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Meigs O. Frost — A. E. Ullman — T. Von Ziekursch

Short Stories

Twice A Month

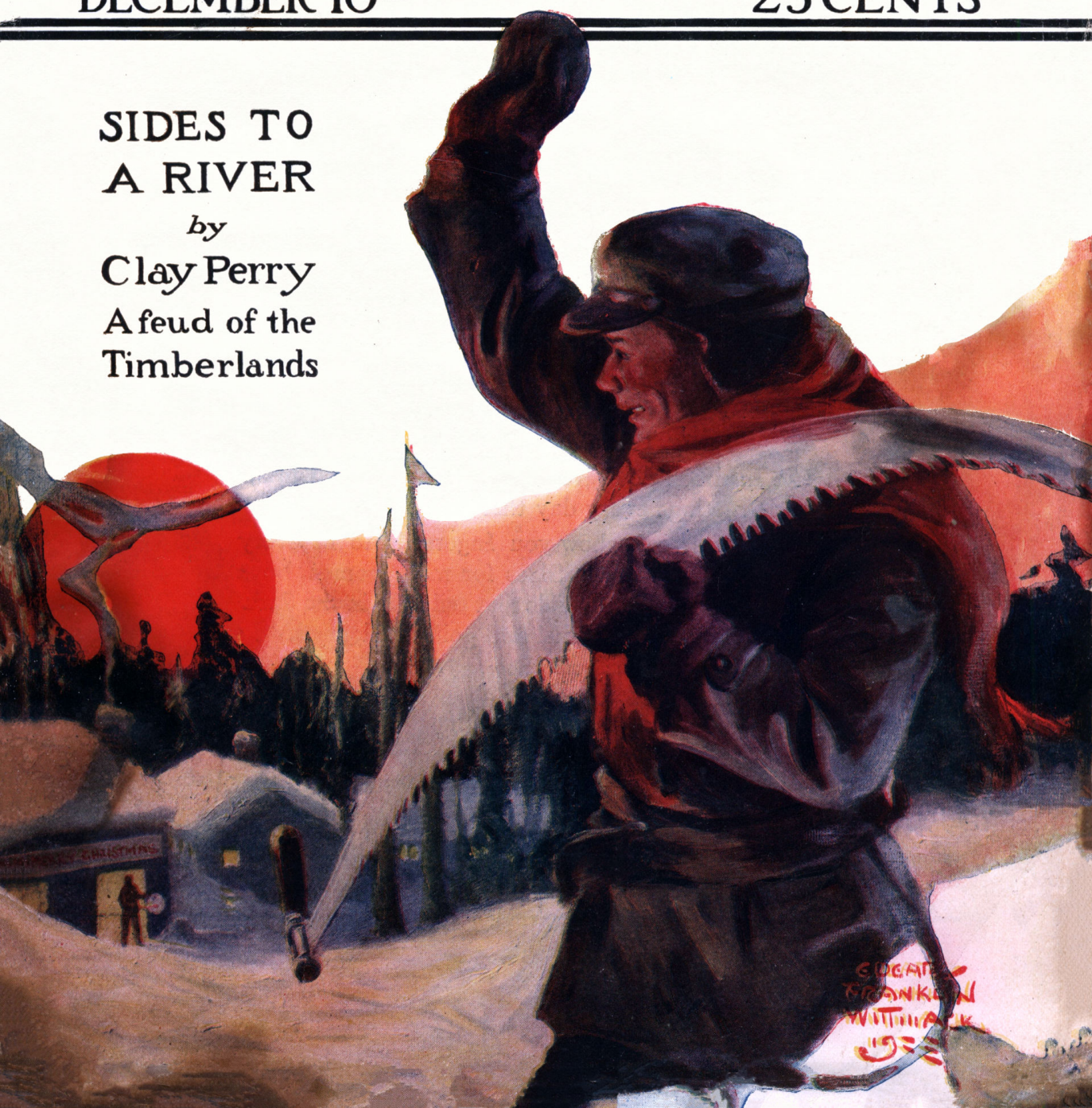
DECEMBER 10th 25 CENTS

SIDES TO A RIVER

by

Clay Perry

A feud of the Timberlands



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Your dealer can show you Ingersolls to fit every purse and purpose. Sizes for men, women, boys and girls. Radiolite dials that tell time in the dark. Jeweled models in nickel and gold-filled cases.

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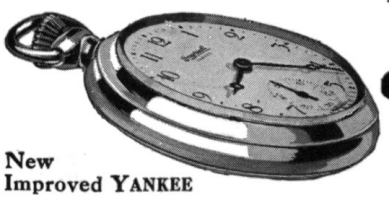

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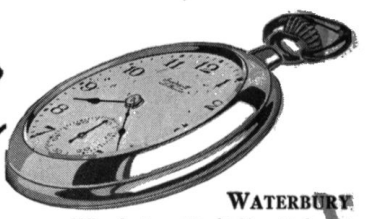

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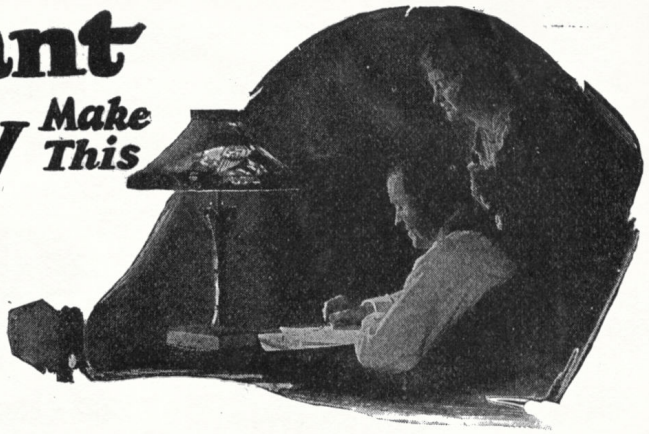
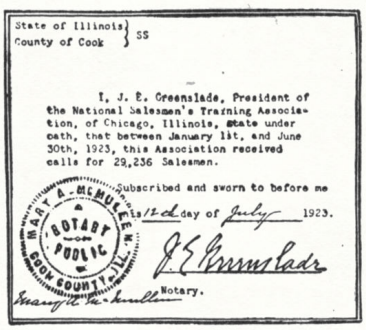


There's a sure way to increase your earning power. And here is such an opportunity. Look into it—you may recognize it as your one chance to earn the biggest money of your life.

ARE you ready for a shock? Then, let me tell you that if you have average intelligence and can read and write, there is a quick and easy way for you to earn enough money to satisfy any average ambition. And after reading this offer, if you do not quickly make more money, you have no one to blame but yourself.

Don't take my word for it. By a simple test—you can make in the privacy of your home—you will know that every word I say is true—or otherwise. The test does not obligate you or cost you one penny. But make it! Then judge for yourself. It has proved to be THE opportunity for thousands. They have found the way to bigger pay—are now earning from five to twenty times as much as formerly. And the beauty of it is they enjoy every minute in the day's work. They are their own bosses.


State of Illinois } SS
County of Cook }

I, J. E. Greenslade, President of the National Salesmen's Training Association, of Chicago, Illinois, state under oath, that between January 1st, and June 30th, 1923, this Association received calls for 29,236 Salesmen.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 12th day of July 1923.

MARY A. McMULLEN NOTARY PUBLIC COOK COUNTY, ILL.

J E Greenslade

Notary.

The thousands who have made this test before you, and who are now making the money you would like to make, are now salesmen. Ninety-five per cent once thought they were not "cut out for selling;" that salesmen were "born" and not made. They found it was a fallacy that had kept them in the rut. They discovered that anyone with proper training can sell, and they are making from $5,000 to $10,000 a year, because they had the vision to recognize opportunity.

Thousands Have Proved It!

For instance, Ellis Sumner Cook, 20 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, left a $25 a week job and last year made $9,000! H. D. Miller, another Chicago boy, was making $100 a *month* as a stenographer in July 1922. In September, 3 months later, he he was making $100 a *week* as a salesman. W. P. Clenny of Kansas City, Mo., stepped from a $150 a month clerkship into a selling job at $500 a month. He is making $850 a month now. M. V. Stephens of Albany, Ky., was making $25 a week. He took up this training and now makes 5 times that much. J. H. Cash of Atlanta, Ga., exchanged his $75 a month job for one which pays him $500 a month. O. H. Malfroot of Boston, Mass., stepped into a $10,000 position as a SALES MANAGER—so thorough is this training. All these successes are due to this easy, fascinating and rapid way to master certain invincible secrets of selling.

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Sounds remarkable, doesn't it? Yet there is nothing remarkable about it. There are certain ways to approach different types of prospects to get their undivided attention—certain ways to stimulate keen interest—certain ways to overcome objections, batter down prejudices, outwit competition and make the prospect act. If you will learn these principles there is awaiting you a brilliant success and more money than you ever thought of earning.

As you will see by the affidavit to the left thousands of reputable selling organizations in America turn to this Association for their Salesmen. We can never take care of all the demands made on us for this better type of trained salesmen.

Make This Free Test at Once

Don't turn this page until you have clipped the coupon, filled it out, and sent it on its way. The test is contained in a free book, "Modern Salesmanship" which we will gladly send you without obligation. After reading the book through you will ask yourself the question it brings up. The answers will prove whether this is your opportunity or not. So mail the coupon NOW.

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASS'N.
Dept. W-57. Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Ass'n.
Dept. W-57, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me without obligation on my part your free book, "Modern Salesmanship" which will enable me to test my ability at home, and full information about the N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service.

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

Four Out of Five Pay the Penalty

Bleeding gums herald Pyorrhea

Take heed of bleeding gums. They're Nature's warning of Pyorrhea. Only one person out of every five past forty escapes. Thousands younger contract it, too.

Forhan's For the Gums, if used consistently and used in time, will prevent Pyorrhea or check its progress. Brush your teeth with it. It will keep them white and clean, and your gums firm and healthy. Pleasant to the taste. At all druggists, 35c and 60c in tubes.

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Get This Wonderful Ring. If You Can Tell It From a Genuine Diamond Send It Back

These amazing, beautiful CORODITE diamonds positively match genuine diamonds in every way—same blazing flash and dazzling play of living rainbow fire. They, alone, stand the diamond tests, including terrific acid test of direct comparison. Lifetime experts need all their experience to see any difference. Prove this yourself.

Wear a Corodite Diamond 7 DAYS FREE

Make this test. You risk nothing. Wear a genuine Corodite and a diamond side by side on the same finger for 7 days. If you or your friends can tell the difference, send it back; you won't be out a single penny. That's fair enough. If you keep the ring, price printed here is all you pay. No installments. Remember, Corodites alone have the same cutting as genuine stones.

No. 1—Ladies' Solitaire 14K Gold S. Ring	$2.84
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No. 5—Ladies' Solitaire Bridal Blossom Engraved	$3.54
No. 6—Gents' Massive Hand-Carved Green Gold Gypsy	$4.39
No. 7—Gents' Heavy Belcher 14K Gold S. Ring	$3.68

Carat size gems. Beautiful mountings of most modern design. Choice of gold or latest white platinum finish. Unqualified 20-, ear guarantee. Handsome art leather case free with each ring.

SEND NO MONEY Keep your money right at home. Just send name, address and number of ring wanted and size as shown by slip of paper, fitting end to end around finger joint. Your ring will come by return mail. When ring arrives deposit amount shown above with postman. If you decide not to keep ring after 7 days' wear, send it back and your money will be immediately returned. Send today.

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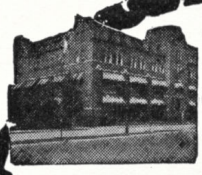
Sole Importers Genuine Corodite Diamonds



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.....Cert. Public Accountant	.....Foremanship
.....Accountant and Auditor	.....Sanitary Engineer
.....Bookkeeper	.....Surveyor (and Mapping)
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.....General Education	.....Fire Insurance Expert
.....Vocational Guidance	.....Wireless Radio
.....Business Law	.....Undecided

Name.....

Address.....

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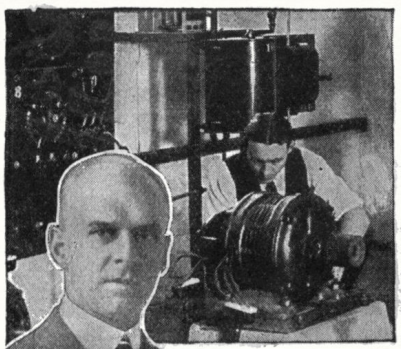
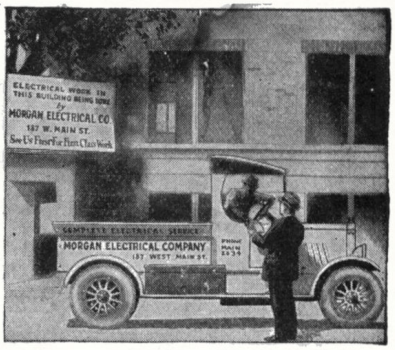
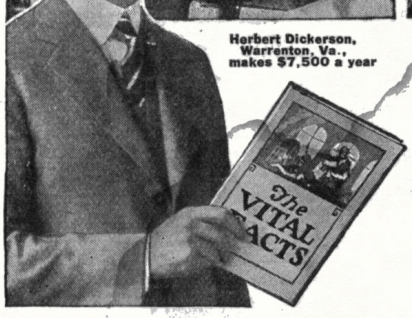




Herbert Dickerson, Warrenton, Va., makes $7,500 a year

Automotive Electricity pays W. E. Pence, Chehalis, Wash., over $9,000 a year

J. R. Morgan, Delaware, Ohio, makes $30 to $50 a day in business for himself



Electrical Experts Are in Big Demand

I Will Train You at Home To Fill a Big Pay Job

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

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

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

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You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training you need, and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is the most simple, through and successful in existence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education, or previous experience the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

FREE Electrical Working Outfit FREE

With me, you do practical work—at home. You start right in after your first few lessons to work at your profession in the regular way. For this you need tools, and I give them to you absolutely free—a whole kit, a complete outfit, one that would cost you $12 to $15.

Your Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, too can get into the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid to me in tuition, if when you have finished my Course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

Guarantee Backed by a Million Dollar Institution

Back of me in my guarantee, stands the Chicago Engineering Works, Inc., a million dollar institution, thus assuring to every student enrolled, not only a wonderful training in Electricity, but an unsurpassed Student Service as well. It's this Service that makes "Cooke" training different from any other training. It's this Service, plus "Cooke" Training, that makes the "Cooke" Trained Man the "Big-Pay Man," **everywhere.**

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L. L. COOKE, Dept. 139 **The Man Who Makes**
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Old-fashioned hot applications, while helpful, have little penetrative power. They heat the surface but do not touch the seat of pain. **Stein-O-Lite's magic rays do!** They get right down into the throbbing tissues and break up the congestion thru stimulation. You can actually feel the pain-shot tissues relax and the pain die out as the warm, mellow rays—golden as tropical sunlight—play upon the tender area. Clean as sunlight, safe as sunlight, pleasant as sunlight—Stein-O-Lite does the work.

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Because Stein-O-Lite rays **cannot** burn or irritate the skin (see why in panel text) any individual can use it. For the pains of little ones as well as grown-ups. Think of its convenience, too—just screw a plug into a light socket, turn the switch and a flood of pain-soothing light starts to work.

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We know — and physicians know — the great remedial powers of Stein-O-Lite. But we want you to try it—**thoroughly** at our risk on

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Send us $12 in money order, bank draft or check (also sent C. O. D. postage prepaid). If Stein-O-Lite does not prove all that our accompanying literature proclaims, return it and we will cheerfully refund money.

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If the vocation of the person to whom you will give Corona is not listed here, mail the coupon below.

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This heavy, double-breasted, all-wool overcoat will give you dandy service. It is beautifully made of pure all-wool material in a warm, deep, rich cinnamon brown. It is as good looking as it is serviceable. Partly lined in high-grade, durable material. Large collars, semi-raglan sleeves, full belt, roomy patch pockets and bound seam. Length 44 to 47 inches. Sizes 34 to 46 inches chest measure. Give chest measure taken over vest. Order by number 4689.

Order Today

Don't miss this wonderful chance to get your winter overcoat at this amazingly low price. If you aren't satisfied with this high quality overcoat at this remarkable low price, your money will be refunded. **Our new catalog showing amazing values in boy's and men's suits and overcoats is just off the press. Send for it NOW.**

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Enclosed please find $1.00. Send me the double-breasted, all-wool ovecoat at the advertised price. If I am not satisfied when I receive the overcoat, I can return it and get my money back. If satisfied, I will pay $4.00 after inspection and $4.00 per month — Total $24.95. Order by No. 4689. My measures are :—

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At $75 to $200 a Week

Every up-to-date fellow knows what a future there is in **electricity.**

Big pay—fascinating work on land or sea—rapid advancement in a field where jobs are ten times more numerous than trained men to fill them, where $75.00 a week is just a fair starter, where top notchers pull down ten thousand dollars or more a year—in a field, where any man if he wishes, can easily have a business of his own, have men working for him, **be his own boss!**

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Yes, you. You don't need a thing you don't already have! You can read. You can write. You can figure. You can **think.** And in your breast is the fire of ambition—the desire to get ahead! All right, that's all you need—we can help you just as you are—just as we have helped scores, yes, thousands of other two-fisted young fellows determined to get out of the rut and into the electric field—into work that will be pleasant—easy—and all in your home, during spare time

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December 10, 1923

Short Stories

Vol. CV., No. 5 Whole No. 452

HARRY E. MAULE, EDITOR
D. McILWRAITH, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LUCK AND FORESIGHT

IF GENIUS is the capacity, as many great men have said in various ways, for taking infinite pains, then luck is large foresight—that strange mixture of intuition, character and acquired wisdom. What we mean is this: Many men are called fortunate because their enterprises turn out well for them. How often do you suppose that the seeming "turning out well" is merely the inevitable result of long and thoughtful planning, of lines laid here and there to bring about certain hoped for results, of a study of conditions, and a strict observance of the laws of cause and effect? Perhaps the most important element is in no wise related to the careful and seemingly selfish calculation indicated by the above lines. We mean *character*; character for its own sake—because real character cannot be developed for so low a reason as personal gain. Nevertheless, character will build you a balance of credit with the outside world more precious than gold. This thing, then, is my idea of the first ingredient of lasting luck. Of course, even a crook may have luck for a while.

Upon such a foundation put intuition—that mysterious thing of which "hunches" are made—checked by wisdom, and you have a man of foresight. There is a man who sees what a given set of circumstances is likely to bring forth, whose word is trusted by those who know him, a man who fools neither himself nor others, and who plans ahead accordingly. When this man's plans turn out well, is it luck? Sometimes it is, we grant you, but oftener we think it something else.

Not, mind you, that we deny entirely the element of luck in success. Of course, it is there. Most success has its share of it and the big men, if honest with themselves, will admit the happy turns of fate in their lives. But luck alone is a slender reed to lean on.

THE EDITOR.

CONTENTS

COVER DESIGN — EDGAR F. WITTMACK

SIDES TO A RIVER — CLAY PERRY — 3

TRAIL OF FLAME — T. VON ZIEKURSCH — 43

THE JUDGMENT OF MYSTERY SWAMP — LEMUEL L. DE BRA — 51

THE CALL OF KIN — HARLEY P. LATHROP — 57

ALIAS SANTA CLAUS — ALBERT EDWARD ULLMAN — 66

THE VOICE OF KÁLI — SAX ROHMER — 80

METTLE OF MEN — JOHN BRIGGS — 122

REALM OF THE MOUNTED (Part III) — JAMES B. HENDRYX — 132

THE BAIT — WILLIAM M. STUART — 155

INHERITED — MEIGS O. FROST — 159

THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE — 173

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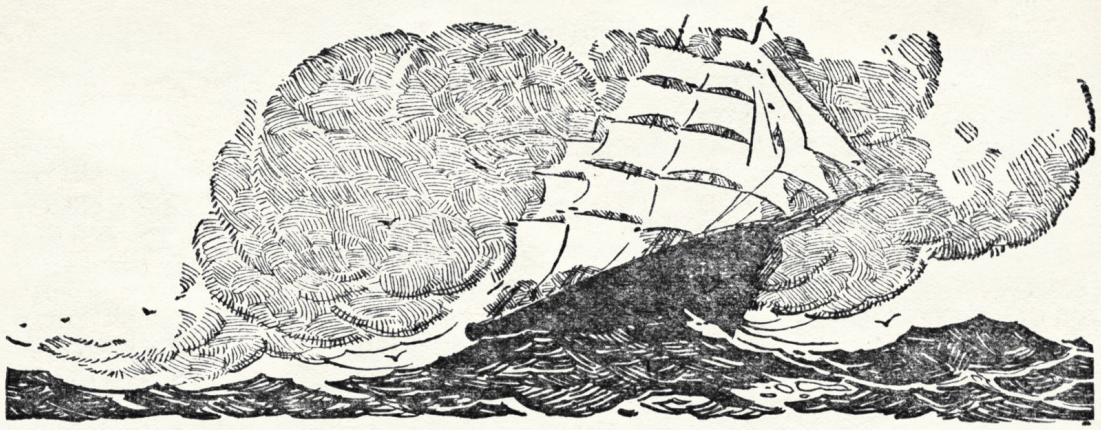

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And we yearned beyond the sky-line
Where the strange roads go down."

And in our Next issue the roads lead

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December 25th

Short Stories

Out the Day it's Dated

SIDES TO A RIVER

By CLAY PERRY

Author of "Wild Rivers," "The Snare," etc.

WHEN WAR STARTED IN THE LAC FLAMBEAU LUMBER COUNTRY THERE WERE MANY SIDES, ALSO, TO SLIM DERRINGER'S STRATEGY FOR DELIVERING HIS LOGS ACCORDING TO CONTRACT, "COME HELL OR HIGH WATER."

CHAPTER I

ITCHING FEET

SLIM DERRINGER and Dinky Dan, the Splinter Cat, quit the job on the Lac Du Flambeau dam together, and came down to Anconia. Slim had an itch to his feet, and Dinky Dan had a terrible thirst. They got through with the dam job—also spelled with an "mn"—before the job was through, because of the Jensens, who were hard men to get along with. It spoke well for Slim and Dan that they had stuck right through the hot summer until late September. They had joined the dam construction crew direct from the drive, after a winter's hard work in the woods.

Slim was ready to shake the bark and sawdust of the Flambeau region from the calks of his drive-boots, and depart on the wanderlust trail, which meant West. Dinky Dan merely wanted some good liquor to drink.

Dinky Dan thought he had the wanderlust. He had "allers intended to up and go West," but he had never done it. Dan had worked most of his life in the Flambeau country. He was older than Slim. Forty years had passed over his head and left it grizzled. More than twenty years he had spent in the woods and on the river, rising to the post of chief dynamiter—hence his handle, "Splinter Cat." It is the man who "blows the jam," who makes the hole called "The Splinter Cat's Nest."

Slim Derringer left his partner sitting on the hot side of a planed pine board, which projected from the end of a picturesquely leaning lumber pile in the yard of the Harper Lumber Company's huge plant. Dinky Dan had refused to go into the office. He would give no reason for his hesitation, but Slim knew, from the manner in which Dan slumped down, with more bend than usual to his powerful shoulders and his faded, narrow-brimmed river-hat pulled down over his eyes, and from the dolefulness of Dan's drone as he broke out in his favorite ditty, that Dan was facing a crisis of some sort.

"O—oh—they's only two sides to a river,
This side and the one over there."

Thus droned Dan.

"You have twelve months straight time coming to you, Mr. Derringer."

Slim opened wide a pair of very blue eyes with a touch of sun and a dash of sky and a ripple of clear-running water

in them, and looked straight into a pair of very serious deep brown eyes behind the bars of the wicket at the pay-window. The brown eyes belonged to a girl, a very pretty girl, but she was pale and worried looking, Slim thought. It seemed incongruous for a pretty girl to look so serious and so distracted.

"Do you want to cash it all in, or bank part of it in the Company Savings? It pays five per cent., you know."

This question had been asked of Slim at various pay-windows. His usual, unhesitating reply had been, "Cash, thank yu." He had never bothered to look into the eyes of the cashier, for the query generally came from a "white collar stiff," whose meager outlook from behind the bars of a pulp-mill or lumber-mill office was as far from Slim's idea of real life as a boiled egg is from a fighting cock. Slim regarded the girl with interest because he was aware she must be Nellie Arthur, private secretary to Nathaniel Harper, owner of the Anconia mills and vast acres of timberlands up the Flambeau. Nellie Arthur, whose father had once been a wealthy lumberman, but who had died bankrupt, leaving an invalid wife and a daughter just out of high school. Nellie Arthur whose name he had heard up in camp. What was it? Ah! "They say Chris Jensen's goin' to marry her. She'll marry money, but it's a hell of a note!"

Vaguely, impersonally, Slim had agreed that it would be a "hell of a note" for any decent girl to marry Chris Jensen, younger brother of John, who was not such a bad sort, himself. Slim had run afoul of Chris up on the dam job, and frankly, it was because of Chris more than because of John that Slim had quit. Slim merely hated John Jensen as a skinflint. Chris he detested with an antipathy that was absolutely unreasonable in its strength.

Slim regarded the girl now, not only because of what he had heard, camp gossip, but because her question and her expression had evinced a not unpleasing, if matter-of-fact, businesslike interest in his financial welfare. At other pay-windows Slim had got the impression it was his money they wanted to use. Cashiers were usually quite impersonal automatons. Slim's reaction to them was to get what was coming to him, and get out of the confining, stifling atmosphere of sun-cooking pine and five per cent. interest into free, open air.

Now Slim hesitated. For some reason it seemed impossible for him to make a direct and impersonal reply to her query. He gave a hitch to his narrow belt which supported heavy woolen trousers, cut just below the knees, to make "high water pants" of them. He smiled and took his stand more firmly in his calked boots.

By the time he had got to that smile, the girl had looked up again from busy pencil on paper, and there was a flicker in her eyes that very seldom failed to appear in the eyes of any girl when Slim Derringer smiled in his frank, friendly fashion. That smile of Slim's inspired confidence, a tingling interest in the owner's personality and welfare. It made him look like a grown-up small boy. Very much grown up, Slim was, for he got his name from his height rather than because he was inordinately slender. He stood six-feet-one in his boots, with a lithe grace about him that belied his real weight, which was one hundred and eighty. His sloping shoulders did not hint it.

Nellie Arthur observed that the face beneath the soft gray river-hat—which he removed presently—was bronzed rather than burned to the brick-red of the typical lumberjack. His eyes had a gleam of intelligence that somehow made his cherubic juvenility of countenance seem less undeveloped. Crinkles of humor about his eyes and mouth strengthened his whole face.

All this occurred in the space of a few seconds. But light travels fast and something like light, swift and sure, had leaped between two pairs of eyes, blue and brown, as their gaze met. Nellie Arthur, who was twenty-two, became more businesslike.

Slim Derringer appeared to be weighing her words of wisdom as his face sobered, but his direct gaze was still bent with frank approval upon the eyes and the soft dusky hair and the lips of the one who had seemed offering him advice.

"D'yu think the Company 'ud get as much good outa my money as I would fun spendin' it?" he drawled.

Nellie Arthur smiled, then. She could not help it, because it was so boyishly serious behind its intonation of dry humor.

She was used to rivermen and their ways. So many of them were merely overgrown boys; they needed to be advised and helped to save their money.

That was the reason for the Company Savings.

"That depends on how much good you get out of the fun you have spending it," she retorted, her smile taking the edge off the touch.

"That's a good one!" exclaimed Slim, with a delighted laugh.

It was a hot moon. He took a colorful silk bandanna from the pocket of his gray woolen shirt, open at the neck, and wiped his forehead.

"You've got over two thousand dollars to your credit in time," she went on. "You haven't cashed in since you went up river last fall."

"Well, I didn't have much use for it up in the woods," he explained with half-seriousness.

"Would you like it all in bills?" came the business-like query.

"Well, I was thinkin'," Slim replied slowly, leaning one elbow on the shelf of the pay-window. "I was wonderin' what I'd do with all my money. I suppose it would buy a quarter section of cabbage-farm up no'thwest of Lac du Flambeau, and I could go to moss-backin' and mebbe double my money in a season. John Jensen's tellin' the immigrants that story."

His voice was quiet, even-toned, but something caused a flash of shadow, almost of distress to pass over the girl's face. She bit her lip.

"Were you thinking seriously of going to moss-backing, Mr. Derringer?"

Slim chuckled and whacked at his thigh with his hat. "Well, not serious. Not for a while yet. Not so long as my feet will stick onto the bark of a birlin' lawg. My idear——"

He stopped short because Nellie Arthur's eyes were studying him so intently that there seemed almost a personal question in them. There was.

"Are you a Yankee, Mr. Derringer?" she asked suddenly, "I mean—were you born in New England?"

Slim did not take the question amiss. He knew the reason for it.

"No, ma'am," he replied, smiling easily. "I s'pose yu might call me Yank as much as anythin', though. I was born in Canada on a steamer out of Buffalo. I was trained in Maine, studied, so to speak, in Michigan white pine and Wisconsin hemlock, matriculated in southern pine and graduated in California redwood. I reckon I came back here for a *post*-graduate course. Ned Harper's pineries caught me on the fly, so to speak, but he ain't loggin' pine yet, and it looks to me like fence-posts, this second- and third-growth pulpsticks. Answerin' yore question, now, what would that make me? I'm white," he finished soberly.

Nellie Arthur colored, and Slim liked to see the white face flushed with healthy crimson. He liked to hear her laugh, too.

"I guess you are all-American," she said. "The reason I asked you if you were New England was because you said 'idear,' and just before that you called a log a 'lawg,' and it puzzled me."

"My tongue's too slippery," grinned Slim. "It's all twisted up around the parts of speech from Bangor to Astoria. Queer thing, when I'm bossin' a gang of bohunks I get to talkin' like one myself. When I'm workin' with a crew like Jensen had up-river my language would make you think of the gang that built the tower of Babel. It's all peppered with Scandinavian and Canuck French and pidgin-Injun. Right now, though, I'm beginnin' to hit off the English more like an educated person than I have for months."

Again Slim got his present wish. She laughed again, with a hint of excitement in her mirth.

"One reason I asked if you were Yankee," she said, suddenly sober, but with the excitement still plain in her voice, "is because I know you are a woodsman and riverman of experience—I knew that before you told me—and because this winter there is a chance for a man with 'idears' to make some money on very small investment of his own capital. Mr. Harper is going to sublet his logging jobs, this fall. In fact, the bids are due to be opened this afternoon. You know that he has turned his whole attention to the reforestation project in white pine that he started last year. He turned over the Lac du Flambeau homestead development to John Jensen and delayed his plan to extend the narrow-gauge railroad up from Rails to Tamarack Bend, because he wants to concentrate entirely on the pineries. Next year he'll start thinning out the present parks of pine-stand. He wants to reforest a big tract lying between Lac du Flambeau, east and south of the river—the Little River section."

"Tamrack swamp!" exclaimed Slim incredulously.

"Yes. And properly logged off, leaving wind-breaks for shelter, properly drained, that's ideal ground for pine seedlings," she answered his objection, and he nodded acquiescence.

"There will be the usual pulp-wood cutting," she went on, "the usual hard-wood cutting for the mills at Rails—and the tamarack job. They are using tamarack a great deal for pulp-wood, in some sections, but our material for pulp is limited to hemlock and spruce. Mr. Harper wants to keep clear of tamarack pulp, and at the same time he feels that the tamarack will find a good market. Swamp tamarack or wild larch isn't very fine timber, you know, except for ship work, and that market is dead. And it's only where the tree gets a chance to grow in the open and keeps all its limbs intact that it could be called pretty. On the other hand, its value for ship-timber, for spars and masts, is greater where it grows close. The lower limbs die and break off clean and the trunk heals over and doesn't leave a bad knot. It's the same with pine but——"

Slim brightened at the mention of pine.

"—but there will be no pine job this year," she finished.

"Shucks!" was Slim's dejected comment.

"Didn't you know that?"

"I thought mebbe he'd cut some pine this winter," Slim responded gloomily. "That 'ud be a fine job. I'd enjoy to be boss of that job. The man on the pine job would be boss of the river."

Nellie Arthur understood Slim's dejection. She knew what it meant to a genuine riverman to be "boss of the river" on a respectable timber contract such as white pine would be.

"But it can't be me," sighed Slim, straightening up. "I'll be looking for a new job, somewheres else."

Chapter II

TALKING TAMARACK

MR. DERRINGER!"

Slim halted at the door of the office.

"Yes, ma'am. I'll be doggoned! I clean forgot all about the iron men that are comin' to me."

He returned to the wicket, grinning broadly. But the girl was not smiling. Her face had become pale again, but it was tinged with a pinkness that spoke once more of hidden excitement. She made no move to count out his pay, but fixed her gaze upon his face, intently.

"Wouldn't you like to try for that tamarack job?" she asked.

Slim Derringer refused to be serious. His laugh broke out in open mirth.

But the girl was very serious. "Someone with 'idears' and nerve might get a fat contract out of it," she said. "And I'll tip you off some more. Mr. Harper hasn't had a single bid on the tamarack job—that is, not a single one. Nobody seems to want it, because it is tamarack, 'little sticks in the mud,' you know." She quoted the popular lumberman's estimate of tamarack. "It will be a fussy job, one that will require individual attention. I heard Mr. Harper say before he went to lunch that he'd have to give it to the man who got the pulp-wood contract as a sideline, unless he could find someone with a little capital and a lot of nerve to take it on percentage. You know what that means?"

"Ten per cent. plus, contractor to furnish grub and horse-feed, pick his own men, Company will discount time-checks up to date of delivery as stated in contract," recited Slim glibly.

"And pay ten per cent. on the capital invested," added Nellie Arthur. "And if you could get somebody else with a little capital, with yours to start with—well, I know where you could get one thousand dollars more, right now."

"You do?" Slim shot the question at her so sharply that the delicate pink of her cheeks became crimson. "Now listen," he went on, his blue eyes holding hers, "there's one thing I want to say. If you'd get as much fun outa helpin' me to spend my roll as I would enjoy to have you—I'd like to go partners with you on that—and that goes."

There was no mistaking the sincere audaciousness of this, but despite its boldness Nellie Arthur had to bite her lips to keep from laughing aloud. The inner excitement that had pinked her cheeks as she urged Slim Derringer to consider tamarack seemed to have intensified under the clear warm, friendly flame of Slim's eyes.

She did not know whether Slim's last remark was a chance shot in the dark, or whether he had guessed that the thousand dollars she spoke of was her own money. Either way, she was on thin ice. The impulse to laugh faded. This was no laughing matter.

"I mentioned the tamarack job to you, Mr. Derringer," she said, as coldly as only an excited woman can manage to speak, "because I am Mr. Harper's secretary, and

I know he wants the job handled right. I happen to know you could do it if——"

"Miss Nellie Arthur; ma'am," cut in Slim Derringer, still holding her gaze with his own, and not smiling. "Since comin' in here I've caught a hankerin' to make that roll of mine look like wrappin' paper, one way or another; either to bury it in a tamarack swamp or else float it out on a raft swelled to five times its normal size. I thank you. I'm goin' out to see Dinky Dan—er, that is, Daniel Absalom Green. He's waitin' for me."

"How much money you got, Dan?" inquired Slim, breaking in on the fifty-eighth verse of Dan's drone.

Daniel Green droned to a full stop and tilted a sun-stricken, frost-bitten, pudgy face up to the sober countenance of his friend.

"Money!" he half-whispered, almost in a frightened tone, as of something dangerous. "Money! Why, Slim, that's what I'm sittin' here singin' for. Why, Slim, what's the matter? I never even heard you mention it before. You want to borry some. I got fifty dollars in my jeans, if that'll do you any good. You're welcome to——"

"Shucks, I didn't mean chicken-fodder," Slim interrupted. "I mean money that you have to count mebbe twice to make sure it ain't more. I'm serious. Nope, I don't want to borrow it. Listen, Dan, I got a business proposition to make you."

"Californy pine!" ejaculated Dinky Dan, a light in his eyes and a sigh in his breast conflicting with each other in the ever-losing battle between the wanderlust and thirst.

"Nope. I jest decided not to go West," Slim responded cheerfully.

He sat still on the teetering end of the same board with Dan, and waited.

"Not goin', eh?" Dan brightened, then his voice sank again. "Money! Slim, it skeers me to think of it. Listen! Mebbe you'll think I'm runnin' bubbles when I tell you, but I got so much money saved up I don't even know how much. In the Savin's, and I been saltin' it down for a good many years until some time mebbe when I'd up and go west. But you ain't goin' now, you say?"

There was both disappointment and delight in Dinky Dan's voice.

"Hum! Say, I've been sittin' here glued to this pine board tryin' to screw up my nerve to go and ask for *all my money to onct.* Yessir. I figgered this year I'd make a blow of it. Either I'd dig outa here with you, or I'd git rid of it right in town, for good. It's tyin' me down, demoralizin' me. You see, I started puttin' away some of my time when I first went to work for old John Pine Harper. Old Pine, he made me. I never dared draw it all out, because he was allers at the pay-window. Well, he died, you see, but I didn't jest want to up and take it all out, last year, off'n Ned, the fust year he was runnin' the show, so I saved it up, another year. Why, I guess mebbe I got several hundred dollars."

"Shucks! Why don't you go in and ask the cashier? Didn't you ever think of usin' yore money?" Slim was impatient with Dan, and this was a new thing entirely.

"Crimus! I jest don't dare!" exploded Dinky Dan with a painful contortion of body and face. "'Cause if I do, sure's I'm sittin' here, I'll up and draw it all out, and I'll wind up somewheres in Canada, Quebec, without a red cent left and have to go to work on a Canuck pulp-stick job for a livin'. You know me, Slim. Long's they was plenty of good likker here to home I could blow in fifty or a hundred dollars, and be satisfied, but this dam' homemade moonshine sets me crazy. Crimus! The on'y thing I can think of after a quart of it is Montreal—somewheres to take the taste outa my mouth."

Dinky Dan had spoken truth. Slim knew it. Dinky Dan was one of the best old-time woodsmen in the whole Flambeau district, but his thirst was greater than himself, when it tasted the first drop of the terrible concoctions dealt out to the lumberjacks by bootleggers. In the woods Dan would never think of touching the stuff. He was on the job, then. But when he drew his time and was "lyin' round loose" between summer and winter——"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Slim ventured after he had pondered a moment. "I'll go in and ask her—ask the cashier how much it is."

Dinky Dan paled in alarm.

"What fer?" he inquired. "Take my time check and draw it if you want, but don't——"

"Shut up, you old porcupine," laughed Slim, rising. "I'll tell you why I want to know the full extent of yore wealth. I want to pair mine with yours on a business deal."

"Lawgs?"

"Uh, huh!"

"What sort of sticks?"

"Tamarack."

"Lawgs? Hell, ye mean mud-sticks. Hell!"

"Lawgs," repeated Slim firmly. "I got a hunch Ned Harper's found a new market for 'em, somehow, since the ship-buildin' slumped. And I got an idear myself."

Slim moved off and Dan relapsed into his doleful drone:

"O—oh, they's only two sides to a river,
This side and the one over there,
Ye—e-e kin chaw tamarack to a sliver,
But 'twon't make a comb fer yer hair."

Chapter III

THREE PARTNERS

SLIM entered the office with his hat off, but replaced it when he saw behind the grilled window, instead of Nellie Arthur, the owner of the mills himself, Nathaniel Harper. Slim, who had expected to face those brown eyes again, was embarrassed how to open the conversation with Harper. He had never made a business proposition in his life. Always it had been the other man who did it.

"Hello, Slim!" Harper greeted him, cordially, saving him for the moment. "All done up above, eh? Laying off?"

"For a spell," drawled Slim, "but I got an idear we might take a whack at somethin', me and Dinky Dan, on our own hook. We've been talkin' tamarack. Thought we might put up a bid on that Little River job."

Harper laughed outright, and Slim's eyes grew dull—suddenly, as if he had been struck a blow. But they brightened instantly when Harper spoke the real reason for his laugh. "Your bid would be exclusive," he said, "except for one that came in as a part of the wood job. I've decided to turn that down, because the tamarack job is one that will need special attention. I don't suppose the other fellow will like it, but—by the way, have you got the money to swing it? On a percentage basis, I mean."

"I know my little pile," grinned Slim, "but Dan hasn't toted up his for so long he's lost track. He's been savin' his wages so long he has got sort of unused to more'n a hundred dollars at a time."

Harper grinned with Slim, for he, too, knew Dan's eccentricities.

"Oh, I see; so you're his acting auditor. Miss Arthur," he called.

She was in the inner office through which Harper had come to the wicket, having entered through the mill. Slim swept his hat off. His reward was a glimpse of a cloud of disappointment on her face to see him there at the pay-window again. Somehow that cloud seemed to have a silver lining, for Slim. Her disappointment cheered him. She thought he was there to draw out his money. She didn't want him to do it. Why?

"Please look up Dan Green's savings account, Miss Arthur, and see what it totals, with interest. Give Mr. Derringer the figures. Confidentially."

"Yes, Mr. Harper, I have them ready."

The cloud rolled away.

While she was in the other office Harper drew Slim into serious discussion of tamarack.

"You know, there isn't a tote-road in the swamp," he said. "You can't get a tractor in, except perhaps a five-ton type in mid-winter. Can't use the big caterpillars we haul out pine and spruce and hemlock with. Have to haul supplies up the River Trail or in bateaux—or on the ice."

"I've been thinkin', and I've got some idears about the job," Slim offered modestly. "Haven't worked 'em all out in my own head yet, but I did think we could ship by bateaux and power-launch, and take a small gang right up, soon, and start cuttin'."

"Before it freezes!" ejaculated Harper. "Man, it can't be done."

Slim's face was crinkled as he looked Harper in the eyes and drawled out, "First time I ever heard you use those weasel words, Mr. Harper."

Harper turned red, but it was with pleasant confusion at the high compliment Slim had paid him. "Thanks for the check, Slim," he chuckled at length. "I won't use weasel words again. Now, what is your idea?"

"Ought not to spring it yet," Slim countered. "Before I find out some things."

Nellie Arthur came out with a slip of paper which she gave to Harper. He inspected it, his eyebrows going up in surprise, then turned it over to Slim.

"Shucks!" exclaimed Slim, his face lengthening as he saw the figures.

"Dan has quite a little bank-roll, hasn't he?" Harper inquired. "And with yours to match it——"

"Aw, shucks!" muttered Slim, more violently. "Nine thousand, four hundred and seven dollars and fifteen cents!" he read dejectedly.

"Interest compounded annually," commented Nellie Arthur.

"It's too much," declared Slim, morosely, and shoved the slip back to her.

"Too much!" exclaimed Harper. "Why you'll need twenty thousand to swing the job."

"Yeah!" Slim crushed his hat into a wad, unfolded it and slapped his thigh. His eyes sought Nellie Arthur's face. "I mean Dinky Dan's got too much money for me to match him. I can't go partners with him on a shoe-string. I've only got two thousand."

The telephone rang, and Nellie Arthur reported it a personal call for Harper. He retired to the other office.

Dinky Dan came in. He was looking for Slim, having waited for him until he had become alarmed, in the belief that Slim was in the act of counting out the money, and had got into a tangle over it. Slim blurted out unguardedly the exact amount of Dan's pile.

For a moment Dan stood as if turned to stone, his little eyes bulging. He removed his disreputable hat and wiped his face with his shirt sleeve.

"Crimus Rod!" he ejaculated, at length. "Over nine thousand dollars! Holy Hemlock! Why, say, I couldn't go and spend all that money on myself and live!"

Nellie Arthur burst into an excited laugh. She sensed what Slim had not—that Dinky Dan was rising manfully to the occasion.

"Say!" cried Dan, throwing his hat on the floor and jumping on it with both feet. "Say! You know something! The only way I can get any action out of that roll is to go into business with it. Say, Slim, lets us take on that tamarack job!"

Slim was too astounded to speak, for a moment. His face lighted at the evidence of Dan's sturdy reaction to the discovery he was a bloated capitalist—but soon his eyes dulled in the curious way they had under the stress of any strong emotion.

"Yo're too rich, Dan," he muttered. "I can't go fifty-fifty with you. I'm bluffed out on the call."

It was Nellie Arthur who suggested a solution of this apparently insurmountable difficulty—for it did not occur to either Slim or Dan that there was any other way of their going into business together.

"Why not form a corporation?" she asked them. "Issue shares of stock, and each take what he can pay for—and raise money on what is left. I know where I can get one thousand dollars. You two men will have over thirteen thousand between you. Suppose you capitalize for twenty thousand; that gives you control, between you. I—I think I know where I could get five or six thousand more, besides."

Slim looked at Dan, and Dan looked at Slim, and they both looked at the girl. Her deep eyes were a-sparkle with excitement that could not be concealed.

"A corporation, eh?" piped Dan. He swaggered up to the window. "Say, Miss Arthur," he went on, in a serious, business-like tone that was almost comical for Dan, "d' you mean the same sort of a contraption as the Jensens got up to farm that homestead tract?"

"Yes—and the same as the Harper Lumber Company, too, for that matter," she replied. "It's done more and more, nowadays, instead of partnerships. Its safer, more convenient—easier to raise money sometimes, too, when you need it. It's like this——"

For a quarter of an hour Nellie Arthur talked and explained the details of the incorporation of a company, illustrating by the concrete example of the proposed concern at twenty thousand capitalization.

"Mr. Green, who will invest the most money, would naturally be president and treasurer of the corporation," Miss Arthur explained, "although there is nothing to prevent separation of these offices."

"I'd vote for you," said Slim to Dan. "You're the oldest, and got the heaviest roll."

"Then that puts it up to you to do the heavy thinkin'," retorted Dan. "You're the youngest, and you got the ideas."

"Suppose I get Lawyer Gardner on the phone and ask him to draw up articles of incorporation for us?" said Miss Arthur.

Slim looked up, sharply, at the inclusive "us."

"You goin' to join up with Dan and I?" he queried. "Oh, that thousand dollars you spoke of——"

"Is my own money," furnished Nellie, with a little uplift of her head. "I told you I could see a chance to make something on this job. I want to invest, help you organize and, if you will let me, take care of the book-work for the corporation.

You might elect me clerk, if you care to. That would complete the officers."

"Call the lawyer," insisted Daniel Green.

"Let's get this started quick, before my money begins to crawl out into my pockets, and burn holes in 'em. Let's call this the Three Partners Loggin' Company. What say?"

"That's splendid!" enthused Nellie Arthur. "Mr. Derringer, what do you say?"

"I say you ought to know somethin' about the idears that are the principal thing I've go to bank on before you risk a cent," said Slim, "before you hand me the earth with a fence around it. In the first place we've got to go to work and build a dam across the mouth of Little River."

"Um!" grunted Dan thoughtfully, and then, "that's the ticket!" he exclaimed. "We got to have a holdin' resevoy for head-water, so's not to depend on the Lac du Flambeau resevoy. John Jensen, he'll control the flowage rights from Lac du Flambeau."

"Yes, and not only headwater," Slim went on, "but *ice* in the swamp."

Dan stared at him. "Ice? We'll make our ice on the tote-roads—which we got to build—out of a water-tank wagon," he said.

"But the cutters have got to have somethin' solid to stand on—in the swamp," explained Slim quietly.

"Frozen bog!" ejaculated Dan. "Soon's she freezes up that swamp will be hard as rock."

"Maybe," agreed Slim, "but anyway we'll want plenty of water in the swamp before she freezes."

Dan's mouth opened for a further query, but Ned Harper emerged from the inner office, with an announcement.

"Well, Chris Jensen gets the pulp-wood contract," he said, "and I've just been tickling the market for tamarack. Our office at Escanaba thinks that if we can put tamarack down to lake-water by the middle of May, they can sell any amount of it, spot cash. I'll have to go down there later, and also take a trip to the lake resorts between Escanaba and Menominee and beyond. Well, boys, how about the tamarack proposition?"

"We're goin' to take a whack at it," declared Dinky Dan.

"Chris Jensen gets the wood contract, and John Jensen controls the flowage at the lake," commented Slim dubiously. "That means the Jensens are boss of the river."

"Oh, you'll get along with Chris Jensen," offered Harper. "He's a progressive, ambitious chap, and not likely to bite off his own nose to spite his face, not even if he is sore because he lost the tamarack job, which he wanted to take on as a side-contract.

"I have given him the right to clean up the old sweepings left lying along the river from Lac du Flambeau down as far as Tamarack Bend, something to keep him busy until his drive goes in the river. The river will be low this fall and sweeping down will be profitable, because he can get at the water-soaked logs that are strung along the river. He'll be busy wild-catting the sweepings and drift-logs, decking them up along shore ready to dump them in the spring and at the same time he will be starting his cutting in the hemlock and spruce. You ought to get along with Chris. You'll have a friend at court if you let Miss Arthur into your combination," he added, with a swift glance at Nellie's bent head.

She did not comment nor raise her eyes from the phone-book where she was looking for Lawyer Gardner's number.

"It's goin' to be the Three Partner's Loggin' Company," declared Dinky Dan, "and Miss Arthur is to be elected clerk. And I say treasury, too. I don't want to be the treasury. Too much money to handle."

Slim Derringer was silent, not because he did not concur in Dan's suggestion, but because the news that Chris Jensen was to have the wood contract on the Flambeau caused him uneasiness. Slim saw that it was really with Chris Jensen the Three Partners would have to make contact—and probably fight for sufficient headwater for the tamarack drive, when they put it into the Flambeau. Chris, cutting hemlock and spruce on the Flambeau's west bank would be in a strategic position. He would be boss of the river. Flowage rights on a logging stream breed trouble as rainwater breeds mosquitoes.

Slim did not voice his apprehensions for two reasons. One of them was Nellie Arthur. Slim was puzzled at her eagerness to launch this tamarack venture, put her money into it. He suspected that it

was a big stake for the girl, a big gamble.

"What say, Slim?" came Dan's crisp voice. "Now, if I'm president and Miss Arthur's clerk and treasury, you jest got to be vice-president and general manager of the Three Partners."

"I'll tell you what," broke in Harper. "I'll give you until May thirtieth to deliver your stuff, entire, but I shall want at least one million feet down here to ship by May fifteenth. If you will agree to that I will invest one thousand dollars in the Three Partners, myself."

"Chris Jensen's got to deliver his stuff when?" inquired Slim in a quiet drawl.

"May first," replied Harper.

"And John Jensen has been guaranteed absolute flowage rights out of Lac du Flambeau, for the irrigation ditches, after May first?"

"Yes, that is true, but you will get plenty of surplus flowage for headwater for your drive. Chris will be out of the way early, you see. The spring rains usually extend into May in this country and——"

"What does absolute flowage rights mean?" cut in Slim. "Can he raise the level of the sluice-ways at the lake so's to hold back the spring surplus?"

Harper shook his head, smiling. "No, the Flambeau is still a logging stream," he said, "and I've taken care of the drive rights. You understand that I built that dam at the lake as part of the logging plant, not only because of the irrigation project. It would have to be an exceptionally dry year to cut off overflow from the lake in May."

"An' they ain't been no dry rains since the winter of the blue snow," put in Dinky Dan with a chuckle.

Slim Derringer was regarding Nellie Arthur, who met his level inquiry with an unmistakable imploring look.

Slim turned to Harper, his face breaking from somber dubiousness into a confident smile.

"The Thre Partners it is," he said. "Thank you for the offer, but I think we'd better not ask you to give us any financial backin' over and above the usual deal on a percentage contract. That ain't business."

Harper smiled. "You don't talk weasel words, Slim Derringer," he said.

"I'll have a business proposition to put up to you, later," responded Slim. "I reckon we'll get the tamarack down here by the end of May even if there is another blue snow or two winters in one year."

Chapter IV

SLIM TALKS WITH HIS HANDS

DANIEL GREEN, having invested all but his pocket money in a capitalistic enterprise, yielded to the impulse to "have one good blow" with what he had on him. Fortunately Dan's thirst had disappeared. His impulse was to buy himself an outfit that would make him look like a logging contractor. Dan was swelled up with innocent pride after the ordeal of preliminary organization of the Three Partners Logging Company in the office of Lawyer Gardner, a process that had consumed the afternoon of the preceding day. Dan gravitated to the huge general store run by the Harper Lumber Company, and which specialized in lumbermen's clothing and supplies. The

Company store was also a sort of informal employment office whither drifted the idle rivermen to look over the bulletin board that was posted at the cigar counter, and where also came contractors and superintendents to pick up help.

Slim Derringer went with his partner to the store, not only for protection to Dan against a chance bootlegger, but because he had some purchases to make. Lawyer Gardner, who was something of a lumber lawyer as well as an attorney-at-law, had seen to it that an announcement of the incorporation of the Three Partners for the Little River tamarack job had been posted at the store, together with the information that there would be a demand for a crew of forty men. Choppers, sawyers, cook, cookees, were specified. Side by side with this announcement hung that of Chris Jensen, and a knot of flannel-shirted timberjacks were spelling out the two documents when the partners entered.

Slim made his way to the grocery counter while Dan sought the dry-goods department opposite the cigar-stand.

He began to select his outfit. First a wide-brimmed Stetson hat which would presently be reduced to the same abbreviation as Dan's river-hat, then a corduroy suit, high-laced boots, a dozen gaudy silk bandannas, shirts and a necktie.

Dan was soon the center of a curious, joshing audience. The audience was just what Dan wanted. He wanted to blow himself verbally as well as financially,

"Yessir, we've gone and incorporated the Three Partners Loggin' Company, incorporated," Dan announced, in reply to a question. "Me an' Slim Derringer and a third party. Have some cigars, boys."

The clerk who waited on Dan passed the usual largesse of five-centers that went with a riverman's purchase of an outfit. The air became blue with friendly smoke.

"Third party, eh?" drawled a tall, red-faced riverman, slapping Dan on the back, with a familiarity that Dan did not resent. "I suppose that's Ned Harper himself, eh?"

"Let me tell you this, Hoot Kelly," snapped Dan, with assumed anger, "Ned Harper wanted to, but we turned him down, that's how well he thinks of this team-up. I'll tell you what. We'll need a wood-butcher than can handle iron when it's hot. Mebbe you'll be lookin' for a job."

Hoot Kelly, true to his name, gave a derisive hoot.

"Mebbe I'll wait till I see what's bein' offered for hands," he retorted. "And I ain't had my blow, yet."

"Have a cigar and blow the smoke," suggested Dan. "I bet you the ole woman's got yore time check."

Hoot Kelly subsided beneath a barrage of laughter.

Chris Jensen drifted in, strolled to the cigar counter and purchased weeds. Jensen looked over the knot of men at the dry-goods counter and pricked up his ears. He had come looking for likely hands, and the bulletin announcing the Three Partners had given him food for thought. Jensen was swelling with importance much more egotistic than Dan's harmless bragging streak. He lived for logging and that alone, and he hated to hear anyone talk timber save himself.

Jensen was a stocky, thick-chested man with a square face and blue eyes that gave a first impression of mild good-humor, but one needed only to mention certain key-words when his eyes took on a glint of calculating hardness. Key-words, such as "contract" or "log-feet" or "drive." Chris was a good lumberman, and he and his brother John, who was the elder, had built up a reputation for business success out of nothing except their ability to work hard and save money—and secure cheap labor.

Chris had a curious way of making himself personally disliked, which was his misfortune rather than his fault. He imagined that he had a fine sense of humor, but it was heavy and broad. Your riverman likes his humor neat and dry, the same as his liquor.

"Well, so you got to have a gang wid web feet," he jeered at Dan, by way of gliding gracefully into the conversation. "Got to go up to Canada and hire some frogs for dat tamarack job. I turn dat down w'en I take de big wood contract. Dat tamarack's a losin' proposition on contract. You can't start cuttin' ontil she dries up next summer. By dat time de Little River be so low you can't even float bubbles out on it."

There was a laugh at Jensen's description of the difficulties of the swamp job, with which the rivermen were well acquainted. But the laughter was uneasy and scattering. The French-Canadians, of whom there was quite a sprinkling in the group, did not like Jensen's sneering reference to "frogs."

The real laugh came when Dinky Dan retorted, in his shrill pipe, "Well, it's purty dry, right now. What's the matter, you afeared we'll get all the good men by payin' 'em real wages? We're goin' to start cuttin' next month."

Slim Derringer, having completed his purchases, joined the circle, returning Jensen's nod with curt punctiliousness. Each man seemed to feel that the contest was on.

"Oh, we don't aim to float no bubbles," Dinky Dan went on, good-humoredly. "We do aim to float a tight little corporation and some good tamarack. Me and Slim Derringer have got together for teamwork, and Ned Harper offered us his backin' if we needed it. But we got a clever little side-partner for clerk and treasury of the corporation. She's a lady with business ideas."

"Ho, ho!" burst out Jensen derisively. 'A lady, hey. I suppose she's backin' the company on your good looks —a swamp-angel, eh?"

Though Jensen spoke to and at Dan, his quick-shifting eyes rested for an instant on Slim Derringer. It was plain to every man in the group that trouble was brewing. Jensen's slurring reference to the third of the Three partners was just a trifle too raw to be passed over.

"She's no swamp-angel, mister," declared Dinky Dan, his face reddening. "She's a business woman, and the proposition looks good to her, for her money

that's all. I guess you wouldn't go so fur as to say that Ned Harper's secretary ain't a business woman!"

A button came off his mackinaw in Slim's fingers. Otherwise he gave no sign of being annoyed at Dan's angry revelation of what was still a business secret. But over Jensen's face came a visible change. His naturally pale complexion turned a purplish hue.

"Nellie Arthur, hey?" he cried sharply, and now his gaze went directly to Slim Derringer's impassive face. "Had to rope in a girl to float your corporation! Ho, ho!" he laughed, unconvincingly. "How much stock you offerin' to the widders an' orphans, anyhow?"

Jensen was trying to hide his sudden rage, that had its seat in jealousy, beneath a sneering attack on the integrity of the partners. He already regarded Slim and Dan as rivals—for he had really wanted the tamarack job. His business acumen had told him it would be good pickings. Now his arrogance was pricked by the knowledge that the girl he regarded as his girl by virtue of his steady courtship of her —with the apparent approval of Mrs. Arthur—had entered a business agreement with Slim and Dan. He strode over to Dan and tapped him on the chest with a blunt forefinger.

"Look here!" he glowered. "You lay off dat sort of t'ing! You lay off from Nellie Arthur, d'ye understand? I'll have somethin' to say about dat. And you can tell yore other partner dat I said so."

Slim spoke quietly, but in the silence that had fallen on the group his voice seemed sharp, cutting.

"Mister Jensen, it won't be necessary for anybody to carry any sech a message, if it's me you mean. I can hear real plain. Now, jest what is yore particular reason and authority for issuin' orders to the Three Partners Loggin' Company?"

Slim was smiling as he spoke—all but his eyes.

"Because she's a friend of mine, a particular friend, and I got interest in her welfare," retorted Jensen, whirling toward Slim with narrowed eyes.

"Oh, yes, so you say," breathed Slim, softly. "But you wouldn't go so far as to assume control over any friend's business affairs, would you. No. Now this confab started between friends. I'm dead sorry you dragged in yore personal affairs. It's not polite, anyhow, for a man to discuss a lady and her business. Of course, you ain't supposed to know that. I'm jest tellin' you, Jensen. You lay off the lady."

Slim's voice was gentle, almost aggrieved, his smile so benevolent, his attitude so indolent, thumbs hanging in his belt, cigar dangling from the fingers of one hand, that it seemed almost as if he were imploring Jensen not to make a scene. But there was that curious dead blankness to Slim's eyes that meant danger. Jensen didn't see it. He did not know Slim very well.

"Say, I'll talk anythin' I dam' please about dis lady," he flared. "She's my particular friend, and it's my business to protect her against such a lady-killer as you that 'ud wheedle money from a woman for floatin' a bubble."

A smoking cigar hit the floor between Slim Derringer's feet, but no sooner than Slim's doubled fist struck the end of Jensen's jaw.

There was considerable disappointment in the audience, although there was no little satisfaction. Rivermen love a good knock-down and drag-out fight, and are not averse to joining one when opportunity offers. This was no fight at all. Slim's blow, delivered with panther-like swiftness, and the weight of his solid body behind it, ended the argument. Jensen went back like a felled tree, and struck the floor hard, on his back, and lay still.

"Come on, Dan," Slim urged, without raising his voice from the low tone he had used throughout the argument. "Our office," he explained to the group of huskies who were still gazing in astonishment at Jensen's prostrate form, "our office is on the bateaux-booms. We're signin' on hands today. We pay five a day, and we don't need any web-footed whimpuses at all."

"I'm wid ye, me bye," hooted Hoot Kelly loudly. "I'm wid ye, now. I like the way ye arger."

"*Sacre nom!* Whoosh!" came the ejaculation from a dark-faced Canadian with a bright sash about his waist and a lopping toque on his long-haired head. "Me, I'm goin' get me wan job wit dees fellaire. I'm lak de way he's talk wit' hees tongue an' hees han'."

Chapter V

APOLOGIES AND "IDEARS"

THE incident of the encounter between Slim Derringer and Chris Jensen remained so, as far as legal notice went, but it got to be quite an event

around town. The rivermen love a quick-hitting, hard-hitting man who is not afraid to stack up with the best of them, and Chris Jensen was not over-popular with the old-line lumberjacks who had too often found themselves forced to take low wages because Chris had imported a gang of immigrants fresh from the old country, many of them of his own race, who would work gladly for much less than the standard scale. Not even when Jensen raised his scale a dollar a day higher than the Three Partners could afford to pay, did those who signed on desert the bateaux-booms, where an old wanigan, which was Dinky Dan's sole possession in what might be called real estate, was the office of the company.

Hoot Kelly, Joe Choquette, alias Montreal Joe, a seasoned, reckless "white water man" who had logged on the Ottawa; Birly Ben, Handsome Sim, Limber Johnson, Rubber Jeck, these were a few of the two-score men with various descriptive river-names who joined the growing gang.

To one person the incident of the knock-down at the Company store loomed as an unfortunate, regrettable catastrophe. This was Nellie Arthur, to whom the news came on the lips of a friend, a girl who clerked at the store.

Slim faced those brown eyes the day after the incident, and found it hard to meet them, for her cheeks were paler than ever, her eyes showed traces of tears, and her lips trembled even as they became reproachful.

"Mr. Derringer, I—I don't know what to say," she burst out. "I've just heard that you and Mr. Jensen were in a fist-fight at the Company store and that it was—it was in some way about me."

She paused long enough for Slim to have put in a word for himself, but he said nothing.

"This makes it impossible for me to—to continue as a member of the Three Partners Company," she declared. "I cannot admire nor respect a man who would start a fight in a public place with a—a friend of mine—a man who has no right to exhibit a personal interest in me."

"You don't mean, Miss Arthur, that you'd quit on us now, because I was a fool?" queried Slim. "Shucks! I'd ruther pull out myself."

"But you can't do that!" objected the indignant girl, with widening eyes. "The articles of incorporation have been granted. The charter came this morning. You are an active member of the company—general manager."

"I could leave my money in, ma'am, and jest withdraw myself," persisted Slim.

"And leave Dan Green alone on the contract? You couldn't think of doing that!"

"He'd have you to keep things straight and you are clerk and treasurer, which he insisted on—an' I could jest hire out to him. That would not make me an associate, ma'am."

Nellie Arthur caught her breath and with it a modicum of common sense.

"Oh, that's foolish!" she objected.

"Yes, ma'am. I expect I'm a fool," Slim commented sadly. "Could I apologize to you, and make it any better? I'd enjoy to do that."

Nellie cherished her indignation and dignity, because her anger was fast melting.

"You should apologize to Mr. Jensen, if anyone," she declared. "What a silly thing—what was it all about, anyway?"

Slim did not allow a quiver of mirth to appear. "Shucks! I reckoned Mr. Jensen had told you," he said.

Nellie bit her lip, hard. "No, he has not. He is a gentleman!" she said, too emphatically to be emphatic.

Slim did not bat an eyelash under this blow.

"Well, then I couldn't go to tell you," he said softly. "I haven't got any right."

Nellie considered this for a moment, and then got its significance and some color came into her face.

"Then we shall consider the incident closed," she hastened to remark, as coldly as possible. "And hereafter please consider me only as you would any business associate."

"Oh, no, ma'am, I couldn't do that," came Slim's surprising answer. "I could apologize to you and to Chris Jensen, too, I think—if you believe I ought to do that last—but I couldn't do the other. Because, you see, yo're a woman, and yore good name is somethin' any man would have to fight for if it was likely to be——"

"Oh! Do you mean to insinuate that Chris Jensen was——?"

"Oh, no, ma'am!" exclaimed Slim in alarm at her interpretation of his hesitation. "Why, no, because if it had been—well, I'm glad it wasn't. I wouldn't

mind the bein' in jail but—for you—it would be too bad."

Again Nellie Arthur caught her breath, in amazement at the simple expression of chivalry that she caught from Slim's statements.

"Slim Derringer," she said frowning, "you have no right to fight for me."

"Yes, ma'am. I have until you give it outright to somebody else and tell me so," he replied in a low tone, and held her eyes to his gaze until her cheeks flushed. "But I'll apologize to you—I do—and to Mr. Jensen, too, when I meet up with him again. He's gone on up-river to take the tractors up, and I can't get away jest now. I'm sorry it came to you, this way. Mebbe it would be better if you should jest withdraw yore money from the company and——"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" gasped Nellie Arthur. "Why, I intended to leave my money in—anyway. I—I accept your apology, Mr. Derringer. I have lots of confidence in your *business* ability."

"Thank you. I'm sorry I displayed any other sort of ability you don't have confidence in."

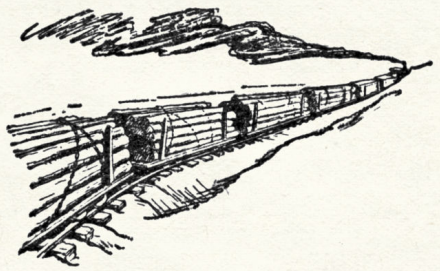
This ended the interview. Somehow Nellie Arthur felt, as Slim left the office, that he had won a signal victory—and she was not at all downcast about it, for some reason. She was troubled, though, because of the clash between Chris Jensen and Slim. It portended conflict throughout the winter, and in the spring. Both men would be up-river, in the woods, where feuds grow and fester, and where disputes are more frequently settled in blood than in ink. But a tingling excitement stirred her blood at the knowledge that Slim Derringer had fought to defend her name.

Slim was troubled, too, but it was not because he had any lack of confidence in himself. It was because he could see that there was behind Chris Jensen's antagonism to the Three Partners a motive other than business jealousy for wishing to make trouble for them. It was plain that the girl wanted to make some money quickly, and Slim began to believe he knew why. Gossip he had heard in town made him believe that Jensen's suit was not being as warmly received by Nellie Arthur as he had formerly thought. It was to the effect that since Mrs. Arthur had left for Florida, Chris Jensen had not once been seen taking Nellie Arthur for a drive in the handsome new automobile Chris had bought that summer.

"I guess," one gossip had said in Slim's hearing, "that if it wa'n't for Jensen's money he wouldn't stand much of a show with the ladies. Beats all how some mothers think marryin' money is the road to domestic bliss."

So she wanted to make money for herself! Suppose the Three Partners should lose money? It was possible, even under a percentage contract. The market for tamarack depended on early delivery of the timber. Ned Harper could afford to lose, of course, or to carry a loss over for another year, and make a final profit—but Nellie Arthur couldn't. Neither could the Three Partners.

Slim planned on getting out at least two million feet of tamarack. He estimated



that with this amount the percentage of profit would be close to $25,000. Provided the firm did not have to raise more than $20,000 capital to swing the job.

Much depended on the practicability of Slim Derringer's ideas, some of which were so revolutionary that he had not even revealed them to Dinky Dan in their entirety. Dan was an old-style logger. He would be inclined to shy at innovations.

Slim took his big idea to Ned Harper. It was about the building of a dam at the mouth of Little River, to back the water up into the tamarack swamp.

"And you think I ought to stand the expense of that," guessed Harper shrewdly, "as a permanent improvement. Don't you know that my idea is to drain the swamp?"

"Yes, but before you drain it you got to log off the tamarack. You want to do that at a profit. You want to sell tamarack next summer while the market's good. Now, my big idear for the dam is to flood the swamp so's we can use pontoons and start cuttin' right away."

"Pontoons? For what?"

"For gettin' at the tamarack before it freezes up this fall, and then, again, after it thaws in the spring, if we need to do late cuttin'. You see, that swamp's only a muck-hole, now. Can't put hosses into it, and can't float anythin' in it. Now, if it was turned into a shallow lake——"

"I see. But have you ever seen pontoons used to log out timber?"

"Down South one year I worked on pontoons. They use 'em in some of the swamps all summer, down there."

"I've heard so, but—well, all right. You build the dam and rig up your pontoons, and—if they work—I'll stand the entire expense of building the dam, and loan you material for the pontoons without extra charge."

"They'll work, thank you."

Chapter VI

BLUE-DAUB AND TROUBLE

SLIM DERRINGER, as captain of a troop of horse that jangled along the River Trail on the south shore of the Flambeau, and Dinky Dan, as admiral of a fleet of heavily loaded bateaux with a power launch for flag-ship, started up-river the first week in October. The stream was shrunken, the flowage from Lac du Flambeau cut to a trickle by the closed gates of the dam to give water for hydraulic erosion in the irrigation ditches John Jensen was rushing through to Homestead, northwest of the lake.

The rudder and propeller of the launch were broken by snags at Tamarack Bend, and the string of bateaux with their loads of tools and supplies was forced to wait for the horses, and cast out towlines for help. The sturdy craft were dragged up to the mouth of Little River, a sluggish stream that emerged into the Upper Flambeau between high walls of crumbling red granite which cropped out abruptly in the high land through which the swamp stream had cut its way to the larger river. Here was found a heterogeneous collection of machinery and tools brought down on rafts from Lac du Flambeau by Harper's orders for the use of the Three Partners outfit in building their projected dam.

Dinky Dan made a hasty inspection of some of the tools and swore.

"Lookit these things!" he demanded indignantly of Slim. "Every blasted hammer is round on the face, and every drill is mushroomed. John Jensen certainly put off a fine bunch of seconds onto us. Hoot Kelly's got his work cut out fer him from the start."

Hoot Kelly likewise swore and hooted, but he set up his portable forge and got busy. A portable saw-mill from Lac du Flambeau was in running condition, and while Dan set to work with dynamite and drills to blast and cut sockets in the granite walls for setting timbers, Slim hustled a gang to the job of planting a coffer-dam in the shallow current a short distance above the mouth of the river. That completed, Slim took ten men and plunged into the tamarack to pick a trail to camp-site, and erect log-shacks for shelters. Tents were used at the dam job, for the weather was warm and dry.

The dam, built entirely of timber cut on the spot, and with a sluice-gate at the north side, which was down-river as the Flambeau flowed, with a slanting spill-way or log-slide from the gate level to the river-bed below, was completed before the end of October.

It was a glorious month, and ideal weather for the work. The days were bright, dry and invigorating, the nights snappy and without fogs which portend an early frost. The foliage of the mixture of maples, beech, small oaks, the conifers well trimmed out here, remained green until the leaves began to die and fall without being touched with frost. The woods were a-rustle with beds of dry leaves through which red squirrels scampered, harvesting their winter hoard.

Slim found a knoll that promised to remain dry in wettest weather, five miles up the Little River, at the edge of the swamp into which they were to plunge for tamarack, and here were erected the log buildings necessary to house a gang of two-score men and a score of horses. This done, Slim left men in charge of the horses and to start building corduroy tote-roads on both sides of the stream, and returned to the dam-site. The river was already responding to the barrier, filling slowly the natural basin above its mouth and forming a pond, which would in time back up to the swamp.

The bateaux had been dragged out of the water after being unloaded, and Slim, with Hoot Kelly as head carpenter, directed the work of constructing pontoons, using the bateaux as boats have been used to make bridges from the time of the Greek and Persian wars. Planks, laid across two bateaux and spiked firmly, fashioned a sturdy platform, which was made more buoyant and steady by the use of empty casks made air-tight, lashed beneath the platform edges.

Early November brought rains, and the pond filled faster and backed up until the river overflowed its low banks in the thick timbered tamarack swamp. Indian summer found the Three Partners outfit hard at work, cutting, a full month earlier than

it had been thought possible. Each of the six pontoons was fitted with a strong winch and cable with which to haul it up-stream and close to the bank, and even into natural openings in the dense timber. Two of the floating platforms were equipped with "bob-saws"—small circular power-saws set in movable carriages on a horizontal plane. These could be used without difficulty in cutting through the small trunks of tamarack, the trees being felled accurately by the use of long pike-poles thrust against the trunks, high up, with a strong man at the lower end to shove the timber in the desired direction. Gasoline engines furnished the saw-power. One pontoon was fashioned into a crude but effective pile-driver, and used in completing the strengthening of the dam. Slim planned other uses for it later.

Dinky Dan, who had been curiously silent while Slim prepared his "tamarack navy," as he dubbed it, rather dubiously, brightened when he saw the navy begin its attack.

"Crimus, if we ain't got a set of floatin' tanks," he exclaimed when the buzzing saws began eating down the tapering timber. "They're better'n caterpillar tractors in this part of the country, anyhow.

"O-o-h, they's allers two sides to a river,
This side and the one over there."

Slim grinned as he caught the more optimistic adverb "always."

"I'm hopin' we'll get some nice cold weather this winter," Slim said. "If it freezes hard we're all to the mustard from now on."

"Goin' to jigger the pontoons into ice-boats?" inquired Dan.

"Well, we might do that," drawled Slim. "Say, Dan, ain't you caught on yet that I was only joshin' you when I said we wanted ice in the swamp?"

Dan turned red. "We want snow," Slim declared emphatically, "and lots of it. Because it looks to me we're goin' to need plenty of head-water runnin' outa Little River into the Flambeau in the spring. Why, the Flambeau is nothin' but a dry ditch now, with the sluice-gates shut up to the lake. I ain't never seen the bottom of the old river so close to the top, before. Hum! I bet they's a million feet of dead-heads and drift-logs showin' up along here. Chris Jensen will have great wild-cat pickin's. Wisht we had his chanct to clean up, ourselves."

Jensen had begun the work of "wild-catting," salvaging the dead-heads which had sunk to the river-bottom as the laggards of past seasons' drives, and which were now visible, half-buried in silt. There were drift-logs cast high into the thickets on either shore, snags and whole tree-trunks torn out by spring freshets, and jammed into eddy-holes and onto sand-bars.

Jensen himself headed a gang of sackers who labored up and down the Flambeau from Tamarack Bend toward the lake. The river-bed was exposed until the red-granite bottom of the channel showed in places, worn smooth as a cement road.

Indian summer faded and came cold rains, but they ceased early, and Slim chose a gang of men from the cutting crew, and went down to the dam to fashion booms that would be set in the spring to guide the tamarack drive down the channel direct to the sluice-gate. While they were at work a timberjack came up the River Trail, and tackled Slim for a job. He said he had quit Jensen because he hated him, and professed an eagerness to join on with the Three Partners.

Something in the man's manner attracted Slim, curiously. His protestations of hatred for Chris Jensen were too strong to be true, Slim thought.

"White Pete" this man was called, when he was not called "Red Pete." He had a shock of straight rope-colored hair and thick white eyebrows, a brick-red complexion and pale blue eyes.

"Yo're a sacker, Pete?" queried Slim. "How'd you like to boss a gang and wild-cat some dry drift-logs for us? We need some cork-logs for boom material."

Pete jumped at the opportunity. His willingness to work was marvelous. Slim had decided that Pete was one of two things: their ally by reason of some private feud with Jensen, or a spy sent by Jensen. Slim determined to watch Pete.

A little way down the Flambeau, Jensen and his sackers were dragging dead-heads from the river-bed, skidding them high, and tallying them with a mixture of blue-colored pigment which was known as "tally-daub." This was Jensen's mark, this year, for stuff that was not considered worth being stamped with a die of iron bearing his initials. Slim had chosen red

tally-daub for the color of the Three Partners, and he gave Pete a small can of it to mark the salvaged drift-logs. Three teams of horses were used in the "wild-cat" party to swamp out these dry timbers cast up by the flood of the preceding seasons.

At noon, while the gang ate near the dam, Slim strolled out on the superstructure, and looked over a bunch of logs that were floating near the sluice-gate. He smiled as he saw that several of them were freshly spotted on the ends with *blue daub*.

They could be claimed by Jensen, if he cared to make a fuss over them.

After dinner Slim took a solitary hike into the thickets, down the Flambeau, and got his eye on Pete. As boss of the wild-cat gang Pete acted as cruiser and tally-marker. Slim was not at all surprised to detect Pete in the act of spotting a log, now and then, with blue daub from a large can which he concealed beneath a bush.

"Um-hum. So he's Jensen's own private trouble-maker," muttered Slim to himself as he slipped back to the dam. "Well, we might as well have it, now as ever."

Slim waited, on the dam, but he was not idle. With a pike-pole he floated all the blue-daubed logs close to the sluice-gate, separating them from those with the red on their ends.

Slim had hoped to meet Jensen ere now. He planned a trip down to Anconia very soon, and the promise he had made to Nellie Arthur to apologize to Jensen was one he intended to fulfil. He wanted to be able to tell her he had kept his promise. Slim knew it was going to be one of the toughest things he had ever tackled, to apologize to the man he so disliked, for having knocked him down. Slim considered he had done just right in flooring Jensen. Slim felt that he would cheerfully do it again, if Jensen gave him provocation —such as, for instance, mentioning the name of Nellie Arthur. Jensen's assumption of being her protector irked Slim fearfully.

Late in the afternoon the sackers began straggling up to the Flambeau on their way to camp. Tired, wet, weighted with muck, they chose the river-bed where the water flowed shallow over rock bottom, rather than the River Trail, high on the south bank. The Trail was cut across by the mouth of Little River, anyway. In former times there had been a rude log foot-bridge over the smaller stream. The new dam held a runway across its top to replace the old bridge, but with the Flambeau so low it was easier to walk in the stream-bed. A path had been packed in the dried mud and silt of the Little River mouth, leading up to a sort of natural stairs in the granite rock, on the sluice-gate side.

The rear-guard of the sacking crew appeared opposite the dam with Jensen at their head. They halted there while Jensen turned up the path to the dam. Slim strolled over from the north end, where he had drifted his red-daubed logs, to meet Jensen.

Jensen, as soon as he got onto the dam,

thrust his foot down and kicked a log until it turned and the blue daub was visible on its end.

"Look here, Derringer!" he snarled, as Slim came up. "You been grabbin' off my wild-cats for your dam booms! Dat don't go. I'm sackin' dis timber, and you ain't got no right to steal it—and particular' when it's got my tally-daub onto it."

Slim's eyes grew dull, but he kept a firm leash on his temper. He studied the bobbing logs near the sluice-gate seriously.

"Well," he drawled, "I noted that blue daub, too. But before we talk business I've got a duty to perform. I've promised a certain person to apologize to you for the way I argued down to the Company store. I'm sorry I hit you—for a certain reason."

Jensen was taken aback for a moment by the unexpected, soft-toned apology, but his face purpled as he caught the significance of Slim's qualifying phrase—"for a certain reason."

"By hell, dere's more'n one reason why you be sorry," he bellowed. "Nobody knocks Chris Jensen down when he ain't lookin', and gets out of it by sayin' he's sorry. I settle wid you sometime! Right now I want dose wild-cat logs put back w'ere dey come from. Dey belong to me."

Slim smiled. He was much relieved, now that he had got rid of the apology—and it had not been accepted. It cleared his slate. The wild-cats were quite a different matter.

"Now I'll talk business," he drawled. "How much will you take for the lawgs, now I've taken the trouble to snake 'em

up here? I'll buy 'em off'n you, if you want to sell."

Jensen sneered, and named a price twice the value of the logs.

"You don't want to sell," chuckled Slim. "Now, you wouldn't expect me to go and tote 'em all back where they come from, would you?"

"You put dem logs back, or I get my gang up here and take dem," blustered Jensen. "And I make trouble for you w'en you come to put your drive out in de spring, too."

Slim smiled broadly but his eyes clouded up.

"Why wait till spring?" he inquired. "I'll accommodate you, right now, if yo're lookin' for trouble. You get off my dam!"

Slim took a quick step forward, and the velvet of his voice became steel. Jensen stepped back, as if from a blow. He had felt the terrific force of Slim's driven fist once—it had, in fact, cracked his jaw-bone—and he feared it now.

He retreated, but he bawled out to his men. Slim advanced, menacingly, deliberately, and Jensen turned and fled. He took to the stony path, and plunged down from the granite wall to meet his advancing sackers who had, apparently, been waiting for his summons. They came charging up the baked mud path with peaveys and cant-dogs in their hands, ready for a rough-and-tumble fight.

In the face of the reinforcements Slim did not pause for an instant nor call for his own men, far up the pond-shore. He chased Jensen down to the dry river-bed. When Jensen left the stony natural stairs in the granite, Slim whirled, sprang up the slope, and raced to the sluice-gate.

Jensen stopped when Slim retreated, and stooped to pick up a stone. Too late, as he straightened, he saw what was coming.

Slim yanked at the rude lever set to raise and lower the heavy plank flash-boards of the sluice.

"Look out, Jensen!" he called. "I'm goin' to deliver yore wild-cats and they're comin' to you spittin.' Here they come!"

A burst of water ten feet wide, and six feet deep leaped from beneath the raised gate. A wild yell went up from the sackers, and they turned to flee. Jensen made a desperate leap for safety from the hard path to the middle of the Little River bed. He was caught first in the rushing wall of water, and thrown to his knees. The blue-daubed logs, sucked through the gate, went sliding, rolling and bumping off the slide, and thudded and rolled toward the fleeing, floundering men below. Slim seized a pike-pole, and shoved the straggling timber through. Then he leaped for the lever, and closed the gate as suddenly as he had opened it.

He doubled up with mirth as he watched the result of his "delivery." Every man from Jensen down to the water-boy with his tin pails had been soaked from head to foot, most of them had been thrown down and were plastered with muck. Jensen had found the muck deeper the farther he went out from the granite wall, and he stood to his waist in the freshly watered mud, and dodged and twisted to escape the rolling, tumbling logs that he claimed as his own.

As the wave of water and timber ceased, he howled something unintelligible, and shook his fists at Slim. His crew was scattered ignominiously, and he made no move to return to the scene of his discomfiture. The sackers were unhappy—and they were almost as angry at Jensen for leading them into the cold-water trap as at Slim for springing it on them.

Jensen's roars seemed to have a central expression which finally became intelligible. In the midst of a stream of incoherent and unprintable threats the word reached Slim like the battle-cry of a defeated chieftain.

"All right, Trouble Jensen!" Slim answered, mocking him. "You got yore wild-cats. Anythin' that's got blue daub onto it will be delivered to you. I suppose the blue daub says it belongs to you. Before long I'm goin' to deliver somethin' else that you'll know when you see it. It'll be tally-marked with blue daub. Watch for it."

CHAPTER VII

RED, WHITE AND BLUE PETE

THE timberjacks of the Three Partners outfit were telling strange and marvelous tales in the bunk-shanty that night. They all started out of the story, told by members of the booming-gang, of how Jensen and his gang had been washed out of the Little River.

"Now, here's a curious coincidence, as you might say!" Slim remarked at length, tapping the bowl of his pipe on the stove. "Those lawgs I let through the gate for Jensen was spotted with blue daub which is sure enough Chris Jensen's tally-mark. Nobody would accidentally mistake them for ours. Chris claims his property by rights. Now, look at this!"

With a swift movement Slim reached over and caught by one arm the man who was called variously White Pete or Red Pete. He whirled him out of his chair and held him with the arm crooked up his back.

"Here's a piece of property that's got some sprinklin' of blue daub on it. Hold up yore other hand, Pete, and let the boys see the co-incidence."

Pete whined as his right arm was twisted high, and held up his left hand. Traces of blue pigment were plainly visible on the scrubbed skin. With one foot Slim kicked at an object under the stove, and there slid out into view, directly between Hoot Kelly's big feet, a broad-mouthed tin can of *blue daub*. It was half full of the mixture, sticky and glistening from the heat.

"This piece of property was tallyin' drift-logs with blue daub when I overlooked him, this noon," said Slim. "I found this can where he carefully left it under a bush."

White Pete could never have been called Red Pete, now. He writhed and whined, "I gotted dat blue daub on my han's off'n Jensen's wild-cats, afore I quit him," he declared. "I didn't do it!"

"Sure, I saw you doin' it," declared Slim mildly. "Makin' trouble for Trouble Jensen. Why yore Jensen's property! You ought to be reg'lar tally-daubed on the end."

