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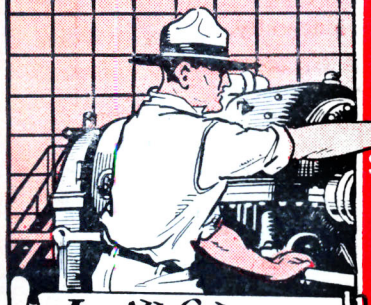

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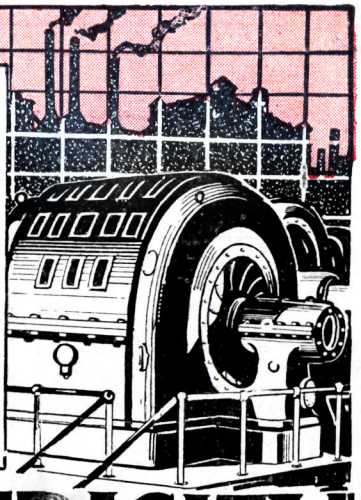

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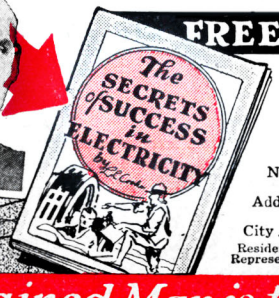

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A throbbingly vivid complete novel of a fear-ridden city.

THE MODERN VIGILANTES, *by Henry C. Rowland*
The beginning of this famous author's fascinating new serial.

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Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.40. This issue dated February 7, 1929.

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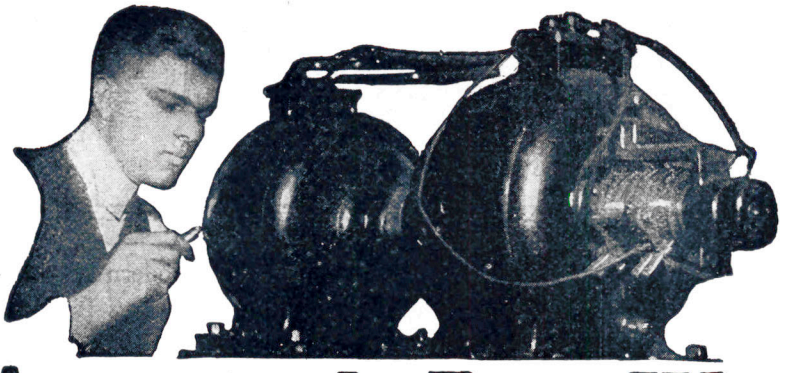

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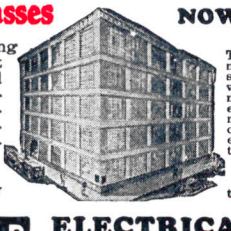

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(*Continued on 2nd page following*)

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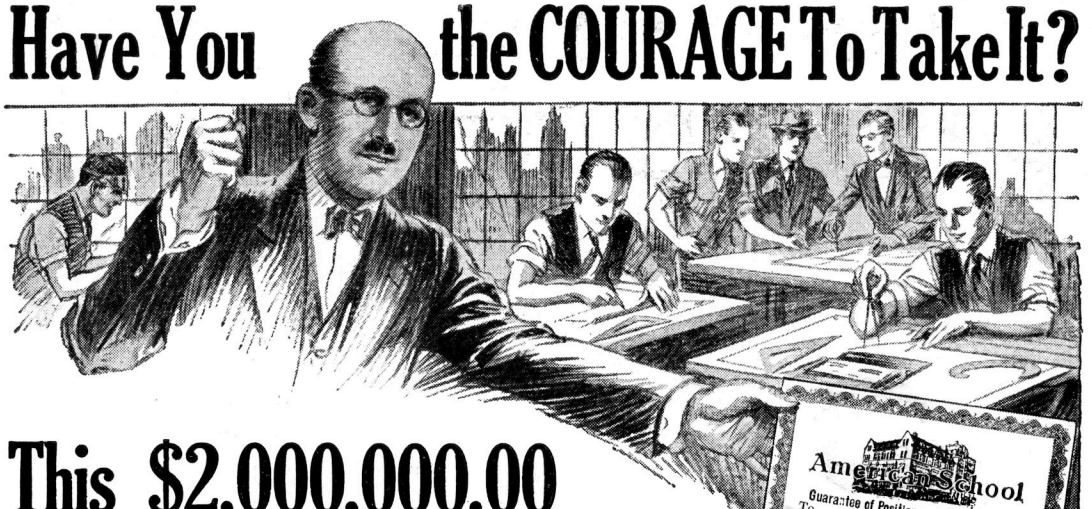

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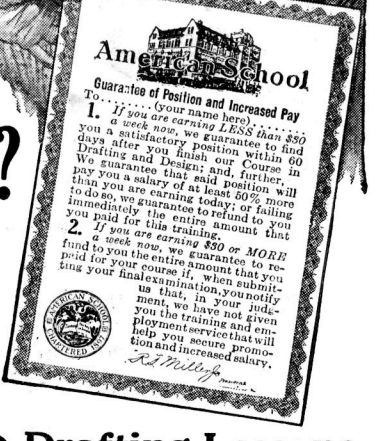

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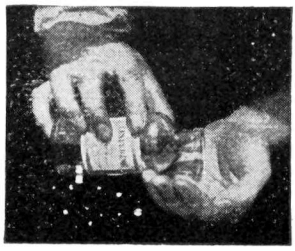

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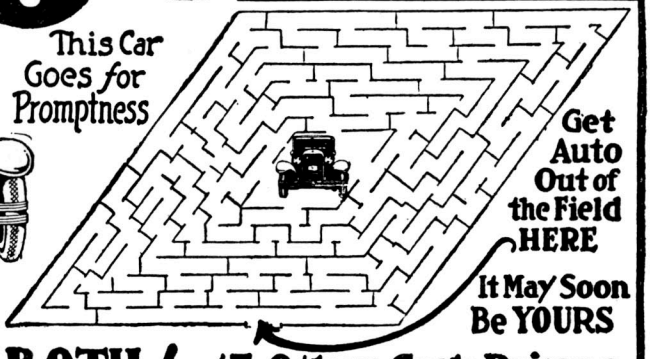

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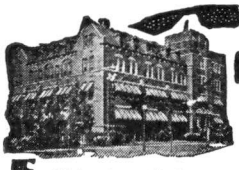

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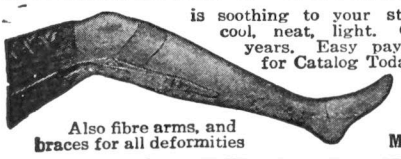

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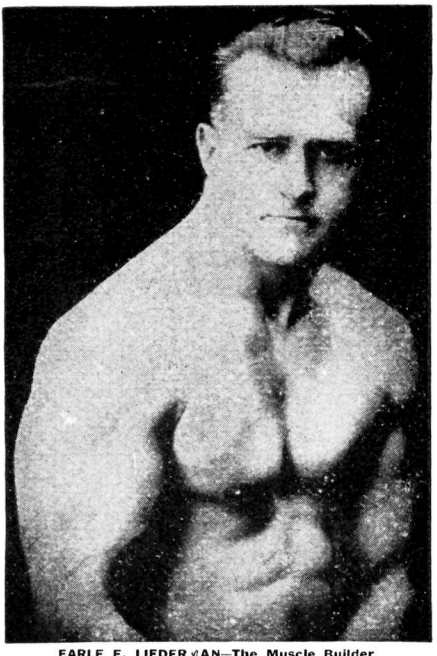

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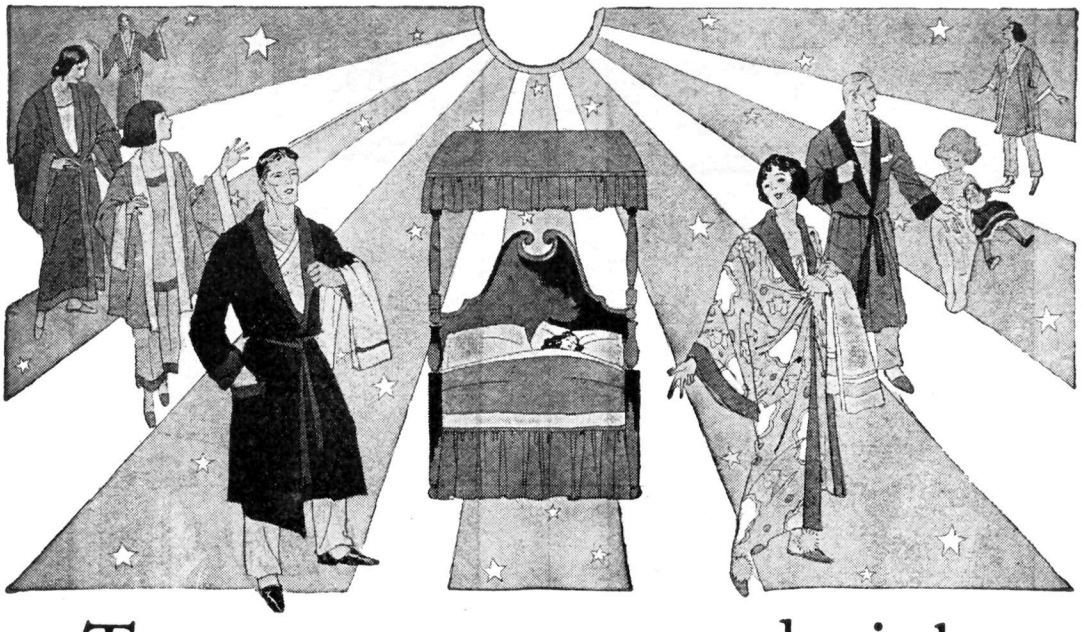

To you...a very good night

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Then quick!—to the gleaming tub, where waits a summery sea!

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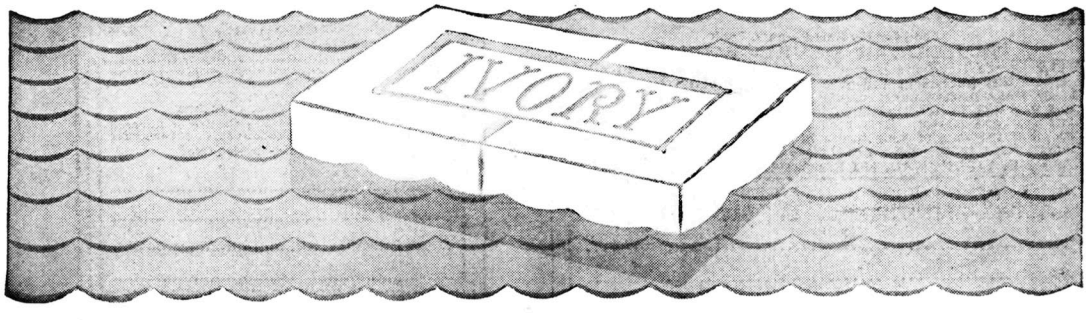


The Popular Magazine

VOL. XCIV FIRST FEBRUARY NUMBER No. 4

THE RACKET TERROR

by Fred Mac Isaac

CHAPTER I.

AN INTEREST IN LIFE.

"LIFE," declared Fletcher Ames, "is a great story told by a poor story-teller. Truth is stranger than fiction but totally lacking in dramatic instinct. If life had given me a square deal it would have permitted a German aviator to drop a bomb on me just after I had filed my exclusive story of the smashing of the enemy lines at Soissons."

Peter Hoskins sniffed.

"In which case you would be dead ten years now."

"And what of it? That surprise attack which broke the German lines and started the great retreat was the biggest event since the world began, the grand climax, the ne plus ultra the I-don't-know-what—and I was in it. Everything since has been insignificant. Do you know where I can get a drink?"

"No. If I did I wouldn't tell you."

"Then, so long," said Fletcher Ames,

and rose and walked out of the city room of the Bolton *Evening News*. Old Pete Hoskins sighed and opened his assignment book. Ames was crazy, of course, but there was a streak of reason in the ore of his nonsense.

Fletcher Ames had been the star reporter of the *News* when the United States entered the war, and his departure as special correspondent with the New England division of the A. E. F. was the newspaper's recognition of his ability.

He had been a great war correspondent. In no time he had been acquired by the big news service of which the Bolton paper was a subscriber, and had won fame along the whole front by his daring, tact and uncanny craft in getting his stories on the cables.

Ames had had a pass which permitted him to travel from the English Channel to the Vosges and had a big automobile to transport him. Soldiers fought the enemy directly opposite and rested on their arms when battle waged on other parts of the line, but Ames was a stormy petrel; wherever there was fighting, there he was to be found. And many times, unarmed, yet in his uniform not to be distinguished from a combatant, he had gone over the top with a regiment whose colonel had no objection to a historian witnessing the achievements of his outfit.

The attack upon the Soissons hinge of the great German salient, which plunged forty miles to the Marne between Soissons and Reims, was a success because it was a complete surprise. Foch attacked on a five-mile front with the first and second American divisions and the Morocco division. He attacked without artillery preparation at dawn on July 18, 1918, and succeeded so well that a million Germans in the salient beat a hasty retreat, which retreat continued until armistice day.

The plans for this movement were so carefully guarded that no correspondent was aware of what was pending; yet, just as the first Yankee division hopped off that morning, Fletcher Ames appeared in his Cadillac, abandoned it and went along with the gang.

When the war was over Ames returned to Bolton and rejoined the city staff of the *News*. He covered fires, railroad wrecks, murders, banquets, divorce actions, prohibition raids, sermons and whatever happened to be on the docket. Other war correspondents wrote books on the war and got into literature in that manner, but Fletcher Ames was not a brilliant writer.

A superb reporter, unequaled in getting facts and setting them down in crisp but unadorned English, he lacked the imagination of the fiction writer and the style.

For a few months he enjoyed the peace and tranquillity of city life, reveled in the comfort of good beds, good food and pleasant surroundings, and then the monotony of things got him.

For a year he had lived amid alarms, had learned to sleep during bombardments, to ignore the crashing air bombs, had grown indifferent to the rumble of .75s, the French rapid-fire light artillery, and had drunk thrills and eaten peril—and for ten years now he had been reporting the inanities of daily incidents in a big city.

Every now and then he vanished for a week, and Peter Hoskins understood that he had gone off on a bat. When he returned he was pale and shaky and broke and ready to go on with the daily grind. The city editor had expected this sort of thing at first, but as years went by and Ames couldn't get the war out of his mind, the reporter became for him an object of great concren.

Fletcher was no longer the star reporter, for no longer did he plunge at stories with his old enthusiasm. After all, he thought, what did they matter? Supposing a miserable thief *did* escape the police, or a scheming actress lost her

breach-of-promise suit, or a society woman refused to permit her photograph to be published? What were these compared to the clash of millions of men in arms?

By instinct he got news and he was dependable in an emergency, but younger men were getting the rewards of brain fag in the solution of newspaper mysteries.

Hoskins admitted to himself that the attitude of newspapers had changed since the war; the papers no longer struggled bitterly for the exclusive item. The counting room had so intrenched itself in the saddle during the years that news was of no importance unless it bore a French date line, and the counting room had filled the columns with syndicated stuff and wire services—much cheaper than a big city staff; and advertising had been permitted to encroach upon space once sacred to news matter.

So long as Hoskins was city editor, Fletcher Ames would have a job; only the poor chap needed more than a job—he needed an interest in life.

Ames was twenty-four years old when he had crossed the Atlantic. He was thirty-four the day he told Pete Hoskins that life had paid him a shabby trick by not ending him for good and all at Soissons.

He was a broad-shouldered, slim-waisted, interesting-looking, old-young man as he left the city room. His black hair was gray at the temples and over the ears. His eyes were dark and arresting, his nose straight, his lips thin and firm, his chin belligerent.

He went directly to the garage where he kept his cheap car, with the intention of taking it out, turning its bonnet toward the open country and driving furiously for hours with complete disregard for traffic. He would wind up at a road house somewhere, persuade the landlord to sell him whisky, and for a few days get the dreariness of daily life out of his system even if he replaced it by poison liquor.

His car was kept in a garage off Main Street, a small garage run by a German named Schultz. As Ames entered he sensed something wrong in the place, and then, from the little office, he heard the sobs of a woman.

So far as Ames was concerned, women might sob all they wanted to—it didn't mean a thing—but when Andy, the car washer, came out of the office with a terrified expression on his broad, stupid face, Ames turned and asked him indifferently:

"What's that yowling in the office? Who is it?"

"It's Mrs. Schultz, Mr. Ames," Andy said. "The word just come from police headquarters that Schultz has been killed."

"Killed? Schultz? Why should anybody kill poor Gus? How did it happen?"

"I don't know nuthin'," said the man. "They picked his body up by the roadside out in Stephens Village. Four bullets in him. I told——"

"Well, what did you tell him?"

Andy looked scared.

"Nuthin'. Didn't tell him nuthin'."

The reporter awoke in Ames. He walked quickly into the dirty little office from which moans and sobs were still proceeding, and faced a fat little woman with glasses and iron-gray hair, who was being held in the arms of a very pretty blond girl whom Ames did not know.

"What's this about Gus, Mrs. Schultz?" he demanded.

Mrs. Schultz lifted a tear-stained face from the shoulder of the girl.

"He's dead," she quavered. "My poor Gus that never harmed a soul. They killed him."

"Who killed him?" he asked sharply. "Why?"

"I don't know. Oh, Anna, what'll we do?"

"Who are you?" asked the girl pointedly. "A police detective?"

He noted absently that she was more than a pretty girl; she was a beauty although she was plainly and cheaply dressed.

"No," he said. "I'm a reporter for the *News*."

"We ain't got nothing to say," said Mrs. Schultz. "You keep still, Anna."

"Are you Miss Schultz? Yes? I keep my car here and I was fond of your father. Andy just told me what happened. Do you know who killed him?"

"Anna," wailed the wife of the murdered man, "you know it ain't safe to talk to reporters!"

"Safe!" exclaimed the girl, her blue eyes hot with anger. "We want them caught, don't we? I'm not afraid to talk. I'll tell you, Mr. Reporter."

"We don't know it was them," persisted the woman.

"Of course it was. What's your name, sir?"

"Fletcher Ames."

"The war correspondent? My brother used to know you, Mr. Ames. He was in the Yankee Division. Arthur Schultz. He was killed in the Argonne."

"I remember him," said Ames. That was not true but he wanted this girl's confidence.

"A week ago a man came to see father. He told him that a garage owner's mutual-benefit association was being formed and that he had to join. The dues were a hundred dollars a week. Father said he belonged to the regular association and saw no reason why he should pay a hundred dollars a week dues to a new one. He couldn't afford it, anyway."

"The Racket!" exclaimed Ames. "The Chicago Racket. So it has reached Bolton!"

"He then threatened to put father out of business. That very night the watchman was knocked unconscious and the tires of a dozen cars were cut. Father had to stand five hundred dollars damage. He called the police and they sent a detective down here. That night he was called to the phone and told his dues were one hundred and fifty dollars per week."

"I told him to pay," moaned the widow.

"The police told him not to," continued the girl. "Father said nobody was going to blackmail him. They put detectives in the garage night and day and nothing happened; but to-day he was called out to Stephens for a towing job and then—and then——" Her composure vanished and she and her mother wept in each other's arms.

Ames' eyes were alight, but he was considerate enough to give her a moment to recover.

"And this man—did he give your father a name and address?"

"Just a card. I'll find it. No name or address on it."

She drew from a pigeonhole of the old roll-top desk a soiled piece of pasteboard. The reporter read:

BOLTON GARAGE OWNERS' MUTUAL BENEFIT ASSOCIATION.

"May I take this? I'll turn it over to the police if they want it," he said.

"Can you do something?" she asked. "Do you think they will catch the murderers?"

"I'll try darn hard—and the police of this town are not corrupt yet. They'll try too," he assured her. "Can you tell me something about your father, Miss Schultz? His age, how long he has been in this country, something about your family?"

She supplied him with the information needed for a newspaper item, and then he thanked her and, rather surprised at the reluctance with which he withdrew, started for a telephone.

Bolton was a New England city of half a million, a contented, quiet, and decent metropolis which had read with wonder of the crime waves in Chicago and New York. Now, in their midst, was a murder which was beyond question the result of Racketeers.

CHAPTER II.

JOB FOR A MAN.

FLETCHER AMES went into a telephone booth, reported the crime and then returned to the office as Hoskins requested. He was surprised to find himself moving briskly and working out, with old-time enthusiasm, the details of the story. For the moment the desire to get away from the grind had vanished.

The police of Bolton, he recognized, were organized to handle traffic, patrol the town and curb sporadic outbursts of crime; but gangsters were something they were unprepared to meet, and organized blackmail was not in their ken.

The chief of police was a fat Irishman who had risen from the ranks of flatfeet; the detective force was almost perfunctory, and the rank and file were old-school patrolmen.

The Garage Owners' Mutual Benefit Association was a Chicago idea, a game to terrorize owners of small garages into paying heavy blackmail. Ames knew that the profits of Chicago gangsters, from scores of associations whose membership was involuntary, ran into millions, and that the person or persons who had murdered Schultz had brought the racket to Bolton.

This was something like, he thought, as he walked rapidly to the office. He hated the humdrum of getting news in a second-rate city after the great life he once had lived. Going after the Racketeers was sporting. It would be perilous, it might mean death—but what of it? Here was a job. He would break up this gang and save the city from the gangsters.

He discussed it with Hoskins.

"We've probably got a half dozen gangsters in our midst," he declared. "They needed a killing to terrify the other garage owners and picked on poor old Schultz. Now, this solicitor has undoubtedly called on a lot of garage men and there ought to be a good description of him available. He has probably left town already. The main guy won't allow himself to be seen, but he'll send out other agents to line up the garage men, and most of them will pay. I want this assignment, Pete. It's active service, the best thing that has come along in years."

"Better trail the police," advised the city editor. "These fellows would have no scruples in killing you if they found you butting in."

"The police of this town are just up to taking in a drunk. They have no stomach for shooting it out with gangsters. Wonder if the boys brought along their machine guns. Get me a permit to carry an automatic, Pete."

"It will be a great story if you can land it," said Hoskins slowly, "and a great public service. If we don't break up the first gang they will multiply. Chicago is getting hot for them. Just the same I hate——"

"Pshaw! It's what I've been looking for. I was starting out on a spree when I heard about the murder of old Gus Schultz."

"It's your assignment, old man. Draw whatever expense money you need and don't bother about reporting to this office until you have something."

"I wish you had seen Schultz's daughter. Imagine that poor old Dutchman having a beautiful child. And, Pete, he had a son killed in the Argonne. I'm going to do a little shooting myself if I find my men. I'd kill one of these fellows with no more compunction than I'd slay a rat."

"Well, it's like old times to see you pepped up about something, but we don't want to lose you. Need help?"

"Have the headquarters man find out what the police have got, and especially a description of that solicitor. Try to find out how many garage men will admit joining the association; some of them will be afraid to admit it. And keep it dark that I'm working on the case. Get my gun permit and buy me an automatic to-day."

"Right," said the city editor.

"I'm off on the job now," Fletcher declared. "See you when we meet again."

He was whistling when he left the office, a habit he had dropped for years. His head was strangely light. This was going to be fun.

Like every newspaper man he had read all he could about the Chicago situation. The Racket business, once it got headway, would be almost impossible to stop because of a congenital weakness of human nature. Being aware that there were unknown men in large numbers ready to shoot down any good citizen who attracted attention to himself, the exemplary citizens were not at all eager to be featured as heading a movement to put down the Racketeers.

In Chicago it was believed that some authorities were hand in glove with bootleggers and gangsters, and merchants and business men expected no protection from those whom their taxes supported. In Bolton, however, the police were honest, the politicians uneducated in crime, and the gangsters could expect short shrift if captured.

On the other hand there was a considerable element of shady and unpleasant people in the city, plenty of good material for a teacher in crime to mold into criminals.

The main guy, Ames decided, must be a stranger in the city. Perhaps his accomplices were natives, or perhaps they had arrived in town with him. But the thing to do was to locate a visitor who couldn't give an account of himself, and start from there.

He hailed a taxi and crossed the river. On the south side of the river could be found what vice and squalor the city possessed. There were a dozen speakeasies which would be worth visiting.

Like many newspaper men, Ames had considered it his duty to obtain recognition in the illicit liquor resorts. Things which made news were always happening in these places, and the crooked element frequented them.

The reaction of local crooks to foreign gangsters in their midst would naturally be hostile, but these resident criminals were not gunmen—just pickpockets, second-story workers, burglars and ignorant yeggs—and they could easily be brought to heel by a firm hand. In a few weeks the Racketeers would have them all working for them. At present some of them might possibly talk.

It was midafternoon and he found most of the dives deserted and their keepers uncommunicative. News of the murder of Schultz had not yet appeared in the papers. At Patrick Carty's, however, he got some slight information.

"Seen anybody who looks strange and curious, Pat?" he demanded as he accepted a glass of beer on the house. "I hear some New York or Chicago crooks have hit town."

"No—yes," said Carty, a red-nosed individual who before prohibition was a poor but honest barkeeper. Now he was a rich one, but he still claimed to be honest.

"There was three fellows in here night before last. Dressed all right but —you know—something wrong with them. And they was talking some chatter that was new to me."

"Italian? Jewish?"

"No, it was English but a lot of queer slang—things that didn't seem to make sense."

"Remember any of their expressions?"

"No, I didn't pay much attention. Tell you who brought them in. Dennis Morgan. Know him?"

"I don't believe I do. Local man?"

"Yep. Some kind of a grafter, I never knew just what. He said they were friends of his."

"Know where he hangs out?"

"Nope, but he drops in here nearly every night. I'll introduce you if you like. What are you trying to find out, Fletcher? I can't afford to have my place get into the papers."

"I heard there were some Chicago gunmen in town," said Ames frankly. "Think those fellows might come from Chicago?"

"I heard them talking about 'Chi' at that. They're strangers to me and I don't want that kind of trade. I buy good stuff and I run a nice place——"

"Can that. I know your stuff and your place. Keep your mouth shut about our talk, Pat."

"I'm deef and dumb," grinned Carty. "Have another?"

"No. I'm working. And unless I'm on a bat I don't drink much. You know that."

CHAPTER III.

UP-TO-DATE CRIME.

THE chief of police of Bolton was a grave, dignified and elderly policeman who had held office under four mayors and was looking forward to retirement on half pay in three years more. He was honest, earnest, capable within limitations, courageous—he had been in Roosevelt's Roughriders in 1898 and joined the police force of Bolton the following year—and just now he was bewildered.

Chief Tom Clancy had always boasted that Bolton was an unhealthy town for crooks. He had five hundred men under him who had learned that grafting would not be tolerated, that their job was to protect lives and property and to put fear into the heart of the evildoer.

Under Clancy, Bolton had been singularly free from crime, and he had the respect and esteem of both political parties, business men and newspapers, who forgave him his increasing pomposity for his excellent services.

Clancy could cope with ordinary police problems, but the new, murderous gangster was something different. He was sitting in his private office at headquarters, gnawing his iron-gray mustache and running his spatulate thumb over a bunch of reports from investigators of the death of Gus Schultz, when Fletcher Ames sent in word he wanted to see him.

Th chief buttoned his uniform coat and ordered the newspaper man admitted. He had known and esteemed Ames for years and he expected to get more out of this conference than he would be able to give.

"Sit down, kid," he said pleasantly. "Chew on this." He proffered a plump cigar which Ames refused, to light a cigarette.

"I'm working on the Schultz case," said Fletcher. "What do you make of it, chief?"

"New game for us," Clancy replied. "Racket stuff."

Ames laughed.

"Then you do keep up with the times. What are you going to do about it?"

"Put the whole gang in jail," said Clancy with false confidence.

"Got a line on them?"

"Sure. You know me, feller."

Ames blew a cloud of smoke toward him derisively.

"I know you. I know your cops. Nice old fellows. Help ladies across the street, mismanage traffic and pick up an occasional second-story worker and a murderer when he leaves a trail a yard wide. Never draw a gun until it's too late."

"Is that so!" cried Clancy indignantly. "I've kept crime out of this town for fifteen years since I held this office. Bolton has the best record of any big city in the East. Where do you get off, criticizing me and my methods?"

"I like you, Tom, and so does everybody else, and I like your methods. They've been all right up to now, but you never had professional gunmen to contend with before. You'd better put your whole force at target practice, for you're up against the real thing at last."

"My theory," said Clancy, "is this. Three or four yeggs have blown into town and tried to start a Chicago Racket here. I'll round them up and send them over the road and that will be the end of that."

"Too bad this State hasn't got an antigun law like the Sullivan law in New York. You'd better get the mayor to put it up to the legislature right away. Then if you grab a suspicious character and find a rod on him, you can send him to State's prison for a long term without waiting until he murders an eminent citizen."

"You know," said Clancy, "I was thinking of that."

Ames chuckled. He knew Clancy hadn't thought of it.

"And you'd better get the city to buy automatics for your cops and throw away those old service revolvers they carry. And you'd better add a few machine guns to your police equipment."

"Go on!" laughed the chief. "This isn't the World War."

"The gangster," said the reporter earnestly, "is something that you must reckon with in the future. There's millions in this Racket idea and there are thousands of half-crazy gunmen to be drawn on by the leaders from Chicago and New York. You've got a few hundred low-lifers in this town that would enlist in the Racket game at the first invitation."

"They can work it in a big city," declared Clancy, "but not in a town like this. We'll round up the feller who shot Schultz and send him to the chair and that will show them. From what I read, the Racket can only be successful when the pols and the police are standing in with it. You know how clean politics is in Bolton, and you know me."

"The Prohibitionists thought when they passed the Volstead act that they had done away with liquor by making the sale of it illegal. As soon as it was found that hundreds of millions of dollars were to be made by selling it illegally, the bootleggers came into existence, and with the bootleggers have come the gangsters who shoot to kill.

"Now, this fake organization of various business concerns is a better game than bootlegging because they can get big money without giving anything for it, and because ordinary human beings are so cowardly. So you may look for a lot of Rackets in Bolton and a lot of murders of poor fellows like Gus Schultz. There may be two or three Rackets going already, with Schultz the first victim stubborn enough to protest."

"Yeh? I think you're crazy," declared Clancy. "But here's what I'm doing: I'm sending out a general order to-night to arrest on sight any tough-looking characters and bring them in for questioning. I'll get these murderers in the round-up, see if I don't."

"Well," said Ames, rising, "I wish you luck. Got a description of this solicitor for the garage owners' society?"

Clancy scratched his head.

"That's a funny thing," he said. "It doesn't seem as if anybody had been approached but Gus Schultz. I had reports on eighty garages and not a one of them has been asked to join."

"They lie," Ames declared. "Don't you see it, Tom? The murder of Gus has frightened them stiff. They'll all pay the blackmail and keep their mouths shut for fear they will be taken for a ride like poor old Gus."

"I don't believe it," said the chief. "They wouldn't all be cowards. How the deuce are we going to find the feller if the people who have seen him refuse to admit it?"

"That's a problem for you, old man. I'm having my paper apply for a permit to carry an automatic. I'm going after these Racketeers and I may have to shoot my way out of trouble."

"You can have it, of course. And don't try to work without the police, kid. You come to me if you get onto anything."

"I expect to call on you at need. Remember what I said about a stiff penalty for carrying a gun without a permit and equipping your men with up-to-date weapons."

"I'll think it over," replied the veteran policeman.

CHAPTER IV.

ANDY GIVES UP.

POLICE headquarters had failed to give the reporters stationed there a description of the organizer of the garage Racket. The afternoon papers had carried the story of the murder of Schultz for refusing to join an alleged association of his business associates, and the other garage men had put padlocks on their mouths.

Ames had to know what this organizer looked like and had considered calling on several garage owners of his acquaintance; but he knew they would be as chary of talking to him as to a policeman. It was evident that the authorities need expect no help from the garage business in the pursuit of the criminals.

It occurred to him, however, that Andy, the helper at Schultz's Garage, had seen this blackmailer. Andy's manner in telling of the death of his employer had indicated that he knew something. And Andy was not a strong character; sharp questioning might get his knowledge out of him. Ames arrived at the garage at seven o'clock in the evening to find the fellow engaged in washing a car.

Glancing into the office as he entered, he saw that it was empty. Mother and daughter had gone home with their grief. He went to his own car, inspected it casually and then strolled over to the wash stand.

"Seen that association fellow since the first time, Andy?" he asked with apparent carelessness.

"No, sir," said Andy vehemently.

"Then you did see him the night he called on Gus? What did he look like?"

Andy shot a side glance at him and did not answer. He was a tall, stoop-shouldered, gangling, vacant-faced blond man of about thirty, with pale, shifty, blue eyes.

"Told the police you didn't see him, didn't you?" said Fletcher.

"Ja."

"And you've just admitted to me that you did see him. For that you could be put in jail. Lying to the police."

Andy dropped the hose upon the cement floor and turned to the reporter.

"You ain't going to tell, Mr. Ames? I always took good care of your car."

"You pretended to be fond of Gus and you won't help catch his murderer."

"I told Gus he had to pay that feller," declared Andy. "It ain't my fault he got killed."

"Well, I'm going to tell the chief of police you lied to the detective, and you'll be behind the bars to-night. I'm sorry, Andy, but you've got information that doesn't belong to you."

"I ain't telling nothing to no police," said the man stubbornly. "They ain't no good. They was told by Gus all about it, and they let him get killed."

"You're afraid they might kill you. Is that it?"

"I know enough to keep my mouth shut."

Ames changed his line of attack.

"I don't know that I blame you. But what would be the harm of you telling me? I won't give you away. We're here alone; nobody is listening in——"

"You'd put my name in your paper."

"I promise I won't."

"And you won't tell the cops on me?"

"I promise you that, too."

"All right. It was about a week ago when a feller came in here. I was washing a car, same as I am now. It was about this time. He was a swell-dressed guy, but a little feller."

"How was he dressed?"

"I dunno. Guess he had on a gray suit and a necktie with yellow in it, and tan boots and white spats."

"What did he look like?"

"I dunno. Didn't notice much."

"Did he have black hair or light hair? What color were his eyes? And was he clean shaven?"

"He had black hair, all right, and his eyes were black, too, and I don't think he had a mustache. I know he didn't."

"Talk like an Italian?"

"No. He talked tough, though. He wanted to know where was the gazabo that owned the dump. I told him that Gus was home to dinner but would be back in half an hour. He walked around the place, looked over the cars and said he would be back. Gus came in, and a few minutes later this guy came in and they went into the office. Pretty soon he went out, and a few minutes later Gus came out swearing and told me this fellow tried to hold him up for a hundred dollars a week."

"And when was the next time you saw him?"

"I didn't see him no more. He called Gus on the telephone. Honest, Mr. Ames, that's all I know. Honest it is."

"Well, that isn't much. Keep your mouth shut."

"And you won't give me away?"

"I told you I wouldn't."

At least, thought Ames, as he got into his little car, he had a description of the Racket advance man and was one up on the police, but the description was not much good. The fellow was probably an American Italian, but all Italians had black hair and black eyes, and a taste for yellow-striped ties, and spats if they had the price of them. There were a couple of hundred young sports on the other side of the river who answered Andy's description.

It came into his mind to call on Miss Schultz, in the hope that she might have information she had withheld when he had talked with her in the garage office. But she had sorrow in her home to-night and had probably not withheld anything; and he was honest enough to admit to himself that it was her pretty face which was drawing him. He dismissed the impulse and stopped his car outside a small restaurant.

He enjoyed the dinner and marveled at his own high spirits. Things were not so bad; the world wasn't as dull as he had supposed. Old Tom Clancy and his cohorts were up against a proposition too big for them, and one Fletcher Ames would have to catch the Racket men for the police. Egotistical, perhaps—but for years Fletcher Ames had not possessed a high opinion of himself, and the return of his self-confidence was like a tonic to him.

He dawdled over his dinner and smoked a cigar with his coffee. Then, observing by the restaurant clock that it was after nine, he finally paid his check, got into his automobile and drove across the bridge with the intention of spending an hour in Carty's speakeasy. He hoped that the friends of Morgan, the grafter, might put in an appearance.

CHAPTER V.

GUNS OUT!

BEING aware of a distaste on the part of Mr. Carty for automobiles parked in front of the old brick house on Blake Street, in the basement of

which was offered liquid entertainment, Ames parked his car against the curb. He had just shut off his motor when, on the opposite sidewalk, he saw a policeman pass a man, suddenly turn and grasp him by the collar.

The arrest took place under a street light, and Ames recognized the patrolman as a genial old cop named Lafe Brown.

The fellow in his grasp was short and squat, wore a soft, black hat pulled over his eyes, and had his hands thrust into the side pockets of his coat.

The policeman and captive and Ames were the only persons in the narrow street at that moment.

Brown had his club in his right hand and had the man's collar in his left. Like a flash the captive twisted around, his right hand snapped out of his pocket, he pressed a gun against the paunch of the officer and fired four shots.

Involuntarily, Ames uttered a shout of horror and wrath. Unarmed—for he had not yet received his automatic—he grasped the door of the car to open it and leap out. The murderer turned, took aim at him and fired three shots. Fletcher dropped at sight of the gun pointed in his direction, and heard two bullets *ping!* again the steel side of the machine and one go through the windshield. He dared not lift his head for a moment, and when he did he saw the assassin turning the corner into Gray Street, a block distant.

He hesitated whether to pursue or run to the aid of the patrolman. Without a weapon, of course, it was suicide to chase that desperate gunman. Then he saw poor Brown move. He ran to his assistance, but in the time it took to cross the street the officer died.

The shots had brought the street to life. Windows banged open and heads stuck out, and from front doors men and women were running to the scene of the crime. Out of Carty's den came a dozen men, and a policeman appeared around the corner from Blake Street, blowing his whistle and running as fast as his bulk would permit.

In less than a minute a hundred people were massed around the body of the martyr to law and order. The policeman arrived breathless, followed by a sergeant, and they immediately commandeered the car of the newspaper man to carry the victim to a hospital—although it was evident that he was beyond the aid of physicians.

The sergeant sat in the front seat, and Ames told him that he had witnessed.

"A general order went out to-night for patrolmen to arrest and search anybody who looked suspicious," said the sergeant. "The captain lined us up and read it to us, and told us that the chief said there were gangsters in town and they had to be rounded up immediately. Poor old Brown thought he was taking in a pickpocket. Just grasped him by the collar and threatened him with his club, did he? Never even drew his gun? He asked for it and he got it."

"You fellows have got to learn to shoot first and ask questions afterward when dealing with gangsters."

"And if we shoot an innocent person, think of the howl that will go up. It can't be done, mister. He nearly got you, too. That windshield shot was pretty low. Must have missed you by inches."

Ames laughed cheerfully.

"I've been under fire before," he said. "It's like the old days in France."

They unloaded the dead policeman at the hospital, whence an ambulance carried him to the morgue. Ames gave as good a description as possible, then drove to the *News* office to write the story.

He asserted confidently that the killer of Policeman Brown was not the man who had called on Gus Schultz, although he might be *one* of those who slew him at Stephen's Village. From the descrip-

tion given by Andy, he knew that the squat man with the black hat over his eyes was not the solicitor for the garage Racket.

The latest killer was dressed in ill-fitting garments, while the Racketeer was a snappy dresser.

However, Ames was careful not to describe the visitor to Schultz's Garage. At the office he thankfully received a new automatic and a police license to carry it. If it had been in his possession, he thought, he would have brought down the cowardly murderer of Brown, for, although a noncombatant, he had learned to shoot in France.

While he was finishing his story, police headquarters telephoned information which required that it be rewritten.

Near the gas house on the South Side, Officer Mooney had stopped two men whom he considered as coming under the description of the type mentioned in general orders. More wary than Brown, he had covered them with his gun. One of them fired from his pocket and laid the officer low; then both took to their heels. Mooney was mortally wounded.

As a result of Chief Clancy's general order, two faithful but incompetent policemen had been lost to the department, while, of two score brought in by other officers, not one of the prisoners failed to give a satisfactory account of himself, and not one was found to be carrying a weapon.

So began the reign of terror for Bolton.

From the standpoint of the unknown gang organizer, the advertising given him by the indignant morning newspapers was worth much money because it put his prospective victims in the proper mood to be milked.

As Fletcher Ames pointed out to Hoskins, the average human being, when drilled and set in an organization, displays audacity in the face of an enemy—a fact amply demonstrated by the behavior of the hundreds of thousands of drafted men in the A. E. F. But the same soldier who would go steadfastly against machine-gun fire, dressed in a uniform, armed with a rifle and supported by his comrades, falters in the face of unknown peril.

The citizens knew this morning that there had arrived in Bolton a band of desperate men who singled out victims and shot from ambush, and those who were in business drew back in alarm from attracting attention to themselves by giving aid or information to the police.

Although Chief Clancy visited half a dozen garage men whom he knew well, in the hope of discovering from them the method of communicating with the head of the alleged benefit association, all denied vehemently that they had joined or had even been approached. Yet he knew by their manner that they lied.

An unidentified milkman telephoned to the *News* late that afternoon, saying that he had been visited by a man representing a dairymen's league and ordered to pay dues of fifty dollars per week. He refused to give his name, but he was found to have phoned from a pay station in a big drug store. He supplied, however, a description of the visitor, which tallied with that which Fletcher had secured from the terrified Andy—with the addition that the man had a birthmark on the side of his neck about as large as a silver dollar.

Clancy talked with Ames in the evening.

The chief's ordinarily placid visage was disfigured by anxiety, and his soft heart was wrung by the grief of the families of the patrolmen who had been killed. He had visited their homes during the afternoon.

"I'm going to get these vipers, Ames," he declared. "I'll get them or they'll

get me. You were right yesterday in taking the gang stuff so seriously, and I was wrong. I know now. I saw the mayor and asked for a gun law like the New York law. Nothing can be done until the legislature is in session, and that don't happen till January. Our city ordinance isn't any good—fifty dollars fine or thirty days in jail. I'm telling the force to draw guns when making an arrest and fire at the first suspicious sign. I'm rounding up all known criminals and putting the screws on them, and I'm having all cheap hotels and lodging houses visited. I'm raiding all the speakeasies and closing them tight till this blows over. I'm going to bust up this Racket game, you bet."

"Trouble is," said Ames," that the crooks can get outside the city limits in ten minutes in a fast car. Who's looking for this smooth yegg who visits the garage men and milkmen? What are the arrangements about paying the dues?"

"I can't find out, confound it! Of all the white-livered, chicken-hearted hounds, these Bolton business men are the worst. I can't find anybody who admits he has agreed to pay—let alone how he is going to deliver the money. Why don't your paper get after the cowardly business men instead of banging the police the way it did to-day on the editorial page?"

Ames laughed.

"Most likely the editorial writer isn't eager to be taken for a ride. You can't blame the civilians, chief. The police are supposed to protect them, and the death of Schultz demonstrates that you can't guard them against this sort of thing."

"But we got to have something to go on," complained the old man.

"What do you know about Dennis Morgan?"

Clancy pressed a button and told the sergeant who entered to look up Dennis Morgan.

"I don't know him myself."

Five minutes later Detective Sergeant Ferguson entered.

"We haven't anything on Morgan," he said. "I know him. He's supposed to be a steerer for a couple of poolrooms, and he scrapes acquaintance with strangers at the hotels and tries to get them to go out to Loftus' in Stephen's Village and try the wheel. We can't pinch him for that."

"He was in Carty's place the other night with three hard-looking strangers," the reporter stated. "I thought he might be worth questioning."

"Put a man on his heels, Ferguson," ordered the chief. "We don't want to overlook anything."

Ames took his leave and again ate a solitary dinner. Clancy was utilizing all his bag of old-fashioned police tricks, but the reporter thought he wouldn't have much success. Meanwhile, Ames decided to watch his step when approaching policemen. The latest order of Clancy's to the force was perilous in the extreme, for it turned out five hundred very nervous and rather stupid coppers with authority to shoot on little or no provocation. Innocent citizens were likely to suffer.

During his dinner that impulse to consult with Miss Anna Schultz attacked him again. Schultz would be buried to-morrow, and to-night a good many family friends would call to pay their respects. If he did drop in it would be only decent, and if he found the girl willing to talk it was possible that he might get useful information. Besides —well, darn it, he did want to see her —he wanted to know how she looked when she smiled.

He looked up the address in the telephone book, got into his car and drove out to the shabby but genteel street on the north side of the river—a street of two-family houses, mostly in need of paint and repairs. Schultz lived at No. 47 Laurel Street.

There were lights in all the downstairs rooms—evidently the family was entertaining—and there were three cars drawn up to the curb. Fletcher rang, and Miss Schultz opened the door. She wore black and her face was pale and there were dark circles under her big blue eyes, but she smiled in surprise when she recognized him. Her smile, he thought, was very sweet and very lovely.

"Mr.—er—Mr. Ames," she hesitated. "It is kind of you to come."

"I was fond of your father and I wanted to pay my respects," he said smoothly. She drew back as he entered the hall. She motioned to a room at the right, through the open door of which he saw three men and two women sitting.

One of the men was a brother of the murdered garage keeper—a small, thin man with a chin whisker who looked uncomfortable in a black suit and high, white collar.

The second was Andy, the car washer; and the third was a stranger —some family friend, no doubt.

Mrs. Schultz was sitting in a rocking-chair, a bundle of black crape, touching her eyes now and then with a white handkerchief bordered in black.

The second woman was about her age and looked like her sister.

There were folding doors to a back room—closed, Ames was glad to see, because the body of Gus Schultz lay behind them.

The quintet had been talking in low tones, but stopped and stared at Ames while Miss Schultz introduced him.

CHAPTER VI.

ANNA ASKS ADVICE.

"NOW I take this as very kind of you," said Mrs. Schultz. "Mr. Ames keeps his car in our garage," she informed the company. "Have a chair, Mr. Ames." The newspaper man seated himself and thought the meeting oppressive; but he found the third man rather interesting.

He was a big, heavy-shouldered person with a bull neck and a pair of small, greenish-gray eyes. He had a huge nose which had been twisted at one time, a wide mouth and a solid chin. His hands were big, but fat and white, and he wore large, patent-leather shoes.

His suit was of blue and there was enough of it to make a tent, for he must have had a fifty-inch waist. His hair was scant and black, with a touch of gray in it. He had bristling black eyebrows.

"Have you known Mr. Schultz long?" asked Ames of this individual, to make conversation.

"Oh, sure," he said heartily. "I'm in the truck-repairing business myself. Got a shop on North Wenham Street. Gus used to send me a job now and then. He was a reg'lar, Gus was." He smiled, and that demonstrated that his teeth were unusually large and unexpectedly white.

Ames couldn't make out from his speech what his nationality might be. He had the manner of a saloon keeper rather than of a truck repairer, and his hands did not look like those of a hard-working mechanic. He might be Irish, but his name was given as Lokwen, and Ames didn't know what country owned such a combination of letters. Lokwen talked like an American street product, which he probably was; but his profile was almost Semitic. His eyes were mean and his big teeth made his smile rather wolfish.

"What line are you in?" asked Mr. Lokwen of Ames.

"I work on a newspaper."

The fellow digested this slowly.

"Thought she said you kept a car in the garage."

"That's true. I'm here as a friend, not as a reporter."

Lokwen nodded.

"Yeh? Guess everybody liked Gus. Dirty shame to bump him off like that. Papers said it was because he wouldn't join some garage association. That's pretty rough stuff."

"It's ten o'clock," Mrs. Schultz said at that moment. "We ought to go to bed early, seeing what is going to happen to-morrow." The thought caused her to snivel, and the visitors regarded her uncomfortably until her sister joined her in her sobs. Then Schultz's brother rose, and Andy and the others followed his example.

Miss Schultz, who had not entered the room, appeared now to usher them out. As he passed her, Lokwen said in a low tone:

"You better do what I say. It's a good proposition."

Ames had lingered and shook hands with the girl as the others were going out of the front door. He pressed her hand warmly and received a slight answering pressure. Her eyes sought his face and what they found there reassured her.

"I wonder—would you mind staying a minute? I have nobody to advise me."

"Anything I can do," he declared. He was unaccountably pleased that she should wish to consult him.

"Come into this room," she said. "Just for a minute." She opened a door at the left, and he entered a plain but comfortable-looking dining room.

"Please sit down," she invited. He dropped into a straight-backed chair and she sat in one pleasantly near at hand.

"You seemed so kind yesterday," she said. "I'm only a girl, and mother has no head for business, and my uncle—well, you saw him. We can't carry on the garage and we must sell it. Mr. Lokwen came to-night and offered us five thousand dollars for it."

"How much does it earn now?" he asked.

"I don't exactly know. Father was a very careless bookkeeeper. I think it must cost us three or four thousand a year to live, but I don't know how much in debt he was. We have five thousand dollars insurance."

"I should think that five thousand was a very low price for a garage which earned even three thousand dollars a year. You ought to get more."

"Yes, but we don't know how to run it. Andy is honest but he has no intelligence."

"I don't dare advise you," he said hesitatingly. "If you refuse this offer, it's possible you won't get another very soon. This blackmailing of garage owners will depress the price of property for a while. Would Lokwen leave the offer open for a couple of weeks?"

"No," she answered. "He said he has another place in view and he has to have a decision to-morrow."

"How long have you known him? Is he an old friend of your father's?"

"I never saw him before to-day. He may be a friend of father's, but father never mentioned him. He offered five thousand cash."

"Have you got a long lease?"

She nodded. "Five years to run. The rent is low, a hundred and fifty per month, and it's a good location."

"I think he told me," said Ames, "that he had between forty and fifty cars at twelve dollars a month. Say six hundred a month in rentals. Other profits ought to be forty or fifty dollars a week. If you could find a competent man to run it, you ought to get an income of a couple of hundred a month out of it, and six per cent of five thousand dollars is only three hundred a year. Will you let me find a manager for you? You are giving the place away. If you have five thousand dollars from insurance, you don't need cash within a few months anyway."

"Would you do that for me?" she asked, with a smile which warmed the cockles of his heart.

"It would be a pleasure to help you. I don't like Lokwen. I think he is trying to take advantage of you. And I know a man who is honest and would go in for about thirty a week and a percentage of the profits."

"I am terribly grateful. I want mother to have an income. I teach school myself and make thirty-five a week, so I can get along all right."

"I'll have a man up to see you to-morrow night," he promised. "Now, Miss Schultz, have you told me all you know about this case?"

"Why, yes. How could I know anything more?"

"It seemed to me that your mother acted as though she feared something would happen to you and her for telling about the benefit association."

"Father talked everything over with her, and she heard the man threatening on the telephone after the tires of the cars in the garage had been cut. She was just terrified with no reason. Of course, they wouldn't injure women."

"I don't think these gangsters are gallant," he said slowly. Do you mind if I bring the man to see you to-morrow night? I could perhaps make a better bargain with him than you."

"I'd love to see you, Mr. Ames. And —er—you said you were working on this case."

"I am."

"Will you please be careful? After what they did to those poor policemen, I am sure they would resent a newspaper reporter——"

Ames laughed to conceal the pleasure which her concern for his welfare gave him. For years nobody in the world had been concerned about the welfare of Fletcher Ames save old Pete Hoskins.

"I shouldn't be surprised if they resented it, but I hope I will be able to put them in a position where their resentment will be of no consequence."

She looked at him rather whimsically.

"You feel very sure of yourself, don't you? It must be wonderful to have so much confidence."

"I sound like a swell-headed pup," he said wryly. "I just mean I am going to do my darnedest to catch the murderers of your father."

"Father is dead, and catching them won't help him. I should hate to have anything happen to you."

"Why, thank you! I shall not do anything foolish; but these fellows have only just started. There's a new kind of criminal abroad in the land, Miss Schultz. They are bloodthirsty tigers. They get an insane joy from murder and unless they are put down quickly they will disorganize life for all of us. I know you are tired, and I'll say good night. Send Mr. Lokwen about his business."

She accompanied him to the door, offered her hand again, and he descended the steps with an unfamiliar sense of elation.

As he was about to enter his car a man stepped from behind a tree. By the light of a distant street lamp he recognized Lokwen.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. LOKWEN IS HEELED.

"I JUST wanted to speak to yer a minute," said the truck repairer, with what was meant to be an ingratiating smile. Ames faced him courteously.

"You a frien' of the family, maybe keeping company with the chicken?" he asked.

"Say!" exclaimed Fletcher. "Haven't you got your nerve to ask questions like that?"

"No offense, feller. I thought—did she say anything to you about the offer I made her?"

"Yes, she spoke to me about it."

"I thought that was it. That's why I waited. Now, that's a good offer, Mr. —what's your name?—Ames, ain't it?—

and she ought to take it. If I hadn't liked Gus I wouldn't offer so much."

"That garage pays five thousand a year and you know it. You offer one year's income. I consider that you are trying to take advantage of a widow and orphan."

Lokwen's manner changed to one of truculence, and his lips twisted in a snarl.

"You damn buttinsky!" he exclaimed. "Now you listen to me. Gus never made five thousand out of that place, and he got shot because he wouldn't pay a tax of five thousand a year. That's what your paper said. Them benefit-society crooks ain't through with that garage. Things are liable to happen there and all the customers will take their cars away. The place won't earn nothing, see? It's dead."

"What do you want it for?"

"It's a better location to repair trucks in. I'm figuring the cops will round up these gunmen and business may be all right again. I'm taking a gamble, but I'll probably lose."

"Humph!" scoffed Ames. "You look to me like a sure-thing player."

Lokwen clenched his big fist and stepped closer. He towered three inches over Ames who stood five feet eight in his socks. Lokwen was broader and fifty pounds heavier, but the reporter did not give way. He thought the truck repairer was soft and he fancied his own skill and agility.

"I'm telling you to mind your own business, see?" Lokwen threatened. "The girl wants this deal and you butt out of it. Otherwise——"

"Otherwise you'll try to beat me up," Ames said scornfully. "The deal is off, Mr. Lokwen. Miss Schultz has decided to put in a manager and remain in business."

"You dirty meddler——" Then, deciding the situation required action rather than words, Lokwen started a right swing so professionally that it seemed he might have got his nose twisted in a prize ring.

Ames blocked the swing deftly with his left and drove a straight right for the pit of the stomach, where his opponent was softest and most prominent. His fist sank in almost to his elbow—or so it appeared to him. The big man's breath came in an agonized wheeze, he staggered back, and his right hand went to his hip.

Out of Fletcher's side coat pocket came the new automatic.

"Up with them!" he commanded. "Up, up!"

The greenish-gray pig eyes glittered with fright and astonishment, and the hands went up.

"Turn around!" Ames snapped.

Lokwen turned slowly and the reporter tapped his hip. There was a hard lump there. He investigated and drew out an automatic pistol which was a twin brother of his own.

"Got a permit to carry this?" he demanded.

"You give me my gun. Yes, I have."

"Show it to me."

"Say, are you a dick?"

"Just a newspaper man."

"Well, I changed my clothes to come to the wake and forgot my permit," the truck repairer explained.

"Well, you go home, get your permit, go to police headquarters and maybe they'll give you back your gun."

"Look here, mister, we had a scrap and there ain't any need for being nasty. You won, didn't you? Give me my gun and we'll call it square."

"I've no fancy for a bullet in my back," retorted Ames as he climbed into his car. "If you have a right to carry this weapon, prove it to the police."

He started his engine, and above the roar heard Lokwen shouting and saw him waving his fists and sputtering with fury.

"For this you'll get yours, young feller. You'll get yours and soon."

The car drove forward and he left the man snarling on the curb. Ames was very well pleased with himself. That Lokwen was contemptible enough to attempt to cheat two helpless women while Schultz's body lay in its coffin in the house, justified a worse lacing than he had received. The loss of the weapon was a further punishment, for automatics are expensive. Ames felt sure, though, that the man had no right to wear a gun.

"This town is getting like the old Western mining camps. Guns on every hip, murder, blackmail—holy smoke!" His self-satisfaction vanished.

Gus Schultz had been lured out of his garage to a suburb and slain by gunmen. The murdered man's house was visited, while he still lay there in his coffin, by a person who tried to buy the garage and who carried an automatic on his hip. Lokwen's last words had been an assurance that he would get Ames soon, and Ames, like a fool, had driven off laughing.

This fellow Lokwen was probably one of the Racket gang whom Fletcher Ames had started out to capture, and whom the police were eagerly seeking. But the reporter, after having disarmed the man, had driven off and allowed him to escape, when he should have been taken to headquarters and turned over to the police.

Fletcher braked his car and considered going back, but discovered then that he had driven a mile before the folly of his conduct appeared to him. Lokwen would not have lingered in the vicinity.

Well, he knew now exactly what one of the gang looked like, and with the description he could give it ought to be an easy matter for the police to pick him up.

Crestfallen, he drove to the police-headquarters building and turned in the captured pistol to the sergeant at the desk.

Sergeant Murray, an old acquaintance, turned to the card catalogue of gun permits and looked through the Ls.

"No permit," he stated. "What was the matter with you, Ames, that you didn't turn him over to a cop? He was going to draw a gun on you, wasn't he? You took this off of him. We could have held him long enough to give him the works. You're a hell of a reporter!"

"It's not my business to arrest your gangsters for you," he replied tartly, because the sergeant only voiced his own opinion of himself. "See if he's in the phone book. He's supposed to be in the truck-repairing business on North Wenham Street."

The sergeant ran his finger down the Ls in the phone book and shook his head.

"Not listed. Let's look in the business directory."

He dropped the book after a minute and looked disgustedly at the newspaper man.

"Right in your hands you had a gunman and you drove off and left him," he reproached. "Give me a description of him. Or were you blind in both eyes?"

In describing the man in detail Ames was able to add to the ordinary description that he had unusually large and very hairy ears.

"Well, you saw something anyway. In about ten years you might know enough to make a patrolman on a suburban beat."

"You go to the deuce!" retorted the disgruntled reporter. "Let's see if you can find him on that, or whether I have to bring him in myself, after all."

He telephoned, after leaving the station, to an automobile salesman of his acquaintance whom he knew to be capable, who had told him a hard-luck story a few days before of having been discharged because business was slack. After getting him enthused over the idea of managing the Schultz garage,

Ames sought his bed, the hour being eleven.

He went to bed, but not to sleep. Lokwen puzzled him. As a truck-repair man, it was reasonable to believe that Schultz's garage would be worth five thousand dollars in cash to him; but he was not in the repair business in Bolton and did not look as if he had ever been a mechanic. Nor did he comply with Ames' impression of a gunman.

It was possible that he might be the leader of the Racketeers who had begun operations in Bolton; but the reporter did not believe that, either, for the fellow was dull witted, slow moving, and did not strike one as audacious. He *was* mixed up with the gang, however. But as a gangster what use could he have for the garage?

Stay! Modern gangs operate on wheels. These crooks were planning operations on a large scale and they must have a base. If they owned a garage and ostensibly did a storage and repair business, they could use it as headquarters without awakening suspicion. And the garage whose owner had been the first victim of the Racketeers was least likely, of all in the city, to attract police attention.

Lokwen had called upon Mrs. and Miss Schultz, passed himself off as an old acquaintance of the husband and father and offered them, in their hour of need, five thousand dollars in cash. He had every reason to expect that his offer would be accepted—as it would have been had Ames not intruded. That a newspaper reporter should become the confidant of Miss Anna Schultz was a bad break for the gangsters—something that they could not have foreseen.

If only he had let the deal go through and then set a watch on the new management of the garage, he would have bagged the criminals quickly. It might not be too late, at that. Why not tell Anna that she had better accept Lokwen's offer?

Well, in the first place, it would be robbing the girl. There was no reason why she should sell her business for a quarter of its value, to help the Bolton police to capture the crooks. And, on second thought, it probably *was* too late. The unknown head of the gang must have brains, and Lokwen had undoubtedly got in touch with him before this and told him what had happened at Schultz's.

The leader would consider an acceptance of the offer after the fight between Ames and Lokwen and the disarming of the latter, as suspicious. If he were wise he would fear newspaper reporters more than he did policemen. And the fact that a reporter was advising the Schultzes would convince the gangster that he was buying a trap for himself. He would find some other headquarters.

Fletcher Ames made a mental note to ask Chief Clancy to watch sales and transfers of ownership of all the garages in the city, and to assign plain-clothes men to duty in Schultz's garage, lest the enemy molest the new manager of the place.

The morning papers were full of rumors of new Rackets. The auto-accessories merchants, the butchers, the expressmen and the druggists were being organized, according to the morning *Bulletin;* but these statements had nothing to support them—no confirmation as yet that there was a gang association of garage owners. Editorially all the papers demanded stern measures by the authorities, and one paper suggested the replacing of Chief Clancy with an up-to-date policeman acquainted with gang methods.

Ames found Clancy frothing at the mouth over the editorial which demanded his removal.

"Maybe they'd like to hire some one from Chicago or New York," he said with heavy sarcasm. "A fine record

they've made in suppressing gangs. Here's an account of a battle in a crowded shopping street in Chicago between two gangs. Two men killed and all the gunmen got away. Nothing like that has happened in Bolton, has there?"

Fletcher grinned.

"We've only got one gang so far. Give us time."

"Who the deuce is successful in fighting modern gunmen? Where would they find a man that knows more police business than I do?" demanded the indignant chief.

"I think you'll win out, Clancy," Fletcher said consolingly. "Have you any information about Lokwen?"

"Yes," said Clancy. "I thought you might be some help. That's why I've been letting you in here. You're the only reporter on the inside. And what do you do? You capture a fellow with an automatic and let him go! I'm disgusted with you."

