your others, to boot. No, I mean it now, child. You've been pestered enough."

"You leave it to me, colonel!" cried Curly impulsively. "I'll find those horses if it's——"

"You leave them alone—and keep out of this!" blazed back Melissa. "I guess my Uncle Jack can take care of me!"

"Well, I ought to!" answered the colonel. "Texas Ranger for four years and never got turned back yet. I'll get 'em, Melissa, so you run along home. And we'll stop and pick up Croppy."

He put his arm about her shoulder and led her gently out, but as she passed into the darkness Curly saw her head droop, her twisted face suddenly buried against his coat.

"By Joe," he said, "I feel like a whipped hound. I'll get them other horses, myself!"

CHAPTER V.

THE CATTLE KING.

THAT'S a pitiful case," declared Colonel Jack Moore as he came stamping back into the house. "Poor little Melissa—she broke down on the way home and told me all about it."

"About what?" his wife asked anxiously.

"About Tuffy Malone!" gritted the colonel. "He's been sneaking around trying to make love to her."

"Why, the idea!" exclaimed Julia. "Make love to Melissa? I thought he had a Mexican girl."

"He's got forty!" grumbled Moore. "And when Melissa turned him down he stole their horses, just to spite them. That's why she's been crying all the time."

"Oh, the poor little girl!" burst out Mrs. Moore. "But Jack, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to hunt up Henry Johnson," stated the colonel firmly, "and tell him this persecution must stop. And then if he doesn't stop it—and get back those horses for Honey—I'll go up and do it myself."

"No, you leave that to me," broke in Curly Wells eagerly. "I feel so dog mean, making fun of her pony, I've just got to do something to square myself. So you give me the brands and a description of the horses and I'll guarantee to bring them back."

"That can wait," decided Moore, "until I've seen Henry Johnson. He's over at this emigrant camp, confessing his sins and getting religion, and right back at his store is the worst gang of outlaws that ever infested the country. They make a business of stealing stock, yet he shelters them and pays them wages. And in return they go out and cut down these Texas trail herds to everything except their straight brand. No matter if they've got the best title in the world, Johnson's cowboys will

claim every steer in forty brands—brands he had when he came into the country. Then they'll run a big Rafter on every brute they steal and turn them out on the range."

"Yes, but Jack," appealed his wife, "they never touch your cows. Mr. Johnson has given them orders to respect the Heart Cross and I don't think you ought to interfere."

"Now, listen, Julia," he said. "I've known Henry Johnson since he couldn't climb up the saddle strings onto a horse. And when he came out here he was honest. But since that Harry Vail took charge of his affairs the Rafter Js have gone to the dogs. They don't even brand their calves—the range is full of *orejanos*—and yet they'll steal every cow they can find. I tell you, Henry Johnson is riding to a fall. Those men will turn around and rob *him*. And when they do I'm going to tell him it's all his own fault—he's a bigger thief than they are!"

"No, now Jack," she protested. "You know very well that Mr. Johnson has always been our friend. It's all right to warn him what his cowboys are doing, but don't call him a thief."

"I've told him that a hundred times!" cried the colonel hotly, "but he always laughs it off. He's a man you can't quarrel with, because he'll get you to laughing and——"

"And then, you knew his mother," she reminded him fondly. "Didn't she take care of you when you were young?"

"Yes, and that's the only reason I've ever put up with it, the way he's been robbing these Mexicans. Henry's mother was a woman of the finest Christian character, and she thought to her dying day that Henry was honest—I used to lie to her about it, myself. And the last thing she said when I came to this country was:

"'Now you'll always be a friend to Henry, won't you?'"

"Well, I promised her, and I'll do it. But it's time Henry Johnson found out just exactly where he stands. This praying and singing will never get him anywhere until he sets his own house in order."

"All right, Jack," she smiled. "I know you'll be nice to him. And tell him we'll expect him for breakfast."

"Yes, there you go!" he snorted. "You'll undo all I've done; but I'll ask him, all the same."

"And take Mr. Wells along, to show there's no hard feeling. And Jack, dear—don't interrupt the meeting."

"I'll ketch him before it starts, then," declared the colonel, stumping out of the room.

They went out on the gallery of the spacious adobe house and in the night the covered wagons stood out on the plains like the lights of some populous city. Against the canvas of the tops the glow of candle and lantern threw ghostly, distorted shadows on the walls—shadows of women bedding down their children, girls combing out their hair, bearded men peacefully smoking their pipes. But in the center of the great circle, with two flares at its front, there stood a long tent propped open at the sides like the skin shelters of Abraham and Isaac. And toward this, muttering angrily, Colonel Moore made his way, for the services had already begun.

For three days and three nights—morning, afternoon and evening—the white-haired parson had been exhorting the sinners, until excitement was at a fever pitch. Some were weighed down with their iniquities and with convictions of sin, others were shouting as they felt the glory; while others, already saved, wrestled powerfully with their neighbors or chanted endlessly the old revival song:

"Oh, hallelujah, hallelujah, I am glad to say—ee,
Hallelujah, hallelujah, I am saved to-day!"

POP—6B

"There he is," said Moore, peering under the upraised canvas, "that big man, dressed like a tramp. Richest man in this country—got eighty thousand cows—and look at him, up in front there!"

He pointed the finger of scorn at a huge, hulking figure sitting close to the mourners' bench. His shaggy head was thrown back, he patted his knees in a joyous ecstasy, keeping time to the hallelujahs; and as the preacher paused and asked the brethren to testify he was first of all to his feet.

"Brothers and sisters," he began, "I have lived in iniquity, but the love of a sainted mother has brought me back to confess all my sins and be saved!"

"Hallelujah!" cried the parson as he closed his long testimony. "The Lord is able to save!" But in the darkness outside Moore muttered in his beard and turned away with a grunt.

"No use waiting," he said. "They'll keep that up all night. And old Henry will be right there, confessing his sins at the mourners' bench and calling on the brethren for their prayers. When they pass the hat around he'll give his last dollar. And yet he makes his wife and daughter work like a couple of Mexican peons—won't even buy himself a new hat. Well, that's Henry Johnson, the cattle king. Dresses and looks like a regular tramp, but when you meet him to-morrow you'll think he's the finest gentleman in the country. He's a man you can't stay mad at; but I'm going to cuss him out, all the same. Things are going to hell in this country, Mr. Wells. And unless all signs fail we're due to have a big cattle war."

"Wouldn't doubt it," agreed Curly, as they started back toward the house. "Say, I'll sleep out in the corral, to-night."

"No, you'll sleep in a bed," declared the colonel warmly, "and get a shave and maybe a hair cut, to boot. Your horses are just as safe in Jack Moore's

corral as they would be inside a fort."

"There's something wrong, though," persisted Curly. "I can feel it in the air—and those Rafter J boys were following me. They gave me back old Tige, but I'll bet you the drinks they figure on stealing Paint."

"Not from my ranch!" stated Moore. "Did you notice that Mexican that I called to unsaddle our horses? That's Porfilio Goya, the best trailer in this country—at one time the greatest horse thief. I'll tell him to keep watch, and I'll stake my life on it, no man will touch your horse."

"Yes, but how about Mister Goya?" inquired Curly shrewdly. "Sometimes these ex-horse thieves relapse."

"No, you can set your mind at rest there, and I'll tell you the reason. When I first came into this country I brought some very fine horses—blooded stock from Louisiana—and among others who tried to steal them was this same Porfilio that I'd trust now with anything I've got. He knew every trick of a mighty tricky trade, but I hadn't been a Ranger for nothing and at last I ran him down. Of course, you know what generally happens in a case like that; but he swore that if I'd only spare his life he'd never steal a horse again. Well, I spared it on one condition—if I ever caught him stealing I shoot him down like a dog. That was twelve years ago and to my certain knowledge he's never made a crooked move."

"Yes, but he's only a Mexican," protested Curly, "and Tuffy Malone is just crazy about that horse. Suppose he'd come in the night! The Mex wouldn't stand up to him. You know—they won't fight a Texan."

"Maybe not," admitted Moore. "But I will, Mr. Wells. You're my guest, understand? And any man that steals your horse will have to answer personally, to me!"

"Well, all right," grumbled Curly, "if that's the way you feel about it."

But in the morning War Paint was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

POR ESTA CRUZ!

IT was dawn when a growing apprehension of danger routed Curly Wells out of his bed. Not in many a moon had he slept in one so soft, yet all night he had tossed and dreamed. And as he belted on his pistols and stepped out into the cold he felt the chill hand of fear. Then at the gate of the corral he found Tige whickering, anxious. And War Paint, his pet, was gone.

"Where's that dadburned Mexican?" burst out Curly in a fury as he searched through the stalls for his horse; and as his curses crew louder a form rose from the hay and slipped out as softly as a cat.

"What's the matter?" demanded Moore, looking in through the corral bars. "What's all this excitement about?"

"My horse is gone!" yelled Curly, "and that danged horse thief of a Mexican is headed for the Line, I'll bet. But you wait till I ketch him and he can pray all he wants to, I'll——"

"Porfilio!" shouted the colonel; and in the silence that followed Curly gave vent to a heartfelt curse.

"Yes, you and your prize Mexican! I knowed all the time that goat herder would steal old Paint. But no, I had to sleep inside there, in the house! You sure have played hell with things now!"

"Porfilio!" bellowed Moore, with an outburst of Mexican profanity. And at last from around the corner a frightened voice answered:

"Señor!"

"*Ven acá, mal nacimiento!*" rapped out the colonel, striding toward him; and like a dog that senses a whipping the Mexican crept toward him until he fell on his face at his feet.

"Ah, Don Jack!" he pleaded, "spare my life! I am innocent!" And he rose up, kissing his thumb laid across his forefinger in the form of an improvised crucifix.

"*Por esta Cruz!*" he trebled, "I swear I did not steal him!"

"But where is he?" thundered his master. "Did I not put him in your care? Did I not say to watch him well, since he belonged to my guest? Where were you all night?"

"I slept in the hay," quavered Porfilio abjectly, "and no one came. I swear it!"

"Yes, the scoundrel will swear to anything," spoke up Curly cynically. "We'll just take a look in that hay."

He led the way to the hollow where Porfilio had made his bed and felt about in the straw.

"I thought so!" he said, holding up an empty bottle. And the colonel smelled the cork and drew his gun.

"Porfilio!" he began; and with an agonizing cry the Mexican threw himself at his feet.

"Ah, no, no!" he begged. "Think of my woman, Don Jack! Have pity on my wife and little ones! I was out by the gate and Tomas Saucedo came by. It was he who gave me the drink!"

"But it was you who took it!" answered the colonel sternly. "And you have made me out a traitor to my guest. Twice he begged for the privilege of sleeping near his horse, but I forced him to come into the house."

"I will get the horse back," pleaded Porfilio, the tears dripping down his gray beard. "Wherever he is gone I will follow and steal him back. Did I ever fail to get one, señor?"

"You have failed to guard this one!" replied Moore. "And now I am dishonored before my guest."

"But I will ketch heem—in one day!" cried Porfilio in halting English as he spied a white form coming toward them; and the next minute Mrs. Moore

slipped in through the bars and came hurrying across the corral.

"Why, Jack!" she exclaimed. "What are you cursing and shouting about? I thought some one certainly had been killed."

"Never mind, dear," responded the colonel. "You go back to the house. Porfilio has let some one steal the paint horse."

"Ah, Mees Hoolia," wept Porfilio, "save my life thees one time! I will never go to sleep again. But that bad mans, Tomas Saucedo, gimme wheesky on purpose. Theenk of my wife and all my leetle ones!"

"Well, all right then—*busca!*" burst out Jack Moore savagely. "*Hunt*, you *pelado*, and bring me back that horse or I'll kill every Mexican in the country."

"Why, Jack, how you talk!" cried his wife reproachfully; but he cut her short with a look.

"You go back to the house, where you belong," he ordered. "I'll handle this hombre myself."

She looked at him again, then turned away obediently and Moore watched her until she passed through the door.

"Mr. Wells," he said, "I'm sorry this has happened. But under the circumstances the only thing to do is to get your paint horse back."

"Yeh," assented Curly, gazing dourly at Porfilio. "Either that or I kill me a Mexican."

"Oh, he can find him," promised Moore. "Never knew him to fail. *Oyez, Porfilio, busca el caballo!*"

"Ah, si! Si, señor!" responded the Mexican eagerly; and took up the trail like a hunting dog. Leaning close to the ground, one extended forefinger pointing automatically to every track he saw, he scouted along the fence and then up to the gate, where he stiffened and stood gazing at a footprint.

"What is it?" demanded the colonel, hurrying over to look; and the

Mexican pointed to a boot track. It was small as a woman's, but without that slender delicacy which marks even the savage woman's foot; and Moore stared at it long, as if he knew it.

"Whose track is that?" he asked; but Porfilio shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quién sabe*—who knows?" he evaded.

"Now here," began the colonel, laying a heavy hand upon him. "You're lucky to be alive—understand? Now tell me, straight out, whose track you think that is; and don't you make any mistake."

"It is the footprint of Tuffee!" answered the Mexican reluctantly. And Curly stooped closer to study it.

"That is the truth," responded Moore. "I knew it, all the time. If you had lied to me it would have been necessary to shoot you."

"It shore is," agreed Curly. "Happened to notice it, up at the crossing. But I knew that it was him, all the time, colonel."

"Hmm," meditated the colonel. "He'll hide that horse somewhere and wait till the search is over. My guess is he's taken him to Mike Broiles' place, the other side of those mountains. But don't you try to follow him, Mr. Wells, because those outlaws will ambush you, sure. Porfilio, you go right now before the people get up and follow that horse track—understand? And if you find him in Mike Broiles' pasture you come back and tell me. Don't you touch him—I'll get him, myself."

"You will not!" spoke up Curly. "I can get back my own horses. And if Tuffy Malone tries to keep me from doing it——"

"No, no!" warned the colonel. "He's as dangerous as a rattlesnake, and he knows those White Mountains like a book. Probably stole your horse on purpose, to get an excuse to kill you, but I'll settle with the little rat. Right here and now I'll have a show-down

with Henry Johnson. And either he fires Tuffy Malone or we split the blankets for good. I'll not consort with a thief."

He motioned the Mexican on his way and strode off to the house. And after a long look at Porfilio, who shrank before his gaze, Curly turned and clumped gloomily after him. The gay vistas which had opened before him when he had won back his Tige horse had turned to a deeper gloom, now that War Paint had fallen victim to the thieves. For where other men, with lesser love, cherished their women and children, all Curly's thoughts revolved about War Paint and Tige, for whose sakes he would gladly have died. They were his own, raised like children and trained to do his will, yet left free to gambol and play; and as he gazed at the distant mountains a tear ran down his cheek, but all he could do was wait.

There was silence at the table as the colonel gulped his coffee and wolfed down a few morsels of food. Then he rose up scowling and fell to pacing the broad gallery which shaded the front of the house.

"There's nothing I hate like a thief," he spat, as Curly came out. "And especially a dadburned cow thief. Henry Johnson will be here soon to get his cup of coffee—he sleeps out, the old fox, every night—and if I don't flay him good—— There's the old scoundrel now, stopping to talk with those children. But I'll skin him alive—I will!"

He paced back and forth faster, watching Tuffy's indulgent boss; but when Hard Winter Johnson finally ambled over toward him Moore slowed down and tugged at his beard. In the cold light of morning the cattle king looked old and shabby, having slept in his clothes on the ground; but his corn-cob pipe was held at a rakish angle and he greeted his old friend with a smile.

"Morning, Jack!" he hailed as he

came through the gate. "Morning, stranger! What's the good word?"

"They ain't none!" exploded Moore. "Henry, this is Mr. Wells. Your cowboys done stole his best horse." —

"Oh, sho, sho!" protested Johnson. "As bad as all that? I can remember one night, right here where this house stands, when I lost two hundred and fo'teen head."

"Yes, and all through your own carelessness," retorted the colonel bitterly. "If you'd had your guards set and brought your herd in at dawn the Apaches would never have jumped you."

"You lost some yourself," suggested Hard Winter mildly. "Life ain't all peaches and honey in a country like this—but I'll try to get Mr. Wells' hawse back."

"Yes, you'd better," raged Moore, "or I'll step in and do it for you! First they come to his ranch, way over in the Panhandle, and steal his zebra dun horse, Tige. And then, last night, after he's got his dun back, they come and steal his strawberry roan. A very valuable animal—and out of my corral! After I'd told him it was perfectly safe!"

"Too bad! I'm mighty sorry!" replied the cattle king, unruffled. "Ah, good morning, Mrs. Moore, good morning!"

"Good morning, Uncle Henry!" she responded sweetly. "Your coffee is still hot on the stove. But you'll have to hurry in, because I've got to tend my milk. Going back to the ranch today?"

"Well, I was," he chuckled heartily, "except for one thing. Can't get no coffee like you make, up there, Mrs. Moore!"

He bowed perfunctorily to the men and passed in to the dining room and Colonel Moore ground his teeth in exasperation.

"Damn it, Wells!" he complained.

"You can't make a mark on him. Nothing you say gets under his skin. And Julia was just waiting to horn in and stop the play. But you wait—I'll ketch him off by himself."

He resumed his restless pacing, and when Johnson at last came out he fell in beside him, silently.

"Come out to the corral," he said under his breath. "I want to show you a track."

"Oh, never mind the track," answered the cattle king jovially. "If you say Tuffy stole the hawse I'm taking your word for it, because I know you've been a Ranger, Jack. And that's a weakness of Tuffy's, I'll have to admit it. Every time some new woman or some hawse ketches his eye he——"

"Lookee here, Henry Johnson!" burst out the colonel hoarsely. "This ain't no jesting matter. Do you know what that low-flung renegade has been doing? He's been trying to lead Melissa McCoy astray!"

"What—Tuffy?" exclaimed Johnson. "I knowed he was coming down here mighty regular, but I thought it was that gal of Tomas Saucedo's——"

"It was her, too," broke in Moore. "But I want you to understand that Melissa is just like my daughter. Her old father, Honey, is kind of touched in the haid and not competent to protect her, nohow; but I'll kill the dirty dog that takes advantage of Melissa the same as I would a snake. I just found out last night that Tuffy Malone has been annoying her. And when she told him to go away he turned around and got ugly and threatened to put them afoot. The next night her riding pony, and all their work horses but one, were run off by parties unknown. But Mr. Wells here found her pony in your horse herd, so I'll give you one guess who did it."

"I reckon it was Tuffy," observed Hard Winter philosophically. "He's

been getting mighty unruly, lately. But he's a good-hearted boy—ain't a mean ha'r on him."

"Yes, and that's most of the time," retorted Moore. "Because all those boys do, instead of branding up your calves, is drink and carouse around at the store."

"Well, now, Jack," defended Johnson, "you know yourself you can't hire a working cowboy no more. They've all turned warrior, packing two guns and riding by night, and my boys are jest like the rest. But I've got to have 'em, see, to protect me from these trail herders that come driving up the river from Texas. They'd grab every maverick and slick-ear they could find, and if it wasn't for Tuffy and them gunmen I've got I wouldn't have a single cow on my range."

"It's nothing to me if those boys don't brand my stuff. I don't care who owns the cow, as long as I get the calf. And I don't care who owns the hawse as long as I get to ride it. But when everybody's stealing I'm going to get my share—they ain't no two ways about that."

"Well and good," spoke up Curly, laying a hand on his shoulder and looking him squarely in the eye. "You can steal all you want to, Mr. Johnson, but don't you steal from me! I'm a lover of peace, but the man that steals my horse has got me to whip, right now!"

"Yes, and he's got me to whip, too!" chimed in Moore belligerently. "Because I'll give you to understand Mr. Wells was my guest, and the man that steals from him steals from me!"

"Oh, sho, sho, now!" protested Hard Winter with a benevolent smile. "You gentlemen are getting excited. But I'm a man of peace, myself—I never go armed, Mr. Wells—and I'm always glad to do what seems right. What price do you put on this hawse?"

"Price!" yelled Curly. "You think

you could buy that horse? I wouldn't trade War Paint for your whole outfit, so you can put your pocketbook up."

"All right," responded Johnson mildly, folding up his long, limp wallet. "Mighty sorry this incident occurred. I'll jest look at that track, so there won't be any question about it, and talk the matter over with Tuffy."

He shambled out to the gate where the bootmark, carefully covered, remained to prove the guilt of the horse thief.

"That's his, all right," he said, after a long look at the track. "Got a foot like a woman's—and mighty proud of it, too. I'd know that boot in a thousand. But Jack, I'm telling you there's no harm in that boy—he's nothing, you might say, but a kid. Only you've got to approach him in a reasonable way, and that's what I'll try to do. But if he won't give up the hawse I'll pay you for him well——"

"You will not!" cut in Curly. "I'll come up there and take him and run your damned Heel Flies out of the country. I'm burned out on this thieving and foolishness."

"And so am I," added Jack Moore. "I'm giving you notice, Henry Johnson, to go back and set your house in order. Fire those drunken, cow-stealing outlaws and hire some honest men. And if you can't do it, Henry, the Texas Cattlemen's Association has authorized me to do it for you."

He paused, and for the first time the sunny smile left Johnson's eyes and a startled, uneasy stare took its place.

"So that's it," he said. "Is Mr. Wells their representative?"

"Not so far as I know," answered the colonel. "But they said they'd send a man over."

"Now, listen!" began Hard Winter, throwing his hands out appealingly. "You gentlemen know, if you know anything at all, that I'm a decent citizen. The man that's doing this stealing,

and corrupting all my cowboys, is Mike Broiles, over at Alamosa. How can I hire honest men to handle my cattle when Mike Broiles, over the mountains, will buy all they can steal and pay them five dollars a head? If I speak to my boys they'll jest up and leave me—and then, Jack Moore, look out! They're peaceable now. They respect your brand and mine. But the minute they quit me the fat's in the fire. They'll steal every cow we've got."

"The first man that steals a cow of mine," gritted Moore, "had better look for trouble. I don't care if it's Tuffy

or Broiles or some Mexican—I'll fight to protect my brand. Now, listen to me, Henry, because this is the last time I'll speak to you. I want you to go back and get this gentleman's horse, that was stole, as you can see, by Tuffy Malone. And I want you to clean out that nest of thieves at the crossing or I'll come up and do it for you. Enough said—if that horse isn't here in three days I'll report it to the Texas Association."

"And I'll do more than that," promised Curly. "I'll come up and get him. Savvy?"

To be continued next week.



THE PROSPECTOR PASSES

THIRTY years prospecting in Alaska, with never a big strike—but prospecting to the end. That, in brief, is the story of Captain H. J. Hanson, veteran of the Ketchikan district, who lay helpless in his cabin at a deserted mining community for five days, fighting the rigors of cold and hunger all that time before visitors discovered him and brought the paralyzed man to a Ketchikan hospital, where he died shortly afterward. Captain Hanson was seventy-two years old.

