

PART 1

"THE GHOST OF THE GOLCONDA"  
A Western mystery story *by* William N. Vaile

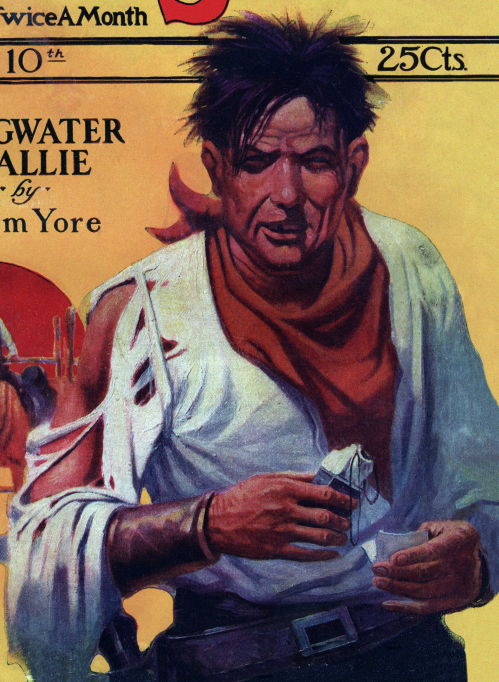
# Short Stories

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CHUGWATER  
WALLIE  
*by*  
Clem Yore





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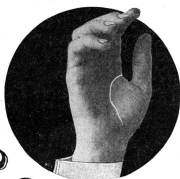
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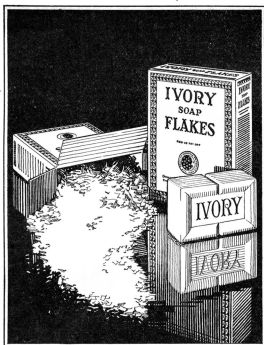
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## Damp towels are dangerous hamper companions for chiffon stockings

When delicate silks are put in a hamper with the towels, sheets and colored cottons of the weekly wash, they wear out long before they have given the service you have reason to expect of them.

Why? Because, even though not obviously soiled, they contain perspiration acids from the skin, which are kept moist by the hamper dampness and destroy the silk fibres.

*So, to preserve fragile garments and prolong the length of their service, many women have made it a habit to tub them in Ivory suds as soon as possible after they are worn, whether they LOOK soiled or not.*

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# Short Stories

Vol. CXI., No. 5

HARRY E. MAULE  
EDITOR

Whole No. 468

D. McILWRAITH  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

## COMMON SENSE

COMMON sense, horse sense, as we say, the practical view of life, is a fine and necessary thing. People who lack it have got to have a lot of talent in various ways to get by in any degree without it. And yet, like many other good things, even common sense can be carried too far. It can be carried to the place where life loses all color and joy, it can be carried to the place where you make of yourself a machine doing an endless round of seemingly necessary things—and nothing else. That, of course, is not living. It is only existing, and the useful things you are doing are becoming your master.

So it becomes necessary for us to know when the point of common sense has been reached and when a little un-common sense and exaltation of the spirit is required. In an article on another subject, Kathleen Norris, a very wise woman as well as a talented author, said, "You can carry common sense

to the point where *anything* seems too much effort—nothing is really worth while."

To do that is to sign yourself into the bondage of *things*. It always seems to us that the people whose happiness rests on the

least secure foundation are those who are bound to things; property, houses, money automobiles. If we are to move forward in the scale of life, such people say, shouldn't one have these conveniences, these pleasant standards of progress? Surely, if you can afford them, but not to be an end in themselves, for then they master you.

What end? Well, that's up to you and your own capabilities to see what you can make of yourself really. A millionaire is the saddest mess on earth if he is just a millionaire. His life has been a failure if he hasn't

used his ability in developing a soul entirely apart from the earthbound life.

THE EDITOR.



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# HUGWATER WALLIE

By CLEM YORE

Author of "Mac of the Tumbling K," "A Son of the Circle," etc.

---

CHUGWATER WALLIE AND THE MEN WHO HAD HIRED HIM FOR HIS DANGEROUS WORK HAD THOUGHT HIS ADVENT INTO THE VALLEY WOULD BE UNNOTICED. INSTEAD, HIS ARRIVAL WAS AWAITED, HIS WELCOME WAS A BULLET. AND THAT BULLET WAS BUT A HINT OF WHAT WAS TO COME BEFORE CHUGWATER COULD RIDE IN SAFETY AGAIN

---

LETTIE BUFORD had been asleep on the window bench in the sitting-room of the T Hanging Box when the drowsy murmur of voices, coming through an open window, aroused her. She heard the late afternoon breeze stirring the tops of the blue gums, caught the faintest tinkle of running water from an irrigation ditch, and listened languorously to the drone of bees coming from the Virginia creeper climbing the heaven-tree. Those voices, they nettled her. Then she heard the rush of a running horse, a sudden stop, a strain of leather; the plomb of boots as they struck the gravel of the ranch-house yard. Sleep vanished.

"Whence come you, *caballero andante*?" She recognized the sneering voice of Luis Perez, the foreman of the T Hanging Box, which adjoined her father's ranch, the K Seven Quarter Circle, fifteen miles away.

"*Caballero andante!*" the arrival repeated, and she caught the bitter hurt he hurled in the repetition of the phrase meaning "knight errant." "I am a New Mexico Mexican," he shot, and care nothing for your high-blown talk. I am American by birth. I vote. I belong to——"

"You rode in fast!" Talk the same way, *Gringo!*"

Lettie was an adept at border Spanish. The voices grew in excitement, then calmed to a hum. She knew tidings of grave na-

ture had arrived. After a moment she heard a complete speech.

"I tell you he is on the way now. He leaves the freight train at Querida and comes here by horse. He is fine *Por Dios!* But they say he rides like a god, and is as handsome as a *matador*. If you move, now, it must be *now!*"

"Again, thou gnat! Tell me his name!" "Chugwater Wallie, from Chugwater, Wyoming. And he rides as a hireling to the Cattlemen's Association. We had it from Fort Collins by wire, my brother and myself. I have, as you know, two cousins there in the sugar factory. They know many things. And are sly as toads. Buford's man talked, I wager that."

"He will ride from the railroad into this valley? Is that so?"

"Sí, Luis Pérez. Now, if all you want is a few days, this is your chance. Buzards cover a trail like nothing else."

Lettie arose and went to the well, drew a bucket of cool water and filled a pitcher; on her return to the house she saw the men who had been talking. They were Luis, Max, and a swarthy Mexican she did not know. A horse, lather covered, stood chomping a bloody bit under a pepper tree. She washed her face, tidied up her dress a bit, and her hair, then strolled onto the veranda. The talk of the Mexicans perplexed her. She did not like it. After a while a woman came out of the house and

said something to her in a low tone. She hurried through the wide hall, across a patio and into a room where a man of sixty reclined on an elbow in a bed.

"Lettie," he said painfully, "I want to thank you for the attention you have shown to me. It's been downright neighborly. But Manuela and I have decided you needn't stay any longer, the fever's gone."

"Are you sure?"

"There's the thermometer; but I took my temperature a moment ago. Ninety-eight and a half—that's what it read, even."

"And the wound?" she asked, "does it ache?"

"A-little, but when the cool of the evening comes I'll get relief. Go, honey, your dad must be worrying about you. Some of the boys are coming up tonight, sure."

"I'll go then, Mr. Worley, for I know father needs me."

At the door she turned back and said, "I just heard Luis talking to a strange Mexican, and they said something about a rider the Cattlemen's Association was sending in here today. His name is Chugwater Wallie. What do they mean?"

The blood drained from the sick man's face.

"They said that?"

"Yes. And the black Mex insinuated that buzzards are fine to hide a trail. I don't like that kind of talk in this valley, Mr. Worley."

"You know Mexicans, my dear. Some woman, I think, is at the bottom of that. You understood the words they spoke to mean Cattlemen's Association? Maybe they were something else."

"Maybe," she said and turned to leave. At the door she looked back and smiled. "I'll come right back if you need me. Don't hesitate to send for me, will you?"

"Adios!" he replied. "Get Luis to hook up your pony, and when he is done send him to me."

As the girl clattered away Luis Pérez entered the room where the wounded man lay.

"Well?" he said, a diabolical twinkle in his eye.

"When you talk, do it low! That girl heard every damn' word you said. Tell it, quick! Spill everything, pronto!"

And Luis repeated what his messenger had conveyed to him.

"What's on the tapis?" asked Worley.

"I'm riding our east fence, then down through the Wagon Mound hills, across the big pear-patch and laying there till this

baby comes along. He must never get into Engle."

"That's right. Fly at it. What did you tell the boys in town about my wound?"

"You was hanging up a gun when it fell and punctured your hip. Nobody's seen a thing. Nobody knows nothing."

"Slide out, you got to hurry to beat the sun to that pear!"

"I'll be there. I'm picking up a change of horses in our big ditch pasture. That Blue's all right, now, huh?"

"He'll carry you. So long."

Luis opened the door, and almost knocked Manuela down. She was picking up some potatoes which had fallen from her apron as he collided with her.

Luis didn't like the look he saw in that kindly old face.

"If ever you open that trap of yours," he sneered in Spanish, "I'll slit it for you! Did you hear? Greasy snake!"

"You mean about your two wives? I am from Valencia, these many years *Ah, que!* One cannot blame lovers!"

He spat close to the hem of her dirty old dress.

"Valencia! Where all the women are false and pretty! Where there's a church, a long pavement, worn by the dirty feet of lying women, and a dead man."

She smiled.

"Go," she said. "What a temper you have!"

CHUGWATER WALLIE dropped out of a caboose on a siding near Querida, and by the aid of the train crew worked a tall sorrel gelding down some bridge planks and out of the car in which it had been riding with a string of other horses. Quickly he threw his outfit on the animal and jogged away from the railroad. When the train was nothing but a clot of dust, with a topknot of white at its fore which he knew to be the escaping steam from a safety valve, he pulled a paper from his shirt pocket and staring at it raised his eyes and searched the horizon. Grimly he smiled and put the sketch back in his shirt.

"This is shore one easy country to map," he mused. "If all them hills ain't twins, then I'm Prohibition. I reckon all I kin do is keep a-ridin' till I runs into somethin' that looks human, or maybe a string o' wire. Come on, Hayburner, I'm cravin' distance." The horse flicked an ear and increased its slow lope. Chugwater warbled a song, urged to music by a deep gnaw at the pit of his stomach.



*I knows just why I'm achin'  
'Cause I'm hank'rin' after bacon  
An' a-cavin' for a can of java, too;  
Now, beans, is what I means,  
Just a shovelful of beans,  
Unless y'u got a yard o' kidney stew.*

*Now come along, pie-trammer,  
These yere chaps is my pajammer,  
An' I'm empty from the belly-band to heel.  
Just deal 'em off yore arm,  
Sling 'em slick, an' sling 'em warm—*

"Oh! Oh, Hayburner, I seen it, too!" he said, ending the ballad abruptly. A flash of dust swirled in a tangle of heat waves on the crest of a distant rise. It lingered a fraction, then vanished. Chug-

water lost all thought of hunger.

"I'll bet he turned that b r o o m-tail around on less ground than his hat w'u'd cover. In about twenty minutes I'm a-thinkin'—"



I'll shore be a-dreamin' it's the Fourth of July."

He loosened the 30-30 carbine in the saddle scabbard. Carefully he drew it out, held it against the side of the horse, and wrapping the lines around the pommel tested the gun and saw that a shell was in the chamber. As he rode he carried the saddle-gun's muzzle hooked in the top of the stirrup taps and half concealed in the flap of his Texas-wing *chaparejos*.

Imperceptibly he guided his mount, by knee pressure and body-leaning, in a gentle curve away from the region where the burst of dust had appeared.

The same pace was maintained, however, and the miles slipped gradually away. Of a sudden the magic of the heated air unwound and he saw before him a vast field of detestable vegetation. It looked like a region of lost souls.

"Hayburner," he chuckled, "old Laramie County never learned y'u nothin' about pear; but in fifteen minutes y'u better keep them laigs o' yores just so. Pear's hell on hosses; fool hosses."

"Pi-ing! Yseeee! A stab of pain!"

Chugwater slumped in the saddle, threw his body on the off side of the horse and clutched desperately at the horn. With a hidden heel he jammed a five point rowel

into his pony's flank and the animal tore forward at a desperate pace. His back burned.

"Now, boy," he said, his face turned up along the gelding's neck, "do yore stuff. When I quits y'u, shove on, I tells y'u, an' shove on some mo'!"

When a dense thicket of prickly-pear was reached Wallie dropped clear of the flying legs and rolled along the sand. His rifle was thrown just as he fell, and a moment later was covered by his body which lay huddled in a limp heap, the head partly under an extended arm, the face buried in the sand, and the feet asprawl. Chugwater's left hand was hidden beneath his chaps and in it he held a bone handled six-gun.

After a minute he heard the sound of galloping hoofs, then the threshing of a moving horse in the cactus. The sound came closer and closer, then ceased and was replaced by the unmistakable crunch of boots running in slipping soil. A hand grasped at the neck of his shirt and he was flung over on his back. From this position he jerked his gun into the air and fired. Then he rolled; rolled toward the boots, now so close to his body. There was another discharge, and he felt powder sting along his neck. The figure above him crumpled, a single-action Colt dropped to the earth, and a Mexican doubled up and buckled backward into a pear tree. Chugwater emitted a long shrill whistle and the gelding rushed to his side. Kicking sand over the fallen Colt, he grabbed his carbine, touched the horn of his saddle, mounted on the run and disappeared.

"Desert coyotes, Hayburner, an' they runs in pairs," he cried as he bent low down on the neck of his horse. "Le's go, old sweetie; we just gotta go, now. They burnt yore daddy!"

Making the top of a small rise he looked back and saw a fleeting horse dashing toward the spot of his encounter. He caught sight of a lurid shirt. It was blood crimson with wide double line checks; about the arms he thought he glimpsed blue garters; but he was dead certain that the hat was an El Stroud Stetson with a five inch brim and a seven inch crown, and around it was a diamond-design bead hat-band.

He flung a bullet ahead of the flying horse as it entered the clump of cactus, then flew into the vegetation before him. At the end of thirty minutes he came out on a loose gravelly floor which rose abruptly toward a greasewood slope.

Picking out one of two arroyos he rode up it as fast as he could and reaching the top hesitated long enough to take a look at the paper in the shirt pocket. Then he headed directly for a sugar-loaf hill, stuffed the carbine in its boot and settled the gelding to its long and accustomed stride.

"If that ain't a greetin'!" he mused. "Somebody's leaked. Somebody's wised up these centipedes. But I introduced myse'f, Hayburner. I an' y'u, oldtimer, we shore took our seats, right now. Didn't we!"

His back burned and after a while it felt sticky.

"Ain't I the doggonest old son of a gun," he said aloud, "I ain't never goin' to show that on the Chugwater. Them hoss thieves always w'u'd swear I was jack-rabbitin' it away, when I got that. Nope! I'll change my shirt out in the harness-shed, or I won't change it."

Shortly after nine o'clock he drew rein at the K Seven Quarter Circle ranch and shouted at the house. A door opened and a middle-aged man stood in the light.

"Who is it?" he hailed.

"Is this Mister Buford?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm gotta note to y'u! An' if y'u don't mind I'd like for y'u to come on out yere an' loan me the loan of a shoulder. If I tries to leave this saddle I'm goin' to bounce, shore."

The man in the door hurried across the porch and assisted Chugwater from the saddle. Slowly he limped into the house where the first thing he saw was the face of a girl, very white and very beautiful, staring at him as he was helped into a chair.

"What is it, father?" she asked.

"This gentleman is hurt, it seems. Now, my boy, what can we do for you."

"Read that." And Wallie brought out a slim envelope and gave it to the ranchman. Tearing it open Buford held out his hand. "Chugwater," he smiled, "I'm glad to know you. And you've just arrived in time.



My brother's directions were successful."

"Ya'as, suh," answered Chugwater. "I wasn't expected much neither, I reckon. Or maybe I was. Some hom-

bre made a right fine shot at me; I reckon it must 'a' bin a good three hundred yards, an' he burnt me, too."

"Why, he's wounded, Dad!" cried the

girl. "Can't you see that? Take off his boots and let's get him on the sofa while I run for some water and a first-aid!"

"Don't touch them boots, suh," spoke Wallie.

"Why?" asked the girl.

"That left one's plumb full of blood. Let's ramble out on the porch an' thay won't be no mess in yere."

The room whirled. The girl floated away in a mist, the center of which was a crazy lamp that revolved with a sickening motion. Then a vast ringing came into his ears and he settled limply in the chair.

When next he opened his eyes the same beautiful girl was seated by an open window beside the bed and she was fanning the flies from his face.

"Why, ma'am, it's plumb day, ain't it?" were the first words he spoke.

She jerked about in the chair and fixed him with a curious look. "How do you feel?" she asked.

"Lordy!" he grinned. "Just like Santa Claus done drove up an' left me in the lap of Old Lady Luxtry. How'm I comin'?"

"Fine," she answered. "You have lost a great deal of blood, but the bullet passed through the flesh along the shoulders. Dad didn't send for a doctor, for after we looked at the wound he decided it wouldn't be necessary. Then he doesn't want any one to know you're with us. He thought that would be your desire, too."

"That's right."

"I am Lettie Buford," she said.

"Daughter of the Colonel?" he remarked.

"Un-huh," she smiled, "but he isn't a colonel."

"Oh, ya'as'm he is! I'm from Kentuck, an' all them Bufords is Colonels, except them as is Gen'als. Y'u better not never call one of 'em Captain. No, sir. My gracious! I w'u'dn't like to make such a blunder."

"You are better," she laughed. "After what I know you went through, Chugwater, I fancy you could call a man most anything, if you felt like it."

"Shucks!" he replied in confusion. "If ever y'u seen a fella leave a country, that was me, when them boys began slammin' lead at me. I an' Hayburner shore took no pity on that pear. An' I wants y'u to know, Ma'am—Miss—"

"Lettie," she aided.

"Lettie," he went on, "that when I an' that horse starts high-tailin', why we leaves town! I leaned ag'in' that landscape down

there till I bet I bulged it wide."

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

"Am I what? Say, Miss Lettie, if it was raining rations, an' I was standin' in a forty acre field, thay w'u'dn't a blade o' grass get hit by so much as a bean."

"Then I'll get you some of the broth from the stew we had dinner."

"Stew. What kinda stew?"

"Irish stew. This is the seventeenth of March!"

"St. Paddy's Day! Lord! Yestiddy, I thought it was Independence Day an' we was givin' the British hell. Never mind the broth. Just bring in the stew—I'll get the broth! I'll just nacherly use that to grease the stew with."

And that was how Chugwater Wallie came to the K Seven Quarter Circle. While Lettie was gone for the food he turned his head and looked out of the window across the fields of alfalfa, now growing green and in blossom, close to the house. A calf bawled down in a corral. A hummingbird whisked like a veil across his vision and fluttered for honey about the hollyhocks. A mockingbird warbled in low rich minor from the top of a cotton-wood, and a vagrant wind stole through the window and fanned his cheek.

"This country is shore hell-for-pretty," he murmured, "an' if I ever leaves it, why I—I hope somebody romps on my neck!"

## II

**I**N TWO weeks Chugwater was up and around; in three he was sound as a dollar and fretting to be at his work—the breaking up or ferreting out of the gang that was in charge of the entire county, its outlawry, its politics. That was his enterprise.

His convalescence had been a dream to him, a vision of the most exquisite loveliness he had ever known.

Lettie and he stood near the corral gate, while Wallie rubbed down his gelding with a currycomb and brush. After a while the girl spoke. Her silence prior to this had been formidable, and he fancied something grave was troubling her. Now as she spoke, a quality in her voice made him whirl and glance at her face.

"You think a great deal of that sorrel, don't you?" was what she said.

"Oh, ya'as'm," he answered, relieved. "I bought him from a fella who was said to be the wisest hoss trader in Wyomin'. He said Hayburner oughta be worth ten dollars of any man's money; fifteen, if the coin was stole. So I haggled a bit, an'

give him seven-fifty. He was wise, that fella. Ya'as'm! If y'u pulled one of his wisdom teeth y'u'd yank out a shoulder bone."

"What made him under-rate the horse?"

"Well, he never seen the pony 'cept in winter, when the snow was so deep y'u had to use a pitchfork to find a haystack, an' then all the range stock was as pore as bees runnin' on alkali water. An' their spirit was gone. Hayburner looked like a Kansas preacher dealin' Monte. But that fella was a fool. Now, for me, gimme a good man goin' off half-cocked, sometimes; a smart thief that looks it; a bang up, twenty-four carat, six-day-a-week, stem-windin hypocrite. But Lord, Miss Lettie, deliver me from a damn' fool! If ever a white man took a cheatin' it was that scoundrel as sold me Hayburner."

Lettie was silenced by the outburst. Chugwater thought he had offended by the use of the expletive, *damn*. "I'm lurid," he smiled, "when I uses hoss-talk. Y'u had oughtn't let it, though, bother y'u none. I'm quittin' it, right soon."

She smiled. "I wasn't thinkin' of the words, I was just forming an opinion. Perhaps you are right about that kind of fool you mentioned. I'm afraid daddy comes under the classification."

"Now, shucks, Miss Lettie, I w'u'dn't let nary one but y'u talk thataway. What y'u mean?"

"The day you came to our house I was nursing a neighbor rancher, and I heard a Mexican tell his foreman, another Greaser, that Chugwater Wallie was to arrive by way of Querida. Then Luis was told that buzzards hid a trail. They said, and I'm sure they knew, that the Cattlemen's Association had employed you to ferret out the members of the rustlers gang. I told father and dad hasn't done a thing yet. He isn't afraid, but I don't know what it is. I think he hates to start a war. He's been through two."

"Is this Luis a ganglin', long windin', stoop shouldered, blond Mexican?"

"He's tall and thin, yes. And is rather light, with gray eyes."

"Does he wear fancy shirts an' a classy Stetson?"

"Yes."

"An' was ary one of them other fellas with the foreman tall, and a real black Mexican—what I means is, *black*?"

"Yes. I should judge he was five feet eleven. The whites of his eyes showed horribly. His face was like a negro's."

"Y'u've shore classified him—sound to



go, without a blemish to sell, and his notches all even up. Miss Lettie, them was the birds what started to burn me out the country."

"I thought so," she answered, "but father rather figured it was the gang from across the Rio Grande. But you would know them again if you saw either of them, wouldn't you?"

"Know 'em? Why if I was froze up in hell, I'd grade both of 'em through forty feet of red hot ice. An' when I see 'em, I'm goin' to give 'em hell-an'-repeat, an' y'u needn't guess twice about that, neither. Who's that comin' down the road?"

"Father," cried the girl, and hurried toward the house.

Buford ran his pony into the yard and yelled for Chugwater. And when the young rider had put away his horse the two men and the girl went into the living room where the elder man spoke swiftly.

"My boy," he said, his voice quavering, "there is trouble abroad now. And it's open warfare on this range, I'm afraid. Last night the five horse thieves we had in the county jail escaped. Do you know what that means?"

"I reckon they're dustin' landscape, now."

"It means that some man in authority allowed them to go free, gave them the saws to break jail. And then went away from the court house while they did it. They are headed for the country west of Hot Springs, up, in and around, the old Nigger-diggings."

"Who were they, suh?"

"Buck Tilley, he's the leader; the Hot Tamale Kid, a half-breed Mexican and Apache; One-Eye John, a large Norwegian; Big Foot Alec and Abilene Al. Here's a description of them all. And a photo reproduction of their faces."

Chugwater studied the reward notice for a few moments.

"I reckon I kin keep this," he said. "When I was a kid I knew this Abilene Al. He useter be a railroad cop for the U. P. at Cheyenne an' he was strict. Why, he'd run y'u two miles if he smelt whisky on yore breath. First thing I heard he'd stole a whole carload of beef cattle. Drove

'em out of a car that had been shunted into a sidin' for feed. But he don't know me. If Miss Lettie will sling me up a little grub, an' y'u'll dig me up a light bed roll, I'll be slantin' out."

"Where?" asked Lettie.

"Nigger-diggins'," replied Wallie. "If anybody asks y'u where I'm gone tell 'em any place but west. If Hayburner is still handy with his feet, I figgers on bein' pretty thick with Buck Tilley right soon."

"That's death, boy!" exclaimed Buford.

"I took a job, an' I've earned three weeks' pay lookin' at Miss Lettie wrangle me my feed. Now it's time I was shovin' on. The way I got this yere thing figgered is this. This Luis an' his boss is in with this gang; they're the only ones what saw me. Not a man in the Association ever laid a eye on me except y'u. I'm just as liable to travel in a straight line in this country without gettin' graded as anybody I know. But I want y'u to do something."

"Anything we can," responded the rancher.

"Find out then what become of the fellow I dropped in the pear; an' if Luis or his boss, or any of them fellas what seen me, goes across the Rio Grande, an' y'u finds it out, send somebody to the bridge an' tie a white cloth or something on the steel struts on the north side. I done studied the west end of this country an' I got a map with me now. I reckon the Digger's ain't more'n seven mile from the bridge, is it?"

"A little less. But what will this mean to you?"

"That I'll be done over yonder. I'll make it a point to stick close to that river-crossin'. Don't forget, sometin' white on the north side on any of the struts."

"The boys are coming home, Daddy," announced Lettie, looking from the window. "Gracious, I didn't expect them for another week."

"Yore men, suh?" asked Chugwater.

"Yes, they've been hunting strays, mendin' fence and branding. They left here the day before you arrived."

"Is they all right?"

"As far as I know."

Lettie left the room to get food for Wal-



lie while Buford sought a bed roll, and just as Chugwater was ready to ride away ten K Seven Quarter Circle boys rode into the yard.

Chugwater pulled down his hat, humped a shoulder and was edging around the grain shed with his horse when a pair of gray eyes caught and held his. He recognized that face, knew it at a glance. It belonged to Sandy Stuart, a man with whom Wallie had quarreled in the Brown's Hole country of Colorado. There was malevolence of a violent character in the glance Stuart gave Wallie and the look stayed with him until the ranch-house was lost to sight. That night he camped on a high flat among the piñon-pine.

The following morning as he shook some coffee out of a small bag into his stew pan, a piece of paper caught his eye coming out of the sack. He literally grabbed it and read a few lines written in pencil.

*Please don't take too many chances.  
And depend on it if we find you  
have been traced we will get the  
signal to you. I will ride, myself,  
and place it on the bridge. Remember  
what you told me about a d— fool.  
And come back to the K7—soon.*  
L.

"Doggone!" he ejaculated, and read the note again. His horse was hobbled nearby and cropping the grass beneath a small tree. "Hayburner," yelled Wallie; the horse raised its head. "Boy, if I felt any better I'd have a runaway. Come yere!" The sorrel hobbled over to the little fire. Chugwater put an arm around its neck, then loosened the gunny-sack hobbles. "Does y'u know, sweetie, that I'm just that larrupin' fine that I'll be feedin' the butterflies all this day; an' I'll bet right this minute I c'u'd fall five hundred feet without dirtyin' a shirt. Dern y'u, didn't I learn y'u to eat oats? Then lissen!" Hayburner rubbed his cheek against Wallie's shoulder. "Quit that! Hear me! In my haid thay's somethin' that's millin' to beat hell an' is tryin' to bed-down. Don't look at me like that! If y'u kin understand talk, then hear me. One look at that Lettie girl w'u'd make a Panhandle onion taste like a peach. If I thought—but Lord! If I keeps thinkin' them fool thoughts I'll believe my mother wasted milk on me as a kid. Besides, if I study about that much, an' it don't grow hay, why I'd cave in like a wind-house. Go on now an' eat. Soon's

I get this java brewed, I'll drink to her an' y'u, honey, to her an' y'u."

Hayburner strolled away and after a few minutes raised his head. Chugwater stood before the fire, a steaming can of coffee held beneath his lips.

"Here's mud in yore eye," he said.

After breakfast Wallie packed up and rode away.

And that night he camped on the west side of the Rio Grande. He noted, as he crossed the river on the bridge, that the water was roily and that the spring freshets in southern Colorado were being carried swiftly to the Gulf. Soon that stream would



be a raging torrent. In this event the only passage in a hundred miles would be the very bridge on which he stood. No man could ford that dirty rushing current which now, at quarter flood, looked murderous in its seething beds of sucking whirlpools.

He built a roaring fire, directly, on the highest point of a steep pine ridge, and sat beside it smiling vacantly and staring into the flames. Soon he heard Hayburner emit a loud snort. Wallie knew what that meant. *A human being was coming up the slope.* Out of the pines a voice hurtled.

"Stay squintin' just like y'u is."

"Come on!" yelled Chugwater. "I don't know what y'u'll do, but I shore know what y'u is."

A man's laugh broke the stillness.

"Well," a voice cried, "he ain't no bum-bola, anyhow. Put down the gun an' let's all slant a eye over him."

Five figures circled the fire.

"Howdy," greeted Wallie, "shall I move over or kin y'u boys find plenty room on this rim-rock?"

"Where y'u from?" asked a vicious looking man whom Chugwater recognized, from the reward notice he had studied, as Buck Tilley.

"If I was to tell y'u all them things the first thing I knew y'u'd be gettin' my mail."

"We seen that road-eater of yours comin' down from the San Jacinto-way, late this afternoon."

"Yep, we was."

"Been to San Felipe, too?"

"Yep."

One of the men jumped back. He was the half-breed, the Hot Tamale Kid.

"Let him alone. Thay's small pox at Felipe!" he cried. "I gotta enough. Give him orders an' let's get goin'!"

"I circled that air town," said Wallie. "I jams into a fella afore I gits to that sin-hole an' he was as white as a tombstone runnin' ag'in' the country. I says, 'what's wrong, podner?' 'Small pox!' he says, 'they's dyin' like rats. Black small-pox.' An' he was gone! All I seen of him was his old fryin' pan puttin' four feet up and four feet down an' leavin' twenty feet in between."

Buck Tilley sat down.

"When didja leave Wyomin'?" he asked.

"Round about thirty days ago, maybe."

"Borrowed something before y'u quit?"

"Say, if y'u is the law, I'd like right well to look at yore jail. I've inspected an' condemned mo' jails than most anybody I know. If y'u hombres is the law, all I kin say is *nobody* pays taxes down yere."

Buck locked his fingers around a knee and tilted backward, swaying to and fro and scrutinizing Chugwater's features.

Up to that instant Wallie had refrained from glancing at the other members of the band, but as Tilley fixed his eyes upon him he estimated the faces of the other men; just at the end of the circle he saw Abilene Al. He looked boldly into the face of the man and laughed aloud.

"I got y'u placed, anyhow," he said.

Al moved toward him.

"Meanin' which?"

"The last time I seen y'u I was slippin' down between a string of empties in the yards at Cheyenne an' y'u was wearin' a pie plate on yore bosom as would dazzle a headlight."

Tilley laughed.

"Didn't I tellya, Al. I kin spot these fancy guys as far as sand shows. This kid's broke an' lookin' for some place to lay out a lotta police gossip. Am I right?"

"Deal me a hand," remarked Chugwater casually. "All I've got off this country for the past ten days is a big bundle of laughs."

"Kin y'u ride?"

"Y'u're a cow-hand or y'u w'u'dn't be eatin' yore neighbor's beef."

"Rope?"

"With both hands. All the way to a sixty-five foot piece of twine. An' I kin build 'em an' braid 'em, too—Injun rawhide, silk-manila, or Monterey *magnay*."

"Are y'u known in Engle?"

"Hell, no! All I understands about that town is that it's got four wheels an' no brakes. Ain't thay a place there called the Cow Daddie saloon?"

Several of the men glanced at Buck.

"Yep," he answered, "the sheriff of this county runs it."

"That's the place. A friend of mine from over on the Sweetwater was down there two year ago an' he said the boys rode in one door, took a drink, an' rode out the other. If a fellow got down off his horse to drink he c'u'dn't get back on ag'in."

Everybody laughed.

"Come on, Kid," said Tilley genially, "let's all of us be gettin' up to our lay-out. Y'u're shore in among Christians now. An' if y'u knows a good fast game when y'u sees one, right here's where y'u can get a change of shirt entirely to yore likin'. We'll tell y'u somethin' when we get the whole crowd in one room."

"Let's go," remarked Chugwater. "I'm shore tired of sleepin' in this San Antonio duck."

And while Hayburner was being saddled the men stood off and admired him by the light of the fire.

"That's a plumb road hoss, boy," commented Buck Tilley.

"Yep. The hombre don't live that kin fork a hoss an' camp alongside me an' this baby, night in an' night out, if we don't like the way he makes pancakes. I got him off a fella in Wyoming for a little less'n six bits. An' I'll bet he thinks creation done played him for a white chip ever since."

"Y'u'll need just such of a pony. I aims to run y'u ragged between here an' Engle. At least till election time."

Wallie swung himself into the saddle and followed Tilley.

"Hey, chief," jibed Chugwater as the men reached their horses, "I'm right anxious to know how y'u placed me as from Wyomin'. How come?"

"I knew that little old Cheyenne saddle. The roll in the seat looks like a bee stung it. I'd just as soon be in the middle of the Atlantic in a rowboat as sittin' a livin' hoss in a stingy thing like that."

Chugwater felt relieved.

"Huh," he laughed, "if I rode a bear-trap like that thing y'u got I'd have cal-louses on my knee-caps. But I'll bust a thirteen hundred pound sacred-cow, bawl-in' it for the fields of Satan, with this slick rollin' pin, an' y'u won't see no fork come out of her, neither."

"That's why I knew y'u was a rider an' a roper," said Buck. "Have a town boy cigarette?"

Wallie took a smoke, lit a match and leaned from his saddle. He cupped his hands over the light, and Tilley bent his head and started his cigarette. In that swift and fleeting action Chugwater had glimpsed the features and poise of the bandit leader and for the rest of the journey to the rendezvous he had no fears. Buck did not suspect his identity.

IF CHUGWATER had been loquacious upon meeting the captain of the gang he was surely cured of the excess when he found himself seated among the



m e m b e r - ship. This was made up of twenty of the hardest countenances and toughest figures he had seen in many a day. He met them all; met them with an

iron grip in his fingers, a chill repulsion in his greeting, and a stolidity of demeanor which carried away all antagonism to him. Yet he knew he was on trial.

He drank sparingly, often not at all, of the jug which went around the room from time to time. Narratives were spun, reminiscences told of old episodes on many frontiers of the cow-country. Wallie seemed an interested, a charmed listener.

"Well, how does she lay, boys?" said Buck, after an hour or more of casual conversation. "What's yore likin'? Does he stay an' throw in with us, or shall we give him a fresh horse an' guide him up in the Black Range."

"I'd like to see him lay a loop on some beefsteak," commented the Hot Tamale Kid. "I'm shore stuck on him the way he sits down."

"That's me, too," added One-Eye John.

"Un-huh," muttered a third. Others nodded. Then Buck summed up.

"Kid, tomorrow we'll send y'u out to bring us in some meat. An' we'll tell y'u just where to get it. Two of the boys will go along leadin' a coupla packhosses. If y'u brings down the cow we wants, where we wants it, then I reckon I'll send y'u into Engle to nose around. In the meantime, what's yore name?"

"They calls me Criss Cross, most places,

but that's not the name my mother give me. I reckon y'u ain't interested in them things?"

"Criss Cross is good enough, if y'u kin do it. Now, let's bed down. One of them boys, Tamale will do, will show y'u where to flop. Big Foot, it's yore night on the dog-watch, go out an' let Snaky come in.

Big Foot left the room and the band sought various cabins where they tumbled into bunks arranged along walls. Chugwater was given a bed above the Hot Tamale Kid.

Just before he went to sleep he leaned out of his blankets and said to Wallie, "I'm shore glad y'u didn't hesitate in Felipe. God, I'm nigger-skeered of black small pox. I've seen it rage; an', man, thay ain't nothin' kin break its strangle-hold on death once it hits y'u. An' carry? Say, it's worse'n musk on a Mex woman for spreadin' over a country."

"I'm afeared of it, too," replied Wallie with a yawn.

But in his mind a thought was revolving. It made him smile. Then he remembered the note from Lettie which he had hidden in the band of his Stetson. He reached to the peg on which the sombrero hung and quietly removed it and laid it in a corner beside his head. Then he nestled into the covers and went to sleep.

### III

THE next day, accompanied by two members of the band, he made an excursion into the hills to the south and toward noon came upon a straggling herd of fine white faced cattle. Here after some maneuvering he roped a yearling steer, threw it, and hog tying it, cut its throat. Quickly the three men cased it out and dressed it and then cut it up into convenient pieces for packing, and after loading the pack animals started for camp.

During the process of skinning Chugwater managed to cut the hide in such manner that he left the unhealed brand burn on a hind quarter; this he read as the Reverse B. L. And on the way home, while he was following his companions with one of the packhorses, he loosened a knot in the basket-hitch which the thief had employed to pack the beef on the horse, and after a few hundred yards the load fell and dragged along the ground.

"Hey!" he shouted, "which one of y'u fellers done this job? Better come back an' let me learn y'u how to braid one of these lousy squaw hitches. Never mind," he added as one of the men started toward



him, "I was just a foolin'. I'll yank her up in a jiffy an' be with y'u soon."

The men continued on their way.

Quickly Wallie removed the hide containing the brand and jammed it deep in a saddle-bag, then threw a single-diamond on the meat and hurried ahead. They reached camp toward late afternoon where the remainder of the band stood watching them approach.

"He'll do," shouted one of those with Chugwater, "he shore ain't a stranger to that kinda toil. An' when y'u sink a tooth in this sirloin y'u'll imagine he's a right good judge of eatin' meat."

Buck was visibly pleased and after the animals had been unsaddled and the meat carried to the kitchen, Tilley told Wallie he wanted him to take charge of the cows the band had hidden in the hills.

"We got an election on yere soon, kid," he said, "an' it's us kind of hombres ag'in' the law an' order bunch. I'm workin' in with some of them fellas on the other side of the Rio Grande, such as Worley, Tucker, Moorhead, Ashton, Billings an' others. Y'u see I'm edgin' y'u in right deep; spillin' it all now, so's y'u kin see where we're at. Pecos Willie Wainright, who runs the Cow Daddie Saloon in Engle an' is sheriff of this county, is takin' orders from them ranchers over there who are tryin' to run some of these other guys like Buford an' the Association men, out of the county. We does the dirty work an' is allowed to get a few cows out of the country for doin' it."

"Why, that's as handy as a pocket in a shirt," expressed Chugwater. "Seems like top an' bottom dealin' to me. Where kin y'u lose?"

"We come dern near it, a while ago. Five of us got caught drivin' two hundred calves up Sausalito way. I just bin outa jail a short time. Pecos Willie give us a box of hack saws an' we went. Buford was the fella what done it. Brought special men from the Governor's office an' they high-tailed an' got us. Now what we're after is to elect Pecos an' Judge Moss. With them two, an' a few cases of right good rustlin', I'm a-thinkin' Buford will quit buckin' us an' sell. If he don't, then one of us will have to put him away."

"Where do I come in?"

"I'm expectin' a Greaser in from San Marcial any day now, and when he comes he'll have the names of three hundred voters which we wants registered. Y'u takes these to Pecos an' he gets the county clerk

to stick 'em on the books of about eight votin' districts on the other side of the river. With them three hundred we've got 'em beat. We only lack two hundred now. That's the important thing this minute, that an' gettin' news from Pecos Willie. But in the mornin' I want y'u to ride up an' look over the bunch of critters we've got up on some high pasture. An' maybe I'll have y'u take over the feedin' end of 'em. I want 'em able to walk to the railroad, anyhow."

"I c'n do that. Maybe y'u better have some wagons bring in a little feed."

"What ever y'u say."

And the next day Wallie saw the cows.

They were first class range cattle and in extraordinary condition. All of them had passed through the operation of brand-blotting, the burns of which were almost healed. He counted in the neighborhood of three hundred head.

A week went by. A week of thrilling excitement for the young puncher, every evening of which he strolled to a high knoll above the headquarters and looked at the bridge over the Rio Grande. No white signal met his eye. At any event his presence in that end of the county had not been suspected by Luis or Worley.

To hasten the healing of the altered brands he had applied axle grease to the sores, and many of the animals were now singularly in condition to pass any inspection. The work had been done well; the old method of a wet gunnysack and a medium hot iron had accomplished the alteration. And then one day—

Carrying a bucket of the grease into the single cabin where the and the Tamale Kid now slept, which was a little apart from the other houses, a curious expression wreathed Wallie's face. It had seemed to him as though the repulsive mass of splotchy-colored lubricant in the bucket had conveyed to him a startling thought.

"Doggone," he mused, "I shore think it will work. But maybe thay won't be no call. Here goes just the same."

He took a handful of the sticky stuff and moulded it into the chinking of the logs in a



dark corner of the room.

"If I wants y'u, there y'u is," he thought.

Then he heard a hurrying of hoofs coming up the slope and saw a Mexican rider dashing into sight from the west.

"Huh," he thought, "I bets four dollars I'm headed toward Engle in the mawnin'."

And sure enough he was. The messenger arrived with the list of names to be registered and Chugwater set out early for the county seat. Toward noon he began to see horizon formation which he knew outlined the ranch of Buford. In a slowly converging half circle he wound toward the boundary of the K Seven Quarter Circle. And as he rode, daring and astonishingly singular ideas filled his racing mind. What if he could stop that election? Then what? Would it serve his purpose? Wouldn't Wainright, Morley and the rest of the conspirators still be in the same relative position? What would his testimony be? He had received a list of names from a fugitive of justice? He had been a member of that band? That wasn't evidence! No! Those names must be entered. Then crashing through him went a plot and a plan that set his blood tingling, and over and over it revolved in his mind and stood the test of every assault he made upon it.

Buford had influence at Santa Fé. Fine! Great!

Maybe he could get the governor to ask the United States Department of Agriculture to send some men down. That was the scheme. If he could do just that. Get the names on the election books and get something from Pecos Willie to prove that he had delivered them to him personally. Chugwater went suddenly hot and cold. Assurance came upon him with the same lassitude with which failure would have smote him. A silly sort of smile twisted his face into a boyish grin. He thought of Lettie. It was confusion!

"Yep," he mused, "I gotta lay out in the hills long enough to let the sun go down, then slide in an' see her an' her dad. Oh! Oh, Chugwater! Y'u knows damn' well y'u ain't a-thinkin' a thing about her old daddy. Ain't y'u the snake-twistin'est sneaky devil what is? Now ain't y'u?"

Hayburner cocked an ear at a strange note in his master's song, then forgot about the rich baritone. For in the distance he had caught the sight of another horse. It was winding slowly in and out of the cool scrub-timber high up in the hills.

Wallie sang on.

*What will y'u be when the round-up's done?*

*Cowboy?*

*Where will y'u be when they ring the bell?  
An' what are the tales y'u then will tell?  
Will y'u be a bronc on the range of Hell?*

*Cowboy, oh Cowboy!*

*I likes the cut of yore sunburned jaw,*

*Cowboy!*

*An' doff my hat to yore code an' law,*

*Y'u're the whitest man I ever saw,*

*An' I'm plumb delighted to share yore paw,*

*Cowboy, oh Cowboy!*

"Whatcha see, honey?" he remarked to his sorrel, trying to pierce the plain before him for the object that had caught the attention of Hayburner. Then he made it out, a pinto pony winding along the west slope of the far hills that marked the western line of the K Seven Quarter Circle.

A recognition went booming through him.

"Come on, Hayburner, lay down them feet. An' take yore time; but if y'u takes too much of the same, watch yore step. Daddy's in no mood for dee-lay. Y'u knows who that is, don't y'u?" The horse literally raced over the earth. It, too, had felt the contagion of that moment. Then a marvelous thing happened. The pinto stopped, faced into the west; and from the shrapnel like puffs of dust which arose from the slope of the hills down which it traveled, Chugwater knew that the paint-horse was coming with a sliding and slipping down that abrupt decline. He felt a tightening of his throat muscles. "Dog-gone that pinto!" he ejaculated. "If he tangles them feet an' so much as busts her nose, I'll whup him, I'll whup him——"

But the pinto came on. It flashed in beautiful style away from the steep hillside and out across the level greasewood and mesquite plain.

"Lady Lettie," he exclaimed, rising stiff-legged in the stirrups, "I shore mighta known that no Buford ever lived what c'u'dn't ride a hoss. Lord! Ain't that a sight, Hayburner? I'd rather see that gal forkin' a hoss than see Lord Dunraven's yacht race; yes, or hear old Pat Gilmore's band. Shucks, Chugwater, an' y'u bin dreamin' about her! Say, y'u ain't in her class. She's Princess-bred an' y'u, why, y'u—y'u belongs to the Poverty Aristocracy; an' y'u cain't even talk her language—never learned no grammar at all."

Then he saw her, and waved his hat in wide circles about his head. They came together with a rush and she reined in the spirited pony to a perfect stop. At the

same time her flushed cheeks, loosened hair falling about her face, her eyes aflame and laughing lips sent a sensation to his heart that thrilled him utterly. She reached from her saddle and caught his hand. The touch of her palm was like a caress.

"Oh, I'm glad, I'm glad!" she cried.

"Me, too, Miss Lettie, I'm shore pleased to see you."

"I've—Dad and I have worried ourselves sick over you. We made up our minds last night that one of us would ride to the river and hang that signal just to watch and see if you were alive. What have you been doing?"

"Stealin' cows an' healin' brand-burns. Now I'm goin' into Engle to talk with Pecos Willie Wainright. If y'u is wantin' me, for the next two days, my address is the Cow Daddie Sayloon."

She literally guffawed as she turned her horse around. Then they started off together. Occasionally she caught a strange furtive glance in Wallie's eyes. It was one of appraisal; filled with admiration, and something else. She did not know what it was but it intrigued her greatly and caused small spasms of joy to lift up from her throat.

She listened to the narrative of his adventures and seemed to think his recital humorous, for at frequent intervals she burst into silvery laughter. When he had told all, she gushed into words.

"Really, Chugwater, I think it is the most ridiculous story I ever heard. The idea that you were able to get in with those men! The way you planned it, by building that large fire on the ridge, so that they would be sure to find you; the stealing of that Reverse B. L. yearling. I think it is great; dad will be tickled to hear that. Let's hurry!"

"But, Miss Lettie, I reckon y'u don't get me quite yet. I ain't goin' in to yore place. I'm goin' to Engle."

"Absolutely not! You have the evidence in that list. You know where those men are. And now we'll get our side together and end this thing."

"Not a bit. To do what y'u wants means blood an' a lot of it. Why them boys lay up in them hills an' they's got glasses which makes a lizard, ten miles away, look like a alligator. They'd see y'u before y'u got within five miles of the river. Nope, Miss, I'm playin' solo on this game an' I'm headin' back to Buck Tilley's gang day after tomorrow."

She became silent. She looked away toward the sun scorched plain out of which

Chugwater had ridden. Then after a while she said, and her voice was tremulously



serious, "Do you know that you're nothin' but a boy; a big clean minded boy with a lot of cocksureness about you? Do you know that?"

"Ya's'm, I'm stuck up."

"I didn't mean that. I meant that it is your youth and your supreme contempt for danger that makes you think you can play this game alone. Why, Wallie,"—It was the first time she had ever employed such a tone toward him, and he caught the infection of her mood—"those men would kill you like they would a snake if they even suspected who you were. Take charge of the posse, if you will; get into the fight that must come; but don't go back there single-handed any more. I'm a ranch girl, born and bred on this land, and I know all the things that make a man do what you are doing. But don't go back. Please!"

She saw him avoid her pleading eyes. She saw his strong face fall into hard grim lines and then his lips drew in and she knew that his jaws had set. Despair clutched at her heart. She realized that he had reached an unalterable decision which no word of hers could change. At last he said.

"Miss Lettie, I'm right proud to feel the interest y'u're takin' in me."

"Interest!" she exclaimed. "Why it's more than that. It's the regard, the friendship, that sprang up during the days you were sick. Don't I know what you suffered? And didn't I see how game you were? Didn't I see the light in your eye when you rode away around that grainshed? It was desperate, that's what it was, desperate gratitude. You think I did something that helped you get well."

"Y'u did, Ma'am."

"Don't you 'ma'am' me. You big blind—" a sob was precious close to her throat at that instant. "I'm a friend of yours. I'm almost as old as you are. And I'm Lettie, to all my friends."

"Thanks," he said, "I like that, Lettie. Seems like Kentucky mountain folks, when y'u Bufords takes up with a runt like me. It shore does. Y'u never will know, girl, how much y'u tickled me by puttin' that note in the coffee."



The anxiety fled from her features.

"I'll bet you thought it mighty funny," she said.

"I'll bet I thought it mighty sweet! Hayburner figured I was a bit teched by the sun. I read the thing eighty-two times between them piñon hills an' the slope this side of the Rio Grande. Looka yere, Lettie." He pulled off his hat and exposed her note under its band.

"You foolish thing," she flouted, "throw that away. It might be the very cause of your death. If they found that——"

"Throw it away? Say, wild horses c'u'dn't yank that from me. No, nor all the Yan'cee cavalry. Y'u kin believe it or not, but this yere paper is the first note I ever got from a girl in my life."

"I suppose you regard that as a love letter?"

"No, Lettie." There was something sober in his words, something that lacked any degree of triviality. "No, I ain't no kind of dog that thinks just 'cause a lady is kind an' good that he had oughta think she's in love with him. I ain't that kind. My daddy w'u'd 'a' lammed hell outa me if he thought I was thataway when I was at home. I knows my place, Lettie; don't y'u mistake that."

"I should say you do," she commented, and he fancied there was intolerance in the reply. He looked at her sharply but her face was an unrevealing mask.

"Then y'u said thay was somethin' funny in the way I looked when I rode away from y'u an' the colonel. Thay wasn't no sech thing. Sandy Stuart's workin' for y'u, an' I an' him had a fight, one time, up in Colorado. I came mighty close to killin' him. He's just as crooked as the Canadian River. I seen him just as he seen me. That was what made me look thataway. I reckon I'm right poisonous appearin' when I shore enough gets riled. Where is he now?"

"Why, come to think of it, I passed him and some of the other boys mending fence on the other side of this ridge. Right ahead of us. Do you think, Chugwater, that he could be mixed up with Buck's gang?"

"Well, I heard him say once that all calves belong to all the people, an' any man's got a right to go out an' stick a iron on any of 'em an' call 'em his own. He thinks a cow that feeds off'n open range grass might belong to her owner, but her calf is anybody's what discovers it. If he ain't with this other crowd I'll bet it's because he ain't never knowed about it."

"Then perhaps we had better fly into these trees. Those hands were going to stretch wire to the top of the ridge and he could easily see us from there. You're determined to go through with your plans?"

"Oh yes, Lettie," he laughed as they broke into a gallop. "My way's the short trail to jail for them fellas, without lettin' no blood. I just gotta hunch it'll whittle 'em down calm an' gentle. But y'u gotta he'p. Willyya?"

"You try me!"

"Then meet me yere, day after tomorrow, at four in the afternoon. Right up by that big dead pine that's a-slantin' over ag'in' that clump of piñon."

"I'll be there."

"An' bring twenty-five pounds of copperas. I wants it plumb fresh—an' pulverized."

"Copperas? Are you going to make vitriol?"

"I ain't a-goin' to say. I gotta hunch an' wants y'u to be my podner, blind."

She closed her eyes. The very words to her heart were like a prayer. *His podner, blind!* She heard his voice continuing.

"I don't want even yore dad to know. Then I wants Colonel Buford to get out tonight for Santa Fé an' talk with the governor. Remember this! Ask him to get the Department of Agriculture of the U. S. to send two men down to the bridge just an even ten days from today. Not one hour sooner. I'll be on the spot to meet them. Tell them inspectors that I knows thay's diseased cattle in that country an' they ought not be allowed to cross over that bridge. Tell them to wait an' inspect all cows as will come across the river. Then here's another thing. Have yore daddy get the governor to quarantine ev'rything in an' out of San Felipe, 'cause of the black small pox. I have a idea that'll stop some votin' up yonder."

"Wallie!"

"Have y'u got it all?"

"Why," she cried, "I see what you are trying to do! I see it! Isn't this it? You want that copperas because——"

"Never mind. Y'u is my podner, blind."

Once more the shock of his words, again the tightening of the cords of the throat. She paled a little.

"Didja hear about the man I hit in the pear?" he asked.

"Yes, and Luis had to take him to El Paso. And evidently he's getting better,

for Luis isn't back yet. Father thinks that they are afraid to leave him for the reason that he might talk. Why don't you want him jailed?"



"Not yet. I'll tend to them fellas! They shot at me an' the law ain't got nary thing to do

with that."

There was a chill grimness to the manner in which he dismissed the idea of asking for warrants against his enemies. It seemed to the girl that the very nature of the man had changed in that swift flash of vindictiveness. It numbed her. And she said to him very quietly, "Wallie, I don't like you to say that. I don't believe it is ever justifiable to take a human life out of revenge."

"Ya'as'm."

Again she felt a shudder of revulsion at the click of that single noncommittal comment.

"I never thought of you as a killer before, Wallie. Really you have seemed to me as a good natured boy who ought to be around me all the time. But now——"

"Y'u see, Lettie, I an' y'u is some different. I bin on my own since I was ten. I was just left to rustle my ideas of life as I did my hash, pretty much as I found 'em. No woman ever told me it was wrong to smoke, or chew, or swear. They wasn't any women. Men, why they thought it was funny to see me per-formin'. I breshed up ag'in' life an' found that the man or the hoss what does the most defensive an' offensive is after a time let alone. I've had it hard. My first lesson in the out of doors was keepin' my dad's powder dry, under my coat, while my hands grew blue an' numb outside. Next I knew what fight meant, an' how to tell when it was comin' by lookin' in a fella's eye. Eyes don't lie! I've learned to read 'em."

"Expertly?" she asked; but he did not catch the query.

"Yore dad an' his friends, through Mister Buford's brother, heard about me from the Front Range Cattlemen's Association an' the work I did around on the Poudre. They bargained with me. They knew I was handy with a gun an' had a tol'able amount of nerve to take a chance. The letter I gave yore dad was this agree-

ment. I was to get a top-hand's wages an' expenses for myse'f an' hoss, if I come down an' tried to break up this gang. An' five thousand in money if I done it. That's what the dicker was. An' it goes as it lays. They knew they might be killin'; they hoped it w'u'd be Buck's boys, but they figgered it might be me. I lit in this country an' got plugged before I got set. Somebody squawked. I hate to think it, but I believe it was yore daddy's brother. I know he got drunk in Collins; an' if he did, well these Mexicans down yere ain't mind readers, an' thay's lots of Mex porters an' sugar-hands in Fort Collins. Now the fella what dropped me settles with me, that's all, when I'm done with my work. Maybe he won't get killed. But if he's a fightin' fool an' loves powder, one of us is a-headin' for Kingdom Come when we yanks the first gun. Otherwise I'll man-handle him with my hands."

"You make me shudder when you express yourself like that Wallie!"

"It ain't altogether me, Lettie. It's family after family of mountain bred men back where I come from. Where thay's a Bible weighing twenty pounds an' bound in the heart of white oak trees brung over from England, an' what the Good Book says is given to y'u at every meal. All the time thay's the latest model rifle a-hangin' on the wall. I know some of these fellas out yere think a lie is a abomination in the eyes of the Lord an' a ever-present help in time of trouble. But among my folks, a lie's a fightin' name an' a liar is four degrees lower'n the roustabouts in hell. Another thing is, when a man tries to fight y'u, gun, knife, or go-as-y'u-please, an' y'u lets the white feather wave in the air, shucks, y'u best just leave the country. Pride, that's what it is, Lettie! Nothin' y'u kin sell, swap or give away. But when y'u got it, Lord, how it eats out yore heart!"

"But suppose you knew that the exercise of your pride caused someone else pain, would you still go ahead in a stubborn way?"

"I dunno. I never had nobody tell me anything I'd do w'u'd hu't 'em; except when some bad-hombre hollered for me to let loose his eye or something."

"I'm asking you, now, not to follow up the fight with Luis and his man. They won't fight fair! They'll shoot you in the back like they did before. Oh, Wallie, I'm afraid——!"

"Why, Lettie! What in the world does y'u mean?"

She stopped her horse and it seemed to Chugwater that her lower lip drooped a bit and sank at the corners, and that a curiously rapid blinking of her eyelids held back tears. But before he could formulate an opinion she had swung the pinto around and was pointing with a hand toward a small hog-back ahead of them.

"Alongside of that little saddle, you'll come across a trail that drops into the road to Engle about four miles from here. Good-by, till day after tomorrow," she said.

"I hope I naven't made y'u feel bad," he said to her, and she turned in the saddle and smiled at him through her tears.

"You said something a while ago and I don't believe a word of it."

"What?"

"Eyes!" she exclaimed, and touched her pony with a spur.

Chugwater watched her vanish among the pine, then rode on.

Three figures, high on the ridge above him, watched Wallie gaze a long time after Lettie, then canter out of sight.

"Ain't that the fella we seen the night we was comin' in home from that three weeks' trip of brandin'?" asked one of the figures.

"Yep, that's him," replied another.

"He shore sits a saddle, don't he, Sandy? Y'u knew him up no'th, didn't y'u?"

"Yes. An' he's one killin' devil, also. Fast, either hand, an' plumb expert, too, when it comes to any kinda fightin'. I'd like to see him get his, plumb center."

What Sandy Stuart saw quickened his pulses, and for the rest of the afternoon he planned and plotted how he was to get off from the K Seven Quarter Circle long enough to pay a visit to the Cow Daddie saloon at Engle. Destiny, however, dropped his pony's foot in a badger-hole on the return to the ranch and in the spill that followed Sandy was rendered unconscious and did not come-to till late at night. At that time he was in his bunk and a great throbbing pain compelled him to roll over and forget all else save his misery. The next morning he was so stiff he could hardly move.

#### IV

**B**EFORE entering the headquarters of Pecos Willie Wainright, Chugwater surveyed the town; laid its methods of egress and ingress clearly in his mind; located the livery stable, the hotel, the principal streets and the railroad; then he walked into a store, bought two hand-

kerchiefs, and went to the hotel.

In his room he took a shriveled object



from a parcel, wrapped it inside the handkerchiefs and writing a brief note to Lettie's father, sealed it and walked to the Post Office, where he stamped and mailed it.

In that package he had furnished Buford with the brand which he had cut from the flank of the Reverse B. L. steer. This enterprise over he strolled across the street and entered the Cow Daddie Saloon. Pecos was watching him as he came through the door.

Chugwater sought a secluded part of the lower bar and signaled with an eye to Wainright. The proprietor got up from his seat and joined him.

"What'll it be?" asked Wallie.

"Raw lickin'," replied Pecos.

"Add that an' carry one mo'," smiled Chugwater at the bartender.

"Who is y'u?" asked Wainright.

"They calls me Criss Cross. I've just come from Buck an' the boys. I got that list to be tallied by y'u fellas. Here it is. It come last night."

"An' y'u left, when?" said the saloon-sheriff, accepting the roll of names.

"This mornin' just before the sun jumped up."

"Boy, that's a ride! Sixty miles in thirteen hours over them sands is plenty hoss work. Y'u musta come right along."

"Yes, but I'm ridin' a hoss. That's got somethin' to do with it, too. Cain't we talk some place, private?"

After the drinks Wainright led the cowboy into a side room and threw him a chair.

"Let her ramble," he said. "What's on your mind except yore hair?"

"We've got three hundred cows ready to go out an' Buck was thinkin' to send 'em to Sausalito the same day them Mexicans comes in yere to vote. He figgered they'd get clean across the big flats an' mesas without nothin' but women seein' 'em, on account all the men bein' in town to vote. An' he's put me in charge of the job of

gettin' ready. What y'u got in the nature of fattenin' feed."

"Maize, barley, chop; most any kind."

"C'u'd y'u get me two wagons of young maize chopped fine an' mixed with ground barley, out of this man's town tonight?"

"I reckon."

"An' two mo' day after tomorrow?"

"Sure."

"That's all I'll be a-needin'. That'll fix 'em ready to move, anyhow. I got all them brands healed up an' Buck's right pleased. I'm waitin' over till day after tomorrow. Tilley wanted me to tell him if y'u fellas got the names down; an' if any trouble come out of it."

"He knows we don't get throwed in our own loop down this way."

"I dunno. An' he told me to have y'u send him some kinda paper tellin' him I got 'em to y'u, correct."

"What kinda paper?"

"That's what I'm wonderin'. What kinda paper kin y'u sign for a raw deal like that. Y'u ain't perzactly altogether a half-wit," Chugwater smiled. "I'm just new, y'u know. Maybe he thinks I'd go to tamperin' or somethin'. But if the paper y'u has is what y'u was to get, maybe he thought y'u'd say somethin' to him in pencil."

Pecos examined the list of names carefully, noted curiously marked lines at the bottom of the list, and when he looked into Wallie's eyes he smiled.

"All right, kid, I'll give y'u somethin'. Buck says y'u're not pewter an' I'll tie to his gradin', any time. Whatcha doin' tonight? Playin' calico or green-cloth?"

"Say, I've heard about this town an' they tells me it's day all day in the day time an' thay ain't no night a-tall. I'm poundin' my ear, to quit feelin' like I was poundin' leather. Right now I'm gaited like a man with a plaster-paris laig an' a cork nose. If thay was ary place in town where a fella c'u'd feed, I believe I'd go in an' buy four thousand *duros* worth o' hawg meat an' hen pickles."

"Let's feed," chuckled Pecos. "Over at the Broad-Daylight Restaurant is where they've got T-bones as bellow an' cove-oysters as crow."

During the meal Chugwater sized up the man before him and looked him squarely in the eye at every opportunity that presented itself. When the apple pie was finished Pecos pulled a note book from his pocket and wrote:

"Three hundred received.  $\equiv$  is some addition."

He flipped it to Wallie who read it and smiled.

"Part of it's in Chinook, ain't it?"

"Them marks is yore name, kid; I criss crossed it so the devil hisse'f c'u'dn't read it, if anything happened to y'u."

"Ain't I the turtle-headed boy-wonder? Y'u know what I took that for?"

"What?"

"*The double cross!*"

"Go on to bed. An' drop around sometime in the afternoon. It'll take us pretty much till that time to get these names scattered over them sheets. An' they got to go to the votin' places inside the next three days."

The next morning Pecos reported that all was well and that the head of the cattlemen was out of town. He had seen Buford take the Cannonball for the north. That assured the court-house crowd that there would be no protest of any kind.

At noon the following day Chugwater rode out of town and at four o'clock met Lettie as agreed. She removed several small sacks of copperas from her saddle bags and Wallie stuffed them into his. Then he gave her the receipt Wainright had written for him.

"When I went to town yesterday," she said, "I saw you entering your hotel. Wallie, I had a lump in my throat as big as a Bellflower apple. Before you leave I want to have an agreement with you."

"If y'u asked me to dust the moon, I'd do it."

"No, but a day or two before those Mexicans cross the bridge on their way to vote, I'll be up in the hills somewhere east of the river and I'll have a camp outfit with me. I intend to be around you somewhere."

"Don't y'u think of such a fool thing!"

"But it isn't a fool thing. I'm as good as a man when it comes to roughing it, and I want to be on hand to see that nothing happens to you, and to rush for help if I think you are discovered."

"But y'u cain't cross the river except at the bridge an' the water's gettin' higher all the time. This side will not have a man from anywhere west unless he gets this way on that bridge. That's my scheme."

He smirked openly at her, but she evinced no concern in his attempt to arouse her curiosity.

"Remember, I'll be east of the river within a mile north of the bridge two days before the Mexicans cross. That'll be the day before the election, won't it?"

"Yes. Buck figgers on placin' them



greasers twenty-four hours before they vote. Dad got away all right, Wainright told me."

"Yes, and he has such faith in you that he'll make the governor do what you want. He's in love with you, Wallie. I think you've bewitched him. He called you *my boy!*"

Chugwater's face was a study of turbulent emotion. All he could do was to rub a palm on his saddle-horn and chuckle. After a spell of strangulation due to rapid smoking he said, "Lettie, girlie, please don't come out thataway. But if y'u does, don't bring nobody along, an' keep out of sight. That pinto ag'in' them red chalk cliffs to the east of our camp, w'd look like the court house burnin' down."

"I'll be alone. Oh, Wallie, I forgot the most important bit of news! Sandy Stuart fell with his horse and was laid up for two days. Now he wants to be taken into Engle. I remembered what you told me and I have told the foreman to delay sending him till I got home."

"Uh-huh. He seen I an' y'u the other



day. An' y'u kin bet now he's wantin' to see Pecos or Luis. If y'u have to break one of his laigs, keep him out of Engle. Can y'u depend on the foreman?"

"Absolutely."

"Then tell him that thay's five hundred on him for calf stealin' up at Hayden, Colorado, an' to keep him solitaire till I gets back. Lord, it'd shore be my luck to have him make a call on me right over on the river. Y'u c'u'd use me for a clabber-strainer two hours after he spilled what he knows on me."

"Wallie!"

He had headed his horse west.

"Wallie, please don't go! All the cattle in this valley aren't worth the risk you are running."

"At the feet of yore grace. An' go with God—as the Mexican women say."

Then Hayburner tore madly into the west.

FOR three or four days after he rejoined the outlaws Chugwater was given to spells of moodiness. The anxious lines he had seen in the face of Lettie and a strange fluttering suggestion

of her meaning to his life would not disappear from his intuitive processes; he was a creature half mad at times with the fantastical workings of some vague hope, and at others a numb staring automaton that circulated among the cows with a lagging step and a formidable unconcern.

This state of affairs aroused the fears of the Hot Tamale Kid. He didn't like it. He watched Wallie; saw a hot flush creep up along his throat and change suddenly into a ghastly pallor; saw the fine eyes of his room-mate glow with a rich flaming fire and fade to a dull listless haze.

Many times he muttered half aloud, "I don't like it. I just shore don't like that kid's actions, an' if I thought—God! An' me a sleepin' with him, too."

One morning, three days before election, Chugwater arose an hour earlier and stepping to Hot Tamale's bunk shook him and said, "I'm goin' to give them cows that special feed this mornin' an' y'u can take care of them this afternoon."

The Kid grunted and went back to sleep.

Chugwater hooked up a team and piled the wagon with the mixed chop sent by Pecos. Under the front sacks were the bags of pulverized copperas.

An hour later, as he was putting the horses away, Hot Tamale came up behind him suddenly and stood straddle-legged immediately behind him.

"Criss Cross," he said in such a low and startling tone that Wallie swung around on the pivot of a single heel.

"Oh, y'u Kid," he said, "that ain't no way to do."

"I wants to know something."

"Go ahead."

"Is y'u well? Plumb well?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Lemme feel yore haid?"

He advanced his hand, laid it on Chugwater's forehead, then jerked it away with a whip. "Fever!" he exploded in a loud toneless voice. "Fever!"

"No, that ain't fever; that's just yore warm hand after turnin' outa them blankets. I ain't got nothin' wrong with me that a very little lump of the *dinero* won't heal."

The Kid walked away perplexed.

That afternoon Hot Tamale fed the cows.

And each of them received a small amount of the copperas which Chugwater had sprinkled in the feed boxes and thoroughly mixed in the morning. His work was done in this regard. And he had not



been caught at it. Two doses had been given.

When Tamale came back, he and Chugwater sat in their cabin playing a game of Seven Up. Buck Tilley came to the shack and joined them. And during the game the rustler appeared in high glee. He expressed himself as fully confident that the care Wallie had taken with the stolen stock would enable him to get five dollars a head more for them than he would otherwise have obtained. He promised Chugwater that he would have charge of the drive. And the hour for starting the cattle was settled on as ten o'clock in the morning the day before election. When the game broke up Tilley said that on the following morning he wanted all the cows brought down to a corral close by the bridge. From this position they could be driven across the river, quickly, without any delay, and with a minimum loss of flesh due to the excitement always attendant upon a drive.

A hail was heard down the hill and Buck arose hurriedly and left the cabin. In a short time Hot Tamale picked up a bucket and went to the spring. He was gone for what seemed to Chugwater to be a very long time, and when he returned he glanced at Wallie in a furtive fearful manner.

Then he began to roll down his shirt preparatory to shaving.

Chugwater sat down to a table and was riffing the cards preparatory to a game of Napoleon solitaire when he heard the voice of the Kid rasp behind him and felt something cold at the base of his skull.

"Stick up them paws, Chugwater, an' don't monkey with me!"

Wallie's hands went into the air. Hot Tamale yanked a gun from Chugwater's holster, then walked backward to the door, flung it open and yelled, "Come on in, he's tame!"

The room filled immediately.

Back of Buck Tilley Wallie saw Sandy Stuart, Pecos Willie Wainright, a tall Mexican whom he estimated by the same shirt he had glimpsed in the pear-patch to be Luis; and around these were members of the gang on whose faces were venomous expressions of curiosity and loathing. Buck fixed his eyes on him and then spoke.

"Go through him."

Two men searched Wallie's clothes. They found nothing.

"Maybe it's in the hat," suggested Pecos, and Hot Tamale picked up Wallie's Stetson and pulled out a sweat soiled piece of paper. This he handed to Buck who read it aloud.

"Well," sneered Sandy, "that Buford gal knows now that he's traced an' the next thing we'll see is her a-headin' this way. If it hadn't been for Luis, yere, I'd bin there yet. That note's from Lettie Buford, Buck!"

"Some of y'u boys take some hoss-feed, grub, an' a bed roll, an' cross the river an' watch them red bluffs. If that gal shows up, bring her yere."

He named three men who left the cabin.

"Willie," said Buck, "are y'u daid shore this hombre didn't meet nobody in Engle?"

"Not a fella. He went to his hotel an' stayed there. When he come out I was with him. An' after the first fifteen minutes I had Pablo on his tail all the time. He never spilled nothin' in Engle."

Chugwater sneered.

"Y'u knows what's a-comin', don't y'u?" shot Tilley.

"Lead yore ace! I've played my hand," replied Wallie.

"Pecos, does y'u reckon—" began Tilley, when Sandy Stuart interrupted.

"This maggie's a cute fella, don't go wrong that he ain't! But if he says he's all set, behind him, I'd lay even money he's jammed. I w'u'dn't believe nothin' he volunteered. My guess is that we got him just in time."

"That's me, too," offered the Hot Tamale Kid and he told of the strange moods of Chugwater. This was taken to mean that Wallie was on the point of escaping and that the band had detected him at the right hour. Looking through the open door Chugwater saw an old Mexican woman passing into a cabin opposite. Luis saw her at the same moment and shouted, "Manuela, come yere!" The woman entered the cabin.

"This old dame," introduced Luis, "is the sister of the Mexican woman who was a nurse to Lettie Buford. And she's thick with the girl. Now tell the captain what the girl told y'u."

"When I am on my way to Engle a few days ago I meet Señorita Buford. I ask her how's the good luck and we talk, *charlamos un poco*, maybe ten minutes. Then I say when I go on, where's the good Señor Buford? And she tell me he is gone to Trinidad to look at two prize bulls. That is all I know, hones'!"

"That's right," remarked Pecos. "The station agent told me he bought a ticket to Trinidad." Manuela managed, during the next few seconds, to hold the eyes of Chugwater an infinitesimal length of time. But in that swift and somehow penetrat-

ing stare, she conveyed to him a feeling that she was in sympathy with him. Her words to the bandit chief had pleased Wallie totally. At a nod from Luis the old woman slipped out of the room.

Big Foot Alec at a command from Buck left the cabin and when he returned a pair of hand-cuffs were snapped on the wrists of Chugwater and he was thrown on the bed. The Hot Tamale Kid was given the key and left as a guard. All the other men filed out of the cabin.

Later Tamale locked Chugwater in and went to supper.

When he came back he carried a tin plate filled with food, and a cup of coffee. He laid the food on the table, tossed Wal-



lie the key to the manacles and told him to unlock the wristlets and eat, while he himself sat near the door with a drawn gun in hand. After the meal Wallie locked

the hand-cuffs on his wrists and the Kid examined them to see that they were securely closed. He stuck the key in a shirt pocket.

That night Wallie was roped in bed and the cabin door locked on the outside.

Twice during the night he awoke the Hot Tamale Kid with nightmarish screams. In the morning he said he did not feel like eating and refused the meal the Kid brought. The day passed slowly and no one approached the cabin. Hot Tamale spent a great deal of time looking from the window and alternating this with a wordless staring at Chugwater.

Shortly before sundown wagons began to arrive, bringing in great loads of Mexicans. And from the babble of sound outside Chugwater knew that a meal was being served in the open. Presently as the Kid looked from the window he turned to Chugwater and said, "They're bringin' the Buford gal up the hill. I reckon that plumb tickles y'u, don't it?"

Chugwater made no reply but a rising gulp in his throat almost choked him. Fear of a numbing and loathsome nature filled his mind. He knew that unthinkingly he had been the means of making it impossible for relief to reach Lettie. He recalled her promise to tell no one where she was going and to bring no one with her. Now—God! Her note had sent them after her.

"Come on over to the window, fella,"

jibed Hot Tamale, "an' y'u kin get a right good look at her. She's passin' now! If she don't land in Buck's lap y'u kin eat my liver. Class, all over her!"

Chugwater rushed from the bed and pressed his face against the glass of the window, and as he did so Lettie saw him. For a fraction of time her eyes widened, stared at him incomprehensibly, then she turned her head. In a door directly before her and staring at the girl, stood Manuela. The end of an apron was held in the old woman's mouth and a white pallor beneath the tan of her cheeks gave to her countenance a miserable aspect.

Lettie passed out of sight and Chugwater returned to his bunk. Hot Tamale's eyes were windows to a fear-filled mind.

A deep racking groan escaped from Chugwater. In the confined interior of the cabin it sounded like a death agony. He raised his cuffed hands and swept their backs across his forehead. Once more the groan. Hot Tamale couldn't endure the sound.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Did the sight of that gal give y'u the belly-ache?"

"I don't know what it is. Give me a drink of water."

The Kid brought a dipper and gave it to Wallie who drank and fell back on the pillow. "I reckon—" he began; then ceased to talk.

"What y'u reckon?"

Chugwater did not reply. Again Tamale put the query. No answer. He came to the bed and stared down on his prisoner.

"Fainted!" he said, then walked to the door, opened it, and passing outside, locked it. As his footsteps died away Chugwater sprang from the bunk and picked up some matches from the table. Next he secured some of the axle-grease from the loosened chinking and placing this in a piece of newspaper hid it under his blankets; then he lay down on the bed. He was inordinately famished. Yet when Hot Tamale brought him his supper he refused to eat. The night wore on. Hot Tamale was away from the cabin for two hours; when he returned Chugwater was sitting on the bunk, looking disconsolately at the floor. The Kid lit the lamp.

"Better?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Wallie, "I must have caved, a little."

"An' that ain't all, bo! Tomorrow we moves out them cows. An' when they's on their way Buck an' me an' two more

boys takes y'u for a ride, to hell. That hoss of yores is shore goin' to be a orphan."

"I don't care! Maybe y'u won't!"

"Thay ain't no maybe about this. The five of us cain't cross east of that river, but Pecos an' the other boys is goin' to run them cows to the railroad. While they're gone we aims to plant y'u so deep y'u won't sprout."

"Then y'u better clinch me on the roof o' hell," Wallie taunted and smiled. "I may s'prise y'u yet, y'u damn' stogey-built whip-snake. If I had my hands free I'd make y'u eat that gun; spit it up, an' digest it slow. If y'u thinks I'm hot-house, just keep on tryin' to make me wilt. But if y'u knows what I knows, y'u'd be usin' that key an' throwin' my riggin' on Hayburner for me an' the girl. Shore as hell I'll be slantin' a eye on y'u when y'u tries to dance on air."

The Kid wet his lips.

"Shut up," he said. "If y'u open that trap ag'in, I'll fold this smoke-eater right over yore brow."

## V

THE cattle drive began the following morning at a little after six and at nine-thirty Pecos and his aids had them fairly well strung out and headed for the bridge over the Rio Grande. Through the clouds of dust rolling before the herd, Wainright made out a wagon on the east side of the bridge. He spurred his horse around the cows and crossed the bridge; on the last steel girders he saw three log chains had been stretched and locked with padlocks. The river-crossing was effectively closed.

He flipped back his vest and exposed his badge.

"I'm sheriff of this yere county," he announced. "Who are y'u birds? An' what is it y'u want with them chains where they is?"

A little gray-haired man who had been seated on the concrete abutment of the east approach arose and looked into the eyes of Pecos Willie.

"Y'u knows I'm United States Marshal up at Gallup, don't y'u, Pecos?" he drawled, his voice full of a resonant menace.

"Of course I knows y'u," replied Willie, "y'ure Cool Charlie Kibbe. Ev'body knows y'u. But what is it y'u want down here?"

"These men," said Kibbe pointing to his companions, "have been sent down here to

inspect all cattle coming across this river. They're animal health-inspectors of the Department of Agriculture. Are those dogs comin' this way?"

"They was."

"We'll have to look at them," said one of the health-officers, ducking beneath the chains.

"Sure," replied Pecos. Then he shouted a command to some of the punchers flanking the herd, and within a few moments seven of the leaders of the band of cattle had been roped, thrown, and hog-tied. The Government men examined them carefully for black-leg, then pried open a cow's mouth and instantly dropped the head.

"What's the answer?" asked Wainright.

"I condemn all this herd and order you



men to drive it into the nearest fence at once. Not an animal can cross this bridge."

"What?"