"I pulled a bone," admitted Ames. "But I did give you a complete description of him. Have you identified him?"

"We may be a lot of old fogies, but we know our jobs," stated Clancy. "I've had half a dozen men out all morning and we found out who this fellow is. It's a perfect description of Dennis Morgan. The ears tell the story."

"Well, you got your tip on Morgan from me, and now I have proved that he is a gunman. Have you put him under arrest?"

"Looks like he's skipped town," admitted the chief. "He knew we'd take him in on the gun charge."

"Now, listen to this." Fletcher told him his theory that Morgan had been sent to buy Schultz's garage as a gang headquarters, and Clancy nodded agreement.

"If you hadn't butted in we'd have caught them there," Clancy reproached.

"If I hadn't had the argument with Lokwen or Morgan there would have been no suspicion if the deal did go through. Be fair, chief. I think it would be a good idea to watch for sales or transfers of garages."

"You're not such a fool. I'll do that. The mayor has given me authority to replace service revolvers with automatics. In a week the force will have the new equipment. I'm organizing a machine-gun squad and I'm putting on fifty additional plain-clothes men."

"Have you any information as to the method of paying dues to the garage organization?"

"Yes," said the chief. "I got a friend of mine that owns a garage on the phone and met him last night in a room at the Bolton Hotel. He admitted to me that he had to join, and he pays a weekly tax of a hundred dollars. Every Saturday, a fellow will run into his place with a car, give him a password and get the money."

"Then all you have to do is to put some plain-clothes men in the place and nab him in the act of being paid."

Clancy looked embarrassed.

"I can't do that, Fletcher. You see, this man is a friend of mine, and he only told me under pledge of confidence. I had to promise to take no action in his place. He figures, if the collector is pinched, the gang will know he betrayed them and they'll fill him full of lead. He gave up to help me, and I have to play square with him. I'll keep watch in the street, however. But, in a day, probably a hundred cars will run into that garage, and how am I going to pick up the blackmailer?"

"How about these other Rackets that have started?"

"I don't know anything about them. Nobody has complained to the police. Maybe it's true and maybe it isn't."

"I doubt if they have had time to organize more than two or three Rackets. Well, chief, we know Dennis Morgan is in the gang. Catch him and give him the third degree."

"I'm notifying the police of the whole

country that he's wanted. Come in whenever you have any info, Ames. I'm telling you things that no other reporter knows, because I know you have too much sense to print anything that would make trouble. You are in my confidence, see?"

"Depend on me. I can publish that Dennis Morgan is wanted, charged with carrying a gun without a license. There is no license in his name, of course."

"No. We looked that up."

CHAPTER VIII.

A CRIMINAL LAWYER.

THE Bolton Athletic Club on River Boulevard is a new and impressive building which is pointed out with pride by the guide on the "Seeing Bolton" motor bus, when it swings into the broad avenue that follows the river for several miles on the north side.

Its membership includes the richest and most aristocratic of the city, but it is not exclusive in the social sense. There are politicians, prize fighters, and persons who have only their money to recommend them on its rolls.

The club cost a million and a half and needs a very large membership to support it, so an application is not scrutinized too closely.

At a table in a corner of the imposing red-and-gold dining room, the evening of the day in which Chief Clancy conferred with Fletcher Ames and reminded him that his disclosures were confidential, two men were discussing the excellent table d'hôte.

One of these was tall and spare, with a shock of iron-gray hair and a heavy black mustache the points of which were touched with gray. He had a long nose, a mouth filled with uneven, tobacco-stained teeth, and a receding chin.

He was the mayor of the city of Bolton, by name Philip Fearing. He was derisively termed by the opposition party, "the gentleman in politics," and had been elected two years ago on a reform ticket by pledging himself to give a business administration.

He came of an old Bolton family, belonged to the best clubs, and had been none too successful in the real-estate business before his nomination—which made the mayorality salary of ten thousand a year something to be desired.

He had been playing handball in the club gymnasium with his dinner companion, who was a lawyer named Guy Larson.

Larson was a criminal lawyer by profession and a sport by predilection. He was a prize-fight fan, a baseball enthusiast, a football rooter and a political power in Bolton.

His income was said to be large but he gambled heavily and unfortunately. It was said that he speculated unwisely. His bridge losses were the talk of the athletic club. In any event, he was a figure in the town and a man the mayor felt compelled to treat with consideration.

In appearance Larson was striking. He was slim, square shouldered, and aggressive, with hair so black that he was suspected of dyeing it; black eyes which were penetrating and terrible to a witness, a small, firm mouth and a jutting, promontorylike chin. He wore a small, black mustache with waxed ends, and was dressed almost too well. With his lurid necktie and fancy vest he resembled the popular impression of a card sharp, but he played cards poorly, according to the players in the club.

"The president of the chamber of commerce called on me to-day," Mayor Fearing was saying. "He demands that I fire Chief Clancy and put a strong up-to-date man at the head of the police force."

"Are you going to do it?" asked Larson casually.

Fearing shrugged his shoulders.

"Peter Clancy, his cousin, is boss of the South Side wards and, I need his

support. Besides, I think Clancy is competent to deal with the situation. I'm authorizing, at his suggestion, the equipment of the police with automatics instead of service revolvers. I have consented to the purchase of a dozen machine guns and allowed him to increase the plain-clothes squad. He's on the job. I told John Logan of the chamber that I would remove Clancy if he proved to be incompetent, but that every man was entitled to his chance."

"I think you are right. The town has lost its nerve because one garage man and two policemen were killed. It isn't the first time that an officer trying to make an arrest has been shot. Why get excited about it?"

"Exactly," agreed the mayor. "After all, we only have that Schultz girl's statement that there is a garage Racket. This reporter, Fletcher Ames, wrote a sensational story and scared the city to death."

"That Ames is a dangerous man. A trouble breeder. The Racket is all in his eye."

"Look here, Larson, you are in touch with the criminal classes in a business way. If there was a big organized scheme of blackmail you would hear some rumors of it, wouldn't you?"

"Very likely. I'm taking it with a grain of salt. It's possible, however. We know it has been worked on an enormous scale in big cities."

"But they say the politicians and police are hand in glove with the gangsters. It couldn't be done in Bolton."

"Not on such a big scale. It's possible, however. I may say I haven't been retained yet by any of the alleged gangsters, and the first thing a criminal does when he prepares for a big job is to make sure he has a good lawyer in the offing."

"Do you think I should fire Clancy?"

"Who would you put in his place? One of his assistants? In what respect would that be an improvement?"

"You're right. It wouldn't. I'm going to get hold of Morrow, who owns the *News,* and ask him to call off this Fletcher Ames. They are making trouble with their stories and it's bad for business generally."

Larson chuckled.

"If I were a Racketeer," he said, "I'd like nothing better than to have the newspapers telling how murderous I was. It's wonderful advertising. After reading the *News,* a business man who was requested to contribute to a Racket would be afraid to refuse. I understand this man Fletcher Ames has been given a permit to carry an automatic. If he gets buck fever and kills some innocent person, it will serve you right. Why should reporters be armed?"

"No reason; but Clancy had a request from the city editor of the *News,* and we are anxious to oblige the newspapers when possible."

"Yes, I see your point of view—— What's that, boy?"

"A telephone call for you, sir," said the bell boy who had appeared at Larson's elbow.

The attorney excused himself and went to a telephone booth.

"Hello. Who is it?" he demanded.

"It's Morgan."

"Damn! Are you here in town?"

"No, sir; but I've got to see you. It's important. I'm at Stephens' Village."

"Well, I'll meet you in Jake's place there in two hours."

He returned to the table and poured out a second cup of coffee.

"You let Clancy alone," he said. "He's a good man. And let the newspapers yell their heads off. They have to have something to sell their papers and this gang stuff is good reading."

"But the chamber of commerce demands action."

"Then have Clancy pick up a half a dozen crooks and charge them with running the Racket. I'll defend them and make some money to lose to you at

bridge. Everybody is thereby benefited."

The mayor laughed heartily.

"You'll be the death of me, Larson. What makes you think you can play bridge?"

"What makes you think you can manage a city? Come on. I'll play for an hour and a half. I have an engagement later."

Every now and then a newspaper or a clergyman or a civic-betterment agitator would declare that something ought to be done about Stephens' Village.

It had been originally a real-estate development located about ten miles south of Bolton, sponsored by a promoter named James W. Stephens. A town had been laid out, gas, light and water installed, and an intensive selling campaign inaugurated.

For a time it grew rapidly, for there were no restrictions on the character of buildings; but the multiplication of cheap houses slew the project, the boom exploded and those who had bought lots were stuck with them, while those who had built homes found themselves marooned.

Stephens had secured a town charter and the two or three hundred inhabitants were in control of a city government with no way to support it except by excessive taxation.

Then there came a restaurant man with the proposition to establish a roadhouse there and to pay well for the privilege. The selectmen welcomed him eagerly. A dozen road houses sprang up in a couple of years, a gambling house was opened and soon there were three or four. Multitudes came out from Bolton in search of amusements, and all the townfolk had to do was to shut their eyes and get rich.

There were no State police in Manshire, no authority in Stephens' Village save the town police force of three men, and these found it to their advantage to see nothing, hear nothing, know nothing. People danced all night at Stephens' Village; they drank as much as they pleased; they tossed their money upon the roulette tables without fear of intrusion by officers of the law.

The town was not in Bolton County, and the vice promoters soon had the officers of the rural Lighton County in their pay. Federal prohibition officers were their only enemies and Stephens' Village soon grew so tough that the Federal men took care to give it a wide berth.

The best people in Bolton, after a few cocktails and a good dinner, liked to run over to Stephens' Village for a little excitement—people who would have roared like angry lions if such an institution existed in the city. The road houses impudently advertised their town in Bolton newspapers as "the one bright spot." Something certainly ought to have been done about that wicked village, thought every one, but it was nobody's business to do it.

The very sporty roadster of Guy Larson drew up in front of Dick Higgins' Merrymont Inn shortly before ten o'clock. He nodded familiarly to the doorman and entered the main hall, but instead of going into the dining room he went up a flight of stairs at the rear of the hall, walked down a corridor and knocked at the door of a room at the end—two sharp raps, a pause, and a third.

"Come on in," somebody invited.

The lawyer entered and discovered Dennis Morgan, alias Lokwen, sitting before a table with two empty beer bottles before him and a third which would soon be empty.

"Why in hell are you hanging out here?" demanded Larson testily. "You ought to be in New York by this time."

"Is that so?" demanded Morgan. "Well, I can't go till I have some jack. And I had to tell you about last night, didn't I?"

Larson sat down fastidiously, with a thoroughly contemptuous look at the big man.

"You had a simple little errand to do and you muffed it. You pulled a gun on a newspaper man and let him take it away from you. You're a hell of a workman! When you pull a gun, use it."

Morgan grew dark red.

"You got it wrong, Mr. Larson. I didn't pull my gun, see? I just took a crack at this guy and he covered me. Then he tapped my pocket and took the rod."

"What business had you quarreling with Ames, anyway? You ought to know reporters are poison."

"He was butting in on our game. I was nice at first, and I was trying to show him that I was giving the Schultzes a square deal."

"Well, Chief Clancy has notified the police everywhere that you are wanted for assault with intent to kill. I'll give you a couple of hundred dollars, and you get an automobile and go to New York. You go to see Al Levoni, at this address, and tell him to send over two good men to report to Louis at this place, and ask him to hide you till this blows over. They haven't much against you, and only want you to question you."

"Two hundred dollars ain't much, Mr. Larson."

"Later you'll get your share, provided you don't make a fool of yourself and get caught."

"This reporter said he was going to put a manager into Schultz's to run the place. Send the boys in to muss the joint up and you can buy it from the women for almost nothing."

"I don't want the place now. Don't you worry about my affairs. You pick up a flivver and start jogging to New York. Railroad stations will be watched, but they can't stop all the flivvers in the world. On your way and lay off liquor until you're safe, get me? Here's your money."

Larson did not even shake hands with his clumsy henchman, but left the room, walked down the corridor, entered another room and found a group around a roulette table.

He pushed his way to the front and in half an hour had dropped four hundred dollars. With an expressionless face he said good night and returned to Bolton.

Fletcher Ames and Chief Clancy were looking for a visitor from Chicago as head of the Bolton Racket. It is obvious to the reader that here was the chief of the Racketeers—intimate of the mayor and most of the prominent citizens—club member, hail-fellow-well-met.

Sharp, shrewd, hard and without principle, this cunning criminal lawyer had embarked in the new and profitable form of crime with his eyes wide open, every sense alert, and with a determination to make millions at any cost. It was Guy Larson who had introduced the Racket into Bolton, and if there was a single individual in the town equipped to succeed in the profession, he was the man.

Larson needed money much more than anybody suspected. He had studied the Chicago system with great perspicacity for many months before he embarked, and he was convinced that he could operate in Bolton more successfully than anywhere in the country.

Ames and Clancy thought it would be difficult to work the Racket without collusion on the part of police and politicians, but Larson was convinced that such civic corruption was a weakness instead of a strength. It meant a division of spoils, which was repugnant to him. He counted upon the cowardice of the citizens in the face of gang peril, and he had ordered the brutal murder of poor old Gus Schultz as an example.

He was considering, as he drove back

to Bolton, the case of Fletcher Ames, the reporter, whom he knew personally very well and for whom he had a liking. Ames, he thought, was more dangerous than stupid old Tom Clancy. Ames would have to be watched, and, if it seemed that he was an obstacle to the Racket, he would have to be taken care of. He didn't want to murder Fletcher Ames, but the fellow must mind his own business.

When he reached his apartment he found a message at the telephone desk in the hall. He read it with a sudden quiver in the region of his heart.

Fletcher Ames had called and asked for an appointment at Mr. Larson's office in the morning!

CHAPTER IX.

BEAUTIFUL DOLLY.

HIS black eyes sparkled dangerously, but he told the operator to call Fletcher Ames and tell him he could see Mr. Larson at ten thirty a. m.

"Damn him!" he muttered. "I'm afraid of him. The only man in town that worries me."

He took the elevator to his apartment and entered. It was a duplex—an enormous studio room with a balcony running around one side, from which two chambers opened. The big room was tastefully and expensively furnished.

In a big chair beside a table sat a young woman. The rays of the reading lamp over her head fell lovingly upon thick, golden hair; but when she lifted a pretty, rosy face, her eyebrows were jet black, as were her eyes. Although it is pretty well established that there are no golden-haired women with black eyes, men continue to admire a type which they know to be synthetic.

"Hello, daddy," piped the young woman. "I thought you were not coming."

Larson leaned over her and kissed her ripe, rouged lips before replying.

"Had a business appointment, Dolly," he explained. "Give me your key, will you?"

She opened her bag, rummaged in it and produced the bit of brass.

"What do you want it for?" she demanded.

Larson dropped it in his pocket and smiled appealingly.

"I've got a deal on and certain people are apt to pop in here unexpectedly. I want you not to come here for a while."

Her little head reared and her black eyes snapped angrily.

"Oh, you want to get rid of me, do you? Well, look here——"

Larson lifted deprecating hands.

"Honest, honey, it's for your sake. I've got to do business with pretty rough characters. That's what I get for being a criminal lawyer. I can't have one of them finding you here and insulting you. I'm likely to kill anybody that did that, and then they'd send me to the chair. You wouldn't like your old daddy to go to the chair."

"No, I suppose not. But if I thought you were trying to give me the air——" She paused and her silence was full of menace.

"Honey, I'm crazy about you," he declared. "I'm cuckoo about you."

She put an arm around his neck and snuggled. "I saw a car to-day I'm mad about, daddy. It's pale lavender and all shiny and goes sixty miles an hour without you noticing it, and it only costs two thousand nine hundred dollars. That old trap of mine is all in."

"Give me a month or six weeks and I'll get it for you," he promised.

"Why not to-morrow?" asked the young lady.

"I'm under heavy expense just now, but I'll have a lot of coin very shortly. The deal I told you about."

"What kind of deal is it?"

"You wouldn't understand, darling."

"Well, so long as I get the car."

In referring to the reasons why Guy

Larson was always short of funds, we did not mention Miss Gwendoline Carleton, but she was one of his principal expenses. Miss Carleton had come to Bolton in the chorus of a musical comedy a little more than three months before.

She had spent in three months about fifteen thousand dollars—and she hadn't yet learned many ways to spend money. But she was progressing rapidly in the art.

Larson had a suite of offices in the Mercantile Building. He had two young lawyers on his staff and four young women clerks. His anteroom often contained as many as eight or ten furtive-looking individuals, for his practice was shady.

A criminal will take terrible chances for gain, but when arrested and in danger of jail he is ready to give up all his ill-gotten profits in exchange for his freedom.

Larson's skill in discovering technicalities in the law which worked for the benefit of the wrongdoer was well known through the State; his eloquence before a jury was very effective, and his political influence in Bolton enabled him to persuade judges, when sentencing his clients who had failed to convince juries of their innocence, to give them the minimum instead of the maximum sentence.

His fees were nobody's affair except his own and his client's, but they usually consisted of all the client owned or had stolen. Lawyers said he made a practice, in cases where conviction was certain, of persuading thieves to turn over to him their booty for safe-keeping, with the promise of getting them a light sentence and dividing with them when they came out.

No proof that he received stolen goods had ever been produced; his standing at the bar had not been challenged, and his activity in politics and his personal popularity caused him to be accepted generally as a pretty decent fellow.

Larson had talked with half a dozen clients when Ames presented himself in the office.

"Hello, Ames," said Larson genially. "You don't come to see me very often. I don't flatter myself that this is a social call, so what's on your mind?"

Ames shook hands, seated himself and helped himself to a cigarette from the box the lawyer extended to him.

"I'm working on the Schultz murder case, Mr. Larson," he said. "I'm trying to get a line on this gang that killed the two policemen and took Schultz for a ride."

"Yes?"

"It's pretty blind going, and I'm moseying round trying to pick up a thread that would lead somewhere. I came to see you because you know the underworld better than anybody in town, and I wondered if you had heard of anything unusual stirring down there. There must be half a dozen visiting gangsters, and our regular criminals probably don't care much for them."

"I had dinner with the mayor last night," said Larson. "I told him that this Racket gang was all in the eye of your esteemed journal, the *News*."

Ames shook his head vehemently.

"You're wrong, Mr. Larson. I have the best of reasons for believing that there is a Racket—perhaps several of them now working. Three murders is the score already."

"Then you know more about it than I do," declared Larson. "I deal with second-story workers, porch climbers, burglars, dips and holdup men. I haven't defended a murderer for five years."

"And none of these people has tipped you off that there is a Racket going on?"

"If there is they don't know it."

"Which bears out my theory that it is the work of a foreign gang," declared the reporter.

"Well, what can I do for you?"

"You know a man named Dennis Morgan," stated the reporter.

"Morgan? Dennis Morgan? Yes, I know him."

"Will you tell me what you know about him?"

"Do you think he is in this gang of yours?"

"I know he carried a gun because I took it away from him. He was passing himself off as a truck repairer named Lokwen and trying to buy Gus Schultz's garage. I want to know why he wanted that garage."

"The Morgan I know is a big, hulking, cowardly hound," said Larson. "He is a cheap gambler and a tout. I don't know why he wanted the garage unless he was buying it for somebody else."

"That's what I think. He was an agent of the gang."

"Well, young fellow, that's all I know about him. And I've got a client waiting to see me."

Ames rose.

"What were you talking with him about last night in Stephens' Village?" he asked sharply.

Larson had a poker face and it served him well.

"What makes you think I was talking with him?" he asked with remarkable composure.

"I happen to know it, that's all."

The attorney laughed cheerfully.

"You're a better sleuth than I thought you were, Ames. I happen to be Morgan's lawyer, and he phoned me asking me to see him out there as he was on the run. What we talked about is between lawyer and client. I advised him to make himself scarce and told him that the charges against him were not serious. In a month, when this idiotic gang terror is over, he can come back and I'll get him off without trouble. Satisfied?"

"Yes. Thanks," smiled Ames. "I certainly hope you won't become the gang's attorney, Mr. Larson. We'd like to convict them and you might be too clever for us."

"I'll defend anybody who pays me enough," the lawyer said brazenly. "But I'll never make any money out of your phantom gang. Good morning, Ames. Come again, any time. Always glad to see you."

When the reporter had gone, Larson drew a handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"Damn that fellow!" he gritted. "He gave me a scare."

CHAPTER X.

BIG MONEY.

UTTERLY oblivious that his visit had alarmed the eminent criminal lawyer, Fletcher Ames was on his way to the *News* office. His knowledge that Larson had seen and talked with Morgan had come to him in the most casual manner.

The previous evening he had motored out to Stephens' Village with the intention of dropping into the various joints, looking over the customers and picking up any scraps of information which might come his way. He was sitting at a table, sipping at a glass of needle beer, when he heard a conversation between the waiter and the head waiter.

"That fellow Dennis Morgan had a big dinner and three bottles of beer up in a private room, and skipped without paying," said the waiter.

"It's all right," the head waiter assured him. "Mr. Larson was with him, and I'll give him the check next time he comes in."

Ames paid his check in considerable excitement and set out in search of Morgan. He learned at a garage that the big man had rented a flivver and driven off somewhere, and then he had telephoned to Larson's apartment house, asking for an appointment.

He was satisfied with the lawyer's explanation of the interview, which had seemed perfectly natural and probable. Criminal lawyers make a practice of covering and defending criminals, and there was no reason why Larson should turn Morgan over just because the police wanted him.

Larson's insistence that the gang was nonexistent, however, made no impression on Ames. Most likely the attorney took that attitude because he hoped to get their business. Such lawyers were really criminals themselves, but they were inside the law.

Early in the evening Ames had taken Joe Grossman, the new garage manager, to the Schultz residence and introduced him to Anna. Worn out by the strain of her father's funeral that afternoon, the girl had dismissed them in a few minutes; but the look in her eye had repaid him for his trouble in her behalf. She had told him what he expected—that Lokwen had not called to receive her answer. Grossman would take hold of the garage the following morning, and Ames was invited to call whenever it pleased him.

He entered the *News* office whistling cheerfully, and Pete Hoskins, inspecting him furtively, thought he looked five years younger than he had a few days before.

"I don't know what you're so cheerful about," he said with mock surliness. "You haven't turned up anything startling yet. Seen anything of the Schultz girl lately?"

Fletcher Ames flushed under Hoskins' humorous gaze.

"What's the matter with you? I don't pay any attention to girls."

"Oh, I thought since you were unlucky in sleuthing you might be lucky in love. I've got some statistics for you. Had a man working on them. Going to run an article on the profits of the Racket."

"Let's have the figures."

Hoskins took up a sheet of copy paper and put his feet on his desk.

"Counting," he said, "what they'd get from the garage men, the milk dealers, the jewelers, butchers and auto-accessory men, and what they'd make if they organized ten such Rackets, they might run up a total profit of thirty thousand dollars a week, or about a million and a quarter per annum. That's big business, Fletcher."

"I'll say it is. Of course, your figures are highly inaccurate, but there's millions in it."

"And all they have to do is to kill a dozen recalcitrant business men to put the fear of death into the others."

"I've just seen Guy Larson. He says the Racket is all in our eye. Claims that he hasn't heard a word of it from any of his clients."

"Bah!" scoffed the city editor. "That crook is probably drawing a retaining fee already. We got four anonymous letters in the mails this morning, representing jewelers, dairymen and auto-accessory shopkeepers, and we know already that the garage owners are paying tribute."

"What do the letters say?"

"About the same thing. They have been notified of membership and told to be ready for the collector. They claim they have to pay and demand that we do something about it, but they don't dare tell us their names."

Ames asked to see the letters and read them carefully.

"They sound authentic," he declared. "Most of these small business men don't make enough to pay their dues, and some of them will fail to give up on demand—in which case we'll hear of more killings. I'm hoping one of these men will be so desperate he will tip off the police and let them lay a trap for the collector. That's sure to be our best bet."

"Well, it's a great story. Our circulation is going up. Everybody is buying

the paper to see who's murdered. Got anything to write?"

"Not now. I'm going up to Schultz's garage to see a fellow I put in charge for the family."

Hoskins concealed a grin.

"So you are acting as adviser for the Schultz family. Is she really a pretty girl, Fletcher?"

"You go to the devil!" retorted the blushing reporter.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROSENBAUM AFFAIR.

MR. I. ROSENBAUM was in the jewelry and what-have-you business at No. 89 Marlow Street, a few doors from Main Street. In his show window was a heterogeneous collection of articles of luxury—watches, necklaces, opera glasses, stickpins, rings, bracelets, cameras, razors, revolvers, bar pins, vanity cases and so on, the total value of which would have amounted to a half a million dollars if it had been as represented.

Over his front door there dangled three large gilded balls, and at the rear of the store was a partitioned-off space where Mr. Rosenbaum conferred with persons who wished cash for good security.

In person Mr. Rosenbaum was robust, dark and saturnine, with bushy eyebrows and a large, hooked nose. His black eyes were as keen as a hawk's, his mouth as hard as platinum, his chin as ponderous as Gibraltar. He was clean shaven, gray headed, and given to gestures.

His clerk was his nephew—a nondescript youth whom he didn't trust much and who did not have the combination of the safe.

At three thirty in the afternoon the door was darkened by a visitor who asked for the proprietor.

"Did you want to buy or sell?" asked young Rosenbaum.

"None o' yer damn business! Where's the boss?"

The nephew jerked his thumb toward the rear where Mr. Rosenbaum, behind his counter, pored laboriously over a ledger.

The customer entered the space sacred to persons who wished to pawn things.

Without saying a word he thrust a card through the grill.

"You been elected a member of the Bolton Jewelers' Mutual Benefit and Protective Association," he announced. "Dues, seventy-five dollars a week. Pay me now."

Rosenbaum uttered a sound between a moan and a growl. He peered at the collector and saw a smooth-looking alien who might be a Greek, an Italian or an Armenian—dark, dapper, with a red birthmark on the left side of his neck as large as a silver dollar. The man wore a necktie of yellow-and-red stripes, fastened with a horseshoe pin in brilliants, and a dark suit. His grin revealed that a right eyetooth was missing.

"I won't join," the jeweler declared. "I'm a poor man, mister, and I ain't a jeweler anyway. I don't make seventy-five dollars a week."

"You read what happened to Gus Schultz, the garage man?" asked the blackmailer softly.

"I won't do it, I tell you! You get out of here!"

The visitor laughed contemptuously.

"Come through, you, come through."

Rosenbaum's right hand had wandered and suddenly appeared with a revolver in it.

"Get out of here!" he snarled. "I got a right to shoot you. The police are looking for you. Git!"

The man looked at the weapon and at the face of the pawnbroker, which was convulsed with rage.

"I'll go," he said. "You ain't going to live long, Rosenbaum."

"Outside! Outside or I'll shoot!" roared the furious jeweler.

Still laughing, the collector turned on his heel and walked out of the shop.

"Issy, get police headquarters!" shouted Rosenbaum. "Tell them to send all the police force down here at once. That was the gangsters that was in here."

In a moment he was pouring his story into the ears of the sergeant on the desk at headquarters.

"What did he look like?" demanded the officer eagerly.

The pawnbroker was able to give him a very excellent description of his visitor, not forgetting the birthmark, and the sergeant wrote it down excitedly.

"I want protection!" cried Rosenbaum. 'I'm a taxpayer, I am, and I got a right to it. This low-life threatened my life, he did."

"Cheer up, Rosy," the sergeant said. "I'll have a bodyguard down there for you in fifteen minutes. Say, if all these merchants had your nerve we'd bust this racket wide open."

"Seventy-five dollars a week, he wanted. I don't make that much."

"Tell that to the cuckoo bird. Don't you pay nothing and leave it to us to see that nothing happens to you."

Rosenbaum interviewed two customers with his gun on the counter in front of him and then two husky plain-clothes men tramped into the place and identified themselves by police badges.

"Sit down, gents, make yourselves comfortable," urged the gratified pawnbroker. "Izzy, run out and buy two ten-cent cigars for the officers."

Several hours passed without incident, and at six o'clock Rosenbaum announced that he was going home to dinner.

"I'll go with you," said one of the detectives. "Orders are not to let you out of our sight."

"I only live a couple of blocks up, mister."

"I got to see you into your house."

Accompanied by the plain-clothes man, Rosenbaum left his shop, walked down to Main Street and turned to the right. His escort was touching shoulders with him.

A row of cars were parked at the curb, and, as the two men approached one of them, a sedan, the engine started, turned its front wheels to move out of line. The street was crowded with people going home from work—men, women and children. The policeman was casting keen glances right and left, and his right hand rested on his gun in the right-hand pocket of his jacket.

Bang-bang-bang bang-bang!

From the window of the sedan, which was already moving, darted sheets of flame. The bullets tore into the bodies of the pawnbroker and the detective, the engine roared, the sedan darted into the roadway and went shooting down the car tracks at thirty-five miles an hour. Several spectators saw it turn a corner at the next block, and that was the end of it.

On the sidewalk lay two dying men. The victims had not been five feet away from the window of the sedan, and each had been hit in the left side and the back. Within a few feet were at least a score of pedestrians who stared stupidly at the fallen men. Then some ran wildly for safety, while others rushed to the bodies and stood gaping at them.

Schultz had been lured out to Stephens' Village to his death, and the two policemen had been slain on dark streets at night; but this killing had taken place, while it was still daylight, in a crowded business street.

A half dozen policemen were on the scene in a couple of minutes, hysterically questioning the persons who admitted having witnessed the crime. Nobody had seen the slayers, who had fired from the interior of the car. Nobody had paid special attention to the car, and

there were half a dozen opinions as to its make. The whole thing had happened so quickly that the deed was done and the murderers away before pursuit was thought of.

It is an axiom of the newspaper business that the destruction of thousands in some remote place is less important news than a fist fight on the main street of the town. The citizens had read about such crimes as this as occurring in Chicago and New York, but with only passing interest, for, whatever happened elsewhere, Bolton was safe and peaceful.

Now—a shudder ran through the city, and then came a burst of wild indignation. The tale passed from mouth to mouth and, long before the newspapers were out with tardy extras, everybody had heard of it.

Indignant citizens were phoning the mayor and the chief of police and were furious because the lines were always busy. Something drastic must be done. The killers must be cornered and railroaded to the chair. Why, no man's life was safe!

Hundreds of small merchants and business men heard with special interest what had happened to Rosenbaum, for they were in the toils of the Racketeers, condemned to pay an illegal tax of a very large percentage of their profits to organized blackmailers.

Not one of them but was fuming at the outrage of which the jeweler was the victim. Most of them had been considering whether it really would be dangerous to refuse to pay and appeal to the police—but now they would pay; they would be silent. Why they should be victims of the public good! Let somebody else work with the police in trapping the criminals. Look what had happened to Rosenbaum, who had been fool enough to call upon the authorities—slain in the company of a police detective who had shared his fate!

This state of affairs could not last, they reasoned, and in a few weeks, at the latest, the blackmailers would betray themselves and land in the toils. In the meantime it was better to draw on their reserves if their businesses did not earn enough to pay the weekly tax, better far to keep their mouths shut and live than to squawk and be filled full of lead.

CHAPTER XII.

A TABLE FOR TWO.

FLETCHER AMES heard the news a half hour after the shooting. Chief Clancy was about to sit down to dinner when his telephone told him of the double murder.

Ames knew he would catch the chief at his home on North Wilton Street, and reached him just as he was getting into his car to return to headquarters.

"Three of my men gone," lamented Clancy. "Three good men and true—and we're just where we started as far as getting these killers is concerned. I'll be removed for this, Ames. The mayor will have to do it. The chamber of commerce has been hounding me."

"Rosenbaum refused to pay the blackmailers, I suppose," said the reporter.

"More than that. He drove the collector out with a gun. I wish he had shot him. Then he called headquarters and gave us a description of the man. It's the fellow with the birthmark. He demanded protection and I sent two good men down to his place with orders to stick with him. What more could I do?"

"From what I hear, your officer was not at fault. The aggressor always has an enormous advantage over the defender. The police cannot go about shooting blindly; they must wait until they have evidence that an attack is intended. This was an ambush."

"Try to tell that to the public. I'm going to notify all citizens that they have authority to shoot to kill any person who enters their place of business

to demand dues in one of these fake associations. If Rosenbaum had shot that fellow, he would be alive now."

"I doubt it," Ames said dryly. "They would have avenged the death of their clansman. This means that the gang will have no more trouble about collections and you'll have less help from victims than before. It's rather queer that they should send out a collector who can be identified by a birthmark. I think it's a false mark, chief —a daub of pink paint that he can rub off. If you arrest a man who answers to other details of the description and he has no birthmark, you have to let him go."

"That's right. I didn't think of that. Ride down to headquarters with me and I'll let you see Rosenbaum's description. Five murders in three days! Man alive, that's more than we've had in two years!"

"Morgan may have been concerned in the death of Schultz, but he seems to have skipped town, so he can't be mixed up in this crime."

"How do we know he's out of town? I'll charge him with it if I can lay hands on him. Nobody saw the killers. Think we could make him talk?"

"I think he's your best bet," the reporter declared. "I don't think he has much nerve."

"Don't seem to be a clew in this case. Not even a description of the car. That wouldn't help much because they probably stole the car and abandoned it when they got a few miles away. Ames, this is too big a job for me. I hope they fire me."

Ames looked concerned. Chief Clancy was his friend and talked to him freely, and a new chief might refuse to supply him with information. While Clancy was an old-fashioned policeman, he was not a fool, and it seemed to the reporter that he was doing all that any chief of police could do under the circumstances.

"You can't quit under fire, Tom," he declared. "I'll get the *News* to publish an editorial in the morning expressing confidence in you. We'll land these fellows."

Clancy waved his head dubiously.

"They just ain't human," he complained. "They don't give us a thing to go on."

"These killers are stupid, drug-crazed aliens with just sense enough to obey orders," said Ames. "We are going to pick one or two of them up sooner or later and they'll crack under pressure, particularly if you keep their dope away from them. Of course, they don't know the real chief of their gang, but they know the man who gives them their instructions. And from him we'll find the leader. He may be some one we know."

"That will all take time," the chief observed. "They'll have my head in a few days. Well, I'll get my pension, and I was going to retire anyway in a couple of years."

Fletcher felt sorry for the old policeman who had run the town successfully for years and now faced disgraceful retirement because of a condition that it was almost impossible to combat. He squeezed Clancy's arm consolingly, but there was nothing he could say.

At headquarters he copied the description received from Rosenbaum and found that it tallied with that given him by Andy. The shrewd pawnbroker had observed that a right eyetooth was gone from the mouth of the collector, and this seemed more important than the prominent birthmark which could be easily be faked.

Of course, an order had gone forth to pick up anybody answering Rosenbaum's description, and the police of the entire State were looking for him.

To Ames it seemed that about the safest hiding place for persons wanted by the police was Stephens' Village. The dives in Stephens' seemed likely to be a

convenient headquarters for the gang which was looting Bolton.

In other towns in the State the police would search vigorously for the man wanted in Bolton, but the law officers of Stephens' were in the pay of the gamblers and road-house men and could be depended upon to please their employers. The several plain-clothes men whom Clancy had watching in Stephens' were unlikely to learn anything. There were John Doe warrants out for the man with the birthmark, which could be served in Stephens' or in any part of the State, but the Bolton officers had no authority to make search outside the city limits.

Ames, wandering about Stephens alone, would be an object of suspicion. If he went there, though, in good company, to dine and dance, he could be sure of polite treatment. The dives depended for patronage upon decent, honest people who got a kick out of drinking unlawful beverages.

He went to the phone and called up Miss Schultz.

"I wonder if you would like to drive with me over to Stephens' Village?" he said hesitantly.

"I couldn't," she protested. "It's so soon after the funeral."

"Miss Schultz," he pleaded, "I would enjoy your company but I would not think of making such a suggestion under the circumstances if it were entirely social. I am trying to collect evidence against your father's murderers, and I think I might pick up some information in one of those road houses. You know what happened to-night——"

"I heard. It's too terrible! It's unbelievable!"

"We've got to get them. Now, I thought we might sit in a booth quietly and not dance. If I have a girl with me nobody will think anything of my being there, but if I go alone I might get into trouble."

"Oh," she exclaimed. "I hope not. Isn't there some other girl you could ask?"

"I don't know a single girl in town well enough to invite her, and there isn't any I want to be with."

"I'll go," she said in a curious voice. "I'll tell mother we are just going for a little ride. She has been urging me to get some fresh air."

"May I call for you in half an hour?"

"I'll be ready," she assured him.

With a sense of elation he hung the receiver on the hook. There was a haunting sweetness in her rich contralto. It was a curiously mellow voice. There swept into his mind a line from "The Lost Chord"—"I struck one chord of music like the sound of a great Amen."

Pshaw! Was he getting sentimental at his age?

Slim and appealing in her black dress, Anna Schultz came down the steps as Ames drew up his car at the curb. He was interested to observe that the touch of her little white hand gave him a thrill as he helped her into the roadster. "I wish you would let the police attend to these terrible people," she said after a moment or two. "After all, it's their business and not yours, Mr. Ames. I don't think the gunmen would hesitate to serve you as they served father if they thought that you were on their trail."

"I'm going to get them," he said grimly. "I'll take my chances."

"But why? Aren't you afraid? I'm nervous about our little excursion just because I know what's at the back of your mind."

He braked the car.

"I'm going to take you home. It's criminal of me to drag you into this. I have a single-track mind, I am afraid, and I was only thinking of my own ends. I beg your pardon——"

"Don't be silly. I'm going. Start the car again. After all, I want my father's murderers brought to justice and

I'm not afraid of a slight risk. I was thinking of you. Why do you do it?"

To his surprise he found himself telling her all about himself and the wretched condition of mind into which he had sunk since the war.

"I was heading directly for the dogs," he declared. "I needed something big to bring me up with a round turn, and this affair has done it. You see, Anna —Miss Schultz——"

"Call me Anna. I like it."

"We've got along in this country with a small police force because ninety-nine per cent our our citizens were decent and law abiding, and the tiny criminal element a slinking cowardly lot, without organization or leadership. We are suddenly faced with a situation for which we are utterly unprepared. There have arisen gangs of savage men, so stupid they are incapable of fear; brutal, bloodthirsty and desperate. They take orders from capable leaders and kill as casually as they eat or drink.

"This Racket business is only the beginning. They will attack banks and great stores next, and the Lord knows where they will stop. Cities like Bolton are helpless against this kind of crime. The police have to cover the entire town, and the gangsters can assemble more men in a certain spot within a few minutes than the police can bring together. They always have the advantage of surprise and they can strike and get away before the police reserves arrive. Besides, our cops are nice old men who will be dead before they get their guns out of their pockets. Somebody has to nip this thing in the bud and I've elected myself. If they get me, small loss; but if they don't, I'll get them."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl. "I think you are the bravest man in the world."

"Pshaw! I must sound like a boaster."

"No. I know you mean it. But the things you tell me are so terrible. They are hard to believe."

"Yes," he smiled. "So hard that Bolton doesn't believe it even yet. Mark my words, Anna, in a few weeks you'll see this town under martial law—armored cars patrolling the streets, all persons out after dark stopped and questioned, battles in the streets, personal liberty destroyed. Just now there is one man running our show and if we can nab him we'll break the thing up. In a fortnight there will be half a dozen gangs operating, and you'll see what you'll see."

"How could any human being be so brutal, so cruel as to shoot down helpless people?" she exclaimed.

Ames laughed with some of his former cynicism.

"Human lives have never been allowed to stand in the way of big money. If, by killing a dozen little business men, this Racket leader can put the town under tribute and extract millions, you can be sure he won't hesitate. It's a wolf against a herd of cowardly sheep, Anna."

"In this day and age——"

"That modern cities have been so safe is the big miracle of the age. In former centuries all good citizens carried arms and knew how to use them. Nobles and rich men employed private bodyguards, and never ventured into the streets unless well escorted. Bandits infested the cities and defied not only the police but the armies. With five hundred men Chief Clancy has guarded half a million people in Bolton with hardly a murder a year. That's a miracle. Here's Stephens' Village. Let's drop into the Merrymont Inn first."

CHAPTER XIII.

MERRYMONT INN.

HE parked his car and they entered the road house—a long, weather-beaten, two-story building fronted by a wide porch. The lower story was a blaze of lights, and there were many lights in the

windows of the private rooms upstairs. The blare of saxophones and trombones greeted them as they entered the long, wide dining room.

One dined well and not very expensively at Merrymont, and one danced on a good maple floor to what passes for good dance music in these days—a band of darkies who made up in heartiness what they lacked in harmony.

There were booths on either side of the dining hall, two rows of tables on either side of the long, narrow dance floor, snowy napery, glittering silver and a cheerful flicker of candles on every table.

The head waiter nodded to Ames and without suggestion conducted them to a booth at the farther side. "Cocktails?" he asked as he seated them. Fletcher looked at the girl, who shook her head.

"Just one. Have you dined, Anna?"

"No, I thought——"

"Neither have I. Two table d'hôtes."

They inspected their fellow diners while they waited. Ames saw half a dozen young people whom he knew to be prominent in Bolton society, and three or four well-known business men with their wives—at least, with ladies. He observed ginger ale and mineral water bottles on their tables and understood that they were merely accessory to the forbidden liquid which was blended with them.

"I feel guilty for coming to a place like this so soon," the girl said. "If you hadn't told me you needed some one for—you know why—I should have refused."

"Yet what harm is there in bright lights and music? I'm sure your father would be glad to know that you are not moping in a dreary house. And you are doing me a service. I've got a hunch that this village is headquarters for—our friends. And I have reason to think that this place is a special hangout of theirs." He was thinking of Dennis Morgan who had lurked here and had his conference with his lawyer in one of the private rooms. "By Jove!"

"What?"

"See that tall man with the black, waxed mustache, dancing with that very pretty blonde?"

Anna looked out.

"He resembles the villain in the melodrama."

"His name is Guy Larson. His business is keeping criminals out of jail. A criminal lawyer. He makes big money, stands well in town and, I'm told, is in society. Funny world, isn't it?"

"I know that girl," said Anna. "The hair fooled me because it used to be black. She went to grammar school with me. She was a waitress for a while and then went to New York and went on the stage. That dress she has on cost five hundred dollars."

The reporter grinned.

"Larson paid for it. She came here with a musical show last year and left the show. Larson is seen everywhere with her. His sweetie. I bet Larson thinks he has a Broadway belle. You can be sure he doesn't know she's a local product."

Fletcher's cocktail arrived, and the soup also. For a few moments they busied themselves with refreshment. Then Anna, looking up, met the glance of the blond, black-eyed young woman who had been dancing with Larson. The girl saw recognition in Anna's clear, blue eyes, hesitated, decided to make the best of it, smiled, and stopped at the table.

"Hello, Anna Schultz," she said. "It's ages since I seen you. I was reading about your father. Wasn't that terrible? I wouldn't have thought——"

Anna flushed guiltily.

"I am not dancing," she said. "This is Mr. Fletcher Ames, Miss——"

"Gwendoline Carleton," said the girl quickly. "I changed my name when I went on the stage. Martha Tubbs was a rotten name. Pleased to meet you,

Mr. Ames. You're a reporter, ain't you?"

"Guilty as charged."

"Well," said the girl with a stupid titter, "I'm on my way."

Anna shrugged her shoulders when Miss Carleton had swept on.

"Martha never was very bright," she said.

Fletcher chuckled.

"Nature equips girls like that with some sort of low cunning to take the place of intelligence and it's good enough to impose on some pretty bright men. Larson is no fool, but he's infatuated with that moron."

"Those gems on her fingers are real and that necklace is actually of pearls," declared Anna. "Well, I'd rather teach children for thirty-five dollars a week."

They were quite unaware that Guy Larson, halfway across the room, was watching them.

Guy Larson was nervous and irritable to-night.

For years he had been in the business of cheating justice of its prey. When a man is admitted to practice law he promises to defend the right, and never knowingly take the case of an evildoer. Doubtless there are many attorneys who adhere strictly to this pledge, but there are plenty also who disregard it.

Larson had secured the acquittal of hardened criminals whom he knew to be guilty, and had accepted as his fee money which he knew to be stolen. His conscience had been thrown overboard years ago. If he had refrained from criminal acts himself, it was because he had no need of committing them, not because of any respect for law.

Chance having placed him in the position of making use of a band of gunmen, he had embarked upon the racket with his eyes wide open and without a qualm. Bolton was a ripe, rich plum ready for plucking. In his opinion chances of detection were very remote, and a profit of hundreds of thousands, perhaps a million, was waiting to be gathered. All it would cost would be a dozen lives.

He had given the word to bump off Schultz and Rosenbaum with utter sangfroid. That three police officers had fallen was not his fault, for policemen expected to take their chances. Anyway, the slaying of the trio helped convince his victims in the city that they need expect no protection from the authorities.

Killings were necessary to the success of the Racket, and he was prepared to slay and spare not. His conscience would not trouble him.

Yet something *was* troubling him. He had shuddered when he heard that Rosenbaum and his bodyguard had died on the sidewalk on Main Street, and now his nerves were on edge.

He was annoyed and disgusted with his weakness, and calling Gwendoline up, he had invited her to go dancing at Stephens' to get the thing out of his mind. He had drunk more than usual to drive away the white, reproaching faces that persisted in floating before his mind's eye.

It annoyed him to discover Fletcher Ames in the dining room of the Merrymont; but the fellow had a girl with him and, most likely, had no other purpose in being present than to dine and dance. Everybody came to Stephens' because they could get a drink with their meals there.

Yet that damn reporter was nosing around and might hit on something. Ames had better look out. No prying newspaper man would be allowed to get in the way of big money. The fellow was a worse menace than the stupid old chief of police, whom Larson would not allow to be superseded if it could be helped.

Larson followed Gwendoline's progress indifferently as she crossed the room. What was that? She was stopping at Ames' table. She was shaking

hands with the girl there. Now she was being introduced to the reporter. This was too much!

Was Ames suspicious of him? Was he on his trail? Was it possible that he had found a girl who knew Gwendoline, and had brought her here in hope of just such an incident?

Larson, giving the devil his due, reflected that Ames was no fledgling journalist but an old, experienced reporter with an unusually keen mind. He was fearless and audacious.

"But he can't have any reason to suspect me," thought Larson.

If Ames did get on the trail he would not be afraid to follow it. He could not be terrorized like the miserable garage keepers and milkmen and pawnbrokers of Bolton, and the fellow seemed omnipresent.

It was Ames who had witnessed the killing of the policeman near Carty's speakeasy on the South Side, and it was Ames who had prevented the Schultz women from accepting the offer for their garage made them by Dennis Morgan. Ames was after Morgan, had followed him to Stephens', had bearded Larson in his office, and was now in Merrymont and had just been introduced to Gwendoline Carleton.

Larson was chewing the waxed end of his mustache, a prey to nervous apprehension. There was no trail pointing to himself, no possibility that Ames could find a reason for suspecting him. But a man of imagination often manages to arrive at a correct conclusion by a perfectly illogical jump.

The attorney had seen the reporter a good many times in the past ten years, had been in his company on one or two large parties and had no animus of any sort against him; but there was only one way to play the game in which he had engaged. Ames knew too much already and might find out more. He must be eliminated.

Larson turned up his chair and walked out of the dining room to the porch, then crossed the yard toward his car—a big, shiny roadster which stood in line with many other machines. The uniformed attendant saw him and walked to meet him.

"Louis," said Larson, "do you know Fletcher Ames?"

"No."

"He's a tall, dark man, about thirty-five, with gray at his temples. He is sitting on the farther side of the dining room in a booth with a pretty blond girl in mourning. He's a newspaper reporter and he knows too much. 'Get him!"

"Better not do it here," demurred Louis. "We don't want to attract attention to the place, bo."

"I want it done at once. He's our worst enemy."

"I'll fix him. The girl, too?"

"No, no. No killing of women."

Louis laughed coarsely.

"You'll get over that. They're as dangerous as the men. O. K., Larson." He went to meet a car which was entering the parking space.

Larson walked on to his own machine, pretended to remove the key, and then returned to his table in the dining room. Gwendoline had just returned, too.

Louis was a heavily built man in a neat, blue uniform, with the cap and gaiters of a chauffeur. He had very swarthy skin, a flat nose and a heavy jaw. There was a full description of him in the hands of the police of Chicago and New York, and under it was the caption: "Pete Moronzoni, bootlegger, gang leader and alleged murderer of two members of the Alcarni gang."

Louis parked the car of the latest arrivals, pocketed a half-dollar tip, then led them to the entrance to the inn, looked through the door of the dining room and spotted the man that Larson wished eliminated. He then walked rapidly toward the Merrymont Garage.

"Who are those people you were talking to?" Larson demanded of Miss Carleton.

"What people?"

"That blond girl over there and the man with her. I saw you stop at their table."

"Oh, them. I used to know that girl —in New York it was. And she introduced me to the boy friend. I forget his name." Gwendoline spoke rapidly. Having supplied Larson with a highly exaggerated biography of her life in New York and her childhood as a member of an old family of Kentucky, she had no wish to have him learn that she had grown up in Bolton and slung hash in a café there.

"Come on, daddy, let's dance," she proposed. "That swell music must not be wasted."

Ames and Anna having finished dinner, the reporter excused himself and strolled out into the hall, walked up to the second floor, looked around, came downstairs and walked out on the porch.

The evening had not been wasted, for he was falling more and more under the spell of the pretty little school-teacher; but, so far as picking up anything helpful to his assignment was concerned, it had been a fruitless journey.

He returned to his table, chatted for half an hour, and then Anna suggested going home.

"It's done me a lot of good to get out of the house. I still feel dreadfully about father and shall for a long time," she said, "but I have enjoyed the evening."

Ames paid the waiter, and they rose and left the dining room.

Larson, dancing with Gwendoline, saw them depart and had an impulse to call them back and rescind his orders. He was not yet so inured to slaughter that he could not be affected by the sight of a victim marching out to death. He bit his lower lip until it bled and continued to dance.

Fletcher helped Anna into his car, climbed in after her, started the engine, threw on his lights and swung out of the parking space. As he did so a car passed him, turned toward Bolton and roared along the highway at sixty miles an hour. Its tail light vanished in a couple of minutes as Fletcher's little bus jogged gently along.

CHAPTER XIV.

AMBUSH.

THE moon had come up, the air was fresh and sweet, and the presence of the young woman sitting so close to him was inexpressibly soothing. Ames admitted to himself that he liked Anna Schultz more than any girl he had encountered for years.

They had covered perhaps a mile and a half and were traveling through scrub woods, when a red light appeared a few hundred yards ahead and began to swing like the lantern of a railroad brakeman.

"Trouble ahead," he muttered as he slowed down. "Perhaps that crazy driver who passed us back at Merrymont has come to grief. Serve him right."

He rolled forward slowly and dimly discerned a man standing in the road, swinging a red lantern. When Ames was fifty feet distant the fellow lowered the light and lifted a warning arm.

A second man appeared and began to approach the car on the left, and just then the moon came out from behind a cloud and, for the first time, shone brightly. Ames muttered an oath, thrust his hand into his right-hand jacket pocket, pulled out his automatic, leaned over the side, took aim and pulled the trigger. A fraction of a second later a gun appeared in the hand of the fellow on the left, but it did not speak for he dropped upon his face in the road.

Anna uttered a succession of piercing shrieks. Still holding the gun, Fletcher

thrust out his clutch, threw in his gears, stepped on the gas and darted forward with the grinding and gnashing of an automobile at high speed in first gear.

The fellow with the lantern broke for the roadside, and Ames could not fire because of the windshield.

"Down in the bottom!" he commanded the girl. "Get down, I say!"

Instinctively she crouched while he bent forward, shifted to second speed and immediately to third.

There were flashes of fire from the roadside, the *ping!* of bullets striking the steel side of the car, the whiz of a piece of lead flying by his head—and then they were past and out of danger. Anna still crouched in the bottom of the car, and he heard her sobbing.

"It's all right, darling," he said softly. "We're safe now." He reached down and drew her back upon the seat.

"You killed that man!" she cried. "How could you?"

"It was his life or ours," he said between clenched teeth. "I'm sorry you had to see that, dear."

"But—but what was it for? Why? What made them shoot at us?"

"Compliments of the Racket. The gangsters set a trap for me. Wow! That was a close shave."

Anna was quivering and shaking, but she resolutely wiped away her tears.

"How did you know?" she asked in a tremolo. "It might have been an automobile accident—and you shot that man before you could tell why they were stopping us."

"It was the moon that saved us," he explained. "I had no suspicion when I saw the fellow with the lantern, and I supposed the second man was coming to ask for a tow. But when the moon came out I recognized him as the yegg who murdered Officer Lafe Brown. He opened fire on me that night, and I was unarmed and had to let him get away. I didn't see his face that night, but I recognized his shoulders and slouch."

"Just the same," she persisted, "you might have been mistaken and you fired first."

"You bet I did. I knew I wasn't mistaken. The only way to stop these gangsters is to beat them to the draw. They are so confident that they will have the jump on you that it's possible to do it. Well, score one for law."

"Fletcher," she said sadly, "you are hard. I recognize that you were right, and there is no doubt you saved your life and perhaps mine, but it was terrible to fire at a man who might not have had evil intentions."

He sighed.

"I know how you feel about it. Perhaps you won't want to see me any more. I'm an old soldier, Anna—at least I was under fire for a year—and I'm used to battle and sudden death. I had to take the chance that it was a gangster who was coming up on us, and I was right. The other fellow who fired as we passed him proved that they had set a trap for us. I like you, Anna, better than any other girl, and I am not a brute normally. Really I am not."

She smiled through her tears and laid her hand on his right arm.

"I know you are not," she said. "I like you. I admire you while I am afraid of you. And I don't think I am much afraid of you."

"Thank you," he said simply.

Little more was said during the remainer of the ride, and he deposited her at her door without further incident.

"When shall I see you again?" she asked.

He considered.

"I don't think we had better meet until this war is over," he said slowly. "I want to see you, but I led you into dreadful danger to-night. Those fellows would have fired into the car and not worried if they had killed you as well as myself. It means that I am marked down by the gangsters as a dan-

gerous man. And this is only the first attempt. No, I'll telephone you but I won't come to see you."

"But Fletcher, they may—oh, they will kill you!" She was wailing.

"I took the fire of a couple of million Germans for a year, and I doubt if a dozen gangsters can get me," he said with more confidence in his tone than he actually felt.

"I'm frightened, really I am. I don't want you to be killed."

"Well, I'm glad of that," he said, trying to laugh. "May I kiss you good-by?"

She put up her sweet lips, and he touched them almost reverently. And then her arm went around his neck, his head was pulled down, and her lips pressed fiercely against his.

"So that's how it is with us," he murmured when it was over. "Don't worry about me, darling. They'll never get me now."

"Please, oh, please take care of yourself."

"Good night, dear. I'll telephone you two or three times a day."

"I want to see you. I must."

"No. It might be dangerous for you. I've got to go into hiding probably."

They parted at last and he got into his car in a frame of mind totally unfamiliar to him.

He found himself at police headquarters without knowing how he got there, and went in and reported what had happened on the Stephens' Village road to the lieutenant in charge.

"I am quite certain I shot the man who killed Lafe Brown," he declared.

"Think he's dead?"

"Either that or very badly wounded. I'm a good shot and he was only twenty feet away. He fell like a dead man."

"Good riddance," the lieutenant said. "Want a piece of advice, Fletcher? Blow the town. I wouldn't be in your shoes for a million dollars. They'll get you sure as fate."

"I'm staying on the job until the last of them is laid out," declared Ames.

"Well, it will be your funeral and don't you think it won't. Now, about the guy you shot—there will be an inquiry as a matter of form, but everybody will give you three rousing cheers. I'll send a police car right out there to pick up the body, but we won't find it. They had a car. It was their car that went ahead of you at Merrymont, and they put the body in it and carried it off. Somebody spotted you at Merrymont, of course."

"No doubt of it. They saw me dining there and laid around until I started away."

"Well, we'll do what we can in that nest of crooks, but we won't have any luck. We never do. Want me to send an officer home with you?"

"I'm going to the *News* office to write the story. They would get your policeman if they got me, and why take the chance? Good night."

"I like you, Fletcher. This isn't your business. Leave town for a few weeks."

"Nope."

"Well, the best of luck," said the lieutenant dolefully.

Sharing some of his premonitions, Fletcher drove to the *News* office and wrote the story of his adventure on the Stephens' Village road, being careful to omit the fact that he had a companion in the car. He stated in his article that he had recognized the assassin of Officer Lafe Brown and had fired first for that reason.

He went home and to bed and, strangely enough, slept very well.

CHAPTER XV.

NEMESIS.

IN the morning he considered his situation. His activity in reporting the crimes of the gangsters was responsible for the attempt upon his life, and in

visiting Merrymont he had given them their opportunity.

Perhaps they had been waiting their chance at him for several days; or perhaps the decision to remove him was made last night at Merrymont because the chief of the band had been there.

Although he had beaten them in their first attack, he knew that he had not affected their determination in the slightest. Rather, he had given them the added incentive of revenge. It was a blood feud now.

Last evening he had explained to Anna the possibilities of gang murder in a big city, but at the time he had had no reason to think that he was a prospective victim.

Now the helplessness of one marked for death by remorseless city savages was brought home to him.

In the open country an enemy can be seen approaching from afar, and there is time to prepare a defense. But in a city a man is in and of the crowd, and the slayer may be upon him without warning.

Fletcher knew that the modern gangster has no fear of the crowd but considers it his protection. The crowd is unarmed; a shot sends it to cover, the crime is committed, and the murderer takes cover with the mob.

One man with a gun in his hand can drive a hundred like sheep before him. There can be no warning.

Fletcher did not know his enemies, but their eyes were on him. The death stroke might come while he walked down the Main Street toward his office. It might happen in a restaurant when he was lunching. He might be driving, or sitting in a street car, or working at his typewriter, or entering an elevator. And what could he do? He could not walk the streets with a gun in his hand. And if he did, at whom was he to shoot?

If he had taken the lieutenant's advice and left Bolton last night, he would probably be safe; but it was too late to fly now. His apartment was probably watched already. Perhaps, as he stepped out of the front door, the bullet would come for him. Fletcher had felt a certain contempt for the frightened business men who were paying the blackmailers and assuring the police they had not seen or heard of the organizers, but he could sympathize with them now because he was in a similar predicament.

If these gangsters wanted to kill him —and he knew they did—he would not live three days. And he had to go forth. He could not lurk in his apartment—they would find him there.

He opened his door and looked out into the hall. Perhaps a killer was lurking there. It was empty, but at the end of the corridor he saw half a dozen pails of paint and a heap of paint-stained garments.

He closed his door, then opened it, walked down the corridor and inspected the garments. There were an incredibly dirty pair of overalls, a paint-streaked jumper and a battered old felt hat with a hole in the top of it. He picked them up and retreated to his rooms.

In five minutes there emerged a slouching painter whose old hat was pulled down over his eyes, and this individual descended the stairs and went out into the street.

"So far so good," thought Fletcher Ames. He had stolen about twenty-five cents' worth of clothing, and when the painter returned from wherever he had gone he would probably make a great disturbance about the loss. But what of it?

The gangsters had Ames' description, but they would not glance twice at him now.

"Painters usually have sore eyes," he thought, and turned into a notion store to buy a pair of dark spectacles. He had not shaved that morning, and he decided to let his beard grow. And, instead of going back to his apartment,

he would get a room at some lodging house, lay in a supply of secondhand clothing and keep out of his accustomed haunts.

Passing a drug store he entered a telephone booth and called Peter Hoskins.

"I'm in disguise and hiding, Pete," he said, when the city editor came on the line. "Give out that I have been sent to Chicago to investigate the origin of the gang which is terrorizing Bolton. Put it in as an example of the enterprise of the *News*. I'm going to see what I can discover here in town under a new personality."

"I was going to suggest your leaving town, old man," said Hoskins. "They will be hard on your heels after last night."

"Did the police find the body?"

"No, but they found blood on the grass and twigs by the roadside where your victim lay before his friends carried him off. Some shooting, Fletcher."

"Well, square me with the authorities on the investigation. I can't be present."

"You bet. You're likely to be presented with the keys of the city. You've done a lot of good by showing that these phantom murderers can be downed. Make sure your disguise is a good one and, for Heaven's sake, take care of yourself."

In a secondhand clothing store, Ames bought a cheap suit case and a coarse, brown suit, much too big for him, as well as some ugly shirts. Then he took a street car to the South Side in search of an abiding place.

He was turned away from four lodging houses whose character he had underestimated, but finally rented a hall bedroom for five dollars a week, cash in advance, in a dismal and garlic-smelling establishment on South Loring Street, in the Italian and Greek quarter.

For three or four days violence ceased in Bolton, and the city breathed easier. Detectives, easily distinguishable in their ill-fitting civilian clothes and big boots, lurked in the vicinity of garages and dairies and jewelers, in the vain hope of distinguishing in the multitudes who visited those places, the collectors for the blackmailers. In several garages detectives had secured jobs as car washers and mechanics and had a better chance than the outside men to discover the agents of the gang, yet they had discovered none of them.

Floods of anonymous letters descended upon the newspapers and police headquarters from business men afraid to admit their identity. These all protested furiously against extortion, demanded protection and railed against the authorities, but none contained worthwhile information. The papers stopped printing them.