Pete began fighting for freedom, and his struggles brought him grief. He kicked at the blue daub can, and it spattered paint on Hoot Kelly's duffel socks. Hoot caught up the can with a roar, and slammed it upside down on Pete's tow head.

The blue daub squirted out, and oozed into Pete's ears, eyes and mouth as he howled for mercy. Slim released him.

"Here's the turpentine! Whoopee!" came Dinky Dan's piping yell, and he pulled his finger out of the corner of his mouth with a sound like a popping cork from a bottle.

White Pete, who was Red, White and Blue Pete now, swabbed blue-daub from one eye. His gaze lighted on a window. No one touched him as he rushed for it. No one wanted to. His shins struck a bench, and he jumped upon it and launched himself head-first for the window. His tin-clad poll went through it like a battering-ram, and he disappeared.

Chapter VIII

SLIM READS THE RIVER

AFTER the November rains the weather moderated and remained dry, and Dinky Dan became uneasy. Slim would come upon him with his ears cocked and his eyes squinting up into the sky, as if he were looking and listening for something. Finally Slim asked Dan what was worrying him.

"Dang it, there hasn't been a single flock of wild geese flyin' south this fall," burst out Dan. "Looks as if it might be the winter of the black snow."

"Don't let that worry you," laughed Slim. "If it don't freeze up, we can cut tamarack from pontoons till the cows come home."

"Yeah, but we got to keep the Little River clear. We can't dump logs in it, and work pontoons up and down it. And we can't deck logs in muck. They'll freeze in, and if it don't spoil half of 'em it will make it hell to get 'em out in the spring."

"I've been thinkin' about that, and I got an idear," drawled Slim, and then he beckoned to Hoot Kelly, who was rigging up the wateringcart to be ready for use in icing snowroads.

"Rig up the pile-driver, Hoot," said Slim. "We've got to use it. In the meantime," Slim went on to Dan, "we can float tamarack down into the reservoir, and rig up a jim-pole outfit and deck 'em on dry land down there."

As soon as Hoot Kelly reported the pontoon-held pile-driver in shape, Slim set it to work driving piles close to the river-bank, and building skidways on them above the surface of the swamp-water. In driving the piles Slim made an interesting discovery, that the piles struck solid bottom, apparently rock, at a depth of from twelve to fifteen feet.

"It's the red granite underlay," Dan explained. "It lays all over—or ruther all under—this country on this side of the Flambeau, and clear down to Anconia. They found it fine foundation for the bridges down to Anconia."

"Funny they don't quarry some of it," commented Slim.

"Too coarse vein. Notice how it breaks all up where it weathers? Under water it wears smooth, but when the air gets to it, it starts crumblin'. Notice how

we struck rock under the muck and silt when we built the dam?"

"That's right. It was rock bottom!"

"Yeah. And we're goin' to strike rock bottom, pretty soon, if we don't raise some more money on our capital stock," declared Dan, changing the subject from geology to finance. "I figger we'll need every cent of $20,000 and we've only taken up $14,000 of it so far. We've paid out ten thousand in cash, and got four thousand in notes to meet the first of the year."

"You better spend Christmas in town," suggested Slim.

"Me? Crimus! D'ye want to ruin me? You leave me here in the woods where I'm safe. You go on down-river, and hang up both socks for me and you. Miss Arthur can tend to the certificates. She said she could raise four or five thousand when we wanted it."

"You ought to be there to sign yore name, as president."

"My name! Name of a pig! I signed it over two thousand times already! All Nellie Arthur's got to do is sign her own as treasury and the stock's negotiable. I don't want to go down."

"I'd sorta look after you," suggested Slim, weakly.

"Both of us go down! Who's goin' to keep things goin' up here? Hoot Kelly? They's goin' to be bootleggers in these woods from Homestead. Beet likker. Waugh! And that squarehead, Jensen, only ten miles away, and spoilin' for trouble! He's jealous because we got this contract, and he's jealous for another reason I might mention."

"Shucks, don't mention it," Slim cried, blushing. "It don't exist."

"What way you goin' down?" inquired Dan, as if that were settled.

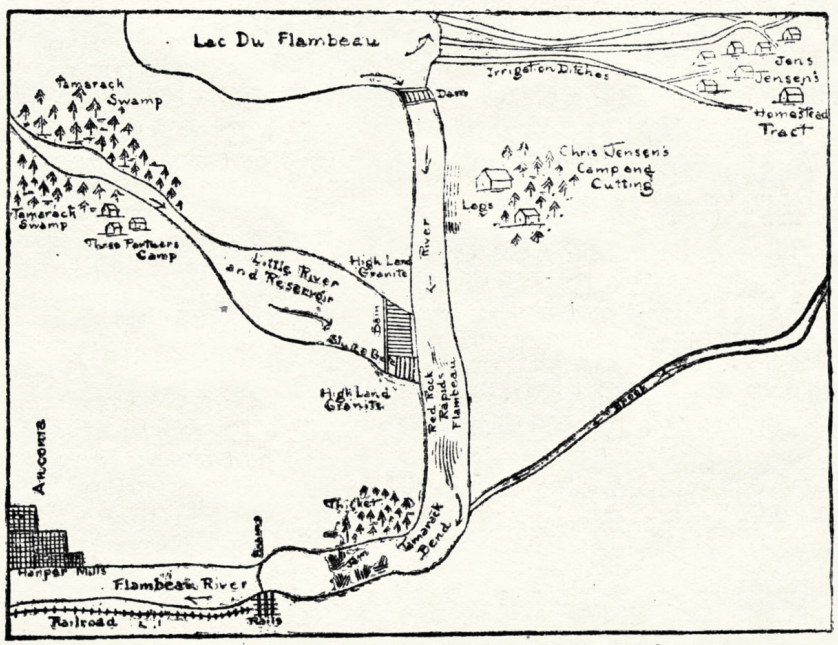
"Bateau, with Joe Choquette to help pole, if it doesn't freeze any more than anchor ice." It was settled.

THE wild geese lagged. December proved unseasonably warm and dry. The moss-back farmers on the Homestead tract kept on with their fall plowing up to Christmas week, the day falling on Saturday. Thanks to the pontoons and the holding of water by the dam, the Three Partners had tallied up 270,000 log-feet of cut tamarack. At this rate their cutting, by the time of the spring thaws would amount to over 2,000,000 feet, provided there was not too much or too little snow and provided they could work the pontoons until a freeze-up gave footing in the swamp.

Dinky Dan continued to listen for wild geese, but he concealed his anxiety from Slim, because Dan knew that Slim had his head full of trouble and figures with dollar marks before them. On Friday, the day before Christmas, Slim and Joe Choquette launched a light bateau in the narrow channel of the Flambeau, broke anchor ice with their pike-poles and set out for Anconia. They were loaded down with commissions from the men which Slim had accepted, refusing to take cash from them, for most of the purchases he was to make for them would be possible at the Company Store, and could be charged up to their time.

Slim studied the Flambeau river-bed with new interest, because of Dan's broad statement about the granite underlay. He knew something about geology from first-hand experience as a guide in the canyons and buttes of the Northwest for a party of scientists, and he "read the river," and stored up impressions in his retentive mind.

The channel was fairly free of silt and flowed for long stretches over the reddish



rock, flinging up silt and sand and mud on either side. The rock-bed was broken occasionally by rapids—but below Red Rock Rapids, there were no steep descents until the dam at Anconia.

Below Tamarack Bend there was considerable accumulation of water-soaked timber in the stream bed, and even on the channel bottom.

"Lots of wet money lyin' round loose," was Montreal Joe's comment, as they bumped now and then on a half-buried dead-head. "Somebody could sack dis rivaire from now on, and make hees pile."

"Too late now," responded Slim. "Next summer's the time for that—if a fellow wanted to sack for a livin'. We got to get tamarack down on the top of a river, Joe."

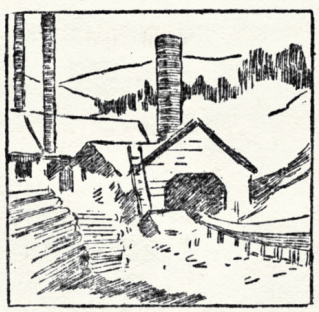
Montreal Joe laughed, and imitated Dinky Dan's wail.

"O-o-oh, dey's on'y two sides to a rivaire, Decs side an' de one over dere."

"Baggar, me, I guess dey's t'ree sides to a rivaire. So? De top-side, also, *hein?"*

"That's what I was thinkin', Joe," responded Slim soberly. I'm hopin' the top-side of this river will be good and plenty in May."

They reached Rails, with its saw-mills and railroad construction gang shanties sprawled on the north bank of the river, in time to catch a "scooter" for Anconia. It got them into the city at nine o'clock, and they registered at the Lumbermen's Hotel, where Slim had previously made headquarters.



It was Christmas eve, and Slim felt that for business reasons he must see Nellie Arthur before the holiday, which would extend over until Monday. He found her name in the telephone directory, but the operator reported the phone "temporarily disconnected."

Catching Slim's disappointed, "Shucks!" she giggled, but with sympathy. "You'll find Miss Arthur at Harper's residence, I think. Shall I try them for you?"

"Thank you," responded Slim fervently.

Mrs. Harper answered the ring, and mingled with her voice was the happy, noisy babble of a child's voice. Slim felt suddenly lonesome, homesick. He could see that candle-lit Christmas tree, and it had been a long time since he had seen an evergreen at Christmas decorated in any other way save with snow and stars. He grew diffident, even with the shield of a phone between him and that scene of holiday festivity. He guesed that the Harpers had invited Nellie Arthur to their fireside for Christmas, and he felt he ought not to disturb her with business worries.

"Jest tell Miss Arthur, if she's there, please," said Slim, "that I'll see her Monday, on business. Merry Christmas, Mrs. Harper, and all yore family."

"Oh, Merry Christmas, Mr. Jensen!"

"This is Slim Derringer, ma'am." Slim felt cold all over.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Derringer. I'm sorry I made the mistake. Won't *you* come up to the house?"

"I—I didn't want to intrude business on Miss Arthur when——"

"Neither do I want you to. We're trying to make up for her having nobody of her own for Christmas. Her mother is away, you know. Just a minute."

Slim held his breath, expecting to hear Nellie's voice, but it was Ned Harper's that came to him.

"Don't be foolish, Slim," he said. "We all want to see you. Come on up. We need an extra man at the supper table. Johnnie is too young to fill the bill, just yet."

Chapter IX

CHRISTMAS STUFF

FOR an hour Slim Derringer was the busiest man in Anconia. Not only had he to bathe, dress in civilian clothes and do shopping for thirty or more timberjacks who desired to send Christmas remembrances to their people, but he found it desirable to load himself down with toys for John Harper, the Harper's three-year-old son, and most difficult of all, to select a proper and suitable present for Nellie Arthur. He was shrewd enough to make sure of its acceptance by purchasing two identical boxes of bon bons, one for Nellie and one for Mrs. Harper—and he strained his personal credit badly at the Company store. Slim had come to town with very little pocket-money, and he and Dan both had renounced the idea of paying themselves a salary out of the corporation treasury.

Slim forgot his troubles, forgot business and strained credit as soon as he saw Nellie Arthur in a shimmering soft silk of

a shade that Slim thought looked like the delicate tint of half-wilted wild roses. He had never seen her in any costume save a work-a-day office shirt-waist and skirt. He blurted out his impression of the "wild-rose dress" and Nellie Arthur's eyes shone. She had met him at the door, by Mrs. Harper's contrivance.

"You are a man of unusual discernment," she declared. "It is called Ashes of Roses."

"It's jest the shade for you," Slim declared. "You ought to wear that kind all the time."

"At the office? It would resemble cigar-ashes, I guess," she laughed.

"You ought not to have to be at any office," he persisted.

"I like it," she retorted.

"Yore mother had to go South?"

She met his eyes bravely. "I sent her to Florida for the winter, and it doesn't look as if we'd have any winter here after all," she said.

"You ought to have gone with yore mother," suggested Slim. "I reckon she wanted you to go."

"I couldn't leave our business," she responded with a pride that Slim translated as partly from her real interest in the Three Partners venture, and partly brave refusal to admit the fact that she had to work in order to support herself and her delicate mother.

"And speaking of business——"

"Which I didn't intend to," interrupted Slim.

"How is everything going up in the tamarack?" she persisted.

"Like greased lightning," he declared, with a little ring of pride in his voice. "I'm sure goin' to be grateful to you, Miss Arthur, for throwin' a big chance in my way. If you hadn't asked me about savin' my money that day—if you hadn't asked me—I'd have been spendin' it on train fare to Oregon or Maine. Now I don't even miss not goin'."

Her cheeks were already flushed, but Slim could detect a brighter sparkle in her eyes, and it thrilled him mightily.

"I'm grateful, now," he went on, "but I want to show it. I want to make yore investment pay you big. We aim to get out over 2,000,000 feet of tamarack with luck and without trouble in the spring."

"Trouble?" she queried sharply. "Just what——?"

"Why, rivers are queer things," Slim explained. "You can't tell what they'll do. Suppose it shouldn't be much of a winter at all. Suppose there wasn't much rain in the spring, and the pulp-wood drive was slow in bein' cleared out, and there wasn't enough headwater to carry our two-million drive? There's different sorts of trouble."

"What a pessimist for Christmas eve!" she rallied him. "I'm sure Mr. Jensen will get the wood out early."

Slim's face became impassive, somber more than anything else.

"About Jensen," he said, in a low tone. "I did what I promised I would. I apologized to him."

"Oh, then you are good friends, now!"

"Shucks! I'm sorry. I don't suppose we'll ever be that. We jest don't hitch. First thing that happened when we met up together on Little River was a misunderstandin' about wild-cat logs which I tried to straighten out as quick as I could. He didn't warm up to me at all. He seems to resent my bein' on earth—for some reason."

They had drifted to a seat before the fireplace. Ned Harper and his wife were strangely long in making their appearance, but Slim didn't mind that.

"It makes it rather—difficult for me, to have you men unfriendly," she explained, a worried expression on her face. "John Jensen is the man whom I counted on to take up the remaining stock in the Three Partners."

"Pshaw! And he and Chris are brothers! No other reason it's hard for you?"

"Only this one—a business reason," she responded quickly, but not looking at him. "What other could there be?"

Slim Derringer folded his long, brown fingers together, his elbows on the arms of the chair and looked directly into Nellie Arthur's eyes, in the dancing light of the log-blaze.

"There might be another reason," he said. "If it was the thirtieth of May instead of now; if I could walk up to the office and say to Ned Harper, 'Well, I've delivered yore tamarack,' then I'd own enough money, so I could turn to you and —ask a question I can't ask now. All I can do is try to show you I'm grateful—try to deliver the goods."

He paused for an instant. Nellie Arthur smoothed her dress to keep her eyes busy.

"It makes it hard for me now," Slim went on. "I've got to jest talk business with you—and I don't want to. I've got to ask you not to sell any shares to John Jensen."

She looked up, startled. "Why, what reason——?" she began.

"No reasonable reason," he smiled. "It's jest that Chris Jensen and I can't be —friends. And I wouldn't want the Three Partners to be beholden to him, through his brother, for anythin'. I wouldn't want you, our partner, to be beholden that way. I haven't any right to say that, but it's so. It's unreasonable of me, of course. Why, come to figure it right down, I'm takin' the same sort of attitude that another man assumed which caused me to take a quick step for which I had to apologize, later."

"What do you expect me to do?" she cried. "John Jensen——"

"I don't ask you to do anythin'. I'll undertake to sell the stock."

There was a dead silence. Again the brown eyes fell before the blue ones. Again Nellie Arthur took refuge in being business-like. He gave her no other choice except—no, there was none. Although she knew he had come as near telling her that he loved her as a man could without blurting it out in three words, he had not even asked her to give him hope by a "yes" or a "no."

"I think you are unreasonable," she declared weakly.

"I know I am," he smiled. "I guess a man is always most unreasonable when tryin' to be reasonable—with a woman."

"I suppose you will object when you learn that I've bought ten more shares of stock for myself," she flared up. "And I did that because I was practically certain John Jensen would take the rest. We can't peddle our stock around town! If we sold only a few shares to John Jensen——"

"I won't peddle it around town," broke in Slim. "I see! You were countin' on John Jensen when you issued ten more shares to yoreself. And I thought you went in, in the first place, because you had confidence in my—in our business ability."

"I did," she declared, with high color, "but I still think your request not to sell to John Jensen is——"

"Unreasonable," he finished for her. "Foolish. I admitted I was a fool—once. I stick to it," he declared.

There was that in his eyes which made her take refuge in a laugh and a shrug. "I won't sell him a single share."

"Thank you," he said, refusing to admit her impatience, perhaps her disgust with him. "I'll undertake to dispose of 'em without peddlin' 'em around town. I've got some friends. Now, we've got over talkin' business—I brought along somethin' else to discuss."

He produced the candy, cigars for Ned Harper and a drum and copious packages of gimcracks for John Harper.

The Harpers returned to the abandoned fireplace, explaining they had been trimming the tree in the dining-room and that supper was ready.

It was a merry Christmas Eve. Of course it was impossible for Ned Harper to keep off the subject of tamarack—but Slim refused to voice any doubts or fears. When he was about to depart he was given—and accepted—a pressing invitation to take dinner with the Harpers the next day.

But that Christmas Day dinner was not so cheery as it might have been. Nellie Arthur was not at the table. Mrs. Harper explained—and it was plain she was disappointed, too—that Nellie had gone to a hotel for dinner with "a friend."

That afternoon Slim saw her. She was in Cris Jensen's new coupé. Chris was having his Christmas in town.

On Monday morning, when Slim went to the office to see the clerk and treasurer of the Three Partners, he was very business-like.

Chapter X

UNREASONABLE REASONS

SLIM DERRINGER could see two reasons why John Jensen might desire to become a shareholder in the Three Partners. One of them was Chris Jensen and Chris Jensen's desire to take part and parcel in the business in which Nellie Arthur was, according to her means, a heavy investor. The other reason was involved in the ever-present conflict between rival logging contractors over flowage rights. If John Jensen could buy an interest in the Three Partners he might be able to give his brother Chris more advantage in control of the head-water on the Flambeau, *below* Little River.

Slim smiled as he realized that John Jensen probably did not dream that the Little River reservoir would be drained dry by the time Slim got back up-river.

Slim's extreme attitude of strictly business, when he faced Nellie at the mill office on Monday morning, was melted a lit-

tle when he saw that her old pallor had returned, her eyes were suspiciously red, and she was palpably much wrought up.

Slim did not know that her Christmas dinner engagement with Chris Jensen had been in fulfillment of a promise made to her mother—nor did he know that Nellie had borrowed money on her note, at the bank, to buy another block of stock in the Three Partners. She had done this in another desperate plunge in the venture by which she hoped to pay for her mother's vacation in Florida, and to retain a nest-

egg which would make her, for a time, financially independent.

"I'd like to take the remaining shares with me," Slim made his request, as casually as he could. "I've got an idear I can get rid of 'em easy."

"Mr. Derringer, I've been thinking over what you said Saturday night about not selling to John Jensen. You said you didn't want the Three Partners to be in any way beholden to—to John Jensen. I can't see it that way. John Jensen isn't a philanthropist. He must think the tamarack job a good business venture."

"Queer, that's jest what I've been thinkin', too," exclaimed Slim. "And if I had the money myself I'd buy up every last share—because I think it would be a good business venture. Thinkin' that way you can see how easy I ought to sell 'em to my friends."

"And if you don't!"

"No weasel words, please," he laughed. "I'll do it—somehow."

"There are sixty shares left. I've put down ten in Mr. Harper's name, or rather, in my name for Mr. Harper."

"Ned Harper, eh? The old scout! Seems to me every capitalist that knows about this company wants to horn in on it."

"I—I had to meet a note that was called the first of the month," confessed the treasurer.

"Who called it?" demanded Slim in astonishment.

"The Co-operative Feed and Grain Company, where we bought hay and grain for the horses."

"Oh!" grinned Slim, and made no further comment. The "Co-op," as it was called, was a creature of John Jensen's.

"Suppose you don't get enough headwater," suggested Nellie Arthur, and Slim knew that the apparent irrelevance of her subject was only apparent, for he felt that she was beginning to admit that the Jensens might make trouble on the flowage in the spring.

"If you only could use tractors," she went on. "There are eight of them in the yards, ten ton tractors that will haul three or four wagon-loads of logs apiece, trailing. If the ground freezes hard——"

"We might get 'em in the swamp and never get 'em out. I've been thinkin' of tractors, myself. Oh, there are more sides to the proposition than that. You know Dinky Dan's favorite tune:

"They's only two sides to a river,
This side and the one over there?"

Nellie nodded and smiled a bit.

"Sometimes he changes it to, 'They's always two sides to a river,' and that's the way I feel, right now—only more so. I'll send you the money for this stock before the first of the year—or somethin' jest as good. And on May thirtieth I'll be in to ask you—to take dinner with me."

The smile he gave her lingered with her for a long time. It was at once daring and wistful. Long after he had gone she wondered why it was she had yielded so easily to his request not to sell to John Jensen, and had allowed him to take the stock certificates up into the woods, without even asking where he expected to sell them.

She felt her cheeks burn as she recalled, again and again, his final words. They burned because she had not enjoyed her Christmas dinner at a hotel with "a friend." This friend had tried to give her a Christmas present which she could not accept—a diamond. They burned because, even in her refusal of the gift she had not finally repulsed Chris Jensen's suit. She argued to herself that she did not wish Chris to believe she was interested in someone else—when she really was not, except for business purposes. And then she recalled Slim's epigram, "A man is most unreasonable when he is trying to be reasonable, with a woman."

"And a woman is most unreasonable when she is trying to find reasons for her unreasonableness about a man," she mur-

mured. "I wonder why he did not ask me, right out, to go to dinner with him, in May?"

CHAPTER XI

SLIM'S SELLING-TALK

IT SNOWED in Anconia on Tuesday, not a heavy fall, but a high wind piled drifts in the streets and Slim Derringer, hustling about town on various errands preparatory to starting back for camp, became interested in the work of a brand new caterpillar tractor with the name of the Harper Lumber Company on it, which was being used to plow the streets. It was fitted with a V-shaped wooden plow which could be raised and lowered by levers, and which bucked drifts, and threw the snow aside, leaving a clean track fifteen feet wide. Slim found himself wishing he could use these ten-ton machines in the woods as Chris Jensen was doing. He had driven one on a contruction job in the West, and he knew the power of the trundling treads. Another tractor came after the snowplow, hauling six wagons loaded high with saw lumber, destined for a railroad siding.

As it snowed the weather became warmer, and Slim and Joe Choquette decided again in favor of the scooter engine and the bateau instead of trusting to snowshoes or skis. Their decision proved wise, for the snow storm had been strictly local. Fifteen miles above Rails there was no snow at all. No snow in the tamarack swamp—but the weather was cooler when they arrived.

At the dam, Slim opened the sluice-gate wide to drain the swamp before the heavy freeze settled. And the mercury dropped that night to zero.

It was cheery and warm in the log-built bunk-shanty, where a sprawling sheet-iron stove roared through a stove-pipe that traversed the entire length of the thirty-foot room. Slim opened boxes of cigars as his contribution to the Christmas season's gaiety; the men had feasted on various pies and puddings prepared by Chumpy John, the cook. They were eager for news from the city, and heard with interest bordering on incredulity Slim's statement that there was snow down-river.

"Why didn't ye bring some long with ye?" demanded Dinky Dan. "This is worse than the winter of the blue snow when the Pacific froze over."

"I heard another funny story down-river," Slim remarked. "The Jensens want to buy into the Three Partners. Seems they've become so interested in the tamarack job they want to take stock into it."

He paused to allow that to sink in, and it sank deep and the listeners showed how deeply it struck by their loud, scornful laughter. The Three Partners crew had as much use for the Jensens and their crews as for nothing at all.

"So I brung along all the stock we got left, sixty shares, with me," went on Slim. "For fear somebody might sell to the Jensen's at par. The stock starts at $100 a share, and I wouldn't want our treasurer to sell it for five times that today. If John or Chris want to buy they've got to pay us $600 a share. I wouldn't sell it to the Jensen's, or anybody but fellers I could trust, for any less. Ned Harper's down for ten shares. Of course we let him in on the ground floor because he's with us, more or less, so to speak. This stock will be worth about $600 a share on May thirtieth. That's what Harper will cash it in for if we want to sell."

"Purty good time-checks for the lucky capitalists," insinuated Rubber Jack, a wide-mouthed, roly-poly little white-water jumper with a pair of large ears and small, keen eyes. "Wisht I could trade my hard labor fer somethin' that would grow moss onto it like that."

"Gosh, I hate to think of lettin' the Jensens have it," mourned Slim, unrolling the

pretty, gold-bordered certificates from a water-proof sack. "If I had the money myself I'd take it all up. I'd cash in my time right now, and trade it. You know, the idear of Chris Jensen gettin' in on this is——"

The next day was pay-day and Slim left the sixty shares of Three Partners stock with Dinky Dan, to whom he had turned them over at the end of the previous evening's entertainment in full view of the men. Before noon Dan had—begrudgingly—allowed every one of the sixty stock certificates to go into the hands of the timberjacks in exchange for their time-checks, indorsed to the Three Partners. He sold them at par. Hoot Kelly bought two shares, so did Joe Choquette, and Rubber Jack was aggrieved when Dan would let

him have but two. Every man in camp had at least one of the "moss-growin' papers." They had taken Slim at his word.

CHAPTER XII

A ROLLING PARTY

THE coup by which the Three Partners stock was disposed of for time drawn against the Harper Lumber Company required that someone make another trip to Anconia at once. There were notes to be met on the first. Dinky Dan was prevailed upon to be the messenger. The Christmas holidays were over, and Dan thought he would be safe because he would not have much real money with him anyway, and he would have to go to the Harper Company office to turn in the indorsed time-checks.

Slim yearned to go himself. It would have been the greatest pleasure in the world for him to have turned over to Nellie Arthur the proceeds of the sale of the stock, but Slim had a personal and particular reason for not going to the city just now. He was flat broke. He had spent every cent of his spare change for Christmas presents.

There were other reasons, which he gave to Dan, for Slim staying on the job, just at this time. Nothing had been seen of Chris Jensen, nothing had been heard from him, or from John Jensen, either. The circumstance was ominous. Slim had reason to expect some overt act from the Jensen camp, which was located within ten miles of the Little River dam, on the opposite of the Flambeau. He and Dan had kept a guard at the dam since they moved up into their tamarack camp.

It seemed to be, as Dinky Dan had prophesied, the "winter of the black snow." There was not even enough white snow to furnish slipping for sleighs on the tote-roads. The tamarack was skidded long distances on roll-ways and snaked out by teams hauling bunches of the sticks over the frozen ground. This heightened the expense in production, too, for it was slow work. Hoot Kelly grew morose, tinkered with the sprinkling-cart, and seemed to be wasting time putting fresh calks on the horses all around.

The cutters worked on frozen bog-land, now, the pontoons having been abandoned. The Little River was shrunken to a narrow stream. One morning Hoot Kelly and helpers hitched a team to the sprinkling-cart, and drew it down to the river, chopped a hole in the ice and pumped the tank full of water. It was bitter cold weather, with fierce winds, the mercury hanging below zero day after day. The choppers wore thick mitts and pulled their Scotch caps and toques far down over their ears as they labored.

Hoot Kelly sent a teamster over the nearest corduroyed tote-road with the sprinkler, and it sprayed a fine stream which froze as it fell. He had rigged a substitute for the usual spray, with its larger holes designed to flood snow-roads. Back and forth, from end to end of the tote-road went the cart. Now and then it was necessary to stop and build a fire beneath the spray-pipe to thaw out the frozen fine holes. It was slow work, but at the end of the day there was over a mile of tote-road with a hard, smooth surface on which the sharp-shod horses could drag huge loads on sleighs. The sleighs were put into action at once, and production jumped.

Tamarack was hauled to the river's edge, and skidded down to the ice until the river was filled from bank to bank for a space of half a mile. The below zero weather held without snow, and Kelly's cart went here and there with its spray, making ice-roads. When the river was filled as far as was practical, the tamarack was decked up on the rollways supported by piles ready to be broken out in the spring.

Dinky Dan did not return. Slim grew uneasy as the New Year came in and two days passed without a sign of his partner, but Slim had sent Rubber Jack along with Dan for a companion and Slim trusted Rubber Jack. He had a better education than any other man in camp. He had entered a small college down-state once as a football freshman, playing end on the 'varsity team for a season, and then dropping out, catching a job as a railroad brakeman, and working his way back to the Upper Peninsula and the lumberwoods. Rubber Jack had one fault; he went wild every spring. He did not drink a drop, but the excitement of the drive and white-water work seemed to go to his head like a strong intoxicant, and he often wound up in the calaboose with a cracked head and broken knuckles from a fierce free-for-all fight with rival drivers.

As the days passed Slim tried to comfort himself in his apprehension over Dan by telling himself that Rubber Jack had probably "broken out" in mid-winter, and Dan was waiting for him to get out of jail. His relief was tremendous when he saw

Rubber Jack shuffle into camp on a pair of disreputable snowshoes that were torn and broken from travel over rough country where there was little or no snow. But Rubber Jack was a sight to behold, and he was all alone.

He was carrying one arm in a sling, both his eyes were discolored, he lacked one front tooth, and he shuffled with a limp, one foot turned out at a painful angle.

"Well, they got us at Rails," he broke out bluntly. "Guess they trailed us down river from Tamarack Bend. Thought I saw somebody at Pine Bluff, when we passed on the ice, but didn't pay much attention. I went to the depot to get tickets for the scooter, and left Dan outside. When I got back he was gone. Feller told me he saw him follerin' a man with his pockets full of wet doughnuts. Booze. Well—I found Dan all right, between a couple of log-decks. He'd been poisoned proper and rolled for everythin' they was on him."

"The time-checks?" queried Slim.

"Yeah! But I had the numbers of every one of 'em." Rubber Jack grinned broadly, but winced with the pain of opening his mouth.

"I was sore, though," he confessed, "and I didn't like the way they busted Dan's right arm."

Rubber Jack's eyes were glittering, though his voice was low, almost toneless. Slim's eyes grew bleak.

"Did you find out—anythin'?"

"Red, White and Blue Pete bought tobacco at the mill-store," replied Jack. "He had a gang with him. They started down the ice for Anconia. I caught the scooter with Dan, and he's in the hospital now, but I figured Pete and his gang would be slower than the train, so I doubled back up the ice—it's a foot deep with snow below Rails—and met up with 'em two miles above town. I didn't get the time-checks back."

Rubber Jack rubbed an embarrassed foot in the sawdust beside the cook-shanty door where he had met Slim.

"I didn't get 'em, because Pete lit out and ran and left the others to do the fightin'. Two of 'em is in the same ward with Dan. They wanted to keep me in the hospital, too. I don't like the smell of ether."

Slim grinned. He waited for Rubber Jack to go on.

"I had to get over to the Company office, and give 'em the serial numbers on the time. Miss Arthur telephoned the banks and stores, and stopped payment on the checks. She told me to tell you she couldn't do anything more than that until the time-checks show up—or we boys fix it up with Dan to issue new checks to replace the old ones—and Dan can't sign his name."

"He was badly hurt?" inquired Slim softly, but with eyes so bleak that Rubber Jack winced when he looked at him.

"Two ribs gone and right arm busted at the joint—because they twisted it up back of him when they rolled him in Rails—and his left hand was mangled. With calks. The whole five of Pete's gang was drunk when I met up with 'em. He stayed sober. Guess he figgers he was gettin' even for bein' turned into a blue streak last fall."

"I guess he's a little more than even," commented Slim. "I'll have to see him, sometime——"

His voice trailed off, and he became very thoughtful.

"Come inside, Jack. Yore arm fixed up yet?"

"They set it, and it's lashed to a board of some sort. I didn't think I'd come into camp totin' finished lumber with me." He smiled.

"Did Miss Arthur—did you see Ned Harper?" Slim questioned, when they were inside and Rubber Jack had been helped off with his snowshoes and coat.

"Ned's away, but Miss Arthur said she'd see that the notes due on the first are met. And she said somethin' about she was glad she didn't sell the shares to the one she wanted to—even if the time was stole from Dan. She went to the hospital. Dan, he tells me she was disappointed because she expected to find you there. Guess she don't care much whether you get beat up or not."

Rubber Jack was perfectly sober, and Slim was puzzled for an instant.

"She didn't know it was Dan got rolled until she got there," he added dryly.

Slim felt the blood rushing to his face from a heart that seemed to be swelling to abnormal size in his breast. He began to swear in the curious oaths which he used, without blasphemy, but with the eloquence of genuine profanity.

"By the jumpin' two-horned toad!" he breathed. "If I wasn't a dodrotted deadfall chained to a donkey-injine I'd go down there and find Red, White and Blue Pete and change his name to Black and Blue, the cross-grained, bean-spoilin' square-

head! Rolled Dinky Dan, did he, the pale-headed son of an albino mushrat!"

Rubber Jack listened with seraphic satisfaction on his face until Slim had finished.

"Much obliged," he said. "That's jest what I wanted to say, and couldn't think of it."

"Jack, yore goin' to take Dan's place," Slim declared suddenly. "You can't handle an ax, saw or peavey now, anyhow. You've got to use yore head from now on, instead of yore hands. Yo're foreman."

"Head's kinda woozy, but I'd like to buck timber with it," was Rubber Jack's speech of acceptance.

CHAPTER XIII

A BAD "BLOW"

THE early thaws were accompanied by brief rains, a scanty precipitation, and then with a suddenness that sent old timberjacks harking back to the "winter of '92" and the "spring of '88" and other famous years of weather-marked memory, it froze up solid again, and continued bitterly cold for a stretch of nearly three weeks. Fierce winds howled down from the Northwest, and the shelter of the tamarack was welcome indeed to the laboring woodsmen. The cutting climbed to a million, to a million and a half, to a million eight hundred thousand feet—and Dinky Dan came up-river.

He was sheepish and bleached and discouraged in appearance. Slim did not mention his weakening for "wet doughnuts" at all. None but Jack and Slim knew of that, though the story of how Dan had been beset and robbed had become a camp epic. It had helped spur the men to prodigious efforts to break all records for cutting, to put the Jensen gang to shame—and they were shareholders, now, anyway. They wanted to see their "pars" as they called them, grow to "grand-pars," with long whiskers like moss on a live-oak.

Poor Daniel Green was boiling with frustrated desire for revenge. He could not remember even seeing White Pete—nor the face and form of any of his gang—and although the sheriff had talked with Dan in the hospital, and offered to comb the lumber-camps and Homestead for his assailants, Dan had been forced to refuse the aid of the law.

"Ned Harper's took care of our notes," he told Slim. "He's takin' the serial numbers for as good as time. Lucky thing for us, too, because the Lumbermen's Bank would 'a' called us sure as green apples, and we'd gone smash. I'm goin' to practice learnin' to write soon as my fingers will move."

Dan still carried his right arm in a sling. The fingers of his left hand were badly crippled. Since three fingers were gone from his right hand he was in bad shape. Sight of Dinky Dan, so crippled, roused the Three Partners crew to rumbling anger.

Dan refused to take his old place back from Rubber Jack. He was humiliated beyond measure by his experience.

"That Miss Arthur's a better man than I be," he told Slim. "But she's workin' too hard. She's pale and peaked. Did ye know that Chris Jensen takes a trip down to town every month? He's allers hangin' round the office. Good thing Ned hired another girl. He's got a stenographer to help out Miss Nellie. Good-looker, too."

"What d'you mean, it's a good thing?" demanded Slim sharply.

"Ned's away a lot and—well, it's nice fer Nellie to have company."

Slim did not need to ask any more questions. He understood that Chris Jensen was pressing his attentions upon Nellie Arthur more insistently than ever. It made him almost sick to know that he must stay up-river until he took his drive down. His presence was imperative, now, for it was the busiest time of the year—or soon would be.

April first, and the thaw struck in again. The men grumbled at it, and when a timberjack grumbles at the spring break-out it means something. These men wanted to keep on cutting. As the bogs thawed and became quaking traps, the axmen and sawyers stuck to it, laboring knee-deep in ice-cold mud. They got a footing where the frost was still lingering below the surface.

The two million mark was reached and passed the tenth of April, but the tote-roads failed then. Snow came, light, fleecy, wet snow and the timberjacks cursed it. It was the "rotting snow" as they called it. Tamarack was cut, but it lay far from the river. Slim called a halt on wood-work, for the ice

was going out. When it had cleared entire, the sluice-gates were closed, and the break-out began.

Slowly the reservoir rose, very slowly indeed, and as it rose it became alive with tamarack floated down from above, in ten and twelve foot lengths. A gang worked at the jim-poles, three of them having been erected near the dam, and used to haul out logs on roll-ways on the dry banks of the reservoir, and extending to the bank of the Flambeau river. The sun smote from a higher angle, day by day. The thaw came, and loosened every bond of frost—and still no rain.

Despite this unusual drouth the reservoir rose, but with every trickle of water shut off, save what spilled over the crest of the dam, the Little River did not back up into the swamps. Over one hundred thousand feet of cut tamarack lay mired in the swamp. Impossible to get at it with teams. Too far to skid out even if it were possible otherwise.

Not in a cycle of years had there been so dry a spring. Weather-wise and weathered old-timers attributed the condition, sagely, to the seven year change in the moon, to the clearing up of sun-spots, to superstitions as old as the woods themselves. Whatever the cause, the drouth that hit the Flambeau country was memorable and terrible.

Slim Derringer went up to Lac du Flambeau on the twelfth of April, and beheld that vast reservoir only two feet higher than its natural level before the dam was built. Through the drainage ditches a steady flow was going to the homestead tracts where the mossback farmers were planting their cabbage-seed, for transplanting patches.

The lake never rose a foot higher. On April fourteenth the sluices were opened, and Chris Jensen's pulp-wood drive began to move out. He had been forced to wait longer than he had expected. John Jensen, who had formed the coöperative association among the settlers who had taken up land in the Homestead, controlled the flowage from the lake—and he was using it.

Slim made another trip to see John Jensen. He was not at the gate-house on the dam, which was his office, but a man told Slim the boss would be found in Chris Jensen's camp, five miles down-river, on the north side. Chris, Slim was told, had "gone down-river on business." John had assumed charge for his brother. Slim comprehended a closer affiliation of the brothers in the logging job than he had supposed existed.

The break-out was proceeding in leisurely fashion, considering the need for swift use of the scanty headwater that could be spared from the reservoir. John Jensen, a bearded, stolid individual in lumberjack rig, strolled placidly about the roll-ways, speechless, brooding.

He grunted, and did not look at Slim at all when Slim presented himself.

"Just went up to the lake to see you," Slim said. "I suppose you'll be lettin' out the head for the wood pretty soon."

"Twenty-fift' of the mont' " responded John shortly.

"Twenty-fifth!" Slim's blood ran cold. "Chris ought to get his drive clear earlier than that."

"Contract says May first. He's got five days, den."

"Waitin' for rain?" inquired Slim.

"It's a dry year," responded Jensen imperturbably. "It's mebbe lucky you builded de dam at Little River. 'Cause, after de first of May I don't open de sluice-gates up above. You better tail clost to dis drive. Mebbe we need some headwater from Little River, too. Dat's w'at Chris gone down-river to find out about."

"You think we can spare our little head to help Chris Jensen's drive?" inquired Slim, stung to anger.

"It's Flambeau River flowage," responded John Jensen, with a sudden jerk of his head and a glare at Slim. "Little River is a tributary stream to the Flambeau. We got rights on it, too. You open de sluice when dis wood runs or we don't give you any from up above."

"Oho!" breathed Slim under his breath. "That's why he wanted to buy stock!" Aloud he said, swallowing his indignation, "Well, I'll do that, if he makes a quick drive. I'm willing to go fifty-fifty."

"You open on de twenty-fift', and keep open t'ree days. Tail in on de wood, and I give you headwater to de t'irty-first. Dat's all. Hear you sold stock to de men on your crew."

"Oh, you did? White Pete told you, did he?"

John Jensen only shook his head stolidly at this shot. Whether he knew of Pete's attack on Dan or not, he did not show it.

"The men liked the idea of making some easy money," Slim drawled. "They knew when a Jensen wanted to buy it must be a good thing."

"It would 'a' been a good t'ing," was John Jensen's significant comment.

Slim left with the feeling there was something sinister in John Jensen's attitude. However, the agreement as to headwater was as good as he could expect. It would mean a quick drive, following closely Chris Jensen's wood-sticks to take advantage of the "tail of the head" that carried the wood down.

Slim hurried back to camp, and after a conference with Dinky Dan and Rubber Jack, prepared for the worst. He floated his timber in the reservoir between booms, ready to shoot it fast through the sluice-gate.

April twenty-fifth came, and Slim and his crew watched anxiously for the "head jam" of Jensen's drive. In early morning they saw the first wave of muddy water sweeping down the Flambeau, token of opened sluices at the lake. They waited until Jensen's head jam rolled and tumbled past, and then opened their sluices and "gave it a boost" on its way. To avoid a clash between his men and Jensen's gang Slim sent all but a few whom he could trust to hold their heads, up to tamarack to break camp and clean up.

The sacking gang or tail-jam gang passed the mouth of Little River the next day. Slim let his water run, husbanding it as best he could, for the reservoir shrank rapidly until he had scarce enough water to keep his tamarack floating loose between the booms. He closed the gate down halfway toward the end of the second day, and sent Montreal Joe and another man down-river to scout and report on the tail of Jensen's drive. They returned at dusk,

angry and excited, with the information that a jam had formed at Tamarack Bend, and the sackers had not tried to man the river for a night run. They were allowing the jam to lie.

Slim closed his sluice tight, and sent Joe back again with orders to find Chris Jensen, if Chris had met his drive.

"Tell him we won't give him another gallon of water until he breaks that tail jam. I know his game. He's tryin' to hold us up."

The worst happened during the night. Joe Choquette did not appear, and Slim was sitting up, reading by a kerosene lamp, at midnight, when the sound of an explosion brought him up, standing. With a yell to the slumbering crew he dashed for the dam.

The wreckage of the sluice-gate told its own story. It had been blown up with dynamite! Water was rushing the tangle of tamarack that had jammed in the hole, and the dam supports were trembling and creaking ominously.

The temper of the Three Partners crew boiled over, hot and threatening, and Slim and Dinky Dan and Rubber Jack had all they could do to keep the men from starting down-river after "the dam' square-heads."

"We can lick 'em, boys," Slim told them, "and we'll do it when we get ready. We've got to plug that hole, clear out the tamarack sticks, and save the dam and all the water we can."

The guiding booms had been torn loose from their moorings at the dam, and the sluice-gate timbers were splintered to pieces. Fortunately the cross-beams of the main structure were intact. The force of the current sucking through the blown gate threatened to widen the breach, however, and quick work was necessary.

By torchlight Dinky Dan superintended the drilling of new holes in the granite wall on the down-stream side, into which were placed long, strong timbers, their other ends braced against the dam at the outer side of the sluice-way. These braces strengthened the dam, and with more timbers thrust upright against them, on the inside of the triangle, virtually a new section of dam was built. It stopped the water's flow, save for leaks in the interstices of the timbers.

Sandbags and stone shut it off entirely. The danger to the main dam was removed, but now came the terrific job of clearing the jammed tamarack. Slim had the pile-driver floated down outside one of the booms, and drove piles close to the smashed gate, right through the tangle of tamarack. The men swarmed down into the icy water, then, and sawed and chopped the logs into short pieces that could be pulled out. By daylight the worst of the task was over, and not a man loafed or groused except to breathe sulphurous threats against "the square-heads."

Joe Choquette showed up in the gray of dawn, and the sight of him set off another wave of rage. He had been treated to the same decoration given White Pete some

months before, and he bore the marks of a desperate struggle.

"White Pete!" he cried breathlessly, in answer to questions from Slim and Dan. "He's back on de rivaire. *Oui*, an' it's Pete dat came up here las' night w'ile hees gang paint me up."

Joe became voluble and incoherent.

"White Pete, eh—and dynamite!" breathed Slim, huskily. "Is the jam still hanging at the Bend?"

"She's lak she's nailed down. Dey don't try to break heem off. Chris Jensen, he's come up-rivaire an' tak' charge de head jam. He's don't care about de rear."

"Dynamited our dam, eh? Wanted to steal all our head-water! Dan, Jack, Kelly! There's only one thing for us to do now."

"Yeah, I know. I got the candles all ready to light," responded Dan laconically. "We got to break that Tamarack Bend jam ourselves."

Dan displayed a bundle of dynamite sticks, capped and fused.

"Grub-pile," murmured Chumpy, the cook, and everything was forgotten for half an hour while the men ate.

EVERY man in the crew wanted to go down with Dinky Dan and help dynamite the jam at the Bend. Slim selected four, and set the rest to work replacing the booms, clearing away further wreckage, and preparing to rebuild the sluice-gate. Joe Choquette, after an hour's work with brush and rag and kerosene followed by hot water and soap, began to resemble himself again rather than a blue devil—but he was crackling with fury.

"Me, I'm want to meet up wit' dose fellaire w'at stick dis blue daub onto me, dat's hall. I'm goin' to sharp' my caulks so dey bite lak beaver teet'."

Slim promised Joe he should have his place in the front rank if a fight were forced on them, or rather, if they could catch up with Jensen's crew. It amounted to the same thing.

An hour later the laboring river-rats at the dam heard a dull boom from down-river.

"He's blown her!" came the exclamation from a dozen throats at once.

"All right, make it fast now, boys. We've got to finish the gate and make a new slide, and be ready to shoot our sticks."

CHAPTER XIV

SLIM GOES THROUGH

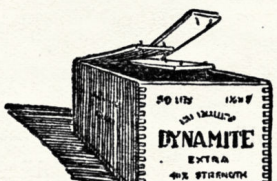
SLIM had anxious eyes on the rushing torrent of the Flambeau—and it was not long before he discovered that the torrent was abating. The head-water was running out.

Fast work was done, as fast as determined river-rats could make it, some of them in water up to their waists and often to their shoulders, as they felt their way to the bottom of the sluice-gate framework with axes, saws and chisels. Slim called a halt on this job, seeing that he was losing too much time.

"We'll have to just slap flash-boards against the up-side of the gate," he said. "Never mind trying to slip in a grooved gate. Get the booms right, some of you fellows. Now for the crib below. Rip it down. We've got no time to lose. John Jensen has shut down the sluices at the lake."

One after the other the laboring jacks snatched a look at the Flambeau, and their faces grew grim. But they did not stop to curse Jensen. They spiked flash-boards to strong cross-pieces and slipped this structure down over the open gate, the force of the current clamping it tight. The crib they had built below was opened, and the water drained out. They demolished the crib then, and began erecting a new log-slide from the level of the sluice-gate sill, down to the bed of the river below the dam.

Cookees, sent down-river with a lunch for Dan's men, returned with the report that the dynamite had broken the jam at the Bend, but the lowering water caused it to hang stubbornly, and peavey-work was necessary.



"Dan said there was a stone-filled crib built in the middle of the river where the jam hung," one of the cookees added. "Looked like Chris Jensen aimed to hang that jam there."

"Uh, huh," commented Slim, grimly.

Dinky Dan led a weary gang back to Little River that night.

"All clear at the foot of the rapids, but by the jumpin' Crimus, d'ye know what Jensen's sackers are doin'? They're makin' jams for us, by cricky! Yes, sir, They're usin' wild-cat logs to stop the rear-drive as it clears. I busted out two

string-jams below the Bend, and I'd a busted the sackin' gang if I had me strength and more men with me and more dynamite. I used it all."

Slim Derringer considered a moment, then he smiled and relaxed for the first time in hours.

"All right, boys, knock off," he said to the laboring river-rats at the sluice-gate. "Grub-pile and bunk-shanty. We've got some hard work comin' tomorrow and the next day and mebbe the next. No use to kill ourselves. The big head has gone, and no more comin' yet. John Jensen shut down a little before sunset. He's due to open 'em again at sunrise. We'll hold all the head-water here we can, and trust to luck and a fast run. We dump through tomorrow morning. We'll knock down the decks on bank first while we wait for the reservoir to fill as much as it will."

During the night the Flambeau had run very low. It had sunk two feet in eight hours. No rush of freshly roiled water came at dawn to show that the lake sluices had been lifted. Two hours they waited, and no head-weater. Then, slowly, the river rose, six inches, a foot. Slim and Dan watched it, puzzled. This was no wave of log-carrying proportions. It spoke of the grudging, slow half-opening of gates. It hung for an hour at the same level.

"John is givin' his brother just enough flow to carry him in the lower Flambeau," declared Dan. "He knows we can't run our heavy tamarack through the rapids on that little trickle. One of us has got to go and see John, and get a head of water."

Slim was silent, his eyes fixed, in a preoccupied stare on the sluggish current below. He rose, with a smile on his face, and went to the tool-shed, emerged with a bundle of dynamite, fuses and caps and laid them down beside Dan.

"Jest fix them up," he chuckled. "I'm goin' on a little trip."

From the bunk-shanty he brought an automatic which he thrust into the bosom of his woolen shirt.

"I'm goin' to take a bateau and Joe and go down through to Rails," he said.

"Rails! Hell, I thought you was goin' up and blow the gate at Lac du Flambeau!" squawked Dan, disappointedly.

"No, I'm no dam wrecker," responded Slim. "Leave that to Jensen and his thugs. I'm goin' to telephone Ned Harper on long-distance and ask him to phone John Jensen at Homestead. Dan, today is the thirtieth of the month. How far d'you think we could get before sundown, with a drive?"

"Half-way to Rails—if we had all the water we needed," Dan responded. "By the jumpin' Crimus, we're licked out!"

"I don't think so," responded Slim, smiling.

"Ye're goin' to have Harper order more water for us, after the first of the month?"

"You keep an eye on the river," responded Slim. "Don't dump a stick until you see enough head to carry through. Hold tight. I'll be back soon as I get what I want."

The bateau shot down the run of the rapids, grating rocks which in normal times were deeply submerged, and went into the deeper reaches of the river that began at Tamarack Bend where the river turned east. Here the bateau ran into a small jam hung up on one side on a silt-bar.

Half a mile down-river Slim and Joe could see Jensen's sackers leisurely rolling drift-logs into the stream which flowed sluggishly, but with enough depth to carry a drive. The fall of the river from the Bend to Anconia was trifling compared to the steep descent of the Upper Flambeau. With a stick of dynamite Slim blew the silt-bar jam, and chased the lagging timber on. The sackers stopped work at sound of the blast. When Slim's bateau glided close to the west bank, where the main portion of the crew was standing, the familiar red face of White Pete appeared.

"Hello, Pete," Slim greeted him, with a grin. "You back up-river bossin'?"

"Yeah, I'm de boss here. W'at to hell you want? We don't need no splinter cats to help us break jams."

Joe Choquette, on his feet in the bateau, with his pike-pole thrust down to bottom, made a quick move, and Slim had to thrust off to keep him from vaulting out and giving battle then and there.

"Why, I'll tell you, Blue Pete," drawled Slim, reaching in his shirt—and drawing out tobacco and a pipe—"we're the head-jam gang for the tamarack, Joe and I. We're clearin' the river for an open channel. Now, if yo're boss of this crew——"

Slim filled his pipe and lighted it, leisurely, thrust his tobacco sack inside his shirt and let his hand remain there.

"—if yo're boss you order yore men to ship bateaux, and ride the river ahead of us. I'll back you up—with this."

His hand came out with the automatic in it, and Pete looked into its muzzle.

"Move fast, you boiled owl!" com-

manded Slim. "No talk. This is loaded up."

Some of the crew began to move uneasily, and Slim wagged the gun on them.

"Ship bateaux!" commanded Slim. "Pete, you take the stern."

Pete moved sullenly, and his men followed suit. Pete's red face had gone pasty white.

"Next time you do a splinter-cat job on a dam, blow up the hull works and save trouble," remarked Slim.

On the opposite shore were other sackers and another bateau, and slim directed Pete's across. The north side sackers had ceased work to watch the maneuvers of Pete and his crew. Slim hid his gun.

"Give yore orders, Pete," he commanded, as they drew near the bank.

"Ship bateau," muttered Pete. The men hesitated.

"Hear the boss?" snapped Slim. "I'm backin' him. Move." The gun showed.

As the other bateau filled with men and moved outstream Slim reached down and picked up a prepared stick of dynamite with hanging fuse. He thrust it in his shirt, and let the fuse peek out, relighted his pipe, holding the flaring match within an inch of the fuse-end, speculatively, and the oarsmen in the bateaux speeded up. He and Joe followed them, poling swiftly, with long thrusts of their pikes.

The gate-booms at Rails lay open. Jensen's main drive had passed through, but the booms were being swung shut, again, an indication that Jensen had not left his sackers behind for any other purpose than to try to hold up the tamarack drive. Slim ordered the north-shore sacking gang to proceed with their bateau, and made Pete's gang run alongside the boom.

"Get out, Pete. Yo're goin' with me," he commanded.

Pete demurred, but Joe Choquette gave him a prod with a pikepoint that limbered him. The rest of the sackers Slim allowed to slip through the closing booms and on down river.

Chapter XV

A Finish Fight

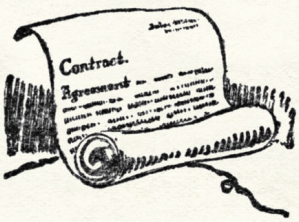
THE voice that answered Slim's call from the phone at the Rails sawmill office sent his heart pounding against the butt of an automatic that nestled against his chest.

"Hello!" he drawled. "This is Derringer at Rails."

"Oh! You're at Rails with the drive!"

"Nope. Not jest yet, Miss Arthur. The drive isn't in the river, yet. Need water., Headwater from the lake. I want to ask Mr. Harper if he could get John Jensen to hold the sluices open for a couple days more. He shut down last night, and hasn't opened again."

"But Mr. Harper is on his way to Escanaba, Manominee and Marinette!" came Nellie's voice anxiously. "He's taken Mrs. Harper with him, and they are to coast down in a power launch, touching at the resorts on the summer beaches. He has gone to clinch contracts for tamarack logs for construction work. Cabins, you know."



Slim almost groaned.

"He's promised shipments to arrive May fifteenth," she continued. "I'll do anything I can. I'll telephone John Jensen, but——"

Her voice trailed off, and Slim winced as he caught the implication. For her to ask a favor, now, of John Jensen would be futile and he knew it.

"We expect Chris Jensen in this afternoon, and—Mr. Derringer, if you had only been friendly with him—I could ask him to get in touch with his brother and—even now, I think Chris would do me the favor, *but*——"

Slim's face went white, and the hand clutching the receiver gripped it until it crackled.

"Don't talk to Chris Jensen," he said, in a voice so low that it seemed as if she could not have heard it, but she gasped. "Let John Jensen keep his gates closed tight and all his water roll in the ditches."

"Slim!"

"Yes'm," spoke up Slim, his voice rising. "That's what my friends call me, but I never liked it so well before."

"Please don't be foolish. I——"

"I always will be foolish, I guess. But this isn't anythin' foolish. *I want the river dried up.*"

"Slim! Mr. Derringer!"

"This is still Slim," he insisted, his voice threatening to tremble. "I'll be down this evenin', myself. May I come to see you?"

"You—why yes, I'll be at the office, until nine o'clock."

"Yo're workin' too hard!"

"Good-by!"

"This is Slim talkin'."

"Good-by, Slim."

It was dark in the mill-yard, but a cheerful light came from the windows of the office toward which Slim headed, walking swiftly and silently in the deep sawdust. He had turned White Pete over to the authorities with a charge of malicious destruction of property against him. By sheer good luck he had caught Ned Harper at Menominee, on the long-distance 'phone, and, although it had taken much earnest, detailed explanation for Slim to convince Ned Harper it would be possible to deliver a million feet of tamarack by May fifteenth—*on a dry river*—he had managed it. Harper had agreed to call John Jensen at the lake, and have the sluices closed down and kept closed.

Harper had also agreed to other conditions that Slim asked for. Slim was happy. The blood was running warm and at high tide in his veins. His hot cheeks were fanned by the cool air of evening, and he drew in deep breaths of the pungent smells of the mill-yard, which he had grown to love, curiously.

Nellie Arthur would be waiting for him. She had called him "Slim." This thought buzzed in his brain, burned in his heart, so much so that he halted near the office door, and strove to regain some degree of calmness.

"Business, old boy," he reminded himself, "strictly business. It isn't May thirtieth, yet. Hold yore horses!"

As he waited, his eyes sought the square of light from the glass window of the office door. He caught a flash of a white waist and bent forward, his pulses leaping again, until he could make out a dark head bent over a desk, inside.

"She ought not to work so hard and so late," Slim thought. "It's too much for her. Shame she has to—shame she has to be so anxious over this picayune contract—to worry over her mother. I wonder why she plunged on this so deep? We got to deliver—for *her*. If we don't, and Chris Jensen is king of the river——"

He stopped short, struck suddenly by the thought, new to him, that he had come close to answering his own questions. Chris Jensen had money, and if the Three Partners failed—as Chris had tried to make sure they would do by every foul trick at his command—then Jensen would be the man who would be asking Nellie Arthur to take dinner with him on May thirtieth! As he had done at Christmas! *And she had gone with him!*

That stuck in Slim's mind, and stopped the rapid beating of his heart. After all, what assurance did he have it was not Chris, all the time, she was fighting for? She wanted him to be friends with Chris! She had wanted to sell stock to John Jensen. She must have a reason for that. What reason?

Slim's blood cooled fast. His shining eyes dulled.

"Strictly business, man," he muttered again.

He raised his bowed head, and looked again through the glass at a distance of less than six feet, out of the darkness into the bright light—and what he saw caused him to set his teeth into his lip.

Between him and the girl at the desk loomed a bulky form, clad in corduroy, head bare, his close-cropped, stiff hair erect and bristling—the form of Chris Jensen. He was leaning over the desk, close to her, and as Slim watched, spellbound, he bent lower above her. Slim thought he saw her shrink away from him, and he started forward with a surge of jealous rage shooting through him—but again he halted as if he had been shot.

A white hand with pink-tipped fingers appeared on the corduroy of Jensen's shoulder. It crept up and about, curving around his neck, and Jensen's head went down, closer—closer——

The light caught in the facets of a stone that sparkled on one finger of the clinging hand. A diamond!

Jensen's deep-throated laugh with a note of thick triumph in it reached Slim's ears like a blow. He was stricken as suddenly sick as if from physical nausea. His head sank on his breast, and he could not seem to raise it. He started to turn away, his jaws clenched until they hurt. His lips were stiff, lifeless.

Then the door of the office opened and Slim whirled. Jensen's laugh floated out in the quiet mill-yard. He heard a voice saying something in a teasing tone, then a laugh—but it was not the laugh he had learned to love; it sounded metallic, silly. He winced from it.

Jensen's bulky form loomed in the door. Past his head Slim saw the white waist, the dark head—Nellie Arthur's face. She was at the door of the inner office, standing there with her hand on the knob. Her face was flushed, her hair seemed disarranged.

"Dat's all right, Nellie," came Jensen's voice. "W'en de Jensens finish wid dat lumber-lawyer, Derringer, I give you better dan dat."

Jensen was coming toward him, the door slamming behind him. As he neared Slim something seemed to snap within him and release a flood of pent-up fury. He stepped directly in Jensen's path.

"Jensen!" he spoke, his voice low but savage. "Yo're goin' to finish with me, now!"

THAT was a fight the rivermen would have loved to see. But no one witnessed it at all. In the darkness with only the beam of light from the office door flashing on them, they swayed and stumbled, rocked and recoiled, rushing back and forth in the sawdust, their steps muffled, no sound save labored breathing, the thud of fists, and now and then a choking, hoarse gasp as fingers clutched throat and strove to shut off breath entirely. They fought like men between whom blood has run red for generations. It was a feud fight, though neither knew it, a war of hatred stimulated by the green god jealousy and the bitter war of timber.

Jensen had no choice but to fight, now. He could not retreat, and Jensen, fresh from the labor of forest and river and flushed with love-making—Jensen could fight, in his own way, when forced to it. He had long cherished the desire to get at Slim Derringer, to come to grips with him and beat him up. The memory of the single clean blow that had felled him ignominiously, and the more recent disgrace before his own men when the sluice-gate washed him away, rankled within him. Nothing but hand-to-hand combat would satisfy his lust for revenge.

Slim's warning was sufficient so that Jensen's was not caught unawares. He had his back to the light and Slim's form was illumined for him, for an instant. Jensen crouched and flung himself forward, both hands outstretched, fingers hooked. He got a hold on Slim's shoulders. He smothered Slim's up-driven blow, although it did reach his chin and rock his head back. His hands slipped down, gripping the arms, down, down to the waist, and there they met and the fingers locked. Jensen raised his crouched frame and began the terrible bear-hug.

His simple aim was to break his antagonist's back.

Slim knew that hold, and he knew he must break it, or the fight was all over. Fists were of little use in this sort of a game. Slim raised his right knee, and it struck Jensen's abdomen and a grunt was driven from his lungs. His vise-like hold relaxed for an instant. Slim bowed his back, keeping the lower part of his body away from Jensen, thrust his head under Jensen's chin. He got an arm free and swung a blow to Jensen's stomach. The Dane grunted again, but lunged forward and tried to draw Slim again into the killing hug. His weight, his reach, his huge arms all gave him an advantage in this sort of conflict. Slowly Slim's more slender body yielded. He had one arm free, and he kept it so. He set his fingers into the flesh of Jensen's arm, the thumb digging into the elbow-pit, and bore down.

Jensen stood it for a long moment, and then with a muffled roar tore his arm free, but flung it back with Slim's arm again in its hold. Slim ducked, suddenly, got hold of Jensen's left leg at the knee by the strong corduroy, and lifted him from his feet by main strength. Staggering, Slim whirled, and thrust Jensen bodily against the rough ends of a pile of lumber. The shock knocked the wind from Jensen's lungs, and the pain of a thrust in the small of the back from a protruding board caused his hold to loosen again. Slim pulled Jensen suddenly forward and then threw him back. His own left hand was bruised by contact with a board. He shifted it higher and repeated the battering-ram drive.

Jensen broke away, giving up his hold to save himself.

They met again, and this time Slim's fists were working. Jensen did not attempt a blow. He sought to clutch, to tear with crooked fingers at eyes and mouth and to bear his assailant down by sheer weight and grip.

As he groped, feeling for a hold, Slim let him have it—and then relaxed in Jensen's grasp for an instant, whirled squarely around in the circling arms, seized the locked hands that came in front of him and pulled the arms up over his shoulders, bending forward with a heave that brought Jensen's feet off the ground, and flung him in an arc over Slim's head. It was a simple ju-jitsu trick that Slim had learned in the California red-wood, of a Jap cook.

Jensen struck against the pile of lumber, his head thrust into the sawdust. He rolled over, sat up, sidewise, groaned and slumped down again.

"Had enough?" rasped Slim. "Or shall I finish you?"

He stood over Jensen menacingly. Jensen was on his hands and one hip, in the sawdust, breathing hard.

"Get up and I'll finish you, you rotten skunk! You wanted to finish me, did you? Get up!"

But Jensen did not rise. He had been badly hurt. However, his anger was not dulled.

"Finish wid you," he echoed. "I finish wid you! I have de law on you. Dam' you, you've broken my back! I'll have you in jail and finish you dere!"

Slim laughed a low, unmelodious laugh that seemed to come from a broken heart that was being pieced together by hate.

"Jail!" he mocked. "That's where

White Pete is now. Jail! Pete's come through, Jensen! He's come through. Don't talk jail to me. Get up and get out of here before I——"

He raised a calked foot before Jensen's face and Jensen shrank and crawled into the shadows on his hands and feet, groaning, cursing. Slim let him go.

For long moments Slim Derringer stood, breathing hard, his hands hanging at his sides, his head bowed. The victory had left no sweet taste. He looked once at the lighted doorway, and caught a glimpse of a white waist, a dark head, emerging from the inner office. He straightened with an effort, wiped blood from his face where Jensen's nails had dug and went straight to the office door and opened it.

"I've got to talk business with you," he announced, as he faced Nellie Arthur.

She started, eyes wide. Her face was flushed, her bosom rose and fell with her breathing as if from strong emotion. She appeared to have been arranging disheveled hair.

"Slim!" she cried. "What——?" and then another wave of crimson swept her face.

"My name is Derringer," he said, "I've got to talk business with you. Strictly business. I'm through bein' a fool!"

Her face went white. She looked into his dull-clouded eyes and her own fell before the expression that was in them.

"Oh! Very well," she half-whispered. "What is your business, then?"

Chapter XVI

FOUR SIDES TO A RIVER

DINKY DAN sat on a tough tamarack log in a dejected attitude at the edge of Little River reservoir and droned dolefully:

"Oh, they's only two sides to a river,
This side and the one over there;
You can log shackmatack in a river,
'Twon't float when the darn stream is bare."

It was the morning of May second. During the night things had happened to bring a drone or a groan to the lips of the hardest boiled riverman. The Flambeau, this morning, was but a succession of shallow pools, not a trickle of current anywhere. In places bare rock had dried in the warm sun. Birds echoed Dinky Dan's droning surprise. They chippered and bustled about, picking unwonted food from the riverbed and using the pools for bathtubs. Dying fish gasped and flopped in the shallow water and muck that was banked along the river's edges.

"O-o-h, they's only two ends to a river,
The source and the mouth of the stream,
Cold water is good for a driver,
He'd ruther drink bubbles than cream.
O-o-oh——"

"What the Crimus Rod is that?"

On the wings of the dry south wind that fanned Dan's solemn, bearded face came a sound like the volley of a battery of machine guns. Dan had withdrawn from the camp precincts to be alone, because it was better. The lumberjacks were sullen. Talk of hitting the trail for town had begun to get serious. Some of the surliest sneeringly demanded that Dan redeem "them pretty pieces of paper" for money, or time-checks.

"Thirtieth of May," was Dan's single response to this.

Yet he was beginning to lose hope, if not faith. He was worried. The bitter mood of the men hurt him. He knew that there is no more uneasy, unreasonable animal on earth than a timberjack on a job that is hung up on the river with no water in sight. He is betwixt the devil and the dry channel. He cannot work off excess energy by doing stunts with logs in a backwater—when there is no backwater—nor get rid of his money except by piking games of cards.

In this case the word had gone around that the Jensens had conspired to break

the Three Partners, and drive it out of business, so the Jensens might enjoy a monopoly of logging contracts, thereafter, in the Flambeau timberlands.

Dan had tried to assure the men water would come in plenty when Slim Derringer got in touch with Ned Harper.

"Yeah, but John Jensen's got the water rights tied up in contract."

"Damn the contract!" Dan exploded. "John Jensen busted it two days ago when he cut off water."

"Well, we're hung up for good. This tamarack won't go out till next spring. That stock you sold us ain't growin' any moss in dry weather."

"You make me sick!" declared Dan. "We ain't outa the woods, and we ain't goin' out except we take tamarack with us."

"Y'er right we ain't outa the woods," was the surly response.

So Dan was sulking on a shaggy barked log.

The popping sound came closer.

"I'm a son of a saw-log!" exclaimed Dan, suddenly. "That sounds like——"

He jumped up and clattered down the wall-steps in his spiked shoes, and out to where mid-stream had once been in the Flambeau, now drying rock, and peered through the overhanging branches that were already budding out into leaves.

"Pop-pop-poppety-pop-pop," the sound persisted coming steadily nearer and louder.

Suddenly a huge, moving thing came in view, starting the ascent of Red Rock Rapids. It had a snout like that of a great pig that was rooting into snags and "crows'-nests" and silt, a V-shaped snout. On either side of it silt, refuse, dead-heads and stones rolled aside in furrows.

"Pop-pop-poppety-pop," went the spitting breath of the monster, and huge blurbs of oily smoke shot into the air like a whale's spouting.

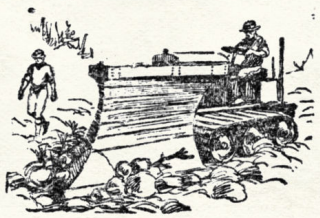
"The gosh-whanged son of a sea-cook!" exclaimed Dinky Dan, and with a whoop that rang loud and long he started running down-stream.

"Whoopee! Ye yeller-livered branigans! Turn out and watch the snappin' turtle from Lake Michigan! Whoopee!"

Strange and undignified noises for the president of a corporation, recently sulking and droning on a log! But it was justified. The grouching gang caught the well-known "whoopee!" That signified more to them than the rattling volley of sound and they flocked down the slope from the reservoir to the dry bed of the Flambeau. Here they ranged along the granite-paved bottom in a curious mob as a great ten-ton tractor with a wooden snow-plow on it climbed the slope of the rapids, flinging rocks and dead-wood aside like straw, and making a path for seven more ten-ton caperpillars that came snorting and popping behind it.

Not only tractors but a wagon-train, rumbling over the rocks. The head tractor was driven by Slim Derringer. It drew up in the cut with a terrific rattle and rumble and spit.

Eight ten-ton tractors, each with three Shebanagan wagons hitched behind! Twenty-four wagons of Michigan make, thimble-axles, low-cut wheels with wide felloes, front wheels twenty inches in diameter, rear wheels twenty-four. Each wagon fitted with a log-rig, high bunks, sixteen feet wide, tied front and back with four-by-four timbers notched in and held at the corners with wooden pegs. Each wagon attached to tractor or another wagon by short-heavy timbers, clevis-pinned to bolsters or bumpers, chains hooked close to each end of the timbers and turnbuckled so that the timber-ends were tight against the bumpers.



Hoot Kelly became articulate first of any, as the tractor-train drew to a halt.

"Hooray for the hot-haul outfit!" he bellowed. "Begorry that's the first toime I've seed a thimble-ex waggin on the Flambeau sinct the summer of the dry rains. Begorry, Slim, where did ye git them? I didn't think they made 'em any more!"

Slim Derringer, grimy and grim, descended from the first tractor, and from his first appearance, everyone who saw his face noted a curious change. He did not crack a smile. His eyes were bleak, dead, somber.

"Store-house stuff," he replied succinctly. "Old John Pine Harper had 'em lofted, knocked-down, in a shed that was piled full of lath and shingles. Lucky for you, Hoot Kelly, the wheels was already cut down or you'd have a job."

"Sufferin' shad! That's the old Shebanagan make! I'd know 'em in Turkey or Afghanistan."

Kelly fell to expert and almost loving examination of the log-rigged vehicles. The tractors, a more modern marvel, did not interest this old-timer so much.

"Now we've got to do some fast work,

boys," Slim said, stripping off gloves and running his eyes over the curious crowd. "We've got to fill in the hole there by the dam to make a track to draw up this train for loading. We've got to build skids all along the top of the dam. Rip the runway off. Skids down from the decks. We want to fix it to load half these wagons at one time. Kelly, take a gang with shovels, and go down to the foot of the rapids. There's a little five-ton tractor with a shear-plow blade stuck down there. Only bad spot on the whole run from Rails. Jack, rig a stone-box on one of these wagons, and get two teams and start fillin' in with rock. The five-ton will help us when she gets here.

"Joe Choquette, you draw the job of road-boss. We got to build a causeway up from river-bed to railroad level down to Rails. They've finished the standard-gauge line. We're goin' to load tamarack onto flats right there. Dan, we've got to draw stumps and rush hard for the rest of May."

Dinky Dan had been silent, thoughtful, calculating, after his first joyful outburst. He scratched his head. Then it burst from him, a paen, instead of a drone.

"O-o-oh, they's allers two sides to a river,
This side and the one over there——"

"Shut up, you old porcupine!" gleefully hooted Kelly. "They's *four sides to a river!* Don't we always use the top-side for a drive? And ain't we goin' to use the bottom-side for a hot-haul now. Hoot-tee-toot!"

Kelly's hoot brought a roar from his mates. The significance of the wagon-train, the tractors, the plow that had been used to clear the rock-floored channel, had at last penetrated their sullenness and disgust.

They sprang to work with a crackling battery of laughter, whoops, swear-words that were eloquent of admiration for Slim Derringer's ingenuity, and not at all profane. All they wanted now was direction, someone to put them to work and keep them busy. They were rearin' for hand-labor.

Slim Derringer took charge of things with an iron hand and a steely voice and without a smile. The men recognized the change in him, but no one asked the cause. Someone noticed that both Slim's hands were torn at the knuckles, and the word went around by a sort of telepathic route that, "Slim had met Chris Jensen and put up a whale of a scrap."

Slim's bitter expression, his somberness, his taciturnity was a reason for no one asking him about that fight. They did not know whether Slim had won the fight. They waited.

Dinky Dan was the first one to break silence concerning things that might have happened down-river.

"How's all our friends gettin' along?" he inquired. "Nellie Arthur—and our good friend Chris Jensen?" He smiled.

Slim did not smile. He gave Dan a cold, bleak stare. All the light of sky and stream was gone from his eyes.

"They're gettin' along fine," he said. "Both of 'em. Fine."

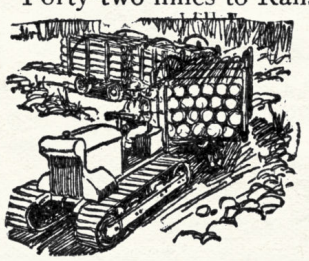
Dan asked no more questions.

Chapter XVII

RESULTS

THE first train of tamarack, twenty-four wagons loaded in great pyramids, lashed and bound with chains and binder-poles, reached the railroad siding at Rails at dusk of the second of May. Without waiting for the skidways to be built down from the dam top, the first train had been loaded from the decks on the reservoir bank skidded right down the bank of the Flambeau onto the wagons drawn close to shore.

The return trip was made at night, with the great headlights and spot-lights of the tractors lighting up the river-bed, the shadowy banks, the glimmering shallow pools, the ugly snags and jagged rocks flung aside by the wooden plow, the exhausts making the echoes ring and startling the night-flying owls and night-prowling animals of the woods. The crew had been divided into three shifts, each working eight hours. The routine of the pulp and paper mills, familiar to these men, they accepted in the open without murmur.



Forty-two miles to Rails were made, with loaded wagons, each carrying an average of two hundred and forty tamarack logs varying from ten to twelve feet long, and averaging seven inches in diameter, in four and one-half hours. Nine hours were allowed for the round-trip, including the refilling of gas-tanks, oiling, etc., part of the overhauling being done at the dam while loads were flung on, part at the railroad siding

where a crew of mechanics had been stationed by Slim before he came up-river.

Slim had figured out a schedule that showed exactly what must be accomplished if the tamarack was to be shipped, and make contract time at lake-water. This schedule he posted where the men could read it, and see for themselves—and he marked off each day the progress accomplished.

The schedule ran:

Wagon-load, 240 logs.

Train load, 24 wagons, 7,760 logs.

Footage (average 11 feet to log) 85,360 log-feet.

Three trains every 27 hours, 256,080 log-feet.

Six-day week, 144 hours, 18 trains, 1,536,480 log-feet.

On May ninth the checked figures on the tally made at the flatcars showed that they had fallen below schedule less than 300,000 feet. They had delivered at Rails, loaded and shipped a total of 1,182,567 log-feet of tamarack.

This was to be expected! There were breakages, delays on the road from various causes; the loading took more time than had been calculated. It was grueling, hard, awkward work lifting the floating tamarack from the reservoir, over the top of the dam to the steep skids that ran onto the wagons. The tamarack was heavy, hard to grip with a peavey or cant-dog, and the reservoir slowly sank as the drouth continued. Horses were used, the jim-pole rigging that had been erected for decking logs on the banks being adapted to hauling great bundles of the "shackmatack sticks" over the crest of the dam to slide down the skids against bumpers that were fixed to take the full shock of the great bulk off the wagon-rigs.

As their second week began, Dinky Dan's spirits rose to the bubbling point. His drone was heard, here and there, among the log-piles and between the wagons, as he directed the loading with expertness gained from experience on many a tote-road with sleighs, and where the "banjo snubber" was needed to ease heavily piled sleighs down steep grades.

Slim Derringer remained somber, quiet, unsmiling, but he was everywhere and he seemed sleepless. He appeared to be consumed with a veritable passion for hard work. He slept less than eight hours a day, assuming personal charge of two of the eight hour shifts and leaving the third to Dan and Rubber Jack. Occasionally he drove one of the tractors to Rails, "hot-hauling" indeed under a broiling May sun, the dry weather unrelieved by rain, the river-bed dry as a bone and evil smelling from the steam of silt and refuse and rotting wood.

There came a day when the two million mark was reached—and it was May fourteenth. There remained but a little more of the stuff in the Little River reservoir. The end of the grueling, hot-hauling job was near. The triumph of the Three Partners was in sight.

Dan rode beside Slim Derringer on the last trip down the river, the caterpillar treads grating and whining and kicking up a fine granite dust as it snaked its rumbling load of three wagons, each with over twelve tons of tamarack on its wide bunks.

"Lots of wild-cats between Tamarack Bend and Anconia," remarked Dan, out of one of the long silences that fell between them—now that Slim had become "hard as nails and quiet as a frozen stick of dynamite," as one of the men had pictured his new mood.

"Yes," responded Slim. "Ned Harper made me—us—a proposition, on this stuff. He wants us to sack the river this summer, while it's dry, and he'll pay us handsome for the lawgs. I got an idear—but I don't know. Dan, I think the itch is in my feet again. Harper wants me to stay, and he's hinted there'll be a big pine job for the Three Partners next winter——"

His voice fell flat, and he looked away—to the West.

"Why," ejaculated Dan, moved by Slim's somber indecision, "the Three Partners has got the world by the tail! We'll have a forty thousand dollar stake outa this tamarack job—twenty thousand profit, Slim. And you got as many ideas as a porcupine has quills. If we clean up this wild-cat job, why don't you take it up? I'll stick with you. You and me and Nellie Arthur has licked the Jensens out. If Harper's talkin' pine—Crimus!"

"Dan," said Slim sharply above the sputter and rumble, "I licked Chris Jensen to a frazzle with my bare hands, not long ago. I made him beg for mercy and crawl off out of my sight. I had to do it because—but shucks! It wasn't any use. Chris Jensen's got me licked in another direction—and that's all I cared about in the Flambeau regions. All I cared about."

Dinky Dan was silent. There was nothing he could say. After a time his drou-

ing voice mumbled out, scarcely audible, but its inflection was doleful.

O-o-oh, they's only two sides to a river,
This side and the one over there.

Slim Derringer smiled, but it was not a mirthful smile.

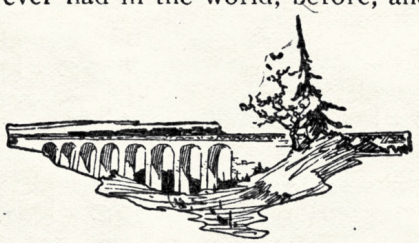
IN THE mill-yard at Anconia, Slim Derringer sat on a projecting pine board that thrust out from the side of a lumber-pile. Beside him stood Dinky Dan, looking down upon Slim's bowed shoulders and wondering what he could do to lift his friend and partner out of his moody dejection.

Dan had been in the office, and he had drawn generously of his capital—the profits of his association in the Three Partners. Slim had not gone in yet. They had come down-river together—again—and the itch was tingling in Slim Derringer's feet to be up and away—to the West.

"Money!" breathed Dinky Dan. "Money! Gosh, it skeers me to think how much money I've got, Slim. Don't it you?"

Slim's mouth was twisted into a bitter smile as he looked up out of clouded eyes into the pudgy, round, ruddy face of Dinky Dan the Splinter Cat—Daniel A. Green, logging contractor, head of the Three Partners Logging Company.

"Money?" he queried, with almost a sneer. "Money'll never bother you, again, Dan. Eight months ago I sat here and wished for all the money in the world—and now I've got more to my credit than I've ever had in the world, before, and all



I want of money is to pay train fare to the farthest station that there is on any railroad line. Alaska, I guess. That's as far away as you can get without crossin' the Pacific—toward the West."

"I'd like to go with you, Slim," said Dan anxiously, "but I wisht ye'd stay."

"I can't stay," responded Slim, almost with passion. "I'm waitin' here now only until the other girl comes to work—so I can draw my pile."

"The other girl?" queried Dan.

"Yes, the new stenographer." Slim drew in a breath of the sun-cooked, pine-permeated air of the mill-yard and expelled it in a sort of disgust. "I want to get out of this hole for good, and go where the wind blows off'n uncut pine and spruce. I'm for the bunk-shanty trail again, Dan."

"But there ain't no other girl stenographer workin' at the office. Only Nellie Arthur," said Dan.

Slim seemed to wince at the name. He had not had it on his lips once since the night he had fought Chris Jensen, here amid the lumberpiles—and had whipped him, and had found no sweetness in the victory. He looked up again at Dan.

"Thought you told me—or was it Rubber Jack?—that there was a new girl at the mill-office to help out? Was it you told me that?"

Dan shook his head, scratched it, and then a sudden smile broke out on his face.

"Oh, I guess I do recollect, now," he said. "While I was in the hospital Miss Nellie did say she had a helper. Name was Hulda Christian. Norwegian girl, she said, but you'd never know it because she was a brunette type, dark complexion and dark hair. Why, they say Chris Jensen used to be sorta sweet onto her, this Christian girl. Now I think of it, I heard down to the Company store today—didn't pay much attention to it—that she got fired because one night she got ketched with Chris Jensen, in the office here, and him kissin' her and makin' love to her."

"What's that, Dan?"

"Yeah, that's what I heard. Girl told me that knows Nellie Arthur, clerk at the store, that Nellie come outa the inside office jest as Chris was huggin' her. And this clerk, she's a flighty, gigglin' little thing, she told me as how Chris had given this Hulda a diamond ring an——"

"Dan! Are you sure about this? Dan, that isn't jest gossip, is it? Tell me!"

Slim had got to his feet, and his eyes, instead of being dull and listless, were afire, blazing, with a fierce appeal that made them sparkle as the sun struck them beneath his short-brimmed hat.

"Well, Slim, I guess it ain't jest gossip," replied Dan, with a smile. "Because I asked Nellie about it, too, and she said—yes."

For an instant Slim Derringer stood like a stone statue, his bronzed face turning slowly white, his lips clenched tight, his eyes fixed and seeming to be unseeing—but he was seeing far.

He was seeing a dark night, the rays of light blazing from an office window, a white waist and a dark head outlined

through the glass of a door, a bulky form clad in corduroy, a white, pink-fingered hand creeping about the man's neck—a diamond blazing.

"Dan," he spoke in a strange, choking voice. "Dan, is Nellie Arthur in the office now—alone?"

"Yes, she's alone, Slim. She's been waitin' for you to come in. It's way past her dinner-time now, but—but, Slim, you goin' to draw out and go West?"

"Not now," breathed Slim quietly. "Not jest now. And mebbe never, Dan, you old porcupine! You got more good idears in yore old dappled head than a porky has quills. I've been a fool. I'm goin' in and tell Nellie Arthur, our partner, what a fool I've been."

He strode off, kicking up sawdust and bark with his spiked shoes, his narrow-brimmed hat on the back of his head, his eyes on the office door, open now to the odorous breeze that curled about the lumber-stacks.

Inside the door, at a desk, Slim saw the form of a girl, her dark head bent, chin in hand, gazing out of a window—toward the West.

Dinky Dan watched his partner disappear through the office door. He took a seat farther out on the end of a pine board and teetered. As he jiggled up and down, his face was wreathed in a seraphic smile and he droned a cheerful drone:

O-o-oh, they's more than two sides to a river,
This side and the one over there.

Inside the little office, had Dan cared to go closer and look, he might have seen a white hand, pink-fingered, and without a ring on it, creep slowly up and over a flannel-shirted shoulder, about a bronzed neck, draw a curly black head down close—closer.

Dinky Dan did not go closer, he did not need to look to be inspired.

"Hum," he murmured. "I kin see where two of the Three Partners is goin' to become one.

O-o-oh, they's more than two ends to a river,
The source and the mouth of a stream,
If a feller ain't thick he'll diskiver,
Things ain't allers jest what they seem.

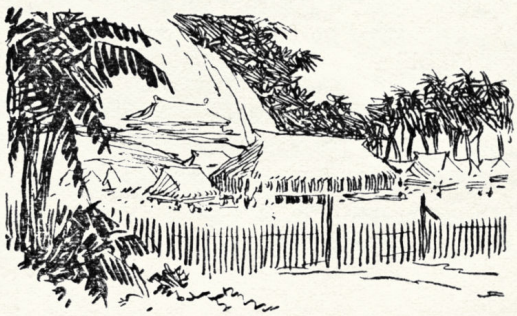
SOUTH!

A Complete Novel

by

J. ALLAN DUNN

A fitting companion to "North!," "East!" and "West!" is this last of the compass quartette—a story of the South Sea Islands, brimful of adventure, of desperate struggle—and yet redolent of the fragrance and the beauty of the outer isles.