"There's hoof and mouth disease of a flagrant character running through this stock and I will have to kill every animal."

The Mexicans came up in their wagons at that instant.

Pecos turned to the chief inspector and said, "Take down those chains an' let these boys through; they're goin' home to vote an' got to ride forty miles, some of them."

"No animal can cross this bridge, to-day; and what's more, no man either until we can get some fumigating houses erected on this side of the river. I quarantine all you men and order you to stay within sight of this place."

A mutter hurried through the ranks of the outlaws, a chattering began among the Mexicans. The face of Wainright was that of a man stricken with utter stupefaction; then he roused, rode to one of the band, and told him to ride back and tell Buck. The bandit tore away toward the hills.

"Come on, Pecos," shouted one of the riders, unhooking a carbine, "let's go. Are y'u a-goin' to let two hoss doctors an' that old coffin-fodder from Gallup run a sandy on yu' like this?"

Cool Kibbe flashed two guns, set them squarely against his hips and shouted at the cow-boy.

"Bring that hand up off that boot, quick! An' let it come empty, too!"

The rustler obeyed with a ludicrous haste. Kibbe continued to talk.

"Now let me tell y'u birds somethin'. This ain't New Mexico y'u're tanzalin'. It's the U. S.! An' that means *us*; me an' sixty millions mo'; an' two troops of the Seventh at Wingate; an' all the tel-ee-graphin' an' railroadin' we wants to feed y'u petty-larceny, near-bad boys just the kinda pills that's good for yore how-come-y'u-sos. Turn them cows slant-wise, an' back 'em up the river. I kin perforate twelve of y'u fellas, more'n likely, before y'u gets me. After that somebody else will get the rest of y'u. Start stringin' 'em out."

Pecos dropped his head on his breast and the cattle were milled about and prodded up the back-trail; the Mexicans held a parley and headed their wagons for San Marcial. More than one of them had gazed into those gray-green eyes of Kibbe; voting was exactly what they didn't want none of. They had their money, or some of it, and now they craved traveling. They headed home in an utter rout.

"I'm shore sorry, sheriff," mocked Kibbe, "but if y'u ain't quarantined, then I'm a liar that never heard of that sorta thing before."

Pecos rose in the stirrups, glanced across the river and saw a great cloud of dust coming toward the west. One look was enough; he fled after the cattle.

**A**N HOUR after the drag moved, the Mexicans started away from the cabins, and thirty minutes after they were gone Tamale left Chugwater. As soon as the Kid was fifty feet from the shack Wallie arose, pulled out the grease, and standing before a piece of looking-glass dipped a match in the repulsive stuff and daubed his face with it.

He built up splotches; pimply cone-like formations; a lone mound of black and brown and faint yellow; and when he had finished to his satisfaction he lay back on the bed.

In a short time Tamale returned.

"Get up!" he commanded.

"I can't get up."

"Whatcha mean, y'u cain't get up?"

"Tamale, I lied to y'u boys."

"How?"

"About San Felipe. I got drunk in that town an' stayed till I sobered up. I slept next to a fellow the small-pox got while I was gettin' nacheral. Now——"

"Now what? Whatcha mean?"

Chugwater moaned, edged backward from the bed and then weakly standing, took several steps which placed his body between the door and the Kid, and turned suddenly and squarely into the light.

Hot Tamale took one swift look and his jaw dropped.

Then he jerked his gun.

"Back away from that door or I'll salivate y'u!" he cried.

"Unlock these cuffs for the love of God an' let me get the air. I want to die in the air! I'm suffocatin' in yere!"

"Get outa the way!" The hammer of the gun slowly rose.

"Shoot! I'll get my hands on y'u before I go. I just know I kin last that long. Y'u're too close; y'u can't beat me outa one grab anyhow. An' one's shore a plenty! An' when I does, this face goes right ag'in' yore mug! Do I get the key to them cuffs?"

"God, yes!" shrieked the Kid, and reaching into a chaps pocket brought out the manacle key and flung it on the floor. Wallie jumped behind the wall, away, from the window, and Tamale unlocked the door and fled. In his haste to get away from the scene and while he attempted to shove a padlock through a hasp-staple the lock flew out of his hand. Instead of searching for it he inserted an iron pin hanging on a piece of wire beside the door casing and ran for the main-buildings.

Buck was standing beside a door and saw the Kid rushing toward him.

"What's up?" he yelled.

"Small-pox!" he screamed. "Small-pox! Chugwater is broke out all over an' I been sleepin' in there. He lied about Felipe! Got drunk an' sobered up there. I wish y'u c'u'd see his face."

He was nearly alongside of Tilley when the rustler's gun jumped out of its leather and covered him.

"Back up!" sang out Buck. "Back up an' take any hoss y'u want an' high-tail away from yere; y'u're done, plumb done, with any of us. Git!"

Tamale stopped, stared, and started on the dead run for a corral where he mounted his horse and tore away through the timber. At that moment Buck heard the rider Pecos sent. In an instant the chief and his aid had entered one of the cabins and the horseman was telling his leader what Kibbe and the inspectors had done.

Across from Chugwater's cabin old Manuela stood looking out of a window. She had heard the loud words between



Wallie and the Kid and comprehended exactly what she was doing when she flung open her door, rushed into an adjoining cabin and took down a carbine and cartridge belt which belonged to Luis, and then turned and hurried to Chugwater's cabin where she slipped the pin and called on him to come out.

As he sprang from the building, she pressed the gun into his hands and gave him the belt.

"Where is the señorita?" he asked.

"There," she replied, "in that small cabin at the big pifon. Go, I have the key!"



The old feet reached Lettie's shack immediately behind Chugwater and in an instant the man and woman had entered

and closed the door.

"Quick," yelled Wallie, "come on! Let's be gettin', Lettie!"

"Manuela at the window screeched back into the room, "Too late, señor, here they come!"

Chugwater pumped the lever to the gun half way, saw that a shell was in the barrel, tried to stuff a cartridge in the magazine and found it already full; then peering out of the window saw Buck, One-Eye John, Big Foot Alec, Abilene Al, and the man Wainright had sent to Tilley, standing with their backs to him, staring at the open door of the cabin he had just left.

He saw they were non-plussed. And with a bound he reached the door of the cabin and flinging it wide shouted, "Paws in the air, y'u coyotes! The man that is last in gettin' up his hooks drops first!"

Five pairs of hands flew above heads.

"Y'u, Buck! Fling that iron on the ground, then back to the sky with that mit."

Buck's gun was tossed to the earth.

"Now, One-Eye, follow suit. If y'u renig, any o' y'u boys, it'll be just once too often for y'u, that's all."

Another gun was thrown aside.

The remaining men were similarly treated.

"Now get in that shack, *pronto*, an' slam the door."

"Shoot, damn y'u, shoot!" yelled Buck. "I'd rather have it thataway than to go in there."

He reached for his discarded weapon,

but at the crack of Wallie's rifle he fell in a side whirl and grasped at his right hand which was now a mass of reddened flesh. The other bandits jumped into the cabin. "Get in there, Tilley!" sang out Chugwater. "Looka yere!"

The rustler raised his face and saw Wallie wipe a hand across his countenance; the pimply visage was transformed into a ghastly smear out of which issued the illuminating grin of Chugwater.

"I don't go in for fancy face lotions," he shouted, "this yere recipe of mine calls for I. X. L axle grease."

"By God!" groaned Tilley and getting to his feet jumped into the cabin.

"Close the door."

The door slammed instantly.

Wallie rushed to the cabin, pulled the hasp into place and finding the lock snapped it through the staple; this done he gathered up all the sixshooters and carried them back to the cabin where Manuela and Lettie stood waiting for and watching him.

"Wash it off, dear!"

"What!" Chugwater's knees suddenly shook. The armful of guns clattered to the floor.

"Wash off that horrible stuff, Wallie."

"Oh!" he said, and stepped to a basin and washed his face and wiped it on a brown towel.

Lettie's eyes were aflame as she saw Chugwater looking at her, and when he stepped toward her they closed, and she swayed suddenly as though she were about to faint. Then——

From far down the slope there came the intermittent bellowing of bulls, the bawls of mother-cows seeking their calves, the "Ow! Ooo! Oooo!" of the herding punchers. The herd was returning!

He forgot Lettie, forgot Manuela, standing there with a rosary in her hands, her lips moving, and her eyes closed. Fear gripped him.

He brushed the women aside and leaped through the door. And as he reached the outside he heard Lettie exclaim, "Manuela, isn't he stupid? Did you see how he treated me?"

"I'll be back," he yelled, reaching the carbine leaning against the wall, "and when I does, y'u better not try that once mo'!"

He was gone.

Down to the corral he sped, whistled for Hayburner and as the horse came to him he found his saddle and quickly mounted and rode away. At the crest of the hill which permitted him to see the road all the way to the river-crossing, a



sight greeted his eyes which made him grow chill. There, right there on the salt flats was the entire herd, and it was on the run and behind it men, many men.

And not a mile away was a clot of dust rapidly rolling along and coming pell mell after the cows. He watched it entranced. Soon he saw a solitary horseman break away from the drag and dash ahead at breakneck speed; then another rustler darted from the bunch, but he took an angling course to the west and headed for the trail which led to San Marcial and the railroad. Rapidly the men driving the cows left them, and in a few seconds they were strung out like steeple-chasers along an extent a mile wide. Their pursuers gained. A puff of smoke flew out of the mist of dust a faint flick of sound reached Wallie's ears.

"Buffalo gun," he commented mentally.

The lone horseman was approaching him rapidly.

It was Pecos Willie Wainright.

Wallie led Hayburner behind a clump of juniper, and secreting himself along the trail, waited for the sheriff. When Pecos came through the trees, Wallie stepped out and threw down his gun on him. Wainright collapsed and fell from the saddle. Willie disarmed him, took handcuffs from his saddle-bags, and manacled his arms around a tree.

Then he looked down the slope.

A part of the horsemen, he estimated it at thirty, was in pursuit of the rustlers who had fled across the wide swale; the remainder was coming up the road toward him, and in the lead was the lean long form of Buford.

When the men reached him he halted them and exhibited Pecos.

"Lettie! Where is she?" asked Buford.

"She's safe, sir," replied Chugwater.

"How come y'u to be so plumb prompt?"

"Last night we found the body of a foreman of one of the ranches east of Engle who had been missing since two days before you arrived in this country. He had been buried between my place and that of

Worley. In his body we found a copper jacketed old style Remington slug of the British make. That told us something there. Worley is the only man in this county who carries a Remington six-gun. We gathered a posse and called on him. He was out, but the greaser who shot



you in the pear was there and we put it

up to him square. It was either come clean to us or decorate a pepper tree. He told us that he was present when Worley shot the foreman because this man had caught them red handed cutting the brand out of one of my calves. Before the man died he got one bullet into Worley's leg. I had been told by my foreman that he thought Lettie had gone to the river. At daybreak we were getting close to the Rio Grande and had found her trail. We saved our horses and jogged in slow till we saw the dust around the bridge; then we came ahead on the run."

"How about Worley, didja get him?"

"No. But we sent some men to Engle with that Mex and we knew that Worley was in town. The two of them ought to have left for Tucumcari on the early morning express."

Chugwater released Pecos and forced him to lead the way into the retreat of the rustlers.

Arrived before the cabin where he had been a prisoner, he jammed his gun-barrel under the hasp and with a quick pry tore the steel band with its screws from the door.

"Come out," he said.

Tilley and his companions issued from the building.

Buford and the men with him literally tossed back their heads and cheered.

Lettie rushed up, and as her father dismounted she threw her arms about his neck and gave way to tears.

**L**ATER in the afternoon the posse returned with fourteen prisoners; some of the rustlers had shown battle and were killed at close quarters. Herding the outlaws into several buildings and placing guards at the door, Buford and Chugwater were about to join Lettie and Manuela when Wallie saw Cool Kibbe and an inspector ride out of the trees.

"Some of y'u hombres come down an' drive them damn' cows," shouted the marshal. "I quit punching twenty year ago."

"Let 'em alone, Charlie," greeted Chugwater. "I reckon y'u is owin' me a right good snort."

"Y'u sin-twisted, good-for-nothin', low-down hill-billie, how is y'u?" And Kibbe was off his horse, slapping Wallie across the back. "I'll buy the snort; lead me to it!"

"Them cows is mostly Reverse B. L., Cool, an' I was figgerin' on shootin' 'em out across the flats an' lettin' 'em browse back to their own feed-grounds."

"I'll have to kill every one," interrupted the inspector. "They have hoof and mouth disease among them."

In Chugwater's eyes a dancing light grew and his lips wreathed in a silly grin. Cool Kibbe, who had been staring at him, suddenly wheeled on the United States man and yelled, "Wait a minute, I'll make him chatter!"

He whipped out a gun and stuck it into Wallie's side.

"Talk!" he said, "talk! Y'u ain't got that grin on yore map just to be laughin'. Spurt out the history!"

"Them cows ain't diseased."

"But I saw the raw blotches, and the purple and pink areas in their mouths. There was every indication," sputtered the inspector.

"Ya'as, sir," replied Chugwater, "y'u see I give them cows, or some of 'em, three doses of that air stuff called copperas, mixed with the feed. Then when they belches up their cud, why y'u see, sir, that air old green vitriol went sure-enough-for-hell to work on the mouth lining. It was a plumb good scheme, I figgered, to stop them Mexican votes from gettin' across the river. I wasn't aimin' on bein' able to do what Colonel Buford done went an' did. I thought they'd be a lotta killin' that-away."

"Well by God," wailed Kibbe, "now ain't y'u played hell on the old U. S.? Y'u oughta be ashamed o' yo'se'f!"

**W**HEN the moon came up that night Lettie and Chugwater walked out among the trees and he pointed to the roaring Rio Grande flowing full-banked below them like some luminous monster highlighted and wriggling through the hills.

"Shore is pretty," he said.

The girl made no reply.

"How come Manuela to be with these crooks," he asked out of sheer shyness and for the want of something to say.

"Luis Perez compelled her to follow him, for he was afraid of her when she was out of his sight. And he had reason to be. It was Luis who killed the son of her sister, who was my old nurse. Wouldn't you like to know how old that boy was? The color of his hair? And where Manuela was christened? And how long she has been an old maid? And what father said when he got that bloody piece of hide? And what I have done with the Criss Cross joke Willie Wainright wrote? And if the

law and order citizens will elect their ticket tomorrow? Oh——!"

She struggled half-way to her feet when Wallie laid a hand on her arm and forced her back at his side.

"When I heard them cows a-bawlin', y'u said something as I hot-footed from the cabin. If I ain't got the lyin'est ears of any white man out of Kentuck, then I dares y'u to repeat them words! I'll show y'u. I shore will show y'u!"

"Look into these two eyes!"

She upturned her face and expanded her eyelids.

"You told me once, that eyes never lied. Now, do they?"

"Let me see," he murmured, and lit a match. As its light flared up a new universe was revealed to him.

He flung away the match and folded her into his arms.

How long they sat in that delightful madness they never knew. But the moon traveled on and on till it dropped the tree shadows in long and purplish images upon the ground at their feet.

Buford, missing his child, came in search for her; and as he stepped gingerly over the earth he saw how greatly she was occupied. He stopped suddenly as he heard Wallie say, "No, ma'am, Lady Lettie, honey, it ain't a-goin' to be any such of a time. No June for me! I'm goin' to take that five thousand dollars, an' six months' diggin', an' learn old Chugwater how to talk. I'm goin' to be eddercated, plumb fancy. For I've got a podner what is a podner, an' I don't never want for her to be shamed of me."

"It'll be June, Chugwater, you old dear. Early in June! And if there is to be any learning, I'll learn you grammar and how to talk, just like you have learned me how to love."

Buford stepped on a twig.

Lettie sprang to her feet and rushed into his arms.

"Oh, Dad," she cried out of an exuberance of emotion, "say something, Daddie! Can't you see how happy I am?"

"My boy!" spoke the old man, with a trace of a gulp in his voice as he reached out a hand.

Out of the pifton there came the wail of a dwarf-owl.

"Who?" it moaned. "Who?"

"Me! y'u feather-whiskered, wise old son-of-a-gun!" laughed Chugwater, and grasped Buford's hand in the powerful grip of his fingers.



# THE CRICKET

By HOLMAN DAY

*Author of "Barrateers," "A Case at Castonia," etc.*

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HE WAS A WOODSMAN, WAS THE CRICKET, AND LOOKED ON LIFE AS A JOYOUS ADVENTURE. BUT ONE THING HE FORGOT—THE TENACITY OF A MAN WITH A BULLDOG GRIP ON A GRUDGE. YET EVEN THAT GRUDGE WAS TO DIE AWAY IN THE SHADOW OF THE FORESTS AND THE GREAT TREES WERE TO LOOK DOWN ON A MIRACLE IN THE WORKING OUT OF DESTINY

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## I

OUT of the black forest of Riviere du Loup leaped young Charlot Belleau.

He emerged from the shadows into the broad valley of the Chaudiere whose waters, fretted by boulders and boiling in pools at the foot of cataracts, had suggested the river's name to the pioneers.

And like the waters did the blood of Charlot's yearning body boil! He sought adventure, opportunity, life, gaiety. He had rebelled all of a sudden. He had broken away from duty self-imposed. In order not to think backward he merely looked ahead for the moment, assuring himself that he was doing the right and proper thing, after all.

Out in the sunshine of the Chaudiere he permitted the glory of new prospects to flood out of him the shadows of repentance. And why should he harbor repentance? Had he not slaved for others until he had almost lost the right to his nickname. The Cricket? Who could feel like leaping and dancing and singing after the long days with the ax? And the big trees were laced overhead to keep out the sunshine, and the great trunks seemed everlastingly marching and countermarching like grim soldiers intent on barring his escape to the world outside. Charlot's fancies made them such! He was imaginative, volatile, sub-

ject to prankish whims. His thoughts were leaping in lively fashion, just like crickets.

And now he had rushed out past the threats of the barrier of the solemn trees; he laughed when he waved them a taunting adieu.

He looked up smilingly at the sun and then gazed thankfully across the rolling meadows of the broad valley. He eased his knapsack upon his shoulders and from a velvet sack, side-slung, pulled his violin; its music was the jolly chirp of *Le Criquet*.

His collie ran frenziedly around him, rolled over and over, arose and scampered some more, transported with delight at this, his first, experience in the open fields.

Charlot responded to his comrade's show of exultation. With his violin against his breast he danced down the long slope of the lea and sang his liveliest *chanson*.

So he came to the broad ribbon of the highway, the King's Road, the international thoroughfare which extends from the Border all the way down the Laurentian slope to Point Levis, opposite Quebec. He was absorbed in his joy. He did not note that automobiles were halting in the highway, that their occupants were surveying him with interest.

He danced down to the side of the road, singing, and was startled when he beheld the strangers—overwhelmed with confusion when they clapped their hands,

"More!" They called, men and women. "More music!"

He shook his head and swapped apologetic glances with Joie, the collie, for whom Jollity now seemed a misnomer. The dog cowered, frankly afraid of the strange vehicles.

"Come here, son!" called a man, beckoning. When Charlot stepped meekly to the side of the car the man stuffed a bank-note into the youth's hand. "Now go to it!"

"I play for the fun, m'sieu', only for fun," stammered Charlot, brokenly.

"Don't do anything in this world for fun only, when you can get cash for doing it," warned the man. "Make that your motto."

And as Charlot had come from the big black woods to seek fortune as well as to see the world, he paid deference to this advice from the wise man of the outside who could afford to ride in such a wonderful machine and could carelessly give a crisp bill to a stroller who took his fancy. Charlot, let it be understood, was not seeking money for himself by this adventuring into what lay beyond the woods; he hoped to find money—yes. But it was so that he might salve with it the situation he had left behind him in the woods.

He tucked the money in his sash and swept a deep salute, arms extended, violin and fiddle-bow in his dipping hands.

"Look how graceful—and the way he's dressed!" chattered a woman. "It's like something on the stage or in a picture."

Charlot's heart jumped and there was a flush under his tan. How silly it had been to wait so long before testing the world outside. Sunshine and green fields! Money from a man and compliments from a woman almost before his eyes were wonted to the sun-glare! Surely he had been wise to fare forth. Now he could do much, in the right and better way, for the folks he had left behind him. It had been wisdom, not desertion of duty. He could make them glad back there in the woods, thankful because Charlot knew the best way and was not merely the thoughtless cricket they had twitted him with being.

So the joy of life flared in him again. The fires had been fluttering and dying, back there in the dim woods.

He played for the strangers his best tunes and sang to the music and danced on the meadow sward beside the great highway. And other cars halted and the folks tossed money which he did not hurry to pick up. His dog sniffed at it and

frisked around the leaping master and barked joyously as if he knew that fortune was at last on its way.

Then the motors hummed and the merry folks rolled on.

"It is all very good and wonderful, this world outside, Joie, *bon ami!*" laughed Charlot, putting the money away. "So soon the fine things have begun to happen for us. And now let us skip along on our tiptoes to see what we shall see. It will be gay, eh, my Jollity?"

## II

KEEPING discreetly to the extreme side of the road, Josué Laliberte trotted his little white nag, taking to the fair at St. Chrysostome in his two-wheeled cart the wooden toys which he had whittled. He, too, dwelt in the big woods of Riviere du Loup.

He scowled and muttered when he beheld Charlot and Joie on the highway ahead of him.

He spoke out when he pulled his horse to a walk, overtaking the young man. "So at last you have run away from your duty, eh? I do not ask you to ride with me. I will not help you in the bad thing you are doing."

Charlot flung the sunshine of his gay smile into the scowl on the old man's wrinkled face. He danced along beside the slow-moving cart. "But, anyway, I would not cramp my legs in your foolish little wagon, Josué. See, they are too lively!" He leaped high and kicked above his head and whirled about.

"Bah! *Le criquet sotto!*" growled Josué.

"Yes, the foolish cricket who has stayed too long in the dark woods."

"How can you dance and grin, *fripou*? Yes, you are a rogue. You leave your honest brother to fight alone, so weak and sick he is, and always will be so, unless the good saints give him back his health. He and his wife and the seven children—how will they find food now? Have you no shame?"

"Yes," confessed Charlot, sobering. "It's a cloud that keeps whisking across the good, gay sun up there. I keep pushing the cloud away."

Then he brightened, his quick emotions always tumbling over each other, brisk hope ever wrestling with sombre thought. He pulled money from his pocket, bills and coins. "See, Josué, so soon! All this. And there'll be much more."



"Not honestly do you get that money so soon," protested the old man, though his keen eyes gleamed avariciously. "One must work with patience to get honest money."

"Like you whittle all day and half the night on your toys, some silly bauble to sell to a child? Not for me!" taunted Charlot. "In just a few minutes I earn all this, only by dancing and singing. And now I go to earn some more."



"It is not honest money, got that way by your prancing legs and not with your hands," insisted Josué. "It will bring much trouble—that money. Now you chirp very high, *M'sieu' Le Cricket*. You will mourn very low a bit later."

"Pooh, for your cawing, old crow! Do you stay at St. Chrysostome all the days of the fair?"

"Yes," admitted Josué. "I must sell my toys."

"I'll have money and many things to send back to my brother Elie by you; and I'll pay you for taking the things—if you're not afraid and think the black magic is on my money," said the young man, vauntingly and with sarcasm. "You will see me at the fair. Yes, you will hear much of me. They all will like my dancing and my music. And maybe," he added in his boastful confidence in the future, "I'll buy the toys you have not sold and I will toss them to the children—like this." He pirouetted and flung his hands gracefully.

Josué grunted his disgust and whipped his horse into a trot.

"He is like all the others who stay too long in the woods," declared Charlot to Jolity, grinning widely into the attentive visage of the dog whose extended jaws seemed to give a smile in response. He allowed the collie to sniff at the money, unclosing his palm. "It will bring trouble to me, eh?" Old fool Josué! Only because it was not earned with the ax? Only because I did not stay in the woods and earn it for Elie and Flore and the children? I will earn more for them out here. They shall see. Come along, Joie. We go to find money and have much fun."

Old Josué turned to look as he went out of sight over a dip in the broad road.

*Le Cricket* leaped high and waved his arms, intent on teasing the gloomy ancient who had reproached him.

## III

CHARLOT sauntered at last into the village of St. Chrysostome. He admired the great arch which spanned the highway. It was wreathed with bunting and, in letters made of the evergreen of shrubs, was spelled, "*Bienvenue*."

"Thank you!" he said, flinging a salute to the word. "Your welcome makes me feel much at home."

It was all so festal, everywhere. There were rows of booths and tents. He loved music. It sounded all about. It was a rude melody, almost cacophony. But his woodsman's soul was thrilled by the emotions that such prodigality of melodies aroused. A hoarse mechanical organ squalled in the midst of the flying horses of the carousel. Inside tents the flutes squealed and tom-toms were beaten. His blood responded to the primitive appeal of this exciting sound. He did not know what was the matter with him. This was surely a new and wonderful and stirring world, after the silence of the big woods.

The dog was apprehensive and carried his tail low and glanced about with evidences of much concern.

But Charlot was exalted—felt very bold—became eager for derring-do and real adventure. There was so much in the world—he became thirsty in his craving for all—he desired to drink deeply of this new experience. He went where there was assembled the largest crowd—to a platform in front of a striped tent. Several girls were standing on the platform and a loud-voiced man was extolling them coarsely.

Charlot blushed when he saw their short skirts. He was a true man of the woods, and his Gallic chivalry respected all womankind. He frowned as the man talked on.

Then he was shocked, almost horrified. He recognized one of the girls. She was Elisiane Fortier. She had been his neighbor in the woods; her folks were honest people.

Charlot had felt no regret when she had gone into the world. He was glad, because she had courage enough to venture. She had merely put into action what he had long wanted to do.

He felt no thrill of joy when he beheld her here. He was conscious only of grief. There never had been anything except careless friendship between him and Elisiane. There never could be anything else, he was sure. But she was from the woods—his own home place. He resented the



leering glances of the crowding men. She had daubed paint upon her face. He was sorry to see that. What a shame for the Fortiers! Old gabbling Josué would carry gossip of this, be sure of that.

Charlot's emotions were keyed high that day. He took no heed, in his concern for her, of place or occasion. "Elisiane," he called, "run and hide yourself or your folks will be shamed. Tatling Josué Laliberte is here."

The crowd howled laughter. The barker cursed. The girl hopped in sudden panic. Then she got control of herself and simpered at Charlot and shrugged her shoulders.

"I am sorry for you," he persisted. "It will be a bad story to go back to your good folks."

She made up a face at him. "Go and squeak somewhere else, *Le Crique!*"

The throng took up the nickname and made much of it in ridicule and sarcasm.

The girl joined with them. "And come up here, M'sieu' Cricket, and do your dances! Oh, gentlemen, he is very lively with his feet. All his wits are in his toes—so 'tis said about him in the place from which he comes."

Men seized upon Charlot and kicked away the growling, snapping dog who tried to defend his master. They heaved their captive high and tossed him upon the platform. Some of them commanded him to dance; others called to the girls to kiss him and cure him of his foolishness.

To Charlot's horror they obeyed and smeared their carmined lips on his cheeks. The onlookers guffawed when he fought the girls to keep his lips from theirs. Then the barker interfered and pushed Charlot off the platform. He fell upon a burly man and bore him to the ground in his fall.

The man rose first and dragged up the Cricket and cuffed him soundly.

Charlot pulled himself away and made sure, first of all, that his precious violin was not harmed.

"I have a mind to crack that fiddle over your head," snarled the burly man. "To pay for half cracking my ribs, you blundering fool."

"I couldn't help it—I was thrown on you," stammered Charlot.

A man was anxiously and cautiously feeling the big individual over, asking questions. The subject of the investigation kept growling oaths, working up more fury.

"You came near making it a very bad job on a man who needs all his bones safe

and his muscle good," confided a bystander to Charlot. "That's the great champion, Tom Moriarty, who has promised to meet all comers at the fights of the fair."

The pugilist winced and cursed under the prodding fingers of his manager. "And did you hear the shrimp butting in and trying to get my girl off the hooks—telling her the folks would be ashamed of her?"

He gave Charlot a vicious stare; the young fellow did not flinch. His cheeks were smarting cruelly. His pride was stinging him, too. He was getting back some of his courage and poise, recovering from the confusion of his involuntary appearance before the public and his treatment on the platform; the onslaught by the girls had upset him more than had the cuffing by the pugilist.

"How do you dare to speak to my girl?" demanded Moriarty. "Insulting her!"

"You do her the insult, allowing her to be gaped at by all these men," retorted Charlot stoutly.

"Lookit!" roared the fighter. "The dam' grasshopper—or whatever it is they call him—dares to talk back to me!" He broke away from his manager and lurched toward the young man. "I guess you don't know who I am."

"This gentleman has just told me," said Charlot, lifting his chin and meeting the glaring eyes. He broke in on the other's ferocious oaths. "If I hurt you I ask pardon. It was not my fault, though. But for warning Elisiane Fortier I ask no pardon, m'sieu'."



"And that's the main point, and it's for that you are going to ask pardon," retorted Moriarty sneering the last word.

"Don't hurt him, Tom," pleaded the girl, suddenly serious.

Now jealousy was added to the flame in the brute. This fellow for whom she asked mercy was from her home, eh? Her lover in the woods, was he? Probably!

Moriarty doubled his fists. Then he grinned evilly, cast side-glances at the bystanders, and unclosed his hands. He lifted his broad, open palms. "Oh, I won't risk cracking a knuckle on you, little cricket! I'm saving my fists for my real business. But come here and take your spanking."

This jovial tolerance caught the crowd; they had begun to mutter their protests at a threatened fight between antagonists so illy matched. There was much hilarity. "Take your spanking, Cricket!" was the chorus.

A strange pallor settled on Charlot's tense features.

He had acted for the girl only in the spirit of friendship and natural chivalry. Now they were making a jest of it all. His woodsman's pride was hurt. In the woods a real man did not take a beating without doing his best for himself in the affair.

And now the uplift of new world-adventure was in his blood. Here and there the tom-toms were beating. It was old stuff to Moriarty—it was strange incitement for Charlot. "Look here, M'sieu' Two-fists, you are making the fight. I do not want to fight."

"You'll get down on your knees and beg me for pardon about the girl, then. You'll also beg her pardon for your saying she has done anything to be ashamed of."

"No, m'sieu'. I have said my say as to that."

"Then you're due for the licking of your life."

Charlot paid no heed to warnings and urgings by the bystanders.

When Moriarty lunged at him the young man slipped off his knapsack upon which Joie promptly flung himself as guardian.

Charlot dodged around and entrusted an onlooker with the violin. Moriarty was reaching for his victim with eager, clutching hands. Charlot eluded the pursuer and jumped backward. Doubled forward, the pugilist rushed at him, disdaining to maintain any defense of his person.

Charlot was shod with paces, a sort of moccasin of heavy rawhide, without hard soles.

He leaped high in air, half turning and struck Moriarty full in the temple with the right foot. The prize-fighter grunted, fell on his face and rooted his nose in the soil. Partially stunned, he lay there for a moment. When he struggled to his knees he bellowed, "What kind of fighting do you call that, you damnation barnyard rooster?"

"You have your way to fight—I have mine," replied Charlot.

The pugilist's manager rushed forward and helped Moriarty to his feet. "Call it off, Tom! Don't risk getting hurt. What in the devil does this Quedaw know about ring rules? His tribe fights with their

feet. They have a name for it."

"Yes, m'sieu'," volunteered a man in the crowd. "It's the *coup de pied*."

"I don't care what you call it," raved Moriarty, feeling his reputation at stake. Who would pay money at the gate of the arena tent in St. Chrostome to see a man who had been worsted out there in public by one who had been laughed at as the Cricket? He shouldered the manager away. "I can lick any man, any way. I don't care if he's got more legs than a centipede."

"You ain't going to make a fool of yourself for nothing," clamored the manager, sticking to his professional ethics. "Besides running a risk of getting out of condition!"

Charlot had not lost his pallor; he was breathing quickly. "M'sieu', I ask you to call it square between us now!"

"Damn you, I haven't started yet," bawled Moriarty, lashing up his rage. He flung his manager away with such force that the man went rolling under the feet of the crowd. Again he rushed at Charlot.

This time the pugilist was more wary. When Charlot leaped Moriarty was ready to grab the right leg. But Charlot merely feinted with that foot, seeing ahead the intent of the adversary; he kicked with his left foot, squarely in the face of Moriarty, and sent him reeling backward. The manager was in the way, on his hands and knees. Moriarty was tripped and fell heavily on his back.

In a flash Charlot, now flaming with anger, fairly beside himself in the surging of his quick emotions, leaped on the prostrate figure and began to pummel Moriarty with fists which toil with the ax had hardened.

The manager, full of alarm for his chief asset, leaped to his feet and kicked Charlot. The crowd howled protest at this combination of two men against one. Men rushed on the manager and hustled him to one side, out of the press. As he was dragged away he yelled, over and over, "Come along, Tom! Don't waste yourself like a fool."

Moriarty, getting back wind and wits, easily heaved Charlot away, only the young man's agility saving himself from a blow which would have cracked his skull.

The pugilist, after having been rolled twice in the dirt, was not much less than a maniac when he was again on his feet.

"Now I warn you, m'sieu'," cried Charlot, his shrill tones quavering. "I want no more fighting."

"You bet you don't," growled the cham-

pion, settling into the grim, ruthless savagery of a bulldog.

"If you keep on I'll stop at nothing," shrieked Charlot.

"Mister, he's become one o' them crazy Frenchmen—and you must have heard about 'em," warned a man in the crowd. "You'll show good sense if you quit!"

"What kind of a dam' nightmare is this, anyway?" snarled the prize-fighter. "Somebody telling Tom Moriarty to quit? After I've been kicked down twice?"

Then once more the girl pleaded. This time with the pugilist. "Tom, dear, listen to me. Don't get hurt."

This advice served as the bellows' draught to make the brute's fury white hot.

He had been striving to swagger in front of the girl, to increase her pride in his prowess. Her plaintive interference, indicating that she was afraid for him in this contest with one whom she had been laughing at as the Cricket, served as a maddening goad. Roaring like a bull, he rushed at Charlot.

The nimbler adversary ducked under the swinging arms and before Moriarty could halt his rush and whirl to defend himself, Charlot leaped high and from behind drove both heels against the thick neck.

The plug-ugly had become unpopular, there was no questioning the fact. The manager's act had started the resentment; the fighter's coarse oaths and his vengeful persistence in pursuing this little chap, who had been dragged into conflict, fanned the resentment into anger. No arms were reached to save Moriarty from a fall when he staggered forward. He tumbled on his face.

Pouncing like a wildcat, no longer thinking but acting on the instinct of the forest creatures among which he had dwelt all his life, Charlot relentlessly made himself safe from further attack. He came down with all his weight on Moriarty's arm, extended on the uneven earth, and the bone of the upper arm cracked with a muffled, portentous sound. Blended with the hog-squeal of the victim were the oaths of the manager, held on the sidelines. The girl leaped down from the platform and ran and kneeled beside the squirming pugilist.

Charlot turned from them. His mien was ominous. He had allowed himself to go to the extent of his fury; even after his victory he was controlling himself with difficulty. They who looked on him marked his dangerous qualities. They muttered among themselves.

"If any m'sieu' now has anything to say

to me, let him speak it out!"

They shook their heads.

When he retrieved his violin the man who had held it patted Charlot's shoulder. "He asked for what he got, son. I guess they'll lay off'm that nickname of yours from now on."

Joie wagged an applauding tail and surrendered the knapsack to the master. The two walked away.



Behind them Moriarty bellowed. His anathema was hideous. He rang changes on his vicious determination to get the damnation Canuck

good and plenty if he never did anything else in his life.

"And it looks like he'd have plenty of one thing—and that's time away from his regular job to attend to private matters," grumbled a man who followed Charlot out of the crowd. "What the blazes I'm going to do now in the way of a show, I don't know, damme if I do!"

Then his forehead cleared of wrinkles of puzzled despair and he hurried and overtook Charlot and clapped a hand on the stroller's shoulder. The young man whirled, posturing against threatened attack.

"You're a smart one, all right!" stated the man with a grin. "I can show you how to earn a good lot of money. You're after cash, of course? We all are."

"Yes, m'sieu'! I want to earn money."

"My name is Connick. That's my big tent over there. It's where Tom Moriarty was going to meet all comers. But you have spoiled my show. An idea has just come to me. You are much talked about right now. They'll all want to see the man who has licked the champion. I reckon I can dig up some other lads who are good at this foot fighting. I'll give out word that you'll meet 'em all. What say?"

Charlot shook his head. "No, m'sieu'! I fight to save myself from harm. I'll not fight for a show and for pay."

"But I'll give you a hundred good dollars right now in your fist. Later I'll hand you a slice of the receipts."

Charlot walked on. "No, m'sieu'. I'd be ashamed to fight for money."

"Then what else can you do?" queried Connick, following. "You have become a good attraction, all at once. You'll draw a crowd. But you've got to do something."

"I can sing the *chansons*—all the Cana-

dian boat songs. I can play on this." He patted his violin. "I can dance very fine."

"Oh, yes, I heard that girl say something about it." He made up a wry face. "It's a devil of a shift from a good fight, but I can make up a fighting bill out of the second-raters who were going against the champ. And you can do your stuff. You'll be worth a hundred to me, even if you do nothing but your fiddle tunes and your hop-and-skip. You'll pull in the crowd to see you, all right. Here's fifty—the rest later."

Charlot trembled with delight when he took the money, more money than ever he had seen all at once before. He promised to be in the tent that evening.

Then he sauntered on while he talked to Joie. "So quick have all the wonderful things happened, *bon ami*. Why did we hide in the woods so long?"

In his joy he gave small thought to the analysis of his situation. Fortune was flooding in on him. That was enough.

He would have been puzzled if somebody had pointed out that he had taken on the trials and perils of life in the outside world, along with the premiums. In the few hours since he had leaped into the sunshine from the shadows of the woods of Riviere du Loup he had become involved in the coil which makes a drama of existence. He had made his fortune, so it seemed to Charlot, he had won fame in a world which had never heard of him till then; only a moment ago the man in the fine clothes had said everybody wanted to see Charlot Belleau; but the drama of life cannot be rounded out without an enemy. However, *Le Criquet* was giving little thought to the enemy. Had there not been a wonderful victory? That ended it.

But the enemy, while the surgeon attended to the hurt, gave all his thought to Charlot.

It was not malevolence which merely flamed high and furiously, promising to burn out soon. The fuel was too plentiful. Moriarty, piecing his maledictions with a few nouns and verbs, itemized his reasons for getting the Canuck good and plenty. Those reasons comprised about everything which could make for implacable grudge. Loss of prize money, loss of prestige, his girl insulted without redress, an arm which might keep him out of the ring for all time. And all on account of a bouncing bantam who fought with his feet!

In the midst of the diatribe came Connick, demanding fulfilment of the agreement as to the return of the forfeit money

which had been posted by both sides to guard against a broken contract.

Moriarty and his manager begged to be allowed to take back their money. They showed their empty pockets; they were flat broke; they needed the money to get out of town.

Connick railed at a pugilist who was so much of a fool as to risk the fortunes of all concerned. He heartlessly insisted on the terms of the contract.

"I can only half square myself by getting a new attraction. I've signed the Quedaw for his song and dance stuff." Connick was not afraid of a pugilist with a right arm in splints. "Even that shrimp will draw a bigger crowd than you can pull after this, Moriarty."

"Get me a gun," the fighter commanded the manager, when they were alone. "I'll shoot that Canuck when he steps into the ring tonight."

"Want to get hung on top of all the rest?" sneered the manager. "What you'll do is give me your watch and that diamond ring. We'll cash in and buy railroad tickets. I'm no good at hiking."

"I'll have you arrested if you touch 'em! I'm going to stick around in this section till I can eat a bantam—broiled!" declared the fighter, grinding his teeth.

"Stay if you want to. You're no good to me any more. Hope you're hung. I'll sell my own watch and get out. Good-by!"

Alone, sneaking into a rear seat that night, Moriarty watched Charlot dance and heard the simple songs.

He growled his disgust.

And the crowd in general did not seem to be entertained, particularly. That men were there to see the second-rate fighting, such as it was, did not serve entirely as an excuse for their lack of interest. It was a tame performance, there in the big tent—Charlot's untrained voice and the faint squeaking of the violin. Their curiosity regarding this man who had felled the mighty Moriarty was soon appeased.

Those songs and the music of the violin belonged in the open, demanded picturesque settings and the air of the unconventional—such as when Charlot came dancing down the lea, sincere and unstudied in his exuberance. The men and the women of the motor cars, caught by the spirit of the thing, had been the right kind of an audience.

Charlot frowned when the men in the tent yelled for him to kick high and show how he licked Moriarty. When they



drowned out his music by their clamorous demand that he fight somebody, Connick stopped the show and gave Charlot the rest of the money agreed on.

So Charlot went out into the night. He was not a bit discouraged. The money was in his pocket. Those men who wanted everybody to fight, who were they to judge



his songs?

"They are only fools, Joie," he assured the dog. "We are the wise ones. We get much money; now we go to find much more where the

folks hate fighting, as you and I do."

Moriarty, slipping out behind, loomed in the darkness when he hurried to intercept Charlot. "I can't do to you what I want to do, not here, not now. But I'm going to do it later. I'm a fair fighter, Canuck! They have always said that about me. I don't dare to talk about what's happened. I'd lose myself and go blooey! All is, look out for yourself. I'm going to get you good and plenty."

"I'll fight no more with you," insisted Charlot.

"It ain't going to be as you say! You've had your square steer from me. After this, any kind of a punch goes, see? That was a mouthful when you said it—'you have your way to fight, I have mine.' And there won't be any more talk. I ain't much of a talker."

He marched away into the shadows.

Just as he had dodged lightly from under discouragement in the tent, so now did Charlot put off dismay, shrugging his shoulders. As ever, he made a confidant of his dog.

"*Un coup sur la tête, Joie!* One, two, three fine cracks on his head did I give him. His wits are still rattling. Pooh! He'll forget after his sleep."

Charlot's emotions were quick, tricky, shutting; he could not understand the nature of Moriarty's one track mind—the tenacity of a bulldog grip on a grudge.

So Charlot, forgetting all troubles in the pleasing dreams of the night, went gaily about his projects the next morning, with money burning in his pockets. He was wholly absorbed—he did not even show especial interest in the ominous shadowing by his declared foe.

Moriarty drew his own conclusions from

what he saw of Charlot's doings; the Canuck was stocking up for a return to the woods.

For Charlot was buying recklessly. Not necessities! *Le Criquet*, in his Gallic flareback, intended to make Elie, Flore and the children happy with the things his own nature suggested—buying what he himself had always longed for in the forest. A talking machine first, with many songs and jolly tunes. Pictures, too, and lace curtains for the windows of the log house—it should be made pretty. And plenty of ribbons and some gay fabrics for Flore and the children; then a generous sprinkling of knickknacks and gewgaws.

Moriarty saw in these purchases probable material for some of Charlot's adventures among the woodland queens and the thought suggested Elisiane; then his grouch grew more bitter. The girl had flouted him that morning, having no more use for a maimed and discredited champion. Feeling sure that he understood what Charlot's future movements would be, and knowing he could locate his prey in the Riviere du Loup woods, Moriarty went to the village inn to ease his aching arm.

Charlot, making several trips to Josué's little booth, deposited his wrapped treasures and secured the old man's grudging consent to deliver them.

Josué hefted the various bundles and estimated them as shrewdly as their wrappings would permit. "If it's foolishness I will not take them. If it's food for their hungry mouths in the woods, it's my duty to carry them, even if they have been bought with money not honestly earned."

"It's all food, good Josué," pledged Charlot, carelessly flinging the lie—a lie that would sweep in its wide arc, as so many lies do, and deal disaster later on.

But prudence prompted Charlot in the matter of the grim Moriarty whose espionage had at last stirred apprehension during the morning. "Joie, he's a very black cloud," the master confided to the dog. "If he follows us he will keep away the good sunshine from us."

Therefore, Charlot sauntered slowly past the inn, singing. From the corners of his eyes he beheld the ugly face of his foe at the window.

Charlot trod briskly and openly on the way back toward Riviere du Loup. When he made sure, after a few miles, that the black cloud was not following, he took to the fields and avoided St. Chrysostome in his back tracks by a wide detour, going on toward the great river of which he had

heard so much. He had only a few coins to jingle in his pocket. But he was glad because the pocket was so nearly empty, reflecting on the happiness he was sending into the woods.

Moriarty was taking his own time about following. He remained in St. Chrysostome for several days.

He wanted to come across his foe later in a place where there would be less hazard of witnesses who could swear a man into the hangman's noose.

The fact was, Moriarty was living in sort of a nightmare. It had begun when a gnat had vanquished him; it persisted in his small mind, now that he had little else to do except meditate on revenge. He had been so high. Now he was nothing. The loafers laughed at him when he ventured forth from the inn.

He wanted to hide himself away from ridicule. The forest would be a refuge, at any rate. And he had a grinding hankering to come upon that Canuck in the woods.

Moriarty paid his inn reckoning and settled with the surgeon and fared forth for the woods of Riviere du Loup.

#### IV

**H**OPE for his fortune and faith in his way of getting it died hard in Charlot. But he came at last to know that fortune is fickle when one depends on favor instead of toil. He reflected on what old Josué had said and admitted that many years make for practical wisdom. And he realized, too, that his little songs and his dances belonged in the open instead of in the saloons of Levis by the waterside.

The autumn frosts had come and there was no longer any hope of interesting the passers along the broad highway. Their ears were muffled and they hurried. In the saloons indifferent men threw him pen-



nies. Such gifts were doles as if he were a beggar. It was not pay for honest music.

Charlot confessed to Joie that he was ashamed. The world was not at all what it had seemed to be on that first day of sunshine.

The clouds came dragging across the skies and the rains lashed the great river. Charlot sought for employment, but in the big town he found no work for the unskilled; there were no trees to be cut down; in the way of tools he knew only the ax.

To get bread for himself and a bone for the dog he went the rounds of the taverns.

Seeing so many men, he at last saw David Roi who was headed toward the Mistassini country in the north because the trapping in the region of Riviere du Loup was no longer good. David talked with Charlot. But the trapper stumbled awkwardly in his speech, looked aslant at the young man and mumbled when Charlot put eager questions about Elie and Flore and the children.

At last David became snappily wroth, showing the air of one who thinks he is being mocked. "Why do you make believe you don't know the bad thing what has happened?"

Charlot's goggling eyes and open mouth and paling face served as mute appeal and for proof that he did not know.

Roi blurted his facts ruthlessly. "Your brother is in jail for murder. And you didn't know that, hey?"

"No!" gasped Charlot.

"*Sacre!* You have been about here and there," Roi waved his arm, "and you don't hear that news so much talked about!"

"I sing and dance. I talk so little with men," waived the other.

"*Le Criquet!* Always so busy about your foolishness," scoffed the trapper. "Well, 'tis said your brother shot and killed Munson, the traveling paymaster for the crews of the Three Rivers Timber Company. For his money, so they say."

Charlot swayed on his feet and sat down at the little table opposite Roi, in the saloon. "But Elie did not do that—by the sacred thunder, no!"

"Oh, I do not much believe in it myself," agreed Roi, setting down his glass, "but it shows up bad against him, and he cannot hire the smart law chaps to hunt up the proof that it's not so. Elie needed money; so many mouths to feed after you left him sick and in the lurch. And then they found in his camp so many things he could never earn money to buy. There was a talking machine and——"

"I know," mumbled Charlot, groping for the words, trembling, all but fainting. "I bought those things myself. I sent them by Josué Laliberte. He knows. Why has he not spoken out?"

"He says you sent only things for them to eat. He swears that's so—you told him that."

The lie—how wickedly it had dealt with the little family in the woods!

"So they are keeping Elie in the jail at St. Francois," said David, naming the county seat nearest the woods of Riviere du Loup. "They will have his trial soon. I think they will hang him; he is only a poor man and the Three Rivers Company is rich. Poor men can't hire smart lawyers. And Elie had too many fine things in his camp—more than a poor man could explain away."

Then Roi went along on his journey because the bell was ringing at the Levis ferry house. He was in a hurry to go north before the big snows came.

Charlot stood up and sifted through his fingers the few coins in his pocket. He bargained with men in the saloon for the sale of his violin. One of them bought it; but he was not willing to give much. The sum was not enough to buy a ticket to St. Francois, so Charlot learned when he went to the wicket of the railroad station.

He looked down into the plaintive, sympathizing eyes of Joie.

"A nice dog," said the man behind the wicket. "I see you need more money. I'll buy him."

Charlot had long trod the road of sacrifice. It had been hard to do so in the woods. He had rebelled, and now see what had happened! His simple mind found rightful punishment in his present plight. He had leaped out into the sunshine to follow the tempting ways of ease and selfish delight. And now Elie was in prison because Charlot had been thoughtless as he always had been in spite of reproach. Charlot was in a mood to do his penance to the bitter dregs. "I must get the money, m'sieu', you may have my dog."

The man paid and came out with a rope and dragged the dog away.

Charlot was glad because his tears blurred his vision; he could not see Joie in the mist. He shut out the dog's pitiful cries, hands over ears, and hurried to the waiting train.

It went jerking slowly out of the station; it halted soon for a switch to be turned.

Charlot, close to the door in the smoking car, suddenly beheld an eager, appealing face at the door through the dingy glass; the dog was on his hind legs and was pawing at the glass. The master

rushed and opened the door and received Joie in his arms as the train started on.

"You must put that dog in the baggage car," said the surly conductor.

"Yes, m'sieu'! I'll go there and stay with him, if you'll allow."

"Suit yourself!"

"Thank you."

So Charlot rode, sitting on the floor in a dark corner, the dog's head on his knees. Joie kept whining softly while Charlot sobbed, unknitting the broken rope from the dog's collar. "We have not been honest with the man who paid the money, Joie. But I cannot take you back to him now. I must hurry to Elie at St. Francois. You and I, we broke our ropes to run away—and it's bad, very bad, Joie!"

## V

IN ST. FRANCOIS, trotting along the street toward the jail, Charlot felt the goad of desperate resolve. He was taking on himself the responsibility for Elie's plight; therefore, he was on fire with zeal. He would smash the walls of that jail, he would get Elie out!

But by the time he was inside those walls—he had begged so frantically to be allowed to see his brother—the sight of bars and bolts and clanking keys and iron doors had thoroughly bashed in him hope and spirit. He had never seen a jail before; he had not dreamed that such pains were taken to pen prisoners.

He wept with the abandon of a child when they brought Elie into the guard-room. Elie was a woeful figure. The poignant worry for a wife and children, left to make shift for themselves in the woods, had prostrated him more piteously than the illness aggravated by this confinement which wore cruelly upon a man accustomed to the open.

"Elie, you will die unless I get you out," wailed Charlot.

The guard growled and searched the visitor's pockets all over again. "No more talk about getting a prisoner out—or out you go, yourself, my fine fellow!"

They allowed Elie and Charlot to sit on two chairs which were held three feet apart by an iron rod.

"I have been thinking much, Elie," whispered Charlot. "We have good friends in the woods. There are the Beaulieus, the L'Abbes and many more. I'll bring them here; we'll find some way to break through and take you out."

"No, I would not have it happen that way," protested the prisoner. "I never

could go home. That's all I want—only to go home. Could I be happy, running and dodging and hiding here and there in the world?"

"I had not thought about that part," mourned Charlot.

Elie's temper flared. After being stricken with grief for so long he needed the relief of righteous anger, and here in his presence was the real culprit, according to Elie's indignant belief. "You never do any thinking about sensible things, *Le Cricket*! Did you think before sending us all those things which Josué brought?"

"Yes, I thought how happy they would make you and Flore and the children."

"And what do you think now, seeing all the trouble those folderols have piled on us?"

"I can tell the truth to the law men, Elie!"

"But honest Josué sticks to what you told him. You are my brother, and they'll say that now you lie to save me."

"Oh, Elie, they must set you free—they'll find you did not do any bad thing!"

"The law has its paid men to fasten the thing on me. I have no money to hire those who can find the truth for my sake."

"I have a little money in my pocket. I'll give it all to you."

"No! I'll not take it. If you have money carry it to Flore. Go to her quickly, Charlot. I stay awake all the nights, so crazy it makes me to think the children may be hungry."

After a pitiful silence, the prisoner continued. "Why have you been so long in coming? Why did you not hurry to Riviere du Loup?"

"I heard only this very day! David Roi told me in Levis. Now," Charlot declared stoutly, "that job of finding the truth for your sake is mine."

He spoke almost joyously. He might be able to serve and to repair his fault, after all!

"I tell you, you shall not," commanded Elie. "Then Flore and the children will have nobody to work for them. Promise me, Charlot, you will go to them as quick as you can, work for them, think only of them. If they keep me here, away from

the woods and my home in this slow justice, I shall die. But don't let me live in hell by not knowing you at least are with them. What would they do without you? Promise me, Charlot. You owe me that much to pay for your thoughtlessness. See! I call it by no worse name."

So Charlot promised in order to soothe an anguished soul. But he knew, when he looked on his brother's wan face and realized what confinement would do, that again he was swearing to a lie. Ready to do penance, he would have gladly taken his brother's place in prison, enduring stoically. In his thoughts, seeing only consequences, he was insisting on his soul guilt in bringing about the catastrophe. He felt he must solve the mystery of the real murderer, and expiate that guilt.

This dread punishment of the innocent roused in him a tumult of emotions, and when the time of his visit was up he went stumbling out to join Joie whimpering at the iron gate.

## VI

TO CHARLOT'S credit was it that he walked from the open fields back into the shadows of the woods of Riviere du Loup without regret. He was even glad because he was again among the sturdy trees, and they seemed to be protectors instead of sullen soldiers who barred his way.

His return struck a fleeting fire of joy from the flint of woe, when he flung open the door of the log house. But dolor and tears quickly dashed out the flash of joy.

Flore had no harsh words for him; out of her own volatile temperament she had always understood Charlot and had sympathized with his fancies. Her only reference to the incriminating gifts was in her appeal to him to take them away and sell them. "You meant all for the best, Charlot, but I cannot look at them any more."

So he went the rounds of the settlement's scattered houses and sold all the articles, though some of the folks shuddered a bit as if they were trafficking with things bought by blood; but, on the other hand, they avowed their belief in the innocence of Elie.

Charlot's real stumbling block was Josué Laliberte, whittling at toys like a Santa Claus and shaking his head and wagging his white beard. "No, Charlot, I shall stick to what you told me was in the wrapped packages. I am one who prays to the saints and I could not kneel with a lie on my soul."





"But Elie has been nowhere to buy such things."

The old man squinted inimically at the rattle-brain who had sauced him so many times. "Oho! So say you who do not know? Well, Elie borrowed my horse and cart. To go to the Omis tract after stock for his ax handles and yokes, so he said! And a day or so later the body of the paymaster was found in the woods where it had been lying under the fallen trees for a week or more. So, you see, you don't know all things, you who have your wits in your toes instead of in your noddle."

"And you'll say all that at the trial, will you?" demanded Charlot hotly.

"I don't tell any lies," returned Josué, creasing with his sharp tool a simper into a doll's face.

Charlot yanked the grinning toy from the maker's hand and flung the taunting image violently into a corner of the shop. It was only partial satisfaction of his ire; but he could not bring himself to cuff the ears of a man so old as Josué.

This sensible control of rampant desire brought a reward to the Cricket, of a sort. Old Josué came to the door and called to Charlot when he was stamping away across the yard of the shop.

Josué crooked an inviting finger and winked significantly and the young man obeyed the summons, returning in a sullen mood.

The old man was more amiable; he had satisfied his pique; he had, as he put it to himself, set the bumptious young chap where he belonged. "But you know I'm sorry for Elie. He has had to put up with so much from others, not calling names. I don't think he killed the paymaster, even if he had the chance to do it, but the law puts much weight on a killer having the chance and needing money."

"Of course, Elie did not kill a man," stormed the brother.

"I always stick to the truth, though it may be bad for others. Now I give you some more truth. I, too, was after hard wood one day in the Omis tract. I heard a gun shot. Then I heard two men having a great fight with tongues and fists. So I hid in a tree, to be safe.

"Then, in a little while, I saw one man go limping, his face all bloody. Ah, he had a fine whipping! Then I saw another man go off another way. It was the big fighter-man. Ah, you made a fine fool of yourself with him at the fair!"

"Then you must go to the law-men—you

must say all that at the trial," urged Charlot with fire.

The crafty old man winked. He shook his head. "Those two wicked men are still loose in the world. I do not run the risk!"

"And my poor brother is locked up and cannot harm you when you swear against him! You're a bad old man, Josué!"

"I'm old and feeble and I cannot fight bad men who are loose."

"How about your truth-telling you brag so proudly about?"

"If I must lie at times to save myself from harm, then I do my penance as the curé orders. That is all I have to say to you, *Le Cricket!* You go find those two bad men and make them tell what is the truth. That's a fine job for you. That you can save your brother—as you ought, after getting him into such a mess."

Josué slammed the door of his shop and dropped the bar.

*Le Cricket* looked out into the sunshine above the trees and got no comfort from the glory.

Two bad men to search down and from them wrench the truth!

He was glad because one was Moriarty. As a creature moved always by impulse, he instantly plunged into the quick belief that the savage swaggerer who would fight in the ring only for money would do almost anything else for money. He lashed himself into full belief that Moriarty had killed the paymaster. It was good to have one object on which to center all his furious attempt to save his own people. Thus, two men were abroad in the world, both filled with the spirit of vengeance.

The sale of the incriminating articles had brought enough money so that the children would not be hungry while a search for the truth could be made in the world, and Charlot gave all the money into Flore's hands.

Then he put himself to asking many sly questions in addition to those he had already put as he made the rounds.

Yes, the big man had been seen in the woods of Riviere du Loup, here and there, many times. He said he had grown to like the woods, excusing his staying on. When the splints were off his arm he had practiced with the ax. Then he had hired as a chopper. From one and another Charlot gleaned these bits of information. It was guessed, rather than known, that the big man had hired for the Megantic cuttings. He was very sly in his going away; he had not told anybody what he intended

to do. But such a blustering, cursing man would be likely to pick upon the Megantic cuttings, so the talk ran, because wild Jock Britten was boss of a camp there and in-



ited just such savage men as Moriarty seemed to be. It was the boast of Britten that he liked to welcome law-breakers because that kind would be obliged to stay with him and work. They were safe with him, he declared to all,

therefore his attitude was well known in all the region. He boasted that never had his crew allowed a law officer to take out a man from his camp.

All this did Charlot learn—and he had heard of Jock Britten's vicious crews.

Nevertheless, he went down to the edge of the woods of Riviere du Loup, to the hiring-office of the Megantic company, and presented himself with his ax and made the chips fly handsomely when he tackled the much-hackled test stump at command of the agent.

"You'll do," said the man. "I always like a really spry Frenchman for the woods. You may take your pick of our four camps. There's Jock Britten's——"

"I'll go there!"

"You'll be in a tough gang, young fellow. There's even a prize-fighter who wants to tackle every newcomer so as to keep his muscle up."

"But I'll go, if you'll allow."

"Suit yourself," said the man carelessly.

Then Charlot pleaded the cause of Flore and the children and asked for an advance of wages.

"Well, if you haven't broken a law and don't need Jock's camp as a hiding place, I may as well nail you to the job by an advance," assented the agent.

Charlot hurried back to Flore with the money; he gave her a written order to go to the agent for more of his wages as earned. Perhaps he would be obliged to work for a long time. It might not be easy to get very soon what he wanted from Moriarty, but he felt glad that he could be on his trail, and still keep his promise to his brother. He said nothing at all to Flore about the big man, and she perceived only the natural thing in his hiring as a chopper.

He went away with the grateful kisses of the family on his lips.

He was able to leap gaily and send them back a cheerful laugh before he turned into the lane of the big trees.

## VII

IT WAS not gay, that trudging for so many miles along tote-roads and by tortuous trails.

The skies were slatey and there were hard, steel-gray banks in the south, promising the first snows very soon. And at the end of the trail, so Charlot knew, would be waiting something very grim and grisly.

He looked over his shoulder every little while. The trunks of the trees crowded themselves together, so it seemed, making serried ranks to close in, to shut off his retreat. But more and more the hatred for Moriarty burned in him, and he fed the fire with fuel of assurances to himself that the enemy must have done the deed which had brought so much woe on Elie and the family.

He came upon other men who were bound, from here and there, into the Megantic cuttings. They warned him sympathetically when he said he was heading for Britten's camp. This one and that, sheering off the trail to Britten's, urged him to come along.

"You're a little chap. You seem to be a good man. Those bad fellows will eat you up."

But he lifted his chin valorously and kept on.

IT SEEMED quiet enough when Charlot came into Britten's clearing just as the twilight was settling into black darkness; he had trotted for several miles in order to distance the night.

He was panting for breath when he presented himself before Britten in the office camp, and tendered his credential slip from the agent.

"You sure act like a willing chap, Canuck, running to get here to your job; you may not be so glad you're here—a fellow of your size," averred the grim Britten. "But maybe you're like all the rest—ready to run their legs off so as not to miss a meal."

He put the paper in his wallet. "And what are you running away from? Who have you killed?"

"I have never hurt anybody! I'm an honest man, m'sieu'."

"You don't fit in this gang then! But I see the agent has nailed you by an advance.

If you try to run away from me you're a goner. Remember that! You're here to work out your time, Canuck, no matter what kind of a razz you get from the gang."

The cookee's shrill call cut the silence outside. "Gru-u-u-b on the ta-a-a-able! Who-o-o-oo! Grub on the table!"

"Better hustle in and get your setting! Else you'll have to dab and pick over somebody's shoulder."

But Charlot disobeyed his first command from Britten, delaying about entering the meal camp.

When the young chap was out in the darkness, trepidation shook him. Warnings—warnings, it had all been warnings! Even Joie was whining now at his feet.

Had this been merely his own affair—only himself to suffer—he would have slunk away into the night, and he knew it!

But limned there before his staring eyes was the memory-picture of his brother, wan and shattered, surely to be killed by confinement in the slow course of justice, and the uncertainty of a murder charge unless Charlot made his best haste.

"No!" he said to Joie. "By the good God, I will stay here to do what can be done!"

But he lingered many minutes in the shadow of one of the horse hovels, before he could gather courage to go into the presence of the crew.

Joie dodged in at the master's heels and went to take a patient post in a corner, waiting for a dole.

Charlot stood for a few moments, meekly surveying the double rows of eaters at the long table, searching for a crevice where he might squeeze in. The men grinned and muttered and shouldered together on the benches. Evidently they intended that any newcomer should "make his bigness" by a show of prowess of some sort.

But Charlot was more interested in a foe than in food. His eyes sought and found Moriarty. The young man was nerving himself for instant trouble. He expected to be assailed by oaths and threats. If Moriarty had leaped across the table and attacked then and there Charlot would not have been surprised.

But on the big man's countenance, after a twist of a queer, quick expression, there was slowly creased a grin; anybody except Charlot would have found it a friendly smile. But Charlot believed he knew what sort of ugly menace crouched behind that smile and he found the grimace sinister.

However, Moriarty's tone was welcoming and hearty when he called to Charlot to come around the table.

"And crowd over, you!" snapped Mori-



arty, roughly tipping over the men on either side of him. "Where 'n' 'ell's your manners, all of a sudden?"

It was plain that the prize-fighter had won his standing there in the camp. The men hastened to move.

"Step in here, stranger. Hurry up!" commanded Moriarty when Charlot came slowly. "You've got one friend in the gang, you see."

The newcomer straddled over the bench and, in spite of his best efforts to seem at ease, he cringed beside the burly man who kept up his grin, looking sidewise at the chap he ostensibly befriended.

Charlot had always dealt sparingly in guile; he did not understand such methods. This attitude of his foe wrought upon the young man's frank nature more cruelly than curses and direct attack, which he would have understood.

Promptly all the others were interested only in gobbling their food and gabbling their clamor of talk. Table ware rattled and voices were high. They paid no more attention to the new man in the crew.

Under cover of the noise Moriarty seized his opportunity. "Didn't know I was here, hey? Some surprise for you, hey?"

Charlot was too much perturbed to do crafty lying. And he had been finding lies dangerous. "I knew I'd find you here, m'sieu'. That's why I have come."

A few minutes later there was a general roar of laughter roused by a coarse story.

"You didn't come up here to get killed, Canuck!" growled Moriarty, taking advantage of the covert of hilarity. "What's your real reason for coming? Out with it! You've come for a reason." He laid down his knife and fork and strove to bore Charlot with a demanding stare. But after a few moments his eyes wavered under the steady gaze from the other. "You'll find out why I'm here! Yes, I think you know already."

The fighter went back to his food, but

his hairy hands shook. He grew pale. He glanced up and found Charlot's eyes accusing him.

Something strange was working in Moriarty, and Charlot perceived it. A man's level look and his few words had set the something in motion.

The two men went on with their food in grim silence.

"Hell, a dawg!" yelled the cookee, on his way to the table with a big can of tea. "Whose?" He knew perfectly well to whom the dog belonged. But he was impelled by an inipish desire to rasp the new man, to start something.

"Who had the gall to bring a dog in here where gents are eating?" shouted a man, affecting great indignation. "Kick that mutt out, cookee!"

"It's my dog," cried Charlot. "If he is not liked in here I'll take him out."

"I order him kicked out," insisted the objector. "Then he'll know better'n to come in here again."

The cookee set the can on the table and started toward Joie in the corner.

Charlot leaped over the bench and made all haste, intercepting the cookee, barring the way with an arm. The cookee, a husky young fellow, struck the arm down. A chorus of voices declared for the kicking. It was only a pretense of dislike for the dog, of course. It was seizing an opportunity to set two young fellows at each other for the sake of providing mealtime entertainment; it was a chance to give a new man some of the razz that was coming to him.

"You heard the orders, Quedaw!" blustered the cookee. "And orders go for me. Get out of the tote-ro'd!" He kicked at Charlot in the way of practice. The Cricket was not at a loss in all quick-as-flash tactics. He grabed the swinging foot and at the same time leaped forward and with his free hand drove a staggering blow under the cookee's ear. With blow and the quick hoist of the captive foot he piled the attacker heels over head and the cookee fell with a violence that knocked breath and sense out of him. Charlot stood over him when he opened his eyes. "Is it enough?" demanded the victor.

"I guess so," admitted the cookee, getting up stiffly. When he went limping back to his duties he called to Moriarty. "You haven't been giving me any line on that kind of fighting in your lessons."

"Don't you dare to call them tricks by the name of fighting," roared Moriarty in protest. "The damnation Canuck!"

"Hi! Look-a-here, Big 'Un," admonished one of the crew. "What has happened to that friendship all of a sudden?"

With difficulty, bethinking himself, Moriarty managed to work rage out of his contorted features and substituted his grin. "Oh, it makes me mad to see ring rules knocked a-hooting! No matter who does it. But as to my new friend—Canuck, I adopt your pup along with you. Come over here and get him a plate of grub." He pounded his fist on the table when men muttered. "Being a friend of mine, that dog is classy enough to eat over there in the corner. What I say goes! See?"

But the other men continued to mutter, apart from Moriarty, when they were back in the bunk house. It was plain enough that the prize-fighter had won his way there by violence and not by inspiring any liking.

"He's gitting too cocky," averred a critic. "Always wanting his own way, no matter how the rest of us feel. Now that he's fell so much in love with Frenchy, he'll probly try to stall us off if we want to give the freshie the reg'lar Britten bazoo!"

"We ain't going to break the biggest camp law only to please Moriarty," said a man, and he was endorsed in his stand by all.

"And this special bazoo will need to be a boomer," declared the spokesman, his voice incautiously loud. "Else the freshie will think he's running the place because he has linked the cookee."

Moriarty overheard. He came thrusting forward. "Nothing doing. See? There ain't going to be a bazoo for the new chap."

"Why not?" was the surly query. Men swapped a lot of understanding, scowling at each other, saying no word. This bumptious Moriarty, fairly new in camp himself, was certainly doing too much bossing! "Why not?" was the general demand, now that the issue had been made.

Moriarty merely cursed them. His ideas were somewhat mixed just then. He realized that he was having some difficulty in explaining to himself just why he intended to keep the young fellow from the hazards of a bazoo. Now that they were making plans for a "boomer" in order to teach the newcomer a lesson, the hazards were real. A poor chap had been killed only a few days before in the Britten camp—a death reported out to the authorities as an ordinary tripped-timber casualty; but hands had slipped from the edges of



the horse blanket in which the fellow was tossed.

Moriarty did not intend to have his man subjected to any such perils. Just then his notions were confused—but he venomously declared that what he said went! This career-wrecker, this fellow who just stirred in Moriarty a still mightier tumult of emotions by a few simple words and an accusatory stare, was not meat for amuse-



ment of that gang of roisterers. Moriarty had serious business of his own with the man who, on top of all the rest, had invaded the sanctity of the law-defying refuge.

Moriarty was in a frame of mind to mix it with the whole of them; by getting his ferocity out of his system in that manner he could content himself to take his own good and torturous time with the single victim. "I tell you, nothing doing. And that's why not!"

"How many of us do you think you can lick all at once, Moriarty?" asked a man vengefully.

"All of you. Come on!" He backed to the wall of the camp, rolling up the sleeves of his mackinaw.

His constant assumption of more and more authority in the camp had made him feared and had won for him a standing. But the grouch against him had been slowly developing. His sneer when he declared he would meet all of them suddenly torched the laid tinder of the grudge. They massed for a concerted attack; then they thought of better strategy and spread out in knots of two and three.

"I'm going to punch to kill," roared Moriarty.

Age now whirled in him like a torch. He did not wait for their onslaught. He dove away from the wall, the scattered knots suggesting his opportunity to him. He struck down men right and left before they had a chance to herd. Their blows glanced off him as he leaped here and there. He picked up victims whom he had knocked down and made missiles of their bodies, hurling them against his grouping assailants. Then he flung himself back to the wall to gain a respite, panting, sweating, cursing.

There was quick, mumbled conference among the men who were left standing.

There was malignant, ruthless agreement. Moriarty was using his tongue on them, threatening to kill. "I've got a right to do anything, with these odds," he yelled. "And I'll do it! So help me!" He stooped quickly and picked up an oak sapling. It was the poker for the barrel stove. The stick had been kicked about the room in the struggle.

The men rushed on him in a concerted attack, the leaders carrying a long deacon seat as a shield. He struck over the shield, knocking down man after man.

It was a dizzying swirl of struggling fighters, a piling forward, a tangle of retreat and new charges; nobody could see what the other man was doing.

All at once there was a porcine shriek from Moriarty. "I'm stuck! You've got me. I'm knifed! Hell on this kind of fighting!"

Instantly the crowd fell away from him; it was a tumult of retreat; the guilty man and the innocent associates were equally anxious to avoid the responsibility for a dirty trick.

Moriarty fell on the floor and writhed, screaming for aid.

Charlot had held aloof from the struggle. He was poised on a bunk, holding on to a stanchion.

Anguished fear swept through him now. Was he to lose this man on whom all the desperate hopes were placed? That was his first thought—his initial spur to action. Then he felt something like pity for this wretch abandoned to his fate. At any rate, the big man had been brave, taking on such odds.

Charlot leaped from the bunk, dragging his belt from its loops. He flung himself beside his enemy. Blood soaking through the trousers below the knee gave the Samaritan his grim hint for action. He dragged up the loose cloth and applied the tourniquet of the belt. He twisted it taut with all his strength while the victim wailed. The limb had been cruelly slashed. Charlot's poor knowledge of surgical aid stopped there. He pleaded with the other men. They shook their heads. They did not know how to do anything else, more than Charlot had done.

"You send for a doctor, to save his life, yes?" was the young man's eager plea to Britten. But the boss, like his men, shook his head.

"You will let me go? I will go. Yes!"

"Don't leave me, Canuck; they mean to get me!" quavered Moriarty. He set trembling hands around Charlot's leg. All

at once he had become broken and full of fear. In the revulsion of his emotions he made the strange choice of his enemy as



his aid and protector; there was nobody else to whom he could appeal. "Take me out of here, Canuck. Take me to a doctor."

"That's a good idea," affirmed one of the men.

The cookee, bringing more wood for the barrel stove, flung open the bunk house door. A whirl of snow followed him in; the promise of the slatey-gray cloudbanks had been kept.

"The devil isn't playing in with his pet on this thing," sneered a man. "He has sent a snow-storm—and you'd better not to tackle it, Canuck."

"M'sieu', the good God has sent the snow," declared Charlot. "It's to make the runners of the sled slip all fine!"

"Yes, if you can find your way," said Britten. "But you can't find it, Frenchy. No man can do it."

"Perhaps a man cannot, m'sieu'." Charlot leaned and patted Joie's head; the dog had come sidling close to his master. "But here I have my good friend who knows how better than any man."

The hostile individual who had mumbled, and who had protested against the going, shuffled near. Charlot was bending over Moriarty, buttoning the mackinaw.

"Watch him! Don't let him get near me, son," whispered the victim. "Damn him, he knifed me. That's Dawse Wadden. Remember him—he stuck me!"

Charlot appealed to the crew, kneeling beside his charge and protecting him. The volunteer asked for a sled, for a lantern, for blankets.

A few moments later Moriarty had been wrapped in the blankets and was laid on the moose sled. By Charlot's direction the lantern was slung from the dog's collar.

Then into the night and thrusting through the storm went the little expedition.

## VIII

CHARLOT did not mark the hours and was only guessing at time.

But he knew he was very weary and he was glad to stop when Moriarty begged to be eased on the sled. "And I'm

all of a chill, son. I guess I'm dying.

"I think it's the cold of the night, m'sieu', and because you lie so still on the sled. We shall help that feeling!"

He broke dry limbs from the slash scattered beside the tote-road and built a fire at which he warmed his charge, turning the heavy body tenderly so that it might be soothed in all its parts by the heat. Then he filled the big man's pipe and held a flaming twig to the tobacco.

"I guess I ain't going to die if we get to that doctor in time," admitted the wounded man, now finding solace in his pipe. "I'll stand the ache. I won't whine any more."

Charlot crouched at the fire beside the dog. The young man was silent, trying to straighten out his thoughts. He had his man at last, to be sure, but he had not won his victory by any real effort of his own. The prisoner had delivered himself, begging like a child to be helped. After all, so ran Charlot's thoughts, it would be something like betraying a trust if he delivered this man to the law. And Charlot realized that he possessed none of the actual knowledge which the stern law would require. Puzzlement and a sense of honor were curiously mingled in his thoughts.

Moriarty suddenly started to speak. It was startling in the silence and Charlot jumped; the other had so surely hit upon the sensitive spot. "Well, son, you've got what you came to Britten's to get. You've got me. Now what are you going to do with me, after the doctor mends me up into something you can use?"

"I don't know, m'sieu'."

"Well, what *do* you know, anyway? You handed me a dam' queer look when we were sitting at table tonight! What's the big idea of chasing me to Britten's?"

"I'm trying to get my poor brother out of the jail where he's dying."

"And you reckon on putting me into that jail in his place, do you?"

Charlot was glad because he had been doing some thinking on the problem; he was able to declare himself honestly. "No, m'sieu'! I have no right to do that. I really know nothing about you—about any good reason for putting you in the jail. But I have a better reason of my own. You have put yourself in my hands, man to man. I have been thinking much about that, m'sieu'. I have lived all my life in the woods. They make a man honest—except at Britten's camp, perhaps!" he added with bitterness.

"Gawd!" ejaculated Moriarty, finding

no other words for the expression of his emotions.

Once more Charlot harnessed himself to the thongs of the sled, bent his shoulders to the burden and they went on.

The patient dog trudged ahead, swinging the beacon from his collar.

Now the sky began to match the color of the snowflakes—the night graying into the white of dawn. Charlot patted Joie's head and puffed out the lantern-light.

"How about this brother of yours, son?" demanded Moriarty thickly. "And how about yourself, too, for that matter?"

So Charlot told.

And simply and innocently he revealed the heart of a child-man—his hopes, his dreams, his disappointment, his repentance.

THE sunshine blessed them when Charlot trudged, hauling his charge, into the settlement at the fringe of the forest.

The surgeon, opening his door, was a kindly man who allowed Charlot to pull the sledge into the house.

After the hurt had been repaired, the Samaritan tugged the sledge out of doors and gazed down compassionately on the big man. "You'll need much rest after so bad hurt, m'sieu'. I'll haul you to the little inn."

"No, not yet," growled Moriarty through clenched teeth. He was still in dreadful pain; the surgeon's work had involved agony. On the sufferer's face resolution was grooved into the furrows set there by his ordeal. "Didn't I see, passing when we came, a sign on a house down yonder? The sign was '*Avocat*,' wasn't it?"

"Yes, m'sieu'."

"Means lawyer—notary—and all that stuff, hey? All right! Take me there."

And *Avocat* Bernier was as kind as the surgeon had been, he allowed the sledge to be drawn into his sitting-room.

The lawyer's wife was there.

Seeing her, Moriarty asked Charlot to draw off the mackinaw which the fighter had not pulled off, even in the stress of

the combat in Britten's camp. "Pull the stitches out of the lining, ma'am, if you'll be so kind. Pick out what's hidden in there." He put up his hand, halting all else, until the woman began to pull out money, bill after bill; the mackinaw was lined with notes.