Guy Larson, who had been both perturbed and relieved at the news that Ames had escaped assassination, was further relieved at the paragraph in the *News*, saying that Fletcher Ames had been sent to Chicago to get a line on the gang which was operating in Bolton. He would learn nothing there.

Collections were very heavy and on the fourth day Larson bought the car for which Gwendoline had been pleading. Things were moving so successfully that he had no more womanish qualms about the killings, and he inaugurated another racket—lunchrooms.

The tariff on these was lower than on other lines of endeavor because there were so many of them—eighteen hundred in the city limits, exclusive of corporation chain establishments—but he set the total at a thousand dollars a week. They responded nicely, so Louis reported to him, but they found a tough customer on Larkin Street on the South side. He was a middle-aged Irishman named Patrick Marlan, a World War veteran, who had beaten up the collector, pursued him down the street and very nearly captured him.

"Get him," said Larson.

There were a score of customers in Marlan's lunchroom. It was seven o'clock on a Wednesday evening.

Two customers were approaching Marlan to pay their checks. Quite unsuspiciously the proprietor took the checks, and they reached into their pockets as if for money. Instead they drew guns and then there came the furious cracking of an automatic. The two gunmen fell, their weapons dropping upon the hardwood floor with a crash and their bodies falling upon them. A shabbily dressed, unshaven man, who had been eating a sandwich and coffee on the arm of a chair near the door, had opened fire on the assassins as their weapons appeared.

Marlan observed that the stranger wore smoked glasses and spoke in a gentlemanly voice.

"Phone for the police," the stranger commanded. "Tell them these men came in to kill you, and look out for yourself in the future." He opened the front door.

"Here!" shouted the alarmed restaurant keeper. "You shot them; I didn't. You got to wait for the police."

For reply the stranger leveled his gun, and Marlan threw up his hands. Needless to say, the customers of the café made no effort to interfere. Then he went out of the place and ran down the street.

"Nemesis!" shouted the newspapers. "The gangsters have a powerful unknown enemy. Gang war has been inaugurated in Bolton."

Tom Clancy issued a statement.

"New crime produces new police methods. Three of the gangsters are already dead, and it won't be long before we get the rest of them. We are giving these murderers their own kind of medicine. Bolton can depend upon her police department."

As a matter of fact, Chief Clancy had no idea of the identity of the executioner of the two gunmen, but he shrewdly claimed credit. And he also credited the police with the killing of the yeggman by Fletcher Ames near Stephens' Village. Clancy had read that Ames had gone to Chicago for the *News*, and so did not suspect him of being concerned in this second affair.

Fletcher had been lurking on the South Side, keeping his eyes and ears open. But he had had little hope of finding anything valuable in that quarter, since he believed the gangsters to be centered in Stephens' Village, and he had entered Marlan's because his disguise forced him to eat in third-rate places.

He had been sitting near the door when the two gangsters entered and took chairs opposite him. The men were aliens—dark, squat and low-browed—and they wore their hats as they ate. What had attracted him to them was the fact that they carried coffee and sandwiches to their chairs and then did not eat but, after a low-toned conversation, arose, leaving the food they had selected almost untouched.

Ames' eyes followed them as they approached the cashier and he saw the glitter of steel as they drew their weapons. They were unhurried, and he dragged out his own weapon and fired on them as they were in the act of lifting their guns. Six shots at ten paces accounted for them.

He could not have identified himself without giving away his disguise, so he extricated himself from the place in the manner described by Marlan.

He had no more compunction in shooting down these assassins than he would have had in killing so many reptiles. In no other way would Bolton be rid of this band.

When Fletcher read the statement of Chief Clancy next day, he chuckled in pure amusement. Crafty old Tom was doing the right thing in claiming credit.

The new guardian of law and order who fired first and got his man would cause grave concern in the ranks of the bandits. It was the first good blow at the Racketeers.

According to the newspapers the two men shot in Marlan's were Poles or Lithuanians, names unknown, whose bodies bore nothing to identify them. One had been instantly killed, the other died on the way to the hospital.

Fletcher was glad for another reason that the killings were laid to a police detective. He had phoned several times to Anna, assuring her of his safety and saying that he was in disguise on the South Side. She had seen him shoot down one man and he was afraid she would shrink from him if she suspected he had slain this pair of miscreants. Women were funny like that—ready to welcome the returning soldier with open arms though they knew that his business was wholesale killing, but fearing the man who used his gun for the protection of society at home.

That afternoon they got Patrick Marlan. He had gone out to make some purchases and he was dropped on the sidewalk at the entrance of his restaurant, with four bullets in his body. Fletcher's timely aid had saved him the night before but did not prolong his existence for twenty-four hours.

It was the gang's answer to Chief Clancy's assurance of police efficiency.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FILLING STATION.

A WEEK of lurking in a slum wore out the patience of Fletcher Ames. It would be better if he stayed at Merrymont. Dennis Morgan had hidden there. From Merrymont the gangsters had started out to waylay him. It was the most likely place to get to the bottom of the plot.

He got a German hair cut, which means that all but a few locks on top of his head were clipped. He rubbed a stain on his very white teeth, drew a long scratch at the side of his right eye with the corner of a razor blade—which was painful and bled for a while but changed astonishingly the expression of his face, donned his disreputable brown suit, put on a pair of rough brogans and hopped on a trolley car for Stephens' Village.

The smoked glasses he discarded, for they were apt to awaken suspicion of a disguise. He had no intention of presenting himself in road-house dining rooms, but proposed to get a job around a garage and from that vantage point look over the layout in the wicked little settlement.

He got off the car and applied to Louis, the smartly uniformed auto attendant of Merrymont, for something to do. Louis inspected him casually and sent him about his business, unaware that this was the man whose bumping off he had so neatly arranged a week before. Nor had Fletcher any suspicion that it was Louis who had arranged it.

He tried three other road houses and then secured a night job at a gasoline filling station in the center of the village.

The gas station was owned by the proprietor of a grocery store close by who lived with his family upon the second floor of his establishment. He rented Fletcher a small, clean room which contained a fair bed. The hours were from seven p. m. until seven a. m., and the pay twenty-five dollars a week and tips. The tips averaged a dollar and a half a night—it was a small station and most of the visitors filled their tanks at the road-house garages.

The newspaper man had plenty of time for reflection between midnight and seven in the morning, for business grew very slack at that period. It was a dull, monotonous occupation, but he found himself satisfied with it.

Life was bubbling in his veins; youth was pouring back into them. He was like a fisherman happily waiting, for hours on end, for the bite of the big fish who was sure to come. He was able to marvel at his old attitude toward men and things—the attitude based upon the obsession that the year 1918 had been high tide and everything since the ebb.

There was a lovely young girl who loved him and prayed for him and worried about him, and there were long, happy years ahead when they would be together. And he was on a big job now. Civilization was facing a new peril. The Racket in Bolton was a symbol of what was going to happen to fat and sleepy prosperity if it didn't wake up. Single-handed he was combating a murderous secret organization and had already accounted for three of its members. Figuratively speaking, they had put a price on his head, and he had come into their lair and was, as yet undiscovered. During the war he had never faced greater danger. And when this job was over there would be others as interesting. Oh, it was a good old world and no mistake!

He had time to consider this secret organization which was operating the Racket. Apparently they were taking toll of a couple of thousand victims in Bolton. This must be a task. A single collector, with the precautions he must take, could not visit more than a score of places in a day, and that meant that a dozen men at least must be doing the collecting. These fellows could not be stupid gunmen; they had to be cunning and smooth and fiendishly efficient. The police had a description of only one of them.

In order to make really big profits the Racketeers must continue to draw revenue for months, and, despite the bewilderment and impotence of the Bolton authorities, that did not seem possible. The gangsters wouldn't stop at this. It was chicken feed for a big organization, although it would be highly profitable for one man. These little Rackets were just to feel out their strength. There was bigger game. There were scores of millionaires in Bolton who valued their lives highly. Why, the yeggs could terrify some of those fellows into paying fifty or a hundred thousand! Bombs. Machine guns. The Racket in Bolton was only getting under way.

Ames felt that he was accomplishing nothing in the filling station. With so many crooks involved, it was curious that they left no threads for a fellow to pick up. He would have given a good deal to see Anna, but the enemy knew that he was interested in her. He might be shot dead on her doorstep. Telephoning was some consolation. It was great to have a girl like that thinking about one.

Off hours he prowled. Stephens' Village consisted of a cluster of small homes, a dozen stores, a church, three movie houses and a couple of garages. Thanks to the heavy taxes paid by the amusement purveyors, the streets were well paved and well lighted.

Beyond the village lay the road houses and gambling places. Merrymont was the largest of the road houses. Besides the main building it included a good-sized garage, and a row of bungalows where the help lived.

The main gate stood open always, and apparently there were free entrance and exit for all. But sharp eyes inspected those who turned in, and somebody always appeared and demanded the business of any suspicious-looking pedestrian, while Louis in person inspected the occupants of the automobiles which drew up in the parking space.

Fletcher had kept tabs on Merrymont as well as he could, considering that his gas station was a quarter of a mile away from the main gate. He had a nodding acquaintance with a good many of the employees, and had talked casually with

a few of them who came to the village in the afternoon to attend a picture show.

If his theory was corrcet—that Stephens' Village was headquarters for the gangsters—then Merrymont was their lurking place. He estimated that there were twenty or thirty waiters in the road house and twelve or fourteen men in the kitchen and pantry force. On the grounds were half a dozen more, and half a dozen were employed in the garage.

One could go from Merrymont to the business center of Bolton in less than twenty-five minutes in an automobile. Gangsters could be at work and back to their hiding place in an hour. The advantages of such a roost would surely appeal to the chief of the bandits —whoever he was.

Among the fifty or sixty employees of the road house, there might well be a score of gunmen. Bill Hines, proprietor of the inn, was a notorious bootlegger who supplied hundreds of persons in Bolton with their liquor. Undoubtedly he had some gunmen in his employ even if he was not harboring the Racket gang.

Fletcher had seen Louis, the manager of the auto park, on a dozen occasions; had supplied him with gasoline when the Merrymont pump had run dry upon several occasions, and he was certain that crime was written on the fellow's face. Besides, he talked English with a rowdy intonation not to be learned by aliens who had spent their lives in New England.

A sudden descent upon Merrymont and the search and capture of the people employed there would yield many weapons, much ammunition and a good many men wanted by the police in various cities. Of that Ames was certain. It would probably end the Racket in Bolton. But the place would have to be rushed by a strong party, and where was a posse to be found?

The State attorney general could swear in a band of deputies and descend upon a resort in any part of the State, but he would not move without very strong proof of wrongdoing, and Fletcher Ames had no real proof.

The Federal agents could swoop down upon any establishment suspected of selling liquor, but their purpose was only to find stores of contraband and their business was not to corral gangsters. Besides, their movements had always been tipped off to the road-house people and the occasional raids had always been abortive.

Single-handed, Ames knew he would not live a minute if he invaded Merrymont with hostile purpose.

Evidently the thing he had to do was to locate the chief of this intrenched band of murderers, pin the evidence on him, nab him and so destroy the gang by decapitating it. From that goal he seemed as far as when he had taken the trail.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARKED MONEY.

ON the eighth day of his employment at the gas station, he went on duty as usual at seven p. m., and ten minutes later went forward to attend to the wants of a small sedan which drew up in front of the pump.

As he stepped to the side of the car, the driver covered him with a gun.

"You're under arrest, mister," he announced. "Stand still."

A second man, who had dismounted at the other side of the car, came up behind Fletcher, tapped his hip pocket and drew out his cherished automatic.

"Heeled!" he exclaimed. "We've got one of the babies."

Ames, who had turned pale because he thought it was a gang move against him, laughed cheerfully.

"Hello, Sergeant Ferguson," he said. "If you take that, who'll shoot your gunmen for you?"

The man who had frisked him was Ferguson from Bolton headquarters. "Damn if it ain't Fletcher Ames!" exclaimed the officer.

Ames looked hastily around. The street was deserted. No one was within earshot.

"What made you pick on me? Give me back my gun."

"Holy smoke! won't the chief be sore!" exclaimed Sergeant Ferguson. "It's all right, Mullen. This is a *News* reporter."

"What's it all about?" demanded Fletcher.

Ferguson sighed.

"Just trying to catch the gang. Say, was it you that plugged those yeggs in Marlan's? We thought you had gone to Chicago."

"I'm the police Nemesis of the gangsters that Clancy is boasting about. Why did you want to arrest me?" the reporter asked.

"Let's go into your little house," said Sergeant Ferguson. He was a sharp-featured, blue-eyed, blond giant, and Ames knew him as one of the brightest men on the Bolton force.

"It's like this, Ames," said the sergeant when they had entered the shanty. "We've got some of these association members working with us on the Q. T., and they've been paying the collectors with marked money. The first that showed up was a twenty-dollar bill you gave a special officer last night in exchange for a fifty he handed over for twenty gallons of gas. We've had our eye on this village. We think they hide out here, and naturally we supposed you were one of the gang."

"Twenty dollars? Got the bill on you?"

Ferguson produced it. On the reverse side was a dot in black ink at the upper right-hand corner. On the lower left-hand corner were two tiny dots.

"We don't do much business here," the reporter said. "I only took one twenty-dollar bill yesterday. I sold a fifty-gallon tank of gas to the auto-park man at Merrymont. The fellow they call Louis."

"Fine. We'll go pick him up," said the sergeant.

"Wait a minute. He takes in a lot of money up there. He might have got the twenty from one of the guests at the road house. They feed a couple of hundred people a day up there and sell them a lot of gas."

"Maybe he will remember who gave it to him."

"It's very unlikely. And that bill might have passed through a dozen hands since it was delivered to the collector."

"Well, it won't do any harm to ask him."

Ames considered.

"It's my opinion, Ferguson, that Louis is a gangster. He looks like one and talks like one, and I suspect that it was he who spotted me at the inn that night and sent a couple of gunmen to waylay me on the road. Now, if you jump on him and ask where he got this marked bill, he will tell you that he took in a lot of twenties from guests and he doesn't know who gave it to him. So you'll get nothing from him in that way. On the other hand, if he is in the Racket gang, he will report that the police are having the bills marked which are handed over to the collector. They'll send future collections out of town, and you cook your own chances."

Ferguson whistled softly.

"You're dead right. But what are we going to do? I have orders to trace this bill."

"Go back and tell Clancy that I am out here watching Merrymont and that I know the bill came from the auto-park man there. I'm sure he got it from the gang; perhaps it's part of his cut in the collections. Tell the chief to put a shadow on Louis; he may lead you to the boss of the Racket. But it won't

do any good to pinch him. Guy Larson would have him out in an hour, and you have nothing to hold him on anyway."

"You have a good head on your shoulders, Ames," the sergeant said admiringly. "I think you're dead right. The chief will be glad to know you're around. I know you're in his confidence."

"Any developments in Bolton? I don't hear anything out here."

Ferguson hesitated.

"I'll tell you in confidence. There is high hell to pay. They threatened to bomb the home of Henry Claxton, the department-store man, unless he came through with fifty thousand in cash. He came through pronto. He tipped the chief off, but refused to tell how or to whom he paid the money. He said he had ample evidence that these gangsters carried out their threats, and that, having paid the money, he proposed to live in comfort. But he was confiding in Clancy so the chief could know what was going on. Half a dozen of the big fellows may have been touched like that, for all we know. They are as cowardly as the little milkmen and pawnbrokers."

"More so. There was nothing cowardly about the behavior of Schultz and Rosenbaum. I expected this sort of thing, Ferguson. This is a big gang and small Rackets wouldn't pay them enough. Fifty thousand to Claxton won't cramp him, but fifty dollars a week would have ruined Rosenbaum. Bombs are coming into it? Well, it was to be expected."

"We can't do anything when we get no coöperation from the citizens," complained Ferguson. "Well, I suppose we can find you here when we want to see you."

"Nix," smiled the reporter. "You are known in this village, and probably the gang has heard already that you and I are here in conference. I'm going back to Bolton in your car. I may be dead in an hour if I stay behind."

Ferguson opened his eyes.

"Say, you're a cautious citizen!"

"They want me more than they want anybody in Bolton. Wait. I've got to take care of this car."

A roadster containing a man and woman had driven up to one of the gas pumps, and Fletcher went out to meet it, followed by the burly detective, Ferguson.

The man in the roadster leaned out.

"Forgot to fill my tank in town and ran out. Give me ten—— Say!"

Ames was looking into the face of Guy Larson, and Larson was gazing at him with recognition.

"Hello, Mr. Larson," he said quietly. Beside Larson was Gwendoline Carleton.

"Fletcher Ames!" exclaimed Larson. "I thought you were in Chicago. What in heck! Are you in disguise? Why are you running a gas station?"

"I needed plenty of fresh air," the reporter smiled. He was studying the face of Larson and especially the eyes of the man. It was natural for the lawyer to display surprise on discovering the reporter under such circumstances; but there was more than surprise showing in his black eyes.

"Sergeant Ferguson, too!" exclaimed Larson. "A little detective work going on here?"

Ferguson was standing beside Ames.

"That's as good a guess as any, Mr. Larson."

"Well, it's none of my business. Ten gallons, Mr. Operator."

Gwendoline leaned forward and beamed upon the reporter.

"I wouldn't have known you, Mr. Ames," she tittered. "You have such a funny hair cut. Did Anna put that scratch on your eye?"

"Good evening, Miss Carleton," he replied. "I bit myself, and somebody threw a hatchet at my hair. Ten gal-

lons—two dollars and five cents, Mr. Larson."

"Give my regards to Anna," called Gwendoline as the car drove off.

"Quick!" exclaimed Fletcher to the sergeant. "I'll lock this place up, deliver the key at the grocery store and be off with you. I have urgent business away from here."

In a couple of minutes he climbed into the police car. It returned to the city at top speed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS MR. LARSON.

AN incredible idea was whirling around in the head of Fletcher Ames. Unconsciously he had constructed in his mind an impressionistic picture of the ruthless ruler of this mob of murderers—a brawny, brutal, low-browed, heavy-jowled, big-nosed savage who had settled in a city which was strange to him and was mowing down his opponents as implacably as such a man might annihilate human atoms who stood in the way of what he wanted.

Once Ames had said to Chief Clancy that the head Racketeer might be somebody known to them, but he had not believed it.

His fixed impression of Guy Larson was more that of a jackal than a wolf. Larson fed upon the profits of thieves. He was without principle—a shrewd, cautious lawyer who would never put his neck in a noose and who lacked the daring personally to break any important law.

But he knew that Larson was a heavy and unfortunate gambler—that was town gossip. He knew that Larson's income, large as it probably was, could hardly equal his expenditures. That Carleton girl, with her jewels, her fine dresses and her car, must be costing him thirty or forty thousand a year. Was there so much money in defending the rather picayune criminals of Bolton?

The gang leader of his imagination, now that he considered it, was not an intelligent type.

This campaign against Bolton had elements of genius in it, and it must have been devised by some one who knew the city inside and out. Guy Larson, if he had the courage and the instruments at hand, was in a position to plan such a campaign and carry it out. He knew the resources of the city and the location of its money bags. As a criminal lawyer he could risk being seen with unsavory-looking subjects without awakening suspicion. Thus even Ames had thought nothing of his conference at Merrymont with the gun-carrying Dennis Morgan.

Larson had standing in the community, a wide circle of acquaintances, political influence and an established reputation for making and spending large sums of money. Fortunate speculation would account for sudden affluence.

He was a sporting man, so he could visit the dens in Stephens' Village without causing comment. And he was in a position to consult as often as he wished with the criminals supposedly at Merrymont, under the pretense of going there with a young woman for dining and dancing.

Ames now recalled that he had seen Larson in Merrymont the night that the attack had been made on himself and Anna Schultz. He remembered now that Larson had left the room for a few minutes during the absence of Gwendoline from his table.

Was it Larson who had passed the word along to slay the reporter on the lonely road? No, that was impossible. Larson had been on speaking terms with Ames for years; their relations were pleasant if not friendly. The man would be a fiend to plot the murder of an acquaintance.

Yet suppose Larson were afraid of him? Suppose he thought that Ames

had not credited his explanation of the meeting with Dennis Morgan?

All this was plausible. Given any sort of hypothesis, it is astonishing what a sound-appearing theory can be constructed upon any subject. Larson was cultured, polished, agreeable, and not a brutal type. He looked like an old-fashioned gambler, perhaps, not a killer—but these polished old-time Western gamblers had been gunmen and dead shots.

It was plausible, but Ames would not have toyed with this idea save for one thing. There had been a look in the eyes of Guy Larson that betrayed him. There was fear in that look—alarm more than surprise. Why should Larson be alarmed to find the reporter in disguise there if the lawyer were a law-abiding citizen? The mask had dropped for a second. Larson was afraid Ames might find out something—and it wasn't the alarm of a good lawyer for his client. He was afraid for himself.

Ames had left the gas station in great haste because of the expression in the eyes of Guy Larson, yet at that moment he had not been conscious that his reason was the fear that Larson would set the gunmen on him. Now he was sure that he would have been slain in an hour.

What the astute lawyer had dreaded, that night in Merrymont when he ordered Louis to remove Fletcher Ames, had happened. Without logic or reason the clever mind of the reporter had intuitively discovered the head murderer.

Assuming, however, that Larson had the motive and the will to loot the city of Bolton, where did he get the means? A man cannot enlist a band of murderers without considerable trouble, even in this day and age.

Well, again Larson was the one person in Bolton who might overcome that difficulty. He had dealings with the underworld, not only in Bolton but in other cities, and the underworld denizens travel far and wide. Through his ordinary clients he might have got in touch with some New York or Chicago gangster who had come to Bolton to hide, and, with him, concocted the conspiracy. The latter could get his followers by whistling for them. A partnership, perhaps. And, for a partner—Louis at Merrymont.

Louis was a gangster, surly and unpleasant enough, but more intelligent than the thugs who had fallen to the gun of Fletcher Ames. He answered to Ames' notion of what a gang leader might be like. Louis was at Merrymont, and Larson went out there with his girl three or four evenings a week. Gwendoline was not entirely an item of expense to Larson in that case—she served as camouflage for his real purpose in frequenting the road house.

"What are you grousing about?" asked Sergeant Ferguson. "I spoke to you three or four times and you haven't answered."

"I was thinking," replied Ames. "I've got to get a new disguise and a new hiding place. They're after me."

"Better jump the rattler. I wish I could get away myself. I've no liking for a bullet in my stomach."

CHAPTER XIX.

NERVES.

GUY LARSON drove on to Merrymont in a frame of mind which offended Gwendoline. Her questions only irritated him.

"What do you s'pose made that feller take a job at a gas station?" she was demanding. "They don't pay much for that kind of work, do they?"

"No!" he snapped.

"And he looked so gentlemanly that night I saw him at the inn. I was wondering how Anna Schultz got such a swell boy friend."

"Huh! Anna Schultz—was that the blond girl who was with him, the one you spoke to?"

"Yea-ar."

He turned on her fiercely.

"You damned little fool! Why didn't you say so? You told me she was a girl you knew in New York."

Gwendoline tossed her head.

"I forgot where I met her. It must have been when I first came here with the show."

Schultz! Then that was the daughter of Gus Schultz, the garage man. She and Ames were trying to run down her father's murderer. That was their business at the inn, not to dine and dance and sip cocktails. He had been right in telling Louis to get rid of Ames, but the idiot had bungled the job. Now Ames was convinced that the gang was using Merrymont and he was pretending to be a gas-pump operator to spy on the place.

A cold sweat started out on Larson's forehead. Ames was poison; he was hot on the trail.

It was pretty near time to quit. Three or four more of the big men in Bolton would have to give up in a few days, and then he'd better suspend operations. He'd have a long talk with Louis.

However, a murder charge is never outlawed, and Larson did not know how near Ames might be to a discovery of the identity of the chief bandits. As he parked his car he gave a signal to Louis. After escorting Gwendoline to the inn, he remembered something in the car and left her. Louis crossed the yard with him—just an obsequious menial, to all appearance.

"Louis!" he snapped. "That reporter, Ames, whom you failed to dispose of a week or so ago, is running the gas station in the village. He is spying on this place and he knows too much. You must jump him immediately."

"You mean that man with the shaved head at the stand near the grocery store? I've talked to him. He ain't the reporter."

"He is. I recognized him and talked to him, and he admitted it."

"Fine," said Louis. "I'll fix him right away. Send a couple of boys in a car, haul up for gas and then plug him. He's as good as dead, Larson."

"Well, see that there's no slip-up this time. That man Ames is our biggest danger. When will you do it?"

Louis grinned.

"He'll be dead in ten minutes."

Larson wiped his moist forehead, fumbled with his instrument board, then walked rapidly to the inn.

It was the only thing to do, of course. It had to be done. Well, good-by, Fletcher Ames.

Half an hour later his tête-à-tête with Gwendoline was interrupted by a waiter.

"You're wanted on the telephone, Mr. Larson."

Larson left the dining room but went out into the yard instead of toward the telephone booths. At the foot of the porch Louis was waiting.

"Well, did you get him?" he demanded tensely.

Louis shook his head.

"He wasn't there."

"He is there, you fool! I saw him half an hour ago."

"Nobody was there. The place was locked and they said in the grocery store he turned in the key and threw up his job a little while ago. He rode off in a car with two men."

"Oh, my God!" muttered Larson. The meaning of this action on the part of the reporter was brought home to him. Ames had fled because he had expected an immediate attempt on his life. Larson had recognized him and the reporter had at once abandoned his post and gone back to town with Sergeant Ferguson.

Why should he consider himself in danger because his disguise had been

penetrated by a well-known and reputable Boltonian? It must be because he suspected that Guy Larson was in league with the gangsters and would order his destruction. He must suspect that it was Larson who had ordered the first attempt on his life.

"What's the matter wid you?" demanded Louis. 'You're shaking all over."

"They're onto us," he muttered. "Louis, call everything off, collect your men and beat it. We've got to go out of business."

Louis eyed him contemptuously.

"You make me sick," he declared. "You got a streak of yellow a yard wide, you have. He ain't got nothin' on us, he ain't."

"I tell you he has. He ran away because I recognized him. That means he suspects me."

"Bah!" scoffed Louis. "In Chicago they suspect me of killing ten men. Suspicion isn't anything. They got to have proof. He ain't got nothin' on you."

"He will have. We've got to quit, I tell you."

"Lissen. We've only got a few hundred grand. We got things lined up nice. When we get a million dollars we quit if you say so, but not before. Get me?"

"I'm through," Larson stated tensely.

Louis stepped close, his baleful eyes glaring into those of his partner from six inches distance.

"How would you like to get six bullets in yer gizzard?" he asked softly. "You try to pull out or turn us over and you'll go for a ride like the others."

Larson was deadly white.

"I'm not going to betray you. I'm trying to save you."

"Well, I'm not worried. You been doing the scheming and we've been doing the dirty work. You keep right on goin' till I tell you to quit. Maybe you think I'm workin' for you. You, Mister Larson, you're workin' for me. Get it?"

"Y-es," he said tremulously.

"Now these reporters get ideas but they play a lone hand. Even if Ames knows all about us he won't tell the bulls. He wants all the glory for his damn paper, see? I don't think he's got a thing, but we know he's in Bolton and we'll find him. I'll set half a dozen boys looking for him right away. If you get a line on him, report it. You fix up these big moneybags. We can work this town for a month yet."

"I guess you're right," the lawyer muttered. "But you'll find that Ames will land us all if you don't plug him."

"That's my business now. I'll get him."

CHAPTER XX.

WHERE IS ANNA?

ONCE in the long ago, Fletcher Ames had driven his car late at night along a shell-racked road in France. The road ran parallel to the front, some twenty miles behind it, and he could plainly hear the mutter and rumble of heavy artillery endeavoring to make the trenches uninhabitable.

The moon was up, and as he drove along he peered upward occasionally for a sight of air raiders. If they were flying low they could spot a black motor car on the white road.

He heard the winged men before he saw them, and he sped as fast as he dared in hope of reaching a bit of woods where he could take cover. No woods appeared, but presently the road dipped to pass under a railroad and he stopped beneath the bridge.

Crash! There is no sound more dreadful than the explosion of an air bomb, and one had struck the road not far ahead. Despite his long experience, he always shuddered and quivered when a bomb fell near him, yet he had grown to ignore high-explosive shells.

A second bomb fell somewhere be-

hind him, a third off to the right and another to the left.

"Persistent beggars!" he muttered. "Extravagant, too, wasting all that explosive on one small motor car. Wonder what they're up to?"

Another bomb split the air, then another, and suddenly it dawned on him that the raiders were not interested in him and his automobile at all. They were trying to destroy the bridge under which he was hiding, and they would keep on till they hit it. He started his engine, darted forward, crawled around the new shell hole in the road and went away from that place at high speed and without molestation.

The sensations of Fletcher Ames, as he left the comparative safety of the police car and stood on Main Street corner alone in a bustling crowd, were much the same as those he had experienced as he hid beneath the railroad bridge in France.

Perhaps he had been too easily frightened at Stephens' Village; perhaps he was a fool to be intimidated by the glare in the eyes of Guy Larson. How could he know that a carload of assassins had driven up to the filling station only a few minutes afterward, cursing at finding it deserted?

He knew he was safe nowhere in the city. Gunmen as deadly as the air bombs of the raiders would hunt him down. If his suspicion of Guy Larson was correct, they were already supplied with the details of his very thin disguise. He must take to flight or encounter death sooner or later. If he went back to his old hiding place in the foreign quarter, it might take them longer to locate him, but if he stepped into his character as a news reporter he wouldn't live a couple of days. His only chance was to strike first, to strike at Guy Larson.

But suppose he was all wrong about Larson, that his theory was composed of wind and straw? Well, he had to take that chance. He was sure he was not wrong.

He glanced at his watch. Eight o'clock. He had abandoned his effects at Stephens' Village, and now he wanted a bath and clean clothes. It might be safe to steal into his own apartment, outfit himself and then make new plans.

Ames lived in a two-room-and-bath apartment on the fourth floor of a four-story walk-up. He took a taxi to the quiet residential street where it was located, looked up and down, saw nobody, fitted his key in the downstairs door and ran lightly up to the top of the house.

Cautiously he opened the door, and was careful to draw all the blinds and shades before he turned on the lights. Everything in the living room was as he had left it. The bedroom also was undisturbed.

He drew the water in the tub, bathed, then donned clean linen, dressed leisurely, put on a decent suit of clothes and looked whimsically in the mirror at his hideous hair cut.

The gangsters thought him in Chicago, and he was safe unless Larson had already informed them that he was still in town. But Larson, of course, had already done that, and he was not safe.

He heard the clock in a neighboring church tower strike nine, and his eye fell upon the telephone. It would be consoling to call up Anna and tell her he had left Stephens' Village. He put in the call and in a moment a voice answered. But it was not Anna's, it was Mrs. Schultz's.

"It's Fletcher Ames, Mrs. Schultz. May I speak to Anna?"

"It's you, is it?" said the mother tartly. "What are you calling here for? Can't you give her time?"

"Time for what?"

"She went out to meet you a half an hour ago. Where are you, anyway?"

"I'm at my apartment," he stammered. What did the woman mean?

"Then what did you tell her to go to Stephens' Village for? You have no business getting my child to traipse out there alone at this time of night."

"Mrs. Schultz," he said earnestly, "I haven't called Anna to-night. I didn't ask her to go to Stephens'. Did she say I did? Did she say she talked with me?"

He heard a gasp at the other end of the line.

"She said you wanted her on a matter of business at Merrymont Inn. I must say it's a queer place to meet. I told her not to go, but she paid no attention to me."

"How long ago did this call come?"

"About an hour ago. Mr. Ames, is anything wrong?"

"No, no. A misunderstanding. I'll go fetch her right away."

"I don't understand this at all. You don't know my girl. You only met her a couple of times and you're telephoning all the time, and she's doing nothing but talk about you. I want you to bring her right home."

"I will, I will. Don't worry."

He hung up with a pale, set face. This certainly was Larson's doing. He had seen Anna and himself together. Most likely his sharp eyes had detected their interest in each other, and he had lured the girl out to that den of gunmen.

Ames grasped his hat, thrust it on his head, transferred the automatic from the pocket of the discarded trousers, and picked up a couple of clips of cartridges. He extinguished the light, ran down the stairs and stood in the street for a moment. His car was a mile away in Schultz's garage and he didn't have time to get it. A taxicab rattled down the vacant street and he hailed it.

"Drive to Merrymont in Stephens' Village as fast as you can," he commanded.

He leaned forward impatiently on the seat. Sweet little Anna! Dragging her into this terrible mess! Well, he'd soon have her out. The cab bumped its way over the bridge across the river, and reason gradually took the place of frenzy.

In rushing out to Merrymont was he not doing exactly what the gang expected? They had nothing against Anna, no reason for getting her out there, and they had induced her to go by making use of his name—which meant they were aware of her interest in him and his in her. This was a trap for him and Anna was the bait, and he was rushing into it like a bull at the red cloak waved by the matador.

Doubtless Larson had reported his presence at the filling station, and the gang had descended upon the place, only to find that he had vanished. There had been a council of war and they had decided to fetch him back by enticing Anna Schultz out. Now they were waiting for him, and his appearance would be the signal for a fusillade.

If Anna was in danger he could not help her by getting killed, and if Larson was the chief of the band, as he believed, she was not in danger. The cold-blooded beast was interested only in getting Ames.

Fletcher rapped upon the window of the cab.

"Go back to town," he said. "I have changed my mind."

He would not go to the Village, as his enemies expected. But what should he do. He loved Anna; she loved him. She had rushed away in answer to what she supposed was his summons, and he must not fail her.

The police? Bolton would have to get in touch with Stephens' Village, and that meant that she would be spirited away before the police raiders descended upon Merrymont. No, he had to do this himself.

And then, as often happens when one is desperate, there came to him a desperate plan.

He left the cab in the theater district and went into a drug store where he consulted a phone book. It had been his intention to approach Guy Larson very cautiously and only face him when he had him enmeshed; but the situation now called for sudden and direct action. He must gamble that he was right about the criminal lawyer. He must not consider what would happen if he were wrong.

CHAPTER XXI.

FACE TO FACE.

THE reader is aware that the conclusions of Fletcher Ames regarding Guy Larson, however arrived at, were astonishingly correct.

Larson had studied the situation, so he thought, from every angle, and saw no possibility of detection. The Rackets, big and small, would operate long enough to win an enormous sum of money; division of spoils would be made and the gang would fade away, to function in some distant city.

The police would strive clumsily and obstreperously to combat the marauders, and when the murders and extortions ceased they would claim a victory.

Both Larson and Louis expected that a few of the gangsters would lose their lives—that was the fortune of war. But gunmen could easily be secured, from the sources in New York and Chicago, to take their places. As for the collectors, a few of them might be captured, but they could be depended upon to hold their tongues. The vengeance of the gang against squealers was much more to be feared than the slow and orderly process of the law.

He had weighed everything carefully, so he supposed, before launching his diabolical enterprise; but it had not occurred to him to take Fletcher Ames into consideration. That Ames would get upon the trail, shoot it out with the gangsters, evade destruction and threaten exposure, was entirely outside his calculations. Ames, now, was more important than the Racket. He had to be put out of the way, or the precious neck of Guy Larson would be in grave danger.

There was something else Larson neglected to consider—that the Frankenstein monster he had created might menace himself.

Having assumed that Louis was a docile lieutenant, awed by the functioning of the master mind, ready to obey orders and to call off the wolves at the word, Larson had been confounded to have the big gangster threaten him with the fate of Schultz and Rosenbaum if he faltered in his course.

Larson was not a physical coward, but he knew too well the odds against him in a battle with Louis.

"Of course I won't quit if you think it's safe to go on," he had said after Louis had assured him that he would attend to Ames. "Only, this fellow isn't going to get found easily. He fooled us once and he may do it again."

"Yep," said Louis. "We got to get him quick. Now, that dame he was out here with—he acted as if he was stuck on her. Know who she is?"

"I found out to-night. She is the daughter of old Gus Schultz."

Louis' bushy eyebrows mounted.

"That's what we're up against," he said. "Those reporters in Chicago was too wise to bother us much. This guy is stuck on the girl and he wants to make good with her by catching the killers of her old man. Well, Larson, we got him now. We got him two ways. If we catch him we'll bump him off. If we don't, we'll get the girl and tip him off that we'll croak her if he don't mind his own business."

"If he is in love with the girl, that might work," Larson reflected. "I hate to drag women into this."

"You give me a pain," sneered Louis. "I got a better scheme. You get her on the phone now. Tell her to come

right out here, that Ames needs her to help out. He's got things dead to rights. If she's stuck on him she'll come, and Ames will come tearing out here after her. We'll riddle him when he comes through the gate."

"She won't come. She'll want to talk to Ames."

"You do what I tell you," commanded the new boss. "You are a police detective—see?—working with the reporter. Hand her a line. Frails ain't got any sense. She'll come a-hoppin'."

Larson did what he was told. His smooth, pleasant voice had its effect, and the anxiety of Anna to see Fletcher face to face—she had not set eyes on him since he kissed her that night on her front doorstep—worked in his interest.

"I'll get the next car out there," she promised. "Will he be in the dining room?"

"He'll either meet you at the door or I shall," declared the lawyer.

Anna delayed a few minutes to make herself beautiful, then left the house and caught a trolley at the corner. It jogged out to Stephens' Village in about forty minutes and deposited her opposite the gas station, which Fletcher had abandoned a short time before. There was a Ford taxi at the curb whose driver agreed to take her out to Merrymont for a quarter. When she descended at the steps of the inn, Louis was waiting for her.

"Miss Schultz, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Your friend asked me to show you the way. He's upstairs, not in the dining room." He conducted her up the flight of stairs at the rear of the hall, led her down a corridor, opened the door of a room and said loudly:

"Here's Miss Schultz to see you, Mr. Ames."

Anna, quite unsuspicious, entered eagerly, and the door was slammed and locked behind her. Her scream brought no response. The room was in darkness and she couldn't find the light. But she saw the dim outline of the window.

The sash was nailed and bars were on the outside. The room was at the back of the building, looking out upon a patch of woodland. There was nobody in sight. She ran back to the door and pounded upon it with her fists and shrieked.

In a few moments the door opened, a man entered, turned a flash light upon her and then grappled with her. The girl struggled, and felt a needle point in her arm. In a few seconds she lost consciousness.

The inattention of Guy Larson piqued Miss Gwendoline Carleton. She did not hesitate to complain, and he did his best to make amends. They danced and drank a bottle of wine. A waiter brought word that the Schultz girl had arrived and was taken care of. How soon would Ames appear on the scene, Larson wondered? And was it possible that he could evade the gunmen this time?

The evening dragged on, every minute seeming an hour to the man who waited to learn that his enemy had lost his life. At midnight he left the girl and sought Louis.

"He ain't showed up," reported the gangster. "You better go on home. He may be laying low, waiting till we close up before he tries to find out anything. We'll be ready when he comes."

So Guy Larson took his girl home and left her at her door.

Later, the night man greeted him as he came into the lower hall of his own apartment house.

"There was a gent here to see you," he stated. "He waited around about an hour and then got tired, I guess."

"Indeed! Did he leave his name or a message?"

"No, sir."

Clients who feared to walk the business streets in broad daylight often

called on Larson in the evening and, if they did not find him in, were exceedingly wary about leaving their names. He dismissed the matter from his mind, got off the elevator at the third floor, walked past the staircase, which somebody was descending, and crossed the corridor, pausing at his own door to insert the key.

There was a step behind him and he turned his head just as a hand landed between his shoulder blades and pushed him so violently into his own hallway that he pitched forward.

Click! The lights went on, and Larson, struggling to his feet, looked into the stern visage and burning eyes of Fletcher Ames.

"Damn you!" Larson shouted. "How dare you lay hands on me? What do you mean by pushing me into my apartment?"

His voice, which had been pitched high with fury, lowered and began to shake as he remembered that this man was his enemy, that he had to-night wronged him wickedly and the fellow must have come for an accounting.

"I want to see you," said Ames in a low, terrifying voice. "Go on into your living room."

"He doesn't really know anything. He can't know anything," the lawyer was reassuring himself as he walked ahead of the reporter into the richly furnished salon. He lighted it mechanically as he entered; then he turned upon the newspaper man.

"I don't know whether you are drunk or crazy," he snapped, "but I'll give you one minute to explain yourself before I send for the police."

"It won't do, Larson," Ames replied sternly. "I have your number."

It flashed over Larson that here was his opportunity. Ames knew something and suspected more; his death was essential to Larson's safety. The fellow had forced himself into his apartment, and Larson could say that on returning he had found an intruder and shot him, supposing that he was a burglar. In the public mood the slaying of any sort of criminal was a meritorious act; he would not be severely censured.

In the drawer of his secretary was a revolver—he never carried a weapon on his person. Louis had failed, but he, Larson, would not fail. Although he never personally had killed any one, he never before had had such an incentive.

"Well," he said blandly, "now that you are here, I presume you have a reason for your call which you wish to explain to me. Take a chair, make yourself comfortable and see if you can find an excuse for yourself. You did not have to assault me to obtain entrance. I would have invited you in."

"I'll stand," Ames said curtly.

"You don't mind if I sit down? I have been dancing all evening and I'm tired." Without waiting for consent he walked toward his antique secretary which stood against the wall, dropped into the mahogany chair in front of it and watched for his opportunity.

Ames, however, followed him and stood over him. Larson's fingers toyed with the drawer but he dared not open it.

"Where's Anna Schultz?" demanded Fletcher harshly.

Larson stiffened but his face did not change.

"Anna Schultz? I don't know the lady."

"You lie! You killed her father."

"You are crazy!" cried Larson, his face livid. He grasped the phone. "Give me police headquarters," he demanded. "I'll have you dragged out of here and put in the asylum."

"You lured her out to Merrymont to-night, Larson. I want her brought back immediately."

"Never mind," said Larson to the operator. He stood up and faced Ames. He was standing beside the drawer and

blocking off the reporter's view of it. He was opening it with his right hand, noiselessly. In a few seconds he would have hold of the hilt of the gun.

"I don't want to give you in charge. There's something snapped in your brain," he said with apparent concern. "I went to Merrymont to-night with Miss Carleton, Ames. You saw us at the filling station in the Village. You spoke to us. We had dinner, danced for a few hours and have just come back. I can't understand your charge that I killed Miss Schultz's father. Everybody knows it was done by the gangsters."

"Get on that telephone," commanded Ames coldly. "Call Merrymont. Tell your gangmen that Miss Schultz is to be put in a car and brought to your apartment immediately."

Larson had the gun, was lifting it. The left knee of Fletcher Ames moved suddenly and crashed against the drawer of the desk, jamming it upon the wrist of the lawyer with brutal force. Larson uttered a cry of pain.

"Take your hand out—empty," Ames ordered. He slackened pressure against the drawer and Larson withdrew his wrist.

"A hell of a gunman you are!" the reporter said contemptuously. "Stand away from that secretary."

CHAPTER XXII.

GWENDOLINE.

LARSON was fondling the injured wrist. "I have a right to defend myself against a lunatic who breaks into my apartment," he whined.

"I want Anna Schultz brought here. If she has been injured or insulted I'm going to kill you like a dog. Get on that phone."

Larson made no move.

"I don't know anything about her. I have no accomplices at Merrymont or anywhere else. What do you think you've got on me, you fool?" he demanded.

Fletcher Ames slowly drew from his coat pocket his automatic pistol.

"Take a look at that, Larson," he said with deadly menace. "It has already accounted for three of your gang. I killed your tools in Marlan's restaurant. Ha! that surprises you, doesn't it?

"I'm a bad man, Larson. I don't care much whether I live or die. If anything has happened to Anna Schultz, I want to die. I'm the worst kind of a customer that you and your cowardly mob could have run up against. I'd shoot you through the heart without the slightest compunction."

Larson was not a physical coward, but the grim man with the automatic affected him visibly.

"For God's sake be reasonable!" he pleaded. "I don't know how you got the idea that I have anything to do with the Racket, but it's absolutely false. You haven't got an iota of proof, and no grand jury in the world would consider holding me."

Ames laughed terribly.

"I'm not concerned with a grand jury. You are not going to get a chance to show your legal craft. You are going to be a dead man in about one minute unless you get on the phone and bring Anna to this apartment."

"But there is nobody there who would know what I was talking about," Larson protested.

"Try Louis, the auto-park man. If nobody there understands you, it's too bad, because I'll murder you anyway."

"And you'll hang."

"I don't think so. 'Latest victim of the gang. Eminent criminal lawyer refuses to pay blackmail and is shot by gangsters in his own home.' Your own game turned against you, Larson."

"I tell you it would do no good to phone. I know nothing about your young woman."

Ames said nothing but lifted the automatic until it covered the heart of the lawyer. He was only four feet from his target.

"When I count three," he said softly. "One—two——"

Larson made for the telephone which stood upon the secretary. Ames followed him, opened the drawer, found the revolver and slipped it in his pocket. Hysterically Larson called Merrymont Inn.

"I want to speak to Louis—Louis, who has charge of the auto park. This is Mr. Larson speaking."

The two minutes of waiting were agonizing to Larson—and to Ames, for that matter—except that Larson's terror was evident.

"Louis, is that you? This is Guy Larson. Louis, I am informed that Miss Anna Schultz is at Merrymont. Will you ask her to come at once to my apartment? Make sure she comes, if she is there. It's most important."

"Make it stronger," instructed Ames.

"I am sure she is there, Louis. It's vital, I tell you. That girl must be brought here at once. Never mind reasons. Well, something has come up. I can't tell you over the phone."

"Tell him that whoever brings her must wait below."

"He has hung up," groaned Larson, sinking, weak and white, into a chair.

"I suspect you threw a scare into your friend Louis," the reporter said ironically. "You seem to be pretty good friends with him, too. Do you think he will do as you asked?"

Larson wiped his forehead.

"Yes, if she is there."

"And he will arrive with a carload of gunmen and come up here to find out what is the matter. What's that?"

The doorbell had rung.

"Don't answer it," Ames commanded.

Larson quivered with desire to open the door, but he obeyed orders.

The bell rang again and again. There is something commanding about a telephone bell or a doorbell. But for Larson the automatic had more authority.

Then a key turned in the lock.

"I know you're in," said a woman's voice in the hall. "Why didn't you answer the bell? Oh!" Gwendoline Carleton stood in the doorway, took in the tableau, and grew pale beneath her rouge.

"Come in, Miss Carleton," Ames said smoothly. "Please take a seat over there beside your friend. He needs support."

"What do you mean by coming here like this?" snarled Larson. "Where did you get the key?"

"I had a second one made, and I only gave you one of them, darling," she said coolly. "I thought I might catch you up to tricks some time. What's the idea of the artillery, Mr. Ames?"

Fletcher grinned.

"You intruded upon a dramatic situation, Miss Carleton. Your boy friend had arranged to kidnap your old acquaintance, Miss Anna Schultz, and I thought it best to interfere."

"What's this?" bridled the young woman. "Look here, Guy Larson, try and——"

"The man's crazy," declared Larson. "He claims I lured Miss Schultz out to Merrymont to-night. You can testify I was with you all evening. I never spoke to the girl in my life, Gwendoline. The fellow is batty."

The girl inspected Fletcher Ames, whose manner certainly was strange.

"I think so, too," she observed. "Put away that popgun, little boy; they's ladies present."

"I'm sorry to be rude," refused Ames, who had seated himself in the chair before the big secretary. Gwendoline rose and walked boldly toward him. "Give it to momma," she said.

"Get back in your chair!" he snapped.

She hesitated, standing a few feet from him, directly in the line between

him and Larson. With a laugh she plunged toward him and grasped at the gun. Ames did not alarm her, for she had no real notion of the seriousness of the situation. Ames, of course, could neither fire at a woman nor strike at her. He swung around in his chair to avoid her. Something flashed through the air. Ames received a heavy blow over the left temple and everything grew black; the room revolved and he knew nothing.

Larson, quick to take advantage of the diversion created by Gwendoline, had grasped a brass book end and hurled it at Fletcher's head when it suddenly came within range. His aim was not quite true or it would have crushed in the skull of the reporter, but it struck him a glancing blow which was heavy enough to stun him.

Like a tiger Larson sprang upon the fallen foe, snatched up the automatic which had dropped to the rug, thrust his hand in the pocket that held the revolver taken from the secretary, stood up and aimed the pistol at the man who had fallen to the floor.

With a shriek Gwendoline threw herself upon him and grasped the gun arm with both hands.

"Get away!" he snarled. "I'm going to kill him."

"Have you gone crazy, too?" she hissed. "Be yerself, boy friend. Want to get hung?"

"It's in self-defense, don't you see, Gwendoline?" he pleaded.

"No, I don't see. This lad is down and out. You've got his guns. What the heck kind of a lawyer are you? Haven't you got any sense?"

"He came here to kill me."

"Well, he didn't do it. You damn near finished him."

He glared at her and then returned to sanity. With this girl as a witness, he couldn't shoot Ames. She would testify against him. And if Ames were found dead anywhere, she would probably declare she had been present at a quarrel and knew they were deadly enemies. He couldn't send her away and kill Ames. She wouldn't go.

And yet he could not permit Ames to depart, provided he recovered consciousness. If that book end had only hit as intended! He had been justified in throwing it. Gwendoline's testimony would clear him in that case. Ames knew he was at the head of the gangsters. He knew he had kidnaped Anna Schultz. Ames would go directly from here to headquarters and come back with the police.

And shortly Anna Schultz, probably accompanied by Louis, would arrive. Gwendoline must not be present. He wanted no witnesses to that scene. There was one way to deal with the Carleton woman.

"You're right, Gwendoline," he said with a forced laugh. "I must have been mad. I won't kill him. I'll fix him up and let him go. It's safe, now that I have the guns. But things are happening here that I don't want you to witness. Private business that means big profits to me, but you don't need to know anything about them."

Gwendoline's eyes narrowed. "Oh, I don't know," she said significantly.

"How would you like a present of five thousand dollars?"

"You talk my language. What do I have to do for it?"

"Nothing except go home."

"That poor boy is bleeding. I'm going to fix him up first."

"All right. Do it quickly and go."

She hesitated. "Now, about that matter of Anna Schultz. I want to know about that."

"He's crazy. Not a word of truth in it."

"And I get five thousand, and you promise to let this boy go?"

"Yes, yes."

"All right."

He sighed with relief.

Gwendoline went into the bathroom, and returned with some iodine, court-plaster and a wet towel.

"Help me get him on the sofa," she commanded.

Between them they laid Fletcher, who was moaning now, upon a divan. She bathed his forehead, drenched it with iodine, then bandaged it more neatly than one would have suspected of a butterfly of her type. Finally she rose.

"I want that five thousand in the morning," she announced.

"You'll get it. Please go now."

"All right. But if I find you double-crossing me——"

He was on tenterhooks until he got her out of the door and into the elevator; then he hastened back to the apartment and stood looking down at his victim. Fletcher was moving and groaning; in a few minutes he would be conscious. Larson's eyes spat hate. If only the fellow would die, if only his blow had been heavier! Now what to do?

In a few minutes Louis would bring Anna Schultz—if Louis had decided to obey orders. The man had been mutinous on the phone; his assent was a growl.

Louis would want to slay Ames, but Ames must not be killed here and now. They would have to carry him off and dispose of him far away. Fortunately the fellow was supposed to be in Chicago. If it were not for Gwendoline, they could put weights on him and drop him in the river. Damn Gwendoline!

But her intrusion had got him out of a tight hole.

What to do? His hold on Louis was the fertility of his invention, and he must have a plan when the fellow arrived.

He buried his head in his hands and tore at his hair. The Schultz girl must not be brought here to set eyes on Ames. Nobody must ever see him again. Gwendoline knew the reporter back in Bolton, though, and one could not depend upon Gwendoline. Five thousand dollars wouldn't stop her mouth long. He glanced at his watch. Half an hour had elapsed since he had phoned to Louis. They might already be at the door of the building.

The thing to do was get Anna back to her hiding place and then dispose of Ames. He seized his hat, locked the door of the apartment and ran down the stairs, too nervous to wait for the elevator. The night man looked at him curiously as he passed through the hall.

"Miss Carleton just left, sir," he said.

"Yes, yes, I know."

He went out into the street and looked up and down. Deserted. A minute passed—two—five—and then a motor car's headlights appeared around the corner and tore down the street at a reckless pace. The fools would attract traffic officers.

Louis swung out as the sedan stopped.

"What's up?" he demanded. He was in uniform. "We've got the girl. What in hell do you want her for?"

"Take her right back!" Larson said sharply. "And you remain here. Who's in the car with her?"

"Couple of the boys. What's the idea? Is this an excursion?"

"No time to lose. I've got Ames."

"Holy gee! Is he dead?"

"No. He's unconscious in my apartment. I knocked him out."

"Why the devil didn't you finish him? What's the matter wid you?"

"I don't want the girl to see him."

Louis laughed. "She couldn't see anything. She's doped."

"Then get her away, and you come with me."

Louis spoke to the chauffeur and the car moved off; then he followed his partner into the hallway. The elevator was up—a lucky break for Larson, for he didn't wish the night man to see him with Louis.

They ran up the stairs rapidly. Larson opened his door, led the way into the living room and uttered an ejaculation of stupefaction. The divan was untenanted. Ames was gone!

Larson ran into the bathroom and bedroom. An open window in a back room revealed the route of the fugitive. He had gone down the fire escape. Ames was not nearly as done in as he had looked; perhaps he had been shamming after the first three or four minutes and had taken advantage of the carelessness of his captor to escape as soon as he was left alone.

"He's gone. He got away by the fire escape," mumbled Larson. "He was lying there unconscious. It doesn't seem possible."

Louis' lip curled.

"You lost yer grip, Larson. You're no damn good. You have the guy we're trying to kill, that we got to kill; you say he's unconscious, and, instead of finishing him, you leave him alone and let him get away. You're no use to us any more."

"You don't understand," protested Larson. "There was a witness. Gwendoline was here; she saw me knock him cold and take his guns away. She'd have been a witness against me if I had killed him then."

"We should worry about her. If she needs to be put out of the way, go ahead and do it."

"I couldn't hurt Gwendoline!" Larson exclaimed.

"Aw right. Now what's the lay? How did Ames get here? What did he want? How did you get him down? Hurry up."

"Ames knows I'm in this Racket business. He knows you and I are in it together. I called you up and told you to bring the Schultz girl here because he had a gun on me."

"Yeah? And what now?"

"He can go to the police and have me arrested on this girl business alone. He's probably on his way to headquarters now."

"No," declared Louis. "He knows our methods. While we have the girl he don't dare let a peep out of him."

"Well, we've got to call off the Racket. We can't go on now."

"The hell we can't! This don't make no difference. I can go on without you, Larson."

"Then let me out," pleaded the lawyer. "I'll get out of town. I must get away."

The laugh of the gangster was unpleasant.

"Wouldn't that be nice? You want to beat it with your share of the swag and leave us to whatever's goin' to happen. Squealers and welshers eat steel, Mr. Larson. You try to make a getaway and you'll get a knife or a bullet in you."

"Might as well die that way as hang," the lawyer muttered.

"This Ames has his teeth drawn," said Louis. "All he thinks of now is finding the girl, and he'll come snooping round Merrymont. We'll get him there. Forget him. We got a couple of hundred grand to pick up in the next few days."

"All right," said Larson quietly. "I warned you about Ames. You've missed him two or three times. He knows everything and he'll send us all to the gallows. If you had any sense you'd call everything off and make tracks. You're just a wild bull, Louis. However, I'll go through. I'll chance it that you can stop Ames before he stops us. Send Nixon to see John H. Hayes in his office, No. 419 Pelham Building, tomorrow morning at ten. Have your men planted to protect his get-away as usual. Hayes will have fifty thousand in one-hundred-dollar bills and will hand them to Nixon when he says: 'I've come for the Charity Fund.' "

"That's something like. You're a fox, if I'm a bull. Don't worry about Ames.

I bet we get him before the night is over. You're coming out to Merrymont with me now."

"I can't do that," Larson protested. "What for?"

"Because," said Louis, "I want you where I can see you. I don't trust you any more, Larson. Put on your hat; and if you want to pack a bag, it's all right. You can do your heavy brain work over there just as well as here."

"But I've got a lot of appointments at my office to-morrow."

"I should worry. You can phone you had to go out of town. Come on."

CHAPTER XXIII.

RAIDERS.

FLETCHER AMES came back to consciousness while Gwendoline was arguing with Guy Larson. Through half-closed eyes he saw his automatic in the hand of his enemy.

What had happened? That woman had tried to take his pistol away, he had moved to avoid her and then something crashed against his head. How it hurt now! Larson had disarmed him and, if he were wise, would kill him.

But the girl who had been responsible for the sudden turning of the tables was now working in his interests. Larson dared not have her present at a murder. He was bribing her to go away. Five thousand dollars. She would take that; but still the lawyer would not dare slay him, for the Carleton woman knew too much.

In a moment they lifted him to a divan and he thought he had better play possum. When Gwendoline bathed and dressed his wound he wanted to thank her, but he managed to resist the impulse.

If he lay quite still and Larson came close enough, he might get strength enough to spring at him and repossess himself of the gun.

Anna would be coming—guarded, no doubt. He had intended to call the police and set a trap for the car which was bringing Anna, but the unexpected intrusion of Gwendoline Carleton had prevented his sending the message.

His strength was coming back and the bandage on his head was soothing. Now the woman had gone and Larson was approaching him. He shut his eyes tight as the fellow stood over him. He knew what a temptation it would be for Larson to slay a helpless opponent, but he was certain the lawyer dared not yield to it. And in a moment Larson left the room. Ames heard the hall door slam.

He staggered to his feet, weak but getting stronger. There must be a way out of here. He would be in the street when the car arrived with Anna. He knew the fire escapes should be at the rear.

He found the iron grating outside a bedroom window and swung himself out upon it. Larson might be back in the apartment any second. There was no time to lose.

Although he was dizzy and his head was ringing, Ames descended the ladder. On the floor below he grew faint and had to rest a minute.

He went down the other ladders more slowly until he reached the first floor, and then he had to drop ten feet to the ground. Ordinarily this would have been a trifle, but now he struck the ground heavily, fell and lay in a faint for several minutes.

He recovered, managed to get upon his feet, circled around the building and emerged from an alley into the street, just as the car containing Anna started away. He saw Louis and Larson standing on the sidewalk and saw them enter the building. If Larson lacked nerve to finish a man Louis would not hesitate. Had he remained in the room he would have been shot on sight by the gangster.

They had sent Anna off in the car.

Larson's need of her had vanished with the overthrow of the reporter.

Back to Merrymont! But what could he do?

Louis had presumed to read the mind of the reporter for the benefit of his terrified partner, and he had correctly predicted Ames' first reaction to the situation. The newspaper man, however, distressed as he was at the kidnaping of the girl he loved, possessed reasoning powers beyond the ken of the brutal Louis.

Again they would be expecting him to come charging against Merrymont, an they would be ready for him. But he was in a very different position now from that in which he had entered the apartment of Larson.

He must go to Merrymont, but this time he would not go alone.

Refreshed and strengthened by the cool air, he walked briskly to the corner of the street, picked up a taxi and gave the driver the address of Chief Clancy.

Clancy was in bed when the reporter rang, and Ames had to ring for five minutes before the chief cautiously poked his head out of a second-story window.

"It's Fletcher Ames, chief. I've got to see you. I've got important information."

"Oh, it's you, is it? I'll let you in in a couple of minutes," said Clancy.

Ames sat on the doorstep patiently for five minutes, and then Clancy opened his front door.

"I heard from Ferguson that you were on the job," he said without prelude. "You never went to Chicago at all."

"No," replied Ames, as he followed the policeman into the sitting room.

"First put in a long-distance call for the governor of this State," the reporter suggested. "You'll know why when you get him."

"It's after one. I hate to wake him up."

"Don't worry about that, chief."

"All right. You've been in a battle, I see."

"Yes, but it's nothing—a crack on the forehead."

Clancy asked for long distance and demanded the executive mansion.

"Chief of police of Bolton calling. Must speak personally to the governor. Tell whoever answers to wake him up."

He turned to Ames, who had dropped upon a sofa. "You got to give me damn good reason for this."

"I shall. Now, listen. The gangsters are all quartered at Merrymont Inn at Stephens' Village. Louis, the auto-park man out there, is their chief, but the big leader, the Racketeer, is Guy Larson, the criminal lawyer."

It looked as though the Irishman's eyes would jump out of his head. "Larson! It can't be! He's a crook, all right, but not a murderer."

"Larson is the brains of the business. I've got the goods on him, and I want you to arrest him on my charges right away."

"Just a minute," said Clancy. He got on the phone, reached headquarters, and asked for the lieutenant on duty.

"Send a squad of men out to Guy Larson's apartment house, surround the house, break into the place and put him under arrest. Have your guns in your hands and shoot if need be. Never mind what the charge is. Do it.

"This is on your say-so, Ames," he said wryly. "Larson has a devil of a pull in this town."

"Now get all the men you can and raid Merrymont at once," added Ames. "Tell the governor you have the gang cornered there and ask permission to go into that township without consulting the authorities."

"If you're wrong, Ames, you'll cost me my job and raise a mess in this State like nothing that ever went before."

"I'll stake my life on this, chief."

"Fine. I'll tell the governor I've got

positive proof and get his authorization."

The phone rang and Clancy talked to the governor in the executive mansion, a hundred miles away. Ames was nervous as the chief assured the chief magistrate of the certainty of the facts. After a moment Clancy hung up.

