

SECOND DEC. NUMBER

NOV. 20, 1928

The Popular

MAGAZINE

20¢
25¢ IN CANADA



THE AUTHORS OF THE HOUR

Thomas Boyd • Robert McBlair • Fred MacIsaac

William Morrow • William Morrow • William Morrow

This is a place
holder for the
inside front cover.

Learn Electricity

in Great Shops!



Not by Correspondence
All **PRACTICAL** Work at

COYNE



IN 12 WEEKS

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Learn to Earn \$200 to \$800 a Month

Why work for small pay? Why make \$25.00 or \$30.00 or even \$40.00 a week in a hard job doing dirty, disagreeable work, and never sure of your job? As a **TRAINED ELECTRICAL EXPERT** you can command \$200.00 to \$800.00 a month. You will do pleasant work, and many jobs give you an opportunity to travel. Advancement will be quick—steady work the year around. **YOUR SERVICES WILL ALWAYS BE IN DEMAND** any place, or you can own your own business.

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My Employment Department will assist you in securing a part time job to earn living expenses while training, and will assist you to a big pay job on graduation and any time thereafter for life.

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Chicago, Illinois

Dear Sir—Please send me absolutely **FREE** your big new book and full particulars of your special offer of two extra courses **FREE**

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Name _____
Address _____
Town _____
State _____



"I'm Going to Raise His Salary"

"I've had my eye on him for some time and I know he can handle bigger work. He studies those I. C. S. textbooks every chance he gets, and I want to tell you it has made him a valuable man for this business. I'm going to raise his salary and give him that new job we were talking about. I wish we had more men like him."

How do you stand when your employer checks up his men for promotion? Does he pass you by as just a routine worker, or does he think of you as a man who is ambitious to get ahead? Won't you be far more likely to get the promotion if he knows you are studying at home and are really preparing yourself to handle bigger work?

Every mail brings letters from students of the International Correspondence Schools telling of increases in salary due to spare-time study.

"At the time I started my I. C. S. course I was working in a paper mill," writes A. J. Hutchins, Chief Draftsman of the American Strawboard Co.

"Before I had completed the course I was called upon to make drawings in one of the company's largest mills and was appointed Superintendent of Construction at a 300 per cent increase in salary."

Jesse G. Vincent was a toolmaker before he enrolled with the I. C. S. He is now Vice-president of the Packard Motor Car Company. Walter Chrysler, President of the Chrysler Motor Corporation, is also a former I. C. S. student.

An I. C. S. course enabled Fred W. Southworth to leave a poorly paying job that he had held for twenty years and get a position as a salesman. In six months he also had increased his salary more than 300 per cent.

George A. Griebel was a stone cutter earning \$15 a week when he enrolled with the I. C. S. He now has his own engineering business in Cleveland and his income is "between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a year."

If the I. C. S. can help these men to get out of

the rut and make good, it can help you too. If it can raise the salaries of other men, it can raise yours! At least find out how.

Mail the Coupon for Free Booklet

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

"The Universal University"
Box 4903, Scranton, Penna.

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

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Name.....

Street Address.....

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

Occupation.....

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

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

On sale the 7th and 20th of each month

IN THIS ISSUE

We ask you to be sure to read

SOUNDS OUT OF DARKNESS JOHN L. ABATES A FLOOD
TOO MANY GOLCONDAS

And we would be glad to know how you liked them.

Volume XCIV

Number 1

TWICE-A-MONTH
The Popular
Magazine

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FREE ON COUPON—on E-ANGLE SCREWDRIVER—Of tempered crucible Spring steel, it has 7 powerful driving edges for large and small screws and 101 other uses—works under obstructions where others won't. Carries like small pocket knife—often more valuable.

Also **FREE**—the "55,000" Circular—giving amazing 125-Picture story of **R**



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All In One



Speed VISE
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 Plus!

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(Say "Eye-fel-Flash") "The T. N. T. of Tools"

You get the amazingly Quicker, Better, Easier, Universal Tool Service of Nos. 1, 2 & 3—Convertible in 1/5 second—in the new 24-Ounce Master Tool Kit—for the Price of One Good Tool; yet it Does the Work of the best other tools Weighing 60 Pounds and Costing \$50.00! It is incomparably Superior!

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A Great Fall and Winter Money-Maker

for Plierench Factory Rep'r—Full or Part Time. Amazing Plierench Demonstrtn. sells at sight—makes \$75 to \$200 Weekly all year 'round. Holiday-Gift Sales Double Prof- its—Ga. Rep'r. made \$97.50 in 20-Minute Group Sale. Mich. Rep'r. made \$368.50 in 12 Days. L. M. E. made \$379.00 in One Week!

MAIL the Valuable Coupon above—NOW!



Most wonderful new Banjo Uke and big up-to-date phonograph. Either one given for selling 15 boxes famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE at 25c each (beautiful art picture FREE with each box) and remitting as per plan in catalog. Send no money, we trust you. Write quick. Our 32nd year. We are reliable. Be first in your town. **THE WILSON CHEMICAL CO.** Dept. 75M TYRONE, PA.

Most Amazing INVENTION in 25 years "Cleans Up" for Agents

FREE MACHINE FOR AGENTS

\$90 WEEKLY IN SPARE TIME!



Men, here is a wonder—the most sensational invention of the age! If you're looking for a rapid fire seller—an item that nets you 100% profit—an item that sells itself to 7 out of 10 men on demonstration—I've got it in Ve-Po-Ad, the amazing new vest pocket adding machine!

Sells for \$2.95—You Make \$1.65

This most remarkable invention does all the work of a \$300 adding machine, yet fits the vest pocket and sells for only \$2.95! It sells on sight to storekeepers, business men, and everyone who uses figures—and makes you over 100% profit on every sale! Ve-Po-Ad does any kind of figuring in a jiffy, yet weighs but 4 oz. Counts up to a billion. Shows total visible at all times. Perfectly accurate, lightning fast. Never makes a mistake or gets out of order. Over 100,000 in daily use!

Get Your Machine FREE

Live wire salesmen are dropping everything else and flocking to Ve-Po-Ad. Ve-Po-Ad brings them quick money and lots of it. Shapiro out in California made \$475 in one week! You can "clean up" too! Only 10 sales a day in spare time will bring YOU over \$95.00 a week! You need no previous sales experience—Ve-Po-Ad sells itself! If you are really interested in earning a truly substantial income, write at once for full details of my MONEY-MAKING PLAN and FREE VE-PO-AD given to new Agents. Do it NOW—TODAY!

**C. M. CLEARY, Dept. 578
 173 W. MADISON ST. CHICAGO, ILL.**

Bladder Weakness

If Bladder Weakness, Getting Up Nights, Backache, Burning or Itching Sensation, leg or groin pains make you feel old, tired, pepleless, and worn out why not make the **Cystex 48 Hour Test?** Don't give up. Get **Cystex** today at any drug store. Put it to a 48 hour test. Money back if you don't soon feel like new, full of pep, sleep well, with pains alleviated. Try **Cystex** today. Only 60c.

I Want 700 Agents at \$90 a Week

Men and Women! Write me today and by this time next week I can place you in a position to make \$2.00 to \$5.00 an hour in your spare time, up to \$15 a day full time. Thousands of our representatives are making that and more with our **New Plans**. Simply introduce and take orders for famous **World's Star Hosiery**, Underwear and **Rayon** Lingerie sold direct from Mill to Home—a complete line for whole family. Permanent customers and repeat orders. No investment needed. Complete selling equipment furnished free. No C.O.D. No deposit. **Write Quick** It's a chance to make thousands of dollars. Exclusive territory. Extra Service Awards. Cash Bonus. Promotion. No experience needed. Write today for all particulars.

WORLD'S STAR KNITTING COMPANY
 Estab. 30 Yrs. 861 Lake Street Bay City, Mich.

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

2 steps AT A TIME TO success and BIG PAY IN ELECTRICITY

Join the big parade of young fellows who shook the dust of "no future" jobs off their shoes! They are making more money every year in electricity than their old jobs would have paid them in six years.

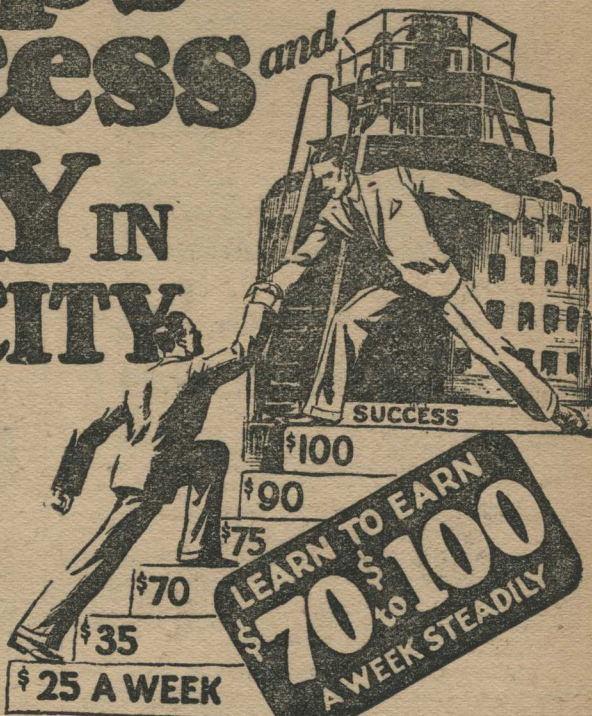
Men without much schooling who used to earn \$20 to \$25 a week have jumped right into jobs at \$50 a week and more. Many of them knock down \$75 a week in a few short months. They need never be out of jobs. Their Cooke Training is like a lifetime guarantee of steady work and real big money.

The field is wide open! It's getting bigger every day! Thousands of opportunities are waiting for men with Cooke Training in every branch of this tremendous industry. Power plants, automobile shops, radio manufacturers, service stations, railroads and hundreds of others are searching constantly for men who have had training in electricity. They are willing to pay for these men—and pay big.

You will be amazed when you see how quickly you can qualify for one of these big jobs without the loss of a single moment from your regular job. Within a short time you can change from your present job to one of your own choice in any city or town you wish to live.

No matter what kind of work you are now doing, give Cooke Training a chance to do for you what it has done for thousands of others—change the entire course of your life and help you take *two steps at a time* to success, to big pay and greater independence.

A few weeks after you start you are ready to do



odd electrical jobs in your own neighborhood that ought to pay you up to \$30 a week extra. Hundreds of my students are doing this now. I furnish you free of any extra expense Six Big Outfits of Tools and Apparatus to work with.

DO YOU EARN LESS THAN \$70 A WEEK—THEN INVESTIGATE

Your name and address will bring you a free book, telling all about the great electrical industry, complete details of Cooke Training, the small monthly payment plan and the money-back agreement. You will enjoy reading this book—it is free—send for it now!

L. L. COOKE, Chief Instruction Engineer

MAIL COUPON NOW FOR FREE COPY OF THIS BOOK

L. L. Cooke, Chief Instruction Engineer,
L. L. Cooke School of Electricity,
Dept. 578, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

I would like to know more about electricity. Without obligating me in any way, send me "Secrets of Success" and details of your training.

Name

Address

City State

(Residents of Canada send coupon to R. A. Farrow,
Special Representative, 7 Medbury Lane, East, Windsor,
Ontario, Canada.)

**THIS COUPON WILL BRING TO
YOU THE SECRETS OF SUCCESS FREE
IN ELECTRICITY MAIL IT NOW!**

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements



Do You Want Pep, Punch and Power?

WITHIN every man are oceans of power floating aimlessly around. Tons of energy lying asleep. Gather these forces together and utilize them. I will show you how. I will convert those inert muscles into fighting machines.

Within 90 Days I Will Make You a Miracle of Muscle

I will give you nerves of steel and husky shapely muscles as strong as iron and as pliant as a whip. You must realize that nowadays men win their jobs by the spread of their shoulders and the trimness of their waistline. Those are the vital men. Let me show you how it is done. I guarantee to put inches on your chest and give you a man-sized arm.

A Purely Personal Course

My course is a purely personal one. Every pupil is separately and confidentially taken care of. YOUR COURSE IS LAID OUT TO SUIT YOUR SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS AND YOURS ONLY. You are trained on the basis of

The Twelve Principles of Life

No other course teaches them. Each week every Jowett pupil gets a separate course dealing with one of the TWELVE PRINCIPLES OF LIFE along with a new order of exercise. This course has won the indorsement of the world's leading authorities. THAT IS WHY I CAN SATISFY YOU. With each enrolment is given

A Pair of the Jowett Grip Disk Dumbbells

They are an unequaled form of apparatus for body building. Can be used by anyone. The strong and the weak alike. I stand behind them with my guarantee that they are the best in the world for CREATING HEALTH and BUILDING MUSCLE.

Send for My Free Booklet

This booklet explains all about the JOWETT SYSTEM OF HEALTH AND MUSCLE BUILDING. Beautifully illustrated, it is an example of my course which is the finest and most elaborate ever produced.

DON'T WAIT FOR TOMORROW. FILL IN THE COUPON AND MAIL IMMEDIATELY.

THE JOWETT INSTITUTE OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

Dept. 14-L, 422 Poplar St., Scranton, Pa.

Dear Mr. Jowett:

Please send me your free booklet explaining the Jowett System of Health and Muscle Building.

Name.....

Street.....

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

Bald Men Look!

FREE



One Full Ampoule of my amazing hair fluid which I discovered myself and which grew hair on my head. This ampoule is absolutely free. Don't send any money. There is No C. O. D. No charge whatsoever. All I want is an opportunity to show you how easily I grew hair on my own and hundreds of other men's heads.

Here is How I Looked When I was Bald



I was just as bald as this photo shows — But I grew my own hair with my wonderful fluid. I can grow your hair, too.

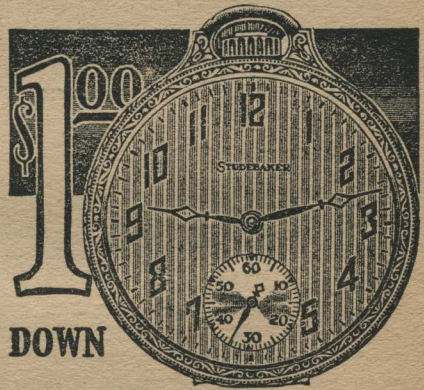
Bald Men Grow Hair! Quick!

What I accomplished on my own head and other heads I can do for you, provided you are under 45 years of age and loss of hair was not caused by burns or scars. Anyhow, I must succeed or you pay nothing. No apparatus. My home treatment is simple, quick, inexpensive.

WRITE FOR FREE AMPOULE

Write today. I will send you immediately, one full ampoule of my marvelous fluid which I discovered, of which I hold the secret and which grew my own hair on my own bald head. Besides the Free Ampoule of Fluid, I will send photographs, names and addresses of men and women who successfully used my Wonder Fluid for Dandruff, Falling Hair and particularly for Baldness. Write for free Ampoule.

VREELANDS — 27-78 EUCLID-WINDSOR BLDG., CLEVELAND, OHIO



DOWN

Brings a 21 JEWEL-Extra Thin STUDEBAKER

Just \$1.00. The balance in easy monthly payments. You get this famous Studebaker 21-Jewel Watch direct from factory at a saving of thirty to fifty per cent.

Your choice of 80 new Art Beauty cases and dials. Latest designs in white gold, yellow gold and green gold effects. Adjustments, including heat, cold, isochronism and five positions. Insured for a lifetime. Ladies' Bracelet Watches. Men's Strap Watches. Diamonds and Jewelry, too. All sold on easy monthly payments. Your credit is good! Write today for free book of Advance Watch Styles or Jewelry Catalog.

Watch Chain FREE! For a limited time we are offering a beautiful Watch Chain free. This special offer will be sent to anyone who writes at once. Don't delay! Get this free chain offer today — while it lasts.

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Directed by the Studebaker Family—known for three-quarters of a century of fine dealing
Dept. P908 South Bend, Indiana
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LONG HOURS

LOW PAY



Human cogs in a great machine. No chance to meet people, travel, or have interesting experiences. A long, slow, tiresome road that leads nowhere.



The Time Clock—a badge of hawk-like supervision and The Rut. A constant reminder that one is "just another name on the pay-roll."



Always worrying over money. Always skimping and economizing—going without the comforts and luxuries that every man DESERVES for his family and himself.



Always wondering what would happen in case of a "lay-off" or loss of job. No chance to express ideas and ability—no chance to get ahead. COULD there be a way out?

I Said "Good-bye" to It All After Reading This Amazing Book— Raised My Pay 700%!



Where Shall We Send Your Copy—Free?

WHEN a man who has been struggling along at a low-pay job suddenly steps out and commences to earn real money—\$5000, \$7500, or \$10,000 a year—he usually gives his friends quite a shock. It's hard for them to believe he is the same man they used to know . . . but such things happen much more frequently than most people realize. Not only one, but HUNDREDS have altered the whole course of their lives after reading the amazing book illustrated at the right.

True, it is only a book—just seven ounces of paper and printer's ink—but it contains the most vivid and inspiring message that any ambitious man can read! It reveals facts and secrets that will open almost any man's eyes to things he has never even dreamed of!

Remarkable Salary Increases

For example, R. B. Hansen of Akron, Ohio, is just one case. Not long ago he was a foreman in the rubber-curing room of a big factory at a salary of \$180 a month. One day this remarkable volume, "Modern Salesmanship," fell into his hands. And from that day on, Mr. Hansen clearly saw the way to say "good-bye" forever to low pay, long hours, and tiresome routine! Today he has reaped the rewards that this little volume placed within his reach. His salary runs well into the 5-figure class—actually exceeding \$10,000 a year!

Another man, Wm. Shore of Neenach,

California, was a cowboy when he sent for "Modern Salesmanship." Now he is a star salesman making as high as \$525 in a single week. O. D. Oliver of Norman, Oklahoma, read it and jumped from \$200 a month to over \$10,000 a year! C. V. Champion of Danville, Illinois, raised his salary to over \$10,000 a year and became President of his company in the bargain!

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about any of these men when they started. None of them had any special advantages—although all of them realized that SALESMANSHIP offers bigger rewards than any other profession under the sun. But, like many other men, they subscribed to the foolish belief that successful salesmen are born with some sort of "magic gift." "Modern Salesmanship" showed them that nothing could be farther from the truth! Salesmanship is just like any other profession. It has certain fundamental rules and laws—laws that you can master as easily as you learned the alphabet.

City and traveling sales positions are open in every line all over the country. For years, thousands of leading firms have called on the N. S. T. A. to supply them with salesmen. Employment service is free to both employers and members, and thousands have secured positions this way.

FREE TO EVERY MAN

See for yourself WHY "Modern Salesmanship" has been the deciding factor in the careers of so many men who are now making \$10,000 a year. Learn for yourself the REAL TRUTH about the art of selling! You do not risk one penny or incur the slightest obligation. And since it may mean the turning point of your whole career, it certainly is worth your time to fill out and clip the blank below. Send it now!

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION

Dept. S-581

N. S. T. A. Bldg.

Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Assn.,
Dept. S-581, N. S. T. A. Bldg.,
Chicago, Ill.

Without cost or obligation, you may send me your free book, "Modern Salesmanship."

Name.....

Address.....

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

Age.....Occupation.....

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

New Discovery "No-Frost" Offers \$15 a Day PROFIT!



Here's an absolutely new money-making idea. Brings big profits—easy profits—quick profits. You can make \$50 a week in spare time—\$100 a week in full time—helping me handle orders in your territory for No-Frost. No-Frost is a new scientific preparation that is absolutely guaranteed to keep steam, frost, fog, rain, sleet, mist, and snow off auto windshields, windows, eyeglasses. Think of it! Keeps glass clean, bright and clear in all kinds of weather.

Anyone, Anywhere, Can Make Big Money

All you do is demonstrate to housewives, automobile owners, stores, garages, etc., and take the orders. We don't sell to dealers. All business from your locality must come through you. *You alone get the profit on every order.* Every demonstration brings you 2 to 4 orders. Just put a little No-Frost on the

glass. It doesn't show. It won't streak, smear, mar, or scratch. Yet keeps glass clean and clear as crystal. A necessity for every auto owner, storekeeper, street car conductor, locomotive engineer, housewife, and everyone who wears eyeglasses. Prevents accidents and takes the place of mechanical devices that don't work half the time.

Vaughn Clears \$125 in One Week

C. Vaughn, Ohio, cleared \$125 in one week and says he has more money and friends than ever before. Men and women everywhere are making amazing profits with No-Frost and my 350 other fast-selling products. H. Heintjes, N. J., cleared \$30 in 1 day. Mrs. K. R. Roof, S. C., made \$50 the first week in spare time. Mrs. B. L. Hodges, N. Y., averages \$18 to \$20 a day—day in and day out. H. C. Hanson jumped his pay from \$25 a week to \$75 a week—and he works only part time. You can make these big profits too.

SEND NO MONEY

Just put your name and address on the coupon. Give me a chance to *prove* that you can make \$50 to \$100 a week. You don't need capital, training, or experience. I furnish everything and tell you just what to do and say in this easy pleasant work. You don't risk a penny. Yet it's an opportunity to pocket hundreds—yes, thousands of dollars in clear cash

profits. You can make \$10 to \$20 a day—*right from the start.*

JUST MAIL COUPON

Introduce No-Frost in your territory while it's new before imitations are put on sale in the stores. Skim the rich cream off the profits. Clinch a big permanent, repeat business. Make more money than you've ever made in your life before. Get the facts and read the proof. Mail coupon to-day—**NOW!**

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co.,
661 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Without cost or obligation, send me full details about the money-making possibilities of your amazing new product NO-FROST.

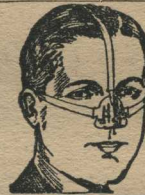
Name

Address

(Print or write plainly)

TYPEWRITERS
ALL STANDARD
10 days FREE Trial
at 1/2 PRICE
ONLY 14¢ A DAY

Underwood, Remington, Royal, etc.
All late models, completely refinished brand new. GUARANTEED for ten years. Send no money—big free catalog shows actual machines in full colors. Get our direct-to-you easy payment plan and 10 days' trial offer.
International Typewriter Ex., 186 W. Lake St., Dept. 11-Chicago, Ill.



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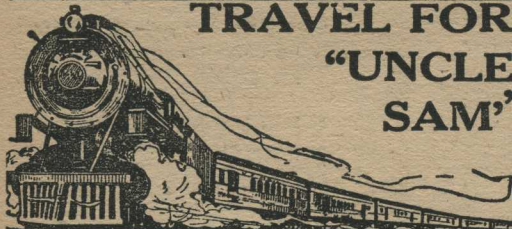
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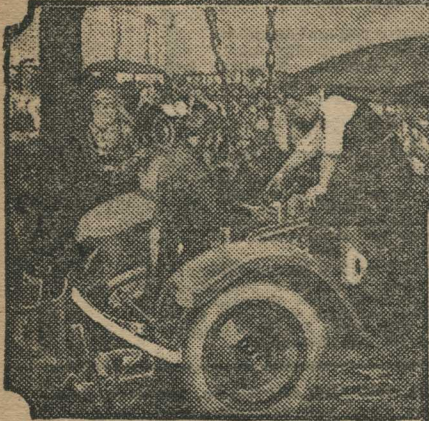
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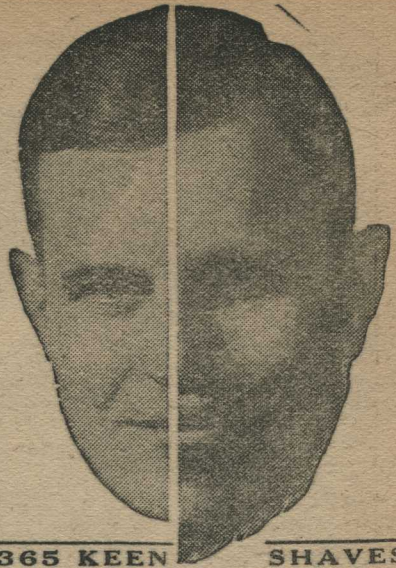
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"I want to say that KRISS-KROSS Stroppler is the best thing I ever saw. I have been using one blade continuously for one year and nine months and have no idea how much longer it will last."
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Inventor Discovers Amazing New Way to Shave! —Without Buying Blades!

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Magic Diagonal Stroke

Until you've seen KRISS-KROSS, fitted its sturdy, nickleod smoothness into the palm of your hand and tested its uncanny dexterity yourself, you never know how amazing it really is! It employs the famous diagonal stroke, same as a master barber uses. Never before has anyone captured the secret of reproducing it automatically. Eight "lucky leather grooves" do the trick in 11 seconds with a precision it takes a master barber years to attain.

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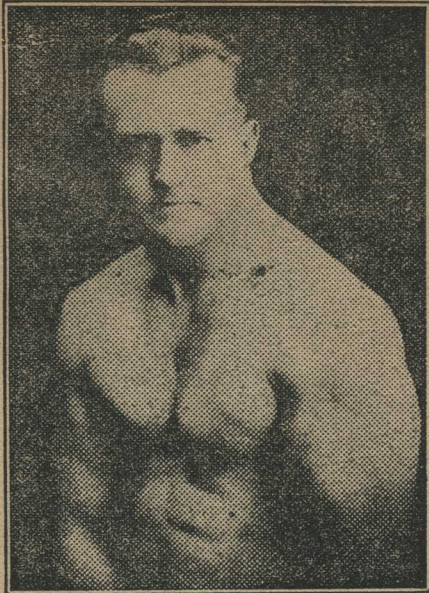
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But they don't come that easy, fellows. If you want muscle you have to work for it. That's the reason why the lazy fellow never can hope to be strong. So if you're lazy and don't want to work—you had better quit right here. This talk was never meant for you.

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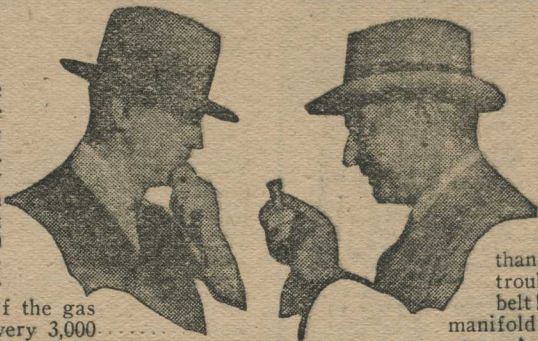
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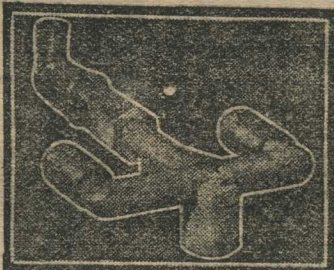
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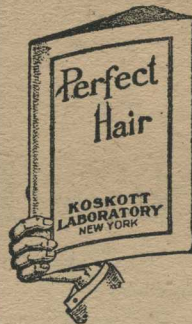
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"Don't spoil the party"

someone called when I sat down at the piano

—a moment later they
got the surprise
of their lives!



WAS just about to enter the room when I overheard Bill saying, "It'll seem like old times to have Dan with us again!" "You'd better lock the piano!" came the laughing rejoinder.

"Nonsense! He won't have the nerve to play after what happened the last time!" "That was a shabby trick. I almost wish we hadn't pulled it."

How well I knew what they were talking about!

At the last party I had attended I had sat down at the piano and in my usual "chop-stick" fashion started playing some popular numbers.

Before long, however, I had noticed an unusual stillness. I stopped playing, turned around, and saw—the room was empty!

Instead of entertaining the party, as I had fondly imagined, my halting, stumbling performance had been a nuisance.

Burning with shame and indignation I had determined to turn the tables. At last tonight, the moment had come.

Every one seemed overjoyed to see me again—obviously glad that I had evidently forgiven and forgotten last year's trick.

Suddenly I turned to Bill and said, "Hope you've had the piano tuned, old boy. I feel just in the mood."

Instantly the friendly atmosphere changed. It was amusing to see the look that spread from face to face. For a moment no one spoke. Then, just as I was sitting down at the piano, some one called:

"For heaven's sake, get away from that piano! Don't spoil the party!"

That was my cue. Instead of replying I struck the first bars of "Sundown." And how! Easily, smoothly, with all the verve and expression I had always longed for!

I Fool My Friends

The guests gasped with amazement. Fascinated, scarcely believing their ears, they drew nearer. When I finished they loudly clamored for more. Time and again, when I would have stopped, they eagerly insisted on "Just one more, please!"

When they finally allowed me to leave the piano I turned around and said:

"Just a moment, folks! I want to thank you for

what you did for me last year!"

The eager, laughing faces turned red with embarrassment. One or two of the boys murmured an apology. Seeing their confusion, I continued:

"I mean it! If you hadn't opened my eyes, I'd still be a dub at playing. I went home mighty angry that night. I'll admit. But it taught me a lesson. And believe me, folks, when I think of the real pleasure I get out of playing now, I'm only sorry you didn't pull that trick sooner!"

Before letting me go home that night Bill demanded "How did you do it?"

I laughed. "Why, I just took advantage of a new way to learn music, that's all!"

"What! Didn't you take lessons from a teacher?"

"No! I taught myself! When that trick showed me up last year, I sent to the U. S. School of Music for one of their free demonstration lessons. Well, it proved to be so much easier than I had hoped for, that I sent for the complete course. And believe me, I'm mighty glad I did! There wasn't any expensive private teacher to pay—and since the lessons came by mail, I didn't have to set aside valuable hours to study. I practiced only in my spare time, a few minutes a day. And the course is thorough! Why, almost before I knew it, I could play anything—ballads, rhapsodies, waltzes, jazz!"

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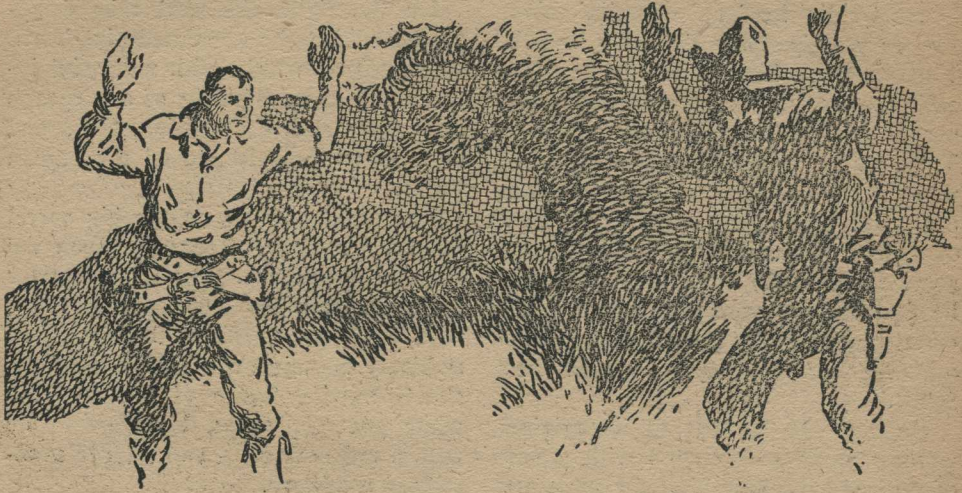
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RED JUSTICE

by Robert M^cBlair

Who wrote "The Silver Spoon."

A redhead, he loved a scrap—just for the hell of it. But there came a day when he fought for a brown-eyed girl—and then he changed into a red-haired devil, with two roaring guns—bringing red justice!

CHAPTER I.

A LOT OF MONEY.

THE small man on the big sorrel pushed the weather-worn black Stetson up from his weather-beaten brow and stared ruminatively upward into the illimitable deeps of shimmering blue. A small dark object floated far away in the thin air, like

a dead cow on the surface of an inverted ocean. Occasionally, at long intervals, it could be seen gently to agitate itself, only at once to resume its leisurely drifting. It was, of course, a buzzard.

The small cowboy on the big sorrel addressed words of wisdom to an inattentive universe.

"That there varmint," said the cow-

boy, rubbing his flat nose with a gauntleted hand, "is got more sense than all the other critters in creation. He don't put himself to no trouble a-tall. He don't do no work and he don't do no fightin'. No, suh. He lets the other folks do it. You don't never see no buzzard ridin' herd an' wrasslin' calves for no measly forty dollars a month. You don't see him fightin' among hisself, neither, like cowhands and other varmints. No, suh. He lets 'em do it. Then, by an' by, when they done wore theyselves out workin', or done kilt each other fightin', he jest draps down, kind of slow an' easylike, an' eats hisself some dinner. He don't even fly down, he jest draps, or kind of slides the easiest way. That's a buzzard for you," said the cowboy, "and I claims he's smart."

He restored his hat to its original reckless angle and ranged with a pair of popped eyes, searching for some one who might oblige by differing with his conclusions.

There was, regrettably, no one in sight. The new board and canvas boom town was behind him, a hundred yards or so away. Beside his sorrel stood a mouse-colored horse, bearing a highly ornamented saddle in the holster of which hung a Winchester with a silver-mounted walnut stock. The mouse-colored horse was wrinkling its white nose to lip the hitching bar across which its reins had been thrown, and apparently was not interested in philosophical controversy.

Immediately in front of the two horses a pair of steel rails, resting upon wooden ties which in turn rested upon a rather dubious roadbed, ran toward the left with hypnotizing exactitude, to lose themselves behind a copse of poplars just this side of the red water tank and the section house with the tar-paper roof.

A short distance beyond the rails rose up the serried and multicolored façade

of the Graveyard Buttes, this being a line of abrupt rock layers, rising into buttes against the sky line and resembling, to the imagination of a frontier town where life is brief, a substantial array of tombstones carved on a mammoth scale.

On the right, the steel rails disappeared behind the unpainted pine-board shack out of which, with mournful infrequency, came the ticks of a telegraph instrument and, on occasion, the sound of a scraping chair and of the human voice.

The small cowboy on the big sorrel fixed his attention hopefully upon the door to this shack. As if in answer to his craving for some one to argue with, the black oblong of the open door suddenly became occupied by the long, slowly moving figure of a cowboy in white goatskin chaps, black shirt and vest, a red neck cloth and a large sand-colored sombrero.

The small man on the big sorrel immediately became agitated. He leaned toward the man in the door till his saddle leather complained; his shoulders hunched excitedly, and he cried in a rasping voice which he tried at the same time to make into a shout and a whisper:

"Did you git it, 'Red'?"

The tall, rather angular young man in the doorway had drawn a packet of cigarette papers out of the breast pocket of his shirt. He moistened a forefinger and removed one of these papers from the packet, returning the packet to his pocket. He creased the paper into a V shape and held it at one end so that it became a sort of chutelike receptacle.

Then he removed a little linen bag from the same breast pocket, pulled it open with the aid of his white teeth and shook a measure of golden grains into the chute. This accomplished, he pulled the bag closed with his teeth, restored it to his pocket, rolled the chute into a cigarette, bent its end so that the

grains wouldn't spill, placed the other end in his mouth after carefully cementing the length of the white tube with spittle, and then began absent-mindedly feeling about his person in search of matches.

The small cowboy on the large sorrel had watched these movements as if he had hoped to discern in them some answer to his query. Now that they had ended, and no answer was forthcoming, he broke forth into an amazing sequence of oaths. He went into several fields of description and expletive and ended by repeating his question, revising the form of it as if that might somehow help.

"Hey, Red, damnit, did you git it, now? Did you git it?" He bent forward pleadingly.

The cowboy in the doorway found a match, flicked his thumb nail against its head and applied the spurt of blue flame to the cigarette. He threw the match on the ground where it flared in a single effort and then gave up as if realizing the hopelessness of competing with the blinding sun.

The cowboy inhaled, then emitted a thin, straggling cloud of smoke as he closed one eye and examined the position of the sun. The sun, as if retaliating, struck sparks from the butts of the two silver-mounted guns which hung low and forward at his lean thighs. It turned the ruddy mahogany of his mustache and hair to a glinting red and even picked out the stubble of beard along the clean, bony jaw. It gilded his cartridge belt.

"Did you git it, Red?" asked the man on the horse in a pleading voice. It sounded as if he might be going to weep.

The man addressed as Red came down the two wooden steps, the round-roweled spurs on his high-heeled boots making a faint metallic sound. His eyes, of a deep blue, changed from being gentle and contemplative; the red-

dish brows, sunburned to a sandy tone, met above the narrow bridge of his freckled nose as he crossed the hot, rocky soil to the hitching bar and threw the reins back over the head of the mouse-colored horse.

"You better get the boys together, 'Shorty,'" he said in a soft Southern drawl. "I want you should start back with 'em pronto."

"Did—you—git—the money?" begged Shorty.

Red stopped stroking the white nose of the mouse-colored horse, which was nuzzling his pocket. From the direction of town had come three quick revolver shots.

"Hear that?" said Red softly. "I wish you'd get them started pronto, Shorty. First thing we know, they'll start somethin' and we'll all have to hang around to get 'em out of it. And you know what I told you about what they seem to be tryin' to do to the colonel back down to the ranch. Get the boys together."

"Did you git——" Shorty began patiently.

"No," Red drawled. "It didn't come on the last train. The agent ain't here right now, but the feller inside says didn't no package come from Chicago. It'll be in on the next train, which'll be here to-morrow or next day if it ain't a day or two late, like it usually is. I'm goin' to wait for it, but I want you-all boys to get back jes' as fast as you can ride. I done told you what they're plannin' to do to the colonel back there on the ranch."

"Yeah," agreed Shorty, flinging a bowed leg over the sorrel's neck and hooking his knee over the saddle horn, "you done told me you figger they're tryin' to run the colonel out of the ranchin' business, Red, and that ain't no news, neither. Looks to me, from the way he done sent us up here with this here herd to sell, like they done already started him runnin'. He ain't

got enough cattle left down there now to pay for keepin' his hands on."

"What I want," said Red in his soft drawl, "is for you boys to git on back down to the ranch as soon as you can. The boys have had one night here, which is enough to raise all the hell that's good for 'em. The colonel and Miss Constance is down there at the ranch house damn nigh by themselves, Shorty."

"Yeah," agreed Shorty, "and soon as that train comes in, you're goin' to be in this here town of Medory with two thousand dollars in cash money on your person, as they say in the obituary notices."

"Miss Constance and the colonel is——"

"Yeah, I know all about Miss Constance and the colonel," interrupted Shorty with some heat. "I know you been workin' your fool head off, drivin' this herd up here an' back on the ranch an'——"

"That's all right, Shorty——"

"That's all right," continued Shorty in a raised voice, refusing to be interrupted; "go ahead an' worry your fool head off about the damn cows, an' see who cares. But, what I'm talkin' about is: bein' in this here cutthroat town with two thousand dollars in cash money—— Why, you damn fool, even the feller in the railway shack there knows what you're here for, don't he?"

"And tell the colonel——" Red began.

"I ain't goin' to tell the colonel nothin'!" shouted Shorty. "You can send the boys back, if you're fool enough, but I tell you right now, I'm goin' to stay up here with you an' keep one of these here sidewinders from shootin' you full of holes while you're ridin' round up here half asleep thinkin' about that there girl an' her old man! I tell you right now, Red, I ain't——"

"Hold on, there! Hold on, Shorty!"

"I ain't goin' to hold on to nothin'!"

Shorty declaimed. "Why, you poor wozzle-witted son of a sheep, don't you know this here Medory is practically owned by that there feller De Mortes? If they are tryin' to run the colonel off the range, who's doin' it if it ain't him? I ask you, who is it if it ain't De Mortes? And you think I'm goin' to leave you up here with two thousand dollars in cash money in your hip pocket, goin' round like a sleepwalker——"

"Shut up, will you?"

Red caught the cow-puncher by the arm and pulled him half out of the saddle. He transferred his grip to the rider's throat and began to squeeze his windpipe with careful enjoyment. In order to escape the rider had to fall off and roll in the dust. He rose and pulled at his shirt collar. His eyes had tears in them and he was coughing spasmodically.

"You dirty murderer," he said between coughs. "I'm goin' to tell Miss Constance the way you treat us boys."

"Shut up, Shorty, will you?" begged Red, bursting out laughing. "Come here, and listen. Damn it, you're tryin' to tell the whole world about this money, and I'm tryin' to keep it a secret."

"Didn't you say that feller in there was——"

"No, I didn't," insisted Red in a low tone, as Shorty came warily nearer. "Besides, I don't want you to be stirrin' up any bad blood against this feller De Mortes, either. That bird in the railway shack there looks like a bad actor and he's one of De Mortes' men or he wouldn't have the job he's got."

"That's jes' what I'm tellin' you, Red," Shorty said.

"I know," said Red, "but listen. I agree with you that the colonel will have to let most all the men go unless he gets some more cattle. And that's why I want you to ride south pronto, Shorty. See? I can depend on *you* to look out for things if anything happens. Now

come on. Fork that horse and round up the boys and start out right now."

Red swung up into the saddle of the mouse-colored horse and pulled on his gauntlets as Shorty swung up on the sorrel, and they rode side by side around the turn and into the dusty, white-hot road which wandered past the canvas tents, the board shacks, the single hotel and the two saloons which, taken all together, comprised the boom town of Medory.

"There's De Mortes now," said Shorty; as a tall, broad man wearing combed sealskin chaps and a yellow-silk shirt appeared upon the porch of the two-story Pyramid Park Hotel. "I swear, I bet he's behind all this trouble the colonel's been havin'."

"And there are the boys," said Red, "over there tryin' to rope the Chinaman's chickens. Start 'em right off, Shorty."

"All right," agreed Shorty. "Now you keep your eyes peeled, Red. You better let me stay here with you."

"I'll be all right," replied Red as they shook hands.

He drew up in front of the hotel and watched as the redoubtable Shorty wound his horse in and out among the riders who were galloping up and down at the far end of the town, whooping and yelling while their ropes spun here and there, at times picking up a squawking chicken and throwing it into a frenzy of wild shrieks and flying feathers.

Whatever it was that Shorty said to them, they followed him pell-mell as he quirted his horse out toward the level gray-green endless reach of prairie. Red watched as their separate entities gradually merged into an irregular cloud of gray dust and flying bodies. By this time to-morrow, he was thinking, they would be seeing Constance Ferguson. He wondered if she would be at all disappointed at finding that he was not with them.

CHAPTER II.

MEXICAN PETE.

HEY, Mr. Morgan!" Red Morgan turned from watching the disappearing riders and saw that the rancher who had bought the herd from Colonel Ferguson was crossing the road toward him. He was a big man in a black shirt, with corduroy trousers stuck into the tops of his high boots. His bronzed face was covered by a silky, black beard.

"Hey, Mr. Morgan, hop down and have a drink with me."

Red swung down and hooked the reins over the hitching rack in front of the Pyramid Park Hotel. As he did so, he felt that he was being watched; looking up he found that the big fellow in the yellow-silk shirt and sealskin chaps, who Shorty had said was De Mortes, was regarding him intently with cold gray eyes.

De Mortes, he recognized, as he returned the almost offensive stare, was the sort of man a woman might consider handsome. He was big and stalwart, with a fine head of red hair and a drooping red mustache. His heavy nose, brutal in its suggestion of strength, the sag of his ruddy cheeks, the thick cords of his neck, all gave an impression of power and animal vigor.

De Mortes turned away, lighting a cigar, before the exchange of stares had become too personal. The rancher came up to shake hands with Red and they pushed through the swinging doors to the barroom which opened on the street in the shadow of the front porch of the two-story hotel.

"I reckon the money will be in to-morrow," said the rancher, as he and Red repaired to a damp, wooden table and the bartender set a bottle and a couple of glasses down before them. "I suppose it takes longer to get things by registered express, and I wouldn't get the bank to send that much cash any other way. The cattle were in good

shape, Mr. Morgan, in spite of the long drive. I hope to make some money out of them on my new range. The only trouble with this country is, we need more law."

"Rustlers?" asked Red gently.

"Not much of that," replied the rancher, throwing down a substantial drink. "But there's not enough law. These hunters and trappers are always quarreling, for one thing. And for another"—the rancher looked around and lowered his voice—"for another, De Mortes controls the sheriff and the two judges, so an independent rancher hasn't got much chance of coming out of the long end of the horn if anything happens."

"Why don't the ranchers get together?" asked Red. "This is a new grazing country, up here in the Bad Lands, but I reckon they must be right smart of ranches stocked up around here by now, ain't they?"

"We are starting something of that kind, a movement in that direction," agreed the rancher. "But you see, our men, while they are fine fellows and brave enough, are not the ruthless sort that De Mortes has. Most of our men, those on the new ranches, are rather recently from the East. They tend toward being tenderfeet. In fact, that's why I wanted to speak to you. I think we need some of the Texas cowboys up here, to teach the others how stock should be handled. I suspect that Colonel Ferguson will be letting some of his riders go, the way he is selling out his stock, and I was wondering if some of the men who came up the trail with you wouldn't be willing to take a job up this way."

"The trouble is," drawled Red, "I've sent 'em on back."

"All of them?" exclaimed the rancher.

"Yep. They'll pick up the cook and go on back as soon as they can. That's what I told 'em."

The rancher once more looked over his shoulder.

"I haven't told any one, of course, Mr. Morgan, that you are getting paid for this herd in cash as the colonel requested in his letters to me. But I was coming by the station a few minutes ago and the man there asked me if you were going to get two thousand dollars in cash from me. Did you tell him?"

"I reckon he might've overheard me talkin'," said Red. "Me and Shorty was up that a way, and we was talkin'."

The rancher looked worried.

"I'll meet you at the railroad station to-morrow evening at train time," he said, "and turn the money over to you as soon as it arrives. You can start right out for the ranch. I wish I had asked you not to let your men go back until you were ready to go with them."

"Oh, I reckon I can get along all right," said Red.

"I think you can if anybody can, from what I've heard," agreed the rancher, laughing in nervous relief. "I just meant that this crowd around here —" He waved a hand expressively, laughed again, and got up. "Well, Mr. Morgan; see you to-morrow."

The rancher walked a few steps and then came back.

"'Mexican Pete' just came in the back door and took a good look at you," he said, leaning over Red's table. "He's one of De Mortes' cat's-paws. Please be careful, Morgan."

"I'll be careful as a weasel," laughed Red, and the rancher went out.

Red strolled outside presently and looked the town over. At the store run by a gentleman named Moe he purchased a money belt. Returning to the hotel he signed up for a bed in the dormitory upstairs, rode his horse around to the livery stable, came back to the hotel for dinner and went to bed early, to dream of Constance Ferguson and to wonder—as he had a habit of wondering—whether she was really aware of

the fact that he even existed. She knew he was a cowhand on her father's ranch; but did she know that he was a human being, as well?

After breakfast in the hotel dining room the next morning, Red went out to the stable and saddled his horse. He was only going up to the railroad station; the walk to the stable was as far as that, but, like most cowboys, he would walk a mile for a horse in order to be able to ride half a mile. It did not comport with his ideas of dignity and human propriety to cover the face of the earth on foot.

There was no report as to whether the train was to be on time, so Red rode back and lounged around the bar-room. He was interested in observing the different sets of men who inhabited this mushroom railroad town which De Mortes was still trying to make into a metropolis, in spite of the fact that he had lost a fortune already in bad investments to that end.

Some of the men wore the mackinaw coats and the spiked shoes of the lumbermen; they were engaged in cutting timber up the river to be floated down and made into crossties.

Others wore the buckskin suits and fringed leggings of the hunter; these wore moccasins, too, and caps of coon-skin, otter or beaver, and it seemed to be the fashion among them to let their hair grow long. One or two Sioux Indians passed by and there was an occasional cowboy riding in for mail or supplies from some outlying ranch house.

The bartender at the Pyramid Park Hotel was a pink-faced, genial soul, and Red did not find the time hanging too heavy on his hands between breakfast and—after the evening meal—the arrival of the train which, for some reason no one was able to explain, was only two hours late.

The whole town was up at the station to see the train pull in. The rancher

was there. He got the station agent to let him have the insured, registered express package as soon as it was put off the train. He and Red went behind the station and counted the crisp, green bills; Red handed over his receipt for the payment and the two men shook hands.

"You are pulling right out, I expect?" said the rancher.

"I got my canteen filled and my guns oiled," replied Red, grinning at the other's anxiety, "and I'm hittin' the trail south as soon as I can git on that there mouse-colored cayuse. I don't aim to bed down till this here filthy lucre is turned over to the colonel. I ain't tryin' to dodge a fracas, but the colonel needs this money bad, an' I ain't aimin' to lose it for him."

"Good luck," said the rancher.

Red dragged his high heels out from behind the shack and made his way to the mouse-colored horse, which he mounted and turned toward the town. The horse seemed to know that it was heading homeward; it stepped along eagerly through the throng and broke into a canter as soon as the open way through the settlement was reached.

Red kept an eye out for any sign that any one had noticed him and the rancher, or that anybody was following him. He saw nothing suspicious, however, until he had gotten past the Pyramid Park Hotel. Then, out of a black shadow beyond a clump of poplars near a canvas tent, two riders galloped off into the darkness.

Red pulled up and listened. Their hoofbeats at first went west, but after a few minutes he could tell that they had headed south.

Ordinarily he would have given this not even a second thought. In the country he had been brought up in, people, when they traveled at all, traveled on horseback. There would be nothing suspicious in two men starting out suddenly to ride across the prairie.

But to-night, in view of what he was carrying in his money belt, and in view of the rancher's warning, he recognized that these two might well be going on ahead to advise some bushwhackers that he had started south; or they might have been quirting their horses in order to establish a little ambush of their own, possibly where the trail crossed the deep channel of the creek, before he got there.

"I reckon I better outsmart 'em, if that's the game," he said to himself, and he turned the horse back to the hotel. "I'll go in the barroom, and let 'em see me, an' say I'm goin' upstairs to bed and start out in the mornin'. Then, when I come out to put my horse up, I'll keep on goin', an' I won't cross the creek where the trail hits it, neither."

He put this strategy into effect by tying his broncho in front of the hotel and going into the barroom under the porch. A dark-visaged man, with oily, straight, black hair and long black mustache, fell back from the door as he entered, and went behind the bar, from where he welcomed the new customer with a yellow-fanged grin.

"Where's Joe?" asked Red Morgan, hanging a heel on the bar's rail. "Quit for the day?"

"Oh, Joe's seeck," answered the bartender, blinking his bright shoe-button eyes. "You have a dreenk on the house, yes?"

"Reckon I might as well," said Red, putting his hands high over his head in a yawn. "Make me sleep better. I got to start out early in the mornin' on a long ride, and I'm goin' to bed early."

"Got some good dreenk to-day," said the oily bartender, disappearing under the bar, "new from Chicago. I take one, too. Make me sleep good, too. I wish you sound sleep, meester."

Red poured a liberal drink from the black bottle and tossed it off while the bartender, before lifting his glass,

opened the glass case and drew forth a box of cigars.

"Ceegar, meester?"

"Thanks," said Red, "I'll smoke a cigarette."

He smiled inwardly as he rolled a cigarette. The man was overdoing it; any fool could see that this was too much friendliness by half.

"I'm sleepy already," said Red. "Got to put my horse in the stable, or I'd go up to bed right now."

He found that he was indeed sleepy. His own words, he thought, in drowsy amusement as he felt himself for matches, had begun to work on him. A kind of self-hypnotism, he reckoned. His finger tips, feeling in his pants pockets for matches, seemed made of wood; they had no sense of touch and this, somehow, amused him.

"A match, meester?"

"I—reckon—I done made myself—sleepy," said Red.

The man behind the bar had lit a match. Red put his hands carefully on the bar and leaned forward. The match blaze was hard to find, because it had grown so large and so bright. Its light was bigger than a man's head; behind it the figure of the bartender had vanished, all but a pair of eyes and a yellow row of teeth, which seemed to enlarge and shrink, like images seen through water, and to waver as if they were the figments of a dream. Everything else, except the blazing light of the match, seemed as black as night, as black as the depths of sleep.

"Sleepy," said Red. He was somehow aware that his voice had a dreary sound; it seemed, too, to come from some vast distance. It was as if some one else had shouted the word "sleepy" from the other side of the valley. Red tried to say it again, say it properly. Something in the back of his mind at the same time was trying to remind him of something. He couldn't think what it was, but he knew it had some-

thing to do with the horse tied outside, something to do with riding.

"Sleepy," he said again; and he realized dreamily this time that he had made no sound at all. His hands on the bar felt nothing. The floor of the barroom was beginning to rise and sway, as if the earth were convulsed. He had to give up trying to remember that something which was pressing itself upon his attention from the back of his mind. He had all he could do to keep his feet in this blackness which was coming down over the earth.

"Sleepy," he said to himself.

It was pleasant to let go, to fall, fall forever into the soft blackness which was rocking him gently to sleep.

When he lay on his back on the floor, his sand-colored sombrero rested against the sawdust spittoon, the lamp-light made little white half moons of the white of his upturned eyes. His red hair, his sunburned red mustache and brows had a brownish look in the smoky lamplight. His lips and his eyelids were faintly purple. But his white teeth showed in a faint smile, as if it had indeed been pleasant to let go and fall into the endless soft blackness in which he and the world were being rocked gently to sleep.

CHAPTER III.

ROBBED.

RED became gradually aware that his head was splitting. He opened his eyes experimentally; then shut them against the blinding glare that cut like a hot knife through the nerves of his forehead and down the back of his neck. He moved his head gently and an agonizing pain went through his temples. He lay perfectly still and tried to remember.

Vaguely, in a crazy pattern, the dreams he had been dreaming mixed themselves with the things he believed he had experienced. His dreams had

been at first among the bright days of boyhood on a Texas ranch. They had included adolescent flirtations or infatuations; but, curiously, in each of these the girl had deep brown eyes and chestnut hair, like Constance Ferguson. His dreams had flitted over the death of his father and mother, had taken him on his migrations as a cowboy from ranch to ranch, looking for change and adventure.

Through the scenes of these migrations would shine now and again the glare of a match, bigger than a man's head; and now and again the shine of a row of yellow fangs, the scent of an onion-smelled breath, the glitter of bright, beady black eyes would make his dream a nightmare.

And throughout the dream, like a ghost awaiting to be recognized, had stood in the back of his mind the realization that he was neglecting something important; something that had to do with riding a mouse-colored horse; something that had to do with the deep brown eyes of Constance Ferguson; something that had to do with a belt — Yes, that was it! A money belt!

Red Morgan raised himself suddenly on an elbow. He remembered now—he had to get on his horse quickly and take the two thousand dollars down to Colonel Ferguson.

The splitting pain in his head blinded him for a moment; or perhaps it was the glare of the sun. Sunlight was falling through the high window cut in the side of the unpainted board wall. Carefully, like a man afraid to trust his neck, Red Morgan turned his curly red head. His deep-blue eyes traversed the row of cots, then the opposite row, making a long line of crossed wooden legs topped by blankets, like some curious centipede. He put a slender hand up to his head; felt the stubble of beard on his cheek.

"But I shaved this mornin'!" he exclaimed.

He swung his spurred boots to the floor and sat up on the cot. His gaunt face, with its clean line of jaw and sharply defined narrow nose and high cheek bones looked now like the face of a man severely ill. The freckles stood out brown and distinct against his pallor. His short, red mustache and his red hair glittered with a conspicuous seeming of life against the sagging pallor of his cheeks, the down drooping of his strong mouth. His sick face was in contrast to the muscular power of the broad shoulders under the black shirt and vest, still dusty from yesterday's ride. He gripped the cot.

"Hold on, Red," he said softly. "What's all this about?" He stared at the angle of the sun on the floor. The day was past noon.

Then, as if catapulted upward by some invisible force, the cowboy sprang to his feet, and stood there swaying.

"I remember now!" he said.

He looked down. The front of his black shirt was open where it entered his trousers. He ran his hand inside and down below his belt.

Then he stood there perfectly still, his shirt open a bit, his blue eyes narrowed and staring as if he were trying to believe the unbelievable; as if he were trying to distinguish the nightmare of real life from the nightmare of a dream. Presently his lips moved.

"They got it," he said in an awed whisper.

Slowly, carefully, as if to know the worst, he examined himself all over. Apparently the money belt alone was gone. The two guns hung undisturbed in their holsters at his thighs. He pulled them out and examined them. They were loaded and unharmed. His cartridge belt, his red neckerchief, even the tobacco and papers in his breast pocket, were untouched. A couple of coins remained as he had left them in his trousers pocket.

His goatskin chaps of white touched

with black had not been removed when they had brought him up to the dormitory from the barroom below. They had even taken the trouble to bring his sand-colored sombrero up and hang it on a nail on the wall.

He reached for the hat and pulled it on. His balance was uncertain as he walked along the aisle between the cots and descended the stairs to the hotel lobby. His spurs jingled softly as he stopped at the desk.

"Is Mr. de Mortes here?" he asked. "I'd like to speak to him."

"No," said the clerk, staring. "He went off last night; I don't know where. Anything I can do?" He was evidently concerned about this guest's appearance, but he knew better than to ask questions in that country.

Red Morgan went out of the front door and down the wooden steps to the street. He had not answered the clerk. He had no room in his mind for trivial questions and answers. His entire will was concentrated upon remembering the location of the butts of his pistols, in reminding his muscles that they must obey him when he called upon them. He was at some pains, too, to keep his wabbling legs in line as he turned to the right and went through the swinging doors to the barroom that nestled under the hotel porch.

It was a relief to his eyes to come into the cool semidarkness of the bar after the merciless glare of the street. He stood at the door and surveyed the room. Two hunters or trappers sat at a table, drinking. A lone lumberjack leaned against the far end of the bar. The long room with its score of tables was otherwise untenanted.

But as Red Morgan looked on, steadying himself, each thumb hitched onto his cartridge belt so that his slender fingers were within an inch or so of his guns—as he stood there, the door beyond the bar swung open and the bartender came in, carrying a case of liquor.

Red Morgan swayed toward the bar. He swayed, but he was in balance; some inner guide kept him poised and ready despite his swaying.

The bartender had been bowed over with his load. He disappeared entirely as he deposited it behind the bar. When he came up into sight, he started backward at the gaunt, white face that leaned across the bar toward him.

"I thought you was sick," said the owner of the gaunt face.

"Me?" exclaimed the bartender. It was the red-faced, genial man with whom Red had chatted the day before. "Hell, no, I ain't been sick. The boss sent me up to the station at train time last night to take off a shipment of liquor. Mexican Pete had the bar while I was gone. Did he tell you I was sick?"

"Is that his name?" asked Red Morgan. "Who did you say sent you up to the station?"

"Why, the boss. De Mortes. He owns the hotel, you know, Red. Why, what's the matter? Say, you look sick, feller."

"Where is Mexican Pete?" asked Red Morgan in his gentle drawl. "Where is De Mortes?"

"They done gone off somewhere."

"Where?" demanded Red Morgan.

"They rode south," said the bartender. "Pulled out last night. I don't know where they went, exactly, Red. De Mortes has got business all over, you know; he's always going off somewhere. Why, what's the matter, Red? Say, feller, you look sick. Anything I can do?"

Red Morgan turned from the bar and swayed to the street. The blinding sunlight seared his temples with hot irons of pain. His mouth was dry and hot. Across the valley the painted contortions of buttes rose and danced in nightmare craziness through the waves of heat. A green trail of cottonwoods threaded the dust-gray plain, following

the river bed. His mouse-colored horse was no longer by the hitching rack.

Despite the pain, despite the heat, Red Morgan found his brain working with amazing clearness. He turned to the left and walked like a drunken man along the dusty road that wandered between the two opposing rows of board shacks and canvas tents.

He pressed on to the livery stable where, as he expected, he found his saddle hanging and his horse stalled. It was one thing to steal money, another to steal a horse. He saddled the broncho, swung up dizzily and turned the horse's head south.

"They've gone down to the Ferguson ranch, Mice," said Red Morgan, addressing his horse, which pricked its pointed ears backward to listen. "I bet it's like Shorty said; I bet that feller De Mortes is behind this business of tryin' to run the colonel off the range. Mebbe so, mebbe not. Anyway, that black-eyed buzzard, Mexican Pete, is headed south, and so is you and me. I—I wish this here head of mine—would quit—achin'."

The smart little pony slackened its pace to accommodate itself to the weak swaying of the lean man in the saddle. Red was slumped forward over the pommel, his face in the horse's mane as they reached the creek, which the horse forded intelligently, but near the opposite bank stopped to drink.

The forward inclination of the horse's head disturbed the slack rider's balance. The horse stepped uneasily and quickly sidewise as he felt the burden in the saddle slip. His movement accelerated the falling object's speed. The next moment the mouse-colored broncho had scrambled out of the water. Its nostrils were dilated, its eyes were wide. It swung its white nose down and snuffled at the lean figure in the black shirt and vest, whose legs and body were covered by the warm shallow water and whose red head lay against the clay bank.

The horse lifted its head and looked around. It could see above the bank, but on either side of the river there was no one in sight along the trail. The hot sun beat mercilessly down upon the dust-gray scene. Far away the colored buttes danced crazily in the heat waves.

The sky was cloudless, a shimmering pale expanse of empty radiance. Only one object disturbed the smooth pale-blue purity of the sky and this object was barely discernible, so high it was and so slowly it drifted. But as the moments passed, it grew gradually larger. It could be recognized now as a buzzard, lazily drifting nearer and lower, occasionally speeding its descent by a few flaps of a laggard wing.

CHAPTER IV.

COLONEL FERGUSON.

LATER in the day, when the sun was going down in a cloud of glory beyond the buttes, a curious kind of water animal crawled out of the river and stood upright in the long shadow of a cottonwood. It was dripping and covered with mud; it shivered in the hot sunlight.

Presently it mounted the mouse-colored broncho that came up to it with a whinny; and horse and man went at a rapid pace southward across the dusty, gray-green prairie.

"They aimed to kill me, Mice," said the rider in a soft, slow voice, which barely reached to the backward-pointing ears of the pony. "That's shore as shootin'. They aimed to give me enough of that there poison to put me out of the way for keeps; that's why they had the nerve to do it the way they did. Yes, suh. But they reckoned without the cookin' of old 'Dirty Bill.' Yes, suh, Mice, any cow-puncher what has eat after Dirty Bill cooked for as long a time as I have, and still lives—well, if they want to hurt his stomach

something serious, they got to take it out and beat it with a stick."

The pony blew its nostrils flutteringly, as if in thorough agreement, and the southward ride continued with little more conversation. A shadow began to rise straight up from the earth, the stars came out, so bright that they seemed to dance. The horse and rider did not pause. A thin moon, like a bent nail of gold, crept silently up the east, turned slowly from red to orange, from orange to gold, from gold to silver. The prairie became ghostly dim with pools of shadow in the hollows and a powder of silver in the air and on the top of the grassy rises.