Working occasionally as a miner, doing assessment work for others, and then grubstaking himself for a few months in the Alaskan hills with pick and shovel, Hanson spent the best years of his life in the Territory.

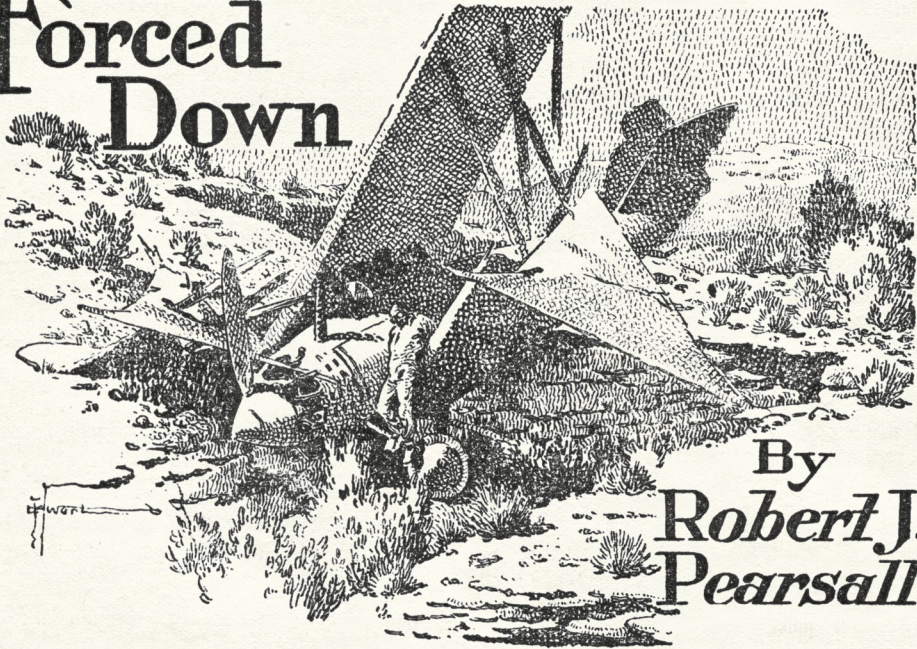
Old-timers such as he have bewailed the fact that the modern-day youth does not turn to prospecting. They realize that Alaskan mountains are rich in mineral wealth, and understand that every inch of ground must be covered, oftentimes in vain, but generally to eventual success.

As a matter of fact, few young men are working in the Territory as prospectors to-day. The few that are found seem to have inherited the posts—like father, like son.

Mineral production, at the same time, is falling off. The latest government figures, for 1926, show that \$17,657,800 was produced from the mines, compared with \$18,220,692 the year previous. For the period from 1880 the production was \$570,962,768, which is considerably less than the production of fish products in the Territory.

Those connected with the mining industry, however, are confident that the production will increase within a few years. Geological experts estimate the potential mineral wealth as great.

Forced Down



By
**Robert J.
Pearsall**

Author of "Kettles' Canvas," Etc.

A super-egotist and an ordinary man are joined in disaster by the roulette wheel of Fate.

A COMPLETE STORY

SCHIDELER wouldn't have done that," said Ross, who happened to be the only man among us who knew Schideler only by reputation. Then, being young and injudicious, he looked around in surprise at the effect of his words. "What's the matter?" he questioned softly.

Not, of course, that there had been any open display of dislike. Schideler would have been safe from that in any group of men, and particularly safe here in the Engineers' Club. There were probably none of us who wouldn't have yielded to Schideler both as an engineer and as a model of irreproachable conduct in other respects, as well. The fact was that the instant of chilled silence that followed the mention of

Schideler's name seemed as unjust as it was inevitable—for it always happened so. And the next minute we would all have been enthusiastically agreeing that Schideler, the paragon of engineers, couldn't possibly have made the mistake under discussion, had not Tabor astonished us by picking up Ross' question and giving it another toss.

"What is the matter? Just what, I wonder. His smile, now—do you suppose it was that?"

Whereupon we all stared at Tabor almost uneasily. The trouble was, our dislike for Schideler—if it was dislike—was so ungrounded in facts that we didn't want to inquire into it. On the other hand, there was Tabor, who could neither be ignored nor suspected of in-

delicacy in probing the question. Almost as great an engineer as Schideler, and closely associated with him several times, he was Schideler's exact opposite in temperament. A good talker, a famous story-teller, imaginative, sympathetic—a man who, if he hadn't been an engineer, might have been a poet, playing with the rhythm and balance of words instead of steel columns. No, it was impossible to rebuff him. But so far were we from wanting to discuss the question he raised that we seized almost with relief upon his use of the past tense.

"*Was*," you say. Has anything happened to Schideler?"

"Yes," said Tabor quietly, "something's happened to him. But it *was* his smile, wasn't it, that you fellows all remembered just now?"

"His smile—ugh!" replied Connell, with unexpected violence. "Yes, I guess you can call it that—his smile."

"And what seemed to be back of it," pursued Tabor evenly. "What really was back of it, of course. For his smile really expressed the man, didn't it? It wasn't a bitter smile, nor derisive, nor even personal—so much less exasperating if it had been. Because that would have indicated a comforting frailty in Schideler himself. It wasn't even contemptuous——"

"No!" ejaculated Connell, while the rest of us stirred.

"Well, perhaps contemptuous, but if so, his contempt was certainly all embracing. Aloof. Unsurprised. Resigned. Contempt for all mankind, maybe, but for no single individual. Because Schideler, who never made mistakes, certainly never made the big one of expecting none from others. And he really made none, you know. He knew himself infallible. Or perhaps 'knows' is the better word."

"I'd like to meet a man like that—all that in a smile!" put in Ross, skeptically.

"All that and more," returned Tabor. "With a suggestion of something in reserve. For he went no farther. He never laughed. I've often wondered what his laugh would be like—devilish mirth or godlike—a bloodless god laughing from an iceberg.

"Well, he has laughed. That's what's happened to him. Maybe you want me to go on. All right.

"As you know, he's back from constructing the Aspinwall dam on the Colorado River. It was on a hurried trip that he had to take from Los Angeles to Denver that the thing happened. I won't go into the reason for the trip—there was politics, the watershed of four States involved, plenty of opposition to the dam. The point is, he had to be in Denver within twenty-four hours to defend his plans, or rather to explain them. And of course the only way was by airplane—no unusual thing for him.

"It seems they do a lot of flying out there—more, perhaps, than we do in the East. You rent a plane as casually as you rent an automobile, only you don't drive it. Schideler went to the Western Flying Company and was immediately supplied with plane and pilot, too. And of course, being Schideler, he expected perfection in neither, and particularly not in the pilot. But he didn't expect—he couldn't expect—the extreme example of the ordinary that he drew in a pilot called Smith.

"Just that—Smith. One of a thousand, ten thousand Smiths, or men of any other name. Melt them all up, pour the mixture into a mold, take out an average Smith—that, Schideler told me, would be the man. Middle-aged, middle-sized, a little talkative, a little shy, a little self-assertive—well, there you have him, I guess. Except for physical stature, a little man, because most men are little. And you have Schideler, who is big. Yes, whatever else he is, he is big.

"You can picture Schideler waiting while Smith thumbed the wires and fiddled with the motor with purely average speed and competence. Schideler was in a hurry to be off, but not at all impatient. Aloof, of course, and resigned to what might have been expected, and perhaps dwelling a little on the fact that what Smith was doing, he could have done in a fraction of the time, and more thoroughly. But in the main not aware of Smith at all, except as a servant.

"Something was wrong—as usual, thought Schideler—and a mechanic had to be sent for. But after another half hour of delay, the plane finally took off, with the man who is the best of his kind in the world and the man who could never be more than average seated in the cockpit. Probably they had never exchanged a word—you know how Schideler avoids *any* waste—until Smith, observing the oil gauge, abruptly announced that the pressure was down, and that they would have to return.

"One of those things that just happen, of course. Not Smith's fault, as Schideler recognized, but I think it was then that his famous or infamous smile first started its work with Smith. Probably Smith wasn't intelligent enough to recognize the fine distinction that it was directed at general incompetence and not at him in particular. Anyway, he cut his explanation short—it wasn't needed, naturally—and steered back to the landing field, from which they made a final start about two hours after they should have started.

"Schideler has his interests; he watched the country widening out as they ascended, flying eastward, observing which was tillable land and which untillable, and where irrigating ditches should go when his dam was completed. So naturally, when Smith would have talked of his own interests—his work, a son that had been born to him, Tun-

ney vs. Dempsey and the moving-picture colony—Schideler replied in discouraging monosyllables or a stony silence. Together, yet as far apart as the poles, they lifted over the Tehachapi Range beyond which was a country where there were no towns at all, nor even farmhouses, then they crossed a deep gorge in which Schideler could catch glimpses of the Colorado River; and at last, flying low, they developed a ruinous pounding in the motor over a terrain of sage-gray sand broken by frequent clumps of yellowish pine and cedar.

"'Damn! A bearings gone,' said Smith. Schideler said nothing.

"Smith cut off the ignition and glided down—nothing else to do, of course. The landing would have been perfect, except that there was a rut in the sand where no rut might have been expected, and the plane came to a lurching stop with one wheel buckled under it. The joy stick caught Smith in the chest and he swore violently; but Schideler, without wasting a word or even a look at the stalled machine, climbed down and began looking for landmarks.

"To the north, low on the horizon, there was a range of black hills. Southward a shallow, dry arroyo stretched interminably down between patches of dwarfed trees that diminished to the vanishing point. Elsewhere there was nothing but those same stunted trees, cactus and other desert plants, gray sand with black ledges thrusting through, and a somewhat violent sun whose hot challenge they hadn't noticed while flying.

"Smith followed Schideler to the ground, and Schideler said, 'Well!'—just that. But he was *very* anxious to reach Denver, and you can imagine the cold venom in his tone at the blunders that shouldn't happen, the accidents that shouldn't be permitted. Nothing personal to Smith, of course. But Smith couldn't know that. He flushed a little

under his tan, shifted his position, shuffled his feet, and said nothing.

"'Those mountains up there must be the Navajo Range,' said Schideler coldly. 'And we've passed the Little Colorado. Have you a map?'"

"'No,' said Smith.

"And Schideler smiled. Smith clamped his jaw, swallowed, and spoke angrily!

"'Look here! If they don't furnish me with a map, it ain't my fault.'

"'Of course not. You couldn't be expected——' Schideler didn't trouble to complete the sentence. It didn't matter whose fault it was, as long as they had no map. Smith glowered at him, trying to read his meaning, and succeeding pretty well, maybe. Then Schideler turned to him again. The man might know *something*!

"'Have you any idea where we are?'"

"'Yes. I have.'

"'Well!'"

"'Over there's the Moqui reservation,' Smith pointed to the east. 'Maybe twenty-five miles.'

"'Humph! And how far to the railroad?'"

"'Why, I don't know.' Smith was relaxing a little, feeling himself consulted, important. 'Maybe seventy-five miles. Maybe more, or less. Due south that is, right into the desert. Pretty dangerous. The Moquis'll give us food and water, and we can likely get ponies out.'

"Schideler reflected. It was extremely important that he get to a telegraph line and a railroad. If the railroad was only seventy-five miles, they should strike the Little Colorado River in, roughly, sixty miles. And they had two canteens of water and two packages of sandwiches—yes, they should get through. Schideler, you will remember, won his engineering spurs in the East.

"'We will go to the railroad,' he announced.

"Smith hesitated, started to speak, met Schideler's authoritative eyes, hesitated again, and then leaned over into the cockpit and produced canteens and sandwich boxes. With the load divided equally, they started, Smith glancing back now and then at the crippled plane; but Schideler plodding eyes straight ahead, his mind on the message he would send to Denver and the time it would take him to follow that message up.

"Now, the desert is hospitable to newcomers. It welcomes you with open arms; it spreads before your eyes rich feasts of form and color. Schideler says that for an hour, save for an ever-increasing thirst which he dared not fully satisfy, he almost enjoyed that walk—the strange, warm scents, the high bloom of the yucca, the vivid cardinal flowers, the rolling, endless vista of sand dotted with ever fewer trees and more of cactus. But the heat from the very beginning was beyond description, and the sand, growing ever lighter and finer as they progressed, dragged at their feet.

"They passed skeletons of animals, and even that rare thing, the mummified figure of a man, saved from the scavengers of the desert for a while by a richer feast elsewhere, and shriveled by the blistering heat into a moistureless and rocklike form. That was along toward evening, and that was about the time Schideler began to realize that the issue was possibly not one of a delayed mission, but of life and death. And that life on the desert was merely a matter of water, his supply of which was going fast.

"For he, being big in body as in mind, sweated very profusely; the moisture poured from every pore and went from him in vapor. He needed to renew that moisture, and his canteen went his lips far too often. For all that, he took to stumbling, his body becoming an incubance; and he was in far worse shape

than the younger and leaner Smith when they lay down that night.

"Then Schideler couldn't sleep. A problem had come to him, but not one very difficult of solution. He lay staring at the incomparable stars, listening—if you will—to the music of utter stillness, and deciding, from the depths of his philosophy concerning the inutility, the unimportance, and the superfluous numbers of the common man, that if either he or Smith must die on that desert, he was the one that should survive.

"‘Intelligence!’ thought Schideler. ‘Intelligence would have it so. Intelligence must care for itself. There are many Smiths.’

"It was too soon to act upon that decision yet, for there was still a chance for both; nor, for that matter, was Schideler sure that his logic would ever carry him to action. There was a certain emotional recoil from the thought of sacrificing Smith that would have to be combated. But after he had reasoned the matter out and decided at least what he ought to do if pressed, a deep suspicion came upon him and still he could not sleep. For his own canteen lay there handy to Smith, and Schideler knew that even the commonest organisms have their will to live.

"Sleeplessness makes for nerves, and Schideler found himself somewhat irritable the next morning. Also Smith proved himself a common man indeed by taunting him with a little of their predicament.

"‘The Moqui squaws would’ve been feedin’ us by now, and instead, look here——’ And Smith gestured around at the illimitable plain. But as Schideler fixed him with a steady stare, Smith’s eyes shifted uncomfortably, and Schideler was reinstated in his supremacy.

"So they went on, through a desert whose character seemed to have changed, to have become malevolent,

bitterly vindictive, a harsh jungle of thorns and sand. Barbs of cactus tore their clothes, sharp twigs of mesquite thrust into their flesh, ominous rustlings sounded from the brush, and three carrion birds swung low above the sage, following, always following. The implacable sun passed from a challenge into a fiery threat, and the hot wind whispered of nothing but death. There are such times, you know—the desert has such moods—and then men who are in it either cling closer together, or, with something of its spirit entering them, draw apart in contagious hate.

"That happened to Schideler and Smith, though Schideler would never have believed he could hate such an insignificant person as his companion. Such hatred was demeaning, and he fought against it, though unsuccessfully. He knew Smith would put up no such fight against the malignant spirit that enveloped them; and indeed, whenever Smith’s eyes turned toward this comrade who was no comrade, this master of wordless insult, they seemed full of the desert glare. And toward noon he again forgot his position.

"‘Save your water, damn it!’ he rasped at Schideler. ‘You won’t get any of mine.’

"Schideler was trying to save it. At the core of his hatred against Smith probably lay the fact that he could not match Smith in that respect. It would be absurd to think that Schideler hadn’t the greater will power of the two. But there is a certain irreducible minimum in that matter as in everything else. A man must allow himself a certain amount of water, or he will go mad and drink it all. Smith’s minimum was simply lower than Schideler’s. His body, younger and leaner, shed less water and demanded less—that was all.

"Schideler foresaw vividly the time when his canteen would be empty and Smith’s would still be gurgling. That would be the time when he would die

and Smith would go on—as preposterous a happening, that, as could be imagined. But a happening to which Schideler could likely give cool reversal demanded by reason. And as the threat of death approached, Schideler's emotional recoil grew weaker.

"'Surely I have the courage, the consistency,' he kept telling himself, 'to follow manifest logic, to save my genius for the world.'

"This as he struggled on after Smith, who kept always an exasperating distance ahead. So they passed into the real desert of ever-increasing malignity, where only the sage and the yucca, struggling in parched arroyos, broke the eternal sweep of the sands. It looked worse beyond, for they could see the south wind playing with the light soil, unfolding pestilent banners of yellow dust, launching sand whirls abroad to right and left. Toward evening that dust reached and choked them, and they halted long before sundown in an arroyo as bare as a bone. After they had finished the last of their food, Schideler, as though by accident, lifted Smith's canteen.

"It was still half full. Schideler's was nearly empty. And that night, after both had gone to sleep, Schideler found himself stirring.

"That is it. He found himself stirring. He was not awake when he began to move. But he was fully awake when his hand fumbled over Smith's canteen. It is not certain what would have happened if Smith, perhaps warned telepathically of danger, hadn't also stirred, seemed about to wake, rolled over facing Schideler.

"Schideler dropped the canteen that instant and lay trembling down upon the sand. Though Smith was evidently sleeping soundly, Schideler didn't make another attempt. He was appalled at what he had started to do and sorry that he hadn't done it; and before he could definitely resolve upon a course,

exhaustion renewed his slumbers. The next thing he knew, it was morning, and Smith was shaking his shoulder and urging him.

"'Come alive! Come alive! Come alive, now!'

"Schideler shuddered back to consciousness. Would another morning find him able to come alive?

"'We should reach the river to-day.'

He tried to say it hopefully, though nothing seemed more fantastically impossible than a river anywhere.

"'Um!' Smith grunted sourly. By now he had entirely forgotten the respect that was due to Schideler's position.

"Then down into the living, moving sand—sand that invaded the province of the air, sand that opened like flour beneath their feet, but dragged at their weary legs like a clinging morass. It hung white on their clothes; it caked their mouths and nostrils; it filled their lungs. The implacable sun beat down, its burning rays like a myriad of fiery darts, setting the sand and the air and the very horizons dancing as though in torment.

"In this inferno, the remainder of Schideler's water was soon gone. But he kept this secret, partly through shame, mainly through fear that if Smith learned it, he would know Schideler's case was hopeless and leave him. And it was very necessary to keep up with Smith now. Another night would come, and another chance at Smith's canteen. He knew his resolution would support his reason then—he would not permit himself to die. But farther and farther he trailed behind Smith, to recover the distance with furious and wasteful effort. There came a time when every movement was a separate torture, requiring a separate effort of the will. Tottering, he forced himself upright; haking, he forced himself forward; and at last, late in the afternoon, all his muscles became flaccid as rags,

and he sank face downward with a moan.

"Smith heard him and came back, but Schideler was too far gone even to feel surprise at that. Smith helped him to sit up, and then sat down beside him. In Smith's voice was all the harshness of the desert and the bitterness of the alkali dust.

"Can't you get any farther?" asked Smith.

"Schideler muttered viciously: 'No!'

"You're sure, eh?"

"Schideler would not waste effort on any answer. And he was to be taken, and this talking fool left!

"Well, then," Smith pondered slowly. "There ain't no use tryin' to drag you. I guess I'd better go on. If I find the river, I can come back."

"He got slowly to his feet and looked around for a landmark.

"There's a hill over there—see it? I can find you by that."

"Schideler didn't even turn his head to look at the hill. He knew better than to believe Smith, and the lying promise filled him with disgust and rage. He closed his eyes, trying to shut out from his consciousness Smith's gawky, triumphant figure. He wished that Smith would leave, but heard no movement. After a moment he looked up again to meet Smith's red-rimmed eyes. Something in them, perhaps pity, flattened Schideler's self-control and he fairly shrieked:

"Go away, damn you!"

"And Smith went. Schideler knew he would never see him again.

"Schideler lay down. He stared up into the brazen heavens where five vultures circled slowly, lower and ever lower. Later he counted them again. There were still five. None had followed Smith. He knew from his reading that from covert and perch on that seemingly lifeless desert, coyotes, vultures and carrion crows were watching that grim circling. The thoughts that

followed took his mind for a while from the tortures of thirst, and they gave way in turn to utter weariness. A merciful sleep came to Schideler. It lasted only a little while, but between spells of sleep and delirious half waking, he endured almost through the night.

"He was awakened completely at last by a near-by long howl, ending in shrill laughter and insane chattering. A coyote had come, but it was the furnace of pain within his body that caused him to open his eyes and moan and roll out upon the desert. His muscles were strengthened a little by the rest, and he dragged himself to his feet and traveled on, without conscious direction, but heading to the south because, as water runs, his feet sought the lower levels.

"Dragging his feet, falling headlong and dragging his body at times, he left a sharp trail in the sand, and dust devils rose and careered about him, marking his course. But the hot south wind was up again, filling in the tracks behind him, and the swirls of dust subsided or whirled away to the north, so no one could follow the way he took. He tumbled down an arroyo and into a mass of cactus and emerged with his clothing in rags and red lacerations covering his hands and face and body. His tongue was so swollen that to breathe he must incessantly swallow, which was constant torture. His body seemed being devoured by the furnace of drought within, and he thought himself in the last agony—but he was not.

"There was much more to follow, and he came to wonder at the endurance of life within him. Then he was sure that he had died, and that it was another person who was crawling in circles like a fly on a hot stove lid, shrieking out into the gray immensity in a voice that hardly left his lips: 'Smith! Smith! Smith!'

"And then, very suddenly and strangely, came peace.

"It is true that one becomes numb at last. The science which Schideler worshiped tells us that, as music may pass in swiftness of vibration quite beyond our ears, so that vibration of the nerves called pain may grow too keen to be felt. The flesh lies prostrate beneath it, and sometimes the soul soars, but that is not mentioned by science.

"Schideler found himself lying as motionless as that mummified figure he had seen, and as free from suffering or anxiety. Death was inevitable and he awaited it placidly, neither rejecting nor inviting it. Meanwhile, it seemed that for the first time he watched the starlit heavens declare their glory. On the wings of a released imagination, he pierced the infinite blue; and beyond, and beyond, and beyond, past all astronomical guess, he traveled toward the center of things which is everywhere and nowhere. And, looking back, he saw himself as an ant, a fly, that had been dancing on the hot plate of this pygmy earth.

"So insignificant! Insignificant! Schideler!

"Then the desert morning approached, with turquoise overcoming the blue of the sky. Over its eastern rim a pallor came, and there were flushes of pink in the west. The wind hushed to a whisper and ceased, the drifting sand devils died, and all horizons receded. Waves of crimson and shooting flames heralded the dawn. A pillar of light arose, a giant crimson tower projected in ten heartbeats from horizon to zenith. Then came the bursting of all floodgates, the billowing upward of color, the spread of a swift conflagration wiping out all the stars and illumining all the earth. Sunrise on the desert! And Schideler lay regarding it and thinking of his puny dam.

"His mind regarded his dam, himself and Smith as from the distance of the farthest constellations. A great mirth

stirred within his; his features began to twitch uncontrollably; and he would have laughed then had his throat not been closed to laughter or any sound. But his body shook with silent, suppressed mirth at the egotist he had been; and he hardly noticed the crimson passing from the sky, and the swift ascent of the white and pitiless sun, the first blast of heat that swept across the plain.

