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Volume XCVI  Number 4

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See the naked heart and spirit,
Know what spur the action gives;
Often we should find it better,
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We should love each other better—
If we only understood.”

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NOW that,” said Silas Tipping, “is what I call a stone!” He turned around toward me the small white paper into which he had been gazing and disclosed a diamond. It was more than half an inch square, as nearly as I could judge, and it glowed and flamed there against its white background as though it had leaping fire in its heart. I looked long at it, for such things always interested me, although I have no hope of ever becoming one of Silas’ customers.

“What is that worth?” I asked.

Silas shrugged. “Whatever one can get for it. I’ll be satisfied with sixty-five thousand.”

I whistled. “That’s a lot of money!”

Silas smiled. “Yes—but when you think of some of them—”

“The big ones, eh? Like the Kohinoor?”

Silas shook his head sadly. “That poor, mistreated stone!”

“Did you ever see it, Silas?”

“No. Very few people now living have seen the Kohinoor.”

I looked at him in surprise.

“But you’ve been in the Tower of London, where they keep it!”

“Not the Kohinoor—the Kohinoor’s ghost!”

“What do you mean?”

“The thing they show you in the Tower is a mere crystal model of the Kohinoor. The diamond itself does not belong to the State, as do most of the things in the Tower. It is the private property of the Windsor family, and is theirs to do with as they please. The Kohinoor itself, from all I hear, is not much more to look at than that piece of quartz. You see, that diamond has one of the longest authentic histories of any famous stone. It has lived in legend for nearly five thousand years, although it does not enter history until the beginning of the fourteenth century. Then it belonged to the Mogul emperors of India, and they clung to it in spite of everything until Nadir Shah, a Sikh, laid waste their empire and took Delhi and with it the Kohinoor.

He kept it as long as he lived after that, which was not long. He was murdered, and his kingdom died with him. The Kohinoor was then snatched from hand to hand for a number of years, becoming smeared with the blood of murder and war. Another Sikh, a man by the name of Runjit Singh, got it and held on to it until about 1850, when it was acquired, along with everything else of value in that poor country, by the East India people. They were in very bad with the queen at that moment, and, as a propitiatory gesture, they sent it to England on the person of one Lord Dalhousie, who presented it ceremoniously to Victoria, whose family still have it.
Brothers In Jeopardy

CHAPTER I.
THE JURY THOUGHT OTHERWISE.

Sometimes they let you read the newspapers in death row, if you have the stomach for it. Doctor Clay Harlan was reading now. He sat on the edge of his cot and let the hands that held the paper droop to rest tremblingly on his knees. Across its top and through the bars of the door he saw the face of the man on deathwatch outside. The watchman had paused there to glance in, and his eyes were kindly. He did not speak, for it is not easy to make conversation where one wretch is caged and waiting for death and the other is his personal jailer.

The man outside understood these things; and the man inside who had so recently been hailed by medical colleagues as a surgeon with a distinguished present and a great future, lifted his paper again.

He was reading about another who had been destined for the “hot chair” at Sing Sing, many hundreds of miles away. Doctor Clay Harlan, himself, was awaiting the hot chair here in Kentucky, and so the two were brothers in extremes, fellow murderers stamped by the verdict of juries into two things as shamefully identical as stained and paltry pennies stamped out of whatever individuality either had ever possessed. Men are of many kinds, but murderers are merely murderers.

He wondered how many men were waiting in similar cells across the breadth of the country for their abject
forced marches to eternity. However many they were, they formed a brotherhood of proven infamy, and they therefore became alike, identical, just as skeletons become alike when they no longer wear the distinguishing attributes of flesh and life.

Yet he could feel no similarity or kinship between himself and this man of whom he was reading. He was the same man, in his own feeling, that he had been when he had been making a brilliant name for himself, performing, in the operating room, little miracles of surgery at which his fellows marveled.

Of course there was the question of conscience. Supposedly that should have stripped him of all self-respect, seared his soul and made of him a different man; but how could conscience scourge him when he, himself, had no certain knowledge whether or not he had killed a man?

He started in again reading his paper, and learned from its colorful vocabulary that the fellow who had been awaiting death at Sing Sing, had already taken other “raps” in the big house. He was luridly painted here as the sort of hero of crime worth columns of print. In Chicago, before he came to New York, he had been a “Tommy-man,” a “chopper” for one of the three principal “mobs,” and the doctor gathered from the content, that this meant he had expertly handled a submachine gun in the execution of enemies to his gang.

This strange underworld character had seemed to derive a perverse grati-
fication from talking day by day with the newspaper boys. He faced them all with a brazen and sneering effront-ery and seemed anxious only to remain in print as long as he lived. He read what they wrote in each edition and spent hours in his cell with an unholy grin on his lips thinking out more brazen copy to give them on their next visit. It was all most curious.

"Always leave 'em laughing when you say good-by," he had been quoted as saying. "That's me, that's 'Benny the Gun.' I've pulled my heat and smoked away at the dicks with both hands and, of course, I always expected to get mine some day. It's a game of give and take—and never squeal. I expected to get it that way, though—shooting it out with the dicks, or the boys, or some other mob, see? Well, I get jammed, see? I don't get the breaks. I don't draw the finish I figured, with a funeral that costs ten grand and my pals riding in the hacks behind. Instead of that I get burned. But you haven't heard me pulling any squawk, have you? I can give it or take it, like I said before. That's Benny the Gun. That's me."

The doctor's hands dropped again to his knees, crumpling the paper a bit between his nervous fingers. No, he could feel no brotherhood here. Such a valedictory was to him incomprehensible.

But after all, he told himself, Benny the Gun was not really any longer a brother in despair. Benny the Gun had crashed out of Sing Sing, and the papers flared with headlines of his escape. He had accomplished the unbelievable, and though the siren had shrieked and the man hunters of the Empire State were out in full cry, Benny the Gun was still at large.

To have "lammed" out of Sing Sing; that was achievement indeed. And this man whose experience of criminality was limited to one conviction for murder, read of it with entire bewilderment.

Still he hoped that Benny the Gun would make good his escape. He might be the most vicious and dangerous human rat that had ever gnawed at the roots of lawfulness, yet Doctor Harlan knew what it meant to chew day and night on the sore cud of waiting to "burn" in the chair, and he found himself zealously opposed to capital punishment under any circumstances.

Escape! Slowly that word wove in his mind a new idea, only to be dismissed as fantastical. True, he was strong. In the arms that were shaking now with the nerve agony of his apprehension dwelt a power of which he had always been fearful. He had amused house parties, as a college lad, by bending heavy iron pokers across his knee, but that strength was a puny thing compared to the strength of the law. And that power had been his undoing, granting of course that he had actually killed Kenneth Galloway. Whether he had or not, he could not say—did not know.

He had heard witnesses on the stand swear that the dead man had come to his death as if he had been in conflict with a gorilla and been bare-handedly and horribly broken and bruised.

Thoughts of escape were not for him. It was different with Benny the Gun, of course. Such a man, once out, had hopes of staying out. He was highly educated in the arts of outfoxing his pack of pursuers, and the papers said he was not a snarling roughneck type except when he chose that rôle, for effect. By nature he was rather the dapper Broadwayite who could mingle and take his ease with well-dressed and well-mannered folk. He could use the right spoon, order the right wine—and then drop, at need, into the caverns of the underworld to find himself as much at home there as a bat in a grotto.

So Harlan dismissed the falsely attractive idea of attempted escape. He had been sentenced to electrocution on a given date and he would remain here
in the Louisville jail until the court of appeals had ruled on his plea for a reversal.

When that plea had been denied, as it would be denied, he would make a journey by rail to the Eddyville prison under the escort of men accustomed to handling criminals; men who understood their grim business. He was not very familiar with these details of criminal procedure, but he felt sure they must be adequate. Otherwise no man would ever submit to such a last chapter being ghost-written at the end of his life.

Suddenly Doctor Harlan dropped that line of thought. It led only into a blind alley of despair. Now, for the thousandth or the millionth time, his memory coursed back to the beginning of this whole phantasmagoria and lived through the aës that had elapsed in a few months.

It was quite true that he had never liked Kenneth Galloway, but he had certainly never regarded him as important enough to hate. Galloway was twenty years older than himself and lived in a different world. They had met that night in the rathskeller of a country club. It was an excellent club, and the bar that went across the side did not make the place a speakeasy. But a man could use liquor if he brought it with him, and that night every one seemed to have it in abundance.

No, that wasn’t quite the beginning, either. One who seeks to analyze must observe sequences if he is to arrive anywhere. The real beginning was about the time he commenced using his prescription book to satisfy his personal thirst and that antedated the fatal evening at the club.

Queer how a man who has always had nerves of steel and a mind studiously governed, may suddenly begin to brood and grow abnormal. He had done that and he had begun, overnight as it seemed, to drink.

What business had he at those wild parties in Greenwich Village in New York—he who was a man wise only in his one sphere? That sphere was surgery and in it he was a master, but she was a woman of another world, a woman whom it had amused to shackle him to her chariot wheel. Perhaps she was not to be greatly blamed. Perhaps she never guessed that such a self-contained young viking was utterly unschooled and defenseless against her subtlety of amour.

She had been playing. He had been serious, and he had come home broken and demoralized. A man should stick to his own game.

Of that night when the world went to pieces, he remembered only the beginnings and, later on, a few disjointed fragments.

Galloway had been sitting at the round table, Galloway with the pig-eyed face which seemed to hold a sort of customary though unintentional snarl. The presence of Galloway had irritated him, but there were others present who found him vastly amusing. As the evening progressed these others began drifting out.

"I don’t suppose," Harlan had reflected, "the man has been sober in twenty years. No man can so abuse himself and live. He is a wretched slave to his poison."

Harlan himself had not been sober for an hour and his unaccustomed condition made him intolerant. Yet he must now take into consideration the truth that Galloway had survived years of dissipation while a few hours had proved ruinous to himself.

On that evening as Harlan’s mind went into the fog, he could hear Galloway drooling on and could hear himself growing heavily sarcastic. There were the makings of a quarrel between them.

Just when he had been left alone with the rat-gray man, he could not remem-
ber. He could remember nothing of those fateful hours except hearing eventually through a deep torpor, excited voices and of being carted away by policemen.

From that dim beginning his thought went to the scene when, clear enough in the head and sore enough in the heart, he had sat in a courtroom and heard Nat Torrelli tell his story.

"Yes, your honor, I'm behind the bar at the club. The soft-drink bar."

"These gentlemen were not taking soft drinks, were they?" a lawyer had inquired softly; and another lawyer had objected, "Your honor, I ask that this witness be allowed to tell this story in his own way."

"These gentlemen had bottles of their own," went on Nat steadily. "They had been there most of the evening—drinking. Finally they all left except Mr. Galloway and Doctor Harlan. They were sort of quarreling, and I was trying to quiet them down."

The witness paused and again an attorney's voice broke in:

"You didn't succeed?"

"No, sir, they were both pretty far gone. Finally I started upstairs to get some of the gentlemen to come down and take charge of them. But just then it all began to happen too fast to keep up with."

"What began to happen?"

"Doctor Harlan jumped up and grabbed Mr. Galloway by the throat. Mr. Galloway had called him a name. They rolled over on the floor, and I thought they were so groggy that it wouldn't amount to anything, but the doctor seemed as strong and as wild as a maniac. He threw Mr. Galloway around like a terrier playing with a rat, and when I seen it was gettin' serious and tried to interfere, he caught hold of me and beat my head against the wall. Then he flung me to one side and caught up a soda siphon and began beating Mr. Galloway with it. Finally he dropped the siphon and sat down. 'That's how they found us when the noise brought people from upstairs. Mr. Galloway was on the floor—dead—and I was leaning up against the bar holding on to it, trying to get my breath back.'"

Harlan had heard the story told and had watched the jurors as they listened. There had been minutes of the time described, perhaps a good many of them, comprising a twilight zone into which his own recollection did not penetrate. He remembered last, with anything like a contour of reality, sitting slumped and less than half awake at the table, but at that time there had been other faces around the table, too, faces of men who had not been there when Galloway was brutally manhandled to his death.

The story had gone on for a time, bringing out details which meant little to the defendant who understood medicine profoundly and law not at all. Finally the Commonwealth's attorney came to the end of his questioning and turned with a wave of his hand to the table where Doctor Harlan sat between his attorneys.

"The defense may take the witness," said the prosecution lawyer, and the Honorable Kennerly Trace had risen complacently from his seat.

"Mr. Torrelli," he began, "you have testified that you were employed by the club to serve at the refreshment stand. How long had you been so employed?"

"Six months," responded the witness, then added as if in afterthought, "that is, this time."

"You mean you had been formerly employed in the same capacity?"

"No, sir. Not exactly. Before prohibition I had been bartender there."

"Before prohibition you had been bartender there," repeated the lawyer musingly. "And for how long?"

"For five years or better."

"Why did you leave?"
"I left when prohibition came in and there wasn’t any bar to tend any more."

The Honorable Kennerly Trace seemed in a deliberative and meditative mood as he proceeded in a soft and almost gentle manner:

"You left because there was no longer any bar to tend. Now you are back. Does that mean that there is once more a bar to tend at the Mohican Country Club?"

Torrelli colored in the witness chair, and the Commonwealth’s attorney was instantly on his feet.

"I object to that question as irrelevant and improper. The Mohican Club is not on trial here."

"I withdraw my question," conceded Mr. Trace amiably. "I will ask you, Mr. Torrelli, how you happened to resume your old position."

"I didn’t resume my old position," came the ready response. "The old position was done for. I’d been out of work and I asked for the job of tending the soft-drink stand, and they gave it to me. It was better than nothing."

"I see." The lawyer strolled a step forward. "How long did you work as a bartender all in all?"

"Quite a few years while a man could work at it—lawfully."

"And in the old days of the saloon, I mean before you came to the well-ordered environment of the Mohican Club, there were occasions on which you were called on to handle disorderly men?"

"Well, now and then I had to put a bum out, if that’s what you mean."

The lawyer smiled and again his manner was disarmingly amiable.

"Yes, that’s what I mean, Mr. Torrelli. You were proficient in giving what is known as ‘the bums’ rush’ to objectionable customers, were you not?"

"I said I sometimes put ’em out."

"You were also proficient in ‘walking them Spanish’—assisting their exits by hustling them along with a firm and commanding grip on the coat collar and the slack of the pants?"

There was a ripple of amusement over the courtroom and the judge’s gavel fell with a monotony rap.

"You might even, on occasion, have quelled the roisterer with a bung-starter, might you not, Mr. Torrelli? I mean, of course, in those distant days of a less temperate era?"

Again the Commonwealth’s objection sounded its interruption and again, without awaiting a ruling from the bench, Mr. Trace abandoned his trend, to inquire suavely:

"You were arrested after the death of Galloway, were you not, Mr. Torrelli, and held for the grand jury under a charge of murder?"

The witness flushed, but he answered promptly:

"The grand jury refused to indict me."

"You were, by your own statement, one of three men in that room when the man was killed, were you not, Mr. Torrelli?"

"That’s what I testified. Of course, a colored boy was in and out about that time."

"Quite so. And under such a condition of affairs—where one man was dead and one of the remaining two had obviously killed him—where you were one of those other two, Mr. Torrelli—isn’t it quite natural that you should become an enthusiastic witness for the prosecution?"

"Why would I want to hurt Mr. Galloway?" demanded the witness; but the court interrupted him: "That is an improper question, which is stricken out."

"I will now ask you," continued the Honorable Mr. Trace, "whether it is not sometimes the case that the tenders of soft-drink stands act as intermediaries between gentlemen who want to buy hard liquor and other gentlemen who are willing to sell it?"
“Not me,” responded Mr. Torrelli with decision. “I ain’t no bootlegger, if that’s what you mean.”

“That’s what I mean, Mr. Torrelli,” the lawyer agreed. “And you answer that you are neither a murderer nor a bootlegger. You tell us you had no motive for attacking Mr. Galloway. Can you suggest any motive this defendant had for attacking him?”

“They had been kind of quarreling all evening—like men sometimes do when the liquor takes them that way.”

A negro boy took the stand to corroborate the star witness.

“I wasn’t in dar when it happened,” he said, “but I’d been in and out mos’ all evenin’. Dey wasn’t nobody on dat flo’ exceptin’ the gentlemen at the table an’ Mr. Torrelli an’ some of us colored help. When I heered a rumpus goin’ on I ran to the do’.”

“What did you see?” inquired the prosecutor. “I seen Mr. Galloway on the flo’ with dis gen’leman here”—he waved a hand toward the defendant—“with his gen’leman here flingin’ Mr. Torrelli back erginst ther bar—I means ther counter.”

Finally when the evidence had closed and the arguments had raged and the jury had retired to deliberate, the Honorable Kennerly Trace had resumed his seat beside his client.

“Not a chance in the world of conviction,” he had said reassuringly. “There are too many holes in the evidence. Your character was established by too many witnesses and the whole case is too fantastically circumstantial.”

But the jury thought otherwise and the jury had the last word.

Sitting now on his cot in “death row” of the jail, Doctor Harlan could see, with an appalling vividness, the set face of the foreman standing before the bench as the court clerk read the verdict:

“We, the jury, find the defendant guilty as charged in the indictment and fix his punishment at death.”

CHAPTER II.
THE WARDEN’S LETTER.

MUIR BRATCHELL, the prosecuting attorney of a Kentucky mountain circuit, sat in his office, the same office in which his predecessor had given dutiful and zealous service to the State until one day when an assassin’s bullet had cut him down.

Now Muir Bratchell, who had sought to avenge his senior’s death and who had aggressively but with only partial success, prosecuted “Red Bill” Featherstone, sat looking out of the office window and a letter lay on his desk, which had just fallen there from his hand.

The door as well as the window stood open and both framed pictures of austere majesty and rugged beauty.

Across from the little county seat stood a wall of timbered peaks rising into a hot and flawless sky. Beyond the street, which had begun to mingle a shoddy modernity of architecture with the simple ruggedness of pioneer aloofness and backed by a wall of forested granite, he could see the ancient cupola of the old courthouse.

This had been a feud-ridden and a bloodstained country, and though men told you that the old days of private reprisal were no more, this young man sitting among his battered law books knew how cheaply human life was held here among a people otherwise stalwart and upright.

Besides the generalities of his legal experience he had sharper and more personal reminders.

Even when his sternest efforts to send Red Bill Featherstone, that old baron of feudal power, to his death had failed, and when he had had to content himself with securing a short prison term, the hand of the dogged old clansman had reached out from the bars
and walls of the Frankfort penitentiary to crush him—and had almost succeeded.

That episode belonged to the past, except as its sequel touched the present and threatened the future.

In the ruggedly hewn but inherently fine features of this young prosecutor, one saw something of the single-minded resolution and unalterable courage of the type that had once produced a Lincoln—and produced him from a similar ancestry.

If he still lived and still carried on the hard duties of his office, it was because Muir Bratchell was a bad man to attack and a vigorous man at returning blow for blow.

Now he sat with an expression on his face which was one neither of overconfidence nor of fear—rather of weariness at the realization of an old issue about to open afresh.

The hills were beginning to burn tawny and brown under the heat of the summer sun. The waters which three months ago had raced and cascaded with the fulness of the “spring tide” were now diminished and shrunk to a lazy trickle. The old town lay panting and hotly somnolent. Up there on the backbones of the ridges, breezes might be stirring, but down here between their knees the heat shimmer played and a few razor-backed hogs grunted stertorously in stagnant puddles along the side streets.

Muir Bratchell closed his eyes for a moment and in memory he was standing again in the old courthouse which thundered with his denunciation of the old miscreant who regarded himself as above the law. He heard again the answering voice that rang through the courtroom and out into the dingy corridor.

“I ain’t ergoin’ ter sulter down, thar in that penitentiary forever, an’ when I comes out—I calls on God Almighty fer my witness, ef somebody ain’t a ready got ye, Muir Bratchell, I aims ter git ye!”

Now Red Bill Featherstone was coming out.

Bratchell did not long keep his eyes closed in reverie. He became conscious of a shadow across the door, and rose to his feet with a smile of welcome on his face.

The woman who stood there wore rough-riding clothes of khaki stained with the mud and dust of a journey over “right slavish” ways, but she carried herself with a straight gallantry, and though she was no longer young, there was a tireless energy in her eyes.

Bratchell drew forward a chair, and Miss Moreland took it. When she spoke, her voice had a quality which suggested drawing-rooms, and her smile held that graciousness which bespoke the gentler origin of the Bluegrass country.

“How are things going over at the school, Miss Moreland?” inquired the man; and there was a repressed enthusiasm in her voice as she answered him:

“We’re breaking ground for the new dormitory on Far Hill,” she told him.

“When we have it, we can take thirty more children.”

“That school of yours,” he reflected, “is what this country has been hurtin’ for for a long spell back.”

The woman leaned forward.

“They are so eager for education,” she said. “One mother over our way said to another the other day, ‘Does ye aim ter make yore children go ter thotched-on women’s school?’ And the answer was, ‘They ain’t ter make. Thay jest p’int-blank cries ter go ter school.’”

She paused, then went on:

“And when those children grow up, with what we can give them of a new idea, the country will be different. You won’t have so many homicide cases to prosecute, Mr. Bratchell.”

The lawyer nodded.

“It’s got to be that,” he said. “It’s got to be the children that grow up.
The old folks will never change. They'll be stiff-necked till they die off. There's wormwood in their blood."

"What I came to see you about to-day," Miss Moreland told him, "is a problem that's just come to us. We have three of the Lockridge children and now Joe Featherstone wants to send his two boys.

Bratchell's face grew grave but he made no comment.

The woman laughed with a low but rather desperate little catch in her throat.

"The Lockridge family say their children can't stay if we let any Featherstones come. What are we to do? We can't truckle to that sort of thing. Our school can't recognize feud hatreds. It must stand open to all, and yet the Lockridges are there first, and if we accept these Featherstone children, they'll be taken away from us."

The eyes of the prosecuting attorney deepened with gravity.

"It's right hard to counsel you, ma'am. When your kith and kin have been shot down and murdered for three generations hand-runnin' by a family of enemies, it's right natural to feel that you don't want your children mixed up together."

The woman sat with her fine face perplexed; then she inquired:

"Don't you agree with me that the only hope is to bring up the oncoming generation to a new viewpoint—to an eradication of the old bitterness?"

He bowed his head, then quite casually he tossed across to her the letter he had been reading.

"I got that to-day," he said.

Miss Moreland took the paper and noted that it was written on the letter head of the State's prison. She read it, then handed it back with a puzzled face.

"I don't quite understand it," she told him; and again he smiled.

"It's jest kinderly a matter of form," he enlightened her. "When the warden up there is about to set a convict free, and when that convict has threatened to kill somebody after he gets out—well, it's the rule that the warden writes that man and warns him, that's all."

"And you mean—""

"I mean that old Red Bill Featherstone comes out of the penitentiary before long, and he's announced that when he gets home, he aims to get me. Now if you can tame that spirit out of Featherstone blood, or Lockridge blood, either one, by catchin' 'em young enough, I reckon Commonwealth's attorneys of the future will be right beholden to you."

"But a threat like that—surely it's just idle talk—just bravado."

Bratchell's reply was grim.

"If old Bill's taken to threat'rin' idly, it's a habit he's acquired down below. He always used to keep his word."

"And you mean to sit still under such a menace?"

"I aim to keep my eyes open. The reason I showed you that is because I'm enough a mountain man to understand how the Lockridges feel. It's all wrong, of course, but it's writ down deep in hate and human passion."

"It's a hate that we're trying to cure," she told him with a zealous earnestness. "So long as it dominates these mountains, there can be no security and no happiness."

"I reckon we're agreed there, Miss Moreland," he assured her. "You call it security and happiness. I call it tryin' to govern the country by law instead of lawlessness. I'm paid to prosecute criminals and punish them. You have given up a life of comfort to do these things for other folks in need. A good many folks hate me and everybody calls you an angel, and yet I reckon we've got the heart an' cravin' for the same thing. I reckon we're strivin' toward the same end."

She smiled as she shook her head.
BROTHERS IN JEOPARDY

"You're much less than just to yourself, Mr. Bratchell," she told him. "You stepped into the shoes of a murdered man knowing that unless you could reverse all the precedents of these hills, you would go the same way to death." She pointed with a weary desperation to the letter lying on his desk. "You still know it," she added, "and you are carrying on."

"A man can't handily lay down a job he's taken up," he told her with self-deprecation, "before he sees the end of it. We both know that."

"And how long, Muir Bratchell," she inquired quietly, "do you reckon it's going to take you to finish that job?"

Bratchell rose and his face kindled to a grave smile.

"You ask how long will it take and I can't answer you, ma'am. The thing we're fightin' has lasted two hundred years, and the courts and prisons and militia of Kentucky haven't availed to change it—much. The hate of feudal blood is long and lasty, Miss Moreland. It ain't to be altered in a day—perhaps not in my time or yours. If it is changed in our time, it will be by schools—like yours."

He sat down again and leaned back in his chair.

"The trouble with my work is, I don't get results. A man commits a murder, but to him and to his people it isn't murder. It's just the killin' of an enemy that needed killin'. That's how he sees it and how the jury sees it. I tell them what the law provides—and I talk to deaf ears."

After a momentary pause, he went on:

"You know my own history. You know that I had to kill two men that Red Bill Featherstone sent to lay-way me. I shot them on my own doorstep in the nighttime, when they'd murdered another man through the window, thinkin' he was me. Was that murder, Miss Moreland?"

"She shuddered, but her response was instant.

"Of course not. No law calls self-defense murder," she declared.

He shook his head.

"Most killin's are self-defense to the thinkin' of the man that does the killin'. It's all just point of view. That's what I'm arguin'. In the long run, point of view is the highest law."

"But you've prosecuted, and in three years you've grown so strong in the minds of these people that they look to you for leadership."

Bratchell laughed.

"I've aimed to be fair as well as vigorous," he told her. "I've dismissed some men that the world would say were right wicked, and I've penentiariated some that the world would call victims of ill luck."

He gazed out of the window for a few moments at the drowsing hills with their insufferable heat.

"No, Miss Moreland," he said, "my job is just one of patchin' up a sick man—not of curing him. It's only you, and people like you, that can bring about a cure."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. It's only by education that you can change the habit of centuries, and it must begin with the babies. The law is a thing that shuts the stable door when the horse is gone. Schools build the stables and build them safe when the horse is still a foal."

The woman's eyes were gravely deep.

"That's our job," she said.

"I reckon if I had my way," the man went on, "I wouldn't bear down too hard on the older generation. I'd just kinderly wait for 'em to die off. I'd kinderly declare a moratorium on punishment meanwhile. I'd quit chisin' at mountain peaks built out of century-old granite with the little tools of unpopular law, and I'd set myself to molderin' the soft concrete of children's minds—like you're doin'.”
"As we are trying to do," she modestly corrected.

"Now, as to this job of havin' young Lockridges and young Featherstones consort peaceable in your classrooms an' dormitories," went on the Commonwealth's attorney, "I aim to see what I can do. I'll talk to Red Bill when he gets back home."

Miss Moreland's eyes widened in amazement. This man had been her chief supporter since she had laid the foundations of her school back of Big Blue, yet even now he was continually surprising her with flashes of the unexpected.

"But you can't talk to old Featherstone," she demurred. "He comes out sworn to murder you."

"That's one thing I aim to have speech with him about," Muir told her calmly. "I think it's worth talking over."

He broke off, then went on more rapidly:

"Since Red Bill went down to Frankfort, he's aged a little, albeit I don't reckon he's changed master much. But nowadays I'm stronger here than I was—and he's weaker. For one thing, he's weaker by the two men he sent to shoot me through my window."

"They were the men who—" she broke off, and Bratchell finished for her without a trace of nervousness in his voice:

"They lay down and died there on my doorstep—as was seemly and fitting."

For a space the woman from the Bluegrass country said nothing. Before her mental vision rose all the somber sequences and sinister background of local history, and it seemed so impossible to reconcile such grim records with the grandeur and beauty of the upflung land and its splendor of quiet forestry.

"How's your hospital comin' on?" demanded Bratchell; and she awoke from her reverie to an enthusiasm which almost at once clouded again under some shadow of grief.

"You haven't been over there since we finished that building, have you?" she asked; and he replied with slow gravity:

"No, but I aim to come right soon."

"It's wonderful," she announced. "Small, of course, but complete—and in a country where there's only one 'diplomy doctor.' On that side of the mountain it will be a boon. There's an operating table and equipment as good as any in Lexington. There'll be a trained nurse, and surgeons will come now and then from Lexington and Louisville to hold clinics there."

"It appears like you ought to be joyful about that," he suggested. "And yet you seem right sad."

Miss Moreland shuddered.

"We've been sitting here talking about murders and trials as if they existed nowhere else. Do you know who gave us that surgical equipment—who planned the little hospital for us in keeping with the conditions we had to meet here—who told us how it should be located, and who meant to come and spend a week or two several times a year operating?"

"No, ma'am. Who was it?"

Suddenly the woman, who could work tirelessly from dawn to late night, who could ride "slavish" roads without complaint, covered her face with her hands.

"That man," she said, "was Doctor Clay Harlan."

"Harlan!" The exclamation broke from Bratchell's lips with astonished suddenness. "You don't mean the man they convicted for killing Galloway?"

Miss Moreland nodded.

"He's sentenced to the death chair," she said. "I went to see him in the Louisville jail—but he said if I would forgive him, he'd rather not see me; that he'd rather have me remember him as he was before any of that happened."
"But you'd talked with him before—about your hospital?"

"No. I'd never met him. We discussed things only by letter, but I felt as if I knew him well. He was a great surgeon. I wanted to tell him face to face that I didn't care what witnesses had sworn to. I didn't care what juries had decided. I had an intuition that went beyond all that—and I knew he was innocent."

Bratchell inclined his head and said quietly:

"I read about that case in the newspapers. I followed it right close—and somehow I felt like you do about it—that it was really a miscarriage of justice."

"He's innocent," declared Miss Moreland with the assurance that can come only from the intangible. "And there's going to be a plate set in the new hospital giving him full credit for his generosity. He'll have that monument anyhow."

There was a shadow in the door again, and looking up Muir Bratchell saw another feminine figure, and heard an unusually musical voice inquiring:

"May I come in?"

Miss Moreland turned her head and smiled.

"By all means come in, Rachel," she said. "I want you to meet one of our main advisers and one of our strongest moral supports."

Muir was standing now, and as the girl came forward he was finding it difficult not to look at her with too direct an interest, because in the freshness of her young beauty was a challenge to appreciation.

She was not tall, but she carried herself with a fine and willowy straightness that gave her an appearance of slender height. Her hair was brown but with the gold glint of the true blond and her skin was as delicate as blossom petals, but Muir Bratchell was more interested in character than in girlish beauty, and so it was her eyes which chiefly interested him.

They were blue eyes, but of a changing blue, for as the light played on them they altered to the blue-gray of certain mosses and to the gray-green of other mosses—and they were eyes delicately attuned to a spiritual sensitiveness yet steadfast with a certainty of will that could be unflinchingly courageous.

"Rachel," Miss Moreland was going on, "this gentleman is Mr. Bratchell, our Commonwealth's attorney." There was a flickering and subtle ghost of emphasis on the word "gentleman," and Muir flushed a little because he saw the quickly responsive intelligence of the girl's glance. He knew that as these two women used the word, it was meant as an accolade.

"If there's any law in this county," went on the older woman steadily yet lightly, "he's it—he, and Judge Cullom, and Sheriff Holliday."

The girl was smiling appreciatively, and Muir heard Miss Moreland explaining.

"Miss Ransome came to us this summer. She's just finished at Bryn Mawr, and she's helping us here. Like all our staff, she's working for the joy of the job."

Rachel laughed lightly enough, as one who would brush away an implication of unmerited praise, and yet Bratchell knew that there was seriousness under her poise and gayety. She was like a butterfly, he thought, that seems to drift aimlessly in the breeze and sunshine, yet that knows the flower which is its destination—and which the wind cannot shake off.

"I finished the shopping," announced the girl, "and I began to wonder what had become of you. So I came to see."

"Yes," agreed the older woman, "we've got the mountain to cross."

And that meant that though it was only a few miles from the railway at the county seat to the school, it was a way
that lay over a range which not so many
years ago no wheeled vehicle had ever
crossed. It was as if one world lay
"hither" and another world lay "yon," with the half-mile-high wall of the
mountains stretching between.

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAIN TO THE CHAIR.

T
HE mandate of the court of ap-
peals has come down," said the
Honorable Kennerly Trace, looking
through the bars in death row. "I don't
suppose you will be surprised. I fancy
you haven't been expecting much."

Doctor Harlan, standing in his cell,
shook his head.

"The conviction is upheld?" he in-
quired calmly; and his counsel nodded
his gloomy affirmation.

"I couldn't believe the jury would
convict, or that, if it did convict, it
would give a maximum sentence," he
told his client. "I sometimes feel that
the practice of other States is sounder
than ours. In those places the jury says
only 'guilty' or 'not guilty' and the
judge fixes the punishment. That seems
fairer."

"Perhaps," agreed the condemned
man dully. "But that is beside the
point. I was tried in Kentucky."

After a moment, Doctor Harlan went
on quietly:

"As to—as to the thing itself, I dare
say it requires little more resolution
than I ask of the patient who goes to
the table with a slim chance of life. It's
quick oblivion—that's all—except for
the filthy disgrace."

"You go with a clear conscience,"
Trace reminded him with a feeble effort
at solace. "So far as you know, you
killed no man—and the rest of your life
is as clear as a hound's tooth."

"Well, what now?" asked the doctor.

The attorney shook his head.

"We're not done fighting, but it
would be an unkindness to raise false
hopes. There is usually the last-mo-
ment effort to prove insanity—"

But the condemned man stiffened and
the dullness went out of his voice.

"None of that! I forbid it!" he de-
clared resolutely. "No caging in an asy-
ylum for me, and no commuting to life
imprisonment, either. Death I can
stand if I brace myself for meeting it.
The other thing—no!"

"Then I have little hope to offer. We
shall go on fighting, but what is left us
is only last-resort maneuvering."

Harlan inclined his head.

"I suppose they will take me to Ed-
dyville now? That's where the chair is,
isn't it?"

"Yes. When the mandate comes
down, the prisoner is usually trans-
ferred there."

"Will they—will they handcuff me?"
The lawyer frowned uneasily.

"That's the general rule, I believe.
They usually send a consignment of
prisoners to Eddyville—about once a
month, under an escort from the
sheriff's office. They are generally
handcuffed together in pairs."

"You mean, I'll make that trip in—
in a chain gang of felons, herded along
precisely like beeves on the way to the
slaughter house?"

"In some particulars," Trace told him
hopefully, "it might be slightly modi-

Clay Harlan stood in his cell and his
eyes went about the place.

"I don't suppose—if you went with
me—and a sufficient guard, as well—I
could take a drawing-room on the train
—and make my last journey free of—of
staring eyes?"

"Possibly—perhaps. I'll try to ar-
range it."

When the day came, a small col-
collection of condemned men arrived at the
railway station and were unloaded from
patrol wagons under a guard of deput-
ties. These were for the most part
malefactors convicted of minor felonies, and they climbed onto the smoking coach of the train two by two, manacled together. A small crowd about the station looked on and there were forlorn farewells.

When the train was under way and the conductor came into the smoker, he took from the chief deputy the tickets for the unhappy group and their guardians, and, beyond counting heads, paid little attention to the wretched individuals.

He did notice that one man sat, though the day was warm, with his collar turned up and with his hat brim drawn low, as though seeking to shut from the public view as much as might be of his shameful plight. The conductor did not see that man's features or seek to see them. He nodded to the officers, stuck the tickets into the backs of the grimy seats and went his way. All that it was needful for him to know, he did know. The full complement of men, penitentiary bound, were in that car and their transportation was in order. But, soon after the train was under way, the chief deputy led a single prisoner into the drawing-room of the Pullman car so unobtrusively that not even the porter noted how the officer and his companion were linked at the wrist. The responsibility of the chief deputy to the State was that he deliver at the prison the persons of his human consignment, and that for each of them he receive a signed receipt from the warden. The details of that duty lay somewhat in his own discretion. He was permitted to use his judgment.

Once inside the drawing-room already occupied by the Honorable Kennerly Trace, the officer unlocked the handcuffs from his own wrist but left them dangling from that of his prisoner, then he lighted a cigar and said abruptly:

“What you gentlemen say to a few hands of blackjack to pass the time?”

It's a fairly long trip we've got ahead of us.”

Harlan had taken his seat dully. Within the walls of the jail the whole thing had seemed real enough. Here in a Pullman drawing-room with windows looking out on a free world it all became monstrously unreal, hideously unbelievable. Now he shook his head.

“I'm afraid I couldn't keep my mind on it,” he said.

“Now, listen, doc.” The deputy leaned forward. “Don't forget you've got a chance yet. While there's life there's hope. You might outlive both Mr. Trace and me, yet.” He paused, then added: “We all need to get our minds occupied—and here's a deck of cards.”

Harlan held up his shackled wrists and started to speak, but the officer lifted his own hand for silence.

From his pocket he drew a small key.

“I'm going to take it off for a while,”’ he said. “Of course, if you tried to make any sort of break I'd have to shoot. But there ain't really no greater need of your wearing bracelets in here than in your cell at the jail.”

The prisoner did not greatly care, but he recognized an impulse of kindliness and was grateful.

When the conductor came in, it was the attorney who drew out his reservation slip and tickets, as he said casually:

“These gentlemen are with me.”

It did not occur to the railroader that one of the trio was a man on his way to the chair.

There was much empty show in the forced liveliness of the guardian, a desperate attempt to make a nauseating duty wear the semblance of a normal railway journey, and the condemned man played his cards with a monotonous and mechanical routine, his face not altering from its expression of one who is dead in life.

They played for small stakes, and, of course, Harlan had no money in his
pockets. Finally Trace drew out a thin sheaf of bills and showed it to the deputy.

“Nothing concealed, sheriff,” he said. “It belongs to Harlan. Can he put it in his pocket?”

“I’ll take a chance on his bribing me,” responded the officer, with a forced jocularity of tone.

At last Harlan laid down his cards.

Through the car windows the west was coloring brilliantly to a sunset that glorified the sky’s margin and spilled a gold and purpled beauty over the low hills along the horizon.

“Tired, doc?” inquired the chief deputy.

Harlan shook his head. “We can play again later,” he said. “I’d like to look at that.” He pointed to the prodigies of flame along the sky line and the melting tenderness of the blue above its splendor.

He did not say, “I shan’t see it again,” but the other men understood, and hastily the deputy assented.

“Sure, doc. Yes, I’d like to watch that sky a while myself. I’ll say it’s some sunset.”

Sky and earth darkened slowly but the narrowing margin of color heightened and blazed as if all the gorgeousness was being compressed and accentuated, and before it was gone the lights of the car came on and the depression of dusk began to settle, while the monotony of wheels on rails insistently beat into the ears of Clay Harlan.

Suddenly the whistle broke into a frenzied shrieking, and, as the emergency brakes went on, the whole train seemed to shudder and scream in an inanimate death convulsion.

The chief deputy started to his feet and his hand dipped into his pocket. He did not know what was happening, but he knew that there was threat of some disaster and instinct bade that he secure his prisoner. Harlan, recovering himself from a jerk that had thrown him against the wall, held out his hands, but the officer never reached him. There was a wrench compared to which the grind of the brakes had been gentle. The sound of a hollow but deep crash assailed his ears. The lights went out. The car rose into the air, tottered and hung for a moment, then turned over and went rolling down an embankment.

The moon was rising now and its pale shield, hardly more than a sickle, cast a light over the black fields and woods of a billowing and empty countryside.

But there was another and a more baleful light. In the chaos of a derailed and shattered train, agonized cries rose and tongues of red flame went creeping back from the engine which lay like a twisted and misshapen monster. These insidious streamers of fire were kindling coaches in which men and women lay trapped and injured, struggling and dying.

Along the muddy embankment where several coaches had come to a disordered rest after leaving the track, figures crawled painfully from the blackness or moved as if in a daze.

The lights of a few farmhouses twinkled across widely scattered spaces and the place of the holocaust seemed an inferno remote from other life.

In the first confused minutes one might have supposed that in a place of such deadly destruction, few had survived whole. As a matter of fact there were many who escaped serious injury, that is to say, if we leave out of consideration, one car.

In that one car the totality of disaster was almost as great as it seemed. The smoker was an old wooden coach and long before the dazed crew of volunteer rescue workers could break through its windows as it lay telescoped on its side, it was a bonfire, doomed to an ashen destruction.

The Pullman had settled on one side in a ditch and its occupants had been pitched about like dice in a shaker.

POP—1A
amidst broken glass and loosened débris. The screams of women sounded, but at first all other sounds had been drowned by the unending blatancy of the locomotive’s whistle which opened its brazen throat at the instant of the wreck and shrieked out in iron agony until it fell silent from the exhaustion of its steam voice.

At length out of a groggy nausea, Clay Harlan’s brain cleared into consciousness. It was as dark as a tomb in that battered cubicle where the seats stood on end and the door was overhead. He stirred and his hand fell on something small where the floor should have been but which was the car’s side. His fingers closed gropingly on the match box between the broken windows.

At that moment Harlan dallied with no thought of flight. This was a crisis and in a crisis he reacted to the strongest and most fundamental impulse of his training. He was a doctor, and if ever there had been a place where doctors were needed, it was here and now.

Realizing that he had broken glass under his feet and that his face and hands were already bleeding, he struck a match and peered about him.

The chief deputy and the lawyer who had been his companions here lay huddled together, and working in the darkness by the sense of touch, Harlan found that both were dead. Laboredly the convict climbed to the door of the compartment which had been thrown wide by the force of the impact. Crawling along the narrow passage above, he wormed his way out through the vestibule door and was perched on the high side of the overturned Pullman.

About him in the pale moonlight and in the red, lurid flare of the savagely burning smoker, were the dark shadow and the red glare of a diminutive hell.

Axes were sounding on wood and metal, improvised levers were straining at tons of weight under which lay human wreckage which might or might not still be salvaged. Groaning bodies went by on rude stretchers borne by men who themselves limped painfully.

Sliding down from his perch the doctor was momentarily blinded by a warm wetness in his eyes, and though he felt no pain, he knew his head or face must be deeply gashed.

He could walk, however, and his brain was clear, so he stumbled along the stubble toward the focus of greatest need in the flare and crackle of the car that was burning as though it had been oil soaked. But on his way, the man who was condemned to the electric chair saw a sight which brought him to a sudden stand. Crouching in the shadow of a brush pile cowered two negroes, and the leap of the flames brought a flash and a glimmer between them; the flash and glimmer of the bracelets which chained one to the other.

A cold sweat broke out of Harlan’s face which mingled with the clotting blood. Abruptly and with an awful clarity, realization broke over him. One of those catastrophes which lawyers sometimes call an act of God had tonight disrupted man’s whole scheme and intent. It had killed his guardian and had set him free. With his own blood and bruises it had disguised him. About him were open fields, the chance of escape, a chance seemingly proffered him by providence.

He stood for a space considering this.

“An act of God,” he repeated to himself—“an act of God!”

Then quite suddenly he felt sick—sick but no longer doubtful. It became painfully clear to him that so long as less qualified men were laboring to stem a rising tide of death and suffering, the fields and roads were not open to him.

He had no choice.

Turning his face away from the cowering negroes, he plodded toward the fire.

There he washed his own face, and from the adhesive and gauze of emer-
gency packs, stanched the flow of blood from numerous gashes and glass cuts about his scalp and cheeks. Then, with a disguise which had not been calculated, but which was fairly complete, he turned to two local physicians, luckily summoned from near-by houses, and reported for duty. For several hours he and his two companions labored there with no talk save the short and pungent question and answer of doctor to doctor.

During those hours he was detached from self. His brain was a machine functioning beyond any consciousness of ego, and he only half heard the shriek at length of other engines and knew that a relief train had arrived.

But he was tired, desperately tired, and he turned away from the crudely improvised emergency station and wandered back into the shadow where he knew a bucket of drinking water stood.

He took a deep draft of the water and reached absent-mindedly into his coat pocket for cigarettes and matches. Then he remembered that his pockets were empty of such luxuries and perquisites of freedom.

Two young men came by and Harlan reached out a hand and caught one of them by the elbow.

"Can I have a cigarette and a light?" he inquired, and while the young man paused fumbling he went on talking excitedly to his companion.

Harlan realized that one of these young men was a newspaper correspondent, presumably a local man.

"I want you to stay here and talk to these doctors and nurses—the ones that have just gotten here," he said. "I've got to get to the telephone at Cedarhurst. Just get all the facts you can till I come back. I've got a new lead."

"What's that?" demanded the other young man, and the words of response came excitedly.

"Doctor Clay Harlan was on that train—going to the chair at Eddyville. The batch of prisoners were in the smoker—handcuffed together in pairs. That car has been totally destroyed. Except for a couple of negroes that got out of the windows chained together, the whole prison crowd was wiped out, convicts and deputies. They're dead and burned beyond identification. I must get that on the wire quick."

The other young man whistled.

"Harlan, the man that killed Galloway?" he murmured questioningly; and his companion nodded.

"Don't you see what a whale of a story it makes? He's dead and burned to ashes."

So the papers would say that—and again the door to freedom opened!

Harlan raised his eyes and looked toward the place he had just left. There he saw new figures, a half dozen or more of them. He even saw the figures of nurses with brassards on their arms; the newly arrived forces of rescue.

He was entitled to leave now. His conscience had received its quietus.

Then in a wholly casual tone the convict addressed the young reporter.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to go with you. I'm anxious to get to a telephone, too. My family will be worried."

"Sure," assented the young man. "There'll be room for you if you care to travel as fast as I do."

The penitentiary at Frankfort lies halfway across the State from the penitentiary at Eddyville. It houses prisoners of various sorts, but it does not execute them. Among the convicts are men from the mountains who curse the flat world of "down below" and the "fur-rinners" whose laws have brought them here.

Mountain men are no more made to be caged than are mountain eagles, yet unfortunately they often break the laws whose penalty demand caging. They come to the prison with baffled but de-
fiant eyes. Often their hill-bred lungs sicken in confinement. Always their spirits sicken—but rarely to repentance.

It was a tall and stooping figure which was brought into the office of the warden one day, clad no longer in the hodden gray of the penal uniform but in the new suit of decent black with which the Commonwealth rehabilitates a man before opening, for him, the gate in the stone wall.

To the fiery eyes of this old convict, the rigors of a prison had been able to do nothing except deepen their sinister and rancid hatred, and in spite of that baleful glow they were fine eyes, just as the eyes of the wolf or the eagle are fine.

As the gaunt figure came into his office, the warden glanced up.

“Oh, yes,” he commented, “No. 1,923.”

The convict retorted with brief scorn:

“My name, hit’s William Featherstone. Folks that’s done been raised up nigh ter me, they calls me ‘Uncle Billy’ Featherstone.”

“No. 1,923,” went on the warden, ignoring the interruption, “is your destination on the reformatory register. To-day you go out, and you will use your name again.”

“All right,” came the laconic reply.

“Ef I’m goin’ out, let me go. I’ve got a right far journey afore me an’ I aims ter git me a soon start.”

“You’ve been here for your full term of two years,” said the warden. “A few minutes more or less are neither here nor there—and the law has its own way of doing these things.”

“Ter hell with ther law,” spat out Featherstone fiercely. “Ther law ain’t naught but furrin interference.”

“That sentiment of ‘to hell with the law,’” came the dry response, “has kept you here longer than you might otherwise have stayed. Because of that stiff-necked attitude you got no good behavior reduction of time.”

“I wasn’t seekin’ no favors,” the convict told him. “I didn’t aim ter be beholden ter no damn penitenshery keepers.”

“The law requires me to admonish departing prisoners,” said the warden somewhat warily. “In your case, I know it’ll do no good—and I expect to have you back here again.”

“Ef ye does,” declared the old man whose eyes were embers, “ye’ll hev me back dead. I don’t nowise aim ter give up ter no law officer—never ergin.”

“So you have frequently said. Moreover you have sworn vengeance on the prosecuting attorney who sent you here.”

The warden glanced at some papers, picked one up and refreshed his memory.

“Oh, yes, here we are. You have repeatedly threatened the life of the Honorable Muir Bratchell.”


“This prison has notified Mr. Bratchell of his danger,” went on the officer, to whom routine had staled even such dramatic valedictories as this. “There are other indictments against you—in indictments which the prosecutor can reinstate.”

“Dead lawyers don’t reinstate nothin’.”

“The law requires that I admonish you,” repeated the officer patiently. “What happens to you or to Mr. Bratchell is your affair—and his, once I’ve warned you both. I’ve done so, and I’m through. Personally, I hope when you’re brought in, next time, it’ll be to Eddyville and not here.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE AFFABLE MR. HARDESTY.

WHEN the car stood before the telephone exchange the hamlet of Cedarhurst, Doctor Harlan sat for a while considering his next move. In the haste
of that drive no questions had been asked him and now he was seeking to arrange and coordinate his thoughts.

He stood in decent enough clothes, barring the dust of the countryside. His head was bound and bandaged, but that was true of many men in this locality just now. In his pockets was a sufficient sum of money for immediate needs—and obviously he should put as much distance as might be between himself and possible recognition. That far the matter was simple. He walked slowly over to the railroad station, where a small clump of men stood about the platform discussing the wreck and with an assumed casualness of manner he went to the wicket of the ticket office.

“What trains are there going out tonight?” he asked.

“Which way?” demanded the ticket agent briefly—and Harlan set his lips as he realized that his anxiety had almost betrayed him into exclaiming, “Any way!”

“To any point where I can make connections for Atlanta,” he said.

The agent was also telegraph operator and he was sitting by his key—a key busier than usual to-night, what with the rushing of relief trains and the rerouting of freights.

“No. 3 pulls in here at eleven o’clock,” he answered. “That will get you as far as Clarksville.”

With his ticket in his pocket the doctor turned away for a less conspicuous spot in which to wait, and in the shadow of a grain elevator he resumed his task of planning his course of action. At first the suddenness of his deliverance had overwhelmed him and he had acted only on an inherent instinct of flight.

Now a brain of trained discipline and keen alertness began to take account and to study conditions.

There would be at first the presumption of his death. This might be a presumption which would later collapse. A first diagnosis, he remembered, is often modified on a fuller survey. It might be that when the wreckage was cleared and the tally of casualties was checked up first assertions might find contradiction in fact.

Yes, it might be that his present miraculous opportunity of escape would prove brief, and another such miracle could not be hoped for.

He was neither a peculiarly hard nor a particularly easy man to identify. He stood an even six feet, not the inch or two above that height which becomes at once noticeable, and he carried his weight so proportionately that one thought of him as less tall than he was. He had lost some fifteen pounds in these months of jail life, and a complexion which had been somewhat ruddy had paled. He had always worn a smooth face, and though he could grow a beard, it would take time. That is a detail which in some men makes a greater difference of appearance than in others. Meanwhile his wounds, slight though they were, would require attention and he must be his own doctor. This thought brought him up from his place by the grain elevator and sent him over to the drug store whose lights he saw burning a short distance along the street.

There, too, his luck held good. Yes, he answered in response to the druggist’s question, he was a wreck survivor who had luckily escaped with a mauling. He bought what he needed, iodine, gauze, adhesive, a few toilet accessories and tobacco.

Now he reasoned he had laid his supposed trail toward Atlanta and it would be wise, as soon as possible, to cut off at some sharp angle.

He was thinking rapidly. Across almost the entire length of the State lay the ragged foothills of the Cumberlands, where life was both primitive and aloof. An older veteran in the arts of hiding out from the law would have advised him to avoid that refuge. A prac-
ticed fugitive, who had lived like a fox, accustomed and inured to the chase, would have pointed out to him that the place to hide out is in crowds. But Doctor Harlan had never run for his life before and he thought of the mountains along the eastern fringe of his State as a territory which has stood for two hundred years remote from the activities that lay on either side of it. To his mind these serried lines of forested ridges stood as the home territory of a hermit people and hermitage was what he sought.

Strolling absently about in the effort to kill time, he came to the post office, still open but deserted. Since the night was growing chilly and he had no overcoat, he stepped inside and he meant to stay there only a short time. Yet he was immediately sorry he had come, for though no one confronted him, a little thing occurred which for the moment dangerously shook his morale and brought cold sweat beads to his plastered face.

On the wall over the shelf with its customary bottle of pale ink and its totally useless pen, hung two or three small placards. Each of them bore the full face and side face of a man wanted by the law and each was accompanied by a description and a dossier of the fugitive's crime.

This was the desolate brotherhood to which he belonged. It reminded him with the sudden soul wrench of panic that before long such likenesses of himself might be plastered and displayed from coast to coast.

At one face he looked with a strange fascination which would not permit him to leave a word unread.

Benjamin Foster, alias Forrester, alias Sacks, alias Benny the Gun. Wanted for murder in New York State. Escaped from Sing Sing—

There followed an amazing listing of high crimes and misdemeanors. This man was described as to weight, feature and detail of ill repute. Beside the murder for which he had been condemned to die and which accordingly gave the State of New York prior claim upon his person, other Commonwealths likewise clamored for his custody.

In conspicuous type appeared these words:

Warning to officers. Take no chances with this man. He is a confirmed killer and will shoot it out if given opportunity.

This, then, reflected Harlan, was the brother convict of whom he had read as he sat in the cell where the light almost burned outside his door in "death row" of the Louisville jail.

For some seconds the man stood gazing before he felt another presence at his shoulder and turned to find a young man smiling behind him.

As the eyes of the two met, this youthful stranger inquired amiably:

"Were you figuring on collecting that two thousand, Buddy? I could use it myself."

Harlan started, then forced a smile as impersonal as his neighbor's.

"Not exactly," he answered. "I'm killing time waiting for the Clarksville train, and there's not a great deal to do."

The other man nodded:

"This burg's a lousy hole to wait in, if you ask me."

He reached into his pockets for cigarettes and proffered them before lighting one himself, then he went on in the fashion of a man who is irked by silence and seeks any conversation in preference to none:

"Were you in that smash-up? You look like you'd been crowned with a freight car."

Harlan nodded, and his chance acquaintance, who gave his name as Hardesty, made a hospitable suggestion.

"I'm touring eastwardly in an old flivver. I go through Clarksville, and
I'm pulling out before that train does. You're welcome to come along if you like."

The doctor hesitated for a moment, then assented, and within fifteen minutes the pair were on the road.

In the last hours before dawn, they stopped in a sleepy village and Harlan took a room alone in the dingy little hotel.

At the sordid lunch counter, where he took his place in early daylight, he found the dapper figure of Mr. Hardesty already perched on a stool, and in Mr. Hardesty's hand was a morning paper.

"Just been reading about your railroad wreck," the young man asserted, "and it looks like you had a real jam." He paused, then added, "I see here that a shipment of convicts got theirs, and that this fellow Harlan was one of them."

"Harlan?" inquired the doctor, with a forced disinterest of tone. "Who's he?"

"Nobody much—now," came the brisk response. "A pile of ashes from what it says here, but yesterday he was a convicted murderer on his way to the chair."

The surgeon nodded his head and ordered a cup of coffee and a doughnut. "Looks like he had a lucky escape."

"Well, I don't know." Mr. Hardesty's voice was dubious. "He was going to Eddyville to get burned—and he got burned before he got there. Which way do you travel from here?"

Harlan considered. It was his policy to be uncommunicative but not to seem so. Above all, he must not appear to be rambling without an objective.

"I'm working toward the east," he said, "but for the present, any destination will do where I can get direct rail connections."

Hardesty nodded cheerfully. "I'm still rolling along eastward," he said. "I started from Oklahoma. If you'd rather come along with me than wait for connections here, you're still welcome to ride. I'd rather have company than travel alone. By the way, what did you say your name was?"

"Savage—Hugh Savage," answered the fugitive.

Again the man who was seeking escape reflected for a moment and was puzzled. After all, this man had seen him already, and if the two of them traveled alone, and at a fair rate, it would, for the time being, save the risky need of forming other direct contacts. But more than this he was urged by another impulse. So far he had been delivered out of the jaws of a disgraceful death by a miracle of chance. It seemed better to leave his affairs for the present on the lap of Chance, and it was Chance which had put this opportunity in his way.

"Good!" he said with well-simulated heartiness. "I'd be glad to go along with you for a way. I'm rather fed up with railroad trains."

Mr. Hardesty proved to be a fast driver and perhaps he might have been called a reckless one as well, but just now his passenger had no quarrel with speed and no great timidity for the chances of the road. Greater peril seemed to lie in slow and cautious progress.

The car which Hardesty drove was of an ancient vintage, such as many of those it passed on these back-country roads. It was an open model with a battered cover and curtains that flapped crazily in the wind. But the engine seemed stanch and industrious, and it carried them rattling along at a rate of speed which only the condition of the roads held down.

When Hardesty had tossed his single grip, a well-made but use-battered bag of cowhide into the machine, he had remarked casually: "I guess you lost your luggage in the smashup, didn't you?"
BROTHERS IN JEOPARDY

Harlan had managed a smile as he replied:

"It was only by sheer luck that I came away with a hat on my head. My hand happened to fall on it as I crawled out of the car."

His companion grinned.

"I'll say it was a great break that you came away with a head to put a hat on," he declared.

They had started on a journey east, swinging southward toward the Tennessee line, crossing it and crossing back again. They drove all day, and as the hours wore by, the sense of imminent peril began gradually to slip away from the doctor's consciousness and to be a less-gnawing soul-ache. The countryside was quiet and monotonous; the drone of the engine was a rattling lullaby, and a sort of drowsiness stole over the soul of the refugee.

The young fellow at the wheel talked volubly and said little, but he had the virtue of being uninquisitive. He seemed almost stupidly prone to take things unquestioningly as they came along.

"I can set you down at some railroad station any time you like," he suggested, "or you can go along with me and perhaps not lose much time. I'm just sort of drifting east. Ride as long as you like and tell me when you want to get out."

That was a peculiarly satisfactory arrangement, and Harlan accepted it with more delight than he thought it expedient to admit.

At a small-town hotel that night the pair had a decent meal, and Harlan went immediately afterward to a room in which he found a fair bed. Hardesty had found a pool table and boon companions of the cue whom he joined with naive glee. The Louisville papers had arrived by that time, and what the refugee read at once reassured and alarmed him.

What reassured him was the general and uncontradicted tone of the account. The writers seemed entirely definite in their assertion of his death—so definite in fact, that in the list of dead, his name appeared, and in the more doubtful list of those not clearly accounted for, it was left out. Interviews with those officers of the law who had been to the scene gave this assumption a full corroboration. It was as if the State which had convicted and sentenced him had accepted the intervention of Providence and had washed its hands of him and his record. The thing which alarmed him was that his picture was displayed along with a brief résumé of his somewhat sensational trial.

This broadcasting of his features disturbed his sleep. Suppose the companion who had befriended him in such a childlike willingness of spirit should compare that portrait with the face of his passenger and grow suspicious? If he could complete this journey undiscovered, dress in the rougher clothes suitable to the mountains, cover his mouth and chin with a beard, he felt that he would be comparatively safe. But that achievement lay at the far end of his journey.

He sought to fortify himself against such anxieties with the thought that newspaper portraits are crude of reproduction, and this was one taken before misfortune had overtaken and changed him; before prison life had left its mark on his face.