But not till the false dawn began to sickly the sky did the rider pull up and dismount. Then, however, rolled in the blankets drawn down from the rear of the saddle, he slept heavily and long, oblivious of the sun which had come around the world to look upon him again; oblivious of the pony which cropped the stem-cured grass and kept an ear cocked toward its master—a pony as faithful as a dog.

The sun was high when Red Morgan unrolled, stretched, drank the lukewarm water from his canteen, rolled a cigarette, lighted it, glanced down at the mud which stained his white-and-black chaps, stamped his muddy high-heeled boots till the mud cracked and fell, then bridled the pony, tightened the saddle cinches, mounted and once again rode south.

"I'm feelin' better, Mice. Fact is, I'm jest about as good as ever, aside from bein' as empty as a whisky barrel the mornin' after pay day. I shore done been generous in pitchin' things up. Howsomever, the better I feels in my insides, the worse I feels in my mind. Yes, suh, I shore do. Great jumpin' horned toad! Jest think of what I got to tell to the colonel. Dern-if it don't mighty nigh make me wish they *had* kilt me. The colonel trusted me with

that there money, Mice. And it was a lot of money to him—they ain't no doubt about that. Go on, Mice—don't let's think about it."

The stars once more had begun to wave their bright flags in the blue field of the sky before the first yellow light of the Bar Four Ranch winked out across the prairie. Red Morgan drew the pony to a walk, but finding that he could think of nothing to make his mission easier, he gave it its head again.

Carefully riding a wide circle around the ranch house, where the Ferguson family lived, he pulled up in front of the bunk-house door, which showed a couple of human silhouettes at the sound of his pony's hoofs.

"Hello, Red. You back?"

"Yeh. Where's Shorty?"

"He's line ridin'. What happened to you—git pitched in the river? Never knew Mice to pitch."

"I reckon Buddy's up to the ranch house, ain't he?" asked Red.

"Naw. Buddy's done gone off lookin' for a bunch of cows. I told him wa'n't no use lookin' for 'em; they been driv off by the rustlers, shore as shootin'; but Buddy he went off anyway."

"By himself?"

"Yep. You hurt? You look kind of sick, Red."

"I'm all right," said Red. "Colonel up at the house, I reckon?"

"Yep. Him and Miss Constance. He's been lookin' out for you all day. He'll be plumb glad to see you."

"Say, Dirty Bill, you got any coffee left?" asked Red. "I'd like to have a cup before I go up to see the colonel."

"Shore," replied the cook. "I'll heat it up."

Red unsaddled the pony and turned it loose to graze; hung up his saddle and went to the cook's shack for his coffee. The men realized from his appearance that he did not desire to be questioned, and they talked casually about unimportant matters. A cow that Shorty

had pulled out of quicksand had charged him and knocked his horse down. A rider passing through had said that a powerful lot of sheep were going to come into the northern ranges next year. The mail-order catalogue had an advertisement of a liquid that would burn on a brand without the necessity of heating the iron. Some of the ranchers were bringing in shorthorns in increasing numbers; they were better beef cattle than the longhorns, although not so hardy. Buddy Ferguson's wall-eyed pinto had beat Shorty's sorrel by two lengths in a quarter-mile race. And so on.

Red drank the muddy coffee piping hot and heard none of it. His heart was sick in his breast. Constance Ferguson and her father were at the ranch house; the colonel had been looking for him all day. And now he had to go up there and tell them—what he had to tell them.

His memory joined forces with fate to make matters more painful for him. At the ranch where he previously had worked he had gotten into a row with the rancher. The rancher had advised the colonel that Red was a drinker, and a troublesome fellow, and had advised the colonel not to hire him. The colonel had replied that he took men as he found them, that he personally liked the set-up of Red and was going to hire him anyhow.

On top of this, after a comparatively short time of service, the colonel had made Red herd boss on the trail up to Medory and had intrusted him with bringing back safely the large amount of cash.

Some of these things Red had found out from Buddy Ferguson, for he and Buddy had become good friends, and on lonely nights at the line camps, or around the round-up fire, men wax confidential. Red had felt that, in spite of his short term of service, he was closer to the Fergusons than an ordi-

nary cowhand could hope to be after having been with them for a lifetime.

Being close to the Fergusons had a particular charm and value to Red Morgan. It was nearer to the real center of his being than anything else in the world. He felt proportionately miserable as the coffee sank lower in the cup and there remained no further excuse for him to delay. Besides, he was the kind of man who faced things.

He put down the cup and went out of the cook's shack and across the flat ground to where the ranch-house lights threw soft, yellow bars out of the two front windows. Without pause, he went up the three steps of the ranch-house porch and knocked firmly on the front door.

It was opened at once.

"Oh, Mr. Morgan," said Constance Ferguson. "Come in."

Her voice told him that she had shared her father's interest in seeing him come as soon as possible with their money. He stepped inside and stood against the door when she had closed it, his sand-colored sombrero in his hands. The shaded oil lamp on the center table cast its mellow glow over his slender figure as he stood there, his face haggard and white, his hair glinting red, a red stubble showing on his cheeks. The sunken blue eyes, a curious expression in them, were fixed upon Colonel Ferguson, who was rising from his chair and laying down the book he had been reading.

"Well, Red," said the colonel heartily, "I'm glad to see you back, my boy. To tell the truth, I've been a bit worried about you. The boys came back without you and I didn't think it would take you so long to follow them."

The colonel's fine figure, a bit bent with age and trouble, had been nearing Red as he spoke. His white hair was luxuriant and bushy; he was stroking his white mustache with an alternate movement of each hand and his dark

eyes—the only feature which Constance had inherited from him—were creased in a smile beneath their bushy white brows. But as he came up to the cowboy and took in the nature of his appearance, he stopped suddenly and dropped his hands.

"You've got the money, Red?" he asked. His voice said more than his words. For the first time Red realized that there were other things to ranching than merely riding herd, cutting out cows and calves for branding, driving the beef cut off to the railroad. He began to see, from the lines of worry in the colonel's face, that the other end of it, the money end, might take more out of a man than even a bucking broncho.

Red cleared his throat and wet his dry lips. His sunken blue eyes ranged slowly around the room, as if he were giving it a farewell look. Indeed, he saw now how much it had meant to him to be able to come to this room and talk to the colonel at times. The clock on the mantel, the colored shawl over the piano in the corner—the only piano within three hundred miles—the rug on the floor, the lamp, the books, the sewing basket by the easy-chair—all these things spoke of the feminine influence and of a family life that he had come to be strangely touched by.

"You've got the money, Red?" repeated the colonel, and this time his voice was positive, as if he were trying to command that Red had the money and thus remove his own doubts.

Red swallowed.

"No, colonel," said Red. He hardly recognized his own voice. "I ain't got it. They took it off me."

In the silence, the terrible silence that followed this remark, Red let his eyes look at the girl. She stood by the table, in one hand a bit of linen cloth that she had been sewing on. Her red mouth, like a budding rose, hung slightly open in surprise. Her deep, soft, brown eyes

were fixed upon his own as if asking him to unsay what he had said.

Her finely shaped head, the chestnut hair parted in the middle and brought smoothly down over all but the lower tip of her delicate ear; the slender arch of her brows; the straight nose, its milky bridge flecked with freckles; the rounded pillar of her throat, losing itself in the fluffy stuff of the blue-and-white dress—these things stamped themselves on his mind in that moment forever.

"What do you mean?" said the colonel's voice.

"Colonel," said the miserable cowboy, "I started back with the money. Two fellers rode out of town ahead of me and I thought I'd give them the slip, so I stopped and went in the bar of the Pyramid Hotel. I jes' had one drink."

The cowboy's soft drawling voice came to an end. He saw the look in the colonel's eyes. It said that he had taken him on against the advice of another rancher; it said that he was known to be a drinker and an unreliable fellow and that this proved the contention to the hilt.

"I jes' had one drink," added the cowboy, turning his tortured gaze for a moment upon the girl. "They had doped it. I never knew nothin' till the next mornin'. Then I come to an' found they had done taken my money belt."

He saw the colonel's gaze running over him, from head to foot. He glanced down and realized with a shock how disreputable he looked; how like a man who had been on a terrible spree.

"I—I fell plumb in the river on the way home," he said.

"You sent the boys back ahead of you," said the colonel.

"Yes, suh," said Red. "I thought I could handle it all right. I reckon I should have let 'em wait for me."

There was another silence. A hectic spot had come in each of the colonel's

cheeks. Red wondered if he was thinking that he had thrown this money away at the gambling tables in Medory. If he was thinking it, he wished he would say it. Anything would be better than this silence.

Finally the colonel spoke.

"I am sorry, Morgan," he said. "I am very sorry. I trusted you, Morgan."

Red Morgan wished that the colonel would curse him, would strike him, would give him an excuse to speak back. This kindness was hard to bear; the colonel's voice was undoubtedly kind. Worried, too; and grieved.

"I am sorry, Morgan," the colonel repeated. "But the money's gone now. We could ill afford the loss." The colonel of a sudden seemed an older man, a broken man. But his voice still was clear and decisive. "I am sorry, Morgan," he said once more, "but there is nothing I can do but ask you to cut out your string and find some other place to work."

Red looked from the colonel to the girl. He looked down at the hat, which was crushed into a ball in his fingers. What could he say? He stood quite still for a moment, then turned, opened the door and went outside, closing the door quietly behind him.

From the bunk house came the sound of a twanged guitar. A harsh voice was raised in the dolorous enjoyment of song:

It's cloudy in the West, an' looks like rain.
My damned old slicker's in the wagon again.

Red Morgan walked across to the stable for his saddle.

CHAPTER V.

HEADED SOUTH.

RED didn't cut out all of his string, as the colonel had suggested. He left behind his other horses, as a minute payment on the huge debt which he felt he owed. He rode out into the

night on the back of a bay horse of his which he had found in the corral, and behind him, bearing his light trail outfit including a small amount of grub, he led the tired mouse-colored pony who rejoiced in the name of Mice.

He didn't know where he was going. He didn't know anything, except that he had a lump of unhappiness in his chest somewhere, and that, in the same chest, was beginning to burn a fierce fire of hate and resentment.

"Somebody got me into this," said the cowboy to the chill night air. "I ain't blamin' the colonel none. And I ain't blamin'—her, though I kind of wish she might've jest spoke up a little bit for me. But, no. Why should she? She don't know nothin' about me. She's a fine girl, eddicated and all, and I'm jest a cow-puncher with a bad name, in her mind. Naw, suh," he continued, talking the thing out aloud, a habit he had acquired in lonely nights on the prairie, "it ain't their fault. It's kind of my fault a bit, and it's shore a heap the fault of that there coyote of a Mexican Pete. They ain't no doubt of that. Whether that there red-headed rat of a De Mortes is in on it or no, I can't be certain sure; but it wouldn't surprise me none. He looked to me like the kind of wolf as would eat its young. Yes, suh. It's them two I'm aimin' to look for, and if I find 'em——"

The bay horse jumped ahead at the touch of the spurs, the tired Mice followed unprotestingly. In the silver ghost light of the slim moon the small cavalcade moved rapidly across the prairie. Red didn't know where he was going. He remembered that the bartender at Medory had said that De Mortes and Mexican Pete had gone south; he was heading south, that was all. And his speed was due to the fact that his imagination was dwelling with some pleasure on what was going to happen when he saw De Mortes or the bartender called Mexican Pete.

Eventually, however, even the faithful and willing Mice began to drag on the lead rope. Eventually, too, the demands of outraged nature began to remind the straight-backed rider of the potion he had drunk at Medory, the fast which had followed, and his lack of sleep.

He drew up, threw the reins over the bay's head, swung down, and began to untie the rope from around the other pony's pack. He yawned as he did so, and noticed that the first gray light of dawn had grown distinct enough to cast the pony's shadow dimly on the dry grass. And then, suddenly, he became wide awake.

He heard the distant sound of gunshots. *Pat-pat—pat-pat-pat!* To his experienced ear the sound was a mixture of rifle and revolver shots. It seemed to come from beyond some rough land off to the southwest.

"Now, I'd jest like to know what that is," the cow-puncher drawled, pushing the sand-colored sombrero on the back of his red head and squinting his deep-blue eyes toward the place of origin of the sound. "Come on, hoss. I reckon we better go take a look-see."

He sprang into the saddle and, pulling the tired pack horse behind him, set out on a lope toward the scene of the shooting. A faint tinge of gray was beginning to assert itself against the rim of the world, even in the west. In front of this he could see the ridge of high ground, broken by the vent of a dry brush coulee toward the south. The shots grew more frequent as he approached; it sounded like a number of guns—five or six, he guessed, but perhaps there were more.

At the beginning of the rise of rough ground, Red slipped from the saddle and staked out the pack horse, to keep it from following him as it would usually do. He got on the bay again and, keeping as well as he could to the turfed ground so as to avoid too much scram-

bling of hoofs on rock, he urged the horse up the rise.

While he had been riding during the night he had paid but little attention to the country, but now he began to recognize this patch of rough land. Beyond the crest in front of him, he remembered, stood a small line rider's shack in which he and Shorty once had taken shelter from the rain when they had been off seeking some strayed horses. Beyond the shack was a stretch of broken country which dropped off, after twenty miles or so, into prairie land again. The sound of the shots seemed to say that the shooting, whatever it was, was taking place in the neighborhood of the shack, and Red Morgan remembered the cook to have said that Shorty was out line riding. Red spurred his horse, wondering if by any chance Shorty could have come so far south.

Two spurts of flame met his eyes as he came up over the crest of the ridge. They had come from two clumps of bush and rock, a hundred feet apart, at the other side of the log shack which lay in the hollow just below him. The shots had been directed at the shack, and as Red Morgan looked he saw the flash of an answering shot from the shack—the spurt of smoke and flame leaped through a crack in the logs.

And then Red Morgan felt a little thrill go through him. Tied to a stake outside the shack stood a horse that he knew. It was a white-and-yellow animal, belonging to the Four Bar Ranch. Whatever the cause of the fracas, it was plain to him that the man in the shack was from the Ferguson ranch. And it became plain to him, furthermore, that there were more than two men on the opposing side; for the fire, which had died away as he came into sight, suddenly sprang out again. He heard the bullets whine over his head as he leaned to draw the Winchester from its holster under his left knee.

POP—2B

With a whoop of fierce exultation, Red Morgan spurred the bay horse pell-mell forward over the rough and steep descent, at the same time firing the rifle at the glimpses he got of a sombreroed villain with a strawberry-colored birthmark on his cheek, and another man with a new black hat and a remarkably red nose. His mind made a note of the location of half a dozen smoke spots in the rocky cover.

He spurred toward them with a shout of something near to glee. Here was something on which he could vent the hot anger that had been rising in him, even though he didn't recognize any of those who were attacking the shack's lone defender.

The wind whistled past his ears, mixing with the whine of the bullets from the men he was flying toward. As he passed the shack, he dropped the rifle, for he was getting now into pistol range, and whipped out the two six-guns. As he did so, he saw that the men in the rocky cover were breaking ground, shooting as they did so, but aiming evidently to get beyond the low crest behind them, where, no doubt, they had left their horses.

Probably they did not know he was alone, doubted, in fact, that a man alone would have essayed to charge against them. He could see their crouching figures, dark and demonlike in the gray light of the growing dawn, flitting from rock to rock, from mound to mound as they ran back toward the ridge, shooting. Their faces in the sickly light were gray and pasty seeming and their eyes were large and dark beneath their hat brims.

He felt a bullet strike his side like a flying hot iron. He saw one of the runners stumble and put a hand to his chest. Two others caught him and helped him on while another stopped and began to reload, kneeling behind a bulberry bush.

"Whoop-ee!" yelled Red, cracking

down on the kneeling man; but before his thumb had lifted the hammer his horse coughed and, neighing in a choked way, jumped sidewise and fell.

Red went headlong, rolled over twice, but got to his knees behind a slight rise of ground and took a shot at the last man as he slipped after the others around the crest of the small ridge.

Reloading hastily, Red got to his feet and ran up to the ridge crest. Before peering around, however, he knew that the fight was over. The other side of the ridge was the bed of a dry brush coulee and he could hear the hoofbeats of the gang's horses scurrying away up it, already out of pistol range around the bend. He crept over the ridge and up the coulee to the first bend, to make sure that they had left no one behind as a rearguard with whom he might swap a couple of bullets.

He saw no one. They were all on horseback and riding off, although on the ground this side of where the horses had been tied he saw the bright red drops of new blood.

"They may come back," said Red hopefully, "but right now they shore seem to be ridin' hell for leather, a-huntin' tall timber. Well, I reckon I'll git on back and git the news about this here from Shorty."

He felt blood trickling down his side. A hurried examination, however, showed him that the blow had been glancing and had merely taken the surface flesh off against a rib. He hurried back toward the shack, being somewhat surprised to see that its door remained closed.

CHAPTER VI.

BUDDY WRITES A LETTER.

THE shack of hewn logs, its wide cracks stopped here and there with grass and clay, stood gray and silent against the bands of pink and gold that were beginning to stain the delicately streaked eastern sky. Its door, a crazy

affair with sagging rawhide hinges, hung askew and gave a few small openings through which, however, he could see nothing as he approached. He knocked on the door with the muzzle of his revolver.

"Shorty!" he called. "Hey, Shorty!"

From the interior of the shack came a groan. Red Morgan put his shoulder to the crazy door and pushed it open, tripping as he did so over the spurred boots of a man whose body lay behind the door. Red Morgan whirled and knelt by the figure.

"Shorty!" he cried.

The recumbent figure checked another groan.

"It's me, Red," said a weak voice. "Boy, howdy!"

"Buddy Ferguson," murmured Red, putting his arm under the other's shoulders. It was like Buddy to attempt a jocular manner at such a moment. Red lifted him in his arms and took him from the dark interior to the dried grass on the outside of the shack. Buddy's eyes closed as Red laid him down. His lids were blue. The black vest, and the gray shirt under it, were sopping with a sticky red. In the half light of the growing dawn the fine young face, so like the face of his sister with its narrow freckled nose, curly chestnut hair and tenderly curving mouth, looked transparent and deathlike. Red's heart came in his mouth.

"Buddy," he said softly, "they shore shot you, boy. Lay still while I ties you up."

There was no need for this admonition. Buddy lay motionless, except for a flutter of breath, as the lean, hollow-eyed cowboy gently cut away the boy's clean gray-flannel sleeves and, tying them together, contrived a strong bandage which he tightened around the wound that had gone clear through the chest.

"They shore dusted you on both sides, son," drawled the soft-voiced cow-

puncher, as he made a tourniquet out of the quirt which he had retrieved from the pommel of the saddle on the yellow-and-white horse tied behind the shack. "I'll git 'em for this, son, if it takes a hundred years."

Buddy Ferguson's eyelids fluttered open. For a moment his stare was dazed and dreamy; then the soft-brown eyes, so like Constance's in their expression, fixed themselves upon the cow-puncher's lean countenance. The pale lips parted to show a gleam of white teeth.

"Well, Red," said the weak voice gaspingly, "it certainly looks—as if—you been—runnin' away from the—barbers. Couldn't they rope you?"

"Don't talk, Buddy," begged the cow-puncher. "I was ridin' south and I run into this here shootin'. Do you know any of these fellows, Buddy? I aims to git 'em, son, if it takes me a hundred years."

Buddy Ferguson was only a young chap—barely twenty-one. Besides, he was weak from loss of blood. His soft-brown eyes, fixed upon the cow-puncher's face, filled with tears.

"I—I believe you, Red," he said with difficulty. "You—you're that kind. I've never told you what I thought of you, Red. I—I better take this—last chance. I think you're the whitest fellow, the best friend, that ever sat a horse."

Red Morgan's lean jaws came together with a click. He turned his head aside. He swallowed hard. In his mind came a picture of the two other Fergusons, the old colonel and his daughter, staring at a silent cow-puncher crumpling a sand-gray sombrero in his hands.

"I'm shore glad to hear you say that, Buddy," he drawled. "You know, I lost that two thousand dollars the colonel let me collect for him up at Medory. They doped me up there and took it away from me. I only had one drink.

But I am afraid the colonel and Miss Constance——" Red swallowed again. It looked to him as if Buddy was not far from death. In speaking to the young man so intimately he felt strangely moved. "The colonel says to me: 'Morgan,' he says, 'I am sorry, but I am goin' to ask you to cut out yore string an' find somewheres else to bed down.' That was bad enough, Buddy, but Miss Constance—I shore hates Miss Constance to think anything like that about me."

Buddy Ferguson's eyes were bright and dry now. The tip of his tongue ran dryly along the curve of his dry lip. He was staring up into the cow-puncher's face, in his soft-brown eyes a curious secretive and yet affectionate smile.

"Red," he said, "let me have a pencil, will you?"

Morgan produced the stump of a tally pencil from the breast pocket of his black-flannel shirt.

"And a piece of paper," murmured the youngest of the Fergusons, his eyes still smiling. "Tear the paper off of one of those tomato cans in the shack, Red."

Red did as bid and returned with the curling sheet of paper, which was white on one side.

"Look here, Buddy," said Red Morgan gently as he knelt again by the boy, "did you recognize any of those fellers? I aims to git 'em for this, if it takes a hundred years. How did you come to run against 'em?"

Lying with his fine young head pillowed against the rise of ground at the shack's edge, Buddy Ferguson's soft-brown eyes stared off into the distance. His face still wore its secretive, affectionate smile. When he spoke, it was as if he was thinking of pleasant things, and telling Red of what had happened merely as a matter of mechanical effort.

"I was ridin' south, looking for a bunch of Four Bar cattle I figured had been driven off down this way, prob-

ably," replied Buddy dreamily. "I ran on to these fellows by accident. I figure they were probably a rear guard for the rustlers, because as soon as they saw me they opened fire. I was right up by this shack, and I tied the horse behind it and slipped inside so they couldn't surround me. But when I ran in the door, one of them got me. I held them off, but I was getting weaker when you piled into the whole crowd single-handed."

"Did you recognize any of the varmints?" asked Red Morgan anxiously. "They'll likely scatter later on and I want to git 'em all, Buddy."

Buddy Ferguson's eyes came back from their dreamy, agreeable contemplation. His brows came together in an effort of thought.

"I don't know as I ever have seen any of them before, Red. One was a greaser, I think. He was dark and had a long, black mustache and little, black, bright eyes."

"Great Godfrey!" said Morgan. "I wonder, now, if that could be my friend, Mexican Pete."

"I don't know, Red. The only other one I got a good look at had red hair."

"What!" cried Red. "Was he a big feller with a red mustache? A great big feller, kind of dressed up like a mail-order cow-puncher?"

"I don't know, Red. I wasn't looking at his haberdashery. I just got a small look at his eye squinting over a gun barrel. Furthermore, he made a break; he hollered something to the others and went over the ridge by himself."

"Now, I jest wonder," said Red Morgan hopefully. "Say, Buddy, you're lookin' better, son. How you feel?"

Buddy Ferguson ran the tip of his tongue along his dry lips. He drew a rattling breath.

"Red, will you do me a favor?" he murmured.

"Anything in the world, Buddy."

"Red, I know there isn't any use asking you not to go after these fellows. I know you're going to go after them, because you're that kind. And I want you to do me a favor."

"What is it? Jest name it, Buddy."

"I want you to go right away, and not come back."

"But, I can't leave you, Buddy!"

"Yes, Red. Shorty or somebody'll be by here and find me to-day, sure. Shorty said he'd ride down this way looking for me, see? Take my horse, Red, and light out."

"But I can't leave you hurt like this!"

"If you are my friend, Red. I—I want to write a letter, and—and I don't know but I haven't got much time left to do it in. I want to be alone, Red. Will you—please?"

"I reckon I'll have to, Buddy, if you put it like that," answered the cow-puncher reluctantly. He went down the slope, took the saddle off of the horse that had been shot under him, came back and put this saddle on the white-and-yellow horse, laying Buddy's saddle behind the boy's head. He picked up his Winchester, reloaded it, went back over the trail and found the mouse-colored horse and rode once more up to the shack.

"So long, Buddy. Can't I write that letter for you?"

The curious, affectionate smile came into Buddy's soft-brown eyes. To Red Morgan, looking down from the saddle, it was almost as if Constance Ferguson lay wounded there.

"No, Red," Buddy replied, and his white teeth glinted between his pale lips. "This letter—is to a girl."

"So long, Buddy. There's the canteen by your hand, and your gun, too. I reckon one of the boys'll be along after you pretty soon."

Red Morgan bent his head and was silent for a moment.

"I hope you git all right pronto,

Buddy," he added. "And—and if you see Miss Constance, tell her—tell her—well, jest tell her you saw me, Buddy, and give her my respects."

Buddy nodded weakly.

"I'll do that, Red. Good-by. Go on. I'm in a hurry."

"Good-by, Buddy."

The lean, straight-backed cow-puncher touched the spurs to the white-and-yellow horse. The mouse-colored horse, answering the tug of the rider's hand, followed down the steep slope. The sun, risen above the level plain behind them, lighted the flame-colored neck cloth, gilded the sand-colored sombrero, touched little tips of fire to the red hair above the back of the sunburned neck. The saddle leather creaked; the hoofs of the horses struck against little stones which went rattling down the incline; the bit chains jingled.

At the mouth of the brush coulee Red Morgan turned and lifted a hand in farewell. Buddy Ferguson, however, had seemingly forgotten his existence. The wounded boy had drawn the saddle nearer, had turned sidewise, and was laboriously writing with the stub of pencil upon the curling strip of paper which Red had stripped from an old tomato can.

Red Morgan did not interrupt the writer. He sat motionless for a moment, the rising sun striking straight into his hollow blue eyes and making his narrow nose seem thin and straight. His lips tightened beneath the stubble of new red beard. The muscles came out against his bony jaw.

Suddenly putting spurs to the yellow-and-white horse, Red Morgan went clattering at a brisk pace up the dry brush coulee, keeping a sharp lookout ahead.

He raised a hand.

"I'll git 'em," swore Red Morgan. "I'll git 'em, if it takes a hundred years!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRAGGLER.

AS Red Morgan rode up the brush coulee, leaving the wounded boy behind him, he began to realize again how much his body had been abused. He was tired, but most of all, sleepy. It was all he could do to keep his head from nodding, in spite of the fact that at any moment it was possible that he might stumble upon one of the rustlers, lying in wait to bushwhack him.

He pushed on, however, for before he slept he wanted, if possible, to establish the direction in which the men were traveling. If he could satisfy himself as to the direction in which they were headed, he might be able to guess at their destination; at any rate, he would have a line along which to follow, and after that he could sleep and eat, counting upon their own loss of time for eating and sleeping to enable him eventually to catch up with them.

Furthermore, he did not anticipate that any of them would lag behind. No doubt they figured that, as they had been seen and had opened actual hostilities, the best thing for them was to make themselves scarce.

He rode for an hour or more before he saw any signs that the rustlers had left the coulee bed. At length, where the depression had grown shallow as it neared the small ridge in which it had taken its start, he detected the hoof cuts which marked the scramble of several ponies up from the bulberry and dry brush incline to the western side.

He already had observed that two of these ponies were shod, indicating most likely that they had been ridden down from the Bad Lands up around Medory, for the Bar Four horses and those on the neighboring ranges went usually barefoot. Slipping down from the saddle, he climbed up the bank of the coulee and from the ridge surveyed the land beyond.

Not much could be seen, except broken land hard to see much of, for a higher stretch rose beyond the immediate irregular depression. He followed the hoofprints far enough, however, to satisfy himself that the course the bad hombres had set was almost due west. Then he returned to the horses, picketed them on the east side of the coulee to graze, and threw himself down to sleep.

His rest was uneasy. As tired as he was, the picture of Constance Ferguson, her brown eyes reproachful, rose in his mind. He dreamed of the man with the red nose and his companion with the strawberry birthmark—the two rustlers he had glimpsed firing on Buddy. He woke with a shout at the feel of a heavy hot body, the big bulk of the red-haired De Mortes, lying upon him; and discovered it was the rising sun that had heated him, pulling the coulee bank's shadow back in upon itself.

He rose at length, cooked himself some coffee, ate some bread and cold meat, caught the horses and started out once more. The trail of the west-bound riders soon was lost completely in the dry, dusty surface of the stem-cured grass over which cattle had trampled endlessly. But from what he knew of the country he figured that they were heading for the river valley beyond the next stretch of high land. There they could turn north to the hills, south along the valley, or could cross to the hills beyond. It was possible that they were heading for the herd which was being driven off by the men they had stayed behind to protect.

"All I hopes," said the cow-puncher softly, "is that it's true Buddy seen that there De Mortes, or that there Mexican Pete with this bunch. Maybe he did. The folks been sayin' for some time that De Mortes, in spite of all the money he oncet had, is done been in for such hard times he's been pullin' some

funny stuff; or goin' with some queer characters, anyway. All I hopes——"

He didn't finish his sentence, but his blue eyes smiled in cold anticipation. He sat the white-and-yellow horse lost in agreeable if somewhat homicidal contemplation, his gaze fixed upon the shadow of his sand-colored sombrero, a jumping shadow always just in front of the steadily traveling animal.

So immersed was he in his imaginings of the fate which he desired to visit on Mexican Pete and De Mortes, he was especially startled when the pony shied, and he turned his head to find the man with the strawberry birthmark on his cheek just beneath him.

A slap against his thigh, and Red Morgan's gun was in his hand. But the man, who, strange to say, was sitting quite still on the ground, did not move. His back was against a boulder, he was bareheaded, with his hands beneath the hat which lay in his lap. His clean-shaven face was remarkably pale, in spite of its sunburn, which brought the birthmark out brightly, and his eyes were closed.

For a moment Red Morgan thought the man was dead, but the bleary eyes opened, and the man started.

"Don't move," said Red Morgan gently, "or I'll shore drill you. You're the one as got hit, eh? What did them skunks do, go off and leave you?"

The villainous-looking individual on the ground stared dazedly at the rider. Then he shook his head.

"No, pardner. That there dern fool horse I was ridin' stepped in a hole and threw me. I was hurt and ridin' slow, and I reckon they didn't miss me. I reckon I must 'a' been sleepin' to let you come up on me like this. He threw me hard."

"All right," said Red. "You're one of the gang who's been runnin' off the Bar Four cattle. Furthermore, you jest now started shootin' at a friend of mine, an' for all I know, done kilt him. I see

your holster's empty. Here, take this gun. I'm gonna give you a chance before I kills you."

The man with the birthmark stared up at the rider without moving. Then he shook his head, and showed a yellow tooth.

"To hell with yuh," he said. "Go on and shoot. Hell, feller, with this hole in my side, I wouldn't move for nothin'."

"Who's in your gang?" demanded Morgan, after seeing that the man meant what he said. "Tell me that, and I may let you live, though God knows that would be against all the Ten Commandments."

"Aw, go to hell," said the man on the ground, and closed his eyes wearily. "Shoot, or go 'way," he added, and nodded.

Red Morgan looked around. A limping roan horse with dragging reins testified to the truth of the wounded man's story. He himself remembered having seen him shot, and he didn't like the idea of shooting a man, even a rustler, who wouldn't defend himself. It was obvious, too, that the fellow wouldn't talk. Red Morgan gave it up.

"Git up, horse," he said. "We'll leave this here varmint to the buzzards and the coyotes. I reckon they ain't so squeamish as I is. Git on with you; we got to ketch up with them others."

The white-and-yellow horse, followed by the mouse-colored horse bearing Red's trail outfit, hadn't taken a dozen steps before a shot exploded behind them and Red Morgan felt the bullet tug at the red neck cloth around his throat.

He turned in his saddle and fired in time to meet the second shot of the man on the ground. His shot struck where it was aimed, between the fellow's bleary eyes, while the man's bullet only nicked his horse's ear and caused it to squeal. Red sat there for a moment, lost in surprise at this peculiar treach-

ery. The man had kept his gun under his hat—either stuck in his waistband, or in his hand; at any rate out of sight. Now the hat was by his side; he was lying staring at the unforgiving sun, his toes pointed upward, his bull-leather chaps and his flannel shirt his only coffin.

"Well, dern my ornery hide!" remarked Red in a soft drawl. "Here, I goes and let this here coyote live, and he ups and shoots me in the back—or tries to. I swarn, a feller shore oughtn't to be as bad a man as that 'less he's a dern sight better shot."

He reloaded his gun, recaptured the lead rope, which he had dropped in the fracas, and turned the horses' heads once more westward.

"Like as not," he murmured to himself as he rolled a cigarette, "them fellers'll be ridin' back lookin' for this here hambah. I wonder, now, if they could 'a' heerd this shootin'?"

CHAPTER VIII.

A LITTLE ENCOUNTER.

RED wasn't the kind of man to brood over things. As a cowboy, living the hard life of the plains since he had been old enough to ride, he had learned to take things as they came.

Neither did he ordinarily look for trouble. The men who had been so unfortunate as to suffer from his quickness on the draw and deadly accuracy of fire had generally brought this experience upon themselves; often because they had been deceived into a bully's courage by Red's soft voice and blue eyes and peaceful demeanor.

And perhaps the reputation he had as a bad man to cross had come in part from this very gentleness of manner; it made his feats seem more remarkable by contrast.

Now, however, as he rode westward across the flat, and dipped down toward the bottom between the two rises, his

blood was pumping rather hotly in his heart. The thought that De Mortes and his bartender—if indeed they were with the rustlers—might be coming back for their companion, the thought that he might meet them face to face and gun to gun, made him full of a furious hope.

It was this bartender, and his boss, who were responsible for all that had happened lately—for his disgrace in the eyes of the colonel and Constance, at any rate, and that was enough. Add to this that the gang had shot poor Buddy, and there was reason enough to hope that he might be lucky and meet them coming back.

His experienced eye caught sight of an unnatural-looking brand on two of a small bunch of steers in a draw. Riding near he saw that it was undoubtedly a brand that had been blotted or run; it was a Bar Arrowhead brand now, but it was easy to see that it had been a Bar Four brand. The work had been neatly done and a little later would have escaped observation.

"Now, that's funny," said Red Morgan softly, rolling himself a cigarette. "Shorty was tellin' me he heerd De Mortes had done bought into the Bar Arrowhead Ranch."

He unhooked the field glasses which he had slung onto the saddle under his slicker, swung them in a slow arc. He saw a coyote, reddish in the hot sun, sneaking behind a hummock. A bunch of antelope, far off, were grazing unconcernedly.

He fixed his gaze upon a tiny cloud of dust, but swung away when he recognized that it was merely two bulls fighting. He moved the glasses northward, and then held them fixedly on a scarred spot that rose clearly to his eyes.

In that spot a branding fire had been built. Further, it was at the mouth of a natural chute, running back into a rise of ground; where the sides of this natural corral had not been high enough,

he could make out that they had been built up with brush.

Somebody had been having a little branding party, and, from the run brand he had seen, it certainly looked as if the missing Bar Four cattle might have been driven over here, branded, then driven over on the Bar Arrowhead range and turned loose. At this time of year, the Bar Four riders wouldn't get over that far. It was perhaps a risky business, but not very; it was really smart.

"I'll take a look up——"

Red's soft drawl stopped suddenly. He had been sweeping the glasses along the farther edge of the bottom land. A coulee, breaking into the face of the irregular high ground beyond the bottom, showed a movement at its mouth. He focused the glasses more clearly.

Yes, now they were plain, having come out into the sun. And they were riding straight across the bottom toward him. Three punchers. And the one in the lead, even at this distance, he could recognize by the glasses as the fellow with the brand-new black hat and the remarkably red nose—one of the men who had shot Buddy Ferguson.

The other two he could see clearly, but he did not recognize them as men he had ever seen before. Obviously, however, the rustlers had sent back some of their men to look for the wounded one who had fallen behind.

Red Morgan swept the glasses up into the coulee, but could see no other men. He was about to drop them when he caught sight of three other riders—no, four, five, six—all coming down from the high flats. They were dipping now into the coulee, some distance behind the other men. It looked as if a big bunch of the rustlers were coming back; maybe to fight it out with the Bar Four men they supposed had attacked them.

Red swung down from the white-and-yellow horse. His blue eyes flashed with a grim delight as he changed the

saddle from this horse to the mouse-colored horse called Mice, who was as steady as a rock under gunfire. He dropped the trail kit to the ground and turned the yellow horse loose.

Then, jumping into the saddle, and leaning to loosen the Winchester in its sheath, he rode straight across the open toward the men who were coming to meet him.

"Mice," he said softly, "this here is jest the kind of party I been sp'ilin' for. It shore is."

The men had seen him. Those far behind were now out of sight, making the winding descent along the long coulee, but the three in the prairie had stopped. One of them was using the glasses; he talked to the others excitedly. Then the three put spurs to their horses and came galloping toward the lone rider, at the same time lifting their rifles. One of them spurred faster than the others and off to the left as if intending to cut off any retreat.

"Shore looks like they recognize us, Mice," said Red, tightening the sand-colored sombrero on his head and taking off his gauntlets. "Yes, suh, this shore looks like you and me's goin' to have a chance for a little fun. The only pain I git is, I shore wish that there greaser was among 'em, and De Mortes, too. But they ain't. That's shore. Look out!"

The rider galloping off to the left had opened fire with his rifle. So had the rear man of the other two. The third man, the one with the new hat and the red nose—Red could identify him even at that distance by his horse—was spurring rapidly forward.

"They ain't got the horses for that kind of shootin', Mice," said Red gently. "Furthermore, they's movin'. Let's you an' me have a try at it."

He pulled his mouse-colored horse to a stand, took aim for an instant at the man on the left, and fired. It was a good shot. The man fell forward in

the saddle, rode that way for a minute, then slid to the ground, raising a puff of dust as he struck.

The other rifle shooter, taking warning from this, pulled his horse up and jumped to the ground. Red fired at the head showing over the saddle, but missed; the puncher fired over his horse's back and the bullet struck the pommel of Red Morgan's saddle, flattening against the steel under the leather.

"Good shootin', Mice," said Red grimly. "I hates to do this. I shore do."

He took careful aim and shot the rifleman's horse through the head. As the animal dropped, exposing the sharpshooter, Red fired again, getting the fellow through the body as he crouched behind the fallen animal. Wounded as he was, however, he essayed another shot, which whined past Red's head. Another shot from the straight-backed cowboy with the red hair, however, ended him.

"This here red-nosed hambah ain't got no rifle, Mice," said Red Morgan, "but he keeps a-comin' jest the same. He's got nerve, and I'll fight him even. That's jestice; that's Red Morgan jestice, anyway, even if he is a skunk. Let's go git him!"

He spurred the willing pony forward, at the same time returning the rifle to its scabbard beneath his left knee and deliberately drawing a six-gun from its holster.

"There he goes, shootin' too soon. Git up, Mice!"

The two riders were galloping straight toward each other, each followed by a train of dust. The red-nosed man was shooting. Red Morgan, though, did not open fire till well within range. Then, with the celerity of a cat, he dropped sidewise till the horse and saddle made a shield, and, holding himself thus with his left hand, held his gun hand evenly balanced and in time

with the rhythm of the horse's gallop. Thus aim was easy and, as he neared the other man, almost impossible of being missed to a crack shot. The other man, surprised at this maneuver, emptied his gun rapidly; his last shot being met by two shots from the gun of the cowboy who was riding Indian fashion.

Red Morgan pulled up as he regained his seat in the saddle. A glance over his shoulder had assured him that there was no more danger from the gentleman with the new hat and the crimson nose; but he began to reload his six-gun rapidly.

Out of the mouth of the dry coulee six or eight dusty riders were emerging, and with a whoop they had begun to quirt their horses and gallop toward him, rifles in hand.

"Well, Mice," said the quiet cowpuncher, "this here looks like a scrap shore 'nuff."

CHAPTER IX.

PROVIDENCE.

RED rode forward to the spot where the dead horse lay; there he dismounted, figuring on using both the horses as shields, perhaps, if he was surrounded. He flung his rifle over the saddle of the mouse-colored horse, who stood as still as if made of wood, and began to pull down upon the leader of the group of riders.

To his surprise, this man, instead of preparing to fire, held up his hand in a friendly gesture. Red held his fire while the leader turned to his men and motioned them to stop. They pulled up and he rode forward alone, still with his hand raised.

"Don't come no closer, pardner," said Red when the man had ridden within earshot. "Who are you and what you want?"

"I'm the sheriff of Bearfield," replied the rider, a stocky, middle-aged chap in a black sombrero and with a

beard which covered all of his face except a hooked nose and a pair of sharp, black eyes. "We been chasin' these here fellers for a week. Leastways," he added, as Red Morgan sheathed the rifle and motioned him to approach, "we been trailin' 'em that long, or longer, and the other day we heerd where they was hangin' out. They're wanted for murderin' the circuit judge."

"Well," said Red, "they won't murder no more jedges. 'Scuse me for crackin' down on you, but I didn't notice that there badge. You can call your friends up, pardner."

"We jest caught sight of these here fellows from the top of the ridge," explained the sheriff, dismounting and loosening the girths of his saddle to breathe his pony. "They didn't suspect we was anywhere around, from the speed they was travelin'. It shore did surprise us to see you headin' 'em off so sudden for us, and you all by yourself. Jest a young feller, too, he is," the sheriff concluded, addressing the men of his posse, who had galloped up. "Gen'lemen, let me make you acquainted of——"

"Red Morgan's the name," said Red. "Call me Red 'cause of my hair, I reckon."

The men laughed.

"Reckon they do," agreed the sheriff. "And speakin' of red, you ain't seen nothin' of a coyote with a red birthmark on his face, is you?"

"Yeah," answered the lean cowpuncher, taking paper and tobacco from the pocket of his black-flannel shirt and rolling a cigarette. "I had to kill him back the trail a piece. He shot at me from the back, jest after I had decided to let him live. He an' these here friends of hisn," Red continued, lighting the cigarette and inhaling a deep breath, "shot up a friend of mine. That's how come I was trailin' 'em."

"You mean you followed the bunch of 'em, by yourself?"

"Well, I don't see nobody with me," said Red.

"Well," remarked the sheriff with obvious admiration, "they's eight of us, and we didn't feel none too healthy. I shore reckon we wouldn't have come after 'em at all, hadn't been for the reward."

"And now this here puncher done got it," put in one of the posse men. All of the riders had dismounted, had loosened the girths of their saddles, and were either smoking or biting off fresh chews of tobacco.

"What reward is all this?" inquired Red Morgan.

"Hell, man," said the sheriff, "they's a thousand dollars on the head of each one of these here skunks! They's been a big nuisance in our county, till some of the cattlemen got together and figured they'd git rid of 'em for good, they been killin' so many folks."

Red Morgan drew in another deep breath of smoke.

"Well," he said in his soft drawl, "I figure you-all shore got some reward comin' to you after all this ridin', and besides I owe you somethin' for telling me there is a reward. I needs two thousand dollars bad, due to some money I lost by bein' doped in a bar-room. It didn't belong to me; belonged to Colonel Ferguson of the Par Four. If you-all is agreeable I should have two thousand, I'm shore agreeable you-all should split the balance."

The men laughed in relief and in agreement.

"Hell, yes," said the sheriff. "That's fair—you risked your skin, and we didn't. Come on, fellers, let's bury these here coyotes. After all, they used to be folks. Then me an' Red'll ride back and look at that strawberry birthmark, 'cause I got to swear to the identification of these here varmints. Then we'll hit the trail for Bearfield, boys," he concluded.

The boys let out a yip at the thought

of the reward and of how they would spend it, and went about the gruesome business of burial in a rather business-like manner. A dead man was not to be made less dead by any amount of futile regret; besides, these men deserved to be dead—that was their satisfying conclusion.

Red rode back with the sheriff to the place where the other man lay dead, and the sheriff identified him as the fourth man they were after. The cavalcade then started on the long ride back to Bearfield; for, lured on by the large reward, the posse had traveled far. On the second day, however, hot, dusty and—in particular—thirsty, the posse, headed by the sheriff and Red Morgan, rode into the county seat.

"No," the sheriff was saying, "we ain't seen or heard nothin' of no man with red hair and a big red mustache with this gang you kilt; but they may have been such a feller behind 'em. Some folks say they have been paid for what they done; I don't know. No, I didn't hear tell of any greaser with them, neither."

"How long you reckon it will take me to git this here two thousand, and begin hittin' the back trail?" inquired the young, lean cow-puncher in his gentle voice.

"Now, that's a question," returned the sheriff, as they rode up the winding and dusty main street. "It won't be long, though. Not more'n a month, at the most."

"A month!" cried the red-haired young man.

"Well, mebbe two months," said the sheriff. "You know how long it takes to git folks together when it comes to gittin' 'em to pay out cash money. But we'll git it, partner, or there'll be half a dozen ranchers round here hangin' on ropes."

"Oh, I'm sure we'll git it," assented Red. "I'm kind of in a hurry—that's all."

CHAPTER X.

THE BACK TRAIL.

IT didn't take two months, but it did take a month and a half before Red Morgan got his money. The association had to be satisfied, for it was paying a thousand, as the men had been convicted of rustling at an earlier date and had broken jail.

The county had to raise cash, too, for it was paying a thousand dollars of the reward; and the other two thousand had to be collected from a group of cattlemen, one of whom had to wait for a collection for some cattle he had sold before he could put in his share.

There was a further hitch when it was discovered that the sheriff, under the State law, was not permitted to accept rewards. This occasioned many bitter speeches and much heavy drinking on the part of that gentleman, but did not otherwise affect the situation, except to make the share of Red and the other men a bit larger. For this Red was duly appreciative, as it helped pay his expenses and his losses at monte while he was whiling away the time.

At length he had the money in his hand, put it in a money belt and strapped the belt around his person. He stayed in his room that evening, so as not to offend the friends who would wish to speed his parting—he had determined not to take a drink with any one, regardless of guarantees as to the quality of the liquor.

To make assurance doubly sure that there would be no untoward occurrences, he paid his hotel bill the night before, telling the clerk that he was leaving town the following noon. And then, rising an hour before dawn, he saddled his horse while the town and the countryside slept.

When the sun came up he was twenty miles out on the prairie, heading southeast along the shortest route to the Bar Four Ranch. His spirits were high.

"Shore is goin' to give me pleasure, Mice," he said to the mouse-colored horse, "to see the expression what is goin' to rise over the colonel's face when he sees me fling these here legal tenders down on the table in front of him. Yas, suh. And I ain't sayin' nothin' about the expression as is goin' to come over the face of somebody else; I ain't even sayin' her name. No, Mice, they is some things as ain't fitten to talk over with a horse."

The white-and-yellow horse had developed a limp, so he had traded him, with five dollars to boot, for a good roan pony, which carried his trail outfit. The mouse-colored horse and the roan horse had perhaps never before kept up so lively a pace so steadily.

"Ain't aimin' to founder you-all, but—boy, howdy!—I ain't got time to sit still, neither. Git up an' git on!"

The noon camp was brief; the night camp was so short that the roan pony gave a resentful squeal when it was roped in the gray morning.

On through the dust-gray prairie; up the slope of the sparsely shrubbed highland. A noon camp, then down the other side. The horses were tired that night, and the rider slept heavily.

He awakened, however, with a light heart and went about breakfast with noises that he would have labeled as song, although the bronchos pointed their ears at him as though they might have considered it the cry of a catamount.

"There's where them coyotes was buried, Mice. Wonder what become of that greaser and that red-headed man? Shore would like to know who they was—I'll keep a-lookin' for 'em, but right now we got other business."

And later on:

"Here's the shack. I'll git down an' look round."

There was the shack, bullet-ridden as before, its door hanging crazily open. Inside it was empty and dark.

As Red came out of the shack, he saw an oblong of white card on the dirt floor. He had to take off his glove to pick it up as a foot had pressed it into the ground. He looked at it, and a peculiar expression came over his lean, sun-reddened face. His deep-blue eyes became pensive.

It was an old-fashioned photograph, faded and stained—the picture of a girl, pasted on a beveled cardboard of egg-shell texture which had the photographer's name in raised letters down at one corner. She was perhaps eighteen years of age in the picture and stood before one of those backgrounds such as there never was on land or sea—a background hand-painted on canvas by some small-town photographer. One of the hands rested upon a high-backed chair, which had been cut away, all except the chair's edge and the remnant of a masculine sleeve.

"Buddy must have dropped this," murmured the cow-puncher to himself. "Miss Constance must have been about a year younger than she is now, I reckon, when this was took. Ain't she got the softest, prettiest eyes!"

He stared at the picture for some time. Then he put it in the right-hand pocket of his shirt, but after reflection changed it to the left-hand pocket, blushing a bit and looking around at the empty landscape as he did so.

He went outside and was about to mount his pony when a hummock, piled with rocks, and surmounted by a shaven and flattened branch of greasewood, caught his eye. He went over to it and read the inscription that had been written in pencil on the piece of wood.

BUDDY FERGUSON.

That was all.

"Shorty came, I reckon," said Red Morgan, taking off his sand-colored sombrero. The sun sparkled in his curly red hair and made a flame out of his crimson neck cloth as he stared at

the grave. "He came, but he came too late."

The young puncher walked slowly on his high heels to the mouse-colored pony and slowly got into the saddle. He led the roan pony slowly from the scene. His lean face, clean shaven now, seemed older than his years.

"Poor girl," he said. "She was mighty fond of Buddy."

And he rode slowly eastward, toward the Bar Four Ranch, shaking his head. He was not in a hurry now. In fact, he almost dreaded facing the colonel and Constance and their sorrow. He wished it wasn't necessary.

But as the familiar landscape surrounding the ranch came gradually into view, his spirits brightened. It isn't natural for a young and healthy cow-puncher to remain melancholy long. Besides, he had in his belt something which was to mean a new lease of life for himself; he almost was brave enough to hope it might affect the lives of the colonel—and even of the colonel's daughter, although his imagination didn't dare go very far in that direction.

When at length, however, the familiar outline of red willows above the long, low bulk of the rough-hewn logs of the ranch house came into view, he let out a shout, jerked the roan pony into a gallop and approached the Bar Four "hell for leather."

He thought it was curious that no one had appeared to answer his call, or to examine the newcomer. The outbuildings seemed curiously silent and empty. The men's bunk house had its door closed; no smoke emerged from the chimney of the cook's shack.

More than this, there was a remarkable absence of any kind of live stock around the place; no horses in the corral, no milk cow near the barn, no saddled bronchos in front of the bunk house. And everything was silent. So silent that it made his flesh creep.

"Hello!" he shouted. But there was no answer.

He knocked with a pistol butt on the door of the bunk house, then rode up to the ranch house itself, dismounted and knocked on the door.

There was no answer. He peered in the window. The shades were drawn and he could glimpse only a dusty and deserted interior, with no sign of life.

He turned and looked over the deserted field, remembering that he had seen but few cattle the last hours of riding. A great feeling of loneliness came over him, although he had never been lonely before.

CHAPTER XI.

DE MORTES?

RED sat on the ranch-house step and smoked many a cigarette before he rose and stretched his hands above his head and walked with a jingle of spurs back to his horses.

The thing to do, he had decided, was to start leisurely northward. De Mortes lived at Medory; so did the bartender, Mexican Pete. On the trail he might be able to pick up some news concerning the colonel and Constance.

He mounted the dark-gray pony and, leading the roan, started out, intending to camp at a spring which came out of the river bank not so very far above the dried-up beaver meadow.

He was pleased to see a horse, saddled and bridled, standing by the spring as he came in sight of it. A cowboy, very dusty, was leaning at the spring's mouth, holding a black, peaked Stetson in front of it for water.

"Hello, hombah!" called Red, glad of the sight.

The fellow straightened and looked at him without responding. He had black hair; his forehead, protected usually by the hat, shone remarkably white above his bronzed nose; his expression was unfriendly.

"Hello," he answered, and bent again to the spring.

"I'm lookin' for Colonel Ferguson and his daughter," said Red, riding up to the river bank, "and they ain't nobody at the ranch house. Can you tell me where they might be?"

"What you want with 'em?" asked the puncher, not looking up.

"Well," drawled the red-haired young rider, "that might be somethin' jest between me an' them."

"That's right," agreed the man. He stood up and drank leisurely and with enjoyment from the dusty-hat brim. "That's right," he agreed, pouring the balance of the water on his head, putting the hat on and climbing the bank to his horse. "Well," he finished, when he had swung into the saddle, "when you find 'em, go right on and talk to 'em freely. Don't let me bother you none."

He spurred the horse, and quirted it, too, and went speeding northward across the dusty prairie, followed by a cloud of dust.

"Now, Mice," said Red Morgan, closing his mouth, which had dropped open at the puncher's uncalled-for hostility, "that there is what you would call a nice, friendly kind of feller. Come he bit a rattlesnake, an' the snake bit him, I bet two bits the snake'd die first. Well, to hell with him!"

He made a fire, after freeing the horses to graze, cooked himself some food and lounged in the shade of the cottonwoods, smoking cigarettes and meditating upon the curious crochets of snakes and cow-punchers.

"Had a hang-over, likely," he concluded at length. He rose, saddled the horses and rode leisurely northward, heading for a line camp where he thought he might stumble upon some lonely rider who, like himself, wanted to talk.

In this he was lucky. Sundown found him greeting not one puncher, but two,

who had each ridden up to this line camp from different edges of their range, and in the morning would ride back again. They were nice fellows, riders for the 2 Bar L.

"We done dropped our range down farther south, here, since the colonel quit," they told him, after the absorbing matter of preparing and eating supper had been attended to.

"The colonel didn't never have no business ranchin', nohow," one of them added, after the cigarette smoke had begun to drift across the cooling prairie. "He was a Kaintucky man, didn't know nothin' about longhorn cattle an' jest come up here after the war, bringin' his son an' daughter with him. I reckon he thought all a man had to do was stock his range and set back for the beef to turn into dollars. This here cattle business seems like to me jest like anything else in nature. It's you git me, or I'll git you, an' God save the wounded."

"When did the colonel leave?"

"Oh, a while ago. A week I reckon."

"Him an' Miss Constance—his son, Buddy, bein' shot a while before. Now there's a pretty gal for you!"

"Yeah," Red agreed. "I was with the Bar Four up to a while ago. She's a mighty fine girl. Where did she and the colonel head for? Anybody know?"

"Leavin' the country, I reckon," answered one of the men, yawning. "Ain't nothin' else for a man like the colonel to do, when he's done quit ranchin'. He can't take up punchin' an' I figger he's too high class to run a saloon or even a store. I seen many a polite man, but he's the plumb politest. He dern near made a gentleman out of me, every time I talked to him. I didn't feel uncomfortable, neither."

"Yeah, they was makin' for the railway, I reckon," said the other.

The next morning Red Morgan rode with one of the punchers, glad of even the semblance of being back on cowboy

work. It wasn't until they had finished lunch that he learned anything further about the Fergusons, and this came out by accident.

"That was shore a fine horse that there feller was ridin'," the cow-puncher remarked during the rest after lunch.

"What feller?" inquired Red, thinking he meant the puncher they had left that morning.

"Why, that there big feller as was with the Fergusons."

"Who was that? Did somebody go off with them?"

"Shore," answered the puncher. "Didn't I tell you? A big feller with red hair. One of the boys what rode for the colonel come over to our outfit and got a job after they had left. He said he thought the colonel had done sold out to this here big feller, but I ain't seen no signs of it yet. Ain't nobody round lookin' out for the old place, even."

"You say the feller had red hair? And big red mustache, too, huh?"

"Why, yes, I believe he did. You know him?"

Red Morgan got up, dropping his cigarette stub and grinding it into the ground with his heel, using perhaps unnecessary violence.

"I don't know," said Red. "Sounds kind of like a man I knew oncet. You didn't hear his name, did you?"

"No," said the puncher. "They jest called him 'Red.' You startin' out?"

"Yep," said the lean young rider. "I reckon I'll be hittin' it out for the north. I'm aimin' for Medory, an' the sooner I start, the sooner I'll git there."

"Well, that's shore true enough," agreed the puncher, laughing, "unless somethin' should happen on the way to delay you."

"So long," said Red, shaking hands.

"So long," replied the puncher cordially. "I'm plumb glad to have sawn you."

CHAPTER XII.

A CURIOUS INTERRUPTION.

THE men couldn't see the buzzard, but the buzzard could see them. Say what you will against the buzzard, he cannot be accused of nearsightedness. He was so high in the dazzling blue of the morning sky that it would have taken a keen eye to locate him as a tiny speck. But his eye, with its lens like a fine telescope, could no doubt see the man hide his horse on the side of the river nearer the town, then creep through the cottonwoods, cross the river and slip to the upcropping rock which stood where the trail went by to the ford.

The buzzard, no doubt, could see this man shove his rifle forward through the dried grass that grew in a niche of the rock; could see him settle himself comfortably and wait.

The other man, who was perhaps two miles away, continued to ride toward the ford. His pace was not fast. He rode a mouse-gray horse with a white nose and led a roan pack horse.

The buzzard sailed lower in the brilliant sky. It is not likely that the bird had any intimation that the coming together of the two men might result in a tragedy. More likely it had become interested in the fact that the man behind the rock had lain still for so long. It sailed lower.

Two miles to the west another buzzard, watchful always of its brothers, sailed lower, too, coasting meanwhile toward the east. In the south another buzzard slanted its wings and drifted northward. In all directions, from the black-and-crimson buttes around Medory toward the north, south to the rolling and unbroken prairie, there came a tug against the altitude of the floating scavengers. It was as if each were tied to a string and one hand had drawn them all slightly closer together, slightly nearer the earth.

The man on the mouse-gray pony seemed to be indulging in pleasant thoughts.

He dropped the reins about the pony's neck and with his gauntleted hand fumbled in the left breast pocket of his flannel shirt and extracted a square of cardboard carefully between index and middle finger. He turned his head on one side as he looked at it.

His mouth, which seemed to be set rather far back between his sharp, narrow nose and his rather broad bony chin, broke into a smile which drew a deep line back and down from his round and forward-projecting cheek bones.

"They may be at Medory, Mice," the cow-puncher said in a soft drawl. "Gid-dap! Let's go look-see."

He touched the pony with his spurs, at the same time tugging at the lead rope. And it was at this moment that the buzzard overhead flapped its wings and worked lazily higher—for from the edge of the rock spurted a jet of smoke, and simultaneously a sharp *crack* split the morning silence.

The next moment the saddle of the mouse-gray pony gleamed empty in the sun. The roan pack horse had reared and run backward at the startling sight of the long body in white chaps and black shirt falling toward it. It stood now, its eyes whitened, its nostrils dilating, its roan ears pointing toward the gray horse which stood so still; and at the dark spot in the grass, across which fell the gray horse's shadow.

The roan pack horse snorted and backed farther away, the knot at the end of its lead rope jumping, as if it were alive, from grass clump to grass clump.

From behind the rock slowly lifted a strange object. It was black; it was cone shaped. It came higher and proved to be a wide felt hat. It rose higher still and revealed the fact that it was upheld by the vertical barrel of a rifle. The hat remained at this altitude, wa-

vering a bit from side to side, while from a spot about two feet below it and to the right the top of a man's head rose cautiously.

First the black hair, then the white forehead, then the shadowed eyes and the bronzed nose.

Now the silence was broken by another crack. From the grass in the gray pony's shadow rose a slow coil of thin, almost invisible smoke. The roan horse snorted again. The black hair, the white forehead—which now had a mark upon it—fell forward against the rock, slid sidewise and downward, jerkily, and came to a stop upon a knob of the rock about a foot above the brown, stem-cured grass.

From the shadow of the gray pony now leaped up a slim figure in white chaps. His bare head gleamed red in the sun as he ran, stooping, across the dry grass, in his right hand a shining tube that smoked. Arriving at the rock, he stood looking down at the relaxed body which the rock hid behind its dusty and weed-grown contours.

The roan pack horse turned its ears toward the ground, shook itself, to the accompaniment of a rattle of frying pan and tin plate, and began cropping the ripe grass as if it had dismissed the incident from its mind as being unworthy of a sensible horse's concern.

The gray horse, after pricking its ears toward its rider, lowered its white nose and took a few nibbles; but it kept its sharp ears slanted sidewise toward the rock, as if ready and waiting for any quick command.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BUSHWHACKER.

THE young cow-puncher, after looking a few moments down at the lifeless bushwhacker, ran awkwardly on his high-heeled boots down to the dry and sandy creek bed. Here, peering up and down the gully, he discovered, tethered

behind a clump of cottonwoods, the bushwhacker's horse.

Satisfied, apparently, that the dead man had been alone, he returned to the rock, where he holstered his gun and, pulling off a gauntlet, ran his fingers through his hair, causing it to stand up eerily in long, ruddy tufts.

"Now, I'm a son of a gun!" he drawled in a surprised voice. "Here I am ridin' along thinkin' 'bout nothin' special, and without a enemy in the world—leastways, not none livin', not as I knows of—and this here——"

He paused, overcome by the seeming incredible nature of the situation.

Of a sudden, he slapped himself upon the hip, causing a cloud of dust to jump forth and float slowly down.

"Dern my ornery hide!" he exclaimed. "I knowed I'd seed this here hombah somewheres. That's jest where it was, too," he added, and nodded: "Yes, suh, that's jest where it was! It shore was!"

The habit of talking to himself, universal among men who are much alone, aided him in establishing the time and place and manner of his meeting with the gentleman who was now so silent and harmless.

"Yes, suh," he said in his soft drawl, "he was the fust hombah me and Mice seen when we rode up to Colonel Ferguson's ranch and found it plumb deserted. Yes, suh, we was startin' off, lookin' for a line camp or somebody as could put us on the colonel's trail, when we come on this here hombah fillin' his belly from that there spring. He looked plumb unfriendly. I says: 'Hello, hombah!'"

The young cow-puncher went through the gestures that had been used by himself and the man accosted. His voice repeated their several words with fine shadings of distinction.

"'Well,' he says, 'when you find 'em, jest go on an' talk to 'em freely. Don't let me bother you none.'"

Red took the cigarette out of his mouth.

"But, hell!" His early astonishment returned. "They ain't no reason why you should 'a' laid there an' tried to kill me, now is they?"

The motionless figure did not answer. Shaking his head, the slim rider walked stiffly back to the dark-gray horse, which whinnied as he approached; picked up his sombrero and fitted it on, swung into the saddle and, catching the pack horse, continued once more.

After he had crossed the creek, he swung off to the east, deciding not to take the most direct line to Medory lest some other unaccountable gentleman might take it in his head to bushwhack him.

His new course carried him across some broken land, and as he was working his way down it, he saw, in a recess back from an arroyo, a steer sunk in a mud hole.