"I got an executive order to go in," he said. "How do we go about it?"

"I believe that there are at least a score of gangsters there, working as waiters, kitchen men, mechanics and attendants. They are all armed and, most likely, have machine guns."

"So has the department. What proof have you of this, Ames?"

"I have been spying out the lay of the land there for a week. Ferguson found me out there to-night. I know what I'm talking about."

"I can round up about fifty men in an hour. I'll take the reserves from every station house. We'll assemble at headquarters at two thirty a. m."

The chief again got on the phone and issued the order. The old man was in undershirt and trousers, suspenders hanging, hair disheveled, feet in bedroom slippers. But he was very impressive to Fletcher Ames. He might be old-fashioned and unlearned in the methods of gangsters, but, given something to go on, he was as energetic as a youth.

"Now what's your plan of attack?" Clancy asked.

"There's a patch of woods in the rear of the inn. Post two thirds of your men in that. Go up to the front of the inn in a couple of cars, rush the house, and have the men in the woods take it from the rear when the first shot is fired."

"But suppose no shot is fired?"

"Don't worry," grinned Ames. "They'll open fire on you when they see your uniforms, but if they don't, fire a shot yourself. Are you going out at the head of your men?"

"You bet your life!"

"Tell off men to cover every building—the garages, the outbuildings and the inn proper."

"Think they'll put up much of a fight?"

"I'm sure of it. And if they do, don't try to rush into the buildings. Draw back, take cover and rake the ground floor with your machine guns. Be careful not to fire at the upper floors unless you see gun flashes from certain windows."

"Why not?"

"Because they have the daughter of Gus Schultz, the murdered garage man, hidden in one of the rooms on the second floor, in all probability."

"What do they want the girl for?"

"Well, if you must know, they think they have a hold on me that way."

"Oh, that's it! Look here, Ames. Are you sure you have the goods on these people? If you're using the department because you think your girl is being held at the inn, I swear I'll shoot you myself."

"Don't worry. I've got the goods."

"All right. Wait here while I get dressed."

Ames waited for ten minutes in a highly nervous condition. The chief had struck him shrewdly in his weak spot. He was using the whole department to rescue Anna. Alone he was impotent. By to-morrow they might have sent her away from Merrymont; or, given warning of attack, they might have murdered her out of hand from pure viciousness.

He was deceiving Clancy in asserting so confidently that he had evidence to justify this raid, when actually he had no evidence that would weigh anything in a courtroom. His charges against Larson would not stand. The lawyer would be free in twelve hours. He was gambling everything that the gangsters themselves would justify the raid by opening fire upon the police. Once battle was joined, wounded or dying gun-

men could be forced to tell what they knew, and that they would implicate Larson he had no doubt.

But it seemed now that he took too much for granted. It might be their attitude to admit the police. They might be so sure of themselves that they would submit to search; and if there were no resistance, there would be nothing to excuse the storming of a peacefully sleeping road house by the police of another municipality. And the Bolton police would be acting upon a governor's order which was obtained by misrepresentation.

Of one thing Ames was certain: Anna was the bait in the trap set for him. He had told Larson he knew that she was at Merrymont, and Larson and Louis would know he was aware that she had been sent back there. They would be expecting him to-night at Merrymont, and, if he stepped through the gate of the road-house grounds, pistols would bark and he would be the target.

When the chief returned Ames had a new plan.

"Clancy," he said, "I have a better idea. These fellows are laying for me. Post your men in the woods, leave your machines outside the Village, and sneak up on foot to just outside the inn grounds. I will enter first, and if they fire at me, that's your signal for rushing in from both sides."

"They'll kill you," declared Clancy.

"I'm responsible for this raid. If they don't shoot at me, I'm all wrong and you have no justification for attacking the place. If they do, you know you are up against the gangsters and you can do your damnedest. I've got to go in first."

Clancy considered.

"All right," he said. "You owe it to me. You'll need all your nerve, Fletcher. I wouldn't walk in there alone for a million."

The telephone interrupted the conference, and Clancy answered it.

"The bird has flown," he told Ames, hanging up. "Larson went out with another man about twenty minutes before the police got there. He was carrying a suit case, and the other feller had a chauffeur's uniform on. The night man told us that, but my men searched the apartment just the same."

"He may be leaving town."

"No trains anywhere at this hour. If he took an auto, we can't catch him, but we'll have the police of the country looking for him in the morning."

"That was Louis, the head gangster, with him. They may have gone to Merrymont."

"With a suit case? That's funny. Come down to headquarters and I'll have a surgeon look at your forehead. We'll go down in my car."

There was astonishing activity in the little square in front of police headquarters when they arrived. A dozen motor cars were drawn up and the outer offices were full of sleepy and curious policemen.

Clancy turned the reporter over to the surgeon, who told Ames that he had a very bad abrasion over the temple, but nothing that a few days would not cure.

The chief busied himself in organizing the expedition. At two thirty the little army started out. There were fifty-six officers, commanded by Clancy, a police lieutenant and half a dozen sergeants. They traveled in twelve motor cars. Two machine guns were taken along, and every man was armed with the new automatic pistols.

They drove at high speed through the sleeping city and over the deserted road toward Stephens' Village. Just outside the town the cars were parked in a field. Clancy sent thirty-six men under a lieutenant to work around into the woods behind the road house, while his own force made a detour through the village, lest a watcher be stationed there, and along the unlighted side road toward the inn.

There was a high hedge fencing the property of the road house, which protected the officers from any owllike eyes there might be within, and they hid themselves against the hedge near the closed auto gateway.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VOLUNTARY TARGET.

"I'LL take a chance on rushing the place," whispered Chief Clancy. "Don't be a fool, Fletcher. It isn't necessary to go in alone."

"I've got to do it," Ames said tensely. "Don't you see? I've got to justify you coming out here. I'm an old campaigner. They won't get me."

He drew the gun which the police had given him, fumbled with the catch of the gate and swung it open. The road up to the inn had been in total darkness; now there flashed on three or four incandescent lamps, set on posts at intervals of twenty or thirty yards, which revealed dimly the white bulk of the inn two hundred feet distant and lighted the path he had to travel.

Fletcher had not counted on this. He hesitated, thrust out his jaw and started on a run up the path.

Ping! A bullet, fired from a weapon with a silencer, whistled within an inch of his head, and he threw himself forward on his face. *Ping-ping-ping!* sang three or four other missiles.

"Got him!" shouted a harsh voice; and Louis, followed by two men, started up from the grass and ran toward him. Fletcher had thrown himself down at the first shot, his gun arm outstretched before him. Louis came into the zone of light, not thirty-feet away, and the reporter pressed down the trigger of his automatic. He saw the big gangster stop short and then crumple up.

Then there came a shout from the rear, and Clancy and his men rushed through the gateway, firing at shadows as they ran.

The gangsters, who had been running to aid their chief, turned tail. And then, from the rear of the house, came the loud rattle of a machine gun and a volley of pistol shots as the detachment from the woods ran toward the inn.

A searchlight from the gate, set up by the police, suddenly bathed the front of Merrymont Inn with its radiance. Windows were heard to open; lights flashed up. And figures appeared from the garage, opening fire upon the police who were thrown into target relief by their own searchlight.

The battle was of short duration. The police from the rear came swarming through, shooting at every figure which did not wear a uniform. Men were falling. From several upper windows pistol flashes revealed the presence of gunmen, but these were silenced by training a machine gun upon them and pouring a stream of lead into the windows.

In five minutes there was no opposition. Upon the ground lay six or eight dead and wounded in various stages of undress. The two fellows who had laid in ambush for Ames had run for the porch of the inn, but had been caught by the searchlight and shot down as they mounted the steps.

Four policemen had been wounded and one had been killed in the short, sharp brush, and then the police were storming through the road house and its outbuildings, making prisoners of all those persons encountered and meeting no resistance whatever.

"Drive everybody into the dining room!" was Clancy's command. "We'll look them over there."

On the second floor of the inn the police discovered Anna Schultz in a room at the rear of the house. She was sleeping heavily and could not be roused. That she was drugged was obvious.

Ames had been discreet enough to remain flat on the ground until the tide of battle had rolled on and the police had

taken the inn. He realized that the officers were firing without discrimination at any persons not in uniform.

Now he crawled to the spot where Louis had fallen. Louis was in a bad way, but he was not yet dead. He recognized the reporter as the latter bent over him.

"Smart guy, you are," he muttered. "I didn't think you'd go for the police."

"Where's Anna Schultz?" Ames demanded hoarsely.

Louis grinned. "Lying doped upstairs. How did you get onto us, feller?"

"Your pal Larson betrayed you," said the reporter craftily.

Louis uttered an oath. "The damn yellow dog! I was afraid of him."

"He's the only one of you that escaped. He left town to-night just before the police got to his apartment."

"He did like hell. I made him come out here, and I hope they shot him."

"Are you badly hurt?" asked the reporter.

Louis grinned. "Got about four bullets in me. I would 'a' done the same for you, though."

"I'll have the surgeon take care of you."

"Won't do any good. I'm through. Don't hurt much."

"Well," said Ames, "you're done and so is your gang, but Larson will get out of it. We haven't got any evidence against him."

"Damn him! Say, go to the Mammoth Trust in New York. Him and me has a vault together. All the coin is in it. Can't open it without two keys, his and mine. That'll fix him."

A passing policeman was summoned and Ames asked him to send for the surgeon, then waited beside the gangster until the doctor came.

Louis had closed his eyes and lay very still.

"He won't live half an hour," said the doctor when he came.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ROUND-UP.

IT was safe now to go into the inn, and Fletcher, leaving the gangster in the surgeon's care, went in search of Anna. A policeman told him where she was.

He found her lying unconscious and breathing very heavily as she lay, fully dressed, on the bed. He rushed back for the surgeon and dragged him to the chamber.

"Morphine," the doctor declared. "She's had three or four injections in a few hours, I should judge. I think she will be all right, but she must be left to sleep off the effects. I've got to hurry down again. Three or four more wounded."

Fletcher bent and kissed the unconscious girl, so pretty in her drugged slumber, then went downstairs and passed the officer on guard in the dining room. It was a weird scene.

There were a score of half-clad waiters and house men and garage workers, all huddled together at the far end of the room. The proprietor sat, pale and silent, in a corner.

On the musicians' stand sat Guy Larson, fully dressed, and apparently in calm conversation with Chief Clancy.

"I have been trying to get evidence against these gangsters since they began their operations," Larson was assuring the chief. "This fool, Fletcher Ames, kept butting in and interfering with my investigations. He even came to my apartment to-night and accused me of being in league with them."

"He says he has the goods on you," Clancy said stolidly.

The answer was a scornful laugh.

"I came out here to-night and put up in the place because I had reason to think they were operating from here," the lawyer continued. "You were too quick for me, Clancy. It was great work."

"I'm not such an old fool as the

chamber of commerce thinks," said the chief, with not too much modesty. "You won't be arrested, Mr. Larson, unless Ames produces real evidence."

"I am not worried about Ames," smiled the lawyer.

Larson had gone to his room at the inn but had been too perturbed to sleep, and he was sitting fully dressed when the battle began. He had been terribly frightened at first, but it came to him that the destruction of the gang, if it were destroyed, would not mean his own conviction.

He knew that Ames had no legal evidence against him; and the captured gangsters would not squeal on a pal. They would take their medicine. He had a chance of crawling out with a whole skin if he kept a cool head.

When the police burst into his room he welcomed them cordially. A search of his person and the chamber revealed no weapon, and he entered the dining room boldly. Clancy would be easy to handle, in his opinion. But then he saw the reporter.

"So you have the main squeeze," said Ames, with a triumphant smile.

Clancy looked at him dubiously.

"Mr. Larson gives a good account of himself, Ames," he said. "You'll have to show me some evidence of complicity in this before I place him under arrest."

"Have you searched him, chief?"

"Yes. He had no weapon."

"Please make him give you his keys."

Larson scowled. "What nonsense is this?"

"I insist, chief."

"Produce your keys, Mr. Larson."

Larson thrust his hand into his trousers pocket, drew out a key ring containing a dozen keys and threw them upon the table. Ames picked them up, inspected them and saw the keys of several safe-deposit boxes.

"Hold them as evidence, chief," he said quietly. "I charge Guy Larson with murder and with the blackmail of thousands of citizens of Bolton. One of these keys fits a deposit box in the vaults of the Mammoth Trust of New York. In that box is the money stolen by the Racketeers."

"You lie, you lie, I tell you!" shouted Larson. He jumped to his feet and made a rush at Fletcher Ames. Chief Clancy covered him with his revolver.

"Sit down! How you going to prove that, Fletcher?"

"On the body of Louis, the auto-park attendant, will be found another key. It is a specially constructed box which requires both keys and the bank key to open it. Louis was the leader of the gang and Larson was his partner. They did not trust each other, so they devised this scheme to take care of their loot until they were ready to split it."

"You'll have to prove all this," said Larson sullenly.

"You're under arrest for murder, robbery and a lot of things, Mr. Larson," said Chief Clancy. "This boy knows his onions."

Larson slumped down in his chair and buried his face in his hands. Two stalwart policemen guarded him.

Meanwhile officers had been searching the employees assembled in the room, and on the persons of four of them they found lethal weapons. These were charged with being members of the gang, while the proprietor of the inn and all other employees were arrested on suspicion. The proprietor would get a long jail term for harboring the gangsters; the innocent employees would be released eventually.

Ames went into a telephone booth and called up the Schultz home.

"It's Fletcher Ames," he said. "Mrs. Schultz. I want to tell you that Anna is all right, but she won't be home until to-morrow morning."

A screech was his answer.

"She need never darken my door again if she stays out all night, and so soon after the death of her father."

"You don't understand, Mrs. Schultz. Anna and I have been working to capture her father's murderers. The whole police force of Bolton is out here and the whole gang is captured."

"Is that so?" demanded the incredulous mother. "That has nothing to do with her staying out all night. Here I've sat without daring to lay my head upon a pillow; never an eye have I closed——"

"Mrs. Schultz, Anna and I are going to be married just as soon as you give your consent," he stated.

"Oh," said Mrs. Schultz. "Oh, you're going to be married? But that isn't any excuse for keeping my little girl out all night. Here it is four o'clock in the morning. I don't know that you're the kind of man I ought to let my daughter marry."

"I assure you that this is business. The chief of police is here with us and the murderers are all under arrest."

"And it's no place for my daughter, associating with chiefs of police and murderers, and you ought to know better."

"Mother," he said with a grin, "we'll never do it again."

"Well, see that you don't!" she snapped, and hung up.

"I hope I don't have to see much of my mother-in-law," he muttered when he left the booth. "Wow! what a tongue. A good woman, though, and she is perfectly right."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GLORIOUS FUTURE.

"IT'S like this, Fletcher," said Peter Hoskins, the city editor. "If you had had your brains blown out at the attack on the Soissons hinge of the Marne salient, which was the apex of human endeavor, you would have missed a very pretty little party, wouldn't you?"

"Let up, will you?" pleaded Fletcher Ames.

"Here is a town terrorized by brutal gangsters who kill innocent men in cold blood, who pillage and blackmail our best citizens, who baffle the police and scare us all to death. Now, if you had been ten years in your grave, I suppose Bolton would still be in the clutches of murderers and thieves."

"Oh, no. In the long run they would have been hunted down and destroyed."

"Who was going to do it? Clancy? Don't make me laugh. You went out, dug up all the evidence, and made all arrangements for the raid. No doubt you gave Tom Clancy his wonderful military tactics, and got the confession of Pete Moronzoni, alias Louis, without which we never would have nailed the thing onto Guy Larson. You did the finest newspaper job in years, brought the *News* into national prominence as a great newspaper, and got your salary raised by a grateful publisher who was going to cough up fifty thousand dollars blackmail the day after the raid. You're the star reporter of this town and this State. There are no better in New York. You're a big man, Fletcher."

"I was lucky. I played a hunch and won," said the blushing reporter.

"You turned back to our grateful citizens about three hundred thousand dollars that they never expected to see again. By a vote of the big men who were held up you get a commission of ten per cent of two hundred thousand of that, which is a lot of money for a newspaper man. You're sitting pretty, aren't you?"

"I'll say I am."

"On your evidence Guy Larson goes to the gallows. He ought to be hanged, drawn and quartered, or boiled in oil. You have restored peace and tranquility to our fair city——"

"What's this a preamble to?" demanded Fletcher Ames uneasily.

"I just wanted to say that if you want to take a week off to go on a drunk and——"

"I don't drink. I'm on the water wagon for good."

Hoskins laughed. "What I'm coming to is this. It's a humdrum old world again. Nothing to do but to report the inane goings-on of a second-rate city. No more excitement. No thunder of guns and rattle of rifles, no bombs bursting in air, no rockets' red glare——"

Ames was laughing. "For Heaven's sake, shut up!" he pleaded.

"You're going to find things very dull. You're going to sink back into your old attitude that nothing is worth while. You're going to turn in rotten stories and be too lazy to cover important assignments."

"Is that so?"

"I'm judging by past events. Now, there is the dickens to pay down in Nicaragua. Our marines are fighting there. Our publisher thinks there's a wonderful opportunity for a great correspondent to go down there and join the rebels and get all their ideas. He wants the facts, with interviews and photographs of all the leading rebel generals. It will be like old times, Fletcher. Battle, murder and sudden death, not to mention yellow fever, malaria and such."

"You paint such a lovely picture."

"So I'm going to send you down there, old man. Always looking out for your interests."

"Indeed? Well, I'm not going."

"You're not? I thought you'd jump at the chance."

Fletcher laughed and poked his friend in the ribs.

"I'm going to stick right around this funny town," he declared. "And in about another month, when her father has been dead three months, I'm going to marry the most beautiful and the finest girl in Bolton, Miss Anna Schultz."

"But you might be back from Nicaragua in a month or six weeks."

"And a mosquito or a crocodile might get me. My life is precious, Pete. I'm going to be very careful. I'm even going to obey all the traffic signals."

"So you really have got an interest in life?" chuckled the city editor.

"I've got a lovely blond interest in life, and by and by I hope to have several little interests, some blond and some brunette. I'm going to work hard and try to make good as a reporter of the very thrilling incidents in the daily life of the city of Bolton. Do you think I am sure of my job?"

"Reasonably certain."

"It's very important that a married man be sure of his job," declared Fletcher Ames.

"Well, I knew all the time you were going to turn down Nicaragua," the city editor declared. "But you love action. You're crazy about war. So you'll never again go into battle?"

Ames roared.

"It's very evident, old hoss, that you haven't met my prospective mother-in-law!"

The Novel in the Next Issue

The Princess Flies

By Roy Norton

The remarkable adventures of an exiled and hounded Russian princess who became a commercial flyer in America and was dangerously befriended by an American aviator.

PARDNER

By Moran Tudury

A black-bearded stranger makes a devastating entrance into the life of Pardner Jones, stage driver

ONE minute "Pardner" Jones' lanky frame was hunched comfortably on the driver's seat of the stage and the whole world seemed a mere background for a riotous Virginia springtime. And the next the black-bearded stranger had crashed tumultuously into the easy-going, untroubled existence of Pardner Jones.

The stage had left Millville loaded with passengers and mail until its dust-laden, homely hubs groaned under the weight. Inside sounded the agreeable hum of farmers' voices talking long-staple cotton. Upon his high perch Pardner Jones' plain, tanned face with its high cheek bones and deep-set gray eyes pulled comfortably at a corncob. Rhododendron, pink and gay, stuck over the hill crests; dogwood bloomed luxuriantly under the warm morning sun.

Back at Millville the company agent had grinned at Pardner Jones: "Better make sartin you got your gun somewheres."

But Pardner Jones, lank and easy-going, had only grunted: "'Tain't in the nature of man to hold a stage up on a day like this." It was a funny little philosophy of geniality that marked the driver of the Hilton stage; and that was one reason why the Virginia valley country called him Pardner Jones.

Exactly one half hour after leaving Millville, expertly picking flies from his two horses' backs, Pardner Jones swung the stage around Two Forks where the

Button Creek divides two ways. And in that instant Pardner Jones abruptly reined in his team so suddenly that two trunks almost fell off the top of the stage into the creek.

"Crickety!" grunted Pardner Jones—and there was reason for his astonishment.

Squarely established in the middle of the road, two determined-looking six-guns in his big fists, a bandanna covering the lower half of his face, was a huge, belligerent stranger. His wishes were communicated to Pardner Jones instantly.

"Fall down offn that there seat!" commanded the newcomer unpleasantly. "An' keep your hands as high as God-a'mighty'll let you!"

Pardner Jones did not argue. An easy-going, peaceful citizen, quick to understand, he obeyed. While passengers stuck heads out, which they withdrew at once hurriedly, the driver of the Hilton stage tied his reins to the whip-hole, lifted his big hands aloft and climbed down to the roadside.

Authority was apparent in the stranger's every movement. "Jest keep where I kin watch you," he told Pardner Jones crisply. "Don't pull no monkeyshines an' you're settin' pretty." Then, six-guns held waist-high, he ambled forward to pay his respects to the passengers.

One by one, in response to his direct orders, the occupants of the Hilton stage made their appearances, hands upraised. One by one they surrendered the contents of pockets to the masked man whose long black beard jutted forth from the sides of the bandannalike hairy tusks. One and all they were acquiescent—two farmers from the valley, a traveling salesman from Richmond, a circuit rider from the Shenandoah. Wry faces alone betrayed the fact that they were not in sympathy with the stranger's motives.

Pardner Jones, sorrow on his plain but honest face, stumbled forward at a snapped direction: "Heave them mail bags offn the top, an' be lively 'bout it!"

Once it seemed to occur to Pardner to offer opposition to the stranger's intent; but a threatening wave of the six-guns in his locality convinced him it was useless.

Ten minutes later, surrounded by a heap of mail bags and miscellaneous loot, the stranger nodded with a grunt: "Now get goin' where you goin' an' don't look back, 'cause my finger here's got a powerful bad itch an' I aim to be peaceful!"

Pardner Jones, once more with the reins in his hands, obeyed mournfully. He spat grievously over the side of the stage, clucked hollowly to his horses and moved off. Five minutes later, when he thought it safe to look back, the road was empty, six-gun toter and all else disappeared.

Now it might very well have been that Pardner Jones was prepared for misfortune when he brought his looted stage into Hilton. But the extent of his disaster was not comprehended until the next day, when even the excited hubbub of leading Sheriff Burton's posse had died down. It was not until the Millville agent of the company came down that he learned the worst.

" 'Tain't no use, Pardner," the agent told him kindly. "You recollect, yourself, that I advised you totin' a gun that trip. An' the comp'ny's got a rule that all the drivers got to carry a gun. I ain't sayin' it woulda done a mought o' good. But the comp'ny's good an' sore, feelin' you didn't foller the rules an' it cost 'em somethin' fierce."

Pardner Jones squatted silently on the doorstep of the little mill jointly owned by Sheriff Burton and Adam Kemble. "You mean the comp'ny's dischargin' me, pardner?"

The Millville agent nodded. "Course I know how you felt that mornin'. Didn't 'pear like any feller'd have the

stinkin' gumption to stick up a stage on a mornin' like that."

The ex-driver of the Hilton stage rose slowly to his feet, chastened and regretful. "I was just crazy in the head, pardner," he said mournfully. Once he stopped to stare thoughtfully from under his bushy brows at the big stage, standing out on the roadside, the driver's seat empty. His gray eyes went slowly over the mud-coated wheels to the two horses casually discouraging a swarm of flies with great sweeps of tail. Pardner Jones, although he was only thirty-five, had driven the Hilton stage for six years.

"I'll kinda git an' itchin' for them there reins in my hands," he stated softly to the world at large. "An' I'm tellin' you there ain't every man's goin' to find them two horses easy. Ol' Martin there's got a blind side an'——" Then he borrowed a slice of cut plug from the agent, grunted sadly, and took himself off into the woods. Pardner Jones from then on was a man marked with sorrow.

Old walrus-mustached Sheriff Burton, half-owner of the sawmill with Adam Kemble, told his partner unhappily: "Kinda breaks a feller up, after he's been a sorta celebrity like Pardner Jones. A feller like him, allers on the go from one town to 'nother, don't take quick to settlin' down for good."

Kemble was more cynical. Partnership in a sawmill with Sheriff Tom Burton had made him so, his lot being to contend with the sheriff's notorious laziness, do most of the work, and then split dividends. "Shucks!" Adam Kemble pronounced acidly. "Pardner Jones' allers been easy. That's why they call him Pardner. Ain't got an enemy in the world. I bet you right now he wouldn't had the heart to shoot that hold-up feller even if he had had his gun with him and the drop into the bargain!"

In the end, that was the verdict of the sleepy little shanty collection of a scattered crossroads town that lay like a symbol of prolonged slumber in the Virginia mountains. Pardner Jones, it was argued, had had it coming to him. He was too easy.

"Wouldn't of shot that gun off if they made him," Adam Kemble grumbled. Then he went back to work, seeing to it that the creek that tumbled down from Two Forks was dutifully taking the course that led through the mill-wheel of Kemble & Burton, Ltd. Sometimes a local wag would perspiringly push over the boulder that blocked off the other channel at Two Forks. On such occasions water ceased to journey dutifully to the Hilton mill.

"Got too much to worry 'bout now with that dam water without fussin' over Pardner Jones!" Kemble growled to his shiftless partner.

But old Sheriff Tom Burton, softer of heart, was touched. Sometimes he beheld the ex-driver of the Hilton stage wandering alone and solemn-faced. On such occasions the sheriff would say: "What you fixin' to do now, Pardner?"

And Pardner Jones, squinting quietly into the sun, would give a reflective tug at one large ear. "Dunno," was his answer. "Directly I'll be humpin' myself, directly."

But to Sheriff Tom Burton, wise in the ways of the valley, those were the words of a broken, inconsolable man.

In the end, it was Sheriff Burton himself who found for Pardner Jones another place in the world of valley affairs. The sheriff, frankly, was dubious when he made his proposal. "I don'a like to see you mopin' round so, Pardner," he said. "At the same time Adam Kemble's allers givin' me hell for not helpin' him at the mill. Mought be you could give him a hand."

And, after a moment's reflection, Pardner Jones nodded. "Mought be I could, Tom," he said. "I'm runnin'

short of vittles down to my shanty, anyways."

The introduction of a new helper did not prove, for Adam Kemble, a particularly promising prospect, however. It was true that nobody, in Adam Kemble's eyes, could quite equal his partner in a talent for shiftlessness. But, in the matter of disinterest, Pardner Jones ran Sheriff Tom Burton a very close second.

"Passin' logs to a mill ain't my style," Pardner Jones owned up at once when Kemble had loudly lamented his new hand's ardent propensity for deserting his post for the purpose of rushing out into the road to see the stage come in. "I'm a hoss feller an' livin' indoors this a way cramps me."

It didn't solve Adam Kemble's troubles to see this was true. Nevertheless he was touched, himself, observing the hungry sort of way in which Pardner Jones raced outside at the first yell "Stage a-comin'!" But Adam Kemble carefully concealed such sentimental impulses from all eyes. "I got a mill to run," he told himself. "An' I got enough to bear up under already with a worthless partner like Tom Burton."

In other ways—and when the stage was not on the scene—Pardner Jones was invariably obliging. When Adam Kemble would yell profanely: "Goshalmighty—that damned water's stopped again!" it was always Pardner Jones who hoofed it up to Two Forks to see what new practical joker had switched the dam boulder into the Hilton water course. And this, for Adam Kemble, was a great deal.

"I swear it to you, Tom Burton!" he shouted, his fat little face flooding sweat and anger. "For ten years I've allers been the one to climb that hill to Two Forks and push that rock off our course. An' I ain't a-goin' never to do it again!"

On such occasions big Sheriff Burton, a sheepish expression in his watery blue eyes, would hitch up his six-gun belt. "I heah you, Adam Kemble. Ain't you got Pardner heah to do it for you?"

"I got him now," his outraged partner retorted hotly. "Leastwise I got him when he ain't poppin' out his eyes at that fool stage. But if ever he ain't here you're goin' up that hill to Two Forks, six-guns an' all, or this mill stays bust down!"

Pardner Jones, listening, found himself more than ever unpleased by a life-long prospect of commercial life. That was one reason why he rather relished a chance to get outdoors, even when it meant footing it a mile uphill in the broiling sun to remedy the damage done to the mill's water supply. And it was one reason, too, why when he came upon two juvenile culprits, he refrained from undue sternness.

"What for you jack rabbits went an' pushed that rock into our fork?" he asked placatingly. "Don't you know every time that there water stops I got to clumb this hill and push that rock over to the other fork?" But his manner was remarkably free from wrath; and, thus encouraged, the youthful cynics almost every day or so came back to the practical joke at Two Forks.

For himself, Pardner Jones was given to standing there for a bit after he had chased the two away. "Right heah," he told himself, "was where that galoot played hell with Pardner Jones." In his mind's eye he could see the whole, fatal scene again.

Once more he felt the smooth slide of worn reins between his strong, gaunt fingers, heard the cheerful rattle of harness and the creaking roll of four wheels under him. His fingers seemed to close round a long rawhide whip and he felt himself mindful of old Martin's blind side. The odor of dogwood lifted out of the warm, disturbing smell of the pines, and a jay flashed across his vision like an invitation to be gone. Then, again, Pardner Jones saw a burly, masked figure with six-guns uprai ed

and two forks of black beard protruding from the sides of a concealing bandanna.

"Crickety!" he said softly to himself; and there was a funny hurt in his throat.

Sometimes Pardner Jones yearned so for another sight of that black-bearded stranger that he could almost feel him close by. It wasn't just that there was a five-hundred-dollar reward offered for the fellow's capture, either. It was a thing that had to do with his loneliness—a matter that kept him out of the world that had been life for Pardner Jones. Now, nights no longer found him squatting down at the crossroads general store, legs on a hogshead, drawling voice explaining to a knot of stay-at-homes: "Tell you the creeks are swellin' down by Little Knob. Tell you that there road stretch by Murray Bottom's a-goin' to cave in." Pardner Jones had lost his place in the valley circles; and even the best sawmill hand isn't worth more than five minutes of listening.

Nowadays he consoled himself at sight of a new driver atop the Hilton stage, heard Adam Kemble's perpetual swearing, his daily complaint: "Better take your foot in your hand, Pardner, an' get up to Two Forks. That damned water's stopped again!"

"Crickety!" Pardner Jones would say to himself when the owls hooted softly from the pines and twilight fell over the crossroads. And sometimes, as he remembered the burly, black-bearded figure that had smashed his life, Pardner Jones—public opinion to the contrary—did not look like a peaceful man.

One particularly hot Saturday morning, exactly three weeks after Pardner Jones had been discharged by the stage company, he took himself into the presence of his new boss. "This here is a Saturday, Adam Kemble," he observed thoughtfully. "They ain't goin' to be much work—an' it's hot. Consequence I'm takin' my foot in my hand for the day."

Adam Kemble grunted. "G'wan then, but if that damned water stops ——" He looked significantly at the indolent figure of his partner. But Sheriff Tom Burton only spat, with assumed innocence of manner, into the roadside fifteen feet away.

Pardner Jones, with a sandwich in his overalls pocket, took to the pine woods in obvious haste to leave the sordidness of civilization behind. A citizen of the outdoors, sawmill life filled his long, inquisitive nose with unamiable smells. "Got to get out where a feller kin stretch his bones," he told himself, and went idly through the woods, his thumbs tucked comfortably under his suspenders.

When Sheriff Tom Burton had guessed Pardner Jones was grieving, he had hit the truth. It hurt him to see another driver up on that stage box, another hand flicking flies from the back of old Martin and his harness mate. Lately, carefully scrutinizing the two horses when they stood tied to a hitching post after the morning's run, Pardner Jones fancied a change.

"You givin' them horses 'nough salt?" he inquired almost pugnaciously of his successor, a flip-mouthed skimpson from down valley.

"Them horses don't have salt on nothin' but their boiled aigs," retorted the other primly.

In many ways, Pardner Jones thought, that was a tolerably nasty remark.

"Jest the same, I'm keepin' a eye on 'em, buddy," he told his successor shortly—and once again men forgot that he was named Pardner Jones for affability.

His mind, therefore, as he trudged stolidly through the woods that morning three weeks after the holdup, was filled with the sorrow of human injustice. Nobody, including the stage com-

pany, had exactly given him a square deal. This was what Pardner Jones was thinking as the bushes in front of him suddenly parted and a voice said sharply:

"Jest hold on there, feller! I'm aimin' to speak a piece with you."

And the next instant Pardner Jones found himself staring amazedly into the intent black eyes of the stranger whose holdup had ruined his life. There could be no doubting the fact that it was the same man, even if he hadn't worn the identical stained bandanna round the lower half of his face. Black beard just showed beneath the handkerchief and the figure seemed as towering in its bulk as it had that other fatal morning.

"Crickety!" said Pardner Jones in his astonishment; and his jaw sagged. The next moment he saw the other emerge from his shelter with a single six-gun upraised. When Pardner Jones looked to the other hand he saw it heavily bandaged.

The stranger saw his glance of appraising curiosity and laughed dryly. "That sore paw is what's bringing me'n you together, Pardner," he said coolly. "Fact is, I cut myself diggin' a hole with a bowie." He didn't have to tell Pardner Jones why he had been doing that. Somewhere among the hills, it was evident, the stranger had cached his loot.

"In a half a' hour," the other went on, still leveling his pistol, "the stage is comin' down from Millville. I'm goin' to be waitin' at Two Forks—you *an'* me, to be truthfullike; because you're a-comin', too.

" 'Ceptin' for this bum hand," went on the stranger, "I'd be pullin' the trick alone. As 'tis now, I need a pardner. Seems to me that somewheres round Millville I heerd 'em callin' you Pardner. Waal I calc'late you're goin' to be took into my firm for one mornin'." He laughed at that; and Pardner Jones stirred uneasily.

"Nothin' to it," explained the stranger again. "I'll stick 'em up an' you get round an' collect from the passengers. You don't need to do nothin' but give 'em transfers, see? From them to me, sorta." And he laughed again.

Pardner Jones was extremely thoughtful as he obediently stalked through the woods to Two Forks with the other man. Once he looked up uncomfortably. "Last time you lost my job for me, holdin' up my stage," he said complainingly. "Now you're a-goin' to make me a pardner in crime. Kinda rubbin' it in."

The burly figure guffawed. "You don't owe that stage comp'ny nothin', Pardner. This here gives you a chance to even up with 'em. Do your stuff right an' I'll give you a one quarter split on the proceeds. Then I'm clearin' out. Maybe you'n me could start a combine?"

Pardner Jones frowned thoughtfully. "Waal," he agreed slowly, "they do call me Pardner here'bouts." And he walked solemn-faced along. To the intent black eyes of the outlaw it even seemed he was wavering at the invitation.

By the time the two had reached Two Forks they were perspiring. The stranger glanced skyward. "I'm new to these parts but from the looks of that sun I figger the stage'll be 'long in fifteen minutes."

Pardner Jones spat comfortably. "Jest 'bout," he agreed.

"Scene kinda familiar?" inquired the other, chuckling dryly as he saw the native's eyes wander over the roadside.

"Yep," admitted Pardner Jones quietly. "You was standin' jest 'bout there when I pulled in my team." His gray eyes rested reminiscently on the little creek.

"This heah spot is ideel for my work," the stranger said professionally. "Get 'em kinda comin' round the curve afore they set eyes on you."

Pardner Jones, who had been thought-

ful even for him, suddenly gave the other man a quick look. In that glance the outlaw felt Pardner Jones had finally given in. "Tell you what," the ex-driver said slowly; "this new driver's a hellion for quick shootin'." He spat expressively into the creek.

"By which you're meanin'——" began the stranger darkly.

"Nothin' much," Pardner Jones said slowly, "'cept we better aim to stop that coach for sartin. You said there was a fourth comin' my way, didn't you?"

The other laughed now and stuck his six-gun into his holster. "Every man's got his price—an' you got somethin' comin' to you from that stage comp'ny."

Pardner Jones said nothing but he cast an appraising eye round the narrow road and the wide creek bed. "Over there's somethin' mought help stop 'em," he indicated—and the stranger nodded.

"I get you," he agreed. "We'll give that there rock a shove and she'll kinda block the road a little. Then when the stage comes across the creek bed she'll jest naturally have to pull up." He put his broad shoulder to the rock and gave it a push, Pardner Jones looking thoughtfully on. The water, which had been flowing downhill to their left, easily changed its course to a gully on their right, and the outlaw grunted with satisfaction.

A change seemed to have come over Pardner Jones. Where he had at first been downcast and discomfited, he now appeared fully reconciled to his new manner of making a livelihood. If old Sheriff Tom Burton had seen him at that moment he might have grunted: "Don't wonder Pardner went wrong! Workin' in a sawmill's enough to drive any he-man to a life o' crime!"

But old Sheriff Tom Burton, at that moment, could not behold Pardner Jones' change. For the sheriff, right then, was a mile away, slumbering peacefully at the mill.

And it was just about then that Pardner Jones' newly found confederate cupped one ear and held up a warning hand. For a minute there was silence, then the listener rose to his feet. "Now, Pardner," he directed coolly, "we better hump ourselves!"

They were just in time because already the two waiting men could hear the jingle of harness round the bend. And the next moment the stage hove into view.

"Stick 'em high's you kin put 'em!" snapped the black beard; and Pardner Jones stepped forward with an empty burlap sack in his hands.

Painfully, the new driver of the Hilton stage climbed down from the box, his eyes blazing at Pardner Jones. "Fine feller, you—talkin' 'bout givin' salt to hosses an' ain't nothin' better'n a stick-up hand!" he snarled.

"I'm a-goin' to do a little saltin' with this here six-gun lessn you shut up," interceded the black-bearded one. He nodded to his assistant. "Just step in, Pardner, an' collect the fares!"

It seemed to the outlaw that his new partner was a trifle slow in getting started. In his apparent pugnaciousness regarding the driver who had succeeded him on the box of the Hilton stage, Pardner Jones lost time. "Jest step a little lively, Pardner," came a warning. "We kin heave this feller into the crick afterward."

Obediently Pardner Jones went the rounds, assisting the two occupants of the coach in ridding themselves of gold watches and wallets. But he was uncommonly awkward in climbing to the top of the coach to throw off the mail bags.

From down below the masked stranger called: "Step lively, feller! A-goin' to be up there all day?"

One of the mail bags, catching in a nail, held Pardner Jones up for three minutes getting it loose. But at last he had carried them to the roadside where

he deposited them with the bulging burlap sack. Once he looked up with a queer sort of expression on his face, squinting in the sun. Then he heard the black-bearded one's crisp order to the stage driver: "Pile up there lively now an' get goin'. An' don't turn round till dinner time to-morrer!"

Five minutes later, having taken a quick survey of the mail bags and the burlap sack, the outlaw turned with a grin toward Pardner Jones: "Them mail bags are goin' to pay us proper. We had a good day. An' now that we're settin' pretty we'll just hustle the whole batch off to a place where there won't be nobody buttin' in."

Pardner Jones had just lifted a heavy mail sack to his shoulder when the other man, sticking his six-gun away, turned suddenly. "Thought I heerd somethin'," he began. He listened, then bent over to take a sack himself, his back slightly turned toward Pardner Jones.

And in that moment something hit him solidly on the back of the head, knocking him to his knees. It was, in fact, the mail sack in Pardner Jones' hands. In a flash he scrambled to his feet; but as he stood up, the bushes in front of him parted and Sheriff Tom Burton, six-gun significantly leveled, looked into his eyes.

"Sheriff," said Pardner Jones thoughtfully, "I was just beginnin' to believe ol' Adam Kemble never *would* git you up heah to see what 'twas damming that creek to the sawmill!"

It was a good month before the valley got tired of talking about Pardner Jones' trick that won him a five-hundred-dollar reward and his old berth back on the box of the Hilton stage. But even then it was a long time after before they wearied of the manner in which he had captured one burly road agent with a black beard.

Evenings, after the afternoon run was over, it seemed that there were always a couple of loungers waiting on the steps of Hilton's general store when the stage rumbled in and Pardner Jones climbed down, dust-laden, from the box. And if there were any strangers about somebody always managed to push them forward to shake the horny palm of the valley's chief celebrity.

But it was only to Sheriff Tom Burton that Pardner Jones ever fully unbosomed; and sometimes in the twilight, with old Martin and his harness mate tucked away for the night, Pardner Jones would open up on the doorstep of the sawmill of Kemble & Burton, Ltd.

"Sheriff," Pardner Jones would begin, "I was suttinly doin' a powerful lot of hopin' when I got that feller to push the rock across yourn an' Adam Kemble's creek bed. Course I was sartin that rock'd stop the mill wheel down heah an' bring somebody up to Two Forks."

"Sho' nuff," agreed Sheriff Burton.

Pardner Jones shook his head at another memory. "But I had a powerful lot o' faith when I believed in Adam Kemble ever gettin' you to climb that hill and push the rock over. I stalled round somethin' turrible, givin' you plenty of time. I was just kinda bankin' on what Adam Kemble said that time. Remember? He said to you right heah on these steps: 'For ten years I've allers been the one to climb that hill to Two Forks and push that rock off our course; an' I ain't a-goin' to never do it again. Next time *you're* goin', six-gun an' all, or this mill stays bust down."

Pardner Jones grinned. "I was banking on them six-guns somethin' terrible!"

Sheriff Tom Burton stretched himself gently, nodding. "Sho' nuff."

Watch for another story by Moran Tudury soon.

The MODERN

IN FIVE PARTS—PART ONE

A lawyer accused of murder finds refuge

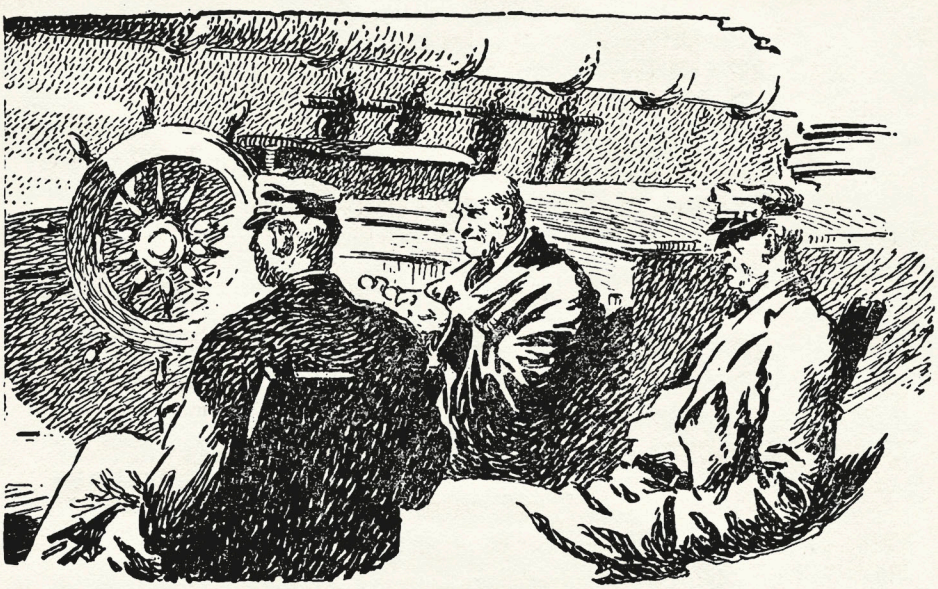
CHAPTER I.

AN EXTRAORDINARY COURT.

HUGH HASTINGS, counselor at law, lay shivering on a scaffold of planks nailed closely and insecurely under a wharf. This little city, Hugh was quite aware, would be raked over with a fine-tooth comb. The process must already have begun, at about the time when he had slipped over the end of a pier in semidarkness and pawed his way between the piles to this hiding place that he had discovered accidentally over a year before. It could be only a temporary sanctuary. The next step must be quickly taken.

While crouched on the end of the pier, Hugh had been watching a little schooner yacht—auxiliary, no doubt—that, unlike others of her sort, was moored out near the end of a pier bulkhead opposite. This was a poor berth and must therefore have been chosen temporarily. The chances were, Hugh thought, that this yacht would be one of the migratory fleet coming up from Florida, that had put in and tied up for a few hours.

At first, Hugh had not considered this little vessel as a possibility for escape. Soon, more desperate, he began to wonder if it might not be possible to get aboard her undetected and hide away somewhere—in one of her boats that would be swung inboard with a canvas cover triced over it, or in her lazaret, under spare sails.



VIGILANTES

By Henry C. Rowland

with a group of millionaire vigilantes

If she were to shove off before daylight and make for New York, he might get a chance to stow away aboard some foreign vessel outward bound, or hit on some other avenue down which to fade away.

Perhaps at this moment there might be nobody aboard—merely a watchman at the pierhead subsidized to keep his eye on her. Even if Hugh were to be discovered the next day, when at sea, her people might believe his story or, even if disposed to doubt it, yet consent to land him somewhere, unreported.

Hugh was acquainted with that freakish psychology by which persons when excited will join savagely in a man hunt, and the same persons, appealed to when calm of mind, assist even a criminal fugitive. And Hugh was not yet a convicted criminal. Merely a fugitive from alleged justice.

He determined to make the attempt shortly before the dawn, if the schooner were still there. But the night dragged over him with such cold and leaden feet that he could not stand the chill and weight of its interminable passage after one in the morning. Any venture seemed better than shivering on that staging over the dark water.

It was less dark, dangerously light, in fact, between him and the schooner on the other side of the entrance to the port. As he slipped down into the brimming cold he wondered for a moment if he were going to swim or drown of a sudden cramp. Lying there in his sod-

den clothes, scarcely daring to move for five hours that seemed an eternity, lest the rickety scaffolding fetch away with him, had numbed and stiffened him to a state of petrification. But after a few painful strokes his motor force returned, and he was able to thrust himself along.

He reached the schooner unchallenged, and found a ladder down on the side presented to him. But it seemed safer to go up over the bow, so he passed himself forward and climbed aboard by the bobstay and bowsprit shroud. Fortune then seemed to favor him. The forecastle hatch was half open, held on its hook. Hugh leaned over the dark square of the hatchway listening. There was not a sound. A sailor down there would scarcely be sleeping silently enough for his breathing to be inaudible. Hugh raised the hatch, noiselessly slipped under it, then, standing on the ladder, hooked it up again.

Pawing about then in the forecastle, he found that it had a berth on either side, one fixed, the other hung on lanyards inboard, so that it could be folded back. Both bunks appeared to be in use for the stowage of spare sails. On the starboard side, these were neatly made up and with some coils of spare lines atop of them. On the port side, there was a long roll of canvas too heavy for the sails of a yacht—an awning, probably.

Rapid continued examination showed Hugh that the forecastle was completely bulkheaded off from the rest of the space below decks. That was a wise smell-proof, bug-proof arrangement in a boat for cruising in southern waters. Its present use appeared to be merely as a lazaret and storeroom, for the tarry ship odor was mingled with that of coffee, spilled, perhaps, by a careless steward. Hugh hoped that he might be able to find some water there, as thirst was beginning to torment him. This might have led him in search of it, but on peering up through the hatchway he discovered a small yacht's boat in which were four persons, almost alongside.

This dinghy had come off so silently as to have a sinister, or at least a secretive suggestion. Mere yachtsmen, or even a crew taking the yacht north, would scarcely come off aboard so quietly. They might be engaged in the rum trade, or some other unlawful occupation, and he hoped that such were the case, so long as they did not attract the suspicion of the police.

The dinghy rounded up alongside and those in her came very quietly aboard. Two of them started immediately to take in the lines by which the little vessel was moored. Somebody, a watchman, said from the pier bulkhead: "A nice still night to make a run, sir;" and a man's voice answered briefly, "Yes, not worth while to wait for the breeze when you carry one aboard." At which the watchman laughed assent.

A moment later the engine started with a smooth, strong thrumming that announced it a modern and high-powered one. It was thrown into gear, and the yacht started gently ahead. There came a soothing ripple from under the bows, and alongside where Hugh lay. Here was a voyage begun, for somewhere, and none too soon. Nobody looked into the forecastle. Hugh, warmed by the awning, fell asleep.

He was awakened by the sun streaming through the glass square in the hatch cover. His mouth was glued together, his thirst almost intolerable, and he wondered if he would be able to weather out that day of parching with the sun beating down on the deck. It was hot in the forecastle, would have proved a sweat box for anybody with fluid in his system to sweat. He was not hungry. The French proverb: *"Qui dort dine,"* is true of hunger, but sleeping only increases thirst.

Hugh lay there pondering on his po-

sition. Evidently the yacht was being run by the owner and guests, with a steward, who probably slept amidships, but no sailor.

Hugh's fevered reflections were cut short by the sudden stopping of the yacht's engine. The fine ripple round the bows gradually diminished, then ceased. There was a long ground swell, but the absence of any short, quick motion of the little vessel indicated a flat calm. As it was too soon for them to be arrived in any port, it seemed probable to Hugh that some engine trouble had developed and he stifled a groan at the idea of an indefinite prolonging of his torment.

His next impression was that the inertia must have enveloped not only the yacht herself, but everybody aboard. Not a sound of any sort whatever reached him. The sails had not been hoisted and the motion was too slow and gradual to stir any part of the rigging. Not so much as a halyard slatting against the mast or the creaking of any loose gear broke the utter silence. No sound came from the other side of the bulkhead closing off the forecastle from the section abaft it. The utter stillness was ominous, oppressive. The faint eddies of air stirred by the motion ahead to refresh slightly the hot, stuffy atmosphere ceased entirely.

There came then through the utter stillness what sounded like the murmur of a man's voice, from aft. It was not conversational, but a steady and monotonous cadence as if somebody was reading or reciting an official homologue. Hugh crept out from under the awning and stood on the second rung of the iron ladder, so that he was able to peer over the hatch coaming. The scene, of which only a part fell for the moment within his range of vision, roused him out of his thirst-stricken lethargy.

The yacht lay flat becalmed and motionless on a pale expanse of ocean that was scarcely stirred by the long, low ground swell. No land was in sight, nor could Hugh with his limited scope or horizon see any vessel. Looking to the westward, Hugh was unable to discover so much as the fish-net stakes that he knew to be set far off the low shore of the New Jersey coast where the water shoals very gradually.

This much he was aware of in his first brief and furtive glance on either side. But the curious tableau on the yacht's small quarter-deck immediately held his attention. There was slight danger of his being discovered, as the sun was very bright, almost overhead, and the half-raised forecastle hatch threw a black shadow under it.

Hugh's first glance showed him that some sort of trial was being held. One did not need to be a lawyer to recognize the forensic character of the proceedings. More than that, as Hugh slightly moved his head so that the corner of the cabin house no longer obscured a sector of his view, he discovered that the man evidently presiding, who was elderly, almost venerable, wore the gown of presiding judge. He was seated in a wicker deck chair beside the wheel. Two other men, both of late middle age, distinguished of appearance and most evidently of superior station, occupied folding camp chairs to the left of the judge, like a jury of two.

The defendant in this curious case being tried aboard this little vessel that was now presumably outside the legislative limits of the shore, was not clearly visible to Hugh. A man stood directly between them, at the back of a camp stool on which a bulky man was seated, slumped down a little. Hugh could see only one of his heavy, sagging shoulders that projected beyond the thigh of the tall, slender man standing behind his chair.

As Hugh now watched this singular proceeding, his thirst set aside in a growing wonder at what might be its object, the judge finished his reading of what

appeared to be a report, or charges against the man who was on trial, then handed the papers to the man nearest him on the right, who merely glanced at them, made some remark to his companion, and, taking a match box from his pocket, lighted the corner of the papers. He held them until they were almost consumed, then let the small fragment, still blazing, flutter over the low rail of the yacht.

Hugh looked intently at these two men, to fix their faces in his memory. There was, he felt now convinced, something extremely arbitrary going on here. Despite his physical discomfort, a chill of foreboding rippled through him. But he found it extremely difficult to check up any distinctly unlawful proceeding on the part of the three men whom he was able to examine so distinctly in that strong light. Hugh perceived that if he were to go into the Union, or Union League, or Metropolitan Club and pick out at random three of its members in the lounge between the ages of forty-five and sixty-five, they would appear just such gentlemen as were here. They had the unmistakable cachet of breeding, position, responsibility, and authority. They impressed Hugh as men whose wealth was hereditary, had descended through a series of generations, like their culture, and their manner contained a sort of assurance, like kings of their respective realms who could do no wrong.

The man standing behind the chair of the defendant—for the position of this individual could be nothing else—Hugh now believed, had, though his back was turned to the vessel's bow, a faint shade of difference from the other three—a difference that could be felt but not described. Though dressed like his confrères in a business suit of dark shade that the strong sunlight and his erect position revealed as the handicraft of a leading and expensive tailor, there was something in the light, perfect balance of his pose, broad shoulders, narrow hips and general trimness of an athletic physique slightly above the average height that described him as a younger man and one whose activities had been in the open, rather than confined to a business or professional office. He and the other two wore yachting caps; the judge was bareheaded.

Hugh observed that whereas the other three to compose this curious tribunal were evidently exercising a strong repression of their emotions, this apparent court officer, though on his feet and unsupported against the slow rhythmic swinging of the yacht, preserved an equilibrium that was as perfect as it was effortless. His trim, erect figure held itself in exact perpendicular to the horizon. He was, Hugh opined from his thick but well-trimmed wavy hair that was slightly brushed with gray over the close-set ears, not much beyond forty.

The president of this arbitrary court asked some questions of what might have been his associated judges, or judge and referee. One of them answered briefly, leaning forward a little in his chair. The face of this gentleman appeared to be glistening as if with light perspiration. Hugh could not follow what was being said. The judge was speaking very rapidly and with a Southern accent.

The judge then performed a gesture that was unmistakable, and at sight of which Hugh, though familiar with the technic of a criminal court in trying a case for a capital crime, felt a shiver ripple up his spine while the hair seemed to crisp at the back of his neck. For the august and impressive gentleman presiding over what could not be other than an outrageous travesty on lawful criminal procedure, reached under the fold of his black-silk judicial gown, then placed a black cap on a finely shaped head of which the crown was thinly covered with silvered hair.

"Andreas Johnson," said the judge,

in a tone that was clear and absolutely steady, "this court by which you have been tried is one of exigency, and it does not regard the previous findings of any other court or courts. The evidence against you is irrefutable. It does not admit of any just reason for clemency. You have proven yourself to be a dangerous public enemy, and as such I herewith sentence you to death, and may God have mercy on your sinful soul."

The two jurists had uncovered. What then immediately happened was so swift that Hugh had scarcely time to realize it, or the nature of its functioning. But in that fatal moment he made a discovery that for the instant blotted from his mind the full horror of what was taking place.

The man who was standing behind the condemned stepped aside, exposing the back of the prisoner seated on the camp stool to Hugh's startled eyes. He recognized instantly the abnormally broad and bulging shoulders with their squarely hunched position that eliminated any neck, the short, black coarse hair there above the coat collar, the shade and texture of the coat itself.

The stool was placed close to the low bulwarks of the yacht over which there hung a slack piece of small chain cable, about quarter-inch size. An end of new manila, about thirteen-thread weight, was secured to a belaying pin in the fife rail at the foot of the shrouds, and went down tautly overside.

As the man who had been standing behind the prisoner, between him and Hugh, stepped quickly and lightly aside to lay his hand on this end of rope, Hugh observed that the slack chain was attached to the manacles by which the prisoner's wrists were handcuffed behind him. But before Hugh could appreciate the significance of this fact, the man standing had cast the light manila rope end off the pin.

Hugh scarcely noticed this act. His dry tongue was glued in his throat. He saw only that the prisoner appeared to leap backward off the stool, whisk out and over the low rail. The stillness was broken by a startled bellow that was syncopated in a splash. Utter silence reigned again.

But only for a moment. The judge, who had risen, said briefly: "Start the engine, Mr. Clamart," and went below.

The two jurors followed him. The man who had slipped the line by which a heavy weight evidently had been suspended at the surface of the water, stood for an instant looking into the depths, then turned with a light, springy motion and went down the companionway amidships. Hugh caught a glimpse of his face as he turned. It was a distinctly handsome face, rather square but with regular, well-chiseled features and a straight, closely trimmed mustache that gave it a military sternness. There was nothing of a brutal or criminal sort in its lineaments. On the contrary, its fleeting impression on Hugh was one of sadness.

But now the shock of this scene and the emotion under which he had been as spectator augmented so suddenly Hugh's parched mouth and throat that he found himself unable to swallow. His tongue seemed to have thickened and threatened to deprive him of breath. All significance of what he had just witnessed was submerged in the imperative need of water. In the panic of near strangulation his horror at this bizarre execution was brushed aside by the instinct of self-preservation.

Regardless of the danger of discovery, he pushed back the hatch cover and climbed on deck. This sortie was rewarded by the sight of a five-gallon water bottle in its slatted crate secured by a lanyard in the shallow cockpit, partly covered by a small square of tarpaulin stuff. Hugh ducked back into the forecastle and secured a nearly empty coffee tin that he had noticed there; then, unmindful of the risk, stole

quickly aft, threw off the lanyard of the bottle, filled this container, and stole as noiselessly as possible back again to the forecastle.

The quart of tepid water was all too little, but a heaven-sent ambrosia. Hugh let it trickle slowly down his glued throat. As he was doing so the engine started. The ripple under the bow became a low-toned, steady rush of waters. Evidently his presence aboard had not been discovered. Refreshed, and with as much fluid as it would have been wise for him to ingest immediately, Hugh crept back into the awning and lay pondering on the curious and fatal scene that he had witnessed. For Hugh that scene was doubly fatal, since with the obliteration of the man Andreas Johnson, Hugh's last hope of possible vindication seemed to have been sunk to bottom.

These men—judge, jury, executioner—certainly had not the look of outlaws of any sort. Nor did they impress Hugh as being possibly a committee appointed for this act of outlawry by some secret order of which they were members. The whole performance was inexplicable for Hugh, incredible and terrifying. Why, he asked himself, had they chosen to take it upon themselves to do this thing? What interest could elderly men who wore every aspect of being fair representatives of the country's elect have in the capture, trial and execution without warrant of such a thug as this Andreas Johnson appeared to have been?

The problem was too hard for Hugh, and presently he gave it up. He considered the idea of revealing himself, explaining his position there and accusing them of the terrible wrong they had done him in abolishing his own chance of vindication from charges of a capital crime, but quickly abandoned it. These men were too inexorable. If they hated criminality enough to take the law into their own hands, then what had he to expect of them with no other support than his own statement? They would decline to accept this, with no reasonable backing, and merely hand him over to the law.

And now, Hugh reflected, he was an outlaw, a fugitive from its far-reaching arm, and of a distinctive physical type that must render his capture almost certain. Even if he succeeded in getting ashore unperceived, Hugh doubted that he could get very far. He had money for the moment, a hundred and odd dollars that had happened to be in his desk; and his clothes, now dried, would be with a little smoothing, presentable enough. The trouble lay in the uncommon fairness of his skin and white-blond curling hair.

Although his type was Anglo-Saxon, with the emphasis on Saxon, Hugh when knocking about the water in small boats had frequently been hailed in Swedish or Norwegian by some sailor of one or the other of these nationalities, and it had amused him to play the rôle of modern viking, not long out of the Skager-Rak and looking for an easy berth aboard a yacht. He had learned, parrotlike, a number of seagoing expressions, but there his knowledge of either Scandinavian language stopped. In fact, the only foreign language that he knew was Spanish, and this he spoke with the fluency of a native of that country.

But this knowledge of Spanish, colloquial and official, did not offer at this moment any great assistance. Hugh would gladly have traded it for a sailor's white-canvas working suit, which at least might get him ashore unquestioned. On the off-chance of finding such a costume, he began to overhaul the lockers under the built-in bunk, when almost immediately he found a suit of what was even better, blues, neatly rolled and stopped at the ends by rope yarn, sailor fashion, and also a blue-woven watch-cap. There was also folded in the back

of the locker a small canvas sea bag with the name *"Lilith"* neatly stenciled.

Hugh quickly made the change, then stuffed his crumpled suit into the sea bag, which he stowed behind some stores. He then climbed back into the folds of the awning and drew a loose bight of it over him.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW IDENTITY.

THE relief from tormenting thirst, hunger and the dread of immediate arrest on setting foot ashore, eased Hugh gently into a restful sleep, instead of the coma of exhaustion he had sunk into on first getting aboard the yacht.

The air grew cool and sweet as the sun climbed down off the meridian, for it was early May on the New Jersey coast. Though with the lines of a submarine chaser and a tremendous reserve power, the speed of the yacht was so regulated that she passed Scotland Lightship off Sandy Hook at dusk, making for the marine basin in South Brooklyn.

Hugh did not awaken until the soothing and steady gurgle of the bow wave ebbed in diminuendo as the yacht was slowed to enter the yard. A soft darkness had fallen. The engines went astern, stopped, and the yacht rubbed gently alongside the piling. It was Saturday night and there seemed to be nobody about the premises, as Hugh did not hear any voices at all. Almost immediately the yacht was made fast and her party of four were ashore and on their way up the long wharf to the gate.