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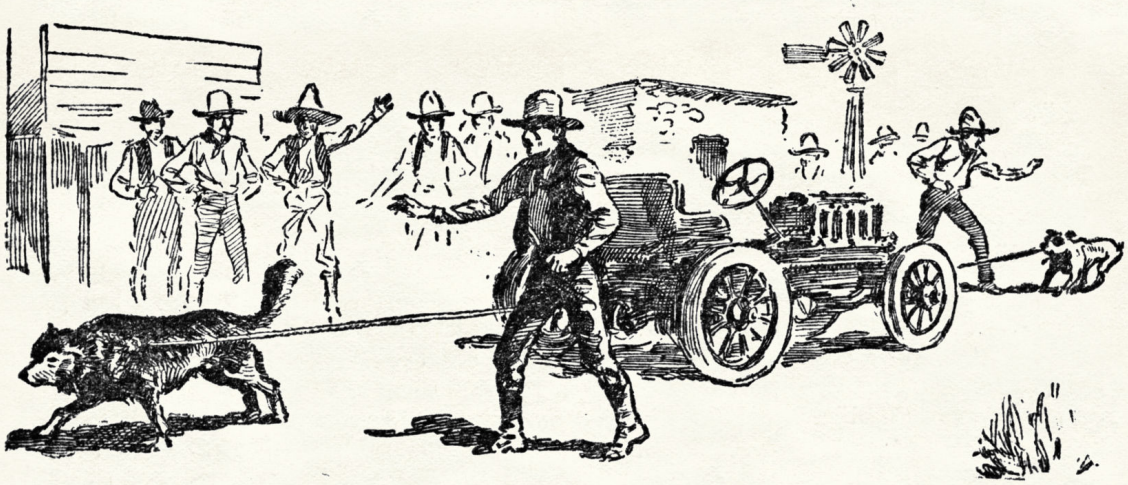


TRAIL OF FLAME

By T. VON ZIEKURSCH

Author of "Empire of Timber," "The Phantom Wolf," etc.

WOUNDED, AND THE PERILS OF DEATH VALLEY AND THE FUNERAL RANGE BETWEEN HIS MASTER AND SUCCOR OF MEN! WELL DID THE DOG BRED IN THE NORTH SHOW HIS COURAGE IN THE SOUTH

THE great, gray-patched dog squatted, panting from the heat and looking at the face of Gordon, obviously aware that the talk of these other men was of him. But for the others he had no concern. It was Gordon alone that mattered, Gordon, the man who had traded an old rifle to the Indian sledge driver of those Northern trails for him when he was a mere pup; Gordon, the mountain and desert rat prospector who had brought him from the Northern forests down to this place of heat that men called Sandstone, here on the very edge of the desert. And Gordon had called him Lightning, this great, quiet, undemonstrative wolf dog possessed of many of those characteristics of the wild gray sire that had been bred to one of the Indian sledge dogs. And now these men of Sandstone, a motley array here on the fringe of the desert wastes, ridiculed the laconic boasts that Gordon made of this thick-coated dog's prowess. There was one named Rogers who intimated that he lied, and in Gordon arose a strong impulse to ram his big fist in the other's face.

Across the sun-baked road, from which these men sought shade beneath the wooden canopy fronting the outfitter's store, was a battered auto left by one of those who listened to the claims of Lightning's prowess. Gordon's glance was on it. There was a brightening interest in his eyes before which the smoldering resentment at the laughter of the other men gave way.

"Rogers, he kin pull that machine, and he kin pull it with you in it," Gordon said.

Rogers laughed.

"I got a bull terrier kin do the same thing."

"And he kin pull your bull terrier off its feet," Gordon said slowly.

"For a hundred dollars he can't," Rogers retorted.

"I ain't got no hundred dollars, nothing except my outfit," Gordon admitted.

"Two hundred against your outfit," Rogers challenged.

Gordon hesitated. That outfit represented his all, and he was not a gambler in this sense. But the eyes of the others were on him, and he nodded.

Rogers hurried off toward some shacks and returned a few minutes later with a big white and brindled terrier, a finely lined beast of slender legs and heavily muscled chest. Lightning eyed the newcomer without show of interest, but Gordon was not deceived. He knew this breed, the pit dog that is to be found in such environment as this, a beast of power and high courage. But there was a twinkle in his eye. If Sandstone and those who were of Sandstone did not understand this dog from the

North, they should learn. From the outfitter's store one of the lookers-on brought a twenty-foot length of rope.

"Get another hunk of that rope," he said. "We'll tie a piece of it to each end of that machine and Lightnin' will pull the machine against your dog, Rogers."

The entire population of Sandstone was gathering now as word of this test reached the last shack in town. A full forty men, sun-browned and with wrinkled eye-corners, attesting the way of their lives, craned their necks to see, and then drew back when the ropes were fastened to front and rear axles.

Rogers made momentary protest when Gordon tied a wide loop that would not tighten and slipped it over the great husky dog's head.

"Look here, Rogers, I ain't sayin' how your dog kin do his pullin' and you ain't goin' to tell me how Lightnin'll do his," Gordon said sharply, and the other man subsided. In front of the car Rogers gave the end of the rope to the terrier.

"Pull, Jim!" he commanded. The terrier's heavy jaws held firmly to the rope, the white and brindled body sank lower, and the dog strained backward. The machine moved and the terrier took fresh foothold.

"Mush, Lightning!"

At the rear of the machine Gordon's order sounded sharply. The husky surged forward, the rope tightening as the great dog's shoulders were thrown against the noose. The forward movement of the car stopped, then slowly it came backward and the terrier at the other end with it.

"Mush, Lightning!"

The terrier's paws dug up furrows in the dry road and the husky strained afresh.

"Pull, Jim!" There was harsh command in the voice of Rogers, and the terrier worried slightly at the taun rope.

"Mush, Lightning! Come on, boy, a little more. Mush!"

The terrier found footing to brace against, an uneven spot where the ridge of a rock jutted through. Both forepaws lodged against it and the terrier fought strongly, but his forelegs bent almost imperceptibly and in a fraction of a second he was sprawling, dragged along through the dust, holding gamely to the end of the rope. Ten feet further the gray husky dog dragged the machine and terrier.

The pride that Gordon knew in this dog was strong as he leaned over to lift the noose from where it had rested against mighty shoulders. From the corner of his eye he saw something white, and heard the warning of those who had stood about admiring. For a moment fear was in the heart of Gordon, fear for this great dog that was more than a partner. Lightning, too, saw the terrier coming and was on all fours, apparently unconcerned.

To Gordon came the impulse to stand between, but he had boasted of the fighting heart of this gray dog of the North. He hesitated. Then pride was forgotten and he dropped the noose over the charging terrier's neck, almost strangling it. It was stopped short by the rope and held until Rogers arrived and fastened a leash to the heavily studded collar.

Quietly, the bristling hair of his neck settling, Lightning came and squatted in the dust at Gordon's feet, while the face of Rogers was dark, and among those who had gathered close to watch this trial of strength, amazement was plain. Some few laughed at the discomfiture of Rogers more than at this man from the North who would not risk the dog of which he boasted in battle against the trained fighting terrier.

Thus it was that Sandstone came to know and respect Gordon and his dog. The day following, with the burro on which the outfit was packed, they left the town, the three of them, the tall prospector, the burro and the gray patched dog. Beyond the town the desert called, flat reaches of sand, and further on the mountains beckoned. There was the Funeral Range, towering high, unreal, a mirage-like world of harsh heights softened by distance that lured the prospector's heart of Gordon. A few miles beyond town he spoke to the dog.

"We kin stand towns and men just about so long, eh, Lightning?"

One of the dog's ears flicked and they went on. A creature of the North, this heat was punishing to him. In two lessons he had learned to bring in the burro after a night of wandering. That might be useful to Gordon if the little beast followed the example of many of its kind and fled in answer to the lure of the wild burros in the mountains. To Gordon this land was an old story. Ten years before he had

prospected among the Roans of Colorado. Now as the heat gradually became stronger with the approach of the summer months he looked through longing eyes at those vague heights of the Funeral Range toward the west. At heart he had always been a true mountain rat, and the hold of the lowlands was evanescent. He needed the heights; there was something mystic, beckoning about them. At last he turned toward them.

These benches and plateaus of the Funerals were forbidding and harsh, wilder, a place of fierce browns and reds. On the lower plateaus the heat was vivid and the world was burned to drab hardness. When the water gave out he followed, as dog and burro alike led to a chasm, a great canyon where a tiny stream trickled down. Beyond were more mountains—the Gold Range. From these new heights he could see far below the great waste place that was Death Valley. In every sense this was a land of the lost, a forbidden country of silence and heat and loneliness, and here Gordon revelled. Hours each evening when the sun's terrific power had ebbed, he sat on some promontory of stone and stared fascinated at the lower levels where the heat mists floated like phantoms of the desert, and later the moon and stars cast their uncanny sheen.

The great dog, too, seemed to find a measure of content, and spent the hot hours of daylight at the feet of Gordon where he worked with hammer and drill. At night, however, Lightning wandered afar, following the instincts of his kind. It was an evening such as that when Gordon sat smoking the worn pipe, serenely apart from the troubles of the lower reaches where men held sway, that a disturbing thing came to mar his peace. Afar down in the broken benches sounded the strange, rolling bark of Lightning. Gordon listened and heard it again and again. Then he arose and slowly went toward it. At last he was directly above it, and it seemed to come from the depths of an abyss beneath the sheer side of a cliff. He crawled to the edge and peered down. As his eyes became accustomed to the vagueness of things there he saw Lightning, and the dog was moving about in a half-circle. At first Gordon's thoughts were that the den of a puma had been found, and he smiled, knowing that the great cat would not attack. But then the dog's attitude would have been different. Its barking would have been a fierce roar of eagerness.

Gordon drew back and worked along the edge of the steep rock. He found a break and an almost indiscernible worn place that must have been a path. Cautiously he worked down, and the dog heard him coming and whimpered. The path ended at a large flat piece of stone, a table-like formation on the side of the cliff, and Gordon saw dark masses lying about. Carefully he examined them, then waited, hardly daring to give way to his thoughts as he sat and smoked with his hand resting on Lightning's head. The first light of the dawning saw Gordon up, eagerly looking about. His heart leaped. In the face of the rock was a pocket right where the cliff jutted up from the table-like formation. Gordon knelt and ran the loose particles through his fingers—a rich pocket of gold, darkened to bronze in appearance. And here were the unmistakable signs of a camp; a pair of boots so parched and burned that at his touch they fell apart, a pick head, two shovels, a hammer and a thing of iron that had been a drill. He knew that many years of intense suns must have passed over these since the departure of the one who had been here before.

He arose suddenly. It must be so—every prospector of the Southwest knew intimately each detail of all the lost bonanzas. There were the Lost Dutchman's and Peg Leg Smith's and tales of a score of others, vivid tales that lured men to renounce much to follow the quest. Might this not be one? Gordon looked around as though seeking the other man. Then he went to the edge of the table rock and flattened to look down over its edge. Far below, at the base of the sheer side, a full five hundred feet down was something white. The sun was hot, a man might easily reel and slip. Gordon knew.

There was ten thousand dollars worth of gold in the bags on the burro that followed Gordon as the gray patched dog led back over the hot desert to Sandstone two weeks later. And when men insisted on talking, he talked willingly—on the merits of Lightning.

They were still trying to make him talk, to draw it out of him, when a morning came that found him gone, out over the desert that reached a hundred miles in

every direction with only the grim mountains that were a part of it, to break the levels. But there was one who saw him go, who had waited each night, expecting such a departure, and who was not after the book in Gordon's pocket that bore a bank credit for over nine thousand dollars, nor after the new outfit. Through the night the other man followed, and with him went a white and brindle marked terrier.

At last Gordon was back in camp where he had been the night Lightning's barking led him to that lost claim with its pocket of gold. And now the great dog was uneasy. Gordon saw it and wondered, remaining in camp, watchful, restless, he knew not why. The next day he forced away the thoughts that held him back. In a low tone he ordered the dog to stay in camp, and Lightning obeyed. Alone, Gordon went down the path, so narrow and worn by erosion that he leaned in heavily against the face of the rock. Now there was no wild thrill as he saw again this riches of the earth, and realization came that it was not the gold but the wandering freedom of the quest for it in these wild open spaces that mattered. Far off he could see down the great chasm and knew that the mountains ended and that there was Death Valley, the world's furnace. It was not to be wondered at that this cliff had held its secret since the passing of the other man. Men did not come into this forbidding place.

At last Gordon emerged from his reverie and dug slowly, while far above on the edge of the rocky promontory lay another man looking down over the edge, watching. Ten feet away crouched a white and brindle marked terrier. On the face of this other man was grim satisfaction. Slowly he drew the heavy barreled revolver from its holster, and far above on the bench where Gordon had camped the gray patched dog of the North lifted his sharp nose as a passing breath of a hot wind brought him strangely mingled scents.

There was something deceptive about the way he rose to all fours, then moved down along the bench toward those odors, and his lope was almost the slinking pace of the wolf. The great mane bristled slightly, and he came on silently without so much as disturbing a pebble.

The man on the promontory brought the gun forward, and the heavy roar of it shattered the stillness. Under the impact of the bullet Gordon reeled, his shoulder shattered. The man above, Rogers the gambler, turned claim-jumper, nervously cursed the fact that firing down had ruined his aim. He was deliberate as he brought the barrel down again. Gordon fell and tugged at his own revolver. The hammer of the gun in the hand of the man above started to lift, then the gun fell and he spun, screaming under the shock of something that hit him from behind and passed like a shadow—save for the fangs that tore through the shirt. On the very edge of the promontory he stumbled, fought for footing, and pitched forward, down, disappearing.

Even before the man had fallen from sight the white and brindled terrier was up, stiff-legged, bounding after this other dog. Now it had passed from a contest of men. Perhaps these dogs remembered that other meeting when only the intervention of Gordon's rope had prevented a trial of the terrible punishing powers of each.

The rocky promontory was narrow, a bench that jutted from the mountainside, twenty feet across each way. The terrier lunged in that low charge of his kind, the closing attack to find a grip for the death battle. The terrier was a scant two feet from the gray dog's throat when something happened. It was as though a huge rubber ball had suddenly become incarnate. Without perceptible effort, Lightning bounded aside as neatly as some dexterous ringman side-stepping a rush. As he went, his lower jaw hung loose in the wolf's slashing manner. There was a quick surging forward of the husky's mighty shoulders and the terrier kicked spasmodically as it went hurtling through the air with throat torn wide, to disappear over the edge of the rocks to the chasm that yawned hundreds of feet deep.

A groan came from Gordon, and the bristling mane of Lightning settled. He trotted to the path and down it. Gordon saw him coming and his eyes were alight. Slowly he took off his heavy belt and fastened it about the dog's shoulders. Then unsteadily, he followed, holding to the belt with his good hand, up that narrow path. Once he sagged and wavered, but the dog's claws held, and at last they reached the top, then worked on up along the bench to the place that was camp.

Gordon's knees were very weak, and

that enormous vitality which had been built up and added to by desert winds of the south and spruce-scented air of the north was tested to the limit before the blood was stopped at that horrible, gaping wound in his shoulder. Calmly he thought it all out, and the realization that now, for the first time, he was in need of help was not good. Lightning sat beside him, quietly alert, and there was a softening that came through the pain in Gordon's eyes as he looked at the great dog.

"Mebbe he done for me, at that," the man said, and the dog's big, fathomless brown eyes turned to look at him. From below by the pocket Gordon had seen the two objects come hurtling over the edge of that promontory and had surmised the rest. It was not intricate. The other man had attacked, and then Lightning had unleashed the full powers of his fury. But had it been too late? Gordon wondered, and a wan smile was on his face that had whitened strangely beneath the tan. The bullet of a forty-five did not need to hit a vital spot to accomplish its end. The size of the slug and its tremendous shocking power would take care of that.

"I got to get in where somebody that knows how can tend to this," Gordon said, and it was as though he pleaded with the dog to answer him. One of Lightning's ears flicked, then the other, and he sniffed at the odor which told of the wound.

Very slowly Gordon packed the burro. A few minutes of effort and weakness overcame him. He drained the last canteen, and had to refill the six of them on the burro's pack from the pothole that made possible existence here. Then he rested and drowsiness overcame him. The stars shone like bluish silver breaks in a purple velvet curtain when he awoke. The metallic intensity of the day's heat was lost. His legs were stiff and did not respond. It required the last dregs of physical and mental energy to force himself up. There was a hot flush all over his body, and he drank again. It seemed strange that he who had asked only to be allowed to wander alone, should encounter such an ordeal. He cursed the man who had been responsible, then laughed and looked around sharply to see whether anyone might be near in this waste of stone to overhear. Even his thoughts came slowly now, and he had to reason each step deliberately. It was as though two personalities fought for the ascendancy within him; one urging care and conservation of what little strength remained, the other bidding him hasten. And, then, there was a third conflicting desire which bade him rest here.

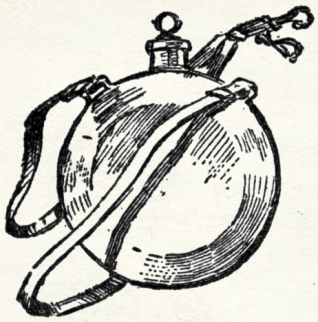
Gordon gritted his teeth.

"Fetch, Nellie!" he said crisply, and Lightning was gone obediently, to return in a few minutes following the burro.

Down along the bench the trio proceeded, the burro walking beside Gordon, and Lightning at their heels. Exhaustion came soon and Gordon rested his weight more and more on the burro. At last he stopped and sagged down to rest. His thoughts ran on. In the fullness of his strength it had taken him a week to come here from Sandstone around by way of the mountains, and that had been an incessant climbing and clambering that would have taxed to the utmost one of lesser powers. Now he was weak, and gradually came the realization that it was futile, that he could never hope to retrace that route. But there, far away toward the south and east, was the habitat of men where he could find relief, life itself. There was a shorter, more direct route, and Gordon winced at the thought of it. He could leave the heights and seek the lower levels, the desert; and that would necessitate crossing the edge of that place of fire, that furnace of the earth where life could not long exist. Well he knew that he was in the Gold Range and that to travel to Sandstone and avoid the ordeal of Death Valley there was only one way—to go back as he had come, in a half-circle into and through the Funerals. It was like a crescent. He was at one tip and Sandstone at the other, and between the tips lay that dread region which all life avoided. True, here at its narrowest part where it must be crossed, one day would suffice. Calmly Gordon measured the time. Around by way of the mountains—his strength would not suffice. Across that cauldron—he might pass through the worst of it in a day, once he had reached the lower levels.

He arose and turned downward, stopping often to rest. When morning came he sought a gulch where the towering rocks afforded some shade, and slept. When he awoke it was to a dizziness, and smiles alternated with a grim, far-away something in his face. Then he looked straight ahead and his eyes blinked often, but he went on down, leaving the mountains. Evening found him on the edge of the desert. There he rested again and then arose unsteadily. He drank deeply from one of the canteens, and it brought

some measure of relief from the fire that tortured his body. The rest of the water in the canteen he poured in the crown of his hat and the dog lapped it eagerly. Steadily the route fell away in front, down, over hummocks and dunes, down until the dust that came up had a taste different than the alkali. There was nitre and a mingling of borax.



Once Gordon laughed, but made a wry face and choked. There was sulphur in that dust and it was suffocating. He plodded on with the burro following now, and the dog in front. This was traveling as hard as that of the Northern trails when the snow was soft. The heat was a pressing blanket, a ghastly envelope laden with death. His nostrils closed involuntarily in an effort to shut it out with its gases, then opened spasmodically and the lungs gasped as bellows suddenly stretched. Then Gordon choked anew. The membranes of nose and throat were fiery with the borax dust, and Gordon's body had ceased perspiring despite the hundred and twenty degrees of heat that was the coolness of the night here in Death Valley.

It was torture, sheer torture, and death itself seemed welcome as a means of relief. But there was that indomitable grimness that fought for life even when reason waned. This was the narrowest part of the valley. That Gordon knew and kept repeating the thought for the reassurance it brought. He who had laughed at a hundred miles of snow trail with the thermometer at forty below, he who had scaled the peaks and ridges of the Roans, the Funerals and those Northern ranges where others quailed, he whose resistance and seeming bottomless depths of vitality had never failed, was now being tested as never before. The wound in his shoulder was a gash of agony, the dead air became an animate thing, pressing, seeking to crush his bones, to beat him down.

The hours passed. He went on, lifting his boots at first, then shuffling them along through the powdered chemical dust, acrid, killing. And Fate played a hand. Although Gordon did not know it he had passed through the lowest sinks and was on the gradual ascent when a sound came from behind. It was the wind that nightly comes down, the cooler air that nature forces in from the mountains to lift the blanket of brutal heat generated by the day's ferocity.

That he had escaped this thing which those who know the dread secrets of Death Valley call the Furnace Blast, he was not aware, but in escaping it he had avoided the death which has come to so many. It moaned like a tortured wraith behind him now, and that weird sound was the climax. Gordon turned to look and laughed even when he choked. Now reason was ebbing, and only that strong will with all its grimness held him up. There were stirrings of the dust in the alkali levels and it seemed as if the sand smoked. His feet, hardened to the worst trails, hurt and pulsed frightfully, burned to tenderness by the heat of the sand that came through his boots. He laughed oftener and tried to sing. It seemed as if the way led along a forest trail and that leering creatures watched and waited for him to fall. He stumbled on and his knees were wobbly now. A great thirst clutched at his throat, and although the burro just behind him had five canteens of water, Gordon's mind could not grasp the fact. There came a sudden lifting of the veil of blackness that had seemed alive with imps driving red-hot forks of microscopic size into his flesh. Over the ridges of the Funeral Range came a flare of red, and another merciless day was born in the valley. Gordon winced, turned his eyes up to the glare and cringed at the pain of it. The heat leaped by degrees, up, up; in an hour it was all of a hundred and forty degrees. Gordon cringed and now he talked, mumbling incoherently. His eyes fell on Lightning, laboring on with tongue hanging far out. Again it seemed that the trail was of snow, the white glare of it blinding, and the edges of the valley where the mountains came down were red. That sun was in his face; he could not avoid it, and the glare of it was as of some monstrous furnace. He staggered and fell forward to a sitting posture. The sand was so hot he lifted his hands—or was that cold and snow instead of heat and sand?

"Lightning!"

The great dog had halted and squatted, panting in sheer misery. In answer to that call he came back.

"Fetch Nellie!"

Gordon played in the sand as a child might have done with heaped pure white flakes of a winter's first snowfall, throwing handfuls up, unmindful of the sting on his

great palms, hardened by years with the pick.

As dog and burro came, Gordon's brows puckered. There was something—why had he wanted the burro? Oh, yes—he was going to have a sledge. Why had he so patiently reared this dog from puppyhood and taught it? Some day he might run a sledge, and he had trained it as a leader.

The momentary intervals of reason were less and less frequent. The world reeled, and there was a place of darting reds. Against the amber and maroon that marked the mountains, heat veils floated like tangible things, great, ghostly gossamers crossing the horizon. The rays from that inverted cauldron in the metallic heaven were a million hammers of power, throbbing, pulsing, beating down.

Gordon managed to attain an erect position, leaning against the burro, and unfastened the rope. Reason and knowledge did not direct him now. It was some tiny speck of purpose that had obsessed his brain and ruled his one good hand when he had forgotten why. There was something he was going to do, and he did it mechanically, an automaton carrying out a plan conceived in some corner of his heat-crazed brain.

The rope was still knotted through the eyelets of the canvas when he loosened it from the pack. Cunningly he looped it about the pack strap on the burro, then made the noose that would not tighten and slipped it about the shoulders of the dog.

Gordon reeled, laughed and clapped his hands. Like a drunken man he took a step forward, spun halfway around and fell on the canvas. Flames were eating at his wounded shoulder, agonizing, horrible flames. His lips were swollen and blistered and his tongue was thick, but in the mumbled jargon that came from him one word was audible.

"Mush!"

It was the command of the Northern sledge driver to his team, the command that the good lead dog will obey until he drops in death.

Lightning arose wearily and threw his weight against the rope. The burro did not move and the dog snarled at him.

"Mush!"

It came again and again. Once Lightning turned menacingly, then lunged forward against the rope and the burro went forward, too.

It may be instinct that tells the trained leader of a team when one in the traces is loafing. Whatever it is there is an infallible knowledge, and invariably the lead dog punishes the slacker as a warning that each must do his share. Once Lightning nipped the burro in the flank and then forged on, over the hot sands, a unique team dragging the fever-racked burden on the small canvas tent.

Hour after hour the strange procession moved slowly ahead toward those rising levels where the Funerals reared from the desert.

Where the weather-tanned neck of Gordon was left exposed by his battered hat a horrible blister formed, and he groaned occasionally. Unerringly Lightning chose the way, straight to a break in the mountainside where a dead wash offered entrance as though some huge gateway had been opened by the stroke of an omnipotent hand. Within the great canyon those cruel rays that fell from the western sky were shut off. Here, at last, the burro rebelled. The packstrap gave way and the stubborn little beast fled to new freedom to join others of its kind, the wild burros of the mountains. On the canvas Gordon stirred.

Worn to exhaustion the dog watched the burro depart, though his own eyes were swollen almost shut and there was white foam at the corners of his mouth. Then he plunged on through the purple shadow of the canyon's depths, and there were rocks mingled with the sand over which he dragged the canvas, straining against the rope.

A new odor was on the still air of the canyon, but the dog did not increase his pace, for there was blood where the pads of his feet, formed by nature for the snows and soft forest trails of the North, had cracked and worn thin on the hot mineral sands.

On he went, deeper into this canyon which led among the mountains, and came around a needle which stood alone. There the canyon bent and the puma that had come down to drink from the waterhole fled at sight of the strange procession, snarling as it leaped lightly from rock to rock, mounting to the high benches.

At the very edge of the waterhole the canvas stopped. Deeply the dog drank,

and the man moved. That terrible glare and heat no longer beat down on him, the acid fumes mounted no more to kill by degrees. Darkness came, and here deep in the canyon it was cool and quiet.

Gordon crept weakly from the canvas and drank. This water that seeped out from the mountainside was cold. His throat was swollen almost closed, but a few drops at a time, straining for more, he swallowed the life-giving fluid that cleansed the membranes and lessened the inflammation. His weakness was of a different sort and reason gained mastery. He saw the rope trace that still held about the dog's shoulders, and wondered. Long he pondered, but there was no recollection. Yet he knew that he must have done it and that the dog must have understood, for there Lightning was, still in that proud position of the leader, and looking at his master through eyelids that were inflamed and swollen. The burro was gone and with it the pack. This was the animal's heritage—desert and mountain — and it must have turned to it when opportunity came. There was a haze still, a clouding of Gordon's mind. He stretched on the canvas and slept, and the light of morning was in the canyon when he awoke. Slowly he looked around, then started visibly. He recognized this canyon, the waterhole, the heights of the mountains about. Here they had stopped, had visited this waterhole long before on the first stages of that trip which led to the lost pocket of gold. And the dog had found it again.

Directly across this spur of heights ahead, two days' traveling, there would be men, others of his breed, wanderers going in and coming from Sandstone. Then he went on, walking and resting at intervals. The dog followed as his heels now. The second day he came down to the desert flats on the other side, and there in the distance was the town that he sought—with all the relief that it meant. Then that superb vitality gave way completely, and two of his own kind found him a mile from the town and brought him in.

Beneath the bunk in which he lay for weeks the big gray patched dog remained, rarely coming out. The hot months were settling; on the very edge of the desert, Sandstone sweltered and suffered. At last came a night when Gordon left his bunk. The fingers of one hand were numb, their use not yet fully returned, and he moved the arm with an effort. He was thinner, and some of that heavy bronzed hue was lost from his face.

Slowly he walked to the end of the town, and the gray patched husky dog of the North followed at his heels. The stars were myriad in the heavens and the plain was hot. Gordon sat down and saw that the dog limped as it came to his side and squatted.

"Hurts yet, does it?" he said. "Wore your pads clean off jes' like you was walkin' on red-hot cinders, didn't it?"

His arm encircled Lightning's neck and drew the shaggy head close. Beyond, the Funerals reared their heights, a forbidding wall of stone beyond which lay that furnace, Death Valley.

"I don't know the whole story," he said softly, "but I can guess about what happened before you dragged me to that waterhole. I guess we won't come back, leastwise not unless we need it right bad."

At last he arose and turned back toward town, and as he went he spoke as to a comrade.

"This ain't your country, old Lightnin' dog. You don't belong, an'—well—seems to me like we belong together—you an' me —long as you last."

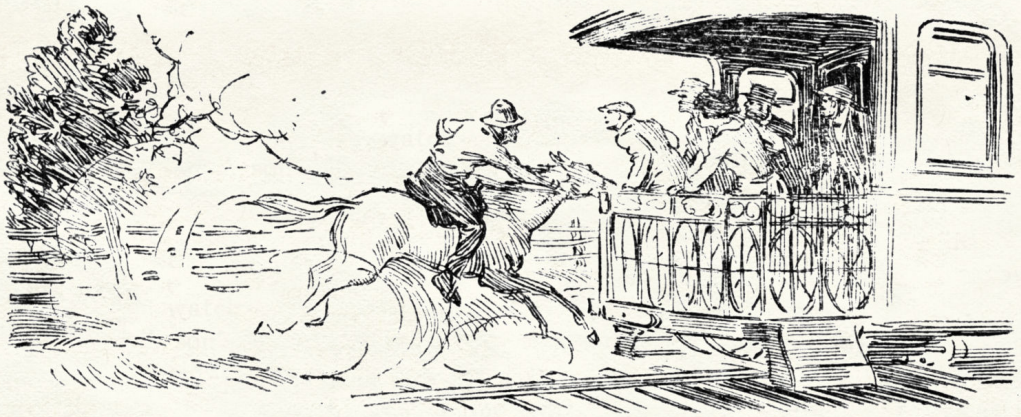
They were among the shacks on the hard baked road.

"We ought to make Juneau by the beginnin' of July," he said, "and I'll bet the spruce will smell good. That'll pay back a little of what I owe you, eh?"

One of the dog's ears flicked.

ONE IMPORTED PARASITE COSTS US TEN MILLIONS YEARLY

FORTY years ago an enthusiastic botantist brought to America from China some cuttings of a peach tree that bears beautiful blossoms, and grafted them to trees in an orchard in the San Jose valley of California. It now costs the farmers of America about ten million dollars a year to spray their peach orchards against the ravages of the San Jose scale, a parasite imported upon these Chinese grafts.



THE JUDGMENT OF MYSTERY SWAMP

By LEMUEL L. DE BRA

Author of "This Is China," "The Strategy of Chun Moy," etc.

AS THOUGH GOD HAD PUT A CURSE ON IT, MYSTERY SWAMP WAS SHUNNED BY EVERY LIVING CREATURE SAVE DEADLY REPTILES—YET ITS JUDGMENT WAS SURE

I

THE man who called himself Parker sat at the table just to the left of the café entrance; an inconspicuous place that gave a clear view of the door. He was tall, excellently dressed, a tiny red mustache adorning his upper lip. His blue eyes were close-set, penetrating; they roved searchingly about the place—and came back always to the door. He sat alone, ate his pompano and crabs, nibbled the inflated potatoes from the basket, drank his coffee, and watched.

Another man entered and turned to the table—the man who called himself Martin. He was short, thickly built, black-haired, cheerful, yet with thin lips and aggressive eyes. He, too, was well and unobtrusively dressed. A fine sapphire glowed in his cravat.

"All set," he announced quietly, dropping into a chair. "Taxi here in a few minutes." He paused to signal the waiter, gave a curt order, then turned again to Parker. "Afraid?" he asked, and his voice showed sudden steel behind the smile.

"We've no choice," said Parker, with a saturnine shrug. "We're cut off from east and north. It would be madness to try to get a gulf boat. You remember I didn't want to come into West Florida in the first place; but now we——"

"We?" repeated Martin, smiling on his companion. "I wasn't seen in Bayou City. Nobody's after me. I've no reason——"

Parker uttered a snarling laugh, and his eyes flashed from the door to the glowing sapphire in Martin's cravat—and back to the door.

"Then you're a fool to wear his stone. You'll get us both in trouble."

Martin snapped the ash from his cigarette. "I'll risk it. You'll remember I got this sapphire from him before——"

"Careful!" Parker warned. "This is a French place. And we know the brother is down here somewhere—looking."

"Let him look," smiled Martin stubbornly. "Say, why not get the car and drive north to the New Orleans road, then strike west and——?"

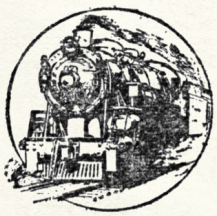
Parker raised his hand, cut in quickly. "And tackle Mystery Swamp again? Not me! I'd rather spend the rest of my life in a Florida prison camp!"

"I thought as much; and I don't blame you. That's why I went ahead and got tickets and a compartment on the night west-bound train. This rent-car—they call 'em taxicabs down here—will run us up the road so we won't have to take chances on the local train; and we'll get

there just in time to get aboard. Good scheme, eh? They'll never suspect that we doubled west."

"It's a chance," Parker agreed gloomily.

"I got the compartment clear through to New Orleans, but we'll skip the train at Pensacola and strike north from there. I'm about cleaned out, though."



"No matter," said Parker. "We'll strike another boob on the train and clean up. Well, here's your pompano."

The waiter served Martin and vanished again. Martin attacked his pompano hungrily.

"You couldn't get a line on the brother?" inquired Parker quietly.

Martin shook his head. "Couldn't ask questions, of course. You know all these people stand together. Damn that stubborn Benet; and your cursed temper!"

Parker made a covert signal for silence. From the private office in the rear appeared Fernan, the proprietor. He came toward them with a brisk smile and a genial greeting.

"You gentlemen seem to be in haste," he said gently. "I'm sorry. The crabs—they are the first of the season. If I can do anything——"

"Thanks," said Parker uncivilly. "We got to catch the train. Going to Jacksonville."

Fernan swung a chair about from an adjacent table and sat down. His eyes touched for an instant on the sapphire that glowed above Martin's waistcoat.

"A pity!" he said. "You have been here long?"

"Just going through," said Parker, and offered his cigarette case.

"Ah! You should stay longer! Tarpon are jumping in the bay. The creeks are full of bass. And you should go alligator hunting in Moccasin Swamp. No, thanks, I never smoke. You have seen the evening paper?"

Parker's blue eyes jerked slightly. Martin appeared not to hear.

"Haven't seen the paper," said Parker.

"No? There was a mysterious murder at Bayou City. David Benet—my cousin. He played cards, it seems, with two strangers. David was never a suspicious man, but he had a temper, that man! I suppose he caught the strangers cheating and——"

"Too bad," Parker cut in. "Where is this Bayou City?"

"West—on the New Orleans road."

"Any description of the two strangers?"

"Very little. None at all of one man. Ah! This is your taxi?"

Parker nodded. He drew a bill from his pocket to cover the check and tip. The three men arose. Fernan opened the screen door for Parker and Martin, bowed them out, then stood gazing after them, a cold glint in his eyes.

"The night train—for Jacksonville!" he murmured, and glanced around at the clock on the rear wall. "I think I shall phone Louis Benet to look up this singular train that leaves at night—for Jacksonville!"

II

THE New Orleans train was leaving the junction when a man on horseback dashed down the clay road, halted in a swirl of dust, stared at the departing train, then wheeled his horse and raced down the track. The crowd on the observation platform watched breathlessly as the man crowded his horse close to the steps, reached out and caught the grip-rods, then swung off. Men reached out to help him over the rail, but he shook them off gently, looked back for a moment at his horse still running after the train but falling behind as he stared with ears up in surprise; then he turned to the other passengers and smiled apologetically.

"Ah hope Ah didn't disturb you-all," he remarked calmly, in the astoundingly broad and liquid speech of the Florida backwoodsman.

The passengers laughed and made way for him as he passed forward. With all his rough clothes—the garb of a woods-rider—there was something about him that was singularly dignified and courteous. His face was long and firmly knit, the eyes far apart and level, the mouth wide and strong; a boy who was yet a man—with blood that had remained unsullied even in the rough atmosphere of lumber and turpentine camps.

The woods-rider worked his way forward, a trifle awkwardly, like a man unused to trains. In the coach just ahead of the observation car he met the conductor. He took an empty seat and produced a huge wad of bills, mostly of large denomination. After paying for transportation to Pensacola he looked up at the official.

"Ah was fixin' to meet a man heah," he said softly. "A tall man, little red mustache——"

"Haven't seen any such party," said the conductor. "Might be in one of the compartments. If I see him, I'll tell him——"

"No," spoke up the woods-rider, smiling. "Ah reckon you'd bettah tell me."

The conductor frowned over his glasses at his passenger; then, with a curt nod, passed on.

The young backwoodsman put his ticket-check away. He was folding his handful of greenbacks when out of the corner of one eye he observed that someone had paused in the aisle. He looked up. It was a man of medium build, dressed quietly in gray, black-haired, cheerful of face, his sharp eyes aggressive. In his cravat he wore a glowing sapphire.

Louis Benet's eyes lingered for an instant on the sapphire, then turned and stared out at the expanse of swamps that hung close to the side of the railroad. A sudden pallor swept into his face; but Martin did not observe it. He sat down at Benet's side.

"Queer country," he remarked with a friendly smile. "Makes a chap lonesome, eh?"

"Yes, suh; hit sho' do!" replied Benet, and continued staring at the swamp.

"My name's Martin. Architect. The chief and I ran down from Chicago to figure on a big office building going up soon at Jacksonville. You live around here?"

"Yes, suh. Mah name's—Prudeau. Ah'm woods-rider for the West Florida Lumber Company—that is, Ah'm one of them, suh."

"Ah! Interesting work, I imagine. Pays well, too, no doubt."

Benet said nothing to this. He knew Martin had seen his wad of bills.

"We're stopping off at Pensacola," Martin went on. "Going to present plans for a beach pavillion. Then we go on to New Orleans where we have a contract for a church. I'll probably stay in charge of the work. Poor Parker is something of an invalid. I have to send his meals to our compartment. Lonesome, too; poor devil. The swamps get him."

Benet started. For a moment he appeared about to speak; then he turned again and stared out at the moss-shrouded cypress that lifted their gray trunks above the black, motionless water of the swamps.

III

MARTIN closed the compartment door and locked it. He looked at Parker.

"Talk about luck!" he said quietly. "It came riding up on a horse this time! Backwoods boob with a wad of dough big enough to choke an alligator! Queer bird, but an easy mark!"

Parker's blue eyes stabbed at the other. "Looks like an easy one, eh? Then watch out!"

Martin smiled. "I suppose you're afraid he might know something——"

"Hardly," Parker cut in with a snarl. "People in these woods never read a paper until Sunday morning. What I mean is that if he looks too easy he's the kind that'll set up a howl; and under the—ah—circumstances we can't afford to attract attention."

"Sure, I understand. Well, there's a flashy old chap with two pretty girls. The girls are looking for someone to flirt with; their dad's looking for a game. I might get in with them and——"

"Nothing doing!" Parker snapped. "Take the dough from the old man, the girls would holler. Take it from the girls, the old man would holler. Besides, you wouldn't get more than chicken feed out of that sort of crowd. We need to pull swift work for something big."

"Then this hick—Prudeau, I think he said his name is—is our meat. Take it from me, he won't squeal. Of course, you're nervous. Me—I never croaked anyone yet. You're nasty when you let loose, Red. If I rope in this kid, you play the fine gentlemanly architect and don't let the varnish crack. Shall I fill in with him at dinner? Being called now."

Parker's blue eyes roved searchingly over Martin's face for a moment. "We'll chance it," he concluded. "I'll size him up when you bring him in. But you better run the cards. My fingers are stiff from driving the car."

"Stiff—the devil! You're nervous; that's all. Forget that Bayou City affair. And quit staring out the window at them cursed swamps."

IV

LOUIS BENET did not go in to dinner. He sat by the window, immobile, brooding. Sensitive about his woods garb, he shrank from observation.

Besides, he faced a problem. Now that he had his quarry within reach, he wondered what he would do. Turn him over to the law with all its shameless publicity and none too certain justice?

He stared out at the ghostly swamp-cypress, the brief stretches of flat pine lands, pine-flats that were giving away to denser ti-ti swamps—and wondered.

The conductor sat down beside Benet. took a paper from his pocket.

"That man you were asking about—remember? Little red mustache? I haven't seen him; but I was just curious——"

Benet took the paper the conductor gave him and found himself staring at a half-tone of a man named Floyd, with many aliases. Floyd was described as a card-sharp and gambler of dangerous attainments. While it did not appear that as yet he was "wanted" by the police, the announcement made it clear that neither was he wanted on trains, and a general warning had been issued against him. Louis Benet, as he looked at the picture, knew that this was the man who called himself Parker, the man who had murdered David Benet.

He returned the paper gravely. "No, suh, thank you," he said gently. "The gentleman I am to meet is an architect."

Again Louis Benet sat alone, staring out at the swamps, thinking. Then a low voice smote on his ear.

"Say, Prudeau, I looked for you in the diner. The chief wants to talk with you if you don't mind dropping in for a minute. As an architect, he's interested in the lumber outlook. He thinks you can tell us more in a minute than some of the so-called experts can in a week."

"Ah'll be right glad to accommodate you-all," replied Louis Benet gravely.

"Good! Then come on!"

Benet followed Martin into the other car, found himself shepherded into a compartment, given a seat at a table. On the table were drawing implements and blueprints. Opposite Benet sat the man who called himself Parker. Parker swept the blueprints aside.

"Glad to meet you, friend!" he said breezily. "I'm sick of sitting here and doing nothing! Shall we have a little game while we talk?"

"You-all are mighty kind," said Benet. "Ah'm not right skillful at cyards——"

"No matter. Between friends." Parker produced a deck that looked as though it had never been opened. He handed it to Benet. "Here's a new deck. Shuffle them up, will you? How about a little drink?"

"No, thanks, suh. Ah don't hardly evah drink."

"Good for you!" said the red-mustached "architect," heartily. "I don't take the stuff myself; but most people like to be sociable and one has to give in. So you're in the lumber business, eh? What'll we play? Stud?"

Benet glanced up, his eyes wide.

"Stud? Why, suh, pokah's no game without chips; and besides Ah don't hardly evah gamble. Now rummy——"

Martin was about to object, but caught a look from the stabbing eyes of Parker that silenced him.

"Rummy it is, then," concluded Parker. "Racehorse; five cents a point to start. Eh?"

Louis Benet agreed. He got the deal at the cut. It was evident that he had no great skill with the cards, and his big brown hands were clumsy. He looked around the compartment and for a moment his eyes rested on the window. Darkness had closed down on the swamps. Benet began dealing.

Martin and Parker were very genial and entertaining, made every effort to make their guest feel at home, told many interesting anecdotes of Chicago clubs. The lumber business was quickly forgotten—

by Parker and Martin, at least. The task of keeping accounts was given to Benet, and it was agreed that settlement should be made after every fifth hand.

The accounts being cast up for the first game, it was found that Benet—or Prudeau—had won rather heavily. Parker produced a twenty-dollar bill. Benet reached for his pocket to make change; and a look of chagrin came over his face.

"Shucks, now! Ah reckon Ah need a gyardeen sho' nuff. Ah done put all mah money into mah bag, and left the bag sittin' right where Mr. Mahtin found me."

He started to rise, but Martin, in re-

sponse to a swift glance from Parker, got between him and the door. "Never mind!" said Martin. "I'll get it for you."

As the door closed behind Martin, Louis Benet reached out with his left hand and shot the bolt. At the same instant his right hand lifted above the table. Parker found himself looking into the muzzle of an automatic.

"Now, suh," said Benet gravely, "Ah reckon you and me can settle this between us."

V

PARKER'S blue eyes flamed; his tiny red mustache twitched nervously.

"What—what the devil do you mean?" he demanded.

The other regarded him a moment, gravely, unsmiling. There was not the least hint of hostility in the woods-rider's eyes.

"Suh," he said gently, "Ah'm Louis Benet—brother of the man you murdered."

Parker started, made a tremendous effort to regain his composure. "What are you talking about?" he demanded in his curtly aggressive manner. "Are you crazy?"

"No, suh, *Mr. Floyd;* Ah reckon not."

Red fury leaped suddenly into Floyd's face; his blue eyes narrowed, glittered cruelly. Then he checked himself; for there was something about the other man that struck fear in the gambler's heart. It was as though all his snarling anger had swirled up against a stone wall. Benet was impassive, grave, unthreatening, yet in those wide eyes lay something more terrible than any threat.

"Well," snapped Floyd huskily, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Ah don't just rightly know, suh."

Floyd stared. Then his blue eyes darted to the door, and back to Benet.

"We can give back the money——" he began, but a sudden hardening of Louis Benet's face warned him. While he floundered, there came a rap at the door. Floyd straightened, leaned forward suddenly and whispered, "I was just playing for time, Benet. There's the man you want. I didn't have a thing to do with it."

"Floyd," said the woods-rider, and now there was an edge to his gentle tone, "Ah admit Ah don't just rightly know if you're a murderer, suh; but now Ah do know that you're a damned coward."

He reached out, unlocked the door and opened it without taking his eyes off Floyd. Martin glided in. Benet snapped the door shut, locked it; and his eyes swept up to Martin's face. He gestured with the revolver.

"Stand up, Floyd!" he ordered with the first show of excitement. "Turn your backs, both of you!"

"What the devil——?" began Martin.

"Shut up!" Floyd cut in. "Don't talk! I've talked too much already. He's crazy. Thinks you killed his brother at Bayou City."

There was nothing slow nor awkward in the way Louis Benet searched the two men. He found no weapons on Martin; from Floyd he took an automatic. He put the gun in his own pocket.

"Mahtin," he said, "Ah'm listening. Ah ain't heard you say you didn't kill mah brothah."

Martin half-turned, spoke quietly over his shoulder.

"Before I talk, I want to know what you intend to do. But I can tell you this much. Parker had nothing to do with it. You let him go; and I'll go with you to the police and tell what I know."

"No, suh," said Benet, lapsing again to his soft drawl. "Ah reckon we ain't going to talk to the police. And Ah ain't going to shed no blood mahself. You-all can put your ahms down now and we'll talk a spell. But don't think Ah won't be watching you. And just remembah that when it comes to shootin', Ah can snip the head off a moccasin as fuh as Ah can see one."

The two men lowered their arms, turned and faced Louis Benet. If Benet saw the flash of venom that each man gave the other, he appeared not to notice it. He looked at his watch.

"In about ten minutes now we will be passing through Mystery Swamp," he said. "Ah reckon you-all neveh heard tell o' Mystery Swamp, eh?"

"No!" lied Floyd, chokily.

"Shaw! That's too bad! If you-all knew about it maybe—— But then, Ah can tell you. Some folks call it Judgment Swamp. You see, in the old days, when folks thought a niggah was a thief they run him out into this swamp. If he got out alive folks said he wasn't guilty. Mostly they neveh got out."

Benet paused while the engine shrieked a long blast. He studied the men's faces. Martin had grown suddenly pale. A sneering look of defiance shone in Floyd's eyes, but his lips were twitching.

"They're whistling for the crossing at Deadman Bayou," Benet went on. "When we are across that, they will slow down

for a stretch o' soft track. Then——"

"You got no right to put us off the train!" Floyd cut in desperately. Floyd knew about that stretch of soft track. It had cost the railway company a fortune to run a roadbed through a part of the swamp that seemed to be bottomless, and another fortune every year to maintain it. Every year, hundreds of carloads of rock used to keep the tracks up were slowly but inevitably sucked down out of sight. Wagon roads built at great cost by turpentine men would be found dry one day, under ten feet of water the next. Small islands, overgrown with ti-ti and young cypress, would vanish before one's eyes. No fish lived in its black waters. As though God had put a curse on it, Mystery Swamp was shunned by every living creature save the deadly moccasin and the water rattler.

"Ah reckon Ah ain't got any right to put you off," admitted Benet; "but you see, Ah can't help thinkin' o' mah brothah. So Ah don't figah Ah'm doin' wrong. One o' you-all done killed —mah brothah. The guilty man will pay. The othah man will get out o' Mystery Swamp. And, Mr. Mahtin, Ah reckon you'd bettah give me mah brothah's pin."

Martin took the sapphire pin from his cravat, tossed it on the table. Out of the corner of his mouth he whispered something to Floyd.

"Yes, suh," said Benet, smiling as he picked up the pin, "all you have to do is to stay on the railroad tracks and keep goin'. Too bad you-all nevah went through that swamp on a mohnin' train. Mighty interesting to see all the moccasins and rattlers, dead and alive. You see, hundreds and hundreds of snakes get on the track at night and are run over because the headlight blinds 'em. Floyd, Ah reckon you'd bettah raise that window now."

Floyd turned to obey, then paused. "See here——" he began, and choked on the words. Something in the face of Louis Benet told him that words were useless. He turned to the window. With shaking hands he raised the sash.

"The nearest town," said Benet, "is Pineville, twelve miles west. Ah reckon you-all can walk that right easy. Of course you know there's no more trains goin' either direction tonight. You-all bettah keep walkin'—and watch out for snakes. Ah'm right sorry to have to do this; but Ah can't help—thinkin' o'—mah brothah."

SOMETIME later that night a man came stumbling down the railroad track to the little makeshift depot at Pineville. As he emerged from the gloom into the yellow light of the one oil lamp, another man separated from the shadows and approached him.

"Ah reckoned it was about time you was showin' up," he said calmly.

"Benet!" The other man snapped erect and stared.

"Yes, suh. Where's your friend?"

"The fool! He—he kept seeing snakes on the track; I saw none. He kept stumbling off the roadway into the swamp; I had no difficulty staying on the track. Finally—we were crossing a trestle. He yelled that a snake had bit him. I saw no snake. He cried again; then he stumbled. I heard him curse. Then I heard a splash. I ran to the edge of the bridge and looked down. I could see nothing but black water. I listened; and once I thought I heard a cry, like a sob. Then——"

The voice died in a hoarse shudder.

Louis Benet fingered the sapphire pin in his shirt. For a moment his eyes dwelt on the black shadows that marked the line of Mystery Swamp; then he turned to the man and spoke in his gentle drawl.

"Ah reckoned that would be about hit, Mr. Mahtin. Ah bid you good night, suh."

HINTS ON HILL-CLIMBING

UNLESS you are sure before your machine starts to climb that you are going to negotiate the hill on "high," don't wait to shift gears until your engine has nearly stopped, is the advice to motorists given by the Bureau of Public Roads after a study of extensive tests made by Professor T. R. Agg of Iowa State College under the auspices of the National Research Council. You not only lose speed and overtax your engine but you waste gasoline. Shift gears the moment you begin to lose momentum, is the wise rule.

THE CALL OF KIN

By HARLEY P. LATHROP

Author of "Flim Flammed," "Rope Shy," etc.

ON THE ONE HAND A CLAN FEUD AND HIS INHERITANCE OF BLOOD LOYALTY; ON THE OTHER THE FREEDOM OF LIFE IN THE CATTLE COUNTRY. YOUNG ANDREWS HAD A TOUGH QUESTION TO DECIDE

JERRY ANDREWS had attained middle age before fate or destiny, or whatever you may care to term it, inserted a finger in the placid pool of his existence and muddied life's waters for him.

Jerry was an East Texan, long, lean, sinewy, sparse of frame and of speech, typical of the piney woods section where he was born and where he lived. Like all of his breed he was a firm believer in the axiom "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," and clan loyalty was the keynote of his being.

Jerry married young, as is the custom in that part of the country, and was slightly past forty when he received the first grim buffet from fate. Then his wife died after a brief illness, leaving him with a son about fifteen. Jerry hid the grief that he felt under a mask of taciturnity and took up his usual routine, which meant dividing his time between his small, stony, side-hill farm and his meager herd of in-bred, half-wild cattle that roamed the bottoms.

Six months afterward fate handed him a second jolt. One day, and most unexpectedly, he stumbled on an outright case of cattle stealing. An incautious remarking of this fact caused him to be summoned to court as a witness. His testimony should have convicted the accused, but in a section where kinship and blood ties are stronger than the written law, justice does not always prevail. Through some fortuitous chance the presiding judge was distantly related to the defendant; also the defendant's lawyer skilfully picked a jury which was biased in his client's favor. Naturally the accused was found "not guilty."

Coming out of the courthouse after the trial, he met Jerry Andrews face to face, and the acquitted man snarled out an epithet which means a blood fight wherever the English language is spoken.

There was a quick, simultaneous reaching backward, and two guns spoke. Jerry's was a fraction of a second in advance of the other's, and in consequence a few minutes later he was occupying the cell which the dead man had but recently vacated.

Now while considerably in the minority, Jerry Andrews himself had many kinfolks scattered throughout that section. That very afternoon the acknowledged leader of his clan, a gray-bearded, soft-spoken, tobacco-chewing patriarch, visited him in his cell.

"Small doubt but what they'll railroad ye, Jerry, if we start lawin' with 'em," he sagely declared. "There's two of 'em to one of us and they control the courts. My idea would be to start a general ruckus and sort of scare them into turnin' you loose."

Jerry gazed unseeingly at the opposite wall of the narrow, forbidding cell, moodily contemplating this suggestion. He knew only too well what such a course would lead to. In his mind's eye he could picture all the grim details attendant on a piney woods feud. It meant that for a long time to come every man must step warily and softly, his eye always on his neighbor's pistol hand. And it meant that dumb lines of misery would draw the faces of the women folks, and that every night each cabin window must be tight curtained against some bush-whacking rifle shot from out of the dark. Too, there would be many empty, crimson-splashed saddles borne home by galloping, unguided horses, whose riders would be lying quiet in the deep woods, eyes upturned and unseeing. All the lamentable horrors of a clan feud loomed large in his imagination. He shook his head in a slow, positive fashion.

" 'Tain't wuth the trouble and misery it would cause," he declared harshly.

"Well, it's gotta be," affirmed the patriarch positively, all his ingrained sense of loyalty and pride of kinship asserting itself. "Blood is blood and I reckon we-all got due cause to stick up for our rights."

For a space Jerry Andrews sat as though carven from granite, groping in his mind for some way to side-step this ultimatum. Then the glimmering light of a possible solution brightened his eyes.

"If you-all could rally 'round here unexpected-like, say tonight, and manage to turn me loose, I reckon I could make it outa the country. It would save a heap o' trouble thataway, and now the wife is dead there ain't nothing holding me or the boy here."

This suggestion led to a low-voiced, but nonetheless heated argument. In the end Jerry's wishes prevailed.

So in the small hours of the following morning a band of masked riders massed quietly about the jail, doors were forced and Jerry Andrews issued forth.

Two months afterward Jerry and his son, Lonnie, both mounted, were a good three hundred miles westward. It was a strange and, to them, an arid and desolate-looking country through which they were journeying. Accustomed as they were to the dank, tangled river bottoms, the steep, grass-matted hills and the perpetual green of the piney woods, this vast, level sweep of country, with its whitish yellow alkali spots and its scattered bunchgrass, was a revelation.

"Don't look like nothin' would grow here, son," Jerry commented disparagingly. "They sure got good cattle, though, and plenty of 'em, but what they live on beats me. Guess we might as well light here as any other place. The next town we hit we'll try for a job of work."

They plodded on down the dim road they were following, and late that afternoon rode into Blake City. As it happened at this particular time, Blake City and the surrounding country were in the throes of house cleaning. The town, though it was well off the beaten track, had for the past year or more, owing to laxly enforced laws, attracted more than its rightful share of gunmen and bad actors generally. Pistol affrays and promiscuous shooting up of the town had become too common to be really comfortable. So some of the law-abiding element had banded together, elected a slate of county officers from judge down, and then broadcasted the word that resorting to the law of the Colt would no longer be tolerated.

Well knowing it would require a man of more than ordinary courage and determination to fearlessly enforce this ultimatum, they had elected Calvin Ainslee county judge. Ainslee was a prosperous cattleman, fearless, upright and what was more to the point, thoroughly out of sympathy with high-handed lawlessness. He immediately let it be known that anyone brought before him accused of being a party to a shooting scrape would be given short shrift.

Of course the saloon men and all other purveyors of questionable entertainment were far from pleased with this new turn of affairs. So when Dock Perryman, who was foreman on Judge Ainslee's ranch, drifted into the Lone Star, the proprietor of that disreputable establishment, yielding to a sudden hunch, began to assiduously ply him with drinks. For Dock had the reputation of being an ugly customer and prone to resort to the use of firearms when under the influence of liquor.

"It'll be a good chance to get back at those reformers, especially that pinhead judge," the saloonkeeper gloated. "I'll

just load Mr. Puncher to the guards and turn him out. He'll hand a package of trouble to the first one that crosses him. Then we'll see what we'll see."

And it was just as Dock Perryman, overflowing with drink and ugliness, lurched out of the Lone Star that Jerry Andrews and his son Lonnie, who were in search of a restaurant, happened to be passing.

The drunken foreman, none too sure of his equilibrium, stumbled heavily into young Lonnie; both lost their balance and fell to the ground, Lonnie on top. It was an outright, unpreventable accident—Jerry Andrews afterward swore to that on the stand, though little good it did him. Nevertheless, Dock Perryman regained his feet cursing, blood in his eye, war in his heart.

Now there is small question but what up to a certain point Jerry Andrews was a very inoffensive man. And he undoubtedly looked far more inoffensive than he really was. That is where Dock Perryman made his first mistake—and his last for that matter.

"You blankety blank nester, I'll take that brat of yours and——" Here the foreman burst into a medley of vile and profane threats, interlarding every sentence with that fighting word Jerry Andrews had once before so passionately resented.

But his previous taste of trouble had taught the tall East Texan a severe and painful lesson. During the long journey westward he had vowed to himself many times that it would take far more than the mouthing of a filthy expletive to make him resort to gunplay again. However, a fighting word demanded a fighting answer, so, setting himself solidly, he let drive for the other's jaw.

Inexperienced as he was in the art of pugilism, Jerry's fist found its billet and six feet two of profane and blustering puncher hit the ground. He staggered to his feet, gun in hand.

Since the beginning of time self-preservation has been the first law of nature, so, forgetting all good resolves and reacting blindly to this primitive impulse, Jerry reached for his gun. Dock Perryman shot first, but he shot wild. There came a second report and the foreman collapsed.

Very shortly afterward Jerry Andrews found himself once again within the confines of a barred cell. In Blake City Jerry had no friends nor kinfolks to rally to his defense and a mistaken sense of pride kept him from communicating with relatives back home regarding his plight. What was worse, he had no great amount of money with which to hire capable lawyers for his defense. So his trial was short and swift.

Unfortunately, there were no eye witnesses to the deplorable affair except Lonnie. He was only a youth and the son of the accused to boot, therefore much of his testimony was discounted by the jury. The state had summoned several of Dock Perryman's cronies who had piled out of the Lone Star after the shooting. They, of course, lied valiantly in the slain puncher's defense, being actuated by a motive of revenge.

Judge Ainslee was absolutely impartial—disinterested spectators all agreed to this—nevertheless, he had resolved to inflict the maximum penalty in case the defendant was adjudged guilty. It was the surest way, he thought, to stamp out all indiscriminate brawling.

"Manslaughter," was the jury's verdict.

"Twenty years at hard labor," snapped Judge Ainslee, and thus fate landed her last and hardest blow on Jerry Andrews.

Jerry was taken back to the small one-story jail for safe-keeping, pending his transfer to the state penitentiary the next day. Lonnie was allowed to stay with his father during this interim.

Jerry's face was grim and worn and strained as he sat perched on the single cot in his narrow cell. His eyes were shot with a deep, smoldering resentment and his tones vibrated with a harsh bitterness as he discussed the sentence with his young son.

"It ain't right, Lonnie," he continued resentfully. "It ain't right or just by any manner o' means. I done kept from pullin' my gun even in the face of what he called me, till he made the first move. It was a clear case o' self-defense no matter what his friends claimed. You was there and you know. If I'd got a fair shake I wouldn't kick. But I didn't. The judge was ag'in me from the start because I shot his foreman. He's the one that really's to blame, son, and in the end he'll have to pay."

Jerry Andrews's face worked convul-

sively and little, deep, hard-bitten lines—lines of revenge and hate—twisted his mouth grotesquely. It was as though a terrific struggle, some inward convulsion, was rending him. And this indeed was the case.

Growing stronger and more dominant as he brooded, warping and twisting his sense of perspective, was an intense, cankering hatred for the presiding judge. At last the passions seething within him gained the upper hand and broke all bounds.

"Listen, son," he said fiercely, and it was a fierceness born of a vast, deep-seated, acrimonious bitterness, "from this day on I'm ag'in all that stands for law. Hereafter I'll be my own law. I'll make my own judgments and I'll carry 'em out. One is already judged and that's Calvin Ainslee—him that sentenced me unjustly. Twenty years is a long time—almost as long as I will live. But I am told that good behavior will reduce my sentence almost half. Then I'll make Judge Ainslee pay. And now, son, I want your promise. Promise you'll live right, make a man of yourself and all the time be plannin' for the day I'll be free. Then I ask you to be ready like any blood kin should, to back me up. Just how I'll make Judge Ainslee pay, time'll have to tell, but I want you to be ready and waitin'. Will you promise, son?"

Lonnie Andrews gazed seriously at his father. As yet only a boy, nevertheless into the very fabric of his being was woven a sense of blind loyalty to kith and kin. It was not his place to reason nor yet to question his father's demand. The call of blood was the strongest tie he knew. For generations his forebears had meticulously observed that rule of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." This primitive creed he had absorbed with the milk from his mother's breast and it was a very part of the warp and woof of his existence. So Lonnie Andrews solemnly promised that which his father requested and Jerry, looking deep into his son's eyes, was satisfied.

WITH the passing of years, time, whirling on its never-ending cycle, worked many changes in the lives of those who had participated in that grim tragedy at Blake City.

Calvin Ainslee felt the relentless pressure of a host of new settlers. Steadily the small homesteaders ate into his range. A cowman at heart and by upbringing, he followed the dictates of good judgment and moved his herds south along the border where the land was still open and where for years to come the cow would still be king.

Young Lonnie Andrews had also wandered south after leaving Blake City. As was natural, he had gravitated into the vocation of cow-punching. Tall, lean, quiet, with a face deep-tanned by years of blistering sun and whipping winds, he was due every ounce of the respect that was accorded him. And it was a plenty, this respect, for Lonnie was quick with a gun, sure with a rope, of unquestioned ability and courage. Not a brawler, sheering off from dissipation, nevertheless he bluntly refused to side-step a single inch if he came face to face with trouble. Deep back in his dark eyes burned a light of steadfast purpose. For Lonnie had not forgotten the promise he had given his father. He had cherished it as a holy thing, and when the time came he stood ready to obey the call of blood.

He had made it a fixed rule to visit his father in the penitentiary at least once each year. And at each succeeding visit he noticed that more and more the passing years were leaving visible imprint on old Jerry. For Jerry Andrews was gray now and stooping and blanched by prison pallor. With the commutation of his sentence in mind he had been a model prisoner, and, as a reward, enjoyed the semi-freedom allowed a trusty. But neither time nor the rigors of prison discipline had in any way softened the hate he felt toward Calvin Ainslee. His desire for revenge was in no way abated. The thought of it, like a festering sore, poisoned his every waking hour.

Then one day, it was shortly after Lonnie had paid one of his yearly visits, old Jerry was working about the prison yard with another trusty. The guards were out of earshot and the trusty began a low-voiced conversation.

"Good looking boy you got there," he remarked casually. "Cowman, ain't he?"

Old Jerry, touched by this unsolicited tribute, smiled and nodded.

"I messed around with cattle myself before they jobbed me into this place," the other continued. "I'll tell you about it

some time." And thus inserting his opening wedge, he dropped the conversation.

But it was entirely unnecessary, this volunteering to sketch his past history. By that underground route of grapevine telegraph which prevails in most prisons, Jerry had long since heard the details of Al Spaulding's life.

He knew that Al, previous to his incarceration, was the most noted rustler in three states. And he was aware that Al was serving a ten-year sentence for murder. But what Jerry did not know was that Al Spaulding, despite the obsequious servility which had earned him his place as a trusty, was still at heart a ruthless, implacable killer, utterly devoid of pity, as cruel and venomous as a snake and as cold blooded and calculating as a weasel. Old Jerry had no idea that even while serving out his sentence in the penitentiary, Al Spaulding was still the supreme head of as sweet a band of rustlers and bad hombres generally as ever went unhung, and that working through some devious underground route, he yet continued to map out all of their undertakings. And Jerry would have laughed aloud had you suggested that Al knew all the details of his past life and had shrewdly surmized that the old man was only awaiting his discharge to be revenged on Calvin Ainslee.

However, Al Spaulding did know all about Jerry's past—he had also listened to the grapevine telegraph—and, too, he was morally certain that the old man's greatest desire was for revenge.

But, at that, Al had given scant thought to the matter until the last visit Lonnie had paid his father. Then, by chance, he had noticed the pair visiting together. The undisputed respect that the younger man showed old Jerry and the obvious bond of affection which existed between the two caused a sudden idea to pop into his mind. Right then Al mentally added young Lonnie to his forces, classifying him as a long-searched-for cog in a certain scheme that he was fathering.

The very next time the two trusties were alone together Al exerted himself to be especially genial.

"What'd they jug you for, old-timer?" he inquired sympathetically, cannily picking out the surest way of gaining old Jerry's confidence.

Now this was the first time since he had been in the penitentiary that old Jerry had found an opportunity to talk to a willing listener about his unjust conviction. Eagerly he poured his story into Al Spaulding's ears. And as he talked, all the pent up hate, the gnawing, biting rancor he felt for Calvin Ainslee, bubbled forth unrestrained.

This brought a little gleam of triumph into the bandit's eyes. Once again he thought he had read a man craftily and right.

"Well," he commented judiciously at the ending of Jerry's story, "that judge sure railroaded you. He could have instructed the jury in your favor if he had been so minded. Me, if I was in your shoes, I'd git him when my time was out."

The grim look which hardened old Jerry's visage proved sufficient answer for Al Spaulding. He smiled inwardly. The leaven was working to his entire satisfaction. From this on he assiduously cultivated Jerry's friendship until at last came the day he felt deep enough in the old man's confidence to broach the subject he had been gradually leading up to.

"Listen, old-timer," he said one day when the two were alone, "how you plannin' to get even with this Calvin Ainslee when you're turned out, kill him?"

The sudden tightening of old Jerry's lip line assured the bandit that he had hit the nail on the head.

"That's a poor sort of a way to be revenged," Al warned. "Stop and consider it. Bam!—one shot and Ainslee will be out of all his trouble while yours will be only commencing. To my way of thinking the best way to pay off a grudge is to make a man suffer—suffer long and steady the same as you have. Take Ainslee now. How could you hit him the hardest? Simply by breaking, making him lose all he's got. He's used to plenty of money and to swelling and big-bugging it around all the time. It would kill him by degrees if he had to quit it. He'd suffer all the tortures of the damned. Now while I ain't said so before, our lines happen to cross in this affair and I got an idea we can help one another. But before I go into it I got to know just how much your boy will help you in this revenge business."

Old Jerry gazed straight at his questioner. "Blood is blood," he answered simply. "Lonnie is my nearest kin."

Al Spaulding knew the breed of man with which he was dealing. Scorning to pledge him to secrecy, disdaining to extract any vows of fealty, he forthwith plunged into detailed explanation of his plans.

"It's a lead pipe cinch," he declared after outlining his scheme. "I have already got

a few men planted in Ainslee's outfit and as many more scattered in the country roundabout. All we lack is one of our men for foreman. It takes a man of ability to hold that sort of a job with Ainslee. Your boy can make the grade or I'm no judge. He can hook on with Ainslee easily, and it won't be any trouble at all for him to work into the foremanship, especially with my boys pulling for him. He can stick there and be getting the hang of things until we are discharged two years from now. Then we will all get together and figure out the easiest way we can bunch every last hoof of Ainslee's cattle and rustle them across the line into Mexico. Nobody will suspect a thing, either,

until it is too late—that is, if the regular foreman is in charge of the work. Ainslee can paw and blow until he's black in the face, and he'll never get a single head back. I'll split them into small bunches and sell them to greaser outfits. The loss of all his cattle will break Ainslee flat, as he will have to sell his ranch to pay what he owes on the stolen stock. That'll make him pull in his horns and quit flyin' so high, wide and handsome. He'll have to try workin' with his hands for a livin'. You consider it. It'll beat killin' him all hollow as a means of gettin' even."

Old Jerry pondered long and gravely over this proposition. He could see a world of truth in Al Spaulding's arguments. Jerry knew that a bankrupt cowman—especially one at Calvin Ainslee's age in life—seldom, if ever, comes back. And he also realized that a blow dealt at a man's pride, particularly to a person of Ainslee's temperament, was far worse than death. How he would suffer! A little, gloating look brightened Jerry's eyes.

"I—we will throw in with you," he declared positively. So, in consequence of this decision, Lonnie Andrews a few days later received a letter from his father requesting him to throw up his present job and pay a visit to the prison.

Now old Jerry rather dreaded to disclose Al Spaulding's plan to his son. It was not that he thought Lonnie would absolutely refuse to assent to this scheme. But old Jerry was aware what a deep-seated loathing any right-thinking cowman held toward the mere suggestion of rustling. While Jerry knew that it might take a deal of argument, he felt sure in the end his wishes would prevail. Still, he thought it might lower him in his son's eyes, this dealing and conniving with rustlers instead of walking up to the scratch like a man and seeking revenge face to face.

But old Jerry was to be saved the humiliation of proposing this plan to Lonnie—for a while at least. And the reason lay with Al Spaulding. At the time he had broached the subject to old Jerry, the bandit had thought it would be as well to acquaint Lonnie with the plan at once. Then after more mature deliberation a little inward sense of caution warned him that the time was not yet ripe. Al was entirely confident that the boy would implicitly follow out any command that his father gave and also stand loyally back of his father in any predetermined course of revenge. But he also felt that the less Lonnie knew, the less chance there would be for him to make a false step. And, too, Al thought that in case old Jerry died in the meantime, Lonnie might possibly experience a change of heart and make known the plan to the authorities. So the day before Lonnie was due at the prison, Al approached old Jerry.

"I been thinkin' it over, old-timer," he said, "and I expect we'd be wise if we kept our scheme quiet till the time comes to put it into effect. We can wise the kid up then just as easy, and he won't have anything on his mind to worry him in the meantime. What do you think about the idea?"

As might be imagined old Jerry joyfully agreed. It was in the manner of a reprieve for him.

The day of his visit, Lonnie listened gravely to his father's suggestion that he get a job with Calvin Ainslee's Bar A outfit. He was not sure that there was anything to be gained by so doing, quite the contrary in fact.

"Just what——?" he began, but old Jerry, breaking in, did not allow him to finish his question.

"Well," he said after a slow search for some conclusive reason, "I been thinkin' about it a long time and I have decided it would be the best plan. You'll be right there on the job and know how and where to find Ainslee when the time comes. That's going to mean a whole lot to me, Lonnie, 'cause you know I ain't as used to

things on the outside as I once was. You —you'll do it, won't you, Lonnie? It ain't askin' much and it'll make it a heap easier for me when the day arrives for the showdown," he concluded weakly.

Lonnie was shot with a sudden feeling of pity for his father. For the first time he fully realized the enormous toll rigorous prison life had wrung from his father. It hurt him—hurt him deeply and poignantly—when he contrasted the broken man before him with the vigorous person his father had been eight years before. And it served to heighten his grim determination to stand at his father's back when the time for revenge came. Never before had he felt more tightly bound by his youthful promise to be at his father's beck and harken to the call of kin. He nodded.

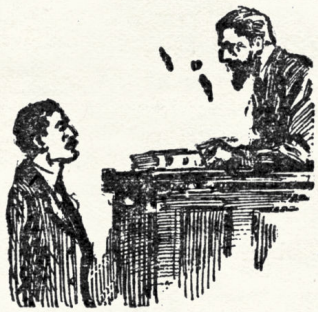
"Just as you say, father," he agreed gently. "I expect you are right."

A great light of thankfulness brightened old Jerry's eyes at his son's ready acquiescence. "You're a good boy, Lonnie," he said.

So three weeks later Lonnie Andrews went to work for Calvin Ainslee's Bar A outfit.

And during the next two years Lonnie conclusively demonstrated that he required no boosting from any of Al Spaulding's henchmen. By dint of sheer unaided capability he proved that as a cowman he was hard to equal. His years of apprenticeship with numerous smaller outfits had acquainted him with every angle of the game. Here on a large ranch, he found free scope for all his talents and, what was more, found them duly appreciated. Inside a twelvemonth he had been elevated to the foremanship and was practically running the Bar A single-handed. As it happened, Calvin Ainslee had long been searching for a younger man upon whose shoulders he could shift the bulk of the overseeing and, satisfied that Lonnie filled the bill in every particular, piled responsibility after responsibility upon him.

And, strange as it may sound, Lonnie came to like and admire Calvin Ainslee immensely. Close association with the old cattleman taught him that Calvin was a fearless, intrepid, upright person, possessing the courage of his convictions and that he would hew to a given line, let the chips fall where they might. For the first time since the trial at Blake City Lonnie harbored serious doubts as to whether Ainslee had been actuated by any motives of revenge when he sentenced old Jerry. To himself Lonnie was forced to admit that Calvin Ainslee's own brother would have received the same sentence had the preponderance of evidence been as strongly against him as it was against his father.



With this new viewpoint on the situation, he analyzed the trial and, piecing together all the evidence, which in spite of years still stood out in his memory with astounding clarity, concluded that the blame lay solely with those friends of Dock Perryman who had perjured themselves in his favor. Consequently Lonnie was deeply troubled, the more so as old Calvin was obviously fond of his new foreman and welcomed him more and more into his home life.

As the time drew near for his father's discharge, Lonnie had formulated a plan whereby he hoped to arrange an amicable settlement between Jerry and Calvin Ainslee. He desired it as he never desired anything before in his life. So, following out his plan, he wrote his father that he found it impossible to meet him at the prison on his discharge. He suggested that his father come on alone and he would meet him at Twin Junction, which was a crossing point of two railroads not far from the Bar A ranch.

Old Jerry read the letter and then communicated the contents to Al Spaulding, who was slated to be discharged two weeks ahead of him.

"Suits me," Al readily agreed. "It's nothing but a jumping off place, which will make it a whole lot better than meeting in any town. I'll happen around casual-like when you get there and we can wise up the boy and make our plans." And so it was agreed.

Two weeks later when old Jerry stepped from the train at Twin Junction he found Lonnie waiting. Twin Junction, as Al Spaulding had inferred, was simply a wide place in the road. It was located on the bald prairie where two railroads intersected. A small station together with an unpretentious hotel and eating-house for the accommodation of belated travelers were the only structures it boasted.

Grasping his father's hand, Lonnie steered him toward the hotel. "We'll eat

first, father," he said, "then we'll talk."

Old Jerry followed his son obediently. He had been wrapped in a sort of a dazed wonderment ever since leaving the prison gates. It seemed strange to him, this bustling world from which he had so long been shut away. He felt out of place, as though he were an alien and was unutterably glad for his son's guidance.

Lonnie led his father across to the hotel and into the small dining-room. "After we have eaten we'll go into the office. I have a surprise waiting there for you," he said.

As they ate, Lonnie covertly studied his father. Would it be hard, he wondered, to talk him out of his long cherished resolve for revenge? When the meal was finished, Lonnie ushered his father into the small, bare hotel office and straight up to a tall, gray-eyed girl who was evidently awaiting them.

"This is my wife, father," he said to the startled old man. "We were married a month ago."

The girl offered her hand, and then impulsively kissed old Jerry on the lips. "I am so glad you are here at last," she declared simply. "We have counted on your coming for a long time."

Old Jerry clutched her hand mechanically, his thoughts in a tumultuous whirl. Lonnie married! He had never dreamed of this. And such a girl! He had forgotten during the long years of his solitude that such women existed in the world. So he stood at a total loss for words, dazzled by the radiance of her smile.

Then Lonnie, seeing his embarrassment, interfered.

"Father and I have something serious to talk over, dear," he said. "If you care to go up to your room, I'll call you a little later."

The girl flashed another smile at old Jerry and turned. At this instant an outer door leading into the hotel office was darkened.

Now it is in no way strange that Al Spaulding's first move after being discharged was to acquaint himself with all that had transpired recently at the Ainslee ranch. This, of course, was easy to do, as several of his band were numbered among the crew. And when he found out that Lonnie was married Al instantly decided that he had been grossly deceived by old Jerry. He immediately jumped to the conclusion that in spite of his warning to delay the telling until he was present, Jerry had confided in his son the bandit's plans for stealing the cattle. And in the face of what had happened it would have been no more than natural for old Jerry to relinquish all thoughts of revenge and ally himself with Lonnie in forestalling the rustler's plans.

Figuring from this angle Al felt sure that the pair, instead of being with him, stood ready to turn him in to the authorities, even if they had not already done so. And this had provoked him to a state of rage where he recked not of consequences. So when he stepped through the door of the hotel at Twin Junction, seeking father and son, he had his pistol in his hand.

His cold, pitiless eyes, narrowed to pin points by wrath, rested a bare second on the girl, then flicked to the two men. A fierce surge of red hate mottled his face, and his lips were twisted in a maniacal snarl of hatred.

"You—you double crossers!" he croaked, and then for the third time in his life Jerry Andrews had the most despicable word in the English language flung in his face.

But as we know, old Jerry was not the man he had once been. Prison life had quenched much of his old-time fiery spirit.

"Al," he quavered, stretching forth a bleached hand, "Al, this is my son. You—you have made some mistake," and his mind groped blindly for the reason of the unexpected outburst.

Contemptuously ignoring old Jerry, Al Spaulding focussed his entire attention on the younger man. "You first, you—you traitor," he rasped and, elevating his gun, shot. With a little coughing grunt, Lonnie Andrews sank to the floor.

With eyes that were almost uncomprehending in their horror-stricken vacancy, Jerry gazed at the crumpled heap on the floor. It was as though a laggard brain refused to give credence to what the eyes beheld.

Then suddenly, in one grand surging rush, the long dead fire of youth seemed to regenerate him. Like a dog shaking water from its coat, he threw off his prison lethargy. Stiffly he gathered himself, his long atrophied muscles responding but slowly to the force of will. And as he

tensed and bunched and gathered his unwilling frame for an avenging spring at the man who had shot his boy, Al Spaulding watched him coldly. His pistol covered old Jerry square, and murder shone in his eyes. He only awaited the first threatening move on the old man's part before he committed his second crime.

Then as he stood watchful, finger on trigger, an inner door leading into the hotel office was flung open and a third man burst into the room.

"Take your gun off that man," the whipping, crackling words stung Al Spaulding into instant action. Like a flash he swung about, came two reports almost as one, and the bandit collapsed.

When Al Spaulding slid to the floor old Jerry insensibly relaxed and swung about. Once more his frame tensed.

"Calvin Ainslee," he cried and all the repressed hate of years billowed to his face. For a moment he hesitated—as a tiger hesitates before its spring.

Then the spell was broken by the gray-eyed girl. She had been anxiously examining Lonnie and now she raised her head.

"Thank God he will live, father," she said, addressing the man whom Jerry Andrews faced.

When he realized the words were directed at another, old Jerry flinched. "Lonnie is—is my son," he quavered.

Calvin Ainslee put out his hand. "He's son to both of us now," he said. "This is my daughter."

For a moment old Jerry stood irresolute and slowly, like the breaking of a thundercloud, the lines of hate were erased from his face. At last he blindly grasped the other's outstretched hand, all thoughts of revenge gone. For the tie of kinship was the strongest bond old Jerry knew.

LUCKY FRIDAY

FRIDAY has long been considered a day of ill-omen, but so far as American history is concerned it has been an eventful day on many occasions.

Columbus set out on his epochal voyage on Friday.

Ten weeks later he discovered America, on Friday.

Henry II commissioned John Cabot to make an expedition to America, on a Friday.

The oldest town in the United States, St. Augustine, was founded on Friday.

The Pilgrims anchored the Mayflower at Plymouth on Friday, and they signed the May flower Compact, the forerunner of our present Constitution, on Friday.

George Washington was born on Friday.

The American forces seized and fortified Bunker Hill on Friday.

Saratoga was surrendered to the Americans on Friday.

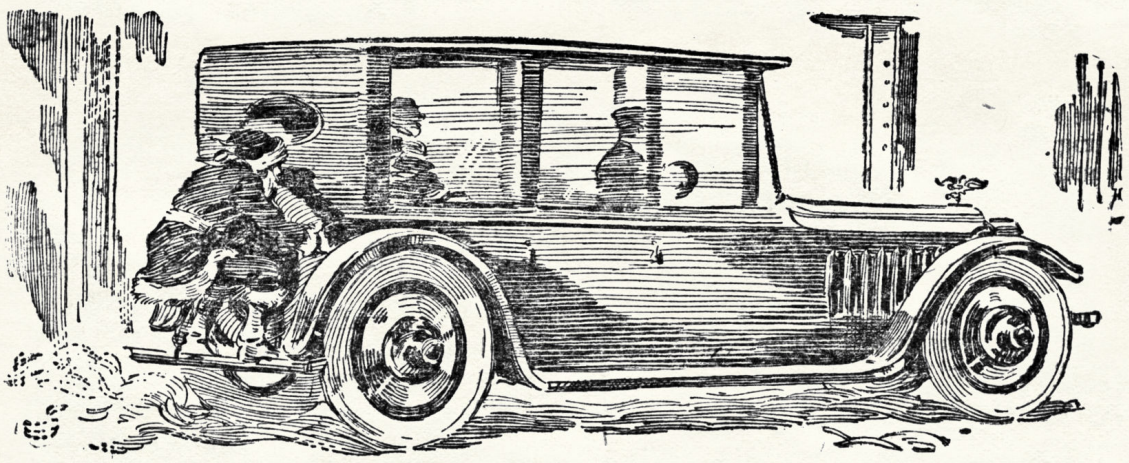
Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown on Friday.

The motion that the united colonies were and of right ought to be free and independent was made in Congress on Friday.

America and Friday ought to be on pretty good terms in the light of this array of events.

GREAT HORSEBACK RIDES

THE first day of the operation of the Pony Express, in 1859, Harry Roff covered the first 20 miles from Sacramento, Cal., eastward, with one change of horses, in 59 minutes. Buffalo Bill, riding for the "Pony," once made a ride of 384 miles, stopping only to eat and to change horses, and was on time at every station. "Pony Bob" Haslam rode 185 miles, through acutely hostile Indian country, without stopping except to eat and to change horses; and after a sleep he finished the return run and made the round trip of 370 miles within a few hours of the schedule time. Later on "Pony Bob" had a regular run of 100 miles every 24 hours, and his time for the trip was 10 hours. He had another run of 23 miles, with 15 changes of horses, which he did in one hour, every day for six months. The greatest ride of all was made by Francis Xavier Aubrey in 1853. The year before he had ridden from Santa Fe, N. M., to Independence, Mo., (800 miles) in a little over 8 days; and in 1853, on a thousand-dollar wager that he could "do it in eight days even," he rode this distance in 5 days and 13 hours, changing horses only every 200 to 300 miles. He was so exhausted on reaching Independence that he had to be lifted from the saddle; but he had the honor of having a Missouri River steamboat named after him, with a silhouette of a horse and rider between her smokestacks.—C. E. M.



ALIAS SANTA CLAUS

By ALBERT EDWARD ULLMAN

Author of "Too Many Crooks," "They Come In Bunches," etc.

MR. RUDDY WAS NO SLOUCH AT THE DETECTIVE GAME—ONCE HE REALLY GOT STARTED. AFTER ALL, A GOOD DISGUISE IS ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS TO GET. AND WHAT BETTER THAN SANTA CLAUS?

SANTA CLAUS stood at the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue. Though his expression was most benign, there was a certain cockiness about Santa Claus, a sort of *savoir faire,* that set him apart from other Santa Clauses who stood on other corners. For one thing, our particular Santa Claus wore his hat quite rakishly on one side of his hoary head, and for another, his long, snow-white whiskers were plaited into two pig-tails which undulated sportively in the wintry breeze.

Then, too, this Santa Claus was most frolicsome, to say the least. He was not only frolicsome with children, but with grown-ups as well. He had a feather tickler on the end of a length of rattan; and with it he did strange didoes. For ever and anon, as some pompous or stern-visaged person sought to pass, his tickler would dart out like a fairy's wand and touch that one on a stiff neck. It was as if Santa Claus expected to wipe out their set expressions and give them Christmassy looks. Evidently the results were not what he expected, for the ones so touched indulged in everything but merry wishes. But Santa Claus, like a good sport, persevered.