He rode up and twisted the animal's tail, but it was in too deep to climb out by itself. He accordingly pulled out his throw rope, looped the protesting animal's horns and dragged it forth. Whereupon, with the gratitude of the typical range steer, it proceeded to charge him and his gray pony furiously, seemingly intent upon goring them to death if that were at all possible.

The rider managed to evade the rushes, with the intelligent coöperation of the pony, and to quirt the steer back into a state of comparative peacefulness. As he rode on over the small ridge, coiling his rope and heading for the pack horse, which had run on ahead, he noticed a recent fire, probably a branding fire, from the marks of an iron in the earth.

The sight made him happy. Pretty soon he would be back on somebody's ranch, telling stories round the camp fire or in the bunk house, dragging a bawling calf to the fire, or occasionally painting up a town with the boys.

The rope was rounding itself into its last coil in his expert hands when he observed a rider, evidently a cow-puncher, coming toward him.

"Hello, hombah," greeted Red, tying on his rope, but keeping his hand ready for any other purpose. "How's things?"

"Hunkey," replied the thin, rather white-faced rider, eying Red's rope. "Goin' to town?"

"Town bound," agreed Red. "Jest was pullin' a steer outn a mud hole and the critter charged me, like usual."

"That's the way it is in this world," allowed the pale one. "Soon as a feller tries to do for others, he gits into trouble."

Red laughed, his face wrinkling with intense appreciation of this bit of philosophy. Suddenly, as if this had reminded him of something, he asked:

"Say, you ain't seen nothin' of a gent by the name of Colonel Ferguson, I reckon, in Medory now, have you? He would likely have a lady with him—his daughter."

"The girl is there," replied the pale man. "I heerd she and Red's goin' to git tied up to-day. But——"

"She and who?"

"Why, De Mortes. They used to call him 'Rum,' but now he wants to be called 'Red,' they tell me; an' if he wants it, he gits it, from me. De Mortes is mighty powerful round these parts, I reckon; mighty nigh runs Medory. I heerd they goin' to be tied up to-day. But the colonel, he died on the trail."

"Now, is that so?" said Red Morgan. His lean face grew grave. He looked past the pale one as if at some private vision. "The colonel is done died, and I am too late."

"What do you mean, too late?"

Red raised a gauntleted hand and let it drop.

"Nothin'. Jest a matter twixt him and me." He looked down and shook

his head. "And the young lady, the colonel's daughter," he asked, looking up, "is she there in town with that there feller, alone?"

"Don't let me horn in on your business, pardner," said the pale one, "but if you edge up on Red de Mortes, like I see in your face you're thinkin' of doin', you better go it easy. He's plumb powerful round here and a stranger ain't got much chance against him."

"I reckon you're kind of a stranger yourself," said the slim cow-puncher, with a quiet drawl, "or you wouldn't be goin' round givin' advice to folks as hadn't asked you for none. Howsomer," he added, his expression relaxing at the look of concern which had come over the other's countenance, "I reckon you meant it kindly and I'll take it that way, and thank you. You might notice, though, that my hair is jest as red as I reckon De Mortes' is."

"Yeah," agreed the pale one, grinning in relief, "I can shore see that!"

Both of the men laughed as they rode by each other with a gesture of farewell. Red caught his pack pony and set out at an increase of pace toward the town.

"My losin' that money of the colonel's shore must have had somethin' to do with him a-closin' out his ranch. If it did or not, Buddy Ferguson was my friend. If—if Constance likes this here De Mortes, he must be all right. I can't be certain *he* had anything to do with dopin' my liquor. If he's good enough for her, and she wants him, she can have him. But if he ain't—and I got to investigate that point, too."

He set spurs to the gray pony and jerked the pack horse to a faster gait. The sun pressed down upon them with its heat. The dust rose behind them and forgot to fall.

Far behind, the pale man pulled up by the branding fire. He looked down at it, then round at the retreating cavalcade, then down at the ashes again.

Finally he turned in his saddle and looked long after the man and the two horses, as if from their very appearance he might get some answer to some query that seemed to be bothering him. But he could scarcely see man or beast for the cloud of dust which rose in their rear.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN ADVANCE OF A WEDDING.

THE town looked good to the cow-puncher heading in at last from the long trail. It was not a cow town; not yet, although doubtless it was destined to be. It had sprung up like a mushroom upon the building of the railroad across the Bad Lands; but it was a town, and a welcome sight, nevertheless.

As he rode up the single winding street, with an eye out for the livery stable, Red Morgan scrutinized every member of the crowd. In front of the Bug Juice Dispensary, which stood next to the building labeled the Pyramid Park Hotel, lolled several big fellows in blue or red-and-black mackinaws, wide sombreros and heavy spiked boots.

Among them were hunters and trappers, in fringed buckskin shirts and trousers, sombreroed, heavily bearded and with long, greasy hair falling down over their shoulders.

Some other men, from the grime which caked their faces and hands and clothes, showed evidence of being workers in a coal mine which apparently had been started since Red had been here last.

There were numbers of soldiers of misfortune—the bums and loafers which the saloon keepers found it profitable to encourage, due to the habit of the customers of standing treat for the crowd. And in between these unusual characters, stiffly dragging his high-heeled boots, walked an occasional cowboy, seeming to bear with him a breath of the plains as his spurs jingled and his guns gleamed and his solitary inde-

pendence of manner proclaimed him a man who infringed upon no man's rights and permitted no infringement upon his own.

Red found a stable where he put up the tired horses, and then he repaired forthwith to the dining room of the Pyramid Park Hotel. Even as he mounted the hotel steps he heard the clump and scuffle of many hasty boots. The bell had rung, announcing the mid-day meal, and the stampede was on.

The young cow-puncher joined the stampede with gusto. He threw first one foot, then the other, over a long bench at one of the long tables. The food was on the board, within reach or within shouting distance. With a short hold on a knife and fork, Red joined the attitude of the others. Most of the men wore their hats. Their heads were bent as if in meditation under the brims; but what speed of shoveling, what volume of intake went on in these shadows was nobody's business.

Presently this activity slackened. Men who had run in, walked out. They moved slowly, as with difficulty, letting out notches in their belts. Toothpicks, and sometimes knives, were wielded with effect, to the accompaniment of much succulent indrawing of breath between the teeth.

Red came at length out of the dining room and found a chair in the pine-board lobby, facing the desk with its show case of brightly labeled cheap cigars, and the stairs, which led to the large single room, crowded with cots, which comprised the sleeping facilities which the hotel afforded.

Red had just sat down when, with a start, he recognized a man standing at the foot of the stairs. It was De Mortes. Even while his thumb stole automatically to his gun belt, Red had to admit to himself that the man was handsome.

De Mortes, red of hair and straight of carriage, stood over six feet tall. His

broad shoulders were covered by a spotless black coat. A handkerchief of light blue furnished the decoration for a yellow-silk shirt.

His sombrero was the color of cream; his chaps were of sealskin, and had been brushed until they shone. Spanish spurs, of silver inlaid with gold, clasped the heels of his polished boots. His face, with its drooping red mustache, was manly and powerful, although Red found something displeasing in the large rather fleshy nose and in the sag of the ruddy cheeks.

De Mortes seemed oblivious of his surroundings. His attention was riveted upon the rear of the lobby where a door led to the single bedroom on this floor. He drummed his fingers nervously on the banisters.

Red Morgan was scrutinizing the fellow with interest when his outstretched boots were kicked rudely aside and a rough voice demanded of him:

"Why the hell don't you keep yo' feet outn a gentleman's way?"

He looked up to find a short, flat-nosed, pop-eyed cowboy frowning down at him.

"Shorty!" Red yelled, and jumped up, while the short, bow-legged cowboy burst out laughing.

They shook hands, slapped each other on the back, poked each other in the ribs, and called each other names which if addressed to a stranger would have resulted in immediate battle and sudden death.

"Thought you was down South chasin' some rustler friends of yourn," observed Shorty after the two had subsided into seats. "Tale goes, you done kilt eighteen of 'em and eat their hearts with chili sauce. That right?"

"Hell, no!" said Red, grinning.

"Mebbe you used salt and pepper?" Shorty suggested.

"Aw, shut up!" growled Red Morgan.

"You ain't up here after me, are you?"

I shore hope you ain't found me out, too!"

"Aw, shut up!" said Red. "I'm shore glad to see you, Shorty, an' that shows how homesick I been for horned toads and Gila monsters. You want a drink?"

"Can't," answered Shorty. "Jest ridin' out."

"The hell you are! You're a fine friend!"

"Can't help it," said Shorty. "Been up here lookin' round for some grazin' country, done drunk up all my wages, and got to git back an' make me a report."

"To who? You still with the Bar Four?"

"Naw. Got fired. The colonel sold what cattle was left and shet up shop. I'm riding for Circle X. I reckon Buddy's gittin' kilt kind of took the heart out of the colonel for cattle raisin'. He wa'n't never much good at it, no way. I reckon you heerd about Buddy gittin' kilt?"

"Heerd about it! Why, I was with him, Shorty. I stumbled on him at that there log shack below the Bar Four range. Some rustlers was shootin' up the shack an' he was hid in it—I recognized him by his horse; or, at least, I knowed it was a Bar Four man inside. The rustlers run, after we had done swapped a few shots, and I would 'a' stayed by Buddy, 'cause I seen he was bad hurt, but he made me leave him. Said he wanted to write a letter."

"A letter?" inquired Shorty with interest.

"Yeah. I give him a pencil, and— Say, Shorty!" Red gripped Shorty's forearm in iron fingers. "There's Constance Ferguson!"

The girl for whom the man in the sealskin chaps evidently had been waiting had come down the lobby, had joined him, and now they were walking toward the dining-room door, beside which Red and Shorty sat.

Red became paralyzed with self-con-

sciousness. He would have been too honest to deny to himself that sometimes, looking up at the stars from his blanket on the prairie, he had dreamed romantic dreams. He had dreamed of breaking unbreakable bronchos before her admiring eyes.

Sometimes, between sleeping and awake, he had dreamed even of none other than himself—with freshly combed chaps and a freshly washed face—standing before a minister while beside him stood a female of the most radiant beauty. But the most radiant of Red's dreams had not been equal to the simple art of nature, and when he saw Constance Ferguson in the flesh walking toward him his heart stood still.

Her soft, thick, brown hair was parted in the middle over a low brow and brought down about the small ears, a tip of each remaining revealed. Her slended figure in the dark-blue dress, her graceful carriage, the alive, warm eyes in the softly molded countenance—all told of character and good breeding.

When her eyes met Red Morgan's hypnotized gaze, their expression for an instant was friendly and even pleased. It was as if for a moment she associated him with happy days on the ranch. Then some recollection clouded their brown surface. Her glance became cold as she looked away from him without speaking.

As she went in the dining-room door, the man beside her spoke.

"Do you know that man?" Red heard him ask. He did not hear her answer.

They sat down at a small table beside the wall. She was facing Red, but after a single cold glance, she did not look at him again. De Mortes, however, turned in his chair. His gray eyes were in sharp contrast, even at that distance, with his red hair, his long, red mustach, his ruddy, fleshy face. When his stare met Red's, his countenance

hardened. The two men crossed glances like swords for a long moment; then the big man turned back to the table.

Red cleared his throat.

"I hear as how she an' De Mortes is goin' to git hooked up," he remarked, trying to make his voice casual.

"Yeah," agreed Shorty. "This evenin', at six o'clock. I'm shore bereaved I ain't goin' to be here for the free drinks. That there De Mortes, he's a slick one. The gal's got some mighty valuable script rights coverin' the Bar Four Ranch, and now the colonel's dead, I reckon De Mortes knows why he's gittin' married. He's a good-lookin' feller to be a skunk, now ain't he?"

"Kind of," said Red Morgan.

"But she don't love him," said Shorty. "I kin tell if a woman loves a man or if she don't."

"She's marryin' him," countered Red.

"What else she goin' to do?" demanded Shorty. "What's a girl like that goin' to do in a board-and-canvas town when she's alone in the world and nobody to look after her, and in a board-and-canvas town like this, at that? If you ask me," Shorty added in a lowered voice, "I don't know how a healthy man like the colonel was ever come to die so suddent as soon as he drunk a cup of coffee at Mexican Joe's ranch house. My own personal and private opinion, publicly expressed, is that that there De Mortes has been playin' some kind of game for quite a while. But, hell!—he's too smart. Couldn't nobody never hang nothin' on him, and nobody ain't goin' to accuse him of somethin' they ain't no proof of."

"Is that so, now, Shorty—about the colonel, I mean? I'm shore glad you mentioned it. Somebody ought to look into that—the colonel was a fine man, if he did kick me out, and I ain't blamin' him for doin' that, either. Now, look here, Shorty. While somebody is look-

in' into this business about the colonel, I shore reckon this here weddin' ought to be postponed. Ain't that fair?"

"Now wait, Red. That's you all over—you always was the dern-firedest man for settin' up t' do things nobody else wouldn't even think of. You're good and healthy. This here girl, she's doin' what she wants to do, ain't she? Why you want to go and git yourself shot?"

Red Morgan apparently wasn't listening. His lower lip was thrust out in thought.

"I reckon they'll be married by a justice of the peace now, wouldn't they, Shorty?"

"The jestice of the peace got shot," said Shorty.

"Well, then, by his depity, I reckon."

"Hell, the depity was the man what shot him. Left town with a string of horses."

"Well, ain't they no law around this town?" asked Red. "Somebody's goin' to marry 'em, and I don't reckon this climate has got healthy for preachers yet."

"Sure, they's law here," Shorty replied. "They's some kind of a judge, named Perkins, keepin' bar over at the Big Butte Hotel. But you can't git the law on a man for marryin' a girl if she's willin', Red. They ain't no proof a-tall that the colonel didn't die natural."

"That's right," said Red. "When you startin' off?"

"Right now," said Shorty, looking at the hotel clock and climbing to his feet. "I'll be back up this way in a month or two, Red, with a bunch of longhorns. You reckon you'll be here?"

"You can't tell," said Red. "I might."

"Say," said Shorty. "You ain't figgerin' on gittin' into any trouble, is you, Red? If so, I'll jest have to quit my job and hang around and look after you. I never seen such a feller for lovin' trouble. Me, I'm peaceful."

"I ain't aimin' to git into anything I can't git out of," replied Red, smiling. "So long, Shorty."

"So long, Red. Behave, now."

They shook hands. After Shorty had mounted his horse and departed, Red went down the front steps and stood in front of the hotel, looking about him.

The river wound down toward the left, bordered with cottonwoods, the grass green in the bottom land. Beyond it, rimming the farther side of the valley, rose the red buttes, streaked with black, which separated the river valley from the rolling land beyond. Toward the right, just across the railroad track, rose a tormented mound of gayly colored rock, streaked and riven with cracks and with ridges of vegetation.

In the protection of these buttes stood a two-story, unpainted board building, built since Red's last visit. Across its front hung a sign—somewhat perforated with bullet holes, but still entirely legible—informing the world that this was the Big Butte Hotel.

The young cow-puncher hitched up his pants, drew his palm as if carelessly across the grip of his right-hand six-gun, and walking stiffly down the road on his high-heeled boots, proceeded across the railroad tracks and through the swinging doors of the Big Butte bar.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PROBATE JUDGE.

THE barroom of the Big Butte Hotel was empty, save for the bartender who was rubbing off the bar with a rag the while he hummed a mournful tune under his breath. The inhabitants of Medory had appetites more accurate than the finest chronometer; only at this hour, the fog end of the dinner period, when digestion took precedence over hilarity, could the bar of the Big Butte be found desolate, and this only once or twice a week and for a very short while.

"Howdy, stranger," greeted the bartender in an ingratiating nasal voice. "First drink's on the house."

He was a tall, comparatively young man with a paunch; with full and loose lips, large brown eyes which appealed for friendship, and a promising set of veins on his small curved nose, emphasizing the unhealthy pallor of his calling. He had succeeded in deluding himself, and nobody else, into forgetting his baldness by draping a series of three brown strands of hair across the forward part of the top of his head.

"Nice weather," he said nasally, and smiled hopefully upon the red-haired young cow-puncher as he set the black bottle on the bar. He was the sort of person who would have been in his element behind a soda counter in a small Eastern town. Red looked at him solemnly and wondered how long Medory would let him live.

"Who is this fellow De Mortes?" Red inquired. "He been around here long?"

The bartender laughed companionably and poured himself a nip from the bottle after Red was through.

"He owns the town," said the bartender, and then tossed the drink down. His large brown eyes became moist and he coughed.

"Somebody was tellin' me he'd lost money."

"Well," said the bartender, resting his elbows and paunch against the bar and lowering his voice to a confidential pitch, "they say he has—on cattle, I mean. You see, he bought up a lot of no 'count range rights when he got here, and tried to fence in some of 'em. You know how long that lasted! Fenced a right of way, and got into a fight with the trappers over that; not to mention what his foremen did to him with the cattle he bought. But he's got other incomes. He owns the hotel."

"The hell he does!" remarked Red.

"That's what they say," said the bar-

tender, pouring himself another nip. "And they say he makes aplenty out of the dance hall and the tables this time of year."

"He runs the games?"

"Well," said the bartender, laughing softly, "what do I know about it? Nothin'! Just talkin' to pass the time." It was evident he was afraid his garulousness might have carried him already too far. "You up here lookin' for grazin' country, I reckon. Been right smart of Texas fellers up here lookin' round. This your first trip?"

"I was here once before," said Red. "Brought up a herd of longhorns for a sale. I lost some money over in the Pyramid joint."

The bartender shook his pudgy face in sympathy.

"These games are hard to beat," he declared.

Red did not reply. He saw in the mirror behind the bar that his deep-set mouth was drawn down at the corners and there was a vertical dent over his narrow nose. He had lost that money in the Pyramid Park joint, but not at the games. He had been doped, and the money wasn't his—and it was too late now ever to right things with the colonel.

"You're the law round here now, ain't you?" asked Red. "They tell me you're goin' to perform a weddin'."

"That's right!" agreed the bartender, drawing his shoulders up in a nervous stretch, pulling his hands upward along his paunch and grinning in a half yawn. "If I can. I ain't so sure I can do it right, but I got to try. I'm probate."

"Where'll it be?"

"Why, over in the sheriff's office."

Two men pushed open the door, came in and lounged up to the bar. One was a logger—the railroad was bringing down logs from the Piny Brush Flats; the other was a miner. The bartender served them, but kept his eye upon Red; it wasn't often, apparently, that the men

would engage him in sociable intercourse.

The men drank. The post-noon sun fell through the two front windows upon the plank floor, gleamed upon the bar rail, lighted the damp tables and ran in little points of light along the bottles and glasses behind the bartender. Red saw that conversation of a private kind was impossible now in the bar, so he nodded his head toward the rear door, and said:

"Step out here a minute, judge. I want to speak to you jes' a second about some law business."

Red carried his drink along with him in his left hand. The bartender followed him outside with smiling alacrity. They were outside the closed door, between the hotel and the butte, out of sight from the street.

The cow-puncher slapped his hand upon his thigh, brought up his gun in one motion and jabbed it hard into the gentle bartender's paunch.

"You want to keep on livin'?" asked Red, his blue eyes narrowed to slits of light.

The bartender-probate judge had become a speechless mass of greenish flesh; so weak, indeed, that he leaned against the boards of the house and made them tremble with him. His mouth was gasping open and his brown eyes seemingly had grown several shades lighter as they looked down upon the ruddy-faced cow-puncher between his trembling lifted hands.

"Well, if you do," said Red, through a lifted corner of his lip which revealed teeth as white as a wolf's, "you'd better not marry De Mortes this evenin'—better not marry nobody till I gives you leave."

"But—but," stammered the probate judge, becoming vocal under the impact of this command, "I've got to, stranger. How can I refuse to do it for De Mortes? Why, why"—the probate judge lost a few seconds trying to make

his dry throat swallow—"why, he'd kill me, stranger!"

"That's for you to figger," replied the cow-puncher. "And you better figger it, too. You better git sick, or sumpn, this evenin'. If you don't you goin' to have sumpn fatal happen to you, and that's a fact! And you better not say I spoke to you, neither—Here, take this drink. I hear 'em knockin' for you inside. Remember now," Red added, giving the gun barrel a push, "what I done told to you!"

The combination of judge and bartender—who looked as if he wished he were neither—wiped his full weak lips with the back of his hand, put a hand on his stomach and took a deep breath, nodded his head with a far-off stare in his eyes as if he were seeing what De Mortes was going to say and do, and turned back to the barroom's back door.

Red stuck his gun back into its holster and, instead of returning to the bar, went out to the road from behind the hotel, crossed the tracks and walked stiffly on his high-heeled boots round to the livery stable. There he saddled the gray horse and rode down past the Pyramid Park Hotel and toward the way from which he had come.

He observed that Rum de Mortes—or Red de Mortes, as the pale-faced man had called him—was sitting on the hotel porch, smoking a cigar, with his polished boots against the railing.

Red had heard it said that when two men meet they are at once either enemies or friends. For himself, he knew that, for no certain reason which he was ready to state, he hated the sight of this man's big, fleshy nose and drooping, red mustache.

And it was plain to him that De Mortes—probably because of the interested glance that Constance Ferguson had cast at him—was equally well aware of the cow-puncher's presence as Red rode by.

At the end of the street, where the

last canvas tent fluttered raggedly and the prairie began, he encountered the pale-faced cowboy, who was riding into town at quite a fast clip. Red hailed him, and the cow-puncher, with a startled look, drew rein.

"Say," said Red, noting that this time the pale-faced one avoided his eye and seemed nervous, "can you tell me where Mex Pete's ranch house might be?"

"You're goin' the wrong way," said the pale one. "It's the other end of town; but it will be easiest for you to go around this way." He pointed to a trail that led around the side of the town. "You can tell it; it's the only shack with a tar-paper roof."

"Thank you, stranger," said Red. He sat his horse and watched as the other put spurs to his and galloped off down the street. Red watched him draw rein before the Pyramid Park Hotel, look back and see that Red was watching him, then spur on again to pull up across the railroad tracks before the Big Butte Hotel barroom.

"Now I wonder if that little weasel-faced ghost is tryin' to cause me trouble," said Red to himself as he rode around toward Mexican Pete's ranch house. "Might be he run into that there bushwhacker and come back here to spread the news. He kind of looks like that sort of a feller to me. I notice it's always these here no 'count spindly ones as goes runnin' round with they mouths hangin' open and air comin' out. Well, hell, if I wa'n't in trouble I wouldn't feel right, nohow."

CHAPTER XVI.

JUMPING JUSTICE.

YES, suh, Mice," said the cow-puncher to his gray pony, as he took the trail around the east of the town, "it's shore funny how the Fergusons and this here feller De Mortes come to stop at Mexican Pete's on their way to Medory, seein' as how the house is on

the other side of town. Although," he added, "I kin see how a feller might ride up to this side of town if he was tryin' hard enough."

He turned in his saddle and squinted at the glare of the cloudless sun, which had begun to drop down the sky.

"Reckon you and me better git a move on, Mice," he said, and the horse, sensing the slight kick of his heels, broke into a gallop.

As the pale rider had said, the house of Mexican Pete was not hard to find; and it was dignified by the name of "ranch house" only because to the Westerner of that section any bit of land at all was a ranch. The one-story board shack, which in a somewhat earlier day had itself been a bar and a gaming joint, now apparently was reserved as a residence.

A pile of tin cans by the back door told of sporadic housekeeping activities. No smoke came from the stone chimney, however, although a starved and mangy hound, which somehow had survived the past year and a half—for Red remembered having seen it on his previous visit to Medory—without falling a victim to the winter wolves, thrust a graying muzzle out from under the cover of a bullberry bush, up by the rather populous graveyard on the hill.

Red rode his horse up to the ranch-house door and shouted: "Hello!" Receiving no answer, he swung down, kicked the door open and went inside.

It was a room disproportionately long in contrast to the pallet bed in the corner. A portion of the old bar still clung to the end wall, but an iron stove for cooking now occupied the space where the bartender once stood. A long table in the middle of the room, a couple of chairs and a bench, a pair of antlers made into a gun rack over the fireplace—these things Red's eye passed over to rest upon a closet in the corner. He strode to this and opened the door on its leather hinges. Then he nodded.

On the top shelf stood a glass jar, and it wore a strip of adhesive plaster around its middle, on which was inscribed the one word: "Strychnine."

This of itself was of no great significance; every ranch house in this section had strychnine on hand, for when the wolves and even the coyotes became too bold and numerous a bit of strychnine, sprinkled into the flesh of their kill, would kill the marauder and at the same time provide a pelt.

But the presence of the strychnine bottle seemed to satisfy Red. He was nodding his head as he went outside again. He walked around the house until he found a spade. With this over his shoulder, he climbed up the adjacent hill to where occasional upright boards—and in one instance an indubitable tombstone, duly inscribed—marked the spot where Medory's dead male population had been buried with its boots on.

Red once had seen a man who had swallowed strychnine, albeit by mistake.

There were three fresh mounds upon the hill. The recently regretted justice of the peace, he figured, rested no doubt under one; under another lay some man whom Shorty's gossip had not concerned itself to name; and under the third—it was unmistakable, by reason of the wild roses which lay fresh upon its bosom—under the third, as the new pine board confirmed, lay the mortal remains of Colonel Carter Ferguson.

With a white face, seeming old and stern in the sunlight reflected upward from the recently turned sod, the young cow-puncher thrust his spade into the earth and threw aside the first spadeful. His face reddened, and the sweat poured from him, before he had removed enough to be able to work the shovel blade under the coffin lid and pry it up high enough to allow him a glimpse of the countenance within. As he looked, his face once again grew gray. Slowly and methodically he threw the disturbed earth back.

Then, with the spade over his shoulder, he went down the hill. As he walked, his blue eyes, no longer soft and open and ingenuous, looked across the two or three miles of grass and sage to where the white tents, the darker blots of the houses, marked the town of Medory. And his gaze, finding the Pyramid Park Hotel, seemed to pierce through it, like a blue dart of flame, and come to rest upon the porch which faced the street.

"What do you think of that, Mice?" he asked the horse when he was once again in the saddle, and headed back to town. "What do you think of that now?"

What the gray pony thought of it is unknown to history, although that it had an opinion is shown by the fact that it increased its pace unbidden—one ear cocked forward and one pointed behind—and carried its grimly ruminating rider posthaste back the way it had come, and then up the main street of the mushroom town—to be pulled up, sliding on its heels, before the Pyramid Park Hotel.

And that the young cow-puncher was deep in his own thoughts is shown by the fact that he did not notice the curious silence which fell over the whole length of the street as he and the gray pony with the white nose came into view. It was a silence that to his usual senses would have been noticeable. Noticeable, too, he would have found the covert and oblique glances which were accorded him as he swung down, dropped the pony's reins over the hitching bar, and, hiking up his pants, trailed his clinking spurs in a stiff-legged walk across the sidewalk and up the steps to the hotel porch.

His deep-set mouth was a mere slit beneath the narrow nose, his eyes were two more slits, rimmed with the pale lashes and emitting a glint of blue. The sun, nearing the horizon, picked out the scarlet handkerchief around his neck as

if it were trying to add an element of cheer and gayety to the somber black of his vest and shirt, to the neutral color of the big sombrero, and to the old-young look of his masklike face.

His glance did not find on the porch the person he was seeking. He stepped into the hotel lobby. The shadow of the porch crossed his shoulders and the sun rested now only on the butt of his right-hand six-gun, the brassy cartridge tops in his belt, the edge of the white chaps and the spurs on his high heels.

An argument had been going forward in the hotel lobby among perhaps a dozen men. As the quiet figure in the sand-colored sombrero and white chaps appeared on the porch and advanced to the lobby, the argument dropped into silence. Only one man, whose back was toward the door, was keeping it up and pounding into the palm of his left hand with his right fist.

"I tell you," he was exclaiming in a high voice, rising to a falsetto, "if we're going to have law and order, we've got to have order in our law! We've got to act legally, gentlemen!"

The speaker felt the constraint which had fallen. He turned and saw the cow-puncher standing just inside the door, his blue eyes searching the group of men. Without a moment of hesitation the speaker strode up to Red, his head and jaw thrust forward, showing a wide array of teeth beneath a small mustache, his eyes diminished in size by the heavy eyeglasses which were supported by a saddle nose.

"Pardon me," said the speaker, and his accent was that of the Easterner, a cultivated man to boot, but somehow its forthright courage deprived it of any offense. "I have just been assuring these men that if you are guaranteed a square jury and a fair trial, on the charge of killing 'Muddy Bill' at the creek crossing, you will agree to stand trial and make it unnecessary to have any further bloodshed."

The young cow-puncher's gaze returned from its thorough scrutiny of the room to rest upon the forthright Easterner, also rather young, who confronted him. Evidently, whoever he had been seeking, he had not found. Slowly blinking his pale lashes, he proceeded now to give consideration to the other's proposal.

"Well, now, stranger," he drawled softly after a pause, "that sounds fair enough. Ain't no jury goin' to hang a man for shootin' a bushwhacker. But I ain't got no acquaintances up in these parts. I ain't a-goin' to give up my guns."

"That's all right," said the Easterner eagerly. "We can see the judge about committing you and he will release you on bail. By George, I'll stand bail for you myself!"

Red stared at the man. He was dressed like a cowboy, but his speech and manner betrayed him to be a tenderfoot; probably a tenderfoot rancher. The cowboy's face softened almost imperceptibly.

"I shore appreciate your offerin' it, stranger," he drawled, "but I reckon I can go my own bail, provided this here judge ain't too onreasonable."

"Let's go," said the tenderfoot, who seemed fairly bubbling with energy. "There is a temporary shortage of legal officers, I am afraid. We'll have to go to the probate judge and he's over at the Butte bar, I understand."

With a great clatter and scraping of heavy boots, the cavalcade of citizens, headed by Red and the Easterner, descended the hotel steps and made their way along the road toward the Big Butte Hotel. Red noticed a crowd of men surging into a small, newly built house this side of the railroad track as he went by; his attention even was caught by the gleam of the window glass, and he noticed that the window sash was painted while the rest of the building was of unplanned boards. It is

on such inconsiderable things that a man's attention may sometimes focus, even when he is on the way to visit a probate judge.

They pushed open the swinging doors of the Big Butte barroom, but the tall young man with the companionable manner and the paunch was not behind the bar.

"Where's the judge?" demanded the Easterner.

"Hell," said the new bartender, not moving his elbows from the bar, "ain't you heerd? He's over at the sheriff's office marryin' De Mortes and that Ferguson filly."

"We'll go over there," said the Easterner with decision. "I think an application for bail in a homicide case can take precedence over a wedding."

"I reckon it can," agreed the young cow-puncher, whose face had suddenly become grim and somewhat pale. "I hope we ain't too late."

"Too late for what?" asked the Easterner, as the men made way and they proceeded across the tracks and toward the freshly built sheriff's office.

"Nothin'," answered the cow-puncher. "I reckon they's always a way."

There was such a jam of men at the door of the sheriff's office that the Easterner, constantly saying, "Pardon me—excuse me—I'm sorry," had to push his way up the three steps and into the open door.

A wavering and uncertain voice was filling the otherwise quiet office with a nasal and hesitating version of the marriage service. The cow-puncher, who had kept along with the Easterner, observed that a red head and a sunburned neck were visible above the crowd. He pushed nearer and saw that Constance Ferguson was standing beside De Mortes. Their backs were to the room. Facing them, and with his back to the painted window, stood the Big Butte Hotel bartender, for the moment the

probate judge, vested with the power, by virtue of his title, to solemnize the marriage ceremony.

The red veins on the tall judge's small curved nose were doubly conspicuous by reason of the pallor which the occasion had lent his flabby countenance. He was holding in both hands a black-bound book which trembled visibly. Between the frequent pauses which he allowed himself as his prominent, soft-brown eyes scanned the antique phraseology, he would lick his full and weak lips; and when he made a mistake he would smile in a sort of apologetic haste to acknowledge his own shortcomings. Sweat darkened the three strands of hair across his skull.

The cow-puncher, worming his way ahead of the Easterner, got past the crowd and stood where his arm would be free. He made no sound, however, until the probate judge had painfully reached that part of the service which said:

"If there be any one who knows of any cause why these two persons should not be joined together, let him speak now or else forever after hold his peace."

This is always a nervous moment, even in the most conventional surroundings. The probate judge paused for an instant, perhaps for a rest, and in the intense quiet the slim cow-puncher cleared his throat.

The large brown eyes of the probate judge turned toward him, recognized him. But no one in the room had long in which to examine the probate judge's expression. Doubtless, before agreeing to perform the ceremony, he had believed that Red would be under arrest. At any rate, he now saw the deadly slit of those blue eyes trained upon himself.

The probate judge hesitated scarcely a second. In front of him the room was crowded. Behind him shone the bright rays of the declining sun, through the window which gave a

glimpse of the great outdoors. With an alacrity and decision commendable in one of his sedentary habits, he wheeled and leaped through the window, carrying along with him parts of the sash and the panes.

There are those who say that he carried the whole side of the house with him. This is not true. The men who were near enough, however, could see that a considerable segment of the sash hung about his right shoulder as his tall frame, ignoring the handicap of a paunch, darted with surprising speed across the space between the sheriff's office and the next building. A calf intercepted him. The judge-bartender, to avoid a collision, leaped over the animal like a deer. The next instant he had vanished around the end of the other building.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN BEHIND THE BAR.

FOR a few moments the men in the room were silent with astonishment. Those in front, who had seen the judge's expression, looked around to see what it could have been to have scared him so; those behind surged forward in order to find out what had occasioned the crash, and where the judge had gone.

Red de Mortes, who had been standing on the brink of matrimony and had seen the brink vanish, was perhaps the most astonished of all. His red head, with the ruddy skin, the fleshy nose and the drooping red mustache, turned around and exhibited an almost comical expression. He did not at first see the young cow-puncher, who was perhaps not five feet from him. His cold eyes, instead, fastened upon the Easterner, who was behind the cow-puncher.

"What's the meanin' of this?" De Mortes demanded, and his tone told that he and the rancher had crossed their wills before.

The young rancher had no chance to answer, however, before De Mortes' gray eyes, searching the bystanders in a cold rage and looking for some one to blame, found the quiet cow-puncher, his thumb hooked over his cartridge belt, standing not five feet away and regarding him with two blue slits for eyes.

De Mortes was startled. Though he was no coward, his face paled. He regarded the cow-puncher for a moment, as if seeing whether his presence meant hostilities, then he returned his attention to the Easterner.

"I thought this man was to be arrested for killin' Muddy Bill," he said. Obviously he was holding his anger in restraint.

"He was," said the Easterner. "We were looking for the judge in order to commit him; or rather to arrange bail for him. He agreed to stand trial."

"He agreed!" shouted De Mortes, his face flushing. "That's a hell of a fine howdy-do, now, isn't it? You ask a man's permission to arrest him. Hell, if we leave it to you and your damned crowd, we'll have a rotten town here pretty soon!"

"Hold on, Mr. de Mortes." The soft, drawling voice of the young cow-puncher drew the big man's eyes at once. "You're kind of forgettin' there's a lady here, ain't you?"

The room became as still as death. To tell a man how to speak before his own intended wife was certainly a plain enough insult. De Mortes' fleshy countenance went pale again with a cold, consuming rage. He swallowed. His gray eyes were like spots of burning light. But he apparently was too discreet to risk a draw with the blue-eyed young fellow who stood with a thumb already hooked over his cartridge belt and his slender fingers not a split second away from the butt of his gun.

"When is this trial comin' off?" asked De Mortes, turning again to the Easter-

ner. "You stopped the men from stringin' the feller up. What is your way of gettin' justice?"

"My way," replied the Easterner, his eyeglasses glinting, "is the law's way. He's entitled to a fair trial before a jury of his peers. Unless the law observes the law, you can't expect any one else to do it."

"I didn't ask for any speech," replied De Mortes. "You've made plenty of them around here the past year. Everybody knows what you think. Now, here's a particular case. The question is, what's goin' to be done, and when?"

"There's only one judge and he——"

"We don't need no judge!" interjected De Mortes violently. "The judge ain't got nothing to do but give sentence, and that comes after the jury. If you want a jury, let's have it. If you want a trial, let's have it. But, for God's sake, let's do something and quit this long-winded speechifyin'."

"I agree to that," said the Easterner, reddening.

"And so do I," added the cow-puncher. His voice was soft and not loud, but when he was speaking the room for some reason held its breath. "It's kind of crowded over here. If this suits you-all, I suggest we move over to the Pyramid Hotel bar. With your-all's permission, gen'lemen, I'll stand treat for the crowd, and then this here trial can be got over with. Tell you-all the truth, I'd kind of like to get it over with my ownself."

"Bully!" exclaimed the Easterner. "Come on, men."

"We got the prisoner's permission," said De Mortes with profound sarcasm, "so I reckon it's all right to go ahead."

"I ain't no prisoner," replied the cow-puncher. "I'm out on bail. Leastwise, I would be if you-all had a jedge around here as would stand without hitchin'."

There was a chuckle of laughter from the room at this sally. The cow-puncher

permitted a corner of the slit of his deep-set mouth to tug upward. His forward-pushing cheek bones wrinkled about his deep-blue eyes.

He stood quite still as the men began scuffling from the room; he was waiting for Red de Mortes to precede him, and the big man, seeing this, moved forward, reaching behind to draw the Ferguson girl with him.

This movement exposed the young cow-puncher to the view of the girl. The half smile left his face when he met her look. It was not because of the sadness that he saw in her dark eyes. Her freckle-flecked, finely formed countenance showed the marks of the recent grief and of strain; but it was what her eyes said to him that made the cow-puncher's expression change.

He saw something there that to a man's man in a man's country he could realize only by a sort of intuition. He saw, for a flash, that here was a girl who after much meditation, and after a recent grief, had decided to marry a certain man; and he saw in her deep eyes that she blamed him for interrupting the ceremony. More than this, however, he saw that, perhaps by way of retracting the first glance she had given him in the hotel lobby, she was giving him an active glance of scorn. Her soft, red mouth was curled slightly at the corner.

Her glance took him in from head to foot, and with the scorn was mixed, he was sure, a woman's horror for the man who had recently killed another man. It was as if she saw in this young cow-puncher all the violence, the cruelty, the bloody habits, of a land which had yielded her only grief and fear.

Red's teeth came together with a snap. His pale lashes narrowed about the blue slits of his eyes as he followed the Easterner, De Mortes and the slender, shapely girl out into the strange, greenish light following the sunset. Beyond the cottonwoods, the weird-looking

buttes had become purple and indistinct in the afterglow. The sky was darkening already; it seemed as if a shadow were rising up from the earth to eclipse the soft light above.

For the first time in his life, Red wondered why, on an earth so pretty to look at, men should bother themselves with killing each other. It was in a pensive mood that he accompanied the gathering into the Pyramid Park Hotel barroom—most of the gathering, that is, with the exception of Constance Ferguson, who had continued along the street to mount the steps leading up to the hotel lobby.

As he went through the barroom's swinging doors, and lost the girl from view, he felt a sadness within himself, a curious pain and loneliness which he had never experienced in his life before.

"Who is that feller?" asked the cow-puncher abruptly of the Easterner.

"What man?" asked the rancher.

"Jest goin' out of the back door," said Red.

When they had entered, there had been two bartenders behind the bar. The smaller one, however, evidently a Mexican, to judge from his olive and greasy skin, shoe-button eyes and long mustache, had stopped suddenly in his motion of putting a bottle on the bar. Bending over, as if to pick up something, he had instead run along behind the bar, and at the time of Red's question he was slipping out of the back door.

"Why, he's one of the bartenders," said the rancher in his cultivated Eastern accent. "His name, I believe, is Mexican Pete."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TRIAL.

LET'S get goin' on this here trial," said De Mortes, as the drinks were tossed off. His gray eyes were fixed balefully upon the young cow-puncher who, in his sand-colored sombrero, red

neck cloth, white chaps and high-heeled boots was leaning against the bar, apparently the most unconcerned man in the room.

"How you goin' to pick this jury?" De Mortes continued, turning to glare at the Easterner.

"Any way you say," said the rancher, who evidently was not in the least afraid of the big red-headed person. "My idea would be to put two dozen slips in a hat, mark a dozen of them, and let the men be on the jury who drew the marked slips."

"Do that, then!" snapped De Mortes. "Where in hell is Mexican Pete?" he demanded of the lone bartender.

"Don't know. Went out somewhere."

"Well, somebody go get that white-faced pilgrim that saw this feller down by the ford. By George, if I was runnin' this business it would 'a' been over long ago."

Red, leaning easily against the bar, his thumb still hooked over his cartridge belt, looked casually around as the hat was being passed. Some of the men present were of the cowboy type; two or three of them, he judged, were ranchers, and he observed that these, and one or two of the cow-punchers, seemed to stand together. Along with them, too, were a few long-haired trappers and hunters in their fringed buckskin shirts and trousers and soft Indian moccasins. He remembered what the probate judge had told him of the differences De Mortes had had with some of the people, and he observed that the tougher elements—the loafers and hangers-on, some of whom no doubt would prove to be professional killers; the tougher-looking cow-punchers and miners—these hung together, too, choosing the side of the room nearest the big man with the red mustache.

The man who was passing the hat seemed to be aware of the division of forces, and of the necessity for avoiding

any seeming unfairness between them, for he was careful to offer it first to one group and next to the other.

The lots were drawn, and the twelve chosen jurors had lined themselves up with their backs to the bar, when the messenger returned, bringing with him the pale-faced cowboy whom Red had met on his way into town that morning.

"All right!" snapped De Mortes. His fleshy nose and full ruddy cheeks had become greasy; his gray eyes shone coldly in the light of the lamps which had been lit. "Here is the jury, here is the witness, and I'll make the charges."

He raised a long arm and pointed at Red, who had moved to make way for the jury and now stood negligently, his sombrero on one side, his thumb in his belt, by the door.

"I charge this here feller with killin' Muddy Bill. This witness will tell you he rode along to the creek ford and found Bill lyin' there dead, just shot, and this here feller had just come ridin' by. Is that right, witness?"

The pale cow-puncher nodded his head and wet his lips.

"Was anything of Bill's missing?" asked the Easterner, showing his teeth at the witness. "Did you see the shooting?"

The pale witness shook a negative to both these questions.

"Don't matter about that!" snarled De Mortes viciously. "Bill's dead and this here feller, a stranger round here, killed him, while Bill, he's been well known round Medory ever since the town was started a year ago. Ain't that right?"

He looked around to receive a number of confirmatory nods. Some of the men said: "That's right, Red."

"And another thing," De Mortes continued, addressing the witness suddenly; "tell 'em what else you saw."

The pale cowboy wet his lips again, swallowed and cleared his throat.

"When I was ridin' south," he began, "I met up with this here puncher down in the rough land this side of the creek ford."

"Where were you going?" demanded the Easterner sharply.

The pale one blinked and flushed.

"Never mind where he was goin'!" shouted De Mortes angrily. "That's his business. Are we tryin' him, or this here stranger?"

The Easterner let the matter drop and the pale one continued.

"I come on this here cow-puncher tyin' up his rope. He seen I seen him, and he said to me he was jes' pullin' a steer outn a mudhole. When I passed him I seen they was a mudhole, and I wouldn't 'a' thought nothin' of it except they was a brandin' fire jes' dyin' down right near by the mudhole. I looked around then for the steer, and when I seen him I noticed that his brand looked kind of queer. I went up right close to him, and I seen that the brand had been burned; it had been changed right recent on him, I mean."

While the pale one had first been testifying, the men in the raftered room had been taking the matter more or less casually. There had been sounds of scuffling feet, of humorous whisperings; shadows from the swinging oil lamps had moved across the room and leaped against the rafters as the men moved about. When the charge of rustling, however, was added to the killing charge, and with so much circumstantiality of detail, the room became very quiet.

"I kep' on ridin'," said the pale cow-puncher in a voice which seemed suddenly very much louder, "because I didn't have no reason for doubtin' what the stranger had said. When I crossed the creek ford I come on Muddy Bill, lyin' by a rock, and plumb dead, with a new hole in the center of his forehead. Yes, sir," said the pale one, as if this added some significance to his testi-

mony, "plumb in the center. Well, when I seen that, coupled with what I had seen back in the rough land, I says to myself: 'I better come on back to town and tell this to the law.' Well, I come on back and told the probate jedge about it."

Every one in the room turned their regard upon Red Morgan as the pale witness finished his story. They seemed to feel that the time had come for him to make some explanation; and he seemed to feel so, too.

"Boys," he said in his soft drawl, not taking his blue eyes off of De Mortes, "I admit I shot this here puncher you-all calls Muddy Bill. I was ridin' along, mindin' my own business, and he shot at me from behind that there rock the witness was tellin' you 'bout. But I ain't done no rustlin'. Hell, I'm a plumb stranger up this a way. What call would I have to be a-rustlin' cattle?"

This sounded fairly reasonable but the Easterner's sharp voice put in an interpolation.

"Why was Muddy Bill ambushing you?" he asked.

"That," said Red, "I don't know."

"You mean you have no idea why he was trying to kill you?" asked the rancher incredulously.

"Not a bit of a idea," answered Red.

"Hadh't you ever seen him before?"

"Well, yes. I had, you might say, kind of seen him."

"Where?"

"Down South. Down on Colonel Ferguson's Bar Four Ranch, it was."

"Did you have any quarrel with him then?"

"No, suh. Not a bit."

"And he came up here ahead of you, shot at you when you were riding up, and so far as you know had no reason for it?" asked the rancher, frowning over his glasses.

"Yes, suh. I reckon that's right," agreed the cow-puncher.

"Did he know you were coming up

this way?" asked the Easterner, as if trying to figure some way of believing in Red's story.

"Not as I know of, suh," answered Red softly.

The room was very silent. The air seemed heavy with the doubt with which the men had heard this strange announcement.

"I reckon we've had enough of this here nonsense," said De Mortes harshly, turning on the jury. "Men, you've heard the evidence. What is your verdict?"

Before the men could reply, Red's soft, drawling voice spoke from the doorway.

"Jes' a minute, hombabs!"

Every glance in the room was suddenly upon the calm figure standing at the door. Something in the tone of the voice had warned them what to expect.

The young cow-puncher, his sombrero on one side, his red neck cloth a bright spot at his throat, was standing with his fists at his waistline; and in each fist was a gun.

"Wait a minute," he repeated gently. "Looks to me like the cards is kind of stacked ag'inst me on this deal. I don't want you-all to bring in no verdict ag'inst me that you might be sorry for afterward. I move that this here court adjourn, as the feller says, till further notice. And I advise that the court and the spectators keep mighty still for a little. It shore would pain me to have to kill any of you."

It became evident now that the cow-puncher's guns were held on De Mortes, the leader of the one faction, and on the Easterner, the leader of the other.

"I'm goin' to leave you-all now," the soft voice continued. "I've got a little investigatin' to do. But I'm comin' back. And when I do——"

An edge, like sharp, hard steel had come upon the soft voice. It was evi-

dent now that the narrow slit of his blue gaze was directed at De Mortes.

"And when I do," he repeated, "they's goin' to be a sinner come to justice. And it ain't goin' to be me, neither!"

His spur jingled as he kicked behind him to open the front door. His guns did not waver from their aim at the Easterner and at De Mortes.

Suddenly, however, he was no longer in the door. The door swung to with a little creaking sound. The men in the room, who automatically had raised their hands, now let them fall. And, as if this had been a signal, there arose from the road outside the clatter of a horse's hoofs—a clatter that faded rapidly and steadily away, southward toward the open prairie.

"Well," said De Mortes, laughing briefly, "we got rid of *him*, anyhow. *He* won't be back in a hurry!"

CHAPTER XIX.

MEXICAN PETE.

MEXICAN PETE, when he slipped out of the rear of the Pyramid Park Hotel barroom, ran to the end of the hotel, where he had his horse tied, scrambled up into the saddle and set out at a rapid pace along the road which led to his shack. He was not sure that the young gringo had recognized him, but he was taking no chances.

He rode past his ranch house, picketed the horse in a coulee and crawled back to a ridge top from which he could see his ranch house, a few hundred feet away, and beyond this the scattered and dim-yellow oblongs which marked the windows of Medory.

Darkness had fallen. The stars lent only a faint steely character to the blotted forms of the earth. Mexican Pete took off his bar apron and wrapped it around his muscular shoulders; but he remained cold. His teeth chattered as he chewed on his black

mustache; his oily hair felt cold to the stroke of his grimy hand.

He felt his aquiline and whisky-red-dened nose. It, too, was cold; and out of the side of his shoe-button eyes, which he kept carefully averted, he could still see the shimmering, almost invisible shape of the head boards, the paler shape of the single headstone, which bloomed like unholy mesquite bushes in the garden of the dead.

Mexican Pete swore feelingly in Spanish, shivered and wondered if he would be safe in lighting himself a cigarette. The thought of the devil had brought the gringo back into his mind. For a year and a half Mexican Pete had heard of that gringo. The riders from the south, bringing herds up to stock the new ranges, had spoken of this man with awe. They had told tales of how he had followed a gang of rustlers with the implacable tenacity of a starved wolf; had followed them from one end of the longhorn country to another; had given each rustler, when caught, a chance to prove his innocence and then a chance to fight it out. One by one the rustlers had gone the same way. This was one of Red's earlier exploits.

The devil, to Mexican Pete's imagination, had always been a dark man with lean features, two small horns, a small mustache, a goatee, and a long red tail, barbed at the end. It had only just begun to occur to him that the devil might be blue-eyed. He began a curse, then changed it into a prayer to his patron saint. It was a muddled sort of prayer, but the effect of it was, "O, *Santo Pedro*, deliver me from the clutches of this blue-eyed cow-puncher who is possibly the devil and is most certainly an infidel."

He began to see how the devil could be cold and quiet and impassive, with slits of blue ice for eyes. He wondered if this was why he shivered.

"*Por Dios!*" he muttered with chat-

tering teeth. "Will they never finish that business? Will they never hang this cow-puncher devil, so a man can sleep?"

Time passed, however, and he heard no riders loping out to the crooked cottonwood. But the night grew darker, and the lights one by one went out in the town.

"They have locked him up, instead of hanging him," he thought, rising stiffly and stretching his cramped limbs. "Or at any rate, he does not want me. Long before now he would have been riding up to my poor shack."

But to be doubly careful, Mexican Pete left his horse in the coulee and walked on his cramped legs down to the shack where he lived. He did not light a light, although he craved a cup of coffee and a cigarette. He crawled into his pallet bed without taking off his boots. The gun and the knife at his waist comforted him somewhat, the blankets warmed him, and he drifted off to sleep, dreaming that he was back again in the warm land of the mescal, and the mesquite, and the prickly pear.

Mexican Pete was warm for a while. Then he dreamed that he had grown cold. He tried to move, but the devil had an icy thumb in his neck. He woke up, cold but sweating, for something cold and round was pressing into the flesh at the base of his jaw, and a voice—the voice of the devil, he thought—was saying quietly:

"Be good, or I'll kill you. Git up now, you weasel, and light the lamp."

Mexican Pete's hands were at his waist; as he brought them up he realized that his gun and knife were gone. He rolled over, stumbled up and struck a match, though his hand trembled so that he could hardly tease the wick of the oil lamp into flame. When he put the chimney down again, and looked around, it was to find the young cow-puncher with the red hair and the blue eyes, standing in the middle of the floor

and rolling a cigarette. Pete's knife was stuck in Red's cartridge belt; the gun he could not see anywhere.

"I'm gonna kill you," said the cow-puncher, crimping the end of his cigarette and lighting a match.

Mexican Pete felt his legs turn to water. He sank to the floor, raising his grimy hands, palms together. Mexican Pete normally was not too brave; this apparition out of his dreams congealed his very insides. His throat was so dry he could not speak. He managed to stammer:

"Oh, señor! Oh, señor!"

"I'm gonna kill you," continued the cow-puncher quietly, exhaling a cloud of thin, blue smoke, "unless you tell me——"

"Anything! Anything, señor!"

"You interrupt me again," said the blue-eyed young creature of ice, "and I'm goin' to cut your tongue out and feed it to the first coyote I see. I was sayin', I'm goin' to shoot your lungs out unless you tell me exactly how Colonel Ferguson come to die in this here house when he was in good health comin' into it."

The cow-puncher pulled out his gun with a lightninglike movement.

"Now you tell me," he said, and his eyes were cold slits of blue, "and tell me right. The first lie from you and it'll be your last. The devil's been lookin' for you a long time, I reckon. And so have I."

These words, as much as the threatening gun, loosed the cords of Mexican Pete's tongue. He stammered the story out, a mixture of bad English and bad Spanish, interpolated with explanations of his own pious intentions and oaths as to his future godliness if allowed to live.

De Mortes, he said, had wanted to marry the Ferguson girl. There had been some dispute with the colonel—this Pete did not quite understand—the colonel intimating that De Mortes was not the man he had claimed he was,

and that he had brought them up to Medory from his ranch under false pretenses.

"Now tell me about the strychnine," said the visitor.

"*Por Dios, señor!* It was not I! He did it. De Mortes put it in the coffee. And you see, señor! I will tell you why—he knows women! After the father was dead, he comforts her; he say how he loved her father and how sorry he is that he should die so sudden. He make her love him because he love her father. He make her love him because——"

"Shut up, you dog!"

The Mexican shrank backward upon the floor at the blaze of fury in the cowboy's eyes. He lay there, muttering prayers while the young man seemingly meditated upon whether or not to kill him. Pete vowed many candles in gratitude to the saint, for the vein which had swelled on the young man's brow had begun to go down, his lips and his eyes were less thin.

"A while ago," said the cow-puncher in his soft voice, "you doped me and robbed me of two thousand dollars. I've come to collect it offn you, or take it out of you."

"I did not get it, señor! If I did, may you kill me here and now, and may my soul go to the devil."

"Who got it, then?"

"He got it, señor! He is the one who has the black bottle. I swear to you that he gave me only a hundred dollars. De Mortes is the boss, señor."

The cow-puncher thought for a minute, his pale lashes close together, a crease over his narrow nose. Finally his lips came together in decision.

"I'm goin' to give you a chance, hom-bah," he said quietly, "though it's a shame to let a coyote like you live any longer. Here's a pencil, and there's a piece of paper. You write a letter, like I tell you, to this here De Mortes hom-bah. You-all got any meetin' place?"

"I have met him at the crooked cottonwood, señor. That is the big tree about a mile beyond the far end of town."

"Yeah, I've done heerd about it recently," replied the cowboy dryly. "Well, you write him to meet you there to-night, *muy pronto*, see? You tell him to come alone and that it is a matter of life and death—which, between you and me, ain't no lie at all. I know you'd shore hate to lie."

"*Si, señor, si!*" exclaimed the greasy, dark-skinned man, turning on his knees to lay the paper on the seat of the chair and to press the pencil point against his tongue. "*Si*, I will write: 'Señor de Mortes: Meet me cottonwood quick. Very much trouble. *Muy pronto*—Pete.'"

He wrote awkwardly, as a child would write, his tongue sticking out of the corner of his wide, brutal mouth. The red-haired cowboy took the paper from him, read it carefully and looked down at the kneeling rascal.

"What's the idea of this here long line through your name?" he asked.

Pete threw up his palms.

"So he know it is me and not somebody else, señor!"

"It better turn out that way!" said the cowboy. "Git up and sit in this here chair and put your hands behind its back."

He took a rope down from a peg in the corner and tied the Mexican, hand and foot and body, into the chair so that an earthquake couldn't have shaken him loose. Then he stepped over and blew out the light.

"It better turn out like you say," he repeated from the door. "Because, don't forget, I'm a-comin' back here to git you, greaser." The voice was very soft and quiet.

The voice ended. Footsteps faded away from the door. Mexican Pete kept very still for a moment. Then he squirmed in the chair, his skin going

cold and hot, his forehead sweating. At length he could stand it no longer and called:

"Señor! Señor Red! Wait! Let me tell you!"

He heard footsteps coming nearer from some little distance away. Presently the door was darkened and a soft voice said:

"Was you makin' a noise? I mean for you not to do that. But I come back to ask you something else, and you'd better tell me straight. That feller, Muddy Bill, what bushwhacked me. Did De Mortes put him onto that?"

"*Si, señor,*" answered the Mexican eagerly. "*Si!*"

"But how did he know I was comin' up this way? And why would he want me killed?"

"But he feared you, señor. He does not tell me all he thinks, and I do not know what varied reasons he may have, señor. Muddy Bill, he had seen you down South, he had heard you were comin' up to Medory, lookin' for the colonel. He told De Mortes, and De Mortes said he would give a thousand dollars to the man that got you. Muddy Bill got the job."

"Well, now, you keep still," said the soft voice.

The doorway grew lighter. The moon, rising slowly above the buttes, laid a triangle of silver upon the sill. Mexican Pete licked his lips, tried to swallow, but his throat was too dry.

Far down the trail, far and very faint, he heard the beat of a horse's hoofs, riding fast away from his shack and toward the board-and-canvas town.

CHAPTER XX.

A KNOCK AT THE WINDOW.

I WONDER if she will holler, Mice?" inquired the red-haired young cowpuncher of his gray horse as he rode fast toward Medory, leaving Mexican Pete's shack behind. "No," he an-

swered his own question. "She's the colonel's daughter. She won't holler."

He pulled the pony to a walk as they neared the board-and-canvas town. Its bare hoofs made little sound in the dusty road. He swung down at a shed near the Pyramid Park Hotel, led the pony into the pit of shadow beneath it, then came out into the bright silver light of the moon, walked with that stiff, dragging step of the cow-puncher across the road and up to an open window on the first floor of the rear of De Mortes' hotel.

All of the hotel windows were dark. The whole town, even the barrooms and the dance halls, were silent and dark. The only sound to disturb the night was the distant wailing complaint of a coyote and, from the nearer cottonwoods, the sweet shrill pipings of a bird.

Red began to go through some curious motions. He had loosened or pulled up his cartridge belt; he was working his bare hands at some buckle under his waistband; finally he brought forth a wide leather belt from under his clothing. This he opened, took out of it a quantity of greenbacks, examined them, put a few in his pocket and made a neat packet of the rest.

He threw the belt on the ground then. After looking once again carefully all around, he stepped cautiously up to the window, raised on tiptoe, but was unable to see in, so he drew himself up by his hands.

He hung there a minute, his dust-colored sombrero and red neck cloth above the sill, his black vest and shirt, white chaps and boots as if plastered against the side of the building, his spurs palely gleaming in the light of the round, pale moon which was now well above the misty, irregular shapes of the buttes.

The moonlight threw the cow-puncher's shadow on the floor of the bedroom inside. An edge of the silver light rested upon the narrow bed in the corner. The cow-puncher's arms had be-

gun to ache, but he hated to let himself down. For in the patch of moonlight lay a calm face, seeming to him like the face of something too beautiful to be real. The long-lashes lay upon the cheeks. The curving mouth was a dark flower against the creamy skin. The chestnut hair lay loose, a careless frame for the face, upon the white pillow. And the crazy quilt, drawn up over the shoulders, rose and fell almost imperceptibly with the sleeper's breathing.

Red let himself down to the ground. He had thought that De Mortes had given her his own room, and that therefore the hotel owner would be in the public sleeping room above.

He stood on tiptoe once again and knocked with his knuckles on the window sill. He had been right in his supposition and now could carry out his plan.

There was no movement within the room. He knocked once more. This time there was a rustle within; some one in a musical but sleepy voice inquired:

"Who is that?"

"It's me, Miss Ferguson," replied Red in a whisper. "I used to work for your father. I have something for you."

There were sounds within the room as the girl got up and threw something around her. The next moment her dark-brown eyes were looking down upon him while the moonlight was swallowed up in the black coat around her.

Red reached up and handed her the packet of bills.

"That's two thousand dollars for you, Miss Constance," he said. "I lost that much of the colonel's money some time ago. I—I didn't have a chance to give it back to him in person, now I've brought it to you."

The girl was looking over the bills as if to confirm his statement. Suddenly she started, leaned out and peered into

the shadow which the sombrero cast over his face.

"Aren't you the man——" she began, and stopped.

"Yes, ma'am," said Red. "I butted in on your weddin', and I shore apologize. But I was jes' lookin' for the jedge."

"But this money!" she exclaimed, and she had become suddenly agitated. "Can it be possible! I mean—well, you of course can't realize what this means to me!" There were tears in her voice, and something else. It was as if she were almost afraid that this might not be true.

"I reckon you and the colonel didn't expect I'd ever pay this back," suggested the cow-puncher softly.

"No," she admitted, and leaned nearer as if trying to read his face. "No, we didn't, and I wonder—— You must be good, to do this, but I have been told that you——"

"Never mind about me," interrupted the cow-puncher in his gentle drawl. "It don't matter none about me. But I wanted to tell you that I always thought a heap of the colonel, and of Buddy especially——"

"I remember—yes—Buddy speaking of you—as if——"

"Yes'm. Buddy and me was pretty good friends, I reckon. And I jest wanted to say if I could help you——"

"Yes!" she exclaimed. And then: "No, no!—I mean, if I could only—now that I have some money and am independent——" She peered down at him, pausing as if thinking. "But you," she went on, "you are a—a fugitive. The whole town is against you. How could you help me?"

"Well, ma'am," he answered gently, "if you need any help, I reckon I'll find a way to help you. After all, it ain't but *one* town against me, is it? And I shore would be proud if I could be of service."

"No. I mean, you should not have

even come here to-night to bring me this money. You are risking too much; you should be far away from here right now. You have done too much for me already, and I have no right to let you. In fact, I have been doing you an injustice in my thoughts. I see that now."

"Excuse me, ma'am, for buttin' in on your personal matters, but would you mind tellin' me how you come to be friends with *him*?"

"With Mr. de Mortes? Yes, I will tell you anything you wish to know. Mr. de Mortes came to the ranch bearing a letter from Buddy, saying that he had saved Buddy's life and that, although father and I didn't know how well he and Buddy had known each other, Buddy thought he was—well, his words were that he was the 'whitest fellow, the best friend that ever sat a horse.' It seems some rustlers had surrounded Buddy and Mr. de Mortes had run them off. Buddy, of course——"

Her voice stopped.

"So you-all come north with De Mortes?"

"Yes," she replied after a moment. "Father had decided to sell out, anyhow, and De Mortes had an investment up here that would make father a lot of money. He was going to let him in on it as Buddy's friend. Father gave him the money."

"And then?" asked the puncher gently.

"And then father—you know about that."

A tear like a drop of quicksilver in the moonlight ran from her wet lashes to the dimple at her mouth corner.