The blaze of Coney Island just across Gravesend Bay immediately located Hugh as he peered round out of the hatchway. He was surprised that the party should have gone off leaving the forecastle unlocked. Still, the cabins were safe enough in such a yacht yard, patrolled by a night watchman. The idea reminded Hugh that he might himself be subject to examination, so he hastily picked up the sea bag in which he had stowed his clothes and followed the four men at the distance of about fifty yards. As the basin was filled with yachts of various types and sizes, house boats, cabin cruisers, auxiliaries and the like, lying both sides and sometimes breasted together, it was evident that the vacant berth they had just entered was reserved for the little schooner auxiliary.

The whole place was brilliantly lighted with high lamps. Hugh had waited until the four men had passed behind a small building on the wharf before venturing to leave the *Lilith*. As if now sensing him behind them, the man addressed as Clamart looked back over his shoulder. But the sight of a young sailor in yacht blues and carrying a sea bag was nothing amiss. Hugh might have stepped off onto the wharf from any of the handsome yachts lying alongside.

They passed several men, yachts' officers, members of the crews, and the wharfmaster or watchman, who touched his cap and said, "Evening, Mr. Clamart." He scarcely glanced at Hugh. At the main gateway Hugh drew in closer to the four men, but concealed the name stenciled on the bag. The gateman also wished them a polite good evening, ignoring Hugh, whom he took evidently for their sailor servant.

Two big, handsome limousines and a coupé were waiting at the end of the street, just outside the basin gates. The chauffeurs of all three cars tossed aside their cigarettes and smartly opened the doors. As he passed by, Hugh heard the "judge" say: "I'm going right on out to Whiteacres. Good night." He got into one of the big limousines, which moved quickly away. The two gentlemen who had served as jurors got into the other big car and followed.

The man named Clamart lingered a

moment, giving some directions to his chauffeur. Hugh kept on his way up the street. So far, so good, he thought. None of the men appeared to have noticed him as he passed them by. He was halfway to the corner when the coupé drew up to the curb alongside him. A low but incisive voice said briefly: "Get aboard here, Olesen."

It seemed to Hugh that his heart missed several beats. The peremptory summons, coming just when he had thought himself to be all clear, was for the instant paralyzing. The same low, hard voice spoke again, with an impatient cut in it: "Come, get in. And mind your step."

There was a volume of warning, of a deadly sort in these last four words. Hugh obeyed the order in silence. He stepped inside the sedan and took a place made for him between the chauffeur and the man named Clamart, holding the sea bag on his knees. Clamart turned it over, glanced at the stenciled name, and made a low noise in his throat. It sounded like a chuckle. The car started off again at a smart speed.

Not a word was spoken as they traversed that part of the city, crossed the Brooklyn Bridge and turned up the Bowery. In the same ominous silence the car turned westward, crosstown, and came to Gramercy Park. It stopped in front of one of those few unpretentious houses left in Manhattan that retain the stamp of quiet elegance under the patina of age. Clamart got out of the car and stood with his hands in the side pocket of his light overcoat.

"Come on," he said to Hugh; and then, as the young man stepped out beside him, "Go in."

Hugh obeyed. Clamart, he realized, had probably been aware of his presence aboard but had not wished his companions to know about it. The chances were that this alert and grim-faced executioner had heard Hugh's step on the deck when he had stolen aft to get water from the bottle in the cockpit, or caught his passing shadow thrown down the hatchway. It looked now to Hugh as if he might have wriggled out of the frying pan into the fire.

He was tempted for an instant to bolt, but something told him that he would not get far. Also, despite the terrible scene that he had witnessed, he found it impossible to think of these four men as assassins, any more than one would think of the officers to conduct a court-martial on a capital offense as assassins. This man Clamart impressed Hugh as the officer to command the firing squad.

He crossed the sidewalk and went up the few low steps, Clamart at his elbow. The front door, itself an antique of beauty, was opened by a manservant who looked to be a Mongolian of some sort, though the glimpse Hugh got of his face showed it to lack the veil drawn across their features by most Chinese in foreign atmosphere. It was alive, alert, and with lines suggesting fierce humor about the eyes and mouth.

"This way," Clamart said briefly, and started up the thickly carpeted stairs. It would be a pleasant, childish romp to be thrown down that stairway, Hugh thought. He noticed also that, whereas before entering the house Clamart had not turned his back on him, he now led the way with indifference. Hugh, glancing into a Florentine mirror as he started after, discovered that this assurance was not misplaced. The Oriental manservant was close behind him.

Clamart led the way down the hall and into a delightful study in the rear of the house. This room had in its practical but luxurious appointments a good deal to suggest the owner's cabin aboard a palatial yacht. There was the same economy of space, that permitted of much useful furnishing without a clutter or a sense of surplus. A multitude of books, compactly shelved, decorated rather than encumbered the walls.

The floor was covered with rugs that were rich and rare, and the lighting was strange—extremely soft, if pervasive.

A number of scientific instruments, some of them strange to Hugh, gave the chamber a cachet as the nook of a savant, and through an open door he caught sight of a small laboratory, with hood and covered balances and white-enameled shelves closely set with ground-glass-stoppered bottles for reagents in chemical analyses.

The whole place suggested less the workshop of a scientist than it did the comfortable and elegant study of some retired man of wealth who had traveled widely, collected here and there, and taken up scientific pursuits as an occupational interest for his leisure. The happy combination of æsthetic repose and scientific study merged with a perfection of accord that was in itself an art.

Clamart motioned Hugh to enter, then dismissed his servant with a gesture and closed the door. He stood for a moment looking at Hugh with a sort of amused approval on his stern quasimilitary face.

"Not bad, for a beginner," he said, in a voice that was pleasantly modulated, and with a slight English inflection. "As a man who in a stormy past that is fortunately remote has had occasion to make some clever get-aways, I must compliment you. Sit down."

Hugh sank into the armchair indicated, a Louis XVI. *bergère* that had the uncommon quality of comfort. He remained silent, but his eyes went eagerly to a tall, cut-glass pitcher of ice-water on the center desk table.

"Help yourself, if you are thirsty," Clamart said, not unkindly.

Hugh rose, poured out a tumbler of water and drank thirstily. He was about to refill his glass when Clamart raised his hand warningly.

"Easy does it. Don't risk a colic. Wait for that to permeate your inside. Thirst was the rock on which you split this afternoon."

"You heard me, sir?" Hugh asked.

"I heard, saw, smelled and generally sensed you. I was already beginning to feel some alien presence aboard. My faculties are not only naturally acute, but trained by a past criminal experience."

"Criminal?"

"Absolutely. From boyhood until twenty-eight years of age I was a more-or-less-successful thief. Then something happened—treachery of the mob to which I belonged in Paris. It gave my viewpoint an about-face. Since then I've been a virulent crimniphobe, to coin a word. All this is known to my acquaintances. I used to steal, and I have frequently killed. *But*"—his words slowed—"I have never murdered."

Hugh felt suddenly impelled to frankness, cost what it might. "What about to-day at noon?" he asked.

Clamart shrugged, one shoulder. "That was not murder. It was merely an execution of sentence passed by an ultrasupreme court, approved and appointed by a highly moral, well-intentioned and superintelligent minority of persons who have the weal of this country's public peace at heart. You witnessed it?"

Hugh nodded. "I did. It drove a spike through my one slim chance of being anything from now on but a hunted outlaw—for no fault of my own but mortal bad luck."

"What's that?" Clamart's keen face grew suddenly intense. "I'd fixed your identity, of course. You are Hugh Hastings, wanted for the murder of Hiram Jones. But what has the removal of Andreas Johnson got to do with it?"

"Andreas Johnson was the real murderer," Hugh said bitterly. "And now you've gone and sunk him with a piece of ballast fast to him." He burst out in furious despair: "That's the trouble

with you private, unofficial regulators. That's always been the trouble with all vigilantes and lynching parties and other hell-inspired, private-citizen, fix-it outfits. You abate nuisance, perhaps, but you don't count on the possible poor innocent victims that may be caught up in their past barbed-wire entanglements. The full deposition that might be got out of many a bad actor is often worth a lot more than his rotten life."

Clamart shook his head. "Andreas Johnson did not kill Hiram Jones. It looks as if he went there to double for the man that did; to build up an alibi. The real murderer probably rigged himself to look like Andreas Johnson, who has been twice tried for murder and acquitted. And Andreas Johnson had a chain-mail defense that even a mad dog of a public prosecutor like Hiram Jones couldn't have got his fangs into."

"You seem to have known him," Hugh said.

"I've watched him do his stuff in court. A reincarnation of 'Bloody' Jeffreys, except that Jeffreys was a presiding judge. Sometimes I've wondered if perhaps Jones wasn't tormented by an internal malady, as some historians claim for that devil in gown and woolsack. Jones did everything but froth at the mouth. Looked like a rabid dog, too—or the dog on a Flemish tapestry of a boar hunt."

"He was two thirds bluff and bully," Hugh said contemptuously. "I told him so one day when we were leaving court—clear of the sacred precincts. He took it."

Clamart smiled. "I heard about that. He called you the 'Sob-sisters' Pet Curly Lap Dog,' and you came back at him for a big black mongrel snarling back and forth inside a picket fence, with the gate wide open. Then you invited him to come out the gate, but he stayed behind the fence. That was after you had put it all over him in the McNaughten trial—'The Duke.'"

"I wasn't proud of that," Hugh said. "Toward the end I knew the man was guilty as hell. He knew I wasn't the sort of counsel that wanted him to tell me so."

Clamart frowned. "How did you happen to go in for that branch of law?"

"By accident. I'd shared a cabin with old Joseph Stone on a voyage from Cuba, and he proposed a partnership, for some crazy reason. I wanted a little experience in criminal law, but didn't mean to stick at it. Then, at the end of the first year, he up and died and everybody said I could never hang onto his clientele."

"And you took the dare," Clamart nodded. "Well, you put it over. You knew your stuff and the very traits the wise guys said would make a joke of you were turned into a gilt-edged asset, once they sailed in to guy you. Grand publicity. 'The Blond Boy Barrister and the Nestor of the golden voice and silver-gilt hair' and all that junk was worth a lot. They smiled when they said it, and when they switched onto 'The Black Masks' White Hope,' your track was clear. Some of us had our eyes on you, and I don't mind telling you, Hastings, that they were none too friendly. Once you took up a thug's case it was like sending a naughty boy to be tried before a tribunal of his adoring spinster aunts."

Hugh nodded. "I've been getting pretty sick of it for some time. Well, it's all over now. If they get me, good night. I may have been the darling of the courtroom gallery gods, but Hiram Jones was the police joss. They idolized him. He was always right there to back up any rotten play they made, and he was rich and contributed freely to their different funds. I was just getting set to go to the mat with him about the third degree——"

Clamart interrupted: "Yes, and do you know why criminal jurisprudence

in this country is cursed with Hiram Joneses to turn court trials into barroom brawls and let a mob of brutal police dumb-bells torture a man before he's brought to trial? It's because with a fathead jury system and sweet-tongued orators like you the prosecution knows damned well that an extorted confession is the only chance it's got for a conviction."

Hugh nodded. "I guess you're right. I'll know you're right, if they collar me. The only chance I'd have is to plead guilty, and I'm not going to do that when I'm innocent. That would mean third degree—and oh, boy! how they would go to it!"

"Yes," Clamart agreed, "they sure would. Hiram Jones' successor is the same run of dogfish. Hiram had 'em well trained to his methods. He was one-time warden of a Southern penitentiary but removed for brutality. One of his chickens came home to roost, I should say. How did you manage to leave such a double-riveted chain of circumstantial evidence against you, Hastings? And you an up-and-coming criminal lawyer?"

"Too academic, as a criminologist," Hugh said wearily. "A sort of closet-naturalist knowledge of the species thuggee. A field man would never have made such breaks. But how was I to know somebody was waiting to get him just then, and that I was breaking ground and making it nice and easy? I went there to his house yesterday afternoon to go to the mat with him about the character he'd given me the night before, to his niece and some of her friends—one of them a chum of mine."

"The appointment of your making?"

"Yes, and he was all set for me. I was primed for a fight, and the first thing he did was to soft-soap me. He had shoved his grandfather clock ahead fifteen minutes and claimed to think me ahead of time. His desk was littered with bundles of stock certificates and big-denomination bonds and other stuff, even his niece's jewels, in a security box. A new modern safe in the corner of the room was open. Everything was open—doors, and the long French windows behind him. It had turned hot after that nor'easter, and they seemed to be airing out the house. He was all alone there."

"Why the bonds and things?" Clamart asked.

"That's what I wondered. He told me his niece, who is his ward, was coming of age in a couple of days, and he had taken some of her holdings out of the vault and brought them home to check up and list them at his leisure. When I went in he was squeezing his right hand, that was bleeding badly. Said he'd jammed it down on the points of a pair of shears that like a fool he had dropped in the side drawer of his desk, business end up."

"Part of the frame-up?" Clamart asked.

"Oh, no, I don't think so. Just a cursed accident. He spoke me fair, and I tied a fresh handkerchief with my monogram round his hand, then offered to get some antiseptic if he'd tell me where to look. He said it was nothing, but he had sliced a little superficial vein and the bleeding would stop in a moment. It did. I took off the handkerchief and shoved it into my pocket. The cut still oozed a little, and he held his paw up over his head. That's what the woman next door saw over the top of the high hedge. She thought nothing of it at the time."

Clamart nodded. His handsome, clean-cut face was tense with interest. "And that was how you got some blood on your hand."

"Yes. Just a little smear on the base of my thumb. Didn't notice it. I was too busy wondering what his game might be. Thought maybe he meant to burgle his own safe that night, and frame me some way. He was smooth

as oil. Said he guessed the reason of my call and on thinking things over had decided that he'd given me a pretty raw deal from the first break. Suggested we patch up a truce. Waved the olive branch and peace pipe and proposed burying the hatchet, all the works. It left me flat. Nothing to say. I was leery, too. So I kissed him good-by, figuratively, and slid out. Wasn't there over ten minutes. He had me dazed. I wanted to get away and try to study it out."

"Have you?" Clamart asked.

"Merely a hunch. I think he meant it."

"Why?"

A flush spread over Hugh's face. It made his thick-curling, flaxen-blond hair look white. "Well, it may sound swanky, but I believe the old alligator really wanted me to marry his niece. He knew I'd partly fallen for her, and that I was a better bet than some of the rest of her suite. She's an heiress."

Clamart nodded. "Care for her?"

Hugh shook his head. "I thought she was the Queen of Sheba, the first throw, but darn soon found that she was really too much like that lady. Hard as nails. I think now that Hiram knocked me, to rouse her partisanship."

"He would," Clamart agreed. "And his objections to your branch of law would have had as much weight with him as homicide would to the chief of a tribe of head hunters. Well, then what? All this is good."

"From one point of view," Hugh grinned. "Well, I went out to get into my car. On the sidewalk I looked at my wrist watch and in doing so noticed a smear of blood on the back of my thumb, where I must have brushed his cut when I tied it up with my handkerchief. Just at that moment a woman and a young girl came out of the house next door and turned my way to go to a car stop about a hundred feet beyond. I forgot about my handkerchief being all bloody, and whipped it out to wipe off my thumb."

"As they passed you?"

"Yes, like a fool. They saw it. What was worse, I turned away, as any man might when he carelessly hauls out a wipe before anybody and sees that it's untidy."

Clamart nodded. "A fair point in defense. A murderer would never have done that. Still—he might. Rotten careless, though."

"Gosh, it never occurred to me that he might have framed me for his own murder," Hugh said bitterly. "Well, the woman and the girl, her daughter, went to the car stop. A suburban line runs down that street. Double tracked. There was a man waiting there for a car. I noticed him casually. He looked like a builder or contractor, decently dressed with a gray felt hat. Fairly big man, heavy in the shoulders and bowed a little, like a man that's worked his way up from the ditch."

"Or stone-breaking," Clamart suggested.

"Yes, I thought of that. And now I remember that he kept shifting his weight from one foot to the other. A man might get a habit like that in stir. Standing in a cell."

"Did you see his face?"

"No. He turned away as I passed. It struck me he might be a part of Hiram Jones' frame-up. Then as I drove along I thought of what I've just told you. That Hiram Jones would set aside any personal grudge to get his niece well married. It struck me that all that display of wealth might be laid out there for bait. A reminder."

Clamart laughed. "He'd be capable of that. He saw a good bet—a big future for you. And you a good pick, socially."

"Good enough," Hugh said. "My grandfather was a sea captain of Devon, England. He quit the sea and settled in Boston and built up a shipping trade.

He had married a titled Spanish lady, of Corunna, but the climate got her the first year."

"That accounts for your dark eyes," Clamart said.

"Yes—and quick temper, maybe. My father insisted on going to sea. He got to be fleet captain and general agent in the Argentine. I was born down there, and never came to America until I was fourteen. Then father was given an appointment in the bureau of commerce and later in the shipping board. I went to school in Washington, then Yale. Academic and then law school. My mother was a Bostonian. She and father both died in the big flu epidemic."

"Too bad. Well, what then? Tell me every detail, no matter how minor, from the time you drove away from Hiram Jones'."

"I beat it back to my rooms. Giving a little dinner party that night. Hiram Jones' house was out in the suburbs, a nice place. Fine big house, well furnished. From foreclosing on so many mortgages he'd become quite an authority on household gear. Where the road struck a thoroughfare of the city I nearly hit a big black-maned police dog. The traffic cop had beckoned me to make my turn when this animal came shuttling across between the cars. I braked hard and a chap behind bumped me a little. The cop looked at me and said: 'That darn dog has been messing up things here for the last half hour. Wish somebody would bust him one.' "

"The cop recognized you, of course?"

"Oh, yes. They all know me by sight. Friendly, personally, but natural enemies. I'm their gallows snatcher. I drove on and was cleaning up when the phone rang. A friend of mine, interne in the hospital, had just brought Hiram Jones' niece in from a ride. They found him dead. Murdered. There'd been a heavy glass paper weight on his desk, one of those dome-shaped things with the photograph of a hotel he owned on the bottom. That was bloodied. He had been sitting with his back to a double-door window, glass, and it was part open."

Clamart knit his forehead. "The thug probably got him with a piece of pipe, then smeared the paper weight. He had you in mind."

"Probably. The plunder there would have been motive enough, alone. I did some quick thinking, let me tell you. In a crisis my brain speeds up instead of stalling. The stuff against me was overwhelming. The police would roar with delight at the chance of putting me through. I had to plead not guilty. Committed without bail, I'd have had no chance to work at the case, to locate this thug. Free, I might get some help from former clients I've got acquitted, whether in gratitude or for a price or both. Crooks don't mind double-crossing each other any more."

Clamart nodded. "That's right, too. The rum gang has broken down whatever there used to be of esprit de corps. There was your late client, the Duke." Clamart's gray eyes gave Hugh a keen glance.

"Yes, maybe. He seems to have disappeared, though." Hugh's own eyes, slaty dark, returned Clamart's look.

Clamart shook his head. "I'm ashamed to admit that the gentleman has faded out of my ken," he said, "and I try to keep tabs on his sort. A smooth worker. This is straight, Hastings. Well, how did you manage then? You're about as inconspicuous as a skywriter over a boardwalk, you know."

"I realized that. But my friend had shut himself in the phone closet and I knew he'd stall as long as possible. It was dark and I slipped down to the basin, avoiding the cops. I've got a little auxiliary yawl that I play round in, but I knew that would be the first thing watched. Then I remembered last summer having heard some boys' voices under a wharf, when I was hauling my

dinghy alongside. I slipped under and found that these kids had swiped some planks and built themselves a sort of hiding place, to play smuggler. They were all upset at my spotting their lair, but I promised to keep mum, and they swore me in as one of the gang. I watched my chance, slipped off the end of the pier and managed to climb up onto this staging. It was close up under the wharf. I stuck it out there as long as I could, then decided to swim across and take a chance to stow away aboard your boat."

Frank Clamart smiled. Then he said slowly: "You're in deep and hard, Hastings. If you had really bumped him, a plea of self-defense might get you somewhere. His violent temper was well known. But as you say, a plea of not guilty would get you crucified."

"What then?" Hugh asked hopelessly.

"Why not report what you witnessed aboard the yacht to-day?"

Hugh shook his head. "I'm a lawyer, Mr. Clamart. Those were big men."

"Do you think, then, they are the sort to perjure themselves under solemn oath?"

"Probably not. But I can't see where it would help my case to attack them, and you. I'd rather have your help. This is no blackmail, understand. I'm square. My misery is not the sort that craves company, no matter how good." He looked hopelessly at Clamart. "Why did you do it, anyhow?"

Clamart said slowly: "I am not authorized to answer that question, just yet. Suppose we let it lie. The point now is this: It may be true that in removing this Andreas Johnson we did you a serious wrong. This would be more true if instead of losing your head and making a get-away you had thought of this man as the possible assassin and accepted arrest and made your charge. Of course, we never associated him with the murder of Hiram Jones. Andreas Johnson had just recently been acquitted on a silly technicality of an atrocious murder in Chicago."

Hugh looked up quickly: "Not the Wilson case?"

Clamart nodded. "Andreas Johnson, alias Michael Orcowski, alias 'Sailor Mike.' His specialty was rich old men and women of solitary lives. He tortured old Mr. Wilson, as of course you know. He was an expert cracksman, which made it all the worse. But that's beside the case. Now what are we going to do about you?"

"What can you do?" Hugh asked. "After all, it may not have made much difference. As you say, I thought about this lobster bait too late."

Clamart began to walk up and down. He was evidently plunged in thought. Watching him, indifferently at first, then more hopefully, Hugh began to feel that perhaps the affair was breaking better for him than he had thought.

Clamart checked himself abruptly and stood for a moment staring at Hugh through narrowed eyes, studying him as might a portrait painter who desired to fix the most pleasing and at the same time characteristic features of a prospective sitter. Then, with one of those sudden changes from intensity to lightness which were, Hugh was to learn, a striking note in this strongly individualized personality, he gave a short laugh and said: "A perfect type, but for one note. And the fact of that being off color is precisely what we want to make a perfect job."

"Job?"

"Yes. The job of completely changing your appearance to any but the actually clairvoyant eye. That's what we've got to do first. Immediately. Make you up for a rôle you'll have to learn to play in your sleep. Disguise is the rock on which most wanted men split, sooner or later. For most who are as strongly identified in appearance as yourself nothing short of plastic surgery will do it. But you don't need that. The very

absolute pronouncement of your present looks will turn the trick, if treated right."

"What's that?" Hugh asked.

"Your extreme fairness in all but your eyes, which are dark. That's what fills the eye of the observer who has seen you, and the mental vision of those to whom you may be described by word of mouth, printed matter or a photograph. A flaxen, curly Devon. You fell heir to that part, but got the Spanish eyes. No disguise can beat that of complexion, when pronounced. Did you ever watch an amateur minstrel show and try to pick out acquaintances when blacked up? And that's crude stuff."

Hugh was startled. "You mean to stain me black? Make a negro of me?"

Clamart laughed. "Not quite as bad as that, lad. But I can make a darned good-looking Cuban or South or Central American of you, and your own landlady wouldn't know you if you owed her for a month's back rent. It's the contrast of hair and skin with your eyes that shout your identity, and we'll change all that."

"Will it stick?" Hugh asked.

"Yes, with applications at least once a week. It's not an ordinary stain. They are actually dyes, and have to wear out of the face and hair. This stuff is a synthetic preparation worked out by a German chemist before the war, for the disguising of their African and Indian secret agents. It's black, but dilutes to a burned umber and sticks like a bad name. But there's a quick solvent for it."

"Hair, too?" Hugh asked.

"The whole works. That was its prime requisite for spy work; that an Arab merchant or Marabout cameleer or Pathan horse trader might, if under suspicion of espionage and with a gill net thrown round the location, walk out of an alley like a simple British tourist with a penchant for slumming."

"Have you some of the stuff on hand?" Hugh asked.

"Yes, and the solvent. I'd use the stain full strength for the hair and about one to six of an aqueous alkali solution for the skin, a pinch of alum or lye or caustic soda to the pint. Sea water would answer in a jam. The solution to wash it off is oxalic acid followed by dilute acetic, then a plain soap-and-water wash. The stuff will stick under plain water, preferably with a pinch of salt for bathing, but you must avoid rubbing alcohol and hair tonics and the like, and wash without soap, to play perfectly safe."

Hugh smiled. "Not to wash at all would be in the rôle of Arabs and Pathans and Marabouts," he said.

"Yes, no doubt about that. Now, about lingo and a port of hail. You say you grew up in the Argentine? Then you speak Spanish, of course."

"Like a native. But I'm not posted up to date on topical events down there."

"You can prime up. We will make an Argentine of you. I'll give you a parentage of sorts. Before the war, in Paris, I knew an Argentine cattle nabob who had leased out his hacienda of some few hundred miles square and come to France to study feminism. He is dead. This Don Francisco de Pilar was a liberal progenitor and left a large number of natural children, providing generously for as many as he could determine. It's not going to injure his memory to charge a spare son to his account. We don't need to flourish the tar brush. With your extreme fair, natural coloring that isn't necessary. But as you are ruddy and rather square of face with prominent cheek bones, we'll claim some strains of royal Inca blood. I'm partly responsible for this jam, and I like to do things right. No police or any other periscope will pierce the smoke screen I'm going to throw over you."

Hugh laughed. "Smoke screen is right. But let's make the smoke thick enough."

Before Clamart had finished with him that night, both agreed that the smoke was thick enough, though yet not too thick. The swarthy tint attained was Indian rather than negroid, yet of an aboriginal shade sufficiently tempered to make such a strain remote. Clamart, whose experience might have fitted him for a make-up specialist, laughed as he ran the clippers over Hugh's curly hair, which he thought too long. "These things remind me of an old enemy—M. Maxeville, alias Chu-Chu le Tondeur. A complete criminal, was Chu-Chu. Now let's get busy with the stain."

"What about your servant?" Hugh asked. "He saw me come in as a sailor."

"Ling Foo?" Clamart laughed. "Well, he came in as one Mike Rafferty. He was born in the British barracks at Hongkong, and speaks, reads and writes Chinese better than most any Mott Street merchant. Looks chink, too; just as you look—let's say gaucho."

Hugh asked no more questions. The transformation made, Clamart furnished him with a complete outfit of clothes, his own. They were nearly enough of a size for Hugh to wear them effectively, and Clamart selected those more suited to a young Argentine. He went even farther, supplying his protégé with jewelry, a watch, rings, a set of shirt studs and sleeve links. Hugh was stirred to discover his new initials "L. P." skillfully engraved on these latter. Clamart told him with a smile that he had added this detail himself by a few minutes' work in his laboratory. "Counterfeiting was never one of my lines of graft," he said, "but your master cracksman must be not only a fine artisan but a bit of an artist."

The work of transformation finished, Clamart touched a bell and a few minutes later Ling Foo entered with a tray on which was hot bouillon, a cold fowl, salad and some fruit. As the pseudo-Chinaman was serving them, Clamart asked: "What about this gentleman, Ling Foo? Do you find anything to criticize in his appearance?"

The servant's eyes flitted keenly over Hugh. "His finger nails are too pink, sir."

Clamart nodded. "A good point. Methylene blue fixed with a mordaunt, alum perhaps, might correct that. What else?"

"If the gentleman were to stand in front of the mirror, sir."

Hugh rose and followed this suggestion. Ling Foo stepped to the wall and turned on an extra circuit of lights. The bright glare did not appreciably alter the tint of Hugh's skin surfaces, but on examining his reflection he discovered his hair to be a dead, lusterless black. Clamart noted this instantly.

"Your toilet accessories require a bit of oil," he said. "Stick out your lips."

Hugh did so. The pinkness of the mucous membrance was in too great contrast to the pigmented skin. Clamart frowned.

"You must remember always to be tight mouthed in more than a single sense, Don Louis. Until you form the habit a few drops of blue litmus from time to time would help. Also, you must grow a small mustache, and touch that daily, as well as your hair. We can keep an eye on you from day to day. On the whole, I should say that the disguise is eye-proof. And it's by no means unbecoming."

Hugh had already made this admission to himself. The dark shading embellished a featuring that seemed naturally shaped for such. As Clamart next remarked, it also gave him an augmented maturity, added at least five years to his age of thirty. He was actually as handsome as Othello, though several shades less dark than the classic portraiture of this fascinating Moor.

Actually, he had in his natural guise given the impression of being about twenty-five, so that now the increase in his apparent age was nearer ten years than five. As Clamart pointed out, this apparent age difference was in itself of enormous value. The man hunt, directed toward a blond, boyish-looking individual would never lift muzzle to scrutinize a Pan-American well into his early prime.

Being no fool, it of course occurred to Hugh that his singular host with the frankly admitted criminal past might be making every effort to bind him not only by liens of self-interest but of gratitude and liking. It looked to Hugh as if the total and efficient eradication of Andreas Johnson had been an act of private interest, probably the disposal of a blackmailer who had too arrogantly thrust his head into some trap set for him. The gentlemen of distinguished bearing had been perhaps aware of Clamart's former underworld activities, and later revulsion of feeling. They had seen in him the man par excellence to manage the suppression of a danger to threaten all they held most dear in the person of a low criminal, and had found means to secure his services.

But Clamart, Hugh felt sure, was no mere hired bravo to undertake a killing for a money wage. Neither was there anything about him to suggest a wild beast who enjoyed killing for killing's sake. His face as he had turned from the yacht's side, Hugh remembered, had worn a look of sadness. Clamart's motive could not have been sordid nor sanguinary nor even to render a gratuitous service to friends who without his help might have faced some sort of ruin. His part of the grim affair might have been the paying off of a past obligation incurred, or possibly to save innocent persons who might be dear to him.

Even before his host had shown him to an attractive bedroom on the floor above, Hugh was beginning to react to the man's strong magnetism. Clamart seemed to shed emanations of a tremendous force that could be ruthless, but yet were not evil—might even be kind. He projected also a sense of swiftness, sureness, exact coördination of sensory and motor impulses. His casual motions exhibited the speed and sureness of reflex actions, which are the involuntary transfers of stimuli from sensory to motor nerves. Hugh noticed that when he rose from his chair to pick up the sea bag that he had set down when entering, the simple act appeared to be one fluent gesture. It was not divided into the separate movements of rising, walking across the room, stooping, taking hold of the bag, lifting it, then returning; all of this series flowed together with a speed that accomplished the purpose in the time it would have taken most men to rise and start. Yet so smooth was the physical machinery in its operation that it gave no impression of haste. Grace of motion disguised the speed.

It was only by degrees, and because he was a close observer, that Hugh discovered this singular property in Clamart. Reaching for a cigarette, Hugh, very tired, fumbled the silver box so that it fell off the edge of the big Empire desk table. Clamart leaned slightly to one side, reached out and took rather than caught it in his hand before it had touched the floor. He did not appear to be conscious of having done anything unusual, continued to talk in the same even tone. Hugh wondered what he could be like when he felt the urgency of haste.

Being young and healthy and with the strain of uncertainty now removed, Hugh slept the clock round. His room was in the front of the house, a small one, on the third floor, and there was a roomy bath that communicated with the chamber in the rear. Clamart had put the whole suite at his disposal, saying that he seldom had a guest or went

above his own quarters on the floor beneath.

His host would be a bachelor, student and something of a solitary, Hugh opined. As a former thief of the big-scale sort who, as Hugh gathered, had been treacherously treated by his kind, then started a blood feud that evidently was not yet finished, Clamart might still have to watch his step. As the self-developed gentleman, and scholar that undoubtedly he was, Clamart's sense of fitness would prevent his intimate association with the upper class of people, and no other class would interest him, Hugh thought.

Waking completely refreshed with the sun streaming in his open window and the air singularly fragrant of spring for the heart of Manhattan, Hugh leaped out of bed and looked out. Beneath him the square verdancy of Gramercy Park was burgeoning, and its perfumes rose above the reek of gasoline. The shrill voices of favored children of residents about the square, possessed of keys to the grilled inclosure, rose happily above the grinding of gears. Somehow the basic and elementary impulses of nature, the sounds, colors, odors, flavors and caressings, even when all of these are soft and unobtrusive, dominate always the harsh clangors and contacts of artifice. No blare of orchestration can ignore the rumble of the surf, no pageant rival a sunrise, no synthetic extract compete with the aroma of the ripened grape nor its exquisite taste.

Hugh bathed, dressed and went down to find Clamart taking fruit and coffee in his study, an open newspaper spread out beside him.

"*Buenos días,* Don Louis," Clamart greeted him in Spanish, and went on to say fluently in the same tongue: "The Atlantic City police seem very much upset at their failure to uncover the alleged slayer of Hiram Jones."

"Let's hope they stay upset, sir," Hugh answered in some surprise at his host's colloquial ease. "You speak better Spanish than myself—pure Castilian."

"I was at one time a good deal in and out of Spain. Cadiz and San Sebastián. Also two years in Venezuela, actively if quietly engaged on the wrong side of a political issue. In fact, I started life on the left-hand side. That was the reason for my early mistakes. A good woman—a sort of saint—changed all that. I can't honestly say that I repent the past, though deploring it. Your outlaw who has played the game squarely from his oblique viewpoint may reform, but never repents. It's a sort of conversion of faith, like making a good Christian of a cannibal."

"It must leave you very much alone," Hugh said.

"Yes, naturally. There were some few of my old criminal pals whom I esteemed, and still esteem. They are all dead—the men, at least. Have a good rest?"

"Splendid, thanks. But I've been thinking, Mr. Clamart——"

"Cultivate the habit of calling me 'Frank.' Sometimes in public places it might be just as well to avoid a name still remembered by many curious people. Well, what have you been thinking? That you're by way of incurring too heavy a debt to me, a total stranger, or some such rot?"

"You're a mind reader."

"We should all be that thing if we took the trouble to cultivate a natural faculty. Well, don't worry. I've got a job for you."

"I hope I can qualify," Hugh said.

"That's up to you. I've just received a cryptic message from the gentleman who presided yesterday at our quarter-deck court that troubles me a little. He is Judge Fairbanks of this city, a number of years retired from the bench and now counsel for the Gasogen Oil Company. The fields they have just got control of are principally in South and

Central America. The judge says he needs a secretary with legal training and a complete knowledge of Spanish. But I think at this moment there is something he needs even more."

"Which is——"

"A bodyguard," Clamart said, and frowned. There was, Hugh had already noticed, something relentless about his square, handsome face when it darkened.

"I ought to make good on the first detail," Hugh said. "And I'll try my best to fill the latter."

The answer seemed to please Clamart. "Good pistol shot?" he asked.

Hugh smiled. "Fair. But I'm better with a bow."

"A bow! Good Lord! What about a boomerang?"

"I don't know; I never tried. But I've hauled down a good many archery prizes. A fad of mine. Don't you think that when a man shoots well with one sort of arm he can quickly get the control of another?"

"Yes, that's right. Same teamwork of hand and eye. Good shots are apt to be above par with a billiard cue or golf club or tennis racket or driving a nail or swinging an ax. Judge Fairbanks is apt to need an eye to windward of him, and to loo'ard and ahead and astern, for that matter. But he mustn't know that he's under sentry-go. He mustn't know that you know about yesterday, of course."

"He needn't," Hugh said.

"No, it would rile him. He's a fine old bird. Southerner of the ancient régime. He may balk a little at your complexion and the faint purple finger nails, but aside from that you are precisely the type he wants. He was a little boy on a big plantation near New Orleans when the Civil War broke, and I don't think he's ever quite overcome his Yankeephobia. Besides, he's a nut for thoroughbreds, and the presumable hidalgo in you would help a lot."

"Even with the baton sinister?" Hugh asked.

"I think so. He's no moralist, as you have reason to believe." Clamart smiled. "He's very rich and runs a big house, so there are probably several grades of service with their separate messes. You would probably be assigned one with the upper-salaried employees—housekeeper and what the French call *intendant* of the estate—that is, a sort of superintendent that hires and fires and pays the bills—with his confidential secretary and perhaps some other aid. The old gentleman's a stickler for caste. About as democratic as a Prussian guardsman of the old order."

Hugh smiled. "Most rich, well-born Americans would be that way, if they could."

"Yes, democracy is a beautiful Utopian ideal that actually exists for the elect only in theory, unless they are religionists. Now about your credentials. I don't a bit mind spoofing the dear old chap for his best good. He will take my word for you. I'll tell him that you are the natural son of this rich old Argentine by a mother who had royal Inca blood. That gets you the blue ink both sides and excuses some few Indian corpuscles. Now where could you have learned your law?"

"Why not studying hard alone while hodling down a job of some sort somewhere?" Hugh asked.

"He might take it into his head to check you up," Clamart objected. His gray eyes lightened. "Why not in my employ as sailing master aboard the *Lilith?* I've got one, but the judge never saw him. That would give you standing, too, and you say you are a sailor of sorts. The judge has a big house boat, and a flotilla of small craft."

They fixed on the details of such an identity, the past four years in the employ of Clamart. Previous to that Hugh had been, ostensibly, a purser

aboard small steamers plying on the coast of South America, working toward the top in the merchant marine, but during his service with Clamar, he had been ambitious to become a lawyer, studying hard in his idle moments, which were many, in the nature of his position. The first idea of his being a young Argentine of leisure was abandoned. Also in this new rôle he would speak good enough English, though accented. In his hours of liberty he would have to report frequently to Clamart for a careful restaining of his skin.

Clamart rose with his habitual light swiftness of motion that reminded Hugh of a leopard, took a guidebook from a shelf and handed it to his protégé. "Study that like blazes," he said. "Familiarize yourself with the ports. You are not apt to be questioned, but it might happen. Now, I'll start things."

He went out. Hugh, feeling as if caught up in some sort of vortex and hurled not only into a different plane of matter but also into a new and strange identity, settled himself into a big chair and turned all his power of concentration, that was considerable, on the adjustment of his actions, speech, and, what was of far greatest importance, the very sense of self-consciousness, on this new personality that fate had thrust upon him.

CHAPTER III.

TWO BAD BLUNDERS.

A WEEK later, when on his way by rail to fill his new and curious position with Judge Fairbanks, Hugh found himself thinking more about the man who, for whatever motive, had so befriended him in his desperate need, than about his own future, immediate and for the time to come.

Intensive preparation for his new rôle under the direction of Frank Clamart had consumed all of this time, and in the course of it Clamart had drilled Hugh hard. Contingencies that would never have occurred to the younger man were carefully rehearsed. In the course of this training Clamart had often alluded skeptically to his own past criminal activities. The former master thief had shown himself a curious mixture of boyish frankness and grim reticence.

He had told Hugh briefly of how, some fifteen years before, when "working" with a Paris mob under the direction of one "Ivan," a Pole of birth and a genius for organized crime, he had been denounced by Chu-Chu le Tondeur. The band, convinced wrongly of Clamart's treachery, had decided to remove him, appointing Chu-Chu to perform this office. Clamart, discovering the plot, had promptly taken a strong offensive and after several clashes had knifed Chu-Chu to death in a fearful struggle in the grounds of a château near Paris.

The story had impressed Hugh not only for itself but because it had suggested to his mind that the scene he had witnessed aboard the yacht might have had as its reason and its justification a similar fatal expedient. The man Andreas Johnson might have been known to be detailed for the removal of Judge Fairbanks, whose friends had then persuaded him to take the offensive, just as had Clamart in regard to Chu-Chu, but in a more dignified and forensic way. But Clamart had evidently reason to suspect that the danger to the judge was not yet past, and on this account had decided to detail Hugh as bodyguard.

But Clamart, Hugh was by now aware, had also his more gentle qualities, under a brusk camouflage. Hugh had one day burst out violently when Clamart was renewing the stain on his hair and face:

"Oh, Frank, what's the use? I can't go through all the years ahead, secretly making up for a show every few days. Better to beat it out for the heart of Africa, or some other God-forsaken, man-forsaken place."

"Steady on, lad," Clamart said, and added with grim humor: "If I thought you'd got to dye all over twice a week to keep alive for all the weeks to come, I'd advise your giving yourself up now and letting us try to get you clear. But I've always been a hunch player with fair success, and I've got a strong one that sooner or later we're going to find out who killed Hiram Jones."

This had cheered Hugh; and now, on the train, he reflected that Clamart himself was taking a good deal of a chance in vouching for him. But Clamart would do that sort of thing, if he saw fit. The strongest salient of the man's steel-spring personality was that quality of law unto himself, Hugh thought, and now he felt sure that this law had become fair and just, however much it might ignore official jurisdiction.

There was also to sustain Hugh in his new rôle the sense of adventure, and he was by nature adventurous. Also he was not lacking in histrionic talent. Any court lawyer to succeed must have some ability as actor, and Hugh had early discovered his own. He was naturally light-hearted, with a boyish zest for fun and frolic, and part of his success had been due to infusing a gloomy courtroom with rays of light, lifting the hearts of a glum jury, impaling his adversary on shafts of wit that were yet decorous, causing a stern judge to smile as he rapped for order and threatened to clear the courtroom if the laughter could not be held suppressed. "Sunbeam" had been another reportorial nickname for Hugh, and the gibe was no sarcasm.

Some few passengers glanced with mild interest at the dark-skinned, handsome young man who hailed obviously from some part of tropical America, but none stared. Hugh was neatly and unobtrusively dressed in blue serge that hung a little loosely from his powerful physique, and masked it. As Louis Pilar—Clamart had thought it better not to stress the hidalgo pretense—he might have passed for a Pan-American legation attaché, an importer, a young visitor of leisure and heir of large tropical estates.

One thing seemed certain—that nobody, however lynx-eyed, could possibly see in him a fair, blond young member of the New Jersey bar who had begun to specialize in criminal cases and was wanted by the authorities for the murder of Hiram Johnson, prosecutor. The train slowed for Hugh's station. It was the middle of the forenoon, and the traffic was toward the city, so there were few waiting private cars now, in the middle of May. A trim chauffeur, whose smartness was more military than of private service, stepped up as he got off the train, gave a perfunctory salute and said in a crisp voice: "Señor Pilar?"

"Si," Hugh answered.

In good soldier Spanish the chauffeur asked for his baggage checks. As he handed them to the man Hugh said in the same tongue: "You speak my language fluently."

The young man smiled. "Thank you, señor. I have served in the Philippines and Mexico, field artillery—and as chauffeur for the general staff."

Here, thought Hugh, might be another employee with twofold duties—another secret-service bodyguard. The chauffeur secured the luggage, all large hand pieces purchased for his protégé by Clamart, and loaded them board the car, a station sedan. As they drove away Hugh ventured some casual remark about the pleasure of driving in the country, and the chauffeur seemed glad of the opportunity to refresh his Spanish, which he said was getting rusty from lack of practice. His name, he told Hugh, was Tom Hardy and he had served two "hitches" in the U. S. army, field artillery, and was honorably discharged a year ago as first sergeant of his battery. Evidently he had placed

Hugh's position accurately as ranking a little more than upper employee, and accorded him all due respect as a superior, officially.

Hugh asked if Judge Fairbanks spoke Spanish.

"A little," Hardy said, "but the Señor Judge is loco to learn." Then, seeing Hugh's puzzled look, he laughed and explained in English:

"That's literal translatin'. 'Crazy to learn' is what I was tryin' to say. The chief is one young old gentleman, keen as a smart rookie to catch onto something new."

When presently they turned into the beautiful grounds of the estate, Hugh was pleased to feel that he had made a friend. A good start, he thought, cheerfully. Then, immediately, there came an episode that was not so good.

Two riders, a man and a girl, beautifully mounted, were approaching on the highway as Hardy slowed to enter the gates. Ahead of the equestrians was a big black-maned police dog that showed all the vulpine traits of its race. The animal was loping on ahead of the riders and turned into the grounds after the car. Hugh saw it stop suddenly, stiffen for an instant, then in a crouching posture steal rapidly along the edge of the wall on the inside.

As he looked then to see what might be the dog's objective, he caught sight of a girl in a sport suit walking across the lawn. The police dog appeared to be making toward her. But at that moment a beautiful English setter came out of a clump of rhododendron growing round a big boulder. The setter sighted the wolfish alien approaching and froze in its tracks.

Hugh made his first slip, the sort of which Clamart had so urgently warned him. "Hold on, Hardy," he said in English and with an accent no South American whose knowledge of that tongue was sketchy would ever use. 'Look at those dogs!"

Hardy looked and braked sharply. As the car stopped, Hugh leaped down and started to run toward the invading animal, first stooping to scoop up a handful of the bluestone from the side of the drive. At the same instant the girl discovered the danger to her setter, and stopped, calling him imperiously.

But the setter was game, on its own property and unwilling to give ground. It stood fast and received the savage rush of the police dog. Like most of its breed it was quick and wary, and parried the feral spring of the black-maned brute with its shoulder, then aimed at its adversary's throat.

As Hugh rushed up the two animals were rolling over in a fearful medley of snarls, close under the wall that bordered the public road. The girl was running toward them, and more to prevent her from being caught up in the mêlée and bitten than to save the setter, which appeared to be holding its own, Hugh stooped down, grabbed the police dog by both hind legs at the hocks and dragged it away from its now furious adversary.

This might not have been possible if it had not been for Hardy who had leaped down from the car and sped after him. He reached the scene of combat before the girl and managed to grab the setter, which even in its excitement appeared to recognize due authority, the restraint of a friend. But not so the big police dog. It squirmed about in Hugh's grip and slashed at his knee, tearing a considerable portion of the new and costly tailoring that enveloped that structure and grazing Hugh's thigh.

Hugh now found himself in the position of the old hunter who, dodging a bear round the trunk of a tree, grabbed a paw on either side of it and hung on. Hugh realized that he needed help to turn the police dog loose. To do so might mean a renewal of the fight and somebody besides the setter receiving a savage bite, or the frenzied animal

might turn and spring at Hugh's own throat. To keep the snapping, snarling head clear of himself, Hugh adopted the tactics of a hammer thrower, in which athletic event he had won trophies in college days. Then, as he spun round, with the dog's body straightening out from the centrifugal force, it occurred to him that the best plan might be to go through with the motion.

He did, therefore, a splendid hammer throw with that police dog, and in a form that would have brought commendation from a trainer of field sports. On the third turn, Hugh put out all his strength and skill, which was considerable. Then, pivoting correctly, he loosed the dog over his left shoulder at such an angle of the arc described that the animal, now yelling through its snarls, sailed clear of the wall, described a parabola and landed invisibly in the roadway beyond with the muffled sounds of a concertina on which somebody has jumped.

The riders, interested in each other, had not observed the invasion of their dog on private property. Coming then abreast of the scene of strife which was hid from their view, the road being on a lower level than the lawn with the wall between, the snarls and garglings of the battle had arrested them. But before they could investigate, here came their formidable pet hurtling through the air to land with a thump and a syncopated yowl on the fairway just ahead of them. The horses snorted and recoiled, but their riders did not lose their seats.

Then Hugh was treated to an exhibition of temperament. Hardy was holding the setter, and soothing it. The girl, a supple creature of vigorous physique with dusky, waving bob, and, to Hugh's brief glance of her, dark purple eyes, rushed to the wall and scrambled up across its top. There, sitting sidewise on one knee with the other extended, she poured out a passionate stream of reproach and admonition in a throaty voice that was husky with rage.

"You careless pest," she cried at the startled horseman staring up at her, "you'd better keep that wild hyena of yours off this place. If he has torn my setter I'll take a shotgun and go get him, and whether he has or not, I'm going to arm the gardeners on this place and give orders that he be shot on sight. Just paste that in your hat."

"But my dear girl," came a rich, resonant, protesting voice. "I didn't know——"

"You've said it: You don't know anything. Well, I'm telling you. We say in the South that a man whose dog won't mind him will suck eggs. Now run along and take that crumpled cur along with you before I finish him."

She squirmed round and slid down off the wall. Hugh was confusedly aware of a flushed, furious face under a wavy mop of hair that was like dark, ruddy smoke, the purple eyes heavily fringed in black, a provocative nose and lips that were too carmine, whether from art or nature or both. Under the light, snug jersey a proud adolescent bosom was still heaving with emotion, the breath coming quickly between a double rim of even white teeth.

She gave Hugh a quick, curious glance, directed only at his face and evidently missing the obvious damage to his costume and possible damage to the structures beneath, then said to Hardy:

"Is he cut, Tom?"

"Not to bother, Miss Jasmine. Just creased a little across the shoulder." He plucked away some fine loose hair. "I'll take him to the garage and fix him up. Wash it out with gas and slap on a little hard grease."

"I'll look after him, Tom. You're busy."

Hugh thought he had never seen so lovely a girl, both beautiful and pretty. She looked again at him, this time noticing the wide tear in his trousers just

above the knee. Her eyes widened. She stepped forward impulsively, then stopped short, her eyes on the dark triangle of skin surface exposed, for Clamart had advised a complete job of the stain.

"I hope you are not bitten, Señor Pilar," she said sedately.

Hugh was conscious of the change of tone. Absorbed, fascinated by this girl's display of temper and vivid personality, he had not yet inspected the extent of damage to himself. Glancing down now at the gaping rent, he was himself a little startled to note the mahogany brown of the flesh that had been bared. Clamart, the foresighted, had laid the dye more darkly on the skin surface that was covered by clothes, that the stain need not be too frequently applied. Hugh understood instantly what had arrested this Southern girl's impulsive gesture of examination.

He saw also a crimson weal, not darker than the skin itself. Hardy, whose perceptions were keen, had not missed Jasmine's arrested movement. He stooped, examined the slight scrape, and said in his crisp, cheerful voice:

"Señor Pilar got off lucky. Just a brush burn. A wipe of iodine will fix it."

Jasmine's eyes, now turning violet, a lighter shade as her pupils returned to normal after the dilation of anger that had made them dark, said in the same formally polite tone:

"I've got you to thank for saving Cordite, señor. Only for your speed and nerve that *loup-garou* would have cut him to ribbons. And *where* did you learn to hammer throw?" She gave a rich laugh. "If only he could have hit his mongrel of a master and knocked him off his horse. That would have been too perfect."

Hugh had recovered his noise and consciousness of identity that had already suffered a dangerous lapse. He smiled. "The next time, señorita," he said in admirably accented English, "I try to land on the target."

Hardy shot him a swift, keen, curious look, then glanced down at the setter, Cordite. "Come on, Cor," he said, "and get your first aid." He turned to go back to the car.

Hugh went with him. Out of earshot of the girl, Hardy said:

"That young lady is Miss Jasmine, the judge's granddaughter. She just got here yesterday from New Orleans. The rest of the family are comin' later. Some of 'em in Europe. This place was opened up last week, for the summer. Only the judge and Miss Jasmine and the personnel here now. Say, señor, that was some dog throw." He laughed.

Hugh merely nodded. He felt suddenly abased. The girl's involuntary check at sight of the bare brown skin galled. More than the brush burn. But Hardy as they came up to the car took out a priming tin of gasoline and tore off a piece of clean waste.

"Let's play safe, señor," he said pleasantly. "I've found gas great stuff as first-aid disinfectant for man and beast, even if the medicos pass it up. The quicker the better with dog bites, even if they ain't deep. I'll wipe the slaver off your breeches, too."

Hugh made no objection. He was wondering if Hardy had noticed that slip when he had told him in perfectly good New York to stop the car. Hardy now moistened the waste with gasoline and began to wipe off the abrasion, that was exuding a little. He wiped it again, then stopped, staring at the superficial wound.

Hugh looked down at his bared knee. A sudden horror froze him. Where Hardy had tamponned the brown skin it was rapidly paling in tint, turning a livid white.

Hardy's face turned slowly upward. His keen, gray-green eyes fairly pierced Hugh's dark ones. Then suddenly the soldierly face hardened. The chauffeur

was on his feet, his wiry body tense, lean jaw rigid. But his Yankee wit did not desert him.

"Seems your color runs a little when you're dry cleaned, señor. How come?"

Hugh's heart sank. For the moment he felt sick. Here, after all of Clamart's intensive tutelage, forehanded work of preparation, the stupid protégé had in the very first day of his assignment, scarcely within the premises, betrayed himself. Clamart had warned him against lotions of a toilet sort, bay rum, eau de Cologne, and other perfumes, even soaps. And now, on the very threshold of his detail, Hugh realized that he had committed two blunders, the former inexcusable, the latter fatal.

Hardy was still watching him alertly. "Come across, mister," he said curtly. "No use to say 'señor,' is it? I've sure done that thing. Who sent you here?"

Hugh stared at him hopelessly, then said: "I shall have to see Judge Fairbanks before answering." It was in his mind that the best he could do now was to make every effort to clear Frank Clamart. And much as he loathed doing so, it might be necessary to tell the judge that he had been an unintentional witness to the execution aboard the yacht. This fact, though savoring of blackmail, ought to let Clamart out.

"You'll see hell first," Hardy answered tersely. "You won't get within telephoning distance of the judge, while I'm on duty here."

"So you're a bodyguard, too," Hugh said.

Hardy's face grew still more bleak. "Where do you get that 'too'?"

Hugh ventured a long shot. "Do you happen to know Frank Clamart?"

"Maybe. What of it?"

"He sent me here."

"Prove it, guy. And prove it good and hard."

Hugh reached in his pocket and drew out a note that Clamart had given him to deliver to the judge. It was unsealed, and Hugh was aware of its contents, a brief indorsement of the bearer as the secretary recommended by Clamart. He handed the note to Hardy, who scanned it through. The chauffeur's rigid face relaxed. He looked less belligerently at Hugh.

"Well, maybe I got you wrong. That's Frank's fist all right. But why didn't he put me wise, I wonder?"

"Or me," Hugh said. "Perhaps he was using each of us as the acid test for the other, Hardy."

"Looks that way, kind of," Hardy said slowly. "Who are you, anyhow—under the greaser camouflage?"

Hugh stared fixedly at him for a moment, then took the jump. "I am Hugh Hastings, a member of the New Jersey bar, and at this moment wanted by the police for the murder of Hiram Jones."

CHAPTER IV.

A HIT BY MISTAKE.

HARDY'S face did not change, but he drew in a long, slow breath. Then he said dryly:

"Well, that's some recommend for the judge's life guard."

"Incidentally," said Hugh, "I'm not guilty. But you don't have to believe that."

To his astonishment Hardy said indifferently:

"I never did believe you guilty. Gettin' down to brass tacks, I don't believe the police think so either. Not unless they're dumb—and that's possible, too. But that wouldn't keep the prosecuting attorney from getting a conviction if he could, and the chances are he'd get away with it. The stuff against you is strong enough to convict Jonah of swallowin' the whale."

"I know it," Hugh said. "That's why I beat it."

"You must be good. They had you cornered between the devil and the deep

sea. A closed line of devils. How did you get through?"

Hugh felt under no further compunction to tell the truth. His obligation to Clamart did not seem to demand it. "I didn't get through. I was already outside. The cops may have gathered in a Swede or two."

"Sure," Hardy agreed. "Those birds don't advertise what's apt to get them a laugh. How come you met up with Frank Clamart?"

"Quite a lot of people know about his past," Hugh said, "and that he's the sort that's not afraid to stand by a man in a jam, if he thinks he's all right."

The answer seemed to satisfy Hardy. "Well, you would, I guess, being a criminal lawyer. He's sure one strong man. You going to tell him about this?" His keen, hard eyes bored like a gimlet into Hugh's.

"Yes. He will be sore, but there's no help for it. Nobody was supposed to know the truth about me. Perhaps he may want to order me back."

"It's safe with me," Hardy said.

"What about reporting it to the judge?" Hugh asked.

"I take my first orders from Mr. Clamart," Hardy said shortly. "Let's go."

They got into the car. "Let's go first to the garage and I can stitch that tear," Hardy's head turned sharply to look at Hugh. "Then if you like you can call up the chief."

"All right." Hugh returned the straight look. "And you can check it up."

Hardy did not answer. A good man, Hugh perceived, who played the game close to his belt. Though now assured in his mind about Hugh, Hardy was yet taking no chances. As they rolled into the garage and stopped, Hardy said: "There's the phone," and he gave Hugh Clamart's number, which was not necessary.

Hugh got Clamart immediately. "I've just arrived at Judge Fairbanks," he said. "When we drove into the grounds a police dog that was passing jumped on Miss Jasmine's setter. I hauled him off, and he gouged me a little over the knee with his fang. Hardy wiped it off with gasoline. That wasn't so good for the skin, and Hardy's a little worried about it."

There was a moment's pause, then Clamart's voice said dryly:

"I see. Is Hardy there? I'd like to speak to him. All dog bites can be dangerous."

"Here he is."

Hugh handed the receiver to Hardy, who listened for a moment, then said: "Right, sir. I'll tell him to carry on."

He hung up the receiver. His face had resumed its friendly expression, worn before the canine clash. "No harm done, looks like, señor. Chief seems pleased."

"With you," Hugh amended.

"Well, yes. But he ain't sore with you. Accidents will happen, in the best regulated dog fights."

"Were you making an assay when you rubbed on that gas?" Hugh asked.

"Not at first. I'd like to claim that, but I got to shoot square. After the first swipe or two I took notice. The greasers I knew were in fast colors. It gave me a jolt. I kept on rubbing. I think the chief wanted to try out your tan on me. It got past. You skidded though, when you busted out in English to stop the car. It's when he's excited a foreign guy's most apt to spout his own lingo. It's a skid like that would make Clamart madder'n a locoed rattler."

Hugh nodded. Hardy got needle and thread and stitched the tear in his trousers with campaigner deftness. "There, señor, that healed quick."

The telephone interrupted him. Hugh noticed that at sound of the voice speaking Hardy's trim figure straightened instinctively. If only the con-

scious objective mind could hang onto one's identity like that, and act accordingly. Hardy said in his brief but respectful military way: "Here in the garage, sir." A pause, then: "Not a real bite, sir. Just a scrape over the knee, through his trousers leg. I'm mending that, sir, before he goes up. Very good, sir."

Hardy hung up and turned to Hugh. "Not such a bad break, at that. Miss Jasmine has reported your armed intervention in the dog fight." He looked at Hugh with approval. "No slob job to grab up a fightin' mad hundred-pound wolf dog by the hind legs and heave him over a wall. The judge will get that. He's an old sportsman. Hop in, señor, and we'll roll up front and deliver you per orders."

As they fetched up under the marquee of the beautiful house, which was French renaissance château style modernized in some few details, a manservant came out. "Judge Fairbanks would like to see you at once, sir, before you change."

He ushered Hugh inside, through a wide corridor with a high, groin-vaulted ceiling with some fine old Flemish tapestries on the paneled walls and to a spacious study that opened on a flagged terrace from which one caught a vista of the distant Sound through a broad *allée* with a velvet greensward. This room was furnished in the period of Louis XIV., and gave a becoming setting for its distinguished occupant. Judge Fairbanks was seated behind a massive writing table, and he reminded Hugh of a portrait of Richelieu.

The servant stepped out and softly closed the door. Judge Fairbanks looked at Hugh with a tight-lipped smile, then motioned to a chair that faced him at a slight angle.

"Good morning, Señor Pilar. I am sorry that your arrival here should have been attended by a violent episode and injury. Is it really no more serious than Hardy tells me? He's an ex-soldier and takes wounds lightly."

"It is nothing, sir," Hugh answered, with a mere trace of foreign accent that was less that than a careful intonation of his words. He found it hard to act a part before this keen-visaged old gentleman.

"Then my regret is modified." Again the piercing smile that was a mere gesture of the straight, thin-lipped mouth alone. "I am glad to know that you are a young man of courage and quick action. A good many people might paraphrase Jean Jacques Rousseau: 'The more I see of men, the more I am afraid of dogs.'"

"That was not a brave dog, sir," Hugh said. "It was a bully. Perhaps if the setter was as big, then the other would not attack him."

The judge nodded. "A sort of vicious apache dog. Such animals are what their masters make them—or permit them to be. This one is a local pest, and I shall take measures to have it abated." He abruptly changed the topic. "Mr. Clamart recommends you highly. One thing I forgot to ask him: Are you a good hand at the typewriter?"

"Quite good, sir. I learn it for my law studies, to make notes."

"Then no doubt you could translate into Spanish and at the same time transcribe on the machine from copy that I have previously dictated to my stenographer?"

"Perhaps I can do better, sir, and make it direct from the dictation," Hugh said.

The judge's stern, ascetic face showed a pale light of satisfaction. "That would be capital. Save time. I have a good deal of Spanish correspondence, and some reports and the like. Are you familiar with the proper technical expressions in Spanish law?"

"It seems to me it cannot be wrong to make literal translation from the Code Napoleon," Hugh said.

The face of the judge showed a flicker of surprise. "How would you address a letter to the Mexican Minister of Finance?" he asked. "Say it in English."

"I must address it: 'To His Excellence, Señor, General or Doctor,' or whatever his title and name, and beneath: 'Minister of Finance of the Republique of Mexico,' and then begin: 'Your Excellency,'" Hugh said.

The judge nodded, then gave Hugh a piercing look. "What were you before you became a sailor, Señor Pilar?"

"I have been to school in Buenos Aires, sir, and purser on some little ships, and I study by myself and read a great many books for education. Also I have been guide for tourist parties, but only to show them what is good to see."

The judge smiled. "I'm glad to hear that," he said dryly, "because the sort of guide who shows them what it is not good to see is a pretty bad lot. Very well. You may as well start in on your duties as soon as you are settled. The man who showed you in will take care of you." He glanced at the big triangular tear in Hugh's trousers that Hardy had mended with soldier skill. "When next you are in town order yourself a new suit and have the bill sent to me. Don't economize. I am in your debt for a fine dog in good repair." He touched one of the several push buttons under the rim of the table desk.

A young woman entered, from an adjoining room in which Hugh had heard faintly the clicking of a typewriter. She appeared to be in the late twenties, very pretty, with soft brown hair that was not bobbed, and her gray eyes and the graceful contours of her figure were by no means hidden under a quiet tailored business suit.