He seemed to think that the wole world should be young with such a season. He seemed to wonder why stupid people kept up the pretense that youth and the joy of youth are only for the young. And he seemed to want to tickle every dull man and artificial woman until they should laugh without anything in particular to laugh at. No; though he met with slights, and glares, and fits of temper, and—shame to say—muttered anathemas, he did not lose hope. Frozen faces they might be, but surely there was a way to open up such and let the sunshine in.

On the other hand the kiddies did not treat him as if he was one demented. They appeared to take it as a matter of course that he should be waggish and playful and seek to evoke laughter by means of his feathery doo-dad. Indeed, they hailed this altogether different Santa Claus and his antics with shouts and squeals of delight. And when he tickled some sour-faced one they shrilled approval. They appeared to think it some new sort of outdoor game, and endorsed it with a unanimity that cried halt to many of its offended victims. Undoubtedly they were with him—and so were their mothers, forsooth—and many of their partings with him were tearful, not to say vociferous. In such cases the wink of Santa Claus was the wink of wisdom; his face was as wise as a treeful of owls and seemed to hold some promise in store for them.

So Santa Claus stood on the curb, occasionally jingling the box in the chimney at his side to attract more silver and pennies. Between whiles he cavorted for the children and performed with his tickler in the hope that joy might be unconfined. He had been standing thus since the great shops had opened their doors to the holiday throngs that massed and moved on the sidewalks of the thoroughfare. But if he were tired or ready to cry quits it was not noticeable by so much as an act or look of his. In fact it was not until the shops had closed their doors, and the steady stream of shoppers and homegoers had died away to a mere rivulet of stragglers, that the figure in the costume that takes precedence over Clown and Pierrot in the hearts of youth lost its animation and appeared to relax. A few minutes later, the papier maché chimney under one arm, Santa Claus darted through the street traffic and emerged on the other side of the avenue.

"Hot dog!" he exclaimed, pulling out a purple-bordered handkerchief, and applying it to his purplish nose. "Some day—and some Sunday story. Talk about your human interest—zowie!"

Saying which Robert Ruddy, alias Santa Claus, scudded across Thirty-fourth Street and set out for Thirty-second, where he would be able to leave his chimney. After that it would be but a few blocks to the headquarters of the Volunteers of America on Broadway at Twenty-seventh Street; and there he would leave his collections in the name of the friend for whom he was substituting. Perhaps friend might be a misnomer, for the reporter and rolling stone had never set eyes on him before that morning. In fact Mr. Ruddy had just arrived in New York, via a side-door Pullman, and was making for the heart of his old-time oyster when he ran across his new friend. And that was because a truck had almost done the same for the latter, for his costumed figure was painfully rising from the gutter, where it had been shunted, when the reporter reached his side.

A brief examination of a leg and side of the injured man, a few words from the latter, a few understanding questions from Ruddy and the matter was settled. The mystic words, "Hey, buddie!" caused a good-natured milkman to stop his vehicle, take them on, and then drive them in such state to Eleventh Avenue. Other words like "Best ever—old egg!" seemed sufficient recompense to the driver, who even lingered to make sure that the young man could make out all right with the limping Santa Claus. That he made out all right was manifest not ten minutes later, for another Santa Claus emerged from the tenement; a buoyant, zestful, not to say, personable Santa Claus; and that Santa Claus was Mr. Robert Ruddy. Freshly returned, and out of employment for the moment, the happy idea had come to him of doing the injured man's stint and doing a story for one of the Sunday newspaper magazines at one and the same time.

In such fashion had his new adventure started. And now the first day had had its run and his mind was colored with its incidents, ranging from the comic to the pathetic. What a story it would make when he was finished with it! Yes; he would write it from the point of view of the hapless man whose place he had taken. That unfortunate, with a wan little woman adding her mite of strength, was fighting as best he could for a little girl, crippled by a tubercular hip. And while earning his daily dole he was doing good for other unfortunates. He, the ne'er-do-well, playing a wooden-faced and wistful-eyed Santa Claus at best, was yet able to coax coins into the box that would ultimately reach other broken beings. What a paradox it was, this wight personating jolly Santa to children of the comfortable and rich. It was to laugh—until you cried. Yea, bo; he, Robert Ruddy would have the sob-sisters looking like the powder on their noses.

In this wise the reporter treated himself to a mental movie of his new adventure. During its unwinding he had left the papier mâché chimney in the rear store of a friendly fruit dealer and now he was bending his steps southward. It was dark now and had started to drizzle; and there were few pedestrians in the street. So Mr. Ruddy pulled his cotton-ermine collar up about his face and, footsore as he was from standing all day, increased his stride until he looked like a Santa Claus in a painful hurry. He halted on the corner of Twenty-eighth Street for a moment, to roll a cigarette, and discovered he had but the meager makings for one. This decided him to walk a short distance out of his

way, beyond Sixth Avenue, to a little tobacconist, and he hurried in that direction.

Shortly he was on a block given over to smaller loft buildings and a storage warehouse or two. Only a few lights showed from their upper stories; a bookkeeper working overtime, some one catching up with belated correspondence, or a rush order to be shipped out, probably explained that, for the workers had gone homeward long before. Inhaling his first cigarette since morning with gusto, Mr. Ruddy increased his stride. It had been a strain—doing without the makings—but he had not wanted to spoil the illusion. What child, indeed, would believe in a Santa Claus out of whose white whiskers cigarette smoke rolled? But, gosh, what a relief! With a happy sigh the reporter took a last puff and flipped the butt into the street. Then he nearly tripped over some object that lay on the sidewalk in the shadow of a new building.

He bent over to see what it was he had so narrowly missed. Then an exclamation escaped him, for a man lay there; a man lay there stiffly on his back, eyes open and staring, gloved hands thrown wide of his body. A derby hat, partly crushed, rested a few inches from the head. Instinct, bred of his experience as a reporter, sent Ruddy's hand exploring for a heartbeat. There was none, though a trace of body heat told the newspaper man that death had not been long. Also, the muscles were still lax, the flesh on wrists and cheeks soft.

Ruddy struck a match, and by its fitful light searched for evidence of violence. Though the crushed hat might indicate that the man had been struck down from behind, there was no bruise or mark on the head. The man had grayish, dark hair, bushy and waving back from the brow. A grayish beard covered the cheeks and was trimmed to a point. Evidently of foreign birth. He struck another match and found dark eyes, that slightly protruded, staring horribly at him.

The match died out of his hand, and his hand was groping beneath the waistcoat to seek evidence of a wound when it was frozen stiff by a quavering, long-drawn shriek. All of his blood seemed congealed as the sound died away; and he had difficulty in straightening up. Undoubtedly it was a woman's voice. Only a woman could put that agony of fear into the cry that had stabbed down at him from somewhere aloft. The shock of the incident held Ruddy as stiff as the building he faced, with eyes sweeping its dark façade. Then the shriek came again, more wild and piercing than ever.

The eyes of Robert Ruddy darted from floor to floor until they were lost in a dark void; then slowly they swept downward. What was that up there, against the reflected light on a glass window-pane—that slender thing which moved? The reporter stared harder, his eyes almost protruding with the effort. It looked like a bare arm. Yes; it was a bare arm—and a hand that waved! He closed his eyes and looked again. And even as he looked the slender, white arm was snatched out of sight. There came a sound of a half-strangled cry, and the banging down of a closed window.

With that Robert Ruddy leaped from the side of the dead man on the sidewalk to the heavy double-doors of corrugated iron that manned the entrance. His hands jerked desperately at the handles, but not so much as by a fraction of an inch did they yield to his violent efforts. Then he stood off and surveyed them. By their structure he could see that the doors opened outward, so there was no use in his hurling himself against them. No; no time should be wasted that way—he needed assistance. With that cry still ringing in his ears, and the staring eyes of the dead man still with him, the young newspaper man whirled about and started at a run for the corner. There he might be able to still find a traffic policeman, even if the regular patrolman was not on that lap of his rounds.

As he neared the corner he stumbled across the part of a broken broomstick. With it he pounded an iron electric light pillar as he reached the corner. Like its echo a sound came from a distance, the sound of a night-stick tit-tatting on the pavement. From the south of him came a similar sound, accompanied by the trilling of a police whistle. Then he heard the pounding of heavy feet from two different directions, and saw two bluecoats charging down on him from up and down the avenue.

"Man dead back there on the sidewalk," he told them shortly, forgetful of his ap-

pearance. "Girl a prisoner in storage building."

He did not notice their skeptical look, but dashed back in the direction of the building. After an instant's hesitation they lumbered after him. As they neared the spot Ruddy slowed up to explain the affair more fully.

"On way from Sixth Avenue," he puffed, "and almost fell over body in shadow—man, well dressed, foreign look—and was giving once-over when shriek came from upper floor and saw girl's arm waving——"

He jerked to a halt in front of the storage building, the two policemen at his heels. Then his words died away as he pointed to the pavement—for the dead man was gone.

"Ho-hum!" sounded the nearest bluecoat with an emphasis that carried a world of meaning. He tightened his grip on his club and glanced at his fellow officer. "It's a joker yuh are!"

The reporter had been searching the sidewalk with dazed eyes, but at the policeman's last words he whirled about with startling abruptness.

"Look here," he snapped. "My name's Ruddy—Robert Ruddy—reporter." He glanced down at his costume. "Have this make-up on to get a story." His eyes traveled from the face of one policeman to the other's. "So when I say there was a dead man here, and there is a girl held prisoner in this building, I know what I'm talking about." The white whiskers stuck out with the movement of his jaw. "If that don't go with you," he ended, "Inspector Corot will probably be telling you something in the morning."

His demeanor, as well as his words, settled it with the two bluecoats, for one set out immediately for the rear of the building in search of a means of entrance, while Ruddy, assisted by the other, tried to force the double doors. At the end of ten minutes they had done little more than dent the corrugated iron surface. And it was fully ten minutes more before a fumbling on the door told them that the other bluecoat had gained an entrance from the back of the building. Then the door swung inward.

"Not a skirt in the building," the other greeted them, "and no sign of one. In fact the building ain't been occupied yet—some of the floors is still piled with plaster and rubbish."

Even as he spoke the smell of newness—of freshly dried plaster and paint—came to them to confirm the last part of his statement. Surely the first part could not be true, thought Ruddy. From somewhere in one of the uppermost floors of the building—the fourth, he was sure—a cry for help had come to his ears, a hand had signalled from its window. That was as real as the teeth in his head. The two uniformed men would have shown their skepticism openly but for the magic of Inspector Corot's name. So it was with set faces that they trailed with him from floor to floor, from one dim corner to another, groping, stumbling, feeling their way, and finding naught but unresisting nothingness. They searched for two hours. They covered the building from roof to sub-basement, and even peered along ledges outside the windows of the upper floors. And at the end there was no girl. There was not even a trace of a human within the shell of new brick and plaster.

Robert Ruddy's face wore a dazed look as he emerged from the building with the two policemen at his sides. A dead man in its shadow had raised himself from the dead and walked away from there. A woman held prisoner somewhere in the new building had dissolved into the shadows that had concealed all but one slender arm.

"We'd better report this case, 'Not a trace!'" dryly commented the taller of the two bluecoats. "'Specially, if you're goin' to get in touch with headquarters."

"All right," agreed Ruddy, swallowing hard. "I know it looks as if I'm clean cuckoo. But—oh, hang it!—I'll call up Corot and see what he thinks of it."

Five minutes later he was as good as his word. Detective headquarters was on the wire and Inspector Corot would be on it as soon as he finished with another call. The reporter told him the story in a few words and had the pleasure of hearing the veteran sleuth's merry ha-ha.

"But, inspector," he persisted, "I discovered two things that point to the truth of my story—a cuff button which I found on the sidewalk near where the body lay, and fresh traces——"

"Of blood?" intruded the inspector in his most jocular vein.

"No," his newspaper friend explained over the wire. "Of oil—in the driveway at the rear of the building. And that shows——"

"It shows," interrupted the head of the

detective bureau, "that we'll have to be raidin' the joints that sell you Park Row lads such hootch." The inspector was enjoying his own words, Ruddy could tell from his guffaws. "You're a good gumshoe reporter," he said huskily, "when you're working at it, but when you're——"

"Good night!" called the chagrined Ruddy, and hung up.

HE WAS still smarting from Inspector Corot's jibes as he turned in his collection box at the Volunteer headquarters, but by the time he reached a dim little lunch-room back on Sixth Avenue he was taking a more reasonable view of it.

"Rostbeeffriedredsnapperspringlamband goulash," warbled a regal waitress in soiled white.

"Ham-and, duchess," said Mr. Ruddy absently, as he continued to ponder on the mystery of the storage warehouse.

Two things, as he had told the head of the detective bureau, had convinced him that he had not been dreaming or wandering in his wits. First the cuff button, a crystal affair, with a fleur-de-lis of gold, in a wreath of flowers under it, was just such an article of jewelry as the dead man would have worn. He was foreign-looking, dressed somewhat in the continental manner, as Ruddy's scrutiny had shown him. Doubtless a Frenchman, if the crystal-faced cuff button meant anything in the mystery. Added to that there was to be considered the fresh pool of oil. No larger than a man's hand was it, yet Ruddy was convinced that it had formed there within a short time of its discovery. Directly beneath a small rear door in the driveway that led to two streets he had come on it. It was fresh, there was no question of that in his own mind, for the space in the rear was still littered with plaster and mortar and the oil had not had time to soak into such porous material. So only one conclusion could be drawn from that by Ruddy. And that was that a motor car had spirited away both the dead body and the prisoner.

"Here's yuramaneggs," said the duchess at that instant.

For a few minutes the young man gave himself up to the enjoyment of the dish before him; then he was lost again in the mental mazes caused by the new mystery. As he went over the ground once more he was sure of his deductions. Yes; in the time that it had taken him to run to Seventh Avenue and beat it up for the cops and return, the body on the sidewalk and the girl in the storage building had both been gathered up. This meant that two persons, perhaps three, had been engaged in what looked like the crimes of murder and abduction. And here the matter was being treated as a joke!

"Peachandapplepiecottagepuddinantapioco," sounded a voice at his elbow.

"I'll show 'em," muttered Mr. Ruddy, gritting his teeth in the apple pie.

He was still showing 'em when he let himself into his hall bedroom and prepared himself for bed.

"Find the murderer of a Frenchman, about fifty-five, with a gray pomp and vandyke," he ruminated from under the covers, "and I'll have the man who kidnapped a woman, or a girl—from the sound of her voice—and the murder linked up with the holding of the girl. It sounds like a mouthful—and it is—but um-er-um-m-m——"

A LATE winter's dawn found Mr. Ruddy still ruminating as he made his way from floor to floor in the new storage building. It had come to him during the night that he had overlooked a bet—the window on the fourth floor, from which the hand had signalled, from which the shrieks had come. On the littered floor there he was sure he would find some evidences of a struggle, perhaps on the window-pane itself the thumb-prints of the hand that had crashed the window down. He was on the fourth floor now only to discover that it was the one floor that had been cleaned and scrubbed immaculately. Indeed, a number of large shipping cases already occupied one corner of the rear, and when he entered a smaller room, partitioned off in front, several smaller boxes confronted him. All of these he examined carefully. Either they had never been used for shipping, or every evidence of labels or markings had been carefully removed, that was certain. He tried to heft one of them, but found it too heavy. Then he turned his attention to the front windows. On one of the glasses was a slight blur, as if made by a finger; on an outer sill a smudge as if an arm had been dragged across it. And that was all.

No; there was nothing to travel on, no

clue to direct his movements or center his suspicions, Robert Ruddy had to admit to his stubborn self. Under the circumstances there was nothing for him to do but await some future development. Later in the day he would telephone the owners of the building and learn what he could. There was not likely to be anything in that, and those packing cases probably housed some equipment of the building, but still it never paid to overlook a bet in a case such as this. In the meanwhile he had the duties of Santa Claus to perform at the world's second busiest corner.

IT WAS well along toward evening before Robert Ruddy, alias Santa Claus, heard the latest news, though the papers had been telling it in black head-lines and newsboys screaming it for some hours. Dorothy Bustaby had disappeared, and from every news-stand the features of the art dealer's daughter were focussing the attention of the passing crowds. About three o'clock of an afternoon three days back the twenty-one year old miss had left her father's house on upper Park Avenue to visit a girl friend, resident on Riverside Drive. She left her home carrying only a purse which, to the best of her father's knowledge, contained ten dollars more or less. At approximately three-thirty o'clock she entered a bookstore on lower Fifth Avenue, where she was recognized by a clerk who sold her a late novel and charged it to her account. A few minutes later she purchased a box of chocolates at a candy store on the same block. And then she had disappeared as completely as if the city had swallowed her.

Then it developed that she had not called on her girl friend; and none of her other friends, anxiously sought by her distracted father, had seen her that day. Following that, every hospital in the city had been visited in vain; and suburban institutions had been called up with the same result. After three days' frantic quest Andre Bustaby, upon the advice of his lawyer, reported his daughter's disappearance to headquarters. Coupled with that, his counsel announced a reward of one thousand dollars for definite news of Dorothy's whereabouts or her safe return to the home of her widowed father.

Such in brief was the story of the disappearance of the beautiful Dorothy Bustaby. Accomplished, popular in the younger social set as well as in the French colony, the daughter of the art dealer had no reason for fleeing her home. Since the mother's death Andre Bustaby had indulged her in every whim, had spoiled her by trying to be both father and mother to her, but despite all that she had developed into a sensible and independent young woman. No love affair, of that her parent was sure; and there could be no financial reasons, for such wealth as the art dealer possessed was all hers if it was direly needed. As for her brother, a scupltor in Paris, he could take care of himself if need be.

This was what Robert Ruddy gleaned at the end of the day from the numerous afternoon papers laid out on the bed in his hall-room. All of the stories were practically alike, but here and there a line appeared in one that had been overlooked by the others or had been cut out by the copy readers. As he finished the latest extra, his brow was furrowed, his eyes shining with a new light. For between the lines of the story of Dorothy Bustaby's mysterious disappearance Robert Ruddy had been reading lines of his own. And those lines had to do with the body and girl that had been spirited away from Twenty-eighth Street.

True, it was a hunch, but Ruddy was one who always played his hunches. Upon first learning the news the hunch had come

to him and he had immediately called up Swann, the Bustaby lawyer, whom he had known for some years, to learn that the latter would be out of town till the morning. The Bustaby home had given him similar information in regard to the art dealer, so the reporter could only deduce that attorney and client had been called out of the city by the search for the missing Dorothy. In the matter of the storage building he was also held up. The owner of the new building, so his brother had informed the reporter, had just undergone an operation and was in a most serious condition. He was certain that no lease had been signed for the building or he would have been informed. As to a watchman, he had just learned that the last one had failed to appear on the job for two days. They were all a bad lot, averred the owner's brother, and given to drink and desertion of their posts without notice. No; he did not have the address of this last nondescript, who had drifted into the job several weeks back. Thus Ruddy found himself with nothing to do until the morrow.

Nevertheless, his brain was busied with the problem of linking up the two mysteries. There was not much to go on, to be sure, but then there was that hunch. To identify Dorothy Bustaby, who had disappeared three days before, with the girl who had cried for help and waved a frantic hand out of the window the evening before, was undoubtedly far-fetched, but it held possibilities, to Ruddy's way of thinking. That the murdered man—his newspaper training called for nothing less than murder—was a Frenchman in all likelihood, and that Andre Bustaby was of the same race, though even a more flimsy connection, was magnified in the reporter's imagination to bolster up his own deductions. As he outlined it to himself it was a good story—if true.

Nine o'clock of the morning found Robert Ruddy being shuttled downtownward in a subway train about the time his new understudy, a youthful occupant of the hall-room above him, had started to give a poor imitation of Santa Claus on a corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street. Mr. Ruddy had not had the heart to witness the other's debut. For him it was sufficient that he had pursuaded the reluctant youth to take his place in the good work until he should have finished his business downtown. That business called for his exit at Cortland Street and his entrance into a huge office building on Broadway a few minutes later.

Office boys meant nothing in Mr. Ruddy's young life; and it was poor work for this one to be up-stage. A dozen reporters had been there upon the opening of the office, and the development of his ego had perhaps been due to that fact. They had made him part of the mystery, had looked to him for his opinion, had looked to him more for facts as to his employer's comings and goings, to say nothing of one particular client. One had even opined that little went on in that office that escaped a smart boy like him, that mysterious phone messages would hardly escape him, and that the stenographer who operated the small switchboard could keep no secrets from him. Still tingling with the wonder of it all, still under the spell of the words the departed word-slingers had put upon him, it was little wonder that he approached the preoccupied Ruddy in the manner of a Jack-the-giant-killer.

"Nope!" he piped firmly to the young man's jerky request to see Mr. Joseph Swann. "You can't see him."

"Eh!" exclaimed the caller, coming out of his mood. "Er—then when will he return?"

"I didn't say he was out," the boy announced severely. "I said you couldn't see him—leastways, not this morning."

"I don't get you, kid."

"Kid!" sniffed the offended one. "Well, you don't get in—kid or no kid."

"Ah! I see," temporized this enemy. "Then it is against your rules for your employer to see anyone during business hours?"

His words were lost upon the dreamy-eyed boy.

"It's my job to pertect the boss," he announced importantly. "Speshully, when he's in con-conference."

"Suppose you take in my name," urged the reporter, taking another tack. "Perhaps he'll break off——"

"Break off nothin'," ejaculated the office boy. "You—you don't know who it is——"

"Maybe it's George Washington," tempted the reporter.

"George, nothin'," gurgled the boy. "It—it's Mr. Bust-aboy—that's who it is. And you can't get in."

"Ah-h!" breathed Mr. Ruddy, like one relieved. He removed his gray felt hat and extended it in his hand as he approached the guardian of the gate. "Would you mind holding this for a moment?"

The next instant the hat was jammed down over the head and eyes of the office boy and Mr. Ruddy was opening the door of a room marked private.

"Hello!" exclaimed a voice as a tall, angular man leaped from a desk chair. Then his voice lowered as he took in the intruder. "Why, er—it's Ruddy, isn't it?" he went on. Then he frowned. "What do you want in here?"

"Fool kid—wouldn't bring in name," explained the reporter, taking in the attorney's companion. "Had important dope for you—knew Mr. Bustaby was here—no time to lose."

Mr. Joseph Swann stood with his mouth open for a moment. Then, after a deprecatory look at his client, turned to the reporter.

"All right," he said shortly. "Let us have it."

"I think I know where Dorothy Bustaby was at eight-thirty last night," announced Ruddy as he appropriated a chair.

At his words the other man, who had looked with such ill-disguised distaste upon his intrusion, gave a startled exclamation and leaped from his chair. A bound car-

ried him to where the newspaper man was sitting, his hands shot out and grasped the other's shoulders.

"Tell me—you have seen my little girl—you have seen my Dorothie!" he gasped, his body shaking with his emotion.

By this time the lawyer had crossed over to lay a calming hand on the art dealer's back. "Calm yourself, Mr. Bustaby," he said quietly. "Ruddy, here, is a reporter, and may have important news for us." He smiled at the newspaper man whimsically. "At least I hope he has," he continued. "So let us learn what it is."

As he spoke Ruddy had been taking in the excited art dealer. A highly sensitive, emotional man—almost effeminate—that was to be seen. A narrow face, a high, narrow forehead, a high, narrow nose and narrow lips, were relieved by a pair of brown, luminous eyes, and a black mustache, in the style of Louis Philippe, trained to needle-like points. His long, slender hands were almost as expressive as his face and were working with the excitement of the moment.

"All right, Ruddy," the attorney said softly when Bustaby had somewhat regained his composure. "Just what do you know?"

The reporter's keen glance traveled from the art dealer's face to the lawyer's. "I'd like to ask a question first," he ventured. Then reaching into a waistcoat pocket he produced some object. "I'd like to know," he went on, extending it, "whether this cuff button looks familiar to Mr. Bustaby—whether he ever saw one like it before?"

Swann reached for it as he finished speaking and, after a hasty glance, passed it to his client with a raising of his eyebrows. As the art dealer took it in his hand he seemed to start slightly. Then he bent his head down to study the piece of jewelry.

"Where did you get this?" he finally questioned, in a voice a little tensed. He did not raise his head, but continued to examine the cuff button as he waited for an answer.

"I asked my question first," said the reporter softly.

There came a pause, and then Andre Bustaby shook his head slowly as he raised it. "I—I don't think I ever saw a crystal pin or button with that ornament before," he answered. His dark eyes flashed at Ruddy for an instant, and then fell.

The man's entire tone had changed—there was a flatness in its timber—and his face had gone flat like that of a poker player. He was concealing something, of that his questioner was convinced. Also, his hands were betraying him, for they were clenched until the knuckles showed white.

"Another question, Mr. Bustaby," announced Ruddy suddenly. "Do you know a man—a Frenchman—about fifty-five—say five-foot-eight—with bushy, gray hair and pointed beard to match—and weighing, say about a hundred and seventy——"

"Stop!" The word came like a bullet from the transformed art dealer. As the word left him he had leaped from his chair and stood, pale and trembling, one pointing finger flung toward Ruddy at full arm's length. He appeared to be in the throes of a double emotion, for fury and fear both struggled on his face.

"Crook! Blackmailer!" he cried. "You come to me from that scoundrel, Herzog. Herzog sent you here to threaten me more. Where is my daughter?" He fairly shrieked this last question at the astonished reporter, threatening him with clenched fists. Then he turned to the equally surprised attorney, who was trying to restrain him.

"Call the police—arrest this man," the art dealer gasped, struggling in his counsel's grasp. "Let them do their worst—I will stand no more—I will no longer keep quiet when my little girl—my Dorothie—suffers——" The livid face suddenly began to dissolve into lines of weakness. Then tears came and the father threw himself back into his chair and buried his face in his hands.

Ruddy, who had not moved a muscle during the entire outburst, now lifted keen eyes to catch the look of blank astonishment on Joseph Swann's face. That moment of torrential speech had satisfied the reporter that he was on the right track.

"So Herzog's the name," he ventured, half-aloud. "Herzog." He raised his voice slightly. "Well, Herzog's dead."

Instantly the head of Andre Bustaby jerked up, his eyes jerked open, and his lips parted in a queer twist.

"Dead?" he whispered. "Dead he is, you say? Wh-when did he die?"

"About eight o'clock last night," Ruddy answered promptly. "Murdered, I think."

As Ruddy looked the art dealer's face again became contorted with that mixed look of fear and fury; and his hands tore at the arms of the upholstered chair as he raised himself to speak. "It's a lie," he said. "All a part of your trick." He waved his hands above his head. "I know it's a lie, because—because I was with Herzog at——"

"P l e a s e—please, Mr. Bustaby," came the soothing voice of the lawyer.

"I was with Herzog at one o'clock this morning," continued Andre Bustaby, shaking off the restraining hand of his attorney. "And he warned me he would give me until tonight to—to——" He started to choke. "You—you scoundrel—you come with a lie to deceive me!" he managed to gasp.

The art dealer had risen to his feet to deliver this speech. Suddenly his legs crumpled under him and he fell back, limp and panting, his hands clutching at space. His attorney rushed to his side, and at the same time motioned Ruddy toward the door. "Please go, now," he whispered excitedly. "Mr. Bustaby is not himself—has said things he's not responsible for. You can appreciate his overwrought condition."

"Sure," started Ruddy. "But what about——?"

"I—I know you have nothing to do with it," breathed Joseph Swann, making another fluttering motion toward the door. "It's all a mystery—a very great mystery. So just leave your address outside—or call me in the morning when Mr. Bustaby is himself again. I know you can be of great help."

Robert Ruddy found himself staring at a red-faced office boy, who pretended to ignore him. Behind the door he had just closed lay the key to the mystery of Dorothy Bustaby's disappearance, and he had thoughts for nothing else.

"Where's my hat?" he asked, absentmindedly.

"There!" gloated the boy, pointing a finger. "Hanging on the floor!"

MANY a youngster wondered what had come over Santa Claus late that afternoon. On previous occasions he had been so much more jolly, more playful, and he had a way of winking that conveyed such unutterable and therefore delightful things. Likewise his tickler dragged the ground like the soiled plume of a spent knight, and his face looked as if he had to learn his lessons before he could play again. Yes; Santa Claus had lost his pep—not to mention his personality.

Of this, sad to say, Robert Ruddy, alias Santa Claus, was quite oblivious. If he was thinking of any of his own shortcomings at the moment, it was of those that prevented him from solving a certain mystery with promptness and despatch. Mr. Ruddy had thought and thought until he was in a mental bog. And a tabulation of his thoughts would have run something like this:

First: Andre Bustaby knew who had abducted his daughter, or who was responsible for it, and this he had not confided to his own lawyer. The latter's blank astonishment at his frantic outbursts was proof positive he had not been taken into his client's whole confidence. Therefore the art dealer had something to conceal. What more likely, then, that the abduction of Dorothy Bustaby was but a screen for some deeper and more dread mystery. For had he not cried out that he "would let them do their worst," and that he "would no longer keep quiet" while his daughter suffered? Was it possible that Dorothy Bustaby had knowledge of the mystery—or plot against her father—and to save him had sacrificed herself either with or without his consent? But if this were tenable, why had the girl shrieked for help? Also, to judge from the art dealer's wild words, his enemies had threatened to strike that night. How strike? Kill the girl? Not very likely, for even the most desperate blackmailers and kidnappers rarely carry out such threats. What other way, then? Ah; perhaps expose some scandal; bring out something from the past of the wealthy art dealer to disgrace him. Yes; that was better. But hold! He, Ruddy, had found a man lying dead, the stamp of violent death on his features, at eight-thirty of the night before. During the ensuing quarter of an hour certain persons who were holding a girl prisoner inside a storage building smuggled her away, taking with them the body of the slain man.

Yet hardly had he described the dead

man to Andre Bustaby when the latter had denounced him as a blackmailer and identified the victim by name. On top of that, though he, Ruddy, had seen this Herzog lying dead on a sidewalk at eight-thirty, Andre Bustaby said he had seen and talked to Herzog at one o'clock—more than five hours later. So, unless there was a mistake in identification, and the reporter was certain that the father had recognized the crystal cuff-button, Andre Bustaby was lying. Why was he lying? Of course if he knew that, he would have the solution of the mystery. Anyhow, the more he puzzled over it the more puzzled he was. It was a good thing that his day was almost done or he would be cracking under this Santa Claus stunt, which held him to the corner. Direct action was what was needed. Bustaby had said something about that night—and it was up to him to be on the job.

The cabbie driving the ancient horse in the ancient Victoria at first hesitated when he was hailed by Mr. Ruddy.

"Go an' getcher rain-deers," he advised, with a cluck to the nag.

"Hold on!" called Mr. Ruddy, clutching his papier mâché chimney.

"I know yah," called back the veteran brightly. "You wanta pin a stockin' or somethin' on me."

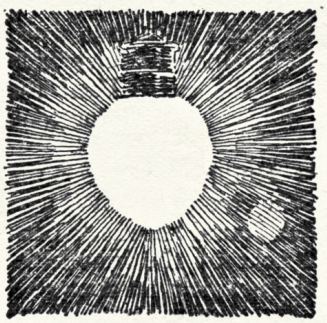
"I'll pin a crape on you," panted the reporter as he caught up with the slow moving vehicle. He flung the chimney on top of the rear seat and clambered in beside it. "Just beat it to Park Avenue like a good old egg," he advised, "and I'll double your fare."

Mr. Ruddy waited while the driver considered. He had been avoided by at least a score of taxis he had hailed, so when the nag's head was finally turned over Thirty-fifth Street it was with a sigh of relief that he sank back on his seat.

Up Park Avenue this odd equipage, with its odd passenger, now slowly made its way. The street's traffic was negative now, and the few persons attracted by the unusual sight found little to exhilarate them in the solemn parade of a solemn horse, a solemn driver, and a more than solemn Santa Claus. And even to this scrutiny they were not subjected long, for by the time they reached the upper Seventies darkness had come. Thus it was that Mr. Ruddy was free from observation when he paid and dismissed his driver and sought a place beyond the radius of the street light well within the shadow of an areaway.

From this place of vantage the reporter kept a watchful eye on the doorway of an old-fashioned mansion midway in the block. A dim light was reflected through the door, and from it his gaze never wavered as minute after minute passed, and the time lengthened into an hour, two hours. For this was the home of Andre Bustaby, and Robert Ruddy was playing his last card. From afar off the chiming of a bell had marked the passing hours for him. Finally came a half-chime, marking ten-thirty, and with the echo of the bell the lighted door opened.

For an instant the figure of a man stood silhouetted against the light, then descended the steps to the sidewalk and started with a nervous, hurried pace in the direction of the reporter's lurking place. An



arc light flooded the figure with its rays not fifty feet away from the watchful Ruddy in the areaway, and revealed the person of Andre Bustaby. The art dealer passed, nervously clutching a small week-end bag, and turned the corner in the direction of Fifth Avenue. As he disappeared the newspaper man hastily concealed his paper mâché chimney in the rear of his hiding place and leaped into action. Half-way in the block he could plainly see the hurrying figure of Dorothy Bustaby's father. The nervous glance the latter directed backward warned the reporter to be cautious, so it was with cat-like tread that he made for the opposite side of the street and darted from shadow to shadow in his pursuit. In this fashion the art dealer reached the avenue, the reporter a hundred yards behind him; then he crossed the street and plunged into one of the shadowy entrances of Central Park.

For a few seconds Ruddy held himself still to give the pursued man chance for another backward look, then he raced toward the avenue and Central Park. Vaulting the low wall, he followed noiselessly over the ground the sound of footsteps that came to him from the winding roadway. Faint they were, but enough to guide him. So, screened by heavy masses of shrubbery and the blackness made by ancient trees, he was soon within a stone's throw of his man. And thus Ruddy followed the art dealer until the latter reached

a place where the main auto concourse swung around in a wide curve. There Andre Bustaby stood, peering anxiously in one direction, then the other, while Robert Ruddy, with infinite pains, managed to gain the shelter of a cluster of bushes not a dozen feet behind him.

Ruddy heard the art dealer sigh, then utter an impatient exclamation. Followed more mutterings while the latter paced to and fro. All of ten tense minutes passed while the situation remained thus. Then the faint hum of a motor sounded, the creak of a brake, and the reporter, risking a raised head above the bushes, beheld the dark bulk of a limousine just coming to a stop in front of the waiting art dealer. Almost silently it had crept onto the scene, and now almost silently its door was swung open by an unseen hand. Without word or ado Andre Bustaby took a quick step forward and entered the car. Then the door shut behind him and the motor took on a louder purr.

Instantly Robert Ruddy was over the bushes and onto the roadway. With a short run and a quick bound he was fastening himself to the rear of the limousine, his hands and feet engaging bumper and spare tire rack. The auto's swift jump forward all but flung him off, but his heavy coat caught on some projection and balanced him until he got a fresh hold with his loosened hand. Hanging on for dear life now, the reporter saw several miles of roadway recede beneath his strained gaze; then car tracks told him they were speeding across Fifty-ninth Street. It was a critical time now, for his discovery by policeman or pedestrian, or the driver of another car, would probably mean the end of his adventure. He hugged the rear of the limousine closer, and tried to curl up the more to resemble some strange bundle. Luckily they were traveling down Sixth Avenue, under the shadows of the elevated railroad, but with passing of each corner and the subsequent flood of light, the newspaper man took a deep breath and clung the closer.

However, before they had reached the Forties the car swung westward into a side street once given over to the stables of old Fifth Avenue nabobs, but now the home of garages and an occasional studio. As the limousine stopped about a third of the way in the block Mr. Ruddy lost his leech-like hold and gently dropped to the muddy surface of the street. And, as the door of the tonneau swung open he rolled under the car and held his breath.

From this shelter he could see little more than the lower part of the legs of the two men as they passed through the gateway of an iron fence that enclosed a small court in front of a two-storied brick structure. As a door closed softly he ventured to peer out and take in the building in detail. It was a studio building, altered from an old stable, that was plain to be seen, for an ornamental doorway and upper bay-window, as well as the broad brick chimney at one hand, had taken little from its general lines. It was as Ruddy took in that chimney, doubtless leading from a great open fireplace, that an idea came to him. For one thing it caused him to roll over and over until he was some dozen feet away from the darkened limousine and then crawl across the sidewalk until he had gained the high iron fence. For another thing it caused him to balance himself precariously on the fence's top and make his way along its side until it ended with the face of the building. There he found the side wall of another stable not three feet away from the one he faced, so with arms and knees akimbo, and scraping the sides of the two walls, he mounted slowly to the roof in a very un-Santa Claus fashion.

No smoke was coming from the big chimney, and this pleased our Santa Claus. In fact it might be said that he almost chuckled with delight when he discovered that he could descend into its depths in the very manner he had made the ascent between the two walls. With what sounded like a suppressed gurgle he let himself down into the chimney.

He had expected to encounter soot, but not so much. In fact it rested loosely on occasional spots formed by the rough bricks and was only too ready to enter his nostrils with his deep breathing. Manfully he tried to suppress a sneeze until blood could stand it no longer. With its escape he jammed elbows and knees into the chimney's corners and awaited results. For an instant he heard nothing; then there came to him the hum of a feminine voice. On the other side of the wall it was, but from its monotone he could tell that it was not occasioned by his ill-timed sneeze. He pressed his ears

against the bricks the better to hear. The voice continued for a moment and stopped, but he was unable to make out its words. Another sound came to his straining ear now. It was in the nature of a half-sob, a few faltered words; and, it, too, was unmistakably feminine. It stopped abruptly as the other voice again took up its monotone. His thoughts were now racing with his discovery. Two women were on the upper floor—and one was in trouble. What was he to find on the lower floor where Andre Bustaby and his companion no doubt were? If things were as he thought, he was near to the end of the mystery. Extreme caution was needed now.

Slowly, painfully, his hands, his knees, his elbows suffering from the abrasions of the rough bricks, he lowered himself inch by inch until he thought the ground floor would never be reached. Finally, one foot touched something solid and he breathed a sigh of relief. He could not lower his head to look down, but he was confident that he had reached the floor of the fireplace. He could hear nothing, for his head was still up the chimney and his ears were clogged with the soot. With a deep breath he relaxed his taut body and lowered the other foot.

A second later his feet were flying from under him to the sounds of clanging metal and falling bricks, and he found himself in a tangle of débris, choking and gasping for breath. From out of this his body rolled until it came into contact with some wooden object that crashed to the floor beside him.

A hoarse, guttural cry broke the silence as the reporter crawled there, attempting to remove the soot and dust from his eyes. It was followed by the weaker cry of another man. Now came the stertorous, labored breathing of someone—someone in distress. Each inhalation was more rasping than the last; a gurgling and gasping, horrible in its beat, marked each expulsion of breath. Then, as from a cavern, a voice.

"Andre! You cheat—you—you trick ——"

Silence now fell on the room. There was not even the cachinnation of that struggling respiration.

"Mon dieu!" rattled a weak voice. "He's dead!"

It was the voice of the art dealer; and as Ruddy finally freed his eyes of the soot and dirt he saw the latter, shaken by fear, clutching at the end of a refectory table for support.

"Who's dead?" he shot at the other in a whisper.

"Herzog! His heart—the shock—the ——" His voice trailed away into nothingness; his stricken eyes dropped to the floor.

The newspaperman, astounded no less by the other's naming of his companion than by the sudden stroke of death, crawled forward to where a body huddled on the floor, the head turned sideways. A second's fumbling beneath the fold of the coat confirmed what the art dealer had just proclaimed. Then he bent over until he could see the face of the dead man. An exclamation escaped him, for it was the face of the man Robert Ruddy had discovered on the sidewalk in Twenty-eighth Street hardly more than forty-eight hours before.

"Good stars!" he ejaculated. "Then he wasn't——" He abruptly checked himself with this overturning of the verities. A dead man come to life—only to die again—it was too much for him.

"You—I know your voice now," the art dealer was saying weakly. He appeared to be groping for words—trying to recover some sanity. "You—you were in my lawyer's——" Again his voice trailed away only to recover itself as the reporter rose to his feet to confront him. "Wha-what are you doing here?" he ended feebly.

"Trying to help you out of a jam, old-timer," Ruddy told him. Then he fixed keen eyes on the trembling art dealer. "You came here to recover your daughter, didn't you?" he demanded shortly.

"Ye-yes; but you know that as well as ——" His eyes dropped to the body on the floor as his words ended on a bitter note.

"I didn't know," the reporter said simply. "I guessed as much and that is why I broke in the way I did. How much money did you bring to pay for the girl's release?"

The art dealer pointed dumbly to the table before he spoke. On it rested several neat stacks of bills.

"All I could raise for the present," he groaned. "Take it now—that this other one is gone—only give me back my Dorothie——"

"Say," interrupted Ruddy, "who do you take me for—a Chinese bandit?"

"I think—yes, I'm sure you're one of Herzog's apaches——"

"Stop thinking, if that's the best you can do," cut in Ruddy crisply. "I'm a reporter—as I told you in Swann's office—

and if you'd spilled the whole truth to me you might have been saved a bunch of trouble." His eyes encountered and held those of the dazed art dealer's. "Wait here a minute," he enjoined, moving toward a stairway. "I think I can find your daughter for you."

"Dieu!" the father's voice followed him as he raced up the stairs. Then he stood there, trembling from head to foot, his eyes focused on the head of the stairs where he had last seen the reporter. A shriek rang out above. It was followed by the hoarse cry of some woman and the loud slamming of a door. A minute later the soot-blackened and strangely garbed Ruddy stood on the stairway once more. "Your girl's up there, and all right," he announced. "Only fainted from the sight of me."

IN THE library of Andre Bustaby's old-fashioned house Mr. Robert Ruddy, scoured into something like a semblance of his former complexion, sat listening to the swift and jerky sentences of the art dealer.

"The first I knew of my boy's crime—of his forgeries—" he was saying, "was when some question was raised of some statuary groups I sold the Metropolitan Museum—as well as that fountain which I imported for August Nelson. Not only did Banquet, my friend, question their authenticity, but other experts joined him. My eyesight is not so good, but I refused to believe them, and so cabled my Paris agent, Herzog. Even while I awaited his reply knowledge came to me of some transactions of his, as well as his manipulation of some of my funds. Then a terra cotta urn came to me, purchased by him for a considerable sum, and under the glass I, even I with my poor sight, was able to discover that it was a forgery, with but a fragment of an old urn used for its foundation. You can imagine my state of mind, my friend. If the other pieces were alike to it I would have to make restitution and confess—and so my business would be ruined, the good name of Andre Bustaby dragged with the pigs. *Mon dieu;* it was terrible, I can tell you. And in the midst of it I cabled for this Herzog—and he came!"

The art dealer looked away as if to gather strength for his narrative.

"He came, my friend—with the proof of my boy's villainy—proof in his own handwriting—with the threat that he would reveal all and have him sent to the prison—unless I paid him fifty thousand dollars." The art dealer shivered slightly, as he glanced at the clock, the hands of which were approaching midnight. "First I challenged him to do his worst—so bitter was I against the boy for his villainy. But to send my son—my own flesh to the prison—that, I found, was impossible. It was then that I pleaded for time in which to raise such a sum. He set Monday as the last day, the wretch, Herzog, but even then I did not have all of the money. Dorothie, my dear child, to whom I had given full confidence in this so-great affliction, pleaded with me that she be allowed to go to Herzog and beg for an extension of time. I forbade her, my friend; but that very day she left our home and did not return. Then I knew that she had disobeyed me and that she was now involved, as well as my son. I was frantic until Herzog's message came to me to meet him after midnight. I met him, and he warned me that if I was not in the park tonight with the money to pay that I should never see Dorothie again, and that my son's rascality—as well as some new forgeries of his which Herzog had brought over and placed in a place of storage—would be exhibited to the world." The father shuddered slightly as if from a chill. "The man had the look of death when I saw him last night. It was his heart he said—he had had attacks before—and he was frantic for the money—that he might go to a *cure.* He insisted that I pay——"

"He's paid," interjected the reporter. "And now where is this confession you speak of?"

"Dieu! Here it is," exclaimed the father. His trembling hand came from an inside pocket and extended a couple of sheets of paper. Before Ruddy could grasp them they fluttered from the nervous clasp of the art dealer to the table, beside a water glass. As the older man reached forward to recover them, with a muttered word of apology, his hand toppled the glass over.

Almost instantly the reporter recovered them, but a little water dotted both of the pages. Waving the sheets in the process of drying, he saw that the ink was running on one of them.

"Hello," he exclaimed, eying the purplish blur that had appeared on the lower paper of the two. "This looks funny." Spreading the two sheets that were covered with a scrawling handwriting on the table before him, he applied a handker-

chief moistened with the water. On one sheet the ink remained as it was, a dull black, on the other it had blurred again into a purplish blot. No; it had not, Ruddy discovered as he bent closer. The ink remained as it was—something under the ink had caused the run of color. The reporter whistled as he looked up at the art dealer with bright eyes. "Indelible pencil—written over," he announced in jubilant tones. "The second sheet is a forgery—written over traced letters—and the first sheet——" He looked it over rapidly and then passed it to the other man. "The first sheet is what he might say in any letter—full of endearments for you and his sister. The last one contains all the dirty work." He grinned up at the startled father. "I think you'll find your son is all to the good," he ended.

For a moment Andre Bustaby stood blinking through tear-dimmed eyes. Then a smile came to his white lips.

"I—I can never, no never, repay you for what you have done, my friend," he said softly, his slender hand seeking the younger man's shoulder. His eyes gazed fondly into those of the reporter's and then swept over his soiled costume. "You are my—what you call—Santee Claus——" He stopped as if struck by some new thought. Then he reached for a black bag on the table and fumbled in its depths until his hand came forth with two crisp bills. "But here is the reward—the thousand dollars—you must take it," he urged.

"I will," said Santa Claus, after a moment's thought. "I can use it——" His face took on a waggish expression as he adjusted his sorry-looking hat at a rakish angle. "You know this is Christmas Eve."

IT WAS almost midnight when our particular Santa Claus was on Sixth Avenue stopping a vagrant pushcart that was moving away from a corner, its Christmas trade done.

"Got some of those dolls left, hey, buddie?" queried Santa Claus. "Well, give me the best a dollar will buy," he continued in answer to the man's nod.

The best proved to be the largest wooden-faced doll, a broken and mended arm its only defect, as the peddler volubly explained. With it safely tucked under one arm Santa Claus now made his way to a small foreign market on a side street. It was closing as he approached, but by gift of gab his order for "chicken and the fixings—up to five berries," won a basket packed with Christmas cheer.

Still moved by some inward mirth was Santa Claus as he stood knocking on a door in a dingy hallway perhaps a half-hour later. Indeed, all the way to Eleventh Avenue, through the mud and slush, Santa Claus had been repeating the words "Hot dog!" as if they were truly mystic. And even as he climbed the five flights of steps the same words escaped him.

A timid voice came to him as he waited now.

"Who is it?" it demanded.

"Santa Claus," announced the man in the hall gruffly, winking a great wink to himself.

"Oh, dear me." Then the door opened, revealing a wan little woman in the flickering light of an oil lamp. "It's the young man who took my poor man's place—so it is," she exclaimed, ushering the visitor into the almost bare room. "And it's a poor woman's blessings you have——"

"Tut-tut!" sounded Santa Claus gruffly. Then he placed an envelope in her hand. "That'll take you folks to Colorado and give you a little start," he stated in tones still gruffer. "So see that you get moving as quick as you can." Suddenly his voice changed and his manner became truly festive. "And now bring out the little girl so she can meet Santa Claus," he ordered gayly.

The sleepy-eyed child, holding to her mother's hand, limped into the room, but at sight of Santa Claus and the big wooden-faced doll he held toward her, her eyes opened until they were like twin stars and a joyous cry escaped her.

"And now sit down and dry yourself by the little stove," requested the mother, after visitor and child had frolicked for some moments. She busied herself with the poker as Santa Claus followed her suggestion, and the little girl with the tubercular hip snuggled on his lap. His eyes were shining as they looked at the child and the child's eyes were shining as they looked at him. In fact it was not until her glance had traveled to his feet, propped against the stove, that they clouded.

"Oh, Santa Claus," she sighed. "There's holes in your shoes—and they're full of mud and water."

THE VOICE OF KALI

By SAX ROHMER

NONE CAN PAINT BETTER THAN SAX ROHMER THE FASCINATING TERRORS RISING FROM THE DARK PLACES OF ASIA, AND IN THIS TALE HE EXCELS EVEN THE HIGH MARK OF HIS FU MANCHU STORIES. WHAT WAS THE HORRIBLE SOMETHING FROM THE MYSTERIOUS EAST THAT THREATENED THE LIFE OF VAN DEAN AND BROUGHT HARLEY OF THE FOREIGN OFFICE DOWN TO THIS PEACEFUL ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE TO SOLVE THE DEADLY PROBLEM OR PERISH? THEY CALLED IT THE LISTENING DEATH. BUT HOW DID IT KILL? AND WHY? IN THE ANSWER TO THIS LAST LAY THE GREATEST HORROR OF ALL

CHAPTER I

A MAN UNKNOWN

THE Coroner's jury, their unpleasant task concluded, filed out of the extemporized courtroom and with almost military precision filed on into the bar parlor of the Three Fishes Inn.

It was near to sunset on a perfect summer's day. High up in the elms at the back of the ancient inn there was much busy chattering from the feathered colony, as though already they were discussing their southern journey. Rooks cawed unmusically; and a red glow spread further and further, right and left of the wood on a neighboring hill, beyond which the sun sank gloriously to rest.

A group of farm laborers homeward bound had collected in the porch of the old inn, to gather news of the excitement which had come to stir the life of this sleepy Norfolk village. The jurymen, conscious of their prestige, nodded distantly to acquaintances and entered the bar parlor to drink the traditional pint with the landlord. Curious glances were cast at the only stranger present.

This was a leanly built, brown-faced man, whose air of eager vitality must have told even the most inexperienced yokel that here was no ordinary personality. He had listened attentively to the recent proceedings, closely studying all the witnesses. And now, looking about him for a moment, he singled out a florid-faced individual whom everybody else treated with the utmost respect and who seemed to be fully conscious of the fact that he deserved it.

"Ah, Inspector Gorleston," he said, "I thought you had gone."

"No, sir," replied the inspector, "not yet. I wanted another word with you. You see, my professional reputation is at stake, if you follow me."

"I quite understand your anxiety, Inspector. A whisky and soda?"

"Thanks," said the inspector, leaning on the counter. "I can do with it. This thing has rattled me." He glanced about

him and then bent forward confidentially. "You see," he whispered, "when Mr. Burton van Dean applied to us at Scotland Yard for protection, we did our best. We had a special man put on duty at his place —the Abbey. What happened?" The inspector took a drink and answered his own question. "Scotland Yard instructs us to take him off! And what's the result? Here's this poor fellow the coroner's just been sitting on, comes and dies right there in the Abbey shrubbery!"

"Quite true."

The inspector glared in choleric fashion, as if highly irritated at his companion's quiet acceptance of his concluding statement.

"Well," he demanded belligerently, "he wouldn't have died if Jones had been on duty, would he?"

"Oh, I see the point!" murmured his acquaintance.

"As you've just heard, the verdict was 'death from natural causes, man unknown.' But was it my fault, sir?"

"Not at all."

"Some half-starved tramp he was," continued the inspector bitterly. "Yet, since it happened, Scotland Yard has ordered us not to come within a mile of the Abbey!"

The other nodded sympathetically.

"They think we're country jossers because we live in Norfolk. And because a tramp dies in my district, I'm told I'm unfit to look after a gentleman whose life is in danger."

"Then you really think Mr. Van Dean's life is in danger?"

Inspector Gorleston bent more closely forward and with a fat forefinger he tapped his acquaintance confidentially on the shoulder.

"I've got two eyes, sir! Two good eyes! And there's something funny about that house."

"About the Abbey?"

"About the Abbey, sir. Funny lights have been seen there. Also the figure of a monk. Funny noises have been heard."

"What sort of noises?" asked the other.

"Well, sir, as you're staying there, perhaps you've heard them yourself. A kind of piping, for instance?"

"Oh," said the other, and his rather grim face relaxed in a quick smile, "that is caused by Wu Chang, Mr. Van Dean's Chinese servant. What other noises?"

"Well, sir, you heard two witnesses speak of the fact that a sort of wailing sound was heard the night that this unknown man died there in the shrubbery."

"Yes, I took particular note of this evidence. You see, I had not arrived at the Abbey at the time of the man's death." And the speaker's glance became introspective, as though he were contemplating some new idea which had just occurred to him.

"Altogether, it's a funny house," continued the inspector. "Of course, Mr. Van Dean is an American gentleman, and very eccentric. But how Mrs. Moody can go on living there beats me. Still, I'm here if I'm wanted. I expect to be wanted very soon."

His companion seemed to have lost interest in the conversation, however. And shortly afterward, bidding the inspector good day, the stranger left the Three Fishes and set out along the dusty road, a lean, active figure in his well cut blue serge, swinging an ash stick and puffing so vigorously at his briar that a positive wake of tobacco smoke spread out behind him as he went.

Curious glances followed him, for few strangers visited the inn, but Inspector Gorleston pompously announced that the gentleman was a guest staying at the Abbey, and this minor interest soon became swamped in the greater one of the tragedy that day investigated by the coroner.

Nevertheless, the worthy sensation-mongers in the Three Fishes would have found their interest revived had one of their number been curious enough to follow the stranger for three hundred yards along the road. At a ragged gap in a blackberry hedge, he paused. He knocked out his pipe on the heel of his shoe and looked cautiously around him. Then, "Are you there, Wessex?" he asked.

"Here I am," replied a voice from some place beyond the hedge. "Any instructions?"

"Yes. Where have you left the bike?"

"In the lane at the other side of the meadow."

"Then fly back. I'll walk slowly in order to give you a good start."

"Good," replied the voice.

Came a sound of moving foliage, of stumbling footsteps; and then silence.

Probably it would have conveyed nothing to the local worthies assembled at the Three Fishes had they been informed that the distinguished looking visitor who had so closely followed the coroner's inquiry and who now was proceeding once more along the dusty road was none other

than Paul Harley of Chancery Lane, London.

Affairs of state, involving possibilities of war, had more than once been entrusted to his experience. East and West he was known as the confidential agent of the highest powers. But here, in this forgotten corner of Norfolk, he was known merely as a guest of Mr. Van Dean, the American millionaire traveler who had leased the Abbey, one of the county's historical properties.

Paul Harley, however, was no seeker of notoriety. The nature of his profession rendered it inadvisable that he should attract public attention.

Now, as he paced along the narrow road, with the rays of the setting sun behind him, he became aware of an unaccountable chill, despite the genial warmth of the evening. That is to say, he experienced a chill which would have been unaccountable in another, but which, in himself, Paul Harley had learned to recognize as a sixth sense. This abrupt lowering of the temperature had often before advised him of the nearness of hidden danger.

It had come to him, that sense of danger, at the moment that Inspector Gorleston had spoken of the wailing sound, which, according to two witnesses, had been heard at about the time that the unknown tramp must have died in the shrubbery of the Abbey.

Possibly this sixth sense was the product of a trained imagination. But experience had taught him that it was closely allied to clairvoyance. Therefore, he felt that he must follow up the clue of this wailing sound. It was in some way associated with the extraordinary affair which had compelled him to abandon every other interest and to set out hotfoot for Norfolk.

He came to the end of the lane, but, before crossing to the stile opposite which gave access to a footpath, he paused, listening intently. Far away on the right, through the summer evening stillness, he heard the purring of a motor bicycle.

He crossed the stile and began to walk briskly along a path which would lead him to the tree shaded lane encircling the northern part of the Abbey grounds. On his left was a wood, romantic in the growing dusk; on his right a sea of grain splashed with the red of the poppy. It was a peaceful enough English landscape, but persistently that uncanny sixth sense spoke of danger. He stood still again, listening.

It seemed a perfect summer's evening, but long experience of the tropics told Harley that there was a hardness in the blue of the sky and a quality in the red sunset foreboding a storm. Faintly he detected the rustling of the higher leaves. His suspicion became a certainty that there was a thunderstorm brewing.

He pressed on, crossed the stile at the other end of the meadow and entered the shadowed lane below the rising Abbey grounds. On his right lay the nettle-grown gully where once had been the waters of the moat, in the days when the Abbey was a monastery.

He came to the gate, opened it, and crossed the bridge. There was no one in the lodge beyond, and as he walked up the drive, arched over with ancient trees, he experienced anew that foreboding chill. He came at last in sight of the beautiful old house surrounded by lawns and well kept beds of flowers. His gaze, however, was directed toward an open first-floor window.

Chapter II

KÁLI

BURTON VAN DEAN had certainly changed the atmosphere of the Abbey. In the spacious library with its panneled walls and oak beamed ceiling, the influence of the American Orientalist manifested itself in the form of numberless Eastern relics and curiosities, which seemed strangely out of place; for memories of the monastery clung more tenaciously to this room than to any other in the old Abbey.

At about the time that Paul Harley was passing the lodge, Mrs. Moody sat in the library, knitting. Her expression was as sweet and as restful as usual, as she bent over her work, so that no one could have suspected the gray-haired old lady of any thought more important than the number of her stitches. But Mrs. Moody was a conscientious housekeeper. Actually, she was listening for some sound which should enable her to locate the whereabouts of Parker, the new gardener. Guests were expected to dinner; and cook had forgotten to arrange with Parker about the fruit

salad. There came a discreet rap upon a door.

"Come in," said Mrs. Moody.

A tall, handsome Oriental entered and inclined his turbaned head in a salute at once dignified and respectful.

"Parker is not in the orchard, *Memsahib,*" he reported.

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Moody, "how annoying. Do you know where Miss Joyce is?"

"I will inquire," replied the dignified servant; and, repeating his curiously Eastern salute, he turned and left the library. This was Mohammed Khán, the Indian butler, and one of the several innovations introduced by Burton van Dean.

Mrs. Moody sighed gently and resumed her knitting. She had only taken up two or three stitches when a girl crossed the terrace and came into the library, pulling off thick gardening gloves. She was good looking in her open-air, English fashion, fresh complexioned and bright eyed. Her brown hair was as the wind had left it, and she had a swinging carriage which was nearly but not quite aggressive.

"Hullo, Mumsie!" she called, and running down the steps she perched on the side of the chair and threw her arms around Mrs. Moody. "Stop knitting and tell me how to get rid of Jim. He's become a perfect pest."

"What's that?" inquired a drawling voice.

Both the ladies turned their heads as a tall, athletic looking young man, the habitual expression of whose tanned face was one of great gloom, came slowly down the steps into the library. His hands were thrust deep in the pockets of his dazzling golf knickers.

Mrs. Moody laid her knitting aside.

"Is Joyce being rude to you again, Jim?" she asked sympathetically.

"Rude!" echoed Jim. "Well, rather! I've been trying to talk seriously to her. What with chaps dying in the shrubbery, and all that sort of thing, it seems to me there's something funny about the house. Old Inspector Gorleston has got a yarn about a monk, or something or other."

"Don't be funny, Jim," admonished Joyce.

"I don't know about funny," drawled Jim. "It's my belief that old Van Dean, with his funny servants and squatting idols and what not, is haunted."

"Jim, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Moody. "Haunted!"

"He's a haunted man," persisted Jim. "There are lots of haunted houses; why not a haunted man?"

"Poor Jim!" muttered Joyce.

A muffled sound of barking proclaimed the presence in the house of a dog somewhere quite near. Jim glanced guiltily in the direction of a door approached by a short open stair in the fashion of the Tudor period of architecture.

"Good dog!" he muttered.

"You see, Mumsie," explained Joyce, who was Mrs. Moody's stepdaughter, "Jim brought Rex over from the Warren."

The sound of barking was renewed.

"Oh, Lord!" muttered Jim. "Shall I let him out, Joyce?"

"Well, not unless I can find a key," was the reply; and Joyce crossed to a writing table and began to search among the many objects which littered it.

Mrs. Moody, who had been looking from one to the other, round-eyed, expressed her gentle remonstrances.

"Surely, Jim," she said, "you haven't locked a dog in Mr. Van Dean's study?"

"Well," replied Jim, standing first on his right foot and then on his left, "old Rex kicked up such a row when we bumped into the livestock——"

"Which means," interrupted Joyce, "that Rex took fright when he met Mr. Van Dean's tame cheetah in the grounds and so we had to lock him up to keep him quiet. No, no key here."

Composedly she crossed and rang a bell beside the deepset fireplace.

"But, my dear!" murmured Mrs. Moody, "in the study! Mr. Van Dean's new book is there, a frightfully important book. Suppose the dog has eaten it!"

"Rough on me, Mumsie," retorted Joyce; "considering I typed it!"

Mohammed Khán entered, inclining his head in dignified salute.

"Mohammed," cried Joyce, "will you go up to my sitting-room and see if I've left a key on my desk."

The butler bowed, turned, and was approaching the door when there came hurrying in from the terrace a gaunt-faced man. He wore hornrimmed glasses, and a Stetson hat with the brim pulled down over his eyes. His tweed suit was untidy, as was his whole appearance; and there

was something at once furtive and nervous in his manner.

Jim Westbury saw him first, and, "Oh, Lord!" he muttered. "Here's old Van Dean!" and glanced guiltily in the direction of the study door.

Van Dean, however, had his glance fixed on Mohammed Khán.

"Mohammed!" he called sharply.

Mohammed Khán turned.

"Sahib."

"Make an early inspection of the grounds, tonight. Test all the connections and report to me with the keys before dinner. That clear?"

"I understand, *Sahib.*" He saluted and went out.

Jim exchanged a significant glance with Joyce. Then, "Anything wrong, Van Dean?" he asked. "You look hot and bothered."

"No, no!" The famous American traveler threw his hat upon a settee and going to a side table poured out a glass of water. "Nothing to worry about. My nerves aren't too good these days."

His hand shook as he raised the glass to his lips.

"Haunted!" whispered Jim, intending the words for Joyce's ears alone. "I knew it!"

"Well," declared Mrs. Moody, "I must say, Mr. Van Dean, that *I* have a dreadful sensation, sometimes, of being watched."

"Nonsense, Mumsie," said Joyce, sitting on the arm of her chair and taking her hands. "Don't say you're going to get nervy, too. You've been so wonderful."

Jim, who had been curiously watching Van Dean, now took him aside.

"What's up, Van Dean?" he asked.

Burton van Dean glanced in the direction of the two women.

"I thought I heard a faint voice a while ago as I came through the shrubbery," he replied in a low tone.

"Near where the dead man was found?" said Jim.

"Yes. Say no more about it. It was probably imagination."

He turned, staring hard in the direction of a strange looking jade image, on a carven pedestal, which stood immediately to the right of the French windows.

"Mrs. Moody," he called, "do you know why no one has come to remove this thing?"

"No," replied Mrs. Moody. "I understood they were coming this afternoon."

"I wish they had!" cried Joyce. "The horrible thing gives me the creeps. But, oh——!" She hesitated. "I'm giving away secrets!"

"No, no, Miss Gayford," protested Van Dean. "You are not. You have been an ideal secretary. But—" his nervousness became more apparent—"I feel I owe your mother an explanation. I had hoped it might not have been necessary. Tonight I know it is. Mrs. Moody, when I leased the Abbey, I knew my life was in danger." He turned, almost pathetically to the elder lady.

"Then why," she exclaimed mildly, "did you allow Joyce and myself to remain?"

"Because your brother made it a condition of the lease, a condition I have never regretted. But I think you ought to know that before I came here I had been in the East for close on seven years. I was reported missing, counted as dead. Your daughter knows where I was. There is no further reason why you should not know also. I was away up on the borders of Tibet. It was there I learned—" he pointed to the jade image—"what *that* stands for. I blundered onto a secret up there beyond Khatmandu. A horror! A thing which—you——" His voice broke. "Well, I got away," he added, "maimed, but alive. Here in the heart of peaceful Norfolk I thought I should be safe."

Mrs. Moody's eyes were growing more and more round.

"Safe! From what?" she asked.

"From the Voice of Káli!" he replied, but in so low a tone that the words were barely audible.

"But," exclaimed Jim, "I can't cope with the thing! What has the voice of Káli got to do with this funny looking image?"

"And what *is* the Voice of Káli?" asked Mrs. Moody.

"It is a summons," replied Van Dean, "used by an organization which regards the days of the world's white races as numbered!"

"A summons to what?" asked Joyce eagerly.

"To death!" replied Van Dean.

The two women stared at him, expressions of horror growing on their faces. Jim continued to regard the image on the pedestal. And then, "What is this thing, Van Dean?" he demanded.

"The emblem of the Indian goddess Káli!"

Chapter III

THE LOCKED DOOR

FOR a while there was silence in the big library. The sound of a lawnmower could now be heard in the garden. Joyce was the first to speak.

"Is what you have told us the reason why the Government has sent Paul Harley down?" she asked.

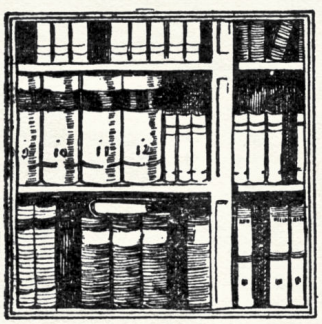
Van Dean slowly nodded his head.

"Yes. No white man, myself may be excepted, knows so much of this secret danger to us and all other civilized countries as Paul Harley of the British Foreign Office."

"I'm beginning to grasp the idea of the barbed wire in the moat," announced Jim, "and the case of small arms and the burglar alarms, and what not."

"I assure you," said Van Dean, "that they are necessary." He turned and advanced in the direction of the study stair. Before the French windows he paused for a moment, looking out. "We're in for a storm," he murmured. "I wonder if Wu Chang has locked up the cheetah. He will have to be moved, tonight, as we are expecting visitors. He is always uneasy during a storm."

Three pairs of eyes watched him as he hesitated and finally went out by way of the door flanked by bookcases.



No one noticed that the sound of the lawnmower had ceased, and no one observed the approach of a bearded, surly looking man wearing a battered straw hat, who slowly crossed the terrace and stood looking into the room.

Finally, Mrs. Moody, heaving a great sigh, turned in his direction.

"You wanted me, Madam," said the bearded man.

"Oh, yes, Parker," she replied. "I wanted to speak to you about some peaches for tonight. Joyce, dear—" she turned to her stepdaughter—"will you see about it?"

"Certainly, Mumsie. Get a basket, Parker," she instructed. "I'll join you in a moment."

Parker nodded and retired as Joyce dropped down again on the arm of Mrs. Moody's chair.

"Dear old Mumsie isn't really worried, is she, about all this bogey stuff?" she asked affectionately.

"Well, dear," confessed Mrs. Moody, "it *is* rather disturbing."

There was a rap at the door and Mohammed Khán came in.

"Pardon, *Memsahib,*" he said to Joyce, "there is no key on your desk." He turned to Mrs. Moody. "There will be, tonight, how many guests?"

Mrs. Moody, whose expression had now settled into one of bewilderment, replied, "Let me see: Mrs. and Miss Westbury, Captain Latham and—oh, Jim, you will never have time to dress!"

"Eh!" said Jim, who had been staring intently at the image of Káli. "Just time to buzz back to the Warren and change."

"Oh!" replied Mrs. Moody doubtfully. "Four besides ourselves, Mohammed."

The Oriental bowed and retired.

"Uncanny chappie, that," muttered Jim. "This place is full of funny people, funny noises, threats of sudden death and what not."

"I quite agree," murmured Mrs. Moody, "but I think—at least I hope—that Mr. Van Dean exaggerates."

"I don't know, Mumsie," said Joyce. "The Foreign Office would never have sent such a big *sahib* as Paul Harley down if there hadn't been something important doing. I should say——"

Suddenly, from somewhere in the house came the sound of a loud crash, followed by that of a whining which died away in a manner curiously horrible. Mrs. Moody clutched at Joyce convulsively.

"Good Lord!" said Jim. "What's that?"

Mrs. Moody stood up.

"I'm almost certain it was in the dining room," she said. "Joyce, do come with me!"

The old lady hurried out, calling for Mohammed. But Joyce hesitated, looking at Jim.

"Jim," she said, "that was in the study!"

"The dog!" muttered Jim guiltily. "I'd clean forgotten him!"

"So had I. I'll go and look for the key myself."

She ran out. Jim was standing peering awkwardly in the direction of the locked study door when Paul Harley strode briskly across the terrace in the growing

dusk, and into the library. Jim turned with a start.

"Hello, Harley!" he cried. "Anything wrong?"

One quick glance Harley gave him.

"Yes!" he snapped, and ran up the stairs to the study door.

He tried the door and snapped his fingers irritably when he found it to be locked.

"Westbury!" he ordered. "Run 'round the garden to the study window. Quick, man!"

Jim stared for a moment and then, turning, ran out of the library, crossed the terrace and disappeared. His footsteps could be heard upon the stone stairs as Joyce came hurrying back. On seeing Harley standing on the landing, she paused in confusion.

"Oh, Mr. Harley," she cried, "I can't find the key!"

"What key?" snapped Harley grimly.

"The key of the study. Rex, Captain Latham's dog, is locked in there!"

"Ah," muttered Harley. "Is that so? How long had you been in the library?"

"About ten minutes."

"Anyone been up these stairs?"

"Not a soul."

"Sure?"

"Positive, Mr. Harley."

A door was flung open and Van Dean came in.

"Quick!" said Harley to him, before he could speak. "The key of your study, Van Dean!"

Van Dean ran up the stairs, fumbling for and producing his keys.

"What's wrong, Harley?" he asked. "What's all the disturbance?"

"I don't know," was the reply, "yet." Paul Harley took the key handed him and fitted it into the lock of the study door. "You haven't been in your study during the past ten minutes?"

"Why, no," returned Van Dean; "I never use the other door. It's kept locked. You don't think——"

"No time," interrupted Harley, "to think." He opened the door cautiously and entered, Van Dean following him.

"Good God!" muttered the latter as he recoiled.

Joyce had been following up the stairs.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried. "Mr. Van Dean, tell me!"

Van Dean turned, holding up his hands. The expression upon his face terrified her.

"I'll tell you in a moment," he said. "Stay there."

"Oh!" whispered Joyce. "Is it Rex?"

Paul Harley came out on the landing and closed the door behind him.

"It is Rex, Miss Gayford. An accident."

"Dead?" whispered Joyce.

"Yes," said Harley. "I wonder if you would send Mohammed Khán to me, here."

"Yes, Mr. Harley," the girl replied. "But what does it mean? Who could have——"

"Later, Miss Gayford!" interrupted Harley sharply. "All in good time."

Joyce, dimly recognizing that there was more in this than either man had declared, turned and walked slowly out. As the door closed behind her, Van Dean clutched Harley's arm in a vise-like grip.

"Merciful God!" Van Dean whispered. *"He is here!"*

Harley rested his hand upon Van Dean's shoulder. They came down together into the library.

"Keep a grip on your nerves, Van Dean," Harley said firmly. "There is more to come. Someone, never mind names at the moment, entered your study a while ago."

"But," whispered Van Dean, "the doors were locked!"

"There's the window," retorted Harley; "and the north wing is covered in ivy. Oh, there's no room for doubt! I saw something moving up there as I crossed the lawn below. He found Latham's dog in the room. The poor brute went for him, and——"

He ceased speaking as Jim Westbury, looking rather sheepish, came in by the French window.

"I say," he inquired, "can I dismiss? Not a soul about."

"Of course," repied Harley in preoccupied fashion. "Sorry. I was afraid you would be too late to see anything." He turned to Van Dean. "If you have no objection, I should like a word with Mohammed Khán and Wu Chang. I have satisfied myself about the other servants."

"As you like, Harley," replied the American. "It's up to you. God knows I'd trust them both. But all the same I——"

There came a rap on the library door and Mohammed Khán entered.

"Mohammed," said Van Dean, "Harley *Sahib* wishes to speak to you."

The Oriental bowed. Paul Harley crossed and stood just in front of him, looking him up and down with his penetrating gray eyes.

"You have seen military service," Harley said. "When and where?"

At that, a trace of uneasiness disturbed the serenity of the Oriental's countenance.

"I serve under the Gaekwar of Baroda, *Sahib,*" he replied in his musical voice, "from the time I am twenty, for five years."

"Why do you claim to be Rajputanan?"

"I was born in Rajputana, *Sahib.*"

"What town?"

"Shahabad."

"And after Baroda?"

"I go to the Madras Presidency in the service of Colonel Forrester."

"As what?"

"As butler."

"Next?"

"He comes to England; I come also. He meets with misfortune, but the Colonel *Sahib* gives me a good name at the agency and I am engaged here."

A little longer the steel gray eyes challenged the glance of the dark brown ones.

"Very good, Mohammed. You may go. Send Wu Chang to me in Mr. Van Dean's study."

Harley's glance followed Mohammed's departure across the library. Then, with not a word to Van Dean or Westbury, he turned, mounted the stairs and disappeared into the study.

"Good Lord, Van Dean!" Westbury burst out. "What's it all about? I always thought you brought Mohammed Khán from India and all that."

"No, Westbury," replied Van Dean. "When I was forming my household here, I advertised for an Indian butler. He came from the Anglo-Indian Association in London. His references were above suspicion."

"Then——" began Jim, and paused.

Unheralded by any knock, a little, stooping Chinaman entered the library, silent in his padded shoes. He glanced neither to right nor left, but shuffled across to the study stairs, mounted them, rapped on the door and went in, closing it behind him.

Chapter IV

THE MANDARIN K

LATTERLY, an odd sense of unrest had come to the household at the Abbey. Bates, the chauffeur, had formerly lived at the gate lodge, where later, Parker, the gardener, had also slept. But latterly, by Mr. Van Dean's orders, accommodation had been found in the main building for both of these.

An undefinable air of mystery had begun to manifest itself from the time that the wealthy and distinguished American traveler took up his habitation there. Several servants had left, but had been replaced by others sent down from London. Mohammed Khán, the butler, and Parker, the gardener, were comparatively newcomers; and to the dignified Mohammed fell the duty of inspecting the grounds every night at dusk, particularly with regard to the efficiency of certain electrical burglar alarms, which Van Dean had installed early in his tenancy.

Where once in ancient days the moat had flowed, was now a stagnant, nettle-grown ditch. This had been rendered impassable by the introduction of a quantity of barbed wire, many thousand feet of which had been delivered at the Abbey, giving rise to sensational rumors in the neighborhood. Once the gates had been locked by Mohammed Khán, it would have taken a clever man to gain access to the Abbey grounds; for these gates were not only formidably protected, but were incorporated in the alarm circuit in such a way that anyone attempting to scale them would set bells ringing in the study.

The tall, white-clad figure of Mohammed Khán seemed most singularly out of place in these old English gardens and shrubberies as he made his rounds from point to point this evening. Once, at a door in an ancient brick wall, he had paused, listening. Then he stood aside, as Parker came out, carrying a basket of peaches.

The surly gardener gave him no word of greeting, indeed, scarcely glanced at him, but proceeded up the sloping path in the direction of the house. Mohammed Khán passed through into the orchard, closing and locking the door behind him, with one of the keys from a considerable bunch which he carried. He made his way round through the kitchen garden to the north wing of the house; and there he paused, locking in at a barred window.

A dull, crooning sound could be heard.

The place was a sort of outhouse, connected by a covered way with part of the servants' quarters; dimly visible within, Wu Chang crouched upon the floor, caressing the wicked looking head of a lithe, catlike creature, whose black-spotted coat of gold gleamed through the dusk. It was Van Dean's Indian cheetah; although fairly tame it was at times a dangerous pet. However, the Chinaman was crooning to it like a mother to her baby. Out of a cage on the wall, two little monkeys peered, chattering.

Indeed, not the least of the distinguished American's eccentricities was this minor menagerie which he had installed at the Abbey, practical zoology being one of his hobbies.

Mohammed Khán proceeded round the wing of the house and finally entered the library through the French windows. The room was empty, and the tall Oriental stood for a moment listening. Dimly he could hear voices proceeding from the study upstairs, among them that of Mr. Van Dean.

In the study, a small room so laden with relics of Van Dean's unusual travels that it resembled the apartment of a very untidy antique dealer, Paul Harley, leaning against the edge of the writing table, was speaking to Jim Westbury. Van Dean sat near him in a revolving chair, his elbow on the table, his chin resting in his hand.

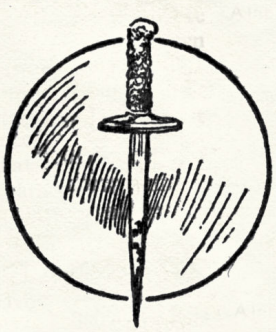
"I asked you to come up here, Westbury," Harley was saying, "because you might as well know the truth about what's happened. But there is no occasion to upset the women."

"What *has* happened?" demanded Westbury.

"Well," said Harley, "whoever gained access to the study, just now, took nothing; probably hadn't time."

"Poor old Rex disturbed him?"

"Exactly. I told Miss Gayford that Rex's death was an accident. Here's the truth."



From his pocket Harley took out a long, slender dagger with a hilt richly encrusted with jewels, conspicuous among them being a large green stone which glittered eerily. One startled glance Westbury took at the thing.

"Good Lord!" he muttered. "There's blood on it!"

"Naturally," said Harley dryly. "The poor brute was stabbed to the heart. This thing was stuck fast between his ribs."

He paused abruptly, placing the dagger behind him on the table as a sound of rapping came upon the study door.

"Come in!" cried Harley.

The door opened and Mohammed Khán entered. He bowed to Van Dean.

"Everything is in order, *Sahib*," he reported. "The gate I could not lock until your guests had arrived."

Paul Harley watched him intently while he spoke, but the man's handsome face was quite expressionless.

"Very good," said Van Dean; "you may go."

Mohammed Khán gravely retired. Harley thoughtfully relighted his pipe before resuming, the others watching him anxiously.

"Look!" he said, again exhibiting the dagger. "The sign of the Group!" He pointed to the green stone on the dagger hilt.

"The mark of Káli!" whispered Van Dean.

Westbury glanced at him, not comprehending.

"What is this?" he asked. "An emerald?"

"No," replied Harley, "a green sapphire; and beneath it is an inscription. Roughly translated it reads, 'He who is summoned by the gods, listens and dies.'"

"The Listening Death!" said Van Dean hoarsely.

"But," cried Westbury, "I can't fathom this thing. I mean to say——"

"Westbury," Harley interrupted sharply, "you don't realize what stakes we are playing for. You don't know that there is a great seething out there in the heart of the East, the surface indication of a threatening mystical fanaticism of such horribly devastating probabilities as the world has never witnessed nor heard of before. I must inform you, Westbury, that this house is the focus of a great conspiracy which may be backed by anything up to four millions of people."

"Good heavens!" gasped Westbury. "But what are they after?"

"They are after *me!*" answered Van Dean.

"And incidentally, myself as well!" added Harley. "Van Dean, we are right up against it. Without any shadow of doubt, you have been traced. We must

be ready for anything. I'm only sorry that there will be ladies here, tonight."

"But you're not suggesting," said Westbury rather wildly, "that we're in for a siege or something?"

"Hardly that," replied Harley; "but this knife bears the crest of the most dangerous criminal in the whole world. I can give him no other description."

"Who is he?"

"He is known as the Mandarin K. One of the secret council termed 'the S. Group.' Their symbol, Westbury, is the mark of Káli; and those who fall foul of them, die."

"A strange death," whispered Van Dean; "strange and horrible."

"For over a year," continued Harley, "I have been searching for the nameless Mandarin, the genius behind the mark of Káli, with all the power of the British Empire to back me. In India, in China, in the Near East, I have had news of him, have met with his handiwork."

He paused again, listening intently. A sound of someone playing on a reed pipe made itself audible, a weird dirge, rising and falling monotonously. Westbury turned startled eyes on Van Dean.

"What's that?" he demanded.

The American smiled rather wanly.

"It is only Wu Chang," he replied. "Have you never heard him playing before?"

"Phew!" said Westbury. "No, I haven't! It quite startled me. Go on, Harley."

"I am coming to my point," resumed the latter. "Knowing what I know, that this man is a menace to the world, I would give all I possess to trap him. I thought that I alone stood between him and his monstrous ambitions, until——"

"Until," Van Dean continued, "an inquisitive American blundered even further into the secrets of the S. Group! With the result that the Mandarin K——"

"Is in England?" demanded Westbury excitedly.

Harley stared in silence at him for a moment, then, "Unless I am very much mistaken, was, tonight, *here!*" he corrected.

"What! In the house?"

"Yes, either the Mandarin K. in person or one of his agents."

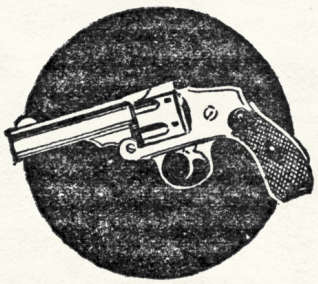
"But what on earth for?"

"For Van Dean's book," replied Harley. And again he paused, listening.

From somewhere, miles away, perhaps from over the sea, came the dim rolling of thunder. Paul Harley nodded grimly. The storm he had foreseen was approaching; but Van Dean buried his face in his hands and groaned.

"I shall never live to see it published!"

"Pull yourself together, man!" cried Harley sharply. "There, in that safe, lies material which, when it is made public will wake up the white peoples of the world to a peril of which they have scarcely dreamed. Yet it grows and grows, like the storm over yonder. One day, if we fail, it will burst on the white races like a second deluge. Remember, nothing to the women."



From his pocket he took out a revolver and tossed it to Jim Westbury. The latter, though obviously startled, succeeded in catching it.

"Loaded!" snapped Harley. "Keep it handy. Directly Captain Latham arrives for dinner, I want to see him alone. I should be obliged, now, if you would grant me the freedom of your study, Van Dean. I want to make a few inquiries."

"Surely, surely," said Van Dean, speaking in a weary voice, and standing up. "Here are my keys." He laid them on the table. "Westbury and I will leave you."

Westbury, turning the revolver over in his hand as though it were some rare curiosity, preceded Van Dean from the study. In the doorway the latter turned.

"I don't think I ever funked a danger I could see, Harley," he said, "but this invisible watching——"

"I understand," replied Harley sympathetically. "But whatever you do, Van Dean, don't lose your nerve. The climax is yet to come."

Chapter V

SCIENTIFIC MURDER

IMMEDIATELY Paul Harley found himself alone in the study, he proceeded to lock the door. Then, seating himself in the chair which Van Dean habitually occupied, he closed his eyes and endeavored for a moment to concentrate upon this new development in the case.

It was characteristic of Westbury, of whom Joyce Gayford had said that he "had a magnificent drive, but intellectually was negligible," to lock an Airedale terrier in this room of all others. Here, so far as

he could judge at the moment, lay the hub of the mystery. Here, in this room, was the explanation of why the S. Group had turned aside temporarily from their gigantic intrigues and had detailed no less formidable a personality than the Mandarin K to do—what? Presumably, to recover from Burton Van Dean something of such value to their schemes that no crime was too great to deter them in its recovery.

Sitting thus in reflection, his pipe, long since cold, clenched between his teeth, Paul Harley became suddenly aware of that odd lowering of the temperature which unfailingly advised him of evil activity. He opened his eyes and looked sharply about him. The body of the dog had been removed by his orders, but there was a bloodstain on the carpet not far from his feet, where the animal had lain.

He endeavored to reconstruct the events which had led up to the death of the dog. Someone, by using a duplicate key to the door which opened upon the corridor of the north wing, or by means of the ivy which formed a natural ladder from the shrubbery beneath to the open window, had entered Van Dean's study that evening. The intruder, he must conclude, had been unaware of the presence of the dog. The animal, with the instinct of its breed, had attacked instantly. Recognizing detection to be imminent, the unknown visitor had stabbed the dog to the heart and decamped, probably by the same route by which he had come. So far, it was clear enough.

His leaving so valuable a clue as the jewelled knife, might be accounted for by panic. It is easier to drive a keen blade into a thorax than to withdraw it. The explanation did not satisfy Harley, but it sufficed for the moment. Clearly, then, a member of the S. Group had been in the Abbey that evening. Came the unanswerable question: For what?

He had been through Van Dean's notes, he had examined in detail every tangible record of his dreadful sojourn on the borders of Tibet. The importance of his discoveries it were impossible to minimize; and unless the death of the man who held such dangerous knowledge were the object of the organization, to what other end had the S. Group made this house the focus of a dangerous part of its activities?

Again, presuming the death of Van Dean to be their object, why had the unknown visitor penetrated to the study that evening, when it must have been evident from an outside survey that Van Dean was not at his table?

Harley found himself baffled. The safe had not been tampered with. Indeed, so far as he could learn, nothing had been disturbed in the room. Yet, that he was near to the heart of the mystery, that queer sixth sense of his insisted urgently. It was all very baffling. He mentally reviewed his recent interview with Mohammed Khán, the Indian butler, and that, less satisfactory, with Wu Chang, Van Dean's Chinese servant.