"I hope you will excuse me for askin'," the cowboy continued in his soft drawl, "but can I look jest a minute at that there letter?"

She stared at him as if in surprise and hesitation at this request. Then she disappeared, to reappear a few seconds later and hand him down two

crumpled sheets. They were pieces of paper torn from a tomato can, scrawled over with a man's irregular hand. They breathed now a faint feminine fragrance, however.

The cow-puncher turned so that the moon fell bright upon the wrinkled paper. He stood with his head bowed over the letter, moving it closer to his eyes as he neared the end. Then he looked up and handed it back to Constance.

She leaned to accept it.

"Why," she exclaimed, a note of something besides surprise in her voice, "why, you are crying!"

"No, ma'am," replied the cow-puncher in a muffled tone, "it's jest eye trouble, tryin' to read in the moonlight."

There was a pause. The girl stared at him with a puzzled frown. He stared at the ground.

"This letter is about a feller called Red," he said.

"Yes. Red de Mortes. And you can see how—well, you see, I loved Buddy so much."

"There's jest one more thing I am a-goin' to ask you," said the cow-puncher, and now he spoke hesitantly. "Do you—that is—I hope you won't be mad with me for askin' you this when you-all was figgerin' on gittin' hitched up. But what I want to know is, do you—do you really, well, love this here man?"

She looked at him a long time. The moon made the top of his sombrero almost the color of moonlight, except for the dent like a rabbit's nose in the crown. The rest of him was in shadow.

"I don't think I can refuse to answer you after you have done this for me." She paused. "Life does queer things to us," she answered. "Sometimes we can't have our dreams. And then we ask ourselves—does any one ever get his dream? And, after all, what is love?"

"You ain't answered my question," said the cow-puncher almost sternly.

"Haven't I answered it?"

"I asked you plain if you loved him—I mean, if you love him the way I mean."

Her lips trembled. She shook her head.

"Perhaps not. But I was alone and without money. And, after what he had done for Buddy. And he is kind."

The cow-puncher lifted his hat and bowed to her.

"Thank you, Miss Constance," he said. "You done told me what I wanted to know. And I got to go now. I got to meet a feller down by the crooked cottonwood."

"I shall never forget what you have done for me," she said. "Never, if I live a thousand years. I think you must be really a very fine person to have done it."

He turned without a word and left her. At the corner of the building he looked back. She waved her hand.

He wasn't sure—moonlight is deceptive, and sometimes a man lets his wishes make a fool out of him. He wasn't sure, but he thought she kissed her hand to him.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT THE CROOKED COTTONWOOD.

THE young cow-puncher followed his moonlit shadow along the side of the Pyramid Park Hotel, then turned into the shadow of the hotel itself and stood in front of the stairs leading up to the porch and the entrance to the hotel lobby.

The entire hotel was dark, and after a moment of inspection the solitary figure climbed the steps. Red knew that by now the ranchers, who had taken the side of the law before his trial, were home in their bunks. He knew that even if any of them remained in town overnight, they no longer would be on

his side even so far as a fair trial was concerned.

He had taken to gunplay while his trial had been in progress; in their eyes, this would be equivalent to a confession of guilt, not only as concerned murdering the man who had ambushed him, but to the charge of rustling or of running a brand on the mudhole steer.

He knew that if he fell into the hands of the townspeople, therefore, he would have short shrift. The bulk of the inhabitants were followers of De Mortes, anyhow, and even the better elements would not stand in the way of a recourse to the rope over a branch of the crooked cottonwood.

But De Mortes was sleeping somewhere upstairs; and he had a message for De Mortes.

He paused in the hotel doorway to extract the note from the breast pocket of his black-flannel shirt and to limber his six-gun in its holster. Then, a hand held out before him to fend off any unseen object, he progressed through the pitch darkness of the lobby to the banisters which told he had reached the steps.

Then, without trying particularly to make his footsteps silent, he went up the stairs to the large room where the sound of snoring, and the smell of leather and wool, told that the sleeping room was rather full to-night.

He entered.

Here he found more light. The moon was shining in through the two windows at the eastern side of the house. He walked along the center of the room, between the rows of narrow cots, each containing a heavily sleeping figure. At last, on the edge of the square of moonlight, lying on his back and snoring vociferously, he distinguished the red head and the large red mustache of De Mortes.

The man's cartridge belt and holster hung at the end of the cot, but the gun was not in sight. His riding boots

stood at the foot of the bed. The light-blue handkerchief and the yellow-silk shirt made the identification positive.

Red stood for a moment gazing speculatively down at the long, broad-shouldered figure on the bed. Then he pushed his hat back on his head, stepped around to where the moonlight threw his face in shadow, leaned and shook the sleeper.

De Mortes was awake on the instant. More than this, his right hand automatically shot under his pillow for his gun.

"Here's a message for you, from Pete," said the young cow-puncher in a voice which he tried to make hoarse, and he thrust the paper into the left hand of De Mortes, who was kicking the covering off his feet. As the big man swung his legs to the floor and held the paper toward the moonlight which poured so brightly through the window, Red moved to the alleyway between the cots and proceeded to walk quietly toward the stairs.

The thought came to him that the moonlight on the bed must have reflected considerable light up to his face and that while De Mortes might not have recognized him at the first sleepy moment of taking the paper, his features and his red hair might arouse the fellow's recollection the moment following. He had gotten to the head of the stairs, however, before De Mortes apparently had finished reading the paper. Then he heard the big fellow's subdued bellow:

"Hey, there! Hold on!"

Red continued rapidly down the stairs, hearing as he went the creaking of De Mortes' cot as the big man pulled on his boots; and the restless stirrings and muttered complaints of the sleepers who had been disturbed.

Red Morgan hurried out to the street, around to the trail behind the hotel, got his horse from the shed, mounted and rode quickly toward the broken ground

which, toward the north, lifted a crooked cottonwood—bare of all branches except one which stuck out as straight as a gallows—against the charred and riven background of the buttes, a mile or more beyond the far end of town.

The night was quiet, except for the coyotes and for the distant sound of a wolf who was baying the white moon down the skies. The ground was gray and shadows were deep blots of impenetrable darkness.

The young cow-puncher rode faster after he had cleared the vicinity of the hotel. Within a few minutes he had reached the foot of the bank on top of which the cottonwood grew.

He pulled the gray horse into the shadow of a thick copse of bullberry bushes, causing a bird to twitter and flutter away, striking twigs and leaves in its flight. The light breeze blew away from town, so Red lighted a cigarette; he would be able to hear the horse of De Mortes as it approached way down the road.

But De Mortes did not come. The quiet cow-puncher twisted another cigarette, smoked it down and rolled another. The white moon mounted to the zenith and the shadow of the bullberry bushes shrank in size.

It seemed to have been there for hours.

Then Red sat up straight; the gray horse pricked its ears. From the town came the sound of hoofbeats, of many horses; but they did not come nearer. Evidently, however, the town was awake; he could hear voices, an occasional loud, sharp command or question.

"Now, look here, Mice," murmured the gentle drawl, "you reckon De Mortes done found out about that note not bein' on the level? He might 'a' loosened that greaser, found out what was the true state of affairs, and done woke the town up to hunt me. Come to think

of it, it was plumb strange that there greaser run a line through his signature. Like as not he done it to make De Mortes see something was wrong. You can't trust them varmints. If that's the case, like as not he will be sendin' the greaser and some others down here to ambush me. You and me better look around and find a better spot to wait."

He touched the horse with his spur. Just as it stepped forward, a flash of flame and an explosion of sound came from the shadow twenty feet away, where a bullberry bush and a boulder joined. Even the well-trained Mice reared in surprise at the suddenness of it in this silent spot. No doubt it was this rearing that saved the rider from the effects of a second shot—this one coming from a shadow on the other side of him. It tugged at the rim of his hat. His own guns were going now. But a third attacker joined the bullet-throwing ambushers—this one's shots coming from out of the long grass straight ahead.

This had taken but a second or two, but it had been enough to set the well-trained Mice into a panic of rearing and plunging, of sidewise leaps and of bucking. Only one of the bullets so far had struck him, creasing like a hot flame along his chest. And in the third second that elapsed the good gray horse, already on its hind legs, gave a wild scream, balanced for an instant, then toppled backward with a thud.

For several moments there was stillness, punctuated three times by gun shots from the ambushers which received no answer. From the direction of the town floated the sound as of answering shots. From the direction of town, too, came the rapidly thudding sounds of horses' hoofs, drawing steadily nearer. The wails of the wolf and of the coyotes had ceased. The smell of gun smoke and of dust mixed acridly with the smell of earth and dried grass

in the shadow-spotted elbow of the dry coulee. The bent cottonwood held out its straight arm high in the moonlight.

Then a dark form, accompanied by a blot of shadow, rose and moved cautiously toward the larger blot of shadow that marked the fallen horse and rider. Slowly it moved, not making a sound. The gray moonlight fell upon the aquiline nose, the shoe-button eyes, the long mustache of Mexican Pete.

From other sides of the space beneath the bent cottonwood two other figures, like ghostly visitors from the tortured Bad Lands beyond, moved forward. In the hand of each, something gleamed brightly.

Suddenly, from the blot of shadow made by the horse and rider, a roar and a flash startled the night. The first creeping figure dropped with a cry. "*Santo Pedro!*" it called, and then choked and was silent. From the two other shadows, flashed the report of guns, met by flashes from the shadow on the ground, roaring flashes of lightninglike rapidity.

Then, once more, there was silence. Twirls of ghostlike smoke drifted raggedly upward into the light.

But the sound of hoofbeats, from the direction of town, had come steadily nearer. Now it was right up upon the small, level space of grass and boulder beneath the bent cottonwood.

Now appeared a broad sombrero, a pair of wide shoulders, a light-blue handkerchief around a thick neck.

A big voice, the voice of De Mortes, boomed in the silence.

"Hey, Pete!" it called. "I reckon you-all got the varmint, this time, all right. And you get the two thousand dollars. It's worth it to——"

The voice stopped abruptly as a lean form leaped up from beside a large blot of shadow. In the lean figure's hands gleamed two evil-looking gun barrels. Their little black mouths were held

where De Mortes' heart and stomach would feel their message.

"Reach up for some of that moonlight, De Mortes," said a soft voice. "Now jump down off that horse, on this side, too."

It would have been suicide for the big man to have disobeyed. His hands were held over his head as he dismounted. His horse, seeing the form on the ground, the form that was not a boulder, snorted and backed away.

The two men stood in the moonlight not five feet from each other. De Mortes, broad and tall, seeming taller with his hands upraised; the young cow-puncher bent forward as if ready to spring, the two guns held at the level of his waist, his eyes slits of cold moonlight.

"I'm plumb sorry Mex Pete can't talk no more," said the cow-puncher, his voice deceptively soft and slow. "Had you come here to meet me by yourself like a man, I planned to go over to Pete's shack with you and see which of you was the biggest liar. I always gives a man a fair chance to come clean, De Mortes."

De Mortes said nothing.

"I'm goin' to give you a chance, De Mortes, to tell the truth. The first lie you tell me, I'm goin' to let daylight into you. You get me?"

The big man moved his head in acknowledgment.

"First off, then—you had Mexican Pete dope me and rob me of two thousand dollars in your barroom. You had him give me enough dope to kill me—didn't you?"

There was a pause. De Mortes cleared his throat.

"If you think I did that," said De Mortes, "I can pay you back." A note of eagerness entered his voice. "I've got the money with me," he said.

"Yeah," remarked the cow-puncher, "I reckon you done collected for some of them cattle you run off down South.

Don't you worry about the money; we are goin' to have a settlement, all right. Now the next thing, and remember what I said about tellin' the truth. You put strychnine in Colonel Ferguson's coffee, didn't you?"

There was another pause.

"Mexican Pete did it," answered De Mortes. "He saw me and the colonel was beginnin' to get on bad terms. Besides, he wanted the colonel's watch and cash. I didn't tell him to do it. He jest did it."

"And Pete says you did it yourself," retorted the puncher. "I think you are lyin', but the both of you are such lyin' skunks, there's no tellin' what's the truth. But there's one more question I'm goin' to ask you, and if you lie about that I'll know it."

Red Morgan held a gun nearer De Mortes' heart.

"You passed yourself off with Colonel Ferguson and with his daughter as me. Why did you do that?"

The big man turned his head from side to side slowly, as if looking for some miracle that might save him. His tongue tip appeared between his big mustaches and his voice told of a dry throat.

"I come on Buddy when he was dyin'," said De Mortes. "He had just wrote this letter, and he only spoke of Red; he didn't give no last name in it."

Red Morgan snorted.

"But you knew who he meant!"

"Yes. He told me. I was goin' to deliver the letter all right, Red Morgan. I'll swear to that. But when I saw the girl—well, then I changed my mind. I decided, like you say, to pass myself off for the feller in the letter."

"Do you think you are good enough to pass yourself off for me?"

De Mortes did not answer.

"Why, you're nothin' but a skunk," said the cow-puncher. "You tried to have me bushwhacked. You been rustlin' cattle. You are a common liar,

and you tried to take advantage of a decent woman. Why, hell, De Mortes, a buzzard wouldn't eat your carcass; he'd starve first!"

The puncher's disgust choked off his speech.

"Well, De Mortes," he went on, "you done had your trial. Dad burn me, I don't think you are entitled to git any chance at all. But I reckon you done heerd of me as a man as gives even a skunk a chance."

As Red Morgan spoke he stepped back a step or two. With the suddenness of thought his guns had disappeared into their holsters. His hands had gone up over his head, just as high as De Mortes' hands.

"All right, De Mortes," he said gently. "You are goin' to git your chance; I never shot a man yet when I had the draw on him. Your hands is up, and so is mine. When you begin to feel lucky——"

De Mortes' hands, like eager claws, flashed down and slapped against his thighs. It was simultaneous, this slap of both men's hands against their legs. The same instant came, from each, the roaring flash of guns beginning to go into action as they left the holster. From men, the two figures had turned into two vicious, destructive machines, each animated with hate.

Red Morgan staggered first. The blow in the breast, like the kick of a horse as the heavy .45 slug of hot lead tore its way, bore him backward and his heels caught on the foot of a boulder. The figure of De Mortes stood motionless, hands at its sides, as the slim young cow-puncher half sat, half reclined upon the rock against which he had fallen.

Then suddenly, without sound or warning, the big man with the broad shoulders, shuddered slightly and pitched forward onto his face. He did not move.

Red Morgan braced himself against

the rock on which he had fallen. The moonlight was fading before his eyes. The world was going swiftly dark. He could see the moon, but it had lost its light and was a mere spot of pale silver, the only thing left alive in a world of darkness.

Then into his drooping consciousness floated the sound of beating hoofs. Not one horse, but a dozen. He remembered dimly the way that De Mortes was to rouse the town against him. The hoofbeats were right at the edge of the clearing. Their thunder was upon him.

With a final welling up of strength, he opened his eyes. As through a dark glass he saw the sombreroed heads of riders. Calling upon the last trace of his failing strength, he raised the revolver, which felt heavier than his whole body. He pulled the trigger. As the gun roared, he pitched sidewise into the deep, restful darkness that had come down over the world.

CHAPTER XXII.

A BUSINESS PROPOSAL.

IF you had shot a little straighter, you would have killed me," the girl said. "Then wouldn't you have been sorry?"

Red Morgan blinked his eyes, but the vision still remained. For some minutes he had been staring at the dark-eyed girl who was looking down at him. He had been afraid to move, afraid to speak, for he knew that this was a dream, and he did not want to have it fade.

He knew that he was dead, that the De Mortes men had found him and had hanged him after he had plunged out of moonlight into darkness. He knew that he was dead, and dreaming, too; because this dream was like heaven, and if he had been dead and *not* dreaming he would have found himself somewhere else.

The reason he knew that he was

dreaming of heaven was that the girl standing by his bed was Constance Ferguson. His eyes fed shamelessly on her face, for this was a dream and he could enjoy the curl of chestnut hair against the creamy skin dappled with a few faint freckles, and he could stare at the red, sympathetic mouth and pretty chin.

She was a bit dark under the eyes and somewhat pale. Her face was drawn as if from recent strain, but to Red Morgan these things only added to her beauty. She was more beautiful in this dream even than his dreams of her had been, when he would take out the funny photograph of her and stare at it for hours by the flickering light of his camp fire.

"How do you feel?"

A sweet voice was saying this, and the voice sounded real. He glanced cautiously around. The crazy quilt which covered him was somehow familiar. The room seemed familiar, too. He stared out of the open window and recognized the trail behind the Pyramid Park Hotel.

"Why," Red drawled, "this here is your hotel room!"

He knew now that it wasn't a dream; he could tell by the pain that ran through him when he spoke, and by the hoarse sound of his own voice. His wonder grew.

"It's yours now," she said. Her teeth were very white and even when she smiled. "I'm only the nurse. The town has been taken over by those Southern riders who dashed in here last night. They say that if you don't get the best there is, they'll burn everything down. They say they are thinking of burning everything down anyhow because you got—De Mortes before they got here."

"What outfit?" asked Red Morgan weakly.

"Three outfits," she replied. "Led by Shorty. They left their herds down

the trail and rode hard to get here after Shorty told them you were probably going to start some trouble. It seems there were some friends of yours in two of the outfits and the other outfit came along for the fun. I led them down to the crooked cottonwood myself."

"I shore appreciate it," he drawled weakly. "If you don't mind, I reckon I'll be gettin' up."

His hand came out from under the cover and felt of the reddish bristle on his chin. His face twitched with pain at the movement, and his blue eyes looked bluer than ever against his pallor.

"I reckon you won't," she exclaimed, putting a hand on his shoulder. "That horse doctor said you were to stay absolutely still for two days. What is it now?"

Red Morgan's hand was at his breast. His blue eyes had a wild look.

"My—my shirt!" he gasped. "What's become of it?"

"Oh, that's gone. They had to cut it off of you."

"Yes, but there was—there was something—"

Her soft-brown eyes had a quizzical look.

"In the pocket?"

"Yes, ma'am," he admitted, and colored. "I reckon you know what it is," he went on, and blushed painfully. "I don't blame you for laughin', ma'am."

"Laughing? Why, Red!" she exclaimed.

She was on her knees beside him, her hand on his forehead, her deep-brown eyes agleam with tears.

"Why, Red, don't say that, please! It isn't true. You know, I've always admired you as a man—until that money misunderstanding made you think I didn't. Even then, though, I still believed in you, in spite of the things De Mortes told me about you. Of course,

they had some effect. I felt angry with you, I suppose because I wanted you to be perfect."

"I'm far from that, ma'am," he said deprecatingly.

She leaned and kissed him on the forehead.

"Shorty told me, Red, all about that letter that Buddy wrote; I mean, that it referred to you. Buddy always loved you, I know that—and to think that it was you that fought for him, and that I thought it was—"

"Yes, ma'am, but because I was Buddy's friend didn't give me no right to tote your pictur' round with me. I'm plumb sorry you found it, ma'am. I shore am."

"But, Red," she insisted, "don't you understand? Do you remember when you asked me about De Mortes—Oh, don't you see that it was because I thought De Mortes was you—"

Red Morgan was slowly shaking his head.

"You can't mean that, ma'am," he said. "Not for me—jest a cow-puncher. I admit I had dreams, but never really hoped—never really believed—"

"Don't call me 'ma'am' any more," she commanded. And when he would have answered, she stopped his lips in a most effective way. "Call me 'Constance, dear.'"

"Constance, dear," he said, grinning.

"That's better. And listen, Red. That money you brought me, at the risk of your own life, is enough to buy a small herd. It really belongs to you; it was reward money, while De Mortes stole my money, he didn't steal yours. I want you to take it and go into the cattle-raising business for yourself. We've got good water rights at the Bar Four, and you could start there."

"De Mortes told me he had money on him, enough to pay back what he stole," put in Red Morgan, his eyes bright. "That belongs to you—it all

belongs to you, so far as I am concerned. You take it all, ma'am—I mean, Constance—and start ranching; and I'll be your foreman. I'd like to see anybody start any rustlin' then."

"My idea of the best thing," said Constance, "is that you and I go in on halves."

"As pardners?"

"Yes."

"Listen, ma'am—I mean, Constance. De Mortes told me he had that money on his person. You better go tell

Shorty to get it because it belongs to you."

"You mean to us."

"To us," he agreed, grinning. "And tell Shorty to rope and hog tie that there probate jedge," he added, "so this time he can't jump out of no more windows."

She laughed as she disappeared through the door. But this time there was no mistake. This time there was no doubt about the fact that she had kissed her hand to him.

In the Next Number:

ZITZA!

*By one of the foremost
authors of the day~*

THOMAS BOYD

A thrilling novel of war and romance.
A desperate search that led from a
balmy Mediterranean beach across
Europe and down into the Aegean Sea,
to an isle once classic but which rocked
with tempestuous Balkan warfare after
the Armistice.



SOUNDS *out*

A story of the trenches, about a friendly, appealing sort of young fellow who was neither a coward nor a hero, but who was simply trying, like most of us, to do his best.

FROM somewhere among the blue-green hills beyond the German side of No Man's Land came a popping noise, like a cork blown out of a bottle.

Young Sergeant David Crawford, who had been dismally regarding the new set of chevrons on the sleeves of his olive-drab coat, looked up warily. His outfit, after long months of training, had come into the front line only two days before and he had not yet learned the ways of actual warfare. While he speculated on the meaning of that sound the chill spring air became vibrant with a shrill whistling that grew louder, more shrill, and still louder. There was fury behind it.

Young Crawford squatted down close

to the side of the wet trench. Into his ears came a gigantic roaring. He cringed. The flesh on his back and shoulders seemed to crawl. *Slam bang!* Even after the noise of the exploded shell had echoed into silence he still crouched there.

The smoke from the bursted shell rolled down into the trench. It was sharp and stinging. Crawford gasped. Immediately his lungs burned as if he had swallowed a flame. Gas, he thought, and reached quickly for his mask. But if it were gas, it came to him, his duty was to shout the alarm. His hands paused at the flap of his respirator. If he shouted "Gas!" the men in the trench would all clap on their masks, the klaxon signal up on the hill by the cap-



of DARKNESS

By Thomas Boyd

tain's dugout would honk its warning, and the whole front line would stand there blind as bats.

Bang! Beramm! Another shell struck and exploded, the smoke rolling over the parapet like an ominous cloud.

And if there was no gas! It was the time of evening, thought Crawford, when the Germans were expected to attack, and if they came over while the doughboys were wearing masks they would probably take the trench. He didn't know what to do; yet there seemed imperative need to do something. He was a sergeant and men were depending on him.

Crawford rose up and stared into the drifting mass of black smoke. His streaming eyes could see nothing. He

looked to the left, where the machine-gun crew was hidden at the end of the trench. Another shell—he winced at its swift whining, but stood erect—hurtled over and crashed in the wire in front of him. Bits of mud and steel flew past him. Again he stared into the dark.

Around the shoulder of the trench to Crawford's right somebody was sloshing over the duckboards. He turned quickly, his bayonet held grimly before him. If it was a German—if they had broken through unseen—The noise came nearer. He heard a violent sneeze. Then somebody spluttered, "Serg—eant!" It was Lieutenant Archer, his platoon commander.

Crawford lowered his rifle and answered shakily, "Yes, sir."

"S-see——" The lieutenant, dark and slender, the end of his thin nose wriggling excitedly beneath his steel helmet, sneezed again. "This confounded high explosive! See anything?" He wiped his nose and eyes.

"No, sir," answered Crawford. "Is that what it is?" He had been a sergeant only since morning and disliked to show too much ignorance, but his relief to find there was no gas in the dark smoke was so great that he would willingly have shown himself to be a jackass in order to find it out.

"Wh——" The lieutenant sneezed again. "What—what is?"

Crawford also sneezed. "This stuff that smells like gas."

"High explosive, yeah." Lieutenant Archer stretched his neck and looked sharply over the edge of the trench. "Those shells certainly played hell with our wire. Ripped it wide enough to drive a truck through." He took out a pack of cigarettes and his new pocket lighter. "Here, have a smoke," he said, and grinned bleakly.

Crawford's thumb and forefinger pinched respectfully into the package.

Lieutenant Archer clicked the steel against the flint. A spark ignited the colored cord, which glowed more brightly as he blew upon it. He held it out to Crawford, then, lighting his own cigarette, he returned it to his pocket.

Though the fumes of the shells had temporarily destroyed all taste, Crawford smoked gratefully. He felt shaky, not so much from the bombardment as from the worry over whether there had been gas in the shells, and the uncertainty of what he should have done if there had been gas. The job of sergeant at the front was not to be taken lightly by a man new to the trenches.

Lieutenant Archer looked at his wrist watch. "Almost time to stand down. We'll have some slum and coffee if the chow detail got through all right." He

turned and started to walk down the slippery duckboard toward the dugouts, but faced about. "You catch the eight-to-twelve watch to-night, sergeant; and I want you to keep a sharp eye on this end down here. We'll have Rainey and another man posted in that shell hole at our end of the trench, but I want you to spend as much time there as you can. Got it?"

"Yes, sir," answered Crawford.

"Because that's where any boche raiding parties would make for if they came over. We may have a wiring detail out; if we do I'll let you know. Password's 'Verdun and Marne.' Got it?"

"Yes, sir," repeated Crawford. Boche raiding parties. Wiring detail. Verdun and Marne. He could remember that, he supposed. It would be his first night in authority and he would have to remember it, he thought sharply.

"Very well." Lieutenant Archer went down the trench.

And shortly afterward Crawford followed, waddling cautiously past the backs of the sentries to the middle of the trench, where most of the platoon, with their mess kits out, were gathered around two large galvanized cans and a pile of bread. One of the cans was half filled with a thin, reddish stew made of potatoes, beef and tomatoes, and the other contained black coffee. Being dinner and supper combined, both containers were quickly emptied. Then Crawford and all of the others save those of the first watch went down into the dugouts to wait until they were called for detail or relief duty.

Eight o'clock came and Crawford stood near the mouth of the communication trench that led back from the front line. It had been dusk a little while before, but now the sky was so dark he couldn't see the wires in No Man's Land. Lieutenant Archer had gone back to Captain Caldwell's dug-

out, and Ryan, the other sergeant, was asleep. Crawford had the unpleasant knowledge that he was the ranking man in a dangerous trench on the first night of his sergeantcy.

The realization of this made him start. And taking his rifle down to his bunk in the dugout, he began a tour of inspection of the platoon front. He pushed warily along in the darkness, his muscles tense and his hand on the butt of his automatic pistol. At every other firing bay the voice of a sentry would mutter, "Halt! Who's there?" and he felt the sharp tip of a bayonet brought close to his breast. "Gosh," he said, "it's only Crawford." Then he would give the countersign and walk carefully on.

He went up the trench to where it was held by the joining platoon, and then turned back. Everywhere about him lay the heavy night, black and silent. But for all the stillness he had a feeling that in that unending gloom were monsters crouching, ready to spring. Even his own trench was mysterious and strange. The duckboards were so loose and slippery underfoot they seemed alive and treacherous. The cavernous mouths of the shafts leading down to the dugouts gaped ominously. The whole night, however silent, was alive.

Near the machine-gun pit at the farther end of the trench the last sentry challenged in a hoarse whisper, "Halt! Who's there?"

"It's Crawford. How—how's everything, Williams?"

Williams stepped back and lowered his bayonet. "I may be wrong but I sure did think I heard somepn out there. Sounded like it was movin' around that wire."

"Jeez! Did you?" Crawford moved forward as stealthily as his rubber boots would allow and stared excitedly into the darkness. But he saw nothing and heard nothing. Finally he turned

away, and tried to give his departure a professional air by saying, "Well, keep a sharp lookout."

He went on past the machine-gun pit and out of the trench toward the shell hole in which Rainey and Jenkins had their outpost. Going over the spongy earth he had a feeling that he was presenting himself as a target for the whole German army. If Williams had been right and there were Squarehead soldiers out in front of the wire— He shivered and bit desperately into the chin strap of his helmet, then bent over and crept through the darkness to the shell hole.

Into the night he whispered sharply, "Rainey!"

Rainey's voice grumbled, "Whatcha want?"

Guided by the sound Crawford went ahead. He stopped at the edge of the hole.

"Step easy," Rainey counseled under his breath. "Don't go knockin' over any of them bombs we got laid out there."

Crawford cautiously lifted his feet and stepped gently down beside the two men, who sat on a board laid across the hole halfway from the top. "You guys got a regular arsenal here," he said. "Ain't heard anything out in front, have you?"

Jenkins was silent, but Rainey mumbled, "No; and we'd better by a damn sight not. We hear any noises around here and we don't stop to argue—we go to heavin' bombs."

"We sure do," agreed Jenkins heartily.

"Lucky I didn't come around in front of you guys," said Crawford. "Bill Williams said he heard something out in front."

"That guy's full of dope," was Rainey's verdict.

They were silent. Back of them could be heard rubber boots swishing through the wet grass.

"Lieutenant's goin' out with the wiring party," explained Crawford.

Silently they waited as the sibilant rustling drew nearer. Four figures of solid black appeared, walking awkwardly under the weight of two rolls of barbed wire through which long poles had been thrust. The bulky burdens that they carried and the necessity for quietness of movement made their progress slow. Near the shell hole the procession stopped and Lieutenant Archer called softly:

"Sergeant Crawford!"

"Yes, sir." Crawford waited. It was the first time any of the men had heard him called sergeant, and it made his ears tingle.

Lieutenant Archer approached cautiously and said in a low tone, "We'll be out in front and to the right of you men, working on the wire." He stepped nearer.

Crawford warned him, "Look out, sir; that edge where you're standing is lined with hand grenades."

The lieutenant retreated hastily, then bent down. "I'll just take a pocketful. Forgot to bring any along."

Crawford could hear the bombs clicking gently together as the lieutenant put one after the other in his capacious pocket. Then the wiring party went slowly forward and soon had completely disappeared in the darkness.

Time passed. Crawford left the shell hole and made another trench tour.

"Remember the lieutenant's out in front with a wiring detail," he told the sentries in the firing bays. For some reason his nerves felt strung up, as if he were bent on a desperate enterprise. The newness of war to him, the fact that his officer was out in front, that Sergeant Ryan was asleep in his dug-out, and that he alone was in charge of the trench—these things, together with his very recent rise to a place of authority, were responsible for the feeling.

And he was sure he was not entirely up to his job. There was so much to be prepared for: a spy who might have sneaked into the trench, a gas attack, a stealthy raid—anything. And all of it—the smell of gas, the normal sounds in a trench at night—was unfamiliar.

After a while he went back to the shell hole, stepped over the hand grenades, and sat down beside Rainey and Jenkins. The three men were silent, staring out into the black night, where Lieutenant Archer, unheard, was stringing wire. Opposite to where they sat was the mouth of a muddy ditch that the French had dug to drain the shell hole. But it was unsuccessful; there was water in the bottom of the hole, and it chilled their feet and legs.

Rainey muttered, "Jeez, it's cold," and drew his breath in sharply.

In No Man's Land sounded a muffled *pop!* Momentarily a great glowing arc appeared in the sky and shed a harsh, brilliant light between the German and American wires. A staccato stuttering broke out from the enemy trench as a Maxim opened up. The posts, the stumps, and the ridges of earth showed clearly, but the lieutenant and his party were not to be seen. Crawford crouched tensely, his hand on one of the bombs at the edge of the pit. Slowly the light floated downward and crumpled into nothingness on the wet ground.

Soon afterward there was the tramp of boots on the grass. The wiring party was returning. They came nearer. Lieutenant Archer called in an undertone and laid his course by the sound of Crawford's answer.

"Guess that's all for to-night," Lieutenant Archer muttered softly.

He and the three men who had accompanied him stood around the shell hole. Everybody was strung to a high pitch of excitement. It was as if the whole darkness were alive with destructive forces. The lieutenant was breathing heavily.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I might as well put these bombs back. You men might need them." He reached in his pocket and stooped down, then reached again. Suddenly there was a clicking noise. A red spark flickered above the row of hand grenades.

That dancing point of red held Crawford's eye. It was close enough for him to be able to touch it. He gave one look, sprang up, leaped through the water and plunged headfirst into the muddy ditch. His action startled the others. The wiring party scattered in every direction and flung themselves on the ground. Rainey threw himself down beside Crawford and Jenkins sprawled on top of both of them.

The silence continued. Crawford lay with his left cheek in the mud and his right against Rainey's shoulder, counting the seconds until the bombs should burst. One, two, three, four, five. Still silence.

"What the hell——" muttered Rainey, after a moment.

From somewhere in the darkness Lieutenant Archer rose up off the ground and came back to the shell hole. He chuckled softly. "It's all right, you men. That wasn't a bomb; it was only my cigarette lighter dropped out of my pocket."

Jenkins stood up and cursed disgustedly. Rainey also scrambled free and began to grumble, "What the hell. I'd sooner be shot than scared to death."

One of the wiring party breathed out, "Golly, lieutenant, I'll never be the same after this."

But Crawford kept still. Wet and bedraggled, tasting grit, his coat cuffs clammy about his wrists, he sat in speechless anger and mortification. He had scurried like a rabbit! From a false alarm like that! He had shown himself up before the whole bunch; had made a confession of incompetence that he could not afford, that no sergeant whose stripes were new could af-

ford, least of all one so young and inexperienced. And Rainey and the rest, he knew, would never forget it.

"All right, let's get back," said Lieutenant Archer; and led his detail toward the trench. "Remember to pick out two men for the chow detail in the morning, sergeant."

"Yes, sir," gulped Crawford. Sergeant! Stranger than ever was the personal application of that familiar word. It made him feel incredibly woebegone and lonely.

Beside him Rainey whispered mockingly, "Sargint! You may not be smart but you sure kin dive!"

Private Jenkins snickered.

"Didn't dive any better'n you guys," said Crawford defensively.

"Is that a fact?" inquired Rainey scornfully. "Is that a fact?" He paused impressively. "Well, lemme tell you somepn, sargint old kid. If you hadn't dove off like you was scared half to death ain't nobody else would've made a move. We ain't runnin' from no cigarette lighters, are we, Jenkins? I'll tell the cockeyed world we ain't."

Under the blast of Rainey's sarcasm Crawford was silent. The other continued, "Besides, we ain't sargints. We're jist ordinary, low-down, dollar-a-day soldiers."

Crawford muttered, "I hope to tell you that's what you are."

"Oh, we admit it," answered Rainey. "We don't claim to be up in society. Not ay-tall; we ain't sargints."

"Shhh!" chided Crawford, "you're makin' too much noise."

"Oh, that's all right," murmured Rainey sweetly. "You needn't be ascaired of any Germans sneakin' up on us. You kin dive."

Crawford did not answer. Let Rainey kid him, he thought; he had it coming to him. Furthermore, he was so miserable on his own account that Rainey's sarcasm scarcely mattered. Soon afterward he left the shell hole and

made a final inspection of the trench before Sergeant Ryan came on with the new relief. Then he dispiritedly clumped down to his bunk in the dugout and went to sleep.

The tension of front-line duty continued as before. In the dugouts men slept; in the trench they waited with weary, anxious eyes for the night to pass. Half an hour before dawn the firing bays were filled with sleepy-eyed soldiers in tallow-stained helmets, which they had used for candle holders. Against their chests were shapeless gas masks which had served as pillows, and in their cold and grimy hands were still colder rifles. The time for stand-to passed without sign of an attack. Later, with the rising sun, the trench was half deserted again. Another day reached its height and began to lower.

That afternoon found Crawford sitting on the wet clay edge of the trench—above which the tip of his steel helmet would be visible to an alert German sniper who might be hiding in No Man's Land—and looking gloomily down the sleeve of his muddy olive-drab coat to the new chevrons that had been sewed upon it. Those three stripes were bright, unwrinkled, and stitched on straight; no officer could find fault with them. Almost any private would have been delighted to wear them. Also, they stood for a considerable increase in monthly pay.

Nevertheless, Crawford had about decided to ask Lieutenant Archer to give the sergeantcy to somebody else; he was willing to be a corporal again, or even a buck private. He scowled and muttered, "Thunderation!"

Glumly he looked about—down the dark, rolling banks of the trench on the bottom of which wooded slats floated on the viscous mud and water, at the cavernous mouths of the dugouts, at the top strand of wire showing over the edge of the firing bay. It was all as new and strange and menacing as it had

been the night before. Beyond the wire was that patch of pitted ground, then another barbed network, with the German trenches directly behind it. At any time during the night or day German soldiers might suddenly appear with their rifles, bombs, and flame throwers.

And Crawford was a sergeant; he would have to tell men like Rainey and Jenkins and Kirkland what to do! When he wouldn't have the least idea of what to do himself. Worse, he might have to take men across No Man's Land into the enemy wire. Well, they wouldn't go, that was certain. They wouldn't pay any attention to a sergeant who had disgraced himself as he had done last night. Despite the warmth of the April sun, he shivered.

From one of the dugouts of the seemingly deserted trench stepped Rainey, holding his rifle in one hand and steadying himself with the other. His eyes, accustomed to the darkness of the deep hole in which he had been lying since breakfast, blinked at the brightness of the day. He rubbed them with a muddy fist, then stared exaggeratedly at Crawford's sleeve. He grinned and said with mock respect:

"Why, hello, sargint!"

Crawford made a wry effort to return his grin. Realizing he had achieved only its shadow, he tried another expression of good will: he stiffened his right hand, touched the brim of his helmet, then sharply dropped his arm. "Carry on, corporal," he said, embarrassed.

Rainey clambered up beside him on the ledge. "Wonder how's chances of chow before my relief goes on."

Young Sergeant Crawford peered at him suspiciously. "What're you trying to do; kid me or something?"

Rainey's face stiffened. "Funny how a guy thinks he's got to be hard boiled when he gets three stripes on his arm."

Crawford raised up and indignantly demanded, "Who's hard boiled? You

come here askin' me how's chances for chow! How'd I know how's chances for chow? I ain't no mess sergeant. You got sense enough to know that three stripes don't make a guy an information bureau."

Rainey eyed him critically. "I hope to tell you they don't," he said at last. "If you think I thought they did, you're crazy, that's all."

"That's all right, then," answered Crawford. "On'y I don't want any of you guys to go thinkin' I'm a wizard."

"I ain't likely to."

Both men were silent. Above them the sky was filled with something swift and trembling; and farther back, a thousand yards or more, two French .75s rapped out sharp reports. The soaring shells crossed shrilly overhead and broke beyond the enemy front line—*crash! bang!*

Sergeant Crawford gave an admiring whistle through clenched teeth. "Hot damn! Give 'em hell, artillery!"

But Rainey cocked a wary eye. "Better duck while you can see where you're goin'," he advised; and slid expertly across the duckboards to the dugout steps.

Whoosh—beram! Whoo—oosh—beram—ramm! In the trench near where the two men had sat a gathering of black, pungent smoke rolled slowly outward and seemed to give forth chunks of mud and viciously flying steel.

"Jeez!" a private nervously called out from the dugout's depths, "I thought the lieutenant said this was a quiet sector."

Crawford and Kirkland reached the bottom of the slippery steps at about the same time. Crawford stumbled over the water-covered floor and sprawled on one of the bunks, which were in two double tiers.

Kirkland took up the matter of whether or not the sector was a quiet one. "Be all right if the Frogs was still behind them guns, but them Ameri-

can artillerymen crave action. They don't care how peeved it makes the Squareheads. Now the Squareheads and the Frogs, they got along all right. Across from each other up here almost four years, and never had any trouble to speak of. Jist shoot enough at each other to keep their barrels from growin' rusty. Then we come along——"

Whee-ee-ee! The roof of the dugout shook; there was an angry roar; then smoke drifted down the dark diagonal shaft from the trench.

"Then we come along," continued Rainey imperturbably, "and the artillery shells hell out of them and they shell hell out of us. And it ain't no quiet sector no more. Ain't that right, sergeant?" he appealed jocosely to Crawford.

The young sergeant contented himself with the caustic query: "Don't sound like a quiet sector, does it?"

From the top of the shaft the precise voice of Lieutenant Archer shouted:

"Out you come, you men. Time for stand-to."

Rubber boots splashed through the water that covered the dugout floor, and a private muttered nervously, "Long about this time of day the Germans come over, ain't it?"

If there was any answer it was lost in the sound of shuffling boots and the explosion of a shell farther along the trench. Each man went up into the light with the muscles of his face drawn tight and his helmet feeling wabbly. Sergeant Crawford was no exception. Twice before the sun had clearly broken, and twice as it was about to set he had come up those slippery stairs to the trench with the feeling that when he turned toward the barbed wire he would see No Man's Land bristling with Germans who were ready to strike with bombs, flame throwers, and bayoneted rifles. He had that same anticipation on this, the third evening. But he hid his fear and hesitancy as a soldier will

—particularly one who has just been made a sergeant.

At the top of the shaft stood Lieutenant Archer, his shoulders hunched and his thin nose twitching, watching the men come up. He saw Crawford.

"Sergeant, any more men down there?"

"No, sir." Even as the words popped out young Crawford wanted to recall them. Unofficial by nature and inexperienced at his job, he had not looked to see whether the dugout had been completely emptied of men. Yet the words had been spoken and it would be foolish to explain. This sergeant business! he thought bitterly. Now if anybody else was down there the sergeant would get the blame. He walked on past his officer.

Lieutenant Archer said as he went by, "Clear down to the end of the second section, Crawford. By the Hotchkiss emplacement."

"Yes, sir."

The Hotchkiss machine-gun emplacement was at the extreme left of the platoon, which was also the extreme left of the trench at that point. For there the line bent in sharply and was unguarded until it straightened out again three hundred yards farther on. Crawford slid carefully along the duckboards past the backs of the soldiers who stood in the firing bays looking dazedly over the parapet at the rusty wire of No Man's Land. Near the Hotchkiss crew—they and their gun were camouflaged by intricately woven branches—he stopped, rested the butt of his rifle on the toe of his rubber boot, and looked over the edge of the trench.

It appeared quiet, almost peaceful. But on the uneven ground beyond the wire lay an old leather boot. Crawford wondered uneasily what had become of the man who had worn it.

After a while the shelling ceased. A gray-green dusk fell over the rolling, wooded country. Darkness came, and

all of the men except those of the first relief shuffled back to their dugouts. Crawford remained near the end of the trench. He would be on duty, as on the night before. Shortly after stand-down Rainey and Jenkins passed him, bound for the shell hole which they guarded. He could barely discern them in the enveloping night.

The routine of the trench went on. Crawford began a stealthy tour, going first down to the right and then doubling back again. Except for the sound of his steps and the challenges of the alert sentries in the firing bays the sector was still, though farther to the east the rattle of a distant machine gun could be heard. He walked slowly, dreading the moment when he would have to go out and sit with Rainey and Jenkins in the shell hole. Already he could hear Rainey's sarcastic remarks that showed up his shortcomings as a sergeant.

By the radium dial of his wrist watch—worn high enough to be concealed beneath his coat sleeve—it was nine o'clock when he went past the machine-gun emplacement and stepped from the trench out into the open field. Three more hours before Sergeant Ryan was to relieve him. Well, he thought; and bracing himself as if for a shock, he crept out to the outpost.

"Well, well," whispered Rainey as Crawford sat down, "if here ain't the sargint! How goes it, old-timer?"

Crawford gave no answer. If only there was some way, he thought, in which he could make Rainey acknowledge the weight of his authority without bringing in the fact that he was a sergeant. But that, he admitted ruefully, was only a daydream.

A little later Rainey cautioned, "Don't dope off, sargint! You'll set us common soldiers a bad example if you go to sleep."

Jenkins chuckled softly.

"Pipe down," muttered Crawford. "You talk as much as if you got paid

for it." He leaned forward and began thoughtfully to scan the darkness of No Man's Land.

The night wore on. With its passing the April chill seemed to deepen and the water in the bottom of the outpost was cold as ice. Crawford hunched his shoulders and continued to stare toward the wire. At first he had been unable to make out anything at all in front of him, but after a while he could distinguish short perpendicular marks looming against the blackness. They were the posts on which the wire was strung. On these he kept his gaze.

Once he turned his head. Beside him Rainey and Jenkins were slumped down motionless on the wide board seat. Their heads were bent as if their chins were resting on their chests, and they were breathing evenly. It came to him with a kind of shock that they were sleeping; dozing, at any rate. He lifted his hand toward Rainey's shoulder, then withdrew it. Why should he waken him, he thought. Let him go ahead and sleep; let both of them sleep. He got a slightly malicious sort of satisfaction out of sitting there in the night and knowing that at any time he could confuse Rainey. All he had to do was to shake him and mutter to him to wake up!

He looked toward the wire again and settled himself to pass the next half hour or so, before making another tour of the trench. The night was as quiet as he had ever known one to be anywhere. Through the whole width and breadth of the sector he could not hear the sound of a shot. And not since he came into the outpost had an illuminating rocket cast its harsh brilliance from the sky. This silence was so pure he could almost feel it in the air. It was also strange and eerie. He waited with watchful eyes on the wire out in front.

A sharp click, very minute, came from somewhere out in front. It was like the sound of a squirrel's teeth

champing through the shell of a nut. Crawford listened so intently that the nerves about his ears felt strained and knotted. The sound was repeated, and he saw, or thought he saw, a shadowy movement among the posts. Stealthily he fitted a bomb into the palm of his right hand. He wanted to throw it, to make sure whether anything was stirring in the wire. He would have thrown it if it hadn't been for what had happened the night before, when he made a fool of himself by running from Lieutenant Archer's cigarette lighter. Steadied by that remembrance, he waited tensely.

Again he heard that dryly clicking noise. This time he was nearly certain that something moved. Still, there was a doubt. So many men strange to the trenches had heard and seen things in the wire. On the first night the outfit arrived each of the three reliefs had taken its turn at flinging bombs out into No Man's Land, thinking they were throwing them at Germans, when they were merely wasting them on the posts and stumps. Crawford determined to make sure of what he was about before he brought any more scorn on his head.

Cautiously he swung over the edge of the shell hole and began crawling forward. A few yards, at most, he thought, would be enough for him to go in order to see more accurately what was taking place. On hands and knees he pushed quietly through the wet grass. And now, away from the shell hole, he felt the night surrounding him. His knees were weak and wobbly and his eyes blinked rapidly with excitement. If Rainey woke up and heard him he might take him for a German and fire. Or those Hotchkiss gunners might hear him. To his ears the rustling of a leaf had become loud as the loudest shout.

Perhaps twenty yards from the wire he stopped. Holding his breath, he listened. From in front of him came the hiss of a whisper, then silence, then the

clicking noise. That sound was sharper and more metallic now. And it was made by clippers. Whoever was out there was cutting the barbed strands, he was sure. They were going about it in a businesslike manner, those bulky figures crouching among the posts.

His eyes blinking, his teeth clenched, he rose to one knee and leaned back to throw the bomb. His finger slipped into the loop of the cotter pin and pulled it out. Stiffening his arm, he let the bomb go sailing for the wire, then dropped down again. One, two, three, four—his mind ticked off the silent seconds.

The grenade roared in the barbed wire. After it there was a moment of quiet in which he heard somebody cursing in an unfamiliar tongue. Then pistol shots broke over him, the bullets whining fiercely. From his own trench a sentry launched a bomb. It burst with a furious uproar, and into this reverberation came the clatter of the Hotchkiss machine gun. It was like a prearranged signal for general pandemonium. He flattened himself out. Everybody was throwing hand grenades, firing rifles and pistols. In the trench a sentry gave an excited shout.

Bullets crisscrossed above him. Even the German machine gunners had joined in. *Rat-tat-tat-t-t-t. Bzzt-zip!*

Suddenly he felt a blow on his shoulder. It was as if some one had struck him with a club. But there was nobody about. After a while the bruise began to ache and burn; and, putting his fingers against it, he discovered that it wasn't a bruise at all, but a dripping wound made by jacketed steel.

Illuminating rockets popped up from the trench behind him. In the glare they made, the wire could be seen. Crawford gritted his teeth and stared in front of him. He could see nothing but the posts and wire. He dropped his head again.

The firing died down as officers and

noncoms in both trenches, reassured by the rockets that they were not being attacked, calmed the sentries and the men who had been called up from the dugouts to stand by. A little later the night was once more silent. Crawford lay there with his throbbing arm, trying desperately to decide whether he should try to crawl back to the shell hole or call out to Rainey to send after him. He was pretty sure he could walk; but if he started to go back they might think he was a German and fire on him.

He called, "Rainey!" and lay stretched out flat as the cry left his trembling lips.

Not Rainey's but the voice of Lieutenant Archer answered, "Who's that?"

Crawford's relief that he had been answered by words rather than by bullets was so great that he nearly blubbered. "It's Crawford," he said at last. "I'm hit."

The lieutenant spoke to some one else. Then he called, "All right; wait a minute."

Crawford lay back and waited with shut eyes. After what seemed an interminable stretch he heard a voice. But it came not from his trench but from the wire. And it said, "*Ach!—Gott!*"

Crawford lifted his head and tried to answer, but he had suddenly become weak and it was so enervatingly blissful to hear the stolid tramp of the stretcher bearers—his own stretcher bearers—that he relaxed and was still, until one of them whispered, "Crawford." He answered and felt their arms around his legs and waist. "I can walk all right," he told them. But they paid no attention. On the stretched canvas they carried him close to the shell hole. There they paused, and Crawford was conscious of Lieutenant Archer standing over him.

"They get you badly, sergeant?" asked the lieutenant quickly.

"No, sir," answered Crawford, "I

ain't hit bad. But there's a German out there in the wire."

"The devil there is! Ryan!"—the lieutenant's voice shook with eagerness—"get a couple more stretcher bearers and send my runner for the intelligence officer." He left the shell hole and began walking toward the wire as Crawford was carried down into the trench.

Crawford lay in the lieutenant's dug-out. Above him, in the light of two burning candles, he saw the round, red-mustached face of the regimental surgeon, who bent over him and said with childlike satisfaction.

"Well, well; our first casualty, eh? We'll have you fixed up in short order."

Near by was another stretcher, on which a moaning German lay; and beside him sat the sharp-faced intelligence

officer. He, too, was pleased. And so was Lieutenant Archer, to whom he was saying:

"That's not bad, Archer, not bad at all: to take the first prisoner in the regiment!"

Crawford heard and saw these things, but vaguely. He alone was dissatisfied. There was something he had meant to do, but had left undone. After a while it came to him what it was.

"Where's Rainey?" he asked.

As he spoke the lieutenant crossed quickly and solicitously over to him.

"Rainey's still out on outpost," he said. "Do you want him very much?"

"Well," Crawford managed, "I guess not. But you tell him I said for him to snap into it." And he dropped back and peacefully closed his eyes.

Comments on any of the stories in this magazine are always welcome.

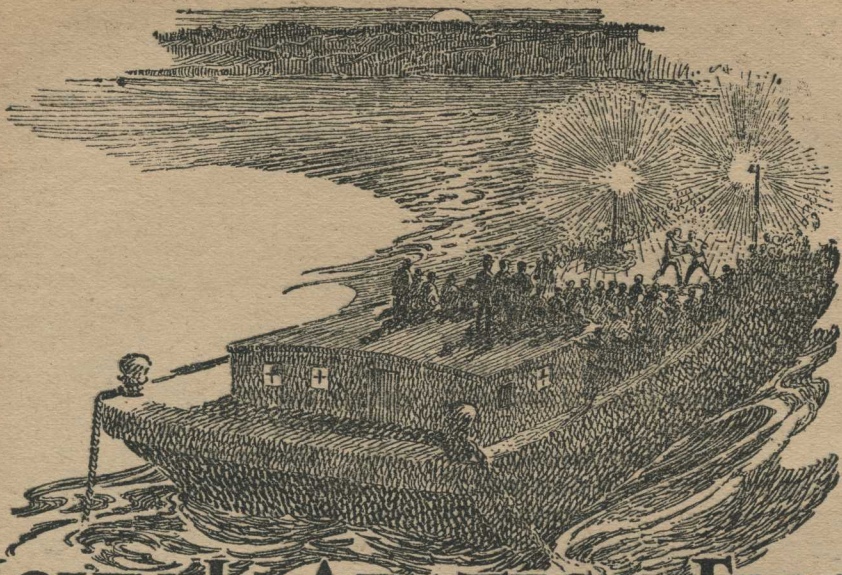


THE CAT AND THE KING

IT was midnight in a swell hotel in Vienna. Midnight also in the suite occupied by Czar Ferdinand, who had abdicated the Bulgarian throne to his son Boris. Suddenly a yowl! And a flood of objurgations in a bass voice! Thereupon, other guests in the hotel, rushing to their doors, were privileged to see the elderly but agile czar, barefooted, and with the rear skirt of his nightshirt straightened out on the wind of his own celerity, doing something better than a hundred yards in nothing flat while he chased a black cat down the carpeted corridor.

After the shouts and yowls died away on the Viennese breezes, it was explained that the czar, credited by the peasantry of his country with vast occult powers, considered a black cat bad luck, a curse carrier, or something equally mystic and harmful.

But why laugh at a king who won't let a cat look at him? Everybody is a little superstitious. The gentleman who walks bravely under a ladder will never boast of his good health without tapping wood, and the lady who scoffs at the idea of thirteen being an unlucky number cannot be induced to begin a journey on Friday. Most of us have a weakness for charms and talismans, thereby admitting that we carry somewhere in our inner selves the possibility of an inferiority complex.



JOHN L. ABATES a FLOOD

By William Hemmingway

Our sport specialist draws a graphic picture of Sullivan's most dramatic fight.

AT the age of twenty-two John L. Sullivan was at the peak of his powers. He was swift of foot and hand, stronger than any man of his weight, and with ferocity that seemed volcanic when he faced a foe in the ring. Untouched by dissipation, he felt energy and ambition flaming in his veins, tingling in his nerves. His late victory over John Donaldson, champion of the Northwest, was dulled because Donaldson had run so fast that Sullivan in his slippery new shoes was barely able to catch him. He was eager to justify his unbounded faith in himself by striking a glorious blow.

"Haven't they got any good men in New York?" he asked his manager, Billy Madden, only a few years his elder but a sophisticated New Yorker.

"Why, yes," Bill Madden replied.

"There's a fellow about your size named Steve Taylor, meets all comers at Harry Hill's place. He's fast and he's good."

"You get him for me," Sullivan commanded. "Tell him I'll give him fifty dollars if he can stay four rounds in front of me."

"Good idea," Madden agreed. "We'll guarantee a hot bout by putting up our money, and the crowd'll fall over themselves to get in on it."

This was the origin of the offer of a purse, which constantly grew in size, to any man whom Sullivan could not knock out in less than four rounds. The boldness of the offer as well as its novelty drew the crowds. A sport which had been carried on by slow "fibbing" and cautious jabbing of bare fists, through long rounds of tapping and wrestling, Sullivan now transformed

into a brief whirlwind of leather-bound fists that flew like cannon balls, and he kindled a new interest in the boxing game. All this, of course, was in its beginning when Madden went to New York and engaged an evening for Sullivan to box Taylor at Harry Hill's resort, a famous free-and-easy at Crosby and Houston Streets.

What a queer old place that was, with its gambling rooms above stairs, the balconies from which the cheaper patrons and their ladies could look down on the stage, and the big main hall, full of tables at which sportive individuals "opened wine"—*i. e.*, treated to champagne—and enjoyed the vaudeville turns, varied with boxing bouts, that made up the program every night. The proprietor, a middle-aged Englishman with an enormous rose made of a handful of diamonds blazing on his broad expanse of tucked white shirt bosom, was amazed to hear that Sullivan, not very big in his clothes and of quiet demeanor, really meant to give Taylor fifty dollars if he managed to stay upright, and he tried to persuade the "Highlands Strong Boy" to keep his money in his pocket. He brought forward an argument which would have convinced any Englishman: "It has never been done before."

"That's all right, Hill," John L. rumbled. "There's never been a man like me before." Harry wagged his head sadly at such folly, but took the five tens the youth thrust at him and handed them to Mrs. Hill, who served as stakeholder.

When Referee Matt Grace clapped his hands and called "Time!" the house was so crowded that the waiters could hardly push from wine room to table. Sullivan leaped at his victim, who fled like a shadow over a landscape. Sullivan laughed—it sounded like the cough of a hungry lion—and charged on him. Crowded into a corner, Taylor shot a straight left for the jaw, but Sullivan

ducked under it and came up with a right uppercut that shook poor Steve, then drove the right under the heart. Taylor clinched for his life. He barely lasted out three minutes.

In the second round the fleeing Taylor stopped long enough to tap Sullivan on the mouth—and to take John L.'s straight right drive full on the left side of his chin. Steve's heels flew up, his limp body flew down, and his spirit flew off to the other world for a few minutes. In the privacy of the dressing room, into which Sullivan carried him, Taylor came back to life after ice had been rubbed on his neck and ammonia held to his nostrils.

"You had no right to hit me like that," he reproached Sullivan. "How can I meet all comers after this?"

"Look here!" John L. growled pleasantly. "You brought your friends here to-night to watch you put my head down in the mud. Well, I put yours; but I got nothing against you. Maybe I'll give you a job—sparring partner."

"No; not me," Taylor exclaimed, rubbing his stiffening neck, where the jar of that mighty right had traveled through every fiber.

Out of deference to the ancient decree, "Never take a shingle off a good man's roof," Sullivan had to sit a while at one of Harry Hill's tables and buy drinks for his friends, but all he took was a flat of beer and after that a few sips of soda water. A small, saturnine man often described in the papers of that day as "Colonel William E. Harding, covered all over with diamonds," edged up to the table and murmured out of one corner of his mouth to Madden: "Mr. Fox is in a box over there, and he wants to see Sullivan."

"Tell him to come over here, then," John L. interrupted. "Let him come on over, and I'll be glad to see him."

The diamond-bearing colonel gasped and hurried away. He was managing editor of Mr. Fox's pink weekly paper,

the leading oracle of sports in the country.

"You want to go and see Fox, John," Madden advised. "He can make you with his paper."

"Yes, and I can make myself," Sullivan replied. And much as the politic Madden urged, he refused to budge. Possibly the small, saturnine man over-emphasized Sullivan's indifference, possibly not; but from that moment Fox tried to find some one to beat Sullivan. He sent agents all over the world to look for good men, actually imported a Maori giant from Australia, spent thousands of dollars, all because this proud young destroyer would not come at his call. Of that, more later. Forgetting all about Fox, Sullivan asked his manager if he couldn't find him a real good man in New York, some one worth licking.

"I certainly can," Madden replied. "There's a red-headed fellow up in Twenty-fourth Street, a little older than you, an inch taller and considerably heavier. They call him John Flood, the 'Terror of Bull's Head.' Never drank a drop or touched tobacco. He's the best rough-and-tumble man in the country to-day."

"Get him," Sullivan ordered.

"He's no glover," Madden added, using the word with which his type of bare-knuckle finish fighters expressed their contempt for mere boxers. "He'll fight only under London rules, where he can use about all his rough-and-tumble tricks—which you don't know."

"Get him," Sullivan replied.

"He's got the hardest bunch of sure-thing players behind him you ever heard of," Madden went on. "They'll bet four or five to one on him, because if he can't win or draw, the gang'll hand it to you with blackjacks and bottles. They'll have the referee. You needn't think because you outed this fancy tapper, Steve Taylor, you can go up against that kind of a combination."

"You get the match, Bill, and I'll do the rest of it," said Sullivan, smiling a little as he contemplated the possibilities. So back to Boston they went, and Madden trudged from one newspaper office to another and told the sports editors—where there were any sports editors—all about what the Highlands Strong Boy had done in the wicked metropolis, and some of them got as much as a stickful in their columns, but most papers would print nothing about such low doings in such a naughty place. Madden wrote to Flood's backers, challenging their man, and they wrote back that they would be willing to fight for one thousand dollars a side, London rules, on a barge, safe from police interference. Not a word about this to the newspapers, of course.

"John was a good boy then," Madden told me years afterward, as we journeyed eastward from the Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight at Carson City. "John was a good boy, a lad nobody in the world remembers to-day. He'd always do his work, even on the road, where no one could keep up with him. He was keen to learn and quick to pick up everything that helped his fighting. And speed! Say, I've timed him one hundred yards in eleven seconds, over a measured distance on a slow dirt road, and John in his street clothes and smooth shoes and knowing nothing about how to start or any other tricks of sprinting. Lord! the speed that man had as a youngster, when all he'd take would be a glass of beer with his dinner or with his supper after a hard day's work. Do you know how his fist would hit a man? Like a load of blasting powder that had been packed down and tamped tight! And nobody in the world remembers him. They never knew him!"

Three days before the battle, Sullivan and Madden journeyed by boat to New York. They had no money, but Madden had a friend who "kept a

place" in South Brooklyn, and he let them have a tiny hall bedroom one flight above his barroom, with one bed for the two athletes. That evening Madden went over to the Bull's Head, the great horse mart of that primitive age, when Henry Ford was a little boy with soft brown curls. In those half dozen blocks were more horses and white and brindle pit dogs and two-legged terrors than in any other part of the land. Flood was their king.

"I'll never forget the night I settled the match," Madden told me as our train sauntered eastward from Cheyenne. "John was a good boy then, and I knew that when he had rested a while after supper he would take a stroll and go to bed at nine o'clock, just as if I was there. The Bull's Head people were only too glad to sign final articles of agreement with me, and we put up one thousand dollars a side as a stake. They were to hire the tugboat and the barge that would take us out of the way of the police, charge ten dollars apiece for all who went on it, and the winner take all and pay for both boats. Of course, I knew what they were out to do to us, but there was no sense in saying anything about that.

"Over in South Brooklyn I let myself in the hallway about half past one in the morning, closed the door and latched it very soft, and took my shoes off. I crept up the stairs. At the door of our little room, which John had left open as I told him, I got out of my clothes, and then tiptoed in and put on my nightshirt. Not a sound. But just as I got halfway to the bed, there's a creak, and John sits up.

"Get the match, Bill?" he says; and I says, 'Yeh.'"

"Good!" he says, and he's stretched out and fast asleep before I can climb in. No worry, you understand, about the gang and what they might do. All he wants is the chance to show what he can do. Fast asleep in a minute, and

breathing soft and regular, and the hardest fight of his life just ahead of him."

They had to wait three days, so that word could be passed to the "good people" in half a dozen cities and they could come to town in time to get the tip and join the battle party. Sullivan strolled over to Prospect Park and ran half a dozen miles each day to keep in condition, stopping to do a few minutes of shadow-boxing now and then in a lonely place. His hands were pickled daily in a mixture of brine and tanin, made according to a secret formula, handed down through generations of canny ringmen and warranted to keep the skin unbroken, no matter how hard the knuckles drove under it. His face often was massaged and soused with the same mixture, too, so that it should not easily cut or puff.