When on the next morning he met Hardesty at the breakfast table and saw a copy of the same paper protruding from the young man's pocket, he braced himself for the moment of ordeal. He braced himself and found it unnecessary. Young Hardesty was transparently scatter-brained—nothing more. He was an individual whose health was good, whose animal spirits were high, and whose intellectual quotient was deplorably low.

With that ghost of apprehension laid,
THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Harlan relaxed, and for the better part of two more days was lurched uneventfully eastward until the rolling country of the central State became broken with the heavier roll which foreshadowed the piedmont of the mounting Cumberland. He began to breathe freer, as does the fox who nears his earth and who begins to forget the voice of the pack.

By the third morning he felt almost light-hearted with the growing sense of safety. Already the bristles on his face were working their change of appearance, and he had valid excuse for neglecting his razor in the bruised soreness of flesh recently injured.

He could even endure without agony, now, his host’s naive failing of broad sympathy which prompted him to stop and to pick up hitch-hikers along the way.

It was almost with equanimity that the fugitive bore with a new group of traveling companions in mid-afternoon, when Hardesty commented:

“‘There’s three lads traveling on their own power. We might as well give ‘em a lift.’”

The car pulled aside and stopped while three young men who were tramping along the highway lined up at the side of the road.

“Howdy, boys,” Hardesty gave greeting. “If you want to ride a piece, climb in the back seat.”

Voluble in their gratitude, the trio piled aboard. They were young fellows who might have been anything from farm boys to garage helpers.

“How far you been driving, buddy?” inquired one of them, and when Hardesty answered with a grin, “Only from Oklahoma,” the inquirer suggested, “Any time you want me to spell you, sing out. I’ve got a bus like this myself—or had one until they foreclosed on it.”

The road was hot and dusty, and when at length Hardesty drew to the side of the road, and turned to say, “All right, buddy, I’m going to let you take the wheel now,” he noticed that the local lads had taken off their stiff collars and unbuttoned their neckbands. Also they had loosely knotted large kerchiefs about their necks.

“What’s the big idea?” he inquired; and one of the passengers answered with a good-humored grin:

“Try it and you’ll see. It lets the wind hit your Adam’s apple, and it keeps the grit from blowing clear down to your belly.”

“That’s a new one on me,” announced Hardesty, “but I’m always ready to learn.”

He divested himself of his collar, and produced a silk handkerchief for an imitation of the provincial style.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE BANK.

This town we’re comin’ into now is Yanceyburg,” volunteered one of the trio, as he climbed back into the car. “If you don’t mind, I wish you’d stop a minute at the bank on Main Street. The old man wants me to deposit a couple of big five-buck checks.”

“Okay,” agreed Hardesty, “but tell it to the lad at the wheel. I’m going to be a back-seat driver now for a while.”

They started on again, this time with Doctor Harlan and the volunteer driver in the front of the car, and with Hardesty and the two other new passengers in the back seat.

The machine rolled into the sleepy town along whose main street stood several machines, all old and rickety of appearance. Along the sidewalks drifted as many scattered pedestrians as you could count on the fingers of two hands.

The bank itself was a two-story brick structure with glass windows painted black to the top of their lower sashes, and emblazoned in gilt letters:

FARMERS DEPOSIT BANK.

“Come in with us, boys,” invited one
of the trio, as he dismounted from the back seat. "I’ll introduce you to the cashier. He’s a good fellow. He’s got a bucket of ice water in there, and if he’s by himself, he might spike it."

Hardesty, who seemed to find an almost infantile interest in everything, no matter how trivial, followed them to the sidewalk, but Harlan, still not courting needless contacts, shook his head and remained where he was, and at his side remained the boy who had been driving.

The entrance to the bank was through a door set back some five or six feet between the windows with their black bottoms, and Harlan suddenly looked up with an appalled amazement which almost brought him out of his seat.

For he had seen a thing which would have been totally mystifying had it not been hideously clear of interpretation.

As the three figures passed between the masking edge of the entrance, though still in view from the car, the two hitch-hikers with single deft sweeps of their left hands lifted their knotted handkerchiefs so that they masked the lower parts of their faces. At the same instant, and with the legerdemain of practiced craftsmen, two right hands came out of coat pockets with blunt automatic pistols. Harlan saw one of the muzzles jerked into the ribs of Hardesty, his host.

Instantly his eyes swung back to the face of the man at his side, and on that face he saw a drawn expression of tense and dangerous threat. He also felt the nudge of something against his side and heard a low but ominous voice command him:

"Sit still, you! Sit still and smile!"

The surgeon’s eyes went back with an agony of suspense toward the bank, but it was darker inside than out, and he could see only vaguely, as though he were looking downward through clouded water.

He did see the flash of metal just inside the door; and he did catch a glimpse of Hardesty’s light-colored suit by a grilled window. The rest he could surmise. The team of bank robbers, cleverly masquerading as country lads, were covering whatever force of men and women were on duty in the bank building.

One was making his threat from the door, and doubtless this man at his side was keeping watch on the street.

Harlan guessed that they were forcing the unhappy Hardesty to rake in the available money while they stood to their guns.

The deliberation of the thing, once he had grasped its meaning, filled him with such a terror as he had never experienced before. He was as innocent as any of the unfortunate officials inside who had been so abruptly ordered to ‘Put ’em up,’ and yet he was in the company of the robbers, a seeming accessory. For him to be haled before any police officer involved not only an effort to explain the damaging circumstances as his presence here, but a puncturing of his safety bubble and a return to Eddyville where the State of Kentucky maintained its death chair. For the desperadoes themselves the threat, at worst, was State prison. For him it spelled electrocution.

While these thoughts shot explosively through his mind in a phantasmagoria of horror, while he sat in the paralysis of an intolerable nightmare, his eyes were gauging, estimating. Off on the somewhat distant corner lounged a man in a slouch hat, and even at the distance one could see a flash on his suspenders strap. He had every appearance of being a town marshal, and as Harlan looked on, sweating from every pore, the man turned languidly and began strolling toward the bank.

Again the surgeon glanced at the man who sat with his hands on the wheel.

That man’s face was as set as stone, as desperate yet as coolly calculating as...
as though it were in hours instead of moments that he must reckon and measure each chance, each movement. But the engine was running, and the man's hand hovered on the starting gear, his foot over the accelerator. For all his seeming of fatalistic calmness, no sprinter, set on his mark, was ever more tensely or readily poised for flight.

Then three figures came out of the bank. They were running and it was Hardesty, the cat's-paw, who carried a lumpy cloth sack. Just as they reached the door, there was an outcry from inside.

One of the spurious hitch-hikers wheeled and fired back, but he seemed to do so without breaking his stride, and then while they all leaped for the running board, Hardesty desperately hurling his bag onto the floor, the man at the wheel shot the car forward, turned into a side street on two wheels and was away with a lurching speed of which the car had heretofore seemed wholly incapable.

Looking back, the doctor saw the town marshal reaching to his hip, then he saw an armed hand rise as the air broke again to pistol fire. He was shooting at the tires, not because of any sentimental reluctance to take human life, but because he knew a flat meant the capture of the lot. The hitch-hikers knew that, too, and as the car went careening along in its dust cloud, making for one of those old-fashioned covered wooden bridges that still stood here and there across the waterways, one of the men in the back seat rose and stood upright with his automatic pistol viciously barking back its defiance.

While he shot with his right hand, the standing figure was reaching into his pocket with his left.

It came out grasping a thing which, from his reading and his war memory, Harlan recognized. It was one of those ugly devices which the Chicago gangsters call "pineapples." The refugee from the electric chair recognized that he was in the custody of no local amateurs at crime, but men of inner and infamous circles.

The town marshal had wasted little time, standing and shooting at so winged a target. He had rushed for the nearest of the cars that were parked against the teetering curb, but while the doctor stared back with a sagging jaw, a roar like dull thunder seemed to envelop him, and the car was rolling across the resounding boards of the covered bridge.

Then, just as the tires took the rough macadam of the road beyond, the standing youth hurled his hand grenade. It was as nicely timed as any tossed into an enemy dugout during the war. Once again the old bridge bellowed, but this time to a noise which was tearing and rending it and making of immediate pursuit a matter of tedious detour.

The young man who had tossed the "pineapple" sat down again, and an unpleasant grin split his face.

"Now we're sittin' pretty," he announced. "Step on it, Joe, and just hit the high spots from here to the Tennessee line."

Harlan found time to glance back at Hardesty and saw him huddled down in a paralysis of fright. Sitting in the shocked silence which had succeeded upon the heart-bursting excitement and agitation of five unexpected minutes of impossibility, the surgeon felt all the hope which had been growing in his heart shrink and harden into a dry despair.

Five minutes before he had been in a car loaded with men all of whom, except himself, had seemed to belong to the dead level of uninteresting respectability. Then out of a placid background of dusty country life had leaped a picture of frenzied speed, activity and unbelievable felony.

He had seemingly been one of the actors.

Now he realized with an appalled cer-
tainty, that such things cannot be carried off without the most careful and accurate planning and timing in advance. These three apparent strollers along the road must have calculated exact conditions. In the rearrangement of the seating of passengers, which had borne every earmark of natural and chance conduct, they had been fitting together the pieces of a satanically clever plan.

In preparation for their get-away, upon which everything depended, they had commandeered a car and virtually kidnapped two men, one of whom they had compelled to participate in their crime. Even the knotting of the kerchiefs as pretended defenses against the blowing dust, now stood out as a sinister and vital detail of rehearsed preparation.

But why had they been willing to carry along with them as dead weight, two innocent men who could easily recognize them thereafter and give their description to the officers of the law? With that conjecture, a cold and clammy moisture came out again on Doctor Harlan's brow and caused the pulses in his wrists to jump crazily.

These men, who had not hesitated to shoot as they fled, who had bombed a bridge with equal nonchalance, would in all likelihood, develop no squeamishness a little later on in disposing of two undesirable witnesses.

The felons had balked pursuit for the present by damaging the bridge, but telegraph and telephone lines would be busy, and every town in every direction would be on watch.

Each of those warnings that went out over a wire would speak of a car made conspicuous by an Oklahoma license plate, perhaps giving its number, and would mention that there were five men in that machine. Thus the three men who were actually guilty would have a better chance to make a get-away by having five seem responsible. How they would dispose of this human deadwood to insure silence was the secret of the three, and speculation upon their possible fate did not make pretty thinking for the two victims of chance.

But in a lonely road across the Tennessee line, a road so narrow that two machines must maneuver to pass there, the car slowed down, and dead ahead of it stood another and quite different sort of motor, blocking the road.

Harlan caught his breath and groaned, but the driver's tensely drawn features relaxed.

As Hardesty's roadster came to a grinding halt, a man came around the tail of the parked sedan and inquired briskly:

"Everything kayo?"

"Kayo," responded the voice of the driver; then he added with a jerk of his head at the bandaged man who sat at his side, "everything except disposing of a couple of tourists."

The newly met man made no comment, and burning with the sense of pursuit, Doctor Harlan could not but admire the entire composure and deliberation with which the coterie of felons bore themselves.

One would have said that they were neither hurried nor nervous, but when they had all climbed out, the driver held his automatic in his hand as he made a gesture of command to Hardesty and the doctor.

"Unload, buddies," he gave brief instruction.

One of the trio who had been in the back seat took up the rôle of spokesman, turning first to Hardesty, and his voice was almost amiable as he said:

"Fella, we're going to take you for a short walk, see?"

Hardesty drew back as if considering refusal, then thought better of it. Harlan sickened as he stood at the roadside among his armed captors while the man who had given him a lift was led away beyond a clump of tangled thicket. He did not speak himself but counted
the moments expecting to hear, and waiting for the rattle of shots which should permanently silence a dangerous tongue.

But that fusillade did not sound, and it was not long before Hardesty, palpably shaken but more composed than might have been expected, returned with his guardians. That comparative composure, the surgeon decided, was attributable to the vast relief of finding himself alive at all. Then the same men who had played escort to young Hardesty beckoned to Harlan. He was conducted to a point shielded from the view of the road.

"Listen, fella," said one of the robbers curtly, "listen close and don't talk out of turn, see?"

The doctor nodded silently and his inquisitor went on.

"Here is where this happy family breaks up. It's a get-away now, and every man for himself. You two birds can have your old junk heap back. There'll be too many tall timber dicks hunting for it, see?"

The convicted man could not wholly conceal his amazement at this implied promise of release and the face of his captor broke into a sardonic amusement.

"I know what's on your mind, fella," he volunteered, "and I'll ease your curiosity. You're wondering how we can take the chance of leaving you behind to crack the whole thing to the dicks, eh?" He paused and smiled with a grim assurance. "Well, let's give that proposition the once-over. Your friend back there won't spill anything, will he?"

"How do I know?"

"Don't be so damn dumb, fella," enjoined the crook sharply. "Use your bean, if any. Who raked the jack off the shelf at that bank? Why would he get close enough to any hayseed cop to be questioned—the only bird in our mob that didn't have his map covered?"

The robber paused again, then laughed ironically as his face stiffened to a malignity which made it more unpleasant.

"And I'm taking a chance on you, too, fella—a chance that you won't let the dicks pick you up for little third-degree stuff, see? I may be makin' a fool break, but I don't think so."

Still Harlan made no reply until the man thrust out his chin and demanded truculently:

"Well, what about it? Do you feel chatty?"

"No," admitted the doctor.

"No," went on the other, and he spoke with a slow impressiveness. "It'll pay you to cover us up. You see even if we get in a jam and land up in stir, all we draw is bank-robbing raps—and they don't burn you for that."

The surgeon flinched, and the other man saw him flinch. He grinned and went brutally on:

"Stop me if you've heard this one before: Once there was an old bird who wired somebody that the report of his death was exaggerated."

Harlan licked his lips and succeeded only repeating in a hardly audible voice:

"What do you mean?"

"Think it over. A highbrow killer is getting a ride to the hot chair. A rattler turns turtle and a car burns up. This hot-seater is supposed to have got his, but they print his picture in the papers and somebody that's got a good eye in his head sees that picture. Well, think it over, Doc Harlan, and crack whenever you please."

Harlan reached up and wiped his face with the back of his hand.

"I won't hunt up any law officers," he said with profound earnestness, and his torturer laughed.

A few minutes later, Harlan and Hardesty stood alone stupidly eyeing each other in the dusty weeds, while the sedan disappeared around the elbow of the dirt road.

It was the irrepressible Hardesty who
spoke first, and his voice seemed, even in its stress of dilemma, the voice of the witless optimist who "muddles through" without any semblance of clear analysis.

"My God, that was a close call," he said. "And what now? Shall we beat it to the nearest magistrate and tell the whole story? Those damn yeggs stuck a gun muzzle into my ribs and forced me to reach through and scoop up what money was in sight. I spilled some on the floor—my hands were shaking so." He paused and wiped the sweat from his face, then his voice changed as he went on: "If we make a clean breast of it, have we got the ghost of a show? Would anybody believe us?"

Doctor Harlan was looking at the battered car with the Oklahoma license plate out of eyes hot with nerve-agony. He was thinking profoundly of what capture meant to himself.

"Not the chance of a snowball in hell," he declared with conviction.

The moments were racing, moments that could ill be spared. Then suddenly Hardesty seemed galvanized into action. His voice had a fresh snap.

"All right, then. Let's get the hell away from here," he exploded. "Wait just a minute. Thanks to Lady Luck, I've got a Missouri license tag in here. Let's put it on. That damn Oklahoma thing would ruin us."

The fate of Clay Harlan still lay on the laps of the gods, and as the first hours of the recommenced journey went by without misadventure, he began to marvel at the series of deliverances with which chance had befriended him.

A day later at a place where the country grew sterner and rougher and the roads dwindled, he shook hands and parted with Hardesty. The younger man drove south, following the metallized highways, and Harlan plunged on foot into the mountainous reaches of the Cumberlands.

Standing alone at nightfall in a thickly wooded valley hemmed in by tall hills, he rubbed his hand over his face and felt its thick stubble. At the natural basin of a clear stream, he removed the bandages from his head and face, and dressed his rapidly healing wounds.

That night he stretched himself on a great boulder cushioned with pine needles. As he looked up at countless stars, a whippoorwill called from the timber, and from a softening distance an owl's voice quavered.

With brooding immensities about him and out of the muted orchestration of the night, Clay Harlan began to draw a solace and comfort of returning confidence. Among those multitudinous stars was his own star. So far it had led him safely through fatality and peril. It might safeguard him as a true talisman to the end.

He knew that the virtues of hospitality and rude dignity stamped the people who were native here despite their lawless self-sufficiency and unbending stubbornness of spirit. Often he had listened with a smiling incredulity to stories of feud killers who had taken "leg-bail" to the hills and successfully hidden out; of sympathetic friends who comforted them and never told.

Now as he looked at the rugged grandeur and broken contours of hills that rose mightily in indigo barriers, all cave porous and laurel clocked, he wondered that such fastnesses ever gave up a refugee.

And from that thought he took comfort that was an anodyne to his harassed soul. Now he was, himself, such a fugitive, with his life at stake, and he seemed wrapped in a blanket of quiet protection.

To the world Clay Harlan was dead. He had expiated his crime in a disaster which had blotted out alike the innocent and the guilty and—unless he came to life by some unkind accident of recognition—the State had washed its hands of him and his affairs. So much
for Clay Harlan, the convicted murderer. Hugh Savage was alive and hopeful.

From this point on he must walk boldly, trusting his disguise and never seem alarmed or surreptitious.

At the first opportunity, he would provide himself with clothes suitable to his surroundings and for baggage he would supply himself with a pair of saddlebags such as travelers customarily used in this country.

Then he could drift, as a traveler seeking health or recreation, and later on could settle down somewhere forgotten by his fellows, to earn his salt in some fashion dictated by circumstances.

Clay Harlan, alias Hugh Savage, turned on his elbow and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.
THE PARLEY.

A TALL man with a short beard and a scar on an otherwise engaging face stood by an old worm fence skirting a creek bed to which that country gave the euphemistic name of a highway. A tawny mule stood panting beside him.

It was hot down there in the valley where the stream had dwindled, and a few geese lazily preened themselves about a shallow pool over which drifted a little cloud of yellow butterflies.

On either side, the steep hillsides went up seemingly impenetrable in their covering of hard wood, laurel and rhododendron.

Hugh Savage was clad in khaki shirt, open at the throat, riding breeches of the same material and canvas leggings. Not being yet inured to such travel as he was encountering over the raggedly broken levels, he hitched his mule to the fence and stretched out in the grass under the huge leaves of a "cucumber tree."

He had been there for perhaps an hour, half sleeping, when he heard a voice in the distance and sat up.

Though the road ran here through the creek bottom, it had come winding down from a ridge, and for a little way, and at a distance, it was a ribbon of clay visible through a break in the green of treetops.

Along it, perhaps a quarter of a mile distant now moved what seemed to be a sort of cavalcade, and what first challenged Savage's attention was that the cluster of men rode with rifles balanced across their saddle bows. Except for that first voice, which he had heard once only, there was no speech, and to the rule of the ready rifles there was one exception.

At the center of the group rode a tall and elderly figure—unarmed. There was an aspect of wariness about this cavalcade which riveted the traveler's attention.

The men at the front and at the rear seemed constantly searching the thickets as they rode, and in their bearing was the declaration of such caution as might have befit a small detachment of ragged soldiery, traversing a hostile country.

The man from down below sat where he was with an aroused curiosity as he waited for them to arrive and draw rein to water their horses in the shallow ripple of clear water.

But when the first man of the cortege came into view around the sharp elbow of the turn, he came alone, and Savage was surprised at the quick suspicion which flashed into his eyes, and at the instinctive fashion in which the right hand fingered the cocked rifle on its saddle bow.

Then, as though he had betrayed no surprise, the mountaineer came on—but his left hand had quickly risen and fallen, before he rode slowly up to the lowlander. Intuitively Savage felt that that brief gesture of the bridle hand had been a signal and a warning, halting the rest of the mounted group beyond the cover of the bend.
The horseman sat a mount blown by what had evidently been a long and tiring journey, and he sat in silence, looking down out of a frowning face upon the stranger at the roadside. The eyes were neither actively hostile nor in any degree friendly.

It was Savage himself who broke the silence with a commonplace of greeting as he rested under that hard scrutiny. Even then, for a long moment or two, the armed horseman did not respond, but eventually he seemed satisfied with his questioning gaze and nodded shortly.

“What mout your name be, an’ meanin’ no harm, what mout yore business be in these hyar parts?”

The voice was steady and not unkindly, yet Savage felt that the speaker was inspired by some special and precarious condition of affairs which imposed upon him a double need for care.

Had this all been seen a decade or two ago, Savage reflected, the circumstance might have been accepted as a sort of keyhole glimpse accidentally afforded him into feud affairs. But now, so far as he knew, there was no feud in activity, and no occasion for men to go armed and on the march.

With a ready cheeriness, intended to be disarming, he left the fence and came down into the road, smiling as he gave his reply:

“My name is Hugh Savage and I’m a stranger to these parts. I’m from down below, and I’m traveling through to the new school.”

The other listened without comment, so the stranger added:

“I spent last night with Cage Wiley on Wolfpen Branch, and I hired this mule from him. As like as not you know both Cage and the mule?”

The mountaineer nodded.

“I knows both man an’ beast,” he announced dryly, “an’ albeit one hes es much sense as tother, thar ain’t no master harm in neither one. I reckon thar ain’t no harm in you nuther.”

The horseman raised his voice after that and called back:

“Come on, men. Hit’s all right, I reckon.”

So reassured, the queue rode slowly into sight and, at the shallow pool they all dismounted. While the horses drank, the men lounged about at ease, but Savage noted that one or two remained constantly watchful, rifle in hand, their eyes on the blanketed hillsides.

The single unarmed figure swung himself from his saddle and stood a pace or two apart in silence, and Savage found the others seemingly unimportant as he studied the face and figure of that one.

The man was old and there was a droop in his gaunt shoulders, but something about him bespoke one accustomed to command. A black slouch hat came low over the forehead, but the face, except for a few days’ stubble, was beardless. It was the eyes which fascinated the lowlander. He thought he had never seen eyes in which brooded so much of suppressed ferocity or so much of emotional energy. Perhaps, thought the surgeon, this was a prisoner in the hands of a posse, and a quick sympathy stirred in his breast with that conjecture. But if this man were under arrest, he must bear a formidable reputation, since five rifle bearers rode with him along his way to jail.

The group stopped for some ten minutes, and when they began to swing themselves into their saddles again, Savage inquired casually.

“I don’t know these roads. Do you gentlemen object to my riding along with you, as long as we go the same way?”

He addressed the horseman with whom he had talked, and that horseman, to his surprise, turned to the old man, who bore no arms.

“Ye heers what this furriner says, Bill. Hit’s fer you ter give him his answer.”
The tall mountaineer jerked his head indifferently and his words came in laconic brevity.

"He kin go along ef he's got a mind ter take his own chaynccs. Hit ain't naught ter me. I've got enemies an' mayhap we won't meet up with 'em."

So this, Savage realized, was not a prisoner after all, but a commander.

By now the surgeon's curiosity was at high pitch and he was a bold man in everything except his dread of a shameful execution.

"If you permit me, I'll take my chances along with you," he said.

Indifferently the gaunt old man nodded.

Savage found himself the part of a slow-moving line which rode with little talk through silences broken only by bird voices in the forest and the low song of hidden cascades. Sometimes they passed through a cove or valley patch with a log house, crude and primitive at its center where native faces looked out and men waved their hands. Sometimes, too, men peered at the road with hardening eyes and gave no greeting.

It was when the sun had begun to slant across the valleys and to illumine the peaks that they reached a somewhat wider highway and there was a creek to cross there just ahead. The ground shelved out from the narrow waterway into a patch of gravelled level and a small country store, which was little more than a shack, stood at the roadside. This opening was a diminutive natural amphitheater, and on one side of it a cliff rose in a fern-mantled and dripping wall, while on the other sides the woods closed in, dense and thickened.

The figure of a single man stood lounging on the rude boards of the store porch, but he stood against the light and was no more than a silhouette.

The cavalcade moved on toward the store and the creek, but when it had approached a little nearer, the man who rode at the front turned his head and his low voice was tense and passion-laden.

"Hit's Muir Bratchell," he said. "He's amin' ter hev speech with us, I reckon."

To Savage, of course, the name of the Commonwealth's attorney meant nothing, but he was sensible of an electric tenseness of nerve, which, at its mention, ran over the group of horsemen. He could feel it in the air as one can feel electricity in the charged intermissions of a thunderstorm, and he could read it in a hard setting of faces.

Savage was watching the eyes of the man in whom he had recognized leadership, and he saw the features stiffen into a sinister hardness. The lips curled into a mirthless smile, and Savage thought it was almost a smile of pleasure, for the arrival of a moment long awaited.

"I knows who hit is," he said tersely. "I knowed hit afore anybody told me. I ain't lost my eyesight an' I ain't disremembered Muir Bratchell."

The horseman at his left brought his rifle halfway up—and the man on the porch must have seen that gesture. If he did, he gave no sign and did not move from his position of standing at ease with his hands hanging at his sides.

"I kin git him from right hyar, Bill," declared the fellow with the ready weapon. But the old man soberly shook his head. His voice held a deadly quietness of tone.

"Ther time hit ain't jest ter say, ripe yit," he answered. "I've done bided my time this long a spell—I kin bide hit still a leettle longer."

Without pause and without hastening its leisurely pace, the mounted company went forward, and Savage drew a breath of relief as he realized, or thought he realized, that it meant to pass on without halting.

But as the group came alongside the small porch of the shack store, the man...
who was standing there moved to its outer edge.

Savage looked at him and his eyes were held. This man was tall and well dressed, though suitably for a rough country, and about him was an air of composure which one felt was quite independent of outer circumstances and entirely armored against excitement and alarms. His face was well chiseled and wore the imprint of thought as well as action, and when he spoke his voice betrayed not only a good quality but a trained enunciation.

"Featherstone," he asserted bluntly, "I crave speech with you."

The escort looked toward their chieftain, restively fingerling their weapons, but the chieftain himself drew his mount to a halt and his eyes shot out sudden jets of fury, even though his tone was level.

"I ain't got no heart ner cravin' fer speech with ye, Muir Bratchell," came the hard response. "All I hed need ter say ter ye, I said that day when we stud face ter face in ther high cote. I reckon ye ain't disremembered hit."

A faintly ironical smile hovered on Bratchell's lips

"I believe you said that when you came out of the penitentiary you aimed to get me—and called on God Almighty as your witness."

The old man, whose patriarchal dignity of countenance was marred by the prison shaving of his head and beard, reddened to his hat brim. He gathered up his reins as if to ride on, and then, jerking his head, he declared in a voice that leaped into truculence:

"I sees ye recollicts aright."

The Commonwealth's attorney nodded quietly.

"You are coming back home to-day, Featherstone, after two years in prison," he said. "Two years' imprisonment when you richly deserved death. I reckon you'd rather stay here a while and not go back to prison right away."

There was an audacity about this unarmzed man, standing under the ugly threat of rifles with muzzles that had lifted toward him instinctively as the bristles rise on an angry dog, which Savage found breath-taking. It was an audacity which seemed to take even the old clansman with dismay, and instead of replying at once to the challenge of words, he sat in his saddle staring perplexedly at his questioner.

When he spoke it was his own henchmen that he first addressed.

"Hold steady thar, boys. Thar ain't no need of undue haste. This hyar feist wants ter bark hisself out. Let's jest suffer him ter do hit."

Bratchell turned his head about the group and then said:

"I see one man there who looks like a stranger."

"He's a furriner that met up with us," answered Red Bill Featherstone curtly. "We suffered him ter fare along with us."

"He doesn't come into these parts in the best of company," observed the man on the porch dryly. "But that can wait, and if he fell in with you by chance, it's not his fault. However, mightn't he as well draw off a little where he'll be out of harm's way if you boys aim to commence shooting?"

"My name is Savage," volunteered the lowlander. "None of these gentlemen ever saw me before to-day, nor I them. They permitted me to follow their guidance along strange roads."

Savage found such a seeming callousness to death unbelievable, yet at a nod from one of the horsemen he slipped down from his saddle and following an instinct, which was a most mistaken one, climbed the steps and stood on the same porch with the lawyer.

Bratchell laughed.

"I reckon you haven't bettered your position, stranger," he suggested, then he turned back to the man who was making his return journey from prison
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with the defiant display of an armed escort.

"Featherstone," he said, "when I sent you to prison for the murder of Judge Fosdick, you threatened to kill me when you came out." He drew a letter from his pocket and held it up. "There is a communication from the warden saying that you've repeated those threats."

"I'm done with threaten' ye now, Muir Bratchell," replied the old man as the fire leaped again in his eyes. "Ther day of time is done come now ter perform."

"There are other indictments standing against you," went on the Commonwealth's attorney calmly. "There's the murder of old Atilla Lockridge for one. Whether I reinstate those indictments or not remains to be seen. I have come here to meet you and find out."

Featherstone laughed.

"I reckon ye ain't no plum' disable fool," he said "I reckon ye knows full well all I've got ter do right now is ter raise up my hand, don't ye? I reckon ye knows full well that when I raises hit, ye draps down an' dies?"

The man who called himself Hugh Savage stood at his end of the porch with a brain that had begun to race in wonderment and bewilderment. He was standing at a place where it seemed as certain a man was to be killed as though that man were braced against a wall with a firing squad drawn up before him.

The doctor had fallen in with this man Featherstone on the road, and now he found him denounced as a murderer not of a single offense but of more.

Until a little time ago he had known little of crime and criminals. Then he had, himself, been doomed to die. Now it appeared that having been hurled into that violent world, he was destined to live in it with its strange companionships. But of such personal affairs he could think only in fragmentary snatches. The drama being enacted before his eyes was taut enough to obscure self.

"You say you have only to lift your hand," Muir Bratchell was saying, and Savage heard him as from a distance. "Why don't you do it?"

"I aim to, d'reckly," Featherstone assured his questioner with a merciless relish. "But ye played with me some days thar when ye had me in that high cote. Now my time's done come on ter play with you a spell."

"You lie, Featherstone," replied the lawyer without heat. "You said I wasn't a point-blank fool—and you know that's true. You know you can kill me, as you say, but you know, too, that your revenge won't last long. You're wondering what ace I have in the hole, but you know damn well I've got one there."

"What does ye mean? I'm a godly man. I ain't no cyard gambler. Aces in holes ain't naught ter me."

"I mean for one thing"—the Commonwealth's attorney paused deliberately, as if for the effect of climax—"that when you lift that hand, you also fall dead. You are covered by two rifles inside this door—and others outside. But that's not all I mean."

Again he paused, and, as he did so, the men of the escort turned nervously to look about them and back at the laurel cloaked hillsides. It began to dawn on them that they had walked into a trap.

Two of them even started across the road, leaving only three holding their rifles at the ready with their barrels pointed toward, but not aimed at, Muir Bratchell.

Then another voice sounded, and on each side of the small store appeared several men whose rifles were actually at the shoulder. In the door of the store two others had materialized with utter silence. The sunlight flashed on yet other barrels at the edge of the woods.

"You boys hed better drap them rifle-
guns,” suggested Sheriff Holliday as mildly as he might have said good day. “They won’t hardly avail ye none. We’ve got ye right smart outnumbered.”

Bratchell himself, it seemed to Savage, had not altered his pose. His face expressed no more triumph at the sudden change of affairs than it had presented fear before.

“Now, Featherstone,” he inquired in a businesslike voice, “will you parley with me? From this point, do you want to fare on to your own dwelling house—or the jail house?”

A deputy was moving about among the men of the escort. His manner bore no truculence. He even grinned in a friendly fashion.

“You boys had better let me tote them rifle-guns for ye,” he invited. “Ye won’t need ’em while ther high sheriff’s hyar ter protect ye.”

Red Bill Featherstone, who had all his life been the chieftain of his clan, who had always regarded himself as above the law until that conviction at the hands of this young upstart, stood trembling in an ague of rage, but it was a baffled and futile rage. His star had set and he knew it.

After all, he had been in prison. He had tasted defeat at the hands of the law. He was growing old and his faith in his own invincibility had taken a death wound.

“What in ther name of red hell does ye want ter parley about?” he demanded.

Muir Bratchell came down from the porch and stood in the road.

“I want you to give me your pledge for law-abiding,” he said quietly. “If you give me your hand, I’ll take your word—and let bygones be bygones. You have been a murderer and a hirer of murders. You have come off too light. You ought to have died. I didn’t think when Judge Fosdick fell I’d ever be willing to let you go free again. But you’re old now and times are changing.”

Featherstone started and stood still, drawing himself up with the stoic rigidity of a captive Indian. Yes, he had just told himself that. He was growing old and times were changing.

“Since I sent you to prison,” went on Bratchell, “you’ve grown weaker here—and I’ve grown stronger. You sent two men to kill me—and I killed them. I’ve grown strong enough to offer you terms and enforce them. I can send you back to prison, or I can take your pledge—and if you once give up a hopeless fight, the rest will follow you to peace.”

“Ef I’d of raised up my hand back thar——” began Featherstone, and Bratchell cut him short.

“If you had, we’d both have been dead by now. I gambled my life on that and I won. Whenever you measure your strength against mine, Featherstone, you’ll lose. Now, will you parley with me?”

“I reckon,” said the old man slowly, “I’ve kinderly got a bound ter.”

CHAPTER VII.
NEW FRIENDS.

It was into a valley lying between two ranges that Savage found himself riding when he left the wayside store, and now he rode with a larger caravan than before. His amazement grew as he noted that once the lightly balanced issues of life and death had been stabilized in a sharp conflict of will and power, the men of the two factions fraternized as though no issue of conflicting loyalties lay between them.

He listened to their drawling conversation, low pitched of voice as is the talk of men who live in silent places, and he relished the quaintness of the pungent phrases from their lips.

Eventually, after he had ridden for some time at the lawyer’s side and talked with him, the cavalcade swung into a road that turned left, and riding up to Savage, Muir Bratchell said:
"We turn off here, Mr. Savage. If you're bound for the school, keep straight along this road. You'll see the buildings ahead of you from a ridge a few miles on, and it's just a whoop and a holler distant from there."

Savage nodded, and the lawyer added:

"Make my manners to Miss Moreland when you get over there. They'll take care of you as long as you want to stay, I reckon."

A little while ago Savage would have avoided the school as the one spot hereabouts with which he had a former connection. He had endowed a diminutive hospital there, but none of the resident force had ever seen him. His newfound boldness came to the fore and his curiosity was great to see the place, to the usefulness of which he had contributed his share.

On a backbone of ridge topping its fellows he drew rein at length and looked down on what he knew at once to be his destination. The sight of the tidy acres and the ordered buildings was as refreshing to him as is the glimpse of an oasis to the desert wayfarer, and as he went slowly down the rocky way between parklike forests and mossy cliffs, the sense of approaching a haven grew upon him in succeeding glimpses. Then he followed a sharp decline through shoulder-high rhododendron where the sun fell in golden splashes between beeches and hickories, and knew that he was at the gateway.

Here a brook which had not run dry like its sister streams, went laughing over a channel strewn with mossy rocks where crawfish scuttled, and though his mount must ford the shallow stream, there was for those who went on foot a bridge hewn from a single colossal log resting at each end on mighty boulders, and the boulders were flanked by rhododendron.

It was a beautiful woodland interior into which one came as abruptly as he might enter a room through a curtained door, and on the old footbridge, with her palms resting on its handrail, stood a girl.

She was slim and delicate in her beauty and her eyes seemed to reflect and mirror the cool green of the mossy channel, but there was a steadfastness in those eyes, too, which gave them strength, and her cheeks were like the blossom of the rhododendron.

Hugh Savage was unconcerned enough with pretty girls to judge this one with an impersonal eye yet to render her her due in appreciation. She was looking down on him from the old log as he drew rein at the brook, and she smiled as he asked:

"This is the way to the school, isn't it?"

"Yes," she told him. "Here is where we welcome our visitors and bid them farewell."

Riding across the brook and dismounting, the man came up and stood on the log beside her.

"I take it you're part of this remarkable establishment. May I light down and rest me a spell?"

The girl laughed at his affectation of the unaccustomed dialect.

"Why not?" she inquired, and he thought there was a trace of delightful mockery in her voice. "In the words of the country, 'If you-uns can stand what we-uns has ter stand, we're right proud ter enjoy ye.'"

Savage's face kindled with pleasure, for he realized he was saddle weary, and this welcome was cordial.

"Only," went on the girl with a mock severity, "any stranger who tarries long must do some work. We don't tolerate idlers."

"Show me to the job," he volunteered easily, "and if I don't know how to do it, I'll undertake to learn."

"That being agreed," she told him, "I'll guide you to the school and present you to Miss Moreland, our chief."
“This,” said Rachel Ransome, an hour later, as she was acting as Savage’s guide over the grounds of the school, “is where you will have your quarters. We call it the pole house.”

“The pole house?” he questioned.

“Poor little city child,” she laughed. “You don’t understand country words, do you? But that’s not fair, either. This place is ‘back of beyond,’ and the speech is unique.” She lifted a slender hand and pointed to the mountain wall. “For instance, they call that Big Blue Mountain, but it isn’t a mountain at all. It’s a range fifty miles long with only two places in its whole length where wagons can cross. Folks speak of ‘goin’ in’ and ‘comin’ out’ when they cross that backbone, just as you always use those words when you refer to a wilderness.”

Savage inclined his head.

“But pole house?” he inquired.

“That’s any log house built of small timber. I hope you’ll be comfortable there. How does it strike you?”

He was standing with his saddlesbags swung over his arm and his eyes were kindling. Perhaps it was when he looked at the girl that they kindled most admiringly, but there was something to spare for the house.

“It strikes me,” he said, “that you haven’t just set out to build a house here on this hill, but to erect a beautiful example of what survives as the best in pioneer sturdiness and beauty. Moreover, you have succeeded. These gutters of hollowed timber, those beautifully mortised corners, those hickory-withered chairs and stools, the powder horns and copper things on the walls: they all make us wonder whether the man in the coonskin cap didn’t live better than we do now. Yes, you have succeeded.”

“You mustn’t say ‘we,’” she corrected him smilingly. “I’m almost as much a tyro here as yourself. This is my first year.” She paused, then added as if in confession of her callow unimportance, “It’s my first year out of Bryn Mawr. They built this house as a resting place for the teachers—for a spot to which they might withdraw and sit communing with the hills.”

“And refresh themselves with a gorgeous prospect,” he declared. “It’s a shame to use it for housing loafers. Why did you change the plan?”

Rachel’s changeful eyes held a flicker of merriment.

“We found that we had more company than time to rest,” she told him. “We found that what communing with the hills we did, was to be done standing up and most of it on the run. Our chief trouble turned out to be that the days are so short.”

“You like it all? The long days and the endless work?”

“I just told you the days were short and I’m getting the biggest kick of my life out of it,” she assured him.

“You look to me,” he commented, “like a girl who could shake a wicked foot at a dance, or play a shrewd hand at bridge; in short, you have the deceptive appearance of being young and accustomed to certain luxuries.”

“I haven’t taken the veil, if that’s what you mean,” she assured him. “You won’t find any of us here pulling the heavy reform stuff. There is talk in certain quarters, of ‘civilizing’ these hills, but not among us. We’re just introducing two centuries ago to now.”

“And trying to teach their offspring that it’s not go good to shoot each other down from the laurel, or to live without bathing,” he added.

Again she nodded her head.

“Did you ever hear of dew sickness?” she asked him suddenly, and he had to confess that he had not.

“Cows sometimes have it,” she informed him. “They get it from feeding in thick and shaded woods. It poisons their milk and often kills the people who drink that milk. Abraham Lincoln’s mother died of it.”
The man raised his brows, and the girl went on:

"But if you clear the woods and let the sun get into them, the thing disappears at once. The faults of these fine folk are just a sort of dew sickness."

They were standing on the porch of the little building, and the man said in a meditative tone, as though talking to himself:

"Dew sickness. I don't remember having seen it mentioned in any of the medical books."

"Medical books?" Her echo of his last words came with a quick and almost eager feeling. "Then you are a doctor?"

Savage wondered whether he had visibly flinched at the question, but certainly his tone was steady enough and quiet enough as he answered:

"I used to be, but I've reformed."

"I must show you the hospital," she told him, then shook her head and smiled ruefully:

"No. Miss Moreland will want to do that herself. I mustn't steal her thunder."

"Why," he demanded, "when you are guiding me over all the rest of these gracious acres? Is this hospital your Bluebeard closet?"

"Just the reverse," Rachel told him. "The hospital is the apple of Miss Moreland's eye." She paused, and then went on with a straight candor that was wholly unself-conscious. "One has to live here a while to understand what a wonderful thing a hospital is in such a backwood country as this, a country where childbirth is still a horror presided over by ignorant midwives; where sanitation is unknown; where—— Did you ever hear of jumping teeth?"

"Again you have me at sea."

She nodded her head.

"They still do it hereabout," she told him. "There are no 'tooth dentists,' you see."

"What is this pleasant practice?"

"A man places the edge of a square nail at what he considers the proper angle under the ridge of the tooth—and hits it with a hammer."

"My God!" exclaimed Savage. "What happens if he breaks it off or the nail slips?"

"I asked that question myself," she enlightened him, and shuddered a little as she spoke. "The answer I got was this, 'Waal, in th' event, ye mout es well stick yore head in a wasp's nest and pray God fer forgetfulness.'"

"You can at least show me the outside of this hospital," he urged.

She nodded. "There's another reason Miss Moreland thinks of it as a sort of shrine," she confided. "We are all hero worshipers of a sort, and even here where we deal with prosaic facts, we can be romantic."

"Here, especially, it might seem possible to be romantic," he corrected her.

"That little hospital was the gift to the school from a great surgeon who must have been a wonderful man as well," she told him. "He was to come here himself to operate for a week or two, and this whole country had been looking forward to his coming as a sort of Messiah. Now——" she broke off.

"He didn't come?"

The question was perfunctory, and the man wondered if his voice sounded as flat to her as it did to himself, but she was absorbed in her own thoughts. "He couldn't come," she said simply. "A jury of—of wretched fools condemned him to die."

"You seem——" The doctor had felt a sudden rush of tumult through his arteries, and he had moved a step forward. Now he steadied himself and went on in a commonplace tone:

"You seem, however, to acquit this man of—whatever he was charged with."

"We are women," she answered. "We have intuition instead of rules of evidence. A man like that couldn't be
a murderer. How could he? His passion was for saving life, not taking it.

"And this man—who did not come? Who was he?"

"He was Doctor Clay Harlan. Do you know him?"

"I've heard his name."

They were standing on a flagstone path edged by bright rows of old-fashioned flowers. The hills that walled them in were rusted green, but those that met the sky and melded into it at the rim of sight, were softened to a tender violet.

The man who was accidentally free to breathe such air, and free only so long as he remained decently dead, seemed to stand in an older and more wholesome world.

Old-fashioned—that was the word; quaintly, beautifully old-fashioned, where all the rush and speed of a nerve-racked age were wiped away like crazy symbols sponged from a slate. So long as he could keep his feet on this solid ground, he could know such a contentment and such a security as though he had stepped back into the safety of two hundred years gone by.

And the girl who stood there with him looked, too, as though she might have had her beginnings in an old-fashioned flower garden—and yet she was distinctly and alertly modern.

Savage smiled. What was this girl to him except a chance acquaintance who was gracious and lovely, the companion of a mile met on a journey, soon to be parted with and not met again?

Certainly, he told himself, it would not have occurred to him to think of her in any fashion of personal interest save for that perverse psychology which makes a man fret under his prohibitions. He was resentful because, like Kipling's cat, he must "walk always by his wild, lone self."

"There is Miss Moreland now," said Rachel. "We can join her and go see the hospital."

"She isn't alone," commented Savage. "That's Mr. Bratchell with her, isn't it?"

"Yes. I didn't know he was here, but he comes often and he always brings moral support."

The younger woman had told the doctor that the hospitality extended to visitors here was uncritical, yet he had feared a little that Miss Moreland might subject him to a more searching inquiry. If there was any such scrutiny it was one of the eyes, and the older woman seemed satisfied. Perhaps she was influenced, too, by the friendly way in which the lawyer greeted the lowlander. The cordial nod of Muir Bratchell was as much of a passport as any one required here.

The quartet went on past the sawmill which sent up its fragrance of flying dust, and its clean song of the toothed wheel. Savage walked in silence.

It had shaken him and yet it had comforted him to know that the man he had once been, for all his branding with disgrace, was held to be something of a hero here. Yet when he had made that gift out of abundant means, he had done a thing which it was easy to do. He had not indeed thought much about it except to begrudge the time he had promised from his practice to come here for the holding of a clinic. His lips twisted in silent irony as he thought of the corollary.

He had no practice to give up now—no tax on his time. In proficiency and skill he had lost nothing, yet with the need of such services crying out here, he dare not offer them. Doctor Harlan was dead. Doctor Harlan must remain dead. Hugh Savage had no credentials permitting him to practice surgery. Moreover his work was like another man's handwriting. There were colleagues who could look at one of his sutures and say:

"Harlan's job, and a damned good one, too."
They crossed a rocky and laurel-thick gorge and climbed another hillock, and there stood the hospital. The man's eyes shone. Anywhere such a workshop would have been a delight to the practiced eye. Here in the backwoods it savored of the miraculous.

"This," said Miss Moreland turning to him, as she indicated a slab of polished hardwood on the wall by the entrance, "is only a temporary tablet. Later it will be replaced by stone or bronze."

An impulse of caution warned Savage to stand back and refrain from too instant an interest, but Muir Bratchell drew close and read aloud:

THE CLAY HARLAN HOSPITAL.
The gift of a man of genius for those purposes to which he dedicated his own life.

Savage felt his face go red, as it had always flushed with the embarrassment of any praise. That was the instinct of an oversensitive modesty, but such instincts must be governed. There was no reason understandable to another why Hugh Savage should blush at such a beautiful tribute to the dead Doctor Harlan.

He stepped up, and having mastered his first nerve reaction, regarded the tablet coolly. He even spoke slowly:

"But is it quite politic to speak in such unqualified praise of a man sentenced to death—for murder? Won't your visiting surgeons take a more worldly view?"

"Not the sort of men who will make the sacrifice necessary to come here," argued Miss Moreland stoutly. "Anyway, this place is a monument, and a monument must bear the name of the man it commemorates."

So this was his monument, reflected Savage, and here, but for the sardonic need of self-effacement, he might have tarried and done a work fuller of compensation in self-esteem than he had ever known before.

"Who will do the medical and surgical work?" he inquired.

Miss Moreland sighed.

"We have Doctor Brand here at the school, a woman and a fine physician," she said. "Soon we will have a regular nurse—but, of course, there is no surgeon."

Rachel Ransome spoke up, and her eyes were sparkling:

"I warned this gentleman when he came here that you'd make him work his way, Miss Moreland—and I've discovered his secret. He's a doctor."

Savage felt the eyes of the three fixed on him with a disquieting intentness, but he shook his head.

"I said I had been a doctor," he answered evenly. "But I'm no longer in practice."

Miss Moreland laughed.

"You may think you're retired, Doctor Savage," she corrected him, "but you'll find yourself drafted here. I'm afraid." Noticing his slightly corrugated forehead, she hastened to amend: "Oh, I don't mean we are exactly slave drivers, but there's a contagion in the air and you may not be able to inoculate yourself against it. The need to do the job gets into one's blood. It will get into yours. The cry for help will go up—and you'll find yourself answering it."

Savage smiled.

"It's not that I am refusing to answer a call at need," he explained, "but I have no license to practice in this State. Your adviser here, the Commonwealth's attorney, will tell you I'd be a lawbreaker if I worked at the job without credentials."

Muir Bratchell chuckled.

"Don't let that fret you too much, doctor," he gave assurance. "If you find a man that needs you to set a broken leg, I won't aim to prosecute you."

"And if you stay long, you'll find
BROTHERS IN JEOPARDY

yourself at work," declared Miss Moreland.

To himself Savage was saying, "Then I'd better go away," but he found that he did not want to go.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRUCE.

YON HOUSE," where Miss Moreland maintained her headquarters, was what the natives called "one huge log house," and on the generously spacious porch at its front Hugh Savage sat as far back and as modestly inconspicuous as possible, for this afternoon something in the nature of a ceremonial, yet more vitally serious than mere ceremonial, was to be celebrated there.

There was an unaccustomed quiet over the group already assembled, which included Miss Moreland, Rachel Ransome and a half dozen more "fotched-on" women, as well as Muir Bratchell.

It was the quiet of a charged atmosphere, and in the varied individuals it expressed itself variously. Bratchell's features were gravely at ease, and those of the women were quietly apprehensive. They knew that before they rose and went their accustomed ways, something would have come to pass which would leave its impress for peace or war on that country, and which would test, under severe strain, the Commonwealth's attorney's power in the community.

At length a heavy-set figure came toward them from the direction of the stables, and Miss Moreland rose to greet Asa Lockridge, brother of the murdered Attilla.

When the two had gravely "made their manners" the woman said:

"I reckon you know everybody here, Mr. Lockridge, except Doctor Savage."

The broad-shouldered man with a ruddy face and the neck of a bull, stood at the foot of the stairs. It is not mountain usage to remove the hat in the presence of women, but he was quick to note that the other two men had done so, and awkwardly he pulled off his battered black felt.

"We're all here save Red Bill Featherstone," said Muir Bratchell. "I reckon he won't keep us waiting overlong."

The heavy face of the mountaineer clouded and his mouth pressed into a tight line.

"I didn't nuver think to set down an' parley with no Featherstone," he said, "an' I misdoubts ef hit ain't—not meanin' to harm—all damn folly. Thar's somebody a-comin' now."

Savage could see no one, and he realized that the keen ears of this woodsman had caught a sound which had been inaudible to his less-trained sense. This realization was confirmed when, after a moment of general silence, the hillsman spoke again:

"Hit ain't Red Bill, though. Hit's a younghesh sort of body, packin' some load. I kin denote that from ther way he picks up an' sots down his feet."

Then through the laurel hedging the path that led down from the ridge of Big Blue, Savage saw a figure emerge, and it was the figure of a young man who was palpably no mountaineer. He was clad for hiking in a mackinaw shirt, khaki breeches and leggings, with a pack carried, camper fashion, on his back.

The doctor's forehead furrowed with surprise and displeasure. There was something familiar in that walk and the peace which he enjoyed here was the peace of being among strangers. Intrusion by any one who awoke a sense of the familiar, even vaguely, out of the past, menaced that security and stirred restless forebodings.

This was an instinctive emotion that came into his mind as he tried to identify what it was about the approaching figure which had challenged his sense of recognition.

The traveler bent his shoulders slightly under the weight of his duffel
pack, and the brim of his hat shielded his face from view, so it could only be the walk which had given Savage that vague uneasiness as the new arrival came up the slope.

Then the traveler raised his face and Savage recognized young Hardesty, that fortuitous companion of dangerous adventures from whom he had so recently parted.

The doctor glanced about with an instinct of flight, but at once he realized that such an idea was futile. He remembered with apprehension, his own estimate of this lad as too stupid to be tactful under surprise, and then he drew back against the wall and waited.

Hardesty glanced about with an amiably smile, and picking out Miss Moreland as the obvious head of the establishment, he introduced himself.

"My name’s Lucas, ma’am, and I’m taking a walking tour through these hills. I’ve been told that you’d let a traveler break his journey here—and I wanted to see your school."

The Bluegrass woman, transplanted in the hills, nodded, and her smile was gracious with that welcome which was characteristic of both herself and her establishment.

"I’m sorry, Mr. Lucas," she said, "that we can’t show you to guest quarters at once, but we’re waiting for a sort of conference. If you’ll just sit down and rest for a while—"

"Sit down and resting sounds good to me," he assured her, easing the pack from his back and straightening his freed shoulders.

So, reflected Savage, his erstwhile fellow traveler had changed his name since they had parted. Well, he could find no fault with such a discreet precaution. The name of Hardesty might, by this time, be unpleasantly linked with the license number of a machine that had fled across a dynamited bridge.

As introductions were made, Savage stood keyed to anxiety. He did not think that the newcomer had seen him yet, back in the recess, and his nerves tautened with suspense as he waited for Lucas’ gaze to engage his own.

Then he heard Miss Moreland saying:

"And this is Doctor Savage, who is also a visitor."

The surgeon stepped dully forward, and whether or not any one else saw it, he himself recognized a flash of surprise in the eyes of the new arrival. The glance had almost the lingering intentness of a stare, and Savage’s heart missed a beat. A small indiscretion on the part of this somewhat witless fellow, might open the way to a whole and fatal sweep of after effect precisely as a slipping stone may start an avalanche, but the young hiker only nodded and said in a casual tone:

"Glad to know you, Doctor Savage," and the perilous moment had passed without misadventure.

The doctor sat down again, and Muir Bratchell, who had graver concerns at heart than the greeting of chance travelers, turned again to Asa Lockridge.

"Asa," he said, "your son Joe wants to send his boys to school, but he’s holding off because there are Featherstone children here."

The mountaineer nodded his head and his eyes hardened to the hatred that was deep in his blood.

"I’m ther grandaddy of them children," he answered, with a controlled gravity of tone. "My brother was Attila Lockridge an’ he fell dead in a creek bed. He was kilt by a bullet old Bill Featherstone hired shot from ther la’rel. Thet was while ther war a truce betwixt ther Featherstones an’ ther Lockridges—a truce thot Red Bill busted ter do murder."

Bratchell nodded but said nothing, and Lockridge went on:

"Jedge Fosdick aimed ter hang him fer thet crime, an’ Jedge Fosdick fell dead by thar coteshouse door. Red Bill,
he hired that done, too. You aimed ter hang Red Bill fer that crime, an' ef ye ain't fell dead yit, hit's done been because ye've availed ter circumvent old Bill so fur. I reckon, Muir Bratchell, yore remembrance, hit ain't es long an' lasty es what mine is.”

“And yet it's longer and lastier, Asa,” the lawyer told him gravely. “I remember all those things—and I remember more. The warring between the Featherstones and Lockridges goes back to times when your own granddaddy was young—and in that time men have fallen dead from time to time—on both sides of the feud.”

“We aimed,” said Asa Lockridge with a frigid haughtiness, “ter defend ourselves an' ter protect our own.”

The Commonwealth’s attorney inclined his head, but his response was dry.

“That's what Red Bill says, too.”

“Right now,” went on the older hillsman, rising to his feet as his eyes smoldered with his festering grievances, “I kin see my brother a-layin' thar in th' shaller branch water, an’ I kin see his face. Hit war an' amazed face. Hit denoted thar he war shot without no sort of warnin'.” Once more there was the pause of a long-drawn breath, and then the man shook his head. “An' yit,” he said, “ye bids me strike hands in a new truce an' confidence that hit'll last this time, when nairy one of ther others ain't nuver lasted afore.”

“This time,” Muir Bratchell reminded him, “I aim to see that it lasts. That's where the difference lies. Nowadays Judge Cullom and High Sheriff Holliday and myself feel strong enough to do that. Nowadays the law is stronger than the Featherstone clan or the Lockridge clan—stronger than both your clans together. I aim to have peace an' law-abidin' hereabouts, Asa, and I seek to have both you and Red Bill aid me and abet me.”

“What does old Bill say ter that?”

“He hearkened to me because he knows he needs must. That's why he's coming here to-day. That's why he's given me his hand to come alone and unarmed, just as you gave me your hand to do the same.”

“I keeps my faith,” declared Asa. He wore no coat, but he threw back his waistcoat and disclosed his accustomed armpit holster which was empty. “I done come because I confided ye, Muir Bratchell, an' ef I gits kilt fer hit my blood is on yore head.”

“You won't be killed for it,” declared the prosecutor, “and there comes Red Bill now.”

From the barn where he had stabled his “ridin' critter” appeared the tall figure of the old clansman, whose record for twoscore years had been that of inveterate bitterness for his foes, undeviating allegiance to his friends and an inexorable determination in all things.

To other conferences, in other years he had come, and from them he had gone. Every peace patched up had soon broken down in new bloodshed. Now Bill Featherstone came fresh from prison, and it had been the first time in his long and stormy life that one of his consequence had been successfully caged by the law.

Perhaps because of the scar he bore on his intolerant pride, the old man came the more haughtily. No reformation had been wrought in his soul by prison punishment, but at the border of his own domain he had been met by a force which could not be ignored, and now he knew that Muir Bratchell had conquered him.

It was not only because an outnumbering force had disarmed his own retainers that despair had struck in upon him. Such things as that had happened to him before and, taking his losses with philosophy, he had set about devising more crafty plans for retaliation.

Now he was no longer planning such retaliation.
He had dreamed of coming home from prison as a Napoleon returns from Elba; to re-establish his empire and extend it. But there in the hot road by the wayside store, realization had broken on him. Matters had changed in these hills and were changing more. He was growing old.

The more, because of these things, he came with his old head high and his old eyes burning, and when he reached the steps upon which his bitterest enemy sat, he paused, looking at that enemy not at all and jerked his head to the women with something as near to a bow as his stiff-necked nature could compass.

"Howdy," he offered greeting. "I sees ye've done got this hyar school ter runnin' full blast since—" he paused there and his voice became brittle as he added, "since I've done been away."

Miss Moreland came down the steps and offered her hand. He took it gingerly and dropped it quickly as she said:

"You will find many changes, Mr. Featherstone. Some of your grandchildren are here, and are among our brightest pupils."

The old eyes softened just a shade, but the voice was still stiff.

"They comes of right good stock," he declared.

Asa Lockridge had not risen. He sat meditatively whistling on a piece of soft pine, and one might have said that he had not seen the other man, just as the other man had shown no recognition of him.

Now Red Bill Featherstone turned to Muir Bratchell, and he scowled as he spoke:

"Whar hev ye got vore deppities hid away this time, Muir Bratchell?" he demanded, "so's ye kin have 'em raise up like ha'its outen ther ground when ye summons 'em?"

"I have no deppities here," came the quiet response. "You agreed to come alone and I agreed to do the same, just as we all agreed to come unarmed."

After a moment, he added: "I knew that here, where we're all three the guests of womenfolks, no man would aim to start any trouble."

Red Bill snorted.

"Yea, eygad, womenfolks!" he exclaimed. "I didn't nuver think ter see no meetin' betwixt Featherstones an' Lockridges take place with more women then men settin' round. God, He knows times hev done jedgematicall changed."

Then Red Bill wheeled upon the lawyer.

"I wants ter know," he demanded abruptly, "why hit war back thar whar ye met up with me thet ye tuck sich a dire chanst on gittin' kilt yoreself? Ye knowed full well ye had me out-man-powered. Fer why didn't ye talk with deppities in sight ter safeguard ye?"

"That," said Bratchell with a grim smile, "would have started bell a-poppin'. There would have been a slaughter. I want peace here—and I want law-abiding. Slaughter would have been a right poor way to start it."

The old clansman studied the younger and more modern type of mountain man with perplexed eyes.

"Yea, but ef I'd done lifted my hand too quick, we'd both hev dropped down dead."

Bratchell inclined his head.

"The matter was between the two of us," he said curtly. "Why gamble with other lives?"

Old Red Bill Featherstone took off his hat and fanned the face upon which his patriarchal beard was beginning to grow again.

"I reckon ye aimed ter hev me come hyar an' harken to yet lay down ther law," he said, "ter me an' Asa Lockridge alike. Then ye aimed ter hev ther two of us strike hands an' pledge ourselves ter whatsoever ye bade us promise. Waal, I'm hyar, but I aims ter do some talkin' my own self."