Moriarty grunted his approbation when the money was heaped on the table. "Now get ready your ink and pen and paper, Mr. Lawyer. I have a story to tell and to swear to about seeing a man shoot Munson, the paymaster. I'm no murderer. But I ain't any cheap squealer, either. I'm guilty, too. I waited and beat that killer up and took the money away from him. That's the cash, what she's been taking out of my jacket. I meant to keep that money, even if I had to do worse to the killer. He chased me into Britten's camp. He was laying for me. He thought he saw his chance when he knifed me. That man is named Dawse Wadden, Mr. Lawyer, and you'd better start a dick with a little army to get him—get him quick, if they have to tear down Britten's camp to get him. But first take down what I have to say so I can swear to it."

The notary, tense and white, hurried to get his writing materials.

Moriarty rolled his head on the sledge rail and smiled on Charlot, who sat on the floor, aghast and trembling.

"You see, son, you thawed it out of me. Remember how I bragged once away back that I was a square-shooter? I didn't half mean it; I was always handing out cheap bluff while I was thinking about what one helluva fellow I was in the world. You tackled me with a new one on me, son—a brand new twist. You couldn't have pounded it out of me—what you came after. But you have thawed it out. And now I'll go to jail and wait for the trial and take my medicine—whatever is coming to me. At any rate, I won't have to be thinking about a poor devil dying in a jail or dancing on air, and leaving his wife and kids. Yes, sir. It was a great twist you put on me, son. Twice you have done it. Once with kicks, this time with kindness. Almost the only real touch of real friendship I've had from anybody in a fighting life. Suppose we shake!"

Then, with Joie close-cuddled to him, his arms around the dog's neck, Charlot sat on the floor of the little sitting-room and with tear-wet, staring eyes watched the patient notary write down the wonderful words which would bring Elie home again.





## PEAVEY WORK

By CLAY PERRY

*Author of "Sides to A River," "Boss of the River," etc.*

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HE WAS ONLY A BOY, AFTER ALL, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS IN CHARGE OF BOOM ONE DURING THE LOGGING DRIVE. AND WHEN HIS DOG WAS IN TROUBLE WITH A BLACK BEAR, IT WAS HARD FOR THE BOY IN HIM TO KNOW WHAT TO DO—EVEN THOUGH THE DRIVE HAD ITS ENEMIES

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**T**HEY'S only one thing you got to look out for, Tod Raine. That's the links of them chain couplings. You watch 'em. You know, no chain is any stronger'n its weakest link."

Slim Curtin, timber cruiser, who had brought Tod Raine to Boom One on the Rainy River four days ago stopped at Tod's lonely shanty on the north bank on his return trip from the timber-cut camps far above.

"Humph!" Slim chuckled, after a moment, his weathered face crinkling about the eyes in mirth. "Boss Whitney, he don't believe in these ready-made proverbs, though. Know what he said to me when I asked him why he was settin' a boy to watch Boom One?"

Tod shook his head and colored a trifle. He expected some jibe at his youthfulness. Tod was but sixteen, though in stature and physical development he was a man. He held a man-size peavey in his hands. Idly he kicked at a boom-chain and sparks flew from steel on iron. He wore heavy calked boots, the sharp steel spikes projecting a quarter of an inch to half an inch out of the thick soles. He had qualified as a seasoned river-driver a year ago.

"Boss Whitney, he says, 'A chain is often stronger than the link that looks the weakest'. Humph! Sort of a reverse

English twist to it, eh? I don't see it's much different from the old one. Well, you seen anybody movin' around up here?"

"Nobody. Nothing but porcupines and skunks. But a black bear cut his nose on an old molasses can out behind the shanty the first night after you left, Slim. I didn't even hear him, though and got no chance at him."

"Where's yer dawg?"

"Well, that's what worries me," Tod confessed. "Rip's been missing ever since yesterday morning, Slim. I reckon he's after that bear."

Something in Tod's voice and face caused Slim's wise eyes to narrow. "Well, you let Rip do all the bear hunting," he said. "If he meets up with one you'll know it all right."

This was one thing Tod feared—that Rip had "met up" with the bear. As soon as Slim had gone on his way down river to where the Great Northern crew was at work building the new dam, Tod fell to calling and whistling for Rip. He knew it was hopeless. The loud voice of the river muffled every other sound, drowned out echoes; and the deep-drooping boughs of hemlock and balsam formed a screen along each shore, shutting the forest away from the river.

"Rip! Here Rip! Here, here, here!"

Tod was in mid-stream, calling, balanc-



ing himself on the teetering boom. There was no sharp, glad bark, no rush of padded feet along the stretch of spruce logs hewn flat on the top, fashioned into a long wooden barrier from one bank to the other.

"Now, where is that doggone dog gone?" he demanded of the wilderness—and the wilderness remained discreetly silent. It held its secrets close, Tod knew, for he had solved some of them and his wood-lore only made him the more respectful. The greenhorn is indifferent to the wilderness, but to the initiate it is a many-paged book which grows more wonderful and awesome as the leaves are turned.

"Doggone dog!" repeated Tod querulously, then he smiled as the picture of the dog came to him, that comical, wistful old-mannish face of the airedale with its blunt muzzle, wire hair standing out in whorls and swirls about the eyes and the head, like the shock-head of a roustabout. A picture of rough and ready cocksure impudence and wisdom. "He-e-ere Rip!"

Tod took a quick turn on the boom and walked it from one end to the other. It was of double strength, each twenty foot section made of two spruce logs cleated together side by side with wooden pegs which grew tighter as the water soaked them. Heavy chains ran through ring-bolts of thick iron driven into the end of each of the log sections. The chains, of half inch malleable iron, were made "endless" with patent lock links which could be opened by driving out a steel rivet. It was easy to replace weakened couplings by this arrangement, and to break up the boom, when necessary. The couplings likewise gave the long boom more elasticity, so that the shock of the battering current and bumping logs would be absorbed.

Tod's job was to guard, day and night, this stretch of boom across the Rainy—with his life if necessary. Not that anyone believed such desperate defense would be necessary, Tod least of all. There was nothing to fear. To be sure, there was old "Pine" Garvey, the river-squatter who had fought, tooth and nail, against the Great Northern building the dam at Bent Creek, from which Garvey ran his pine logs, and who regarded pulp sticks, the commodity in which the Great Northern dealt, as picayune timber compared to his pine. Garvey had been beaten, muzzled by the law, forbidden to place any obstacle in the way of progress as represented by the concrete dam. Slim Curtin had spoken of

"Crook Knee" Joe, the wretched *habitant* who was "Pine" Garvey's tool, and who poled the river in a rotten bateau and made what trouble he could for construction bosses and timber bosses.

Crook Knee Joe, Slim had said, was a rank coward. And Tod had his .32 rifle in the shanty, which he was under strict instructions to use "only in emergency, and then only as a threat."

Dusk was falling. Tod walked slowly along the boom to the shanty which was his home. He shot a final glance up the turbid flood of the Rainy. It was clear. The logs had not yet started down from the cuttings above. But soon they would be, for the headwater was rising fast. Before another day had passed the drive would be bumping the boom, piling up a brownish, grayish field of timber.

Tod pursed his lips for a final shrill whistle for Rip—and the whistle died into a low "Whew!" as his eyes lighted on an object lying on the ground before the shanty door. He stopped and picked it up. It was a worn leather mitten—Slim Curtin's. The cruiser must have dropped it as he took his departure.

Tod grinned. "Good thing Rip wasn't here," he said. "Slim wouldn't find his mitten again. Doggone that dog!"

But he grinned again as he recalled Rip's playful trick of snatching up every loose object in the shape of clothing he could find and running away with it—so that he could be coaxed back and petted when he returned it.

"He-e-ere Rip!" His call was almost unconsciously given. The answer was the rasp and squeak of boom chains, the liquid roar of the river, a blue-jay's mockery, a crow's caw of alarm.

Tod did not sleep well that night. The absence of Rip weighed more and more heavily upon him. For one thing the dog had done night sentry duty for Tod. Curled up in a bush just outside the shanty door—refusing to sleep inside—Rip was a better guard than a man could be. For another thing—Tod had found his imagination terribly active. It projected him far into the forest and pictured for him his dog engaged in a furious combat with a big black bear.

He was up early in the morning, pacing the boom, his peavey over his shoulder, its heavy curved hook swinging. He looked not unlike a soldier of some ancient army of the days when bill and pike were common weapons, and it was not hard for Tod to imagine himself some such soldier—a

Briton guarding a chain defense on the Thames, a Roman soldier holding the bridge across the Tiber, a Gaul fiercely watchful and jealous of a pontoon across the Seine.

His imagination, however, swung always around to the scene of his waking dreams—the trail of the bear and the airedale. His caked boots crunched crusted snow, his peavey became a rifle, his eyes blazed. He lowered the peavey to his arm-pit, took aim, pulled the trigger—that is, the steel hook and—

"Boom!"

He started as if the peavey had turned into a rifle and had gone off unexpectedly in his hands. Then he grinned at himself and cried out, "Hello, Mister Log!"

The "boom!" was the bump of the first log of the drive against the boom.

The logs drove down, at first in a dribble, then in increasing clumps and tangles. By noon a bobbing floor of timber lay against the boom, stretching one hundred yards upstream. Tod had a busy time.



He zig-zagged across the loose-lying, tricky floor with the ease of an expert, his caked shoes gripping bark and bare logs with equal sureness, his educated feet seeking just the right spot, leaving a sinking log at just the right instant, treading timber, leaping aside, running the length of a big one, birling another beneath him. He straightened out piling tangles, made the logs lie flat and easy. It was part of his job.

The boom bowed into an arc. The coupling chains tightened and grated sharply, link on link. Tod walked the boom and inspected each coupling closely. There was considerable wear on the chains, subjected to the corroding influences of river water, rain, snow and frost. One half of each coupling lay under water all the time. Tod noticed that the patent links, all of them, were submerged, as if with purpose. He puzzled over that. It would make it very hard to unlink a weak chain and replace it with a new one, but in a flash it occurred to him, also, that it would make it hard for anyone to uncouple the boom. Crook Knee Joe, for instance. He smiled at the thought. Boss Whitney

would never leave this boom to be guarded by a lone boy if he thought there was danger of that sort. Would he?

"A chain is often stronger than the link that looks the weakest!"

So this was Boss Whitney's philosophy. Well! Tod wondered how to apply that.

Abstract wonderings were erased by concrete considerations, now. The strain on the boom was greatest in mid-stream, the sharpest bend of the bow. Here must one expect danger, if anywhere. The possibility of a break in the boom, however, was remote. Ten times as many logs would fill the broad stretch of the Rainy, extend for a mile up-stream and the boom would hold fast. It was built to hold.

"He-e-re Rip! Here, here, here!"

His call was almost a wail of despair. If he only knew—

In mid-afternoon the drive slackened. The flow of logs ceased entirely before four o'clock.

"Uh, huh! They've got a jam up above," Tod said aloud, "Gosh! I'd like to go up and see it, and help."

He was yearning for companionship, for action. If Rip were only here to join in the game of running logs—

He had convinced himself absolutely that Rip had followed the snooping bear. Tod went to the shanty, took down his .32, fingered it, sought out a blackened stump along the shore which bore some resemblance to a bear, sought a vital spot—and hit it, first shot. With a swift glance across the river, which showed him the logs lying quiet, no more timber coming down, he stepped about the corner of the shanty and studied the footprints of the bear. Driblets of blood in the caked snow told of Bruin's reckless search of a jagged tin for molasses. Tod cut a wide circle, seeking for Rip's paw-prints, too. He did not find them.

"By Jove! I'll just follow this bear's tracks until I do find where Rip hit the trail," he told himself with a thrill, and plunged into the thicket whither the trail led.

An hour later Tod Raine floundered out of the morass of a tamarack swamp to the bank of the Rainy, his face set, his breath coming in great gasps, his eyes stony and fierce. In that bush he had come upon something that sent him crashing wildly through the morass. It was the scene of a furious combat between a bear and a dog. Blood and hair and torn up roots and snow told the tale. Tod had turned another page in the secret book of the wilderness,

and its secret, solved, froze his blood. Bear's hair and dog's hair lay in tangled mats in the bloody snow.

The serious part of it was that, for many yards beyond the scene of that conflict there had been blood in the dog's tracks, and the tracks showed that the dog had limped for long distances on three legs.

The story was plain. The bear had turned to face the trailing airedale, had fought, had been worsted, had turned and fled—the dog, bleeding but fearless, in pursuit. That had been two days ago!

On the retina of his inner eye Tod got the picture of the final stand of the bear. It was in a ravine, deep in the forest, where a swollen creek blocked Bruin's progress. He turned and in fierce defiance, faced the limping dog. Before the savage attack the bear—a young one, though quite large—climbed a tree.

"Rip's got him, and he's waiting for me to come and help him," Tod told himself, with the conviction of one who *sees*.

But his searching, feverish eyes were torn from the trail where it mounted a rise on the river-bank—where the bear had turned away from that barrier and plunged into the thicket again. What he saw on the bosom of the swollen Rainy was a mass of moving logs, driving down in almost solid formation, from bank to bank!

Tod shuddered from the violence of emotional reaction. A lump rose in his throat and made his labored breathing more difficult. For a dizzy moment he stood, torn between the desire which amounted to a frenzy of fear for his beloved Rip, the desire to keep on that blood-stained trail to the end, and the knowledge that his place at this moment was down at the boom, on the job.

Just for an instant he hesitated, then stooped low and sent a piercing whistle into the forest, beneath the drooping boughs; and with the sound of that shrill call ringing in his ears as the only answer, he sped down the bank and leaped onto the first log that swerved close to the shore.

The river claimed him. Tod knew that were it not for the sweep of that current, carrying him down, he could never have returned to the boom as he did. It needed the mighty pull of the river, against his own volition, to do it. He rode with the drive until the glint of open water told him he was nearing the boom. The open water lay beyond the barrier.

For the last time he turned his face to the north, up the river, his muscles tighten-

ing with the impulse to dash ashore and take up the trail again. A line from an old verse of Kipling's ran in his head:

Brothers and Sisters, I bid you beware

Of giving your heart to a dog to tear.

"Well, he ran away from me, doggone him!" he cried, trying to justify himself. But his throat continued to ache. Something like a film over his eyes made the log-field waver and quaver as he turned his face downstream. He bit his lip, shook his head to clear his sight—and started as if he had been stung.

What was that dark object down there in mid-boom? *A dog?*

Clutching his rifle in both hands across his chest he started running the logs as they moved.

"Doggone dog! Bet he's been back waiting for me all the time—thinks I've gone and left him. Well, it's good enough for him. I—say! That don't look like Rip!"

He halted suddenly in his zig-zag sprint and rode a big spruce which lay amid its fellows with steady balance.

"It's bigger than Rip—sorta black—and I wonder—if it could be—the bear. Now, hold steady Tod Raine!"

The sun, sinking, shone almost directly in his eyes, the way the river curved from north to west. It was difficult for Tod to make out much but a dark blot on the boom. But at last, banishing the distortion



of desire which made him think it was Rip and the illusion of imagination which made it a bear his judgment forced him to the slow belief that it was neither dog, bear, porcupine

nor any four-footed thing—but a man crouching on his heels!

Slim back? No, Slim wouldn't come back after a night and a day—not for a lost mitten. Tod poked at the bulge in his blouse where he had thrust the mitten, automatically hiding it from Rip.

Then swift alarm came to him with the sharp, metallic ring of steel on steel. His eyes, for an instant, shielded from the sun by a tall spruce, caught a clear glimpse of the object on the boom.

*It was a man squatted there, swinging a short-handled sledge.*

With a guttural rasp in his throat Tod

sprang forward. For a distance of forty yards on the moving drive, which meant sixty or more on the river, he ran, reckless of himself. He had only the grim purpose to charge the squatted figure. It was plain enough what the man was doing. He was cutting a boom-chain with a cold-chisel.

At the edge of the log-field Tod halted his sprint. He was within two hundred yards of the boom. Plainly he saw the sledge rise and fall, with the sound of its metallic clink reaching his ears an instant later. He raised his rifle, balanced himself carefully on a teetering log and aimed for a spot on the boom near the trespasser.

The shot ripped splinters from the boom and ricocheted on the open water beyond, whining at it whirled. With a start the man with the sledge jumped up, then he turned and ran, flinging the sledge and cold-chisel into the river, each in a different spot.

Tod noted instinctively, where they fell, knowing that their recovery, later, might be important. He noted, also, the curious gait of the fleeing man, and knew who it was though he had never seen him. It was Crook Knee Joe, the *habitant*, Pine Garvey's tool.

Tod let him go. To fire at him was useless, unless he wished to shoot to kill—and he did not. That was against orders, and against his own desire. The important thing was to get to the boom as quickly as he could and see what Crook Knee Joe had done.

Tod sped so fast that he stumbled and fell, his rifle crashing across a log, and when he picked it up he found the gun wrecked. It was but a step to the boom. Tod slammed the useless gun down, crawled over the logs on hands and knees to the boom and scrambled desperately to the coupling place where the man with the sledge had been busy.

He gasped as he reached it. One of the chains that held the double ends was gone entirely. It had been cut and slipped out of the rings. The other, alone, held the boom. He ran his fingers along the tight-drawn section, gasped again as their sensitive ends came in contact with a sharp-cut notch in the under side of a link.

The second chain had been cut half-way through. Only a quarter inch of iron held the boom, the grinding, bumping horde of logs, the swollen, swift, tearing Rainy—and protected the growing dam, five miles down the river.

"A chain is often stronger than the link that looks the weakest."

Tod sent up a prayer that Boss Whitney's philosophy was true. And then he sent up another prayer for himself. His quickened thought brought home to him a lesson. It was this, that he was one link in the chain upon which Boss Whitney depended for the harnessing of the Rainy, for the safety of the dam and of the hundreds of workmen swarming over the structure, the comfort and well-being of the thousand employees of the paper mills far down river. He was one link, and Boss Whitney had chosen him because he believed in that proverb of his—and in Tod Raine. Others had shaken their heads doubtfully, looking him over, when the boss chose a boy. Boss Whitney had smiled and, later, Slim had brought Tod a reason for that smile.

"Rip, Rip, why did you go away?"

Tod half-sobbed the words as he got to his feet and stood for an awful moment, bewildered, seeking to clear his brain, to think out the first step he must take to strengthen that weakened boom.

It was not broken, yet. He was not broken, yet. But he felt as if a sledge had driven down upon his very soul. It sickened him. Upon him depended whether that cut link, when it broke—and it must—would mean the bursting of the boom, the rush of millions of feet of racing timber down the raging stream to batter and crash against the false structure which diverted the river from the setting concrete of the new dam.

Tod turned and ran for the shack. His feet dragged. His legs were wet to the thighs, but it was not this which hauled at his heels, it was the fear that when he left the weakened coupling it would break before he could return. He dug his calks into the flat boom and raced on. At the shack he caught up his peavey, snatched from a nail on the wall a length of chain with a patent link, fished from beneath his bunk the sledge and the piece of railroad iron which was to be used as an anvil, felt in his mackinaw for the slender steel punch he carried, always, and then again whirled out to the boom. A few steps and he stopped, dumped everything onto the boom and went back. He snatched a second length of chain from its hanging, berating himself for his haste.

The sun had set. The swift northern dusk faded like a fragment of dream. Tod bent low over the boom-ends. If only he had brought the lantern! Too late now to go back.

The huge iron circles of the ring-bolts



lay as flat as the links running through them would allow and he had to use his peavey point to raise them and thrust through the new chain. The boom moved restlessly. It seemed to Tod that every yank would be the last. If the chiseled link snapped, all would be over. Still, he had become very cool and calm and sure. It was a job of running a length of chain through those rings, drawing the ends together, snapping the patent link shut and riveting it tight. In emergency he might even omit the rivet.

But to draw the ends past each other and give slack enough for the connection was one thing to try, another to do. The chain, when he got both ends through their rings, fell short. The ends would not meet. Tod gasped in dismay. He saw the reason. The old chain was now stretched so taut that it stood out of the water, entirely, and the half-cut link was opening.

The wonder was that it held at all. Tod thrust the long spike of his peavey through one link, just behind the weak one, caught the barb of the curved cant-hook through an other link, beyond the yawning bit of iron, seized the handle at the top, which rose to the level of his eyes, and applied his weight to the lever.

He was not a second too soon, for the yawning link dropped off, even as he grasped the peavey handle, broken at its sharpest curve, where it fitted into its brother.

Tod gulped and his skin seemed to contract all over his body as he saw that happen. But an instant later he exulted as he found that his weight applied to the leverage which the peavey gave him was more than sufficient to hold the broken chain—and even to draw its ends closer together. Now, if he could manage to draw it far enough, so that he could join the ends of the new chain—

He bit his lip and cried out, "You dog-gone fool! You've got to use both hands to snap that link on!"

He held tight and pondered. Then he brought the handle of his peavey down toward the boom, crooked one knee over it and, tentatively, tried holding it that way. He found that it was possible, and began to see his way clear to making the connection. He dragged his anvil forward, with some idea of using it, later, and bent his body toward the boom-end.

The movement gave him a frightful thrill of alarm for, as he shifted his weight forward, the peavey-handle came up, too, and almost took him off his balance. To

keep his advantage he must put his weight well to the end of the handle. And to do this and reach the dangling ends of the chain—well, it simply couldn't be done, that was all.

He must hold the boom, himself. With this realization a huge weight seemed to settle down upon Tod's shoulders. The logs ground and bumped the boom, seemed to rise like an avalanche of wood, the river



leaped and tore at the boom, the boom wavered in eccentric curves from shore to shore. Blood seemed to start from his finger-tips, then they grew cold.

The darkness fell and with it a chill of frost. He shivered as his warm blood cooled after the strenuous log-running he had done, and he settled to his vigil.

Along toward midnight Tod roused himself from a sort of creeping stupor of cold and fumbled in his blouse for Slim's mitten. It would keep one of his hands from freezing, anyway.

"Here Rip!" He thought he heard something. "Rip! Out here!"

Long afterwards, it seemed hours, Tod was brought from another stupor by the soft patter of toenails on wood. The steps were irregular, hesitant. He reached down for his useless rifle.

"Sounds like a porky," he muttered sleepily. Then he cried out, letting the rifle fall, "Rip!"

It was the dog. In the darkness Tod could not see him, but he knew that the airedale was sorely hurt. No sound of whining told him, for Rip did not whine nor yelp. He was a thoroughbred. He knew, first, from the dog's hesitation, his creeping approach, and then, when he reached down one numb hand to the dog's muzzle, his fingers touched a sticky substance caked all over the dog's head. It was blood. Carefully he coaxed Rip close and, hooking his knee firmly about the peavey-handle, with one hand beneath it, as he had done off and on during the vigil, he felt over the dog, for broken bones. Rip winced when he touched one forefoot, but he sat on his haunches and allowed his master to examine the blood-clotted leg without jerking away.

Tod took out his bandanna, dipped it in the water and began sopping the blood

from Rip's wounds. The water was icy, and it was that helped to stanch the flow of blood from the raking scratches of bear's claws. It made Tod's numb hands still more numb. He took off the mitten, the better to work over Rip, and the moment he laid it on the boom Rip sniffed at it and gave a sharp bark.

As if the dog had spoken human language Tod answered him, husky with cold and excitement.

"Yes, Rip, that's Slim's mitten. Slim's, you understand? Slim is down river—that way," he gestured in the darkness. "*Rip, take it to Slim!*"

The dog got to his feet. Tod fumbled for a match and lighted it with some difficulty. Pointing down river he repeated his first half-hysterical command more firmly.

"Slim Curtin," he said. "Down that way. Take it to Slim. Take it!"

The dog's eyes gleamed in the match-light, his ears came up—one of them ragged and torn.

Tod moaned, but he knew that his pity must be hidden. He must only command. He must send this battle-scarred pal of his five weary miles down the river trail to bring help.

He thrust the mitten toward Rip's muzzle. Rip sniffed it again, then quietly opened his jaws and took it, and with a look that was at once understanding and reproach, he turned and with his tail wagging, trotted back toward shore.

The darkness swallowed him up and it hid, also, something very much like tears in Tod Raine's eyes. They were not tears of weakness, though his hands were so numb he could scarcely close the fingers, and his neck ached from the strain of holding to the peavey-handle and his wet feet and legs were stiff and chilled to the bone.

It was breaking dawn when two men strolled up the river trail, behind them limping a dejected, sore-footed airedale, who now and then stopped to lick at a great raking rip in the skin of one fore-leg and to shake off drops of blood from a torn ear. They made for the shack on the shore, set back in a little clump of balsams. The boom was hidden from them for a short distance on the trail.

"Can't see that anythin's wrong," spoke Slim Curtin, looking out over the clear flow of the river, which was visible to them. "The boom's held, all right, or the Rainy'd be alive with logs. But I figger I dropped that mitten here, and the dog must have been back here after I left to

pick it up, and something sure happened to that dog, and——"

"What's that out there, Slim?"

"Well, I swan!"

The man who asked the question, a powerful young man with an air of capability about him, a square chin but humorous lips, kindly, keen gray eyes, broke into a run and leaped onto the boom. A bristling figure sprang past him. It was Rip, suddenly alert, forgetful of his own troubles, as his eye caught sight of his master.

It took the combined strength of Boss Whitney and Slim Curtin to unlock Tod Raine's clenched hands from about his peavey-handle.

"Gosh, he's a strong kid!" exclaimed Slim. "Lots of power in those hands."

"Strong is right," ejaculated Boss Whitney, bending closer over the clenched hands as Slim, with a quick grasp of the situation, took Tod's place at the peavey-lever. "Those hands are frozen stiff!"

Tod was revived by the warm tongue of a dog who answered to the name of



Rip. He was lying in his bunk, his hands curiously detached from himself, it seemed. He looked down at them, they were as red as fire, but he felt no sensation from them. The quer-

ulous thought came to him that he ought to scold those hands. They ought not to be here, they should be out in mid-boom, wrapped tightly about the smooth, cold handle of a peavey.

He coughed. The convulsion hurt him. He moved his arms and the hands with them, like lumps of lead attached to his wrists.

"Rip! H-e-ere Rip!"

The dog reared on his hind feet and laid his forefeet across Tod's chest. With a quick, human-like up-tilt of his head he seemed to be reassuring his master.

"Doggone dog, you! Did you take it to Slim?"

At this moment Slim appeared, and behind him Boss Whitney. Tod came to full consciousness with a rush. He sat wildly up in his bunk.

"The boom!" he cried. "The boom! Crook Knee Joe cut the chain. I went after Rip, to kill that bear and he cut the chain!"

Boss Whitney came over and took one of Tod's helpless hands in his own. At the touch sharp needles seemed to strike through the member. He winced.

Boss Whitney smiled. "So you can feel it, eh? Well, I guess they'll be all right, then. Thought they might be frozen worse. How long did you hang onto that peavey handle, son?"

"What time is it?" countered Tod.

"Well, it's past noon now, but it was only five o'clock this morning when Rip brought us up here."

"About twelve hours then, I guess," Tod answered the question the boss had asked. "Then I—the boom—I let go? After all that? And the boom——"

"The boom is all right. Slim and I put in two new connections, and Slim can't figure out, yet, how you managed to hold the old one together, with a link gone entirely."

Tod sat up and told them. He did not attempt to excuse himself for going on the bear's trail for Rip.

"Well, Tod Raine," spoke Boss Whitney, when Tod had finished his story. "I guess you realize you ought not to have left the boom, at all. I'm not going to

reprimand you, however. Because, Tod, no man without a human weakness is worth much—if there is such a man. Your devotion to your dog was part and parcel with your sense of obligation to *hold that boom if it killed you*. And you held it. That's enough for me. I tell Slim, here, that a chain is often stronger than its weakest link looks—and I believe that. I want to take you down river with me and give you a real man's job—even more of a man's job than guarding Boom One. I'm going to put you on duty as head watchman at the new dam. You and Rip."

"Yes, sir," gulped Tod. "Yes, sir. I guess I'm cured of that weakness of mine—I mean nothing could get me to leave my post again for a minute."

"I know it," smiled Boss Whitney.

"And I've got to cure Rip of his weakness, too," Tod added, "if he's going on the new job with me. He's got to learn to leave bear's tracks alone and stay with me."

"I think Rip has learned that already," chuckled Boss Whitney. "Judging from his looks."

Rip rolled a solemn eye in his direction.



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our next issue*

# HASKELL OF THE DUG-OUT HILLS

*by*

**FRANK C.  
ROBERTSON**





# THE GHOST OF THE GOLCONDA

*A Story in Two Parts*

By WILLIAM N. VAILE

• PART I •

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HAUNTED BY A MYSTERY OF THE PAST, STIRRING WITH THE POLITICS OF THE PRESENT, THE MINING TOWN OF GOLD CREEK GREETED YOUNG GEORGE FRISBEE WHEN HE ARRIVED THERE SEEKING ELECTION AS ATTORNEY-GENERAL. AND PAST AND PRESENT WERE TO BE STRANGELY MERGED BEFORE THE GHOST GOLD OF THE GOLCONDA MINE BECAME FOR HIM REAL GOLD, WARM, FRIENDLY AND FULL OF PROMISE; AND BEFORE THE PIONEER SPIRIT OF THE TOWN BECAME FULLY TRANSLATED INTO TERMS OF LAW, ORDER AND JUSTICE

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## CHAPTER I

### A DELAYED RETURN

**G**EORGE FRISBEE shuddered as his native village came in sight beside the rocky banks of Gold Creek.

The mere scenery of the day's journey, scenery which he well remembered and which he had long wished yet feared to behold again, had made him profoundly depressed. In other places he loved the great rugged mountains, green and red below, where the pine forests were gashed by granite and sandstone cliffs, bald and white above where patches of last winter's snow still remained in the high clefts to mingle with the first covering of approaching winter.

But in the last few miles these mountains had had eyes, black, empty, sightless eyes, scores of them, the long-abandoned prospect holes of forgotten pioneers, eyes looking silently and sadly upon the traveler

until the train passed out of their range, when a new group would immediately take up the vigil beyond the next curve.

George Frisbee, reputed a very matter-of-fact young man, a lawyer, with fine sensibilities perhaps, but certainly not usually a creature of dreams or fancies, had lapsed into a settled melancholy. His mood was a vague and general sense of tragedy and sorrow.

A slight jolt and an almost imperceptible shifting of his own weight as the train started down the mountain side toward the town huddling in the bottom of the lofty bowl, and then came the thing which he had been subconsciously fighting off, the thrill of distinct and red and horrid memory—his father lying with his head against the wall of that very building yonder, a smoking pistol falling from his hand, blood running from his mouth and staining his shirt, curses on his lips. The curses ceased as the boy threw himself, sobbing, on the man's breast. Then came



the last words, thrown brokenly at a tall man who stood in the doorway of the building opposite, holding another pistol.

"You ain't got me, Gass Dubonnet. You can't get me. I'll stay right with you till I get my rights. Rights! Rights! D'y'e hear! Rights, for my wife and kid!"



That was more than nineteen years ago, and his mother had taken him away a few days later. He had never returned to Jamestown. When he had had business there he had sent his partner, Griswold. But a thousand times in the intervening years his mind's eye had reconstructed that moment. Once, in the last few weeks, he had met in the streets of the Capital, a tall old man with a pointed beard who had looked curiously at him in a startled manner. It could hardly have been the same tall man, and yet—there had been something grimly reminiscent about him.

Now, with the very street spread before him, George Frisbee not only visualized the tragic event of long ago, he heard and felt it, felt and tasted the salt red mixture of his father's blood and his own tears, felt his father's hand clutching fiercely at him, felt the quick throbs of the man's heart and the one last hard desperate heave of his breast.

He shuddered, then pulled himself erect in his seat. He had work to do in this town, work which was important, at least to him, work which called for a pleasing appearance and a cheerful and confident manner. He was there to inspire confidence in himself.

For George Frisbee, aged twenty-seven, was a candidate for the office of attorney-general, election was only three weeks off, and this old Colorado mining camp, seedy

and moribund, was still the heart of the opposition and the residence of his opponent. With a tremendous effort of will he shook himself out of his morbid mood and braced himself to assume the character of his part.

His own name greeted him from a poster on the station wall. "*Grand Political Rally. Court House. October 17TH, 3 P. M. Hon. George Frisbee, Candidate for Attorney-General, and best local speakers.*"

And here on the platform were residents of Jamestown, whom he had seen occasionally at the Capital.

"Hello, Mr. Frisbee. In on time, I see."

"All set for the meeting? Going to have a good crowd."

"Yes," said a third voice, "everybody being out of work, they can afford to waste an hour."

The last speaker, grinning with a slightly malicious expression, proved to be Kenehan, the district attorney, Frisbee's opponent in the present race.

"That's all right, Charlie. I'll give 'em something to talk about, and that's more than you've been able to do."

Guffaws of mountain laughter greeted this sally, and Frisbee was introduced around.

"Here's Judge Dunaway. He'll be your chairman. He's lived here forever. Guess he founded Jamestown."

Judge Dunaway, a lanky round-shouldered, middle-aged giant, with an unkempt grayish beard, extended his hand.

"Well, well, Georgie Frisbee! Welcome home! Reckon you don't remember me. But I remember you, a serious-faced barefooted kid, and I remember your mother and—and your dad."

The last was spoken as if he had mentally questioned whether to say it and then had decided to let the words come as originally framed.

Another mental surge of the ancient scene almost staggered Frisbee as he grasped the older man's hand. His eye involuntarily turned to a place a block up the street. Dunaway was holding him with a sort of deliberate and intensive friendliness. Sensing a momentary embarrassment, he added, "Sorry you've been away so long. Always wanted to know you after you'd grown up."

Next to the station, Kenehan was talking with another little group. One said, with sneering lip, "He's too much like his dad to be any good. The young upstart! Thinks he can coddle this town now, at

election time, after he's been too good for it for twenty years."

Dunaway, catching the voice but diplomatically ignoring the words, turned pleasantly toward the speaker.

"Slade," he said, "I want you to know Mr. Frisbee. He'll probably be the next attorney-general, but anyway we'll have one from this little old burg of Jamestown."

Frisbee extended his hand. "Well," he remarked, "of course I agree with Judge Dunaway. Glad to meet you, Mr. Slade."

"Say, Frisbee," said Kenehan, "don't forget that Slade is the coroner up here. He's been burying your party so many years now that he just naturally can't get out of the habit."

"Well, come to our meeting, boys," returned Dunaway. "You'll find us very much alive. And, George, you won't find all the people, or even all the county officers, against us. Here's Sheriff Bates and his boy. Mr. Bates, shake hands with Mr. Frisbee. Mr. Billy Bates, Mr. Frisbee. Billy's only eighteen, but if Kenehan don't watch him close he's likely to slip a ballot for you into the box."

"Nix on that, Judge," protested the grinning youth. "I'm an officer of the law, I am. But I'll bet I can get a few votes for any candidate that you are for."

The judge escorted Frisbee up the street toward the hotel, stopping at frequent intervals to introduce his charge. Among some of the old-timers there seemed to be an undercurrent of hostility or resentment which Dunaway breezily disregarded, assuming that the person introduced would be glad to meet "the next attorney-general."

Several times the question, "Why haven't you ever come to see us before?" was put, in one form or another, and it was a rather awkward one. "Guess you've been too busy making money in the city," was an occasional comment in connection with the question.

"No, I can't say I've made much money," laughed Frisbee in response to such a remark from old Dad Postlewaite at the hardware store. "I always thought the mountains were the place to find gold."

"Well, it's all ghost-gold now. Nothin' but memories, like everything else in this place. Gee! You're a memory yourself!"

"I think it's memories that have kept George away," said the judge quietly, then added hastily, "Come along, George. There'll be folks at the hotel I want you to meet. Most everybody in town comes there to dinner. Drop in at our meeting,

Dad. The boy'll show you how he can trot."

Postlewaite looked after them reflectively. "Just the double of his father! If he'd had a whisky breath and a flannel shirt I'd 'a' sworn it was Jack Frisbee walkin' the streets to get Gass Dubonnet, like he said he would."

He glanced up past the end of the street to where, at the foot of the mountain, a mile and a half beyond the town, stood a great, bare, weatherbeaten structure. The fall air was chill and raw, presaging a coming storm. Postlewaite shivered again and turned into his store, where he kicked open the stove door and added two stout chunks of wood to the fire. "Dreary, haunty place up there," he soliloquized. "That's where Jack Frisbee's ghost is, if he's anywhere this side of hell."

Dunaway was saying to the young man, "Slade's been getting the town sore about you because you haven't been back. And he's been digging up old stories about your dad. I knew your father well, boy, and liked him. You're certainly the breathing picture of him. Don't get peeved at these old codgers. Their point of view has got twisted in the last twenty years. They're always thinking of the old busy feverish times and it makes 'em bitter to see the place so dead. An' then, since you haven't been here, they haven't had any chance to know you, and they've all been hearing the other side of the story for a long time."

He paused and looked at the mill.

"I must say, he never tells the story himself. He lives up there, all alone."

"He?"

"Yes, Gaspard Dubonnet. I feel sorry for him, too. Do—do you mind my talking about him?"

"No, no, go ahead," said George, with the fascinated horror of a child. "I want to hear."

"Well, you remember—no, I guess you don't—what a gay spark he used to be. Always had plenty of money. Always slinging it around. Always spending it like water, but never spending it for water. Every mine promoter,



every drummer, every politician, used to know him well. He knew all the big ones. He and Senator Lamson were great cronies. Lamson used to say that

Gass was the best drinker, an' the best pistol-shot, an' the best engineer he ever knew, and he was right all 'round. The senator used to come up here to Jamestown to go on speers, an' then he'd stay with Dubonnet till he'd slept off his jag.

"Hot old days they were, boy," he continued, as they turned in at the hotel. He glanced from the hall into the lobby. "Nobody here yet. Well, we can chat a few minutes. I like to talk about those good old, bad old, times, when everybody had money an' liquor. The old Saddle Rock Saloon never closed its doors from one year's end to another, and when miners up the gulch would get their month's pay they'd make a bee line for the Saddle Rock and they'd never leave till their last cent was gone. Then Jim Slade—father of Tom Slade, the coroner—would stake 'em to enough to get back to the mines, after they'd passed all their money to him over the bar or played it on his roulette wheel.

"The miners at the end of each month, and some rich daily customers like Gass Dubonnet and Senator Lamson and your—and twenty or thirty other chaps like 'em—made Jim Slade a rich man. At night when Gass Dubonnet and Lamson and some of their gang weren't playing the wheel or playing poker in some other gambling joint, they'd be singing and carousing over at Slade's or down the line at Mag Lovejoy's.

"Lord, I wonder now when we boys ever slept! We all lived so fast you'd think we'd have just naturally burned out—and now we live so awful slow that I don't suppose we'll ever get through living.

"Most of the old gang's gone, now. Jim Slade finally took to drinking, himself, and died of delirium tremens even before the town died. Old Mag Lovejoy's still alive and still here. Runs a miners' boarding house now, though she ain't got many boarders. People have almost forgotten she didn't used to be respectable. Not to say she wouldn't still bootleg a little for you."

"And she'll still show you a hole right in the eye of a picture of Buffalo Bill. Gass Dubonnet shot that hole with one of those old French duelling pistols—excuse me, boy, I forget—"

"That's all right. Go ahead, please."

"Well, it's nothing anyway, except a remarkable stunt. Gass Dubonnet shot that hole just to show he could. He drilled it so neat in the middle of the eye that you'd hardly know it was there. But that's only

half of it. He was standing with the other pistol in his left hand and—I know you won't believe this, but I saw it myself—he plunked just exactly the same kind of a hole in Buffalo Bill's other eye."

The judge whistled reminiscently at the exploit and then changed the course of his remarks.

"Well, I'm left, and Dad Postlewaite, and half a dozen of us old no-account fellows that were only second-rate sports in the old days. Maybe that's the reason we're still alive. We haven't had pep enough or money enough to get away. But that ain't the reason Gass Dubonnet has stayed. He's always thought there was gold still in the old Golconda. He isn't the owner, at that. He's just a sort of volunteer manager, with a half-interest for life. He's managed to raise money—God knows how, but mostly by selling the machinery, I believe—to redeem the old judgments and to pay the taxes. He's never taken out an ounce of gold in a dozen years as far as I know. Sometimes you'll see the old man puttering 'round up there and even running out a car of loose rock by hand. He buys a little powder occasionally, and everybody knows he's tapping and drilling around in the old stopes.

"Here, lately, he's kind of thawed out a little. We think he's got somebody in the city interested with him, enough to give him an occasional stake. He goes down every couple of weeks or so, and he seems to have a little money. But until lately we'd hardly see the old fellow from one month's end to another. He'd get some canned stuff and some bacon and a little powder and caps and just hide himself in the mine and in the old mill. I've been up there occasionally—I'm about the only man in town that goes there—and he's friendly enough to me, but at that he ain't exactly what you'd call hospitable. When he ain't puttering in the mine he's reading. One end of the old mill room's his kitchen and the other's his bed-room and library, and books—you just ought to see 'em. There's been a new box of 'em at the station for him every two or three months, as long as I can remember, and more of 'em lately than before. Last time I was up there he was reading one on spiritualism."

Dunaway paused for a moment and stroked his ragged beard. He looked at Frisbee thoughtfully.

"He talked about spiritualism last time I was up there," he resumed reflectively, taking his eyes from his companion's face

## CHAPTER II

## A STORM BREWING

and looking vacantly into space. "I guess I'm the only man he ever talks to, at all confidentially, an' that ain't very much. But he does come to see two women, two very different women. One of 'em's old Mag Lovejoy and the other is—is Miriam Packer."

"Packer? Packer?"

"Yes, the school-ma'am—one of 'em. Why, I guess probably you might remember her. She was a little kid when—Let's see, she must be just about your age."

"A little red-headed girl, with a long mouth and great big staring blue eyes."

"Well—er, yes. Leastwise she's red-headed, all right enough, and she does have rather a long mouth, but I don't think her eyes are any bigger than ordinary."

They were big, however, in the recollection of George Frisbee, for it was made up of several principal impressions. There was the child's horrified look when he had put a little garter snake in her desk at school. There was a wide stare of righteous indignation which she had habitually directed at him for several weeks after that. And there was a still more horrified stare on that last terrible day.

That last look burned in his memory now, but the burning was eased by the words which had accompanied it, awkward, childish, tender words. She had run to him and his father as they lay together in the street, run apparently without fear.

She had put her hands on the boy's shoulder.

"Georgie," she had faltered, "dear Georgie, I'm so sorry." And her compassionate eyes had been like great blue marbles under their wide-open



lips.

And those same eyes looked at him now from the hallway of the little hotel, eyes wide with astonishment. The young woman had paused, apparently to nod to Judge Dunaway. The nod stopped half way as she saw the judge's companion.

"Miss Parker," said Dunaway, "do you remember George Frisbee?"

"Is it really George Frisbee?" gasped the girl. "Well, I declare, you did give me a shock. I thought I had seen a ghost."

The big blue eyes turned downward in confusion and her face reddened as she realized what she had said.

DUNAWAY broke the embarrassment by making his customary boast about his candidate.

"George has grown a lot in every way since you two knew each other as kids. Now he's come up here to talk you into voting for him. It ought not to be a hard job, but come to his meeting this afternoon anyway."

"I should be glad to come and I shall probably be able to. I expect to let school out early so that the children who live up the gulch can get home. Mr. Suggs, the bus-man says there's a bad storm coming and that it's already snowing hard in the canyon."

Dunaway whistled softly and looked out of the window. A few large flakes were falling on the sidewalk.

"George, I'm afraid this means good-bye to your meeting at Summit. I guess you could make it up there all right, even if Miss Packer is nervous about her kids, but if we get one of our real good heavy early snowstorms you couldn't get back. Better make your plans to enjoy the hospitality of your native town tonight."

"Well," Frisbee replied, "I hope I can get to Summit because I promised the people there that I'd come up."

"Well, we'll see. You can call 'em up by 'phone after your meeting here. There's the dining-room open. Let's go in."

Miriam Packer, it appeared, was accustomed, on schooldays, to take her dinner at the hotel. She lived in an old house at the lower end of the narrow town, which spread, never more than three blocks wide and most of the way only one block wide, through the long narrow basin which the crowding mountains grudgingly granted the creek at this place.

On Frisbee's inquiry she told him that her parents were both dead. She rented the lower story of her house to a married couple and lived in the upper story with the other teacher of the little school. This other girl, she said, had been confined to the house for several days.

Dunaway sat at one side of Frisbee and Miriam Packer at the other, and although the young man was introduced to the other noon boarders across the red tablecloth, he found all his attention concentrating upon the girl.

When she was leaving to go back to the school, he went to the doorway to help her into her coat—rather a shabby coat he



thought—and her long mouth curved into a delightful smile as she buttoned the collar tightly around her throat. Was she pretty? It was hard to say. No. Probably not.



face and—a good face.

Frisbee saw Dunaway smiling broadly from the side of the table, and in momentary embarrassment he stepped out of range beyond the door.

"I mustn't keep you, Miss—Miriam," he said, "since you're going now in order that I may see more of you today, but—" he glanced out of the window where the snow was now driving before the wind in small steady flakes, "I don't believe I'll be able to go to Summit tonight and—"

"Oh, but, George, you must go. It means votes, doesn't it? George, I'm so anxious for you to be elected." She looked down, in sudden confusion. "Good-by," she said, hurriedly. "I must run."

Dunaway chuckled as Frisbee returned to his coffee and his dried-apple pie. The others at the table were grinning broadly.

"Must say you're a fast worker, boy," he remarked. "But nobody can blame you. Miriam Packer's just about the nicest little lady I ever knew, but you'll have some competition from the home boys. There's her cousin Henry, for instance."

"Henry's certainly been pretty busy over there lately," remarked one of their table companions. Apparently it was not at all out of order to discuss a lady's personal affairs at the hotel dining table.

"And Mort Caythorne," said another.

In the midst of his growing resentment it dawned upon Frisbee that this forgotten little town was a sort of family, in which the intimate concerns of each were the intimate concerns of all.

"I don't think she's given Caythorne very much encouragement," said one of the group.

"Well, he's one of the home folks anyway. She's known him since he was a boy."

The speaker glanced at Frisbee with a look in which there was a half-hidden intimation that he was an unjustified inter-

loper. A tight little family, this. It was evidently necessary that he should establish his own title to membership in it.

"I may say that I knew Miss Packer myself, when I was a boy," he remarked quietly, and sought to change the subject. "Snow coming down quite steadily now."

"Yes, and blowing awful mean," said the man at the end of the table, looking toward the window. "That'll make it kind of unpleasant for another of Miriam's beaux, the old man o' the mill."

"Well, Gass doesn't call there every single night."

"No, but he generally calls after each of his trips to the city. Brings her a present, I suppose," looking at Frisbee to enjoy his discomfiture, "an' I don't think he called after he got back yesterday, so he'll probably come tonight."

Frisbee could stand no more of this stuff. He rose quickly and strode through the hotel waiting room, where he savagely bit off the end of a cigar and stood in angry disgust, contemplating the dreary scene without.

Guffaws of laughter sounded from the dining room, but he scarcely noticed as two sentences were ringing in his ears, one from long ago, and one from the immediate present.

"Georgie, dear Georgie, I'm so sorry."

"George, I'm so anxious for you to be elected."

### CHAPTER III

#### TRANSMIGRATION?

**B**Y THE time set for the afternoon meeting it was evident that Frisbee could not proceed to the next town, and Dunaway telephoned to the chairman there to cancel the speaking engagement. However, the Jamestown meeting was promising. The room of the district court was fairly well filled, in spite of the weather, when Judge Dunaway tapped for order at three o'clock.

"Fellow citizens," he began, "we shall listen this afternoon to a native son of Jamestown. Mr. George Frisbee, a little boy, was favorably known to us old-timers of the mountains. As a man he is favorably known to the whole state and has become the candidate of a great political party for the office of attorney-general, one of the most important in the gift of the people."

While he was speaking Frisbee's eyes searched the audience to find Miriam Packer. He was thinking of what he

could say to her, rather than of what he could say to the others. He did not locate her at first, probably because the rear of the courtroom was rather dark, but as his gaze roved the chamber he felt a rather uncomfortable sensation, as if it were being drawn to a particular spot.

The compulsion seemed to grow stronger.

At last, like the final spring of a piece of steel to a magnet, his glance jumped to the place which had been drawing it. The spot was the piercing black-eyed gaze of a man in the back row of his audience.

The impression was only of those eyes, deep and sad and inscrutable. And yet they seemed not unfriendly. Except for the fire hidden in their depths they somewhat resembled the prospect holes which from the mountain sides had watched each mile of his advance into this fastness. Weirdly they held his own with a power he could not shake off. They seemed to penetrate his soul. There was some message—some inquiry. Inquiry? Well, an inquiry or a demand. They seemed to call for some concession.

In some strange way their expression changed a little as he gazed into them. Those eyes, like the black muzzles of a pair of pistols, were demanding that he surrender something, some secret. Secret? His own eyes flashed back the return. He had no secrets. His life was an open book.

With this establishment of communication he felt his own strength returning, like that of a man who, sinking in a quicksand, should suddenly feel a rocky ledge beneath his feet. The other's gaze left him for a moment and he realized that Dunaway had turned toward him and, with an introducing gesture of his right hand, was summoning him to arise and greet his former townsmen. What Dunaway had said, after his opening paragraph, had been completely lost to Frisbee, but a very considerable salvo of applause marked the conclusion of the introductory speech and the rising of the visiting speaker, the clapping no doubt being generously intended for both men.

As Frisbee rose he felt his feet slipping from the ledge into the quicksands. Those pistol points must be aimed at him again. He must fight this out, somehow. His voice sounded husky to himself as he began. "Friends and fellow-citizens"—he cleared his throat—"and, I am proud to say, fellow-townfolk—" Those eyes! Those eyes! They were drawing him with an unearthly power. His feet were on the very brink of the sustaining ledge. If he could only find some other support! Ah, a saving idea, a simple idea!

"It is so long since we have had a chance to see each other," he continued, "and the storm has made it so dark in this room, that I wish some one who knows where the switch is would be good enough to turn on the light. Besides, I want to show you that politics is really not a dark subject at all."

With the appreciative titter which greeted this mild sally, the room was flooded with light, and George Frisbee found himself normal, capable and smiling, before a smiling audience. His nightmare was past. The ghosts and goblins of the twilight seemed to have departed.

"There, that's better," he remarked, glancing with approval at the new chandelier whose stout prongs of shining brass decorated the center of the room. "It reminds me that the principal business of the legal department of the State, the principal business of your attorney-general, is to let the light into dark places. The business of that office is to discover and suppress graft and extortion and to see that people are protected in their rights."

He looked, voluntarily now, to find the eyes which had watched him from the back row, and saw a tall elderly gentleman with iron gray hair brushed back in smooth waves from a splendid broad forehead. The man was sitting very erect. He wore a neatly trimmed pointed beard and long upturned mustaches which were almost white. Above the beard rose a strong aquiline nose. Those compelling eyes were deep-set under shaggy brows. They seemed now to be burning like live coals.



It was the face of a mystic, a dreamer, possibly a fanatic.

Frisbee paused again, almost shivered, as he confronted those eyes. Once more, but with cruelly intensified vividness, the old scene flashed before his mind as he realized that he was looking into the face of Gaspard Dubonnet, his father's slayer.

The audience, awaiting his next words, shifted uneasily in their seats. Some followed his gaze to the rear of the room. There was a whispering here and there.

Frisbee, realizing that the pause was becoming awkward, endeavored to recover himself by repeating his last word.

"Rights" he said—Dubonnet's wide eyes had narrowed in their deep caverns and he was stroking his beard with long sensitive fingers, like an artist's—"rights are what most of us think of in our relations to other people and to the government."

It was strange indeed that he hadn't seen Miriam Packer in the hall until that very moment, especially strange because she was right beside Gaspard Dubonnet in the back row. The sight gave him an odd pang which was closely akin to jealousy but which helped to steady him from his own spiritual vertigo. Dubonnet stopped stroking his beard and appeared as if about to rise from his chair. The girl passed her hand inside his arm and said something to him. Then—she looked at Frisbee and smiled.

The speaker continued, and as his speech gathered force he felt that the crowd was more and more with him.

Miriam's face was aglow with delight and satisfaction. She smiled a benediction at the speaker and he felt his spirit expanding under the warmth of her encouragement. Half turning, to spread his thought to other parts of the audience, he caught the eyes of Slade and Kenchan, the latter thoughtful, the former contemptu-

ous. He would win at least their secret tribute.

"Our sturdy pioneers of these mountains well understood that rights depend upon duties. They understood that justice means self-restraint; that if men should be permitted to take the law into their own hands there would soon be no

law; that if each individual should be allowed to enforce his own rights there would soon come a time when no one would have any rights to enforce.

"Their peace, their industry, their property, their mines, were too precious to be left to the haphazard and arbitrary adjustment of the six-shooter and the sawed-off shotgun. They must have the machinery for an orderly adjustment of their disputes, an adjustment without passion or violence.

"There were indeed times when our own pioneers forgot their creed of law—" Confound it, why should his eyes be drawn again to those burning coals in the rear of the house? The rest of the audience began to sense the strange duel. People turned and looked from Frisbee to Dubonnet, from Dubonnet to Frisbee.

Frisbee concluded his sentence rather lamely—"but those times, happily, are past."

Turning his glance by a strong effort of will to the faces of others in the crowd, Frisbee was disturbed by an expression of uneasiness, almost of alarm, which he noted here and there among the older men and on the face of one elderly woman. Dad Postlewaite's mouth was open and his countenance registered something akin to both fascination and fear as he stared at the speaker. Nor was that expression changed, it was rather enhanced, when Frisbee deliberately smiled at him. As if terrified by the smile Postlewaite shrank into his collar and then suddenly turned around, looking at Dubonnet in the back of the hall. Thither Frisbee looked again, and then there came a diversion while he stood silent upon the platform. Dubonnet rose suddenly and went to the rear door. There he turned for a moment and looked fixedly at Frisbee. With every nerve tense, George steadied himself to return the stare unflinchingly.

The audience was greatly but silently excited. Men rose in their seats and gripped the backs of their chairs, looking first at one and then at the other of the two apparently hypnotized men. Strangely again the consciousness was borne upon Frisbee that there was no hostility in the compelling gaze of the other man—merely soul-searching question, insistent, desperate inquiry or demand.

Suddenly Dubonnet lifted his head proudly, bowed to Frisbee and abruptly passed out.

The audience caught its breath with relief. Frisbee felt faint. He swayed



slightly, resting his hand on the edge of the speaker's table to steady himself.

Suddenly his eye caught Miriam Packer's. She looked almost wistful. Frisbee in his turn felt a sort of childish yearning to lean on this woman for support. And now he seemed to get the support from her eyes. He spurred himself to continue his speech and then decided that it would be better to conclude it.

"My friends," he said, "sometimes I am flooded with a rush of old memories of this town where I lived as a child." There was a slight murmur throughout the audience. "I really came up here to get acquainted with you, not to make speeches to you. I believe I have nothing more to say from this platform, but I hope you will remain, and let me mingle with you and chat with you."

The simple friendliness of it was effective. People who had sensed some strain without knowing what it was suddenly clapped their hands in generous applause.

And some of them did remain to greet him. These were mostly the younger people. But while they were shaking his hand, Frisbee, his nerves still tense and his senses still sharpened by this afternoon's struggle, overheard some scraps of whispered conversation near him.

"Did you see what Gass Dubonnet saw?" came the hoarse sibilants of Dad Postlewaite. "No wonder he left. He saw Jack Frisbee's ghost—an' so did I—an' I ain't sure that I don't see it now. Let's go."

And soon the few people who remained were drifting toward the rear of the hall.

Frisbee felt Dunaway's hand on his shoulder. "It's all right, boy. You did your best, and it was good, too. But there was a spell in the air today. Gass Dubonnet brought it with him, I think. He was here, but he was years away from us. He looked just like he did the last time I talked to him at the mill. I remember he asked me then if I believed in the transmigration of souls.

"Well, I've got to go to my office for a few minutes. See you this evening, George."

#### CHAPTER IV

##### *"I Beg to Be Excused"*

MIRIAM PACKER had come forward to the place where Frisbee was standing, near the platform. She had been talking to Dunaway, and he turned back to her for a moment before

leaving. "All right," he said, "in just a few minutes."

She smiled at the judge and turned to Frisbee. She invited him to "supper" with herself and her school-teacher companion. Frisbee assured her that he was very glad indeed that it had been found necessary to call off the meeting at Summit.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Miriam, "because I believe each of these public meetings is important in your campaign. But I'm glad, too, because I want to visit with you. I'll see you about six-thirty. I must be off now. Have one little matter of business to attend to before supper."

She gave him a roguish smile at that, as



if the "matter of business" concerned him. George guessed that it involved a visit to the butcher shop.

He spent the next two hours in very pleasant anticipation.

Queer, he thought, how he had always had in his mind a picture of a girl who looked just like Miriam Packer.

Miriam's house was typical of Jamestown construction. Its lower floor, fronting on the narrow street which bordered the creek, consisted of two rooms, one beside the other. Its upper floor, reached by a stairway up the steep hillside, consisted of four rooms, the two rear ones burrowing back into the hill, the two front ones perched over the lower story. At this particular part of the gulch there were no houses higher up, and the side windows of Miriam's rear rooms, the sloping ground reaching almost to their sills, commanded a view of the hillside for a considerable distance both ways.

Miss Chapin was a sweet-faced girl, charming and cultivated, though rather colorless, George thought, by comparison with Miriam. But she had a bright and pleasing style of conversation. She had traveled more than Miriam, who had never been about at all, and she had a somewhat wider superficial knowledge of the world, though Frisbee was more impressed by Miriam's keenness and soundness of judgment.

The evening meal passed very pleasantly indeed. Miss Chapin excused herself soon afterward, saying that she had been suffering for several days with a severe cold.

Miriam sketched her own history,



briefly, for George Frisbee. Her father had died ten years previously. He was at that time the sole owner of the Golconda mine which, however, had pinched out and suspended operations five years before that. Gaspard Dubonnet, her father's engineer and manager, was granted by his will a half interest in the property and its proceeds for life. She was glad of that because it had given the old man a place to live.

"And he insists," she said, "that the property will yet make us both rich."

Frisbee was searching his memory for a remark which his father had made and which his mother had occasionally repeated. Finally it returned to him. "My father always said that his fortune was under the big tree just below the Golconda shaft-house. Did my father have any interest in the Golconda?"

"Well, of course he did at one time. He was the locator of the original claim. That was the beginning of his quarrel with Mr. Dubonnet."

"Yes, I know."

"But Mr. Dubonnet has been so good to me. And he is so quiet and retired now, and so self-sacrificing. I really believe that at times he hasn't had enough to eat. He sold all the machinery at the mine and the mill and I had hard work to get him to take half the proceeds. He said that his life interest in the property didn't include the permanent equipment. He said that was a part of the property itself."

"Well, he was right, from a legal standpoint."

"But I'm quite sure that he used his half, or most of it, to pay off some old debts and to take care of the taxes. I've finally got him to promise to show me an account of them. But he says that when the mine begins to pay again it will be time enough to reimburse him for what he has spent to preserve it. He's very confident that time will come soon. I—I have reasons to believe he is right."

She seemed about to explain further, when their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of another guest, Miriam's cousin, Henry Packer, a shifty-eyed young man, flashily dressed, who apparently had been drinking.

Young Mr. Packer seemed surprised and not altogether pleased to find Frisbee there, but he made an effort to be affable. He conversed agreeably enough, but Frisbee was at a loss to understand what there might be in common between this supercili-

ous cheap sport and his serious, sensible cousin. He gradually reached the conclusion, more by intuition than from anything



that was said, that there was absolutely nothing in common between them except the tie of blood.

Miriam apparently took only a perfunctory interest in his conversation, and the visitor seemed to be getting a trifle impatient.

He appeared to be waiting for Frisbee to go. The latter caught a glance of inquiry directed toward Miriam, as if Packer were seeking to know when they might be rid of the stranger.

George had no intention of allowing the fellow to "sit him out," but an interruption presently occurred which changed the situation for all three.

Another visitor arrived. It was Gaspard Dubonnet. He was carrying a small heavy satchel.

For just a moment before the attempt was made to present him to this visitor, Frisbee saw Miriam glance with a sort of apprehension at the satchel and then at Henry Packer. And he saw Henry Packer look for an instant at the satchel and then turn his face away from the others with a covert half-smile. What did it mean? What was the confidence, involving a lack of confidence, which existed between these people?

Then he looked at Dubonnet. The old man was standing very erect, dignified, unsmiling. So he must have looked, thought George Frisbee, when he slew his father twenty years ago. So he did look, in George Frisbee's memory, as his childish eyes had turned from his father's prostrate form to the doorway of the saloon across the street.

A wave of repulsion seized him, filled him with sudden nausea.

He was dimly conscious that Miriam was speaking. "Mr. Frisbee, let me present my old friend, Mr. Dubonnet."

Before him was Dubonnet's extended hand. Frisbee remembered afterward that that hand, with its long, thin, delicate fingers, was trembling. He recoiled from the

hand as if he had seen his father's blood upon it.

"I—I beg to be excused," he stammered. His eyes rested for a moment on the face of his hostess. She was very pale. He bowed stiffly to her.

In a dream he heard her say, "As you wish, Mr. Frisbee."

He half groped his way to the door, for strange visions mingled themselves before his eyes. In a daze he found his hat and overcoat. He let himself out in silence, leaving silence behind him. He staggered up the street toward the hotel, overwhelmed, half crushed, under a surge of conflicting emotions.

The heavy wet flakes of the driving snow, and the effort of walking in the storm had a tendency to cool and steady him.

He paused in the doorway of the hotel to brush the snow from his coat. There, turning for a moment toward the street, he saw, hurrying past him, one of Miriam Packer's visitors of the evening, her cousin Henry. That young man must have left almost immediately after he did.

Packer was swaying a little. Perhaps he had taken another drink. If so, it must have been from a pocket flask, for he would hardly have had time to stop anywhere. He hastened unsteadily past the hotel, muttering and swearing to himself.

#### CHAPTER V

##### A SHOT IN THE NIGHT

**F**REED from the immediate emotional pressure under which he had left Miriam Packer's house, and endeavoring to consider the situation in the light of reason and candor, Frisbee was soon blaming himself bitterly for hurting her. The matter had been beyond her control and in no wise her fault. After all, the old murderer was her father's manager, and her own partner, agent and trustee. Apparently she had every reason to feel grateful to him.

She had not caused the embarrassing meeting. When it did occur, what else could she have done than she did do?

He would find an early opportunity to make amends. He would even seek out Dubonnet and apologize to him, but he could not do it tonight. He wanted to see Miriam before he saw Dubonnet, and Dubonnet was still at her house. Tomorrow was Saturday. She would not be at school tomorrow. He could see her in the morning before train time. And if he had

to stay over a day to make formal apology to the man who had robbed him of his parent twenty years ago, why, he would do that, too.

In the meantime, what was he here for? He was not here for a courtship. Certainly he was not here to dig into old wounds, either of himself or others. He was here for politics. He was here to make friends. He might as well forget, for the present, the early misadventures of the evening and improve the time remaining. It would do him good, anyway, to chat with strangers about ordinary matters.

The pool-room on the corner above seemed to be open. Buttoning his overcoat around his throat, he went out into the storm and entered that place. He bought a cigar for himself, and one also, in accordance with political custom, for the proprietor.

"I was at your meeting this afternoon," said the latter. "You made a good talk. Wish you'd talked longer, but I s'pose you wanted to visit with folks you knew when you were a kid."

He smiled roguishly at Frisbee. "Saw you talking with our school ma'am. Well, I don't blame you. Mighty nice girl. She has my two kids and they think there just ain't anybody in the world like Miss Packer. Smart girl, too."

Frisbee attempted to steer the talk to politics. But from state politics, in which the other seemed little interested, the conversation slid into local politics, and thence back again to other local affairs and to local people, including the two whom Frisbee particularly disliked to talk about, but whom he could not help thinking about.

"Funny," said the pool-room man, "how old man Dubonnet got up and went out. But then, nobody ever knows what's working inside that old fellow's head. Lately he's been making occasional calls on Miss Packer. About once every two or three weeks. Goes to the city about that often and calls on the girl generally the same evening after he gets back, or the next day, anyhow. Probably it's partly on business, because he always carries a little satchel that he might have papers in. Odd that he should take a notion to do that lately, because for years he's hardly budged out of the mill, except to buy a few provisions. Some folks think the old boy has been negotiating a sale of the mine, and has been getting some money for a first payment, because he seems to have a little money now, and so does the girl.

"And so does that chap, Packer, her cou-

sin, though he hasn't any interest in the mine, that anybody knows about. He goes to the city, too. He's making up to the girl, and he acts as if he was jealous of old man Dubonnet. Seems to think the old fellow's tryng to cut him out."

"Has he got so far that it's a case of cutting out?"

"We-ell, I can't say how far Henry's got, but I'll say he sure is attentive to the lady. Young Caythorne's been kind of shining up to her lately, too. Caythorne's never seemed to care for that kind of a girl



before. He must have an idea that she's coming into a little money, somehow.

"And I wouldn't be surprised if old Gass didn't think he'd found something in the mine. There hasn't been any engineers up here to look it over, so I don't think it's possible he's been negotiating a sale. But occasionally, lately, he's hired one of the Quillin boys, up the Creek, to muck some rock out of the old lower tunnel. He won't allow anyone else in the mine, and believe me, no one's going to try to get in without the old man's permission. He comes out with them two old long-barreled pistols, one in each hand. He can shoot just the same with either hand, and like as not he'll do a little target practice, just for fun.

"There was a tourist foolin' around up there last summer, and old Gass plugged two holes through his hat, pretty as you please, one with each pistol. Right or left hand, it's all the same to him. I ain't ever heard of his missing yet, but I don't take any chances myself. Some day he'll go an inch under a feller's hair instead of an inch over it."

In the enthusiasm of his narrative, the pool-room proprietor had not noticed the effect that the story of Dubonnet's marksmanship was making on his visitor. As Frisbee listened, his muscles tightened, and his fists clenched automatically. "My father never had a chance!" he was saying to himself. "It was cold-blooded murder."

The man behind the counter continued,

"You'd never think, to look at him, that he knew anything about shooting. They say he killed several men in duels before he came to this country. They say he killed a man right here in this street twenty years ago.

"Hey! There he goes, now! Poor old feller! He doesn't look much like a fire-eater, does he?"

Indeed he did not, a stern ascetic old man. As the bright lights from the pool-room window fell in his strong but sharp and rather pinched features, his fierce black eyes seemed to pierce the storm as if they were demanding an answer from the future or from infinity. It was a baffling face, noble yet humble, savage yet refined.

Frisbee mumbled something to the man behind the cigar-case, and passed out to the deserted street. He glanced at the thin figure half a block away and was almost tempted to follow. But how fast the old man traveled! In a moment he was lost to sight in the snow.

Frisbee returned to the hotel and sat down by the stove. It would be cold in his room. In his morbid mood he dreaded the dark and the cold.

There was something unnatural about the old man he had just seen, something uncanny in his own relation to that man. Right now he craved warmth and the company of ordinary commonplace humans. He would smoke a cigar by the stove and get back to normal by talking politics with the clerk and with the doctor, who had just come in and was hanging his snowy overcoat on the back of a chair.

The stove was warm, the cigar was comforting. The clerk and the doctor, if not brilliant, were at least cheerful and sensible. Thank goodness, there was nothing unusual or mysterious about either of these men. And, whether from accident or from some unexpected considerateness, they both refrained from talking about Gaspard Dubonnet. They each accepted a cigar from Frisbee, as he lighted his second.

Ten minutes later, the three of them suddenly stiffened in their chairs. There was the sound of a shot, muffled somewhat by the storm, but still distinct. To Frisbee it sounded as if it came from a distance of two or three blocks.

The doctor ran to the door and looked down the street. "Snow's coming too thick, now. Can't see a thing!" he exclaimed.

The clerk, at his heels, turned back to answer the telephone.

"Hello! Yes, this is the hotel. What! Miriam Packer! Who? Yes, yes, he's here!" He faced quickly toward the others.

"Doctor Martin," he called, "Miss Packer has just been shot. Get there, quick!" Then he spoke into the telephone with a further inquiry, but the person at the other end had hung up.

## CHAPTER VI

### AN EMBARRASSING MISSION

THE announcement of the catastrophe, perhaps a tragedy, had struck George Frisbee not only with horror and amazement but with a sudden and overwhelming sense of frustration, of personal failure.

In a rush of mixed feelings he got into his overcoat as quickly as the doctor and hurried out with him, without asking or thinking of asking for permission to go. He would have been much surprised if anybody had suggested that he should not go. Instinctively he felt that he should be near her.

Miriam Packer shot! Who could possibly have wished to do an injury to that lovable girl? What enemy could she possibly have made?

Ah, his own failure had been that he himself had done her an injury, that very evening, and that he had not yet atoned! Would he ever have a chance to atone now? Would she pass out of his world on the very day when he had found her again, bearing with her to the unknown country, as a last thought of him, the remembrance that he had repaid her friendliness with a cruel hurt? Why, why, had he not gone back to her immediately, with an apology and a plea for forgiveness?

And if he had been there through the evening as he had expected him to be, as she had expected and wanted him to be, this monstrous and unnatural thing could not have happened. He would have protected her. His churlishness had lost him the great opportunity of his life, had perhaps cost the life of this splendid woman.

Young and vigorous as he was, George Frisbee was hard put to keep up with the doctor in his rapid progress down the narrow street beside the creek, and he was half a dozen steps behind the physician as they ran up the long stairway at the side of Miriam Packer's house. Miss Chapin opened the door for them before they had a chance to ring the bell.

With the assistance of the people in the

downstairs part of the house, she had carried Miriam to her bedroom. After calling the doctor at the hotel she had called the sheriff, but he had not yet arrived. Several other people, neighbors, had come in, but she had asked them to remain in the dining room until Dr. Martin had made his examination.

The sheriff arrived a moment later, and Miss Chapin gave the very brief narrative



of what had occurred, which was simply that Miriam, while washing the dinner dishes, had been struck down by a bullet fired through the window from the side hill.

Several men had gone out there to investigate, but in the falling and drifting snow, any tracks which might have been made by the would-be assassin were almost instantly obliterated. It had taken a few minutes to clamber down the steep hillside through the snow, and they could see no one on the street except several people running toward the Packer house, among them Doctor Martin and Mr. Frisbee.

Here, some inquiring glances were leveled at Frisbee. "Yes," he said, "I was sitting at the hotel with the doctor when we heard the shot."

The doctor came out from Miriam's room.

"Well," he said, in response to their anxious looks, "it's one of those cases where you can't tell what will happen. The wound itself doesn't seem so bad, though any gunshot wound in the body is a mighty serious thing. The bullet—not very large caliber, I judge—passed completely through her right shoulder just below the collar bone. It didn't sever any important vein or artery and it seems to be a clean wound. The danger in these cases is, first, the nervous shock to the patient, and second, even worse, the danger of pneumonia. A person is extremely likely to contract pneumonia after a gunshot wound in the upper part of the body. We'll have to use every precaution to prevent that. If we succeed she'll soon be well. Oh, yes, she's bearing up wonderfully. But she seems to be worried about something. She doesn't seem to be light headed at all, but she's extremely anxious that somebody should go up to the Golconda mill tonight—right away—and



tell Dubonnet what has happened. I'm sure I don't know why she thinks it's so important, but I do know that her ease of mind is important, very important indeed at a time like this."

"I'll go, of course," said Sheriff Bates promptly. "But I'll have to make some investigation around town before I can start."

The other men were looking at each other rather sheepishly. They had seemed almost to shrink into their collars at the proposed trip in the storm to that uncanny place guarded by the eccentric old recluse.

But to George Frisbee the suggestion came as a heaven-sent opportunity to repair his earlier mistake.

"I'll go, right away," he exclaimed eagerly. "Please tell Miss Packer that I shall be very, very glad to go."

The doctor looked at him gratefully, the others admiringly but curiously, as if they suspected that he was losing his mind.

Frisbee set out at once for the mill. The way seemed oddly familiar to him, even in the storm.

"She shall know that I can make amends," he assured himself.

But he felt a strong pang of jealousy that she should particularly want Dubonnet, of all men, to know immediately of anything that had befallen her.

## CHAPTER VII

### "WORK TO DO"

THE mill itself, as seen from the village earlier in the day, had brought no sense of recognition to George Frisbee's mind. He could not remember that he had ever seen it before. But he did distinctly remember the way to it. As he passed the untenanted houses in the deserted upper outskirts of the town, even though he saw them but dimly through the storm, he knew that he had been this way many times before. He even remembered some of the people who lived long ago in these habitations now standing lifeless and deserted. In this one had thrived the turbulent Malone boys with whom he had played in the remote past. And in that farthest house—yes it was there yet, though the windows were all gone—had been old Mother Fridhof who had kept the fierce billy goat that used to charge at little boys.

He had been wont to hurry past the place twenty years ago when he walked up that road with his father's dinner bucket. But, oh, how pleasant it had been, espe-

cially in summer, to come back down the mountain with his daddy. How defiant he had been of the Fridhof goat when his father was at his side!

A hundred little circumstances, hidden in some out-of-the-way corner of his memory, little things forgotten since childhood, suddenly came out clear and fresh.



And he remembered little stories that his daddy had told him about the creek, stories about the funny little gnomes that dug the gold out of the middle of the mountains, and

about the fairies that sprinkled it, in little bright specks in the sand of the stream where men could find it if they had faith and patience. And his daddy had said that he was trying to find the place where the little gnomes dug, so that daddy and mother and Georgie could have the things they needed, and so Georgie could go away to school when he got bigger.

And his father had shown him, too, how the stream was always running away and hiding from you, how on this very road you couldn't see much of it at a time because it kept curving away from you all the way to the mine, and there was a high bank that hid the bottom when you were on the road, unless you were on the very edge. And a little boy must be mighty careful, especially when he was alone, not to walk off the road.

But the warning given in childhood should serve him now, Frisbee reflected. He must exercise caution because he had come to the place where the road began to curve, and there was real danger that he might not follow that curve in the blinding snow.

He had an odd but persistent feeling that he was being led, or at least that somebody was preceding him by a very short distance. Suddenly, in a sheltered spot where the road turned away from the creek for a short distance, between a high boulder and an abandoned building, he was almost positive that he was following a man's footsteps. Of course Dubonnet himself had come this way within an hour, but his tracks would doubtless have been completely obliterated before this. These appeared to be more recent. Still, even as he looked at them, they were filled up beyond recognition.

Soon Frisbee was able to distinguish a

light in the window of the mill. As he approached, he found that the window on the south side, nearest to him, was very high, at least twelve feet from the ground.

There was no entrance to the building on this side, though there was a mine tunnel door below and a little to the east of the window. The tunnel entrance was evidently under the mill. Frisbee noticed that its old plank door was ajar and apparently blocked by the snow about the base.

The entrance to the mill floor was evidently on the west side, near the creek. Yes, the ground ascended rapidly here. The space between the mill and the creek was quite narrow, giving barely room for the road. In fact, the road at this place was partly on made ground, extending over a bed of broken mine rock to the retaining wall or "rip-rap" which kept the creek from encroaching on the road and the building. The bottom steps of the stairs to the mill door had been broken, probably by the wheels of passing vehicles. There were two windows on this side, each about twenty feet from the central door.

Frisbee passed the southern window, which was high above his head, and ascended the steps. He knocked repeatedly but got no response. He called. He tried the door. It was locked. He shook it vigorously.

The northerly window on this side began about seven feet from the ground. Frisbee went to it, and by the exercise of "chinning himself" pulled himself up until he could get a view of the interior. He found a slight toe-hold on the logs of the base of the building, which enabled him to ease the strain on his fingers.

His man was there.

There was a fireplace on the north side of the room. A wood fire of several logs was burning there, brightly. At a table before this fireplace sat Gaspard Dubonnet. The table was covered with books. Frisbee shuddered as he saw beside the books two long old fashioned single-barreled pistols in an open leather case. But Dubonnet was apparently not concerned with either the books or the pistols. He was playing with a little mound of yellow and glistening mineral, tossing and fondling the pieces, his lips moving strangely.

The man's hands suddenly ceased their movements, as if paralyzed. His lips parted, but became still. His strange black eyes turned slowly until they looked full into Frisbee's own. Then his body suddenly became tense.

Frisbee expected to see a pistol leveled at him, but he himself seemed to be frozen in his place, unable to move, his aching fingers incapable of loosening their claw-like hold on the windowsill.

Dubonnet was saying something, but Frisbee could not distinguish the words through the closed window. He motioned with his head for Dubonnet to come nearer. Dubonnet suddenly rose, laid the pieces of quartz on the table, and advanced deliberately to the window. His stare at Frisbee's eyes was steady, yet unnatural. From the motion of his lips, he seemed to be repeating the same words, as he approached.

Frisbee's every muscle was tense as the old man's face came within two feet of his own, on the other side of the glass. Then he heard the words.

"Jack Frisbee! Jack Frisbee. Again tonight! Again tonight!"

He put his face still closer, and added, while Frisbee's scalp prickled, "I will fight you again, if that is still my destiny, but I would rather be at peace with you. I have tried to atone to you—for years I have tried, and again this very day. How often have I asked you to come in! Come in! Come in!"

With every nerve tingling, Frisbee nodded his head sideways toward the locked door. Then he dropped to the ground and ran to it. The old man opened it and, as in a trance, motioned him in.

As the door closed behind him, Frisbee extended his hand. The old man began suddenly to tremble.

"Will you pardon me, please?" said Frisbee huskily. "I owe you an apology."