Joe Goss, old champion whom Sullivan had obliterated in a punch and won as his loyal follower, came on from Boston to go in John's corner. He joined John L. and Bill in South Brooklyn, and on the evening of May 15, 1881, they journeyed slowly by horse-car and ferry and elevated railroad with its cindery little coal-burning locomotives to West Forty-second Street, New York City. More than a dozen Boston admirers of Sullivan, including a few city officials and several gamblers and husky citizens, all confident of their man, came to town early in the afternoon and visited Bull's Head to get their bets down. Some of them got only three and a half to one against their man, and some got four and a few five to one, but every Boston dollar that was offered was covered in a jiffy. The Bull's Headers seemed to entertain only one fear—that some easy Boston money might possibly escape them. The bets, of course, were put up in safe hands.

The little visitors tried their best to learn where the battle was to be fought, but the natives shushed at them and told

them they themselves did not know yet, and that no one should know until eight o'clock that evening; for if the spot were picked out too soon, the so-and-so police would hear of it, and the whole evening would be spoiled. Therefore at eight that evening the innocents strolled by twos and threes into a "place" in East Twenty-fourth Street, and disappeared into a back room. When they counted faces and found that all were assembled, a genial and ruddy-cheeked gentleman said to them.

"Down at the foot of East Forty-third Street, gents, you'll find a barge out at the end of the pier. Get your tickets at the gangway for the Sans Soossee Chawder Party, ten bones apiece. Scatter out now, one by one, and take it easy." Poor innocents!

Sullivan and his two seconds strolled out to the water front of West Forty-third Street soon after eight o'clock and saw the barge *Joe Grey* moored to the pier, with a tugboat fast to her starboard side. Under the sizzling arc lights on the pier stood between three and four hundred men. Sullivan, Madden and Goss moved slowly among them, looking for their party, but could not find one familiar face.

"Jobbed!" cried Madden. "The gang gave our crowd a bum steer."

Which was quite true; for about that time a group of innocent Bostonians might have been seen standing—some danced with rage—at the foot of East Forty-third Street, sending strange oaths up to the stars in the soft May sky as they denounced the vain tricks of the wily New Yorkers.

But they were earnest seekers, and soon they got them a tug and started for the missing barge with a battle party on it. Running down close to the pier-heads, they saw nothing resembling their boat, so they continued their patient search and vigil long all the way up the North River front of the city,

often losing valuable time on false appearance that seemed full of promise.

"Stay back a minute, Bill," Sullivan growled in his deepest register. Then he swaggered alone through the crowd, his huge shoulders swaying from side to side, his derby hat drawn down a little over his right eye, his feet spurning the planks over which he strode. His hazel-brown eyes seemed black and glowing as he glared from face to face in the throng. Near the head of the gangway they blazed as he found what he was searching for, a dozen of the meanest-looking mugs in a city where not every man was an Apollo. These were the fellows with blackjacks in their pockets and murder in their hearts, determined to see that no bets on Flood should be lost. Some of them tried to glare back at Sullivan, but made a poor job of it and dropped their gaze to the pier with the rest.

"My name is John L. Sullivan," said the swaggerer, his voice rolling out the syllables with the depth of thunder among crags. "I understand you're going to try something funny on this barge to-night. I'll tell you this: the first — makes a crooked move, I'll kill him." Thereupon, with a last contemptuous glance, he slowly turned his back on the tough mob and swaggered aboard the barge. To relieve any possible suspense, let me add that the boys, one and all, behaved as gently as Mary's little lamb during the voyage, even when Flood was at his lowest ebb.

Just to insure themselves against possible temptation, they stood three or four rows away from the ring that was pitched on deck as the barge passed Spuyten Duyvil and stood over for the western shore of the Hudson. Or maybe they stood where they were sure that even Sullivan's long arms could not throw a punch.

The barge slowed and drifted gently with the tide under the shadows of the

Palisades opposite Yonkers, and the men were called into the ring. Flood towered an inch or more above Sullivan as they shook hands at the center. Referee Smith warned them that they must not butt with the head, nor gouge with the thumbs, nor hit after a man was down. Sullivan smiled grimly. Flood looked serious as they went back to their corners. The referee clapped his hands and called "Time!"

Flood came out at a moderate pace, seemingly sure of himself and sure that he had the fight well in hand, and he showed none of the excitability we are apt to associate with red hair. Sullivan was trying a game new to him, and he studied his man with care. They stood apart and feinted each other with little flicks of the left fist that did not go near head or body, but were calculated to lead an opponent into a blow. This might make opportunity for a smashing counter. Flood's skin was white under its freckles, while Sullivan seemed all pink from the waist up, and the smooth muscles rippled like soft snakes as his fists played inquiringly to and fro.

"The young lad's in grand condition," some of the wise men whispered to one another.

The two fighters stepped in and out of distance, feinting, withdrawing and advancing as if in some sort of ceremonial dance. I like the language of good old "Topsy" Maguire, the reporter for Dana's *New York Sun*:

"At the opening of the first round Sullivan was very cool and mischievous in his hitting."

He was cool for a minute or so, until he had gauged the speed of Flood's motions, driving back Flood's first rushing attack for the head with a sharp right counter. Then John L. leaped at him with a chopping left that knocked down his guard, and the Terror clinched barely in time to save himself from the following right. They slugged at short range, the blows drumming on their

bodies. They broke and stepped away, and again Sullivan dashed in. His left fist caught Flood flush on the cheek, and his right sped like a bullet to the short ribs, so that the red-haired giant went down in a heap. Indeed, aye; Sullivan was very cool and mischievous in his hitting. The *New York Herald* reporter noted: "This was the fiercest round ever seen in so short a time—two minutes."

Sullivan charged from his corner at the call for the second round, driving his left fist at the face and following with a right swing, which Flood dodged under, then tied John L.'s arms in a clinch. The Strong Boy broke loose and sent a shower of straight lefts and rights into Flood's body with such force that the Terror sank helpless on the deck just one minute and a half after the opening of the round. Dooney Harris and another friend, his seconds, lifted him up and half carried him to his corner, in approved London P. R. fashion, and Flood had hard work at first to keep his balance on the knee of his supporter. Yet the crowd, even those who had laid five to one on him, were so in the habit of seeing him win that they felt no alarm.

Flood, in spite of the pounding he had suffered, arose briskly from his second's knee at the call of "Time," though it came but half a minute after Sullivan had dropped him helpless on the deck. He was in first-class condition. Before he could start anything Sullivan rushed at him, swinging his thick right arm for the neck. Flood ducked so low that the arm grazed his shoulder. As he arose he pinioned the Strong Boy's arms to his sides in a clinch, but Sullivan easily broke out of it, stepped aside and charged in again.

Again the Terror clinched, but Sullivan burst from his grasp and drove short left and right jolts into the midsection so fast and heavy that after two minutes Flood once more collapsed. As

the faithful Dooney and friend lugged the red giant to his corner the most enthusiastic Bull's Head partisans began to feel serious doubts of victory—but not one of the boys with blackjacks dared too near Sullivan, who ignored Joe Goss' knee, remained standing, and looked about for signs of hostilities. The wicked saw him, but shrank back so he could not see them.

"It was pretty manifest," Toppy told readers of the *Sun*, "that Sullivan was the better man; for he delivered two blows to Flood's one."

The fourth round was due, but before the call everybody heard the sound of a high-pressure tug approaching at speed, and with yells of "Cheese it, the cops!" all fled as far as possible from the ring. The fighters hid in dark corners and began to dress in haste, hoping thus to look innocent. The tug ranged along the port quarter of the barge, and a voice from the pilot house hailed, "Is this the fight?"

"Who are you?" asked the master of ceremonies.

"Boston people," the skipper of the tug replied.

"Get to hell out of this, or we'll chuck you overboard!" roared the crowd on the barge, and although the Bostonese were brave and had paid ten dollars apiece to see the fight, they were not foolish enough to face odds of twenty to one; so their tug stood off and on amid the glooms of the Palisades, and the partisans followed the fortunes of John L. by listening to the yells of encouragement as the battle raged. This process was difficult because both warriors were named John.

Quickly undressing, the principals reentered the ring, Flood much refreshed by the delay of five minutes. Sullivan again darted at him, chopping with the left and swishing his right. Flood clinched, was thrown back, clinched again and wrestled as long as he could to delay his fate, but in three minutes

Sullivan once more felled him. He probably would have been finished in short order but for the intermission, for Flood was still groggy when he came out for the fifth round. He fell in, clinching several times, and once he butted Sullivan; but John haughtily refused to claim a foul, and sent him to the deck in one minute. ("Flood took a good deal of punishment," says Toppy.)

The Terror was so battered that he could hardly see to find his way to the scratch for the sixth round. He could not hit his man. Sullivan struck him in the mid-section five times, and when he fell again into a clinch, opened his arms and let Flood drop. Time, one and a half minutes. The seventh round was equally brief and one-sided. The Terror had lost his distinctive quality and was as harmless as his own frightened gang.

Eighth round: Flood could hardly rise from his second's knee, though the faithful Dooney gave him a great boost. As he gamely staggered forward, John L. swung his right fist, not with utmost speed, but with enough for the business at hand, and poor Flood spun across the deck, into his corner, down and out. Total time of battle, sixteen minutes. Take out of this the half-minute rests between rounds and the five minutes' intermission to get rid of the tug, and you see that the Highlands Strong Boy swept the mighty Flood into oblivion in less than eight minutes of actual strife. The red man never fought again.

Sullivan stood proud and erect in his corner as the referee waved to him as the winner. From the dark tug drifting down to leeward came a ragged cheer, but from the three hundred men on the fight barge not a sound but murmurs of intense surprise. "Our John never had no chanst," one Bull's Header remarked disconsolately, and all who heard him nodded. The Strong Boy, not a mark on his face nor any tension

in his breathing, swaggered royally over to Flood's corner, where the poor man was still trying to find himself. Sullivan reached down and grasped the Terror's limp right hand.

"We met as friends, we part as friends," John rumbled in his deepest and most sympathetic tones. Flood, still unable to articulate, mumbled his agreement with his new-found friend and feebly shook his hand.

The crowd was so favorably impressed by the Terror's gameness against overwhelming odds that they passed a hat and collected one hundred dollars for him. Sullivan put in ten dollars. His profit and Madden's, after paying for the tug, the barge, training expenses and various mysterious sundries which even in those days sapped the fight game, came to a little more than one thousand dollars. Compare this pittance with the hundreds of thousands won by the gladiatorial gold-diggers to-day!

It would be pleasant to end the account of this contest right here, but that cannot be, for something happened that night which started Sullivan on the downward path, a consummation quite outside of the expectations of the grateful admirers who involuntarily sowed the seeds of Sullivan's ruin.

The strange tug was allowed to berth at the same pier with the fight barge, and the Boston crowd swarmed around their Strong Boy, whacked him on the back, told him he was the greatest man that ever fought and shook his terrible right until it was sore. The lad accepted all these tributes with serene dignity. He permitted himself to smile.

"Did he land on you at all, John?" asked Jimmy Colville.

"Never felt a blow," Sullivan truthfully replied; "just like fighting a child."

The Boston party went down Broadway to Twenty-sixth Street and went into the St. James Hotel, then the

mecca of turfmen and devotees of all the sports from all parts of the country. The aldermen and others who had won thousands of dollars, partly on Sullivan's knock-out of Flood and partly by his conquest of the blackjack gang, insisted that Sullivan and Madden must have supper with them. Through the broad lobby they paraded, the queer old lobby with its pavement of big squares of black-and-white marble, decorated with paintings and statues that would be regarded with tolerant smiles to-day but were then the finest things in hotel adornment.

The chef of the St. James had earned a reputation that spread from coast to coast. It hurt him to feel compelled to prepare so humble a dish as beef-steak for the king of the gladiators, but he solaced himself by cooking tenderloins à la Châteaubriand, each plump steak broiled within an envelope of other juicy steaks and served with an aromatic sauce that would make an anchorite hungry. Now, Sullivan was no anchorite, and he was hungry after a long fast before battle and the appetizing influence of the fresh river air—to say nothing of the brief exercise in the ring.

He ate steak after steak until the chef took off his cap and white jacket and put on a black coat, so that he could come up to the supper room and admire the mighty gourmand and *professeur de la boxe Americaine*. The youth engulfed a dozen or more of the filets Châteaubriand—with ample trimmings. When the chef expressed his admiration at this unpremeditated tribute to his genius, Sullivan kindly said to him: "You're all right," and the other great man went back to his sacred fires full of satisfaction in having met a kindred spirit.

But that was not the worst. Sullivan's friends, politicians all, were in the habit of celebrating great occasions by "opening wine." The honest Strong

Boy had never seen champagne before that night. He tasted it critically, rolled it over his tongue, and blinked a little at the pleasant rasping of the bubbles in his throat.

"That's great!" he exclaimed, and pushed forward his glass for more. The waiters vied with each other in refilling it. He kept them busy until the party broke up, some time before breakfast.

"And from that time on," Madden told me that day coming home from Carson City, "John drank all the champagne he could get hold of. That's one reason why he was always broke, no matter how much money he made on the road. The other reason was that he handed out his money to any one who asked for it. I couldn't stop him. No one could stop him. 'Oh,' he'd say, 'they need it, or they wouldn't be asking for it.'

"Sullivan was going back steadily after that night. It seemed as if he never could get enough champagne. He opened a saloon on Washington Street, Boston, drank with his customers, and when his turn to treat came around called to his barkeepers, 'Give the boys some wine!' How they hung around him, slapping him on the back, telling him what a wonder he was, and waiting for the next bottles to be cracked! He loafed and put on weight fast. He hated exercise—or anything else that interfered with drinking his wine.

"I saved all the money I could for him, but it went fast, even while he was making hundreds of dollars every night stopping all comers who tried to win a thousand dollars by staying four rounds—and getting knocked out in a couple of minutes. Of course, when the cash ran low, it was a case of no wine; but he was a good boy, and when I told him we were running short he'd drink something cheaper. One day we were in Cusack's place, at No. 25 Broadway, with a party of friends. One barkeeper

waited on the rest of us and one gave all his time to waiting on John L. He'd mix four gin fizzes at once and take them to John on a tray with the carbonic water—then hurry back of the bar and mix four more.

"In one hour John drank fifty-six gin fizzes. I knew, because I was his manager and paid the bill, so I counted them."

"Don't you think there was a mistake in the count?" I queried. "No one can believe offhand that one man could take in that much liquid in one hour, to say nothing of the gin in it. Are you sure?"

"Sure as I'm sitting in this car," Madden insisted. "I made a tally every time the barkeeper took a tray of four drinks to John L. There were fourteen tallies. Count it for yourself."

"How did you carry him uptown?" I asked.

"Carry nothing," said Madden. "He walked out to his carriage, straight as a judge, climbed in and waved his hat to the crowd that was cheering him."

"Didn't he show any signs of intoxication?"

"Well, yes," Madden admitted. "If he happened to use a word with two or three syllables in it, he'd miss one of them, but he'd say it over again and get it right. He had more drinks after we got up to Matty Clune's, and a lot more before he went to bed. I don't believe any man ever lived that drank as much as John did in the years he was at it.

"John had gone a long way down the hill before he beat Paddy Ryan for the championship, eight months after he beat Flood. Even at his second best, or his third best, he was twice as good as any other fighter. See how he lasted ten years at the top, destroying himself all the time! They compare this one and that one with Sullivan, but they don't know what they're talking about, for they never knew the real Sullivan. He disappeared after the Flood fight."

A word more, to show Sullivan's attitude, his indifference to the publicity that is the breath of life to so many pugilists now. Flood died soon after Madden had told me about his battle with Sullivan. The Sunday editor wanted the story of the fight, and although I knew the details I saw a chance to pay one hundred dollars to John L., who was short of money. I found him in the home he had given his sister in East Boston in the days of his prosperity. He had gastritis, he said,

and explained that it was caused by drinking so much wine—his insides had been scraped by the gas: that was gastritis.

"I'm glad to see you again," he rumbled graciously, crunching my hand in his once mighty right. "So poor Flood's gone, eh? He was a decent fellow, all right."

"My fight with him? Sure, I remember it well. I'll tell you all about it: We met on a barge, and I put him out in the eighth." And that was that.

William Hemmingway is a regular contributor to this magazine.



SOUTHPAW RECORDS

IF Herbert J. Pennock, of the Yankees, and Eppa Rixey, of the Cincinnati Reds, discover next spring that their left wings are still good pitching arms and not soup bones, they will be within a few months of the record for long-time service by southpaws in major league baseball. Both have gone through sixteen seasons. Pennock came into the big show with the Athletics, and Rixey started with the Phillies. The record for left-handers is seventeen campaigns, held jointly by Eddie Plank and Rube Marquard.

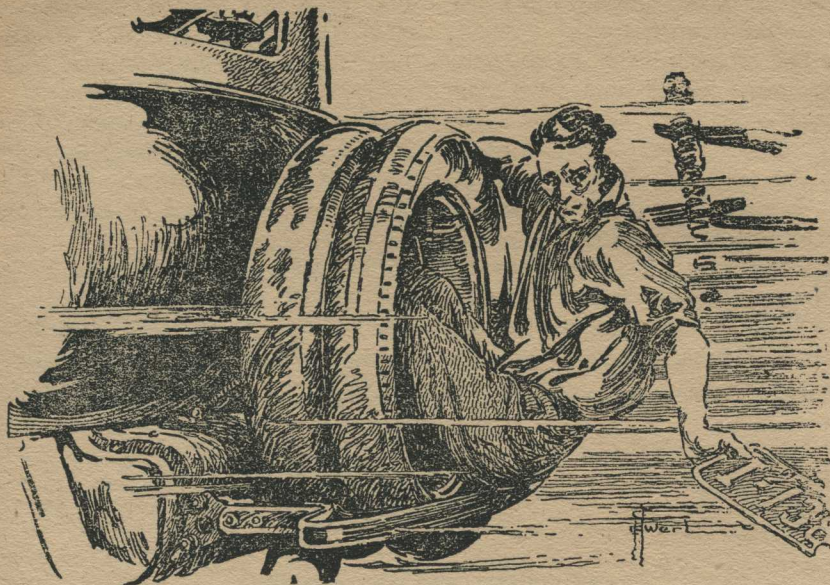


THE FIXERS

DIPLOMATS," said the old Washingtonian, "are gentlemen who build up a new alarm the moment old antagonisms have been adjusted. They feel that, by keeping the nations stirred up by the possibility of war, they prove diplomacy to be a necessity and assure themselves of perpetual employment.

"Consequently, they're always whispering behind the door, lifting significant eyebrows and pursing indicative lips. They are the Big Fixers, the Brethren of Mystery, the Boys with the Gum Shoes. They excel in silence and reticence. They can run up and down the whole keyboard of the international piano without sounding a treble note or getting a boom out of the bass, the while they drip innuendoes and exude hints, intimations, and double meanings.

"No peace is so binding, no alliance so tight, that they can't blast it with the dynamite of their gossip and garrulity. As soon as one war threat is dissipated, they create another. They are never without their gum shoes and dynamite. All of which is natural. They neither march nor fight. They neither bleed nor die. And men are always bravely eager for war when they can use syllables for shot and conversation for cannon."



HOLD EVERYTHING!

By Will McMorrow

An active young man, an attractive young woman, and a thoroughly hectic afternoon.

JERRY BLADES saw her first. That is to say, he saw her before she saw him—or appeared to see him, she being the kind of girl who could look, calmly indifferent, through and beyond even a personable fellow like Jerry Blades, and pretend he didn't exist. A white-and-gold girl, with eyes that Jerry miscalled lavender-blue. A girl tall enough to wear a great, floppy straw hat gracefully.

He was eating a hot dog at the Wayside Cabin outside North Spencer, and reading plumbing specifications; and he should have kept his mind on his business, which was to get the plumbing-fixture contract for the new sanatorium at South Spencer that very afternoon. The Sharon-Holt Company, for whom

he worked, were essentially hard boiled when it came to romance between the hours of nine in the morning and five in the evening and they believed that a man diligent in his business would eventually stand before Park Avenue architects—more important to young salesmen than standing before kings, who wouldn't know a pedestal basin from a main house-trap. Especially should Jerry Blades have kept his mind on his business since this was his first big prospect since the Sharon-Holt outfit had adopted him, and his drawing-account was mounting at the rate of sixty dollars every week.

He did his best. He wrinkled his nose over the typed sheets, bumped his square chin down on his palm, elbow on

table, and was a picture of a sleek-headed, pink-faced young man in frowning concentration.

"Any lead or wrought-iron pipes that set in fire-proof or concrete floors and cement fill are to be coated with hot tar," he read distastefully. "She's a wow. Wish I'd kept my coat on instead of leaving it in the car. Probably thinks I'm some poor bum drifted in here for a hot dog. Let's see. *In no case will a refrigerator waste pipe be connected directly with the house drain.* Beautiful and proud—that's her—not a smile curves her chiseled lips—cold and hard—*cast-iron sectional steam boiler to be of sufficient strength to sustain a water pressure of one hundred pounds per square inch—probably married anyway—just my luck—there ought to be a law against being that darned good looking—never see her again—ships that pass in the night—if I had the nerve to talk right up to her—all to be done according to specifications and in a workmanlike manner.*"

He laid down the specifications, devoured his parboiled frankfurter slowly, and considered his manner of approach to the girl at the end of the long counter. To let her lose herself forever in the swarm of autos parked outside the Wayside Cabin was unthinkable—tragic.

He was still considering when she had finished her strawberry soda and was powdering her nose, and it was not until she had slipped sideways from the high stool and was halfway to the door that Jerry Blades came to life. The glow of his inspiration was reflected in his genial smile as he intercepted her, a shining quarter on his outstretched palm.

"Is—is this yours? On the counter—change, maybe—you forgot it."

She seemed to discover him with difficulty, regarded him haughtily, and shook her gold-and-purple adorned head. "You're mistaken. There was no

change coming to me. It is not mine." Which was nothing but the truth, since Jerry had fished the quarter out of his own pocket a moment before.

"Funny." Jerry pocketed the coin unabashed and ventured a warmer smile. "Could have sworn you left it there. Happened to be—kind of looking your way. I was just thinking you looked so much like a girl I used——"

"Hey, feller"—the broad hand of the counterman extended across the mahogany, palm upward, invitingly—"not so quick with that quarter!"

"What's the idea?" Jerry asked resentfully.

The counterman wiped his hands carefully on his apron. "You found it on the counter, didn't you? Kick in."

Jerry kicked in, reluctantly.

"And don't go pickin' up no more receipts," the big man advised pointedly. "I ain't asked for a silent partner in this business. When I want a guy to go shares with me on the day's re——"

Jerry was already out the door, regretfully watching a graceful figure disappear into a store farther up the street.

He waited five minutes, happened to look at his wrist watch, and his mind leaped back to his duties. Five minutes to two, and he was due at South Spencer, ten miles away, at two o'clock! He was going to be late for that appointment with the architect, even if he stepped on it, and there were half a dozen rival salesmen very keen on the job.

His eyes sought the place where he remembered leaving his car parked, missed it, and then located the familiar blue body of the Buckland sport sedan farther on. He hurried to it, twisted the handle of the door. It was locked.

"Darn it! I've got a great head!" He slapped his pockets, looked at the ground, peered underneath the car to see if he had dropped the keys there. "I must have been wool gatherin'."

Locked the doors and then lost the keys. Now, where the heck——"

He hurried back to the Wayside Cabin.

"Did you see a bunch of keys lying around anywhere? I've pulled the same fool stunt I did once before—locked myself out of my car."

The counterman surveyed the mahogany cautiously for quarters. This was a slick bird, but he couldn't fool him again. "What kind of keys were they?" he inquired unhurriedly.

"Car keys—keys to a car," Jerry sputtered. "I'm in a heck of a hurry, too."

"Keys, hey?" The counterman scratched his chin shrewdly. "That same gal didn't leave them behind, by any chance, did she? You seem to do a lot of fetchin' and——"

"Look here!" Jerry's voice rose. "I've no time to waste kidding with you. Did you see my keys or didn't you?"

"Not to give you a short answer, I didn't. An' as fur as wastin' valuable time around here, I believe in bein' curchess to customers, but if you ask me——"

"Is there a taxi in town here?" Jerry looked anxiously at his watch, which registered two o'clock.

"There was one." The keeper of the dogs swabbed his counter slowly. "Stew Urtell owned one but he sold it to Jimmy Henderson an' he works up by the silk mill during the day an' you can't get him easy."

"Where's your phone?" Jerry broke in.

"Right there." He indicated a wall phone. "But it won't do you no good. It's out of order. They's one in the tailor's shop."

When, after another five precious minutes had been wasted, Jerry got a connection with the architect's office, the line was busy. Jerry rushed back to the car.

There was only one thing to do and Jerry hated to do it, for the new and shining Buckland sedan was the only valuable thing he owned. But it was better to take a small loss than lose that contract.

He looked around, selected a chunky stone, and the plate glass of the door shattered jaggedly. He reached inside, threw open the door and climbed in, his foot jamming down on the self-starter almost at the instant he swept the broken glass from the seat.

The engine surged roaringly to life, the gears rasped harshly as Jerry jammed into reverse to back out of the parking space. Out of the corner of his eye Jerry caught a flicker of yellow dress and purple straw.

"You—you——" Lavender eyes flashed angrily. "Where are you going?"

"South Spencer," Jerry grinned easily. "Glad to give you a lift. In a deuce of a hurry. Got a deal to close. Tell you about it on the——"

"How dare you smash——" She whirled around, a smooth, tanned arm waving frantically to the traffic officer on duty at the corner. The man in blue slid toward them on his motor cycle.

"Look here," Jerry protested, "I've got a perfect right to break into my own car."

"What's the trouble, lady?" the cop's voice rumbled from subterranean and hairy depths, his heavy jaw projected toward Jerry. "What's he done?"

"He tried to steal my car!" She was excitedly breathless, her eyes large and reproachful and, still, holding a trace of admiration in their sea-blue depths as she turned their full force on Jerry. "He broke the window and tried to get away. I never saw such a nervy——"

"I'm afraid," Jerry laughed, "you're making a rather embarrassing mistake. I suppose if I produce my coat and brief case from the rear seat here it will convince you I'm not a car-robb——"

His laugh, meant to be condescendingly forgiving, faded to a sickly grin as he twisted around in the seat. There was no brief case and no coat. On the rear seat reposed a frivolously feminine sport coat. He felt a distinct chill on the back of his neck.

"I guess," he croaked unconvincingly, "I made a mistake myself. Two Buckland sport sedans—natural enough—mine was moved—right over there somewhere."

It wasn't over there anywhere. In the double line of cars of all makes and conditions of servitude the blue of the Buckland sport sedan was appallingly absent.

"Stolen!" Jerry gasped. "Darn it, some one has driven off in it! I left it right outside the Cabin."

He started to wriggle clear of the seat.

"Stay right where you are, buddy." The law enforcer unbuttoned the flap of his revolver holster meaningly. "An' keep both hands in sight. Makin' a mistake and drivin' off in somebody else's car is old stuff. But you haven't even got a car for an alibi. Hop in, lady, if you ain't afraid to sit beside him, an' keep in second. Town Hall's around the corner. Don't be scared. I'll be right alongside you all set for this egg if he starts something."

She appraised the pale young man beside her. "I'm not afraid."

"But look here," Jerry objected, "I've got an appointment. I know this looks funny——"

"Pipe down! The chief will tell you how funny it is. An' keep them arms folded nice. All right, lady."

She shifted into first nervously, and they rode around the corner, Jerry stealing an occasional glance at the determined little chin beneath the flopping hat, the policeman *chug-chugging* alongside, on the alert.

They marched into the shiningly new brick-and-stucco Town Hall and Jerry

found himself being regarded with deep suspicion from behind a varnished desk by a shirt-sleeved chief of police with heavy eyebrows and a manner of closing one eye that gave an aspect of shrewdness not at all justified.

He listened to the girl's recital, favored Jerry with a one-eyed glare, and borrowed a fountain pen from the traffic cop.

"What's your name?"—leveling the pen at the girl.

"Patricia Lang."

Jerry gave his name in turn and acknowledged that he was twenty-two and had not been arrested before.

"Looks like a plain enough case to me," the chief volunteered. "What charges do you want to prefer against him, lady? Grand larceny—breakin' and enterin' with felonious intentions—malicious mischief—it's all the same to me."

"Not to me," Jerry protested. "If you'll let me get in touch with my firm I can prove——"

"Got any proof on you?"

Jerry shook his head. "My coat and hat and brief case were in my car. Some one drove off in it, and without thinking I stepped into this young lady's Buckland sedan. I'm with the Sharon-Holt Company, plumbing contractors. If I could send a wire or phone them they'll tell you I had a Buckland——"

"We'll come to that," the chief grunted. "It's up to you, Miss Lang, bein' as it was your car he tried to pinch."

"I don't know." She looked at Jerry doubtfully. He thought her more appealingly beautiful than ever. "He might be telling the truth. He does not look like the type who would go in for stealing cars——"

"Thanks," Jerry said warmly. "I'm glad you can see——"

"I mean the intelligent type of criminal," she amended icily; and Jerry's view was shut off by Milan straw. "I

don't want to have him put in jail on my account."

"Tell you what I'll do"—the chief rubbed his nose judicially and closed one eye again—"we'll give him rope enough to hang himself. I'll take the name of his so-called employers and wire 'em fer particulars. Then you can press the charge if you want to. Meanwhile we'll keep him safe."

"Look here!" Jerry exclaimed hotly. "I'm late now for an important appointment. If you think I'm going to waste any more time in your two-by-four lockup——"

Evidently the chief did think so, for Jerry spent the succeeding two hours pacing back and forth in the brand-new cell downstairs.

At the end of that fretful waiting period, wherein Jerry Blades had ample time to consider the possibilities of being stranded in North Spencer without money, car, coat, or hat, the chief came down and unlocked the cell door. He held two open telegrams in his horny hand.

"Mebbe you're all right, young fellow," he conceded; "but it's your own fault to go jumpin' into other people's automobiles. Here's what they sent me:

"Wire received answers description of salesman Jerry Blades, height five feet ten inches, brown eyes and hair, driving Buckland sedan to South Spencer to-day on important business of firm.

"And here's a wire for you," the chief added.

Jerry took it and read it without enthusiasm. It was briefly informative; and signed by the salesmanager for the Sharon-Holt Company.

Contract let to competitor when you failed to appear stop not interested in salesmen in jail stop cashier will send final check stop good-by forever.

"Well, you're free to go now." The chief jerked his thumb over his shoul-

der. "An' don't go sky-larking around this town again. I suppose you'll want us to find your car fer you."

"*You* couldn't find it," Jerry said bitterly, "if it was parked out on your front lawn with a sign on it in three-foot letters."

Outside the stucco Town Hall he stood irresolutely on the brick pavement of North Spencer and wondered what to do next. For a fleeting instant he regretted that neat retort to the chief of police, for there was a possibility that the car might be found with diligent search. If it weren't Jerry could visualize a long walk back to New York. His wallet was in the pocket of his coat, and that had vanished with his new car and his job.

A blue-and-nickeled Buckland slid up to the curb and a manicured hand beckoned to Jerry.

"You're out again, I see." Patricia Lang's voice held just the proper shade of regret. "I came back to see who was going to pay me for my window. And I paid for that telegram for your employers to bail you out."

Jerry managed a grin that was one-sided. "Thanks a lot. They bawled me out instead—and then they fired me out. No more plumbing for me, I guess. Don't send any more wires."

"Was your car insured?" she asked.

"No. I intended to and forgot about it."

She shook her head disapprovingly. "You shouldn't be allowed out alone this way. I never heard of such a senseless—— I suppose the thing to do is help you find your car again. You can't go around without a hat and coat."

"Try and get it," Jerry intoned pessimistically. "They're a long way off by now and going still. A needle in a haystack."

"That saying is stupid and probably invented by a man." Her chin tilted scornfully. "As if any one would expect to find a needle in such an out-of-

the-way place. Get in here, and please don't sit on my coat. Put it on the rear seat."

"But—where are we——"

She jammed the shift in place harshly, with complete feminine disregard for meshed gears. "We're going back where you left it and start from there. That seems sensible."

They stopped outside the Wayside Cabin and Jerry went in to inquire. The counterman was heavily facetious.

"Thought you was arrested. You'd ought to quit pinchin' quarters. No, I ain't seen no Buckland sedans. They usually park them outside. Ask the filling-station feller."

The filling-station man was grease-covered and sociable. "How're you. Miss Lang? Back from school, hey? Seen your pop yesterday an' he was lookin' fer the car to go golfin'. He don't think much of your drivin'."

Patricia's smooth cheek colored. "My father and I share the car, but not our opinions. I stopped to ask you about something else."

"Buckland sedan?" he repeated, when she had explained the quest. "Lemme see. There was a couple stopped here to-day. One particular, I call to mind. Three hard-lookin' customers in it. They asked the way to South Spencer. Couple of hours ago it——"

She jerked the car forward. "South Spencer. It's a straight road. We'll watch for a Buckland. Do you know your license number?"

"Lord, no. Who ever remembers his license? I've got a note of it in my memorandum book; but it's in the car, too."

"How on earth," she asked, "do you expect to recognize it?"

"I'd know it in a minute," Jerry boasted. "The front right fender is dented, where I bumped into something."

They went slowly, Jerry watching the sides of the road.

Within two miles they passed a dozen cars coming toward them. Two were Buckland sedans, with undented fenders. There were other cars parked by the side of the road here and there, but none was a Buckland.

"Two hours," Jerry remarked dismally, "is too much leeway. They're halfway to the Berkshires by now, unless they had tire trouble. That front left shoe was beginning to go. I hope it blew—— Hey! Wait a sec——"

"What is it?" The car screeched to a stop, almost skidded into the ditch by the road. "What's the matter?"

Jerry hit the road running, picked up a battered object they had passed, and hurried back to her. The battered object had once been a straw hat with a fancy ribbon. Apparently several cars had passed over it.

"It looks," she remarked critically, "like a shredded wheat biscuit—only more so."

"My hat!" Jerry pointed to the initials inside the dusty wreck. "We're getting hot! Let's go!"

Half a mile farther on Jerry got out to inspect a Buckland sedan that was drawn up in a clump of trees. He walked around it, looked at the front right fender, and hurried back to Patricia, leaving a mystified and indignant picnicking party behind him. He was working fast, with no time to answer questions.

They were beyond South Spencer before they sighted another of the make and model they sought, but that, too, proved to be a false alarm.

"You know," Jerry said reluctantly, "this is an imposition. We might spend half the night cruising this way. I have no right to ask you to go to all this trouble——"

"Oh, I don't mind. We'll go another few miles. I like driving. Father doesn't let me have the car often. If something doesn't turn up soon we'll go back to town and give the local police

a chance to show what smart—— What is it now?"

Jerry's finger indicated a blue sedan drawn up beside the road some distance ahead. "Something tells me that's my car."

"What tells you?" she inquired doubtfully.

"Just a hunch. And look! There they are—the three tough eggs the garage man told us about! I'll just give that the once-over."

He jumped out as she applied the brakes, stopping the sedan a dozen yards in the rear of the strangers. Evidently they had been having some engine trouble, as the hood was raised and one tough egg had his head hidden, ostrich-fashion, in the entrails of the car. He withdrew it and favored Jerry with a cold and glassy stare. Two other pale and dapper young men gazed as silently at Jerry through the rear window of the car. The exhaust throbbed unevenly, blue in the sunlight.

"What do you want?" The voice of the first egg was flat and toneless, and he spoke without moving his lips, like a man who conserves energy for emergencies. "Lost something?"

"Yes." Jerry advanced boldly. "I'd like to take a look at this car, if you fellows don't——"

From behind Jerry—some distance behind—came the steady sputter of a motor cycle sweeping toward them around a curve. It seemed to release some hidden spring that controlled the action of this trio of mask-faced and dapper men, whirling them into action, turning this flat and colorless photograph into swift, flickering motion.

The man beside the engine jerked downward into a crouch as a sibilant warning came from the rear seat, and Jerry threw himself out of range in the second that the shattering roar of an automatic blasted in his face. He landed against the spare-tire rack, felt it leap from beneath his hand as the car

lurched forward. He jumped for it, felt the rubber of the outer spare tire underneath his fingers, and felt his feet scrape against the stony surface of the road. If the car had been under more headway he would not have been able to do it. Even at a starting speed of ten or fifteen miles an hour his shoes were almost ripped from his feet. But first one knee found purchase on the inside of the tires, and then the other.

Half wedged inside the circular space, he wrapped his arms about the tires, clinging with all his strength as the car rocked along the road, gathering speed quickly. Dust eddied about him chokingly; every bump threatened to throw him loose from his precarious hold.

He twisted his head around and looked back. The motor-cycle cop circled toward Patricia's car. Jerry had a glimpse, through the yellow cloud, of the girl's arm waving to the policeman to hurry. The curve of the road hid them immediately and Jerry was left to a consideration of his position.

It was not an enticing one and was becoming less so by the second. He couldn't let go safely. Even at thirty miles an hour that streaking road beneath him would be unpleasant to hit on all fours. And if he stayed where he was until a lonelier stretch of road was reached he had a fairly accurate idea of what was going to happen to him at the hands of the three armed men in the car.

Jerry glanced up, holding on tightly as the car bounded over a bump. Against the rear window an unhealthily pallid face was pressed, flat nose flatter against the glass, just a gleam of ivory showing between the twisted lips. He was watching Jerry with an unfaltering catlike stare, the muzzle of an automatic ready to send the glass tinkling downward and reach out at the propitious moment.

Cars swept by them coming from the other direction. A low, speedy road-

ster, holding a man and girl, overtook them, passed by, the man grinning and waving jovially in answer to Jerry's violent signals.

Holding on with aching arms, spread-eagled across the back of the swaying car, Jerry's mind worked frantically for a solution. There was no way in which he could stop the car. He thought of the gas tank. The plug that emptied the tank was inaccessible, and required a wrench, anyway. He had seen them in the movies puncture a tire with a pistol shot; but that required a pistol.

If he could attract attention in some way. He could not see the road ahead, but he knew there was no crossing within several miles with stop-and-go signals that would make the speeding car slow up so that he could jump clear.

There might be a traffic cop ahead. But thirty miles an hour was permissible on this road and a motor-cycle cop would not give chase unless there was something radically wrong—something other than the sight of a foolish young man sky-larking. Something to make the policeman give chase—

The car picked up more speed and struck a depression in the road. Jerry's left hand missed hold and swung against the license plate. The sharp edge of the tin bent beneath his clutch, cutting the inside of his hand.

That was it—the license plate!

It was harder to cling to the tire with one hand in that awkward position, but Jerry managed it while the jolting stopped as the car sped along a smooth stretch. His left hand worked at the wing-nuts that held the license plate in place, found the nuts new and not rusted in place yet. His action was screened from the men in the car.

The tin plate came off in response to his tug and he held it in readiness in his left hand, his elbow crooked again around the tire. The car swerved off to the right and down a hill. Jerry had a flashing glimpse of a littered picnic-

ing ground, a gas station, a motor-cycle cop at the crossroads, straddling his machine, alert for a possible quarry.

Jerry had only a moment or two to work in, as that khaki figure receded in the dust cloud, but Jerry made the best of it. The license plate skidded through the air for a dozen feet and missed the policeman's head by a fortunately wide margin.

Action was forthcoming immediately. A man may be foolhardy enough to ride, hanging to the back of a car, or on the roof or radiator, and still be within his constitutional rights. But when he removes a license plate and shies it at law and order, the most lethargic policeman must be aroused to activity.

In the bright lexicon of that particular cop there was no such word as "lethargy." He roared after the car as if shot from a catapult. Above Jerry's head the pallid face vanished for a second and the car's speed increased by leaps and bounds. Jerry held on for all he was worth.

Smack! It sounded to Jerry as if some one had slapped a flat board down on a quiet pool. But it was a more sinister sound than that. From under his elbow he glimpsed, through the dust haze, the flash of nickel in the policeman's free hand extended over the handlebars.

Sharp particles of flying glass stung Jerry's neck. He swung lower, twisting out of the line of fire of that pumping automatic that was shoved through the window. But the men inside were not interested in Jerry Blades at the moment. They were reacting instinctively to the natural enemy of their species, and the fact that an unfortunate plumbing-fixture salesman was between two fires did not make the slightest difference to them.

An empty shell flipped down Jerry's shirt collar and the answering shot from the pursuer drilled a neat hole in the

metal of the car body over Jerry's head. Then, in such quick succession that it was impossible to follow the sequence of events, the left rear wheel seemed to drop into a deep rut, the car swung wildly across the road, and Jerry left his perch in a parabolic curve to the sound of splintering fence rails.

It seemed quite suddenly after that sound that Jerry heard his own voice in an atmosphere that smelled of drug store, and he had a guilty notion he'd been talking in his sleep.

"Cast-iron sectional steam boiler to be of sufficient strength to sustain a water——"

"A hard head, Miss Lang," some one said briskly, "and nothing broken, apparently. I wouldn't worry, if I were you. He could sustain a worse——"

Jerry opened his eyes in the shade of a wide purple straw.

"What happened to my car?" he asked presently. "They didn't get away with it, did they?"

"No, they didn't get away." She adjusted an automobile cushion under his head. "They're locked up. They were three gangsters from New York, and I believe the police want them there, too. And it wasn't your car, after all. They just surmised you and that first motorcycle policeman were chasing them and they tried to break away. It was their own Buckland sedan——"

"Good Lord!" Jerry sat up. "Do you

mean to say I took that blamed-fool ride—and I'm as badly off as ever!"

She smiled tremulously. "You did look kind of funny, spread over the back of their car—even though I didn't feel at all like laughing. But I must go find father. He just got here after driving all over town looking for you. He wants to apologize and give you back your car."

"My car! How——"

"Now, don't bawl him out." She tapped his lips lightly with a pink forefinger. "He feels dreadfully about this and he's threatening to put you to work in his office to make up for it. He's a plumbing contractor, too, you know. It was all his fault. You see he made the same natural mistake you did and drove off from Wayside Cabin in your Buckland, and left mine—I mean his. It's all fearfully complicated."

"Why," asked Jerry frowningly, "didn't he tell you when he came and got the car?"

"He doesn't want me driving." She looked supremely offended, radiantly appealing, and defiantly stubborn—a rare combination and possible only to girls of nineteen with eyes of lavender-blue. "He thinks the Buckland is too dangerous for me to handle. Absurd, isn't it?"

"You bet!" Jerry grinned up at her. "Hereafter you can drive mine—just as much as you like."

Will McMorro is a regular contributor to these pages.



AN AGED JOCKEY

IN the millionaire Bobby Lewis, Australia has one of the most wonderful jockeys of all time. He is forty-nine years old. In Australia the Melbourne Cup race is as great an event as the Derby in England, and Lewis has won it four times. Less than a year ago he won it on Trivalve, a six-to-one shot, and during the season on that same horse he brought home to the owner more than one hundred thousand dollars.

When his friends tell him it is time for him to retire from the track, he replies: "Why should I? I'm not old. Besides, riding isn't work to me. It's my fun."



The ISLE of the FATES

By Fred MacIsaac *In Four Parts Part II*

Jefferson Willard, wealthy orphan, handsome, brilliant, athletic, detests and is detested by mankind, because he has the remarkable gift of reading real thoughts, regardless of spoken words. Determining to isolate himself indefinitely, he buys a lonely island in the South Seas, the Isle of Les Parques, and sets sail for there with a guard of six men. The leader of these strangely mixed six is Joe Egmont. The others are: Gregg, English actor of some polish and education, but shifty character; Svendsen, Maher, McLeod, and Schultz. Arrived at the island, Gordon, captain of the schooner that brought the workmen and material for the luxurious house that has been built for Willard, as well as quarters for the guard and for the servants, tries to wreck Willard's yacht, the *Charmer*, in hope of pillage. Willard orders him to sea by morning. Before Willard finally leaves his yacht, Joe and Gregg are alone guarding the house. Joe, strolling around outside, gets a queer feeling that some one is watching him, and turns to see.

CHAPTER X.

A VISION OF DELIGHT.

IN the jungle, not a dozen feet away, peering through fern branches, was a face. Joe had but a glimpse and it was gone. Had he imagined it? No; the fern was shaking where its branch had been released.

He rushed to the spot and tried to force his way through, but he was not able to penetrate two feet. Yet the owner of the face had been able to move there. He heard a piece of dead wood crackle a few yards away.

So it was not imagination. He had seen the face of a spy; and the spy was a woman, a girl.

It was almost noonday, the light was bright, and the face was no figment of fancy. He could never have imagined a face like it. A very beautiful girl had been peering at him from the bush. A native girl, perhaps, for her skin was dark. But he was sure that she had blue eyes, very large blue eyes; and he had seen a mass of light-brown hair falling on bare shoulders.

Maybe some of the Kanakas had brought women with them; but he did not think natives had blue eyes and light-brown hair. And if she belonged to the band who had been brought here by the contractor she would not be lurking in the jungle spying on the house.

He swung about and walked swiftly back to the porch. A glance told him Gregg was asleep. Good enough! He did not wish to talk about this with Gregg.

For some reason his heart was beating faster than usual and the depression which he had felt at the prospect of being marooned here for so long a time had given place to a curious sense of elation.

This was no Eveless Eden after all. There was a girl on the island, a wild girl; and nobody knew it except himself. There was a mystery to be solved. Who could she be?

If she were a shipwrecked traveler why had she not made herself known during the five weeks that MacPherson and his workmen had been in the place? Willard had assured him that the island was uninhabited, so she could not be a member of a band of savages. Besides, her eyes were blue; so despite her brown skin she must be a white girl. If the woman hater, Willard, found her he would ship her off ruthlessly on the *Charmer*. His views on women he had expressed very freely one night during a poker game. She might be a half-caste, child of some beach comber and native woman, and belonging to one of

the Kanaka carpenters. That would account for her blue eyes, but that did not explain her prowling through the jungle.

Joe resumed his chair, but he was no longer sleepy or bored, for his mind was active. He would soon find out if she belonged to the Kanakas, since they would board the schooner to-day. He knew that Willard had threatened to sink Gordon's vessel if he was not gone by morning. He watched carefully the bush at either side of the house for an hour without again getting a sight of the lurking beauty; and then he saw a boat put out from the *Charmer* and recognized the contractor as one of the occupants.

Five minutes later MacPherson entered the house, grinned at the spectacle of the sleeping Englishman, and nodded in friendly fashion to Egmont.

"Having a quiet time of it, I see," he said pleasantly. "How do you fellows expect to amuse yourselves for the next two or three years?"

"God only knows," Joe answered, more cheerfully than he would have done an hour before. "We let ourselves in for something."

MacPherson dropped into a chair. "I have been having a long chat with your respected employer. He is the most remarkable young man I ever met in my life. It's a darn shame for a man as brilliant as he to plan to bury himself on this dot in the south Pacific. Some big tragedy in his life, I suppose. He is appallingly cynical. I never saw any one more so."

Joe shook his head. "We can't make him out. We don't know any more about him now than when we left New York."

"Well," smiled MacPherson, "he'll get over it, whatever it is, and you'll all be back in civilization in a few months. I've got to round up my natives and get them aboard the *Minerva* with their truck. Thank heavens, I

don't have to go back on her. She's filthy and the cooking is horrible."

"I—I thought I saw a woman among the crowd on the beach," said the other.

"Oh, no. We wouldn't let them bring their women. Afraid of quarrels and knifing. I think you fellows will be comfortable in your quarters on the other side. Of course you haven't got the luxury we provided for Mr. Willard. It will cost him about eighty thousand dollars to pay for what we've set up on this island; but I reckon he can afford it."

"Are there any native inhabitants on the island?"

"No," replied MacPherson. "There used to be a French château on the place, a couple of miles north; but the jungle is all over it now. The old marquis who lived here has been gone for fifty years. I have warned Willard that the place has been visited since. We found traces of logging on the other side of the island and some tumble-down huts evidently built by traders at some time or other."

"Mightn't there be people living here without your knowing it?"

The contractor shook his head. "We've gone over the place pretty thoroughly. It's not a big island and if it had inhabitants we should have found them. So long."

The men shook hands and the contractor departed. Joe saw a couple of boats leaving the schooner a moment later, and saw MacPherson marshaling his workmen on the beach. It took about an hour to ferry them out to the *Minerva*, and Joe saw activity on board which indicated departure. A gentle breeze had come up and the glassy bay was now covered with ripples.

The crew of the schooner began to lift anchor, a noisy operation attended with shouting and singing and rattling of chain and creaking and groaning of the windlass. A very dirty jib crawled up the foremast, and then foresail and

mainsail climbed into position and the schooner began to move very slowly off. The sails were patched and worn in many places, and Joe had enough nautical experience by this time to be aware that the operation of departure had been a very sloppy job.

The schooner passed close to the *Charmer* without appearing to awaken any interest on board and presently she was moving more swiftly across the bay in the direction of the opening in the reef.

He didn't pay her any more attention. On this island there was a white girl who didn't want her presence known. MacPherson had settled any question of her being a Kanaka woman. Now what should he, Joe, do about it?

If Willard had been an ordinary sort of employer he would have reported his discovery at the first opportunity, but it seemed to him that the boss might not take the right attitude in the matter. He might order the poor creature hunted down. It would be better to find her, win her confidence, explain to her that she had nothing to fear, and persuade her that she should come in voluntarily with the assurance of decent treatment.

As far as his duty was concerned he did not think that he was doing wrong in concealing her existence for she certainly was not a menace to the peace of the community. He decided to keep his mouth shut and his eyes open. And it would be well to keep out of Willard's way lest his uncanny prescience inform him that Joe had something on his mind.

An hour later the schooner was well out to sea, heading west with all sail set, and the people on the *Charmer* were coming ashore. Willard led a procession consisting of MacPherson, Captain Johnson, and the four guardsmen, who were all carrying rifles. Presently they tramped upon the porch. Joe had awakened Gregg, who stood by his side

to receive them. Joe quaked lest Willard should turn his eyes on him and ask if anything out of the ordinary had occurred, but the millionaire paid no attention to him.

"Mr. MacPherson," Willard said, "suppose you take my men to their quarters and see if they have anything of which to complain. Sit down, captain, and I'll have them give you a high ball."

The contractor led the way around the house and over a slight elevation into a jungle path about four feet wide. It was dark in places, because the foliage met overhead.

"You men will have to use your axes to keep this road open," MacPherson said. "Let it alone for a month and the jungle will be all over it again. Hanged if I know why he wants to plant you away over here."

"Say," said Maher, "the farther I am from that guy the better I like it. He gives me the willies." There was a murmur of agreement.

The contractor said nothing but it occurred to him that Jefferson Willard was not very wise in settling on a remote island where he was at the mercy of armed men who were already disaffected. Egmont, however, was in command; and MacPherson felt sure that that individual was thoroughly trustworthy.

They walked over thick moss, damp and slippery in places, and after ten minutes came suddenly in view of the sea. There was no reef on this side of the island, nor was there a beach. At the right was a high rocky headland, at the left land which, though lower, still lifted abruptly from the water. Directly ahead, in a natural clearing, stood a long, low building with a roof thatched with palm leaves. The building was constructed, apparently, of bamboo. They came upon it from the back, which was shedlike; but upon swinging around a corner of the structure they saw that

there was a long screened-in porch, from which opened many doors.

"This isn't so bad," said Joe cheerfully.

"You'll find it very comfortable. Each room has a good single bed, and you have a well-furnished living room. You ought to get along nicely. I wouldn't mind living here myself."

"You can take my place," said McLeod grimly.

"You will have your own cook and servant, Kanaka boys. There is a phonograph with a couple of hundred records. You're better fixed than most outfits in the tropics. There are only six of you, and twelve bedrooms to choose from."

The men spread over the building, inspected the chambers, and reassembled speedily on the porch. Maher dragged out the phonograph, set a jazz record at work, and grinned delightedly.

"Good beds, good grub, nothin' to do, and money for doin' it. It ain't so bad."

"I say, stop that bloody machine, will you?" exclaimed Gregg.

"It's a good tune," retorted Maher.

"What good is dance music without girls, you ass?" snapped the Britisher.

The men exchanged glances.

"Better shut it off, Maher," said McLeod. "If there was a hundred dames here waiting to dance, I wouldn't ask them. But since there ain't any——"

Sluggo stopped the record. They flopped into chairs and MacPherson clapped his hands. From a room at the far end of the building came a brown man in white coat and trousers, but bare feet.

"Six time whisky soda," the contractor commanded. The native grinned and trotted off.

"They'll have lunch for you at one o'clock. Good luck to you all. I'm going back to Mr. Willard."

"Better stay with us. We're much more cheerful company," urged Gregg.

"Sorry, but duty calls."

CHAPTER XI.

CRUSOE DE LUXE.

LUNCHEON at the owner's residence was served on the porch. A table had been invitingly spread, the linen was snow white, there were silver service dishes, and the contents under the covers were inviting. A canned soup, a broiled red snapper, cold corned beef, and sherbert, was the menu. Champagne filled tall glasses.

The meal was eaten silently by Willard and his two guests, Captain Johnson and MacPherson. The white foreman had been sent to join the guardsmen at their repast. Over the coffee MacPherson, after some hesitation, spoke his mind.

"Do you propose to leave arms in the hands of the men across the island?" he asked.

Willard nodded.

"I wonder if you know what the tropics do to white men, Mr. Willard?" the other went on. "I never knew one who did not degenerate from long residence."

Willard smiled enigmatically. "I am not afraid of them," he said.

"From the little I have seen of them, you are not popular with them," the contractor hazarded.

"I have never been popular with anybody," Willard replied. "The captain here hates me and will be glad to see the last of me. Oh, yes you will. You, Mr. MacPherson, seem for some reason, to like me. With one exception those fellows execrate me. I know that perfectly well."

"Well, in that case, you are taking a big chance."

"I enjoy taking chances," Willard said coldly.

"I suggest that you store the arms in the house and keep them locked up. In case of trouble of any sort you will have ample time to serve out weapons."

"They hate me but they fear me,"

Willard said. "I am in no danger of attack."

"Then look at it from another angle, Mr. Willard. They are rough fellows, and time will hang heavily on their hands. They will quarrel, and the next thing you know they will be shooting one another up."

Willard laid down his cigarette. "That is something which had not occurred to me, Mr. MacPherson. I think you are quite right; and I shall have them disarmed. I don't care how much they fight, if they settle things with their fists. But it is not my plan to leave them in idleness. I am going to raise pineapples and sugar cane. I'll let them grow the stuff on shares. Every six months I'll have a ship come for their crops."

"Unprofitable. You are too far from markets to make it pay."

"Oh, I don't care whether it pays or not. It will keep them busy and make some money for them."

"If their wives were with them they might settle down here contentedly," reflected the contractor.

Willard laughed unpleasantly. "God forbid. If a woman sets foot on this island I'll throw her into the sea."

The contractor made a gesture of compassion.

"No," Willard said swiftly. "I have never had a love affair in my life, so don't waste any sympathy on me. I don't care for mankind, Mr. MacPherson. I can tolerate men, but women I despise."

"You'll get over that," said MacPherson quietly. "Do you need my help in setting up your wireless?"

"No. I'll do it myself, with the aid of my men. Speaking of women, these men are divorced, save for one who was jilted by a girl, so perhaps they are not as much in need of female companionship as you think."

Captain Johnson lifted his glass and gazed through it at the light.

"Women," he said softly. "We may hate 'em but we can't live without 'em."

"I always have and I always will," said Willard icily.

On the fourth day, the *Charmer* set her white sails and slipped gracefully across the harbor through the reef opening and out upon the gleaming dark-blue sea. On the little landing were assembled the six guardsmen and the half dozen native servants. Jeff Willard had said good-by to MacPherson and Captain Johnson at the house, and did not come down to the beach.

The yacht pulled at the heartstrings of the men on the landing, almost drew them into the water in a mad longing to regain her deck. And as she gradually faded from sight the marooned white men saw on one another's faces the same handwriting of despair.

"He didn't even come down to see her off," said McLeod glumly. "That man just isn't human."

"Yah. Crazy, that's what he is," declared Svendsen. "Us, we ban in the hands of a loony."

Joe, who shared in the general gloom, felt called upon to defend his master. "Can that kind of talk," he commanded. "It's no good and may get you into trouble. The boss is as sane as anybody. He told us what we were up against, gave us every chance to back out, and now we have to take our medicine."

"Right, old Egg," agreed Gregg. "Here we are, monarchs of all we survey. Our right there is none to dispute except Willard. A smiling green island in the south Pacific, the Isle of the Fates. I'd swap the blasted place for a hamburger sandwich in a dirty lunch room on Sixth Avenue."

"There are six of us and only one of him. If we had guts we could have made him send us back on the *Charmer*," said Maher bitterly. "Well, it ain't no use to beef about it now.

Let's go back to our jail and put 'The Prisoner's Song' on the phonograph."

Gregg tittered in his exasperating way. "Don't fancy he overlooked that possibility. That's why he took away our weapons and locked them up. Just now we are unarmed and he is a walking arsenal, so we must be good children and do what teacher tells us."

Joe followed them across the island while he pondered upon the peculiarities of humans. Here they were on an exquisitely beautiful island breathing air which was not heavy and humid but as stimulating as wine. The most gorgeous flowers grew all about them; the fragrance of the trees and plants was delicious; the tall palms with their green feather-dusters brushing the blue sky were joyous things to behold. The Garden of Eden must have been like this, he thought.

Unlike castaways on a desert isle they had no living problem confronting them. They had good food, plenty of wine and spirits, excellent quarters, and deft servants to wait on them. Willard was not a hard master. Until now he had left them to their own resources. And it was unlikely he would give them much to do in the future. Certainly he would not interfere with their amusements.

In a land of soft, scented breezes, of unbelievable beauty, the six had been set down to a life of ease and idleness. How many toiling millions had dreamed of something like this. The Christian heaven, according to the best descriptions, is not unlike it. These men had been treated badly by the world and by women and had rapturously embraced the opportunity to follow Willard. At the end of three years in a place where expenditure of money was impossible, they would have earned fifteen thousand dollars each with which they could return to civilization and do about as they pleased. Princely pay for living in paradise; yet already they were discon-

tented, almost in open mutiny, and Joe himself was not entirely free from the sentiments of the others. What was the trouble?

It seemed to him that lack of occupation had something to do with it. All of them had been accustomed to hard work, and now they had been unemployed for three months. They were fed up with the island in four days, and they would settle down to drinking, gambling and fighting almost immediately, if something was not done about it. Unaware that Jeff Willard had already determined to give them work, he decided he would suggest to their employer that that be done.

He had always supposed that the climate of the south Pacific islands was enervating in the extreme, but that of Les Parques, while soft and balmy, had something stimulating in the air. In the sun it was very hot but in the shade it was cool, so cool that they had found it desirable to wear cotton shirts over their undershirts and even to don the white drill jackets with which they were supplied.

Like most who have not visited the islands, Joe had lumped them together in his mind's eye, forgetting that some of them simmer under the equatorial sun and others are so far south that they are soaked by fog from the antarctic and even are visited by heavy snow. Les Parques was blissfully located nearly twenty-five degrees south of the equator, where weather conditions are ideal.

Joe stayed out of the poker game which started immediately. As they settled around the table it came to his mind that all these men would not own fifteen thousand dollars at the end of three years. Some would be penniless and others would possess two or three times that sum.

But they might not live to carry it away. Decidedly these fellows had to be put to work. He determined to

brave rebuke and make the suggestion to Willard immediately.

He recrossed the path to the residence, keeping his eyes open for a sight of the girl who he knew lurked somewhere in the bush. But she was not on duty to-day, or, if so, he did not catch a glimpse of her. He came round by the front of the house and rather diffidently stepped upon the porch. Willard was lying in the hammock smoking a pipe, a big volume open on his lap. He glanced up and smiled a welcome.

"You've come on business, Joe," he said. "Take a chair. Have you ever done much reading?"

"Magazines are about all I've read since I left school, sir."

"I have some very remarkable books," he stated. "I'll have them unpacked and placed on the shelves in a day or two. You and Gregg are welcome to borrow any which may interest you. I doubt if the others are reading men."

"I'll be pleased to avail myself of your kind offer," Joe said rather stiffly. "It might be a chance for me to get a good education, since I'm going to be here for three years."

"Now, about the men," said Willard. "You are quite right in thinking that it would be dangerous to leave them in idleness. They ought to put in several hours a day at hard work which would make them too fatigued to quarrel among themselves or make trouble for me. At one time there were plantations on this island; and we'll revive them, in a small way. I am informed that there are no dangerous animals or reptiles here. But that I propose to find out for myself; so I plan to start out to-morrow to explore. The jungle has reclaimed most of the island, so exploring it will be very hard work and may take several days. We may have to camp out. Tell the men to put on the khaki suits with leather puttees and be ready at six to-morrow morning. I'll issue axes and revolvers

—no sense in being weighed down by rifles—and we'll make a start before the sun gets hot. I'm curious to reach the old French château, which is somewhere up the hillside to the north."

"Shall all of us go, sir?" Joe asked eagerly.

"Yes. The houses are safe enough with the servants. We'll tire out those fellows so thoroughly that they won't have a chance to feel sorry for themselves for a week."

"That was what I came to see you about, sir."

"I know."

Joe hesitated.

"You've got something else on your mind," said Willard, turning his penetrating eyes upon the young man.

"Nothing important, sir."

Willard shrugged his shoulders. "I should be sorry to find you practicing deceit. However, let it go. Report here with your men at six a. m."

Joe withdrew, considerably shaken. As usual, the boss knew what he had to say before he said it, and had almost divined the secret. Perhaps he had guessed it and was waiting for his captain to report. That remark about deceit was very significant.

CHAPTER XII.

DEATH IN THE BUSH.

CAPTAIN JOHNSON and his crew had worked hard during their four days at the island, landing the stores brought by the yacht, which amounted to some forty tons of everything from wine to ammunition.

The ammunition was placed in a concrete cellar which had been constructed in the rear of the residence, and the key of which was in the pocket of Jeff Willard. Food supplies had been stored in a corrugated iron shed in the yard at the rear of the kitchen. Huge boxes of books had been set down in one corner of the living room. Joe had noticed

that Willard had broken open one or two of these boxes but had made no effort to shelve the books as yet. Several packing cases containing bedding and clothing had been sent to the barracks for the men, and from one of these cases Joe brought out the service costumes to be worn by the explorers next day.