Asa Lockridge shifted his position uneasily, then rose and stood leaning
against the post. His eyes had become wary and distrustful; not of Bratchell, but of his power to control this wild soul with gall and wormwood in his veins. It was all like talking diplomacy on the edge of a rumbling crater.

The face of the lawyer did not alter.

"Ye heered me take oath, with God A'mighty fer my witness, tht I aimed ter kill ye," went on Featherstone. "Ye knows full well I ain't ter be affrighted. Ye knows I come on home plum', p'int-blank resolved ter sottle my scores an' then lay me down ter death. I'm a-bloomin' fer ther grave, anyhow, an' I've done come on ter be blond with age."

He paused to sweep the group with his leonine eyes, then continued:

"Ye didn't cure me of no wickedness when ye sent me down ther ter sulter in the penentientary, Muir Bratchell. I come out fuller of hate then when I went in. I studies matters out fer myself an' I ain't ter make by no man."

Once more he fell silent, but now his chest was heaving with the agitation of his emotions. Then abruptly he stepped back and threw out both his hands in a sudden gesture.

"Yit now," he declared, "I'm done with warin' an' feudin'. I've done come hyar of my own free will ter tell ye so."

So sudden was the change of front that a little chorus of amazement and relief went up from the women gathered on the porch. Asa Lockridge's lips curled in disdainful contempt for so palpable a lie. Even Muir Bratchell's eyes did not respond with belief, and so it happened that when for once this old man of violence spoke with a deep and profound sincerity, it was assumed that he was dealing in subterfuge and chicane.

But Bratchell said:

"That's all I asked you to do—to quit feudin.'"

Featherstone caught him up hotly.

"I ain't a-doin' hit because ye asked me ter. I come home ter kill ye. My hate fer ye ain't abated none—but I've done grewd old. I've done come ter see tht matters hev changed. I reckon I've done outlived my day. New-fangled notions hev done sprung up among my offsprings, an' this world hit rightfully b'longs ter ther young ones. Ye kain't no more avail ter stop 'em then what ye kin hold back ther spring tides when ther year is in hit's rise an' bloom." He turned to Miss Moreland and added: "They tells me ye rears up ther young folks hyar ter lay by old grudges. Air tht so?"

"That's so, Mr. Featherstone."

"An' yit, folks suffers thar children ter come ter ye?"

"More than we can take care of. Your grandchildren are here."

He wagged his head slowly and spread his hands in a gesture of accepting the inevitable—and incredible.

"Thet sottles hit, then, so fur es I'm consarned. Ef tht's ther fashion my offsprings is bein' reared up, I don't aim ter saddle 'em with no heritages of bloodshed. I'm willin' ter suffer tht my own grudges be buried with me—an' do my own hatin' in hell from now on!"

Yet when he seemed to have finished, he added bitterly:

"Only ef we makes a truce an' hit's busted ergin, I aims ter be free from my pledge an' I 'lows ter die a-standin' behind my rifle gun."

"Mr. Featherstone," said Miss Moreland, looking into his face with deeply earnest eyes, "with you and Mr. Lockridge there, laying aside the old warfare, with your grandchildren and his coming here to us, the truce won't be broken. You can lie down when your time comes, knowing that a curse has been taken off of the land."

Asa Lockridge was standing with his back to the pillar of the porch, and after a moment he lifted his hand and held it out. For a space Featherstone gazed at
him with flint-hard eyes, then let his own come up to meet it. Their palms barely brushed and fell apart. There was no long grip and no word of promise, yet between them had been passed the most solemn pledge and compact that can be joined between mountain men.

They had, for themselves and for their clans, agreed to bury the past, and had declared an amnesty, and, unless some headstrong fool ran amuck and violated that treaty, the Lockridge-Featherstone war was at its end.

As yet Asa had not directly spoken to Bill nor Bill to Asa. Now it was the Featherstone who broke that silence:

"Asa," he suggested with a mighty effort, "I ain't jedg'matically a-sayin' hit's so, but mobby when my gran'sire faulted your gran'sire fer forgin' th' corner-stob, he mout of been wrong."

Gravely the Lockridge nodded.

"Mayhap," he admitted, "my gran'sire mout of made a mistake his own self."

Sitting on the same porch as the sun began to set, Savage was listening in silence to the talk that went forward there, talk loosened by relief.

Across from him was Rachel Ransome, and the gold of the slanting shafts was kindling her soft hair. Savage found his eyes dwelling on her, and deep in himself was conscious of longings that he might again be a free soul to whom so many things were not forbidden.

The conversation was, to his spirit of reverie, mostly a drone of voices scarcely noted, but he realized that young Mr. Lucas was chatting volubly, and slowly his attention came back and began to take note of what was being said.

"So this is the wind-up of one of your old mountain feuds," the new arrival was commenting. "I thought they were played out long ago."

"If they weren't pretty well played out," answered Bratchell, "you wouldn't have heard a man like Featherstone declaring that the times had passed him by, but there's enough left to make human life a cheap thing here."

The young visitor nodded.

"It's cheap everywhere," he declared.

"I used to read about these bad mountain men and how dangerous they were, but they're just back-country amateurs compared to our city criminals."

"They aren't just the same," Bratchell reminded him gently. "These men are not criminal types in any respect except that one thing. They don't steal. They don't prey on their kind—they just have a twisted view."

"Take any one of the three principal mobs in Chi," ran on Mr. Lucas. "Look at the sort of stuff they pull—rough stuff with machine guns; hijacking, dealing in heavy money; and taking a guy for a ride, or putting him on the spot if he runs out on them. And every bird that works with one of those three mobs has the two other mobs to reckon with. It's a stiff game, and the real class of racketeers don't fool with little jobs. A man that turns a hand for less than a grand is a pool-room chiseler—a peewee hustler."

"There are a good many of those words," commented Bratchell interestedly, "that we don't hear much in these parts."

Lucas laughed.

"Sure," he replied, "but if you were a city prosecutor, you'd know them all. I used to be a police reporter in St. Louis, and police reporters get to be sort of specialists in underworld doings. We heard plenty of that sort of talk, and wrote plenty of it, too, for a sensation-hungry public."

"Well, we have that much to be thankful for," the lawyer admitted.

"We don't get many of those human rats down here."

"No," laughed Lucas. "They'll come later, with so-called civilization. You
find the rats where the food is, and these big-time crooks are all for the heavy money.”

He rose and stretched himself, then turning to Miss Moreland, suggested:
“You promised to let me see the school, you know.”
“Yes,” smiled the woman, “so I did. Rachel, won’t you play guide to Mr. Lucas?”

CHAPTER IX.
INDIRECT ADVICE.

HUGH SAVAGE had been at the school back of Big Blue for a week when his chance companion of adversities on the road had turned up there. The surgeon had meant to make a much briefer stop, but there had been the allurement of the lotus land about the place, and like Ulysses he had lingered.

Acting under the auspices of Doctor Brand, the woman physician who was the only “diplomy doctor” on the yon side of Big Blue, he had found Miss Moreland’s prophecy working out its verification. There was much work to do, and operating only as an assistant to a properly qualified physician, he found himself as busy as herself.

“The Lord knows,” she had told him with a sincere enthusiasm, “you know more about medicine than I can ever hope to learn. You may have to sort of bootleg the surgery end of it, since I’m not a surgeon and can’t include you in my own credentials, but we won’t get overtechnical when the need cries out.”

“You are carrying too much of a load,” he told her, “and while I’m here I’m glad to take a little of it from your shoulders, but I am a wanderer and I can’t stay long.”

“If you hadn’t taken that Viper Branch family with its diphtheria off my hands,” declared Doctor Amelia Brand stoutly, “there’d be several fresh graves over there by now.”

He nodded gravely, remembering a squalid and unsanitary family of nine, exclusive of cats and dogs, that occupied a clay-daubed cabin of one room with a sagging chimney. He had found them lying wretchedly about with red-flannel rags wrapped about their throats, and a gaunt slattern of a woman defying every rule of health with the fatalistic calm of the stupid.

So he, too, almost from dawn to dark, had ridden forest trails and creek-bed roads to dwellings that still shocked him with the stark privation of the lives they housed. And as he rode—which was a dangerous thing—a face floated before his eyes; a face whose eyes played a color gamut from blue to gray and from gray to moss-green. It was a face which could be as sweetly soft as that of a grave child, or as strong-spirited as that of a well-balanced man.

A remembered voice sounded as accompaniment, too, to the thudding of hoofs along the sandy reaches, and the rattle of mule irons on pebbled creek beds. They were the face and the voice of Rachel Ransome.

Yes, that was dangerous for an unplaced man who could never claim his own rightful identity. He must root it out, and the best way to root it out was to go away.

Yet as he rode on his visitations through sweltering heat and sudden torrents, he would think of the school’s gracious acres as of a secure harbor; a refreshing haven where fear was exorcised and where tranquil security enveloped him.

It seemed unbelievable that he had been here so short a time. There was about this whole environment the strong-rooted feeling of home.

Then young Hardesty had come. There seemed no valid objection to young Hardesty, who was now young Lucas. Yet his advent from the outside was a blow at the sense of security which had brooded in the air and shone down from the bright skies. It bore a
reminder that, after all, the wall of the hills was not impassable and that every stranger who appeared might prove a potential informer.

Savage found, too, that he disliked young Lucas, and this was most unfair. The stranger had given him a means of inconspicuous travel at a time when such a kindness was a true deliverance from peril. He perhaps owed his freedom and his life to this breezy young man who had saved him without knowing the scope of his service.

Yet the surgeon found him irritating and alarming. Suppose the careless young man should absent-mindedly reveal their former acquaintanceship? In such small and insidious ways do leaks in a dike of safety creep on to destruction.

Then, too, though he was doubtless a decent enough chap, Lucas lacked those elements of fineness which the doctor esteemed. He was somewhat coarse of fiber and too loud spoken, but of course this was mere prejudice; it mustn’t be held against the fellow.

As a matter of fact, the debonair Lucas, who like himself threatened to leave each day and ended by staying on, was making himself genuinely useful. Though the county seat was only a few miles away as the crow flies, one did not go or come as the crow flies. One toiled slavishly over the wall of Big Blue, climbing its “nigh” side by “right steep an’ la’relly” paths and descending its “yon” side between crowded pulpits of sandstone and granite.

The dream of the school was a road over Big Blue, but until such time as an engineering miracle brought it into being, one “wagoned” supplies by a long and tedious detour. But young Lucas had tireless legs and lungs. With his duffel pack on his shoulders, he would “make a soon start” and “go out” whistling blithely some jazz tune which sounded queerly here to return “man-powering” his load of supplies and in- augurating the unprecedented luxury of an almost daily mail.

“I wish,” said Doctor Brand to Savage one morning, “you’d ride up Quarrelsome, and have a look at ‘Old Man’ Maddox. This boy is a neighbor who has brought a call for help—and it looks like a surgical case.”

“What’s the trouble, son?” inquired Savage of a gangling albino boy whose pink eyes wore the vacancy of inbred degeneracy.

The boy fingered his hat nervously. “Ol’ Man Maddox, he’s a mighty mean old man,” he began in a nasal and whining voice. “Some says hit’s a mark put on him fer his wickedness.”

“But what sort of mark is it? What’s the matter with him?” demanded Savage impatiently; and the boy went diffidently on: “Ther bones they’re jest p’int-blank rottin’ out inside his foot.” Savage glanced meaningly at Doctor Brand.

“Gangrene?” he questioned speculatively, and her reply was as brief.

“Perhaps. Have a look, will you?”

“Suppose it calls for an amputation?”

“Arrange to have them bring him in.”

Savage met her steady eyes, and his own lips twisted into a mirthless smile.

“So far, I’ve kept within bounds—as your student assistant,” he reminded her. “This would be—rather flinging aside our legal fiction, wouldn’t it?”

The woman’s grave face did not change except that her chin tilted to a more resolute angle.

“Suppose it is? What are legal fictions for, if they’re not flexible enough to cover the need?”

As Savage rode those upland miles, Rachel Ransome went with him a part of the way. She was going to look after a woman with a new baby, and the native boy, who was the doctor’s guide, kept on ahead crooning weird ballads in a whining and dolorous falsetto.

But Savage was not dolorous. An
artificial and high-spirited mood pos-

In jeopardy

sessed him. Rachel's eyes were full of

sunlight to-day, and they seemed to

call and mock-him, though it was, the
gay mockery of comradeship. The
doctor rode a young half-broken mule
which he had been warned "follered runnin' away." Now he dragged no
more cruelly on the curb chain of the
heavy spade bit than he did on that
which governed his own self-control.

He had always told himself that,
should he want to make love to any
woman, he would fail because his tongue
was gifted with no eloquence for court-
ship. To-day he felt that if he were
only free to speak his thoughts, no trou-
badour could outdo him.

And this girl gazed at him from time
to time as though mystified by his palp-
able self-enforced reticence. Perhaps
she was reading his unspoken thought,
but she could not guess his need of si-
cence, enforced upon him because he
was a living ghost, walking furtively
among the quick.

That afternoon they rode back again,
and Savage had arranged to have Old
Man Maddox brought in for an ampu-
tation of his infected foot.

On a rocky stretch Rachel's pacing
mare stumbled and rolled over. She
was thrown against Savage and would
have gone down with her mount had he
not swept his arm about her and lifted
her like a feather out of her saddle to
swing her in front of him on his own.

To the power of his arms that was
an easy thing, but something else was
less easy. For a moment she rested
against him with his arm around her
and her breath on his face, and in that
instant his own face went white with
an emotion which seemed to shake the
mountain under him.

Then she slipped lightly to the ground
and stood there, saying nothing, but
with eyes that were both starry and per-
plexed.

That night the children who were
suffered at Yon House and several of
the women were sitting just after twi-
light on the wide porch, and again as
so often before, Doctor Savage felt the
subtle yet powerful magic of this re-
move place.

Led by Rachel Ransome, these chil-

dren were singing ancient mountain bal-

lads about the "ocean-sea" handed down
from generations long dead, and singing
them with the lilting vigor of childish
minstrels.

But it was only the voice of their
leader that he heard and it sung dis-
turbingly to his restless heart. The
moon was riding the skies, and over the
world was a wash of cobalt and plati-
num. The ridges stood up against the
starry skies like titans cloaked in velvet,
and the soft radiance caught the bright
light of the girl's eyes and made a nim-
bus about her hair.

Savage rose and went hurriedly down
the steps of the porch. He could not
bear it and the surge of emotion that
swept him seemed about to swamp his
resolution; so he sought safety in flight,
going casually as though wandering out
for the view from the next hillock, and
there he sat down on a mossy hump of
granite and covered his face with his
hands.

After a while the singing ended and
he knew that the children were being
sent away to bed. Still he sat there
wrestling with his clamorous emotions
until he felt a light touch on his shoul-
der, and heard a soft voice inquiring:
"What is it, Hugh? What's the trou-
bles?"

She had never called him Hugh be-
fore, and he came to his feet trembling.
He looked at her, and she laid her hands
on his shoulders. Then he found that
he was crushing her to him and that she
was making no effort to escape from his
arms.

"Why did I ever have to see you?" he
demanded fiercely. "Why must life be
utterly merciless?"
"Does holding me in your arms—make life merciless?"

He could only gasp, but finally he let her go.

"Now," he said bleakly, "I must go away."

"Why, Hugh?"

"I can't even tell you that. Do you suppose that if I'd had the right to talk to you about love, I could have kept silent to-day—on the road—when my arm was around you for the first time? Do you suppose that from the instant I first saw you, and my heart stood still—I'd have sealed up the things that were bursting it?"

She was standing at arm's length, and her eyes were wide with a questioning perplexity.

"I don't understand," she told him. "But now I know you love me—and that's something."

"You've known that before now," he declared almost fiercely. "You could no more fail to see it than you fail to see the flames, if I were burning to death."

"And still—"

"Listen," he said, and he was trying to force his voice to a doggedness of self-control. "I have no place in the world to share with you. I am a wanderer and a sort of outcast. I have nothing to offer any woman. I can't even tell the woman I love why."

Slowly Rachel shook her head.

"I have a place in the world—for us both," she asserted. "I have money enough for us both, if that mattered. I have an intuition that tells me whatever makes you call yourself an outcast is nothing that disgraces or soils you. That is enough for me."

"That's enough at the start," the man told her in a stony voice of despair, "but it wouldn't be enough through life. I should have gone in time before I tangled you, as well as myself, in my messed life. Now you must forget me—and I must go."

He saw her standing there in the moon mists with a bosom that the excited breath was buffeting. Then he saw her put out her hand.

"I won't question you, Hugh," she said quietly, "though you could tell me anything that one could tell his priest in the confessional—and as safely. I believe in you—that's all. Let's shake hands and try to forget to-night."

"I must go," he repeated wretchedly. "You must not go because of me," she declared, and her voice rang like a muted bugle call. "Neither of us need run away—because we've been shaken. You can't leave the work you're doing here. You wouldn't leave, if it were just Old Man Maddox—and there are plenty more."

She paused, then said in a low and very earnest voice:

"Why if the man who built the hospital for us were here, himself, he couldn't be doing more than you are doing. These folk need you and bless your name—and you won't run away until there's some one else to take your place."

Savage was sick with misery, but he straightened, and taking her by the shoulders held her off and looked down into her face.

"I'll finish what I've begun," he said, "but I won't start anything else. I've hurt you enough, and if I stayed here too long, one other thing might happen that would hurt you even more."

Back on the porch again the scene was unchanged except that the children were gone and that Muir Bratchell was sitting there with the others.

"There he comes now," said Miss Moreland. "Doctor Savage, I've just been giving Mr. Bratchell a very insufficient account of your good offices."

"I'd heard something about them already," the Commonwealth's attorney volunteered. "I've been down in Louisville and Frankfort for a few days, and I rode in through the valley. I met
BROTHERS IN JEOPARDY

up with some several people who were bragging about the lives saved by the ‘furrin’ doctor. You’re a neighborhood hero, Doctor Savage.”

Savage sat down with some murmured self-deprecation. He was hardly steady enough just yet for general conversation, but as he looked across at Rachel sitting in the fulness of the moonlight and noted the proud tranquility of her face, he felt shamed by his own weakness.

“It is almost,” said Miss Moreland, in a low voice, “as if Doctor Harlan had been among us, himself.”

Bratchell nodded quietly, then he said:

“Miss Moreland, you’ve plum’ made a saint out of Doctor Harlan, haven’t you? Did it ever occur to you that he was right lucky, after all?”

“Lucky? In Heaven’s name, how?”

“He died a clean death in a railroad wreck—along with a good many others. Like as not he never knew what happened, and when it did happen, it saved him—from the other.”

“Yes—from the other.”

Again Bratchell nodded, and added musingly:

“And then, of course, there’s always the chance that a miracle happened.”

“A miracle? What do you mean?”

The lawyer sat looking thoughtfully out across the blue and platinum. Finally he spoke as though to himself:

“I reckon I don’t mean much of anything. Just a sort of fool notion that’s come to me. But you see I’m a feller that notices little things, and oftentimes I build up fantastic ideas out of mighty nigh nothing.”

“But in this case?”

“Well, I just happened to think of this: handcuffs don’t burn.”

“Handcuffs don’t burn?”

The older woman was bending forward in her chair, and Savage’s hands closed until he could feel the bite of his nails into his palms.

“Yes, ma’am,” went on Bratchell evenly. “You see, there was an exact number of prisoners and deputies with ’em on that train. There were enough burned bodies to account for that whole group—except for two. You know two Negroes got out alive—and were soon picked up again.”

Miss Moreland shook her head in perplexity, and Rachel Ransome, looking out through the moon mists, seemed too busy with her own thoughts to follow the conversation.

“Nobody ever seemed to raise that point,” went on the lawyer, “but while enough bodies were found to account for all the prisoners missing, the list never said how many had handcuffs on. If I’d been investigating, I’d have checked up on that.”

“Wasn’t the investigation thorough and conclusive?” demanded the Bluegrass woman, and Bratchell answered her slowly:

“I reckon so—only I looked to see that point covered and I never did see it covered. Take the conductor’s story,” he suggested. “He had taken up the tickets in the smoker just after the train left the Louisville station. At that time the whole penitentiary crowd was in that car. Later the head deputy left the prisoners with his assistants and went into the Pullman to visit with the lawyer in the drawing-room. There was another gentleman in there, too. That deputy died in the drawing-room. So did the lawyer. The other gentleman wasn’t found there after the wreck.” He paused, then added meditatively: “I’ve sort of wondered who that other gentleman was—and what became of him.”

“Do you mean you believe that he escaped?”

Miss Moreland’s voice was eager.

“No, ma’am. I haven’t any belief. I was just speculatin’,” he told her.

Suddenly her helpfulness of manner changed to apprehension.
“And if he did escape—and they found him again—” she broke off.

Muir Bratchet answered her unfinished question with terse directness.

“The chair, I reckon.”

“But—” Miss Moreland shuddered, but she persisted: “But now it’s all over, isn’t it? There isn’t any further hunt being made, is there?”

“Not that I know of,” answered the man.

“I hope he did get away,” declared Miss Moreland, and her partisanship made her gentle voice militant.

“If I was his lawyer, and thought he was alive and I could get in communication with him,” said the Commonwealth’s attorney meditatively, “I’d counsel him to start over across the ocean-sea somewheres and stay there.”

He paused, then went on still abstractedly: “But I’d tell him, too, not to seem too hurried. If I was runnin’ away from anything—unless the chase was mighty close—I’d kinderly hope along easylike. A fox understands the sense of that, but most men don’t. But I reckon that’s all right notionate. More likely the border he’s crossed is one he can’t cross back again.”

Bratchet rose.

“Well, I must be farin’ home again,” he said, and as he passed Savage, he held out his hand.

“It’s mighty good work you’re doin’ here, doctor,” he said. “We’re all right beholden ter ye.”

Standing at the place where he had taken Rachel in his arms, as though at some shrine, after the others had gone their respective ways, Savage felt a touch on his arm again and turned to see the girl whose face was very white in the moonlight.

“He was right,” she said tensely. “You must go. You must go across the ocean-sea—and when you get ready to send for me, I’ll come.”

Again she was in his arms and he spoke to her quietly enough:

“So you guessed what he meant?”

“Of course I guessed—and you must go.”

“Now that you know,” he told her, and his voice was no longer agitated. “I think I’d rather stay—and risk anything—than to leave you.”

“No,” she urged, “you must go. Of course, you mustn’t rush away too suddenly. That would be bad. You must stay on a little while and seem unhurried—but then you must go.”

He turned her so that he could see the full light on her face.

“Before I kiss you,” he said, “I want to tell you—that if I killed him—I don’t know it.”

“I didn’t ask you that,” she declared. “I didn’t have to.”

CHAPTER X.

BROTHERS IN JEOPARDY.

Do you think Bratchewan has recognized me?” asked Savage as he and Rachel stood the next morning on the old log footbridge between the boulders of the brook, with the sunlight flecking through the greenery.

The girl shook her head. Last night, while the talk had gone on, her quick mind sharpened by her own feelings, had caught and construed it into a full revelation. Not only had she taken the impact of that realization without self-betrayal, but she had sat with her face bathed in the moonlight and dreamily tranquil while her heart had been pounding to an agony of panic.

Now when they were alone together, her eyes showed their stress and their suffering.

“He may have his guess or his suspicion,” she answered, measuring her words. “No one can ever tell what Muir Brantchell knows. I don’t know what a prosecuting attorney’s duty would be in such a case. I know he has an iron sense of duty, but he has something better, too—a sense of jus-
tice and mercy. If he was making guesses that concerned you—"

She paused, and the man inquired:
"Yes; what is your theory?"

"If he was making guesses about you, he was talking with a purpose, and that purpose was to give you warning of what was in his mind while he was still free to speak—before he actually knew anything."

"What would his attitude be, do you think, if knowledge came to him?"

Her eyes were troubled.
"How can I guess? I don't know what his actual duty would be. But while you stay, I am in an agony of fear."

"There is Old Man Maddox to be opreated on—and attended for a while afterward," he said musingly.

She nodded her head, then came close and hid her face against his shoulder, trembling in a paroxysm of fright, the paroxysm of a woman who had last night alibied him so superbly with a dreamy disinterest of expression.

"Of course," she said in a muffled voice from his shoulder, "Mr. Bratchell has seen that we love each other. Those eyes of his haven't missed that."

"Do you realize, dear," he asked, "that at any time I was at work in that operating room—if any well-known surgeon from Louisville or Kentucky came in, he would know me? That's the penalty of having been a fairly promising young surgeon."

"The penalty," she corrected him, "of being a master."

"Did the talk mean anything to Miss Moreland, do you think?"

This time Rachel shook her head decisively.

"Not unless she's a better actor than I think," she declared. "But if it did, I know her. She stands on the side of the angels."

In spite of his sense of jeopardy, he laughed at that.

"On the side of the angels—and against the law," he mused. "And this is the institution of learning founded on the principle of weaning a law-breaking people from their waywardness."

"We're on the side of God's law," she exclaimed passionately. "And as for your meeting other doctors, I've thought of that, too. Henceforth I'm your secret-service department, Hugh. I usually meet people. I'll see that you know who comes—and know in time."

That night Miss Moreland, Rachel and Savage sat on the porch again after the children had been put to bed, but this evening young Lucas, who had been on a twenty-four-hour hike, sat with them, and before long they were joined again by Muir Bratchell.

"Howdy, Mr. Lucas," said the lawyer genially. "You two visitors seem to find right gay hospitality here. I see you're still with us."

"They're letting me hang on," laughed Lucas, "so long as I work, and I'm afraid I'll work as long as they let me hang on."

"Mr. Lucas is a more amenable guest than Doctor Savage," interposed Miss Moreland. "They are both helping us, but we've drafted Doctor Savage. I don't know how we'll manage when he makes good his daily threat to leave us."

"Considering that I stopped only overnight," laughed Savage easily, "I consider that I have pretty well strained my welcome, but now I must strain it a little longer. I've planned to amputate Old Man Maddox's foot and to see him through the first stages of after-treatment."

Bratchell nodded understandingly, and young Lucas lighted a cigarette. Its little star of glow shone from the shadow of the porch.

"It's a great world—and this is a great country," he volunteered blithely. "All newspaper men want to write books. I've got it on my mind to write one about these hills."
“It’s been done before,” suggested Bratchell dryly, “but mostly it hasn’t helped the hills.”

“Right,” agreed Lucas. “They have usually gotten the wrong slant. The thing I’m after is the portrait of a people so honest that a man may be afraid of murder, but doesn’t have to bar his door for fear of being robbed.”

“No,” muse Bratchell. “We don’t have many thieves among us.”

“On this last hike I took, for instance,” went on Lucas, “I heard a story that’s almost too much to believe.”

“What was it?” inquired Rachel, and the young man turned to her.

“It’s about this fellow Red Bill Featherstone. They say that he was a sort of murder lord in a way—that he condemned his enemies and had them killed out of hand—yet that for years, including the time he was in the pen, he has had a sack of money, several grand, in fact, lying under a four-poster bed in his cabin and it’s never occurred to him that there’s any danger of theft.”

“I’ve heard that story,” admitted Bratchell, “but I don’t credit it over much; in fact, I’m right sure he banked that money. Still he might have left it there and been safe enough, I reckon.”

“Well, where else could he do it, I ask you?” demanded Lucas. “Not in any town I’ve ever lived in.”

Bratchell sat looking out at the blue contours of the hills.

“Maybe there’s something in what you say,” he admitted, “but thievery is coming closer to us. Not so far away from these hills a bank was robbed not long ago—and the job was clearly done by city crooks. Yes, they are drawin’ in closer to us.”

After a moment, he added:

“This world of ours up here used to be plum’ shut in. What went on down below didn’t touch us very close.”

“And now——”

It was Savage who put the question, and Bratchell turned toward him as he answered.

“Well, now and then an echo comes in nowadays—from down below. You see pictures and descriptions in our post offices nowadays. I saw one not long ago of a murderer that got out of Sing Sing before they electrocuted him.”

“Are you looking for that bird to show up here?” asked Lucas with huge amusement, while Savage’s mind went back to the newspaper reading in his cell in death row—and he shuddered. “Do you think he could live so far away from the bright lights?”

“No, I reckon not,” answered Bratchell. “If I thought there was any chance of his comin’ here, I wouldn’t speak of it at all, because I’d have a duty in the matter. It just interested me to note how echoes from the outside creep in nowadays.”

“I read about the bird that got away from Sing Sing,” said Lucas. “He must be a headliner. Any man who can crash out of the Big House on the River belongs in the ‘Who’s Who’ of crime. They say he’s got a head like a tack.”

“Yes.” The lawyer rose and took up his hat. “I reckon I ought to be right thankful I get simpler problems than that in my circuit. Those I get give me all I can do.”

Strolling together over to the pole-house a little later, Lucas pressed Savage’s elbow between tight fingers.

“Say, doc,” he demanded in a low voice, “didn’t you begin to get creepy when Bratchell pulled that crack about the bank robbery? I wonder how much he knows? Of course it’s a hundred-to-one shot that it’s nothing at all. Just the same I was relieved when he dropped the subject and got to talking about the New York killer. Did you notice how I led him on about that—so as to get his mind off the bank?”

“I haven’t been fretting much about the bank,” said Savage, with a forced
calmness. "Once we got well away from there, I stopped being frightened."

"Yes, that's all right for you. You sat out in the car with your head wrapped up in bandages like a mummy in a museum; but me, I was inside with an automatic rammin' my short ribs—and they all took a good look at me." He stopped on the path and mopped his brow. "Say, doc," he demanded, "do you think I'd better blow?"

Savage weighed the question, then he said gravely:

"You must decide that for yourself, Lucas. You're innocent, of course, but the circumstances were pretty damaging. As to Bratchell, he only spoke of these things as matters he'd read about in the papers."

Lucas drew a long breath of relief.

"I guess I'm just getting hopped up about nothing," he agreed. "A fellow that hasn't been a crook doesn't know how to act when he gets in a jam."

Savage came out of the operating room where he had removed the foot of Old Man Maddox, and drew off his rubber gloves. With him was Doctor Brand and her eyes were kindled. She held out her hand.

"Doctor Savage," she said, "I'm no surgeon, but I know enough to tell when I've seen a piece of work done in a masterly fashion. It deserves wider recognition."

Savage grinned somewhat sardonically, but he said nothing.

Coming, that afternoon, out of the immaculate whiteness of the little hospital building where his patient lay on his cot and going to the pole-house, he found young Lucas there ahead of him. The ordinarily debonair youth was tight-lipped as he paced the narrow confines of the porch. On the top step Savage halted, and his companion broke out excitedly:

"Listen, doc. I've got to talk to you. You're the only man I can talk to."

He made no effort to lower his voice, and it was not necessary, because the pole-house, surrounded by its pines, had a remoteness of its own. Still, Savage said shortly:

"Wait! Let me look around! One of the children may be outside."

Then he came back, and setting his face to the necessity of playing confidant, sat down inside the room into which Lucas followed him.

"Listen," went on the younger man in a hurried, frightened tone, "while you were sitting out front in that car and while they were forcing me to hold the money sack, there was a bird sitting inside—that didn't belong at the bank."

"How did you know that?"

"Hold on, now. Let me tell this my own way. I'll give you all I know. This fellow was back behind, and he reached for the air like the rest when those yeggs said, 'Put 'em up!' Well, that guy was a bank examiner—and to-day I saw him over in town, across the mountain."

"Did he see you?"

"No, thank God! I saw him first and I dusted quick. I'll tell the world I didn't give him any chance to look me over!"

"Then what are you frightened about?"

"What am I frightened about? My God! And you ask me that! Right over back of that hill there is a man who saw me inside, clawing in coin like a roulette croupier—and you ask me why I'm frightened!"

"Bank examiners go around the country," Savage reminded him in a tone meant to be quieting, "but they usually go where there are banks."

"It looks like everybody that strikes these ranges comes here to look at this damn school, too. As for me, I'm blow-ing, doc. I'm blowing as fast as I can do it without raising a hue and cry."

Savage did not find it in his heart
to detain him, so he nodded his head and said:

"That might be the wisest thing to do."

"But I'm not going far," went on Lucas. "That is, not just yet. Before I go for good, I'll be back."

The surgeon looked up in perplexity.

"But why?" he inquired. "If you go at all, why not keep on going?"

"That's just the point, doc. Don't you see? You aren't dumb. For God's sake, use your bean. I've got all the appearance of having robbed a bank. As a matter of fact, I did rob a bank, but I didn't get a red cent of the loot, any more than you did."

"I was there," Savage told him shortly. "You don't have to protest your innocence to me."

"Well, then, use your bean. I robbed a bank. For that matter, so did the cashier that shoveled the currency and silver into the bag I held. We both had guns held on us—but he can prove it and I can't. Now I'm not just running away from this particular spot. There are bank examiners other places, too. I want to find out whether this one comes over here snooping. I want to find out whether he's given my description to this bird Bratchell. I want to know when I move on, whether the pack is after me or not. That's what I'm coming back to find out."

"How," inquired Doctor Savage mildly, "do you expect to learn that?"

Young Lucas came a step nearer and bent urgently forward to speak in a lowered voice.

"That's where you've got to help me out, doc. You've got to cover me up here. You've got to give me the office whether I'm suspected or not. Then I can tell which way to go—and where."

Savage rose from his chair and slowly shook his head.

"Sorry, Lucas," he said, and his note admitted of no mistaking, "but I'm mov-

ing on myself just as soon as this patient can be left. You don't seem to take into account that I was in that robbery car as well as yourself. If I get taken up on charges of complicity, my case is no better than your own."

Lucas bent further forward and his voice became strained.

"You were outside. You couldn't have been recognized. I was inside—and unmasked. Don't you see how cleverly those yeggs hung it on me? I was the only man with an uncovered face. I was the one every bird in there was trying to memorize by sight—if they weren't all too scared to see. That examiner didn't look like he scared easy. I noticed when he stuck up his hands, he did it like a matter of routine. Get this: you're safe as wheat in the mill and I'm in the hell of a jam. It's absolutely up to you to help me."

Savage rose and sought to calm the excitement of his companion by the tranquillity of his own manner.

"I'd like to help you out, of course, Lucas," he said slowly, "but I can't."

He paused a moment, then added: "As long as I'm here, I'll keep you posted, if I can reach you, but when the time comes that I can move on myself, I mean to move on, and that may be tomorrow or the day after."

"Then you turn me down? Then you won't do that much for a pal when you know his danger? Suppose they did pick you up. A professional man like you could prove his character. You'd be cleared."

Savage's face stiffened like concrete; yet that was how it must look to Lucas, Lucas who was only fleeing from pursuit as a supposed bank robber, while he, himself, was a convicted murderer.

"I'm sorry," he repeated with inexorable determination, "but I'm leaving soon."

Suddenly Lucas drew back and his eyes narrowed to a desperate fury which transformed his usually amiable face.
“Now, listen, buddy,” he said in a hoarse whisper, “you can't afford to refuse me. Get that straight!”

Savage lifted his eyebrows. Things seemed involved enough without being drawn into a quarrel with this young man, who was naturally terrified and jumpy.

“Can't afford?” he repeated. “I hate to refuse you—but why can't I afford to?”

Lucas came a step nearer, trembling with his emotion, and answered with a counter-question:

“Why did those eggheads take a chance on turning you loose to spill the whole story? They were safe enough in letting me go, because they had me dead to rights. They had me framed under glass. But why should they take a chance on you?”

The doctor's voice remained steady, but his spine seemed to prickle and grow suddenly weak with fear.

“How can I know?” he asked.

“How can you know? I'll tell you,” Lucas broke off panting, and then went on: “But I don't have to tell you. You know, all right, Doctor Harlan.”

The place seemed to swim about Savage as he stood there in the little room with an oblique panel of sunlight falling through the door upon the wide floorboards. It seemed to the man, to whom life had recently assumed new and greater values, that he knew the agony of a mouse under the paw of a cat, and while he stood there, half stunned, he heard the voice of his companion going on in the truculent snarling notes of desperation: “Now do we live and let live, Doctor Harlan, or do we both spill all we know?”

Abruptly for Doctor Savage the balance wheel of reason seemed to fly into a racing wildness of lunacy. He saw red and trembled with a fury of murder lust. In Lucas, who had called him by name, he saw only a deadly threat to be silenced. Instinctively he leaped forward and seized the slighter man in a grip as powerful as that of a gorilla. His hands fumbled for the throat of the other and a hurricane of killing instinct swept him beyond control.

Young Lucas fought back with futile desperation, but he could not even cry out, and the life would have gone out of him had Savage not recoiled from his gust of murder madness as swiftly as he had succumbed to it.

In a palsy of realization and self-disgust he lifted his victim in his arms and carried him over to his cot. He was repeating over and over to himself:

“'My God, I almost killed him—I almost killed him!'"

Then as he looked at the mauled and gasping figure, the cold sweat came out on his temples. That was how witnesses said Galloway had died—man-handled to death by a human gorilla.

Penitently he bathed the face of his victim.

When the younger man could speak, he looked up, and now his voice was almost whining in its plaintive tone of imploring.

"Were you—going—to kill me for recognizing you?" he asked. "Did I ever give you away? Didn't I pick you up in my car and save your life? Didn't I take the chance of shielding a criminal for your sake?"

"Yes—you did. God forgive me."

Savage had drawn a hickory-withered chair up beside the cot and slumped down on it. His posture was as sagging as it had been there in the cell of death row in the Louisville jail—death row, which callous inmates call the "dance hall."

"How did you know?" he asked in a dead voice.

"I as good as knew from the time I read that morning paper—that had your picture in it. I'm a reporter and I'm trained at recognizing faces. I covered you up. Now you refuse—"

"Wait!" said Savage. "I suppose I
can't refuse, but if you know me, you know my danger is greater than yours."

"But it isn't, doc—not here," pleaded Lucas. "Nobody suspects you here. They're all for you strong. You're a sort of tin god to them."

"Where do you propose going?" asked the surgeon, and Lucas struggled up to prop himself on one elbow, and spoke with a reborn hope:

"Back somewhere among the branchwater folks, where I can get out over the Virginia line if need be. You ride this country every day. We'll fix a place where you can hide a note. It can just be a code signal. You'll know in a day or two whether anybody suspects me or not—whether the examiner comes snooping, or whether Bratchell seems interested. I believe that lawyer has been watching me for a week or more—probably had a description of me. You can say you don't know where I am, because you won't know. All you'll know is the place to leave the note."

Grimly Savage nodded his assent.

"I suppose I must pay my score," he said. "We are brothers in jeopardy."

CHAPTER XI.
WHEN HELL THREATENED.

WHEN Lucas presented himself before Miss Moreland the next morning, he was as breezy and as full of light-hearted, if unedifying conversation, as ever he had been, and his pack was on his back.

"I'm starting out on a hike to 'Old Uncle' Caesar Wygatt's cabin up Greasy Creek," he announced, as he waved his stout hickory staff and went swinging away into the woods.

And that evening Muir Bratchell, whose visits to the school had of late become surprisingly frequent, came up to Yon House bringing with him a stranger.

Savage was in his accustomed chair and Rachel sat on one of the stone steps with her hands clasped about her knees. There was no opportunity, without a seeming of undue conspicuousness, for the doctor to withdraw from sight, and for both himself and the girl there was that moment of breathlessness which came to them with the arrival of any unplaced stranger.

Bratchell introduced his companion.

"It's got to be the same with them all," he made observation. "You ladies are like the fellow that made a good mouse-trap. Folks are beating a path to your door. This is Mr. George Gerald, a state bank examiner. He's been over in town, and he 'lowed he had to come over and see the school before he went back."

"He's right welcome," laughed Miss Moreland, "but he'll have to share the pole-house with Doctor Savage. It holds two, and as it happens, Mr. Lucas started off on one of his hikes this morning."

Savage had risen, and as the mention of his name brought him into conversation, extended his hand. Mr. Gerald took it, and for a moment the doctor thought his glance was one of inquiry, but as the bank examiner smiled, the surgeon knew that he, himself, had been dismissed from interest. He felt like a suspect at whom a bloodhound has sniffed and then has turned away, wagging its tail.

"Well," commented Bratchell in the slow drawl of his more leisurely moments, "we'll lack right smart talk by reason of Mr. Lucas' absence, but in a fashion that's a relief. A gabby man seems out of place hereabouts."

No further mention was made of the absentee. If Mr. Gerald had made the "slavish" climb across the mountain with any other concern than that of inspecting the school, he gave no evidence of disappointment or divided interest, and Bratchell seemed equally unconcerned. When at last Savage guided the newest
guest along the path to the pole-house, it was still early.

A hot day had been followed by a cool night, and that coolness came as a refreshment and a relief as the two men sat on the small porch, watching the contours of the range standing stark against the starlit skies. Gerald smoked a cigar with languid relaxation, and the conversation was comfortably desultory.

The surgeon, entirely reassured as to himself, was curious on Lucas' behalf and anxious, if it could be discreetly done, to learn something that might aid the young man who was innocent, and yet who was so deeply implicated by circumstance.

Yet above curiosity stood caution, and he offered no leads which might have indicated an interest in the visitor's profession.

Gerald was a quiet man with steady eyes, and it was he, himself, who swung at last into commonplace talk about the work he did.

"Curious," the doctor then commented, lighting his pipe afresh, "how little we know of activities outside our own scope. To me, the work of a bank examiner is a vague generalization, and yet it must have its keen interests."

"It's about as exciting as an accountant's job," laughed Gerald. "Routine, that's all." Then after a pause he added, "Only once or twice have I encountered any semblance of adventure."

"Adventure?" Savage calculated his tone nicely. It evinced an interest that was polite but tepid, and the other man went on:

"Well, near-adventure might be a better term. Some weeks ago, for instance, I was sitting in a country bank when it was robbed."

"I should not call that a near-adventure," demurred Savage. "It would seem disturbingly real to me. What did you do?"

"Nothing heroic. I obeyed instructions and stuck up my hands. The average man doesn't argue hotly with pointed automatics."

The surgeon nodded and puffed on his pipe, which cast a tiny glow on his composed face.

"I fancy there might be little use or health in such argument," he agreed.

"There was one feature to that robbery that struck me as unique, however," went on the narrator. "The robbers were all masked, with loose scarfs—except one. I suppose his scarf had slipped down from his face accidentally."

"So you had a good look at him?"

"None too good. You see my back was turned when the command of 'Stick 'em up!' came, and it occurred to me that it might not be overdiscreet to crane around too conspicuously. But that wasn't the queer part. That was all the regular stuff so far."

"What was the peculiarity?"

"The unique thing was that the fellow with the slipped mask had a gun stuck up against his own ribs."

"Oh!" Savage felt that now a more lively interest was called for, and he leaned forward. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "You mean they were compelling an unwilling victim to help them in their job?"

"That was my guess. But, of course, if he was innocent, that fellow was scared stiff. He would have to be a bit of a hero to come out in the open—more of a hero than I'd be, I think."

"That was curious indeed, so even if the fellow was a helpless cat's-paw, he'd still be afraid to tell his story."

Mr. Gerald nodded.

The talk drifted away from the topic as casually as it had drifted toward it and the men smoked on until they grew drowsy. The next morning after going over the school, Gerald started away. He had asked no question about Lucas and had sought to lead the conversation into no channel which might have elicited a description.
Standing at the log footbridge where he waved farewell to the visitor, Savage said to himself:

"He doesn't suspect Hardesty—I mean Lucas, or he would have asked some question."

Then suddenly his face changed.

"What a fool I am," he told himself, "what a blind fool! He didn't have to ask for any description! He already had that from Bratchell. He wanted to see the man. Lucas' absence confirmed his idea. He told me that story, thinking it would probably get back to Lucas and set up in his mind a sense of false security. Mr. Gerald will be back again."

That same forenoon, Savage drew up the sure-footed young mule he was riding on one of his journeys and hitched it to a "flying limb." He turned into a narrow path scarcely more clearly defined than a deer run through the forest and followed it to a great age-gray formation of stone almost as large as a small house, over which towered a tall beech tree. This was the point upon which he and Lucas had agreed for the leaving of messages in a deep but fern-covered fissure near the boulder's base.

Savage reached into his pocket for an empty tobacco tin. The paper on which he had made his marks in code symbols was inclosed in that tin, and had it fallen by unlikely chance into the hands of a stranger, it would have carried no significance. To Lucas, however, it would say:

"He suspects. Don't come back."

Riding back the doctor met Rachel who had known his legitimate but not his secret destination, and who had come out to meet him. Through woods that were gorgeous in spite of their heat rust, they rode side by side and they had no great need of talk since their eyes spoke for them and their hearts.

But as they paused to water their mounts at a crystal clear brook, the man looked up.

"I don't like to see that haunted look in your eyes, dearest," he said. "I know I'm a ghost, but I can't bear to haunt you," and he added between almost closed lips, "My God, I love you so!"

"It's not that you haunt me," she told him stoutly; "it's your danger. You must put that 'ocean-sea' of which Mr. Bratchell spoke between yourself and your peril."

"Old Man Maddox," he told her with a reassuring smile, "will be out of the woods in a day or two more. Then I can go." He looked at her, and his eyes shadowed. "But what will safety mean to me—when I have to pay for it with absence from you?"

"That won't be for always. I'll come to you when you send for me. But you must go soon—or I'll go mad with fear."

The dwelling house of Red Bill Featherstone was solidly built in days of honest pioneer standards, and in its time it had more than once served as a feudal fortress. It sat beside a gracious orchard where bee-gums were ranged in order under the apple trees and behind it mounted slopes of corn patch and woodland. To-day the old man rode along the dusty highway from some neighborly visit and hitched his "ridin' critter" by the stile. As he crossed into his yard the place was still and empty, but up on the new clearing of the hilltop he could hear the ring of an ax where his son was splitting rails. The womenfolks and the children were all away on a day-long visit, and the old man stood inside his fence contentedly breathing in the free air for which his lungs had so hungered in the penitentiary.

Then slowly he started to his door. Some eight or ten yards from the threshold, he thought he heard a sound inside, and paused, perplexed. He had supposed there was no one in the house whose door stood open, yet his keen ears
BROTHERS IN JEOPARDY

had heard something. Perhaps the women had come back.

He took one more step forward, and then from the dark interior of the log house there came a belching of gunfire, not in a single report but in a triple clash.

The familiar stench of powder drifted to his nostrils as his knees gave under him, and slowly he crumpled down gasping at a thrice-torn breast. The aged feudist had faced gunfire at that door before but always the attack had come from without and his defense from within.

There was a horrible sense of having been betrayed by his own castle as he lay with his face to the house and the blood flowing from his wounds into the dust of his own dooryard. His eyes showed a hurt dismay through their grimness as his son Joe came crashing through the brush down the steep hillside.

A little miracle was happening that same day at the school. These busy folk in midafternoon were standing for a moment idle. They could see the loop of the sandy road where it showed half a mile away emerging from its cloaking of forest to be swallowed up again in a blanket of green. Suddenly Miss Moreland cried out in a startled voice:

"Look!"

It was only a horseman she had seen, but it was a horseman riding at a pelmell gallop and whipping his mount. Over these roads men ride like that only under the spurring of dire need.

"He's comin' in tormentin' haste," declared the woman, dropping into the local vernacular, "and that means trouble."

When the horseman, after galloping destructively through flowerbeds and hedge rows dragged his mount violently back on its haunches by the doorstep, they could see that his face was sinister and dark.

"Red Bill Featherstone, he's done been shot nigh ter pieces, an' I reckon he's amin' ter die, " asserted the messenger tensely. "They're fochtin' him hyar ter yore hospital now."

Miss Moreland stepped forward and her face was sheet pale.

"Mr. Featherstone shot! Who do you 'low did it, Jase?" she inquired, and the man threw back his head with a bitter laugh.

"Who does ye 'low would do hit," he demanded, "save some damn truce-bustin' Lockridge?"

"When will he get here?"

"They're man-powerin' him acrost the hills, four men at a time totin' him on a shutter. Hit's a right dilatory fashion of wayfarin' but thar ain't no other way."

Savage spoke quietly:

"I'll set things ready at the hospital," he said. "Send for Doctor Brand,"

Miss Moreland turned again to the horseman.

"Jase, you might as well light down and rest yourself. We can't do anything until they get him here."

But the man scowled down from his saddle and his voice was harder than before:

"No, I ain't fulled my task yit, an' I've got a bound ter hasten like a man borrayin' fire."

"Where are you farin' to, Jase?"

"Whar am I a-farin' ter?" he shouted back in a transport of fury. "Whar would hit be save ter every dwellin' house whar a Featherstone hes got guts enough ter pick up a gun an' take toll fer what's come ter pass?"

"You mean—you can't mean——"

The woman's voice broke on a note of despair.

"Oh, I'd done almost disremembered," the courier broke out as he gathered up his reins. "Joe Featherstone wants his boy sent home. We wants every Featherstone kid in this hyar damn school sent home straightway."
"But why? What has the school done?"

"Why? Wasn't hit hyar, with fair words an' highfalutin' lies, thot Red Bill suffered hisself ter be overpersuaded, an' pledged a truce? Waal, thot truce is busted now an' that's a reckonin' due."

"But Jase, listen. The woman caught at his bridle reins, and though he jerked them roughly from her grasp, she went hurriedly on. "This place is good enough for you to bring your wounded man to. If his life can be saved, we will save it. Why isn't it good enough for the children?"

"Hit's ther only hospital that is, so we've got a bound ter fetch him hyar. I've done give ye my message an' I'll bid ye farewell."

Miss Moreland stood looking after the spurred horse and its rider, and her gallant shoulders drooped.

When the clan mandate went forth the school would be depleted of all its feudal children, to the remote ramifications of the two families involved. Out of their haven they would be withdrawn, like brands snatched back to the burning.

"The truce is broken," she whispered. "The feud is on again—and the school will be empty!"

Then, shaking off that impulse of surrender to despair, she went to the telephone, that precarious line of communication through the forest which was pitifully at the mercy of every tempest and every marauding hand.

The line might be cut at any moment and it must be used first.

"Give me Muir Bratchell's house," she said insistently, and then stood rigid, with intolerable anxiety, as she waited.

Finally her tense posture loosened in a sigh of relief, and she began speaking rapidly:

"Red Bill has been shot. They are bringing him here. Jase Fulsome is out rousing the Featherstones. They are taking the children out of the school—-

Oh, you know it already? Thank God for that!"

Abruptly she hung up the instrument.

"He didn't stop to talk," she said. "He's already on the job and if the miracle can be done, he'll do it."

They went to the hospital, to which Savage had already hurried, and waited with taut nerves at its door where the hardwood tablet bore its tribute to a man supposedly dead.

Doctor Savage had donned his operating gown and looked like some high priest of a mysterious order. Close beside him stood Rachel Ransome and her face was composed with the determination of the need, but her eyes were full of suffering and fear.

Then at last they saw another movement on the distant patch of road. It moved with the labored slowness of a snail-like crawling and yet it was a race for life.

They could not fail to realize the deadly import of this catastrophe, They knew that fires of mortal passion were being kindled and fanned along the creek beds, in the coves and into the squalid houses of the "branch-water folks." By to-morrow these hills would be ablaze with blood lust.

Muir Bratchell's strength would be tested to its fullest now. He had said the law was paramount, and so it might prove to be when its ponderous machinery had swung into action. But before that could be accomplished, other deaths would follow.

If, as he died, the old clan chieftain, who had been a convict, raised a battle cry, that cry would be taken up and echoed between the peaks. It would fructify in a red and black flowering of action. If he died without speaking, the results would be as dire.

Slowly the cortège came into nearer sight, four men swinging along at a dog trot under their burden on an improvised stretcher; the relief quartet, armed with rifles, trotting ahead and behind.
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But before they had reached the hospital, a messenger came from Yon House.

"Muir Bratchell is coming!" reported the young woman who had taken the call. "He says to tell Red Bill he'll have the man that shot him before sun-up. He says he beseeches Red Bill to hold his hand and have his folks hold their hands till he has speech with him."

The unbelievably tough fiber of Red Bill's spirit had refused to succumb. They brought him in with a drawn and sweat-beaded face and tight lips, but with life still smoldering doggedly in his eyes. They hurried him to the table, and it was Miss Moreland who bent to give him his message.

As it was repeated, his son Joe broke into profane remonstrance, but the old man on the operating table lifted a weak hand. His voice was scarcely audible, yet they all heard it.

"Hearken ter me, Joe," he commanded. "I aims ter hev speech with Muir Bratchell if I so-be lives thot long. If I dies you're yore own man ter act, but until I knows hit all I am ter keep my pledge. Don't suffer nair a gun crack twell I bids ye act."

Reluctantly his son went out to relay that command to the henchmen.

"Scatter out an' see ther old man's biddin' is heeded!" he ordered gruffly at the end of his instructions. A queer smile twisted his face as he added: "We aims ter turn tother cheek fer a spell—an' then we aims ter give 'em unshirted hell."

It was an hour after nightfall when Muir Bratchell arrived, because there had been more than one thing to do, and though Doctor Savage had done his best, and though that was good as anybody's best, it was only a matter of hours, or perhaps minutes now, before the old man's spirit would desert his mutilated body.

Then, the deluge!

When Muir came into the little hospital room attended by the glowering Joe Featherstone, the place was already crowded. He went direct to the bed, and his first words were sharp enough to challenge even a sinking mind.

"I told you I aimed to see this truce was kept, Bill," he said. "I haven't lied. You were not shot by a Lockridge."

The face seemed with age and pain twisted into a grim disbelief.

"I'm bloomin' fer death," he gasped. "Don't aim ter trifle with me."

"I don't aim to trifle with you. I never lied to you. I'm not plum' dead sure, but I'm morally certain I have the man who shot you. You may not live to hear him confess, but your son will. He wasn't a Lockridge." The lawyer bent a little lower.

"Featherstone," he said, "you can speak the word that will make your leguecy to your offspring—peace or war. For the love of God, leave them peace. You've known the other thing. What has it brought your blood? Bid your folk quit feudin' while there's still a chance to speak."

The old man stared for a long moment into the eyes of the lawyer. He found them unflinching—and honest. It seemed that only his inexorable will kept the guttering glow of life in his body, and he spoke slowly and gaspingly:

"I've done always hated ye, Muir Bratchell. But ye ain't no liar. I'll confidence ye—once more. Whar's Joe at?"

His son bent over him, and the old man nodded.

"Bid 'em—" he said, then his head fell back. His lips worked convulsively as he struggled to shape his last words—and succeeded. "Bid 'em—quit hit, Joe."

Outside again where the henchmen waited, with their rifles leaning against the wall, Muir Bratchell stood with Joe Featherstone and the others.
“Ye said in thar,” Joe reminded him brusquely, “that ye aimed ter hev ther feller thot got him. What is he at? Who is he?”

“Men of mine are bringing him in by now—if all has gone well,” said Bratchell. “He’s a furriner and one of his names is Lucas.”

CHAPTER XII.

LUCAS IS BROUGHT IN.

Savage and Rachel were standing a little apart, and the effect produced by the name of the accused on those who heard it was varied in kind and degree.

The frown on Joe Featherstone’s face deepened sulkily, but rather, it seemed, from disappointment than from any increase of vengeful wrath. The pattern of his mind caused his thoughts to fall into old formulas like wheels in old ruts, and his whole measure of righteous indignation had fixed itself on Lockridge enemies. To punish a stranger, whether by personal reprisal or by the less relished agencies of the law, was like whipping a strange dog. It left no solace of warrior triumph.

But Doctor Savage had stiffened and his face had paled incredulously at the name, and the girl was quick to read in his expression an omen of fresh danger to himself. She pressed closer to his side as if she would hold him against whatever new and dangerous tides might be setting in, tides that his eyes told her, might sweep him indirectly or directly onto the shoals of his fate.

To Savage, the idea of Lucas as the murderer of this old war lord, seemed more fantastic even than it did to Joe Featherstone, but it mattered not how absurd might be the theory, it must nonetheless bring its train of consequence. If Lucas were captured and brought in—and apparently he was already a captive—he would begin by seeking to clear his prior reputation.

He would assume that he was suspected of this murder because he had first been discredited by suspicion of the bank robbery, and naturally enough, he would call on the doctor as his character witness. That meant exposing Savage’s presence at the scene of the robbery—and with such a beginning, the rest would follow to its fateful conclusion.

In those purgatorial days in death row, he had wretchedly pictured the bare room with the electric chair. Now those visions returned like old and tortured dreams.

He heard Featherstone protesting his disbelief and Bratchell again talking in an even voice.

“I’ve undertaken to prove my statements, Joe. This time you will be one of my judges—and a judge waits to hear the evidence. All I ask of you is peace until I’ve had my chance.”

“Ye heered me give my pledge ter my pappy, didn’t ye?” came the morose response. “I’ve got a bound ter tarry twill I heers ye out.”

“Joe,” went on the lawyer steadily, “you know how this shooting occurred, and you’ve seen a lavish of feudin’ in your day an’ time. You can remember more than one case where a man has been lured to his door and shot from outside—generally in the night time.”

“Jin recollect a lavish of sichlike doin’s.”

“All right. Did you ever know of a mountain man being shot on the outside of his own house by an enemy hiding inside?”

“Never afore this day, but I knows of hit now.”

“Yes, and the man who shoots his way out of a house when he’s faced by the householder is right apt to be a thief. You’ve heard it narrated round-about that your father had a sack of money under his bed, haven’t you?”

“Red hell!” exclaimed the moun- taineer, spitting contemptuously, “every- body knowed thot was jest granny talk.
Moreover, the Lockridges is pizen mean, but I ain’t never heered tell of one of ‘em stealin’ no money.”

“Precisely,” Bratchell nodded his head, “and no Lockridge tried to steal that money. It was a furriner who heard that yarn about the sack under the bed—somebody who had stolen money before.”

Savage drew back and leaned against the wall. As he saw the trend of the lawyer’s hypothesis, it grew more and more fantastic, but around himself it seemed to tighten coils as destructively powerful as those of a boa constrictor. It would all force young Lucas to talk—and he, himself, would be mentioned in that talk. Then his questioning and recognition.

Bratchell was building a structure of supposition on what he knew of the bank robbery, and though it happened that Lucas was innocent of that, it all mortised into a strongly circumstantial case.

“The man who killed your father, Joe,” summarized Bratchell, “went there to rob the house. He watched the premises until he saw his chance to slip in. He was disappointed in not finding the money, and started out again. Then he found himself confronted by a man whose reputation he knew—a man who would not submit tamely to burglary. He drew back into the dark room and cut loose his pistol volley. Then he made his get-away through the back door—or thought he was making it.”

“Fer why does ye say he thought he was making hit? He did, didn’t he?”

“I’ve had my eye on him for some time past. I had no notion, of course, that he planned any robbery. I suspected only that he aimed to slip away from here and take leg-bail over into Virginia.”

“How come,” demanded Joe with a truculent gleam in his eye, “ef ye hed yore eye on him, thot ye wa’n’t watch-in’ him ter some avail?”

“Because,” answered the attorney steadily, “it turns out that I didn’t have my eye on him close enough. I had a circle drawn, though, so that he couldn’t slip through—couldn’t get out of this territory. I had stopped the roads and trails against his escape.”

“What’s he at now?” demanded Joe Featherstone. “He’s my man ter kill.”

But Bratchell shook his head.

“He belongs to the law, Joe, and I’m responsible for him,” he said with an unimpassioned firmness, “but he’s going to be punished, and punished with death.”