"Jack Frisbee! Jack Frisbee! What do you mean? Would you shake hands with me twenty years after I killed you?"

It was the young man's turn to tremble. It was evident that he had a madman to deal



with.

"You are mistaken," he said, collecting himself with difficulty. "I am not Jack Frisbee. I am Jack Frisbee's son."

"Yes, yes, that is the way you come, now. I saw you, Jack Frisbee, this afternoon, at the court house."

"No, you saw me, George Frisbee, at

the court house. You saw me, George Frisbee, this evening at Miriam Packer's. I refused to shake hands with you, then. Will you let me shake hands now? Please do not refuse me."

The old man stood swaying. Frisbee caught him by the shoulders. The action seemed to steady his mind as well as his body. Then came a queer sound, which made Frisbee's flesh creep, but which brought the other back to sanity. It was a sliding sound, followed by a distinct thump. It came from a wooden structure projecting slantingly downward into the upper part of the building, on the far side.

Dubonnet listened for an instant inquiringly, then he smiled slightly, as if reassured about something.

"Just a rock falling down the old ore chute," he remarked. "They get loosened occasionally, by moisture in the mine. That's why I blocked up the end of the chute."

He passed his hand before his eyes for a moment, and when he turned them again at Frisbee they had entirely lost their wild look.

"Yes," he said with simple dignity. "I am very glad to shake hands with you."

He did so gravely.

"Won't you be seated, sir," he continued. "You have come quite a distance on a bad road, in a bad night. You have found me a little upset. I fear I must have been dreaming."

"Thank you, Mr. Dubonnet, I must not stay. I came for two purposes. One of them is already performed. That was to apologize to you for my boorishness earlier this evening. I hope you will believe that my apology is sincere, even if it is brief."

"You owe me no apology. The debt is the other way, and is much heavier than mere words. I would be much pleased if you would stay a while and talk about—yourself."

With a sort of old fashioned formal courtesy Dubonnet waved his visitor toward a seat by the fire at the end of the room.

"No, really, I must hurry back. There has been a crime, perhaps a murder, in the town this evening. I was commissioned to tell you, but I want to return quickly and learn how she is."

"She?" repeated Dubonnet, with a sudden intake of his breath.

"Yes, Miss Miriam Packer. Some dastard, some would-be assassin, shot her this evening, through the window of her house. It happened very shortly after you left."

Dubonnet's eyes had opened wide. "Is there danger that she may die tonight?" he inquired.

It occurred to Frisbee, later, to wonder why the question had related so specifically to "tonight."

"The doctor thinks not. He says that though her condition is very dangerous she will recover quickly unless she contracts pneumonia as a result of the wound. That cannot be determined for a day or two."

Dubonnet exhaled his breath, as if with great relief. But almost immediately the wild look came into his eyes again. "Go! Go, at once!" he exclaimed. "But if your father will come, I do not fear him now. The pistols—ah, the pistols!" He glanced at the pair of them, crouching side by side in their leather case on the table.

Frisbee feared that his own life was in danger, yet he also feared to leave the man.

"Go! Go!" repeated Dubonnet fiercely, actually shoving him toward the door. "I mean you no harm, young man. I wish you well, with all my heart. But you must go, and go at once. I have little time for what I must do—for Miriam and—and another."

Frisbee departed from this extraordinary interview with his brain in a whirl. After the punctilious courtesy with which he had been received, why was he dismissed with such unceremonious and desperate haste? What was it that Dubonnet must do in such a hurry for Miriam—and who in the world was the "other?" Why could he not have been asked to help?

As he passed down the road he heard through the storm a sound which puzzled him a little, a sound of hammering. He paused and listened. The sound continued for, perhaps, ten minutes. Well, whatever it was, it was none of his business. Part of the strange old man's secret, no doubt.

During the hour in which he plodded his slow journey through the heavy snow, the storm ceased entirely and the stars came out bright and clear and cold. Glancing back at the mill he could see the lights twinkling dimly from Dubonnet's window. He was troubled as he thought of the old man alone there with his crazy delusions. Vaguely and ineffectually he blamed himself for leaving, even though he had virtually been thrown out.

At the hotel he found the clerk awake but yawning. Frisbee was evidently the last guest of the little hostelry to be accounted for.

"Well, Mr. Frisbee! Understand you

went way up to the mill in the storm. Bad night for a stroll, I should say! I've just put an oil stove in your room so you can dry out your clothes. How'd you find the old gentleman? Did he let you in?"

"Let me in?" repeated Frisbee wonderingly. "Sure, but I'm worried about him. How's Miss Packer?"

"Getting along as well as he expected, according to the doctor. He came in and went to bed an hour ago."

"I'd like to see him," said Frisbee.

"Oh, don't bother him now. He said Miss Packer was asleep and resting easy. He's got Mrs. Lovejoy to go over there and stay in the house so as to spell Miss Chapin. One of 'em'll call up the hotel if anything goes wrong. I'm going to sleep, myself, but I'll hear the bell, if it rings.

"No, don't disturb the doctor, Mr. Frisbee. He's had a hard day. Gee, it's quarter after eleven right now. That's awful late for us folks up here in the hills."

Frisbee still protested. "I'm disturbed about Mr. Dubonnet," he said. "I don't think it's safe to leave him up there alone tonight. He—he seemed to be a little out of his head."

The clerk smiled. "Seeing ghosts, was he? Well, that's nothing new with him. He's been doing that ever since—for a long time, now. Don't worry. That old boy'll live forever.

He's queer, but he ain't crazy—not by a darn sight—and he can jolly well take care of himself."

Frisbee, worn out both with physical fatigue

and with the emotional strain of the day, got upstairs to his room. His bones ached as he removed his clothes and hung them in front of the smoky little oil stove.

He stretched his tired frame under the blankets and was soon asleep, but it was a troubled sleep, a sleep full of weird dreams and grisly images.

In those dreams he heard a sound of hammering, like that which had followed him from the mill. In those dreams he heard Dubonnet calling, "Jack Frisbee! Jack Frisbee!"

Then, dimly, he realized that it was his own name that was being called, "George Frisbee! George Frisbee!"

And, not dimly at all, he realized that the

hammering was a loud and insistent hammering at his own door.

Wide awake, he switched on the light and blinked at his watch. The time lacked several minutes of three o'clock.

"George Frisbee! George Frisbee! Open the door!"

He opened it and a man pushed his way in, roughly, a man whose scraggly mustache was full of little melting icicles and whose overcoat was caked with snow.

The man held a revolver in his right hand.

"George Frisbee," he said, "it is my duty to arrest you for the murder of Gaspard Dubonnet."

## CHAPTER VIII

### TWO PISTOLS

THEY served an early breakfast in the Jamestown jail. It was brought by Mr. William Bates, the sheriff's eighteen year old son, and it was quite surprisingly good, consisting of ham and eggs, toast and excellent coffee.

Young Mr. Bates seemed to harbor no aversion toward the prisoner.

"Dad says for me to do anything I can for you, Mr. Frisbee," he remarked pleasantly, "and mother says she hopes you'll like the breakfast."

Savory as it was, however, Frisbee had little stomach for it, though he finished the coffee. Young Bates informed him that he would be taken to a coroner's inquest to be convened at nine o'clock to investigate the death of Gaspard Dubonnet.

"Nine o'clock!" he exclaimed. "May I use the telephone again?"

He had already used it, immediately following his arrest, to summon his partner, Griswold, by long distance. Now he called the coroner, Slade, who had been up most of the night, and was in a very disagreeable temper.

Yes, Slade informed him, the inquest would be at nine o'clock, and the sheriff had been ordered to bring him to it, but of course he would understand that it was for the district attorney to decide whether he should be permitted to be present while other witnesses testified.

Frisbee protested vigorously. His partner, Griswold, could not reach Jamestown until noon. Griswold ought to have at least a day to make some investigation.

The plea was entirely lost on Slade, who reminded him that a coroner's inquest was not a trial, that a person suspected of or charged with crime was not entitled to be





represented by counsel at an inquest and that it was his, Slade's, duty, as a public official to make his investigation immediately and while the evidence was fresh.

Oh, yes, the inquest would be public. Mr. Griswold would not be barred from attendance if he should come, but the coroner would not tolerate any interference with his own investigation or with the evidence.

Frisbee was unable to get Kenehan, the district attorney, by telephone. Mrs. Kenehan informed him, rather cuttly, that her husband was out investigating the "murder."

At nine o'clock, however, when Frisbee was taken into the cold and dusty offices of the coroner, where there was already a considerable crowd, he renewed his protest to Kenehan. That gentleman, a little more diplomatic than the coroner, was no less insistent that the inquest must proceed immediately, though he said that Frisbee would be at liberty to remain, under guard, throughout the hearing.

"Will you tell me something else?" inquired Frisbee. "How is Miss Packer this morning, and what progress has been made toward discovering who shot her?"

"I don't think I am obliged to disclose information acquired by my office in the course of its investigations," responded the district attorney icily. "As to her physical condition, well—she's alive. That's all I know."

Doctor Martin was called as the first witness. He testified that a little after midnight he had been awakened by a call from Miss Chapin, who was worried about the condition of her charge, Miriam Packer; that the hotel clerk expressed regret at having to rouse him, saying that when Mr. Frisbee had returned from the mill about an hour earlier he had wanted to speak to the doctor about Dubonnet, but that the clerk had refused to disturb him on that account.

The doctor had gone to Miss Packer's, he testified further, but had been there only a few minutes when Hawkins, the night marshal telephoned to him from the hotel, stating that Dubonnet had been killed, and asking him to go out there immediately to make an examination.

Hawkins, he said, had previously stopped at the livery stable and ordered a team to drive to the mill. He had called the sheriff and the coroner, and they all went together. On arrival there the sheriff had asked Hawkins to hitch the horses on the south side, below the mill, and had

directed the party to proceed to the steps in such manner as to disturb the snow as



little as possible, and not to go north of the steps at all.

Dubonnet had previously been laid by the marshal on his library table. There was a bullet hole clear through his body and he had been dead for, probably, two hours.

The coroner seemed surprised at the latter statement, which evidently did not correspond with his own opinion.

"Two hours, Doctor? Shouldn't you say he had been dead longer than that? You remember it was nearly two o'clock when we got there."

"Well, it's hard to tell. We judge it by several things, the extent to which rigor mortis has set in, the extent to which blood has clotted, and in several other ways. No—I should not think he had been dead more than two hours, if that long."

The coroner was persistent. "You wouldn't care to say, would you, Doctor, that he could not possibly have been dead for three or four hours?"

The doctor did not seem to regard the point as of very great importance, but he was a little nettled.

"Oh, no, I wouldn't say it was impossible. I would say it was extremely improbable. Such a conclusion would not correspond at all with my own professional experience."

Mr. Billy Bates who, in the capacity of bodyguard for Frisbee, was sitting beside him, looked at the coroner with a perceptible curl of his lip.

The doctor proceeded with other details of the appearance of the body. The bullet had entered the right arm-pit and had passed out at the left arm-pit, imbedding itself in the left arm just below the shoulder.

Was there any other mark of the bullet? Yes; it had cut the flesh on the little-finger side of the right hand and had ploughed a furrow up the right arm as far as the elbow, clipping the bone of the elbow, the furrow commencing again on the upper part of the arm and extending until it reached the place where it entered the

body, in the right arm-pit.

Would it have been possible for a man to shoot himself in that manner? No, it would have been absolutely impossible for a man to hold a weapon with his left hand so as to sear both the upper and lower part of the right arm on the under side, clear to the shoulder, and shoot himself horizontally through the body. He could not have done it by firing the pistol with his foot. In that case, no matter what the man's position, the course of the bullet would have been upward, not horizontal.

Could he have aimed the weapon at himself with his right hand? The doctor, wriggling his finger experimentally, didn't think it possible to fire a weapon with the right hand so as to cut the fleshy part of that hand just below the base of the little finger.

"Did you see any weapon?" inquired Kenehan.

"Yes, one of the old-fashioned single-shot dueling pistols, which Dubonnet had for so many years. Yes, that is the pistol."

"Had it been fired recently?"

"Well, it smelt strongly of powder."

Frisbee objected that the person who first found the pistol should be the one to testify as to its condition. The district attorney replied, curtly, that he would conduct the case in his own way to get at the truth.

"Was the bullet which you found in Dubonnet's left arm of the caliber of this pistol?"

"I judge so, but I'm not sure. I don't know much about pistols. Anyway, it was a little bit battered out of shape by passing through his ribs."

Judge Dunaway was called as a witness and identified the pistol as one of a pair owned by Dubonnet. He had seen them often, he said. They had been old fashioned when Dubonnet had brought them from France, "but he always claimed that they had been made by the best gunsmith in Paris, and that they were more accurate than any modern pistol. He said they had a long record behind them in the old country." Judge Dunaway made this statement with a quite nonjudicial disregard for the hearsay character of such testimony.

The other pistol, he stated further, was just like this one. The barrels were about ten inches long. Each butt had a steel plate on the bottom.

It appeared that the plate on this one, otherwise dull, was now marked with a narrow light streak, apparently new, running

parallel with the barrel of the weapon. Dunaway looked at this streak curiously. He rubbed it with a moistened forefinger, and then put the end of his finger to his tongue. He said nothing, awaiting the next question.

"Do you see anything peculiar about that pistol?"

"I never noticed that mark on it before. I've seen the pistol many times."

"Was there such a mark on the other pistol?"

"Not when I last saw it. The pistols were identical, except that this one always had a little file-mark on the under side of the barrel. Here's the mark. That was the only way you could distinguish them."

"When and where did you last see the other pistol?"

"At Dubonnet's library, in the old mill, the last time I was up there, a month or six weeks ago."

"Where was it then?"

"They were both together in the leather case on his table."

"Have you ever seen the pistols otherwise than together?"



The witness hesitated a moment and looked at Frisbee before replying, "Yes; once."

"When and where was that?"

"That was nearly twenty years ago, in the street out here. I saw one pistol in Dubonnet's hand, and the other one dropping from Jack Frisbee's hand."

Again the cruel, bitter, surge of memory, for George Frisbee!

"What were the circumstances?" pursued the district attorney.

Frisbee objected to the question. The coroner told him that his objections would not be entertained and that if he should again disturb the proceedings he would be returned to jail and left there until his testimony should be required.

Dunaway, declining to answer, was threatened with punishment under the statute requiring witnesses to give testimony at a coroner's inquest, but Kenehan said, "Let me ask this question, first. Was George Frisbee present on that occasion?"

"Yes, but he was a little child, only six or seven years old."

Slade said to Frisbee, "Do you remember that incident?"

"Since I am not permitted to make other objections," said Frisbee, "I would like to remind you that I am not on the witness stand."

"Well, you will be soon!" snapped the coroner.

"If I consent to be," returned Frisbee quietly. "I believe the Constitution is still applicable in Gold Creek County, is it not?"

The district attorney, who had heard of the Constitution, even if Slade had not, approached Dunaway from another angle.

"Did you ever hear Dubonnet express any unkindly feeling toward Mr. George Frisbee?" he inquired.

"No. On the contrary, I have heard him express a friendly feeling toward him, though, as far as I know, he had only seen George Frisbee once since he was a child—until yesterday. But he was always afraid of Jack Frisbee."

"Of—of Jack Frisbee? You mean twenty years ago, when Jack Frisbee was alive?"

"No; I mean during all of the last twenty years, after Jack Frisbee was dead. No; he wasn't afraid of him. That doesn't quite express it. But he believed Jack Frisbee was coming back to fight with him again."

The people in the court-room were leaning forward, with intense interest. A light began to dawn on George Frisbee.

"Mr. Kenahan," said he, "if the witness is willing to answer, I will withdraw my objections to his stating the circumstances of the death of my father."

"All right," said Kenahan, rather ungraciously. Turning to Dunaway he continued, "Are you willing to state them now?"

Dunaway hesitated a moment. Then he said, "I don't know all that preceded it. But there was a quarrel in Jim Slade's—in the old Saddle Rock—saloon. Oh, yes; I was there. I was generally there, and so were Dubonnet and Jack Frisbee. We knew that Frisbee had located the Golconda mine, and it seemed he'd given a power of attorney to Dubonnet, and he accused Dubonnet of selling it to Fred Packer for a song."

"Well, one word led to another, and Frisbee—he'd been drinking a little too much, I guess—called Dubonnet a cheat and a crook. Dubonnet didn't have a gun on him, and neither did Frisbee, and Dubonnet didn't slug him like an American would have done, but he says, very cold and polite, like a French grandee, 'Will you fight, Mr. Frisbee?' And Jack says,

'The sooner the better, and the longer the better.'

"Dubonnet lived upstairs, right there in Slade's hotel, over the saloon, and he goes up, very dignified, and gets his pistols, in their leather case. Yes, that's one of them. He hands 'em to Slade and he says, 'Here are Romulus and Remus, the wolf-whelps with the bark and the deadly bite. Take either one you want, Mr. Frisbee,' he says to Jack, and then, when Jack had taken one of the pistols, he says to Slade, 'You toss a coin, and the man that calls it right stays here in the doorway. The other goes across the street, and when he gets there and turns around, you'll holler, 'Fire!' and we'll shoot. There's just one shot apiece.' He bows to Frisbee, very polite, and he says, 'Is that satisfactory, Mr. Frisbee?' 'Suits me, fine,' says Jack.

"And Jack calls the coin wrong, so he goes across the street. The pistol that he had was the other one, Remus, but they were exactly alike, except for this little file-mark.

"I always thought that Jim Slade hollered 'Fire!' just a second before Frisbee got turned around so as to get a good chance to aim, but I might be wrong. Of course we were all over in the other side of the saloon, by the window farthest from the door, and we ducked down pretty low, too. Anyway, they both fired, once, and Jack Frisbee was killed. He never touched Dubonnet. I believe his bullet is in the wall over the saloon door yet."

"What did he say after he was shot?" inquired the district attorney, gripping the arms of his chair. He had heard the story a thousand times, but now it took on for him a professional interest.

Again the witness hesitated.

"Go ahead, as far as I'm concerned," said George Frisbee, nerving himself to hear his own recollection confirmed. The district attorney shot him a look of mingled rebuke and incredulous pity. "Do you remember what he said?" he asked the witness.

"I remember it mighty well. He said, 'You ain't got me, Gass Dubonnet. You can't get me! I'll stay right with you till I get my rights. Rights! Rights for my wife and kid!'

"Was his kid the def—Mr. George Frisbee, here?"

"George Frisbee was the only kid he had, and he ran up—he was on his way from school—just as his dad dropped to the sidewalk."

Everybody breathed deeply at this nar-

ration, by an eye-witness, of the old story which seemed to have some connection with the recent tragedy. Mr. Kenehan attempted to establish that connection.

"You say that Dubonnet saw the defendant—Mr. George Frisbee, I mean—only once since that time?"

"Well, he saw him yesterday, of course, at the court-house, and perhaps several other times. I only know of one previous time, and I only know that by what Dubonnet told me."

"What did he say?"

Dunaway looked inquiringly at Frisbee.

"Go ahead, as far as I am concerned," said George.

"Well, he told me he had seen Jack Frisbee on the street, in Denver."

"Jack Frisbee?"

"Yes, that's what he said. But then he was always seeing Jack Frisbee. I told him he must have seen George Frisbee, his son, and he said yes, he'd heard of George Frisbee and that he seemed to be a fine young man, from all reports, and doing well, and that he wished him luck. And then he said that he'd thought about it for a good many years and that he didn't believe Jack Frisbee did have his rights in the mine deal, and he'd like to make it up to him if he could."

"What do you mean when you say that he was always seeing Jack Frisbee?"

"Well, that was a persistent fancy with him. You know he had got interested in spiritualism and transmigration of souls,

and all that sort of thing. He said that Jack Frisbee used to come and look into his window at night——"



George Frisbee shuddered so violently that many people looked at him, and the witness paused.

"——used to come and look in his window at night, and used to tell him to keep the pistols ready, for they were going to fight it out again."

The night marshal, in the front row of the audience suddenly cried out, "An' that other pistol wasn't nowhere in the room when I found Gass Dubonnet."

## CHAPTER IX

### CAN GHOSTS KILL?

**S**LADE was distinctly annoyed. So was the district attorney. The investigation was getting a little out of hand, it seemed. This was supposed to

be a plain inquest into facts, not into the realm of the supernatural. It must be brought back to earth.

To George Frisbee, wondering about the absence of one pistol, whereas he had very distinctly seen them both an hour or two before Dubonnet's death, Pete Hawkins, the marshal, soon contributed another contradiction on a minor detail.

The witness was greatly agitated as he began his story. He said he had been riding around Jamestown all evening, looking for a trace of some person who might have shot Miriam Packer. He knew that Dubonnet had been at her house earlier in the evening. He finally rode out to the mill, starting from town a few minutes after eleven. But it was slow going, on account of the snow, and his horse continually getting his feet balled up.

No, it wasn't snowing then. It had stopped, probably half an hour before he started.

He finally got up to the south side of the mill, he said, and was going to tie his horse to the bolt of the old tunnel door, but when he got near it he observed that the door was nailed up.

Frisbee distinctly remembered that it had been open when he observed it.

"Ask him if he's sure of that," he said, in an undertone, to the district attorney.

Kenehan looked at him sharply. "What do you know about it?" he inquired.

The witness had overheard the colloquy apparently, for he hastened to answer. He seemed very anxious to get along with his story.

"I certainly am sure, because I noticed it awful particular, an' I'll tell you why. Gosh!" he ejaculated, running his hands through his hair, "I guess I know. I was sittin' my horse there for a minute. It was kind of in a shelter, an' I was lookin' at that plank door to see if there was a place where I could tie old Dandy, because I didn't want him to get impatient and wander back home without me while I was callin' on Mounseer Dubonnet."

"I noticed that it was nailed up good and tight. The snow was kind of tramped down in front of it. That door was made of inch planks, the regular kind that you buy for a foot wide, an' that run about eleven inches, but they wasn't all the same length. There was one of 'em, I reckon, eight or ten inches shorter than the others, an' that left a little porthole through the bottom of the door at the end of that plank."

"Well——so help me, Mr. Kenehan, while



I was lookin' at that door I suddenly seen a pair of eyes lookin' at me from that hole. Old Dandy seen 'em, too, an' he gave a sudden snort an' jumped away from there like he'd seen a ghost, an' I believe he had. If an animal an' a man both see a ghost, it's there, ain't it?"

The audience seemed in no mood to laugh, but the district attorney smiled in a superior manner. "Did you investigate the ghost that looked at you through the hole in the door?"

"Yes; I did, Mr. Kenehan. I do claim that I ain't no coward, an' I did that very thing—a little later. An' I'm sure it was a ghost, because I didn't find it there an' because—because I did see it—it must 'a' been it—at the other place."

"Other place?"

"Yes, in the air in front of Gass Dubonnet's north window. You see, it was like this. Dandy had shied away from that door awful quick. I didn't want to have the thing in the rear of us, so I managed to get him around to the west side of the mill, around the corner beyond the steps. I got my gun out and watched that corner that we'd just come around, but I couldn't get Dandy to face back, he was that nervous, so I had to kind of turn in the saddle. Well, nothin' come off after we'd waited there a minute, an' I began to think maybe we'd made some fool mistake, an' I'd better go on an' finish my errand. An' then I looked around again, in front of Dandy this time, to see where I could leave him. We was beyond the steps, an' almost to the north window. It was propped open, a little, with a stick or somethin', I suppose—just a little, perhaps three or four inches."

"Propped open!" thought George. "It was closed tight, when I raised myself by the sill to look through it." He hung breathless on the witness' next words.

"An'," thinks I, 'I won't have to hitch



Dandy at all. I can just talk through the window to old Gass.' Because, you see, his light was still burning, an' I knew he must be up. He sits up—he used to sit up—half the night,

readin' them queer books. That's what Judge Dunaway says."

"Never mind what Judge Dunaway

says," cautioned the coroner. "What did you see?"

"Well, I'm tellin' you, ain't I? Good God, I seen enough! I'd moved Dandy up a step or two. His head was in front of the window, when I heard Gass holler, inside. An' then—my God, Mr. Slade, it makes my blood run cold!—then the shot came, an' just that minute—right with the shot—somethin' jumped or flew away from that window, above the road, right in front of me!"

"Something! Well, what in the world was it?" inquired the district attorney, leaning forward.

"Good Lord, Mr. Kenehan, I wish I could tell you! Dandy reared up backward, whinnyin' pitiful—a kind of whinnerin' shriek, an' dumped me off in the snow, an' ran home. Mr. Kenehan, I hear animals can tell a ghost quicker'n a human can. I know I can't tell what the thing was. It was somethin' bright. It seemed as if you could see through it. It was—Why, I think it was round, an'—an' about as big as a dinner plate. Well, I dunno, either. It might 'a' been bigger or smaller than that.

"Now, Mr. Kenehan, I ain't no coward, an' you know it. I've been in all kinds of gun fights, an' sometimes against some pretty bad hombres, but I hadn't never fought with no ghosts: I just got back against the wall an' stood there, with my gun in my hand, for I don't know how many minutes.

"An' nothin' at all happened, an' I didn't hear nothin' at all, an' then I kinda begun to come to myself, an', thinks I, 'There ain't no ghost lookin' for me. An' anyway, I'm an officer of the law, lookin' for a criminal.' An' finally I got up my nerve to holler, 'Gass! Gass Dubonnet!' I didn't get no answer. My own voice kinda give me a little courage, as you might say. An' then I went up the steps to the door, an' knocked on it, an' then pounded an' kicked on it an' shook it, but I couldn't raise a sound inside. The door was locked, all right enough. I stuck my jackknife in the key-hole an' found the key was in it.

"An' then I looked for somethin' to stand on, to look through the window. An' I had to go 'round by the tunnel door again. God! It sure did give me the creeps, but I remembered I had my electric flashlight—I'd been so flustered I'd forgot all about it before—an' I turned it on that little hole at the bottom of the door, an' there was nothin' there at all. An' I realized that the thing must have flew away

from the north window. Just the same, I looked inside the hole to see if I could see any tracks, though I don't believe ghosts make tracks. Do they, Mr. Kenehan? Anyway, there wasn't any. No, I didn't put my hand in. No, sir, I didn't want some skeleton to grab it. The space inside, near as I could tell, seemed to have been swept—there was nothin' that would show any tracks.

"But ghosts don't make tracks, I'm sure, because, later, I looked with my light all over the ground from the north window to the creek. You could see real plain with the electric torch. I didn't disturb the snow. I didn't go any further than Dandy's front hoofs had gone just before he jumped. There was some holes in the snow, partly filled up, like as if somebody had gone to the north window and back to the steps not long before the snow had stopped. But there was no fresh tracks on top of the snow anywhere around or near that north window—no, sir; not as much as a snow-bird. Of course, as I said, the snow around the south side of the building an' near the tunnel door had been pretty well tracked up.

"Well, I got hold of an old ore-car, there, an' managed to tip it up on end, so's I could climb up on it an' look through the south window. Gass' light was burnin' bright, and there was a bright fire in the fireplace, an' through the window I seen Gass lyin' with his body forward on the table, stretched out toward the window that that thing had flew away from. His right arm was stretched out ahead of him, an' the pistol was near his hand. There was a pool of blood under his chest, drippin' down from the table to the floor.

"Well, I managed to get an iron handle off that ore car, an' smashed in the door—it was a hard job—an' got in. Gass' pistol barrel was still warm, but he was dead—er'n a door nail. There was a pile of gold nuggets on the table. Some of 'em was pretty big, an' they all seemed fairly clean.

"His dead eyes was open wide, but they didn't look crazy at all, like they used to sometimes when he was alive. An' he had the peaceablest expression I ever saw on him. Looked just as if he'd died happy."

"How far was he from the window?" asked the coroner.

"Well, I should say all of twenty feet. It's a great big room. But the table ain't been moved. You can measure it.

"Now, Mr. Kenehan," he continued, "here's something queer. That window that the thing had flew away from was

closed an' locked. The other windows was closed and locked an' nailed down. There was only one door, an' that had been locked, an' I'd broke it open to get in. There was a trap door leadin' down under the mill, into the old tunnel, but that was



locked above, with a strong padlock an' hasp. An' besides that, the tunnel door was nailed up, as I've told you. There had been an ore-chute going into the building when it was

used for a mill. That's over on the other side, away from the window, through the top of the wall. It was nailed up tight. There positively wasn't any way for a human being to get into that room, or out of it, except by the door where I came in or the window where the thing had jumped away. Nothin' or nobody else came out while I was there, or after the shot. But when I got in, there was no one in the room except me an' Gass Dubonnet's body. There was only one pistol in the room. An' Gass couldn't have shot himself with that pistol, as the doctor says."

"Well, then," said Kenehan impatiently, "what's the answer? You seem to know so much about the supernatural! Who did shoot him?"

"Mr. Kenehan," said the witness humbly, "that's what we're here to find out, I reckon—but I know, now."

"You know!" shouted the district attorney. "How can you know?"

"I know from what Gass Dubonnet said, when he hollered, just before the shot."

Kenehan leaned back in his chair and stared at the witness.

"Well, what did he say?"

"He hollered out loud, 'The pistols are ready, Jack Frisbee! Fire!'"

## CHAPTER X

### A WOUNDED HORSE

PETE HAWKINS, though a plain and matter-of-fact person, was not insensible of the effect which his astounding narration produced upon the audience and upon the six men of the coroner's jury. Those gentlemen all shivered a little, even two of them who had been sitting with rather scornful expressions during the earlier part of the recital. The witness, living through his ghostly

experience again, wiped with a red cotton handkerchief a brow which was sweating freely in this cold, damp room.

In the tension of the moment, the opening of the street door created a slight but welcome diversion. With the entering of a gust of outside air, the thoughts of the occupants of the room turned a little toward normalcy. The man who came in with that fresh air was Griswold, Frisbee's partner, just arrived from the station.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, indicating Kenehan, Slade and the jury, with a comprehensive bow. "I'll sit here beside Mr. Frisbee, if I may."

Slade started to tell him that he could not, but was deterred by a look in Frisbee's eye. And the district attorney whispered, "Don't make this too strong, Tom. It'll cause a reaction."

"Sorry I had to interrupt," remarked Griswold pleasantly, though he sensed the hostility. "Please proceed."

"Let's go back a little now, Mr. Hawkins," said Kenehan, really gratified at an interruption which seemed to draw the situation a little away from its supernatural atmosphere. "Let's go back to the time when you heard the shot. Did it sound from outside the room or from inside it?"

"That's the funny thing," replied the witness. "I can't just tell. It seemed to come from inside and it seemed to come from right in front of me, too. The more I think back to it, the more it seems as if it came right from the window in front of Dandy's nose. But it was a funny sound—in' kind of a shot, a kind of a ghost shot——"

"Let's not put any ghosts in this thing, now. It had a real sound didn't it?"

"Ye-es, but—I'm tryin' to tell you—it had a funny kind of a sound."

"Well, well, now what do you mean by that?" pursued the district attorney, greatly annoyed.

"I mean I never heard any shot just like it, and I've heard lots of shots, too. The only way I can describe it is to say it was a kind of a long-sounding shot. I don't mean it wasn't sharp. It was sharp enough, but the crack of it seemed to kind of rise a notch, just a tiny fraction of a second after it first started. Instead of going 'bang,' real short and quick, like an ordinary pistol shot, it kinda went 'ba-ang,' an' that thing jumped away from the window just as the shot sounded.

"I tell you what I think, Mr. Kenehan——"

"Well, you needn't tell us any more ghost stories," said the district attorney. "What we want is the plain facts."

"I wish you'd let him finish his answer, Mr. Kenehan," volunteered one of the jurors, "it may throw some light on the situation."

Kenehan waved his hand resignedly. "Oh, all right, all right! Give us the benefit of your theory, Mr. Hawkins."

"Well, Mr. Kenehan," resumed the witness, "there's a lot of things that us ordinary folks don't know about. We don't know much about spirits. But there's a little thing—I mean two little things—that I found there, that makes me believe that Gass Dubonnet tried to get the—the—to get Jack Frisbee to agree to somethin' an' they couldn't agree, an' they got mad, an' then they had their duel again, an' this time Jack Frisbee shot him."

The district attorney waved his hands above his head in desperation. "Ghosts! Ghosts! You've got ghosts on your brain, Hawkins! Get rid of your ghosts, and get down to sense. We know that George Frisbee, a living man, a young and active man, was at the mill very shortly before Dubonnet was killed. We know that that living man had a reason to hate Dubonnet——"

"Stop it, I demand!" shouted Griswold. "What kind of fair play do you call this? What semblance of legality has such a statement? Mr. Coroner, I protest against this——"

"Oh, well," said George Frisbee quietly, "I was there, about an hour and a half before midnight. I have nothing to conceal."

The coroner and the district attorney looked at him in amazement.

"But," continued Frisbee, "why not let the witness proceed? He is telling an honest story and, whether his conclusions are correct or not, he evidently has some more facts to tell. Why not ask him what was the thing, or the two things, which he found there, to give him the idea which he has?"

"They was two pens," interrupted the witness, without waiting for the question to be put by the district attorney.

"Two pens!" repeated the latter, in perplexity.

"I saw two pens, in cut-off penholders, on the table this morning," stated the coroner, disregarding the order of procedure.

"That's them," said the witness. "I

picked 'em up from the floor. Two new pens, in penholders that had been cut off with a jackknife so they was about four inches long. Both pens had the points split open, just as if two men had started to write with 'em, an' then got mad, an' jabbed 'em down hard on the table or somethin'."

Judge Dunaway, who had been following the testimony with a very thoughtful and studious expression, tiptoed over to the district attorney and whispered something to him. Then he looked at George Frisbee and smiled.

Kenehan addressed the witness. "Did you find those pens on the table?"

"Why—why, no," replied Hawkins, as if the idea had just come to him. "I found 'em on the floor—on the floor just under the north window."

The witness seemed vaguely disturbed, as if he had overlooked the significance of this fact, and as if it might cast a doubt on his theory. Then he brightened.

"The thing—the ghost—must have taken them to the window," he added reflectively, "an' dropped 'em before it went out. Or perhaps Gass started to hand him a pen at the window."

The district attorney himself smiled at this hypothesis.

One of the jurors, who thought it was time to display a little practical common sense, remarked, "I think, Mr. Coroner, that we ought to see the premises while the snow is still fresh and before conditions change."

"I intend to take you there right away," replied Slade. "You may go, too, if you wish, Mr. Griswold," he added indulgently.

"Why, certainly I'm going," said Griswold quietly.

"In the meantime, Mr. Hawkins," said the coroner, ignoring the lawyer's attitude, "have you anything more to say?"

"Yes, somethin' else, but it's somethin' I don't understand. I don't see why a ghost should have any grudge against a horse, especially poor old Dandy. He's a gentle, harmless critter. But that thing cut him—twice."

"Cut him!" exclaimed the coroner and the district attorney simultaneously.

"Yes, gentlemen, that's just what it did. You know, Mr. Kenehan, after I'd come back here to town on foot, an' called you an' the doctor, an' Mr. Slade, an' the sheriff, an' arrested Mr. Frisbee, like you said for me to do, I went home and let Dandy into the barn. He was whinnerin' an' cryin' outside. I was so excited I didn't notice anything wrong with him, except that the poor beast was awful cold an' miserable. I put a blanket over him an' tied him in his stall. Well, this mornin' I noticed that he had a little cut across his nose, an' another one, quite a deep little cut or jab, in his neck, just in front of the right shoulder. The cut on his nose was raw, but had started to scab over a little. The place on his shoulder was swollen up pretty bad.

I started to wash it out with some weak carbolic acid solution, but Dandy quivered an' jerked so that I don't believe it did much good."

Judge Dunaway thoughtfully took off his glasses, wiped them, and put them in their case, as if the principal work of the day was concluded.

Others in the court-room stared blankly at Hawkins, wondering what this strange and apparently irrelevant detail could possibly have to do with the strange and unnatural story just told by this straightforward and honest man.





## CHAPTER XI

## "FIND COUSIN HENRY"

WILL you be sworn, George Frisbee?" inquired the coroner.

"Just a moment, Mr. Coroner," interposed Griswold. "I understand that Mr. Frisbee has no objection to being sworn, but I am going to advise him against it, for the present. He is arrested on a charge of murder. This inquest is speeded up, over his protest, without even the elementary fairness of allowing his counsel to be present at its commencement. The whole proceeding seems to me a palpable attempt to convict him before he is tried. I am convinced that his own candor and frankness would be used——"

"That will do, Mr. Griswold," snapped the coroner. "He doesn't have to testify, and it isn't your province to make a speech to the coroner's jury, as you very well know. His reasons for not taking the witness stand are immaterial. The jury can draw their own conclusions."

"I'm willing to trust the jury, but I'm not willing to trust George Frisbee's personal and political enemies. I——"

The coroner rapped with his gavel, drowning the flow of words.

"Silence!" he shouted. "This session is adjourned. The jury will accompany the coroner and the district attorney to the Golconda mill. The sheriff will keep George Frisbee in custody at the jail."

"Mr. Slade," said the sheriff, "wait a minute till I give you a note to my men. I've posted guards on the road about a hundred yards each side of the mill."



"What did you do that for?" said Slade, with sud-

den and unaccountable vexation. "It wasn't necessary."

"I did it on Judge Dunaway's advice," replied the officer.

"A very wise precaution, sheriff," said Griswold. "It is not only necessary to see that the mill is not disturbed, but——" he looked Slade squarely in the eye and continued deliberately—"where a man is accused of a murder, committed at the mill, and the ground is covered with snow that fell before the murder, it is important to keep that sheet clear—to show that the

accused man's tracks were not in the snow after it stopped falling.

Slade and Kenehan exchanged the look of conspirators who have been caught, and each of whom desires to shift the blame to the other. Several of the jurors glanced at each other knowingly.

Dunaway looked at Griswold with high approval. "Just exactly what I thought, Mr. Griswold," said he, "and I wish you'd take me on as associate counsel for the defense."

"By the way, Kenehan," added Griswold, "let me ask by what authority you are keeping Frisbee locked up. Have you filed any complaint against him? Has any grand jury indicted him? If not, I'm going to demand his release today on habeas corpus."

Kenehan was in an embarrassing position. He could, of course, prevent Frisbee's release by filing a formal complaint for murder and, as a commitment on this charge was not bailable, Frisbee would be kept locked up until his trial—until after election. Until after election—that was the trouble. If he didn't file such a complaint he might be subject to some criticism; but if he did he would probably be accused of taking an unfair advantage of a political rival by detaining him so that he could not present his case to the people.

Frisbee was well respected throughout the state. People generally would not be inclined in advance to believe that he was guilty, even with considerably stronger evidence than had yet been discovered. And, in any event, Frisbee could not get away without his knowledge. He could not possibly walk over the precipitous snow-covered mountains. The only way out was down the railroad track. The only precaution necessary was to keep an eye on the track and to watch the departure of the daily train.

It suddenly dawned on Kenehan that under the circumstances it was the height of political folly to detain Frisbee. Slade had put him up to this. Slade was a fool. Well, he would undo this folly as rapidly as possible. Generosity, confiding and noble generosity, was the correct—indeed, the only permissible—play.

"Now, now, Mr. Griswold," he said rather pompously, "we plain country lawyers are perhaps a little too punctillious, sometimes, in the performance of our duty. Personally, I don't believe Mr. Frisbee is guilty of this crime. But an atrocious crime has been committed. Mr. Frisbee was on the scene—by his own ad-

mission—at least a very short time before the crime. He had a possible motive, though—er, personally, knowing his high character—I would be the last man to attribute it to him. Under the circumstances it seemed to Mr. Slade and myself that it was our duty, as sworn officials, to detain him until some investigation could be made. However," here he swelled to noticeably larger proportions, "I think I am justified, since—er—no formal charge has yet been filed—to release him on his promise not to leave this town without my permission."

Thus establishing both his dictatorship and his magnanimity, in the minds of his fellow townsmen, Kenehan bowed to Frisbee and waved his hand with the liberal gesture of benevolent royalty. Dunaway's lip curled a little scornfully. Griswold smiled faintly. But the jurors and the others present—who included most of the inhabitants of the little town—applauded vigorously, with generous disregard of the proprieties of the court-room.

"Ain't that just like old Charlie Kenehan!" "He'd never think ill of anybody." "He's too high-minded to suspect anybody of a crime." "Trouble with Charlie is he's too generous to be a district prosecutor. We'll have to elect him to a higher office."

These and similar expressions were heard on every side. Kenehan glowed as he realized that he had increased his popularity and extricated himself from a difficult situation by one clever stroke.

Frisbee was tactful enough to play to the same lead. "That is very generous of you, Mr. Kenehan," he said, warmly, "and I want to assure you that I shall stay right here in Jamestown until this mystery is solved."

A murmur of approval was his reward. Dunaway gripped his hand. "Come on with us to the mill," he exclaimed.

"No," said George, to the surprise of everybody, and the suspicion of some. "I have an errand to do here in town. I'll wait for you at the hotel."

Slade, the only person in the building who was not pleased at any part of what had happened, glowered at him and whispered to the pimply faced youth who acted as his clerk and general assistant. And when Slade, the jury, Kenehan, Griswold and Dunaway departed for the mill, in Suggs' bus, George discovered that he was followed from the room.

Of course he had not expected to be at liberty without being under surveillance.

Not pausing even to return to the hotel, he went at once to Miriam Packer's.

The young man, Caythorne, stood below him on the sidewalk, as he knocked gently. Miriam's teacher companion opened the door. She seemed greatly surprised to see him, but was quite friendly and asked him in.

"How is Miriam—Miss Packer?" he inquired eagerly.

"Getting along very nicely. The doctor says it was a clean wound and is well sterilized. If he can keep her from having pneumonia she'll be sitting up in a couple of days, and will probably be out in a couple of weeks. She kept asking if Mr. Dubonnet knew of her wound—got a bit flighty over it, in fact. Along about midnight she was delirious for a little while. Seemed to think something horrible was happening. Kept saying—well, I don't believe I ought to tell you."

"Please do."

"Well—I will. I don't understand it, but it may be important. She kept saying, 'Dear Georgie, I'm so sorry.'"

"I think I understand," said Frisbee solemnly.

"I was quite alarmed about it," continued Miss Chapin, "and I called the hotel and



got Doctor Martin out of bed. He came over and looked at her. He said it was nothing to worry about, and it was to be expected that she'd have a little fever. He gave me some medicine to put

her to sleep, and told me, whatever I did, not to excite her, but to keep her quiet.

"But then the doctor and I got pretty excited ourselves"—here Miss Chapin lowered her voice—"because, just as he was putting on his coat, Mr. Hawkins telephoned from somewhere for him to come out to the mill, and then he took me out into the kitchen and told me that Mr. Dubonnet had been shot, too.

"And it was odd about Miriam. I hadn't given her any of the doctor's medicine, but when I went back into her room, after the doctor had gone, she was entirely in her right mind, but she was crying. She said, 'And so he's dead, poor man! I might have known it.' I thought we'd been awfully quiet in the kitchen, but she must have overheard us. Still, the doctor didn't tell me that Mr. Dubonnet was dead. He only said he had been shot. Well, anyway,

Miriam went to sleep after that, and she's still asleep."

A faint call from the adjoining room proved that Miss Chapin was mistaken. She left the visitor, but returned immediately.

"Miriam just asked if you were here. She says, 'Tell him to find Cousin Henry.' She's quite excited. You'd better go, Mr. Frisbee. See if you can get Doctor Martin over here right away. I'm afraid."

The doctor, however, entered the house as Frisbee left it. He greeted the young man briskly but not unpleasantly.

Frisbee walked back to the hotel, followed by his shadow, Caythorne.

"Find Cousin Henry." Well, that ought to be easy enough. He couldn't very well get out of town. But wait a moment. Where could he be? When had he been seen last? At Miriam Packer's house, and coming from it, shortly before she was shot, so far as Frisbee knew.

But it was a little odd that with most of the people of Jamestown at the coroner's inquest this young man, who had no regular occupation which would keep him away, had been conspicuous by his absence.

Nor was he present when the coroner's little court reconvened.

## CHAPTER XII

### THEORIES, FACTS AND FIGURES

**G**EORGE FRISBEE, although he did not go with the others to the mill, was too preoccupied to think of luncheon. But apparently the coroner, the jurors and others concerned in the investigation, had found time not only to visit the scene of the crime, but also to eat a hearty noonday meal.

When the coroner tapped for order at about two-thirty, for the benefit of the record, Mr. Hendricks, the county surveyor, who, it seemed, had attended the examination at the mill, made a diagram of it and a profile sketch of the interior of the mine. He based the latter upon his own acquaintance with the property and upon a blue-print of the Golconda mine prepared by Dubonnet several years previously.

"I remember something of the early history of the Golconda," said he. "John Frisbee sank the shaft and located a small but rich vein within thirty feet of the surface. He dropped the shaft a few feet below it and ran a short cross-cut to the vein, which seemed to have a dip to the west and a strike almost north and south."

One of the jurors, a tenderfoot named Hazelton, who had recently come from the East to regain his health in the mountains, and who had then tied his own decaying fortunes to those of the little town by investing his savings in a Jamestown store, caused a smile at this point by requesting information.

"Mr. Hendricks," said he, "I wish you'd explain the terms 'dip' and 'strike.'"

"Certainly," replied the witness, adding as a friendly rebuke to the others, "The language of mines seems simple enough to those who have grown up among them, but it is not familiar to other people. Mr. Hazelton could get most of us balled up, I guess, if he should talk in Iowa farming terms."

"It's like this. Just suppose that your vein, sometimes called a lode, is a sheet of paper. Of course the edges are irregular, and it's full of holes, and in some parts it is thin while in other parts it is thick. But although it is called a vein, it is a mistake to think of it as a tube, like the veins in your body. A vein of mineral is conceived of as a sheet between walls of rock in the earth—a sheet lying on a slant. The sheet is generally bent and twisted. Take this sheet of paper, now."

He held it, sloping, before him, to illustrate.

"The top edge of this sheet is its apex, the apex of the vein. That is to say, the apex is not the high point but the high edge. The direction of that edge is the 'course,' or 'strike,' of the vein, and the slope of the sheet is what we call its 'dip.' You get at the vein by cutting down to it or across to it. If you cut across to it by a tunnel you follow it up on its dip, and sideways along its course, by excavations in the rock. We call those excavations 'stopes.' Is that clear now, Mr. Hazelton?"

"That's fine, thanks. These chaps have made my head swim with their talk about 'stopes' and 'shafts' and 'winzes' and it's all been Greek to me."

"It's easy enough when you know it. The shaft, of course, is the vertical hole in the mine, a sort of well. A winze is a vertical excavation made in a tunnel, as for instance, to get at ore below the tunnel. You have to do that sometimes, but the best mining practice is to carry the stopes upward."

"All right now, Mr. Hendricks," said the coroner a little impatiently. "If you're through with this lecture on general mining practice, suppose you go ahead and tell

us about this particular mine."

"I was about to do so," replied the surveyor calmly. "Frisbee ran a tunnel west from the shaft a hundred feet below the surface and hit the vein again a hundred feet from the shaft. You can see from the old blue-print showing these workings, that the vein had a dip of about forty-five degrees. It showed up a little thicker there, but the greater values seemed to be below, as Frisbee demonstrated by a winze which he sank in his tunnel at the hundred foot level.

"So he dropped down with his shaft another hundred feet, and this time, tunneling west again, he struck the vein, still not very thick, a hundred and fifty feet from the shaft.

"That is to say, the dip had become steeper. The vein was not far from vertical at that point.

"It was about that time, I believe, that Frisbee's interest went to Packer. Dubonnet took over the management. I remember Dubonnet thought that Frisbee's vein didn't promise very much at that depth, but he was confident that it would show heavy values lower down. That is rather characteristic of the lodes in this section. And of course there was always the chance of cutting another vein. So Dubonnet dropped the shaft to seven hundred feet and then he tunneled west again. If the vein had continued to dip at the same angle, or if it had maintained its tendency to drop toward the vertical Dubonnet would have cut it pretty near the shaft, or at least within four or five hundred feet. But he had to run a lot further than that. I know that Mr. Packer thought the vein had pinched out entirely. As you might say, Mr. Hazelton, Packer thought they must be below the bottom edge of the sheet."

He held his simple model up again for illustration.

"Packer was in favor of starting a tunnel higher up. But they finally struck the vein twelve hundred feet from the shaft. You see, somewhere between the two hundred foot level and the seven hundred foot level the vein had flattened out till it was only about thirty degrees from horizontal. Well, it was good, rich stuff when they did find it. Dubonnet stoped upward from the seven hundred foot level for perhaps two hundred feet, taking out good values. Then he started to follow it down below the seven hundred foot level. But you see, from there down, he was pretty near the side of the mountain, and so, to avoid

the necessity of winzes and underhand stoping, and also the necessity of running all his rock to the shaft and hoisting it to the top, he simply ran a short tunnel from the outside, about a hundred feet lower, in the direction of the shaft.

"That made it mighty easy to work the mine, especially so because the short tunnel was run right from the county road. He didn't have to run that tunnel more than thirty feet before he struck the vein. Its further dip would carry it below the road and below the creek, if it didn't pinch out. However, it was pretty thin at the lower tunnel level. Dubonnet simply stoped up from there, taking out the ore till he hit the place where he had been working in the seven hundred foot level.

"Well, there seemed to be an unlimited supply of ore above. They assumed that it went clear up to where Frisbee had left off, and it was rich, free-milling stuff, so Dubonnet thought he'd save expense by putting up a little ten-stamp mill. And he had an ingenious scheme for running his ore into it. He didn't have to hoist it out of the mine and then tram it down to the



mill. He simply made a chute from the mill itself up inside the mine to the seven hundred foot level, following in a general way the hole that he'd made when he had stoped out the ground between it and the lower tunnel. Of course he had to enlarge that hole in some places. The chute must have been about two hundred and fifty feet long. He'd simply drop his ore into it at the seven hundred foot level. He had some contrivance of heavy gates, swung from the top, inside, to keep the rock from coming too fast and wrecking his mill. I remember he had to experiment a little with those gates, but he finally got them so the ore would feed in, nice and easy, to the upper floor of the mill, which he used for a crushing room. The chute is still there. You've seen where the lower end of it runs into the mill. But the machinery is all gone from the mill, and even the upper floor has been taken out. It was made of very heavy timber, and I believe Dubonnet used it all up in the mine, since the mill stopped running. Timber is rather expensive up here nowadays, you know, because there are no more sawmills left in the mountains.

"When the mill was running, Dubonnet



sifted his ore right in the mine. It was very simple. All he had to do was to put a grizzly in the bottom of his chute and let the siftings come through a funnel-shaped arrangement below, that carried the finer stuff right down into cars on the short tracks in his lower tunnel."

"Excuse me," said Hazelton again. "What do you mean by a grizzly?"

"Oh, that's just a set of bars that you run the ore over, in order to sift it. Of course Dubonnet had to hoist the sifted stuff into his mill, but it wasn't much of a hoist."

"The country rock he would let run down into the lower tunnel, and then he hauled it out and ran it alongside the road to convenient places where he dumped it into the creek. He used the creek for nearly half a mile, up and down, but he rip-rapped the outside of his dump so as to make a pretty good retaining wall all the way along the east bank. It really improved the channel and protected the road. That cost him something in labor, but he wasn't pinched for money in those days and he and Packer were always public-spirited men."

"He had ore-bins down below his crusher floor and he would feed his stamps from them, but they've all been pulled out now. The poor old boy didn't have anything but bookcases in there, these last few years, and aside from those the place has been about as empty as a barn. I guess you'd say it looked emptier still, stretching way up in the dark, with the upper floor out."

"Well, I don't know how far Dubonnet followed the vein up above the seven hundred foot level. I do know that it finally tapered down so thin that the expenses ate up the property. The mine got deeply in debt and Dubonnet had hard work to save it. For the last few years we've wondered how he managed to live, and poor Miss Packer has had to teach school."

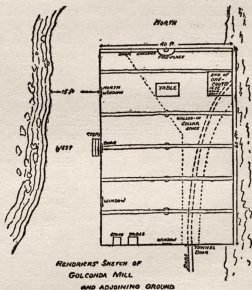
"However, it looks now as if he'd found at least a little pocket of high-grade stuff lately. Nobody knows where, or how much of it there is."

Mr. Hendrickson then sketched the interior of the mill, showing its relation to the surrounding ground.

In front of the mill the road, which necessarily followed the creek from James town, had barely room to pass between it and the building, as the space north of the steps was not more than fifteen feet wide. The mill consisted of one large room, forty by sixty feet. In the north end of

it, in the middle, Dubonnet had constructed a fireplace. It was connected simply to an ordinary iron stove-pipe outside, but inside the building it had a fairly wide flue. However, the flue was not large enough to hold a man. He had measured the flue. It was eight inches wide by twelve inches long. There was also an opening in the concrete floor at the back, for ashes, and doubtless intended also to improve the draft, but this opening was smaller, only eight inches by eight.

Dubonnet ate, slept and lived in this large room. There was a line of very heavy studding through the middle of it, but these posts, connecting with the enormous logs which had served in former years to support the crushing room floor, were evidently intended to sustain those logs and that floor and had never served



to divide the mill into two rooms. At the north end of the room these pillars were missing. They had doubtless been pulled out, Mr. Hendrickson explained, for use in the mine. The same reason probably accounted for the absence of one or two of the great rafters, which were the size and length of telegraph poles. And in spite of the width of the room probably none of these rafters needed the support of the central stulls, now that the weight and vibration of the machinery were gone. If Dubonnet had lived there much longer he would probably have used up all the insides of the old place.

His cook-stove and a small kitchen table were in the south end of the room. His cot-bed was on the east side, near the north end, and under the old ore-chute. The

end of this chute projected seven feet into the room, at a height at least sixteen feet from the present floor. The chute itself was approximately six feet square, and it entered the room on a slope of about forty-five degrees, through the east wall. Its lower end was about four feet above the rafter log which had originally supported the crushing room floor. The end of the chute was provided with a door which swung from the top. The door was secured by a padlock through a hasp at the bottom. Mr. Hendricks explained that this door, which would have been of no use or effect to stop the fall of ore when the mill had been in operation, had probably been put in by Dubonnet to prevent the entrance of sneak-thieves into the mill from the mine.

Not only was the padlock fastened, but the door had recently been nailed securely in place. Recently, the witness repeated, because the nail-heads were bright and the wood about them showed fresh hammer dents.

Frisbee wondered if this could account for the sound of hammering which he had heard after his departure from the mill.

Against the walls extending from the fireplace Dubonnet had made bookshelves, and these were full of books. Mr. Hendricks said that he and the coroner had taken out all the books and examined the space behind them, and the walls. There was not room there for the concealment of a man, and the walls appeared to be solid.

At this point in the county surveyor's testimony one of the jurors asked that Hawkins be recalled to say whether he had looked behind the books.

"No, not behind the books," replied the night-marshal, "but I looked everywhere else, in and under the cot, under the library table and under and behind the kitchen table and the stove, though there wasn't room for a man there.

"Yes, and I climbed up on the rafter that was under the ore-chute and——"

"How did you get up there?" asked the juror, quickly.

"How did I get up there? Why, I used Gass Dubonnet's ladder. There was a ladder, about twelve feet long, I guess, lying against the east wall. I looked on top of all the rafters and on top of the ore-chute. There would possibly be room for a man up there, but he couldn't be up there without my seeing him and he couldn't have got into the chute from the top because it was boarded over. Anyway, a man couldn't get up there without something to stand on. The ladder, as I say, was on

the floor against the wall, and the table, with Gass Dubonnet lying on the east end of it wasn't directly under the rafter, or near enough to jump to the rafter from the top of it. Would you think so, Mr. Hendricks?"

"It would certainly take a very athletic man to get onto the rafter from the table," responded the surveyor. "I don't believe it could be done. I measured some of those distances, with the same thought in mind. The table is two feet and six inches high. It is three feet wide and a little more than five feet long. It was almost squarely in front of the fireplace, parallel with the north wall. But the north side of it was six feet from a point below the center of the rafter. The top of the rafter was ten feet from the floor, that is, seven and a half feet higher than the top of the table. A man would have had to make a standing jump that would enable him to grasp a log a foot and a half or two feet higher than his head at a distance of six feet from where he stood. No, gentlemen, as the table stood, it seems to me it would have been impossible for a man to get from it onto the rafter that was under the ore-chute."

"Mr. Hawkins," persisted the juror, "how long was it after you heard the shot before you got into the room?"

"Well, I should think it was all of ten minutes."

"Gentlemen," said the surveyor, "you saw the situation yourselves. Even if the table had been under the rafter log it would have been very difficult for a man to get onto the rafter from the table. The rafter would have been a couple of feet higher than his head, and he would have to have tremendous strength in his hands to grip that rounded surface after he had jumped to it, and then to swing himself up onto it."

"And, anyway, Mr. Slade," contributed the night-marshal, "the table couldn't have



been moved. I'd have heard it."

"You'd have heard it, while you were break-in the front door with an iron bar?" persisted the inquisitive juror, disregarding the coroner's

frown. "I ain't sure about that."

"You forget I looked in at the south window before I broke in. And when I

looked in, the table was where it is now, an' Gass Dubonnet was lyin' on the end of it."

"Uh-huh," continued his cross-examiner, "an' how long was it before you looked in? How long was it that you was shiverin' outside the wall waitin' for a ghost?"

"We-ell, I—really, I dunno. Five minutes, mebbe. But I'd 'a' heard a mouse if one had moved across the floor then, and believe me, gentlemen, there wasn't no sound at all inside that room while I was listenin'."

"Just a minute more, Mr. Coroner," persisted the juror. "Let me ask you this, Mr. Hawkins. Could you have heard a mouse, or a man, while you was wrestlin' with that ore-car to get it up to the south window, so's you could look in?"

"I'm pretty sure I could. I didn't make much noise. Really, I was kind of scared to make much noise. I believe I'd 'a' heard any noise even then. But now let me ask you a question, you're so awful smart. Suppose while I was movin' that ore-car—it didn't take me very long—a man had moved the table under the rafter and stood on it and jumped to the rafter, and then climbed to the top of the chute—he'd certainly have to be some gymnast to do any part of that stunt—an' perhaps got into the chute—God knows how—then, this is what I'm askin' you, how could that man have put Gass Dubonnet's body back on the table and moved the table back six feet to the rear of the rafter?"

The amateur sleuth on the jury subsided in the general snicker which immediately enlivened the grim proceedings.

The coroner rapped for order. "I think there's been quite enough of this informal discussion," he announced. "Go ahead, Mr. Hendricks, and give us any other information which you have prepared."

### CHAPTER XIII

#### FINGER-NAIL MARKS?

**M**R. HENDRICKS gave the jury some further figures. The sill of the north window on the west side was seven feet from the ground, and the slope to the south end of the mill made the height of the other windows greater, the one on the south end being a little more than nine feet above the ground at that point. The tunnel door was below, but a little to the right, or east, of that window, and it, like the chute in the mill-room, had recently been nailed tight.

On a question by the inquiring juror, who was endeavoring to re-establish his reputation as an acute observer, the county surveyor confirmed Hawkins' statement about the small porthole at the bottom of the tunnel door. It was the width of one board, that is to say, about eleven inches, and it was not quite seven inches high, the end of the board being cut somewhat on a bias. A man could not possibly get through this opening. The trap door in the mill floor, evidently used in times past to hoist ore from tunnel cars in the basement of the mill and, more recently, as a means of descent from the mill into the basement and thence into the tunnel, was firmly locked from above. The key to this lock, like the key to the chute, was on the ring which Dubonnet customarily carried and which Mr. Slade had taken from his pocket. This door, when locked, could not be moved more than half an inch. Mr. Slade had opened this trap door and, with Hendricks and several of the jurors, had descended into the space below the mill floor.

Frisbee happened to glance at Dunaway during this part of Hendricks' story, and saw that gentleman watching Slade very keenly. Dunaway whispered something to Griswold, and the latter addressed the district attorney. "May I ask a question, Mr. Kenehan?"

"Certainly," replied the district attorney, with an access of his new-found consideration.

"What I wanted to ask, Mr. Hendricks, was whether Mr. Slade went ahead of you into the tunnel?"

"Why, yes, naturally. He put the ladder down into the basement and climbed down ahead of us and walked back and forth for a few seconds. Then he turned his flashlight so that we could see to get down."

Frisbee thought he saw the shadow of a smile behind Dunaway's unkempt beard. "The old chap certainly has some theory of this case," he thought. "Wonder what it is."

"Well, below the mill, the tunnel wasn't actually cut out of the rock, was it?"

"Oh, no, of course not. The mill had simply been built on pilings a few feet above the ground, and under the mill the tunnel wasn't really a tunnel at all, but a cellar, except where it curved into the mountain almost under the east wall of the mill. However, the cellar was very small, because practically all the space had been filled up, clear to the floor of the mill, with loose rock hauled out of the

## THE GHOST OF THE GOLCONDA

mine. It was a narrow passageway for perhaps thirty feet from the south door, and then it



widened into a triangular space under the northeast corner of the mill. There was room for the tracks, leading to the tunnel, proper, and there was room left to

get under the fireplace on the north end, so as to remove ashes. There was some empty space in the north end, but most of the basement was filled up tight with rock from the mine. It was easier, of course, for the old man to dump his cars there than it was to trundle them by hand down alongside the creek."

"Was—may I go on, Mr. Kenehan?" asked Griswold. "Thank you. Weren't there plenty of places where a man could hide among those boulders?"

"No; I think not. They were piled up pretty even, so as to prevent falling, and they had the effect of a walling in of the passage and of that triangular space. We didn't see any place where it looked as if a man could be concealed in that cellar. Of course the tunnel ran back a little way into the mountain. We followed it in, but we didn't try to climb the stope above it."

"Did Mr. Slade go ahead of you into the mine, by the tunnel?"

"Sure. He had the only flashlight."

Dunaway was leaning forward, greatly interested.

"Did you see any depression in the ground, the floor, of the tunnel?" he inquired.

"Wait a minute," said Slade, rapping with his gavel. "We can't allow this. If the district attorney wants to permit one of you gentlemen to ask a few questions, that's all right, but I'm not going to have all of you butting in, haphazard, trying to develop theories of your own. Please proceed in the regular way, Mr. Kenehan, or we'll dismiss this witness."

"Well, never mind that question, anyway," said Dunaway, unabashed. "I'll suggest one to the district attorney, if I may."

He did so, and the district attorney asked, "Mr. Hendricks, do you know whether that tunnel was ever used for

any other purpose than as a passageway for ore and rock from the mine and as an entrance to the stope above it?"

"Why—er—I don't know from personal observation, but as an engineer I know that it must have served another purpose."

"Exactly. What purpose, please?"

"Why, as a drain, of course. There's more or less water in all these mines up here, as you know, Mr. Kenehan."

"Well, that's just what I was getting at. Now, did you see, in this tunnel, any sign that it was used as a drain. Was there water flowing in it, or was there a water channel?"

The witness had not thought of it before. He was frankly puzzled. He seemed to think that his failure to observe something of the sort was a reflection upon his professional keenness. He finally stated that he had noticed a little water trickling down the stope, but had not noticed where it ran out of the tunnel. In order, perhaps, to cover his own confusion, he remarked, "Of course you know there have been a good many deep tunnels cut in this district since the Golconda was opened up. They've drained the country to a considerable extent. And for that reason there's not nearly as much water in many of the older mines as there used to be."

Dunaway was scratching his head reflectively, as if he was trying to remember something. Mr. Slade again took a hand.

"I don't see, Mr. Kenehan, what is the purpose of going into all this. It cannot have anything at all to do with the case. It makes no difference what the tunnel or the cellar was like. Gaspard Dubonnet could not possibly have been shot by a man hiding there, even if there were any evidence that anybody had been there. It is as clear as can be that he was shot by somebody in the room, or by somebody through the window. It is also perfectly clear that after he had been shot nobody could have got into that tunnel."

"Oh, very well," said Kenehan rather testily. "It's the coroner's business to determine the manner of this man's death—if he can. I'm willing to drop this line of inquiry for the present. Mr. Hendricks, tell us about those windows, if you please."

"Well, as has been already stated here, they were all permanently fastened, that is, nailed, except the north window on the west side. They had been nailed from the inside, and they had evidently been fastened that way for a long time. The north window on the west side had no



weights—I don't believe any of them had, for that matter. To keep the window open, you would have to prop it open. But when it dropped down, it would fasten automatically, because there was a little spring catch on each side. When I examined the window those catches were both fastened."

"Same as when I saw it, right after Gass Dubonnet was shot," ejaculated Hawkins from his seat. "But not the same as when I saw it the minute before that."

"That will do, Hawkins!" snapped the coroner.

Mr. Hendricks' further testimony related to the topography of the country outside. The creek bed, proper, was about thirty feet wide at that point, and its bottom was very rocky. It was not frozen over, though there was ice in the pools. The water was a little above average height right now, and, opposite the mill, was perhaps eight or ten feet below the road.



The near bank was the practically vertical rip-rap wall. The far bank rose rather smoothly for about a hundred yards, in which distance the total ascent was about seventy-five feet, which would bring it above the top of the mill.

There was absolutely no track of a man or an animal in the snow on that opposite slope. The witness—at the suggestion of Judge Dunaway, it appeared—had examined it most carefully. And between the creek and the mill there was no sign of a track on the top of the snow at any point as far north as the south edge of the north window. The most northerly marks were the front hoof-marks of a horse just south of that point. There was some disturbance in the snow, there, which the witness thought was sufficiently explained by Mr. Hawkins' testimony.

Also, there were some depressions in the snow under the north window, made before the snow had stopped falling, and hence not readily distinguishable.

"Those were my tracks," volunteered George Frisbee.

"Your turn will come directly," said the coroner, sarcastically.

As for the stream itself, it would hardly show tracks. But there was no disturb-

ance of the snow on either bank, or on the rocks in the stream, such as would be made by a man or an animal walking in it. The rip-rap was a smooth snowy wall, not only at this point but as far north and south as he could see from the mill.

"Anything else of interest that you can tell us, Mr. Hendricks, either about the mill or the ground near it," inquired the coroner, apparently relieved, though not satisfied.

"No-o; I believe not. I did notice one little thing in the mill that I couldn't understand. It probably has no significance. There were two little fresh cuts or gouges on the top of the window sill, inside. They were not much more than short, deep scratches, about an inch long, I should think, and an eighth of an inch deep. They were about four inches apart and they were just inside the window. I only noticed them because they seemed to be new."

Again that queer suggestion of a smile, behind Judge Dunaway's beard.

Hawkins suddenly ejaculated, trembling with excitement, "My God! They musta been the marks of the ghost's fingernails when he was bracin' himself for a shot!"

Even Slade laughed. Dunaway alone looked thoughtfully at the marshal. "Something like that," he murmured, as if to himself.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A THEORY OF MOTIVES

GEORGE FRISBEE, later in the afternoon, told simply and in concise language the story of his visit to Dubonnet. He remembered that when he had got back to the hotel it was five minutes before eleven. It had taken him perhaps three quarters of an hour to walk down from the mill in the snow. It had stopped snowing a few minutes before he reached the hotel.

He made no effort to conceal any fact which might have a bearing on the tragedy.

He was asked if he had felt any enmity toward Dubonnet? Well, he must admit that he had entertained such a sentiment. It had been difficult to overcome it. But he had offended Miss Packer by displaying it, earlier in the evening, and after that he had endeavored to suppress his own feelings.

Did Dubonnet display an animosity toward him? No; Mr. Dubonnet had received him very courteously, had not manifested any enmity or dislike, and had shaken hands with him. He said nothing about

Dubonnett's initial refusal to do so, deeming this matter of hallucination not material to the inquiry.

The jury went out to consider their verdict. Dunaway, Griswold and Frisbee went to the latter's room in the hotel. There, Dunaway closed the transom and looked carefully down the hall, then locked the door and hung his overcoat over the knob.

"Let's be brief, here," said Frisbee. "I want to go over and inquire about Miriam Packer."

"Of course you do," said Dunaway, smiling seriously, "but there are some things to be considered first. Let's review this case a little, and kind of think out loud—but not so very loud. You have some enemies in this town. I don't mean Kenehan. I think he would really like to be decent, but he's never learned how, and he was put up to fix this on you, George.

"Now, as a starting point of our inquiry, let's consider who would be interested to kill Gass Dubonnet. You have a possible motive, revenge for the killing of your father. Would anybody else have a motive? What's the usual motive for the crime of murder, outside of revenge—which isn't very common. Well, it's usually either jealousy or cupidity. What about jealousy? It seems a little far-fetched to imagine that



anyone could be jealous of the attentions of an elderly man to a young woman, but stranger things have happened. Gass Dubonnet was only about sixty, and he was a pretty fine figure of a man, mentally and physically, though lately he's seemed to me to be rather losing his strength. If it was possible for anybody to have that motive, there are two men who might have it. One of 'em's yourself."

"But—" began Frisbee rather angrily. "Now don't fly off the handle, George. I believe you're as innocent as I am. I'm just suggesting how other people might look at this. It's the other people's point of view that we've got to consider now."

"Who's the other person?" asked Frisbee.

"Why, her cousin, Henry Packer, of course. He's been a frequent visitor at her house.

"Now, then, there were two crimes committed last night within several hours of each other. The man who was shot—" he paused and changed the form of expression, to the mystification of his auditors—"the man who is dead was a frequent visitor to the woman who was shot. He visited her in fact on that very evening only a few minutes before she was shot and only several hours before he was—before his own death."

Frisbee and Griswold looked at each other, frankly puzzled by Dunaway's odd choice of words.

"Now," continued the old lawyer, "every police officer, every criminal lawyer, every judge, knows that it's a very common thing indeed for a jealous suitor to kill both his favored rival and the woman who has disappointed him. If jealousy was the motive it couldn't have inspired Frisbee to commit both crimes because at least it is clear that he did not commit the first. He was at the hotel in conversation with Doctor Martin when the shot was fired in the first crime.

"Could the other suitor—if you can call either of them a suitor—have committed both crimes? Well, he might possibly have committed the first. He might have committed the second if anybody, any assassin, committed it. Of course we are up against the difficulty of finding out how any assassin could have done it.

"Now, personally—of course I may be wrong, I don't believe that Henry Packer was enough in love with his cousin to be goaded to murder on account of her rejection of him. And we don't know whether she ever rejected him, or had occasion to. Henry is rather a vindictive sort of a chap, but I don't believe that Dubonnet's attentions were of the sort to inspire jealousy.

"But if it wasn't jealousy, was there any other motive and is there any other person who would be affected by it? The usual motive is cupidity.

"A very interesting thing was developed at the inquest which surprised me and which I know surprised lots of other people, though it wasn't emphasized to any great extent. Kenehan apparently didn't think it was important. I know from Slade's expression that he did think it was important, but for some reason he didn't choose to dwell on it or inquire into it at length. That interesting thing was that Gass Dubonnet had before him a pile of gold nuggets, raw gold, practically pure, probably worth several thousand dollars.

You saw them when you looked in at the window. Hawkins saw them. They were there when the doctor came. It would seem that Dubonnet wasn't killed by somebody trying to rob him of that gold, or at least any such robber was unable to complete the intended robbery.

"The coroner took possession of those nuggets. I'd rather see them in the hands of a more honest man. I don't trust Mr. Slade.

"But the significance of their presence is that Dubonnet must have actually found an ore body in the mine where we supposed there had been nothing to speak of—certainly no high-grade—discovered in the last fifteen years. If that is correct it probably means that Dubonnet had taken out more of the same kind. That explains to me his frequent trips to Denver with a heavy grip. He could carry several thousand dollars' worth of such stuff in an ordinary satchel. A good deal of it he could take right to the mint. As for the rest, any assayer could separate a few thousand dollars' worth for him. That kind of gold is almost pure. It wouldn't have to be milled or smelted. It was almost as negotiable as cash.

"And if there's any of that stuff in the mine there ought to be a lot of the next grade, high-grade milling ore. In other words, the mine is valuable, probably immensely valuable. Now in that case who would benefit by Dubonnet's death?"

"Of course, if the person who would benefit didn't know he would benefit, then it would provide no motive to him. But oddly enough—and I believe that I'm the only living person who knows it so far, except Miriam Packer—the only person in the world who would benefit at this time by both Dubonnet's death and Miriam Packer's death is—"

"Her cousin!" exclaimed Frisbee.

"No indeed—yourself."

## CHAPTER XV

### A LEGAL DISCUSSION

AT THIS remarkable statement the two young men looked at Dunaway and then at each other as if they doubted the reality of their own existence. Frisbee spoke first, endeavoring to wake himself from this queer dream.

"You say I am the only one who could derive a benefit from the death of both of these people, and yet you believe I am innocent?"

"Well," said Dunaway judicially, "I'll

put it this way. You are the only person who could derive a permanent benefit from Miriam Packer's death—at this time. And you are the only person who could derive a permanent benefit from Dubonnet's death as it has already occurred. It's possible that some one else, most any evil-disposed person, might derive a temporary advantage by having him out of the way. But you couldn't have known that you could get either that permanent benefit or that temporary advantage."

"Well, George," said Griswold, "this case has more mysteries in it than anything I've run against in my experience as a lawyer.

"Yes, and more dangers, I'm afraid," replied George. Judge, or heaven's sake, explain."

"That's what I got you here for. It's a matter of the title of the Golconda Mine. Give me your professional attention for a few minutes. What became of that title depended partly on which died first, Miriam Packer or Gaspard Dubonnet. If Dubonnet died first, all the property would belong to Miriam Packer for her to dispose of as she saw fit. If she died first, half of the property, her half, would go to her natural heirs, and then, when Dubonnet should die, the other half, his half, would also go to her heirs."

"Her heirs? Who were they, and how would they get Dubonnet's half?"

"She has only one, now, her cousin, Henry Packer. You see, it's this way. Old man Packer wanted to provide both



for his daughter and for his engineer and manager, Dubonnet. His will left the Golconda mine to them by undivided half interests during the period of their joint lives, "with-

out impeachment of

waste," to use the expression of the old law-books that you boys are familiar with. They could mine and sell all the ore there was in the Golconda if they could find it and get it out—until today I wouldn't have thought that was a very valuable right—but while both of them were alive they couldn't sell the mine itself, and neither of them could dispose of his or her half interest.

"That isn't quite a correct statement of it either, because Miriam was allowed to dispose of her half interest after she should become twenty-six years old, whether Du-



bonnet was still alive or not. In other words her life interest in the half would become a clear title in fee when either of two things should happen; first, when Dubonnet should die, no matter how old she should be then; second, when she should become twenty-six years old, even if Dubonnet should still be alive."

"Why twenty-six?" inquired Griswold.

"Well, old man Packer didn't have a very high opinion of the business judgment of women. He often said that if a man could dispose of his property at twenty-one a woman ought to be at least five years older than that before she should be allowed to do it."

"This is rather curious," said Frisbee. Miriam must be close to twenty-six right now."

"Very close indeed," said Dunaway, smiling. "Today happens to be her twenty-sixth birthday."

The young men both whistled softly.

"Remarkable coincidence," said Griswold.

"Not exactly coincidence. Coincidence implies chance. I don't think it was chance that caused her to be shot the evening before her birthday. It fits too closely with somebody's financial interests. If she had been killed last night instead of being only wounded, her title to the mine would have descended to her natural heirs—heir. Not only that, but Dubonnet's title would go to the same person when he should die. You see, his life interest was only a half interest in any event, even if he should survive Miriam."

"Packer wanted him to have the income from half the property during his life, but it was all to go to Miriam or her heirs finally. Of course he naturally expected that she would marry and that her heirs would be her husband and children."

"Well," said Frisbee, "it sounds frightfully cold-blooded—of course any murder is cold-blooded—but this seems pretty nearly to convict Henry Packer of both crimes. He would gain by having Miriam Packer die before she was twenty-six because her property would go to him—"

"And Dubonnet's half, too, as soon as he should die," interposed his partner.

"Exactly. Whereas if she should live until today she could deed her part away—"

"And Dubonnet's part, too, after his death," interrupted Griswold again.

"Precisely. Or she could dispose of it by will so as to cut out her natural heirs."

Dunaway was smiling quizzically at them.

"You're a discerning lawyer, George," he remarked.

"I don't know whether that is sarcasm or not," replied Frisbee, "because, for the life of me I can't see how all this affects me at all. She certainly hasn't sold the property to me. Probably she hasn't the physical ability to make a deed today, even if she has the legal right to do so."

"And if she'd made the deed yesterday, do you say it wouldn't convey anything because she then didn't have any title which she could convey?" said Griswold.

"Well," responded Frisbee, "I suppose it could operate as a covenant to convey such title as she might acquire later."

"Yes—if there was a consideration for it," said Griswold argumentatively. "You haven't been buying mines from a lady instead of playing politics here, have you, George?"

"Boys," said Dunaway, "you're getting into rather fine legal distinctions. This case is simpler than that. I'm quite sure she didn't make any deed. I certainly should have advised her against it. But she didn't need to do that in order to accomplish her purpose. Now we'll continue this bar examination a minute or so while you bright young city lawyers tell me how else she could dispose of her property."

"By will, of course," said Frisbee.

"Effective, when?"

"Why, at her death, certainly."

"Go to the head of the class. So it wouldn't matter when she made her will, what kind of a title she had then, or, indeed, whether she had any title at all. The will would pass whatever title she might have at the moment of her death."

"This is elementary stuff, professor," said George, "but I don't see how it affects me."

"Of course you don't, because there's one important fact that you don't yet know. Unless they told somebody, there were only two persons beside myself who did know that important fact. One of those two persons is dead, and the other one is wounded and may die. Those two are Gaspard Dubonnet and Miriam Packer."