The men hailed the news of the expedition with delight, and no more murmurs of discontent were audible that day and evening. They dined on canned soup, fresh fish caught by the mess boy that afternoon, and canned plum pudding, washed down by high balls and hot coffee. That evening they played the phonograph and Schultz and McLeod awakened mirth by dancing together.

In single file, the following morning, they crossed to the residence in their brown service suits, each man wearing a white cloth helmet. Joe had marveled at the completeness with which the Willard party had been equipped. It seemed to him that if the work of the contractor and his men on the island totaled eighty thousand dollars, the stuff brought down by the yacht and the cost of chartering that vessel for the very long voyage must total fifty thousand more. And Willard was pledged to pay to his six ex-soldiers a total of ninety thousand dollars during three years.

A quarter of a million dollars spent by this young man for the privilege of burying himself upon a South Sea island, not counting the price of the island. He must be rich as Croesus. But what good did it do him?

Joe left his squad on the lawn in front of the house and went forward to report. He found Willard in the living room, standing before a table upon which were seven belts each carrying a revolver in its holster on the right side and a short-handled ax at the left, and filled with cartridges.

"The guns are loaded," Willard said.

"Call the men in and have them put on these belts." He had buckled on his own belt already, but omitted to carry one of the axes.

When the outfit was equipped he lifted his hand for attention.

"Now, men," he declared, "this is nothing but an excursion, in all probability. There are no inhabitants, wild animals or snakes on the island, according to my information. However, there seemed to be singularly little knowledge of Les Parques in Tahiti, and I do not know what we may encounter nor how long we shall be gone. You have all been soldiers, and I have never seen service, so you will take your orders from Egmont, who is your captain. In case of an emergency, I'll obey orders like the rest of you. We shall all carry light knapsacks, for we may be two or three days exploring the island. We don't need a tent, and we can easily collect fuel for a fire. Go out through the kitchen and pick up the packs you'll find on the table ready for you. Let's go."

Five minutes later they left the house and moved down to the beach, where they halted for instructions. Willard glanced north and south.

"This island is twelve miles long," he said, "and this bay seems only three or four miles from the south end. The big job is north, so we'll go in that direction. We'll follow the beach until we have to strike inland."

"Forward march," commanded Joe. Willard walked beside the captain; and for the first time during their acquaintance Joe realized that his employer seemed to be enjoying himself. His eyes were shining, his cynical smile was replaced by one of eager expectation, and he strode along at a pace which made the others hustle.

"Better take it easy, sir," Joe suggested. "We have a long way to go, and at this rate we'll be all in at the end of an hour."

"Right you are," laughed Willard, slowing up. "I'm so anxious to inspect my island that I forget how large it is."

"It looks volcanic ahead," said Joe.

"Yes. Many of these islands are part volcanic and part coral. That was a coral reef, of course, on which that scoundrel, Gordon, almost piled up the *Charmer*."

They followed the crescent of the beach around to the point at the north and found that the beach ended abruptly in a mass of volcanic rock. Schultz clambered nimbly upon a high rock and peered ahead.

"Rocky shore from now on, sir," he reported. "No chance of going any farther this way."

"Now the fun begins," laughed Willard. "We'll have to plunge inland."

They were compelled to retrace their steps a couple of hundred yards before they found a likely exit from the beach. They climbed a mossy bank, scrambled through thorny bushes, and forced their way between small fern trees, then came against a clump of bamboos which presented a wall-like obstruction, so close together did they grow.

"Here's what looks like a path," called Gregg, who had moved toward the left thirty or forty feet.

Joe and Willard hastened to join him and found an opening through the bamboos which did resemble a path, although it was knee-deep with grass and weeds.

"Snakes," suggested Schultz.

"They can't hurt you," retorted Willard. "That's why you are wearing leather puttees. Come on."

The path narrowed immediately, so they had to proceed in single file, Willard forcing his way ahead. The bamboos gave place to tall trees, some of them several feet thick, and already they were in semidarkness. There was a thick growth of bushes underneath the trees and they were walking on damp

moss. The air was heavy with the strange perfumes of exotic flowers which grew in this place, and now and again the bushes stretched arms across the path. Willard called for Joe's ax and cut them away.

"I think we are heading for the château," he called back. "This was probably a wide path in the days of the old Frenchman. Keep close on my heels and don't wander off if you see a by-path."

"I bet some of these vines are poisonous," Joe heard Gregg declaring to the men behind him.

They were attacked now by swarms of tiny insects, minute green flies, gnats, and other pestiferous insects that came out of the jungle to inspect these strange beings. The men were busy swatting their assailants and swearing. It was very damp now and the humidity caused them to perspire profusely. Willard dropped back and handed the ax to Joe.

"I'm all in," he admitted. "You take a turn at clearing a path."

Joe then began to hack at the obstructing vegetation, and found it very hard work. But after fifteen minutes of slow progress the jungle thinned and the path began to climb up a hillside. They made better speed now and in another quarter of an hour came into an open space, in the center of which they saw what had been the residence of a French nobleman.

It had been a large square building, the walls of lava stone cemented in place, the roof of heavy timbers and thatched with palm leaves. The roof had fallen in and part of the walls, and moss and shrubs had crept up upon it. A tree was growing out of the center of the building, having pushed its way up through the ruins of the roof. There had been glass in the windows, which had long since shattered, and there were evidences that a wooden porch had fronted the château, though

there was now a tangle of underbrush on its site.

The seven men grouped and inspected the relic in silence for a moment.

Willard laughed harshly. "Others besides myself have sought solitude, it seems."

"Say, Mr. Willard," exclaimed McLeod. "Who lived here?"

"An old French marquis who remained loyal to Emperor Napoleon III. and who preferred to live alone on this island to paying homage to the French Republic," he said.

"Darned old fool," said Maher.

A glare from Willard caused him to shuffle his feet and drop back.

Willard moved slowly toward the house and placed one foot upon a broken wooden step that led toward the heap of rubbish which had been the porch. Immediately two creatures which looked like rats but were as large as rabbits shot out from under the step and darted toward the jungle.

Bang! The report of a revolver sounded like a clap of thunder in the little clearing and was echoed back from the wall-like forest. One of the animals rolled over dead.

Willard leaped back from the step and faced his men angrily.

"If you can't use your weapons more intelligently, I'll take them away from you," he exclaimed. Then he strode over and inspected the kill.

"It's a rat," he declared. "These things are eaten by the natives and considered excellent, but I don't think we care to feed on it. You men keep a sharp lookout, but don't fire again at anything which obviously is not dangerous. Egmont, come with me. I'm going to try to get a look into the house."

Joe saw a rotting log not far away, picked it up with difficulty—for it was heavy ebony wood—and carried it to the steps. He placed it to reach from the step to a piece of timber that seemed firm about four feet in.

"If you will walk on this," he suggested to his employer, "I think you can leap from the end into the doorway. There may be some venomous things hidden in this mass of wreckage."

Willard stepped on the log, reached the end, and jumped, landing in the open doorway, from which the door had long since fallen inward. Joe was at his side in an instant.

There were traces of what had been a rug inside the door, but there had been a second floor which had collapsed and the interior of the house was a mass of broken boards, plaster, old carpet, rotting and decrepit tables, chairs, bureaux, bedsprings and mattresses, which gave off a musty odor. The pile of refuse and wreckage rose waist-high, and upon it much dirt had been deposited and weeds were growing, while a tree of some strange species thrust its trunk through the middle.

They gazed a moment, and then a black spider as big as a dinner plate crawled out from under some moldy cloth and confronted them.

"Let's get out of this," exclaimed Willard. "I suppose it's fifty years since the roof fell in."

They returned to the men and began a tour of the clearing. At the rear were some bamboo walls that marked the site of servant quarters, and just beyond Joe espied a blackened cross about two feet high.

"A grave, boss," he cried. "Shall we have a look at it?"

They approached the cross and Willard knelt in the grass and tore away a covering of moss to reveal a faded inscription carved with a jackknife in the wood.

Armand Gaston Marie LeGrand
Marquis de Lormigny
1804—1879
Vive l'Empereur

"He has been dead forty-seven years," said the new owner of the

island. "*Vive l'Empereur!*" That bounder, Louis Napoleon, didn't deserve loyalty, but it is fine to know that such men as De Lormigny have lived. This place is very depressing. Let us move on."

He led the way northward; but their path was blocked a few hundred feet distant by a hedge of sugar cane which grew to a height of ten or twelve feet, and so close together that progress was impossible. From their position the ground sloped upward and they could see that the sugar cane extended some distance up the hillside.

"This," said Willard, "is a field of sugar cane which has grown wild. The only way we could get through it would be to chop our path, and it would take too long. We'll try to find a way around it."

One of the men broke off a sprig and tasted it, uttering an explanation of pleasure. Willard smiled rather sardonically.

"In case our supply of liquor should give out," he said, "it may interest you to know that you can make excellent rum from this stuff. Let's try to find a road to the eastward."

A couple of hundred yards east they found a hogback of rocky ground along which they marched for a quarter of a mile with no difficulty, and then they came upon what had been an orchard of mangoes and breadfruit.

"I bet the old boy had a lot of slaves to operate this plantation," said Joe. "Wonder what became of them?"

"I presume they were carried off by the people who buried the old man," said Willard. "I doubt if these trees could be reclaimed. The fruit does not look appetizing. This is quite a high hill." He glanced at his wrist watch. "It's nine o'clock," he exclaimed. "Nearly three hours and we haven't traveled more than two or three miles. I expect the vegetation will be less luxuriant as we get higher. When we find

an attractive spot we'll stop and rest and eat something."

"Have you noticed that there don't seem to be any birds?" asked Joe. "Not even parrots. And I haven't seen a monkey."

"Probably not indigenous to the island and were never brought here. I can get along without monkeys."

"I know there must be animals, because I've heard awful noises at night, but we haven't seen anything except those rats."

"Wild animals only hunt at night, and they would avoid a party of men, anyway. I've heard night noises, but I don't know enough about the tropics to identify them."

For another hour they moved upward, sometimes making good progress, again having literally to cut a path for themselves through a tangle of ferns, brambles, bushes bearing a curious red berry, bamboo thickets, and wild banana plants. Before they reached it they heard the ripple of water and suddenly debouched upon the bank of a clear, clean brook which flowed over white sand and babbled against polished lava rocks.

"Me for that," exclaimed Maher, who rushed forward and threw himself on his belly.

"Stop!" commanded Willard. "Drink from your canteens. That water may be polluted, though it doesn't look it."

"Gee!" protested the fighter, reluctantly getting on his feet again. "The water in the canteens is hot and this looks cool. I've a thirst it's a shame to waste on water, anyway."

"Orders!" snapped Joe Egmont.

"This looks like a good place to rest for a while," said Willard. "If you want to open your knapsacks and eat a little, go to it. I'll fill a canteen with this water and analyze it when we get back. I imagine it's all right. It makes our progress easy, too. All we have to do is to follow this stream to its source,

and from there to the hilltop won't be much of a hike."

There were trees of the fan-palm variety growing along the bank of the little stream, the turf was soft and clean, and the men threw themselves down upon it to rest in the shade. Being old campaigners, all except Willard, it did not take them long to have a fire going and a can of coffee boiling over it, after which they clustered in a circle and ate buttered fresh-baked bread, jam, and a little dried beef.

They remained on this spot half an hour, when Willard gave the word to proceed and they moved upstream—in great comfort compared to their previous method of progress.

There was no order in their going and McLeod, who had forged ahead, stopped at the end of a quarter of a mile and uttered a sharp cry. Willard and Egmont were at his heels in an instant.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

Lying with the head in the stream was a man's body, evidently a Kanaka, by his ragged brown trousers, and naked brown torso—and badly decomposed.

"Look at the water you was going to drink," exclaimed Svendsen to Maher.

The pugilist was pale as a ghost. "It makes me sick to think of it."

"Looks like he committed suicide by sticking his head under," said McLeod.

Joe, much as he disliked the task, moved toward the dead man. Three feet away he had seen enough.

"This fellow was speared in the back while he was drinking," he reported. "There's a big hole there, too big for a knife, and animals have been gnawing at him. I hate to look."

"Get hold of him by the pants and pull him out of the water," commanded Willard. "Lay him in the bushes. We have no tools to dig a grave now, but we'll do it later. How long has he been dead, do you think, Joe?"

"Couple of weeks, by the look of him.

Gregg and Svendsen, give me a hand here."

The stench from the body was sickening, but they disposed of it quickly and washed their hands in the stream. Gregg threw a surly glance at Joe. "You had to pick on me," he muttered.

"If I touched him, why not you?" Joe retorted.

Much depressed and somewhat alarmed the little party continued on its way. Willard dropped into step with Joe.

"MacPherson reported that two of his Kanakas had disappeared," he said. "This accounts for one of them."

"The other one killed him and is hiding," hazarded Egmont.

"No," said Willard softly. "You say it was a spear, not a knife. It looks like the work of a savage."

"But you said there were none on the island."

"I said I was told so. We don't know what's on the island. Most of it is jungle. How do we know what may be lurking there? I rely on you to keep the men on the alert."

"I'll see to that, sir."

Willard moved forward and walked beside Gregg. Joe could not hear what he was saying to the Englishman. They followed the brook to the spring from which it bubbled forth, and after a respite hacked and hewed their way through another mile of jungle and suddenly came rocky ground where only weeds and low bushes grew. They were almost at the summit, which was without vegetation, a tiny plateau of volcanic rock.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUBMARINE HORROR.

JOE was constructing a theory of the murder which differed from that of Mr. Willard because of special knowledge. He reasoned that the natives had caught sight of the woman who had peered at him from the bushes near

the residence and had made up their minds to capture her. They had slipped away from the other workmen and had started to explore the island. Undoubtedly they were more competent to move swiftly through country like this than white men.

The girl, aware of her danger, had sped toward the summit, and one of the Kanakas was hot on her trail. What then? She had come upon him drinking and had driven a spear into his back. He did not like to think that the beautiful creature he had glimpsed was capable of such a deed, but Willard had said that the Kanakas had knives, not spears.

After all, the brutes would have mistreated her if she had fallen into their hands, and she would have been no match for them in fair fight. If she had struck him in the back could she be blamed? Yet she must be a savage little creature. And where did she get the spear? How about the second Kanaka? Had she disposed of him in like fashion? Certainly she must have accounted for him or she would not have been free to descend to the vicinity of the residence and spy upon the newcomers. She was a wild woman and considered every man her enemy. She might be lurking near now, with spear poised.

Willard would shoot her down like a wild animal if he saw her in an attitude of attack. The man was ruthless. And, even if she had slain that yellow brute, Joe did not want her killed. The thing was to find Willard in the right mood and tell him everything.

Willard was rich. Joe thought he was decent enough not to harm the girl if he was forewarned of her condition, and he would probably agree to capture her and have her sent off somewhere to be civilized and educated. Besides, the boss would get his secret out of him, anyway; he had half guessed it already.

Another hundred feet and they were upon the summit looking down upon a

scene which caused exclamations of appreciation from such hard-boiled individuals as McLeod, Svendsen and Maher.

The hill must have been eight hundred or a thousand feet high, and from its peak they looked down on the island as on a map—a map in living colors of a brilliancy that cannot be imitated by lithographers.

Roughly speaking, the island was pear-shaped, with a long spit of sand representing the stem, and, at the very end, what seemed to be a coral atoll with a ring of palm trees. From their elevation Les Parques was a daub of dark green on the sea. At its rim were streaks of yellow-and-white beaches washed by water of pale green and topaz, which turned light blue as the bottom fell away, and deepened to an indigo a mile or so from shore. From there the dark-blue sea stretched on all sides to the horizon. There was no other land in sight, and the immensity of the Pacific was more impressive by the contrast with the patch of land on which they stood.

"Gee!" exclaimed Maher. "How far do you suppose we can see, Mr. Willard?"

"From this height," replied Willard, "we must have a vision of fifty miles in all directions, possibly more. If we were shipwrecked men hoping to be taken off, we would erect a flagpole here and put up a signal of distress by day and light a beacon fire by night. As we are voluntary exiles, content to spend our lives here"—he smiled ironically—"naturally we are not interested in attracting the attention of passing vessels."

"If he wasn't so damn sarcastic!" muttered Schultz to Gregg.

"You may be interested to know," continued Willard in the same vein, "that this island is quite out of all lanes of travel, and even out of the way for island trading vessels. I was told in

Tahiti that years might pass without any craft coming within sight of Les Parques. That is why I chose it."

As the noonday sun was beating down upon them and there was no shade on the summit, they remained there only a few minutes. From it they could see the roof of the residence with its green shingles and the low barracks on the other side of the island, both apparently but a short distance below them. Toward the north they looked down on a tangle of vegetation extending for several miles, including a forest of very tall trees—apparently ebony, mahogany, or sandalwood.

From the viewpoint of Gregg and several of the men, it was an utter waste of energy to plunge into this wilderness; but Willard nodded to Joe, who gave the order to march, and with sighs of distress they slipped on their knapsacks and followed their leader down the hill.

It proved to be easier going for a time, as the country was fairly open, and tall trees furnished refreshing shade; but at the end of half an hour they came upon dank, steaming jungle and the moss underfoot was soggy.

"Let's go to the east or west, boss," suggested Joe. "I'm afraid it's swampy ahead."

"Let's swing west, then," he assented. "I saw a cove in that direction from the summit."

Again they had to move in single file and use their axes freely. It was such hot work that after a quarter of an hour of it Joe turned the task of hewing a path over to Svendsen, who passed it on to McLeod, Gregg, and Schultz. Insects of all descriptions assailed them and the faces and hands of all the men began to swell from bites.

"We should have brought gloves and face nets," said Willard. "I have them but forgot that they might be necessary."

At the end of an hour and a half of

hard going during which they had heard the growls of wild animals whose lairs were disturbed and had seen several sizable snakes cross their path, they found themselves upon a bluff overlooking the sea. Below them two rocky arms extended several hundred yards into the ocean, forming a narrow bay, at the head of which was a pebble beach. A tangle of palm trees prevented them from getting a good view of this beach; but it was possible to descend, if cautious, and Willard led the way down a steep rocky slope aided by vines that grew upon it in profusion. They landed on the beach at the south end and saw that it was about half a mile in extent.

It was an inviting spot, for palm trees grew thickly on the beach and the water looked cool to tired, sweating explorers.

"How about a swim, boss, and then some lunch?" suggested Joe.

"I would like a swim myself," agreed Willard. "I'm pretty near all in."

Immediately the men began to strip, and in two or three minutes seven white forms moved slowly over the sharp pebbles, occasionally wincing as keen edges touched tender feet.

"The beach shelves steeply," warned Willard. "Remember that there may be sharks here, and don't get far from the shore."

They plunged in. The water was not much cooler than the air, but it refreshed, nevertheless, and they shouted like children, turned somersaults, and swam lustily, but did not venture out into the cove. Schultz clambered out upon the rocks which formed one side of the cove and squatted upon a huge boulder. Willard who was swimming near saw that the man's body was gleaming white although his face and neck were tanned by the sun.

"Better get under water, Schultz," he warned. "You'll get a frightful sunburn in a few minutes if you stay up there."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the German, who began to clamber down.

Joe had already left the water and was getting into his clothes. Willard swam away from the rocks, and the other men were farther up the beach in shallow water. Schultz leaped into a deep spot and struck out, then emitted an ear-splitting yell.

"Help—help—help!" he screamed, slashing so furiously that water for ten feet around him was churned into milk.

"What's the matter?" shouted Joe.

"Something's got me," shrieked Schultz, whose head immediately disappeared beneath the surface. Willard turned and swam toward him, while Joe grasped his revolver and rushed waist-deep into the water.

At that instant Schultz's head appeared again and a yell of mortal terror burst from his lips. Something like a snake leaped out of the water—a brownish-white snake—and wrapped itself around the neck of the man.

Willard turned for the shore, reached it in two or three strokes.

"It's an octopus," he shouted. "Look out, Joe. Try to shoot it in the eye. Keep out of the way of the tentacles."

Joe was within a dozen feet of the struggle and saw poor Schultz disappear again under the water, which suddenly turned black. He could see nothing but he fired six shots where he thought the body of the thing ought to be. And then something coiled around his ankle with a sucking and burning sensation, and he was jerked off his feet. It was his turn to shout. But aid was at hand. Willard, armed with an ax, grasped him around the waist and lifted him. The thing had hold of his right leg and hurt. Willard dropped his body, seized his leg and lifted it out of the water. Swish! The ax had slashed through a tentacle, severing it completely, and then two or three men pulled Joe up on the shore.

Schultz had vanished. There was a

black patch ten feet in diameter on the water.

"Oh, my God!" sobbed Joe, who fell upon the beach and burst into tears. Willard was white as a ghost and shaken out of his pose of immobility.

"What was it? Where's Schultz? What got him?" cried the men hysterically.

Willard moistened dry lips.

"It was an octopus," he said in a thin tone. "It must have been lurking under one of those big rocks, and Schultz jumped into its hole. It got a tentacle around him immediately and probably wrapped two or three around him before Joe opened fire. Joe was so close to it that it got hold of him, but I was in time to save him by cutting the tentacle. Men, I regret this as much as you do; and I blame myself, for I know more about these islands than you. I have read a lot about octopuses, and I should have known that they abound in such places as this."

The men were too shaken to reply. Residents of the South Seas are familiar with the octopus and know its habits—even get a lot of fun out of hunting the giant squid; but to a Northerner the thing is a dreadful and repulsive monster, and the thought of being eaten by one seems more horrible, somehow, than being eaten by a shark.

Schultz was a comrade in intimate association with them for months, and they sorrowed for him, but the thought that what had happened to him might as easily have been the fate of one of them was more shattering to their nerves than his death.

Joe recovered first. "At least we can catch the damn thing and torture it to death," he cried, regarding ruefully an ankle with a red and bleeding ring around it.

"No," replied Willard. "It has crawled under some of those big rocks and we can't reach it without risking the loss of another life. But I'll read up on

methods of catching octopuses and we'll make it our business to revenge Schultz. As I said before, I consider myself to blame for his death. If I hadn't called him off the rocks the poor fellow would be still alive."

"Let's get out of here," pleaded Gregg, whose teeth were chattering. "I don't want anything to eat, now."

"We'll look over this cove and then start back for home," agreed Willard. "I've had enough of exploring for the present. I think the only safe place for bathing is the beach in front of my house. Have you men been swimming on the rocky shore opposite your barracks?"

McLeod nodded and shuddered. "I'll never go into this bloody ocean again," he swore. There was a murmur of agreement.

More perturbed than he wished his followers to observe, Willard left them sitting in a group and walked alone under the trees toward the opposite side of the cove. Bitter, cynical, oversophisticated as he was, Jeff Willard was a very young man and it was his first experience of death by violence and under repulsive circumstances. He had been happier and more contented that day than ever before in his memory, as he hewed his way across this exotic isle that was his by right of purchase. Now there was the matter of the dead Kanaka and the loss of one of his six guardsmen. This quiet, peaceful island, where he had expected to live a solitary but luxurious existence, was full of menace, and death lurked in the thicket and under the smiling surface of the tropic sea. Schultz, like the others, had been willing to take chances when he signed up for this expedition; but Willard's conscience reproached him for not foreseeing the perils of bathing on this sort of shore.

He walked on a carpet of rotting palm leaves through a grove of coconut trees so regularly spaced that they

might have been planted, perhaps had been. In five minutes he came in sight of a cluster of huts, four of them, the thatched roofs of which had fallen in. This must be the place of which MacPherson had spoken, where he had found traces of visitors.

He peered into one of the huts, and walked around them. He saw stones on which fires had been lighted, and evidence that trees had been felled, but no signs of recent occupation. Either beach combers had lived here or some ship had come in to take water and carry off timber; but it might have been ten or twenty years ago, so far as the evidence went.

Satisfied with his inspection, he was returning when his foot struck against something buried under palm leaves. He poked with the muzzle of his gun and turned up a skeleton.

There was no flesh on the whitened bones, so the owner must have perished many years ago. He kicked the leaves over the thing again and returned slowly to his men.

"All ready to start back?" he demanded.

They leaped with alacrity to their feet.

"We'll try to follow the west shore as far as we can," he stated; then began the climb back upon the bluff from which they had descended.

They were able to move along this for a mile, always in sight of the sea and not much impeded by vegetation. Then they encountered a rock wall a hundred feet high and unscalable, and were forced to skirt its base inland and again plunge into a maze of ferns which were as large as trees, spiny thickets, wild banana plants and bamboo. Expert axmen by this time, they hewed their way through steadily, if slowly, cut across the low hump of the cliff which had blocked them, and came again in sight of the sea. Two hours slow progress along the shore descending and

ascending, but usually going downward, and they came suddenly in sight of the barracks. The sun was already sinking and in a quarter of an hour that black night which succeeds daylight so quickly in equatorial lands would be upon them.

"Back again the same day," exulted Svendsen. "I don't want to camp out on this damn island."

"We'll start out again in the morning," Willard told them, "and explore the other end of the island. It looks like a much more simple job."

Joe pulled him by the sleeve. "In view of what we found," he said, "don't you think a couple of men ought always to sleep in your house. Whoever killed that native——"

"I know," interrupted Willard. "It was foolish of me to locate the barracks so far away, but I was proceeding with the idea that this was a much smaller and entirely unpeopled island. However, I am on the second floor, there are four servants there, and I'll make sure the house is locked at night. You men better take the same precautions. Perhaps later I'll have one or two of you in the house."

In ten minutes they were at the barracks, and Willard, vetoing an offer by Joe to escort him to the residence, said good night and started for his home. The men found dinner ready for them, ate heartily but in silence, and smoked for a while. But nobody turned on the phonograph or suggested cards. Shortly after nine they all turned in.

Joe awoke in the middle of the night in a cold sweat. He had dreamed the octopus had him instead of Schultz and was dragging him down. He saw the horrid formless body and the vicious beak and big staring eye of the monster, and awaked with a stifled yell. No more sleep for him that night. He rose and dressed and sat out on the porch till dawn.

The sea was breaking on the rocks.

Its sullen swishing had a sinister meaning. Six men, he thought, and one of them gone inside of a week. At the end of three years how many of them would be alive?

This was no place for white men with nerves and imagination. Well enough for low orders of intelligence like that of the savages who belonged here; but modern civilized men are creatures of the temperate zones and should never leave them.

He saw the sunrise, a sight to give bliss to an artist, and he welcomed it eagerly, for the light it gave rather than for its beauty. For the first time he had listened to the night noises and they were dismal and alarming. There had been a continuous croaking—frogs, perhaps—and a far-off wailing, which might be imagination. But there had been a bloodcurdling howl from near at hand. Undoubtedly there were savage beasts on land as well as monsters in the sea. How could that girl survive out in the jungle in the black night? A great pity for her filled his heart and he hoped they would find her soon and give her their protection.

At six o'clock he roused the men, and at six thirty, ready, if not eager, for another day of exploration, they marched across the isthmus and reported to Willard, who was up and dressed, pacing restlessly the length of the porch. Joe thought he looked haggard; probably hadn't slept much more last night than himself.

"I think we should easily cover the south end of the island in a day, men," said Willard; "so we'll only carry enough food for lunch. We'll take along a bottle of whisky. We could all have used a drink yesterday after that horrible experience." He hesitated.

"I want you men to enjoy life as much as possible," he said. "The bay in front here is always calm and undoubtedly there is excellent fishing. We'll build some outrigger canoes and

do a lot of sailing. The beach is very shallow and I think swimming is quite safe. If I have seemed stand-offish to you, I want you to know that it is not because I consider myself of better clay than you but because I am solitary by disposition and custom. If there is anything any of you wish, do not hesitate to come to me and ask for it. Later I'm going to give you a chance to make money by growing pineapples and sugar cane. Each of you may have a little plantation, and it's up to you what you make of it."

"Suppose we wanted to get away from here? That's all I want," said Svendsen insolently.

The old frown, which they had learned to dread, was bent upon the Swede.

"That is not possible," he replied curtly. "You signed on for three years and I won't have any deserting. Besides, you couldn't get away. No ship will touch here for six months."

"You could get one by that wireless when you set it up," persisted Svendsen.

"You heard what I said," retorted Willard.

"Well, I didn't sign up to be a farmer," said Svendsen sullenly.

"No one need accept my offer if he doesn't wish to. But I'm sorry it was Schultz the octopus seized," he added significantly.

"'Tention!" cried Joe. "All ready, Mr. Willard."

The employer led the way down to the beach and turned in the opposite direction from that previously taken.

"Look here, Svendsen," Joe said in a low tone to the malcontent, "it won't do you any good to take that tone to Mr. Willard. He's boss and we've got to do what he tells us."

"All right," replied the Swede. "He needn't try to soft-soap us. I want to get away from this hell hole and so does everybody else."

Joe said no more, for it was obvious that the others agreed with Svendsen. He knew that such an attitude meant trouble sooner or later, and he feared he might find himself lined up alone with Mr. Willard against the crowd.

When they came to the point they found that there was a narrow strip of white sand between the water and the vegetation, which was nowhere near as dense as it had been on the other end of the island.

They made good time and in an hour came out upon a sand spit that extended a couple of miles, ending in the group of palms mentioned before. Willard took a step and sank up to his ankles, another and went halfway to his knee.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONSPIRATORS.

QUICKSAND!" he shouted. "Help!"

He sank an inch while he spoke.

"Get in line and get hold of each other's waists," cried Joe. "Quick!"

On the end of the chain he ventured close to Willard and grasped him by the shoulders, while his own feet sank into the sand.

"Pull for all your worth!" he yelled. "Pull!"

The others were on firm ground and tugged violently, bringing out both Willard and Egmont so quickly that the whole outfit fell on their backs.

Willard got up first and proceeded to shake the sand out of his shoes.

"That was quick thinking, Joe," he said quietly. "A couple of minutes' delay and I would have been covered. That sand is semiliquid. I'm much obliged to all you men. I think we can get along without crossing the sand; we can see pretty well what's ahead. We'll swing across the island."

In order to avoid the sand they were compelled to force their way through a low growth of reeds and ferns, an admirable lurking place for

reptiles, and they set down their feet in fear and trembling. The island was about a mile and a half wide at this point, the small end of the pear, but it was nearly two hours before they came out upon the opposite side.

"We'll lunch here," said the commander, "and take our time going back."

They selected a patch of sand close to a mass of rocks, and were hardly settled when there came out of the rock a great green crab followed by a second, a third, and then four or five more. These crabs were round as a soup plate and twice as large; they walked on eight legs and lifted each a pair of claws at least eight inches long.

Gregg had his back turned and was the last to see them. The nearest was ten feet distant when he looked behind, following the eyes of the others, and with a yell of mortal terror he leaped to his feet and ran up the beach. The others withdrew more sedately. Joe had an idea.

"Those things ought to eat as tasty as lobsters," he suggested. "Let's shoot a few of them."

"Don't waste cartridges," countered Willard. "Let's get rocks and pot them. It's more sporting."

They loaded their arms with rocks as big as cobblestones and awaited the crab squadron, which was moving fearlessly toward them.

Joe aimed and let fly, catching the head crab squarely on the shell and crushing it. The others stopped their march, fell upon their fellow, and began to tear him apart with their claws while his legs were still wiggling.

"Cannibals, by heck," yelled Maher. "Let 'em have it, boys."

A volley of stones fell upon the crabs, who continued their feast until each in turn was slain. Then the men approached the scene of the massacre.

"How about building a fire and having broiled fresh crabs?" suggested Joe.

"Fine. These things are very good eating," agreed the boss.

In five minutes they had a fire going, and when it burned low they laid the crabs upon it. As a broiler it was not a success, but it cooked the creatures partially and made them decent eating. Gregg ate his share and took the razzing of his companions good-naturedly.

"The fact is," he said, "we're a bally lot of greenhorns. If you hunted the world over, Mr. Willard, you could not have found a set of men less suited for savage life. If we stay here long enough we'll all go the way of poor Schultz."

Willard shook his head. "I wanted brave men and experienced fighters," he said. "You all have good war records and you'll learn quickly how to protect yourselves in the tropics. I think you will come to love the life. Most white men do, if they remain long enough. You must make up your minds that you are here to stay, as I told Svendsen this morning, and the quicker you adapt yourselves the better."

"At present you lie around the barracks and play cards just as you would do in New York. You've got to work and learn to play in the open. No doubt there is good hunting, and we know there is fishing. We'll go after sharks and octopuses, which will certainly be sport, and has the thrill of danger. From what we have seen there may be hostile savages on the island, though I hope not. But we may have unpleasant visitors, so that there is a possibility of fighting. We have a vast store of good food, all the liquor which we are likely to need, comfortable quarters, and my library is at your disposal. Personally, I am enjoying myself."

"It's done you a lot of good, boss," said Joe. "You've been more like one of us the last couple of days than you ever were before."

"I want you to consider me a comrade as well as an employer," Willard

said earnestly. "I know some of you don't like me and I am indifferent to the opinion of my fellow man, but if you play square with me I'll play square with you."

"Three cheers for Mr. Willard," called McLeod. They were given with a will, for the men were comfortable, their stomachs full, and at the moment they regarded their employer with approval.

"The only down I've got on you, boss," said Maher, in a burst of confidence, "is your coming in and taking all our coin at poker, so we couldn't raise hell in Panama. Of course, I know it was a square game."

"I doubled your second month's wages," smiled Willard.

"Yes, but a feller don't get so many chances to have a swell time, and I certainly hated to miss it in Panama. Joe took us 'round and gave us a look-in, but we couldn't bust loose, and now we ain't got no chance."

"When your time is up you will go back to New York with money enough to knock the roof off the place," he replied. "I really did you a favor."

"And kept us in your service," said Gregg dryly.

Willard shot a glance at him and the man dropped his eyes.

"Exactly: did you a service by keeping you in my service."

"Two o'clock, boss," Joe reminded him. "We've got a long hike yet."

"Forward march," laughed Willard; and the outfit got under way again.

Although they could see the barracks from the starting place it was three hours before they had conquered natural obstacles and reached their destination. Again Willard bade them good night and returned to the residence.

Dinner that evening was rather jolly. Willard had contributed a bottle of wine, there was delicious fish, and canned roast beef and tapioca pudding. The men had put in an active day, they

were comfortably fatigued and good natured. After dinner some went to their rooms, Maher set the phonograph going, and Joe, after a little while, strolled down to the shore and sat on a rock.

The moon had come up and shed a silver radiance on the sea. The night was soft and felt like velvet as it touched the skin. The stars hung like lamps low in the sky and it seemed to him that they were brighter and more numerous than he had ever known them in the North. He tried picking out the familiar constellations and the new ones that Captain Johnson had showed to him from the deck of the yacht. The water splashed pleasantly on the rocks and every now and then there came a heavy *plop* where a big fish leaped out of the water and fell back, leaving circles on the water.

Farther out, where the moonlight was almost as bright as daylight, he saw schools of flying fish gleaming as they made their short flights through the air. Gradually peace stole over his soul and his discontent dropped from him. It did not seem so bad to be marooned here for three years. Mr. Willard was showing himself more considerate and agreeable than he had dared hope. He liked Maher, the prize fighter, and McLeod was like his native thistle, but decent clear through. And the Swede and the Englishman were all right in their way, he guessed. They would have a good time together when things got going.

For a long time he sat there hidden in the shadow of a big rock, and then he heard voices not far away. He recognized the high inflection of Gregg and the bass rumble of Svendsen, and would have joined them, but a word that came to him stayed him.

The men had been walking and talking and had now flopped down on the other side of the big rock. What Joe heard was a remark of Gregg's.

"Why wait for the money?" the Englishman said.

"We gotta wait. Three long years," growled Svendsen.

"Oh, yes," said Gregg. "By Jove, what a swath we could make on Broadway with a few thousand dollars, hey Svendsen?"

"Yah. Shut up, will ya."

"Three years of this. A shark will get one of us, an octopus pluck another, like Schultz, and how do we know where there may be other quicksands?"

"By Yimini, shut up," pleaded Svendsen. There was fear in his tone.

"Here's another thing. How do we know we'll get our money at the end of three years, if we live so long? Thought of that, laddie?"

"Oh, we'll get it. He's rich."

"I suppose so. It's a pity we can't get it sooner."

"We could run away, if we had a boat."

"And land on some island, if we were lucky, without a sou marqué."

"Then we yust stick."

Silence. Joe listened breathlessly.

"Svendsen," Gregg said softly, "suppose an accident happened to Willard. He's mortal."

The Swede was obtuse. "What accident?"

"Oh, some wild beast might get him, or a fish; or he might be shot by accident."

"Not him. He's the devil."

"You know, I've been thinking. He didn't come down here without a lot of money, and it's probably in gold. Thousands and thousands. He may have our pay for a year up to the house. That's thirty thousand dollars, Svendsen."

"Yah. What of it?"

"Well"—this was very low; Joe could hardly hear him—"if there was an accident we could summon a ship by that wireless he is going to erect. Nobody would know how much money he had."

"Murder him. That's what you mean," said the Swede bluntly.

"You're crazy. I was just thinking, if an accident happened to him. He's rich. Why leave his cash for his heirs? And we might get away from here with our pockets lined. Hey, what?"

"Ho, ho!" chortled Svendsen. "That would be a lucky accident. Ja."

"Hi, ho, hum," yawned Gregg. "It's all talk. We're stuck for three long years. Some of us will go crazy if we don't get eaten by something or other. I'm going to turn in."

"I go back with you," said Svendsen. Joe heard them scramble to their feet and move away, and he sat back to think this over. He had never thoroughly trusted Gregg, despite his close companionship and the fellow's efforts to ingratiate himself; and now he knew that the man was without principles or scruple.

Gregg had weighed well the surly character of the Swede and heard with pleasure his insolent argument with Willard that morning. Much too shrewd to commit any overt act himself, he was working craftily upon the big Scandinavian. He had tempted him with the thought of big money on Broadway now instead of in three years, had alarmed him with the suggestion that some calamity might remove him before his time was up, and set him to considering what a fortunate break it would be for the employees of Jefferson Willard if something happened to their employer. At the same time he had been careful not to commit himself. He had not advised removing Willard and looting his treasury. He just called attention to the probability that there was a treasury and it would be at the disposal of the guardsmen if Mr. Willard happened to perish.

If Joe confronted him and made an accusation Gregg would laugh and tell him he had just been pulling the leg of

the simple structural ironworker. But if Svendsen brooded over the talk and determined to bring about the action, Gregg would be on hand to profit.

CHAPTER XV.

WHERE IS WILLARD?

THERE was nothing Joe hated so much as a tale-bearer. As a sergeant in the army he had never reported a man if he could avoid it, had turned his back and closed his eyes on minor infractions, but he had had the best disciplined squad in the company. These men were in the same estate as himself, and Willard was an arrogant and forbidding master, although he had humanized recently to some extent. Should Joe keep silent and watch the pair whose talk he had overheard or put Willard on his guard?

Sluggish Maher was stupid but he was a square shooter, Joe thought. While the fighter was as unhappy as the others to be exiled here, he would play the game. And McLeod was honest, if quick tempered. Neither would brook treachery. He might get these men apart and tell them what he had heard, then confront the traitors and awe them into harmlessness; but suppose they professed willingness to be good and then caught Willard unawares?

And, too, he was captain of this little company and he had to do everything necessary for the safety of his general. Tale-bearer or not, he would go to the boss and inform him of what he had heard.

Having made up his mind, he returned to the barracks and found there Loto, the number one boy from the residence, who was trying to make McLeod and Maher understand something.

Gregg and Svendsen joined them as he came up.

"Say," exclaimed McLeod. "Can any of you guys make out this Choctaw? It's a mystery to me and Maher."

"What's the matter?" asked Joe of the brown man.

"Come no much fella," repeated the native.

There is a sort of pidgin common to the South Seas. Although some of the islands are under French, Dutch and—until recently—German domination, the pidgin is based upon a few English words which the natives learned from the English and American traders who have roamed these seas for a century and a half. Joe had never heard it, and the man's remark was as much Greek to him as to the others.

"Say that again," commanded Gregg.

"Come no much fella," repeated the man.

"'Fella' is their word for a man. 'Much fella' means big man or chief," translated Gregg. "I say, you mean Mr. Willard?"

The man nodded in agitation. "Him much fella, no come."

Gregg took the center of the stage.

"Much fella no come big house. No there?"

"No come."

"He isn't here. Say, chappies, this is curious. Willard hasn't come to the residence. He left here hours ago."

There was an excited glitter in his eye.

"He can't mean that."

"White fella catchum," suggested the native.

"He wants us to find him," said Gregg.

"Come on, men," cried Joe. "We'll go with him to the house. Mr. Willard is there all right."

"Get a flash light, somebody, we can't see in the dark," said McLeod. In a couple of minutes they started across the isthmus, the servant gliding ahead fearlessly in his bare feet. In a few minutes they came in sight of the lights of the residence and hastened their steps.

The dinner table was spread in the

living room, but the master's place had not been occupied.

"No come," wailed the servant. The other three natives glided into the room and made vociferous but unintelligible confirmation of his statement. The five men regarded one another in dismay. Whatever might have been his intentions, Svendsen was as alarmed as the others; and, if Gregg was not, he simulated it well.

"Search the house from top to bottom," commanded Joe. They separated, some for the kitchens, others for the rooms off the balcony. Joe remained in the living room to try to puzzle things out. His first thought was that Gregg knew something of this; but Gregg and Svendsen had had no time to take action after their conference. Had Gregg followed Willard when he started for the residence? Joe knew he had not. The man had been in plain sight until dinner time and had eaten with the others. Joe could personally account for the time of both Gregg and Svendsen for two hours after the departure of Willard. They had nothing to do with this.

Willard had to cross the isthmus over a narrow path through thick bush a distance of half a mile, and could have covered it in ten minutes—fifteen at the most. If he had not reached the house he had vanished somewhere along this path. Joe was sure that the boss had nothing on his mind save the thought of dinner and would have made the best time possible to his own home. Therefore he had been carried off against his will.

By whom? Joe knew there was a girl loose on the island, and Willard had said there might be savages. They had explored the place during the last few days but they had moved very slowly and had come very far from discovering all it contained. There must be twenty-five square miles on the island—plenty of room for an army to hide,

if it were so disposed. There was the second Kanaka who had vanished from the band of workmen to be accounted for. It was evident that Willard had either been knocked on the head or made prisoner. If he had been killed they would have stumbled over his body on the way from the barracks, as savages would not have bothered to carry it off. In all probability he was a prisoner, and it was up to his men to find him.

The others came back one by one to report no trace of their employer.

"Now what?" demanded McLeod.

"Well," said Gregg cheerfully. "The chief has vanished and we are all equals here, so let's have a council of war."

Joe had to assert himself at once or never, and the treacherous intentions of Gregg were fresh in his mind. He astonished the others by drawing his revolver.

"Like hell we are all equal here," he shouted. "I am captain of this band and in command of this place in the absence of Mr. Willard. If any man here wants to dispute it, let him step out. Gregg? Svendsen? Got anything to say?"

Gregg looked surprised and shrugged his shoulders.

"A little brief authority goes to some men's heads," he sneered. "I only intended to be helpful."

"Military discipline prevails from now on. Attention!" Automatically the others drew themselves up, after a second's hesitation, Gregg among them.

"Now where do you stand? Are you with me, McLeod, and you, Maher?"

"Sure," grinned the Scotchman.

"Soitainly," agreed Maher. "Don't get het up."

"Svendsen?"

The big man grinned slowly. "You're the captain," he agreed.

"How about it, Gregg?"

"Just as the colonel says," he said with a nasty smile.

"All right," said Joe, content to have won his point. "Now, listen. If Mr. Willard has vanished, he has been carried off by men—savages or beach combers—who are hidden on the island. We have got to stand together and somebody has to give orders for the safety of the rest of us or they'll destroy us piecemeal."

"You're perfectly right, Joe," said McLeod. "I'll obey any order you give without question."

"Me, too," added Maher. "Glad to pass the buck."

"All right. Mr. Willard has not been killed or we would have come across the body, so he's alive and a captive and we've got to rescue him."

"Wait a minute," said Gregg. "That's a tall order. We don't know anything about jungle fighting. We've got to fortify ourselves here and be ready to stand a siege."

"We were hired to protect Mr. Willard and we haven't done it. Now we've got to risk our hides to do our duty," stormed Joe.

"All right. How do you propose to begin?" sneered Gregg.

Joe was stumped. In the darkness there was no chance to pick up a trail and Willard might have been carried anywhere within twenty-five square miles.

"I presume we must wait until morning."

"Suppose we don't find him?" said Svendsen. "What you do, then?"

"We'll find him."

"I tell you what we do. We put up that wireless and call a warship," added the Swede.

"Yes? Can you erect a wireless broadcaster? Can any of you?"

They regarded one another in dismay. "Well, I can't either. Mr. Willard knows, and without him the thing is no use. No ship will come here till the first of January, so you make up your minds that you're marooned. Further-

more, the men who carried off the boss intend to get us all, so put that in your pipes and smoke it. If you want to be alive by the first of January you've got to go out and get them."

"You said it, bo," declared Maher heartily. "Hit 'em before they get a crack at us."

"I agree with you, Joe," Gregg said smoothly. "You are quite right. If these fellows should besiege us we wouldn't stand a chance. Neither this house nor the barracks are built for defense."

"We have a machine gun among the stores," Joe informed them, "and we have modern rifles and plenty of ammunition and we ought to be able to handle anybody on this island. Now, I don't see what we can do to-night, but in the morning we'll get on the trail. From now on we station sentries. What a lot of boobs we were to stay here all this time without a watch. Only yesterday I told Mr. Willard that two of us ought to live up here with him, and he said he would consider it."

"Where are the arms and ammunition?" asked McLeod.

"In a bombproof cellar back of the house, locked."

"Who's got the key—Willard?"

"Yes," admitted Joe.

McLeod whistled.

"To-morrow we'll blow the door off; we've got gunpowder enough for that," replied the captain, "We have these six natives, altogether. I suppose they would fight for their lives and they ought to be able to find their way through the jungle better than we can."

"If Willard comes back and finds us camped in his house he'll raise hell," said Gregg. "After all, he might have gone for a walk. Maybe he went for a swim before dinner and a shark got him."

This was an alarming thought and Joe summoned the natives, all four of the house men. After much difficulty

Gregg learned from the number one boy that he had been watching the path to the barracks so that dinner could be put on the table as soon as the master came in sight, and he had not come. So that disposed of the swimming theory.

"At dawn we start the search," Joe announced. "Everybody go to bed now. Use the upstairs rooms, two in a bed, and keep out of Mr. Willard's room. I'll take the first watch, two hours, and McLeod can follow me. Good night, fellows."

His orders were obeyed and in a couple of minutes he was alone in the big living room. After some consideration he put out the lights, lest the unknown enemy or enemies take a shot at him from the dark.

The situation really terrified him. Willard lying somewhere in the jungle, bound and helpless, hoping for rescue; all responsibility on Joe's shoulders—and he as uninformed in the ways of tropic islands as any of his men—all of them babes in the woods, and two of them bad babies.

He could not depend upon either Gregg or Svendsen and he did not know how far he could depend upon McLeod. Maher, he thought, would stick through thick and thin. What had happened was what Gregg had been wishing to happen and had hoped to bring about through the instrumentation of Svendsen, his cat's-paw. From Gregg's standpoint, it would be unfortunate if Willard were rescued, since he wished to possess himself of what cash was in the house and get away from the island. Gregg had counted upon summoning help by wireless, in the event of a fatal accident befalling Willard, dividing whatever money was discovered with the others and returning as soon as possible to the bright lights.

While McLeod would have had no hand in the "accident," Joe thought he might make the best of the situation as represented by Gregg and accept his

share of Willard's funds; and Joe was not sure that Maher would not do likewise. Had he been unaware of the plot he himself might have agreed to do the same, under the influence of sophistical arguments, though he hoped he would not. In that case the others might have put a bullet in him to prevent him from betraying them.

What had saved the situation had been the ignorance of all regarding wireless installation. Joe, without having thought it out, had realized that it would be bad for the search if they could erect the wireless and had denied knowledge of the mechanism of it. From a boy he had been a wireless "bug," and at the age of sixteen had perfected a sending set in the attic of his home in Brooklyn with which he had mischievously broken in upon official messages until his station had been located and he was stopped by the police. If necessary he could put the station in operation, but that would be his ace in the hole.

The night dragged slowly and the plight of Willard presented itself more vividly at every moment. Joe chafed at the necessary delay, for his impulse was to rush out in the dark and beat the bush.

Mr. Willard had done everything possible to make himself disliked, yet Joe had liked him and admired him. The man's great football career had made its impression, and his personality, thought Joe, was only artificially antagonistic. Joe thought that if he got over whatever ailed him he would be a first-class fellow. He was amazingly intelligent and his gift for guessing what a man was thinking was uncanny, yet he had not exhibited remarkable intelligence in settling on this island in the blind fashion in which he had done it.

Joe thought that, in his place, he would have hired people who knew the South Seas to inspect the island for him

and he would have had at least one man in his employ who was not a tenderfoot. Of course, he had had a contractor and a gang of men on the place five or six weeks before he arrived and he probably supposed the island was so small that nothing could have escaped their notice in that time. Anyway, he was gone and Joseph Louis Egmont had to carry on.

He wondered what Peggy Withom would think if the news ever reached her that her former lover was slain by savages on a South Sea Island. Peggy, after all, was a sweet and lovely girl. Mercenary, of course, but so were all girls until they fell in love, and then they didn't give a hang for money. If he had taken a different attitude with Peggy, if he had not been content to be a doormat, but had asserted himself, he might have made her love him and be a good wife to him.

His first furious anger at Peggy and his contempt for the whole sex had worn off by this time. Men of his age cannot hate woman very long, and lately he had thought that he had been a fool to take Peggy so seriously. But that was all over now.

With a quartet of men, half of whom didn't want to find Willard, Joe had to go out and find him—a task tremendous enough with loyal followers—and he would have to force a degree of discipline on the men that might easily result in a revolt against him. There was a possibility of a bullet in the back.

Even after he had been relieved by McLeod, Joe did not fall asleep immediately; but the wakeful night before finally caused him to slumber, despite his disturbed mental condition. It only seemed a few moments later when Maher was shaking him by the shoulder and telling him it was time to get up. McLeod rolled out immediately from the other side of the bed but Joe was drunk with sleep for four or five minutes and dressed with difficulty.

"Wake up the servants," he ordered, "and tell them to get us breakfast at once and fill our knapsacks with food. While we're waiting for breakfast, you and I, Mac, will go over the isthmus and see if we can discover where he was dragged off the path."

If the sun sets quickly in the tropics, it rises as rapidly, and it was bright enough when they left the house. They proceeded slowly and carefully and noted a dozen places where the growth was sufficiently thin to admit of the passage of several men with a prisoner, but, upon the moss-covered ground, they found no traces to indicate just where Willard had been set upon. They went all the way to the barracks, saw that all was well there, and were back in half an hour, to find the others engaged with bacon and coffee.

"Find anything?" asked Gregg.

"No," said Joe glumly.

"Well, what is the program?" Gregg asked with a satirical grin.

"I think it's obvious," replied the captain, "that they went north with Mr. Willard, instead of south. There is comparatively little cover on the south end of the island but we know from experience what the north side is like."

Gregg nodded. "You figure on going it blind, then?"

Joe made a gesture of perplexity. "What else can we do? I think we shall have to break toward the north from the center of the island, because we struck out along the shore day before yesterday and found nothing. We may strike a trail right away or we may not, but we've got to keep hunting until we find out what happened to him, for our own sakes as well as his. That's plain enough."

"That's true," said the Englishman. "But suppose while we are straggling through the bush these fellows, whoever they are, descend upon the house, and carry off all our food supplies and arms

and ammunition. If they have any intelligence that's what they'll do."

Now this had not occurred to Joe, but he covered up quickly.

"We'll have to leave one man here and arm the natives."

"Which reduces our force to four," Gregg reminded him.

"Yes, but we shall be armed with rifles and revolvers and we ought to be able to account for four or five times our number of savages or beach combers."

"Unless they pot us from the bush."

"We'll have to move slowly and take precautions." He was turning over in his mind whom he should leave behind and it seemed desirable to separate the two whom he did not trust. Gregg he wanted to keep under his eye, lest he make mischief in the rear; but he thought Svendsen, if left in charge of the house, would do his duty for his own sake.

"I'm going to put you in charge, Svendsen," Joe said. "You will have to keep within the house. No matter what you see that may be suspicious, don't wander out. You'll have to make soldiers out of the Kanakas, and if they don't know how to use guns, show them how. There are six of them."

"Better take one or two of them with us," suggested Gregg. "After all, it's their kind of country."

"That's true. Will you feel safe with four men, Svendsen?"

"Oh, sure," said the Swede, who was delighted with his assignment. He was grinning broadly. "I'll show them how to shoot if they don't know."

"Show them the mechanism of a gun, but don't let them fire any shots," warned Joe. "If you are attacked, or if you see strangers, fire three shots in succession, wait a minute, and fire three more. We ought to be able to hear rifle shots for a couple of miles, in a place like this, don't you think?"

Gregg and McLeod nodded.

"That house boy who waits on us at the barracks speaks understandable English," Gregg suggested. "Better send for him. I can't do much with the pidgin of these fellows up here."

Joe clapped his hands, and when the number one boy entered told him to bring the two men at the barracks immediately to the residence, and the servant departed to send one of the others on the errand.

"That leaves the barracks empty. They might steal the phonograph," said Maher, causing a laugh.

"There is only a day-by-day supply of foodstuff down there," Joe replied, "and I doubt if they would want your confounded talking machine. It was a great mistake for Mr. Willard to build our quarters so far away, and he admitted it to me night before last."

"He was so stuck up," said Svendsen, "that he didn't want us near him, and now look what's happened to him."

"After all, he's only a kid," remarked the Scotchman. "I hope they haven't given him what they gave that poor Kanaka we found lying in the brook."

"If they have, we'll hunt them down to the last man," declared Joe. "I've got a hunch, though, they're holding him a prisoner; and they may open negotiations with us, if they are beach combers."

CHAPTER XVI.

TRAVELING IN A CIRCLE.

JOE lined up the natives and called for volunteers to accompany the expedition. The brown men were reluctant, but the number one boy of the residence declared in pidgin his desire to hunt for the master. He made a long speech, mostly unintelligible, but Gregg made out of it that he loved Mr. Willard.

"Fancy that!" sneered the Englishman, as he translated.

"Find out if they know how to shoot."

Gregg put the question and it appeared that the waiter at the barracks and the cook's assistant at the residence had fired guns in their time. The number one boy said he knew how to use a pistol.

This being settled, they went out to the bombproof, where the rifles and ammunition were stored. The contractor had sunk a concrete room in the ground just behind the kitchen shed, which was entered by a steel trapdoor, fastened by a heavy padlock with a patent lock. This was broken open by filling the keyhole with powder from revolver cartridges and touching it off. A ladder led down, and Joe and Gregg descended. A dozen rifles stood ready in a corner, and a case of ammunition was open. There were many ammunition cases, two long boxes containing more rifles, and the machine gun which had been set up on the yacht was ready for action.

"Shall we take it with us?" asked Gregg.

"I'd like to, but it's too heavy to pack. With magazine rifles we are not likely to need it."

They called down the others and armed and equipped them, then dropped the trap; but they had to make shift with a padlock from a kitchen cabinet to replace the big one which they had blown open.

With an injunction to Svendsen to let the liquor alone in their absence, they started across the isthmus, Joe in the lead, Gregg at his heels, and McLeod and Maher bringing up the rear of the procession.

About halfway across they came to a break in the bush and Joe decided it was as good an opening toward the north as any. He stopped to give his orders. Each man carried rifle, canteen, knapsack, and belt containing revolver and short-handled ax, the total weight of which was only half what a doughboy in the A. E. F. was accus-

tomed to stagger under—but heavy enough under a tropic sun.

"We'll go slowly," the captain informed them. "I'll march ten paces ahead, Gregg and McLeod next, close together, and Maher, you will be the rear guard. Keep ten paces back. If anybody sees anything out of the way, shout, and we'll get together. Watch the bush on all sides and if you spot a native shoot quick. Make sure you're not shooting at Mr. Willard, though. And let's not make any more noise than we can help."

"O. K., general," said Gregg.

Joe glared at him. "Cut the comedy," he snapped. "Your sense of humor will get you murdered some day. Forward march."

He started off the path and was able to make good progress for a couple of hundred yards, but the moss upon which he walked grew soggy and water began to ooze from it, while the bamboo and hardwood bush gave place to ferns and then reeds and rushes. Cypress trees began to appear, and once Joe's foot sank to the ankle. He stopped short and faced about.

"We're getting into a swamp," he said. "We'll have to go back a way and try to work around it."

When they reached solid ground they found an opening to the east and this led them up a slope into a tangle of every variety of thicket, creeper, and thorny growth, through which progress was impossible except by hacking out a path.

Joe drew back again.

"They couldn't have come this way," he declared. "There must be some trail that they followed and we'll have to roam about till we find it."

They weaved back and forth through the jungle for a couple of hours, unable to judge how far they had come and lost, now, to direction, when Maher, who was now in the van, gave a shout.

"Here's a trail, Joe," he called ex-

citedly over his shoulder. "We're all set, now."

They followed him eagerly and found themselves in a broad path, the vegetation on either side showing where axes had been at work.

Gregg began to laugh.

"We're out of the labyrinth, anyway," he said. "Maher, old thing, this is the path from the residence to the barracks."

Back where they had started. Their faces red and perspiring at every pore, the brown-flannel shirts and khaki knickers tattered and torn, worn out and disappointed, back where they started.

The men dropped to the ground, save Joe, who kicked savagely at the moss.

"Might as well go back to the residence for a while," said Gregg. "After lunch we might try something else."

Joe resented Gregg's suggestions, and his manner even more, but he had nothing to substitute for the suggestions and he wanted to avoid an open break with the man as long as possible.

"All right," he said, "but we'll only rest an hour and start out again. This time I think we'll follow the beach to the place where we broke through to the old Frenchman's and see if we pick up a new trail from there."

He brought up the rear and Gregg dropped back after a moment and clapped him on the back in friendly fashion.

"You did as well as any of us could have done, old boy," he said. "No chance of breaking through from this angle."

"That's the way they took Willard," Joe replied sullenly.

"Maybe. Maybe they didn't. Look here, Egg"—Joe had given up trying to stop him from calling him Egg by this time—"I don't mind telling you that it wouldn't worry me if we never found hair or hide of our revered boss."

"No?"

"You want to get away from this place like the rest of us. You don't want to be penned up here three years."

"I'm not crazy about it."

"Well, then. Of course we've got to make a search, but there is no sense in killing ourselves or walking into an ambushade of some kind."

"What do you suggest?" asked Joe, controlling his anger.

"Getting to work and clearing away this jungle close to the residence and using the timber to fortify the place. We have a good well, provisions for a long time, plenty of arms and ammunition and a machine gun, and we can sit tight and wait for the enemy to show."

"You suggested something like that last night," Joe said blandly. "Meanwhile, what happens to Mr. Willard?"

"Nothing that hasn't already happened to him. He's dead; and we'll join him, if we don't watch out."

"I wonder if you are a coward," the American said slowly. "If you really were a British aviator you can't be."

"You'd better not call me one," flashed Gregg.

"Then you must be a crook of some kind. You don't want Willard to come back, so you can take possession of his property. Is that it?"

Gregg's face wore a black look; and then he laughed.

"There are only five of us left and for our own sakes we mustn't quarrel," he said suavely. "If Willard is dead where do we stand? He guaranteed us three years' work at a hundred a month. We came out here to get it. I am in favor of taking any funds that may be found in the residence and dividing them among us to compensate for our pecuniary loss. I don't call that crooked."

Joe got control of himself, and managed to laugh. "You may not, but I think a court would say it was stealing from Mr. Willard's heirs. However, we won't have to worry about that, because we are going to find him."

"A fine start we made!"

"And as you say," Joe continued, "there are only five of us and every man will be needed to protect the lives of the other four. If you don't forget that, I won't."

"Top hole, old Egg," said Gregg cheerfully. "There is Gustavus Adolphus, the Lion of the North, waiting to receive us."

When Jefferson Willard waved goodbye to the group on the steps of the barracks he was in a very cheerful frame of mind: He was powerful and athletic and felt little fatigue from his day's journey and his mind was more at ease than it had been for years. He was thinking, as he turned into the jungle path with the sun blazing on the horizon behind him, that the island project had been an inspiration. The insincerity of civilized people had always exasperated him, yet conventions forced a certain courtesy toward them which they did not deserve. Here he was master, far from vapid crowds, associating only when he wished with the men in his employ. That was certainly a wonderful improvement in living.

Against nature he had no grievance and nature here was sublimely lovely. The attitude of the men toward himself did not worry him because he was confident that he could overawe them. Should they revolt against him, as MacPherson had warned him, he thought he could hold his own, and if a fight were forced upon him he might enjoy it. He had always loved physical conflict and he was utterly fearless, perhaps because he had little satisfaction in being alive. He understood perfectly the character of each of the six men who were supposed to be his bodyguard, and for only one of them did he have respect—Joe Egmont.

Joe was holding out on him for some reason, yet he did not distrust him, and a few minutes' quizzing would make

the fellow blurt out what he was concealing.

Willard's peculiar gift for mind reading was in no sense fortune telling. He could not read a person's past or future, but in a situation where an individual opposite him must do or say one thing or another he knew what that person would do or say.

The thing that was on a man's lips he knew before it was spoken, and he was aware whether it was true or false; but he could not tell from looking at Joe

Egmont that hours before he had seen the face of a beautiful girl in the bushes, though he might bring that girl's face into Joe's mind's eye by adroit questioning and then get the information.

As he tramped he was considering the best way to make these men sufficiently content so that they should not annoy him by evident dissatisfaction, and he was sure that the way was by keeping them physically employed. And then he came around a turn in the path and goggled in astonishment.

Continued in the next issue.



A BIT OF TOO TOO-MUCH

SOMERSET MAUGHAM, the English author and playwright, was in the Frohman offices in New York, interviewing actors who wanted parts in the first production of his play, "The Constant Wife," in which Ethel Barrymore had the star rôle. In came an American actor full of the idea that the way to sell his services was to display what he thought was a very fine English accent.

"You know," Maugham confided to Gilbert Miller, after the applicant had gone out, "I—I'm afraid his accent is too English."

"You mean for America?" Miller asked.

"No, no," Maugham replied. "For anywhere."