The American's eccentricities irritated him. For a man who knew himself to have incurred the enmity of a powerful Eastern group to retain in his household a native of Rajputana, and one of Canton, was not in accordance with common sense. But eccentricity must be excused, he reflected, in a man distinguished alike by his intellect and his millions. Harley stood up, knocked out his pipe in an ash tray and reloaded it thoughtfully.

That inner prompting of his higher imagination spoke to him no more, but intellectually he was alert. These isolated incidents were rapidly leading up to some crowning event; and for this he must be prepared.

When he came down from the study to go to his room to change, for he had had little enough time before dinner, he discovered Wu Chang engaged in drawing the curtains before the French windows. He had not yet lighted up, however, and beyond the terrace Harley had a glimpse of an angry sky, although save for that distant rumble, the brewing storm, so far, had failed to proclaim itself.

As Harley left the library, the Chinaman, his task completed, turned and, tucking his hands into the sleeves of his blouse, stared up at the study door with half-closed eyes. No man could have read anything from the expression of that shrivelled, yellow face, nor have improved his knowledge of the psychology of Wu Chang by studying the curious shrug which he presently gave, ere shuffling across to the door

beneath the balcony and leaving the library.

Almost at the same moment a car came

purring up the drive, and Mohammed Khán, opening the door, admitted a pretty, rather fragile looking girl, curiously unlike, yet in some way oddly like, her gloomy brother Jim. She was accompanied by a man so deeply bronzed as to tell of recent exposure to tropical suns. His neatly groomed black hair, short regulation mustache and upright bearing, all spoke of the soldier. He carried a suitcase, and as Mohammed Khán opened the door of the library and turned up the lights he directed, "Take this suitcase to Mr. Westbury."

Mohammed Khán bowed.

"Van Dean *Sahib* presents his compliments and will be with you in a moment," he said.

"Oh, thanks," murmured the visitor and followed his companion into the library.

"Harry, I'm frightened!" said the girl, at the moment of the butler's departure. "I'm sorry now we came. There was something strange about that telegram."

"Hush," returned the man; "there's someone coming. Don't let your imagination run away with you, Phil."

"But," she protested, "I have always been frightened in the Abbey. And lately——"

She paused as Mrs. Moody, dressed for dinner, entered with beaming face.

"Phil, darling!' she called from the open doorway. "You look perfectly sweet." She turned to the man. "Don't you think she looks perfectly sweet?"

"Perfectly," he agreed. And he spoke with sincerity.

"So glad to see you again, Captain Latham," Mrs. Moody said, "before your leave expires."

Torrential rain had begun to descend, pattering up from the terrace onto the library windows.

"Brute of a night, isn't it?" said Latham. "We've just dodged it. But I shall miss every spot of that dear old rain when I'm back in Rangoon."

"But I thought you liked Burma," exclaimed Mrs. Moody.

"Well," said Latham, glancing at Phil, "it may not be so bad, at times."

"But, my dear!" cried Mrs. Moody, again turning to the girl. "Where is your mother?"

"Well——" Phil Westbury hesitated. "She had a queer telegram." She stopped, as if at a loss for words, and Latham continued, "Yes, Mrs. Moody, the family solicitor is coming down to see her, tonight. Urgent affairs, I gathered. Asked us to apologize."

Just then came an interruption. Jim Westbury, in an ill-fitting dressing gown, his face lathered and a shaving brush in his hand, peered in through the doorway.

"Phil! Phil!" he complained to his sister. "You've brought the wrong waistcoat!"

Latham, smiling whimsically, stared at the lathered face in the doorway.

"Jim," he said, "in the name of decency, don't discuss your wardrobe before ladies. You, my host, disappear after lunch from the clubhouse, owing me a return round, and reappear now in a semi-clothed condition. Go away, Jim. I'm offended."

"Oh, is that so!" drawled Jim Westbury gloomily. "Well," he waved his shaving brush, "cheerio, everybody." And he departed.

"I like people to make themselves at home," smiled Mrs. Moody. She turned again to Phil Westbury. "Come and leave your things in my room, dear. I know you'll excuse us, Captain Latham. The men will be in, in a moment."

As if to confirm her words, Harley, dressed for dinner, met them in the doorway.

"Good evening, Miss Westbury," he said. With a bow, he closed the door after the ladies and turned to Latham.

"Ah, Latham," he said, "I wanted to see you."

"Good," was the reply. "Is there any news, then?"

Harley dropped into an armchair facing the speaker.

"Yes. Bad news," he replied. "But first a question. Did you by any chance see the body of the man who met his death in the shrubbery here, recently?"

Latham stared hard at the speaker for a while.

"Yes," he presently replied. "When I heard of the tragedy, I thought the man might be the same who called recently at the Warren—Phil was with me at the time—and asked for work. Therefore, I applied to see the body; but it was not that of the same man."

"Ah," said Harley.

"Did anything occur to you at sight of him?" asked Harley.

"It did," replied Latham, staring harder than ever. "You may remember that curious epidemic in Burma early in '22—the series of mysteries which became known as the Listening Death."

"Ah!" Paul Harley jumped up and banged his fist on the table. "So *you* noticed it?"

"Look here," said Latham, looking badly puzzled, "I wonder if we're driving at the same thing?"

"Listen!" Paul Harley's face grew

very grim. "Were you stationed in Burma during the affairs you speak of?"

"Yes, Moulmein. The district superintendent put the deaths down to fanaticism, to some dodge of the devotees of Káli, sort of wishing a man to death."

"Quite!" snapped Harley. "They were found with that horrible expression of listening upon their faces?"

"Yes; and no marks of violence. There was nearly a panic. Talk about Káli calling for victims! When I saw that poor beggar's face, the other day, I had an awful shock."

"You recognized the Listening Death in peaceful Norfolk?"

Latham smiled unmirthfully. "Of course it was a delusion," he said.

"It was no delusion!"

"What?"

Paul Harley shook his head grimly.

"The Listening Death," he explained, "is not peculiar to Eastern people. And now I am coming to my point. Do you recall Dr. Ulric Ernst?"

"Yes," Latham answered, closing his eyes and speaking musingly. "The Swiss electrician, inventor of the Ernst Trajector, much discussed but never demonstrated."

"That's the man," snapped Harley; "he died abroad, and—well, the voice of Káli is a far reaching voice!"

"But, damn it all, Harley!" exclaimed Latham. "The voice of Káli doesn't kill folks in England!"

"It does!" Harley's expression grew more grim than ever. "The man you saw died of the Listening Death!"

"My dear fellow!" Latham's tone was almost incredulous. "What is it? A disease? Hypnotism? Magic?"

"No," snapped Harley. "Scientific murder! Listen!" He stood up and looked from door to door as if expecting eavesdroppers. "That 'tramp' who was found to have died 'from natural causes,' by a local jury, was really here to protect Burton van Dean."

"What!"

"He was Detective Sergeant Denby of Scotland Yard! Oh, we gagged the Press, but Denby was murdered. That is why *I* am here!"

"Good God!" whispered Latham.

"Another victim was sacrificed this evening, old man," Harley continued. "I'm sorry to have to tell you, but Rex, your Airedale that Westbury brought over, was killed in Van Dean's study."

"Rex!" cried Latham, standing up. "Rex! *Here?*"

From a pocket of his dinner jacket Harley took that jewelled knife.

"I found him with this through his heart," he said. He returned the knife to his pocket once more. "The women don't know the truth, yet," he added. "Remember."

Chapter VI

THE LIGHT ON THE TOWER

IMMEDIATELY after dinner, Paul Harley slipped away to his room. An unpleasant tension had characterized the gathering. There were several things that puzzled Harley, particularly the acute nervousness of Phil Westbury. Over and over again he had caught her exchanging mysterious glances with Latham and had intercepted silent looks of reassurance from the latter. It might be, of course, that she knew of the menace which overhung the Abbey and its occupants. But this explanation did not entirely satisfy him. He determined to take an early opportunity of questioning Latham respecting the telegram which had detained Mrs. Westbury.

On entering his room, he did not turn up the light. But, groping his way to the window, he raised the blind and looked out. As is the fashion with such midsummer disturbances, the storm which had been threatening all the evening now hovered to the west, blackly. Distant peals of thunder there had been during dinner, and two short but intense showers of rain, but no lightning; and now, although angry banks of clouds were visible in the distance, the sky was cloudless immediately overhead.

He softly opened the window, inhaling the fragrance of moist loam and newly wetted leaves. Away on the right he had

a view of a corner of the terrace; directly before him the ground dropped steeply to a belt of trees bordering the former moat; beyond, it rose again, and two miles away, upstanding weirdly beyond the distant park, showed a ruined tower, one of the local landmarks and a relic of Norman days. It actually stood on part of the Westbury property, although it was half a mile or more from the Warren.

At first his survey of the prospect was general and vague; indeed, he had opened the window more to enjoy the coolness of the evening air than for any other reason. He had wanted to reflect; but now, suddenly, his entire interest became focussed upon the ruined tower rising ghostly above surrounding trees.

Clearly visible against the stormy backing, a little point of light high up in the tower appeared and disappeared like a winking eye!

Paul Harley clenched his teeth, craning out and watching intensely. A code message was being transmitted from the tower! For a while he watched it, a sense of triumph hot within him, only to realize, to his mortification, that it was in some code unknown to him. Instantly upon recognizing this, he acted.

The geography of the neighborhood, which he had made it his business to memorize, told him that this message could only be intended for someone at the Abbey. Neglectful of the fact that the leaves were drenched with rain, he quickly got astride of the ledge and began to climb down the

ivy to the shrubbery beneath. He had used this route before and was moderately familiar with it.

He dropped into the wet bushes without other mishap than the saturating of his evening clothes and, keeping well within the shadow of the building, he began to work his way round in the direction of the terrace. He passed the dining-room, glancing up at the rooms above it, and proceeding, noted that the library was illuminated. Below the terrace he paused, looking again toward the distant tower.

The top remained just visible above the trees; and there, still coming and going, was the signal light! He stepped out further from the building, cautiously, looking upward and to the left.

"Ah!" he muttered and, dropping down upon the sloping lawn, the grass wet from a recent downpour, he crept further northward, until he could obtain a clear view of the study window.

The study was in darkness, but the curtains were not drawn. A light, probably that of an electric pocket torch, was coming and going, dot and dash, in Van Dean's study!

Harley came to the end of the terrace, and taking advantage of a bank of rhododendrons, crept yet further away from the house, until he could see not merely the reflection, but the actual light being operated in the room.

Faintly, as it glowed in the darkness, he could detect the figure of the one who held it. And at first he was loath to credit what he saw, believing that certain words of Inspector Gorleston, which he had considered curious, must be influencing his imagination. But one thing he could not doubt, nor ascribe to his drenched garments nor to the comparative cool of the evening. This was the premonitory chill, the awakening of his sixth sense. Intently, he watched, crouched behind the bushes, until the unintelligible dots and dashes ceased.

The man signalling to that other on the distant tower, for a man he assumed the signaller to be, was wrapped in a sort of *cowl*, his head so enveloped in the huge hood that in the dim reflection of the torch it was quite impossible to detect his features!

"Good God!" muttered Harley. "What does this mean!"

Stooping below the level of the bushes, he turned and regained the shelter of the terrace, and ran for twenty paces. Then, leaping into the shrubbery, he located the thick branch of ivy which was a ladder to his window and began to climb up to his room again, his heart beating very fast and his thoughts racing far ahead of his physical effort. So that ere he drew himself back over the ledge and regained his bedroom, he was, in spirit, in Van Dean's study confronting the cowled man.

His room regained, he was about to run out into the corridor, when long habits of prudence came to his aid. He paused,

turned, lowered the blind and, opening the wardrobe, contemplated the garments there, wondering what explanation he could give for changing from evening dress into tweeds at that time of the evening, for he had no other dress clothes with him. But he fully recognized the folly of giving his unknown enemy a clue to his recent movements.

He finally decided that a change of shoes, the service of a hard clothes brush and a hasty wash would render him sufficiently presentable to pass muster. Two minutes later he walked into the library. Latham was there with Phil Westbury, but no one else.

"Where is Mr. Van Dean?" asked Harley sharply.

"In the drawing room," replied Latham. "At least, I left him there."

Harley nodded and ran up the stairs to the study. He rapped, and as there was no answer, opened, and looked in. The room was in darkness. He quickly depressed the switch and glanced around. The study was empty. He tried the further door, but as usual, it was locked, then turning, he came down again, into the library.

"How long have you been in here, Latham?" he asked.

"About ten minutes, I should say."

"So long as that? Are you sure?"

"Why, I should think for quite ten minutes," answered Phil Westbury, that unaccountable expression of fear coming again into her eyes. "But why do you ask, Mr. Harley?"

"If you have been in here for ten minutes, you can tell me if anyone else has entered or left the room during that time."

"No one," replied Latham blankly. "Not a soul."

Harley stood irresolute, looking about him; then, turning, he went out and crossed to the drawing room, but contented himself with looking in at the open doorway.

Van Dean was there, talking to Joyce Gayford. Mrs. Moody was knitting and Jim Westbury was turning over some music, by the piano. Hearing footsteps behind him in the darkened corridor, Harley turned. Mohammed Khán, carrying a tray bearing coffee and liqueurs, passed him and entered the drawing room.

Harley proceeded in the opposite direction, finally opening a door communicating with the covered way. As he did so, the sound of a reed pipe came to his ears. He paused again, but finally went forward. He came to the outbuilding which was the home of the miniature menagerie, walked around it and looked in through the barred window.

The cheetah was in its cage; the monkeys were huddled close together in theirs, fast asleep. Seated on a mat, in a corner remote from the window through which Harley was peering, was Wu Chang, the Chinaman, with expressionless slanting eyes which stared straight before him. His wrinkled, yellow fingers rising and

falling rhythmically, he played upon a Chinese pipe, a plaintive wailing melody, monotonous and unpleasantly weird.

For a while, Harley watched him. Then, turning, he retraced his steps; and as he came again into the main building and closed the door the sound of piping became inaudible. In its place, from the direction of the drawing room, came the strains of a very modern fox trot. He returned along the corridor and met Mohammed Kán coming out of the drawing room.

"Mohammed," he said.

Mohammed Khán paused and inclined his head gracefully.

"Is the outer gate locked?"

"It has been locked for an hour, *Sahib.*"

"Good," said Harley shortly. "That is all."

Mohammed Khán bowed and departed.

Chapter VII

THE SHADOW OF A COWL

LATER, in the library, there was a curious development. Harley had been seeking for an opportunity of a chat with Latham, but it had not presented itself. Burton van Dean had brought Phil Westbury in to exhibit some of the strange curios which were housed in this room. But Harley had not failed to notice her reluctance and the manner in which she constantly glanced in Latham's direction.

"Really, Mr. Van Dean," said the girl, "I hate to mention it, but mother will be worried to death. You know I should love to stay. But really——" She looked once more at Latham.

"Miss Westbury," interrupted Harley, "I regret to cause you any inconvenience, but I don't want anyone to leave this house, tonight."

His words created a momentary silence of stupefaction.

"Hang it all, Harley!" replied Latham, "*our* lives aren't in danger."

At that Van Dean stood up and laid his hand paternally on Phil Westbury's arm.

"Miss Westbury," he said, "I quite understand and I apologize right from the bottom of my heart. I'm going to say that you don't grasp all the facts. Harley is right. Harley knows."

"I know part, but not all," replied Harley. He pointed to the image of Káli upon its carven pedestal. "One thing I don't know and cannot understand is why you give that thing house room. It's an image, I know, but the symbol of a dreadful danger."

Van Dean shrugged his shoulders.

"It was sent down by one of my agents, Harley," he replied. "It is very old, and probably unique, so for a while I tried to stifle my feelings about it; but I had arranged for its removal today. There's been some hitch."

During the latter part of the evening he had recovered something of his self-possession, but now his voice shook nervously. Turning to Phil Westbury he said, "Really, you mustn't go, tonight."

Jim Westbury, whose face wore its most gloomy expression, had listened dully to this conversation.

"I wonder if I dare take a pull at the old pipe?" he inquired. "Anybody mind me smoking a pipe in the library, Van Dean?"

"The ladies are used to it." was the reply.

"Cut it out, Jim, for a minute," Joyce interrupted. "I want you to try that new step with me. Come along, you can smoke in the drawing room if you like. We've got a lot of new gramophone records you haven't heard."

The two withdrew. And Harley, crossing to Latham, whispered, "I want a word with you. Come up to the study."

Latham exchanged a quick glance with Phil Westbury and then followed Harley up the stairs to the study. Switching on the light, Harley closed the door and faced the other.

"Tell me, Latham," he said quietly, "what's the mystery about the telegram which detained Mrs. Westbury?"

Latham started and then smiled rather unnaturally.

"Well," he replied, "it was rather queer, Harley. It was worded in such a way that the sender obviously intended to detain not only Mrs. Westbury but Phil and myself at the Warren, tonight."

"Hm!" muttered Harley. "By the sender, you mean Mrs. Westbury's solicitor?"

"I doubt it!" was the reply.

"What do you mean by that?"

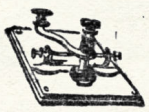
"I mean that I feel dreadfully guilty to have acted as I have acted. But I think it was a fake! Phil thinks so, too, and she's rapidly getting in a panic about it."

"You mean," suggested Harley, "that this telegram did not come from the solicitor?"

"That's my meaning," replied Latham. "Someone, for an unknown reason, wanted to prevent us coming to the Abbey, tonight."

Harley stared at him curiously for a moment. "That being so," he asked, "why did you come?"

"I might as well be frank with you, Harley," Latham replied. "Phil and I are engaged, but Mrs. Westbury doesn't know! Oh! you haven't met her, Harley! She has ambitions for Phil far higher than a poor Indian Army officer. My leave expires on Thursday and, to tell you the truth, we bolted, just in order to be alone together for the evening, or at least, away from Mrs. Westbury. But in the circumstances, for there was something very mysterious about that telegram, Phil is naturally anxious to get back."



"I see," said Harley and held out his hand. "Let me congratulate you, Latham. You have solved a minor point that was worrying me. But frankly, although I am sympathetic, no one must leave this house, tonight. You are probably correct in your surmise that the telegram was not genuine. This makes it all the more important that you should not venture out of the grounds of the Abbey, tonight. I have something to tell you. Not long ago, I saw a signal being flashed from the tower on the hill."

"The tower in the grounds of the Warren?"

"Yes. It was distinct. The night's as black as the Pit; there's a devil of a storm brewing. I couldn't read the message; it wasn't in plain Morse. But I do know that it was intended for someone here in the Abbey!"

"How do you know?"

"It was answered."

"Answered! By whom?"

Harley lowered his voice.

"By someone in this room!" he replied. "Someone who was in this room at the time that you and Miss Westbury were in the library, below!"

"Good God!" muttered Latham. "Are you sure?"

"Certain. I saw him."

"Who was it."

"I know it sounds like a nightmare," he replied, "but it was someone enveloped in a cowl and hood! Oh! it appears preposterous, but there may be common sense behind it. There is a tradition that the Abbey is haunted by a monk. Anyone meeting such a figure in the passages would maybe not be likely to query his identity. Do you follow me?"

Latham stared hard for a moment.

"Yes," he replied. "I do. It's someone who would be recognized?"

Harley nodded grimly.

"Latham," he said, "for many nights past, someone has come into this room and the library, after everyone else was in bed. Yet, never a bell of the alarm rings. There was someone in Van Dean's study earlier tonight."

"You're right there, Harley," Latham agreed. "Dear old Rex! Poor brave old chap. It was——"

He ceased speaking and stared wildly at Harley. From the library below had come a piercing shriek. There came a second, a third! Latham dashed open the study door and he and Harley raced down into the library.

Phil Westbury was there alone. She was crouching on the floor over by the bookcases, her hands raised to her face, her wide open eyes staring wildly in the direction of the French windows, from which she had evidently retreated to the further limit of the room.

Latham ran across to her and raised her tenderly.

"My dear!" he said. "Whatever is the matter?"

"Oh!" She looked up at him, her eyes wide with fear, her face blanched. "The monk!"

"What do you mean, Miss Westbury?" asked Harley.

"He crossed!" she said, as Latham led her to an armchair. "There! Outside the window!"

Harley turned and stared at the French windows. The storm had retreated temporarily and the moonlight shone outside, as was evident through the thin material of the curtain. The shadow of anyone crossing the terrace fairly near to the house would certainly have been visible.

"It was a horrible, crouching figure!" the girl went on, her voice shaking hysterically. "With a great hood drawn over its head! Oh, Harry!" She clutched at Latham. "Take me back again! I am frightened of this house!"

"Miss Westbury," said Harley soothingly, "don't unduly alarm yourself. You have not seen a ghost. I cannot explain at the moment, but I shall do so in good time. Be brave. You have nothing to fear."

From somewhere in the distance came a low rumble of thunder. Faintly, too, the notes of a fox trot, played by the gramophone in the drawing room, reached them. Harley understood why Phil Westbury's screams had failed to attract the notice of the others.

"Oh," said the girl, who was fighting for composure, "was that thunder, again?"

"Yes," answered Harley. "They're getting it on the coast, now."

Latham was holding the girl's hand and she looked up, smiling bravely.

"You must think me a dreadful coward, Mr. Harley."

"On the contrary, I love your courage," he assured her; "many women would have been prostrated."

"But," she pleaded, "it was not anything supernatural I saw? Please tell me it was not."

"It was not, Miss Westbury," Harley replied. "You may take my word for it."

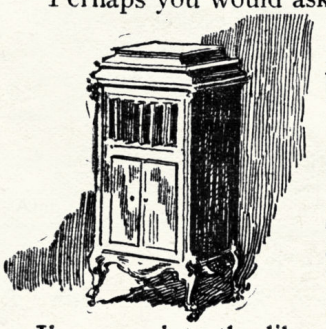
She stood up, smiling more composedly.

"Then, I think I'll go and talk to Joyce a while," she said.

"Are you sure," asked Latham anxiously, "that you're all right?"

"Quite sure," replied the girl.

"Perhaps you would ask your brother to join us here, Miss Westbury," said Harley, opening the door.



Loudly, now, from the gramophone in the drawing room came the tones of a dance piece.

Jim came into the library.

"Cheerio!" he greeted them. "Want me to do something?"

"Yes," snapped Harley, "shut the door."

Jim scowled gloomily, but returned and closed the door, whereupon the sound of dance music became almost imperceptible.

"Westbury," said Harley.

"Yes?"

"Have you been sitting in that chair?"

He pointed to a deep rest chair, upon the rug before the high, old-fashioned fireplace.

"No," Westbury answered.

"You, Latham?"

"No."

"Anybody else, tonight, that you can remember?"

"Not that I can remember," returned Latham slowly, staring in a very puzzled fashion at Harley.

"Quite so," murmured the latter. "Would you mind standing just there, Westbury?" He indicated a spot to the left of the study staircase. "And you, Latham, just there?"

Both men looked surprised, but recognizing that there was method in his madness, obeyed.

"Thanks," he murmured. "Now, from where you are, can you see anything of the image of Káli, Westbury?"

"What part of her image?"

"Any part."

"Not a bit; only the pedestal."

Harley moved farther away from the figure.

"Can you now, Latham?"

"No," was the reply.

Harley moved nearer again.

"Now?"

"Yes. I can see a little corner peeping out."

"Ah," said Harley, a note of satisfaction in his voice. "Might I trouble you to stand on the stair, Westbury, three steps up?"

Jim Westbury, hands deep in pockets, moved up the study stairs. "Is this a guessing story, or something?" he inquired.

But Harley ignored him and said, "Latham, please take my place, here."

Latham did so; and Harley, crossing to the rest chair before the fireplace, seated himself in it.

"Can you see me from there, Westbury?" he demanded.

"Not an eyelash."

"You, Latham?"

"I can just see the top of your head."

"Good!" snapped Harley, standing up. He moved the chair about a yard to the right. "Now suppose we join Van Dean and the ladies."

Latham laughed shortly.

"By all means," he said. "Anything to amuse you, Harley!"

As Westbury opened the door, the music of a one step swept out to meet them, but as the three men went out and closed the door there was silence again in the library.

Mohammed Khán entered, removed a coffee cup from the top of a bookcase, emptied several ashtrays, and generally tidied the room. He was about to leave the library when the telephone bell rang. Mohammed Khán crossed and took up the instrument.

"Yes," he said, "it is. Will you please wait. I will bring him."

He put the receiver down and went out to the drawing room. A moment later Van Dean came in and took up the instrument. He listened in growing consternation to the message and was just replacing the receiver when Harley returned.

"Anything wrong, Van Dean?" Harley asked.

"Wrong? Wrong?" echoed Van Dean distractedly. "Harley, your suspicions were all too true!"

"Tell me," said Harley.

"My old friend, Dr. Huang H'Si, of the Chinese Legation, has just phoned me."

"Well?"

Van Dean looked about him suspiciously.

"The Mandarin K is known to be in England!" he whispered.

"Hm," muttered Harley. "That's no news. He's here in Norfolk! What steps are they taking?"

"They have informed the Foreign Office."

"When?"

"Tonight."

"And then?"

"Dr. Huang H'Si," replied Van Dean, "thought it wise to advise me of the fact that——" He hesitated, all the old symptoms of high nervous tension reappearing in his sensitive face.

"Yes?" prompted Harley.

"The Mandarin K disappeared from London yesterday!"

"Quite so!" murmured the other grimly. And his glance was drawn almost magnetically to the big rest chair in front of the fireplace.

"Harley," said Van Dean hoarsely, "I try to keep a grip on my nerves, but I *know* the S. Group!" He rested his hand upon his bent back. *"This—"* and he clutched his breast over his heart—"and *these—"* touching the powerful spectacles which he wore— "are legacies of those

fiends! Harley, of all of them—all of them I know by name—I would rather meet anyone, than the Mandarin K!"

Paul Harley grasped his arm.

"I understand, man," he answered. "I understand. But we are at least forewarned. It will be our fault if we are taken by surprise. Quick, before we are interrupted: what do you know of the personal appearance of the Mandarin K? Did you ever see him?"

"Once, Harley," was the reply. "But he wore the cowl and robe of a *lama*. It was an effectual disguise."

Paul Harley started.

"Good God!" he muttered. "And you never saw him without the robe and the cowl of a priest of Lamaism?"

"Never. But I know many things about him. He is a linguist who speaks nearly every civilized language."

"I know all this," interrupted Harley. "Have I followed him half-around the world without learning to respect his acquirements? He is an excellent chemist. He nearly succeeded in poisoning me in Tientsin, and again in Hong Kong. He is a master of disguise. He sat beside me unsuspected in the Cairo Turf Club and tried to knife me when I came out!"

"What! He sat beside you? Then you——"

"He certainly overheard all my conversation, of this I am sure." He paused. Again, the telephone bell had rung. "Who can this be?" he muttered.

"I can't imagine," returned Van Dean. "I'll go." He took up the receiver. "Yes," he said. "Yes, the line was engaged. Good! Hold on. For you, Harley. Innes, your secretary, speaking from Chancery Lane."

Harley took up the instrument.

"Is that you, Innes?" he asked. "Yes, yes! Ah, good! At last! What? Are you sure?"

Throughout the ensuing moments that he stood at the telephone Burton van Dean watched him in almost agonized suspense; for he was a man come near to the end of his resources, a man who had suffered much and bravely. Even had he not been so intent upon the telephone conversation, it is doubtful if he would have detected the fact that the door of the study had been slightly opened, as though someone within listened to the speaker at the telephone in the library.

"Good, Innes!" Harley was saying. "Is that all? Yes, I quite understand and I shall act accordingly. I learned another important fact, tonight, but I cannot possibly tell it to you over the telephone. Stand by until three o'clock, Innes. I may want you to take certain action. Right. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver and turned to the anxious man who had been hanging upon his words. The study door was closed again, silently.

"Let us go up to your study, Van Dean," said Harley, resting his hand upon the other's shoulder.

The two passed up the stairs to the study. On the landing Harley halted for a moment.

"Van Dean," he said, "you and I are standing between what we call civilization and a horror five times blacker than the Great War. It's a very tiny shield, Van Dean, just two lives, to protect all the white races!"

"God knows it is!" muttered Van Dean.

"Brace up, Van Dean," said Harley, gripping him hard. "Tonight the shield is going to be tested."

He opened the study door and turned up the light. They entered together. The room was empty.

Chapter VIII

Hidden Ears and Strange Sounds

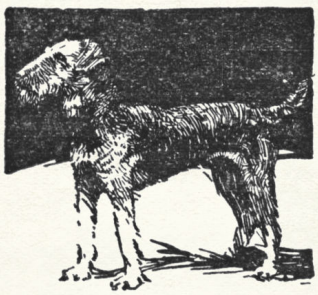
A FEW moments later, Latham came into the library. To all appearances, it was empty, yet at the moment of entrance he stood stock still, looking around him and wondering why he could see no one. For some unaccountable reason he had expected to find another in the room. Now, recognizing its emptiness, he wondered whom he had expected to find there and why he should experience surprise at finding no one.

He was conscious of growing uneasiness. The death of his dog had hit him harder than he had allowed to appear. It had served, too, to bring home to him the reality of the danger which overhung

Burton van Dean. He wondered what secret the American possessed which could account for the extraordinary happenings disturbing the Abbey; and he wondered if Harley knew the explanation.

Following his brief pause he crossed to the table, took a cigarette from a box and lighted it. He went over to the fireplace, seating himself upon the arm of the big rest chair and staring down at the empty hearth. Suddenly the study door opened and Paul Harley came down, smoking a pipe.

"Hullo, old man!" he called on seeing Latham. "Thinking?"



"Yes," was the reply.

"What about?"

"Old Rex. I loved that hairy ruffian."

Harley clapped him on the shoulder and leaned on the mantel, facing him.

"The fortunes of war, Latham," he said. "I don't think the enemy got off quite scot free."

Latham looked up interestedly, noting the grim expression on the face of the speaker.

"What do you mean?"

"All in good time, Latham. Listen!" Harley looked about him suspiciously. He, too, was vaguely conscious of being watched, whenever he found himself apparently alone in the library. "For some reason," he went on, "I have found myself thinking, today, more than once of the late Dr. Ulric Ernst."

"You have mentioned this before," said Latham, "but the connection escapes me. Why Ernst?"

"Because," replied Harley, "I am moderately certain that Ernst was the first victim of the Voice of Káli! Do you recall the circumstances of his death?"

Latham paused a moment before answering. He was listening to a distant rumbling sound; the storm was moving again in the direction of the Abbey.

"Frankly, I'm afraid I don't," he confessed. "I was in India at the time. He died in Cairo, if I remember rightly?"

Harley nodded.

"Yes. His health failed. He settled in Egypt and was on the point of giving to the world a new and deadly weapon of war, more deadly even than the Ernst Torpedo. He died suddenly."

"Yes," mused Latham. "Ernst's Trajector; the papers were full of it. We were told it was going to supplant artillery and revolutionize warfare."

Silence fell for a moment.

"He died, before giving any demonstration," said Harley.

Latham knocked the ash from his cigarette, slowly nodding his head.

"His secret died with him," he murmured. "Perhaps this is all for the best."

Harley took his pipe from between his teeth and stared down hard at the speaker.

"If he died of a Listening Death," he said, speaking deliberately, "and I am more than half-convinced that he did, then the S. Group murdered him! This being so, *did* his secret die with him?"

"Eh!" cried Latham. "You don't mean——"

"Can you imagine a war in which the enemy is armed with such a weapon?" interrupted Harley.

"The Ernst Trajector?"

"Certainly! If half we heard was true, this deadly thing makes trench warfare obsolete. It can strike through the earth! It can strike *through* the earth! It can strike through armor plating of battleships. It can strike through water and reach the hidden submarine!"

"You mean to suggest——?"

Harley lowered his voice and his expression grew even more stern.

"I mean to suggest," he said, an icy note in his voice, his expression more stern, "that the S. Group may today be in possession of the secret of Ernst's Trajector!"

"Then God help us all!" muttered Latham.

"If I fail, tonight, God help us all, indeed!"

"Tonight?"

"Tonight!" Harley repeated grimly. "You are Indian Army, old man, and I can tell you nothing about the unrest in the East that you don't know already. India is not to blame. India as we know it is loyal to the core. China is our friend. Japan showed her policy in the last war. Coming nearer home, Egypt, the older Egypt of Kitchener, is all for us. Yet there——"

He stopped, looking about him again in that oddly suspicious fashion.

"*I* know, Harley," Latham said softly.

"Do you? Ordinary European fanatics can be handled, but the horrible fanatics of mystical Asia——"

"The S. Group!" said Latham, almost in a whisper. "With its roots penetrating into all Asia's remotest confines!"

"You know?"

Latham nodded his head.

"Every man whose job of work takes him east of Suez, knows."

Paul Harley relighted his pipe.

"The Foreign Office, here, gave me the task of tracing the men behind the movement," he went on. "Perhaps in the midst of your regimental duties you don't just realize what this organization means."

"I can hazard a guess!" Latham declared.

Harley touched the match end into the grate.

"It means the probable end of every white civilization!" he snapped. "First, that of our own country. But the turn of the others will come soon—a fight for life which may end one way or the other."

He stopped, staring hard at a framed photograph set in a recess of the overmantel. He was not studying the photograph, however, but in it he could see reflected a tall lacquer cabinet which stood near the foot of the study stair. Suddenly he went on again.

"The S. Group, which dares to plan the horrible things it does plan, revolves around one man."

"You know him?" asked Latham with suppressed excitement.

"He is known as the Mandarin K. Forget his nationality; he is an international genius. If I could trap that one man, that great man, I might retire from the service knowing that I had earned at least a few years of peace for this poor old scarred world."

Again he stared intently at the photograph, unnoticed by Latham.

"You speak of tonight?" said Latham.

Harley, his glance fixed on the reflection of the cabinet by the foot of the stair, replied slowly.

"When I had almost despaired of a bag, a decoy duck took the water. Burton van Dean, America's greatest living Orientalist, blundered right into the headquarters of the S. Group."

"It's a miracle that he escaped with his life!" exclaimed Latham.

"A miracle indeed," Harley agreed. "But here he is, in Norfolk; and here am I."

"Then the Mandarin K——"

Harley glanced aside from the framed photograph for a moment, staring hard at Latham. "The Mandarin K has followed him!" Suddenly he raised his voice. "Tonight," he added, "I am going to perform an experiment."

"What are you going to do?"

"You notice the shape of the chair upon the arm of which you are sitting at the present moment."

Latham glanced down at the deep rest chair in puzzled fashion.

"Yes," he replied; "it seems a very comfortable piece of furniture."

"I'm not thinking of its comfort," snapped Harley. He looked about him with an air of suspicion which seemed almost exaggerated. "But it is going to be my base of operations, tonight! Placed as it is now, anyone seated in it will be invisible from practically every other point of the library, only excepting the door leading into the conservatory, and the hearth rug, of course, where I am standing now."

"But what leads you to suppose that anything will happen tonight?" asked Latham.

"I am *sure* something will happen tonight!" snapped Harley in reply, his glance again seeking the framed photograph. "Come up to the study with me for a moment and I will explain my plan in greater detail."

There was something unnatural in Harley's method of speech, which Latham had not failed to notice; and with a very puzzled expression upon his face he left the library with the investigator. Side by side they mounted the stairs to the study. When they had entered, Paul Harley closed the door carefully.

"Did you notice the position of that armchair, Latham?" he jerked abruptly. "The one you were sitting on?"

"Not particularly. Why?"

"Do you remember that I moved it earlier in the evening?"

"I remember that distinctly. Though what for, neither Westbury nor I could imagine."

"At any rate, you remember that I moved it. Well, someone has replaced it in its original position. Unless you moved it again. Did you?"

"No," said Latham blankly. "What's the significance?"

"Possibly none," was the reply; "but

possibly a very deep one. Did you observe that I moved it once more before we left the library?"

"I am afraid I didn't," confessed Latham, laughing shortly. "I should never make a detective, Harley. One thing, however, I did notice."

"What was that?" asked the other eagerly.

"The way in which you raised your voice during the latter part of our conversation."

Harley nodded.

"I had a definite reason for doing so," he said. "You may have observed a very handsome old lacquer cabinet or cupboard that stands just at the foot of the stairs, outside." He had lowered his voice, now, to a mere whisper. Latham, watching him intently, merely nodded in reply. "Well, someone was hiding in that cabinet, listening to every word I said!"

There followed a short silence. Then:

"Why in heaven's name didn't you trap him?" cried Latham.

Paul Harley raised his hand in protest.

"Softly, softly. If I had done that, what should I have learned? Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the eavesdropper had proved to be Wu Chang——"

"Do you suspect Wu Chang?"

"I have not said so," Harley answered. "I am merely endeavoring to illustrate my point. Assuming that the eavesdropper had been, shall we say, Parker, the gardener, would his presence in the cabinet have constituted definite evidence that he was a member of the S. Group? I can only see, as the result of making such a discovery, the dismissal of the culprit, and nothing gained."

"But suppose," suggested Latham slowly, "that the eavesdropper had proved to be *not* a servant."

"Not a servant?" echoed Harley. "Mrs. Moody, for instance?"

Latham laughed, but there was very little merriment in his laugh.

"What's worrying me," he declared, "is the fact that there's some cold-blooded Eastern murderer concealed about the place. Remember, Harley, that there are women in the house. By the way, I am still unable to fathom your reasons for allowing the hidden enemy to overhear your plans for this evening."

"Simple enough," was the reply. "I *wanted* him, or her, to overhear them!"

"Good heavens, Harley! I can't understand."

"Listen!" Harley dropped into an armchair facing the other. "I have two tasks; or rather, my task has two aspects. Let me explain what I mean. Some considerable time ago, Burton van Dean, having leased this house, applied to the local police for protection. I was not in England, at the time, and the local authorities failed to recognize the importance of the case. Van Dean, who had installed all sorts of burglar alarms and other devices, stated that, in spite of these, someone had gained access on more than one occasion to the Abbey and had even gone so far as to ransack his private papers. A special constable was put on duty, but apparently this mysterious interference continued in spite of him. Thereupon Van Dean went over the heads of the police and wrote to Scotland Yard.

"Wessex of the Special Branch, a very promising officer, jumped to the truth of the matter. He came down and interviewed Van Dean, recognized that he had to deal with the S. Group, and had himself put personally in charge of the case. Sergeant Denby came down immediately and, cleverly working from a neighboring village, seems, poor fellow, to have penetrated fairly deeply into the mystery."

"But!" exclaimed Latham, "what was Wessex doing?"

"Wessex was also on the spot," said Harley with a smile; "but he had to deal with extraordinarily clever people and, at the time of my return to England, he had made comparatively little progress."

"Do you think they knew of his presence?"

"I don't," replied Harley, "but of this, of course, I cannot be sure. He was handicapped to a certain extent, as you will realize when you know the full facts. Accordingly, last Tuesday night——"

"That was the night the man died in the shrubbery!" interjected Latham excitedly.

Harley nodded.

"On that night, Wessex made arrangements for Denby to be admitted to the house."

"Admitted to the house!" echoed Latham. "How could he do that? Did he obtain Van Dean's consent?"

"Not at all!" Harley assured him. "Van Dean was unaware of the care which was being taken of him. Oh, believe me, Latham, Scotland Yard is not effete, yet! Detective Sergeant Denby was admitted,

then, to this very room, last Tuesday night."

"But he was found in the shrubbery?"

"I know!" snapped Harley. "But he didn't *die* in the shrubbery. He died down there in the library. I am practically certain of it! All this is theory, however, I admit, but I am hoping to put it to the test, tonight. The evidence of Wessex from this point onward is of no value, for the reason that, having arranged for Denby to come into the house, he was unable to remain, himself. The next piece of evidence, therefore, comes from Mrs. Moody, whose room is directly above the library. She was awakened by a strange sound."

"What kind of sound?"

"The very point that we have been unable to establish," was the reply. "In brief, Mrs. Moody is quite unable to describe this sound; she can only say that it was utterly unlike any sound that she had ever heard in her life before!"

"I don't follow. What does she mean?"

Harley shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"I can only suppose," he said, "that she had heard the Voice of Káli!"

"The Voice of Káli? But what *is* the Voice of Káli? Surely no more than a figure of speech?"

"I don't think so," snapped Harley. "I think that it is a sound, but probably one that is difficult to describe. There is simply not another scrap of evidence to show what happened here on the night that Denby met his death. He was found by Parker in the early morning, lying in the shrubbery below the terrace."

"Yes," muttered Latham, "with that awful expression of listening upon his face. Was there any sign of a struggle, any footprints?"

"There could be no footprints!" cried Harley irritably; "the ground was baked hard by weeks of tropical heat."

"Was there any sign of a struggle?"

"No, nothing was disturbed, either in this room or the library."

"Yet you think his death took place in the library?"

"I am practically certain of it."

"Then how did he get into the shrubbery?"

"His body was dragged out through the French windows and dropped there."

"How can you possibly know that?"

"By a close examination, secretly conducted, on the library carpet, the steps and the terrace, I obtained evidence, slender certainly, but evidence that went to confirm this theory. You see, the death of Denby brought *me* upon the scene; and the first step was to hush up the identity of the murdered man. Perhaps you will begin to realize the two aspects of the case. First, I have to apprehend the agent of the S. Group, to whom bolts, bars and barbed wire offer no obstacle; secondly I have to solve the mystery of the Listening Death. It is some mysterious agency employed by these people to remove their enemies. I *must* know what it is!"

Latham shuddered involuntarily.

"Brrr!" he said. "Got the shivers! What does that mean? Someone walking over my grave, isn't it?"

"Yes," replied Harley absently; "or an enemy thinking about you."

"Did you really mean what you said to Phil a while ago," continued Latham, "that the figure of the cowled man was not an image of her imagination?"

"I did," said Harley. "I have learned from Van Dean that the Mandarin K used the monkish robe and hood of a *lama*, as a means of disguising himself. Probably other members of the group do likewise."

He became silent again, puffing reflectively at his pipe, and Latham watched him a while in silence.

"Harley," Latham said suddenly, "I recognize, of course, that in the circumstances, no one must leave the Abbey, tonight; but naturally I am anxious for the safety of Phil. We are dealing with people who know everybody's movements. You think, don't you, that the telegram that came to the Warren, tonight, was a forgery?"

"I do," replied Harley promptly. "They thought the presence of visitors here might interfere with their plans."

"Also," continued Latham, watching him closely, "you have a theory respecting the identity of this agent of the S. Group who gains access to the Abbey in spite of all Van Dean's devices."

"Why do you suggest this?" asked Harley.

"Suggest it!" cried the other. "Because I think it is true. And if you are hesitating to apprehend this awful criminal in our midst because you want to solve the mystery of the Listening Death, I feel called upon to remark that you are exposing women to a quite unnecessary risk!"

Harley stood up and glared down grimly at the speaker.

"Latham!" he snapped, "we have known one another for a long time. I have to deal with events as I find them. I could

not foresee the position that would arise tonight. But as I find it, so I must deal with it. This is not merely a question of apprehending an isolated criminal. If it were, I should not hesitate for a moment. You speak of exposing women to danger? Surely you realize that if I fail in my campaign against this dreadful agency, it may mean the sacrifice, not of two or three, but of millions of women, to the rapacity of a

great, ruthless, fanatical, colored tide, now stemmed and held back, but only awaiting *something*, something which I can dimly imagine, to be loosed upon the white races. Do you understand?"

Latham stood up and faced the speaker.

"Forgive me. I understand, Harley," he said quietly. "I spoke hastily, perhaps selfishly. You are right, of course. But as to the nature of your real plan, I haven't the faintest glimmering."

"My plan," replied Harley, "is that which I allowed the eavesdropper in the cabinet to overhear. I am going to get everyone to bed and then return alone to the library, where I shall wait for the Voice of Káli!"

CHAPTER IX

JOYCE COMES IN

IN THE drawing room, some attempt had been made to disperse the gloom with music and dancing; but there was a hollowness in the merriment. That uncanny sense of danger which seemed to pervade the atmosphere round and about Burton van Dean had culminated in the mysterious death of the man in the Abbey shrubbery. The horror of it all and the ordeal of an unofficial inquiry had shaken everybody's nerves. Now, tonight, there was the story of the hooded man who had passed across the terrace in the moonlight.

"You know, dear," Mrs. Moody said to Phil Westbury, "much as I like Mr. Van Dean, I really don't think I shall be able to stand it much longer. I am beginning to believe that Jim is right when he says that Mr. Van Dean is haunted. I'm certain I sha'n't sleep a wink, tonight."

"I wish we were back at the Warren," said the girl. "I can't help wondering and wondering about that strange telegram."

"Don't worry about it, dear," urged Mrs. Moody; "it may have come from the solicitor, after all."

"It came from London. But Harry—that is, Captain Latham—is certain it was part of some plot."

Mrs. Moody laid down her knitting and took the girl's hands in her own.

"Phil, dear," she said coaxingly, "I have been wondering for a long time. Won't you tell me? Is it Captain Latham you care for?"

Phil Westbury blushed rosily; then the blush faded, leaving her very pale. She nodded her head and lowered her eyes in sudden confusion.

"Mother would never hear of it," she whispered. "What are we going to do?"

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" said Mrs. Moody, patting her hand encouragingly. "Why didn't you tell me before? Your mother would have listened to *me*. And is it all settled between you and Captain Latham?"

Again the girl nodded her head.

"Don't worry, dear," continued the old lady in her sweet, sympathetic way. "It will come all right."

"But his leave expires on Thursday," explained Phil almost tearfully. "We were going to tell mother, tonight."

"Never mind, dear. Probably it will all turn out for the best."

And such was the influence of her restful personality that for a while Phil was soothed. She looked across at Joyce Gayford; but Joyce, ignoring the conversation of Jim, was watching the drawing room door for the return of Harley and Latham.

At that moment it opened and Latham came in alone. Joyce immediately stood up and crossed to him.

"Captain Latham," she said, "I know you don't want to alarm mother and Phil, but you needn't worry about *me*. You are Mr. Harley's friend and you probably know the facts. What is the meaning of all this bogey business? Did Phil really see someone cross the terrace a while ago?"

Latham hesitated, glancing around the room and then back to the resolute face of the girl.

"Yes," he finally admitted. "Someone did cross the terrace."

"Dressed like a monk?"

"It sounds ridiculous, I know," replied Latham, "but yes, I believe he was dressed in that way."

Jim Westbury had started the gramophone again, and Joyce had to raise her voice above the music of a fox trot.

"I wanted to know," she explained, "be-

cause, about a week ago, I thought I saw a cowled man in the library one night."

"What!" exclaimed Latham. "And did you mention it to no one?"

"No," answered the girl composedly; "I thought I was dreaming. The place is supposed to be haunted by a monk, you know. But I have lived here for a good many years and have never seen the apparition."

"You have great courage, Miss Gayford," said Latham.

"No," she replied. "Just common sense. But now I realize that I really did see someone. Tell me—" she glanced around to be sure that she was not overheard—"who is it?"

"I don't know," answered Latham. "Keep it from the others, but, there's a stranger in the house."

She studied him for a moment with her clear eyes.

"Does Mr. Harley know?" she challenged.

"Yes," said Captain Latham, "I believe he does."

"Then why doesn't he act?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you. He is a clever man, who thoroughly understands his business. We must allow him to know best, I suppose."

He paused as Harley entered with Van Dean. Joyce, giving a quick glance at Latham, accepted a silent invitation from Jim Westbury to dance.

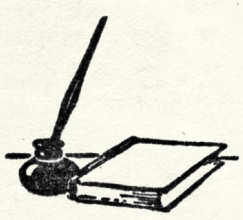
"Hullo," said Latham, "I wondered what had become of you."

"He came and knocked on my bedroom door, Latham," explained Van Dean, "and gave me the fright of my life."

"Sorry," said Harley, clapping his hand on Van Dean's shoulder; "but perhaps it was as well. You're growing morbid, man. Try to forget it, if only for an hour."

"What's the trouble?" asked Latham, glancing back toward the ladies.

"Van Dean is preparing a condensed statement," replied Harley, "a statement of certain matters known only to himself; facts he discovered in Tibet."



"But," Latham asked, "the book——"

"I'm a tired man," said Van Dean, "and tonight I feel that my race is run. It may be my book will never be completed. But there are things not yet put on paper which must be made known to our own peoples, even if I die tonight."

"Brace up, man!" snapped Harley brusquely. "You're not going to die tonight."

"Harley," was the reply, "I wish I had your spirit; but what I had, they broke. No, no! What I've begun I'll finish. Another two or three pages, that's all. And then, anyway, I shall have done my bit. It'll be in my safe, addressed to you."

He turned to go.

"Make it as short as possible," said Harley significantly.

Van Dean nodded and went out.

Latham watched him to the door.

"It sounds a silly question," he said, "but do you think Van Dean is safe alone?"

"No," snapped Harley, "I don't. That's why I banged on his door a while ago. Hang it all! I'll smoke a pipe with him while he writes."

He turned toward the door, when Joyce, breaking away from Jim, ran toward him.

"What! Are you deserting us, too, Mr. Harley!" she cried. "We were just going to ask you to dance."

"Oh!" said Harley, pausing. "Might I suggest, without upsetting the party, that you have the gramophone taken into the library and continue the ball there?"

"But, whatever——" began Joyce. And then, reading urgency in the gray eyes which were watching her, "Oh, of course, yes. I suppose really there is more room in the library."

"Infinitely more suitable, I think," said Harley. "Mr. Van Dean is finishing a piece of writing, and I am going to ask him to complete it in his study."

With his intuitive grasp of character, Paul Harley had recognized that Joyce Gayford was to be relied upon.

"May I leave these arrangements to you, Miss Gayford?" he concluded.

"Certainly," she said. "I quite agree with you."

He nodded to Latham and went out.

"Come on, Mumsie," cried Joyce, running across the room and ringing the bell. "We're all going into the library. We're going to take the gramophone in there."

"But," protested Mrs. Moody, "if Mr. Van Dean is working, and he always seems to be working, surely the noise will disturb him?"

A rumbling of thunder sounded rather nearer than before.

"At least," said Joyce, "it will be more cheerful than the storm."

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Moody, "I quite agree."

Mohammed Khán came in.

"Oh, Mohammed," said Joyce, "will you take the gramophone into the library?"

Mohammed Khán bowed and, under the supervision of Jim Westbury, conveyed the instrument and a number of selected records from the drawing room into the library. Mrs. Moody gathered up her work basket and followed; but Phil Westbury and Latham lingered behind.

"I suppose the idea of returning tonight, Harry," said the girl, "is perfectly hopeless?"

"Perfectly," he replied, putting his arm around her shoulders. "But don't worry; there's no danger at the Warren. There are queer things going on, Phil, and I'm sorry you are here. But——"

She looked up at him. "I don't mind, as you are here as well."

The gramophone was duly installed in the library, to Jim Westbury's satisfaction; and presently Latham and Phil joined the party. There were ominous rumbles of thunder, now, and the electrical disturbance of the atmosphere manifested itself curiously in the form of general nervousness. No one is wholly immune from the curious influence of a thunder storm, and it seemed a jest of fate that this party, already wrought upon by a series of uncanny events, should be further tried by a natural phenomenon at no time pleasant.

Mohammed Khán had retired, and Jim, in his capacity of orchestra leader, was about to start the gramophone when Harley came in with Van Dean and crossed in the direction of the study stairs. Joyce looked up.

"Is there anything I can do, Mr. Van Dean?" she asked.

"Thanks, no," replied Van Dean. "I am just making a few notes. Your work, Miss Gayford—" and he forced a smile—"will begin tomorrow."

With which he nodded and went up the stairs to the study. Everyone noticed his extreme nervousness. Paul Harley allowed Van Dean to precede him; then, as he passed Latham, he whispered, "See that this room is *never empty*, until I return. And, by the way, look at the rest chair."

He went upstairs and disappeared into the study. The gramophone, started by Jim, proclaimed a popular melody. But Latham twisted his head sharply and looked in the direction of the fireplace. The big rest chair was once more in its usual position.

CHAPTER X

THE INTRUDER

JIM WESTBURY and Joyce Gayford began to dance, as if impelled by some higher power. The shadow which overlay the Abbey temporarily was forgotten. For these two were dance fiends. Latham and Phil Westbury did not respond immediately, whereupon Jim bumped genially into Latham.

"Show a leg!" he cried.

He was dancing badly, as his partner had commented in her most acid fashion.

"What's wrong with you, Jim?" asked Latham.

"My shoe's come undone!" he called back.

"You seem to have engine trouble!" murmured Latham.

At that, Jim kicked his shoe off entirely, and, "That's that!" he exclaimed. And, ignoring his partner's frigid stare, he continued to dance.

Phil and Latham, standing up, were about to fall to the lure of the band record when Harley came out from the study, descended the stair and, crossing to the gramophone, raised the needle.

There came sudden silence. In the far distance sounded a rumbling of thunder. Then, short and sharp, the crack of a pistol shot.

"My God!" cried Latham. "What's that?"

Phil clung to him and Mrs. Moody clutched at Joyce, who had halted beside her chair.

"Harry," said Phil, in a hushed voice, "it was in the house!"

The agitated face of Burton van Dean now appeared at the study door. There was a moment of tense silence, then, a sound of hurrying footsteps, and into the library burst Wu Chang, a revolver in his hand!

In a trice Harley had confronted the Chinaman. There came a rapid interchange of questions and answers in Chi-

nese, unintelligible to everyone in the library except Van Dean.

"Let no one leave the room," said Harley sternly. And followed by Wu Chang, he ran out.

"Oh, whatever has happened!" moaned Phil. "I'm frightened!"

"Wherever have they gone?" said Joyce, some of her self-possession deserting her.

"I'm going to see!" exclaimed Jim. "It's all very well, but——"

"No, no, don't go, Jim!" Mrs. Moody implored.

"No!" said his sister, clutching his arm. "I'm afraid. Stay here with us."

"But I mean to see," persisted Westbury.

So far had he proceeded when Paul Harley reentered the library and closed the door behind him.

"I should like to reassure everybody, especially the ladies," he began, but his face was very stern. "You all heard the sound of a shot. It was fired by Wu Chang. I won't insult anyone's intelligence," he continued, "by endeavoring to hide the facts. Someone passed the window of Wu Chang's room. Wu Chang, whom I'm pleased to say I trust absolutely, challenged him; and being aware, as everyone in the house is aware, that there is a stranger amongst us, he, failing to get any reply, fired through the window."

"I didn't know," broke in the hoarse voice of Van Dean, "that Wu Chang had a revolver."

"Possibly not," returned Harley grimly. "But in the circumstances, I cannot blame him. The point is, that he missed his man."

"Someone in the grounds!" cried Jim Westbury. "I vote we arm ourselves and go out and hunt him!"

"On the contrary," replied Harley, quietly, "I am in charge here, Westbury. We four men are going to investigate this matter, thoroughly once and for all."

"Oh, Mr. Harley!" Joyce interrupted. "Don't say you want us to go to our rooms, because——"

"Nevertheless," Harley answered, "through no fault of your own, you *are* going to be sent to bed!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Phil. "Stay with me, Joyce! I simply refuse to be left alone, tonight!"

She looked despairingly at Latham.

"You will both stay with me, girls!" announced Mrs. Moody with an air of finality.

Latham glanced reassuringly at Phil Westbury and, although she had been about to speak again, she remained silent.

"With you, Mrs. Moody," said Harley, "I know they will be quite safe."

Van Dean, descending the stairs with the step of a weary man, now spoke.

"Miss Westbury," he said, "I haven't words to say how sorry I am for this."

"It's not your fault, Mr. Van Dean," the girl replied. "Please don't worry about it."

"But," cried Joyce, "can't we be of some use? It's awful to be locked up with things happening!"

"It's the passive part, Miss Gayford," Harley agreed, "and the harder, I admit; but you can help best by doing just as I ask."

"Oh, Lor'!" exclaimed Jim Westbury. "Well, well. By-by, Joyce! Good night, Aunt. Don't worry about mother, Phil. We've both had nights out before. That is, I mean to say——"

"Good night, Jim," interrupted Joyce. "Auntie won't expect you in a storm like this. Cheerio everybody. If I hear a shindy, may I come down?"

"On no account," snapped Harley.

As the ladies passed out of the library, Latham crossed and took Phil's hand.

"Good night," he said. "Don't be afraid. Just do as you're told." As the door closed, "Harley!" he said, lowering his voice, "is the Chinaman straight?"

"Yes!" replied Harley. "It's the other we have to count with—the one who was fired at."

"In heaven's name, how did he get into the grounds of the Abbey?" Latham asked blankly.

"So much for my defenses, so much for my barbed wire and my alarms!" groaned Van Dean.

"It isn't credible, Harley!" declared Latham. "This S. Group is admittedly clever, dangerously clever, but they're only men, after all! Are the alarms set?"

"I tested them quite recently," replied Harley.

"Then only a spirit could have entered these grounds, tonight, without setting the bells ringing!"

"Yet," retorted Harley dryly, "we have the evidence of Miss Westbury, and now that of Wu Chang, that there is a stranger amongst us. Let's face the facts." He began to fill his pipe. "A member of the most dangerous fanatical organization in the world, the S. Group, is here in Nor-

folk, here in the grounds of the Abbey—in this house."

"I'd give all I possess," muttered Latham, "to have the women out of the place."

"It's impossible," said Harley. "Also, this man's purpose is undivided. He is here to remove Van Dean, or myself, or both of us! We have the doubtful honor to stand between this present civilization and a great uprising of other races. Some superstitions have a basis of truth. Now, throughout the Far East, the anger of the S. Group is associated with the Indian goddess Káli. Am I right, Latham?"

"Absolutely," was the reply.

"The natives believe that the Listening Death is directed by the voice of Káli. Is that so, Van Dean?"

"It is," replied Van Dean in a low voice.

"Whatever produces the so-called Listening Death," went on Harley, "it is beyond doubt used by the S. Group. It was used recently here, as we know, Van Dean. I have explained to Latham about Denby."

"You haven't explained to me!" objected Jim Westbury.

"No; but we are counting on you, Westbury," Harley replied.

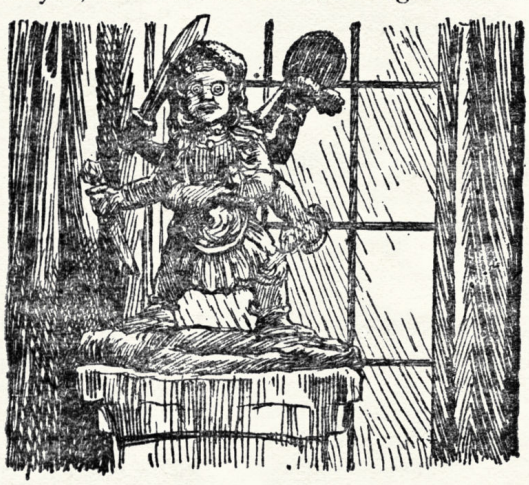
Burton van Dean dropped down upon a settee.

"I am past cool reflection," he confessed in a voice that shook pathetically. "Maybe that's understood and forgiven."

Paul Harley crossed and clapped him on the shoulder.

"We all understand," he assured him.

"A most dangerous fanatic," Van Dean continued, "a criminal genius—unique, maybe, in the whole world—is right here at



my heels. I know it, I feel it. What is your plan, Harley?"

"I'm following inspiration rather than plan," was the reply. "Without attaching too much importance to the presence of an image of Káli in this room, I am convinced that this library is the center, the focus, of the enemy's activities. By the way, Van Dean, you are sure that this figure *did* come from your agent in Rangoon?"

"Harley!" exclaimed Van Dean. "Whatever do you mean? It was accompanied by a letter."

"Handwritten?"

"Typed. But the signature——"

"Hm!" muttered Harley. "I should like a glimpse of it. But tomorrow will do. And now I am going to post my guards. Westbury, you are armed, I know. Your post is in the dining room."

"What!" exclaimed Jim.

"Off you go. No lights, no smoking. If you hear a shot, be in the library under the speed record. Otherwise, wait for the word." Harley grimly pointed to the door.

"Right-o!" said Jim, gloomily. "Count on me. But honestly, I can't cope with it."

"Are all the servants in their rooms, Van Dean?" asked Harley, as Jim went out.

"Yes," replied the other in a weak voice. "Mohammed Khán reported to me, you remember."

"And then retired?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, get along to your room—and lock your door!"

Van Dean stood up.

"A poor part," he said, "for *me!*"

"We all have our breaking point, Van Dean. You are perilously near yours. Remember! Don't open your door unless *I* come for you. Understand?"

Van Dean nodded wearily and walked out of the library. At the door he turned.

"May the gods be with you tonight, Harley," he said.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE LIBRARY

"WHAT now?" inquired Latham.

"Now," Harley replied, "my great experiment begins; and I have no time to lose in commencing. Therefore, Latham, will you be good enough to seat yourself in the rest chair before the fireplace."

"What?" said Latham, not comprehending.

"Just sit there for a moment, and do as I direct. That's all."

"Right," the other agreed, impressed by the urgency of Harley's manner.

He crossed to the chair, and sank down into its cushions.

"Now," continued Harley, "look around. You can see the image of Káli quite plainly, can you not?"

"Yes, quite plainly."

Harley grasped the heavy pedestal on which the strange figure rested and, moving it much nearer to the French windows, asked, "See it now?"

"Yes, I can still see it. But surely, Harley," he protested, "you have done all this before?"

"No," was the reply, "not this part!"

He moved the figure yet farther.

"Can you see it now?"

"No."

"What obstructs your view?"

"The lacquer cabinet, at the foot of the stairs."

"Good," said Harley. "Operation No. 1 completed. Now we will leave the library for a moment, first turning all the lights out."

"Right!" said Latham, smiling slightly. "This is all frightfully mysterious. But no doubt you know what you're about."

Accordingly the two men left the library, extinguishing the lights from the switch inside the door.

"The room which has been placed at your disposal for tonight," Harley inquired when they were in the corridor, "is right at the top of the house, is it not?"

"Yes, above Mrs. Moody's."

"Good. I will see you to your room."

With no further explanation to the puzzled Latham, Harley led the way upstairs and on the top landing halted, looking upward at a trap in the ceiling of the top corridor, which clearly gave access to the roof.

"Ah!" he muttered, whilst Latham watched him in silence. "There's probably a ladder somewhere for reaching that trap. I should have located it; it was careless of me."

"What about the cupboard at the end there?" suggested Latham.

Harley nodded, went along to the cupboard, opened the door, and sure enough, in addition to a quantity of spare linen, there was a short ladder.

"Excellent, Latham," he said, pulling it out. "We must not make too much noise. Now—" he placed the ladder against the wall under the trap—"the other two rooms on this corridor are at present unoccupied, I believe. Therefore, provided no one comes upstairs, we shall not be interrupted. You will mount guard during my absence. If anyone comes up—anyone, mind—it will be your job to invent some story to account for your presence and to induce the inquirer to return, without giving him, or her, an opportunity of seeing this ladder and the open trap. Do you understand?"

"Quite," said Latham, entering into the spirit of the thing. "Count upon me absolutely."

"Good!"

Harley nodded, mounted the ladder, and without very much difficulty, raised the wooden trap.

"Look out," he said softly, as he did so. "I'm afraid I can't avoid a shower bath, but there's no reason why you should not dodge it."

As he had anticipated, a stream of rain water fell upon the carpet as the trap was raised; but, not heeding this, Harley climbed through and disappeared onto the roof. Latham peered upward, but could see no stars, whereby he concluded that the night was black. Ominous rumblings sounded in the distance; from some quality in the atmosphere it was easy to predict that sooner or later, at some point not far from the Abbey, the electrical disturbance would culminate in a tremendous storm.

The object of Paul Harley's behavior, Latham was utterly unable to imagine. Neither his moving of the figure of Káli, nor his present excursion upon the roof, conveyed anything to Latham's mind. He could detect no association of ideas; but, recognizing that he did not know the root of the mystery, he wisely refrained from useless theorizing and, taking up his post at the head of the stairs, he patiently waited for Harley's return.

He had not long to wait. Harley was not gone more than two minutes. When he came back, however, and, lowering himself onto the top of the ladder, succeeded in replacing the trap and climbing down into the corridor, it was evident that the expedition had been successful. There was an almost fierce look in his gray eyes, but a grim smile upon his lips.

"Have you discovered something?" asked Latham.

"Yes."

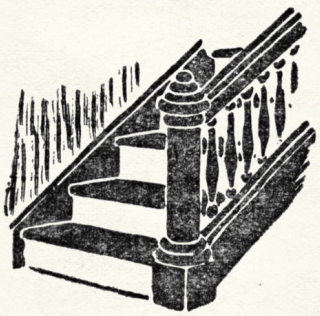
"What?"

"An utterly mysterious thing," was the reply. "Its exact significance I can't grasp at present, but it confirms my theory. I have discovered another part of the murder machinery which has been installed here—of the machine of which poor Denby was the first victim. Tonight, I hope to unmask it all."

He returned the ladder to the cupboard.

"Now," he said, looking in dismay at the grime upon his hands, "we can proceed."

"Where do you go?" asked Latham blankly.



"Downstairs again."

"Good heavens! Do you really intend to return to the library alone?"

"Of course. Otherwise my entire plan would fail."

"But, Harley," suggested Latham, laying his hand upon his arm, "let me come with you. You may need me."

Harley turned, looking into the other's face.

"I may need you, Latham, I admit," he replied, "but unfortunately I cannot avail myself of your offer, much as I should like to. It is imperative that I should be alone in the library, tonight. Otherwise, the murder machine will not be set in motion and all my efforts will have been wasted."

"I don't understand," muttered Latham, "but I am beginning to realize that some awful peril overhangs this house. It seems to center in the library; and the idea of your submitting yourself to it, alone, is not a nice one to contemplate."

"I have my reasons," replied Harley quietly; "but many thanks all the same. Now, will you be good enough to post yourself at the end of the corridor leading to Mrs. Moody's room, where the ladies are."

"Is that all my job of work?" asked Latham blankly.

"It is. I count upon you."

They stared hard at one another for a moment in the dimly lighted passage, then Latham shrugged his shoulders.

"Right-o, Harley," he said. "It's your pigeon, I admit. If I hear ructions, I shall be into the library like a shot."

"Good enough," smiled Harley.

And then, going down the stairs, he crossed the lobby below. Latham, listening intently, just detected the opening of the library door. Then absolute silence fell, only broken by the ticking of a grandfather's clock in the hall and, occasionally, by the remote, ominous rumbling without.

Paul Harley, on entering the library, did not turn up the lights, but, taking an electric torch from his pocket, flashed its ray rapidly about the room. He examined the lacquer cabinet and the recess behind it. All the shadowy corners he investigated. He opened the conservatory door and peered along the aisle between the palms; he reclosed the door, but did not lock it. Whereupon he moved softly from point to point in the big room, peering into the wall cases and examining the fastenings of the French windows.

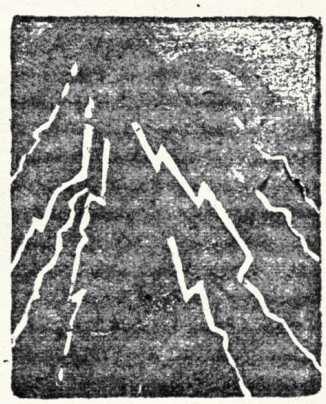
Then, creeping quietly to the door communicating with the lobby, he opened it once more and stood there, listening intently. He could hear no sound other than the ticking of the big clock; seemingly satisfied, he re-closed the door as quietly as he had opened it and stood in the library, endeavoring to become accustomed to the darkness.

He became aware of a sudden inward chill. The sixth sense was speaking to him urgently, telling him what his reason had already told him, that now, in the blackness of that room, he was about to come to close grips with the thing known and dreaded throughout the East as the Voice of Káli, the indescribable sound to which men listened—and died.

It was a situation which few could have handled with confidence; but courage is of many colors and the training of Paul Harley had been an unusual one.

Almost silently, he crossed the long room from end to end. The big, deep armchair creaked slightly as he seated himself in it. Then the light of the electric torch shone out from the depths of the chair, touching the framed photograph in the recess of the overmantel. A moment it glittered there. To the accompaniment of a faint click the ray disappeared. Utter darkness fell.

There were some moments of absolute silence. Then, heralded by several isolated drops, a perfect deluge of rain began to fall, bounding from the paved terrace upon the glass of the French windows, creating a sort of regular drumming sound, which continued unremittently for a minute or more, then ceased as suddenly as it had begun.



A vivid flash of lightning weirdly illuminated the room. For an instant, every detail of the library

was clearly visible, making the ensuing darkness seem greater than ever. Came a crash of thunder which vibrated through the house, which rolled and rolled, then died away in the distant echoes. Perfect silence reigned again, except for a faint and regular sound, so gentle as almost to be inaudible. It was a sound as of a person breathing somewhere in the library.

CHAPTER XII

THE SOUND

UP ON the first landing, Latham waited in a state of indescribable suspense. Seated on the top stair, he watched for he knew not what, listening intently, yet not knowing for what he listened. Somewhere, a chord of memory awakened, and he endeavored to identify it. Presently, he was rewarded.

In spirit he was carried back to a muddy trench, not many miles from Ypres. Fantastic figures, hideously masked, surrounded him. He seemed to see again a little weather vane quivering in the breeze and to be waiting, waiting, waiting for a gas attack from the German lines. This suspense, this waiting for an intangible danger, was similar, he thought. He wondered how Westbury fared in the dining room; and the nature of Harley's dispositions puzzled him more and more.

He could see no point whatever in posting a man in the dining room, although the tactical importance of his own position was evident enough. Then, quite inevitably, his thoughts flew to Phil Westbury. He walked quietly along the corridor to the door of Mrs. Moody's private sitting room.

As he had anticipated, the women were wakeful. Mrs. Moody's soothing voice he detected, and the incisive tones of Joyce. Then, just for a moment, he heard the voice he had come to hear. Words he could not distinguish, nor did he wish to; but he was satisfied and he returned again to the stairhead, thinking that of all the odd positions into which fate had ever thrust him, this one was the strangest of all.

Then came the rain, so suddenly as to startle him. He heard it beating on the roof above and rattling on the windows around. Vaguely it irritated him, since such noise would prevent him hearing—what? He smiled at his own mental bewilderment. What did he expect to hear? The Voice of Káli? Yes, he, a cultivated Englishman, who took pride in his common sense, found himself under the influence of a wave of Eastern superstition. For his reason rebelled against this thing which Harley seemed to believe, but which surely belonged to the mysterious darkness of the Orient, out of which it had come.

"What is it?" he had asked. "Magic? Hypnotism?" And Harley had answered, "Scientific murder!"

Stairs and corridor were wildly illuminated by a vivid flash of lightning. Followed a booming as of big guns over the house, and the rattle and echo of thunder rolling about and about the building. He knew that the women would be alarmed and he longed to go to Mrs. Moody's room to reassure then, but he conquered the impulse and remained where he was.

The final reverberation died away. And then, in upon the new silence, intruded a sound. At the moment that he first detected it, for it began very softly, Latham found himself thinking of Mrs. Moody's evidence in regard to the night of Denby's death. It was "unlike any sound she had ever heard in her life."

Now he understood her inability to describe it, for this sound, if sound it could be called, which assailed him out of the silence, was undoubtedly the same that she had heard on that occasion. It was the Voice of Káli!

Latham knew from the very first instant of its arising that he had never experienced an identical sensation in his life. This vibration which increased and increased with every passing moment seemed to numb his brain; so that, whilst it was more like a sound than anything else, it produced so singular an effect that, during its continuance, his senses seemed to become merged or confused. He could not say if the thing which held him rooted to the spot where he stood reached him through his sense of touch, taste, sight, smell or hearing. At its height, it was dreadful, almost insupportable.

Then, to awaken him from the stupor which this thing induced, came a dreadful, frenzied shriek—a choking deathly cry, which rose in a wild crescendo and died away in a series of guttural moans.

The other horror—the Voice—the *thing*—he knew not how to define it—ceased at the same moment.

"Harley!" he whispered hoarsely, then cried the name aloud. *"Harley!"*

His scalp was tingling electrically. He was not master of himself and knew it. But, forcing his muscles to action, he staggered down the darkened stair and reached the lobby.

At the same moment, the dining room

door burst open. There came the click of an electric switch. And there was Jim Westbury, revolver in hand, wild-eyed, running toward the library door. Westbury looked at Latham.

"Latham!" he cried. "You heard it?"

"My God! Of course I heard it!"

They reached the door almost together, threw it open and leaped into the room.

"The switch!" gasped Westbury. "It's on your side." Then, "Harley! *Harley!*" he cried.

There were sounds of opening doors and hurrying footsteps. A blinding flash of lightning illuminated the room just as Latham found the switch and turned up the library lamps. Deafening thunder burst over the house; but Latham and Westbury, standing close together within the open doorway, looked wildly about the library.

The room was empty!

"The chair!" gasped Latham. "He's in the chair!"

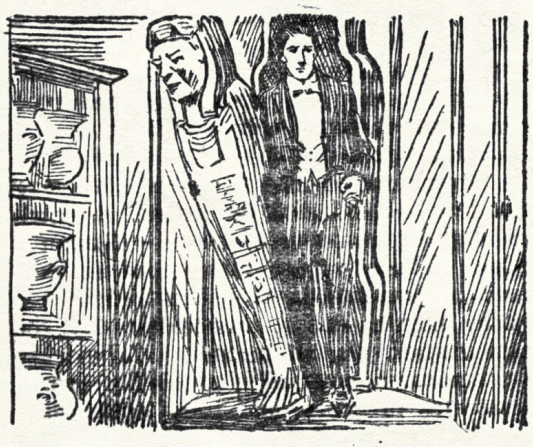
In a frenzy of apprehension he ran across the room, reached the deep rest chair and peered over the back of it.

It was empty!

"My God!" cried Westbury.

Latham turned in a flash. Westbury was staring at one of the wall cases, the glass door of which was swinging slowly open in response to the movement of a gilded Egyptian sarcophagus lid—one of the curiosities which Van Dean had imported.

Silently, the two men watched; and then, just before the ancient painted thing, the gilded effigy of the woman whose mummy had lain beneath it, fell out into the room, it was seized from behind and



replaced in position. Paul Harley stepped out and closed the door of the wall case.

"Forgive me," he said. "I did not mean to alarm you."

"Harley!" cried Westbury and Latham together. "Thank God you're safe!" added the latter.

They all three turned as Burton van Dean, wrapped in a dressing gown, staggered into the library.

"Tell me! Tell me——" he began, then saw Harley and pulled up short.

"All right, Van Dean!" said Harley. "I'm safe."

Excited voices sounded from the lobby. The women were down.

"Stop them, somebody!" Harley snapped.

"Jim! Jim! What has happened?" came Joyce's voice.

"Please go back," said Latham, stepping to the door; "everyone is safe."

"Ladies," cried Harley, "I shall be glad if you will all return to Mrs. Moody's apartments and lock yourselves in!"

Behind the group huddled at the doorway other voices could be heard.

"Order all the servants to their rooms," commanded Harley. "Latham! Lock the door."

Latham obeyed, leaving all that frightened party out in the lobby. The thunder sounded again, but this time more distantly.

"What in heaven's name does this mean?" implored Van Dean. "What has happened, Harley? I expected to find you—" and his voice shook—"dead!"

"So did someone else," said Harley shortly. "But brace yourself, Van Dean. There is more to come. If you don't feel capable of facing it, tell me frankly. I shall quite understand."

"I want to know the truth," whispered the American.

"So do I," said Latham. "That noise, that vibrating thing that seemed to pierce my brain! And then the shriek!"

Paul Harley looked sternly from face to face.

"Van Dean," he said, "what do you keep in this cabinet?"

He pointed to the tall lacquered cabinet which stood at the foot of the study stairs.

"Nothing," was the reply. "It is empty."

"Then, why is it kept locked?" demanded Harley.

"Because the door has been damaged sometime," replied Van Dean, "and the only way to keep it shut is to lock it. But for heaven's sake, why do you ask, Harley?"

"I have a very good reason. Who has got the key of this cabinet?"

"I have."

"Where is it?"

"It's on the bunch with the others."

"Have you your keys with you?"

"No, they are in the table drawer in the study. You know where I keep them."

Harley nodded shortly and, turning away, walked up the study stair and into the study. A few moments later he returned, carrying a bunch of keys. No one had spoken during his absence, but all three men had stood staring, as if petrified, at the lacquer cabinet at the stair-foot.

Excited voices could plainly be heard in the lobby, outside the room, and recognizing what their state of mind must be, Latham would have given much to have been enabled to speak words of comfort to soothe the mind of one at least among them. But such was the tense expectancy which held him that even that other claim faded beside it. He watched Harley descend the stairs and it seemed to him that he was unduly deliberate. But finally, keys in hand, he reached the cabinet and faced the three men who were watching him.

"Much remains to be explained," he said. He held out the keys. "Which is the one, Van Dean?"

Van Dean, his fingers tremulous, selected a long, slender key from the bunch and returned them to Harley.

"Prepare yourselves," said the latter. "When I have unlocked this door, one of the minor mysteries will be solved."

He inserted the key in the lock. It operated and he turned it without difficulty. Then, his attitude tense, he slowly opened the door.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PHANTOM CYCLIST

A FURTIVE figure passed the barred window of Wu Chang's quarters. The Chinese pipe was silent, now, and the man who stole along the wet grass outside noticed that the light was out. In spite of the darkness, he hesitated for a moment ere darting from the outbuilding into the shadow of the trees. From there, however, three paces brought him to the kitchen garden. Evidently familiar with the path, he now broke into a run, until he came to the door in the orchard wall. This he opened with a key, entered, and locked the door behind him.

The orchard sloped down to the former moat, but the sky was so heavily overcast by thunder clouds that only one familiar with the ground could possibly have found the way. Presently, however, he came to the nettle-grown gully which marked the site of the former moat. In addition to the natural difficulties, the hollow was thickly set with barbed wire. Pausing at the edge of the gap, the man groped about in the undergrowth for a while and then came upon a stake stuck in the ground, to which was tied a piece of string.

He hauled upon this string, drawing it toward him, and presently, attached to the end of the string, came a rope. He hauled upon this, in turn, until it became fairly taut; then, tying it firmly about the stake, he swung out across the barbed wire below and worked his way along the rope until his feet rested upon the bank beside the road bounding the grounds of the Abbey.

Releasing his hold on the rope, he crawled through a gap in the hedge; and from the trunk of a tree, which grew there,

unknotted the rope and allowed it to fall back into the weed-grown moat, where, even in daylight, it would be unlikely to be detected.

He looked along the dark and narrow lane, which came out upon the highroad some twenty yards to the westward. For a while he stood there watching, listening. But no sound reached his ears, save the drip, drip, drip of water from the leaves and the increasing rumble of thunder. He turned to the left, walking quickly away from the highroad, and skirting the Abbey grounds. On the right were meadows; and presently, coming to a stile, the man crossed it, turning sharply to the right behind a thick-set hedge and reached a rough shed having a tarred roof and a door fastened with a padlock.

With a key which he carried he unlocked the door and entered the shed. Closing the door behind him, he struck a match and lighted a candle which rested upon a ledge. There were a number of agricultural implements in the shed and also a motor bicycle; and it was to this that the man turned his attention. He quickly overhauled it, satisfied himself that everything was in order, and then, extinguishing the candle, wheeled the bicycle out of the shed onto the narrow footpath.

He reclasped the padlock and laboriously trundled the machine along the edge of the meadow, passed the stile and carried on

for another thirty or forty yards until he came to a gate and, presently, with the bicycle, he was out in the lane. He rested a while, breathing heavily from his labors; then, lighting the head lamp, he succeeded, although not without difficulty, for the road was bad, in starting the bicycle.

Once mounted, he proceeded at a good speed along the lane, swung into a turning on the left, with part of the Abbey grounds now rising above him, until the lane, ever bearing westward, finally brought him out upon the highroad. He followed this to within fifty yards of the Abbey lodge, then swung to the right and raced down a tree-arched narrow road, at a speed which, on so dark a night, must have meant destruction to one not familiar with every foot of the route.

It was at this moment, as the racing cyclist, after recklessly dropping into the valley, had begun to whirl up the slope beyond, that Inspector Gorleston leaped out from the shadow of the hedge, about ten yards north of the Abbey lodge.

"Jones!" he cried. "Tewksbury!"

From a point south of the gate a constable appeared, and a second from the gloom of a small coppice nearly facing the lodge.

"Get your machines out!" cried the inspector excitedly; "we've got him, tonight! He's heading for the Warren. There is no turning before he gets to Yarmouth Road."

He ran back into the shadow of the hedge, the two constables imitating his movements. Presently all three were mounted upon bicycles of the "push" type in use by the Force, and, Inspector Gorleston leading, were proceeding down the sloping lane, on the track of a racing motorist.

But, considering the nature of the surface and having proper regard for his neck, the pace, as set by the inspector, was not comparable with that of the quarry.

As if the Fates had decided in favor of law and order, there came a temporary break in the storm clouds. Moving patches of light painted the road ahead; and, taking advantage of the slope, the three riders increased their pace to such a degree that they were carried well up the acclivity and contrived to stick to their wheels for two hundred yards of the gradient before being compelled to dismount and push their bikes from thence onward to the brow of the hill.

Blackness closed in again and there came fitful flashes of distant lightning to the south. Now, the ground was level and they rode along at a fair pace.

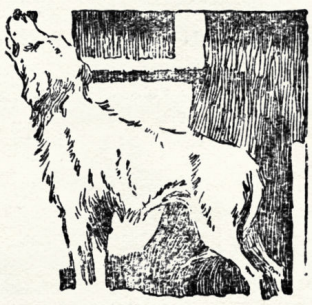
In the stillness, which was only broken by the distant rumbling of thunder, all could still faintly hear the pulsing of the motor, far ahead of them.

"He's still on the road," said Gorleston. "We've a good chance this time."

His subordinates ventured no comment, but plodded along steadily in his wake.

This phantom cyclist had become a nightmare to the local police; intruding upon the monotony of their ordinary duty, he had so stimulated zeal that neither Jones nor Tewksbury resented this special duty. Indeed, recognizing that they were hot upon the heels of a mystery which had set fire to the local imagination, they had no regret for the comforts which they were foregoing, but on the contrary fell for the ardor of the chase. They were three very keen men who pursued the phantom cyclist that night, nor lightly to be discounted.

Meanwhile, the object of the chase, half a mile ahead of his pursuers, had slowed down, as sighting some straggling outbuildings. A dog barked angrily in the



distant farm to which the buildings belonged, but the phantom cyclist knew that he could afford to ignore this disturbance. He dismounted and, evidently familiar with the ground, pushed his bicycle along a narrow path by the side of a barn, reached a weedy wilderness beyond and presently came to a disused cattle shed. There he docked his bicycle and walked back again into the lane, having first extinguished the lamp.

At this time the three pursuers were walking their bicycles up the slope, rather less than half a mile behind him.

He broke into a trot and carried on steadily past the cornfields until the lane ran through a straggling parkland. Here he halted. He took a footpath to the right and, having followed this for fifty yards, plunged into undergrowth Now the ground rose sharply and was studded irregularly with trees, but beyond, a strangely forbidding object, uprose a ruined Norman tower. He was on the Warren property and a trespasser. But undeterred by this fact, he pressed on, now moving cautiously, avoiding the break-

ing of any twigs and studying every step that he took.

More than once he paused and listened. Lightning flashed fitfully away to the east and the thunder rumbled and re-echoed incessantly. But there was no sound to tell of human activity, either ahead of him or behind. He crept further forward, cautiously, step by step, until at last there was no obstruction between him and the gaunt ruin.

He dropped down flat amongst the wet undergrowth, studying the building as well as he could see it in the dim light; by now, the wandering storm had obscured the sky all around.

Strangely forbidding, the ancient building uprose above the trees. Rain dripped from the leaves and the night was filled with those curious sounds made by the earth inhaling rain.

Inspector Gorleston and his subordinates had come to the farm buildings and had dismounted.

Chapter XIV

THE LISTENING DEATH

THERE was a hushed silence in the Abbey library as Paul Harley slowly opened the door of the lacquered cabinet. Then, as if impelled by a common impulse, the three who watched him recoiled.

"Merciful heaven!" cried Van Dean.

But the others, save for a sharp inhalation, were silent.

Rigid in the cabinet, one hand resting upon the right and one upon the left side, was Mohammed Khán!

His face had an indescribably leaden hue. The head was tilted forward and to the left. His eyes were startlingly wide open and his whole expression was that of one who listened, alertly, to some important message.

Latham, stifling a great revulsion, stepped forward and touched the still figure.

"Dead!" he whispered.

"The Listening Death!" said Harley.

A cloud of horror like a palpable thing seemed to sweep out and envelope them all. Even Harley was not entirely untouched by it. He averted his face, closing the door of the cabinet and locking it.