"Nor, though his ears registered the sound, did his mind perceive for a minute or two a voice as raucous as a crow's insistently calling his name. When he did become aware of it, it was almost unwelcome. Either it was calling him to fresh, obnoxious effort, or it was the first symptom of madness following that supernal calm. But he braced himself up with his hands and saw Smith staggering back from the dome of sand beside which he had left Schideler lying. It was a full minute before he realized what it meant, but when he did, the fever of life and the agony of thirst entered Schideler again, and weeping weakly, he began to crawl toward Smith.

"Water! Blessed water! Blessed life!

"Thoughtless of physical consequences, he poured water down his sizzling throat until Smith took the canteen away, but then he submitted like a child. And he became aware that Smith was speaking, as though in answer to a question Schideler did not know he had asked:

"'No, I didn't find the river. A water hole!'

"'Where?' asked Schideler, glaring wildly southward.

"'That way.' Smith's finger wavered uncertainly as he pointed.

"Schideler observed the wavering finger, and looked out over the uniform expanse of level sand and cactus. Swiftly fear returned to him, for he had read of these desert water holes—

how unmarked they often are, how hidden in tiny hollows, how unfindable save by chance or a plainly marked trail. He knew that men dying of thirst have passed unknowingly within a hundred yards of them. And he saw how Smith's trail, even the last few steps, was already closing in behind him, being filled in by the devils of the desert, the whirls of sand.

"Suddenly he cried out at Smith:

"There are trees there? We can find it?"

"Well, no trees," replied Smith vaguely. "Nothing. But I guess——"

"And from Smith's clothes, though they were tattered, no strips had been torn. No streamers which, flying from the tops of cactus, would have guided them to the oasis, the water which was life. Schideler says that for a moment all the folly and thoughtlessness and unreason of mankind were centered in Smith's drooping figure. Schideler asked him harshly:

"You didn't mark a trail?"

"No!" Smith now understood what he should have done. Swaying on his feet, he met Schideler's angry eyes half sheepishly, half defiantly.

"Why in Heaven's name——" began Schideler.

"Then he checked the question, for suddenly, staring at Smith, he realized that the truth confessed itself. The truth proclaimed itself, rather, in

Smith's weakly tottering figure, his bloodshot, desperate eyes, his skin, freshly torn and bleeding from a hundred cactus thrusts. How he had hurried that stupid fellow! How he had driven himself! Or rather, how had pity driven him, pity and fear for Schideler, blind and noble emotions, destructive of thought, antipathetic to self-preservation, engenderers of stupidity—the divine stupidity of the common man!

"Stupidity indeed! The dolt! The divine dolt! And then it was that Schideler laughed.

"His lips were bloody, his throat was again parched, his body was again a furnace of pain, and death still lay in wait, but he laughed. Stupid, stupid Smith! And stupid, stupid Schideler. Not to have seen so clear a thing before! To have vaunted himself, vaunted human reason, above this sublime folly. Well, he'd been forced down. Into the desert, into humility. He was half hysterical, probably, and likely Smith was too, but all of a sudden he became aware that Smith was laughing with him.

"And so, linked in laughter, they started out to seek and find, first the water hole, and then the river beyond and safety. That linking in laughter is the thing that has happened to Schideler, and that's why I say that his smile was."

—More stories by Robert J. Pearsall will appear in forthcoming issues.

HARD TO KEEP OUT OF JAIL THERE

NEW ORLEANS being subject to three nations at varying periods of her history, has a mixture of Spanish, French, and English laws, among them being the one of "incommunicado," a relic of the Spanish rule. Under this ordinance, sometimes called the "long charge," from its wordiness, a person can be arrested simply for appearing to be about to commit an offense. It authorizes any citizen to charge a person with evident intention to break any ordinance, and authorizes the officials to incarcerate him in jail for seventy-two hours, without allowing him to communicate with lawyer or friends. On occasion it has been used to prevent certain persons voting, or to put quietly away some objectionable character.

Crossroads in Jericho

In Two Parts
Part II



By
**Will
McMorrow**

Author of "The Sky Buccaneers," Etc.

A young man regains consciousness after an accident on a road near Jericho, fifty miles from New York. He has forgotten everything except his name, Tyrone. Penniless, he is taken in by attractive young Meryl Taylor and her Aunt Hattie, who run a roadside tea room. Doctor Schoenberg, who boards there, patches up his wound; and Tyrone works around the place to pay for his keep. He falls in love with Meryl. One day he is recognized by a hard-boiled passer-by named Gypsy Feroni. Feroni tells him he is "Slim" Tyrone, wanted for stealing thirty-four thousand in bonds and he demands that Tyrone give Feroni and his pals their share of the swag. Tyrone refuses to accept the story, and Feroni departs, saying that "Chalky" Dan won't stand for this. Tyrone is about to telephone the police, when a strange voice behind him tells him that the wires are cut.

CHAPTER VI.

"CHALKY" DAN SCORES.

TYRONE looked at the pallid, expressionless face on a level with his own—a face unhealthily pale—with neither hair nor eyebrows to break the unwholesome smoothness of the skin—and projecting forward from above the narrow shoulders with a kind of serpentine watchfulness.

Tyrone recoiled instinctively and set down the telephone.

"What's the idea of cutting the wires? Who are you, if I may——"

"Your old playmate, Chalky Dan Leamer, dropped in for a chat." The

stranger chuckled again, without moving his colorless lips, and kept both hands plunged into the side pockets of his tan coat. Tyrone sensed that one, at least, of those hidden hands was not empty. There was a rigidity to the elbow and forearm as unnatural as the abrupt and startling line of reddish hair under the straw hat, showing the unmistakable wig with which the hairless one covered his naked skull.

"Gypsy told me he's located you, Slim. An' he says you claim you're outa yer nut an' lost yer memory. You don't remember him, an' you don't remember me—an', most important of all, you don't remember what you done

with the dough when you beat it off from the bank an' left us waitin' on the street corner that day. Zat so?"

"I don't know whether it's so or not." Tyrone squared his shoulders, straightening up. "But I'm going to find out darned soon—and take what's coming to me."

"That's what I wanted to talk over with you." Leamer jerked his thumb over his shoulder toward the porch. "We won't broadcast it. Just step outside with me, Slim, an' we'll get this straightened out nice an' friendly between ourselves."

Tyrone cast an upward glance to the head of the stairs.

"The girl might listen in," Leamer suggested, noting Tyrone's action. "I asked fer you when I came in, an' she told me to wait. She beat it upstairs. I guess she didn't like my line. She'll keep fer a while. I want to talk to you first."

"Stick to me," Tyrone jerked shortly. "What do you want?"

He stepped outside into the gloom of the porch, following Leamer's gliding figure.

"Here's the dope," the latter began easily: "I ain't blamin' you none for losin' yer memory. Sounds kinda fishy, but I'm takin' your word for it. The three of us, you and me an' Gypsy, fixed it up so's you could get that job with the trust company. When the cops nabbed you the bonds was gone. You hid them. Then you get a bump on the head. I dunno how. Maybe a cop crowned you when you beat it an' kept goin' till you dropped. Maybe you hitched behind a truck an' fell off. Anyway, here we are, high an' dry without the bonds. Some guys would say you was holdin' out on us to hog the whole deal. I figger you're on the level."

Tyrone waited silently, pushing Leamer's hand aside as the pallid gunman tapped Tyrone on the chest.

"The thing is," Leamer went on, "you gotta help us locate them bonds. Now, since you're wise to who you are, you can play square with yer bunch. We gotta find out where the jack is hid, an' we can't find it without you. You're the ace in the hole."

"How do you expect me to help you?" Tyrone parried.

"Easy enough. You were knocked cuckoo, but it won't last forever. It'll all come back to you some time. But we want to be around when it does. Gypsy an' me ain't takin' no chances of you doin' a nonstop flight some day with our split. You can't stay here, where the cops is liable to pick you up on yer description any day. We got a safe hang-out in the city where you can stay until you get cured——"

"In other words"—Tyrone's voice was dangerously calm—"I'm to help you complete this robbery of thirty-four thousand dollars?"

"Now you got it," Leamer sneered. "I'm glad they didn't knock *all* the sense out of you. Let's go."

"Wait a minute, Leamer. I think I've given you the wrong impression. I don't know what I used to be, and everything you say may be true. But, as far as those bonds are concerned, you're not going to get any help from me. I must have changed a lot with the blow on the head, according to your story. I'm going to get in touch with the nearest police station and find out just who I am—or at least who I used to be."

Leamer's eyes gleamed.

"You know what they'll hand you, I suppose," he said softly.

"I don't care what happens. I'll take my chances. As far as that goes, I may not be taking any chances. This whole game may be cooked up——"

"I'll prove it to you." Leamer stepped over to the car and beckoned to Tyrone. "I've got something in your own handwriting here."

He held a paper under the dim light from the ceiling lamp in the car. Tyrone leaned over to read it.

Then the light snapped off again; Tyrone was struck by a hurtling body from the rear, and landed sprawling across the seat cushions, with a thick arm wound about his neck and a large hand closing his mouth.

"Step on it, Chalky!"

The car jerked forward, throwing Tyrone's assailant slightly to one side and diverting the aim of the loaded blackjack that thudded against the upholstery, grazing Tyrone's ear.

He twisted over, for a second was free—with the door of the moving car still swinging open. Unhesitatingly, he leaped backward into the streaking road.

He landed on hands and knees—to the detriment of both from the highway—rolled over several times with the speed, if not the grace, of a trained acrobat, and found himself sitting up in a puddle—aware of as many bruises as he had limbs.

But there was no time to take stock of injuries. The sedan had stopped, with a screeching of tires and brakes, a hundred feet away; and a burly, silk-shirted party—obviously Gypsy—was waddling swiftly to the attack, firing blasts from an automatic as he came.

Tyrone jumped to his feet and looked around to get his bearings. He was several hundred feet from the tea room and the crossroads. The State road was deserted in both directions, except for the car he had so abruptly left and which was swinging around now to turn and face in his direction. Beyond the stone wall bordering the road was a dark field—a low-lying, swampy stretch given over to shrubs and grazing.

He did not stand upon the order of his going, but took the wall in one jump, landing in the squishy soil on the other side and stumbling through

briers and across hummocks, diagonally across the meadow toward the Jericho road.

Looking back once, he caught sight of the car, shining beneath the high-swung road light. It had turned and caught up with Gypsy, who stood on the running board, gleaming weapon in his free hand, the other clutching the door jamb for support.

Tyrone figured his next move. Evidently these former confederates of his had no intention of letting him report himself—and them—to the police. But that was just what Tyrone wanted to do. They commanded the State road, so getting to Jericho village by that route was not feasible. It was more roundabout by way of the back road—and if they followed him, he would have to take to the fields bordering the road, and make his way laboriously along parallel with it. But he had no idea he could outdistance the city-bred gunmen when it came to a cross-country race afoot.

He reached the wall by the dirt road, and prepared to climb over, when he caught sight of the headlights of the car sweeping around the turn at the tea room, in an attempt to cut him off.

He hefted a good-sized chunk of rock from the top of the wall and backed away, reaching the shelter of darkened trees just as the car came abreast of him.

"Come on, Slim!" Gypsy shouted. "Don't go playin' tag wid us in there! It'll only make it worse when we get you. Be good, now, before we cut yer dirty——"

The temptation of Gypsy's bulky figure against the glare of the headlights was more than Tyrone could resist. The piece of jagged rock clanged against the side of the car, missing Gypsy by a foot, but changing his wheedling invitation to a snarling, many-worded imprecation by no means complimentary to the thrower.

The automatic crashed again, sending a random bullet humming across the field.

"Lay off that, you big bonehead!" Leamer barked. "D'you want to bring every hick cop in the country? Climb in here an' put the soft pedal on that gat of yours."

The rest was lost to Tyrone, already traveling as swiftly as the broken ground would permit away from that place.

At the crest of the next hill he looked back along the road. The car had turned again in the narrow place and was going the other way, back to the State road. He waited until the tail light passed from sight, then climbed the wall and continued at a faster pace in the direction of Jericho.

Even at the best, the winding, rutted way was not easy going, and it seemed interminably long to Tyrone. A few miles stretch to a remarkable length when one navigates them by uncertain moonlight on foot. Tyrone went cautiously on the alert for an ambush. The State road led to Jericho, just as this one did, and it was quite possible for the two gunmen to have made a complete circle in the time it took Tyrone to make a couple of miles. They could leave the car and advance to meet him. He rather regretted that he hadn't taken the flivver and risked meeting Leamer again back at the tea room.

He felt relieved when he caught sight of the lantern-lit platform that he had noticed on his drives to Jericho. It was the place where the local dairy farmer left his full milk cans for the trucks to pick up. The village was only a short distance beyond that.

Then he came abruptly on it as he rounded a bend; and he stopped stock-still for a moment.

Two cars were pulled up by the side of the road. One was the sedan he had escaped from. The other was

Simpson's ancient touring car with the green-lettered "Police Department" signs adorning the bumpers. Under the yellow light of the lantern Gypsy and Leamer stood facing the constable, whose long-barreled six-shooter was prominently displayed.

"You caught them right in time, constable," Tyrone said, walking into the circle of light. "They were about to head me off——"

"They were, hey?" Simpson swung the long barrel around to cover Tyrone. "I guess lots of folks has been tryin' to head you off; but it takes old Jericho town to do it. Stick 'em up now, young feller, before I make a hole in you!"

Tyrone complied promptly. Even if he had contemplated resistance, there was something about the rawboned Simpson that indicated a dogged intention to fulfill his threat.

"There's no need for the gun play, Simpson," Tyrone objected. "If I meant to escape, I wouldn't have come looking for you. It's those two men there you need to keep your eye on. I'm only anxious to establish my identity."

Simpson grinned sourly. "I guess we know who you are, all right. These two detectives from New York just told me all about you, an' they got your description, too, on a paper. You may be smart, but you're not smart enough. You're under arrest for stealin' thutty-four thousand dollars, an' you'd best come peaceable. You can drop yer hands now."

"Look here," Tyrone protested, "you're making a mistake. These men are a pair of dangerous crooks. They're trying to kid you. Can't you see that——"

A rope dropped neatly over his shoulders, slipped down to his elbows, and was drawn quickly taut, binding his arms to his sides, before he could make a move.

CHAPTER VII.

TYRONE TAKES A CHANCE.

LEAMER stepped into view. "I seen you didn't have yer handcuffs handy," he said to Simpson; "so Gyp—I mean Detective Feroni—fixed this guy up fer you. He won't give you no trouble. You done good work there, constable. I wouldn't be surprised if you got a reward out of it."

Simpson chuckled. "We ain't so slow in Jericho, at that, I guess. I knowed he was a dangerous character soon as I seed him. I'll just run him along to the barn an' call up the New York authorities——"

"I wouldn't do that," Leamer interjected hastily. "You leave that to me. I'll attend to that after I get finished with them folks at the tea room. This guy's got confederates workin' with him, an' I gotta cross-examine them. Anyway, they ain't no use splittin' the reward with them city bulls."

"How much d'ye suppose we'd get for ketchin' this feller?" Simpson asked anxiously. "I put a lot of thinkin' into this."

"You sure did," Leamer congratulated warmly. "They'll fix you up swell—real dough. An' I betcha they'll be askin' you to join up wid the first-grade detectives. A guy like you is wastin' time here in the sticks. Ain't that right, sergeant?"

"You betcha," Gypsy growled. "Lay off, now, before I bump you!"

This last was directed to Tyrone, who was writhing in the grip of Gypsy's hands, on the way toward the constable's car. Struggling ineffectually against the three men, Tyrone was dumped into the tonneau, and the end of the rope tied securely about his ankles.

Simpson seated himself behind the wheel.

"See you gents later," he called.

"I'll keep him safe until you let me know."

"Keep mum on it, now," Leamer cautioned. "I don't need to tell a wise guy like you about all them dicks that's lookin' to pick up this reward. My partner an' me will go back to the house an' locate them bonds. That skirt is in on this——"

"You awful bonehead!" Tyrone tugged frantically at his bonds. "Can't you see these two yeggs are just kidding you along to get rid of me and go back to turn that house upside down? I tell you they're a pair of crooks——"

"Crooks, hey?" Simpson chortled complacently. "Seems to me it takes a crook to call a crook. S'fur as that goes, I seen their badges. Fer a feller that don't know his own name, you seem to know right much about other folks. I suppose you'll be tellin' me I'm a crook next."

"No such luck," Tyrone groaned. "You're just the world's blue-ribbon dumb-bell of the purest, first-grade variety. If you had a ray of sense, you'd know that these men used you because they knew I was going to reach you eventually, anyway, and——"

"Won't do you a mite of good to call me names," Simpson grunted savagely, "just because I was too smart for you. So long, gents. You kin tell Mrs. Hanley I ain't sech a fool as she thought—even though I did run twenty votes ahead of my ticket. She can thank me this feller didn't rob her outa house an' home."

"We'll tell her all about it," Leamer promised meaningly. "An' I don't mean perhaps."

Tyrone heard the gangsters' car grind into gear. He made a final effort to be heard.

"Simpson, you don't know these men at all. You're leaving a couple of helpless women at the mercy of two gunmen. They tried to get me to tell

them where those bonds were, and now they're desperate to get their hands on them. The least you can do is to go back there with them. I won't try to escape. I was on my way to see you, anyway, when these fellows pulled the wool over your eyes with that hokum."

"It ain't hokum," Simpson snapped. "An' them fellers didn't pull no wool over Ed Simpson's eyes. Some of you feel-ons could take lessons in bein' perlite to the law from them same detectives. No use yer gassin' to me. I'm goin' to lock you up in my barn fer the night."

"Damn it, man!" Tyrone raged. "Don't you see you're playing right into their hands and leaving that girl where——"

The car jerked ahead into the road, the tinny engine drowning out Tyrone's voice. Simpson bent over the wheel, his knuckled hands busy guiding the wobbly wheels along the ruts at a good speed for the make and age of his vehicle—his stubby chin projecting forward in the light of the dashboard lamp, his one-track mind, no doubt, spending the proceeds of that indefinite but welcome reward.

Tyrone, with his fingers plucking at the bonds about his ankles, was thinking of something else—of two hard-faced gangsters, streaking their way along the black road back to the tea room to look for the hidden bonds, to wring what information they could from the women. The fact that Gypsy and Leamer had forestalled Tyrone and turned him over to the dull-witted constable indicated the conclusion their crooked minds had arrived at—that Tyrone had been lying to them, and that he knew, and possibly Meryl knew, where the bonds were hidden.

Tyrone twisted around to a sitting position on the floor of the car. For the second time that night he was being carried, an unwilling passenger, and for the second time he contem-

plated escape and the unpleasant possibilities of a jump into the roadway from a moving car. Further appeals to Simpson would be useless. That arm of the law was incurably muscle-bound from the neck up.

Tyrone kicked his feet free from the loosened rope, barking his shins in the cramped quarters, and pushed lightly against the farther door, which, in default of a catch, was fastened with a piece of string. It gave way under the pressure of his foot, and the battered door flew open. Simpson did not look around.

There was little time to waste. Already the straggling line of the street lights of Jericho was in sight. Still, for another precious moment, Tyrone hung back from that plunge into the dark. It was not going to be a safe proceeding. Even at the rate of speed Simpson's senile car was capable of—a lurching, rattling twenty miles an hour—a man with arms bound to his sides risked a broken bone, or worse, in doing a Brodie into the bushes.

On the other hand, there was Meryl, alone with an elderly woman in the house, while Doctor Schoenberg was off on some nocturnal ramble—and two ruthless and vengeful criminals invading the house——

Tyrone set his teeth grimly and shoved his feet through that open door, feeling for a purchase on the sagging running board. There was just a chance that Simpson would not notice his prisoner's sudden departure for several minutes, and Tyrone was banking on that chance. There was also a chance that Tyrone would break his neck or catch a flying bullet from the constable's ready gun. Tyrone preferred not to consider either possibility.

The car slowed down slightly to make the turn that would bring them into the village.

Tyrone edged his broad shoulders

through the narrow opening, felt the running board beneath his feet, and threw himself forward without straightening up.

Even as he did so—in that split second he spent twisted awkwardly in mid-air—he found time to wonder whether his feet or shoulders would strike the shadowy road first, and he tried to squirm about to face forward. But a man jumping from the running board of a moving car in the dark—and from a crouching position—is at more than one disadvantage, particularly if the car strikes a bump at that moment, throwing him off balance. The road seemed to leap upward out of the darkness to meet his hurtling body—

The car, Simpson bent over the jiggling wheel, rattled explosively around the turn and down the steep grade toward the village, the old-fashioned oil-burning tail light winking sleepily against a black background until it winked out of sight.

Tyrone lay in the dusty weed growth where he had rolled.

He lay very still—so still that the tiny but noisy toad, scared into his little pool near by by Simpson's car, hopped out from his hiding place and took possession of the night again.

Gradually other shrill voices joined in the chorus—incessant, piercing, clamorous—growing in volume steadily, unceasingly—joining in metronomic and monotonous cadence with another sound that was felt rather than heard—a warning bell ringing urgently and ever louder from behind a curtain that was lifting—

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LIGHT IN THE BARN.

DARN those stretcher-bearers! They never seemed to be on the job when a man needed them. Busy shooting craps in a billet somewhere

while he—Private Tyrone of divisional headquarters—could lie out here in a shell hole by the road, with his motor cycle a mass of twisted junk, his messages to G. H. Q. lost in the shuffle, and a nice hole through his left forearm. Damned uncomfortable, too, lying on your back with both arms underneath you. Like being handcuffed.

Road seemed kind of quiet, at that—for an advance zone crowded with troops and under constant long-range fire. Maybe Fritz was through, and the war over.

He wrenched one arm free from the binding rope, leaned unsteadily on his elbow, and peered around at the dark, silent fields and the empty road.

Of course, the war was over! That bump on the head must have made him cuckoo for a minute. Hurt like the dickens, too. That must have been the pale-faced fellow—the one that had been driving when their roadster forced him into the ditch beside the State road. The pale-faced fellow had been standing to one side when the big fellow—What was it he called the big fellow—Gypper?—Gypsey? But the pale-faced fellow must have been the one that swung the blackjack.

Darned lucky they hadn't done worse than stun him.

Old Harrison, the cashier, had been right—he usually was. But Tyrone had laughed at the warning. The deal with the Westchester bank was Tyrone's deal. It was a good thing for the Strand Trust. What more natural than that Tyrone should want to deliver the bonds in person—especially when it meant a pleasant drive in the cool of the evening in his new sport sedan?

Well, it hadn't been such a pleasant drive, after all. It was all coming back to him now—the two men at the gas station who had watched him out of the corners of their eyes; the expanse of deserted State road ahead, and the

sight of the blue roadster in the mirror over the wind shield.