“Hit ain’t agoin’ ter content me none,” declared the son of the murdered clan chief, “ter hev no unfulled promises.”

“It ain’t goin’ to content me, either,” Muir Bratchell assured him dryly.

Savage felt as if he were awaiting his own ordeal, as he heard the hammers ringing from the sawmill, where the coffin of the dead Featherstone was being nailed together. He watched the henchmen lolling about near their rifles as they waited for the arrival of the other party, and wondered how far the talk would go before it chained him to his fate.

Finally that party was seen approaching along the road, and even at the distance, Savage could recognize the figure of the man with whom he had been thrown into such a strange companionship. He was not walking now but was riding a mule, with his shoulders slumped, and the posse of men who rode with him, sat their mounts with a lazy unconcern that seemed ghastly.

The horsemen arrived at last and dismounted. They stood in an informal but watchful circle about their captive.

Sheriff Holliday, a small man with a pink and cherublike face, in a tidy white shirt, came up to Bratchell and made his report.

“I found him jest about what you figured he’d be, cuttin’ fer ther Ver-
ginny line. I was thar myself when he come up—an' he was travelin' in right tormentin' haste."

Bratchell was looking at an ugly bruise on the face of the prisoner, and in a quiet voice, but one tinged with sternness, he inquired:

"You pistol-whipped him, didn't ye, sheriff?"

But Holliday smiled cheerfully and without embarrassment.

"I made me a mistake," he declared. "I 'lowed he'd give up ter me when I hailed him, but he jerked out his pistol gun like an old-timer."

"Yes?"

"Waal he covered me an' 'lowed he didn't aim ter surrender to no backwoods flatfoot."

"And so——"

"He 'lowed he ate fellers like me every day—so I rapped him jest once with my pistol gun and focht him in."

"And he didn't eat you," observed the lawyer with a spasmodic jerk of his straight lips. Then, turning to Lucas, who had stiffened defiantly, he said: "It's right heedless for furriners to pull guns around here, Mr. Lucas, unless they use 'em and use 'em tolerable quick."

"Why should I be stopped by a hick constable when I was traveling the roads like any other lawful citizen?" stormed the captive. "I want to know that."

"We aim to tell you," replied Bratchell smoothly.

"I suppose you think you can frame me for that bank job——"

Bratchell raised his hand and lifted his brows.

"Bank job?" he inquired. "Who said anything about any bank job, Mr. Lucas? I didn't hear any accusation to that account." After a moment's pause, he added: "I reckon I ought to warn you that anything you say may be used against you. I didn't aim to question you so much as to tell you what I know. If I do ask any questions you object to, you needn't answer 'em until you have your lawyer at hand. That's your own business, but it is sound counsel."

"Then what's the big idea? What are you making this pinch for?"

"I aimed to talk about that."

Bratchell turned to Featherstone, and said:

"Joe, just listen now for a spell an' don't cut in. You may not fathom the drift, right at first—so wait till you do."

Then he addressed himself again to the prisoner.

"The money wasn't there, was it, Mr. Lucas?" he made amiable inquiry. "Don't you remember I told you that that story was just granny talk?"

"What money? What the hell are you cracking about?"

"The money I mean, Mr. Lucas, is the sack you heard Red Bill kept under the four-poster bed: the money you went after when you shot him."

Lucas threw back his head and gave a disdainful laugh.

"I get you," he declared. "I see the frame you're working up. Well, it's hick stuff, see? These men of yours wouldn't tell me what they wanted me for. So you think you can hang the Featherstone murder on me, do you?"

Bratchell shook his head.

"Not hang it on you—but nail it to you and clinch it. It was the sort of thing a reckless and desperate gang killer would do. You didn't have to kill old Bill. You could have made your get-away out of that back door, just like you did—but without shooting. You were sore because you didn't find the money you thought you'd pick up as you left this country. The prospect of pickin' up several grand in the backwoods had sort of tickled your sense of humor. So you were disappointed and you just threw in a murder for good
measure. That was gangster stuff, too. It was gangster style to fire a fusillade where one shot would do. You were 'givin' him the works.'"

"Are you through?" demanded Lucas, who had quieted now and whose face, as it hardened, defensively presented an aspect which was unfamiliar. "Because if you are through, I'll talk a little. You say it was the job of a city gangster. Well, I don't happen to be one, see? You say I was running away at the time. Well, that's a damn lie, too, see? You say I threw in a murder, and that's a damn lie, too, see? Now, if you think you can prove any or all of those things, crack your whip and be damned to you."

"A few minutes back," Bratchell reminded him, "you mentioned a bank robbery."

"Yeah, and you said you weren't talking about that. Have you changed your mind?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"I'm not interested in that—not now," he answered. "I was interested in it one time—but that's gone by. I'm just referring to it as a sort of an illustration. I thought it might interest you."

"All right. Crack it. You've got the floor with your mob of gunmen here."

"Once quite a long while back there was a crook in Louisville who later moved on to Asheville. He pulled off a robbery of a country bank," Bratchell told him, "and he showed he was a smart boy because he invented a trick that hadn't been tried before. And it worked—one."

"I don't get you, but don't let that discourage you."

"I don't aim to. That crook was just a beginner then, but he had the makin's of a world-beater in him. He framed this robbery with three others, and he had one of his accomplices hold a gun on him all the while. He made it seem so plain that he was an innocent victim that he didn't even run away far after-ward. And when he was picked up, he told such a straight story of being forced at the gun muzzle, that he was accepted as State's evidence, and failed to identify the others."

"Well, what has all that hop-talk got to do with me?"

"I'm just congratulatin' you on the invention of that trick—only you ought to have been content with workin' it once. Well, when I first got to talking with Mr. Gerald, the bank examiner, quite some time before he came over here, and he told me about another bank robbery in which pretty much the same thing was done, I hooked them two cases up together. I only knew of one crook as smart as that, and it set me thinking."

"What had either of those robberies to do with me?"

"They looked like two jobs done by the same hand—your hand, Mr. Lucas."

The prisoner laughed again, but less assuredly.

"Shoot," he prompted. "It's a sweet little bedtime story."

"Well, I've got a habit of getting interested in little things, and I've got a sort of knack for recognizing faces. So when I saw you first—"

"You'd never seen me before, had you?"

"Never before—but I'd seen your picture. I wasn't sure, of course, because you're right smart at disguise, and those pictures that they paste up in post offices and the like, they ain't always good. A rogues' gallery likeness don't seem natural, somehow."

Lucas bent forward and his face, though still warily masklike, had become tense.

"It was only when we were sittin' on the porch at Yon House one evenin' that I caught a certain angle and expression—and made my guess. But still I couldn't be right sure."

"Sure of what? Why don't you come out and talk sense?"
“Sure you were you. So I dropped a piece of paper out of an envelope and you were civil enough to pick it up for me. I reckon you wouldn’t scarcely have been so careless in town, but you eat backwoods flat-feet, and I reckon you figured me to be as dumb as the rest. It didn’t occur to you that I could use a little lampblack and a camel’s hair brush to bring out those finger prints, as well as a city cop.”

“I don’t get you. It’s all raving. I’ve been a newspaper man. Finger prints don’t mean anything unless a guy has a record—unless he’s been mugged and printed.”

“So,” went on Bratchell equably, “I mailed that piece of paper to New York.” He added irrelevantly: “I was there once myself.”

“Sure,” sneered Lucas. “That makes you a wise guy all right. You were in New York once.”

“I mailed that slip of paper,” repeated the lawyer, “to the Bureau of Identification there in New York.”

The tautness of the young man’s face had become somewhat ghastly, but he shook his head doggedly.

“They’ll give you a big laugh when they get it,” he declared.

“Well,” continued Muir Bratchell with the same inexorable levelness of tone, “gettin’ my answer back was a matter of time—an’ I had to wait.” He paused, then his voice quickened and sharpened. “Now, I don’t have to wait any longer.”


“No, I reckon not, but you see I got interested in the stick-up only because I thought I saw whose handiwork it was and the finger prints seem to prove up my theory.”

There was a greenish tinge to the young man’s face now, and his lips parted apprehensively over his teeth, but in his eyes was the beady glint of the cornered rat who fights back to the end.

“Crack the rest of it,” he invited. “What are you going to do now? That’s what I’d like to know.”

“I’m not going to start investigation of the bank robbery,” Bratchell told him. “So far as I’m concerned, I’ll just write that off the books, and I don’t see why the State of Kentucky should be put to the expense of tryin’ you for killing Red Bill Featherstone, either. I’ve got me a right full docket without that.”

Joe Featherstone had stood silently scowling while this talk had gone on touching not at all on the murder of his father. Now he stepped forward and his eyes burned.

“So ye’ve been lyin’ ter me, after all, Muir Bratchell!” he exclaimed in fury-choked voice. “Fust ye pledged us ye aimed ter punish this man with death. Now ye says hit ain’t wuth ther money hit costs ther State of Kaintuck ter try him.”

Bratchell had not turned his face from the gaze with which he held Lucas’ eyes. He brushed the tall hillsman aside and went on:

“It’s not worth while to delay the processes of justice by holding you here. They want you in Louisvill, too, for the Shawnee Bank robbery two years ago. They want you in Asheville—and there’s a man coming from New York for you with requisition papers. They want you there worst of all.”

“I tells ye thot ain’t agoin’ ter content me none——” roared Joe. “I wants him worst of all, an’ I aims ter hev him.”

This time Bratchell turned toward the frenzied mountaineer.

“Bide your time, Joe,” he said, with a conciliating gravity. “The man that comes from New York is taking him back to Sing Sing prison. He escaped from there. He is already sentenced to death and he can’t die but once. He
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goes back to the electric chair, Joe. It doesn’t mean anything to you, but another of this man’s names is Benny the Gun.”

Lucas had straightened. His eyes were more than ever ratlike now, and there was no collapse in his attitude or his expression.

Of course the finger prints had settled it.

He was full of brittle defiance and his lips curled. Savage wondered how he had ever seen him and failed to recognize his rogues’ gallery portrait, and in the same breath he realized that until now the man who had called himself Lucas could have worn the thing on his front like a sandwich man without recognition by any ordinary eye.

There was a strange, an unaccountable exaltation about the captive, the warped pride of the criminal who had hogged headlines on the front pages, and who flaunts his notoriety as if it were high fame. This exaltation had possessed him now and he no longer cowered or evaded, but stood up and boasted.

“No, that wouldn’t mean anything to our friend here,” Lucas said brazenly, “but it will mean something to the newspaper readers around the big burg. It will be first-page news, there, where class counts, where the people aren’t hicks. The boys of the heavy-money rackets will open giggle-water along the main stem to drink to the best little guy of them all. That’s what they think of me up in the big town.”

He turned to Bratchell:

“As for you, you creek-bed mouthpiece, you backwoods rider, you’ve made more of a name for yourself by this lucky break than you can make in your whole damn briar-patch life rapping hick criminals. You’ve turned up Benny the Gun, Benny the Gun that crashed out of the Big House. But there’s one thing you ain’t done. You ain’t heard no squawk out of me, see? I give it and I can take it. That’s Benny the Gun, see? You’re a fool for luck, Mister Bratchell. I’ve got to hand it to you there, all right.”

The man who had been known here as Lucas broke off on a derisive, almost hysterical laugh, yet he was not through. Like an actor holding the spotlight on the stage, he seemed greedy and proud of his importance, and he swept on disdainfully:

“But you are a hick and a sap for all your luck, Bratchell. The green shows through you when you talk about their sending a man for me from New York. They’ll send a squad—and they’ll pick the squad, because they know me there, see? They know the lad that sprung himself out of Warble-Warble on the river. You’ve got me, but it was just a lucky break for you, and I can laugh at you when I take the step back from the dance hall to the hot seat, see?”

Bratchell turned to Sheriff Holliday who stood impassively by with nothing but tranquillity on his pink-checked and cherublike face.

“Put the irons on him, sheriff,” directed the attorney. “It’s all right now. I hadn’t mentioned one little detail before. The reason I hadn’t taken hold of him before was that the letter hasn’t come back from New York yet—but I guess he’s talked himself into the chair. His confession is enough for the present.”

Benny the Gun wheeled and at a breath the bravado went out of his face, leaving it snarling with a pitiful chagrin.

“What’s that?” he demanded. “Crack that again. You ain’t got me identified, after all?”

“I didn’t have,” Bratchell corrected him, “until you got to bragging. Sheriff, don’t pistol-whip him any more—unless you have to. This boy comes from the city. He ain’t quite so stout as a mountain man, you know.”
CHAPTER XIII.

DOCTOR CLAY HARLAN.

The stars above the turrets of the hills that night were large and clearly bright. Big Blue reared his ancient shoulders among them, and down in the well of the world between his knees, detail was lost in a lake of sleeping purple.

On the old log footbridge stood Hugh Savage and at his side was Rachel Ransome.

"It's peace and beauty after the storm," he was saying. "The old feudal lord went to his Valhalla like a fine old baron, didn't he?"

"And Lucas—" she said, but got no further because a shudder ran over her, and she drew nearer to him. "But you, Hugh. You must go now. You mustn't delay it any longer. Your danger hasn't passed." Her voice trembled. "I thought Muir Bratchell hesitated when he bade you farewell. It was as if he were on the point of saying something. Then as though he had thought better of it, he just nodded and went away."

"Have you had time to think what a strange pattern was worked out, Rachel?" asked the man soberly. "Here were three of us, all condemned as murderers; three brothers in jeopardy thrown together by chance. One was a typical underworld killer; one an old feudal leader who followed a warped code—and myself."

"You are innocent," she protested hotly. "You have no brotherhood with them."

"Except the brotherhood of the law's brand. One of them is on his way to death. One of them lies already dead, over there. He waved a hand toward the little hospital. "So far luck has led me—and luck is a wanton."

"Don't talk like that," she pleaded. "I can't bear it. It's Providence that has saved you—not luck."

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"Whatever happens, I want you to remember this," he told her. "Even if they take me back, the sting won't be so bitter now. I know I have your faith and that means vindication. You make my world—and you believe in me."

"To-morrow you must go," she gave command in a desperate whisper—"to-morrow while there's still time. You've tempted fate too long."

But in the gray just before dawn, there was a knock on the door of the pole-house and when Savage flung back his door, a woman stood there with a lantern in her hand.

"You—Doctor Brand!" Hugh exclaimed, and she nodded, but with an unsmiling face.

"It's Rachel," she said. "Appendicitis, and it's bad. My judgment is that she should go to the table soon, but that's for you to decide."

The man's face paled. So violent a palsy of fright possessed him that he knew his hand could not be trusted with the scalpel. This demoralization would not do. He must steady himself.

In another minute he was following her with a bleak face along the little path to the hospital from which only a few hours ago, the men of Featherstone's escort had carried a pine coffin on their shoulders.

"I don't want you to operate until later in the day, if you think it will wait," said Doctor Brand earnestly, "but, of course, we mustn't waste time."

From her cot the girl looked up and lifted a weak hand. As he took it her fingers closed around his own and she smiled.

"They've told me," she said with a faint smile, "and with you to operate, I'm safe. I'm not afraid."

Hugh Savage's hand was as steady now as the cool iron of the hospital cot. His voice was steady, too.

"There's very little danger," he told her professionally. "We can operate in time. We'll take you to the table"
—he looked at his watch and added—
"at ten o'clock."

Doctor Brand had left the room for a moment, and the girl looked up. Her eyes clouded.

"But you must promise me one thing," she said. "Operate and go. Don't wait afterward. Doctor Brand can do the rest."

He shook his head.

"No, dearest," he told her, "I stay with you until I can say good-by to you on the old footbridge."

"No, no!" she urged. "I shall die of fright if you stay. I won't get well. Terror will kill me. You must promise me you'll go to-day."

He saw that she was exciting herself, and with reluctant slowness and a mental reservation, he nodded his head.

"I yield," he told her, and again she smiled.

In the operating room, Doctor Brand said in a businesslike tone:

"I'll have our patient ready at ten. I'll handle the anaesthetic for you, myself."

"Good," he said. "That will be best, and yet, for this case, I wish I could have you standing at my elbow, with some one else attending to the anaesthesia."

The woman paused as she searched a white cabinet for certain accessories, then went on casually:

"I don't know whether Miss Moreland told you last night—the message came late—but Doctor Shelby of Louisville is coming this morning. I dare say he'll get here before we operate. You know who he is, of course?"

She was not looking at his face. She did not see the momentary spasm which crossed it, and the words from behind, though they may have come a trifle belatedly, were as casual as her own.

"Yes. Shelby is as sound a man as there is in Louisville."

"So I'm told," went on Doctor Brand, turning from the cabinet. "I thought you'd be glad to know he'd be on hand. It's one more on the firing line."

"Yes," answered the surgeon, "I'm glad you told me."

They went down to the door together, and he paused to say:

"I'm going back to the pole-house for a little while. Perhaps you understand what a profound personal interest I have in this case, Doctor Brand. I'm going to ask you to see that I'm left alone until I operate."

"I quite understand," she assured him. "I have guessed how it is—between you."

Back in the pole-house Hugh Savage stood at the door looking off across the ridges with a stricken face. It was as if he were photographing something on his heart through the lenses of his eyes. Then he walked slowly down to the footbridge across the brook—and that was a pilgrimage.

He was thinking what it would mean to her.

Yes, he knew Doctor Shelby and Doctor Shelby knew him.

An instant after their eyes had met, it would be as impossible for him to go on playing out his masquerade as a living ghost as if he had never been lost from public view.

Shelby was not only a great doctor, but he was a member of the State Board of Health, an officer of the Commonwealth. His conception of public duty was sternly inelastic.

Yes, reflected Hugh Savage—or Clay Harlan, as he might as well now call himself—the course of developments had at last shaped themselves into an ironical and inexorable pattern. This small operating room which he had, himself, endowed, would this morning become merely an anteroom to another.

In that other, the State of Kentucky had installed its electric chair.

Between the man's eyes two furrows drew themselves deeply. Life had become inordinately hard to give up. The
instinct to struggle on toward escape, safety and happiness, was clamorous in him, and he was tasting the agonies of Golgotha.

He might see Shelby and throw himself on his mercy. It might possibly avail—but he shook his head.

The time had come. The old feudist, Red Bill, had died gallantly and unafraid with a magnificent gesture at the end of a violent life. Even the gutter rat with his infamous past had thrust out his jaw and taken his death decree with a braggart’s pride.

In a little while they would all know. Bratchell already guessed, and had gone as far in his behalf as he could go in honor.

He would not be the only one caught running, dodging, to be dragged back to his doom. He would not ask others to make themselves accessories by shielding a convict.

And he was horribly afraid it would kill her.

At last he looked at his watch. It was time to go across the familiar lawn and prepare for his work.

Before donning his gown and head gaue, Savage went into the small anteroom where a little group was already standing.

Doctor Shelby looked up and their eyes met.

Possibly had Shelby had time to reconstruct his thought and to reaccommodate his mind to its amazement, he might have followed another course. As it was, his mouth opened and his eyes dilated as he stood at the side of Muir Bratchell.

“My God, Harlan!” he exclaimed.

Savage glanced at Bratchell, and Bratchell’s expression did not change by so much as the twitching of a muscle, or the quiver of a lash. Savage found himself smiling ironically as he responded in a tone of entire quiet.

“Savage is the name, Doctor Shelby, if you don’t mind.” He paused an instant, then added, “until this work is finished.”

As if the realization of what he had done had overwhelmed him with something akin to horror, the visiting physician’s face burned red and he stammered:

“I beg your pardon. Yes, Savage, of course. It was the surprise of a resemblance.”

“It’s Savage,” repeated the surgeon, “until we are through here, if you don’t mind.” He turned to Doctor Brand. “Let’s have our patient in the operating room,” he instructed.

When they were about to cover her lips with the ether cone, Rachel smiled up at the surgeon and his smile down on her was one of tranquilizing reassurance, as Doctor Brand’s voice instructed:

“Take a deep breath.”

Savage had divested himself of his operating gown and head gear, and he came again into the anteroom where Miss Moreland was awaiting him with Doctor Shelby and Muir Bratchell.

“It was a beautiful operation, Doctor Savage,” declared the Louisville physician, “and I’m sure your patient will soon be on her feet.”

Savage nodded his head briefly and turned to Bratchell.

“I’m ready now,” he said. “I suppose you want me.”

“What for, doctor?”

“You heard Doctor Shelby here. He called me Harlan.”

Bratchell nodded his head.

“I heard him call you that—and then I heard him say he’d made a mistake.” The Commonwealth’s attorney smiled as he added: “Moreover, doctor, while I didn’t know anything for sure, I suspected who you were from the first. I’d seen your picture in the papers. I’m given to noticing resemblances right close.”
"Then you do want me—and I'm ready to go—unless——"

"Unless what, doctor?"

"Unless I may stay until I know more——" He jerked his head toward the door of the room where Rachel lay.

"So far as I know," Muir Bratchell assured him, "you can stay as long as you like—within reason. I wanted to tell you that this morning, but they said you didn't want to see anybody till you'd finished your job. When I met you here, I didn't say anything either, because you'd keyed yourself up for what you were facing, and a sudden surprise, even if it were joy, might have unsteadied you."

"I don't understand."

"It's a right simple matter, though," Bratchell told him. "What took me to Louisville that time when I got started on the trail of this gunman, Lucas, was another matter. It was you, doctor."

"Me?"

"Yes, sir. I knew Miss Moreland here held you to be a sort of saint—and I hadn't ever been able to feel quite satisfied that you'd had justice. So when I saw you——"

"But you weren't sure it was I."

"No, I wasn't sure it was you, but I suspicioned. I didn't want to know, for sure, because if I knew, I had a right dire duty, but so long as I was just guessin', there was something I could try. I wanted to see if anything could be done for a man who was dead—but who might happen to come to life again, so I went down there to Louisville."

"But it was all settled there."

"I was goin' at it from another angle. I was right interested in this fellow Torrilli that testified against you. It looked to me like he was swearin' more for himself than against you."

"Yes, they arrested him, but he turned State's evidence."

Bratchell smiled.

"Turnin' State's evidence is one way out," he said. "I began lookin' up that fellow's past history. I found out he'd been fired from that club because he'd got too raw with his bootleggin'. Looked like he was playin' along with some big outfit. So I went further back an' I stumbled on a right interestin' fact."

Savage had dropped into a chair and seemed hardly to be hearing what was said, but Miss Moreland prompted eagerly:

"What was it, Mr. Bratchell?"

"I found out that years ago this fellow, Benny the Gun, was a cheap little crook around Louisville—what he'd call a peewee chiseler, I reckon. That was back yonder before he got so great. In those days he and Torrilli lived in the same house. I got to studyin' over whether, now that Benny the Gun was at large again and hidin' out from the big cities, he mightn't turn up in his home town. If he did, I 'lowed Mr. Torrilli might have had some dealin's with him." He paused, then explained: "You see, if I could get a criminal connection for Torrilli, I would have something to go on. It might even help with the governor, if so-be Doctor Harlan came back to life some time. Up to that point, that was the only interest I had in Benny the Gun."

"And what did you find?"

"I found that the Louisville police were right sore. They'd just missed Benny the Gun, who had been in town and given them the slip. I gave them the suggestion that they watch Torrilli—and they put a man to tail him."

"Did they get evidence against him?"

Bratchell shook his head.

"No, not enough, but a hijacking job was pulled just outside town about that time, and this Torrilli fellow got shot. They took him to the hospital. That was all in the papers a little while back, but I reckon you folks here overlooked it. I doubt if Mr. Lucas did."
Bratchell fumbled in his pocket and brought out an old pipe which he filled with crumbs of tobacco. He didn't seem to be in any hurry.

"I thought maybe Torrelli would die, and that if he knew he was dying, he might make a clean breast about the killin' they had convicted Doctor Harlan for. I knew he wouldn't give away any member of his gang. They don't do that. It's against the code—but in his own peculiar fashion, Mr. Torrelli was religious. If so-be he was plum' dead certain he was dying anyhow, I 'lowed he might come clean about the Galloway killin'.”

"But you didn't stay there in Louisville long, Mr. Bratchell. How did you do all these things?"

"I put another lawyer to work there—a friend of mine. Well, last night Torrelli died—and before he died, he confessed. It seems Galloway had abused him and he was scared. There was right smart self-defense in what he did, but he got scared and put it on Harlan. Harlan was too drunk to know. The Negro that corroborated him was in the bootleggin' game, too, I reckon. Anyhow, the confession was made and sworn to."

"When did you get this news?" asked Savage, looking up dumfounded from his seat.

"Well, it came by telephone yesterday," Bratchell made reply, "but you see yesterday was a right busy day. I didn't get it until last night. Then I called up Louisville. Then I called up Frankfort and had speech with the governor."

"Do you mean," Savage rose to his feet and stood facing the country lawyer, "that I am free?"

Bratchell laughed.

"Well, you ain't pardoned yet—and the old sentence still stands on the books, doctor. But the governor paroled you in my custody. He'll be right willin' to talk to you, and I know what he'll tell you, just as soon as you prove to him you're alive. The best way to do that is to go see him."

"I think," said Clay Harlan, "I'll go into the patient's room. I want to be there when she comes out of the ether."

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT DOGS?

By dint of loud, long, and emphatic repetition, the sons of men have been persuaded that there is something wrong with the person who does not love dogs. Consequently, everybody, male and female, does love, or pretend to love, a dog or dogs. But love presupposes knowledge of, or at least some slight acquaintance with, the habits and peculiarities of the thing or person loved.

Any real, one-hundred-per-cent dog-lover, therefore, can cause a noticeable degree of uncertainty, embarrassment, and sidestepping in an average group of persons who announce their admiration and adoration of canines, by asking them the following questions:

Are puppies born with teeth?
If so, do they, like children, lose the baby teeth and grow another set?
Are they, like kittens, born with their eyes closed?
Are they born with their ears closed?
If so, do the eyes or ears open first?
Knock 'Em Down, Moe Closky

By RAYMOND LESLIE GOLDMAN

Author of "Grandfather's Stock"

How Ben and Sidney, Clothing Merchants, Almost Became "Prize Fights Permoters."

MANHATTAN was in the icy clutch of winter. The sky was a heavy blanket of dark wool from which fell soft flakes of snow. Standing at the window of his office, Ben Lowenstein looked down into Thirty-eighth Street, seven stories below. High dikes of discolored snow lined the curbs like fortifications; street and sidewalks were covered with muddy slush. His breath clouding the window and obscuring his discouraging view, Ben turned away with a sigh.

"A fine day for the skirt-and-blouse business!" he muttered, seating himself at his desk. "If I was in the rubbers business, I bet you, or the overcoats business maybe, the day would be hot and dry like summer."

This remark, which he must have addressed to himself, since he was alone in the office, may lead you to infer correctly that he was in the skirt-and-blouse business, and, further, that he was not optimistic by nature.

He had, however, no actual cause for complaint, for January was normally a dull month for sales, though an active one in the preparation of spring lines of merchandise. Within five or six weeks the market would open; out-of-town buyers would flock to the metropolis;
and at that time an inviting display of the newest in skirts and blouses must be ready.

All of Ben's employees, with the exception of the two salesmen, had tasks enough to keep them furiously busy; and when Ben walked back to the shipping room to inspect a newly arrived consignment of rayon, he was surprised to see Manny Lipman, the shipping clerk, noticeably inactive among the unopened cases.

Manny, usually an exemplification of energy, now reclined on the floor, his back propped against a packing case, his face flushed and his head drooping. The only parts of him that showed any activity whatsoever were his eyes and nose.

"Nu, Manny," Ben inquired solicitously, "what's the matter with you anyway?"

Manny looked up and used his handkerchief.

"I got a derrible cold, Mister Lowenzdein," he explained weakly. "I feel rodden."

Ben shook his head and sucked his tongue sympathetically.

"You look even worse," he declared consolingly. "From the way you look, Manny, you could be already in the last stages of ammonia. Why don't you go home and go to bed with a doctor?"

"How can I?" the shipping clerk queried helplessly. "Loog ad thiz worg?" He paused to sneeze; then added conscientiously: "All these cases go do be unbagced. And—"

"Listen," Ben cut in. "Can you un-pack them by dying here, Manny? You go home right this minute."

Manny struggled to his feet.

"Thangs, Mister Lowedzdein," he said gratefully. "I guezz I bedder. I'll be all righd do-morrow."

Next day, however, the shipping clerk did not return; nor the day after. Mrs. Lipman telephoned to impart the gloomy tidings that her husband had influenza and would be confined to his bed for at least ten days. Ben hung up the receiver with a groan.

"That's how it goes," he told himself bitterly. "In the selling season the salesmen get sick; in the cutting season the designer gets sick; and now, with the goods coming in, the shipping clerk gets sick. Such luck I got, it's terrible. If I was playing solitaire with myself, I guess I'd get sick."

To be without the services of a shipping clerk was out of the question, so Ben reached for the telephone and called the Central Employment Agency.

"Hello," he said; "this is Ben Lowenstein—skirts and blouses on Thirty-eight Street. Should you got a good shipping clerk by you which he wants a job? It's to handle heavy cases and yard goods, so I want he should be good and strong. And healthy," he added.

The girl consulted her lists, returning to inform Ben that a man named Doyle was available.

"Doyle?" Ben echoed. "Ain't you got maybe a Levy or a Cohn?"

Again the girl absented herself from the telephone; then she said:

"There's a man in the office now, Mr. Lowenstein, whose name is Moe Closky. He's a big fellow and looks strong. His references are very good and he'd like to work for you."

"Moe Closky," repeated Ben with satisfaction. "Send him over and I'll see him right away."

Half an hour later, Miss Josephs informed Ben that the applicant was calling; and when, a moment later, she ushered him into the office, Ben looked up with something like startled awe in his expression.

Before him, hat in hand, the newcomer stood like a block of granite, well over six feet tall, as broad as a doorway, with long, thick arms that terminated in hands like slabs of meat. The face was, at first glance, forbidding. The nose was broad and squat, the
mout wide and thick lipped, the square jaw bulged with muscle. But the eyes were as blue as a child’s and quite mild and friendly.

“Well,” Ben breathed, not without admiration, “what kind of a shipping clerk are you anyway? For pianies and safes, mister?”

The man had a most disarming smile. The general timidity of his manner contrasted strangely with his ponderous size.

“Ye said youse wanted a strong man,” Closky ventured quietly. “Well, I’m strong.”

“I bet you,” agreed Ben. “Even if I was in the elephant business, you would be strong enough.”

Ben was delighted with his new employee. Closky, it developed, was a willing worker, friendly and good-natured. He lifted the heaviest cases with an ease that was amazing; he carried in one trip as many bolts of cloth as Manny Lipman could have handled in a dozen trips. And best of all, he had agreed to work for a wage that Ben had mentioned only as a starting point for bargaining.

“A feller like that,” Ben told himself, after Closky had been working for him a week, “would be good to have here even when Manny gets well. And now with Manny turning into ammonia—poor feller—it’s no telling when he’ll come back here. First thing you know, if I don’t do something, this here Closky will find hiself a better job, and then I won’t have him or Manny neither.”

He thought the matter over shrewdly; and on the first day of the following week he called the giant shipping clerk into his office for a conference. At its conclusion, Closky returned gratefully to his packing cases and Ben heaved a sigh of relief.

Ben was, therefore, in an excellent humor when Sidney Soloman dropped in for a visit. Sidney, who maintained a cloak-and-suit establishment on the fourth floor of the same building, was Ben’s physical contrast. He was as thin as Ben was stout, as tall as Ben was short, as dark as Ben was fair; and his head was as luxuriantly crowned with black hair as Ben’s was bald and shiny.

Ben looked up at his friend appraisingly. Sidney was a man of extreme moods; he was either lugubrious or gay, and, always, he was in the throes of excitement. Ben noted with relief that Sidney was gay.

“Hello, Sidney,” he said. “What for are you so happy? Did your designer steal a new number?”

Sidney grinned. “You should talk about stealing numbers, Ben! Abe Plessner told me that your designer got his idea for your new blouse, No. 14-A, by calling on Plessner’s designer one night and getting him drunk. Ha! You should talk!”

Ben flushed. “What do I know where my designer gets his ideas, Sidney? If he got Plessner’s designer drunk with bootleg, I bet you, it cost enough to do it! Anyway, that 14-A is a grand number, Sidney. Like my designer says, it’s got the punch.”

Sidney drew up a chair and seated himself.

“Speaking of punches,” he remarked, “you couldn’t guess where I was last night, Ben.”

Ben nodded. “That’s right, Sidney. I couldn’t.”

“I was to a prize fights!” Sidney declared with the manner of hurling a bomb.

Ben shrugged. “What’s so wonderful about that, Sidney? Lots of low-lifes go to prize fights.”

“Low-lifes!” Sidney echoed. “Since when does only low-lifes go to a prize fights?”

“Since when, I don’t know,” Ben returned, “because I don’t know how long they got prize fights already. But I know low-lifes go there.”

“In the old days, maybe,” Sidney ex-
plained patiently. "But not any more. The finest people go. You take, f'r instance, the Bijou Sporting Club, where I was last night—it's like a grand the-
ayter, Ben, with reg'lar seats, not benches, and stylish ushers, and a men's room as fine as the Astor Hotel is got! And before the fights begin they got music from a band which I wouldn't be surprised if it was Sousa."

"Am I interested?" queried Ben; which meant that he was not. "For my part they could get Sousa hisself to do the fighting and I wouldn't care. Any-
way, what made you go all of a sudden to a prize fights, Sidney?"

"I thought you wasn't interested?" sneered Sidney.

"I ain't," affirmed Ben. "But I could ask anyhow, couldn't I?"

"The reason I went," Sidney replied, "is because yesterday I met on the street Jake Bernstein, and he was going to the L & K for lunch like I was; so we went together." He paused, and Ben said:

"How does eating lunch with a feller named Bernstein make you go to a prize fights, Sidney? I can't see the connec-
tion."

"Why don't you let me finish, Ben? Don't you remember Jake Bernstein which he used to be in neckties over on Third Avenue?"

Ben widened his eyes and lifted his brow with sudden understanding.

"Oh! You mean that crook which he finally made a failure a long time ago? That's the kind of a low-life who would go to prize fights."

"Is that so!" Sidney rose to the de-
fname of the absent Jake Bernstein.

"Well, he's a mighty fine feller, Ben, and don't you forget it! Could he help it he made a failure? It was because he had a partner who was such a back
number, Ben, that he kept on making ties in 1920 like they was wearing in the Civil War. Anyway, he's no failure now, lemme tell you. He's got him a Packard automobile with a feller to drive it for him, and you and me put together should got his money!"

"Is he in neckties again?"

Sidney laughed scornfully. "I should say he ain't! He should be in such a piker business like neckties, or skirts and blouses either! In one night he makes more than you and me put to-
gether makes in six months."

"So does Rockefeller," Ben declared. "But how does he make so much, Sid-
ney?"

Sidney waved an airy hand. "Prize fighting," he replied loftily. "That's how he makes it, Ben."

Ben stared incredulously. "Prize fighting! Jake Bernstein? Are you crazy, Sidney? He's as old as I am, and maybe older! What kind of prize fights do they got now-days? On crutches and wheel chairs?"

"Don't talk so ignorance, Ben. Jake Bernstein don't fight. He manages prize fighters. It's like this: He signs up a feller who is a fighter, y'under-
stand, in a contract which it says that everything the fighter makes fighting, Bernstein gets half. All Bernstein is got to do is get fights for the fighter. F'r instance, last night there was a fighter named 'Knock-out' Wilkins. That was one of Bernstein's fighters."

"One of them?" Ben interposed.

"Has he got two?"

"Two? He's got six in his stable, Ben."

Ben's jaw dropped. "What are they, Sidney—horses he should keep 'em in a stable?"

"He don't keep 'em in no stable, Ben. It's just called a stable."

"What's called a stable?"

The question stumped Sidney for a moment. He passed his hand through his hair.

"Ben," he cried, "why don't you stop asking questions till I told you? No-
thing's called a stable, Ben—that is, nothing that looks like a stable. They just
call all the fighters that a manager is got, a stable. One is one, two is two, and all of them is a stable.”

“Such a crazy business,” shrugged Ben. “I guess all the fighters, plus the manager, is called a garage.”

“Are you telling me, or am I telling you?” Sidney demanded. “Can I help it if they call fighters a stable? Anyway, this here Knock-out Wilkins which he fought last night, is one of Bernstein’s stable; and for that one fight Wilkins is paid out two thousand dollars, and Bernstein gets half of it. In one night he makes a thousand dollars because Wilkins gets up there and fights.”

“Is this here Wilkins crazy?” asked Ben.

“What do you mean—is he crazy?”

“Why should he get up and fight and then give up a thousand dollars to Bernstein? What is it—blackmail?”

Sidney was losing patience. “Didn’t I told you,” he cried, “that Bernstein is his manager, Ben? Every fighter is got to have a manager.”

“Why?” asked Ben.

Sidney jumped to his feet. “Why, I don’t know. And anyway, what’s the difference why? Ain’t it enough that they do?”

“For me, it’s enough,” Ben returned calmly. “You don’t got to go to work and bust a blood vessels on account from it, Sidney. Because if they got managers or they ain’t got managers, you understand, I’m in the skirt-and-blouse business, Sidney, and I got all I could do getting out the spring lines.”

This remark terminated the discussion; or rather, it halted it temporarily.

Several days later, Sidney again broached the topic which had suddenly become nearest his heart. It seemed that Jake Bernstein, out of the kindness of his heart, had offered to sell Sidney a half interest in the contract of one Mike O’Toole, a heavyweight who would undoubtedly climb the pugilistic ladder to the pinnacle of a world’s championship.

“Think of it, Ben,” said Sidney earnestly. “For five thousand dollars he would give up a half interest in this here feller, O’Toole! That would mean that every time O’Toole had a fight, y’understand, he would get half of what he got, and Bernstein would get half of what was left, and we would get the rest.”

“We! Who is we?”

“You and me, Ben. Providing, Ben, you would want to go in with me on this. This here O’Toole is a heavyweight, Ben—which means that he gets more money for each fight than any other kind of weight. Five thousand for one fight is nothing. Ten thousand is nothing. And if he gets to be the champeen, or even if he only gets to fight the champeen, then he would get maybe a half million dollars for one fight alone. If you put in twenty-five hundred and I put in twenty-five hundred, then in maybe only a month we should got all our money back. And from then on everything is clear profit!”

Lines of determination came into Ben’s face; his mouth and eyes grew hard.

“Don’t waste up your breath, Sidney,” he said quietly, “because before I would buy a fourth of a prize fighter for twenty-five hundred dollars, or even a whole prize fighter for twenty-five dollars, you would got whiskers down to your feet. And that’s the end!”

Sidney was discouraged, but not wholly hopeless. He reached into his pocket and extracted two oblongs of pasteboard.

“All right, Ben,” he replied. “If you want to throw away a fortune, you could do like you please. All I could spare now is twenty-five hundred, but I guess I could get plenty others to go in halves with me. Anyway, I got here two tickets to the fights to-night which
Bernstein gave them to me free, and they're the best seats in the front row. So why don't you go with me, Ben? Such excitement you never seen in your life! It don't cost nothing to go, does it?"

"All right, then," Ben accepted without enthusiasm. "Like you say, it don't cost nothing. And at least I could see what it's like."

There are any number of theories advanced to explain the lure of pugilism for the average individual. The scientist speaks of atavistic tendencies; of inherent brutality; of blood lust, and what not. Regardless of the fundamental cause, it remains that nearly everybody loves a good fighter, whether it be in a school yard, a back alley or a boxing ring. It may be that the spectator, through the magic of imagination, changes personalities with the participants, picturing himself as the winner and his pet enemy as the loser.

Be that as it may, professional pugilism has become almost an industry; and one of the reasons for its popularity is that no one need understand the technical side of the sport in order to enjoy watching it.

Ben Lowenstein had never witnessed this legalized form of assault and battery, and it was with undisturbed calm and an entire lack of enthusiasm that he allowed himself to be led by Sidney into the imposing structure which housed the Bijou Sporting Club.

A smartly uniformed usher conducted them to their ringside chairs; and Ben twisted about in his seat to take in the full grandeur of this Palace of Swat. It was five minutes before the start of the first bout and the place was crowded almost to capacity. Lights blazed, the band blared, and there was the drone of three thousand voices.

There was about the place a subtle emanation of excitement; and although the ring was empty, and nothing was happening that was different from any theater prior to the rise of the curtain, Ben felt an odd quickening within him. His heart beat a little more quickly, his breath came a little faster, and a bright sparkle took possession of his eyes.

"It's a grand place, ain't it?" he said to Sidney. "And look at the nice ladies in here, too! Who is going to make a fight to-night, Sidney? John L. Sullivan, the champeen?"

"Ben," Sidney replied, "don't be such a back number. Sullivan ain't champeen no more."

"He ain't?" said Ben, in surprise. "Who is, then?"

Sidney flushed and reflected deeply. "I—I ain't positive, Ben," he replied somewhat weakly, "but I think it's Corbett. Anyway, he ain't fighting here to-night and no champeen is fighting. They got five diff'rent fights and the best one is the last fight, the next best the next to last, and so on. In the next to last, O'Toole is making a fight. Jake Bernstein says we should watch him and we would see how he would be champeen some day."

At this moment a mighty cheer arose, the music ceased and the fights went out except for the white cone that flooded the roped arena. Then, amid sustained shouts and cheers, the preliminary boxers entered the ring. Ben asked:

"What is it, Sidney? Are they going to take a bath?"

"Shush!" Sidney answered. "Watch now! It's beginning!"

After the usual formalities the boxers shed their bath robes and the bout began. Ben watched its progress, his excitement increasing every minute. At its conclusion, he sank back into his chair, mopping his damp forehead.

"By golly!" he exclaimed. "Such excitement I never seen before in my life! It's a lucky thing, Sidney, from the way them fellers was swinging, they didn't hit each other. They would've got killed, I bet you!"

**THE POPULAR MAGAZINE**

**POP—5A**
"Don't talk crazy, Ben," the superior Sidney replied. "They wasn't supposed to miss. They was just rotten fighters, that's all. You wait. Gradgilly the fights gets better."

This prediction proved to be a true one. The second preliminary was a gory battle which terminated suddenly during the third round. With the unconscious loser on the floor of the ring, the spectators were on their feet, some of them, indeed, on their chairs, shouting and gesticulating. Pandemonium reigned.

Ben's eyes were fairly starting from his head. His face was purpled and his hands were icy cold. Frantically he clutched Sidney's arm.

"Sidney!" he quivered. "He's killed, Sidney! Sidney, don't get mixed up in this! Don't give your right name!"

"Shush, Ben! What's the matter with you anyway? He ain't killed. It's a knock-out. In a minute he'll be all right."

Again Sidney forecast correctly and Ben's terror subsided. By the time the semifinal bout was introduced, Ben had become an ardent fight fan, cheering and shouting as loudly as any, and actually praying for a knock-out.

When O'Toole climbed into the ring, Ben appraised this ponderous fighter with an almost expert eye. O'Toole had red hair, a broken nose, gold teeth and weighed nearly two hundred pounds. To Ben, all of these were assets. But, unfortunately for O'Toole, the gold teeth and the broken nose were results of a lack of skill, the red hair signified nothing except that his name was O'Toole; and too considerable a portion of the two hundred pounds was located just above the belt line. The sad fact of the matter was that O'Toole had outlived his usefulness. Once a promising heavyweight, he was now sustained by little else than his reputation. His manager, Jake Bernstein, was well aware of this decadent condition; but he had little fear of Sidney's sharing the knowledge with him. O'Toole's opponent for this fight was a man whom even O'Toole could defeat.

The announcer at the Bijou Sporting Club was not one to shield the modesty of the fighters whom he announced. His praises were always unstinted, he having formerly introduced circus performers. In the case of O'Toole, he made no exception.

"In this coh-nah," he shouted, "we have that mighty batt-ah, that mag-nee-fi-cent box-ah, that soo-poib slug-gah, that leading con-ten-dah for the cham-peen-ship of the wor-uld—mighty—Mike—O'Toole!"

Ben and Sidney listened to this encomiastic utterance with a sort of glowing pride that could have been little greater had O'Toole been their son and heir.

"You hear that?" asked Sidney, nudging Ben with an angular elbow. "And that's the feller you and me could buy a fourth of! Lord knows how much he gets for this here fight—and Jake Bernstein gets half! There's Jake now, Ben—see?—there in the ring with O'Toole!"

Ben's eyes followed Sidney's indicative finger, and he saw a thin, short, wiry man, in shirt sleeves, with flaming red suspenders.

"That's him, all right," Ben agreed. "He looks just like he done when he was still in the necktie business. And there he is, right in the ring with O'Toole. I guess he wants to stick around to be positive he gets his half!"

When, during the fifth round of this bout, the mighty O'Toole brought up a vicious uppercut that came within a sixty-fourth of an inch of connecting with his opponent's jaw, and the frightened opponent collapsed to the canvas to be counted out—when this consummation occurred, Ben assumed on the instant the rôle of victim. Jake Bernstein had spotted his guests from the
ring; and at the conclusion of the final bout, he made his way to their chairs and greeted them heartily.

He had prepared a most convincing sales talk; but when, at Sidney's and Ben's first words, he perceived that they were already sold, he changed his tactics. Instead of urging them, he manifested a reluctance to part with a quarter, nay, even so much as a finger of his mighty O'Toole; and Ben and Sidney became correspondingly eager to make the investment.

"I don't know if I should," the manager hesitated. "If O'Toole wins the championship I could make a million dollars with him. Why should I divide that with you for five thousand dollars? I ask you."

The spectators had filed out through the exits into the January night; the musicians had packed away their instruments and departed; the ushers had rushed through the rows, throwing up the seats; and now the janitors were busy with mops and long-handled brushes. In the shadow of the darkened ring, Ben, Sidney and Jake Bernstein still stood bargaining.

"Seven thousand!" Ben shouted. "And not a penny more!"

At this figure, the manager surrendered. He was a fool, but for the sake of an old friendship he would do it. For seven thousand dollars he would let them acquire a quarter interest in an unbeatable heavyweight.

"To-morrow you come by my office with the papers," said Ben, shaking hands warmly. "Then, when we got all signed up, we give you the check."

"All right, Ben; I'll be there," promised Bernstein. "And Mike will be with me to sign up also. You are both terrible lucky, lemme tell you."

"Don't we know it?" beamed Sidney. "Good-by, Jake. Come first by my office and we'll all go up together."

Next morning Ben had little mind for the skirt-and-blouse business. His thoughts were constantly in the hectic realm of pugilism; his eye was always on the office clock.

"Do you want to send that letter to the Empire Company?" asked Miss Josephis.

"When Mr. Soloman comes with two fellers, show him quick in the office," replied Ben.

"Mr. Lowenstein," said Closky, the shipping clerk, "dem cases come in from Florheim's. Should I open 'em?"

"Was that a punch! Bingo! and down he went like a ox!" Ben answered.

At noon the expected visitors had not yet appeared. Ben was in an agony of apprehension. His pudgy fingers toyed with the papers, the inkwell, the onyx paperweight, the pencils on his desk. Had Bernstein backed out at the last moment? Had O'Toole himself refused to accept a new managerial force? Why did they not come?

He was about to rush down to Sidney's office when the door opened and Sidney bounced in, followed by Bernstein and the flame-crested O'Toole. Bernstein made the necessary introduction.

"Ben, meet the great fighter, Mike O'Toole. Mike, this here is Mr. Lowenstein."

Ben cautiously extended his hand. "How-do! Don't you even feel a little sore from last night?"

O'Toole showed his gold teeth. "Aw—hell! That baby never touched me! Never touched me—see? And I'm tough. I take it and like it when I have to—see? I'm hard and tough."

"I bet you!" Ben agreed wholeheartedly. "In a dark alley I wouldn't like to—" He stopped himself, realizing that he was betraying his thoughts. "Well, let's get down to business, Jake," he added hurriedly to cover his tactlessness.

Bernstein, it seemed, was willing to conclude matters. He drew forth a
long, typewritten document which Ben read with great effort and small comprehension.

"I read it, Ben," said Sidney. "It's all right. All we got to do is sign it."

Ben seized a pen and was about to scrawl his signature on the dotted line when the door opened.

"About dem cases, Mr. Lowenstein. Should I open—"

It was the deep, full-toned voice of the giant shipping clerk. Ben held his pen suspended and turned about in his chair.

"Right now, Closky, I'm busy. Don't you see it?"

This reprimand was without effect. It fell on deaf ears. For Closky was standing rigidly in the doorway, his huge hands doubled into huge fists, a strange gleam in the usually mild, blue eyes which were now fixed upon the face and form of Mike O'Toole.

The mighty Mike had also become rather rigid, and his expression was that which was spoken of as his fighting face. His gold teeth showed, but through snarling lips; and the small space between these two men seemed to be charged with hissing electrical currents. Ben realized that something was wrong—cataclysmically wrong. He leaned forward in his chair, as if wanting to rise but lacking the power.

"What—what's the matter here, anyway?" he stammered.

No one seemed to hear him. The shipping clerk advanced another pace into the office, cautiously, like a boxer stepping out of his corner to meet a tricky foe. O'Toole advanced a pace and, the distance between the two men shortening, the electrical currents seemed to sputter more furiously. A deathly silence pervaded the office; and suddenly Closky broke it with a splintering oath.

"Closky!" shouted Ben.

"Mike!" shouted Bernstein.

And, as the giants swung at each other simultaneously and closed in, the three noncombatants ran from the office, fearful for their own lives and limbs. Slam! the office door swung shut; and they stood listening with horror to the quaking sounds of an invisible battle.

"Bernstein! Stop them!" screamed Ben, tugging at his own collar. "He's killing Closky! Stop him!"

"Get the police!" cried Sidney, trembling from head to foot. "It's murder!"

But no one made a move.

The fray was furious but brief, which was a fortunate thing for Ben's high blood pressure. After the actual elapse of one minute and nine seconds and the seeming elapse of twenty years, there sounded a mighty thud; the floor shook. There was a moment of horrible silence. The door opened—and from the office walked Closky, the shipping clerk.

"Look!" choked Ben. "Is it or ain't it!"

Undoubtedly it was. Closky was certainly the victor, striding healthily away toward his shipping room, whisking his palms against each other as if to rid them of dust. And on the floor of the nearly wrecked office lay the mighty Mike O'Toole, his face covered with blood and only his heavy breathing denoting that he still lived.

Bernstein was equal to the emergency. From his vest pocket he extracted a small vial of pungent liquid which he held under the nose of the recumbent heavyweight. With O'Toole's head between his knees, he manipulated the giant's sagging jaw. And all the while he was striving valiantly to revive him, he was showering curses upon his red head which, if granted, would have confined the poor fellow to the very regions from which he was being saved.

When O'Toole was on his feet again, conscious but groggy, Ben heaved a vast sigh of relief.

"Phooee, such a fighter!" he exclaimed, recovering the unsigned contract and tearing it down the middle. "I
should spend out my money for a feller which he can’t even beat up a shipping clerk.”

The mighty Mike O’Toole was in disgrace. With the tearing of the contract, Bernstein saw seven thousand dollars disappearing into thin air, and he was furious. He turned on his protégé.

“Get out from here!” he cried. “From now on I’m done with you! Yesterday was your contract up with me and now I’m done. Can you find suckers every day with seven thousand dollars? Go on; make a quick get out!”

Ben had run back to the shipping room to interview his victorious employee and so clear up an affair which was clothed in mystery; but he returned in time to hear Bernstein’s unintentional revelation about suckers with seven thousand dollars.

“So!” he told Bernstein as O’Toole slunk out of the office. “So you was playing us for suckers, Bernstein! Now I see it; and it was lucky my shipping clerk knew O’Toole from a long time ago when O’Toole stole his girl off him! That’s what Closky told me, Bernstein. And I want you should told me who is it suckers now, you or me, Bernstein?”

Bernstein seemed unaware that Ben’s words were meant to flay him. He was looking at Ben with a certain shrewdness in his eyes.

“Closky,” he repeated. “Is your shipping clerk’s name Closky?”

“Yes, it is,” Ben returned. “Moe Closky. And furthermore—Bernstein, where are you going?”

For Bernstein suddenly darted from the office and was last seen flying rearward to the shipping room. Ben looked at Sidney.

“What should I said!” Sidney wanted to know. “I got nothing to said.”

Ben nodded scornfully. “Believe me, you ain’t, Sidney. Nilly, on account from you, I throw away thirty-five hundred dollars in the gutter! If it wasn’t for me, where would we be at now? If anybody’s a sucker, Sidney, I don’t got to look far to see him.”

Sidney had no weapons of defense. His face flushed hotly but he was forced to remain silent. He was saved from further denunciation by the return of Jake Bernstein to the office. Bernstein wore an air of triumph. Above his head he waved a sheet of Ben’s stationery which was covered with handwriting, and as he fluttered it aloft, he executed a few steps of a dance that was reminiscent of another land.

“La, la, la, la, la-la-la!” he sang in time with his feet.

Ben stared. “Bernstein! What’s the matter with you anyway? Is this a wedding?”

“Is it!” Bernstein replied, interrupting his dancing. “It’s better as a wedding, even if it was my own daughter. Now have I got you suckers!”

Ben paled. “You got some way we should got to buy up a part of that O’Toole? I wouldn’t do it! You could sue me first!”

“Oh, who’s talking about that bum?” cried Bernstein. “With him I’m all done with. It’s Closky! Didn’t Closky knock out O’Toole? And Closky ain’t even a reg’lar fighter yet and don’t know nothing about fighting. What could he do when he knows something?” He paused and answered himself: “He would win the champeenship, that’s what. And even if he didn’t win it, then I could make a million dollars with him anyway. Because right now everybody’s looking for a Jewish heavyweight. All the other Jewish weights they got, but not heavyweight. The promoters holler: Give us a Jewish heavyweight and take in the money! And now I got one!”

“You got one!” Ben repeated. “Where have you got one, Bernstein?”
"You ask!" Bernstein exulted. "Right from under your nose I got one. Ain't Closky a heavyweight? Ain't he Jewish? Well, Ben Lowenstein, I got him, and here's the paper which he just signed up, and from this minute on he goes to work by me for a hundred dollars a week till he's trained enough; and afterward I get half of all he makes!"

He stopped breathlessly, and upon his words followed a deep silence. This was shattered at length by an explosive laugh; and Ben turned to Sidney.

"Well, Sidney! What is it so funny all of a sudden?"

Sidney took his revenge. "Nothing's so funny, Ben. Nothing is, I assure you, Ben. Only please told me who is a sucker, Ben? Am I or are you? Did you get a Jewish heavyweight under your nose which he would make for you anyway a million dollars and right away you throw him away in the gutter, or didn't you? I ask you."

Ben made no reply to this. Instead of wasting words he dropped to his knees and began searching through the jumble of papers which lay scattered on the floor of the disordered office. Coming at last upon what he sought, he rose laboriously and faced Sidney with mild contempt.

"Maybe I am a sucker, Sidney," he said calmly, "and maybe I ain't. But anyway, I don't throw away so quick a fine Jewish heavyweight into the gutter, Sidney. Because, Sidney, and Jake Bernstein, also—because I got here a contract which makes Moe Closky my shipping clerk for a year from last week; and if he works by anybody, as a shipping clerk or a Jewish heavyweight either, y'understand, it would got to be by me and not Bernstein. A contract is a contract and the first contract is the best contract. Now would you please told me—who is it a sucker?"

Triumph rode lightly on Ben's stout shoulders. After the crestfallen departure of Jake Bernstein and Sidney Solomon, Ben summoned Closky and superintended the restoration of the office. This was Closky's last service in the skirt-and-blouse business; for Ben had Miss Josephs write a new contract, the signing of which made Closky a heavyweight pugilist, drawing a weekly salary of one hundred dollars, and Ben Lowenstein a manager who would, in due time, receive one half of the boxer's earnings.

"Now, then," said Ben, after the signature had been affixed, "you couldn't said I didn't do right by you, could you, Closky? I could hold you here for a year at thirty dollars a week; but I want to give you anyway as much as that crook Bernstein would give you. Just the same, Closky, I want you should come here every day until I find out who I could start a fight with for you."

"I gotta learn first," the ex-shipping clerk said modestly.

Ben grinned. "A lot you got to learn, Closky! If you learn much more you'll kill people."

Indeed, triumph rode with Ben. But triumph, like life, the stock market, elevators and a fashionable waistline, has its ups and downs. The following day, Sidney bolted into Ben's office, and it took no great powers of perception to see that he was primed, set, aimed and ready to explode with important tidings.

Ben, however, was so loaded himself that he paid no attention to his friend's surcharged condition.

"Hello, Sidney!" he grinned joyously. "Well, what do you thought of me now? I got my Jewish heavyweight all signed up for not one year, Sidney, but ten years! From now on till I'm practically a old man, Sidney, I don't even got to work and still I can be maybe a millionaire. In the beginning I pay out a hundred dollars a week, and then I take a coupla thousand a week."

"But in the meantime, Ben, you pay
out a hundred dollars a week, ain’t it?”
The very quietness of Sidney’s tone, the
strange expression on Sidney’s face, should
have warned Ben.
“For a while, yes,” Ben replied.
“But suppose this here Closky which
you got turns out to be a no-good
fighter? Then what?”
Ben shrugged. “In the first place, he
couldn’t be a no-good fighter, Sidney,
because if he was much better as he is
already, the police wouldn’t let him fight
at all. But even if he wasn’t so good,
then I could anyhow make a million dol-
ars with him, like that crook Bernstein
says, because he is a Jewish heavy-
weight, and the permoters holler: ‘Give
us a Jewish heavyweight and take away
the money.’”
Now Sidney was ready.
“Ben,” he said gravely, “I feel sorry
for you.”
“You feel sorry for me, Sidney? For
why do you feel sorry for me?”
“Because, Ben,” Sidney returned
frankly, “you are a big sucker. Now
wait till I finish, Ben! You are paying
out a hundred dollars a week because
you got a Jewish heavyweight, ain’t it?
And you ain’t even got one at all. I
found out all about this here shipping
clerk you are paying a hundred dollars
a week to. And in the first place, his
name ain’t Moe; it’s Dan. And it ain’t
Closky; it’s McClosky. And he ain’t
Jewish, but Irish. Outside of that, Ben,
he’s a Jewish heavyweight named Moe
Closky!”

There was a sincerity about Sidney
that was terribly convincing. For a mo-
moment Ben stared in silence; and when
he finally broke this silence, it was not
with articulate words but with queer
gurgling sounds which issued from his
throat.
“Ben!” Sidney warned. “Remember
your blood pressure!”
It is probable that Ben’s blood pres-
sure was rising, but so was Ben. He
staggered to his feet, tottered across the
office to the door, and thence, new en-
ergy coming to him, dashed madly to the
shipping room. He did not see his de-
ceiving clerk, but he did come upon the
man’s coat which was flung across a
packing case.
Ben went carefully through the pock-
ets, finding, among other articles which
interested him, a letter which was ad-
dressed to Mr. Dan McClosky. Then
Dan himself appeared; and there fol-
lowed an interview which began amid
storm and strife and ended with the
proverbial dove nesting easily atop a
flag of truce.
“Well,” said Sidney, when Ben re-
turned, “was I wrong or right?”
Ben dropped into his chair, mopping
his brow and the top of his head.
“You was right, Sidney,” he admitted.
“His name is Dan McClosky, not Moe
Closky. And the reason he done it is
because the girl at the employment
agency told him I wanted a Jewish feller;
and that’s how bad he wanted a
job.”