"Now, strictly speaking, I have no right to tell you this, but from something Miriam Packer said to me I'm going to assume authority to do so, because it is a link in a chain of evidence affecting the charge which has been made against you and which may be made against you again."



But you and Griswold must promise not to breathe a word of it until Miriam Packer releases us—or dies. In that event it will become a matter of public record."

The two young men, leaning forward in their chairs, eagerly promised.

"Right after your meeting yesterday," continued Dunaway, "Miriam Packer and Gaspard Dubonnet went to my office. Dubonnet, in fact, went there before the close of the meeting. He left early, as you must remember. Miriam asked me to go with her and meet him there.

"Dubonnet—he was something of a legal draftsman himself, like most mine managers here in the mountains—had a will made out in his own handwriting—"



"His will?" interrupted Frisbee.

"No, her will.

It was short and he had it all prepared for her signature. I looked it over and I must say the contents of it surprised me very much, but it was all right from a legal standpoint—and I reckon it was all right from a moral standpoint, too, a mighty high moral standpoint."

"Moral standpoint?" said Frisbee, puzzled.

"Well, they both explained some things to me, particularly Dubonnet, but I won't go into that now. Don't think I'd better assume that much authority. Miriam executed the will herself, then and there, in due form, with Dubonnet and myself for witnesses. I joshed her just a little about a document which probably wouldn't be effective for about sixty years, and she said she'd attend to other steps long before that time, but she was just doing this for the sake of—of a possible emergency. That will's in my safe now, and—mind you, mum's the word—the will devises all her interest in the Golconda Mine to George Frisbee, his heirs and assigns forever."

## CHAPTER XVI

### FOUND IN THE ASHES

WHILE George Frisbee was endeavoring to adjust himself to this astonishing information there came a knock at the door. Dunaway

opened it and greeted the hotel clerk.

"I thought you gentlemen would like to hear the coroner's verdict," he said. "I just got it by telephone. I wrote it down. There's lots of queer things in this world, ain't there, Judge?"

Dunaway took the slip of paper and read: "We, the jury, find that Gaspard Dubonnet came to his death at about midnight, on or immediately following the 17th day of October, from a gunshot wound not self-inflicted, but inflicted by some person or agency unknown. We are in doubt as to whether any earthly human agency inflicted said wound, but recommend further investigation by the district attorney of the possible connection of George Frisbee with said crime."

"Well," remarked Griswold, "there's one thing about a coroner's jury. They haven't any responsibility and they can say anything they please. But you see, George, that regardless of evidence you're still under suspicion."

"But," said Frisbee, "that jury was simply a prey to superstition. Let's be sensible about this. A pistol shot may be an unnatural thing—of course it is, in a sense—but at least it isn't a supernatural thing. A human hand must have fired that shot. It couldn't have been anything else. Don't you say so, Judge?"

"I would certainly say that a human—the judge paused a moment, again appearing to be casting about for the right word—"a human agency fired that shot. I agree that bullets are not fired supernaturally. But I'm not going to spring any theory about this till we clear up a few things. Here are a few questions.

"Where is the other pistol? He always kept the two of them together, and George saw them both together on his table a couple of hours before he was killed. George didn't have the other pistol in his possession or in his effects when he was arrested. Could he have taken that pistol and thrown it into the snow on the way home? Possibly, but why should George have taken the pistol except to use it? And he couldn't have fired the fatal shot because he was here in bed in this room at the time it was fired. The clerk saw him come in and go upstairs to bed nearly an hour before the time when Hawkins heard the shot. That alone would seem to be a clear alibi for George, unless he managed to sneak out again and go back to the mill to commit the murder. And that would be very far-fetched. At least it hasn't been suggested yet.

"Which pistol fired the fatal shot? The pistol in the room had just been fired when Hawkins broke in, and, if it was not fired by Dubonnet's hand but by some other hand, it might be the one which killed him. It was near his body and in front of his hand when it was found, but it might possibly have been thrown there by an assassin—if there's any way of accounting for an assassin's presence in the room or his escape from the room.

"But were there two shots, or only one? Hawkins says he heard only one, but from his statement I'm inclined to think he heard two, fired almost but not exactly together.

"If there were two shots, from what place was the other one fired? I mean the one not fired by the pistol which was found. It couldn't have been fired from the road between the mill and the creek, or from the ground beyond the creek, because the ground at both places conclusively shows that nobody was there. It couldn't have been fired from the bed of the creek, because a person standing there wouldn't be in range. The bottom of the creek is too low, even if the man had been on horseback.

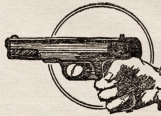
"And how could anybody get out of the room? The door was locked from the inside. No one could have gone out through it without being seen by Hawkins, and even if anybody had gone out of it there was no one inside who could have locked the door after him. Dubonnet, gasping out his last breath on the table, could not have done so. The windows, except one, were nailed shut, and that one was fastened on the inside. Of course if anyone had raised that window and got out it would have fastened automatically in place behind him, but he would have been seen by Hawkins, and, furthermore, the ground shows that nobody did get out that way. There were no footprints in the snow except the half-filled depressions made by George Frisbee two hours before."

"Could somebody have shot Dubonnet from the ore-chute?" asked Griswold.

"That seems quite impossible, though I will say that that ore-chute is one thing I want to examine further. However, the end and sides and bottom of it were boarded up tight. Anyway, a shot from inside the chute or from the top of it would have shown a downward course in Dubonnet's body, and from the other side."

"Could the shot have been fired from the hole in the floor in the fireplace?"

"Well, that would have given the bullet an upward course. But I don't see how a man could get both his head and his arm through a hole eight by eight inches. He'd have to have them both through in order to



aim and fire a pistol. But there was a fire in that fireplace when Frisbee saw it a couple of hours before the shot, and also when

Hawkins saw it five or six minutes after the shot.

"No, I don't see how the shot could possibly have been fired from there, but I do think that fireplace will bear further consideration. I considered it a little today, when we were up there, and I also considered the space below it. It's an ash-heap. I poked around there for a minute, while Slade and the other fellows went a little way up the tunnel, and I found—this."

He drew from his pocket a semi-circle of steel. The ends were bright, as if they had been recently filed. It was a pistol trigger-guard.

"Now, boys," said the judge, "I don't know yet what this means, but I have an idea. There's several other questions in this case. There's a question of where the other pistol bullet went, if more than one were fired. There's a question of who nailed up the cellar door, and why. There's a question of where is Miriam Packer's sole heir-at-law, her precious cousin. It's most remarkable that he hasn't been around here all day. I'm glad to say the sheriff guarded the mill last night. He stayed there after he went up with the doctor and the coroner. Bates is a mighty diligent officer. No doubt he will maintain his watch for several nights, if necessary. I believe something's going to show up there."

"I've got to go, now. I want to see how Miriam Packer's getting along, and then I promised to look at Pete Hawkins' horse. I used to drive the stage up here when I was a kid, and I always thought I was a fairly good amateur veterinary surgeon. Right now, some of the boys will tell you that I'm more of a horse-doctor than a lawyer, and I guess they're right. But, even at that, I do try to be a horse-sense lawyer."

## CHAPTER XVII

## A FEMALE OLD-TIMER

I WANT to go with you to Miriam's," said Frisbee. "She wasn't able to see me this noon."

"All right, come along. But mind you, not a word on her affairs."

"Oh no, they're not for discussion yet, I know," replied George, "but I'll be thinking about them a lot."

Miriam, however, so they were informed by her friend and nurse, Miss Chapin, was not yet able to see anybody. The doctor thought she might have a visitor or two tomorrow, if she had a good night's rest. However, if they would wait a moment she would tell Miriam that they were there. She might have some message for them.

She did have a message. She thanked them for coming and hoped to see them in a day or two. Had they learned anything of the whereabouts of Cousin Henry?

Dunaway stroked his chin thoughtfully. "You tell her," he said, "that we'll look for him till we find him."

He continued to George as they left the house, "Henry wasn't home last night, so his landlady says, and I don't see how he could have got out of town. There hasn't been a freight train out since he was at her house last night, and only one passenger train. That was the afternoon train today, the one that brought Griswold up, when it went back on its return trip. Of course the snow-plow came up and went back, early this morning, but they didn't take him on that. The sheriff had both it and the train watched to see who went out of town, and he asked the engineer of the snow-plow and the conductor of the train to wire him the names of all passengers he might get farther down the canyon. Those fellows know everybody on this jerk-water line. The wire came back a while ago, and Henry Packer wasn't on the list.

"The wagon road isn't passable either on foot or by wheels and there's been no wagon or motor traffic since the storm, except locally around town. Of course he might possibly have walked down the track after the snow-plow had been over it, but it would have been pretty hard going at that, and he would have been practically sure to be seen. I believe he must still be in town somewhere. There's one person that possibly might know. That's old Mag Lovejoy. We'll just blow around to her place, and I'll postpone my medical visit to Pete Hawkins' horse."

Mrs. Lovejoy's place somewhat belied

her name, in its outward appearance, but the old girl greeted them very pleasantly and took them into a cheerful though cluttered and disorderly back parlor. There was a merry little fire in the grate, there was a bird-cage in the window, and beside Mrs. Lovejoy's rocking chair there was a basket of heavy wool men's socks. Evidently she had been darning them for some of her boarders.

"Mag," said the judge, "you look so domestic that I can hardly believe I know you. Meet my friend Mr. George Frisbee. Mr. Frisbee, Mrs. Lovejoy."

"I knew your father years ago—by sight," said Mrs. Lovejoy.

"By the way, George," interrupted the judge, "there's that picture of Buffalo Bill I was telling you about."

There it was, indeed, and so neatly had the bullet holes been drilled in the pupils of the old plainsman's eyes that at first they appeared to be only slightly enlarged so as to give Mr. Cody a rather surprised expression.

"Would you and your friend like a little drink?" inquired their hostess, going to the cupboard. "Good stuff, I can tell you, and perfectly lawful. Some I had left since before prohibition."

"I was hoping you'd say something like that," replied Dunaway. "But don't try to slip any of that before prohibition stuff over on me. I know something about this town—but I'm not a magistrate now. I'm—just a sort of investigator. In that capacity I'll try a little sample, just to see what its quality is."

"Thanks very much, none for me," said George, as the lady produced the bottle. "Never learned to use it."

"Well," said Mrs. Lovejoy, "even at that I guess your family could make a pretty good average. Oh, excuse me, I didn't mean to say anything unkind. Since I've said it, though, I'll say that's the only fault your dad had, as far as I know."

"Mag," said the judge, "the subject of liquor is really what we came here to inquire about. We're looking for Henry Packer—" Mrs. Lovejoy raised her eyebrows inquiringly—"I've got to talk to him about business matters arising on account of Gass Dubonnet's death. Knowing that Henry is fond of his tea, and knowing that you generally have a little—



left over from before the war—and that you occasionally accommodate a friend, it occurred to me that Henry might possibly have called on you in the last twenty-four hours and that you might know where we could find him."

"Hasn't he been to see his cousin since she was shot?"

"No, and she's very anxious to see him. That's part of the reason we're looking for him."

"Well, the young pup! So he's never been near her, eh? That's funny. I'll tell you all I know about him, Judge. I've got a little bit sore at that boy lately——"

"Does he owe you any money?"

"No, not now. He did, for quite a while, but he's paid it all. But I don't like his style. He's drinking too much, for one thing."

"Great Scott! That from you, Mag!"

"Well, it's the fact, but I can't tell you much. He came in here last night. I should think it was a little before nine. He bought a bottle of whisky, same as this."

"Did Henry spend any time here with you?"

"No. To tell the truth I didn't want him around. He'd been drinking some already."

"Did Henry have a gun with him when he came here?"

"Oh, my God, Judge! You don't think he—? Why, no—leastwise I didn't see any. Of course he might have had a pistol in his pocket. I know he has a rifle, because he left it with me once as security for some booze. But he took it away when he paid me a couple of weeks ago, and I haven't seen it since."

"Do you remember what kind of a rifle it was?"

"Why—I don't know much about rifles. It was one of those guns that they hunt deer with. He told me it was a good one."

"Small caliber?"

"Well, yes, I think so. But I don't know much about it. The boys used to handle six-guns around the house in the old days, and I've seen



one or two shooting scrapes, but I don't know much about rifles or any kind of long guns, myself."

"Did Henry say where he was going?"

"He said—I lectured him a little about drinking too much, of course I was talking against my own business—that he was going away for a day or two and wanted a little to take along with him."

"Didn't he say where he was going?"

"No, not that I remember. I just supposed he was going to the city."

"Well, much obliged to you, Mag. George and I'll be on our way. We may drop in on you again."

"Glad to see you any time. Come again, Mr. Frisbee, even if you don't want anything in my line. I like straight men, and I believe you're straight, like your father was."

Frisbee and Dunaway proceeded up the street in the gathering dusk.

"Not much information there," said Dunaway, "but every little bit helps. I had a sneaking idea that Henry might be at her house, but I believe she was on the square with us."

"So do I," said Frisbee.

"One thing I do know," continued the judge, "wherever Henry went, he didn't leave that rifle behind him. I went to his room this morning. Told his landlady I had an appointment with him and that he'd asked me to come there and wait. His rifle wasn't anywhere in the room. I picked up several cartridges."

He exhibited two long-nosed 30-30's.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FALLING STONES

AT THE hotel, Frisbee discussed with his partner the events of the last twenty-fours hours.

"George," said Griswold, "it seems to me that there's one thing that's very important, and that is to see that the Golconda mine is guarded night and day until this mystery is thoroughly cleared up. Let's go over and talk to the sheriff. He'll probably see the propriety of it himself. Aside from any other feature of the case, the mine is Miss Packer's property, and it seems to be a valuable property now, or at least to have some value in it."

The sheriff had gone home to an early supper, and they followed him to his house, adjoining George's quarters of the previous night.

"I agree with you boys about guarding the mill," he assured them. "I've had two men there all day, and I'm posting two there for tonight."

"Not only the mill, sheriff," said Gris-



would. "I think the whole mine should be guarded. Miss Packer is the sole owner, now, I understand. If Gaspard Dubonnet found some high-grade in the mine there's probably more of it. They tell me those nuggets are practically pure gold. Somebody's likely to try to carry off fifty or a hundred pounds of that stuff. At around twenty dollars an ounce it wouldn't take long for a good many thousand dollars' worth to disappear. How much of a job would it be to guard the whole property?"

"H-mm," said the sheriff. "Not much, I reckon. So far as I know there's only one entrance to the mine besides the tunnel. That's the shaft. The shaft-house is up on the hill. But it hasn't been used for years. What little work Gass did was done through the tunnel. I doubt if the old shaft is in good enough repair for anybody to get down it. But we'll just take a look at the shaft-house. If that girl has some real pay-dirt in that mine you bet I'll see that it stays there till she's well enough to look after it. Lemme hitch up and I'll drive you up there with me. Go-in' up there anyway to take two fellers to relieve the boys that are there now. Hey, Billy!" he called up-stairs to his son,

"Yes, Dad!"

"You go up the street and get Axel Olson, and then you two boys be ready to go with me to the mill, as soon as I get the team hitched. Has your mother got your lunch ready?"

She had, it seemed. A comfortable motherly hamper of sandwiches, boiled eggs and pie, with a thermos bottle of hot coffee.

Frisbee and Griswold accompanied the sheriff to the barn and watched him while he put his faithful work-horses to the ancient buckboard. He conversed amicably during the operation.

"Motors are all right most anywhere but



not in the mountains, especially in winter. Our roads ain't good enough for motors up here, away from the bulk of the tourist travel, and there's too much snow. I don't believe an automobile could make it from here to the mill tonight."

"Well," said Frisbee, playfully provoking an argument, "at any rate the automobile wouldn't get scared at eyes in the dark like Pete Hawkins' horse."

"That's so, too, but that's because a horse has some intelligence. For my part, I believe every word Pete Hawkins said, and I don't believe in ghosts, neither. He may not 'ave seen what he thought he saw, but he did see somethin'. That's one reason why I'm sendin' the boys up there tonight an' why I've kept a guard on the place ever since that night.

"Of course, Mr. Frisbee, I don't believe you're any guiltier than I am. Slade and Kenehan might criticise me if they knew I was takin' you up there with me, but in the eyes of the law you're an innocent man yet, and I believe you will be just as innocent when this thing is all thrashed out."

"I appreciate your confidence, Mr. Bates. I assure you it isn't misplaced. I'm more anxious than anybody in this town to solve this mystery."

"Well, I think we're goin' to find that murderer right around here," said the sheriff confidently. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he was somewhere in the old mine this very minute, though I'll admit I don't know how he could have got into the mill house or out of it.

"The place has been watched, I'm tellin' you. Except for the time when Pete Hawkins was walkin' back to town, an' the time it took the doctor an' the rest of us to get back there, there's been somebody at the mill ever since the murder. I stayed there till morning after the doctor went back to town. Slade came up early to look the place over, and then I came back and sent a couple of men up. Slade told me he'd stay there till they came."

"Did you notice anything peculiar while you were there?" inquired Griswold.

"N-no; I can't say that I did. I thought, once or twice, that I heard some little noise back in the old ore-chute, but I ain't sure."

"In the ore-chute, you say?" said Frisbee curiously. "Well, now, that's odd. I heard a thump in the ore-chute myself when I was there with Dubonnet. He said it was a rock falling down."

"Like as not," said the sheriff casually. "I guess that's what I heard, if I heard anything. There's always rocks falling in an old mine.

"That's one reason why it's dangerous to be in one of 'em. The timbers gradually

rot away, of course, and there's always moisture loosenin' the rock in the walls and roof. Why, I'll bet the old Golconda levels and stopes are half caved in. I know old Gass ain't done hardly any real timbering in the last dozen years.

"So if there's somebody hidin' in there, I wouldn't like to be in his place. An' I don't just see how he's goin' to get out without runnin' against my men—though I hadn't thought about the shaft. It didn't occur to me that anybody could get out by it.

"Slade seems kinda crabby about explorin' the mine, for some reason. And Kenehan was the same way until this evenin'. Seemed to take it for granted it wasn't necessary, because you musta been the murderer, Mr. Frisbee. I mentioned it to him tonight, and he said it was nonsense to think the murderer was in the mine and that anyway we'd better wait until Miss Packer got well enough to talk about it, so she could give us authority to investigate.

"We'll watch it, just the same. Here come the boys. Hop aboard, gentlemen. We'll take a little pleasure drive up the creek."

Billy Bates was obviously impressed with the importance of his assignment, guarding the mill for the night, as his father's deputy. His partner, Axel Olson, was a year or two older and apparently somewhat more phlegmatic. Bates had a small hunting rifle, and Olson was provided with an army Springfield.

"Dad, I wonder how Pete Hawkins' ghost would like the taste of a bullet," said Billy. "I believe, if I see any ghosts, I'll just start in to plug 'em."

"You won't do nothin' of the kind," said his father. "If you see any ghosts you just arrest 'em, that's all."

Bill subsided, while the other lad snickered.

"And look here," continued the sheriff. "I want one of you boys to be awake and outside the mill all the time. I want that one to be near the corner where he can see both sides of the mill, an' the tunnel door, an' the mill door. You can take turns sleepin'. One feller can sleep inside for three hours at a stretch, but I want the other one of you to be where he can see the road and both sides of the mill, and not leave that place except to wake up the other feller when it's his turn to relieve him. You understand me, boys?"

They assured him that they did.

"Well, it ain't so cold tonight, I'm glad

to say," continued the sheriff. "But, Billy, when you're outside, keep your coat buttoned around you. If you catch cold, your mother'll never forgive me for puttin' you on guard here."

Between the solicitude of a parent and the severity of a superior officer, Mr. Bates pretty well filled up the time with instructions and admonitions until their arrival at the mill. There he greeted two young men waiting on the steps. They seemed very glad to see him.

"Anything new, boys?" he inquired.

"Quiet as a graveyard, Mr. Bates," said one of them.

"H-mm," replied the sheriff. "Well, it is a sort of a graveyard. You'll have to wait here, boys, for about half an hour, unless you want to walk back to town. I'm going to take these gentlemen up to where they can see the shaft-house. We'd better walk, Mr. Frisbee. It ain't very far, but the road ain't broken, and I know the team can't make it up the hill."

He pointed out the shaft-house, a lonely structure a quarter of a mile up the side of the mountain and apparently six or seven hundred feet higher than the mill.

"There she is. We'll walk up the old road. It's the only way we can get up there, and it winds about half a mile around the mountain."

They followed him past the mill to where an ancient road, whose ruts were deep enough to have left their outline in the snow carpet, led away from the main highway and took a steep course by two switchbacks up to the old building.

The sheriff, for all his sixty years, plugged steadily through the heavy snow at a pace which his companions found difficult to follow. He even had breath enough to talk.

"Well, one thing's a cinch," he remarked. "This convenient snow proves that at least no one has been up here since it stopped falling." He grinned back at the laboring young men. "Can you step out, a little, boys, or is it too hard for you?"

They "stepped out" to the best of their ability, but were vastly relieved to arrive at last, panting and with their knees shaking, at the comparatively level piece of ground which surrounded the front and two sides of the old building. The rear ran into the hill.

The shaft-house was built of substantial timbers, and, though weather-beaten, was in pretty good repair. The door, however, was locked.

"Slade has the key, of course," muttered the sheriff. "He took Gass' keys along with all his other personal stuff. But this lock doesn't look as if it had been opened since the nineteen-ten census. I doubt if the key would unlock it now. Say, boys, ain't that a pretty view of Jamestown and the canyon from here? Just look at that sunset, will you! Did you ever see anything finer in your life?"

The view and the sunset were all that he claimed for them. Frisbee stood with him for a moment, marveling how the sordid village had become ennobled when seen in the pure whiteness of the snow, its twinkling lights beginning to sparkle like gems on the long shadow-fingers cast by the peaks across the canyon.

But Frisbee's admiration was broken by a remark from his more practical partner.

"Yes; it's a peach of a view, all right, but I wish we could get a view inside this old building. Thunderation! It's certainly too bad that we haven't got the key!"

He applied his eye to the narrow space between two of the upright boards.

"Too dark inside to see anything, of course."

Suddenly he held up his hand for silence. All listened intently. In the depths of the mountain below them they heard a dull crash, quickly repeated twice at a greater distance.

"Gosh!" said Bates, with a shudder. "That must be a section of the shaft wall fallin' in. Boys, it's lucky for us we ain't in that shaft right now. Well, let's go. There's nothin' we can see—from here."

The return was easy. They walked back in the trail which they had broken in the snow on their upward journey.

The sheriff was silent on the downward trip. At the mill he picked up the two young men, who had waited for the ride back, and gave a parting admonition to his son and Olson.

"Boys," he said, "mind you, no shootin' unless in self-defense. That won't be

likely, but don't let anybody go up or down the road unless you know all about 'em. An' be ready to report to me everything you see, and every noise you hear. An—oh yes, be sure to arrest all ghosts."

But after this joking parting shot he relapsed into a thoughtful silence which continued during the drive back to town. At the upper end of the village he bade goodbye to his deputies telling them he would pick them up about eight o'clock in the morning.

"There's one thing I'll ask of you two fellers," he added as his assistants alighted from the buckboard. "An' that is, don't tell anybody about our goin' up to the shaft-house tonight. We didn't find anything up there, but I don't want it talked about, around town."

The two young men gave him their assurance. Bates clucked to his horses.

As the wagon moved down the street, he turned to the two lawyers.

"Boys," he said, "I don't think it's necessary to post a guard at the shaft-house tonight. We've seen that nobody but us has been up to it or has come from it since the snow. Nobody could get up there from the town without being seen an' stopped by my boys at the mill. There ain't many people up the creek, an' there surely ain't any of 'em that would come snoopin' into an old shaft at night—or any other time, if they could help it. They're miners, an' they've got some sense.

"But I'm puzzled about them sounds. There's always rocks fallin' in an old mine, as I said. But there's too many of 'em fallin' there in a short time. Frisbee heard one in the mill-end of the chute last night. I thought I heard two, way back in the chute, later last night, though if that's what it was it's odd that they didn't come on down the chute. We all three of us heard quite a fall in the shaft tonight. It ain't normal. I'm satisfied there's somethin' goin' on in those old diggin's, an' I'm goin' to find out what it is—tomorrow. I'm kind of anxious to hear what the boys'll have to report, in the morning."



## CHAPTER XIX

## LOVE AND DOUBT

SHERIFF BATES came to the hotel a few minutes before eight the next morning. Judge Dunaway was with him. Inspired by the early-rising habit of the mountain inn, even on a Sunday morning, and perhaps rather restless because of their excitement, Frisbee and Griswold had been up for an hour and were just finishing breakfast.

Bates and Dunaway joined them at their table in the dining-room and conversed in low tones, though there was no one within convenient earshot.

"Mr. Frisbee," said Bates, "I asked Judge Dunaway to come with me, because I want him to see Miriam Packer—if anybody can see her—and get permission to examine the mine. I think it ought to be done today, but I don't just



like to do it without her permission. Besides, Slade has the keys to the shaft-house and to the trap-door in the mill, and I'm positive he won't give 'em up unless Miriam demands 'em. Kenehan might force him to do it, but Kenehan doesn't just know where he's at in this whole matter, and I'd rather not have to depend on him. Of course I guess I have the legal right to break in, in search of a criminal."

"I think so," said Griswold, "even without a search-warrant. The mine isn't anybody's house."

"Well, Bates," said Dunaway, "I suppose it would be possible to smoke 'em out. All you'd have to do would be to start a good smudge in the lowest level."

"I've thought of that," replied the sheriff, "but I'm afraid it won't do. Whoever it is that's in the mine might be suffocated by the smoke. I don't want to kill anybody in making an arrest, if I can help it."

"And we're not dead sure," added Dunaway, "that the man in the mine, or the men in the mine"—he appeared to be measuring his words carefully—"have committed a capital crime. Besides, I'd like to talk to the fellow, the fellows. I think they might have something important to tell us."

"Oh," said Bates, "the thing to do, plainly, is to search the mine, but I don't want to do it without Miriam's consent, except as a last resort. Judge Dunaway thinks that you, Mr. Frisbee, have some special influence with Miss Packer, and he wants you

to come with us. Can you come right now? I want to pick up them two deputies as soon as I can, and, as it is, I'll be a little late relieving the boys I posted at the mill last night."

"But we'll have to get hold of Doctor Martin, first," said Dunaway, "and get his permission to talk to the girl."

"I certainly think so," said Frisbee. "No matter what happens at the mine, it isn't so important as what happens to her. Let's call the doctor."

He went to the desk and was asking the clerk to call Doctor Martin, when the physician himself came down the stairs on his way to breakfast.

"What is this, gentlemen? A reception committee?" inquired the doctor, as the four men surrounded him and led him to a corner of the hotel office.

"A reception committee, and a visiting committee," replied Frisbee. "In the first place we want to know how your patient is."

"My patient? Say, do you fellows think I'm such a poor doctor that I only have one patient? There's generally more than one person sick at a time, even in a healthy place like Jamestown."

"Oh, he means your most important patient," said Dunaway.

"Oh, yes, of course," returned the doctor. "So far as he is concerned, there is only one. Well, I'm glad to say she was a whole lot better last evening. If she rested well last night, I'm going to let her sit up a little today."

"That's fine," said Bates. "I want to ask her something that's important, though it's simple enough."

"Business matter?" inquired the doctor, looking serious.

"Yes, in a way. I want her authority to make a search of the Golconda mine."

The doctor whistled softly. "Don't know about asking her a thing like that. Don't want to get her excited, now. Her wound has closed nicely, and I don't want to run any risk of starting a fever. What's the matter with your making a search without anybody's authority. You're the sheriff, aren't you? Seems to me I voted for you for sheriff. Scratched my ticket to do it, too."

"Oh, yes, I can do it that way, I reckon; and I may have to do it that way. But I don't want to. I'd like to have her own say-so, if I can get it."

"Well, come along to her house, and we'll see how she is. Guess my breakfast can wait half an hour. I was feeling so



easy about her, I was going to wait till I'd had my ham and eggs, but I'm not so sure about this kind of a proposition."

The whole five of them repaired to the sheriff's buckboard and drove the block and a half to Miriam's house.

Miss Chapin greeted them with pleasant surprise at the top of the high side stairs. "Well, I declare! Are all of you gentlemen calling on Miriam?"

"Well, I'm not going to let them all see her," responded the doctor. "How is she this morning? Oh, excuse me, I don't believe you've met Mr. Griswold, Mr. Frisbee's partner. Miss Chapin, Mr. Griswold."

Miss Chapin acknowledged Griswold's bow, and turned to the physician.

"Why, I think she's just fine. She had a splendid restful night. She's just waked up, hungry, and wants her breakfast. I wasn't going to give her any until you told me what she could have."

"Hungry, eh?" said the doctor, rubbing his hands. "Well, you can give her some grape-fruit, and some oatmeal, and some lamb chops, and some fried eggs, and a big plate of waffles and syrup, and some tea and toast—especially the tea and toast.

She can have that, now—but make the tea rather weak. You can give her the other things along about next Sunday. But let me see her. Wait



here, gentlemen. You can call on Miss Chapin for a few minutes. She's good company."

The grinning men seated themselves in the parlor while the doctor disappeared.

He came back directly. "She's in fine trim this morning," he announced. "But I want to keep her that way. I guess she can talk a little business, but make it brief. Dunaway, you and Mr. Frisbee go in. She wants to see you both."

Dunaway turned smilingly toward the younger man. "You go in first, George. I'll wait a minute."

George went in the direction indicated, and knocked at the door of Miriam's room. "Come in," said the voice he had been longing to hear.

She was propped up in bed and greeted him with a radiant smile.

"I knew it would be you, George. Sit

down beside me and tell me what has happened."

"First," said George, "I want to beg your pardon for my cruel rudeness to you and your guest. I hope—I do hope you can forgive me."

"George, I knew you couldn't help it. Some things overpower us at times, and you were simply overpowered that evening. Poor Mr. Dubonnet said so, himself. He didn't criticise you."

"No, he was very generous to me. He shook hands with me when I went out to see him, that night, at the mill."

"Oh, I'm so glad! George, for twenty years he had been fighting a terrible sorrow and remorse. He was as sensitive as a child. But he was so—so good and kind to me."

Her chin quivered a little. "He couldn't have been any kinder if he had been my own father. Oh, poor man, poor man! Why, why, did he do it?"

"Oh, Miriam, don't think about that old affair. Up here in the mountains the bloody old frontier days lasted for a long time. And, anyway, men's minds and passions change in twenty years."

"You—you don't understand me, George. But what happened yesterday? They wouldn't tell me, but I knew there was something going on, something that involved you."

"Yes," said George, smiling grimly. "It involved me a whole lot. They had me in your charming city Bastille all night, charged with——"

"Oh, George, they blamed you for Mr. Dubonnet's death!" Her eyes opened wide again, and she clasped her hands. "Oh, what a stupid, cruel wrong!"

"There, there! I shouldn't have said anything about it. The doctor told us we positively mustn't get you excited. Anyway, it's all right now, as far as I'm personally concerned. They turned me loose yesterday afternoon at the inquest."

"George, what did—what did the coroner's jury decide was the cause of Mr. Dubonnet's death?"

She looked at him rather strangely, Frisbee thought.

"That's the trouble. They didn't decide anything except 'gunshot by some person or agency unknown.' They put in the 'agency' because some of them seemed to think the old gentleman was killed by a ghost—the ghost of my father, I suppose. But they still have their eagle eyes on me. I'm not formally charged with the crime, but I'm suspected of it."

"Why, George, this is terrible! It must be cleared up."

She half rose to a sitting position, but immediately dropped back, her lips twitching with pain.

"Oh, Miriam, dear girl, I shouldn't have talked so much. I'm going, now. There's just one thing more I want to say—at present. There have been noises heard in the mine. The sheriff wants your permission to examine it."

The girl suddenly shrank back in the pillows.

"No, no, George! I thought so at first myself, but I was wrong. It can't be. Not now! Not now! Don't ask me why. But don't let them go in there!"

George was, naturally, amazed. He started to say something, but paused because he could find nothing to say. Then he thought himself of another commission she had given him through her young woman companion.

"You wanted me to find your cousin Henry," he said. "Well, I have to report failure so far. We've looked all over town, and made many inquiries, but we can't locate him."

"I—I guess he's gone to Denver—or



somewhere. It doesn't matter now. Are you going, George?"

He had risen, and was lifting her hand. He put it, limp and unresisting, to his lips.

The hand tightened around his fingers and drew him back toward her. He looked at her face, and she drew him with her eyes. He dropped on his knees beside her and kissed her lips. He felt her arms around his neck, crushing his face to hers.

"Miriam, precious girl!" he murmured. "I know, now. I must have loved you all my life."

"George, dearest—I was afraid I might die before you had kissed me!"

She pushed him gently from her, so that she might look into his face. "But now—now that I shall live, and we shall both live—Oh, everything is different. George, don't let them search the mine. And whatever you do please don't search it yourself."

The strangeness of it bewildered him.

"Won't—won't you tell me why?" he stammered pathetically.

"George, oh, my darling boy, don't quar-

rel with me. George—I—love you with all my soul! I'll—I'll tell you later."

George was rising again.

"Send Judge Dunaway to me, please."

George turned away. She spoke his name faintly, and, as he looked back, he saw her arms outstretched to him.

"Once more, dear heart! Once more, then go."

His arms, his lips, found her again.

## CHAPTER XX

### SENTRY-GO

SHE doesn't want the mine searched, now, Mr. Bates," said George, as he re-entered the sitting room. "I'm sure I don't know why, but her word is law with me—from now on forever."

"Congratulations, dear fellow," said Dunaway. "But let me see her. Perhaps I can persuade her."

He could not however, and when he emerged in his turn he was equally at a loss to explain why. He declared that the lady had given him no reason, but that he hoped the sheriff would respect her wishes for the present.

Frisbee, watching him narrowly, somehow gained the impression that he had a theory concerning the reason; but whatever that theory was, the judge did not disclose it.

"Gentlemen," said Bates, "I don't like this. I think we ought to search the mine right away. I believe it's important. But you're the one principally concerned, Mr. Frisbee, and I'll take the chance of postponing it a little longer. Of course it'll save some trouble—and possibly some danger—to myself and my men."

"Danger?" inquired Frisbee, hoping to get a more definite idea of what was in the sheriff's mind.

"Yes—there's a lot of rocks falling in that mine," responded the sheriff dryly. "It's always dangerous to go into an old mine."

"It certainly is," agreed Dunaway, "especially this one."

"But," said the sheriff, "believe me, I'll watch it. I'll have to hurry now and relieve those boys. Want to go along, anybody?"

They all did, it appeared, except the doctor.

Bates stopped in the upper end of the village and picked up the two men whom he had taken home the evening before, and soon arrived at the mine. The road had become pretty well beaten down, and in

the frosty morning before the sun had warmed it up, it was rather hard, though rough, and the sheriff's horses made pretty fair time.

They found the night guards sitting on the mill steps, both looking rather fagged.

"Well, boys," said Bates, cheerfully, "guess you've been on your job all right enough. You both look as if you were awake most of the night."

"I'll say we were!" said Olson.

"Oh, now, Axel, this is just beginning to get interesting. Say, Dad, lemme stay up here with these fellers today. We're just startin' on an elegant ghost-hunt."

"What's that! You boys been seein' ghosts, too?"

"I'll say we have," repeated Olson. "An' I'm tellin' you I don't wanta see no more."

"Oh," protested Billy, "we didn't see nothin' but the eyes, and Axel only seen 'em once, but they scared him to death."

"Tell me all about it," directed his father, "and tell it in order."

"It was this way," narrated the boy. "Axel, he took the first shift out here, and I went inside to sleep. I'd put the cot down here at the south end, so's to be near Axel if he should holler, an' because I didn't like to sleep under the ore chute. I'd thought I heard a noise in there like a little rock slidin' down, and a kind of a bump against the end. Axel didn't call me till eleven o'clock—well, it was about quarter of eleven—" he turned a reproachful look at his companion. "He did wake me up a little bit early, the big lobster. I suppose he got tired of doin' sentry duty out here in the cold."

"Well, when I went out, I put a couple of ma's ham sandwiches in my pocket. An' after I'd been out here a few minutes, I took one of 'em out of my pocket, and had just started to unwrap the paper she'd put around it, when all of a sudden I looked at that little hole in the bottom of the tunnel door, an' there was a pair of eyes lookin' at me. I can tell you I was scared plum stiff, because I remembered what Pete Hawkins had said about them eyes—What you laughin' at, Judge Dunaway?"

The others looked at the judge in surprise. His mouth was open in a broad grin.

"It wasn't no joke to me," continued the boy, and the others agreed with him.

"Go on, kid," said the judge. "You're doing fine, and I believe every word you say. What happened next?"

"Well, I kind of pulled myself togeth-

er, and I pointed my rifle at the eyes, an' then I remembered that dad had said, 'No shootin' except in self-defense,' an' thinks I, 'I ain't been attacked yet; the thing is just lookin' at me.' So I hollers out, real bold, 'Halt!' says I, 'Who comes here?' But there wasn't no answer. The thing just kept lookin' at me. And I looked around for somethin' to throw at it, but the snow was kinda hard, and I couldn't find a stone handy, an' then I grabbed the sandwich—I'd dropped it when I aimed my gun—and I shied the sandwich straight at the eyes. An' the eyes disappeared, quick as a wink, an' the sandwich went right square into the hole. An' then I started to come a step or two toward the tunnel door. I'm bound to say I didn't come very fast. I wouldn't be surprised if it took me two minutes to walk them two steps.

"An' then—now I can't be quite sure about this—but it seemed to me there was a faint glimmer of light back somewhere under the mill. Anyway, I heard a little noise somewhere inside, a little noise like 'psst!'"

Judge Dunaway suddenly clapped his



hand on his thigh and broke into a guffaw of merriment. "Psst! Psst!" he repeated. "Say, kid, this is the best ever!"

The boy's pride was hurt. The others were

annoyed by the unseemly levity.

"Well," said Billy, "I—I ain't absolutely positive I heard it. It wasn't a very loud sound. But I think I did."

"I think so too, Billy," replied Dunaway. "I'm almost positive you heard it. It's just exactly the kind of a sound you'd be likely to hear."

The boy looked at him doubtfully and rather resentfully. Was this sarcasm? Was the judge insinuating that he would be likely to hear imaginary sounds?

"Go on please, Billy," said the judge. "I'm strong for you. What happened next?"

"Well, Axel had heard me holler, an' he come tumblin' out, with his rifle in his hands. We waited a while an' didn't see nothin' more, an' then I took a flashlight an' went close up to the hole an' looked around inside of it, an' couldn't see nothin' at all. I put the flashlight inside, an'

—I was kinda scared to do it at first, because I remembered that Pete Hawkins thought a skeleton hand might grab a feller's wrist if he put it in there, but I laid down first with my face to the opening and looked around as far as I could see. I reached my arm inside an' felt around, but I couldn't feel nothin' except the rocky ground. I couldn't even find the sandwich. It must 'ave rolled quite a ways to one side. I found the paper it had been wrapped in, right near the opening, but I couldn't find any part of the sandwich."

"Nothing unnatural about that," interposed Dunaway. "The ghost was hungry, and ate it up, that's all. I don't think that ghost has had his regular meals since Gass Dubonnet died. What happened next?"

"Well, nothin' happened then," said the boy rather peevishly, "an' finally Axel said he didn't believe I'd seen the eyes, an' anyway he was goin' to sleep.

"I stayed out there to finish my three hours sentry-go, an' bimeby I seen the eyes again—just lookin' at me out of the hole. So—I wanted Axel to see 'em an' not think I was tellin' him a fairy story—I went up the steps an' called him, not very loud. He musta heard me in his sleep, because he stopped snorin', but he was sound asleep just the same. I went in an' shook him awake. He was kinda cross, an' didn't want to come out, but I dragged him out; it was about half past one, I reckon. The eyes wasn't there when we got back, but pretty soon they came to the hole again. And Axel—he hadn't believed me before, but he sure did, then—he was that scared he nearly crumpled up on the ground. You see 'em, didn't you?" Billy inquired, turning to his comrade.

"I'll say I did," replied Axel sheepishly.

"Axel kinda got his nerve back after a bit, an' he wanted to shoot, but I wouldn't stand for it except in self-defense, as dad had said, an' of course the eyes wasn't doin' nothin' to us except lookin' at us. That was kinda scarey, I will say, but I didn't feel quite so nervous when Axel was there with me, so I says to the eyes, 'What do you want?' an' then I says, 'What you lookin' for?' but I didn't get no answer."

"Looking for the other sandwich, of course," interposed Judge Dunaway. "Did you feed the ghost again?"

Billy vouchsafed a very cold reply to this impertinent interruption.

"There wasn't any sandwich left. I'd et it myself. Now, as I was about to tell you, I started up to the eyes, but I'd just

taken a couple of steps when they disappeared."

"Did you have a sandwich in your pocket when you started," asked Dunaway.

"Of course I didn't. Say, Judge, what'ye keep joshin' me for? Well, we stayed there a while, but the eyes didn't come back, an' nothin' happened then until Mr. Slade came up."

"Mr. Slade!" exclaimed the sheriff.

"Yes, he came up, on foot, about half past two. Told us he'd been thinkin' about Pete Hawkins' ghost story, that he didn't believe in ghosts, himself, but he just thought he'd come up, to see if there really was anythin' hoppin' 'round here at night. So we told him about the eyes, and he seemed real interested, and we all watched for them together, but they didn't come again, an' finally he says, 'Boys, I believe you're dreamin', or else you're spoofin' me.' An' he says, 'It's too cold to stay outside.' I went in with him, because it was Axel's turn for sentry-go. Axel wanted to come in with us, but I said, 'No, dad wouldn't like that,' so he stayed outside. Mr. Slade sat for a few minutes talkin' with me, an' I asked him to help himself to the lunch, an' he did. An' then I said I was tired, an' would he mind if I went to bed, an' he said, 'Certainly not, Billy. I'll just set here by the fire a few minutes,' he said, 'an' get warmed up, an' then I'll go out an' keep Axel company.'"

"How long did Mr. Slade stay here?" asked the sheriff, rather severely.

"Well—er—Dad, you'll have to ask Axel that."

The sheriff turned inquiringly to the other.

"I—I don't just know, Mr. Bates."

"Don't know?" repeated Bates.

"You—you see, it's like this, sheriff. Mr. Slade stayed out there with me for a while, an' finally he says, 'You're tired ain't you, kid?' An' I allowed I was, 'cause I'd taken the first turn, an' been up most of the second turn besides, an' he says, 'I'll relieve you for an hour or so, if you want to get a little nap,' an' so I just give him my gun, an' went in an' sat in the arm-chair by the fire to take a little bit of a snooze, an' the first thing I knew, it was quarter after five, an' Billy was movin' around, an'—"

"I must have waked myself," said the sheriff's son. "When I went to sleep, I kept thinkin' it would be my turn again from five to eight."

The sheriff, who had been glaring at Olson with mounting indignation, shot a



momentary glance of pride at his own off-spring. Then he turned savagely on the other young man.

"You're a hell of a sentry, you are, Olson!" he exploded. "I left a man here to relieve you at the proper time—and a good man, too, even if he is only an eighteen year old kid, and my own son. I didn't say anything to you about being relieved by anybody except me or my deputies. And you desert your post, and even give up your gun to a stranger!"

"But, Sheriff, Mr. Slade ain't no stranger. He's a county officer. I thought it was all right to let him relieve me, if he—"

"Well, you've thought yourself out of a job with me, that's all. You beat it right down the road for town. I don't want you around here, and I don't want you in my rig when I drive back. Come around to my office after breakfast and get your pay—though you ain't worth a cent."

"Oh, say, Dad—" began Billy.

"Oh say, nothin'!" snapped his father. "Duty is duty and orders is orders. No man can hang around me that won't do his duty, and no man can work for me that won't take my orders. Where's Olson's gun? Have him take it, an' git."

"I—I reckon Mr. Slade musta took it with him when he went," said the wretched ex-deputy. "I'll get it at his office. Good—good-by, Billy."

He started disconsolately down the road.

"I suppose," said Griswold, "that Mr. Slade simply decided that guard duty was unnecessary."

"Humph!" snorted the sheriff. "I'll do the decidin' myself in my own department. Well, come in, gentlemen. Maybe you'd like to look around in the mill again."

## CHAPTER XVI

### A HUNGRY GHOST—AND OTHER THINGS

THE judge had withdrawn from the group and was on the other side of the road, gazing reflectively at the creek.

"Ain't it remarkable," he said irrelevantly, "how quick our mountain streams rise and fall? Saturday forenoon, after the snow, Gold Creek was quite high. Of course it hasn't been very cold, and the snow went almost as fast as rain, after old Sol had begun to get in his work. And now you'd think most of it had run down

the canyon. The creek has dropped more than a foot."

"Say, Billy," he continued, turning toward the group by the door, "wouldn't you like to see your mysterious eyes by daylight. I think I can show them to you again. Got another sandwich left in your bucket?"

"Why, sure, I guess so," said the boy, perplexed. "I'll bring it."

It was a fair-sized basket, not an ordinary dinner-bucket, which his mother had packed for him, but he was much surprised when he opened it, on the top step of the mill.

"Well, by gosh!" he ejaculated. "I guess Mr. Slade did help himself, or else Axel ate my lunch, as well as his. There ain't nothin' left except this little odd scrap of meat."

"That'll do fine," said the judge. "You just watch now, while I make a ghost trap."

He laid the scrap of meat about a foot from the hole and sat down beside it, with his back against the tunnel door, his hand over the opening.

"If your ghost doesn't come pretty soon, I'll call to it," he remarked, grinning, "but let's wait a minute or so."

That was all that was necessary. Billy blushed with mortification, as the "ghost" appeared at the entrance. An instant later it uttered a "*psst—psst*" as the judge's hand clutched the back of its neck. The cat was rather wild, but Judge Dunaway maintained his grip while he soothed it.

The newly arrived deputies were doubling up with laughter. The sheriff's stout form was shaking, and the tears were running down his cheeks.

"Say, Judge! Say, Dad!" began the wretched Billy. "Don't give me away. Please, fellows," turning to the other deputies, "don't talk about this business around town."

"Oh, Billy, this is too good—too good to keep," said one of the young men, starting to open his lunch box.

"A cat, or anybody else, would get hungry staying up here in this old mine for a couple of days," remarked the judge. "Come over here a minute, Billy. I want to talk to you."

He led the crestfallen youth to one side. "Here's something for you to think about, lad," he said, in an undertone. "As you remarked a moment ago, it's quite singular that you didn't find any part of the sandwich you threw at the ghost last night. Cats don't care much for bread, though I



suppose this cat might possibly have been hungry enough to eat it all. Even at that, there ought to be a few crumbs when we look behind that door—if the cat ate the sandwich. But if the cat was eating the sandwich, its first meal in two days, it ought to have been happy. Why should it have snarled the 'psst' that you thought you heard?"

"Why, because it was mad or scared at something," I suppose."

"Exactly. Now, what would make it particularly mad? Let's assume that cats are just as natural as human beings."

"Well—er—it would have been pretty sore if it had lost its meal."

"Of course it would, just like anybody else. But that suggests that there was something or somebody else in the mine that was hungry, too, hungry enough to rob a cat. I have a pretty strong idea who it was."

"So have I!" exclaimed the boy. "And, believe me, I'll find him. I ain't goin' to have those guys callin' me a ninny because I was afraid of a cat."

The judge looked toward the mill. "Where's your dad and the boys?" he inquired, and then answered his own question. "Guess they've gone inside. So much the better. You and I'll just play partners in this game for a little while, Billy. You're the kind of a sentinel I like, and I owe you something for letting that cat out of the bag. Sit down here on the bank with me for a minute, and let's talk about the old times. You don't know much about the early days in this camp, but there's some things worth knowing."

"In the first place, do you know that all the original mining up here was placer mining—when they washed the gold out of the sands of the creek?"

"Why, sure," replied the boy. "Everyone knows that, I reckon. They washed gold out of the creek before they found the lodes under the ground."

"And there's still gold in the creek, isn't there?"

"There's some, of course. You'll see old Tod Hargroves and Jed Snook workin' along here, most any time in summer, with a little mercury and a dishpan."

"They make tobacco money out of it, and I guess that's about all. But the point I'm working at is that gold isn't the only thing there is in this creek. The whole history of the camp is in it. I've camped beside it many a night and talked to

it while it's talked to me. It can tell you many a story, and show you lots of things, if you have ears to hear and eyes to see. It knows where the gold is hidden, and sometimes it tells men that. It knows other things. I believe it knows who killed Gass Dubonnet, and I believe it's trying to tell us, now. That's why it's sunk so low in the last couple of days. That's so it can talk low. It's trying to whisper to us—just to you and me, Billy. And I'm afraid that if we don't get the secret, some old fool like Hargroves or Jed Snook might stumble across it, and maybe the creek never could tell that particular secret after that. Or maybe Slade might catch it—and then it's a cinch you and I could never learn it."

"Now, listen close. I mean look close. Turn your head this way a little. Look right square in the middle of the stream, right at the base of that rock. See anything?"

"Well, by criminy, I believe I do see somethin'. Somethin' kinda shiny. Looks to me sort of like the edge of a sardine can buried in the sand."

The judge glanced toward the mill.

"Those fellows are all inside," said he. "Now, Billy, if this is what I think it is, you go and tell your dad what you've found, and I reckon it'll more than make up for the cat. You just wade in and investigate that sardine can. Go below there, a little ways, where the rip-rap is broken. I reckon a spry young fellow like you can get down all right, from there. I'd do it myself, only my rheumatism'll kill me if I get my feet soaked—to say nothing of my legs. And besides, this is your discovery. Remember, boy, you and I are partners."

In a few seconds the boy, quite excited, was stumbling through the chilly water, which reached nearly to his knees, but ran into a little shoal at the base of the rock. When he pulled up the object, he nearly dropped it in his amazement.

It was a long single-barreled pistol, with the trigger guard filed off and the trigger broken off!

As Billy Bates brought this prize to the bank and handed it up to the judge, at the top of the wall, he latter drew from his pocket the semi-circle of steel which he had picked up underneath the mill. It was obviously the trigger guard of this identical weapon, Gaspard Dubonnet's missing pistol.

(Concluded in the next issue of SHORT STORIES)



# THE MID-WATCH TRAGEDY

By VINCENT STARRETT

*Author of "The Missing Men," "The Fugitive Statue," etc.*

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JIMMIE LAVENDER WAS ON HIS VACATION WHEN HE STEPPED ABOARD ONE OF THE BIG ATLANTIC LINERS, BUT EVEN THE VACATIONS OF FAMOUS DETECTIVES MAY TURN UP MURDER, ROBBERY AND SUDDEN DEATH

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THE military-looking gentleman produced a thin, expensive watch from his waist-coat pocket, and put it away again. "The bar," said he sagely, "will be open in half an hour."

I acquiesced with a smile. He flicked the end of his cigarette overboard, and idly watched its descent until a wave took it. Then, as if the action had removed a weight from his mind, he turned briskly and continued. "Do you play bridge, Mr. Gilruth?"

"No," I said thankfully, "I don't."

Where the devil, I wondered, had he got my name? We had been hardly an hour at sea. He was excessively friendly—much as, I understood, were the professional gamblers against whom the company had thoughtfully warned its passengers.

"My wife will be disappointed," said he. "You and your friend are about the only eligibles she and her sister have discovered, to date. I can play—but I won't."

I resented his easy assumptions. My acquaintance with Jimmie Lavender had not been without its practical value, and I had learned to distrust plausible strangers.

"That, I believe, is my friend's situation, also," I replied stiffly. "However, he must answer for himself."

"Of course," said he with a courteous nod. "My respects to him, please. His reputation is well known to me. My name is Rittenhouse," he added, handing me his

card. "And now I must run along and see what has become of my women."

He turned away, and I watched him for a moment as he threaded the crowded deck, before I, too, turned and went in search of Lavender. It was Lavender's vacation, I mused, and I was in a sense his nurse—at any rate, his companion—and I did not intend that he should be bothered, if I could prevent. Not that Lavender was ill, but certainly he was tired; and even if the plausible Mr. Rittenhouse were not a professional gambler, bridge was no game for a man who needed rest.

I circled the promenade deck in my search, and at length climbed to the boat deck, just in time to see Lavender appear at the top of the aft companionway, closely followed by a deck steward dragging a couple of chairs. The detective indicated a spot amidships, somewhat sheltered, and balanced an either side by a giant air funnel.

"Dump 'em down here," he ordered. "Hullo, Gilly! This looks like as good a place as any. A quiet spot on the aft boat deck is always to be preferred to the chatter and publicity of the promenade. I'm sick of crowds!"

"See anybody you know?" I asked casually.

"Nary soul," said he, "and don't want to. I've seen the purser, however, and the dining-room steward. We're to sit at the purser's table—all men. It's rough on

you, Gilly, but I haven't enough small talk to be good company for the women."

"There are two of them looking for you," I said grimly, and told him of my meeting with Rittenhouse, at whose card until that moment I had not troubled to look. It revealed that the military-looking man's name was Joseph, and that he was a Major, retired, in the United States Marine Corps.

Lavender snatched the card, as if to verify my assertions, then chuckled delightedly.

"By George!" he cried. "It's Rit!"

"You know him, then?" I asked somewhat taken aback.

"Know him! Why we've hunted *men* together! He served two terms as police commissioner of Los Angeles, where I met him. A better man never held office. And you thought he was a crook!" He chuckled again with great happiness. "Where is he?"

"Looking for his wife and her sister, I believe."

"I must hunt him up. I hope you weren't rude, Gilly! Anybody else of interest on board?"

"I've looked over the passenger list," I replied airily. "There's a British lord—Denbigh, I think; a Sir John Rutherford; Betty Cosgrave, the screen actress; an Italian baroness whose name I forget, and the Rev. Henry Murchison of Cedar Rapids, Iowa."

"Good!" laughed Lavender. "You have them pat. The baroness, I fancy, is the dark woman who looked me over carefully as I came on board. She was standing at the rail, and I thought she looked as if she knew me, or believed she did. She looked Italian, anyway, and she was romantic enough looking to be a baroness. I thought for a moment that she was going to speak to me, but if she was she thought better of it."

"Confound it, Jimmie," I said, "I hope you're not going to be bothered by baronesses or Majors or Majors' wives, on this trip; or Majors' wives' sisters, either. Your nerves are all shot to pieces."

"And you are an idiot," was the amused reply. "However, I'll promise not to play bridge."

"It would be just our luck to blunder onto trouble of some sort," I went on morosely. "Jimmie, if anybody robs the ship's safe, you are not to interfere. Let the Major run down the thief, since he's such a good man."

He laughed again. "All right," said he,

"I'll go and see him about it now." And off he went, to hunt up his erstwhile crony, the retired Major and man-hunter, whom, I suspect, he discovered in the smoking-room (which was also the drinking-room), for the bar had been open for several minutes.

And that is the way it all started, the memorable voyage of the trans Atlantic liner, *Dianthus*, which added laurels to the reputation of my friend Lavender, and began his vacation in a manner—from Lavender's point of view—highly satisfying and successful.

Actually, it was the evening of the second day at sea that the first whisper of the trouble I had predicted reached our ears. My sardonic prophecy, however, was not accurate in its detail. The ship's safe—if it carried one—remained unmolested.

The day had been warm enough, but the evening called for wraps. The promenade deck was a scene of some activity, what with the hustling stewards and the eternally tramping Britons, who toiled around the oval like athletes training on a track. An Englishman is never happy unless he is walking or sitting before his fireplace; and the ship had no fireplaces. The boat deck, however, was comparatively deserted, and Lavender and I, wrapped in our rugs, looked out into the windy darkness and smoked contentedly. Our nearest companions were a spooning couple some yards away, half hidden by funnels, and wrapped in blankets and their own emotions. Major Rittenhouse, a likeable fellow, as I had rapidly discovered, had surrendered at discretion, and was playing the amiable martyr in the card room.

An occasional steward drifted past, and once the second officer of the ship stopped for a word and a cigarette, but for the most part we were left to ourselves.

"Indeed," said I, "I believe we have the choice of locations, Lavender." And at



that instant the Italian baroness hove into view.

Her name, we had discovered, was Borsolini—the Baroness Borsolini. She



came forward uncertainly, wavered in passing, passed on, and in a few moments came back. She was quite alone, and obviously she wished to speak to us. On the third trip she had made up her mind, and came swiftly to our side.

"You are Mr. Lavender?" she murmured. "I must speak with you. May I sit down?"

"Of course," said my friend, and rose to his feet to assist her. "Something is worrying you, I fear."

"You are right," said the baroness. "I am very much afraid."

Her English was perfect. Her manner was pretty and appealing.

"Something has frightened you?" asked Lavender encouragingly.

She bent forward and studied his face closely in the darkness.

"You are a good man," she said at length. "I can tell. I think you are a poet."

Lavender squirmed and feebly gesticulated. Before he could deny the amazing charge, she had hurried on.

"Yes, I am afraid. Last night—after I had retired—someone was in my cabin!"

"A thief?"

The words came eagerly from the detective's lips. In his interest, he forgot her preposterous notion about his profession.

"I think so. But nothing was taken away. He did not find what he sought."

Lavender's interest deepened. "What did he seek?" he asked.

"My jewels," said the baroness. "What else?"

"They are valuable then?"

"They are very valuable, my friend. They are valuable because it would cost a fortune to replace them; but they are priceless because they are my family jewels. I speak of replacing them, but believe me, they could not be replaced."

My friend's cap came off to the breeze. "Tell me how you know there was someone in your cabin," he said.

"I awoke suddenly—I don't know why I awoke. I suppose I felt someone there. There were little sounds in the room—soft, brushing sounds—and breathing. Light, so light, I could scarcely catch it. It was only for an instant, then the man was gone. I must have made some little sound myself that alarmed him. As he went, I almost saw him—you understand? He seemed to glide through the door, which he had to open to escape. He made no sound, and what I saw was just black

against gray as the door opened. I only half saw him—the other half I felt. You understand?"

"Yes," said Lavender, "I understand perfectly. But how can you be sure it was a man? Probably it was—but are you sure?"

"I think so—that is all. It is my feeling that tells me it was a man. I can not explain—but if it had been a woman, I think I should have known."

Lavender nodded. "No doubt you are right," he said. "Whom have you told of this, Baroness?"

"I have told no one but yourselves. You will advise me whom I should tell?"

"You had better tell Mr. Crown, the purser. He will, if he thinks best, tell the captain, I suppose, or whoever handles investigations of this sort. At any rate, Mr. Crown is the man to whom the first report should be made. I am sure he will do whatever is necessary. Probably he will have his own way of getting at the man who did this. I would see the purser at once, Baroness, if I were you."

She rose promptly. "Thank you. I am sure your advice is good. I shall go to Mr. Crown at once. You are very good."

"Meanwhile," said Lavender, "we shall, of course, say nothing. Good night, Baroness, and I hope you will not be disturbed again."

We rose with her, and watched her as she tripped away to the companionway. With a wave of her hand, she descended the steps and vanished. Lavender shoved me down into my chair.

"Stay here, Gilly," he said. "I'll be back shortly."

A moment later he, too, had disappeared in the direction of the lower deck.

Well, it had come! My unthinking prophecy had borne fruit, and Lavender already was involved. Where would it end? I lay back in my deck chair and earnestly consigned the baroness and her family jewels to perdition. It occurred to me that it had been nothing less than criminal for her to come on board our ship with the infernal things. She could just as well have waited for the *Maltania*! And Lavender might then have been allowed to have his vacation in peace.

In ten minutes, the subject of my paternal flutterings was back.

"She went, all right," said he laconically. "I should hope she would," I retorted. "Did you think she wouldn't?"

"I wanted to be sure, Gilly," answered Lavender kindly. "I'm wondering why

she didn't go to the purser first; why she singled me out for her attention; why she didn't put her blessed jewels in the purser's charge when she came on board—it's the thing to do. I'm also wondering how she knows *me*. For I'm convinced that she does know me, in spite of her assertion that I was singled out because I look like a 'good man.' I am more than ever convinced that she recognized me when I came on board. She wanted to speak to me then, although she had no attempted jewel robbery to report yesterday. Really, it's all very interesting."

"Yes," I admitted, "it is. Do you think there will be another attempt, Jimmie?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," said he thoughtfully. "In fact, I would almost bet on it."

## II

IN THE dining saloon, the next morning, the company had perceptibly thinned out, for a stiff breeze and a choppy sea had sprung up in the night. At the purser's table, however, we sat six strong, as we had begun the voyage. Crown, the purser, pink complexioned and almost ridiculously fat, beamed good nature upon his charges, from his seat at the head of the table. He was in jovial spirits.

"If there were a prize offered for the table that showed no desertions," said he with a chuckle, "I think we should win."

Beverly of Toronto, who sat at my left, growled humorously. "There are several days ahead of us," he significantly observed. "I, for one, do not intend to crow."

Lavender, who had been the last one to sit down, was looking around the room. The Major's wife, thinking him to be looking in her direction, raised her brows and smiled, and he caught the gesture and smiled and nodded back. He spoke to the purser, beside whom he sat.

"Two of the notables have not materialized," he remarked casually. "The baroness and the clergyman are missing."

The purser looked startled.

"Yes," he answered, "I noticed that. Murchison is ill, I hear; but I don't understand the baroness's absence. She looked to me like a sailor."

He seemed worried for a moment, and looked back at Lavender as if longing to confide in him; but the presence of the others at the table prevented. Lavender himself, having given the officer the hint he intended, devoted himself to his break-

fast. From time to time, however, during the progress of the meal, he glanced toward the baroness's seat at a neighboring table, as if hoping to see that it had been occupied during the moments of his inattention. But the breakfast hour passed away and the object of his solicitude did not appear. The purser, too, continued to be worried, although he kept up a lively flow of conversation.

Outside the saloon door, the detective and the ship's officer paused while the passengers dispersed.

"She may be ill, of course," said the purser, at length. It was almost humorously obvious that he would have been relieved to hear that the baroness was very ill indeed.

"Of course," agreed Lavender, "but we had better find out. She told you, I suppose, that she came to me first?"

"Yes," said the purser, "one of my assistants tried to look after her, but she insisted on seeing me. I'm glad she was so cautious about it. Usually, a woman gets excited, tells everybody her difficulties, and



then in loud tones demands to see the captain. As a result, the trouble—whatever it is—is all over the ship in no time, and everybody is nervous. I

suppose I'm a fool, Mr. Lavender; but somehow I'm nervous now, myself. I hope there's no further trouble."

"What did you do, last night?"

"Spoke to the night watchman. He's supposed to have had an eye on her cabin all night. Of course, he couldn't watch it every minute, and do the rest of his work too; but he was ordered to notice it particularly every time he passed, and to hang around a bit each time. I fancy he did it; he's a good man."

"And the baroness herself?"

"Refused, in spite of all my persuasion, to place her jewels in charge of my office. Of course, in the circumstances, if anything does happen to them, it's her own lookout. Just the same, that sort of thing, if it gets out, gives a ship a black eye, so to speak."

"Well," said Lavender, "we'd better have a look at her cabin. Nobody seems to be interested in our movements. Come on, Gilly!" He started up the stairs to

the cabin deck. "Who is her stewardess, Purser?"

"Mrs. King, a nice old soul. I spoke to her too, but all I said was that the baroness was nervous, and to do what she could for her. We'll see Mrs. King at once."

He sighed and rolled heavily away, and we followed closely at his heels, down the corridors of the lurching vessel to the stewardesses' sitting room. Mrs. King, however, had nothing to tell us.

"She didn't call," said the woman, "and I didn't go near her."

"She wasn't down to breakfast this morning," explained the purser, "and we thought perhaps she was ill. You haven't been to her cabin yet, this morning?"

"No, sir," replied Mrs. King, "having had the lady's own orders not to wake her if she didn't choose to get up."

"I see. Well, you must go to her now, and see if she needs you. She may be ill, or she may just have missed the breakfast gong and be sleeping. Give her my compliments, and say that I was inquiring for her."

The woman seemed reluctant, and hung back for a moment; then she moved slowly off to the door of the cabin numbered B.12, where she paused uncertainly.

"All right," said the purser impatiently, "knock, and then go in!"

Mrs. King timidly knocked, and again stopped as if in apprehension.

"What's the matter?" asked Lavender, in his friendliest tones, seeing that the woman was frightened.

The ship lurched heavily, lay over for a long moment, and came up again. We all braced our legs and clung to the nearest woodwork.

"She doesn't—answer," said the matron faintly.

"Open the door!" ordered the purser.

Thus adjured, Mrs. King turned the handle, and with a terrific effort put her head inside the door. In an instant the head was withdrawn. The woman's face was pale and scared. The purser looked angry. Lavender, however, knew what had happened. With a quick frown, he pushed past the motionless woman and entered the little cabin, the purser and I at his heels. We filled the place.

There was no particular disorder. The port stood half open, as it had stood through the night, to allow ventilation. On the upholstered wall bench stood the baroness' bags. Her trunk half projected from beneath the bunk. The curtains blew gently with a soft, swishing sound.

Even in the bunk itself there was small disorder. Yet beneath the white coverings, with tossed hair and distorted features, the Baroness Borsolini lay dead.

For an instant, we all stood in silence. Then, from the corridor without, sounded the frightened whimper of Mrs. King, the stewardess. Lavender beckoned her inside, and she docilely obeyed.

"Stay here until we have finished," he quietly ordered.

"Good God!" said Crown, the purser, in awed dismay. Then he continued to stare, without speech, at the bed.

Lavender bent over the silent figure of the woman who, only the night before, had whispered her trouble to him.

"Strangled," he murmured softly.

"Killed without a sound."

"Good God!" said the purser again.

Once more the stewardess' scared whimper sounded.

"Don't, please," said my friend, gently. To me, he said, "Gilly, can you say how long she has been dead?"

Anticipating the question, I had been examining the body, although without touching it. Now I stepped forward for a closer examination.

"Six or seven hours, at least," I said at length. "The ship's doctor—Brown—will tell you better than I."

"We'd better have him in," said Lavender, "although you are probably right. Excuse me, Mr. Crown," he added. "I don't mean to usurp your position in this matter."

The purser shuddered. "Go ahead," he said. "I'll be glad to do whatever you suggest."

"Then get the doctor here, quietly, and ask Rittenhouse if he cares to come down. What else there is to do, you will know better than I—that is, I suppose you will have to report to the captain, or something of the sort. You'd better take Mrs. King out of this, too, Crown. I'd like to talk to her a little later, though."

He looked keenly at the frightened, shaking woman, but his touch on her arm as he uttered his last words was gentle. I knew that he was wondering about her hesitation before opening the door. I, too, had been wondering. Was it merely a woman's uncanny prescience, or something more significant?

When the purser and the matron had gone away, he turned to me.

"A queer, unhappy case, Gilly," he quietly remarked. "Do you sense it? The beginning, if I am not mistaken, of some-

thing very curious indeed."

Without further words, he turned from the bed and began a swift search of the cabin. His nimble fingers flew as he worked, and under his touch the possessions of the murdered baroness came to view and disappeared again with skillful method. Apparently he found nothing to guide him.

When he had finished, he said, "The question is, of course: did he, or she, or they—whichever may have been the case—find what they were looking for?"

"The jewels are gone?" I asked. "You don't find them?"

"They are not here," he replied, "unless they are very cleverly hidden. The second

question we are bound to consider, Gilly, is: *were* there any jewels?"

That startled me. He answered my surprised glance.



"We have no proof that she ever had any jewels. She was vague enough about them, when she spoke to us—vague about their value—and she refused to deposit them with the purser, which was her proper course. We have only her word for it that she possessed the jewels, and that she carried them with her. None the less," he added firmly, "she may have had them, and they may have been stolen. Certainly she was not murdered as a matter of whim."

"I think you suspect something that you are not mentioning, Jimmie," I remarked, with another glance at the dead woman.

He followed the glance. "Yes," he replied, "you are right. I believe this all began somewhere on shore. Almost the most important thing to be done, is to establish the identity of this woman."

"You doubt that she is—?"

"The Baroness Borsolini? Well, yes and no. She may have been just what she claimed to be, and yet nobody in particular. Baroness, in Italy, means nothing of importance. The last Italian baron I knew was floor-walker in a Chicago department store. And, of course, she may not have been a baroness at all. My doubt of the poor woman, I will admit, goes back to the fact that she seemed to know me. However, if we are fortunate, we shall know all about her before long."

Again I looked a question.

"Last night," said he, "I sent a wireless, in code, to Inspector Gallery, in New

York. I was curious about the baroness and her tale, and suspecting further trouble, I tried to anticipate some of our difficulties."

"You anticipated—this?"

"No," he flared quickly. "Not this, by Heaven! If I had, Gilly, I'd have stood guard myself all night long. I anticipated another attempt on the jewels," he added in lower tones. "Another attempt on whatever it is this woman had that her murderer wanted. We must have a talk with that night watchman, too, before long. I wonder who occupied the cabin across the way?"

"We can soon discover that," said I; and at that moment the purser came back with the doctor.

Brown, a fussy little man with a beard the color of his name, had heard the story from the purser, and was prepared for what he saw. He conducted a swift and skillful examination that proved his ability, and verified my statement as to the time the woman had been dead.

"Let us assume seven hours, then," said Lavender. "That would fix the murder at about two in the morning—possibly a little earlier, possibly a little later. Where the devil would the watchman have been at that hour? No doubt he had just passed on, for certainly the murderer would have been watching for him. By the way, Crown, who occupies B.14?"

The baroness' cabin was at the corner of an intersecting passage, and its entrance was off the smaller corridor. B.14 occupied the corresponding position across the passage, and was the opposite cabin to which Lavender had referred.

"I'll find out for you," answered the purser; but the doctor replied to the question.

"A clergyman," he said. "Murchison, of some place in Iowa. He's ill. He had me in, last night."

"Last night?" echoed my friend.

"Yes," said the doctor, "and it can't have been very long before—before this happened! About one o'clock, I think. It's not nice to think that this may even have been going on, while I was just across the way."

"How is he?"

"Oh, he's sick enough, but it's the usual thing. It was new to him, though, and I suppose he thought he was going to die. The poor chap is pretty low."

"He may have heard something, if he was awake," suggested Lavender. "Can he be questioned?"



"Oh, yes, but I doubt if he heard anything but his own groans. Somebody's with him now. I heard talking as I came by."

"I told Major Rittenhouse," volunteered the purser. "He said he'd be right down. He ought to have been here by this time."

"We'd better go to my stateroom," said Lavender. "There's nothing further to be learned here, I think. I shall want to talk with the night watchman, Purser, when I can get to him. I suppose he's asleep now. Doctor Brown, would you care to speak to your patient across the way? Ask him if he heard anything in the night, you know; and press the point. Any trifle may be important."

The door opened and the tall figure of Major Rittenhouse entered softly. He closed the door quietly behind him.

"I heard the last question," he remarked, then glanced at the bed. For just an instant, his eyes rested on the dead woman, then without emotion he continued. "I've already questioned Mr. Murchison, Lavender. It occurred to me as a good idea to look up the nearest neighbor. In a case like this, time is of considerable importance. Murchison was awake most of the night, and had the doctor in, once. About four o'clock he got up and staggered around his room a bit, then opened his door. He saw someone leaving this cabin, and supposed the baroness to be ill, too, for he thought no more about it."

"Four o'clock!" cried Lavender. "And if he thought the baroness was ill, he must have seen——"

"Mrs. King!" gasped the purser, with new horror in his voice.

"I don't know her name, and neither did Murchison," said Rittenhouse; "but the woman he saw was one of the stewardesses."

### III

RAIN fell heavily throughout the afternoon, filling the smoke-rooms and lounges of the floating hotel with animated conversation; but in Lavender's stateroom, as the great liner shouldered through the squall, a grimmer conversation went forward, unknown to the hundreds of our fellow passengers. It was feared that, soon enough, the ill tidings of death would spread through the ship, and throw a blight over the happy voyagers. Meanwhile, the task of apprehending the murderer of the unfortunate baroness had to move swiftly. It is prob-

able that no shipboard mystery ever occurred more fortuitously; that is to say, with two more admirable detectives than Lavender and Rittenhouse actually on board to handle the investigation; but it is equally probable that no more mysterious affair ever engaged the talents of either investigator. We were a little world of our own, isolated from the rest of civilization by hundreds of miles of salt water; our inhabitants were comparatively few in number, and there was no opportunity whatever of escape. Somewhere in our



midst actually moved and ate and slept a man or a woman guilty of a hideous crime of violence; yet not a single clew apparently existed to the identity of that indi-

vidual, unless Murchison's testimony had supplied it.

Mrs. King, the stewardess, was reluctant to an extraordinary degree, when for the second time she was questioned about her murdered charge. At first, she denied pointblank any knowledge of the events of the night, then, as Lavender continued to probe, she burst into a storm of hysterical weeping. Confronted with the purport of the clergyman's information, she made a statement that only added mystery to the case.

"I did go in there at four o'clock," she said tearfully, addressing the purser, "and, so help me God, Mr. Crown, she was already dead!"

The purser's astonished glance went round the cabin and settled on my friend; but Lavender only nodded.

"That is what you should have told us at once," he said. "You were afraid of compromising yourself, but you only compromised yourself more deeply by keeping silent. You see, Rit," he continued, turning to the Major, "the time element remains unconfused. The murder occurred at about two o'clock, as the body indicated. Now, Mrs. King, let us have no more evasions and no more denials. If you stick to the truth, no harm will come to you that you don't deserve. Tell us exactly why you went to the baroness' cabin at four o'clock in the morning."

"She—she called me!" whispered the woman, in a voice so low that we caught

the words only with difficulty.

"That, of course, is nonsense," said Lavender, severely; but Major Rittenhouse had caught a glimpse of the truth.

"You mean that the call board showed a call from her room," he interrupted. "But you didn't hear the bell ring, did you?"

The woman shook her head.

"She was probably asleep, Jimmie," continued the Major. "She didn't hear the bell, but when she awoke, some hours after it had rung, the board showed the baroness' number up. She answered—and found the body!"

"Is that what happened?" demanded Lavender of the woman.

Again Mrs. King responded with a gesture of the head, this time affirmative. The pursuer was angry.

"You are the night stewardess," he cried. "You have no right to be asleep."

"Nevertheless," said Lavender, "she was asleep. It doesn't help matters now to scold her. What happened, is this: the murderer entered the cabin about two o'clock, and the baroness woke—possibly she had not been asleep. She heard the intruder, and sat up. Before she could scream, his hands were at her throat. There was a struggle, sharp but brief, and somehow the victim managed to reach and touch the call button. The ringing of the bell in the passage alarmed the murderer and he fled. Mrs. King was asleep and did not get the call. Two hours later, she awoke, saw that a call had come from the baroness' cabin, and responded. Murchison, across the way, opened his door and saw her leaving the room. A pity he didn't open his door at two o'clock!"

Rittenhouse nodded and took up the quiz.

"You saw nothing in the room when you entered?" he asked. "Nothing that would give you an idea as to who did this thing?"

"No," answered the woman faintly.

"Was there a light in the room?"

She shook her head.

"Then how did you know the baroness was dead?"

"I—I turned on the light."

"Why did you turn on the light?"

"She had called me," answered the woman, somewhat defiantly. "I spoke when I went in, and she didn't answer. I thought maybe she had got up and gone out—I thought maybe she was ill. So I turned on the light, and then I saw—I saw her!"

Rittenhouse nodded again.

"And then you turned out the light, and went away?" Lavender finished. "Why didn't you tell somebody what had happened?"

"I was afraid," said Mrs. King simply. "I was afraid they would think I had done it."

"Hm-m!" said Lavender. He looked at the Major, who shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess that's all, Purser," said Lavender, at length. "Let's have the night watchman in."

But John Dover, the night watchman, an ex-sergeant of the British army, could tell nothing. His story was straightforward enough.

"Yes, sir," said he frankly, "Hi passed that room many times, sir. There was no trouble that Hi could see, sir, hat any time. Hif there 'ad been, Hi'd 'ave looked into it. There was no light in the room, sir, hat any time."

This, after an hour's questioning, was still his story.

"It's probably quite true, too," observed Lavender, when the man had been cautioned to keep his mouth shut, and had been dismissed. "The murderer wouldn't be fool enough to attract the watchman. Well, Rit, where are we?"

"Just about where we began, Jimmie, I should say," answered the Major.

"You believe the stewardess' story?" asked the pursuer dubiously.

"There's no earthly reason to disbelieve it, as yet," frankly responded Lavender. "She *could* have done it, I suppose, but so could a dozen others. Extraordinary as her statement is, it has many of the earmarks of truth. I believe she did exactly what eight out of ten women would have done in the circumstances. We can't leave her out of our calculations, of course, but certainly we must allow her to believe that we accept her story *in toto*. In point of fact, I do accept it."

It was not long after these developments that tidings of the death of the Baroness Borsolini were all over the ship. Exactly how the news was started, nobody knew, for everybody with direct knowledge had been sworn to secrecy. It is a difficult thing, however, to hush up as serious a matter as murder, particularly on ship-board; and no doubt the leak could have been traced to the night watchman or Mrs. King, or the clergyman of the ship's doctor, or possibly even to the Major's wife or her sister. It is not the sort of knowledge one human being can possess without telling to another.