"Miss Brown," said the judge, "this is Señor Pilar. Some time this afternoon you may give him the Mexican and South American correspondence I dictated last evening. Also, you might explain a little more in detail than I have time for just now the character of the prospectus we are at present working upon."

Hugh had risen and bowed. Miss Brown gave him a friendly nod. Neither spoke. The judge gathered up some papers and touched another bell. The manservant who had ushered Hugh in opened the door. "Number five car, Glaenzer, with Hardy to drive. Then show Señor Pilar his quarters and the ropes in general." He turned to Hugh and said more genially: "Consider yourself quite free to look round the place in your leisure hours, señor. Let's hope we can avoid any more dog fights." And with his pale, shadow smile, this active, dominant old ex-jurist went out.

A little later, in the delightful room assigned him, Hugh changed into fresh clothes, then was taken down by Glaenzer and presented to Mrs. Shelton, the housekeeper, Mr. Berthold, who seemed to be the field manager of the big estate, and an elderly Scotchman named MacDonald, who was, of course, head gardener. These people, with Miss Brown, had their own table, to which Hugh was assigned. They received him kindly and were not inquisitive. Hugh was glad that Clamart had not shaded him too darkly, but scarcely more than what would be for most Anglo-Saxons a deep bathing-beach tan.

His afternoon was spent with Miss Brown in the work assigned, and he found it easily within his abilities and not uninteresting. Hugh spoke only when so required by the exigencies of his task, but he felt the young woman's eyes frequently resting on him, and once caught on her pretty face a look of pensive speculation. She was, he felt instinctively, trying hard to size him up, get some sort of slant on his real personality, and not making a success of this effort.

Being a nimble operator of his machine and with Spanish at his mental finger tips, Hugh finished the work in hand by five o'clock. There was, Miss Brown told him, nothing more to do immediately, so that he was free to look about the premises if thus he chose. Hugh went out and turned toward the shore of the Sound, about a quarter of a mile away. Following the wide opening cut through the trees, he came presently to the top of steep sand cliffs, at the foot of which was a wide stretch of beach. There was a concrete pier with a landing, and though it was early in the season, there were several small yachts at moorings off it. A fairly exposed position, it immediately seemed to Hugh.

It was a typical evening in mid-May, calm, warm but with a latent chill as the sun went down over the distant Connecticut ridges, and a calm on the pale-blue water. The tide, Hugh observed idly from the slant of a black-spar buoy some distance off the point, was running ebb. He had seated himself against a clump of cedars near the brink of the sand cliffs that at this point was about a hundred feet above the beach. As the arc of the shore was right here convex in relation to Hugh's position, he could see that at the lower third these cliffs rose at an angle of about forty-five degrees, then became almost vertical to their brink, which in some places overhung slightly in a sort of turf cornice from the erosion. There was no great danger in this formation, since the worst to happen a person falling over the edge would be the fright of a chute that would end gradually in the soft sand.

Sitting there now admiring the sunset hues in the western sky and their reflection on the still water, Hugh considered the bizarre position in which he found himself placed. Through no fault of his own he had been flung violently out of what had promised a legitimate, interesting and successful career to find himself, first, a hunted fugitive from alleged justice, then rescued, sheltered and vouched for by a man of mystery with a criminal past whom he had witnessed perform the unauthorized execution of a malefactor, and now disguised as a dark-skinned alien of dubious parentage occupying the position of secretary to a distinguished ex-jurist who had officiated in an act of what Hugh's own legal knowledge was bound to pronounce one of murder. The criminal-code definition of murder did not, Hugh reflected, permit of any other term.

Moreover Hugh, a citizen of the United States, had by his passive part as a witness of this act become accessory after the fact. The probability that it had been performed outside the territorial limit was of no importance, because the yacht was presumably under the flag of the United States, equipped with the papers of such and subject to the jurisdiction of this country. There could be little doubt of that.

Hugh wondered if any other person had ever found himself wound up in so curious a coil. So far as concerned himself, the best that could be said of it all was that his conscience was clear. Even at this moment, doubly involved as he found himself in relation to the law, his self-respect stood on a higher plane than it had done on two occasions when he had helped to defend and successfully cleared of punishment criminals of whose guilt he had been convinced.

At that time he had argued with his own ethical sense that any act legally performed and sanctioned by duly accredited authority must be right. But now, he was not so sure. Where then, was one to draw the line? The commanding general officer of a revolutionary political movement issued orders for the wholesale slaying of the troops sent to suppress him by the established

government, and if successful in his cause was hailed as a patriot. Witness George Washington and Bolivar and Trotzky and Lenin. To what degree of magnitude must a revolt against recognized authority be raised for it to become ethically correct? And if such action worked one way, then why not in the reverse direction? If it was worthy to free men from a certain burden of social conditions, then why was it not equally worthy to free a social condition from the burden of certain men? And in defending enemies of society from what was intended to be their just suppression, might not a person be guilty of a moral treason to the commonwealth of which he was a citizen? It would appear that he might.

The above argument, Hugh perceived, was a defense of the act that he had witnessed aboard the yacht, and an impeachment of his own past efforts as a criminal lawyer. Where was one to limit the rights of an intelligent minority? Briefly, which of the two were in the wrong: the criminal lawyer who by legal skill, eloquence, magnetism, appeal, persuades a jury to acquit and turn loose on society a dangerous malefactor, or a little group of trained minds who in possession of all proof necessary to a conviction of capital crime sees fit to render it and to carry out the sentence imposed for such?

Hugh was at this indecisive point of this thesis when his eyes were caught by a flash of color at the foot of the sand cliffs to his right. His eyes were good, the light still strong and the air clear, so Hugh recognized immediately his fellow secretary, Miss Evelyn Brown, who had been wearing that afternoon a light sweater of neutral orange tint. Evidently she had gone down the long flight of steps from the top of the cliffs to the landing, for a stroll on the beach.

As Hugh watched her without curiosity, another figure appeared, that of a man, who came in sight from behind the brim of sand cliffs just in front of where Hugh sat. This person, though unknown to him, seemed then to be identified by the black-maned police dog who had literally scraped an acquaintanceship with Hugh that morning. The animal ran up to Evelyn Brown with every canine appearance of friendly greeting. She and the man did not loiter, but walked slowly along the high-water mark and were hidden from Hugh's sight by the obtruding brink.

Here evidently was a rendezvous, Hugh thought, between the judge's secretary and a man who was not held in esteem in the judge's household. It did not look very good to Hugh. He got up and walked back toward the house by a different path, coming out on a broad sweep of lawn on which, against a mound, he saw a target for archery set up on its tripod. Beside it, as he drew near, Hugh discovered two bows and a long box of arrows, also the accessories of finger tips and a proper wrist guard.

This sport, as Hugh had told Frank Clamart, was one of several in which he excelled, though for the past year he had not indulged in it. Noticing now that one of the bows was of masculine strength, forty pounds to draw the arrow, Hugh picked it up, took a handful of arrows and walked to the edge of the terrace, about a hundred yards. At that range, even if out of practice, he did not think that he would miss the target, to risk damage to the arrows.

He strung the bow, then fitted an arrow and shot, scoring on the red. He shot again, closer to the bull, then on the third shot pierced it. Not so bad, for one whose hand and eye might be a little off its accuracy. Then, as he sped the last arrow, the best shot of all, a cool voice said from behind and a little above him:

"Bravo, Señor Pilar. Some Robin Hood."

Hugh looked round to see Jasmine standing on the edge of the terrace. Her prettiness was poignant and invested her from the top of the dark, almost lurid, smoky hair to the tip of her tennis shoes. She presented now in what struck Hugh from the lower level of ground on which he stood, an appearance that was stagy—footlights, like the première danseuse of a chorus—and her piquant features seemed brushed upward from beneath, small nose tilted and lips pouting a little. He would not have expected a young girl of that old Southern family to be quite so modern in the display of her undeniable physical charms.

It embarrassed him, but this put him entirely upon his guard. "I hope you do not mind," he said, speaking slowly. "I was tempted to see if I could still shoot with the bow."

"Well, I'll testify you can. Where did you learn?"

"An old Indian taught me. When I was a boy in the Argentine."

"That accounts for it. Not one of our gang could touch you. Next meet we have I think I'll win some money on you, though it's scarcely sporting to bet on a sure thing. Still, you might get rattled and lose your form."

"I am sure I would do so," Hugh said, in the same slow and careful enunciation of his words that was better than any attempt at a foreign accent, he had decided. "I fear Judge Fairbanks would say I am here for secretary, and not to play with bow and arrows."

"Grandpa is not so ferocious as he likes to make you think. Did the old Indian teach you how to throw the dog? Or maybe, in a Spanish country, it was the bull."

The irony was not lost on Hugh, though he pretended to misunderstand. "No, we have long heavy whips for dogs, and I never care for bull fights."

Jasmine came down from the raised position that revealed so extended a sector of her shapeliness. "Let's get the arrows. I want to see you shoot again."

This expressed desire was in the nature of a command. They walked to the target. Jasmine gave an exclamation of surprise, then turned a puzzled face to Hugh.

"Some of them have gone clear through, and the rest are buried to the feathering. They never do that with us."

"It is how you shoot," Hugh explained. "When I loose the bowstring I thrust the bow ahead. That is how the Indians kill big game with little bows."

"Doesn't that spoil your aim?" Jasmine asked.

"No, Miss Jasmine. You must not sight an arrow like a gun. You look always at your target, like when you throw a stone. And you must draw and loose in one motion. Not try to hold the cord."

"When I shoot hard I miss," Jasmine said. "I can hit the target better by letting the arrow fly easily and curve down."

"For target practice some archers score better with a dropping shaft." Hugh told her. "But that would not do for killing game."

Her violet eyes opened wider. "That's so. Have you killed game with a bow?"

"Oh, yes. Many times. I have killed rabbits and wild duck, sometimes in the water and once in a while flying over me." Hugh checked himself. He was telling the truth, but his bow hunting had been on the eastern shores of Maryland and Virginia, and it would scarcely do to tell the girl this. He continued: "It is better to learn how to shoot straight and hard."

Jasmine nodded. "Yes, it's better to do anything straight and hard. Will you give me a lesson?"

Hugh wished that he had resisted the temptation to see if his hand had lost

its skill. Then he glanced at Jasmine, and was less sorry. She was like a bouquet of roses and violets and the flower from which she had her name, the faint fragrance of which reached him as she drew closer. He had never seen such a girl, to be fully conscious of her. He felt the blood burning in his face. It may have darkened a little his artificial shading. Jasmine, watching his face, seemed to draw slightly away. But she continued to look at him, as if her eyes were held against her will.

"Judge Fairbanks might not wish me to shoot with you, you know," Hugh said.

"He would not mind. Grandpa told me when he went out this morning after talking to you that you seemed to be just the man he needed. And he told me something else. He said that you had good Spanish blood and possibly a strain of royal Inca. He is a Southerner and knows."

Again Hugh's cheeks burned. "The judge is right—in part."

"Part what?"

"I have no Indian blood of any kind, Miss Jasmine."

Her face showed relief. "Well, it wouldn't matter, if it was a royal strain, and you do look as if you might have that. It's all right, so long as it's not African. We Louisianans draw the line at that. I'm glad you told me, though. Let's shoot, now that the race problem's settled."

They walked back to the edge of the terrace. Hugh showed Jasmine how to stand, left side presenting to the target. Then, as she drew her bow, he quickly clutched the arrow against the bow and held it. A glance had shown him the chance of hurt she ran in this position when wearing a soft silk blouse, and drawing the arrow to its head, so that the bowstring was drawn past her breast. A flood of embarrassment swept him.

Jasmine, following his gaze, understood instantly. She nodded coolly. "I get you. The Amazons were right. I'm not dressed for this outdoor sport. To do it right, I'll shoot in my bad old form."

She flickered her arrows in a parabola, five out of a dozen striking the target feebly, so that they hung down. "Not so good. Now let's see you kill it, señor."

Hugh sped ten arrows, swift and hard and more accurately as he began to get the feeling of the bow. The eleventh was on the cord, when Jasmine gripped his wrist.

"Look!" she whispered. "There he is again. You can kill game. Get him —quick!"

Following her gaze, Hugh saw the big black-maned police dog stealing wolflike along the border of a box hedge planted round a sunken garden to the right, at about the same distance as the target. It occurred to him instantly that Miss Brown must have made her rendezvous brief and that the dog, accepting her as a friend and protectress, had probably escorted her back to the grounds. The animal had a wary eye on Jasmine and himself, though its vulpine stealth disguised this as it moved slowly along close to the squarely trimmed hedge, back toward the woods, or park between the grounds and the sand cliffs.

"Get him—get him, quick!" Jasmine said in a low, imperious voice. "There —now, while he's still!" For the dog had stopped and seemed to be listening for some person beyond—Miss Brown, no doubt.

Hugh shook his head. "It would be cruel."

"It wouldn't. He's got it coming—nasty, skulking, savage brute. Put an arrow through him. He's the neighborhood pest."

Hugh raised his bow. He was innately kind and had not the least intention to impale the dog with an arrow,

savage trespasser though it might be. But he did not wish to offend Jasmine by a flat refusal, provoke her anger and her scorn. He could, however, send an arrow close behind the dog, into the hedge, and give the animal a fright, seeming to miss.

But even as he drew the shaft quickly, to loose it in the same motion as he had instructed Jasmine, the dog must have seen covertly what it read as a hostile gesture. Its wolf strain was not only wary but swiftly alert. Instead of springing forward, it darted back, as a hunted wolf is sometimes seen to try to dodge a bullet. The arrow, less swift, sped truly for the spot at which Hugh had aimed, and which the dog's body obstructed at the very moment of its arrival.

There was a snarl, a snap of the strong teeth, then a piercing yelp. The dog turned again, then plunged into the hedge, scrambling through it into the sunken garden. At the same moment Hugh caught sight of a head of soft brown hair just visible above the squarely trimmed box hedge near its corner toward the woods. It disappeared instantly.

Jasmine clapped her hands. "You got him, señor!" she cried jubilantly, and started to run toward the garden. She had not seen Evelyn Brown.

"Hold on," Hugh called; then remembering his rôle: "Let me go first. If he should turn on you——"

Jasmine paused. Hugh wished only to delay her, to give Miss Brown time to get out of sight. He had been able to follow his sped arrow closely enough to see that it had not badly wounded the dog. He thought it might have hit a hind leg and glanced off. A target arrow with its light conical metal tip would not pierce unless it struck squarely. He fitted another arrow.

"Let me go first," he said. "A big dog like that might be dangerous as a wolf. He is, in fact, part wolf."

Jasmine paused. "All right. Go ahead. But I don't think he was hard hit. Some shot, though—the way you got him as he darted back."

Hugh did not tell her that it was an accident. He was quick to realize that to do so would be to put him entirely out of rôle. Such humane compunction, mercy to an animal that had that morning scored him with its fangs, did not mix with the blood of a nation of which the popular sport is the bull ring.

With an arrow on the string he walked to the hedge and looked over. The dog was not to be seen, nor was Evelyn Brown.

"Well," Jasmine said, "that ought to teach him. Thanks for the lessons at target practice and on dangerous big game. I've got a lot more respect for this polite tea-and-toast lawn sport after that."

She gave him a brief nod and walked away to the terrace, crossed it and entered the house. Hugh stood looking after her, wondering why she had withdrawn herself so abruptly. Then, glancing toward the big trees, he saw a streak of orange behind the trunk of one of them. Jasmine, he imagined, had seen it also, and come to conclusions of her own.

Hugh stood for a moment, thinking rapidly. The presence of the dog with the man whom he had seen at the foot of the sand cliffs would seem to place that person as the rider whom the dog was with that morning. And the fact that Evelyn had slipped down there for a brief rendezvous had also its significance. Hugh feared that he had made an enemy, and one close to his work. Evelyn Brown would not easily forgive him what must appear to be an act of Spanish cruelty.

Hugh walked back to the target, laid down the bow where he had found it, and started back for the shore by the path that he had come. The man, he thought, would be very apt to wait for

his dog on missing it. Hugh now desired to have a look at this person, and the pretext of explaining that he had not meant to hit the animal would not only furnish this opportunity but might go far to square him with his coworker, Evelyn Brown. He did not want to let her know that she had been seen.

Reaching the brink, he ran along its edge to the stairs. As he reached the top of them he saw, as he had hoped, the man, and discovered that he was examining the dog, which was crouched on the sand at his feet. The man looked up at that moment and saw Hugh, stared for a moment, then continued his examination of the dog.

Hugh hurried down the stairs. It was not until he had reached their foot that the man glanced up at him. By this time the daylight was waning, the night not far away. Hugh leaped down into the loose sand and started to walk toward the man, who had straightened up and was staring at him in ominous silence. The dog raised its head, gave a snarling growl, then, at a curt word from its master, crouched down again, head flat against the sand but eyes lurid as they fixed unwaveringly on Hugh.

As if distrusting the ferocity of his pet, and his control of it, the man reached in the side pocket of his tweed golf coat, took out a strip of rawhide and reeved it through the collar of the dog, catching a turn or two round his hand. Then, straightening up, he said pleasantly enough and in a voice that was well modulated and struck on Hugh's ears with a rather startling familiarity:

"Better not come too close, señor. It looks as if somebody had just drilled my dog through the neck. Odd, as I heard no shot."

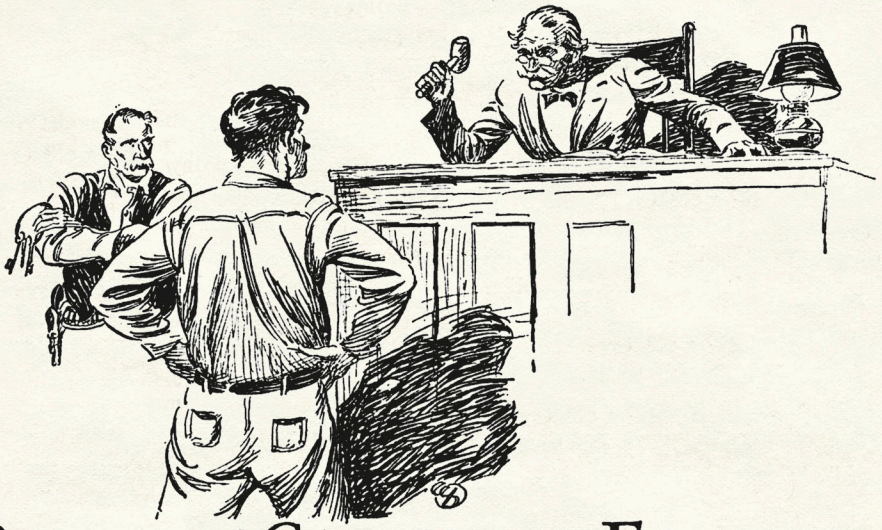
The purring, resonant voice was like a cold current passing through Hugh. It made him feel as might an unarmed hunter who lays down his empty gun to examine a trophy and finds it lying in the coils of a boa constrictor. It did not need the narrow, evil, handsome face to tell Hugh with whom he had to deal. The man, he realized with a wave of something akin to terror, was well known to him.

To be continued in the next issue.

BAD ARITHMETIC

JOHN W. CRADDOCK, grandson of Governor John Sevier, of Tennessee, prominent New Orleans business man and elder of the famous old First Presbyterian Church of that city, was swapping tales with Charles Farren, a Methodist steward from Mississippi, while both were sojourning in the mountains of North Carolina.

"My minister," said Mr. Craddock, "was raising a contribution for an important benevolence, and asked the congregation to be very liberal. He made an eloquent exhortation and scattered pathos all over the congregation. It was a melting discourse. The deacons then took up the collection and the count showed that eight hundred and forty dollars and two cents had been cast into the Lord's treasury. The minister was gratified at the response, but exhibited some worry over the two cents. 'I perceive,' said he 'that there is a Scot in the congregation.' Whereupon a burly man in the rear of the church arose and stated: 'Ye air wrang, Meester Finch. There be twa o' us.'"



BIRDS *of* CHANGING FEATHERS

By **Robert J. Pearsall**

The writer of "Ox Train"

A fine friendship in the wilds that changed two men for the better

YOUNG Jim Ruddick was the loneliest man in Tehoe Township. And the unfriendliest, of course. Waves of contempt radiated from him; waves of antagonism came back. Which was a pity, for one side of him would have given anything in life for a friend. But that wasn't the side that Tehoe Township stimulated.

The day that Jessup came on him, he sat in the prisoner's chair of Justice Simpkins' courtroom, liberally bestrewing the floor near his feet with shavings whittled from a pine stick. He was lean and sinewy, and his rough-hewn face looked dangerous. His knife looked dangerous, too. The justice glared at him, cleared his throat to protest, but didn't.

"The pris'ner at the bar," he said instead, "will stand up."

So Ruddick ceased whittling. He closed his knife with the greatest deliberation, put it in his pocket, placed the stick on the seat nearest him, gripped the back of his chair with his hands, and hoisted himself to his six feet of height as slowly as was humanly possible. Standing erect, he was conscious of the hostile gazes of twenty-odd fellow citizens to his rear.

"The pris'ner at the bar," he mimicked, "has stood."

"Say 'your honor,'" ordered the justice.

"Your *what?*"—sharply.

"My hon—— I mean, say 'your honor.'"

"Haw-haw-haw!" laughed Ruddick, with that biting, sarcastic mirth that at various times had made half the men of Tehoe Township see red.

Wisely mindful of certain embarrassing things that might be said, the justice forbore to press the matter. Some of the spectators were grinning covertly. His honor's eyes ranged over them, to settle angrily on a well-dressed but

ard-looking man who had just entered from Tehoe's one street. This was Jessup, who had an hour to spare, and had entered, drawn by no motive but curiosity.

"Order in the courtroom," the justice bawled. "Take a chair an' set, or leave."

Jessup smiled, in toned-down reflection of Ruddick's mocking laugh.

"I wasn't aware," he said in a brittle, metallic voice, clipping his words, "that I was disorderly. But I think I'll stay."

Composedly, he settled himself in a chair.

The justice, picking up a paper, transferred his gaze to Jim Ruddick, who had turned in the interval and observed the stranger with a slight start. Then he relaxed. The man had reminded him of some one whom he would never see again. The justice went on.

"Order bein' restored, we'll take up your case. You're charged with serious crimes, which might easy be made felonies an' taken to a higher court, if 'twarn't for the mercy of the complainant. Illegal trespass, malicious destruction of property, stealin', and assault an' battery. You an' everybody here knows the particulars, so there's no use goin' into 'em. D'ye plead guilty or not guilty?"

Ruddick raised one foot to a bench in front of him.

"Yeah! That's the way I plead," he drawled.

"Eh? What's that?" The justice eyed him suspiciously.

"Guilty or not guilty," returned Ruddick with determination. "That's the way I plead. I busted down Sanders' dam, all right, if it was rightfully hisn. I stole his water, with the same little 'if' enterin' there, too. An' I slammed him on the jaw when he called me a thief, just the same as I'd slam you. Or," he continued thoughtfully, "any of these grinnin' galoots behind me."

The justice's face flushed and tightened. He rapped on his desk to check the responsive muttering, himself glaring angrily at the prisoner. But after a moment, he pursed his lips judiciously.

"I have to take that as a plea of guilty," he said, "because you admit the acts alleged to you. The question of Amos Sanders' ownership of the property may be admitted *ipso facto,* which is a legal way of sayin' 'it's a fact.' But before passin' sentence, I've got a word to say.

"You was raised in this here community, Jim Ruddick. By rights you ought to be one of us. But you ain't. This here is only one way that you've set yourself against this place an' everybody in it. You've been a disturbin' influence, a contrary influence, ever since you come back from war. You've fit an' quarreled an' scared folks ontil it's my conviction you ain't got one friend left in the place. Is that the truth or not?"

Ruddick deliberately turned his head and surveyed the faces behind him with a mocking grin. He faced the justice again, laughing in his maddening fashion.

"Haw-haw-haw! A friend among these here uns! But is that any of your business?"

"In a way it is, because I'm feelin' a bit guilty over the fact that I'm enjoyin' conductin' this here trial over you. An' in another way because it shows you a dangerous individ'al. If I did my duty by the community, I'd likely take the matter out of Mr. Sanders' hands, an' hold you for trial by the superior court, so's to insure to be rid of you for a while."

"Tail says, 'I'd wag the dog *if*——'" replied Ruddick, his wide lips twisting sardonically.

The justice of the peace grew turkey-red. His cackling voice rose a note.

"You be careful. Say what you mean by that."

"Bein' careful isn't tellin' you what I mean. But I'll obey the last order, like they used to tell us in France. Everybody knows Sanders has got you roped an' hog-tied."

"You—you——" the justice stuttered. "How d'ye dare——"

"Well, you asked for it. You dassn't go against Sanders, an' Sanders dassn't take this to a higher court, because he's scared of outside investigation."

A few in the crowd were snickering The others looked awe-struck. Jessup was regarding the back of Ruddick's head with eyes grown opaque at the mention of Sanders' name. The justice flailed his desk with an ink bottle.

"Order in the courtroom. Pris'ner, ye're in contempt. I fine ye ten dollars or ten days for that."

"Make it a million, Simpkins, an' it'll match my feelin' toward you better."

"An' for yer other offenses, ninety days er ninety dollars. An' maybe ye've got that hundred handy in yer pocket. Or else"—with vast sarcasm—"ye've likely some friend here who'll put it up."

Ruddick leered, full in the justice's apoplectic face. His own face was like a mocking gargoyle's. He chuckled slowly, maddeningly; and with an indefinable air of superiority and contempt, he turned upon the spectators, who were still slyly enjoying the justice's discomfiture.

"Huh! If I had a friend here, I'd sure disown him. You was supposed to be my father's friend, an' you stood by while I was at war, an' watched him cheated of everything he had. An' that kilt him afterward, together with the rot-gut bootleg he took to drinkin' an' peddlin', an' the trouble he got into on account of it. Sanders didn't get into any trouble, did he? But you know he's head of the whole booze ring in the county. An' you know as well as I do that he's fenced in gover'ment land. And if he was a poor man, wouldn't you make a hullabaloo? But he's the richest man in the county, an' so you all say 'Hallelujah!' an' haul me down here because I busted down his dam to get some water for my stock. A friend among you scared apes! Why, I tell you——"

With words growing more vitrolic, he berated them. Jessup regarded him with a queer, startled look. Something Ruddick had said had wiped away his hardness, his complacency. The others in the courtroom stared at Ruddick, uneasiness mounting over resentment. That back-country township had had plentiful experience with outlaws and killers, and Ruddick was of the stuff of which they are made. Steadily he had been drifting that way, ever since he had come back from war. The justice tried to catch the marshal's eyes, but the marshal looked another way. It wasn't quite the right moment to escort Ruddick to the hot-box jail. As Ruddick paused, his vocabulary exhausted, Jessup rose, with an impulsive movement queer in such a man.

"I'll pay that fine," he announced.

Then, as Jessup threaded forward through the chairs, it was Ruddick's turn for a change of features. His jaw dropped; his eyes blurred. It wasn't merely that he had found a friend where he thought there was none; it was the memories that the stranger stirred up. It was his army captain, killed in the Argonne, of whom he was reminded—just such a figure as this, close-knit, efficient-looking, perfectly poised. And the thought of him brought back other thoughts to the lonely Ruddick: of friendships, pals, buddies he had known in the army, before he came back to find everything gone wrong. No wonder, with that mist before his eyes and those things in his brain, that there were things about the stranger he didn't see—lips again set implacably, eyes habitually guarded. But some others in the courtroom did, and they sniggered wisely.

"Birds of a feather!" they muttered. "Birds of a feather! He'll find use for Ruddick."

And they leaned forward, curious to hear the stranger's low words to the justice.

"I just happened to see your palatial jail," he said, with cool sarcasm. "Was waiting while I got a puncture fixed. Yes, please, a receipt. Name's E. W. Jessup."

That was over quickly. Turning, Jessup passed Ruddick with hardly a look. He was going—this friend! Ruddick followed him with his eyes almost to the door, and then he started after him.

"Say—wait!" he hailed, hurrying after Jessup up the one business street of the unpainted, run-down town, sweltering and stagnant in the yellow sunlight.

Jessup stopped, and they faced each other. Ruddick's words came rushing out of his full heart.

"Say, that was white. I wanta thank you. An' I wanta pay you that back. I ain't got anything but some stock an' they're all mortgaged. But I'll work. Can't I work for you? Take me with you an' you'll see I'll pay you back. I ain't wantin' to have you lose anything on me."

Jessup's tight-lined face crinkled into a smile. For an instant biting mockery peeped from his eyes. "You've got something from me; you want to get more," they seemed to say. But Ruddick, eyes dim, didn't see that. He was looking at a friend. Jessup, eying him, seemed to realize that, reluctantly. A mixture of emotions stirred his face. He hesitated, and then replied brusquely:

"You can cook, I suppose? Rough camp cooking? I've got a sort of camp up north. You'll take care of it? All right. Come along."

So Ruddick gratefully followed along the sun-baked street to the one garage. Thence they drove to Ruddick's shack, neat as an army barracks, where he bundled a few belongings into a knapsack. Followed six hours of pavement driving, four more along country roads, fifty miles along a wagon trail that was hardly a road at all, and so to a wilderness camp—the real use of which was for a time as mysterious to Ruddick as Jessup's motives had become.

For even before the ride was over, Jessup had unmasked himself. Or rather, Ruddick's eyes and mind had cleared so that he saw Jessup better. Jessup was hard, no mistake about that. He was bitter and mocking and selfish—so much so that there seemed something lacking in his explanation of why he had rescued Ruddick from jail.

"It was because you laughed," he said. "Tehoe's the world; and like you laughed at Tehoe, I laugh at the world. And did when I was at the bottom, too, like you were. Because you had spunk enough to laugh, I picked you out of there. 'Birds of a feather,' I heard somebody say. Well, we are."

Which was well enough, in a way, but didn't fit in with Jessup's utterly selfish philosophy, as he expounded it to Ruddick from day to day. Nor did that philosophy fit in with the tormented look that Ruddick sometimes caught in Jessup's agate-blue eyes.

Another problem that troubled Ruddick was his usefulness to Jessup. The "camp" proved to be a three-room log cabin, almost luxuriously furnished. The work of cooking and keeping it in order was next to nothing. For days at a time Jessup was absent on some unrevealed business; and other days he and Ruddick spent whipping the trout stream to the north, or tramping aimlessly through the woods. It was an existence for which many men would be willing to pay high. Why did Jessup bestow it on a stranger?

These puzzles didn't altogether prevent Ruddick's enjoying himself. And that part of him which for so long had

lain vacant of friendship filled with magic rapidity. It could hardly be otherwise, in spite of Jessup's black moods and long silences, for wasn't Jessup his benefactor? And sometimes, usually when they were fishing or on the hike, Jessup's moroseness fell from him for hours, dissolved by the forest magic—lights and shadows and sounds of woods and water life, flashing deer in the underbrush, wind music, tree music, the whipping of the stream, and the clean, relaxing fatigue. At such times, Jessup talked—such talk as Ruddick had never heard before: of men and things, books and music, strange cities and stranger cultures. Ruddick thrilled, for there was a vacancy there, too.

And in those temporary periods of woods camaraderie, Ruddick also found himself talking with greater freedom than he had ever known before. Of ambitions he had had, a correspondence course in engineering he had taken, a girl's love that the war had lost to him, the war itself, his dead father, the dead captain who had looked so very much like Jessup. But never twice concerning either his father or his captain. Camaraderie passed when he spoke of either; a glare almost of anger appeared in Jessup's eyes.

Why was that? What was the matter with Jessup? Ruddick had to be no psychologist to understand that something was very seriously the matter.

One evening when they were shooting at a target Jessup had put up near the cabin, he gave Ruddick what seemed to be a partial explanation.

"You had your joke about the war. Marching gallantly off and coming back to find things as you did. That started you off, didn't it? Made you see people as they are. Well, I had my joke, too. What d'ye say to this? A woman engaged to a man worming a secret out of him. Selling it to another man, or maybe giving it to him. Marrying that other man, after he'd wrecked the first by using that secret. A joke for the gods, that is. Wouldn't that give you even a bigger laugh than Tehoe Township did?"

They had been together a week then. Ruddick's heart went out in sympathy which he didn't know how to express. To cover his embarrassment, he said:

"Well, anyway, you ain't broke now."

Jessup flung back his head and laughed raucously.

"Broke? Not I. I was then, but not now. Made plenty of money since then, more than I'd ever have made out of —well, what I was doing. Got plenty of the only stuff that matters, and getting more every day. E. W. Jessup never intends to be broke again.

"Put up another target. Pity you haven't got a gun, you do so well with mine."

Jessup had an automatic. He practiced for speed rather than accuracy, flipping the gun from his hip or coat pocket and firing with the forward throw. He set up rows of targets, which he perforated in succession, fast as he could swing his gun. He usually did this sullenly, without any joy in the sport, but he did it. Watching him, Ruddick concluded that there was something more than that old sore wrong with Jessup.

It was only natural that Ruddick should connect both that target practice and Jessup's mental state with visitors that began to appear at the cabin. Every day or two, a different man would drift out of the woods to the south. Ruddick counted six, all roughly dressed, swaggering, heavy-jowled, sinister. They never talked in the cabin, but Jessup would go away with them, sometimes for all day. On two occasions, when he came back, he was more than usually taciturn, with a hint of worry behind.

One very clear day, Ruddick saw a peculiar smoke wreath curling high

against the sky to the south. The woods stood between, so he couldn't see anywhere near to the base of it. But it certainly came from no forest fire, and it looked yellow and heavy, like no wood smoke Ruddick had ever seen. He thought a great deal about that smoke. Was it a signal—or what? Had it anything to do with the doubtful look with which Jessup sometimes regarded him, as though he were debating a confidence? Had Jessup, in the beginning, meant to use him for something else than a cook?

If so, why didn't he do it? Or if he was afraid to trust Ruddick, why didn't he send him away? It must be that he trusted him, or he wouldn't have excited Ruddick's curiosity with a vaguely worded warning to stay out of the woods unless Jessup was along.

The next night, at an indefinite time, Ruddick came slowly half awake to the sound of a low muttering of voices. The vague moonlight showed him Jessup's bunk unoccupied, and he had a dreamlike knowledge that there had been a knocking at the door. Some one had called Jessup out, and, with sleep still clinging to him, Ruddick heard Jessup say with restrained impatience:

"Yes, he's asleep. But I told you not to come knocking around here. You've been drinking."

"Well, boss, it's this way. The boys wanted me to tell you that it's ready to move. an' they'd like to know——" The voice died down to a grumble.

"The same as ever!" snapped Jessup.

"All right. An' there's somethin' else. You're runnin' things, of course, but——" Again there was something Ruddick didn't catch. Then: "Killin' men ain't our specialty. That one down south was plenty. We don't want to have to give this gazabo the works."

"He's all right, I've told you before," said Jessup sharply. "Maybe I'll tell him, and maybe I won't. Whichever way, he won't talk. I intended to take him into the business, and maybe I will yet. I'll decide that. When you say I'm boss, you're dead right, and don't you ever forget it."

"I ain't forgettin'. I'm with you, Jessup. There's another thing I wanted to tell you. The boys are doin' a lotta talk. Discontented, like. 'Spike' Manning's doing most of it, but it's Wills you've gotta look after."

"Look after him!" Jessup's voice rasped. "What d'ye mean by that? More money, eh? Blackmail?"

The other muttered something.

"Well, I'm glad you don't," Jessup said. "But get this, and take it back to the others: I'm taking care of all you fellows. Without my work on the outside, you wouldn't last a week. I put up my money to start this thing, and you're all drawing down twice the money you ever did before in your lives. And I'm running the show. Bump me, and you'll discover you're bumping dynamite. Now, about loading that shipment——"

Voices and footsteps receded toward the edge of the clearing. Ruddick heard no more. He lay trembling a little. Now he understood everything, including his own danger—and the danger of his friend. Jessup was still his friend, bootlegger or no.

The next day Jessup took Ruddick fishing upstream. It was always upstream, for the river tumbled to the south. But this wasn't like other days; Jessup got no comfort from the stream or the woods. His black mood was on him, his mood of infinite mockery. He laughed at Ruddick, himself, the world. He exalted the power of money, however got. And at times he seemed to hover on the brink of revelation: he would tell Ruddick what Ruddick already knew, and invite him to translate Jessup's creed into profitable outlawry.

Ruddick knew what was coming. He knew Jessup's motive. Ruddick's participation in the game was the only basis

upon which their companionship could be continued. Those men to the south wouldn't stand for his unexplained presence very much longer. They had talked of killing him; very likely they would. Ruddick couldn't decide what reply he would make when Jessup's proposal finally came. It might be as Jessup said—that there was nothing to goodness. And Jessup was proving that the magic of the woods had been working on him, too—that he would miss Ruddick as much as Ruddick would miss him.

Jessup was a friend. A friend! But how was friendship possible with Jessup's utterly selfish creed. There were contradictions in the situation that Ruddick saw only dimly. Then Nature, springing one of the traps of which she is overfond, revealed those contradictions in a blazing light.

They had traveled upstream farther than usual and were taking a new short cut home. The whole contour of the country was downward. They came to a cliff hundreds of feet high, very precipitous, but down which it seemed they might safely climb.

The face of the cliff was bare of brush, and largely covered with arrested slides of shale. Jessup started down it. Ruddick followed a different course, and shortly found himself a little below Jessup. He was on a safe ledge a few feet wide, with the cliff curving inward below him, but an easy descent beyond. Above him there sounded a sudden grinding roar; he looked up to see Jessup ankle-deep in the front of an avalanche of dislodged shale. Then Jessup was down, struggling frantically on a surface that heaved like a waterfall, rolling over and over, being borne just a little to the left of the point where Ruddick stood.

Ruddick saw that the bulk of the slide would miss him. He saw that the ledge narrowed where it would pass, and where Jessup would pass, too. Jessup saw those things, too, and maybe, as he came tumbling down, he thought them over. With Ruddick, instinct was quicker than thought; when the slide hit the ledge, he was right in front of it, gripping a projection of the solid rock with one hand, and holding out the other to Jessup. Then he became aware that Jessup was shouting:

"Go back! Go back!"

Jessup wasn't going to take his hand. He wouldn't chance dragging Ruddick down. Ruddick clutched his shoulder. Then the shale and the tumbling rocks were on them both. Jessup went over the edge of the cliff, desperately trying to get a handhold. He failed; there was nothing saving him but Ruddick's clutch.

He saw Ruddick spread-eagled above, both arms extended, body nearly at right angles to the cliff, working his feet up and down to keep them on top of the slide. He saw Ruddick's face white with fear and grim with resolution, saw his shoulders spreading as though at the point of dislocation, saw the rigidity of his grip on the projecting rock, and how other flying rocks, thrown out by the slide, were hurtling about his head.

If one of those rocks struck Ruddick a—— But one of them struck Jessup, instead. He went out in a flash of stars, a falling of constellation.

When he came to himself, the wilderness was quiet and friendly again, and he lay on the broader section of the ledge, where Ruddick had dragged him after the slide settled.

He was in better shape than Ruddick, in a few minutes. He had nothing but a scalp wound, while Ruddick was in a state of complete exhaustion. Jessup expressed curt gratitude, and then seemed to fall into a fit of black brooding. Long after dark they got back to the cabin, where Jessup found a sealed envelope thrust under the door.

Jessup read the letter it contained,

scowling darkly. He walked over to the fireplace and burned it without a word. They went to bed, and in spite of his lameness, Ruddick slept soundly. He woke in the morning to find Jessup gone, with a note on the washstand saying he wouldn't be back till night.

That was nothing unusual. The unusual thing was revealed when Ruddick went about his usual business of straightening up the cabin. Under Jessup's tumbled pillow lay a roll of bills bigger than a man's fist. The outermost was a fifty.

Ruddick's mouth gaped when he saw it. His hand trembled when he picked it up. There was more money there than he had ever handled before, or dreamed of handling. His eyes gleamed, seeing visions, for in the last few weeks his boyhood ambitions had revived. Enough there to make certain those ambitions, to unlock all gates, to put him on the high places, to realize for him all the pleasures and dignities of the world. Money—money! How he had longed for it! And this money! How had Jessup got it? Surely it was fair loot, if ever loot was fair. Could Jessup blame him if he followed Jessup's own creed?

That was one side of him. There was another side. For a chancy five minutes the two fought. Then Ruddick's lips curled while his back straightened. He put the money on the mattress again, and smoothed the pillow over it.

Toward night, Jessup came back. At his step, Ruddick straightened and turned from starting a fire. Jessup was frowning. Something had displeased, disappointed him. Could it be that he was angry because Ruddick was still there? He walked straight to the bed, turned over the pillow, picked up the money.

"You found this, Ruddick?" he questioned sharply.

"Yeah! Sure, I found it."

"And that's all you did." Jessup's voice turned mocking. "All you thought of doing, I suppose."

"Well, no. To be truthful, I thought of a heap of other things. Includin' the fact that you wouldn't be back till night."

"Humph! Tempted but honest. Damn noble, aren't you?"

Ruddick was growing angry.

"Well, I ain't a thief."

"Not a thief, eh! And I suppose you——" Jessup suppressed something. "Well, it's plain you don't belong in my company. That's why I'm going to tell you to get your things together and—get."

"Get!" Ruddick's jaw dropped. He had expected thanks, not this. "Get where?"

"Get anywhere. Get back to civilization. I'm tired of you, if you must have it. Here!" Jessup strode to Ruddick's knapsack, hanging on the wall. He tore it down, and began thrusting things into it. "Help me, now. You're leaving right away."

In Ruddick, amazement triumphed over his anger. This was his reward for saving Jessup's life. He wasn't sure that Jessup hadn't gone crazy, but the man's cool resoluteness seemed to deny that. Ruddick could do nothing else but help pack the knapsack. On top Jessup crammed in canned stuff and bread, and he held it for Ruddick to slip his arms through the straps.

"You've been an entertainment—an entertainment, Ruddick. And I rather like you. But there's been too much of you. Stick to the wagon road." He was pushing Ruddick through the door. "Fifty miles to a traveled road. You won't get lost."

Ruddick stumbled bewilderedly off. The whole thing was incredible. He wasn't helped any by a whisper of sound behind him—a very ghost voice, it was, as though Jessup had repeated as he closed the door: "No, *you* won't get

lost." He wasn't sure that he heard it. He was only sure that he was friendless again, and that the world was a twisted world, warped past understanding.

Maybe Jessup understood it. Maybe Jessup was right. Maybe honesty called for punishment, and dishonesty for praise. His clear-eyed captain, giving his life, was therefore a fool, and Ruddick himself a lesser one. "Haw-haw-haw!" Ruddick mocked himself, in bitterer rendition of his old Tehoe Township laugh. He should have grabbed that money; he should have glued himself to it.

The cans in the knapsack prodded his back. Might as well be comfortable, anyway. He unslung the knapsack and sat down on a log. He pressed his bundled clothes away from the back of the knapsack, and thrust a can deep behind. He jerked out his hand with an incredulous cry, and stared, in the fading light, at what he held.

The money! He still had the money!

He jerked off the rubber band and started to count the bills. They were all fifties and hundreds. He passed the thousand-dollar mark, and then dropped his hands and sat staring back over the wagon road. There was a fortune there, but of greater interest than the amount of it was the insistent question: Why—why—why?

Jessup's enmity was nonexistent. His anger had been feigned. He had driven Ruddick off as an act of friendship. Was it to save Ruddick's life? Was that his gift to Ruddick, greater than the gift of the money? Was trouble imminent with the men in the woods, and had Jessup known that ordinary arguments wouldn't make Ruddick leave, while Jessup himself was in danger.

That meant that Jessup had first left the money as a temptation for Ruddick to steal it. He had tried to get rid of him that way. But what a way it was!

Ruddick didn't stop to ponder Jessup's motives. The roll was already replaced, and the knapsack on Ruddick's back. Rising, he started hurriedly back, with the blood again running warmly in his veins, the chill of loneliness gone.

Reaching the cabin, he found Jessup gone—a circumstance that supported his reasoning. If trouble threatened, Jessup was a man who would go to meet it. Ruddick's next route was obvious, then—the forbidden way to the south.

In the woods, it was already night. Only a ruddy glow lingered through the treetops to the west, but as it passed, the opposite sky brightened. The trees hid the moon, but its light helped Ruddick to keep a general southern direction. All he had to guide him was his memory of the mysterious, sulphurous-looking smoke column.

After perhaps an hour, he came to a tumbling stream. This must be the same one that Jessup and he had whipped so often to the north, and finding it raised Ruddick's hopes. Certainly the camp he was looking for would be on or near water. Moving quietly, keeping under cover, and stopping every now and then to listen, he followed the sunken, rocky bed.

His caution was fortunate, for within fifteen minutes he heard from the left the sound of men's voices.

By now the moon was well up, but very little light penetrated the thick, high growth of forest through which Ruddick turned from the river. Here and there a single treetop was silhouetted sharply, and through openings around it, Ruddick got glimpses of a silvered sky set with pale stars.

The talking sounded nearer. There was a promising harshness about it, a grumbling quality, reminiscent of Jessup's visitors. As Ruddick stole on, an increasing whiteness of moonlight filtered through the trees ahead of him. Presently he was crouching behind some shrubs, looking out into a sizable clear-

ing, in the middle of which stood three dilapidated shacks. Barrels, kegs and boxes littered the ground, and the still air was heavy with a strong, heavy odor. The talking went on with little ebullitions of excitement, little momentary pauses.

Ruddick looked around, studying the ground. To his right was a little swale which led across the clearing, with stumpage between the swale and the rear of the shacks. Army training helped him to silence as he crept on his stomach through the swale, and then zigzagged to the left from stump to stump. Reaching the shack from which the voices came, he pressed his ear against the log wall and caught Jessup's voice.

"I tell you straight, I think you fellows have been framing something up. Not that I give a curse if you have. That note saying you had to see me—what was that for, eh? Just more silly grumbling? Well, I've heard it and I give you your choice: work along with no more of it, or pack your kitties and get out. There'll be no change in our agreement. If I get the lion's share of the profits, there's a good reason for it."

"Yeah? You're the lion, I suppose. An' we're—what d'you call 'em—jackals, eh?"

"Put it that way, if you like," said Jessup.

Some one inside the shack moved abruptly. Ruddick felt a chilling of the skin. But nothing happened, except that Jessup laughed mockingly.

"Try that, if you want to, Wills."

There was a window above Ruddick's head, and Ruddick was drawing himself up. With his eyes at the level of the window frame, he peered in. Opposite the window was a door, and Jessup was standing just inside it. His right hand was in the side pocket of his coat. Facing him were six men, one of whom was just a little in advance of the others. Probably that was Wills. He crouched as though to spring, eyes on Jessup; and plainly the thing that held him was the object in Jessup's pocket—and Jessup's low laugh.

Jessup's laugh puzzled Ruddick. It expressed real merriment—the first that Ruddick had heard in it. His hard blue eyes were aflame with mingled defiance and enjoyment. His face was the only one that Ruddick could see. Wills and the other five had their back to Ruddick. They were standing close together. One of them put in silkily:

"Well, it ain't really that we're kickin' about—the divide, I mean."

"What is it then, Spike?" Jessup demanded sharply. "Time's over for hints; this is a show-down. Shoot your stuff straight, if you've got the nerve to."

"I've got the nerve, all right," Spike said resentfully. "It's like this: There's two other things we've been talkin' about. One thing is, you bringin' that fellow Ruddick up here, without knowin' anything about him. Leastways, nothin' that you want to tell us. Now you say he's gone away, with the devil knows what under his hat. An' the devil knows who he'll be tellin' it to. We claim that ain't fair to the rest of us."

"Humph! How many times have you rehearsed that speech? Well, what's the second count?"

"Like to have your answer to that important question first," put in Wills insolently.

"You want trouble, don't you, Wills?" said Jessup softly. "Well, you'll likely get it. My answer to you is that no ex-convict is choosing my company for me. And to the rest of you that your concern's all flub-dub, if you get what I mean. You're not really afraid of Ruddick's squealing. You know he's no squealer, or I wouldn't have brought him up here. It's just part of—— Well, go on, Spike."

Spike stirred uneasily. His voice thinned with apprehension, and yet he forced himself to speak, falsely and mechanically.

"The other point's just this. You're splittin' the way we agreed, all right. That is, you're splittin' on the sales as you report 'em to us. But we've been talkin' it over, an' we find your figures don't agree with what we know about the market."

There was a momentary dead silence. The accusation behind the words was plain. The five men behind Wills seemed to lean toward each other. Jessup moved a little forward, and his hand came empty out of his pocket. His eyes ranged the line of faces.

"At last! Thanks for the showdown. And you're all in this, aren't you? You poor fools! D'ye suppose I haven't figured on this? D'ye suppose I didn't know it was coming? Kill me, and everything's yours, for maybe a month. That's about the time I give you to get nabbed. So you figured I'd jump Spike, and then you'd give me the gang rush, and—finish, eh? My six brave men! Not one of you with nerve enough to pot me in the back, for fear the others would tattle. Not one of you with nerve enough to face me alone. Not—one—of—you!"

Toward the last, his eyes settled squarely on Wills. The drawled insult in his words had its effect. Wills' burly figure tightened, swayed forward toward his boss, and then he replied savagely:

"So I ain't got the nerve—you think that?"

"Prove it, then," Jessup replied quickly. "Come out, now. Come out where there's room. You and I to it. Fair fist fight—if you're not afraid. Eh? You will? Good! Fair play's all I ask from the rest of you. Come on."

And Jessup deliberately turned his back, opened the door, and passed out.

The others started after him, with meaning, sidewise glances at each other. They trooped out with a hint of furtiveness. Ruddick lowered himself and crept along the back wall of the cabin, He tingled with fear for Jessup; and with a certain joy, too. Memory of Jessup's black, tormented hours came to him, explaining much, even the merriment that had been in Jessup's laugh. Why, Jessup was like a prisoner who welcomes freedom ahead, even if it may bring death with it! Jessup had never been a companion for these men; he was a companion for Ruddick, instead. Ruddick glowed, and then remembered with bewilderment the money test Jessup had given him? Was that the act of friendship? And wasn't the final bestowal of the money almost too great a gift?

When Ruddick peeped around the cabin, the men had formed a close line. Their backs were still to him. Jessup had turned, facing Wills warily, like a prize fighter. Wills was edging forward, hands up, but only half clenched. Ruddick caught a whisper from one of the men.

"Hope he kills the——"

The two came together, both cautious. Jessup struck and Wills rushed in with flailing arms. But his real endeavor seemed to be to get a grip on Jessup.

Jessup retreated, well on his guard, and driving some blows home. He maneuvered skillfully to avoid the stumps with which the ground was broken. His long arms worked like pistons, in and out, so swiftly and powerfully that Wills could seize neither them nor Jessup's body.

Jessup, though handicapped by his coat, was having all the best of it. Wills' forehead and jaw were bleeding, and one eye seemed to be closing, but he still grinned grimly, confidently. Jessup retreated every time his guard was penetrated, and Wills hurled epithets

at him, taunting him with cowardice. Wills was getting in an occasional hard blow to Jessup's body, but they hardly seemed to be interesting him or the onlookers.

"If Wills ever gets a holt on him he——" Ruddick heard them say. "If he ever gets a holt on him——"

That was what they were hoping for. Wills was far heavier than Jessup, and under the back and sleeves of his shirt, his muscles showed, enormous. What he wanted was rough-and-tumble fighting, on the ground, with nothing barred. Suddenly it seemed he was about to have it. Jessup had backed almost against a stump. He was within an inch of it, and the top of it just reached his knees. One shove and he would go backward over it, with Wills on top of him. Wills saw it and rushed in furiously, both arms extended.

Ruddick suppressed a cry. There were the beginnings of chuckles from the watching men. But as Wills rushed, Jessup, perfectly balanced, leaped sidewise. Everybody saw in a flash it had been a trick. Wills had no guard, and Jessup shot in blows where he liked, right and left and right again. With the second blow, Wills was falling; the third stretched him full length.

Jessup stood over him, breathing hard. Wills made a move to get up. The five men were on Jessup that instant, striking, kicking, smashing him down.

Ruddick saw it—saw Jessup's hand go into the side pocket of his coat. As he toppled, his automatic sputtered like a machine gun. But one of the men thrust his arm up, and the bullets bombarded the stars. Caught in the press, Jessup did not, or perhaps could not, relax his trigger pull till the gun was emptied. Then he was down, with the men on top of him.

Ruddick leaped on top of them, into the tangle of bodies. He gouged, kicked, bit, fighting through to Jessup. He saw Jessup curled on the ground, his arms around his head. The men were piling in blows. His right hand still clutched the emptied revolver. One of the men was reaching for it. Somehow, Ruddick seized it first. He jerked it out of Jessup's hand and leaped away.

"Hands up!" he barked. "Hands up!"

His unexpected attack had already bewildered them. They didn't know, as he did, that the revolver was empty. Maybe they didn't realize that it was Jessup's revolver. And to them, the mystery of him was now explained; he was a gunman, hired by Jessup to protect him. They drew away from Jessup, elevating their hands. Jessup got up, swaying on his feet. His eyes widened when they finally came to rest on Ruddick.

"Stand where you are," rasped Ruddick to the men. "The first one that moves gets shot."

With his revolver waving so as to cover them all, he stepped to Jessup's side, and they began to move backward toward the edge of the clearing. When they got halfway, he remembered an omission.

"We should've got their guns."

"We couldn't," whispered Jessup. "They're inside the cabin. And that gun you've got is empty."

"I know it."

"You knew it, and yet—— Well, you're a hero." Jessup's tone was mildly sarcastic. "I've got no more ammunition."

One of the men just then took a chance and darted for the cabin. Instinctively, without thought, Ruddick aimed and pulled the trigger. The resulting click gave the bluff away. With a chorus of curses and angry cries, the group broke up. Two started after the fugitives. The rest broke for the cabin.

"Come on!"

Jessup jerked at Ruddick's sleeve, and started on a run for the woods.

Ruddick followed. Just as they reached the underbrush, a rifle cracked behind them. Ruddick whirled halfway around, stumbled and fell. He was up again, but his right arm dangled useless. Jessup seized his other arm and dragged him into the brush.

"Where'd they get you?"

"Through the shoulder. You'd better —beat it. Maybe they won't—do anything—to me."

Jessup's teeth clicked tight. "Yes, I'd better—but I won't. What brought you back, anyway?"

"I knew when I found that money the meaning—— But you can get away if——"

"Damn the money, then." Jessup started to run, keeping beside Ruddick. Then his voice turned eager, excited. "You still got it. Where is it, then?"

"In my knapsack. But——"

"Wait! Wait, then!"

But Ruddick wasn't waiting. He jerked away, bent on running while he could. The warm stream running down his sleeve warned him he wouldn't run long. He didn't understand Jessup's exclamation, nor why Jessup seized the straps of the knapsack and stripped them back over his shoulders. Unless it was to make easier going for him. He crashed on through the brush, thinking Jessup was behind him. There was no trail, and the noise would make pursuit easier. There was no way to gain distance and creep into a hiding place. The men would follow faster than he could run, with his strength leaving him like this. He was a goner, but Jessup might have saved himself, for he could run like a deer. Jessup—— But where was Jessup?

Jessup wasn't behind him. Nor ahead of him, either, it seemed. There was no sound of Jessup, anywhere. Had Jessup deserted him, then—taken the money and crept away, hoping the pursuit would follow Ruddick? Ruddick wouldn't believe that. And where was the pursuit, anyway? Not even in the underbrush, yet. Ruddick stopped and swayed weakly, holding to a tree for support.

How far had he gone? And where on earth *was* Jessup? And the knapsack? And the money? And what was the meaning of those sounds back there in the direction of the clearing? Sounds of brief, swift rushes, darting movements, scuffles, snarling cries, cries of gloating and triumph.

"Savin' they're men, it's like a bunch of hogs in an apple fall," thought Ruddick. And then, suddenly, he knew where the money was.

Some one was moving near him. Ruddick froze in the darkness, though he was sure it was Jessup. The stealthy sound came nearer, and a whisper floated out of the brush.

"Hey! You 'round here, Ruddick?"

"Here I am."

"Good!" whispered Jessup, coming close. "Let's get a little further and then we'll fix up that shoulder. Let me shove this handkerchief in, so we won't leave a blood trail."

Ruddick looked. On Jessup's back was the knapsack, its flap hanging loose.

"You threw the money out to them?"

"Yes. Scattered it mighty wide. I knew it'd hold 'em. Ten thousand smackers! It ought to; it's all I had."

"All you had! And you——"

"Come on," whispered Jessup. "Except that property back there," he continued, "if you can call it property. And this affair shoots that to the devil."

Ruddick followed him, vastly puzzled. First Jessup had seemingly thrust on Ruddick all his tangible wealth. Now he spoke with most unphilosophic bitterness of its loss. Ruddick had accepted the theory of his gift before, but now he found it untenable. When Jessup halted to bind up Ruddick's shoulder, his perplexity broke into words.

"But that money—I thought——

You mean you gave it to me, an' it was all you had?"

Jessup chuckled under his breath.

"Not quite that much of a saint yet, I'm afraid. I knew this fracas was coming off and I wasn't going to run away from it. If they got me, I did want you to have the money. If they didn't, I'd have come up with you before you got anywhere in particular. By the way you wouldn't take it when you had a chance, I knew I wouldn't have any trouble getting it back. And about giving you the chance to take it —well, I was watching, you know. I wanted to see what you'd do. I'd made up my mind that nobody was on the square. Maybe there's a whole lot like you," he concluded reflectively.

Ruddick was a little chilled. But the very humanness of the explanation somehow satisfied him. After digesting it, he spoke again in a defensive tone. It was his ideal of Jessup that he was defending.

"But you could've hid the money. An' you could've had me to help you against them men. You were tryin' to keep me from gettin' mixed up in the trouble."

"Oh, sure I was," said Jessup lightly. "Just like you'd have done if things had been the other way around. Before I really knew you, I said we were birds of a feather, and I've sort of got in the habit of thinking that's so. Only my feathers are more speckled, I guess. But they change—they change. Just for your comfort, I was through with all that"—waving his hand back toward the now distant clearing—"whatever way things broke. I think we're both ready for a different flight."

It was a whole lot for Jessup to say, as Ruddick realized, a little vaguely. He was growing weak, but with Jessup's help he would make it to the cabin and Jessup's car all right. After that, the outside. But he had an idea they would be together a great deal, all the same. He had his friend back, anyway. A great thing, that!

Jessup spoke of changing. Well, Ruddick had changed, too. His bitterness, he felt, was gone. He was ready to play the game with life.

Robert J. Pearsall is a regular contributor to this magazine.

PIONEERING GETS TO BE FUN

THE task of pioneering used to be rather a slow, and therefore tedious, task; but that is changing. Witness: in Alaska, the last great frontier in North America, the sour doughs fly to work in airplanes!

It has become quite established in the Territory and the residents accept the plane as a matter of course. Recently two men were missing from Anchorage, at the head of Cook Inlet on the Alaska Railroad. Instead of sending out search parties afoot and behind dog teams, a cabin plane of the Anchorage Air Transport Company was dispatched. The men were located and it became apparent that they were safe, only awaiting high water to navigate down a stream. Food was dropped to them in sacks and the plane reported their safety to anxious relatives in Anchorage within a couple of hours.

Tales

By

Frank E. Barbour

I SAT among a group of men
Who told of things beyond my ken,
And listened while some vivid phrase
Would thrill me with an awed amaze.
Their words were ships that carried me
To outplaces of mystery.
I held my breath at the stench of S'pore
When outward tides laid bare the shore,
And old prahus with half-nude crews
Crept slowly out of the steaming ooze.
Will I ever see and smell that shore,
The reeking flats of Singapore?

Tales I heard of the River Nile;
Of the dentist bird to the crocodile;
The tom-tom's call and the Dance of the Moon;
The hard, sharp bark of the great baboon;
The coughing, choking lion's roar;
And the strange wild life of the jungle's floor.
Tales of climbing toilsome ridge;
A slide for life on ropen bridge,
Where time stands still and the dead must wait
To be buried on some lucky date.
Can nothing still that strange unease
That comes from hearing tales like these?

I long to go where life is wild,
To see the lands still undefiled
By man, the first to blaze the way,
And then come back and have *my* say!
But what's the use? These stirring tales
Of lonely camps and unknown trails
Are good to listen to and read,
But, pshaw! It takes a different breed
Of chaps to do these things; and then,
Why, who would sit among these men
And lend a willing ear and sigh,
If there were not such men as I?

THE GRINGO MATADOR

An American youth accepts a challenge to a duel—with a bull.