Ben was so much calmer that Sidney
felt it safe to take advantage of his op-
portunity. He chuckled, chortled and
otherwise disposed himself with glee.
“Give a laugh, Sidney,” Ben said
cordially. “Go on and give a laugh.”

“I’m giving it,” declared Sidney.
“And while I’m laughing, you are pay-
ing out a hundred dollars a week.”

“That’s right, Sidney. But it’s only
because I want to pay it out. I had
Miss Josephs call up that there crook
Bernstein, and any minute now he
would come in here. Then you’ll see.”

Indeed, less than ten minutes later
Jake Bernstein rushed into the office.
“Ben, did you want to see me? Well,
here I am.”

“Don’t I see it, Bernstein?” Ben an-
swered. “Have a seat and we’ll talk
business together.” And when the man-
ger had drawn up a chair, Ben con-
tinued: “Bernstein, I been thinking
something. Me, I’m in the skirt-and-
blouse business and things ain’t so bad with me. Now I got me a fine, high-class, Jewish heavyweight signed up in a contract, and I don’t even know what I do with him. What do I know about fighting, Bernstein, except maybe now and then a lawsuits? Nothing!

"Now you, on the other hand, is a manager of such fighters and when you got hold of one you know what to do about it. So what I called you here for is: Do you want to buy from me the contract of a fine Jewish heavyweight like Moe Closky?"

"How much?" asked Bernstein.

"How much would you give?"

"Twenty-five hundred!"

"Five thousand!"

"Twenty-seven fifty!"

"Four thousand seven fifty!"

They collided agreeably at thirty-two hundred; and thereafter it was the work of a few minutes to prepare and sign the necessary papers, and for Bernstein to write the essential check. These matters concluded, Bernstein rose.

"Well, Ben," he said briskly, "now it's all fixed up. But before I get out from here, Ben Lowenstein, I want to told you something, you crook! You thought maybe you was playing me for a sucker, ain’t it? You thought you was fooling me about this here feller being a Jewish heavyweight. But I wasn’t born yesterday, Ben Lowenstein, or the day before yesterday, neither.

"I knew before I come up here all about his name being really Dan McClosky and not Moe Closky, and about him being a Irisher also. Because I went to work and I found it out, Ben Lowenstein. But even if he was named Greta Garbo, y’understand, still I would want him anyway. Because any man which he has got a sock like this here McClosky has got, he is worth anyway a hundred thousand dollars to me. Mike O’Toole maybe ain’t so good no more, and I’ll admit it to you. But just the same, Ben Lowenstein, bum as he was, this here McClosky is the only man which he ever knocked him off his feet! And that’s good enough for me. So good-by, Ben; and if I don’t never see you again, even that would be too soon!"

With this friendly adieu, he took his departure, with his new protégé.

Ben went back into his office.

"Excuse me, Sidney," he said politely, "but I got to run quick to the bank and cash in this here check. Because this check is good only if I could get to the bank sooner as that low-life crook could. So you got to excuse me."

"Well," cried Sidney, "I’m still laughing, Ben. Because even if you got a few thousand dollars, you threw a hundred thousand dollars in the gutter. After all, you wasn’t so smart. Bernstein was smarter even. Just because that feller wasn’t Jewish, you practically threw him away; and with a sock like he got it, Ben, he was worth anyway a fortune. Yes, Ben, still I give you a laugh."

Ben shrugged. "Give it, Sidney. But first listen: A sock is a sock; but a onyx paperweight is something else again, ain’t it?" He reached into his pocket and drew forth the mentioned article, holding it up for Sidney’s puzzled inspection. "This is my paperweight, Sidney. It was on my desk. Just before, when I looked through that Closky’s pockets, I found this in his pocket. Then I understood, Sidney, where he got such a sock, Sidney. Not in the arm, Sidney, but in my paperweight. When I asked him was that it, he says yes. So maybe that crook Bernstein will make a hundred thousand dollars with him, but first he’ll have to get for him a paperweight. Good-by, Sidney. You stay here and laugh while I cash in my check. And anyhoe, maybe now the laugh is on the other foot, ain’t it?"

The next of this series will appear in an early issue.
THE GHOST CITY

By FRED MacISAAC

THE highroad from Reno to Carson City was as straight as a spear and its polished concrete gleamed like steel in the morning sunlight, as over it rumbled and roared the largest and most glittering automobile that one thousand dollars had been able to buy for Philip "Bull" Moulton, erstwhile full back of Leland Stanford, waterfront reporter of the San Francisco Call and at present motor tourist.

Two weeks ago he had inherited two thousand five hundred dollars. The car had come out of that. In two weeks more the rest of the legacy would be gone and he would go back to the waterfront, impecunious as before; but he would have the car. In the meantime, the open road and sixty miles an hour!

Bump! Crash! Bang! Gerflum! A puncture at sixty miles an hour may be a serious thing, but Phil brought his leviathan to a stop without disaster, got out and saw that he had only ruined a brand-new shoe. He shrugged his shoulders. That he had to change a tire worried him more than a torn and useless shoe; there were two spares on behind, and he had plenty of money in his pocket.

There were no garages, of course, for many miles. A few yards ahead was a crossroad and he ran the car off the highway into the side road to the left, stopping in front of a signpost which read:

Virginia City, 15 miles.

Virginia City! That was the famous
A Deserted Dead City, Just a Curiosity. But
No! For Amid Those Ruins He Found a
New Adventure and a Lively, Modern Girl.

old mining camp where Mark Twain
worked on a newspaper in days of old.
Only fifteen miles away. As Phil la-
bored on the tire he began to recall
what he had read at various times about
Virginia City—for that curious institu-
tion, the human mind, has a way of ab-
sorbing facts that make no apparent
impression and of tucking them away in
remote recesses of its spongeliike sub-
stance, to ooze them out in time of need.

Virginia City, he remembered, had
been the greatest mining camp the world
had ever seen, the biggest, richest, wild-
est, most fantastic town that gold had
ever caused to be born. Scraps of its
history came to him as he sweated over
his left rear wheel. The Comstock Lode
was at Virginia City, the richest mine
America has known. He had read
somewhere that, in ten years, more than
a billion and a half in gold and silver
had passed through the clearing house
of the mountain town, and a billion and
a half in 1870 would buy what ten bil-
ions would be required to purchase to-
day. The place had sickened and died
when the mines gave out and it was
just a ghost city now.

“If I ever get this tire changed,” Phil
exclaimed aloud, “I’ll go to Virginia
City! Probably nothing there, but I’ll
have a look just the same.”

It wasn’t as if he had definite plans.
His character was antipathetic to itiner-
aries and schedules. When he left
Frisco he had no intention of going to
Reno; he just followed his nose.
In an hour he had successfully replaced the torn shoe, tossed it into a field, climbed into his seat, left the pleasant present as symbolized by the perfect concrete pavement and headed into the past over a very uneven country road.

For some time this road crossed a flat, uncultivated plain, a brown sun-burned waste, uninhabited and dreary. Phil fixed his eyes on the mountains ahead and presently the road began to climb. Fifteen miles, the signpost had said. That was nothing on a paved highway, but fifteen miles through the mountains could be a hard trip.

Now the road began to rear like a rampant horse. He passed a signpost which read “Geiger Grade,” and that recalled things. It was one of the steepest mountain roads in the Rockies. In stagecoach days, passengers had to get out and walk up this grade but, coming down, the coaches took the curves on two wheels.

Would his pretentious-looking but inexpensive car be equal to the task? He went into second gear and she climbed. The road wound around the mountainside and he looked down into a dry, desolate valley. The hills were bare and dismal, just gigantic rock piles, treeless, grassless; grim mountains which had contained in their hard bosoms vast wealth in gold and silver. Signs of old excavations were everywhere.

Up, up, up! He was in low gear and the car was laboring. Wisps of steam came out of the radiator despite the tightly screwed cap. It seemed that he had traveled twenty miles and was already on top of the world, yet the road lifted and wriggled and each turn showed him higher hills.

Was it possible that forty thousand people had ever chosen to reside on top of a mountain in a land as desolate as one of Dore’s pictures of Dante’s “Inferno”? The power of gold! When the golden river ran dry they had moved away with great speed. Ah!

He had rounded a curve and the grade was ended. A mile or two ahead of him lay a city on the border of a great lake. Not so bad to have lived on a lakeside. And this was no ghost city; it was solid and substantial.

As he gazed a monstrous thing happened. The lake was an illusion. It was dissolving before his eyes; its bluish-gray expanse was sinking rapidly.

What he had taken for a lake was a cloud which filled the deep valley, and it had melted and left Virginia City perched precariously upon the precipitous slope of a mountain—above the clouds. He must be eight thousand feet up.

For a moment he thought the city might be a mirage, but it did not disintegrate; it was a real settlement of brick and mortar which he was fast approaching. Below, where the cloud had rested, he saw the stamping mills of the old mines and the vast slag piles of bluish white—refuse from which the precious metals had been extracted. From the tall chimneys of the mills, no smoke issued. Probably a quarter of a century or more had elapsed since there had been fires in those furnaces.

He was moving slowly, now, along a wide, paved street lined with three and four-story brick buildings. There were people here. He saw persons moving on the sidewalks ahead, and there was a traffic cop.

A man in khaki had stepped into the road and lifted his baton—which was curious, for Phil’s was the only automobile in sight. Slowing down in response to the signal, he approached the policeman and received a shock. The traffic cop was a man with a wooden sword, whose wizened face cracked and who cackled like an imbecile as he saw the car obey his signal.

Now Phil realized that these brick buildings on either side of the street
were ramshackle and tottering; that the windows were broken and the doors padlocked. Not one shop in fifty was open for business.

He drove the full length of the avenue, more than a mile, until he came to a large, four-story schoolhouse which was in good repair; then he swung back upon an upper street which ran parallel to the main thoroughfare. This had evidently been more of a residential avenue, for it was lined with what had been fine houses, some of timber, some of brick. At the end of the avenue, Phil passed an imposing courthouse which gave evidence of tenancy. Beyond it was a huge brick theater in sad disrepair. He swung down a steep side street to the main avenue and parked his car at the curb. His spirits, which had soared during the adventure of the Gieger Grade, had sunk under the influence of the depressing remnants of former grandeur. It was a dead city, though there were a few people moving in its ruins.

It was lunch time and a whiskered loafer, who leaned against the front of a vacant store, told Phil he could get food at the only eating place of the town—a lunch room half a block up on the opposite side of the street.

Phil passed two or three male idlers who regarded him with lackluster eyes—they were too far gone, he thought, even to be curious—and then he entered the lunch room.

Its interior was vast and dusty and dismal. At one time it had been a dance hall and gambling saloon. Behind the long bar was a coffee tank, and a few pies and pastries under glass covers were on the shelves. At least fifty years had elapsed since paint had been applied to this interior. It was empty, but he climbed upon a stool at the bar and pounded upon the board with his fist.

A service door at the rear of the room opened and a waitress entered. Phil gaped at her. The girl fitted this interior no more than a poinsettia growing from a rubbish heap. She was young, blonde, star-eyed, and radiant as a mountain sunrise. Her big, blue eyes regarded him speculatively.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Is this a joke?"

"What?" Her voice was sweet and mellow.

"You, in a place like this?"

She smiled and her teeth were pretty. "We have ham and eggs," she said.

"I'll have 'em."

Phil Moulton's sobriquet, "Bull," had been earned in college, because he was what might be called impulsive; he acted first and thought about it afterward. He was big, broad shouldered, black haired, sunburned, with a laughing devil in his gray eyes and a heavy jaw which indicated determination or stubbornness.

Girls of every variety of beauty had buzzed around Bull Moulton in his time. He had gone to a coeducational college, and had been a spectacular kind of football player, so he knew what feminine adoration was like. In recent years girls hadn't been so important in his life; one doesn't meet many attractive ones on a water front.

This waitress, exceptionally pretty as she was, might not have bumped Phil very hard if he met her at a hotel dance or at a house party, but she had caught him unawares, so to speak. All his defenses were down in this distressing wreck of a great city, and that hair and those eyes just bowled him over.

"Why, you darling baby," he murmured, addressing the service door, "you rose of the Rockies, you gazelle, you infant cyclone, you—you mountain goddess—to think you should be hidden up here!"

He drummed on the counter and waited impatiently for her return. The way she had said "ham and eggs," the allure of her pose, the coquetry of her
smile as she took his order, the grace and liseness of her——

"Hurry up!" he yelled good-naturedly. "I'm starving!"

She was evidently the cook as well as the waitress for, when she returned with his order, her face was flushed from the fire. She drew a cup of thick, black coffee from the tank and laid it beside the platter of ham and eggs, then she drew under from under the open can of condensed milk and placed it beside the cup. This done, she leaned her elbows on the bar and gazed saucily at the customer.

"I suppose you came to view the remains," she observed.

"Something like that," he replied. "But I can't reconcile them with you, Miss——er——"

"My name is Virginia Nevada Darrell. What's yours?"

"Philip Moulton. I'm a San Francisco reporter."

"Come to write us up?"

"No. I was going down to Carson, saw the signpost and obeyed that impulse. I'm awfully glad I did."

"Why?" she asked with a smile.

Phil was anything but shy. "Don't you know? Can't you guess?"

"Stranger, if you mean me, pipe down. This claim has been preempted by a local light, a fellow with old-fashioned bad-man ideas. He packs a gun and shoots from the hip—or says he does." Her laugh belied her words.

"Oh!" Phil exclaimed, somewhat dashed. "What can you see in that sort of person?"

Her face grew serious. "Any company is good company in a graveyard."

"You aren't a native, I'm sure. Where do you come from?"

"Chicago."

"How can you stand it here?"

She laughed satirically. "I love excitement. I suppose you'd like my life story?"

"You bet."

"Well," she began with mock intensity, "two years ago I was running a typewriter in Chi. I had three dollars in the bank and was happy but overworked. Then I became an heiress. My grandfather, one of the pioneers of Virginia City, died, leaving me two hundred dollars in cash and the sole ownership of the Golconda Hotel, a five-story brick building completely furnished, containing fifty rooms and built in 1870 at a cost of two hundred thousand dollars. I took the first train to claim my inheritance. Would you like to buy a hotel?"

"How much?" he smiled.

"I'm asking a thousand dollars, but I'd take less—much less."

"But it cost two hundred thousand dollars. Why give it away?"

"Look around you. We have a population of two hundred, all broke, and almost no visitors, so the hotel is not doing very well; in fact, there is a padlock on the door."

"I suppose it is a white elephant, but it's a bargain at your price."

"Friend," she said solemnly, "if you paid five dollars for it you would be stuck."

This absorbing conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a customer. He was a small man, wearing a two-gallon Stetson hat, a corduroy jacket, riding breeches and puttees. Around his waist was a wide, leather belt containing a big revolver in a holster. He had a mustache of reddish brown of the variety known as "walrus," and had thick, bushy eyebrows over sunken eyes of pale blue. He inspected Moulton sharply, then addressed the waitress.

"Hello, Jinie," he said in a husky voice. "See you caught a tourist."

Phil sensed immediately that this was the person who had built a fence around the young lady. He would have taken umbrage at the man's manner anyway.

"Hello, Mr. What's-your-name," Phil said insolently. "Not a tourist—a set-
tler. I'm going to grow up with your town."

"Hah!" exclaimed the astonished native. "Say, mister, you're crazy. This burg's gone."

Phil beamed. "On the contrary, I think it has a great future before it."

The man with the mustache wagged his head.

"Jinie," he said, "this guy is bugs."

"I'm so confident of the future of Virginia City," proclaimed Phil, himself surprised by the statement, "that I've just bought a half interest in the Golconda Hotel. Here's a hundred to bind the bargain, Miss Darrell."

He considered the astonishment and dismay of the native worth the expenditure. The girl mechanically accepted the money, but her dumbfounded condition was obvious.

"You don't really mean it!" she gasped.

Phil smiled at her joyously. "Certainly. Put the money away. I'm your partner now."

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Darrell's admirer. "I'll be dinged!"

"And you're interrupting a business conference," declared Phil.

"Jinie," said the man hoarsely, "I forbid you to take that money. And you get right out o' this town, young feller. It ain't goin' to be healthy for you."

Virginia thrust the hundred-dollar bill into the bosom of her blue dress.

"If you would like to buy a half interest in my hotel for the same price, I'll refuse to accept this offer," she said derisively.

"You know it ain't worth nothin'," the native protested.

"I'm surprised at you," mocked Phil. "Don't you want your town to boom? I bet this is the first real-estate deal pulled off here in a quarter of a century."

"I ain't talking to you," retorted the native. "Gimme some ham and eggs, Jinie."

"What time do you close, Miss Darrell?" asked Phil. "I'd like to inspect our hotel."

"I'll lock up, in an hour, 'til dinner time."

"Meet you here in an hour," Phil promised, and then, ignoring the rival, went out into the street. Despite his warlike trappings, the fellow had not impressed Phil and he had no doubt the girl could handle him.

Even in the days of its glory this must have been a weird town, Phil thought. The three avenues had been cut in the mountainside and all the side streets were twenty-per-cent grades or more. Behind the buildings on the opposite side of C Street, the main thoroughfare, the ground dropped abruptly. A man might start to roll and wouldn't stop for a mile unless he popped into one of the many cellars where houses had once been.

He drifted along until he came to a curiosity shop, the proprietor of which sat in the doorway, smoking a clay pipe and looking down into the valley. He was bald but he owned a long, white beard, stained with tobacco juice. His show windows were piled high with rubbish and were so dirty that one had to enter to identify the contents of the windows.

"Can you tell me, please, where is the Golconda Hotel?"

The old man pointed with his pipe. "Up on the other side. It's closed. Most everything is closed."

"Been here long?" Phil asked.

"Man and boy, more than sixty years. Mister, I seen the rise and fall of 'Ginia City.' He cackled. "I seen it when the sidewalks was so crowded with ladies and gents in grand clothes a man had to walk in the gutter. I seen it when we had fifty thousand people."

"Really? Where did they live? It looks to me like a town of four or five thousand."

"Ain't nothin' left but the business
center," explained the old man. "Lot of this is gone, too. The kind of winters we have in these hills carries off everything that ain't cared for. Man, the houses stretched from the bottom of the valley to the mountaintop. We had a lot of fires, too. We had a seven-story brick hotel with three hundred rooms and lots of baths, just like New York. It used to cost thirty dollars a day for a room without grub. Burned up about twenty years ago."

"What do the present inhabitants live on?"

"Nothin' much. Only a few of us left. We grow garden truck and hunt a little. Nobody has any money. We had seven hundred people here up to three or four years ago when the last mine shut down. Now we've got less than two hundred."

Phil wished him good day and continued on to the Golconda Hotel. The sight of it caused him to laugh ruefully. It was a dingy brick building of four stories, with a sixty-foot front and a depth of a hundred feet. The ground dropped abruptly and the foundation wall at the rear of the hotel was fully twenty-five feet high. Architecturally, it was just a packing case. Over the restaurant was a sign which proclaimed:

The best fifty-cent dinner in the State of Nevada.

The show window of the café was broken and boarded up.

"Well," thought Phil, "the hundred dollars will take Miss Darrell back to Chicago." He did not regret his idiotic gesture in giving her the money. It was worth something to get her away from the man with the gun. Imagine that fantastic denizen of these ruins making up to Loveliness, Incorporated. Ruins!

People journeyed many thousand miles to inspect historic ruins. There were Babylon, Pompeii, Athens, Luxor. Before him lay the ruins of a great city, relic of a mighty past, of an age that has gone forever. Virginia City, El Dorado, La Golconda, perched like an eagle's nest upon a high crag in the Rockies, forgotten, forlorn and desolate.

"They'd come," he muttered as he started back toward the lunch room.

"All Virginia City needs is a press agent."

Miss Virginia was locking the front door of the only food emporium of her city. She had changed her gingham work dress to a pretty little blue suit and had clapped a blue cap on her golden locks.

"How did you get rid of the 'Bad Man of the Mountains'?" Phil inquired.

She protested. "Fanshaw is rather nice."

Phil hooted. "To think his name is Fanshaw! What is he going to shoot with that gun? Rats?"

"There are plenty of them," she smiled. "And Fanshaw is his first name. His last name is Drummond. He is a clerk in the courthouse. Here is your money."

He waved back her outstretched hand. "You can't back out of a bargain. I'm offering five hundred, not a hundred, for a half interest. I'll pay the rest out of profits."

She looked puzzled. "You are absurd. In another year there won't be a dozen people in Virginia City."

He took her hand, perhaps to add conviction to an impossible-sounding statement.

"In a year this avenue will be packed with automobiles and there won't be a vacant room in the Hotel Golconda."

"Mountain sickness, but it's a strange variety of it," she murmured.

"You wait. Let's take a walk. I've seen the hotel. Show me the points of interest."

"Well, we'll climb up to A Street and I'll show you the ruins of Millionaire Row and what's left of the coaches and carriages in which they rode in state."
THE GHOST CITY

His eyes snapped. "Great! The place is full of romance and color. It was fate that caused me to puncture a tire at the fork in the road down below. It led me to Virginia City and you."

"Please don't start that sort of thing," she pleaded. "You are a nice boy and I'm not so happy in this place."

Phil faced her buoyantly. "Listen, doubter. This is the wonder city of the West, the most romantic spot on our continent, the source of the wealth that built the Atlantic cable and put the Mackays and Fairs at the top of the heap in New York. Here was the first great city of the Rockies, and nothing like it has arisen since."

"Well," she smiled, "what of it?"

"The American people have forgotten it—the American people can forget anything. But if they knew what Virginia City meant in American history, there would be a thousand motor cars up here every day and the Geiger grade would have to install traffic control. Do you know what we have to show here? Ruins!"

She laughed rudely. "I'll say so!"

"But what ruins!" he orated. "Worth crossing the continent to see. A city above the clouds. A swell hotel to accommodate all. No parking problems. Think of the profit in gasoline alone."

"Rave on," she scoffed. "You require a low altitude to restore your equilibrium."

"Do you know," he demanded, "that two hundred thousand automobiles entered California from the eastward last season? Are you aware that there are a million motor cars in California, owned by people who are crazy to find new places to visit? Do you appreciate that hundreds of thousands visit Lake Tahoe each year, and that that's only fifty miles or so from here?"

"But if they cared anything about this place, they would have come," she protested.

"Man alive—I mean woman alive—they don't know! They have to be told and I'm the boy who's going to tell 'em."

"This is B Street. You see that it was lined with all kinds of impressive buildings."

"You bet. Here we have the only ruined great city in America. To every visitor, one free brick from the ruins of Virginia City."

Virginia was holding her sides with laughter. "Barks like a coyote and almost as wild," she declared. "If these things were possible they would have been done."

"A press agent never came along. We'll open up the hotel, start the restaurant and fix up some of the rooms. I'll handle the publicity. On all main highways will be billboards telling tourists that Virginia City is the Pompeii of America. In every tourist hotel in California will be booklets describing the place and how to get here. Say, the traffic we shall divert from the Lincoln Highway will make this town look like Market Street, Frisco, on a busy afternoon."

"If it were only possible," she sighed, her eyes wistful.

"Publicity does it. Look at the toothpaste that everybody uses because it's advertised. Wait till I get the dope. I don't really know much about it. Do you?"

"I know my grandfather used to tell me it was the wickedest city under the sun."

"Marvelous!" he cried. "Think of the people who'd like to see the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah. They can't, but they can see Virginia City. That's the best selling argument yet. You have a talent for publicity, Vir—Miss Darrell."

"The hotel is in a frightful state of repair," she complained.

"What do we care how bad it is? We have no competition. Let's go look at the joint."
She sighed. "If I could make money enough to go back to Chicago."

"Chicago—nothing! If you go anywhere, it's Frisco——" He broke off and flushed. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye and then she blushed. She was very pretty when she pinkened.

"That's the famous theater," she said quickly. "Grandfather told me they paid Forrest and McCullough and Lotta and Jenny Lind as much as ten thousand dollars a week to play here. You see, they had to cross the continent over the Union Pacific Railroad—and in those days hostile Indians often attacked the trains and there were frequent train robberies—and then make the long journey back from California in stagecoaches."

"We'll fix the theater up and show movies in it," Phil assured her. "That county building seems in good shape."

"Oh, yes. You see, the county offices are still there. This is the oldest county in the State and was the most populous. Now the jobs are a sinecure. You see, nobody has any money to pay taxes and nobody will buy property seized by the State for taxes. Isn't it all weird?"

She led him up to A Street where there were other wonders to be seen, but Phil thought the greatest wonder of Virginia City was its namesake, Virginia Nevada Darrell. He studied her as she chattered brightly. She was a city girl, a self-reliant, merry little stenographer of the superior sort; a keen, rather slangy, straightforward, self-respecting working woman. She was so pretty that she must have been popular, and doubtless she was an ardent devotee of theaters, concerts and dances.

Take an urban product like Virginia and bury her in this musty, dusty mausoleum for more than a year and the wonder was it hadn't slain her. He could visualize her departure from Chicago—arms full of flowers, candy boxes piled high on the seat of her section in the Pullman, her eyes sparkling with anticipation, her friends from the office waving good-by and some of them frankly envious, for she was an heiress going to take over her inheritance. He could see her when she set eyes on Virginia City and the Golconda Hotel—her cheeks white, her eyes brimming, her lip quivering with disappointment and dismay.

She had told him her story in only two or three sentences, but it was as tragic as tragedy comes outside of Greek plays. Penniless in this ghost city, all her courage had been needed to face the situation. She could laugh about it now, but doubtless she had wept before.

What a dauntless little creature she was to have survived and retained her beauty and vivacity! Her sense of humor had probably preserved her reason.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked sharply. "There actually are tears in your eyes."

"I was just thinking how horrible it must have been for you here."

"Well, don't cry about it. I got all over that long ago," she assured him; but she turned her head away so that he could not see that tears had formed in her own eyes. "Anyway, we're going to make this a popular place if you believe your own ballyhoo."

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"At Mrs. Wilkins' boarding house a little way up this street. She was a washerwoman twenty years ago, but finally she moved into a good vacant house and started to take boarders. She has never had to pay any rent, for nobody knows what has become of the owner. It's clean and that's about all I ask."

"And the imbecile with the uniform and the wooden sword—who cares for him?"

"He lives with his widowed mother. Their name is Freeman. Nobody knows how she manages to exist."

POP—6A
"Well, prosperity is on its way," he declared cheerfully. "Let's open up our hotel and see what it looks like."

The interior of the hotel was slightly less dreadful than its exterior, but it required an ardent disciple of advertising to believe that self-respecting travelers would be willing to put up in it.

"Paint will do wonders," Phil assured her. "Paint and cleaning."

"I think there is enough good linen to supply eight or ten rooms, and the restaurant equipment is good enough," she said. "I can hire help very cheaply. Are you sure it is not a waste of money?"

"Positive. Now I'll leave you here to get things ready. I'll go back to Reno and arrange for printing and bill-posting and mailing. In two weeks from today you'll begin to see results. I tell you the West is full of automobile owners wondering where to go for a ride. I'm going to wire to Frisco for cash. Can you do much with that hundred dollars? I'll reimburse you when I come back."

"You will not," she retorted. "This is our gamble. You'll be surprised to find what I can accomplish with it. When will you go to Reno?"

"Right away. I want to get things started. I hate to leave you, though. It may take me four or five days to launch our advertising campaign."

"It seems so sudden. Are you sure?"

"I tell you we'll put this over big."

She walked down the street with him and saw him enter his car.

"Well—er—good-by," he mumbled. He wanted to say more but he didn't dare.

"Mr. Moulton," she said hesitatingly, "if you should change your mind, if things don't go as you expect—you will come back, won't you?"

He jumped out of the car and took both her hands.

"You blessed kid, I'd come back if I had to climb the grade on my hands and knees." He wanted to kiss her, she wanted him to, but neither could read the other's mind. He squeezed her hands and rode away.

Phil wrote daily from Reno the progress of the advertising campaign. Roadside signs cost more than he anticipated; the job printers were exorbitant, the sign painters were worse, and he had to scale his plan to fit his pocketbook. Nevertheless, things were moving.

Virginia wrote him brisk little business notes in boyish handwriting. Everybody in Virginia City supposed her insane, but they had no scruples in accepting her money, so the hotel was being rapidly prepared for reopening.

Without the slightest hesitation Phil had wired for his back balance in San Francisco and gambled with it joyously. Sign painters were out on the roads from Reno down to Tahoe putting up boards bearing the following:

VIRGINIA CITY
America's Pompeii
Historic. Romantic
GOLCONDA HOTEL
Good Food, Good Rooms

He would have liked to say much more, but motorists travel fast. His four-page circulars were in the mails, addressed to every hotel of importance in northern California. He had written newspaper stories of the charms of Virginia City and the comfort of its hotel, and had sent them to the Sunday editors of the leading papers in Reno and in California.

At last, having spent all but a couple of hundred dollars, he started back to the city and the girl named Virginia.

There was no doubt whatever in Phil's mind that he was going to drag people up to Virginia City and, when they got there, entertain them at the Golconda Hotel. There was never any doubt in his mind that he would succeed in any project he tackled. He didn't
have any doubt, for example, that he would capture Virginia Darrell. She fired his imagination, that youngster fighting her battle for life on a mountaintop in a city of the dead. No girl had ever appealed to him in this way before. He had never encountered one so picturesquely situated. He would demonstrate to her what a great mind could achieve when it applied itself to a tough problem, and she would be so overcome with admiration that she would naturally fall in love with him—if she hadn't already. Our hero was no modest violet. They would make a lot of money out of the hotel, sell it, get married and then go to Frisco where he would set her in an apartment and go back to his newspaper job. Nothing to it.

He churned his way up the Geiger Grade, steamed down the main street and parked his car in front of the hotel. The boardings were down, the show window was replaced, the sign boasting about the dinner served within had been repainted, and a dozen of the inhabitants were lounging about outside, while half a dozen of them were parked in chairs in the lobby.

Fanshaw Drummond, minus coat and vest, but wearing his shooting iron, was mopping the floor; and Virginia, a dust cloth over her bright hair, was moving about the lobby. The place, already, was spick-and-span.

Phil colored under the battery of basilisk eyes, but he strode up to Virginia and put both his hands which she took in both of hers. For a moment they read things in each other's eyes.

"Well," she said, "I've done my part. We are ready to provide bed and board."

"You've done wonders," he admired. "The publicity is out and all we've got to do is await results."

Bang! Fanshaw Drummond had hurled the mop upon the floor. Arms on his hips he strode toward Moulton.

"You let go her hands!" he commanded. "Jinie, you don't have to be so friendly with this bozo jes' 'cause you're in business with him."

Phil confronted him, half angry, half amused.

"Let me tell you something, 'Alkali Ike,'" he exclaimed, regardless of the two drab females and four whiskered sitters who were watching the scene like spectators at a film. "There is more in this than meets the eye. Virginia and I are business partners, true, but we are also engaged to be married." He turned to Virginia and held out his arms.

Smack! Virginia slapped him on the left cheek so hard that the prints of her five fingers were plainly visible.

"We are not engaged!" she exclaimed, her eyes burning.

"Whee-oo!" bellowed Drummond, beside himself with delight.

"The partnership is dissolved and you march right out of here," continued the girl. Her voice broke in her anger.

Phil mechanically felt of his stinging cheek with his left hand and eyed her irresolutely. He had thought so much about Virginia and what he proposed to do about her that he had forgotten, in his exhilaration, that she knew nothing about it.

"You heard what she said!" snarled Drummond. "Out, feller!"

Phil glanced at him as one looks at a buzzing blue-bottle fly and saw that Drummond had gone into action. His gun—a long, blue-barreled Colt of a previous generation of firearms—was in his hand and pointed at Phil's middle.

"Out or I'll drill you!" the native threatened. "You coyote!"

He was standing less than three feet away. Phil's right arm shot out, and his strong hand grasped the gun and twisted it out of the grip of the "bad man." He swung Drummond around, got him by the collar, rushed him to the open door of the hotel and kicked him
into the street. Then he extracted the cartridges from the gun, and tossed it toward its owner, after which he felt better.

"I'll get you for this!" promised Drummond from a safe distance. "You big coward, I'll get you for this!"

During the incident, which occupied only a few seconds, Virginia had turned pale as death. The spectators sat silent and entranced.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Darrell," Phil said blandly. "I deserved to have you strike me and I shall leave the hotel at once. See, I'm outside. Now may I come back if I promise to behave myself?"

The color returned to Virginia's cheeks, and the smile that he considered so bewitching settled on her lips.

"Let's pretend you've just come," she said. "How do you do, Mr. Moulton?"

He entered gravely, bowed, shook hands and then turned to the audience.

"Would you people mind going now? I have some business to discuss with Miss Darrell."

"Say," said an old man, the same who kept the curiosity shop, "if it was me that had you covered, I'd have put six bullets in you 'fore you got your hand on my gun, mister."

"Mister," replied Phil with a short laugh, "if you ever pulled a gun on me I'd certainly say my prayers. This Drummond person is a cat of a different color. Shake."

He shook hands with all six natives and saw them out; then he returned to Virginia.

"Will you forgive me?" he asked tenderly.

Her answer was a laugh.

"Nothing to forgive; but your sense of humor some day will be the death of you. You have made an enemy of Fanshaw Drummond."

"That fellow just gets my goat. What I said about us stands, though, Virginia—about our being engaged, I mean."

She flushed. "I hardly know you," she evaded. "Now for business. You'll sleep here nights. I'll still go to Mrs. Wilkins'. I'll act as cook and waitress until we get so much trade that we'll have to hire a waitress—if we do. I have spent about eighty dollars of the hundred. Have you any money?"


"Because there are some small bills and we shall have to send to Reno for certain things. Oh, Mr. Moulton, what shall we do if nobody comes?"

He roared with laughter. "You certainly don't know me. The ads are out and the business has to come. You've thrown up your job at the lunch room, of course?"

"Certainly not," she retorted. "I'm still working there at noon and at night. I need the money. I've kept my share of our bargain, but I've done a lot of thinking since you went away, and—well, really, Mr. Moulton, it doesn't stand to reason that people will start coming here just because you have sent out a few circulars and put up some roadside signs."

"You're not from Chicago, you're from Missouri," he laughed. "Good Lord, he's in again!

Fanshaw Drummond had strode into the lobby.

"Jinie," he said earnestly, ignoring his late antagonist, "I want a showdown. You going to marry me or this feller?"

Virginia regarded him with a furious look in her eye.

"I'm not going to marry either of you, but if it was a matter of necessity for me to decide I certainly wouldn't choose you. So, there!"

The little man looked so crestfallen that her heart smote her.

"I'm sorry, Fanshaw, but you would have it. I do like you."

"All right," he retorted angrily. "I just wanted to know. Now you look out for me, both of you. I was good
enough for you till this big dude came along. I come here to give you your chance. Now you wait and see what’s going to happen.”

“Do you want me to run you out again?” asked Phil, moving suggestively toward him.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Drummond,” said Virginia. “I appreciate your kindness toward me—”

“Bah!” retorted Drummond. “You can’t soft-soap me.” He made a dignified and unassisted exit.

“What will he do—shoot at me from ambush?” said Phil.

Virginia shook her head.

“I don’t think he’s a killer. The gun doesn’t mean much more than the wooden sword of the town idiot. You were mad to grab it, though. In this country they usually shoot when they pull a revolver. No, I don’t think Drummond’s threat amounts to anything. Poor little chap.”

For two or three days both Phil and Virginia worked like slaves to get the hotel into shape and, yielding to his persuasion, Virginia left her job at the lunch room and prepared to receive guests at the hotel dining room.

Phil did not fail to note the daily grist of tourists—eight or ten cars, mostly flivvers. The proprietor of the lunch room, disgusted at the prospect of competition, padlocked his front door and went to Reno in search of a job, so what local trade there was immediately shifted to the hotel dining room. The returns did not total twenty dollars a day with the tourists.

A week passed and no improvement occurred, and then six touring cars, filled with Californians, arrived at once. They were a group of guests at the big hotel at Lake Tahoe who had made up a party after perusal of the Virginia City booklet which had been placed in the resort rack in the hotell lobby. There were twenty people in the party and they lunched at the hotel. Phil suggested that they remain overnight and make trips to other abandoned camps in the vicinity; but the ladies voted for putting up at Reno because it was livelier there.

Phil acted as waiter on this momentous occasion, and Virginia did the cooking. The guests praised the food and left some thirty dollars in the till.

When they had gone the boy seized his partner and danced her joyously about the lobby.

“Now what do you think of my idea?” he wanted to know.

“Perfectly marvelous,” she assured him. “Oh, Phil, won’t it be glorious if we make this hotel succeed?”

“You haven’t seen anything yet. They’ll be coming by the hundreds soon, and those who get here late will have to put up overnight. These folks came too early. Say, if they had been delayed, we could have got forty or fifty dollars out of them for rooms.”

“But we didn’t.”

“We’ll rent our rooms, all right.”

Next day the usual small quota of flivvers put in an appearance. These were not results from the advertising.

But the following day, when ten cars came with sight-seers from various points, the dining room did a rushing business and two rooms were rented that night. Phil immediately hired a bell hop and a night clerk.

Apparently all Virginia City had needed was a press agent for, during the next week, fully one hundred tourists came with sight-seers from various lently, a dozen rooms were rented and the total receipts of the Goloconda went over two hundred dollars. The partners pinched themselves to be sure they were not dreaming, and Virginia had no hesitation in agreeing that half the money be sent in additional advertising.

They hired a cook who would work under the supervision of Virginia. They built air castles like a pair of children
as they sat outside the front door of their booming hotel on those warm summer nights and watched the moonlight up the deep valley which had once contained billions in gold and silver.

Phil was behind the desk one morning when Fenshaw Drummond entered briskly, drew a paper from his pocket and handed it to his rival.

"Well, well, well, 'Deadwood Dick,'" said Phil, whose mood was exceptionally benign. "Haven't seen much of you lately. We've missed you, so we have. Only last night I was saying, 'All I need to make me perfectly happy is to have Fenshaw Drummond come round and point his popgun at me.'"

"Think you're smart!" sneered Fenshaw. "Just look at that paper, Mister Hotel Owner."

Phil unfolded the paper and his cheerfulness faded rapidly.

"What's this? It seems to be a demand by the State of Nevada for eighteen thousand dollars. What for?"

Fenshaw pulled his mustache.

"Unpaid taxes on the Golconda Hotel for thirty-eight years," he said dryly.

"But—but—I suppose we have you to thank for this."

"I thought of it," said Drummond. "It kind of come to me the night you kicked me out and chucked my gun after me."

"And what happens if we don't pay?"

"Sell the hotel for taxes in thirty days."

"This is your friendship for Miss Darrell," reproached Phil. "You plot to ruin her."

"No plot. State can grab any building in Virginia City, pretty near. Nobody's paid taxes for years and years."

"But who'd buy the hotel?" demanded Phil.

Drummond's big mustache lifted as he grinned.

"Might buy it myself. Looks like a pretty good thing now you got people coming up here every day to see what the town looks like."

"You leave," said Phil, "before I lose my temper."

He was white with rage, and Drummond recognized the symptoms and kept his hand on his weapon as he departed, leaving Phil to inspect the tax notice at his leisure.

Such a contingency had never occurred to Virginia or himself; nor would it have occurred to the State if Drummond had not made the suggestion. This city was a corpse and no revenue had been derived from it for years. Nobody in town paid either rent or taxes. Nevertheless, the liability could not be controverted. Unless thirty-eight years' back taxes were forthcoming the sale of the hotel was inevitable.

Phil looked mournfully at Virginia, and she met his eyes bravely.

"Maybe no one will buy it," she offered.

"Don't worry," he replied dolefully. "We've started a boom and some Reno business man will drive up here and bid it for a couple of thousand. We made nearly four hundred dollars profit for the week ending yesterday."

"What are we going to do?" she asked plaintively. "There is money enough to take us out of town, but you've lost your investment."

"Do you suppose I'm going to let that motion-picture bad man chase me out of town?" he cried indignantly. "We keep right on, Virginia. We have four weeks. If business continues to improve it's possible we shall have a couple of thousand cash by that time. And I'll take my balance sheet to a Reno bank and borrow a couple of thousand more on my personal note. It means our first season's profits will all go for taxes, but at least we shall hold the fort and clean up next year."

"If we survive the winter—eight or
nine months long and—oh, so cold!” she said with a shiver.

“Well, we’ll carry on until the day of the sale and then decide whether to let the hotel go or try to buy it in. Here comes the first batch of tourists.”

During the next few weeks Phil and Virginia worked hard and profited reasonably, but the enthusiasm which had marked the beginning of the enterprise was gone. They had supposed that their net weekly revenue was all free and clear; now it must be turned over to the State if they expected to remain in business.

At the end of the third week their total capital was just under twelve hundred dollars, and during the fourth week tourist trade began to fall off. Phil understood why. Such an enterprise required a steady expenditure for advertising, and he didn’t have the heart to advertise when he had no assurance that he would reap the benefit of it.

He ran down to Reno one morning and interviewed a bank president, a person whom he recognized as having been a patron of the Golconda Hotel a fortnight before.

“I’m sorry,” said the banker. “You have done wonderfully, Mr. Moulton, in dragging so many people up to Virginia City by your press-agent methods, but you can’t keep it up. Your hotel is antediluvian, the town is dismal. What you are trying to do is reanimate a corpse. Take my advice and let the hotel go, provided anybody wants to bid it in. It’s possible there won’t be a single offer, in which case you can buy it for a few hundred. I can assure you that no bank in the State would lend you money for such a shaky enterprise.”

That night Phil and Virginia had a long talk and they decided that the banker was right. But the tourist business revived next day, and on Saturday and Sunday the hotel dining room did the largest trade in its recent history.

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The sale would take place at noon on Monday. Sunday night the owners pooled their receipts and found a total of one thousand three hundred and seventy-eight dollars.

“Shall we take a chance?” asked Phil.

“No,” replied Virginia. “I want you to take out of this sum the amount you have invested, and if there is any left we’ll split it.”

He laughed and patted her hand.

“Fifty-fifty on the principal sum, my dear,” he said.

The entire population of Virginia City assembled in the lobby of the Golconda to attend the sale—the most exciting event in several years to the inhabitants of the dead city. From Reno came an auctioneer hired by the county, accompanied by several residents of the big town drawn by curiosity. Virginia and Phil had made their decision the night before. They were through. Let whoever wanted the hotel have it.

After reading the county commissioner’s authorization, the auctioneer announced that the property would go to the highest cash bidder and that there was no minimum. He asked for an offer, but none was forthcoming. However, finally a man from Reno said with a laugh: “One hundred dollars.”

There was a delay before getting a second offer and then Phil, at a sign from Virginia, offered three hundred.

“If we can get it for a few hundred, why not?” she whispered.

The Reno person came back with four hundred, but when Phil bid five hundred he withdrew. For a moment it looked as if the partners would get it at that price, but a voice from the rear of the crowd bid six hundred. Then Fanshaw pushed his way to the front row.

“Oh!” exclaimed Virginia. “Don’t let him get it, Phil. Don’t let him!”

“I won’t,” he said grimly, and raised Fanshaw’s bid. In five minutes, going up twenty-five dollars at a time, they reached thirteen hundred dollars.
"Fourteen hundred!" shouted Drummond.

Phil gritted his teeth and exchanged glances with Virginia. They were beaten.

"It's yours," he said to his opponent. Drummond looked confused and frightened.

"I take back my bid. I didn't mean to go so far," he stammered to the auctioneer.

"Then I sell the hotel to Mr. Moulton for thirteen hundred dollars. Sold, Mr. Moulton?"

"Yes," said Phil.

There was a murmur of excitement in the crowd and a few weak cheers. Drummond was not popular, but neither was the young man from Frisco. They had nothing against Phil except that he was an outsider.

"Oh!" exclaimed Virginia, her face pale, her eyes burning as she realized too late what had happened. "Mr. Auctioneer, stop that sale. It was unfair."

The auctioneer looked up from his papers. "Why was it unfair?"

"Because I don't believe Fanshaw Drummond has any money. He couldn't have bought the hotel at any price. I demand that the auction be held all over again."

The auctioneer chuckled. "This gent, Mr. Moulton, has money. He's paid me and the hotel has been sold. As far as I know, the other bidder was as well fixed as this one."

"You know you have no money, Fanshaw," Virginia reproached her former admirer. He grinned maliciously.

"I fixed it so the State got all of youn'," he said.

Virginia started toward him belligerently and he backed away.

"You get off my property and stay off," she commanded. "Everybody go, please, please."

When they were alone in the lobby they eyed each other ruefully.

"I was a fool," sighed Phil. "I for-
night, after escorting the girl to her lodging, and stood at his window looking down into the valley. He occupied a room on the second floor back, which gave him a view that would have been worth thousands to a hotel in Switzerland or California. The wind was howling and he felt the old house shake now and then when the full force of it struck the ancient façade.

Sleep was impossible. Phil was too young to accept defeat with resignation. His nerves were on edge. And as he stood at the window he became aware of a vibration which was not the wind. It was a steady tap-tap as of a hammer on rock. There was no mistaking it. Softly he lifted the sash and leaned out.

By the fitful light of the moon he discerned a man stooping over and doing something to the foundation wall far below. There was nothing Phil could do against fate, but if he had a human enemy around whose throat he could grip his fingers—Phil slipped out of his room, down the stairs and out the front door of the hotel. He ran to the corner of the building, climbed the shaky board fence and moved carefully down the steep slope, keeping close to the wall of the hotel. It was a hundred feet to the rear wall and a drop of nearly thirty—a rough, dangerous slope. He peered around the corner and saw a man approaching.

Phil waited until he turned the corner and then, with a whoop, sprang at Fanshaw Drummond.

The "bad man" uttered a terrified yelp and fell over backward, Phil on top, hands at Drummond's throat, and then they started to roll. Clinging together, they sped with sickening speed down the mountainside, the force of gravity augmented by the fifty-mile gale which accompanied them.

Weeks ago Phil had looked down this slope and estimated that a man could roll a mile if he once got started. Of course, he wouldn't be apt to reach the bottom alive.

However, fate had arranged to place in their path the débris-filled cellar of a long-vanished cottage, and into this they dropped with a thud and landed upon a thick growth of moss. This saved the skull of Drummond, who happened to be undermost, from fracture.

They stared at each other stupidly for a few seconds and then the sound of an explosion restored his senses to Phil Moulton. He clambered to his feet and looked up the hill. He saw a cloud of smoke at the base of the Golconda. The moon came out from behind a cloud and showed him the hotel swaying like a drunkard in the wind. A second, two seconds, and then the building toppled slowly and disintegrated.

Phil dragged Drummond to his feet and hauled the fellow, still stupefied, out of the cellar and ran him across the mountainside, out of the path of the avalanche of brick and mortar and rotten timbers. A hundred yards distant he stopped and looked back. The Golconda, in a million pieces, was on its way to the bottom of the mountain and, already, a torrent of bricks was pouring into the cellar which had ended their own descent.

Drummond burst into childish tears under the accusing eye of the man who had just saved his life. Phil needed no confession. The fellow had drilled a hole in the rear foundation wall of the hotel, thrust a stick of dynamite in it, touched a fuse and was taking to his heels when he met his Nemesis. Aware that only Moulton slept in the building, he had counted on disposing of his enemy and destroying the property of the girl who had refused to marry him. He was potentially a murderer.

Phil shut his right fist and drove it against the man's chin with every ounce of power he possessed, and when Drummond crumpled beneath the blow he left him lying there and painfully
THE GHOST CITY

climbed the slope until he reached the main street.
He laughed suddenly. His problem and Virginia's had been settled for them. Nothing now to hold them in Virginia City. The cellar was almost empty because the building had just tipped over and gone sliding down the hill. He accepted the condolences of the natives who approached him, and, annoyed by their importunities, started for Mrs. Wilkins' boarding place. Might as well get a good night's sleep.

He met Virginia, fully dressed, coming out of the lodging house. Taking her hands he told her what had happened to her inheritance, but he didn't feel just now like explaining the agency of Drummond in the affair.

"If it had only happened a week ago," sighed the girl.

"Well, the State of Nevada is that much richer. Go back to bed, dear, and in the morning we'll visit the ruins."

When they arrived next morning at the place where the Golconda had stood, they found the proprietor of the curiosity shop poking about in the cellar.

"Looking for stock for your shop?" called Phil cheerfully.

The old man glanced up. "Just nosin' round," he said. "Knew you wouldn't mind. Found an old trunk here that belonged to the gal's grandfather. It was busted open by a rock, but there ain't nothing much in it."

"Make you a present of it," declared Phil. "We're getting out of town before the authorities make us pick up our property from the floor of the valley down there."

"Don't be so hasty," commanded Virginia. "Lift up the trunk, Mr. Payton, and we'll take it to your shop."

They carried the broken trunk to the curiosity shop and spent an hour pouring over its contents. There were musty ledgers, batches of moldy bills and a big envelope full of crackling parchment which Phil spread out on a table.

"Stock certificates!" he jeered. "He had stock in all these abandoned mines around here. Worthless, the whole lot of it. Wouldn't bring a nickel a bushel — What's this?

He held up a green certificate, and his hand was trembling.

"Pick up that newspaper over there. Look up Grandlund Copper."

Virginia frowned over the stock quotations in a week-old newspaper until he snatched it from her hand.

"Grandlund Copper," he read.

"Shares closed at two hundred and thirty-one dollars. My God, Jinie, you're rich? This is a certificate for a hundred shares. The old man probably paid five dollars a share for it forty years ago."

"Is it still good?" she exclaimed.

"Good as gold. Made out to your grandfather, and you are his sole heir. This piece of paper is worth twenty-three thousand one hundred dollars."

"Oh!" she squealed. "See if there are any more like that."

But there were no more.

Two hours later Phil and Jinie in their shiny thousand-dollar automobile, which descended mountains better than it went up, waved good-bye to Virginia City.

When they were ten miles away, he told her about the part that Drummond had played in their good fortune.

"But you might have been killed!" she exclaimed. "Turn back. I want him punished."

"Punishment enough to have to live in a dead city," he chuckled. "We have important business in Reno — matter of a license and a preacher."

Virginia smiled up at him.

"Well, I suppose that is really more important," she admitted.

Stories by Fred MacIsaac appear frequently in these pages.
His to Fly

By Richard Howells Watkins

One Parachute and Two Men—and the Ship Couldn't Land.
What Happened?

A biplane on the further side of five years, but spruce enough, considering her age, stood silent at the edge of a New Jersey meadow, while a thin, sandy-haired young man in dungarees ministered to her numerous wants with a pair of pliers.

He was busy on the interwing wires, methodically tightening or loosening turnbuckles according to his idea of rigging. From this work he looked up with a nod when a rickety flivver rolled up to the edge of the field and his partner, "Beak" Becket, got out.

Though Beak had been to town merely to get some cigarettes and to transact a small business matter, he wore the full regalia of a pilot—leather coat, whipcord knickers and glistening Cordovan puttees. On his head, accentuating the eaglelike curve of his brown nose, was a new leather helmet, with
tabs unfastened. His eyes were habitually fierce, also like an eagle's, and now they seemed fiercer than usual to Jerry Tabor.

When the flyer's driver had been paid, Beck took off his fine jacket, lit a cigarette and strolled over to the plane. With the removal of his coat, Beak had also removed something else—something less tangible, perhaps, but none the less apparent. For the coat had concealed the fact that Beak's whipcord knickers fitted him a bit too snugly and that his stomach ran his chest a close race in the matter of prominence.

Beak Becket glowered at his partner. He kicked a chock vigorously out of the way. Then he tested the tension of one of the wires with a grip of his hand and scowled at the young man in dungarees. Jerry looked up with a certain apprehension in his face.

"You get some of the strain off those lift wires, and do it in a hurry, too," Beak said petulantly. "Don't you know yet that lift wires should be slack when she rests on the ground?"

"That wire was so loose it vibrated like a harp cord when I test-hopped her," Jerry TABOT explained mildly. "I'll take some out, Beak, but——"

"You test-hopped her!" Beak repeated, in a tone of derision. "What does a wing walker know about test-hopping? About as much as a fish knows about ice skating. You leave test-hopping to me, my boy."

Jerry got red under his sunburn.

"If I'm not a pilot as well as a wing walker, you got money under false pretenses, Beak," he answered steadily.

"Made his solo three months ago—and thinks he can tell me when a ship is rigged right!" the older aviator remarked caustically to some unseen spectator. "He'll be claiming he invented planes in another three months."

Jerry stirred, as if under the lash of a whip. Nevertheless, he showed a placating grin. It was always possible that Beak had run into some particularly bad liquor and that he could be kidded out of his fit of temper.

"What's the matter, Beak?" Jerry inquired. "Did another race horse sit down on you? You ought to stick to flying. Betting on races is risky."

"When I need your advice, kid, it'll be because everybody else is dead!" Beak snapped. He ignored the smile. "You slack off that wire, d'you hear? We're going to hop out of this God-forsaken neighborhood right away. It's as full of barnstorming planes as a dog is of fleas."

Jerry looked at the senior partner in surprise.

"I thought we'd been doing pretty good business, myself, Beak," he commented.

"Don't think. Work!" Beak meditated, scowling at his puttees. "I'm getting pretty low down, I am," he said aloud. "Me, Beak Becket, one of the pioneers in the flying game—one of the few of 'em left—being given orders by my own mechanic and wing walker! I've flown before kings and presidents and shaken hands with 'em afterward; I've thrilled millions with my daring—and now a kid I picked up and learned to fly tells me where I get off."

"I understood we were partners, Beak, I having supplied the money for this ship and you having taught me to fly and having the experience," Jerry said steadily.

"He thinks we been doing pretty good business, he does," Beak went on, addressing the air. "Since when, even if they are partners, did a dirty-faced, wing-walking crowd catcher stand knee high to a flying man?"

Jerry Tabor gripped his pliers tightly, then slipped them into a pocket and turned to face the other man.

"Beak, you and I don't seem to be hitting it off as well as we might, lately," he said. "I reckon half of it's my fault, anyhow."
“You’re right; half of it and more, kid. Telling a man like me, one of the best-known pilots in the world, where to get off because I venture to say that flying wire’s too taut!”

Jerry sighed.

“And throwing it in my face all the time that it was his money that bought the ship!” Beak added.

Jerry unbuttoned the dungaree coat.

“That does it, Beak,” he said. “I don’t mind being your mechanic and wing walker and just getting a chance at the stock once in a while when the crowd’s thin or you don’t feel like flying, but all this talk besides is too much. It don’t help my wing walking any. I nearly lost my grip yesterday. I guess it’s about time we put some air between us.”

Beak blinked at this. There was something decisive about the way Jerry Tabor took off his work clothes. Beak disliked work clothes, himself, and the sight of his partner taking them off raised forebodings. He thought quickly and then spat out his cigarette.

“That suits me fine,” he growled. “The old man’s taught you to fly; he ain’t much more use to you. Go ahead, Jerry; I won’t stand in your way.”

Jerry was a bit staggered at Beak’s ready acceptance. Nevertheless, he remained determined.

“How about the ship and the ‘chute?” he asked. “Will you buy me out or will I buy you?”

“You know damn well you’ve got me at a disadvantage, owing to—reverses,” said Beak with dignity. “I can’t buy you out, but you can buy me. I value my half of the ship at five hundred, and my half of the ‘chute at fifty. Five hundred and fifty’s the amount.”

Jerry Tabor opened his eyes wide. There was a gleam of anger in them. “Why the ship only cost seven fifty when I—we—bought it six months ago!”

“That was before I had it lined up right and the wings partly recovered,” Beak answered coldly.

“But—it was I that did most of the work on her!” Jerry protested. He was holding himself in with a great effort.

“And it was I that did most of the flying. You think you can freeze me out of this ship because you have a little ready cash tucked away? Guess again and guess better!”

“I can’t pay it,” Jerry said, dispirited. “I haven’t got that much.”

“That’s not my fault,” said Beak. “If you want to go, go ahead, and I’ll pay you for your share of the ship—when I can.”

He looked at Jerry keenly. Jerry looked at the plane.

“Where this ship goes—that’s my post-office address,” Jerry declared emphatically.

“All right.” Beak cinched up his flying helmet. “We hop out of here right now, then, toward some place where the people appreciate a pilot like Beak Becket.”

For a moment Jerry Tabor hesitated on the verge of rebellion. Things had been getting worse and worse. But the man before him was Beak Becket, a pilot of whose exploits he had read when he was still in school. And Beak had taught him to fly. The money Jerry had paid—money won by hard work in an automobile factory—seemed little compared to the fact that Beak had made him a pilot. True, Beak had also made him a wing walker, a mechanic and a general errand boy, but allowances must be made, Jerry felt, for a godlike creature like Beak. Nevertheless Beak, though only thirty-eight, often acted like a querulous old man of seventy. The air—or something—had taken its toll of Beak.

“I’ll get ready,” Jerry decided. He glanced at the sun. “How far we traveling? It’s a bit late for a long hop.”

“Give me some more orders!” snapped Beak. “We’re going to hit it
for Massachusetts—Pittsfield way, if you don't mind. If you do mind, we're going to hit it that way just the same. Get busy!"

As a hero, Beak had become somewhat shopworn; as a partner he was a tyrant, but Jerry got busy nevertheless. While he owned half the ship he would not leave her. He ached for the time when he would be his own master, with no old man of the air to ride him. But Beak had made it plain that that time was still far off.

At a word from the pilot Jerry swung the prop and then, while Beak warmed the ship up, he lashed an extra wheel and a five-gallon gas can to the wing beside the fuselage and packed their two suit cases in the front cockpit. As he picked up the parachute pack to stow that, Beak throttled down the roaring motor to speak to him.

"You put that 'chute on," Beak commanded. "I may want you to do a jump to let 'em know we've come—if we hit a likely looking town."

It was a seat-pack type 'chute and as comfortable to sit on as the seat. Silently Jerry strapped on the heavy harness, put the chocks and a few other miscellaneous articles comprising their scanty equipment on board and clambered into the front cockpit. There wasn't much room in there for him, for not only was the baggage bulky, but the ship still had the stick and rudder bar dual controls connected up. Beak's last job at this field had been helping an old war pilot try to get back the feel of the air at thirty dollars an hour.

"Keep that duffel clear of the controls and check me on the chart," Beak shouted, passing Jerry a dirty map of the southern New England States.

Jerry nodded and as they taxied out on the field he took a squint at the amount of country between them and Pittsfield. It was a long way to go with the sun beginning to incline toward the horizon. He glanced up at the sky. A few stray cumulus clouds were heading westward at a perceptible rate. That meant they would have a brisk easterly cross wind most of the way northward. Winds mean something in an old and underpowered ship.

"But he'll get there," Jerry muttered, with grudging admiration. "Blast the old crab, he'll get there! He always does."

Beak Becket swung his ship abruptly into the wind and gave her the gun. Perversely he kept her tail down and her wheels on the ground until it seemed certain that she would crash through the fence. Jerry gripped the sides of the cockpit. But Beak, at the last second, bounced her off. He headed her upward in a zoom that continued until Jerry reached again for something to hang onto in the coming crash.

As the ship reached the stalling point, wavering in the air, Beak jerked her over onto her nose and regained control in a dive that brought the landing wheels within touching distance of the road. After this display he headed her prosaically on her course. The ship gained altitude steadily, her old ninety-horse motor thundering at full throttle.