"Latham," he said, "will you get out your car and bring it round to the front door? On your way, you might try to reassure the ladies. I leave it to you how much to tell and how much you withhold."

"Very well," Latham replied, and unlocked the library door and went out.

"Now, Westbury," Harley continued, "will you please telephone to the police. Give them the facts as briefly as possible. It will be close upon an hour before they arrive, giving ample time for me to complete my inquiries."

Jim Westbury appeared to be half-dazed. He listened to Harley with a sort of stupefied expression; then, as if the meaning of the words had suddenly come home to him, he walked out of the room without any comment whatever.

"And you, Van Dean," said Harley, "would be all the better for a stiff peg. I want to be alone here for ten minutes, uninterrupted. So when you go out, I shall lock the door again. Will you give instructions that I am not to be disturbed? Then, when I have finished my inquiries here, there are a number of questions which I wish to ask you."

"Very well, Harley," was the reply.

But Van Dean glanced rapidly at the cabinet and rapidly away again. A question trembled upon his lips. He stifled it, however, and resting his hand on Paul Harley's shoulder for a moment, walked slowly from the library; his was a pathetic figure, that of a courageous man broken.

A quarter of an hour later, Harley came out into the lobby. Wu Chang, carrying a tray, was about to enter the drawing room.

"Wu Chang!" called Harley. "Tell Captain Latham to come."

The Chinaman nodded and went into the drawing room. A moment later, Latham came out.

"Want me, Harley?"

"Yes," was the reply. "I have something to show you."

They returned to the scene of the mysterious tragedy and once more Harley locked the door. Latham, looking quickly about him, made a discovery. The rest chair, the lacquer cabinet and the emblem of Káli were the three objects to which he particularly addressed his attention. And, on looking at the third, he exclaimed, "What's this?"

The front of the carven pedestal had been removed in some way! It was hollow, but the interior was entirely occupied by intricate looking electrical devices! He stepped toward it, kneeling down and peering in.

"Come away from it, Latham," said Harley quietly.

Latham turned, startled.

"You're in the danger zone. Move to the other side."

"The danger zone?"

"Exactly!"

Latham backed hastily away from the pedestal.

"No need for me to inspect the correspondence from Van Dean's agent in Rangoon," said Harley dryly. "Either it was forged, or, if it was genuine, this thing was tampered with, either before it left Burma or between the time that it left the docks and reached Norfolk."

"But, Harley, what does it all mean? What is this thing? How does it operate? My God! I'll never forget—" he glanced hastily toward the cabinet—"the face of Mohammed Khán!"

"The Listening Death is not easily forgotten," Harley admitted. "But as for the way this thing operates—well, it's mechanical genius. Unfortunately for himself, Mohammed Khán failed to realize that by moving this pedestal I had placed his hiding place inside the danger zone. Incidentally, I was well out of it. I had marked that Egyptian coffin lid, some time ago, and had provided myself with the key of the wall case."

"I am still in the dark," declared Latham blankly.

"In some respects, so am I," confessed Harley. "But there is much that I can explain. You see, as the room was originally arranged, a line drawn from the image of Káli across to the fireplace would pass through the rest chair, which habitually stands upon the hearth. I moved the image in such a way that this imaginary line from the pedestal to the fireplace would now pass through the lacquer cabinet."

"Yes." Latham nodded. "But what has the fireplace got to do with it?"

"A point that puzzled me for a long time, Latham. My researches were handicapped, you see, by the fact that I knew a spy of the S. Group to be in the house. But, tonight, I climbed onto the roof, if you recall."

"Yes. What for?"

"To examine the library chimney!" was the reply.

"The library chimney! And what did you find?"

"I found a piece of soft copper wire, with a tiny fitting attached to the end, protruding from the chimney. The other end of the wire I had already detected from here. It comes down to within three feet or so of the fireplace."

"But what is its purpose?"

"Its purpose, Latham, is to fix the direction of something—shall we say a wave—which proceeds from the mechanism in the pedestal of the Káli image."

At that, Latham stared almost affrightedly at the strange figure.

"What is this mechanism?"

"Well—in some respects it resembles a wireless receiving set; but there are certain differences. Do you begin to grasp the truth, Latham?"

Latham shook his head blankly.

"It is Ernst's Trajector!" snapped Harley. "Mohammed Khán was killed by Ernst's Trajector. It is some adaptation of wireless, a kind of wave which evidently has the property of penetrating all obstacles and destroying life instantly. In the case of human victims, it produces that ghastly, contorted expression, which has become known as the Listening Death."

"Then," said Latham in a low voice, "the inventor, Ulric Ernst——"

"Was the first victim of his own invention! The S. Group were watching and waiting. How, we shall never know, but they used the Trajector to murder the inventor. Since then, they have employed it to remove their enemies. This thing—" he pointed to the image of Káli—"was introduced into the Abbey by the Mandarin K. Van Dean, all unsuspecting, gave the murder machine house room!"

"That horrible, indescribable sound," muttered Latham. "You heard it, Harley?"

Harley nodded. "I heard it. I believe we shall find that it is a new note——"

"A new note?"

"Yes, a sound which human ears have never before heard. Anyone, upon whom it is concentrated, dies. There was no post-mortem in the case of Denby. I managed to prevent it. But in the case of Mohammed Khán, I think we shall find that death was brought about by cerebral hemorrhage. It may interest you to know, Latham, that there is a length of cable running from the base of the pedestal of Káli to the lacquer cabinet."

"By which you mean?" said Latham.

"By which I mean that a concealed switch, reached through some hole in the ancient woodwork, controls the Trajector."

"What! It was worked from there?"

"It was. There is much irony in the fact that Mohammed Khán actually pressed the switch which caused his own death. It disconnects automatically when the pressure is removed."

"Van Dean trusted him implicitly!"

Harley nodded. "His credentials were forgeries. He was a spy of the S. Group, patiently watching, biding his time. He has a bad wound on his left arm, by the way."

He stared significantly at Latham as he spoke.

"What's the point?" asked the latter.

"The point is that it was caused by the teeth of your dog! Oh! there's no doubt of it. Mohammed Khán was the man who penetrated into Van Dean's study this evening. Mohammed Khán, in all probability, murdered Detective Sergeant Denby."

"But," cried Latham, "he died outside in the shrubbery!"

"He didn't, Latham," snapped Harley. "*This* is the death chamber. I moved that chair three times, tonight; and three times it was moved back again into focus. Denby was lured into this room, into that chair; and there, in that chair, he died! His body was dragged out into the shrubbery by Mohammed Khán!"

"Mohammed Khán, of course, held duplicate keys?"

"Yes. They are on him now. He had pierced the woodwork so that he could lock the cabinet from the inside. No doubt you understand, now, why Van Dean's orders for the removal of that murder machine were never carried out?"

"Mohammed Khán intercepted them?"

"Exactly. He wore some sort of cowled garment when engaged upon any work which would have been difficult to explain, had he been detected in it."

"Trusting to be taken for an apparition if anyone met him?"

"That is my idea," agreed Harley.

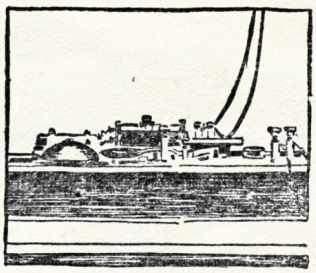
They were silent for a moment, listening to threatening peals of the storm which seemed to be approaching again.

"The object of it all is what I can't fathom," declared Latham.

"Simple enough," said Harley. "*I* was the object! I will explain later. There is still much to do."

"I quite agree, Harley. The heart of the mystery appears to me to be not here in the Abbey, at all. I mean to say, if this thing is worked by wireless, where is the transmitter?"

Harley stared at him silently for a moment.



"I am not sure," he replied, "but I think I know where the transmitter is. If your car is ready, we will start now."

He paused. There came a loud knocking on the door. Crossing, he threw it open.

Westbury was standing there, practically all the members of the household grouped behind him.

"Good heavens, Harley!" he cried, "what's the meaning of this? Parker, the gardener, has disappeared!"

Chapter XV

ONE WHO PASSED BY

SOME ten minutes after the departure of Harley and Latham, the rest of the party, seated in the drawing room and endeavoring to forget the horror which was locked up in the library, were startled by the tones of a distant, deep-toned bell.

"Oh, murder!" cried Jim Westbury. "What's that?"

"It's the bell of the lodge!" said Joyce in a hushed voice. Then, "Why, of course. It is probably the local police and the doctor. Mr. Harley must have relocked the gate."

There was a momentary pause.

"Can you let me have the keys, Van Dean," said Westbury, standing up. "I'll go down and unlock it."

"Oh, Jim," muttered Mrs. Moody, "you ought not to go alone!"

"We will go together," said Van Dean, rising.

"No, *I'll* go with him," Joyce volunteered.

"Oh, no, you will not, dear!" pronounced Mrs. Moody.

"Really, Joyce," Phil declared, "I don't know how you can think of going out of this room!"

There came a knock at the door and Wu Chang came in.

"Wu Chang can go," said Van Dean. "*My* presence is small use," he added pathetically.

"Wu Chang won't!" cried Westbury stoutly. "*I'm* going! All right, Wu

Chang," he cried and went out of the room.

In the lobby, as Westbury unfastened the front door, Bates, the chauffeur, joined him.

"If you're going down to the lodge, sir," he said, "I think I'll come with you, if I may."

Secretly welcoming the man's company, Jim replied with an effort at nonchalance, "Right-o, Bates. Are you armed?"

"No, sir. Are you?"

"Yes; rather! I've got a revolver in my pocket."

Presently, as the party waited in the drawing room, listening intently and in a high state of tension, a shrill electric bell began to ring, apparently in the library.

"Good heavens!" cried Phil, "what is it?" She clung to Mrs. Moody.

"It's the alarm," said Van Dean. "I reset it after Harley went. It will go on ringing all night, unless I stop it now."

"Oh, good gracious!" said Joyce, who had sprung to her feet. "Of course! How foolish we are. I will stop it, Mr. Van Dean; sit down."

"But, my dear," exclaimed Phil, "you are surely not going into the *library!*"

"It's the shortest way into the study where the bell is ringing," was the reply. "Therefore, why not? My dear, a dead man can't hurt one. It was when he was alive that we should have been afraid of him!"

She walked quickly and resolutely from the drawing room and was heard crossing the lobby and opening the library door. There was an interval of half a minute and then the bell ceased. Joyce returned, a little pale, but quite composed.

"You're wonderful, Joyce," said Phil. "I couldn't have entered that room if my salvation had depended upon it."

"Neither could I, dear," returned Mrs. Moody.

And now voices could be heard from the drive.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Joyce, going out into the lobby. "Surely there is a woman amongst them!"

"A woman!" cried Phil. "How can that be?"

"I don't know, but I'm sure I heard a woman's voice."

Quick footsteps became audible crossing the lobby and Jim Westbury appeared, full of excitement.

"What do you think?" he cried. "Mother's here!"

"What!" said Phil, standing up very suddenly.

"The telegram was a fake! The solicitor never turned up! Mother was in a panic and sent Willis down to the police. So, on their way here, they called; and she insisted on being brought along. So like her!"

Phil had grown very pale, until Mrs. Moody, taking her arm affectionately, said, "Leave it all to me, dear. I know exactly what you're thinking. But I understand your mother perfectly; so don't be afraid."

Now, into the lobby, came the superintendent from Middle Boro', with a sergeant and the police surgeon, the latter escorting Mrs. Westbury, fur-wrapped and very agitated. She was a handsome woman of much stronger personality than her daughter.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Moody. "This has been such a terrible night!"

A deafening peal of thunder crashed and reverberated around the house.

MEANWHILE, Harley and Latham were speeding down that sloping lane along which Inspector Gorleston and his subordinates had preceded them, not so very long before. Conversation was spasmodic.

"Do you think this nameless Mandarin is operating the thing personally?" asked Latham.

"I am inclined to think he is," Harley cried back. "Van Dean had news, tonight, from a reliable source, that the Mandarin K, who was known to be in London, had left, yesterday."

"Why was he not arrested, if he was known to be in London?"

"My dear fellow!" Harley laughed unmirthfully. "If you knew how many clever men all over the world have tried to capture the Mandarin K, you would be more sympathetic toward Scotland Yard!"

He spoke with a suppressed excitement which communicated itself to his companion.

"You have hopes of apprehending him, tonight?" suggested the latter.

"Yes, but I am not really sanguine.

There are so many things I don't understand."

"You say that all this murder plot is directed against you and not against Van Dean?"

"I did say so; yes. Let me explain. They evidently conceived the idea of using Van Dean as a decoy. That was why they let him go when he blundered so far into their secrets in Tibet. That was why he returned alive. Having watched him settle here in Norfolk, they proceeded to manifest themselves in such a way that he could not well fail to apply to the police for protection. Their persecution increased to a point where Scotland Yard necessarily intervened. By the arrival of Wessex on the scene they knew that the truth was out and that sooner or later I, too, should be on the spot. Their installation of the murder machine was not meant for Van Dean—they could have dealt with him twenty times over—but for *me!*"

"But what about the death of Denby?" cried Latham.

"Poor Denby had learned too much," was the reply. "At all costs it became necessary to deal with him. I can only suppose that he had partially solved the mystery of the Ernst Trajector; but only partially, or he would not have met his end in that way. Tonight, Latham, I received a message from Innes, my secretary, in London. The authorities have been at work along certain lines, night and day, since I left. Their inquiries resulted this evening in the discovery that Mohammed Khán was an impostor, a very clever one. The credentials which he presented to the agency were quite in order. He had actually been a butler in the service of an Indian officer, now retired.

"It needed a lot of tracing out, Latham, but at last the men at work upon the job discovered that prior to his entering the household of the colonel, he had been, beyond all doubt, associated with a known member of the S. Group! I might have acted at once, but I waited."

"I don't understand why, Harley!" cried Latham.

"I will tell you. I knew that, in some way, the S. Group had learned of these inquiries, and I expected desperate danger to prompt desperate measures. Accordingly, I waited, in order to solve the mystery of the Listening Death. Hullo! What's this?"

They had arrived at the farm buildings adjoining the road. Here, leaning against a wall, were three bicycles! They pulled up and jumped out.

"This is extraordinary!" said Latham. "Because, so far as I remember, there is a footpath just beyond here which leads, when it is light enough to follow it, to the Warren!"

"Ah," said Harley, examining the bicycles, "does it lead anywhere else?"

"Nowhere in particular. It skirts the mound on which the ruined tower stands."

"I thought so!" cried Harley. "I thought so!"

The night was now black as pitch, save for flickers of lightning on the further slope where the Abbey stood. There was an incessant rumbling of thunder.

"I place myself in your hands, Latham. The owners of these bicycles have undoubtedly gone along that path. Let us do the same."

"I am at your service," replied Latham shortly. "Have you any idea what this means?"

"Yes, a faint one," muttered Harley. "The local police are here before us; that's what it means!"

"The local police?"

"Yes, and I only hope they have not bungled badly."

"But what can have led them here?"

"I think I know that also, but as I may be wrong I won't mention my theory at the moment. Do we turn to the right, here?"

"Yes, through the trees. By Jove!"

Latham paused and looked back. There had been a tremendous flash of lightning over by the Abbey, followed by deafening peals of thunder.

"They are getting it over there."

He turned and pressed on, followed by Harley, picking their way in the new darkness amongst the tree trunks.

"The most significant thing that has happened tonight, since the death of Mohammed Khán," said Latham, "is the disappearance of Parker. Does that fit into your theory of the affair?"

"It does," replied Harley shortly. "Are we near the tower now?"

"Yes. If it were light we could see it."

"Then don't talk any more. We must proceed cautiously, now. Make as little noise as possible."

In silence they trekked on, until Latham paused and grasped Harley's arm.

"I think we are nearly at the foot of the place, now," he whispered. "Do you want to go in?"

"No. Hush! Be quite still for a moment."

His sixth sense had become suddenly alert. He experienced so acutely the odd inner depression that he knew, although his reason could give no explanation, that a deadly peril lurked very near to him in the surrounding darkness. Nerves at high tension, he stood listening.

Suddenly, Latham pressed his arm and, bending close to his ear, whispered, "Someone is moving near us!"

Harley grasped his shoulder in reply, but did not speak. There was no sound to tell of that presence which both of them had detected in their different manners. But that someone, or something, approached them out of the darkness, neither doubted.

"Drop down slightly," said Harley. And down they both went into the undergrowth at the moment that the night was

again whitely illuminated by lightning. Right above them loomed the ruined tower, but no living thing could be seen in that momentary illumination.

The storm had settled now over the farther slope, but when the thunder came, it echoed hollowly and weirdly in the shell of the old ruin. Then, silence fell once more, an awe-inspiring silence.

A sense of some near presence was experienced by both. Then from the shell of the building ahead, came a sudden cry of, "Hold him!"

"Out of the way!" cried another angry voice.

"Quick! He is going through the window!"

Excited shouts and sounds of stumbling and falling followed.

Latham leaped to his feet.

"What now?" he demanded.

Harley sprang forward.

"Into the tower!" he cried. "But we are too late! We are too late! *He* passed us out there in the darkness!"

Chapter XVI

THE TOWER

IN THE library of the Abbey, the gruesome police inquiry was being conducted. The body of Mohammed Khán lay upon a settee. The police surgeon, rising from his knees, his examination concluded, shook his head in puzzled fashion.

"There is this wound on the arm, Superintendent," he said, "which seems to have been inflicted by the teeth of some animal. No other marks of violence whatever."

"Then, what should you say was the cause of death, Doctor?"

"Well," the surgeon replied slowly, "it sounds a queer thing to say, but he looks remarkably as if he'd been struck by lightning!"

"Struck by lightning?"

"To be sure, I have only seen one man in my life who had died in that way. Over at Moss's farm, two years ago, you remember?"

The superintendent nodded.

"Well, the body presented much the same appearance," said the doctor.

"Of course, we can't do much," complained the superintendent, "until the Scotland Yard man who has the case in hand appears on the scene. He should be here now."

"What Scotland Yard man?" inquired Jim Westbury, who had remained in the library and undergone a lengthy interrogation.

"Inspector Wessex. Perhaps you didn't know he was here?"

"He's not here!" declared Jim. "He hasn't been here. There have been no Scotland Yard men in the house!"

The superintendent smiled.

"He may not have been in the house," he replied, "but he has been on the case."

"Then, where is he?"

The superintendent continued to smile.

"That's just what I want to know," he said. "We haven't been dealt with quite fairly. We've been kept in the dark all along; and now, without knowing the facts which led up to this man's death, how can we be expected to do anything?"

He turned to his assistant, who was curiously examining the mechanism in the pedestal in the image of Káli, which had been moved into the center of the room. "Any ideas?" he asked him.

"Can't say I have, sir. Looks rather like a receiving set."

"It's not a receiving set," declared Jim

Westbury. "It's the thing that caused this man's death!"

The superintendent shrugged his shoulders, looking helplessly at the doctor.

"Do you see any connection, Doctor?" he asked.

"Not the slightest," was the reply. "Except——" The medical man's expression suddenly changed. "Well, I don't know!" he added. "There might be, there might be——"

A vivid flash of lightning illuminated the room and the building seemed to shake in sympathy with the reverberations of the thunder which followed.

"The storm seems to be centering right over us," commented the superintendent; "that last flash was very near the house."

"Very near!" mused the doctor, looking vaguely at the electrical mechanism in the pedestal and all about the room, as if he questioned something.

Finally, he stared again at the strangely drawn face of the dead man who lay stretched on the settee. A second blaze of lightning came and cries of alarm were heard in the drawing room.

"That," said the superintendent, "was a still nearer one!"

Amid the deafening crash of thunder, the four men in the library looked at one another. And in all their eyes was a question.

As the last hollow echo died away, "The sound that you heard at the time of this man's death, Mr. Westbury," said the doctor, "could you describe it?"

"I never heard anything like it before," Westbury declared. "It left my scalp all tingling."

"You mean that literally?"

"Quite literally," was the reply. "As though—as though——" He fumbled for words.

"Did you ever have an electric massage?" interjected the doctor abruptly.

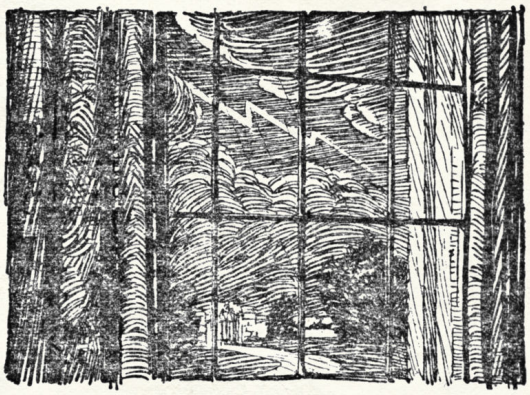
"Never!" Jim Westbury replied blankly.

"Oh! So that isn't going to help us. But—" and a strange expression crossed his face—"do you mind, superintendent, if we all leave this room, now? At any rate—" he paused significantly—"until the storm has abated."

"I don't mind," replied the superintendent. "I can do nothing further until Inspector Wessex turns up."

"Good!" said the doctor. "Then we will go, if you don't mind!"

Each man experienced an unaccountable sense of relief on passing from the library into the lobby. The last to leave was the superintendent, who closed the door behind him.



"My God!" cried Westbury. "That's got the house!"

A third fork of lightning had leaped down upon the Abbey. There was a strange, quivering sound. The atmosphere seemed to vibrate. Every light went out. A vivid, blue radiance prevailed in the lobby for several moments. There came a vicious sparking from the library which they had just left, then a dull explosion; then darkness fell. And with an ear-splitting roar the very heavens seemed to open above them!

"Just in time!" said the doctor grimly.

Out of the drawing room burst a panic stricken party. But the doctor had thrown open the library door.

"Who has a torch?" he cried sharply. "The lights have failed!"

"Here you are!" said Jim Westbury. "My God, what's happened!"

Vaguely, the light of the torch illuminated the big room they had so recently quitted. Pungent fumes filled it.

The image of Kali lay upon the floor amid the smoking ashes of its pedestal!

THREE minutes prior to this, Harley and Latham had groped their way in through the ruined doorway of the ruined tower two miles away from the Abbey. A desperate fight was raging there, somewhere above them.

"Is there a stairway?" cried Harley.

The light of his electric lamp suddenly illuminated the ruinous place in which they stood.

"Yes! right ahead of you!"

There, sure enough, were the remains of a spiral stair leading to a fragmentary floor above them. Harley went stumbling up, Latham close behind him. Lightning was splitting the blackness on the further slope and thunder was booming wildly away over the Abbey.

Onto a partially ruined landing they made their way.

"Hands up!" said a loud voice.

Two lanterns moved in the darkness. And stretched on the floor, still struggling and uttering threats, was a man who wore handcuffs! Immediately in front of Harley, revolver in hand, stood Inspector Gorleston!

"Mr. Harley!" cried the prisoner, from the floor, "he's escaped! Explain to this imbecile who I am!"

"Lower your revolver, Inspector Gorleston," said Harley sternly. "You may not know me, but my name is Paul Harley, and this is Captain Latham. We are both guests at the Abbey. Your prisoner is Detective Inspector Wessex of Scotland Yard!"

"I don't believe it!" cried Gorleston.

"Will you look at my notebook!" cried Wessex. "That will tell you everything. By God, you'll pay for this!"

The inspector was shaken.

"But this man is Parker, who has been posing as a gardener at the Abbey!" he protested. "He's been dashing around the countryside on a motor bicycle at night. And——"

"Release him!" snapped Harley. "At once! You should not have interfered. You had definite orders to stand aside." He stamped his foot angrily upon the ground. "Too late, Latham!" he said bitterly. "We are too late!" He turned to the inspector, as Wessex, released, got up. "Clear this building!" he ordered. "I want everybody out of it."

"But," objected Gorleston——

"Listen!" Inspector Wessex crossed and confronted him. "Mr. Paul Harley's in charge of this case. He's acting for the Government. You have done enough mischief for one night. Just obey orders!"

Accordingly, a strange party, they stumbled down the ruined stairs and out of the tower and stepped out on the slope.

"Was anyone here when you arrived, Wessex?" asked Harley.

"I am almost certain there was, Mr. Harley," was the reply. "I watched for a long time; and then I crept into the place and up the stair to the point where you found me. There is some way to a higher platform and I was trying to find it, when those——" He shrugged his shoulders angrily.

"Gorleston followed you?"

"Evidently," returned Wessex.

"It may not be too late," began Harley. And then there came a dreadful interruption.

A vivid flash of lightning gleamed on the distant Abbey slope. Everyone was conscious of an uncomfortable, tingling sensation. There came a deafening crash from somewhere high in the ruined tower. A great spurt of blue flame leaped up, far over their heads. There was a rending, tremulous roar. The very ground heaved beneath their feet.

"Run! Run for your lives!" cried Harley.

He turned, and to the accompaniment of booming thunder they raced headlong down the slope, stumbling sometimes, but always recovering and running away—away from the tower, which, having survived many centuries, now was tottering!

As they all threw themselves exhaustedly down, at the base of the little hill, the old tower fell with a shuddering crash, in smoking ruins.

"Good God!" gasped Latham. "But the lightning was two miles away—it could not have struck——"

"It struck the Abbey!" replied Harley, horror in his tone. "It struck the copper wire in the library chimney! And by some reflex action, some law we don't understand, all that electrical force passed from the *receiver* in the pedestal of Káli to the *Ernst transmitter* at the top of this tower!"

"Merciful heaven!" moaned Latham. "I pray there was no one in the library!"

"To which," said Paul Harley grimly, "I add a prayer that the fiend who planned this thing was still in the tower when it fell!"

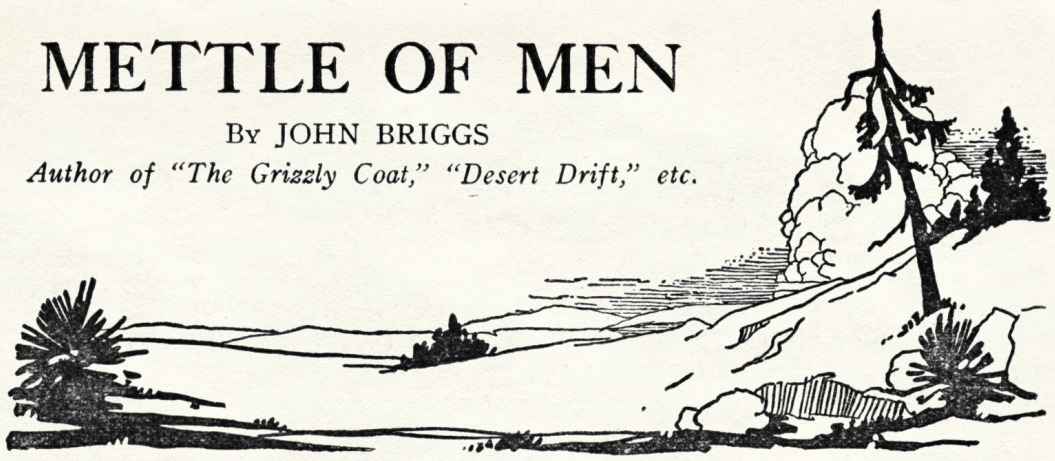
"We may never know, for sure, Mr. Harley," came the awe-stricken tones of Wessex.

"*I* shall know!" was the answer. "*He* has failed. But if he has escaped, my task is all before me!"

METTLE OF MEN

By JOHN BRIGGS

Author of "The Grizzly Coat," "Desert Drift," etc.



NEVERCOME JACK WAS A DESERT RAT, BUT ONCE HE WAS FOOLED BY A TENDERFOOT—TO HIS OWN BITTER REGRET AND THE CONFUSION OF THE HARD BITTEN COWMEN OF THE CIRCLE H

NO MORE—I'm done!" Wearily the loose-jointed speaker clamped himself into a wooden-bottomed chair. Catching his boot heels on the lower rung, he tilted his lean shoulders back against the faded yellow rustic back.

The low roofed portico of the Gray Eagle Hotel supported a dense mass of vines. The proprietor of the hostelry boasted frequently that his veranda was the coolest place in town; yet the late arrival from the blistering lava lands pulled off his dust coated Stetson and tried to accentuate the idea of coolnes by stirring up a local breeze.

"Uh-huh," grunted his single auditor, the rotund proprietor himself. "You boys er allus hollerin' about tourists an' tenderfeet. Yer all the time figurin' to move on somewheres where they ain't, an' where they can't never reach yuh. Better pluck 'em while the pluckin's good, I say! Because, tarnal sure as I'm settin' here, they'll be runnin' the country when us fellers are gone."

Nevercome Jack grunted with disgust, and with just a hidden trace of contempt for the comfortable hotel keeper included.

"Not by a jugful!" he retorted emphatically. "She's a hard country, mister, an' she calls for hard men—the kind that's born with the crust of Ole Mother Earth on 'em! When a man trampoos out here with a soft spot in him, it'll break out all over like the measles. No, sir! I don't pack kit for no more tenderfeet. I'm quits, for good!"

His lean jaw clamped with finality; but almost immediately thereafter it sagged in stupefied appraisal of the most striking representative of youth and unsophistication that he had ever beheld.

Wearing heavy laced boots, the young man clumped up the steps and limped forward as though very foot-sore. His face was girlishly soft in contour and of a complexion which had been pink and cream, save that the sun had baked it and the new skin had remained turkey-red. His large blue eyes glanced from one to the other of the porch occupants, and finally fixed themselves with a certain glue-like intensity on the leathery bronzed features of Nevercome Jack.

He approached within a few feet before he halted timidly and spoke, and then his voice was barely above a whisper.

"Are you Mr. Nevercome Jack?" he inquired.

The old packer's chair came down on all fours ka-thump! and he glowered up at the speaker, his hands pugnaciously clasping his knees. His entire action and attitude suggested a man saying "Boo!" to some predatory pup.

"No!" he thundered. "I ain't never been called that! 'Ceptin' some of my friends call me Nevercome, when they're speakin' right pussonal. But it ain't no 'Mister' name. If you've got to say Mister, you c'n say Mr. Densmore!"

The youth's sun scorched face turned a

shade darker with embarrassment, and then suddenly his white teeth flashed in an illuminating grin. His response was a strenuous whisper.

"All right, old dear! They told me you were a regular fire-eater. So I thought I'd look you up."

"Huh!" snorted the plainsman. "'Nother one uh these movie-pitcher hombres? I s'pose you want'a hire somebody to do all the mule ridin' and hog-ketchin', an' afterward when he goes to look at himself in the movie, it appears that mommy's pretty little buddy has had the faces switched, so's it looks like it's him that done it all!"

Shifting his weight alternately from one sore foot to another, the young fellow waited patiently until Nevercome's tirade ended in a final snort.

"You've got me wrong," he then whispered with his tantalizing grin. "I'm not in the movies. In fact, I'm homesteading, over in the Smoky Creek country. I—I came to see if I could get you to help me pack, and so forth, you know. I thought it would be better to get some one who understands—— I—I don't know much about it, you see. And there is no wagon road yet—to where I want to go."

"Y-o-u—what?" came Densmore's astounded response.

Again the young man blushed.

"Ec-excuse me," he answered. "My throat, you know—my voice is, er—a little bronchial trouble. It's the main reason why I want to live in the desert. In Boston, the doctor told me it would be the —the only thing. I can't speak any louder —I'm sorry. I say I'm homesteading——"

"Yeh—yeh, I've got good ears, youngster," Nevercome retorted. "But I was jest a wonderin' what fool kind of homesteadin' you're aimin' to do in the Smokey Creek Desert. Don't rain there enough to raise a spavined hope, 'ceptin' by accident. An' if yuh did raise anythin', the Circle H outfit 'ud range cattle right onto it, an' feed it off. Meantime, most likely havin' you stretched up to dry! They spring-range there, an' sort of hold the ownership.

"Furthermore, an' besides that, it's summertime, now—or maybe you ain't noticed it yet!—an' there's no water out there at all; 'ceptin' in two places 'bout a mile apart."

His listener's teeth gleamed again in a quick smile. "Thank you," he quavered. "You're just the right party to help me. I'm homesteading right at one of those springs—the one that bubbles up from the bed-rock, out of the sand. I've already staked out my claim there, and I've filed on it. That's going to be my farm——

"When can you find us four or five pack burros?" he questioned abruptly.

"Hold on here, Kid," Nevercome halted him, heatedly—though feeling at a loss somehow to account for his increasing interest in the youngster—"ain't you runnin' off about half-cocked, now?"

"Just how do you mean that?" the youth said, somewhat hesitatingly.

"Your understandin' will enlarge with time," Densmore mumbled aggrievedly. "What do yuh take me for, anyhow? Talkin' already like yuv' done hired me, an' its plumb settled!"

"Oh," said the youth in comprehension. "I get you. I didn't mean it that way. I—I just felt, you know, that you were the sort of man I might trust. I'd so much like to have you. If—if you will?"

"Hell!" exploded Nevercome Jack. "Now lissen here, kid, take an' old-timer's advice. You beat it right back to Boston town. Or maybe; if you think the climate here is good for what ails yuh; you might stop a while with Biddle, here. He puts up a good feed. But get this here farmin' germ out'a your noodle."

"But—but, you see," responded the youth softly, "it may take a long time—years. And I can't afford just to loaf around waiting for a cure. Besides I'm hoping to make a place where—where I can make a home some day for, er——"

His recital ended in considerable confusion under the hotel-keeper's amused grin and Nevercome's stony stare.

"Uh-huh, uh-huh, now I get you. A girl, eh," the latter mused. "Maybe Joe, here, will give you a job waitin' table on his summer tourists. He was jest now a sayin' that he don't get a chance, no more, to set down but twenty-'r-thirty times a day. Whereas he usta' could jest keep a settin'."

"Sure, kid, you ken have the job!" Biddle agreed quickly.

"I'm—very, very much obliged to you," the youngster responded, "but that—isn't what I want to do."

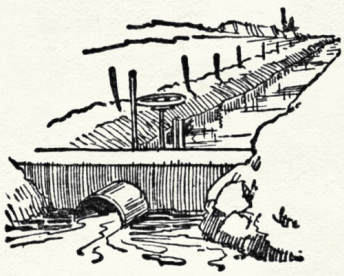
"Jumpin' Jehosaphat!" Nevercome mumbled with an indrawn breath. "That there spring that does run, is surrounded by alkali, sand and horned toads. An' it sinks right back into the sand, inside of ten feet. Yuh can't——"

"Just the point!" interrupted the youth. "It's just a gentle slope down to the other

spring, and from there on lies some of the prettiest land, ever."

"Lower spring's jest a bog-hole," Densmore objected. "Couldn't run no water out'a that!"

"But you see," explained the whispering youngster, "we'll carry out cement on the burros. Then we'll start a ditch at the higher spring, and mix the cement with the sand, as we go along. Concrete, you know. The water will run in that kind of a flume, and we'll just extend it right onto the good soil. Then we won't have to wait for rain. The land slopes just right, and that stream will irrigate several hundred acres. There'll be enough there for you, too!"



"How's that?" demanded Densmore, scratching his head. And he gave attention with increasing interest while the project was further explained.

"And you're plumb sot on it, I reckon?" he finally asked.

"Just like concrete, myself."

"An' you'd take me for a neighbor?" Nevercome interrogated.

"I'd like to have you. We could work everything together at first—or, or always, just as you like."

"Me farmin'—over in Smoky Creek Desert!" expostulated the old packer. "The sheriff 'ud ride after me, thinkin' I'd gone plumb loco! O' course, you bein' fresh from the East they prob'ly wouldn't bother *you.*"

The youth's face paled a shade or two, as he stood silent. And Nevercome Jack, gazing up at him speculatively, was puzzled by the peculiar, fatherly protective urge pulling at his soft and admittedly foolish old heart.

"Well, I dunno, kid," he finally ruminated, half to himself. "But if there ain't no argurin' yuh out of it, I reckon I'll have to traipse along with yuh; so's I'll be on hand to carry yuh back. Confound my worthless carcass!" he added abruptly. "Here I went an' lied to myself, jest a minute afore you come!"

That his new charge might bear out the poor reputation he had given all tenderfeet, did not enter into Nevercome's decision. The youth from Boston was so amazingly minus hardihood and experience, and yet so headlong determined, that the old-timer felt it would be a sin to let him make all the mistakes he would be certain to make alone and unaided. Something in the kid's steady blue eyes—a quality not congruous with his delicate appearance—may have influenced Densmore's decision, without his knowledge.

WHEN he had made the first trip with the Whispering Kid, and had seen the land, he returned alone for a second load of cement and to file on the half section adjoining the Kid's. They had agreed on partnership.

Too fascinated with their development work to afford a trip into town with his older partner, the younger man remained at the claims, each day extending the concrete flume, until there was needed but one more load of cement to finish the job. The shining ribbon of water had nearly reached the tillable land. The Kid's exuberance maintained a fever pitch. His muscles had hardened, his face had thinned to firmer lines, and his skin had cooled to a normal tan. Strength had come to his voice. Hard toil had erased much of his resemblance to the delicate youngster who had climbed foot-sorely up the porch steps of the Gray Eagle, two months before.

Albeit, Nevercome Jack was not entirely reconciled to the change in his young partner. With the hardening of his body it seemed that the Kid had undergone a certain inner hardening which was not quite decipherable. In spite of his unflagging good humor, he had grown into something of a grim driver. Although he hadn't bargained for this pressure against his easygoing ways, the old-timer would have reconciled himself to it, as necessary to a belated success in life, except that he could not quite overcome his prejudice against having the impetus delivered by one not yet proven of temper in the crucible of severe trial. Yet it had been ordained by the fates that so entangle the twine of mortal tenure, that he should make his judgment of the Whispering Kid—soon make it and soon regret it.

Having nearly completed the first part of their development work, the Kid accompanied Nevercome on his final trip for cement and for pipes to be used in constructing a reservoir for drinking water. He was impatient to order the materials needed in building their adobe house, and also to hear from the girl in Boston.

Arrived at the Gray Eagle, the youth was engrossed in letter writing while his partner confided to the proprietor the sev-

eral ways in which he regarded himself as a soft old fool.

"I don't know if the youngster would pan out in a pinch," he confessed, "but we've done shook hands on the deal. We'll be buckin' the Circle H Outfit, too," he added thoughtfully.

"But he's right about that there land. And with him a paintin' beautiful green pictures all over it—of how the water is goin' to turn it all into a medder, includin' flowers and trees, with the cows comin' home at night a tinklin' their bells, and the dogs a barkin', and the chickens crowin'—or cacklin', whichever—with cool wavin' branches and vines growin' around our restful verander. And us asettin' out there on it, after a day's honest toil, waitin' fer that there girl, back in Boston, to holler 'Supper's ready!'—I mean her havin' come out to the farm, o' course, after we've done built the beautiful dobe hacienda, with its indoor courts and patios an' whatnot. Well, I'm a plumb dodderin' ole ijut, ain't I?"

Back across the white, powdery sage land, the two partners tramped. Leading their pack train at right-angles to the red smoky rays of the dipping sun, they approached the hidden valley of their hopes just as evening ended the second day of the tramp. The five burros were heavily loaded and their plodding feet quickened as they scented water; for their supply along the dry route had been closely calculated in order to allow for the much needed equipment.

The dust reddened eyes of Nevercome and the Kid strained ahead expectantly to catch the first sparkle of that clear running stream which their tireless efforts had coaxed foot by foot across the dry sands.

"Funny," mused Nevercome, "I allus seen it afore, when I got to here!"

"I can see the flume," rejoined the other, whose eyes had not squinted through the dusts of fifty summers. "It—it's dry!"

The two exchanged glances apprehensively, and then the Kid burst out with his ever spontaneous and soundless laugh.

"What's the matter, Old Blueface?" he challenged. "It's only a crack in the concrete, and it's let the water through. I expected that, on account of the sand shifting sometimes. It'll take about ten minutes to fix it!"

The gloomy frown of his old partner relaxed. "Shucks, I never was fast at figurin', Kid," he exclaimed with relief.

The Kid hastened ahead. "I'm sure it's only that," he explained, "but I want to find out where it broke."

Following more slowly with the burros, Nevercome arrived at the flume where it ended in the sand, and began unloading the cement. The little beasts were restless and wanted to go on to the water.

Soon the Kid returned, walking thoughtfully in the dry flume. "Well, it's all right," he announced, wanly smiling. Bring Jenny along with her load on. We'll need that cement at the spring."

"What's wrong?" demanded Nevercome.

"Well," responded the other slowly, "our enemies, the Circle H, have registered their first objection."

"Huh? Broke up the ditch?"

"A little worse than that, old pard. They—they've blown up the spring."

Nevercome's oath was one of surprise and wrath. "Then there ain't no water?" he interrogated.

"Not a trace even," the Kid affirmed. "For a while we'll have to go for water down to the other spring, till we get the bubbler cleaned out."

"But if she's blowed up," his partner objected, "the hardpan will be cracked, and there won't be no water come up in it at all. An' that there settles farmin'!"

"Oh, don't be a gloom," retorted the youth cheerfully. "We'll shovel out the sand and pour concrete into the fissures that the blast made. Then, up comes the water again!"

Appreciation lighted the old-timer's face.

"Kid, if I'd had your gumption when I was a young feller," he asserted admiringly, "I'd of lost more money, by ginger! I'd of made more to lose!"

The burros whose packs had been removed reached the destroyed spring ahead of their masters. They were pawing around the familiar spot; but the sand which had shifted in was dry. Presently of one accord they started off for the lower spring, in which the water was drinkable, though not running. Jenny, the bell animal, quickly trailed after the others, when she had been unpacked.

A shovel sticking up conspicuously nearby had a piece of brown paper tied to it.

The Kid read the scrawled message and handed it to Densmore.

The old plainsman felt his hot fighting blood mount as he slowly deciphered the scrawl:

Maybe this here axident will show you that farmin' along Smoky Crick can't be done. Yours truely. Circle H.

Nevercome's eyes blazed smartingly. "By thunder, Kid," he shouted, "we stay! I thought I had a good friend or two, among 'em. But the lid's off. We'll fight them hombres to a standstill—if you're game. Are yuh?"

"Right-o!" agreed the Boston youth, unconcernedly. "Now let's go down to the other spring, get our cooking water and wash up. Tomorrow, or maybe next day, we'll have the old bubbler doing as well as ever!"

As they made wearily for the other watering place, the old packer drew the unhappy mental deduction that pure ignorance had induced the youngster to take the matter so lightly.

Nearing the lower spring, they saw four of their burros stretched out on the ground, and agonized groaning reached their ears. Little Jenny, the last to arrive, having drunk her fill, wabbled away and soon fell. As the pardners ran excitedly to her, she was trying to climb onto her crumpling knees, jerking up her head and rolling her eyes in great pain. Quickly she was caught with convulsions and was done.

Nevercome saw the Kid's face turn white, and then he heard vindictive utterances never equaled in the vocabulary of men he had known. And he noted that their own predicament was neglected in the tirade; for it was directed against the heartless treachery which had victimized their faithful beasts.

Another note was tied to one of the tall stemmed water-teasels growing near the spring:

We wouldn't like to see you sufferin' so advize not to use nun of this here water. It will be all right agen next year when herdin' hereabouts, but now it ain't good. Hopin' you got plenty water in your bags to get out on—and wishin' you a pleasant trip to whichever place you are headed for, we remain yours sorrorfully, Circle H.

"Maybe about a gallon uh water in the bag we left back there," stated Nevercome resentfully. "We can't hoof it to Domingo Springs on that!"

"We won't both need to go," the Kid thoughtfully amended.

"How's that!"

"One of us can go while the other stays and digs for water. Anyway, a day's digging ought to reach the water in the old spring. And when the hole's dug out a little, there'll be moisture, and the one that's digging can do with less water than the one hiking."

"E-eh!" grunted Nevercome, in disapproval. "If there's any water there, two of us c'n dig to it quicker'n one. Besides, I see plumb through your scheme! Now, wasn't you plannin' to stay an' do the diggin', makin' sure uh me a gettin' out by leavin' me take all the water? Wasn't yuh? Nope, Kid, I won't do it!"

"You're running ahead again," retorted the youth sharply. "How do you know I was planning to stay?"

"Well, I dunno," Nevercome hesitated, fighting his anger and suspicion aroused by the Kid's rebuff. "Only you made the proposition. In this here country, when a man makes a one-sided offer, that-a-way, he generally figures on the loser's end. That is, if he's a man, he does!"

"We can draw straws to see who stays," proposed the Kid, ignoring the accusation of his partner's words. "How will that suit you? We'll make it the long straw stays here and digs, with a quart of water for his share, while the short straw tracks out with the other three quarts. Is that fair?"

Nevercome grunted his consent; though almost confirmed in his suspicions. He didn't like the sound of that straw trick.

Then he remembered the little girl back in Boston, and he didn't blame the Kid so much. When they had reached their camp at the wrecked spring, he made a final appeal, with the faint hope that chance might yet favor them both.

"Le's both of us stay here tonight an' dig," he suggested. "Maybe that way we'll have good prospects of water, by mornin'. An' if we don't, it'll only be fifty-fifty, anyway, with who goes an' who stays. Even three quarts ain't none too much water for that trip."

He wondered what was going on in the Whispering Kid's mind, so long did he wait for a reply.

"All right," came the final agreement; though the words suggested thoughts unvoiced. "But let's draw our straws tonight. Because in the morning, you know, we might not agree on this drawing device. Especially it wouldn't look so good then, if water isn't to be reached."

"Shoot-'er, then!" consented Nevercome, impatiently. "Might jest as well know right away who's goin' t' be the goat."

With a tin cup they divided their water into two bags; pouring a cupful into one bag, to three cupfuls in the other. The Kid then broke in two a match, showing the pieces to Nevercome.

"You see," he said, "the short piece has the head on it. "We've agreed that the one who draws the short straw gets the three quarts of water and starts out in the morning. While the other stays here, no matter whether there's a prospect for him to reach water in the hole, or not. Now I'll stick these both into a lump of sour-dough, with the broken ends out. Shall we draw?"

"Let 'er go!" assented Nevercome, trying to quell the unloyal thoughts stealing surreptitiously into his mind.

From one of the pack kiaks, the Kid obtained the sour-dough, kneaded it into a little ball, and turning his back to his partner, partly thrust within it the broken pieces of match.

Arguing inwardly against his suspicions, Nevercome demanded of himself why the Kid should not be entitled to arrange the thing? He had no better plan of his own. Why not let chance or fate decide which of them should court death, and which struggle on for life? He wasn't asking to win—he hoped the Kid would—but for the youngster's own sake, he hoped he would win fair.

The Kid turned about with the broken match ends sticking out of the ball of dough.

"Old pard," said he, "you're trusting me, aren't you? Because if you're not——"

"I am, by thunder!" avowed the plainsman. And quickly he grabbed for one of the broken slivers of wood, to prove to himself that he meant it.

In almost stupefaction he stared at the short match end between his thumb and forefinger. The head had a little piece of dough sticking to it. Slowly entered his mind the realization that he was the winner in the gamble of life and death. The thought that he had doubted the Kid, overwhelmed him.

"Kid—this—this ain't no fair——" he gulped, and could say no more.

Coolly the Whispering Kid glared at him. Then chucking away the piece of dough containing the remaining match end, he remarked unemotionally, "Well, now that's settled—let's get busy."

"But le's eat a snack, an' then toss up to see who shovels first," suggested Nevercome.

"We'll eat," agreed the Kid, "but no more gambling! When I start shoveling, I want to keep right on at it. You dig first; then I'll relieve you and you can get in a good sleep before you start out in the morning."

There was more sense in that arrangement, Nevercome was forced to admit. And when the Kid had rolled up in his blankets, he took up a shovel with the determination to work as he never had before.

A rough man, was Nevercome Jack, but his heart went out to the youth apparently sleeping calmly over there under the same silent stars that had looked down upon similar tragedies since time began. He commenced to realize upon what a slim chance his young partner had staked his life. Furiously though he shoveled, for several hours, he made little headway against the dry sand which continually shifted back in. He began to consider the prospect of digging down to water a hopeless one. Yet in spite of his misgivings and his crying muscles, he sternly kept on, and thus he would have continued until daybreak without arousing the sleeper. But promptly as the pendulant axis of the Big Dipper stood at meridian over the North Star, he saw the silhouetted figure of the Kid coming toward him.

"Look'a here, son," he expostulated. "There ain't a dumblamed thing in this. A man can shovel here till doomsday, and this here dry sand keeps a crawlin' right back in. I had a hole almost twenty-foot wide—an' now look at it! Let's call off this here tomfoolery an' take our chances fifty-fifty, in the mornin'."

"Tut-tut!" responded the youth's hoarse whisper. "You've got a hole nearly to bed rock already. Quit crabbing and get to

sleep! I'll have water here, before you wake up."

Nevercome stretched himself in his blankets, puzzling how he might save the Whispering Kid. Only for thinking that the youngster had turned soft, had he consented finally to that match drawing decision. With the old gallantry of the range, his reasons had been sentimental—that girl in Boston. But even as he had hoped to return the Kid to her, now he was robbing her. Finally his fatigue overpowered him and he entered profound slumber.

Daylight was well along when he felt his shoulder being shaken and stared blinkingly up into the flushed face of his young partner.

"Hey! I've got it! Water!"

"How in tarnation did you do it?" Nevercome demanded, sleepily incredulous and failing to voice his great mental relief. Between sitting up and rubbing the alkali gum from his eyes, he stared at the place where he had excavated during the night. The depression had nearly refilled itself to a level with the surface. And then with astonishment he saw projecting up from the sand a piece of half inch pipe.

"What'n thunderation is that?" he interrogated.

"Why, you see," the Kid whispered happily, "I fitted a loose plug in the end of that pipe and started working it down through the sand. It was hard going, for a while, but pretty soon *ka-plunk*—it went right into the water! Then I dropped some pebbles down the pipe till the plug was forced out. And there she is—a pipe half full of water!"

"Yeh—well, what good'll that do us?" was Nevercome's doubtful objection. "How yuh aimin' to get it out'a the pipe? Suck it?" The question was a shade sarcastic.

"Yes," was the undaunted reply, "I jointed together some of those hollow teasel stems. You can suck it up same as through a straw."

"Huh? Suck water out'a the ground through a straw! I ain't in no humor fer jokes, Kid!"

"No joke at all," retorted the other cheerfully. "The pipe made too much vacuum to lift; so I tried the teasel stems. It works. Get up and try it, you lazy bum!"

After a doubting test, Nevercome found that he really could draw up a few swallows at a time. The water was flavored unpleasantly by the new pipe and the teasel stems.

"How'll this do us any good; 'ceptin' jest to stay right here an' drink it?" he queried, his brow corrugated in a riddle.

"Well," offered the youth, "I've figured that I can stay here and get enough water this way to keep me alive, while you go in for some more burros and get a pump. If we can get the pump down, then we can have water to drink and to wet the sand just enough to keep it from sliding so much.

"Sounds like it might work," Nevercome granted tentatively. "Anyhow, I'm sure glad you got yourself drinkin' water. Only yuh have to stay here t' drink it. But you done some figurin', by ginger! I was plumb upset over leavin' you here without no chance at all."

The Kid laughed silently, as though he had not in the least worried about the outcome.

"Better bring back enough water with you to last a couple of days," he advised. "Might not get that pump working right away, you know."

"You're dead right," Nevercome concurred. "You're learnin' fast, Kid." But the depth of his own careless ignorance, the old packer had yet to find out.

He noticed that the Kid seemed disinclined to join him in rummaging for a cold bite to eat, after he had wrapped up what food he was to take along with him.

"Too sleepy now," was the whispered reply to his solicitous inquiry. "I'll eat when I've had a nap."

Nevercome made up his small pack, and finally shouldered the canteen containing his precious supply of water. A thought struck him, as he did the latter, and he wheeled about facing the Kid, who had seated himself on his blankets.

"Did you drink all your water?" he asked. "I was jest thinkin' you wouldn't be needin' it now."

He seemed to notice that his young partner's face had developed an unwonted seaminess and pallor. But the impression was erased by the slowly mounting color induced by his question.

"I—my throat——" The whispered stammer was barely audible. "It got to hurting—I drank the water—before I had the pipe down. But, now, you drink all you can from the pipe."

Nevercome labored with the straw until he believed his thirst satisfied.

"Tastes rotten," he grimaced, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Well, I'll mosey on. Good luck, Kid, I'm hopin' it don't go dry on yuh."

"Good luck, pard," the Kid whispered

with one of his beaming grins. "I'm awfully sorry I wasted that water."

"Aw, ferget it!" expostulated the old trailer. And without more ado he headed out across the desert. He was weary and stiff from his unusual exertions the night before. Steadily he kept to his pace, realizing the full seriousness of the journey before him. The molten rays of the meridianal sun found him trudging mechanically on. There was no need to stop. The sparse low stubble of wilted sage afforded no sheltering breath of shade in which to rest. He hoped to make the passage to Domingo Springs in a day and a night. Seventy miles. Flesh might stand such a trip, with an iron will to drive it.

Turning from molten white to blazing gold, the sun dipped down slowly to the jagged sky-line of the hazy hills far distant. The patient plodder glanced but seldom into the discouragingly barren stretches ahead of him. Once as he did so, he thought for an instant that he had glimpsed tiny moving dots in the glaring blue haze. But illusions of the desert were to him as common. He kept his bearings instinctively, and for a great while did not again look up. When he did so, he was surprised to learn that his first vision had not been illusory. Not more than a mile away, a rider was approaching, outlined in the dust from the hoofs of several horses he was leading. There was no doubt that the rider had for some time been directing his course with a meeting as his object. Nevercome waited.

The approaching horseman was leading two horses saddled and one pack animal. Nevercome saw that he urged his beasts into a quicker pace, and in a moment he recognized him as an old hand of the Circle H whom he had known for many years as Charlie Patten. The horses being led with saddles on them were truly a welcome sight to Nevercome. The high pitched voice of Charlie Patten carried to him at some distance before the rider had drawn near enough to halt.

"Nevercome! Bless muh weary ole eyes, yeh! Where's yer tenderfoot partner—hey?"

He stopped in a cloud of dust and dismounted. He was a barrel built man. His overalls were hitched around his rotund waist with a bailing rope. Removing his hat he wiped a bald, gray fringed pate with a blue bandanna.

"Well, I heard the dirty trick they done yuh," he announced. "So I quit right off. I got plenty water here, an' two plugs fer yuh—— Where's that there Whisperin' Kid they was tellin' me was with yuh? Played out a'ready? They all do, yeh!"

Nevercome interrupted him and explained, while his listener, with apparent agitation, stroked his stubby mustache. Finally the latter burst out with a sudden interrogation.

"Water? Water in that hole, you say? Hell no! When we blew her up, that there water sunk down to China!"

Then he suddenly recalled himself guiltily, and his face reddened. But he bristled defensively as Nevercome's lean hand leaped out and gripped his shoulder, and he answered the challenging glare.

"Yeh, yeh," he confessed, "I wuz with the gang. Now don't get excited. You'd uh done the same thing, yeh—if you'd uh been workin' fer the Circle H. But I didn't agree t' no poisonin'. Honest, I tried tuh stop that. Lay off, there, Jack! You an' me don't want to have no trouble. I done all I could, yeh—by comin' back after yuh, soon's I could."

Nevercome's hand slipped limply from Patten's shoulder. "If—if," he hesitated, "there wasn't no water at all in that hole —what was it I drunk out'a the pipe?"

A terrible realization began to dawn on him. He remembered how stale and tepid the water had tasted.

"Charlie," he gasped, "do yuh know what I done? I drunk that Kid's own quart uh water! My Gawd! He tricked me! Tricked me to a fare-ye-well. Poor, durn little Whisperin' Kid! An' fer a while I thought he was soft! He jest plugged that there pipe an' poured his own water into it. Oh, durn me! Durn my dumb ole carcass!

"Charlie, jump onto yer hoss agen. We're startin'!"

With the interminable suspense of the long ride through the night, Nevercome had time for further meditation and self-accusation. The horses could be ridden only at a regular, steady pace. Charlie, having delivered himself of necessary explanations, was not a talkative companion. Only intermittent remarks passed between them, indicating that both their minds were occupied with the same worry and speculation. What would the Kid

do—probably knowing it would be useless trying to dig for water?" Now Nevercome realized that with all his assumed cheerfulness and nonchalance, the Kid had been coolly facing death all the while. Was the youth now slowly dying of thirst? Or had he——?

At this point of conjecturing, his sudden oath startled Charlie Patten.

"Charlie!" he burst out in a voice wild with distress. "He'd go down there an' drink that other water! That's what he'd do—so's to end it quick! My Gawd, can't we go no faster?"

"Mebbe he ain't thunk about that," suggested his companion.

"Ain't—what?" Nevercome groaned. "Say, Charlie, lemme tell yuh, that there Kid thinks faster'n a buzz-saw! Ain't thunk of it! Why, he'd of thunk of it last night, afore we drew them matches, even. An' I'll gamble he done fixed them matches, too!

"Charlie Patten, lissen!" he cried in his great grief, beside himself. "If the Kid is done for, Charlie, I don't care, even if yuh are tryin' now to help—— Charlie, I'll kill yuh! Hear me, I'll kill yuh!"

The other made no response, and the creaking of saddle leather with the rythmic thudding of hoofs, were the only sounds, following the threat, that broke upon the still night. And thus they rode on, until they entered the shallow valley where the sands of the anciently meandering Smoky Creek shimmered silent and barren under the stars.

There was no light in the tent. Though such would not have been the case, anyway, at midnight, Nevercome's eyes had peered painfully ahead with his hope that he might see one. They rode into the deserted camp and dismounted.

"Hey, Kid, hey!" Nevercome cried, with hopeless fear. He hurried into the tent, although neither of them had been accustomed to sleeping in it. It contained their camping supplies. Fumbling in the dark, he found a lantern. With its gloomy radiance only accentuating the bareness he felt, he hastened out with it. The other man followed him.

"Here's where we dug, Charlie," he addressed Patten for the first time. "An' here's where I'll bury yuh, if——

"No—the pipe ain't here—ain't here at all! But he's been tryin' to dig—— Tryin' to dig some more—an' there wasn't a drop!"

A flutter of white caught his attention. Again it was a note tied to a shovel. Giving the lantern to Patten to hold, he opened the paper with shaking fingers. Slowly and with awful dread, he deciphered the words.

Nevercome: When you come back it won't be any use to try to put your pump down here. The water soon gave out after you left. I guess I had just struck a little pocket of it with the pipe. I've dug to bed-rock, finally. I struck moist sand; so it helped me. But there's nothing there.

By-and-by, let the little girl know. But do it as easy as you can. I think the other trouble would have got me in a few years, anyway. So here's luck!

Your tenderfoot pard.

The white paper fluttered down from Nevercome's nerveless fingers.

"Drop that lantern, Patten," he cried, "an' grab your gun!"

But the other man was prepared. The innate training to give the "called" man a chance was Nevercome's undoing. In the fractional pause while he waited, the lantern struck his face. The blow dazed him an instant, and the light went out. In the next moment he was being grappled by the barrel-bodied cowman. He was dragged down in a bear hug, but he got his frantic fingers into Patten's throat. He struggled uppermost of the shorter man, and with all the wild vengeance of his mortal anguish, he bore his fingers home. He felt the bear clamp beginning to loosen; but his own grip continued remorselessly. He was killing mad.

And then it seemed as though he slowly became conscious of someone standing near him. A shadowy shape materialized out of the night. In his frenzy he was not aware of it, or of anyone near, until he realized that whatever, whoever it was, had for some seconds been hammering at him, shaking him, and saying something which he could not understand.

But he was forced out of his madness. The clamping arms of his victim had dropped from their hold. Then Nevercome saw, and realized, that the Whispering Kid was there—real and in the flesh!

"Stop, you damned idiots. Quit it!" It was the Kid's familiar, hoarse whisper. "What's the matter, anyway? That you,

pard? Well, what are you killing the other guy for?"

"My Gawd, I don't know," was the stupefied answer. "Ken it be really you, Kid?"

"Of course," was the response. "I heard you riding in. I was asleep, down by the other spring. I had got all fagged out. And when I found the water running good—— Well, I was intending to drink it anyhow. But after I got soaked up good, I snoozed."

"Well, now yuh ain't goin' t' kill me—get off'a me!" came the sudden gasping order, from underneath.

Both recent combatants got slowly to their feet.

"This here's Charlie Patten, Kid," announced Nevercome, in considerable confusion. "I met him comin' to—er rescue us."

"Fine way to treat a rescuer," the Kid remarked.

"Well—he done the blowin' up, too. So——"

"Oh! In that case, Mr. Patten," the youth hoarsely interrupted, "you did us a great favor. When you blew up the spring, here, you let the water down so that now it runs to beat the band out of the lower one. We won't have to finish the flume, even. And of course, the water you poisoned was soon forced out, after it began running."

The announcement was received in amazed silence.

"Hurrah fer farmin'!" Nevercome finally yelped.

"I'd almost invite you to join us, lower down, Mr. Patten—you have really helped us so much—" the Kid continued, "if it hadn't been for that poisoning."

"Charlie tried to stop that!" Nevercome explained quickly. "That's why he quit his job an' was comin' to help."

"In that case let's shake, all around," suggested the Whispering Kid, "and then get some sleep. The fine air of your desert, Mr. Patten, is a salubrious aid to slumber!"

TURNSPIT DOGS

A COMMON tavern sign in 1693, in Philadelphia and elsewhere, was one depicting turnspit dogs. These dogs were patient little creatures, long-bodied and crooked-legged, whose lives were spent in the tantalizing torture of turning the meat that was slowly roasted before open fireplaces. Dr. Caius, founder of the college at Cambridge, England, that bears his name, writes thus of turnspits: "Certain dogs in kitchen service excellent. When meat is to be roasted, they go into a wheel, where, turning about with the weight of their bodies they so diligently look to their business that no drudge or kitchen scullion can do the feat more cunningly." Turnspit dogs were taught their duties in an inhumane way that modern society would not tolerate. The dog was put into a wheel. A burning coal was placed upon the treadway behind him. If he stopped running, his legs were burned. By this simple expedient he was soon taught his lesson. It was hard work, too, for often the meat was twice the weight of the dog, and the roasting required at least three hours. Experienced turnspit dogs often learned to disappear at sight of the cook or the wheel.

STREET SWEEPING IN FRANKLIN'S DAY

TO THE already long list of progressive measures, inventions and sociological ideas originated or fathered by Benjamin Franklin, probably the most versatile American in our history, is now added his work as organizer of the first street-cleaning squad.

In the time of Franklin, housewives had a bad habit of throwing waste into the streets. This was very unsanitary, besides being slightly inconvenient for a passer-by to have his clothing unceremoniously drenched by a stray panful of dishwater. No one seemed to devise a way to collect the waste material until an industrious man offered to keep the streets clean by sweeping them twice a week for the small sum of six pence a month. This was to be paid by each houseowner. Franklin was interested in this man and tried to help him. He wrote and printed a paper stating the advantages secured by this small expenditure and sent a copy to each house. In a day or so he sent two men around to see what people were willing to pay for this service. The paper was signed unanimously, and the work was well executed until paved streets were laid out and a city ordinance required housewives to be more careful.

REALM OF THE MOUNTED

A Tale of the Far North and its Hidden Mysteries

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "North!" "The Challenge of the North," etc.

Part III

Chapter XIII

BESIDE THE LITTLE FIRE

BEYOND the muskeg, through which the Fish River winds for a mile or more above the mouth of the Icy, Janier spoke to the dog.

"Go on, Puk-puk! See what you can find."

Janier motioned toward the bank and, without a moment's hesitation, the dog leaped from the canoe, taking the water in a clean cut dive and striking out promptly for the bank.

All during the afternoon the dog, on shore, kept abreast of the canoes, swimming the river at various points to avoid swamps and muskeg. Sometimes he was plainly visible where the stream wound through open country; and again he was lost to sight, for an hour at a time, when timber lined the banks.

As they sat about the little fire after supper, that evening, Irma Boyne reached out her hand and caressed the head of the great dog.

"Why did you make Puk-puk walk instead of letting him ride in the canoe?" she asked.

"Oh, he does lots of walking along rivers," answered Janier. "He isn't like these Injun dogs. He's got a nose. Not as delicate or discriminating, perhaps, as some hounds, but a perfectly dependable nose, nevertheless. And I have trained him to report to me anything he scents or sees or hears that is out of the ordinary."

"How wonderful!" cried the girl. "He's almost human!"

Janier frowned slightly.

"Not at all," he explained. "Puk-puk is just a dog, nothing more. A very good dog, bred for stamina and endurance and loyalty, bred to work all day, and day after day, in ice-water if necessary. Swims like an otter and dives like one."

The man walked to the bank and picked up a white stone the size of a hen's egg. "Fetch!" he commanded, showing the stone to Puk-puk and tossing it far out into the stream. The dog sprang into the water and swam rapidly, his eyes on the spot where the stone had disappeared. Then, suddenly he dived; after what seemed a full minute, he reappeared on the surface, swam to the bank and dropped the stone at Janier's feet. After vigorously shaking himself, he returned to his place beside the girl.

"And he is not even wet," smiled Janier.

"Not wet!"

"Only the long outer coat will feel damp to the touch. Just part the hair and examine the short inner coat."

"Why, it's dry as a bone! He's like a seal!"

"Exactly," smiled the man. "And no one would think of going into raptures over the fact that a seal don't get wet when he goes into the water."

"Oh, it isn't that. It's his intelligence. He sits in your canoe as steadily as a trained canoeman. And he seems to understand everything you say." She shuddered slightly. "I thought he would tear Mr. Babcock in pieces. He stood there on the sand as unconcerned, as gentle looking as could be, and the instant you spoke he had changed into the very incarnation of vicious hate. And then, later, when you told him to go ashore and see what he could find, he dived in without a moment's hesitation, and never so much as offered to return to the canoe all the afternoon."

"Even so, there is nothing particularly wonderful about any of these performances, if you will stop to consider that he did only what he has been carefully trained to do. Puk-puk and I have been inseparable companions for three years. We have eaten together and worked and played together and we understand each other perfectly. A friend in Toronto gave him to me when he was just a puppy. He had an idea he would make a sled dog."

"Is he a sled dog?"

"By all odds the best lead dog in all the North. He has the weight and the stamina of the best of the huskies and malamutes, combined with intelligence far superior to the intelligence of any husky or malamute. Why shouldn't he sit a canoe like a trained canoeman? He has traveled more miles in canoes than any canoeman I know. And as for the other things, I have trained him to attack a man at a word of command. I got the idea from reading a magazine account of the training of police dogs in Belgium. And I have trained him to notice anything in the wilderness

REALM OF THE MOUNTED

JAMES B. HENDRYX

A word about the story and what has happened before

WHEN we begin a tale of the North by the leader of all writers of that land, Mr. Hendryx, we know that we are going to meet with adventure that will hold us irresistibly and with people and scenes that ring absolutely true.

In "Realm of the Mounted" we have the story of the rare Gus Janier, blithesome adventurer of the open spaces, and of plucky Irma Boyne, and of the famous Canadian Mounted Police.

Irma Boyne has set out into the wilderness in search of her missing father and, through the wiles of an outlaw named Nixon, she finds herself with only the staunch old Indian, Teddy-By-and-By, for a guide. Nixon is planning to jump whatever mining claim Irma's father, John Boyne, may discover.

It happens that the carefree rover, Gus Janier, is also, in a friendly spirit, keeping his eyes open for Boyne at the request of his good friend, Corporal Downey, of the Mounted.

Still another searcher for Boyne is one Babcock, who is a sort of temporary guardian of Irma, but it evidently would not break Babcock's heart if he found that Boyne was dead. In that case he would have control of Irma's inheritance for some years. Nixon, with the aid of his crooked fellow conspirator, Constable Crowley, hires out as guide to Babcock so as to be able to steer him off from coming across Boyne himself.

Janier, on his way to locate Boyne, finds a lady's handkerchief, in a deserted cabin, marked with the initial B. In a spirit of romance, though not forgetting his main object, he sets out to trail down this mysterious Miss B. He finds her and Teddy; is much attracted by her and learns that she is the daughter of the rich missing John Boyne. Telling her that he will meet her further on, at Icy River, he pushes on to try and find what the suspicious character Nixon is doing up around where Boyne is supposed to be.

At Icy River he runs across Constable Crowley, who speaks to him about Babcock and mentions that Nixon is now guiding Babcock. Crowley then goes on his way, with the idea in his head of making it appear that Janier is the guilty party if it should prove to be necessary for Nixon to do away with Boyne in jumping his gold claim.

Presently fate brings Babcock and Janier together at Icy River. Janier, concealing his suspicion of Nixon, suggests to Nixon that he search one part of the Heywood Range for Boyne while he himself searches another part. Nixon, though aware that Boyne is not there, is glad of the chance to search for him alone while Babcock stays in camp. Janier doesn't go far away himself, and when Irma appears soon after, he returns and thrashes Babcock for his boorish behavior and then he and Irma and Teddy-By-and-By set out in search of Boyne together, leaving Babcock to rage.

that has the man-scent upon it. That is why he is wise to his job of working the banks of streams. I have been able to help the police in locating many liquor caches." The man paused and laughed. "And incidentally, I think I have personally examined every old discarded pot and tin can between Alaska and the Bay.

"You see, Miss Boyne, if Puk-puk had any human attributes, he would not bother me with inconsequentials. He would learn to discriminate between the worthless and the worth while objects he runs across; but as it is, he reports as faithfully the finding of a worn-out sock as the discovery of a liquor cache. And I praise him equally for his finds. If I were a great dog trainer, one who knew just how far he could go with a dog, I would probably be able to increase his proficiency by teaching him to disregard the inconsequential; but I don't dare to try it. I might undo the work I have already done. And then, how do I know that at some time the finding of an empty tin or a discarded sock may tell me just the thing I want to know?"

"But," questioned the girl, "why do you want to know these things? You are not in the Mounted. What difference does it make to you who camped upon the bank of a river, or why?"

"In the great majority of cases, no difference in the world. In certain cases, a difference of life and death, for me or some other. As to the hootch—if they traded it to white men I wouldn't concern myself with it. But they don't. They trade it to the Injuns and they take in exchange the fur that is so badly needed by the poor devils to buy food and clothing for their women and their babies. These Northern Injuns, for the most part, live a miserable existence, at best. And when most of their fur goes to the hootch trader, the sufferings of the innocent ones is little less than tragic. At least it seems tragic to me. I know them. I suppose in the great world of mockery that is called civilization, their little sufferings would find scant sympathy. But, to us, who live here in the North, of whose world they are a part, their tragedies seem very real. We are an unsophisticated folk, Miss Boyne. We sorrow with our neighbors."

"But you, you are not unsophisticated. You have not lived always in the North. You are a man of education."

Janier struck an attitude: "Discovered at last, in spite of all I could do! Was it the Bible that said, 'Be sure your sins will find you out?' I assure you, Miss Boyne, I am trying to live it down!"

"Do be serious!" laughed the girl, "and do tell me, what is the idea? What is the object of your life here in the wilderness?"

"I like it here," answered the man simply. "I have tried civilization, and have rejected it. One perfectly good education was wasted when I absorbed whatever I did absorb of it. It is of no use to me whatever."

"But it will be, after you settle down to really doing something."

"Settle down! Do something!" exclaimed the man, with a touch of impatience. "You talk like the rest. What in the name of high heaven do people want me to do? Stay in a post and dicker with Injuns for fur? Join the Mounted and have someone else order my life for me? Practice medicine? Ship on a whaler? Puny jobs! I'll have none of them!"

"But, surely, you can't spend your whole life just roaming around in the wilds, hunting and fishing!"

"Why not?"

Irma Boyne found the direct question disconcerting. She strove to answer and found herself floundering. "Because—why, because you're wasting your life," she said. "It isn't right——"

"By what standards?"

"Why, by the world's standard, of course. By the standards set up by the civilization you profess to scorn, standards that teach that all waste is wrong."

Beside the canoe that had been drawn up on the sand, Teddy-By-and-By lay asleep in his blankets. The girl's hand caressed lightly the big dog that dozed with his head in her lap, but her gaze was on the face of the man who leaned toward her, his eyes alight as he spoke with compelling conviction.

"I do not scorn civilization, Miss Boyne. It is merely that I choose not to live under the conditions it imposes. You just said that it teaches that all waste is wrong. But it does not so teach! If it did, it would bring against itself a terrible indictment. My dear lady, the wastes of civilization are appalling. And they are preventable wastes! There's war, with its waste of men and material. Look, also, at the senseless ravaging by your civilization of the world's natural resources. Where is the timber, that had it been properly cut and properly used could have been reaped annually as a crop in quantity sufficient for the needs of civilization forever? And the coal? They are saying now about the

coal exactly what, less than fifty years ago, they were saying about the timber. There is enough to last forever! And in a hundred years from now they will be wringing their foolish hands and blubbering about the dearth of coal, even as we are blubbering about the dearth of timber and damning its wasters.

"And the waste does not stop there. Look at the petty waste, which in the aggregate totals billions, waste in fire losses, in human life in railway and automobile accidents, and even in the dumping of sewage into rivers and of garbage into the ocean. All ninety per cent. preventable, yet all smugly accepted. And you, yourself, have accepted these things, because such acceptance has become the conventional posture of civilization. So you see, Miss Boyne, your criticism of my mode of life cannot be based upon civilization's principles of conservation, for civilization has no such principle.

"Men are supposed to be engaged in gainful occupations, is the cry. Your greengrocer, your banker, your butcher, your baker, and your candlestick maker, are persons of eminent respectability. Why? Because they are, as you said, doing something, have settled down, are working to an end. What end? To earn a living and possibly to lay something by, to win a great fortune, if they are, in the eyes of the world, successful. Their game is a game of acquisition. They live to get, not to give.

"I believe, Miss Boyne, you will not consider me a boaster when I tell you that I consider my own life is upon a broader plane than the lives of workers for gain. I enjoy life, but the life of a wanderer in wild places is hard work and the material gain is negligible; or perhaps I should rather say fleeting, for I believe that some time I shall accomplish a thing that will make me rich. What that thing is, whether it will be power development, mines, reindeer ranching, oil, I do not know. But I do know that when that time comes, the material gain will be merely an incident, not an end. The end and the aim will be the development of a new land that will be a land of promise for many men and women. You see, I have my dreams of empire, Miss Boyne, as many men of your civilization have had dreams—some of them good dreams. I have every confidence in the ultimate success and glory of your civilization. But I have mighty little patience with its methods!

"And so you find me, a mere wanderer, going here and there, paying homage only to the great god *hunch*. But, even should my dream of empire never be realized, my life will not have been wasted; for in our wanderings Puk-puk and I have been the means of doing some measure of good among the little peoples whose lives, at best, are forlorn and meagre and who know the gnawing of hunger. Many of these poor devils I have saved from death by disease or hunger or freezing. In the satisfaction of doing these things lies the pay for my day's work."

The fire had died to red coals that cast just the faintest glow upon the profile of the girl who sat listening as one entranced to the voice that spoke softly out of the gloom at her side. And in the moment of silence that followed his speaking, Janier caught the glint of a tear upon her lashes as she stared straight before her toward the crest of a wooded ridge where the shoulder of the moon was just showing through the tops of the stunted trees.

Again he spoke.

"I never have defended my position before. Always I have been criticised, but I have never stooped to defend, to argue, to explain, because I did not care. I did not suppose there lived a person in the whole wide world for whose opinion I cared the snap of my finger. I was wrong. For your opinion I do——"

"Why should you care?" interrupted the girl, with such sudden vehemence that Puk-puk raised his head from her lap and regarded her with smouldering yellow eyes. "Oh, forgive me! I did not understand! I was a fool. Anyone is a fool who attempts to criticise that which they do not understand! What must you think of me!"

"I am going to tell you what I think." There was that in the man's voice, a note of suppressed emotion, of some mighty force held in check, that caused the girl to meet his gaze with tear-dimmed eyes. "For your opinion I do care. I care tremendously. Miss Boyne—Irma——" The voice trembled and broke. The next instant his arm was about her and she was crushed against his side, while in her ear sounded his voice in a hoarse whisper:

"I love you—love you, dear! I have

loved you from the moment I first saw you—since before that! Since your voice floated out to me over the still waters of the lake I loved you! For years and years I have loved you. I didn't know what it was, the longing, the irresistible, illusive call. But now I know. The longing was for you, darling, and the call was your soul calling to mine!"

For one brief moment the girl struggled, helplessly, hopelessly, against the mighty torrent of his love, then the torrent engulfed her, the struggles ceased; and as his lips met hers she knew that her arms were around him and she was drawing him closer, closer.

The moon rose clear of the timbered ridge and from some little landlocked lake came the quavering cry of the loon. "And I love you, my darling," she whispered softly, as with her head resting against his shoulder, she looked up into his eyes. "I too, have heard the call. And tonight I have found the answer. I love it all—the moon, the untrodden ways; and even the wild, shivery night crys. Always I have been attracted to the wild country, as my father is attracted. But tonight you have taught me to love it! And to love the man who is big enough to trample rough shod the petty conventions of men!

"Oh, you have made me see it all so differently—the values, the sordid, humdrum lives of the money getters, back there, and the simple dignity, the unselfish, the almost unconscious service of your life here. No wonder Teddy-By-and-By fairly adores you! And no wonder Nixon hates! And now we must hurry and find dad! I want him to know you and to love you, as I know you and love you."

Janier smiled: "Dads don't always do that, you know! If I should find no more favor with him, than I have found with your estimable guardian——"

"That Babcock!" cried the girl, in disgust. "I hate him! And I'm afraid of him, too!" She shuddered. "Oh, if you had not happened to come just when you did! He dared to speak to me of love! He tried it once before; and when I told him what I thought of him he threatened. He wants dad's money! That's what he wants! And he thought the way to get it would be to marry me. But, dad will love you—he can't help it!"

The man laughed: "We shall soon know. You and Tedy-By-and-By will camp tomorrow on Sussex Lake, and Puk-puk and I will start hunting for him. If I am not mistaken we shall find him somewhere in the ridges yonder to the eastward."

Chapter XIV

Boyne's Camp

LEAVING the girl and the Indian, next day, comfortably encamped on the east shore of Sussex Lake, which is the head water of Back's Fish River, Janier made up a light trailpack and with Puk-puk at his heels struck off to the eastward.

"I may be back tonight, dear," he said, as he took leave of the girl who had accompanied him a short distance from camp, "or, it may be three or four days. And when I come I shall bring your father."

"And I will be waiting for you! Oh, I do want to see you two together, *my* two men! Father is larger than you; and so——"

"In that case," interrupted Janier, "I may appear about two jumps ahead of him and going strong!"

The words were drowned in a laugh; and he kissed her and was gone.

It was late in the evening of the second day when Puk-puk approached in great bounds to where Janier was traversing the crest of a bald ridge, his eyes scanning the country for signs of Boyne or his camp. It was thus the two worked together, the man on the ridges where his superior vision could command the distance, and the dog in the scrub-timbered valleys where his sense of scent outvalued the sense of sight. Pausing before his master, the dog whined and, whirling about, started off in the direction from which he had come. Janier followed, picking his way with all possible haste down the steep side of the ridge. At the bottom the dog was waiting. And when the man came up he plunged into the scrub and led the way at an angle up the narrow valley.

Two hundred yards farther on the dog halted before the dead ashes of a small fire and, looking up into the man's face, wagged his tail and voiced a series of low whines of delight. Janier reached down and thumped the dog's ribs and shoulders with great slaps of approbation.

"Good dog, Puk-puk! It took a long

time to find it, didn't it old man? But you hung to it. Yes, sir! An' now, down with you! I don't want you rompin' around here mussin' things all up, till I look around a bit."

The dog, his yellow eyes alert to the man's every movement, settled down onto the ground and subjected the ground and surrounding scrub to minute scrutiny.

"Fire was made yesterday, or today," Janier confided to him. "It rained night before last; an' no rain has fallen on the ashes. Both days, I guess. He camped here last night. Didn't bother to cut branches. There's his hip pole. So he was no Injun or husky. Bein' a white man the chances are it was either Boyne or Nixon. If it was Boyne, it's a good bet we're not very close to his camp, or he wouldn't have camped here for the night; it must be at least a half a day from here. If it was Nixon, the chances are we're pretty close to Boyne's camp, or he wouldn't have been so careful to camp in such thick cover. There are a hundred better campin' places within a few hundred yards, any one of which a man who was not guardin' against discovery would have selected. He wore moccasins. That would indicate Nixon. Boyne would hardly wear moccasins when his work takes him most of the time among rocks.

"I guess we'll decide it was Nixon, an' we've got to hurry an' dope out which direction he took before we camp for the night. The trail might be too cold for your nose to pick up in the mornin'; it may be too cold now, but we'll see. Wait just a minute, an' I'll try to help you a bit. He camped last night. Let's see, which way was the wind last night? If we're right in believin' we are close to Boyne's camp, it ought to be upwind from here. There wasn't much wind, but what there was came from the northeast. I remember we sat on the northeast side of our fire. And Nixon slept a little north of northeast of his. These ridges run almost north an' south. Puk-puk, I'll bet Boyne's camp lies either in the next valley to the east, or the second one—not a bit farther than that!" The man glanced at his watch. It showed nine o'clock. "Come on, Puk-puk, we've still got an hour of good daylight. Which way did he go, boy? Let's see if you can pick him up!"

The dog sprang up at the wave of the man's hand and circled about, his nose to the ground. After a few moments he struck off to the eastward and Janier followed. A few rods farther on the dog again began to circle, ranging to the right and to the left and far to the front. Janier grinned. "Shame to make you do a hound dog's work, Puk-puk. But keep at it. You may find something, even if you can't hold the trail. If Nixon were a crippled bird, now, or a wounded caribou or deer, you could follow him to the Bay!"

On the summit of the ridge, Janier paused and searched the narrow valley that lay before him for signs of a camp. But no flicker of fire met his gaze, nor any thin column of smoke. The valley was more sparsely wooded than the one he had just left; he was on the point of descending the ridge and crossing to the next, when once more Puk-puk came racing toward him. Following the dog to a point at the base of the ridge and a considerable distance up the valley, he found himself staring into the mouth of a crosscut in front of which lay a scattered heap of rock fragments.

Swinging his pack to the ground he produced his flashlight and, dropping to his knees, explored the interior. Twenty feet from its mouth, the tunnel terminated abruptly in a face, before which lay an assortment of hammers and drills, together with a bag containing several sticks of giant and a coil of fuse.

"Good boy!" he cried thumping the dog. "We've found Boyne's workings an' we'll soon find Boyne himself!" Returning the flashlight, he swung the pack to his shoulder, and studied the ground. "He's been quite a while at this job, an' ought to have left a plain trail to his camp." A short distance from the tunnel entrance he stopped suddenly and stared at two stakes, driven side by side into the ground. His forehead contracted in a frown.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed, and continued to stare at the stakes. "This is evidently a corner stake," he muttered. "But why two?"

A short search revealed another corner, with two stakes marking it. The third and fourth corners were soon located, each marked by two stakes; and Janier searched the ground for the centre stake to which the location would be affixed. He found it, or rather them; for, as at the corners, there were two. To each stake a notice

was affixed with a bit of wire. Dropping to his knees, Janier loosened both notices and, removing their oilcloth coverings, spread them side by side. Both were identical; and a flush of anger, followed by a sudden thrill of chilling apprehension, swept over him. One notice, signed by John Boyne, was written in a clear full hand, while the other, a verbatim copy, was a labored scrawl. At the bottom appeared the name, George Crowley!

"What the devil!" cried Janier, staring at the scrawl. "This is Nixon's work! But why has he used Crowley's name?"

His first impulse was to pull up the second set of stakes and to destroy the notice. But, remembering that such procedure constituted a crime which carried a heavy penalty, he rewrapped both notices in their weatherproof coverings and wired them in place. For well he knew that should Constable Crowley find the stakes tampered with, he would leave no stone unturned to bring him to book.

"I've got to move fast, now!" cried Janier aloud, "Boyne's staked an' probably gone; an' Nixon will try to beat him to the recorder an' will stand a good chance of doin' it, too, with his knowledge of the country! But—I can't leave *her!* I've got to make sure Boyne's gone out an' then hit back for her. Maybe, at that, I can beat Nixon out. I know a thing or two about this country that even he don't know! But, first, I'll stake for her! It's a game three can play as well as two!"

Hurriedly the man cut and drove his stakes and copied the location to which he signed the name of Irma Boyne, which he affixed to a third center stake. Then, in the waning light, he took up his search for a trail. "Too wise to leave one," he muttered, after many minutes of futile search. "Came a different way each time." Giving up the idea of finding a trail, he struck straight across the valley, hoping to find Boyne's camp beyond the next ridge.