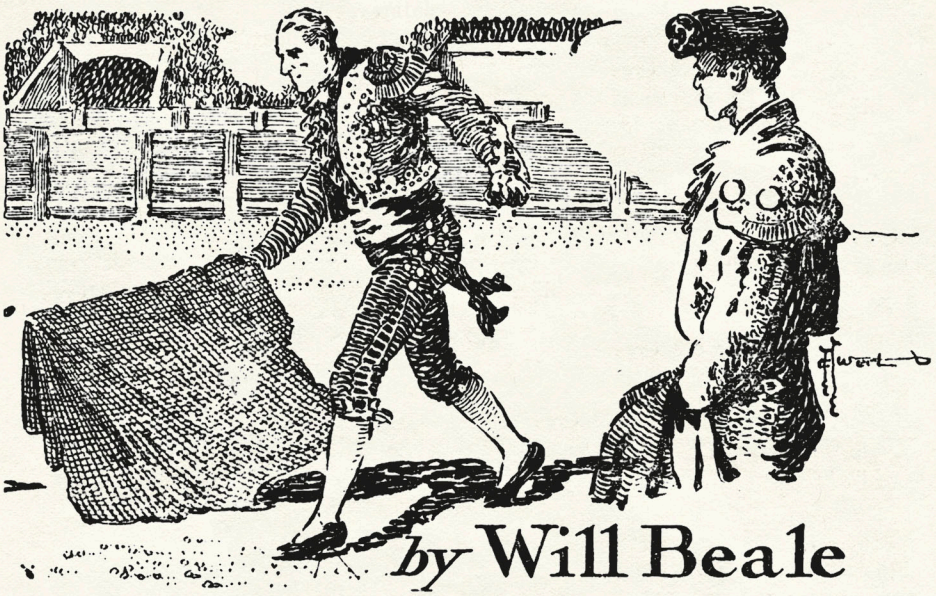
OUT in the middle of the floor the blood-red dancer whirled to a finish like a spinning pillar of flame. About her the *cantina* blew up in a roar of applause. And now a high-keyed man's voice shouted for attention.

"Señors!" A glittering-eyed Mexican leaped to a table, his arms outstretched. "Listen! Listen!" His voice was almost soprano from effort. "I am looking for amateur bullfighters for the *plaza de toros* during Easter week!"

The uproar began to subside. The blood-red dancer making for retirement in the background halted, turned back to listen. There came dead stillness. In all the *cantina* the only man not focused upon the announcer was an over-liquored young American at a table in a corner, his sand-blond head weaving uncertainly above his plate while he made ineffectual jabs at mopping up chile con carne with a folded tortilla.

From the table, now, the Mexican was eying the crowd with almost insolent good humor. "Who wants a chance to be a hero, gentlemen?" he called out, tauntingly. "For the bull ring five dollar each is offered for amateur chulos—and we have four; twenty dollar each for amateur picadors—we have two; thirty dollar each for amateur banderilleros—and two have accep'!"

Here the wily exhorter contrived his high-keyed derisive voice into a stinging challenge, sent it ferreting disturbingly among the rat holes of man's reticences seeking out the thing of courage. "And now, who is brave enough for an amateur matador? It has never yet been done in this section. For a matador Americano, perhaps five hundred dollar. It would double the receipts from across the border." The Mexican's eyes slid over to the young American messing his food at the table in the corner. His face turned oddly cynical under its apparent humor. In mock salute he lifted a hand and asked of the vacant face raised to his own. "You señor, are you of the courage?" And the crowd laughed.



by Will Beale

Who wrote "When the Gods Go Mad," etc.

The young American stared confusedly about into all the grinning faces. Then his eyes met those of the red-clad dancer, intent upon him, and he rose unsteadily to his feet and made fools of them all. "No, Venida, I—I haven't the courage," he said, a bit thickly; "but I'm not being told of it by any one like you. I accept."

"Viva Americano!" some one shouted derisively. And some one else: "Give him another drink!" The young man was facing a brawling sea of derision.

The Mexican was not laughing. His eyes afire with sudden eagerness, he had leaped to the floor and was fighting a way to the American through the crowd. "If I bring you a contrac' in ten-fifteen minutes, will you sign?"

A look very like unacknowledged enmity lay in the eyes of each.

"Yes."

Some one sprang in front of the young man protectingly—the red dancer. She faced the crowd furiously. "Leave him alone!" she cried out hotly. "Can't you see he's drunk!"

Coldly insolent, the Mexican pressed her aside. "Just keep out of it, if you please!" Then, to the American: "Wait here, I'll be back!"

The boy nodded. The crowd cheered; and fell to dancing.

The dancer was tugging sharply at the young man's arm. "Come along with me, boy" she said swiftly. "I'll get you home out of this."

"No, no!" he said obstinately. "I'm going to wait!"

She was urging him firmly toward the door. "Well, then, come on out into the air. It'll do you good."

Dazedly he submitted. At the door the girl spoke, low, to an attendant. "Benito, bring us out some coffee, hot and strong and black."

Swiftly the girl searched the moonlit open out back for some hiding place. Gripping the boy's hand firmly, she led him toward a hidden service-table. She eased him into a chair and glanced about with a gasp of relief. All about, the moon lay down a fanciful purplish lacery of the cottonwoods upon the

hard-baked yard. Soft dusk flowed away to far, dim-sensed mountains. Here and there along the sable valley the lights of a ranch pricked pinholes in the night. Out here it was clean and clear and big.

Coffee was deposited silently on the table.

"Here, drink this," the dancer commanded.

"But I don't want it." The young man pulled himself up in important alcoholic dignity.

"Yes, you do," she said sharply, impatiently. "Put it into you, and be quick about it." He gulped the coffee.

Inside the *cantina* the dancing had stopped. "Here, drink some more. Then pull yourself together and we'll slide out of this."

The boy strained himself up, his lids jammed shut as though fighting out from haze. "I'm not going to slide out," he said firmly.

"But you must! You're crazy!"

The *cantina* disgorged a sweating, muggy crowd into the yard, and the girl pulled her companion into the shadows. In the moment of breathless silence the girl's eyes were on him searchingly. He seemed neither tall nor heavy, but his body emanated a marvelous youth. Standing motionless, his eyes were still clenched tight, as though he was striving powerfully to free himself from fumes. And now the girl was noting that the head in the dappled moonlight was fine and clean, although the face was dragged, drawn, tired, contradicting its unmarred youth.

The crowd had tumbled in to dance again. The girl began speaking hurriedly in a low, guarded voice. "Now you listen here," she said quickly, brusquely, looking into the clearing eyes. "You look to me like a man who's down on life; but there's no sense saying it with flowers. Any moment Manuel Venida is liable to be out here and involve you in a mix-up that may walk off with your very life. You've simply *got* to beat it. Where are you stopping?"

"Nowhere. Just got in to-day."

"But"—with quick impatience—"where do you want to go?"

"Nowhere. I'm going to stay right here with you." He wheeled suddenly away. "Wait. I'll be back."

He left the table and made for a circular well along the cottonwoods that glimmered softly white in the moonlight. Without an instant's hesitation he plunged his head deep in a pail of water, and the girl heard him splashing and blowing and gurgling with vigor. And now an eager, noisy crowd burst again from the *cantina,* following the Mexican, Venida. Darting back into obscurity, the girl's face stiffened with concern. She watched the crowd scatter searchingly all about the yard. The Mexican, carrying a flash light, was coming straight across to her.

He glanced down at the coffee things on the table. "Where's the American?" he demanded.

"He's gone," she said.

"You lie very badly," he accused. "And listen: I don't like it—your protecting him."

Some one had slipped up to them, spoke to them from the shadows. "She doesn't have to protect me. Where's your paper?"

The dancer turned and stared. The young American's collar was drenched. His hair reared upward in a wet, crinkly crest that glittered brightly in the moonlight. He was still lit, still on the heights, but apparently now it was not all from drink.

The Mexican faced him. "I have here a little matter of contrac', so that the management may know I do not lie about the matador, and so that you may be sure of your money."

He laid down a sheet, lit it up with the flash light, and held out a fountain

pen. The crowd was swarming about them from across the yard.

The girl intervened vehemently. Her dark eyes were blazing, even in the moonlight. She was involved in a torrent of Spanish. The Mexican, however did not budge. Then she cried in English: "You can't stage such wild melodrama with this young man, Venida! Take that thing away!"

"But surely your frien' is no coward."

"Yes, I am," replied the young stranger. "In things like this I'm yellow as hell. I have been told so all my life. But here's where I stake myself as something different!" He took the pen and signed "Kim McKenzie," in a smooth, beautiful script of ease. "There you are."

He turned about, and he smiled, although his smile was still the overconfident smile of much drink, rather than that of the real man beneath.

"If I had squealed I could never have looked this girl in the face again," he announced, contentedly. "And I'm going to do just that."

Morning.

McKenzie had found the house of the dancer—found it almost on the run. Early had he stolen out into the morning—confusedly, uncertainly, like a desert owl ejected from a gopher hole. He was sick and depressed. His soul was flat. He had been loose over a month, but he was still so unseasoned to drink that it always left everything within him raw, cringing. He had stood helplessly trying to piece together the night before, bit by bit. Inside, he had an ominous feeling that he had made a fool of himself, somehow. He wasn't clear about it. But the girl—she had been wonderful.

Here, something halted him, snatched at his breath like a deluge of icy water. He was hearing his own name—over and over.

"Señor Kim McKenzie, matador Americano!" There followed something in Spanish. A swarthy little urchin carrying a bundle of newspapers was blazoning all the morning with it.

It was an El Paso paper and McKenzie stood in the glare and read. His heart pounded unbearably. The thing made a good story, a big story. And to-morrow it would be read where he would be recognized.

He found the house of the dancer in the *Calle Francesca*. It was an old house. The gray stucco was cracked and split. Inside glimmered a courtyard like a jewel. Here the sand-colored walls were gemmed with little sparklike balconies of flowers. An old red water pipe ambled down an angle like a scarlet thread. In the center of the court a little pool of vivid water plants was set like an emerald. McKenzie's desert-parched soul dropped reverently before the color, as at a chiming of bells.

The girl on the veranda stood up and her visitor halted in surprise. Freed of her dancing costume she was a slim, supple young girl. Her dress was a sports skirt of white flannel, a daintily brilliant sweater of many hues, and silken hose. Her hair was the shorn brown crop of a child. She was lovelier than anything he had ever seen.

"Why—why you're not Spanish," McKenzie stammered.

"Not by a million miles." She was regarding him curiously. "I'm no more Carmelita than you're Pancho Villa. I'm Joyce Adams."

"You—you're about the only thing I get clear from last night. But you—you don't seem clear now. You look like——"

"Probably almost human. I don't eat and sleep togged up like a fire engine. What's the matter with you?"

"I—I'm trapped!" he said blankly. "I hardly know why I came here. I—I seemed to feel you'd help straighten me out."

She had been staring at him in the full light. He was pretty deeply wrought up. His face was white and concerned, but there seemed nothing cowardly in it.

"Have you seen this?" He was holding out a newspaper.

The girl glanced at it and handed it back. "Little Manuel's a fast worker. How do you feel about it?"

His face went passionate. He cried out: "It's ridiculous! I can't tackle a thing like that. It simply isn't in me. When it comes to that sort of thing, I—I guess I'm marked. I'm chicken-hearted. And it is partly because of that very thing that I'm down here now."

"Well, why not go across the river, look up the newspapers, and kill that story?" The girl seemed hanging intently upon his answer, as though the proving of his courage was of more than casual interest.

His face came back to hers, sharply. "I can't. I'm afraid I'm in dutch across the border. My father may want me."

He halted a moment.

"My father runs a big cattle ranch up in the New Mexico section. Outside a year or more at the State Agricultural College I've hardly been off the range. In fact it got too much for me and I beat it." He ran a nervous hand through the shining hair.

"Besides, my father and I didn't get along. He set me to range-riding almost before I could reach the stirrups. But I was never his kind, and we didn't understand each other. I never could stand cruelty, and I always hated even the branding of calves. I wasn't any fighter, either, and a big cowhand, Laflin, made life hell for me. The last day I couldn't stand it. I took five hundred dollars I felt belonged to me and lit out across the border."

Listening, the girl's eyes were big and shone with an almost maternal compassion. "Well, what was your idea last night? I can't seem to see you in a bull ring."

"I—I suppose I was drunk enough to want to bluff being a 'real guy'—at least before you." His deeply concerned eyes fell away from hers, hopelessly. "Bull ring! My father's made a specialty of stock bulls. I've been brought up to regard them as almost sacred, like the ancients of old. In fact, I had one of my own—a great black brute with a banded tail, magnificent as all life. It was to pay for him I took the money. I couldn't kill a bull," he said miserably, "even if I had the skill."

A long, quiet moment. Suddenly the girl's face lighted. "Can you do rodeo stunts?" she asked.

"Yes. I can."

"Well, listen. At this fiesta-week celebration I understand they're going to do all that sort of thing in the bull ring—roping, tying, and bulldogging. Perhaps you can ooze out of the other by making good at that. But there's only one man who could fix that up, and that's friend Venida."

McKenzie was staring at her oddly. His face had gone a bit grim. "I'd stand no show with him."

"Well, I would." She turned to the house. "Wait a moment, while I locate him." She was gone some time. When she came out her face was a trifle flushed, her eyes burning high. "He was nasty, for some reason," she said. "But there's going to be a session of the committee down at the Caldes ranch at eleven o'clock to pick out bulls for the amateurs, to sort out ropers, and to look over cattle for the rodeo show, and I induced Venida to give you a try-out." She studied his face shrewdly. "Are you good at these stunts?"

He flushed. His eyes held hers steadily. "Yes, I'm good."

To the girl out at the Caldes ranch

a little later there was something terribly appealing about things. The young man might have been a yellow-headed stranger from another planet coursing desperately about a dead-black sink of the desert. And he might have been a creature fighting for life itself—and losing.

They had brought out from a corral a lean black horse with flat-plastered ears and a mean, rolling eye—a mount that ducked and evaded every movement of saddling with vicious agility. But once in the saddle the young man's body flowed so perfectly into the brute's every mood, he was so perfectly where he belonged, that the horse straightway forgot his efforts at intimidation and was off after a fleeing steer like an arrow from a bow.

Beyond that, the boy's performance was puzzling. For some reason or other his roping effort seemed unskillful, inexpert. In his second attempt, the steer, a great rangy creature, turned with head and tail up at sudden freedom and bolted for the hills behind the ranch house. The boy flew in pursuit. The performance of the half-wild horse pursuing the fleeing steer clambering goatlike up through little draws and ravines perilous with sliding shale and rolling stones, was a marvel. But the same almost amateurish roping effort followed. Finally McKenzie succeeded and came dragging his captive down, slipping, skipping, sliding in the shale, his horse mincing daintily on down, one foot placed calculatingly before the other with every step, on down the face of rock that would intimidate a goat.

Venida, the Mexican, smiled at him satirically. "You ride well, *amigo mio,* but you are amateur with a rope."

"There was something wrong about that rope," he replied confusedly. "I couldn't make it work."

"Oh, to be sure," Venida said dryly. "Your roping would not make you eligible, however, but we'll give you a chance at broncho taming, if you like."

The girl watched the performance that followed in sheer terror. In a cloud of dust, the boy strode a wild demon of a horse—a horse that was squawling and grunting horribly, and jerking itself about a mesquite-stake corral as though the ground beneath its feet were red-hot steel. At length the brute crouched fiendishly and crawled along the rails to scrape the rider off. The boy flung one leg clear, easily, his whole body constantly flowing quicksilver. Something happened! Came a wild, whirling tangle of fighting man and horse, and the boy lay sprawled in the dust.

He stood among them a moment later. A thin lash of blood lay across his face. His body stood like a draggled doll. "Something went wrong with that saddle," he gasped out.

Venida smiled scathingly. "Of course."

"Where is it, that saddle?" McKenzie demanded angrily. Already the sweating horse stood drooping in the corral, passive, motionless, bare. A Mexican brought a saddle. The boy glared at him hotly. "This isn't the saddle, and you know it!"

Venida interfered. "That is all very well for you to say, but the fact remains, my friend, that your performance in the ring would only be burlesque. As a matador no one would expect skill, only courage. I felt from the first that with you it was courage alone that was lacking. If you wish to back out I will so advise the newspapers, giving the true reason, of course."

The boy threw out a hand in a helpless gesture of submission. The wild anger in the blood-smeared face dropped to a set mournfulness. The draggled figure slumped, turned away.

In their hired car, a half hour later, the boy and the dancer were streaming

rapidly along the desert, back toward the town. Hard and flinty ran the road among the shale. On either hand black, gloomy rock, scattered wide with grim largesse, piled itself up oppressively toward the distant mountains. What growth there was was harsh, weird, distorted, unbeautiful—Spanish bayonet and giant saguaro cactus, tall, gaunt, spectral and blackened and gnawed by a million worms.

The boy drove silently his face ahead, dead white. Beside him the girl sat quietly, stealing furtive glances at him, terribly concerned.

All at once, along the trail among the hills, a little flat opened up. It held a starved little mongrel ranch with a wretched 'dobe ranch house cocked at the sun like the blind pupil of a helpless, lidless eye. The boy turned out, as though impulsively, and stopped.

He faced the girl passionately. Sweeping a hand at the pitiable desolation, he burst into speech. "This is it! This is the sort of thing that was squeezing the life out of me up there. Up in my country there was more feed, of course, but even there a few extra tufts of grass, another inch of water in the cattle tanks, were gifts from God Almighty."

Now his pale blue eyes were blazing into hers with all the burning hurt of youth.

"It's a crime against God to expect to develop life, young, human life in a place like that. And I wanted to live! *live!* My father is rich. Yet there were times when I went all starved inside, for life, for sound, for color. In the spring, when the poppies came rushing down the ravines and out upon the opens, I used to want to go out and roll in them, they dragged at me so. As a kid I used to tear my hands all to pieces trying to cut the tall cactus blossoms to get some real color right into my grasp. And the first day we had a little graphophone that my mother got out of my father, I had to go out and hide in the feed ricks, I cried so hard from just hearing it play."

He choked and began again huskily. "And I was two years a man before I ever saw any one dance. That—that's why you've been so wonderful."

Beside him the girl turned away. She was seeing the grim, grisly, desert world through a swimming haze.

And in a moment she was shaking her head compassionately. "I know, boy. I've been all through it. I felt the same way. With me there was life all round, but I guess it was my spirit got cramped. My people were old-generation hard shells. I wanted to be young, to play, to dance. They throttled it. So I lit out same as you. And for a couple of years I've been all through what you call 'life,' and it isn't life at all. It's just a merry-go-round, with a machine to make it go, and rotten lights and rottener noise. There have been times when I've had to fight—hard—to hold onto my courage.

"Way up in the States I've got a dad who's a small-time preacher. He's little and old and poor, but he's known life. Poor old dear, if he knew his daughter was cruising greaser honka-tonks he'd want to make them let him into heaven right away!"

In the girl's face, turned toward his now, was tenderness, great compassion. But she was shaking her head, sadly. "In some ways you're wrong, kid," she said. "Every human animal needs something to anchor to. You must go back home and start square."

He came back bluntly, savagely. "I can't. Without the money my father would jail me—and love to. To him I'm a common thief. And then—I'd be losing you."

Her face leaped alight. "What—what has that got to do with it?"

"I've followed you half over Mexico the last two months. I'm not going to leave you now!"

She stared at him long. Then: "You didn't follow *me*. You followed a few red rags, and some dance hokum that's supposed to be seductive." She looked away, as though carelessly, but her hands were trembling.

"I followed *you!* So has that damned greaser, Venida. He knows I followed you. That's why he's after me."

There came a tremulous little cry, almost a sob. "Oh, boy! I guess I *have* known about it. I've seen you and wondered. And I've danced just for you alone so many times that I've been ashamed, to myself. And last night, when I saw you——"

He had dropped the wheel and was gripping her hands. "Say—say, do you mean it? Then—— Good Lord, I've *got* to start square! I've *got* to win that money! I *can't* squeal now!"

A stifled moment he held her; and then the car roared out upon the road.

In town an hour later young McKenzie burst in upon the Mexican like a thunderbolt. He broke forth into Venida's astonished face abruptly. "You've been talking to me about courage, Venida!" His voice swept up to a passionate protest of youth. "Damn you, I'll show you about courage! I've got barrels of it now! You needn't bother to stuff the newspapers with anything more about me and my squealing on your bull fight. For I'm going in!"

The bull ring opened to the sky a vast flower of color. About its mighty chalice, color ebbed and flowed continuously; color waxed and waned in great splotches; color was alive. Streaks of flame, which was the finery of women, ran vividly through dull black, which was the garb of men. Knots and splashes of white, of green, of purple collected and were shattered. At the bottom of all, the smooth-raked sand glittered beneath the sun, a hot, gleaming arena of gold. And the living chalice hummed. Up along its splendid, variegated sides swept a constant murmur, as of a million bees seeking sweets about its gorgeous, golden heart.

A trumpet sounded a sonorous summons. The humming took on an expectant clangor. From beneath the seats a brilliant pageant entered the ring, a splendid retinue afoot. Came two imperial matadors of dignity; came banderilleros like spangled performers in a circus; came picadors mounted on grotesque mounts, with stovepipe armor incasing scarecrow legs; then chulos bearing flaming capes of scarlet, of vermillion. And now the clangor burst into a derisive roar. A small, sheepish-looking band of amateurs followed in, participants trying to appear gay, careless, at ease. And at their head walked a blond young American, with the sun glinting on his smooth-brushed yellow hair as on a golden crown.

The entry halted, saluted, and filed out. The fight was on.

In one of the half-lit retiring rooms underneath the tiers McKenzie sat and waited his turn. It was as though he were gripped in a dream from which he could not awake. That he was to fight an animal, to kill, was a perpetual nightmare. At the same time he *had* to win. The week past had been a grueling hell of frenzied training, of preparation. In despair he had looked up an old-time retired bullfighter and with him had spent long hours in a desperate training.

And it was all pretty hopeless. The kindly old matador could impart but little skill to a novice. He could only strive to fix in the boy's mind the one little area high in the bull's neck where he might thrust downward to reach the heart. And McKenzie had worked cruel hours with his *espada* to train and strengthen his wrist. And all the while every fiber in him cringed away

from the thought of torturing a poor, baited beast—a creature which gradually took on an odd reality in his mind, became a bull that wore a white star on his forehead and an odd white band about his silken black tail—became the magnificent young stock bull, Pedro, of his own. And he could not cast the fancy off.

The girl, Joyce Adams, had been wonderful. Consequently the Mexican had come to vent his hatred of McKenzie openly. And a strange thing had happened. A few days ago McKenzie felt sure he had seen Venida with a man who looked like Laflin, from the home ranch. The incident puzzled McKenzie. The coupling of these two together, even in imagination, gave him a foreboding chill. But he kept on grimly, seeing no way out. And up to the very last hour had the situation kept closing in like a trap. Earlier in the day a carful of jubilant youths from his agricultural college drawn to the Easter fiesta, had learned of his part in things and had descended on him with wild acclaim. And not half an hour ago one of them had given him the news that his father also was in the town, on some errand or other —hard, set, unyielding.

Thus stood events.

A swift-running crackle of applause overhead ignited the silence to a roar. The retiring room opened on the runway leading from the ring, and as McKenzie looked out, a pair of mules came tramping sturdily along down the runway from the arena dragging out the first slaughtered bull. And McKenzie could not keep his eyes off it—a limply undulating red-and-white thing of blood and flesh, adorned with a deadly garniture of gay rosettes and tinsel darts.

The sole other American amateur, a seedy-looking individual of leathern face and with the hopelessly bowed legs of the cowman, asked McKenzie for a light. "Have you looked over our bull?" the fellow asked.

"No."

"Well, I don't want to throw a scare into you, but from what I learn they've stacked the cards on us amateurs. There's something doing I can't make out. For our performance they've run in a critter you seldom see in this country. He's the slickest brute I ever saw off the pampas. If he wasn't sired out of hell, in Andalusia, I'm a ground hog. And I can't figure the answer."

In a flash McKenzie was seeing Venida, was sensing his crafty hatred. "I can," he said shortly.

Another great, stormy uproar, and again McKenzie's eyes sought the runway. A humping bull of white, limp, lean, tragically clownlike, was being dragged past; and McKenzie knew the next bull would be theirs.

Up in the arena, following the shrill trumpet calling for a fresh entry, there befell on the whole bull ring a great dead silence. And then this silence suddenly exploded into a splendid uproar that rent the heavens, ripped into sharply by hoarse excited individual outcries of intense admiration. A magnificent animal, such as had never been seen there before, soared out to the arena from the darkened pens beneath the tiers. A superb black creature with head defiantly erect, a white star on his forehead, and a curious white band about his silky black tail.

Leaning over the runway into the ring, a galvanic Mexican had driven a barbed rosette decorated with colored streamers deep into the beast's shoulder, where it would engage the joint. And in maddened, eccentric leaps the brute shot in upon the sand, careening furiously here and there, endeavoring to dislodge the barb. He swerved from his course to make for the darting chulos, flaunting their vivid red capes so torturing to the darkness-accustomed eyes, and scattered them igno-

miniously. Here, there, everywhere—he was power and hurtling force incarnate, and he never ceased his furious pursuits until every last frightened chulo was perched safely on the arena wall.

The trumpet summoned. The arena gates again flashed open. The crowbait mounts of the amateur picadors were lashed through. The blindfolded nags danced nervously up and down in one spot. The bull shot toward the first. The rider set his pike. It ripped across the bull's forehead. He shook his splendid black head. Again. The pike caught in the tendons of his shoulder. He overturned this horse. He tossed the other. But already was one foreleg hopelessly impaired.

It was here that Kim McKenzie, bearing his short steel *espada* wrapped in its sinister red-lined cape, came out from the retiring room to the arena. He gave one glance over into the ring—and his heart for one dead instant stopped beating. The bull was his own bull, Pedro, from his father's ranch.

Stunned by the ringside, the boy knew himself turning all man—all man *animal*. He felt himself whirling in a flame of such wrath as he had never known. He made for the wall and leaped over into the arena, moved only toward rescue. But already were the banderilleros in action, poising their long, tinseled darts nervously before the rushing bull. McKenzie halted and hoped with all his soul that they would be killed. He prayed for it, madly. The bull was hurtling for the first. The dartsman had nerve. With unbelievable luck he placed both his banderillas in the bull's neck and sprang away. The second man was not so skillful, and the bull, man, and a half dozen attendants became involved in a writhing, knotting tangle across the ring.

McKenzie sprang forward, crazed. He ran swiftly out upon that sand, and stood, an odd, glittering figure, in the glare. A great thick silence had settled down, held him, buried him. Across the ring the bull was coursing free, and now, noting fully his injuries, McKenzie knew with a great awed stillness settling within him that the greatest kindness he could show would be to bring the animal speedy death. The bull was a macabre creature. The various implements of his torture were distinguishing him like decorations of death. He had come out of the last encounter with three long, streamered darts dangling from his neck, flirting and brandishing cruelly with every movement. When he halted, panting and slobbering and rumbling, he stood unsteadily on one foreleg. But his head was still high, his eyes blazing green emeralds of defiance.

The white-faced young fighter approached like a mechanical man of steel. The great black contestant began shaking his head hugely, trying to clear his eyes from the flowing blood. He sensed a new torturer across the ring and made toward him, moving limpingly.

In the next five minutes Kim McKenzie seemed actually less man than automaton. There was a terrific tenseness. Gripped in his motive to dispatch the tortured brute as speedily as possible, his body seemed to be actually fighting apart from his mind. And the circle of activity became small. It was like fighting death on a plate. Head down, the half-blinded creature would hurl his whole bulk toward the man in swift, deadly leaps. But the man, steel-cold, would spring aside. The bull would wheel upon him violently, his feet flinging the dust. The man would elude death by a sinuous move of the waist. There came an instant with the bull poised before the extended cape, when suddenly, with a soft, gurgling rumble, he lowered his head to sniff the matador's shoes, as though in sudden recognition.

His heart crying out upon him, the matador lunged. And the bull dropped.

McKenzie shot from that frenzied, rocking arena on a run.

At the rear exit some one gripped him by the arm, was saying tensely: "So it was you who stole the bull—to butcher him down here?" And McKenzie's flaming eyes were staring into the coldly angry face of his father.

"Let me go!" he ground out furiously, and ripped away.

He rushed across to the Mexican, Venida, who was trying hurriedly to mount a horse. McKenzie pulled him to the ground, drove for him with both fists, and fought him through the struggling crowd until his back was against the arena walls. He cried out wildly into the purpling face: "You stole that bull, and he belonged to me."

"No! No, señor! A man named Laflin came and offered him! Said this bull would be the very one to develop your nerve! But I—I didn't know, please——"

"Well, you're going to pay me five hundred dollars for the bull, and my slaughter fee besides, or I'm going to kill you right here!"

A moment later McKenzie wheeled and spoke to the tall rancher standing, dazed looking now, at the edge of the crowd. He was still a man far from himself, his blue eyes seemed almost white in their intensity.

"I'm not turning bullfighter," the young man said. "I had to fight, or run away from—everything. And even you would have wanted the bull out of his misery. Here's the money I took. How much more do you want?"

But the man had gripped him oddly by both arms and was staring at him now in a way that struck the crowd to silence. "No money can figure between a man and his son when he's as proud of him as I am of you. Can't you come back, son, and start square?"

The boy stared back as though coming slowly out from a spell. And in a moment the man like blued steel within him had melted to a boy again. And his eyes were blinking, as he said: "I've already started square—a couple of weeks ago. Come, I'll show you the answer."

Around front Joyce Adams was waiting in a little hired car. When his son had finished speaking, Dan McKenzie spoke very gravely into the earnest dark eyes of the girl.

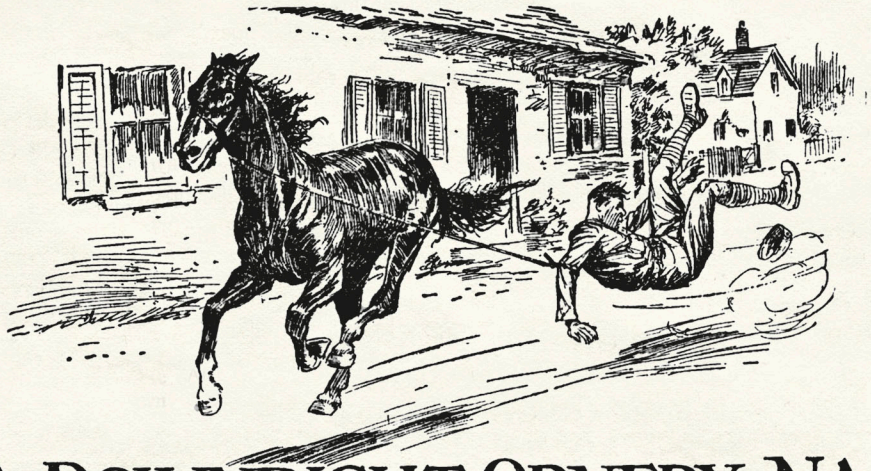
"I see where you've found a *man* in my son."

The girl laughed and glanced at Kim with shining eyes of pride. "The man was always there, but"—looking back at Kim's father brightly—"sometimes a woman can see it where a man cannot."

"Maybe you're right. Anyhow, I don't want to lose him now. And besides"—a trifle ominously—"I'm going to need a man to take Laflin's place. Can't Kim come back? And can't—can't you fix it, somehow, to come along with us?"

Young McKenzie laughed. "All right, dad. You can pick us up 'round sundown. And there'll be no need of any fixing. We'll be married by then."

Watch these pages for other stories by Will Beale.



A DOWNRIGHT ORNERY NAG

By Hal Borland

The tempestuous adventures of "Hairpin Mike" and the meanest horse in the army

CROOKED? Sure it's crooked! If you blasted flying birdies had of been where us of the One Hundred and Third was, Buddy, your arms would of been crooked, too. And your necks, too; and maybe your backs. But no, you birdies had to be sitting in a safe little seat with perfectly good wings and a two-hundred-horse-power engine to haul your wagon through nothing but air.

You lucky devil!

And us, we was down in the rain, with wagons of dunnage that rode in the mud like garbage scows on the North River—and nothing but equines to haul 'em. Nothing but horses, and a smattering of mules, damn their long ears!

Aw, the arm? Well, it was crookeder once. So crooked the boys called me "Hairpin Mike." And if my wife—she was my sweetie back here in little old New York then—if she'd of seen me then—well, I'd of got the air for good. She give me fair warning before I started away.

Shell? Naw. Shell'd of probably took it clean off and left me alone, a kind of a decent-looking cripple. Naw, it was a hoof—a great, big, black, ornery hoof. And a horse was on the other end of it. Yeah, one hell of a horse.

What say? Naw, let's just sit and smoke a while. The waiter'll git hay fever from wanting to get us out and get paying customers in. But let him sneeze. Sure, I smoke 'em. Thanks. Got a match about you?

We was at remount station when I first met the devil. He was right fresh from the country. Them damn government buyers was sent out, I guess, just to see what a wild lot of critters they could run in on us. One or two of that batch was harness broke—I heard about 'em, but never seen 'em. Half a dozen knowed enough about a saddle to run when they seen one coming. And the

rest of 'em was said to be broke to lead. But hell! If old Hammerhead was broke to lead, French mud is good slum.

I drawed the devil—my usual luck—along with a pair of rawboned bays that curried like a washboard, and another black with a temper like one of those opry singers.

But they was fairly decent. A week or so and I had 'em leading on the end of a rope, tame as puppy dogs. And they got so it only took an hour or so to harness 'em, with a little help.

But old Hammerhead—well, right off he rope-burned my hands so I had to answer sick call for a week.

Marie Louise—that's my wife; she was my sweetie then—Marie Louise, she heard about it, and she laid down the law to me proper like.

"Mike," she says, "you're in the army now. You're going to learn something—maybe. But just you listen to mamma, big boy in uniform: You're going to France, and you're going to wear back one of them Victorian Crosses or whatever they are. Maybe you're going to get shot while you're over there. But just listen, big boy: If you get a little finger bit off by a hungry dog in training camp, don't come whining to your Marie Louise and say, 'I got a wound stripe.' Cause Marie Louise won't swallow it. See? If you get hurt, get hurt good and plenty. If I got to tell my kids their daddy got shot in the war, I ain't going to tell 'em he got shot with a BB gun. And if you get your nose caved in from a horse's hoof—well, that ain't the kind of a war wound my kids' daddy is going to have. Get your nose shot off, get your ears shot off, get a leg shot off—and you'll find Marie Louise waiting for you with open arms. Come back with a dog bite or a cat scratch—and you'll find a cold, cold shoulder."

That was Marie Louise's verdict, Buddy.

Well, after that I didn't think nothing at all about the rope burn. And it really wasn't nothing at all—just the beginning. Next thing, Hammerhead takes a piece out of my scalp with them long, yellow teeth of his. And when I got over that what does he do but slam me in the ribs, cracking five or six and hardly benefiting the rest of 'em. But I wouldn't of minded even that so very much, only he done it with his front feet—couldn't *kick* me, like a decent, self-respecting army horse, but had to *strike*, like a lousy, sneaking, long-eared mule—damn 'em!

But my hands healed up, and so did my head, and the ribs didn't show when I seen Marie Louise. Everything was Jake.

By the end of the month I had learned old Hammerhead pretty near as much as a good horse picks up the first day. He led fair to middling; he come like a subway train when there was oats to be had; he was pretty good at standing still; and I could harness him in an hour and a half, with good luck.

With the harness I had to step like a cat. Toss it on him a little too hard, and you picked it up in a mess forty feet away. Buckle the bellyband snug, and you got a wallop on the jaw or thereabouts with a hind foot. Get in a hurry about jerking the bit between his teeth, and you likely lost a finger. See that scar? Well, I got in a hurry one morning.

But if the devil was slow learning about harness and such, he sure made up for it learning the bugle calls. The smartest rookie I ever seen couldn't come anywhere near Hammerhead. Second morning in camp he answered reveille with a squawk like a jackass, and it wasn't no time at all till he knowed five minutes beforehand when orders was coming to fall out. He was the smartest bonehead I ever seen, bar none—that Hammerhead horse.

Well, anyway, things drifted along

for another month or so, and I got to kind of like the old devil. You know how it is, don't you? Downright ornery, always trying to get a crack at you, but kind of likable, anyhow. Well, that was Hammerhead all over, Buddy. I had to watch every move of them ornery black feet of his, and I had to whale him over the nose with a club a few times to part his long yellow teeth from my collar bone, but all in all we got to be right friendly. I wasn't feeding him sugar, and he wasn't nuzzling sweet kisses into his big daddy's ear; but I guess if he'd of up and died or been transferred somewhere else I'd of missed him pretty bad.

About then we got moved down to embarkation camp. I was still a friend of Hammerhead's. Then one morning, like a dumb Irishman, I got careless, and he reminded me that we hadn't never signed no armistice, me and him. See that scar? Well, he took about four inches of skin off of my jaw, right there, with them long, yellow teeth of his.

I cussed him. I pleaded with him. I cussed him some more. Then I massaged him with a hickory singletree. After that I looked in the mirror, thought about what Marie Louise had said, and staggered off to the infirmary.

He was pretty good after that. Better'n I expected, in fact. He kicked the top soak through the side of the stable. But all I cussed him for was his bad judgment—he shouldn't of wasted a wallop like that on nothing less'n a shavetail. And he busted out a couple of feed boxes, trying to get after a drafted corporal. But I didn't start nothing. Old Hammerhead was just growing a regular army soul.

What? Nope, waiter, nothing more —not a thing.

He thinks he can ease us out like that, eh, Buddy? Got another match? Thanks! Reminds me of a waiter once in Brest. He was the——

Oh, yeah. Well, we sailed about the middle of June in an old Hudson River night boat they'd loaded with baled straw and called a transport. The best bunks they give to the horses, the next best to the mules—damn 'em!—and the worst of the lot they give us sodjers.

For two days everything was sweet enough. Then it stormed.

Buddy, when it storms on land you flying birdies just skin right up above it, don't you? And when it stormed on your way across, you just skinned right up to your bunks, didn't you?

Well, when it storms on land us poor devils just sticks with the equines—and when I says stick, I don't mean it no other way but just *stick*. In the mud. In the slop. In the fields. Anywheres. We just stick.

And when it stormed on the way across we done the same thing—we went down with the horsies, and we stuck with 'em.

Ever see a seasick horse? Well, don't go looking for none, Bud. They're a sight. And what's worse, they're a active sight.

It wouldn't be so terrible, just sitting and watching 'em suffer, but when you got to get right in among 'em—say, Buddy, steer clear of seasick horses on a transport.

Two of the skinners got it in the neck in the first hour after the storm got started. One got a busted leg. Mule kicked him. Other one lost an ear and a lot of whisker-soil. Horse got a little excited and thought he was a ear of corn.

I got out whole, after I used a pitchfork on Hammerhead.

That storm lasted three days. And it was three days in hell with a overcoat. The third day I stepped up alongside Hammerhead a little too sudden, and about that time a wave hit that decorated Noah's Ark they called a transport. I put out my hand to steady myself, reaching for the nearest thing—

Hammerhead's ribs. I knowed I was acting foolish when I done it, and I cooed at the old devil like a coed.

Zowie! Down I went. Hammerhead had connected. I'd made a false step and he'd made a bull's-eye. And when the rest of the boys untangled him and me and the pitchfork, I had a right arm that didn't quite track. The old devil had landed square on it the first pop, and then when I went down he cut loose with them front feet. By the time the doc got through counting he had found six separate and distinct fractures of my right forearm, besides a few minor cracks, splinters, warpings, and cockeyed kinks.

Well, he tied it up the best he could with the old tub rolling like a washing machine, and he sent me off to the cootie-hatch they called my bunk.

And within a hour after they put me to bed, the storm quit! Yes, sir; the sea was as calm as a dill pickle. Not even a little ripple. Just the minute I got out of nursing them poor, dear seasick equines, the ocean quit kicking.

Couple of days later I ducked down to the horses' palatial quarters, to cuss old Hammerhead and not let him get lonesome. And the minute he seen me coming, he made for me. He was the glad hand itself—only he was mostly long, yellow teeth, from where I was looking at him.

Well, I forgot for a minute just what had happened to me, and I give him the old glad hand right back. I give the old devil a dear, loving wallop right across the nose. And I rolled back into a corner squealing like a stuck piggy. I'd caressed him with that bum wing of mine. Finally I got to my feet, and staggered back up to my bunk. And when I'd fainted a couple of times more I straightened the bandages the best I could and called it good.

Don't care if I do have another'ne. Thanks.

Well, we landed at Brest finally. And next day an old doc by the name of Mahoney pulled the bandages off of my arm.

"My God, Mike!" he says. "What did they use for splints on you? Hairpins?"

I squinted down at the old paw, and she did look kind of strange, even to me. But at first I laid it to the scrawny look she'd took on from having them bandages on all that time. So I grins and says:

"Naw, doc. She's all right. I can still swing a bull whip. And my vocal cords is still working. I'm still a pretty good skinner, doc."

And after while he lets me go. But I got to thinking about it. And I got a letter from Marie Louise. And the more I thought, the more I cussed. And the more I cussed, the more I thought—about old Hammerhead. Here I was, not even within a hundred miles of a real war, and all bunged up already.

And it was plain as day that that cockeyed arm wasn't no result of no shell nor shrapnel. It was just a plain, everyday compounded fracture produced by a equine devil named Hammerhead. No wound stripes for Mike for such things as that. Nothing but a cockeyed arm, a mean job getting a shirt on and off—if I ever got back where I *could* take it off again—and a cold, cold shoulder from the only girl in the world.

A week or so later, when we'd moved on up the line a little ways, I found some more reason to cuss. There was a kink in the arm somehow, and I couldn't swing the harness quite right, and I couldn't get into my jacket like a nominal sodjer ought to, and I couldn't salute the way they all told me to. My saluting was like a chicken trying to clap its hands that it ain't got.

And then I got another letter from Marie Louise, and she says, "Be careful of them horses, Mike. I kind of got a hunch you ain't treating yourself right, or something."

So just the minute I got around a medical corps I copped a orderly and asked him where I'd find a good, kind doc.

"See that guy over there—that captain?" he says. "The one with a face like a apple and legs like a chorus girl. Well, he's a good guy. Ask him what you want."

Well, I goes to Captain Apple-face and I says, "Say, doc, I got a meat hook here I'd like made into a arm again. It's inconvenient as hell at chow time, and my dear, beloved, black-souled equine son of Satan that done it for me don't like the way it makes me drop the harness on his fat, silky back."

The doc takes a look at my flesh-and-bone corkscrew.

"Sure," he says, "I can fix it."

"How?" says I, a bit leery of that grin on his mug.

"Bust it again and set it over," says he.

"Like hell," says I. "Not even if 'twas tied in a bow knot you wouldn't."

"Suits me," says the doc. "I got a week's work ahead rebuilding a couple of shavetails, anyway," And off he went.

'Twasn't long after that we begun moving chow up for the marines that was fighting in the Argonne sector. Rain every morning, noon and night, with a couple of showers thrown in for good measure. It was one mud hole after another, and as fast as we got the wagons out of one swamp they dropped into the next one. Then the Heinies got to dropping shells closer and closer, and at last we was driving the wagons right through a twenty-four-hour barrage.

The first few shells that went over, whistling like they did, old Hammerhead just throwed up his head and listened. He'd learned whistle signals just as quick as he learned the bugle calls, and he thought them shells and their singing had something to do with orders.

And say, Bud, they did, didn't they? But old Hammerhead didn't get that "lay low" stuff out of their whistling for a couple of days. He always was dumb, like I said before.

Then the shells begun to drop closer and closer, and just when we was beginning to get used to 'em—zowie! one of 'em dropped right in the middle of the outfit right ahead of us.

Just one great, big, roaring bang. Then I was wiping the mud out of my eyes and wondering why all the bells was ringing; and there stood my horses, shivering like a bunch of hootchie-kootchie dancers. And ahead of us, where the other outfit had been, was a wagon tire, three cans of Willie, and a hole ten feet deep. Maybe there was a few harness buckles, too.

"Aha!" I says to myself. "You pretty near got that cockeyed arm busted, Mike, so the doc could fix it right and you'd get a honest-to-God wound stripe at the same time. Better luck next time." And we pulled around the crater and drove on.

Half an hour later another one dropped just a little ways off to the right and I got a hole through my tarpaulin. And before daylight we had a couple more chances, and lost out both times by five or ten feet. And all the next day we watched 'em bust and hit some one else.

We was safe. Hoodooed, it looked like. I begun to think I was doomed to have a crooked arm all my life. But I said a few prayers, anyway.

That sort of luck kept up a week. The shells dropped all around us. The skinner right in front of me got both arms broke in one day, and the shell that hit him landed all of fifty yards away. But there I'd ride with a shell searing my whiskers and one warming my pants, and never a sliver touching me.

Then it come. It was a freak, like a lot of 'em. A whizz-bang come a-siz-

zling over, and we ducked, out of habit, and I says to myself, "Another prayer unanswered." Then there was a roar, and I seemed to be riding a cloud, and I says "Wrong again, Mike. This is the answer." And I looked down and seen a cloud of white smoke, and out of it something big and black went streaking off to my right like an express train.

Then I knew I was coming down, and I squirmed around, getting that cockeyed arm underneath. If she hadn't been hit by a sliver I was going to land on her and bust her again, and give the doc a chance.

Ker-SPLASH!

What did I do but land soft in a shell hole half full of water!

I cussed, and then I picked the mud out of my eyes and ears. And then I swum to shore. And then I cussed good and proper.

Well, I finally hiked back to where I'd left my outfit. There wasn't much to go back to—both the bays had been killed outright. The front of the wagon looked like a big, dull knife had sliced it right off. One of the blacks was still standing there, on the edge of the hole the shell made, ten feet deep. And the black didn't have so much as a scratch, and even his harness was just like I left it, to the buckle. He was too scared to move.

But alongside of him there was a big empty spot—Hammerhead was gone.

"Blowed back to hell, to his maker," I says to myself. But when I looked and I didn't even find so much as a scrap of hair, I remembered that black streak I seen when I was on my way down.

And I says, "All I hope is that he turns up right alongside of Sergeant Abe Cohen, that laughed when the devil busted my arm." And that was that.

But that night some son of a cockeyed sea cook rustled around in the swamps somewhere, and before I even got the water wrung out of my pants and shirt, I had three mules on my hands—three low-down, sneaking, biting, striking, lazy, good-for-nothing Missouri jackasses. And I was ordered to harness the devils and hitch 'em onto a wagon where the skinner had went west with his team when a shell dropped in for lunch.

The first day or so I figured maybe it was Providence taking a hand in the matter—getting rid of that good-for-nothing Hammerhead and sending me three mules in his place. But the mules started in like they'd have not only my crooked arm broke, but my neck broke, too, before I got out of the war. One of 'em kicked me over a stone wall the second day, and I landed—not on my bum arm—no such luck—I landed on my head, on a rock. I busted six pup-tent poles on the long-eared son of Satan in the next week. Then I got my good arm done up in a sling. The longest-eared, orneriest of the jackasses stuck his teeth into it and forgot to take 'em out till I'd punctured his pelt with a pitchfork.

Couple of weeks I laid around without doing much but loaf at the emergency hospital. Down there I run onto Doc Apple-face again, and he says right off of the bat:

"Say, Hairpin, when you going to let me straighten that cockeyed arm of yours?"

"When General Pershing gives a tea for the Kaiser and plays 'The Watch on the Rhine' on a piccolo," I says.

The doc just grins. "Your time's coming," he says.

He was right.

Next day they brought up a batch of mail, and I had a couple of letters from Marie Louise. In one she says she wants to know what's happened to my writing—it looks cockeyed, she says, like I got hurt in the arm. And in the other one she says she knows if I got hurt it wasn't no bullet, or I'd of said

so. And she says if I let a lousy mule bite me she's through with me for good.

"There's too many real heroes around," she says, "for me to waste my time on any unfortunate stable hand. So be careful, honey," she ends up. "I loved you when I seen you last. Don't disappoint me when I see you again."

Well, after reading them letters, I begun to feel an awful big pain in that arm the mule—damn 'im—bit. So I went over to the hospital and found the doc, and he looks at it and says:

"Don't look so good, Hairpin. A little infection." And he goes and gets some kind of liquid fire and pours on it.

Well, that flaming fluid, or the letters, or the worry, or something seemed to knock me off of my base. Anyway, when the doc asked me again when he could fix that arm, I up and says:

"Right now!"

Before the words was dried on my lips there he was with a wad of cotton and a can of ether. And before I could change my mind, there I was flat on my back, floating off into space, it seemed like, and him saying over and over, "It won't take but a little while, Hairpin. Just a little while."

He'd just got to wavering in front of me—I was just about gone, when——

Whammmmm! A shell dropped in our front yard.

I thought it was all part of my dream. The doc and the wad of cotton and the ether can all disappeared. The shelter we was in disappeared. Nothing was left but me and the sky and a great, big, loud ringing in my ears.

It must of been half an hour before I really come to. Then I rolled over, and looked right down into a shell hole. Finally I found the doc under a cot fifty yards away. The blast had throwed him that far, and the cot on top of him. He wasn't hurt much—just a few bruises and a wallop on the head where he landed on a stone. And the first thing he said when he come to was:

"When am I going to get at that cockeyed arm, Hairpin?"

"When a frog general kisses the crown prince," I says, "and gives him a croix de guerre."

Now, listen, waiter. We're two gentlemen having a chat over our cigars and coffee. And we don't like to be bothered by hash-slingers. And, waiter, bring me a match—a *box* of matches.

Well, about two months later we got moved up into a hot sector. There'd been a see-saw scrap going on—now we had it, now the Heinies had it, and now nobody had it. Well, it seemed they was moving a bunch of marines in quiet-like, and then all of a sudden there came orders for us to move up to a little town they called Izzy Malone, or something like that.

Up we went, under cover of night. Seemed to me then like we was going right out into No Man's Land almost every step, but we kept on and on and I knew we was awful close to the German lines.

Then we pulled up in Izzy Malone, without so much as a match to guide us. Black as that coffee. We unspanned in the dark, hiding the wagons in the ruins. There wasn't a dozen houses left standing over about twenty blocks of ground. I seen later. But that night it seemed like everywhere I stepped—in a wrecked barn, out in the street, or in a blasted grape garden—everywhere I walked on marines.

Finally I found me a little pile of straw in a barn and laid down to sleep. And I'm telling you, I was pretty damned sick of the war. I'd just had a letter from Marie Louise, and she wasn't none too cordial. A lot of the boys was being invalided home, and with their wound stripes and citations and all—and me with that cockeyed arm. Well, I was feeling pretty rotten.

And then I got to thinking about old Hammerhead, and wondering about him. He was a devil. He was worse

and dumber than all the rest of the horses I ever seen put together. But he was just like a ornery, freckle-faced Irish kid that sticks a tack on your chair—you sure missed him when he was gone.

It didn't seem like more than half an hour after I laid down when some son of a half-wit stepped on my stomach. Then he stepped on my arm, and I sat up and throwed somebody's excavation shovel at him. Then I started telling how dearly I loved him—and he turned around and I seen he had two silver bars on his shoulder. Captain. Then I seen a red-apple face and a grin I knew by heart, and I went right on with my speech. He was the doc that got knocked on his head when he tried to fix my corkscrew arm. He always was showing up where he wasn't wanted.

I hadn't even laid down again when I heard a couple of saps talking outside, loud as if it was noon hour in the subway here at home.

"Sure," says one, "it's a service horse. Branded like all the rest they sent over from the States."

"Where'd he come from?" asks the other'ne.

"Damn if I know. The old froggie says he woke up a couple of months ago and found this *cheval* standing there in his house and eating his mattress."

"What's he look like?"

"Long-legged, boney, black, with a nose on him like Abe Cohen's beak. About as hard a looking piece of horseflesh as I've seen."

"Ain't mine, I guess."

I crawled out of my straw pile and out to where them two guys was gassing.

"What's this about a hammer-headed horse I hear you bozos saying?" I asks. And a lanky sergeant that talks like he's got a mouthful of hot soup tells me what he's seen and heard.

I hears him out with a grunt or two. Finally I asks, "Kind of ornery, is he?"

"You said it!" says the sergeant.

"Why all the worry?" asks Soupface.

"I just wanted to know. I'm interested."

"Lose a horse like that?"

"Something."

"Was he a black? And did he carry the U. S. brand?"

"Hell, no!" says I. "He was red, green and yellow, and he was branded with the kaiser's coat of arms!"

It was just getting daylight, and I went around and squatted down alongside the ruins where I'd tried to sleep. It was Hammerhead, all right. And I was homesicker for the old devil than ever. I had half a notion to hike out right then and find him. All I'd got out of this war, anyhow, was a cockeyed arm, a lot of lousy jobs, poor grub, no bed—and I'd lost my girl, it begun to look like. If I was to go back with a cockeyed arm and try to horn in on them guys with wound stripes and citations—well, you see how it was.

I guess I set there half an hour, and it was pretty near daylight. The marines begun to show up. A dozen of 'em stuck their heads around the corner of a ruin next door and watched me, laughing to themselves. Then on down the line another bunch of heads appeared. And still more.

Then a shavetail and half a dozen bucks come around the corner, and he called a dozen more marines from somewhere, and in a minute there was a couple of squads of 'em standing there, and the looie was talking fast and big, while the marines looked ready to beat it back where they come from.

BLOOIE! PING, ping, ping, tut-tut-tut-tut!

The looie and the marines was gone. And out where they'd been standing there was five bodies laying that was living sodjers a couple of seconds before.

Somewhere out front there was a nest of Heinie machine gunners—maybe a

whole regiment of 'em! They'd snuck up in the night and took up position in some of the ruins across the village. This was a sweet pickle! And somebody was going to catch hell when headquarters heard about it. But right now everybody that moved was liable to catch hot lead!

Little Willie was on the far, and safe, side of the barn when he looked at his feet again. So was about thirty marines.

And then what should that damn fool looie do but stick his head out from around a tree thirty yards out front, away off from even any of the ruins! Not only that, but he pulled out his little tin whistle and began to tootle! He tootled reveille. He tootled mess. He twittered to the colors. He finally hit assembly and kept on tootling assembly. *Tootle-de-tweet tweet! Tootle-de-tweet tweet!*

Crack-crack-crack! Put-put, put-put, put-put!

They cut loose with another volley from them Heinie machine guns. He'd give himself dead away. They knew they had him cornered. Slivers flew from all around that tree, and leaves come squattering down at him.

Suddenly I shivered like that looie must of been shivering. I heard a sound I'd heard before. Something like a cross between a bull bellowing and a woman coming with a rolling pin. And I turned around, knowing to a T what was up—and hoping and praying that it wasn't—and still hoping it was.

Well, it was, all right. The looie's whistling had did the work. Hammerhead was *assembling!* Out of a barn about twenty yards away he come, like a black cyclone cloud. He come a couple of jumps, them long ears laid back and them yellow teeth stuck out like tombstones. Then he stopped and looked around.

I'll never forget that look when he spotted me if I live to be as old as Methuselah. His eyes got downright green, and his teeth stuck out more than ever.

Then he come right for me.

The first thing I could lay my hands on was a great big trench knife sticking in a marine's belt alongside of me. I just had time to grab it in my good left hand.

Then Hammerhead arrived. He made for me with his teeth. I tried to jump back. And as he tore past, missing me with them ivories, he made a pass at me with his hoofs. All that in a wink. And I was trying to jump back, and somebody's feet was in the way. I stumbled. And as I went, I naturally throwed up my arms.

Bam! I must of hooked onto a hurricane. My feet left the ground! My old right arm like to got jerked out of its socket! I flew!

Well, it turned out old Hammerhead had a rope on his neck, and there was a loop in the far end of it. When he made for me, the loop was swinging free. When he tore past, that loop caught me, and dropped over my cock-eyed arm like it would over a hook! There I was, like the fish catcher that hooked a whale!

The first time I hit the ground I seen that looie that caused it all. I was right alongside of him. And he was white as a flock of bandages. The next time I hit was twenty yards farther on. After that I only touched bottom once or twice more. And that right arm was numb clean into my heart.

With me bouncing on the end of the rope, Hammerhead was scared to death. He went across that ruined town like a subway train headed for Times Square at two o'clock in the morning. And he headed right for a shell-shattered old barn about five hundred yards from where he started. Any port in a storm, I guess he figured.

Bam! Bing! Bam! I was bouncing along like a tin can tied on a cur

dog's tail. And Hammerhead was running like the cur dog:

He spotted the busted barn. There must of been a doorway in our side. *Bingo!* In he went, like a cyclone. And me bouncing right at his heels.

"Yow, yow, yow! Kamerad! Nein, nein! Kamerad!"

I thought I was dead and had been sent to the kaiser's headquarters instead of hell. Hammerhead jumped around, couldn't find the way out, and stepped on half a dozen Heinies. More yowling. Hammerhead begun to lay out with his hoofs—and boy, how he could do it!

Soup-pot helmets flew in every direction. German language splashed around like mud from a shell hole. The corners were full of them Dutch uniforms, with scared eyes sticking out like doorknobs.

I finally come to, standing in the doorway. In my left hand I still had that big trench knife. In front of me, piled up in the corners mostly, was twenty-five Heinies. In the middle of the barn was Hammerhead, his nostrils big as portholes, his eyes like a pair of green glass saucers and them yellow teeth of his looking at least six inches long. He just stood there, lifting his big hoofs one at a time, and wondering which corner to tackle next. I seen it all in a glance, and the throb in that right arm kind of woke me up.

"Stick up your hands, you bloody Dutchmen!" I yells out. "Stick 'em up!"

And Bud, they done it!

Every last man-jack of 'em sticks his paws skyward. Then they all begun shouting and yowling again:

"Kamerad! Kamerad!"

Well, of course I couldn't kill 'em all. And, besides, it was a lot bigger coup to take 'em in captive. So I just marched 'em out one at a time and lined 'em up alongside of the barn in full sight of the marines across the way. Twenty-five, there was, and when we went back a little later we found six machine guns in the barn—only Hammerhead had kicked four of 'em all to pieces.

I got 'em all lined up, and then I says, "Let's go." And they goose-stepped right down the street—right down to that tree where the looie was still shivering and hiding his eyes and tooting on his little whistle.

"Here, sir," I says, trying to salute and not getting the old right wing to function at all. "Here's some acquaintances of mine you ought to know. Put up your whistle and take 'em. I got a date with a doc—a doc what stepped on my belly a little while ago."

Now, listen here, waiter. If you don't quit brushing that tablecloth and looking crosseyed at us gentlemen, you'll be picking this water jug out from between your ears. What? The check! Say, we'll pay the check when we get —— Say, waiter, bring me some more matches. And make it snappy!

Yep, the old wing was broken. Five places that time. Six before. That's why there's still a kink in it. The doc only took out five of 'em.

But the one he left didn't seem to matter much. I kind of got used to it, you know. And Marie Louise—well, she was downright proud of it. Said it went with the D. S. C. and all.

What? Oh, sure. And the croix de guerre, too. Why, that looie even tried to get me the Italian palm and the Russian diadem, or whatever it is. If I hadn't of caught the transport back when I did he'd of had me a Rumanian chevalier and Czechoslovakian archduke, not to say nothing about making me a Astrigan hussar, with Hammerhead for my mount, Abe Cohen for my aid-de-camp, and that Doc Apple-face for my chief of staff.

Look for another Hal Borland story in a future issue.

THE DUO-CASE

by Reginald Wright Kauffman

In the office of Fred Englebert, junior partner of Crossett's department store, a murder was committed. Reade, an executive, drank a glass of sample ginger ale, and died instantly. Fred was present. The doctors said: "Prussic acid." Detective Ashley suspected Fred, for the latter was engaged to Vera Barnes, who had charge of the rest room, and Reade had been annoying her. Inquiry showed that the ginger-ale label was a forgery. Ashley remained alone with Fred and the dead man. The store closed. Then a phone call, supposedly from Fred, sent the two watchmen on fake errands, leaving the building empty save for Ashley, Fred and the victim, and two minor executives, Trigg and Forse, who were in their own offices. Suddenly the fire alarm rang, and Ashley and Fred ran to the sporting-goods department to investigate. There was no fire. Returning, they found Fred's office lighted, the door closed and a handkerchief missing from Reade's face! Vera had lingered, unwilling to desert her fiancé. Before the alarm, she had overheard some of their talk. When they went downstairs, she saw a shadowy, ominous figure approaching her hiding place——

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT.

IT was hardly five minutes later when Ashley and Fred returned to the latter's office, but the office was then empty of intruders and there was no Vera in the alcove. Innocent of any guess that she had so much as been there—that she was anywhere inside the store—the detective and the junior partner stared at each other, then Ashley announced the disturbance to that handkerchief which he had left as a cover for the dead man's features.

The officer shouted: "Who's your accomplice?"

"You don't mean that!" But Eng-

lebert wiped again his sweating forehead.

Ashley's gaze swept the room and rested on the desk. Then he said, in quick surprise:

"The bottle's gone, too!"

His companion took one comprehensive glance at the desk. Then he went to the refrigerator—swung wide its door.

"The other bottle has been taken out of here," he announced.

"Yes!" Ashley peered over Fred's shoulder—one flash only. "Whoever it was that came here was after those bottles—they're evidence against him. Their type—— Where's that Scudder letter?"

As nearly as he could remember, it had been tossed back into the wire basket as soon as it had been consulted during the telephone talk with Peter Scudder. Now the wire basket was empty.

Ashley ran from window to window. The side one gave upon a fire escape. The detective looked up and down—but, so far as this big bulk of a building was concerned, he looked only at empty darkness.

"The person who was in here turned on that alarm before he came in—so's he could get us out of the road—and he made a get-away before we were anywhere near."

"And," said Englebert decisively, "he was the murderer."

"Sure. Destroying evidence—that's clear enough."

"Well, then"—Fred's rankling resentment against the suspicion once cast upon himself demanded vindication—"do you still think I was working with him?"