Even then he hadn't been "hep" to the game. He had been too busy thinking of this thirty-four thousand dollars' deal with the Westchester people—a small concern that kept open nights to receive deposits.

Then the quick closing-in of the blue roadster. He had been too busy for the moment avoiding a crash and dodging a tree to get at his gun before they jumped on the running board. He had been too busy getting rid of the wallet containing the bonds.

That had required quick work—a short toss into the budding clump of berry bushes near the stone wall. And they couldn't have seen it.

He got to his feet, sloughing off the loose coils of rope from his arms. He felt sore all over.

They must have carted him up this lonely road, stripped his coat off to search it, and dumped him here when they found the bonds were missing. He hoped they didn't go back to search the bushes, and he hoped they had left his car. Well, he'd better get back there and pick up that wallet again. In a clump of berry bushes, near the stone wall, ten feet or so back from the road. Not the Jericho road. Jericho—that name sounded—— Wait a second—steady now. Meryl——

The shrill, incessant clamor of the tiny frogs seemed to take up the name in a steady chant.

"Meryl! Meryl! Meryl! Quick! Quick! Quick! Meryl!"

It was as if the curtain that had divided Tyrone's memory for the past month had been swept away like fog before a great wind—an obscuring fog in which had moved dimly figures of Gypsy and Leamer, Aunt Hattie and Meryl. It all came back to him.

He stumbled out into the road.

There was no sign of activity in Jericho's main street at the foot of the

grade. Evidently Simpson, who lived on the other side of the village, hadn't reached home yet and discovered Tyrone's escape—which meant that Tyrone had really been "out" only for a minute or so.

He started on a jog trot back toward the Crossroads Tea Room. Things were getting clearer to John Tyrone, up to a month ago the youngest and most promising assistant cashier of the Strand Trust. He was beginning to see the holes in the ladder. The two "stick-up" men had tossed him overboard into the road that May night, and later on came back to find him, having, doubtless searched his baggage—he had a brief case with him—and found the bonds missing.

The delay of a month might be explained in various ways. They would hesitate to show up in the neighborhood for fear he had recognized them and broadcast their descriptions. Cautious scouting around, and, no doubt, a judicious and thorough pumping of the skeptical Simpson, who did not believe in amnesia, had acquainted the gangsters with the true state of affairs.

Then, with the aid of a circular containing his description—but with certain changes—they had endeavored to persuade him that he was a crook, too, doubtless in the hope of keeping him away from the police and safely in their hands in the event that his memory of the bonds should come back. It was only when he insisted on giving himself over to the authorities that they beat him to it and turned him over to Simpson.

It was obvious to Tyrone now. As obvious as the fact that it had been his own car he had been gayly throwing rocks at. As obvious as the fact that there had been thirty-four thousand dollars in negotiable bonds lying in a clump of berry bushes beside a much-traveled road for the past month!

If there had been no other incen-

tive to speed—and there was, in his worry on Meryl's account—the thought of that fortune, intrusted to him and left lying for any chance autoist to pick up, was enough to hasten his lagging footsteps.

He did lag a trifle as he passed the lighted platform where the constable had awaited him. He was tired, sore all over, felt as if he had been passed none too gently through a revolving concrete mixer. To jump from two moving autos—once with hands tied—to get a severe knock on the head, and then to run a couple of miles, as a chaser—this may be meat for a movie star, but another man's poison. Tyrone squared an already square jaw and plugged on, up grade and down.

The lights of the tea room glowed through the fringe of trees as he topped the last hill. He clattered down, half sliding, sending the loose stones bounding into the ditch.

At the stone wall he hesitated whether to climb over and investigate—see if the gangsters had really chanced coming back—or continue on to that point on the State road where the wallet had lain for a month. It was only a matter of a quarter mile or so.

He was still telling himself that it was more his duty to find the trust company's property than to protect Meryl from doubtful danger—even while he slipped over the wall and made his way cautiously toward the house.

Tiptoeing across the porch, he looked in the window of the living room. It was empty. He could see across the room, through the open door leading to the hall and into the broad dining room. There was no sign of any one.

He opened the screen door quietly and slowly, to avoid a squeak, and stepped into the main hall, stopping with his hand still on the opened door to listen. The only sound came from

the steady ticking of the clock above the desk, and the faint, querulous honking of a distant car on the State road.

Frowning, he stole through to the kitchen, where, at this time of the night Aunt Hattie would be finishing her dishes, cleaning up and preparing for the next day's meals.

There was no one there, either. The light was still on, showing the neat stacks of plates on the drain board, the door of the ice box swinging open, a kitchen chair upset, and the white fragments of a shattered dish spread on the linoleum floor—as if the washer had been suddenly interrupted in her work.

On the floor, muddled by trampling feet, lay something else—a torn bungalow apron of checkered green pattern.

Tyrone picked it up, while his pulses lagged with freezing lethargy, then pondered angrily ahead in fighting cadence. It was Meryl's. He felt his nails bite sharply into his tightly closed fists, as he caught the sound of muffled voices in the stillness.

He bent down to look through the window beneath the half-drawn shade. Yellow light showed through the chinks of the old barn behind the house.

Impulse told Tyrone to rush the place; caution prompted him to take it easy, approach quietly, slowly down the back-porch steps and across the littered barnyard. As he skirted the edge of the barn to get to the front where the rotted door hung askew, the voice was louder. He recognized Leamer's flat, snarling accents.

"No use kiddin' me, sister, an' you can can the sob stuff. Come clean an' you'll be all right. Wait a minute, Gypsy. We'll get this straight. Listen, cutey! This guy of yours is a double-crossin' lad, an' you're helpin' him out. But I'm wise. First of all, he cracks that he's lost his memory;

an' I fall fer it. But I ain't fallin' fer no more. He knew all along who he is, an' who we are. We stick him up, an' he gets away, an' now he wants to lay low an' claim he don't know nothin' about them bonds until it blows over, thereby gyppin' us guys an' the trust company, too. A wise guy! He grabs a chance to do a bunk with the stuff, an' if he's caught he'll say he don't remember nothin'. He wasn't goin' to give up to the cops at all. But Gyppy an' me helps him, so we can go to work on you. Now you come clean! You know where them bonds is at!"

Tyrone had reached the opening in the door now and could see the tableau lit up a single oil lantern.

Simpson was the first one Tyrone caught sight of. The constable, handcuffed, half hung from an old block and falls that depended from high in the cobwebbed rafters—the chain of the handcuffs across a hook and drawn up so that his feet barely touched the floor. A gag, manufactured from his own weathered felt hat, hid all of his face but a pair of vindictive eyes.

Chalky Dan was paying no further attention to this prisoner. He stood with his back to the door, facing Meryl behind whom loomed Gyppy, one of whose hands was clapped across the girl's mouth, the other holding both slim wrists behind her.

"Won't give us no help, hey?" Leamer nodded. "You don't know me, girlie, at all. I'm good at makin' a dame like you talk. An' this is only the beginning. Give her a twist on them arms, Gyppy; an' watch she don't yell too loud."

Gyppy did not twist. In that crowded second he was busy fumbling for his hip pocket and opening his mouth—a shade too late—to shout a warning to Leamer concerning a tall young man with blazing eyes and swinging, balled fists who was hurtling through the narrow door opening.

CHAPTER IX.

VICTORY AND DEFEAT.

TYRONE went straight to his nearest objective, and his right arm was swinging upward while he was still moving forward. There was nothing graceful about that lunge and nothing to suggest the neat synchronization of distance and momentum familiar to the professional prize fighter.

But, even in real life, fortune sometimes favors the rash. Tyrone's swing was wild, with a lot of power and righteous anger but little judgment behind it, and he might have overshot his mark, if Chalky Dan had not just begun to turn that pallid and hairless face Tyrone's way at the critical moment.

Tyrone landed neatly and crashingly on the "button," with a jar of bone against bone that he felt all the way to his shoulder; and Leamer seemed almost to be lifted to his toes before he made a spinning nose dive into a dark corner, slapping down on the plank floor with a force that sent a cloud of fine straw dust dancing into the lamplight.

He did not get up. No competent observer would have expected him to.

Tyrone did not stop to investigate further. The force of his onslaught had carried him well into the center of the lighted space, not five feet from the stalwart Gyppy. That individual was jerking out of his pocket what looked like, and probably was, the businesslike section of a double-barreled shotgun with the more unimportant parts sawed off.

"The memory expert," he grunted, and swung Meryl aside to clear the way for action. "Here's where I give you the works, old——"

Tyrone closed quickly, before that double charge of lead slugs had a chance to operate. He knocked the heavy muzzle of the weapon aside just

in time. In that closed place the blast of the detonation seemed to lift the roof off the old barn, filling the air with dust and the biting sting of smokeless powder, as the two men grappled and swayed under the flickering light of the vibrating lantern.

Gypsy had the advantage in weight and in Tyrone's fatigue after that long run, but was handicapped by having to hold the pistol, which he could not use while Tyrone's grip was fastened on his wrist. The younger man put his weight on that wrist, bending it backward, while with his free arm crooked under Gypsy's left shoulder, he fought to tighten a half nelson under the gangster's chin.

The vicious-looking weapon clattered to the boards; and for a space they rocked, stumbling across the floor, their locked figures dancing in fantastic shadow around them.

Meryl, her eyes bigger and darker than ever, picked up the gun. Tyrone, writhing in a crushing embrace from those powerful arms, caught sight of her frightened face over Gypsy's shoulder and knew she wanted to help. He tried to twist around to grab the weapon from her, but Gypsy's bulky arm interposed.

Tyrone would have gladly broken away now. He realized Gypsy had him outclassed as far as wrestling was concerned—however, Tyrone's superior ability and reach would have helped him in a straight out-and-out boxing bout.

Once he succeeded in driving a sharp uppercut to the leering face in front of him, and the twisted grin changed to a scowl. But the next moment Gypsy's knee wrapped around his, and they crashed to the floor, Tyrone underneath.

The gangster was up with a spring—and lunged for Meryl. He backed away with the improvised riot gun in his hand, his eyes gleaming wickedly.

Tyrone, getting slowly up from hands and knees, dazed with the stunning force of that fall beneath two hundred-odd pounds, had, for a sickening second, a vision of the weapon being raised, the distorted face above it, the wriggling figure of Simpson hanging by his outstretched arms—and knew that he would never reach Gypsy in time to escape the deadly blast of slugs that waited on a bent forefinger.

Gypsy knew it, too, and his predatory eyes lit up with the glow of the killer—the venomed killer of the city jungles, merciless, craven, dangerous, treacherous slacker in all wars but his own.

He took another quick step backward to get a better view of his victim, and almost brushed against the swinging form of Simpson.

The unfortunate constable's face contorted with the joy of battle. It was his moment, and he took advantage of it gladly. When it came to acrobatics, Constable Simpson was no champion; but he did his best. One corduroy knee jerked back at an acute angle, and a No. 11 shoe, well fortified as to heel and sole, shot out with the force of a mule's hind leg, caught Gypsy with devastating energy behind the ear, and sent him sprawling on top of Tyrone, thus ending the battle suddenly and dramatically.

Tyrone edged himself from underneath that inert mass and possessed himself of the gun. One glance at Gypsy, however, convinced him there was nothing to fear from that quarter. The gunman had the look of a man who would stay down until some one fetched the cold water and smelling salts. Tyrone turned his attention to the constable, releasing the block and falls to ease Simpson down, and removing the gag.

The constable worked his stiff arms back and forth.

"Feels like they're pulled plumb

outa the sockets," he complained. "Just reach in my pocket, young feller, an' get the key to these here handcuffs. I aim to swap 'em around an' let that feller I just knocked out wear them for a while."

Tyrone found the key and released the bony wrists from the steel.

"How on earth did you get here?" he asked. "I left you on the——"

"I come back around the other way, by the State road," said Simpson, rubbing his arms, "to head you off, an' ran acrost them bandits right here. Then they strung me up with my own handcuffs an' brung that young lady in; an' the pale feller starts pickin' on her, like you seen."

He shoved his hand forward. "Guess I was wrong about you, at that."

"That's all right," Tyrone grinned. "You made up for it. You used your feet, even if you didn't use your he—— I mean that was good work. I'll see that the Strand Trust Company takes care of you. I'll get in touch with them just as soon as I lay my hands on those bonds I threw out of the car the day those yeggs——"

He caught sight of Meryl standing alone by the door, and he moved quickly across and took her two hands in his.

"That beast hurt you, Meryl? I'll take another sock at him when he comes to life——"

"No. It isn't that. I was just—scared, I guess." She shook the yellow hair back from her forehead and smiled uncertainly. "I'm—I'm so glad you remember now, Ty."

"I sure do." He growled down at her. "Everything is kayo now. I know all about little me. I've got a name and a job and a few dollars in the bank—and a new car, if I can find it. And everything except——"

"Doctor Schoenberg was right, then," she said, nodding and looking

away from him. "He said it would come back to you."

"Old Schoenberg! Darned if I didn't forget all about him! How is it he isn't around?"

"He and Aunt Hattie took the flivver and drove to Dawnville to the movies," she informed him, withdrawing her hands. "I was in the kitchen when they came. They tried to get me to tell them about the bonds. I wouldn't have told them, even if I knew."

"Say," Simpson interrupted casually—he had finished handcuffing the two gunmen and was now comfortably seated on Gypsy's stomach—"where was it you said you threw them bonds?"

"In the field alongside the road about a quarter of a mile south of here," Tyrone said, turning toward the constable. "That reminds me—I'd better see about them. Have you got a flash light in your car? I'd like to borrow both."

Simpson fished a brier pipe from his pocket, searched for a match, and poked inside the bowl reflectively.

"Borrow it any time you like. Was that field on the right side of the road, right beyond a yellow house; an' was it kinda swampylike, with an old dead chestnut in the middle?"

Tyrone nodded agreement. "As well as I remember, that's the place. I threw the wallet into some berry bushes. There was a lot of dead brush that had been cut and let lay."

"I was afraid so." Simpson shook his head and blew thoughtfully through the pipestem. "That's Jim Kersey's medder—a second cousin of mine."

Foreboding of disaster gave Tyrone a weak feeling low down under his belt. He swallowed hard.

"What about it?" he questioned faintly.

"Ain't no use gettin' disturbed," Simpson cautioned philosophically.

"What's ended can't be mended. Jim burnt that field over last week. He'd been wantin' to clear it out for his cows since last April. I helped him; an' that brush went up like Billy-be-durned. If they was a wallet——"

He blinked at the vacant space, where, a moment before, had stood a disheveled and despairing young man, and shook his head again at the sound of a motor starting frantically.

"I hope he don't blow none of them tires," he muttered, tapping out the heel of his pipe for a fresh load. "They ain't so new."

Gypsy groaned, opened his eyes, and scowled wrathfully.

"Hey! What the hell am I, feller—a soft?"

CHAPTER X.

SCHOENBERG MAKES A SPEECH.

DAYLIGHT was streaking the road to Jericho, and dimming the lights that burned in the windows of the Crossroads Tea Room, when Tyrone drove the constable's rickety flivver up the driveway. It stopped with a final explosive shiver alongside the porch steps.

He climbed out slowly and leaned for a moment against the newel post—a tired and discouraged young man with a fine black powder of burned brush smudging his hands and face and torn shirt. He looked like a man who had been climbing through coal bins all night—which was not remarkable, considering that he had spent a good part of the time on hands and knees in a five-acre burned field, looking for something that was not there.

There was no chance of its being there. He remembered just where he had tossed the bulging wallet, and there could be no mistake. The berry bushes were shriveled twigs now, on a carpet of black sod, and the pile of brush was a heap of gray ashes.

Thirty-four thousand dollars gone!

He wondered how the Strand Trust Company board of directors would like that part of his tale, when he got back after a month's absence. Would they believe him at all? He had Doctor Schoenberg's testimony; but that was doubtful testimony. The old doctor was probably a better botanist than a brain specialist. And if they did believe the story about amnesia, they would be unlikely to continue Tyrone in his job. A man who throws a fortune into a field and lets it be burned up on him might have all the excuses in the world and still find a corporation rather sensitive about thirty-four thousand dollars.

Tyrone did some doleful figuring.

Seven thousand in the bank—he had saved that painfully—and a few hundred for his car at forced sale. He would have to work off that debt for the rest of his life.

He turned at the sound of a motor racing up the driveway—a motor that propelled a shining sedan, which he recognized as belonging to the senior vice president.

It jarred to a stop within a foot of Simpson's dejected flivver; and old Harrison, the cashier, puffed into view.

"My dear fellow!" He grasped Tyrone's hands and pumped them energetically. "I rushed up as soon as I got the message. Dear me! What a time you must have had! But they caught the rascals—I'm delighted to hear that! We'll make an example of them, John—mark my words! We think too much of you, young man, too much of you to let you be waylaid by every scoundrel——"

"Just—just a minute. How did you get here so soon?"

"Get here?" The cashier's round, red face glowed emotionally. "I got up out of bed as soon as the watchman phoned me from the bank. And, fortunately, had this car at my disposal. We had been holding a meeting to in-

crease the reward we had posted for your recovery. It was some party named Simpson called up—a sort of sheriff, I gather—two hours ago. And to think you were here all the time, guarding the bonds, wondering, perhaps, who you were, fighting off those ruffians! My dear fellow, the company is deeply indebted to you for risking your life in defense of its property."

Tyrone took a deep breath. "As a matter of fact, the bonds——"

"They will keep." Harrison waved his hand and smiled cordially. "We were really worried more about you. Of course, we are glad to recover the bonds, too; but your welfare should be the first consideration."

"I don't think you quite—understand." Tyrone leaned wearily against the newel post. "You see, the bonds—I tossed them into a field——"

"Don't worry about them now. We will look them over later. First of all, you must be made comfortable. You need some rest after your harrowing experience. If you will permit me, as a man old enough to be your fa——"

"Listen," Tyrone interrupted again, "we ought to get straightened out about the bonds—I can pay something on them. That field, you know—it was burned over. I've been looking for them for two hours."

"I dink maybe dere hass been a mistake," Schoenberg's voice boomed behind them. "Constable Simpson hass explained to me of the bonds."

Tyrone looked around. The little, rotund doctor stood on the porch. Beyond him Simpson stood in the doorway, and through the open window Tyrone caught sight of Gypsy's bandaged head and the neat uniforms of the two State policemen.

"I haff here der precious bonds."

Schoenberg passed down a familiar leather wallet to Tyrone. "A week ago I found that by the roadside. I put it in my pocket to read later, and I forget completely. It iss but paper, and I haff more lovely things to look at that day—a veed dot the smart Alecks in Vall Street cannot make. So it is only to-night dot Simpson speak of der bonds you look for."

He rocked on his toes, folded pudgy, earth-stained hands across his round stomach, and puffed out his cheeks disapprovingly at Tyrone.

"So! It iss as I said. It comes back mit a rush. Der goddess Psyche flirts vunce more, und Venus cries off by herself."

Tyrone reddened quickly and caught at the word. "You mean—Meryl? Where is she?"

"Maybe she iss afraid und hides in der room upstairs, because she thinks you haff found other things in the past and you haff no need for her now. Maybe she does not luff you at all and tells der foolish old doctor she cries for nothing. I do not know. It iss a flower more delicate than grows in der fields—more delicate than the violet or the——"

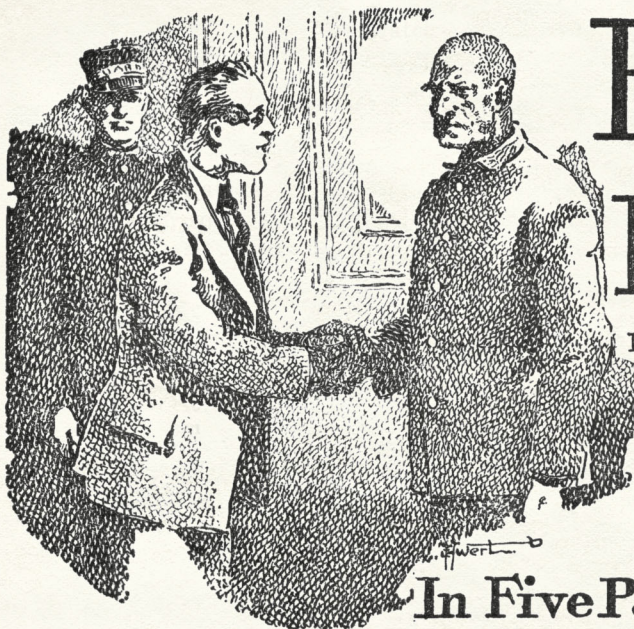
The remainder of this discourse on structural botany was directed at an unappreciative constable and an elderly banker who was adjusting his glasses over a colorful sheaf of negotiable bonds. Tyrone was taking the steps that led upward to a room under the eaves, two at a time.

Constable Simpson sucked his pipe speculatively.

"They's a minister in Jericho," he opined—"kind of a second cousin of mine. Kersey's his name. If them young folks had a license and was thinkin' of settlin' down in a nice quiet town——"

More stories by Will McMorrow will appear soon in THE POPULAR.

Watch for them.



Flying Hoofs

By Charles
Neville
Buck

In Five Parts Part IV

Author of "Fool's Paradise," Etc.

Joe Bonnie, youthful jockey protégé of Shannon Wiley, race-track gambler, lost the Kentucky Derby on Hazardous, stellar horse, which Wiley had sold to Jerry Ferris, multimillionaire aristocrat. Hazardous, high strung and sensitive, lost the race because Soon, his cat companion, had been stolen from his stall by Mose Clay, negro stableboy, who hoped to make big money by conniving with crooked bookmakers to bet at long odds against Hazardous, the overwhelming favorite. Ferris tells people he has been double crossed by Wiley and Bonnie. Wiley, in Ferris' field office at his polo field, tells Ferris that Bonnie comes from fine old Southern stock and is straight. He demands that Ferris give Bonnie—who is in love with Ferris' not unresponsive daughter, Leslie—another chance. Ferris refuses, insults Wiley, and the two men become terribly angry. A few minutes later Ferris is found shot dead.

CHAPTER XII.

ABRUPT ARREST.

NOT for long was it possible to conceal from Leslie the fullness or grimness of the facts. The stupefaction which had for a little while refused to assimilate the whole conception of violent death had been merciful but very brief.

Now she sat in her own room, while Mrs. Mooney, too wise to intrude the futile solace of many words, hovered about her with a grief-drawn face.

Leslie had neither fainted nor succumbed to hysterical outburst, but she sat with an unnatural stillness, and her

eyes were full of stricken bewilderment for this incomprehensible cruelty.

She was wondering and reaching no conclusion.

Perhaps every man has some enemy, but she knew of no one who harbored a vindictive hatred of her father. Of course, there might be corners of his life of which she knew nothing, but it was hard to believe that in them lurked the savagery of murder motives.

Her father had a stiff-necked pride of a sort which she could not, herself, understand—that vanity of class and station which had flashed into eruption and anger at the thought of her admitting a jockey to her friendship.