HOW HE MISSED THE PRESIDENCY

TWO met during the Republican convention of 1920, and when they parted, one of them had thrown the presidency of the United States out of the window. Walter Brown, one of the political bosses of Ohio and later appointed assistant secretary of commerce under Mr. Hoover, approached Senator Hiram Johnson, of California, whom the convention had refused to nominate for the supreme honor.

"Senator," began Brown, "now that Harding's been chosen to head the ticket, we want you to run as the vice presidential nominee."

"I don't want the vice presidency," retorted Johnson, "and I'm not going to be talked into taking it."

"But," insisted Brown, "won't you think it over? There's certainly one thing to consider: only one life will stand between you and the presidency, and you never can tell when——"

"Oh, I know!" Johnson said. "I know all about that. It's been used on many other men, but it won't go with me. Go sing your siren song to somebody else!"

On that, Mr. Brown took his departure. Calvin Coolidge was nominated for the vice presidency. Warren G. Harding died in office. And Coolidge got what Johnson would have had if he had listened to Brown's "siren song."



THE SHAKES

By Leonard Lupton

Author of "He Just Dropped In," Etc.

The noblest thing a man can do.

WE were putting up steel at Jericho Junction, when "Tam" Boni blew into construction camp with all of that gusto rather frequently ascribed to a Kansas cyclone.

The Old Man—fortunately, as he admitted later—was aloft. Aloft, for your information, in steel construction is that spot seemingly midway between heaven and earth where the riveting hammers are beating their *rat-a-tat-tat* in a mad scramble to hang up another day's record.

On the ground, some two hundred feet below, the boys saw that puff of white steam which meant that in a second or so later, depending upon the wind, the whistle would sound, and they prepared to go down.

The fire died in the heating forge, and there was a surge for the ladders. Four

hours aloft in the crest of the columns will put an edge on a man's appetite.

In those first few seconds after the whistle blows, buckstays and buckle-plates aren't half as important as a corned-beef sandwich and a wedge of apple pie. Record or no record, nothing can make a girder monkey forget his lunch—except a good scrap.

You may believe me, as a spectator, that on the day that Tam Boni blew into camp, the boys forgot their lunch!

I've a notion that you would like Tam Boni on sight—that is, if you like a man's man. He was tough, no question about it, but then there aren't any lily fingers in steel construction. It's a man's job, and only men tackle it.

The girder monkey is a queer specimen—as old as a fist fight, in his make-up, and as modern as a cantilever bridge.

Tam Boni was a giant. He had the loins of a race horse, the shoulders of a grizzly, and that rollicking love of adventure that sent Robin Hood to live in the greenwood. His eyes were black, the eyes of a man who has a way with women, and his laugh was as boisterous as a mountain torrent rushing to the sea. You knew, looking at him, that here was a man who battered his way up and down the world, risking his life with a laugh on his lips, and finding all things good.

Tam Boni swaggered as he crossed to the Old Man.

"Hi," he said, with the accent of a French Canuck, "you want one tam good man?"

We learned later that that was the origin of his nickname. His loquacious tongue could not twist itself around the abbreviation of condemnation, which of course is "damn" and a necessary part of a bridgeman's vocabulary.

The Old Man was a pretty tough boy himself. He liked to hear the bones snap.

"I could use another rigger aloft," he admitted, "a damn good man, as you say—but where could I find him?"

That didn't faze Tam Boni a bit.

"Eh?" he said. "You want what they call the cre-den-tials? I have them!"

The Old Man laughed. We all did. "Where?" he spat out.

Tam Boni made a sweeping gesture toward the shack which housed the pencil pushers—the office force.

The Old Man looked that way. His face colored a little. With a quick stride he moved toward the office.

"H'mmm," he said, and his voice was more terrible in calm than in anger. "A broken door, a smashed window, two chairs splintered, and a desk warped considerably out o' shape!"

Suddenly he whirled.

"All right, you," he said. "You've got a job. And you pay for this out of your first pay check! Now, then,

somebody scatter and round up the office force again! If he's killed anybody, he'll have to bury his own dead!"

With a quick stride the Old Man departed, and Tam Boni turned and winked broadly at us.

"Clever, eh?" he said. "And eet always works! I have heem, the job!"

We all looked him over, trying hard not to like him too much.

Tam Boni seemed to puff under our scrutiny.

"You know me now," he said. "Tam Boni—and you see how I do. Always I wreck the shack first, and then—I wreck the toughest guy in the crew."

We knew it was coming; we knew it the moment that we saw that wrecked office. By rights, the Old Man should have skinned the hide off him, but then the Old Man was—just that. So we looked at "Grumble" Garrick.

Remember how a thin boy was always called "Fatty"? Well, that's why we called Bill Garrick "Grumble." Bill was made for laughing. Take a fall day, with the wind galing past at sixty per, and the hot rivets sizzling by your ears so close that it would take a micrometer to measure the distance between, and the sound of Grumble Garrick's laugh brought a new spirit, a new challenge to the rivet pounders. It was like the sight of the flag to a man in battle!

But Bill Garrick could get a mad on, too. We saw that he had one, this day. Oh, he was laughing, all right! His face was split from ear to ear, but the cords were standing out at the back of his neck, and his broad shoulders were bunched under his blue-denim jumper.

"Why, you—you—" he said, and then he choked. Across Tam Boni's shoulder, he had caught a glimpse of Marjorie.

Tam Boni, of course, did not know that Marjorie was there. He did not know that she was the Old Man's daughter and that every noon she packed

a hot lunch with her own hands, at the boarding house where they had put up for the duration of the job, and brought it down to the camp, to the Old Man.

If Tam Boni had known, he probably wouldn't have called Bill Garrick the name he did. At that, he didn't get it all out. Bill Garrick's fist leaped forth and met that word halfway.

Tam Boni went down.

We were excited—no use denying it, we were. It isn't the thing, these days, to become excited over a common brawl—unless you pay forty dollars for the privilege—but just the same we were excited. Two good men were squaring off, and a riveter and a heater and a girder monkey are all brothers under the skin when bones begin to crack.

Tam Boni, as I think I said, went down. But he didn't stay there. Not by a darned sight, he didn't! In two seconds his feet were under him, and he was charging like a bull after a red parasol. His fists were up and flailing and his jaw was set. A thin trickle of blood oozed from the corner of his mouth, and his face was discolored, but the battle light was in his eyes.

I was standing nearest Bill Garrick.

"Get *her* out of the way," he said through set teeth. "I can't have her see what I'm going to do to this baby!"

There was no time left for more. In a split second they came together and suddenly a cloud of dust was scuffed into the air about them and out of it, at rapid-fire intervals, came a fist or a leg or a head, and then finally out of it came—Bill Garrick.

I'll raise my hand on it, that he was off the ground completely. He was *sailing*! To this day, my own jaw hurts at the very thought of what that blow must have felt like to Bill Garrick. He crashed, of course. It was only for a second, or at the most two, that he was in transit, but still I have a clear-cut picture of Bill in the air. He landed on his shoulders and then bounced like

a man rocking, and when his feet hit the ground he lunged upward again and was wading right back into the cloud of dust.

It was funny in a way. They might have had a screen around them, for all that we could see, and then suddenly, when the nervous tension was getting almost too much for human nerves to bear, Grumble Garrick came out of that dust cloud again.

Have you ever heard a crowd of men groan in unison? It's a shivery sound. Sort of makes you think of the end of the world and all the lost souls crying out for mercy.

He landed at our feet. I remember that I tried to yell, that I tried to plead with him to get up and go back in there and kill that bum, but all I could manage was that groan that swelled from every throat even as from mine.

Maybe it was all for the best. I seem to see Bill yet, looking up at us with mild surprise on his battered face, and then suddenly laughing. Man! That was thrill! Knocked through the air twice, battered to a pulp, and *laughing*!

"Gee," he said, "gee, I didn't know you guys were so set on my winnin'. I—— couldn't disappoint you! Here goes!"

Here goes, indeed! He went! His feet were under him again and snapping up and down like pistons. With his fists at a business angle, Grumble Garrick charged into that dust cloud again, looking for *more*!

We waited, and there was expectancy in our eyes now and not despair. We had a glimpse of them whirling inside that ring of dirt particles. We saw them briefly dancing back and forth, and then suddenly, before our straining eyes, that curtain of dust parted and out of it came Tam Boni.

He did not go back.

You might have thought that that would end it. You might have thought

that the feud was done. But not if you knew the men who work in steel!

The Old Man himself sluiced water over Tam Boni's battle-scarred face and at last the new man came once more to his senses. For a moment he sat there on the ground, sheepishly, the water trickling from his chin, and stained in spots by blood—and then suddenly he was on his feet and holding out his hand.

"I would like to shake the fist that knocked me cold," he said to Grumble Garrick. "It was vun tam good fight!"

Grumble Garrick's face was sober for a change. He shook hands, solidly and with enthusiasm.

"Forget it," he said, "and let's eat. I'm hungry."

He shared his lunch with Tam Boni, to seal the truce, but all hands knew that that was what it was, a truce, a temporary lull, in combat. Tam Boni would never admit his inferiority, nor, if the condition were reversed, would Grumble Garrick. That is the code, a grim code, not taught in Sunday-school—but you'd be surprised how it raises steel!

Tam Boni soon had a crew under him. He knew the game. He might not be familiar with such terms as "compression struts" or "long diagonals" or "eyebars chains," but he could get up steel. He could inspire the men under him, he could thrill them and shame them with his daring, and in the course of time, he proved to them that he dared do what none of them save Grumble Garrick had dared to do before—roll eyes at the Old Man's daughter.

You'll find, among a gang of roughnecks like a steel-construction crew, a vast amount of respect for womanhood. There are no angels in the steel game—although many have come from it—but nowhere on earth will you find more of that spirit of chivalry toward a woman or a girl who is kind and true and self-respecting, than from those

selfsame roughnecks whom you might be loath to invite into your home!

The Old Man's daughter was deeply respected by them all. She was on a pedestal, over and above them all.

Grumble Garrick's right to pay her attention was not questioned. He was a good cut above the usual girder monkey. Some said that he had behind him four years at a tech. school, and others said that if he cared to claim it, a fortune was his for the signing of a check. This last was not true—I know that; but Grumble was educated. He told me once, laughing, that there was no sport in building bridges on paper, though, when one could build them in the air.

For that reason Bill Garrick had gone a-sparking like any swain of old, and if Tam Boni had not come along, a wedding would have soon been in the offing, I believe.

Unfortunately, though, Tam Boni came, bringing with him the glamour of a much-traveled man, bringing with him his soft voice and his warm hands and his eyes that could talk when his lips were silent; and before Bill Garrick quite knew what it was all about, Tam Boni was holding down one end of the parlor sofa on alternate nights.

I suppose a man who has been in every State in the Union is never at loss for something to talk about. Tam had seen them all, and his smooth tongue rattled off experiences and thrills and tales of wondrous deeds, until poor Bill Garrick must have seemed an awful dub.

Grumble knew what a figure he was cutting, and there were some of us who knew him well enough to call him to account.

"Bill," I said one night, when we were sitting in the moonlight with our pipes aglow, "you can bash me one for this, if you please, but why in the heck don't you spike Tam Boni's guns?"

Grumble Garrick smoked in silence

for a spell, and I saw that his gaze was on the silhouette of the bridge which we were flinging across the Jericho River. His gaze followed the spidery stretches of steel, and he had the look of a man examining his handiwork and finding it good. Twice, after that, he drew deeply on his pipe and exhaled and then suddenly turned to me. There was no pride, no exultation in his face, but only agony.

"Thank you," he said. "I know what you mean. Perhaps I should. There may be a way, but after all, old man, she's old enough to choose. He's got a way with him. He's not the man for her, of course, and I should hate him for the thing he's done to me. But I can't. Hang it all, there's something about him that——"

I nodded. I, too, had felt the magic of Tam Boni's personality.

"He's game," I said, "and a sportsman. He can slap up steel, too. But there is something about him—maybe it's his smoothness. If it wasn't for that, if it wasn't for the way that he rolls his eyes at a woman and all, he'd be aces high with me. But as it is——"

"I know," said Bill, "and there's a name for the thing that we don't like, in Tam Boni."

"Meaning?" said I.

Bill shook his head.

"I wouldn't say outright, of any man, that he had a yellow streak. Lord knows, things happen on a steel job that would turn any man yellow. But still he——"

"Right," I said; "and let's forget it. I know how you feel. You can't strike at a man when his back's turned, and we're close to doing that! I do wish, though, that you and Marjorie—well, I'd like to know a married couple that I could drop in on, sometimes, for a home-cooked Sunday dinner!"

Bill shook hands with me that night, when he turned in. It was a funny thing for him to do, and it gave me an

insight as to just how hard this business had hit him. I worried for a while, before I dozed away. Such things might make a man like Bill Garrick reckless of his life—and it's easy to be reckless in steel construction.

The bridge grew, a thing of beauty and strength. It seemed incredible that it was the work of man. It was hard to believe that those pygmy things that moved aloft, that crept from beam to beam and rammed hard metal on hot steel, had really built this mighty masterpiece, had hewed it from the living earth and stood it here, a molten poem.

As the bridge grew, so, too, did the ardor of Tam Boni. You may have noticed, if you've roamed a bit, that the greatest fighters are quite often the greatest lovers, too. There is a charm to a man who can handle his fists, and Tam Boni could do that well! In a polite world, removed from steel construction, strong-arm methods might be looked upon askance; but the golden Marjorie was a daughter of a steel-construction boss, and, to her, Tam Boni must have been something of a god.

I myself saw them together at times, again I heard of them from others, and in time I had a composite picture of the whirlwind courtship of Tam Boni.

He had a beautiful technique, this French Canuck. His humorous, smiling, generous mouth could say one thing, and his eyes could talk a language of an entirely different sort. He put himself across. As they would say in business, he "sold himself" to Marjorie. And strangely enough, in the doing, *Tam Boni lost his heart!*

There was a piquant humor in that situation at first. This heartbreaker, this man who had fought and cursed and loved his way across half the world, had been stopped at last. There was no getting away from the fact that Tam Boni was in love. Every gesture, every move he made, betrayed him. He be-

gan to notice sunsets. He was heard to sigh beneath the moon. At times his hands grew moist, his brow flushed; and on such occasions he would arise hurriedly, and leave us sitting at the table, to go off alone by himself, caring naught for food or drink.

We laughed. Who wouldn't? There is nothing quite so funny to calloused men as the sight of a fellow man in love. We could have overlooked a flirtation and forgot to laugh, but the sight of this great hulking brute, mooning sheepishly about the camp like a callow, college boy, was far too much. We reveled in the great, grim jest, not knowing just how grim it was.

It has been remarked since that it was indeed a wonder Tam Boni did not start a wholesale slaughter. It shows, perhaps, just how deeply he cared, that he did not resent our gibes—did not indeed know that we were making fun of him.

In time our laughter died. It was not so funny, after all. Living as we did, a united whole, we were in touch with each other as are the members of an isolated family, and it came to us at last as something of a shock that Marjorie, too, had been smitten by one of those winged arrows symbolical of the divine emotion.

Envious men can find no room for laughter, and we were envious. We knew, all of us, that nowhere among our lot could be found two such men as Tam Boni and Grumble Garrick. They were the two extremes of mankind, as opposite as the poles, and they overshadowed each of us, so that we could only stand as spectators and watch this drama move toward its destined close.

The race had narrowed down by now. Warfare was open and declared. Side by side, they worked aloft those two, racing each other, joshing each other, feeling for each other that strong emotion of friendship which only two men

can know; but when once their feet touched ground at night they were enemies again, bitter and to the end.

Tam Boni seemed to lead. It is not to be wondered at. What woman, knowing that the man she loves has loved broadly before, is not flattered by his attention? What woman, no matter how good, how sweet and pure, can resist that impulse to lead a man on, to give him a fast and merry race?

Tam Boni was a good pursuer. All his life he had pursued, but it became apparent all too soon that this time, in pursuing, he was done. Tam Boni had found his woman!

Out of all those whom he had met, out of all of the millions upon the earth there was now, to Tam Boni, only one girl. We saw her as a pretty girl, with eyes of heaven's own sheen, and hair that was as golden as dawn, but even these physical attributes were lost on Tam Boni. He was blinded by her, dazzled by her, and knew only that he loved her.

There is always humor in any given situation. It may be lusty, trite, or ironic. Certainly, there was irony in the humor of the situation which now faced Tam Boni. He had loved widely, traveled broadly, seen much, and the soul of him had withered as the candle burned at both ends. That plagued him now. He had never pondered before on his worthiness, perhaps because never before had he loved a woman who demanded real worthiness; but now, at last, his conscience tormented him.

Tam Boni had always played the game. He had lived with gusto. He was aware of the tricks, wise in the knowledge of how to make his eyes talk for him, of how to say those softly whispered things that women love to hear, and he had used this technique until Marjorie's eyes were starlike and there was something of heaven in her glance.

We could not know it all, of course.

We could only imagine them sitting there, side by side, with Tam Boni's arm encircling a slim young waist, while his soul poured up into his eyes, and his loquacious tongue whispered the old, old words.

We could only picture her, dreaming sweetly, listening, awed and thrilled by his nearness, and loving not him so much as the image of him which she had created!

Oh, that was the rub! That was the thing that turned Tam Boni bitter! He knew the truth before long. He felt it in the lukewarm warmth of her response. It was not love that brought that light to Marjorie's eye, but the subtle imitation—infatuation!

It must have been a bitter pill indeed for Tam Boni to swallow.

You might well wonder now just what Tam Boni did. The answer is nothing. Tam Boni lived life to the full—he asked only that of life that it be full!—and he knew, in his heart of hearts, that life with Marjorie could not always be that. In time, infatuation would wear away. It was intense, but not lasting, and this man, who had never cared for lasting emotion, asked now for nothing else.

He might have gone away and left the field open to Bill Garrick. But he could not do that, for after all, there was only one thing in this world that he could ask for—marriage; and because that was his for the asking, all of the fine manhood in Tam Boni silenced his tongue.

Bill Garrick hung on. He would; he was a plodder. A keen thinker, a man to plot his course and pursue it doggedly, he had the tenacity of a man who cannot be beaten.

We all respected Bill Garrick. We respected his fists, his education, his laughter in the face of death, and we knew, as Tam Boni was coming to know, that poor old Grumble was the man for Marjorie. It might be that he

could never bring that light of delight to the clearness of her eyes; it might be that he could never make her heart beat in that swift exultation that touched her at Tam Boni's nearness, but we knew that Bill was lasting, that he was substantial, that he was, after all the material of which husbands are made.

There was nothing dramatic about Bill, nothing colorful, exotic or particularly adventurous. He had not sallied forth to meet life, to experiment with it, as Tam Boni had done. But the soul of him was untarnished. If, after all, he could not inspire the fires of infatuation, he was dependable, the sort of man that a woman could love, quietly, deeply, to the end of time, and know that in her loving she was not wasting her life.

As we saw the way the wind was blowing, we began to hope that Bill would call Tam Boni out, would demand a settlement with his fists. That, so we thought then, was the only solution. What we did not know then, though, was how madly, how deeply this fighting man cared.

We sensed the drama that would have culminated in such a battle, and as it became imminent our excitement grew, for we felt that never again would such a fight be seen by mortal eyes, as these two men would fight.

The crisis came one crisp and chilly morning. We were gathering at the column's base, to go aloft, and as we neared the scene we saw quite suddenly that Tam Boni and Grumble Garrick had gathered there, and were squaring off.

We ran. No need to pause and ask each other questions, no need to speculate upon the cause. At last the time had come for this mad episode to be settled once for all, and it looked now as if the settlement were due.

But in that moment, I learned that one can be too sure!

There *would* have been another bat-

tle at that moment if the whistle hadn't blown. As it was, they had to go aloft—and it would have been better by far if they had both gotten the poison of hatred out of their systems before they swung upon the columns, two hundred feet above the earth, where death is a matter of inches.

I would like to tell you now, in graphic, breathless language of the thing that happened on that incompleting bridge that day. I would like to build you a fantastic picture, etched and shaded against the great blue canvas that was the sky, but somehow a thing that comes close home to a man must be told in blunt words, lest emotions run away with the judgment and the great deed itself be buried beneath a flurry of inconsequential words.

You have seen caricatures of that grim, gaunt figure which to mortal man means Death, and looking back upon that day, it seems to me that the gross and ugly thing must have flung its shadow against our web of steel.

A gale was ripping up the Jericho. Below us—two hundred feet below—the white horses were galloping on the river in rigid rows. The clatter and the clang of steel on steel sung merrily and with derision, while the tugging tendrils of the wind reached forth to snatch at figures moving unwary and incautious on the beams.

I do not doubt that Grumble Garrick and Tam Boni nursed their grudge. Their mood was as wild as the wind that tugged at them, and it is my belief that Bill Garrick himself was so immersed in his troubles and his brooding that for one brief second—far too long, in steel construction!—he forgot all caution, forgot even where he stood, and then suddenly he no longer stood, but was hanging by his hands from a girder, with below him, two hundred feet of empty air!

We had gone ahead. Bill Garrick, finishing up, had worked alone for a

moment there below us, and in that moment the thing had happened.

You would expect for me to tell you now how Tam Boni swung down, forgetting his hatred, and snatched Bill Garrick from the gaping maw below. Well, in a way, he did, but the things that happened then, so rapidly, were not at all the things that mortal man might expect!

With the agility of a monkey, Tam Boni went down to that girder below, and the words that he said were not cursing but prayer. Somehow he braced himself, there below, somehow he snatched at the wrists of Bill Garrick, and then slowly and surely he drew him up, up, from the fate that waited him evilly, there below.

We should have cheered. We should have waved our hats and sung a mighty song of victory, but we did none of these. Mute, spellbound, we stood and held our breath, and every man of us there knew that we were looking at something which is not good for man to see.

Tam Boni had snatched Bill back, but he had paid! Oh, he had paid! In that terse moment as he stretched there, staring into oblivion below, a terrible thing had snatched at him, a thing that tore at his sanity and knifed his courage to shreds.

We saw, watching breathlessly, that Tam Boni, of all men, had the "shakes!"

It is funny, yes, in a way. A grown man, a brave man, a fighting man, suddenly stricken with an awe of heights. A man who had ridden girders, a man who had worked aloft from boyhood, suddenly frozen rigid and afraid, by the realization that he was two hundred feet in air!

No reasoning can subdue that panic. No steadying thought can allay that fear. A man stands taut, clutching at everything, at anything, and his hard body shakes.

We should have acted, of course. We

should have jumped to those two and seized them both. In all truth we started, but paused, our hearts slumping to the pit of our stomachs! The shakes had claimed Tam Boni—and they had taken him over.

I could not tell you—some other man might, but I doubt that, too!—what happened in that split interval of time, as Tam Boni began to fall. We knew the cause, and in a flash we knew the effect, but that chemical reaction of nerve impulse upon brawn was all too fast for human eye to see.

We knew only that positions had been reversed. Bill Garrick was taut, across the girder, and clinging to his wrists was that socket-wrenching weight of Tam Boni!

Arm lengths apart, those two men, those bitter enemies, looked into each other's eyes. With fingers of steel, Tam Boni gripped the wrists that were his sole support, and if his face were white, what man dared laugh at that?

"Hang on," said Grumble Garrick, and his eyes were blazing. "Hang on and I'll get you back!"

He tried—two words, and the sweetest epitaph ever written to man. He tried! From somewhere within him, he found the stark courage to still his own quaking. From some inner source he found the strength to hope, and to try again, once more, to lift that inert weight—that tonnage, now—which was dragging him down.

We were on our way to him, from

above. We were coming down, but we did not delude ourselves. We knew. An inch, he slipped and then another, and Tam Boni, ghastly already with the pallor of death, looked up into his face, and still hung on.

"Dear God——" he said, no more, and closed his eyes that he might not see Bill Garrick slip another inch. Then two.

I do not believe, though, knowing steel men, that they were really thinking then of God. Stubborn fellows these, tenacious, of the world and worldly. They were thinking of that girl, of Marjorie, of the one who made this earth a paradise and hell in one.

We were almost there by then. Almost. But Tam Boni did not know that we were coming. He did not know that we were on that bridge. He looked up into the eyes of the man whom he had fought. He looked into the eyes of Bill Garrick, and then, softly, as one says a blessing and a benediction too, he whispered:

"Be good to her, my frien', be good to——"

A puff of steam fluttered out upon the air, and then the whistle blew.

Tam Boni laughed! His color came back! Once more his eyes sparkled and were bright with wit.

"Ah," he said, and did not whisper this time, "ah, the whistle blows! Quitting time! Time to go down——"

And, nearer to God than he had ever been, Tam Boni let go.

There will be another story by Leonard Lupton soon.



ANOTHER BIG PARADE

THE sick and disabled veterans of the World War will be marching down the trail of the years for a long time. In 1977, if the calculations of the Veterans' Bureau are correct, there will be in the government hospitals 1,605 men, every one of them more than eighty years old.



SINGIN' SAM

By Holman Day

The man who wrote "A Man of the Border," Etc.

A mighty readable yarn about an old stagecoach driver who had a gift for invention.

SAM SHIVELY was coming. He was identifying himself by song—by a particular hymn. It was as characteristic of Sam Shively as his knobby nose, his gray whiskers, his squinting eyes, his side-twisting grin. Whenever the mastication of a fresh quid, or call for retort in conversation, or concentration on a special topic for thought, did not interfere with melodic expression, Sam rumbled his lay.

The March evening was young. Its silence was taut. On the tense string of that silence sounds carried far.

Three men were leaning, half sitting, on the slope of a shoulder which hemmed one side of Potlatch Gulch; a brawling stream, spring flooded, splashed and gurgled on the other side of the road near which the three men were tarrying. This road led down

from the high level of Callas Prairie, whiplashing in places along the two thousand feet of descent from prairie to Potlatch Creek. The men were near a short stretch where the slope of highway was gradual.

"Here he comes," said one of the party.

Then they listened, the stream furnishing mellow obbligato for Sam's vocal efforts:

"Bring-hing in ther sheaves,
Bring-hing in ther sheaves,
I will come rer-JOICING,
Bring-hing in ther sheaves."

The singer was on the high level of the prairie.

The coming of Sam entailed also the coming of the mail stage, of which Sam was the veteran driver. He was hours

late, as was usual at this time of the year. In the summer, with the ground hard and dry, he could make good time with his six horses. But in March Callas Prairie was a wallow of adobe mud. From a distance, the stage, to a daylight observer, looked like a crawling caterpillar. Reaching the rim rock above Potlatch was as if a journeyer had come to the solid edge of a bowl after crossing a sticky jelly mass held by a container.

Sam voiced his hymn more loudly, more joyously, when the wheel tires rattled against the stones of the solid road where it dipped to make the sinuous descent from prairie to creek bed. He set his feet securely on the footboard. He was bringing in valuable sheaves that night. And he was nigh to a place where he could dump a heavy burden off the shoulders of his soul!

In the fore boot under his feet was the steel express chest. Estimating the raw gold from placer miners' monthly clean-ups, the cash, and more gold from the Sterlock traders—Sterlock was a terminal village planted close to the other side of the prairie—there was value of nigh-about twenty-five thousand dollars in the steel box. Ordinarily Sam's old coach carried only passengers and mails. But every once in a while he was intrusted with one of these clean-ups. He was always mighty glad when he had landed the golden sheaves at the railroad express office.

He was able to look down on the roof of that express office, in daylight, when he came over the rim rock. The new boom village of Gratte was clustered at the end of the recent railroad extension and was a settlement of mushroom buildings of slats, slabs and tarred paper.

Rowdies, roughs and general tough nuts had come chasing along with that railroad extension, Sam knew.

He gazed at the scattered lights below him. Given a parachute, it seemed

as if one could drop off the cliff and land in the middle of the boom village. But to descend a couple of thousand feet by the whiplash road Sam must drive more than two miles. However, it comforted him to see the lights; they seemed so near and so reassuring. Therefore, he caroled heartily. He jammed on the brakes, and the lisping squeal of leather pads against the tires played a sort of fife accompaniment to his song.

"He's over the rim rock," said one of the three men waiting in the shadows of the gulch.

Sam was squinting into those shadows. Around his eyes were plenty of crow's-feet. He had squinted for many years into sunshine as driver of the stages for the old California & Nevada Company. The newfangled motor busses had ousted him.

He had been compelled to range far up into Idaho in order to find a locality which demanded a six-horse hitch and a man who knew how to team it. Mud-time Callas was tough for going and the Potlatch whiplash was no picnic; but Sam took all the trouble serenely. At any rate, he could sift reins between his calloused fingers and use his picturesque vocabulary and his own hand-made lash whip on six horses. Language and whip would be a dead loss in handling a gasoline bus. Sam had expended some of the language on those who wanted him to learn the motor-stage stuff. He saved the whip and carried it north, tucked under his arm.

A quarter mile down the gulch he held up on the melodic announcement that he was bringing in the sheaves. He was giving his thoughts a run. Mud-time Callas was bad. So was the descent of Potlatch. But the bad would be peppered with worse if some of those roughs and toughs now current in lawless Gratte should take a notion to revive the old-fashioned road-agent tricks. Everybody in the mushroom railroad

village must know that periodic shipments of gold were made from Sterlock.

Sam Shively had long before made up his mind that he would be no passive victim of road-agency revival. He purposed to meet the old stuff with a new twist. He was proud of his inventive ability. He welcomed an opportunity for exercising what he considered was a gift.

He had started early in life by inventing a special whip and mastering its tricks. He had seen drivers punishing cruelly with a whip which they could not control when they wished to impress nags ahead of the swing pair. Others carried canvas bags filled with small stones and pelted lazy or refractory leaders. But Sam's whip, in his hands, merely put horses on their honor—and not too harshly. Of the whip Sam said: "It wakes up a reelizing sense in 'em and makes 'em do their dammdest to earn oats."

Pondering on the possibilities, estimating the new personnel in Gratte, Sam had been giving his inventive genius fresh exercise in the time between trips.

Now, getting more deeply into the shadows, he set his toe against a knob on the footboard and lifted back a hinged section. After that preliminary, he lilted his rejoicing prediction about bringing in the sheaves.

The coach wheels dragged more slowly against the brake pads. The horses, harness slack, scuffed and slid in the loose shale.

Suddenly three figures became silhouettes against the shadows. Sam knew them for men because they hailed him gruffly, hoarsely. But he did not pull the horses to a halt.

The three figures became welded in a huddled mass. From the mass came the call:

"Hold up and let passengers aboard."

Fair enough for a proposition, as far

as it went! But Driver Sam, on the box was sharply conscious that he held custody of property of Uncle Sam. In the rear boot of the coach were the sacked United States mails. For the moment the cash in the fore boot took second place on the responsibility list.

"This slarnt on the grade ain't no parsenger deepo, gents," advised the driver. "Git outta the way o' the 'Nited States mail."

Immediately there was a medley of profane commands from the shadows. The custodian of valuables heard mostly sound without explicit sense; but he did sense hostility in the tones. He admitted casually to himself that he might be wrong in figuring all this as a threat instead of the natural irritation of parties wanting to be passengers and denied the privilege. But in the dark and in the depths of Potlatch he was not taking chances.

"Look a here, you ahead there!" he bawled, easing on the brake and setting the horses into their collars. "This parsenger stuff ain't so awful reasonable. Step acrost the brook and slide into Gratte on the seats o' your pants, by way o' the short cut. Outta the way o' the mails, I tell ye!"

"We're coming aboard," insisted a spokesman. "We mean business!"

"So do I! Outta the way, now!"

"You old fool, you can't keep passengers off a public conveyance," shouted the man who was talking for the others. "We mean business, I say, and this talks for us." He cracked out two revolver shots. The flashes informed Sam that the man had fired into the air, straight up. "Does that tell you anything?" the fellow demanded on the heels of the echoes.

The lead horses shied to one side, dragging swing team and wheelers almost at right angles to the coach.

"Yas, it tells me consid'able," bel-lowed Sam. "If it didn't mean what I think it does, then so much the worse

for you fellers! Third and last time I'm saying, 'Make way for the mails!'" They did not move.

Sam Shively had dealt successfully in the old times with men who stepped into the path of the United States mails. Custodians who had temporized had not come off at all well.

The voice ahead put the snapper on the situation. "Put up your hands, driver!"

Sam did put up his hands. But he also put down his foot. He put it hard onto a wire strung along the open section of the footboard.

There followed a blaze of fire, a thundering crash of sound. Only because he was a master reinsman was Sam able to keep his horses from floundering over the pitch into the stream. The squawks and squeals from men in pain and fright made the driver's job more difficult, but he managed to control the brutes.

Then he let off the brakes, cracked his whip, and went with a rush past the men, who floundered out of the way. Careening, the coach rounded a shoulder of the cliff, out of reach of lead which vengefulness might send after it.

"But I guess that tending to what ails 'em right now gives 'em plenty to do without bothering us any more," Sam remarked, for the consolation of the frightened horses.

He jammed his foot hard against the brake bar and slowed the coach before negotiating the hairpin curve below.

Later he arrived at Gratte, threw his sacks in through the post-office door, rode along and deposited the steel chest with the agent of the railroad express.

While doing these chores, he hummed, "Bringing in the Sheaves."

His voice was wholly occupied with the song. He did not interrupt himself in order to mention what had happened up in the Potlatch shadows.

When he drove into the stage com-

pany's stable he was singing loudly and jovially.

Company Manager Oscar Dyott stepped out of his little office in the stable. Sam straightened up from a job he was doing on the coach footboard, finishing the work with haste.

"Anything special to report, Sam?" Dyott asked.

"Only that somebody has mixed merlasses into the Callas mud. It's stickier."

"Nobody but you can drive six hosses over it at this season," declared the manager. "I wish I had somebody as good as you to drive split-hoofers acrost it." Dyott handled cattle and hogs as a side line.

The driver pulled off his wide-brimmed hat, took from its crown certain papers and handed them to the manager.

"Quite a mess o' the yaller dust this trip," commented Dyott, perusing figures. "I don't know but we ought to give you a guard with a rifle, on the next trip when you're bringing a clean-up."

"Run your business to suit ye, Boss Dyott," returned Sam amiably, slapping his hat on his head. "I ain't ever telling ye how."

"But there must be some bad men in this bunch of floaters who've come jamming in on us. These days the gangsters mostly hold up banks and paymasters, I know; but every once in a while there's one stage in the country hauling something worth a holdup." He kicked a muddy wheel of the coach. "And that's this one!"

"Never no telling, of course," admitted Sam indifferently. He yawned and strolled away toward his bunk place in a partitioned corner of the stable. "Guess I'll turn in, boss. Had my supper at Double Tee ranch house. It sure does make a lazy trip, plowing acrost Callas 'thout no parsengers to talk religion and politics to."

"We can't expect folks to travel in mudtime, rate o' two miles an hour."

"Not unless they're called to the rail-ro'd oftener by sickness and funerals," suggested Sam hopefully. "But for pleasure or on reg'lar business—no!"

Dyott stepped back into his office and the driver shut his plank door on his bedtime rendition of "Bringing in the Sheaves."

After a time the manager cocked his head and listened. "Blast me, if I can tell whether he's snoring or humming that hymn! It's a wonder he doesn't snore to the tune of it, anyway!"

Dyott remained late in his office. He was studying market prices and reports, estimating profits from live stock on the hoof.

On him burst Jeff Arne, flurried, fussy. Arne was Gratte's deputy sheriff.

"Where's old Shively?"

Dyott jerked thumb over shoulder. Both men listened for a moment to the sonorous snores.

"How the bald blazes he can sleep after what he has gone and done is all outside my cal'lating," snorted the officer. He did not wait for questions. "But he told you, of course, about his rinktum in Potlatch to-night."

Dyott shook his head, staring wide-eyed.

"Holy hoosup! D'ye mean to let on to me that Shively comes in here and goes to bed and never yips about what he's been up to? Who's manager o' this stage line, you or him?"

"I'm manager," yelped Dyott, thudding his fist on the desk.

"Glad to hear it said. That makes you responsible for act of a 'poyee."

"What act?" demanded the boss with heat. "More facts and less riddle-come-ree!"

"You step acrost with me to the Royal Palace Huttel. You can use your eyes and save me from wearing out my tongue telling the facts."

Deputy Arne swung and started out. Then he halted. "Guess I'll have to arrest old Shively first, though."

"Arrest him for *what*?"

The officer tipped his slouch hat to one side and scratched his head. "W-a-a-l, on second thought, mebbe I'd best wait and let the jedge name it when he issues the warrant. Damfino jest what old Sam done, and even the victims ain't sartin—not up to date. You come along to the Royal Palace and use your own jedgment. Glad to hear you say you're responsible. You'll have a chance to say it again in court."

All this talk was bodeful. Dyott, while the two men were scuffling through the mud of the street, tried to extract more information by questions and curses.

Arne hurried on ahead, tossing his arm. "Look 'em over yourself, I say. And I'll also say that the Gratte & Sterlock Stagecoach line, by act o' 'poyee condoned by manager, is taking one hell of a way to encourage high-class hustlers for business to settle here and help out our boom. You come along."

Manager Dyott, swearing, made what haste he could through the sticky mud of the principal street.

The Royal Palace was larger than the other structures in the boom village; but, in its fabric of tarred paper and slabs, was just as mushroomy.

Arne and Dyott, tramping in, produced on the structure the effect of a couple of minor earthquakes.

"Step lighter, gents!" the landlord warned. He tipped his head to indicate certain activities at one end of the office room. "It's a fussy job, and the doc is having a turrible time keeping his hand stiddy."

Arne used his authority in making a lane through the press of men who were herded in the room as spectators. Dyott, following the officer, got dirty looks when he ran the gantlet. Men growled mean remarks about the Ster-

lock & Gratte stage-line policy. One man grabbed Dyott's arm. "I'm speaking for our new chamber of commerce. What good is it, us pulling hard for business development, while you're hiring men to kill off high-class developers?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," rasped Dyott.

"There's a whole lot o' truth in what you say," retorted Arne acridly. "You have let your understrapper put the smirch all over Gratte and don't even post yourself after it's been done. I had to drag you here to see for yourself." He spread his arms to make way for Dyott at the forefront of the assembled citizens.

The doctor was busy with one of the three men. The patient had been stripped to his waist. From the exposed flesh of chest and face the ministering surgeon was picking particles with forceps, sopping the wounds with balm.

The other two men were awaiting their turn. In ire and pain they twisted visages which had been plentifully peppered.

Manager Dyott required no identification of the patients. The three men had been conspicuous figures in the village for a week. They were snappy in attire and manner, their dress and poise distinctly metropolitan, and the new chamber of commerce had been fawning on them. Their announced business intentions were: Mr. Easely, drugs; Mr. Wallace, insurance and investments; Mr. Cullen, realtor.

The latter had the ready tongue required in his line. "Look at us, Dyott. The doc says it's birdshot and rock-salt." He flapped his hand, shutting off the stage manager. "After supper," he continued, "I strolled up to see what could be done with a subdivision on the heights. These gentlemen went with me." He indicated his cosufferers. "We were tuckered and hailed the stage for a lift. And this is the lift we got

from that damnation old rampager of a driver."

"He must have took you for hold-uppers," stammered Dyott.

"That's hooley!" sneered Cullen. "I hailed him, all polite and pleasant. His answer was *bang-o!* And here we are. Look at us, I tell you!"

Dyott blinked, as if the spectacle hurt his eyes. "I'll go to the bottom of this thing," he promised. While he jammed his way back through the throng toward the door, a small man slipped along close behind, like a chip in an eddy. He stepped in front of Dyott when the two were free from the crowd. He was Decker, local attorney.

"I'm counsel for the plaintiffs, Dyott. They have pooled their cases. It may be better if you and I coöperate. Perhaps we can keep it out of the court. Maybe we can stave off a criminal charge against old Sam. What excuse did the fool give you, anyway?"

"He hasn't yipped," exploded the manager.

"My, my! That's queer!" clucked the attorney.

Deputy Arne, standing close, declared likewise with profanity.

"Let's play with all cards on the table," suggested Decker amiably. "Take me in on your talk with Shively and then I'll do my best to handle my clients on a full understanding."

"I've got nothing to hide," declared the manager. "Come along, squire."

Arne went without invitation.

Dyott took a stable lantern with reflector from a hook in his office, led the way into the bunk room, and trained the spotlight on the sleeper.

Sam bit off a snore and opened his eyes. When he had derricked himself to a sitting posture he surveyed the three men. "The boss, a lawyer, the deputy sheriff! As for the coroner, I s'pose he is busy trying to find out what killed 'em."

"Why the hoot'n' hell didn't you tell

me you'd had a run-in up in Potlatch?" demanded the boss with heat.

"W-a-a-l, I cal'lated it was all over and down with and I was lo'th to have ye worry and miss a good night's sleep, boss. When ro'd agents git staved off they us'ally skedaddle. The sheaves had been brung in. I wasn't looking for any gabble or fuss to foller. The bandits were——"

"Bandits be yahooded!" yelped the deputy. "Them was Easely, Wallace and Cullen—drugs, insurance and real estate! Gents standing ready to help the boom in Gratte. All they done was ask you for a ride."

"Who says so?" inquired Sam.

"They say so."

"And they never done nothing else, hey? Do they say that?"

"Of course they say it—all three of 'em."

"Huh! All three being alive, that makes it three against one." Sam crooked his arms over his head and yawned. "I reckon my word won't go for much while Gratte is crazy with the boom. I played 'em for ro'd agents. Yeah! I let 'em have it!"

"Well, what in the link-eyed tophet did you let 'em have?" ripped out Arne. "The doc is getting samples, but what kind of a bumfino were you toting, anyhow?"

"You can take a peek and name it," said Sam mildly, rolling out of the blankets and standing draped in a sagging wool union suit. "It's a new invention o' mine and I ain't got around to naming it. But it ain't a killer. It's more like a discourager."

He led the way out to the stage-coach and lifted the hinged board. He exposed three sets of double barrels. "I sawed 'em off'm shotguns and ironed 'em in solid. And this wire——"

"Of all the coot craziness I ever heard of, this beats the partent lock on tophet's back door," averred the sheriff. "And you couldn't rest till you'd tried it

out, hey? Tried it on three of Gratte's best boosters!"

To the light of the reflector lantern Sam turned steady gray eyes. Those eyes slowly filmed with the secretiveness of one who realized that words wouldn't count for much against what the three boosters could say. Gratte was having its run of boost fever! However, Sam did make inquiry. "Did they happen to mention that one of 'em popped some shots and then ordered me to put up my hands?"

The deputy bellowed his wrathful reply. "Golamitey, nothing like that was done by them gents. If you swear to it till you spit froth, you won't never be believed!"

"Prob'ly not," admitted the driver. "These is queer times in Gratte. So I'll explain about this wire. It's rigged up——"

"Just a moment," briskly put in the attorney. "Dyott, I've seen and heard enough on behalf of my clients. Their condition shows how the invention works. I'm not interested in details. Suppose I run over to the hotel and confer with them on terms of settlement? I agree with the sheriff that Shively is crazy. That'll be taken into account on terms we offer the stage company."

Dyott was grateful and said so.

The lawyer hurried away.

"Now this wire is rigged——"

"Shively, you plug that yap," raged Dyott. "You have rammed us in for a big bill of damages and I've a good mind to gallop you around this barn under a hosswhip."

"I don't know as I'd do that, if I was you," said Sam.

The manager and the deputy retired to the private office for a conference.

Sam got a screw driver from the tool pack in the boot and went about the job of taking out his double-barreled battery. Dyott had left the lantern.

In a little while the attorney came

in on the rush. Dyott and Arne walked to meet him.

Decker was enthusiastic. "Boys, those gents are all to the good when it comes to considering the business interests and the fair fame of our village. They don't want to hurt the stage company. They don't want any word to go out that it's as much as a passenger's life is worth to hail the Sterlock & Gratte coach in the dark. They ask for no arrest. Here's their proposition. You pay for my fee and for doc's services, and no other money passes."

"Golamitey, that's sure white," blurted Dyott.

"And, of course, they insist that Shively gets the bounce here and now, to-night."

From the spotlight of the lantern Sam called, waving the screw driver:

"I've been resigning with this here thing for the last fifteen minits! Don't bother with the bounce stuff."

But Dyott had something of his own to put over. He wanted to convince the injured parties, the Gratte Chamber of Commerce and the citizenry in general, that the stage company was standing for genteel public service. Therefore, he advanced on Sam Shively and flourished fists and shouted abusive epithets that were peppered with oaths as thickly as Sam had dosed the three with birdshot.

"And you step into the office, Shively, and get what is coming to you in wages," Dyott concluded.

"You don't owe me nothing, Mister Dyott, as she stands. Mebbe I can git my pay later out o' making you ashamed of calling me all them names."

He cuddled the sets of double barrels in his arms and shuffled into his pen, singing:

"Bring-hing in ther sheaves,
Bring-hing in ther sheaves."

A few minutes later he walked out past the conferring men, armament and patent whip lashed into a bundle.

"Now, Squire Decker, you can tell the gents and all Gratte that Sam Shively was fired good and plenty," advised Dyott.

Sam avoided the Royal Palace. He found shelter at the Imperial Hotel, a bit second-rate because there was only one thickness of tarred paper for room partitions—whereas the Royal had two thicknesses.

Indignant guests repeatedly thudded in bare feet to the side of his cot and thumped him and damned him for snoring like a rock crusher. Therefore, Sam remained awake after frequent assaults. He devoted the wakeful hours to meditation.

Drugs, investments, real estate, hey? He had heard about slick holdup men even in these pursuits. But as an old-timer in the stagecoach business he did not need to be told about the tactics of road agents. His judgment was not hampered by Gratte civic pride in a boom and its boosters. He sat on the side of his cot and hummed the tune of "Bringing in the Sheaves."

Frankly he was admitting that this judgment might be all askew. Continuing to play these notables as bandits, even in the light of personal experience and a lively hunch, would set him stark alone against the field. And that involved hazard, with Gratte at the climacteric of its boom fever!

He continued his meditations while he buttoned his suspenders in the early morning. "Gorry! They may lynch me. But considering as how I've always been a cantankerous cuss I might jest as well keep on being that way—using jedgment, hows'ever!"

Therefore, he put on a mask of humility when he went on the street. Men snarled at him, barked at him, hooted him. He had lost his nerve in Potlatch, had gone blooey, had blown up! He was raucously advised to get out of Gratte before something happened to him.

Right away an opportunity was offered. He accepted with the gratitude of a lost pup that had been dodging kicks in a crowd.

Several men in overalls were loading a freight wagon with short poles, coils of copper wire and glass insulators. Sam knew the job they were on. They were rigging a makeshift telephone line between Gratte and Sterlock. He had seen them at work while he had teamed the stage. For most of the distance they had utilized the upper strands of the barbed-wire fences along the highway, insulating these wires.

The boss greeted Sam and confessed the need of a real teamster to cope with the mud of Callas.

Therefore, slicing air an hour later with his patent whip, Sam was once more behind six horses. Before night he was finding the new job interesting. The day's work had consisted of linking gaps and testing connections. The boss showed Sam how to cut in with a portable instrument and sent him on ahead with the horses, stage by stage, in order to prove up on sections of the line.

Around midday the mail coach came dragging from Gratte on its way to Sterlock. The driver was a hostler from the Dyott stable. He pulled to a halt near the place where Sam was yelling into the telephone receiver. The coach slowly rolled over upon its side and two mud-smeared passengers crawled very awkwardly out of the open windows.

Raged one of the men, getting Shively's attention:

"That's five times this bat-eared slabgullion has let this stage tip over 'twixt here and the rim rock."

"I ain't letting it tip over, neither," protested the driver, picking his way about the vehicle; "it tips over spite of all I can do."

"I'll have to side with the parsen-gers," stated Sam. "Stopping right smack on a honey pot like you've done

is aiding and abetting in having it tip over."

"How could I tell this was a honey pot?"

Sam surveyed the driver triumphantly, complacently. "Handling a stage in Callas mud comes under the same head as piloting a river steamer past shoals and reefs. It takes knowledge, sense and instinct. And the going is still wuss from here on. Too bad! Too bad!" He clucked solicitously. "Mebbe you'd better drag her along jest as she lays, on the side. It'll save everlasting boosting her back onto her wheels."

"I'm going to hoof it from here on!" one of the passengers announced. "And I'll get back my fare money, even if I have to sue for it."

"Me, too!" declared the other.

The two of them stiff-legged away through the mud.

"Does that telefoam thing work all the way into Gratte?" queried the discouraged driver, when Sam resumed his testing.

"She do."

"Then you holler over it to Dyott and tell him I quit. Tell him where he'll find his old goose pen. I'm going back to ranch work."

He strode away across the prairie.

Sam conferred with the telephone boss, who came up to inspect the situation.

"I s'pose something has got to be done about this here 'Nited States mail," suggested the stage veteran. "But if I talk to Dyott about it he'll maybe think I'm rubbing it in."

The other grinned with full relish in the situation. "I'll do the talking—and he won't have any doubt about it being rubbed in. He nicked me good and plenty on a live-stock deal a few months ago."

"He nicked me with his tongue. I'd like to shame him," commented Sam. He picked up a length of discarded

joist and set about pounding caked 'dobe mud from between the spokes of the upturned wheels.

A few minutes later the telephone boss reported:

"Dyott says you're hired back on the job and he wouldn't take my word that I couldn't spare you. Says he's going out on the street and tell the chamber o' commerce and boosting gents and all interested parties that the United States mail is more important than salving over any skin and mending feelings hurt in a misunderstanding. He banged away from the phone—and that's that. What are you going to do?"

"Boss, as it stands, it hasn't been rubbed into him proper, hey?" There was a lot of significance behind that query.

The telephone man fell in with Sam's mood and allowed that there had not been a proper amount of rubbing in.

"What say if we rub? But you ain't asking no questions o' me, understand?"

"O. K. with me!"

They took their time about getting the mail stage to Sterlock. They righted it and moved it by fits and starts of progress while the telephone connections were hitched up.

"It ain't noways reg'lar, of course, and it hurts me to see the 'Nited States mail lag along this way," confided Sam. "But on tother hand, we're only doing it to 'commodate Uncle Sam—and the Dyott driver was too busy tipping over to ever git it to Sterlock."

However, the expedition managed to pull into the terminal at supper time, delivering the mail stage and contents intact and leaving behind completed telephone service to Gratte.

An hour later came Manager Dyott astraddle a horse. The beast's feet were caked in mud lumps as big as foot-balls.

He saw his ex-driver on the street and shouted:

"You're hired back, Sam, and there

isn't any misunderstanding in Gratte about it. And I want everybody in Sterlock to know you'll be back on the box to-morrow."

Shively looked Dyott up and down, manifestly hostile, supremely disgusted. "Look a here, Mister Dyott: if Thomas Peter Ederson, or whatever his name is, should invent the grandest and best-running machine in the world, and you could get anywheres nigh it, you'd stick in a thumb and put it out of everlasting kilter."

"What the blazes do you mean?"

"I ain't going into no long explanations with diagrams. I'm only telling ye I won't lift webbings on that stage again." He marched away down the sidewalk, tossing disdainful arms when Dyott shouted appeals.

A wizened man caught up with Sam. "That's sure the way to talk to 'em, old-timer. Take a stand and stick to it."

Sam took in this stranger with a side glance. "How come the special love and kisses, mister?"

According to the veteran driver's keen estimate the man did not check up to standard under scrutiny. And he stuttered a bit when he continued to make profession of admiring interest in any man who could tell bandits and stage managers just exactly where they get off.

"Oh, I know all about what happened," he said. "News travels fast up here."

"Yeah! And it'll travel faster, now that the telefoam is open to Gratte."

The wizened man snapped eyes of interest. Too much interest, according to Sam's checking along a line of quick suspicion.

"By mighty, that's good news! Are you sure?"

"I'll say I'm sure. I've been working all day, helping connect up."

"Well, well! It'll help a lot in running business." The man started away.

And after the stranger had turned a corner, Sam started, too.

By a rear door he entered the stable where the telephone wagon was lodged. He secured the cut-in instrument which he had been using that day.

Night had settled. The crisp air was stiffening the mud surface. Sam marched out across the prairie and hitched up on the current conversation on the new line. It was a busy line and there was much talk of no account by various parties. But Sam extracted wheat from the chaff eventually, after he recognized the voice of the wizened stranger. Only an ear keen with suspicion would have gleaned information from his cryptic gabble. But Sam had an understanding ear for the one subject on which his interest was focused.

He was informed that Sam Shively had ducked out somewhere and could not be found by Manager Dyott. Therefore, Dyott was making a special trip back to Gratte that night, driving himself, teaming horses hitched to a four-seat open wagon. Several passengers had booked themselves, parties having urgent matters to attend to. And the informant would be a passenger. He was calling himself "Little Jack Horner."

Sam, translating as his suspicions prompted, learned that a Buffalo Hump pack train had arrived with a big cleanup and that this treasure furnished the special urge to Dyott to make the night trip over Callas while the mud was hard. And the listener-in was especially interested in this addition to the bulletin:

"The king has borrowed a double plum cake. Little Jack Horner will sit in the corner and pull out the plums with seeds in 'em. He'll slip in other plums that won't hurt the teeth. Oh, yes, I'm talking all safe at this end. They've rigged up a temporary plank booth. King says he'll be hitting the rim rock by midnight."

POP—10B

Sam trotted back to the stable and restored the cut-in instrument to the telephone kit. He secured his patented whip and his knapsack.

Under the stars, over the frost-stiffened prairie, he made his lonely way by short cuts.

He set himself to wait in a little arroyo on the prairie side of the rim rock. The night was chilly. Therefore, he kept his blood warm by exercise. He found a small white rock in the bed of the stream and jammed it into the side of the bank. He added more length of braided rawhide to the whiplash, along with something else as a snapper, and then he proceeded to imitate a dry-fly fisherman, using the white rock for a target. He grunted with satisfaction after he had perfected himself in range and distance. He wanted to sing, "Bringing in the Sheaves." But he discreetly refrained.

He continued with his warming-up practice until he heard the smacking of hoofs on the frost-hardened road.

Then he moved stealthily to a niche in the rim rock overlooking a curve where the road made its sweep of descent toward Gratte. He chose this covert and halted in it after he heard mumbling voices below him in the shelter of the cliff's shoulder.

Squealing brakes heralded the wagon's approach.

Three dim figures issued from the screening shadows of the cliff.

Sam rose, straddled, and braced himself.

The affair snapped into action without preliminaries, except that a voice barked:

"Hold up!"

Dyott replied by banging away with both barrels. He pumped the lever and banged again when the three men advanced on the halted wagon.

Again the barking voice. "This ain't the Fourth of July! Come down off that wagon."

Then Sam made his first cast. The lead slug on the end of the lash caught one of the men on the side of the head. He toppled forward and lay motionless.

That bolt from the night operated in silence, except for a baleful hiss.

While the other two men were yawning their amazement, the unseen hissed again, and another victim dropped.

The third man cowered, searching skies and earth with eyes to locate the manner and method of this mystery. Then he dropped in a huddled heap, the mystery unsolved.

Then Sam, crouching while he ran, got within range of the wagon and nailed the wizened man squarely between the eyes. He slumped on the seat and slid off, his limp body plopping on the ground.

Sam, silhouetted against the stars, called to Manager Dyott:

"Hop down, you and the parsengers, and hog tie 'em afore they come to." He continued over frantic queries. "Oh, no! I don't cal'late they're dead. Hows'ever, this is the first time I've tried out this invention and my touch may 'a' been a leetle mite heavy."

He slid down and captained operations. Pulling the masks off of the unconscious figures, he revealed the faces of Mr. Drugs, Mr. Real Estate, and Mr. Insurance.

Then, with the help of Dyott and the

passengers, he tied up the reviving four and bundled them into the coach. After which he got up on the seat, took the reins, and started the stage off for Gratte.

Manager Dyott, sitting beside him, choking and stammering, tried to find words of grateful praise.

"Boss Dyott, it's tough tripe! I wouldn't chaw on it if I was you," Sam advised. Then he effectually shut off apologies, by bellowing his hymn: "Bringing in the Sheaves." He rendered the "re-JOICING" line with extra volume and fervor.

For the information of those persons who have never had access to the files of the *Gratte Weekly Bugle of Progress*, it may be added that, before the prairie flowers were blooming, the Gratte Chamber of Commerce got up a big affair for Mr. Shively, in spite of his profane objections. Among other gifts he received a check for some thousands of dollars from a Middle West bank association. Oh, yes! The four captives were fugitive bank robbers. They had ducked to remote Gratte and had grabbed at opportunities which looked ripe.

"Banks has now proved to be a good thing," Sam declared. So he put all his money into stock of the new trust company of booming Gratte.

Other stories by Holman Day will appear in future issues.



CONFLICTING DUTIES

"DAD, just what is a congressman?" asked the five-year-old son of the representative of a New England district.

"A congressman," replied the father, "is a man who is sent to Washington to reduce taxes and vote for all the people's favorite appropriation bills."



BLACK FLIES

By Aimée D. Linton

Two friends who went through hell—but not always together.

IN the dim light which filtered through the one window of the post store no one appeared to notice him. The prospector, the French trapper, and the Indian had favored him with a mere glance.

He sat slumped over in a far corner, his face on his chest, slouched and battered hat pulled well down over that face. To the three men in the store he seemed to be asleep. An hour or so before he had staggered into the post, had pulled out a worn and crumpled dollar bill and asked for a can of corned beef and some soda crackers. In less than five minutes he had wolfed it all down.

Beyond a doubt the man was starving. More than that, Dave McQuade, the factor, judged him to be somewhat off his mental trail. His face was horribly bloated and humpy with black-fly bites. But one look the factor had had of the man's eyes—red balls of bot-

tomless fire sunk deep into the sockets of his skull. McQuade's flesh almost prickled on his spine.

"Looks like a crazy man to me," the factor summed the man up. "Well, it's none of my business; I'm here to gather in pelts, not lunatics."

But ever and anon he glanced furtively at the man in the corner. A young man, Dave McQuade decided the fellow to be, in spite of his humped shoulders, long hair and stubbly beard.

The French trapper shouldered his pack and left. He had been gone about five minutes when the door of the post opened and another man entered.

The newcomer was tall and broad-shouldered, with dark, somber eyes, and a tanned, clean-shaven face on which were traces of fly bites—a good-looking young fellow who gave one the impression of strength of both character and body.

With a quick, inclusive look at the

others, the tall young man walked up to the rough counter.

"Half a side of bacon, five pounds of flour, can of Klim, two pounds of coffee, box of matches, and two pounds of tobacco," he ordered briefly.

As the factor turned to fill the order, he saw the man in the corner raise his head sharply. Hot murder shot from those red eyes as they rested upon the tall young man. The bloated face had become a mask of passion, violent and pitiless. The man half rose to his feet, then slumped back into his seat in the corner. But not for one breath did he take his eyes from the tall newcomer.

As the factor filled the order, the tall young man looked moodily down at his larrigans.

"Nice cool weather we've be'n havin' lately," the prospector opened up conversationally. The tall young man assented with a brief "Yes."

"But my gosh, it sure was a scorcher long there 'bout the beginnin' of July," the prospector continued.

"Yes," again assented the stranger.

"Never seen the black flies as bad in all my ten years up here! Thought I'd go clean crazy with 'em! I s'pose the heat an' so much rain accounts for'm bein' so bad. Two young fellers I met comin' down was drove outa the North an' beat it fur the city till after the black-fly season."

The stranger fixed a pair of somber, dark eyes upon the garrulous prospector.

"Two of them, did you say?" His face worked queerly for a moment.

"Uh-huh," the prospector confirmed.

"Two of them!" the tall young man muttered.

"Why, yes, ther' was when I met 'em." The prospector's face wore a slightly puzzled look. "Know 'em?"

"No—oh, no," the tall young man hastened to say.

Over in his corner the fierce, red eyes of the man glared mute hatred at the

tall young man. Curses bubbled against his tight lips.

"Surprised that there should be two men together! Damn his stinking, traitorous soul!" he cursed inwardly.

"Now, by hokey, I'm just wonderin' if that there body this Injun here seen floatin' down the river the other day could be one o' them chaps?" the prospector broke in on the furious musings of the man in the corner. "Youngish man, you said, didn't you, Mawassah?"

The Indian nodded and grunted. The tall young man started violently and made a harsh noise down in his throat.

"Where—where did you say you saw —it?" he essayed at last, boring the Indian with his dark, brooding eyes. The tan of his face had turned to a sickly putty color; his mouth moved nervously in the effort to control himself.

The eyes of all, including the factor, were riveted upon the tall young man.

"I see him in the river," the Indian made vague and characteristic Indian answer.

"The Bell River," the prospector amplified, "down 'bout twenty mile or so, he told me. Injuns don't like foolin' with dead men's bodies, so he didn't touch it, he said. Matter should be reported to the Royal Mounted, though. Foul play somewheres, by hokey! Them two young chaps had struck it rich, they told me, an' sometimes gold becomes yaller pisen between two friends. Like's not one of 'em plugged the other in the back, or pushed him over the cliff into the river. The like of that's often be'n knowed to happen."

"Unthinkable!"

The tall young man's muttered word reached the ears of the man in the corner. He almost laughed aloud, then, recovering himself, he choked back his laugh. The result was a sound like a deep expulsion of breath.

The factor's eyes turned upon the

man in the corner; the latter pulled his hat down over his eyes and dropped his marred and bloated face lower on his chest.

The tall young man took from an inner pocket a small bag of gold dust and passed it to the factor. McQuade weighed the dust, then passed back what was left.

"You be'n prospectin', too, I see," the prospector said curiously.

"I was," the tall young man admitted colorlessly.

"Any luck?" pursued the prospector with the harmless curiosity of the well-intentioned man.

"The worst possible luck!" was the dreary answer, as the young man shouldered his pack and left the post.

"Liar, thief!" the man in the corner flung mentally after the departing stranger.

The factor looked keenly, inquiringly at the man in the corner.

"Know that man?" McQuade asked, jerking his head toward the door through which the tall young man had just passed.

The man in the corner laughed mirthlessly. "I thought I did—once; but I guess I was mistaken!" He snapped his jaws together viciously.

The factor turned then to light a lamp, for the post store was becoming quite dark. As he laid the match to the wick, the man in the corner rose to his feet, and without a word to any one, passed out of the post door.

Keeping well behind the trees which lined the path to the landing place, Gregory Vokes, the man in the corner, moved stealthily down to the river's bank. He watched the tall young man throw his supplies into the bow of the canoe and push off, downstream.