Even in this room so recently grown so grim, even at this moment of suspense, a smile flickered over the detective's lean features. It was an abashed grimace followed by an exclamation more explicit than any verbose acquittal; Ashley paid a tribute of defense to his past doubts, but took cover under a friendly gibe:

"Oh, hell! You might be in cahoots, of course, even now; and at first things did look queer for you. But *you* don't look queer or act queer—you don't look or act smart enough."

"Thanks."

Ashley was now entirely professional again.

"Only think, man—*think!* The guy that killed Reade did it by mistake. He was trying to kill you. He had it in for you. And, besides, he knows his way around this store; he belongs here. You said lots of the employees didn't like you; there must be some one that hated you worse than the others. Try to remember who."

"There wasn't anybody crazy enough to want to murder me. I don't know of a soul."

Ashley cast one significant glance toward the figure on the floor.

"There was somebody murdered," said he dryly. "Call it sane enough, if you want to. Who had a motive?"

"Nobody."

"Not what you'd think was motive enough for you, but what might be motive enough for another sort of man. Did you stand in anybody's way?"

No seed fructifies more swiftly than that of mistrust, and Ashley had sown with a liberal hand. In spite of every demur made by his solid business self, there forced a way into Englebert's mind a misgiving heretofore an entire stranger.

"I'm planning to leave this firm, and it's pretty generally known I am. When I do leave, one or another of a pair of our employees will succeed me. At least, that's what supposed, I happen to know."

"Who are they?"

Fred tried to jettison these doubts. Ashamed of them, he tried even to mislead Ashley:

"But wouldn't they have thought they were rivals of each other—not of me?"

"Who *are* they?"

"Neither's the kind that would——"

"Nobody knows what anybody else would do anywhere, because nobody knows all the circumstances that govern anybody else."

"Well, as a matter of fact, one of these men *knew* he was to succeed me, and the other thought *he* would. They hadn't anything to bother about—only wait a few months."

"And one of them probably couldn't afford to wait. Did you make up your mind to go suddenly?"

"No." And then horror darkened over Englebert. He remembered something. "But, my God, after I had announced I was to go, I did suddenly postpone my going!" His hands clenched. "You don't suppose——"

"I don't *suppose*," said the detective slowly. "Unless you've got some more likely enemy, I have to assume one or both of these to be guilty. One or both somehow gambled on getting more money at a certain date—the date when you were to leave. Because you didn't leave, he didn't get it. Because he didn't get it, this happened." Ashley pointed to the body at their feet.

Englebert's tone fell to a whisper.

"So it was Trigg or Forse?"

"If those are their names."

"One knows about type because he's head of our ad department—and the other, he's in charge of the jewelry, but he has a brother who owns a job-printing shop somewhere up in Harlem. Still"—Fred went very white—"I tell you they're neither of them the sort that would kill."

Ashley seized Fred's wrist.

"Steady! Perhaps we can prove my theory soon enough. The killer is still somewhere on these premises—or has only just left 'em. What ways out are there?"

"There are the fire escapes."

"I know; we've got to allow for them. But what other ways?"

"Everything's generally locked up, and there are the two night watchmen on the job."

"Anybody leaving the premises would have to pass those birds?"

"Unless the watchmen were on their rounds. If they were on them, the doors would be locked, anyhow."

"Come on, then—those watchmen! We've *got* to see them."

Downstairs the pair passed at a race—all the way down to the ground floor. They went with a wild clatter of rushing feet, a mad scurry amid shadows, the detective following Englebert, who knew his way.

Forward they turned, toward the front of the store. Now directly ahead of them the light of an unshaded lamp shone. It was that incandescent which provided illumination for the literary pursuits of Mr. Bill Luddington—when he followed them. Now his chair stood empty, and his newspaper lay beside it.

"Bill!" called Englebert.

There came no answer.

"Bill!"

Echoing shadows gave the sole response.

"Perhaps he's on his rounds," suggested Ashley.

"Perhaps."

"After him!"

"After the other one—the other watchman!"

"Wait a second." Ashley dived for the front door that stood close by. It was locked, as Englebert had predicted it would be.

"Where's that other watchman?"

"In the annex—at least that's where he belongs."

Spurred by the prick of mystery, the detective and firm member partially retraced their steps. They went to the second floor; running, they crossed its bridge into the annex—always running. Then downward they plunged once

again, and along more passages, between more rows of counters covered with clothes that were like so many funeral palls.

"Here we are!"

They were at the main exit from the annex, and at the second watchman's post beside it. The scene mirrored its predecessor—again a single light, again a dropped newspaper, again an empty chair.

"Bill!"

No Bill Roscoe, either.

Fred sank into that watchman's chair so mysteriously deserted. He sat there panting heavily.

The ratlike Ashley was in better shape. Apparently, speedy pursuit of murderers was his daily form of gymnastics. He spoke with scarcely any break of breath:

"What does *this* mean?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"You're in the firm here."

"Well, they must be on their rounds."

"Why?"

"Because they're not here."

"Is it the time for them to be patrolling?"

"*I* don't know! Just because I'm a junior partner I don't know every rule that's made for a night watchman, you know."

The detective advanced a step and looked that junior partner straight in the eyes:

"Englebert, those men aren't anywhere on these premises—or, if they are, they're either dead or out of commission."

"Not here? I can't—can't understand." The business man was still well-nigh breathless, but not alone from physical exertion: bewilderment played its part. According to his code, this absence of the two Bills, no matter how demonstrable to the senses, was beyond acceptance by the intellect. Only, though Fred spoke the truth when he said that he could not understand, clammy fingers seemed to grip at his heart. "Not on the premises, you say?"

"They didn't answer that fire alarm," Ashley grimly reminded him.

Englebert sprang to his feet. How was it that the watchmen's strange nonappearance at the sporting-goods department had escaped the careful column of his calculations? Three—four—five ticks of time's clock passed by.

"Ashley——" he then began.

Thereat, through the shadows of the store ripped something that interrupted him—something that shattered speech—that split the night. It was a wordless cry—a woman's cry—the cry of a woman in mortal terror.

CHAPTER IX.

CAUGHT!

PEEPING around the alcove's curtain, Vera had been at first petrified with fright. One moment later, she was galvanized by it.

A figure—a man's figure; that was all she saw. Such faint light as entered the huge space here came from a window in Englebert's office and through the open door; it silhouetted the man, but, because his back was toward it, and his face turned full toward her, the features of the face itself were no more than an indefinable smudge. She could be certain only that this was neither Englebert nor Ashley.

The creature held something in each hand. She saw him deposit those articles, one in each of the side pockets of his coat, and the second of them, striking some hard object there, gave out a sound like that of glass. The man had stolen those ginger-ale bottles which somehow figured in all this mystery!

Click!

Now he had drawn to the office door behind him! The night folded him in its embrace. He was almost entirely blotted out—but he was close by.

So this was what he had come here for—secretly, furtively, at such risk as she could now well imagine. Without doubt, knowing the office occupied, he had turned in that fire alarm in order to clear the coast. She recalled Ashley's talk with the Scudder Company. These bottles were evidence that had better be destroyed, if the criminal were to escape, and this man, guessing as much, was taking them away to destroy them. For this man must be the murderer!

It was then that her hand shook as it clutched the curtain. The curtain was fastened by brass rings to a brass rod. Metal rattled against metal. Perhaps it was the slightest of noises, no louder than the clink of that bottle as it went into the killer's pocket; but for the girl it was as if a bugle called her enemy to the attack.

And he heard it, too. He started backward—stopped—crouched ready for a spring.

"Who's that?"

His hoarse whisper shot across the semidarkness. Vera choked a cry. She bit her lips until they bled.

"Who's that?"

He leaned toward her. He began to shuffle forward.

Every instinct bade her recoil, but reason triumphed over instinct. He had heard, even if he had not seen. He knew that somebody was here. If she drew farther into the alcove, she would be going deeper into a trap; it had only this one exit.

She was wearing shoes that were little more than slippers. There was no inch of all the floor space in Crossett's that she did not know by heart. Should she run—run at top speed, but silently—run while yet he was a few yards away from her? She might find some shelter in the maze—find one of the watchmen—reach Fred or the detective.

She ran. She kicked off her shoes, tore back the curtain, flew down the aisle that opened to the left of the alcove.

"Stop!"

Even then he whispered, but the whisper reached her as she sped away. The ruse that rid her of her shoes availed nothing; he heard her progress. Was he armed? Would he dare a shot—he whose whole safety depended upon his escape without encountering anybody capable of stopping him? A shot would bring her help and him ruin, if it did not kill her. But he was desperate. He knew that she had seen him. If he was some employee, perhaps he assumed that she had been able to recognize him. He *might* shoot.

Let him! Vera ran.

Along this aisle she scuttled to its end. Up the aisle into which it emptied. On for the stairs.

He wasn't going to fire, that she reasoned with relief—but he was coming after her. She had some start, yet she was not able to increase it. He ran as nimbly as did she.

The stairs. She all but fell down them. She thanked Heaven for short skirts. One leap and then another.

"If you don't stop——"

The whisper was so close that it seemed to her she could feel his burning breath against her neck. That sensation fairly maddened her! She had passed the third floor—the second—ere the realization dawned upon her that she was not going in the direction taken by Englebert and Ashley. Luddington, then, the watchman at the front door—she must get to him.

Down—and down. If she called for help—but she had no breath to call. If she called, she would be captured; life would be throttled out of her before any assistance could come.

Here was the ground floor at last. Luddington's station was just over there.

But Luddington wouldn't *be* there! Luddington would have answered that

false fire alarm, and, of course leaving the front door locked, he would have taken its key with him!

Vera plunged on downward. The basement furnished her last hope. Her own room was there, opening off the rest room. If she could get to it, slam its door upon her pursuer before he overtook her, she might still escape. There was a bolt on the inside of that door and a telephone beyond it. While he endeavored to break in, she could call police help.

She raced across the basement. This way she dodged, and that. She took familiar short cuts through the darkness. She doubled on her tracks. No use. Silently running, she was silently and expertly followed. She must get to her own room and her final chance.

Through the toy department she ran. Through the department of kitchen accessories. Here, in the midst of this section, rose the big exhibition Igloo Refrigerator, in which the whole carcass of an ox could have been kept. She half circled that vast ice box visible at this hour only because of its brilliantly white-enameled surface.

All of her course had been noiseless, but noiselessness had failed to confuse her enemy, who as noiselessly followed. She could not outrun him. She could not shake off his relentless pursuit—could not maze the trail. Whoever he was, he must know Crossett's as well as she did.

Vera slipped. Some careless errand boy had spilled the tea or coffee that he was carrying to a department head that afternoon, and the mess was left for the attention of the early-morning scrubwomen. The girl tried to right herself, slipped again, fell headlong, crashing on one shoulder.

Then, indeed, she felt that scorching breath beat against the base of her neck. Worse, she felt a pair of iron arms imprison her.

She tried to call now. A broad hand pressed against her gaping mouth. The cry died in a gurgle down her straining throat.

She was lifted in air as if she were a baby. She was carried—kicking, scratching, but impotent and stifled—a few yards along the way that she had so lately come. A door was opened.

To accomplish this, the murderer had to release at least her lips. Vera shrieked. She shrieked as she had never shrieked before, as she had never believed it within her power to shriek. That yell tore into tatters and silence of Crossett's.

But it was cut short. The broad hand redescended. A frigid blast beat upon her. She was tossed into a darker darkness—an arctic dark. The door closed. She was a doomed captive in the airproof, sound-proof Igloo Refrigerator.

CHAPTER X.

EXIT ASHLEY.

OVER in the annex stood the two men who did not even guess that Vera was anywhere within the precincts of Crossett's.

This early evening had been too crowded. So slowly did time move, while events hurtled by so rapidly, that less than thirty minutes had elapsed since Crossett, Thomas and Cogshall quitted the store, whereas Englebert and the detective might have guessed the hour to be ten o'clock.

With that wild cry ringing in their ears—its source mere matter for conjecture, its cause surely some dire terror or desperate need—they were rooted to the absent annex watchman's post as if the tintinnabulation had blasted them both into paralysis.

"What——" The headquarters man framed that word awkwardly, and stopped short.

There came no repetition of the cry. There came nothing except a silence that was worse than any imaginable shriek.

"It was somewhere in the main building," said Englebert—and scarcely recognized as his own the voice that said it.

"Downstairs."

"A woman."

"In the basement."

But upon that phrase Fred sprang away. All of his recent exhaustion fell from him like a discarded coat. He began again to run.

"Hi! Where are you going?" demanded Ashley, instantly following.

"Where do you think? Down to the main-store basement, of course!"

For Vera Barnes' office was situated in that basement. Vera's office—and the cry had unmistakably been a woman's. Oh, to be sure, Englebert thought she had gone home when ordered to leave the store; but in this night of horrors anything might happen, anything had become credible.

"We'll have help soon," avowed Ashley as he, too, mounted the stairs to the first bridge. "That wagon I ordered the doc to have sent—you know—it should be along any minute now."

But problematical wagons were nothing to Englebert. "Come on!" was all that he flung over his shoulder as he plunged across that bridge.

They gained the main building. They circled a huge light well that rose to the roof, through which, by means of a skylight, some degree of false illumination filtered. The well descended to the ground floor, and, on the second floor—the floor this pair were traversing—a wall of furniture ringed it in lieu of a railing: the pet hobby of old U. S. Crossett, English carved-oak cupboards, Dutch ebony cabinets, walnut tables with expanding leaves made in Swiss peasants' châlets many a year ago.

Ashley stumbled over a gate-legged taboret. He caromed. He might have fallen downward but that his precipitate progress was checked by a heavy Florentine coffer, all gilt arabesque and stucco ornamentation, a product of the late 1400s which Crossett would not have sold at any price.

"This way!" shouted Fred.

He was on the stairs, which afforded a safer means, if slower, for descent. He had not seen the accident, nor would it have deterred him had he sen it.

He took the decline in an uninterrupted series of bounds. The recovered Ashley came close to heel behind.

"Here!" called Englebert, careless of who might now be listening. "The stairs to the basement are across this floor."

Already he had started thither, refusing to lend conscious attention to the fears that raged in his soul while yet they were the maddened motor that drove him. The detective ran close behind. From above, from the furniture-filled floor they had just quitted, they must have appeared—were there anybody there to watch them—merely two unidentifiable shapes.

Yet there *was* somebody to watch them—somebody to whom their differentiation was unimportant.

With a tremendous crash something fell from the floor directly above. It fell as if it were the mighty missile from a giant cannon, and it burst in half with the detonation of a high explosive.

Even Englebert had to turn in his tracks. That Florentine coffer had been tugged over the edge and tossed down—or else it had been shoved too far by the detective's first collision with it, an unlikely conjecture—and at this moment what was left of it lay across Ashley's legs.

Fred cursed the delay, yet had no choice save to submit to it. He retraced the brief distance that separated him from his fallen companion. He bent over Ashley and removed the main body of the coffer.

"Are you hurt?"

The man's eyes were closed. He groaned.

"Ashley!"

The detective was conscious. When, however, he tried to rise, he shuddered and sank back to his recumbent position:

"Only my leg—the left—but that's smashed."

"Wait a minute. I'll——"

"No!" Ashley spoke through gasps of pain. "There's somebody up there, somebody that's after you—and my gun's rolled away, I don't know where. Don't bother about me—cop—on corner—the cop outside in the street—the traffic cop—get him!"

The caution concluded with another groan. The detective had finally gone into a faint.

Englebert rose erect. Before he could move farther, there came a whistling through the air, a premonitory sound that rose to a crash.

Bang! A table, some spidery Chippendale or more sturdy Adam product, splintered a few scant yards from Fred's side.

Bang! Something else followed—and yet something else. A perfect bombardment of furniture began.

There might be men who would have followed Ashley's instructions. There might be others who would have yielded to the natural impulse that bade them charge the stairs and, the second floor regained, seek instant contact with that as yet invisible assailant. Englebert the business man would normally have belonged to the former class; Englebert attacked felt the urge toward an immediate retaliation.

But Englebert the lover triumphed. He gave no more than a second to debate. By every law of reason, Vera shouldn't be at this hour anywhere near the basement whence that cry had risen; yet by every pulse of sympathy, he knew she somehow was.

He barely spared a moment for the dragging of Ashley into a more sheltered position under the lee of the balcony. This accomplished, he resumed his dash across the floor of the light well and toward the basement stairs.

Bang—bang! Two more reports sounded at his heels as two more antique chairs or tables sought his destruction. Then, yet again, silence save for the clatter of his own feet. The cannonade ceased as soon as he passed out of range.

He did not look back, though the temptation loomed strong. Perhaps he would be followed and, himself unarmed, attacked from the rear. Well, he must chance that. He darted down to the basement.

Pell-mell he went through the department given over to exchange desks and the transfer counter.

Now he was among those toys that suggested nothing more tragic than nursery war games and the anxieties inseparable from dolls' houses.

Here lay the prosaic kitchen-utensil section, which began to clang with tinware and aluminum as, his knowledge of the terrain at last giving place to ruthless haste, he struck against heaps of wares and dislodged them.

This veritable tower which bulked just ahead—it was the big white refrigerator, no longer like a house, rather resembling the Cyclopean tomb of some barbarous but forgotten king than recalling any cold-storage compartment outside a hotel.

And here now, at last, stood the rest room out of which opened Vera's little office.

Into the rest room he catapulted. It was dark, but he found and turned an electric switch. Empty—the place was empty save for its wicker chaise longues and its gay chintz hangings that Vera herself had last spring chosen.

That office—then hers. He pushed open its door.

This office was empty, too. At first he saw even no sign of its proper occupant except those mute tokens of her possession which ought to have appeared

at any hour. It seemed years ago that he had last been here, when she, safe, had worried for his safety.

His roving glance was suddenly arrested. There, on a table, lay a cloche hat. It was hers; he had often told her how well it became her.

"Vera!"

She no more answered his appeal than the watchmen had responded to his calls for them.

Perhaps she kept an extra hat here, and had gone home wearing another. He didn't know. He couldn't remember having noticed, this afternoon. Or was it this morning?

But he did somehow know that it must have been Vera whose despairing cry he so lately heard.

"Vera!"

The silence that had again grown abysmal echoed and reëchoed, "Vera!" Just as when he sought Luddington and Luddington's mate, other response there was none.

He searched futilely, here—there—everywhere. He wasted time. He had wasted he did not realize how much—until he comprehended that he *was* wasting it. Then, heartsick, yet still at top speed, he retraced his steps to the ground floor.

He made for the front entrance. The watchman, of course, was not there. Fred had not expected that he would be. But it was still possible to carry out the detective's suggestion and summon assistance from the policeman always on duty in the street outside.

Ah, but *was* it possible?

The main doors were locked. Their panels were of thick glass. Moreover, as Englebert well knew, there were iron grilles in front of them, and these, too, would be secured.

"Keys, then! Where are my keys?"

As junior partner, he had a key to these barriers. Feverishly, he searched his pockets. There were no keys in this one. There were no keys in that. He searched every pocket. Thinking that he had failed through hurry, he turned each pocket inside out—with no better success.

Yet, somewhere, he did have a key, A methodical man, he never went without his bunch.

Upon his memory flashed a picture. It was the picture of a desk drawer with a key in its lock and a bunch of other keys on a ring dangling therefrom. The recent past's untoward events had fractured habit. He had left his keys up there on the fourth floor, in his office.

He thought of breaking the doors' glass panels, if only to attract attention. But he might attract none from outside before it was too late—before the desperate murderer was upon him, or, what was worse, before that creature had got away by whatever surreptitious means he probably had at his disposal. Fred abandoned the idea.

There were the fire escapes.

Better—here was a telephone. It stood on the table beside Luddington's empty chair.

Englebert tore the instrument from its hook and called into the transmitter:

"Hello—hello—*hello!*"

Yet once again, no answer. There came to his frantic ear not even any of that faint buzzing which always indicates a wire which is in healthy action.

He guessed the truth, but rattled frantically at the hook. No, this phone was dead.

He seized the incandescent lamp left burning by Luddington. He swung it around, setting the shadows dancing, in quest of another telephone.

The thing was still in his grasp when the light went out.

He felt for, found and turned the switch attached to it, but gained no result. He twisted the hot bulb—but it was still tight in its socket. Then he realized that not alone the spot where he stood was night ridden; darkness brooded everywhere.

An accident—two accidents—might have happened. That was just possible. But, from the depths of Englebert's being, rose the conviction that somebody, gaining the house exchange, had severed all telephonic connection—and then, down cellar, swung over the main lever controlling all the electric lights in the Crossett store.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE IGLOO.

ONE foot thick and five feet high, the door of the exhibition cold-storage plant had closed upon Vera with a reverberation that deafened her. She fell to the metal floor and struck the shoulder already injured by her fall outside.

Finally the very pain of that revived her. She found herself in absolute darkness. She had been tossed from the superheated air of the store into an arctic temperature that was at first refreshing, then chilled her through and through.

Soon it would more than chill her. This she thoroughly understood.

Her cries for help were fruitless. The waves of sound merely struck those sound-proof walls and were driven back upon her throbbing ears. She crawled on hands and knees through the darkness, until her extended fingers encountered a door, and on that she beat with small clenched fists directed by all her power.

"Let me out! Let me out!"

Not a single beat would be audible a yard away. She felt upon her knuckles the blood now so warm, so soon to be so cold. Useless to pound thus, useless to call—and yet she could not cease doing either until sheer exhaustion should terminate the effort. Calm and competent she had always been; but calmness was fractured in this Igloo, and competence had become panic impotence.

Her bleeding fingers met the edges of the padded door. She dug at them. She tore her nails. Beyond that she accomplished nothing. But she did not stop, nor did she stop her cries.

How long?

The fearful cold bit into her. Even her tearing fingers began to stiffen. Her legs, bent under her, were already stiff, her slipperless feet like chunks of ice. It seemed to her that she had already been here for hours.

"Help—help!"

Otherwise useless as every action was, movement at least kept up circulation. Yet to what purpose? No amount of exercise could long successfully battle against this degree of temperature.

She flung herself from side to side. She stretched out her legs and began to massage them. Dully, she wondered whether it would not be better to surrender—easier to lie still and let the cold do quickly what it was bound to consummate long before morning, when the clerk in charge would slide back the bolt, open the door and find——

She made a gesture of despair, throwing out her arms. A hand struck a platter on a shelf and brought down one of the dishes of food kept here by the restaurant chef. The dish broke on the metal floor, but the hand had been halted by something else—it had been halted by a hole in the wall.

She had utterly forgotten that. With the mechanism of the Igloos she was entirely unfamiliar, but she recalled that Fred, enthusiastic over his promised connection with the manufacturing firm, had had that small sample of its product installed in his own office and told her that the cold for it was piped up from its big brother away down here in the basement.

But then Fred might hear her now! He would be back from the spot to which the fire alarm had summoned him—perhaps. She tried to remember whether, when she last saw it, the smaller refrigerator was standing open—tried and failed. Try something else

she must, though. She crouched before the pipe mouth and called again for help.

For her here—as, unknown to her, for Englebert out there at Luddington's telephone—no reply resulted. Fred and the man from headquarters might not have gone back to the former's office, after all. Or that other door might be shut. Or they might even have left the store. She had no sense of time here in this frigid dark.

Still, she would try once more.

She remembered something else. Metal pipes carried to their mouths any cry launched into them, but only to their mouths. If the mouths were shut, or if a padded door was shut some space ahead thereof, they were ineffective transmitters. Yes—yet metal itself was a conductor of any metallic tappings upon its surface, and the pipe that supplied Fred's refrigerator was not buried in the wall. Having been constructed recently, it passed up through the floor, through that refrigerator and then, again exposed, on upward to a service cold-storage installation in the restaurant above.

Vera groped along the shelves. Nothing more metallic than china. Her hand flew to her breast. She drew out of her uniform's pocket her ever-present friend, her clinical thermometer. The thermometer itself she slid back, but she clutched the case.

Among her duties as head of the rest room was the drilling, in certain of their activities, of a company of younger employees forming a band of Girl Scouts common to most such establishments as Crossett's. Vera, according to Girl Scout regulations, had learned the Morse code, among other things, and taught it to them. Through a week of evenings, she had taught it to Englebert, too, if only to perfect herself in speedy sending of the dots and dashes. An idle amusement, then. Would it—could it—prove a vital asset now?

Tremblingly she began to tap the pipe's interior with her slender metal thermometer case. She was at the last pitch of nervous excitement. She was so cold that her fingers were like icicles. But she managed to tap: "In the Igloo—help!"

Her brain was rocking. That ought to bring aid."

And then she was the center of a flood of radiance—and blinded by it. The door had opened—the door to her prison.

It opened only for a second. It was reclosed while yet her mouth hung voiceless, and her breath was warmed momentarily, deliciously, by the natural outer air.

"Not dead yet?"

Those words were uttered in a hoarse croak, from the middle of a blazing sun; her captor had become her tormentor. His face was concealed because of the electric torch that he thrust forward the better to study the suffering written on her own features.

"Not dead yet? Well, you soon will be—without leaving a trace of who did the killing." A frightful laugh punctuated his declaration. "They've got the fire escapes watched on the outside, but the roof's still clear for me!"

It was on this phrase that the door slammed.

She was a prisoner again. She slid limply to the flooring of her cell. Consciousness left her.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH?

CONVINCED that the murderer, having severed all telephonic communication with the building, had then darkened it—convinced by the sudden extinction of the incandescent lamp in his hand that the assassin was at this moment in the cellar engine room where all the store's controls were housed—Englebert ran from his position at the

main entrance and mounted the stairs, three at a bound.

He never paused to consider the elevators; he never stopped at all until he had come to the fourth floor and regained his office. Here he could find his keys, or hence descend, for outside help, by means of the fire escape.

With fumbling fingers he struck matches. Yes, there were his keys! He dropped them into a pocket and turned to go back; his whole training impelled him to leave Crossett's by means of its chief door. He was afraid, but he wouldn't confess his fear by any action. Downstairs lay Ashley, perhaps still as inert of brain as of body. Above all, there was that cry which they had heard and which——

The match flickered. It cast its red glow over the motionless body of Reade, then shifted to the desk, then against the door of that miniature refrigerator whence Englebert had innocently extracted death for Vera's annoyer. Something told Fred to look in there again; the white surface issued a silent command that compelled compliance.

He struck another match and thrust it midway into the interior. In the farthest corner stood a couple of paper bags. If they were here before, they had escaped hurried attention. He drew them out. One of them dropped and spilled its contents: type.

He took up a handful of the pieces. By the dying end of his match he saw that they were thirty-point Elzevir Gothic.

Fred knew, at that, what he would find in the companion bag. And he found it, by match light: Jensen old style type.

The murderer had not been content with his destruction of the bottles and their labels. He had cunningly guessed that Fred, himself possessing a technical knowledge, would have mentioned their unusual style to his companion, whose easily observed course loudly announced him a city detective. The murderer had conveyed this type here in order to convict Englebert in court, should Englebert escape his assaults in the dark.

"His devilish ingenuity! *Whose?*"

The jockey's intelligence is not all centered on getting out of his mount that animal's utmost speed; he keeps an eye on his rivals and saves one mental compartment for the exercise of track strategy. Boxer and fencer, automobile racer and air pilot—they think while they act, not only before acting. Thus, too, that business man whose destiny is business success. Fred had systematized his mind as much as ever he had systematized this store; he who could lay instant fingers upon any detail of the Crossett establishment could as readily draw at need any requisite piece of information from the cross-indexed pigeonholes of his brain. What he thought now he thought in the time it took to stride across his office.

He recalled Ashley's arguments, which subsequent events had increasingly substantiated:

The assassin must be his enemy—Englebert's—and not Reade's, since the attempt had been based on Fred's fondness for a certain beverage, and nobody could have been sure of Reade's approaching visit.

The assassin must know Crossett's inside out—from top to bottom.

The assassin must either have been a printer or have a printer in his confidence.

Well, Englebert had mentioned to the detective two names as those of men with a just-possible motive—and either of these men might, on the evidence so far accumulated, be said to fit.

Forse?

Or Trigg?

Which?

Each thought, and one correctly, that he was to be Fred's successor in the firm. Each had been long enough with the firm to find his way blindfolded

about its premises. Each knew, as it happened, Englebert's liking for ginger ale on a hot afternoon—on any afternoon. Trigg was the advertising department's head, could buy type out of his own funds without exciting comment from the type founders, could set it secretly here in the store—yet Forse's brother owned a printing shop, and Forse had once served an apprenticeship there.

But there was one detail that served to differentiate the two. That was——

Tap-tap!

Fred dropped his match. Through the dark pierced a series of tappings. He turned. They issued from the refrigerator.

Dot-dot-dot-dot!

Startled, he had missed some of the message. But it *was* a message! It was Morse.

He stood rooted in his tracks. Vera had taught him the Morse code. Then this might be Vera. Vera somewhere—but where?

More taps.

He blundered toward the refrigerator. He had been too much in love to learn that code thoroughly; now, as much in love, he was too tremulous to interpret the sendings with perfect accuracy. If, however, he could only so much as——

In the Igloo!

That was it! Then—then telegraphic mumblings. Like the preceding sounds, they all came up the pipe connecting his refrigerator with the big cold-storage compartment in the basement.

CHAPTER XIII.

CRASHING TO DEATH.

IN an overstrained body, a mind overtaxed by violent and unfamiliar emotions goes, so to speak, blind. Thus Englebert now.

Within a comparatively small gamut of time, the bow of fate, besides demanding the utmost from his purely physical resources, had sounded again and again upon the string of his being a dozen discords that, until to-day, were foreign to his heretofore calm, well-ordered life.

Moreover, to all his new experiences—and to this late revelation of Vera's whereabouts—was here added a thorough knowledge of the Igloo system's potentialities; he had tested the invention before agreeing to leave Crossett's and exploit it.

In the Igloo!

A mental dark buffeted him. He knew, at one instant, Vera's peril; he knew nothing more until he was in the store basement again and throwing himself against the white sepulchral bulk of the giant refrigerator.

Only that single bolt secured it. He tore it from its socket. He all but risked his own liberty by stepping into the frigid interior.

He drew Vera out and held her sheltered in his arms.

At first he thought he was too late. He could scarcely see her, yet her face, as he pressed it to his own, was as cold as death. Then he felt her breath flutter against his cheek.

"Vera!"

She struggled faintly. "Let me go! Who are you? Let me go!"

"It's Fred."

"No—no!"

"It is. You're all right."

She knew him now. His mere tone assured her, drew her away, firmly, kindly, irresistibly, from her region of terrors. With a glad cry, her arms encircled him.

"You? And I thought it was—that man!"

"Never mind. You're safe at last." He rubbed her wrists to help the circulation.

When she had recovered a little more, Vera said shakily:

"But he caught me watching your office—I'd gone back there to be near

you—to hear what the detective was saying to you—and he ran after me. He got me—he shut me—shut me in here——"

Englebert's rage rose. "Who is he?"

"I don't know. I couldn't see him. And his voice—it was a voice gone crazy." She shuddered.

"Was it Forse?"

"Mr. Forse? How could it have been?"

"Or Trigg?"

"What makes you think such a dreadful thing?"

"They both wanted my job here. It was somebody that knew my habits, that knew the store, that understood printing, that could get——" Then a thought, that was like a revelation, came to him. Either Trigg or Forse, he had been sure, must be guilty; suddenly he saw that one of them could not be.

"It's Trigg!"

"Fred, how *can* you——"

"Prussic acid—a person can't buy that the way he buys a pound of sugar. He has to register; the druggist would remember. Only, it can be stolen, if you have access to a drug store. I don't believe Forse had; he's a jeweler. But the head of our advertising staff has the run of all this place; he can go anywhere, for 'ad copy.' Well, last week, you remember, our advertisements featured the drug departmnet—*and Trigg wrote that ad!*"

"Mr. Trigg? Why, he knocked at your office door when we were all in there with the doctors and the detective, and he wanted to know——"

"He wanted to make sure he'd finished me."

She did not half understand, yet she wholly believed. Hearing the reasoned sincerity of Englebert's utterance, nobody would quite be able to escape conversion.

"Fred, he's crazy! He said something about all the fire escapes being guarded by police, but——"

"They're not at all. He was frightened."

"Crazy, I tell you! He said he was going to get away by the roof, somehow; but if he wants to kill you first—perhaps he's still somewhere here!"

Of that Englebert was certain, but his first task was to complete Vera's safety.

"Are you still chilled?" he inquired.

"No, I'm all right," she assured him.

He got her to the ground floor. The main entrance stood before them. His key released its locks.

"Run out to that policeman," he instructed her. "Tell him to send in a call for help from the nearest box, and then to come here at once."

"And you?"

"Do what I tell you, Vera—quickly!"

"You're not going to stay *here?*"

"If I wait in this vestibule, I can watch. Nothing can hurt me here."

Reluctantly she went.

But Fred did not wait. He had reverted to the primitive, this mere business man, who normally played golf and drank ginger ale. Again and again, somebody—the maddened Trigg—had tried to kill him. Before, Fred had desired only quick escape from further attacks. But not now. For now Vera had been nearly murdered—and with his own hands Englebert would somehow capture the offender.

A sole concession did he make to modernity. He knew that, close by, stood one of those commoner fire alarms that are glass covered; simply to break their covering summons the nearest city fire crew. The assistance to be called by the policeman might not suffice to surround the store and cut off retreat. Fred's fist smashed the glass.

Then back into the darkness he ran. Where to seek? He didn't know—couldn't guess. The cellars? But they would be deserted now that what work was to have been done there had indeed been done. Unarmed, he must procure

some sort of weapon. Alone, he must proceed warily. But he meant to accomplish his purpose, and he judged that his presence would soon prove bait enough to attract the murderer.

He fancied he heard a sound to the left—darted thither, crashing into a counter full of perfumes. Vials broke. Mixed scents rose. Nobody there.

He stood still, to listen. Now he did hear something from the right. It was a sob or a moan. It issued from the direction of the jewelry department. It became articulate.

"Help!"

Englebert had long lost all memory of aisles and byways. As in the basement, he struck and overturned objects whose position had lately been as clear to his understanding in the dark as ever they had been to his eyes by daylight. He reached the jewelry section. He stumbled over a body.

"Help!"

The cry came from that body. Fred found another match and struck it.

Forse, his scalp laid open by a blow that, he disjointedly explained, had fallen on him from an assailant unseen, was telling him, in another moment:

"I don't know how long ago—had some work to finish—stayed late. I was just looking for that watchman to let me out, when—burglar, I guess—thought I'd seen him and could identify him. Then of course he thought I was dead—*I* did, too. Been lying here, knocked out, for——"

Somebody besides Englebert must have heard. The murderer had evidently regained the trail of his originally chosen victim. Through the darkness, toward those voices, whistled an object—an almost priceless Meissen ormolu Mayflower vase, Forse next day declared when its fragments were shown him. It splintered between the fallen man and Fred.

Englebert wheeled about and ran toward the spot whence that missile had been launched. He who launched it turned and ran also.

Show cases crashed, spilling along the aisles all such jewels as had not been bestowed in safes for the night, at closing time. Rings rolled into corners. Bracelets, too—necklaces, for the startled scrubwomen to gloat over in a few brief hours. Flying glass filled the air, crackled underfoot.

"I know who you are—Trigg!" Fred's yell sounded like that of an Iroquois brave closing upon his enemy.

"But you haven't got me yet, Englebert!" The crazed advertising man flung defiance behind him as he ran.

Out of the jewelry department—over to the farther end of the store—where was he?—somewhere just ahead!—what was he doing?

Came the rattle of iron. Came the scrape of a cable. Came the crashing opening of an elevator door.

Fred read that aright. Trigg had hauled to him, by main force, one of the twin elevators in the shaft just ahead here. He was in it—he was going up. Believing the fire escapes guarded, he would essay some mad exit over the roof.

"Come on if you dare!"

Englebert heard the car shoot upward. Well, two could play at this game, and reënforcements must already be near at hand. He reached the shafts, reached through the grille, grimly opened the door and hauled up the second elevator. What would result he didn't know and didn't much care—but something final. Power had been cut off from the lamps in Crossett's; that power which worked these elevators was left intact.

Fred had entered the second cage. He found its guide wheel and twisted that as far over as it would go. At a speed which jerked the breath out of him, the car mounted into the inky atmosphere. From below mounted also the pounding of feet—up the staircase

circling these elevator shafts—but both cars would have reached the top before pedestrians, however agile, got there.

Englebert's cage never got there. Above all the racket, Fred heard a maniacal laugh from overhead—Trigg's stentorian voice, cracked, but exultant, fiendishly exultant, calling down to him, mounting—the voice of Trigg, who had already gained the floor directly under the roof.

"I half unscrewed your car's sustaining wheel twenty minutes ago! I knew I could juggle you into it! It'll not take a second to send you down to hell, Englebert!"

Almost on the instant, sustaining wheel and cables fell. Exactly on the instant, Fred's car reversed its progress and began to drop.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I'LL TELL."

BUT it *is* the plain truth; and we think he's still in there somewhere. And Fred—Mr. Englebert—*he's* there, anyhow, and he—— Oh, please, *please* hurry!"

Thus the erstwhile self-possessed Miss Vera Barnes concluded her plea to the policeman on the corner.

There was no need to make it so vehement. He was an ordinary policeman, which is to say two things: that, while appearing to have no vision beyond the ordinary, he received news of the devastatingly marvelous as if it were no more than an unexpected election result—and that he gave every outward appearance of being stupid and phlegmatic while being in reality both physically and mentally alert.

Consequently, he wasted only a little time before passing from receptivity to action. He did pause to turn in, from the nearest box, Vera's requested call for help; but then, the main door to Crossett's standing open, he disappeared within the store at a pace that far outstripped that of his young companion. He required no guide. The clamor which was rising in there proved amply sufficient. It came from what he found to be the nearest twin elevator shaft. Neither shaft visibly held a car; but invisible cars were audibly rising somewhere overhead. This "cop from the corner" was armed and understood his business: he forthwith found the staircase that reason said must circle the shaft, and he straightway sprinted upward.

Upward! Around this landing he went—around that. Upward into a deeper dark. He was a heavy man, but he ran without distress. He heard Trigg's wild and fatal jeer.

"I've got a gun!" bawled the cop from the corner, even as a sustaining wheel was loosed. "Lay off, you up there!"

He was near the top when he shouted. Answer took the form of a crash—the crash of that wheel on the released elevator that it was constructed to haul far into air. The catapulting downward of the twin cars followed.

The policeman—whose name, by the way, was O'Malley—ran on higher. He was nearing the topmost landing. He yelled:

"Come out o' that!"

To which he received another sort of reply. The blackness of the winding stairway was sliced by a thin streak of flame. An explosion shook the shadows. Unseen, Trigg had fired.

That was an error. He betrayed his location—and to a member of a police force trained to take advantages of just such passionate self-betrayals. As cool as an April morning, O'Malley fired in return. He fired thrice, and much more quickly than the amateur could respond—besides which, the policeman kept on dashing higher while he pressed trigger.

His first shot must have gone close; Trigg must have felt the bullet whistle near his head. The second went farther wild, because it was no more than a

period to a sentence. The third shot, O'Malley rightly calculated, did all that it was intended to do.

There came a curse, a choking cough, the slump of a wounded body. A minute later, the officer was carrying a dying man downstairs.

Englebert's faith in system might be supposed to have been sorely tried, but it was part of his being. He knew what Trigg did not—that the elevator's air cushions had been recently tested and were all in his favor. As the freed pulleys banged on the top of his car, he leaped upward and, seizing the grille work overhead, swung his legs free of the floor that fell a few feet below his own descent.

Even this maneuver was unnecessary. The safety device worked as it should work. The car struck. It struck the air cushion at the shaft's bottom. The maniac's calculations had failed to extend so far. Though the concussion proved mighty, the invention held good. After that elevator had bounded yards high and fallen again yards low, a dozen futile times—Englebert walked out, disheveled but utterly uninjured and only slightly shaken. Going from the basement to the ground floor, he met there a strange scene. Held by half a dozen of the policemen O'Malley had summoned, flash lights played over it, like miniature searchlights over a battlefield just after hostilities are ended. Their cold rays swept up and down, back and forth, now throwing one wrecked counter into uncompromising relief, now another, now blotting these out completely and passing from person to person among the pale and tragic bystanders.

Police Surgeon Cogshall, having returned with the morgue wagon requisitioned by Ashley, at this moment was supporting that detective. Ashley was strenuously insisting against being led away before the drama's end.

"You've got a bad fracture, but," Cogshall admitted almost reluctantly, "it won't lame you for life if you're careful."

Two men from the nearest station house had discovered Forse, who, wellnigh himself again and quite as crotchety as ever, was vehemently declaring that the firm must be responsible for his injuries to the extent of physicians' bills and general damages.

But Fred at first saw none of these. He heard Vera call him by name and found that, as his arms had received her at the Igloo, so at this instant her arms waited for him. They were conscious of nothing except each other until a rush of boots broke in upon them, and through the main entrance streamed the firemen come in answer to Englebert's false alarm. Only this was able to reconstitute Englebert as guardian of the Crossett interests.

"For Heaven's sake," he shrieked, "don't start your hoses!"

Somebody shouldered a passage through the firemen. It was Bill Roscoe, the annex watchman, his burly form aquiver with indignation, his black eyes ablaze.

"Mr. Englebert," he vociferated, "I don't want to complain none, but you certainly sent me on some journey: there ain't no man named Brown lives anywheres near the corner of St. Felix an' Fulton Streets what's a night watchman."

Ten voices were speaking at once, when all were silenced by an apparition. Down the stairs marched O'Malley, carrying in his mighty arms what, as the flash lights played upon its white face, all save one of the spectators took to be a dead man.

"He's a goner," said O'Malley, and laid Trigg's body as gently on the floor as if it were that of a lifetime friend.

Cogshall bent over it. "Soon," said he, "but not yet."

"Search him," ordered Ashley, sway-

ing on a white-coated attendant's arm. The surgeon went through the pockets of the unconscious advertising man. He found a watch, some coins, a handkerchief, a knife.

"Any papers?"

Yes, here in a breast-pocket wallet were a number of letters.

"Read 'em."

To Englebert it seemed a ruthless process; rage had fled him at sight of Trigg's pitiable condition. But the law proved less sensitive; the letters were read. They were all from brokers demanding immediate payments for the protection of margins.

"There's your motive," Ashley said. Suffering though he was, he still refused to leave; they had to lay him beside Trigg while Cogshall divided his attention between the two patients.

"Through the right lung," the surgeon declared concerning the man O'Malley had shot. "Just a bit under the fifth and over the fourth ribs. Not a Chinaman's chance. Brandy, please!"

The stimulant was administered. A little color returned to the white cheeks. The eyes opened—and they were sane eyes at last. Trigg, whose pinched features gave him the air of incalculable age, whose loss of blood almost etherealized him, looked around the group, pausing at the medical man, who hovered nearest to him.

"It's—all over?"

Cogshall nodded.

"Englebert's safe?"

Drawing Vera with him, Fred came forward and held out a hand.

"I'll tell you how it happened," gasped," gasped Trigg.

CHAPTER XV.

VERA DECIDES.

DYING, he could not tell much. Living, he could have added details.

Trigg was to have succeeded to the junior partnership, and would yet have succeeded as soon as Englebert surrendered it. Despite gossip and Forse's own belief, Forse, of course, never had a chance. Everything had been quietly arranged by old U. S. Crossett.

But on Crossett's promise, Trigg, after a life of petty stock gambling, had plunged too heavily. He lost. That would not have mattered, had Fred left at the date originally scheduled—but, under Crossett's persuasion, Fred modified his plans and agreed to remain for the extra fatal year.

Trigg's few reserves were soon exhausted; he hypothecated firm moneys. —and still the market went against him. He went mad with despair.

From that moment, he regarded Englebert as the sole cause of his difficulties. He regarded him, soon, as their conscious and calculating cause. He magnified a hundred unconsidered brusquenesses into as many personal insults; he determined that he would, by one stroke, at once rid himself of an enemy, save his liberty and guarantee his future.

He knew Fred's partiality for ginger ale—had often drunk it with the junior partner in the latter's office. Trigg bought the special type, set the false Scudder letterhead, composed the lying epistle. He stole the prussic acid from the store's drug department, manufactured the Duo-Case with native ingenuity, charged its bottles, and sent them, gloatingly, by a district messenger, who delivered them downstairs.

It was all so simple—in the planning. He knew that neither the odor nor the traces of this cyanide lasts long. An individual found dead, some hours after death, in his office—ninety-nine times out of a hundred, death would be ascribed to heart disease. Trigg acted accordingly.

But then things began to go wrong. At one hour, the would-be murderer, fearful because of long delay, disguised his voice and telephoned to get news of

his design. It was the intended victim himself who answered. A little later—for Trigg kept canny watch—strangers hurrying into Englebert's office were enough to tell that death had occurred; but the detective's presence announced that murder was suspected. The assassin dared to knock at Fred's door, only to receive Vera's unsatisfactory message. He couldn't leave for the night until he had done something to cover his tracks.

To that end, he had cleared Crossett's of its watchmen and, by means of the fire alarm, made the junior partner's office safe for his own entry. There, protected from intrusion by one locked door—the other did not matter, for he had to leave it unfastened for a quick exit, and, besides, it gave on the farther side—he found, to his consternation, that he had killed the wrong man. The suspicious bags of type were on his person. Placing them in the refrigerator, he would plant evidence against his business rival. But, from here on, he was doing the uncalculated, and it was easy to make mistakes—one feverish mistake after another.

For, the type planted, he encountered Vera. With the fatal egoism of the occasional criminal, he assumed that she guessed his guilt and had followed him. That she had recognized him he took for granted:

"It was all too horrible. I'd always liked Reade. I didn't have a thing against you, Miss Barnes, except that you were engaged to Englebert. But there I was, and there you were——"

He had to make a clean sweep, and, mad as he had been for weeks, an utter blood lust seized him for its own. Nothing except hurry let Forse off with the blow that Trigg had supposed fatal.

"I had to go through with it! I—I *had* to, then!"

On those words his white lips closed. With that cry ringing through the almost Stygian store, Trigg went to the bar of eternal justice.

"Can't we keep this quiet? In all the firm's history nothing like this has ever happened before! Can't we keep it quiet *now?*"

Finding that his quest, too, was a wild-goose chase, red-headed watchman Bill Luddington had developed brains enough to conclude that there was "sumpin' wrong." He had fetched old U. S. to the scene of the mystery that was a mystery no longer.

Ashley doesn't limp, after all—though whether because he was a better patient than he started out to be, or because Cogshall is a really first-rate surgeon, forms to this day the chief subject of dispute between the two of them.

Old U. S. frequently bemoans the ruin of certain pieces of antique furniture—and still buys more that he has no intention of selling, nor could he at the exorbitant prices he pins on them.

As for Forse, he got the coveted money for his doctor's bills—got what even he grumblingly admitted was a liberal indemnity besides—but he has not yet got a place in the Crossett firm, and it looks, as time goes by, as if he never would.

For Fred Englebert has remained there.

The decision was made at an official funeral given by the Crossett firm to poor Reade.

"But, Fred," said Vera Englebert, née Barnes, as she added the left to the right hand that he was holding, "I can't even *think* of you being connected with an Igloo!"

Englebert bent to her.

"You know, dear," said he, "I'm a very commonplace and unemotional person; but old U. S. wants me to stay on with the firm—and I think I will!"

Another exciting mystery story will appear in a coming issue.

The Truth About Copper Hill

By Berton Braley

TALK about extensive workin's," said the Man from Copper Hill;
"Why, you fellers don't know nothin', never have, an' never will.

"You kin shoot your tales of Leadville, of Australia and the Rand,
But *them* mines just scratched the surface—they was wormholes, understand?

"In the country that I come from, in my little minin' town,
We just called 'em placer workin's till we'd burrowed two miles down;

"Cages run a mile a minute, droppin' downward with a jerk,
But it took us half an hour to be lowered to our work.

"Oncet I'm kinda separated from the others on my shift
An' I finds I'm lost completely in an old, abandoned drift.

"Still I doesn't get excited—I kin feel my way about
Though I haven't got no matches an' my candle's flickered out.

"Seven days I gropes in darkness, seven days in deepest gloom,
Till I kinda gets to thinkin' that the mine'll be my tomb.

"But at last I sees the glimmer of a distant steady light
An' I pants an' stumbles to'rds it as it keeps on shinin' bright—

"Shinin' bright an' glowin' redder till it gets to be a glare
An'—I sees a bunch of devils that is stirrin' brimstone there!

"Boys, I'm tellin' you I beat it—far away from such a spot,
All my weariness an' hunger an' my faintness is forgot.

"Through the dark I run regardless, scared them devil imps would find me,
Runnin' blind but always runnin', thinkin' fiends is just behind me.

"Never stoppin', never pausin', for a month or more I run
Till I feels the race is finished, till I knows I'm almost done.

"Then I bumps into a ladder. Weak an' feeble though I be,
Still I manages to climb it for a day or two or three,

"Fearin' there's a fiend behind me with a red-hot iron fork,
Till I finds that I have landed—in the subways of New York!

"Talk about extensive workin's, talk of holes *you* think are big,
In the country that *I* come from, when we dig a mine we *dig!*"

A Chat With You

DURING the past month we saw two pictures at the movies that, because of their contradictory effects upon us, struck us as odd. Both had to do with the Russian revolution.

The first had for its hero a young prince—a kindly, manly chap. When he was dragged out of his palace, beaten and humiliated by the frenzied mob, we were torn with sorrow for him. For, you see, he stood up like a man and took his unmerited medicine with the dignity of the true aristocrat. Seeing that picture, we were on the side of the nobles, and against the mob.

* * * *

THE hero of the other picture was a sturdy son of the soil. All day long he labored at his forge, and we were filled with admiration for the simple, homely honesty and sincerity he typified. You could see his sterling qualities in his clear, gray eyes, and in the iron strength of his face in the glow of the fire.

Then, one day, the arrogant soldiers of a vicious noble rode roughshod through his peaceful village, and he was dragged out, humiliated and callously beaten. He became a bitter revolutionist—and we were tickled when, at the end of the picture, he gave the merciless noble what was coming to him.

* * * *

THAT just goes to show you that there are two sides to everything. We feel the deepest pity for those suffering industrial workers who shivered in long bread lines, and for the thousands who were sent to slave in the terrible gray wastes of Siberia.

But we pity also those numberless worth-while people of the upper classes —those brilliant, benevolent men and women of the aristocracy who were struck down and trampled under the ruthless hobnails of the mobs.

All social upheavals are like that. The scythe of a revolution cuts a wide swath, heedless of the innocent.

* * * *

WHEN you read Roy Norton's novel, "The Flying Princess," in the next POPULAR, you will see the side of those Russian nobles who were innocent sufferers. It is the story of a prince and his daughter who were hounded, even in America to which they had escaped, by a man who was a traitor even to his fellow revolutionists. There is no hokum about Mr. Norton's novel; he writes of what he knows.

* * * *

FOLLOWING the novel there will be a short boxing story by John Talbot Lynch. You recently read his greyhound story, and many of you have said that you liked it. This new one is very entertaining. Mr. Lynch, you know, is one of our new writers. We have spoken before of his clear, bright style, of his fine portrayal of characters. Now we repeat all of that with enthusiasm.

In the next issue a writer entirely new to this magazine will make his bow to you. You'll like him. His short story, "Tokyo is Tame," is filled with a new kind of humor that appeals to every one. He is L. G. Blochman.

* * * *

LOOKING over, as we write this, the stories planned for that number, we are well pleased with their wide and unusual variety. We cannot speak of them merely as tales of boxing, mys-

tery, animals, Scotland and the West, for they cannot be properly described by such brief terms. Take Aimée D. Linton for instance. Her story is about wolves, told from the viewpoint of the Black One, the wily leader of the pack. Reading it, you will somehow get the *feeling* of that wild, desperate life; you will imagine yourself to be running, stalking, fearing, conquering, with the pack!

* * * *

AGAIN, take Meade Corcoran's "The Raid on Campbell's Bull." The scent of heather, the ruggedness of the Scottish highlands, the debonair swing of plaid kilts, the tang of smoke curling up from snug wayside inns, the lilting, tantalizing, rollicking swing of bagpipe music—all of that will rouse you, delight you, until you'll feel as if you yourself had been out for a brisk walk in the invigorating air of bonnie Scotland!

One and all, the stories in that issue will appeal strongly to you. And why? Because they are rich in human feeling. They were written by men and women who are story-tellers in the true old sense—people who write from the heart. And that is the secret of this magazine's policy—to print stories that seem to speak to you.

TO NEW WRITERS

The editors of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE would like to see your stories. They assure you of a sympathetic reading and a prompt decision.

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

In the Second February Number

The Flying Princess — **ROY NORTON**
Novel

My Kingdom for a Spur! — **JOHN TALBOT LYNCH**

Tokyo Is Tame — **L. G. BLOCHMAN**

The Modern Vigilantes — **HENRY C. ROWLAND**
In Five Parts—Part II

The Brains of the Pack — **AIMÉE D. LINTON**

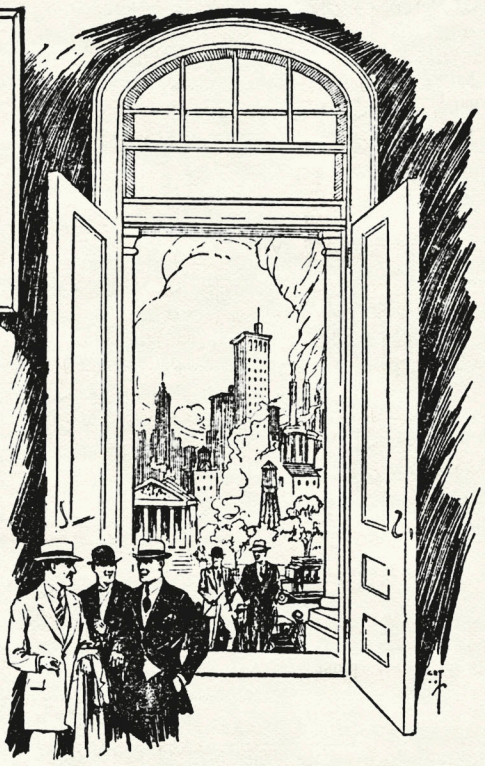
The Raid on Campbell's Bull — **MEADE CORCORAN**

The Man Who Would Be Killed — **ROBERT J. PEARSALL**

The Popular Club

A Chat with You — **THE EDITORS**

The POPULAR CLUB



OUR thanks to the many members of our club—which includes on its unwritten roll you and every other reader of THE POPULAR, old or new—who have filled out and sent in the preference coupons we have recently been publishing for the purpose of giving every member a chance to tell us what stories he likes best.

We give these coupons careful attention and are doing our best to meet the wishes of the majority and so give the greatest pleasure to the greatest number. There are some sharp differences of opinion, of course; one man may flatly condemn a story for which another has only praise. But all the various preferences, taken together, help to give us a comprehensive idea of what you all want—good reading. And that is what we aim to give you.

Let's *all* send in our coupons. We, the editors, are anxious to hear from just as many of our fellow members as we possibly can. If you don't feel like filling out the whole form, put down one or two choices, anyway, and send the coupon in. You will find it printed at the end of this department.

LOOK, MR. LUPTON.

THE following letter from Member H. T. Brummer, of Woodcliff, New Jersey, is especially interesting because a number of people have praised the same story. We liked it immensely ourselves.

> In your issue of September 7th I enjoyed a short story called "He Just Dropped In," by Leonard Lupton—a very delightful story. Hope to see more in the future by this author.

Doubtless Member Brummer read Mr. Lupton's "The Shakes," which appeared in the Second December Number. There will be more by him shortly.

To be sophisticated, is not to be superior. To be blasé or cynical, is not to be a philosopher.

OTTO H. KAHN.

UNUSUAL PUNCHES.

A FAVORITE POPULAR author, Member William Hemmingway, who has been acquainted with practically all of the big-time fighters for years, and who has even had the gloves on in a friendly

little bout with the one and only John L., has written us as follows:

Speaking of unusual punches, as did Mark Reed in his recent POPULAR story, "The Postman's Knock," let me ask you to consider the Sesquicentennial Smash. It changed the course of pugilistic history, confounded the wise, and took the title of world champion from Jack Dempsey, the "Manassa Mauler," who drew more millions to the ringside than any three of his predecessors—and, so far as we can see to-day, as any five of his successors will draw.

Dempsey was as strong as ever, could hit as hard as ever, and was as full of fight as ever when he met his Waterloo. Years without battle and the soft life of Hollywood had slowed his footwork somewhat, but he was the most dangerous fighting man in the world. How could he be beaten? Gene Tunney, neither as strong nor as rugged as the champion, studied this problem day after day as he watched moving pictures that showed Dempsey boxing.

The student noticed that whenever Dempsey made an attack he first turned his head sharply to the right for an instant, then faced forward and dashed in. Perhaps this was due to long practice under a moving-picture director who wanted to show our hero in profile as well as in full face. Tunney ran off the reel slower and slower, and there was that turn of the head every time Jack started to fight. After he had studied Dempsey's movements intently for the hundredth time, Tunney knew just where Jack's chin would be at the instant of turning. He could hit the exact spot with his eyes shut.

That was only a beginning. Tunney practiced a short, straight right-hand drive to shoot on the point of Jack's chin at the very moment it swung aside. He held the right fist loosely poised on his chest, drawn back the least bit. He practiced shooting it in with every ounce of his energy packed in it. This he did while punching the heavy bag. On the light bag and on his sparring partners he practiced the punch over and over again, literally hundreds of thousands of times, always trying to shoot it faster and faster. And every day he ran off the moving pictures and deepened his memory of just where he would connect with that chin. The blow traveled less than two feet.

"Remember the chin!" were Billy Gibson's last words as the gong clanged the call to battle. After the first flurry of fists, Dempsey, as became a champion, began to attack—unhappily began it with that turn of the head. Tunney shot the short, straight right so that it would meet the chin. In the haste of the moment, with a million dollars depending on it, he hit a little high, well up on the cheekbone. But even so the blow jarred Jack so hard that they had to use the smelling salts when he got to his corner, and he was weakened for the rest of the fight.

Some punch, the Sesquicentennial Smash!

THE DOCTOR SAYS——

IT gives us pleasure to know that among our readers practically every profession is well represented. It is interesting to learn what men of different callings think about the magazine. And when we get a letter from a doctor, like the following from Doctor J. Bruce Crook, of East Haddam, Connecticut, we read it with more than usual alertness; for doctors know life and people—the material from which our stories are made. Says Member Crook:

I have been a reader of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE since its inception. I take practically all the professional journals, to sharpen up my work; but a time comes after a hard day's work when one seeks mental relaxation—and that is the time THE POPULAR comes to the fore.

I enjoy it more than any other magazine that comes to the house.

Wish you would publish some college serials—football, et cetera—such as wonderful, lamented Ralph Paine was wont to write. I am not much on Western yarns. But I am fond of a good mystery story—Ferguson—and humor—Chisholm, not slapstick.

Fire is the test of gold; adversity, of strong men.

SENECA.

WE HAD A VISITOR.

ONE of our best authors dropped into the office the other day. He was saying such pleasant things about the magazine that we cannot resist the temptation to quote him.

"I think," he said, "that was an excellent cover, 'Fall Pippins,' on your First December Number—so gratifyingly different from the usual prancing horses and cowboys that so many other publications have. The whole magazine, in fact, outside and in, looks wonderful."

We were so happy after that that we almost gave him a cigar. But we caught ourselves just in time.

The man who cannot forgive any mortal thing is a green hand in life.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

SOME LIKES AND DISLIKES.

I like submarine stories with enough technical truths to make them possible—no matter how improbable the stories may be. Something along Jules Verne's line. My favorite type of story is of outdoor life; adventure such as airplane, et cetera.

MEMBER LEONARD A. MITCHELL.
Selkirk, New York.

Western stories of irrigation, if spiced with plenty of hair-raising incidents ought to take well—in re Boulder Dam, for instance, or the Los Angeles water supply. I enjoy most a combination of adventure and romance, preferably located in the south seas or Florida. MEMBER HARRY M. THOMAS.
New Brunswick, New Jersey.

I have never missed an issue of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE. That's what I think of THE POPULAR! MEMBER F. B. GREGG.
Tucson, Arizona.

"The Red Eagles of the Tyrol," by Edgar L. Cooper, was the best for some time. Any more like it? My favorite type of story is —secret service and air.

MEMBER W. B. CHISHOLM.
Westhazel, Saskatchewan, Canada.

The first story I ever read in THE POPULAR was "Chip of the Flying U," by B. M. Bower. I have been reading the magazine ever since. I also like stories of the cities.

MEMBER W. J. LECHER.
Wharton, New Jersey.

Young fellows will be young fellows.

ISAAC BICKERSTAFF.

Editors,
The Popular Magazine,
79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

Dear Sirs:

I liked, in this issue, the following stories:

Best:_____ **Third:**_____

Next:_____ **Fourth:**_____

My favorite type of story is:

_____

Name: Member_____

Address:_____

Note: Any further comments will be very welcome. Special consideration is given to the preferences of our readers as expressed in their communications.

Battle Wagons!

Took them over and brought them back; and, in the meantime——

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When the war came, the navy brought out her big guns, her mines, her convoys, and all the other implements of offense and defense. There was work to be done in home waters and in foreign waters. The navy was busy, and——

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