The purser, Crown, was deeply annoyed, for he was worried about the good name of the ship; but Lavender only grunted and said it could not be helped. As a matter of strict accuracy, it was the very revelation of the murder that brought us one of our strongest and strangest clues. It brought to Lavender's stateroom, the Hon. Arthur Russell, of Beddington, Herts., England, son of that Lord Denbigh whose name I had discovered on the ship's passenger list.

All over the ship the rumor of tragedy flew, once it had started, and the passengers gathered in groups to discuss the



fearsome occurrence. In the smoking-rooms, the male passengers bragged and told each other what *they* would do to apprehend the murderer, and in the lounges the women twittered and hissed like the gaudy birds of passage that they were. Many were frankly alarmed at the thought that the assassin was still at large, walking among them. They stated their fears audibly, and the purser was stormed by brigades of them, seeking information and assurances of safety.

"We may all be murdered in our beds," said they, in effect, so vehemently and in such numbers that Crown probably wished in his heart that many of them would be.

"Idiots!" said Lavender to me in privacy after the harassed purser had told him what was going on. "They are, if anything, safer than before. The murder of the baroness was not a result of blood-lust, nor the beginning of wholesale assassination. The selected victim has been killed, and for the murderer the episode is over. Quite the last thing he would do, unless he is crazy, is kill someone else. What he wants to do now is keep himself a secret, not to advertise himself by further crime. People are funny, Gilly; they don't think. Most murderers are really very safe men to be near, after they have committed their murder. They have it out of their system; their hate or their vengeance has been satisfied; the one who stood in their path has been removed, and in all probability they

will never again commit that crime. The way to stop murder—philosophically speaking—is not to lock up or kill murderers, but to prevent the accomplishment of crime, or even the desire to kill, by scientific, educational methods. This, however," he added, with a smile and a shrug, "is not a doctrine that I often preach, and never in public. It would land me in the insane asylum!"

I was inclined to agree with his last assertion; but Lavender is a queer fellow, and his philosophy, as he states it, is very plausible. I merely smiled politely, and at his suggestion rang the bell and asked that our tardy luncheon be sent to the stateroom. As it happened, the Hon. Arthur Russell came in with the tray—that is, he was hard on the heels of the waiter who bore it, and he apologized profusely for interrupting. He was a mannerly young Briton, handsome and likeable, and we asked him to sit down and have a cup of tea.

I supposed him to be spokesman for his father, or for some group of the passengers, but his mission, it developed, was quite a different one. He was not seeking information; he had it to impart.

"I say, Mr. Lavender," he began, "is it all true, this that I hear? That the Baroness Borsolini is dead?"

"Yes," replied my friend, "quite true. She was found dead in her berth, this morning."

"And that she was—" he boggled over the word "murdered," and substituted another one—"that she was killed?"

"Yes," said Lavender again. "There is not a doubt in the world that she was murdered, Mr. Russell."

"Good Lord!" said the boy. He drew a long breath. "That's what everybody is saying. I couldn't believe it!"

"Why?"

"Because—well, I couldn't, that's all! It seemed too horrible. Why, only last night, sir, she was with me on deck—full of life—and happy—why, I may have been the last person to see her alive!" he finished.

"The individual who killed her was the last person to see her alive," said Lavender coolly.

"Of course!" cried the boy. "I didn't think of that. Say, that's clever!"

Lavender smiled a little, not displeased by the boy's quick admiration.

"I think perhaps you have something to tell us, Mr. Russell," continued my friend. "Don't hesitate, if you have. Any infor-

mation is very welcome."

The Hon. Arthur Russell gulped his tea, suddenly and convulsively, then put it aside.

"Well, I have!" said he. "Not much—but I've got her address!"

"Her address?"

"Yes, sir. She gave it to me last night. You see, we had struck up an acquaintance, and we liked each other. We sat out on deck and talked, pretty late. I told her about my school life, and she told me a lot about America; and when we were parting, I said I'd like to write to her. So she gave me her address. Wrote it on a piece of paper and gave it to me. Here it is!"

With something of the air of a conjurer, he produced the paper. His youthful face was alight with the excitement of his news, which he believed to be of the highest importance. He could have been no more than twenty, while the baroness had been all of thirty-five, although pretty enough. Apparently, the boy had been greatly smitten. It was rather amusing, and rather pitiful.

As he spoke, he handed Lavender the scrap of paper that he had taken from his pocket.

"That's it," he concluded. "*Florence, Italy. The Hotel Caravan.* That's her writing, sir!"

Lavender rose to his feet and carried the paper to the light. The boy too rose, and followed him. The interest of both was profound, although for the life of me I could see no reason for excitement in the discovery of the dead woman's address.

"Interesting," commented my friend, at length. "Very interesting indeed! And, if I'm not mistaken, very important, too. I'm really very much obliged to you, Mr. Russell."

"I'm glad if it's a help," said the boy, flushing. His eyes sparkled. "I'd like to think that I had—" Suddenly he broke off, and his eyes bulged. "Why," he cried, "you're looking at the wrong side!"

"No," said Lavender, with a little smile, "this is the right side. I saw the other side too, and it's interesting also—particularly as there is no Hotel Caravan in Florence, that I ever heard of. But it is the reverse that interests me most. You say that she took this paper out of her bag?"

"I didn't say so," answered the boy accurately, "but as a matter of fact, she did. Tore it off a large piece, and wrote on it. That's her handwriting!"

He was still stupefied by Lavender's

curious action, and still certain that in a veritable specimen of the baroness's handwriting he had furnished us with a sensational clue. But Lavender continued to study the reverse of the fragment. At length, he handed it to me.

"What do you make of it, Gilly?" he asked.

I looked, and saw nothing but a fragment of what apparently had been a printed form of some kind, for there were upon it several words in small print, and a perforated upper edge. The words were quite meaningless, removed from their context. Above the small print, however, was the one word "LINE" in larger type.

"A ship's form of some kind?" I hazarded. "Torn from a book of similar forms?"

"Exactly," agreed Lavender. "The word 'Line,' of course, is the last word of 'Rodgers Line.' The rest, at the moment, means nothing. If we had the whole form, it might be very illuminating."

There was a tap on the door, and a moment later Major Rittenhouse entered the stateroom.

"Jimmie," said the newcomer, "there's a message coming in for you, upstairs."



One of the wireless boys just told me, and asked me to let you know. What've you got? Something new?"

"Yes," said Lavender.

"What do you think of it, Rit?"

Rittenhouse turned the paper over in his fingers, and at the baroness' written name and address, he blinked.

"We are indebted to Mr. Russell for it," explained Lavender, and repeated the young Briton's story. "But what do you make of the other side, Rit?"

After some cogitation, the Major made of it exactly what I had made.

"Well," said Lavender, with a sigh, "I may be wrong; but I thought I saw more than that." His eyes narrowed. "I'll tell you what, Rit," he added suddenly, "take it to your wife, or her sister, and ask either one what it is. I'll gamble that one of them will tell you."

The Major appeared surprised.

"Are you joking, Lavender?" His tone was a bit indignant.

"Not a bit of it. I'm intensely serious. Will you do it?"



"Yes," said Rittenhouse. "I'll do anything you say, Jimmie; but I'm damned if I know what my wife has to do with this thing!"

"Meanwhile," continued Lavender, "let's see what New York has to report on the Baroness Borsolini. I've a feeling that another revelation is at hand."

"May I come?" asked Arthur Russell eagerly.

"If you like," smiled Lavender, "but I'll be right back. Better stay here, all of you. We don't want to parade about the ship in groups, and start a new set of rumors."

He hurried away, and we sat back in our seats and impatiently awaited his return. In a few minutes he was back, with a small square of paper folded in his palm.

"Another interesting document," he observed. "This is Inspector Gallery's reply to my request for information concerning the baroness. It is in code, but I have translated it. Bear in mind, Rit, that he didn't know when he wired that the baroness was dead."

He began to read the message.

*"Baroness Borolini probably Kitty Desmond, well known adventuress and international character. If she has a small mole at left corner of mouth it is——"*

"She has!" interrupted Arthur Russell, in high excitement.

"Yes," said Lavender, "she has." He continued to read: "*—it is almost certain. Jewels probably famous Schuyler jewels, worth half million, stolen here two months ago. Have cabled Scotland Yard to meet you at Quarantine. Gallery.*"

#### IV

AT THE purser's table that evening, the murder of the Baroness Borsolini was the sole topic of conversation. We still sat six strong. Besides Lavender and I and the purser, there were Beverley of Toronto, Dudgeon of New York, and Isaacson of St. Louis. The latter three were acquainted with all the rumors, and they questioned Lavender and the purser diligently. That Lavender was a famous detective, and had been placed in charge of the case, was a piece of news that had circulated with the rest of the reports. Our fellow passengers at table felt themselves very fortunate indeed, to be so fortuitously placed with reference to the fountain-heads of information, and I fancy they were vastly envied by passengers at the other tables. Throughout the meal, heads were turned constantly in our direction.

The rotund Crown, who, by virtue of his office, had been harassed even more than had Lavender, was inclined to be reticent and a bit short. Lavender merely smiled coldly, and replied with scrupulous accuracy to all questions leveled at him. The facts, he admitted without reserve, but he declined to indulge in speculation.

"It is obviously a case of a falling out of crooks," he concluded. "I have received a wireless message from New York, which positively identifies the baroness as a well known and, if you like the term, a high class crook. The stolen jewels, if they have been stolen—and apparently they have been—are said to have originally disappeared in New York, some two months ago. I have no doubt that the baroness was on her way to Europe with them, and that the division of spoils was to be made there. Possibly she was to sell them. Her accomplices in the original theft, I should imagine, are for the most part on the way to Europe on other vessels. One, however, it would seem—or, any rate, somebody who knows the truth about the jewels—is on board this vessel. There is no cause for alarm. The decent passengers are quite safe."

"She would have had to smuggle them in, wouldn't she?" asked Beverley of Toronto. The remark was more of a statement than a question.

"Yes," replied Lavender, "but that plan was probably worked out to the last comma. Smuggling offers no great difficulties to a clever person."

At the close of the meal, we were surrounded by interested questioners; but not even the wiles of Betty Cosgrave, the screen star, could shake Lavender's reserve. We heartlessly left the purser to answer all interviewers, and hurried on deck. On the way up, we passed the captain, a pleasant faced Englishman somewhat past middle life. He had something on his mind.

"Er—Mr. Lavender," he observed. "Mr. Crown has been keeping me informed, of course, of this extraordinary business. Nasty—very nasty indeed! Sinister! Mr. Crown, of course, acts for me and for the company. I have no wish to interfere with what is in better hands than my own; but you will understand that I am deeply affected by it all. May I ask whether you anticipate a—a successful conclusion?"

"Entirely successful, Captain Rogers," replied Lavender seriously. "It is the sort of case the very simplicity of which makes

it difficult; but I believe it is yielding to treatment. I believe, quite honestly, that before long I shall be able to present you with the murderer of the Baroness Bor-solini, and to turn over the stolen jewels."

"Thank you," said the captain with a nod. "I have every confidence in you. And in Major Rittenhouse, too. Crown tells me you are both quite famous men in your field. I am sorry I could not have you at my table. If I can be of service, please command me."

We finished our journey to the boat deck, without further interruption, and found our long unused deck chairs awaiting us. The night had cleared, but a cold breeze was blowing over the sea, and we wrapped ourselves in rugs to our chins.

"You seem pretty confident of success, Jimmie," I ventured, when our pipes were going strongly, and the moment seemed propitious.

"I am confident," said he. "It is beyond credence that this fellow can escape. I am working privately on an idea of my own that, I confess, may not work out; but it looks promising. Frankly, Gilly, it has to do with that fragment of paper that the baroness gave young Russell; but that is all I dare say about it, at present. And I will ask you to keep that much a secret. What I want, of course, is the other piece of the paper—the larger piece."

"Did Mrs. Rittenhouse identify it?" I asked curiously.

"She did," replied my friend, almost grimly. "She identified it in a moment, because both she and her sister have papers exactly like it. Rit is working with me in this, and I may hear from him at any minute. He is less of a figure than I, in this thing, and can snoop about with less attention."

We sat in silence for a few moments, listening to the throb of the ship's great engines, and the rush of water beyond the white line of the rail. Then I spoke again.

"Gallery was a bit previous, wasn't he, Jimmie, in cabling Scotland Yard



to help you?"

"No, it was all right," replied my friend, with a little smile. "Don't be jealous, Gilly. I know exactly why Gallery did

that. He thought that I might, at the last moment, feel some embarrassment in using the wireless; that is, that I might find myself in a position where I could not use it without betraying my suspicions, whatever they might be, to the person suspected. He anticipates that my use of the ship's wireless, if my actions are being watched—and, rest assured, they are being watched—may alarm the murderer. It was a piece of clear thinking on Gallery's part, a resourceful man's safeguard against chance or probability."

I nodded, and again we sat without speech, until a step sounded along the boards, and the tall figure of the Major hove in view. Rittenhouse seated himself without a word beyond a greeting, and for a few moments we all smoked in silence. I'm prepared to accept it."

"Murchison is still ill," he said, "but he's coming around. I've seen him again. He has nothing to add to his first statement. He saw no one but the stewardess last night; he is willing to swear to that. I've had another whirl at Dover, the watchman, too. He now remembers seeing the doctor leave Murchison's cabin. The incident made no impression on him, and he didn't think of it before; it was just a part of routine to him, to see Brown in attendance somewhere or other. All in all, Jimmie, there is no escaping your conclusion, and I'm prepared to accept it."

"Yes," replied Lavender, "it's pretty certain; but the fellow must be made to betray himself. We haven't enough to go on, as it is. It's dangerously near being guess-work. You asked Crown about the baroness' papers?"

"I did. He has them in safe keeping. Not a thing in them, he says, that gives us a clue."

Lavender smiled. "There wouldn't be," he rejoined laconically. "Anyway, I've been through them twice, myself."

"However, I told him of the fragment of paper Russell gave you," continued Rittenhouse. "It startled him."

"When are you going to tell me?" I demanded, at this juncture. "Where do I come in, Jimmie? Can I do nothing?"

Lavender turned to me very seriously.

"The fact is, Gilly," he said, "you will be a much better witness in all that is to follow, if you know nothing for a while. You can do one thing, though, you can keep an eye on me! I mean it. The fat is in the fire, if I'm not mistaken, and from now on, I shall be a marked man. I shall go calmly about my business, as if all were well, and

it is up to you and Rit to see that I don't get a knife in my back, or something equally unpleasant. Rit and I know the murderer. The question is: does he know that we know? I don't think he suspects Rit; but he may suspect me. And the more innocent you appear, Gilly, the better it will be all around. But keep your eyes open."

"All right, Jimmie," I replied obediently. But I was horrified by the turn the case was taking, and for a long time I sat and thought deeply, while the two curious fellows who were with me actually sat and talked about baseball.

Who, by any chance, could have committed the crime? Who had the opportunity? I faced the problem squarely, and admitted that there were plenty of persons who could have done it. In addition to the great numbers of obscure passengers, first and second class, who had not even been named in the inquiry, there were undoubtedly half a dozen principals who might very well be definite suspects. The second class outfit, I was inclined to disregard, for a second class passenger surely would have been noticed by one of the stewards, if he trespassed on holy ground. And yet, as I came to think of it, was there so much difference between a first and a second class passenger? Actually, I was forced to admit, there was none, so far as appearance was concerned. Of the principal figures, however, five at least, as I now numbered them, stood forth clearly as possibilities. All had been, or could have been, near the scene of the murder at the time it occurred. And with something of a thrill, I realized that I must add young Russell to the list. I did not for a moment suspect him, but for that matter I hardly suspected any of the others.

And Lavender was in actual, active danger of one of them! Clearly, there was only one thing for me to do, and that was to watch everybody. I resolved to watch the entire ship from the captain down, not excluding Rittenhouse himself. Since I was to be Lavender's guardian, by Heaven, I would suspect everybody!

In this frame of mind, I went to bed and dreamed a mad, fantastic dream in which the captain of the liner, which curiously had become a pirate ship, stole into Lavender's stateroom and stabbed him with a fragment of paper, while the Baroness Borsolini joined hands with Rittenhouse and danced around them. Waking with a start, I sat up and listened. Finally, I knocked three times on the wall of my

cabin, and listened again. After a pause, there came back to me Lavender's reply, in similar code. And after this performance, I turned over and managed to get to sleep.

The morning of the fourth day broke clear and fair and cold. I went at once to Lavender's room, to find him already up and gone. He did not appear until breakfast, and I had no opportunity to ask him where he had been; but it occurred to me that he was not playing fair. If I was to guard him against assassination, he ought at least to keep me posted as to his movements. So I thought.

Breakfast passed with the usual chatter about the uppermost subject in everybody's mind, and at a table not far removed from ours sat Murchison, the Iowa clergyman, eating his first meal in the saloon. He looked pale and thin, but happy to be on earth and able to eat. Later, I saw him in conversation with the purser, and still later with the captain. Was he, then, the heart of the mystery, and were the coils beginning to tighten?

Lavender too had a brief talk with the captain, after which they vanished in company, while Rittenhouse and the purser talked in low tones at the door of the latter's office. Obviously, something was afoot, and I felt strangely out in the cold. Then Mrs. Rittenhouse, and her sister, Miss Renshaw, corralled me, and for an hour I was forced to sing the praises of my friend Lavender to their admiring accompaniment.

After this, however, the suppressed excitement seemed to loosen up, and for an entire day the routine of ship life went quietly forward with only casual mention

of the crime. Some gayety was even apparent in the lounges and smoking-rooms, and I reflected sardonically on the adaptability and the callousness of human nature. The fifth day would be the last on board, for the sixth morning would



bring us into port. It was this knowledge, I suppose, that cheered the passengers, although the Lord knew that the voyage had been anything but boring.



When I asked Lavender what progress had been made, he answered merely that he was "waiting."

On the fifth morning, I suddenly remembered that the day was the anniversary of my birth—not a particularly significant occasion, Heaven knows, but at least a subject for trivial conversation. Lavender, however, greeted the tidings with singular enthusiasm, and promptly ordered a splendid dinner for the evening; Rittenhouse ordered wine during the afternoon, to drink my health, and Mrs. Rittenhouse and her sister embarrassed me immensely by presenting me, with ridiculous speeches, with tiny bottles of perfume and post-shaving lotion, purchased of the ship's barber. The dinner went off with gusto, with everybody ordering champagne and making idiotic addresses, to which I lamely responded. My humble birthday, indeed, was made an occasion for strained nerves to relax and for worried men to forget their problems. To cap the climax, when I went to my cabin in the evening, there was a gorgeously wrapped and tied box of cigars and cigarettes, with the captain's card attached to it, and a huge box of candies, with the purser's compliments similarly presented. I felt excessively guilty about these latter gifts, feeling as I did that they were intended to show appreciation of Lavender's services. Lavender, however, only laughed and was pleased that my birthday should have passed off so well.

"Any occasion is good for a celebration, at sea," he observed.

Late in the afternoon, we had dropped anchor in the outer harbor of Cherbourg, while a tender took off our passengers for Paris. Then, with a fresh breeze, we had headed for England and the end of the voyage. I had noted that, during the transfer of passengers for France, Lavender stood at the gangplank stretched between the steamers, and carefully observed every person who went aboard the tender. For a time, I had looked for fireworks, but apparently there was no call for his interference.

We sat late that night, upon the deck, the three of us, and for a time the purser made a quartette. It was with reluctance that Crown took his departure.

"We dock in the morning," he said, as he prepared to go. "I've a nasty report to make to the company, Mr. Lavender. You haven't anything to tell me that will make it easier?"

"The report will be full and complete,"

replied my friend. "The murderer will be apprehended at quarantine, by Scotland Yard officials, and the jewels will be turned over at that time."

Crown was startled and amazed.

"You don't mean to say that—that you've got your man!"

"Not yet," said Lavender, "but I shall certainly get him. Crown, he is one of the officers of this ship."

The purser's jaw dropped; his fat cheeks sagged. His eyes searched the eyes of Lavender.

"My God!" he said. "I'm almost afraid to ask you—who he is!"

Suddenly he got to his feet. "Will you come to my cabin?" he asked. "This is no place to discuss what you have to tell me."

Lavender nodded his head and stood up. They moved off together in the direction of the forward deck.

"Ready, Gilruth!" said the Major, sharply, and I saw that his face was hard and set, his limbs braced. "After them quickly."

The sudden intelligence seared my brain like a hot iron, and then I went cold. But Rittenhouse was already on his way, and mechanically I followed him.

We were none too soon. Lavender and the purser had barely disappeared beyond the cheek of the wireless cabin, when the huge criminal fell upon his companion. There was a shout, and then a scuffling of feet and the sound of blows. The next instant, Rittenhouse and I were on the scene.

In the deep shadow of the piled lifeboats, a desperate struggle was in progress, with the rail and the water dangerously close. Even as we reached them, the wrestlers pitched toward the edge; the great bulk of the purser was forcing the slimmer figure of Lavender back over the rail. I heard the cold rush of the water, and the heaving breathing of the combatants. The wind snatched away my cap, and tingling spray beat upon my face.

Then Rittenhouse was upon the purser like a wolf, and with cleared wits I was beside him, aiding.

The powerful Crown fought like a maniac, but the odds were now against him, and slowly we wore him down. Haggard and disheveled, he struggled to the last. At length, Rittenhouse tripped him and brought him down with a thud that seemed to shake the deck. Kneeling on the great heaving chest of the beaten man, the Major forced the purser's wrists to-



gether, while Lavender snapped on bracelets of steel. As the struggle ended, Captain Rogers and his first officer ran up out of the shadows.

"Mr. Crown, Mr. Crown," panted the captain, "what is the meaning of this?"

But as the pursuer could only glare and foam, Lavender, slightly breathless, replied for him.

"It means, sir," said he, "that Mr. Crown has just been frustrated in an attempt to throw me overboard. Major Rittenhouse and Mr. Gilruth prevented him. As I explained to you, our actual evidence was slight, and it became necessary to force Mr. Crown to incriminate himself. The attempted murder of James E. Lavender will do for the present charge. Later it will be changed to something more serious."

The first officer was incredulous.

"Do you mean," he began, "that Mr. Crown had anything to do with—?"

"I believe the murder of the Baroness Borsolini to have been accidental," answered Lavender. "None the less, it was Mr. Crown who committed the crime."

Suddenly the fat face of the prostrate man wrinkled like that of a child, and the great frame began to heave. Then sobs of anguish broke from the lips, and incredible tears rolled down the massive cheeks.

"I didn't mean to kill her," sobbed the pursuer. "I swear to God, Captain, it was an accident! I never meant to kill her. So help me God, it was an accident!"

## V

WITH the pursuer safely locked in his room, under heavy guard, Lavender, in the captain's cabin, repeated the tale as chronologically it should be told.

"The Baroness Borsolini," said he, "was really Kitty Desmond, a well known adventuress. Crown has made a full confession to me and to Rittenhouse. Miss Desmond was made the repository of the stolen Schuyler jewels, and sent to England with them, where they were to be sold, I imagine, and the money divided. She recognized me when I came on board, and wondered if I were on her trail. It worried her, and she made the bold play of coming to me with a cock-and-bull story of attempted theft, in order to find out what I knew and, if I knew nothing, to gain my sympathies. I am convinced that there was no attempt on her room, the first night.

"Crown, however, recognized *her*. She had been a frequent voyager on the Atlantic, and many men knew her. She had been pointed out to Crown, a year ago, on



another ship. He knew only that she was a police character, and probably up to no good. When I sent her to him, to test her story, she was obliged to carry the thing through, and tell him the same story she had told me. She trusted Crown's office,

as she had every right to do, and actually deposited the jewels there, and received the usual receipt.

"But the temptation was too great for Crown, he was desperately hard up—deeply in debt—back home in England. It looked to him like a sure thing. He would keep the jewels himself, steal the receipt which had been issued to Kitty Desmond, and defy her to say anything. He was, of course, in a position to fix the records in his own office, and being a matter of routine no one else likely to remember the issuing of that particular receipt. There could be no appeal for the woman; her story would be laughed at, if she reported it, for her reputation was against her. Probably she would accept the inevitable and make no outcry.

"Crown's slip occurred when, on the second night, he stole the receipt which had been given her. She woke up, and to keep her from screaming, he choked her. His reputation depended upon his silencing her, at least until he could talk to her. If he had not killed her, he would have offered her—when she caught him in the act of theft—a share of the profits. Unfortunately, she died under his hands; he is stronger than he suspects. He got the receipt, however, and fled. No one saw him; he had timed everything very well.

"As it happened, in giving young Russell a false address, the night before, the Baroness—so to call her—had torn off a fragment of the receipt, the only piece of paper that came to hand in the darkness. Whether she knew what it was, or not, we shall never know. Perhaps she did, for she tore off only a small piece; not enough to spoil the receipt. But there was enough of the print on the reverse of the written address, for me to guess what the entire paper must have been. If then, she had deposited something with the pursuer's office, the pursuer had lied when he told me

she had not. In the circumstances, the logical conclusion was that she had deposited the jewels.

"Crown is a bold man, and he played his part well, once he was forced to it. But in the end, I let him know, through Rittenhouse, the importance I attached to a certain fragment of paper. As he had the rest of the paper himself, he knew very well what it was that I had, and what I probably suspected. He tried to bluff it through, even tonight, for he wasn't positive that I *knew*, and he had destroyed the rest of the receipt. Nevertheless, he was badly frightened, and he had already resolved to get rid of the jewels, and try to clear his skirts.

"As for me, my case was purely circumstantial, and would have been difficult to prove in law; I had to force Crown to incriminate himself. I told him point blank, just before he sprang upon me, that he would be arrested, told him where the jewels were, and asked him what he intended to do about it. You know the rest."

"And a wonderful beginning of your vacation it has been!" I said bitterly, looking at his lacerated hands.

"Don't be silly," said Lavender. "I never enjoyed myself more in my life. This has been just what I needed. And I'm sure the sea air, as a background, has been very beneficial to my nerves."

"But where are the jewels?" asked the captain suddenly.

"I asked Gilruth to bring them with him," replied Lavender with a smile. "As a last resort, Crown tried to get rid of them, as I said, and so he palmed them off on Gilly. The birthday gave him his chance. The jewels are at the bottom of the box of candy, which was the purser's gift to my friend."

Whereupon, I emptied the box onto the table; and the chorus of exclamations that followed were Lavender's reward for his efforts, and the final proof of the truth of his deductions, even though later the suicide of Albert Crown made legal proof unnecessary, and made unnecessary the prosecution of that unfortunate man.

## BLACK AND WHITE

THE West African marvels at white man's inventions, but acknowledges no superiority in the whites. He has no conception of the brains and ingenuity behind the construction of railroads, ships, launches. They simply exist, as do trees and canoes, and that is all. The savage will be more affected by a small launch than a great liner. The latter is beyond his mental grasp.

## THE HOME OF A VANISHED RACE

THE once brilliant capital of the lost Maya race, a race which reared an amazing culture in what is now Yucatan before the dawn of the Christian Era, is being exhumed from the covering débris of twenty centuries and more.

Mosaic temple floors, palaces, pyramids, ball courts, market places, terraces, tombs and plazas cover an area two miles long and a mile wide; and beyond this in every direction for miles stretch the homes of the humbler folk of the lost race.

The work of excavating the ruins of Chichen Itza, the center of the old civilization, from the jungles of Yucatan is being carried on by an expedition of archaeologists sent by the Carnegie Institute of Washington. It began last May and probably will take ten years, according to the estimate of Dr. Sylvanus G. Morley, who heads the work.

Part of the excavation, already done, discovered to the explorers beautifully carved columns, whose great numbers have given to the court which was the center of the old city the name of "The Court of a Thousand Columns." In it has been found a figure of Ku Kulcan, the patron diety of Chichen Itza, surrounded by sculptured figures of jaguars and flowers.

A map of the ancient capital has been prepared by J. O. Kilmartin of the United States Geological Survey, whose services were loaned to the Carnegie Institute. This map will enable the archaeologists now working in Yucatan to locate every temple and plaza in Chichen Itza.

The work of excavation has to be suspended during the summer and autumn of each year because of the rains.—L. R.



# UNDER THE MATING MOON

By T. VON ZIEKURSCH

*Author of "Denison's Final Ride," "The White Trail's End," etc.*

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PITILESSLY HUNTED BY HIS ENEMY, MAN, THE GREAT WOLF SOUGHT THE REFUGE OF HIS NATIVE DESERT. THROUGH THE NIGHT HE MADE GOOD HUNTING. BUT THERE WAS LONELINESS IN HIS HEART—UNTIL THE DEEP THROATED, PULSING CALL HE SENT ACROSS THE DARKNESS BROUGHT THE ANSWER HE AWAITED

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**T**HE desert was a place of exotic grandeur, of silvered half-lights and toned shadows. From a heaven of vast distances came the subtle, mercuric glow of myriad stars like crusting diamond chips on the softness of purple velvet. The night was a time of magnificence unparalleled by the hours of day. The Joshua trees and the giant yuccas were dark, weird sentries in the elfin hours when Nalin, the Night Girl, as the old legend called the moon, came from her cave and rode her celestial pathway, illuminating the flats with her reflected beneficence.

The awkward branchings of the desert trees and the crude forms of the giant cactus lent unreality and added confusing shadows. The sharp leaves of the sotol, the cat's claws, the great dagger plants and all manner of queer growths lost their forbidding appearance and merged into false softness under the night's touch of magic.

It was such a night as Shinav, the great Wolf God might choose for one of his sallies against the things of evil, loosing his arrows that the white men find in the valleys which are stained with the blood of strife, and, finding them, call them petrifed trees.

The desert was under the spell of the old gods now, and the power of the newer

things could not prevail. Enchantment and almost forgotten spells could work again for a few brief hours. Not a night breeze stirred. From vague distances came the unreality of a coyote's voice, lost at last in the far waste places. One thing moved. It was a shadow, a darker streak than the purples. It wavered in and out among the spiny growths and it made no sound in passing. There was solidity about it, yet it was as a wraith in the night, dark, sinister, strange.

Far off, inaudible to ears less keenly attuned to read the message of the very currents of air, was a sound other than that of the coyote's voice. The great wolf stopped and there was a silent snarl. The hunting pack sent forth by men was baffled again.

It had happened before, often. They had harried him and he had retaliated against their masters. It was ceaseless war with extermination the only terms that could end it. Ten miles, each night, the great lobo had circled in days that were gone, making his kill sometimes when hunger drove him into the herds of men. But after a fashion this was their fault. His kind had existed on the buffalo and the antelopes before the white man came. Now that ten miles circle was a thing of the past. The trailing dogs and the fight-

ing pack that yipped so eagerly behind them drove him afar at every opportunity. Into the desert wastes they could not track him. Here on the hot sands even their keen noses were at a loss.

Not so with him. Here he found comfortable abode. And how he hated them! To him all dogs were anathema. There had been nights, many of them, when he had deliberately used every wile of that cunning brain to lure the fleetest of them away from the others. They were big dogs, these long-eared, deep-voiced hounds, and game to death, but he held them in contempt. Only once had his plan worked. That night he sat on the rising slope above a ranch house and howled his fierce defiance at the race of men and their dogs. Then the pack came, their trailing methods forgotten in the mad pell-mell of the sight hunt.

Two of them distanced the rest by a full hundred yards, and the great lobo held back that amazing burst of which he was capable. A dark arroyo opened in front and he sped nimbly down its steep sides with the big hounds following. At the bottom an explosive thing happened. The lobo's feet seemed scarcely to touch the fallen sand as he leaped in and slashed twice, then he trotted in that shambling fashion on up the arroyo, circled a patch of greasewood and was gone into the night, while the trailing pack, stopped by their dying companions, resumed the chase too late.

Tonight again he had tried it, but one lesson was sufficient for these dogs which had been brought only after poison and traps failed. And tonight they had hung together and chased him long. Hours after they took the trail he left them at the edge of the desert and he was tired. New understanding of their gameness came in that chase. He hated them with an unreasonable hatred.

Perhaps some of the emotion which had never found opportunity in his own kind and therefore soured within him, went into that hatred. In the years of his maturity he had never known another of his breed. By the hand of man, which distributes poisoned baits cleverly concealed, his mother had died. He had seen her pick up the piece of meat, then fall writhing in the awful convulsions that the strychnine wolf pill brings. An iron thing with sharp jaws had leaped out of the earth near a freshly killed calf and held the leg of his litter brother until the men came and killed him. Two of the shaggy fighting dogs had

caught and killed the other member of the litter, a small female, and since that time the lobo understood all the hunting wiles of men so well that they termed it uncanny.

On all the sweet grass ranges, in the cooler hills, amid the hot wastes of the desert there had never been an answer to his long, deeply reverberating howls. And now he trotted in that strange, slinking gait amid the desert growths and his mind was filled with hatred for the pack that was left so far behind. He was their master, individually, in every quality. And he was their master even as a pack, in some things. In power of fang, in the cunning of battle he was more than a match for any of them. More, for any three of them. In speed, in shrewdness he surpassed them all together. There was nothing of vanity, none of over-confidence in that supreme contempt he knew for them. He had tested them in every fashion and gauged them nicely.

Here they would not come after him. The desert was his sanctuary. He ruled it supreme, and accorded respect only to the side-winders and the red rattlers that were to be found within its reaches.

Miles behind him, on the very edge of the sand waste, the dogs had given up, but the lobo went on, and here the desert was broken. Its sharp, luxuriant vegetation gave way to sparser and even sharper growths amid the rocky outcroppings that told of rising heights and the ancient mountains. Century plants and Spanish daggers grew in crevices. The shadows were stronger, sharper cut and more dense. A sense of harsh mysticism pervaded. There were luring valleys that were promising but that promise, too, was false.

Into the entire region the lobo fitted by every characteristic. About him was that same indefinable harshness; it was as though in him the vaguely ominous spirit



of the wastes found being. He was the symbol of the inanimate, living, a thing that represented death and hardness and hate. Yet there was something strangely sinuous about him

as he moved, suggestive of slinking power. Once he stopped with forefeet on a rock, silhouetted against the soft glow of the



heavens. His head rose, muzzle high, and went back. His mouth opened and the long fangs that were turned inward instead of out, as are those of a dog, gleamed. But no sound came and in his eyes was a greenish fire, clouded, flaming, ebbing.

Thoughts of the pack he had left so far behind dulled and faded. He had nothing in common with them. Thief and murderer of the wild reaches they considered him, and to him they represented all that is deserving only of death. Tonight they had run him long. He was tired, but the silences of these desert mountains did not bring him content. Again he halted and that lambent flame in his eyes was opalescent in the darkness.

High in the heavens the Night Girl flooded her pale softness, diffused into interminable distances. It was magic, irresistible. Again the lobo stopped and his head went back. There was a low sound like the yip of a tiny dog, then from deep in his chest came the howl. It was heavy, throaty, a great basso. It rolled forth as thunder in the distant hills, throbbing, beating, rising in tone as it fell in volume. In it was unfathomable depth of loneliness. Over the miles it pulsed, long drawn, to merge at last with and die in the stillness. It was the wail of a wraith that is lost in outer darkness.

An interval of silence followed, then it pulsed forth again straight up to that moon of magic and back to the far reaches of the desert, carried by echo.

A night breeze stirred, hot, a moving current close to the sand and rock, drifting into the crevasses. Circling about to curl up there amid the rocks, the great lobo stopped, then sank to a crouch and stiffened. Those flames of greenish hue played and faded in his eyes as cold fire in the boreal skies.

There was no perceptible movement, yet he seemed to be up, alert, tense. The clouded fires were brighter in his eyes. Noiseless as one of the ghost folk which the red men assert wander of nights in these mountains of the desert, he moved and was lost in the stygian blackness of a rocky dip where the boulders lay in jumbled fashion. A patch of moonlight revealed a flitting shadow and he was gone again into the blackness where the celestial illumination did not penetrate. This was the cunning of his brain and instincts, masterful at all the arts of concealment. Only his eyes were visible in the darkness and it may have been the intensity of hate

that made them glow so vividly as though eager fires burned.

That hot ground breeze came steadily and was stronger as he crossed a sharp ridge and went down into the forgotten bed of an ancient watercourse that told of the days when the world was young. His advance became a swift lope; the mane was stiffened about his neck and added an appearance of weightiness as though he was swollen. Abruptly he went into a crouching run, a fierce closing rush, and stopped, head high, over a cringing form. A rumbling was in his chest, an ominous sound, but he looked away from that lighter, cowering thing.

Minutes passed and the two figures were motionless, like graven things. The lips of each were lifted and a stray shaft of moonlight filtering through a break in the rocky ridge revealed the bared fangs of dog and wolf.

Theirs was a hatred of heritage, an emotion developed through the centuries. Between them was a chasm greater than anything which separates the races of man, its depths sunk into the chaos of utter hate. Tonight the hunting pack from the ranches of men had run him miles, every booming mouthing of the trailers, every sharp yip of the fighters pronouncement of the hate of their kind for him. And he had led them on hoping to separate one or more from the rest that he might kill them alone. No individual among them could cope with the speed of his lunging stride and he had longed for just this opportunity—but he did not leap in to attack.

Slowly he backed off a few stiff-legged steps, and sat down. His head went up and his keen muzzle was pointed at the silvered stars. Across the desert that awful throbbing roar sounded, beating, pulsing, rising in cadence to the desolation of utter loneliness. There had never been an answer to that wail though at times he sent it forth often through the night and traveled afar over the sand wastes and the rock.

The dog trembled at that sound and the great wolf approached again and stood close, towering over the lighter form of the hound. He leaped back once lightly as a wind blown leaf, and the dog's teeth clicked on empty air. Again and again he advanced, stood close and leaped nimbly to avoid those teeth. Also he saw the pathetically thin flanks of the dog that rose and fell so rapidly in strained panting at the slightest exertion, and then he followed a few feet behind as the dog moved weakly off to where a rock overhang shut

out even the dim glow from above.

Throughout the hours of night the lobo hung close. At times he, too, was gone from sight beneath that overhang only to appear suddenly, bounding back into the open like a rubber thing. But the intervals were longer and at last he did not reappear.

**I**N THE eastern sky rose tints diffused the gray and spread as bands of orange, the heat colors rising on the brow of day. The last star was gone and the time of mystic enchantment gave way to that harsh reality. The heat increased and the sands and rock magnified it and gave it back until the heat waves became visible, dancing their oppressive haze higher and higher from the surface. The rocks took on reddish hues and browns shading to sepias and crimsons. It was as though nebulous flame from that inverted cauldron in the heavens touched and fired them. The flats with their tawny sand glittered and the cactus and other growths cast thinnest of shadows that were lost entirely as the sun passed overhead. Gradually it westered and the jagged crests of stone in the mountains gave lengthening shadows. The fierce reds, the mad colors of the rocks, faded to the hue of dried blood, became dun and deepening browns.

Under the rock overhang something moved. A long, gray brown head with slanted, reddish eyes appeared and the lobo lay with muzzle on forepaws, watching a lengthening shadow of purple that came from a sharp needle of rock.

Dusk was in the canyons ere he moved, sitting up. He yawned and his head turned in a slow half circle, peering all about. Then he got up, stretched and moved out into the world of vague shadows even as one of them. On the high ridges were tints of red gold as the last rays of the sun burnished them to richly metallic colorings. Higher toward the peaks that last touch of day mounted and was gone at last. Stars were out and in the east the brass disc of the Night Girl appeared to claim her world of desert.

Through the night the lobo moved, a part of it. Once he stopped on a low shelf of rock and looked away toward the east where lay the lands of men with their herds and their calves that were so easy to take. He looked toward them over the miles and his muzzle wrinkled and lifted slightly in what might have been a snarl. But he went on toward the south, a moving segment of the vague darkness, and

remained among the mountains. The miles passed under that swift lope. Once a coyote fled, streaking low across the wastes at his approach, and a few moments later a bagnio of sound told that it had stopped to voice its resentment at the invasion of another to its solitudes.

The lobo paid no heed, and passed over a broad table of rock, then down into a widening canyon. His pace was slower now and often he stopped to test the air. He dropped into a crouch and his mane was up again. Where the canyon spread broad and flat there was running water, cold from the springs of hidden caverns far back in the mountains. But the scent that came to the lobo was not of water. It was the man scent.

Those lambent flames played more strongly across the great lobo's eyes and he was up. Silently he trotted off, swinging wide and testing the air. Uneasily he looked back often as he went down the canyon to where the sage growths started in the lower reaches. There he leaped forward in a galvanic burst that was like



the swishing of a sudden gust. The huge jackrabbit at which he had leaped bounded up a fraction too slow and died before it could squeak. The lobo appeased his hunger somewhat, then went on and a half mile beyond the tragedy was repeated, for he was

a masterful hunter by every instinct. But this second jack he did not eat. A few moments he rested, then picked it up and carried it down to the water. There he lapped a long time, again took up the rabbit and turned back as he had come, back through the rock wastes of the rugged, desert mountains. Only the moon saw his passing and the eastern sky was pale with the dawning as he came to the rock overhang, still carrying the jack in his great jaws.

Again followed one of those days of heat, of glaring light and fierce tints on the rocks, a day when the world was a place of flame and reds darkening to deepest browns that turned to purples as the long shadows crept. And with the advent of dusk the lobo appeared once more. His way led again as it had the night before and when he came to the place where the

drifting currents of lazy air brought him the man scent he stopped as he had the night before, his lips lifting in the silent snarl of hatred.

He went on down toward the sage flats where he had killed the jackrabbits, all unaware that through the night a lighter form had followed him from the rock overhang. As the dog came to where the breeze drifted up with its scent from the prospector's camp it stopped, looked in the direction the lobo had gone, whimpered and hesitated. Twice it started toward the canvas flap of the men's camp only to halt each time and peer through the darkness after the lobo. Then it went on down to the man, a tall, dark figure.

Eagerly the man welcomed the hound. His words were kindly as he knelt and examined the scrawny form in which the marks of starvation and thirst were evident.

"I thought you were gone, sure," he said, "an' I tramped two whole days lookin' fur you. Where you been?"

The dog whimpered, looked at the man, then turned its head to stare away into the darkness where down in the flats the lobo hunted long.

**A** JACK got up far in front of the hunting lobo and sped off with such an advantage that even his speed could not overtake it. An hour went by and another as he ranged along with head low, seeking air currents that hung closest to the ground. At last came his chance and he drove in, crushing down a small sage clump where the jack nestled. He was intensely hungry himself, but he did not stop to eat as he had the night before. Instead he looked toward the heavens. It may be he measured the hours of night that remained to travel the distance to the rock overhang. Once again he stopped at the creek to drink and the water increased his hunger, but he picked up the jack and fell into that trotting lope which consumed the miles.

The heavenly lights were paling and the first ribbons of rose and orange in the east were the heralds of day as he came to the rock overhang. He was gone beneath it but emerged almost instantly without the rabbit. There was something eagerly alert about him and he ranged in a wide circle with head high in the air. Once he howled, that deep-throated, pulsing howl. The fierceness was gone from it and the loneliness was intensified. He stopped to listen, then howled again. His head came down

until his muzzle was close to the rock and sand. It seemed there was something frantic about his movements as he circled back and forth.

One brief moment he halted, sniffing, then sped off, head low. A little while yet that scent would hold. It was very faint. Even his keen nostrils might have passed it by unnoticed under other circumstances. An hour more and it would vanish entirely under the touch of the sun's rays. His speed was amazing, but the sun rose faster and soon the last vestige of that scent was gone. No living thing could have held the trail. On the edge of a ridge the lobo stopped and his head went back but he did not howl for daylight was brilliant over the desert.

The sun had passed its zenith when he returned again to the rocky place. The jack was still there, untouched, and he nosed it and licked it. His hunger was great and it was tempting, but he did not eat it. His head stretched out on his paws as he lay and his eyes were closed, but they opened often, slanted, amber hued eyes that looked out as though they expected to see something that did not appear. His ears moved slightly on occasion. Again he watched the purpling shadows, sharp cut as they slid down from the western heights, saw the reds lose their fire and turn to brown, then merge into solidity of tone with gradations of density.

Slowly, as though wearied, he arose and was gone into the night. Smoldering fires were renewed and burned consumingly within him as the moon rose. He had been hungry but the hunger was forgotten. On other nights the creek with its cold water from the heights had been his first thought. Now he went toward it, but the desire that came was not to be quenched there.

At last he came over the same way as he had come before. Once the night breeze told him of a rabbit not far off, but he paid no heed and went on, up over the region of boulders, up where the rocks mounted higher to a low mesa that stood silhouetted against the mercuric glow of the heavens, a vast block of harder stone that had been left by the erosion of the centuries.

There, high above the desert he stood and his keen eyes saw far through the half lights. Then, out over the wastes his cry sounded, mournful, deep. The very air seemed to tremble with it and in this region of silence it throbbled off into distances unbelievable. Often he had given voice to that howl when this moon illu-



mined the heavens, and it had never been answered. Twice his neck and throat swelled and that awful sound pulsed forth.

In his camp the prospector heard it and saw his dog's head lift, then witnessed that which made him wonder. The dog was up, quivering. Suddenly it leaped away into the night and he called after it. But the dog did not return. Again the man called, then mused aloud.

"You fool! You got lost before an' I don't know why you didn't die for want



o' grub an' water. You ain't got sense enough to know that's a lobo's howl an' if he gets wind o' you he'll kill you sure."

He peered through the semi-darkness up the canyon and thought he saw a lightish form that moved very rapidly. Out of the stillness again came the howl of the lobo, faint, distant. The man shook his head resignedly and sat down, while far off the lobo turned down off the mesa. He no longer traveled at that easy lope. His walk was slow and his head hung lower. Life had played strangely with him. Never

an answer, and there were times as now when that moon was a thing that brought madness to his kind. He seemed very tired as though the years had suddenly taken heavy toll. Again he was going back toward that rock overhang. Something lured irresistibly. He was almost there when he stopped and turned. In his chest was a deep rumbling, and afar he saw something of lighter hue that approached rapidly.

Suddenly the lobo's head arose, his mane stood out in swollen fashion. A marked change came over him. He moved a few steps toward the approaching thing and the shuffling walk gave way to that stiff-legged trot. All the old power was evident and he broke into a wild run beside the dog, circling, leaping over and ahead of the lighter form. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the sands.

In front of the rocky overhang they stopped together, then the dog entered and came out with the forgotten form of the jackrabbit. Stiff-legged the lobo circled about and once his head went back as the howl throbbed over the reaches. But it was different. The loneliness was gone out of it, given way to something of fierce defiance, of possession perhaps. The dog trembled, then came and licked his muzzle and the lobo stood in guardian fashion as she returned to the rabbit.

## SEQUIOIAS

**I**N ONE of the groves of Sequoias or "Big Trees" in Tulare County, California, is found mute evidence of the wonderful span of life and the enduring quality after death of these giant trees.

Count of the annual growth rings shows that the increase in diameter approximates one foot per century. A tree one foot in diameter may not show one hundred annual rings but one seven or ten feet through will usually show about seven or ten hundred, respectively.

Trunks now lie prostrate in the forest, still perfectly sound, with trees more than seven feet in diameter growing in positions where they could have started only after the fall of the prostrate trees.

Death, barring the hand of man, the great destroyer, seems to come to this family only through accident, like uprooting in softened soil or by some freak wind storm. Lightning does not seem to kill them, for many thrifty trees show scars of the Jovian bolts, and forest fires fail even to injure the bark.

One tree that fell and has now entirely disappeared in the almost countless centuries elapsed since its fall, made and still shows a lasting monument in the form of a trench-like depression formed by the accumulation of mold and soil against its trunk while existent and now made visible by the total disappearance of the tree. Within this trench or vacant bed, now grows a Sequoia more than twenty seven feet in diameter as high from the ground as a man can reach to measure it. This living successor to the older tree could only have sprouted after the disintegration of its predecessor. Excavation within the depression gives evidence that the old tree was not destroyed by fire.—M. L. W.





## HEAD WORK

By WALBRIDGE DUDLEY

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WAITING OUT THERE IN THE LANE OF THE BIG LINERS, CAPTAIN HOGAN OF THE "LAUGHING LADY" WAS CONTENT TO KEEP HIS HANDS OFF THE SMUGGLING ACTIVITIES OF HIS SINISTER PASSENGER, UNTIL DAVY TENCH TEMPTED HIM. THEN THINGS TOOK A CURIOUS TURN

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LATE of Georges Banks, later of Nassau and Rum Row, the *Laughing Lady*, Captain Thomas Hogan commanding, was slogging into it, with stay-sail taut as a Congo drum; her standing gear all a-whine to the lash of the shouting wind and white water over her weather shoulder every forty seconds. Smash! She would cut into a long, hogback roller! Then a tall geyser of spray would nod, glitter, collapse in a lather on the deck and vanish with a gurgle over the taffrail, ghost pale in the faint fire of the splintering stars.

"Ten knots, easy," barked Hogan over his shoulder, and spat where the lee smoked to the rush of black water. "Ten knots. We'll be pickin' her up any minute, Mister—uh—Mister Jones."

"You have already. Look ahead."

"And so we have," acknowledged Hogan, squinting eastward over the other's pointing hand.

On the rim of the tossing world a tiny diamond and ruby cluster sparked at them across a dark infinity.

"We're south of her course, aren't we, Captain? Might as well lay up, now."

"Ah, sure, an' that's wan thing I got tired of, a-layin' there in the Row off the Jersey coast; but it's right ye arre, Mister Jones, an' so be it." His thick voice rose in a sharp succession of bellowed orders. The deck sprang to life; the wheelman

slammed her fair into the wind. Up she came, slatting and whipping. Hogan bellowed again, and *whing—clink—whir—whir—whir—down* dropped jib and foresail, and there rode the *Laughing Lady*, with the reef points on her mainsail snapping, a block up forward rattling like a snare drum and the black water sneaking by.

"Good! Hold her so!" said Hogan, and turned to his passenger. "I'll be steppin' below wan minute, Mister Jones. Will ye be after havin' a small sniffer? 'Tis cold work, this."

"I'll be along in a little."

"Right ye are," said Hogan; but he paused at the companion head to stare back at the spare figure silhouetted against the stars.

"Cripes!" muttered Hogan, "there's a pr-roper hard lad. Salted, he is and no mistake. A bad guy in a squabble, I'm thinkin', and I'm no tremblin' lilly meself." He shrugged and went below.

It was true. Hogan was not the first man who had seen the winter in Jones' pale eyes. And this business he was on tonight called for all that, keeping him briefly above decks now. He looked back over the way they had come.

It had rained the day before and now a horned moon drifted down the sky; a combination that lit the ocean with long streaks of an intense phosphorescence. Their wake still swarmed behind the

*Laughing Lady* like some gigantic jeweled scimitar slowly returning to the sheath of night.

He looked forward again. The liner was climbing the curve of the world, up, up, mounting with a startling rapidity. The wind veered, came in fitful gusts, seemed about to die away. Somewhere up near the bow a man began to sing. From the four hours he had been aboard Jones knew already that it must be the cook, a Barbadoes nigger with bag eyes, an English accent, and a voice like an angel's.

"Never For You," he sang, fixing his pitch, and then his great baritone boomed into the night:

*"You may not greet the scented balms  
That drift across a breathless sea  
From those low coasts, where slender palms  
Dream in the moonlight, silently——"*

On and on went his booming voice while the cordage hummed a cello accompaniment, on and on across the distance, mounting into the colossal void, climbing the pale stairway of the stars. And the liner came on and on——

Jones shook himself as though rousing from the vagueness of a dream, from the depths of some hypnotic spell. Captain Hogan appeared on deck and handed his passenger a flask silently. The negro's song died away.

"She's coming fast," said Jones.

"Aye, that she is," acknowledged Hogan. "Steppin' right along. Ain't goin' to miss us more'n a thousand yards either. Prob'ly not that. She's bearin' this way."

"All right. Got those lanterns ready I spoke about? Yeah? Well, better run 'em up."

Hogan shouted, "Tench! Oh, Tench!" Then he muttered, "Where the two horned divvil is the lad? Ah, now, here he comes. This is a felly with sinse, Mister Jones, very stiddy."

The approaching man called out, "Aye, Cap'n." It was too dark for Jones to make out much except that he seemed well knit, held his head high and gave an indefinable impresion of youth. "Aye, Cap'n."

"There's two side lights lashed together with a white lantern below," ordered Hogan. "Get thim, Tench, an' run 'em up."

"On my way, Cap'n," answered Tench in a pleasant, throaty voice, disappeared, and within five minutes the red, green, and yellow lights were a cluster at the fore

truck, dipping and swaying in wide arcs to the roll of the racing seas.

It was plain now that the liner would pass them close; she seemed to be veering in. But Hogan was not looking at her. Studying Jones, he swayed closer to him.

"Ye certainly got wan divvil of a swell lay, Mister Jones. They bring it right to ye, don't they? Man, it's fair wunnerful!"

A grim, slow smile slid down Jones' angular face, avoiding his pale eyes as it came. The pulse of the liner's screws was loud across the water.

"I don't know, Cap. You got a tough gang here. S'pose you decided to frisk me an' then tie a little scrap iron to my ankles, eh?"

Hogan recoiled. "May the good God forbid!" he stammered. "In cold blood? Never! 'Tis a good figger ye're payin'. Me and me bould boys share it. 'Tis enough without neck stretchin'."

"Just the same," answered Jones, with his sleep walker's staring smile, "you were thinking of it, or you wouldn't have jumped so when I mentioned it."

Hogan's resentment was muffled by a hail from the liner's bridge. The shout spewed down on them, thickened by a megaphone: "Hoy theer! In any trouble?"

"No!" bellowed Hogan between his cupped paws.

"Why the lights?"

"We're signallin' fish!" roared Hogan, and the Barbadoes nigger cackled as he lurched to the curl of the wash from the enormous black bulk rushing by, tier on towering tier of golden port holes, and a faint burst of music spattering through the wind. Then the *whoosh, whoosh*, of the giant screws, the slick sides rounding into the stern, and a flash of white falling, falling, from some obscured port.

"*What was that?*" called someone in the waist sharply.

"Shush, a bit of paper, Mist' Tench," answered the nigger's baritone.

"It fell too fast!"

Jones smiled his slow, frosty smile.

"Get a boat over!" whooped Hogan. The men sprang to it.

"Well, well," put in Jones, "a little excitement, eh?" He raised his voice.

"Guess I'll go along if y' don't mind, Cap'tain."

Hogan stared at him curiously. Jones fluttered a parchment eyelid.

"Tench is such a bright boy, didn't you say, Cap'n?"

Hogan shrugged. "Passenger's goin'

fer the ride," he shouted.

Jones dropped into the stern as the boat got away to a succession of furious climbs and breathless descents. Between powerful pulls at the stroke oar, young Tench was studying the passenger covertly, as well as the vague light would permit. As they skittered over an enormous roller Jones suddenly flashed a powerful hand searchlight full in Tench's face, blinding the boy for an instant and then shot the beam beyond the boat, to pick up a red glint on the water. They swept down to it.

"As I live and breathe," said Jones nonchalantly, "a nice, fat inner tube, with a towel or something tied to it, and—yes—a long—thin box." He leaned out, produced a knife with the suddenness of a magician and cut the tube away. With the box wedged between his knees he spoke again, coolly.

"All right, boys. Let's be getting back. I thought maybe somebody was overboard."

As they swung there idly for a moment in the trough of the tremendous swells

David Tench smiled inwardly. He had seen some strange doings in his first trip to Rum Row; and this, he thought, was the weirdest of all.

Backing water with his long oar he called out. "Right, fellers! Give way!" and with a sudden lunge they began to climb a long slope toward the wheeling stars and the tossing lanterns which marked the *Laughing Lady*—

Aboard again, Jones stumped to the companion head and so out of sight. With his hand on a backstay Hogan bellowed orders and they were soon under weigh, coming about smartly under a freshening wind that came zooming over the port quarter.

Young Tench kept near the captain. When he thought Hogan was about to go below he glanced swiftly around the deck and stepped up to him.

"Cap'n," he muttered, "can I have a word with you quiet-like?"

Hogan peered at him. "Wisha, me lad, a dozen of 'em," he answered, leading the way aft.

"What now, Davy, me bould bucko?"

queried Hogan finally, settling against a hatch coaming.

"Cap'n, here's cases: I know this feller Jones as he calls himself."

Hogan started. "Ye do?"

"No, no, I don't mean that way. But I know what he's up to. He's one curly wolf. I'm no saphead. He got a box out there from the *Ionía*, a nice size to slide out of a stateroom porthole. Fastened to an inner tube, savvy? You can blow 'em up after you shove 'em through the port. Now, Cap'n, what's in that box?"

Hogan was rubbing his grizzled chin and grinning at the darkness.

"S'posin' you tell me, Davy," he suggested softly.

"Well, now, Cap'n, I don't need to tell you. Nobody needs t' crack you on the head with a club to make you see a dollar."

"A bright la-ad like you would be a-noticin', Davy, that I never asked the felly what 'twas all about when y' came overboard. And—"

"Then you knew alla time it's stones he's runnin'?"

"As ye say, bhoy, I need no clip on the conk to see the hand before me face."

Tench edged closer to him. "You know what I'm a thinkin', Cap'n?"

"One o' them light taps on the head ye been talkin' about an' we're both rich men? Eh, is that it, now?" whispered Hogan playfully.

With iron fingers David seized the other's arm.

"Whs-s-s-t, Cap'n. Who said a word about taps on the head? Where do we land this fellow, or don't we?"

"Without a drop o' hard liquor bechune decks the *Laughing Lady* c'n take chances. We're on the first reach fer a lone spot I savvy along Connecticut way, Davy."

Tench's clutch loosened. "Me an' you might ruin him ashore, mightn't we, Cap? Nice and friendly like, y'know. He's a tough egg, mebbe. But the two of us, eh?"

Hogan chuckled. "Meanin' a two way divvy? The crew not to know, la-ad? Is that the lay?"

"You said sweet music, Cap. Wait till we get this baby ashore."

Hogan laughed aloud. "Bhoy, ye got the makin's!" He shot a swift glance around the pitching deck and added lower, "The makin's of wan gr-rand young hijacker!"

David released his arm with a hard smile and walked away to lounge in the bows till the squat coast line hove in sight.

The pearl of false dawn was paling the



morning star and the crests of the piling combers were white as curd outside the wide inlet when they lost steerageway at last.

From the cabin where he had sat watchfully through the night, Jones came slowly up the companion ladder; his lean face pallid in the light of a hurricane lamp held high by the bag eyed nigger. The movements of men across the deck made blobs of deeper darkness here and there. A small boat rattled in the falls, knocking gently as an oily swell slipped underneath. With the thin box tightly grasped, Jones crossed to the davits, Hogan following.

"I'll see ye safe ashore," volunteered the captain, settling himself in the boat. Tench shouldered through the clustered men as Jones clambered into the stern.

"I'll lend a hand, Cap'n, by your leave," he offered, scrambling into the bow seat.

Hogan looked over his shoulder and grinned. "Always on the job, eh, la-ad? The quicker we're in and out the better. All right, me bould buckos, lower away!"

As the boat hit a ground swell with a teeth rattling jolt, the darkness of the eastern sky split open to reveal a broad bar of sword gray light. Through the vastness of the whimpering air they could hear the far off tolling of a buoy, deep and mellow.

Everything was ghost gray. When they slipped from the side of the *Laughing Lady* her spars stood out sharply for an instant against the growing light in the east and then seemed to withdraw into a vague opalescence. It was as though they drifted over some pale sea of dreams on which their lifting oars laid a slow row of silver discs.

Looking over his shoulder between strokes, David caught a quick glimpse of the misty piles and stringers of a leaning wharf. He could hear the furtive lapping of water beneath. A block rattled on the distant ship; the wind caught at the sound and plucked it away. Then Jones announced quietly: "There's a landing stage around at the other side. Row there."

Hogan grunted. "Expecting anybody t' meet ye, Mister Jones?"

"I work alone," said Jones shortly.

As they rounded the end of the wharf David thought of the speed with which their passenger had made the knife appear when he cut loose the box from the inner tube back there in the open sea, and he wondered whether the man carried it in a forearm sheath. The fellow was one tough cracker, for a fact. He speculated

on how big a haul he and Hogan would make. A fortune probably. Jones had never chartered them for twelve hours for any piker stake. He smiled and felt of the hard weight in his side pocket as Hogan stopped rowing.

Offshore the *Laughing Lady* stood out suddenly in slender silhouette against the enormous vacancy of sea and sky. far off the buoy was tolling, *dong—ring, rang—dong!*

David sprang to his feet as they slid up to the landing stage. Here the wharf cut them off from a view of the ship. He stepped out and threw the painter in a double half hitch around a stub of rotten post.

Hogan grunted to his feet and looked slowly about. They were shadowed by an old shed at the landward end of the wharf. From the landing stage a path ran up a gentle slope. Some distance inshore was a group of tiny houses, stark in the morning light. A thin smudge of lilac smoke bloomed from a chimney and fled away in the clutch of the wind.

Hogan leaped lightly onto the stage, ran with astonishing speed up the path to the top of the rise and stood there for a moment gazing around. "All right!" he called suddenly, beginning to descend once more.

In the meantime Jones had crawled stiffly out, the box, wrapped in black oil-cloth, projecting from his side pocket. But he did not turn his back to David; sidling along instead until he reached the path. As Hogan approached the man, David sprang forward, shouted and flung up an arm. Instinctively Jones dodged and half turned. In one great leap Hogan was on him. David stood aside, detached, aloof, almost as though he had no interest in the outcome. There was something grotesque about the struggle, so silent there in the



cool morning air. They fell, slipping down the path almost to his feet. The box twisted from Jones' pocket and lay apart in a clump of weed. Jones, though slighter, proved top man. David's hand came slowly from his reefer gripping a big, blue automatic. For some obscure reason he was smiling.

"Soak him!" wheezed Hogan.

Methodically David leaned down and



smote Jones once at the base of his skull, not very hard. Jones shivered, twitched once or twice spasmodically, and relaxed with a sigh.

"Expert, eh?" grinned Hogan, getting shakily to his feet. "Wisha, the felly's twice me strength; but that rap fixed him. 'Twas a two man job though Davy an' no mistake."

"Yes, it's a two man job, all right; but mebbe not the way——"

"The box, Davy! In Hivvin's name, the— Ah, sure, an' here we are!" He made a lunge toward where it lay and began fumbling with the wrappings.

"'Twill be a couple hunnerd thousand or there's snakes in Ireland," he muttered. "Whisht, lad! What ye doin'? C'mere!"

Working quickly and silently, David had produced a coil of thin rope and was lashing Jones' arms behind his back in sailorly fashion. Next he went rapidly through the man's pockets while Hogan tore at the inner fastenings of the box, and transferred a considerable armory to his own jacket. He was tapping Jones' bulging money belt when he heard Hogan gasp:

"Wirra, 'tis himself was crazy! There's nothin' in the dom box at all, at all!"

"You're right, Cap!" said David, straightening, with an amused glint in his black eyes. "You're probably right. He was usin' the box just to fool us."

"F-fool us?"

"Likely. I'll bet there's a hundred grand in stones in his money belt if there's a thin dime."

Hogan leaped to his feet.

Jones stirred slightly and David looked down to see the man's filmy eyes fixed on him with a stare of such insane venom that he almost recoiled.

"In a belt ye say? On him?" barked Hogan, and dove for Jones' prostrate body, to fumble furiously at his waist.

As calmly as though he were crushing some annoying bug, David at once leaned over and rapped Hogan sharply behind the ear with his heavy gun butt. The Captain slipped forward soundlessly across Jones' chest; but the expresion of the man beneath changed not by so much as the twitch of an eyelid.

"What?" queried Jones softly while

David explored Hogan's pockets. "What is the idea, boy? You must be some opposed to splitting with your pals, eh? You don't think for a second you're gonna get by with this do you?"

With another length of cord David was tying the captain's wrists as tightly as he could pull. "That's for a double-crosser," he muttered. The pain began to bring Hogan around. "Why, yes, Jones, or whatever your name is," he went on, "you might say I'm expectin' to get away with it." He looked down at them and turning Hogan over with his toe. "Yes, I guess I'll get away with it, O. K."

"You don't know the gang you're bucking when you begin to mess me up!" Jones spat out viciously. "I'll follow you myself."

Hogan's eyes opened for a bewildered moment. Then, through a purpling face, he began to curse with fluency and vigor.

"You follow me?" said David amusedly, disregarding Hogan. "You follow me? Why man, you're plain nutty."

Hogan stopped swearing suddenly. "Why, wha' d' ya mean, ye dirty spalpeen, ye double-crossin' hijacker!" he shouted.

"That'll be all of that!" snapped David. "Get up, the both of you, and make it snappy. C'mon!"

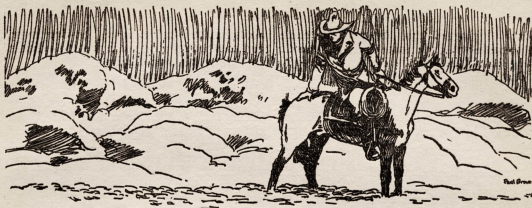
"What the hell's the idea?" snarled Jones.

David swept off his cap and ran a lean hand through his black hair. "Why, this," he said pleasantly, "just this: you got two big shipments through, Mister Jones. That was plenty. So the Customs Service had the Coast Guard plant a man in every fast boat on Rum Row to kind of lay for you; and, as far as the *Laughing Lady* goes, I'm him! You sort of hit me as a hard to handle baby, so I thought I'd just get Hogan's help on the job and then pinch him too. The rest of the crew ain't worth botherin' with, or I'd wait for some of them to come after the boat."

"Well, I'll be domned!" gulped Hogan.

David made no answer; but the steady whisper of the wind, the little ripples around the worn piles of the wharf, and the distant tonking of the bellbuoy blended into the sound strangely like sardonic laughter.





# THE PROPHET OF PINTO MESA

By KENNETH PERKINS

*Author of "Cal Triggers Bucks His Luck," "The Voice of the Chasm," etc.*

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ALONE WITH THE KILLER PABLO CLAUG IN THAT DESOLATE STORM BATTERED SHACK AT PINTO MESA, LITTLE JINGLE THOMPSON FACED DEATH UNAFRAID, WITH A STRANGE POWER OF HIS OWN GREATER THAN ALL OF PABLO'S BRUTAL STRENGTH

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## I

A GIANT mongrel, half Pima and half white, rode up to the door of a desert shack. His face, under the broad lop brim of the sombrero, was a mask of many emotions, of which, exhaustion, fear and cunning were uppermost. The high cheek bones, the slanting eyes of his Indian breed, the flabby lips, the bristling and brutal chin, these lineaments were softened by a thick coating of alkali, mud-died with his own sweat to a mask.

He pounded at the door with his gloved fist.

A leather faced man with the narrowed pupils common to the desert mucker, opened the door, started back, collected his wits and then grinned obsequiously. His visitor was a famous man. What he asked must be granted.

"Let me, in here—hide me—feed me. Water my cayuse—and water *me*. Pronto!"

"You-all seem to be in a hurry, Pablo," the old mucker said genially. "Who's after you?"

"Two hombres from that Thompson outfit."

"You-all been shootin' up them poor Thompson's agin'?"

Pablo lurched in, swigged eagerly from the flask proffered him, fell into a chair and began gobbling up the noonday meal of flapjacks and bacon and coffee at which his host had just been engaged. Between mouthfulls he vouchsafed to explain.

"Went up thar to their outfit to shoot 'em. Old man Thompson and his father—that's all that's left of the outfit exceptin' some young kid, who don't count. If I'd seen my chancet to plug the two men—that would of finished the outfit."

"Didn't git your chancet, Pablo? Oh, well, wait till next time."

Pablo Claug swore fervently through a mouthful of flapjacks. "I'd have got 'em if it hadn't been for a Galloway bull that chased me."

"Shouldn't sneak around them cow outfits too much on foot," the old man counselled sorrowfully.

"I wasn't on foot! It happened out on the range. Weren't nowheres near the outfit."

"You mean a bull chased yer while you was on hossback? And you got skeered?"

"I plugged him. Skeered? No, I weren't skeered. Never was skeered in my life. I admit a bull gits on my nerves, same as a gila monster will on yourn. Was tossed oncet, when I was a six-year-old. Who wouldn't be skeered, rememberia'?

that? I plugged him. Forgot how these here cattle will drift home to die, ef you-all plug 'em in the belly." He licked his lips. "That thar's where I like to plug a Galloway bull."

He went on eating loudly, while his host maintained a respectful silence, as if the noise of his guest's eating demanded attention as much as his verbal pronouncements.

"You see the damned Galloway got back to the ranch afore I got thar," Pablo finished, "and word was spread around that I was back agin. That's how it happened. Old Thompson and his father came gunnin' for me. Picked up my trail at a gamin' house just this side of Mule Town and I couldn't shake 'em off all the way down into the desert. They're hot after me now." He snapped out the conclusion to his narrative: "Give me a good shot of likker."

The old mucker gave him a jug and a tin cup.

"Don't see what you need to be afraid of now, Pablo," the host said. "That thar red roan of yourn kin walk away from any hoss of the Thompson outfit."

Pablo Claug drank. Then, smacking his lips, he let the liquor take its slow burning course. A light came to his eyes. They slanted, wrinkling.

"Walk away?" he repeated. "Walk away, did you say? How come you allus want to be givin' me an insult, you little ole seedwart. Don't appear like you know me. I'm Pablo Claug. Why should I walk away from Thompson—and his toothless old father? I ain't goin' to walk away from nobody."

The host reflected silently that Pablo had shown evidence of fear and trembling before taking that swig. But he held his peace.

"Now that Thompson and his father have took the trouble to come all the way down here to the desert rim where I want them, I'll fight 'em!"

"Fight two men?" the other exclaimed. It was hard to believe. For Claug had never been known to fight two men together before.

"Ain't goin' to fight 'em. Goin' to kill 'em. And right here out in front of your shack. In just about ten minutes."

Ten minutes! The old mucker went to the door of his cabin and looked out toward the horizon of mesas. On the scarp of the granite hill nearest to him, he saw the silhouettes of two horsemen. A short zigzag ride down the face of the mesa, thence

across a boulder wash of the dry river, and they would soon reach the adobe banks just above his own diggings.

Pablo Claug came and looked over his shoulder.

"You-all have been thinnin' out them Thompson's cattle for a long time," the old mucker said. "Bein', as you yourself stipulate, them two is the last grown-up men of the tribe, they're goin' to be powerful keerful. How come you're offerin' to fight two desperate hombres of that thar nature?"

Pablo Claug evidently had not listened. He was staring at the crest of the adobe banks a few hundred yards beyond the sand windrows and sage patches outside the door.

"And remember this," the host was saying. "You cain't expect a pore old man like me to help you, much as I'd like to. I cain't draw any too quick these days. And besides, why should I draw on them Thompsons anyways, and git plunked. Me a pore, weak, ole seedwart, as you yourself likes to call me?"

"You don't have to draw on no Thompsons!" Pablo Claug answered. "But you got to draw on me. And not only that, you got to *throw* on me."

"Throw on you!" the other gasped. The heat must have gotten the better of the big gunman, despite the fact that he was a breed.

"I reckon you're a good enough shot to throw your gun on me—and miss?"

"That thar looks easy, Pablo. But how come you want me to raise my gun agin you. I ain't nothin' gin you. I want to be counted one of your friends. Wouldn't dast raise it agin you. No one in these parts dast, 'ceptin' only them Thompsons."

The sound of hoofs, as the two Thompson men came galloping down along the pebbly trail of the boulder wash, struck in upon the ears of Pablo and his old friend.

"Quick now! Here's my game," the breed said. "I'm goin' to mount. Then



I'm goin' to ride around this here shack—like I was raidin' you. When they come up to the top of that thar adobe bank and are pickin' their way through the mesquite

for to ride down into the stream bed, then you begin to pot at me out'n the window. Be sure and aim good and high. Don't want 'em to see yer bullets kickin' up the dust. Aim for that greasewood, so's they won't ricochet. Good and high mind you. It'll make it all the safer for me. Then, suddenly, afore they come within range, I'll drop, pretendin' to be hit. I'll fall on the sand, lyin' face down'r'd. They'll most like ride up slow, dismount, and maybe palaver with you, or maybe not. Won't make much difference. If they do, you tell 'em I was after a bag of pay dirt you got. Anything to make it look good. Then when they come up to me to see just how bad I'm hit, I'll blaze away at 'em."

The old man's lips trembled to an uncomfortable smile. "I've helped a lot of men, both reckless and keerful, in my days out here in the desert," he said, "but I never met up with anyone so all-fired keerful as you! Hate to cold-deck two honest gents like them Thompsons."

"If you don't like it, mebbe in this here sham fight of ourn I might do some honest-to-God sharp shootin' on you, instead of pretendin'!"

This settled the problem. The old mucker did not spend another moment in weighing the moral aspects of the act. Pablo Claug was the king of the desert. His word was law, and the old mucker prided himself on being a "peaceful law-abiding man."

"All right, Pablo. Anything you says must be right!"

"And mind, aim good and high! If I see them shots ricocheting too close to my roan's feet——"

There was an idea! If the old mucker could only have reacted to that touch of divine inspiration! Why not actually shoot Pablo Claug in this sham fight!

But no! He had nothing against Pablo. If he raised a hand against him he would win nothing, and perhaps lose everything.

There was Pablo Claug, now mounted and galloping his roan in a wide circle around the little cabin. It had the same effect on the old mucker, as they say a circle drawn in the sand has upon a horned toad. It hypnotized him.

He began emptying a volley of fire. The shots smashed loudly into the thin quiet air, mingling with the growing clatter of horse's hoofs. The Thompsons were already at the crest of the adobe banks.

"Good men, them Thompsons," the old mucker said. "But they're reckless. Pablo

ain't. And I'm with the strongest side."

His sixth shot rang out. And he had been very careful to aim all six high in the air.

## II

THE two riders drew up their mounts at the edge of the adobe bank and looked down toward the mucker's shack. The dry river bed stretched below them, a furlong or so across, with the shack in the middle, an ore-crusher near by, and a small corral surrounded by giant boulders and stretches of sand and sage. Across this little scene went the white flashes of fire from two six-guns.

"What-all's happenin'?" the older of the two men, Blink Thompson, said. "All as I kin see is a rider circlin' that 'air cabin."

"It's Pablo Claug himself," Blink Thompson's son replied. "He's got into some argument with an hombre inside."

"Good enough. Now's the time to pot him," old Thompson cried. "Kin you git that range? Too fur for me. My eye's too bleary. You kin do it. Now's your chance."

"Too far for anything sure. We'll leave our cayuses here and git down a bit closer to him behind them there boulders."

They dismounted, letting their horses stand with reins dragging.

"Hulloa there!" the younger Thompson cried. "He's hit!"

"Who's hit? What's happened? Pablo Claug stretched another victim? The yellow-livered son of a skunk!"

"No, it's Pablo Claug that's hit!"

The old man shaded his weak, watery eyes. "Cain't see. What's that roan trottin' off for, without its rider? What-all's happened!"

"It's Pablo Claug been hit! Damme if he ain't stretched good and proper. Rolled to the sand off'n his saddle. Wrigglin' like a chuckawalla that's been stepped on!" Ned Thompson gave vent to a joyful shout. "We're free, b'God! Do you git that, Dad? Pablo Claug ain't goin' to persecute us no more! Free! Come on!"

He leaped down through the mesquite, unmindful of the tearing thorns, jumping over the low patches, picking out the shortest route through the dense brush. His aged father stumbled slowly along after him, gun in hand, mumbling as he went.

"Look out thar, now, son! Don't be reckless! I know a thing or two about gun-fightin'. You're too all-fired reckless. Easy now! Don't try to bust through mesquite thetaway!"



The son had come out on the open river bed, and for a moment having no protection, he paused. His father's warnings came in breathless and excited treble.

"I tell you, son, watch out! Find out who lives in that 'air mucker's cabin first! Some loosed hermit mebbe. Most like he'll take a pot at you!"

"Whoever he is, he's a friend of ourn!" the son cried joyfully. "He's bumped off the yellowest coyote ever chawed off a cow's nose!"

The "hermit" had come out to the door of his shack, now, and standing in full view of the two newcomers, he waved.

"It's all right!" young Thompson said. He looked over to the form of Pablo Claug lying in the sand, head toward the shack, one arm pinned awkwardly under his body, the other, his right, lying out with palm upward, in the blazing sand. It looked precisely as if his six-gun had fallen from his hand, and he had died in the act of clutching the empty air.

"Hulloa thar, pard!" young Thompson called out. "What-all does this mean! You sure will be a hero in my eyes, from this day on!"

The mucker came down from his shack. "Just a disagreement. He come after me, thinkin' to stick me up. He seen I ben doin' some pannin' here. It's Pablo Claug. You know him, mebbe. Got a sting in him wors'n a rattler." He dropped his voice. "*A rattler'll stay alive till sunset*, you know that there superstition, hombre?"

But the warping was not loud enough. The old mucker, loath as he was to see a man shot down practically in cold blood before his very eyes, did not dare to oppose the great Pablo Claug.

The tragedy, inevitable as it was horrible, came. The mucker saw it, and if he hadn't been used to such sights during his fifty years in the desert, he would have covered his eyes. And the older man off there in the mesquite brush saw it, even though his eyes were dim.

A flash of light, a report. It looked as if a white tongue of fire had leaped out from directly underneath the prostrate Pablo's chin. The simile of the rattler was perfect.

Thompson's hand went to his chest. His head went back, as if some invisible hand had timed an uppercut on his chin. His knees sagged, his gun flipped from his hand; he sank forward face downward in a patch of rattleweed.