"Now what's your little game, Jack Hutton?" Vokes muttered. "Headed downstream, back North! Um-mm! Ah-ha! I've got it! Starvation and black flies haven't left me altogether

crazy! Going to find that dead body in the river, aren't you? You think it's me! Ha-ha-ha! And when you've found him, you'll sink him nice and deep and perhaps say a little prayer over poor old Greg! Then you'll beat it for the city with our poke!

"'Poor old Greg!' you'll say to the boys down home. 'Never was strong, you know; so when the black flies filled him with poison, he just hadn't the constitution to buck it. Greg and I were great pals, as you know, chums all through college and two years prospecting together in the North, eaten alive by black flies and mosquitoes and never a word between us! Two years in the North, boys! That's the acid test of friendship! Naturally he left me the whole poke.'

"Oh, yes, I can hear him! Always was eloquent and persuasive, damn his polluted soul!" In the grip of an ague of hate, Vokes shook like a tree in the wind.

"If I had a gun, I'd shoot him now! But I haven't; he saw to that! I'd have killed him with my bare hands back there in the post, but those men would have pulled me off him. But I'll get him yet! A club will do when he's sleeping! I'll get him some way!" Thus over and over.

Gabbling tremulous curses of impotent rage, Gregory Vokes followed Jack Hutton along the banks of the river, keeping well out of sight. He felt stronger now because of his recent meal of canned beef and crackers, the first real meal he had had for over three weeks.

During those weeks Gregory Vokes had been lost—deserted, he called it. One day, late in the morning, he had wakened from delirium to find his friend and fellow prospector, Jack Hutton, gone. Gone was also everything else that counted—the canoe, loaded with most of their supplies, and the bag of gold dust sluiced from a creek whose

sands for a month had washed rich in gold, with plenty more of it to be had for the labor of washing.

From the time the ice had left the creek they had worked feverishly, happily. Then had come the black flies which worked like maggots in the brain and distilled poison through their systems. There was no escape from them. Bitter cold, grueling work, and even hunger, they could endure and had endured. But the ceaseless, poisonous boring of the terrible black pest was something which even their young and ardent blood could not withstand—and leave them sane. So, with the intention of returning to their rich discovery when the black-fly season should end, they had hastily headed south for steel.

Of only the first two days of their journey south had Gregory Vokes any remembrance. He supposed he must have been out of his head, delirious. He had one lucid memory of Hut feeding him rabbit broth from a cup. Hut had always been the stronger, and so he would be better able to resist the black-fly poison. The *yellow* poison had got in its work instead! That was a virus for which friendship was no antidote.

Friendship! Gregory Vokes ground his teeth as he stumbled forward in the gathering dark. What a joke the word was! Human affections were but shadows at which humans clutched as they passed through the desert of life—bits of dried elastic which, if stretched, would snap. A few ounces of gold dust had snapped his and Jack Hutton's. Worse than broken friendship, the yellow dust had made of Jack Hutton a criminal, guilty of the North's worst crime.

Of the first week of his desertion Gregory Vokes had now but vague memories. Fish, so plentiful in those Northern rivers, he had caught with his hands and cooked them while his few matches lasted. After that he had eaten them raw. At first he must have

wandered from the river, westward, for at the end of that first week he had come to realize that he was far west of the Bell River, in the desolate, unpeopled tracts of northwest Quebec. He had then headed due east again, and at last had come to the Bell River, and finally, at the end of the third week, to the post.

Temporarily, Gregory Vokes had doubled his age. For when one's faith dies, real old age begins, the soul shrivels, and youth goes. Perhaps as much as anything, the desire to be avenged upon his treacherous friend kept him alive. Hugging the venom of his mind, luxuriating in it as in some secret sin, he sucked in the wine of red hate and wrath until he was drunk.

The bowl of the sky crept nearer to the swaying tops of the spruce trees. Night fell. Down the stream a few rods ahead of his pursuer, Hutton still paddled.

"He'll camp on this side, among the spruce, for sure," Vokes reasoned.

But Hutton headed his canoe for the opposite shore and made camp there for the night on the rocky cliff.

"The devil takes care of his own!" Vokes raged in bitter disappointment. "Never mind—to-morrow!"

Vokes wrapped himself in the one blanket which had been left him and dozed fitfully throughout the night. He must not miss following Hutton when he left the next morning.

At daybreak, after a breakfast of coffee, bacon and flapjacks, Hutton was up and off. The wind wafted the odor of the cooking food across to Vokes and his mouth drooled with hunger, like a dog's. He could not have any breakfast for himself; he must not let Hutton see him fishing. And he would have no time, anyway.

So, with hunger gnawing like an acid into his vitals, and the fury in his heart working like a ravaging disease, Vokes followed Hutton's canoe downstream.

Hutton was paddling slowly, carefully scanning each side of the stream as he paddled. Sometimes he peered intently into the river's pellucid depths.

"Ha-ha!" Vokes laughed crazily to himself. "If you only knew I was up here and following you, you'd paddle your long arms off trying to get away from me! You won't get me down there, but I'll get you—up here!"

On again throughout all that day, following stealthily along the river's bank, waiting for the chance to kill his treacherous friend, Vokes followed the canoe downstream, into the North.

Toward night Vokes began to stagger from weariness and hunger. Of this he was scarcely conscious, however; his mind was focused on the one purpose left him in life.

Then, as the night of the second day came down, his chance came. Hutton paddled his canoe directly under the cliff on which Vokes stood. Vokes, peering from behind a tree, saw Hutton bend over the side of his canoe and peer down into the water, his head turned from the cliff.

Vokes came out from behind the tree and looked down at Hutton. His chance had come, at last! Hutton was an expert swimmer, but if stunned, he would have no chance. They would both probably drown. But what did it matter? There was nothing left in life to live for.

With a wild, inhuman cry, Gregory Vokes leaped, far out, arms and head forward.

In that downward plunge of a second or so of time, Vokes' confused senses registered but one objective impression: Jack Hutton was looking up, his dark eyes upraised to Vokes' own in startled appeal.

A paralysis of horror swept over Vokes; his rigid body went limp. He struck the water and went down—down through green, cooling, liquid depths—far down into a new world of subter-

ranean gloom, himself a shadow among shadows—down into a world in which the fires of hate and revenge seemed enveloped in phosphorescent luminosity.

A thought flickered like a brighter point of light in the luminosity: Hut would never know. Then the thought-flame went out and all was dark, with the darkness of death.

Something at last seemed to beat against the placid texture of unconsciousness. His half-dead soul seemed to struggle with itself, confused, astray. He had turned into a windmill, for his arms were moving up and down, propelled by some external force. There was a throbbing sound in his ears. He tried to open his eyes to find out what it was all about. But they seemed glued together.

The confused sounds in his ears were clearer now; they had become a jumble of words and sobs.

"He *has* to hear! God, he *has* to hear!"

That was surely a human voice—Hut's voice! Vokes forced his eyes open. "He's alive!" It was a harsh, distorted cry which seemed to fill all space around them.

An infinite peace descended upon Gregory Vokes. He felt himself sinking into a bed of ether, comforting, enveloping. Momentarily he surged from it; he must tell Hut that—

"The—black flies——" he tried to say, then fell into the depths of slumber.

Ten hours later he awoke. The vistas of his mind were clear, real; the past seemed but a wreath of mist. Beside him Jack Hutton was holding a cup of hot broth in his hands.

Vokes sat up and smiled, happily, sanely. It seemed so natural that Hut should be there with a cup of hot broth in his hands. How good it smelled! He reached out a hand for the broth.

"'Atta boy!" There was a strange catch in Hut's laugh. "I'd sooner slush this down you than to pump water out

of you!" Hut added, with a natural laugh this time.

As he greedily drank the rabbit broth Hutton fed him, the memory of the past month swept over Vokes like the returning memory of a bad nightmare. Black flies, black thoughts, black desires—Vokes shuddered inwardly. Unthinkable! For there sat Hut feeding him, an unmistakable light of joy in his eyes.

"You must have fished me out of the river when I—I fell in, Hut?" Vokes asked when he had finished the broth.

Hutton laughed a little awkwardly. "I didn't know it was you I was diving for until I brought you up—after the third dive down for you. You looked to me like a crazy man who had been fired out of a gun at me!"

Vokes' eyes turned from his friend's face to the swaying spruce tops through which the moon shone in fitful glints.

"Crazy is right, Hut!" he murmured. "I think I've been out of my head for some time."

Hutton nodded. "You were—with

black flies—when I left you, almost a month ago now."

Hutton paused, and his voice shook a little as he said, "I don't suppose it is necessary to tell a pal how I came to leave you? Because, of course, you must have realized that I was out of my head, too. The day I left you I came to lying in a tepid pool of water—a backwash of this river. I must have lain there for hours, for it was dusk when I realized where I was. It was moonrise when I reached our last camping spot."

"And I had gone?" Vokes smiled.

Hutton scraped his throat. "Yes—and then I went crazier than I had been before! I had the canoe and almost all the supplies; you were gone—with nothing! I had the poke—you had nothing!"

"Nothing but a lot of poison in my system!" Vokes' laugh was comforting, reassuring. "Well, Hut, we've both had the water cure, so let's start back to-morrow for our creek."

This magazine is always glad to hear from its readers as to their likes and dislikes.

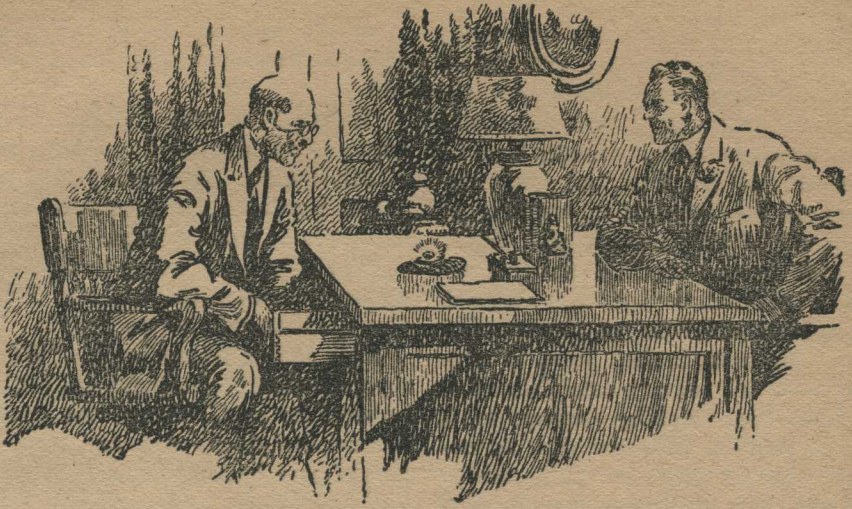


THE VINDICTIVE POLITICIAN

WHEN Senator Furnifold M. Simmons, for a generation the darling and dictator of the Democratic party in North Carolina, advised the young men of the State to vote against Al Smith, many of his former friends and lieutenants were in a state of mind that made the wailings and writhings of a dozen broken-backed hydrophobia cats seem like a lethargy. One of them, a newspaper publisher who had fought, bled, and died a hundred deaths for Simmons, was particularly rough and wrathful.

"If I saw the senator in a den of lions," he declared, "I'd react to the scene as my little daughter did to a similar one last night. I was showing her a picture of Christian martyrs being thrown to the lions, and I was telling her how brave and good the martyrs were.

"Daddy!" she interrupted me in a pitying voice. 'Oh, daddy, look at that poor little lion, away back there! I'm afraid he won't get any!'"



Too Many Golcondas

By James Sayre Pickering

Another entertaining story about Silas Tipping, Fifth Avenue jeweler, and his interesting business deals.

A LONG and tenacious memory is an invaluable asset to a jeweler. If he would be successful, he must keep in his mind countless items. He must know the location and price of any number of jewels which he does not carry in his stock—odd pieces, or, more likely, gem stones of great value which he cannot afford to own but which would make a tremendous profit for him if he could sell them. Then he must remember all the little wishes which his customers have expressed to him from time to time, but which he was unable to fulfill at the moment. He never can foretell when one of these expressed wants may coincide with a certain stone that he knows of.

It is rather like the "Help Wanted" and "Situations Wanted" columns in a newspaper. If one could only bring together the jobs and the applicants for

jobs, what a world of newspaper space and money could be saved! And how unenthusiastic the newspapers would be!

Silas Tipping had a remarkable memory in this regard, and he took care to supplement it by making copious notes in a fat leather book that he kept in the drawer of his desk. Here, under the names of his customers, were listed their desires, usually for large or rare stones; while, in another section, he noted those dealers or syndicates of dealers who possessed items of extreme rarity and value. He had made a great deal of money by mutual cancellations of many such bits of information; and had thereby acquired a reputation for being able to supply the wanted article with a minimum of time and trouble to the purchaser.

Silas was sitting one morning, rocking easily back and forth in his com-

fortable swivel chair, his chin sunk upon his chest in his customary attitude of inner contemplation, and his body so relaxed that the stiffly starched shirt bosom which he always affected rose in a smooth and beautiful arc from the bottom of the aperture in his vest to the second of his smoothly pink chins. His eyes behind their gleaming spectacles were mild, and at this moment they seemed fixed on an object miles away. Business, in late June, is negligible in retail jewelry establishments, and Silas was thinking—trying, as it were, to create a customer with an expensive craving which he could satisfy.

During these quiet days, the sound of some one entering the store was a signal for unusual activity on Silas' part; and now, as he heard George Hibben greeting a customer in the outer office—a man, from the voice—he sat up, pulled down his vest, and kept his eye fastened on the entrance to his own little private room for sight of the expected visitor.

George ushered in a gentleman dressed with care and precision in several different shades of brown. His shirt collar was a delicate tan. His tie was a rich chocolate, just one tone darker than his well-made suit, and from his breast pocket peeped one corner of a handkerchief that was blood brother to the tie. His shoes, of course, carried out the motif. He was a man of about fifty, ruddy and robust, with a heavy mustache that, to Silas' eye, had been only recently retouched to conform to the general color scheme. Silas rose, as the gentleman appeared in the door.

"Mr. Tipping?" inquired the gentleman in a tone whose rich unctuousness partook, too, of a certain brownness.

Silas acknowledged his name.

"My name is Farquhar—Henderson Farquhar," went on the gentleman. "Your name was given me by Mr. Carter Field of Chicago, who suggested that you might be able to help me."

At the name of Field, Silas bowed again and motioned Mr. Farquhar to a seat.

"Indeed," he said, "I shall be very happy to do anything I can for a friend of Mr. Field's. How can I help you?"

Mr. Farquhar sat down, and clasped his hands in front of him.

"I'm afraid I'm going to be a bit of a disappointment to you, Mr. Tipping. I've come to sell, not to buy."

Silas smiled reassuringly. "Whether or not I shall be disappointed, Mr. Farquhar," he said, "is not the question. I must buy goods now and then, or I should have nothing to sell. What is it you have?"

"A rather important diamond."

Silas had a momentary twinge of misgiving. When a prospective seller, particularly if he be of the laity, describes a stone as important, it generally turns out to be important in his eyes only, and then largely because of sentimental associations which have no value to the jeweler. Silas saw ahead of him the job, usual in such cases, of persuading Mr. Farquhar that his diamond was not precisely a mate to the Kohinoor.

"Have you the stone with you?"

Mr. Farquhar nodded, thrust a hand into the breast pocket of his coat and drew out a small box covered in black leather. This he opened and swung over to Silas. Silas gazed into it casually and then fought to keep the wonder and admiration out of his face. In the box, on a little throne of white velvet, reposed a diamond of which Mr. Farquhar's word 'important' was a poor and feeble description! It was a round, brilliant-cut stone and seemed compounded all of blue light and flame. It weighed, to Silas' trained eye, over ten carats; and it was a Golconda, if Silas had ever seen one!

"Golconda" is the name given to a diamond from the old Indian mines lying in the district around the fortress of Hyderabad, which belonged to a long

succession of rajahs and emperors, each of whom, in consequence, gloried in the possession of the finest diamonds in the world. Silas' first idle thought about Farquhar's stone had not been as wild as he supposed, for the Kohinoor itself was, beyond reasonable doubt, a Golconda. These mines, in fact, supplied the world with diamonds for centuries before the comparatively recent discovery of the Brazilian fields and those much richer and more extensive workings in South Africa.

Now, alas, the Golconda district has been unproductive for upwards of two hundred years, and the stones possessing the unmistakable qualities of this field are becoming yearly more and more rare. They have a fire in them which is unearthly and a blue which matches the quiet, sleepy blue of the Jagersfontein stone, but which leaps and blazes, sending forth apparent explosions of flame and color. There is no other diamond like a Golconda, and no jeweler who has ever seen one can go wrong in identifying the stones.

Silas took the little box in his hand and lifted it so that the light from the window behind him fell upon the stone. It blazed so fiercely that one could have thought it would set fire to the velvet upon which it lay. There could be no doubt about it! He asked permission from Mr. Farquhar to examine it more particularly and, on receiving that gentleman's nod of acquiescence, he lifted it from the velvet and placed it on the pan of his scales. Against it he set a ten-carat weight and the Golconda overbalanced it. He added fractional weights until he brought the scales to rest, for jewelers, unlike chemists, weigh with a still balance. The diamond weighed eleven carats and three one hundredths.

He took the stone from the scales and dropped it into the fold of a piece of white paper, holding it so that he could look at its side. The color, which

by this method can be accurately determined, ran true. It was as blue in the culet, that bottom-most point of a diamond, as it was across the wide girdle. The stone was well cut; not thick and clumsy as are most old diamonds, but truly and correctly proportioned with one third of its depth above the girdle and two thirds below and all its angles and facets as they should be.

It had been cut, probably, by some old Dutch lapidary who had already, years ago, fathomed the secret of diamond polishing, which is a matter of geometry rather than art. Many old stones, if they happened to be of sufficient importance, were cut thus correctly, while the less valuable and smaller diamonds are thick and unlovely, cut by natives and apprentices.

Silas next drew from the drawer of his table a silk handkerchief and, breathing on the stone to moisten it, he polished it carefully to remove all finger marks and dust grains which might adhere to the surface. Then he picked up the diamond in a pair of tweezers and inserted into the hollow of his eye a loupe, that elongated monocle which jewelers and watchmakers often use. Through this he examined the stone. First the "table"—the large surface at the top—was probed. Through this area one can see down the center of the diamond to the culet; and, indeed, if one hold a diamond up to the light this passage will be seen to be clear, while the surrounding portions of the stone are dark and opaque, as the other facets will not permit the entrance of light. The stone was so deep that Silas had to focus his glass on one cross section after another of it, peering into its magnificent depths for flaws.

There were none. He went over it, facet by facet, looking down through each as though it were a tiny tunnel. Several times he paused and blew gently upon the surface of the stone to free it from some infinitesimal dust grain

which, though it be on the surface, may be taken for a flaw because of its reflection and refraction in any of the fifty-eight facets which a brilliant bears. Mr. Farquhar's diamond was clean—flawless; nor did any chip mar its girdle.

After satisfying himself on this respect, Silas laid the stone again in the box and looked up at Mr. Farquhar, who had been sitting easily in his chair, waiting quietly for Silas to finish.

"Mr. Farquhar," said Silas, after a second, "that is an important diamond. Although praise of the goods one is about to buy is contrary to the best tradition, I don't hesitate to say that it is a most remarkable stone! I shall make you an offer on it, and a high one—based, of course, on my possibilities of selling it. You are not bound to consider my offer if it does not suit you. It is made contingent on your being the rightful owner of the stone with power to sell. That I am taking for granted."

"Of course. The stone has been in my family for generations. You can easily verify that, if you wish. I understand your feelings in this regard; but there is no need to worry. Naturally, I wish to get as much as I can for the stone, and I came to you because I had heard that you would be fairer in your dealings than any one else. I should like to hear your offer."

Silas had sat studying Mr. Farquhar through this little speech. The diamond was a beauty—a thoroughbred. He wondered if Mr. Farquhar was the same. That gentleman had as much polish, certainly, as his diamond. But Silas felt, somehow, that he would do well to examine Mr. Farquhar with a mental loupe, searching for the flaws he believed he would find. Mr. Farquhar was too meticulous in his dress, too carefully rehearsed in his speech, to be absolutely genuine. Silas decided on his plan. He would make an offer in good faith and make it as high as he felt he could possibly go. Mr. Farquhar would

probably not accept. The owner rarely does, in such cases. Then Silas would see.

"I have two ways of handling a matter of this sort, Mr. Farquhar. I can tell you what I feel that I should like to own the stone for, and you can sell it outright to me, if that is satisfactory to you. Or, if that does not suit, I can work with the stone on commission. I will submit it to such of my clients who may be interested, and when I get what seems to you to be enough, I can sell it, retaining ten per cent as my fee. I will give you, in cash, thirty thousand dollars for the diamond."

Silas paused. Mr. Farquhar appeared mildly interested. "It is, of course, possible," Silas continued, "that you may realize more in the other way—I mean working on a commission. I leave the choice to you. I can assure you, however, that you will not get more than thirty thousand dollars for it on a blind offer from any other dealer."

"What do you mean by a blind offer?"

"One such as I have made you—a noncompetitive bid. Of course, had I known that some other dealer had made an offer of, say, thirty thousand, it would be an easy matter for me to offer a few hundreds more. It has been done. For that reason I must ask you to keep my offer in confidence, and, to be fair to me, if you show it elsewhere, to agree to take only blind offers."

Mr. Farquhar nodded. "I see. And I shall do whatever you wish about it. I did not have any definite idea as to the value of the diamond, but I do wish to realize more than thirty thousand for it, if possible. I would prefer to have you sell it for me on a commission, but I must approve any sale before it is made."

"Of course. Now, will you leave the stone with me, Mr. Farquhar?"

Mr. Farquhar hesitated. "Why—I don't suppose it makes much difference.

I hadn't planned to. In fact, I had never thought about it, one way or the other. It's been in our possession constantly for so long that it will seem strange to be without it."

Silas smiled. "It will make it rather more difficult to sell if I haven't the stone here to show. However, it's a very unusual diamond, and I can probably swing it, if I can get in touch with you and have the stone here at a moment's notice."

"I'd prefer that—at first, anyhow. If I get more hardened later, I will leave it here." Mr. Farquhar reached into his pocket and drew out a card case. He handed a card to Silas. "I shall be here for the next six months. You can get me at any time at this number, and I can be here with the stone inside of half an hour." He picked up the diamond and put it back into its case and the case into his pocket. He stood up and extended his hand to Silas, who rose with him.

"Good-by for the present, Mr. Tippling! I have every confidence that you will be able to help me and I shall not take the stone elsewhere until you have told me to. Thank you for your courtesy!"

Silas shook his hand, which was somewhat cold and limp, and walked with him through the store. As they passed before the cases there, filled with all the wonders which Silas had to offer to an expectant world, Mr. Farquhar turned to him. "I can readily see by looking at these things that you would be the logical man to handle this proposition. You must have a tremendously wealthy clientele to be able to carry such a stock."

Silas himself looked at his cases. Here was a necklace, all alone, lying on a creamy velvet bust. It would go to any one who had three hundred thousand dollars to spend for it. That emerald, lying cool and living green here, although it weighed less than five

carats, would cost its purchaser fifteen thousand dollars, exclusive of the ring for which it was intended. Sapphires as blue as the Adriatic and as deep as night lay beside diamonds whose color and brilliance were only surpassed by that of Farquhar's stone. It was very pretty, and did not take in all the countless smaller articles stowed in cases and trays in the shelves of his cabinets under the counters.

Mr. Farquhar indicated the cases again with a sweep of his hand. "I feel reassured!"

The two men smiled, Mr. Farquhar warmly and ingratiatingly and Silas in a rather preoccupied manner, as though he had something else on his mind. They shook hands and Mr. Farquhar left.

Silas walked back to his office and sat for some time in thought, his finely kept hands spread on the desk before him. He was considering Mr. Farquhar's diamond from every possible angle. It certainly was a beautiful stone! He thought over the offer he had made for it. He felt that, in the present state of the market, twenty-five hundred a carat was as high as he dared go. He had made it an even thirty thousand dollars for convenience in figuring. If some one wanted it, fifty thousand dollars was not too much for such a stone. It was unique. There were no comparisons of value upon which to base a figure. It was worth what one could get for it, and an unscrupulous jeweler might even raise this last figure by fifty per cent and succeed. Silas felt that fifty thousand was the top to which he might go, and not have his conscience bother him.

He fell now to cogitating on Mr. Farquhar. He wondered why the man had made an adverse impression on him. Nothing you could lay your hand on, but something seemed to rub him the wrong way. Here was a perfectly harmless man, polite, courteous, per-

haps just a little too well dressed, and Silas felt the hackles rise on the back of his neck at the very sight of him. He called for his stenographer and dictated a cautious and circumspect letter to Carter Field.

These details attended to, he set back, half closed his eyes, and dove deep into the recesses of his memory. Man's brain is a curious piece of apparatus. A large, purplish lump, covered with a network of veins, seamed and furrowed with countless convolutions, its workings and ramifications have always been a puzzle and an enigma to mankind.

Here is Silas, motionless, calling forth from the past the picture of a diamond which he had once seen and handled, which was like the one which Mr. Farquhar had shown him that morning. Some one had such a diamond and wanted another. If he could remember who it was, and what the stone was like, it might mean many thousands of dollars to him. A large, blue, brilliant, round, flashing diamond. He had handled it—one, two, four years ago. Nineteen twenty-four. Summer. Was it summer? Late spring, anyway. She sat there—across the table. Had it in a little chamois bag! Now who was that? He pounded his forehead with the heel of his hand in an effort to remember.

Woman in black. Widow. Who were his widows? He closed his eyes and groaned with the intensity of his effort. Widow—rich—had a big diamond— Wait! He sat up suddenly, his eyes gleaming, and plunged into the drawer of his desk after his little black book of names. He fluttered the pages aimlessly, groping with uplifted head for a further clew. Rich widow. Just—a—second!

Ah! There she was! He thumbed the index open to the letter C, ran his forefinger down the page, and then, with a broad smile of satisfaction, laid

the book down open on the table before him. There, in his neat, tiny handwriting it stood.

"Mrs. Sarah Colby. Looking for ten-carat brill. Fine blue. Has one. Wants a match."

So it was old Mrs. Colby. And she could do it, too! Fortunes from two such husbands could buy many a Golconda like Farquhar's, and not miss it. He slapped the book shut with a bang and pursed his lips as though enjoying the savor of his find. He'd get in touch with the old girl to-morrow! Hope she hadn't gotten one somewhere else. If her stone was as he remembered it, Farquhar's diamond would be a wonderful match. His mind again at ease, he went about the day's affairs in a glow of satisfaction.

The next morning, he dispatched a note to Mrs. Colby, telling her merely that he had found something which might be of great interest to her, and asking her to tell him when he could see her. It was a sure sale to him, if he could only make Farquhar's ideas meet with Mrs. Colby's. He had hardly gotten the letter off when George Hibben came in and sat down at the table opposite him. Silas, with that geniality which comes from a knowledge of work well started, glowed at him over the tops of his glasses. George was evidently full of something. It beamed from his eyes, and was tripping already from his tongue. Silas smiled at him, noticing his excitement.

"Well, out with it! What's on your mind?"

George sat back, making his statement casually, but so obviously bringing forth a big piece of news that Silas almost laughed aloud.

"Well, I've got a little matter on hand. A rather good thing, if it turns out."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Ought to run up to about fifty thousand!"

"So? Who's going to do all this?"

"My Mrs. Blake. You remember that elderly lady who always buys for cash? She's gotten a knife for her nephew and a little watch and so on. Well, the other day she came in when you were out to lunch, and she showed me a diamond. Say! I've never seen anything like it! It was a round stone—big! Weighed about ten carats, anyway, and it was a gemmy gem! She was taking it down to put it in her safe-deposit box, and stopped by to show it to me. Said she might want to get one like it some day. Well, I didn't think much more about that part of it, although I did remember the stone. But to-day she was in, and said that she had had a stroke of good fortune, and was ready to consider getting another stone like hers. Say! Why, it's the most beautiful stone—Why, what's the matter!"

Silas had sat up suddenly, shifting in one motion from the attitude of one who listens indulgently to that of one who is vitally interested in what he is hearing.

"Never mind! Tell me what you know about Mrs. Blake!"

"Well, she's a woman in her fifties, I guess. She dresses in black, and she came in here about two weeks ago, for the first time. I waited on her and we got to be very friendly. She wanted her watch fixed, and we did it for her. We got to talking as I showed her around, and she seems to know a lot about stones. She talked about some pieces she had, and said she'd bring them in some time and let me see them. I thought she'd break out a lot of junk; but when she came in with this baby—well! If you hadn't been out to lunch, I'd have shown it to you. She's bought some little things, as I said, and I asked her about opening an account, but she said she never did that, she always bought for cash, no matter how much. Her name's not listed in the credit

book; but money's money! If she pays cash for a stone like the one she had—— Boy! She'll have to hire a truck to bring the roll up here! What about it?"

Silas looked at him with a grin on his lips.

"Nothing, except that you have competition, that's all!"

"You mean somebody else is trying to sell her a stone?"

"No. It's the other way around. Somebody else is trying to buy a stone like that—or at least, I hope she is—and I'm trying to sell it."

George sat up, his eyes boggling out of his head.

"Well, say! Have you got the stone?"

Silas nodded, chortling in his glee. "I have! A gem, too! An eleven-carat Golconda!"

"Oh, Lord! Listen! Mrs. Blake is red hot, too. No fooling! How about letting me take a look?"

"It isn't here. Remember the man all in brown that you brought in the other day? Well, he has it. I offered him thirty thousand spot cash for it, and he couldn't hear it. Said he'd rather work on a commission. I dug up Mrs. Colby—remember her?—who has a fine, ten-carat stone; and I'm going to try and get her to bid on it. I've written to her about it just this morning. If you really think your Mrs. Blake is interested, I'll get the stone, and you can show it to her."

"She is! She told me when she was first in with her diamond that she was planning on getting one, and had been for years. Then she came back to-day all excited. She had made a barrel of money in Chicago, where she used to live, and was all set. I told her it might take months to find it, but she said that was all right. She had the money laid aside, and could get it any time. She told me she was ready to go big for it, because her other stone

cost the late Mr. Blake many nickels. Say! This is hot stuff! Talk about luck! Have you really got one, no kidding?"

"Absolutely. It sounds good, George. I wish I knew a little more about Mrs. Blake. Wait a day or two. I've written to Carter Field in Chicago, asking about—— Say! Did you say your Mrs. Blake came from Chicago?"

"Yes. But she's staying at the Oglethorpe, now."

"H'm! My man's from Chicago, too. Funny if they had to come here to New York to make a deal. Well, I've written to Carter Field, and I'd rather wait until I hear from him before I do anything definite about selling the stone. When I do, you can have first whack at it. How's that?"

"Fair enough! But how about Mrs. Colby?"

"Well, it'll probably take some bargaining to get Mr. Farquhar and our customers together; and if Mrs. Colby overbids Mrs. Blake—there you are! I don't want to have them run the thing up above its real worth, though. Of course, we get a commission on it; but just the same, it wouldn't do to stick anybody, just on that account. We'll see. I ought to hear from Carter Field any time, now. If you put it over, it'll be a big thing for you. I hope your Mrs. Blake has got this cash habit firmly rooted in her system."

"I think so. She seems to be obsessed with the idea."

"Good! We're off! Let's see, now, who has the luck."

Silas grinned at George, who grinned in return and left the office in a state of mild lunacy. The letter from Carter Field came in the afternoon's mail. Silas read it with interest. Carter Field made some personal inquiries, and went on to say:

About Henderson Farquhar. I knew him some years ago, but haven't seen him for a long time. If I recommended you to him, it

must have been casually and long ago, for I don't recall it. Not that I wouldn't do it, you know. He went broke in a peculiar business deal here, and it rather put him under, socially, too. He has, or rather his wife had, before she died, a lot of fine jewelry. I suppose the poor devil is trying to raise some funds. The stuff is his, more than likely. I don't think you need to worry on that score.

Silas nodded his head as he read. That was probably the trouble. Farquhar's difficulty had stamped him, and Silas had sensed it. Well, if the man was trying to come back, Silas was willing to go more than halfway to meet him. He called in George, and told him the news. George listened with interest, and was eager to get away to tell Mrs. Blake that he had a diamond which might be the one she wanted. Silas nodded to him, opening the next letter. He glanced at the signature, and looked up quickly, catching George just as he was about to leave the office.

"Hey! Wait a minute! Here's one from Mrs. Colby. I'll read it."

He glanced over the few lines, and then, with a chuckle, read them to George:

"MY DEAR MR. TIPPING: Your very mysterious note came to me. You have me all in a flutter—expecting marvels. Heaven help you if you haven't them to show me! I'm a very querulous old woman, and I hate disappointments! I shall be in your office Thursday next.

Sincerely,

SARAH COLBY.

"Well, there you are! We'll give Sarah a run for her money, anyway. I'll call Farquhar right away, and you find out when you can get hold of Mrs. Blake. Let's go!"

Silas swung round in his chair and seized his phone. George ran out to his own desk to call Mrs. Blake at the Oglethorpe. Silas reported success. Mr. Farquhar would arrive at ten o'clock the next morning with the stone. George could not get Mrs. Blake, but left word to have her call him. This

she did about three o'clock that afternoon. George told her his story and she arranged to be at Tipping's the next morning at eleven. The two men got together in Silas' office and prepared their campaign.

George's plan, sprung full armed from his excited and teeming brain, was to show the stone as a part of their stock, recently acquired, sell it and have an end to it. Silas shook his head.

"Whoa! Can't do it, George. Stop and think. How much are you going to ask for it? You don't know what price to put on it. Suppose you get forty thousand for it, and then find that Farquhar won't sell for that? Then where are you? Or suppose you put it at forty and she won't pay that? And then you find that Farquhar would be satisfied with thirty-five? How about that? No, George, it's got to be a slower process.

"We've got the stone here and we know that Farquhar wants more than thirty thousand. In a deal of this sort, the only possible thing to do is to put all our cards on the table, tell her the whole story and take her bid. If it's acceptable, all right. If it isn't, we can tell her so and let her try again, if she wants to. All we can do is warn her if we feel that she's offering more than the stone is worth. That's the only way to handle it. If Farquhar had put a definite price on it, it would be easy. But now— Well, we've just got to let it work itself out. All I hope is that they'll both be reasonable."

The next morning at ten, Henderson Farquhar arrived and left the stone with Silas until noon, carrying away a receipt for it. Between the time of his departure and Mrs. Blake's arrival, shortly before eleven, George Hibben walked around the office as nervous as a hen on a hot plate. He watched the door, glanced at the clock every five minutes and, had she not entered when she did, he would have been, as Silas

remarked, cutting out paper dolls in another five minutes.

He took her to a seat at one of the small tables in the front of the showroom and hurried into Silas' office to get the stone. Silas handed it to him with a broad grin and a wink which said, "Good luck!"

George carried it out and opened the little leather case with the air of a conjurer extracting marvels from thin atmosphere. Mrs. Blake was impressed, to put it mildly. She gave every indication of feeling that that stone was the one thing she needed to make her life complete.

"Oh, heavens! That is perfect! That is *so* like my stone! My dear Mr. Hibben, I *must* have it! It is *just* the stone! Can you imagine how that would look with mine? You remember how much mine was like this? It is a duplicate. Now tell me, quickly, how much do you want for it?"

George sighed. It was rare that he had a customer so eager, so willing to pay great sums of money for such an important piece. He hated to throw cold water on this ardor, but it had to be done. He explained the situation.

"Oh! And this man wants me to make an offer? But what do I know about such things? I know I want it, and that it is a very fine one; but how much is it worth? Fifty thousand? Seventy-five?"

George went on, slightly dizzy at this woman's casual mention of such staggering sums.

"We hope to be able to get it for you for considerably less than either of those figures," he said. "Mr. Tipping has already made an offer of thirty thousand, which was refused. If I were you, I should try thirty-eight, which would give the owner nearly thirty-five, after our commission is deducted. We can submit that and see how it works."

"Do you think you can get it for that, Mr. Hibben?"

"We can try, Mrs. Blake. The owner can do no more than refuse. A transaction of this sort always takes time, you know. That will give us a start, and then we can work from there on. That's about the lowest possible figure, anyhow. We know that we could not get it for less. I haven't talked to the owner myself. Mr. Tipping is handling that end of it. You may be sure that he will do all he can to prevent the price from becoming inflated."

"Oh, I can believe that! He was very highly recommended to me. I can trust the reputation of Tipping's."

"Thank you, Mrs. Blake." George touched the stone with his finger. "This is what you want, then, is it?"

"You saw my stone the other day Mr. Hibben. Don't you think it is very like?"

"As I remember it, yes. I should say that this was an excellent match. Probably as close as you could find in a long time. Of course, I am saying that only from my memory."

"Well, I am more familiar with my stone, of course, than you are, and I am satisfied that this is precisely what I want. It is so much like mine that it is uncanny! If I hadn't been looking at mine this very morning, I should be suspicious!"

George smiled. "I'd like to see your diamond again, Mrs. Blake. Why don't you bring it up again and let us compare it with this one, side by side? Two such stones together would be a sight worth seeing!"

Mrs. Blake looked closely at the Farquhar stone and then up at George. "I may do that. But I hate to carry my stone about the streets except when I absolutely have to. When do you think you'll have a chance to submit my offer?"

"We can do that in a very short while. I don't know, of course, whether the owner will make up his mind immediately to accept or reject it, but we'll

communicate with you as soon as we know, anyhow!"

"Do you think I'm giving enough?" Mrs. Blake leaned forward seriously. "I don't want to run the risk of losing that diamond, now that I've seen it. I feel as though I *must* have it! I'd rather offer a little too much than lose it by being slightly lower than some one else."

George shook his head. "I don't know how to advise you, Mrs. Blake. I've told you what we offered for the stone. The fact that you have a mate to it makes it considerably more valuable to you. A pair like that are worth more than twice as much as a single stone. You might easily get one hundred thousand dollars for two such diamonds. It's up to you."

Mrs. Blake sat a moment in silence, fingering her lip. She looked up, suddenly, reaching a decision. "I'll tell you! You have my authority to increase my bid for the diamond to as high as forty-five thousand dollars, if necessary. Naturally, if you get it for less than that, so much the better. Let it stand that way." She rose. "I'll come in again to-morrow. Perhaps you'll have word by then."

George escorted her to the door, the Farquhar diamond in its case clutched in his hand. This was a big deal! If he could put over a forty-five-thousand-dollar cash sale—— Boy! He bade Mrs. Blake good-by and hurried back to Silas. To him he told the story, begging him to get in touch with Mr. Farquhar. Silas took the diamond from the excited young man, and opened the case. The Farquhar Golconda, glorious, fiery and blue, blazed up at him.

"Wonderful stone, isn't it, George?"

"It sure is! And hers is darn near as good! If I remember it, it's almost as big, and just as blue. She may bring it in to-morrow."

Silas looked up. "That so? Well Be sure to let me see it, if she does."

Two such stones together would be rare! And Sarah Colby has another. Sarah, bless her, will be here Thursday—that's day after to-morrow—and then the fur will fly. Here's luck, George, and may the best man win! You can't ask for better than that."

"Oh, Lord!" said George lugubriously, "I hope not."

He turned here, at the sound of some one entering the store. It was Mr. Farquhar come back for his stone. As he went into Silas' office, George crossed his fingers, closed his eyes, and put a charm on him to be reasonable. After he had gone, half an hour later, George hurried in to Silas.

"Any luck?"

Silas shook his head.

"No. He's holding out. I think he wants fifty. Think your Mrs. Blake will go that high?"

George shrugged. "She may. She certainly wants that stone!"

"If she has the mate to it, she might afford to pay fifty. Otherwise, no. We'll see her stone to-morrow and tell her then. Farquhar may drop at that, particularly if it's dribbled out to him slowly enough. Hold everything, my son, and hope for the best."

"Did he take it away with him?"

"He did. I'll bet he sleeps with it! He's a queer bird, you know. I can't make him out. I'll be well satisfied, George, when we're all through with this deal. That man, somehow, disturbs me. So much so, that I wouldn't sell him a nickel's worth, and I wouldn't buy, either, if it wasn't for Carter Field's letter. Well, we'll see."

The next morning affairs began to move rather faster. George came into Silas' office rather crestfallen, but obviously excited. "Mrs. Blake is on the wire. She doesn't want to bring her stone in, because she hates to carry it around loose with her. She wants to know if she can see the other stone for a while this morning, as she's going

to Chicago and wants to make a final offer for it before she goes."

Silas' eyebrows rose. He thought for an instant. "Tell her to come ahead. We'll get Farquhar's diamond here and give her another shot at it. Now, run along. I've got a lot of thinking to do."

George scurried back to give the waiting Mrs. Blake the message, and Silas started on his thinking. He rose from his creaking swivel chair and walked slowly back through the showroom to the work offices. Here he stood benignly for a few moments, watching the industry there. This room was long and narrow, and along one side, where five great windows admitted the clear and steady light from the north—as essential to the study of jewels as it is to painting—were the desks of his men. A steel grille separated them from the rest of the office, in which sat his bookkeeper and the young lady who managed the switchboard and took care of the firm's correspondence.

Behind the grille sat first, Tom Harris, head of the diamond office, and hence controlling the lifeblood of the business. The diamond office is that particular department which buys, classifies, and distributes all loose stones and pearls, gathering them in with one hand, as it were, and releasing them with the other; controlling, valuing, watching.

Next came the special-order desk, where was handled the mass of detail which is the inevitable accompaniment of remounting customers' jewels and making other pieces from special designs.

Beyond this was the registry desk. Here all new pieces that go into stock are examined and described in the most minute detail. This pedigree is entered into great ledgers, and it is from these that comes the information, often required, that the brooch which was purchased, perhaps twenty years ago, was thus and so, and contained so many dia-

monds of such and such a weight, down to the tiniest iota of description.

Then came the desk of the repair department, that chaotic branch of the trade which is the best of all possible schools for the business. Following this was the watchmaker's bench, with its racks of tools, its acid jars and its little bell jars for covering delicate movements from dust.

Then, last of all, tucked away in a quiet corner, was the pearl stringer, through whose fingers yearly passed untold fortunes in pearls. He sat here, all day long, sliding and knotting and fighting off hysteria, for his business is as wearing and as trying as is any in the world.

Silas looked over his hive with satisfaction, and walked to the desk of the bookkeeper. From this, he picked up one of a set of neat, black-bound books, and thumbed through it. He paused at a certain page and read several of the entries there. Then he put down the book, and spoke to the bookkeeper. This young man rose, nodding, and led Silas to one of the cupboards which lined the rear wall of the room. In this, after a short search, he found what the old gentleman wanted—another black-bound book, very much like the first one—handed it to him and went back to work. Silas opened this book, thumbed its pages carefully, and then, with a nod and a broad grin of satisfaction, carried it back to his own desk, marking the place in it with his finger.

He sat down again in his swivel chair and, turning to his phone, made two calls. One was to Mr. Farquhar, asking him to come in that morning and to bring his Golconda with him. The other was to Mrs. Colby, asking her, too, to call that morning, if possible, instead of the next, and promising her still further delights and mysteries. To both his messages he got eminently satisfactory answers. Then he called to George, outside at his desk.

"George, Farquhar will be here at eleven. If Mrs. Blake comes in, let me talk to her until Farquhar arrives, will you? I won't crimp your sale."

"Sure. Anything you say. Do you think we'll sell it?"

Silas nodded, smiling cryptically, and winked one eye at George, who grinned in return, and then, as he heard the main door open, went to greet the customer. This one was a little, plump, lively lady, dressed in black, who walked into the room with a short, quick step. This was Mrs. Colby, one of the oldest and friendliest of Silas' customers. She had been twice widowed, and her boast was that she always bought her wedding rings at Tipping's. She was full of twinkling smiles and her expansive chins quivered constantly with quiet chuckles. She greeted George, whom she had known ever since he had been a delivery boy, who had respectfully handed her valuable packages at her door.

"Why, George Hibben! How you've grown! You're a full-fledged salesman now, eh? Well! Well!" She shook hands, chuckling delightedly and looked up to see Silas, who had come to meet her, roused at the sound of her voice. "Hello, there! What in the world have you got that's rousing all this mysterious furor?"

Silas greeted her warmly and escorted her to the door of his office. George, who had accompanied them thus far, stopped and would have withdrawn had not Silas beckoned him on. He drew out a chair for Mrs. Colby and all three sat at the table. Silas turned to Mrs. Colby and spoke.

"First of all, have you your diamond with you?"

Mrs. Colby nodded and dove into a small black hand bag, from which she emerged with a chamois pouch fastened with a draw string. This she handed to Silas who opened it and decanted from it a diamond. This, to George's

now extremely interested eye, was as fine and full of color and fire as either of the others he had seen. He gasped. Farquhar's and this one and the one Mrs. Blake kept in the safe-deposit box. What a trio! He had gone years in the business without seeing a Golconda and now he had seen three of them in little more than a week. This was a great game, and one was likely to learn something in it every minute of every day. Silas picked up the stone and played with it, lovingly.

"You want a match to this one, eh?"

Mrs. Colby nodded. "But I don't think you have it."

Silas grinned. "I haven't, yet! But the man who has it and wants to sell it will be here in a few minutes, and we'll try to get it for you!"

George sat up and gurgled. Silas turned to him still smiling. "Poor George! He's afraid I'm going to double-cross him! You see, I asked him to come in here with us because he's vitally interested in all this. He has a customer, too, who wants this stone. She's already seen it and is willing to pay cash for it. He'd like to make the sale, naturally!" Silas' face grew serious, and he leaned toward George, while the wondering Mrs. Colby looked from one to the other.

"George," said Silas gently, "this is one time when you'll have to trust me. Let me talk to Mrs. Blake. I'll try my best for you to get Mrs. Blake to buy the stone; but—and a big, heavy 'but'—I don't think she will. I can't tell you more, now, George. Just trust me absolutely, will you?"

George, rather shocked, nodded wordlessly, his prospects tumbling roarily about his ears. Truly, one did learn things by the minute in this game. What was the old boy up to, anyway? Whatever it was, he knew that it was all right. Trust Silas? Don't be silly!

Silas turned to Mrs. Colby. "And you, too! I'm going to do some very

rash and peculiar things, but I want you to know beforehand that I haven't gone absolutely insane. Will you trust me, too, even if I do seem to have taken leave of my wits?"

"Of course! Haven't I always, in spite of the outrageous jewelry at terrific prices that you've foisted on me? Of course I'll trust you! But, for the love of Heaven, tell me what it's all about before I burst!"

Silas shook his head. "Not a word! If either of you knew, you'd spoil it! Just let me keep this diamond of yours here in my desk for the next hour, and when George's customer comes in, you go into the next office. And you can listen, too. I'd rather you did. I may want a witness. I promise you a thrill." He stopped as he heard Murphy, the doorman, admitting some one. "If that's Mrs. Blake, George, bring her in here. Now, Mrs. Colby!"

Silas rose, and Mrs. Colby, fairly shining with delight at her adventure, followed him into the adjoining office. Silas closed the sliding door between the rooms until it all but met the jamb, and turned to greet Mrs. Blake and George.

George made the introduction, which Silas acknowledged courteously, seating Mrs. Blake. George stood at the head of the table, smiling frozenly to hide the turmoil of doubt and anxiety within him which had been engendered by Silas' actions. Silas glanced up at him and admired silently his ability to assume the poker face. Then he turned to Mrs. Blake.

"Mrs. Blake," he said, "Mr. Hibben has, of course, told me all about your desire to buy that fine diamond. Personally, while I'd like to have him sell it for as much as possible, I thought that the forty-five thousand dollars you authorized us to bid for it was far too much. Fortunately for you, I have succeeded in getting it for less. You may have the diamond, Mrs. Blake for

thirty-five thousand, cash!" He reached into the drawer of his desk as he spoke, and drew out Mrs. Colby's diamond, laying it on the table before Mrs. Blake with a pleased smile.

George's heart stopped for an appreciable moment, and his eyes bulged out of his head, in spite of his efforts to control his expression. Was the old boy nutty? That was Mrs. Colby's stone! He forced his face to assume the duplicate of Silas' satisfied grin as he caught Mrs. Blake's startled glance sweeping up at him, even as he waited the inevitable ruin which must follow such an act on the part of Silas.

Mrs. Blake looked from one man to the other, and her face slowly paled. She poked a cautious finger at the blue, flaming stone that laid there on the black broadcloth of Silas' table. Finally, in a choked voice, she managed to speak.

"But that—that—isn't the diamond—I saw!"

Silas' eyebrows went up in indignation.

"How can you say that, Mrs. Blake!"

"But I'm sure it isn't! I mean—the diamond isn't—that is—— Oh, really! I don't know what to say."

Silas' expression changed. He leaned forward over his desk.

"Are you quite sure that this diamond is not the one you were so enthusiastic over—the stone you offered forty-five thousand dollars for?"

Mrs. Blake grew bolder.

"I am! Quite sure!"

"Will you tell me how you can possibly tell that it is not that same stone?"

"I just know it, that's all! And I refuse to become interested in this one."

Silas sat back, smiling. "You are quite right, Mrs. Blake, although no expert in the world could have sworn that this diamond was not the one you had seen without handling the stone at the very least. I will tell you, since

you apparently do not wish to tell us, just how you know that this is not the other stone. You know it, Mrs. Blake, because you know that Mr. Farquhar has it with him, and will not be here until eleven. Is that correct, Mrs. Blake?"

George's loud, indrawn breath was audible over the room. Mrs. Blake sat still, motionless, her eyes, now startled and frightened, fastened on Silas' keen blue ones, that seemed to look through and through her. She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came for some minutes. Then, hoarse with fright, she spoke, but what she said had little meaning for George.

"The fool! The fool! He told me there were no stones like it!"

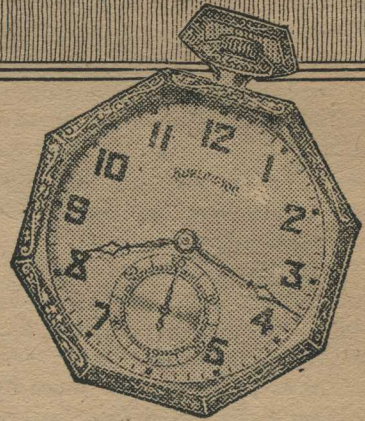
She rose and turned as though to go. Silas rose with her, and George, not yet comprehending fully, but knowing that something had gone terribly amiss, moved to the door and stood between it and Mrs. Blake. Silas spoke now sharply.

"Please sit down, Mrs. Blake!"

At the sight of George effectively blocking the door, Mrs. Blake turned slowly back and sat down on the edge of the chair. Silas resumed his own seat.

"Good!" he said. "Now I'll go on with my story! This is for your benefit, George, since most of what I am going to say is already known to Mrs. Blake." He opened the drawer of his table as he spoke, and drew from it the small, black-bound book which he and the bookkeeper had unearthed from the cupboard that morning.

"Let's start from the beginning," he went on. "Mrs. Blake came in here, all unheralded, and invested fifty-odd dollars in building up a reputation as a cash customer. Then, while I was at lunch, she showed you a particularly fine diamond, and hinted that she might be in the market for another stone just like it at some future time. Then, Mr. Henderson Farquhar calls on me with a



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fine, blue diamond which he wants to sell, and which he wants to sell on commission. Next, Mrs. Blake tells you that she is ready to buy a diamond for herself—a match to her stone. She sees Mr. Farquhar's and finds it absolutely what she wants. You, yourself, could testify that the stones were an excellent match.

"They were, George, because there was only one stone. Mrs. Blake's diamond and Mr. Farquhar's diamond were the same thing. You see, Mrs. Blake was to bid up the price of Mr. Farquhar's stone, and then, just as Mr. Farquhar was about to accept a very fat offer for it, she was going to Chicago. We, being eager to consummate the sale and get our commission, would have advanced Mr. Farquhar the cash he was certainly going to demand for his diamond, waiting until Mrs. Blake should return from Chicago, claim the diamond and reimburse us.

"We should have waited, George, until this great city crumbled into the solemn silence of the dreamless dust, for Mrs. Blake was not coming back. At least, not into our ken. We should have had the Farquhar Golconda. But at what a price! Do you see, George?"

George nodded, dumbly; and Mrs. Blake sat silent, her eyes cast down.

"I'll tell you," Silas went on, "how I know these things. You see, before Mr. Farquhar's—er—business misfortune, his family was well regarded in Chicago. They were listed in the Social Register, for instance. A handy little book, at times. Well, this year's Register does not mention them. Last year's, however, tells the story. I always keep these little volumes for a year after they have become obsolete. They are excellent references. In last year's Social Register for Chicago, then, we have both Mr. Farquhar and Mrs. Blake listed. Mrs. Blake"—he turned the pages of the book until he found the entry he wanted—"has an interesting

entry. Here it is. 'Blake, Millicent (wid. Henry Barnes) Millicent Farquhar.' That is, Mrs. Blake, before she married Henry Barnes Blake was Miss Millicent Farquhar! As a cross reference, Mr. Farquhar's entry showed that he was one of a numerous family, and that one of his sisters, Millicent, was to be found under the name 'Blake.' And there you are!"

Silas sat back, slammed shut last year's Social Register for Chicago, and looked at Mrs. Blake. George, who felt rather withered under this fierce light of understanding which was breaking over him, made dry noises with his mouth. Mrs. Blake did not look up.

"Isn't that just about it?"

Mrs. Blake spoke venomously:

"You are remarkably clever, Mr. Tippling! Much too clever for this world! And now what?"

Silas smiled easily. "Nothing at all, except that I should like very much to have you stay here until your estimable brother arrives, which will be at any moment, now."

Mrs. Blake bowed resignedly. George, at a gesture from Silas, took from him Mrs. Colby's diamond in its little bag and carried it in to that beaming and delighted lady. At the sight of him, she fairly glowed with excitement and admiration for Silas.

"Isn't that man a marvel! Imagine the cold nerve of him, offering that woman my diamond!"

George managed to work up a respectable smile at the idea, although it was a half-hearted effort. He gave Mrs. Colby the stone and turned away. As he went into the showroom, Murphy was admitting Mr. Farquhar, who stepped in in a hurry and whom George escorted with great pleasure up to Silas' office. Silas rose as he came in.

"Good morning, Mr. Farquhar! I'm glad to see you. I hope you have your diamond?"



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Mr. Farquhar nodded, looking at Mrs. Blake with no sign of recognition.

"Yes, indeed! Is this the lady——"

The lady raised her head slowly, and, with a look of unutterable weariness, pronounced the word, "Idiot!"

Mr. Farquhar looked startled. Silas sprang into the breach, and, very seriously and conventionally, introduced them. "Oh, pardon me! Mrs. Blake, may I present your brother, Mr. Farquhar? Mr. Farquhar, this is your sister, Mrs. Blake!"

Mr. Farquhar stood very still, his face not so ruddy, his confidence slightly deflated. Then he, too, turned to the door and faced a very determined George, who knew very well how to handle him, and asked only for the opportunity. Mr. Farquhar faced about again with a shrug, and then looked at Silas.

"And now," said Silas, "since we know one another, I shall make again my first offer for the diamond. And let me advise you, Mr. Farquhar, to sell it to me if you wish to sell it at all! I have spent some time and a little money in warning other potential purchasers of that stone of the trap which you laid for me. None of them are at all eager to set foot in it. I will give you thirty thousand dollars, cash. And I advise you to accept! You have the advantage of me, there. You know that you are doing business with an honest man!"

Mr. Farquhar, completely staggered, looked at Mrs. Blake.

"Take it, you idiot, and consider yourself lucky!"

Watch our future issues for other stories by James Sayre Pickering.

Silas grinned in delight. Mr. Farquhar was still in the dark.

"But—but—I don't——"

"Never mind!" Mrs. Blake was rising to the occasion as her brother crumpled. "Let me run this, now! You've botched it, so far. We accept your offer, Mr. Tipping."

"Good!" Silas turned to George. "Get a check for thirty thousand dollars made out to Henderson Farquhar. He'll indorse it and we'll get the cash for him while he waits."

The three sat in solemn silence while George sped away and returned with the check, to which Henderson Farquhar put a reluctant signature, as he did to the bill of sale that accompanied it. This silence was not broken until George hurried in for the last time with a sheaf of bills, which Silas handed to Mr. Farquhar, receiving the little leather box containing the Farquhar Golconda in exchange.

"There you are, sir!" said Silas finally. "And now, if you will excuse me——" Mrs. Blake and Mr. Farquhar stalked out, gathering the shreds of their dignity about them, past George, who watched them morosely. He turned back to see Silas and Mrs. Colby in the middle of the showroom, shaking hands in high glee. He looked at them sadly and shook his head. Mrs. Colby turned to him and put out a sympathetic hand.

"Ah! You poor child!"

George grinned. "Thanks. Don't worry about me, Mrs. Colby. What was it you called me when you came in? That's what I am—a full-fledged salesman!"

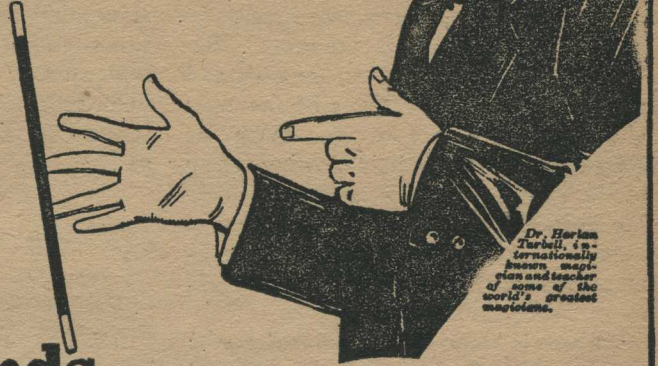
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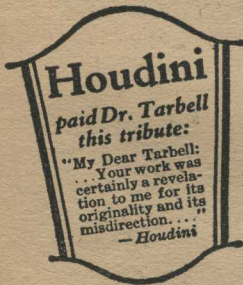
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A Chat With You

WE like to see a hero starting out on the open road that winds and undulates toward a horizon of misty, beckoning hills. The sky is like blue satin above him, the sunshine like nectar. Behind are the petty worries, the dust and roar and honeycomb offices of the city; ahead lies the wide world. With his shirt collar open, his hair blowing freely in the breeze, his hands swinging jauntily in time to his stride and his heart in tune to the universe, he is the embodiment of that spirit which Stevenson admired when he wrote:

"There is some life in humanity yet; and youth will now and then find a brave word to say in dispraise of riches, and throw up a situation to go strolling with a knapsack."

* * * *

NOW and then we have spoken here of the way we like an adventure novel to start.

Of course, every time we read a corking novel we cotton especially to the way it was written, the way the author lured us into his yarn. And we forget, for the moment, that other stories have delighted us just as much.

Actually, then, a novel of adventure doesn't have to follow any rule about its beginning, just so long as it provokes the interest.

* * * *

BUT to-day we say that the above is our pet beginning—the heaven above, the road below, and who knows what marvels beyond the horizon! Fortunately, though, we hope that this con-

fession will not bring a rain of stories, all beginning that way, from our authors. It would spoil everything; there is nothing worse than too much of a favorite thing. And, anyway, to-morrow we may read a novel in which the hero sets sail in a catboat across the China Sea, and that might become our pet.

* * * *

BUT right now we're all for the open road, and Thomas Boyd is to blame. He has been capturing our fancy in his new novel, "Zitza!" You will read it in the next number. His hero is Paul Richards, a convalescent American soldier who, just before the armistice, is basking on a Mediterranean beach on the Riviera. Fed up with monotony, he and a pal, a languid Britisher who is a good sport, set out on the open road, A. W. O. L.

The skies of southern France, old wayside inns, white roads—and then a girl, a beautiful French-American girl. And before the reader is aware of it, he is deep in a network of romance and action that spreads, yea, as far as the isles of Greece! And all that works up, works up in a mounting crescendo until, relieving the tension finally like the rattle of drums and clanging of cymbals, there is *war*! If you want to forget everything and be carried away, read "Zitza!"

* * * *

THAT next issue will be your Christmas holiday one, and we promise you several admirable Christmas stories, in addition to the stirring novel and other items. A. M. Chisholm manfully



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pounded his typewriter day and night so that his "The Genial Mr. Palmer" could reach this office before our holiday number went to press. His manuscript had to travel several thousand miles, too. But it arrived, and you'll be able to read it. It's a corker. We think it must have been very pleasant work, even if it was hard, because the story abounds in genial humor. Mr. Chisholm is a real humorist, not the superficial, wise-cracking kind. He starts deep chuckles rumbling down inside you, and then suddenly makes you roar heartily. There is an old saying that humorists are cranks personally, no matter how good-natured they are in their work. But he isn't like that. He is a warm-hearted, jovial man. Somehow, we don't know just why, he re-

minds one of Chaucer, in his geniality. There is just one other thing about this Christmas story of his—it is distinctly unusual, *distinctly*.

* * * *

AND W. B. M. Ferguson will be there, too, with a story called "Merry Christmas." And so will Henry Herbert Knibbs, with a holiday short story, entitled "Up a Tree."

Besides these, there will be Fred MacIsaac, William Hemmingway and others, rounding out a— No, we've forgotten something. That issue will be rounded out by a pleasant surprise, a novelty. Can't tell you about it now. Christmas is the time for surprises. Just watch for the next number. It'll be on the stands on December 7th.

Editors,
The Popular Magazine,
79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Dear Sirs:

I liked, in this issue, the following stories:

Best: _____ Third: _____

Next: _____ Fourth: _____

Fifth: _____

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My favorite type of story is:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Note: Any further comments will be very welcome. Special consideration is given to the preferences of our readers as expressed in their communications.

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DEPT. 73S

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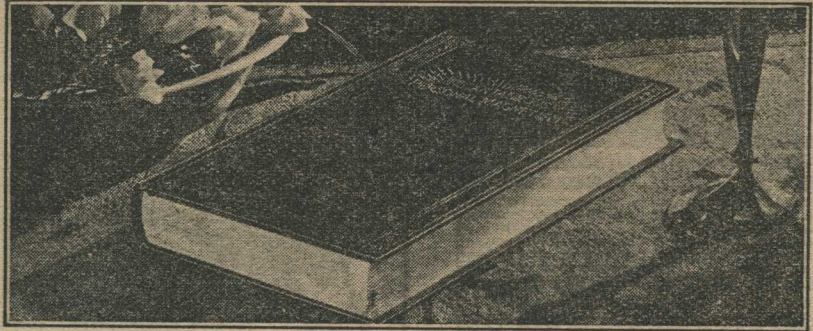
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