"The crazy old crab, he's a better airman than I'll ever be," Jerry muttered. He turned around and discovered Beak grinning maliciously at the back of his head. Beak cut the gun promptly.

"Worried about your investment?" he shouted, in the sudden cessation of uproar. "If you'd been at the stick, kid, you'd ha' been a bankrupt in hell right now!"

Jerry didn't answer. While Beak was in control of the ship he was in a position to win any argument. And Jerry was in the forward cockpit—the one that hits the ground fastest and hardest.

He wriggled around in the small compartment until he had made himself fairly comfortable in the midst of the duffel. Then he looked over the map.
Pittsfield, as he figured it, was about two hundred miles away and the best that could be hoped for from this aged crate was sixty-five miles an hour—that would be an actual fifty, allowing for crabbing into the wind.

"We'll be squeezing the gas tank and landing in the dusk," Jerry prophesied.
"I'm glad it's Beak that does the flying. On paper it can't be done."

Beak coaxed the ship up to four thousand feet, to give the Jersey pine belt plenty of room under him. The wind was too strong, however, so he dropped down to fifteen hundred, where he straightened out. Slowly the dark-green carpet, with the pines looking no taller than grass blades at that height, slipped behind them.

Jerry checked the course against compass and cross wind, and nodded to Beak. Then he settled down a bit farther in the cockpit, out of the wind and gloomily considered the chances of escaping from under Beak's choleric thumb. It could be done only at the sacrifice of Jerry's share of the ship, he decided, and he would never quit the ship he had paid for. He roused once from his meditations when the ship pitched suddenly. Turning, he discovered that the motion was due to Beak clamping the stick insecurely between his knees while he crouched low to light a cigarette.

Meeting Jerry's inquiring eye, Beak gripped the stick angrily and shook it about. The plane reeled in the air and Jerry was rattled about among the baggage. He snapped on his safety belt and ignored the man behind.

"He'll be making me shine those puttees and slapping my hand with a ruler," he mumbled in deep discomfiture. "But he can't shake me loose from this ship."

Jerry sank back into the cockpit again and stared at the sky. Cross-country flying has its thrills, but it also has its monotony when indulged in too frequently.

Some time later, a hearty kicking at the back of his seat startled Jerry into realization of mundane affairs. He turned to his partner.

"Check ground speed!" Beak shouted, pointing downward. They were over a sizable sheet of water—Jerry recognized it from its contour and from the many ships as upper New York Bay. On the map, he reckoned the distance from the Battery to Yonkers ferry, about eighteen miles. He glued his eye to his wrist watch while the ship, bumping erratically in the rough air above the skyscrapers and the Palisades, crawled up the Hudson. It took almost twenty minutes to reach the ferry slip.

"About fifty-four!" he shouted back, and Beak jerked his head in acknowledgment.

Jerry looked over the situation. The puffy clouds that had glided across their course above them had vanished. Instead there was overhead a thin, grayish stratum that moved inland, creeping in a sluggish race to overwhelm the sun before the latter could escape below the horizon. The air was smoother now, but perceptibly colder. They thundered on up the river. The eastern bank was still bathed in sunshine and its verdure was bright in color, but the high western cliffs seemed to brood beneath their mantle of shadow.

Just one hour later Jerry looked back at his partner somewhat distrustfully, and then turned his eyes very pointedly toward the sinking sun. He shook his head. The bridge at Poughkeepsie was not far behind them.

With a quick hand Beak cut the motor.

"You keep your damned hand still, you pink mouse!" he shouted vehemently. "I said Pittsfield and Pittsfield it is. D'you think I don't know this country?"

He opened up again at once, preventing any back talk from Jerry.

The young aviator glanced down at
the country on the eastern side of the river. Pools of whiteness were filling up the hollows in the ground. Mist, like a phantom ocean, was seeping up through the warm, porous earth into the cooler air. It was rising steadily—for so Jerry interpreted the growing size of the vapor-filled valleys. He scowled at it uneasily. Another half hour passed and then Beak abruptly swung northeast, away from the river, across the misty earth.

“He’s trying to throw another scare into me,” Jerry decided with rising resentment. “He’s going to land at some field he knows this side of Pittsfield, after letting me think he’s flying right into the fog and the night. Well, I won’t scare.”

He clamped his jaw shut and stared with rising perturbation at the mixture of dust and water vapor that was erasing the landscape. The ship itself still flew in brilliant sunlight, but somewhere down there in that growing gloom they must find a broad, flat space to set their landing wheels on. And broad, flat spaces below were scarce. The land high enough to escape the murk was the wooded tops of hills—the rolling, uneven Berkshires.

What fog can do to a ship is nothing compared to what fog can do to a plane. There is no stopping for a plane. It must keep on—on or fall.

Jerry looked down, behind the lower wing and then, as if following backward with his eyes some feature of the ground, turned farther and contrived to get a glimpse at his choleric partner without looking at him directly. He became aware, with a sudden jolt in his chest, that one of Beak’s hands trailed over the side of the ship and that the hand clutched a flat, pint-size flask. Even as he saw it, Beak raised the bottle and flung it sidewise, out beyond the tail. It whipped astern; vanished as if dissolved in the dirty grayness.

“Huh!” Jerry muttered. “Hope that stuff hasn’t made him too optimistic.”

He looked around for the sun, but it had vanished, like the bottle. He glanced at the compass. The ship was no longer flying northeast; it was headed due east. Even as he stared at the instrument, the ship banked abruptly, swinging around until it was flying southwest. Beak was retreating his course; he didn’t like things now, either.

Jerry turned then and examined the pilot critically and without dissimulation. Beak’s eyes seemed brightly fierce even behind his concealing goggles. His mouth was grim and tight-set. His big, curved nose was as rigid and motionless as if it had been turned to stone. However much Beak had indulged in earlier that day, he was cold sober now.

The ship roared on, flying a straight, unvarying course. Abruptly Beak jerked a finger toward the obscured ground beneath; then pointed southwestward, toward the clearer air from which they had come. But there was no visible earth in that direction, either. The sun had been vanquished completely; black night and filmy whiteness had allied and spread over the earth.

The fact that Beak had condescended to make this gesture of explanation filled Jerry with alarm.

“If he messes up this ship, landing——” Jerry mumbled angrily.

The motor spluttered, thundered on a few beats more, and spluttered into silence. Jerry’s heart jumped. He remembered then that it had been some time since he had looked at his watch. The big tank in the upper wing had been drained dry by the hungry motor.

In a sudden frenzy of activity he flung his body half over the side of the cockpit and with cold fingers tore at the lashings of the five-gallon can of gasoline that rode on the lower plane. His heavy harness hampered his movements; the ‘chute pack got in his way.
Beak put the ship into an easy glide. "Don't drop it!" he shouted hoarsely, as Jerry unloosed the cumbersome square can and raised it up. Standing on the edge of the cockpit with the wind whipping past him, Jerry got the cap off the gravity tank. He fitted in the short length of hose already attached to the gas can and let the precious fuel gurgle down into the tank.

Although the propeller was still turning idly in the windstream, the motor did not catch at once. That meant that Beak had switched it off; that, however much the bottle had contributed to this plight, it was no longer a factor.

Jerry screwed on the cap again and turned to the pilot.

"Thirty-five minutes?" he asked, with a nod of his head toward the replenished tank.

Beak was licking his lips.

"I can make it last forty," he answered. His voice was strange to Jerry's ears. Though he spoke against the wind, in a shout, the strength and confidence had gone out of it. The years of experience that had made Beak Becket so cocky a pilot now told him with relentless truth that they were in about the worst jam that could befall a flying man. Night coming; fog concealing the ground; gas failing.

Jerry wormed down into his cockpit again. He was green in this hard game, but he had the airman's instinct, and he knew a hole when he saw one. Quite suddenly he became aware that he was in a parachute harness; that he was sitting on a 'chute—a life preserver that would carry him safely down through both darkness and whiteness to the good, solid earth.

He laughed, though his lips were so tense they were hard to command.

"He had a bottle; I've got a 'chute,"' he muttered. "He used the bottle and got me into this. Why shouldn't I use the 'chute and get out of it?" He did not touch the harness that girded him.

The motor picked up with a roar; then Beak throttled down. He was spiraling boldly earthward, spending his altitude recklessly as he sought to discover some loophole in the trap, some bit of ground still visible on which he could pancake the ship.

The air around them grew more thickly dark as they descended. Jerry felt like a man gone blind, groping his way with arms outstretched. Only dimly could he make out the loom of Beak's head and shoulders just behind him. They corkscrewed on, but the spiral, Jerry sensed, grew less and less tight.

The feeling of something just ahead—something they were about to smash into—grew. Jerry gripped the cowling with rigid fingers. He had never been so cold before. He was cold to the heart.

Beak straightened out the ship.

There was no altimeter in Jerry's cockpit; he could not tell how high they were. He remembered, too, that the altimeter had been set for that flat meadow in Jersey—almost at sea level. There was no telling how much these blasted hills encroached on what the altimeter indicated was free air.

The motor roared into action again. Jerry's body swayed toward the back of the seat. Beak was climbing again. He was climbing steeply, climbing as if some devil was pursuing him out of the black pit below. Jerry felt the terror, too.

The fate that Beak Becket had flirted with so casually that afternoon, merely to startle his partner, now appalled him. Death bulks larger in the dark.

Not until the luminous hand on Jerry's watch had marked off eight minutes did Beak cease to climb and throttle down. For another interval, in comparative silence, the ship rode on the air.

They were in clean atmosphere; there were stars above them. Only the earth
had vanished out of the universe. The interwring wires that Jerry had worked on that afternoon hummed a low threnody. The prop cut the air with a whistling, uneven flutter. They were cut off from the world—refugees in cold space.

“You better jump,” said Beak hoarsely. “The gas is going.”

Somehow the words revived Jerry’s courage. He did not answer, but he felt relief.

“I tell you, jump!” the pilot snarled. “Jump, I said! Jump, you—” His voice ran on in a tangle of oaths.

“I’m not going to jump,” said Jerry.

“You sap! You fool! You got a chance. Take it! Take it—quick!”

“I’m not jumping. D’you want the ‘chute?”

“You trying to make a coward out of me?” Beak shrieked. “You can’t do it, you blasted little pup! Not me! I was in a ship when you was in a cradle! I’ll nose her down and dive her to hell before I’ll take a ‘chute off you!”

His voice was keyed as high as the note of a flying wire under diving strain. Coming to him out of the darkness behind, it didn’t make Jerry feel any more secure.

“I’m sticking to the ship,” Jerry said stubbornly. “It’s half mine, and I’m sticking.”

Beak burst into high, jeering laughter. “You fool! Don’t you know there won’t be enough left after we hit to make you a coffin?”

“We’ve got a chance. Beak! Listen, Beak!” Jerry’s voice became vibrant with urgency. “You want to gamble on this? I’ll give you the ‘chute and three hundred—about all I’ve got—for the ship—just as she flies, Beak.”

The man in the rear cockpit was mute. Jerry, turning to squat at his head and shoulders in the blackness, could see no sign or motion. But the ship, responding to Beak’s hand on the stick, shuddered in the air.

POP—8A

“What d’you say, Beak? It’s a gambling proposition. I’m sticking anyhow—so the ‘chute’s no good to me. I’ve got a hunch, Beak, and I want to play it. Three hundred—right here in my pants pocket—three hundred and the ‘chute.”

“Go to hell!”

“I’m willing, Beak. I want to back my hunch.”

The ship sang on in the still air.

“You’re a crazy damn fool!” Beak growled.

Jerry did not answer him. It was up to the pilot now.

“Crazy! Dumb! Gi’ me the ‘chute! Get set to take control! Crazy! Hurry up!”

Hastily Jerry worked at the buckles. He felt only like a man easing himself of a burden. Finally he wormed out of the harness. He passed it and the ‘chute pack carefully back to Beak. Then, steadying the ship with his own stick, he waited silently, sensing every move of the struggle Beak made in getting into the straps.

“Here’s the money, too, Beak,” he called, leaning down the fuselage and groping for the other man’s hand. He could not locate it.

“This is your own damn foolishness—I didn’t have nothing to do with it,” Beak said thickly. “I warned you!”

“That’s right, Beak. But I want to back a hunch. If it don’t go through—
you can’t be blamed any, Beak.”

Suddenly Beak’s rough fingers met Jerry’s. The roll of bills was jerked out of his fingers.

“Ready to take her over?”

“Wait a minute!” Hastily Jerry groped in the cockpit to make sure that none of the duffel was apt to jam the controls. “All right, Beak!”

“Take her! How about some altitude? This ‘chute’s got to have plenty room to open.”

“Right!” Jerry’s hand was controlling the ship now, and his feet were on
the rudder bar. Danger was lost in exultation. The ship was his. His to fly—his to own. For a while, anyhow. He notched up the throttle.

The motor picked up. With gentle pressure he eased the stick toward him. The ship straightened out and began to climb. He had held her on her upward course for fifteen minutes when Beak kicked his seat.

"All right," he said, when Jerry throttled down. "Let her glide. D'you see anything?"

His hoarse voice had an appealing note. But there was unbroken gloom beneath them. Jerry had been looking, too.

"Nothing nearer than the stars," he answered.

Beak climbed onto the fuselage, holding onto the cowling with one hand, while his feet dangled over the side. His other hand, Jerry knew, was on the rip cord of the 'chute.

"Ten years ago I'd ha' told you to go to hell!" he said bitterly, and shoved off.

His body was visible as a sprawling thing for an instant, then vanished absolutely. Jerry, staring backward, caught a dim flare of near-by whiteness—the opening parachute.

"Poor Beak!" he muttered, with a searing pity of youth for age.

He turned forward again. The stick rattled and the plane moved uncertainly. Jerry tightened his fingers and the ship ceased its erratic motion.

"I feel as if the tail had dropped off her," he muttered.

The sense of emptiness behind him in the other cockpit made his back feel uncomfortable. He switched on the motor. Its roar made him feel better.

"No use sticking around up here till she quits," he decided. He picked out a star and flew toward it for several minutes, to give Beak plenty of room in descending.

With a piece of his shoelace he sus-
penetrable than the darkness had been. He switched the light off, tucked it in his pocket and put his hand out to the jackknife again. It was not where he expected it to be, but to the right. He edged the stick over to the left.

The landing wheels under him suddenly struck something; the ship jarred harshly. In another instant the nose went down. Jerry was flung violently against the instrument board. His safety belt cut into his body. He cut the motor. Something was happening to the ship. Noises were all about him—rasping, squeaking, swishing, creaking sounds.

He struggled upward again and dimly felt that the ship was bounding along, seemingly with increasing speed. Yet the motor was cut, the propeller was idle. It was like a delirium, a nightmare in the dark.

Abruptly he realized that the ship was on a hill or a mountain, rolling downward precipitately despite the drag of the tail skid. There was nothing he could do. He braced himself and waited.

He did not wait long. She struck something too high for the wheels to rise over. There was a crash. Jerry felt the cockpit rising under him—up and up—and then down. Some object in the backness thrust at him, and his consciousness left his body with his hissing breath.

There was a blurred interval. Then he found himself struggling feebly against some powerful force that held him unflinchingly about the waist. His fingers came in contact with a familiar thing. It was the catch of his safety belt. He jerked it and instantly the force that held him ceased to exist. He fell heavily on his head and knees. It was grass that he dropped onto.

For a time he lay there, less than half conscious, but quite incapable of movement. There seemed no reason to move, even if he could. Then, gradually, he made up his mind to shift his body off something that was boring cruelly into his hip. Groaning, he did so. He felt the thing and found that it was the flash light in his pocket.

Pulling it out, he raised himself to his hands and knees, and rested there. Through his head was running a flood of thought. He had tried to land in the darkness. He was on earth now, and not dead. The thing to do was to see how badly he was hurt and the ship—What of the ship—his ship?

He raised himself up off his hands. He felt the smooth fuselage of the plane above him and then a wire. With what support he could gain from the wire, he got to his feet. He turned the flash light on the plane and pressed the button.

The white radiance, clouded by the mist, traced out the lines of the ship. She was on her back. But she was not the mass of crumpled wreckage he had feared to see. The thing she had hit was a heavy rail fence. Instead of going through she had rolled over it.

"Cracked up—but not washed out," he muttered. "If that motor——"

He dragged himself toward the nose of the ship. The prop was a splintered stump. But the motor looked good—pretty good. It takes more than a noseover to ruin a chunk of metal.

He felt his ribs gingerly.

"I've got something gone in there," he reckoned. "But I guess I'm a pilot now—and in about a month I'll have a ship—my own ship. That hunch worked fine. I'm a pilot now."

He looked at the plane and his mind was busy with the thought of a box splice for a broken spar of the lower right wing.

"Poor Beak!" he muttered. "He should ha' stuck."

Watch for more air stories by this author, Richard Howells Watkins.
A Light-hearted Young American Adventurer is Arrested

THE DEVIL'S WIDOW

CHAPTER I.
RAVENEL CHALLENGES THE FATES.

PAUL RAVENEL sat by the open window gazing out over the sun-baked rooftops of Paris, wondering whether September would be as luckless for him as the incumbent August. It had been no month for a man with fight in him and wits to exercise. He got up, brushing the flies from his moist face and murmured:

“If it gets a degree hotter I’ll croak.”

The Paris heat, simmering over a sea of chimney pots, was intense. Half hoping that Lady Luck herself might be trying to arouse his lazy concierge, he poked his head out the window, gazing toward his front door, six stories below; but the street was tropical, empty and quiet.

Ravenel locked his arms behind his back and began striding like a caged tiger from one end of his long chamber to the other. The mirror revealed to him six feet two inches of anatomy clothed with neat, taut muscles that rippled beneath his soaking shirt—a body that cried out for action—any kind. He shook his mop of flaming hair at himself in disgust, his warm blue eyes flashing with stifled animation.

“You lousy red-headed son of a camel!” he hissed to his glowing reflection. “You should have jumped at Lemercier’s offer.”
in a Paris Criminal Hangout and Charged with Murder.

By SEAN O'LARKIN

There on his table was Lemercier's letter; it gave him military command of the Tibetan expedition. What could have been sweeter? It was another "missing-link" junket organized in the name of science by the wily little Frenchman—a graft that provided two thousand francs a month, his keep, and the probability of exchanging shots with a few misunderstanding Mongolians. Ravenel had hesitated—and Pat O'Hanahan, his buddy in the Foreign Legion days, had snatched it up.

A clatter at his door aroused him from his thoughts. Beyond, embittered and embattled, rang the shrill voice of Madame Roulade, his concierge.

"The rent, m'sieu'!" she sang like a sick bird. "I must have the money—at once!"

"To-morrow, milady," Ravenel retorted sweetly, imitating her Breton accent. "To-night I seek fortune."

"You don't stir from this house," the Amazonic voice replied. A key rattled in his lock and before he could spring to the knob, there was a loud click. "Now, m'sieu', you pay or rot!"

"But how can a prisoner pay?" he laughed.

"Write to one of your friends to bail you out!"

"To the devil with you!"

"Bien, m'sieu'! Sorry you can't join us."

Silence followed her footsteps into
the bowels of the house. Ravenel, grinning at this new turn of affairs, scratched his head thoughtfully, hopefully.

“‘At least something has happened to me,’” he sighed. “It’s better than waiting for the blazing sun to drop out of the skies so I could play fireman to all of Paris.”

The bells of St. Sulpice sounded close by. Ravenel jumped to the window and ascertained by the jeweler’s clock on the corner that it was four. His own time-piece, a token from the ex-Shah of Persia for services rendered, was serving its master in a pawnshop in the Rue Cassette. Alas, the “service” was spent two weeks ago.

He slipped into the coat that matched his rusty tweed trousers, clamped a battered Panama on the scarlet locks and hung a precious malacca on his arm. That stick would bring a thousand francs, but he had had it through thick and thin and pawning it would mean betrayal of a great friendship.

Stepping to the window, he surveyed the course below. This exit had been considered days before, in view of the quaint customs of Parisian concierges who would have their rent at any cost. With one hand on the waterspout, he could swing the five feet to the next roof. If he missed, his neck would suffer; and that would be exciting, in any event.

“Well, here goes,” he grinned, slipping over the window sill. “I’ve emerged from fancier windows in my day!”

Ravenel made it, swinging the five feet with five stories and a cold, stone pavement below and landing on the next roof intact. Making his way to the stairhead, he entered the adjoining house and tripped, whistling “Tipperary,” to the street. As he sauntered past his own front door, his cane twirling nonchalantly, a pair of eyes blazed into his.

“‘Morbleu!’” shrilled Madame Rou-lade. “‘You defy me!’

“For your own good, madame,” he replied, walking faster as she sputtered.

“——and don’t come back, then! Your trunks will pay me, m’sieu’. I’ve had enough of you.”

“Your last remark is mutual!”

Entering the Boulevard Raspail, he took a southerly direction, letting the slanting rays of the August sun scorch his well-tanned face. He knew that when two boulevards meet in Paris it is an event usually celebrated by a café. Where Raspail met Montparnasse stood the Café Rotonde, that garish rendezvous catering to the thirsty of those inmates of the Latin Quartier who talk their art and quaff the proceeds—if any.

The buzz of conversation on the Rotonde’s teeming terrasse was well punctuated with greetings in English, French, Italian and Swedish when the red-headed one hove into view. Ravenel responded glibly to each acquaintance in the tongue he was greeted by as he wended his way among the tables toward a solitary French youth.

“How goes it, Raoul?” he asked, sitting down and lighting a proffered cigarette.

“Magnificent!” the Frenchman cried. “Papa found a few thousand francs on the Bourse yesterday so I leave to-morrow for the Midi. With two months of sunshine, dark-eyed damozels and the simple life, my new novel will be the talk of the town.”

“I’ve heard that before!” Ravenel laughed. “But good luck to you! The Mediterranean sunshine sounds good for the old novel but the damozels’ll be monkey wrenches in the machinery of creation.”

“Parbleu! You Americans are so conscious of women! To me they are like a typewriter, or copy paper, or a pencil.”

“Ah, I forget! You’re a great unpublished author.”
“Tiens! I’ll turn the trick this time, Paul. I’ve got a grand idea for my plot!”

“I’ve heard that one, too,” Ravenel said, calling to the waiter: “A dry vermouth, Gigo!”

A compatriot stopped to talk to Raoul. Ravenel took the opportunity to glance about him, nodding to new arrivals. Then he heard some one mentioning his name. A man and a girl at a table behind him were discussing him in English, so he listened, amused. He knew neither of them by name or sight.

“Ravenel’s worth a ton of money,” the man was saying, “but he rarely has two sous to rub together. His father’s a Chicago banker.”

“That suit he’s wearing must be ten years old!” the girl observed. Ravenel recalled that its age was eight.

“Oh, he’s bohemian. He doesn’t care how he looks. All he’s after is excitement, adventure. He doesn’t give a hoot for money, and his family doesn’t give him any to hoot about. When he scrapes enough together he lights out for Spain or Italy or Egypt or somewhere and——”

“What does he do, write or paint?”

“Neither, my dear. He’s just a rolling stone, the last of what story tellers call a ‘gentleman adventurer.’ He learned soldiering in the Foreign Legion, stopped a machine-gun bullet with the A. E. F. in the Argonne and has been chasing gunpowder ever since. They say he did secret-service work for Mussolini’s government and taught Trotsky how to handle his bolshevik army.”

“But he’s only a kid!” the girl said incredulously.

“He looks twenty, but he’s nearly thirty. Perhaps that’s what women like about him.”

“Now you’re getting interesting. Go on!”

“Don’t know much in that quarter. He’s careful. But women have played their parts in his scrapes. The papers carried columns about a Swiss contortionist who wanted to marry him. And only last year Paris was laughing over his love for a singer at the Opéra Comique.”

“Go on,” the girl insisted; and, much to Ravenel’s chagrin, the man lowered his voice. The damned gossip! He had been right about most of his facts, but he had Ravenel wrong on the women. Nobody would ever believe the truth about those women, not even his father. He’d met them on business, he reflected and grinned sheepishly to himself at the thought of the “business.” Secret service had its advantages and its disadvantages.

“Where did he pick up that swell French accent?” the girl asked, satisfied with the man’s account of Ravenel’s amours.

“Oh, he’s lived here almost all his life —school and then the war. He speaks better French than the French themselves. He knows a dozen argots. They say you’ll meet him dancing at the embassy one night, hobnobbing with countesses and princesses, and the next you’ll find him whooping it up at some apache bistro. He gets along with absolutely anybody.”

“Well, you can have him,” the girl sighed. “I prefer my men simple, steady and stay at home.”

Ravenel chuckled.

“What’s up?” Raoul asked as his friend departed. “Where is she—the source of your pleasure?”

“There’s no ‘she.’ I’ve just been hearing all about myself. I’d no idea I was getting to be a landmark like Napoleon’s Tomb. The fellow behind us knows all about me—and doesn’t mind telling it.”

“You’re a legend in the Quarter, Paul. You know that. Why you’re known throughout Paris.”

“I know it now. But I bet I could
drop out of sight and stay in this very city and nobody’d spot me.”

“Impossible!”

“Maybe I’ll try it,” Ravenel laughed. “I’m dying for a war or panic or something. The governor hasn’t replied to my latest appeal for funds. Otherwise I’d be headed for the Riff this very hour. Action is what I crave, man—action!”

“When is the answer due?”

“Ten days ago. I’m beginning to get worried. The governor hates to encourage my staying over here, but he does come across when I’m broke. But now something’s up; the bank won’t advance a loan. I suspect the old man has cabled something in the way of bad news for me.”

“He still hopes to make a banker out of you!”

“Just picture that! All I know about a bank is that it’s a place to cash checks.”

Raoul, sipping his drink, dropped off into meditation for a few moments, saying at length:

“Why don’t you join me in the Midi, Paul? We’ll economize on my francs, and you can amuse the damozels with your tales of daring while I woow my muse.”

“But those are tales I never tell, Raoul,” Ravenel said seriously, half chastisingly.

“Parbleu! I don’t see what women see in you. You’re as quiet as a mouse about your adventures, those stunts of yours in the Balkans, in Russia, in Persia—yet the women think you’re cat nip.”

“It’s my red locks that fascinate ’em,” Ravenel grinned in jest. “And garçon, another vermouth!”

“I’ll bet you’ve never loved a woman, Paul.”

“You lose. What about my mother?”

“I mean you never experienced that divine thrill that Frenchmen die for. You’ve never trembled at the sight of a beautiful woman. You’ve never been in love.”

“Maybe I’m not old enough yet, Raoul,” Ravenel parried. “After all, I’ve been misled several times.”

“You should seek romance instead of adventure.”

“He who seeks love rarely finds it, the Chinese say. I’ll wait a little longer.”

“Until the right woman pops into your life, as you Americans say?”

“That’s the idea!” Ravenel said decisively, bringing that phase of delicate conversation to an abrupt end. He knew that his friend spoke the truth. He had never been in love. But he was young yet. “Now what time is it? My clock is in jail. I have business afoot.”

“Ah, with a lady?” winked the irrepressible Frenchman. “It’s nearly five.”

“No, it’s with the American Express!” the American retorted. “I’ve a hunch that the governor has penned me a few pungent words on globe trotting versus banking—and that they’re in Paris waiting to annihilate my joie de vivre.”

Ravenel summoned the waiter and paid him. Then, turning to Raoul, he clasped his hand.

“I go to challenge the Mesdames Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos,” he declaimed lightly. “If those fatal ladies have a letter waiting for me, I’m confident something is bound to happen to me—before dawn, praise God!”

“I’ll help you out if—”

“I insist that the Fates help me—and the governor’s check book. I’ll look you up later—about seven. We’ll bid Paris adieu for you.”

“Splendid! There’s a party on at Strix’s. We’ll wind up at the mushroom market to sober up.”

“So long. Now for my rendezvous with Fate.” Ravenel left.

“Take care those three girls don’t stand you up,” Raoul called after him—or on your head.”
THE DEVIL’S WIDOW

CHAPTER II.

HE MUST ABDICATE.

THE jaunty red-headed American strolled through the Rotonde’s noisy terrasse, across a strip of pavement that was hot through the soles of his shoes and perched himself on the curb. His stick went up to a passing taxi. The cab pulled up and he got in, settling himself comfortably as he called out:

“Place de l’Opéra, driver, and make it snappy.”

Suddenly invested with an energy that France only displays in its motor vehicles, the taxi was hurling him at breakneck speed toward the heart of the city. It shot down Boulevard Raspail, bumped its way over the Seine via the Pont Solferino and tore through the Place de la Concorde, aiming straight for the Corinthian façade of the Madeleine Church at the end of Rue Royale. When they narrowly averted flying up the front steps of the church, Ravenel heaved a sigh of relief and wondered what Parisian taxi drivers did with themselves when off duty. Could it be true that they kept in trim by splitting hairs with a dull razor?

Before he could begin to anticipate the possible contents of a letter from his father, should one be awaiting him, the taxi jolted to a standstill in the center of the Place de l’Opéra. He got out, paid his fare and sauntered through the whirling traffic into Rue Scribe, barely missing death at the hands of vociferous taxi men at every step because of his leisurely gait. He made his way into the American Express building unscathed and climbed the stairs to the mail department. A clerk demanded his credentials and, after glancing at his passport, shoved a letter at him through the wicket.

“The governor sure enough!” Ravenel said to himself, recognizing the insignia of his father’s Chicago bank. “To read or not to read? It may floor me, so I’d better sit down where I won’t have far to fall.”

Musing in this vein, he left the American Express for the handy terrasse of the Café de la Paix facing the Opéra. Here, legend had it, the world and its peoples passed in review: sit here and some long-lost friend is bound to turn up in quest of you or a drink. Ravenel hoped some one he knew would appear to cheer him up since he sensed bad news reposing in that missive tucked away in his inner pocket.

He found a vacant table in the middle of the terrasse on the Boulevard des Capucines side of the café. The waiter put in a prompt appearance so he ordered a Martini and then determinedly slit open his father’s letter. Before reading it he took one last glance at the people around him—hoping that the letter was not to pluck him from their midst; they were mostly tourists sprinkled with adventurous faces from India, England, Afghanistan, the Balkans, Korea and points east and west—all colorful and happy. There was an indefinable bond between him and these of the adventurous faces; they were common rovers. Half the world was still a closed book to him; the Orient was yet to be experienced. And there was India, mystic and romantic; there was still time to resume negotiations regarding the Rajah of Kalitara’s desire to have him reorganize the tribal military forces.

The waiter planked the Martini and its saucer in front of him on the marble-topped table. Ravenel stared at it and then downed it with a gulp, spreading his father’s letter before him. It read, in neat élite type, the art of an impeccable stenographer:

My Dear Paul: I received your cable, or rather your request for funds, and I am taking this means of replying in order that you may fully understand my position. You have tried my patience beyond the limits of endurance.

Understand me clearly:
I will not give you another penny.
I have instructed Morgan Harjes to honor no more of your checks or requests for money. I will have nothing more to do with you —unless you come home and settle down. Consider your life these past few years: You have spent money as though it grew on lamp-posts, gadding about the globe. You have been in more tight places than Houdini, and you did not get out of them yourself; I got you out.

Through my connections with the embassy, I got you out of the Foreign Legion when you were about to go to Africa. And I got you out of your entanglements with that music-hall singer in London. The newspaper notoriety attending these escapades of yours was nothing short of scandalous.

Your mother has been greatly upset and worried by you. I do not hesitate to say that this worry has impaired her health. Another escapade with odious publicity might have serious consequences for her. Not to mince the facts, I may say that there is every reason to believe it would probably cause her death.

You are my only son, Paul, and I had hoped to have you take my place when I must go. There is a job here at the bank for you. You have ability, personality, and courage. You could make good here with the same amount of energy you are using now to spend my money in search of adventure.

Come home, settle down, and we will forget the past. I am instructing Morgan Harjes to provide you with passage on the Berengaria, sailing Saturday, said passage to be delivered to you on shipboard. They will notify me of your acceptance.

Should you decide to decline my offer, do not turn to me again when you are in trouble, but stand on your own feet. And consider your mother's condition before you plunge into further newspaper notoriety.

You are twenty-nine years old now. You have a great family name and its traditions to uphold. I hope you shall not be found wanting now, in this hour of decision. You have had your fling.

Affectionately and hopefully,

Father.

For some time Ravenel did not smile. His father's words were impressive, an ultimatum. But his buoyancy was not to be destroyed and at length he sighed: "Well, that's that! The governor gets peeved in the most dignified manner."

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Yes, he reflected, he had had his fling. All life couldn't be catching boats, burrowing into forgotten places, loafing with soldiers, diplomats, plainmen, anarchists, builders of empires and dreamers of new, unexplored worlds. There must come a reckoning and a settling. But why so soon?

"I do not hesitate to say that this worry has impaired her health." His father's words concerning his mother rang in his ears. "Another escapade with odious publicity might have serious consequences for her."

Ravenel had no idea his mother was ill. The letters she exchanged with him held no word of this. No doubt she was keeping it from him. She adored him. It would be best, if only to make her happy, that he chucked his roving and returned to the parental fold.

"Morocco," he said to himself. "Mysterious land—the East in the West. Desert wastes punctuated with cool oases — tribesmen — warriors — magic. Well, I guess you're not going to see Paul Ravenel this year."

Slowly he folded his father's letter. How like the governor it was to descend on him like a ton of bricks! Never once before had he tightened the reins so sharply. The letter practically disowned him—if he did not return to Chicago, to the bank, to dull Clark Street totally devoid of the excitement craved by a free spirit in his wanderjahrs.

"Am I being selfish, going on this way?" Ravenel asked of himself. "The governor is counting on me to fill his shoes some day. It would make them happy, the folks, if I went back. And I'd have my summers—three months, instead of two weeks, for a vacation. I could have a banker's vacation." This brought a pleased light into his eyes. He would bow to the inevitable.

Dusk had strolled up the boulevards. Now lights were twinkling, illuminating Paris like a magic city. It was time for another drink and dinner. Ravenel de-
cided to hunt out Raoul and make the farewell to Paris a double farewell.

"In the morning," Ravenel planned, "I'll break the news to the bank. The following morning, sober or otherwise, I'll be bound for the high seas and home, Chicago, stocks and bonds. Heigh-o."

"Garçon," he called to a bewhiskered gentleman in apron and jacket, "another cocktail—the sort one gives to a king when he abdicates!"

CHAPTER III.
IN WHICH THERE IS A GIRL.

A WAITING his order, half wondering what sort of cocktail the waiter would bring him, Ravenel could not help but think of his return to Chicago. His parents would be elated. Once more his father would speak of his pride for him—particularly if he went into the bank. His mother would immediately lay plans for his marriage to one of a dozen eligible débutantes. He sighed. He had made up his mind to go home, and come what may, he would stick to his decision.

"M'sieu', I hope this will please," the waiter beamed through his whiskers. Ravenel was proffered a potent-looking Daquiri in a brimming glass. "I once served this to the King of Portugal—after he abdicated," the waiter explained.

"If it's any good, I'll abdicate again," Ravenel smiled. He was about to drink when he set the glass down, adding, "On second thought, I don't know what it might do to me. I'd better see if my papers are straight."

The waiter stood by watching him with austere curiosity. Ravenel fished a packet of papers from an inner pocket and from them drew forth his American passport. The eyes of the waiter lighted up with amazement.

"M'sieu' is American!" he exclaimed. Revenel nodded, proceeding to inspect his card of identity issued by the prefect of police in Paris. "M'sieu' speaks like a true Parisian," the waiter added. "You deceived me completely, m'sieu'."

"I'm sorry my education was so thorough," Ravenel laughed. "I've been living among you fellows for twenty years. If I don't go home I'll forget my English and think like you."

Ravenel was satisfied that his identification papers were in order and amused with the waiter's concern over his mastery of the language. Now he would venture to consume that tempting Daquiri. If it stood him on his head, the police would know where to send him.

The Daquiri almost turned the trick. It was ambrosia for a god. Ravenel felt a glow of contentment welling up within him. Again he sighed. There would be no Daquiris to solace him in Chicago should he desire to abdicate from the bank; at least, there would be no real Daquiris like that one, though he had heard Chicago boasted of Daquiris and better.

The Paris night was now galloping along the boulevards. It was everywhere, manifest by men and women in miraculous evening attire sailing by in shrill taxis. Above, through the anaemic trees, clear, cool stars were glittering—all a part of "the wonder city."

A newsboy was yelling loudly and attracted Ravenel's attention. "Driant sentenced! Driant, the assassin!" the boy shouted lustily, thrusting a paper under his nose.

He bought a paper. He had followed the Driant case with a sense of horror which surprised him. Death was no stranger to him, nor was murder. But Driant's crimes made his blood run cold. The man slaughtered men and women for a sou and for years had managed to evade the toils of the law. Now he read:

Albert Driant, convicted of the murder of Madame Marie Fouquet, the dressmaker in Rue Mazagran, was sentenced to deportation
late to-day by the justices of the Seine Tribunal.

Driant escaped the guillotine, which he rightly deserved, because of an imperfection in the case of the prosecution. He will spend the rest of his life, however, in the Guiana Penal Colony.

“Devil’s Island for him!” Ravenel said to himself. “He’d have been better off under the blade of Madame Guillotine!”

And he mused that those who escaped “The Bloody Widow”—Madame Guillotine—suffered a far more horrible fate at the hands of “The Dry Widow”—Devil’s Island—that penal colony which prepared perpetually black souls in a tropical hell for the inferno to come. He thought the system of transportation—particularly to a convict colony such as that on the northern coast of South America—a cruelly barbaric one.

They called the guillotine “The Bloody Widow” because she automatically lost the men she married the moment the gruesome nuptials were ended. And they rightly called Devil’s Island “The Dry Widow,” since her victims, though married to her burning jungles, were as good as dead; they were victims of a dry, rotting, bloodless torture.

Ravenel recalled the celebrated Dreyfus affair. Poor Captain Dreyfus, unjustly convicted of high treason back in 1894, was condemned to Devil’s Island. There he spent five years of his life, not in the convict camps in the jungles, but on the Ile du Diable—the Island of the Devil—a desolate, rocky pile set in the sea off the coast of French Guiana. His home was a solitary cell in a hut, guarded day and night by a squad of soldiers. Only after five years was he brought back to France for a new trial and the subsequent establishment of his complete innocence. Those who saw Dreyfus after those five years knew that he had been through a living hell.

“I think I’ll have another abdication,” Ravenel said to the hovering waiter.

He wanted to forget the penal colony called Devil’s Island.

He gazed about him, allowing his eyes to take in the jubilation of the “city of night”—the young bloods in search of amusement, the tattered old men picking up cigarette stubs from the gutter and stowing them safely in a bag to be later sold to makers of cheap smokes who used the bits of used tobacco, the guides spotting tourists with keen eyes and luring them with strange tales. He listened to the orchestra in the Grand Hotel playing a soft but pleasantly sentimental waltz. In two more nights he would be on the Atlantic, rolling home.

A voice reached him during a lull in the eternal clatter of plates and glasses on the marble-topped tables of the café. It was a sweet, vibrant voice—the voice of a young girl. From where he was sitting, Ravenel could not see her, but he would swear she was beautiful. Her accent was that of a colonial, but the purity of her French indicated she was a girl of culture.

“It seems like a dream, being here in Paris,” he heard her say. “I suppose I’ll never see this city of wonders again.”

“My dear,” a gruff man’s voice responded insinuatingly, “you’ll see it as often as you desire.”

“But soon I’ll be so far away—thousands of miles away,” the girl said sadly. “Oh, I’ll never see beauty, happy people like these, or the gay colors of the buildings—never again.”

Ravenel lost the man’s reply in the din that began anew. No longer could he refrain from looking behind him. The girl was a veritable goddess—the chaste Diana. Her loveliness was accentuated by a chic frock which set off the coolness of her skin, an alabaster skin, well cared for by a discriminating mind and a healthy body. She was fair, blue eyed and slender. To Ravenel she was truly Diana, the daring huntress in
THE DEVIL'S WIDOW

the picture from Greibet's illustrated mythology.

But the man at her elbow surprised him. Ravenel saw a burly, thickset fellow, dark of eye and face, dapperly dressed in the exaggerated clothes of a French colonial. Contrasted with the beauty of Diana, he was sinister—a trogodyte. Instinctively, Ravenel detested the man and became concerned for the girl. Was the man interested in her? Ravenel hated the way his eyes watched Diana; they were the eyes of something that crawled in slime.

While the sinister one spoke, softly and ingratiatingly, Ravenel noticed that the girl avoided his eyes by keeping hers downcast. The American felt happy in the belief that the girl liked the man no more than he did.

The waiter, commanded by the sinister one, approached their table and gave the addition. As the man fumbled with his bank notes, the girl looked up, meeting Ravenel's gaze. For a moment she was surprised by his audacity; but he smiled, ever so faintly, not knowing exactly why, and the traces of a pretty smile hovered on the girl's lips. It was not the smile of a flirt but that of some one seeking a friend. Thus Ravenel decided.

As the pair rose to leave the Café de la Paix, Ravenel hastily summoned his waiter to pay and tip him liberally.

"I'll be back to-morrow night or next year—to abdicate again," he laughed.

"M'sieu' is always welcome," the waiter said, still caressing the pourboire in his palm.

Ravenel followed his Diana and her lugubrious escort down the Boulevard des Capucines. At the corner of Rue Caumartin, the pair stopped and the American overheard the man say:

"A taxi, dear, will take you home in ten minutes. It is best and safest. I would go with you, but I have business near by. You must hurry, since your mother is waiting for you."

"I'd rather walk," Diana said. "It's a beautiful night and I can't walk in Paris—every night."

"Suit yourself," said the man. The rest of the conversation was lost to Ravenel by a newsboy shouting further information concerning Driant, the assassin. He saw the man bow, kiss the girl's hand, and watch her continue toward the Madeleine. When the man turned into Rue Caumartin, Ravenel followed the girl, keeping a safe distance between them. He could not make up his mind as to how to approach her, but he did want to meet the girl, to hear that soft voice addressed to him, to know who she was and where she came from. It was the first time he was ever so curious about a girl, and he found himself trembling as he drew closer.

In Rue Royale a college boy, careening out of Maxim's, blocked Ravenel's first attempt. He was no more than two feet from the girl at the time. In the Place de la Concorde, it was a taxi that foiled him. On the Quai des Tuileries, the darkness beneath the trees, unnerved him for such an encounter. He was afraid of frightening his Diana. The quai was lonely and quiet, its mysterious placidity only disturbed by boat sounds from the Seine.

A figure darted from behind a tree. The girl screamed. Ravenel saw her struggling with a man who was trying to wrest her purse from her grasp. He fell upon the fellow, grabbing him by the coat collar and hurling him against the wall by the river. The thief, cursing angrily, sprang to his feet to rush the American, his eyes glittering with rage.

"Be careful," the girl cried to Ravenel. He doubled his fist and smashed it into the man's face as he rushed him. With a cry of pain, the thief did what his kind do on such occasion; he showed his heels as he disappeared into the darkness.

"He might have knifed you," the girl
said, breathless and excited. Ravenel was aware that her eyes were upon him, admiringly.

"Those fellows never use a knife when they're face to face with you," he laughed. "But you shouldn't have come along this quai. It's infested with sneak thieves. The other side of the river is much safer."

"But this side is so much more beautiful," the girl said. "Think of it! Marie Antoinette must have walked along here when the Tuillerie Gardens extended to the river."

"Did she?"

"It says so in the guide book," the girl said a trifle apologetically. "I have to use a guide book, you see. I'm a stranger in Paris."

"May I see you home?" Ravenel asked, fearful that she might answer in the negative. "It's dangerous along here."

"I'd be glad to have you. I'm staying at the Hotel Voltaire. It's just across the river."

Wishing that she lived farther away, Ravenel walked beside her. But he was suddenly speechless. The girl spoke of the magic beauty of Paris, how she had longed to see it and how much more wonderful it had proved to be. All the while he was wondering how he could learn her name and what tactics a real lady's man like Raoul would pursue. Suddenly an old bromide, which friends of his had used, occurred to him and he said:

"Aren't you Mademoiselle Lanvin?"

"No," the girl replied, not the least bit helpful.

"You—look—like her," he stammered, to cover his embarrassment. Then he blurted out, "What is your name?"

"I'm Diane Coulard," she said simply. He felt his heart pounding unmercifully. He had called her a Diana and her name was that—Diane.

"You followed me, didn't you?" she said, watching him. He nodded. "But you're not like the other men who've followed me in Paris."

"Thank you," he said with a nervous little laugh.

"I didn't mean it as a compliment. It's just a bit of observation."

"Well, to be perfectly frank with you, I didn't think you were Mademoiselle Lanvin. But I did want to meet you," he confessed naively.

"Why?"

To that there was no answer. Ravenel hoped his discomfort was not apparent to her; his cheeks were burning. He believed they were the color of his hair. And worse luck, they had arrived before the Hotel Voltaire.

"Thank you for your escort," Diane laughed. "I'm sure any other footpads were frightened off by your very presence."

"May I offer my escort again?" he asked boldly but tremulously. "May I see you again, mademoiselle?"

"Certainly. You're a nice boy, monsieur."

Ravenel winced at the "nice boy." It was putting him in his place, warning him not to be too presumptuous. He ventured further.

"I'd like to show you the real Paris. Will your father mind?"

"Father?" she said, and then added, as though divining his thoughts of her sinister companion at the café, "That wasn't my father."

"I'll come around in the morning," he said, disregarding the failure of his ruse to learn the dark one's identity. "About ten?"

"That will be fine. Mother will just love having a native Parisian for a guide." Diane Coulard was ecstatic. Ravenel was wondering about the uninvited guest, Diane's mother, for whom he had not bargained; but the chaperon was a French custom to which he must bow.

"Fine," he said a trifle weakly. "I'll
be delighted to show your mother—the city.”

“Now, thank you for saving my purse and thank you for seeing me home, monsieur,” the girl said, giving him her hand. He pressed it gently, lest she discover his tremors.

A moment later she was gone behind a clicking door. He had wanted to ask her a thousand questions; he hadn’t told her his name; he hadn’t learned where she came from; he hadn’t sounded her out on her mother’s disposition. But the morning would reveal everything. In the meantime he must hunt out Raoul—at Strix’s or the mushroom market—and put a thousand questions to him.

CHAPTER IV.
IN WHICH HE MEETS A NEW FRIEND.

For some moments Ravenel stared blankly at the heavy portals of the Hotel Voltaire, then, turning slowly, he headed for Pont Neuf, hoping to pick up a taxi on the way. He felt peculiarly light-hearted. And he must see Raoul, the lady’s man, immediately. There had been a perceptible trembling experienced while in Diane’s company and it must be properly diagnosed.

The night was pleasantly clear, wrapping the city’s muffled noises with a simmering brightness. With the aid of the huge, quiet moon he could perceive the Ile de la Cite and Notre Dame looming high in the middle of the Seine.

Three taxis, whirring past, escaped the call of his whistle and presently he found himself on the Quai de Conti beneath the gloomy pile that was the Institut de Monnaie. The quai was deserted, but ahead he saw the taxi stand.

He had begun to whistle a tune, twirling his stick, when something struck the back of his head with a dull thud. Scuffling feet dragged his sagging body toward a dark doorway as the ponderous pain grew inside of his brain. He remembered sinking to the steps of the doorway as some one’s hands ran through his pockets. Consciousness left him then.

When he tried to open his eyes again, he was surprised that the throbbing in his head gave him little deep pain but an inordinate heaviness. Voices reached his ear.

“Must be full of too much white wine!”

“A student, probably.”

“We must tell a gendarme. Maybe he’s sick.”

“Sick of too much white wine!”

The voices, accompanied by shuffling feet, moved off. Ravenel sat up, rubbing his head and wincing as he touched the swollen lump behind his right ear.

“Whoever it was is a pretty good shot,” he grinned painfully.

The city seemed strangely dark. The bright lights had vanished and the moon had moved far across the heavens, now casting faint light and heavy shadows. Ravenel realized that he must have been “out” for a long, long time.

“Well, they didn’t get my watch,” he smiled, as he went through his pockets. “That’s still safe in hock.”

His money, his handkerchiefs, cigarettes, keys, his address book, all were gone as though a thorough vacuum cleaner had purged his suit. Then he sprang to his feet with a sincere “Diable!” His papers—his passport and his card of identity—were gone, too. The highwaymen had done a clean—a very clean—job.

Well, he mused, he’d seek out Raoul, borrow enough money for a taxi in the morning—and his cot for the rest of the night. Then he’d have the embassy arrange for a new passport and the bank would have to retrieve his trunk and watch. Now for Raoul’s—a fifteen-minute walk up through Boul’ Mich’.

As he passed a jeweler’s shop on the Quai des Grands Augustins, Ravenel gasped as he beheld the hands of a clock pointing to four fifteen. And the clock
was running, too. Raoul was certainly not at home so early. He remembered the possibility of his friend's winding up his farewell to Paris at the mushroom mart—probably Pere Luco's bistro near the markets—so toward that quarter he set his nose. His feet protested at first but finally he established communication and relation between those pedals and his throbbing head.

But Pere Luco's was deserted even of marketmen who, after driving their produce in from the country, customarily ordered a brandy and dozed with their heads on the foul-smelling, greasy tables. The markets must be open, running full blast, Ravenel thought. Perhaps, he reflected, Raoul's party was in search of a "nightcap mushroom" and would be found in the sheds.

He strolled across the Rue Berger and into the huge sheds that constitute one of Paris' greatest market places. In the light of sickly electric bulbs, the dealers were laying out their counters with every conceivable kind of fruit and meat, haggling menacingly with the farmers from whom they were buying. Already the hotel-provision purchasers were sleuthing among the counters for the choicest commodities. A sleepy-eyed gendarme watched Ravenel curiously.

The mushroom stalls showed no sign of Raoul or a friendly face. A few college boys, quite far from sober, were buying mushrooms to complete their night's carouse.

Suddenly, the American saw a huge fellow, dressed in provincial clothes, approach the deserted fruit stand in front of him and stealthily fill his cap with oranges and apples and the finest plums. He was about to move away when the gendarme appeared with a pounce and clapped a heavy hand upon his shoulder. As the fellow was swung around, spilling his loot to the floor, Ravenel saw a long, serious face, lighted by a pair of merry eyes. But the man's expression was one of mortified, childish pain as he listened to the gendarme's opinion of pilferers.

Quickly Ravenel stepped up to the culprit and flashed him a smile, at the same time ignoring the gendarme. He retrieved the fruit from the floor and replaced it in the man's cap.

"That will be four francs fifty," he said to the quavering culprit.

"But I am penniless," the man stammered.

"Then charge it, m'sieu," Ravenel beamed, taking a pencil and paper from the counter and scribbling on it.

"A thousand pardons, m'sieu," the gendarme whispered hoarsely, backing away. "I had no idea that m'sieu——""An honest mistake, my man," Ravenel laughed. "Have an apple and save your doctor's bills."

The gendarme retreated with his apple and when the American turned to the fellow he had saved, impulsively, from arrest, he found the man had disappeared. He could not explain his act to himself. Perhaps it was the bump on the head, perhaps, he considered, he was struck by the fellow's face. It was the face of men he had for pals in the Legion, a face he was drawn to instinctively.

A weakness soon made itself felt in Ravenel's stomach. He had had no supper and hunger was not unnatural since even his lunch had been so frugal. All about him was food; edible things. The recent affair with the provincial put an idea into his head. Why not a peach, a plum, a brioche? It would hold him till morning. Of course, there wasn't a sou in his jeans!

But the fellow he had saved was hungry and broke and hadn't hesitated to help himself. It wouldn't be stealing. He could return later in the day and settle with the dealers. The brioches were at his elbow. His fingers closed over one which, as he drew it from the counter, proved to be huge. He slipped it
under his coat. Some one cried, "Thief! Stop the thief!" almost at his elbow.

With that cry ringing in his ears, Ravenel took to his heels. The gendarme appeared directly in front of him with outstretched arms, a savage gleam in his eyes as he recognized the apple donor who had tricked him. Holding tightly to his brioche, the American ducked under the man's grasp and headed for the Rue Berger entrance. The market was now filled with Latin pandemonium as though an army of bandits had ravished its counters and tills.

Ravenel leaped over several tripping feet and reached the door with its welcome darkness beyond. The gendarme was in full pursuit, shouting:

"Cease, m'sieu! Halt in the name of the law!"

The fugitive darted across the empty street and headed for a dingy alley. It would never do to be caught in this scrape. He could see the newspaper headlines: "Paul Ravenel, Scion of Chicago Family, Arrested for Looting Paris Markets."

As he slipped into the alley, the gendarme was a pace behind him, shouting lustily. His foot struck a stone and he crashed forward on his hands. The gendarme's hand fell upon his shoulders. A moment later it was lifted and, as Ravenel rolled on his back to surrender himself, he saw a dark form swing the squealing gendarme high in the air and deposit him in a market-man's cart. The impact of the gendarme's body on the produce permeated the air with the acrid odor of new, healthy onions.

A hand lifted Ravenel to his feet and half dragged him to the far end of the alley. In the light of an arc lamp, he recognized his savior as the man whose face had prompted him to save him from arrest a few minutes earlier in the market.

"My friend, I salute you," the big fel-

low said in an argot that came all the way from Picardy. "My name, m'sieu', is Mathieu Dubac."

"You've repaid me well, and in the nick of time," Ravenel laughed, shaking warmly and fraternally the man's outstretched hand.

"I wasn't sure," the Picard said, "but I thought you were one of us when you came to my rescue back there."

"Glad to help a fellow any time."

"What is your line, m'sieu'?"

"I travel," Ravenel said lightly.

"Ah, m'sieu' is discreet. I admire the man with the cautious tongue and I admired you the moment I saw you," the Picard grinned. "We have a common enemy, hein?"

"Hunger?"

"Morbleu! The police!"

Ravenel understood and was amused. Ruffian that he was, the fellow was a most likable ruffian. His hulking body was topped by a sad face, merry eyes and a mop of chestnut hair, wavy and bright in the street light. The American forgot his resolutions in admiration of this bird of the night, this man that he instinctively regarded a friend. It was one of those rare occasions in his life, he felt, when he bumped into a man and in the fleeting moment of contact might find a lifelong friend. He had met Raoul that way in a brawl at the Bal Bullier.

"What's your specialty, m'sieu'," Ravenel asked cordially.

"Burglary—it's safe and it pays," the Picard said with childlike pride. "I've just come up from the south to do a job here. I've a partner—my apprentice."

"Parbleu! An apprentice burglar!" Ravenel exclaimed, hiding his mirth at the fellow's seriousness.

"Why not, m'sieu'? Aren't there drapers' apprentices, grocers' apprentices, chemists', ironmasters', jockeys', carpenters', wine-growers' apprentices?"

"Of course! It's a swell idea!"
"And your line, m'sieu'," the Picard repeated curiously.
"Checks—banks."
"Ah, a forger. But it is not very exciting, m'sieu'?"

"Not when there's no money in the bank," Ravenel laughed dryly. He hoped Morgan Harjea's treasure boxes would be overflowing for him in a few hours when he presented himself for "deportation to New York."

"Let's have a drink, M'sieu' Forger," the Picard said, linking his arm in the American's. "My apprentice is waiting across the river—with a pocket full of francs, I hope."

"M'sieu' is penniless?"

"The trip to Paris was expensive. But my apprentice, who was once a lowly pickpocket, will help me in this hour of need."

After they had gone a few paces, the Picard stopped suddenly and seized Ravenel's shoulders in his powerful hands. His merry eyes were dancing but the expression on his sad face was full of appeal, hopefulness.

"We shall be friends, m'sieu'?"] he asked tremulously.

"We are friends," Ravenel replied.
"Where're we headed for?" Ravenel inquired as they crossed the Pont au Change beneath the towering walls of Notre Dame.

"For the Café of the Dancing Duck. My apprentice will be there. You must join us, m'sieu'—become one of us."

CHAPTER V.
IN WHICH FATE FROWNS.

THE Café of the Dancing Duck, Ravenel soon learned, was a miserable little bistro off the Rue Galande in the shadows of the crumbling walls of St. Julien le Pauvre. This, the heart of the Sorbonne Quartier, was one of the toughest sections of the city and might be comparable, in the type of criminal it nestles, to his native Chicago.

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The empty street echoed as his new friend pounded mightily on the dark-paneled with the flat of his palm. Presently a light glowed within and the door opened on a chain permitting a sharp eye to scrutinize them.

"It's Mathieu Dubac from Picardy," the big fellow grumbled as though annoyed by the delay and the formalities.

"Patience is not one of your virtues," a voice croaked. The door slid open and rattled behind them as the bolts were shot. They followed the dim, bent form, barely illuminated by a guarded wick, through the deserted bar and down into the cellar where Ravenel now heard a piano in the agonies of a French fox trot. Another door was unlocked by their guide, who in the flood of light, was revealed as the most evil-looking old hag he ever laid eyes on in all his wanderings.

"Mother Sange," Mathieu said with a flourish, "this is my new friend—my friend——"

"Paul Marat," Ravenel said, helping him out.

"He's one of the favored," Mathieu continued. "He is a genius in outwitting the police. We will be partners, hein, M'sieu' Marat?"

"Who knows?" Ravenel laughed with a careless, noncommittal shrug.

The hag, whose name in English was "Mother Blood," pierced him with her eyes, shut them for a moment as though to impress his visage on her memory, and then, curling her lip into what he assumed to be a smile, she left them for a place at a table cluttered with wine bottles.

As Mathieu gazed about this spacious underground rendezvous, Ravenel took stock of his neighbors. In the flickering light of candles, he saw the new apaches of Paris: men one could spot a mile off as thieves and cutthroats despite their well-tailored clothes; slumbering pickpockets; alert, scheming burglars; elegant-mannered guides va-
cationing from their tourist prey over cognacs; in a word, the choicest gathering of Parisian riffraff a mortal could wish for.

A coatless blind man sat at the piano, strumming the dirty keys like an automaton. From time to time his gnarled hand crept to a glass which the bull-necked patron kept filled with cheap, poisonous absinthe; Ravenel felt exhilarated by the sights.

"Ah, there's Hugo," Mathieu cried, grabbing his arm. "He awaits us. He will like you, my apprentice will!"

Paul started off in Mathieu's wake, letting his glance shoot past the blind piano player into a murky corner. A guttering candle illuminated a slightly familiar face. Its eyes returned his gaze with a strange, brooding glitter. Then memory functioned and he recognized the face of the man he had encountered on the Quai des Tuileries in the act of snatching Diane's purse. What a pleasant situation for him, the American thought; out of the proverbial frying pan into the fire. But the man lowered his eyes and stuck his nose into a large, brimming glass of wine.

"Hugo," Mathieu was saying at his elbow, "I have the honor of presenting to you my new friend, M'sieu Paul Marat."

Ravenel took the stranger's puffy, round hand in the most fraternal grasp he could command. The man named Hugo beamed at him with saucerlike eyes, mumbling cordialities in what he took to be the Gascon argot. He was short, round and fat, jovial of countenance—and rather shrewd, the American surmised, by the cast of his ruddy face.

"Hugo Maranneau!" the jovial-faced fellow gulped. "I am him. He greets you by the beard of St. Stephen!"

Mathieu drew up a chair for Ravenel and in a single breath presented him to Hugo's company, a barrage of names, none of which he got. Cognacs were ordered by Hugo in an amusing attempt at the grandiose.

"Ah, my apprentice," Mathieu grinned, "your old trade has stood you well."