Pablo Claug knew that this was no sim-

ulation of being hit. The man was hit beyond any shadow of doubt. Pablo knew it; the old mucker knew it; the white haired, bleary-eyed frontiersman who was the father, knew it.

The latter ducked into the protection of two boulders and opened fire. The carcass of Pablo Claug came to life, arose, ran off towards his horse. Over his shoulder he hurled a string of fire towards the boulders and mesquite brush from which the father Thompson was firing. A bullet passed the breed's head, like the crack of a whip. Another ripped through his tall peaked sombrero. A fear gripped the big half-breed. He realized suddenly that he was in the open, and his adversary was under cover. But this was not what routed him: It was the fear of facing the father of the man he had shot. He vaulted to the saddle of his horse and hit the trail.

Old Thompson came out, stricken with rage and grief. He had given his best in the fight, but his best no longer counted. He had a steady hand, an indomitable strength of wiry body, a heroic spirit. But his eyes were dimmed by many years of squinting at desert suns. No use. He had come to help his son, with his wisdom, and his courage, but he had failed.

Both the father and the old mucker ran toward the fallen man. The former turned him about carefully. He felt for the wound, held a flask to the half-opened lips.

"He ain't done for yit!" the mucker said.

The father turned upon the speaker with an oath. "He was cold-decked, be God!

And you know it! You ole, toothless coyote! My son was cold-decked. You wasn't fightin'! You was stallin'! And ef my son dies—you're goin' to pay, the same as Pablo Claug's goin' to pay!"

"He ain't goin' to die, Mister!" the mucker whimpered.



The father snatched the flask from him, and tipped it to the wounded man's lips. The eyes flickered.

"Take me back," he whispered finally. "I ain't through fightin' by a long shot. But not now. I want to be back with—my boy."

The aged father thrust his powerful arm under the man's head.

"Only a crease, that's all, I swear, Dad. But I want to see my boy, right away. He's only a young kid, Dad. Your grandson. We got to git to him quick. I want to warn him what we-all are fightin' against. Not against a man, but against a rattler."

### III

THE third generation of the Thompson outfit was a slender gray eyed boy of nineteen who seemed as much out of place in the cow country as an ocotillo blossom in the desert. He was a very peculiar character. No one understood him. Some called him a poet. "Jingle" was his nickname. For he had a habit of writing poems to adorn the walls of the cantinas. Most of the barkeepers and gamblers, in fact, were his friends. They had his sonnets about "Spring in the Canyons, the fragrance of sage, the wind in the mesas," and the rest of his favorite topics written upon the mirrors behind the bar.

Totally oblivious of the fact that his father and his aged grandfather had gone gunning for their enemy, this boy was singing one of his odes, accompanying himself on a banjo, while the cantina girls, miners and stockmen thumped out a Texas Tommy to his rhythm. Jingle Thompson was really a very popular citizen of Mule Town. But he was popular in a disagreeable way: as Domingo the Humpback was popular, for instance, among the gamblers. Domingo brought luck to you at cards, if you rubbed his back. Jingle was popular and pitied, and, in a manner of speaking despised.

And the reason for Jingle Thompson's being despised was this: he had sedulously refused to learn how to fire a six-gun. This was supposed to be due to some promise he had made to his mother, a promise which his father made him keep. Nevertheless a man who refuses to touch a six-gun does not command much respect in Mule Town and the ranges about Soda Mesa. A man must not crawl behind a promise to his mother and thus save his hide. That was the philosophy of Mule Town's stockmen and gamblers. Every boy promises his mother not to fight. But does that let him out?

And now at the climax of his merry-making at Cal Martin's Cantina something happened. When the dance was over, an old mucker from the desert shuf-

fled across the sawdust covered floor, drew his gun and aimed it at the floor of the platform where Jingle Thompson was seated, playing and singing.

"Now do that 'air song to the tune of my gun," he rasped out shrilly. "Don't sing it, nor don't play it. Just dance it!"

"Why the hell should I dance to your gun?" Jingle Thompson asked quietly, focusing his gray eyes upon the grizzled old man.

The man seemed to be struck with the deadly calmness of the boy's look. He hesitated just a moment before opening fire.

"Don't touch that boy, you!" the bouncer called out. "You can't pick a fight with him. He never fights!"

"Ah, that's it!" The old mucker laughed. "I can't touch him because it is generally known he don't carry a six-gun. Cain't shoot a man who's known to be busted. You're like them weaklings in the Zuni tribes which calls theirselves Klathmanas and does the work of women instead of goin' on the warpath. In plainer terms, kid, you're yaller!"

Neither the bouncer, nor the barkeep, nor the deputy sheriff, nor any acquaintance of Jingle Thompson seemed disposed to contradict the irate old gentleman from the desert.

"Play us another tune, Jingle. The old kook is locoed, or drunk. Forgit him."

But Jingle did not take his eye from his accuser. "Am I yeller because I won't pull a trigger? It's the man who goes around town ready to protect himself by killing, who's yeller."

This was a particularly unhappy statement as it insulted practically every man at the gaming tables, as well as at the bar. There was a grumble of anger throughout the smoke befogged room.

"Look here, kid," the desert mucker said, "if you don't shoot your enemies, just what-all *do* you do with 'em?"

"Forgive 'em. Make 'em my pards. Give 'em my hand! Take a drink with 'em. Forgit the wrong. Go on enjoyin' life!"

The grumble of the assembled bar guests lightened to scoffing. The old mucker spat. He looked at the gray wide open eyes with every mark of contempt, and then snarled out, "You'd give your hand to a man who's done you wrong? You yaller skunk! What ef he wouldn't take yer hand? What if he stayed yer enemy?"

"I'd find a way to reach him. There's

something good in the worst man."

"By good you mean he could understand yer lousy pomes?" the mucker scoffed. This brought a good laugh from the bar.

"Yes, I mean that!" Jingle cried hotly. "They's poetry in every man's carcass. Don't care if he's a greaser or gunman! They's pomes inside him somewheres, and I'd git him thataway!"

Again the mucker spat. "What if it was some hombre as plugged your own father? Would you try pomes with him?"

The question nettled young Jingle. For a moment the gang of stockmen and miners waited upon his answer. The cantina girls who were always on his side, for some peculiar sentimental reasons understandable only to womankind, peered eagerly under the fans of the hanging lamps, at the boy's handsome face. That was a question!

Jingle frowned. His philosophy had never embraced the existence of revenge. It rejected it, as for instance some religions reject the existence of disease. He resorted to his bible—that is to say his pack of fortune teller's cards.

Many prophecies in time past had come from the boy's pack of cards! Cowmen



had said that since he was ten years old he had prognosticated drought, storm or rinderpest with the

uncanny certainty of the Indian shaman and medicine men of the county.

Still they waited for his answer. The old mucker, breathing sniffing, swayed belligerently where he stood in the middle of the dance floor. There was the sound of poker chips, the tinkle of a glass. A cowboy's spurs clicked. Then Jingle Thompson gave his answer.

"I turned up a spade here. Which it says the blood of my kin has been shed."

"That thar's a damned good guess, boy!" the old mucker laughed. "I said if your father was plugged! Didn't I? Damned good trick of yours to guess what I'm drivin' at! Well and good, young Mr. Snivelin' Coyote! Your dad was plugged down thar!" He pointed toward the desert. "Now kin you-all answer my question?"

The boy paled, coming irresolutely to his feet. "My father! You say my father—"

"Now do you want this here gun?" the

mucker cried triumphantly. "Now are you goin' to give your enemy your hand, and call him pard!"

"My father—where— What's happened? Plugged you say? In a gun-fight!" He covered his ashen, horrified mouth with his hand. "No, no, not that! Not killed? Tell me—quick—who did it?"

"Pablo Claug!"

The cantina was in an uproar. The proprietor, Big Cal Martin, came from a gaming table, eye-shade on forehead, sleeves rolled up. Loo Yung, the cook, came from his hot dog stand in the corner. The barkeep leaned across the bar with a grim interest.

Another victim for Pablo Claug! Pablo the cruel and the powerful, the wolf of the Bad Lands, the bully of all muckers! Pablo, the pet fear of old Sheriff Bendley!

Then there rose a champion. Not the Sheriff—he was too old and too diplomatic. Not the sheepmen—Pablo left them alone. Not the prospectors—Pablo gave them immunity from his Papago henchmen. No! The champion who presented himself was a frail, banjo-playing youth—a fortune teller and writer of cowboy ballads, a poet who did not know how to load a gun or squeeze a trigger.

"I'll git him!" Jingle Thompson said to the crowd.

His gesture of revenge was so futile that a cowpuncher in the background laughed. It started a snickering that went like a rustle of leaves over the whole gang.

"Git him? How?" The old mucker guffawed. "With yer pomes!"

The humpback Domingo gave a giggling rasp. "You think Pablo Claug has po'try in his carcass?"

"Every man, so the kid says, has po'try in him!" laughed the barkeep.

"Not Pablo Claug!" cried another.

"Yes, he has, so help me God!" Jingle Thompson cried frantically, turning upon his persecutors. "He's got it in him, damn you all! And I'll git him—thataway!"

In the silence with which Mule Town accepted this peculiar dictum of their youthful prophet, Jingle turned to the desert mucker:

"Tell me, old pard, where is my father?"

"He's bein' toted up from Saddle Creek from my diggin's. I seen the whole fight. Your grandfather's totin' him home. No, he ain't daid yet, son."

Jingle pulled his sombrero down over his eyes, hitched up his trousers, and walked out to his horse.

When he was gone, one man turned to

another and said, "What-all did thet kid mean when he said he'd git Pablo Claug *thataway*?"

"He meant every man's got po'try and good in him. And he'll work on Claug thataway."

"Well the yaller livered son of a jack rabbit!" the other snorted. "Goin' to make friends with the man as plugged his father!"

"You cain't allus tell."

#### IV

WHEN Jingle arrived at the little group of shacks, calf sheds, and corrals that composed the Thompson cow outfit, he found that old "Blink" Thompson had already arrived, bringing with him the wounded man, Jingle's father. A Mexican *moso* was hobbling about excitedly attending to the horses; and his wife, a mountainous half-breed, weeping and hysterical, was bringing water from the pump for her master's wounds. Both the ranch hands were acting like two chickens after a hawk has made a raid on the coop.

The hawk was Pablo Claug. And his law among all the renegades and breeds and Mexicans of that range was that if he declared war on an enemy no man must come to that enemy's assistance. Very shortly after Jingle came home, the two ranch hands had fled.

Jingle went into the main ranch house. And his grandfather, upon seeing him, looked at him as if he had completely forgotten the fact of the boy's existence. There had been a gunfight. And when gunfights were concerned, Jingle Thompson ceased to exist. The gaunt, old frontiersman looked down upon the boy as if trying to recall who he was. Then it seemed to come to him. Yes, this was the little cottontail they called "Jingle." This was his son's son! No, by Heaven! He would not believe it! He was every inch of him a replica of Ned Thompson's wife. The boy looked like Ned, the grandfather admitted, but in his nature, he was every bit a woman! He dismissed him with a snap.

"Git in there, you! And take a look at yer dad!"

Jingle needed no prodding. He brushed by the old fierce-looking cowman, hurried into his father's bunk-room, and fell down by his side.

"It's all righto, son!" the father said cheerfully. "Don't worry. It'll take some time, but I'll be all righto. Just a crease.

Cain't do any more fightin'. You see what comes of pickin' a gunfight just because of a ole Galloway bull as was shot. Remember what yer Maw said afore she died. We ain't livin' here to be gunmen. Too many gunmen as it is. The West's changin', little by little. We're in a corner that ain't changed yit. But *you're* the kind we're goin' to have here when the gunmen's thinned out."

Jingle did not answer. Many thoughts were whirling through his mind. His mother must have been right. She had made him one man in a community who could live without a trigger-finger always itching. She must be right. But she had left out that little point about revenge. There was no revenge in her heart.

"I wanted to git back quick, son, so's I could warn you of something," the father went on. "Thought mebber there'd be rankin' inside of you for to go and even up this here score. Well, you ain't goin'! I'm tellin' you that straight. If you go after Pablo Claug you'll git killed. Don't reckon I'd git well if I know'd that, son. What's more, the fear that you might git killed by Claug has made me come to a decision. We-all are goin' to leave this ranch. Once Pablo Claug gits it in for



anyone, he don't let up. Look at the way he finished up the Circle M Outfit. Picked 'em off one by one, snipe - shootin' at 'em. Even the Sheriff

stays out'n his way because he's got all the renegades in the desert on his side. Yes, they's a reward out for him, but no one dast go after him. He never shoots you straight face to face. Allus in the back. They say he allus finishes up his enemy because he's afraid to let 'em live, same as when you half kill a rattler when yer campin' on the range. Yer can't sleep at night till yer go out and find what's left of him and bury him. That's Pablo Claug's way. And that's what I'm avoidin'."

"You mean for my sake, Dad, yer givin' up our ranch?" the boy asked piteously. "You mean we've got to run away."

The wounded father winced under this. He wouldn't run away, not if twenty Pablo Claugs were after him. In fact, did he not go into the desert after Pablo Claug? But



when his son was considered, the son who was the only living and tangible thing remaining of his dead wife, then he looked at the whole affair in a different light.

"I'm goin', son," he said conclusively, "because I know damned well, Pablo will come after you!"

"But look here, Dad——"

"No, no more! I'm gittin' weak. Give me a swig. There now! Git out." He called him back by putting up his shaking hand: "One thing else, son! You pack up a grubstake and saddle Black Diablo, and right now you take the trail up to Eagle Fan Mesa. Our cousin "Smoo" Thompson'll take keer of ye until I come. Which I promise to come in a day or two. Now git! Hell!" He groaned with the pain in his shoulder. "Damn this! If I only had the strength—God Almighty, *I'd shore git him!*" Another groan, and he looked up, seeing the boy still kneeling beside him. "Git out of here, damn you! Are you-all goin' to disobey me at a time like this! Git. And saddle Black Diablo, he's the fastest." He sank to the pillow. "You'll need a fast horse. God! Give me—give me my strength again—to fight!"

OLD Blink Thompson found his grandson some few minutes later, down in the coral, saddling Black Diablo. Black Diablo, the best little bronc on the outfit! The fastest on a rough trail, the longest winded, the surest of foot in riding down deep arroyos or up the rocky sides of mesas and lomas.

Blink Thompson stepped up behind the boy, grabbed his arm and whirled him about toward him.

"So you're doin' what yer dad told you to! Ay!" the gaunt old frontiersman snorted disgustedly. "Oh yes, I heard it all. Was just outside the bunk room. Heard him tell you to beat it to where Pablo won't git you!" He clutched the boy by the scruff of the neck, fairly lifting him from his feet and looking into his face. "Look here, you! Don't you know your dad's out'n his head with that thar crease bleedin'? Do you think in his right mind he'd want to give up this here ranch, sell out, and run away? Hell no! You know your dad. He's doin' it for you. He's actin' like a mother to you, bein' you ain't got one. For the time bein' he's weak and sick and womanish!"

"I ain't goin'!" Jingle muttered angrily.

"Ain't goin'? Oh no, it don't look like it, does it now? What-all air you saddlin' that bronc for then?"

"Leave me alone. Leave me play my own game."

The grizzled man peered intently into the boy's face. For all Blink Thompson's dim sightedness, his bleary eyes had a peculiar fire in them. From his many years staring at desert sunsets, it seemed as if he had developed a new sight, sharper far than the vision of younger men. For a moment the grandfather's and the youth's eyes were alike—wells of limitless passion and wisdom.

"Look here, boy! Do I see a yaller coyote before me, or do I see a man with my own blood coursing in his veins. The West has changed since my time, but here's one day taken out'n my own past. If you're my grandson, there's one thing only for you to do: You got to live this here, day like it was fifty year ago! This here corner of Arizony is the same like the frontier was in my day! You're me, all over agin! Git that? And ef you-all don't do what I would of done, then from now on you ain't my grandson but only a yaller coyote!"

"Leave me alone, I said. I'm playin' my own hand! You quit ridin' me!"

The grandfather burst out in a volley of oaths. He yanked the boy away from the strap he was cinching and pulled him out in the open corral. It looked for all the world as if he were going to give the boy a flogging. Or perhaps worse, for the irate old fellow actually drew out his six-gun.

"They call you Jingle Thompson, don't they, you little calf-eyed wart! Jingle! That's a fine name for a grandson of mine! They call one of my kin Jingle because he writes 'pomes' about the drifts of tumbleweed and the palo santo and the cactus wren! Zowie!"

"What-all are you goin' to do, for hell's sake? Shoot me?"

"I ought to! If you was in a gunfight you'd know what real honest-to-God pomes there are in real life. Palo santo, yah!" he spat disgustedly. "Gunshootin' with a flash of white fire and a man saggin' to the alkali sand, that's *pomes*! That's what'd awake somethin' in your carcass!"

The boy tried to writhe from the vise grip but he couldn't. Old Blink still had a giant's strength.

"You never got in a fight, did you? You never so much as asked me how to fan a gun, did you? You never so much as asked me how to clean it, how to throw it

on a Mex. You never knew that when you aim you get the top of this here front sight settin' on a Mex or a stallion and you get it in the notch of this here sight, with equal daylight a-showin' on both sides. You never knew that you should orter press on the trigger slowly, not pull it! Press it back, not sideways. Hell! You'd close your eyes if the trigger didn't pull sweet! You'd flinch if the pull was creepy and you were waiting too long for this here deadly weapon to kick! Bah! What do you care about it, anyway! You care more about your stars. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"No," the boy said sulkily. "You said if I ever touched it I'd blow out my brains."

"And this holster. I'll bet if you tried to put it on you'd get yourself all tangled up, like the way you harness a mule. Here, you—let me show you—"

"What are you puttin' it on me for?"

"This-away! Fasten it on the belt, and anchor the belt so's it'll always be in the same place," the grandfather went on, "so's you could yank out the old shootin' iron and throw it on a man within a second."

Jingle Thompson looked down at the holster that had been buckled on him. He fingered it awkwardly, his brow wrinkling, his gray eyes narrowing. He unbuttoned the flap, started to pull out the shooting-iron. But it stuck. He looked up again into his grandfather's face.

"What and the hell is this here contraption for! I don't need it! Don't want it! Couldn't use it, if I had it!"

"I told you just now how to use it! If that ain't enough then go on and git out!



Vamose! Git off'n this rancho. You don't belong here with menfolk. Go up to the Zunis and make a klathmana out'n yourself; they kin use you for weavin' blankets and cookin' of their meal cakes!"

The boy fumbled nervously, uncertainly, with the buckle of his holster. There must have been some trick to it. Always is a trick to these things! Finally he gave it up as a bad job. He would wait until he was free from that burning gaze of his grandfather. He turned to his bronc.

The father watched him cinching the

saddle again, so viciously that the bronc turned to bite him.

The youth mounted, swung off, and galloped his horse toward the corral gate.

"Keep that there deadly weapon with you, boy!" the grandfather called after him. "They's lots of jack rabbits on the way up to your cousin's outfit. And jack rabbits is right dangerous animals! I mean comparatively speakin'!"

"I ain't goin' up to my cousin's ranch!" the boy shouted angrily. "I made up my mind long afore you started razzin' me, where I'm goin'."

The old man shaded his eyes as he saw his grandson heading down for the desert trail.

"Consarn my eyesight!" he grumbled. "Cain't see that he's takin' the trail up no'th like his father told him!" He strained his eyes looking down through the cow-barns, the corrals, the bunkshed towards the sage plain to the south. "What-all is he ridin' thet-away for?"

Although old Blink Thompson's eyes were none too good, his ears were phenomenal. He could hear the hoof beats of Jingle's horse striking on the pebbles of the stream bed. It was from the direction of the canyon. Now the sound drifted away as the horse went clattering down towards the canyon floor.

That canyon, old Blink knew, had only one opening—ten miles further down. And that was the desert.

"I heard him say he'd made up his mind! the grandfather exclaimed with a sudden burst of exultation. "Make up his mind to what? I know, by hell! The young 'un's goin' to trail Pablo Claug!"

The aged frontiersman swung his scrawny burned fist in the air with a whoop, as if he wanted all the mesas, the sage plains, the canyons and gulches to join him in his cheer.

"I knew it! I knew it! These here ole bleary eyes of mine kin see what other men can't! I knew he was of my blood. My son's son! That's what he is! He's goin' to kill Pablo Claug!"

He rushed back to the ranch house. "I'm goin' to tell his paw! So help me, it'll make his paw well!" He paused. "No, I can't do that. The boy's goin' to git killed. He can't fight Pablo Claug. I mustn't tell his paw. *He's goin' to git killed!*"

With a different expression on his wind-burned, heavily seamed face the old man gazed again towards the canyon. All he

could see was a deep black gash in the breast of the plain.

"Goin' to git killed!" For the first time in his life, old Blink Thompson knew what fear was. He had never felt it for himself. But now his great courageous heart began to beat like a frightened bird's.

For if the truth must be told, he loved the boy. No matter how strong, no matter how despicably weak, the boy was his son's son.

# V

JINGLE THOMPSON trailed all during the earlier part of the night while the moon was up. A supper at a water hole and a few hours sleep, then a short ride during the cool of the morning brought him into the lower reaches of the valley.

Here the chasms deepened. It was a region where it seemed the cool night air of the plains was never admitted. Many days of blistering heat were imprisoned there. Finally there appeared at the end of the valley a narrow vertical slit between two precipices, beyond which was a red glare—the desert and the sun. It was like looking into the mouth of a furnace.

Here in a remote arroyo an Indian shaman lived in a shack. In his earlier boyhood Jingle Thompson had come to this man somewhat as a disciple going to a shrine in the wilderness; he had taught Jingle many things, some of which belonged to the trapper's lore, some of which belonged to the lore of the Bad Mind and the Cold Hand; some Jingle accepted, some he refused. He taught him how to make milk out of corn, how to paint hides with the juice of prickly pear, how to stimulate his sight with the peyote plant, how to make medicine out of the spider bean. And likewise he taught him to read the stars, to understand the call of coyote, of buzzard, of the wind. He taught him songs to the tune of his jesako drum and he gave him the sacred turtle bones, which if swallowed, would give him power to see into the body of the sick.

The Indian hermit came down to the canyon bed through which the trail wound. He stood there, a giant with the heat shimmering about him. His mane of white hair glistening in the sun crowned with a dazzling sort of glory the ragged and unkempt figure. Except for that stature and that silvery hair, he was an ordinary Pima renegade, with shirt hanging out, sleeves tucked up with armbands of fawn skin;

trousers hanging in torn shreds; mummied feet bare, dried, gnarled.

Jingle Thompson dismounted and said, "Jesako, you have told me everything in the world, everything in the sky above the world. But now I've trailed down this away once more to ask you a question. And you kin answer. No doubt about it. Beat on your drum! Git your turtle bones. Swallow 'em! Bring down the ole stars out'n heaven for to do your biddin'! And answer me this: Where is Pablo Claug?"

"What need of the stars?" the shaman said. "The halfbreed Claug is hiding below Pinto Mesa. A kinsman of mine trailing up to Cobb's Coulée with baskets to sell told me."

"Good, Jesako. You've told me what nobody else in the desert dast tell me. You've told me where Claug is at! And I'm goin' to kill him."

The old shaman's eagle eyes looked piercingly at the boy's face. Then he nodded as if to say, "Yes, I see! You have murder in your heart." Without changing the expression of his deeply wrinkled face, he said aloud, "Any man dast tell you where Pablo Claug hides. Because Pablo Claug himself will laugh when you find him. And after he laughs he will take your life."

"I don't know about that. My cards don't say that. Hunted all through my pack over and over agin for that statement, and it ain't there."

"Then the desert will take your life. I have seen many signs ever since the Time of Ripe Acorns, that we are to have a great storm. And today the signs multiply."

"Thought I felt that in my bones," Jingle admitted. "But what of it, Jesako? I've been in a desert storm before. None of your tribe ever got skeered of a little wind and a couple clouds of sand. Let her come! The hell with it!"

"This kinsman of mine, this basket weaver who saw Pablo Claug, tells me that the heat is very great down there by the Sierra del Aja. It is a sign likewise. Pablo Claug, hiding in his canyon, does not leave the shack which is his hiding place, because of the great heat."

"Good enough for me, Jesako! So much the easier. I'll go up to his door and knock, so help me God, and I'll say, 'Here's Jude Thompson son of Ned



Thompson, the man you plugged.' And then I'll——"

The old Cloud-Swallower watched the youth, no sign of surprise or incredulity coming over his face. But Jingle himself darted back an angry look.

"You think I won't kill him, ay?" He hitched up his trousers in the belligerent swagger of a boy. And in doing so his hands touched his holster.

Yes, he still wore that holster. He had been many a time down that canyon without a gun, but now for once he clung to it: it was a half superstitious, half sceptical feeling he had towards it. Very much for instance as the feeling a negro sustains towards the rabbit's foot he carries tucked away. A foolish little talisman, no possible good to anyone; but then why go against the superstitions of many years? Besides, Jingle's grandfather had given him that gun. And his grandfather was always right.

"You think I ain't good enough to kill him, ay?" he went on threateningly. "Well, then, why does my card pack tell me I will? And why do them stars which you taught me to read—and which all last night I was palaverin' with—why do they say I'll kill him?"

The old shaman nodded. Such things had happened. This youth had all the strength of the mesas and the Sierras behind him. They were on his side.

"Look here, I'll tell you how I'm goin' to git him. I'm goin' to skeer him. They say he gits skeered easy, don't they? Never kills a man outright. Plugs him in the back, or else lyin' down. This time he lay down pretendin' he was daid, and then plugs my father. A lot of imagination he's got—that's what I hear is the right name for it. Imagination! Same as I have. Only I write pomes with mine, and he bumps off his enemies with his'n. Well, this time, it's my imagination agin his'n."

"The heat—the storm—" The shaman was shaking his head with its straight mane of coarse hair. "Is your mind greater than the mind of the storm—of the sierras—of the Hot Hand?"

"Damn right it is!" Jingle said shaking his fist, like a boy making a swollen and futile oath. But the shaman did not smile. Again the eagle eyes pierced into the youth. And again he nodded his white head.

"This hombre Pablo Claug, it is true, is a coward. He fears everything which his grandmother, a Pima witch, feared. But he will not fear you."

"He won't, ay?" the boy cried. "Why, look here, he got so all-fired scairt of a Galloway bull that he plugged him in the belly! How's that for bein' plain adobe yaller!"

The Indian held up his hand, a withered mummy hand whose gesture no man could disobey. "Listen to this, white child! He is afraid of bulls because when young he was tossed. But what of that? Can you take a Galloway into the arroyos? A bull may fright this man. But a child like you—" Now the hard deep wrinkles, the piercing eyes, the hook nose, the adamant countenance, seemed to soften. Jingle Thompson was the one white man in the world who understood this shaman's religion. He could not forbear giving him warning: "You may laugh at Pablo Claug, even though he has the strength of seven men. But can you laugh at the fires of the canyon? Can you laugh at the sandstorm and the desert whirlwind?"

"Good God," the boy fairly screamed, "the canyons are on my side! And so's the desert, the heat, the sand! Them's my weapons! I'll use 'em! If I can't git Pablo Claug with this here contraption on my hip, I'll turn the fire of hell agin him—which is the desert!"

The white head nodded slowly. "Yes, it is true. Ever since you were born the canyons and the wind—and the mesas—they have been on your side!"

## VI

JINGLE followed the witch doctor into his shack. Many a time before the old sage had given the boy refreshment for body and soul.

"I'm goin' to wait till the time's ripe," Jingle said. "When the desert's so hot you can't see and when the vultures begin to escape to the Sierra, when the mesas turn upside down in lakes of mirage—then I'll trail him!"

He ate some meal cakes, drank of a colorless liquid the shaman had distilled from the agave plant, rolled a cigarette and then he spread out his pack of cards to study them.

The Indian stood at the door watching the coming of the mirages.

"The desert is burning," he said. "Never was there greater heat. No wind across the picachos. The country is dead. There is a buzzard fleeing like a sea-gull before a storm."

"The old bird's guessed wrong," Jingle said, reading his cards. "If he stuck



around a while longer, he'd git a good meal!"

"Never was there such heat—and never was there so much water. The sierras are become islands! The Thunder Bird is come into the desert. The Bad Mind is casting a spell over it."

"Then, b'God, I'm trailin'!" Jingle said.

"The time is come," the aged shaman admitted to his disciple. The Hot Hand be with you, my little puma cub! Go down to your combat. And, when you fight, wear this braided cord about your neck, for it means you have dreamed the Great Dream and are a Jesako!"

JINGLE went down to the river bed to his horse. He now had two talismans with which to fight: the six-gun which his frontier ancestor had given him, and a piece of sacred string—given to him by his boyhood friend, a half-crazed Pima!

He mounted Black Diablo and at a steady canter plunged into the wilderness of rabbit brush and mesquite. The first steps of the Sierra del Aja appeared on the horizon in squares, in a pattern as regular as the battlements of a castle. They changed in color as the rider neared them, from a light blue to a purple, brightening to a streaked orange.

He reached their bases and then started a slow climb up the façade of rain stained rock, zigzagging up across strata of cream yellow and Indian red, shadowless adobe, glistening quartz.

Reaching the crest he struck off at a steady trot across the mesa's flat top. At the southern crest, he came precipitously upon a vast purple bowl, its rim consisting of crater formations, its center corrugated with numberless radiating wallows. In the canyon closest to his feet Jingle could see a lake tinged a dusky lavender. Although he knew this was a mirage, it was a veil hiding something beyond. He strained his eyes, trying to fathom the depths of that lake, the heart of the desert.

Despite the lateness of the day and the slight elevation, Jingle could feel a terrific heat gathering about him, until his head throbbed and he heaved slightly for breath. His horse, without having loped fast enough to become lathered, panted heavily. It was a curious heat, not the kind that usually comes up like a furnace blast from south of the Sierra del Aja. There was no feeling of wind, but there was the sound of it. And in the floor of the can-

yon whiffs of dust scudded across the



sand. The phantom lake seemed to be simmering to a boil. The crest of the granite benches against the low sun, partially obscured by a strata of heat, undulated in scarcely per-

ceptible billows.

The tensify of the atmosphere preceding a storm, the semblance of a tornado on every side without so much as the touch or sound of wind, all these things baffled the boy.

The sun rolled down quickly, snuffed out in those mirage lakes, like a torch thrust sputtering into water. There was no twilight.

A line of vivid lightning scratching across the table mountain transformed the scene into a wide sweep of sand, faults of jagged granite, silhouettes of man-high cactus. A rumble of thunder like the sound of a Jesako's tatoo upon a witch drum sent Black Diablo tearing madly down into the bowl canyon.

With his rider clinging to his mane, the bronc plunged through patches of black sage, sliding down steeper slopes partly on his haunches in a shower of rocks and sand, scratching his flanks and tearing the boy's khaki in the underbrush of thorn. In flashes of lightning Jingle saw ahead of him the dry wash of a river bed, a series of sharply falling cliffs and draws—and a desolate nester's cabin.

"That's where he is—damn him to the bottom of hell!" A useless curse. Pablo Claug was already in the nethermost depths of hell. And so, for that matter, was the boy. Hell was all about, appearing in spasmodic flashes, a stark demesne of cactus, lava thunder—and that nester's cabin.

"The Bad Mind's sure a'workin'!" Jingle said. "And the Thunder Bird's hoverin' over us! If it scares me, think how it's scarin' him!"

He laughed, achieving a sudden courage. "If the Thunder Bird, which I don't believe in, can scare me, it'll sure make that halfbreed crazy; he's part Indian and believes!" He pressed his horse up toward the cabin. The animal was trembling, hysterical, shying at every cactus. Jingle looked over his shoulder at the overhang-

ing mesa, down at the gulch. Lightning was playing across from one granite wall to the other. There seemed no end to the echoes of a single thunderclap.

"If it's terrifyin' me," he said again, "think what it's doin' to him!"

## VII

JINGLE THOMPSON had a very clear conception of what he was talking about. Claug was afraid. But he was afraid no longer of posses of men trailing him. He only wished they were trailing him! His great horror was the anticipation of spending a night in that desert, the only human being within many miles.

The first flash of lightning seemed to electrify all the dormant horrors of his Pima ancestry. They came to life, clamoring about him, gripping him, riding him!

No longer able to bear the loneliness of that little shack, he went out for his horse. Better to ride pell mell on any trail, to any destination. There was a chance he might find some wayfarer—pocket hunter, bandit or Mexican—if he rode far enough. It made no difference as long as it was a human being. Two men can laugh at the Thunder Bird and all such savage gods and devils. But one man alone—no!

He untethered his horse. The desert had darkened rapidly; the stars were blanketed by what seemed a red curtain hanging between them and the mesas. Pablo Claug looked about in the deep gloom in which the cactus and pronged saguaro loomed like waiting beings. If they only were men! He would rush to them, throw his arms about them, crying out for joy! He was alone in a bedevilled creation. He was lost and in a country even the buzzards abandoned. Why had he fled from those Thompsons? Or from civilization? For all he knew Thompson might not even be dead! And besides it was a fair fight. He could have escaped the noose. Many a time before he had escaped. He cursed himself for his fear of men, which had sent him fleeing into a region of demons. No, those saguaro looming about were not men—they were demons, biding their time.

He leaped to his roan. Terrified at the frantic pulling at its mouth, the horse reared, standing upright, and falling back onto the sand. Pablo Claug, practised horsebreaker, left the seat in time to save himself. A streak of lightning sent the roan galloping into a patch of mesquite,

leaping over it in bounds into the deeper tangle of the thorn, and then struggling like a fly caught in a web.

Claug knew well enough he could not go after his mount in that mesquite patch. He had no desire to be trapped out there now. Let the horse fight it out, his reins would keep him from wandering.

He picked himself up and stared about dumbly. A flash of light revealed a great cloud of dust sweeping down through a break in the Sierra del Aja. Far off, as if from a region as remote as those crimson stars, he heard the howling of a great wind.

Another flash. One of those pronged saguaro down toward the creek bed seemed to have come to life. It was a big saguaro—bigger than any he had noticed: more like a horseman, than a man on foot.

The wind rose to a deafening roar. It came rushing down through gulch and barranca, bringing with it a dense mist of alkali. It hit the patches of brush so that the lightning caught a glitter on the undersides of the leaves. It came walloping against the little shack with the force of a tree trunk hurled against it. It overthrew one of the cactus-trees. And that big saguaro was blown bodily along the trail. For all the world it was a horseman riding before the wind!

And then the lightning revealed what at first looked like a cluster of white blossoms at the top! Just like a face—as if the horseman had lost his sombrero in the gale, so that his face was revealed clearly in the flashes of light.

"By God it is a horseman!" Pablo cried. "No, it ain't. Yes, it is! Or a devil! No, it's human, that's what, so help me, blowin' along the trail afore this wind!" He drew his gun. "No, ain't goin' to kill him. I want him! I'm goin' to keep him. He'll save me from the Thunder Bird—just talkin' to him will save me from goin' mad."

The mere thought of a human being coming up that bank, buffeted by the wind, seemed to bring Pablo Claug to himself. He was no longer alone at the mercy of all his superstitions, his Indian devil-gods. The Thunder Bird and the Bad Mind were again something to be laughed at. "I'll shore keep him at my side till the night's over!" he said triumphantly.

But then another much more rational fear occurred to him. The law was after him, and perhaps this man was trailing him. Very likely! Some double-crossing Indian in the desert had revealed Pablo's

whereabouts. Some Indian who wasn't afraid. But there was no such Indian. They were all afraid. Still, you couldn't tell. They got drunk sometimes—or else crazy mad, eating *peyote*. A sensible Indian wouldn't tell on him, but a locoed Indian—

Well, nothing to do but treat the wanderer as an enemy, shoot his horse, break him, take him prisoner. That was an easy matter—for this man Pablo Claug.

He turned to the door of his shack, and, knowing he was still out of range, he stood there, with back towards the horseman, and calmly and slowly rolled a cigarette as if he had not noticed anything coming up the trail. He did not light his cigarette, because of the wind. But he stood waiting with a fine calculation of the exact moment the horseman would come within range.

And then he wheeled, drawing on the instant, firing a shot into the chest of the man's mount, a black bronco. The little cow pony plunged forward, reared and fell rolling as if to shake off some animal that had clutched its throat.

Pablo Claug rushed down the trail, gun in hand, and stopped within a few feet of the rider who had been violently thrown.

"You draw on me, hombre," Claug shouted, "and I'll put the rest of these here shots in your own carcass."

The man on the ground struggled to a sitting posture and looked up. When Pablo Claug saw the oval face, the black wavy hair and big gray eyes of a mere boy, he burst out into a laugh.

"So it's you, Jingle Thompson!" he roared triumphantly. "You've come to get me, ay?"

"Sure it's Jingle Thompson," the boy said, "I'm his son."

"I didn't figure that you'd do anything about it, little *mozo*. They always said as how you was a reader of the stars, that there was no fight in you."

Jingle sat there unflinching. There was no tremor visible on his lips.

The truth was, and Pablo knew it, that the boy, even though looking into the muzzle of a six-gun, was completely devoid of fear.

"If you're a reader of the stars," Claug said scoffingly, "I'm right glad you come.

I'm goin' to keep you a while, afore killin' you. The stars look funny tonight and I'm wanting a thing or two explained to —"

A terrific cannonade of thunder broke off the halfbreed's speech. His eyes opened wide again so that young Thompson could see the whites and a peculiar sheen about them like the phosphorescent eyes of a coyote.

"You'll be company to me tonight," Claug said, marching over to the boy and frisking him of his gun. "You come into this here shack with me. I'm hankerin' for company. In the mornin' I'll fix you so's you won't be trailin' me any further south. Instead the coyotes will be hangin' around for a chaw at your pinto's nose—and yourn."

Claug threw the boy into the cabin, and Jingle found himself in a hot room which was cluttered with saddle parts, oil cans, frying pans, a Dutch oven, a jack lantern on a box table.

Pablo lit the candle, sticking it in the cone of dropped wax. He then turned to the boy, who sat on the floor looking up with a taunting placidity at his enemy. How pitifully frail in comparison to the hulking and powerful brute! And yet in those large gray eyes, glowing through a stray black lock, Claug could not detect the slightest flicker.

For the first moments Pablo Claug took little notice of the "companion" he had captured. The boy was unarmed, Claug having tucked his six-gun in his hip pocket. Nothing to fear from this little waif of a human being. Compared to the thunder he was pitiable, ridiculous—and also a tremendous comfort!

Meanwhile the whirlwind raised its voice, unnaturally close, maddening in its resemblance to a desolate puma or to the wail of a woman. The sound swelled with a burst. The shack rocked almost like a cabin on a ship's deck. A furious pelting of sand, pebbles, mesquite roots deafened the two inmates. Pablo reinforced his nerve with a prodigal swig and then looked almost beseechingly at the boy who was studying his captor with glowing eyes, calm set lips.

"Look here, you damned little skunk!" Pablo cried. "Aren't you afraid?"

He waited, then goaded by the inexorable, almost happy smile, he shouted, "Do you hear me? I'm yellin' at you. Why the hell aren't you tremblin' at this here storm! Maybe I won't live to kill you in the mornin'. You'll be dead before that



—and me too! Damn you, I'll make you afraid, you little grinnin' rabbit!"

Pablo Claug swung his great red fist toward the floor, catching the boy on the side of the mouth. Young Thompson hurtled back, his shoulders splintering the boards of the door of the shack's bunkroom. The rusty hinges snapped, and the door warped backward, twisting partially open.

"You've got power in your giant body, Pablo Claug!" the boy said, wiping the blood from his mouth. "But I have a power you haven't, a power denied to other men."

Pablo Claug, after the hysterical exertion of his blow, was left sitting, trembling from head to foot.

"I've got my right mind," the boy said, scrambling to his feet, composed for all his dizziness. "That's more'n you have, Pablo Claug. Your mind's shriveled up with this here whirlwind. I can see your forehead, dry as a cow skull bleachin' in the rattle weed!"

Claug frowned. The nerve of the little rabbit, making fun of him! Then he smiled and rubbed his huge paw across his forehead. The smile left him. Yes, the boy was right. His forehead was dry! Dry as something bleaching in the wind.

"I can read the stars—that's my power!" the boy cried, his voice ringing piercingly in a lull of the storm.

Pablo Claug fingered the flap of his holster nervously. Across his long face there flashed indecision, a whimper of pleading, then, when the thunder clapped, a new expression of fear. His forehead was no longer dry, for Jingle could see a moist film of sweat reflecting the candle light.

He looked to the boy beseechingly and his eye followed the trickle of blood from the placid mouth, down the oval chin, to the sacred cord.

"Who gave you that there Jesako cord?" the breed asked.

"My own right! I dreamed the Jesako's dream. Are you so daft that you've forgotten the rites your Injun grandma taught you?"

Pablo winced, swore, then stammered out, "Tell me—tell me this— if you're a Jesako—what's happenin' up thar—and what's happenin' to me? You tell me straight! Don't think you can save yourself. I'm goin' to stretch you when I'm ready. Don't stall and tell me lies, thinkin' I'll let you off!"

"You're goin' crazy, Pablo Claug. I read

that in the low stars. I seen the low red stars reflected in your eyes!"

The halfbreed stared quizzically, puzzled at first, then maddened.

"You're a stinkin' liar!" he cried.

"Am I? Then why is it you're believin' there's a storm outside? Why—if you ain't locoed? You *are* sayin' there's a storm outside, ain't you now?"

"Hell no!"

"But you are! You said so. And there ain't a touch of storm out there. No water, no rain, no hail——"

"Who said there was hail?" the halfbreed grumbled in bewilderment.

"You heard stones hittin' against the cans overhead."

"Sure!" He kneaded his lips, fingers writhing.

"And you thought there was a wind—a whirlwind blowin' up the under sides of the sage." He changed his voice: "Maybe you think you can smell the sage?"

There was no doubt about the sage pervading every corner of that room. Claug sniffed. He reminded young Thompson of a horse snorting in fright.

"There was thunder," Claug whimpered uncertainly. "But maybe I was——"

"Dreamin', ay? You're crazy, that's what. Did you ever hear a millin' herd growl? Did you ever think it was like thunder?"

Claug's lower jaw, big and peppered, dropped. He gasped with a whistling intake of breath.

Jingle Thompson knew that he had touched a vibrant chord.

"Did you ever hear of the man-eatin' bull?" the boy hastened on, his imagination soaring. "The bull that gets his victims and waits till they go crazy with thirst?" He raised his voice to an intense cry—a bard evoking epic scenes: "I've seen that bull, Pablo Claug. You took a shot at it when it came chasin' you to get you. They told you it was my father's Galloway, but it warn't. It was the Bad Mind in the form of a bull! And after you potted it in the stomach the way you do any drag that skeers you, that bull came back wanderin' through the arroyos until it come here, right in this canyon knowin'





you would come back to it. You *have* come back, and it's goin' to get you and gore you, Pablo Claug! That's what the stars say—the low red stars I seen out thar reflected in your eyes!"

Claug's face turned color. The soft, wagging light of the candle threw his features into a relief—a blue mask with sharp black lines of madness, desperation. The big, fear-crazed man, impotent against the thunder, cornered like a rat, turned on the only thing upon which he could vent his rage and fear—the taunting boy.

Jingle Thompson met the onslaught with a wide sweep of his slender arm. His fist did not reach up to the brute's chin, but instead a fortune teller's deck struck Claug's face, bursting outward into a shower, filling the dim room for an instant with downward fluttering cards.

Claug rubbed his eyes, confused, baffled, at kings, jacks diamonds, black spades—symbols of death, of life, of misery and power.

Jingle Thompson raked the torn dog-eared pile together with his tapering fingers.

"Death is written here, upon this table."

Above the tumult and whistling in the flattened tin cans of the shack's roof the boy raised his voice. His words were screams following sharply, rapidly upon the claps of thunder.

"The cards are readin' the life of Pablo Claug, torturer of cattle, killer of men. Every card falls tellin' of death! Pablo Claug, locoed, dies. And the cause of him dyin' is his own cruelty. Taurus comes down out'n the sky tonight. Claug will be gored, trampled as the bones of the Mex matadors are broke! As the chaff of the Pima's corn is driven away!"

A long roll of crashing clouds drowned him. Then as they rumbled in diminishing echoes through the mesas, the boy added, "You can hear it now: the bull of Pinto Mesa at your very shoulder, behind you—on the other side of that wall!"

Yes, there was unmistakably a rattling of the boards, a rumble of sticks and stones beyond, and all about them a bellowing of wind.

Pablo Claug's jaw dropped, a hoarse scream came from the stained gaping mouth. He wheeled, drew and emptied his revolver into the bare warped boards. It was the same cowardly impulsive act by which he had killed Jingle's pinto; the same by which he had shot Jingle's father. During that moment Jingle circled his adversary and crept up behind him as he was

firing hysterically into that wall. The boy's hand, with one convulsive gesture, reached to Claug's hip pocket. The fingers snapped shut upon the gun, his own gun, which the breed had taken from him.

But the streaks of white fire and the loud banging seemed to waken Claug from his hallucination, as a man's own voice calling awakens him from a nightmare. He turned, his thick lips blue now, not so much with fear as with a humiliated rage.

"You think you can come Injun on *me*, do you? You white-livered rat! You with your tricks and your cards! I ain't waitin' till mornin'! I'll finish you here and now for your lies!" He pulled the trigger and heard it snick on an empty shell.

Jingle Thompson, clutching frantically at his own gun, jumped to his feet and straightened up. He was no longer a frail, puny boy waiting smilingly for death. The smile was wiped away. His lips were tight. He was immobile, statuesque, amazed, baffled at the terrible power that had suddenly come to him.

"Don't throw it on me," Claug gibbered brokenly. "For God's sake, kid! I'm only a poor ole *cholo*—an old cowedog that ain't worth killin'. I'll save you from the storm, kid, from the desert, from the lightning! I'll—" He sank to his knees as Jingle lifted the gun, pulled the trigger.

A blast of white, a shot ripping a warped upright. Jingle staggered back, his wrist sprained by the kick, his ears deafened, his brain numbed by the terrific power of the gun in his hand, a heavy iron thing that had become horribly instinct with life.

Pablo Claug roared with triumph. The muzzle had kicked upward. Claug had ducked just before the trigger was pulled.

A stinging pain leaped from Jingle's wrist to his shoulder and across his back. It felt as if that kick had shattered his forearm. With both hands he clung to the piece, fumbled again for the trigger, backed to the wall. Hurling his whole weight against him, Claug smashed the frail figure against the boards.

Claug's great fingers dug into the boy's throat, twisting his neck till a thousand pains gripped him. A white light, more brilliant than the lightning, stabbed his brain. Again he pulled convulsively, innumerable times upon that trigger.

A succession of muffled reports came from between his body and the stench-ridden animal that was suffocating him. There was a hideous smell of powder and

burned clothes, of his own flannel shirt and the calfskin vest of Pablo Claug—and of flesh.

For an eternity of moments those fingers tightened, pressing his jaw backward, sending pains like deep knives throbbing down his spine. Two hundred pounds of sheer weight lay against him. He could feel the man's heart pounding, he could feel a huge pulse in the thumb buried in his throat. A dense cloud pressed downward upon his lungs; his palms burned with the hot steel of the gun.

And then he felt Claug's pulse flutter, pause, beat frantically and stop. The thumb cutting into his neck just below the jaw was stiff—but without any consciously directed strength.

The huge carcass of flesh fell away from him, sliding to the floor.

Jingle Thompson stood there, like a spirit which is freed from its habitation of putrid flesh, like a delicate winged thing from which a hideous cocoon has fallen.

## VIII

**T**HE afternoon sky above Mule City was of an intense, a dazzling blue. The air purified by the storm was so clear that you could see the piñon trees on the Sierra, etched like little black lines of pen-and-ink.

As if to compensate for this extravagance of light and color, the shacks and corrals and main street of Mule Town were clothed in a dull monotone of alkali. The sand storm sweeping up from the Pinto Mesa Desert had transformed everything as completely as if with a fall of snow. Dust was an inch thick on the warped galleries of Cal Martin's Cantina, on the chow wagon of Ping Loo, on the buckboards, on the snubbing posts, on the edges of the horse-troughs, on the crooked stretch of board sidewalk in front of the Wells Fargo and the sheriff's office.

Into this scene rode one who had been in the vortex of the storm, a flimsy scarecrow of a youth, riding an exhausted hide-torn, limping horse.

"It's Jingle Thompson, be God!" a stockman cried, coming out of the swinging doors of the big Cantina.

Several men left the bar, several left the monte tables. The Chink left his hot dog stand, and his cousin Ping Loo came to the door of his chow-cart with his cow-puncher guests. A girl came out on the gallery above. A deputy came out of the

sheriff's office. The cry went down the street.

"Jingle Thompson's back—and Claug didn't kill him! The halfbreed let him



come back, somehow. Might he didn't find Claug at all. Else how come, he's ridin' back this-away?"

But there he was, and the word went from cantina to hotel to veterinary's shop, to the barber's, to the livery stable, to the assayer's office, and from bar to bar.

"Jingle Thompson, he's back!"

But someone raised a very plausible objection as the youth rode down the center of the main street, his nag shuffling up the soft dust. It was not a black broncho. It was a roan whose hide was torn with thorns, making streaks of blood through the alkali coat. And the objection was this: "'Tain't Jingle Thompson at all! And that thor hoss ain't from the Thompson Outfit!"

This seemed a very reasonable doubt: The boy's face was disfigured with blue marks as if a bear had cuffed him. His back, revealed by the torn shirt, was cross-hatched with the marks of thorn and rock; his neck was swollen, clotted with blood.

Some one else called out, "It is Jingle Thompson. But it ain't his hoss. It's Pablo Claug's roan!"

In the gaping silence that followed this statement, a gaunt frontiersman stepped out into the middle of the street, and walked down towards the rider, shading his eyes with his scrawny, dried-up hand. It was Jingle's grandfather, and the whole town coming to doors and windows, saw their meeting, the meeting of the past generation of lawlessness and gunfighting, with the new generation represented by the boy they all scoffingly nick-named Jingle Thompson.

The grandfather's eyes squinted, his mouth at first anxious began to curl into a grim smile of recognition. Yes, this was his grandson. No matter what horse he rode; no matter what tatters he was clothed in; no matter how thick a mask of alkali and blood was on his face. The partly blind, old man knew his kin.

"Did you do it, kid?" the old man asked excitedly, so that everyone in the street could hear him. "Did you do what I ast you to? I told 'em—the whole town—you'd gone after him! I told 'em you was my flesh and blood! Did you bump him off!"

The boy was eager to tell. But there was something else that came first:

"Where's my Dad?"

"He's back thar, kid. I had to tell him. Damned if it didn't give him more spirit to fight for his life. He's all righto, kid. Comin' around fine, fightin' like hell! 'Cause he wants to see you!"

Before the grandfather could resume his volley of questions, the crowd had come down from office and bar and gaming room and chow-cart. The boy was surrounded, and the old grandfather was shouted down with the clamor of questions.

"Where did you git the ole roan?"

"Who tore up your clothes?"

"Who tore up your face?"

"Been wrasslin' with a puma?"

"And Pablo Claug, where is he now?"

The grandfather was feeling of the horse's hide, his nose, his mouth, aiding his sight with the sense of touch. "Is this Pablo Claug's hoss, shore enough?"

"It is! And I done it!" Jingle Thompson announced with a boyish flourish.

"He's bumped off! He's done it, b'God!"

"And with his bare hands!" the deputy sheriff cried.

"Cain't shoot a gun. Must have did it with his hands! They wrestled. The boy won! But how in hell——"

The skeptical barkeep of Cal Martin's Cantina yelled out above the din, "Did you-all git him like you said you would—and tell pomes to him?"

This did not elicit the laugh it might have done a few days ago. Instead the crowd became silent, as if waiting for the answer.

"I told him pomes shore enough!" Jingle said grimly. He alighted from his horse and took a swig from the flask the first man held out to him. "Pumped po'try into him till he was ravin' mad. He emptied his gun firin' into the storm. And then I finished him, with this here contraption."

He patted the six-gun his grandfather had lent him.

The deputy sheriff, as well as some of the more skeptical citizens of Mule Town,

scratched their chins. Finally: "Look here, Jingle," said the deputy, "you cut out this here po'try and tell us the truth. Did you ackcherly meet up with the hell-bender?"

"Go back there to the dry wash south of Pinto Mesa," Jingle rejoined, wiping his mouth. "There's a nester's cabin there."

"What about it?" from the deputy.

"Pablo Claug's body's there."

"That's talkin', Jude," the grandfather cried. He turned about to the whole crowd and announced proudly: "My grandson—Jude—he stretched him!"

"That's the ole gunman, Jingle!" cried a barkeep.

"I knew he'd do it! I told you-all he'd do it!" shouted the grandfather. "Jingle, he rode after Pablo Claug and bumped him off! Wow!"

The scarecrow took another swig from the flask and looked up, as if startled, into his grandfather's face. He had never been called "Jingle" by that man before, except in the most scathing contempt. Could it be he deserved that now?

"What-all are *you* callin' me Jingle for, I'd like to know."

"What-all? What-all? 'Tain't me. It's your dad, he's the one. He said, 'you just wait till my kid comes ridin' down the center of town with his rein chain's ajinglin' and his spurs ajinglin'. They'll listen to him then, I'll tell you!' Dad burn my soul, ef he'd only know'd you was comin' ridin' Pablo Claug's hoss! Wow!"

The deputy sheriff, the barkeeps and gamblers, and every miner and stockman and renegade there broke out into shouts of laughter and acclamation.

The excited old frontiersman added at the top of his lungs, "Didn't you-all hear the way his rein chains jingled when he was a-ridin' home? And his spurs? That's why you'll all call him Jingle Thompson from this day on! Because it's music in everybody's ears! Be God, I heard that thar jingle of them rein chains down to the bottom of my toes, so help me! And I'll never forget the sound of it!"

But as loud as his cries were, he was drowned by the renewed acclamations of Mule Town.

"Jingle" was the name of the kid whose tunes they danced to; it was his name before; it was his name now; and it would be that forevermore.



## TEMPERED WITH MERCY

By ERIC HOWARD

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LLOYD'S GREED HAD ALWAYS CRUSHED EVERYTHING BEFORE HIM ;  
BUT UP THERE IN THE COLD HEIGHTS OF THE PECOS COUNTRY  
HE WAS FACED WITH SOMETHING STRONGER EVEN THAN GREED—  
THE CALL OF BLOOD THAT MADE JACK HUGHES EXECUTE JUSTICE

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**T**WO men on horseback, following three heavily burdened burros, rode up the dry arroyo. A light snow fell, obliterating whatever trail marks there had been; a biting wind swept through the gash of the canyon. The first man, cursing the blinded burros, accepted the cold as he accepted most things, without complaint. The other, of quite a different type, unused to the saddle, equally unused to the ways of the trail, beat his hands together, bit his lips, blinked his smarting eyes, and again and again sobbed: "God, but it's cold!"

Occasionally the man in the lead would turn his head and give his companion a contemptuous glance. Of course it was cold! What did he expect, in mid-January, at this altitude, with the wind sweeping full force down the Pecos?

"When do we reach camp?" demanded the second man, querulously.

"*Poco tiempo*," lazily responded his guide.

Both men were dressed heavily, in preparation for storms of any kind—the guide in a double sheepskin coat, a fur cap, long woolen stockings and high boots. The second man wore what the best of Chicago's clothing shops had recommended for such an expedition as he was undertaking—an expensive fur coat, imported chamois riding trousers, waterproof boots of soft, pliable leather. But, warmly as he was

dressed, Henry Lloyd was not warm. For city winters he was prepared; he went from his steam heated apartment to his steam heated office in a closed car. His body was soft and round, but his blood was thin; rich food had lowered his resistance.

Why, he asked himself, had he had the bad luck that made necessary this trip at this time of year? Luck usually favored Henry Lloyd; but now it seemed to be dead against him. And yet the long journey was necessary, necessary to everything that made Lloyd's life what it was. He must investigate for himself the reports and rumors that had reached him. If they were true, if the Upper Jemez land was really valuable, all of his plans would have to be changed.

He recalled how he had acquired that property, for less than the proverbial song. The pleasure that recollection gave him caused him to forget for a moment the pain of the saddle and the trail. He laughed softly, the chuckle of triumph that those who entered his Chicago office, furnished in heavy mahogany, knew so well.

His chuckle ceased abruptly. He felt the serious eyes of the guide upon him, and a shiver not of cold, passed up and down his spine. Damn the fellow, anyway! What was wrong with him?

"He gets my goat," said Lloyd to himself. "I didn't like his face when I first saw him. If there'd been any other guide,



I'd never have hired him! And this damn' country! You might as well be in Mexico, with a swarm of Yaquis in ambush waiting to attack, as here! The government ought to do something—nothing but Mexicans in all these towns we've passed through! And he savvies their lingo like one of 'em! Wish I did!"

It was true that, since leaving San Andreas, two days before, they had journeyed through tiny villages where the majority of the inhabitants were of Spanish extraction. Lloyd ignored the historical fact that these people were the descendants of the Conquistadores who had come into the country three hundred years before, that it was their country. He had heard no English, or next to none, since he had left San Andreas; yet he was within the United States. The guide, obviously an American, spoke seldom; he became fluent only in Spanish. He had nothing in common with his employer; and to the latter it seemed that his eyes took on a malevolent gleam whenever the guide looked at him.

Lloyd was uneasy. From now on they would pass no more towns, not even Mexican villages. They would follow the arroyo far up into the mountains, ascend the long trail that led to the mesa, and traverse that to the section of land that had already proved profitable to Henry Lloyd. It gave promise of even greater profit, and Henry Lloyd lived for profit.

Swope, his agent in San Andreas, had recently reported that the land was valuable. Several persons had tried to buy it, one of them the representative of a large coal company. There was actually coal on it, and probably oil. Swope advised Lloyd to go easy; it might be worth far more than he had ever thought when he allowed his imagination free play in writing his stock prospectus. The Upper Jemez Mining Corporation, which was one of Lloyd's pseudonyms, had already sold twenty-five per cent. of his stock. Its only assets were the section of land, which Lloyd had never seen, and Lloyd's imagination. Gifted as he was, Lloyd had never imagined that the land was really valuable; he let his stockholders imagine that.

But if it was coal, and oil-bearing, then he'd stop his stock selling campaign, let it rest for a year, buy back the stock that had been sold for a tenth of what it had brought, and negotiate with a big company for the sale of the property. Once before, Lloyd had lost a hundred thousand by selling stock in a worthless enterprise, only to have it prove valuable. He didn't intend

to make that mistake again. And he was enough of a geologist to make the examination for himself.

Lord, but it was cold! Nothing but business, crooked business, could have got Henry Lloyd out of his steam heated apartment and his comfortable office in the middle of winter. But when he thought of the financial possibilities, his small eyes glowed and he forgot, for a moment, the guide and the cold.

But not for long. He couldn't forget the guide. The man rode before him, tall and lean and broad of shoulder, somehow sinister. Henry Lloyd had been afraid be-



fore, but never under circumstances like these. There had been the time when a mad-dened investor in one of his enterprises had leaped to the running-board of his limousine, in the midst of the city traffic. Lloyd

had cowered against the soft cushions, while his strong chauffeur flung the man off and called a policeman. Later, Lloyd had read that the fellow had been sent to the insane asylum.

In his office and in his apartment, he had nothing to fear. No one could get to him; his negro valet had been a pugilist before he learned to press trousers; and his office was well guarded.

But here? He looked at the bleak cliffs, twisted and distorted by volcanic action. He was alone, many miles from the protection of the law, alone with a man who hated him. He knew the guide hated him, but did not know why. And he feared him, as he had never feared anyone before. Worse than the fear was the terrifying uncertainty. He was going into the wilderness with this man, and he was helpless.

He felt, in his hip pocket, the pearl handled pistol he had brought along. But he was no shot and his gun was a mere toy compared with the long barreled revolver that was holstered below the guide's silver Navajo belt.

Had it not been for his greed, Lloyd would have turned back at the end of the first day. But he must learn for himself the truth about the Upper Jemez property. He must go on, in spite of his fear. His cupidity made him almost brave.

Besides, he was probably imagining things, he told himself. The guide was probably just a dumb, stolid brute like the burros. Why should he hate Lloyd? He

had never seen him before, knew nothing of him.

"When do we get to that darn' camp?" he demanded again, striving to put a cheerful, comradely note into his tone.

The guide pointed to a rise far up the arroyo. There was a small shack barely visible.

"We'll camp there for the night," he said. "I've been headin' that way. It's Jim Hunter's old cabin; nobody there now, since Jim died."

Jim Hunter! The name startled Henry Lloyd, and seemed strangely familiar. Who the devil was Jim Hunter? Why—why, he was the chap who had owned the Upper Jemez section! Lloyd had got the property from him! Jim Hunter! Of course.

So Hunter was dead. Yes, he had heard that. And tonight he was going to sleep in Hunter's old cabin. Ugh! He didn't fancy that. He wasn't superstitious, but it was sort of ghostly for all that. He frowned as he remembered his dealings with Hunter.

He felt the guide's eyes upon him, studying him.

"Well," he attempted a casual tone, "I hope it'll be warm."

"It'll be warm all right," the other responded slowly.

What did he mean by that, Lloyd asked himself. The words had some other significance than they usually had. He'd have to be on guard, have to watch himself; it wouldn't do to let this fellow know that he was afraid.

Jim Hunter had come to Chicago, a lean, gangling youth, in ill health. Lloyd remembered his first visit to his office; they hadn't admitted him until Hunter had mentioned that he owned some coal land in the Upper Jemez. Then Lloyd had talked with him, the first of several conferences. Hunter was Eastern bred, and had taken a partial course in geology at an Eastern university. Unable to go on with it on account of his health, he had left college and gone to work.

Later, he had married. Later still, his health became worse, and, with his wife, he had gone West. They had lived out of the world for a long time, Hunter prospecting as much as his health would permit. He had found the claim on the Upper Jemez and had acquired the property by borrowing a little from his family. Then he had gone East to sell it, or to get capital with which to promote it.

"I'm afraid I won't last long," Lloyd re-

membered him saying. "I want to leave things right for Jane, my wife."

Lloyd was not the first to whom he had offered the property, but Lloyd saw possibilities in it that the others had not seen. It might, or it might not, be valuable; it didn't matter much, to Lloyd. He needed some remote, little known El Dorado as a bait; if he could get the Jemez land cheap enough, it would do. Hunter needed money, at once; and Lloyd needed the land. He set to work to get it. He offered no objection to it on the ground that transportation would present a big problem; if it was as rich as Hunter said, they could build their own narrow gauge down to the main line.

Lloyd's Alaskan Oil Corporation was almost exhausted. All but a small block of the stock had been sold, and what remained wasn't moving. In the end, after skillful maneuvering, he had exchanged that worthless block of stock, being extremely glad to get rid of it, for the Upper Jemez property. There had been a verbal agreement that he would buy it back, at any time, at its current price—but only a verbal agreement. Young Hunter, inexperienced and very sick, accepted it and looked for the stock to rise in value. Soon it slumped; in six months it was worthless and Lloyd forgot the verbal agreement. Hunter, too weak to return to Chicago, realized on his death bed that he had been robbed and that Jane would be left penniless.

And Lloyd was to sleep, tonight, in the cabin in which Hunter had suffered and died, with the guide as his only companion. He shuddered.

Swope at first had reported the land worthless, after a cursory examination by a local prospector. Acting on that report, Lloyd had proceeded to sell stock in it. But now it seemed that Hunter's dream was a reality; he had to see for himself, had to avoid the mistake of selling stock in an enterprise that might be worth keeping. But what a fool he had been to hire this guide! He might have engaged a geologist to examine the property. But he wanted to be sure. And especially he wanted to keep his knowledge secret. Secrecy was important in all Lloyd's dealings.

IT WAS an hour later that they reached the old cabin. It had grown dark. "Go on in," said the guide, "and get a fire started. I'll look after the animals."

He herded the burros into a makeshift

barn—four poles supporting a roof—and proceeded to remove their packs. One of the burros carried feed for the animals.

Henry Lloyd stood on the threshold of Jim Hunter's cabin, with the door half open. In the dim light he saw that it was rudely furnished. It had the look of having been suddenly abandoned, like the ghost houses in deserted mining towns. In one corner was a drum stove; near it a pile of dry piñon wood.

Lloyd forced himself to enter. He felt that the guide was watching him. Timidly he walked across the creaking floor to the stove, and with numb fingers made a fire.

Jim Hunter's cabin! He inspected the shack more carefully. So it was here that Hunter had lived with his young wife through the long days of his sickness; it was here he had died. Lloyd didn't know what had happened to Hunter's wife; he never concerned himself with such things. But she had probably left the cabin just as it was, after Hunter's death; had probably fled from the place of misery and death.

Before the guide brought the packs into the cabin, Lloyd had time to recall vividly the stricken youth he had defrauded. But there was no regret in his heart, only fear.

The guide silently set about preparations for supper, cooking a simple meal over the heater.

"*Frijoles y pan y cafe. Comida buena!*" he said, and set the pot of beans, greasy and richly flavored with chilli, on the table.

"What's that?" demanded Lloyd, always suspicious of the guide's Spanish. "Talk English, will you?"

"Sure," said the other. "But first, let's eat."

Again Lloyd felt that there was something ominous in the guide's simple words. But he sat down on a rickety chair and lifted a fork of beans to his lips. Ugh! What food! But he was hungry and, however they tasted, the *frijoles con chile* were filling and warming. He ate heartily, drank two cups of black coffee, and lighted a cigarette, offering

his case of monogrammed cigarettes to the guide.

"No, *gracias*. I'll roll one." The guide drew out a book of brown papers. "Funny," he said,



after a moment, "to be stayin' in a dead

man's house. Hunter's been dead a year or so, now."

"Did you know him?"

"Sure. I knew him when he first came out here. Nice young fellow. Too bad about him. I wasn't here after he came back from that fool trip to Chicago or when he died. He should never have left here. If he had stayed, he might be livin' today. Couldn't stand any other climate. But the poor kid wanted to fix things for his wife, and there was no one else he could send. If I had been here— But I was down in old Mexico, looking for gold, that year. The worst of it is he lost everything, got swindled right out of it, by some shark. And his wife was left without a thing."

"Where is she?"

"Workin' down in San Andreas. She hasn't been well since he died. It wasn't the trip that finished him, so they tell me, half so much as his disappointment when he found out he had been stung. The poor kid was lyin' right there on that bed, half willin' to die, thinkin' he had kind of repaid his wife for all her loyalty and devotion. And then to find out that he had given his claim away, for nothin'! For less than nothin', for a batch of worthless stock! That's what killed him. And the man that did it is his murderer. Jim died cursin' him, callin' out his name!"

The guide's steely eyes bored into Lloyd's. The Easterner recoiled and his hand moved feebly in the direction of the pearl-handled pistol in his pocket.

"What?" he cried, his voice rising. "It's a lie! The whole thing was fair and square! I can prove it in any court!"

So that's why the guide hated him! That's why he had feared him. What an idiot he had been to place himself in this man's power! Why, he might be—

"Who are you?" he cried.

The guide had given the name of Jack Hughes, but that might be an alias.

"I'm Jim Hunter's first cousin," Hughes replied, "and in our family a kinsman always fights for a kinsman."

Lloyd's fingers clasped in desperation about the pearl handle of his pistol. But before he could remove it from his pocket, he saw a flash of silver and the blue barrel of the guide's revolver was leveled at him across the table.

"Put up your toy," said Hughes, in his slow, steady voice. "Put it on the table. That's right."

Lloyd cringed. Perspiration stood out on his white brow. His small eyes darted

desperately around the room, in search of a means of escape. Seeing none, they looked again at the guide, a desperate, pleading look.

"Don't kill me! Don't shoot!" he begged. "I didn't know—about Hunter. I can prove, in any court——"

Hughes' mirthless laugh cut him short. "Maybe you'll have a chance in a court where technicalities and such truck don't go!" he said, with an upward gesture. "You better pray."

"Don't—don't shoot!" wailed Lloyd, and his voice broke.

He began to crawl, literally. Hughes spat in disgust.

"Stand up!" he commanded. "I ain't goin' to shoot you—yet. That would be too easy for you. Jim Hunter suffered for months on account of you. And, besides, I guess there are other ways of dealin' with a hombre like you, ways that'll hurt you more."

"Listen! This Jemez property of Jim's ain't worth much—not more'n a hundred thousand. There's no oil, and not any too much coal. It's more valuable on account of the water on it, for grazing, than for anything else. But, with the water and the coal that's on it, though it'll be years before they can take that out, it's worth maybe a hundred thousand."

"But the Western Coal people offered ——" began Lloyd, and then checked himself.

"Sure," grimed Hughes. "And I guess you heard a lot more about how valuable it was, eh? Sure! I fixed that. Gregg, of the Western Coal Company, would do anything for me; and I started the other rumors. I wanted to get you out here, knowin' I couldn't get you in Chicago."

"You——" began Lloyd.

"Sure," said Hughes. "I understand you've sold about a hundred thousand dollars' worth of stock in this Jemez project. How many widows and orphans does that make? Anyway, what you're goin' to do, before you leave here, is to have that money transferred from your bank in Chicago to Mrs. Jane Hunter in San Andreas. You might as well write that letter now."

Lloyd attempted a laugh. He was sure that Hughes was bluffing. How was he going to send a letter to Chicago from here? They were miles from any post office, farther still from a telegraph station. Give up a hundred thousand dollars? Not much!

Some of his feeble courage returned.

"You can't bluff me with your bad man

stuff," he said. "I won't fall for it. I bought that land from Jim Hunter fair and square, and that's the end of it. What I've made since is mine, and I'll keep it. Your bluff about sending a letter don't go! How you going to send it? You'll have to think quicker than that, if you——"

Grinning, Jack Hughes exerted his trigger finger. A bullet whizzed past Lloyd's head, burying itself in the wall behind him. Instantly, the man cringed. His face was white, and his eyes had the look of a cornered rabbit.

Before the smoke had cleared, the door of the cabin was kicked open and a blanketed Indian entered. He lifted his right hand in silent salutation.

"Come in. Sit down and eat!" Hughes greeted him casually in Spanish.

The Indian entered, sat down, and began to eat, letting the colored blanket slip from his shoulders. He paid no attention to Lloyd, except to grunt as he passed him. White man's business!

"Here is my messenger," said Hughes. "Santiago is the fastest runner in all the pueblos. He is my friend—eh, Santiago?"

"*Si. Muy buen amigo!*" He turned casually to Lloyd. "Santiago run like hell, like the damn' ol' wind! Sure!"

"Santiago will bear your letter. It will go special delivery. Then he will go on to San Andreas. When the money is deposited to Jane's account in the bank there, he will return and tell us. Then—well, then perhaps you can go."

Lloyd thought quickly. The shot had unnerved him.



The presence of the stolid Indian who was the good friend of Hughes upset him. A hundred thousand? Well, supposing he lost that; there was still enough in the bank. He would get it back.

"You're a damned robber!" he protested. "I'll write the letter. I have to."

"That's right," said Hughes, soothingly. "I'll dictate it."

When it was written, enclosed in an envelope and sealed, Hughes handed it to the Indian.

"*Bueno!*" observed Santiago.

"I'll see you jailed for this!" said Lloyd.

"Well," considered Hughes, gravely, "I guess I'll have to ask you to write a kind of confession, just to protect myself. Sup-



pose you tell the truth about the Upper Jemez Mining Corporation, the Alaskan Oil Corporation, and all the other things you've promoted. I know a good deal about 'em; I sort of looked into 'em after I learned that you had killed Jim. Come on, now, write!"

"You can't blackmail me any more!"

"Write!"

"I won't!"

The gun barked again, and Hughes grinned.

"I—I'll write!" promised Lloyd. "But you're forcing me——"

"No, sir," smiled Hughes. "I'm just kind of requestin'. Put down, first, that since you've got religion you feel you ought to tell how many widows and orphans you've robbed. And don't lie. Remember, I know a lot more about you than you think. I want a full and complete confession."

Lloyd wrote, submitting each page, as soon as he had finished it, for the other's approval. Sometimes Hughes returned the sheet, demanded a clearer statement of some fine point, and Lloyd laboriously copied it. Once or twice, during the long evening, he rebelled. It required only a slight gesture, an elevation of Hughes' revolver, to start him writing again.

At last, Hughes approved the statement. Santiago witnessed Lloyd's signature to it.

"*Bueno!*" said Hughes, and proceeded to fold the sheets of paper and to place them in an envelope. This he addressed to the district attorney at Chicago.

"My God! What are you doing?" cried Lloyd. Until now he had visioned his return to his steam heated apartment, to his luxurious office. True, he had lost a hun-

dred thousand dollars. True also, he had been forced to write a confession of numerous and sundry fraudulent enterprises in which he had engaged. But more money could be made. Once out of this infernal country, away from this man and his gun, safe in Chicago, he would quickly regain what he had lost. And never again would he risk such a chance! But now—the district attorney! Good Lord! If that confession were mailed he would be ruined. He had been investigated once before. They hadn't been able to get anything on him—he worked within the law, as much as possible. But, with that confession——

"You're not going to mail that?" he cried. "You said it was to protect yourself! I've given you a hundred thousand! I'll give you more! But don't send that! Don't! I'll——"

"Do you think," asked the guide slowly, "that I'd be so selfish as to let you go on robbing people? Do you think I'm only thinkin' of Jim and Jane? No. They come first; they're my kin. But I'm thinkin', too, of all the others—of that boy in the asylum and of the other one in jail for stealin' so he could buy your stock. I'm thinkin' of them, same as Jim would have thought of them if he'd lived and got well. *Si, señor*, the letter will be mailed—after Jane's money is properly put in the bank for her."

There was a grim finality in the tone and eyes of Jack Hughes. Lloyd, staring at him, recognized his doom.

"I'll give you—I'll pay you——" he began.

"No," said Hughes. "The letter goes—with the money and half the outfit. You stay here or not, as you like."





## SONG POWER

By MAGRUDER G. MAURY

*Author of "Putting It Up to Hardy," "The Devil of Panlang," etc.*

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A DEEP BLUE SEA AND A WHITE HOT SUN, AND A BOAT FULL OF GAUNT, THIRST-TORTURED MEN; A YANKEE SAILOR AND A HATE-CRAZED PASSENGER AND, IN BETWEEN, A MAN AND A WOMAN SINGING—HAD EVER A MAN SEEN THE LIKE? THE MAN-O'-WAR'S MAN HAD NOT

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**T**HE *Monacy*, all squat and ugly in her war paint, was lying at anchor off Ninety-sixth Street. Windows along the Drive north and south of Grant's Tomb were beginning to blink their early evening messages through the gathering mists. Aboard the cruiser mess-gear had sounded and the smoking lamp was lit.

Jimmy Legs, his big shoulders in their tight fitting C. P. O.'s uniform looking bigger than ever in the autumnal gloom, sat on the hatch coaming forward, watching the gunner's-mates making secure for the night. One of them, a tall youngster, angular and slim but with the promise of a chest that would later rival that of Jimmy Legs himself, was singing in a clear tenor voice and bad Italian accent, a Neapolitan folksong made familiar to American ears by the phonograph. O'Leary, the red haired chief-boatwain's mate, suffering from his customary indigestion and grouch, growled a surly protest against song and singer.

"Leave him alone," broke in Jimmy Legs. "I like to hear him and the song, too. It reminds me of one time off Hatteras—and us in an open boat."

The gunner's-mates, their work complete, joined the gang on the hatchway and settled themselves comfortably to listen.

Jimmy Legs made them welcome with a grin that showed his big white teeth firmly clenching the stem of his pipe.

"There ain't none o' you youngsters as is old enough to remember the old *Dirty Kate*?" he began interrogatively. "No? I thought not. She was broken up before most o' you was old enough to be out o' kindergarten back in the Middle West towns where you was raised. I was on her when they commissioned her at the old Brooklyn Guardo. She was the meanest thing afloat, always up to some sort o' unsuspected trick. Never was there when you called her.

"On this trip I'm tellin' you about we was ordered to the South Atlantic Station, as it was called in them days, with old Sammy Patchen as commandin' officer, and little Willie Snow as first luff.

"I remember goin' down through the Narrows, me at the con and old Sammy teeterin' back and forth on heels and toes just behind me, watchin' the Staten Island shore slip by and pickin' up the marks ahead. When we got into the lower bay we run into a nasty sou'easter. Before we'd left the Swash Channel the old ship was earnin' her nickname for fair, with spray a-flyin' over the high fo'c's'le-head o' her, and rattlin' ag'in' the canvas wind-shields on the bridge like birdshot on a tin roof. That weather kept with us south o'

Cape May, us huggin' the shore.

"By the time we was off the Virginia Capes the gale had grewed to a hurricane. I never seen nothin' worse. The *Dirty Kate* was shippin' it green when she rolled, makin' extra work for all hands to keep the broadside guns from breakin' adrift and smashin' things up in general. You couldn't get no sleep on watch nor off, and we'd had nothin' hot to speak of, exceptin' midnight and mornin' coffee, since leavin' Scotland lightship behind us."

He paused, looked around the circle of expectant faces now growing dim in the twilight, rose and rolled to the side, where he spat into the brown tide of the flowing Hudson. Back on the hatch once more he went on.

"Well, we weathered Hatteras all right, passin' close enough to scratch the red paint off'n the sides o' the Diamond Shoals lightship, and changed the course a couple o' points to the east'ard. That brought us headin' sou-sou'east, or thereabouts, and right into the gale which, 'stead o' dyin' down, was gettin' stronger as we went south.