Yes, his fineness had been flavored by a touch of snobbishness; but it was usually so well restrained that many of the people he most patronized thought him a paragon of graciousness and democracy. And, after all, men are not murdered out of hand because they are snobs. To her he had been a devoted and indulgent parent, and now he lay dead by the hand of a murderer.

As she sat stunned into a forlorn helplessness, that ugly thought of murder forced itself more and more insistently into the foreground of her bruised misery—murder as quite separate from mere death. Death itself, even unwarned death, left nothing for the bereaved except acceptance. But murder was different. It imposed a heritage of stern duty.

Leslie had lived until now in the shelter of ordered ways. Nothing had ever aroused in her those passionate emotions which make the eyes see red and the pulses leap and thunder to hurricanes of fury.

Now there was dawning in her something new and terrifying. An Amazonian spirit was girding and arming itself for a duty which should not end until her father's death had been avenged.

Thin, hot fires began to run scaldingly through this girl of gentle antecedents, and in their essence these fires did not greatly differ from the passions that burn deep in the heart of the feudist who takes his blood oath of vengeance and reprisal. She must become the driving spirit and the energizing impetus behind those forces of the law whose duty it was to track down and punish this assassin. Until full justice had been done and entire expiation had been made, she must see to it that these forces did not weary nor relax their zeal.

The machinery of which she thought with vague unfamiliarity was already

swinging into action. Out there about the grounds where a little while ago polo ponies had been galloping, the disciplined agencies of inquisition and pursuit were mobilizing. There had been the coroner's representative. Town and State police were on the ground and had been joined by an energetic man from the district attorney's office. Reporters were arriving, too—reporters whom Mrs. Mooney valiantly sought to repel.

Van Barron had tried to describe with the explicitness of adequate portraiture the stranger with whom the master of Maple Court had left the polo field; but the police investigators had shaken their heads.

"The man you describe, Mr. Barron," declared the questioning officer, "might be one out of almost any dozen. 'Elderly, stout, and quietly dressed'—that doesn't give us much to get our teeth into."

"It's amazing," groaned Barron, "that no one else seemed to notice him either."

"No, it's not at all amazing. Everybody was interested in the players and the ponies. A chance bystander out of the crowd spoke to Mr. Ferris. He meant nothing to them. Why should he?" The detective paused and asked. "Is his daughter able to talk to us yet? I'm afraid it will be hard for her, but it's necessary."

"I'll find out."

A few minutes later Leslie, pallid but surprisingly self-possessed, had joined the little group in the main hall of the great house.

"Yes," she answered in a resolute voice, "I'm able to answer questions. I want to help all I can. From now until this man is caught—and punished—that is my job."

"Do you know whether your father expected any one to call on him today?"

The girl shook her head.

"I'm pretty sure," she told her questioner, "that he wouldn't have made any appointment that would interfere with the practice match. It must have been some one he didn't expect at all."

The questioner nodded.

"Do you know of any enemies he might have had reason to fear?"

"None whatever."

"We have questioned every employee on the place," the inquisitor told her, "except one. Your father's head groom isn't here. We were told that he'd taken several ponies to the farrier's; and it seems he left before the—before this thing was discovered. We've sent for him."

Leslie was still with the investigating group when Michael Strong was ushered in. The man was a small Englishman of cockney speech, and the bow legs of one who has known the saddle almost since he has known how to walk.

"Gawd!" exclaimed the new arrival in a terror-stricken voice. "This thing is fair orful."

"Strong," demanded the police spokesman, while the assistant district attorney sat attentively silent, "where were you during this practice match?"

"Back an' forth, as you might say, sir. Back an' forth between the field and the stables. I was seein' to changin' tack and rubbin' the sweaty ones, sir. When the last chukker began I turned things over to Pat Cogan, one of my stable lads, and took some ponies to be reshod."

"Were you still about when Mr. Ferris dropped out of the game and went to his office?"

"I was that, sir. I was changin' saddles by the sideboards—close to Mr. Ferris."

"Do you know who he left the field with?"

"That I do, sir, right well, though I don't know how far they went away together. He was with Mr. Shannon

Wiley, the gentleman he bought the colt Hazardous off of."

Leslie had been leaning forward while the head groom talked, and when he gave the information which should have been so easy to get, and which had taken so long, a low exclamation of surprise and shock ran between her lips.

The questioner turned quickly toward her.

"That name means something to you, Miss Ferris?"

With an appearance of reluctance, Leslie nodded. For the moment her lips trembled and refused to shape words; then she answered carefully:

"Father didn't like Mr. Wiley. He believed that he had been cheated about Hazardous. But Mr. Wiley never seemed to mind. He could have no possible motive."

"That remains to be seen." The comment was dry. "Sometimes a sudden quarrel becomes motive enough." The official spun on Michael Strong. "Where would this man, Wiley, be apt to go from here? Have you any guess?"

"'E's got a two-year-old entered at Belmont this afternoon. It's a likely youngster, too, with a nice chance to earn brackets. But if I was in 'is shoes to-day, I'd be goin' farther off than Belmont Park."

The official rose decisively from his seat.

"Now we're getting somewhere. Send in Kelly and Rathbone."

At Belmont Park Shannon Wiley was leaning on the fence by the judges' kiosk. Toward the head of the Futurity chute a field of juveniles was making its way for a five-furlong dash, and on one of them perched Joe Bonnie. The old horseman watched the queue of two-year-olds meditatively, his face as expressionless as that of a wooden Indian.

Two uniformed policemen made their way along the fence, guided by a track officer, and one of them laid a hand on Wiley's arm.

"Come along with us," he said briefly. "We want you."

The horseman looked up, and his eyes did not flicker.

"Want me?" he inquired. "I guess you've got the wrong pig by the ear, son."

"You're Shannon Wiley, ain't you?"

"Yeah, but——"

"There ain't no 'but' to it." The voice of Officer Kelly hardened. "You'd better come nice. We ain't takin' no chances with you, see? Come on now."

"What for? I've got a right to know, haven't I?"

"I guess you know, all right. They want to talk to you about Jerry Ferris being bumped off a little while ago—an' you the last man seen with him."

"Jerry Ferris? Bumped off?"

"That's what I said."

Slowly Wiley nodded, and his eyes were moss agate in their guarded coolness. If he was at all disturbed, he didn't show it.

"Yes, I'll go nice," he told them quietly. "But two minutes ain't going to make much difference. Just wait here with me till my colt finishes, boys; and then——"

A thunder of voices broke into eruptive clamor.

"They're off!" yelled the grand stand.

And as Officer Kelly laid a hand on the elderly man's shoulder, Wiley raised his binoculars and held them stone steady on the thundering confusion of horseflesh that was pelting under a dust cloud along the chute.

He was still standing there exactly one minute later, with his escort vigilant, when the field swept under the wire, and a slow smile tilted his lips. Joe Bonnie had led home his field by

a length. Then, as his trainer appeared on the track just across the palings, Wiley leaned over and raised his voice above the huzzahing:

"Tell Joe he rode a pretty race. I'm called back to town by sudden business. You look out for things."

Wiley turned toward his captors and shrugged a pair of broad shoulders with the fatalist's stoicism.

"All right, boys," he suggested. "Let's go."

It was on the train going back to town that Joe caught sight of a flaring headline which made stark proclamation:

JERRY FERRIS MURDERED

When the man who had been reading the sheet abandoned it, to change at Jamaica, Joe seized the thing from the car seat. This was an off day in midweek at Belmont Park, and the race trains were less crowded than usual. The young jockey sat by the window of the car, and his face became rigid. The type of the headline was of monstrous size, but the news story beneath it was brief and hysterical, for this was an early edition hot from presses that had as yet no fullness of detail.

The multimillionaire had been shot to death as he sat in his chair. The mystery was baffling; the motive unknown. That was about all of a positive nature, but there followed much of the sort of thing that the rewrite man can always supply from the "embalmed" records of the newspaper "morgue," and this embellishment was sensational.

It was of Leslie that Joe was thinking. It was for the crushing disaster that had fallen without warning on her life that his face had stiffened into bleak misery. He wanted inarticulately but desperately to have her know of his sympathy. But he had been put

out of her world; and, after all, what was there that he could do—or say?

When the train had pulled out of the tunnel and come to a grinding stop in the Pennsylvania Station, Joe hardly realized that the trip was ended. He sat there with stunned eyes, gripping the paper in his hand; and the car had almost emptied when, with a start, he came to himself and rose unsteadily from his seat.

But as he passed through the waiting rooms of the Long Island section, new and later papers were spread on display. One of these seemed to rise up and shout at him; to shout at him with such a staggering blatancy that he found himself panting and faint, as if he had been sandbagged.

SHANNON WILEY ARRESTED

Did Quarrel Over Horse Trade Cause Mysterious Murder?

Joe was running for a taxi now, but he remembered that he must know more and wheeled to snatch a paper from a news stand, forgetting to pay for it until an angry voice challenged him. He flung down a coin and waited for no change. Then, as his taxi seemed to crawl snaillike through tangled traffic, he tried to read and found it hard.

But this was no time to lose his head. At a crisis such as this there were many things to be done, and done with careful speed. It was like a race when the horses jam on the turn, and a man must think quick and think clear, only here the race was for such a prize as he had never ridden for before.

Apparently they had taken the accused to the district attorney's office, and first indications were that the case was circumstantial but black. Of course, Joe was certain the singling out of this man as the slayer was ghastly folly, but that need not make it the less tragic. Joe told himself that

Shannon Wiley was no killer. But these inferences and circumstances so hurriedly stated in sensational news columns were already weaving meshes about him that would be hard to break, and the first man accused is already on his way to conviction.

Thank God, the rank and file of his turf colleagues would rally to Shannon Wiley's support. They knew him for a hard man but a straight one. Every one of them would swear that Shannon was on "the up and up." But they would only be character witnesses; and they were, for the most part, sporting men.

Over against them would be ranged formidably respectable forces. Joe felt cold beads of sweat creep out on his face as he thought of that. A community was outraged, and a logical defendant had been taken with the circumstantial appearance of red-handedness.

It was not for some time that the young jockey had an opportunity to talk with his benefactor—the questioners of the county and the commonwealth took precedence over personal claims. And when Joe sat face to face with Wiley, the State had already placed against him a formal charge, and the district attorney's office had already declared that it had evidence enough to send him to the chair.

But the face of the old turfman as he greeted the boy maintained a stoicism which betrayed no ravages of terror. If there had been a third degree, it had not broken him down; and of the two, it was the younger who wore the haggard eyes.

The case of the People against Shannon was first tried in the newspapers, and the spirit which animated those assizes was untrammelled of restriction. Its slogan seemed to be: "Get a new sensation into each edition."

Thousands of readers became fa-

miliar with the distinguished face of the murdered millionaire—a face undeniably handsome and youthful for its years.

In contrast with this countenance was placed that other; the face of a man noted for the granite ruggedness of his features and for the cold immobility of his eyes.

By such a sardonic parallel was established, in advance of trial, the prima facie contrast between a respected pillar of society and a dubious character whose fingers had been printed and whose features had been mugged.

Eventually, heralded by journalistic ballyhoo, the case came to its more formal hearing in the Long Island courthouse where jurisdiction lay. The case of the People against Shannon Wiley was under way.

Photographers had been banished from the courtroom by judicial decree; but outside they had set up their batteries, and all who entered passed under their fire. Because of the dead man's wide reputation, the press accommodations had been enlarged. Beside seasoned reporters, to whom the matter was all in the day's work, sat varied semiamateurs of the pencil—the sob sisters, doing "color stuff," the specially dafted psychological novelists; even crime-analyzing ministers of the gospel.

In the days that had elapsed since the crime was done, nothing had developed to corroborate the accused man's dogged assertion of innocence. The face of that defendant as he sat with his counsel, was a sealed document. And the faces of the gifted lawyers ranged around him were outwardly confident; but when they talked together in privacy, it was with no air of assurance that they spoke.

Joe Bonnie had his chair at Wiley's side. The face that had been so sensitive was a stiffened mask now, tight with the effort at restraint. He felt a

dread such as he had never known before—and this was not such a case as that other time of momentary panic which he remembered from long ago. He could not now close his eyes to shut out the dangers of the jam. He must keep them open, and he must not let them betray that sense of forlorn hope which he knew lurked under the specious smiles of the defense lawyers.

Joe had scant familiarity with the machinery of law. Once or twice he had sat in the courthouse at Lexington, Kentucky, listening idly to trials, with a boy's interest in drama unfolding from red tape. This was different. Now he closed his eyes and saw that other courthouse looking out on the old Cheapside where lurked traditions of other days. He saw again the statue of John C. Breckenridge and the mounted bronze figure of General Morgan, the great raider. Somehow he felt that here he was a stranger in a hostile land. Back there in Lexington no jury would willingly believe Shannon Wiley a murderer. Here that assumption of innocence seemed reversed. The accused stood against no favorable background.

Behind the table of the prosecution, piled with a breastwork of books, the district attorney was laughing as he chatted in undertones. To him, too, this was all in the day's work, and it was a day's work whose outcome seemed promising. Now he talked of matters far removed from the entries on his docket.

But discreetly he stopped laughing, and his face sobered as a murmur ran through the room, and he recognized its significance.

He rose and stood solicitously drawing back a chair, and down the aisle came the slender figure of a girl in black accompanied by a middle-aged woman who was palpably neither a member of this girl's family nor a servant, yet who was partly both.

Leslie moved like a sleepwalker. Against the inky somberness of her attire, her cheeks suggested the waxen ivory of camelia petals; and her eyes were deeply ringed with sleeplessness and suffering. Into the chair which the district attorney placed for her she dropped and sat looking straight ahead.

Joe Bonnie's eyes had followed dumbly as she came. They could not leave her now, and the paleness of his own cheeks grew more pronounced. At last the girl raised her eyes and let them travel slowly about the room with the air of one who must face one's hard surroundings. In their circuit they encountered those of the boy, and Leslie winced. But she gave no other sign, no recognition.

Then her eyes came back again and were downcast; she seemed to see nothing but the table at her front. The gavel of the judge fell, and the reporters shuffled their copy paper.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHANNON WILEY'S TRIAL.

SO well had the newspapers done their work of press agenting the show that it required a long while to fill the jury box. The suspense of slow preliminaries had eaten as corrosively into Joe Bonnie as they had eaten into Leslie Ferris.

Session after session, while veniremen were examined and challenged, they had sat there across a narrow space, yet a space which was the no man's land between intrenched armies.

The trial itself dragged through many days; but eventually it reached that climacteric period toward which every murder trial builds—the histrionics and the pyrotechnics of final argument by counsel.

When the Honorable Andrew Simmons, for the State of New York, rose and faced the jury box, his face wore

the complacency of one whose fight is already won.

"Gentlemen—and ladies—of the jury," he began, "you have sat patiently through a long ordeal. You have laid by your own interests and your own affairs to come here and perform the hard duties of citizenship. but your task is well nigh ended. You have heard the evidence. We have now but to consider and weigh that evidence." He paused and then plunged conversationally into the prefatory portion of his plea; but as he talked on, his tempo and pitch quickened. His words became vigorous drumbeats against the orchestration of lurid drama; but it was toward the end, when he began drawing his threads and twisting them into the strand of conclusion, that he became most oratorical.

"What do we see as we look back and adjust the values of perspective to this mass of testimony?" he inquired.

"We have heard the story of two men as far apart as Jubal and Jubal Cain. One of them was a pillar of society; a gentleman of chivalric nature and unsmirched honor. That man lies dead. The other was a man who came up from gambling hells and who spent his life seeking to get something for nothing. A bold and predatory man he was, who lived upon others—an animal of prey who survived and acquired a certain leadership among his kind, after the fashion of the boldest wolf, which, by virtue of audacity, runs at the head of his pack. That man still lives; but you are oathbound to mete out justice, and justice requires you to see he shall not much longer live."

The prosecutor paused and turned to contemplate Shannon Wiley as he might have contemplated a wolf too insecurely held in the jaws of a trap.

"Between these human beings, so far

separated in ideals and practices, a deadly feud arose—a feud of small beginnings but of tragic end. This defendant now seeks to have you believe that this was a one-sided hatred, entertained only by Jerry Ferris and ignored by himself. But Ferris lies dead, and Shannon Wiley still lives. That feud arose, so we are told, over the sale of a horse. It is true that this was no common horse. Indeed, it proved to be a Trojan horse. But what did horses mean to these two men? In the response to that question you will find a key to much else. To one of them, thoroughbred horses were the symbols of clean sportsmanship—magnificent pets and genuine personalities. To the other, they were gambling tools, as cards and roulette wheels and dice are gambling tools; and it was with dice that the soldiers of Pilate allotted the garments of the Crucified One.”

Joe Bonnie squirmed in his chair and made a supreme effort to hold his features steady against the lashing tides of invective, to keep the blaze of outraged fury quenched from his eyes.

“And what defense have you been offered for the weighing of your verdict that was not an insult to your judgment?” demanded the district attorney, with a cold scorn.

“We could see that the able and learned counsel for the accused were at odds in their own deliberations. They faced a dilemma and in its bewilderment they chose the wrong horn. Should they fail to introduce the defendant himself on the witness stand, they permitted to go before you unexplained the fact that he went with the deceased to a private office and that after that closeting together the deceased was not again seen alive.

“Should they put him on the stand, as they so mistakenly did, they could only confirm from his own lips every contention that the State has advanced

up to the verge of the murder itself—and then seek a way out by the thin and incredible story that Shannon Wiley departed in peace, and that some mysterious, unnamed person followed on his heels and took his place to commit a murder for which no motive in any other breast has been suggested. Who was that mysterious, that wholly mythical stranger? Where did he come from, and where did he go? They offer you no answer. They give you no hint. They merely submit new riddles for old—wild hypotheses for proven facts.”

The courtroom was silent and attentive now. Leslie Ferris sat in her chair as still and motionless as though she were trance-bound, her eyes fixed to the front.

“This defendant tells you that he went to the house of Mr. Ferris uninvited and unwelcome to ask justice for a jockey whom Mr. Ferris did not trust, and whom Ferris had, in full candor, denounced. That jockey sits now by the side of his would-be benefactor. He makes common cause with him. He was a protégé of this professional gambler who went along the devious paths of a predatory life, from bookmaker to murderer. One wonders if he may not be a chip off the old block; nor could one greatly blame him if he were.

“Well, these men quarreled over this boy, whose racing reputation could hardly have been worth a gentleman’s life. Wiley admits that when Ferris refused to make the amends demanded of him, he threatened to force the vindication of this boy who was his protégé. He now falls back on the unconvincing assertion that the action he threatened meant only a suit in court for damages. The outcome and every reasonable inference show that the action was more direct and more plenary, and that for Jerry Ferris it spelled death.”

The speaker paused again, and then he pointed a finger at the counsel table of the defense.

"An admission is an admission, however so well it be disguised," he declared. "Those learned gentlemen who sit there have earnestly claimed that their client is innocent; yet they have not dared stand solidly on that contention and rest their case on an unequivocal position. Wiley killed the dead man or he did not; yet, in secondary plea, his advocates fall back on a weak and left-handed claim of self-defense. They have pointed their evidence to show you that Mr. Ferris was killed with a bullet fired point-blank into his heart; yet that a tomahawk lay on the floor near his limp hand. They have talked mysteriously of the fact that the fatal bullet was of an unusual caliber. They have sought to have you find an element of extenuation in the killing of which they say their client is not guilty. They have subtly endeavored to have you believe that Wiley did not kill Ferris; but that, if he did, he fired when the other man seized the hatchet to attack him. Their argument is like that of another Kentuckian than the one we are trying. That gentleman declined a drink, saying, 'I never take one before breakfast, and, besides, I've just had one.'"

It had all come to its end, at last, and the jury had taken the case. The crowds had lingered on in the courtroom for a long while, hoping for the dramatic sequence of an early verdict, hanging on to see the face of the defendant when that verdict was read. But as the hours lagged without result, the onlookers trickled out. The prisoner had been led away, and the judge had retired to his chambers. Only in the locked jury room was the drama still in its acting.

There it had gone on for hours, and over the "twelve good men and true"—of whom three were women—had set-

tled the stalemate of a seemingly irreconcilable and dour antagonism.

At first there had been no hint of dissension. The pink-cheeked broker who had been chosen foreman had smiled on his colleagues as they gathered about the table and had spoken briskly.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he suggested, "I hope we won't be detained much longer. But this is a serious case—an extremely serious case—and we should approach our decision without haste. I suggest that we simply sit here and relax for a little while before we discuss our verdict or take a ballot."

There was a murmur of approval, a sense of momentary reprieve; and instinctively the three women drew off to themselves, and the nine men gathered in a masculine group. Of the men, there were minor capitalists, prosperous farmers, and one or two laborers. Of the women, there was a blond and somewhat frowsy matron, a young and comely school-teacher, and a grim-featured, middle-aged stenographer, with an acid manner and a determined jaw.

After a little, the foreman called them into conference again.

"We have sat for a long while listening," he said. "I hope we have done our weighing of evidence and argument as we went along. I now suggest that we take a trial ballot and see how closely we stand agreed."

He paused and, reading on the faces about him a certain shyness in the face of such responsibility, he went on energetically:

"Some one must always be the first to speak, and where the accountability is so heavy, there is apt to be a certain hesitation; therefore, I will volunteer my own opinion, as a starter. As I see the case against the accused, there is no reasonable doubt of his guilt. I therefore advocate a verdict of guilty

of first-degree murder. Let us prepare the ballots."

"The defense seemed weak," put in the blond matron timidly; "but still, it was all circumstantial evidence, wasn't it? My husband says——"

"Your husband, my dear madam," the foreman politely reprimanded, "is not sitting in this case. You have taken your oath to form your own conclusions."

"Well, I wish some of the evidence had been direct, instead of just circumstantial; but I suppose the majority should rule."

"Nothing of the sort, my dear woman. A verdict must be unanimous." It was the middle-aged stenographer who spoke, and she spoke with a vinegar edge on her voice. "What you mean, though you don't express it very clearly, is that every reasonable doubt has not yet been removed from your mind. Isn't that about right?"

"Why—yes—I guess so. You see there——"

"Well, don't let the fear of deadlocking these proceedings bother you for a moment; because I haven't voted yet, and unless some one here can remove doubts that still linger in my mind, I mean to vote not guilty." The lady paused, and her smile was wintry as she added: "Unless I am so convinced, I mean to stand by that vote till purgatory freezes."

The foreman looked up with a surprised furrow on his brow. Though he said nothing, the woman juror read his thought and interpreted it for him.

"I know what you're thinking," she declared with the aggressive manner of one who relishes attack above defense. "You are thinking, 'That's what comes of having fool women on a jury.' Well, you've got us here. What are you going to do with us? I'll tell you one thing you're not going to do: you're not going to stampede us."

"If we are not agreed, we had better discuss the case," said the foreman, speaking less briskly than before. "We are here to exchange impressions."