"It has," Hugo, the ex-pickpocket, replied. "At least well enough to go another round."

"Magnificent! And to-morrow we'll have a fortune fit for an old-fashioned king!" Mathieu was radiant.

"Not quite that," a grizzly bearded fellow muttered. He wore the old apache cap and scarf, and Ravenel took him to be an old-timer. "Rozier reported to-night that the house only holds half what you estimated."

His comrades hushed him, nodding toward the red-headed newcomer; it was evidently a matter not for his initiated ears, Ravenel realized, slouching easily in the chair.

"M'sieu Marat," Mathieu said decisively, "is one of us—even in this affair."

There were several protests; angry eyes flashed at Ravenel. He was not known to all; his participation would reduce each one's cut.

"But I vouch for him," Mathieu insisted dominantly. Ravenel saw that his friend was master of these men even if he was new to Paris. "He is my friend and my interests are his."

"And I vouch for him," Hugo blinked, "if M'sieu Dubac does. By the twenty-four feet of the twelve apostles, my master never mistakes a friend!"

The protests died but Ravenel felt that he must make his position clear and consider the quickest and most effective means of escaping this situation without arousing suspicion. A false move in this underworld cavern—and only his parents would miss him, since no friend of his in Paris would think of looking for him at the morgue among the bloated floaters hauled from the Seine.

"I'm sorry, comrades," he said, affect-
ing an elegant apache patois, "but I'm afraid your work is not in my line. From friend Mathieu, I take it that you're all burglars. That is not my game, messieurs."

"M'sieu' Marat is a forger," Mathieu hastily explained. Then he pleaded, "But my friend, join us this once—for amusement. You may like our work."

"Sorry," Ravenel laughed, shaking his head, much to the satisfaction of the others, who obviously distrusted him. "It is beyond my powers."

Further persuasion was interrupted by the arrival of two pretty girls. By their dress, Ravenel knew they were from the provinces, too. By their manners, he knew they were not habitués of the place nor of the other women's brand.

"Mimi!" Mathieu shouted, sweeping the dark-haired girl into his lap. He kissed her a resounding smack.

"Chou Chou!" Hugo cried, kissing the hands of the little blue-eyed woman. She sank into a chair beside him.

"Ah, M'sieu' Marat," Mathieu declaimed, "this is a happy hour when I can present to you, my new friend—my affianced, Mimi Vauclair. And there beside the efficient Hugo sits his affianced, Chou Chou Bonnieres."

Ravenel arose and formally kissed the hands of the girls, much to the pleasure and appreciation of Mathieu and Hugo. The others he saw, winked and nudged one another, jesting over Mathieu's "presentation of his affianced!"

The girls were eager to know of what success their men were having. They were assured that all was in order and that by the same hour the following morning they'd all be looking for a palace for a home. Once more plans of the burglary—it was directed at the house of a wealthy wine merchant in the Bois du Boulogne—were discussed under Mathieu's chairmanship.

Their table occupied a corner of the vaulted cavern and from where Ravenel sat he could not see the man he had whipped the night before. Suddenly, however, the fellow appeared approaching their table with a lazy saunter, watching Ravenel curiously through half-closed eyes. Several of the others nodded to him. Neither Mathieu nor Hugo nor their girls saw him, so engrossed were they in their plans for the burglary.

There was a loud, alarming commotion near the entrance and Mother Sange screamed. Candles were doused, tables overturned and curses coupled with the whisper, "Police!" The man Ravenel had been watching, now a shadow in the faint light, started at the cry of police and, after a moment's hesitation, the American saw him pass quickly behind their table.

"Marat!" Mathieu hissed. "Don't be alarmed! It may be a false alarm. We have them every night."

"Let's get to a panel!" Hugo cried. The girls agreed with him. Ravenel could hear doors opening in the gloom and the scuffle of feet growing fainter and fainter.

The patron was at the entrance, demanding the identity of those outside. Gruff voices resounded beyond the door.

"It's gendarmes!" Hugo cried. "By St. Peter's nose, I smell 'em!"

They sprang from the table as Mathieu for a moment flashed his pocket torch at what Ravenel recognized to be a half-closed secret panel.

"Run for it!" he whispered. "My guess was wrong! It's the police!"

But before they could take a step, the main door, snapping from its rotten hinges, crashed to the floor and a dozen flash lights were leveled at them.

"Don't move!" a voice commanded from the darkness behind the gleaming circles of light. "Put up your hands. Shoot the first man that moves."

The flash lights surrounded the prisoners slowly, while behind them, gen-
darmes began to light the extinguished candles on the tables.

"Three men and a woman!" a voice barked. "The rest of the rats have scuttled. The men upstairs ought to trip a few."

From another corner of the cavern came a cry. Gendarmes appeared in the range of light, dragging three men.

"Got 'em behind a panel," one of the officers said. "It was stuck and they couldn't get to the trap above."

"What does this mean?" the patron blustered weakly.

"It's an outrage, disturbing the drinking of honest folks!" Mother Sange cried. "It's persecution!"

"Murder and robbery, m'sieu! That's why we're here," a deep-voiced individual snappel to the patron. Ravenel took him for a detective. His revolver never wavered from the little group.

"Carrol, the jeweler on Rue Vaugirard, was held up two hours ago, shot to death and robbed," the detective said quietly. "I seek murderers and robbers. Naturally I'd come to the Danting Duck first. Isn't it the home of thieving assassins?"

"Oh, monsieur!" the patron whimpered.

"Who are these prisoners?" the detective snapped, pointing to Mathieu's party. "Get their names and we'll take 'em along."

Ravenel's heart sank within him. He expected an examination, an inquiry, but not arrest. The gendarme nearest the detective stepped up to them and demanded their cards of identity. Mathieu, Hugo and the girls surrendered theirs.

"Where's yours, m'sieu?" he commanded testily of Ravenel.

"I've been robbed," the red-headed fellow said simply.

"Search the thief!" the detective cried. The gendarme obeyed and was somewhat amused when he could find not so much as a feather in Ravenel's pockets.

Promising to settle with Ravenel later, the detective turned to the other three prisoners. Ravenel now saw that one of them was the man he had recognized—the man from whom he had saved Diane. As the gendarme took their cards of identity, this Nemesis of his called the detective by name. The officer walked to his side.

"A squealer!" Mathieu hissed.

The detective listened to the prisoner, stared at the man for a moment and then quickly walked behind the table Mathieu's party had occupied. He called to two gendarmes.

"Pick those things up!" he ordered.

The gendarmes arose from behind the table, one holding a revolver and the other a small black pouch. The detective opened the pouch, pouring into the palm of his hands a tiny pile of sparkling diamonds.

"This bag," he said, "bears the imprint of 'Carrol—Jewels—Paris'!" He took the gun and broke it expertly, saying: "Two chambers exploded. There were two bullets in Carrol's body. I guess you're the boys we want."

"It's a frame-up!" Mathieu cried.

"We're innocent," Mimi sobbed. "My man is not an assassin."

"By the teeth of St. Dominick!" Hugo shouted. "I am innocent! We are innocent! All of us are!"

The detective sneered and as he walked away, tossed over his shoulder to us:

"That remains to be proven!"

In his speechlessness, Ravenel shuddered; his heart was pounding wildly and he could think of nothing but those last words of the detective's: "That remains to be proven." Unlike America, in France a man is presumed in the eyes of the law to be guilty until he establishes his innocence. How on earth could Ravenel do that? Charged with murder and robbery, who'd believe
that he had been robbed of his identification papers? Who'd believe that he had lain unconscious on the steps of the Institut de Monnaie for hours, probably while the crime was being committed, and had then wandered over to the markets?

But there was solace for him, small as it was. His identity was still a mystery to these men. To Mathieu and his friends, he was Paul Marat. If he could still remain Paul Marat to the police, he'd be spared a scandal that would not hurt him so much as his parents—his mother! His father's letter, word by word, passed before his eyes. "Another escapade with odious publicity might have serious consequences for her." Those were his father's words.

Ravenel's true identity could free him in the morning after he had communicated with the embassy. Perhaps his connection with the case could be kept out of the newspapers.

"Who are you?" the detective was asking him. "You don't look like one of the Dancing Ducks."

"Marat's my name—Paul Marat."

"H'm, a good murderous name, Marat is." He was thinking of that blood-thirsty Marat who precipitated the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution—the Marat who was done to death by Charlotte Corday. "Still a murderer's name!" the detective remarked conclusively.

The detective, by the confident gleam in his eye, was obviously convinced already of Ravenel's guilt. Could Ravenel convince him with the aid of his true identity? Could he convince the embassy that mere coincidence had brought him to the Café of the Dancing Duck? He had been found among thieves in the most notorious underworld rendezvous in Paris. The seriousness of his plight weighed heavily now. Would he be readily believed by his friends?

Ravenel started; he would be confronted by the gendarmerie. Would the policeman he had outwitted and eluded in the markets recognize him, expose him as having been a petty pilferer there? The faster he thought, seeking loopholes that would preserve name and honor, the quicker he realized that he was doomed to nasty trouble. If he was identified as the thief of the markets, no one would believe him in this affair.

"Pick up your feet!" a gendarme growled. "We're moving to the jug."

Ravenel was herded with Mathieu and the others and shoved toward the entrance. The big Picard took his hand in his, pressing it firmly and encouragingly; there was sympathy in his eyes.

"I'm to blame for your plight, my friend," he whispered, "and I'm as innocent as you are of this crime."

"I believe you," Ravenel replied. "This is just my—my unlucky day."

"Unlucky!" Hugo echoed with a groan. "This is the devil's own day! By St. Martin's ten fingers, I swear it!"

Prod by revolvers, they were escorted to the street where a Black Maria—a huge prison van—awaited them. They were pitched into it. Mathieu protested vigorously:

"Take me!" he cried. "Examine me! But let the girls go free! They are as innocent as I am but your persecution will hurt them more."

A blow in the mouth silenced him. Three gendarmes hurled him into the van on top of Ravenel. Then came Mimi and Chou Chou, screaming and sobbing hysterically. The doorlock clicked and off they went to the uneven clop-clop of horses' hoofs on cobblestones.

The Prison de la Sante was their destination. They saw its towering gray walls looming against the scarlet dawn as it crept out of the East, when they left the van in the prison yard. Quickly, before they could draw a breath of air, they were marched inside to the office.
"Paul Marat!" a prison official barked, leaning over a broad register. "The charge?"

"Murder!" the detective said tersely.

The walls reeled around him. The word "Murder!" rang in his ears. He fought to keep his racing heart from overcoming him. He had anticipated the charge considering the circumstances of his arrest, but now that the word "Murder!" had been uttered, its menace enveloped him like a shroud.

There were, the American decided, but two courses for him to take: to declare his identity then and there, or to fight the charge before a magistrate. The declaration he realized, would heap upon him international newspaper publicity—a notoriety he greatly feared for his family’s, for his mother’s, sake. But would it free him of the charge? If he fought the charge, would he win or lose the case? He had no witnesses to establish an alibi for his whereabouts at the time of the crime.

Pondering, worrying, Ravenel fell into a heavy sleep shortly after his protestation of innocence was taken and he had been escorted to a dingy, airless cell.

CHAPTER VI.
HE IS GIVEN A NEW SUIT.

RAVENEL, slumped in his chair, rubbed the stubble of beard on his chin and watched the little sharp-eyed judge as he discoursed with his two black-robed confreres. Would this man be merciful, he wondered? The judge's jaw had the cut of an army disciplinarian. There was little sympathy in that face—yet mercy, if needed, might be hidden there.

Mathieu and Hugo, dulled and stunned by the proceedings of the past two days, were hunched over the defense counsel's table, staring mutely at its oaken planks. Ravenel slowly felt himself gripped by the air of misery that hung over the black-walled courtroom.

He wanted to jest, to cheer up his ill-fated friends, but the Criminal Court of the Seine Tribunal did not encourage laughter.

The jury box was empty; it had been thus for the past hour. Now a gendarme approached the presiding judge and word rippled through the courtroom that the twelve peers of Ravenel, Mathieu and Hugo were ready to render their verdict.

Ravenel felt his body tremble with apprehension. What would the verdict be? He was innocent; all three were innocent. They had made a brave, sincere defense, aided by the offices of Advocate le Brunier, whose impassioned charge to the jury had brought tears among the spectators. But then the French are easily moved!

Ravenel had decided during the long, weary stretches of night spent in a narrow, damp cell that his masquerade must go on. He was Paul Marat now! It was a matter of honor. It meant his mother's good health—her life! There was no way of avoiding the inevitable scandal should he reveal his identity. The course he had adopted was easy and right. The jury would be convinced; and once at liberty, no one would be one wit the wiser that Paul Marat, charged with the murder of a Parisian jeweler in a holdup, had been Paul Ravenel, scion of the Ravenels of Chicago, one of America's foremost families.

The court had accepted him as a Frenchman. The police, handicapped by his lack of identification data, could do no more than classify him as a Norman whose past crimes, thus far unsolved, were so heinous that the culprit dared not reveal his true name lest he be irrevocably incriminated. Pictures of himself which had appeared in the newspapers were so bad no friend of his could possibly recognize him.

Of course, he had no sound alibi to offer; he dared not mention Diane's...
name; he dared not tell the story of his robbery in front of the Institut de Monnaie, since it would have evoked nothing but laughter, so incredible did it seem. Nor could his companions furnish adequate explanations of their whereabouts at the hour of the crime. The web of circumstantial evidence enmeshed them cruelly and mercilessly.

The prosecution had a thin but plausible case. Had not the diamonds stolen from Carrol and the weapon used been found under these desperadoes’ chairs? Were they not habitués of the notorious Café of the Dancing Duck, the rendezvous of the most calloused patrons of vice? Weren’t their alibis vague and unconvincing? While the prisoner Marat posed as a man of mystery, weren’t his companions in crime known burglars? He must be judged by the company he kept, the prosecutor had said.

It was small consolation, but consolation nevertheless, that Mimi and Chou Chou had been freed. They did establish alibis. Ravenel was touched by their loyalty to their fiancées. But their help was little, futile in the face of Fate.

The十二 jurors assembled in the box as twilight peered in through the dirty windows of the Seine Tribunal. The court requested the verdict. A seedy little old man, probably a grocer or a dairyman, arose and, after a slight cough, delivered the verdict:

*To be continued in the next issue.*

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**LAZY OL’ HOUND DAWG**

*By Willard E. Solenberg*

Lazy ol’ hound dawg lyin’ in the sun,
Jus’ like every hound dawg since the race begun;
Drowsin’ on the doorstep through the afternoon;
Nights, he goes sniffin’ and bayin’ at the moon.

Lazy ol’ hound dawg scratchin’ at the *fleas,*
Pausin’ now to listen to the buzzin’ of the bees,
Dreamin’ of a rabbit hoppin’ through the dusk,
Watchin’ for a chipmunk in a pile of husk.

Lazy ol’ hound dawg, sad as widder’s tears,
Snappin’ at a hossfly flittin’ round his ears;
Lookin’ kind of dismal, his head a-hangin’ low—
Mighty little happens that ol’ hound don’t know.
THE ADVERSE ARAB

By WILL BEALE

RECENTLY I discovered the Arab, the footloose, nationless individual of Asia and Africa. To me he's interesting—and significant. I see him emerging from darkest antiquity, approaching the speedway of modern civilization, regarding it haughtily—and turning away. His place in things? Wait.

Let me show him to you in one typical desert town, through one typical day. The town is of mud habitations annealed together in low, irregular masses like dirty honeycomb, silent, trafficless—lost. In these mud houses are no windows, no light, and little air. Smoke from the fire finds it way out the door. Furniture—none. Here, generally in one room, live the Arab and his family, including the ass and the mule.

Oddly, I first met the Arab himself at prayer. Wandering about in the saffron glow of sunset, we climbed to the roof of a dobe mosque to watch the stealing magic of color upon the desert. Suddenly from behind us on the roof came the strangest call ever heard—the voice of an old man, high pitched, resonant, intensely penetrating; the call to prayer: "Allah is the greatest. There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet. Come and pray. Come to salvation."

The silence that followed was intense. Across the roof, now, the muezzin faced us, head bent—blank. We gave him a few coins, he looked up, and lo, this man who had been crying faithfully the praises of his Creator was himself a beggar of the lowliest description, and—totally blind. Everything is all right. It is Allah.

Night. The street of the Ouled Nails, the dancing girls of the desert. Here, primitive, barbarous, unregenerate, the Arab let loose his emotions. To the mounting passion of shrilling pipe, the racing heartbeat of throbbling drum, his ancient love, the dance, came forth from the murk of the centuries—wild, beautiful, pathetic.

The next morning I got a glimpse of his law. The office of the prefect of police was jammed to suffocation with a passionate populace, and we joined the throng. The case was murder. An Arab, catching another stealing grain from his house, had driven his knife into the thief's throat and well nigh severed his head. The trial was a hot, painful turmoil of frenzy, passion, blood. The accused man was freed.

At noon, we marked a wedding that had lasted two days. Attendants bearing great trays of cous cous to the house of the bride, maidens in white robes, flowers, dancing, feasting, merriment.

In all this not one moment of work. Nor did any other day reveal much difference.

To the swift-moving progress of to-day the Arab brings his indolence, faith, habits, laws, and customs of the untold ages. The national ward of some of the most advanced civilizations, he yet scorns work, sanitation, and hygiene. He begs poetically, loafs superbly, and apparently dies in his rags, and poverty, with his half-blind eye, without having lived. He leaves behind him a little handful of stones scratched together from the rubble of the desert. And that is all.
HORSE-KETCHUM

By DANE COOLIDGE

The Story So Far:

A train of covered wagons stopped at a poisoned watering place in Death Valley. Men, women, children, and beasts drank, and perished. Only Randolph Morgan, and his wife and child, abstained. Embittered, he settled in the mountains. A myth sprang up about him, his daughter and his golden horses.

Years later, in Mormon Lake, Val Bodie, buyer of stolen stock, bought some gold ore from a crazy prospector, "Frying-pan George." A stranger, Johnny Lightfoot, also called Horse-Ketchum, rode up on a humpbacked horse. When he told how his beast had won a big race, Bodie offered to race his mare, Fly, against it. Horse-Ketchum put up a piece of Breyfogle ore, from a famous lost mine. He won. Bodie and his men tried unsuccessfully to grab the stakes. Frying-pan identified the ore as true Breyfogle, but said his own ore was also Breyfogle, and that he had found and staked the mine. He rode off; but Bodie ignored him and warned Horse-Ketchum not to search for the mine or the golden ghost horses of Night Water.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FORBIDDEN WATER HOLE.

FROM the top of a high butte on the Pahrump trail Horse-Ketchum, the trouble hunter, watched five far-away horsemen riding out toward Daylight Pass. And ahead of them, like a shadow on the face of the desert, he saw through his glasses two burros that plodded west, flogged on by a black-bearded man. The latter went down to Death Valley and the five horsemen suddenly leaped into a lope.

"Come on, Jack," said Horse-Ketchum; "I've got cards in this game. Maybe so we find the Breyfogle Mine."
“Nope—no findum,” grunted Captain Jack, his keen eyes still following the chase. “Frying-pan—she crazy. You think she ketchum mine? No good. Me trailum, long time.”

Lightfoot laughed at the badly mixed pronouns, but his eyes lighted up at the news.

“Oho!” he exclaimed. “So you’ve back-tracked George yourself, eh?”

“Long time, me trailum. She shoot like hell. No go to mine—turn back like fox. Every time Injun come—she shootum. Then long time me wait—see George going back. Two burros—plenty gold, like now.”

He stopped and chuckled, his strong teeth flashing white against the sunburned blackness of his skin.

“Me follow tracks back,” he said. “Findum hole—no gold! Frying-pan stealum gold, then buryum. Bimeby she come back, digum up, tell Bodie ketchum mine.”

“I see!” nodded Horse-Ketchum. “But where does he get this ore, then? Maybe you and me can steal a little, too.”

“No-o. No good,” returned Captain Jack soberly, rubbing a bullet mark on his neck. “More better ketchum horse.”

“What horse?” inquired Horse-Ketchum absently.


“In Death Valley?” demanded Horse-Ketchum eagerly. And the Shoshone nodded knowingly.

“Death Valley—upper end. Long time Val Bodie try ketchum.”

“Umm!” mumbled Lightfoot—or Horse-Ketchum—polishing his gun butt dubiously. “Aint you scared Mr. Bodie will kill us?”

“Maybeso we kill him,” suggested Captain Jack, his crafty eyes gleaming wickedly. “These Shoshonnie horse—no b’long Val Bodie. Death Valley, Shooshonnie country. This side them mountains, all Piute country—savvy? Other side, all belong Shooshonnie.”

“Yes, but how about that girl you stole from Eatum-up Jake? Bodie says the Shooshonnie will kill you.”


“No, by grab!” declared Horse-Ketchum. And suddenly Captain Jack smiled.

“You good man,” he said. “My friend. You no let nobody kill me, eh? All right—me brave man, big warrior. You come—me show you horse.”

“That’s a go!” exclaimed Horse-Ketchum, holding out his hand. And Captain Jack shook it briefly.

“Me show you good horse;” he stated. “Too good, these horse. Nobody can ketchum. Maybe so spirit horse—run fast.”

“Let ’em run,” boasted Lightfoot. “If I can’t ketch ’em with High Behind I’ll give you a hundred dollars!”

“Wano! Good!” laughed Captain Jack. “Me buy me nother squaw. These horse come nighttime. No likeum sun. You think you ketchum—moonlight?”


“Pretty horse!” praised Jack, rolling his eyes ecstatically. “Yeller horse—come play on dry lake. Me watchum long time—ride out—try ropum. No good—run fast, like that!” He clipped one hand across the other in the Indian sign for speed, and Horse-Ketchum jerked out his roll.

“Jack,” he said, “you put me and High Behind where we can get a straight run at them horses and I’ll give you two hundred dollars. I got plenty—two hundred dollars!”

“Good! Good!” agreed Captain Jack.
“Me buy me two squaw.” And he laughed as he brought up Johnny Lightfoot’s horse.

“You see moon?” Jack asked, pointing up at a pale crescent in the sky. “Bimeby come down there, get big. Come full moon, me show you horse.”

“All right, then,” replied Lightfoot. “Where you want to go now, Jack? Maybe so Val Bodie kill me.”


“Yes, good enough,” agreed Horse-Ketchum. And as he fell in behind he looked back at Mormon Lake and laughed.

The moon, which was on the wane, rose later and later, to float pale and wan through the sky; until at last it hung at dusk, crystal clear in the west—a new moon that grew and grew. The next evening it hung higher, an hour above the horizon; and so, night by night, until it rose in the east, huge and yellow in the last rays of the sun.

For two weeks and more they had wandered through desert ranges, losing their tracks on the beds of dry lakes. But as the moon soared high, turning the color of gold, Captain Jack swung back into the north. Traveling trails that only his people knew, he headed toward the valley of Timbooshah, and Horse-Ketchum found himself lost. Mountains rose where he expected valleys until at last, mounting a divide, he sensed the great abyss.

They stood at Daylight Pass, and below them, lost in moonlight. Death Valley seemed to shimmer and breathe. It lay before them, that mighty chasm where the earth had been rent and then half healed of its wound. A warm wind came to meet them as they descended into the depths, until suddenly at a black point the great sink appeared, its salt marshes gleaming in the moonlight. But the Indian had wrapped himself in the mantle of silence, and Horse-Ketchum held his peace.

They had entered unawares into an enemy country, where every man’s hand was against them. Wandering Piute or vengeful Shoshone or the Night Riders of Val Bodie would alike take up their trail. And when, on the floor of the valley, they encountered the first sand hills, Captain Jack lost his tracks in the dunes. Then, as the mountains to the west cast their moon shadow upon them, he turned and rode to the north.

Rocky washes and wide expanses of salt meadow, where the crusted earth listened with alkali, crossed their path. Then huge sand hills, studded with mesquite trees, rose up from the gathering darkness, and they struggled through a chaos of dunes. The moon had sunk from sight behind the ramparts of the Panamints; and in the east, above mountains that rose like a wall, there glowed the first light of dawn. They came out on a dry lake bed and before them, like fleeting shadows, strange creatures wheeled and fled into the night.

“Tóóghahboth!” muttered the Indian as he reined in his horse. And for a long time they listened in silence to the patter of retreating hoofs. Then, down the wind, there came a loud whistling snort and Horse-Hetchum’s heart leaped with joy. Unseen by friend or foe he had reached forbidden Night Water, and the golden horses were there.

CHAPTER VII.

INDIAN DEVILS—AND GHOSTS.

At dawn, while their horses drank deep at the water hole, Captain Jack circled the spring, his head low like a hunting dog as he read the story written in the sand. Like a guiding automaton his forefinger swung here and there, lingering briefly as he studied out each track—until at last it came to a stop. Daintily stamped in the wet soil was
the footprint of a horse, round and firm
and exquisitely formed.
"Yeller horse!" he explained, as
Horse-Ketchum came, and then he
pointed again. Half trampled by other
tracks but stabbed deep into the dirt
was the mark of an iron-shod hoof.
"Val Bodie!" he pronounced, and
Horse-Ketchum nodded. His enemy
had been there, and gone.
"This bad place," observed Jack un-
easily. "Injun devil watchum, too. She
live up there, on mountain. Callum
Emipi Kai—my people."
He fixed his beady eyes on the forbid-
ing cliffs of Devil Mountain, and for
a long time scanned them intently. Then
he drew back closer behind the shelter
of the trees and hastened to lead the ani-
mals out of sight. He bored deeper
into the thicket of thorny mesquites that
flanked the dry lake bed on the west,
and when all were safely hidden he
crept to a brushy hillock and once more
gazed up at the cliffs.
They rose like the battlements of
some medieval castle, their striated
walls painted black and iron-red, or
flecked with strange yellows and
chromes. And behind them, deep in
shadow, Horse-Ketchum could see a
canyon, cut out of the mountain's heart.
Only the gash of a narrow gateway
made its presence believable, and the
wide, sluicing flow of the sand wash,
where cloud-bursts had belched forth
their waste. It was a place easily peo-
dled by the savage imagination with
demons which rushed forth to kill.
"Injun devil live up there," croaked
Captain Jack at last. "We no lightum
fire—she come down—maybe killum.
Long time ago killum plenty Sho-
shoonies. My people no come here no
more."
"What look like, this devil?" inquired
Horse-Ketchum indulgently as he
trained his powerful glasses on the cliff.
"And say, Jack, where are all those
horses?"

"All gone," responded the Indian
solemnly. "Maybeo moon takum.
Yeller horse only come at night. One
time me hide here—see spirit-woman
ride horse. Me think he drivum away."
"Maybeo," agreed Horse-Ketchum.
"Injuns see lots of spirits, eh? You
ever see this devil-man, Jack?"
"Me seeum!" asserted Captain Jack
positively. "Tall man, long hair. Long
whiskers, all white. She see us, she
come down—killum. You look long
time, topside big canyon mouth. May-
beso you seeum, too."
Lightfoot shifted his glasses to the
crags above the gateway; but the great
shelves and benches were empty and
lifeless, without even a mountain sheep.
There was not a tree or bush from the
summit of the mountain to the base of
the sun-blackened cliffs. All was bar-
ren, deserted; and yet as he gazed he,
too, peopled the mountain with ghosts.
From the shadow of a rock something
rose up and slipped away—perhaps a
man or a sheep or a light specter caused
by heat, which was making the desert
bushes dance.
The sun was over the peaks, pulling
them out into strange shapes, distort-
ing the broad valley which lay to the
south until it shimmered in the sem-
blance of a lake. As the sand absorbed
its rays the mesquite trees seemed to
rise, as if floating away into space.
Their gnarly tops were pulled up high—
the mirage made them islands and their
trunks became long, trembly stems.
Horse-Ketchum crawled up again when
the sun was smiting hot and trained his
glasses on the demon-haunted crags; but
only an Indian's eyes could see the man-
devil, gazing out over his desert domain.
In the breathless silence of midday
the valley lay sleeping beneath its blan-
ket of palpitating heat; but as the sun
touched the peaks a wind came steal-
ing in, stirring the tops of the limp
trees. Far away across the flats,
where they had been grazing on the
saccaton, a line of wild burros headed back toward the water hole, plodding slowly as if in a muse. But not a horse was in sight and Horse-Ketchum became restless, for he did not believe in ghosts.

If the golden horses of Toóghaboh cou...
ing behind, stood out straight as tufted arrows. They came galloping, fleet as the wind.

Yet some instinct had taught them to avoid the crescent of trees that surrounded the lake and spring, and as he set himself to go Horse-Ketchum felt misgivings. For the first time he doubted High Behind's speed. Fastest of all wild horses at Sundown Lake, faster even than the thoroughbred Fly, there was something about the action of these swift, dashing mustangs that told Lightfoot his steed would fail. The horse band went thundering past him, their manes and tails like wind-tossed plumes; and he drew back, swearing, to wait.

In the open by the water hole the circling mustangs came to a halt while a beautiful mare, their leader, stepped out from the rest. Lightfoot counted seven more. Eight horses, so clean and perfect that each seemed a replica—and all yellow as gold in the moonlight. She advanced, sniffing the air, turning her head to right and left as if she sensed the hidden horsemen in the brush. But no one dashed out and she stepped down into the trench, bowing her head to the water in the depths.

The others crowded closer, eager to slake their all-day thirst but uneasy within the circle of the trees. Horse-Ketchum made a balk to charge out among them, but thought better of it while yet there was time. Once filled up with water their speed would be cut down by enough, perhaps, to make one his prey. But even when the stallion ventured down into the pit Horse-Ketchum did not shake out his rope. Now, while that proud head was hidden, was the time to make his charge, to stampede the herd and capture the leader himself. But Horse-Ketchum had lost his nerve. Something told him that to start was to fail, and he let the golden moment pass.

The stallion backed out swiftly, throwing his head into the air; then in a senseless stampede, playing and snapping as they ran, they sped out across the lake bed. Far off to the east they galloped, and Lightfoot thought they were lost until suddenly he heard their swift feet returning. Yet now there was a difference, coming subtly to his ear that was trained to measure such cadences—it seemed as if one of them was ridden.

They loomed up, dim and ghostly in the moonlight, which veiled them with a soft, effulgent glow; and now, a solid troop, they thundered by like charging soldiers and Horse-Ketchum saw the leader wheel and guide. Then as they swung in behind him Lightfoot beheld a woman's form, leaning forward along his neck as she rode. Her hair mingled with his mane, her body seemed part of his; until suddenly she rose up, revealing a face white and ghostly, and golden hair that flowed out behind. Then in a clatter of hoofbeats she was gone.

Horse-Ketchum rubbed his eyes and stared up at the moon, but the memory of that girl face remained. Then again the hoofbeats came and he gazed out, incredulously, for the ghost woman was riding, straight up. She rode bareback, graceful and slender, on a mare that caracoled as gently as any in a circus; and as the stallion came rushing past she leaped lightly upon his back, seizing his mane with a swift, triumphant swing. They were off in a galloping circle, leaving the others far behind, and like a man in a dream Horse-Ketchum watched their prankish play.

But now, running beside her, were two silver-gray foxes, the black tips of their tails whipping about in the wind as they glided, unseen, over the ground. Except for their black tips they were gray shadows on a gray lake bed; but as they dashed into the lead they leaped up at the stallion's head, like dogs inviting their master to play.
Horse-Ketchum sat rigid, his useless rope still in his hand, and let the shadowy racers dart by. Here were horses, his eyes told him—the finest in the world—and a woman, more beautiful than he had dreamed. But whence came these foxes, to run and play at the stallion’s head? And where had they suddenly gone? He strained his eyes, to pierce the darkness, which no moonlight could quite dispel; and in the distance, moving together, he saw them gallop away until suddenly the night swallowed them up. With a curse he hurled his coil of rope to the ground and turned to find Captain Jack, beside him.

“Somebody come!” Jack stated stolidly, pointing off to the south. And Horse-Ketchum came back to earth. While he, in a sort of dream, had watched the horses on the lake, Captain Jack, ever vigilant, had been searching the night for enemies—for at Night Water no man was their friend.

They took cover, and a single horseman came trotting out on the playas, as if driving the golden horses into a trap. And suddenly, from the east, a loud yell rent the air and in a stampede the horse herd came back. They were running wildly now, straight out across the lake bed where nothing could impede their flight; and behind them in a half circle shadowy riders appeared, whirring and spurring to cut them off. The lone rider had checked his steed and as Horse-Ketchum crouched, staring, Captain Jack spoke hoarsely in his ear.

“Val Bodie!” he said. “Ridum Fly horse.” And even as he spoke Bodie charged. Like an arrow the high-bred mare shot out across the lake bed; while Bodie, big and burly, shook a loop out of his rope, leaning forward to make his throw. But the mustangs had seen him coming—they swerved sharply to the south, and in a wild clatter of hoofs they raced off through the night, leaving Bodie and his thoroughbred behind.

Horse-Ketchum laughed shortly as he witnessed his rival’s defeat. Then Captain Jack took command.

“No ketchum,” he said. “We go.” And Horse-Ketchum turned reluctantly away.

“All right, Jack,” he answered. “But bimeby we come back. And then I’ll ketch me—one horse.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE HORSE.

When the moon, yellow as gold, sank down in the west and the sun topped the mountains to the east, Horse-Ketchum, still riding, gazed back into the valley where the horses of Toogah both ran. Val Bodie on his thoroughbred had been left at the start—the horse did not live that could match the golden animals—and yet as Horse-Ketchum gazed he muttered again:

“Some day I’ll ketch me—one horse.” Would it be the regal stallion that the moon girl had seemed to ride, with a mane as yellow as her hair? Or the mare who led the race, when the cowboys came charging in and they fled in a wild stampede? Or the filly, as free as air, which had kept its mother’s pace, its head and tail lined out straight? There were speed and grace and beauty—but every one possessed them. They were perfect—the finest horses in the world!

Horse-Ketchum’s mount was tiring, but Captain Jack spurred on, his dark face grim and set. The pack mules jerked their heads and lagged as they broke their trot, but the Indian lashed them ruthlessly on. He did not look back, for he knew they would be followed as soon as daylight revealed their tracks. Val Bodie had promised to send them both to hell, and his Night Riders would try to make good.

At noon, from the black peak that guarded a hot spring, they saw the dust POP—9A
of the distant pursuit, and Captain Jack lightened his packs. Horse-Ketchum changed to High Behind and they turned off up a side canyon that led to the high plains beyond. All day, without pursuers, they fled on to the east; crossing the Grapevine Mountains and still pressing on until they came to a small, dry lake.

"Me foolum," promised Jack, riding out on its polished surface. And after losing his tracks in circles he turned to the south, doubling back toward Mormon Lake. Not till daylight, if then, would the weary avengers find the clev-erly hid trail they had made. And by then more dry lake beds would conceal their bold flight, straight back into the lion's den. Only when a pack mule quit and lay down beneath the lash did the Shoshone seek shelter and camp.

All day they lay in hiding, and the next night, beneath the moon, they circled until they passed Mormon Lake. Then, tirelessly, night after night, Captain Jack lost his trail and rode on, to lose it again.

"Me foolum," he said, grinning, and Horse-Ketchum nodded. And so the moon waxed, and waned. But as it soared once more toward its throne in the east, whence soon it would emerge, a full moon, and as it lighted up the dry lakes with unearthly splendor, Horse-Ketchum returned to his dream. On the playa of Toóghaboth he saw the horses of the moon, trooping in to slake their thirst at the spring. He saw the stallion, his head erect, his golden mane gleaming, circling the flat while he whis-tled his alarm. And then the mare, her slender legs all set to wheel and run, walked in on the pawed-out hole.

He saw them drink and scamper away, rejoicing in their speed, challeng-ing the horse hunters to do their worst. And behind them, on his thoroughbred, the fat and burly Bodie, laying the rope across Fly's rump in sheer chagrin. He was a rough man, a hard man, and he had those in his gang who would not hesitate to kill if they could. But he was only a man, and the golden horses of Night Water belonged to the first one who came. They were wild horses, free to roam over the limitless sink, free to drink at twenty hidden springs; and the first man who could ride up on them and snare one with his rope could hold him against the world.

"Jack," announced Horse-Ketchum, as he watched the half moon rise, "I want to go back—ketchum horse."

"Huh!" grunted the Indian. "Val Bodie—she kill you. How much you give me, I go?"

"How much you want?" countered the other eagerly.

But Captain Jack would not say. "You afraid?" demanded Horse-Ketchum at last.

"No! No 'fraid nothing!" answered Jack valiantly. "You give me five hundred dollars—me go."

"Five hundred!" cried Lightfoot, not to yield too quick. "That's a whole lot of money. Jack. Don't you know it's against the law for an Injun to get rich? What the hell do you want with all that?"

"Buyum wife!" responded Captain Jack promptly. But Horse-Ketchum shook his head.

"Ump-umm!" he protested. "We've got troubles enough, already. Who'll help me ketch horses if you buy a wife? All the time, you stay at home."

"Nope-five hundred dollars!" repeated the Indian expectantly, and Horse-Ketchum slapped him on the back.

"Say, who is this lady?" he bantered. "Another girl of Eatum-up Jacke's?"

"No! Good woman!" stated Jack. "Maybeo Plute girl. You give me five hundred—me go."

"And you don't give a damn whether Bodie gets you or not, eh? All right, Jack, come on. It's a go!"

Captain Jack turned his horse and
headed north by the stars, and three nights later they rode into Night Water, where a horse trap had been built, and torn down. Only the solid posts remained, set deep around the trench where the mustangs went down to drink. Horse-Ketchum and his Indian dismounted in the moonlight and sought long for human footprints. Val Bodie had built the fence and swung the huge gate—but who had torn it down?

"No way!" pronounced Captain Jack, slapping his leg emphatically. And instinctively he raised his eyes to where, black and menacing, Devil Mountain towered above them like a wall. "No good!" he said again. "Yeller horse all go 'way. Maybeso, devil-man come here!"

"Maybeso," agreed Horse-Ketchum. "Where you think horses go? You don't reckon Val Bodie caught 'em?"

"Nope! No ketchum!" decided Jack. "'Nother spring—over here." And he pointed toward the west.

They filed out across the flats, where the self-rising ground had puffed up and formed a hard crust, until at last a broader trail led them to a hidden hole, where the burros had pawed out fresh dirt.

"Yeller horse!" exclaimed the Indian, pointing eagerly to a track; and once more Lightfoot saw the round, dainty hoof marks, newly made in the trampled earth. But this water hole lay in the open, amid hummocks of coarse grass; and surrounded by miles of the treacherous self-rising ground, where in a chase the best of horses might fail.

"We'll shirt-tail it!" he decided. And, hanging rags on stakes and strings, they went back to Night Water, to lie in wait when the wild horses came in. For the same fear which had driven them to abandon their old watering place would now send them back to Toögahboth. A rag fluttering in the wind, the suspicious line of white string, carelessly stretched to surround the water hole, would conjure up visions of horse hunters in hiding—and the fence around Night Water was old.

Many times, since it had been set and then torn down to the bare stakes, the golden horses must have circled it while the stallion snorted and whistled and the lead mare snuffed from afar. But now, driven by thirst, they would come back more eagerly. Horse-Ketchum left the water hole undisturbed.

All that day, making no smoke, they lay hid among the mesquite trees, where their animals could browse and eat. But, though he waited for two whole nights, while the moon approached its full, only burros returned to the spring.

Captain Jack, torn with fear of the Indian devil of Enüpi Kai—whom he considered the protector of the horses—and yet resolute to win his five hundred dollars, lay hidden day and night on the summit of a huge hummock, where the sand had buried a mesquite tree to its tips. Crouched down behind the brush, he watched the cliffs with staring eyes, turning his head again and again to search the desert to the south for signs of Val Bodie and his band. There was danger on every side, but Horse-Ketchum would not give up. And that night the moon would be full.

"What's the matter, Jack?" he asked as they saddled up at sundown. "Don't you know some other place where maybe these horses drink? You think, now—some other spring!"

"Maybeso Hole-in-Rock," responded Captain Jack at last. "Me go up there to-night—putum rock over hole. Then horse come down here—you ketchum."

"Why, sure!" agreed Johnny. "Why the hell didn't you say so, instead of waiting around for three days?"

"Me no likum Hole-in-Rock," explained Jack. "Val Bodie ketch me there—she kill me."

"I see," nodded Lightfoot. "Well, don't let him ketch you, then. But you run those horses down here, where I
can get one more chance at them, and I'll give you your money. You can go."
  "You gimme five hundred dollars?" demanded Captain Jack eagerly. And Horse-Ketchum nodded grimly.
  "You bet ye," he assented. "But you find them horses, savvy? This is getting kinder spooky, and first thing we know Val Bodie is liable to drop in on us. Have you seen that old devil-man to-day?"
  "Me seeum!" stated the Indian briefly. "You look out. Maybe she kill you."
  "Ye-es, she'll play hell—killing me!" scoffed Johnny. "I'll just plug Mister Injun-devil, right where his suspenders cross, if he tries any rough work with me."
  "You look out!" warned Captain Jack, swinging up into his saddle. "Tonight full moon—Injun devil makeum medicine. Maybe she Val Bodie makeum, too."
  "I'll make a little, myself, then," promised Horse-Ketchum. And he slapped the worn holster of his gun.

As the sun sank in the west a great light appeared, as if, behind the mountains to the east, the world itself was afire. The sky was lit up with a red-and-yellow glow, until at last over Devil Mountain, like a ball of enameled gold, the moon rose up, majestically. Every crater on its surface seemed to stand out like a pit hole, its huge ranges cast broad shadows across the plains; and the sun, scarcely hidden behind the rim of the world, made its sister of the night gleam like day.

Horse-Ketchum cinched up High Behind and took his post behind a tree; but his eyes, which at first were wary and intent, soon grew big with the wonder of the scene. Devil Mountain rose before him, its canyons deep and black, its high cliffs etched with lines of silvery light. And on the playa of the dry lake mystic figures appeared as the wild burros paced in toward the spring. In the moonlight their runty bodies were transformed to ghostly horses, their huge ears to crested manes; and, running dimly among them, he seemed to see silvery foxes that leaped up to kiss their noses as they passed.

It was the old moon madness coming back. But when the burros stumped past him to gather about the water hole, he laughed and shook out his rope. Let Jack see Indian devils, and maidens who rode by night on the backs of golden steeds—all he believed was what he saw and not half of that. But this time there would be no delays. When the golden horses came he would ride out and make his throw. He would tie to the phantom stallion and let his rope be the judge—if it passed through the horse, then all was a dream.

Scuffling and braying in clownish abandon the burros drifted off, to graze on the coarse saccaton; and, keeping his long vigil, Horse-Ketchum dozed. He was fetched up standing by a shrill neigh from High Behind, a neigh that rose, eager and piercing, and ended in a snort as Johnny laid a hand on his nose.

All was silent then, and the broad, white lake bed brought back no answer to his call; but in a tremble of excitement Lightfoot tightened his cinch and whipped the kinks out of his rope. Then he listened, and at last down the wind there came a whistle that he knew. The golden stallion had returned!

Across the playa something moved, something that seemed to glide on air; but Horse-Ketchum knew it was a band of wild horses, circling about before they came in to drink. They were tired, for they traveled at a walk. Weary miles lay behind them if they came from the spring where Jack had covered the hole with a stone. They were thirsty, and they broke into a trot.

Down the wind from the water hole, behind a barricade of sand drifted up against the body of a tree, Horse-
Ketchum stood watching in the blackest shade, twisting the hackamore on High Behind’s nose. Man and horse were trembling now in anticipation of the chase, but Lightfoot’s nerves were calm. He felt none of the indecision which had come over him before and held him back from the start—and yet he bided his time.

Weary and gaunted though they were, the golden horses could still outrun him. He waited until the mare, stepping forward out of the band, went down into the trench to drink. Then he mounted silently, though the stallion snuffed the wind, holding back while his manada went in.

With heavy sighs, one by one, they backed out of the trench and stood, drooping, while the others went down—yet Horse-Ketchum withheld his hand. The golden stallion still stood guard, shying suspiciously at the circle of posts which had been set when Bodie made his trap. And of all these glorious horses he was the noblest by far. Horse-Ketchum waited—for him.

Snuffing the wind, snuffing the sand with its faint human taint, his head pivoting as he scanned the shadowy trees, he entered at last into the circle of deepset stakes and glided down the incline to drink. Horse-Ketchum shook his rope out, his lips murmuring a sort of prayer as the last slow seconds passed. He felt exalted, almost religious, raised above his common self by the thought of what lay before him. One careful, measured rush—a flip of the rope—and the golden stallion was his! The most beautiful horse in the world!

He rode out slowly, hanging low behind his horse, and for a moment the mustangs were deceived. They stood staring, their heads erect, their nostrils quivering in frightened snorts, and Horse-Ketchum threw in the spurs. But though High Behind leaped forward in a series of mighty strides the wild horses galloped away—beyond the sweep of the rope, spurning the earth in a drumming stampede. Only the stallion, head down in the narrow trench, was left behind in the flight.

At the sudden rush of feet he backed out with a whistling snort. His wind-swept mane seemed to bristle as he faced the charging horseman. Then he whirled and dodged out between the posts of the half-wrecked trap, every muscle in furious action. The ground trembled beneath the impact of his racing feet, but High Behind was upon him, charging down in full stride, and Horse-Ketchum shook out his loop.

The reata whistled in swift circles as he poised for the throw. Then as the stallion straightened out into his swift, resistless pace Horse-Ketchum shot out his rope. They were running like the wind but the plaited rawhide went straight and true. The long loop hovered and spread, and settled around his neck. The golden stallion was snared! Horse-Ketchum took his dally and set High Behind up, leaning back to hold his saddle against the jerk. Then the stallion hit the rope and went tumbling, heels over head, and Horse-Ketchum took up his slack.

CHAPTER IX.
A PRESENT FOR BODIE.

LIKE a man who feels the tug of an enormous, fighting trout, which he has angled for long in some pool, and sits back, playing him warily, so Horse-Ketchum, the mustanger, thrilled all over at the jerk and gave the golden stallion more rope. But the animal did not run against the slack, to hurl himself once more, thrown and sprawling across the smooth sands. Somewhere before he had felt the bite of rope and he came at his captor, charging.

Horse-Ketchum threw off his turns and reined quickly aside, holding his coiled rope high for a flip. Then as the
stallion wheeled and reared, his forefeet raised to strike, a loop came spinning down the rope. It encircled the poised feet like the writhing of a snake and the stallion fell heavily to the ground. Another loop followed, drawing the forefeet close together, and Horse-Ketchum stepped down from his horse.

In his hand he held a *jaquima*, the rawhide hackamore of the horse breaker—a heavy nose piece of plaited thongs, rigged with ropes to form a halter which when pulled would cut off the breath. Waving his hat at High Behind to make him keep the reata taut, Johnny went down the rope to where the stallion had fallen and jumped straddling on his neck. Over his nose with a practiced jerk he slipped the breaking-halter and adjusted it behind his ears. Then, with two ropes instead of one, he swung up on his mount and flipped off the binding loops.

The stallion came up snorting and Horse-Ketchum leaned back to meet the shock of another jerk. But somewhere this wild horse had learned the lesson of the rope, for now he did not run. He shook his head and looked around, every muscle atremble; then, facing the east, he neighed, long and shrill. But his *manada* did not respond. They had fled into the night—he was alone.

Horse-Ketchum rose up closer, pulling gently on his hackamore, and suddenly the wild mustang was tame. He yielded to the tug before the cruel *bosal* closed down against his sensitive nose, and when Lightfoot reined away he followed after his captor obediently, yet always with his eyes to the east. Again and again, like a quavering cry for help, he let out his piercing neigh; until at last, from the night, there came a distant answer, clear and high—the call of his mate.

Lightfoot leaned back and watched him, taking in with admiring eyes every line of his beautiful prize—the small, sensitive ears, the full eyes, the flaring nostrils, the proud set to his head as he neighed. Every part of him seemed perfect, for endurance or speed—the straight back, the slender legs, the heavy muscles of shoulder and hip. He had all the points of a thoroughbred, and yet Death Valley was his home. Johnny spoke to him, softly, but now the stallion had turned and was gazing away to the south.

High Behind switched his ears and listened intently, his sensitive nose testing out the wind. Then he, too, gave a neigh; and soon across the lake Captain Jack rode up to them, laughing.

“Ketchum horse, hey?” he cried as he paused to survey the prize. “Me findum track at spring—put big rock on hole. Bimeby horse come—me drive-em.”

“Well, bully for you, Jack!” exclaimed Horse-Ketchum exultantly. And, whipping forth his pocketbook, he counted out five hundred dollars into the Indian’s expectant hands.

“Now,” he went on, “let’s get out of this country. Listen to that!” And the stallion neighed again.

“No wana!" warned Captain Jack. “You pullum rope—makeum stop. Injun devil, she come here, sure.”

“Val Bodie’s the only devil that I’m afraid of,” answered Horse-Ketchum. “What’s the quickest way out—straight north?”

“Go Hole-in-Rock,” responded Jack. “Ketchum water—hide all day. This horse, she fight like hell.”

“No. No fight!” declared Johnny. “Look here, how he leads.” And he started slowly off across the dry lake bed.

“Too good, that horse,” observed Captain Jack cynically. “You look out; maybeso she kill you.”

“Kill me—nothing!” retorted Horse-Ketchum. “He’s gentle, I tell you. Somebodi else has caught him, before.”

“Maybeso somebody else ketch us,”
grumbled the Indian. And he loped off to pack up the mules.

They pulled out on the run, the golden stallion following free as they rode away across the dry lake; but when they turned into the trail that led east to Hole-in-the-Rock he set back and fought the rope.

"Yeah—she tame!" jeered Captain Jack, riding warily in behind him. And as Horse-Ketchum reined his mount to keep clear of the thrashing slack Jack laid his quirt across the stallion's rump. The horse jumped forward, striving purposely to entangle his captor. Then with teeth bare and gleaming he charged back at the Indian, who promptly took to the brush.

"Leave him alone!" ordered Horse-Ketchum, after the flurry was over. And, setting back gently on the hackamore, he cut off the stallion's breath. Three times he pulled and slackened, and then with a great sigh the golden horse accepted his fate. At the tug of the rope he followed along obediently, but at every turn and corner he looked back. Up the smooth, hard stream bed, laid down by some cloud-burst, they swung along at a rapid trot—past the Breyfogle Buttes, past the looming point of rocks and into the dark canyon beyond.

Hole-in-the-Rock lay before them, with its dim trail up to the spring; when suddenly, out of the darkness, they rode forth into bright moonlight, and with a snort the stallion began to buck. Out of the corner of his eye Horse-Ketchum saw the pack mules, fleeing madly back down the gulch. He glimpsed Jack, whipping after them—and other forms that meant nothing as he clung to the saddle and rope.

High Behind was jumping in circles to keep the slack from under his heels, and Johnny was playing the bounding stallion like a fish, when from the blur of movement about him a rawhide rope came slap! and his arms were pinned to his sides. Another loop roped the stallion—they came pelting in like rain, and he found himself jerked to the ground. Then as his head ceased to spin he saw horsemen all about him, and Val Bodie looking down at him, laughing.

"I got ye, eh?" he taunted, swinging down from his horse and snatching Johnny's gun from its holster. "Red-handed, by grab! But I'll have to admit it—you're the most accommodating and obliging son of a goat that I've met with in many a day. You not only ketch my horse but you bring him right to me!" And he leaned back, shaking with laughter.

"And he got the stud, too!" shouted Hank Boots triumphantly. "The best danged horse in the band. If that ain't being clever, what is?"

"One good turn deserves another," chuckled Bodie. "Just for that, boys, we'll let him live. Turn him loose, to rustle. Maybe next time we ketch him he'll have us another fine horse." He glanced across admiringly at the stallion.

As Horse-Ketchum felt the sting of their laughter he fought against the ropes, cursing furiously. After all his hard riding, his weeks of danger and toil, he had ridden into the hands of his enemy. But he would not give up the horse.

"You leave him alone!" he shouted. "I caught him, and, by the gods, he's mine! You steal that horse and I'll come and steal him back. He's mine, I say—he's mine!"

"That'll do, now," warned Bodie, jabbing a gun against his ribs. "It's no trouble at all to throw a rope around your neck and drag you to death over the rocks. That's what I intended to do when I rode down to the spring and found where you'd covered up the water. That's a crime, out on this desert—the worst crime of all. But nobody can say that Val Bodie ain't generous—"
and young man, you've sure done me a good turn. With this stud here for bait I can build me another trap and ketch every mare in that band.

"Now think this matter over and don't speak too hastily; don't say anything that you're liable to regret. Didn't I understand you to say you was bringing me back this horse, being as I told you, once before, he was mine?"

He put up his pistol and dropped a loop over Lightfoot's head, and Horse-Ketchum saw he was whipped.

"Well—take him," he answered sullenly.

"I'll do that," responded Bodie, "and thankee kindly, stranger. You're not such a fool as I thought. I was going to strip you clean and turn you loose on the desert with your hands tied behind you, barefoot. Now there's another little thing that I'd kinder like to have—as a memento, you might say, of our meeting. Something to remind me of you, when you're gone. You mentioned one time a piece of rock you had. I'd like that Breyfogle ore."

"What is this?" demanded Johnny, "A holdup? Are you going to steal everything I've got?"

"No, not if you're reasonable," answered Bodie. "All I want is that piece of rock."

"And if I give it to you," bargained Lightfoot, "will you let me have my horse, to get out of this cursed country?"

"You can have Old Humpback," replied Bodie, scornfully. "Only be damned sure you keep a-going. Don't let me ketch you back again, mixing up in my affairs and trying to find my mine. Because if I do I'll beef you, for a certainty."

"Take these ropes off," ordered Horse-Ketchum fretfully. And when his hands were freed he fetched out the precious specimen and handed it over to Bodie.

"Well and good," observed the saloon keeper, looking it over by moonlight and thrusting it into his pocket. "Now I'll just take your gun and pistol, so there won't be no argument about it. And yonder, up the canyon, is your road."

He flipped off the last reata and Horse-Ketchum took the road. But at the turn of the canyon he stopped. He was unarmed, but he was free; and somewhere in the hills Captain Jack would be watching for his smoke. Val Bodie had twenty men and they were only two, but Horse-Ketchum had gazed upon the beauty of the moon horses and he reined High Behind back into the Valley of Death.

CHAPTER X.

THE HORSE TRAP.

On the south flank of Breyfogle Butte, as the moon sank low, a fire flared up and died down suddenly, then leaped up with a fiercer glow. It winked out and blazed forth again for as long as a desert greasewood could give off its feeble flame; and at last, far down on the floor of Death Valley, an answering signal shot up. Two fires, side by side, and Horse-Ketchum knew that his faithful Indian had seen.

An hour later they came together in a rocky wash, Captain Jack hanging back and sending his pack animals ahead, for fear of another trap. He stepped out of a black shadow when he heard his master's voice, but his old confidence was gone and he hung his head in silence, as if expecting a just rebuke. For at the first sign of danger he had whirled and fled as if the devil of the mountain was after him.

"Well, Jack," spoke up Lightfoot, "I reckon here's where you and I part. Val Bodie took my horse and I'm going back after him. All I want is some grub—and your gun."

"My gun!" repeated the Indian. "What for?"

"Never mind," answered Lightfoot.
“Val Bodie took mine—and this one is no good to you, nohow. You take the outfit and wait for me at Pahrmump. Hurry up and open that pack!”

He stuffed a flour sack with jerked meat and a little bread and coffee, then fished out his spare pistol from the bottom of a kyack and strapped it around his waist.

“Where you go now?” demanded Captain Jack gruffly. “Maybe Val Bodie kill you.”

“Well, he’ll never get you,” rejoined Johnny sarcastically. “So come ahead—gimme that gun. All you need is a pair of spurs when it comes to a fight. You’re brave as hell—aин’t you, Jack?”

“What for me git killed?” demanded Captain Jack indignantly. “Me seeum plenty men, all ride up at once. Me see horse buck; no can leadam away.”

“Nope—I lost him,” agreed Lightfoot. “But the show ain’t over yet. Only I can’t whip twenty men with one old six-shooter. So what about that one of yours?”

Captain Jack fingered ruefully the butt of his precious pistol, the symbol of his warrior’s estate. But he had not made good on his oft-repeated boasts, and at last he unbuckled his belt.

“You takeum,” he said. “Me wait for you—Pahrmump. Maybe Val me no see you again.”

“Don’t you worry,” responded Horse-Ketchum grimly. “You’ve got five hundred dollars and all the time in the world. Now you stay there, savvy, until I come.”

“All right,” agreed Captain Jack, and turned the mules back into the hills, to make a dry camp for the day.

Horse-Ketchum rode back north, straight for the Breyfogle Buttes, and at daylight he crept out on a point and trained his glasses on Night Water. There were men there, cutting mesquite poles and setting posts around the spring, where their water trap had been destroyed. And, tied to a heavy stake for his mates to see, if they returned, the golden stallion stood drooping.

Johnny muttered to himself and scanned the desert floor, where in great reaches of gravel and broad, alkali-whitened flats Lost Valley stretched away into the haze. Here and there on the wide expanse he spied burros in twos and threes, grazing on salt grass or browsing on mesquite tips; but nowhere within the sweep of his field glasses could he pick up the golden herd.

They had fled to some canyon in the distant mountains or quit the country for good; but all through the day Val Bodie’s men worked on, until their horse pen and trap were complete. Then as evening approached they mounted and rode away, leaving the stallion to fret at his stake. Nothing stirred in the thickets of trees that lined the edge of the dry lake, and the horsemen rode back the way they came; but Horse-Ketchum had counted them—and he knew Bodie’s horse. There were six men hiding by the trap.

Night came and he crept back to where High Behind was hid and rode down to an alkali spring, but as the moon came up he moved in toward his magnet—the horse he had won, and lost. So brief had been the time of his joyous possession, so urgent the necessity to escape, that he had never laid a hand on that glorious head and neck, except to fasten a rope. Fighting his head and pulling back, the golden stallion had done his best to escape his inevitable fate. And then, while the battle for supremacy still raged, Val Bodie had captured them both.

Not once had Horse-Ketchum stroked his velvety nose or brushed back the flowing mane. It was a fight, from the start, but even while they struggled his heart had gone out to his prize. The stallion fought with a courage that knew no defeat; yielding only to hide his time for another, more reckless break to gain the freedom he loved. Yet now he
stood, anchored fast to a stake, to serve as a lure for his mates.

From the far end of the dry lake Lightfoot edged in toward him, keeping back under cover of the brush. He had circled Night Water, to come in against the wind, which was blowing up strong from the south. The air was full of sand and out across the playa dead sticks and wisps of grass went flying past. It was a good night for a task as desperate as his, for every limb and bush was on the move. Even the moon was half obscured by the smudge of rolling dust.

He crept up till he saw the stallion. A massive snubbing post had been set before the spring; and, half hidden by brush, two wings had been constructed, leading into a pen behind. Then the builders had ridden away, leaving the stallion for a lure. And somewhere among the trees lurked the mustangers. Horse-Ketchum came on warily, his eyes on the thrashing branches that masked every movement behind. At any moment from that thicket Val Bodie might charge out at him, and then the best he could hope for was a running fight, with High Behind out in front.

He was a horse that had no equal among the mounts of the Night Riders. Not even Bodie's Fly could keep up with him on the level, and across the rocky draws he was invincible. In no more time than it took to leap upon his back Johnny would be safe from his enemies' pursuit. And if they came on shooting he would stand and shoot back, for nothing could possibly be gained by flight.