"I was quartermaster first class then, and Jimmy Doyle was an apprentice quartermaster. It was Jimmy that sings out, the morning after passin' Hatteras, that there's a ship ahead of us and makin' heavy weather of it. I was just bein' relieved but I hangs on to see what's goin' to happen.

"Old Sammy was a real seaman. He pokes the nose of the *Dirty Kate* around and heads for the hulk, for we could see that was all she was. And the nearer we got to her the worse she looked.

"The storm had raised hell-in-general with her, all right. Her foremast was just a stump, her single funnel was all twisted and slued to one side, and her decks seems to be swept clear o' boats and deck houses, except for the solid superstructure amidships. From the top o' what was left o' her mizzenmast a Spanish flag is a-flutterin', just a-beggin' for help. On the wreck-age of her bridge is a little group o' people a-wavin' and a-jumpin' up and down like they was crazy. It give me a funny feelin' in my throat to see 'em there, so sure we was goin' to save 'em—and in that sea.

"I tell you, fellers, I never see a worse sea than what that was. She's all runnin' twistywise, with a nasty under-rollin' swell that chops the waves about so's they come together in spurts o' white spray that shoots up like waterspouts.

"Little Willie Snow come up on the bridge and was standin' along side o' the Old Man. Both o' them was a-studyin' the wreck through their binoculars, with the wind whippin' their oilskins about their legs sort of affectionate and cuddlin'.

"She won't last long in this sea," says Willie, cockin' one eye at the captain.

"No-o-o," says Patchen, drawlin' the words as though he was considerin' somethin'.

"I could see the Old Man was a-workin' over some problem and guessed he was tryin' to figger out a way for us to get a boat to them people on the Spiggotty craft. But he looks at the seas and sort o' shakes his head, like he was sayin', 'It can't be done.'

"No use tryin' to reach 'em with a boat, sir?" says the first luff, like he's makin' a statement he wants the captain to contradict.

"The Old Man just shakes his head again, and I get a little cavin'-in feelin' around the pit o' my stomach. No use lookin' any longer at what I can't help. I'm just turnin' my head away so's I couldn't see the founderin' craft and them on her, when Little Willie, who had went back to his starin' through his glasses, sings out.

"There's a woman on her, sir! She's just come up from below!"

"The *Dirty Kate*, roundin'to under the captain's orders so's to pass across the stranger's bows, had fell off into the trough o' the seas and was rollin' like no other ship I was ever on before nor since when Little Willie squawks out about the woman. The Old Man jerks out a word he don't often use, starts to raise his binoculars when the ship gives a roll, and over him and I and Little Willie goes. I feel the bridge rail givin' under our weight and let a yell out o' me as I go overboard.

"I don't fall far, seein's how the *Dirty*



*Kate* is heeled over the way she was, and so don't sink deep, but when I come to the surface there I am right under the counter of the Spaniard. How I got there so quick I've never been

able to tell, though I guess we was nearer to her than we figgered in the mist. Anyway, I strike out and grab a rope that's trailin' over the side.

"Next minute I'm a-clawin' and a-spittin' up her flanks, and a-climbin' over her broke rail to her deck, with nobody offerin' to give me a hand.

"Up there the wind seemed to blow harder than ever, and the ocean was almighty close, too close for comfort. I see a big boat in chocks just abaft o' where her funnel had been and keeps wonderin' to myself as I go forward to the bridge where the people's still a-standin', not payin' no 'tention a-tall to me, why they hadn't launched and took their chances. I supposed then that they must have some good reason—no time, or no men, or somethin'."

The old fellow paused, drew his pipe from the pocket into which he had stuffed it when he began his yarn, carefully filled it with navy plug, changed his mind and replaced the pipe in his pocket.

"I wish I could tell you how that gang up there on the old broken bridge looked when I got to 'em," he said, slowly. "It took just a glimpse of the captain to show me that he was skeered silly, and didn't know what to do. He was wearin' a coat with gold braid on the sleeves and his face was covered with a week's growth o' beard. He's sayin' somethin' in Spanish, and a-lookin' off astern.

"I turns to look, too, and what I sees ain't none too reassurin'.

"It's the old *Dirty Kate*, so far behind us I can barely see her through the thick mist. Of course I knowed then she'd been up to some of her tricks, but couldn't rightly figger out just what had happened. While I was a-lookin', though, she fires one o' her six-pounder bow guns and sends up a rocket, which I take to mean that she's tellin' us she's a-standin' by. Anyhow, she's out o' the reckonin' for some little time to come, so I turns back to the Spaniards.

"That was a pretty close shave," I says, just to be polite and open the talk, 'but I made it all right. You look in a pretty bad way.'

"The Spiggotty skipper says somethin' back to me in Spanish which, me speakin' only the cigar box kind, gets clean by me. I guess I looks as blank as I feel, for I hear a soft, low voice at my elbow say, 'The capitan asks will your warship remain close by?'

"Stand by?" I says. 'Of course she'll stand by till hell freezes over. That's a way we have in the navy, ma'am.'

"While I'm speakin' my little piece I get a good look at the woman. And say, she was an eye-full. Her clo'es was all wet

and clung to her figger, and her face was white with brine and her eyes was big and looked bigger, but she was calm and, and—Oh, I don't know how to say it. When she looked at you you just had little crawly feelin's racin' up your spine, and you felt like you do when there's general muster for punishment and the Old Man begins readin' out the court martial orders, you know—all gone inside.

"When I get the full charge o' them eyes I stammer out, 'I beg pardon, ma'am.'

"I don't know what I'm beggin' her pardon for, but it don't make no difference for she ain't payin' no attention to me. She has turned 'round to the captain and is speakin' to him in Spanish. And believe me, if tones is anythin', I wouldn't be spoke to that-a-way if I had to jump overboard to dodge it.

"The captain didn't seem to mind. Maybe he was so skeered he didn't care what anybody thought o' him. Anyway, she leaves us, walkin' stately as Queen Flavia in the movies, or somethin' like that, only there wasn't many movies in them days.

"The Spiggotty mate comes up and tries to get more out o' me. His English bein' rotten, I couldn't make him out and goes off to the wing o' the bridge to clamp my glims on the misty *Dirty Kate*. It don't take me long, dim as her shape is through the murk o' that day, to make out there's somethin' wrong with the old hooker. Instead o' roundin' to and comin' toward us as she'd ought to be doin' she's gettin' further and further away. I stand there, wishin' not to b'lieve my eyes, till she's disappeared altogether.

"Knowin' old Sammy Patchen as I do, as well as what's expected of us in the Navy, I know there's only one party to blame for the way the *Dirty Kate's* behaviorin'. And that's the ship herself.

"As soon as I fully take it in that she's gone and left us adrift I get sick. Sick's no real word for it. I could tell easy enough by the way the Spiggotty is wallerin' that she's due to go pretty soon. The seas was washin' over her as she rolled and pitched in the trough, and each time I see one comin' at us I say my prayers and get ready for a long last swim. As for them things amidships, they don't do nothin' but moan and make funny noises in their throats when the waves hits us. Finally I go up to the Spiggotty mate and talks business to him.

"See here," I says, 'this hooker's goin in a couple o' shakes. Why not make a fight



for it and launch that lifeboat back there? I'll get her over the side if you'll gi' me a couple o' men.'

"He just stared at me with wild eyes, his lips all slack and trembly and his chin a-wobblin'.

"Well,' I says, tryin' to wake him up. 'What about it? Do we launch that boat and have a try for our lives, or do we just stay here and drown like rats? Remember there's a lady on board.'

"He just keeps on starin' and wobblin', so I turns to the captain and tries to get him to order the boat launched. He understands me all right, but he just shakes his head.

"No good,' he says. 'She zeenk queek, como los otros,' or somethin' like that.

"So'll this ship sink quick, you lump,' I says. 'Sink quick and us on her.'

"I turns to the third man.

"This feller was a-wearin' a long coat, almost down to the tops o' his shoes which is long and narrow and pointed—you know the shoes the Spiggoties wears. Around his throat is wrapped a gray scarf which he's pulled up over his head to protect his ears, for the wind has a nip in it. The scarf thing makes a sort o' frame for his long dark face, which is set off with a little spiked chin beard and some mustaches all waxed and drawn to a fine point. I didn't like his looks at all, but I could see he had his wits still and I thought maybe he could get the captain to act, bein' plainly a passenger, so I grabs him by the arm and points to the lifeboat astern.

"Boat!' I yells at him. 'Boat! Launch, eh?'

"He shakes off my grip easy, bein' a powerful man, and snaps at me in good English.

"Do not touch me, Yankee dog,' he says. 'Your ship has deserted us, leaving us shipwrecked—as Yankees would do. You are all cowards, a race of pigs.'

"Say, if he'd slapped me in the face I couldn't ha' been more took aback. I look at him a minute, wonderin' if he's goin' dotty or was I. Then I seen he meant it, and I let a howl out o' me and went for him. I just hit him once though, for the lady, who wasn't anywhere around as I see when I pitched into him, steps in between us. She gives me the once-over with them eyes o' hers, and makes me feel cold and hot in the wrong spots.

"She speaks, and her voice is cold as the wind. 'If you think we should launch that boat and are willing to try, I shall get you the men. Only five are left. The

others were drowned trying to launch the other boats. Come.'

"Feelin' anythin' but proud o' myself, but knowin' that the only chance any of us stood was in that lifeboat, I follow the woman down the ladder to the forward well deck. Remember the bulwarks was all washed away, and the ship was rollin'



like O'Leary here comin' back from a twelve-hour liberty. And every time she'd roll she'd ship it green over her sides, the water rushin' across the deck in a sluicin' torrent. It was a sweet job crossin' that deck.

"At the foot o' the ladder I sort o' hesitated, watchin' the sea and kind o' gropin' round for my courage. But did that dame hesitate? She did not. She just walks out on that swayin', slippery death trap of a deck like she was walkin' across a ball-room floor. I foller.

"At the coamin' o' the forehatch, over goes the ship and a sea leaps aboard like a dog jumpin' for his master. I yell, expectin' to see the woman washed away to leeward. Instead, down she drops, clutches a line made fast to the battens o' the hatch and lets the wave go right over her. I never see sech presence o' mind in man nor woman. Before I'd got my breath back, she's up and a-walkin' on toward the fo'c's'le-head.

"Down the fo'c's'le ladder she goes, with me a-trailin' her. It was dark down there and the deck was all awash, the water swishin' back and forth with the motion of the ship.

"O' course the place is full of noises, what with the creakin' o' the crazy structure, and the poundin' o' the waves outside. But in spite o' the racket I can hear the woman's voice, clear and cool, a voice of authority if ever there was one. Presently a man comes lumberin' out o' the dark to the little patch o' light under the hatch, and then four more.

"You tell them what to do, and I'll translate,' she says to me with that air o' hers, sort o' high and mighty, as if she was

talkin' to a pretty punk kitchen maid. Upstage, that's what I'm tryin' to say. If it had o' been anybody else you'd ha' wanted to bash 'em, but you sort o' expected it from her.

"You fellers know what it is, gettin' a boat over the side without proper tackle or hands. Blest if I know yet how we did it, but somehow we did.

"Finally we gets her swung outboard and then, at deck level, and then I get the dame into the stern sheets, all wrapped up in coats and things.

"By this time the skipper and the mate and the man in the long ulster has come down off the bridge. The two officers was tryin' to help, but fear's got 'em, and they get in the way more'n they do anything else, so I shoo them into the boat with the woman. The other man hain't offered to do nothin', but he's made no protest when I orders him to load us up with water and what food he can find, and I go on with my work, thinkin' he's obeyed.

"Before we're all ready for launchin' the ship has sunk until her deck's only a couple o' feet above the water line, and every roll she gives is a peck of trouble for us at the boat.

"When all is ready I give the word and down we lower the boat on the run, me stayin' on deck last to see she cleared properly. I come damn' near missin' out, though, for she sheered away as a big wave rushed us. I slipped, brought up against the ragged edge o' the broken bulwark, tearin' my shirt and a rip down my right arm. There I am on the sinkin' ship and there's the boat ten yards away, and goin' further every second.

"Believe me, I done some quick thinkin' just about then. The woman, though, she motions the men to back water, and I take my chance and jump, and go for them hand over hand. The captain shows he's human, for he reaches down and grabs me by the hand and helps me into the boat.

"She was already gettin' out o' the lee o' the ship and beginnin' to feel the full force o' the wind, so I scramble aft and pick up the steerin' oar. With the help o' the others I manage to get her straightened out, head to the sea.

"I was so busy doin' that, I didn't hear a shout from the captain, that is, I heard it without knowin' I heard it. After we was ridin' fairly easy I look around for the ship we've just left.

"She's gone. It was just as though she was human and had waited for us to get away before sinkin' for good and all.

"So there we was, seven men and a woman in a open boat, with night comin' on and, as near as I could guess, at least a couple o' hundred miles o' stormy sea between us and the nearest land. To make it worse, there's no water and no food in the boat. The man in the long ulster hadn't done what I told him to do. He was too aristocratic for that, I reckon. Anyhow, he didn't, and we had no sort o' provisions o' any kind.

"When I find it out I looks at this fellow with the waxed mustaches and I says, 'You called me a dog a while ago back there on that ship. I slapped your dirty face for that then. We are quits on that, but when we gets ashore I'm a-goin' to take this out o' your hide. Understand?'

"He gives me a scorchin' look which don't scorch me none, for I'm not worryin' about him no more just then. I'm a wonderin' where we're at, and whether we'd best try runnin' before the wind, with the little rag o' sail I'd put in the boat, or try hangin' around on the chance the *Dirty Kate* fixed up whatever had happened to her and come back to pick us up. At last I decides on tryin' for the land, feelin' very sure that Sammy Patchen would never have deserted that sinkin' ship unless somethin' had happened to his own vessel to make her unmanageable for fair.

"I ask the Spiggotty captain where he figgers we're at, and after a deal o' talk, with the lady actin' as interpreter, I make out that he reckons we're about two hundred miles south o' Diamond Shoals light-ship.

"That gives me my line and I get the boat swung about, though it was some job with a small boat and the seas that was runnin'. I do it, though, and away we goes, with me crouchin' in the stern sheets at the steerin' oar, bein' afraid to let any o' those squogy moogy landsmen with me take on the job.

"And I tell you I was skeered. The waves looked as though they was comin' aboard every other minute, curlin' out o' the dark with their fierce white caps and just towerin' over us. Somehow, more by good luck than anythin' else, I managed to keep her free for the most part, though once or twice we was caught and almost swamped by one that broke sooner than I expected.

"All that night we run for it. Lucky the boat was a big one, with blunt bows and good freeboard for her size.

"With mornin' the wind dies down to a gentle breeze, though the seas continues

high for a long time after the sun comes up. 'Long about ten o'clock, after I'd been at the steerin' oar for close on seventeen hours straight, I turns her over to the mate. He proves to be a pretty good steersman, now that he ain't so skeered, and I go for'ard for a rest under a thwart. Pretty soon I was poundin' my ear eight bells, in spite of an empty stomach which even then was beginnin' to hurt.

"I don't sleep so long at that, though, but wake up in about two hours with the sun straight up over me, and me sweatin' and stewin' in the heat for all I'm worth.

"I sits up and looks at the others. Three o' the men is settin' near me in the thwarts. Aft in the stern sheets is the others, the girl sittin' for'ard o' the men with her chin on her hands and her long white fingers over her eyes, hidin' them from the glare.

"From the girl I turn to look at the weather.

"The sea has gone down until, except for a long slow swell and a tiny little ripple where the catspaws stirred the surface, there's no movement to speak of. The horizon is close aboard, though, and there's a vague sort o' shimmery mist over everything. It don't look so good to me, seein' as how we was so far from land, and I look back at the men to see how they seem to be takin' it and whether I can count on much help from them.

"The mate was still steerin'. The captain was a-lyin' back on one of the fore-and-aft seats, his shirt open at the collar showin' his red, turkey gobbler throat all tufted with beard where he needed a shave.

"But it was the chap with the spiked beard and mustache that looked worst off to me. He'd took off his coat and was in his shirt sleeves, but still had his head bound up in that scarf thing.

"I suppose my gettin' up had sort o' attracted his attention to me, there where

we'd nothin' to do much but watch the sea and each other. Anyhow, he's studdyin' me through squinched up eyes when I look at him, eyes that gives me a little

shiver they're so damn' mean lookin'. Oncet sence then I saw a fillum called Fawst. The Mephisto in that movie looks just like this feller I'm tellin' you about.



There's a broodin' melancholy devil a-lurkin' in his eyes that meant business, it seemed to me, but I couldn't for the life o' me tell why he had it in for me special, unless it was because I was an American. O' course I'd handed him a wallop back there on the ship, but he'd brought that on hisself. Anyhow, I squinches up my own eyes and stares at him till I beat him at the game and he turns his back on me.

"I take a seat on the nearest thwart and reach for my pipe and tobacco. O' course the tobacco's wet and spoilt. Still I manage to get a chew that stopped my stomach gnawin', but it don't quench my thirst none, and believe me by that time I'd ha' give a month's pay for one swig from the old *Dirty Kate's* scuttle butt.

"While I was sittin' there, chewin' slow so as to make it last longer, the woman takes her fingers off'n her eyes and looks at me with a slow friendly smile that curls her lips and lightens her dark face. It's the first time she's looked at me like I was human, and I smile back in return.

"Come and seet where we can talk," she says to me. 'There are many questions I would ask.'

"Ask 'em," says I, gettin' up and crawl-in' over the in-between thwarts till I am sittin' alongside o' her. 'What are they?'

"Your sheep," she begins. 'Why did she not come back to get us?'

"Because she is of that pig nation, the Yankees,' breaks in the evil lookin' man with the beard.

"Be silent, Señor Gonsales,' commands the woman beside me. 'I will not have troubles made here, especially with this American who reesk his life to come to our aid.'

"I feel sort o' guilty at that, seein' as how I'd not had anything much to do with the comin', the credit bein' due the rollin' o' the old *Dirty Kate*. But I didn't say nothin'. If she wanted it that way, why that way it was a-goin' to be. Señor Gonsales, as she'd called him, growls a little under his breath and turns his head away.

"And now," she goes on, 'what is your name, what is your rank, and why did not your vessel stand by,' as you thought she would?'

"I tell her my name and the real name o' the *Dirty Kate*, and explain that the old hooker certainly busted somethin' or she would have been back for us.

"But of course," she says. 'Your sheep is herself in trouble. I had not thought of that.'

"She sits silent for a long time. Finally

I get up the nerve to ask her what her name is. 'They call me in France *Le Rossignol*,' she tells me, 'which means in your language, "The Nightingale."' In my own countree I am called Carlotta and on the billboards I am called La Seville, which is the name of the city in which I was born. Many names, is it not?

"Quite a few," says I, respectful. 'What am I to call you, miss?'

"Not 'miss,'" she says, and her face is like a stone image. 'You may call me Madame Gonsales.'

"After that neither of us says anythin' more, her forgettin' whatever other questions she wanted to ask me, if any. By and by I go back to my for'ard thwart and falls to watchin' the sea.

"Man and boy, I've been follerin' the sea pretty much all my life and pretty near all over the world. I've seen it in all its moods and under all sorts and conditions of weather, but I never hated it, yes and feared it, like I did that day. It looked so damn' sleek and shiny, like a great slippery snake crawlin' its way to the land.

"It got hotter and hotter. By and by one of the three Spanish sailors beside me slips to the bottom of the boat and lays there with his mouth open, and moanin' a little. He's just a youngster, I think, as I look down at him and see his chin covered with a black down and just a couple o' curly hairs stickin' out—just a youngster a-growin' of his first beard. I can't make out all he's sayin' in his mutterin's, but every now and then I catch the word 'agua,' and know the poor kid is askin' for what he can't get—water.

"Lord, how the day drags! But at last the sun goes down behind the sleek swells, the wind freshens a little, and I feels better and goes back to the steerin' oar to relieve the mate, none o' the others havin' offered to take their turn. Pickin' out the North Star as my guide, I sets my course a little to the west o' that, hauls the sheet a little flatter, and feels kind o' cheerful when the boat begins slappin' through it.

"The funny thing about that day, I'm a-thinkin' as I steer the boat, is that nobody talks. We might ha' been a gang o' deaf mutes for all the sound we make for hours on end.

"Along about nine o'clock the moon comes up, and we go slappin' along with the water purrin' at our bluff bows like a brace o' ship's cats. I get tired a-figgerin' our chances on bein' picked up or makin' land on our own, and takes to observin' the people in the boat.

"Madame Gonsales is settin' on the bottom o' the boat between the two after thwarts, her back to the stern sheets. She might be a statue o' one of them Buddhas for all the motion or sound from her. The mate has gone forward with the men and the captain is a-restin', as usual, on one o' the fore-and-aft seats astern. Gonsales is on the other. He's took the scarf thing off his head, and I notice he parts his hair so it looks liketwo little black horns in the moonlight. He's a-leanin' with one arm over the side, his fingers a-trailin' in the water. I see now what I hadn't noticed before, that he's a big man as Spiggotties go, with narrer hips and broad shoulders. He makes me think of a bullfighter I seen once in Barcelona. Evidently, I thinks to myself, there ain't no love lost between him and his missus. They don't even look at each other if they can help it, much less talk. The youngster in the bottom o' the boat's half asleep.

"It seems to me as I set there, lookin' 'em all over in the slitherin' moonlight, that they're all dotty, and me with 'em.

"Thinkin's doin' no good so I takes my second chew o' tobacco, goin' easy on it, first because I want it to last and second because the salt in it makes me thirstier than hell. The wind keeps a-freshenin' and haulin' 'round more and more to the west, kickin' up a nice little ruffle o' sea. Funny, I'm thinkin', how different the sea is. That afternoon I'd fair hated it for bein' so sleek and slimy and full o' treachery. Tonight with the cool air and the moonlight and all the little wavelets runnin' to white caps as cheerful as kittens, the sea's a friendly companion.

"At midnight the mate has one o' the men relieve me, and I go for'ard again to try to get some more sleep. Pretty soon, in spite of hunger and thirst, I doze off, my last thought bein' that the wind's a-gettin' lively, and does the man steerin' know his business?

"He don't, and I come out of it sharp, with the sail a-flappin' all over me and the mast over the side. I make a grab and try to salvage it, but the darn fool aft lets the sheet fly and away goes the stick, draggin' the sail after it. There we was, adrift on the high seas, with nothin' but oars to get way on her and not a blasted thing in sight except the white caps, which don't look so playful now that the boat's swung off into the trough.

"I grab an oar and bellows to one o' the other men to grab another. Pretty soon we had her headed into the seas, and pull-



in' just enough to keep from broachin' to. Before that she'd been a-wallerin' like a pig in a sty.

"And then them Spiggotties begins to talk. First the captain starts on the feller at the steerin' oar, and I think is he goin' to beat his brains in. Then the mate takes his turn with the captain chimin' in and the man a-shoutin' at 'em both, and the kid in the bottom o' the boat stops his moanin' and laughs in a way that sets my teeth on edge. With that the other two sailors butts in till it sounded like a whole menagerie's broke loose on the lower deck of a freighter. I stand it till I can't stand it no longer, and then I declare myself.

"Shet up, every damn' one o' you," I yells, louder than any of 'em's shoutin'. 'The damage's done, and talkin' won't mend it. It's up to us to row this boat ashore. I'm goin' to head due west. The mate and me'll do the steerin' and the rest o' you can row, except, o' course, Madame Gonsales.'

"I don't think they understand all I'm sayin', but I scramble aft and take the steerin' oar, and Madame Gonsales sings out somethin' in that queer penetratin' voice o' hers. Two o' the men takes oars while she's talkin', and away we go.

"And then I begin to look back on how well off we was when we was a-sailin' easy, with the wind doin' the work and us a-liv-



in' high. Now we've got only our arms and backs for it, and nobody knowin' how far we are from land. Grousin' never done no good, though, so I sticks to the oar, a-thinkin' maybe I'm better off now than I will be in a little while, for I feel in my bones that more trouble's on the way. It'll be comin', some of it, I tells myself, when I orders that feller Gonsales to take his turn at the oars, which I've made up my mind him and the captain's got to do when their time comes.

"Dodgin' trouble ain't losin' it none, though, so I sets my jaw and when I figger the first two men has rowed for a couple o' hours or more, I sing out, 'Time to relieve the wheel! Watch below, turn out. You I mean, Mr. Gonsales. Take them oars.'

"He is a-leanin' back over the side, trailin' his fingers in the water as if he was a silly woman on a pleasure boat. He didn't pay the slightest attention to me when I

spoke, just went on trailin' his fingers in the water, one arm over the side, the other makin' a rest for his chin on the gunwale.

"I beckon to the mate, who's roused at my call, and tell him to take the steerin' oar. I guess they think I'm a-goin' to take a trick at rowin', but instead, I reaches down and grabs Mr. Spaniard by the waistband o' his trousers, gives a yank and pitches him into the bottom o' the boat at the feet o' one o' them two oarsmen.

"Next second he's up and comin'. I brace myself and let him have it, a good solid clip on the jaw.

"Back he goes under the blow, the gunwale takes his knees and he drops over the side. That's more than I had planned, and I reach down and ketch him by the shoulder as he slips past, and haul him back into the boat. He's a-gaspin' like a fish, and full o' water, and with no fight left in him.

"That's for disobeyin' orders,' I tells him, 'and has nothin' to do with the lickin' I'm a-goin' to give you when I get you ashore. Now you take that oar, and row.'

"He takes the oar without another kick, but I see in a minute he ain't never learnt how to handle one proper. I keep him at it, though, and calls on the captain, expectin' another fight. But I don't get it. The captain's learnt his lesson by watchin' what happened to the señor. He takes holt at the word from me, and I go back to the steerin' oar and send the mate to finish his watch below.

"That second day, when it comes, is like the inside of a tomb. Nobody says nothin' to nobody. Mine, givin' orders, is the only voice I hear, and I get damned tired of it.

"All that day we pull, the mate and me takin' turns at the oars and cuttin' our tricks at the steerin' short to make up for it. I was gettin' used to bein' hungry now, but the thirst was like a raging fire, gettin' bigger and hotter every second.

"After sundown that day the youngster with the fuzzy chin goes plumb loco. He's been drinkin' sea water for a couple o' hours, I find out, and his fool mates ain't stopped him. No use tryin' to describe that part of it. It don't last long but it's hell while it does last, and I'm glad when it's all over and there's only six men and a woman left in the boat.

"As for that woman, she's just the same, except that her face has browned under the sun till she looks like a Malay.

"It's the mornin' of the third day. The sun comes up on a bare cruel sea, all burnished and shinin' like the bright work on the pinnacle of an English man-o'-war.

The mate bein' all in, I've been steerin' since about six bells in the midwatch. My tongue's so dry it rattles in my mouth. My eyes feel hot enough to burn holes through my eyelids, and there ain't no little bone no muscle in me that ain't achin' with weariness. I look around at the steel blue of the horizon with never a break in it, and I says to myself, 'This is the end. Here's where they sound taps over you, old boy.'

"I don't say this with my tongue, for it seems useless for all practical purposes. My mouth feels like coals o' fire. When I try to stand up, with the help o' the steerin' oar, my head spins around like a dog vane in a change o' wind. It's all I can do to keep the boat's nose headed west.

"All night long the woman has been a-settin' on the bottom of the boat. If she's moved once, I don't know when it was, but now she gets first to her knees and then very slow to her feet, and looks around the horizon. Presently she turns to me and points dead ahead.

"And then, just when I've give up hope, I see it.

"It's a little black bump on the edge o' the horizon, just a sort o' hump on the sea. It don't look no bigger'n my fist from where we are, but I know it's a ship o' some kind. The sight o' it steadies me. I gives a gulp, and finds my voice.

"Yes, ma'am, I says, croakin' like a frog. 'It's a ship.'

"And then, just like a black blanket, despair comes down over me again, for I see the oarsmen lyin' exhausted on the flat o' their backs and the mate all in, lyin' with his face up to the sun, his cracked lips pulled back in a inhuman grin from his teeth. I realize, too, that we've dropped off into the holler of a swell, and that I've been just dabblin' with the steerin' oar for I don't know how long when I might as well been savin' my strength.

"We're done for, I tells myself. 'We'll never make that ship see us. Cain't get close enough to it.'

"I guess what I'm thinkin' must ha' showed on my face, for the lady says, very low and kind o' tender as if she's lots sorer for me than she is for herself, 'Are you near the end of it, big man?'

"Not on yer life, ma'am, I says, tryin' to grin. 'You can't keep the workin' man down.'

"That seems to puzzle her a bit, but at last she smiles.

"I know,' she says. 'You mean you will die fighting. Is it not so, yes? And I, I shall die singing.'

"She pulls herself up full and tall and looks at the señor, who's give up trailin' his hand in the water since both hands is all blistered and raw from his rowin'. He's lookin' at her as if his eyes would burn holes in her face, but she just smiles, gives him a scornful little bow, and says, 'Would you like to hear me sing, señor, once more before the end?'

"She don't wait for him to reply, but turns to me. 'And you, big man?' she says. 'You would like it, eh?'

"She makes a little bow as if she was standin' on a stage, throws her head back and begins.

"At first it was sort o' husky, that voice o' hers. But soon it begins to fill out and gets richer and richer and clearer and clearer, and goes soarin' out over the water like the sound o' eight bells from the flagship of a squadron.

"I feel new life comin' into me. I forget I'm thirsty, hungry, achin', burnin', and go stumblin' around, rousin' the fellers in the bottom o' the boat, yellin' at 'em, pullin' at 'em, kickin' 'em, I guess, till I get them to the oars. Then I points to the bump on the horizon, which don't look no bigger'n it did before, and tells 'em it's a ship.

"The singer, while I'm doin' all this, is silent, but when I'm back at the steerin' sweep again she gives me a long look, and takes up her singin'. For a time the men at the oars don't seem to know what's goin' on. They just pulls along, without puttin' any heart or muscle, which maybe they ain't got left, into it. By and by they seem to hear the señora, and stop rowin' to listen.

"Instantly she stopped singin'.

"Row,' she says in Spanish. 'Row for that ship. If you do not row, I shall not sing.' And then, to me, 'Make them row, big man.'

"I didn't have to make 'em. They catch at the next song she starts and begin keepin' time with their oars. This is a sweepy sort o' thing that seems to carry us along, rollin' and swellin', dippin' and swingin'.

"And there we go scuddin' across the seas like a lot o' crazy people, with nothin' to make us go but this woman, singin' like a mermaid right out o' the sea.



"And then her voice goes and cracks on a high note. She drops onto the thwart, her face in her hands, and begins to cry.

"I don't know what makes me look at Gonsales. He's the last one I'd 'a' thought of by my own self. But somethin' pulls me that way and I look, and catch my breath.

"His wicked face is changed. It ain't wicked no longer. It's all lit up from the inside and washed clean of the nastiness and meanness of it. Very slow he gets up and steps over to her, and stands there, with his hand restin' on her bowed head. A moment like this, and he begins to sing --and it sounded like the ruffle o' drums when the admiral comes over the side.

"Say, I didn't know whether I was afloat or ashore. And them fellers at the oars, they just pulled their bloomin' guts out.

"Me, I gets an idea and yanks off what's

left o' my shirt, sticks it on the end o' the steerin' oar, and begins wavin' at that ship. Can you beat that? Me, naked to the waist, them fellers tuggin' and sweatin' with the last ounce o' their dyin' strength, and him standin' there with his hand on his wife's head and a singin' like a church organ--and off on the edge o' the horizon ---"

A new sound cut in on the speaker. A phonograph record had been started just back of him by the young gunner's-mate.

For an instant the weather-beaten face of the old sailorman showed disgust and amazement at the interruption. Then slowly his features quieted down and a smile of recognition widened his mouth and brought a twinkle into the gray blue eyes beneath the shaggy white brows.

"That's her!" he exclaimed. "Ain't she a bird?"

### FIRST COVERED WAGON TRAIN

THE first emigrant train to cross the plains to California left Sapling Grove, Kansas in May, 1841. An old French trapper had spread a story of the wonders of the Pacific coast and with James Bidwell, later General Bidwell of the United States Army, succeeded in persuading a number of families to make the journey.

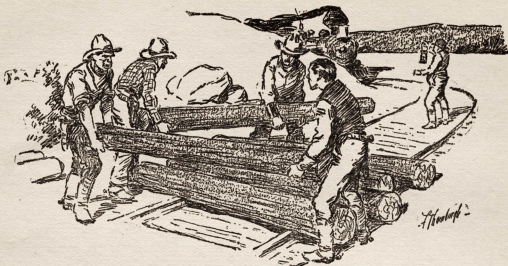
The Missourians of the party were skeptical at first, fearing that fever and ague abounded. On being questioned as to this, the trapper replied that there was but one man in all California who had ever had a chill, which was a matter of such wonderment to the people of Monterey that they went 18 miles into the country to see him shake.

When all was ready the wagons rendezvoused at Sapling Grove, and although several families became disheartened at the last moment, sixty-nine persons began the long tedious journey to the Pacific. The party was led by a man from Jackson County, Missouri, who although not the best choice for the position would have deserted with his eight men had he not been put in charge, seriously weakening the defensive force.

The route lay from near Westport, now Kansas City, northwestward to Salt Lake City, then southwest across the Nevada deserts. Cyclones, Indian scares, and other troubles were prominent features of the journey, but the pioneers pushed on, accompanied by a missionary party which had joined them after leaving Sapling Grove. Half of the families decided that the trackless wilderness was too much for them when they neared Fort Hall on the Snake River, and they followed the missionary party into Oregon. The remainder, thrown on their own resources without trail or guide, but none the less undaunted, determined to reach California or bust.

They reached Salt Lake City in September, the settlement being known even then by that name. Here the wagons, furniture, and everything possible was abandoned, and packs made on the oxen. To add to their misfortunes game became scarce, necessitating the killing of the oxen.

Fully incompetent for leadership the Jackson County man, Bartleson, deserted the party several times with his men, but returned when hungry. Food was so scarce that crows and even wildcats were shot to keep the people from starving, but when the San Joaquin Valley was reached they found wild grapes and herds of antelope in abundance. Doctor Marsh's ranch was reached on November 4, 1841, where the party was agreeably surprised to learn that they were at last in California.—J. R. J.



## BLUE OVERALLS—\$1.75

By CLEMENT WOOD

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THAT WAS THE SUM—ONE DOLLAR AND SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS—  
AND IN RAILROAD CIRCLES ALONG THE COLORADO-KANSAS STATE  
LINE THEY STILL TALK OF THE WAY IT WAS COLLECTED

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### I

IT DID not begin with the pair of blue overalls that Nat Beale purchased at the New Canterbury Emporium, it did not even begin when old man Stidham's piebald calf strayed on the Central Pacific tracks, just before the Sunset Flyer was due. The armed deadlock between every self-respecting man in Wallace County, Kansas, and every "thug and hireling of the railroad"—the profanity has been edited out—commenced when the C. P., secured from a spineless legislature the right of way for a curve a hundred yards long inside the Kansas county, over the protest of every decent citizen. The tension reached breaking-point when the railroad placed its station at Sinai, Colorado, a quarter of a mile across the line, ignoring that pride of Kansas, the thriving village of New Canterbury.

The railroad was welcomed with closed fists and hair-trigger guns. The cattlemen saw in the roaring trains a potential murderer of cows, calves, and profits; the farmers swore that their stock was not safe, and that the fall of cinders damaged crops and threatened, during every dry spell, a general conflagration. The wildest

arguments concerning improved transportation met only black disbelief.

Pat Boggan, gaunt, blue-eyed foreman of the great Bar X ranch, phrased the general feeling, from his splint-bottomed throne in Lem Hodgkins' New Canterbury Emporium. "Bad enough to have thim murderin' spalpeens killin' cattle an' settin' woods an' cornrows on fire; but—" and his blue eyes flashed ominously, "—to have thim locate their blankety-blank station at that blankety-blank Sinai, without even a store—a cross-fields dump with only four run-down shacks, outside of the depot an' that mangy little railroad warehouse—in Colorado, too—an' with New Canterbury gleamin' like another Dublin half a mile away—thim railroad folks is distracted."

"They had to consider the grade, Pat," weakly urged a former hand on the Bar X, named Nat Beale.

"Grade yer grandma! You talkin' railroad? I bet you gone an' got a job with 'em! Out with it, aincher?" He scowled ferociously at the smaller man.

"I wuz aimin' to watch at the warehouse, if Judge Peck don't need me."

"Andy needs hands, an' you know it. You don't want to work; never held on to a white man's job yet. Loafin' like a



greaser on the railroad payroll!"

"Now, Pat——"

"Mister Boggan, you pip-eyed loafer! No railroad man calls me Pat—an' don't forget it!"

"Oh, don't get peeved." He turned easily from the scowling foreman to address the proprietor, an intent listener to the argument. "I didn't come to talk to no cowman, Lem. I wanted you should sell me a pair uv blue overalls."

"If I had my choose," said Hodgkins deliberately, "you'd be the last man I'd pick to sell anything to. But I ain't in business fer brotherly love. There you are," slapping down two dark blue garments, bright with gleaming brass buttons. "One seventy-five, an' two an' a quarter. Which'll yer have?"

Tentatively Beale fingered them. "What's the difference between 'em?"

"Fifty cents," snapped Hodgkins. "Four bits. Five dimes. Ten nickels."

"Oh, I'll take them there," indicating the cheaper garment. "Wrap 'em up, won't yer?"

"Paper an' string free," jeered Boggan. "You railroaders take everything you can git, without payin' fer it, I notice."

"No charge fer advice is there, Pat?" He lingered over the name, and reached for the package. "Just charge 'em, will you, Lem?"

"I will not." Each word was thrust out; the storekeeper squared stiff elbows aggressively on the counter. "Spot cash f'um railroaders, an' don't forget it. Gimme them overalls!"

"Now, Lem, don't be in such a peagreen hurry! I'll pay yer Sat'day night. Ain't got a pay-check f'um the railroad yet. You know I ain't got a cent. I gotter have these here overalls to wear, I have."

"Any man that's low-down enough to work for the railroad——" commenced the foreman suggestively.

"Don't mind that old crawfish. Just till Sat'day night, Lem! I don't owe you nothin', do I?"

"Never guv you a chance," grumbled the storekeeper.

"Till Sat'day night——"

"Oh, take 'em along. But you listen to me, Nat Beale. If you don't pay on time, I'll make you dance in yer socks!"

"Thanks, Lem. So long, Pat." He backed rapidly for the door, clutching the precious parcel. "I don't dance by myself," he smirked irritatingly from the door.

A sudden motion of the foreman's to-

wards his hip, and the small man leaped sideways, rabbit-fashion, almost colliding with two men who had suddenly turned the corner. He escaped in the midst of a rabid call-down for his carelessness. The two men shouldered into the store without ceremony.

Lem rose courteously. "Hello, Mr. Stidham—hello, Mat. What's botherin' you boys?"

"Bother enough," growled the tough old wreck called Stidham. "I just come f'um Andy Peck's."

Pat helped end the pause. "That so?"

"Just tried my case about that calf." He bristled again into silence.

"Which calf was that?" urged the storekeeper.

"Piebald, run over by the Sunset Flyer." His mouth clamped again.

"How much damages you git?" There was real interest in Pat's query.

"Yes, ask 'im," urged the second newcomer sardonically. "How much damages did you git, Stidham?"

Each word came bitten clean. "Not a danged cent. Danged if that Andy Peck didn't throw my case plumb out of court!"

## II

COWMAN and storeman stared in unbelief. "Not a cent——"

"Gimme a plug." Stidman settled himself in a chair, and bit off a masculine gouge. After a few preliminary chews, he expanded. "You know, I sued that railroad, Lem, fer ninety-nine dollars—that's all the joorisdiction Andy's got."

"That little piebald, eh?" Pat figured professionally.

"You mout er sold that calico calf fer four-fifty," agreed the storekeeper reflectively.

"Yes, man; but this was the railroad." Old Stidham chuckled. "Best way to improve the breed of livestock is to cross 'em with a C. P. engine, ain't it? But—he throwed the whole case out!"

"Didn't give you nothin'?"

"Not a Mexican dime."

"No damages?"

"Consarn his eyes, no! Dick Copeland, that four-eyed station agent at Sinai, he swore he'd give me notice to keep my stock off'n the tracks. All he did wuz to send me a letter—how'd he expect me to guess what wuz inside uv it? I thought it must be f'um Gover'ment—taxes, or somethin'. I aimed to bring it over for you to read, Lem. I told Andy that letter hadn't got run over, an' my po' little calf had. Ast

him how he'd like to be a motherless calf, an' have his hind-quarters bi-sected an'



have to have his brains blowed out. Do you know, Andy Peck had the gall to listen to that four-eyed jackrabbit, an' even made me pay costs! Not that he'll ever see 'em. That man ain't fitten to be judge uv nothin', sidin' with the railroad."

"That's straight talk." The cattelman squirmed in indignation to the front of his seat. "Can't you appeal, or nothin'?"

"I could, I s'pose; but the higher up you git, the bigger the railroad looks to them judges. I got another idea." He leaned confidently closer. "Listen to this, boys. When's the next county election?"

"Nex' Tuesday, ain't it?"

"Well?" Stidham paused.

Lem Hodgkins thudded a heavy fist against the pine counter. "By Jasper, you've said something! We'll put somebody up, an' lick the hide off'n Andy Peck! Sidin' with the railroad! But—ain't it too late to nominate?"

"It's never too late, when you got to do something."

"Who'll we put up?" Boggan shared in the excitement.

"Well," the old farmer grew thoughtful. "We got to have a tough, two-fisted, two-gun man, who loves the railroad like a rattler. Somebody we can trust to bust the lights an' liver out uv that danged corporation, every chance he gets. Ain't I right?"

"Mmm—yes." Boggan's blue eyes were thoughtful; he tugged reflectively at his scrawny moustache. "That's about it. Somebody who'll always give justice against the railroad."

"In other words, hittin' 'em hard every chance, eh?"

"Mmm— Yes."

"Well? Who do you think?"

"Doc' Landsay?"

"Too busy."

"You?"

"Too old." Stidham grinned. "An' too cussed."

"Bill Heidt, fum Flying P?"

"Too wu'thless. It's gotter be somebody we kin trust, Pat."

"Out with it. What's on yer so-called mind, Stidham?"

"Namely, Mr. Patrick Boggan, foreman."

"Go wan!"

"I mean it. You gotta be judge. You'll back me, Lem?"

"Sure. I'm chairman of elections, too."

"It's won already! Ye'll do it, Pat?"

"I don't know any law——"

"Trouble with most judges is, that's all they do know. You know the railroad's always wrong——"

"I know that, but then——"

"Boys, it's a go! Me 'n' Mat here will notify all the boys, an' Tuesday, Andy gets a free ride into private life! This is good. I like things done legal—when they can be, of course. When a judge sides with the railroad, in Wallace County, it's about time for a new deal!"

Four brawny right hands clasped on the matter; four minds had but a single thought, and four hearts beat as a multiplied one.

### III

FIVE intent faces bent over the Emporium's counter, at eight o'clock on the evening of the next Tuesday. All day the nearer farmers and hands had strolled in, and the further ranchers and cowmen had loped by; not a one entered without a whispered word from Stidham or his helpers. Some had seen the light, some had not; it was up to the chairman of elections to do his best. The acrid smell of kerosene came from the three glass lamps. Lem Hodgkins wet his purple pencil on his lips, and added up the figures for the third time. He beamed upon the crowd. "Pat Boggan is elected justice, 49 votes to none!"

The candidate wore a puzzled look. "No votes a-tall for Andy?"

"I don't see a one," Lem shook a decided head.

Old man Stidham, sitting on the cracker box where all votes not for Boggan had been deposited, chuckled slightly. "Not a vote in sight."

"There's one." Mat, the helper, pointed to a slip of paper off by itself.

"Just hand that here," ordered Stidham.

"Might as well count it," grugged Hodgkins consolingly. "It'll look like Andy put in one vote for hisself. Pat, you're our lawfully elected judge." He marked down another figure carefully. "49 to 1—a bigger majority than Free Silver got. Now, gentlemen, a real job: we'll just pop over an' notify Andy Peck."

"You're needin' us?" urged Stidham.

"An' your guns, gentlemen. The law must be obeyed."

The buggy held the stout storekeeper beside Mr. Stidham; Boggan, his assistant foreman, and Mat, Stidham's helper, mounted their horses, and trotted off after the buggy through the chilly Kansas night. Down the hill to the curved hundred yards of railroad track on Kansas soil, then along the road that climbed beside the state line to the turnpike, and down this to the second farm on the upland.

They turned in at the gate; a wild clamor of dogs suddenly woke.

A man, lamp in hand, appeared in the doorway. "Who's thar?"

"It's me, Andy Peck, Lem Hodgkins. Me an' a party. Call off them dogs."

"Come on in. They wouldn't hurt a horned toad." Andy Peck led the way to the dining-room table, and set down the lamp on the one spot clear of papers. He rubbed his judicial hands importantly together. "I wuz just stidyin' out a case I got to decide tomorrow," he explained, with shy pride.

"We'll save you the trouble," said Hodgkins briefly. "At the election today, duly called an' held, Mr. Patrick Boggan was elected Justice of the Peace; 49 votes to one for you, Andy. You just hand over them papers peaceable, an' we won't say nothin' more about it."

The room grew suddenly tense. Peck pushed his chair back from the table with a harsh grating sound, and half rose. He could feel the pressure of his pistol against the back of the chair, and shifted his body a trifle, to free it. "Don't talk foolishness, Lem Hodgkins. That warn't no election." His eyes rolled from one to another of the group, and sank before the steely determination there. His brain worked rapidly.

"I'd like to know why not!"

A laugh that sounded easy. "For about a hundred reasons. I wuz the only man nominated——"

"They wrote in Pat's name."

"He ain't been a legal citizen of the State long enough."

"He's to pass on that; he's judge, ain't he?"

"No, he ain't."

Anyhow," Peck rose and assumed a nonchalant pose beside the door opening into the darkness of the house. His eye measured the distance to the lamp; pity it was

on the far side of the table! "Anyhow, my own term don't expire for four months yet. Good night, gentlemen." Aimlessly his hand swung against his side.

"No you don't!" barked out from Mat; he pulled his own gun half out of its holster. "We're five to one, Andy. Better be reasonable."

A bitter gleam flashed across the face of the cornered farmer. "I'll see you——"

"Stiddy, stiddy." Pat Boggan rose heavily to his feet. His hand roved in a wide gesture of command. He moistened his lips slowly, and launched out upon his first public address. "Andy, when in the course of human events it becomes necessary fer a man to git, he ought to git with as little trouble as possible."

"Hear! Hear!"

"It is now time for you to git." The tongue did duty again against the dry lips. "I want to be Justice, an' almost all of the qualified voters—all exceptin' one of the votes counted—want me to be justice. I command you, in the name of the Constitution of the State of Kansas and of the Newnited States of America, to git! Otherwise, you will compel me, as Justice, to hold you for contempt of court, interferin' with an officer in the discharge of his bounden duty, an' general cussedness."

"You can't make me——"

"Stiddy, stiddy!" The foreman's pale blue eyes pierced compellingly out of his gaunt face. "Furthermore, Andy, please notice that Lem Hodgkins is on our committee. I've had a little talk with him, about the mortgage on this farm that he holds. If you don't vamoose pronto, it's by-by farm. Get it?"

Peck squared his shoulders against the door jamb. "You can't threaten——"

"I ain't. We're peaceable men, Andy; but there's five of us, an' each of us is got two guns. Do you resign peaceable?"

For a moment the visitors feared regretfully that there would be peace. Then it happened all at once. Peck had hurled himself on his knees into the dark hall; there was the gleam as his gun seemed to leap from the holster.

But Mat was quicker. He threw himself beside the other man, and clipped down with all his might against the gun arm. "No you don't!" he snarled.

Shaken and unnerved, Peck was jerked back to his feet and into the light. The four men faced him, their hands negligently ready on their hips.

"Do you resign peaceable?" Pat repeated meekly.



Andy was a reasonable man; he was persuaded. Relieved of his gun, he bundled up the papers, and delivered them to the new justice, thereby installing him in his post.

"You can get your gun at my place in the morning," Hodgkins called back as they passed out of the gate. "Better be good, Andy." Without a chuckle the cavalcade commenced its brisk trot back toward the New Canterbury Emporium.

"Pat," Lem called the new arm of the law over to him, "I got the first case for you already."

"Bootleg stuff?" grinned Stidham.

"A real law case. Pat's witness an' judge too. You know them blue overalls Nat Beale bought uv me last week? Sat'day night I ast him for my money, an' he just laughed at me. Said he'd see me somewhere first—an' it wasn't Kansas he mentioned, either. I'm goin' to sue him, an' garnishee the Central Pacific for his salary."

"I don't know nothin' about law, Lem

"That's all right; I got the garnishee-ment blank all made out. All you got to do is come along with me over to Sinai, an' serve this paper on Dick Copeland, the station agent. Then the money's ours. Law's easy as easy, if you're judge."

"Good. Tonight?"

"He closes station at six."

"Tomorrer mornin', then, I'm your man. We'll ride over together."

"Righto. Railroad better stop, look, an' listen now, eh, Judge?"

"We'll make 'em dance! Just you watch."

#### IV

**S**HORTLY after sun-up, the new justice of the peace and his efficient election chairman set out on the short jog over to Sinai station. The road led down to the curve of the railroad within Wallace County, turned, and crossed the state line. The storekeeper drew rein, and surveyed the sister commonwealth before him disgustedly. "Bum lookin' place, Colorado, ain't it, Pat?"

Boggan inspected the land in front, and turned back for a view of the landscape, absolutely similar, that they had just left. "Reg'lar hole, Colorado is, Lem."

"Yeah. Kansas fer mine."

They continued a quarter of a mile along a rocky gulch, at whose level head the station had been placed.

"Got your gun?" Hodgkins whispered to Boggan, as they topped the last rise, with the station just before them.

"Have I got my face?" asked Pat disgustedly. "But, remember, we won't need 'em. This is to be peaceable, Lem. I'm an officer of the law now, an' I'm goin' to preserve law an' order, come what dares."

"Yonder's Copeland now," whispered the storekeeper excitedly. "Thought we'd jump him."

As they drew up at the platform, the agent nodded absentmindedly, and hurried



inside. The two men left their horses, and walked briskly in.

"Mornin'," the railroad official looked at them over his

glasses in some bewilderment. "You want a ticket to somewhere?"

"We don't." Pat winked at his associate significantly.

The agent stared at them. "Want anything?"

"We do." The new justice scowled truculently.

"Well, spit it out." Copeland slammed a drawer open, glanced within, and drove it shut again. He had found this mysteriously effective. "Why—what's this?"

He picked up the paper with a puzzled stare, as, swelling with importance, Boggan pushed it through the grating to him.

"It's a garnisheement," he explained proudly. "Can't you read?"

Slowly Copeland spelled aloud the awkward lettering. "Lemuel Hodgkins, doing bussiness as the New Canterbury Emporium, Plaintiff v. Nat Beale, Deaf't. The Cent. Pac. Railroad, Garnish. \$1.75." He sniffed contemptuously, and tossed it back. "Just put it in your pocket, Pat, and trot along. I'm busy."

"This is a——"

"It's a joke, I reckon," Copeland yawned. "I'm too busy to joke this morning. I got work to do. Come back some other time."

The veins on the judge's neck bulged out; his eyes glittered. "You goin' to pay that money?"

"Soon as somebody leaves me a million. Trot along, Pat."

"Look here, Dick Copeland, you ain't talkin' to me—you're talkin' to my judicial office. You're talkin' to the judge



"Haven't got time to talk to nobody." Copeland turned his back a moment, to bring forward a bulky report book.

Hodgkins gave Boggan a nudge, and pointed significantly. The agent, warned by some unnumbered sense, looked up, and into the chilly end of a big six-shooter.

"Put that up, you big—" He stammered slightly.

"Stiddy, stiddy. You're talkin' to the law, you are. Are you goin' to pay that dollar sixty-five?"

"Seventy-five, Pat," whispered the solicitous plaintiff.

"Seventy-five, I says, an' costs. Will you take it out of Nat Beale's salary?"

Copeland's mouth became a straight line. This was not in the contract, but he would have to see it through. "Don't be an idiot, Boggan. Put up that gun. There aren't any more bad men in Colorado. Of course I'm not going to pay it."

"Ain't, hey?"

"Good lord, no. Beat it—I've got to work."

This was a complication. Justice was plainly being flouted; there seemed no way to pierce the nonchalance of the station agent. Boggan kept at him doggedly. "Why?"

"Oh, for nine milion reasons. But one's enough, you Kansas jack-rabbit." Copeland laughed frankly now; Boggan had laid his gun aside, and relief spoke in the agent's voice. "This is Colorado, you tanktown constable—and not Kansas. If you had the brains of a dead nanny-goat, you'd a known that yourself, and not come pesterin' around with your dinky little writs. Your authority stops with the State of Kansas. Don't you know that, you sawed-off runt."

Boggan held in his freshet wrath with difficulty. Lem, face puzzled, turned toward his friend. "That sounds reasonable, Pat. Is that the law?"

Judge Boggan forgot his ignorance, and replied meditatively, "Well, that depends on the construction I put on it."

The agent laughed immoderately. "Construction your aunt's red-nosed grandmother! What do you think you are—the Soopreme Court of the League of Nations? Every bit of law in the world begins with the proposition that a judge has joorisdiction so far and no further—and you're a darned stick further. It's up to you to backtrack." Pat's blank face inspired him to push home the point. "Why, man, the English Common Law, the Constitootion of the United States and every

State in the Union, and every decision of every court in the world, has decided that. You'll have to reverse all that before your dinky little writ would amount to anything. D'you realize that?"

Boggan's pale blue eyes looked musingly at the representative of the railroad. "I might do just that, Dick."

The latter exploded. "You make me snicker! Do it, please! And listen to me, you poor little cinder; the Central Pacific hasn't time to bother with fly-specks like you, no matter what the law is. The Central Pacific's big enough law for this place. Get that?"

Boggan's eye fixed him coldly. "So your policy, Mr. Station Agent, is that the railroad will let its men live in Kansas, and trade in Kansas, and run up bills there, and dodge payment, and the railroad won't lift a hand to assist in getting lawful an' just debts paid an' settled?"

"Not a paw," sneered Copeland. He was not so much at ease now; his tongue had carried him a station beyond his intention.

"And the Central Pacific won't pay any attention to me and my writs, no matter how legal they are?" Boggan's voice was as smooth as cornsilk, and as unemotional.

"Not a bit. Put that in your mouth and chew it!"

"This ain't the finish." With solemn dignity the judge turned. "And may God help you an' the Central Pacific, when I get after you!" He walked out; Hodgkins, face uncomprehending, close beside him.

Without a word Boggan mounted his horse, and set its head toward the dusty haze beyond which lay Kansas. Without a word Hodgkins trotted after him. He realized now that somehow the leadership had passed out of his hands. Some mighty thought was shaping in that furrowed brow beside and a trifle ahead of him, that was certain. There was a dangerous hard glint in the eyes, that spelled trouble, in capitals, for somebody. Hodgkins thought to himself that if a man with those eyes started after him, it would be an excellent time to take to his cyclone-cellar.

"Well, Judge—" he commenced awkwardly.

Boggan for the first time beamed. "Don't ask me no questions, Lem; you do as I say. You be at the railroad, at the Kansas curve, at seven o'clock tonight. Have a couple of men along. Lemme see; the local passes at 7:30, doesn't she?"

"An' the Sunset Flyer at eight."

"That's so, too— Mmm— Two men, a wagon, and a half dozen logs from behind your place, bigger around than railroad ties. Regular whoppers. Got that right? I'll bring a red lantern, and anything necessary. And before we collect that dollar an' sixty-five cents—"

"Seventy-five, Pat; don't forget that dime—"

"Don't worry, Lem; the railroad'll wish it had paid us ten times—a hundred times that much, before it got Judge Patrick Boggan on the warpath! Two men, a wagon, the logs—at seven. Without fail!"

"I'm there, Pat, with whistles tootin'!"

### V

AT TEN minutes to seven, Lem Hodgkins, with two trusted neighbors, arrived with the wagon load of logs at the Kansas curve, the brief railroad stretch within the county. Judge Boggan was nowhere in sight.

"We're early," he explained. He climbed down to stretch his legs.

The ten minute stretch dragged. Seven o'clock, and still no Boggan.

"He'll be here any minute," Hodgkins explained. He felt more reassured, after he had said it.

Ten—fifteen—twenty minutes passed, and still no Pat. Anxiously the storekeeper's eye scanned the horizon toward Colorado, where the train would soon appear; fretfully he studied the hill road behind, down which Judge Pat should long ago have put in his appearance.

"I don't know what's happened to him; I'm sure he said seven."

Five—seven minutes more.

"Thar's her smoke," one of the men pointed excitedly.

A despairing survey of the hill road, hazy in the dusk. Why there—

"An'—an' there he comes!"

Lickety-split down the slope Pat galloped. As he came nearer, they saw the unlit lantern dangling from his arm. He flung himself over the saddle, face panting. "Pile them logs on the track pronto, Lem; had to look everywhere to get this red lantern. Hurry!"

He knelt in the dust of the road, trying to light it. The others watched him open-mouthed. "Hurry!" the judge commanded.

The first match went out on him; he heard the first log fall into place, he heard the whistle of the approaching train at the grade crossing a third of a mile away. The second match sputtered feebly. Des-

perately he pushed it down through the air, the flame leading. It showed brief blue vitality, then grew golden. A trembling hand slid it along the wick. There! Lighted at last!

"Pile that second one on. There!"

Agilely Pat jumped up, one foot on each log, and started waving the red signal up and down.

The sky to the west was lit in a moment with a red glare of welcome, the rails trembled in eagerness to hold the vast monster, as round the far curve it swung into sight.

"Hi, Pat," screamed Hodgkins. "It'll hit you!"

"I'll crow-hop," shouted the judge. "Stand back."

It did not seem humanly possible that the train could come to a standstill in so short a distance. Boggan, just as he imagined he felt the fiery breath of the iron monster envelop him, flung himself toward the road, his legs working like agitated pistons. Every moment he expected to hear the crash as the train hit the logs, and to feel them hurtling through the air after him. A screeching of brakes, a grinding of wheels, and the train came to a standstill less than fifteen feet from the obstruction.

Without delay, fireman, engineer, con-



ductor, several guards, came running up.

"What in the devil does this mean?" shouted the engineer.

Out of his breast pocket Judge Patrick Boggan drew with great dignity a sheet of legal-cap, and read in a loud voice: "This engine, the property of the Central Pacific Railroad, is hereby and heretofore attached, to be held on to in satisfaction of a debt of \$1.75 owed by Nat Beale to Lemuel Hodgkins, doing business as the New Canterbury Emporium."

Engineer, fireman, guards, conductor, stormed and raged; the air grew dusky with profanity. Boggan would not be moved.

They withdrew for an excited conference. The conductor swaggered brusquely over to him. "This is a mail train; you're interfering with the United States mail.

That's a penitentiary offense. We're going through those logs. I'll report this to the government."

Pat blanched a trifle; his hand inched back toward his gun.

The conductor read the motion. His face paled and stiffened; abruptly he turned his back. If it had to come—"A penitentiary offense," he grunted. "Go ahead, Tom. Give her all you've got."

Pat's fingers clenched the automatic impotently. With the whole government against him—The engine rumbled, quivered, backed a score of yards. Then, while the judge, plaintiff, and the two helpers gazed helplessly at the thing, it gathered sudden momentum and threw the two V-placed logs aside as gently as if they had been wisps of stubble. Two triumphant toots, and it disappeared in the distance.

"Can you beat that!" groaned Hodgkins.

"You bet I can," Boggan muttered through set teeth. "Tell me, Lem—is the Sunset Flyer a mail train?"

"I dont' think so."

"It dont' make no difference. Pile on all them logs, men. This time we got 'em!"

## VI

THEY did a better job this time, fixing the apex of the V toward the direction from which the transcontinental express would come. All seven logs were placed on the pile; an engine would split itself against such an obstacle.

The storekeeper made an important find—an unlocked box of way tools left a few rods down the track. At Boggan's direction, the men brought out crowbars and sledges. "Maybe we can get the first rail loose—"

"There she comes!"

Again the judge mounted the logs, and wigwagged the red warning.

The mighty train, warned by the signals that the local had just left the block, was running easily; she stopped two score feet away. Again the officials came on the run.

Pat read his notice again; but this time he included the tracks, the first car, and the right of way.

Before he could finish, a fussy personage elbowed his way through the uniformed officials. "What's this? What's this? What are we stopping here for?"

In a moment he had half a dozen explanations.

"Oh, stop, stop! This is outrageous! I'm Mr. Lessing, Vice-President of the

road. I never heard of such a thing!"

"If your depot agents are sassy as Dick Copeland, you'll hear of it again," said Pat grimly.

"There he comes now!" cried Hodgkins, excitedly.

Sure enough, around the bend in the road, the agent was approaching on horseback.

He flung himself off his saddle, glaring wildly through his glasses. "That man is crazy!" he gasped.

"The law is never crazy," corrected the dignified justice.

The vice-president sized up the situation. "Said he wouldn't pay any attention to your writs, did he? I think you're legally within your rights, my man. I'll pay the bill out of my own pocket—"

"Not this day." Pat Boggan's jaws closed like a wolf trap. "The railroad had its chancet; I wuz informed you'd pay no attention to the law. I hold this engine, car, right of way, tracks—"

The worried general official offered to give bond to cover the garnishment, or pay any amount Boggan would name. His blue eyes snapping, the homespun judge remained inflexible. "Sinai Station may not be within my jurisdiction, but this curve is. Am I right, Mr. Four-eyes? Here I am, and here I stay."

"Take your engine, then," the conductor sneered coldly. "This is a mail train—"

"Your first car isn't carryin' mail."

"It's owned by the Pullman Company—"

"They don't own the tracks an' the right of way."

"Ah, fishhooks! I'll get a switch engine, and butt the train into the next station. You put the engine in your pocket, if you want to—"

For one second, the judge was stumped. He had a mental picture of the poor engine and its car being butted ignominiously out of Kansas, into lowly Colorado, carrying with it his own defeat. Should he submit to this? His hesitation ended before the second ticked; his blue eyes were like levelled guns. "Then I'll tear up your tracks, an' pile 'em in my back yard; I'll put an armed posse on this right of way, that will tie up traffic till my case is finished, if it takes till—till Colorado freezes over!"

Well, what could they do? There was nothing left but to submit, as gracelessly as possible, to the law, as embodied in the gaunt man with the piercing blue eyes and the scrawny moustache.

"Have a heart, Judge," the vice-president pleaded. "We'll switch this engine back to the siding a quarter of a mile away, and let you have it, if you'll release the tracks and the right of way and whatever else you're after."

Boggan's face beamed; what had been hidden in his mind slowly emerged. "You



give me that switch engine at Sinai as security, and I'll let you go right through—if you'll do two things." His eyes grew bright, at the realization of his power to

aid the community. "You know we wanted a station here at New Canterbury, instead of that dump of a Sinai——"

"I'm familiar with that," hurriedly the general officer spoke.

"Give us that station, then; dispossess your place at Sinai—that's first. Second, you'll agree to pay attention to any an' all court papers from my court." He drew himself up cockily.

The local men gasped in admiration; the

vice-president studied him shrewdly.

"Mr. Judge, you're a reasonable man. I can't guarantee the station for you, but we've been discussing the change, and I'll pledge you my word that I'll do my utmost to get it for you. And I can assure you that your writs will receive as much attention as a mandamus from the United States Supreme Court, as long as you're on the bench. Will that suit?"

Judge Boggan drew a long breath. "I'll take your switch engine and your word, sir. Go ahead."

The switch engine was hurriedly backed down onto the siding; the Sunset Flyer resumed her journey, two and a half hours late. At the termination of the suit of Hodgkins, etc., vs. Beale, three weeks later, the railroad paid judgment promptly. The check was handed to the judge by Dick Copeland's successor at Sinai.

"I'll be moving over to Kansas next month," he said affably, while Pat finished the crude receipt. "Soon as we get a roof on the temporary station. You must a had some pull with general offices, to get the change."

"Not me," the jurist evaded modestly. "That Vice-President's got something over his shoulders beside a roof. He respects the law."

### THE FAMOUS SHARPS RIFLE

ONE of the most famous rifles of the Old West was the Sharps. This rifle, invented about 1855, was one of the first successful breech loaders produced; in fact in 1861 it was the only reliable weapon of its kind manufactured in the United States. The Sharps was equipped with a vertically sliding breech block, and used at first a conical bullet in a paper or linen cartridge which was fired by a percussion cap or a flat percussion plate held in the priming lock. Loading was accomplished by dropping down the breech block and inserting the paper cartridge in the rear of the barrel. When the block was pulled up, by means of a lever forming the trigger guard, the end of the cartridge was sheared off, exposing the powder to the flash hole in the block. A percussion cap was then placed in the nipple leading to the flash hole and the gun was ready to fire. The paper cartridge was quickly replaced by one of brass, greatly improving the firearm.

The Sharps was issued to a few British regiments in 1857, and shortly after the start of the Civil War its issue in carbine form was begun to United States Cavalry.

When the Henry repeating rifle appeared most of the other rifles were driven off the market, but the Sharps single-shot retained its popularity for many years. This was due largely to its powerful cartridge which was splendid for large game and long ranges. It was the Sharps that killed off the buffalo. So popular was it with hunters of that animal that a special model was produced known commonly as the "buffalo gun." This was supplied with a heavy octagon barrel, usually of .45 or .50 calibre, using the paper cartridge. With the invention of the brass cartridge the gun was changed to the hammerless type, the shell containing as much as 120 grains of black powder and a bullet weighing 550 grains. The popularity of the arm is accounted for in a comparison of its cartridge with that of the best of other rifles, the Henry, which used a shell containing only 28 grains of powder and 200 grains of lead.—J. R. J.



# THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE



"WE HAVE WITH US TODAY——"

AFTER reading "The Ghost of the Golconda," which begins in this issue, which, by the way, will be published as a cloth-bound book by Doubleday, Page & Company shortly after its completion in SHORT STORIES, we started wondering just how *much* truth there could be in the widespread belief that the Congressional Record is a dry-as-dust old tome! At least we're willing to wager that William N. Vaile's contributions to that worthy publication are pithy, interesting and to the point. Concerning himself and this, his first novel, Vaile writes:

"Born in the centennial year at Kokomo, Indiana. My father and grandfather were lawyers. Grandfather also ran an abolition newspaper in Indiana before the war, conducted a station of the "underground railway" and got tarred and feathered once or twice for his (in those days) exceedingly radical anti-slavery views. As a child I used to be filled with horrible yet humorous fascination when I visualized that stiff and solemnly dignified man enduring such a cruel but grotesque torture.

"Your present autobiographer graduated from Yale University in 1898. I served as a private in the Spanish War but the Spaniards have no cause of complaint against me as I never got out of the U. S. Afterward studied law at Harvard and at the University of Colorado and practised law until my first election to Congress in 1918. I was a candidate two years before that but was licked. Of course the only reason for that—aside from the popularity and ability of my opponent—was that I was absent from my district during the campaign, being an officer of the Colorado National Guard, on duty at the Mexican border. The duty consisted mainly of chasing Mexican children away from the

city dump of Douglas, Arizona.

"Since that time the folks at home have been very good to me and have just re-elected me for a fourth term.

"I have lived since early childhood in Denver except for several years on a farm near there. My regular political opponent used to say that farmers called me a lawyer, that lawyers called me a farmer and that I could prove an alibi on either count. So far, nobody has accused me of being a writer, but if the editor should make that allegation I would plead *nolo contendere*.

"I suppose you want to know what I have been doing in Congress. My constituents often ask me the same thing. My work has been chiefly on legislation relating to immigration, naturalization, public lands and war veterans. I was one of the draftsmen of the Immigration Restriction Acts of 1921 and 1924 (the '3 per cent.' and '2 per cent.' laws) being one of the conferees responsible—for good or ill—for the final language of those two measures. I have to my credit a little bill, now enacted into law, extending the provisions of the Federal Employees' Compensation Act. At present I am serving on a joint committee to work out an adjustment of the old Northern Pacific land grants.

"I have not traveled much except in the United States, but have made two trips to Canada (before Prohibition) and three to the West Indies and Central America.

"I tried to write a little twenty years ago, but with no success. Tackled it again three years ago. (Of course you will understand that I don't want all my words buried forever in the Congressional Record). Haven't had much time to write (of course I may have more after next election) but have accumulated enough rejection slips to paper the wall of my office and haven't wasted much money in return postage that wasn't used. Still, I have

managed to get by the guillotine with a few short stories. 'The Ghost of the Golconda' is my first offense as a novel; but I do not want to commit myself to abstinence in the future.

"In it I have tried to take a sympathetic glance backward at the old feverish mining camps which were passing away when I was a youngster and to give also something of the flavor of those camps as they exist today. There is no didactic purpose but I have allowed myself to express here and there the voice of the sound Americanism which was inherent in the old period but which speaks just as vigorously in the new."

WILLIAM N. VAILE.

### THE RED GODS SMILE

**H**IS name was O'Brien, and he was about as tattered and unshorn a tramp as one could find—unlovely to the extreme until one saw the smile wrinkles about his blue-green eyes. He had stowed away upon a nitrate freighter, and had been kicked ashore, dead broke, at Antofagasta.

"Where d'you hail from?" queried a benefactor who had yielded the price of a meal and lodging.

"Oh—out there—anywhere," vaguely waving an arm over half the swing of the compass.

"But I mean, where's your home? What country?" persisted the new friend.

O'Brien chuckled. A look of the far horizons underlay the laughter, though. "Home?" he repeated softly. "Well, ye

might say Australia. Yep. Ye see, I *ain't ever been there yet, but I'm goin'!*"

If Eric Howard, who on the occasion of his first **SHORT STORIES** offering writes in a similar vein of himself, runs across O'Brien in Peru, or Macao, or beyond Ballarat, may there be a handclasp and an understanding.

"I was born with the wanderlust, and it has been pronounced incurable. During the last ten or fifteen years I've wandered back and forth, up and down, across the country, seeing with commendable thoroughness America first. Mexico, South America, Europe, the South Seas and the Orient are all scheduled. For many months past I've made old Santa Fé my headquarters, doing by horse and flivver the country roundabout. I've witnessed Indian dances more dramatic and colorful than a Morris Gest production; I've lived in Indian pueblos and have made friends with these survivors of a great and noble race; I've given them abalone shells from the Pacific and they've given me turquoise and pottery in return.

"From here I shall go into the Navajo country, and to Hopiland, reaching Oraibi in time for the famous snake dance. After that? I don't know. Perhaps La Ciudad de Mejico y America del Sur. It's a large world, and one must keep going.

ERIC HOWARD."

### THERE'S MAGIC!

**S**EVEN candles burning before a shrine, a five and a deuce spots-up on the cas-

**DON'T FORGET THE COUPON! CUT IT OUT TODAY AND LET US KNOW 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 \_\_\_\_\_

tanet dominoes, the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter—

Walbridge Dudley put the jodey on the stamped return envelope sent with "Head Work," his first SHORT STORIES tale. Therefore, the envelope went back to him—empty. He tells how he wove the spell.

"Born Chicago, 1887. Armour Scientific Academy, 1904. University of Chicago, ex-1908. Since then the advertising and news syndicate publicity business in all branches. Have lived in Chicago, New York City, Wisconsin, Georgia, Arizona, California, Wyoming—the last three during a year and a half of ranching and farming done with the idea of securing fiction material. All my life I have written as a relaxation, mostly practice in cadence, integration and so on as occasion offered, especially during a year in the army. Until lately seldom submitted anything to the magazines, not thinking it good enough. During the past year, however, have been writing more and more, still mostly practice exercises. I have been so fortunate as to sell most of my writing in this period of discipline; of my last six yarns 'Head Work' was the fourth accepted, and I believe my seventh attempt to storm the well guarded portals of SHORT STORIES, which I hope to enter again from time to time. It was a delight to write 'Head Work,' in fact writing is a real joy to me; so if your readers take only half as much pleasure in the reading as I did in the writing of it, I shall experience a payment that no check, no matter how liberal, could possibly equal.

H. W. DUDLEY."

### NO MAIL BAG THIS TIME

**T**HROUGH reasons having to do solely with the inclusion of one particularly good tale in this present issue, we

have been forced to omit from the CIRCLE the department of letters from our friends and foes. Since we have a number of splendid letters on hand, and certainly hope to read hundreds more during the next fortnight, we'll try to give The Mail Bag extra space in the next issue.

### THE MAKING OF A KILLER

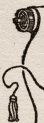
**O**UT of a fight he would have avoided if possible, Bob Haskell emerged with slitted eyes and smoking guns. Two men lay dead on the floor, men who had earned bloody names in the range country. From that moment Haskell was a man apart, a skilled and merciless slayer—or so the story grew.

Hired to terrorize sheep herders, he comes to the point where his greatest strength and manhood are required to combat the ugly thing which has attached itself to his name. Read "Haskell of the Dug-Out Hills," a fascinating complete novel by the much admired Frank C. Robertson, which heads the next issue of SHORT STORIES.

Do you personally favor the system of presenting an eighty thousand word serial in two issues instead of four? Read the final big installment of William N. Vaile's great mine mystery, "The Ghost of the Golconda," and then give us your reaction as a guide to future policy.

Besides these two features, the next number will contain one of W. C. Tuttle's inimitable Mexican stories, "The Fate of the Wolf"; Anthony M. Rud presents a story of the Nevada diamond fields, "Smoky Treasure"; and there will be excellent short stories by Don Cameron Shafer, Frank Richardson Pierce, Douglas Newton, Richard Howells Watkins, H. M. Sutherland and others.

Established 1860



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Letters typical of thousands  
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**N**OT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

Eat two or three cakes a day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) night and morning.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

And let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-17, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.



**THERE** are many delicious ways of eating yeast—dissolved in water, fruit juices or milk, spread on crackers, or eaten plain.



"In MARCH, 1923, I had what I supposed was a nervous breakdown. I was restless and irritable. I had headaches and dizzy spells. I began to use Fleischmann's Yeast. Gradually my ills disappeared—I became regular, and discontinued the use of cathartics. My energy returned—and in four or five months I was my former self. Not only have I regained my health, but my color and my general appearance have been improved."

MRS. MARGARET ADE SWEENEY, Roxbury, Mass.



"I AM A HOSTESS at a hotel and not a day passes that someone doesn't ask me how I manage to be up late at night and out in the sun every day and still keep my skin so clear and fair and my eyes so bright. My answer is Fleischmann's Yeast. Years of intestinal indigestion had brought me to the point where I determined I'd stick at it until I got relief. Three cakes of yeast dissolved in water became a daily rite. In three months I had the results I wanted—relief from indigestion, gas and chronic constipation." MRS. GERTRUDE W. HOOD, Mount Lowe, Calif.





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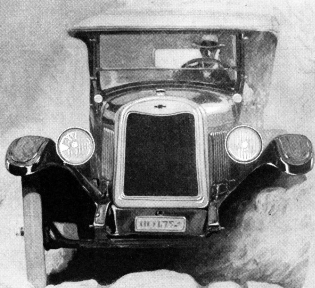
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A needless victim of Pyorrhea

4 out of 5

Dental statistics show that four out of every five over 40—and thousands younger, too—are victims of dreaded Pyorrhea. Will you escape?

Tooth neglect demands its toll

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Once Pyorrhea secures a firm hold, pus pockets form, gums become weak and flabby, the teeth loosen and fall out no matter how white and sound they may be.

Forhan's For the Gums contains just the right proportion of Forhan's Astringent, as used by the dental profession in the treatment of Pyorrhea. It protects and preserves the gums, and keeps them in a firm, pink, healthy condition. If you don't care to discontinue the tooth paste you are now using, at least brush your teeth and gums once a day with Forhan's. All druggists; 35c and 60c in tubes.

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More than a tooth paste  
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The wise traveller always has Beeman's—deliciously flavored—its use is

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But the thoughtful wife and mother doesn't buy it just for that reason alone. She thinks of what is *in* the package.

Whole wheat—with 25 per cent Natural Wheat Bran. So delicious that the family never seems to tire of it—and everybody gets the bran that is so good for them, *and likes it*.

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The New Pettijohn's is selected whole wheat, pre-cooked, processed to develop the flavor, rolled and delicately toasted.

A hot, fresh cereal that makes a generous, grateful breakfast—oftentimes a welcome change for luncheon—and a nourishing supper for growing children.

Eat the New Pettijohn's with good top-milk or cream. The flavor is something to be grateful for.

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1. Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes.
2. The pick of America's Wheat—contains 25% Natural Bran, with essential Vitamines and Mineral Salts.
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When that  
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A corn isn't just a *pain*—it's a *drain*. A tax on the whole nervous system. A *blight*, not alone on the toe, but on the spirits and the disposition. . . . Doctors know that a corn can darken a man's whole viewpoint on life. Headache, fatigue, irritability, and indigestion are often reflexes of a throbbing corn . . . "Pain-messages shoot to every nerve center, when a corn starts

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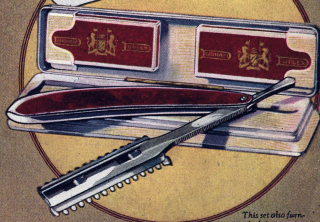
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*The Blades Men Swear By  
-Not At*



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