"That man," said the dissenting woman bluntly, "isn't an assassin. It's not in his face, and that's all there is to it. He might kill in the heat and passion of a fight—but not in cold blood. When you get far enough away from that electric-chair notion to discuss other aspects of the matter, let me know. Meanwhile, I brought some knitting with me."

Joe Bonnie sat through an eternity of suspense-filled hours in a courtroom now deserted save for attendants, some of whom slept in their chairs; yet the waiting brought a faint glimmer of hope, and as that waiting dragged on, hope grew. The one member of the defense counsel who remained on guard with him pointed out that delay argued disagreement and that a hung jury would be a better outcome than they had really ventured to hope for.

Finally, after many hours of chilling suspense, there was a rap on the inside of the jury-room door; and the boy came up, rigid in his seat. An attendant spoke through the panels, and other court functionaries went scurrying about. From somewhere the judge appeared, and reporters drifted again to their places. The defendant was led in once more. And finally the jury-room door swung wide, while a weary and hollow-eyed procession filed again to the box.

Joe bent forward with his nails biting his palms under the table. But Shannon Wiley gazed ahead of him with an obdurate set to his features—and that expression did not alter when he heard his fate published. He had escaped the chair, but the term of his punishment in prison was to be the term of his natural life.

"I'd sooner it had been the other," he commented to his attorney.

The lawyer offered what solace he could. "At least it gives us time," he said. "We will appeal, of course—and something may turn up."

Jake Goodman stood one morning toward the end of July in the living room at Maple Court, where he had been called for a conference.

Leslie, still pale and thinner than she had been, sat before the empty fireplace, the mantel of which had been brought from a Florentine palazzo. But her eyes wandered off through the wide windows where the curtains stirred lightly in a breeze from the Sound. About the place, seated and standing, were several gentlemen—legal advisers, executors, and trustees—and the girl shivered a little as she remembered that, except for Jake Goodman, this was the same group which had gathered here for the reading of her father's will.

"We want to discuss some things with you, Leslie," said the attorney, who had also been a lifelong friend of her father's. "Particularly it seems necessary to reach some conclusion as to the racing stable. Your father made no provision for that in his will. Since his death the orange and blue have naturally not been seen on the tracks. Now the question arises as to whether or not you want to continue those activities. Many of the horses have stake engagements; and while they stand inactive in their stalls, a heavy investment lies idle."

Tears came into the girl's eyes.

"Those colors have been on the turf since my grandfather's time," she said. "Father loved them. I wonder what he would want."

The lawyer knitted his brows and toyed with a jade paper knife.

"As an individual, I should say that Jerry Ferris would want his stable to

race on," he said thoughtfully. "But as a lawyer, I ought to remind you that there are certain reasons against that decision."

"What are they, Mr. Van Ide?"

"I should say that such an establishment as this ought either to maintain its former greatness, or it ought to go into hands that will make full use of it. You can afford costly toys—but not unless they are toys your heart is set on playing with. Unless you are keen to carry on, you had better sell."

Leslie sat with her hands in her lap, looking off through the window.

"I don't know," she said finally. "I've always taken the horses as a matter of course. I love them—but somehow I can't imagine racing without dad. And yet I can't bear to think of the Ferris colors—not ever going to the post again. Maybe it's too soon to decide. Maybe"—she paused and drew a long breath—"maybe I can't realize yet—that he won't ever come back."

Van Ide nodded gravely; but he said nothing. And Leslie twisted her fingers while the pain of indecision showed in her eyes.

"I wish I knew what to do," she said in a low voice.

"If you'll let me make a suggestion," volunteered the trainer quietly, "I'd say strike a sort of compromise. Later on, Miss Ferris may want to carry on. Just now there's a lot of sorrow mixed up in the thing."

The girl nodded her silent assent, and the horseman continued:

"At all events, the stable is top-heavy at present. Why not weed it out? Why not hold a dispersal sale of the bulk at Saratoga, and keep those sires and dams that Mr. Ferris prized most? There are some two-year-olds and yearlings that I'd hold onto—but weed out fifty per cent and sort of mark time, building for the future rather than the present. That keeps

the name alive and cuts the investment in half."

"And it would give me time to think," agreed the girl. "Could we do that, Mr. Van Ide?"

"I don't see why not. I suppose Mr. Goodman has a list of what he feels ought to be held?"

The trainer nodded.

"But there's one horse I can't take the responsibility of deciding about," he added. "I guess you all know the horse I mean."

Leslie shuddered, and into her eyes came a sort of horror.

"Hazardous!" she exclaimed. "He caused it all—I couldn't bear to own him."

"He's turned vicious," mused Goodman. "He won't train, and he won't run. Personally, I don't believe he'll ever win a race again. And yet—we know what he's been. We know that when he's good-humored he's probably the greatest horse in the world."

"I think we've had our fill of him," commented Van Ide dryly. "Let some one else gamble on the miracle of his comeback."

It was not once but three times that the "silver stallion with the heart of gold" changed hands at the Saratoga meet; only now he no longer bore that name. He was satirically alluded to as "the nickel horse with the heart of cheese."

And the last time that he was sold he was led away by one of the "haltermen"—which, being interpreted, means that his owner entered him in a cheap claiming race out of which he was taken for a price which would scarcely have paid the jockey for riding him in one great stake in the days of his full glory.

After that, the colt which had once been a Halley's comet among all the stars of the racing heavens, disappeared from sight. To the forgetful

he ceased to exist. Among the cognoscenti of the turf ran wild and legendary stories, such as spring up about all celebrities that disappear and leave no trace. The most generally accepted story had it that he had broken a leg in a frenzy of passionate effort to unseat and kill an exercise boy and had had to be destroyed. Less-authenticated tales spoke of his passing into the hands of those gypsies who hang to the fringe of the racing world, and of his being painted, disguised and raced as a ringer on county-fair circuits under various aliases. So Hazardous the Great passed out of history and went, dead or alive, into the limbo of myth and legend.

Those various devices which seek to make the most of the law's delays had been invoked in the interest of Shannon Wiley, picturesque survivor of the turf's more colorful days. Appeals pending; motions were made; lawyers argued; and meanwhile the human identity who had been born a gentleman, lived more or less as a man, and never failed to be a sport, had lapsed to the anonymity of a number who pegged shoes in the prison shop at Ossining.

On a visitors' day Joe Bonnie, who had visibly aged, talked with him there. So disintegrated had life become for this boy that he himself did not remember the date until the convict reminded him of it.

"This is your twenty-first birthday, isn't it, son?" commented Wiley.

Joe looked up blankly; then, realizing that his dolorous and forlorn bearing offered no cheer to a man who needed it, he forced a somewhat stiff grin.

"So it is, Uncle Shan," he admitted. "I'd clean forgotten."

Wiley nodded.

"Things have been breaking fast—and bad," he admitted. "A fellow loses track of dates—unless he has

nothing else to think about. Well, you were going to decide when you came of age whether to ride or write, weren't you?"

Joe's lips tightened.

"I've decided to do neither," he announced. "I'm going to spend my life finding the man whose place you're taking here—only, when I find him, he's not coming to Sing Sing for life; he's coming for death."

Wiley laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Sometimes life's a rough game, son," he observed steadily. "It ought to teach a man something. It ought to teach him to take his losses along with his winnings. My life has still got a bet riding—with the hope of pay-off."

Joe gulped.

"Uncle Shan," he exclaimed as his throat tightened, "you're game. What is that bet?"

"You're the bet, son. You've got life ahead of you; and even if I stay here, I can watch it. You've got to give me something to watch, boy." He paused, then he went on slowly: "And I've got a birthday present for you."

In simple words, under the eyes of the watch which is kept upon convicts, the elderly man gave Joe Bonnie the facts of his identity. He was not Joe Bonnie, a stable stray, but Joseph Preston Popeworth. The shell-barked fellow who had borne through life the repute of a stony realist would have amazed his acquaintances, had they seen him warm to the ardor of his recital as he described what that name had once stood for in Kentucky and the South. Of the fortune which awaited this boy's claiming, he said nothing, though before he left he would give him the address of a Louisville attorney and instruct him to make a call at his office.

But Joe needed no mention of that material gift from the gambler who

had been labeled as "out only for the jack." Upon him, in addition to every call of loyalty and affection, had come the obligation of *noblesse oblige*. Where Joe Bonnie, the stableboy and jockey, might default of service to a benefactor, Joseph Preston Popeworth dared not fail.

One may not visit too long at Ossining; and it was as Joe was reminded of this, that Wiley grinned.

"And about this man, son—what of him?"

"What man, Uncle Shan?"

"The man you're going to find and send to the chair."

"Oh, I don't know. But I'm going to stick on his trail till I get him."

"Either I did it or he did it—and I didn't do it," said the convict grimly. "Whoever went into that office after I left it is likely to have been a fellow who knew enough about my differences with Ferris to make use of them. He trailed me in—and when he went out he knew just why I would be suspected. The bad blood between us was to be his alibi. I don't know who he was, or what grudge he bore; but I've got a hunch that it was somebody that hung around race tracks. It must have been—or he couldn't have figured it right."

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO UNEXPECTED MEETINGS.

IN an elbow of Elkhorn Creek which twists picturesquely through the blue-grass country of Kentucky sits a negro cabin which was built of chinked logs in the days of slavery. Near to it, strung like heads along the white turnpikes that thread this gracious country, lie many of the most celebrated stock farms of America. But the place itself is a scrap of garden, a small tobacco patch, and a grassless yard floridly enough colored with sunflowers and hollyhocks in the summer-

time, but sordidly drab in the neutral tones of winter.

Joe Popeworth, walking along the creek bed on a day when the skies were heavy with unfallen snow, and when his own spirit was no less heavy with frustrated effort, paused by the broken palings of the place. Many decades back, this cabin had been a part of the slave quarters on the estate of his grandfather. Later it had been snipped from a ragged edge of the stock farm of Jerry Ferris to become the habitation of improvident black folk.

Joe had been seeking to tramp off the chafing restlessness of his soul. He had promised a man who was caged and helpless to solve a problem and give him freedom, and he had advanced no step toward success. He had advanced no step in almost two years of tireless effort; and those had been prison years for Shannon Wiley.

Because of Wiley's suggestion that the mysterious murderer was likely to be a man whose life had its orbit about race tracks, Joe had deferred his decision to abandon riding and had maintained his jockey status by occasional stake appearances. But that had come to nothing, and despair drew its coils tighter, crushing hope after hope.

Now he paused by the broken gate and looked across the ragged yard, where nondescript clothes and bedding hung on a sagging line, and a miscellany of farm implements lay rusting. It was a sordid picture of human improvidence, and as the young man contemplated it, a powerfully built negro straightened up by the woodpile and leaned on the ax with which he had been chopping some neighbor's fence rails into firewood.

"Well, Lawd bless my soul!" shouted the colored man boisterously, as he started to the front of the place, "ef it ain't Mr. Joe Bonnie. Don't you remember me, boss?"

Joe leaned on the fence and nodded his head.

"Yes, I remember you well enough, Mose. The last time I saw you, you were working for Mr. Goodman. You got drunk and lost your job, didn't you?"

The negro's face lighted to a white-toothed grin.

"Yas, sah," he declared. "A passel of things has done come to pass since dat day an' time—a right smart passel of things." His face sobered, and his black forehead wrinkled into a scowl.

"How's Mr. Wiley comin' on?" he made diffident but solicitous inquiry. Then he leaned on the fence, and over his features passed a variety of emotions.

"I ain't been around no race tracks since I quit Mr. Goodman," he volunteered. "An' sometimes I gits plumb homesick. Dey had me in de wuck-house for a long spell after dat time I got drunk on Derby Day. An' when I got out I didn't come home fer a long spell of time. I jest trapsed around."

He paused, then he inquired:

"Mr. Joe, did yo' ever hear de hon-es'-ter-goodness truth 'bout how I stole dat cat an' made de gray stud hoss lose de big race?" His voice hardened with remembered outrage as he added: "An' how I got double crossed?"

Joe straightened with an electric interest; but he shook his head with an artful pretense of carelessness, because he knew the intricacies of the African mind.

"No," he said indifferently; "but if you were to blame for that, you deserved whatever you got—and more."

With a bleak wind winding through the sycamores and rattling the dead but tenacious leaves of the oaks, the young man stood pretending to be chiefly interested in kindling his pipe while Mose Clay unbosomed himself of his wrongdoings and his wrongs.

Joe was learning some ugly aspects of unpublished history. With particular emphasis and embellishment he had been given the outrageous details of how "Dapper Joe" had repudiated the man who had disreputably thrown, for him, the world's greatest horse race. But what stood out in Joe's mind as he listened was the fact that from this original infamy all the subsequent tragedy had sprung.

"Some day," announced Mose at the end of his recital, "I aim ter git even wid Mr. Merrick. I don't jest know how, but I'm studyin' 'bout it all de time."

"I wonder what ever became of the cat?" mused Joe.

Mose laughed.

"Dat's de beatenist thing 'bout de whole business," he declared. "Dat cat jest pintedly disappeared offen de face of de yarth. Whilst dey had me in dat wuckhouse I sent folks searchin' fer him, but dey didn't niver find him."

"Lost without trace?" The question was idly put, because Joe, who was inwardly seething, knew that for a while yet he must not betray too deep a concern.

Again the colored man's laugh rang boisterously in the chill air.

"You knows, Mr. Bonnie, dat kitten was borned right hyar at dis cabin. It follered me over ter Mr. Wiley's farm. We took it along with us to Churchill Downs an' everywhars we went. Louisville's 'bout eighty miles from hyar. I *knows*, 'cause I walked back home."

"Yes?"

"Yas, sah, dat's what I means when I says it's de beatenist thing. When finally I got home ag'in after all dem months, de fust lady I seen was dat cat. She was layin' right on de po'ch when I come home, like es if she hadn't never been nowhars else."

"Here?"

"Yas, sah—right hyar. An' mo' dan

dat, she's hyar right now. Jest cast yore eye over dar behind that woodpile. See dat cat nappin' dar? Well, sah, dat's her. Dat's Soon. I reckon no cat in de world ever caused mo' trouble. An' yet I keeps her. I don't know why—but I does."

Joe Popeworth's face had stiffened into a grimness which for a moment frightened the big negro. Here were an illiterate and dishonest man and a stump-tailed cat, and they had been the pawns in a game which had started as a swindle and ended in a landslide of tragedy.

It is dangerous to speculate on what catastrophes might have been averted in the affairs of men, had not a certain thing happened at a certain time, but here the trail lay clear from the first step of dishonesty to the final climax of death. Had Hazardous gone on in triumph through his three-year-old season, Jerry Ferris would be living, and Shannon Wiley would be free.

In the light of Mose Clay's story, Joe knew that, save for the loss of his stall companion, the colt would have gone on untroubled and unbeaten.

Certainly but for this theft of a cat, Jerry Ferris would never have denounced Joe, and it would not have been necessary for Shannon Wiley to undertake his mission of intervention. Because of what had followed on the loss of that race, he must go on to the end of his life thinking of the girl he loved as sitting across the chasm of bitterness which must always and inexorably separate them.

Such had been the poison of the fruit of this conspiracy. And as the negro saw the deep passion which was mounting in the eyes of the white man, he edged away and wished he had held his silence.

But the mind of Joe Popeworth was not contenting itself with the thought of pawns. Mose had been venal, but

he was almost as irresponsible as the cat. This was not true of Dapper Joe Merrick. To punish that chief offender, and to punish him as he deserved might at least appease a part of the soreness and bitterness which had been storing its poison in the young man's heart.

So far, he had dedicated himself to the running down of an anonymous murderer. But he had failed, and, after all, one cannot hate with a satisfactory definiteness an individual whose face one cannot picture. Here, and suddenly, a secondary hatred was supplied—a hatred with a definite object. This human rat who presumably had never known Jerry Ferris except by sight had, to all intents and purposes, been an accessory before the fact to his murder. He was the venal first cause of all that had come afterward. In his crooked business, he had kicked loose the stone which had launched the avalanche.

Joe's face cleared of its stressful wrath, and he nodded his head.

"Mose, you're a black scoundrel," he said quietly. "One man is dead, and one is in prison—because of what you did that day. You ought to be in the penitentiary. But I may need you later on." He paused, and then he added cryptically: "And I may need that cat. Take good care of it—and don't ever tell this story again unless I give you permission."

Joe went rather aimlessly across the fields, as he sought to burn out in physical action the storm stress that rode and harried him. His course had taken him across a hemp field and brought him out on a lane which in summer was graciously shaded by maples but which now ran starkly between skeletons of timber. He was walking with his head bent and a smolder in his eyes; and when some sense of human presence caused him to lift his eyes, it was to see the slen-

der figure of a young woman standing in startled indecision before him.

With recognition of Leslie came the realization that he had crossed a boundary line and was on the Ferris farm, the estate which had once belonged to the Popeworths.

They had not met since those days when they had sat across the no man's land that separated the ranged forces of the Long Island courtroom; and into the faces of both of them, on his unexpected encounter, came a flash of surprise and painful constraint.

"I'm sorry," said Joe slowly and with an effort. "I was walking aimlessly. I didn't realize I was a trespasser—and I had no idea you were in Kentucky."

On the beauty of Leslie's face, Life had been at work. The things that had happened had not destroyed that beauty but had transmuted it. There was a depth of seriousness in the eyes which no more comes until sorrow has struck than ripeness comes to some fruit before frost. But they were not hardened eyes, nor bitter; and if her voice was guardedly level and almost toneless, it was because she, too, found the moment a difficult one.

"It's the first time I've been here since—for three years," she told him. "And there's no reason why you shouldn't walk on this lane."

She stood outwardly quiet but inwardly shaken, and then she added:

"I've only known since I got here that this place was once your people's—and that you were born on it."

He nodded.

"My people moved away before I can remember," he said.

There was a painful silence; then Joe announced with a dogged determination:

"Since we have met, there is one thing I must say. Next to yourself, there is no one in the world who has been more anxious to see your father's

death avenged." He paused again. The rest was very hard to say, but he said it. "Only I want to see the right man, and not the wrong man, punished."

Into the pallor of her cheeks stole an indignant flush, but her voice was quiet. Each of them was treading warily on a thin crust of tense emotion over the bit of well-remembered tragedy.

"I don't blame you—for your belief; and you can't blame me for mine. It's just that there's a ghastly conflict of loyalties between us."

Joe nodded soberly.

"You see, I know him," he made simple declaration, "and I know he couldn't have done it. I know he's as innocent—as much a victim—as either of us."

"We'd better not talk about that, had we?" she questioned. "It can only hurt us both—and we've been hurt enough. You see one side of the shield, and I see the other. I didn't want to believe it, either. At first, I refused. But I went through that trial, and now I can't believe anything else."

That was a discussion which there was no profit in pursuing, thought Joe. Each of them saw it emotionally, but the daughter had her conviction buttressed by cold proof which a court and a jury had stamped as authentic and final, while he held to his contrary belief only because he felt sure that no proof could validly put the mark of Cain on the forehead of Shannon Wiley.

"It must seem to you a fool's quest," he said slowly; "but I'm spending my time trying to find the real murderer of your father—and by finding him to vindicate Uncle Shan."

She did not answer, and a cloud of pain crossed her eyes. She wondered whether he had not suffered almost as much as herself; and whatever else she

must believe, she knew that he was as innocent a victim of the tragedy as she had been. But there was no answer to offer which might carry a grain of comfort. He could not find the murderer, she told herself, because the murderer was already found.

"And so," went on the young man, "I wanted to ask you one thing. If ever I should find a clew which had to be followed up with the help of some one near to Mr. Ferris—may I call on you? It would never commit you to exonerate Uncle Shan unless it proved that the real felon was still free."

Leslie's eyes were brimming with sympathy.

"Of course," she declared. "I should think you'd know that. It's not vindictive vengeance on—just anybody, that I seek. I don't want to see the innocent suffer—only——"

"Yes, I understand," he finished for her. "Only you must be convinced."

She nodded gravely.

Walking between the barns at Jefferson Park in New Orleans one morning soon after New Year's Day, which is the official birthday of all thoroughbreds, Joe Popeworth found himself standing in the company of old Jake Finkelstein, an assistant trainer, and Bill Rush of future-book fame. Jake, whose moonlike face and bald head had shone on many tracks for many years, was moved, this morning, to reminiscence, and his companions listened to the voice which still expressed itself in strongly Germanic idiom and accent.

Jake was a humorist of sorts, and his stories followed one on the other. One of them had to do with Dapper Joe Merrick; and when Joe and Rush were alone together, the young man spoke reflectively.

"Since we're telling stories, Mr. Rush, and since Merrick has been

mentioned," he began quietly, "there's one I want to tell you that I'm not telling many people. Maybe you can help me." And he confided the full narrative of the deal between Mose Clay and this same Dapper Joe.

"So you see," Popeworth summarized at the end of his recital, "though, so far as I know, Ferris and Merrick never knew each other, yet all that came afterward was in a fashion due to Merrick. And I mean to make him pay for it."

The older man walked in the silence of thought for a little way; then he shook his head.

"That bird Merrick would deserve almost anything he got, I should say, and the only part of your story that I hadn't doped out for myself was that it was he and the darky that framed the thing. But you are wrong on one point."

"What's that?"

"Ferris and Merrick had met. I was present once when they did meet. I and a woman."

"A woman?" Joe looked up in surprise; and his companion nodded.

"The lady was Cherry Bostock. She was a gold digger, and I guess she had come up from even less than that. But from what I saw, I figured that she had Jerry Ferris going. It was at a night club that I met them, and Dapper Joe came over to the table. He told us he had known the dame before—though she didn't seem to get much kick out of meeting him again. And, of course, Ferris gave him the frozen face."

"What became of this woman?"

"She has a night club of her own now." And Bill Rush gave an address in the Forties not far from Broadway.

"I don't see"—Joe was groping among new and puzzling thoughts—"I don't see how a man of Ferris' type could have been attracted to the sort

of woman you describe. It must have been very casual. He was fastidious and"—the young man paused and flushed with memories that were too personal for recital, but he went on resolutely—"he seemed to draw the lines of social caste as rigidly as any one could."

Rush laughed philosophically.

"Most men have two worlds, son," he said. "Not that Ferris was ever a notoriously bad actor, but there had been stories about him before—stories that he hushed up, though it might have cost him something to do it. Besides, this woman had something about her that got men, though I'd as soon played with a tigress." The elderly man broke off, then added: "Ferris is dead, and it doesn't do any good to rake up old scandals about him. Taking him by and large, he wasn't a bad sort; and on the turf he was as straight as a string. But there's a story along Broadway that the money this lady used to set herself up in her jazz palace came from Ferris."

"No"—Joe was thinking of phases of the case which he did not mean to mention here—"I don't want to tarnish his memory with scandal; and after all, Merrick's connection with what followed was accidental. Yet he's the man who started the ball of disaster rolling, and he started it for his crook's profit. I'm out to get him and see that he settles in full and with interest."