The valley beyond was more thickly timbered and Janier wasted no time taking observations from the crest of the ridge, reasoning that the chance of finding a camp fire was small and that in the failing light Puk-puk's nose was of far greater value than his own eyesight. And so it proved to be, for hardly had he reached the level of the valley than the dog was at his side, whining and wagging his tail. Janier hastened after him and soon came upon a camp that had evidently been occupied for a number of weeks. The camp was deserted, as he had expected, and stepping to the little tent, he lighted the candle that stood upon the rude pole table.

The place was in the utmost confusion. Books and papers were scattered about the floor, while blankets and various articles of clothing had been tossed outside to lie in a disordered heap before the door.

"Nixon found Boyne gone an' ransacked the place," was his first thought as he stared about him. Then, suddenly, the chill of apprehension once more gripped him. If Boyne had gone to file his claim, why had he left all his personal effects behind? The man's eyes swept the jumble of articles, cooking utensils, camp dishes, a pick, pan, shovel, and a couple of light hammers. Yes, Boyne's pack sack was here, and his blankets and clothing—and even his toothbrush!

Janier's was a brain trained to draw deductions from meagre sequence of sign. Very carefully and methodically he examined the interior of the tent, even hurriedly scanning the fragments of notations in small notebooks and upon half sheets of paper that he shook from between the leaves of several text books on mining. One of these sheets he read and reread. The second reading finished, he sat for some moments staring straight at the flame of the candle. Then, with a peculiar smile upon his lips, he folded it and placed it very carefully inside the sweat band of his hat.

At the end of an hour he sat upon Boyne's blankets and checked off his findings to Puk-puk, who listened with head cocked wisely to the side.

"There's something wrong here, old man," he confided. "Something devilish wrong! Let's see if we can figure it out. This was a two man camp. Boyne was one of them; an' his companion was an Injun, old Nenikna. I know, because I found one of his worn out gloves, an' it happened to be one of a pair of my own I gave him a year ago. Boyne an' the Indian are both gone. The Indian's belongin's are gone. Boyne's belongin's are here. Yet Boyne himself is not here. Clearly he did not go away to file his claim, and leave his pack-sack, his canoe paddles an' his toothbrush behind, even if he had other blankets and clothin'; which I doubt, for there are enough of both here to last for a couple of years. And there we are!

"Now, if Boyne didn't go away, he was either taken away or he is still in this vicinity. Neither Nenikna nor Nixon could have taken him away single handed. An' Neninka would never have helped Nixon.

If he was not taken away, he is either dead or rendered unable to return to his camp. God! Puk-puk, how I wish, for just this once, you were a bloodhound! With all this stuff of Boyne's here you could find him in no time. But, we've got to find him, Puk-puk. And we've got to start right now! I won't be much help till the moon gets higher, but thank the Lord, you don't need light to work in. Come on!"

Janier leaped to his feet and, walking a short distance down the valley, waved his hand toward the eastward. "Go on, Puk-puk! See what you can find!" As the dog leaped into the scrub, Janier followed, making poor going of it in the comparative darkness.

At the end of an hour, they had half circled the tent and struck off to the westward. A low whine from the dog brought Janier to his side at a point not twenty yards from the tent. Before him lay the form of a man, an oldish man, large of frame. The man was dead. Janier could not see his features. He lay sprawled upon his face, close beside a jagged fragment of rock.

For some moments Janier stood looking down at the man. Then, calling the dog, he hurried to the tent, procured his electric flashlight and returned to the body, which, with its surroundings, he submitted to the same careful scrutiny with which he had examined the interior of the tent. The man's hat was gripped in his hand; and a little above and behind the left ear was a peculiar, crescent-shaped wound from which blood had flowed freely, matting the rather thin, grizzled hair. Upon a sharp corner of the rock fragment beside the man's head a few grayish hairs were cemented with freshly dried blood. The fragment, partly embedded in the ground, had evidently, at some distant time, become detached from a much larger fragment at whose base it lay.

Janier turned his attention to this larger fragment. It rose to a height of eight or ten feet sheer from the valley floor. A thick, irregular slab, outcropping from the ground. Upon the opposite side of the body from this slab, and distant not more than three feet, a rock ledge rose perpendicularly to a height of twenty or thirty feet. Boyne had met his end as he passed between the ledge and the slab. Behind the slab, upon the side away from the body, was a tangle of scrub. Very carefully, his flashlight directed upon the ground, Janier crept around to the rear of the large fragment. A few freshly broken spruce twigs lay upon the ground close against the base of the slab, where the soft earth had been trodden by moccasined feet.

Janier crawled back to the body and for ten minutes stared at the wound and at the jagged corner of smaller rock fragment to which clung the hairs and the dry blood. The point of the fragment presented an almost perfect triangle. The wound almost a perfect crescent!

Very carefully, with the tips of his fingers, the man explored the wound. Red blood welled from beneath the dry. The skull was broken, a segment crushed inward. Janier could feel a loose fragment as though a piece of the bone had slivered off. It moved at his touch, and grasping it gently between his thumb and finger he withdrew it from the wound and held it close to the lense of his flashlight. Wetting his finger with his tongue, he removed the blood from the fragment, and examined it for several moments, minutely. Then he returned the fragment to the wound, pressing it deeply, and as it entered beneath the inner edge of the skull, he crowded it sidewise.

Holding the light close to the wound, he opened his knife and with the blade pushed the fragment well back beyond the edge of the skull. He turned the body upon its back and noted that the man's shirt-collar was rolled back, as though habitually worn open, and saw that the neck was tanned as was the face. Running through this tan clear around the man's neck was a thin white mark, a narrow ribbon of untanned skin. Gently, he pressed the lids over the staring eyes and, rising to his feet, walked slowly to the tent, procured a blanket which he threw over the body, weighted its edges with rock fragments and, returning to the tent, made up his bed and slept.

Chapter XV

CROWLEY MAKES AN ARREST

IT SEEMED to Janier that he had scarcely closed his eyes when he was awakened by the sound of a rifle shot. Instantly he was upon his feet, his eyes

upon the dog, which stood with ears alert, staring straight down the valley.

"So, that's where it came from, eh? All right, Puk-puk, just a second an' we'll slip down there!"

A few moments later, with the dog at his heels he was speeding through the scrub as fast as his moccasined feet would carry him. A mile below Boyne's camp the valley widened perceptibly; and the creek, which at the camp was hardly more than a trickle, became canoe water. The scrub of the upper valley thinned, increasing his range of vision in the rapidly gathering daylight. A quarter of a mile farther on he halted suddenly and, drawing into cover of a bushy tree, peered across a small beaver meadow toward a point where three figures were bending over some object upon the ground. "Huskies!" muttered the man. And stepping into the open, he walked rapidly toward them. Catching sight of him, the three stood erect and awaited his approach. Janier saw that the object upon the ground was a caribou fawn. The Eskimos stared stolidly as he greeted them, then one of them stepped quickly forward, his wide, flat face stretched even wider in a grin that seemed to bisect it from ear to ear.

"Me know you. You Gushany!"

"Hello, Kormik!" cried Janier, recognizing the man as a native he had once employed as interpreter on a trip to the coast. "What in the devil you doin' here?"

The man gave every evidence of delight that Janier had remembered his name: "Hunt, feesh," he replied and pointed to the eastward. "We go feesh Beverly Lak'."

"Beverly Lake, eh?" An idea suddenly occurred to Janier and he laid a hand on the man's arm. "Where you boat?"

"Beeg lak'." And the Eskimo pointed to the southward.

"How many boat?"

"Me, *kayak*," he answered. Then, pointing to the other two, he said, "*Umiak.*"

"Good! You savvy police house—Baker Lake?"

The man nodded.

"You know me. Gus Janier tell you the truth." Again the other nodded emphatically. And Janier continued. "All right! Now you listen." He paused and, tearing a page from a small note book which he drew from his pocket, hastily scribbled a few lines with the stub of a pencil and handed it to the Eskimo. "You take paper to police—Baker Lake. Take *kayak.* Go like hell! Four hundred mile! Give paper to police. By-m-by I come. Find you Beverly Lake. I give you company order you get twenty-five fish hook, five file, one ax, one pound tobac', one hundred cartridge. You savvy?"

The man's face fairly beamed as he took the paper. "Me go! Mebbe-so ten sleep."

Janier laughed. "If you make it in ten sleeps, I give you two hundred cartridge!"

The man nodded his understanding and, without a further word, turned and hurried toward the lake. The other two Eskimos, not at all comprehending what it was about, followed more slowly, one of them shouldering the fawn.

Janier turned away and headed up the valley.

"There is no hurry now," he muttered. "That will spell Nixon's finish if he shows up to file."

As he returned to Boyne's camp he followed the bed of the creek and found the prospector's canoe cached in a thicket of scrub at a point that appeared to be the head of navigation. Examining the ground he noted that another canoe had been drawn from the bushes. "Yesterday, or day before," he reasoned as he examined the tracks in the mud. "This sign hasn't been rained on. That would be Nenikna. But, where did he go? And why?" As the man continued up the creek he puzzled over the disappearance of the Indian. "He went before Boyne died. If Nixon had chased him off, or if he'd returned to camp and found things as they are, he would never have stopped to collect all his stuff."

When within a few feet of the tent, Puk-puk, who had been trotting along directly in front of Janier, halted so suddenly that the man stumbled against him. The dog stood with muscles stiff and eyes fixed upon the tent as he sniffed the air. Stepping around him, Janier cautiously advanced a few steps to a point that admitted a view of the tent's interior. Then he, too, halted abruptly. He was staring straight into the muzzle of Constable Crowley's revolver. And beyond the gun's muzzle Constable Crowley's eyes glared with a mingled triumph and hate.

"Put 'em up!" The officer spat out the words fiercely, but Janier, as he elevated his hands, laughed.

"Don't be a fool, Crowley," he said. "You know I'm not heeled. That twenty-two rifle there beside you is the only deadly weapon I carry, an' you know it!"

"I'll know it a damn sight better when I git through searchin' you. I've got you dead to rights, at last! Remember what I told you last time I seen you?"

"Don't remember anything important you told me."

"You don't, eh? Well, I told you that I'd see you ag'in an' that when I did, you'd wisht to God I hadn't! Guess that sounds kind of important, now, don't it?"

"So far as I know, nothin' you've ever said, Crowley, is of any importance. You spoke a moment ago of havin' me dead to rights. What's the meanin' of this fool play, anyhow?"

"What's the meanin' of it? Fool play, eh? You won't think it's no fool play when I git through with you! I've caught you redhanded right on the ground, after murderin' old man Boyne, ain't I?"

"Oh, that!" exclaimed Janier with a deprecatory grin. "So that's what you're kickin' up all this fuss about, is it?"

"So, you admit it, eh?"

"No, Crowley. I don't admit anything at all. But, put down that gun. I'm tired holdin' my hands up, an' it must look foolish."

"I'll be damned if you ain't a cool one, Janier," admitted the officer as he stepped from the tent and approached to within arm's length. But you ain't goin' to put nothin' over on me. You've got by fer a long time, an' had a lot of 'em fooled, but you ain't fooled me. Come acrost with that there location paper!"

"What location paper?"

"The one you took off'n old Boyne's neck. D'you think I'm blind that I couldn't see where he'd wore it around his neck with a thong?"

"I haven't got any location paper."

Crowley took a step backward, still keeping the man covered.

"You're under arrest for the murder of John Boyne," he stated, "an' I'll damn soon find out whether you've got the paper or not. I went through yer stuff before you come up. Take off yer shirt an' toss it here."

Janier complied and watched with an irritating grin as the other subjected it to a minute examination. "Now yer pants," ordered the officer. When he had examined the garment he called for Janier's moccasins, socks and undergarments. Then, his hat. With an exclamation of triumph he produced the folded paper that Janier had secreted beneath the band of his hat. "Thought you could fool me, eh?" he cried, as he opened the paper and read its penciled lines.

"That's not a location paper," said Janier, "and is of no interest to anyone but me."

"It's in Boyne's writin', ain't it? It was his'n an' you was caught with it in yer possession. It's jest as good for evidence as a location paper. I don't know why you wanted this paper. It don't look to me like it was important enough to kill a man for. But that jest shows how easy you'd commit murder." The officer folded the paper and placed it carefully in his wallet. "But you got that location paper somewheres. It must of be'n a location paper he carried around his neck. He sure as hell wouldn't of carried this here one."

Janier laughed: "Don't it occur to you, Crowley, that if he'd made his strike he'd have gone out to file it, instead of carryin' around his location description as long as he must have worn that thong around his neck to leave the mark it did?"

The officer glowered at him for a moment: "Then, if he ain't made his strike yet, what in hell did you kill him for?"

"I told you I didn't kill him."

Crowley sneered. "Who did, then? Mebbe, if you're so damn smart, you kin tell me that."

"Give me my clothes an' we'll talk it over," suggested Janier. "What makes you think he was murdered?"

Crowley seated himself on the ground, his gun in his lap. "Put yer clothes on an' we'll go up an' look him over. Damn if I'd want to look at a man I'd killed."

"I, either. But, first let me get something to eat. Have you had breakfast?"

"No, I ain't. I'd forgot breakfast. I camped las' night not over a quarter of a mile above here. If I'd of come jest that much further on, I might of got here in time to see Boyne killed. But I didn't know where in hell his camp was an' how clost I was to it. About an hour ago I

woke up sudden. Thought I heard a shot, but I wasn't sure. Anyway I couldn't git to sleep ag'in, so I rolled my blankets an' come on. An' I stumbled onto—him; an' then this camp. Then I seen your outfit here an' I be'n waitin' for you to come back. Go ahead an' git breakfast for the two of us. I'll jest set back with this here gun to see that you don't make no mistakes."

"What were you huntin' Boyne's camp for?" asked Janier, over the bacon and tea.

"Mebbe just on a hunch."

"Thought you were goin' to the coast after evidence against Nixon."

"I was, but I got caught in the Malley Rapids. Smashed my canoe all to hell an' jest got out by the skin of my teeth. So I worked my way back up-river a-foot an' found Babcock where I'd left you, at the mouth of the Icy. When he told me about you hittin' off up river, I had a hunch an' I struck out acrost country. I know'd Boyne was down here somewheres. I be'n huntin' his camp for two days." The officer paused, his eyes leering into Janier's face and his hand on the butt of the gun in his lap. "An' that brings me to the rest of it. I kind of helt off on it for a surprise. Tell me," he exclaimed, sharply, "what have you done with the Injun an' the girl?"

Janier regarded him with a look of indifference: "I left them in camp, back on Sussex Lake, while I scouted around. You see, I promised Miss Boyne I'd find her father."

"I'll say you found him! Throw your outfit together, if yer through. We're goin' up an' have a look at Boyne an' then we're goin' over an' have a look at the Injun an' the girl. I'd ruther git three murders on you than one, any day."

Janier made up his pack and, tossing it beside Crowley's, accompanied the officer to the body, beside which lay the blanket with which Janier had covered it the previous evening. Crowley had rolled the body into its original position to examine the wound. "Now," he said, "if you don't think he was murdered, what in hell killed him?"

Janier pointed to the piece of rock: "Maybe he fell and struck his head on that. There's blood and hair sticking to it"

Crowley grinned: "He might of, but he didn't. You ain't half as smart as you think you are, Janier. Not as smart as I thought you was! D'you think you could fool anyone with smearin' blood an' hair on that rock when the rock don't no more fit the hole in his head than nothin!?"

"What did make the wound, then?" asked Janier, apparently unperturbed by the officer's discovery.

"I wisht to God I know'd! What made it, is whatever you hit him with! An' I've hunted all over for a weapon. You've hid it successful, so far. But we'll be comin' back this way an' mebbe we kin find it then. I'd say, lookin' at the hole, it was made with one of Boyne's own prospectin' hammers."

"Looks like it, don't it?" agreed Janier.

The officer stared at him. "Damned if you ain't the cold-bloodedest proposition I ever seen!" he cried suddenly. "It—it gives me the creeps jest to listen to you!"

"Look here, Crowley," asked Janier, "do you really believe I killed this man?"

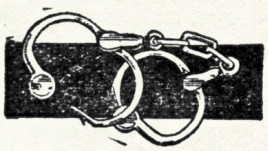
"Really believe it! I know damn well you did! Who else was around here? What was you doin' here with one of Boyne's papers hid in yer hat for? Do I believe it? I'll prove it!"

Janier shrugged. "You're a bigger fool than I thought you were. But, come on. We'll hit out for Sussex Lake."

Carefully they covered the body and, returning to the tent, swung the packs to their shoulders. When Janier was in place, Crowley stepped before him. "Stick 'em out!" he ordered.

"What do you mean?"

The officer reached into his pocket and withdrew a pair of handcuffs. "I mean I ain't goin' to take no chances with you. You're too smooth to suit me. I'll travel better with you if I know I've got you where you can't put nothin' over on me."



A crimson flush overspread Janier's face. For an instant he contemplated hurling himself upon the man, but Crowley divined the thought and the next moment had him covered.

"No you don't! Jest slip them bracelets on, an' no monkey work. An' remember that the first crooked move you make, out goes yer light!"

Janier snapped the irons upon his own wrists and, with the officer following closely, struck across the valley to the westward, being careful to give wide berth to the spot where lay the triple-staked claim.

CHAPTER XVI

NIXON RETURNS

CONSTABLE CROWLEY spoke the truth when he told Janier that he had spilled in the Malley Rapids. Unfamiliar with the river, he was in the suck of the big rapids before he had realized his danger. Faster and faster had flown the canoe despite the man's utmost efforts to check its speed and turn it into one or the other of the banks that grew higher and rockier as the swiftness of the current increased until with a mighty roar the river plunged into a veritable gorge whose rockribbed floor churned the water into a leaping, seething fury of white-water.

By sheer luck the canoe rode two-thirds the length of the gorge before the inevitable happened and it crashed full upon a rock and broke in two. In the icy water Crowley was whirled along, now on the surface, now in the grip of an undertow and scraping and bumping the bottom, to be shot to the surface again when the undercurrent boiled upward. Five minutes afterward, bruised and battered and half drowned, he was spewed from the gorge and, in the grip of a friendly eddy, had scraped along a tongue of sand with just life enough left in his body to drag himself clear of the water and crawl to the bank, where he had lain head downward until he coughed the water from his tortured lungs. Except for the clothing he wore and the revolver at his belt, not one vestige of his outfit remained; and after a few hours' rest he had headed up-river on foot, arriving at Babcock's camp the day following Janier's departure with Irma Boyne and the Indian.

In scowling silence he had listened to Babcock's story of the departure of Nixon and Janier in search of Boyne, of the arrival of the girl and the Indian, of the reappearance of Janier and of his immediate departure up the river, taking Irma Boyne and the Indian with him.

Babcock dwelt upon the events immediately preceding this departure—which he referred to as the abduction of his ward—and gave a much garbled account of how he had been disarmed and set upon by Janier and his dog when he had rushed to the defence of the girl.

At the conclusion of the narrative, Crowley, pleading fatigue, threw himself down in Babcock's tent and for an hour endeavored to size up the situation from many angles. He knew that, despite Babcock's statement, Nixon had not really gone into the Heywood Range, for he knew that Nixon knew that Boyne was to the southward. Janier's early reappearance would argue that he, also, knew that Boyne was not in the hills; and his immediate departure up-river showed that he had a fairly accurate knowledge of Boyne's whereabouts. Nixon, with the start he had and his knowledge of the location of Boyne's camp, should have no trouble, Crowley figured, in arriving there first. But, sooner or later, Janier also would find Boyne's camp. If Boyne had already made his strike, as Nixon had firmly believed he was on the point of doing, then in all probability Nixon was already in possession of the location. But—and here Crowley's scowl deepened, and whispered curses hissed from his lips—if Boyne had not yet made his strike and Nixon was forced to wait upon his making it, the chances were strongly in favor of Janier locating Boyne's camp in the meantime. In which event Crowley knew that any chance he and Nixon would have of obtaining Boyne's location would vanish into thin air.

Suddenly he sat erect, cursing his sore muscles, and joined Babcock, who was smoking beside the fire. He had discounted Babcock's story of the abduction, but therein lay a chance and he would take it.

"You say Janier assaulted you," he began. "What did he hit you with?"

"With his fists, I think."

"Sure it wasn't no deadly weapon?"

"I—I can't say for sure. I didn't see anything in his hands."

"That's too bad," muttered Crowley. "If it had be'n some deadly weapon, now, it——"

Babcock caught the drift of the man's thought. "But, surely," he said, "if you are thinking of arresting him, any assault is a criminal offence."

Crowley shook his head. "I wouldn't dare fetch a man in without nothin' more ag'in him than assault an' battery. That would go down in the settlements, but not here. I'd get bawled out good an' proper."

"But he set his dog upon me. That ought to constitute an asault of sufficient magnitude."

The officer looked doubtful. "If I hadn't of lost my manual I might look it up. But I don't know if a dog is a deadly weapon. Looks like one might be. But, then ag'in, a dog's a animal an' not no weapon. About this here abduction busi-

ness? Mebbe we could hold him on that, if you'd prefer charges."

"I shall certainly prefer charges and very serious charges!" cried Babcock. "The young lady is my ward; and as such is subject to my authority and command."

Crowley scratched his head. "There's somethin' about abduction, all right. But I can't remember what it is. What did he do? Knock you down an' grab her an' throw her into the canoe an' paddle off?"

"Well, not exactly that. After assault-

ing me, he made his dog guard me; and while I lay helpless upon the sand he ordered Miss Boyne into the canoe. Evidently terrorized by what she had just witnessed, she dared not disobey him for fear of being treated as I was treated. The instant she was seated in the canoe, Janier shoved it out into the river and the Indian started to paddle away. The poor girl had no chance of regaining shore. Her action in entering the canoe showed plainly that she acted through fear or duress, or under the spell of some hypnotic influence the man held over her. You can imagine the anguish with which I helplessly watched her abduction, Constable, when I tell you that she was shortly to have become my wife."

"Um-hum, pretty tough," agreed Crowley. "Guess that constitutes abduction, all right." Any ways, I'm goin' to arrest him for it; an' it'll be up to the inspector or the judge to turn him loose. I'm goin' to take my discharge, anyhow, in the fall. To hell with 'em! But you got to back me up with charges."

"Count on me," answered Babcock. "If anything I can say will put him there, he'll spend a long time behind the bars."

"Well, I better be shovin' on, then. The quicker I start, the better. You wait here for Nixon. An' then you'll be comin' on up-river in a canoe, so you loan me yer pack sack an' a blanket an' some grub an' a hat. Tell Nixon I'll be waitin' either on Sussex Lake or somewheres along the north shore of Clinton Colden."

Crowley struck southeastward, avoiding the muskeg and swamp country of the river valley. That night he camped on the northern reach of the ridge country; and thereafter, for two days, he drove himself mercilessly in an effort to intercept Janier before he could locate Boyne's camp. But no trace of either Janier or Nixon or Boyne did he find; and then, early the following morning he had stumbled upon the body of Boyne, carefully covered as Janier had left it. His first emotion, as he tore away the covering and discovered the fatal wound, was one of exultation. Nixon had done his work! Boyne had made his strike! Else Nixon would not have killed him; and undoubtedly Nixon was already on his way back to Babcock's camp with the location paper!

His second emotion was one of anger against Nixon. "The damned fool!" he muttered, as he glanced at the blood smeared corner of rock fragment. "Anyone could see as how that there rock never made that hole in his head! An' coverin' him with a blanket! How in hell did he figger that anyone that found him would think he could of covered hisself up an' weighted down the blanket with rocks? It's a good thing for him I was the one that found him!"

He was about to remove the blanket from the spot, when he glanced up and caught sight of Boyne's deserted camp. Dropping the blanket, he hastened over to inspect the tent and, with a shock that for a moment set his very blood running cold, he came upon Janier's blankets and pack sack. A moment later the shock of fear turned to a thrill of exultation. It was Janier, not Nixon, who had killed Boyne! Janier had the location! And he, Crowley, would seize it for evidence when he placed the man under arrest. Later he would copy it and send Nixon to affix the stakes. Then, before the original could be released from the custody of the police, he would file the claim. In one master stroke he would thus secure the claim, fasten the murder of Boyne upon Janier, and forever rid the country of the man he secretly feared, as every crook north of the railways feared him.

Later, after searching Janier and failing to find the location paper, and in the face of Janier's coolness and denial of the murder, the officer really hit upon the right solution; namely, that Nixon had done the killing and had made away with the paper before Janier discovered the body. With this theory in mind he determined to redouble his efforts to fix the crime upon Janier; and he decided to await Nixon,

who, he knew, would not now be long delayed.

At almost the same moment that Crowley and Janier started their journey from Boyne's camp to Sussex Lake, Nixon's canoe shot from the mouth of the Icy and beached before the patch of scrub timber that sheltered Babcock's camp. Nixon stepped from the canoe and surprised Babcock, who still lay in his blankets, though the sun was all of two hours high.

"Hello," cried the latter, blinking owlishly, "did you find him? Is he out there with you?"

"Naw, I didn't find him," growled Nixon. "An' what's more, he ain't in the hills."

"Wait a minute and I'll be out. Meantime you might get breakfast." Nixon kindled a fire and, as he sliced bacon into the pan, Babcock joined him. "Thought you said it would take ten days or two weeks to search the hills?" demanded the man.

"It would, if I hadn't had the luck to run acrost some huskies that's be'n huntin' in there all summer. They be'n all over the hull range, an' they say there ain't no one be'n in there."

"Well, where do we go from here?" snapped Babcock impatiently. "I thought you and Janier were so damned sure Boyne was in the hills."

"I was sure of it. That is, that's where I figgered he'd be, headin' the way he was when I last seen him. Guess we'll hit up-river."

"How about Janier?" Babcock asked the question abruptly, his eyes on Nixon's face.

"To hell with Janier! Leave him where he's at." He grinned at Babcock. "I guess you wouldn't be none too sorry to see him wastin' his time huntin' them hills for Boyne. From what I heer'd when youse was talkin', I guess you'd ruther it would be you than him that found Boyne. The way I figger it, the one that finds him'll have a little bit the edge on the other one with the gal, won't he?"

Nixon's words had an unforeseen effect upon Babcock, who flared up angrily. "Yes, damn you, he will!" he growled. "And it's all your fault for being so positive Boyne was in the hills! Janier has probably found him before this! While I've had to sit here and cool my heels waiting for you!"

"What d'you mean, found him?" sneered the other. "Ain't I jest got through tellin' you Boyne ain't in the hills?"

"And neither is Janier in the hills!" roared Babcock, his anger rising as he pictured Janier already supplanting himself in Boyne's favor.

"Ain't in the hills?" repeated Nixon. "Where's he at?"

"Gone up-river. Started the day after you left."

Babcock stared in surprise at the effect of the announcement on Nixon. The man's leathery face had turned a pasty white, his jaw sagged open and his eyes assumed a glazed, staring appearance.

"What in hell's the matter?" cried Babcock in alarm. "Nixon! Come out of it!"

Slowly the man passed the back of his hand across his mouth, his eyes blinked and lost their glassy look and with a visible effort he pulled himself together. "It's only that I be'n canoe ridin' on an empty stummik," he mumbled. "That—an——"

"And what?" asked Babcock as Nixon's words faded to silence.

"An' jest somethin' I was thinkin' about."

"What is it?" Babcock asked impatiently. "What could you be thinking about that would turn you into a ghost?"

"Ugh!" the man started at the word and glanced nervously over his shoulder. "What in hell you got to be talkin' about ghosts for?" he asked. "What I meant was—you remember when you an' him was talkin' an' he asks you how old man Boyne was fixed an' you says he's got around a million or so?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I seen the look in his eyes, when he heer'd that, an' I know'd right then if Janier could cop off the gal, Boyne's life wouldn't be worth a damn. That, an' the empty stummik, kind of made me feel—funny."

"You mean that you think Janier would murder Boyne for his money, if he got the chance?"

"If he thought he'd git the money, he would. Leastwise, that's what I seen in his eyes."

After a moment of silence Babcock asked, "Didn't you pass anyone coming down the Icy, when you went up?"

"No. Why?" asked Nixon, quickly.

"Because Miss Boyne and her guide arrived here the day after you left. I don't see how you could have missed them."

"Probably slipped by when I camped for dinner. Or mebbe after I'd camped for the night; or before I'd got started in the mornin'. Where'd they go to?"

"They went up-river with Janier; and the next day Crowley came along."

"Crowley!" cried Nixon in surprise.

"Yes, Crowley. He got wrecked in a rapids and lost his outfit and came back a-foot. I filed a complaint against Janier for the abduction of Miss Boyne; and he started right out to arrest him."

"Crowley's goin' to arrest Gus Janier?" cried Nixon. And Babcock noted that for the first time since his announcement that Janier had gone up-river the man's voice had resumed its natural tone.

"Yes, for abduction. And he said to tell you when you arrived that he would wait for us either on Sussex Lake or on the north shore of Clinton Colden."

"Well, why'n hell didn't you say so!" cried Nixon, seemingly in a perfect fever of excitement. "By God, le's git a-goin!" and, with the words he leaped to his feet and began hastily to pack the outfit.

Chapter XVII

Janier Breaks the News

SEARCHING the ridges and valleys, it had taken Janier and Puk-puk two full days to find Boyne's camp. The return journey, despite the handicap of Janier's manacled hands, was easily made in one.

Toward evening, as they topped the last of the ridges, from which the lake of their destination was plainly visible, Janier halted and faced the officer.

"Crowley, what do you expect to find down there?"

The officer regarded him with a frown.

"If I was to tell you the honest-to-God's truth, Janier, an' there ain't no reason why I shouldn't, I'd say that I don't expect to find nothin' but your canoe an' a trompled place that looks like a couple of folks has camped there; also somethin' or 'nother layin' around that could easy be identified as belongin' to Boyne's girl; an' prob'ly I'll find a plain trail on the gravel showin' where two folks had broke camp an' shoved off in a canoe."

"You think they've pulled out?" asked Janier quickly.

The officer grinned. "No, Janier, I don't think they pulled out. I don't think they ever was there. You see, I'm givin' you credit for bein' smart enough to fix things up so it will look plain as day like they pulled out. I don't think them two will ever be heard from again."

Janier smiled.

"Thanks for the compliment, Crowley. At least, you have imagination. As I believe I told you once before, it's too bad the Mounted is about to lose you."

"To hell with 'em!" growled the officer.

"When they git holt of a good man they don't know how to use him—jackin' him up all the time fer vi'lation of reg'lations. I'm fed up on livin' like a damn scollard in a school an' drawin' boy's wages for it, to boot."

"There's no question about the inadequacy of the pay," answered Janier. "There isn't a man in the service that doesn't earn ten times over what he draws. But in the present instance, you're going to be disappointed. Within a half hour we'll be in Miss Boyne's camp. And, it is because of that I want to ask a favor of you."

Crowley glanced toward Janier's fettered wrists, swollen and chafed and bleeding where the steel handcuffs had bruised them during the travel through swamp and scrub and in the ascent and descent of ridges. But Crowley shook his head. "Nothin' doin'!" he said. "I don't dare to take a chanct. With some I might. But not with you."

Janier looked the man squarely in the eye.

"Crowley," he said, "I'd see you in hell before I'd ask a favor of you on my own account. What I'm goin' to ask has nothin' whatever to do with these." He clicked the bracelets together. "Sometime I hope to settle that score. But not while you're an officer and I'm a prisoner. As a matter of fact, Crowley, Miss Boyne has done me the honor to consent to become my wife. We shall be married within a month. And the favor I am asking is merely that you let me break the news to her of her father's death. It's going to be a hard blow for her to bear; and I think that I can make it fall less abruptly."

"Be married!" cried Crowley. "In a

month! By God, Janier, I'll say you're there with the crust! In a month you'll be in jail waitin' to be tried for the murder of John Boyne, with a man walkin' up an' down in front of yer cage with a big gun to see that you stay there!"

He paused and for a minute stood regarding Janier curiously. He was thinking that the fact of Janier's engagement to the girl could be used as additional motive for Boyne's murder. And the thought pleased him. For he had heard from Babcock of Boyne's million. When he continued, it was to grant Janier's request. "Sure you can tell her," he grinned. "It's a job I ain't hankerin' for, anyhow. Only, you got to do yer tellin' where I can keep an eye on you."

Janier nodded, and the officer gave a little laugh.

"They seems to be, what you might say, some little misunderstandin' about this here lady's gittin' married, Janier."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, 'tain't over three or four days ago Babcock tells me he's the one she's goin' to marry. I was a-goin' to have to arrest you for abduction, if I hadn't of picked you up for murder instead."

"Abduction!" exclaimed Janier.

"Yup. Babcock claims you knocked him down an' feloniously run off with the lady which he's guardeen of, ag'in the peace an' dignity of Fish River. At that, it was a hell of a wallop you handed him. His eyes looks like a couple of egg-plants."

Janier smiled, surprised at the sudden change from Crowley's hateful, domineering attitude to a lighter, almost facetious mood. The man added, "Funny way to court a woman—murderin' her old man!"

"That's according to the way you look at it," grinned Janier. "Different people have different ways of doing things. But you forget that I told you I didn't kill Boyne."

Crowley favored his prisoner with a glance of grudging admiration.

"I'll tell the bleedin' world that nerve is your middle name! Yes sir! If I was right now in your shoes, with evidence heaped up around me to my ears an' gittin higher, believe *me,* I'd be sweatin' blood instead of standin' there kiddin' the bird that's fetchin' you in to where the rope's at! Facts is, you're takin' it *too* damn easy! Look-a here, Janier," he exclaimed, with a sudden show of frankness, "if you didn't kill Boyne, you must have some idee of who did, or you wouldn't be so damn cool about it. An' if you have, I'll leave it to you, ain't it your duty to tell it to me? If you know who done it, we're losin' a lot of valuable time. If you could prove who done it, 'spite of the evidence ag'in you, I'd turn you loose right now an' own up my mistake, to boot."

Janier shook his head. "I wish I could prove who did it. Of course, I've got my own good guess, but you wouldn't care about that."

"The hell I wouldn't!" exclaimed the officer encouragingly. "Didn't I tell you, I was playin' you for bein' smart. If you've got a guess, le's have it; and mebbe I'll see it your way."

"Well," answered Janier, carefully weighing his words. "There is the Indian—Boyne's guide. He's gone, an' his outfit's gone, too. Did you think of him?"

Crowley shook his head. "No, but it wasn't no Injun killed Boyne. Most prob'ly the one that did kill him chased the Injun off. If that's the best you can do, I guess I'll jest hang onto you. It wasn't no Injun had that there paper of Boyne's in under the band of his hat."

"I found it when I was lookin' through his outfit for a clew to the murderer."

"Tell that to the judge. Got any more guesses?"

"There's Babcock."

Crowley laughed. "Worse yet. He couldn't of got down there an' found his way back to his camp in a year's time. I camped with him comin' in, till we met up with Nixon, an' one night he got lost goin' to the spring. An' it wasn't dark yet!"

"The only one else would be Nixon. Do you know, I'd be inclined to suspect Nixon, if I didn't know positively that he's up in the Heywoods. A man can't be two places at the same time. So, that lets him out."

"That's right," agreed Crowley with alacrity. "It couldn't of be'n him; an' it couldn't of be'n Babcock. So it's between you an' the Injun."

"It's the Injun, then," said Janier. "If I were you, I'd try to find him, because I don't know any more about the murder than you do."

"Well, you ain't me, so I guess I'll jest hang onto you while I've got you. I can

git the Injun any time. Nixon knows him; an' Nixon'll be along d'rectly."

"Be along?" asked Janier. "Where?"

"Right here on Sussex Lake. I left word with Babcock for them two to come on up as soon as Nixon come back from the Heywoods."

"What do you want them here for?"

"Well, I figgered I'd have you gathered in for abduction ag'in they got here, an' I wanted Babcock should go along in an' prefer charges. An' I got to take Nixon in, anyhow, so I figgered we'd make one job of it."

"You didn't think Babcock would go on clear to headquarters without finding Boyne, did you, after he's spent all this time hunting him."

"We'd of had Boyne all right," answered Crowley. "I know'd if Nixon didn't pick him up in the mountains that it's a safe bet he'd be down here in these ridges; an' we could of located him easy."

"It may be a couple of weeks, or more, before they show up," opined Janier. "Especially if Nixon works the whole range himself. We ought to slip back there and bury Boyne. It isn't right to leave him lying there on top of the ground."

"Oh, no, we hadn't!" answered Crowley. "Boyne don't git buried. Leastwise, not till he's be'n brung into headquarters. I ain't through huntin' for the hammer you hit him with, yet. An' when I find it, I want the inspector should see how nice it fits the hole in Boyne's head. An' I'm goin' to break off that corner of rock that you fixed up, an' show him how nice that *don't* fit it."

Janier smiled grimly as he struck out toward the camp. He had feared that Crowley would leave the body behind. The smile, however, was fleeting, as his thoughts flew to the girl who was even at that moment eagerly awaiting his return. And such a return! How would she accept the news of her father's death? How could he tell her of it? For a moment he almost wished he had left the telling to Crowley; but the next moment he was cursing himsef for a craven as he thought of Crowley, blunt and brutal and boorish. He began to invent phrases in which to break the sad news. They were stiff, awkward phrases which he discarded even as his lips repeated them. And then, almost before he realized that they were nearing the camp, he heard the girl's voice.

"Puk-puk!" she had cried. Unnoticed, the dog had trotted on ahead of her.

Then Janier's own name was called. He saw Irma burst into the little glade, hesitate for the fraction of a second, and then, as she made out the two figures approaching in the twilight, he heard the glad cry with which she sprang forward to meet them. He saw her stop short, at the distance of a few yards, as her eyes first noted that the man following him was not her father. And he saw the sudden change of features as her eyes met his own, saw the quick bracing of her body, as if to withstand a blow, and the dumb questioning of her eyes. He sensed that Crowley had lagged farther behind. And now he himself was very close to her.

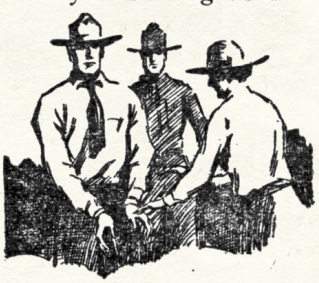
"My—darling——" The words faltered upon his lips.

She understood. There was a quick, gasping intake of breath. The eyes that had gazed so searchingly into his own faltered, seemed to widen, like the eyes of a scared child. Then upon his ears fell the sound of her voice, toneless, steady, the words uttered distinctly.

"My father is—dead?"

"Yes, dear. He is dead."

The girl's eyes closed, and she swayed toward him where he stood, an arm's reach away. Then, suddenly, as his arms did not enfold her, she pulled herself together and drew back, her lips parted, and stared wildly into his face. Before he could speak, her glance shifted swiftly to his fettered hands. With a startled cry she leaped forward and snatched at his wrists, her eyes dilating as she stared in horror at the encircling gyves.



"It is nothing," he murmured in a soothing voice. "I am under arrest. A foolish mistake has been made and I happen to be the victim."

"But—oh, look at your poor wrists!"

"It's nothing."

"You brute!" she cried, whirling upon the uniformed man who had come to a stand a few paces in the rear. Ignoring his mumbled retort, she turned pityingly again to Janier. "But—why—why did he arrest you?"

Janier's answer came almost in a whisper. "For—the murder of John Boyne."

The girl stared in frozen horror as the blood slowly receded from her face, leaving her tanned cheeks in an unwholesome pallor. Her eyes closed, she swayed

slightly and, despite Janier's ineffectual effort to catch her with his manacled hands, her knees gave way and she sank senseless upon the ground.

Stepping hurriedly to the spot, Crowley was stooping as Janier sprang forward. "Don't touch her!"

The officer stared up at him in surprise and Janier thrust his two hands outward. "Unlock those, damn you!"

The words cracked out like a pistol shot and there was that in the man's voice and in the look of his eyes which caused Crowley instantly to obey.

Janier shook the loosened steel from one wrist and with the handcuff dangling from its chain he slipped his arms about the girl and raised her from the ground. "Keep me covered, if you're afraid of me," he called over his shoulder and, carrying his unconscious burden, he walked swiftly to the camp and deposited it gently within the little tent.

Chapter XVIII

on sussex lake

IRMA BOYNE opened her eyes. Close beside her, in the tent, squatted Teddy-By-and-By, in the act of dipping a cloth into a pail of cold water. A moment later the folded cloth was pressed gently to her forehead and its cool, damp touch felt good to her throbbing temples. She felt strangely dizzy and weak. Suddenly the memory of the events of a few minutes before flooded her brain. She shuddered, and struggled to a sitting posture.

"Where is he?" she asked in a half whisper, as she stared into the stolid face of the Indian.

Teddy-By-and-By answered in a tone scarce louder than her own.

"Gus Janier out dere—by de fire. She say dat bettaire I'm kin put de wataire on you head for wake you up. She say if you wake up an' see heem, you mebbe-so gon' back to sleep some mor'."

Slowly the girl passed a hand across her eyes. "Oh, what is it all about? Tell me, Teddy-By-and-By, that there has been some terrible mistake!"

"I'm not know not'n 'bout dat. Firs' t'ing I come queek een here an' mak' you wake up. Dat beeg mistak', all right, to arres' Gus Janier. I'm not know dat p'lice. Gus Janier I'm *know*."

"But he's arrested for—killing my father!"

The Indian shrugged.

"Dat p'lice dam' fool. W'en de time come, Gus Janier she fin' out who kill-um! Mebbe-so Beeg Mouth; mebbe-so Nixon; mebbe-so p'lice; mebbe-so husky. Some tam' Gus Janier fin' out! An' den——" The sentence closed eloquently in a shrug of meaning.

"Who is this Big Mouth you mentioned?" asked the girl eagerly.

"De man w'at mak' da beeg talk an' say you no git een de canoe an' Gus Janier knock hell out of heem."

"You mean Babcock!" cried the girl, her eyes wide with horror as thoughts crowded themselves upon her brain. Babcock, who alone of all the people in the world would profit by her father's death! She pressed her fingers to her eyes as if to keep out the picture of his face. After a moment of silence, she spoke to the Indian. "Tell Gus Janier I want to see him."

For a long moment the black eyes of Teddy-By-and-By fixed her own with a gaze so penetrating that it seemed to the girl as though he read her innermost thoughts. Then, as if satisfied, he turned and silently quitted the tent.

When Janier had stepped out of the tent, after leaving the girl there, he had given the Indian his instructions and, immediately joining Crowley at the fire, had stretched out his hands toward the officer, who shot an inquiring glance into his face.

"Snap it back on," he ordered curtly.

Crowley hesitated.

"Don't mind takin' the other one off for a little while," he said, "long as yer right here where I can keep an eye on you. Kind of rest up yer wrists a little. Hot an' cold water'll ease 'em up. It was pretty rough on you, that trip, but I didn't dare to take a chanct."

Janier shrugged. "Might as well get used to them. We've got a longer trip ahead of us."

Crowley affixed the handcuff and both seated themselves as the Indian returned with a pail of water and entered the tent.

Ten minutes later the Indian reappeared and turned to Janier. "She wan' for see you," he grunted.

Janier glanced inquiringly into the face of the officer, who nodded. "G'wan in, if you want to. Jest give me yer word you won't try to start nothin'."

A grim smile twisted Janier's lips.

"Thanks, Crowley. We may as well get squared away, right here. For you, personally, I've got no respect whatever. For the uniform you wear I have the greatest respect in the world. All my life I have respected it; and never before has my re-

spect failed to go deeper than the uniform itself. I give you my word, no matter how preposterous the charge against me, that as long as I am your lawful prisoner and you are wearing that uniform I shall neither try to escape nor shall I commit any attack or assault on you. That's all I've go to say."

"An', personal," growled the officer, "I ain't got no more time for you than what you have for me. You can go on in there like I said. But I ain't goin' no further than that. This here respect you claim to have might kind of shrink up when you've had time to think of—what's comin' to you."

At the tent door Janier stooped and peered into the gloom-shrouded interior. What would her verdict be? During the ten minutes in which he had sat waiting for the reappearance of the Indian he had vainly tried to reason what the girl's attitude would be toward himself, upon her recovery from her swoon. He realized that she scarcely knew him. Vividly the words with which Babcock had sought to poison her mind against him recurred to his brain. For a single fleeting moment a smile flickered upon his lips as he recalled his own bitter arraignment of himself back there on Lake Providence.

Did she really love him? Or was her plighted love but the result of a passing interest he may have created in himself? That and the wizardry of moonlight? And, if she did love him, would the flame of this young and untried love burn strong and steady and clear in the steadfastness of its own confidence and belief in him? Or, would it waver and flare, now this way, now that, under the breath of suspicion, to be snuffed out, or turn even to the fiercer flame of hate fed and fanned by the fierce blasts of accusation that would soon be visited upon him? For, with the arrival of Babcock and Nixon, he knew that inculpation would be heaped upon him, buttressed by whatsoever of innuendo and evidence the brains of the three could conceive and the hands of the three discover or manufacture.

Janier set his lips grimly. He knew his own love for the girl. By merest accident had his love been tried and found not wanting. And, in the newfound pride of self that had been his since the moment he folded the half sheet of paper and placed it beneath the band of his hat, he knew that no slightest measure of lesser love in her mind would suffice him. One breath of suspicion, one fleeting doubt, and the man knew that their ways must part. He would, to be sure, first prove his innocence, would fix the guilt where it belonged. Then he would go his way.

As he peered into the tent he heard his name called from the dusk of the interior.

"Gus Janier!"

The words were hardly more than a whisper, yet the tone of them to the man was as the tone of a deep throated bell. His pounding heart thumped faster. Within him a wild surge of gladness struggled to burst its bounds. Never to his dying day would he forget the rapture of that whispered name, the sound of it, the appeal, the unshaken love in it. Swiftly he dropped to his knees and gained her side, his steeled wrists clicking audibly. Her arms went about him, her lips were upon his, and in that moment Janier knew that the love of this woman had put his own to shame. For had he not questioned that love?

"My darling!" he whispered. She bent over his bruised wrists, and a hot tear dropped upon the back of his hand. He tried gently to remove them, but she held them fast.

"Wait, dear," she whispered, "I will bathe them. See, here is water." And dipping the cloth that the Indian had left hanging upon the edge of the pail, she applied it to his swollen wrists.

Very gently, with careful attention to detail, but sparing her insofar as possible, he recounted the events of the past three days, omitting only the details of the finding of the paper and of the tiny loose fragment that he had crowded back beneath the edge of the skull. "So really," he concluded, "in view of the circumstances, you must not be inclined to judge Crowley too harshly."

"Not judge him harshly!" cried the girl. "And he murdered——"

"No! No! Not that! As a matter of fact I am almost certain that he did not do the deed."

"But the claim! You said his name was on the paper."

"Yes, dear. But I did not say it was in his own handwriting. Have patience, darling. Trust me implicitly and I promise

you that at the proper time I will bring your father's murderer to book."

"I do trust you, dear! But I blame Crowley!" cried the girl impetuously. "He's a clod! I blame him for daring to even entertain the thought you could have done this thing! But, most of all, I blame him for this!" She indicated the manacled wrists. "Couldn't he have accepted your word of honor that you would not try to escape?"

Janier smiled. "To men of Crowley's stamp, dear, a word of honor means nothing at all."

"You mean, he's——"

"I mean that he is everything that a man, and especially an officer, should not be."

"He's a disgrace to the Mounted!"

Janier shook his head. "No. When you know the Mounted as I know it—the hundreds of clean, stalwart, upstanding men who are the members of its force—you will realize that no act of any one man can in the slightest measure besmirch the honor of its name. A member of the force may bring dishonor upon himself, but never upon the service whose worth and sterling integrity is a byword through the whole world."

The girl nodded. "I think I understand," she murmured. "And now what?"

"Crowley's plan is to wait here for Babcock and Nixon to join us."

"Babcock and Nixon!" cried the girl. "Oh, why should they come here? I detest them both! I thought Nixon was in the Heywoods!"

Janier shook his head.

"No," he answered. "Nixon is not in the hills. You remember back there on Lake Providence I told you that Nixon did not believe your father was in the hills, or he would never have dropped the word that you thought was accidental? Crowley left word with Babcock two or three days ago for them to join him on Sussex Lake as soon as Nixon returned. I look for them here tomorrow."

"And what will they do when they get here? Oh, I am afraid!"

"You have nothing to fear," reassured the man. "We will all pull out, when they arrive, for your father's camp. There the three will endeavor to tighten the chain of evidence against me. Crowley seems to believe that if he could only find the instrument with which your father was killed, he would have a clear case against me. The instrument was a hammer, he thinks. Obtaining this evidence, they will take your father's body and proceed to Baker Lake."

"Baker Lake! Why that's way over near Hudson Bay!"

"Yes, but we are much nearer Baker Lake than we are to Fort Norman. And this crime was committed in the territory covered by the Baker Lake detachment of M. Division. Crowley works out of Baker Lake, and it is there he must report."

"Oh, it will be intolerable!" cried the girl. "That journey with all of them treating you like a common murderer! Subjecting you to abuse and accusations when they know you are innocent! And now that dad is—gone, Babcock will threaten and bully me in every way he can think of."

"Yes, it is going to be hard on you, dear. But it won't last long. It's only four hun-

dred miles; and after we hit the Thelon it's down stream all the way. But it's getting late. I'll say good night, and leave you, now. Tomorrow we may move camp."

"Will he make you sleep with those horrible things on your wrists?" asked the girl.

"I don't know," Janier smiled. "I have never worn them before and really I don't know what the usual procedure is. But don't worry about me. I don't sleep with my wrists."

"But the torture of it!"

"It's nothing. I'm getting used to them. Good night."

As he joined Crowley at the little fire, which the addition of green lush grass had converted into a heavy smudge, Janier was not aware that the girl had followed. She paused beside the officer and pointed to the irons.

"Surely, you are not going to leave those on him at night, are you? It would be barbarous!"

Crowley shifted uneasily. "Well, mom, I can't hardly see no other way. It ain't that I want to be harder on him than ne-

cessary. The regulations is agin' abuse of prisoners. But then ag'in, I ain't supposed to take no chances, neither. I sure can't stand guard on him night an' day."

"But," insisted the girl, "it's an outrage! His wrists are swollen and sore and he'll never be able to lie in a comfortable position with his hands fastened together. There must be some way. I am sure he would give you his word that he will not try to escape."

"Yes, mom. He's give me that already. But where'd I be at, s'pose he did pull out? What would the inspector say when I reported that I'd trusted to a murderer's word?"

"He's not a murderer!" cried the girl. "How dare you——"

"Well, that's what he's charged with, anyhow. If he ain't, he can tell it to the judge. But I got to look out for my own hide, too."

As he talked the man's eyes had fallen before the blazing eyes of the girl, and rested upon the base of a small scrub tree near at hand. Suddenly he looked up.

"Tell you what I'll do," he offered. "It won't be as bad as havin' his hands chained together. I'll leave one of them bracelets on, an' he can lay his bed up agin' that tree an' I'll pass the chain around an' snap the loose bracelet around it. That'll give him one free hand; an' if he lays close, it won't put no strain on the other one. Then I'll spread my bed beside his'n an' if he wakes up cramped I'll change the bracelet to the other wrist."

With that the girl had to be content. Thanking the officer coldly, she turned and disappeared within her tent.

CHAPTER XIX

THE START

THE following morning, of his own accord, Crowley removed the handcuffs from Janier's wrists and slipped them into his pocket. "Long as I ain't got nothin' to do but keep an eye on you, you might's well rest up yer arms a little."

Janier thanked him and breakfast was eaten in silence, after which Janier and the girl drew aside and found a shady spot that gave a view of the lake and still was in full sight of Crowley, who busied himself with keeping the fire going, feeding it with green stuff which sent a tall column of signal smoke high into the still air.

About the middle of the forenoon a canoe was sighted, skirting the north shore of the lake. Soon afterward the figures of Babcock and Nixon were plainly distinguishable. Crowley walked over to the two and, drawing the bracelets from his pocket, slipped them onto Janier's wrists, ignoring the wrathful glance of the girl.

"Prob'ly have somethin' else to think about, for a while, after them folks git here, an' I ain't takin' no chances," he explained. "And, mom, we're goin' to pull out of here right after dinner. You can come along, or not, jest as you want. We're goin' to hit for yer paw's camp an' look around a little; an' then we're goin' to take the corpse along to Baker Lake. You're welcome to come with us, if you want to. If you're comin', you better tell yer Injun to git yer outfit ready for the trail."

"Thank you. I *am* going with you," answered the girl. And she walked away to give the Indian his orders.

Crowley turned to Janier.

"I sure wisht there was canoe water somewheres between here an' there," he said. "The way it is, we've got to leave the canoes here an' backpack acrost the way we come an' then take a chanct on pickin' up some boats off'n some natives somewheres."

"There's good canoe water almost to Boyne's camp," said Janier. "All we have to do is to paddle to the south shore and portage over into Lake Aylmer, which connects with Clinton Colden, an' it's canoe water up to within a mile of his camp."

"Are you sure?" asked Crowley.

"Ask Nixon, if you don't believe it. He knows the country."

"But he don't know where Boyne's camp is at."

"Don't he? Well, I do. Maybe you'll have to rely on me for your guide. Boyne's canoe is just about a mile below his tent."

"That's where you was the mornin' I caught you, eh? You were huntin' Boyne's canoe for to make a gitaway."

"Yes, that's where I was. You ought to make a note of that, Crowley. Don't forget that anything I say can be used against me. But here comes your friends; maybe we better go tell them the news."

"My friends?"

"Yes, you invited them to the party, didn't you?"

"Still got yer nerve with you, ain't you? Wonder if you'll hold it clean up till the time you stretch hemp."

Janier grinned. "I suppose you refer to my hanging. A most vulgar, and inac-

curate phrase, Crowley. Hemp don't stretch; that's why they use it."

"Well, I'll be damned," muttered the officer; and he moved away, with Janier close behind him.

Hardly had Babcock's canoe beached than Babcock was upon the gravel, his features beaming in a broad smile. "Good work, Constable! Good work! I see you have your prisoner! And handcuffed, too! A wise precaution, Constable, no doubt!" The smile changed to a scowl as he turned upon Janier. "You realize, now, young man, that the long arm of the law reaches even into the wilderness after the abductors of women!"

"Abduction hell!" cut in Crowley. "I gathered him in for murder."

"Murder!" cried Babcock, his eyes fairly bulging from his head. "You mean he has murdered—her?"

"No, not her. Him."

"The Indian?"

"John Boyne," answered Crowley. "Caught him redhanded. That is, I picked him up right in Boyne's camp. He killed him the night before an' was still hangin' around when I come along the next mornin'."

Babcock received the news in silence, standing there staring from one to the other of the men who confronted him. Out of the tail of his eye Janier watched Nixon, who still remained in the canoe. The blood seemed suddenly to have ebbed from the man's sallow face, leaving it a sickly gray, like a face of putty. It was like a death mask, save for the eyes which blinked rapidly and then burned with an unnatural brightness.

Hearing the voices, Irma Boyne hastened to the spot and took her place close by Janier's side. Sight of her seemed to rouse Babcock from a stupor. Taking a step forward he addressed the girl.

"I warned you!" he sneered. "I warned you against having anything to do with that man! And in disregarding that warning you have brought about the death of your father! It's my turn now. The death of John Boyne reverses the aspect of things. I have asked you to marry me. I have even begged you to. And what was your answer? You insulted me to my face! You have told me, not once but many times, that you distrusted and despised me. For that you will pay—later. When I get ready to marry you now, I'll tell you so. And you'll——"

"Just a minute!" The voice of Janier was not raised above its normal tone, yet the words were distinctly audible, even to the man whose voice had risen with his anger. "In addressing Miss Boyne, you will please show proper respect. It may interest you to know that she has promised to become my wife."

"Your wife!" The words fairly hissed from Babcock's lips. "What do you mean? You—you——" and the man, seemingly beside himself with rage, groped helplessly for a word. Giving it up, he turned upon the girl. "Irma, what is the meaning of this?"

"I think the meaning is perfectly clear. What Mr. Janier just informed you is that as soon as we can find the proper authorities he and I are going to be married."

"Marry that murderer!" Babcock's face, seemingly puffed out with excess of blood, showed a mottled, purplish red. "You fool!" he cried, glaring at Janier. "You didn't know that in killing Boyne you were playing directly into my hands!" Tearing open his coat he drew from an inner pocket a long flat leather wallet which he shook in Janier's face as he slapped it loudly with his other hand. "In there is John Boyne's will! All duly signed and witnessed! It's good in any court in the world! It names me as executor; and by its terms I am to administer his estate without let or hindrance, exactly as I see fit! By its terms I am to pay his daughter an annual income, but the amount of that income is left entirely to my own judgment! Does that mean anything to you poor fools? A dollar a year—a penny a year—if I see fit! And I am to handle this estate until his daughter reaches the age of thirty! For the next ten years I, and I alone, will have the handling of it. At the end of that time I am to turn over —what's left! You didn't do so very well for yourself, after all, did you? Or possibly you intended to murder me after murdering Boyne! Judging from Miss Irma's taste in husbands, it seems that John Boyne did well in——"

The sentence ended in a blur of sound. Goaded beyond control, Janier raised his manacled hands above his head and, as he sprang forward, brought the irons crashing down into Babcock's face. The taut

chain, tearing through the flesh of the man's nose, smashed the bone, while the wrist bands ripped the flesh of his cheeks so that the blood spurted into the air. The stricken man staggered backward until his heels struck the bow of the canoe, which tripped him and sent him crashing backward into the water of the lake, from which he struggled a moment later, half blinded by both blood and water. He staggered onto the gravel, clawing wildly in an endeavor to draw the revolver from its holster at his belt. Crowley leaped forward and, pushing Janier back with one hand, struck Babcock's hand from his gun, which he promptly secured.

"Quit this damn fightin'," he growled, "or I'll take an' hogtie the two of you! This man Janier's my prisoner!"

"But he attacked me!" screamed Babcock. "He's broke my nose!"

"Sure! I can see the bones stickin' through. But quit yer howlin' an' an' I'll see what I can do. It was yer own fault. I don't blame him none."

"I'l kill him for that! I'll——"

"You'll shut up!" cried Crowley, thoroughly exasperated. "Or I'll turn his hands loose an' let him finish the job where he left off at!"

When Nixon had finally succeeded in locating Babcock's medicine kit and had procured therefrom iodine and bandages, Crowley set to work. A needle and thread were requisitioned from Irma, and at the end of an hour Crowley finished his job.

"I'm afraid you ain't never goin' to amount to a awful lot for looks no more. Yer cheeks kind of woppses down like a blood hound's. An' yer nose is sort of caved in where the bones was, an' slants over at the end like. I done the best I could, but they ain't nothin' left to hold it straight. Maybe that'll learn you not to shoot off yer mouth too free after this."

When Teddy-By-and-By called them to dinner, Crowley stepped up to Janier and unlocked his hands.

"What are you doing, Constable?" cried Babcock, his voice sounding strange and unnatural. "I protest against any favor whatever being shown that man! Poor John Boyne!" he whined. "I'll send his murderer to the gallows if it costs me every cent I've got in the world."

"I'm runnin' this outfit," Crowley informed him. "An' what protestin' you do, ain't worth a damn, one way or another."

When questioned, Nixon corroborated Janier's statement regarding an easy portage to Lake Aylmer and a continuous water route from there into Clinton Colden. Beyond that he was very careful not to commit himself.

While Teddy-By-and-By was washing the dishes, Nixon managed to beckon Crowley into the bush for a moment. Once sure that they were out of observation of the others, the man tore open his shirt and with hands that trembled slipped a thong from which dangled a thin packet wrapped in oiled cloth.

"Here," he whispered, hoarsely, "take this! It's the location!"

"You didn't need to be in no such hurry about it," growled Crowley. "You could of carried it till we got almost in."

"Not by a damn sight! I've carried it long enough, a'ready! An' you an' Janier both had me sweatin' blood. Damn you, what did you have to go lookin' at my neck for, first thing? I had to keep my shirt buttoned clean up to keep the string from showin'! An' I always wear my shirt open, an' I bet he know'd it!"

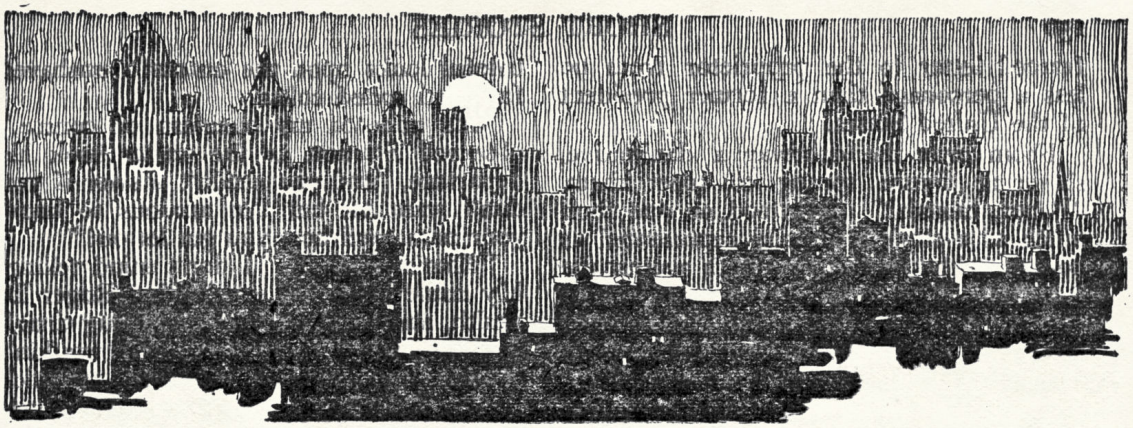
"Aw, hell!" growled Crowley. "You lost yer nerve. I never looked at yer neck; an' I bet he never. You jest imagined it. I ain't afraid to carry it. I keep my shirt buttoned, anyhow."

"Say, Crowley, we got him dead to rights, ain't we? God, I'm scairt stiff. I have be'n, ever since."

"Sure I got him. You got to help, though. An' that there Babcock, he'll swear to anything, now, to git Janier hung. Jest to cinch matters, you an' him might kind of git together an' see if you can't remember somethin' he said, back there in yer camp, that might sort of show up agin' him. We got him, but you can't never have too much evidence, at that."

An hour later the outfit was on the way, paddling toward the portage. In the first canoe, Janier paddled the bow and Crowley the stern, with Puk-puk between them. Irma and the Indian followed; and Babcock and Nixon brought up the rear, Nixon paddling and Babcock in the bow, bemoaning his injuries.

END OF PART III



THE BAIT

By WILLIAM M. STUART

Author of "Government Supplies—Handle With Care," "Who Sups With the Devil," etc.

WHEN YOU EAT IN A "HAM AND" ALL NIGHT RESTAURANT YOU WANT TO BE CAREFUL WHO STAKES YOU TO A MEAL

L. H. STANTON came out of the Railway Mail Club in Vesey Street and paused to light his pipe. He cupped his hands to shield the feeble blaze of the match from the wind which swept up from the harbor. Three attempts were necessary before combustion of the tobacco was effected.

It was probably the severity of the weather, rather than the lateness of the hour, which rendered the street nearly deserted. The roar of a Sixth Avenue L train sounded from Church Street; but other than that evidence of hurrying humanity, lower Manhattan appeared to have taken itself indoors.

Stanton shivered, turned up the collar of his heavy overcoat and directed his face toward Broadway. Suddenly a figure detached itself from the shadow of a doorway and confronted him.

"Are you a railway mail clerk?" said the man in a shaky voice.

"Well, if I am, what's the next question?"

"Friend, it's like this: I was a mail clerk once, and I thought perhaps you might——"

"Where did you run?"

"I ran five years on the N. Y. and Chicago, three years on the Boston-Spring, and a little while on the Shore Line."

"So? What case did you have coming this way?"

"New York State letters part of the time, and Pennsylvania papers quite a lot."

"Good. Now, just name two or three towns on the N. Y. and Salamanca R. P. O."

"Well," returned the other as he pushed meditatively at a miniature snowbank with his right foot, "there's Callicoon, Susquehanna, Owego, Waverly, Addison, Hornell, and——"

"That's enough," broke in Stanton with a laugh. "I guess you've been there and helped skin 'em. But I wanted to be sure. There's so many pan-handlers loafing around here trying to work the postal clerk racket that it pays to be careful. You're hungry, I suppose."

"Nearly starved."

"Come with me, then. I'm on my way to Havelock's beanery on Park Row for a midnight supper before I go to work. You don't object to Havelock's, I hope."

"Not tonight," returned the hungry one grimly. "Lead on, MacDuff—I'm with you."

Side by side the two men swung into Broadway, passed around the angle of the post office, and approached the eating place noted for its corned beef and beans, its corps of ex-prizefighter waiters, and a

framed letter to the proprietor from no less a personage than a former president of the United States.

From near the doorway a diminutive, shivering figure sprang to meet them. "Paper, mistah?" He stood on one foot, much as a stork is usually represented as doing, and he forced his breath against the red fingers of his left hand, even as his right hand darted toward the roll of papers held under his arm.

"Beat it, kid," snarled the ex-postal clerk. "Don't block the door; we're in a hurry. Your papers are old anyway."

But Stanton tendered the lad a quarter. "Keep the change, son," he said kindly as he accepted a paper in return. "'Tis a cold night, and you'd better be getting yourself a cup of hot coffee."

"Tank youse, boss," murmured the newsie, slipping the coin into his pocket with remarkable rapidity. "Youse is an all-right guy, but yer in poor comp'ny, I'll tell de woild."

The hostelry was nearly devoid of patrons for the nonce, so Stanton and his companion had no difficulty in finding seats at a vacant table. They were speedily approached by an individual equipped with a dirty apron and a prominent chin, who belligerently demanded, "Wot's yours?"

"Ham and, French fried, side of beans and coffee," announced Stanton. "What're you eating, my friend?"

"Oh, I guess I can get along with a bowl of crackers and milk."

"Crackers and milk, nothing!" scoffed Stanton. "I thought you said you were hungry."

"Well, you see," hesitated the derelict, "I thought, perhaps, if I didn't eat much, you'd stake me to a bed."

"What'll you have to pay for a bed?"

"I can get one for fifteen cents, up on the Bowery."

"Well, son," proclaimed Stanton, "you just go ahead and order up a plate of man's grub. We'll see about the bed later."

"Thanks. Then I'll take the same," said the ex-clerk as he turned to the waiter who was fidgeting with impatience and casting baleful looks upon the outcast's unshaved face and soiled collar.

"It's none of my business, of course," observed Stanton as the waiter took his departure, "and you needn't answer if you don't want to, but I'm anxious to know your name and how you got let out."

"That's all right. I don't mind telling. My name's Swif—, er, Smith. Roger D. Smith, and I got let out for getting drunk and missing my run. The fellows wouldn't lie for me. I tried to work the sick racket, but it was a no go. It was a rotten deal all around."

"And now?"

"And now I'm down and out, that's all. When I started down, everybody kicked me along, as they always do in cases of this kind."

"No offense, but you, er—look as though you still drink some."

"I'll tell you, friend," confided the other as he leaned across the table. "What did you say your name is?"

"Stanton."

"Well, Stanton, when I was fired I had over two thousand dollars saved up. It's gone—every cent. Booze mostly, although I've had to live. Oh, this booze is hell, Stanton. But I'm going to reform and—get back into the service. I know a guy that's a friend to a United States senator. He's going to pull some wires for me."

Smith paused and rubbed his hairy chin reflectively. His bloodshot eyes gleamed with anger, or aroused ambition.

"But ain't it rotten, Stanton, to fire a man for getting drunk once and missing his run?"

"Was it just once?"

"Well," grudgingly admitted Smith, "it might have been more than that. But it's rotten, anyhow."

"Here comes the grub," announced Stanton. "Let's eat."

With much clattering of dishes, the hot food and fragrant coffee were placed between the two men. Smith at once buried his troubles, and began to eat in a manner that tended to substantiate the assertion he had made in Vesey Street. Stanton ate in the manner that a perfectly healthy man six feet tall, two hundred pounds in weight, and forty years of age, should eat. For the space of fifteen minutes, therefore, the conversation languished.

"Have another cup of coffee," finally invited Stanton. "I'm going to have another. It's over four hundred miles to Salamanca, and I have to stoke the human furnace well before the train leaves."

"Thanks," said Smith.

Another interval of silence. Then Stanton pushed back his chair. He brought forth two cigars. "Smoke?" he inquired.

"Thanks." Smith eagerly stretched out a dirty hand.

"How do you live—ordinarily, I mean?" queried Stanton. "What do you work at?"

"Oh, I get odd jobs now and then. Not much doing in the winter, though, except when there's a snowstorm. But wasn't it rotten to fire a man just because——?"

"I suppose they have to insist on the rules."

"Rules, hell! Nobody lives up to the rules. The only thing is not to get caught. Now, I'll bet you don't always live up to the rules. Are you the registry clerk?"

Stanton nodded.

"Well, the rules say that the clerk accompanying registered mail from the post office to the train must at all times be where he can observe the door of the mail truck. Do *you* always stay out on the deck of the ferryboat and watch the truck on cold nights—like this one?"

"No, not always," conceded Stanton.

"You go into the warm cabin, as a usual thing, don't you? And break the rules?"

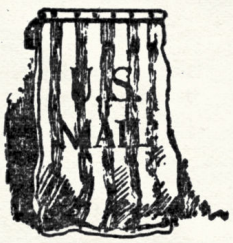
"It looks that way."

"Going to stay out tonight?"

"Hardly. It's too darned cold."

"Just so. Rules, hell! Everyone breaks 'em. But they fired me just the same."

"I suppose I ought to stay out, though, at that," said Stanton. "They're shipping a lot of specie lately by registered mail. We have some nearly every trip."



"Most of the rules," continued Smith, ignoring Stanton's remark, "are foolish. Now the one about watching the truck—and freezing to death. In the first place, the mail is enclosed by the metal screen of the truck and locked in with a mail lock. How could an ordinary robber get in during the few minutes it takes to cross the river? In the second place, if a gang really wanted the swag, would they hesitate to knock you on the head? What could you do? One against three or four!"

"Moral: safety first—keep out of the way," laughed Stanton. "I believe I shall tonight. It's devilish cold."

"Rules, hell!" grated Smith.

"Here's a half-dollar," said Stanton as he rose. "Get a white man's bed tonight. I've got to be on my way now. I must get the registers and catch the 12.45 boat, or I'll miss my train. In that case, maybe I'd suffer the same fate you did."

"Rules, hell. I certainly thank you, Stanton, for your kindness to a has-been. If my former companions had been as considerate, maybe I wouldn't be where I am now. If you will give me your address I'll send you this money—which I consider merely a loan."

"Forget it! You're welcome to the feed and bed. Hope you strike a good job before long." Stanton paid the combined bill, donned his overcoat, and hurriedly left the restaurant.

THE 12.45 A.M. boat, which was scheduled to connect train seven, was on the point of leaving, and the gate-keeper was about to close the entrance, when a mail truck hurtled across West Street and, with wildly honking horn, bore down upon the Chambers Street ferry.

"You want to git on the job!" shouted the porter at the door to the chauffeur, as the truck rumbled through the gateway. "We don't hold this here boat fer no mail er nothin'. This here's the train boat."

The registry clerk, sunk up to his eyes in his heavy overcoat, paid no attention to the man's blatancy. But the driver, not to be denied his inalienable right to a "comeback," cordially returned, "Don't I know it, yuh bonehead? I don't make the snow, do I? Cut the anvil!"

The ferry hand shouted throaty, but indistinguishable anathemas after the sociable driver as the truck clanked on to the boat, then sullenly withdrew into his coop.

With the rushing of mighty waters, sundry bumps and scrapings, the boat gathered headway and slid out into the river. The jagged skyline of the city rose behind, and the freighted craft breasted the current of the stream; heading not toward her objective, but toward the capital of the state. The thumps and shocks which emanated from her water line indicated that ice was running strongly with the ebb tide. The stars twinkled in a clear but frosty sky, and the wind rushed through the vehicle deck of the steamer, biting like the sting of a serpent all who stood in its sovereign way.

For a few minutes the postal clerk who was accompanying the registered mail retained his position on the seat of the truck. The chauffeur had almost immediately de-

serted his car and vanished into the smoking cabin. After an interval the clerk stiffly descended from his perch, walked around behind the car, tested the lock, and then followed the example of the driver.

The truck with its contents of unknown value stood deserted in the pathway of the sweeping breeze.

Less than one minute after the clerk had betaken himself to the heat and comfort of the smoking cabin, a figure emerged from the darkness of the gangway, stood listening for a moment, then approached the door of the mail truck.

He whipped a key from his pocket, inserted it in the mail lock, and cautiously swung the door open. He paused for a second; but, except for the whistling of the wind and the continuous bumping of the ice cakes against the side of the boat, all was quiet. The lights of Jersey City began to loom close at hand.

The nocturnal prowler next produced a flashlight and focused it upon the sacks and pouches of mail which lay just within the door. He apparently knew what to select, for he neither hesitated nor pondered. Seizing a well-filled bag made of red and white striped canvas and secured by a heavy brass lock, he dragged his prize to the floor. He placed it by his feet, then carefully closed and locked the door of the mail truck. Next he drew from his pocket a newspaper which he proceeded to wrap about the registered sack. After his plunder had been made to resemble an innocent package of merchandise, he tucked it under his arm and sauntered toward the rear of the boat.

Whistling softly, he passed on the right side of the steel bulkhead, which partially divided the traffic driveway. As he did so, two men stepped noiselessly from around the other side. The taller of the two raised a heavy gun and placed the muzzle thereof exactly behind the ear of the thief. "Just drop that bundle, Bob Swift," he growled menacingly, "then stick out your hands—quick!"

Swift whirled and faced his accuser, making as he did so a noise similar to that of a punctured tire. But, agreeable to the command, he dropped his package and thrust out his hands with commendable promptness.

"Attaboy!" encouraged the tall man. "Just a moment. There you are with a nice pair of bracelets. And now that you've been so agreeable, we'll introduce ourselves all around. The gentleman on my left is Tom Moran, the registry clerk tonight. I, of course, am merely L. H. Stanton, the man who had the pleasure of supping with you about an hour ago. No, I'm not a clerk now. I'm the inspector who has been trailing you for some little time."

"Ain't it hell?" ejaculated Swift in disgust.

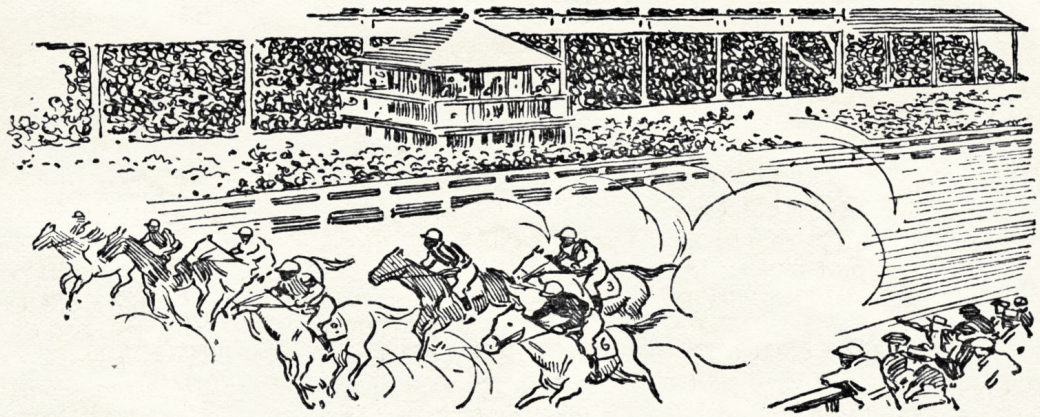
"That all depends on how you look at it. Generally it's what you make it; and you've had your chance. Anyhow, you'll now have a regular bed every night.

"You and I both know," went on Stanton, "that when you were pinched for that Special Delivery job on the Shore Line, your mail keys were not recovered for the Department. Well, since you got out of Atlanta, there have been several little jobs like this pulled off. Mail trucks arrived at the terminal with doors securely locked, but with registered gone. Obviously, some unauthorized person had in his possession a mail key. We suspected you, but had no proof. I thought it extremely probable that you would hang around the club with the idea of pumping important tips from incautious clerks. So I've been sticking around there myself for about a week. Tonight I wasn't sure I had picked up the right party until I got you into Havelock's. You know the rest: I put out some bait and you took it.

"Now come on; the boat's in. Watch your step."

"BURNING LAND" DISCOVERED IN NORTHERN CANADA

DISCOVERY of a great tract of "burning land" in the northern part of Canada, in the Mackenzie River country, is reported by a Canadian government agent. Over a large area the air is full of the smell of sulphur and the gases given off by burning coal, while along the river are great cliffs of molten clay. Scientists say that the "Bad Lands" of South Dakota originated from just such a condition, the surface beds of coal and shale catching fire and burning, perhaps for thousands of years, until the fires had penetrated so deeply into the soil that there was no longer sufficient oxygen to sustain combustion. Some of the coal beds of South Dakota are still burning.



INHERITED

By MEIGS O. FROST

Author of "The Whistlenail Handicap," "Pride," etc.

AMID THE TENSE EXCITEMENT OF THE RACE TRACKS AND SURROUNDED BY THE VARIED FOLLOWERS OF THE GAME, IT WAS GIVEN TO DICK LAMBERT TO PROVE THE CALIBRE OF HIS INHERITANCE OF SPORTING BLOOD

IN HIS big white house among the magnolias of the rich Mississippi Delta country, old Claiborne Lambert was dying.

Little seemed alive about him, save the eagle-keen old eyes that shone in dark contrast to the white pillow, the white face and the thick white hair. But fire seemingly unquenchable burned in those eyes. They looked steadily at the face of young Richard Lambert, his nephew, who sat beside the bed, his features drawn with the effort for control that it takes more of age and experience to achieve than his twenty-one years had given him. For the dying man had been closer even to the youth than his own father.

The old man spoke slowly.

"It's a stock joke that old maids and bachelors know more about raising children than mothers and fathers," he said. "That's why I've called you in to talk to you. Your father's wrong and I'm right, even if he is the exception to the Lambert rule. I've spent a good many years waiting to see him kick over the traces, and ——" a whimsical, cynical smile twisted the pallid old lips—"I think he stayed steady in the boat out of sheer cussedness, just to disappoint me."

Despite his grief at his uncle's passing, a faint grin could not help creeping on Dick Lambert's face. The old boy was going out game, balanced, under control, as he had lived. For Claiborne Lambert was a lovable old sinner, different as day from night from his brother, Dick's father. That unregenerate uncle never had married. Hard as he had worked—and few harder—he had played harder yet.

There was no doubt that tradition had decorated the chronicle of Claiborne Lambert's revels with many an unjustifiable frill. But also there was no doubt that there was a real foundation for many of the stories over which his neighbors rolled their tongues, or which they held on high as a horrible example to youth. For Mississippi has its strange mingling of Cavalier and Covenanter stock—and the Lamberts were of the Cavalier branch. It was lasting grief to the Covenanters, old Claiborne Lambert was wont to say, that his prosperity did not permit them to point with relish to his fallen fortunes in their moral discourses.

"So I called you in, Dick," pursued the old man, "to tell you what I'd planned for you. Your father's a mighty good man, but he doesn't understand youth. He never did."

The old voice grew silent as the old mind rambled off on memories of the elder Dick Lambert when the two were boys together many years before. Then it spoke again.

"I've watched you a lot. You're heir to a lot of the Lambert virtues, Dick, but

you're heir to the Lambert wild streak, or I'm no judge of men. Your father is the only Lambert I've ever known who wasn't a born gambler, though we've been pretty successful gamblers. You're going to come into a lot of property some day. I want you to have some sense of balance by the time you get it. Your father and I disagree on how to give you that balance, but he has given in to the whim of a dying man, Dick. He was going to disinherit you if you ever touched a card or bet on a horse. I've talked him out of that."

"Say, see here, Uncle Claiborne," spoke the youngster. "You and dad look to me like the woman who wouldn't get married because her son might go swimming and get drowned. Where do you get all this gambling stuff about me?"

"Knowledge of your ancestors, Dickie. Don't interrupt. Just listen. In my will I'm leaving you a special bequest of fifty thousand dollars. It's your money, to throw away anywhere you want. You get it on two conditions.

"You come back with it doubled, and your father won't say a word. Bring back a hundred thousand dollars you've won as a gentleman should, and you'll step into your place at the head of everything I've left—plantation, sawmill, bank and store.

"You come back broke, and you go to work for your father. For the property will be his, then. He'll make you sweat, I have no doubt. I know my brother. One way or another, by the time you come into the Lambert holdings, you'll know a lot you don't know now. Except for your father, the Lamberts have been gamblers for a great many generations, Dick. They haven't been cheap gamblers, or crooked gamblers. I want you to cut your eyeteeth like a gentleman. I want your word before I die, that you'll stick to that agreement. How about it, Dick?"

The youngster by the bedside looked steadily at him.

"I think you're both a little bit cracked," said he. "But if *you* ask any such agreement, I could hardly refuse you, could I—not now."

The old sinner on the bed smiled amiably.

"No sentiment, Dickie," he chuckled. "I know men—and I know the Lambert men rather well. You're a good youngster, but you've got a lot to learn before you're turned loose with a big property in your hands. You've had too much coddling and too many moral lectures and not enough chance to learn the percentage against you when you bet on a horse or try to fill an inside straight. Do we shake hands on it?"

They gripped—the muscular tanned young hand, and the long, slender white old one—in masculine compact.

"By the way, Dickie," said old Claiborne Lambert, "before you start on your travels, take a whirl at New Orleans. I've had you put up at the Colonists' Club. There's a square poker game there. And look up old Henri Jolisson. Greatest chef in the South, Dick. His oysters Rockefeller and his filet mignon are worth traveling for. Give him my regards. Now on your way. That ass of a doctor is about due, and I don't want you to hear me lose my temper."

That night old Claiborne Lambert died—smiling, cynically amused, as he had lived.

"He offered to lay me twenty to one he wouldn't live until morning," said the doctor to Richard Lambert, senior, before he departed, "and I took him for a hundred. Shall I send my check to the administrator?"

"Give it to charity and be damned to you," said Richard Lambert. "My brother is damned already."

A month later Richard Lambert, junior, took train for New Orleans.

HE STOOD in the doorway of the Pan Zareta Restaurant, looking about for a moment before he took seat at table. The laughing, chatting, joking crowd, intent on its own affairs, gave him a casual glance and went back to its business of enjoying life—a business in which dinner at the Pan Zareta was only a preliminary. It was rather a close corporation, that crowd, anyway.

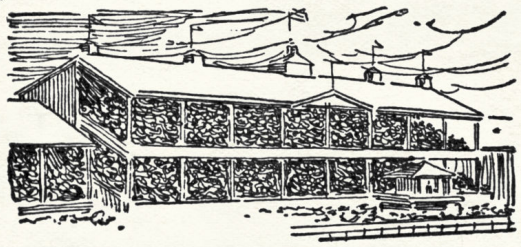
Those who glanced at Dick Lambert as he entered the restaurant saw a youngster with the same look in his eye you'll see in a friendly pup willing to make overtures. Tall he was, and broad of shoulder for all his youth, with crisp red hair that curled back from a tanned forehead, with friendly blue eyes and a face and hands that bore the marks of long hours in sun and open air. His clothes were good. They sat him well. But there was a queer shyness in his manner—a diffidence that loomed all

the more obvious in contrast with the easy camaraderie of the folk in possession of the little restaurant.

You won't find the Pan Zareta in the guide-books. It isn't one of the places Society seeks out. Its unostentatious front fills the space between the entrances of two hotels that are really lodging houses, on a narrow Old World street in the heart of the old French Quarter of New Orleans.

Many months in the year the Pan Zareta does just an average and casual business, its patrons the polyglot residents of the strange old houses for several blocks around. But when the racing season starts——!

Then it is that horsemen and their camp followers stream into the ancient Southern city, full of the gossip of Churchill Downs and Tia Juana, of Havre de Grace and Saratoga and Belmont. In they come for the opening of the Shrewsbury track just outside the Orleans Parish limits, on



Thanksgiving Day—for the greater season that follows the New Year opening on the Fair Grounds track, New Orleans's own. Then it is that the Pan Zareta and Henri Bernard Jolisson, its proprietor, really come to life.

For in the days when Pan Zareta, New Orleans' greatest racehorse, was foaled, was trained and triumphed in a city where folk have been race-mad for a century, it was Henri Bernard Jolisson who backed her in every race with all the money he could raise. He was a chef when Pan Zareta started racing. He owned his own restaurant before she was in mid-career. He visits yet her untimely grave—that green mound in the center of the Fair Grounds oval around which she sped so many times to the plaudits of victory. In the little restaurant he named in her honor, no racing man known to Henri Bernard Jolisson goes hungry—and he knows them all.