Horse-Ketchum had come to steal back his horse, and all the long night lay before him. He took shelter behind a mesquite tree and watched. All day Bodie's riders had toileted hard, building the trap. The night before they had been in the saddle. What would be more natural, if no wild horses came, than for the hunters to fall asleep? Lightfoot kept on his feet, to fight off the sleep that came over him, and the moon swung up to its zenith.

The wind went down, leaving the air still and murky, and the stallion began to fight at his stake. He set back against the rope, trying the hackamore with all his strength; but it held and he quit with a grunt. His proud head drooped again and he stood patiently, waiting the next move in a losing game. Wild burros came trooping in, to snort their distrust as they gazed at the fenced-in hole, and suddenly the golden stallion pricked his ears to the east. He neighed, and there came an answering call.

The burros stood staring, Horse-Ketchum tightened his cinch, and across the silvery lake bed a single horse trotted in—it was the lead mare, returning to her mate. Now the chance had come for which Lightfoot had waited. There would be mounting and riding, a chase across the playa—and while Bodie and his riders sought to pen the faithful mare the stallion would be left unguarded. Lightfoot backed deeper into the thicket, while out across the lake the mare came trotting, with her head up.

Johnny gazed at her covetously as, half revealed by the dim moonlight, she circled and snuffed the wind. She wheeled and raced away, but soon she was back again, whickering softly to her captive mate. She advanced and set her feet, ready to whirl and run at the first sign of impending pursuit. But she came on, almost to him, and something in her gait suddenly caught Horse-Ketchum's trained eye. She traveled like a horse that was ridden.

She whirled as if to flee, and above her floating mane Johnny saw a head bob up. It was the head of the moon maiden, lying close to the golden mane which mingled with her own flowing hair; and as the mare wheeled, snorting, he saw the form of the rider, cling-
ing close to her side like a bat. With a quick slap at her head she brought her mount up to the stake. Then suddenly she leaned down and cut the stallion’s rope loose, and Horse-Ketchum knew the rider was a woman.

Living with Indians so much and listening to their talk, he had come almost to believe in their stories of devils and ghosts. Almost, and not to oppose him, he had conceded to Captain Jack the presence of a devil on Enúpi Kai—a man-devil who watched over the ghost horses. But, when his rope had snared its neck, the ghost stallion had proved real—and now the ghost maiden had flashed a knife.

She rose up triumphantly as the tie rope was slashed and headed the stallion back toward the hills. But as he jumped to escape his forefeet were jerked from under him and he fell sprawling—he was hobbled, to boot. Then a yell went up from a thin fringe of mesquite trees that extended out into the lake, and six riders came dashing forth. Their ropes were swinging, they leaned forward against the wind, and their horses came on at a gallop.

The moon maiden turned to flee, then she dropped to the ground and ran back to the struggling horse. Like a flash the startled mare made a break to escape, but a rope brought her up with a jerk. The woman was stooping over to cut the stallion loose when a reata dropped over her head. Six riders with six ropes made their casts into the scramble, and every loop fell true.

“Well, my Gawd!” whooped Bodie as he set up his horse. “Look what I got, while the getting was good! A girl, and a damned pretty girl!”

He dropped down and grabbed her as she threw off the rope. There was a struggle and a woman’s piercing scream. Then Horse-Ketchum, forgetting his mission, charged down on them, cursing. Val Bodie had the girl in his arms, struggling.

**THE POPULAR MAGAZINE**

**CHAPTER XI.**

**THE MOON MAIDEN.**

A FIERY rage had swept over Horse-Ketchum at the first shriek of the moon maiden, whom Bodie had roped as she fought. Johny had come there to win back his horse, but he cast the thought aside and rode in on them, shooting furiously.

The horse hunters stampeded as if blown by a wind, carried away by the panic of their mounts, and as Bodie saw the flash of a gun in his face he ran without firing a shot. Lightfoot hurled one pistol after him and swung down by the struggling stallion, throwing the girl the rope of her mare.

“There’s your horse—now ride!” he panted; and stooped down to cut loose the tangled stallion. He leaped in on him recklessly, feeling about for the rawhide hobbles, straightening up to get out his knife. Then, sitting on his neck, he slashed the hobbles loose and the stallion came to his feet. But as the horse plunged out into the night Horse-Ketchum grabbed the hackamore and sat back on the rope. They fought each other desperately, each intent on his own escape; but man, the master, won and Johny swung up on High Behind with the halter rope wrapped around the horn.

For one instant, exultantly, he glanced back at the mesquite thicket where Bodie and his riders had fled. Then he turned toward the north, leaning forward against the tug as the stallion resisted the rope. Johny’s chance had come, and he had seized it. Now the stallion was his, and the woman was already forgotten. He had scattered the mustangers and won back his prize, the glorious golden stallion of his dreams. He sunk the spurs into High Behind at sight of a man running toward him, but as his mount plunged forward a shotgun blazed and he felt the burn of shot across his back. The
gun belched again and High Behind fell to bucking—bucking and running and squealing with pain.

Horse-Ketchum grabbed the horn, turning sidewise to dodge the rope which was towing the stallion behind, and they took off across the dry lake. High Behind’s tail was clenched down, his rump was twisted sidewise as he shrank from the hurt of the shots; but angrily, bawling and lashing, he bucked out into the night while Horse-Ketchum rode him, reeling. The grip of his knees had weakened, his hand was wet as he grasped the rope; but through the storm of whirling and bucking he kept his turns on the horn. The golden stallion was his!

They went galloping, across the lake bed and out into the rocks where a great sand wash came down from the hills, and here Horse-Ketchum suddenly learned why the stallion had led so free. He was following after his mate, the mare. She had come down from Devil Mountain to seek him when he was caught, and now he was heading toward home. But High Behind, shrinking and side-winding from the burn of the buck-shot, climbed the cut-bank and headed north; and as they started to leave the wash the golden stallion set back, jerking the saddle until it slipped.

For an instant Horse-Ketchum clung desperately with his spurs, while High Behind leaped and writhed. Then the latigo popped and he went backward through the air, still clinging to the stallion’s rope. He felt the scratch of thorny bushes, the impact of polished stones. He gripped the hackamore, and his light went out.

When he came out of his trance he was riding again, only now he was tied to the horn. And the horse that he rode was not rough old High Behind but the golden stallion of his dreams. They were trotting up a canyon so deep and narrow that the walls cut out the light of the moon; but before him, leading the way, Johnny could see another horseman. Then he went out again, and woke up groaning.

He lay face down across the saddle, lashed on like a deer, and on his lips there was the salt taste of blood. Ropes bit at his wrists and ankles, his back burned like fire and his head seemed incased in an iron band, against which his pulse beat throbbed furiously. His brain reeled and he was conscious only of the gentle motion of his steed, an ambling trot that lulled him to sleep.

He woke again, long after, and he was lying in a cave from whose roof, like crystal pendants, long stalactites hung down, with an eerie suggestion of splendor. In the pale light of dawn bats were flitting past his couch, seeking their clinging places in the darkness beyond. Horse-Ketchum sat up, laying one hand on his throbbing head, and at a stab of pain he clutched at his back. His shirt was wet with blood.

For an instant, seeing the splendor of the crystals overhead and the eerie bats flitting past, he had wondered whether he was in heaven or hell. But at the feel of the fresh blood it came back to him instantly—the fight over the horses, the sting of buckshot as he fled, then the ride up a dark, narrow canyon.

But who had brought him up there? And why had they left him, to welter un cared for in his blood? He listened intently as a distant noise came to his ears—then, clear and distinct, he heard the *whang*! of a heavy rifle and a staccato of answering shots. A battle was on, and at the memory of Val Bodie he rolled over and crept out of the cave.

A tangle of wild clematis hung down over its entrance, and as he peered out he saw the stallion over which they had fought, standing tied and still burdened with his saddle. There was a fence across the canyon, ancient willows lined the creek, and over the white stones a stream of water flowed, crystal clear,
inviting him to drink. He rose weakly to his feet and staggered down to its brink, and as he drank and washed his face the stallion nicked appealingly, pulling back against his rope.

“Poor old horse,” murmured Johnny, crawling over to the tree. And with the last of his strength he untied the tangled ropes and let him go down to the creek. Then he dropped back exhausted, for every effort he made started his wounds to bleeding afresh. The stallion sighed and sipped again, but at a noise from down the canyon he snorted and raised his head. Horse-Ketchum heard the sound of approaching feet and wriggled feebly back toward the cave, but halfway across the open the last of his strength left him and he fell face down in the dirt.

Some one came and stood over him. He saw the tip of a buckskin moccasin and the butt of a gun on the ground. But as he raised his eyes he beheld a woman’s face, surrounded by a nimbus of golden hair. It was the moon maiden, flushed and hurried, and even as she gazed she turned and looked behind her.

“Who are you?” she asked in a low, anxious voice. “I found you last night and hid you in the cave. If my father finds you here he will kill you.”


“That was Val Bodie,” she said. “He tried to steal Paynim, and now he’s coming up the canyon. Let me drag you into the cave, where nobody will find you. Because I can’t bear to see you killed.”

“Neither can I,” grumbled Horse-Ketchum grimly. “Can’t you do something for my back?”

“Not now,” she answered, taking hold of his hands and dragging him, willy-nilly, into the cave. “My father sent me back to get some more cartridges.” And, dropping him inside the entrance, she deftly wiped out his tracks and sped away down the trail.

Horse-Ketchum thrust out his head and stared after her curiously, as she darted into another and larger cave. Its door was only a cowhide, suspended by strips of rawhide.

When she came out she bore an armful of cartridge boxes, which she dropped into her buckskin skirt. Then, snatching up her rifle, she ran off down the trail as swift and agile as a deer.

“My Lord!” he breathed, as the shooting burst out afresh. “She’s a fighter, or I miss my guess. But how in the hell did she get up this canyon? And that horse I stole is tame!”

He glanced across the creek, where the golden stallion was peacefully feeding, and his eyes grew big as he watched. Here was the leader of the wild horses that he had chased at Night Water, and that Val Bodie had tried so long to trap, browsing placidly on willow shoots not ten feet away from him—with a saddle on his back! It was Horse-Ketchum’s own saddle, and the hackamore on its nose was the one he had put there himself. Yet down on the dry lake bed the stallion had fought like the devil.

“Here, Paynim!” he called softly, using the name he had heard her use; and the horse pricked his ears and stared. But Paynim remembered the battles they had fought—he snorted and drew away. “A regular pet,” muttered Johnny, looking him over enviously. And then, at a thought, he glanced up and down the canyon for some possible way of escape. But it was boxed in—there was no way out. He was trapped within these walls that rose thousands of feet high, and only the good will of this woman could save him, for he was wounded and unable to ride. Yet he was the man who had stolen Paynim, and Bodie had but only taken the horse from him.
HORSE-KETCHUM

There was a boom from down the canyon, the loud-mouthed roar of a rifle, and a crackling of distant shots. Bodie had discovered at last the hidden pasture of the horses and he was trying to force his way in. If he succeeded, then Horse-Ketchum could look for no mercy, for he had robbed Val Bodie of his prey. Next to whisky he loved women—and the golden horses of Toogahbooth had long been the apple of his eyes. Yet Lightfoot at one stroke had deprived him of both prizes—the moon maiden and the stallion on which she rode.

Horse-Ketchum listened anxiously as the shooting came nearer. Yet even if Bodie failed to force the narrow passageway, what hope had the future for him? The girl herself had told him that her father would kill him if he found him in his hidden retreat. He crawled back from the entrance to the shelter of some pack saddles, and crouched down to endure his pain; until at last, outlined against the light of the entrance, he saw a head bob up. It dodged back, and for a moment he felt the cold fear of death. Then it rose up again and his blurred eyes caught the vision of a nimbus of golden hair. The maiden had come back, but she was looking behind her down the canyon. He heard the sullen roar of guns.

She stood at gaze, like a sentinel guarding the secret of the cave. Then she stooped down suddenly and crept in toward him, and he felt her hot breath on his cheek. She leaned closer, feeling his face with small, clutching hands as if she feared to find him dead, and a quick tear splashed down between.

"He is coming!" she gasped. "You must stay here and hide." And she dropped a bundle of food and fled. But of this man who came Horse-Ketchum knew nothing, except that his coming meant death.

To be continued in the next issue.

EXTRAVAGANT ANDREW

THE Mellon brothers are proofs of the theory that the genius of a father is sometimes transmitted to his sons. Their father was a big and influential banker in Pittsburgh, and with his ability as a maker of money he had the stern, old-fashioned idea that possession of wealth was no excuse for high living or throwing cash about recklessly.

According to the Washington gossips, soon after Andrew W. Mellon, secretary of the treasury, had moved into a great, big, swell apartment on Massachusetts Avenue, he had as his guest his brother, Richard B. Mellon, of Pittsburgh.

"Say!" exclaimed Brother Richard after admiring the luxurious surroundings.

"How much are you paying for this place?"

"Eighteen thousand dollars a year," confided Andrew.

"And what is your salary?" pursued Richard.

"Twelve thousand a year," Andrew informed him.

Brother Richard emitted a low whistle.

"Great Scott!" he said. "Wouldn't father raise thunder if he knew about this?"
If a Horse Could Talk

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

I wonder, now, what my pony thinks,
When I slip his bit and he snuffs and drinks,
Then noses around the home corral,
And stands in the corner to rest a spell?

I wonder, now, if he sees the sense
Of huntin' strays or of mendin' fence?
Or runnin' stock, or a-ropin' steers,
Or slittin' a slick-eared yearlin's ears?

Sometimes, when he stands with half-shut eyes,
Lookin' so solemn and old and wise,
Just like he savvied the turns and tricks
Of cows and women and politics,

I get to thinkin' it's just as well,
Considerin' all that a hoss could tell,
For me, and many a good cowhand,
That a hoss ain't called to the witness stand.
But speakin’ of hangin’ and flowers and such,
Some hosses and humans can know too much,
And get to swellin’ and shed their pack,
A-scatterin’ trouble to hell and back.

One time, way up by the meadow sink,
When I was givin’ my hoss a drink,
A city girl on a thoroughbred
Come ridin’ up to the pool and said:

“Why, Jim! You here? What a big surprise!”
And she looks at me with them teasin’ eyes—
And our hosses nickerin’, now and then,
Just like they was sayin’: “You here again!”

Me leanin’ close to her laughin’ lips,
When my hoss steps wide and the saddle slips;
Then he bogs his head and he done his best,
And I knew when I lit I was sure out West.

A-seein’ me up in the air like that,
Her hoss stampeded across the flat,
And my pony follows, a-runnin’ stout,
And then—a couple of stars come out.

Thinks I as I started to pull my freight:
“It’s six cold miles to the ranch-house gate,
And a pretty night—for a good, long walk.
How the boys would josh, if a hoss could talk!”
THE HOKUM KID

By VIC WHITMAN

Jazz, Sizzling Hot, Right Off the Griddle!

The "Hokum Kid," otherwise known as Johnny Carson, stood at a side entrance of the Colosseum Dance Hall, staring thoughtfully and a bit wistfully at a sign that had attracted his attention. The sign read:

Stop! Look! Listen!
Carnival Jubilee Vaudeville Acts held here two weeks from to-night. Any one eligible to enter for the grand prize of $500. Enter early.

The Hokum Kid fingered the lone dollar bill in his pocket, pushed back his hat, and scratched his head.

"Five hundred," he mused. "What a help that would be! If I only dared to take a chance, everything would be jake."

The door swung suddenly open and from force of habit the Hokum Kid stepped quickly into the shadow of the building. Out came several young men in tuxedos and they were half carrying, half leading another.

"Steady, Charlie," the Kid heard one of them say soothingly. "It's tough, old boy, but you'll be there pretty soon. Bill's going with you. Just try to hang on. Hey, taxi!"

Watching curiously, the Kid saw them hoist the inert young man into the cab, saw the cab pull away, saw
them group on the sidewalk and stare after it.

"Acute appendicitis," said one. "I hope old Charlie pulls through."

"Course he'll pull through!" scoffed another. "The doc said there was plenty of time if we hustled to get him to the hospital." He sighed. "Right in the middle of the job, too. I suppose that means one of us has got to double."

The young men went back into the hall, and the Hokum Kid emerged from the shadows. The thing was perfectly plain to him. Dance-band men, they were, and they needed a man to take the place of the one who had just gone. Well—— The Kid looked again at the sign, and fingered again the dollar bill in his pocket. Maybe this was a good break for him; again, maybe not. It was a cinch that he needed money, and it was equally certain that he was longing to get back into the old familiar atmosphere of the dance hall once again.

Impulse prompted him to go in, but some inner wisdom cautioned against it. Undecided, he moved to get a better look at the sign just as a young couple strolled by on their way to re-enter the hall. Unnoticing, the Kid bumped into the girl, nearly upsetting her.

"Call your shots, big boy!" she exclaimed. "Sorry, but I don't carry shock absorbers."

The Kid started.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he stammered. "Honest, I didn't see you. I was thinkin' of something else."

Dark eyes looked up into his, surprised inquiry changing to approbation as the girl considered the gray-eyed, well-set-up youth before her. Red lips crinkled adorably into a smile that was like the passing of a fresh breeze, and the lonely Hokum Kid caught his breath. Slim, and small, and graceful—— gee, she was nice!


Her escort, a tall, blond youth, lingered to scowl at the Kid.

"Watch where you're going here-after!" he snapped.

The Kid's hard eyes narrowed a trifle, but he made no answer. He was in the wrong and it wouldn't pay to quibble over the matter before the girl. Silently he stepped aside to let them pass. Frowning a bit, he watched them go into the brilliantly lighted entrance.

Of late the Hokum Kid had conceived a dislike of brilliantly lighted places, but now the combination of things proved too much. Quickly he took stock of himself. His suit needed pressing, but it didn't look too badly, all things considered; his shoes were fairly presentable; and only that morning he had washed and dried his shirt at a little brook out in the country.

"There's money to be had in this hall, and I need it," he decided. "Colosseum, here I come."

With which he strolled to the ticket window and saw his dollar go into the box-office till. He took the bit of pasteboard handed him, and went into the big hall. Shaded lights, and immense dancing space, little tables, booths, gliding waiters——these things the Kid took in at a glance.

Then he looked to the wide stage where the band men were gathered, apparently arguing over something. The Hokum Kid's interest became professional, and he sauntered to the stage.

"I understand you're shy one man here," he said, speaking to a tall, thin man who seemed to be the leader. "That right?"

The leader glanced down and flicked a finger to his clipped mustache.

"Yeah," he answered, and went on talking to the piano player.

But the Hokum Kid persisted:

"Listen, pal, if you're out of luck on a man I can fill in for the rest of the evenin'. Since I'm not in tuxedo I'll cut my price to three bucks."
"What do you mean, 'fill in'?” demanded the leader impatiently. “You don't even know what instrument we're shying yet.”

The Hokum Kid grinned. It was a twisted, good-humored little grin that did away with a certain cold watchfulness of mien.

“That don’t make any difference,” he said easily.

“You mean you can double on anything we got here?”

The Kid ran his eye rapidly over the instruments—alto and tenor saxophones, banjo, drums, violin, piano, trumpet, trombone, and double bass.

“I can, pal,” he nodded. “And I can fill in with hoofing and singing, too.”

Despite himself the leader laughed.

“You sound like a three-ring circus,” he declared. “But I got to admit that we're in a hole, and if you can play a little bit of banjo—”

“My meat,” the Kid assured him, climbing up on the stage. “Gimme that 'harp' and name the number. Three bucks, pal, and we're off to a flyin' start.”

They called him hard—the Hokum Kid—and perhaps they were right. Not hard in an overbearing way, but hard in the sophistication of a life that had left no illusions. It showed in the cold grayness of eyes that narrowed frequently and never showed surprise, in the set of a rather clean mouth that gave no compromise with idealism. The Hokum Kid was twenty-three, believed in the survival of the fittest, and took life as it came, asking no odds.

He was individual, and it showed in his playing. Before the team had played four measures of a popular trot, the leader knew that he had stumbled upon a musical genius. The twanging bite of that banjo as the music hit the chorus—the steady, irresistible, confident oddbeat was a thing of syncopated beauty and a joy to the heart of the drummer.

“Whooppee!” yelled that musician, twirling his sticks on his finger tips and going to work on his cymbal. “Listen to 'at harp talk out! Pick 'em up and lay 'em down, brother, and I'll mark time! Hot damn! This baby can play like nobody's business! Ooh, sister, step on the gas!”

The piano player grinned over a swaying shoulder.

“Boil, buddy!” he called. “Sock 'em out in there! Get hot! Get hot! Get hot!”

The Hokum Kid got hot. Gray eyes shining, he rocked and twisted in his chair, aware of the crooning of the saxes beside him and the piercing, muted bark of the trumpet. The fingers of his left hand worked like lightning up and down the neck of the banjo; his right arm swung like a pendulum in figure-eight strokes, producing weird, close chords that were peculiarly his own. This was his element and he gave himself to full enjoyment of it, regardless of what the future might hold. In the familiar atmosphere the loneliness of the past weeks warmed away. Get hot! That was the cry of the moment. Get hot! Get hot!

What a harp this was! Must have cost around four hundred. True as steel on the frets and had the carrying power of a grand piano. Lucky that Charlie left it behind when he went to the hospital. Tough on the poor guy. Still, that was life.

Grinning broadly, the leader bent to the Hokum Kid's ear.

"Want to sing the next chorus?” he yelled over the booming jazz.

"Easy.”

The leader spread his arms, the music softened instantly to a liquid accompaniment of saxes and piano, and the Hokum Kid stood up, still strumming away at the banjo. Hunching his shoulders to the rhythm, grinning, he took up the words:

“Oh, what a girl—what a night!
Oh, what a moon—shining bright—"
The Kid was a good singer but it was his manner of singing that was effective. The patrons of the Colosseum raised their eyes to the stage and beheld, not the usual mournful-eyed, sentimental song pusher, but a dynamic youth whose every muscle was aquiver with the energy and joy of what he was doing. Here was something different, and they watched.

"What a time and place tobill and coo;
What a wild desire to cuddle you——"

Then she danced by in the arms of the tall, blond young man, danced by as effortlessly as a bit of down floating on a vagrant breeze. She smiled approvingly up at the Hokum Kid and her smile was open and friendly, not as the alluring smiles of others. Rouged and with over-red lips, but not like the rest. The Kid’s keen eyes read that. Gee, what a little knock-out! Because he had exchanged words with her he felt that he knew her; because it was the custom to sing to some girl on the floor he sang to her:

"What a thrill—I would get
If our lips—ever met——"

She shook her head at him, but there was laughter on her lips as her partner scowled. What a washout that guy was!

With a crash the number ended and the dancers clapped and called for more. The Hokum Kid grinned, bowed, and sat down.

"Take an encore," urged the leader. "Oh, boy, this is too good to be true!"
"Sure. Speed up the tempo."

And now the Hokum Kid showed the reason for his pseudonym. Not only did he play and sing but he did a soft-shoe dance at the same time—an intricate, flashy step that set shoulders a-swaying. The crowd awoke to the fact that here, indeed, was rare hokum. Nothing just like it had ever been seen in the Colosseum. The dancers crowded to the edge of the stage and by the time the Kid danced his way back to his chair they were packed ten deep, and the Kid took four bows.

"Whew!" he panted. "Hot stuff!"
"I’ll say it’s hot!" yelped the delighted leader. "Brother, you got the goods, and I don’t mean maybe! Say, how about a proposition to work steady with us?"

The Hokum Kid considered. Again that small voice within him warned that he should not stay. But the call of synecperation, beating loud in his temples, drowned out all else. It was great to be back in the game once more, and, besides, he needed money. His mind flashed to the Jubilee prize. After all, he’d been traveling constantly of late, and perhaps a little time here wouldn’t do any harm.

"What’s the proposition?" he asked.
"Play the banjo and do hokum," answered the leader. "Give you a hundred a week."

The Kid considered. "Well, now I don’t know. I might——"

"Moreover, there’s the Jubilee acts in two weeks," the leader pointed out. "That prize ain’t anything to be sneezed at, and you could give Ned Yates a run for his money."

"Who’s Yates?"
"Oh, he’s the big cheese around here in monologues and acrobatics—or thinks he is. That’s him down on the floor now. See, the one with the little dame in the red dress."

The Hokum Kid looked and laughed.
"That would be him," he commented. "Who’s the him?"

"Her name’s Peggy Arnold," said the leader. "Great kid. Everybody likes her. Works as hostess here. They call her the smile girl."

"The smile girl, is she?" commented the Kid. "Not bad. Tell you what I’ll do, pal. Lemme go down and step this number and I’ll give you my answer after. How’ll that be?"
"Fair enough. Only, for Pete's sake, decide to kick in with us."

When the music started up again, the Hokum Kid left the stage. It had been a long time since he had danced, and the old dogs were itching to circle the floor. Didn't make any difference whom he danced with, he told himself, but he'd ask Peggy Arnold because he knew her. Wasn't in any position to fall for any bims but—the smile girl, what a pip of a title! Just suited her, too.

Peggy Arnold was just about to begin the dance with Yates when the Hokum Kid reached her side.

"Pardon me," he said smoothly. "My dance, I believe."

She hesitated, looking uncertainly from the Kid to her partner.

"On your way, fella!" snapped Yates. "Get going."

"Right," murmured the Hokum Kid. Deftly he interposed himself between Yates and Peggy, placed an arm around her waist, and glided out on the floor.

"You sure have got a nerve, big boy," she said, laughing a little. "What causes that?"

"You do," countered the Kid easily. "I just wanted to dance one with you."

"Well, you seem to be doing it. I don't think Ned likes it."

"I don't think I care whether he does or not," drawled the Kid. "That is, unless he's got a mortgage on you."

"Don't be stil."

How lithe and graceful she was, following his every step! Dark circles under her eyes, though, circles that even the rouge could not offset. Tough rackets these hostesses had, dancing continually and having to appear gay and lively. A killer.

"It's a crime the way you put over your stuff up there on the stage," she observed. "I was watching you all the time."

"Yeah? Well, I had both eyes on you, too, Peggy."

"How'd you know my name?"

"Asked," said the Hokum Kid. "You haven't told me yours yet."

"Mine? Oh, you can call me—Johnny."

"Johnny what?"

"Blake," said the Kid after an instant's reflection. He saw Yates trying to get close enough to cut in and he maneuvered adroitly to get out of that irate young man's way.

"Johnny Blake? Oh, I like that. Where you from?"

"Here and there," said the Hokum Kid carelessly. "Mostly here. That don't matter. S'pose we talk about you for a while."

"Well?"

"Like your work?"

"Mmm—yes."

"Never get sick of it, huh?"

"Sometimes." Looking down at her the Kid saw that the mask of gayety had dropped from her face for the moment. "Honest, it would be heaven if I could go into the country for about a month and do nothing but rest. One of those places where everything smells of the hay and the clover, with a brook running through a meadow and flowers growing all round." She stopped with a self-conscious little laugh. "Gee, listen to me!" she exclaimed. "I must sound like the guy who's burning the old homestead."

"Not a bit," the Hokum Kid assured her gravely. "I've thought of them things myself. It's natural, I guess."

Easily, gracefully, they circled the floor, swept on the booming syncopation. The Hokum Kid was a natural dancer, but now his mind was not on his dancing. He was thinking, debating with himself about the morrow. By all rights he'd ought to be on his way, but there—

The dance ended just as Yates reached them, his face like a thunder cloud.

"I've a good mind to take a paste at
you, you bum!” he said as the Kid released Peggy.

The Kid’s eyes became frosty.

“Yeah?” he drawled. “Well, don’t let me stop you.” He waited expectantly, then as no signs of action were forthcoming he bowed to the smile girl.

“Thanks much, and I’ll see you again, Peggy,” he said.

Nice kid, he reflected, as he waited in the wings for the band to finish its encore. Mighty nice. But a guy could get smiles anywhere. If he stayed it would be to get a roll together. Yes, and for love of the game. Once the dance-hall germ got in your blood it stayed there, and there was no getting away from it.

Thoughtfully he watched the band in operation. A good outfit but it could be made much better. The fires of musical ambition began to burn in the Hokum Kid’s veins. Inspiring bands to the heights of syncopation was his forte and his hobby. This team, for example, was good enough so far as technic was concerned, but it needed that intangible stamp of a dominant personality.

When the encore ended the Kid walked back to his place.

“Well, how about it?” asked the leader anxiously.

“Sure,” said the Kid. “I’ll fill in for a while, on one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“That you won’t advertise me.”

The leader stared. “But listen—”

“Take it or leave it,” said the Hokum Kid flatly.

“Sure I’ll take it,” said the leader hastily. “It’s your business, of course, if you don’t want to be billed.” He extended his hand cordially. “Tickled to death. My name’s Kenny.”

Never had the music been so good at the Colosseum as it was that night. Of a sudden it acquired a rhythm, a swing, a compactness that it had not had before. And the cause of it all was a banjo player who swayed and bounced and imparted his own enthusiasm to the rest of the musicians and the dancers—a hard-eyed youth who grinned as he played his chords and sang to a dark-haired girl who smiled often at him:

“‘I’d rather be blue, thinking of you,
I’d rather be blue over you
Than be happy with somebody else.”

The following day the Hokum Kid obtained an advance in pay, and that night he appeared faultlessly dressed in tuxedo. The first of the evening Peggy Arnold didn’t seem to be in the hall, and the Kid was disappointed. He’d wanted her to see him in his new togs instead of the old outfit he’d bummed across the country with. But maybe the Kid was sick.

At intermission he was smoking off stage when a gruff voice sounded behind him.

“Stick ‘em up!”

Slowly the Kid’s hands went into the air while the color drained from his face. Then he heard Peggy’s jolly little laugh and turned.

“It’s only little me,” she chuckled.

“Why, your face is awful white, Johnny! Did I scare you that much?”

The Hokum Kid forced a grin.

“I’ll tell the world you did,” he answered unsteadily. “Whew! Thought it was a holdup.”

Quizzically she studied him.

“But you don’t look as if—well, as if you were the scary kind.”

“You never can tell. I’m an awful coward.”

“Are you? Tell it to your ancestors.”

Her eyes left his face and strayed over the new tuxedo. “Well, well! The old soup-and-fish, I do declare! I guess the boy is there. Not too bad, not too bad!”

The Kid reddened. “Where’s the heavy to-night, Peg?” he asked hastily.

“The heavy!”

“Yeah, the boy friend. Haven’t seen him.”
The smile girl shrugged gracefully.
"How should I know?" she retorted.
"Maybe he's baking a cake; maybe he's working on his act. He swears he's going to beat you out if it's the last thing he ever does."

"Who told him I was goin' to enter?"

"Oh, everybody knows that," said Peggy. "They're all talking about your chances to win the Jubilee."

The Hokum Kid frowned. "They talk too much," he muttered.

"Well, aren't you going to enter?"

"Haven't decided," said the Kid.

"Say, how's for me to run you home after the dance? I can borrow Kenny's car and we'll have a bite to eat and then take a ride up along the ocean front. All right?"

She hesitated. "Well, yes. I don't very often go with any one, but in honor of the new torgery I'll be delighted."

Kenny tapped with his bow and they went back to their respective jobs—both of them adherents of jazz, of syncopation that flowed on and on endlessly; steady, crashing rhythm that pulsed in the eardrums long after the hall had become dark.

Later the Hokum Kid met Peggy outside the hall.

"Hungry?" he asked.

"No, not a bit. If you are, though, we'll go to a restaurant."

"Couldn't eat a mouthful," lied the Hokum Kid.

He started the car and drove, while Peggy snuggled beside him, a slender little figure in the dimness. This was a relief after the clatter of the Colosseum, and silence fell between them as the Kid turned onto the ocean road. The Kid watched the road ahead and Peggy let her pensive gaze wander from sky to water and back again.

Presently she spoke.

"There's something about this that's different," she said dreamily.

"I'll say there is," agreed the Kid. He stopped the car and lit a cigarette.

She motioned toward the stars. "I can't help feeling how darned little we are whenever I look at them," she went on thoughtfully. "Do you ever feel that way?"

"Plenty," said the Kid grimly.

"I wonder if there's anybody up there," she mused. "If there's somebody who watches us and helps us out of our troubles. I believe there is. Don't you, Johnny?"

The Hokum Kid shrugged shortly as he dragged at his cigarette. Nothing in his experience had been revealing.

"Search me," he said. "If there is I'm glad He don't talk."

She looked at him then, troubled.

"Johnny boy, I don't get you at all," she said quietly. "What the matter is I don't know, but I do know that something's wrong. The way you can play and dance and sing, you could go on big time instead of fooling around in a place like this. You won't talk about yourself, and Kenny says you won't let him bill you."

"Did he say that?"

"Yes. Told Ned and me this afternoon. It almost seems like you didn't have any ambition."

There was bitterness in the Hokum Kid's grin.

"Aw, who cares!" he said.

"Who cares? You might be surprised, big boy."

Two of them who had no illusion about life, two of them who concealed with shrugs and evasions and gay retorts what might be in their hearts. Yet the present moment was magic, and they both felt it. Gently radiant moonlight, to which the surf beat a sighing accompaniment, touched Peggy Arnold's hair and weaved misty patterns about it, revealed dark eyes that were softly inquiring.

The Hokum Kid moved uneasily.
THE HOKUM KID

Couldn't allow himself to go soft about any bim now. He bent forward and snapped on the ignition.

"Well, that's that," he said noncommittally.

Thereafter he kept away from Peggy Arnold. He saw her every night at the Colosseum and he answered her gay smile with his twisted little grin, but that was as far as it went. He allowed the blond Yates to monopolize her, fiercely denying to himself that it mattered.

As the Jubilee drew near, interest in the event waxed correspondingly higher. Any one could put on an act, but, because the talent was always of surprisingly high order, lesser lights hesitated to enter; hence the list was kept down to a reasonable length.

The Hokum Kid worked hard in preparing his act. He gained permission to use the Colosseum afternoons, and Kenny gave him the use of the band equipment. Three hours a day the Kid spent on the big stage, practicing until he was ready to drop.

The day before the Jubilee Yates met the Kid on the street.

"Think you're going to cop off the five hundred, do you?" he said, a slight sneer on his face.

The Kid regarded him calmly.

"What's it to you?" he wanted to know.

Open hostility shone from Yates' eyes.

"Plenty if you want to know!" he snapped. "I got an eye on that five hundred myself."

"Yeah? Well, that makes us even."

"Not by a long shot." Yates' expression became crafty. "I may as well say that a lot of people are curious about you."

"No kiddin'."

"Yes, and I'm one of 'em," flashed Yates. "Might be a good idea if you were out of this town—say, the night of the Jubilee. If you were here people might want to know more about you."

"And it might be a good idea if you was away from this spot in about one second," countered the Kid evenly. "I might want to know if you got a glass jaw, for example."

Nevertheless he frowned thoughtfully as he watched Yates walk away. There was no denying that Yates' words had made him uneasy, distinctly uneasy. Everything considered, he was a fool to stay around until the Jubilee. He was building up a reputation and that was bad, very bad. If only he knew what lay in Yates' mind, then the decision would be easier.

Then a voice hailed him, and he turned to see Peggy Arnold walking toward him. She was smiling brightly as usual, but the Kid's keen eyes discerned traces of red around her eyes.

"Hello, Peg," he said. "Now what's the trouble?"

"Trouble?" She pretended surprise. "Don't be like that. How could there be any trouble on a day like this?"

"Cut it out," said the Kid sternly. "You been cryin' about something? Spill it."

"Oh, it's nothing, Johnny."

"Come clean now."

"Well, I've just been up to see the doc." The smile still remained on her lips even though they were trembling a bit. "I haven't been able to sleep much for the past week, and I thought I'd find out about it. He—he said if I didn't check out of the dance game right away, and get off for a good long rest in the country, that they'd sell me for junk. He didn't say, though, what I could use for money."

The Hokum Kid whistled softly. He had seen signs of weariness, but she'd been such a good little sport that he hadn't realized the seriousness of it.

"What is it, Peg—lungs?" he asked slowly.

She nodded. "One of the darn things
has got a spot on it. Dance-hall dust, I guess.” She laughed a trifle recklessly. “That’s all right. I’ll hang around and earn my coffee and cakes as long as I can. Let’s talk about something else. I understand you’re not going into the Jubilee.”

The Hokum Kid came to himself with a start. His gray eyes had been fixed unseenly upon a passing patrolman.

“Who told you I wasn’t?” he asked.

“Ned Yates.”

“Some day I’ll kill that guy,” said the Kid with conviction. “Now, listen. The next time you see him you tell him that I’m goin’ into that contest. And believe me, Peg, there’s one baby I’m goin’ to beat out.”

On Jubilee night a tremendous crowd jammed its way into the Colosseum to give its approval or disapproval to the acts that were to go on. Out in the box office the ticket seller took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves; inside the big hall red-faced ushers scurried about, hard put to find seats for all on the improvised benches. Twenty minutes before the first curtain the S. R. O. sign was hung out, and the promoter of the Jubilee was grinning expansively over his big cigar.

Behind the scenes that air of tensity prevailed which is peculiar to performers who have had little professional experience. Girls and young men, children, and an occasional old trouper were hurrying in and out of the dressing rooms, asking needless questions, peering out through the curtain peephole at the rapidly filling house, bothering the harassed electrician, and generally making nuisances of themselves.

The Hokum Kid stood quietly amid all this hurry and bustle. He grinned at the number he had drawn, a number that signified his act was to be the last. With an audience such as this he was glad of it.

He shot a glance at Yates who was frowning at his own number. Yates looked up, met the Kid’s sardonic gaze, and sauntered over.

“I suppose you’ve picked the drop number?” he said.

“Who cares?” Yates laughed nastily.

“It’s a cinch I don’t,” he retorted. “Your act won’t see the footlights tonight. What do you think of that, bum?”

There was triumphant certainty in his eyes as he turned away. The Hokum Kid bit his lip, then stepped quickly to the peephole. His eyes, traveling over the assembled throng, came to rest upon two men who sat in the fourth row back.

“Oh, my Lord!” gasped the Kid.

His first thought was of immediate flight. There’d be just time enough to slip out the stage door and make his get-away. He turned quickly, his eyes wild like those of a trapped animal. A few steps he took toward the stage door, then stopped as if brought up by a cable. Things went through the Kid’s mind, and he knew that he was going through with his act. His jaw set doggedly.

“Oh, what the hell!” he muttered. “It’ll all come out in the wash.”

He called a passing stage hand and in terse tones told what he wanted. The man listened, nodded, and went on. The Hokum Kid resumed his place by the electrician. Peggy Arnold appeared.

“I skipped out here,” she explained. “Wanted to see you and wish you luck, big boy. How’s the courage?”

The Hokum Kid grinned strangely. “Never better, Peg,” he told her.

“Atta boy!” she encouraged. “You can go out there and knock ‘em dead; I know you can.”

The Hokum Kid looked down into the dark eyes upturned to his own, then looked away. Funny how his heart speeded up, even at such a moment as this when the whole world seemed to be
leering ironically at him. Something was cockeyed somewhere. Dimly the Kid realized there were things he wanted to say to her, but couldn’t. Not with those men out there in the audience.

In the pit the orchestra started on the overture. A call boy hurried back to one of the dressing rooms. Presently two young men appeared and took their places in the wings. Detachedly the Kid noticed that they were wearing too much make-up and that they were nervous. Nervous! What the hell had they to be nervous about?

The overture ended, the cue lights blinked in the pit, and the orchestra went into a fast waltz. Grinning in sickly fashion the two young men went out, did a waltz clog, and retired to generous applause. For an encore they did a slow-drag eccentric. More applause.

“Good mood out there,” muttered the Kid. “That’s a help.”

One by one the acts performed and retired. There was a one-act playlet put on by three men and a woman; there were, successively, a ukelele act, an animal act, singing, and tap dancing. To the Hokum Kid, tense and waiting, these acts dragged interminably, but the applause from the house grew more and more boisterous.

Then Yates went on. It took the Hokum Kid just one minute to realize that here was a performer of the first order. In his monologue Yates had a solemn delivery, than which nothing is more comic when effective. He began by imitating various persons of local importance, and he sent the audience into spasms with his interpretation of a deaf, excitable old lady at a bargain counter. Next he did a series of con-tortionist stunts that brought a gleam of approbation into the Hokum Kid’s hard eyes. Yates was good.

The curtain dropped and the Kid felt of his tie. Oddly, his lips were moving, although no sound came from them. He didn’t notice Yates speak quickly to a man waiting in the box corridor. He nodded to the electrician.

“Cue ‘em,” he said tersely.

Again the lights blinked in the pit and the orchestra swung into the Kid’s lead.

“Good luck,” whispered Peggy, patty-ing his arm.

Then the man had emerged from the corridor, and had caught the Kid by the shoulder.

“Just a minute, young feller,” he said. “You’re not going to step on that stage. I’m Constable Clark and I’m putting you under arrest.”

The Hokum Kid’s muscles tightened. “What for?” he demanded.

“For murder.”

All in a second the Kid saw Peggy Arnold shrink away, her hand pressed to her mouth, her dark eyes wide and horrified; saw the grinning face of Yates; heard the insistent lead of the orchestra.

“Fair enough,” he said softly. “You can take me—after this act.” With a wrench he tore himself loose and was out on the stage before the constable could stop him. He reasoned and rea-soned correctly that the officer would not attempt to go out after him, but would wait in the wings.

The sea of faces blended into one vast mass of white. The Kid’s heart was beating wildly but he grinned out at the people as though he had not a care in the world. Then he went into action.

He seated himself at the piano, picked up the orchestra and played a chorus through, swaying to the lively beat of his own tempo. Then he rose, grabbed a saxophone, and played half a chorus on that. A trumpet, a violin, a trom-bone he seized and played them all with a gusto that set feet to tapping the floor. As the orchestra swept into the final bars, the Hokum Kid leaped to a set of drums and fairly made them talk, laughing wildly the while. He finished
the last note on a cymbal crash, and bowed to prolonged applause.

Next he did a buck and wing that had the people rocking in their seats. His shoes beat upon the boards with the rapidity of a trip hammer and all the syncopation of a darky rattling a pair of bones. He took three bows and the applause grew with each bow. Then the Kid held up his hand. Breathing heavily from his exertions he addressed them:

"Your applause is mighty generous and I sure do appreciate it. Now I'll conclude with a stunt that I think is fairly original." He glanced into the wings where the constable waited, where a white-faced girl stared out at him. "I might add," he said with grim irony, "that this will be my last public appearance."

And then, while the orchestra played softly, while the audience held its breath, the Hokum Kid took a guitar and mounted a stepladder to a tight-wire strung across the stage. Holding the guitar across his chest as a balance, the Kid made his way out on the wire. House lights and footlights gave place to a glaring spot that fell upon the smiling Kid and depicted his every move.

He raised the guitar. Swaying and balancing there on the wire, he began to play and sing softly, yet loud enough so that his voice carried to the balconies. It was not jazz that he sang now, rather it was something peculiarly appropriate to the circumstances:

"There's a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingale is singing
And the white moon beams——"

There was not a sound in the packed house save the notes of the old, favorite song. The Hokum Kid was weaving his spell and weaving it well. Perhaps in this last song he was bidding farewell to his freedom, to the gay, carefree life of the dance halls, to a girl with artifi-

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cial roses in her cheeks and pallor beneath—to things that had suddenly assumed great importance. Be this as it may, the Hokum Kid was putting his very soul into his singing:

"There's a long, long night of waiting
Until my dreams all come true,
Till the day when I'll be going
Down that long, long trail with you."

More than one woman in the audience put her handkerchief to her eyes; more than one man swallowed hard at the lump in his throat. And as the Kid's song died softly away there was complete silence for a long moment, then the house went crazy. Wave after wave of deafening applause shook the rafters; people stood up and laughed and cried and shouted. It was the acclamation of genius.

The Hokum Kid let it go at that. For his finale he had been planning a dancing stunt on the wire, accompanying himself meanwhile on the guitar, but he was far too good a showman not to sense the value of an exit now. Still smiling and bowing, he stepped out into the wings.

Even the constable was moved to a word of praise.

"Mighty good act, young feller," he said. "Mighty, mighty good."

The Hokum Kid laughed wearily. There was a look of chagrin on the face of Yates, a look that told the Kid better than words how the judges would decide. No doubt of that, for the crowd was still stamping and applauding. That was all that really mattered. Now with that five hundred Peg could go out in the country, where everything smelled of the hay and the clover, could restore to her cheeks the roses that belonged there. She wouldn't have to know where the money came from. There were plenty of ways of fixing that up.

The Kid held out his hands.

"Put 'em on any time," he said, not looking at the smile girl.
THE HOKUM KID

But she stepped to his side and searched his sullen face with wide, dark, frightened eyes.

“You’re not a murderer,” she said slowly, her voice trembling. “I don’t care what they say. I’ll never believe it, big b-boy.” Quickly she drew down his head and kissed him on the lips, then was crying softly.

The Hokum Kid choked.

“Let’s go!” he said harshly, while the roaring of the continued applause sounded dully in his ears.

Two men came up on the stage. Their smiles died at sight of the handcuffed Kid.

“What’s the idea?” demanded one.

And the other questioned the constable:

“What the hell’s he done now?”

“He’s wanted for the murder of John Sampson, New York landlord,” said the constable smugly. “I’m holding him here while I wire for instructions. See?” He drew a crumpled newspaper picture from his pocket and held it out.

“That’s right,” chimed in Yates. “I found it in an old edition. If there’s any reward for him I claim it.”

Both men laughed.

“Reward—my neck!” said one scornfully. “Better get them twisters off, old man. This case was dropped right after that picture appeared. The Kid here simply belted Sampson because he got nasty and insulted a woman who wanted a week more to pay her rent. Then the Kid skipped, thinking he’d pumped Sampson. But Sampson recovered and decided not to press charges—after what we learned about him.” The man showed a badge. “Happened to be working on extradition down here and heard about the Jubilee. Good stuff, Kid. You’re a wow. If you don’t believe it, just listen to ’em yell out there.”

The Hokum Kid stood motionless while the handcuffs were removed. This, then, was the silver lining. And for over a month he’d been needlessly on the dodge!

Then he looked at Yates. The three men turned inquiringly at the sound of a thump and saw Yates flat on his back on the floor. But the Kid was bending over Peggy Arnold.

They called the Hokum Kid hard, but the hardness didn’t show in his words now.

“Gee, Peg,” he said reverently, “I guess you’re right about somebody bein’ up there. I just asked Him to lemme go through with my act before they got me and—well, I guess He heard me. Gee!”

Impulsively the little smile girl kissed him.

“Atta old talk,” she said softly, a catch in her voice. “I knew you’d come out of the fog. The sun just had to shine for you some time, didn’t it, honey?”

Then, because she felt like crying, she pushed him toward the footlights.

“They’re still calling for you, Johnny boy,” she said. “Better give ’em one more stunt.”

Dazed, blinking, miles in the clouds, the Hokum Kid turned.

“Will I!” he said happily. “Will I! Say, just lemme through them wings! Oh, baby, I don’t know whether I’m goin’—or comin’, but that don’t matter! It’s the old hokum that got ’em, and it’s the old hokum that’ll get ’em again! Make way for the Hokum Kid, gentlemen, and watch me step!”

SCOUTING FOR JOBS

President Hoover has been made a Boy Scout; and a lot of job seekers are trying to convince him that they are good scouts.
Every reader of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, man or woman, qualifies as a lover of good stories and as a good fellow, and is therefore automatically and entirely without obligation elected a member of THE POPULAR CLUB.

We intend our magazine to appeal to a wide range of readers—to all who like a good story, young and old alike. There is no question of the appeal of "Red" to the younger generation, which makes it all the more interesting to hear from Member William B. Blake, Sr., of Ronceverte, West Virginia, who writes us as follows:

I have been a reader of the Popular ever since it started. Don't think I have ever read anything that has given me more genuine pleasure than "Red," by A. M. Chisholm, now in course of publication. His quotations from the poetry and prose of my childhood and early reading days, his real wit and sparkling humor, have a zest that stirs me at seventy-seven years. As I read, the memory of "The Deacon's One-horse Shay" comes into my mind as though I had read it but yesterday. More power to a writer who can link up the past with the present and do it with such inimitable grace.

FRED MacISAAC.
One of the most popular of POPULAR authors speaks, by request, of himself.

I TURNED up originally in Boston about the time men wore side whiskers and the ladies had bustles and big sleeves. I remember when bicycles were popular and women who had the nerve to put on bloomers to wear when cycling were thundered against in all the best pulpits. I attended the Boston Latin School, which was founded in 1635 and which had the original books and teachers in my day. They taught us Latin and Greek and had an outrageous system of marking papers which makes my blood boil to this day. You wrote a page of Latin composition, and an antediluvian professor corrected it with a blue pencil. If he found five mistakes out of a possible hundred, he wrote zero on the paper and that was that. You had to be smart to get through that school. I hope they've changed the system, but probably they haven't.

Having acquired a hatred of education in this way, I landed a job on a Boston newspaper, since defunct, and, at the time, impecunious. When pay day came, you never knew whether you
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would get money or an order for a suit of clothes on a department store or a side of beef at a butcher’s. It was what the Germans call “reparations in kind.”

First I reported sermons. But that took me too frequently to church, so I contrived to be assigned to the water front, where men were men and schooners of beer cost five cents.

About this time I thought some more learning wouldn’t do me any harm, so I entered Harvard without notifying my employers and heard lectures for a couple of years while I was supposed to be climbing up rope ladders and asking sea captains how the weather was in the Gulf Stream. Such a state of affairs could not last, and I jumped about a foot ahead of the editorial boot to the Boston Herald, a very staid, conservative paper at the time. There was a gibe in vogue at the period that a young man who was run over by a hearse was discovered to be a Herald reporter hurrying to a fire.

From the Herald I shifted to the Boston American, then a very yellow journal which enjoyed in rapid succession some of the most delightful managing editors who ever infuriated a quiet community. Sam Chamberlain, Foster Coates, Bob MacCabe, Bill Anderson, and, last but not least, Walter Howey, who is suspected of being the original of the snappy editor in “The Front Page.” I was supposed to be reporting facts, but I learned about fiction from those fellows.

I spent a long time on the American, punctuated by frequent leaves of absence, for, when I saved money, I blew it in seeing the world. Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America split my savings among them. My idea of bliss, then and now, was the deck of a passenger liner going somewhere, anywhere. I always hated trains.

I was music critic and dramatic editor on the American for eight or ten years. As a Hearst newspaper wasn’t sufficiently exciting during the period when I condescended to work, I used to put on great open-air spectacles, series of concerts, fireworks shows, et cetera. People wonder why I don’t enjoy poker and crap games. Piker’s stuff! You ought to have a twenty-five-thousand-dollar stake in an open-air opera in a town where it’s more apt to rain than not, if you want thrills.

About eight years ago I came to New York, and, after doing newspaper work and theatrical producing, I began to write stories and sell them. To anybody who ever did rewrite upon an old-fashioned yellow journal, fiction is a cinch. It’s the same thing, honest.

I spent six months in the movies a couple of years ago and found a lot of my old pals there. The biggest fakers were all great executives.

I write all my stuff on a portable typewriter and turn it out anywhere. I drift about as far as the Gulf Stream swings each year—and considerably faster. My only hobbies are driving a motor car so high up a mountain I have to hire somebody to drive it down and lying in a deck chair on an ocean liner waiting for the dinner gong to ring.

THE GOLDEN HIGHLANDER.

From down in Wilmington, North Carolina, Member W. C. Fields writes in to ask about a favorite fiction character of his and the man who put that character in the pages of our magazine. We are glad to tell Member Fields and the many others who, we know, will be interested that we have recently been urging Member Roberts to give us some more stories about Alastair MacIver, and we hope that we will have one in the not-too-distant future. Here is Member Fields’ letter:

What, oh, what, has become of our “Golden Highlander,” Alasdair MacIver, and Mr. Theodore Goodridge Roberts, his author? I hope the insolent Major Pottle has not
found means with which to drive them back to the bonnie hills of Scotland.

I dearly loved the tall, clean, fearless Scotchman, the snow-clad woods along the Waakadoggan, pregnant with game, and Flora McDonald, primitive, maybe, but wholesome.

Please get Mr. Roberts back for us, for I am not alone in worshiping the "Golden Highlander." I have heard others who did him homage.

**THE V-A-S-E.**

From the maddening crowd they stand apart,
The maidens four and the Work of Art;

And none might tell from sight alone In which had culture ripest grown—

The Gotham Million fair to see,
The Philadelphia Pedigree,

The Boston Mind of azure hue,
Or the soulful Soul from Kalamazoo—

For all loved Art in a seemly way, With an earnest soul and a capital A.

Long they worshiped; but no one broke
The sacred stillness, until up spoke

The Western one from the nameless place, Who blushing said: "What a lovely vase!"

Over three faces a sad smile flew, As they edged away from Kalamazoo.

But Gotham's haughty soul was stirred To crush the stranger with one ground all

Deftly hiding reproof in praise, She cries: "'Tis indeed a lovely vase!"

But brief her unworthy triumph, when The lofty one from the home of Penn,

With the consciousness of two grandpapas, Exclaims: "It is quite a lovely vase!"

And glances round with an anxious thrill, Awaiting the word of Beacon Hill.

But the Boston maid smiles courteouslee, And gently murmurs: "Oh, pardon me!

"I did not catch your remark, because I was so entranced with that charming vase!"

*James Jeffrey Roche (1847-1908).*

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**THE POPULAR MAGAZINE**

*In the Second August Issue*

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A Minute With——
The New Appian Way  
**LEONARD LUPTON**

The Golden Scent  
A Complete Novel  
**FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK**

Mr. Palmer Goes East  
**A. M. CHISHOLM**

For the Sake of Old Man Stein  
**RAYMOND LESLIE GOLDMAN**

The Devil’s Widow  
A Four-part Story—Part II  
**SEAN O’LARKIN**

Visibility—Zero

Horse-Ketchum  
A Six-part Story—Part III  
**JOHN AMID**

The Playboy Works Best  
**DANE COOLIDGE**

The Popular Club  
**WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY**

A Chat With You  
**THE EDITORS**
MR. A. M. CHISHOLM, whose story, "Mr. Palmer Goes East," will appear in the coming number, tells humorously in a letter of something that many writers often experience.

"I have," he says, "no formula for writing, no special system of work or for work. I work when I feel like it, which is most of the time. My observation being that if you work when you don't feel like it by and by you may feel like it; but if you wait till you feel like it, you will not feel like it till the 'Sweet By-and-By.'"

* * * *

THE lives of creative people, whether they are writers, artists, or musicians, show us that they must constantly fight obstacles. These may be sickness, worry, poverty, a disinclination to labor—or any one of a number of things. Some of the great masters used to resort to tricks to help them. Voltaire had several desks, on each of which was a different manuscript. He would work on one for a while, then, growing weary of it, change to another, and so on, in this way keeping his interest ever fresh in his various writings.

Mark Twain preferred to write in bed, with a board on his knees and a cigar between his teeth. Stevenson wrote in bed, too, while he was spending his last days in Upolu, one of the Samoan Islands; but he was sick and had to. The natives there loved him and called him Tusitala, "teller of tales."

* * * *

ALFRED DE MUSSET, the French writer, could not work except at night, and so he would create an imitation night by pulling the shutters and lighting his candles.

BALZAC liked to write at night, too. He would sleep until twelve, midnight, then toil for many hours, drinking large quantities of black coffee, and in the morning his papers would go off to the printers.

Edgar Allan Poe penned his stories and poems at night, and with the aid of black coffee, also—but not because he preferred to do so. He had to slave all day managing, editing and writing most of his newspaper, the Broadway Journal. And yet he continued his literary production, even though harassed by financial worries, ill health and the mortal sickness of his wife.

* * * *

LONG before Poe was born, another genius had his troubles. François Villon, the beloved poet-thief of France, composed his verses in grimy wine cellars, while the footsteps of the dreaded watch sounded like death-knells on the cobblestones outside. At any moment he might be caught and sent to the gibbet.

Michelangelo had to combat distractions, and so had a shed built over a large piece of fine marble, where he worked in seclusion for two years—and the marble slowly took form as his great statue, David. Leonardo da Vinci, who was as great an inventor as he was an artist, suffered for his versatility, for the nobles of Florence used to interrupt his painting to get him to fix things for them—like plumbing, et cetera.

* * * *

YOU see, they all faced difficulties. Thomas Carlyle was troubled by dyspepsia. Writing was hard for him, into the bargain. He often complained of the labor and worry it cost him—and
yet he is one of the masters, and his works would fill a bookcase.

Joseph Conrad, whose many novels of the sea testify to an amount of imaginative and intellectual effort almost Shakespearean, said that writing was torture for him—and that he spent many dark hours in doubt about the quality of his own work. He remarked, if we remember correctly, that his stories were torn bodily, as it were, out of himself.

CREATIVE people dream all their lives of some peaceful, secluded nook, suited to their temperaments, where they may work. But it is an open question whether genius thrives best in an atmosphere of contentment or harassment. The few examples given here seem to prove nothing except that great things have been produced in spite of all obstacles, and that the thinkers and creators of the world are no more fortunately situated than our own selves.

Of course, many people have worked and do work under conditions that seem almost ideal. Horace, the Roman poet, was given a grand villa in his favorite hills, and all he had to do in return was to write poems in praise of his patron, Mæcenas.

In our own time, Eugene O'Neill, who is considered America’s greatest playwright, has bought an old coast-guard station at the tip of Cape Cod. Wisely, he chose it partly because it is very hard to reach. Would-be admirers are discouraged from making distracting visits by a two-mile walk over sand.

OUR own Fred MacIsaac, like a true newspaper man, seems to be able to turn out stories anywhere he places his typewriter, and sometimes that is in Los Angeles, at other times in New York, or in Paris, or Rome, or on a steamer, a train or in an airplane. Dane Coolidge, whose serial is now running, lives in the Southwest and does his writing there, in the very country he describes. Sean O’Larkin, whose “The Devil’s Widow” is running also in serial form, lives now in New York, now in Paris, and feels ashamed of himself if he writes less than five thousand words a day. If you think that’s easy, try it!

WE meant to ask Frank Lillie Pollock where and how he wrote “The Golden Scent,” his new novel which will appear in the next issue. It is a well-thought-out mystery story with a new idea. The opening scene is in a fashionable hotel, at evening, on the west coast of Florida. A jazz orchestra is playing, people are dancing, couples are strolling in the gardens where lanterns hang in long festoons. Romance is king, and all the world seems rosy. And then Death, with one silent blow, strikes out the light and joy—and the scene shifts to the hovering gloom and mystery of the cypress swamps, where good men and bad grimly struggle for an exotic substance that is worth its weight in gold.

MR. POLLOCK does not write many stories, but when he does do one, you may be sure that it’s a corker. And this is just that. Good stories simply have to be written, no matter whether the author is languid about work, sick, worried or busy with other things. Mr. Pollock is usually too busy to write. But “The Golden Scent” must have itched at his finger tips until he had to sit down at his typewriter. More power to that itch!
You wouldn’t care to meet Marvin

Men thought him a great fellow—for a little while. Women grew romantic about him—until they knew. People welcomed him at first—then dropped him as though he were an outcast.

Poor Marvin, yearning so for companionship and always denied it. Poor Marvin, ignorant of his nickname and ignorant, likewise, of the foundation for it.

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