Rush nodded.

"I wish you had a better chance, and you can count me in anywhere I can help you," he said. "I've never believed for a minute that Wiley was guilty; but they've got him convicted, and it's hard to warm up a cold case."

Hazardous, the Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of the race track, was not dead; but, like one of the fabled jewels which carry sinister fortune to all

who own them, he had passed from hand to hand and become an outcast, was no longer seen on any reputable tracks.

From being the first-dimension star of a multimillionaire's stable, he had passed shabbily down the line. Beguiled by the remembered greatness of his juvenile form, small turfman after small turfman had taken the chance of buying him cheaply. One after the other they had lost money and reaped only the chagrin of failure. Race courses of the "bushes" and county-fair circuits had seen him come and go; but he had not even paid his way by winning petty purses against half-breeds. And now, at length, under his own rightful name, he was entered in the cheapest of company in a small-purse race at Havana.

Joe Popeworth, who in other times had not frequented the pettier and more commercialized winter tracks, was finding himself in these days reversing the old order of his custom. His quest had stretched so long and had become so threadbare in its prospect of success that he had come to the last resort of following faint will-o'-the-wisps wherever they beckoned. Shannon Wiley's "hunch" that the unknown who had killed Ferris would be found, if he were ever found, among race-track habitués was the lure which led young Popeworth in these random wanderings along the lower strata of the sport. And now it was the name of Hazardous in the racing news which took him to Cuba.

Shannon Wiley had not been friendless, and shrewd men like Bill Rush had organized themselves into something like a secret service of their own. This loosely knit but elastic organization had delved into subsurface matters in an earnest effort to come on some clew that might solve a mystery which the State of New York had long ago dismissed as solved, and upon

which had been set the seal of the courts.

"I don't know how many guys had owned Gray when I got him," Connie Sparhawk told Joe Popeworth as they stood in the paddock at the Cuban track. "I know he seemed to have disappeared off the face of the earth; and I, for one, believed the story I'd heard that he was dead. I bought him off of a shoe-string gambler at Omaha, and his bills of sale were all in proper order."

The present owner, a man who campaigned a small stable of indifferent platers, shook his head ruefully. "I was a sucker to take him over, at that, even if the fellow did mighty near give him to me. But you know how it is—a horse like that teases a man with fool hopes. You can't get over the hunch that if you can just make him give you what he's got one time, you can clean up and quit rich. You can't get the bug out of your head that he's got it in him to run away and hide from anything else on four legs—if the notion ever strikes him—and that some day it's bound to strike him."

Popeworth nodded. He was looking at the gray picture horse which had once set the racing world by its ears; and memories came crowding out of the past. So far as mere conformation and outward appearances went, the disreputable derelict was as eye filling and as superb as he had been in the days of his greatness. There was no appearance of ghostliness about this Flying Dutchman of the turf.

"I've ridden him," said Joe, thoughtfully, "when I felt he was as different from every other horse as an antelope is different from goats; and I've ridden him when he felt as dead under me as a rocking-horse."

It was in the manner of a rocking-horse that he performed that day at Havana, cantering sluggishly behind an assortment of spavined crow baits.

He was as beautiful and as utterly damned as some spirit of perdition.

Over by the barn where Sparhawk stabled his few mediocrities, the present owner of Hazardous leaned disconsolately against a stall door and unbosomed himself bitterly to Joe Popeworth.

"I seem to have just two varieties in my stable," he lamented. "Throatlatchers and trailers. Either they stick their muzzles up to the throatlatch of something else on the wire and get nosed out, or else they're like that gray counterfeit there. They don't even take the trouble to raise a sweat. But this is the first time I was ever sap enough to fall for a skate just because of sentiment and hoping for a miracle."

Joe was feeling over the pasterns and hocks of the horse that had betrayed his promise; and he found them sound and clean.

"To-day settles it," went on Sparhawk sourly. "I'm going to take him out behind the barn and shoot him. It ain't the initial cost of a skate like that, it's the upkeep; and I'm not going to pass him along to gyp anybody else. Yes, sir, killing is what he needs and what he gets. I wouldn't even wish him on my worst enemy."

Joe smiled, then suddenly he raised his head and shook it.

"No, Connie," he made assertion, "you aren't going to do anything of the sort. You're going to start him in a half dozen more races at this meeting."

"Like hell I am! How many kinds of a sap do you take me for?"

"I take you for a good friend of mine. That colt was developed by Shannon Wiley. One man is dead and one man is serving a life term because of things that started with this horse; and the game isn't quite played out yet. Somehow I've got a hunch that somehow we may need him."

"All right." Sparhawk shrugged his shoulder. "You're welcome to him.

But take him away from here—dead or alive, I don't care which. He's eaten his last oat at my expense."

But Joe negated that offer of a gift horse with an amiable determination.

"No, Connie," he explained, "I don't want to appear in this matter. And, of course, I don't want you to carry a dead weight of expense, either. I've got a plan in the back of my head. It may be hairbrained. I'm not even going to tell you what it is yet; but I want you to start that fellow as often as you can. And the oftener the form sheet says he 'also ran' the better it will suit me. You can charge up all the costs to me: feed, jockey fees—everything else. And if the miracle ever should happen and he should cop a purse, it's yours to keep."

"Sounds like a nutty proposition. Say, Joe, do you know something that you're holding out on me?"

"Perhaps," said the younger man soberly. "But if I'm holding out anything, you'll know it in time. I want you to go on racing Hazardous in your own colors. Maybe I want to take a fling at trying the comeback you've all tackled—and maybe I have a method that hasn't been tried yet."

"Say, you interest me. What's the big idea?"

"It may not be a big idea after all. It may be a flop. Just go on racing him here for a while yet at my expense, and then ship him to Shannon Wiley's farm. I want to try some training experiments with him, and I want to ride him myself." Joe paused; then, as if in afterthought, he gave voice to an announcement which had all the earmarks of extreme and hopeless lunacy.

"And by the way, I want you to enter him for the Coffroth Handicap at Tijuana next March."

Connie's eyes bulged and his jaw fell.

"The Coffroth!" he gasped. "Page the lunacy commission! You poor nut,

the Coffroth's a sixty-thousand-dollar stake this year."

"Yes—it will probably be worth nearer seventy. By the way, 'Dapper Joe' Merrick is making winter book still, isn't he?"

"Sure. They say he's on easy street. He's here at Havana right now."

Joe nodded again and he went on placidly.

"Every time you start this skate here, make a good, substantial bet on him; and see to it that Dapper Joe knows about it. I'll supply the stake for you to lose; but pretend you're doing it for yourself. If you can manage to lose it to Dapper Joe in person, so much the better."

"Say! For the love of Mike, why do you want to give away money to that crooked rat? If you're going in for charity, give it to me."

Popeworth's eyes flashed. He knew this small-time turfman and he trusted him. His answer was prompt, and it had in it the crack of a bull whip.

"Because he is a crooked rat, and I'm out to get him. Just now I'm giving him rope, Connie—to hang himself with."

"Oh!" Sparhawk scratched his bewildered head. "I don't get you, but so long as you're paying the freight, I'll string along with you. Maybe you've got a scheme on that calls for a losing horse instead of a winning one."

"Maybe I have," agreed Joe.

There was mirth and ribald laughter among the boys of the "talent" when the eligible list for the Coffroth was published including the despised name

of Hazardous, "the nickel horse with the heart of cheese."

Had the gray has-been emerged fresh from oblivion with that announcement, he might have come with the glamour of mystery, and men might have feared him out of memory of his great past. But he came from the cheap racing at Havana where in a succession of starts he had never been in the money.

An owner whose conduct strongly indicated lunacy had campaigned him in Cuba; and the wonder was that he had been able to pay his feed bills and shipping charges. The seemingly demented Sparhawk had dug up stake after stake and had trotted with them into the betting shed like a mad devotee making sacrifices to an unresponsive deity. Well, that was his affair, but the future-book makers could not see eye to eye with him. They held the gray at contemptuously long odds, and one of them who fancied he knew something which the rest did not know, invited his patrons to "write their own tickets." That was Dapper Joe Merrick. But as yet there were no takers.

Meanwhile the gray colt, returned to Kentucky, was eating his oats in easy idleness, being given a respite from all labor and the chance to forget some things and remember others out of his checkered past. While he munched his feed with a hearty contentment, a gray cat with a stump tail sunned itself in his stall, and a negro who had known him from a yearling crooned to him as he wielded currycomb and brush on his silver coat. And horses have long memories.

To be concluded next week.

THE MODERN CONTORTIONISTS

ALONG about the time to get reelected it is queer how many candidates can simultaneously keep their ears to the ground, their heads in the clouds, and their hands in the pockets of contributors to the campaign expense funds.

Camels Helped in Building Up the West

WHEN a tourist visits the plaza at San Antonio, Texas, he probably admires the palms and the Oriental atmosphere of the place; but he would consider it a stretch of imagination to picture that historic old parade ground inhabited by white-robed Arabs and grumbling camels. Yet, in the summer of 1856 and for several years thereafter such a scene was of daily occurrence.

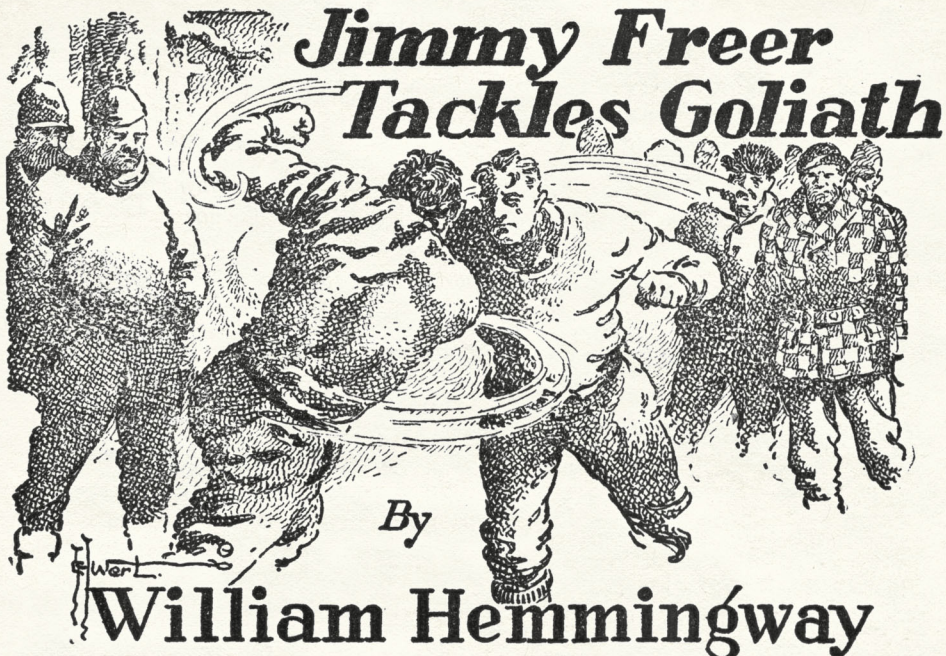
Jefferson Davis, then a member of the military commission and later secretary of war, had commanded troops in the Southwest in the Mexican War and knew what it was to march for days over that hot, dry country with little to drink and inadequate methods of food transportation. He decided to ask Congress for camels to carry army supplies over the desert; and an expedition was authorized to go to the Orient to buy them.

The return trip across the ocean proved diverting to all but the persons directly interested in the camels. Both the Arab guardians and their charges became seasick, the men continually complaining and the animals biting every stranger who came near them. After they arrived in Texas they did not improve in temper, being naturally morose and savage animals—as can be testified to by any one visiting the Orient. It was found that a swift kick from their powerful hind legs would instantly kill an army mule, and they caused a great vacancy in the ranks of that mainstay of the army transport. "The Major," one of the largest and oldest of the camels, had a record of seven mules in one day.

For a time the camels proved of much value in the transport of road-building materials, being able to carry 1,250 pounds for a great distance across the hot desert, with but little water to drink. But when they took a drink, it was *some* drink! A caravan went into the village of Sutherland Springs and watered at a well that had never been known to run dry; but only one half of the caravan camels got a drink, and the other half raised so much disturbance because they were still thirsty that the town authorities were fearful for their lives.

The California gold rush slowed down, the Civil War came on, and the government decided to dispense with the camels. The Arabs were sent home, but the camels remained—without drivers, for the soldiers refused to handle them, and no one could talk Arabic to them. By the end of the war the camels had disappeared. Some were stolen—but soon released—others drifted into the desert and there finally perished, and others are said to have swum the Pacific back to Arabia. Occasionally for some years a solitary specimen would be seen by some prospector or traveler, who probably immediately took the pledge never to drink another drop of liquor.

A San Antonio real-estate firm now carries a picture of the camels being loaded in the plaza, upon their letterhead, with the Alamo in the background. This was copied from a painting made in early days by Erhardt Biersch, who was located in that city at the time.



Author of "The Passing of Jack Dempsey—Maybe!" Etc.

In his father's lumber camp Jim found useful work for the punches he refused to sell in the ring. He wanted to live peacefully, but circumstances, in the person of a giant lumberjack, wouldn't let him.

A COMPLETE STORY

JIMMY FREER was sitting pretty in his father's lumber camp on the Lower Keewanoosuc. He had come in with the gang in the early fall and taken his full share of hard work in swamping the twitch roads over which the logs were to ride to the main roads; next he had taken lessons from expert Malachi Heenan in the science of chopping, and now, after a month's intensive study and work with the ax, he felt that he was beginning to learn some of the rudiments of the profound art of the lumberjack. He had common sense enough to sing low and not look for any favors because he was the owner's son. In that respect he stood up so straight that he leaned backward.

This was none too easy of late, for ever since he had knocked out and banished the camp bootlegger, the logging crew were likely to spoil him with praise—which he dodged as far as he could, but which kept cropping out now and then in the queerest way. There was "Old Man" Padelford, for example, expert teamster and camp epicure, who had brought in a box of fifty cigars—long, fat and black—to smoke with frugal zest on Sundays through the season, and now insisted on giving them to him as a testimonial of admiration.

"I tell ye, boy, I've paid good dollars down t' Bangor t' see p'fessional scrappers that wa'n't able t' do half's pretty as the battle you put up against

that big fella Commaghan," the old man declared. "I cal'late these see-gars'll just abaout pay f'r my seat in th' fust row, ringside. By mighty! it was a hummer!"

"Thank you, Pad," said Jimmy, "but I can't use them. I'm in training here all the time, and I mustn't smoke rich cigars."

"Smoke pipe, don't ye?" asked the old man. "What's the diff'rence, anyway?"

Jimmy had to argue hard and fast to persuade the generous old man that he was really in training while smoking only three pipefuls a day, and a full half hour passed before he was able to press the box back into the old man's hands.

"Well, I'll tell ye," said Old Pad, as he reluctantly accepted the box; "I'm not sure you're right about this trainin' business, and yet I'm not so certain you're not right, either; so I'll keep 'em. But if ever I c'n find a chance, I'll square books with ye f'r the fun I had last Sat'day night."

"Roly-poly" Rowan, the camp cook, produced the finest batch of doughnuts the eyes of woodsman or river rat ever beheld and named them "Vict'ry Specials" in honor of the fistic event; and Malachi Heenan, sober now and grateful for his release from Commaghan's blackmail, showed Jim a flick of the wrist at the end of the stroke that made his ax bite into the spruce an inch deeper every time. Yes, he was sitting pretty.

Yet his native wit, backed by four years of the coaching of "Tuss" McLargan, whose merciless criticism had bitten hardest after the most gorgeous football triumphs, helped him to keep his head down to normal size. Indeed, the sickening revulsion that comes to every decent man after he had knocked a fellow out, no matter how mean he is, made Jim uncomfortable amid all the praise. He was lucky enough to

get a letter from his father after a while that restored him to normalcy.

There really wasn't anything else for you to do, as I get the facts. That bootlegger would have put our business on the rocks if you hadn't put him out of business first. At the same time, Jim, you don't want to be known as a slugger. That kind of fame leads to no end of mix-ups, and sometimes what one man can't do to you a gang can do.

Your aff.

DAD.

P. S. I'd have given my best rod to see it.

So Jimmy attended strictly to the lumber business, improved his ax technique with careful study and hard work, and found himself getting stronger by the minute. At the same time he dodged all the congratulations he could, and when Clem Patterson and some others of the liveliest big fellows suggested that they would send down to Bangor for a set of gloves if he would give them lessons, Jim declared he didn't know enough about the game to try to teach any one. The boys soon dropped the idea. Yet from force of habit Jim never let a day pass without getting away by himself somewhere and practicing a few minutes of shadow boxing. It helped to keep his eye accurate and to preserve that keen coördination of hands, shoulders and feet without which no man can hit worth sour apples.

Nearly half the twelve million feet of lumber the crew expected to cut had been hauled down to the main roads and yarded. From there to the Lower Keewanoosuc would not be much of a chore when the time came; but with half of the black spruce still to be cut and all of it to be got down to the river bank for the spring drive, the job still loomed up big before the men of Freer's camp.

Yet for some time Jimmy had been aware of the growing uneasiness of Tom McCalmont, the woods boss. After watching Mac for days, he overcome his dislike of seeming to inter-

fere and made up his mind to offer such help as he could, and one evening as they tramped back to supper well behind the crowd he made a bid for Tom's confidence.

"Looks as if something's worrying you, Mac," the youngster said inquiringly.

"Oh, no," the boss replied; "nothing much. Man is born to trouble, you know, and lumbering runs more trouble to the foot than anything else I ever heard of."

"Yes," Jimmy admitted. "But I can't see anything wrong. We've had enough snow to make good roads, and it won't be much of a job to smooth off the sluiceways when we're ready to use them——"

"Oh, yes; natural conditions are O. K.," said McCalmont. "But for more than a week now we've not been cutting within ten thousand foot a day of what we did at first. Getting rid of the booze has helped a lot; there's not so much slack work and lazying. But there's something else spoiling our men. We're losing ground. Now and then I hear a grumble over something not worth noticing, not when men are feeling right. Look's if some one is sore and spreading poison among the rest. Wish I could guess who it is."

"Wish I could help you," Jimmy echoed fervently.

"You're the last one in the world who could help," said McCalmont. "If you knew, you couldn't tell, for the crowd would hold it against you and turn sourer than ever. And, just because you're the son of the man who owns the business, they'd be twice as sore. No, indeedy! You're out. Much obliged, just the same."

But while McCalmont was a first-class woods boss, he was not much of a prophet; for, through the most casual accident in the world, Jimmy happened to point the way to discovering the trouble maker. Not that he guessed it,

even after it happened. This was the way of it:

Old Man Padelford, after a Sunday dinner in which Roly-poly Rowan had distinguished himself by cooking roast beef that would tempt a Hindu anchorite to forget his vegetarian principles, backed with the finest potatoes in the State of Maine, just bursting from their jackets, cabbages that had been buried in swale hay under two feet of frosty earth and were sweeter than honey, to say nothing of rice puddings that tasted of Paradise and were stuffed with raisins as big as plums—after such a dinner as that, Old Man Padelford sauntered back into the main camp and groped among the balsam fronds in his bunk. Presently he drew out his precious cedar box and helped himself to two of the long, fat, black cigars. He bit off the end of one, lighted up and puffed away luxuriously, then carefully tucked the other in his pocket, put the box back in its place, and started out for a stroll.

Jimmy Freer had taken in these incidents only half-consciously, for he was reading a war novel and had come to that part where the heroic aviator was in the midst of a duel with Immelmann two miles above France, and his soul was absorbed in the struggle. He had just drawn a deep breath of relief at the escape of his hero when a shadow crossed his page, and seemed to stop at Padelford's bunk. Wondering what had brought the old man back so soon, he looked up—and saw "Goliath" Swinford rummaging under the bedding. The big fellow rose up to full height with the cigar box in his right hand.

"Hey, fellows!" he snickered. "What say we put one over on Old Pad? Let's smoke up his seegars, fill up his box with leaves and tell him a ha'n't must 'a' come in and plundered him?" Half a dozen lumberjacks came toward him, grinning expectantly.

"One minute, fellows, please!" Jimmy Freer exclaimed. "Goli' can't give away Old Pad's cigars without leave or license."

"Who says I can't?" Goliath interrupted him.

"Why, you know it yourself," Jimmy reasoned with him. "They're his property. You can't give them away any more than you'd give away his watch or his ax."

"The hell I can't give 'em away!" roared Goliath savagely. "Th' durned old hunks has no business bringin' fancy smokes in here, where we ain't got 'em, and goin' round smokin' 'em, just to tantalize us. Here, fellows—help yourselves!"

Jimmy put down his book and stepped between Goliath and the others. Big as he was, Swinford towered half a head above him, and his shoulders seemed twice as wide as Jim's.

"You'd better put them back, Goli'!" he said, his voice rising.

"Not f'r you nor any other fresh college gink," Goliath grumbled. He set the box down on the bunk and strutted toward the door.

"If you're half the man you think you are," he growled, "come out here in the open, and we'll settle it woods fashion." The crowd moved after him, chuckling at the prospect of a whale of a scrap.

Jimmy felt like old Si Humphreys, who caught a bear by the tail and then hollered for some one to come and help him to let go; but he didn't see how he could escape a mix-up, and he followed the giant, trying meanwhile to invent some argument of quiet persuasion. Swinford had thrown off his gaudy red-and-orange-checked mackinaw jacket, and Jim was slowly unbuttoning his, when Boss McCalmont strolled over from the meal camp, puffing at his peaceful brier. Quickly he placed himself between the pair.

"No fighting in this camp!" he or-

dered. "First one who starts it, you'll get your time and out you'll go. Jim Freer, that goes for you as much as any other lumberjack in the gang."

"Well-ll-ll, I d'know as I want to chuck my job," grumbled Goliath, slowly picking up his jacket and slipping it on; "but no college gink can horn in here and tell me I can't play a little joke by passin' out Old Padel-ford's cigars. He can't tell me where I get off, boss' son or not."

"You've got no business swiping any one's cigars, and you know it," said McCalmont, as Swinford moved off, with a small group of sympathizers at his heels. There were a few grumbles from the back of the crowd, not loud but noticeable enough, as McCalmont went into the main camp, picked up Old Padel-ford's precious box and put it back in its place. Then he went out to look over the camp—the regular Sunday inspection.

Jimmy, feeling as raw as if he had been sandpapered from head to foot, took up his book and tried to lose himself in it as he settled in the deacon seat near the stove, but he read line after line without understanding a word of the text. He worried as he thought of his father's warning to keep out of fights, and he worried when he thought that perhaps it was his thankfulness to Old Padel-ford for his compliment in offering him the box of cigars, rather than his sense of fair play, that had led him to interfere. This puzzle plowed wrinkles in his forehead, and he was asking himself for the twentieth time if he hadn't been unwise to spoil Swinford's mean joke, when Tom McCalmont came in.