It was nearing the end of the dinner hour, at the moment of Dick Lambert's entrance, and all save the racing crowd had dined and departed. The Pan Zareta belonged to the brotherhood of the track for the evening.

Fat Henri himself, his responsibilities for the moment cast aside, sat at table in the midst of them, over his *petit verre*. His wife, Maman Eulalie, fatter even than her distinguished husband, had descended from her perch behind the comptoir and sat beside him, over the latest innumerable *café noirs* of the day. A believer in *café noir,* dripped thick, was Maman Eulalie.

As Dick took his seat, Henri heaved himself ponderously to his feet and rolled magnificently to the table. It was his custom to greet the newcomers in person, introducing himself.

"M'sieu is somewhat late, but the table d'hóte is yet good," said he. "Does m'sieu wish it, or some special dish?"

Dick grinned diffidently.

"My uncle, Claiborne Lambert, told me to give you his regards and order oyster Rockefeller and filet mignon," said he.

Fat Henri's eyes grew round. His pudgy hands uprose.

"The nephew of M'sieu Lambert! Welcome to the Pan Zareta!"

He turned suddenly.

"Be silent, imbeciles," he commanded the joking, laughing crowd. For while some had started a song, in a far corner a group of youths had pulled a table away from the wall and were kneeling behind it, while there sounded an agonized: *"Be* a seven, dice—*be* a seven!" as prayerfully they beseeched the little white cubes to behave.

Dick Lambert grinned again. This was something like!

And a moment later, to the booming cadence of fat Henri's introduction, he was on his feet and bowing embarrassedly.

"That," said Henri Bernard Jolisson, "is sufficient for the most of these imbeciles. Now—" and he led Dick by the arm to the table from which he had deserted his *petit verre*—"I present you especially to Maman Eulalie, my wife, and to her guest of honor for the evening. Miss Sanborn, this is M'sieu Dick Lambert, the nephew of my friend."

Dick found himself looking into a pair of brown eyes in which a smile was glinting. He caught a vision of dark brows, a broad white forehead, a mass of red-gold hair. He stammered something.

"You eat at our own table, m'sieu," fat Henri was intoning.

That seemed eminently reasonable to Dick Lambert.

But as they seated themselves, up out of the kneeling ruck of the crap-shooters shot a smiling youth. On their table he ad-

vanced. In one hand gleamed the little white bones. In the other fluttered bank-notes.

"I'm the Gutta Percha Kid," he announced. "The harder they slam me, the higher I bounce. I shoot nothing but naturals."

He spun the dice in air, caught them, rolled them across the table-cloth.

"Ada from Decatur!" he read them. "They won't behave unless there's meat in front of 'em. Pork chops!"

He glanced mirthfully at Dick.

"Fifty dollars says they'll behave," he chuckled, stripping from a currency-filled hand the bank-notes that fluttered in its fingers. "Am I faded?"

Something warm and tingling stung the blood in Dick Lambert's veins. He drew out a pigskin wallet fat with currency.

"Shoot, brother," he said, as his fifty fluttered to the cloth.

The Gutta Percha Kid shot.

"Snake-eyes!" he mourned. "Shoots another fifty."

"Make it the hundred," grinned Dick, leaving the bills as they lay.

"A sport!" announced the Gutta Percha Kid. His hundred floated down. He nursed the dice, whispering eloquent pleadings to them. They rolled across the table.

"Wham!" he grunted. "Read 'em and weep!"

But the bones had stopped their progress.

Ace-deuce looked up at the electric lights.

"I'll do the weeping," concluded the Gutta Percha Kid. "Tomorrow morning, when I wake up on the levee, I'll look at the first crawfish that crawls out and say, 'Good morning, breakfast'!"

"Serves you right," smiled Leslie Sanborn. "You picked on him first."

Dick Lambert grinned boyishly.

"Wait till I get some food," he chuckled, "and we'll use that coin for something better than breakfast. You'll take breakfast with me, anyway, won't you?" he invited the Gutta Percha Kid. And as that individual's "Will I!" sounded, Dick went on. "You-all know the town and I don't. Tell where we go, and we'll make it a party. Show and supper."

Cheers rocked the Pan Zareta.

Dick Lambert was a member of the club in good standing. One alone in the place failed to join in the cheer. Though his face was smiling, it was a calculating smile, born of that glimpse of Dick Lambert's fat wallet.

The folk of the track have peculiar genius in the nicknames they give their brethren.

This youth they knew as "Iron Gall."

IT WAS a strange world in which Dick Lambert found himself, the world of the race track folk. A world of fast friendships and stealthy treachery. A world where some men's bare word is good for scores of thousands of dollars and other men's signed bond is not worth a thin dime. A world where some men live for the sheer love of excitement and the clean joy of watching racing thoroughbreds, and others live for the jackal pickings to which they can prowl. A world in which some, joying in the labor of breeding and training and racing, work harder and longer hours than the veriest ditch-digger to achieve the results that stand in the record-books. A world in which others, seeking to avoid all honest toil, spend yet longer hours in study of form-charts, in exchange of laboriously-achieved information and deliberately-concocted misinformation, in the hope of easy money. They make that easy money—sometimes. It comes and goes and comes again—but always it goes in the end.

With the racing season in full swing, New Orleans now was the capital of that world, headquarters for the men of the racing game and the strange breed that hovers about the fringe of the game.

Into that world Dick Lambert stepped joyously as one who enters into a heritage. Cynical old Claiborne Lambert had been right. But in the paths where he had revelled, always amusedly on guard, his nephew now wandered, knowing less than nothing of the play of plot and counter-plot, the strange mixtures of clean sport and sordid purpose that are part of every racing meet.

Side by side with him went two figures that filled his eyes. One was a slender figure of a girl with brown eyes and a mass of red-gold hair—Leslie Sanborn, in whose life stables and track had played a part since childhood. The other was that whimsical, irresponsible figure of loyal friendship—the Gutta Percha Kid.

And following him closely down that path was a third figure that hardly registered at all in the eyes of Dick Lambert. Waiting and watchful as a beast of prey

crouched for its spring. It was the quiet, calculating figure the folk of the track knew as Iron Gall.

IF THEY keep on a-runnin' like this," complained Hymie Newmyer, "a guy can buy a murder around this track for a ham sandwich."

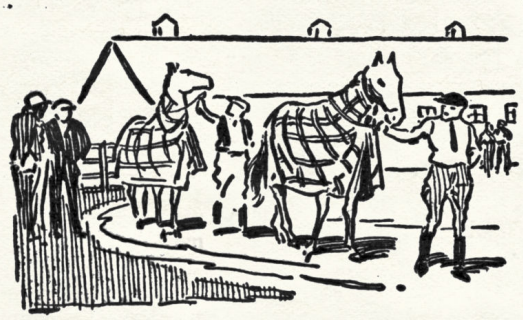
"You said it," agreed Paddy Grogan, his partner, and indeed times *were* hard for the hustlers at the Fair Grounds track in New Orleans that season. There was no denying it.

The players—as the racing world knows the betting public in contrast to the layers, or book-makers with whom that public bets—were having a phenomenal run of luck on their own selections. The bookies were being slaughtered by amateur dope. Wherefore there was small market for the dope of the hustler brigade—the boys who study form and clock try-out and listen in to stable gossip, and bring to their clients, when they really work, the crystalized judgment of the track.

Times certainly were hard.

"They say the cheaters live off'n snowballs in the winter," mourned Hymie, "but I ain't never heard nothin' 'bout an honest hustler livin' off'n grass in the spring. Somethin's gotta be done f'r the good o' the order, all right, Paddy. What? I dunno."

The pair of them looked morosely out past the whitewashed fence against which they leaned. In the chill of the Southern winter morning, misty, shot through with the glowing shafts of sunrise, the blanketed and bandaged thoroughbreds were being led forth. Darky swipes crooned to



their shrouded charges. Trainers and jockeys and some early-bird owners here and there held low-voiced consultation. Vibrant racing machines with quivering nostrils were being warmed up in walks and short sprints.

Down past them thundered a spirited racer, while clockers with keen eyes and split-second watches checked the performance.

"Pretty work that Jambalaya horse is doing'," approved Paddy. "Looks like ol' man Sanborn's gonna clean up with him this time. And say, what Garcia wouldn't do t' take a slice o' fat off'n Sanborn's ribs ain't in the dictionary."

Robert Ballister Sanborn, breeder and owner, was the man who was racing the Jambalaya horse. Alexis Garcia, track superintendent at the Fair Grounds, had hated him with bitter hatred since the historic Creole Handicap which Sanborn's Cloudburst had won under the handling of Sandy MacGriffin, the Sanborn jockey, when a carefully-cooked scheme of Garcia's had been exploded and his bank-roll thinned by many thousands.

But Hymie was in no mood for track gossip that morning. More urgent matters obsessed him. And breakfast was the chief of these.

"Pretty work, huh!" he growled morosely. "Say, put a stack o' wheats an' some country sausage an' hot Java ahead o' my nose, an' I could pass that hayburner like he was a harness-maker's model."

"Me, too, ol'-timer," grinned Paddy.

"You poor boys! Hungry as all that?"

Both of them wheeled at the voice. Their caps came off simultaneously.

"Mornin', Miss Leslie."

It was Leslie Sanborn, daughter of that same Robert Ballister Sanborn, who stood beside them. And she was as slim and lithe and beautiful and every bit a thoroughbred as the horses her father bred up on his Bayou Sara plantation in Louisiana to race on all the tracks from Hamilton to Tia Juana.

She had ridden from the day when they balanced her precariously on the back of a Shetland pony as chubby as herself. Now, nearing twenty, with finishing school behind her, motherless, she trailed the circuit with her father, enjoying a freedom that would have whitened the hair of her chaperones of school days.

Every man who knew the racing game, knew and respected Robert Ballister Sanborn if in their veins ran the blood of clean sportsmanship. Up at his stock farm, they knew he made almost a religion of clean breeding. Out on the track, they knew equally he made almost a religion of honest racing. The most cynical admitted that when the dark blue and silver of the Sanborn colors, with Sandy MacGriffin up, were atop the pigskin, that jockey was rid-

ing his mount for the last ounce of speed that was in the thoroughbred heart and legs of the horse beneath him.

They knew and respected Robert Ballister Sanborn.

But they adored his sunny-haired daughter. For hers was a genius for fine friendliness.

The regulars who went the rounds of the circuit, from darky swipe up through the ranks of hustlers and jockeys, hostlers and touts, trainers and owners and veteran bookies, were hers to command. If fighting were necessary, they wouldn't have waited for the drop of the hat. They'd have thrown the hat down and jumped on it, to get into the fight.

"I know it's a fine morning," smiled Leslie Sanborn to the greeting of the two. "But that isn't what I asked you. Are you two boys as hungry as I heard you say, just now?"

"Aw, Miss Leslie——"

Paddy was fingering his cap with deprecating denial. But as Hymie shook his head in vigorous negation, and the Irish lad shufflingly and gallantly perjured himself, the brown eyes of Leslie Sanborn were taking the two in from mop of hair to unshined shoes.

Her firm little hand thrust forth.

"Here," she said. "Quick. Don't let anybody see you. Now you chase yourselves and come back for inspection this afternoon before they start. The whole works, both of you. All you can eat. Haircut, shave, shine, shampoo and a brush-off and a clean collar. Nobody's going to take a tip from a pair of young gentlemen who look as if they'd slept in the park."

Paddy still shuffled nervously. But Hymie's hand had shot out and grasped the folded bank-note she proffered.

"Gee," he breathed, as with a swift glance he saw the "XX" in the corner. "Aw—say—Miss Leslie——"

"Not a word out of you," she interposed brusquely. "Do what I tell you. And let me know if you have any luck this afternoon."

"Aw—say—thanks, Miss Leslie!"

"Forget it," said that young lady, in argot never taught by her finishing school. "I won a little something yesterday when Prince Ivan came home fifteen-to-one. Now I'm investing some of it. If you don't pay me back, I'll have you ruled off the track for life."

The two boys grinned and were off like a shot.

They were back that afternoon before the barrier rose.

"Glad you're looking like sports again," Leslie Sanborn greeted them. "What's today's crime going to be?"

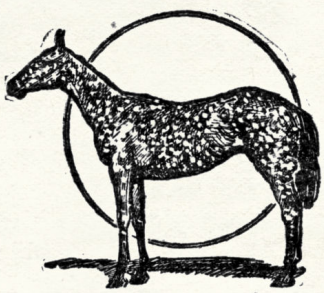
Hymie Newmyer grinned. He produced a handful of envelopes from his coat pocket. On them, printed with a little portable rubber printing press with rubber type, just then parked in an obscure corner under the grandstand, was the inscription: "Paddy's and Hymie's Sure Fire Tips. A Winner a Day Guaranteed."

"We got the press outa hock with part o' your double-sawbuck, Miss Leslie," explained Paddy, "and now we're lookin' f'r customers."

Leslie Sanborn chuckled gaily.

"Run along, both you young pirates," she ordered. "You'll have me betting on your judgment, next."

"You might do worse, Miss Leslie," protested Hymie. "Now, that Applejack horse in the last race today—on the level, he's the surest thing ever went into the starter's hands."



"On your way," sounded the laughing orders. "Run along."

They ran along.

"She's a queen," said Hymie, as they went their way.

"All o' that—an' a lady an' the best sport I ever saw," added Paddy.

"Well, that's that," said Hymie, fingering his pocketful of sure-fire tips. And then, with swift instinct for business: "Now let's see whatta coupla honest hustlers can pick up in this bunch o' boobs."

Through the thickening crowd in front of the grandstand they made their way. Then Hymie wheeled as a hand was laid on his arm.

"I gotta good thing if you boys'll come in with me," said the youth who stopped them.

"Spill your stuff, Iron Gall," said Hymie.

"You see that bird over there by the foot of the stairs—blue suit, light gray hat, glasses over his shoulder?"

"Sure," assented Hymie.

"His name's Dick Lambert an' his roll'll choke a hippopotamus. Get next to him. Feed him the hot stuff for a while,

I'm outa this just now f'r a reason. Give him two hot ones today. Jambalaya in the third and Applejack in the last. It's straight stuff. Garcia's own pick. I'll feed you some more tomorrow. We're nursing this baby along for a killing. Place your bets at any book in the Palm Garden except Garcia's and mine."

"Our meat," quoth Hymie, grinning. "Watch our smoke."

BACK from a brief run down to Havana, where he had gone to open certain negotiations between the officials of the Oriental Park track and Honest Jack Ryan, that square-shooting bookie whose earlier name had been Mose Feinblatt, the Gutta Percha Kid stepped off the boat.

As befitted an ambassador, he rolled in state and a taxi up Canal Street and met his principal in the onyx-pillared lobby of the hotel where for certain months of the year the residents talk horse and nothing else. He made his report. He received his praise and his fee. And then, leaning back behind the wreathing smoke of one of the perfectos that had traveled back to New Orleans in his personal baggage, he asked casually, "Well, what's been doin' since I left the old town to shift for itself."

Briefly and picturesquely Mose recited the chronicle of recent events—and then his face lighted with an appreciative smile.

"One dam' funny thing since you left," he said, "is our comic opera Pittsburg Phil. Some new plunger we got in the family."

"How come?" The Gutta Percha Kid was interested.

"There's a bird blows in with a roll," grinned Mose. "Those two young hustlers, Paddy and Hymie—you remember 'em?—get him on their string. They're leadin' him on."

The Gutta Percha Kid smiled. "Who is this prize boob?" he asked.

"He's a guy from up in Mississippi, somewhere," said Honest Jack Ryan, "and what's more, he's really lucky. You know how a streak of luck will hit some baby smack on the nose sometimes. Well, if it rained gold dollars this young Pittsburg Phil'd be out in the rain with a circus tent upside down. He's nicked into my bankroll for about fifteen grand already. His name's Dick Lambert. And say, what he's doin' to the bookies just now ain't a spot on what's gonna be handed him pronto, Kid. I got the low-down the other day that Iron Gall is back of this somewhere —an' you know Iron Gall ain't nothin' in this world but the pussyfooter for that crook Garcia. Garcia's out t' smash old man Sanborn ever since that crimp was put in his roll on the Creole Handicap last year. This boob Lambert is rushin' little Leslie Sanborn all over the place. It looks to me like Garcia's gettin' ready to smash 'em both."

The amusement of the Gutta Percha Kid had ceased. "The hell you say," quoth he. "Dick Lambert's my buddy."

"Well," opined Mose Feinblatt, "fifteen grand is a lot to slip to anybody's buddy, Kid. But if you're all cut up about him, the best I c'n slip you is to tell your buddy to tie it up in bonds and lock up the bonds. That's the only way he's gonna save carfare, if he keeps on skatin' on tissue-paper ice."

"I wish I could," mused the Kid. "But I'm kinda getting to know that bird. You've got to walk easy with him, or he'll tell you where you get off. And I like him. He's straight."

The ups and downs of the track, its woes as well as its joys, were old news to Honest Jack Ryan. The sight of rich men made poor in an afternoon had lost novelty to him, long since. It was all in the run of business.

"Well," said he, not unkindly, "I've told you where he'll get off. And if there's any walkin' easy to be done, Kid, he's the guy to step light. Take it from me, he's walkin' over dynamite right now. You know Garcia, well as I do."

OF THESE matters Dick Lambert just then knew nothing, and would have cared less. There might be grief in store for him through the hands of Alexis Garcia and Iron Gall. But even had he known, that was in the future. He had plenty of trouble of his own on his hands, right now.

He was sitting in his new and shining chummy roadster, at the moment. The car was parked out by the seawall of the West End road, where one can look out over the dancing blue miles of Lake Pontchartrain. And by his side sat Leslie Sanborn.

Five minutes before, he had told her, with a strange mixture of pride and diffidence, of his love for her and his hope that she would marry him at any day she might name—the earlier the better.

"I think I can take care of you, Leslie," he had said. (There spoke the pride.) "I came to town with fifty thousand dollars to spend, and I've got about eighty

thousand of it left. And when it's a hundred thousand, I'm going back home to step into the business my uncle left me. And Leslie—(there spoke the diffidence)—I love you more than I ever thought I'd be able to love any girl. There isn't another girl like you in the whole world."

The brown eyes of Leslie Sanborn had looked at him with softness in their depths for a moment.

"Don't you like me—a little, Leslie?" he had asked.

"I like you a lot, Dick," she had said, candidly. "But just now I wouldn't marry you if I had to go to work as a waitress, instead."

Amazement struck Dick Lambert dumb.

"Why?" was all he could gasp.

"I'll tell you why," said Leslie Sanborn. "Because you're headed to make the woman you marry the unhappiest woman in the world. Boy, you're drunk on gambling."

Silence for a moment, and then youth rallied to its own defence.

"Why Leslie! Your own father races horses and bets on 'em."

"I know he does, Dick," said Leslie Sanborn calmly. "But it's the breeding and the racing and the selling that is the big game with him, not the b e t t i n g. And, Dick, the racehorse-breeding up at Bayou Sara is only part of his business. Dad bets now and then, Dick. But he doesn't plunge the way you've been plunging. Why, boy, can't you see you're headed for the biggest kind of a smash? I've been on race-tracks ever since I was in pinafores, I guess. I've seen a lot of plungers, Dick, but I only know of one Pittsburg Phil that quit rich. This thing is getting into your blood and you won't be able to get it out."

Swift pity seized her at the woe in the youthful face beside her.

"Won't you stop it, Dick?" she asked. "I don't want you to make me any silly promises the way a drunkard signs the pledge. Just stop this spectacular plunging down here for thousands, and go back to your work, Dick. For your own sake, more than mine. And then we'll talk it over again."

Once more her eyes were shining softly. He *was* clean and young and good to look upon.

A moment his gaze roved afar, then he turned a miserable face to her.

"I don't think I can explain it to you now, Leslie," he said, "but I've got to go on until I've made that hundred thousand or lost it."

The girl's quick brain and cool sense of balance were at work.

"If you've got to have a hundred thousand for any legitimate purpose," she said, "you can raise it at any bank with what you've got now. But of course, if this gambling fever has got you——"

Her voice trailed into unhappy silence.

That same unhappy silence lasted on the drive back to town. Its memory rankled with both beneath the conventional courtesies of farewell as he left her at the quaint, old-fashioned hotel where Robert Ballister Sanborn always stayed during the racing season at New Orleans.

THE many tendrils of Mose Feinblatt's "grapevine route" by which such amazingly accurate and diverse information reached the case-hardened and philosophical little bookie, had borne true report when they told him that Alexis Garcia and Iron Gall were leagued against Robert Ballister Sanborn and Dick Lambert. And none knew better than Mose the lengths to which Garcia's position as track superintendent permitted him to go. To that position he had wormed his way by the combination of stockholders' proxies and certain political elements, to whom his control of a block of back ward votes was of value. From that position, later, he was to be dynamited in a blast of racing reform that barred him from the turf. But that was in the unsuspected future. Just now, on the inside of things at the Pair Grounds, many were the manipulations whereby profit came to the hand-books he financed—to the downtown pool-room he ran under the camouflage of the Busy Bee Social Club.

In many a racing meet are to be found jockeys and trainers who can be approached and won to schemes for easy money. And among them Alexis Garcia, with his New Orleans resources and his connections with eastern hand-books, was a power.

He had put that power to work. Its goal that season was both profit and vengeance.

The doors of the back room of the Busy Bee Social Club were locked. In-

side sat a group of that strange breed that crawl about the outer edges of the racing game. And to them Alexis Garcia was laying down the law.

There sat little Joe Devine, as crooked a jockey as ever faced a barrier. A word from Garcia to a board of stewards, and he would have been let down for life, barred from the turf. There beside him was Bugs Sebastian, broken-down prize-fighter, now planted at the Fair Grounds as a night watchman by Garcia's appointment. It was handy, many a time, to have a night watchman whose eyes stayed closed when he was told to close them; who took his orders unquestioningly. And there, cigarette drooping from cynic lips, sat Iron Gall.

Point by point to this choice gathering, Garcia outlined his plan of campaign. Point by point he drilled them to their tasks until his keen and cunning mind deemed them letter-perfect.

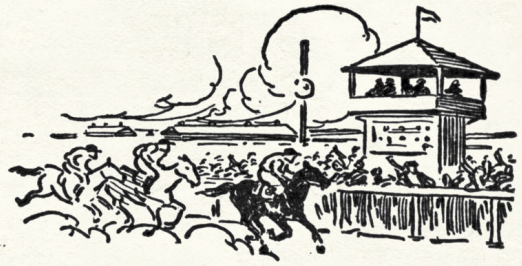
Then, when Devine and Sebastian had slipped out of the rear door, to emerge from the back alley into the crowd that wandered the narrow streets of the old town, Garcia grinned affably at Iron Gall. "Got the low-down on it?" he asked.

"I'll say," quoth Iron Gall, succinctly. "My job is to get the Mississippi boob to come through with the bank-roll. I'll have him put up the jack to lay Jambalaya on this frame. Then we'll work the old six-and-seven on him. Hand it to him I got the last-minute dope the line-up was shifted and we bet on some other hay-burner. Any old hay-burner so he comes in with the field."

"You'll do," grinned Garcia. "Now on your way. Slip the old harpoon into that Lambert guy, and I'll take care of Sanborn. Believe me, kid, he'll be the best-taken-care-of-bird in track history, when this comes off."

NEXT day the Creole Handicap was to be run. That yearly classic of the Southern turf brought out the best the circuit owned, to race before the fans of a city that has been a horse-racing town since those long dead ante-bellum days.

The year before, Robert Ballister Sanborn had won it with Sandy MacGriffin riding Cloudburst to a carefully-planned and cleverly-executed victory, while Jambalaya, prize horse of the Sanborn string, had been pocketed by a group of three jockeys riding to Garcia's orders. And Garcia's bank-roll had suffered heavily thereby. This year that same Jambalaya horse, by all the dope, was due to win again for the Sanborn stables.



"If—he—ran!" was the muttered comment of Garcia to himself. But the task to which Garcia had set himself was to make sure that Jambalaya would not run that year—that never again would he run under Sanborn colors. Or any other horse. Complete disbarment of the dark blue and silver of that stable from the turf was what Garcia's appetite for vengeance demanded.

The loot of Dick Lambert's bank-roll was a side-issue to that plan—profitable, but none the less of a side-issue. To Iron Gall was to go a slice of that particular piece of fat meat the jackal had scented for his master, with the casual report that "we might as well trim this boob. He's sweet on Sanborn's girl."

Purposely, since he had scented that loot first, that night at the Pan Zareta, Iron Gall had held only casual and friendly contact with Dick. He had even fattened the Lambert bank-roll, from time to time, through the Garcia tips he had fed Paddy and Hymie. And Garcia's tips, when they came, usually were based on sure knowledge. Yes, Iron Gall had helped in Dick's run of luck until the time he could strike.

The time had come to strike.

So Garcia's man that evening telephoned Dick at his hotel room, with the cryptic message, "There's something I've just found out I think you'd like to know," and invited the victim to dinner that evening at a lakeshore restaurant.

Dick Lambert, when that telephone message came, had been sitting in his room, alone, sick with the outcome of his afternoon with Leslie Sanborn, too depressed to think of anything but a solitary evening of bitter disgust. This, at least, was something to pass away the time.

"I'll be with you in five minutes," he said.

Late that night he returned from the lakeshore, his whole being acrid with disgust and disillusionment even more bitter

than he had thought it possible for him to know.

Waiting for him in the lobby, he found the Gutta Percha Kid. That usually smiling youth's face was set in lines not pleasant to see.

"Dick," he began, starting forward as his friend came into sight, "I've been chasing the town to find you. Then somebody said you were out at the lakeshore with Iron Gall. When I telephoned, they said at the restaurant there'd been some trouble and you'd left. Let's go up to the room and talk awhile. This business I've just got wise to is all tangled up. It's got you and old man Sanborn and Miss Leslie mixed up in it—and Garcia and Iron Gall. It ain't a pretty combination, Dick. There's some things I might put you wise to."

"Thanks, Kid," said Dick Lambert, white and drawn of face, "but I'd rather not talk about it, if you don't mind. I'm all in. See you sometime tomorrow, maybe?"

There was that in his face the Gutta Percha Kid recognized. Pleading would be useless, he knew. His own heart was heavy and hot within him.

"Mighty sorry, old-timer," he said, thrusting forth his hand. "When you're ready to talk, you know where to find me."

He turned and left the lobby.

It was filled with racing folk talking of the morow's meet.

In the doorway he bumped into Paddy Grogan.

"Seen Hymie?" asked that busy youth. "I been lookin' f'r him all evenin'. No? Say, me star client, the Prince o' Mississippi, got twenty grand down on Jambalaya t'morrow even money. Best y' c'n get now is five t' eight."

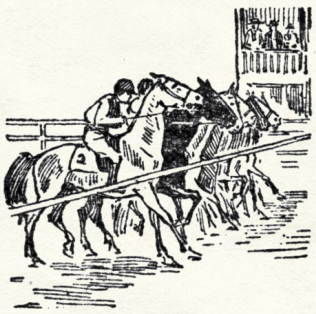
"Oh, go to hell," said the Gutta Percha Kid irritably, and shouldered past him.

"Wonder what's made a Gloomy Gus outa Sunny Jim?" Paddy speculated, as he watched the lithe figure swing down the street.

YOU'LL find the result of that particular Creole Handicap in the record books. You'll find its description in the newspaper files of that date. It was the same old wonderful racing picture.

The crowded grandstand with its waves of bright color, where boxes and tiers of seats were filled with the costumes that Paris and New York had designed, billowed as it has billowed for decades. Out in front stretched the wide brown curve of the level track, as of old, circled by its white-washed rail. The Southern sun shone down again upon the close-clipped turf of the center-field, with its ancient spreading live-oaks, with the green mound in the center of the oval where sleeps Pan Zareta amid the scenes of her triumphs.

Forth from the paddock stepped the thoroughbreds with mincing feet, the jockeys' silks shimmering above the silken shimmer of groomed coats of bay and chestnut, when again, as of old, the silver call of the bugle brought them out and placed them in the starter's hands.



It was there, complete, the old, old picture. But Dick Lambert was not there to view it.

In the stuffy room of an obscure hotel where he had gone after checking out of his old quarters, that morning, he sat throughout the afternoon, smoking in miserable silence, waiting for the hour of the evening train that would bear him home.

Not for him, that day, the sight of the field as it neared the barrier, prancing, wheeling, curvetting in lithe loveliness. Not for him the thrill of that moment when all the velvety muzzles were aligned, when the webbed strand shot skyward, when the thunder of pounding hooves was drowned in the surf-like bellow of sound from human throats.

Not for him the focussed, following binoculars, the hoarse ejaculations, the shrill cries, the singing of taut nerves as they passed the quarter—the half—as they entered the home stretch.

Nor was his the glorious thrill that for the moment blotted out Leslie Sanborn's woe and puzzlement, and relaxed the grim lines of her father's face, as out of the swirling mass of straining horses and riders edged the white nose of Jambalaya.

Far over the withers, whip tossed aside, cap lost in a whirl of dust furlongs behind, leaned the flaming red head of Sandy MacGriffin, his lips working—pleading—pleading—pleading.

"Here we go, Jambalaya baby—stay with 'em, boy—here's the time we show 'em, the swine—climb into it, laddie—*climb*—stretch yourself, boy—show 'em they're chasing a *racehorse* now—come on, laddie—come on!—*come on!!—oh, come on!!!*"

And to a chorus of frenzied shouts, inarticulate hoarse bellowings, Jambalaya came on.

The lead of a nose stretched to the lead of a head. Close behind, the frantic arm of Joe Devine flailed with cutting whip against the sides of Robin Hood. Like the rush of a hurricane unleashed, they thundered past, with little Sandy MacGriffin crooning still his war-song to that Jambalaya horse.

By a clean half-length he flashed in ahead of the field.

Two years in succession, as the record books will show you, Robert Ballister Sanborn had won the Creole Handicap.

But there are a lot of things the record books don't show.

There's no mention in them, naturally, of the puzzlement of Robert Ballister Sanborn, as for the fiftieth time that day he drew from his pocket a plain envelope and looked at the two pieces of paper it held. It had been delivered to him by messenger boy, just before noon, that day.

One piece of paper was an unsigned, typewritten note, begging him to reconsider his determination to have Sandy MacGriffin pull Jambalaya and lose the race to Robin Hood, a horse that all men knew, while he raced beneath the colors of one Pedro Lopez, was really owned by Alexis Garcia.

The other piece of paper was a cashier's check payable to Robert Ballister Sanborn. It was for sixty thousand dollars. And the cashier who had signed it, reached by telephone five minutes after it came into Sanborn's possession, had regretted politely that he was not at liberty to inform Mr. Sanborn at whose instructions it had been made out.

THE booming, resonant voice of fat Henri Jolisson was muffled by prodigious effort. He was telephoning from an instrument in the hall of one of the lodging houses abutting the front of the Pan Zareta.

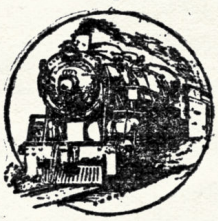
"Yes, Kid," he was saying, "this is Henri. The person for whom you ask that I watch, he is now here at table. I slip out and tell you, as I have promise. What? Ah, *oui!* Yes. I will keep him here till you come, if it be necessary that I sit on him—me, Henri, I promise. Good-by."

Unaccountable were the delays in service at the Pan Zareta, that developed just then. But to Dick Lambert, who had come back for just one more meal in the old surroundings where once he had thought he had found happiness, those delays were merely pinpricks, hardly to be noticed alongside the stabs of his utter misery.

He paid no particular attention, in fact, to Henri's present performance, though to one who knew him, it was worthy of scrutiny. For the fat host, instead of holding his customary and leisurely conversation by the table of so intimate a friend, was fidgeting nervously. Up and down he paced between Dick and the door. Always between Dick and the door. Back and forth his glance roved from table to entrance. The interminable delay between order and service he explained volubly by the fact that it was ahead of the regular dinner hour. As though Dick did not know that, quite well enough. He had picked the hour for that particular reason. Never again could he run the gamut of that laughing jesting crowd, he felt, with the chance of Leslie Sanborn's smiling face in the midst of it.

But even the most interminable delays must end. The dishes came. Half-hearted, Dick Lambert nibbled at them and waved for their removal. Morosely he sat over coffee and a cigarette.

Just about an hour more to train-time, he was telling himself. Ample time to finish before the racing crowd came streaming in for dinner; ample to stroll



quietly through the streets to the depot where his baggage waited, and slip away quietly—back to Mississippi—back where his brand of boob belonged. Work was what he needed. He gritted his teeth savagely. In work, even under as harsh a taskmaker as his father would be, he would find a relief. And he was under no delusions as to the kind of work that waited. There'd be no fatted calf killed for this prodigal, he knew.

Through the wreaths of his cigarette smoke he stared blindly. His thoughts drifted back to that first night he had entered the Pan Zareta. At that table over there, Leslie Sanborn had sat, beside fat Henri and fatter Maman Eulalie. Over yonder in that corner had been the scene of the crap-game from which, mirthful-eyed, had risen the tall figure of the Gutta Percha Kid.

He could almost hear the chuckling gayety of the voice: "The harder they slam

me, the higher I bounce! I shoots nothing but naturals!"

He turned with a start. That same voice was sounding in his ear, and this was no voice of dreams.

"You poor fish," it was saying, "what do you mean by tryin' to slip out on your friends?"

His chair creaked with the suddenness of his twisting turn.

Beside him stood the Gutta Percha Kid. His countenance was decorated with one of the finest prismatic black eyes in the history of rough-house. His nose, too, was yet considerably swollen, and bore evidence of having bled profusely in the not remote past. The knuckles of the hand he laid on Dick's shoulder were yet raw and skinned beneath the stains of iodine.

And by his side stood Leslie Sanborn.

Dick rose hastily.

"Sit down," said the Gutta Percha Kid.

"Sorry," said Dick, "but I have to catch a train."

"You'll catch no train tonight, old son," the Kid rejoined amiably, "if I have to sink my teeth in your leg and hold on while Henri calls the police. After the decorations I've got today, a little more makes no difference."

Courteously the Kid drew out a chair and waved Leslie Sanborn to a seat at the same table.

"I'm going over there to the table by the door," he informed Dick, "while you talk with Miss Leslie. If you want any witnesses on some things she's going to tell you, you stiff-necked nut, I can offer myself or Honest Jack Ryan, or Paddy and Hymie. Iron Gall, too, but you'll have to visit him. He's in bed number eight, ward fourteen, Charity Hospital, just now, and what with a broken rib and a flat nose and a fracture of the jaw, I don't think he'll want to talk much. But he'll wiggle a finger for 'yes' when I ask him leading questions. Now, Miss Leslie, he's yours for the evening."

Smiling a smile that in the very nature of things was twisted somewhat askew, the Gutta Percha Kid walked across the room to the table he had selected, and proceeded to order much food. It had been a strenuous day for him.

There was a moment's embarrassed silence at the table where Dick and Leslie sat. And then she met the situation bravely.

"I'm going to start by telling you a few things that have happened," she said, low-voiced, "and then I'm going to ask you some questions, Dick.

"You know there are all sorts of people about a race-track, Dick. My father's kind——" she noticed that he winced, but said nothing—"and—and—Garcia's kind. They've been enemies for some time, my father and Garcia. It happens that last night little Newmyer was out at the track shooting craps with some of the swipes. When the game finished, it was too late, he thought, to come in to town and get out again for the morning clocking. So he slept in one of the stables.

"He heard a noise and slipped out to see what it was. There's a jockey in this meet, Dick, that ought to be off the turf for life. His name is Joe Devine, and Garcia owns him, body and soul. Hymie looked out of the tack-room where he was sleeping, Dick, and saw this jockey working on the door of our tack-room. If Hymie's anything, he's loyal to me, and he slipped along to see what was up. He didn't know who it was, then, but he knew he had no business around the Sanborn tack-room the night before the Creole Handicap.

"He followed him from there around to the paddock. That was where Hymie recognized him. For Bugs Sebastian, the night-watchman there, flashed a light on Devine's face, and let him pass. Hymie crept around and looked into the window of the jockey's locker-room at the paddock, where Devine had gone. He saw him working away with some keys at Sandy MacGriffin's locker.

"Hymie came straight into town and woke up my father and told him about it. Dad went out there before daybreak. In Sandy MacGriffin's locker he found a racing saddle that looked just like the regulation saddle, but, Dick, it was fitted with an electric buzzer."

"A what?" asked Dick Lambert in his innocence.

"A buzzer. One of those little portable batteries that shock a sluggish horse into winning, sometimes," explained the daughter of Robert Ballister Sanborn. "It's old, old stuff at the track. And when we searched our tack-room, there in the medicine chest was a package of heroin capsules. Devine had planted them there."

"Did he expect your father to use 'em?" asked Dick Lambert, in bewilderment.

"No, silly," smiled the girl who had been reared about the tracks from childhood, "but what he expected didn't happen.

Someone made a complaint to the stewards. Just after dawn a committee came out and searched our tack-room and Sandy's locker. Don't you see?

"Garcia had Devine plant that evidence and had the complaint made. If that committee had found that stuff, dad would have been barred from the turf in disgrace. They'd have taken instant action. Not a horse could have run under Sanborn colors. Jambalaya couldn't have run today."

A great light was breaking through the fogs in Dick Lambert's mind.

"And then," Leslie Sanborn went on, "Hymie told dad how that Iron Gall person had been feeding you Garcia's tips, and the Kid told me how you had dined with Iron Gall last night. And when I tried to reach you today and find if you were in any danger of being mixed up with that crowd, you'd simply vanished. I asked the Kid to find you for me—and he did."

Silence again, while Dick Lambert's thoughts raced.

"Now," said Leslie Sanborn evenly, "Dick, I want to have you tell me why you sent Dad that sixty-thousand-dollar check and vanished."

"Who told you I sent him a check," he sparred.

"Nobody, you poor benighted innocent," she said. "But did you ever hear of a woman's intuition before? Nobody but you around this track ever did such a quixotic thing, or wrote such a quixotic note."

A shamefaced blush was his only answer. But she was remorseless.

"Tell me," she said steadily.

Slowly, brokenly, Dick Lambert began his tale.

"Iron Gall telephoned me last night to take dinner with him," he said. "He told me he'd found out something he thought I'd like to know. Leslie, he said the Creole Handicap was all fixed—that your father had agreed with Garcia to have Sandy MacGriffin pull Jambalaya so Robin Hood could win. Garcia was betting heavily with the Eastern bookies, he said, and getting long odds. He told me your father needed money badly, and could get more that way, than by sending Jambalaya in to win the stakes and selling him afterward. He said he knew I had a roll to bet, and he offered to let me in to finance his book to lay against Jambalaya at favorites' prices."

"And what did you do then?"

Dick looked at her a moment.

"I—I—knocked him under the next table," he confessed. "But he wouldn't fight back. And then I went back to my hotel."

"Yes—and then—?" she encouraged.

"You see, I'd already bet twenty thousand on Jambalaya at even money, to make up that hundred thousand. I'd only sixty thousand and a few odd hundreds left. It made me sort of—well—kind of sick, you know, to think of your father being in a fix where he had to do anything like that. So I—I sent him that check and asked him to—to—race to win. You see, I was getting sort of sick of this track mess, if it got decent folks in that kind of a hole, and I was ready to quit. It really didn't matter, so long as I didn't make the hundred thousand."

The brown eyes were bent steadily upon him, now.

"Dick, I want you to tell me why you had to get that hundred thousand that way, or lose it."

Miserably, haltingly, eyes still lowered on the table-cloth, he told her of old Claiborne Lambert's bequest and the conditions that hedged it.

"And just what were you planning to do now?"

"I'm taking the evening train back to Mississippi—to go to work for my father," he said slowly.

The brown eyes that were bent upon his head, bowed over the table, were very soft, now—very human.

"You did that for my dad, Dick, when you hadn't met him a dozen times in your life?"

"He's your dad, isn't he—if I never had met him."

Dick Lambert's eyes had never risen from the table-cloth, where his fingers were fumbling with crumbs of broken bread.

Within the focus of those downcast eyes crept a firm little hand, ringless, almost as sun-tanned as his own. Gently as a butterfly lighting on swaying blossom, it rested on his for a moment. A voice sounded in his ears—a voice freighted with infinite promise, infinite allurement.

"Dick, do I have to ask you to propose to me again?"

Over at his table by the wall, the Gutta Percha Kid found instant interest gazing out through the windows of the front that

gave upon the narrow Old World street. Fat Henri, coming in through the service door, wheeled suddenly and silently, and vanished into those mysterious realms of the rear. But Dick and Leslie that moment were too engrossed to recognize and appreciate this delicacy.

Then as the two sat there facing each other, in through the doorway burst that figure of sporting life that the track knew as Honest Jack Ryan—though to his intimates he was known by his given name of Mose.

"Henri!" he bawled joyously. "Henri! Champagne!"

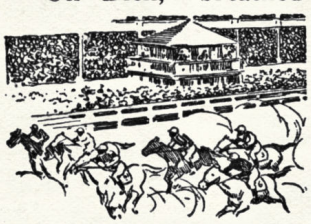
Out of his den behind the service door popped fat Henri. "Champagne? Certainly, m'sieu. You celebrate?"

"I'll say I celebrate!" whooped Mose Feinblatt. "Do I keep off that Jamabalaya horse today? I'll say I do! Do I like the looks of that Robin Hood? I'll say I don't! Do I take a good soak at him? Again I'll say I did. The guys that're payin' for this champagne are Aleck Garcia's crowd. They try to bump me for close to forty grand on Robin Hood's nose. It goes in the little tin box and it stays in the little tin box. The best dinner you can cook for the house tonight, Henri. They'll be here in a minute. It's on papa!"

And then his eyes took in the tableau at the little table.

Apologies were not in Mose Feinblatt's line, but he did the next best thing under the circumstances. He turned and bolted, to take up his place on guard in front of the door in the street, outside.

"Oh Dick," breathed Leslie Sanborn, "and I never told you! Why, Jambalaya won! And you had twenty thousand bet on him, even money, you said? It makes up your hundred thousand. See?"



From the absurd little bag that depended from her wrist, she drew out a slip of paper and handed it to him. It was a cashier's check for sixty thousand dollars, payable to the order of Robert Ballister Sanborn.

"I told Dad I thought I knew where it came from," she said.

Absently Dick fished in his vest-pockets. After a moment's fumbling he produced some tickets and laid them on the check. Check and tickets alike lay unconsidered on the table as he looked into the eyes just across from him. Eyes in which lurked the stuff of dreams for long years to come.

Laughingly he spoke.

"Are you sure you know what marrying me means?" he challenged. "There isn't much excitement up where I live, in Mississippi—and there's going to be a lot of hard work."

Laughingly she met his gaze.

"There'll be you, won't there?" she asked.

He thrilled to the look in her face. And then diffidence and humility seized him, though through them shone the decision of high resolve.

"I've learned what a fool I am—and that's something," he said. "I could take this hundred thousand back and step into the management of a lot of business, Leslie. But I know now I'm not fitted for it yet. Uncle Claiborne was right. Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going back home and turn this over to Dad. He'll probably give it to charity, to purify it—" he grinned involuntarily—"and put me to work in the sawmill. But I'm going back and do that, and make just one condition."

"What's that, Dick?"

"He's got to pay me enough to support a wife," said Dick Lambert.

She looked at him smilingly, the brown eyes shining softly, still.

"Do you know, Dick, it won't have to be such a fearful lot of pay, at that," said Leslie Sanborn. "I don't want to brag about it, but I'll be the best cook of any sawmill hand's wife in Mississippi."

Beside them stood the Gutta Percha Kid, grinning.

"After you-all get through honeymooning," he chuckled, "I'm coming up to see if Miss Leslie can make good on that. But cooked food isn't my main interest just now. You'll forgive me if I tell you that the gang outside is getting ready to run over Mose Feinblatt and come in anyway. And you'll excuse me if I go in back and mooch Henri for some uncooked beefsteak to put on this eye Iron Gall gave me before he saw reason and came clean?"

"Let 'em in and get your steak," laughed Leslie Sanborn.

A moment later the corks were popping in the familiar chorus the Pan Zareta knew, when fortune had smiled on its children.

"To the both of 'em," chortled Mose Feinblatt.

THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

FOREST FIRES

EDWIN HUNT HOOVER'S story "Under Fire," which appeared in a recent issue, has attracted much attention not only because of its fine story qualities but for the interesting and unusual forest fire description it contained. In the CIRCLE of that issue, Mr. Hoover explained some of the intricacies of fire-fighting and the types of fires the Forest Service must combat. Arthur Hawthorne Carhart, formerly Recreation Engineer of the U. S. Forest Service at Denver, Colo., the man who "checked up" the technical points on "Under Fire," has contributed an interesting article on forest fires and fighters which appeared in a recent number of the *Author and Journalist*. The article, inspired by Mr. Hoover's story, is so interesting and packed with information that will help to get a better understanding of the great West of today, that we quote the following from it:

You can't dodge the U. S. Forest Service in a Western tale of any time after 1905. The cow business of the West today, as for the last eighteen years, is centered around the national forests. The only great open range of much consequence is within our borders. The story of a struggle between cattle and sheep herdsmen, must almost inevitably bring in the forest ranger. Many a battle has been averted when this man of the forest has appeared on the scene.

One of my friends, supervisor of a forest, stood one day with a score of drunken cowmen, all heavily armed, threatening every minute to shoot him if he did not order sheep off the range immediately. The leader, a noted gunman, more drunk than the others, jammed a gun into the super's ribs time after time, with the hammer up. It seemed a miracle that it did not go off. But this one forest man, unarmed, stood his ground and gained his point. A range war was averted.

Irrigation projects, every one of them, depend on the forests at the head of the watershed. And, too, nearly all the dam sites in the higher country are on forest ground and subject to forest regulations. The same is true of power projects.

Homesteading within the mountain areas often is in or near the forest. All the hill ranches are in the higher valleys within forests. Even the homesteaders of the Western plains have their cattle on forest permits.

Timber trespass, fraudulent entry for homesteading, mining, and "dude" wrangling in many cases, will have a national forest and its regulations as a background And the work of the Forest Service itself carries material for a thousand books, countless stories and many, many bits of poetry.

Perhaps the most common error in speaking of the forests is to call them "reserves" Since 1905 they have been "national forests." The first "reserve" was established in the late eighties.

Another common error is to speak of all forest men as rangers. They are no more all rangers than all the men in the army are cavalrymen. First of all, there is the chief forester at Washington. Recently the "chief" part of the title has been dropped. He is just the "forester of the U. S." He has an "associate forester" and several "assistant foresters." Then there are chiefs of branches, such as "public relations." There is a considerable corps of other technical and administrative men in this Washington office.

The whole country is divided into eight districts In each a "district forester" is in charge. He has "assistant district foresters" and "chiefs of branches" on his central staff. For example, the fireman is designated as "Mr. Blank, in charge fire suppression" but called "fire chief" for short. There is a "district engineer" who has charge of water power, roads, and other similar technical engineering work.

Then each district has its forests. These are in charge of the "forest supervisor." And under him are the "rangers," and under the rangers are the "guards." There are lookouts, grazing assistants, expert lumbermen, forest assistants, surveyor-draftsmen, and others too numerous to mention.

To one who knows, one of the greatest shortcomings of fiction with Western backgrounds lies in the fact that the Forest Service is so often ignored; and technical points concerning it are bungled when it is mentioned. But it cannot really be ignored. Its regulations, its men, its traditions, its procedure, all must be linked up with a vast majority of the stories of the West which are dated since 1905. And since that date there have grown up traditions and a spirit comparable in every way with the noted Northwest Mounted.

THE WEST FROM THE WEST

MANY of you have expressed your appreciation of Harley P. Lathrop's stories and perhaps have wondered how they got their genuine Western tang. In the letter which accompanied his story in this number, "The Call of Kin," Mr. Lathrop gives out his secret—and incidentally gives a clue to where Raymond S. Spears secured the flavoring for "Hard Luck Ranch," his salt-marsh cattle story we recently published:

I am not one of these here writer fellows—just a cowman who has more leisure than he can spend hunting and fishing.

Am anxious to see Ray Spears's story of the cattle country in your next. He visited me here last winter and laid the tale in the country where we winter our cattle. In fact, he started it after he had ridden over the range with me. A great old bird is Spears. The boys on the ranch sure loaded him to the guards with material.

Quite a bunch of cattle in this country, second largest amount in the state. I am dragging my tail with all the rest of the boys trying to live down the slump. It didn't get me, but it sure crimped my style. Am running a little under a thousand head now and at present prices they hardly pay expenses.

THE FLORIDA SWAMPS

ANOTHER contributor to this issue who has an interesting bit to say about his story is Lemuel L. De Bra, author of "The Judgment of Mystery Swamp":

I've lived in the Rocky Mountains, on some of the wildest parts of the Pacific Coast, been through the worst of the Southwest deserts, but I tell you the swamps get me more than anything I've ever seen. Black, silent water; dead gray cypress draped with gray moss; moccasins and rattlers; sleepy alligators that you mistake for logs until you see them sink; queer little ponds as round as a dollar, fringed with a single line of cypress, beautiful with hyacinths, and *bottomless;* rivers that suddenly and silently vanish to appear again a mile or so away. To me, a Florida swamp is the most beautiful and yet the most terrible thing one can imagine. I believe I'd rather live in an earthquake country than here; and yet this country gets you.

Not long ago about forty Chinese were smuggled ashore down here. Something went wrong and the poor Chinks became lost in the swamps. A woods-rider for one of the big turpentine stills had been on a drunk for a week but finally sobered up enough that he could stick in the saddle, so went to work. Not far from camp he found a Chink sitting on a stump He had never seen a Chink in his life. He stared a moment at the silent eyes, yellow face and snaky queue—then dashed back to camp. "Boss," he said, "fo' God's sake don't make me work today. Ah ain't sobah yit!"

CANDY IN THE DESERT?

AN EX-WADDIE and bronco-buster who was enthusiastic about Robert Ames Bennet's story, "Tyrrel of the Cow Country," has raised an interesting question as to the thirst-quenching properties of sugar. His letter follows:

Mr. Robert Ames Bennet:

Can't help it if your mail is cluttered, Ol' Top, just got to do it. Don't know who you are, where you came from or where you are going, but I'm here to tell the cock-eyed world that you can write a damn good story of the cow country.

Just finished reading "Tyrrel of the Cow Country" and want to thank you for about the most enjoyable three hours I have had for some time.

Used to be a waddie and bronco fighter myself and want to say you have portrayed some good characters in your yarn and have brought in some rattling good action.

Would like to ask you about one thing, though: you have Gerda urge everyone to eat plenty of sugar to stave off thirst. Now that is contrary to all my experiences and in the desert country I never heard of it. Your tomatoes are fine, but would you mind telling me if in some dry countries it is the custom to eat sugar when no water is to be had?

Have had quite a few exciting experiences myself and have come in contact with men who have had many more, and when I read an absorbing tale like yours I want to sit down and write one.

Very cordially yours,
A. R. ADAMS,
Tonopah,
Nevada.

Part of Mr. Bennet's reply follows. If any of you can contribute an experience to the question, the CIRCLE readers will no doubt be glad to hear of it. There is no telling when such information may mean the saving of a life. Mr. Bennet's reply:

With regard to eating sugar to stave off thirst, I have never heard of it being done by cowboys anywhere. But I do know of a large exploring and prospecting party that always stocked up heavily with stick candy (pure sugar) for this purpose when going into the desert. I have tried it myself on fairly dry trips and found that it worked. The scientific explanation is that sugar is a chemical combination of carbon and water. When broken up in the process of digestion, the released water tends to relieve thirst. It is not claimed that sugar will take the place of the water barrel when the desert is sucking the sap out of you faster than you can pour it in. But it will give *some* relief. Try it next time you make a dry trip.

Now let us hear from you desert dwellers and wanderers.

SOUTH!

WE'VE been "West!" and "East!" and "North!" and we've debated a long time about who should take us "South!" And, while we debated, J. Allan Dunn did it. In the next number his complete novel of South Sea Island adventure, of pirate gangs and fierce native warriors, will come to you as the fourth of the compass series, a story well worth taking its place with those of Seltzer, Hendryx, and Bedford-Jones.

With it will come a strong, gripping tale of the mighty Mississippi from the pen of Charles Tenney Jackson, a Ruddy story by A. E. Ullman, and a Jimmy Lavender detective tale by Vincent Starrett. Among the other contributors will be such old favorites as T. Von Ziekursch, Lemuel L. De Bra, Roy W. Hinds, and John Mersereau.

Watch for it!

THE MAIL BAG

THIS time the lock is off, the bag is tilted over—and the letters are coming as they tumble on the pile.

One from a dentist booster for SHORT STORIES:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

SHORT STORIES continues to give me the pleasure it always does. After a strenuous day at the office, I surely enjoy reading it evenings; all cares vanish and I lose myself entirely. In fact, Mrs. Baade and I have had several "tiffs" because I never hear her speak to me when I get going.

I like the American Western story best, but really feel that my mind has been broadened from things learned in reading the seafaring and Far East stories.

The publication days can't come too often for me.

Sincerely,
DR. W. W. BAADE,
Campbell, Minn.

And one from a girl admirer who wants to have her say with the men:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

I have noticed in your STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE that most of your admirers of SHORT STORIES are men. But, believe me, the girls enjoy your big clean stories as well as any man; at least, here is one girl across the border who does.

E. WILLIS,
Toronto, Ontario,
Canada.

This one from a railroad mail story booster who will be glad to know we have several more of Wm. M. Stuart's stories on the way:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

In reading a recent copy of SHORT STORIES I was agreeably surprised to find a story apparently upon a subject which is new in fiction. I refer to the story "Who Sups With the Devil," written by Wm. M. Stuart.

Our vast system of handling the United States Mails is a system of which the layman knows but little, but it is a subject which intrigues imagination and much romance must necessarily be interwoven in its meshes. I shall be pleased to find more stories in your pages upon this most interesting subject.

Sincerely yours,
LYLE W. JACKSON.

One of our wounded soldiers who finds enjoyment in SHORT STORIES:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

Just to let you know I enjoy SHORT STORIES from cover to cover. I am an ex-soldier and am sick with T. B., and the stories in your magazine sure cheer a fellow. I think it is a good idea to let the readers report which stories they like best so you can get more of them. Am enclosing three coupons.

ALOIS KNETZGER,
Muirdale Sanitorium,
Wauwatosa, Wis.

Have you been sending in your Readers' Choice Coupons? Here is a reader who has:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

Thanks for the pen and ink sketch you sent me; it is mighty nice to get something for just telling what you like. Your magazine has been a semi-monthly purchase of mine for more than two years, and that ought to be enough to let you know if I like it or not. But will say right here that your Northwest stories are the best things that you do, can, or ever will print. Am enclosing the coupon of the current number. Thanking you again for the sketch, I am,

Yours truly,
PEARL BIBEE,
1105 Highland Ave,
Knoxville, Tenn.

Here is a reader who wants information. Perhaps some of you CIRCLE readers can tell him where to get what he is after.

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

Can you send me information concerning the buying of Indian bows, arrows, spears or some other Indian implements? Also where can I secure some cowboy "chaps" and a real old-fashioned, the real cowboy or Western "Stetson" and a Mexican sombrero? I'd like to start a collection of Western articles.

Please send the addresses of the stores or retailers. I get SHORT STORIES regular and I never miss a story; it's one "nuts" of a book.

I remain (a steady reader),
W. H. CLYMER,
630 Third Ave.,
Bethlehem, Pa.

This reader likes the Coupon idea, but disagrees with one space on it:

READERS' CHOICE EDITOR,
DEAR SIR:

Enclosed you will find the choice coupon. As for my opinion, I think the idea is great. The question on the bottom of the coupon about what stories I don't like and why, is just an absolute waste of good paper. There isn't a story printed yet (in my eighteen months of reading SHORT STORIES) that I didn't like. Please let us hear more of W. C. Tuttle, because you have to give credit where credit is due. Now by asking more of him I don't mean less of the others. Keep your red sun shining and you will have lots of readers spellbound as you have me. So, believe me to be in love with all of your stories. I remain,

JAMES MORROW,
807 Concord St.,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

How did you become a SHORT STORIES reader? No doubt there is many an interesting tale could be told of how the

CIRCLE readers first met the magazine. Take this one for example:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

I took a notion this fall to go out in the harvest and work off a bit of excess fat. There I happened to come across a copy of SHORT STORIES in the town drug store, and I bought it. I'll say it was the best buy in a magazine I ever made.

On rainy days I could sit down and read those stories till I was blue in the face and not get tired of them. They sure hit the spot. One thing I'll say that is exceptional of SHORT STORIES is that I liked every story that was in the three issues I have had so far. And I sure am going to get the next issues, too.

Wishing you many years of success, I am,

C. R. NELSON,
1301 7th St., S.,
Minneapolis, Minn.

SHORT STORIES is this man's side-kick:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

From a confirmed reader to a fanatic is the progress of my enthusiasm for your magazine.

The stories are vital and pulsating with action throughout. So it comes natural to a man loving the "out of doors" to enjoy your magazine.

Clarence E. Mulford and H. Bedford-Jones are my favorites.

Looking forward to many pleasant evenings this winter with SHORT STORIES as my "side-kick," I am,

Yours truly,

J. R. SARNER,
Galveston, Texas.

And here is one from a construction engineer:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

Today is Sunday and I just finished my copy of SHORT STORIES and want to say just this: I have been a constant reader of SHORT STORIES for at least five years and I never yet have written my opinion of same so think it is about time I am saying something.

I am an engineer with a construction outfit and my work takes me to some mighty interesting places and in this as in most everything I am accompanied by my wife. We are always on the lookout for the next SHORT STORIES and I think that our taste for stories run about the same. I am writing a few of our especial favorites: Mulford's "Rustlers' Valley" is mighty good; "Sontag of Sundown," "30-30," and "The Curse of Painted Cliffs," by Tuttle, were all humdingers. Anything that H. Bedford-Jones has his finger in is bound to be good, and Harold Lamb is no slouch when he gets going.

MR. and MRS. GENE MILLER,
601 W. 36th St.,
Norfolk, Va.

Thirty below and a copy of SHORT STORIES is this man's recipe for a good time:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
DEAR SIR:

I have been reading SHORT STORIES for about two years, but until you started 'Readers' Choice Coupon' I have never let you know what I think of SHORT STORIES. To put it briefly it can't be beat. I must say that during the long winter nights when the temperature is hovering around 30 below, it's nice to be sitting around the fireplace with such a pleasant companion as SHORT STORIES. I have no favorite author. I just say that if he writes for SHORT STORIES, well, he must be good. I hope we will soon have another story by Von Ziekursch. I might add that I am a radio bug, and enjoyed Mr. Pierce's story, "The Ice Pirates," very much.

Here's hoping you keep up the good work and keep SHORT STORIES up to the present standard.

ARTHUR POTTER,
370 Albany St.,
St. James, Man.

DON'T FORGET THE COUPON! CUT IT OUT TODAY AND LET US HAVE YOUR OPINION OF THE STORIES IN THIS NUMBER

READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, SHORT STORIES:
Garden City, N. Y.

My choice of the stories in this number is as follows:

1_____ 3_____

2_____ 4_____

5_____

I do not like:

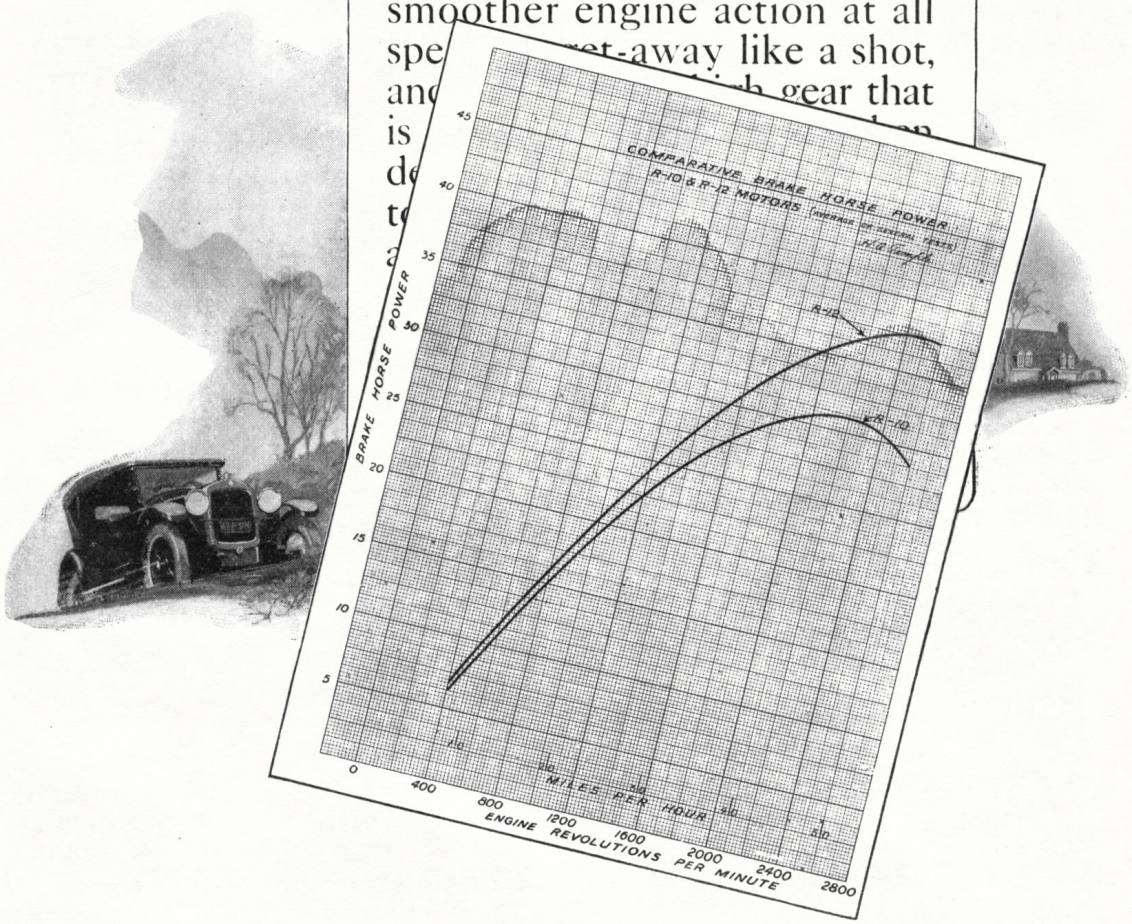
_____ Why?_____

NAME_____ ADDRESS_____

The New **Hupmobile**

MUCH greater power accounts for the magnificently improved performance of the new Hupmobile.

Not only greater speed, but smoother engine action at all spe[illegible]et-away like a shot, an[illegible]h gear that is [illegible] de[illegible] t[illegible]



The power curve chart reproduced above represents a very close approach to the engineering ideal in the development of power by an automobile engine.

You will note that the upper curve—which records not one test, but the average of a number of tests with the new Hupmobile—show a steady increase in power up to a speed of 50 miles per hour.

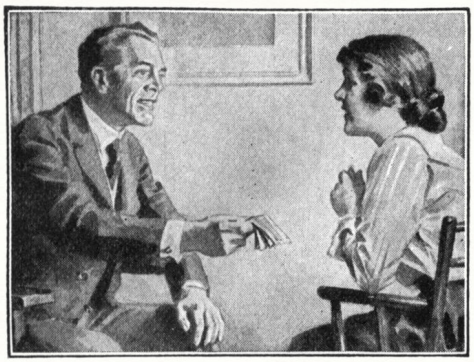
Moreover, this maximum power is sustained, as the curve shows, over a range from about 2300 engine revolutions per minute to about 2600 revolutions per minute.

The upper curve means a more complete elimination of vibration and other physical forces which tend to interfere with full and free power development.

A heavier counter balanced crankshaft, larger bearings, lighter pistons and connecting rods—these are some of the engineering refinements which make it possible for the new Hupmobile to develop its greater power so easily and so smoothly.

Never before have we built such an engine. Never before has any Hupmobile—fine as they all have been—given its owners such splendid results in all the performance-abilities which make or mar the owner's satisfaction

Hupp Motor Car Corporation, Detroit, Michigan



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"I'm making *real* money now! Yes, I've been keeping it a secret until pay day came. I've been promoted with an increase of $50 a month. And the first extra money is yours. Just a little reward for urging me to study at home. The boss says my spare-time training has made me a valuable man to the firm and there's more money coming soon. We're starting up easy street, Grace, thanks to you and the I. C. S."

To-day, more than ever before, money is what counts. You can't get along on what you have been making. Somehow, you've simply got to increase your earnings.

Fortunately for you there is an unfailing way to do it. Train yourself for bigger work, learn to do some one thing well, and employers will be glad to pay you real money for your special knowledge.

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☐ Metallurgy
☐ Steam Engineering
☐ Radio
☐ Architect
☐ Blue Print Reading
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
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Occupation.....

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She Found A Pleasant Way To Reduce Her Fat

She did not have to go to the trouble of diet, exercise or unpleasant greases and salves. She found a better way, which aids the digestive organs to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

She used *Marmola Prescription Tablets*, which are made from the famous Marmola prescription. They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They will allow you to eat many kinds of food without the necessity of dieting or exercising.

Thousands have found that *Marmola Prescription Tablets* give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

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"Little Wireless Phones for the Ears" requires no medicine but effectively replace what is lacking or defective in the natural ear drums. They are simple devices, which the wearer easily fits into the ears where they are invisible. Soft, safe and comfortable.

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How can a medicine that is applied on the outside of the skin reach a pain deep down in the joints and muscles? This treatment acts by stimulating the brain to send new blood to the affected area

DON'T suffer unnecessary pain. Get relief at once. It may be splendidly courageous to just "grin and bear it"—but it is a frightful waste of the very vital resources you need to help you get rid of the cause of the pain.

Your doctor will tell you that pain should always be relieved—just as quickly and as completely as possible.

And this relief is easily at hand. However deep-seated, however hard to reach the pain may seem to you, it can be stopped—quickly and permanently.

Nearly fifty years ago a remedy for muscular pain was given to the world that has brought relief to so many sufferers that today you will find it in one home out of every three.

This remedy is Sloan's Liniment—probably the foremost household remedy in America, used all over the world and recommended by doctors everywhere.

No matter where the pain is, no matter how deep down in joints and muscles, *it can be reached* if the natural curative powers *inside* the body are only aroused.

When you use Sloan's, it stimulates the nerves on the skin. They arouse the brain, which in turn causes the blood vessels to expand throughout the painful area, *under* the place where the liniment has been applied. Rich new blood rushes in.

This new blood coming, freshly purified, from heart and lungs, with all its marvelous germ-destroying, upbuilding powers brings to sick, pain-ridden tissues just what they need to heal them.

This is the scientifically correct way to relieve pain. It doesn't just deaden the nerves. It gives your own natural bodily defenses the aid they need to drive out the cause of pain.

Don't wait until you are in actual need. Get a bottle of Sloan's this very day, and have it on hand—35c at all druggists. Just apply it—no rubbing is necessary. It will not stain. Immediately you will feel a gentle warmth—then a pleasant tingling of the skin—then, almost magically, relief from pain. There is no burning, no blistering, only quick, lasting relief.

SLOAN'S Liniment — *Kills pain*

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A Gift that Everyone Wants the "Take-a-Picture-Package"

"Just what I wanted"—what a joyful satisfaction it is to hear that glad cry on Christmas morning. And you'll hear it surely if you choose the new Ansco Take-a-Picture-Package for your present.

A neat, durable red case, a sturdy smooth working handsome Ansco Camera, [pictures 2¼ x 3¼ in.], four rolls of the wonderful Ansco Speedex Film, and the handy little Ansco album to keep the snaps in,—that's the Take-a-Picture-Package, complete for five dollars! By far the greatest camera outfit value we've ever heard of.

Be sure to see the Take-a-Picture-Package before making up your Christmas list. It will solve the old "what-shall-I-give" question for practically everybody. If your dealer hasn't it send us his name and address.

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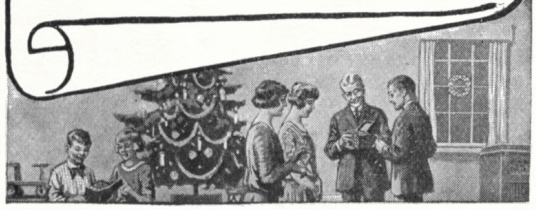

WHITING-ADAMS
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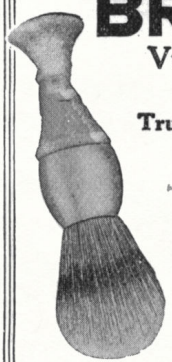

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For EYES of starry brightness, use *Murine.* This harmless lotion clears the whites of the EYES and imparts new life and sparkle. Delightfully refreshing after reading, sewing, business, motoring and all outdoor sports.

Write Murine Company, Dept. 61, Chicago, for FREE Eye Care Book

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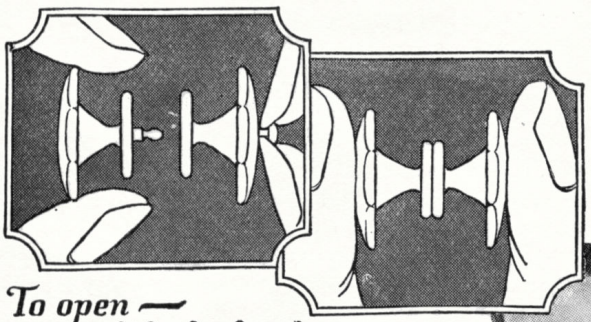

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HE'S hoping for a pair of those popular new Sta-Lokt Links. The kind that press together, lock and *stay locked* until you lift the knob. Then they open easily—instantly. Sta-Lokt is the *perfected* separable cuff link. There are many two-piece links, but only one Sta-Lokt. Be sure and ask for it by name. From $1.50 to $7.00 a pair. Your jeweler will be glad to show them to you. Write for folders of Sta-Lokt designs, including the new Cuff-Line shape.

Pair illustrated has solid gold tops. In handsome gift box, $7.

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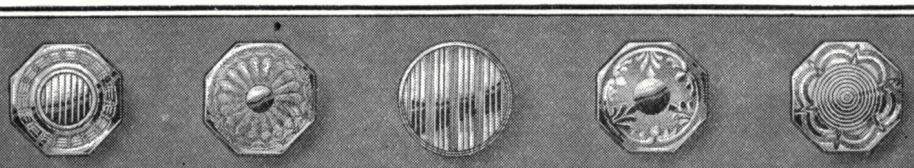

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THE BOSS gives the orders—Riley takes them and does what he is told. Both started the same, had equal ability to begin with. Riley works harder than the BOSS and gets less money. What is the answer?

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..Sales Manager	..Foremanship
..Cert Pub. Accountant	..Sanitary Engineer
..Accountant & Auditor	..Surveyor (& Mapping)
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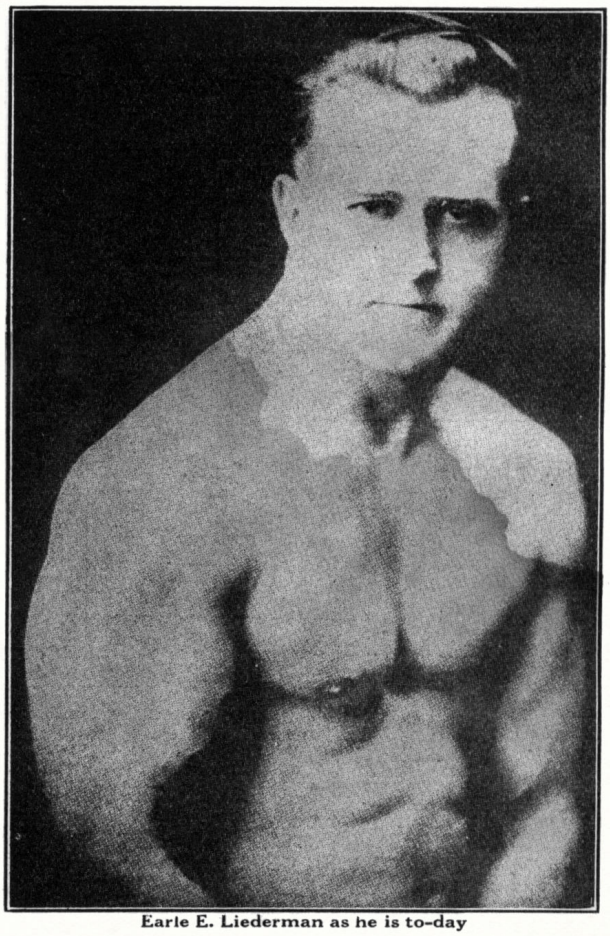

Earle E. Liederman as he is to-day

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Stop! It's all wrong. There is another life right here before you. A *new* and a *better* one. A life that is full of *thrills* and *sunshine*. Every day opens *new worlds to conquer, new joys, new friends* and *lasting ones*. Come with me and let me guide you to it.

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That's what you need and that's what you get. Come on now, pull in your belt and throw out your chest. Take a good deep breath of that pure air that's all about you. Give your heart a treat with some rich blood. You will feel so good you will think it's your birthday. Drop me a line and I'll show you how to do it. I'm going to put a chest on you that will make your old ribs strain with the pressure. I'm going to change those skinny arms and legs of yours to a real man's size. You will have the strength and vitality to do things you never thought possible. Come on fellows! Get busy. I don't promise these things—I guarantee them. Are you with me?

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It contains forty-three full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, imploring me to help them. Look them over now and you will marvel at their present physiques. This book will prove an impetus and a real inspiration to you. It will thrill you through and through. All I ask is 10 cents to cover the cost of wrapping and mailing, and it is yours to keep. This will not obligate you at all, but for the sake of your future health and happiness, do not put it off. Send to-day—right now, before you turn this page.

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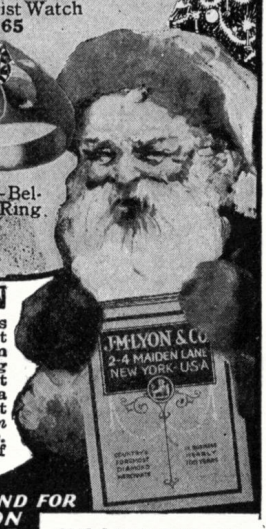

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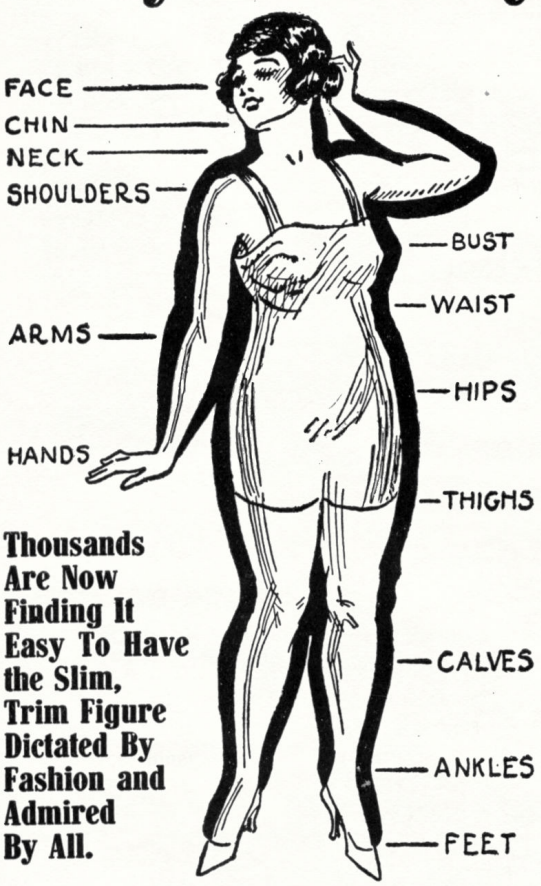

Thousands Are Now Finding It Easy To Have the Slim, Trim Figure Dictated By Fashion and Admired By All.

Science Discloses Method of Quickly Reducing Excess Weight—Many Losing a Pound a Day Without Starvation Dieting or Exercise —Greatly Improves Appearance. Generous Sample Sent Free.

Quick Results — Rid-O-Fat, the scientific compound, comes in convenient tablet form, and is practically tasteless. You simply take one at each meal and bedtime.

No Exercise — ***No Starvation Dieting.*** Results often surprising in their rapidity.

Within a few days you should be conscious of a new feeling of energy and lightness, taking the place of that tired, worn-out feeling.

Quickly as the fat gland resumes normal functioning you should lose weight in a healthy, normal manner. Many fat, ungainly figures are in this scientific manner helped to regain their normal and idealistic proportions, giving that fashionable slenderness and athletic poise.

And all this time you live as you please.

Nature is doing the work. No more irksome exercise—no more denying yourself of all the things you like. Take just one small, pleasant, Rid-O-Fat tablet after each meal. Could anything be more simple?

Rid-O-Fat Used By 100,000 People

Since the announcement of the wonderful Rid-O-Fat formula it has been used by more than 100,000 people. Twenty to thirty thousand more people are writing for it every month. The following letters show what users think of the scientific Rid-O-Fat system of fat reduction.

Lost Forty-One Pounds In Thirty Days

"When I wrote for your Rid-O-Fat sample I weighed 245 pounds. Today, which is 30 days later, I weighed only 204 pounds. A reduction of 41 pounds in a month. I am delighted. Please send me another 30-day treatment, as I want to reduce to 145 pounds, which is the correct weight for my height. I am sure that I will realize my ambition with Rid-O-Fat and I feel better than I have in years."

Lost Twenty Pounds In Three Weeks

"According to weight tables I weighed exactly 20 pounds too much. Rid-O-Fat reduced me to normal in just a little more than three weeks. I feel better, don't get tired, and my friends say I look like a new person."

Generous Sample FREE

I want every fat person to have a chance to try Rid-O-Fat in their own homes at my expense. I don't want them to take my word or that of the thousands who have used it. I want them to see for themselves that the results are more pleasing than anything I can say. To introduce Rid-O-Fat in a million more homes I will send a free sample to anyone who will write for it. In fact it is really more than a sample, as it is sufficient to reduce the average person several pounds. I will also send with the sample an interesting booklet that explains the scientific reason for fat, and why Rid-O-Fat meets with the highest approval.

Costs Nothing! Don't send a penny—I will send the sample and the booklet under plain wrapper and fully postpaid. This does not obligate you in any way and is never to cost you a cent. It is simply a limited offer I am making to more generally introduce Rid-O-Fat.

This free offer is good for only a short time, so send me your name and address on the coupon below or a post card, and I will see that the generous sample and booklet are mailed immediately under plain wrapper postpaid. Do not try to get Rid-O-Fat at drug stores as it is distributed only direct from my laboratory to you—remember this is a short time offer and send your name at once. H. C. HAIST, Whinton Laboratories, 1518 Coca Cola Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

H. C. HAIST, Whinton Laboratories,
1518 Coca Cola Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

Without obligation in any way and with the understanding it is not to cost me a cent at any time, please send me your generous free sample of Rid-O-Fat and free booklet under plain wrapper.

Name.....

Address.....

ARE you fat? You shouldn't be. Without rigorous dieting or exercise—by a simple natural process—you should quickly and easily be able to have the slender fashionable figure that is so attractive.

Scientists have discovered that excess fat is often caused by the subnormal action of a small gland. Once this gland is healthy and functioning properly, your weight should reduce naturally and without effort on your part, to the normal amount for your height.

And science has discovered a simple extract which tends to regulate the gland that controls fat. Without lifting a hand in unnecessary and violent exercise, you should find it a delightfully simple matter to have the ideal, slender figure admired by everyone.

The wonderful thing about the scientific formula known as Rid-O-Fat is that in losing your superfluous fat you should gain added vigor, health and energy of mind and body.

Feel Young—Look Young

There is nothing which adds to a person's age so much as fat. A few extra pounds makes any man or woman look from five to ten years older. Not only that, the excess weight and increased heart action saps vitality and energy.

Once the gland which controls your fat is functioning properly your food should be turned into firm, solid flesh and muscle. As your weight comes down to normal you should experience a delightful and amazing improvement in your appearance. You should not only feel and look younger—you should actually be younger. You should also be in better health—a real health of energy—not the fictitious and deceiving health of fat that insurance companies say shortens the life ten years.

Complexion, health and figure are improved at the same time. The result is new vitality, magnetism and personal charm that makes for success. Tasks once hard become easy and life worth while.

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which painlessly and harmlessly replaces the old skin with a new and removes all Surface Blemishes, Pimples, Blackheads, Discolorations, Sunburns, Eczema, Acne, Birthmarks, etc. A non-acid, invisible liquid. Produces a healthy new skin, beautiful as a baby's. Results astounding. Booklet "The Magic of a New Skin" free in plain sealed envelope.

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Personal appearance has a lot to do with the way you feel. Clothes count, of course. But still there is one thing so many people overlook—something that at once brands them as either fastidious or careless—*the teeth.*

Notice today how you, yourself, watch another person's teeth when he or she is talking. If the teeth are not well kept they at once become a liability.

Only the right dentifrice—consistently used—will protect you against such criticism. Listerine Tooth Paste cleans teeth a new way. The first tube you buy will prove this to you.

You will notice the improvement even in the first few days. And, moreover, just as Listerine is the safe antiseptic, so Listerine Tooth Paste is the safe dentifrice. It cleans, yet it cannot injure the enamel.

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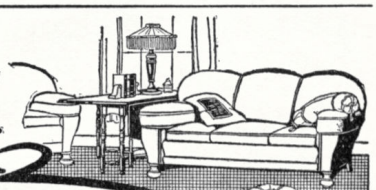

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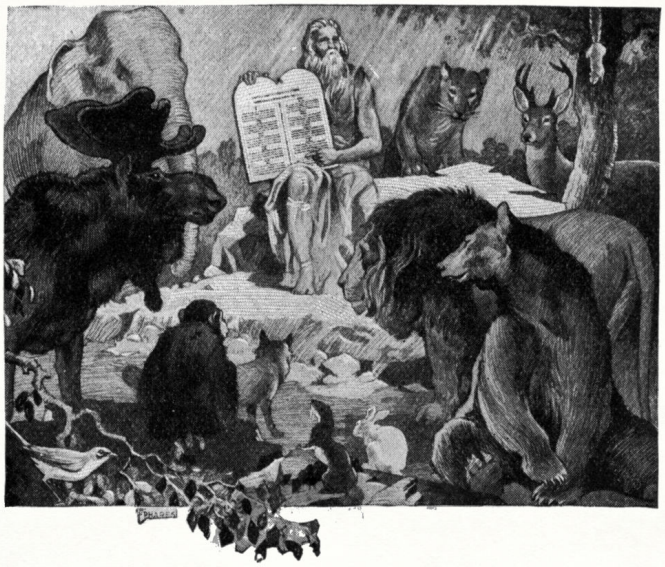

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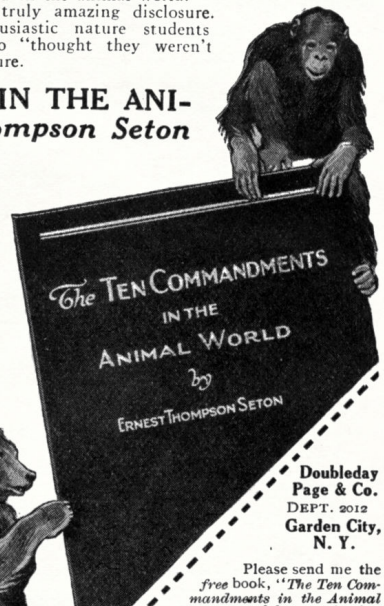

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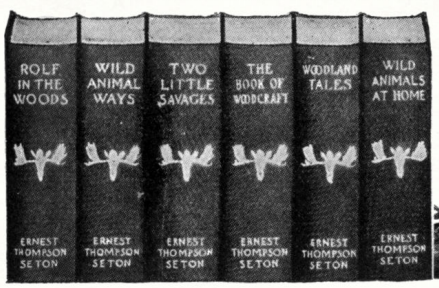

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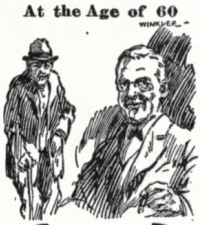

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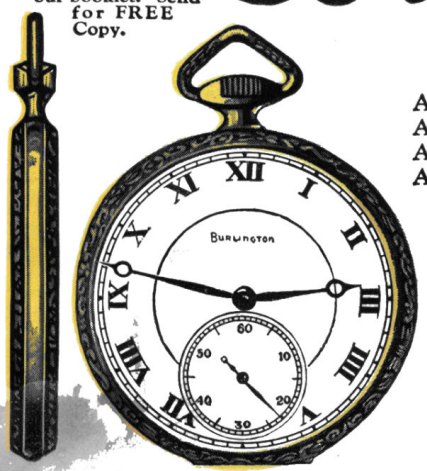

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