"I'm much obliged to Old Pad," he said, "for leaving his cigars where they started something."

"Gosh, Mac!" Jimmy exclaimed. "I wouldn't have started anything for the world and all. I'd rather——"

"Don't worry, son; you're all right,"

McCalmont reassured him. "I cal'late you don't quite get the whole picture. That little turn-up made Swinford show his hand. Now I know who's been stirring up trouble for us. You heard what he said about you being the boss' son and he wouldn't stand for you telling him anything. That's it. That's what I've been trying to puzzle out. I'm certainly thankful to Old Pad for bringing him out from under cover."

"I'll write father to telegraph me to come home," Jimmy suggested hopefully. "I guess that will quiet that big sorehead. That'll be better than have your crew go sour on you."

"Thanks, Jimmy, but that'd never do," McCalmont decided. "That would mean we had knuckled down to Swinford; and once we did that we might as well call it a day and all go home. No; you've got to stick on here. And don't bother your father. It's up to me to head that fellow off before he goes too far—though how I can do it I don't see now. He's a smart lumberman, and he's too cunning to give himself away. If I fire him offhand, the crowd'll blow up and pass out. It's a mean kittle o' fish, 's far as I can see."

"What's he so grumpy about, anyway?" asked Jimmy. "I've never done anything to him—nor to any one else, that I know of."

"Of course, you haven't," McCalmont agreed, "but he's got a kink in his brain. I had a hunch not to take him into the woods, thinking he might spoil on us. You see, his grandfather, old Peleg Swinford, was one of the biggest lumbermen of his day. Peleg's son, Goliath's father, took his fortune down to Bangor after the old man died and started out being a shipping king. Then he found out he wa'n't cut out for the king job, he'd lost most everything he had; so he upstaked and come back home, and spent the rest of his life telling how the big men ruind

him. Guess Goli's got the same bug—sore on every one that's got anything."

"The father must have been sore on his son, too, to give him a name like Goliath," Jimmy thought out loud.

"Oh, his real christened name is Aholiah," said McCalmont. "But when he was only eighteen he'd grown as big as he is now, and folks got to calling him Goliath—well, because he looked like the big Philistine. Acts like it, too—overbearing and bullying. He's spry and soople, though, I tell ye! 'Bout the only giant I ever see that's got the real gimp and knows how to handle himself."

The woods were never more enchanting than they appeared in the week of sunshine which followed that Sunday, the sun never shone more brilliantly on the black-green giant spruce that towered far above the crisp, white snow, and the invigorating northwest breezes never souged and sang more inspiringly among the lofty branches—and yet the one hundred men who lived among all this beauty seemed downcast and spiritless. Old Padelford sang no more to his horses as they hauled logs along the well-smoothed road, and even "Happy" Holmes, after trying a few ballads of an evening in the main camp after supper, found he could not rouse any enthusiasm for a chorus. In desperation he thought to awaken interest with the long-drawn saga of Napoleon, a song that has resounded for generations through countless Maine lumber camps. No go. Not one voice piped up when he chanted:

"Next at Waterloo those Frenchmen fought,
Commanded by brave Bonapaut."

Happy shook his head, said: "I'm licked," and crawled into his bunk.

Old Pad cheered Jimmy a little on Saturday evening with a plan for the next afternoon.

"I've brought in a couple o' fishin' rigs, as I always do," he said, "and, soon's we get dinner out o' the way t'-morrow, we'll meander round to Fillmore's Pond and see if we c'n get us a mess o' pick'el."

The two borrowed a chunk of salt pork from Roly-poly to use for bait, promising to pay it back with interest if they had any luck. Until bedtime the old teamster kept Jim fascinated with one tale after another of the struggles he had had with pickerel, some of them powerful and some of them wily, but all of them gamesters to the end, who did not give up even after they were hauled out and could only flap helpless defiance in their last throes on the snow-covered ice.

The old man would not start on the two-mile tramp through the woods next day until he had finished the last inch of one of his pet cigars, because, while he enjoyed smoking well enough if he was merely strolling along the smooth road, he couldn't "a-bear to spile the flavor of fust-class t'baccy trampin' through heavy snow, tigger-luggin' fishin' rigs and an ax"—which seemed fair enough reasoning. When at last they started, there was not a soul in sight around the camp, and the only signs of life were the steady champing on Sunday oats in the horse hovels and the clatter of pots and pans as "Dink" Dermody, the cookee, was finishing his clean-up after the big feast of the week.

Jimmy felt as if he were treading the aisles of some vast cathedral as they made their way among the giant trees, whose rugged limbs met far overhead in groined arches; and the golden flood of sunlight, illuminating the dark, thick columns and enriching the snow pavement, whiter than marble, was more glorious than any coloring he had ever seen applied by man. Husky as he was and full of the energy of

flaming youth, the majesty of the silent groves filled him with reverence. Neither he nor his companion felt like breaking the spell of unspoken worship that the great woods wrought upon them. They were within half a mile of the pond, whose broad, white expanse showed through the trees, when they began to hear, at first in brief snatches, then longer and longer, a high-pitched voice as of some exhorter plying his eloquence on a silent audience. Soon they could hear whole sentences.

"And what are we gettin' for it?" the voice cried, as they came to a gap in the trees opening upon a wide swale filled with men.

"It's Goli' Swinford makin' a stump speech," whispered Old Pad. "Looks 's if he's mustered th' hull crew here, an' got 'em spellbound abaout suthin' mighty int'restin'." The speaker, standing on a fallen tree and with his back to the newcomers, went on with his discourse as they came nearer:

"And what are we gettin' for all our labor an' hardships we go through? Nothin' at all—leastwise, nothin' worth mentionin'; while the big feller, just because he has money, or can borrow money, to start things goin', skims off all the rich profits. Look at us—up in the dark of the mornin', crawlin' into our bunks in the dark of night; toilin', sweatin', swearin' and freezin' in the snow and slush all day long, riskin' our lives, likely to be wiped out in a smear of red meat and crushed bones whenever we break a log jam in the river drive or take our chances in the white water so we c'n get our drive downriver ahead of the rest!

"And now, look at old Freer—settin' in a soft armchair at his warm desk in a fancy office, drivin' us and braddin' us on to gamble our lives and our broken bones, while he gets all the money there is in it! We risk

everything and do all the work. He risks nothing but a few dollars he's sure to get back anyhow, and draws his money out of our blood. 'Tain't right. All we're askin' is fair play, a fair share for what we do. I tell ye, we're a pack o' fools if we don't strike t'-morrow mornin'—tell Tom McCalmont it's double pay f'r the hull season, or we'll walk out on him and let this operation go to hell!"

There was a muffled spattering of mittened hands here and there through the crowd and a scattering chorus of, "H'ray! That's the stuff!" But most of the men had seen Jimmy's approach, and, besides their shrewd Yankee disinclination to be swept off their feet by any man's oratory, they hung back until they should hear the other side of the case. Jim scrambled over the fallen tree and wheeled around to face Goliath Swinford.

"You want fair play?" he asked. "Well, suppose you give my father fair play, too. Every man in this neck o' woods knows that James Freer began just where we all stand to-day—a lumberjack, swamping, chopping, hauling and yarding lumber and running it downriver in the spring. He toiled and sweated and froze and lived as hard as any man here—yes, and I'll say he did more work than any man here. And by hard pinching, after years of risks and killing work, he scraped enough money together to undertake his first lumber operation. And he's been at it ever since, outworking any one of us, nearly wiped out time and again by thaws and floods, but always paying the best wages and running the cleanest camps and with the best grub.

"He's 'taking no risks?' Why, you just said it yourself, Goliath! All that's needed is for this crew to walk out tomorrow, and, as you say, this operation all goes to hell! That would break him. I'm asking you"—and, turning on his heel, he faced the crowd—"and

I'm asking every man here to give this job fair play by sticking it through."

"And what do we get then?" called a dozen voices from the crowd. Swinford did not say a word.

"You'll get what my father has always given every one—a fair deal," Jimmy answered.

"Old Freer's square!" "He's never hornswoggled any one yet!" "Better not throw away all our time, now we're half through the job!" came from all sides. Goliath Swinford saw he was fast losing his audience; that they were retreating from the pitch of enthusiasm he had raised them to, and that he would lose them altogether unless he could do something big to recapture their attention.

"One minute!" he cried from his stance on the fallen tree. "One minute! I want you fellows to know what you're doing before you let this fresh college gink hand you his bunk talk. I say here and I say now that old Freer won't do anything like what this gink says. He'll skin you as sure as——"

"My father will do the square thing, and if we're entitled to more pay, he'll give it to us. That I can guarantee," said Jimmy. Most of the heads in sight nodded approval.

"And I say you're a liar!" yelled Goliath, jumping down from the tree trunk and striking up to Jim. "I say you're a liar, and I'll prove it by whalin' the pelt off you."

"That wouldn't prove anything if you did," Jim answered, trying hard to force a smile, but not succeeding very well. "You're a big, strong fellow, thirty pounds bigger than I am." Snickers began to ripple through the crowd, and Goliath scowled.

He suddenly jumped at Jim, swinging his right fist at him with a smash that would have knocked him half a rod, and yelling:

"You're yaller, too!"

Jim side-stepped to safety, and the

impetus of Goliath's fierce swing sent the latter sprawling on all fours.

"You hold your horses!" Jim exclaimed, as the giant stumbled to his feet, still more infuriated by the cackles of discreet laughter from distant parts of the crowd. "If you're bound to have it this way, there's nothing I can do but defend myself. How do you want to fight?"

"Th' old bare knuckles 'r' good f'r me," Goliath boasted. "Round lasts till one man's down; then half a minute rest, and then the next round—that is, if you're able to get goin' again." He could not deny himself the luxury of this sneer as he looked down on his adversary.

"Have it your own way," said Jim reluctantly, as he stripped, above the waist, to his undershirt, Goliath doing the same. "And—wait a moment! No matter how this thing comes out, I ask all you men to go on with the job till our last log is in the booms down the River St. James. I'll guarantee you won't lose by it. You know I'm on the level."

When the antagonists faced each other on a patch of snow which had been tramped smooth by the feet of the crowd, the huge bulk of Goliath Swinford towered over Jimmy Freer as that of a big teacher above a half-grown boy. His shoulders were enormously wide and thick; his arms like oak beams. Jim, smiling confidently, put out his hand for the regulation clasp that the old rules call for, but Goli' stepped back, snarling:

"I don't shake hands with a faker."

"All right; you'll shake later," said Jimmy.

Malachi Heenan, referee and time-keeper, waited until the minute hand of his watch was on a dot, and shouted:

"Time!"

Glaring, Goliath leaped forward like a sprinter off his mark, his huge head down close to his deep, burly chest,

and the scowl that came with the snarl still twisting his features. As he drew near he swung his right fist with all his weight in it. Jim ducked so low that the blow whistled six inches over his head, then rose quickly and hooked his right fist on the back of the giant's neck. The big man was moving so fast that the blow simply prodded him along, but he had to jump forward and run half a dozen strides before he could catch balance and stop himself—making such a ridiculous spectacle that a dozen men in the rear ranks of the crowd guffawed in great glee.

"Think ye're smart, don't ye?" growled the big fellow as he came in again.

Jimmy said not a word, but his boyish grin of good nature showed that he considered the giant a pretty good joke. This contempt, added to the jeers of the crowd, inflamed Goliath's temper, and he charged in again, whirling right and left swings windmill fashion. A left-hander caught Jimmy on the right shoulder, swept him off balance as if he were a straw man, and spilled him on his side in the soft snow twenty feet away.

"Goli' shot him off like a rock-et!" exclaimed an admirer, as Jim plowed headfirst through the soft bank of white, and picked himself up and shook off the flakes. He was not hurt in the least, but as he went back to his corner and perched on the knee that Old Padelford, his second, made for him in the ancient style, he realized that he'd better be careful. Goliath Swinford scorned to sit. He stood like a turkey cock with his great chest puffed out. Malachi Heenan called time at the end of thirty seconds that seemed as short as three, and the giant again ran in, fists flailing. Jimmy skipped far to the right, leaving Swinford to beat the empty air. He looked so foolish that more men laughed at him than before.

With a curse, Goliath turned and rushed in to destroy his enemy. Jimmy gave ground for three quick steps, measuring the giant's rush exactly, then, before he could quite stop, drove his left fist straight as a rapier and full on the big fellow's nose. As his head went back, Jimmy jumped in, struck hard and lightning fast—right, left, right—on each side of the chin, and had the giant tottering. He shot in a hot right hook that caught Goliath full on the point of the chin and dropped him like a poled ox, flat on his side.

"H'rah f'r th' youngster! H'rah!" came a chorus from the crowd in great volume. After seeing Jim knocked down, they didn't believe he had a chance; but now they were so surprised at the sight of the camp bully sprawled out that they didn't know what to think. The cold snow on his cheek quickly revived Swinford, and he arose clumsily and scuffled on heavy feet back to his corner. This time he was glad enough to sit on the knee Bob Saunders gave him. The second grabbed a handful of snow and held it to Goliath's nose, but that did not stop the little stream of pink that was trickling down, and as he came out of his corner at the call for the third round he was sniffing and looking puzzled. He instinctively raised his left hand to rub his sore jaw, and before he quite touched it Jimmy shot in a straight left fist on the injured nose, and leaped away to one side before Goli' could recover his balance.

"I'll learn ye!" he yelled, and started another rush. Jim jumped backward, but not far enough, and a round-arm swing caught him high above the ear and spilled him on the snow. The giant started toward him, growling, but Malachi Heenan ran in between before he could reach the fallen man.

"Back to yer corner, ye big *omadhoun*!" he cried. "Back to yer corner, or I'll flatten ye with a sled stake!"

Goli' fell back, mumbling threats—but back he went.

When Jim fell he was unconscious—quite out—but, thanks to his fine physical condition, he scrambled up within three or four seconds and rested on one knee. He shook his head to clear away the cobwebs, and was glad to see that the trees in the background had stopped dancing. In less than ten seconds he was on his feet, and, waving back his second, who had run out to give him a lift, walked to his corner quite easily and perched on Old Padel-ford's knee.

"Got ha'f a goose egg on your noddle, but I cal'late ye don't feel it," the old man remarked with a smile.

"Don't feel it a bit," Jim reassured him; "but it'll teach me to mind my footwork after this. This snow makes heavy going." And, when Malachi called time, he stepped out as good as new.

Goliath thought he had victory in his hands, and he ran in on Jim more than halfway across the ring. Jim ducked under the straight left the big fellow sent in—the first he had tried—came up under his shoulder, and drove his right fist into the short ribs with all his weight behind it. The giant fell back, winded and bewildered, and Jim, sticking close with him, drove rights and lefts with the speed of a drilling machine fairly into his mid-section. As the huge bulk toppled over, Jim felt as if some great spruce was falling toward him, and briskly stepped aside.

Then, as Goliath plunged blindly ahead, Jimmy Freer put everything he had in a straight right punch that landed on the "button," as the boys call it—that spot so hard to shave, just under the point of the chin. The big fellow tottered two steps ahead and dived into the snow, as cleanly knocked out as if he had been torpedoed. Jimmy quickly turned him over on his back, so that the snow should not stop his

breath. Then Bob Saunders, helped by Jimmy and two other huskies, picked up Goliath, carried him back to his corner, set him up on the trunk of the fallen tree and tried to hold him erect, but he wobbled like a sack of bran with the string off; and he was still drooping and wobbling when Malachi Heenan, at the end of thirty seconds, called time.

"Time! D'ye hear me?" Malachi repeated. "Can ye fight, or are ye licked?"

"What ye hollerin' about so loud?" asked Goliath in a thin, querulous voice. "I'm not interferin' with you, am I?" His wits were still wandering.

"You win, Jimmy Freer—and as ever I saw!" Malachi proclaimed, and shook the winner's useful right hand.

"Thanks, Malachi," said Jim; then turned and helped Saunders and the rest to bring Swinford around. He packed a big snowball flat and hard, and rubbed it on the back of the giant's neck. The effect was magical. In less than a minute Goliath straightened up and asked a question, that classic question so often put by a man who has been thoroughly knocked out:

"Which hand did he hit me with?"

"This one!" Jimmy answered, grasping Goliath's bony paw with his right. "Look here, Goli'; you and I have too much sense to fight. Let's forget it. What d'ye say?"

"Well-ll-ll," Goliath slowly assented, "well-ll-ll, I cal'late there ain't much of anything else to say but 'Yes.'"

Watch for more of William Hemmingway's contributions.



Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of THE POPULAR, published weekly, at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1928.

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of the Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of THE POPULAR, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor*, Charles A. MacLean, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York,

N. Y.; Annie K. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,
Of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of March, 1928. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 184, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1928.)

A Chat With You

SOME one has asked why it is that most of the mystery and detective stories are laid in London or New York. Some of them are laid in Paris, but not so many. Most of these stories start with some one being killed—generally a man. Has it ever occurred to you how few of them open with the killing of a woman? This may be due to gallantry and respect for womankind on the part of the authors who are generally men.

We have our share of homicides in New York, but London has a rather enviable record that way. Very few people are done to death in that old town, nearly all the murderers are brought to justice very promptly; yet to judge from a lot of the mystery tales coming out at two dollars in cloth covers they kill some one over there at least once a week and he is generally a person of prominence.

* * * *

IT may be because it is easier to write a mystery-murder tale set in a big city. There are so many people there and anything might happen. It is hard to check up on the author. We, for ourselves, like an occasional one set outdoors. There are as many mysteries on the Western ranges as there are anywhere, and generally the truth, if it is ever disclosed, is a less sordid and more colorful drama than the tale set in the big city. Then, too, there is an especial charm about the outdoor tale when it is done by a writer who can bring the breath and feeling of the unspoiled country and the forthright qualities of its people home to his readers. Such a writer is Robert McBlair. His latest novel, "The Black Rider," appears complete in the next issue, out a week from

now. You have read one or two already by McBlair. He is comparatively new to THE POPULAR, but he belongs here and with the best.

* * * *

MCBLAIR'S narrative is true to life, but just to say that a rousing good story is true to life and to stop there is faint praise and unfair to the tale. Doubtless the reports of the proceedings of the Interstate Commerce Commission are true to life, but save to those directly interested—and even to those in many cases—they give a distinctly less pleasurable thrill than good fiction. It is the human quality, the warmth, the color in the novel that makes it perhaps the most valued form of reading where people read much. Don't let us spoil the plot of "The Black Rider" by telling you about it. It is a mystery story and a Western story as well. And, more important, it is a story vibrant with thrill and action.

* * * *

WHICH do you like best, stories of the outdoors, or stories laid in cities, tales of the West or tales of the sea? Should you answer this—and we hope you will—it would be a still greater kindness to give your reasons. We ourselves are rather fickle, shifting from one kind to another in our preference, more or less guided by the last story we have read, whether good or bad. After reading a dull sea story we are inclined to go inland for our literature. But after reading a good one, we want to go to sea again. We have just read a good one. It is "The Best Traditions of the Sea," a long short story by Roy Norton. It appears complete in the next issue of THE POPULAR.

THERE are stories that are hard to classify. For instance stories about famous jewels and perfumes. These things seem more fit for a boudoir than in a narrative of action and adventure. Yet every great jewel might tell, if it would, a great adventure of the outdoors, and all the famous perfumes bring with their scent the breath of romance. The best perfumes are made from actual flowers and sometimes the flowers are hard to get. They say it takes a whole field of roses to make a few drops of the genuine attar of roses, and that the real attar is so powerful that it will leave its scent on things for years and cannot be sniffed in the undi-

luted form, it is so strong. Let Idwal Jones, with his complete story in the next issue, "The Borjic Attar," tell you something about it. The scene is laid in the Balkans. Everybody lives practically outdoors there. They spend a lot of their time fighting. Those who don't get shot frequently live to be a hundred. And yet there they distill the finest attar of roses in the world, something, in its concentrated form, quite as precious as jewels.

You will find the names of the authors you will meet next week in the list below. We think it one of the best numbers in a long time. We hope that you will think so, too.

THE POPULAR

In the Next Issue, May 19, 1928

The Black Rider

—Novel.

ROBERT McBLAIR

The Best Traditions of the Sea

ROY NORTON

War Paint

DANE COOLIDGE

A Five-part Story—Part II.

The Borjic Attar

IDWAL JONES

A Social Knock-out

MARK REED

Flying Hoofs

CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

A Five-part Story—Part V.

Leguerre of the Lost Division

HOWARD FITZALAN

The Mercy of Kwan Yin.

A Chat with You

THE EDITOR

Other Stories by Favorite Writers.

POP—9B



Who Was It? Who Killed—

The answer to the crime puzzle! Gripping mystery, breathless suspense, the exciting sort of story that keeps you burning the midnight oil to get to the dramatic climax and learn the identity of the criminal.

The best mystery and detective stories are now obtainable in book form in substantial attractive cloth bindings, gold stamped, with good paper and large clear print; volumes that are the equal of most novels published at \$2.00. These books are known as the

Chelsea House Popular Copyrights

They are all new stories, that have never before appeared in book form—not reprints of other editions—and they sell at

75 Cents a Copy

Some of the latest Detective and Mystery stories in the CHELSEA HOUSE POPULAR COPYRIGHTS are described below.

The Tunnel to Doom

By ROY W HINDS

The only clue to the fugitive criminals was a bit of adhesive tape and it led Jim Person into a deadly trap.

Blundell's Last Guest

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

A clever mystery story of exciting suspense with a surprising and dramatic ending.

The Sleeping Cop

By ISABEL OSTRANDER and
CHRISTOPHER B. BOOTH

Patrolman Larry Moore was asleep on post when Braddigan, the political boss, was killed. So Larry set about finding the murderer.

Hidden Out

By HOWARD FIELDING

One of the oddest mysteries that ever baffled a police department was furnished by the elusive Captain Reddy and his accomplice.

THERE ARE ALSO WESTERN, ADVENTURE, AND LOVE STORIES—ALL THE MOST POPULAR TYPES OF FICTION—INCLUDED IN CHELSEA HOUSE POPULAR COPYRIGHTS. WRITE FOR A COMPLETE LIST OR ASK YOUR BOOK-SELLER.

The House of Disappearances

By CHESTER K. STEELE

One person after another vanished from the uncanny old house. A grim crime puzzle to sit up o' nights over.

Alias the Thunderbolt

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

How John Flatchley, alias the Thunderbolt, restored ill-gotten wealth by playing nocturnal bandit.

The Thunderbolt's Jest

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

More of the engaging adventures of John Flatchley and his man Saggs in squaring a crooked account.

The White Rook

By HUGH McNAIR KAHLER

The checkered career of a master cracksman who makes a laughingstock of the police.

CHELSEA HOUSE, Publishers, 79 Seventh Ave., New York



'How do you like these new Chesterfield advertisements? '

"All right . . . but they couldn't be as good as the cigarette itself!"



THEY'RE MILD
and yet **THEY SATISFY**

©1928, LIGGETT & MYERS TOBACCO CO.